

## SOUTH ASIAN AND WESTERN FOLKLORES

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### Abstract

*All literatures stretch an unmapped and immeasurable world of oral tradition which may roughly be called Folklore. As in other countries in the world in Bengal also we can find an enormous amount of influence of folklore on old and modern Bengali literature. It has now become proverbial that "Shakespeare is not Shakespeare without folklore". If one is to analyze and understand the Bengali literature, it is therefore", necessary that he should be familiar with the folkloric heritage of the country." I believe this paper, however, will endeavour to give a short historical background of folklore scholarship and its prospect in Bangladesh, Pakistan and other states of South Asia. The abundant folklore of present-day Bangladesh, and Pakistan, therefore, contains a variety of elements, which is partly to be explained by historical forces. From the third century A.D. the Mouryas, the Guptas, the Palas, the Senas and the Muslims came one after another to rule the land and they grafted their ways of life and culture traits on the indigenous population. Subsequently Portuguese, French and English ships anchored in the harbours of Bengal, and left not only their merchandise but also their customs. Among these foreign traders, the British became most powerful and were able to consolidate their authority at the expense of the fading empire of the Mughals. The battle of Plassy in 1757 ended with the defeat of the Nawab of Bengal. This British victory ensured the supremacy of the British East India Company over the entire Sub-continent, including Bengal, for nearly two hundred years. As a result the folklore of Bangladesh will present an interesting variety and blending of anthropological and sociological background.*

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## Folklore Origin Traditions

Mr. A.R. Wright F.S.A. was president of Folklore Society in England. He said:

It (Folklore) might be defined as the science which studies the expression, in popular beliefs, institutions, practices, oral literature, and arts and pastimes, of the mental and spiritual life of the folk, the people in general in every stage of barbarism and culture. It is at the base of all other sciences, and appears in all of them at their early stages and often survives to a told one; thus astronomy has evolved out of astrology, and chemistry out of alchemy. Scientific medicine is the child of medical folklore.<sup>1</sup> We see that for atleast three or four thousand years, and doubtless for ages before, the part of the story teller has been cultivated in every rank of society... we find the long-haired page reading nightly.... To entertain his lady.<sup>2</sup> The presence of these parallels with European tales in most part of Indo Pakistan Sub-Continent and of still other parallels in the old literary collections caused a whole generation of older scholars to conclude the India Sub-Continent is the great homeland of most of the European folk stories.<sup>3</sup> 'No distinction is taken between gods, beasts and men. The more barbaric the people, the more these lack of distinction marks their usages, ritual myth and tales... of magic and cannibalism'.<sup>4</sup>

'Aesopic writer had his animals act in accordance with their own characteristics, the Indic fables treated the animal' without regard to their special nature, as if they were merely men masked in animal form".<sup>5</sup> On the one hand the Islamites, and on the other the Buddhists... have brought about the diffusion of the folktales of India (Sub-Continent) over almost the whole world'...

'Oh! Burzoe! Thou has learnt one things, but other things have escaped thee; did you not understand that this is an allegory of the ancients? By the mountain they meant the learned – by the dead they meant the ignorant. They wished to say that when the learned instruct the ignorant by their maxims it is as if they brought the dead to life."<sup>6</sup>

The first phase of folklore collecting was started by the British rulers of India. Though the purpose behind it was obviously political and administrative. As soon as the British East India Company became ruler of Bengal, it requested the British civil officers to learn about the people of the land through their traditions and customs. Consequently under the directives of the Company, scholars like William Jones (1764-1794), a judge of the old supreme court, Calcutta, established the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal in the year 1784. This Society promoted the study of the humanities, including materials later recognized as folklore, which were published in the journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Shahidullah, *Loka Shahitya*, Dhaka, 1963, p.3, (English Folklore p.7)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. ,p.175.

<sup>3</sup> Stich Thompson, *The Folktale*, pp.15-16.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p.378.

<sup>6</sup> *The Ocean of Story*, Vol. V.

<sup>7</sup> Siddiqui, Ashraf, Dr., *Folklore*, Bangladesh, Bengal Academy, Dhaka, 1976. p.10.

Thomas Herbert Lewin, Deputy Commissioner at Chittagong Hill Tracts, offered an authentic anthological survey of tribal people in his *The Hill Tracts in Chittagong and the Dwellers Therein* (1869) and *The Wild Races Of South-Eastern India* (London, 1870). He recorded some myths, creation of stories, customs and superstitions directly from oral tradition. He supported his comments with documentary notes.<sup>8</sup>

G.H. Damant, another British, who was a Deputy Commissioner in Rangpur, contributed a series of folktales, legends, charms and myths to the *Indian Antiquary*. The very first volume of this journal (1872) contains some well-known tales of North Bengal (Dinajpur in Bangladesh) which he collected. His harvest of twenty two tales makes him the first major collector of Bengali tales from Bangladesh.<sup>9</sup>

Sir George Grierson (1851-1941), whose love and deep interest for Eastern folklore and language has already become proverbial, arrived in 1873. Ultimately he published material on 179 languages and 364 dialects of this continent. Because of this scholarship, he received a Knighthood in 1912 and the order of Merit in 1928 from the King of England. Grierson spent 26 years in India. While in charge of Rangpur District, from 1873-1877 he collected from the peasants folk-rhymes, folksongs and ballads such as the widely known 'Manik Chander Gan' (The Song of Manik Chandra). After these songs were published in the *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal* (1878), the search for similar songs was carried out in earnest. In 1898 Grierson was appointed the Superintendent of the Linguistic Survey of India. The famous Norwegian linguist and folklorist Sten Konow assisted him in this work. They decided that "a piece of folklore or some other passages in narrative prose or verse...[should be] taken down... from the mouth of the speaker on the spot"<sup>10</sup> as a specimen of language of dialect. Grierson's nineteen volume survey contains folklore specimens from many languages and dialects of Indian Sub continent. Major Alan Playfair, then a Government Officer, studied the tribal people and wrote *The Garos (Tribe, 1909)* which gives an excellent account of the Garos, many of whom live in Mymensingh District. This valuable contribution to the ethnology of the primitive peoples was one of the series published under the sponsorship of the Government of Eastern Bengal and Assam.

In 'The Tribes and Castes Of Bengal' ( 2 vols., Calcutta, 1891) Herbert H. Risley of the Indian civil Service applied to Indian anthropology the methods of systematic research followed by European anthropologists. This work, besides containing a great deal of anthropological information, included myths, legends and fictional folktales from Bengal.<sup>11</sup>

The missionaries of Great Britain, Europe and the United States contributed importantly to folklore collection and publication. Since their aim was to preach Christianity among the natives, it was incumbent on them to know the natives and their customs. Among the missionaries, the name of William Carey deserves special mention. Carey served in Fort

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.11.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p.12.

<sup>10</sup> Thompson, *The Folktale*, p.378.

<sup>11</sup> *The Ocean of Story*, Vol. V

William College from 1800-1831 and with the help of native munshis he published a series of Bengali books, edited newspapers and encouraged the translation of folktales known in oral traditions from Sanskrit and Persian.

Reverend James Long was a prolific collector of Bengali proverbs and sayings. His publications include 'Three Thousand Bengali Proverbs & Proverbial Sayings' Illustrating Native Life And Feelings. Among 'Ryots and Women' (1872), Eastern Proverbs and Emblems Illustrating Old Truth (London, 1881) and Two Thousand Bengali Proverbs (Probad Mala) Illustrating Native Life and Feelings (1868). Many folk rhymes and charms also have been incorporated among these proverbs and sayings which were used by later compilers of Bengali rhymes.<sup>12</sup>

William McCulloch's Bengali Household Tales (London, 1912) is regarded probably one of the best folktale collections of Bengal because of its notes and organization. Though the tales were collected from a Brahmin informant around 1886-87, the book was published in London in 1912 after McCulloch had retired. His notes refer to parallel examples of both literary and oral stories in other eastern and western collections. It should be noted that the above mentioned writers were influenced by the English Anthropological school headed by Darwin, Taylor and others.

Devi (Orient pearls, 1915) and others in collecting and compiling oral tradition. It was, however, Sarat Chandra Mitra, who made excellent studies of folklore on the harvest made by former collectors and scholars. He published nearly 250 articles in various native and foreign journals which have always been referred to many research publications both locally and abroad. Another prolific writer was Abdul Wali who contributed much to various journals including Asiatic and Anthropological Societies.

The second phase of the folklore movement was introduced by Bengali scholars. Rabindranath Tagore was the pioneer of this movement. From 1885 to 1899, he published four essays focusing on the importance of folk-literature. These four Essays were compiled in a book Loka-Sahitya (Folk Literature) in 1907. Tagore patronized others and he himself collected a large number of folklore materials from his vast estate in East Bengal. He himself wrote, " When I was at Selaidah. I would always keep close contact with the Bauls (Mystics folksingers) and have discussions with them, and it is a fact that I infused tunes of Baul songs into many of my own songs."<sup>13</sup> Dr. Dusan Zbavitel, Professor of Indology in the Oriental Institute of Czechoslovakia, writes : " It is my firm belief that without staying in the countryside for as long as he did, Rabindranath could never have become what he was, either as a man or a poet."<sup>14</sup> Critics have commented that Tagore has used numerous folklore themes in many of his poems, songs, dramas, novels and short stories. Tagore's example was followed by the leading Bengali journals. Bangiya Sahitya Parisat, a Bengali literary society established under his encouragement in 1893. The Sahitya Parisat journal, from the year of its inception (1894), began publishing folklore materials collected from the various regions including

<sup>12</sup> Siddiqui, Ashraf, Dr., op.cit., p.10.

<sup>13</sup> Dr. Ashraf Siddiqui, Folklore, Bangladesh, Bengal Academy, Dhaka, 1976. p.15.

<sup>14</sup> Rabindranath Tagor, Folklore-II, Calcutta, 1961, p.14.

### Bangladesh (Now).

Dr. Dinesh Chandra Sen is credited for collection of ballads. Dinesh Chandra, a resident of East Bengal (Bangladesh now) who read Percy and others ballad collections, was aware of the rich ballad heritage of Mymensingh. Chandra Kumar De of Mymensingh was appointed to collect ballads from this area, including information about the singers. Four large volumes of Eastern Bengal Ballad Mymensingh with texts in both Bengali and English, were published from 1923 to 1932. These Ballads attracted attention all over the world. His works, *Glimpses of Bengal Life* (1915). *Prachin bangla Sahitye Musalmaner Abodan* (1940: Contribution Of muslims to old Bengali literature) and especially, *Folk literature of Bengal* (1920) are invaluable. In the latter book, a comparative study of some Bengali tales with those of Europe he boldly expressed the view that in the Sub-Continent the highest level of culture was for ages represented by Magadha. Since lower Bengal, the Banga proper, was an important gateway for enterprising foreign people who traded with un-divided India, one consequence was the circulation of the Jatakas, the birth-stories of Buddha, from Bengal or more probably Magadha, throughout the countries of Europe and the Middle East.<sup>15</sup>

Mansur Uddin, another prominent folklorist of Bangladesh, took up the task of collecting Baul songs, which had been started by Tagore. After the publication of the first volume (1939) in 1942, Calcutta University published his second volume of *Hara-Mani* (lost gems), which included a few hundred songs. Since then ten additional volumes of his collections have been published in Dacca. Eminent poet Jassim Uddin, who started his career as a collector of folklore for Dinesh Chandra Sen, had published collection of folksongs and folktales. He was, however, most famous for his use of folklore themes in dramas and in poetry. His published folksong collections include *Rangila nayer Majhi* (The boatman of the Green Boat) in 1938. His collection of humerous folktales, published in Bengali as *Bangalir Hashir Galpa* (1960) appeared along with English translation. He also published *jarigan* (mobable theatre, 1968). His other works are still to be printed. Special mention should be made of Late Abbas Uddin, a scholar, accomplished singer, and collector of folksongs. His influence in the contemporary folklore movement of Bangladesh is immense. Recording companies on record sold out his genuine hundreds of folksong records like hot cakes. Popularly known as the father of Bengali folksongs, Abbas Uddin has made folksongs quite popular and has created a school of folksingers in Bangladesh. These three scholars, Mansur Uddin, Jassim Uddin and Abbas Uddin, represented the Bangladesh at folklore Conferences held in London, at Indian University in Bloomington, and in Germany, in the past.<sup>16</sup>

The third phase of the folklore movement was begun in Dacca, the East Bengal, in the year 1938. In that year a conference was held under the auspices of the Eastern Mymensingh-Literary-Society, at Kishoreganj. Dr. Mohammad Shahidullah, then Chairman of the Department of Bengali at Dacca University and a lover of folk-tradition, in his presidential address lauded the great value of folklore study and his remarks were carried by many of the journals and news papers of the country. This enthusiasm resulted

<sup>15</sup> Dr. Danish Chandra Sen. *The Folk literature of Bengal*, Dhaka, 1920. p.49.

<sup>16</sup> Dr. Ashraf Siddiqui, *Folklore, Bangladesh*, Bengal Academy, Dhaka, 1976. p.19.

in the formation of the 'Eastern Bengal Folklore Collection Society' at Dacca University. Dr. Shahidullah became its President, and Asutosh Bhattacharya its Secretary. Chandra Kumar De, a collector of Eastern Bengal Ballads, Sirajuddin Kashimpuri and Purna Chandra Bhattacharya, two other enthusiastic collectors, and Jassim Uddin joined their effort in this project. A.K. Fazlul Haq, then Chief Minister of Bengal, patronized. Shortly, courses in folklore were included upto the graduate level in Dacca University.

Dr. Shahid Ullah's contribution was important because he clearly pointed out that folklore materials pass from one country to another and hence a comparative outlook was a must. While he showed the international aspect of folklore, Guru Saday Dutt, an inhabitant of Sylhet and later posted in various districts of East Bengal, as a Civilian, contributed series of articles on folk arts and crafts of Bengal in international journals. Asutosh Bhattacharya's *Bangla Mangal Kayjer ithas* (History of Bangla good works, 1939) and *Banglar Loka-Sahitya*, (1954) are however, prominent works of this period. His books include large material from East Bengal which he collected.

Folklore activities was, however, accelerated when the erst while East Pakistan Government established the Bengali Academy in Dacca in 1955 to promote research work on Bengali language and literature. The council of the Bengali Academy, in its very first meeting made a decision to promote collecting, preserving and publishing of folklore materials. Sufficient funds were allocated for this purpose. Circulars were issued all over the country through newspapers, private organizations and government agencies, requesting that folklore materials be sent to the Academy.<sup>17</sup>

A number of folklore collectors were appointed by the academy to work on the project in the regions rich in folklore. As a result, folklore materials of high quality poured in an ending stream. While collecting was thus being established on a systematic basis, the Academy began to publish folklore collections. The first publication, *Momen shahir Loka-Sahitya* (Folklore of Mymensingh), collected and edited by Rowshan Izdani, came out in 1957. His book contains specimens of different genres of folklore material of Mymensingh district. Izdani was, however, more a collector than a scholar.<sup>18</sup>

In May, 1960, the Folklore Committee of the Bengali Academy resolved that the Folklore materials collected by the Academy should be edited by eminent scholars before publication in a scientific method. The Committee decided that each editor should work with a particular kind of material from a specific region. In the introductory chapter, the editor was instructed to cover the following points:<sup>19</sup>

1. Information about the field and the informants
2. Social and cultural background of the material
3. Functional use of each genre
4. Typical regional characteristics, if they are any

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p.20.

<sup>19</sup> Dr. Mazharul Islam, *A History Folktale Collection in India and Pakistan*. Ph. D Thesis, I.U, 1966, *Loka Shahitya*, Ibid., 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Dhaka, 1977).

5. Historical elements, if there are any
6. International circulation. if it can be determined
7. Literary value, etc.

So far the Bengali Academy has published a huge number of books including some in English. Thousands of books may now be compiled from the huge material collected by the Academy.

The influence of the Asiatic and the Folk-Lore Societies were greatly felt in the then India because many of the government officials and missionaries active there were affiliated with them. Dorson has described the foundation of the Folk-Lore Society and its influence on English folklorists thus:

In a period roughly bounded by 1870 and 1910 England witnessed a vigorous activity in folklore. Within these years the first folklore society in the world was formed; the first folklore journal [Folk-Lore Record, 1878-1882] was issued, and filled with brilliant articles; collectors' handbooks [Gomme, *The Handbook of Folk-Lore*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1887; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1890; enlarged ed. By Burne, 1914] were compiled, and systematic country collections were under-taken; folk materials hidden in magazine files, chapbooks, and similar antiquarian sources were located and reprinted; an International Folklore Congress was held at London in 1891, dominated by English scholars; and a steady outpour of theoretical and controversial treatises wrestled with the problems of the new science.<sup>20</sup>

In the first issue of Folk-Lore [1890], the organ of the Folk-Lore Society, which succeeded Folk-Lore Record [1878-1882] and Folk-Lore Journal [1883-1889], the editor Joseph Jacobs clearly stated;

Since Mr. Thomas invented the term in 1846, Folk-Lore has undergone a continual widening of its meaning and its reference... Folk-Lore has now been extended to include the whole vast background of popular thought, feeling and usages, out of which, and in contract to which have been developed all the individual products of human activity which go to make up what is called History.<sup>21</sup>

And in all the studies an attempt will be made to give exact and prompt bibliographical information of noteworthy contributions in books or articles published at home and abroad.<sup>22</sup>

In the same way Burne in her Handbook wrote:

Whatever country be the scene of operations, the first requisite in collecting folklore is to enter into friendly relations with the folk... he [the collector] must adopt a sympathetic attitude and show an interest in the people themselves.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Rrichard M. Dorson, *The Great Team of English Folklorists*, JAF, LXIV (1951).

<sup>21</sup> *Folklore-I* (1890). p.1.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p.2.

<sup>23</sup> *The Hand book of Folklore* (London-1924) p.6.

In response to the Origin of Species, Tylor in his researches into the Early History of Mankind (1865) and the primitive culture (1871) "crystallized the concept of cultural ascent for folklorists as well as anthropologists."<sup>24</sup>

Taylor's evolutionary anthropology was carried on by Frazer, who found in primitive culture an opportunity to indulge his interest in ancient survivals. His *The Golden Bough* (2 vols., 1890; several volumes published under different titles were issued in an enlarged edition of 12 vols.; 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. From 1911 – 1915), a comparative study of myths, tales, rituals, and other genres of folklore, drew equally from ethnology, ancient history and European and Oriental folklore. Among many areas and cultures Frazer refers to, we find numerous references to material from various parts of Bengal collected and studied by English civil servants, missionaries, and native collectors.

However these synthesis seemingly gave a "scientific basis to the doctrine of survivals"<sup>25</sup> cherished by the anthropological folklorist, and prolific scholars such as Gomme, Hartland, Lang, Clod and Nutt, "who together combated and vanquished the solar mythologists"<sup>26</sup> led by Max Muller, Cox, Gubernatis and Robert Brown etc.

It is true that folklore activities in England gave a great impetus to the European civil servants and missionaries residing in India. But all of them were not equally good scholars. Neither did rigidly followed the methods by English folklorists. Local scholars and collectors, on the other hand, imbued with a nationalistic spirit, saw in folklore a long continuing cultural heritage and in some cases they allowed emotion to colour their discussions and scholarship. Among the nationalist folklorists the names of Rabindranath Tagore and Dinesh Chandra Sen rank high.

### **Folksongs of Bengal**

The British anthropologists and survivalists is headed by Darwin, Tylor, Frazer, MacCulloch, Gomme, Hartland, Lang, Clodd, Nutt, Andrew Lang and others on the one hand, and such prolific Indianists as Benfey, Max Muller, Bloomfield, Cowel, Tawney and Penzer on the other hand, reigned over the folklore scene of Indo-Bangladesh subcontinent almost from the beginning till the last days of British supremacy. The anthropological and survival theories changed but their followers still clinged to the old theories, they talked, debated, essayed which in some cases though were illuminating, national, but in no ways were international. Folklore scholarships during the British period, nay, even today in Bengal, has less comparatively been influenced by the Finish Historic-Geographic method, the modern anthropological and ethnological graphic method, the modern anthropological and ethnological theories, the Psychoanalytical School or even Structuralists. While Finland, Ireland, Sweden and America are emphasizing on the modern 'field method' and specially the 'style', 'contents' and 'functions' of folklore or folksong, we are still gossiping on the same Victorian armchair,

<sup>24</sup> Richard M. Dorson, "Folklore Studies in England" . Folklore Richard Around the world/Bloomington, 1961. p.22.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.



our eyes kept wide-open on printed materials, books or theories. What is needed now is a first hand knowledge of folklore in our field, its life history, the people, tellers, informants, singers and cultural hinterlands. Then only we can proceed for comparative studies in respect of its types and motifs, distributions and circulations as has been followed by the contemporary American, Irish, Finnish and Russian scholars. We have our comparative tools, as discussed earlier, we have printed materials. We now need to sit down with our countries, may be, in other parts of the globe. It is high time that we endeavour to spread our researches from the national to the international levels.

An historical survey of music including folksongs, ballads and similar traditional materials of Bangladesh he must be acquainted with the social and ethnic condition of the country.

Formerly, a province of British India, Bengal now forms the state of West Bengal (India) and Independent Bangladesh. It is needless to say that Bengal has a long history and a rich cultural heritage. It was in Bengal that Britishers consolidated their power; Bengal was the headquarters and capital of British India for nearly one hundred years, so that British education and civilization have naturally greatly influenced the development of Bengal. Because the light of English education fell first on Bengal, the people of Bengal naturally took the lead in political, social and nationalistic movements, not only in Bengal but throughout the whole of India. The study and collection of folklore was under-taken in Bengal both by the British civil servants and missionaries for the purpose of improved administration and also for better understanding of Indian social structure. Local collectors and scholars imbued with nationalistic spirit, have enthusiastically collected and studied folklore. In fact, at the present time, active folklore work is going on in both the present time, active folklore work is going on in both West Bengal and Bangladesh and is making a significant contribution to the advancement of folklore science in Asia.

The history of Bengal was obscure until the third century B.C., and we know only that it formed a part of the Mourya Empire of Asoka, the Great. However, if one analyzes the cultural heritage of present-day Bengal in the areas of tradition, folklore and language, he can easily discover the repertoire of various other primitive or aboriginal cultures.

Among the popular elements...met with all over India, Bengal has got their largest varieties. This fact cannot but have [a] historical reason behind it. The different races of humanity, which entered India in pre-historic times now the North East of this sub-continent must have had passed through Bengal at one time. It can, however, be easily imagined that they not only passed through this country, but imagined that they not only passed through this country, but also lived in it until they were driven out of their settlements subsequently by more powerful invading races, because Bengal has got her natural attraction. In medieval India there was a saying which meant that "there was a way in but no way out of Bengal."

In fact, Bengal was a paradise for food-producing primitive races. As a result, all the races which once settled in prehistoric Bengal made it their permanent residence and in time each developed its respective culture.

The Negrito is considered to be the oldest specimen of the human race existing in the world. People containing Negrito blood are found in South India and Assam; existence of Negrito elements in the tribal population of Assam especially among the Nagas, proves that these people once must have passed through Bengal on their way to Burma, the Malayan Peninsula and the Pacific Islands.

The Proto-Australoid who came from the west forms the basic element of the Indo-Bangladesh population. By admixture with other elements, especially with the Negritos, who came before, and with the Mongoloids who came after them, they gave rise to the Kol or Munda type in Bengal and Bihar, and the Mon-Khmer in Assam, Burma and Indo-China. Some aboriginal people of Choto-Nagpur, Orissa and Madhya-Pradesh speak Austric languages. A great number of Austric words still prevail in the Bengali language.

### **Folk Ballads**

Bengali ballads, A form of narrative folksongs are compared with western of folk poets of Europe in the Middle Ages are known as ballads. In Bengali these songs are called gatha or geetika. Bengali gatha or geetika is a narrative and close to English Ballad in performance. Ballad in English owes its origin to French language. It means song and together. In Danish it is called 'vise', in Spanish it is 'romance', in Russian it is 'bylina', in Ukrania, it is 'dumi', in Servian it is 'junacka' while in Bengali it is called 'geetika' or 'gatha'. Ballad introduced in middle ages when oral literature.

Similarly Bengali ballads is traced to Middle Ages. Divergent opinions have been expressed as to the origin of ballads. There are two contending groups; (1) communalistic and (2) individualistic.

The first group saw in ballads a continuing tradition from the primitive ages and thought that these were made by a kind of communal improvisation or for communal recreation.

Later critics, persons like French sociologist Dirckheim suggested that people were too indefinite, too unorganized for such concerted effort and that ballads were composed under the direction of a leader who brought the necessary discipline in the songs and who functioned as the main organizer and guide. According to them after an individual ballad was composed, it passed on from people to people, community to community through oral tradition. In the process, some were changed, improved and sometimes deteriorated. This individualistic theory has been accepted by the Western scholars and ballad is being examined and studied in this light. The Indo-Bangladesh sub-continent possesses a rich heritage of traditional folklore. Bengali ballads<sup>27</sup> edited by late Dr. Dinesh Chandra Sen, in the second decade of this century attracted the attention of the eminent scholars of the world.

The student of folklore will still face difficulties in the scientific research of these ballads for Dr. Sen did not furnish any variants of his materials. Variation is the crucial test of

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<sup>27</sup> Eastern Bengal Ballads, 4 vols. (Calcutta, 1923-1932)

folklore, and it is only variations, basing which we can examine the progress of any individual ballad through various geographic, anthropological and ethnic regions. Like H<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub> (Sulphuric Acid) in chemistry a ballad or a folktale is also a combination of various motifs. These motifs are nothing but the personal complex of a teller that means his own motifs. All story matters can be divided into some motifs and types. These have been defined by the western scholars as the 'Motif' and 'Type' of folklore. After a continuous discussion and investigation over half a century at last Finish folklorist. Antti Aarne and American folklorist Stith Thompson have been able to make the types of folktale and of the other similar story materials.<sup>28</sup> Mr. Thomson's monumental work Motif Index of Folk-Literature is a valuable contribution to the study of international folkloristics.<sup>29</sup>

Variation is the crucial test of folklore. We all come from a historic past and in folklore we can discover the chain and progress of this human civilization.

Bengali ballads also give us an idea of the Bengali society in the Middle Ages, its joys and sorrows, laughter and tears.

Bangladesh is the land of river-almost all the villages are linked with rivers. Proverb goes that "there is not a single village without a river or a rivulet and a folk-poet or a minstrel".<sup>30</sup>

The struggle for existence was not as hard in the Middle Ages as it is today and the minstrels and folk-poets had ample opportunity to enjoy nature and pass their care-free-time in composing songs and stories. Moreover, they were always patronized by the local feudal lords.

It was, of course Muslim rule in the Sub-Continent gave the highest acceleration to the development of Bengali ballads. We know that the Turks conquered Bengal at the very beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Muslims brought with them a huge store of Persian literature and the low-caste Hindus for the first time in their lives had the opportunity to talk and mix with the conquering race. They saw that there was no barrier of caste and creed among Muslims and all men were equal. In due course, the influence of the Persian romances reached the remotest corner of the country. Gradually the Hindu society also came to know of this and humanism like over the literature of Bengal.

Ballads are usually sung in accompaniment with tabors, drums, and other folk instruments. Ballad stories are sung by a leader who is called a gayen and he has a group of associate singers called paile who join in chorus in illustrating the episodes. Following are some of the well-known and popular Lore from Sub-Continent.

1. Mahua Pure Love: is a ballad from Bangladesh, displaying unique characteristics. It was composed according to legend by one Dvija Kanai, some 350 years ago.

<sup>28</sup> Stith Thompson, Antti Aarne, The Types of Folktale. 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (Helsinki, 1928; 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Helsinki, 1961)

<sup>29</sup> Motif Index of Folk-Literature, 6 Vols (Helsinki and Bloomington, 1932-1936, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1955-58)

<sup>30</sup> Dr. Ashraf Siddiqui, Folkloric Bangladesh, Bengal Academy, Dhaka, 1976 p. 41.

“Amar bari jiorey bandu boitey diam pira  
 Jal pan karitey dibo shali dhaner chira  
 Ghore ase mosiehr doirey khio tino bela.”<sup>31</sup>

I come to my house, my love: I will give you a stool to sit  
 I will give you finest fried rice for your tiffin  
 I will give sweetest card of buffalo-milk to eat.<sup>32</sup>

2. Symbolic Love: Kanka and Lila: Dhobar Pat: The story of Lila and Kanka is recorded to have been composed nearly 300 years ago.
3. Nuptial Love: Dewana Medina: The story of Dewana Medina sung by Mansur Bayati takes us to another aspect of the Bengali wife, viz., her devotion to and absolute faith in her husband's love and thus it possesses a singularly human interest.

We can compare Dewana Media with ‘Butcher Boy’ and ‘Fair Annie’ of English popular ballads. In ‘Butcher Boy’ we see the heroine to say:<sup>33</sup>

“In London town where I did dwell  
 A butcher boy I loved him well.  
 He courted me for many a day;  
 He stole from me my heart away,  
 .....  
 The reason is, I will tell you why,  
 Because she has got more gold than i.  
 But gold will melt and silver fly,  
 And in time of need be as poor as I”...

At the time of her death she requests:

“Go dig my grave both wide and deep,  
 And on my grave place turtle dove  
 To show the world that I died for love.....”<sup>34</sup>

Let us quote a few lines from “Fair Annie” where her cruel husband is saying while going for a second marriage:<sup>35</sup>

“It is narrow narrow make your bed  
 And learn to lie your lane,  
 For I am going over the sea fair Annie  
 A braw bride to bring hame”.

Circumstances are similar. Like Dulal both heroes become ambitious and forget their dearest at hearts. But Medina is far more appealing. She does not know even how to grumble.

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<sup>31</sup> Motif Index of Folk-Literature, op.cit.

<sup>32</sup> Dr. Ashraf Siddiqui, op.cit.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p.47.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

4. Historical Romance or Tragedies: Feroz Khan Dewan, Dewan Isha Khan & Kedar Roy, Suja Tanyar Bilap and Choudhurir Lorai: The 'Last Fierce Charge', 'The Death of Queen Jang' or 'Brave Wolfe'. Ballads can be composed with the English Loos. Feroz Khan Dewan, Isha Khan and other stories have close connection with history.

We can find similar historical story in the romantic tragedy of 'Earl Bran' (The Douglas Tragedy) of Scottish ballad where like Umar Khan the father of Fair Margaret also is not willing to give her daughter's hand to Earl Brand whose father was his 'lifelong enemy'. He says:<sup>36</sup>

"Rise up, rise up, my seven brave sons  
And dress in your armour so bright,  
Earl Douglas will have lady Margaret away  
Before that it be light.  
Arise, arise, my seven brave sons,  
And dress in your armour to bright  
It shall never be said that a daughter of mine  
Shall go with an earl or a knight."

The tragic end is almost similar:

"The one was buried in Mary's Kirk  
The other in Mary's Quire,  
The one sprang up a bonny bush  
And other a bonny brier  
And when they could not further grow  
They coost the lover's knot."

Isha Khan married the sister of Kedar Roy in manner narrated in Feroz Khan episode. But there was no tragedy. Suja Tanaya and Choudhryir Lorai are also based on historical legends.

5. Pirates, Badmen and Heroes: Dasyu Kenaram, Nizam Dakat and Kafanchora: 'Tom Dooley', 'Robinhood and the Monk', 'John Henry' and 'Jessee James' are all popular folk heroes in the Western ballads. They are robbers but they help the poor folks; sometimes, some episodes bring dramatic changes in their lives and ultimately they become folk heroes. The above mentioned Bengali stories have close connection with that of Ratnakar Dasyu in Ramayana, which is based on typical traditional stories. Probably the story found its way in Ramayana directly from the oral tradition. It is interesting to see how religious anecdotes at last find their way in ballads.
6. Ballad Based on Place-names: Baro-tirtha: in Purbabanga Geetike. We have already discussed that place-names are also a prominent branch of folklore. Not only one, but many similar ballads in Bengali may be found.

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., pp.49-50.

7. Songs of the Forecastle and Lumber Shanti: HatiKhedar Gan: 'Hati Khedar Gan'<sup>37</sup> etc., in Bengali ballads can be compared with the 'Songs of the Forecastle and Lumber Shanti' of the popular English ballads. In both the places, the ordinary people go for earning their bread – they fight with the adverse natural calamities and compose songs which depicts sometime romantic and sometime tragic episodes of their deserted lives.
8. Conclusion: Dr. Stella Kramrisch, the famous European critic, drew our attention to the romantic tales of medieval Europe, Aucassin and Nicolett, and Tristan and Iseult in connection with the Bengali ballad "Mahua".

Aucassin, the only son of Count Beaucare, like Nader Chand, is in love with Nicolett, a beautiful girl of unknown parentage, bought of the Sarecens, whom his father will not permit him to marry. The story runs towards the same adventure of the lovers and at last they are rewarded. But Nader Chand and Mahua end in tragedy. We have similarity of episodes in the Wood of Morois with Tristan and Iseult. But their love tinged with Western idealism reaches the level of Christian ideal of self dedication. They illustrate Milton's Maxim that "man is born to rule and women to yield to his sway." But stories of Mahua, Kanka and Lila are absolutely free from any religious binding; they have no sentiment other than that of the human heart in all its purity and strength. Women are independent and they have always occupied a high place in these ballads.

Women are independent; but that does not mean that they can do whatever they like. Because of their independence, they have on their face the purity and strength of the transparent river – of green nature-which comes to their resources in times of advertise. We find purity and strength in Medina as she dies for her husband; Sakina dies on horseback, "killed not by a hundred bullets, not by a hundred swords"<sup>38</sup> directed against her for long three days and three nights, but by a cruel letter of divorce. Dying on horseback is a symbol of nuptial love with all its old world charms, a theme of epic grandeur worthy "to be painted by a Raphael and sung by an Orpheus".<sup>39</sup> She is martyr to that love which is invulnerable against all physical forces, "yet so sensitive and delicate that it cannot for a moment bear the loss of its supreme faith"<sup>40</sup>, says D.C. Sen.

Leaving aside even the question of historical accuracy regarding the time and circumstances under which characters of the heroes and heroines are introduced in the ballads, one can easily observe that these heroes and heroines were not bound by the shackles of scriptures of social obligations. Their main concern was love and love alone as expressed in the following lines:

"Love is my treasure,  
Love is my care,

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p.50.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p.51.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p.52.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

Love is my necklace,  
He who dies for love  
is immortal”<sup>41</sup>

### Folksongs

There are innumerable varieties of folksongs in the riverine Bangladesh, which are sung by different cultural groups, in different parts of the country. I can attempt only to discuss here briefly a few varieties which are most popular. These can roughly be divided into (a) Work Songs or Occupational Songs: These songs include harvest songs, which are sung at the time of cultivation or harvest; songs of the bullock-cart drivers or palanquin bearers sung at the time of carrying passengers from one place to other; songs sung by labourers when they build the roof of a building, make a road or a bridge; sari-gam, song by boatmen in the month of monsoon at the time of boat race, etc. (b) Ritual Songs are those which are connected with various ritual ceremonies, such as invoking rains at the time of continued draught; sorcerers, songs for driving a ghost or a disease; songs in connection with harvest, birth, fertility or marriage taboos and charming or subduing a snake. (c) Ceremonial Songs are those usually sung at the time of some ceremony, such as birth, marriage, festivals etc. (d) Regional Songs are those which are usually sung in a particular region, e.g., Al-Kaaf (North Bengal); Batiali (riverine eastern part); Bhauaia (North Bengal); Ghambhira (North Bengal); Gajir Gan (North Bengal); Haboo (Dacca); etc. (e) Historical Songs are those which relate to achievements of some historical figures, their patriotism and chivalry. (f) Heroic Songs, again, are those, such as puthir gan, where the romances or tragedies of some heroes or heroines are sung. (g) Mystic Songs: include those of bauls, marfati, murshidi, dehatatma, etc., where the pangs of human soul are depicted in deep ecstasy and devotion. (h) Jari and (i) Kavi on the other hand are most popular types, having both ritual and entertainment aspects. Jari contains the tragic events of the battle of Karbela between Yazid and prophet's (S.A.W) grandson Imam Hussain (R.A.) and is usually sung in the month of Muharram. But there are other kind of Jaris also which are sung in the villages of Bangladesh, just for entertainment's sake throughout the year. Two rival singers, through the exchange of various challenging questions, both social and religious, and also ready wits, keep the audience spell-bound. Kavi, bases mostly Hindu myths and legends, and is also sung by two rival singers, usually at the time of Hindu festivals. Like Jari, mentioned above, kavi, may also be sung all through the year for laughs. Both kavi and jari sometimes go beyond the limit of their particular subject and in the course of singing introduce modern topics or amusing national or local events causing pure entertainments. Sometimes, when rival singers indulge in personal attacks, through exchange of sharp wits, the audience burst into loud laughter.

As regards the tunes of most of our folksongs we can say this much that our folksongs usually consist of two types of tunes: (1) short and (2) long. In the first one it is the words that matter. In the long measured group the tunes are half carved, long carved and sometime full carved. Where as most European or American tunes turn in straight line,

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

the tunes in our folk songs flow in carves.

### **Folksongs: An International Theme**

As all human beings are made of the same paste, it is quite natural that we may discover some similarity of our songs with those of other countries. It should be clearly understood that geographical and sociological circumstances, may bring new motifs in the songs but their approach to human heart remains the same – no barrier of seas, mountains or deserts can stand in the way.

As concrete examples we would like to cite a few Western folksongs:

1. Clementine:<sup>42</sup>  
 In a cavern, in a canyon, excavation for a mine,  
 Dwelt a miner, forty-niner, and his daughter Clementine,  
 Oh my darling, oh my darling, oh my darling Clementine,  
 You are lost and gone forever, dreadful sorry, Clementine,  
 Light she was, and like a fairy, and her, shoes were  

Number nine,

 Herring boxes without topes, sandals were for Clementine,  
 Drove she ducklings to the water every morning just at nine,  
 Hit her foot against a splinter, fell into the foaming brine,  
 Ruby lips above the water, blowing bubbles soft and fine,  
 Alas for me I was no swimmer, so I lost my Clementine.  
 How I missed her, how I missed her, how I missed my Clementine,  
 Till I kissed her little sister, and forgot my Clementine.  
 In a churchyard near the canyon, where the myrtle doth entwine,  
 There grow roses and other posies, fertilized by Clementine.

This song, through many variants, comes from California from the gold-rush days of 1849 or earlier, when many Easterners left their comfortable homes, caught by the fever to dig for gold and went West. We have almost a similar song from Rangpur, collected by Sir George Grierson: More ai-la katha pham parechhe, ge, ago abo chhaymas bharia nadari maria.

2. River Song: Shenandoah:<sup>43</sup>  
 Oh, Shenandoah, I long to hear you,  
 Away, you rolling river  
 Oh, Shenandoah, I long to hear you  
 Away, we're bound away, across the wide Missouri.  
  
 The white man loved an Indian maiden,  
 Away, you rolling river  
 With motions his canoe was laden

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p.55.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p.51.



Away, we're bound away,  
'Cross the wide Missouri.

Oh, Shenandoah, I love your daughter  
Away, you rolling river  
I'll take her 'cross the rolling water  
Away, we're bound away,  
'Cross the wide Missouri.

Oh, Shenandoah, I'm bound to leave you,  
Away, you rolling river  
Oh, Shenandoah, I'll not deceive you  
Away, we're bound away,  
'Cross the wide Missouri.

This song may remind us our popular folksong Nadir 'kul nai kinara naire' (The river has got no bank, no end).

'I know my Love' was current from the English colonial period, sung in the eastern portion of the United States, and was borrowed from the Britishers. The verse about the girl who worries that her man is at the dance-hall with another woman is echoed in many American and British songs:

3. Love Song: I Know My Love:<sup>44</sup>  
I know my love by his way o' walkin'  
and I know my love by his way o' talkin',  
and I know my love in a suit of blue  
and if my love leaves me, what till I do,  
and still she cried, love him the best.  
and a troubled mind can know no rest,  
and still she cried bonny boys are few,  
and if my love leaves me, what will I do.

There's a dance house in our town.  
and there my true love does sit down  
He takes a strange one upon his knee  
and don't think now that vaxes me.  
If my love knew I could wash and wring  
If my love knew I could weave and spin  
I'd make a coat of all the finest kind  
but the want of money leaves me behind.

More sons 'chariya jai' (My golden love is going away) may resemble the same pain and sorrow.

'I've Been Workin' on the Railroad' is one of the most traditional American

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p.56.

songs and every school child can sing it. Probably written during the 1700's and 1800's when American was moving toward the West, and railroads were being built. Now it has no locality as such, but belongs to all of America.

4. Railroad Song:<sup>45</sup>

I've been working' on the railroad, all the livelong day  
 I've been working' on the railroad, just to pass the time away,  
 Don'tcha hear the whistle blowing', rise up so early in the morn  
 Don'tcha hear the captian soutin', "Dinah, blow your horn."  
 Don't won'tcha blow, Dinah, won'tcha blow, Dinah won'tcha  
 Don't won'tcha blow, Dinah won'tcha blow, Dinah wont'cha  
 Someone's in the kitchen with Dinah, someone's in the  
 Someone's in the kitchen with Dinah, strumming' on the  
 Fee, fie, fiddle-e-i-o, fee fie fiddle-e-i-o-o-o—  
 Fee, fie, fiddle-e-i-o.. strumin' on the old banjo....  
 Will not this song remind one of our Oki garial bhai

(Oh, my brother bullock-cart driver) which is now so popular and known all over Bangladesh.

"Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" is a song from the plantations of the South. It is certainly an example of most indigenous type of music, the Negro Spiritual, probably written during the 1700s, and sung by everybody. It tells of the yearning of the poor man on earth to escape his life of toil and take sweet chariot to its destination. ;

5. Swing Low Sweet Chariot:<sup>46</sup>

Swing low, sweet chariot  
 Comin' for the carry me home;  
 Swing, low sweet chariot,  
 Comin' for to carry me home;  
 I looked over Jordan and what did I see  
 Comin' for to carry me home;  
 A band of Angels comin' after me  
 Comin' for to carry me home;  
 I am sometimes up and sometimes down,  
 But still my soul feels heaven bound.

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p.57.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

O dhew khelere—jhilmil sayare dhew khele (Waves are plying over the dazzling sea.....), is again, its another counter part, where, human heart, irrespective of caste and creed and colour bleed in the same manner all over the world.

### Genuineness Of Folksongs

As concrete examples of the genuineness of folksongs, I would cite here only three of Grierson's songs collected about 1873-77, most popular in the oral tradition along with their variants collected later by Abbas Uddin (Nos. 1B and 2B)

And Naye Ali Tepu (No.3) and recorded in 40's of 20th century. The readers may observe the interesting variations that occurred during the past one hundred years. Late Mr. Abbas Uddin said in 1959 that these songs along with local variants were current in the oral tradition for nearly 200 years, if not more. It is quite possible that some of these songs were shortened or some paras were dropped to accommodate in commercial gramophone records. As regards genuineness we can say that the Rajbanshi dialect of Rangpur and Cooch Bihar with its characteristics of ai-gula (those); i-ea for aie-gula (these); mook for make (to mother); bapak for bapke (to father); mui for ami (me); kay for ke (who); karo (I do—as finite verb—present tense); karicho (I have done—as perfect tense) and karim (I shall do—in future tense) etc. have been retained in these songs. Versions B of Nos. 1 and 2 clearly show that if a song is popular, it does not usually deteriorate rather it elevates in the oral tradition. As regards song No.3, Mr. Mustafa Zaman Abbasi, a scholar and folksinger, has been recorded version by Naye Ali Tepu, except some minor changes, more or less remains the same. If more variants of these songs could be collected, it would have been possible to frame the historic-geographic chain with hypothesis about probable critical text.<sup>47</sup>

#### Version 1 (A)

Partham jaubaner kale na hail mor biya,	(1)
Ar katakal rahim ghare ekakini haya,	(2)
Re bindhi nidaya	(3)
Haila pail mor sonar jauban, maleyar jhare	(4)
Mao-bape mor hail badi na dil parer ghare	(5)
Re bidhi nidaya	(6)
Bapak na kaosarame, mui maok na kao laje	(7)
Dhiki-dhiki tushir aghun jalchhe dehar majhe	(8)
Re bidhi nidaya	(9)
Pet phate tao much nap hate laj-saramer dare,	(10)
Khuliya koile maner katha ninda kare pare	(11)
Re bidhi nidaya	(12)
Eman mon mor kare, re bidhi, eman mon mor kare,	(13)
Moner mata chengra dekhi dhariya palao dure,	(14)
Re bidhi nidaya	(15)
Kahe kabe kalankini? Hani naika more tate,	(16)

<sup>47</sup> Linguistic survey, Vol. V, p.185.

Moner sadhe karim keli pati niya sathe. (17)  
 Re bidhi nidaya (18)

(Translation)

At dawning youth I was not by Hymen favoured, (1)  
 How long still am I to remain single at home, (2)  
 O fate marble-hearted : (3)

The full-blown flower of my golden youth yields to Malay's  
 softest breeze,  
 (4)  
 My parents have become my foes in not sending me to another's  
 home in ties hymeneal, (5)  
 O fate marble-hearted!, (6)  
 My heart I cannot open to my father for shame, my mother I  
 cannot press by maidenly modesty bound, (7)  
 Slowly is love consuming my frame as fire within chaff, (8)  
 O fate marble-hearted!, (9)  
 Even though my soul give way to pressing love within my lips  
 never open for fear of shame, (10)  
 If I give out the feelings of my heart, the folk would blame me, (11)  
 O fate marble-hearted: (12)  
 Such mind is mine, Oh Lord, such mind is mine, (13)  
 A youth to my heart would I find; with him would I fly to a distant  
 clime,  
 (14)  
 O fate marble-hearted: (15)  
 Stain who will my name, aught do I not care, (16)  
 To the fill of my heart will I enjoy the time in my love's sweet  
 company,  
 (17)  
 O fate marble-hearted  
 (18)

**1 (B)**<sup>48</sup>

Bidhi mor nidayare  
 (1)  
 Bapaka nai kao saram mui maoka nai kao laje. (2)  
 Dhiki Dhiki tusher Agun jale dehar mahe. (3)  
 Bhindhi nidayare (4)  
 Bok fate tao much na fte laj saramer bhre, (5)  
 Khulia kaile moner katha ninda sagai kore. (6)  
 Bhindhi nidayare (7)

<sup>48</sup> Siddiqui, Ashraf, Dr., op.cit., p.60-61.

Eman mon mor karere bindhi eman mon mor koy (8)

**Translation**

O fate marble-hearted : (1)

My heart I can not open to my father, my mother

I can not express by maidenly modesty bound, (2)

Slowly is love consuming my frame as fire within chaffe. (3)

O fate marble-hearted : (4)

Even though my soul give way to pressing love within, my  
lips never open for fear of shame, (5)

if I give out the feelings of my heart, the folk would blame me. (6)

O fate marble-hearted : (7)

Such mind is mine, Oh Lord, such my mind says (8)