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Abstract

Bengali is an Indo-Aryan language possessing a history and tradition of at least a millennium, with a rich tradition of folklore and folk literature. Folk rhymes form an important part of this tradition. The origins of many Bengali folk rhymes are obscure, but are thought to be of considerable antiquity. Folk rhyme exists in many languages, but is often of secondary importance compared to other forms of folk literature, such as folktales and ballads. In Bengali folk literature, however, rhyme holds a place of equal importance to these other forms. Bengali folk rhyme is not simply an instrument for the amusement of children but a subject worthy of serious study, bearing most of the essential characteristics of folk tradition: anonymous and collective creation, dynamism, textual variation, and social function.

Key words: folk rhyme — Bengali language — folk literature — oral transmission

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INTRODUCTION

BENGALI, one of the Indo-Aryan languages,¹ developed from Sanskrit and the Prākṛit languages. There is a difference of opinion regarding Bengali's date of origin: three of the four outstanding experts on the subject believe that it developed during the ninth or tenth centuries A.D. (SEN 1896, 1; CHATTERJI 1926, 1; SEN 1940, 13), while the fourth believes that it existed as early as the seventh century (SHAHIDULLAH 1953, 7). In either case, Bengali is a language with a history and tradition of at least a millennium. It is now the state language of Bangladesh, and is also spoken in the Indian state of West Bengal and in portions of Tripura, Assam, and Orissa. The number of Bengali-speaking people in the world today may be as high as two hundred million. The Bengali name for the language, "Baṅgla," is the same as the old name for the country: "Baṅgla" or "Bānṅg-gālā," derived from "Bangō."

Bengali has a rich tradition of folklore and folk literature.² This tradition is the creation of the rural folk, transmitted orally from one generation to the next. In addition to the rhymes that comprise the subject of this article, Bengali folk literature includes such forms as folktales, riddles, proverbs, maxims, and songs.

Folk rhymes exist in one form or another in most areas of the world. Examples are the nursery rhymes of Europe, the Mother Goose verse of America, and the *warabe uta* and *komori uta* of Japan. The origins of many Bengali folk rhymes are obscure, and are thought to be of considerable antiquity; certainly a large portion of them are known to have existed in the oral tradition for several centuries at least. This is a characteristic they share with the folk rhyme traditions found in most other cultures. SIDDIQUI quotes the famous folklorist M. Bloomfield as follows:

There are many popular rhymes which cannot be definitely assigned to any specific moment in history. The very same popular

rhyme may have been in existence for decades, each time adopting itself, now to one and now to another manifestation of actual life, and being subjected sometimes to slight, sometimes to very extensive changes. (1963, 203)

Bloomfield, like many other folklorists, considers rhymes to be “striking examples of the poetic primitive” that existed as early as “primitive archaic” times. Some scholars consider rhyme to be the “genesis of all songs” and hence older than even the earliest of songs (OPIE 1951, introduction). This opinion is shared by such outstanding experts on Bengali folk rhymes as Rabindranath Tagore, Sukumar Sen, and Muhammad Shahidullah (SHAHED 1988, 53–54).

On the basis of the available evidence, Bengali folk rhymes appear to be at least as old as the Buddhist mystic verses *caryā-pada*,³ the earliest literary work in the Bengali language. If this hypothesis is correct, Bengali folk rhymes share the thousand-year history of the Bengali language itself.

COLLECTION AND COMPILATION

The investigation and compilation of folk literature was stimulated by a number of factors that emerged during the past several centuries: an interest in humanity’s cultural and literary heritage, a desire to link the present with the past, and growing levels of nationalism throughout the world. The collection of folklore material was further aided by the spread of literacy and the wider availability of the printing press.

The collection of folk rhymes began in the eighteenth century, with the earliest known publications being *Tommy Thumb’s Pretty Song Book* in 1744 and *Mother Goose’s Melody* in 1765 (CUDDON 1979, 456). The interest of folklore gained new momentum in 1812–1814 when the German philologist Jakob Grimm and his brother Wilhelm published the two-volume *Kinder- und Hausmärchen*, containing a large number of German folktales (VREDENBURW 1917, 8). These stories were for the most part collected directly from the peasantry, since they comprised part of the unwritten oral tradition passed from generation to generation by word of mouth. The Grimms’ collection attracted worldwide attention from researchers with an interest in folk literature, and inspired members of the intelligentsia in various societies to investigate the native folk culture of their own lands, drawing particularly upon the older generation of peasantry whose knowledge of life had yet to be transformed by urbanization.

Roughly contemporaneous to this, many of the colonial administrators, Anglican missionaries, and travelers from Victorian England

were recording native traditions in various parts of the world in order to better understand the peoples they governed (DORSON 1963, 4). English translations of these collections were later published, sometimes with romanized versions of the original texts.

These developments had an influence upon the collection of Bengali folk rhymes as well. From the eighteenth century the region of Bengal was occupied by the British East India Company,⁴ whose administrative personnel and Christian missionaries⁵ acted as links between Western civilization and the elite of the developing city of Calcutta. Credit for the first few collections of Bengali folk literature goes to these people. Four compilations of Bengali proverbs were published between 1832 and 1872 by the missionaries William Mortan and James Long, and folktale collections were issued by Sir George Griarson⁶ in 1873 and Reverend Lalbihary Dey in 1883. Folk rhymes found their way into these collections when the authors mistook them for the genres they were researching.

The advent of the twentieth century saw the establishment of folklore societies in various parts of the world and the publication of a number of journals devoted to folklore studies.⁷ This created a viable organizational structure for research and lent new impetus to the collection of folk literature. Yet another stimulus came from the rising spirit of nationalism and independence in colonial lands, which inspired many among the native elite to search for their cultural roots and explore various avenues of cultural revival, one manifestation of which was the collection of folk literature. In Bengal, interestingly enough, this effort was led mainly by the English-educated citizenry of Calcutta, whom the British had intended to make "English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" (THOMPSON and GARRET 1934, 315).⁸

It was Rabindranath Tagore, the Nobel-laureate of Bengal, who at this stage played the major role in the collection of folk rhymes. The fruit of his conscientious and painstaking work during the last decade of the nineteenth century was published in the form of two articles containing about one hundred Bengali folk rhymes (TAGORE 1958). In a very short period of time this collection assumed the stature of a classic, and encouraged many others to follow the path pioneered by Tagore.

At about the time that Tagore was collecting these rhymes, the Bangio Sahitya Parishad (Bengal Literary Council) was established in Calcutta, which subsequently became the center of most Bengali writing and research. The council's journal began printing Bengali folk rhymes; in its first decade of publication (1896–1905) it serialized about

three hundred rhymes that had been collected by experts from various corners of the then-undivided Bengal (DAS 1971, 71–102). The first collection of Bengali folk rhymes in book form was published in 1899 in Calcutta. Compiled by Yogindranath Sarkar under the title *Khumonir chara*⁹ [Rhymes for kids], it contains four hundred rhymes (SARKAR 1899). This collection was unique in character, and became a permanent source for researchers in this field.

The publication of folk rhymes in journals continued during the first half of the twentieth century. The end of British rule in India in 1947 resulted in the division of Bengal¹⁰ and led to the concentration of Bengali cultural and literary studies in two centers, Calcutta and Dhaka. In Calcutta the study of folk rhymes was continued by eminent scholars like Sukumar Sen and Ashutosh Bhattacharya during the 1950s and early 1960s. Ashutosh Bhattacharya alone compiled and published more than six hundred rhymes in two volumes (BHATTACHARYA 1957, 1962). Younger researchers like Kamalkumar Majumdar, Bhabataran Dutt, and Nirmalendu Bhoumik joined this movement in the late 1960s and 1970s. The compilation of DUTT (1970) consists of about one thousand rhymes, while that of BHOUMIK exceeds five hundred (1979).

The stream of Bengali folk rhyme study centering around Dhaka, the provincial capital of what was then East Pakistan, was associated mainly with the University of Dhaka and in particular its Bengali department. Muhammad Shahidullah took the pioneering role in this effort, researching folk rhyme with Muhammad Abdul Hye as part of a UNESCO project on the traditional culture of the region (SHAHIDULLAH 1963).

The rise of Bengali nationalism in East Pakistan during the early 1950s gave birth to a new interest in the roots of Bengali culture and literature. Urdu was declared the state language of both portions of Pakistan following its creation in 1947, angering the 56% of the Pakistani population who spoke Bengali and leading to a movement for the recognition of Bengali as a state language. The movement culminated on 21 February 1952, when a number of students were shot to death by soldiers during a demonstration in the streets of Dhaka. The outcome was a moral defeat for the Pakistani government, which was compelled to provide institutional support for the development of Bengali art and culture. One result was the establishment in 1955 of the Bangla Academy, committed to work in the field of Bengali literature. During the 1960s the academy undertook the collection of folk literature from a vast number of villages, with approximately five thousand rhymes being recorded by about thirty researchers. About half

of these were published by the academy during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, but a large number have yet to appear in print (SHAHED 1988, 50–52). In addition to these major organized efforts, a small but steady source of rhymes has been provided by journals and newspapers published in both Bangladesh and West Bengal.

In his book *Folklore: An Introduction*, Jawaharlal HANDOO divided the growth of Indian folklore studies into three periods: the missionary, the nationalistic, and the academic (1989, 127–44). The development of Bengali folklore studies as described above can be viewed in roughly the same way; a slightly more detailed analysis is presented in table 1.

TABLE 1

Time	Collectors	Sociopolitical factors	Purpose/remarks
1830–1885	Christian missionaries	Christian evangelism	To increase the effectiveness of missionary activities
1860–1885	British colonial administrative personnel	The incorporation of India into the British Empire (August 1858)	To better understand and govern the Indian peoples
1886–1945	Bengali elite and scholars	A rise of the spirit of nationalism, patriotism, and independence	To increase knowledge of the Bengali cultural heritage
1947–	Large numbers of amateurs and scholars	The division of Bengal as a result of the independence of India	Folk-rhyme study divided; new study developed centering around Dhaka
1955–	Academics and semiprofessional collectors	The triumph of the 1952 Language Movement in Dhaka and the recognition of Bengali as a state language of Pakistan	A large number of rhymes collected under organizational framework

BASIC CHARACTERISTICS

Folk rhyme may be basically defined as that segment of folk literature or oral tradition that consists of rhyming verse, usually recited or sung. Certain other characteristics are also looked for, however. These include:

- a. Short verses with lines that almost invariably rhyme;
- b. A basis in sound, sometimes with a musical setting;
- c. A structure with, generally, no logical idea, story, or continuity of event, but composed rather of a series of images;
- d. Composition in simple meter and language;
- e. Marked by nonsense, fantasy, absurdity, impossibility, etc.—most are free from didacticism and idealism.

This definition excludes several rhyming forms of Bengali folk literature that do not show all of the essential characteristics of folk rhyme; these forms include mantras,¹¹ magical rhymes, proverbs, riddles, and maxims (the most popular of which are those of Khona and Dak). The following may be presented as examples of true folk rhymes:

1. Ghumpaṛani masi-pisi¹² Oh aunts of sleep! Come to our
 moder baṛi eṣo, home,
 khat nai palong nai khokar There is no cot or bed, so be
 chokhe bṣo. seated on child's eye.
 Bata vore pan debṣ gal vore A tray¹³ full of betel leaf will be
 kheo, served, eat them with full
 mouth,
 Khokar chokhe ghum nai Sleep has gone away from child's
 ghum deye zeo. eye, give him some sleep.
2. Chhele ghumaṣ paṛa juṛalo Kids slept, locality silent, looters
 bṛgi eṣo deshe, came,
 Bulbulite dhan kheyechhe Birds have eaten the paddy, how
 khajna debṣ kise? can I pay the tax?
 Dhan furalṣ pan furalṣ kha- The rice and betel leaf are fin-
 jna debṣ kee? ished, what would I pay as tax?
 Ar koṭadin ṣobur koṛo rasun Kindly wait a few days, I have
 bunechhi. sown garlic.
3. Brishti paṛe ṭapur ṭapur It is raining *tapur tupur*,¹⁴ rivers
 noḍe eṣo ban, are flooded,
 Shib Thakurer biye hoṣo tin The marriage of Shib Tagore held
 konney dan. with three brides.
 Ek konney radhen baṛen arek One busy with cooking, another
 konney khan, eating,
 Arek konney na kheyē baper The other left for home¹⁵ without
 baṛi zan. taking food.

Like other oral literature, Bengali folk rhymes are anonymous in the sense that once created they become common property (unless recorded and placed in collections that identify the creators). The dynamic and lively nature of the genre leaves room for continuous change, resulting in many variations on a single rhyme. These textual variations occur in three principal ways:

I. Variation due to word changes, otherwise known as making *terminus post quem*:

1. Agdum bagdum ghoradum *Agdum bagdum ghoradum*¹⁶ are

- saje
Dhak mridōng jhājhōr bajē
- Bajte bajte challō dhuli
- Dhuli gelō shei kōmōlapuli.
2. Agdum bagdum ghoradum saje
Dhai mirgel ghaghōr bajē
- Bajte bajte pa'lo ṭhuli
- Ṭhuli gelō kōmōlaphuli.
3. Agdum bagdum ghoradum saje
Lal mirgel ghaghōr bajē
- Bajte bajte elō dhuli
- Dhuli gelō shei kōmōlapuli.
4. Agdam bagdam ghoradam saje
Dan mecra ghaghōr bajē
- Bajte bajte paṛlo ṭuri
- Ṭuri gelō kōmōlapuri.
5. Agdum bagdum ghoradum saje
Lal gheghōr ghagōr bajē
- Bajte bajte challō dhuli
- Dhuli gelō shei kōmōlapuli.
6. Agadōm bagadōm ghoradōm saje
- preparing
Drum, tom-tom, and gong are being beaten,
The drummer is moving while beating,
The drummer goes to that Komo-lapuli.
- Agdum bagdum ghoradum* are preparing,
The drummer is beating the tom-tom and cymbals,
The beating continues and blinkers fall [on the eyes],
The blind man goes to Komo-lafuli.
- Agdum bagdum ghoradum* are preparing,
Red tom-tom and cymbals are being beaten,
The drummer comes while beating,
The drummer goes to that Komo-lapuli.
- Agdam bagdam ghoradam* are preparing,
To the right, *mecra*¹⁷ and cymbals are being beaten,
The beating continues and blinkers fall [on the eyes],
The blind man goes to Komo-lapuri.
- Agdum bagdum ghoradum* are preparing,
Cymbals are beating and [the woman in the] red skirt [is dancing],
The drummer is moving while beating,
The drummer goes to that Komo-lapuli.
- Agadom bagadom ghoradom* are preparing,

It is clear that these changes in wording bring about definite changes in meaning, sound structure, and sometimes meter. Certain minor variations can even cause radical alterations in the entire context and content of the rhyme.

II. Change in the light of variations in local experience and culture:

Chhele ghumalɔ para juɔalo bɔrgi eɔ deshe	Kids slept, locality silent, looters came,
Bulbulite dhan kheyeche kha- jna debɔ kise?	Birds have eaten the paddy, how can I pay the tax?
(Second version)	
Mɔni ghumalɔ para juɔalo gɔrki eɔ deshe	Baby, slept, locality silent, land flooded.
Gulgulie dhan kheyeche kha- jna debɔ kise?	<i>Gulguli</i> ²⁰ has destroyed the paddy, how can I pay the tax?

The first of these two variants was collected in the western part of Bengal, while the second was recorded in Chittagong in the eastern part of Bangladesh. The word *bɔrgi* in the first rhyme has been transformed into *gɔrki* in the second; the other changes are minor. *Bɔrgi* is the local Bengali name for the Mahratha cavalry, notorious for their free-booting inroads. Their raids into the western part of Bengal in the first half of the eighteenth century led to social and economic disruption (HOSSAIN 1982, 11–15), the memory of which is depicted in the first version of the rhyme. The eastern section of Bengal had very little experience of this event, but the coastal areas were frequently affected by the *gɔrki*, a high tidal wave that flooded the paddies and destroyed the rice. This difference in folk experience is reflected in the above textual variations.

III. Change due to expansion and reduction in size

Various texts of the above-mentioned “*agdum bagdum ghoradum saje*” rhymes also differ in length. Four versions of this rhyme in the Tagore collection have fourteen, twelve, sixteen, and four lines respectively (TAGORE 1958, 610–11). Three in other collections have eleven, eight, and eleven lines respectively (SHAHED 1988, 57–58).

Bengali folk rhymes in dialect²¹ may be considered as yet another kind of textual variation.

CLASSIFICATION

The classification of Bengali folk rhymes is complex and difficult. Attempts to this end have been made by Rabindranath Tagore, Sukumar Sen, Ashutosh Bhattacharya and many others, but unfortunately most of the systems are incomplete, unscientific, and at times self-contradictory. The major defect of most of these classifications is that the divisions are based on more than one yardstick: some rhymes are classified according to function, others according to subject matter or main theme. Proverbs, mantras, riddles, maxims, etc. are sometimes mistakenly included because of their form and meter.

BHATTACHARYA'S system is the major exception: it is well thought out, broad, and, for the most part, logical (1962, 28–36). A modification of his divisions results in the following classification of Bengali folk rhymes:

I. Lullaby and cradle songs

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Ay ay chad mama tip diye
za,
Chader kopale chad tip diye
za.
Machh katle muru debo,
Dhan vanle kuru debo,
Kalo gorur dudh debo,
Dudh khabar bati debo
Chader kopale chad tip diye
za. | Come uncle moon! Give a <i>tip</i> ²²
Give a <i>tip</i> on the moon's [baby's]
forehead, O moon!
When I cut a fish I shall give you
the head,
When I husk the paddy I shall
give you the chaff,
I shall give you the milk of a
black cow, ²³
I shall give you a pot for drinking
the milk,
Give a <i>tip</i> on the moon's fore-
head, O moon! |
| 2. Dol dol duloni
Ranga mathay chiruni,
Bor asbe ekhani
Niye zabe tokhani. | Swing, cradle, swing
A comb in the color[fully de-
corated bride's] head,
The bridegroom will come right
now
And take you then and there. |

II. Feminine rhymes of marriage and other domestic functions

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Alta pora pa'go
Jamai ante ja'go, | O lac-dyed feet,
Go and bring the bridegroom, |
|---|--|

VI. Historical rhymes

- | | |
|--|--|
| 1. Sa-re-ga-ma-pa-dha-ni ³²
Bom phelechhe Japani,

Bomar maidhe keṭṭe sap
British bole bapre-bap. | <i>Sa-re-ga-ma-pa-dha-ni</i> ,
The Japanese have dropped
bombs,
There is a cobra in the bombs.
The British shout, <i>bapre-bap</i> . ³³ |
|--|--|

VII. Work songs and counting rhymes

- | | |
|--|---|
| 1. O buṛi o buṛi suta kat
Kail biane Olir hat,

Olir hatot zabi ni?
Chorka bandha dibi ni? | O old lady! spin some thread.
The Olir-bazaar is tomorrow
morning,
Would you go to the Olir-bazaar?
Would you mortgage the spinning
wheel? |
|--|---|

VIII. Rhymes used in folktales, fairy tales, etc.

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1. Amar kothati phuralo
Nōte gachhti muṛlo,
Keno re nōte muṛli?
Goru kenō ghas khay?
Kenore goru ghas khas?
Rakhal kenō chōray na? | Thus my story ends
The Natia-thorn withers,
Why do you wither, Natia?
Why does the cow eat grass?
Why do you eat grass, cow?
Why does the cowboy not let me
graze? |
|---|--|

SUMMARY

Bengal has a rich treasury of folk literature, of which folk rhyme is an integral and important component possessed of its own universe and notable in terms of both quality and quantity. In many languages and cultures folk rhymes are of secondary importance in comparison with folktales, ballads, etc., but in Bengali folk literature rhyme holds a place of equal importance to these other forms. Bengali folk rhyme is not simply an instrument for the amusement of children but a subject worthy of serious study, bearing most of the essential characteristics of folk tradition: anonymous and collective creation, dynamism, textual variation, social function, etc. (BUNGI 1977, 101–103). Local culture and folk experience play a dominant role in the composition and variation of these rhymes.

The origins of most Bengali folk rhymes are obscure, and are thought to be of considerable antiquity, possibly sharing the thousand-

year history of the Bengali language itself. Classification of the rhymes is difficult and still in a fluid stage, although certain hypotheses have been advanced. The collection and compilation of Bengali folk rhymes in a systematic way has a history of one century. It was inspired by the worldwide interest in folklore collection on the one hand, and by the rise of Bengali nationalism and cultural consciousness on the other. It may be mentioned here that the early collection of rhymes took place before the study of folklore assumed any organized or institutional shape in Bengal. A few literary journals and a handful of devoted scholars deserve the credit for this early work. As a result, collection came first and discussion afterwards.

The collection of Bengali folk rhymes was also inextricably linked throughout its history with sociopolitical change in Bengal. The collection process continues, with many of the recorded rhymes still unpublished. The production of a complete anthology, handbook, or dictionary of Bengali folk rhymes remains a task for the future.

NOTES

1. Indo-Aryan is one of the two major divisions of Indo-Iranian, the easternmost major division of the Indo-European language family. Classical Sanskrit is the best-known example of Old Indo-Aryan, while the label Prākṛit subsumes all Middle Indo-Aryan varieties. Māgadhi Apabhraṃśa was one of these varieties. Gradually a language later identified as Udra-Bangṛ-Kamrupi developed from this Apabhraṃśa. With the passage of time Udra became Uṛia (the language of Orissa), Kamrupi became Ahomia (of Assam), and Bangṛ became Baṅgla (COMRIE 1987, 110–41).

2. The use of the term “literature” to define the aesthetic productions of “illiterate” creators has long been a subject of controversy. In order to bridge this apparent gap, such terms as oral literature/tradition, traditional literature, verbal art, and unwritten literature were invented. In spite of the slightly pejorative connotations and a few limitations, folklore and folk literature are still widely used to define orally transmitted literature (BUNGI 1977, 101–102; UTLEY 1961, 194). In the present article the terms folklore, folk literature, oral tradition, etc., are used in a very general way.

3. A book of fifty celebrated Buddhist verses (of which 3.5 are missing) that is accepted as the earliest specimen of literature in the Bengali language. Assamese, Uṛia, and Maithili also treat the same hymns as the earliest specimens of each language.

4. Business interests had drawn the Europeans to India in the late medieval period. The Portuguese, Dutch, French, and English were the main contenders. In the mid-eighteenth century, the East India Company (the “United Company of Merchants of England trading to the East Indies”) was poised to control business in Bengal, obstructed only by Sirāj-ud-Dawla, nawab of Bengal. The Company defeated and killed him at the battle of Plassey (1757) with the help of Mīr Ja’far, the chief general of the nawab and a man whose name is now synonymous in Bangladesh with “traitor.”

5. The missionaries failed to find many converts in Bengal, but their contributions to education, literature, journalism, and printing in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries were significant (GUPTA 1971, 192–94).

6. A member of the Indian Civil Service (SHIGEMATSU 1984, 46).
7. The first folklore society was established in London in 1878, and published a journal entitled *Folklore*.
8. The Bengali elite was nourished by the English rulers in the hope that it would strengthen colonial rule, but the result was the reverse. The rulers wished to use folklore as a means to approach their subjects; nationalists used it to fight colonial power.
9. Nirmalendu Bhoumik claims that *Puturanir chaṛā* by Baishnava Basak is the first compilation of Bengali folk rhymes in book form (BHOUMIK 1979, 272). He has been unable to obtain a copy of the book, however, so this claim cannot be evaluated.
10. Bengal was a part of Suba-Bangla, along with Bihar and Orissa in Mughal India. The British divided the province in 1905 but were compelled to reunite it in 1911. With the end of British rule in 1947 and the division of the subcontinent on the basis of religion, Bengal was separated into two sections. The eastern part of the province with its Muslim majority became part of Pakistan, the western part remaining in India. East Bengal (East Pakistan) became sovereign Bangladesh following a bloody war of liberation with West Pakistan in 1971.
11. Originally a portion of the Vedas containing sacred hymns. Gradually any mystical or esoteric word recited or incanted became known as a mantra.
12. The phrase *ghumṛaṇi masi-pisi* has many textual variations, such as *ghumṛaṇir ma* and *nindorolir ma*. Sometimes these lines indicate that the common people imagined a supernatural power that controlled sleep and was able to distribute it.
13. The word "tray," which suggests a flat-surfaced container, does not convey the full meaning of the word *bata*. The traditional *bata* used for betel leaf has a cylindrical shape and is usually made of metal, with three or more compartments separating the betel leaf, lime, nuts, etc.
14. The sound of the rain as traditionally imagined in Bengal.
15. The journey of a bride to her parent's house after marriage is a ceremonial one. The journeys usually continued at regular intervals, and were known as *naior*. It is apparent from many folk rhymes that the bride never considered her in-laws' house as her own, and used to return to her parents' house whenever undesirable incidents occurred.
16. *Agdum bagdum ghoradum* has no apparent meaning, but some scholars have tried to explain it in the following way: *Dom* is a lower-caste Hindu whose responsibility is to burn dead bodies and look after the crematorium. Fishing and playing musical instruments are their alternate professions. *Agdum* means "Advance, *Dom* soldiers"; *bagdum* means "sideline *Dom* soldiers"; *ghoradum* means "*Dom* cavalry," since *ghora* means "horse" (BHATTACHARYA 1962, 228). SHASTRI even relates this rhyme to a *Dom*-Brahmin war (1980, 294).
17. Meaning uncertain; perhaps a type of musical instrument.
18. "String of bells" is inadequate to express the full meaning of *ghugur*. A *ghugur* is an anklet set with small bells used by dancers, predominantly female. The jingle of bells in an anklet usually suggests the appearance of professional dancers for entertainment, sometimes associated with drink. They were even used to entertain soldiers at the front.
19. Meaning uncertain; perhaps a type of musical instrument.
20. Yet to be identified; it may be an imaginary creature. Another possible explanation is that the sound "gulguli," which sometimes means rolling, may suggest the advancing form of a tidal wave.
21. Horizontal differentiation of Bengali dialects is very extensive both in terms of

the number of regional dialects that occur and in terms of their mutual divergence. The extreme eastern dialect of Chittagong, for instance, is unintelligible even to many speakers of other eastern Bengali dialects (KLAIMAN 1987, 511).

22. The most common meaning of *tip* is a finger impression on the forehead common to Indian women. But here no actual impression is made. The reciter of this rhyme stretches his or her hand toward the moon and then, turning the fingers, puts an imaginary impression on the forehead of the child whom he or she is trying to lull to sleep.

23. It is generally believed in Bengal that the milk of a black cow is superior.

24. The monetary unit of Bengal.

25. In Bengal almost every household, bazaar, marsh, tank, pond, etc. has a popular name. *Sukor bil* and *Olir hat* in these verses are examples.

26. "Halo!" is a popular refrain used in rhymes and songs.

27. The *Michelia Champaca*, a flower of the magnolia family.

28. *Shai* is the corrupt form of *shahi*, which means royal, *kabadi* is the name of the game, and Brindaban is a sacred place in Mathura (near Delhi) associated with Radha-Krishna.

29. The literal meaning of *phota* is a drop or blob of liquid, but the word has a special connotation in Bengal. A *phota* or roundish mark on the forehead symbolizes a victorious person. Sometimes it is used as a sectarian mark for religious preachers like vaishnava.

30. *Bida* means a bunch of twenty leaves. In Bengal there is a tradition of counting things in which twenty (*kuri*) is the highest number.

31. A *shalik* is a special kind of black sparrow with a yellow beak. *Ram* is an adjective meaning big or large, a usage that derives from Rāma of the epic *Rāmāyana*. A number of folk beliefs center around the sparrow in Bengal. For example, it is believed that the appearance of a yellow sparrow indicates the imminent arrival of guests.

32. It is the Indian equivalent of *do-re-mi-fa-so-la-ti-do*.

33. During World War II all Indian leaders except Subash Chandra Bose supported the British, but the popular mood was anti-British since there was a history of oppression. "Bapre-bap" is a common exclamation in Bengal indicating fear or surprise.

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