

009

CHITTAGONG stands on the south-east of Bangladesh, 122 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 interlocking powers—the Arakanese, the Burmese, the Tippera Kings and the Bengal Sultans—had to acknowledge and hence the over 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 in

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-Gung (here 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 move eastward and found a sanctuary in Chittagong. The Buddhists brought with them their learn-

Education,

ing and culture. Chakrashala and Diang 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

Cultural And Literary Development Of Chittagong

—M. Harunur Rashid

(M.A. Cantab)

The Arab traders started frequenting the port since the 8th Century. Chittagong was a key point in their Sulukul Bahar their sea-route to the far-east. They were fascinated by the abundance of green around the city and they fondly started calling her Shahre-Sabi, the City of Green. The Arabs gradually started settling on the banks of the Karnafuliv. As is characteristic of their race, the Arabs never took their women out of their own country. They would convert native girls and marry them. It was about this time that the preachers and saints brought the message of Islam to this part of the world. People were moved by their love, affection and spiritual powers. Thus Islam conquered the hearts of the people long before the political conquest of the place by the Bengal Sultans. Hence the Arab influence is obvious and deep-rooted in the culture of the place. The dialect which is almost unintelligible to people of other parts of Bangladesh has absorbed a large share of Arabic words. Place names like Sholok, Babar, Alkaran, Gulirpar etc. are reminiscent of its Arab traders. Words like, Kadda (a big

earthen cup) Bainduar (the back side of house) Hanak Sabak (lesson) etc. are derived from Arab. Arabic grammar has influenced its use of the negative. Arab has also penetrated into the idioms in a curious combination of Arabic and native words, viz Faan Lager (I understand).

ELABORATE EDUCATION SYSTEM

Marked a ethnic stronghold towards the end of the Thirteenth Century and subsequent of Chittagong. The Muslim conquest of Chittagong towards the end of the Thirteenth Century and subsequent consolidation of the headquarters at Fatehabad (a place close to the University), gave the place its indelible Islamic stamp which on the Muslim conquest in 1666 got further imprinted. During these years of Muslim rule, Chittagong for the first time got its elaborate education system through mosques, madrasas and khankas. Royal patronage helped poets and writers flourish and when the Arakan court became a tributary of the Bengal Sultans, it gave shelter

and patronage to a galaxy of scholars and poets from Chittagong including Alawal, the brightest luminary of his time.

The third important factor in its culture is the coming of the Hindus who were not the original inhabitants of the place. The first batch of Hindu immigrants came with the Mughals in 1666 to man their offices. Most of these Hindus settled in and around Patiya. The second batch of Hindus came with the British and they settled in Razan area. During the British rule the Hindu culture received royal patronage and tended to support the traditional Muslim culture, particularly their wedding ceremony, superstitious belief and

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 settle at Eiringhee Bazar by Shalsta 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 Chittagongian 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 traditional

TUESDAY OCTOBER 29 1985

of dry-fish and even their pastimes, holi-khela 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 monasteries of monastic schools were the earliest known educational institutions. Marco Polo writing in 1272 reports, "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. (See Page 10)

(2)

(From Page 12)

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

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 century through the Seventeenth centuries. The earliest Bengali dictionary was written by Jatadhar 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), Mauharan Kabir, Bhabaninath. Purnanand Das (1493—1538), Srikanth Nandi Afzal Ali Shabirid Khan, Shaikh Paran (1550—1615), Shaikh Muttalib (1593—1661), Nasrullah Khan (1560—1623), Sayyid Sultan (1550—1643), Daulat Wazir Bahram Khan (1560—1575), Muhammad Khan Mardan Quaratshi Magan (death—1640), Muhammad Naqul, Shamsur Ali, Dwija Ratideb Abdul Hakim Nawazish Khan Daulat Qazi, Alawal (1607—1680) and others whose names also deserve special mention. Of these, Alawal and Daulat Qazi were the greatest poets of their times. During the British period Nabib Chandra Sen, Adhar Lal Sen, Nabib Chandra Das Kaviragunakar, Sush Chandra Ghose were writers and poets of repute. Among the Muslims who wrote in the wake of the Muslim Renaissance

were the Alam Brothers of Fatehabad—Shamsul Alam, Dikarul Alam, Wahidul Alam and the most famous of them, Mahbubul Alam who besides his literary achievement has also written a three-volume history of Chittagong. Abdul Karim Sahitya Viharad (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 Haq, another scholar of repute, he was co-author of the Arakan Rai Shabbay Bangia Shahitya. 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 sculptress—Novera Ahmed.

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