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CHITTAGONG stands on the south-east of Bangladesh 12 miles of sea coast looking the restless waters of the Bay of Bengal. Its political history has been tumultuous and its culture, consequently, has absorbed influences from a number of sources. Her geographical situation has given her a strategic importance, which all these opposing and interneccine powers—the Arakanese, the Burmese, the Tippera Kings and the Bengal Sultans—had to acknowledge and hence the ever changing political drifts that Chittagong had to learn to live through over the last thousand years or so. When the European traders and pirates entered this political drama, they only added to the tumult. In fact, when it brought with them their learn-

the mid-Tenth Century the Arakanese King Tau-La-Ting Tsandra invaded Chittagong and build a monument near Kumira to commemorate his victory with the inscription: Tsitta-Gunuz (there shall be no war). He hardly knew that the inscription was going to be a bitter and ironic comment on the history of the place in the next millennium.

Chittagong's history has a glorious Buddhist past. In the wake of the Revivalist Movement started by Sankaracharya in northern India, the Buddhists were persecuted and hounded out of their boundaries. The long refugee trail moved eastward and found a sanctuary in Chittagong. The Buddhists brought with them their learn-

ing and culture. Chakrashala and Dhang became important centres of Buddhist learning. Pandit Vinara whose exact location is uncertain, but which is supposed to have in Chittagong, became the most famous monastery where Buddhist scholars used to participate in exciting religious and academic debates during the Sixth and Seventh centuries. Hence Buddhism is an important factor in the history of its culture. Chittagong has, till today, the largest Buddhist population in the Sub-continent.

The most important factor in the evolution of her culture is the Arab and Muslim influence.

CHITTAGONG SUPPLEMENT

DRAKA

other social rites.

The fourth and perhaps the last factor is the influence of the Europeans particularly of the Portuguese and the English. A sizeable Portuguese population, descendants of the Portuguese who were obliged to settled at Firinghee Bazar by Shista Khan, still live peacefully in Chittagong. The dialect has absorbed a number of Portuguese and English words.

All these influences have contributed to the evolution of a culture which today every Chittagonian is proud of their dialect with its unmistakable heavy accents and difficult intonation, their religious bent of mind, their respect for the holy shrines, the wearing of lungi and thumi by a large section of men and women, their necklace

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of dry-fish and even their pastimes, holikha and kite-flying. The culture of Chittagong stands out distinct against the larger backdrop of Bangladeshi culture.

EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Chittagong has had educational institutions since its Buddhist past.

The Buddhist kvaungs of monastic schools were the earliest known educational institutions. Marco Polo writing in 1272 A.D. says, 'they have masters who maintain schools.' An elaborate educational system must have come with the coming of the Muslims. They built mosques and the inevitable Madrasahs which catered to the educational needs of the people. But the system was streamlined and brought under state control.

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ing the Mughals. When the British took over in 1760, they started building schools for the education of people who would man their offices. The earliest school in the district was built in 1880 (the present Collegiate School). But with the abolition of Persian in 1835 Muslim participation in English education was not immediate. The Imperial Gazetteer of 1908 regrets this lack of the Muslims in education. The total number of primary schools in the district was 835 in 1908 with a total enrolment of 33,171 students. Of these, the vast majority must have been Hindus. However, with the Muslim Renaissance, the Muslims of Chittagong started coming forward in the first quarter of this century. The partition in

1947 gave the Muslim population further impetus in this direction. The rate of literacy stood 16.17 in 1961 and this, hopefully, will rise to an expected 25 per cent by the next census.

Chittagong today has such noteworthy institutions as the Cadet College at Faujderhat, Chittagong College, Commerce, Government Girls' College and Marine Academy. With the establishment of the University at Chittagong, Chittagong has at-

tained structural self-sufficiency in education and this, hopefully will help her towards a revival of her past learning.

It is in the field of literature that Chittagong's achievement is most spectacular in the Fifteenth through the Seventeenth centuries. The earliest Bengali dictionary was written by Jatadhara Acharya of Debakar (near Feni). A copy of this dictionary written in the Fifteenth Century is

preserved in the India Office Library. A Galaxy of poets patronized by the rulers and the nobility flourished during these periods—Muzammil (1440), Mauhammad Kabir, Bhabanirath, Purmeswar Das (1493-1538), Srikrira Nandi Afzal Ali Shabirid Khan, Shaikh Paran (1550-1615), Shaikh Muttalib (1595-1661), Nasrullah Khan (1560-1623), Sayyid Sultan (1550-1648), Daulat Wazir Bahram Khan (1560-1575), Muhammad Khan Mardan Qureshi Magan (death-1660), Muhammad Naqvi, Shamsheer Ali, Dwija Ratideb Abdul Hakim Nawaizish Khan Daulat Qazi, Alawai (1607-1680) and others whose names also deserve special mention. Of these, Alawai and Daulat Qazi were the greatest poets of their times. During the British period Nabin Chandra Sen, Adhar Lal Sen, Nabin Chandra Das Kavirajakar, Sardar Chandra Ghose were writers and poets of repute. In the wake of the Muslim Renaissance

were the Alam Brothers of Fatehabad—Shamsul Alam, Didiurul Alam, Wahidul Alam and the most famous of them, Mabbubul Alam who besides his literary achievement has also written a three-volume history of Chittagong. Abdul Karim Sahitya Varshad (1869-1953) needs special mention here. A dedicated scholar, he spent all his life collecting Bengali Manuscripts bringing to light some 150 Muslim poets of the Middle ages. With Dr. Enamul Huq, another scholar of repute, he was co-author of the Arakan Raj Shabha Bangla Sahitya. Mention also must be made of Abul Fazal who is an eminent Bengali writer. Bulbul Chowdhury, a great exponent of oriental dance was born in Chittagong, also has the distinction of having produced a scul-

ptress—Noverta Ahmed.

Chittagong has a glorious past which her people, a seafaring and brave, must try to revive in the larger context of an independent Bangladesh.