

Mary Frances Dunham

JARIGAN

Muslim Epic Songs of
Bangladesh



BANGLADESH: TOWARDS THE YEAR 2000

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the folk musicians of Bangladesh.

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PREFACE

Jarigan songs comprise one of the most important genres of folk songs in South Asia, yet they are little known outside their native region, Bangladesh. Even within Bangladesh, the topic has received surprisingly meager scholarly attention. Whereas books and articles abound concerning Baul songs, for instance, only a few scholars have studied the topic of *jarigan* songs. Nevertheless, these songs are epic in scope and represent a high standard of poetic, dramatic and musical composition. During their golden years, *jarigan* performances entertained and educated rural audiences in the tens of thousands. In modified form, *jarigan* songs continue to be produced today. They merit attention outside, as well as within, their native land.

It was by accident that I first came to know about *jarigan* songs. While I was living in Dhaka during the 1960s, the Bangladeshi poet, Jasimuddin (1903-1976) was preparing a book on the topic. He had transcribed twenty full-length *jarigan* songs (a feat in itself) and written a ninety page explanatory introduction. He asked me to provide musical notations for inclusion at the end of his book. He recorded a singer whom he considered to be among the best *jarigan* singers in the region. At the time, I found the task of notating the singer's melodies was difficult because the language, literature and music of Bengal was still new to me. When I expressed my frustration at trying to capture on paper the subtleties of the music, Jasimuddin offered encouragement and assured me that some day I would be grateful for the effort I was making.

His prediction began to materialize soon after I returned to America in 1967. My experience in the work I did with Jasimuddin suggested the *jarigan* repertory as a subject for a Master's degree thesis at Columbia University in 1972. Subsequently, the material I possessed became the source of several articles and lectures on Bengali music. I realized at the same time that my material was limited to a relatively few examples of *jarigan* songs and that much of my information depended on descriptions in books of how the songs used to be performed. To verify and

understand more fully these descriptions required that I return to the country where *jarigan* songs originated.

In 1993, I had an opportunity to revisit the country which had been East Pakistan when I left it, but had become in 1971 the independent nation of Bangladesh. I mentioned my past work on *jarigan* to Bangladeshis who might be interested in the topic. To my surprise, I found not only a recognition that the topic was important, but an interest in reprinting what I had written so many years ago. Several Bangladeshis suggested to me that a book in English might serve to introduce the topic of *jarigan* to people outside of Bangladesh. A grant from the Ford Foundation and the cooperation of scholars and lay people in Bangladesh and in America made it possible to prepare the present book.

In 1995, I returned to Bangladesh to begin field work, to seek out material concerning *jarigan* in Bangladeshi libraries, and to talk to scholars who were familiar with Bengali folk literature, with Bangladeshi folk songs in particular. Since the publication of Jasimuddin's book in 1968, only one other book on the subject of *jarigan* had been published: *Bangladeshi Jarigan* (1986) by S. M. Lutfor Rahman, Professor in the Bengali Department of Dhaka University. When I saw how much information this book contained, I hastened to meet with him. He gave me one of the few copies of the book that he had left and encouraged me in my project.

I consulted with many other Bangladeshi scholars and amateurs of Bengali folk literature. They contributed useful information from their recollections of past *jarigan* performances and directed me to current sources of information. Returning to America, I supplemented my information from Bangladesh with research in libraries in New York City. Although I found hardly any material on the *jarigan* genre itself, I came upon helpful books and articles on related topics. I was able to contact scholars working on relevant subjects such as the Muharram festival, Bengali music, and Bengali theater among other topics that are helpful for reconstructing *jarigan* performances of the past.

I have divided the book into four parts. The first one (Chapters One through Five) provides a general introduction to the *jarigan* repertory: its cultural setting, its historical development, and its traditional recital form. In the second and third parts (Chapters Six through Ten), I provide a closer look at *jarigan* songs themselves: their themes, prosody and musical form. The last part (Chapter Eleven) contains a descriptive definition of the *jarigan* repertory, together with commentary on contemporary issues involved in a further study of these songs.

During the preparation of this book I found that rereading a *jarigan* song text or listening again to one of my field recordings enabled me to overcome those moments of discouragement which accompanied my attempt to piece together the probable origins of *jarigan* songs or to reconstruct their performances in the past. For example, reading the *jarigan* called "Kasem-Sokhinar Jari" (The *Jari* of Kasem and Sokhina) would restore my spirits with its moving narrative and skillful poetry.

This experience suggested to me that I recommend to readers unfamiliar with the *jarigan* repertory to peruse the translated examples that I provide in Appendix A. These translations can help to give a first-hand idea of the themes and form of *jarigan* songs. I have also provided musical notations which can introduce readers to

the melodic elements and structure of the *jarigan* tunes. Unfortunately, written texts and musical notations are "silent;" they cannot reproduce the sound of the dramatic declamation and stirring melodies of an actual performance. I have attempted to describe these intangible aspects of the *jarigan* repertory in the chapters of the book.

I am aware that readers who are familiar with Bengali culture may find mistakes and important omissions in the present book. The examples of *jarigan* songs on which I base my descriptions of the genre are limited to examples from the central areas of Bangladesh, whereas important styles of *jarigan* singing exist in the southern and northern districts of the country and *jarigan* songs are still sung on the other side of the national border in the State of West Bengal in India—in the Hooghly and Murshidabad areas, for instance. The descriptions in this book of the form of *jarigan* songs and of their recitals are necessarily generalizations based on the material available to me within the scope and time of the project.

Implied in the present book, if not explicitly stated, is a plea for preserving *jarigan* performances on film and in sound recordings. The suggestions by many friends that this book be accompanied by cassette or disk recordings is a logical one. As this book goes to press, this seems to be a possibility. For the present, I have included in Appendix C a listing of some of the *jarigan* audio-cassettes that were available in Bangladeshi music shops at the time of my research. For the future, I hope that the material in the pages of this book will convince others to participate in the preservation, study, and dissemination of a poetic and musical tradition that has served to entertain, educate and inspire Bangladeshi people throughout many generations.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

During the preparation of the present book I have received help from many people in ways ranging from scheduled scholarly consultations to casual conversations at dinners and teas. Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of a formal acknowledgment to include the names of all those who assisted me. I have listed mainly those which may help others to pursue the *jarigan* topic.

Very little has been written about this topic, so that often I depended in my research on information obtained in meetings with scholars in fields relevant to the *jarigan* repertory. In Bangladesh these scholars included Shamsuzzaman Kahn, Director General of the Shilpakala Academy, formerly Director of the Research, Compilation and Folklore Division of the Bangla Academy; Mohammed Sayeedur, the Bangla Academy's expert on Muharram festivals; Professor S. M. Lutfor Rahman, author of one of the two Bengali books on *jarigan*; Professor Ahmed Sharif, a retired professor from the Bengali Department of Dhaka University, the author and editor of many works on ancient and medieval Bengali literature; Karunamaya Goswami, Professor of musicology and author of books on the history and form of Bengali music; Professor Selim Al Deen of the Department of Drama and Dramatics at Jahangirnagar University and Professor Afsar Ahmad, Chairman of that Department; Syed Jamil Ahmed, Chairman of the Drama Department of Dhaka University and the creator of the passion play, *Bishad Sindhu*; Mustafa Zaman Abbasi, a dedicated collector and promoter of Bengali folk music; Ahmed Sofa, poet, essayist, novelist and historian; and Rustom Bharucha, a writer of essays and books on the performing arts of India. These scholars whom I consulted encouraged my study of *jarigan* songs and gave generously of their time answering questions and reviewing my work.

In America I met on several occasions with Peter J. Chelkowski at New York University where he is Chairman of the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Literature and an expert on Muharram celebrations and Persian

ta'ziyeh. I also consulted with Professor Israel J. Katz, a retired professor of Ethnomusicology, a writer and editor specializing in Sephardic songs. I benefited from frequent discussions with Amy C. Bard at Columbia University where she is completing her doctoral dissertation on Urdu *marsiyas*. I am indebted to these American scholars for the amount of information and guidance they gave me during the preparation of this book.

A number of other American scholars provided me with their articles, specific information and encouragement: Frank J. Korom, Curator of the Asian and Middle Eastern Collections, Museum of International Folk Art, Santa Fe; Ephraim Miller who studied ancient Bengali literary epics for his doctoral dissertation at Chicago University; Mary Elaine Hegland, Professor of Anthropology, University of California at Santa Clara; Margaret Mills, Professor in the Department of Folklore and Folk Life, University of Pennsylvania; Milla Riggio, Professor of English and organizer of a *ta'ziyeh* conference held where she teaches at Trinity College, Hartford; Dorothy Angell from American University (Washington, D. C.), an anthropologist whose doctoral dissertation concerns Bengali migrants; and Joanna Kirkpatrick, retired professor of anthropology at Bennington College, who has taught and written about Bengali folk art. Some of the works of these scholars which were especially helpful to a study of *jarigan* songs are mentioned in the essay on sources preceding the Bibliography or listed in the Bibliography itself.

I received generous assistance for various practical needs involved in research and the collection of *jarigan* songs. I owe special thanks to Syed Shujauddin Ahmed, Director General of the Department of Mass Communication in the Government of Bangladesh, for sending out questionnaires to singers in different districts. During the 1995 Muharram festival celebrations I was hospitably received by the Pir of the Gorpara *Imam bara* during the Muharram celebrations there.

I was able to use the resources of cultural institutions in Dhaka. These included the library and audio-visual center of the Bangla Academy, the library of the Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, and the library of Dhaka University. At the Iranian Culture Center the Public Relations Officer, Barkat Ullah Zahiruddin, made available the Center's video films on the Muharram celebrations in Iran and Bangladesh.

A number of Bangladeshi journalists and students made preliminary translations of *jarigan* texts: Priscilla Raj, journalist for *Samaj Chetana*; Mohammad Moydul Islam Mohoshin, staff reporter for *Bichitra Shangbad*; his friend, "Kartik," student at Jaganath College; Faiyaz Murshid Kazi, an executive of Bitopi Advertising, Dhaka; and Mrs. Khalida Aktar, a bio-chemist working in Dhaka. Mohammad Tayub Hossain Khan, Principal of Nayabazar College in Dhaka, translated several songs. Madeleine Frisch, a graduate of the Manhattan School of Music in New York, helped with revisions of the preliminary translations.

I am thankful to Sukalpa Gupta, a vocalist studying Indian classical music and possessing a broad background in Bengali history and literature. He made musical notations of my recordings using the Indian system, at the same time helping to transcribe and translate the texts of the songs notated. Steven Sweeting, an American composer, converted my hand-drafted notations into computer-produced staff notations, a task which required exceptional perseverance as well as his fine musical ear.

I consulted with A. M. Saadullah, a graphic designer, about esthetic aspects of the present book. M. Amiruzzaman, an architect working for the Sthapati Sangshad firm, also gave helpful advice on the appearance of the book.

Mohiuddin Ahmed, the Managing Director of the University Press Limited, was among the first to take an interest in my work on *jarigan*. He not only undertook the publication of the present book, but patiently accepted the fact that my draft kept increasing in length. His staff worked skillfully and often over-time to effect the final product.

I owe my research assistant and photographer, Mokhlesur Rahman Lenin, unending gratitude for his intelligent and unstinting work in overseeing almost every aspect of the production of this book. As well as photographing, sound-recording and interpreting during my interviews with singers, he introduced me to valuable contacts and sources of information. He not only took charge of the practical details of field trips, but supervised the technical aspects of the book at each stage of its production.

My landlord, Mr. Habibullah, and his daughters took care to make me comfortable during many months in Dhaka while I was occupied with research and writing. Ali Joon Ispahani and Ameneh Ispahani and the Fathers of Notre Dame College were among many friends in Bangladesh whose concern for my welfare and whose hospitality I shall long remember.

The folk song singers of Bangladesh who sang for me deserve special thanks. Their names can be found in various sections of the present book.

I am most of all grateful to my husband and daughter for their moral support as well as for their valuable suggestions and help with decisions about the content, direction and format of the book.

The Ford Foundation provided the grant that enabled me to undertake research and field work. I have been thankful for this opportunity to study the topic of *jarigan* and I hope that the present work will influence scholars and amateurs to collect, preserve and foster the *jarigan* traditions that still survive.

TRANSLITERATIONS, TERMINOLOGY AND TRANSLATIONS

TRANSLITERATIONS

For the sake of readers who may be unacquainted with the Bengali language and its script, I have chosen to use a phonetic style of transliteration rather than an orthographically precise one. My aim is to make my text as easy as possible on the eye of a reader with little practice in academic conventions of transliteration. I trust that my transliterations are self-explanatory to readers already acquainted with Bengali. For the most part, my phonetic representations resemble closely those listed in Appendix XVIII of *The Students' Favorite Dictionary* by Ashu Tosh Dev (Calcutta, 1964). Readers desiring more precise representations should, of course, refer to the Bengali alphabet. For a succinct explanation of the history of changes in the pronunciation of Bengali words I recommend J. D. Anderson, *A Manual of the Bengali Language* (1920, republished in 1962).

Choosing a transliteration system for this book has been complicated by the fact that I found no model of transliteration that served the various aspects of *jarigan* studies as found in the descriptions in this book; that is, dialectal and *shadhu* (literary) Bengali, Sanskrit and Perso-Arabic vocabulary, etc. I found that eastern, if not western, spoken Bengali has changed remarkably since I did my first research on *jarigan* songs in the 1960s, so that I needed to revise the transliteration system that I worked out at that time. In my desire to reproduce the sound of *jarigan* song texts, including the dialectal pronunciation of words, I have favored phonetic transliterations rather than orthographically precise ones. I apologize for the inconsistencies that inevitably have occurred as I tried to satisfy both orthography and phonetics.

I have used diacritical marks for transliterations of Sanskrit words and for words in particular portions of the Glossary. Otherwise I omit diacritical marks. In the case

of Bengali technical words that are closely cognate with Sanskrit or Perso-Arabic words, I have favored orthography, but without including diacritical marks. For example, I have written "s" in spelling the Bengali word "*sahitya*" (literature), although the "s" in the colloquial speech of Bangladeshis often resembles the sound of "sh". On the other hand, in the case of more vernacular Bengali words, I have represented them as phonetically as possible without straying too far from orthography. I hope that the following remarks are sufficient to explain the transliterations in my text.

Representations

"a" represents various sounds:

It may represent 1) the sound of "uh" rhyming with the "u" in "cup"; 2) the sound "aw", as in "saw"; 3) the sound of "a" as in "father"; or, sometimes, 4) the sound of "o" as in "go". To understand this last possibility, read the explanation below about the letter "o". The reader who is already acquainted with the Bengali language has a feel for which sound to attribute to the letter "a". For the reader unacquainted with Bengali, it is convenient to pronounce the letter "a" like the "a" as in "father". In the majority of cases, this approach will yield an acceptable, though crude, approximation.

"e" represents the sound of the accented "e" in the French word "*café*", or a sound which is part way between the "e" in the English words "pet" and "weigh".

"i" represents the sound of "i" in "sit" or the sound of "i" in "police". For the reader unacquainted with Bengali, the second sound will yield the best result in most cases.

"o" represents the sound of "o" in "go". This "o" may represent the Bengali letter for this sound, or it may represent an "o"-sound which exists in Bengali speech, but is not expressed in Bengali writing. For example, I write "*boli*" (I or we say; pronounced "boh-lee"), instead of "*bali*", as in the academic style of orthography, for which the letter "a" has been chosen to represent various vowel sounds (including an "o"-sound) which are sounded, but which may not be written.

"u" represents the sound of "u" in "true".

"y" represents the sound of "y" in "yes", even at the end of words. Thus, for example, *jay* (he or she goes) rhymes with "pie" and not with "day". A "y" following a consonant has no sound of its own, but doubles the sound of the consonant that precedes it. In vernacular words when "y" follows a consonant, I omit it and double the preceding consonant. In the case of literary words, however, I often preserve the "y", although it is not pronounced. For example, I write "*dhuya*" (a kind of refrain song) as "*dhua*" (the way it is pronounced), but I write "*sahitya*" (literature; pronounced "shah-heet-toh") preserving the "y" although it is not pronounced.

"ch" and "chh" represent the sound of "ch" in "chin". These two Bengali letters are often pronounced today like "sh", as in "shop", or even as "s", as in "see". The letter "c" in my transliterations never represents the sound of "k".

"j" represents the sound of "j" as in "jump". In dialectal speech it may sound like "z".

"sh" represents three Bengali sibilant letters that have the sound of "sh" as in "shop" with slight variations respectively. The third sibilant in the Bengali alphabet is conventionally transliterated as "s", its original sound. In the case of erudite words, I use "s", not "sh". For example, I write "*sahitya*" (literature), although the word often sounds like "shah-heet-toh".

"th" represents the sound "th" as in "Thomas" and not the sound of "th" as in "thought" or "this".

"ph" represents the sound of "ph" as in "philosophy". Often this sound is transliterated with the letter "f", especially in the case of Perso-Arabic words.

"b" and "v" represent the sounds of "b" and "v" as in English words. However, their sounds are sometimes interchangeable in Bengali speech. Often the "v" of Sanskrit has become a "b"-sound in Bengali. For example: *kavi* (poet) may be pronounced "*kabi*" ("koh-bee"). Bengali writers writing in English vary as to how they transliterate words containing "b" and "v". For lack of guidance in this matter, I generally have chosen the spelling that is found in the Sanskrit derivation of a Bengali word, but if the modern Bengali pronunciation often disagrees with this, I have generally represented the Bengali word phonetically as it sounds to me today.

"n" in my transliterations is used to represent the sound "n" as in "note" and, in a few cases, to represent no sound of its own, but to indicate that a preceding vowel is to be nasalized. For example, in the word *banshi* (bamboo flute), the "a" is nasalized as signaled by the letter "n" following it which is itself not pronounced. In the Bengali word "*vamsha*", the "m" serves the same nasalizing purpose.

Italics. I have italicized all Bengali words, but not proper names, as, for example, in the song line, "Banu [*re*], Joynal *shopilam tor hate*"... (Oh, Banu, I entrust Joynal into your hands ...).

Capitalization. Bengali writing is uniform; it uses no capitalization. However, in my transliterations I have used capital letters for the titles of songs, books, and articles, as well as for the spelling of names and for the first letter in each new line of a poetic text.

Plurality of nouns. I use the letter "s" at the end of transliterated Bengali words in the plural, although plurality in Bengali grammar is indicated by other means. For example, I write *boyatis* (chief singers) for the plural of *boyati*.

The possessive case. I write "#s" and "s#" at the end of transliterated words in the possessive case, although the possessive case in Bengali grammar is indicated by other means. For example, I write *boyati's* for the possessive case of *boyati*, and *boyatis'* for the possessive case of the plural form of *boyati*.

Transliterations of Arabic and Persian words. I have transliterated these words from the Bengali versions of them as they are given in Shaikh G. M. Hilaly's *Perso-Arabic Elements in Bengali* (Dhaka, 1967).

Hosein and Hasan. These names are transliterated in several ways; for example, Hossein or Hussain and Hassan. I write "Hosein" or "Hasan", respectively, except when citing from specific sources. In those cases I honor the spelling found there.

Punctuation. Bengali written texts need little punctuation other than indications of a period and comma. In my transliterations, if the meaning seems clear without using a comma, I omit it. In the text of this book, when I use terminology and other special vocabulary, in Bengali or in English, I place any comma or period that would normally be placed within a closing quotation mark, outside of the mark, in order to preserve the integrity of the particular expression, as in the following sentence: In tunes where one *matra* per syllable predominates, the tunes are characterized as "syllabic".

TERMINOLOGY

Bengal-Bengali and Bangladesh-Bangladeshi. I use the words Bengal and Bengali when I refer to phenomena that apply to the whole geographic region where Bengali is spoken, including the State of West Bengal in India as well as the People's Republic of Bangladesh, especially before these two areas became separate political entities in 1947. In referring to cultural matters in eastern Bengal which are specific to times following 1947, I generally use the noun Bangladesh and the modifier Bangladeshi, even in some cases when I speak of the East Pakistani years of Bangladesh. I apologize for inconsistencies that occur in my text due to indecision as to how to treat the Pakistani interim period of Bangladeshi cultural history.

I use the word Bengali instead of Bangla in reference to language. Although Bangla is preferred by many people today, I was unable to master its use before this book was due at the press. I experimented with using Bangla instead of Bengali, but found trouble devising an adjective from it. The word Bengali serves conveniently in English both as a noun and an adjective, whereas Bangla is a noun, requiring special handling as an English word to use as an adjective. I found that if I changed the word Bengali to Bangla in my text, I would have to make radical changes in many sentences, taking time from work on the book that I felt was more important. My choice, therefore, of "Bengali" over "Bangla" is merely a matter of present convenience and does not reflect an ideological stance.

The word "text". Readers should be aware that when I use the word "text" in reference to the verbal content of *jarigan* songs, I do not suggest that the songs exist in writing. The songs are transmitted orally and only written down by collectors in their transcriptions. My descriptions of the songs involve the relationship between the texts of songs and the melody that accompanies them. In these descriptions it is more convenient to use the word "text" (as if a written text existed) than to say "verbal lines", or other such circumlocutions. I avoid using the English word "lyrics" because it connotes too readily the texts of short,

light genres of songs, not the mostly expository (non-lyrical), epic-like texts of *jarigan* songs.

TRANSLATIONS

Interjections and other extraneous elements. *Jarigan* songs contain various exclamations and interjections. In the transliterated Bengali texts I have enclosed these expressions in brackets and I have translated them with expressions such as "Oh!", "Ah!", "Alas!", etc. For example: "[*Ore*] *ga tolo* Sokhina ..." (Oh!, arise Sokhina ...). I have also enclosed in brackets the extra sounds that a singer articulates to fill out the meter of a line or to provide time for melodic embellishment. For example: "*Shonen*[*a*], *shonen*[*a*], *shrotagon* [*go*] ..." (Listen, listen, listeners, oh! ...). These extra syllables that are found on the ends of words have no specific meaning, but I include them in order to reproduce the sound of a line as it was sung.

Gender. Gender is not indicated in Bengali pronouns. Because *jarigan* singing is largely performed by men, I have used masculine pronouns when generalizing rather than saying "he or she", "his or her", etc., except in sections that concern women specifically.

Indicating translations. Within the text of the book, I have indicated translations by enclosing them within parentheses. Unless otherwise indicated, these translations are my own. They have been made literally, rather than poetically, in order to represent the vigorous quality of the vocabulary of the Bengali texts.

Dates. I have translated dates that I found cited in *Hijri* years ("A. H.", "*Anno Hejirae*") of the Muslim calendar into Christian Era years ("A. D.", "*Anno Domini*"). However, it should be kept in mind that some of my sources use only the *Hijri* system. My conversions may be approximate rather than precise as to the turn of one year into the next.

PART ONE

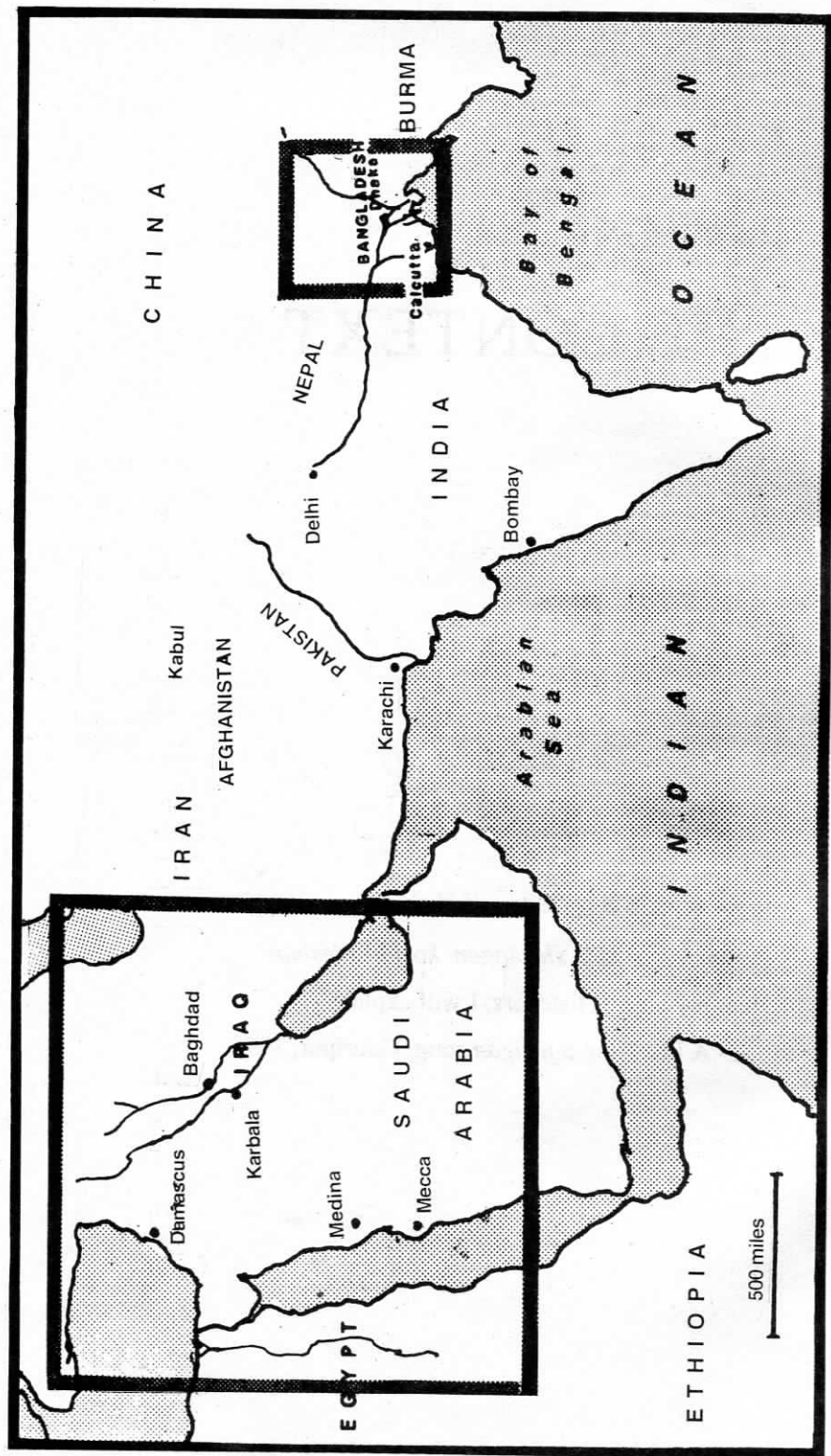
THE CONTEXT

শোনেন আমার ক'ই শ্রোতাগন, করি বিশ্লেষণ ...

Shonen, amar ko'i, shrotagon, kori bishleshon ...

(Hear my words, listeners; I will explain ...)

— A line from a *jarigan* song, Gouripur, 1995.



Map 1. From Damascus to Dhaka.

THE SETTING

মহরমের মাস আসিল, শিমুলতলীর গাঁয়ের সবে,
জারীর গানে লাঠির খেলায় মাতলো আবার মহাৎসবে।

*Maharamer mash ashilo, Shimultolir gayer shabe,
Jarir gane lathir khelay mat'lo abar mahatsabe.*

(Muharram, and the villagers have come,
Drunk with excitement, singing *jari* songs,
To fence with canes ...)

— Jasimuddin's, *Sojan Badiar Ghat* (1933).¹

THE MUHARRAM FESTIVAL

The expression "*jarigan*" metaphorically unites the Middle East to Bengal. The word "*jari*" comes from the Persian word "*zārī*", meaning lamentation, while "*gan*" is the Bengali word for song. The modifier "*jari*" was acquired from the association of particular Muslim songs with the elegiac literature of the Muharram festival. *Jarigan* songs, however, include many moods, as well as mournful ones. Nevertheless, whether cheerful or sad, the repertory is so closely associated with the lamentations of the Muharram festival that it seems appropriate for a book about *jarigan* songs to begin with an explanation of the festival.

The history of Muharram celebrations

The Muharram festival originated among Muslims of the Perso-Arabic world of the Middle East. It commemorates a battle that occurred in 680 A. D. (61 A. H., *Anno Hijrae*) on the banks of the Euphrates River at a site known as Karbala. There, forty-eight years after the death of the Prophet, a band of Muslims, headed by the Prophet's grandson, Hosein, was destroyed by the army of the current caliph of the Muslim world. In memory of this battle, Karbala is one of the most sacred sites of pilgrimage in the Islamic world.

From mourning rituals commemorating the heroes of that battle, a festival evolved in the Middle East whose ten-day long pageantry and intensely moving literature in sermons and songs constitute the most exciting festival in the Muslim calendar.

By the tenth century in Persia, mourning practices in memory of the heroes and heroines of Karbala were well established. In the sixteenth century, the Safavid rulers of Persia encouraged the commemorations, allowing this primarily Shi'a manifestation to develop into an extensive, popular festival.² The festival spread to every corner of the world where Muslim communities exist. The festival was introduced to India in the seventeenth century by Shi'a Muslims migrating there when support for Shi'as diminished in Persia. By the nineteenth century, Muharram celebrations in India had become so lavish that they rivaled the most elaborate Hindu *pujas* (worship-festivals), surpassing in splendor even the Muharram celebrations in Iran where they originated.

Narrative themes from the festival

The events of the Karbala tragedy supply the central plots and spiritual themes for *jarigan* songs. In order to appreciate these themes and their emotional impact, it is helpful to know as much as possible about the battle of Karbala. The following account provides a brief summary of events that have many more ramifications than can be included here.³

The battle was fought as part of a disagreement among Muslims about the system of choosing the leader of the Muslim world. When the Prophet died, it was unclear who should succeed him to lead the Muslim community. One branch of followers, the Sunnis, believed in the Arabic tradition of leadership by election. Another branch, the Shi'a (literally, The Party), believed that Hazrat (Revered) Ali, the Prophet's cousin and husband of the Prophet's daughter, Fatema (Fatima), was the rightful successor. Some Shi'as are known as "Alids" because of their great reverence for the Prophet's son-in-law, Hazrat Ali.

The Sunnis, the "traditionalists", succeeded in electing four caliphs in succession, the fourth being Ali himself. After a long leadership during which he did much to strengthen Islam, Ali was murdered, becoming the first of the Shi'a martyrs in the Karbala cycle of stories. Mu'awiya proclaimed himself the caliph on the assassination of Hazrat Ali. There is, however, some controversy as Mu'awiya was a powerful leader but not as worthy a candidate to become a caliph as the Prophet's grandsons, Hasan and Hosein, the sons of Ali. Muslims who objected to the way in which Mu'awiya gained the throne and to his oppressive ways, sponsored Ali's sons, Hasan and Hosein, to be the next caliphs. Hasan, the elder brother, was eliminated by poison, according to Shi'a accounts, making him the second martyr connected with the Karbala stories.

During Hasan's lifetime, Mu'awiya had entered into an agreement with him, stating that Hosein, Hasan's younger brother, could become caliph after Mu'awiya's death. Mu'awiya, however, actually hoped his son, Yezid, would succeed him. Hosein, supported by an increasing number of Shi'as, presented a threat to this plan. By the time Yezid succeeded to the throne, Hosein, portrayed in Muslim literature as a saint, had become so popular among a growing community of Shi'as that Yezid felt his power was clearly threatened.

Hosein's supporters urged him to join them where many lived in the city of Kufa near Baghdad. Hosein first sent a cousin, Muslim, to find out if these supporters

were sincere. When Muslim reached Kufa, he thought they seemed sincere and sent a letter to Hosein to this effect. The *jarigan* song, "*Shonen amar ko'i, shrotagon*," which can be found translated in Appendix B, tells how Yezid tried to bribe Muslim to his side by offering Muslim the throne of Kufa. Muslim refused to be bribed. He was captured and executed, the third hero to be martyred in this struggle against oppression. Muslim's two young sons, who accompanied him, were also killed.

Meanwhile Hosein, convinced by Muslim's letter of finding support among the people of Kufa and ignorant of Muslim's execution, set out from Medina for Kufa, taking with him seventy-two male companions and his family members. Yezid sent an army of thirty-three thousand soldiers by some accounts and his most frightening generals to intercept this group and capture Hosein. An ambush occurred at Karbala.

For nine days, Hosein's followers suffered extreme thirst because they were cut off by the enemy from the Euphrates River, their only source of water. Far outnumbered and weakened by thirst, on the 10th day of Muharram Hosein's band battled with little hope of victory. Several times Yezid's chief general offered a truce contingent on Hosein's signing an oath of allegiance to the caliph, but each time Hosein refused. Hosein offered to return to Medina without further fighting. This offer was not accepted. In various individual efforts to get water, Hosein and all his men were killed. Only one young son, Joynal, survived. He had stayed in the camp during the days of battle because he was seriously ill. The women and Joynal were taken captive to the court of Yezid at Damascus and from there they were returned to Medina.

While they were captive in Damascus, Yezid allowed the women to return to the battle field to bury their dead. It is said that the dirges sung by Hosein's women, and even by Yezid's women, were the beginning of the mourning practices of the Muharram festival.⁴ Many episodes narrated in the Karbala cycle of *jarigan* songs are the same as the episodes referred to in Muharram dirges.

The Karbala stories told at Muharram time commemorate each day's events during the ten days of the battle. The description of Hosein's death represents a typical episode that is elaborated in the Karbala cycle of stories. On the tenth day of fighting, when the sun was at its zenith, and only Hosein remained, he was drawn into a fight with the most famous warrior in the caliph's army, Shimar. Knowing his end was near, Hosein asked to be allowed to pray. As he knelt in the position for prayer, Shimar severed his head. For a moment the sun was eclipsed.

One of the most popular episodes from the Karbala cycle of stories concerns the marriage of Kasem, the young son of Hasan, to his cousin, Sokhina, the daughter of Hosein, a marriage that Hasan on his deathbed asked Hosein to accomplish. When Kasem offers to fetch water from across the enemy lines, Hosein remembers the promise he made to his brother, Hasan. A wedding takes place followed by permission for Kasem to go to battle. The moving scenes of this story are described in the "Kasem-Sokhinar *Jari*" song which can be found in Appendix B.

Yezid transgressed the laws of Islam in several ways: he had challenged Hosein to fight during the sacred month of Muharram, when fighting, as well as other indulgences, are proscribed. He spilled the blood of the Prophet's descendants. He allowed the wanton murder of each man in Hosein's army. In contrast, the deaths of Hosein and of each member of his group represent heroic acts of will as each man chose to die rather than fail in the cause of Hosein's leadership. The deaths were a

sacrifice in the name of righteousness and in the true spirit of Islam. Even Sunnis agree that what happened at Karbala was disgraceful on the part of Yezid and his army, and that the martyrs of Karbala attest to the glory of Islam.

The Karbala stories contain episodes that many Sunnis claim, and even some Shi'as agree, are historically doubtful. However, most Sunni Muslims as well as Shi'as admire the heroism of Hosein and his followers, conceding that this noble band received undue and unwarranted treatment at the hands of the caliph Yezid. In Bangladesh, Sunnis participate in the Muharram celebrations in honor of the *panjatan*—the Prophet, his daughter Fatema, his cousin Hazrat Ali, and his grandsons, Hasan and Hosein. Sunnis no less than Shi'as memorialize the suffering of the women, such as the grief of Fatema, the daughter of Hosein, on receiving the news of Hosein's death and later, at the court of Yezid, when the caliph hands her the severed head of her father, moments that are portrayed in the *jarigan* songs which are musically notated in Appendix B.

The dissemination and scale of the festival

The month of Muharram was always a month of penance for Sunnis, as well as for Shi'as. Acts of penance during the festival take on special significance as a way to remember the suffering of those who died at Karbala and to aspire to their level of heroism. The underlying themes of the festival—heroism, grief and salvation through righteousness—are shared by non-Muslims as well as Muslims.

Whatever the actual origins of the festival activities, they are charged with emotional intensity unsurpassed by any other festival. Even the Easter processions in Spain fail to match the extent of Muharram activities that replay, day by day, the ten days of the tragedy of Karbala. In Bangladesh, as elsewhere, the processions display dedicated craftsmanship in the making of symbolic tombs and other properties and in the skill of mock fighters wielding bamboo staffs. Groups of men chanting the names of the Karbala martyrs draw blood from their chests and backs as they flagellate themselves with chains.

Today, Bangladeshis, like many Muslim communities around the world, continue to celebrate Muharram much as it was celebrated when it was first introduced to the Indian subcontinent.⁵ In Bangladesh, where Shi'as comprise less than one percent of the population and Sunnis comprise the vast majority of Bangladeshis, over ninety percent of the Muharram participants and onlookers are Sunnis.⁶

With a few exceptions⁷, the Muharram celebrations are enjoyed by all communities in Bangladesh. Hindu craftsmen and musicians are traditionally employed in the construction of *taziyas*, the symbolic tombs, and other decorations. They provide the drum playing that accompanies the mock fights and announces festival activities. Christians and Buddhists, in areas of Bangladesh where Muharram is celebrated, enjoy watching, if not performing, in the celebrations. Jasimuddin observes in the lines cited at the head of this chapter, everyone in the village gathers for participating in the festival.

Processional symbols

The Muharram celebrations take place in two spheres: open air activities, mainly processions, and indoor gatherings called *majlises* (assemblies) held in the halls of

buildings known as *Imam baras*; literally, Imam houses, buildings devoted to the *Imams* (religious leaders) of Islam, especially the martyred ones commemorated at Muharram time. The largest one in Dhaka is called Hoseini Dalan (literally, Hosein Building) built in the seventeenth century.⁸ These buildings are used to store the properties of the festival: flags, swords, shields, and other symbolic accouterments of battle.

Although the festival is technically a time for "weeping and wailing"—for "*zārī*" in the literal sense of this Persian word—the events are far from mournful at all times. In fact, the festival is a gay occasion, as much like a fair as a funeral. An Indian Muslim in India in the nineteenth century describes the preparations for Muharram "as if for a festival of rejoicing."⁹

Processional activities include carrying *alamas* (battle flags) atop ten to fifteen-foot poles, creating in their numbers a mobile forest of fluttering pennants. Self-flagellation on chest and back is carried on by groups of young men within the procession and accompanied by lively drumming and by the energetic chanting of the names of the martyrs celebrated.

Large *taziyas* (literally, consolations) are carried in the processions. Resembling multi-storied fairy-palaces they are made of bamboo frames covered in colored tissue paper and tinsel. They are carried along on the shoulders of groups of men or wheeled on carts. *Sharbat* (flavored sweet water) is distributed from carts in memory of Hosein's thirsting band. The horse of Hosein, "Duldul", or several "Dulduls", are led along in the procession, riderless and beautifully caparisoned. Decorated elephants add to the pageantry.

The processions are taken out daily after the third or fourth day of Muharram. They occur at various times during the day or at night, when lighting and "fire play" (whirling of torches) is visually exciting. Only males participate in the processions, mostly boys and young men. The participants wear simple but effective costumes, representing soldiers of Hosein's army. Flagellants are bare-chested; in the course of the procession they draw increasing blood, attesting to their devotion to the memory of the martyrs and as a form of yearly penance.

"Band parties", groups of musicians with martial instruments—trumpets, horns, oboes and tubas—follow along in the processions, playing British marching tunes. The drummers, following the flagellants, beat their drums to a lively rhythm as they move in the procession with a dancing gait.

The procession pauses at intervals while groups of young marchers with *lathis* (bamboo staffs) stage stylized fights known as *lathi khela* (stick play). The clacking sound of their *lathis* as they strike each other add a delicate percussive beat to the heavy beat of the large drums that accompany their dance-like motions. Leaps and pirouettes manifest long training in the art of *lathi khela*. Jasimuddin describes the "intricate and rhythmic play of canes" in his story-poem, *Sojan Badiar Ghat*. The passage below is from Barbara Painter and Yann Lovelock's translation of Jasimuddin's poem.

The two began their play, whirling their sticks,
In circles as the potter spins his wheel,
As lightning roars through clouds to strike the trees,
Or as one kite swoops on another kite.¹⁰

Muharram majlis

Every evening during Muharram, people gather at the *Imam baras* in their neighborhood for *majlises* (meetings) to hear the sermons and sing the Muharram dirges. Women hold *majlises* separately from men in their homes or they attend the men's *majlises*, staying behind a curtain which is hung for the purpose.

During the Muharram festival in June of 1995, I attended a women's *majlis* in Dhaka conducted at the home of a young female lawyer, the daughter of a Shi'a sage whom I had visited earlier. Mohammad Sayeedur, a veteran folklorist from the Bangla Academy, had recommended the sage as someone knowledgeable in matters having to do with Muharram.

The *majlis* room was in a small building reserved especially for the purpose, across a courtyard from the sage's rooms in the highly dense neighborhood of Hoseini Dalan. The *majlis* began about eight in the evening and lasted until nine-thirty. The congregation of about thirty women and a few girls sat on the floor for the sermon and stood for singing *marsiya*s (dirges). The leader sat on a chair, gave the sermon and led the singing. Four women held tattered booklets of lyrics. With the leader adding her strong voice to theirs, they led the others in singing the songs, starting each new verse with gusto before the others joined in. Singing preceded and followed the sermon. During the *majlis*, many women let their *dopattas* (a long scarf for covering the head at prayer time) slip from their heads as they joined in the evident pleasure of singing.

The whole *majlis* was conducted in Urdu, the language of Shi'as in northern India. I was reminded that some of the finest poetry in this language can be found in *marsiya* poems of the nineteenth century by such Indian poets as Anis and Dabir¹¹. Some of the Bengali songs that Jasimuddin includes in his book on *jarigan* resemble the poetic style of these Urdu *marsiya*s.

The leader started a sermon whose emotional escalation I could appreciate. As the sermon progressed and more episodes were commemorated, the lady's voice rose higher and higher in pitch and became increasingly strained. The women seated on the floor began to cover their heads with their *dopattas* and to weep quietly. By the end of the sermon, which climaxed in statements uttered in a high-pitched chant, all were weeping volubly.

More *marsiya*s were sung after the sermon. These were followed by *naohas* and *matams*, songs that accompany chest-beating. Small girls along with their elders participated in this action with well-timed strokes. After a last song, the women dispersed for tea served in the rooms of the leader's home close by.

A country Muharram, June 10, 1995

During the 1960s I attended Muharram celebrations in Dhaka and Calcutta, both large, capital cities. I welcomed the chance while I was preparing the present book to witness the festival as it is celebrated in the countryside of Bangladesh. Shamsuzzaman Khan, the Director of the Folklore Division of the Bangla Academy in Dhaka, suggested I talk to Mohammad Sayeedur, the Academy's expert on Muharram celebrations.

Mohammad Sayeedur is an institution. An expert on Bangladeshi folklore in general, he works on the top floor of the nineteenth century Bangla Academy headquarters, in a large, high-ceilinged room, at one end of which he has his desk with a few chairs for receiving guests. A man in his late sixties, he has such poor eyesight for reading that even with a magnifying glass he bends over to peruse papers, almost touching what he reads with his head. His handwriting, nevertheless, is as clear as the printed page of a book, and his explanations to me were made with the same precision and clarity as his handwriting. If I speak with affection, I echo the same sentiment on the part of his colleagues.

Sayeedur, as he is known, recommended that I see Muharram not only in a town called Manikganj, reputed to have the most elaborate celebrations, but in a smaller town, Hobiganj, in Sylhet, Sayeedur's home town, where he said the celebrations were the most elaborate of all. As it turned out, it was all I could do to fit in the trip to Manikganj.

About three weeks before the Manikganj trip, my young assistant, Mokhlesur Rahman Lenin ("Lenin"), and I paid a visit to the *Imam bara* in Gorpara, a site outside of Manikganj where the celebrations of that area originated. Shamsuzzaman Khan arranged for us to be received by the Pir (a Muslim religious leader) who is the custodian of the *Imam bara* there. This preliminary trip would put us in touch with the Pir so that he could inform us about the program of the celebrations and answer questions, which he would not have time to do once the ten days of the Muharram festival got under way.

Manikganj is sixty-eight kilometers (thirty-five miles) northwest of Dhaka, two hours away by bus, depending on traffic in Dhaka and suburban towns. Buses in Bangladesh are generally filled to capacity and beyond, but we managed to get on a bus that had seats for us, or, rather, a man sacrificed his seat for me. A man that sat next to me gave us some useful information about a singer that we should try to find in the Mymensingh area on another trip. From his suggestion we found an excellent *jarigan* singer in that area which led to attendance at the competition of *jarigan* singing described in Chapter Four on *jarigan* performances.

We reached the Manikganj depot around noon from where we took a bicycle rickshaw to the area called Gorpara. The rickshaw driver had to contend with a rough road most of the way. He pedaled along a path of broken bricks and rutted clay. On either side of us the land often sloped steeply down a bank to a shallow canal or river. Lenin said that the drought of that year and the water diverted from Bangladesh into India by a large dam had so reduced the water of these channels that it was impossible to make a more comfortable journey by boat, as he remembered doing as a child.

Our destination an hour later was marked by our arrival at a gate by the side of the road. "GORPARA IMAM BARA" was written in bold letters above the gate. There was a yard on the other side with *pukka* (solid) buildings on two sides of it. One of these was the *Imam bara* itself.

We went through the gate. A man greeted us and guided us across the open yard to a small gateway and down a path that brought us to the steps of a *pukka* house. We took off our sandals and entered a small reception room where our guide invited us to sit down to wait for the Pir who, he said, would come shortly. The ceiling fan

was turned on and we were given refreshments. We had time to look around the room. On a cabinet there was a large stereo-cassette-radio player. On the walls were poster-size photographs of soccer players among colored prints of the Kabba at Mecca.

When the Pir arrived he welcomed us cordially and said he had received the news of our coming and that we were to stay for lunch. He made me feel important by thanking me on behalf of Bangladesh for caring about *jarigan* songs. We were treated to an excellent lunch of local fish curry and spinach on the side. After lunch the Pir told us to follow him to the *Imam bara* so he could show it to us and answer any questions we had about it.

The building is an unprepossessing, one-storied rectangular structure with the traditional large room inside for the *majlises* and for storing the permanent *taziyas* and other processional properties of the Muharram festival. In a small side room there was a wall lined with photographs of past Muharram celebrations and of ambassadors and other foreign dignitaries that had attended them. In this room also stood a huge drum, the head being about two feet in diameter and the depth of its belly about three-and-one-half to four feet.

The Pir said we must sit on the verandah that ran along the front side of the building. There his nephew was busy inscribing three books which he carefully wrapped in red paper with green ribbon. The Pir presented these gifts to me with a little speech in English. He was pleased that I noticed the colors of the wrapping paper and ribbon. Green represents the poisoning of Hasan and red represents the blood of Hosein at Karbala. One of the books gave a blow-by-blow history of Karbala by a Bangladeshi scholar writing in English. The other two books were in Bengali, about the festival and about Shi'as.

The Pir told us that the Muharram festival and this *Imam bara* had been instituted in his great-grandfather's time. It seems that this ancestor used to live in Bihar, the State that lies west of West Bengal in India. He was married to a Shi'a wife. For some reason he had to migrate to eastern Bengal and he settled in Gorpara before summoning his wife to join him. When he wrote to her, she said that she would come only if he instituted Muharram celebrations in Gorpara. He promised that he would. She came, he kept his promise, and the *Imam bara* was built. From that time the celebrations became increasingly popular. People started coming from distant villages as well as from Gorpara to join in the celebrations, bringing their families and livestock, and camping for days at a time near the *Imam bara*.

We returned to Gorpara for June 9, the day before the climactic tenth day of the festival, the Ashura. By the time we were to return to Gorpara, my husband from America had joined me in Dhaka. As well as my husband, a friend of Lenin's, an African visitor to Bangladesh, was to go along with us and help with photography. Another friend of Lenin's lent us a luxurious, air-conditioned van and a driver. We were to stay in a government guest house in Manikganj on the night of the ninth so that we would be ready for the celebrations on the tenth.

On June 9th we reached Manikganj in time to take the rickshaw ride to Gorpara and observe the events of that day. When we got there, the place was filled with visitors milling around the *Imam bara* compound and at the stalls of vendors who had set up a fair-like market of toys, household equipment, and crafts. Near the *Imam bara*, cooks were stirring vast pots of food for the gathering.

The Pir delegated a nephew to take care of us and he guided me around the campus. I was attracted by a *putal nach* (literally, doll-dance; marionette show). The performance was held in a make-shift room made of cloth walls attached to bamboo poles and a little stage at one end. I was fascinated by the way the marionettes merely echoed with modulated squeaking sounds a narrator's chanted story-telling. He was accompanied by a flutist and tabla player who repeated the tune of the chant or played interlude music. The effect of the chanting was somewhat like the chanted narrative style of a *jarigan* song recital.

The Pir had told me that I would be able to hear men's *marsiya* singing in the evening around eight o'clock, so we stayed at Gorpara for this occasion. After sunset a large crowd of women began to settle on the grass in front of the *Imam bara* verandah, keeping behind the all-male audience that sat on the ground directly in front of the verandah. On the verandah itself about ten men stood in a group near the large drum that we had seen earlier.

The singing started around eight-thirty and went on for about an hour. Each verse of a song was given impetus by the leader of the group. He would sing the first word or words of a verse and the others would join in after him. A drummer beat out a lively rhythm for each song and there was a harmonium (small, organ-like instrument) being played by someone seated on the floor of the verandah. The singing was not as smoothly even as in the women's *majlises* that I attended, but at least the tradition of *marsiya* singing seemed to be thriving.

The next day we returned to see the tenth day procession from its beginning in Gorpara to its end in the streets of Manikganj. We were told it would begin around three in the afternoon, but it was five before it actually got started. Meanwhile, an increasing number of participants were arriving in costume and bearing long poles with banners still furled. Some held swords or spears and some held the round shields characteristic of Karbala representations.

During the previous day and on this day, groups of young men and boys frequently performed ritual runs around the *Imam bara*, chanting "*Hai Hasan! Hai Hosein!*"¹² The drummer would beat an accompaniment to the rhythm of their footsteps. Some carried long poles with banners and wore costumes consisting of long white shirts over white *pajamas*. They wore twisted ropes of red and black or green and red ribbon which they wound around their waists and crossed over their chests and backs. Many wore kerchiefs around their foreheads. These groups joined in the gathering crowd of celebrants.

The processions started with rolls from the large drum, which was wheeled on a cart, and a fanfare from a "band party". We followed along the side of the procession with the crowds of onlookers. At intersections in the road, groups from other villages would join the group that had started out from Gorpara, swelling the procession as far as the eye could see ahead.

Suddenly the sky darkened and a typical monsoon rain storm burst on the procession. It lasted for the rest of the journey to Manikganj, about two hours. The participants continued their march in good spirits with the music playing most of the way and the properties seemed none the worse for wear. A rickshaw driver let us shelter ourselves and equipment under the hood of his vehicle.

When we reached the main streets of Manikganj, they were filled with individual processions, merging like tributaries of a great river, each with its own kind of properties and banners. The rain abated so that it was easier to watch the variety of activities. As well as groups of men carrying tall poles with *alams* (pennants), like an advancing forest, young boys, about ten years of age, also carrying long poles with *alams*, walked or jogged in orderly ranks. Other groups carried real weapons of war from earlier times—swords, spears and shields, which were made of beautifully carved and embossed metal, not the bamboo frame and paper weapons I had seen in the Dhaka processions. Later Sayeedur said that, indeed, these were real weapons that have been preserved from Moghul times.

I saw at least three caparisoned elephants ambling ahead of the groups of arms-bearers. Then I saw what Sayeedur had told me was a specialty of the Manikganj celebrations, the "fire play", a kind of dance with burning torches. A group of men were whirling and tossing their torches in rhythmic motions. By now, in the dark of the evening, these created an exciting vision of flames flying in graceful curves.

Absence of *jarigan* singing during the festival

In the *majlises*, as in other Muharram activities that I have attended, I observed no evidence of *jarigan* singing in the sense of a lengthy narrative recital. This absence may be due to the emphasis on participatory events rather than on passive listening, except to sermons in the *majlises*. Perhaps the stories about Karbala that are referred to in these sermons and in the *marsiya* and *matam* songs are found to be sufficient.

In communities that are far from a town such as Manikganj, Muharram may be celebrated on a small scale and *jarigan* recitals may play a part in such places. At the present time, however, in the town celebrations that I observed, recitals of *jarigan* songs, whose "*jari*" connotation was once acquired through association with Muharram themes, seem to play only a side role, if any at all, during the actual celebrations.

Nevertheless, the rituals of Muharram and the symbolism in its pageantry share identical themes with those of *jarigan* songs about the Karbala episodes. Observing a Muharram celebration is like seeing some of the *jarigan* episodes enacted on a stage. Knowing the *jarigan* narratives about Karbala gives meaning to the symbols and events of Muharram, just as the sights and sounds of the events of Muharram create lasting images in the mind that Bangladeshis bring with them when they listen to *jarigan* recitals.

Beyond the festival context

The performances known as "*jarigan*" that flourished especially in the nineteenth century, although they featured Karbala themes, developed mostly outside of the Muharram festival context. Presumably in former times, if not at present, Muslim bards were engaged to sing the Karbala stories as part of the Muharram festival program. Later, at some time after the advent of Muharram to Bengal, bardic recitals of Islamic narratives, which included Karbala stories, developed into large-scale events that were scheduled and staged at any time during the year when someone or a group of people cared to organize them. By the nineteenth century, intensive conventions

of *jarigan* singers might last as long as a week, entertaining massive numbers of listeners.

In the district of Mymensingh, *jarigan* songs are performed as dances: *jarinach* (*jari*-dance). These dances may be related to the *lathi khela* (stick play), performed at various times during the Muharram festival, or to local dances which may be derived from the dances of tribal populations of Bangladesh. Although sharing the same narrative themes as *jarigan* songs, the *lathi khelas* are accompanied only by drumming or other instrumental accompaniment, whereas *jarinach* represents a dance that accompanies the singing of a full-length *jarigan* narrative. A *jarinach* competition is described in Chapter IV on *jarigan* performances.

Jarigan stories include many themes that are only indirectly connected with Muharram stories or not connected at all. The Karbala episodes, however, remain the identifying episodes for the whole repertory of *jarigan* songs which include other themes as well. As a result, all the stories sung in a traditional style on Muslim epic themes tend to be classed as "*jarigan*" or simply "*jari*", whether they are about the sad events of Karbala commemorated at Muharram time or not.

THE BENGALI HOME

Bengal in the context of South Asia

The history of *jarigan* songs represents a fine example of the integration of foreign ideas into the local culture of Bengal. The process of absorption can be traced to a sequence of invasions into the Indian subcontinent, beginning with the Aryans from the northwest around 1500 B. C. Later Greeks, Moghuls and the British have contributed to the fabric of Bengali culture as they did to cultures elsewhere in the Indian subcontinent.

Bengalis have always been exceptionally receptive to new ideas from distant lands, even those from Islamic West Asia which represented a very different philosophy from the local Hindu and Buddhist ones. Yet, these ideas were absorbed within a surprisingly short time. As a result, the people of today's Bangladesh, where most Bengali-speaking Muslims live, have inherited a rich mixture of ancient Indic traditions and influences from western Asia and Europe.

Geography

Bangladesh is situated on the north-eastern fringe of the Indian subcontinent, just west of Myanmar (Burma), with the hills of Assam to the north and the Bay of Bengal to the south. The region includes one of the world's largest deltas. In this "liquid land,"¹³ four great rivers, the Ganges, the Brahmaputra, the Meghna, and the Padma, join and disperse themselves into a sinuous network of waterways. At one time an area of jungles, the land now is blanketed with fields. What space remains for habitation in a meager fifty-five thousand square miles of the country supports a population surpassing one hundred and twenty million, the most densely populated country in the world.

The many rivers of the region have facilitated boat travel before the time of trains and automobiles, but they have also impeded overland transport. Consequently, communities geographically contiguous have remained relatively isolated from each other, not unlike communities in the mountainous regions of the world.

For instance, in the 1960s, when I first lived in Bangladesh, which was at that time East Pakistan, a visit from Dhaka to a village about twenty miles away entailed a day's journey of circuitous travel down several large rivers in a launch, then along smaller rivers in a paddled boat, and finally an hour's walk along the ridges between fields of paddy. Thus the rural communities of Bangladesh tend to be self-contained, with their own dialects, styles of worship, festivals and forms of entertainment. *Jarigan* singing, for example, heard in different areas of Bengal, reflects differences in language, singing style and performance program.

Bangladesh is blessed with fertile soil and with a temperate climate, but devastating storms can sweep in from the Bay of Bengal, and rising rivers can flood a large portion of the country. These natural disasters kill crops, cattle and the people themselves, leaving families bereft of relatives and without their means of sustenance. On more than one occasion I have seen the devastation caused by storms and internecine quarrels often caused by tense economic circumstances. Although living in a bountiful rural landscape, most Bangladeshis are directly acquainted with the central themes of many *jarigan* songs: physical suffering, death and separation.

The advent of Islam

Muslims started to settle in Bengal as early as the ninth century A. D., when Arabian and Persian merchants arrived in Vanga, or Gaur as the region was known.¹⁴ These travelers found a thriving Hindu civilization with important Buddhist communities in its midst. In exchange, the local Hindu and Buddhist people of the area encountered a religion and world view quite opposite to their own.

It is believed today that the conversions to Islam of many of these people was largely due to the pioneering work of Islamic religious leaders, especially the Sufi *pirs* (spiritual leaders) from the Muslim world of the Middle East. These enterprising immigrants set about building mosques and *madrasas* (schools for Islamic education), and organized the clearing of land to expand agriculture.¹⁵ Especially Sufi literature imported and imparted by Muslims influenced the thinking and poetic style of Bengali folk poets.

One recent historian attributes the relative ease with which Bengalis assimilated Islamic ideas to the frontier quality of life in Bengal. At the time of the early Muslim settlers, Bengal was largely a region of jungles. Newcomers depended on the help of local people for survival and local people benefited from the settlers by exposure to new ways of thinking and working.¹⁶ Later, immigrants from the Middle East and European lands also found a *modus vivendi* for themselves in which Bengali culture was absorbed into their own lives. At the same time, the inhabitants of this eastern corner of South Asia continued to absorb cultural influences from the foreign settlers in their land.¹⁷

Turkic and Afghani rulers of the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries were succeeded by the Persians of Moghul times. Although the Moghul governors in

Bengal owed allegiance to the emperors enthroned in capital cities of central India, they enjoyed considerable independence.¹⁸ Geographic isolation encouraged political separation, and encouraged accommodation to the patterns of local life.

With the disintegration of the Safavid dynasty in Persia in the early seventeenth century, Shi'a aristocracy, including highly cultivated intellectuals, started coming to the Indian subcontinent for refuge. Persian intellectuals, including poets, flocked to the courts of Muslim rulers of north India. These Shi'as not only brought the Muharram celebrations as far as Bengal, but they enriched Bengali literature with their tales and poetic forms. The work of poets from these times indirectly, if not directly, influenced the development of *jarigan* poetry.¹⁹

The marriage of Islamic themes and literary genres with Bengali poetic forms was consummated at two levels: at the court level, when Turkic, followed by Moghul rulers patronized Bengali as well as Persian poets, and at the folk level by Bengali bards who absorbed Islamic themes into their repertoires. After a period of Shi'a Muslim rulers in the seventeenth century, Shi'as were never dominant for long in the region, but the Karbala stories that they brought with the Muharram festival became a part of Bengali bardic literature. The roots of *jarigan* Karbala themes may be traced to their presence.

During the years of Turkic and Moghul rule, various cults were evolving among the Hindus of Bengal. The most prominent was the Vaishnava sect founded by a Hindu poet-saint in the sixteenth century, embodying the devotional faith of Vishnu worshipers (Vaishnavas) from earlier times. The Vaishnavas developed songs whose music influenced that of the Bauls, a sect of mendicant mystics. The Bauls to this day follow their own practices and express the tenets of their syncretic faith in a characteristic form of song which has influenced profoundly the poetry and music of Bengal, including the music of *jarigan* songs. Other important cults of the time focused on local deities. Stories in praise of these deities were woven into lengthy ballads which provided models for *jarigan* songs.

The British and Pakistani years

As Moghul hegemony waned and British political power spread throughout India, Bengal continued to flourish agriculturally. During the nineteenth century, the region enjoyed political stability and productivity. In the countryside, large-scale *jarigan* performances developed alongside of the extensive Hindu recitals of poetry known as *kabigan* (poet-songs).

In the early twentieth century, the British planned to impose a political division between eastern and western Bengal, to facilitate governing this populous region. The city of Calcutta, in western Bengal, was by then the metropolitan center and capital for the whole of British India. Although the division of Bengal was revoked, a border had been articulated that would become permanent at the end of British rule in 1947. This border still follows a line demarcating a socio-religious difference between Bengalis in West Bengal in India, where the population is predominantly Hindu, and Bengalis of Bangladesh, where the population is predominantly Muslim. Muharram is still celebrated in certain Muslim areas of the State of West Bengal in India, and *jarigan* songs may be sung in Muslim communities there,²⁰ but it is in Bangladesh where the tradition developed and mostly survives.

In 1947, the Muslim majority region of East Bengal was absorbed into the newly formed nation of Pakistan, but by 1971, within less than a generation, the region known as East Pakistan asserted its identity as an independent nation called Bangladesh (literally, Bangla-land).

The performing arts in Bengali culture

The arts of poetry, drama and music predominate in Bengali culture. One reason for the prevalence of these oral forms of artistic expression lies in the geology and climate of the region. Deltaic Bengal must import any material more durable than clay, wood and bamboo. High humidity and voracious insects limit the survival of works of art using paper, wood or cloth. Some examples of ancient brick architecture still remain from Hindu, Buddhist and Moghul times, but most of the visual art work from the past has vanished. In contrast, the oral arts, poetry and music, are evident in every corner of the country, where the songs of each district show signs of a long and cultivated tradition.

In Bangladesh, I have experienced the sound of singing throughout the day. Hawkers cry their wares in melodious chants, and construction workers relieve the tedium of their work with romantic songs. Beggars, singly or in groups sing religious songs with haunting tunes. Traditional songs as well as the latest "film" songs are amplified from loud-speakers in market places. Concerts of song are a part of most "functions" (gatherings in honor of a person or event). In addition to speeches, a typical memorial celebration will include songs and perhaps dances. Sometimes these events turn out to be veritable feasts of music. *Jarigan* songs, along with many other forms of song, have thrived in this environment.

Today, theatrical productions in Bangladesh are among the most outstanding in the world. In spite of limited material means and the economic necessity for directors and cast to work full-time jobs during the day, the plays that I have seen on Dhaka stages are remarkable for their imaginative interpretations of avant-garde as well as classic works, from foreign as well as Bengali sources. I marvel at the excellence of the direction of such creative directors as Jamil Ahmed and Selim Al Deen to name only two. Like smoothly integrated palimpsests, their productions refer to roots in Sanskrit times, to the *lilas* (literally, plays, generally in honor of Hindu deities) of nineteenth century Bengal, to secular folk dramas known as *jatras* (literally, journeys), and to modern influences in international theater. These influences merge into original productions that are peculiarly Bangladeshi.

Full scale *jarigan* performances manifest the influence of different performing arts. The varied facets of a traditional *jarigan* performance include poetic debates, the acting out of the stories narrated and a variety of song and orchestral entertainment. *Jarigan* performances continue to represent the artistic imagination and performance skills common to Bangladeshi culture today.

Due to the political, social and economic upheavals that occurred since the 1940s, *jarigan* performances began to decline in scale. Expert *jarigan* singers continued to practice their art throughout the region, but by the 1960s the number of these singers was decreasing. Potential *jarigan* singers were choosing work in cities for their livelihood and tastes became affected by Western influences.

REFLECTIONS OF THE MIDDLE EAST

The "Middle East", a name coined by Europeans, connotes inadequately the literary territory in which most of the *jarigan* stories take place. The expression is too abstract and vague to conjure up the particular world and the dramatic events that the *jarigan* stories depict. From a Bengali perspective, the region which includes Arabia, Iraq, Iran and Syria—the world of the *jarigan* stories—is a religious and fabulous entity rather than a geographical or political one. It is the world where the Prophet was born, and where he first collected his followers. It is the world of the Karbala stories.

The Islamic lore on which *jarigan* songs are based grew from a treasury of ancient history and legends in this area, including many of the same stories that are found in the Old Testament. The scenes in the *jarigan* Karbala stories epitomize the Bengali view of this Perso-Arabic Islamic world, a place where Muslim heroes first defended and spread their faith.

Seen through *jarigan* poetry, the Middle East resembles a network of traveled routes rather than a patchwork of countries with politically drawn borders. Cities rich in trade and intrigue, as well as in sacred associations, are linked one to the other by the itineraries of merchants, pilgrims, and marching armies. In Bangladesh, the traditional costuming of men in the Muharram processions and of the dancers in *jarinach* performances represents soldiers from story-book times and places in the Middle East.

If to the Western ear Damascus and Baghdad call up an "Arabian-Nights" mystique, so have these names a special resonance for *jarigan* audiences. Damascus figures in *jarigan* songs as a capital city from which the cruel caliph Yezid ruled at the time of the battle of Karbala. Other cities mentioned in the *jarigan* repertory include: Baghdad, flourishing in trade; and Kufa, whose citizens claimed they would support Imam Hosein then failed him; Mecca, the birthplace of the Prophet; and, most important of all, Medina, "golden Medina," as the city is called in *jarigan* texts, the haven of the Prophet and his followers in their move from Mecca.

Without the need to place them on a map or describe their appearance, the very names of these cities, in their Bengali spelling, conjure up an epic world in which sins against Islam are condemned and heroic deeds bear witness to the truth and power of faith in Islam. Although Medina, Damascus and Baghdad are names from a distant world, they also figure more importantly in the lives of *jarigan* audiences than many places closer to home, such as Delhi or even Dhaka. In *jarigan* literature, "Damesk" is only a town away.

As for what lies between the great cities of the Middle East, the *jarigan* poets envision lonely deserts with only the moon and sun for natural beauty. Whereas rocks must be imported to the clay-soiled regions of Bengal, in the Middle Eastern setting of Karbala stories there are stones handy on which bereaved heroines can strike their heads. Water figures in *jarigan* texts by its absence. The well where Iusuf (Joseph) is thrown by his wicked brothers is a dry well. The theme of thirst is prominent in the episodes of the Karbala stories. Sand, dust, rocks and dry wells are part of the poetic iconography with which *jarigan* singers portray the settings of their Middle Eastern stories.

Although *jarigan* stories are about events that occurred in the Middle East, elements of Bengali rural scenery and life creep into the *jarigan* narratives. Heroines



Map 2. The World of Karbala Stories.

who come from a Perso-Arabic world are seen to busy themselves with boiling *khir* (a Bengali rice pudding). In a *jarigan* episode about the childhood of Hasan and Hosein, they buy a sari for their mother, Fatema. When treeless deserts become too alien for *jarigan* poets to imagine, it is the *kokil* bird of Bengal, a jungle bird, as the *kokil* describes himself, who brings the news of a hero's death to the camp of Hosein. The *jarigan* scenes may be set in Arabia, but prophets, heroes and heroines speak to each other in the familiar language of Bengali households. Thus, the very name "*jarigan*" symbolizes the union of two worlds: the distant Perso-Arabic world, which contributed the word "*zārī*" to the Bengali vocabulary, and the local Bengali-speaking world to which the word "*gan*" belongs.

PREVIOUS STUDIES

As a university student in Calcutta during the late 1920s, Jasimuddin was apprenticed to Dinesh Chandra Sen, one of the foremost scholars in the field of Bengali literature and a pioneer collector of oral literature in the countryside of Bengal. This contact with Dinesh Chandra Sen has particular significance in the history of Bangladeshi scholarship devoted to Bengali literature.

It is significant that the meeting between Jasimuddin and Dinesh Chandra Sen was in Calcutta. At that time, Calcutta was the Paris and the Oxford of the Indian subcontinent, if not of Asia as a whole. Dhaka was still only a provincial capital, reflecting the light, or, rather, lying in the shadow of metropolitan Calcutta. Dhaka University, founded in 1921, had expanded and was producing scholars of quality, but many of these still looked to Calcutta for inspiration.

As regards the scholars native to Calcutta, they were primarily Hindu scholars. Jasimuddin was a Muslim. No doubt Dinesh Chandra Sen benefited from contact with Jasimuddin as much as Jasimuddin benefited from his contact with Calcutta's Hindu scholars. As a mature poet and writer, Jasimuddin began to fill the gap in studies of Bengali Muslim folk literature that the Hindu scholars allowed to go unattended. For instance, the attention paid in their works to *jarigan* is scant. Only Jasimuddin realized the value and the need for collecting *jarigan* texts and studying their origin.

Through the years until the end of British rule, Calcutta continued to be the premier cultural center of India. In 1947, when the border was drawn between West Bengal in India and the newly formed East Pakistan, Calcutta fell to West Bengal. The tense relationship between Pakistan and India that dogged the Pakistani years of Bangladesh discouraged visits by scholars in East Pakistan to Calcutta, but it thereby encouraged reliance on local resources. By the time that I was living in Dhaka in the 1960s, Dhaka University was flourishing with intellectual fervor to the extent that its scions were among the first targets of the Pakistani army of 1971, when it took action against the Bangladeshi freedom movement.

In spite of the loss of many intellectuals at that time, the people of Bangladesh recovered their inherent love of ideas and artistic expression. By my next visit to Dhaka in 1993-1994, I found a lively and productive intellectual community that was persisting, if not economically thriving, with individual pursuits. S. M. Lutfor Rahman's book on *jarigan* is only one example. My former teacher from the 1960s, Professor Ahmed Sharif in the Bengali Department of Dhaka University, had become a prominent leader amongst Bangladeshi scholars and the Bangla Academy which I used to visit in the 1960s had grown into a large organization with many departments.

On visits to Calcutta at this time I received the impression that by comparison to Dhaka, Calcutta was no longer the cultural leader. If anything, Dhaka was outstripping Calcutta as a cultural metropolis. I have already mentioned the outstanding work of Bangladeshi dramatists. A friend from Calcutta, Rustom Bharucha, who holds a doctorate in dramaturgy from America and has several books to his credit, expressed wonder at the advanced scholarship he saw in articles written by Bangladeshi professors in the Drama and Dramatics Department of Jahangirnagar University. An annual book fair held in commemoration of the martyrs of the

language riots of 1952 is one of the most popular events in Bangladesh. The many books of high quality that have been published in Bangladesh attest to the love of Bangladeshis for reading and writing.

There have been other times of intellectual renaissance in the Bangladeshi region in the past, but the recent one that I am describing provided a happy environment for my studies about *jarigan* songs. In the 1960s, the *jarigan* topic elicited little scholarly interest, with the exception of Jasimuddin's own perceptive enthusiasm for folk poetry. By 1993-1994, I found that scholars were sincerely interested. More than one yearned to accompany me into the countryside to find *jarigan* singers. All suggested where to go and whom to find.

Some of Bangladesh's foremost scholars welcomed my interviews, giving me their precious time for the sake of the topic, not merely to be hospitable. If I had not felt this interest to be genuine, I would not have undertaken to prepare a book on a topic that a Bangladeshi scholar could prepare far more thoroughly and efficiently than I could, if given the time and means for the project. From this local interest, the topic of *jarigan* may receive its due attention.



Fig. 1. Children's *jarigan* competition at Bangladesh Shishu Academy, Dhaka, 1994.



Fig. 2. The south side of Hoseini Dalan, built in 1642; Dhaka, 1964.



Fig. 3. Map of Karbala by Ahmed Hossein, specialist in paintings on rickshaws, in Hoseini Dalan, Dhaka, 1986.



Fig. 4. Symbolic tomb of Hosein in Hoseini Dalan, Dhaka, Muharram, June 10, 1995.



Fig. 5. Muharram participants viewing *alams* in the main hall of Hoseini Dalan, Dhaka, June 10, 1995.



Fig. 6. Processional participant dressed as a Karbala warrior. Green represents Hasan; red is for Hosein. Dhaka, Muharram, June 10, 1995.



Fig. 7. A *taziya* in a Muharram procession, Dhaka, June 10, 1995.



Fig. 8. Green *alams* representing the poisoned Hasan and red ones for Hosein killed at Karbala. Muharram, Dhaka, June 10, 1995.



Fig 9. Self-flagellation exercises and *alams* representing grief. Muharram, Dhaka, June 10, 1995.



Fig. 10. Ritual self-flagellation, Muharram procession, Dhaka, June 10, 1995.



Fig 11. A model of an *Imam bara*, Muharram procession, June 10, 1995.



Fig. 12. Horses representing those of the martyred heroes of Karbala, Muharram procession, Dhaka, June 10, 1995.



Fig. 13. Muharram processional participants, one fainting from fasting and heat. Gorpara, Manikganj, June 10, 1995.



Fig. 14. A *putol nach*, Muharram *mela*, Gorpara, Manikganj, June 10, 1995.



Fig. 15. A *taziya* for the Muharram procession, Gorpara, Manikganj, June 10, 1995.



Fig. 16. Processional emblem with symbolic shields and daggers. Pictures show an *Imam bara*; the *buraq* (the Prophet's carrier on his visit to Heaven); Duldul (Hosein's horse); and Madina or Damascus.

CHAPTER TWO

THE DEFINITIONS

আল্লা, প্রথমে সেলাম ভেজি আল্লা নিরঞ্জন।
তারপরে সেলাম ভেজি নবীজির চরণ।

Allah, prothome selam bheji Allah niranjan.
Tarpore selam bheji nabijir choron.

(First to Allah I offer my salam, Allah without blemish.
Then I offer my salam at the feet of the Prophet.)

— Opening lines to a *jarigan* song from Brahmanbaria.¹

CONNOTATIONS

Derivation of "jari"

The "zārī" derivation of "jari" is translated in Persian and Urdu dictionaries as "crying, groaning, wailing".² Such demonstrative expressions of grief are an important part of Muharram celebrations. Participants express grief not only in ritual chants and dirges, but many celebrants practice self-flagellation to the point of drawing blood as an expression of sympathy with the suffering of the Karbala heroes and heroines, as well as a way to prove piety and to perform penance.³ The expression "jari" applies more directly to these outward displays than to the controlled chanting of the *jarigan* stories.

A plethora of connotations

Neither the general public nor scholars agree on a simple definition for *jarigan*. When I ask "What are *jarigan* songs?", I receive almost as many different answers as the number of people that I question. The variety of answers calls to mind the Buddhist parable in which blind sages, not knowing they are touching an elephant, judge what they are touching by the limited area that they can feel near them. In the same way, the term *jarigan* is defined differently, according to each individual's experience of *jarigan* performances, even as I base my own conceptions of *jarigan* singing on limited experience.

From the various answers I receive, I find that two basic concepts co-exist: a narrow one and a broad one. The narrow definition limits the *jarigan* repertory to songs concerning only Karbala episodes—to "Hasan-Hosein" songs, as many Bangladeshis have identified them to me. This view, with its reference to the hero-martyrs commemorated in the festival of Muharram, adheres to the connotation of "*jari*"; that is, "lamentation". "*Jarigan, bishader gan*" (*Jari*-songs are songs of sorrow) is the first statement in Jasimuddin's book, *Jarigan* (1968).

Some Bangladeshis whom I interviewed identified *jarigan* songs as folk song versions of a popular nineteenth century epic novel, *Bishad Sindhu* (literally, *Sorrow-Sea*), by Mir Mosharraf Hosein. This novel vividly recounts the tragic story of the battle of Karbala. *Jarigan* songs, however, antedate this novel by several centuries. Nevertheless, the association of *jarigan* songs with *Bishad Sindhu* is correct in that the novel and the *jarigan* repertory share the same themes.

In practice, Jasimuddin identifies *jarigan* songs broadly to include more than just Karbala episodes. This is implied in the variety of examples in his collection. For instance, he includes only three Karbala songs out of eighteen songs that he identifies as *jarigan* songs. The other songs concern stories from the lives of prophets, two romances and two versions of a short humorous tale. Likewise, S. M. Lutfur Rahman includes in his collection of *jarigan* texts only two Karbala songs out of nine songs that he identifies as *jarigan*. Both writers stress that *jarigan* songs are not limited to songs of grief, but that many contain a variety of moods within individual songs.

Bangladeshis, who spent their childhood in the rural countryside before the 1960s, remember all-night *jarigan* performances that they attended as children. They remember especially the sessions of witty questions and answers between poet-singers that were part of these performances. Based on this experience, some Bangladeshis define *jarigan* songs as purely poetic debates. When asked about the themes of actual "*jari*" songs, many answer vaguely "Hasan-Hosein stories", and many responders are unaware that "*jari*" means lamentation.⁴

Some Bangladeshi scholars whom I questioned know well that "*jari*" means lamentation and they emphasize that *jarigan* songs are songs with themes exclusively about Karbala. Most singers whom I questioned, although not all, tended to stress the connection of *jarigan* songs with Karbala themes, but when I asked about such narrative songs as "Tilekban" that Jasimuddin includes in his collection, they agreed that such songs are also *jarigan* songs. Audio-cassette recordings in Bangladeshi music shops have titles that include the word "*jari*" for non-Karbala songs, as well as for Karbala songs. My observation of how poems are titled in paper-back collections of Bangladeshi narrative song texts suggests that *jarigan* has come to mean simply a lengthy Muslim story in song form.

Often *jarigan* connotes a style of performance rather than a genre of song. Many Bangladeshis answered my question about the meaning of *jarigan* by saying that it was songs sung by a *boyati*, a chief singer, with *dohars*, a chorus, and that often two such groups would compete in poetic duels. Two scholars that I questioned have compared *jarigan* singing to American "spiritual" singing, referring to the emotional quality of the Karbala songs and the antiphonal aspect of their performances.⁵

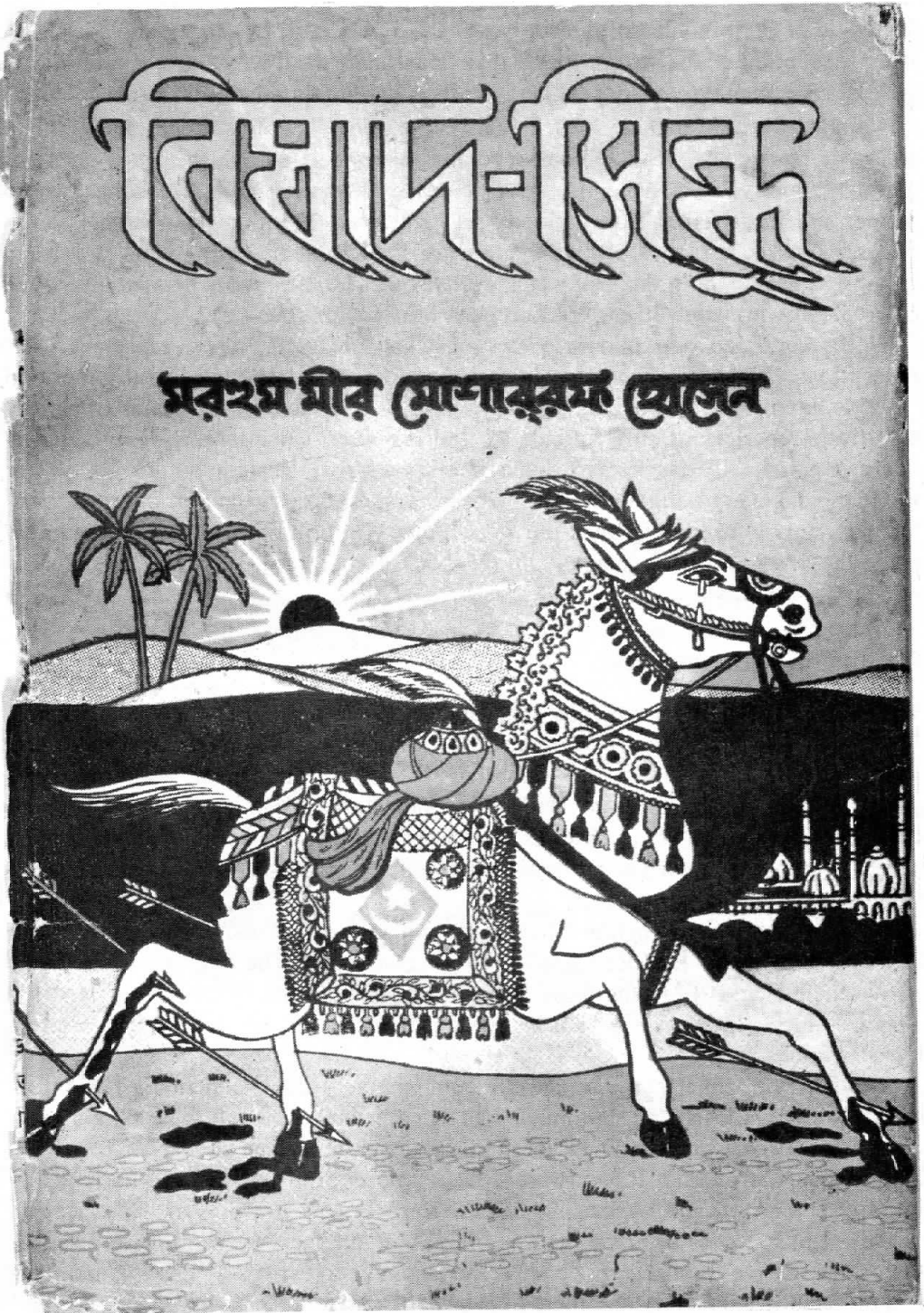


Fig. 17. Cover of Mir Mosharraf Hosein's historical novel, *Bishad Sindhu*, (1908), 1980 edition; featuring Hosein's horse, Duldul, the Karbala desert, the setting sun and Madina and Damascus.

The style of performance of *jarigan* songs is so important to many Bangladeshis in their conception of the word *jarigan* that I can understand why the term signifies a style of song recital to many people rather than a genre or repertory of song.

I find the word "ballad", which is used by Bengali writers to describe *jarigan* songs, is inadequate. "Ballad" has several meanings. Although the word connotes narrative poetry, it is generally used for relatively short narrative songs whose themes are local rather than national. *Jarigan* songs are more comparable to the *chansons de geste* (songs of battle action) of French medieval literature which are lengthy and national in their import. *Jarigan* songs are even more comparable to the epics sung by minstrels in eastern European Muslim communities.⁶

Both the broad and narrow views of what "*jarigan*" means represent valid perceptions. The difference between these views depends on how literally the term "*jari*" is interpreted. If it is literally interpreted, then, of course, the *jarigan* repertory signifies a repertory of only Karbala stories. However, if the term *jarigan* is understood pragmatically (as I have found it to be used by Jasimuddin, S. M. Lutfur Rahman, and many Bangladeshi singers and laymen), then the epithet "*jari*" need not be taken any more literally than the word "*jatra*" (a form of Bengali folk drama) is taken literally to mean "a journey". In this book, I interpret the term *jarigan* broadly rather than literally.

Confusion with *marsiyas*

The *marsiyas*, the elegiac hymns sung during Muharram, merit the designation of "*jari*" more than the songs of *jarigan* singers. *Marsiyas*, a Persian form of poetry, came to Bengal along with the Muharram literature from Persia. Many *marsiyas* sung in Bangladesh represent Bengali versions of Persian texts, but many are composed by local poets in Urdu as well as in Bengali. Unlike the texts of *jarigan* songs, the texts of *marsiyas* are available in print in paper-back booklets. They are sold in bazaars near *Imam baras*.

Jarigan songs are sometimes confused with *marsiya* songs, which may explain how the term "*jari*" has been applied to *jarigan* songs. The two genres of songs derive their themes from the same stock of Karbala stories, but *marsiyas* are truly elegies,—lyrical cries from the heart—whereas *jarigan* songs are lengthy, expository narrations.

The texts of Muharram *marsiyas* are comparatively short, containing five or six stanzas, pre-composed and set to melodies that are simple enough to be sung by lay-people in unison. *Jarigan* songs, on the other hand, represent the narrative art of a highly skilled, professional bard who is the composer of his songs and who is free to improvise. The *jarigan* songs that feature Karbala episodes may include laments conveyed in speeches of heroes and heroines, but, although the wording in these laments may derive from *marsiya* poetry, the laments represent only passing moments in a principally expository chronicle of events.

The excerpts below, one from a *marsiya* and one from a *jarigan* song, illustrate the strong similarities between the two genres when only the scenes of grief in *jarigan* songs are isolated and compared to *marsiyas*.

Example 1: a free translation of a complete *marsiya* from a booklet of *marsiya* lyrics composed some time in the 1950s or 1960s. In this *marsiya*, Hosein thinks of his brother, Hasan, as he goes to battle. (See further remarks about this song in its translation in Appendix A.)

In deep distress, Hosein weeps;
 lost in grief for his brother.
 When danger looms over a brother,
 Who can face it without a brother?
 "Where are you my brother? The world grows dark.
 Who will stand by my side?
 Where are you, my brother? Whom do they see,
 these infidels that surround me?
 Why, my brother, have you died leaving me,
 giving me over to the infidels?
 In this time of danger, I call on you;
 Allow me to see you once again."⁷

Example 2: a free translation of the first lines in a *jarigan* song in Jasimuddin's collection. This song composed of eighty-one couplets is about the marriage of Kasem to his cousin, Sokhina, before he goes to a battle in which he will predictably be killed. The story begins with the despair of Hosein. (A translation of the entire song can be found in Appendix A.)

At Karbala, Hosein wept and prayed to Allah:
 "In this danger before me, no one but you (Allah) is my friend.
 Each one of my followers has died—without food, without water.
 I hear our people crying in the camp for water: (crying) 'Alas! Alas!'
 I have no friend left who can fetch water."
 So saying, Hosein wept bitterly.⁸

Both passages depict a dire situation and a feeling of despair. Both passages use speech as a way to depict an emotion. However, in the *marsiya* song the text is more lyrical, less expository, than the *jarigan* text and the verbal expression is more personal. The repetitions of words (for example, "brother" and "infidels") and of phrases gives a lyrical character to the text of the *marsiya* example, whereas the *jarigan* text exposes information without repetition in order to advance the story.

Besides these differences in perspective and in the modes of expression between the two passages, the respective texts in the original Bengali reveal a difference in prosody as well. In *jarigan* songs there is a fixed couplet-verse structure with a set number of syllables per line. In *marsiyas* the poetic meter and form varies for different songs. Often in *marsiyas* a tripartite division is used in each line of couplet-verses, a more lyrical prosody than the bipartite, shorter-lines of the couplet verses of *jarigan* poetry. The *marsiya* songs are far shorter in their entirety than *jarigan* songs, but their individual verses are often longer in word count than the couplet verses of *jarigan* poetry.

Nevertheless, the above two passages are sufficiently alike in spirit to warrant a study of *marsiyas* in order to understand their relationship with *jarigan* songs.

In a lengthy book devoted to Bengali *marsiya*s, the author, Golam Saklayen, devotes a chapter to explaining *jarigan* songs and their relationship to *marsiya*s.⁹ More such studies are needed in order to establish clearly the separate identity of each genre.

TERMINOLOGY

A further difficulty in defining the *jarigan* repertory in Western terms arises when trying to translate Bengali terms of classification into English equivalents. Western classifications are based on a world view in which items are envisioned as discrete entities. The Indian view, however, is more organic; in it all things are part of a continuum.

The Indian view has an advantage in that it can account for entities that are difficult to place into one category or another, ones that fall "between the cracks" of Western classifications. For instance, when is a large pond a lake or a small lake a pond? Or, more pertinently, when is a Muharram *marsiya* (elegy) really a *jarigan* song, or when is a portion of a *jarigan* narration sung in isolation from its context really a *marsiya*?

In the case of the term *jarigan*, even the "-gan" component of the term, if isolated from "*jari*", may have one of many meanings. It may signify any one of the following: a single, particular song; a specific type of song; songs in general; repertories of songs; or the performance of various songs in a recital or concert situation. Bengalis speaking in Bengali understand which connotation of the word "*gan*" is intended by the context of the discussion.

For the sake of clarity in English, I consider the word "*gan*" in the expression *jarigan* to signify genre rather than song. I then use the expression *jarigan* as a modifier. Thus, I use such expressions as "*jarigan* song" or "*jarigan* recital", although, if *jarigan* is translated literally, these expressions are redundant to the Bengali ear. It might be simpler to say, for instance, "the *jari* repertory" instead of "the *jarigan* repertory", or "a *jari* recital" instead of "a *jarigan* recital", but in the long run I find that the full expression "*jarigan*" avoids the confusion that can arise from the many connotations of the term "*gan*".¹⁰

In *jarigan* song titles and in ordinary conversation about *jarigan* songs, the word "*jari*" is often used alone without the second component "-gan", as in the title "*Korbanir Jari*" (The Sacrifice *Jari*; the story of Ibrahim's sacrifice of Ishmail), or "*Shahid-nama Jari*" (The Martyrdom-chronicle *Jari*; the story of Imam Hosein's death at Karbala), and "*Iusuf Jari*" (The Joseph *Jari*; the story of Joseph and his brothers). Thus, the term "*jari*" may be used by Bengali speakers interchangeably with "story" in the context of *jarigan* songs and *jarigan* singing.¹¹

The word "*jari*" may be absent from a title but assumed to be there, depending on whether the song so titled resembles other *jarigan* songs in theme and form. For instance, a *jarigan* song simply titled as "*Tilekban*", without the designation *jari* after it, is, nevertheless, a *jarigan* song. Not only is this clearly announced in the text of the opening lines of the song—"I am going to tell the '*Tilekban Jari*'"—but the song resembles other *jarigan* songs in its Muslim themes and characteristic poetic structure.

Thus, in general, the term *jarigan* refers to songs that are of considerable length based on Muslim stories of considerable national import, whether the themes concern specifically Karbala episodes or not. Many Bangladeshis whom I questioned indicated that in addition to these connotations, "*jarigan*" identifies a particular style of singing rather than what story is sung. In other words, what "sounds" like a *jarigan* song is probably just that.

I find that I, too, can recognize *jarigan* singing stylistically, having heard as many examples of it as I have to date. Recently I was on a bus headed out of Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh, when it stopped at an exceptionally noisy market town to pick up passengers. Vendors on either side of the road cried out their wares and the horns of buses, trucks and cars blared in the hopes of forcing their way through the traffic. Above this din I could hear the amplified sound of a recording that I guessed from merely its style was a *jarigan* song. My Bengali assistant who could distinguish some of the words, confirmed my guess that, indeed, it was a *jarigan* song.

TYPICAL SONGS

The excerpts below represent the spirit of *jarigan* poetry in its most epic vein. The beauty of the Bengali assonance, rhymes and metric pattern is, unfortunately, impossible to render in English without substantial paraphrasing and the sacrifice of the forthright quality of vocabulary that is characteristic of *jarigan* poetry. The examples below are intended merely to show the epic action portrayed in *jarigan* poetry, this being a prime feature of *jarigan* songs. The Bengali texts and musical notations for some of them can be found in Appendix B.

Composed in fluid verse, set to expressive melodies and sung in a dramatic style, the songs have an arresting quality which is the special aim of the *jarigan* storyteller. The example below is from the story about the poisoning of Imam Hasan, a grandson of the Prophet. The incident described occurred about ten years before the battle of Karbala, but this event is part of the political and prophetic context in which the Karbala cycle of *jarigan* episodes unfolds.

Example 1: a translation of a passage from a *jarigan* song from Jasimuddin's collection in his book, *Jarigan* (1968).

Returning from the hunt, Hasan asked for water before the eyes of his wife.
Not knowing that there was poison (in it), having brought water, his wife
gave it to him to drink.

When the Imam (Hasan) drank the poison,
His limbs turned black from the poison.

Wavering, falling down, alas, the Imam began to cry.

Crying, the Imam said: "(Dear) wife, you were my love;

For what sin (of mine), alas, (dear) wife, have you given me poison?"

When the Imam said this,

His wife beat her head against stone (saying):

"My good fortune (up until now) has abandoned me!"¹²

In the next example, the scene is also dramatized by a speech. A young bridegroom is saying farewell to his bride before going to battle from which there is little hope of his return.

Example 2: a translation of a passage from a *jarigan* song called "Kasem Sokhinar Jari" (The *Jari* of Kasem and Sokhina) in Jasimuddin's collection. The full text of this song is in Appendix A.

Speaking with deep emotion, with tears in his eyes,
Kasem says, "Oh, Sokhina, do not cry more,
To cry at the hour of battle is ignoble.
As the son of the valiant Hasan and grandson of Hazrat Ali,
If I do not go to battle, I will lose my good name."¹³

In another *jarigan* song the death of an infant son is described through a message spoken by a bird.

Example 3: a translation from a *jarigan* song in Jasimuddin's collection. (The Bengali text and musical notations for this passage are in Appendix B.)

At dawn the *kokil* bird¹⁴ said: "Arise, sad mother.
I have come to give you news; I am the black *kokil* bird.
I, a bird, live in the jungle. My nest is in the jungle.
I saw the death of Ashgor Ali; my heart is broken.
Alas, at the time of death, Ashgor said:
'*Koio! Koio! Koio*, alas! (Tell! Tell! Tell, alas !)
Take the news to my mother.
(Tell her) your Ashgor has died by the hand of the fearful Kafir."¹⁵

The following passage from a *jarigan* song that I recorded in the summer of 1995 illustrates the close interplay that is characteristic of *jarigan* songs when the text composed and sung by the *boyati* (literally, couplet-maker) is embellished by the participation of the *dohars* (literally, repeaters). At the end of the *boyati's* first and second lines, the *dohars* merely "echo" the *boyati's* last phrases. Then they sing a little song about a different topic and in a different tune, but they keep to the same rhythmic pattern and melodic mode of the *boyati's* tune. The short text of their song is difficult to understand without further lines. Their song may express a philosophical idea based on analogy to an engine that runs without coal. After this little refrain, the *boyati* continues his narrative, continuing from where he left off when the *dohars* took over.

Example 4: a passage from a *jarigan* song sung by a group of dancing-singers in a *jarigan* competition in Gouripur, Mymensingh District, June 12, 1995. The scene takes place in Kufa, a city in Mesopotamia where the citizens claimed to be supportive of Hosein. The mayor, Abdullah Ziyad, tries to win Muslim, a cousin of Hosein, to his side by offering him the throne of Kufa. (The Bengali text and musical notations for this passage can be found in Appendix B.)

[Narration sung by the *boyati*]

Listen, listen to my words, listeners! I will explain.
What terrible things happened, oh, my soul!

[Refrain sung by the *dohars*]

Without coal the engine keeps running, wobbling along.
What (marvelous) sort of engine did Amina send to this land?
Without coal the engine keeps running, wobbling along.

[Narration by the *boyati*]

Going to Kufa, when Muslim reached there,
Abdullah Ziyad spoke to him.
"Listen, listen, oh, Muslim! I will tell you (my idea).
I will tell you that you can have this throne."

Besides such Karbala episodes as cited above, the *jarigan* repertory includes many stories based on other themes. Rather than heroism and grief, some concern domestic issues, cosmology, or the ridiculous bragging of monsters. The fairy-tale-like *jarigan* called "Tilekban", quoted in full in Appendix A, sparkles with village humor.

A WORKING DEFINITION

Analogies

In order to establish a working definition in English that combines the various Bangladeshi connotations attached to the expression *jarigan*, I have considered the following analogies in European literature.

Ballads

As mentioned earlier, writers have used the English word "ballad" to describe *jarigan* songs, thus classifying them with the ballad literature of Europe. This classification is adequate if it refers to multi-verse, narrative poems in song, but it is inadequate for describing the epic nature of *jarigan* themes. The term is more suitable as applied to Bengali folk poetry known as *mangala* and *vijaya* songs which are long story-poems that contain stories about local deities, heroes and heroines. The poetic form of *jarigan* songs is similar to the form of these other Bengali narrative songs, but the themes of *jarigan* songs are far too epic to be called simply ballads.

The word "ballad" often evokes a song in English such as the following one from which I cite only two stanzas.

Example: two verses from the six verses of the ballad "No, John!".

First verse:

On yonder hill there stands a creature,
Who she is I do not know,
I'll go and court her for her beauty,
She must answer yes or no.

Refrain:

Oh, no John! No, John! No, John! No!

Second verse:

My father was a Spanish captain,
Went to sea a month ago,
First he kissed me, then he left me,
Bid me always answer no!"

Refrain:

Oh, no, John! No, John! No, John! No!¹⁶

Such ballad poetry, though charming, is clearly not a counterpart to *jarigan* poetry. The theme of the above ballad is limited to a local incident and the extent of the poetic composition is not comparable to the dimensions of *jarigan* compositions, which may contain over five hundred lines of verse. Even if the word "ballad" is used to describe a long narrative poem, such as *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, it generally refers to a self-contained story, not a story that fits into a large cycle of other stories in the way that *jarigan* stories are related to each other. The stories in *jarigan* songs, whether closely or loosely connected, are part of a vast network of inter-connected themes reaching far into the past and future.

Jarigan songs, then, represent something more than ballads.

Epics

... 'জারী' বিচিত্র রসের সমবায়ে গ্রথিত এক আশ্চর্য গীতিকা (Ballad)।

'জারীর' বিস্তৃতি মহাকাব্যের মত।

... "Jari" vichitra rosher shambaye grothita ek ashcharja gitika (Ballad).

"Jari"r bistruti mahakabyer moto.

... (If the multitude of various *jari* themes are tied together they become an amazing story-song (Ballad). The extent of "*jari*" is like an epic...)¹⁷

In this statement, although the word "ballad" appears, S. M. Lutfur Rahman confirms, as he does elsewhere in his book, the epic nature of *jarigan* songs.¹⁸ Indeed, in the epic scope of its themes, an individual *jarigan* song resembles a "book" of Virgil's *Aeneid* or of Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*. The very couplet-verse structure of *jarigan* songs is derived from the *śloka*s (couplet verses in a fixed meter) of Sanskrit epic poetry.¹⁹

Individual *jarigan* songs, of course, are too unpolished to be in league with major epics such as the *Mahābhārata* or the *Iliad*. Although the themes of *jarigan* songs are epic and the poetry of individual *jarigan* songs often manifests a high standard of poetic composition, *jarigan* songs lie mostly unwritten and scattered in a multitude of individual singers' oral repertoires, not "tied together" and polished as the epics of literary poets.

As said earlier, *jarigan* songs resemble more precisely the minor epics of medieval European literature, such as the *chansons de geste* or the epic-like ballads of eastern Europe and Turkey.²⁰ Like these minor epics, even though they lack full literary stature, *jarigan* songs transport listeners into another world of great deeds and deep emotions. They represent the seeds of epics if not fully developed ones.

Drama

The frequent use of dialogue in *jarigan* texts and the way in which a *boyati*, the chief singer, animates his recital with interjections and hand gestures suggest a direct connection between *jarigan* songs and plays. In *jarigan* poetry, passages of speech and dialogue predominate. The poet wastes few words describing a scene, but rather lets the scene be imagined through the words of the protagonists. The dialogue is life-like, using colloquial speech and such devices as exclamations and rhetorical questions. *Boyatis* are partly actors as well as singers.²¹

Performances of *jarigan* songs that narrate Karbala stories are similar in their dramatic aspects to Persian passion plays known as *ta'ziyeh* (literally expressions of consolation). In the nineteenth century, while *jarigan* recitals were flourishing on a large scale in Bengal, folk dramas in Iran, which evolved from the Muharram celebrations, became so extensive and spectacular that they included large casts of actors, lengthy scripts, and special theaters to house an arena for realistic fights and to contain mass audiences. These dramas continue to be staged in Iran today. The actors deliver their lines in spoken verse, in song, in chants and in recitatives. Comic scenes are included, although the tragic story of Karbala is the central theme.²²

The *jarigan* and *ta'ziyeh* themes are fundamentally the same. Besides sharing Karbala themes and their intensely emotional significance, both *ta'ziyeh* and *jarigan* forms of performance resemble each other in certain aspects. Staging is laid out "in the round" with no scenery. The performers address each other and the audience, alternating between spoken poetry, sung poetry and spoken prose. Of course, the theatrical ambiance of *jarigan* recitals cannot be compared to the splendor of *ta'ziyeh*. Yet, as embryos of full dramas, *jarigan* performances have a special appeal.

Oratorios

In some ways, full-scale, staged performances of *jarigan* singing represent folk versions of oratorios. In a traditional half-hour or hour-long recital of a *jarigan* song with a full complement of *dohars* and instrumentalists, the program of the recital includes a series of songs that are embellishments to the featured narrative song. The *jarigan* song itself, like the central story of an oratorio, concerns a sacred event—a "passion" (literally, a suffering). As in oratorios, the *jarigan* "passion" is expressed in a variety of song forms, both expository and lyrical. Like the performance items in oratorios, the program of a *jarigan* recital contains both solo and choral singing, accompanied by instrumental pieces. *Jarigan* recitals, however, unlike oratorios which are pre-composed, polished compositions, are *ex tempore* performances, subject to *in situ* invention and change.

A working definition

As can be seen from the above analogies, *jarigan* songs with all their various connotations are difficult to classify precisely in any one of the above categories of European performing arts. *Jarigan* songs, therefore, constitute a special genre of their own which this book is intended to describe as clearly as possible within the limitations of my present knowledge.

In phrasing a working definition I have tried to encompass both the narrow and the broad view of what the term *jarigan* signifies, as well as including a rough idea of how the songs are performed. In the following definition, I use the expression "epic songs" as the truest, yet briefest, expression that I can devise for classifying *jarigan* songs in English words. By this expression I suggest that *jarigan* songs are not only songs in the ordinary sense of poems set to music, but that they have epic dimensions.

The expression "epic songs", however, omits connoting the importance of *jarigan* songs as a form of large-scale entertainment. An idea of what constitutes a traditional *jarigan* performance needs to be expressed in order to complete the picture of what most Bangladeshis visualize on hearing the expression *jarigan*. Therefore, in addition to identifying the poetic genre of *jarigan* songs as epic songs, a definition needs to include attributes pertaining to performance style, as well as to the themes and structure of *jarigan* compositions.

I propose the following definition of *jarigan* songs:

Jarigan songs represent an important category of Bengali epic songs that feature stories from Islamic history and legend, composed in a traditional couplet-verse form and performed by a chief singer accompanied by a chorus.

This definition serves only as a point of departure, a crude model from which to build a more refined definition as more facets of *jarigan* are described. The ensuing chapters are intended to portray the *jarigan* repertory through a variety of its aspects: thematic, poetical, theatrical and musical. The translated examples of *jarigan* songs and related songs that are provided in the Appendixes are offered as raw material to which the reader may refer for a personal understanding of the *jarigan* poetic genre.

CHAPTER THREE

THE ORIGINS

দিন গেল রে খোদার বান্দা ঘিরল মায়া-রসে,
আরে এ দুনিয়া সুখের বানিজ্য, কেউ কান্দে, কেউ হাসে।

*Din gelo [re] khodar banda ghirlo maya-roshe,
[Are] ei duniya shukher banijya, keu kande, keu hashe.*

(Oh, the day has passed; the will of God has been lost
in illusions and emotions.

Alas, this world is a market of pleasures: some weep, some laugh.)

— Lines from an invocational passage to a *jarigan* song.¹

CONJECTURES

Much of the repertory known as *jarigan* probably developed several centuries before it acquired its name. S. M. Lutfur Rahman suggests origins for the term and for influences on the evolution of the repertory. He points to feudal times in Bengal, before Muslim rule, when "powerful rulers hired bards to compose songs about their romances, wars, victories and defeats, etc."² He laments the fact that there was a long period from which no such poems have survived. Later, in the thirteenth century, Bengali poets began again to compose long narrative poems. Jaya Deva's *Gīta Govinda* (*The Song of the Divine Cowherder, Krishna*) represents a work in Sanskrit of epic dimensions by a Bengali poet.

Literary (written) epics in Bengali flourished starting in the seventeenth century. According to S. M. Lutfur Rahman, in the year 1645, Mahmud Khan, in his epic poem *Maktul Hosein* (*The Martyrdom-story of Hosein*³), mentions "*jari*" and "*marsiya*" (elegy or dirge song) in a same line. This suggests that songs about Karbala were composed to be sung at Muharram time, becoming bardic counterparts to the literary epic poetry on the same themes. The terms *jarigan* and *marsiya* at that time may have been used more or less interchangeably.

S. M. Lutfur Rahman also mentions the expression "*matam jari*" (mourning "*jari*") as coming from the same period. The word "*matam*" refers to penitential self-flagellation or the chants that accompany it. The term is still used in booklets of Muharram chants sold in Bangladeshi markets today.⁴ The linking of the word "*jari*" with "*matam*" also suggests that in the early days of the introduction of Muharram to

Bengal the term "*jari*" meant simply "mourning" or that it signified any song associated with the lamentations in the festival.

S. M. Lutfur Rahman suggests that the songs of the Muharram celebrations influenced the Muslim folk poet-singers who had already composed story-songs in local traditions. One of their models may have been the song-poems of the Vaishnava poets who produced biographies in verse about their founding saint, Chaitanya, and his disciples. Another influence may have come from the ballads known as *mangala* (literally, auspicious) and *vijaya* (literally, victorious) songs, the works of poet-devotees of local deities. These various narrative songs, along with *gazirgan* (literally, songs of warriors, referring to Muslim warriors) and *jarigan* songs, may all have been influenced by an earlier genre of Bengali narrative poetry known as *panchali*.⁵

At some time after the advent of Muharram celebrations to Bengal, the need may have arisen to separate conceptually Hindu from Muslim *gitikas* (song-stories). At this point, the Muslim *gitikas*, also called *pala-gans* (episode-songs), that were based on Karbala themes may have taken on the name of "*jari*". This may have occurred even though some of the songs included in the repertory had only tenuous connection with Karbala or none at all.

Another influence on the development of *jarigan* songs in the early stages may have come from the works of Bengali Muslim poets under court patronage who were composing literary (written) epic poems such as the *Maktul Hosein* already mentioned. These court poets, who wrote on Hindu themes as well as Muslim ones, introduced into Bengali literature the tales of *Leila-Majnun*, *Iusuf-Zuleikha*, *Sohrab-Rustum*, and other popular stories from Persian literature.⁶ In this way, romances from the Middle East may have entered the repertoires of Bengali Muslim bards, rural ones as well as court-sponsored ones, along with Karbala stories and stories about the lives of prophets. It is possible that the nomen "*jari*" came to be used loosely to describe any Muslim narrative song, whether it concerned Karbala themes or not.

LITERARY ANCESTORS

The story themes in the *jarigan* repertory come from outside Bengal, but the poetic form of the repertory is indigenous. Understanding the ancestry of the *jarigan* repertory entails reviewing the Bengali pre-Islamic literature that comprises the substratum of *jarigan* poetry.

The line separating the work of Bengali rural bards from that of royally-sponsored literary poets is often a fine one. The evidence of poetic refinement in *jarigan* songs suggests that there was always contact between literary poets patronized by the élite and rural artists. Bengali *charanas* (bards) and *bhatas* (another word for bards) seem to have circulated in both societies.⁷ Thus *jarigan* poetry can trace its form to literary as well as oral matrices.

Major Muslim literary epics

Probably no culture with an ancient past is without an epic, a narrative poem of considerable length that embodies the deeds of heroes and the spiritual values that

communities wish to preserve and transmit. In Bengal, literary poets have rendered Islamic as well as Buddhist and Hindu lore into epics of a refined quality. At the same time, Bengali bardic poets have composed long narrative poems based on many of the same historical and legendary episodes as those used by literary poets.

Because the bardic versions of literary epics are transmitted orally, they have no definite shape as a composite work in the way episodes have been compiled into one epic poem such as the *Mahābhārata*, the *Iliad* or the *Maktul Hosein* mentioned above. The compendium of *jarigan* stories is a putative one, as yet uncollected and uncompiled into one epic poem. If a compilation could be accomplished, the result would probably resemble the Bengali Muslim literary epics of the sixteenth through eighteenth centuries. Besides the *Maktul Hosein*, these literary models include the *Nabi-bangsha* (Prophets-Line) of Saiyad Sultan (1586 A. D.), the *Janga-nama* (*Battle-chronicle*) of Hayat Mamud (1724 A. D.), and many others.⁸

Minor Muslim literary epics and elegiac poetry

Poetry from "The Garden of Martyrs"

In Persia, a book called *Rowzatu'l Shuhada* (*The Garden of Martyrs*) was compiled by a poet in the late fifteenth century. It contained stories about the Shi'ite martyrs connected with the Karbala tragedy. The chanting and singing of these poems was called *rowze-khani* or *rauza-khwani* and occurred during the Muharram festival. As well as in Persia, this practice became well-established in India, including Bengal. The practice was a likely influence on the composition of Bengali literary epics.

Majlis poetry: *marsiya*s, *nauhas*, and *matams*

The *majlises* (ritual meetings) of the Muharram festival are occasions for congregational singing of elegies and dirges. The *marsiya*s are dirges of a literary quality, while *nauhas* and *matams* are more colloquial in their poetic texts. In India, as in Iran, both literary poets and bards have composed songs in the three forms. The *jarigan* songs on Karbala themes are sometimes confused with *marsiya*s. However, *marsiya*s are comparatively short, lyrical pieces, not sequential narratives.⁹

The *marsiya* singing of the women's *majlises* that I attended in Dhaka during the 1995 Muharram festival consisted of short hymns in Urdu not Bengali, in spite of the fact that many *marsiya*s have been written in Bengali.¹⁰ The close association of the Karbala themes in these songs with the *jarigan* songs which narrate Karbala episodes suggests that these *majlis* songs were at one time interrelated with the *jarigan* singing at Muharram festivals.¹¹

A. H. Dani in his history of the city of Dhaka describes a nineteenth century Muharram festival in which *marsiya* and *jarigan* singing are mentioned. A. H. Dani bases his description on "a detailed account given by Mr. Hakim Ahsan" in a journal article that came out in 1923, as well as on a painting from the nineteenth century by Alam Musawwar, part of which has been reproduced on the cover jacket of this book. A. H. Dani's summary of the sections of the report that mention *marsiya* and

jarigan singing are worth quoting here. (The information within parentheses is from A. H. Dani, but the explanations within brackets are my own):

... From the fourth day the ceremony assumes full swing. People crowd in the verandahs of Husaini Dalan to hear the *Bhatiyali marsiya* (the mourning songs in the *Bhatiyali* tune of Bengal). For the purpose of singing about twenty *mahallas* [neighborhoods] of the city divide themselves into *Hadi* and *Girwah* [names of competing clubs], broken up into two parties, the song being sung in the form of question and answer by the opposing parties. The composition is in both Urdu and Bengali, and the singing arouses enough emotion and spirit. The *Marsiya-Kwans* (the *marisiya* singers) come in groups headed by those who read *Salam* [an Islamic salutation or eulogy]¹²... In the *marisiya* both the Sunnis and the Shiah—the two important sects of Muslims—participate. In Husaini Dalan the Shiah occupy the northern half of the *Dalan* [building], where they have their *zarih mubarak* (symbolic tombs), *'Alam* (flag) and *minbar* (pulpit), and where they do *noha khwani* (reading of hymnal songs in praise of the martyrs) [*nauhas*] and *soz-khwani* (reading of mourning songs). These Shiah songs are popularly called *Rangin Marsiya* [colorful *marisiyas*], probably because they were sung with sweet voice ... On the eighth day ladies from villages come in great numbers and start their *jari* (*zari*) songs from the afternoon, and hence it is called *dupahriya matam* (afternoon mourning) ...¹³

In this description the term "*jari*" singing is mentioned only in connection with the songs of the women with no description of what they were like. On the other hand, *marisiyas* seem to be the important form of Muharram songs. This suggests that the long, narrative songs that are known today as *jarigan* songs were not distinguished as such in earlier times. Also the description does not include the singing of long, narrative songs by a bard with a chorus, as would be noted, if this event existed during the Muharram celebrations. Rather the account takes note of the question-and-answer competitions which are a part of traditional *jarigan* performances even today, but which are not the main item in a *jarigan* recital.

The mention of "*noha khwani*" and "*soz khwani*" shows that Muharram customs were closely linked to the practices in the Middle East and northern India where these terms are still used. The explanations of these terms given in A. H. Dani's parentheses use the expression "reading" rather than "singing". The *marisiyas* may have been chanted from written scripts. It is also likely, however, that the expression "reading" is preferable to "singing", because "singing" belongs to the representative arts which by strict Islamic custom are discouraged.¹⁴

I assume from this report and from descriptions of nineteenth century Muharram celebrations in northern India that Muharram songs—the *marisiyas* in particular—supplied the matrixes for the Karbala cycle of stories in *jarigan* repertoires, although not their actual poetic form and tune which are described later in this book.

Mushaira poetry

The Islamic rulers of India, including those in Bengal, sponsored a form of poetic entertainment known as *mushairas* (poetic meetings) in which poets would gather to entertain the local élite, Hindus as well as Muslims. Their repertoires included *qasidas*, lyrical poetry on a specific theme, such as longing for a loved one, and *masnavis* or

mathnavis, long narrative poems based on a variety of themes from history, historical legends and tales from the *Arabian Nights*. The *masnavis* no doubt influenced the Bengali composers of Muslim epic poems.

*Marsiya*s, as a form of *qasidas*, were especially composed for *mushairas*.¹⁵ The ritual, more colloquial, *marsiya* songs that are sung during the festival of Muharram may have provided Karbala themes for literary *marsiya*s, and, in reverse, the literary *marsiya*s on Karbala themes may have influenced the composition of new, colloquial *marsiya*s for Muharram celebrations. *Mushairas* held in Bengal may have included bardic poets as well as literary ones. S. M. Lutfur Rahman corroborates the suggestion that the poetry recited at *mushairas* may have influenced *jarigan* poetry.¹⁶

BARDIC PARENTS

In every society there are perhaps as many ways to tell a story as there are story tellers, but in public recitals certain forms develop which an audience comes to expect, forms that are comfortable to the ears and minds of the listeners. The poetic form of *jarigan* songs lies within the tradition of Bengali "ballad" literature, such as the *mangalas* and *vijayas*. A Bengali Muslim bard accustomed to hearing such ballads might naturally adopt the same poetic form for composing narrational poems based on Islamic instead of Hindu themes. The likeness in the poetic form of *jarigan* songs to the poetic form of *mangala* and *vijaya* poetry suggests this process took place.

It is difficult to tell whether the Islamic themes of *jarigan* poems developed directly from Middle Eastern sources or whether they came indirectly through Islamic literature of central northern India. The stories of the *jarigan* repertory may have come from both sources. Their poetic form, however, comes from local Bengali traditions of bardic chanting that were probably well established before the time of Muslim rule in Bengal.

Rasos

S. M. Lutfur Rahman mentions possible roots of *jarigan* songs in *rasos*, bardic songs in praise of kings.¹⁷ Ashok D. Ranade, an Indian writer about Indian music, mentions these songs as belonging to the "early historical period" of Indian poetry and music. He says that *charanas*, *bhatas*, and other bards who used to entertain at the courts of Hindu kings included among their "stray songs" narrative poems which were known as *raso* compositions. *Rasos* describe the "valor of kings."¹⁸ Their titles indicate the patrons to whom the poems are dedicated. S. M. Lutfur Rahman lists several titles: "Bishal Deb Raso", "Khuman Raso", "Prithviraj Raso", "Hambir Raso", "Vijay Pal Raso", and others.¹⁹

Panchalis, mangalas, vijayas and gazirgan

Panchali songs seem to be the grandparents of Bengali narrative songs. They flourished in Bengal from the thirteenth through eighteenth centuries as repertories used for dramatic presentations. In performance, they combined poetry, music, dance and

acting in the same leader-cum-chorus format as *jarigan* performances. Some of the narrations were about a "synthetic" deity known as *Satya-Pir* (Truth-pir) and about other *pirs* (religious leaders with saintly status), including *gazi* (warrior) ones.²⁰

Many Sufi *gazis* in Bengal were regarded as saints. They figure in ballads of the *mangala* and *vijaya* genre. Such songs known as *gazirgan*, not as *jarigan*, are still sung today in northern areas of Bangladesh. Their verse structure does not resemble the epic couplets of *jarigan*, but the length of the songs and their style of performance using a *mulgayen* (chief singer, synonymous with *boyati*), accompanied by a chorus of *dohars* seems to be the same as in *jarigan* performances.²¹

Punthi path

Another model for *jarigan* compositions may have been the recitations known as *punthi path* or called *punthi pora*, both terms meaning readings or recitations in verse or prose. *Path* and *pora* generally refer to reading passages from *punthis* (literally, "manuscripts"); that is, readings or recitations from actual written material, generally from the *puranas* (literally, ancient things). These include an indefinite stock of tales from the great Hindu epics, the *Mahābhārata* and the *Rāmāyaṇa*, and from lesser ones, such as the *Gīta Govinda* (*Song of the Divine Cowherder, Krishna*).²² Even if a passage of *punthi* literature is recited by heart, not read from a manuscript, the venerability of the text classifies the recitation as "*punthi path*"; that is, a "*punthi reading*".²³

In modern times a "*punthi pathak*" (*punthi reader*) may be a professional reader or a family member who entertains family and neighbors in the evening with a favorite story. Depending on the affiliation of the reader, the texts vary according to the religions and their sects. Each sect or cult has its own stock of *punthi* literature, whether from the ancient epics of the Hindus, from the *Jataka* tales of the Buddhists (episodes in the life of the Buddha) or from the Muharram stories of the Muslims. The tales have universal appeal and can be enjoyed by all communities.

If the "reader" is literate, he or she may actually read from a book in which the stories are collected, but often the "reader" knows the stories by heart and declaims or chants them in prose or in poetry.²⁴ In Bengal, the verse form of storytelling is generally preferred to prose form. Presumably verse is rendered in song. Poetic recitations and song are almost synonymous in traditional Bengali culture. Even a recitation of prose includes musical aspects, because reading out loud by Bengalis is often half-chanted or declaimed.

Kirtans

Bengali songs known as *kirtans* influenced most of the important genres of Bengali folk songs, including, I am sure, the *jarigan* style of performance and singing. *Kirtans* have existed in India from ancient times as hymns in praise of deities. In Bengal, *kirtan* singing is associated especially with the Vaishnava cult of Hinduism. This cult evolved from the *bhakti* (devotional) movement in Hinduism dating back to the sixth century in India. Devotees of Shiva became known as Shivites and devotees of Vishnu in his incarnation as the god Krishna are known as Vaishnavas.

In Bengal, Vaishnavism gained momentum around the thirteenth century. The *Gīta Govinda* (*Song of the Divine Cowherder, Krishna*) is a famous epic song in Sanskrit by the thirteenth century poet Jaya Deva. In the sixteenth century in Bengal, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (1486-1533), a saintly Vaishnava sage, popularized Vaishnavism through organized congregational singing of *kirtans*.²⁵ "The devotional and love songs known as the *Vaisnava pads* (Vaishnava verses, the basis of *kirtan* songs) are among the most beautiful things in our literature to the present day," writes the historian of Bengali literature, J. C. Ghosh (1948).²⁶

Kirtans known as *lila kirtans* recount episodes from the life of Krishna. Other Vaishnava *kirtans* narrate episodes from the life of Chaitanya and his disciples. The texts of all Vaishnava *kirtans* emphasize devotion to God through the analogy of human love. The poetry and music are highly lyrical. This lyricism is said to be the main influence on *bhatiyali* and Baul songs. The tunes of *jarigan* songs show a touch of *bhatiyali* and Baul styles, although the texts of *jarigan* songs are expository rather than lyrical.

The following description of Bengali *kirtan* performances from Manju M. Seal's thesis on the topic (1993) closely resembles performances of *jarigan*. The information within brackets is my own.

... *Kirtan* is ... a means of popular entertainment in villages and small towns. Troupes enact *lilas* [plays] from Krishna and Chaitanya's lives for six to eight hours at a time. Women, men, old people and children of the village or town will join in watching the troupe perform; sometimes all night at a time... In *padavali kirtan*, the life and deeds of Krishna and Chaitanya are elucidated through narrative singing. The leader explains and enlivens the audience with a well-knit story both by songs and speech. More than ten people may be included in a chorus. *Khol* [a kind of drum], *mandira* [small finger cymbals], *khanjani* [a small drum] and harmonium are included in the ensemble...

... Normally there are three singers in *padavali kirtan*; i.e., "*mulgayaka* (chief-singer), on his right the *shira-dohar* (main co-singer) and on the left the *kola-dohar* (another co-singer)" ... *Doha* is a two line rhyming poem. *Dohar* is one who recites *doha* or poetry. In the context of *kirtan*, *dohar* is the refrainer, one who helps the main singer by repeating the lines or reminding him of the songs while singing. Besides these are the *khol* player and the *kartal* (cymbals) player. [*Kartals* are small finger cymbals like *mandiras*.] In modern days playing of the flute, *esraj* (a four-stringed lute popular in Bengal), and harmonium (the main melodic instrument) is common, but the traditional *kirtan* singers frown upon this practice...

... During the narration of the story, the *kirtaniya* [*kirtan* singer] usually modulates his voice to depict a new character...

... While performing any *pala* (episode), the narrative style of the *kirtaniya* is dramatic and theatrical...

... He invokes communication and dialogue with the audience and plays a key role in transferring, sharing information about Vaishnava ideals. The *kirtaniya* elucidates upon the stories, pointing out and rationalizing morals, and reinterprets tradition ...²⁷

All these characteristics as described above are features of *jarigan* performances as well. Even the inclusion of ethical discussion is characteristic of *jarigan* poetry, although, of course, in *jarigan* texts the commentary is generally on Islamic themes.

Karunamaya Goswami, a Bangladeshi musicologist who advised me on aspects of Bengali folk music, remembers his mother joining in with *kirtan* singers in his village. He said he remembers that the singers would go from house to house, singing their *kirtan* songs. His memory of these singers is in keeping with the description of writers on the subject.

As the water-table fell in Bangladesh during the spring of 1995, a newspaper reporter told of boys going from house to house in the village of Shimuldai, Bogra, singing *jarigan* songs as a prayer for rain.²⁸ The description of the boys entering courtyards of rural compounds and singing while standing in rows resembles not only Karunamaya Goswami's memories of *kirtan* singing, but Manju M. Seal's description of *nama samkirtans* (literally, name praises) and *nagar kirtans* (town *kirtans*) which consisted of singing *nama kirtans* in procession.

Kabigan

Finally, *kabigan* (literally, poet-songs) performances exerted an important influence on *jarigan* performances. The principal interest of *kabigan* recitals seems to be in their *ex tempore* poetic debates, whereas *jarigan* recitals feature a narrative song and a program of items which may or may not include a poetic debate.²⁹

Jasimuddin describes the subject matter of *kabigan* debates. Topics may spring from an interpretation of a story from one of the great Sanskrit epics, or from episodes about Krishna's love adventures with Radha, or, simply any riddle with which one poet challenges another. Jasimuddin gives an example of a moral dilemma which one poet proposes for the opposing poet to resolve. The particular dilemma is one in which a housewife is asked for a drink of water by a male guest. How is she to keep her head modestly covered holding the end of her sari over it with one hand and still be able to fetch and pour water for him? The opposing poet answers that the woman will succeed by wearing a *burka* (a head-to-toe robe) the border of which she will use as a strainer through which she will pour the water. In this way she will serve the guest and yet remain fully covered. In their questions as well as answers the poets add witty personal details to tease and challenge the opponent.³⁰

Today, *jarigan* sessions are similar enough to *kabigan* sessions for *jarigan* to be confused with *kabigan*. Some Bangladeshis answered my question about the meaning of *jarigan* as if it signified only poetic debates, as in *kabigan* sessions. A more precise comparison is beyond the scope of the present book, but it should be kept in mind that the relationship between *kabigan* and *jarigan* is an important issue in tracing the traditional mode of *jarigan* performances.

THE PROGENY

I have suggested that *jarigan* songs are the offspring of a rich ancestry in both literary and bardic genres and in both local and foreign influences. However, a more thorough examination than was possible in preparing this book is needed in order to trace the ancestry of *jarigan* songs more precisely and surely. A study of the vocabulary and style of composition common to most *jarigan* songs should be made along with a

study pertaining to the vocabulary and structure of other genres of *gitikas*, such as the *mangala*, *vijaya*, and *gazirgan* songs already mentioned. This comparison may supply clues to the origins and development of *jarigan* songs themselves. For instance, a distinction exists between *jarigan* recitals and *punthi path*, as explained below.

Jarigan poetry as *gan*, not *path*

In the case of *jarigan* poetry, the text is more than chanted or declaimed; it is fully rendered in song. The themes of *jarigan* poetry may be considered a sub-class of *punthi path*, but the poetic form of *jarigan* songs is so influenced by melodic interpretation that *jarigan* poetry is, indeed, *gan* (song), as its name indicates, and not *path* (a reading). By contrast to *punthi* literature, the structure of *jarigan* poetry shows how Bengali poetic texts seem to be composed with a tune in mind rather than in isolation.³¹

This does not mean that *jarigan* poetry is limited to recitals by professional poet-singers. *Jarigan* stories may be chanted or sung by anyone who knows them. Informal recitals on a verandah, like *punthi* readings, are an important way in which the *jarigan* stories are transmitted from parents to children. Semi-professional, street-corner singers also help a community remember the *jarigan* stories between professional performances.

Jarigan poetry differs essentially from *punthi path* literature in that it was never intended to be written down. The texts of *jarigan* songs are transmitted orally. Exceptionally, some *jarigan* singers consult transcriptions, as did one group of *jarigan* singers whom I recorded.³² Otherwise, the *boyati* composes a *jarigan ex tempore* as well as through alterations of inherited songs.

Casual performances of *jarigan* songs, which may be declaimed rather than sung, may resemble *path* more than *gan*, depending on the excellence of the performer. However, most *jarigan* performers are talented poet-musicians and, to some extent, actors. In this respect, their performances belong to the *pala-gan* or *gitika* (song-story) category more than to the *punthi path* one.³³

Because of its fundamentally musical nature, *jarigan* verse is further distinguished from *punthi path* literature by the freedom that the *jarigan* singer has to improvise and to alter the standard verse structure of *jarigan* poetry to fit a particular tune. In reverse, *jarigan* compositions that are less musically oriented, and more chant-like, more like *path* recitals, articulate a traditional verse form. How the *jarigan* singer integrates textual verse and melody is an art that distinguishes *jarigan* singing from *punthi path*. This integration is described in Chapter Eight through Ten on the poetic and musical forms of *jarigan* composition.

Differences between *jarigan* and *kabigan* recitals

As stated earlier, *jarigan* recitals are similar enough to *kabigan* sessions for the two kinds of entertainment to be sometimes confused. Both types of recital, like *jatra* (folk dramas), are organized for mass audiences and staged "in the round" for lengthy sessions lasting, sometimes, several nights. The main difference, however, to be stressed is that *kabigan* sessions feature debates, whereas a *jarigan* session

features a *jarigan* song. Debates are inserted as an added attraction rather than as the main item of a *jarigan* session.

Different styles of *jarigan* texts

The *jarigan* texts in the Jasimuddin and S. M. Lutfor Rahman collections are remarkably similar in themes, vocabulary and prosody. Modern *jarigan* songs that are available in printed texts are also remarkably similar in style to traditional *jarigan* texts. There are only subtle differences which, nevertheless, may be significant in understanding the origins of *jarigan* song compositions.

I note a few differences between Jasimuddin's collections of *jarigan* texts and the collection of S. M. Lutfor Rahman. The texts in Jasimuddin's collection seem more tightly constructed than the ones in S. M. Lutfor Rahman's book, some of which are more lengthy than any in Jasimuddin's book and some of which are incomplete, as S. M. Lutfor Rahman indicates. He says that his collection contains the first important collection of *jarigan* texts from Jessore,³⁴ whereas many of Jasimuddin's songs come from Faridpur, his home territory.

S. M. Lutfor Rahman's collection includes one story that to date I have not found elsewhere: "Rasbatir *Jari*" (Rasbati's *Jari*). Both Jasimuddin's and S. M. Lutfor Rahman's collections should be compared carefully and more songs collected before these "children" of Bengali literature change beyond recognition or simply disappear.

THE PERFORMANCE

শোনেন, শোনেন, শ্রোতাগণ গো, শোনেন দিয়া মন।
মহরমের জারি গো আমি করলাম আরম্ভন।

Shonen, shonen, shrotagon [go], shonen diya mon.
Maharamer jari [go] ami korlam arambhon.

(Listen, listen, oh, listeners, listen attentively.
I am starting the Muharram jari.)

— A couplet from a *jarigan* song by a contemporary singer¹.

THE BEST YEARS

Through works of social historians, and especially through the writings of Jasimuddin and S. M. Lutfur Rahman, I have tried to reconstruct the sights and sounds of former *jarigan* performances at the time that they thrived in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century—the heyday of *jarigan* recitals.

I have found no descriptions of *jarigan* performances from times previous to the nineteenth century. Jasimuddin gives descriptions from childhood memories of *jarigan* festivals that flourished in the first half of the twentieth century. He describes the massive audiences that attended and the "intoxicating" effect on him of the *jarigan* songs.² In more analytical terms, S. M. Lutfur Rahman gives a detailed outline of what he believes to have been a typical *jarigan* recital program.³ Mustafa Zaman Abbasi, himself a singer of folk songs with long experience in collecting them, described to me the sessions of *jarigan* singing that he remembers from his youth.

I depend also on information from Bangladeshi folklorists and on conversations with Bangladeshi friends who can remember attending sessions of *jarigan* singing in their childhood. I have drawn on my own observations from attendance at folk song concerts in Dhaka and from *jatra* (folk theater) performances in rural areas during my stay in Bangladesh in the 1960s and recently in the 1990s.

Circumstances in the 1800s

From the end of the seventeen hundreds through the early decades of the twentieth century, the region of Bengal enjoyed a period of peace and substantial productivity

in jute and indigo as well as rice. Large tracts of land were controlled by *zamindars* (land-holders) who maintained residences in the cities of Calcutta and Dhaka as well as country estates on their rural land. These "country squires" alternated between life in the country and life in the city, contributing to a cultural flow of influences between city society and rural communities.

During this time, rural people of Bengal had the inclination and the means to sponsor and enjoy large-scale recitals. Two forms of entertainment were especially popular in rural communities: the poetic debates known as *kabigan* (literally, poet-songs), based mainly on Hindu lore, and recitals known as *jarigan*, based mainly on Muslim themes. Such events were veritable festivals, spanning as many as seven or eight nights.⁴

From the descriptions of typical *jarigan* festivals in the works of Jasimuddin and S. M. Lutfur Rahman, I imagine that *jarigan* festivals in their best years resembled *kabigan* recitals.⁵ Both genres of performance featured *ex tempore* poetry, including *ex tempore* poetic debates. *Jarigan* evenings, however, seem to have focused on a featured *jarigan* story, whereas *kabigan* sessions seem to allude to narratives, rather than tell them. Narrative themes served as a springboard for debates. The Muslim narrative portions of a *jarigan* session, combined with additions of popular songs from other repertoires, as well as instrumental interludes, supplied an attractive Muslim counterpart to the debate-oriented performances of *kabigan*.

The decline

After the 1920s, the rural districts of Bengal were suffering from a combination of problems resulting from the political and social upheavals accompanying and following independence from Britain in 1947. The contribution of the Indian subcontinent to the struggle of the allies in World War II, Hindu-Muslim riots that preceded and followed independence, and a serious famine in the region served to deplete Bengal's physical resources and cultural energy.

In 1947, the absorption of eastern Bengal into Pakistan and of western Bengal into India resulted in a large shift in population. Hindus from eastern Bengal migrated to India while many Muslims from western Bengal moved to the area newly named East Pakistan, increasing the majority of Muslims there to a predominant population. While the shifts effected a certain communal homogeneity on the respective sides of the border, the hardships of the time caused long lasting psychological as well as economic stress to the populations on either side.

During the years when Bangladesh was East Pakistan (1947-1971), the central government, located over a thousand miles away in West Pakistan, took little interest in the cultural activities of its eastern "wing", especially in any that manifested pre-Islamic influences. Various cultural activities, dance and drama in particular, were curtailed in Dhaka and large-scale rural performances were left to depend on their own resources for moral as well as financial support.

By the 1950s, rural as well as urban society was increasingly exposed to Western, including American, culture. Tastes of urban society that had once been shaped by folk traditions were influenced by what could be seen and heard of Western popular music over the radio and on imported television programs. Except for Bangladeshis

living in isolated communities, rural Bangladeshis came into increasingly close contact with town life. A growing number of young men, who formerly followed in the work of their rural fathers, began working in cities. They began to bring back city tastes to their village homes. As tastes changed throughout the country and poverty increased as population figures rose, fewer young people cared to become singers as well as farmers and fishermen. Patronage for folk performances, which already had waned since the middle of the twentieth century, was attracted to "media" arts. Today, encouragement for folk performances relies on organizations such as the Bangla Academy, the Shilpakala Academy, Nari Grantha Probortona and a few individual enthusiasts of folk music, such as Mustafa Zaman Abbasi.

THE ROLES

In a traditional session of *jarigan* singing, the chief singer, the *boyati*, is supported by a chorus of singers known as *dohars*, and an ensemble of instrumentalists. Together these performers constitute a *jarigan dol* (*jarigan* group). In a full-scale *jarigan* recital, each of these divisions plays a distinctive role.

The vocalists

The *boyati*

The term *boyati* comes from the Arabic word *bayt* meaning couplet. The *boyati* is the "couplet-maker", the poet-composer who sings the lengthy narrative text of a chosen *jarigan* song. As a narrator he is also an actor, declaiming a story in song and gesturing for emphasis.

The *dohars*

The derivation of the term *dohar* is unknown, but a likely guess is that it comes from the Hindi word *doha* which has various meanings ranging from couplet to a particular meter for an ancient type of song used, for example, in the North Indian folk theater known as *Nautanki*.⁶ The possible connection of *doha* with "*dhua*", a lyrical type of song, is discussed in the chapters on the poetic and musical form of *jarigan* songs. The dictionary translates *dohar* as "second singer; prompter; repeater".

There may be as few as two or as many as ten or twelve *dohars* in a *jarigan dol* (*jarigan* troupe). While it is possible for a *boyati* to sing a *jarigan* song without the accompaniment of *dohars*, in large scale public performances, such as those that flourished in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the *dohars* are an integral part of the event. In fact, one *boyati* whom I asked to sing for me said that he could only sing a *jarigan* song in the company of *dohars*.

The instrumentalists

For a large-scale public performance of *jarigan* singing, instrumental accompaniment is a necessary embellishment to the recital, adorning the program with a variety of music.

Boyatis as instrumentalists

Most *boyatis* can play an instrument and some construct themselves the ones they use. Although it is possible to sing *jarigan* songs without instrumental accompaniment, as did a number of *boyatis* whom I interviewed, a lengthy solo recital is enhanced by instrumental accompaniment which emphasizes rhythmic pulse and introduces variations of timbre and melodic refrains. A *boyati* may accompany himself by stroking a *dotara* (literally, two-stringed, but generally four-stringed, lute); or bowing a *sarinda* (a viola-like instrument held vertically) or a *behala* (fiddle); or beating a *duggi* (a small hand-tapped drum).

The instrumental ensemble

In extensive recitals, a *jarigan dol* may include four or five instrumentalists playing accompaniments, instrumental refrains and interlude pieces. The *dholak* or *dhol* (double-ended drums), or a set of *tabla* (a pair of hand drums) are important for maintaining the "swing" of a lively rhythm. Stringed instruments for *jarigan* singing include a few or several of the following: *ektara* (an ingenious one-stringed folk lute), *dotara*, *sarinda*, and *behala*. Wind instruments include the *banshi* (bamboo flute) and *shehnai* (a reed, oboe-like instrument), and possibly a cornet or bugle. Small percussion instruments include *ghungur* or *juri* (small finger cymbals), and *khonjoni* (a small drum that may contain jangles in the rim, like a tambourine). A small, hand-pumped organ called a "harmonium" is generally included. The following line from a poem about folk musicians lists instruments frequently heard in a *jarigan* ensemble.

বাজে খুঞ্জরী, নুপুর, জুড়ি, কাঁশি, বাঁশি, ঢোল।

"*Baje khunjori, nupur, juri, kanshi, banshi, dhol...*"

(They play using the tambourine, the ankle-rattles, the wood clappers, the small finger cymbals, the bamboo flute, the double-ended drum ...) ⁷

The ensemble plays in melodic unison with the singers, or it echoes the sung phrases of the *boyati*. The ensemble also plays separate pieces to add entertainment to the *jarigan* recital. The sound of a lively tune played by the ensemble at the beginning of a program alerts the neighborhood to the opening of a *jarigan* recital.

Women performers

Women professional *boyatis* are few. Women occasionally sing as *dohars* and frequently participate in the ensemble. Two young women sang as part of a group that I recorded in Dhaka. They also provided a crisp rhythmic beat, striking the *kartal* clappers together or shaking the *khonjoni*. One of the women played a *behala*. The women were married to the lead singers in the group. The one who played the *behala* sings every week at a *mazar* (grave) for large gatherings near the High Court building in Dhaka. She sings different genres of songs, including Baul songs and other popular folk songs rather than *jarigan* songs which require long sessions to

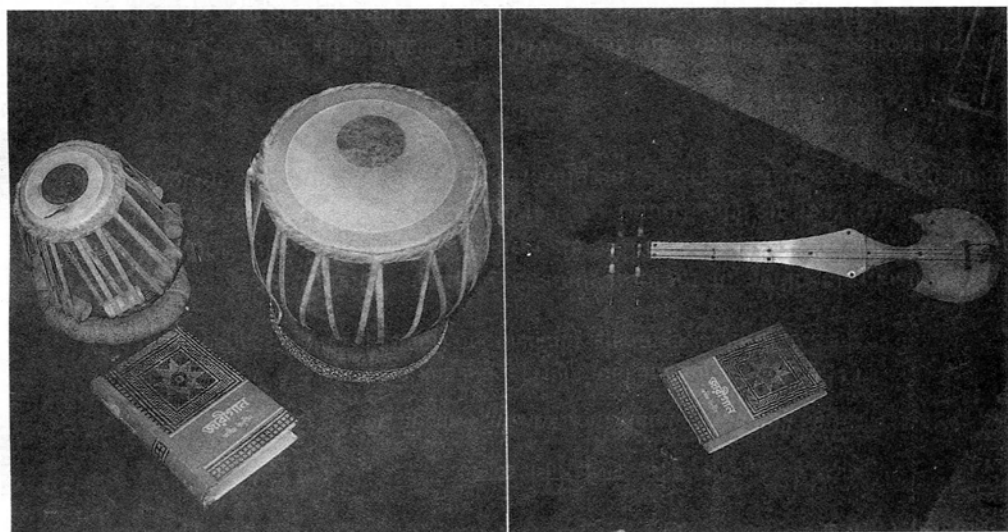


Fig. 18. A *dotara* and a set of *tabla* belonging to Mustafa Zaman Abbasi at his home. Dhaka, 1996.



Fig. 19. Urban folk song singers, Dhaka, July 25, 1995. The instruments include: *ektara*, *dhol*, harmonium, *behala*, *mandira*, and *banshi*.

complete. The men of the group expressed pride in the popularity of their women as professional singers.

A tendency to force their voices rather than sing at their normal volume causes women folk singers, when singing solo, lose pitch. Women singers, however, receive enthusiastic response from the audience, but this may be partly due to the refreshing sight of women after a steady fare of men.

THE AUDIENCE

In the past, audiences arrived from far away as well as from the immediate neighborhood of the *jarigan* festival site. Bengalis used to journey for several days to attend a *jarigan ashor* (assembly or event), trips requiring night as well as daytime travel.⁸

Audiences for *jarigan* festivals of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in eastern Bengal included a large number of Hindus as well as Muslims, reflecting the large proportion of Hindus in eastern Bengal at that time. As well as census figures from the first half of the twentieth century, which indicate a balance between numbers of Hindus and Muslims in the region of eastern Bengal, Muslim folk poetry of the time, including *jarigan* texts, contains references to Hindu lore, reflecting a larger proportion of Hindus in the audience than is generally found in Bangladesh today.⁹ In today's Indian State of West Bengal, which has a predominantly Hindu population, *jarigan* recitals may take place in localities such as Hooghly and Murshidabad, where there are sizable Muslim communities, but recitals of *jarigan* songs are probably rare in West Bengal as a whole.

Men and boys always comprise the bulk of the audience at most public performances, but women also attend, often bringing along their children. Today, women who attend public performances generally sit together in groups or with the male members of their family. One *jarigan* singer whom I interviewed boasted about how many women attend his recitals and he described how they are moved to beat their breasts when he sings the tragic events of Karbala.¹⁰

THE STAGING

Jarigan festivals of earlier times were extensive in their programs, but simple to organize and to stage. The patron, a local *zamindar* or other sponsor, had only to spread the news that he was going to hold a *jarigan* event. He would invite the best known singers from distant districts as well as from his own and he would provide the required physical installations.

The physical setting

A large space, generally a field, was needed to accommodate the several thousand listeners. Sitting on the ground, they would surround a rectangular space, known as *ashor*, the same word as for "assembly". This performance space might consist of a wooden platform (*mancha*)¹¹ or simply a central space fenced with bamboo railings.

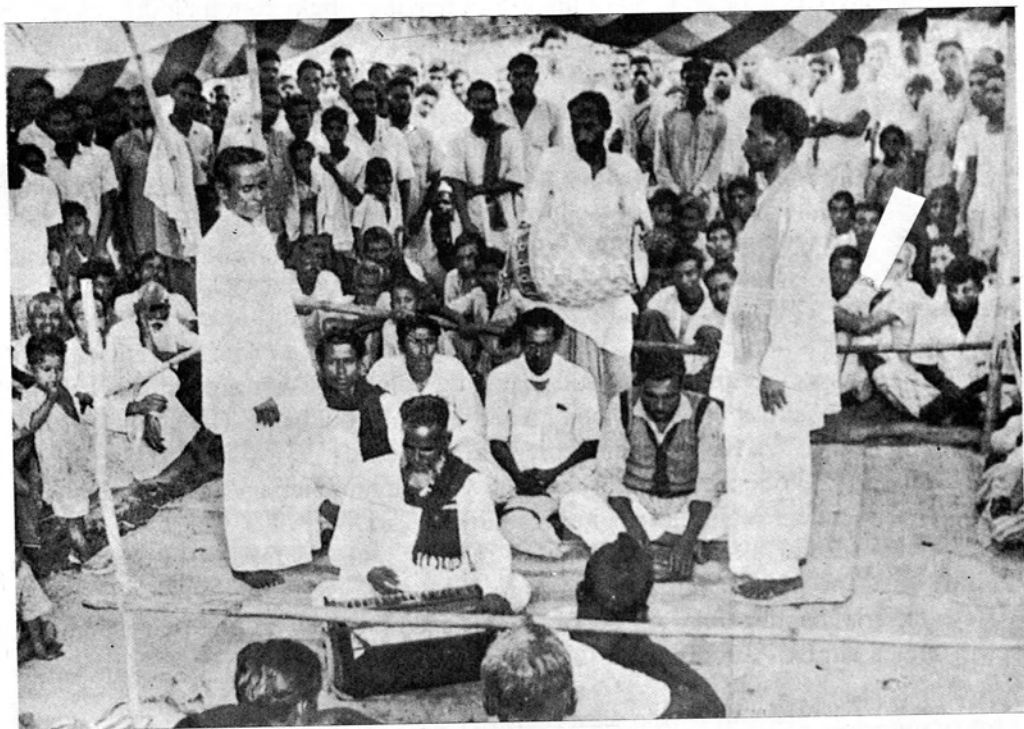


Fig. 20. A *jarigan* recital session, village in Faridpur, from Jasimuddin, *Jarigan* (1968).

Measuring about ten feet by ten feet, the space would be large enough to hold a *jarigan dol*—a *boyati* standing, eight or ten *dohars* sitting (at times), and four or five instrumentalists sitting. Like *jatra* performances today, the stage was generally roofed over with a *shamiana*, a decorated cloth roof traditionally used for most Bengali open air functions. The *shamiana* is supported by bamboo poles erected at the corners of the stage.

At least one path from a corner of the stage is kept clear through the audience on which the *jarigan* performers enter and exit. Jasimuddin describes how several paths permitted *dohars* to carry their singing to audience members who are too far from the stage to hear clearly. Sections of the audience out of range of hearing, while waiting for the *dohars*, passed the time in talking and eating.¹²

On-stage arrangements

Using Jasimuddin and S. M. Lutfor Rahman's descriptions of past performances and by extrapolating performance traditions from *jatras* today, it is possible to imagine the earlier staging of a *jarigan* performance.

The *boyati* stands or paces about in the middle of the stage while the *dohars* sit or stand on one side of it and the instrumentalists sit on the other. The stage has no scenery, but from the words of the narrations, the audience imagines the various domestic or historical settings of the plot. For different characters, the *boyati* uses a

rumal (handkerchief) or *gamcha* (a three-foot length of light cotton cloth) in various ways to depict persons and situations. When he speaks the words of a heroine he may drape his head with the *gamcha* as a woman drapes the end of her sari or he may wear it as a turban when he speaks the words of a noble figure.¹³

Sometimes a *boyati* may handle a *chamor*, a fly-whisk made from a short stick with a bundle of horse-hairs attached at the top. By holding it in different positions and activating it like a hand-puppet, the *boyati* can indicate that he is cradling a baby or speaking to a villain who is trembling with anger.¹⁴

Costuming is simple. The *boyati* and *dohars* dress in ordinary clothes. Currently they may wear a *pajama* (literally, leg-clothing; a loose, full-length pair of white cotton pants) or a *lungi* (a sarong-like lower garment) and a *kamiz* (a long sleeved, long shirt). A specific group may add matching colored sashes around the waist or worn diagonally across the upper body and a colored headband. The color for these accouterments is often red, but other colors are also used.

Lighting in the nineteenth century was provided by torches and kerosene lanterns. A friend remembers seeing *jatras* in his childhood in the 1940s. These were sometimes lit by special torches consisting of long, cylindrical tubes that contained a burning gas. The light of this gas was so bright that he could not look directly at it. Today, electric lighting may be supplied or lanterns called *hajaks* (hand-pumped, petrol-fueled lanterns) are used in villages which lack electricity.

The occasions

A *jarigan* festival may be organized for a number of reasons. In the past, a wealthy *zamindar* might wish to celebrate a happy event, such as the birth of a son. He might provide a *jarigan* session in conjunction with a *mela* (country fair) to increase his own popularity. After *zamindars* lost their position and wealth, guilds and other local organizations initiated *jarigan* events by taking up subscriptions.

Jarigan singing can occur in two ways during a *mela*. A large-scale performance may be formally organized as a scheduled feature and performed on specific days of the *mela*. In other cases, *jarigan* singers may perform informally. Like the entertainer with his trained monkey or the snake charmer, a *jarigan* singer, with or without instruments, with or without *dohars*, may sing a *jarigan* story to a crowd of shoppers and passers by at a *hat* (market place).¹⁵ In this way the *jarigan* singer resembles other entertainers who circulate around village *hats* and *melas*.¹⁶

Today as in former times, pilgrimages on special days to the *mazar* (grave) of a famous saint are enhanced with song performances including *jarigan* songs. The on-site celebrations at a *mazar*, including song performances, have taken on the designation of *mazar*.¹⁷

Length of programs

In the past, depending on the extent of patronage, a *jarigan* festival might last as long as a week, from eight or ten o'clock each evening until the early, or even late, morning hours. In the case of such extensive sessions, several groups of *boyatis* with their *dohars* would perform in sequence on each night.

The expenses and payments

For a scheduled performance, *jarigan* performers received presents as well as cash payment. Food and shelter for artists who come from outside the community would be provided by local people. The patron or society organizing the festival would see to the expenses of the event and perhaps offer a base payment to the *jarigan dols*. At the *jarigan* competition that I attended, audience members pinned cash onto the shirt of a *boyati* during pauses in the recital and even during the recital itself.

THE PROGRAM

The words *utsav* and *anusthan*, which both mean festival, are often used in Bangladesh to designate a cultural event, like a concert, containing a program of items, such as an evening of folk songs or an evening featuring another genre of music. Such are the occasions staged in Dhaka parks and auditoriums that feature "Lalon-giti", songs by the famous folk poet-singer Lalon Shah (1792-1890), or Rabindra-sangit, songs by Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941), or Nazrul-giti, songs by Kazi Nazrul Islam (1899-1976). These programs today, although they may be called *utsav*, are minor "festivals" in comparison to the multi-night sessions of *jarigan* songs in the nineteenth century.

Unlike a Western recital or concert which lasts only a few hours, a *jarigan* festival used to be an extensive, gala occasion with a variety of songs and musical entertainment. The word *ashor* (literally, an assembly) is used by S. M. Lutfur Rahman like the word "recital" to designate one session at a time of the successive performances by different *jarigan dols* (*jarigan* groups) within a night's series of *ashors*. The same word is used synonymously with *utsav* and *anusthan* to designate an entire night's program, or as a generic term to mean any scheduled occasion for performances of one kind, whether lasting one night or for a whole week.

Each night's program in a past *jarigan* festival included a series of *jarigan dols*, two or three performing in alternation. The program within each group's *ashor* (session or recital) followed a traditional sequence of items. When it came time for the *boyati* of the *dol* to sing a *jarigan* song, he would sing only a portion of it at one time, leaving the rest to be continued in subsequent sessions. The length of such a session lasted from a half hour to an hour or more before the next group took over. Instrumental accompaniments and interludes added variety to the vocal items.

The action

The following descriptions of different aspects of typical *jarigan* festivals in the past are rendered in the present tense, as if these past recitals existed in the same form today.

The solos

The *boyati* is responsible for narrating the featured epic-like poem-song from his repertory of *jarigan* songs. He sings his tale in couplet-verses accompanied by a

melody that is basically chant-like, but enhanced with lyrical improvisations. He and his *dol* will return to continue the story or enter into a poetic debate after another *dol* has performed.

While singing the narration, the *boyati* stands or walks about. He may pluck a stringed instrument or bow a *behala*. With or without an instrument, he gestures with a free hand to emphasize the point of a passage or to call the audience's attention to a comment he would like to make. While singing, he moves his body to the rhythm of the song. Mustafa Zaman Abbasi showed me the traditional pose of a *boyati* with one foot slightly ahead of the other and one hand raised to draw attention to the narration.

Instead of a stringed instrument, a *boyati* may accompany himself with a small drum called a *khonjoni* tucked under one arm. He may activate *nupurs* with his rhythmic stepping. If the *boyati* has no instrument, he may hold one of the "props" already mentioned: a *rumal*, *chamor* or *gamcha*. With these he portrays characters or simply agitates them to emphasize his words. Each *boyati* has his own style of visually dramatizing the scenes he narrates.¹⁸

In one *dol's* recital during an all-night program, the *boyati* sings only a portion of a *jarigan* song. His individual recital is interspersed with refrains and short interpolated songs sung by the *dohars*.

Sometimes a *boyati* is backed by a second *boyati* who acts as an alternate narrative singer and as a leader for the *dohars*. The second *boyati* can serve the first *boyati* as a supporting actor, interacting *ex tempore* with the first *boyati*, exchanging sung comments and expressive looks.

Among the *jarigan* examples given in this book, the reader may notice the informal and intimate language with which the narrating singer, the *boyati*, addresses his audience. The close relationship between the *boyati* and his audience is typical of *jarigan* performances. Sometimes the *boyati* even interrupts his narrative singing to address the audience with commentary in song or normal speech. He may comment on the story he is narrating, connecting it with what has passed or is to come, or he may connect it with a current local incident or issue. One *boyati* in the session of the *jarinach* (*jari*-dance) which I attended commented during his singing on the current elections due at the end of the year. Another one included a eulogy to the agricultural productivity of Bangladesh, giving the name of the fruits and vegetables of each district.

The choral additions

The *dohars* are responsible for adding variety to the *boyati's* narrative. When they echo his lines or inject refrain-like songs, they provide contrast to the sound of the *boyati's* solo chant by their combined voices. Their singing does not require inventiveness on their part as much as long experience in knowing when and what to sing in keeping with the *boyati's* style.

The *dohars* may sing refrains of various sorts. Some of these refrains consist of lyrical poetry that refers to the plot of the *boyati's jarigan*, like the lyrical commentary of the choruses in the ancient Greek dramas.¹⁹ At other times the *dohars* may take over the burden of entertainment by introducing songs from other genres of folk songs, embellishing the program with a variety of oral entertainment.²⁰ The various

types of song introduced by the *dohars* are more fully described in the chapters on *jarigan* poetry and music.

The *dohars* generally have a leader who indicates to them when to join in the singing of the *boyati*, when to echo him, and when to sing a refrain or other choral song. As an alternate *boyati*, he may sometimes take over the role of chief *boyati*, adding variety to the narrative singing and giving the chief *boyati* a chance to rest.

The *dohars* sit or stand loosely grouped on one side of the stage. They may wear *gungur* (ankle bells) that make a jingling sound or *nupur* (ankle bracelets with beads inside) that make a soft metallic rattling sound when they step to the rhythm of their singing. They may play *mondiras*, also known as *jhuris* or *kartalṣ*, which are pairs of small finger-cymbals that give out a bell-like tone when struck together.

The instrumental accompaniments and interludes

Each *jarigan dol* includes several instrumentalists who are accustomed to playing in that *dol*. The instrumentalists have an active role not only as accompanists to the *boyati* and *dohars*, but they provide musical entertainment which supplements the *jarigan* narrative singing. Sometimes they play softly as background to the singing. At other times they provide a forceful accompaniment to it. They know when to interject a purely instrumental piece and they provide overtures and final fanfares to an individual *jarigan dol's* program, enriching it with a variety of musical fare. Their pieces are generally based on popular songs of the day as well as old, favorite tunes.

The percussionists play an especially important role, reinforcing and maintaining the beat of the *jarigan* vocal rhythm, and they inject fresh energy and "swing" to the musical effect of the singing. Meanwhile, melodic accompaniment is supplied by players on *dotaras*, *sarindas*, *behalas*, and today's ubiquitous harmonium. Wind instruments, such as the *banshi* and *sheṇnai*, are especially expressive in "echoing" the singers' lines. In modern performances, wind instruments used in military bands, such as bugles and trumpets, add a circus-like gaiety to the *jarigan* sessions. As well as providing variety to a *jarigan* performance, the music of the instrumentalists serves to broadcast the presence of the recitals to neighborhoods at a distance, as well as to the audience in the immediate vicinity.

The program of an individual session

S. M. Lutfur Rahman describes a program that is typical of the first *jarigan* session in a night's series of sessions. This program is reproduced below. The considerable attention given to Hindu themes in the listing of items suggests that the program is typical of pre-1947 years, when Hindus still comprised a large community in eastern Bengal, now Bangladesh.²¹

Panchali and *chora* songs, which are listed in the program, are important genres of Bengali folk songs that are frequently mentioned in the history of medieval Bengali literature. *Panchali* songs are narrative songs referring to Hindu lore and local adventures. I mention these genres later in the chapter on *jarigan* poetic

form (Chapter Eight) because of their probable influence on the development of *jarigan* poetry and style of tunes. At the time of writing this book I have been unable to establish clearly the content and form of *chora* songs, but they seem to be of a shorter and lighter nature than *panchali* songs. Many resemble English nursery rhymes.

I assume that all the songs listed in the program are sung solo by the chief *boyati* or his alternate. I also assume that the *dohars* carry on their role of repeaters and embellishers for all the items listed.

The songs called "*dhua*" in the program belong to a category of songs whose precise definition is as elusive to me as a precise definition of *jarigan* songs. Generally, as in the schedule below, the term "*dhua*" applies to songs that are additional to and contrast with the narrative song—a *jarigan* song—the featured event of the program. The *dhuagan* songs, by their preponderance and specific uses as greetings, invocations, and concluding commentary, play an integral role in the session's program. Indeed, S. M. Lutfur Rahman cites the following ditty as proof of the importance of *dhuagan* songs in a *jarigan* session.

ধুয়া-জারী দু'টি ভাই
কারে থু'য়ে কারে পাই

Dhua-Jari du'ti bhai,
Kare thuye kare pai.

Dhua-Jari are two brothers,
Where you keep one you get the other.²²

Without defining *dhuagan* songs, Jasimuddin nevertheless devotes a section in his book to describing them.²³ He says that they consist of a variety of poetic forms and that they contain religio-philosophic themes: *nabi-tatto* (prophet-matters), *deho-tatto* (mystical analogies of the universe to the human body), *prem-tatto* (analogies of devotion to God with human love), *Imam-bicched* (separation-grieving for the martyred Imams), the songs of ferrymen (about the love of Radha and Krishna), and others. These songs, he says, furnish material for the poetic debates that are a part of *jarigan* programs. At the end of his collection of *jarigan* texts, Jasimuddin includes several examples of *dhuagan* texts. He also identifies as "*dhuagan*" some of the songs that I musically notated for him. Analyses of the music of these songs reveal some clues to the definition of *dhuagan*, as I suggest later in the chapter on *jarigan* song compositions (Chapter Ten).

Notably in S. M. Lutfur Rahman's program below the featured *jarigan* song is the eighth item out of eleven items. In other words, a *jarigan* song is only part of the entertainment of the session, flanked before and after by other items. Presumably the *boyati*, or an assistant *boyati*, performs the songs that are additional to the featured *jarigan* song. S. M. Lutfur Rahman told me that the *boyati* sings only a portion of his *jarigan* song in one session. He continues it in a subsequent one. One session, he writes, may last from a half hour to an hour or more. This suggests that if a half-hour or more is devoted to the *jarigan* song, the ten or so other songs are quite short.

A *Jarigan* Program²⁴

1. An invocational *dhua* song. This is generally addressed to Allah and the Prophet. S. M. Lutfur Rahman includes the goddess Saraswati, goddess of learning and music, and "Ma" Fatima (Mother Fatema, the daughter of the Prophet and the mother of Hasan and Hosein). This greeting *dhua* may include other citations, including other Hindu deities, sacred places, local persons to be honored, etc.
2. A *panchali* song. This is an ancient genre of song. S. M. Lutfur Rahman says that here the song is addressed to the ten "directions" (eight cardinal points of the compass and the upward and downward directions), the singer's *guru*-teacher, his parents and the audience members. This item and the previous one resemble *bandanas* (invocations), which is what they are generically.
3. A *chora* song. This is a light genre of song which may be pre-composed, already popular, or sung *ex tempore*.
4. *Kathakata*: literally, the telling of an event; the introduction of a story, perhaps a summary of the story of the *jarigan* to be sung, rendered in prose and in verse.
5. A *dhua* song. This time the *dhua* song comes from a genre of singing called *nilakari* or *lilakari*, a form of play acting while singing. S. M. Lutfur Rahman says that in Jessore District, two singers act out the parts of Radha and Krishna.
6. A *panchali* song. S. M. Lutfur Rahman says that this item is known as a "*th[y]ash panchali*" (teasing *panchali*). This kind of *panchali*, he says, contains sarcastic wit directed to the opposing team of *jarigan* singers.
7. A *dhua* song. This *dhua* song honors the *jarigan* singer's *ustad*. The *boyati* sings a song in the "*guru-padi*" (*guru-verse*) style or "*shishya-padi*" (*pupil-verse*) style; that is, in the style of the disciple, his own style. The *dhua* song here may be a *deho-tatto* (literally, body-topic; analogies of cosmology to the human body). Jasimuddin lists this form of song as part of a *jarigan* program, as well as *nabi-tatto* (prophet-topic) songs. He says that they supply the topics for *palla* (competition).²⁵ It is not clear whether the items up to this point in the program are performed by the chief *boyati* or an assistant.
8. The featured *jarigan* song. The *boyati* now sings a portion of his chosen *jarigan* narrative; perhaps only fifty lines of it, alternating with refrains by the *dohars*. He may also include in his recital a topic for debate with the *boyati* of the next *dol*. When he performs later in the night's program, he will sing the next portion of his chosen *jarigan* story.
9. A *dhua* song known as "*jari kata dhua*" (literally, a *dhua* that "cuts off" the *jarigan* narrative). This *dhua* song may summarize the narrative of the current *jarigan* song and prepare the audience for more to come in a later session.
10. A *panchali* song. In this *panchali* song, the *boyati* may propose or repeat questions for debate.
11. A *dhua* song. This *dhua* song may repeat the question for debate before the particular *jarigan dol* retires and the next one takes over.

According to S. M. Lutfor Rahman, in subsequent sessions of an all-night *ashor*, the first three items of the above program would be omitted. When the first *dol* returns after an intermission or after the performance of another *dol*, the *boyati* will continue his narrative where he left off. It is not clear whether the *boyati* of a different *dol* continues the story of his predecessor or starts a new one.

If two *dols* have had a debate, S. M. Lutfor Rahman says there may be a program section called "*goshto*" (literally, a going-to-the-pasture) in which the rival *boyatis* make friends again, as happens in the *Rāmāyaṇa* when Balaram, the brother of Krishna, after a quarrel with Krishna, invites him to return to the pasture with him. The winner of the debate plays Balaram and the loser plays Krishna.

Individual performances during a *jarigan* festival probably vary considerably in their content and schedule, depending on the traditions of individual *jarigan dols*. Their styles of performance reflect the different dialects and rituals that can vary considerably in eastern Bengal between districts, even between neighborhoods.

The sections of an individual *jarigan* song

Each song type included in the above program has its own particular internal structure. A *panchali*, *chora* or *jarigan* song belongs to a genre of its own with its own style of poetry and music. "*Dhua*" seems to signify the role of different songs in a session, not specifically a genre of song. This is discussed in the chapters on the poetic and musical form of *jarigan* songs (Chapter Eight through Ten). Here I merely note that "*dhua*" songs include a variety of short songs that contrast with the lengthy featured *jarigan* item.

The internal structure of a *jarigan* song is simple. It generally starts with a *bandana* (a greeting or invocation) and ends with a statement that the *pala* (the particular episode narrated) has ended. In the course of his narrative singing, the *boyati* may interject spoken passages of narration and some digressions in the form of comments addressed to the audience. These may not be related to the episode he is narrating and may be delivered as part of his song or in a speech. The *boyati's* narrative singing is interspersed with refrains sung by the *dohars* who may also interject extraneous short songs to add variety to the narrative singing. The form of their interpolated songs, which I presume are *dhua* songs, or parts of *dhua* songs, is discussed in the chapters on *jarigan* poetry and music.

Programs of informal recitals

Even if a *boyati* is sitting on a verandah singing solo for family and friends, the *jarigan* songs that he sings are no less "*jari*" than those he sings for mass audiences on formal occasions. In fact, solo performances in informal settings represent *jarigan* song examples in their purist form without the interpolations by the *dohars*. The sound recordings from which I made the notations in Appendix B of this book contain examples of solo *jarigan* singing as well as examples of performances with *dohars*. The freedom for a *boyati* to be more musically creative in solo recitals than when accompanied by *dohars* is evident in the notations of songs that were sung solo.

JARIGAN DANCES

সোজন আজি নতুন গায়েন, লাল গামছা ঘুরিয়ে শিরে,
মহরমের নাচন নেচে গান গাহে তার দলটি ঘিরে।

*Sojan aji notun gayen, lal gamchha ghuriye shire,
Maharamer nachon neche gan gahe tar dol-ti ghire.*²⁶

(Sojan is the new singer for today;
He dances, a red turban round his head.)²⁷

Thus Jasimuddin describes the *jarinach* (*jari*-dancing) during a Bengali village Muharram festival in the early twentieth century. The Mymensingh district of Bengal is known for its performances of *jarinach*. In the competition of *jarigan* dancing that I attended in a remote area of Mymensingh, twenty to thirty *dohars* participated in each of five competing groups, each group performing for about forty minutes. The *dohars* danced continuously during the solo singing of their *boyati* and during their own refrain songs.

The dance patterns involved moving in a circular direction, sometimes clockwise and sometimes counter-clockwise, while performing different dance steps and various body movements. Sometimes the *dohars* danced in pairs, while moving around the circle exchanging partners. The choreography included moving in unison to the

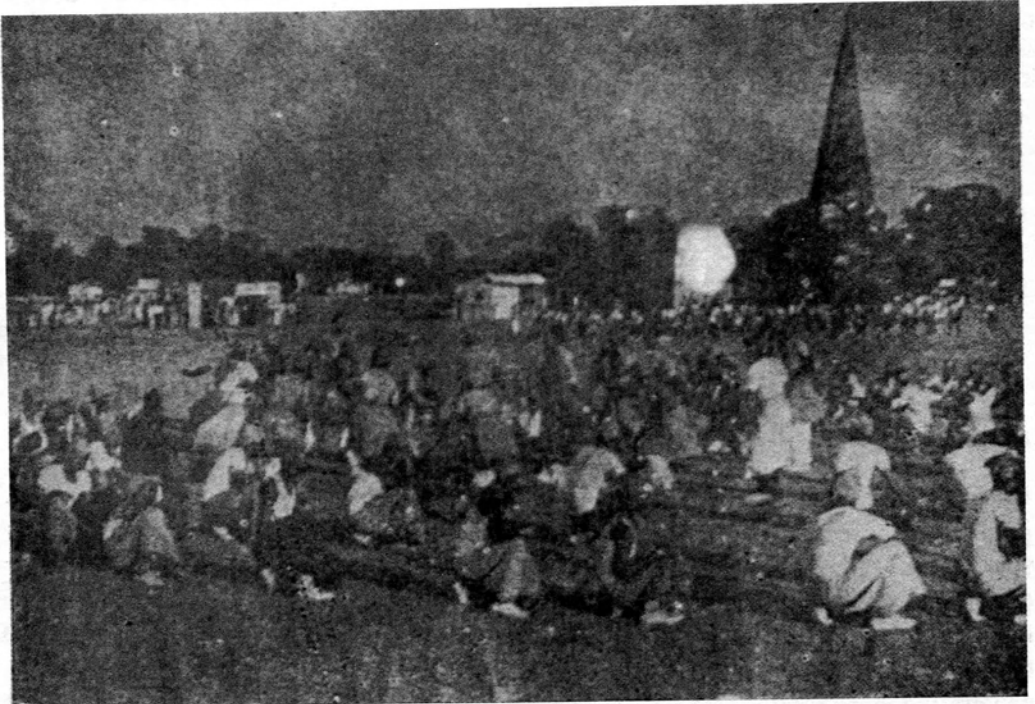


Fig. 21. *Jarinach* in Dhaka during the 1950s, from *Traditional Culture in East Pakistan* by Hai and Shahidullah (1963).

center of the circle and out again with arms raised and lowered. During the performance of one group, the dancers in single file followed a spiral formation, winding their line ever more tightly until they formed a circle with one *dohar*-dancer sitting on the lap of the *dohar*-dancer behind him. The ring of men, one on the lap of the other, held together in the way that an arch of separate bricks depends on a keystone. The audience burst into applause at the seeming miracle.²⁸

There was no instrumental accompaniment for the performances. As the dancers performed their various steps, the *nupurs* on their ankles softly accented the measured rhythm of the singing. During brief pauses in the singing, instead of complete silence, the swishing sound of these ankle bracelets enunciated the otherwise silent tread of the dancers' bare feet on soft ground.

The dancing of the groups was so perfectly in step that I presume that there was a right side leader, the *daina*, and a left-side leader, the *baina*, as described by S. M. Lutfur Rahman.²⁹ A same dancer in a group could often be heard punctuating the singing with soft, rhythmic cries: "Hun! Hun!"

The *boyati* of each group wore ordinary clothes, a shirt and pants. Each group could be identified by the costumes of the *dohar*-dancers. In some groups they wore white *pajamas* (loose cotton pants) with a white "T"-shirt or a *guernsey* (a sleeveless cotton-knit shirt). One group was dressed in the traditional lower garment of Hindus: a *dhoti* (a long strip of white cloth wound around the waist and between the legs to form skirt-like trousers).³⁰ The dancers of each group wore headbands of matching colors, some groups with red headbands and others with green or orange ones. They all carried *rumals* (handkerchiefs) which they waved in different dance gestures or which they used as links in formations when they danced as couples or when they all joined in a single circle.

The dances of each group varied in their details, but they all conformed to the descriptions of *jarigan* dancing in various books about Bangladeshi music and dance, as well as in the books of Jasimuddin and S. M. Lutfur Rahman. The similarities between these written descriptions and the dancing that I saw in the competition suggest that *jarigan* song-cum-dance traditions may have survived more intact than the concert-style program of *jarigan* song recitals as outlined by S. M. Lutfur Rahman. This kind of program no longer seems to exist in that form.³¹

CURRENT PRACTICE

Changes in patronage

During the end of British rule, the loss of *zamindari* and other private patronage for public events in rural Bengal seriously affected the frequency and extent of large-scale *jarigan* performances, such as described above. After 1947, potential patrons of folk music became increasingly occupied with city life, gradually losing their close ties with rural society. By the mid-twentieth century, the influence of Western music through radio, films and television brought a change in popular tastes in songs, penetrating even rural society. Sons of farmers for whom no land was left to inherit began to seek work in cities and their tastes also changed. The number of young singers dedicated to learning the lengthy songs of the *jarigan* repertory decreased.³²

Modern repertoires

Although today *jarigan* recitals on the scale of earlier times no longer exist, *jarigan* singers still perform professionally at folk song festivals and fairs, and on radio and television programs. According to what shopkeepers of Bangladeshi music stores told me, *jarigan* songs recorded on audio-cassettes are sold in remarkable quantity.³³ Today's *jarigan* singers, like their predecessors, continue to incorporate contemporary topics into their narrative singing. Organizations dedicated to improving life for rural Bangladeshis sometimes use *jarigan* singing as a way to disseminate information on such topics as hygiene, nutrition and family planning.³⁴ In the recent political elections, *jarigan* singing was used for encouraging people to vote.

With the creation of a nation of their own in 1971, Bangladeshi Bengalis were free to renew contact with their background rooted in its diverse cultures and outlooks. Over the years since then, academies of music, groups of dramatists, and various cultural organizations have proliferated in Dhaka, Chittagong and other major cities. In the countryside, festivals of folk song and *jatra* performances have diminished in scale, but continue to exist. Today, *jarigan* songs are still sung, but they are included in programs of mixed genres, like Western concert programs that include the music of different styles and periods all in one evening.

In the preparation of the present book I was able to attend a *jatra* performance in the countryside of Manikganj and several concerts of folk songs in Dhaka. The *jatra* performance was arranged for video-taping by the Bangla Academy. Although it was staged traditionally and was thoroughly entertaining, the circumstances were artificial. The audience numbering over a hundred was nevertheless far smaller than the audiences I remembered in the 1960s for such affairs. Presumably the show had not been announced to the general public as it might have been had a local sponsor organized it.

The folk song concerts that I attended recently in Dhaka were in Ramna Park, a central park in Dhaka, or in the theater of Shilpakala Academy, one of Dhaka's largest indoor theaters. These concerts represented more truly the modern day style of organized folk song performances. By nineteenth century standards, the current audiences numbering under a thousand seem small, but spaces in the park and theater were filled to capacity with enthusiastic gatherings. The audience, mostly young men, expressed evident enjoyment, swaying to the music and shouting ovations at high points in a performers' poetic and musical expression. None of these concerts that I attended included a *jarigan* song on their programs.

A modern day performance: The "Cow" Competition

My closest contact with a genuine *jarigan* performance occurred thanks to a trip to the small town of Gouripur in Mymensingh district to record the singing of Hatim Uddin Sarkar. He had been recommended to us by a casual acquaintance that Lenin, my assistant, and I had made several weeks earlier as we returned from the first visit to the *Imam bara* of Gorpara where I attended the 1995 Muharram celebrations described in Chapter One.

We located Hatim Uddin through the name of a prominent citizen in Gouripur which our Gorpara acquaintance had given us. This same citizen, when he heard that

আমেরিকানদের উছোগে এক প্রতিযোগিতা বৃন্দক ঃ জারি গানের অনুষ্ঠান ঃ

স্থান ঃ—নাহড়া বোর্ড বাজার।

তারিখ—২৯শে জৈষ্ঠা বোজ (সোমবার)

(বেলা ১ ঘণ্টাকায়)

পুরস্কারদাতা মেসি ফ্রানলিস ডনহম (নিউইয়র্ক আমেরিকা)

১ম পুরস্কার - টেপ রেকর্ড ১টি, ২য় রেডিও ১টি, ৩য় দেয়াল ঘড়ি ১টি,
৪র্থ সীল ১টি, ৫ম কাপ ১টি।

অতিথি বৃন্দ ড্যানিয়েল ডনহম আমেরিকা, বেরনার্ড নবেল্জাবেদা আফ্রিকা,
মোখলেছুর রহমান লেলিন চলচ্চিত্র নির্মাতা বাংলাদেশ।

সভাপতি আঃ ওয়াহুদ বোকাইনগরী ৬নং বোকাইনগর ইউ পি চেয়ারম্যান।

পৃষ্ঠপোষকতায় মিঃ আমিনুল ইসলাম খান প্রাঃ চেয়ারম্যান, ডাঃ আলী
হোসেন, আঃ মামুন তাঃ প্রাঃ চেয়ারম্যান, ফিরোজ আলম খান প্রাঃ চেঃ।

পরিচালনায় হাশিম উদ্দিন আকন্দ; ও মিজানুর রহমান খান (মিজান)
এডভোকেট।

ব্যবস্থাপনায়—আঃ হেকিম খান পাঠান, মজলিশ খান পাঠান, আবদুল
রাজ্জাক খান, সাহাবুদ্দিন, আঃ ছুস সান্তর, আঃ মুন্সাক আকন্দ,
আবু বকর, হাফেজ আলী, নবাব আলী, মিসেস ফজিলতের
রেহা, মিসেস জাহানারা বেগম, মিসেস আনোয়ারা বেগম,
ইউ পি সদস্য ও সদস্তা বৃন্দ, আবুল কাশেম সেক্রেটারী।

প্রাণাধিকার—সাদির উদ্দিন আহমেদ, আমানত খান পাঠান, মনকর উদ্দিন,
হাবিবুল্লাহ, ইছমাহিল, আলীউদ্দিন, কিতাব আলী, আঃ আব্বাস
আঃ হেকিম শেখ, আজিজুল হক, নিয়াস উদ্দিন, ইব্রাহিম মুল্লী,
আঃ রহমান নাজিম উদ্দিন, আঃ রাশিদ, ডঃ আঃ গফুর, আরমান আলী
আমিছ চৌঃ, লাল মিয়া, এম. এ. রহমান, প্রাঃ ইউ পি সদস্য বৃন্দ।

Fig. 22. Announcement of a jarigan competition. The top lines say "A Competitive Program of Jarigan." Gouripur, Mymensingh, June 12, 1995.

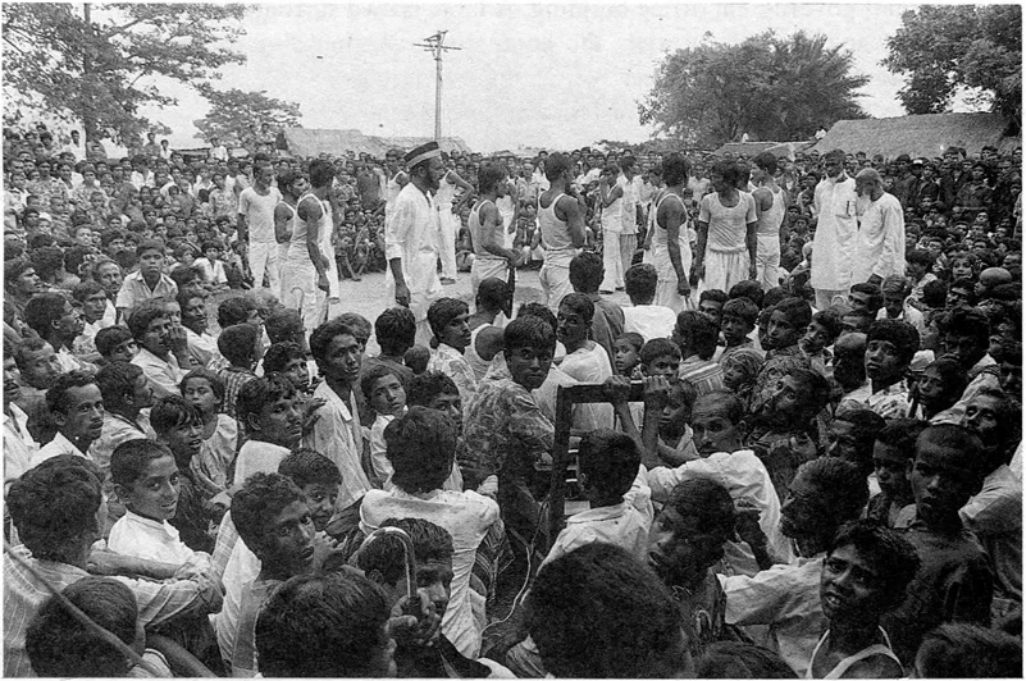


Fig. 23. Audience and *jari dol* in a *jarigan* competition, Gouripur, Mymensingh, June 12, 1995.

I was interested in *jarigan* performances, told us that there were annual *jarigan* competitions in the area. We asked if one would be held in the near future. He replied that if we would like to see one, it could be organized for us, if we could offer a prize. We asked what we might offer and he suggested a cow. We learned that takas 2,000 (about fifty dollars) would purchase a small cow.

A date two weeks hence was selected for our return to Gouripur to attend the competition, by which time it would have been organized. Back in Dhaka, we sent the "cow" money by postal order and prepared ourselves for the trip. Accompanied by my husband as well as Lenin, I set out for Gouripur, allowing an extra day for finding the venue of the competition.

Getting to the city of Mymensingh was a two hour journey on a crowded bus. In Mymensingh we boarded the first vehicle we could find, a *tempo*, a miniature scooter-run bus, which already contained its full complement of passengers. We were squeezed in and an hour later reached Gouripur, the end of the *tempo's* route.

We inquired at a municipal office where the competition was to be held so that we could visit the site ahead of time. We checked in at the local government "rest house" where we would spend the night. Then a guide came with us as we meandered in rickshaws for the next hour along narrow paths bordering fields of ripening paddy. It was difficult to believe that there could be an open place large enough for a *jarigan* event in this countryside where every available square foot of land was filled with flourishing produce. By about four in the afternoon we arrived at what appeared

to be a small government office building. A large crowd surrounded an open space in front of it, and, to our surprise, the competition we had "sponsored" was in full swing. In fact, it was almost over.

It seems that the date fixed for our expected arrival was planned according to the Bengali calendar, not by the Western one. After much discussion, it was agreed that the entire competition would be re-staged. No cow was in evidence, but instead we were shown five prizes: a radio-cassette player, a radio, an electric wall clock, and two plaques. This decision enabled each of the five competing groups to receive some sort of prize.

We were given copies of the flyer on which the competition had been announced and all the performers had been carefully listed. At the top of the flyer our names, accurately transcribed in Bengali, appeared as honored sponsors. After a break for tea, the competition began again from the beginning.

As it turned out the event was actually a *jarinach* (*jari*-dance) competition. Each group of singer-dancers consisted of a *boyati* with from twenty to thirty *dohars*. Hatim Uddin Sarkar was the *boyati* for one of the *dols*. My husband counted about six hundred people in the audience, most of whom had been watching the competition from its earlier beginning, and who ended up by seeing the entire competition twice over.

The groups performed for about forty minutes each. As darkness settled during the third group, a monsoon rain lightly baptized the event. I huddled under the judges' table to take notes while a villager held an umbrella over Lenin who walked about within the circle of dancers, making cassette recordings and photographing the event.

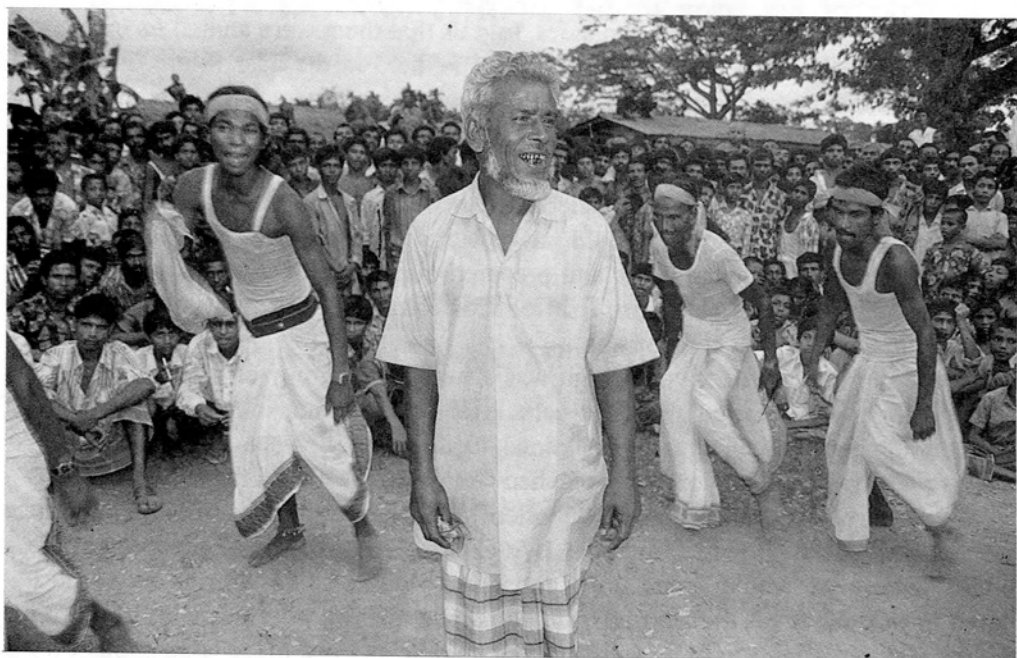


Fig. 24. A *boyati* in shirt and *lungi*; *dohars* in *guernsey* and *dhoti*. *Jarigan* competition, Gouripur, Mymensingh, June 12, 1995.

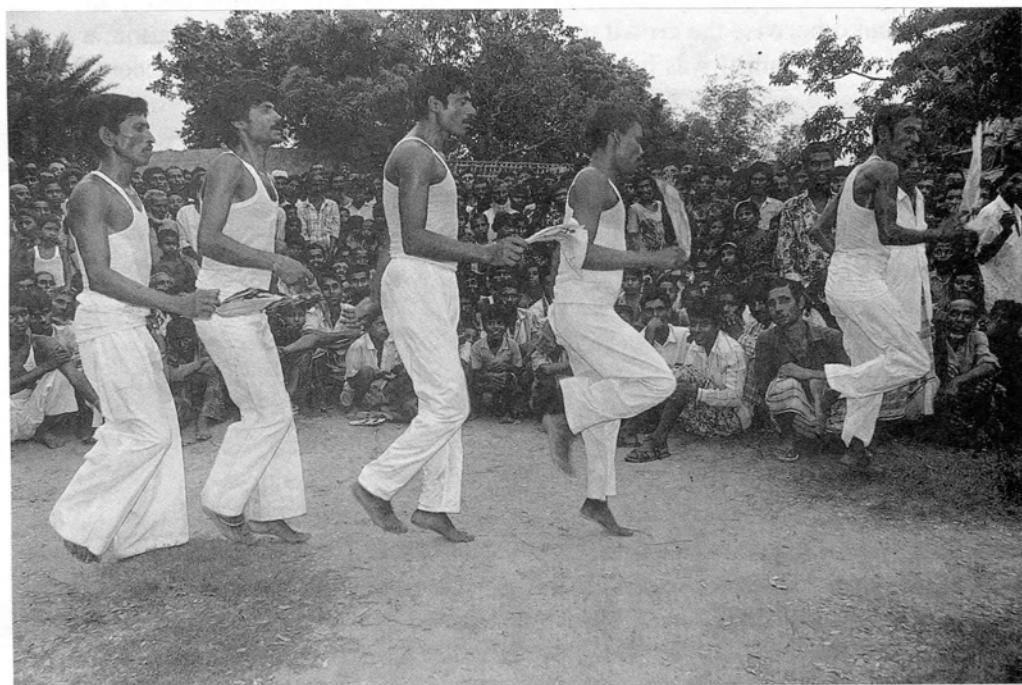


Fig. 25. *Dohars* with *rumals*. The *nupur* on the ankle of one *dohar* is visible. Jarigan competition, Gouripur, Mymensingh, June 12, 1995.



Fig. 26. *Dohars* completing a spiraling pattern into a self-supporting circle. Jarigan competition, Gouripur, Mymensingh, June 12, 1995.

Most of the few women who had attended the first session left before its repetition, but otherwise the crowd remained undiminished. For illumination, a *hajak* (a gasoline mantle lamp) was hung from a pole in the middle of the dancers. When the lamp's light faded, someone would appear from the audience to pump it up again. During pauses in a *boyati's* song, while his *dohars* continued to dance, members of the audience would approach the *boyati* and pin cash to his shirt.

The performances were followed by the long awaited prize giving ceremony conducted by three judges. First we were honored with speeches to which we responded. We distributed takas of our own to the leaders of the *dohars*, having made a hasty calculation of what we could give. The group that had performed the spiral pattern mentioned previously in this chapter won first prize. The five groups had seemed to me equally expert and we were glad that the "cow" had turned into more than one prize.

The event described above is probably typical in many ways of *jarigan* performances in rural Bangladesh today. The location of the competition was far from the nearest urban center, beyond the reach of electric power. The organization of the competition was spontaneous and informal, depending, in this case, on the appearance of a patron. Without the aid of modern technology, the organizing of the event was efficient; within two weeks over one hundred performers had been contacted, the flyers had been printed and the prizes purchased. All the scheduled performers attended and willingly performed twice. The audience remained through the many hours of the event. Although modest in comparison to a nineteenth century *jarigan* festival, this competition proved that in modern times *jarigan* is still performed at a professional level by a considerably large number of artists.



Fig. 27. . The author and three judges. *Jarigan* competition, Gouripur, Mymensingh, June 12, 1995.

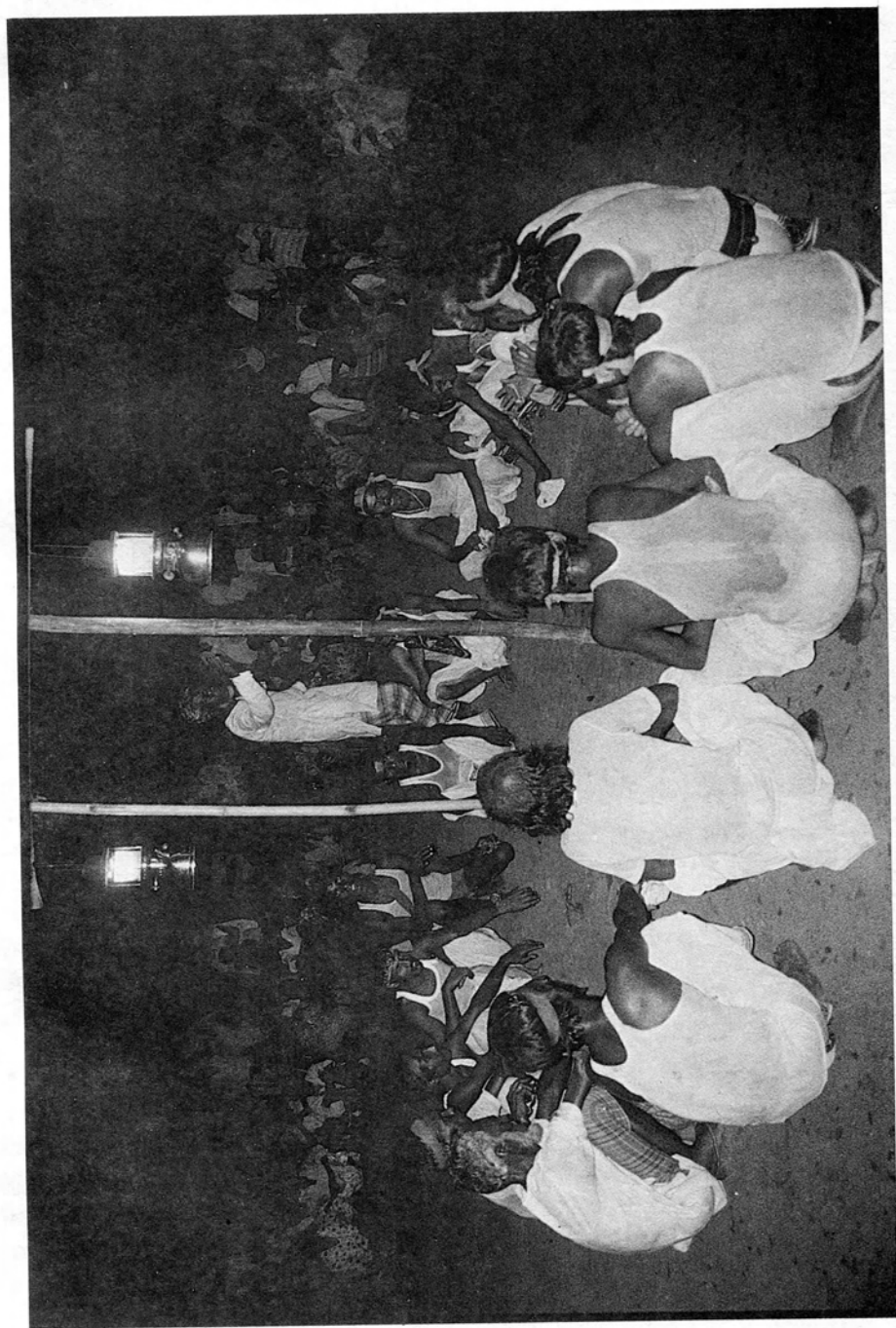


Fig. 28. *Boyati* and *dohars* performing by the light of *hajaks*. *Jarigan* competition, Gouripur, Mymensingh, June 12, 1995.



Fig. 29. *Boyati* in *kurta* and *lungi*; *dohars* in *guernsey* and *pajama*. *Jarigan* competition, Gouripur, Mymensingh, June 12, 1995.

PERFORMERS TODAY

তুমি গা তোলো সখিনা মুখের কথা যায় শোনা
 নিশি প্রভাত হ'ল,
 ওরে রণ-খোলাতে বাজে কাড়া দরজাতে সিপাই খাড়া
 আজ বুঝি মোর রণে যেতে হ'ল।

Tumi ga tolo Sokhina; mukher kotha jay shona,
Nishi probhat holo.
[Ore] ron kholate baje kara, darjate shipai khara,
Aj bujhi mor rone jete holo.

(Arise, Sokhina; hear the words of my mouth,
 The night has become dawn.
 Oh! he beats on the war drum, the soldier who stands at our door.
 Today I know I must go into battle.)

— A *dhuagan* song in Jasimuddin's collection.¹

"ABBASUDDIN'S SON"

For the descriptions of *jarigan* singers in this chapter, I am thankful for the guidance of Mustafa Zaman Abbasi, son of Abbasuddin, a former illustrious singer of folk songs who died in 1960. In the 1930s and 1940s, Abbasuddin was among the first enthusiasts of Bengali folk music to be recorded, offering some seven hundred folk songs on three-hundred-fifty "78 rpm" discs of the time from which two "33 1/3 LP" disks were made after his death in the 1960s. One of these recordings I happened to have purchased in New York City, not thinking that some day I would meet Abbasuddin's son, "Abbasi". That particular recording contains songs in Bengali folk song style composed by Jasimuddin as well as songs culled from many generations of rural singers.

Abbasi (born in 1937) started collecting folk songs from Bengali rural singers while he was in college in 1956. He received his Master's degree from Dhaka University in 1960. Between 1957-1970 he made recordings on "78 rpm" discs for His Master's Voice in Karachi. After Bangladeshi independence in 1971, he continued making recordings in India. Abbasi is in charge of Bangladeshi television and radio programs that promote Bangladeshi traditional culture.

Although he claims that he is not a scholar, I learned more from Abbasi that was of use in my research for the present book than from many academic sources. Abbasi's appreciation of the melodies, not merely the texts of local folk songs, and his dedication to preserving them and encouraging their continued performance places him among the foremost patrons of Bangladeshi folk music today.

Abbasi has spent his life adding to his father's collection of folk song recordings, as well as singing himself and serving in numerous different ways to promote Bengali folk music. He is in charge of television and radio programs about Bengali folk songs and he is in demand for officiating at cultural functions.

I visited him several times at his home, always early in the morning, his only free time before his long day begins at the television studio and attending cultural events where he is frequently asked to officiate. When he heard that I was preparing the present book, his joy was sincere. He said he longed himself to write "two hundred books!" about Bengali folk music, but that, unfortunately, this was beyond his means. He was glad that someone had undertaken the task of producing a book on *jarigan*.

Abbasi not only appreciates the cultural significance and musical beauty of *jarigan* songs, but he told me how he has actually stood on the field of Karbala in Iraq. He said that the moment he reached there, he had "the feeling of touching the feet of Imam Hosein, so beloved he was of the Prophet!"

He could tell me about *jarigan* singing in West Bengal, India, where he had made a visit at the beginning of January, 1994. He said that in Murshidabad, a community there has a *jari* organization and that when he was there, they were honoring Chayan Uddin, a popular, *jarigan* singer in his seventies. Abbasi said his style of singing was different from the style of Bangladeshi singers and that he sings on modern topics of social interest.

"As a singer, I am a small researcher" is the way Abbasi explained to me his enthusiasm for knowing about the songs of his country. He went on to tell me how he remembers Pagla Kanai of eastern Bengal (now Bangladesh) in the 1940s, when that exceptionally talented singer was still alive and singing for massive audiences. What Abbasi said echoed the description in the section of Jasimuddin's book devoted to Pagla Kanai's life and singing style. Pagla Kanai (literally, the Mad Blind-one) was, in Abbasi's words, "the best singer in the last century ... He had a very melodious voice and could compose instantaneously ... He is no more, but he has left us his songs."

Another famous singer whom Abbasi remembers well is Abdul Gani (or Ghani), "the father of modern *jari* ... the king of *jari* from the 1950s through the 1960s." Abbasi was between ten and fifteen years old when he heard Abdul Gani sing. Abdul Gani died in the 1960s, but his sons, who also sing, still live in their father's house, which Abbasi urged me to visit in Jalakathi in Barisal District, "the motherland of *jari*," as he added.

Abbasi explained how Abdul Gani acquired his large house, a surprising feat for a folk singer. During the time when Bangladesh was part of Pakistan, a Governor, Azam Khan, gave Abdul Gani a large tract of farm land. "In this way he became wealthy," Abbasi explained. "When Bengalis become wealthy they take another wife. He had many children who became good singers." I noted mentally that the composer of one of my favorite *jarigan* texts in Jasimuddin's collection, the "Kasem Sokhinar *Jari*", was composed by Abdul Gani, as identified at the end of the song text.

Abbasi's description of other *jarigan* performances that he remembered corroborated the descriptions by Jasimuddin and S. M. Lutfur Rahman. Abbasi said that it was true that past *jarigan* performances occupied whole nights and continued for a week at a time. He remembered performances in his youth lasting for three nights.



Fig. 30. Cover of a booklet containing songs by Abdul Gani Boyati, "the Emperor of Jarigan," first published in 1961.

Today, he said that performances are reduced to "maybe only one night, with a break at five in the morning for a second part." He described different styles of singing during a performance, such as *payar* measured chants or singing in free rhythm, and dramatic renditions using dialogue between two singers.

Abbasi is one of several Bangladeshis who have compared *jarigan* singing to American gospel singing. He referred to the way both *jarigan* songs and American "spirituals" are based on a scriptural text into which the poet-singer injects his or her own feelings and commentary. The leader and chorus style of a *jarigan* performance with its emotional give-and-take he felt was similar to gospel singing. He stressed that *jarigan* singing is "totally different" in its textual themes and style of performance from other Bengali genres of folk song performances. *Jarigan* songs are thoroughly Muslim in their themes, he said, whereas other Bengali folk songs show significant Hindu influence. Furthermore, he commented, *jarigan* singing occurs in all districts of Bangladesh; it is not localized like Mymensingh ballads, *bhatiyali* and other folk songs that are associated with particular regions of Bengal.

According to Abbasi, the *boyati-cum-dohar* style of recital, is especially well-developed in *jarigan* recitals. He compared these recitals to *jatra* (Bengali folk dramas). He commented that the *boyati* plays the characters in his narration, acting out their "conscience", which I interpreted to mean acting out their thoughts. He demonstrated the *jarigan boyati's* typical pose with one hand raised, the palm turned slightly towards the face, one foot in front of the other.

When I asked him to comment on the decline in *jarigan* singing in modern times, Abbasi said that in his childhood maybe two thousand *jarigan* singers were alive, out of which two hundred were "top" *jarigan* singers. He estimated that today there may be only eleven or twelve "top" singers with their groups among some two hundred groups. Without a doubt, the practice is waning, he said.

Abbasi arranged for me to attend an annual children's competition in *jarigan* singing which was instituted fifteen to twenty years ago by a philanthropic Bangladeshi lady, Zubeda Khanam, the Director of the Bangladesh Shishu Academy (the Bangladesh Children's Academy). Abbasi, who serves as one of the judges in the final round of the competition, said that in spite of their training and excellence, few of these children go on to become professional *jarigan* singers. He said that I would see only one child, a son of a professional *jarigan* singer, who may become a singer himself.

Abbasi longed to go with me on my trips to record the *jarigan* singers whom he recommended to me. This proved to be impossible. I was grateful for the time he gave me at his home, as I hope I have conveyed in this account.

A GENERAL PROFILE

Jasimuddin mentions in his book famous *boyatis* of the past whose talents were so phenomenal that some are regarded as saints and their homes are pilgrimage sites, such as the home of Abdul Gani as described by Abbasi. Pagla Kanai, mentioned by Abbasi, whose life spanned most of the nineteenth century, was known throughout Bengal for the beauty of his songs. Jasimuddin says that Pagla Kanai could charm audiences numbering in the tens of thousands. No collection of his *jarigan* songs

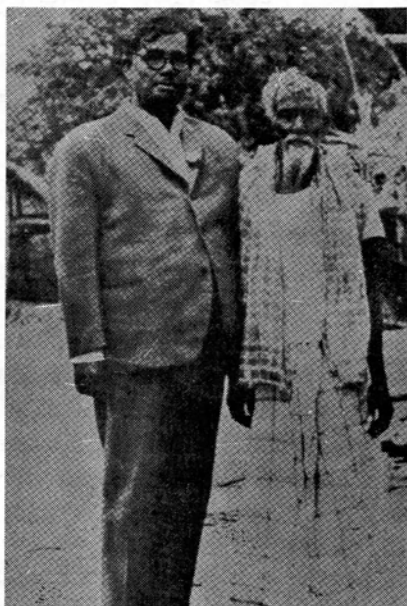


Fig. 31. Jasimuddin with Pagla Kanai's grandson, from Jasimuddin, *Jarigan* (1968).

exist, but the texts of his songs found in other repertoires of other singers survive as evidence of his exceptional poetic skills.²

Jasimuddin also mentions several other past singers, some of whom he heard in his boyhood. Of these Afazuddin Boyati of Dhaka District was known for his *jarigan* singing which Jasimuddin describes as deeply moving.³ The recordings that we made in 1964 demonstrate the unusual musical skill of another singer, Meghu Boyati, whom Jasimuddin brought from Faridpur to my home in Dhaka where, at that time, I had one of the few tape recorders in the country that was adequate to the task.

My descriptions in this section about contemporary singers are based on interviews with singers who sang examples of *jarigan* songs for me to record. I base the following profile on over fifty questionnaires that I prepared and which Syed Shujauddin Ahmed, the Director General of the Department of Mass Communication (Ministry of Information), distributed throughout Bangladesh on my behalf.

Ages

The singers whom I interviewed and who answered my questionnaire generally reported their ages in increments of five years. Often singers looked older than the ages they gave. The exceptions were the two singers who claimed to be over ninety, but seemed to be much younger. The ages ranged from about thirty five to ninety five years. The average age lay between the late thirties to the mid forties.

Making a living

I asked *boyatis* if they could make a living by singing. Many had other employment, but some said that they managed to earn a living by performing in folk song festi-

vals. One said that his *dol* (group) could make as much as two or three thousand takas for a single night's performance, the equivalent to four months salary of a semi-skilled worker.

Payments for singers may come from government sponsored cultural organizations, such as the Bangla Academy or the Shilpakala Academy. At other times, singers may be engaged by cultural or social groups wishing to embellish a meeting with folk songs or to celebrate an event with a cultural show.⁴ For such occasions, however, semi-classical songs sung by classical vocalists are often preferred; for example, *Rabindra-sangit* (the songs of Rabindranath Tagore) and *Nazrul-git* (the songs of Kazi Nazrul Islam).

It was difficult to find out specifically how most *boyatis* earn a living during the periods when they are not performing. Most are probably farmers, fishermen, boatmen and craftsmen, the common occupations of rural Bangladesh. The singers whom I questioned personally seemed to take these occupations as axiomatic. Some *boyatis* who are well over the age of sixty no longer work at a job or craft, but continue to sing at festivals.

Training and transmission

Most *boyatis* have had little formal education. Some whom I questioned said they had passed the eighth grade, but the others had not gone that far. Many said that they started serious training in *jarigan* singing at around the age of fourteen. They seemed to have trained as chief singers from the start, following the traditional *guru-shishya* (preceptor-disciple) relationship with an *ustad* (master artist), whose name they would state with pride. Only a few said that they learned *jarigan* singing from a father, a grandfather, uncle, or other close relative. Their training at the feet of their *ustads* may have been supplemented by participating as *dohars* in public performances.

When I asked *boyatis* if they were deliberately teaching their children to sing *jarigan* songs, many said they were not. I assume that young children become acquainted with songs by hearing their parents sing, but learning *jarigan* singing, unlike the passing on of a trade from father to son, seems to be learned from a professional teacher outside the immediate family. The children in the finals of the *jarigan* competition that I attended, like small replicas of their elders, performed brief but technically flawless and inspiring examples of *jarigan* songs.

THREE SINGERS

Abbas Ali Bhashan, Brahmanbaria, July 7, 1995

The town of Brahmanbaria is 126 kilometers (about 80 miles) from Dhaka by train, a ride of about three hours, passing through a countryside robed in fields of paddy, jute and sugar cane. As I made this journey with Lenin, everywhere greenery filled the scene under a dome of clear blue sky. On reaching the station at Brahmanbaria we were met by Lenin's friend, Bhushon, who suggested that we go first to the local Shilpakala Academy (Arts Academy), a branch of the main one in Dhaka.

On that day, a class of children were to give a vocal concert and we could hear them rehearse.

We were welcomed by the Director and entertained by about fifteen girls and a few boys ranging from seven or eight years to early teens. They sang an "environmental" song telling the evils of dust and smoke, singing in the leader-cum-chorus format that is typical of *jarigan* performances. They sang a "*choragan*", in this case a modern, light song. *Chora* songs, as mentioned earlier in connection with S. M. Lutfor Rahman's program of typical *jarigan* sessions, are a form of lilting song that goes back far into the past. The children swayed their bodies in rhythm to the right and left as they sang. A girl sang a "Tagore" (Rabindranath Tagore, 1861-1941) song and another girl sang a "Nazrul" (Kazi Nazrul Islam, 1899-1976) song. The children then sang a song about the six seasons of Bangladesh followed by another environmental song that is performed on radio programs. One of the girls made an announcement about the value of knowing folk songs such as "*jari, sari, bhatiyali* ..." The "*jari*" was probably mentioned for my sake as they didn't seem to know any *jarigan* songs themselves. They concluded their program with a genuine folk song in traditional style, the only one on their program.

This little concert was indicative of current tastes. The songs were all descended from traditional songs, but, with the exception of the last song, represented a "film" style of rendition, lacking the rhythmic subtlety and energy of genuine Bengali folk singing. When I asked the Director about *jarigan* singing in the area, he said that the children had learned a "welcoming *jari*" that had been composed to greet an official to the town. He sang a bit of it for me. It was, indeed, in *jarigan* style. It could be classified as a *bandana* in a *jarigan* recital. The Director said that he knew of a *jarigan dol* in the area, but he was not sure how to find the singers.

Bhushon helped us find a bicycle rickshaw with a driver who knew some of the names of the singers on our list and how to find them. We chose two that were within range of our day's schedule and set off for the first one. Within about twenty minutes of a smooth, but increasingly hot ride we reached the address of Abbas Ali Bhashan in Poiratala, the name of the *gram* ("village") to which his settlement belongs.

The words *gram* ("village") and *desh* (home locality) are often synonymous and do not connote a village in the Western sense of a small town with shops, a post office, and other local services. The name of a person's *gram* or *desh* refers to the nearest township, but the person's actual home sits on a hillock in the midst of fields. This home is occupied by the members of an extended family and is composed of four or five one-room structures surrounding a clay-floor, open space.

Abbas Ali Bhashan lives in such a traditional house along with others grouped near the main road by which we had come. He was tall, a bearded man with white hair and a lean, muscular body. At ninety-five years he looked as if he would be active for a long time to come.

At first he was reluctant to converse or sing. After Lenin explained to him that I was writing a book about *jarigan*, he became eager to answer our questions and to sing. First he sang a non-*jarigan* song of his choice, as I had directed him. He said the song was a *murshidi gan*, the song of *murshidis*, Islamic spiritual leaders. Its notations can be found in Appendix B under the title "*Allah, tomai daki ami* ..." (Allah, on you I call ...). The text is virtually a *bandana* addressed to Allah as the

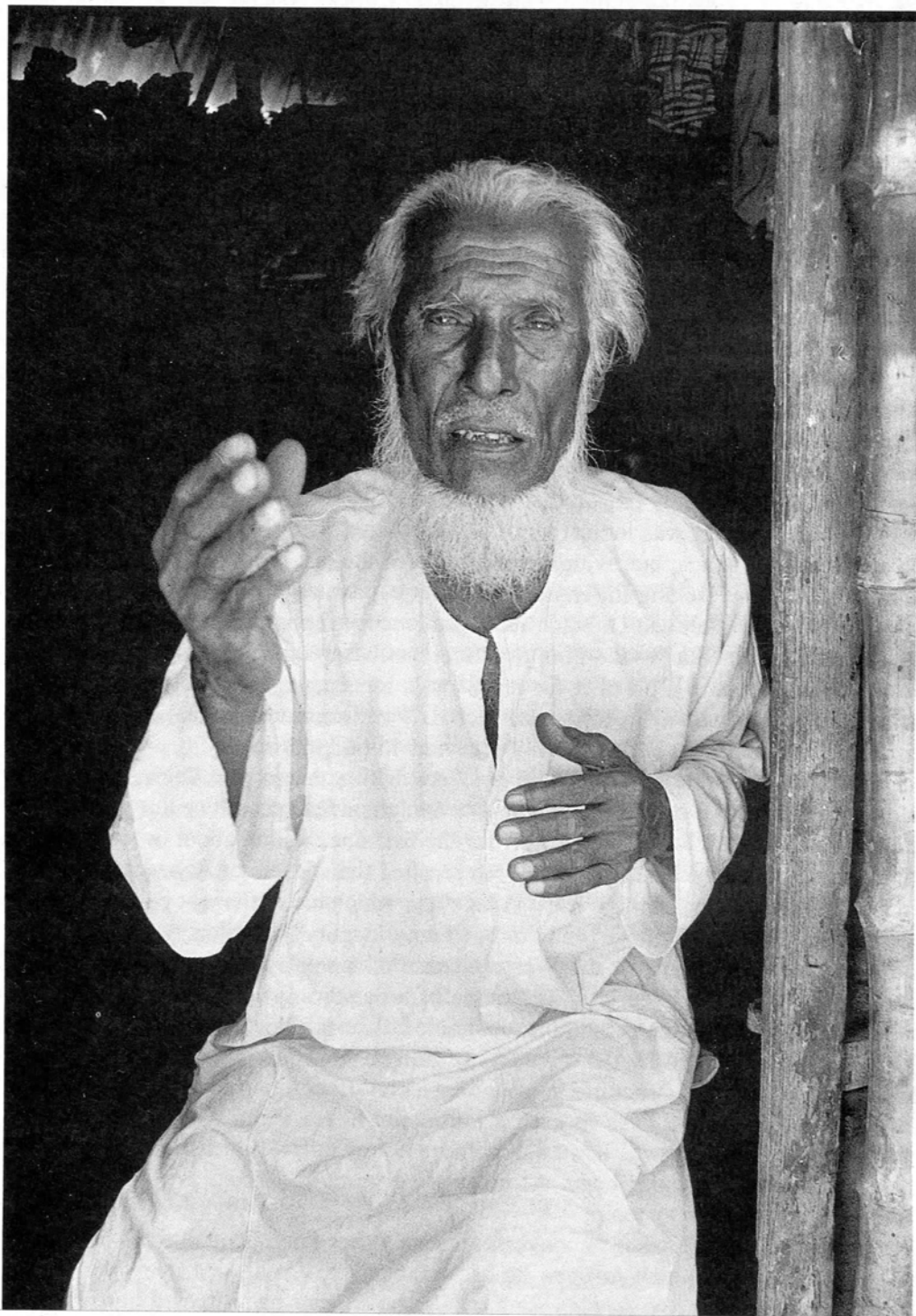


Fig. 32. Boyati Abbas Ali Bhashan at his home, Poiratala, Brahmanbaria, July 18, 1995.

protector and savior of the prophets. Jonah in "the stomach of a fish" is mentioned and Noah in the "hurricane". As he sang, he waved his arms aloft in rhythm to his tune.

I asked him to sing a *jarigan* song. Without hesitation he chose to sing the story of Kasem and Sokhina, the couple wedded during the battle of Karbala before the young bridegroom goes to his death. Abbas Ali Bhashan gestured with his hands to emphasize the drama of the situation. He also sang parts of other *jarigan* songs, including one about the letter that Hosein's son, Joynal, sends from his prison to his uncle to seek help, and one about the poisoning of Imam Hasan. The tunes were different from the ones that I musically notated for Jasimuddin's book, although the textual themes were the same.

Abbas Ali Bhashan said he could sing all the *jarigan* songs that I mentioned to him from a list on my questionnaire. He said, however, that the songs about prophets were not *jarigan* songs. "*Ei shab nabi gan!*" (Those are all prophet songs) he stated firmly when I mentioned some of the titles. When I asked if he could sing *marsiyas*, he instructed me that *jarigan* songs are *marsiyas*. I was interested in this remark because I had found in my research in written sources that *marsiyas* (elegies) are sometimes, indeed, considered to be *jarigan* songs.

When I questioned him about his life and how he learned to be a professional singer, he told us that he had studied with an *ustad* with whom he traveled on concert tours. He was insistent, however, that he composes his own songs, saying that he reconstructs songs of other singers, but he does not copy them. He said that currently he sings mostly in his area. "*Bish din gaisi!*" (I sang for twenty days at a stretch), he boasted in dialect. When the moon shines, he said, he feels like singing. He does not sing for money.

He told us, with a show of being confidential, that his *jarigan* singing was out of favor with the local fundamentalist religious leaders. They claim that his singing is too popular among the women and that he stirs them emotionally so that they beat their breasts, an action the local religious leaders find to be immodest. He laughed when he confessed to us that he had a second wife.

Mohammad Ali Akbar Miah, Brahmanbaria, July 18, 1995

From the house of Abbas Ali Bhashan we rode along a highway in search of the other singer in the Brahmanbaria area that we hoped to find. As the heat was reaching its midday peak, we looked longingly at the cool rivers and the *pukurs* (rectangular ponds) which are part of each household's land.

Finally, our rickshaw driver indicated a path for us to take on foot. It ran between a series of houses to a cluster that we were told was the home of Abbas Ali Akbar Miah, the singer we hoped to find. He was out working, we were told. He would be back in about an hour, if we cared to wait. A crowd of children and women gathered around us, curious to know where we were from and why we had come. We asked permission to cool ourselves in the *pukur* that was near Ali Akbar's back door. To the delight of the neighborhood, we went in fully clothed, as Bangladeshis do, and swam for about twenty minutes. The water was clean and refreshing. Children shouted and laughed on the banks as they watched us. A few boys joined us, showing off by somersaulting in the water and begging us to do the same.

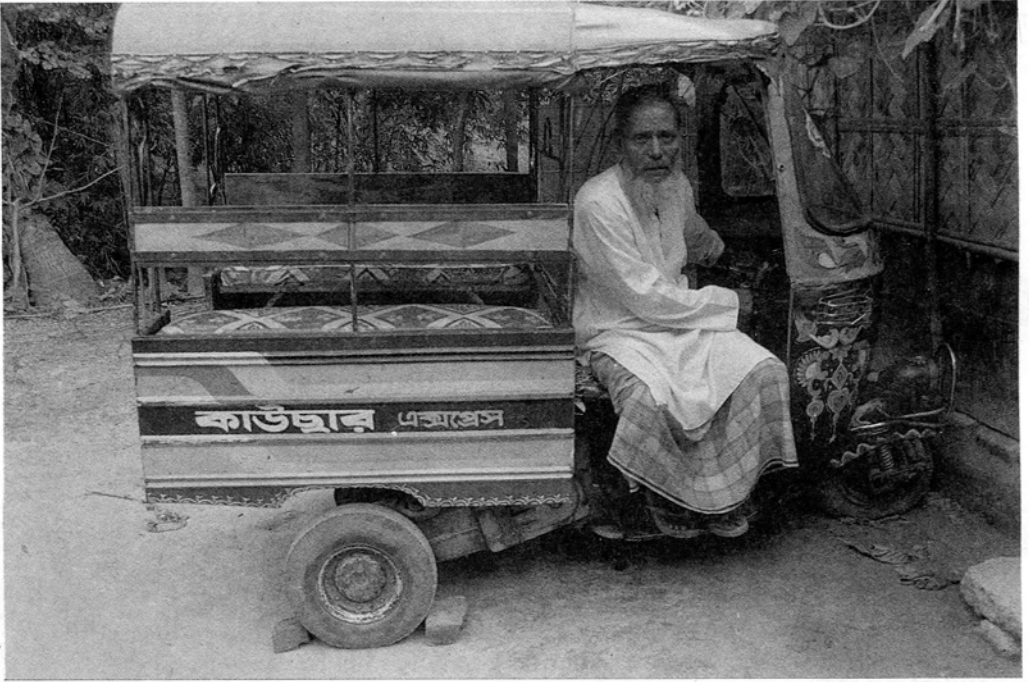


Fig. 33. Boyati and tempo driver, Mohammad Ali Akbar Miah, Shuhilpur, Brahmanbaria, July 18, 1995.

I dried my clothes by standing in the sun in Akbar Miah's courtyard while I answered questions about America that the women around me were asking. Suddenly, the crowd abandoned me. I could hear the children shouting "*Gari! Gari!*" (Car! Car!) as they ran towards the path by which we had come. The sound of a motor materialized into the arrival of a man driving a *tempo* (a small, three-wheeled vehicle for passengers) right into the courtyard. It was our singer, Mohammad Ali Akbar Miah, a hefty middle-aged man who looked more like the veteran bus driver that he was than a singer of poetic *jarigan* texts.

It took him some time to understand why we had come to see him. When he was convinced that we were not on some official government business, he agreed to sing, but said that in order to sing *jarigan* songs he must have some *dohars*. He went off to gather them from the neighborhood, returning in a short time with four men who seemed to be in their mid thirties or early forties.

He brought out pages of type-written song texts which he placed in front of him as he sat on the ground. The four singers sat in a semi-circle facing us. A crowd gathered all around. Akbar Miah announced that he would sing first a *bandana*, explaining to me what that meant, and then a "*Muslemer Jari*", a *jarigan* song about the martyrdom of Hosein's cousin, Muslim, who was executed before the events at Karbala.

The impromptu performance was outstanding. There was a coordinated unity of participation on the part of all the singers and an abundance of energy injected into

each passage of the song. We recorded both the *bandana* and the narrative, some of which can be found musically notated in Appendix B. The singers beat their chests with a rhythmic and graceful motion of arms and wrists, swaying gently from side to side as they sang. From time to time, two singers shouted "Hosein! Hosein!" with increasing volume on refrain phrases. The beating became more energetic and was accompanied by a rhythmical intake of breath like sobs. This was followed by actual sobbing as they sang.

In answer to our questions, Akbar Miah said that he had learned his singing from an *ustad*. He had sung at this year's Muharram celebrations at the house of an official in town. He said over a thousand people had attended. He maintained that when he sings a whole *jarigan* story, it lasts all night, from about ten in the evening until the early hours of the morning.

I wished we could have stayed several days to hear more of the repertory of these singers, but we had to catch the evening train back to Dhaka. From the train as we went along, we watched one of the many glorious sunsets that can be seen at that time of year. The final rays of sunlight formed bright borders edging monumental clouds, occasionally penetrating them with streaks of color. The spectacle was a fitting climax to the beauties of a day in rural Bangladesh where we had experienced so much fine music and generous hospitality.



Fig. 34. *Boyati* Mohammad Ali Akbar Miah and four *dohars* performing *matam* while singing *jarigan*, Shuhilpur, Brahmanbaria, July 18, 1995.

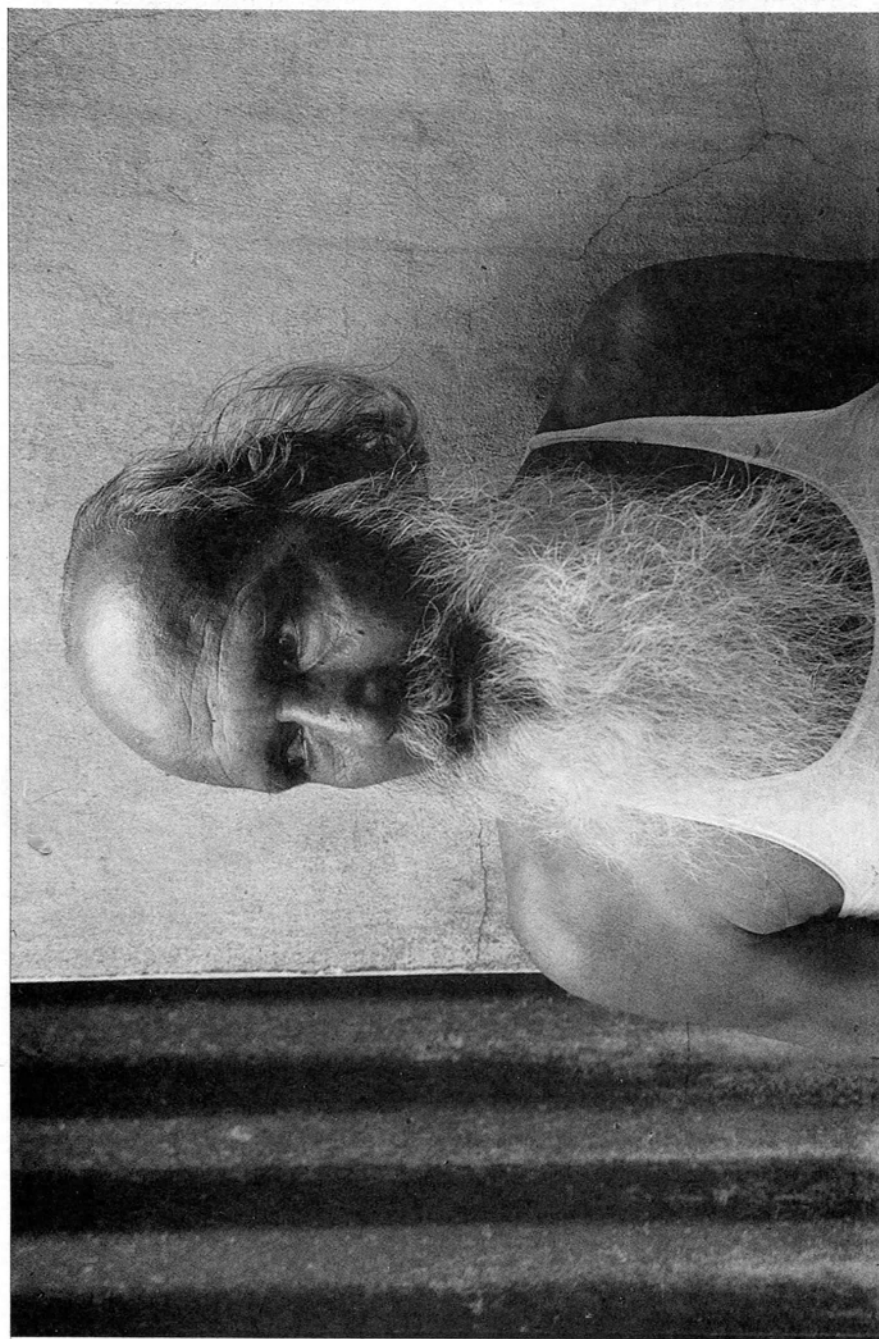


Fig. 35. *Boyati Khaleq Dewan*, Hazaribag, Dhaka, July 24, 1995.

Abdul Khaleq Dewan, Dhaka, July 24, 1995

Abdul Khaleq Dewan is a singer in his nineties whose name was one of the ones given to me by Mustafa Zaman Abbasi. Lenin and I found him at an address in Hazaribag, a district on the western edge of central Dhaka. To reach him we passed through a street lined with tanneries. The smell was so overwhelming that we hurried past.

We found the number of the house that we were looking for and knocked on the door. A young woman opened it and invited us in. We explained our mission. She invited us to sit in the small but comfortably furnished room that we had entered while she went to get her father, Abdul Khaleq, from somewhere else in the house. Abdul Khaleq on arriving explained that he was staying at his daughter's house. His own home is on the other side of Dhaka.

He told us that his father, Alfu Dewan, had been a famous singer whom he used to accompany in singing the songs of *fakirs* (mendicant holy men) and Bauls. I asked him why so many singers carried the title Dewan. He was surprised by the question and said he did not know the answer. He supposed that once a famous singer had this name and others took it on to be associated with him. Historically, I noted, that this title was one conferred by Moghul rulers signifying a landowner. I still remain puzzled why it is attached to the names of so many Bangladeshi folk singers. Other designations associated with singers include "Baul", "*fakir*" and "*darwesh*" (or "*darvesh*", meaning dervish), as well as *boyati*.

Besides his son who is also a singer, Abdul Khaleq had an elder brother, Manik Dewan, with whom he used to sing. He said that they sang in two separate *dols* ("parties" or groups) in question-and-answer competitions. "We had very entertaining fights! That's how I spent my whole life."

In describing the 1950s, Abdul Khaleq emphasized how popular he was as a singer. "I didn't know how to live a regular family life. Always three to four parties were after me for hiring me (to sing) in their areas. That's how busy I was!" He said that he and his brother used to entertain the public all night. In those days he said that he sang the whole night, even until ten or eleven in the morning. "The people refused to leave us. We had to continue (singing)." When Lenin asked how he traveled about the country, he said that sometimes he traveled long distances on foot, or took a *goina* boat (a boat for passengers) or "launch" (an engine driven boat with capacity for many passengers).

When military rule was imposed in 1958, he lived in Mymensingh, where he went through a period of poverty trying to maintain his family. At the time, three sons were in school. He himself had a fifth grade education. His eldest son was in ninth grade. "I didn't know what to do!" Later, in speaking of his family, he said that one son was currently working in America.

At this time, a university student, whose name Abdul Khaleq no longer remembers, saw him writing down songs in a notebook. The student suggested that he take his notebook to the Bangla Academy in Dhaka. When Abdul Khaleq went there, the director was not interested in his poems, but said that he would be interested in *kishas* and *kahinis* (folk tales). So, Abdul Khaleq bought a notebook "for two annas" and set himself to work writing stories, filling fifteen to sixteen pages a

day. He said the Bangla Academy took his notebook, but never acknowledged his work. "*Jai hok!*" (Let it be!), he remarked.

I asked if he were singing currently. He said that he did occasionally sing for radio programs. He declined to sing for us. He said that to sing a *jarigan* would require an hour to cover one story, but that Baul songs, of which he said he knew many, required only ten minutes. When I asked how *boyatis* managed to sing long narrations of *jarigan* songs, he said that one *boyati* sings for about an hour, then another takes over, using the same tune, until the story ends. By contrast, he added, Baul songs are short songs.

He wanted to know what *jarigan* songs I myself knew. When I sang him the beginnings of two examples, he carried on the singing for awhile in the same tune. He gave an example of one of his own *jarigan* songs, but only a brief passage from its beginning. It was fully identifiable as a *jarigan* song, one similar to those on the recordings by Jasimuddin that I had musically notated in 1964.

Abdul Khaleq told us how he used to sing *jarigan* songs accompanied by *dohars*. He himself can play the *tabla* (pair of hand drums), harmonium and violin. When Lenin asked him whether he knew about *jarinach*, he said that he didn't have "regular dancers" in his groups, but he knew such performances existed. He said that the *mazar* (grave) on the grounds of the High Court Building in Dhaka was the oldest site for singing and dancing in the area. He added that he used to sing all night for Jasimuddin at his house in Dhaka and that Jasimuddin would dance with him "bare-chested."

Like Abbas Ali Bhashan of Brahmanbaria, Abdul Khaleq seemed in good health in spite of his advanced years and he seemed content with his life. His daughter served us tea and his seven year old granddaughter hung about his neck affectionately. We left him sitting comfortably in the cozy room where we had interviewed him.

IMPRESSIONS AND INSIGHTS

Jarigan singing continues

Although Jasimuddin predicted the demise of *jarigan* recitals when he finished his book on *jarigan* in 1968, the tradition still seems to be thriving in the 1990s, although not in the glorious form of its heyday in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. My impressions concerning the welfare of *jarigan* singing are based on the following points gleaned from interviews such as the ones described above:

- The singers all said they knew and could sing the *jarigan* songs whose titles I listed in my questionnaire, a copy of which is included in Appendix D.
- Most singers had all sung *jarigan* songs for at least one large-scale public function during the past year, 1994-1995.
- The singers seemed generally content with their lives. This was indirectly evident in different ways. They seemed primarily proud of their profession as singers and of their individual fame. Although far from affluent, they were

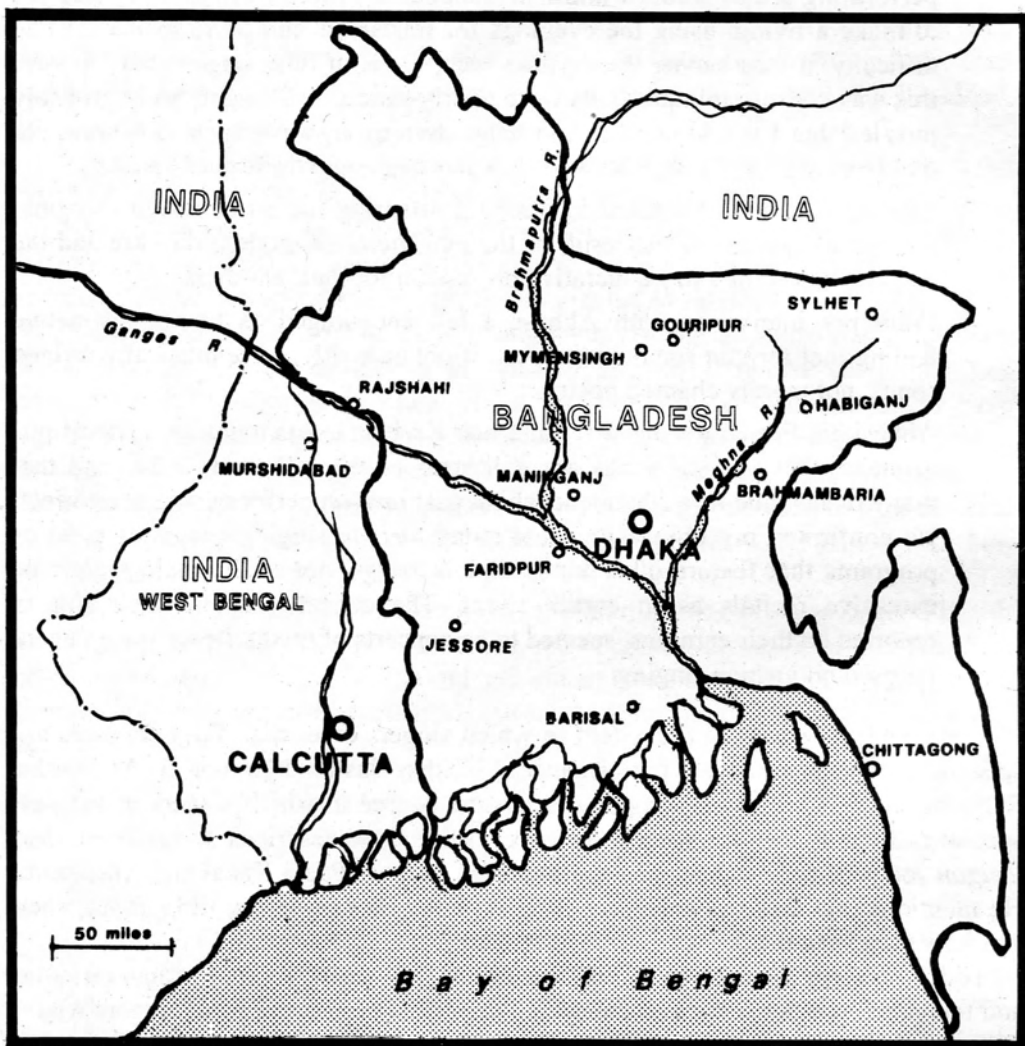
providing for themselves and their family. They made no requests for help of any sort. They seemed to take whatever circumstances they were living in as acceptable. "*Jai hok!*" was the closest expression that I heard to a complaint.

- The singer who makes his living by driving a *tempo* is characteristic of most performing artists whom I know in Bangladesh. Most work at a daytime job to make a living, using the evenings for rehearsals and performances. I had difficulty in ascertaining the daytime occupations of rural singers, but I believe this was because my questions were poorly stated. The singers were probably puzzled that I would need to know the obvious answers, such as farming, or that there was anything that needed explaining about these occupations.
- I detected a lack of interest in teaching offspring the art of *jarigan* singing. I presume that this is the result of the exigencies of modern day life and the singers' hopes for a more lucrative profession for their children.
- From my interviews with Abbasi, I felt encouraged as to my instinctive feeling that *jarigan* songs in the past, if not currently, were musically refined songs, not merely chanted poetry.
- Abbasi confirmed for me first hand that Karbala exists today as a site of pilgrimage, that *jarigan* songs are still sung in West Bengal, India, and that many of Jasimuddin's statements about past *jarigan* performances are correct. He confirmed my observation that today *jarigan* singing occurs as parts of programs that feature other kinds of folk songs, not as the main feature of extensive recitals as in earlier times. The concerts from which singers reported on their earnings, seemed to be concerts of mixed items, not an event focused on *jarigan* singing.

I remain puzzled about the extent to which singers other than Baul devotees are specialists in *jarigan* song performances. Neither Jasimuddin nor S. M. Lutfur Rahman, in their books on *jarigan*, discuss the degree to which singers in the past specialized exclusively in *jarigan* singing. Jasimuddin describes songs other than *jarigan* songs of famous past singer-composers, such as Pagla Kanai and Afazuddin. He mentions that these singers sang *jarigan* songs, but says very little about when and how they sang them.

Today, singers seem to be hired for singing specifically *jarigan* songs on radio and television programs such as the ones that Abbasi organizes. Some singers whom I interviewed or who answered the questionnaire mentioned making audio-cassettes as a source of income. From the numbers of these cassettes in the Bangladeshi music shops, it is evident that there are singers whose *jarigan* recordings are in demand, although these singers attach the title "Baul" or "*darvesh*" (dervish) to their names rather than "*boyati*".

There is still much that I would like to know about the past and the present of *jarigan* performances and performers, but limited time has constrained me to the information in this book. The following chapters describe *jarigan* songs themselves, their themes and structure, and their relation to songs interpolated from other repertoires. This exploration into the "interior" of *jarigan* songs reveals further clues to their origins, past popularity and impact on Bengali culture.



Map 3. The home of *Jarigan* song.