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Turkic Acculturation and the Emergence of Bengali Identity

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Abstract:

Bengal is the largest delta in the world. Because of the easy access to natural wealth, many people groups of different ethno-religious backgrounds migrated into Bengal from prehistoric times. Following the conquest of Bengal by the Khalaj descended Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar Khalji, the Central and West Asian traditions greatly influenced the Delta throughout about 600 years. Although there were migrations of many other groups, primarily the predominance of Turkic traditions encouraged waves of Turk-Bengali acculturations which helped emerge and mature the Bengali identity in the Delta. Later, there were trends of false narration, propaganda history and attempts of deculturation throughout 190 year-long colonial rule. Yet, the signs of this harmonious and mutual acculturation still survive in archaeological and historical sources of the region. Citing some of them, this study aims to present a glimpse of the process of welfare and Turk-Bengali acculturation in the Bengal Delta.

Keywords: Bengal Delta, migration, acculturation, Turkic people groups, South Asia

Türk Kültürleşme ve Bengali Kimliğinin Ortaya Çıkışı

Özet:

Bengal Delta dünyanın en büyük deltasıdır. Doğal zenginliklere kolay erişim nedeniyle, çeşitli dini-etnik kimliklere sahip birçok insan grubu tarihöncesinden beri Bengal Delta'ya göç etmiştir. Ortaçağ döneminde, özellikle Halaç kökenli İhtiyar-al-din Muhammed bin Bakhtiyar Haliçli'nin Bengal fethinden sonra, Orta ve Batı

Asya gelenekleri Bengal Delta'yı yaklaşık 600 yıl boyunca büyük ölçüde etkiler bırakmıştır. Bu uzun süre içerisinde diğer birçok insan grubunun da göçü olmasına rağmen, öncelikle Türk geleneklerinin baskınlığı, Bengal Delta'da 'Bengali Kimliğinin' ortaya çıkmasına ve olgunlaşmasına sebep olan kültürleşme dalgalarını teşvik etmiştir. Daha sonra her ne kadar 190 yıl süren sömürgecilik dönem boyunca yanlış anlatımı, propaganda tarihin üretilmesi ve yıkım girişimi olsa, Ortaçağ dönemdeki karşılıklı uyumlu kültürleşmeni ispatlayan gösteren zengin arkeolojik ve tarihsel kaynaklar bölgede hala var olmaktadır. Bunlardan bazılarının yardımıyla, bu çalışma Bengal Delta'sındaki Türk-Bengali kültürleşme sürecine bir bakış sunmayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Bengal Delta, göç, kültürleşme, Türk toplumları, Güney Asya

1. Introduction

Bengal Delta, also considered as Ganges Delta, is argued to be the largest deltaic land of the world (Akter *et al.*, 2016). People groups from diverse ethnicities, cultures and civilizations migrated into this fertile land since prehistoric period (Alam & Salles, 2001; Siddiq & Habib, 2017). Consequently, the Delta witnessed many cultural transformations, socio-religious revolutions, and different waves of acculturations process through different socio-political changes (Jha, 2014; Siddiq & Habib, 2017). The physiological feature of the Bengal Delta is based on hundreds of rivers, thousands of braided channels and long floodplains (Akter *et al.*, 2016). Because of very rich natural resources and remarkably advantageous geographical protections, the migrated people groups mostly settled with local people and established strong kingdoms and rich cultural identities, different from other parts of Indian subcontinent.

Bengal was also among attractive destinations for Central and Western Asian people throughout history; hence experienced the influence of Islamic spread from the very beginning (Poonawala, 2017). Although they came to know the Islamic faith from the Arab sailors since eighth century AD (Chowdhury, 2008), the sustained contact of the deltaic people with Islamic civilization actually occurred in the context of establishment of a large number of Central Asian Turkic people groups into the Iranian plateau and Indian subcontinent (Eaton, 1996: 71). Turkic people groups started to migrate and settle down in the Bengal region during the end of the 12th and beginning of the 13th century AD, particularly following the establishment of the Muslim Sultanate by the Khalaj descended Ikhtiyar-al-din Muhammad bin Bakhtiyar Khalji (Hussain, 2012; Karim, 1960: 17-19; Karim, 1977; Sarkar, 1973: 8; Rahim, 1959).

The Khalji Turks, who came to Bengal as conquerors, soldiers, or fortune seekers, were accompanied by their wives and children, and settled down in the land. Bin Khalji died in 1206, the Turkmens continued to overflow into Bengal with every new governor and their disciples. When Balban's dynasty (1265-1287 AD) was overthrown by the Khaljis in Delhi, more Ilbari Turks came into Bengal (Rahim, 1959: 52), seeking home and employment under Nasir Uddin

Bughra Khan, who had established a dynastic rule in that province. Notably Bughra Khan's son Rukn al-Din Kaikaus (1291-1300 AD) entitled himself as "the great Sultan, the king of the kings of Turks and Persians, the lord of the crown, and the seal, the helper of the caliph" (Eaton, 1996: 26).

Later in 1338 AD, the Qaraunah Turk descent Fakhruddin Mubarak Shah established his independent kingdom basing in Sonargaon, modern-day southeastern part of Dhaka, Bangladesh (Khatun, 2006; Sarkar, 1973: 96). According to the renowned traveler Ibn Battuta, the Bengal Delta witnessed great prosperity under Fakhruddin. The region was super-abundance in commodities of daily necessity of the people as well as trade and commerce (Khan, 2012). Following the short-lived reign of sultan Fakhruddin, Bengal Delta was ruled by the Ilyas Shahi dynasty for over one hundred fifty years (Sarkar, 2003: 95-119). This very influential Turkic dynasty was mainly founded by the Sakastāni Turkic descent Shamsuddin Ilyas Shah, uniting the whole Delta under the united Bengal sultanate (Eaton, 1996: 27). The long-lived dynasty supported the prosperous societies and harmonious livings in the Delta almost until the end of 15th century AD (Majumdar, 2006: 205-214).

In was the Turkic Ilyas Shah who first put the name "Bangalah" to his united sultanate in the Delta, and this was the people of the Delta first introduced by the name of "Bangali" (Ahmed, 2012). Being the successful nation builders, the Ilyas Shahi sultans managed to infuse a new life in the Delta by adopting liberal policies to bring cohesion among the societies. Consequently, all the people groups of the Delta came under the banner of one politico-social and linguistic platform throughout the long-lived dynasty (Ahmed, 2012).

Another prosperous reign of Hussain Shahi dynasty (Habibullah, 2003) continued patronizing the flourishing Bengali territory (Figure 1). The dynasty was founded by Ala al-Din Husain Shah, a Tirmiz (modern day Turkestan) origin migrated elite in west Bengal (Chowdhury, 2012). It is noteworthy that the reigns of sultan Ala al-Din Husain Shah (1493-1519) and his son Nasir al-Din Nusrat Shah (1519-1532) have been generally regarded as the "golden age" of the Bengal Delta (Eaton, 1996: 63; Habibullah, 2003). Along with the economic prosperity and socio-religious harmony, the Hussain Shahi dynasty also contributed a remarkable development of Bengali literature, art and architecture (Habibullah, 2003; Majumdar, 2006: 693; Rahim, 1959: 214-218).

The immigrations and cultural influence of Central Asian people groups in Bengal further increased following the beginning of the establishment of the Indo-Timurid or Mughal Empire by Uzbek born Zahir-ud-din Muhammad Babur in 1526 (Sarkar, 2003: 187-206). Later, by the late sixteenth century, a dynasty of Chaghatai Turks, also known as the Mughals in Indian

Subcontinent (Eaton, 1996: 137), started to rule the Delta under the vast Mughal Empire (Figure 1). It is particularly mentionable that the Chagatai Turks have also migrated and been living in Anatolia since the medieval period with the surname “Çağatay”, which is still a common surname in Turkey even today.

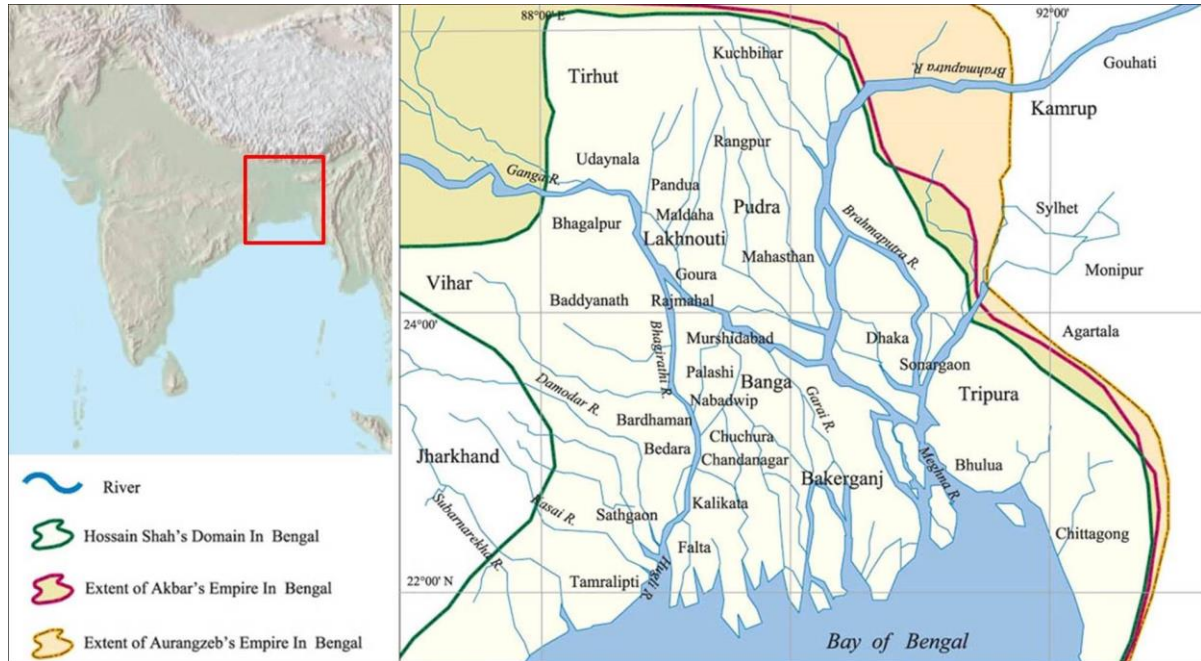


Figure 1. The territory of different Turkic rules in the Delta (after Hussain, 2012).

Throughout the Mughal rule, the deltaic region was ruled by a *subahdar* (governor) appointed by the emperor. However, there were often resistance of Muslim and non-Muslim local landlords in different territorial area of Bengal (Eaton, 1996: 147). Following the decline of these territorial rulers, Bengal was directly ruled as a Subah (province) of the Mughal Empire until about 1717 AD when the acting *subahdar* (governor) Murshid Kuli Khan declared independence from the Delhi-centered Mughal rule and entitled himself as the Nawab of Bengal (Sarkar, 2003: 397-421). Following his death in 1727, the people of Turkic blood continue to play a vital role in Bengal politics under the suzerainty of the Mughals. For example, Nawab Shujauddin Muhammad Khan (1627-1639), the successor of Murshid Kuli Khan, was an Afshar Turk by descent (Karim, 2012). Another important ruler, Nawab Alivardi Khan, was also a man of Turkic descent. However, the Nawab dynasty in Bengal ended up following the foundation of British colonial rule in 1757 (Sarkar, 2003: 496-500). Yet, similar to the previous periods, Bengal Delta had common practices of migration and remigration with different people groups of Central Asia, Western Asia and African regions until the end of Mughal Empire.

Overall, there was a wide influence of Central Asian and Anatolian Turkic culture into the development of a civilization throughout medieval Bengal (Rahim, 1959: 55). The 600 year-

long prosperous political reigns planted a harmonious Muslim society, opening the gate of Bengal to numerous immigrants from the then Muslim world (Karim, 2012). During the particular crises times, including the Mongol attack across Asia, great number of inhabitants all across the Old World fled from their homelands and settled in the prosperous Bengal region. These people always brought with them their ideas, skills and craftsmen, which they applied in the architectural settings and socio-cultural traditions across the Delta (Rahim, 1959: 214-220). Consequently, with the fusion of indigenous and extraneous elements, the Delta experienced over a century long Turk-Bengali acculturation process. Presenting some architectural, archaeological, and historical records, this study aims to present a glimpse Turk-Bengali acculturation process, which helped build the final phase of Bengal Civilization in the deltaic plain.

2. Remains of the Turkic-Bengali Acculturation

Following the conquest of Bengal by the Khalaj descended Bakhtiyar Khalji, particularly the mosque architecture of Bengal inherited its identity based on the Western and Central Asian building tradition (Hasan, 1987a; Muktadir, 1990: 75). A large number of mosques were built during the independent Sultanate periods and were influenced by the Seljuk and Ottoman architectural traditions. Among many mosques with Turkic architectural features, especially the Adina Mosque of Hazrat Pandua, West Bengal (1373 AD), Gopalganj Mosque (1460 AD) and Sura Mosque (16th century) of Dinajpur, Sixty Domed Mosque (1442-1459 AD) of Bagherhat, Ghorar Mosque (1479 AD) of Dorasbari, Choto Sona Mosque (1519 AD) of Rajshahi, and Azimpur Mosque (1746 AD) and Khan Mohammad Mirdah Mosque (1704-05 AD) in the old Dhaka are highly mentionable.

The interior plan of the Adina Mosque, with a wide central nave along with side wings, was a unique architectural style first seen in Bengal Delta (Alamgir, 2014; Dani, 1961: 146; Hasan, 1987b). This type of wide central nave with side wings is the common feature in the Seljuk and Ottoman mosques. It is interpreted that the plan and architectural features of the Adina Mosque was a mixture of Central and Western Asian Islamic architectures together with pre-Islamic local tradition in Bengal (Alamgir, 2014). The curved cornice, mihrab decorations and massiveness of the brick structure without the application of plaster on sidewalls in Adina Mosque are the features that are shared with other Bengali mosques in following centuries (Dani, 1961: 146-47). The mosque was not only the largest mosque in Bengal but also one of the largest mosques ever built in the whole Indian subcontinent (Roy, 2003: 113).

It is widely believed that the concepts of the use of many domes in Bengali mosques also came from Central Anatolian Mosque and tomb architectures. Particularly parallel plan of Gopalganj Mosque and Masjidbari Mosque is found in the Iznik Yeşil Mosque in Iznik (1378-1391 AD), Alaeddin Bey Mosque in Bursa (1335-36 AD), and Yıldırım Bayezid Mosque in Mudurnu, Turkey (1382-83 AD). Especially the main mosque of the Old Ottoman capital Bursa was the “Ulu Cami” (1399-1400 AD) covers a large area of 63 by 50 meter and was roofed by twenty domes resting on large square piers. Similar kinds of domed mosques were also built-in contemporary Bengal including the Sixty Domed Mosque, as well as earlier mosques including Zafar Khan Ghazi’s Mosque (1298 AD) in north Bengal.

Since the early phase of the empire, many Ottomans Mosque had been built with a square base supporting a great central dome flanked by four half domes and numerous smaller, subsidiary domes. The best examples of such architectures can be found in Şehzade Mosque of Istanbul (1548 AD), Selimiye Mosque of Edirne (1569-1575 AD), and the Blue Mosque (Sultan Ahmed Mosque) in Istanbul (1609-1616 AD). The prayer chamber of the Azimpur Mosque in Dhaka (1746 AD) also often compared with such sanctuary wing of the Ottoman standard plan. A fore-room is also an important part of square-shaped single unit mosque of Bengal. Significantly the fore-roomed single square monumental design was a characteristic feature not only of the early Ottoman Turkic religious architecture, but also a preferred architectural design throughout the six centuries Ottoman rule (Ahmed, 2006: 29). Typical examples of these mosques built in the early Ottoman period can be Alaeddin Bey Mosque of Bursa (1335-1336 AD), Firuz Aga Mosque of Istanbul (1490 AD), and Iznik Yeşil Mosque in Iznik, Bursa. The best examples of similar Ottoman type of single unite mosques in Bengal can be the Rajbibi Mosque and Chamkatti Mosque at Gauḍa, the Sura Mosque of Dinajpur, and the Ghorar Mosque of Jhenidah.

There is a platform in mosque architecture called *Dikka* or *Dikka al-Muballigha*. The Central Asian origin terminology ‘Muballigh’ and ‘Mukabbir’ have been used almost interchangeably in medieval text. *Dikkas* are commonly found in Ottoman and Egyptian mosques, and the mosques with Turkic influence in Bengal. Particularly *Dikka* (or this type of platform) is a common feature in Satgachiya, Monohar and Pirpukur mosques in Barabazar, Jhenidah. It is also present in the Sixty Domed Mosque of Bagerhat, and at the mosque on the mound near Mankali Kunda of Mahasthangarh (Alamgir, 2014), in the northern part of Bangladesh.

Another architectural section *hunkar mahfil* or the Royal Gallery in both early Ottoman and Bengal mosques had a shared cultural influence. The Ottoman Sultans used *hunkar mahfil*

to pray their Friday prayers, Eid-day and other special night prayers. This royal gallery is still present in the Ulu Cami and Yeşil Cami of Bursa, and Bayezid Cami of Istanbul. Same type of architectural feature (*hunkar mahfil*) was also found in contemporary Darasbari Mosque of Chapai Nawabganj district, Bangladesh. It is notable that the Ulu Mosque of Bursa and Darasbari Mosque of Chapai Nawabganj are also very similar in their dome and other architectural features. Similarly, *Zenena* or ladies gallery was also a common feature in early mosque architecture across the Bengal Delta. *Zenena* was built in Choto Sona Mosque of Chapai Nawabganj and Kusumba Mosque of Naogaon district of Bangladesh, as well as Bari Mosque of Hooghly district of West Bengal. Similar to Bengal, *Zenana* or ladies hall has been a common feature in Turkic architectural tradition since the early Ottoman period.

Before the establishment of madrasahs, the worship center mosques were used as schools, particularly for education based on the Quran and Hadith. The Seljuk was the first imperial power to introduce separate buildings as educational institutions (see: Saoud, 2003). Two of the most momentous scholarly-scientific institutions in the Seljuk world were the ‘madrasa’ and the ‘hospital’ (Dar al-shifa). With the establishment of various madrasas, hospitals and libraries, cities including Baghdad, Merv, Isfahan, Nishapur, Mosul, Damascus, Cairo, Aleppo, Amid (Diyarbakır), Konya, Kayseri and Malatya, were basically transformed into flourishing cultural centers under the reign of the Turkic Seljuk.

Madrasa was also widely established in the Bengal Delta from beginning of Muslim establishment (Alamgir, 2007). According to inscriptions, historical as well as hagiological literature, a wide list of such centers with early madrasas and educational institutions can be found in many prominent cities including Lakhnawati, Mahisun, Sonargaon, Satgaon, Pandua, Dhaka and Murshidabad (Rahim, 1959). For example, beside the Minhaj al-Siraj Juzjani’s accounts regarding the construction of madrasas, the inscriptions supply at least three concrete examples of madrasas built during the time of Muhammad bin Bakhtyar (Karim, 1977). Madrasas were built in Bengal during the reign of the Sultan Rukn al-Din Kayka’us (1298 AD) and Sultan Shams Uddin Firuz Shah (1313 AD). Sultan Ghiyath Uddin Iwaj Khalji too built a large mosque, a college (madrasa) and a caravanserai at Lucknauti and two other caravanserais, the Boro Katra and the Choto Katra in Dhaka following his appointment as the ruler of Bengal (Law 1916: 106). While looking at the architectural plan, the Anatolian Seljuks built their madrasas with an open courtyard (*Iwan*), winter classroom along with student rooms, masjids, türbes (tombs), fountains and minarets. This architectural design is special to Anatolia throughout the 12th and 13th centuries (Soaud, 2003). In Bengal, all prominent medieval

madrasas follow the architectural plan more or less like Anatolian Seljuk madrasas and are continuing even to this day.

The Seljuk also established a large number of hospitals, welfare and socio-cultural institutions all across Anatolia (Soaud, 2003). Following this tradition, there were many *khanqah* (welfare institutions) built throughout the Islamic rules in Bengal. The *khanqah* was also the hospital and asylum where suffering people, old, infirm, and diseased could find a ready home and shelter and were nursed and looked after by the Shaikhs (Sufis), *Dervishes* and their disciples (Eaton, 1996: 71, 228; Rahim, 1959: 148). According to Minhaj al-Siraj Juzjani, the very first Turkic ruler of the Bengal Muhammad Bakhtyar Khalji was first to build *khanqahs* for the Sufis. The inscriptional and historical records illustrate that every Sultans and their local administrators established many mosques, madrasahs and *khanqahs* all across the Delta. Because of the welfare services, *khanqahs* became the meeting places for the root level mass communities all across the Delta. People of all religions, races, caste and creed used to visit *khanqahs* for spiritual healing and satisfaction, which truly enabled the Sufis and *Dervishes* to reach the common people and understand their feelings and attitudes (Rahim, 1959: 147; Siddiq & Habib, 2017). *Khanqahs* were so important that six of the thirteen inscriptions of the first one hundred years of Central Asian Turkic rule in Bengal Delta (1204-1304) bear the testimony of *khanqahs* (Rahim, 1959). Particularly the Turkic descended Sufi scholar Shaikh Sharfuddin Abu Tawama (born in Bokhara in about 1210 AD) established a prominent *khanqah* and a *madrasa* in medieval capital city of Sonargaon. His institution gained wide recognition from various countries in that time (Karim, 1977; Rahim, 1959: 103-105).

Like Shaikh Sharfuddin Abu Tawama, hundreds of Sufis came to Bengal in different times from the lands of Islamic civilization in Western and Central Asia as well as Northern India (Rahim, 1959: 76). Sufism came to develop a host of social, ritual, artistic, institutional, and political manifestations. Many Sufi saints have played a significant role in establishing new socio-religious and cultural trends following the conquest of Bengal by the Khalaj descended Bakhtiyar Khalji. Among them, the most influential Sufi in Bengal is argued to be Shah Jalal Al-Mujarrad. Some accounts say that Shah Jalal was descended from Yemen in Arabian Peninsula. However, according to the *Gulzar-i-Abrar*, Shah Jalal was a Turkistani by birth (Hanif, 2000: 165). Some accounts even claim that Hazrat Shah Jalal was born in present day Konya of Central Anatolia in about 1271 AD. It is reported that Shah Jalal's father was a cleric and contemporary of the Sufi mystic Jalāl ad-Dīn Muhammad Rūmī in Konya (Rahim, 1959: 101). Particularly, some medieval inscriptions described him as “*Shaykh Jalāl Mujarrad bin Muḥammad Kunyāi Kuniyayī*”, the Shaikh Jalal Mujarrad, son of Muhammad of Konya (Dani,

1961: 103). Therefore, it can be argued that Shah Jalal came to Bengal from present day Konya, Turkey, the place which was capital of the Saljuqid sultanate of Rum and an important center of Turkic Sufism.

It is said that, while the companions of Osman (c.1299-1324 AD), the founder of the Ottoman dynasty, were passing from a pastoral to a sedentary rule in northwestern Anatolia, the nomadic followers of Sufi saint Shah Jalal were settling down in eastern Bengal (Eaton, 1996: 75). Shah Jalal was set out for India and eventually Bengal with his 360 disciples (Rahim, 1959: 47), and they all settled down in different places across the Delta. Following his conquest of Northeast Bengal, Shah Jalal himself settled in present day Sylhet and devoted himself to preaching and humanitarian activities. It is notable that Shah Jalal's shrine in the northeast has been the most famous Sufi tomb throughout Bangladesh, and thousands of people are visiting the place every day.

Another Turkic descended Sufi saint Ulugh Khan Jahan (1459 AD). He continued his pilgrim of religious and welfare down to the Sundarban in the southwestern part of Bengal Delta and founded cities, towns, mosques, madrasas, *khanqas*, and also dug a large number of *dighis* (human made large lake), a large number of roads and bridges across the regions on his way. In fact, Bengal's Sufi saints did not bring wives and families with them; their followers flatly married local women, settled on the local land and gradually became integrated with local society. Most of the Sufis came to Bengal, died at their *khankas*. It is also said that there is no town and villages in Bengal where the holy saints did not come and settle down (Karim, 1960: 85). The welfare activities of Sufis became a powerful factor in gradual socio-cultural change and new waves of acculturations in Bengal society. Sufism not only has established the welfare religious trends in Bengal, but also heavily influenced the literary, socio-cultural spirit of the state which helped forming the mature stage of Bengal Civilization (Siddiq & Habbib, 2017). Through time, Sufi tradition in the Delta had been transformed into a folk culture and numerous songs and stories were written on the miracle of the Sufi saints and many of the Sufis were regarded as saints or folk deities. For example, if a storm arises during a maritime journey, sailors pray to Pir (Sufi) Badar, repeating his name, "Badar Badar".

Among the medieval architectures, there were mausoleums (or tombs) which typically build basing on the grave of a saint, notable religious scholars or influential rulers. It is notable that tomb architecture was not popular in early architectural tradition. It gained popularity only with the increasing migrations of Turkic people groups in Bengal (Husain, 2014). The mausoleums were especially developed under the Seljuk patronage. The spread of tomb architecture was particularly due to the expansion of Sufism which was widely practiced in

Persia and Anatolia. Particularly octagonal and cylindrical shapes topped with conical roof were the most popular in Anatolia. Among the examples in Anatolian mausoleum, the tomb of Kılıç Arslan II was built at the courtyard of Ala al-Din Mosque in Konya (built between 1192 and 1193 AD). Two other examples famous tombs are respectively the Mahperi Khwand Khatun tomb, built in 1238 AD, and the cylindrical mausoleum of the Döner Kümbet tomb, built for Princess Shah Jihan Khatun in c. 1275 AD (Saoud, 2003). Both tombs are in present day Kayseri province of Central Anatolia. Following the increasing influence of Central Asian and Anatolian mystic traditions, large-scale tomb architecture also became popular in Bengal. The first monumental tomb in Bengal was the Eklakhi mausoleum at Hazrat Pandua, in West Bengal (Husain, 2014), which is traditionally known as the mausoleum of Jalaluddin Muhammad Shah (died in 1433 AD). Because of heavy rains in the regions the roof of the tomb was designed with a slight curve and a heavy cornice to throw off the excess rainwater. Two other important tombs in Bangladesh, respectively the tomb of Khan Jahan at Bagerhat (1458 AD) and the tomb of Badr Pir at Chittagong (1440 AD) were also built following the Eklakhi tradition. These tombs have surprising similarities with those earlier and contemporary tombs in Anatolia and other parts of the Seljuk Empire.

Before the establishment of Turkic descended Muslim rule in 1204 AD, a major part of Bengal did not use metal coinage at all, although there was plenty of uncoined silver in the possession of local rulers in the region. Afterwards conquering the Bengal in 1204 AD, Bakhtiyar Khalji himself issued a gold coin in the name of his superior/central ruler in Delhi, Sultan Muhammad Ghuri, with one side depicting a Turkic cavalryman charging at full gallop and holding a mace in hand (Eaton, 1996: 33). Later, Ali Mardan Khalji also began issuing silver coins bearing the horseman image (Lowick, 1973). When Delhi re-established its power over Bengal, the coins in the name of Sultan Iltutmish (1210-35) continued to bear the image of the horseman (Eaton, 1996: 34).

Besides the effigy of horseman, some other important features in the Bengal sultanate coins were the name of the sultan with his epithet, often meaning including “all things belong to Allah”, “very mighty Sultan”, or “help of the world and the faith”; as well as different type of effigy of sun, and lion motifs (Karim, 1960; Karim, 2012). Similar types of effigies and features were also common in the coins of Anatolian Seljuk Empires. For example, the effigy of a horseman appears on the gold and silver coins of Qilij Arslan II (1156-1192 AD), Kaykhusraw I (1192-1196, and then 1204 - 1210 AD). The coins of Rukn ad-Din Sulayman bin Qilij Arslan (minted 1198 AD) also bear the effigy of a horseman holding a mace in hand in the center. The effigies of sun and lion appeared on the coins of Ghiyath al-din Kaykhusraw II bin Kay Qubadh

(1237-1246 AD). Overall, the tradition of the coin-based monetary system in medieval Bengal was prominently influenced by the economic system of the mighty Seljuk Empire. Notably the tradition of horseman feature and effigies of Anatolian coins were the predecessors for the coin system of medieval Bengal.

Like the coin-based economic system, afterwards the establishment of Muslim rule in Bengal, a large number of inscriptions was also widely used in monuments including mosques, mausoleums, and madrasas. There were traditions of issuing copper plates, but pre-medieval monuments in Bengal did not bear any stone inscription so far. Some scholars argue that the first inscription of medieval Bengal belongs to Ala-Uddin Ali Mardan Khalji (1210-1213 AD), a Khalaj descended Turkic Sultan in Bengal. It is notable that Bengal inscriptions generally begin either with a verse from the Holy Qur'an or the tradition of the Prophet or both, indicating the rewards that await one in the afterlife (Karim, 1960: 40; Karim, 1992). Similar tradition is also common in the inscription of Seljuk and Ottoman rulers throughout their reigns. The calligraphy too was one of the important decorative aestheticisms in medieval traditions in Bengal, which were first introduced on black basalt stone inscriptions and coins ordered by the Turkic rulers and elites of early sultanate period.

3. Discussion

The contact between cultural populations is regarded to be one of the major sources of the development of human behavior, in both cultural and psychological level (Sam & Berry, 2010). While cross-cultural contacts often alter collective activities and social institutions, over time, it also can have power to change and establish new basements of socio-psychological behavior. Thus, the migrations and settlements of new people groups in a geographical territory often promote new phases of acculturations with the help of cultural integration as well as positive and negative assimilation processes. Since there were many waves of migrations into Bengal from the prehistoric period (Jha, 2014; Siddiq & Habib, 2017), the people in Delta too witnessed acculturations process and new phases of cultural formations through time. For example, there were attempts of Aryanisation over the non-Aryan indigenous cultures across the Bengal plain throughout first the millennium AD (Alam & Salles, 2001; Jha, 2014). There were also influential waves of migrations into the Delta from the southern part of India. For example, although for a comparatively short period of time, the Sena warriors managed to establish a kingdom over Bengal Delta following the fall of long-lived Pala rules (Chowdhury, 2011).

It appears that socio-cultural and socio-religious traditions of the Bengal Delta never followed any orthodox religious rules or strict ideological thoughts. Even the mainstream

religious traditions of great imperial powers such as Maurya and Gupta had to experience several phases of assimilations and acculturations (Alam & Salles, 2001; Chowdhury, 2008). The indigenous socio-religious and philosophical traditions heavily affected the basic features of new-coming Aryan and Buddhist thoughts, which are widely visible in contemporary religious texts, norms, rituals, arts and architectures in the region. Similar conditions were also present the cultural elements of medieval Bengal.

The medieval society in Bengal Delta developed through four main fractions: i) the predominantly Turkic descended Bengali ruling class, elites, saints, scholars and a rich number of business class people groups (Poonawala, 2017); ii) the root level people who converted to the egalitarian Islamic tradition; iii) the root level people groups who remained active in their traditional norms; and iii), the emigrated Central and West Asian people groups, who continued to come in resourceful Delta for trade, commerce, welfare, religious missions and search of fortune throughout the six hundred years of Muslim Bengali rules. Besides the independent Bengali rulers, there were also waves of migrations during centralized ruling of Delhi. For example, at least 15000 Ilbari Turks, male, female and children migrated into Bengal following the time of Sultan Balban, as well as at least 5000 Qarauna Turks similarly came to Bengal during the Tughlaq Sultanate (Rahim, 1959: 63). A record of settling down of at least 15000 soldiers, officers, women, and children into Bengal was found only from the reign of Mughul Emperor Jahangir. Thousands of Turks were also migrated during the time of mighty emperor Aurangzeb (Rahim, 1959).

Similar kinds of migrations were also witnessed in Anatolia and many other parts of West Asia during the long reins of the Byzantine, Seljuk and Ottoman Empire. However, unlike Anatolia, Bengali identity always became prominent in every wave of migration and acculturation within the Delta. Particularly, environmental background, geographical locations, natural elements and spiritual background in the region played prominent roles. As happened in previous periods, Bengal also played a distinctive role of its own for several centuries during the medieval period, which eventually helped complete the final phase of Bengal Civilization. However, the legacy of Central and West Asian Turkic elements (Poonawala, 2017) in this formation is still undeniable.

Muslim Bengali rulers of direct or indirect descendant of Turks (Karim, 1985, 2012) played significant roles in the establishment of harmonious socio-religious tradition, wealthy economic system as well as modern trends of civilization inside the Delta, giving Bengali culture and heritage a finest shape. From the beginning, they built mosques, madrasahs and Khanqahs, as well as patronized saints and scholars in the purpose of welfare and proper education of mass

people. The Turks came to Bengal and made the Delta their homeland. Unlike their predecessor and successor colonial groups, these medieval migrated groups neither transferred wealth and treasures from Bengal to their ancestral land nor did they think of leaving their new country.

Along with elegant traditions introduced from Central and West Asian regions, the medieval Muslims also adopted the local and indigenous traditions in their art, architecture, buildings, and urban planning as well as socio-religious traditions (Alamgir, 2011; Rahim, 1959). They also widely initiated welfare activities such as making roads, bridges, dykes and embankments for controlling floods, facilitating trades, commerce and helping root level farmers (Alamgir, 2015; Karim, 1977, 1985; Rahim, 1959). Since the rulers adopted the local culture by settling down in Bengal, essentially there was tolerance in cross-religious faiths, and administration was based on welfare (Chowdhury, 2011; Eaton, 1996; Karim, 2012; Rahim, 1959: 31-34). Non-Muslims people were also appointed in the higher offices, even in positions such as ministers and generals. For example, the Hindu Raja Ganesh rose to the position of a principal minister, chief of administrative and revenue matters in the reign of Sultan Ghiyasuddin Azam Shah (Karim, 1985). The Turkish-Bengali sultans also patronized literature and religious scholarships too, which ultimately provided the concrete foundation of Bengali culture (Rahim, 1959: 212-239). Some of them even patronized Hindu poets. For example, Maladhar Vasu, the poet of the Shri-Krsna Vijaya was highly patronized by Sultan Rukunuddin Barbak Shah (1459-1474).

While the philosophy and methods of Muslim Sufis and saints also had strong effect on non-Muslim socio-religious traditions including the Bhakti movement (the Neo-Vaishnavism) led by Sri Chaitanya (O'Connell, 2011), local philosophical thoughts too influenced the newly established Muslim tradition in Bengal. For example, the worship of Buddha's footprints was transformed into the veneration of the holy Prophet's footprints (i.e., Qadam Rasul); the tradition of five Bodhisattvas (five development stage of Buddha) was transformed into the beliefs of Panch-Pir (five saints) in Eastern Bengal (Chowdhury, 2011). In this way, Aryan, Buddhist, Islamic and indigenous norms and philosophy in Bengal experienced positive admixture on one another throughout a period of about 600 years (Siddiq & Habib, 2017). This gradual acculturation process encouraged medieval people in the Delta to develop the Bengali Muslim identity, which was different than the Muslims in other parts of South Asia, Central Asia and Arab world, particularly in form and practice.

Colonial rulers successfully divided the Bengal society. Old order of the rural Bengali and tribal groups in every corner was in complete decline (Bhattacharyya, 2018). In only 190 years of British administration, there have been tremendous changes and fractions in harmonious

social and cultural practices in the Bengal. In the conclusion, Bengal Delta was eventually divided into two societies basing mainly on Muslim and Hindu orthodox tradition (Chatterji, 2002), although all people groups in Bengal Delta have been sharing a common geographical, economical, and socio-cultural value for millennia (Siddiq & Habib, 2017).

However, it is a fact that the Bengal Civilization (Siddiq & Habib, 2017) achieved its mature stage predominantly through the long process Turk-Bengali acculturations. Tangibly, the witnesses of the acculturation are present in the prosperous cities, towns and ports, classic and terracotta architectures, cultural and art objects, inscriptions, coins, as well as hundreds of philosophical, religious and literature books and texts. Intangibly, they are living in the norms of hospitality, socio-religious traditions, oral histories, wide variation of folk stories and songs, Sufi-Dervish rites, rituals, and festivals as well as non-Muslim religious traditions including Neo-Vaishnava traditions across the Delta.

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