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Bhoot.Com Podcast as a New Media Network:

***Ghatana* and Its Use in the New Media**

Master's Thesis

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Table of Contents

For Professor William Westerman as a token of gratitude.

(This thesis has been in the making since 2013, when I made the virtual acquaintance of Professor William Westerman and started interviewing elderly people in my neighbourhood. Over eight years my raw emotion has transformed into an endeavor in the field of folklore.)

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Introduction

Earlier scholarship on orality, as closely related to storytelling, and use of technologies such as radio, television and telephony raises concern over the shift of 'oral expression' to 'writing' and of primary to secondary orality as they appear in new media (Ong 1978), and its resultant influence on the understanding of what communication is (Ong 1960). However, in this thesis I do not question the concept of orality, primary or secondary, rather my focus is on the Bangladeshi supernatural narratives that are appearing in podcasts in the era of online interaction. I agree that new media has a role in "constructing social, linguistic, and expressive forms" for "face-to-face and virtual communication" (Blank 2013: 106). My standpoint in this respect, too, does not contradict what Blank maintains about the 'virtual corporeality' of the new communication and the benefit it provides to wider public exposure and interaction (ibid.: 110, 112).

The virtual, non-face-to-face interaction is a well-established concept in Europe and many other parts now, as folklorist Simon J. Bronner wrote when talking about "Digitising and Virtualising Folklore" in 2009. He says

> … the Internet … is certainly viewed as postmodern in its transcendence of space and time, it is popularly constructed in the model of the pre-modern village, which raises comparisons to a global village governed by tradition rather than nationalistic rule of law. Its interactive empowerment and constructiveness are among its culturally expected addictive features. (2009: 39)

Bangladesh has been witnessing this rapid shift since 2015. Virtual platforms, such as podcasts, TikTok, Over-The-Top, etc., and concepts, such as vlogging, online classes, working from home, etc., are still unfolding in Bangladesh. This rapid expansion also involves and witnesses the transmission of traditional folklore genres into such platforms. The effect it has on the Bangladeshi scholars, as well as the general public, is yet to be determined. There were occasions when it seemed that they were petrified by the way any user can easily perform and reach a wider audience almost instantaneously with content and tended to discard this content as meaningless imitation. Or at certain points they become alert, for instance to a wedding song that went viral at the beginning of 2021, for preservation and copyright. Their concerns can be divided into two groups, one sought to ascertain an author for the wedding song while the other strived to credit it to the oral tradition. Zafir Setu (2021) in his article in Bengali settled the dispute regarding

ownership by presenting various but authentic versions of this song originating at the same time in different regions, therefore, rendering the authorship to the folk. This debate, however, did not investigate the transmission of the song and the folk into a new media and platform. They basically do not pay much attention to this emerging virtual social sphere and seem to dwell on the idea that folklore is 'devolving' (Dundess 1969) from authentic to unauthentic and towards commercial free use, hence, the search for authorship and authentic versions of the song.

Quite on the contrary, it requires a study from a non-devolutionary perspective of the emergence of folklore tradition in virtual platforms to perceive the nature, reason and function of the transmission. One specific platform for the thesis is easier to concentrate on rather than many at a time, hence, the choice of the ghost story podcast. It can be likened with, but not limited to, horror podcasting as defined by Danielle Hancock and Leslie McMurtry:

> … a pre-recorded, audio horror fiction form, which is available for on-the-go download and listening through mobile audio devices… It is one of the fastest-developing horror forms, representing a dramatic shift from a supposedly visually dominated culture and entertainment industry and opening up new potentials and meanings of Gothic and horror fiction. Furthermore, through podcasting's unique properties of audio/visual mediation, temporal disjuncture/on demand play, and mobility, … [it] assert[s] a fundamental development of audio horror, which distinguishes podcasting from not only cinematic horror but, crucially, from radio and oral horror forms also. (2017: 2)

The other feature of such a podcast is that it "moves with… [listeners], occludes the external aural world, and speaks to… [them] wherever… [they] may go" and "offers "refuge" from "the real" by "Gothicization of that" (ibid.: 3). The podcast in question slightly differs from this definition in this sense that it is streamed live first and then uploaded for on-demand play. It is also arguable whether it can be, if not likened to, then at least differentiated from, oral horror.

The research targets in this thesis are two: podcast narratives and their performance, and the collective folk and their identity in the podcast. However, I will tackle these based on related questions and will proceed to find the answers within the scope of this thesis. The questions are: Why and how are supernatural narratives (re)appearing and spreading in the new media of Bangladesh? What happens when a Bangladeshi conventional storytelling event is transmitted via new media? What

becomes of the genre, of the storytellers, their performances and functions? Who are the audience for such events?

The first question raises the issue of the background Bangladeshi socio-economic dimension as an actor that facilitates such development and thus the answer will draw on that. The second question is directed to the shift of social gathering from face-to-face to the virtual sphere and thus will refer to the network itself, its structure, function, and interaction with members. The last two questions are related to the second and hence they offer an insight into the role of the performers and the audience and the performance itself in a different situation (i.e. via virtual media).

The concerns regarding the performance of the narratives and their genre shared in the podcast are significant in this sense that storytellers do not perform face-to-face here. Therefore, they must adapt and adjust themselves and their narrative repertoires to the podcast reality. One of these would be the use of the rhetoric of truth. As a performative tool it helps performance in face-to-face events by storytellers. Apart from oral rhetoric they can use gesture, body language, facial expression, and the cognition of the audience as an instrument for successful presentation and comprehension of narratives (Oring 2008). But in the podcast the audience are geographically scattered and, therefore, the concern about performance is that it is aimed at entertaining and convincing them of the storyteller's eloquence. This is one of the issues discussed in this thesis in connection with the podcast. I also speak about the genre of the narrative that storytellers introduce as *ghatana*. I propose *ghatana* as a Bengali vernacular genre, i.e. a narrative of any event or occurrence that is claimed to have happened and is ubiquitous in its use in conversation. However, the use of *ghatana* in the podcast performance, I present in contrast with a conventional account of *ghatana* as a narrative, is extended rather than mono-episodic and conversational (Tangherlini 1990).

I also propose in this thesis that the podcast as a platform of interaction acts as a network thereof raising the question of the identity of the folk. The problem of understanding people according to the identity ascribed them from the community where they are born would not be possible for their virtual presence. This raises the next concern of this thesis. The definition of folk as "any group of people whatsoever who share at least one common factor" (Dundes 1978: 7) is criticised as a homogenous concept that "cut[s] the social universe into various kinds of discrete segments" (Bauman 1971: 32). Instead, folk are perceived in differentiated terms connected by networks of

5

differentiated people through interaction via performances (Noyes 2016a). I agree with this standpoint and identify the folk as they are addressed during performance in the podcast as storyteller, host, listener/audience member, and moderator.

This may result in a question about homogeneity in this sense that these identities are global, not local. However, post-national (cf. Nigam 2009) scholarship in South Asia expresses concerns about the quest for "some pure *uncontaminated indigenous* self" and in the "domain of thought and knowledge" a pursuit for a singular "pristine source of authentic knowledge – an indigenous *intellectual/philosophical* tradition" (Nigam 2020: 29, emphasis original). They are also aware that this quest "turned out to be futile, leading only to violent attempts to get rid of 'impurities' that inevitably become part of life as it moves away from that pristine 'source'" (ibid.: 29). They instead perceive of history and people in a hybrid sense (ibid.: 21) and their endeavours are directed towards "…not rejecting Western theory or philosophy but at treating it as one among the many sources of…thinking" that they "*think across traditions*" (ibid.: 28, emphasis original). In doing so, they progress by receiving from every possible source and gradually adopt it into their own (Chakrabarti and Weber 2015 qtd. in Nigam 2020: 19).

My position is also partly in line with them. However, in this thesis I also show that the podcast itself is an embodiment of what they refer to as *think[ing] across tradition*. In this sense that the narratives in the podcast come from a different style and tradition of the Bengali-speaking audience worldwide and gradually become part of the network's culture with the performance of them by storytellers, an inseparable part of it. People of the podcast, however, may not be sophisticated scholars but they represent how fusion occurs among different cultures in new networks and thus form new cultures and traditions. In this vein, the podcast network also shows what Nigam is trying to establish as decolonising in a pluralistic sense as opposed to a nation-state by filling people's minds consciously (or I would say unconsciously) with hybridized components (ibid.: 29). But I stress, in line with Noyes (2016a, 2016b), that it is already evident in the virtual (and also in real) world as a fusional process where people instead of opting for a hybrid identity blend in different networks with differentiated identities based on the network's performances by acting as Muslim when they interact with Muslim network. Their action is that of listeners when they listen to a podcast and when they

play games, their role is of gamers. In all cases they are interconnected by their actions rather than by their preconceived identities.

This thesis consists of three chapters. In the first chapter, I deal with the background of the rise of virtual platforms and the reasons that facilitate it. A historical overview of the Bangladeshi mindset by scholars propose that it is made up of a triangular confluence of modernity, religiosity and globalisation, and that this confluence alienates the folk from their traditional self as they navigate their way through newer cults (Sofa 2002; Rahman 2017). It also provides a theoretical background to the rise and influence of consumerism in lifestyle and behaviour and seemingly in the appearance or reappearance of folk genres. The results of this are manifold and are the sole reasons behind the rise of the different media where people now largely interact. Storytelling performance is among the many outputs of these changes. This transformation of interaction platform, from face-to-face to virtual, leads to the probable modification of genres, social bases and performance of folklore narratives as they attempt to fit in with the new platforms. Riaz (2009) concentrates more on the transformation of the Muslim faith while Rahman (2017) stresses the Bangladeshi people's thoughtless practice of religion, modernity and tradition. In fact, Riaz stresses the disappearance of the syncretic belief in a similar way to that in which Dundes discussed 'devolutionary' premise of folklore.

The second chapter is basically the elaboration on *ghatana* as a genre, its use in the podcast and its performance. As will be shown in the chapter, there is a basic difference in the oral face-to-face use of the genre in contrast with that on the podcast, i.e. *ghatana* can be perceived as a combination of fiction, belief, ritual and legend received from various cultures and traditions that exhibits contemporary technological reality. This leads to concern for the conventional rhetoric used by the storytellers. While I do not deny the use of them in the new media, I also demonstrate that there is a shift in performance. In face-to-face oral events, the participants share some common understanding (or context) and thus their narratives tend to be understood. This shared understanding or context is orally "unrepresentable" (Kapchan 2003: 137); when the performance shifts to online platforms, it reaches a wider and more diverse audience. This diverse audience may not share the same context, challenging the storytellers to adjust and innovate rhetoric, to syncretise within the performance. From this line of thought, I propose that these changes, adaptations, modifications in performances are valuable

ethnographic resources. At least performances in the podcast show how the supernatural is adapting to the technological era, how conventional beliefs, customs and rituals are accumulating from across traditions in the performances. In doing so they create the possibilities of transmission both into the network and outside it.

In the third chapter, my focus is on the structure and function of the network, its folk and their identity. In line with the first and second chapters, it focuses on the settlement of parts of the Bangladeshi population in different platforms thus connecting them with a larger populace, which would not be possible in a face-to-face network. This leads to a shift in the social base, at least from the household to a new and diverse one. It is because of the mobility, both offline and online, and diversity of the people that they gradually develop newer identities and statuses created by their performances in daily life in contrast with their ascribed identities. It may not be a new concept, rather, I acknowledge people's mobility since time immemorial and hence the diversity of religion, culture and customs in Bangladesh. However, this is more evident now with the virtual communication and its increasing expansion in daily reality (Bronner 2009) makes it more visible. Hence, the understanding of the social basis of folklore can be seen in terms of network (Noyes 2016b) rather than in a homogenous and territorial sense. The result of this, as I present in the third chapter, creates a global identity repertoire for the network. This I view as a tendency of the time we live in, in which people, instead of perceiving themselves in national and homogenous terms, know themselves in the moment of performance. However, this does not reject the national (or more importantly religious national) and racial factors marking identity. But it does create frequent dialogue among people of different cultures, beliefs and races and thus the podcast members' identity, too, is already syncretising with diverse traditions and taking global forms in which indigenous (or 'one's own') and many other components of identity integrate, as it did in hundreds of years ago.

In total this thesis offers an understanding of the podcast as a network, not as a community or homogenous group who interact in a combined way through storytelling and listening. Amid the rapid growth in consumerist culture, this podcast offers a view of how this network in virtual reality absorbs influences from across tradition and culture and syncretises them, and how the virtual-gadget oriented folk create visual or virtually transmittable and syncretic narratives in a global form in changed circumstances. This understanding reduced the idea of territoriality, created space for plurality in place of one

pure or authentic culture, and opened up the possibility of dialogue beyond physical territory by eradicating the spatial and temporal constraints usually present when becoming part of networks.

From this line a further understanding of the network folk in syncretic terms will be palpable. Its use has been belief-oriented both positively and negatively by scholars (Stewart 1999). However, 'hybrid' as a close synonym of 'syncretic' too has the same sorts of concern. "There is no doubt that the notion of hybridization has had politically charged often contradictory currency throughout the past two centuries. Nor are the contemporary uses of hybridity any more coherent or consensual" (Kapchan & Strong 1999: 242; also cf. Blank 2013 & Stewart 1999). On the other hand, in their use of the word 'syncretic' Riaz (2009) and Banerjee (2010) exhibit a positive outlook towards it. Even though syncretic belief is in tension with rigid religious belief because of the rise in nationalism and religious reinterpretation of myths, legends, etc. (Banerjee 2010: 18, 56), syncretic belief developed naturally in a social sphere where plethora of belief co-existed. But the shift came from the top of the state and society, which imposed secularism and rigidity thus breaking the cultural and religious plurality (Nigam 2020). For all these reasons, I use 'syncretic' as a less ambiguous and positive term in its general sense, rather than limiting it in its link to belief, in which it "involves the combination of elements from two or more *different* traditions" (Stewart 1999: 55, emphasis original).

Chapter 1: Background

1.1   Problems Understanding the Bangladeshi Mindset

Bangladesh is a South Asian country that shares borders with India and Myanmar, and has a coast on the Bay of Bengal. Situated in a temperate climate zone, Bangladesh has a total population of about 166 million, 90% of whom are Muslim. Hindu, Christian, Buddhist and the indigenous inhabitants constitute the rest of the population[1]. Bangladesh as a state came into being through the liberation war of 1971 against Pakistan.

The geographic territory that is now Bangladesh underwent occupation by different regimes over many centuries. Occupants such as Aryan, Gupta, Maurya, Pala, Sena, Afghan and Mughal intermingled with the local Dravidians. Sumanta Banerjee (2010) and Ali Riaz (2009) outline these forces and the outcome of their influences in the lives of people as producing "syncretic" belief. It has been a dominant aspect of the region of Bengal.

This syncretic belief encountered British colonial rulers who introduced European concepts of modernity, Enlightenment, nation, and nationalism to the territory of Bengal (now West Bengal and Bangladesh) culminating the Bengal Renaissance of the 19th and 20th centuries (Bhattacharjee 1986: 19). This initially began with two groups of educated Hindus based in Kolkata. The reformative Rammohanian tradition pioneered by Raja Ram Mohan Roy (1772-1833)[2] highlighted the Indian Middle Age (1200-1760) as marked by superstition, blind faith in divinity, casteism, absence of subjects' participation in governance; those, in their view, were neither logical nor humanist (for example *Satidaha pratha*, the custom of cremating the widow alive with her deceased husband) in an objective and scientific observation (Bodhichitta 2020, Bhattacharjee 1986; Tagore 1933 qtd. in Bhattacharjee 1986: 12). They focused on a conscious syncretisation of European tradition with Hindu tradition through reinterpretation of ancient texts such as the *Upanishad* and the *Ramayana* in a liberalist framework of logic and objectivity (Bhattacharjee 1986: 19, 22; Bodhichitta 2020, Nigam 2020: 33). On the other hand, the

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[1] See https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/bangladesh-population/

[2] K.S. Bhattacharjee maintains that Raja Ram Mohan Roy 'stirred' 'traditional society of Bengal' for a humanist, rationalist and liberalist reform of Hindu society. In doing so he promoted the replacement of traditional institutions with those promoting Western education. (1986: 106-107)

radical "Young Bengals[3]" stressed rationalism and rejected tradition (Thapar 1960: 3, Rahman 2017: 869-70).

Following the sepoy revolution of 1857[4], this reformist liberal standpoint took a nationalist turn led by prominent novelist Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (Bhattacharjee 1986: 26). *Shikha Gosthi*, consisting of Muslim writers centred in Dhaka also joined the renaissance as reformists, although they stressed the reformation of society by synthesising Muslim tradition with the European Enlightenment (Islam 2013 cited in Rahman 2017: 870). Opposed to the ideals of the *Shikha Goshthi*, another group evolved who stressed the use of Middle Eastern culture as a Muslim tradition focusing on "Islamic Revivalism[5]" (Chowdhury 2011 qtd. in Rahman: 870).

The Islamic Revivalist group is what Ali Riaz names "transnational" and traces its origin back to the colonial period 1757-1947 (2009: 86). Both Riaz (ibid.: 86) and Rahman (2017: 872) incorporate this with Wahabism, the scripture-based transnational Islamic reformation movement. This, they claim, made local tradition inapt for Muslims as they subscribed to Middle Eastern tradition initially by synthesising it with local geography and contrasting it with Hindu tradition (Sofa 2002). Thus, the tradition shared among Muslims across the world is disseminated in Bangladesh. Rahman opines that this was due to an "identity crisis of Muslims in colonial Bengal" (2017: 873). The Muslim elites, once rulers, lost the war of Plassey in 1757 against the British East India Company. While they dissociated themselves from the victor East India Company and were financially behind, the Rammohanian reformists understood the significance of "right of

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[3] Bhattacharjee (1986) gives an overview of the Young Bengals as

> Scholars who have so far studied this subject have identified the members of Young Bengal as students from the Hindu College of Calcutta who came into personal contact with Henry Louis Vivian Derozio (1809-31) or at least who imbibed from his thoughts an uncompromising spirit of free enquiry in every sphere of life. The leading members of Young Bengal were born between 1804 and 1815 and died between 1855 and 1898. (103)

[4] The revolt of sepoys employed under the British East India Company began a mass movement against the company. One of the important reasons for this was the rumored use of fat in cartridges. Muslim sepoys were mobilised with the rumor that pig fat was used, while Hindus were convinced that cow fat was being used. It is important here to note that pork and beef are prohibited respectively in Islam and Hinduism. This movement is also known as the 1857 Revolution, Mutiny, etc. (Cf. Sarkar 1979).

[5] Prominent Bangladeshi author, journalist and politician Abul Mansur Ahmad's (1898-1979) Bengali memoir *Fifty Years of Politics As I Saw It* [1969] (2013) guided me in understanding the rise of the Islamic Revivalist movement and the progressive *Shikha Goshti* at the juncture of *Swadesi* Movement, the Non-Cooperation Movement and the Khelafat Movement (in support of the Ottoman empire) during and after the First World War.

choice of vocation" and chose to pursue that through education institutions established by the British colonial rulers (Bhattacharjee 1986: 23).

During the liberation war of Bangladesh in 1971, local Islamic parties supported oppressive West Pakistan to safeguard Islamic brotherhood. Post 1971 Bangladesh, for some time, banned Islamic parties as secularism was taken as "one of the four state principles in the constitution" (Riaz 2009: 82). Riaz also maintains that after the murder of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, the founding Prime Minister, the military regimes succeeding him adopted closer ties with Middle Eastern Muslim countries and introduced Islam as the state religion. There is still a divide in education institutions between madrasas for Muslims and secular schools, colleges, and universities for all. All of this started a shift in practiced Islam, in Riaz's view, from a syncretic and inclusive social form to a rigid, political, and exclusive transnational one. This transnational *"umma"* or fraternity of the followers of the Prophet Mohammad (ibid.: 96) is on the rise. It entered through Islamic preaching and political movements, short term migrations of Bangladeshis and Islamic charity. It is strengthened by global crises such as the Palestine-Israel conflict, the 9/11 terror attack followed by the global war on terrorism and subsequent Afghanistan and Iraq war, etc.

The influences, in Ali Riaz's view, of this on society are manifold. Religiosity has increased in terms of mosque attendance, Islamic attire, and religious festivals. It has popularised the debate on "authentic" Islam by abandoning the syncretic views and practices and aiming to establish, for the Muslim elite quest for a new identity during the colonial period, a "muslim Identity as opposed to national identities bounded by culture and geography" (ibid.: 96, 99). This is a result of what he refers to as "an absence of clear understanding of secularism in Bangladesh", which resulted in "latent tension" (ibid.: 83).

Similarly, they opine, the imposed ideals of the Bengal Renaissance are, in the Bangladeshi mindset, vague. In Rahman's view, they are "limited to material aspects of Western modernity such as modern buildings and the English language" while the universal aspects of modernity like "tolerance, rationality, openness to other cultures" are not put up with (2017: 874). Therefore, modernity in Bangladesh (or, I underscore, in the Bangladeshi state) is exhibited "in hypnotized consumerism" that encourages people to "believe in a putative cosmopolitan culture and count value of life in terms of money, consumption, entertainment rather than in terms of duty, community, and a strong social

bond" (ibid.: 874). Accordingly, Bangladeshi people are now alienated from their traditional identity. In Rahman's words, they "are in identity crisis, alienated, and somewhat exiled from their own realm" and relentlessly try to "negotiate among secularism, faith, and Bengali culture, and equally garner . . . the benefits of globalization" (ibid.: 874, 875).

The problem with this view is that it perceives people the way the colonialist rulers viewed the colonised. It only slightly differs in this sense that people used to be viewed as barbarous. But now, with the interference of the state, globalisation and transnational religion, they have become imitators, and hence comes the end of syncretism. For this very reason one can propose a similar critical view of virtual media and its use of folklore traditions in Bangladesh. The state's conscious effort to break the natural syncretic process with imposed secularism is the reason behind all of this, in Aditya Nigam's view.

> . . . by forcing a secular order on entire populations whose lifeworld is populated by ancestors and spirits who make their this-worldly journey more bearable and liveable, modernity leaves them bereft in the face of impersonal forces like the Law and the State. This situation is always disempowering and diminishing in more ways than one—stripping life of its richness for which modernity has no substitute. The tired discourse of modernity, scientific temper and secularism over the decades has simply imposed a certain modernist common sense without any discernment and discrimination between different modes of being. (2020: 208)

The alienation of the Bangladeshi people did not happen naturally. Rather, it was a result of religious and secularist imposition coming from the state. However, it is undeniable that there is a change in the social environment in Bangladesh and that people are resettling themselves in diverse locations both inside and outside Bangladesh and in virtual spheres. At the same time, one cannot discount the large population claiming them to depthless imitators who live in an era of consumerism.

1.2. Bangladeshi Folklore and its Social Base

The problems of the shift in the Bangladeshi mindset owing to alienation is not an issue created by the people. At least it raises the question of tradition and its representation by the state and the media. Sumanta Banerjee maintains that state and media selectively uphold components of folk tradition that favour the imposition of secularism (Banerjee 2010: 22). Swadhin Sen (2017) also elaborates on the issue:

> The contemporary consumerism and politics of representation have selectively manipulated various genres of traditions and their representations in popular domain under the rubric of '*Baul/Fakir* song', culture, and lifestyle. They are one of the most celebrated products in commoditised consumer culture these days. The invention of the categories in Bangladesh, like *lokgaan* (folk songs), *loksahitya* (folk literature), *loksanskriti* (folk culture), *loknritya* (folk dance), *loknatya* (folk drama), etc., overtly represent homogenisation and reductionism of differences, plurality, and embodiment into authorised, sanctioned and commoditised categories of 'folk'. (18, emphasis original)

Swadhin Sen maintains that the *baul*, or mystic songs, as a strongly represented genre of Bangladeshi folklore, are selected and made popular by state and media as secular components of folk culture ignoring their dimension in the mystic world of the *bauls* and *fakirs*[6]. While there are many subgroups among them, *bauls* are now defined in a generic sense and hence anyone who performs a folk song is considered a *baul* (Chakraborty 2014: 26). This tendency, portrayed by Sen and Chakraborty, is viewed as caused by social reality. Rahman considers that there is a "triangular confluence" of the "Bengal Renaissance", the "rise of Islamism" and the "consequences of globalization" (2017: 876). This creates the mindset of Bangladeshis who, they claim, do not go deeper into modernity, Islam, and local culture, but merely blend these three categories in their lives.

Then on the other side lie the representation of folk tradition in new media, not owned by state or mainstream media but rather where people instead represent their tradition and perform it. This tendency, in Rahman's view, becomes merely an imitation. This view of the folk is problematic and points to a lack of understanding of

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[6] *Baul* and *fakirs* are synonymous in Sudhir Chakraborty's opinion. People refer to Hindu mystics as *baul* while they regard Muslim mystics as *fakirs* in his book *Baul Fakir Katha* (2014: 26).

the changed social realities of Bangladesh. It is important initially to identify folk and their social base in a new framework. Richard Bauman (1971) proposes:

> …true understanding of the social base of folklore must be based upon investigations which focus upon those social identities which are relevant to the performance of folklore within the context of particular situation and events for it is only here that we will find the true locus of the interrelationship between the folklore and its bearers. (1971: 38).

Zafir Setu (2021) looks backward for a solution to the authorship of a wedding song that went viral on TikTok in 2021, stressing not the bearers of the wedding song but rather its authenticity. But Bangladeshis have been congregating in different professional and online platforms, followed by regional and international migrations. The social base is formed where the song is performed and transmitted through a network within which communities develop (cf. Briggs 2012; Noyes 2016b). This is the situation in which the performance of a song happens and in which it interrelates with its bearers.

In this vein, it is important to consider the new normal social spheres in Bangladesh. Showbiz is moving to over-the-top platforms for individual consumption. Office work to some extent is shifting to remote working. Since mid-2020 education institutions have been shut and run online despite concerns over the digital divide (Mohiuddin 2020; Laden 2021). These factors have revolutionised the use of devices and technology in Bangladesh. In line with this there is an increase in online platforms, for example podcasts, OTT, YouTube, TikTok (Nusaiba & Nikita 2020; Chowdhury 2021; Sultana 2021). This trend has expanded its sales to virtual lands for interactional purposes (Carmiel 2021), where people "can display their . . . art collections, walk around with friends, visit buildings and attend events" by purchasing space (Howcroft 2021). Therefore, this rapidly growing technology culture in Bangladesh accommodates millions of Bangladeshis into a new virtual world where they are syncretising different traditions. This sphere avails them with opportunities to perform and interact and thus forms one of the social bases for Bangladeshis (both diasporas and locals).

1.3 Genre and Performance in Virtual Networks

"Brown History", a crowdsourced Instagram group, is noted as an example of how diasporas from South Asia gather online and form communities by using pictures as valuable archival materials representing the history of the common people (Kalia 2021). These pictures, however, uphold their identity that they once were 'vanquished'[7] and colonised by states who labelled them barbarous. But they are now an important part of the states labelling them. The beginning of a podcast sharing crowdsourced narratives hosted by a Bangladeshi Muslim male[8] may not be explained from this context. Its use of conventional ghost narratives is also difficult to analyse in the traditional framework. 'Ghost' (or *bhoot* in Bengali), a supernatural entity of a syncretic type, has a place in the podcast. It also contradicts what the religious institutions try to impose. However, at the same time, people's roles are now defined by newer crises (cf. Šešo 2011) in newer grey areas of technological reality (cf. Saethre 2007; Ball 2010) that create new supernatural narratives along the line of modernity and globalisation.

My essay, about the origin and use of jargon among food delivery workers in Tartu, Estonia, maintains that "jargons…allow rapid communication and grow naturally among a… [network] of people working together" and that "any… interaction develops meaningful referents as a process of communal understanding among a… [network] from the very moment of its origin" (Ahmed 2020: 2). These referents denote a reality shared by two or more individuals to facilitate interaction. Once their reality changes, or the network is new, then new referents are required to facilitate the communication among members. These will grow through a syncretic exchange through interaction. The same applies to folk narratives, which must be re-created with each telling, reflecting both past and present for this re-creation, and be comprehensible to an audience even though they may refer to "past language, symbols, events, and forms" (Oring 1986: 123). Most importantly, "each narration is the creation of the moment" and hence it will "crystalize around contemporary situations and concerns, reflecting current values and attitudes" (ibid.: 123).

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[7] Their Instagram page description reads, "South Asian history retold by the Vanquished". See https://www.instagram.com/brownhistory/

[8] He is part of the majority in three senses: He is Bangladeshi by birth, he is Muslim and he is male.

The rise of virtual media indicates a change in the transmission, communication and performance of genres. As important media these require attention as folklore's premise lies not in devolution, but rather in evolution toward different contexts in people's everyday lives (Dundes 1969) and their practice and performances (Bronner 2012; Noyes 2016b). Along the same lines, traditional genres appearing on new media requires attention. Richard Bauman (1992) presents two sets of understanding of this situation. The traditional one, perceiving traditional genres in rigid forms such as myth, legend, fairytale, etc. (53); and the "recent" perspective, which understand genres as flexible discourse types originating at the moment of need, malleable to fit in any situation (ibid.: 43, 58; Harris-Lopez 2003: 116, 117).

Usually the inconspicuous supernatural world that people perceive is made up of words that create a comparison with everyday life. Storytellers use language and rhetoric based on contemporary lifestyles, values and material realities to make the supernatural evident. Like language, this supernatural world "develops by metaphorical extension in borrowing words from the realm of corporeal, visible, tangible and applying them by analogy to the realm of the incorporeal, invisible, intangible" and with time "the original corporeal reference is forgotten, and only the incorporeal, metaphorical extension survive" (Burke 2017: 93). In this sense, change in everyday life syncretises with and reflects on the conventional supernatural and narrative performances of it.

For Deborah A. Kapchan, performance is a public event (with an audience) conjoined with "a shared real… that is ultimately unpresentable" (2003: 137). Thus, performance requires common ground for the audience to perceive the "unpresentable real". However, in new media in Bangladesh, performances of the *baul* song originate in a different reality and are expressed in performance in TikTok. This cannot be understood from the conventional "shared real" of the original song. Therefore, a closer study of the performances and narratives of the new media and the new shared real is imperative. Bhoot.Com Podcast offers one such opportunity to do so.

Bhoot.Com Podcast[9] is a rejuvenation of the live Radio show *Bhoot FM* – a Friday midnight ghost storytelling event hosted by MD Asraful Alam, alias RJ Russell, a former radio jockey currently employed by data and artificial intelligence company ADA

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[9] See Appendix 1 for screenshots of the podcast app.

(Analytics, Data, Advertising), operating across South and Southeast Asia. On February 14th, 2020 RJ Russell revived the show as a podcast streamed every Friday at 11:59 pm. Each weekly performance is described as an episode usually containing 5-6 narratives received from different sources. The length of each narrative varies between 4 to 45 minutes. An episode usually lasts for an hour and fifty minutes or longer depending on the lengths and numbers of the narratives – live, recorded audio and written text shared via email. The emails are read by RJ Russell while the live output is performed by storytellers in the studio. The audio is played during the podcast.

Before each episode the audience is encouraged to email stories in text and audio formats stating whether they intend to perform them live. The podcast team chooses narratives for an episode from the listeners through a selection process headed by RJ Russell. Senders are usually notified via email. They may receive a Bhoot.Com T-shirt as a token of love from the host.

The podcast can be described in three parts. The first part features the host, his studio and the app. RJ Russell anchors the podcast and reaches out to the listeners through the app, called the Shadhin Music App. The next part consists of the storytellers. Apart from RJ Russell, Afnan, a Muslim male and a full-time employee[10], narrate stories in every episode. Hafiz Mainuddin, a mullah who has memorised the Quran and exorcises people, performs from time to time. Occasionally storytellers come from the audience. Each episode approximately follows this format, usually begining with RJ Russel introducing and reading out an email, followed by Afnan and then by an audience member or Hafiz Mainuddin.

The Bhoot.Com Podcast is streamed live in the Shadhin Music App. Initially the episodes were free, both when streamed live and the archive of previous episodes. But since July 2020 access to the archive has been via a paid subscription, although they allow users to listen to the 'live' for free. Bhoot.Com's **Facebook Group** consists of 44,745 (as of August 9, 2021) members who are basically categorised into 3 groups: Admins, Moderators and Members. Three admins (RJ Russell, his wife Shegufta Farhat and the Bhoot.Com page) control the group including privacy, security and modification, as well as its name and admin panel. They share with 12 moderators the activities of approving,

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[10] This is basically all that Afnan shares with audience in Facebook. He does not have any Facebook presence in the group and his appearances on YouTube and Facebook are limited to Bhoot.Com's identity.

rejecting and removing member and post requests, pinning and unpinning posts, etc. This group is one of the platforms that facilitate the interaction of members since communication in the podcast is limited to live action only, once a week. The group is also the base from where the podcast team forms regional committees for the podcast to promote it. The group covers all the major cities in Bangladesh and has a growing network across and outside the country, although limited to Bengali speakers.

The group's **Facebook Page** has 36,678 likes and 40,837 followers (last checked on August 9, 2021). The page acts as a promoter of the podcast, helping it to reach out to a wider circle of Facebook users. It also inspires people to join the platform, gradually get into the group and interact in a private but populous zone consisting of people related to the podcast. Their **YouTube Channel** is a platform that engages with audience with videos. The BhootDotCom channel has as of August 9, 2021 22,300 subscribers. This channel began its journey prior to the first episode in February 2020.

Fieldwork

I listened to their episodes live as a participant from episode 59, streamed live on 26th of March 2021, to the 69th episode, transmitted on 11th of June 2021. In these 10 live episodes, I participated in their conversation and watched their promotional videos prior to the episodes both on Facebook and YouTube. I observed their norms, rituals related both to performance and activities to determine how their bonding develops and how they interact.

Sixty-three[11] narratives analysed in this thesis cover three groups of episodes. My primary focus was on the live episodes and hence these are more in number, consisting of 7 episodes (59-65). The choice was also influenced by the fact that these episodes are more recent and performed live enabling me to observe the participants' virtual reactions. I also listened to the first three episodes (1-3) in order to understand the shift of the podcast narratives into the main episodes in the study. For the same reason, I randomly picked episodes 12, 44, 45, and 52.

Apart from these, the field work involves analysis of Facebook group posts and their categorisation. The other activity is a follow-up on activities on the YouTube

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[11] See Appendix 2 for the outlines of these narratives.

channel where the podcast team usually engages with the audience by streaming live or uploading videos as part of their performance under the name Haunt the Haunted. I interviewed 10 people – 2 from Tartu and 8 from Bangladesh. I had also participated in different narrating events in Bangladesh between October 10, 2013 and April 14, 2018 where I observed and recorded performances in different situations.

However, despite my long and persistent efforts to interview the podcast host and storytellers, they kept stalling. This is one of the shortcomings of the research perhaps owing to lack of face-to-face interaction. Golam Rabbi, moderator of the podcast, told me that they thought I was a rival podcast host. Even after I cleared up this misconception, none other than Rabbi responded to my messages on Facebook. It could have been even more rewarding for me if I could have interviewed the team since their engagement is a bit too concentrated on the performance and promotion and thus there is rarely any way to get their take on the narratives themselves as individuals.

The data used in this thesis are obtained as per the consent from the persons involved allowed[12]. I studied the 10 interviews and the recorded performances as samples for my project and choose to use those of Fotol and Hobib as they represent the conventional narrative style of the agrarian reality. During the performances Hobib and Fotol were aware that I was recording and would use the material for my research.

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[12] See Appendix 3 for permission by RJ Russell to use podcast data.

Chapter 2 *Ghatana* and Its Performance in the Podcast

2.1 The Genre of Bhoot.Com Narratives

Timothy Tangherlini has defined the genre of legend as follows:

> Legend, typically, is a short (mono-) episodic, traditional, highly ecotypified, historicized narrative performed in a conversational mode, reflecting on a psychological level a symbolic representation of folk belief and collective experiences and serving as a reaffirmation of commonly held values of the group to whose tradition it belongs. (1990: 385)

If applied to the contents of the podcast, the narratives fall short of fulfilling the criteria. For instance, a narrative in episode 12 refers to part of the river known as *dou*:

> [A]t a remote village beside which the Brahmaputra River flows. When water in the river dries up, little children go to bathe there. We also go when we could manage time. A few children went to bathe in the scanty amount of water. They were swimming. Suddenly… as they were bathing as usual – little children of that area – a wave, a sudden wave came. Russell *vai*[13], there was hardly any water in the river, even with a wave it would reach up to your waist level at most. The wave came suddenly. Once it was gone, they [children] found out that one of the girls was missing… They [elderly people] searched for her. There was no deep water to dive in and search for her. Close to this part, there was a *dou*. It is the name of that part of the river edge where the current is strong. The *dou* is so deep, almost as deep as the bottom of a sea. We also hear that there are many *dous* the bottom of which cannot be touched. It was quite away from the spot where the girl went missing. Professional rescuers came and dived into the *dou*. But they could not find her.
>
> Then seven long years went by, or perhaps even longer. Everyone forgot the *ghatana*. There lived a boy in the village. He became an adult by this time. He had one problem that he could not walk. He was crippled since he was born. He could not make his livelihood for which he had to live through much hardship. He would live by begging crawling from door to door. Besides, he had a deep burden of sorrow in his heart. He always used to complain Allah about his sin [for which he was suffering]. Why his life was full of agonies… One night suddenly he dreamed, in his dream somebody told him, "Come to me. All your agonies shall be over." He did not bother about it on the first day. Then he had the same dream again on the second consecutive day. "Come to me. All your agonies in this life shall be over." He went to a mullah. He told him, "Perhaps you are complaining to Allah quite a lot [for which] perhaps some

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[13] Vernacular addressing of an elderly male in Bangladesh originally meaning brother.

miraculous power is summoning you. Or what you think of day and night, you are dreaming that."

A few days went by when again he saw an old man as beautiful as light [*noor*] in his dream. That old man told him, "Come to me, all your agonies will be over." Then he…I mean a faith began to grow in his mind that perhaps his agonies will be over at one point. Then he dreamed again. He was told, "Come to this *dou*. Once you get there, just dive in. Make sure to drive before the Fazar Azan. If you dive, you will come to me. Come to me."

Fear crept into his mind [since] the *dou* was haunted. If he fell down in that, chances of him being alive was thin. Yet he had deep hatred for this [crippled] life. By leaving everything, leaving his love for his own life he woke up late one night [before dawn]. Right before the *Fazar azan* he reached the *dou*. Then dived in. He thought he would die. But as soon as he dived in, this is how he narrated the *ghatana* to us [and] as we heard, he described how as soon as he dived, he found himself in front of a palace. It was so beautiful that he never saw the like even in cinemas. He waited at the front of the palace. Then walked towards it. As he reached the gate, it automatically opened. Russell *vai*, you can't even believe, the palace was full of precious metals [*Shonadanay varpur*] that he never saw in his life. He crawled in the palace. As he entered, he found himself in a maidan. Almost like the kings we have watched in movies sitting with their ministers – after reaching the maidan he saw that that old man who he dreamed of was sitting on a throne.

That old man asked him, "I summoned you quite some days ago, why did you delay?" Russell *vai*, what could he say! …He was perplexed. He could not say a word. He [the old man] asked, "What do you want me to give you? All the gold that you see, all this is yours. Carry as much as you can." But Russell *vai*, humans if they cherish something deep from their heart, greed cannot grasp that human. It could not tempt him as well. That boy replied, "No, just cure my legs. I want to walk as a normal man." Russell *vai*, the *jinn* replied…who people call Khowaj *pir*… Khowaj *pir* replied, "Alright! I am curing your legs. But you have to make a commitment." "What commitment?" "I will make you self-reliant, provide you with riches. I liked your words. You cannot harm people and live purely, normally and with faith." He agreed. Then when he was about to receive the treasure, he [Khowaj *pir*] called someone "*bauma*" [daughter-in-law], "Give him some gold coins." When the girl came out of the house, Russell *vai*, [the boy] was surprised [to see] that the girl who drowned in the river, that girl handed him over the gold coins. And he recognised her straight away. He called her by her name, the girl responded to that. Then the *jinn* responded, "Yes, you recognised her. Well done. My son liked her pretty much. For this I abducted her and married her off to my son. If you recover, when you get back, let her family know that she is doing well. Mark my words, Russell *vai*¸ when he…I mean when suddenly he noticed that he was ordered, "Close your eyes." He obliged with that and felt himself inside water and he was almost at the surface. He then got up from under water. As he tried to get up from the *dou*, he saw that his legs were perfectly alright. He could not believe it. He got back home from there soaked in water. People at his home were surprised, how could this happen?

And there were gold coins with him…the whole village ran to him, "How did this happen? How did your legs get cured?" Then he shared everything with them. And now he is self-sufficient and honest, his days pass in peace. This is my *ghatana*, Russell *vai*. We all are witness of this otherworldly *ghatana*. I hope that listeners will like it. Russell *vai*, if you do stream it, it will feel good. If I find more *ghatanas*, in sha Allah, I will send them to you. Thank you.[14] (my translation, recorded audio via email)

The above event is not a legend most importantly because it is not mono-episodic, instead, it is rather lengthy and detailed. However, it centres around a *dou* and legends besides their secular, human narratives, "include local tales of buried treasure, ghosts, fairies, and saints" (Bascom 1965: 4-5). *Dou* may fall into this category as it involves the disappearances of people for supernatural reasons, i.e. to be cured and to gain wealth. Another version could be the anonymous narrator's narrative from Episode 59.

There are many among the listeners who know that rivers, especially at the point where they bend, that part is deeper than the other parts. This is known as *dou* in our area. Even during dry season other parts of a river dry up, but the *dou* never dries up. In such parts, people set traps and catch fish. Often people poison the water to catch fish… On the day of the *ghatana*, the victim, let us know him through a pseudonym of Rahim of Malaipur village, and three of his friends went fishing in a boat. They were fishing in the river at the opposite side of the village… In the end, Rahim began to swim across the river to go home. After a while, his friends could not see him in the river, and they thought that he…went home. In a moment a shrilling voice from the other side of the river proved them wrong. That man was collecting grass for his cattle. Rahim, while 30-40 feet away from the shore, suddenly cried out, "Uncle, hold my hand! I am drowning." It is important to mention here that Rahim's house was at the riverbank, and he was a great swimmer since his childhood. He swam across the river on numerous occasions. There was no way he could drown in the river. It was not a normal *ghatana*. Right at the moment when the man was about to dive to rescue Rahim, a strong whirling tide came and drowned him…The diver [who came in the rescue operation] searched for Rahim about a couple of minutes and came back from down the *dou* and whispered something to his team leader. His team leader forbade him from diving into water. The other members of the team searched for him at the shallow part of the river for some minutes and came back. When pressed about their hasty return, they said, "We tried a lot. But could not find him. Can you call Rahim's mum? We need to talk to her." Then [when Rahim's mum arrived] they told her, "Offer *batasha* and many such food in the *dou*. Then you will be able to find Rahim, but not alive." The villagers still kept on pressing them. They asked the villagers, "Didn't something happen at the *dou* before?" Elderly men among the villagers told them that about 35-40 years ago two people also drowned there together and died. Then the firefighters said, "We went down and saw an abnormally large

[14] See Appendix 4 for samples of the transcribed narratives.

creature whose whole body was full of eyes. Lights were coming off the eyes of the abnormal beast. It told us, if we want to leave safely from there, we need to leave … immediately. [That creature told us] if we tell the drowned boy's mother to do this and this, then they will get back their son. After hearing this, we swam up immediately."… Later, we came to know from Rahim's family that he poisoned the *dou* to catch fish during dry season 2 years ago. He was reminded in a dream that he had committed a terrible offence by poisoning the river. He was warned not to go to the river alone. (Episode 59, my translation, text via email)

These two narratives follow a pattern, showing two sides of the uncanny beings that reside in the *dou*. The first one shows the benevolence of it and the second one reveals vengeance. However, inherent in both narratives is absence of the criteria mentioned by Tangherlini in his definition. Thus, these cannot structurally be analysed as legend, nor can they be seen as myth or folktale (cf. Bascom 1965). This is also indicative of the fact that prose narrative genres are amalgamated in the podcast narratives. These are neither myth/legend, nor folktale. They are historicised (hence, not myth) but not mono-episodic (hence, not legend). But they are not folktale because they are not regarded as fiction, rather they are "considered as dogma or history" that is claimed to "have happened" and may or may "not to be taken seriously" (Bascom 1965: 4).

The obvious question then is, what genre are they? The narrators collect and share narratives they claim to be true, aiming to create a feeling of excitement. But in Kaarina Koski's opinion, the narrator as entertainer "openly locates the event in the Taleworld and evades being responsible for its truth value" (2008: 339). However, there are personal experience narratives as well. In Episode 44 an anonymous male narrator communicates his feeling as an approach to make his claim to truth stronger:

Let me tell you one more thing here, believing in my *ghatana* or not is solely your issue. But who encounters this sort of *ghatana* only s/he would feel it, s/he would only know what happens there. And I will pray that what happened to me must never happen to anyone else. Because the problem that follows and the pain that it causes… [does not finish the sentence and moves to the *ghatana*]. (My translation)

The beginning of the narrative suggests that it can be analysed as a memorate since it involves personal experience (cf. Honko 1964). However, the anonymity of the narrator, the length and detailed depiction of a series of encounters somewhat distance it from a memorate[15] even though the narrator was present in the event (Honko 1964: 105). Rather,

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[15] A detailed transcript of the narrative appears in Appendix 4.

in performative term, it is a cognitional rhetoric that generates an emotional reaction from the audience and thus facilitates performance (Oring 2008: 150). From this perspective the claim to truth of the first two narratives can also be seen in performative terms. Another narrative by Afnan *vai* will make this clear, as he begins:

> [T]he *ghatana* I am going to share with you is told by another person who, now, lives in Faridpur. There, in Faridpur, he is the area manager of a renowned Bangladeshi company. I am not sharing the name of the company. His name is Hasan. His country home is at Dewantala in Gobindapur Upazila of Gaibandha District…Let me warn you, the *ghatana* I am going to narrate, after listening to the first part of it, you might feel that you have listened to a lot of such *ghatanas*. Yet, you must listen to this till the very end. (Episode 45, my translation)

Afnan includes the name and address of the person to give the narrative credibility. However, it does not completely settle the contradiction regarding genre. One option here is to examine how they introduce their narratives. This can be expressed as a table:

Total Narratives	Type of genre by narrator	Number
63 1-16: Episode 1-3 [14-02-2020 to 28-02-2020] 17-55: Episode 59-65 [26-03-2021 to 07-05-2021] 56-63: Randomly picked narratives from other episodes	*Ghatana*	45
	ghatana and story	08
	advut/strange g*hatana*	03
	aloukik/otherworldly g*hatana*	03
	orachalita galpa/story in practice	01
	satta /true *ghatana*	01
	highway related g*hatana*	01
	bekhkhatit /inexplicable g*hatana*	01

TABLE 1 GENRE OF NARRATIVE ACCORDING TO THE NARRATOR

From the 63 narratives, 45 are introduced as *ghatana*. Of the remaining 18 narratives, 8 are referred to both as *ghatana* (occurrence) and *galpa* (story) by their narrators. Three each (3+3) are regarded as *advut*/strange and *aloukik/*otherworldly *ghatana*. One each is termed as *prachalita galpa* or story in practice (1), *satta* or true *ghatana* (1)*, bekhkhatit* or inexplicable *ghatana* (1)*,* and highway related *ghatana* (1). All narratives, with one exception, have *ghatana* in their name, some are followed with words defining the type,

i.e. *advut ghatana* refers to an occurrence that is strange to the narrator. This brings up the question of the definition of the *ghatana*.

2.2. *Ghatana* as a Vernacular Bengali Genre and its Use in Bhoot.Com Performance

Ghatana is a vernacular word that refers to an occurrence, an experienced reality that truly happens or is claimed to have happened and is narrated from the perspective of an eyewitness or person(s) involved. It is not directly part of vernacular Bangladeshi Islamic belief genres, which are usually listed as follows:

1. *Mujeja*

2. *Keramat/Karamat*

3. *Telesmat*

Mujeja refers to narratives about miracles seemingly performed by the prophets, but in reality were performed by God. Isa's (Jesus) bringing the dead back to life, the journey of the prophet Muhammad to meet God, otherwise known as *Miraj*, are examples of *mujeja*. Miracles seemingly executed by *pirs* (saints) are known as **keramat**. Anything out of these two categories is regarded as **telesmat**, meaning magic, fraud, illusion. With time the first category persists in belief while the two others are gradually disappearing from Bangladeshi oral tradition.

Ghatana, in a face-to-face situation, is performed through interaction and may be even performed alternately. Hobib, then aged 60, a Muslim male farmer who studied to the third grade, narrated a *ghatana* in a conversation with me in 2013. There were 3 other participants in this. The first was Arafat (then 19) a student. The second, a widow (then 70) whom I call *dadi* (grandma) is one of the hosts of such gatherings, especially since she used to sell Indian *biri* (filter-less tobacco wrapped in foliage) to locals. People would gather at her home, which intermittently continues now, but which may end once she dies for others in her family may not do it. The third person was *dadi's* daughter Ashikun (then 45), a housewife. Hobib narrated the following *ghatana*:

A *ghatana* happened at home. [Women of our family][16] ground a huge amount of rice into powder [on a *dheki*, a traditional instrument[17]]. They kept this [in the kitchen]. A visitor [a woman from the neighbourhood] came and saw this on the *dala* [bamboo-tray]. But it was not an occasion of *Eid-Forob* [Islamic festivals (when Muslim families bake cakes known as *pitha* in Bengali)], yet they ground a large amount of rice into powder. That woman saw them busy preparing *pitha*… They were mixing the powder when that woman visited. The woman, who came to pay a visit, saw they were making *pitha*. They knew well the baking process. Yet when they put the *pitha* in the *gaiari* [a clay pot with many tiny holes at the bottom put on top of another pot filled with water]. Time went by as they kept on baking, but the *pitha* would not be cooked… They failed to find anyone who would be able to help them. What the woman did, as she saw that, she did not chant anything. But when she saw them baking *pitha*, the chant popped into her mind. One of the women suddenly said, "You should go to this woman. She came here today. You should get some *pora paani* [puffed water] from her…Don't accuse her of doing this, she won't help." They went to that woman and called her, "*Bhabi* [sister-in-law, wife of a brother or cousin]!" She asked, "What happened?" "Our *pitha* is not boiling." The lady puffed over some water and gave it to them. Upon returning home with the water, they poured it in the *gaiari*. As soon as they did it, the *pitha* was ready. It did not even take time. They took the *gaiari* off from the earthen oven perhaps ten minutes later and could eat the *pitha*.

The *ghatana* above is related to a belief. This will come out with a follow up conversation among the participants.

Grandma: She probably enchanted [*thamilawa*] the *pitha*!

Hobib: No, she did not. She knew how to enchant. It just popped into her mind. That's why it happened [*pitha* did not boil].

Grandma: I would say she enchanted it.

Arafat: It does not involve conscious enchanting. Whatever Sutai [an old man in the village] would see, be it a plant or anything, would die out.

Hobib: There is no need to chant anything. Well, Sutai does not know any chants. It was his eye, if he would ever look at the *uloin* [udder] of the cow, that's the end of the cow giving milk. The *uloin* would be burnt. The eye is evil. Not everyone's eye is benevolent. Some of us have evil eyes. Allah perhaps created them with eyes like this, whatever they see will rot, burn out or die. Allah may have created this. There was a *ghatana* when one day Kadir was picking tomatoes, Sutai came in and saw it. Sutai only wished he had such tomatoes. In next few days, all the tomato

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[16] Hobib is a cousin to me. Arafat addressed Hobib as uncle. Hence, we all know the 'women' in his family. He did not have to introduce them to us. But it is also a norm usually to not to name a person who knows how to enchant. This is why he did not name her and we also did not press him to expose her identity.

[17] See in Appendix 5 pictures of the *pitha* making process.

plants burned out. Villagers are afraid of him. Whenever he would be around, they would try not to show him anything that they possess, plant or nurture.[18]

This conversation itself creates context and sticks to it. One *ghatana* followed by discussions and comments results in another *ghatana*. From the *ghatana* of *thama* [enchanting], the conversation ended up bringing out another *ghatana* related to evil eye. This is how a face-to-face storytelling event proceeds. Another such event back on April 14, 2018 with about 10-15 participants, children and adults, would add evidence to that and help to contrast *ghatana* from other categories. The storyteller, Fotol, a farmer with no formal education, was then about 55.

> Rasel: *Vaisab* [elder brother], can you tell us a *kissa* [tale] today?
>
> Fotol: What do you want to do by listening to these now? People do not believe in them anymore.

This remark "people do not believe in them anymore" made us, listeners, even more interested in what he was about to tell. We also became aware that what he would tell was not a *ghatana*. It would be something different.

> Badshah Sikandar one day decided to go to *bonij* [a trip to distant place for financial endeavours]. He prepared 13 dinghies for himself and for his men. They kept on going and going until nightfall when they neared a hill. Badshah Sikandar ordered his men to anchor the dinghies there… It was already evening then… At that moment, the Badshah's attendants heard a woman weeping somewhere in the forest… All his men went to search and found her sobbing under a tree. She wore a garment so charming that she looked mesmerising [*bagu bagu karer*]. She was such a beautiful woman! Yet she was sobbing. Seeing her like this, everyone's heart became full of pity. Badshah married her and travelled around for some days. Then he returned home… What she used to do to him at night, after midnight-1am was that she would enchant him *adhmara* [unconscious] and would leave to the hills for a meal. She would return 1 or 2 hours before *azan* of *Fazar* [the call to morning prayer from the mosque] in human form.
>
> One day, Lukman Hakim visited the Badshah – Lukman Hakim was the person who knew all the medicines and cures to diseases – and proposed, "There is a sea… Let's go there together." They decorated their dinghies and sailed out through the Padma River [one of the major rivers in Bangladesh quite far from the narrator's region]. Suddenly, [as they] reached halfway through the river, Badshah Sikandar said, "*Oba Badsha* [Dear Badshah], you know everything about the world. The air pays tax to you. But can you tell me the depth of the river?" "No, I cannot tell you that." Badshah Sikandar asked again, "Who can respond to that then?" "Your youngest wife who you married from the jungle can answer that." "How can she tell that?" "She can."… Lukman Hakim secretly asked, "Have you any *shisha* [metal or lead] in the boat?" Sikandar answered,

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[18] See Appendix 6 for a detailed transcript of the conventional narratives by two farmers, a housewife and a mullah.

"Yes, we have it!" Lukman Hakim commanded, "Ask her to dive into the river."… As she was a *deojat* [monster], she began to stretch herself longer and longer as she was going down to the riverbed. Only both her wrists surfaced [as her toes touched the bottom]. They kept hitting her with the *shisha*. Thus, after imprisoning her using *shisha*, Lukman Hakim ordered the men to set sail. From then on, that woman summons people with one hand and forbids with the other… Whenever a boat or aeroplane goes near this location, she brings it down… She is still there in the Padma River.

Many versions of this *kissa* were frequently shared during my boyhood at such conversational moments. Especially when elderly people sat together at a house, they shared such narratives. If they began with one such type, unless someone broke the cycle by introducing a different genre, they continued with that. Fotol's *kissa* was followed by conversation about a belief of similar type prompted by his ending remarks.

Rahan [10 y/o, boy]: What happens if someone goes there?

Fotol: Not just humans, a bird even can't go there. She even brings down aeroplanes.

Nehar [45 y/o, woman, housewife]: She was a *maal* then. I heard that somewhere.

Fotol: A man used to go fishing and come back immediately with a *kholoi* [basket stitched out of pieces of bamboo] full of *bain maas* [a type of fish]. He caught fish and skinned them [and sold them to people]. He did this for five or six months. Only *dhora* [the least venomous snake in Bangladesh]. He caught the snake by the head and skinned it. One day unconsciously a bit of the skin remained on the snake. Women were cutting when they noticed the skin. They screamed, "This man picks up *dhora* snake from anywhere!" Men then asked him, "The fish that you bring every day, what are these?" "Aha, these are fish, *bain* fish! Even though it is *dhora*, it's not a snake. It's a fish. But there is one snake in your *haor* [wetland]. There is no other snake." They replied, "Can you show us the snake?" "You have to give me some time. I have a sister who is a *daat goonin* [better sorcerer] than I am. She lives in Dhaka. I can catch the snake once she is here. Otherwise, I can't." They said, "Ask her to come here then." It was the age of letter exchange. He wrote a letter saying, "There is a snake, I told people about it. They want to see it. It is a *deojati* [monster]. I can't control it alone. You should come along." She replied, "I will come on this or that day." People spread the news using drums that a snake will be caught from this *haor*. There is a *haor* on the other side of the Kuiasori river. He told them, "Build me a tall house by levelling this place. I will play my flute from the house and the snake will appear from the *haor*."… They spread the news by drumming in bazaars… People began to gather around from morning. His sister was on the way. People began to exhaust him with pressure. He told them, "If my sister doesn't come, I can't handle this." "Damn you, why can't you do it? Summon the snake. We will see." Right before dusk he was unable to endure their pressure. He began to play on his flute. He continued playing on and on and on. The snake thin as a string began to appear. When the snake came in front of him, he stopped playing on his flute. The slower he played on flute, the angrier

the snake became. As time went on, it kept extending its body. It became this big [indicates using his hands]. His sister was still not there. She was a bit far. She was, I suppose, in Fesuganj, then in Sylhet. From Sylhet she got in a car to be here. The snake kept enlarging its body. The snake could not bear that. His sister, say for instance, was on the other side of the river. The snake came and held him in its mouth by his shoulder and went back to the *haor*. His sister arrived. She began to use her power [*goon chalaise*]. She kept on doing it and urged the snake, "Please, at least show me a glimpse of my brother!" It just showed her a glimpse of him and disappeared. You are talking about a snake, the shepherd of the house [*rakhal*]. They are very dangerous. We have one in our house. They are called *maal*. When we were digging our pond, Azim nearly died.

Yet again Fotol creates an opportunity to engage in conversation, which also serves as a tool that he narrated an event that was true. The *kissas* [tales] above are stitched together by the conversation that followed. The main characters common to Fotol's narratives involved monsters who provide people something and yet are not deemed benevolent. To some degree the beings involved got offended and in turn endangered the humans involved. But these events happen in the taleworld and thus do not directly resemble any personal belief or ritual. But the next part of the conversation takes a turn. From *kissa* the narratives moved to belief and rituals. This will be evident in the following conversation.

Rasel: Why didn't the *maal* bestow his family with wealth?

Fotol: The *maal* only gives you wealth, in return it cleanses the whole clan. Once you get wealth from him, and you give birth to a child, *maal* will snatch the child away from you. For this reason, people do not want wealth from a *maal.*

Rasel: What does he do with the human child?

Nehar: He will turn the child into a *maal* and keep it as family.

Fotol: In the past, during the event of a wedding, people would prepare a list written by a pious maulana and carry it to a *dor* [a gutter in the river, synonymous with *dou*] and place it there. Next morning, they would get ceramic plates and whatsoever they needed, *maal* would place them over the shore. They would bring these and perform the wedding ceremony quite wonderfully. Then they would wash and clean the objects received from the *maal* and place them back on the shore of the *dor.* The *maal* would then take them back.

Rasel: I heard of this *gof* [conversation].

Salik [45 y/o, male]: You can hear this *gof* in every house where a *maal* resides. [A *maal* usually resides in ponds, *dou/dors,* wells, etc.]

Rasel: Would people have to please the *maal* in every way possible? A slight mistake would infuriate him, right?

Salik: Yes… [Interrupted by Fotol].

Fotol: You know what a woman did, she saw a nice small bowl [received from a *maal*] and kept it. Later they put the goods in the shore of the *dor*. But the *maal* wouldn't take them back. Next day, the owner of the house was visited by him in a dream. "My porcelain bowl is left at the house of that person. Bring it to me. Otherwise, I will not take this stuff back." The man woke up and went to that woman's house. He told her, "There is a porcelain bowl left at your house. Could you give it back to me?" The woman replied, "By Allah, I don't have any bowl here. See all the things I have are here. You can check, there is no bowl in there." The *beti* [woman] did not acknowledge this. The following day, *maal* asked the man, "Where is my bowl?" He replied, "That *beti* did not return it to me. What can I do?" "Didn't she return it?" "No, she didn't!" The *maal* conjured her the next day. She began to have a loose motion and a terrible fever. Doctors, *kabirajs*, failed to cure her. The woman died of this… Another woman from that house, following her death, was conjured. They understood that it was a conjuring by a *maal*. It will not even spare their clan. They searched and found at one corner of the house a beautiful bowl. They returned it and performed many rituals and a very powerful maulana like Fultali Saheb[19] drove the curse away.

Rasel: I heard that you were the target of *baan* [*baan maara*, magic spell to kill someone] once in your young days. How did it happen?

Shahan [8 y/o, boy]: What is *baan*?

Rasel: It is to tie you using a rope.

Shahan: No, I know that, but this is not what the word is used for [here]. It has a different meaning.

Fotol: Children these days will not believe this *gof* of the past. A *kurula* [whirlwind] was blowing. A maulana wrote a list and dropped it in the *kurula*. *Mishti, jilapi, long, elachi* [delicate food] came in abundance.

Rasel: Isn't *kurula* the sign of the journey of a *deo* [monster]?

Fotol: Yes, it is their *roth* [chariot] which runs in the form of *kurula*.

Salik: *Kurula* is *roth*. Have you seen *roth* moving?

Fotol: *Kurula* is how they move from one place to another mostly during the noon time of the day. But it is occasional. *Roth* is another type that flies in every Saturday and Tuesday. There was a *Talfa* [a mullah or a madrasa student who lodges in a farmer's house during the time of his study or duty as a mullah] who had some knowledge like you [i.e. me]. Ha ha ha ha… he wrote a token and put it in the *kurula*. They [monsters] were going to a funeral with a corpse. As he put the list in, they received it and came in angered and beat him so much ha ha ha that his hand was fractured

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[19] A prominent *pir* in Sylhet, Bangladesh. My family and all the neighbours were his followers (*murid*). He died in 2008.

and he was half dead by the time they left him. The next day people found that *talfa* lying on the isle of the land. *What happened?* He was barely breathing. *What happened to him?* They took him to that maulana [who got all the delicate food from the *kurula*]. "I cannot do anything till next Saturday." They went to him on the next Saturday. He wrote a list and dropped it in the *kurula*. Through this he asked them, "Why did you beat this man?" They replied, "We were going to a funeral, and he summoned us for sweets. This is why we beat him." The maulana replied, "You did a great job then. He will never do it again."

Nehar: Maybe it does not fly anymore?

Fotol: No, they do on Saturday and Tuesday. Not very far from here, the wife of the Hazi's house, Amir's wife and the daughter of Siraj had a flower plant. *Fori* [fairies] used to have a gathering there. Her room was adjacent to the flower plant. It so happened that the fairies conjured her. They used to carry her with them every night after 12 o'clock. She [probably her mother] would not know that. They would bring her back prior to *azan* [call for morning prayer]. This continued to happen regularly and then Amir married her. The fairies conjured her again. She told them, "I am a married woman. I have children. You would harm them." "We will not do anything to your children. But you must control your husband." One night, perhaps Amir made some movement while asleep as they were about to take her on a trip and he woke up and saw everything. Upon arrival, she implored him not to interfere, "If you interfere, they will kill me." But he didn't pay any heed to her. When on the next Saturday they arrived, he neared them. They killed him instantly and conjured his wife who died later because of that. But just as they killed these people, they also returned them [his family] with riches. From then on, whatever they did turned out to be a huge financial success. That's how they became rich. They even won a lottery of 10 million Bangladeshi taka. Ten million taka of that time is worth a hundred million now.

These narratives are also stitched together and connected with the theme of *kissas*. There is vagueness about the people involved (except the last one) not because they are doubtful about the event. On the contrary, they are so common in people's lives that they have stereotyped them and attributed them to humans in general rather than to specific people and form a belief or a ritual to be protected from and to understand personal events juxtaposed to such types. These categories are limited to humans and explain events that may happen to them (the death or sudden flourishing of a person, etc.). The beginning of each of Fotol's *kissa* ("Badshah Sikandar one day decided to go to *bonij*", "A man used to go fishing and come back immediately with a *kholoi* full of *bain maas*") indicates a common action that results in something. But they are longer and vivid. The second category in Fotol's narratives have a likewise cause-effect relationship, however, they are mono-episodic, conversational and historicised as opposed to myth, hence legend. I

underscore they originate from a firm belief, or a ritual and thus need no imagination, therefore, the precision that helps better oral transmission.

This pattern encompassing a theme is common in the *ghatanas* narrated by Hobib as he turned to day-to-day life occurrences experienced by him and people known to him and narrated only those suitable for the context. But the *ghatanas* that he picked are not descriptions of mundane activity, these are events that happen occasionally and are marked by their significance as *ghatana*, something that is not monotonous and that entertains, transmits a belief or explains some phenomenon of the rural lives and crises of farmers (the evil eye and the dying of crops, I presume this is where the syncretisation and or juxtaposition of belief and ritual of legendry occurs in explaining *ghatanas*) or simply narrates an accident or event and are explained using perimeters of belief or rationalism. The beginning of the *ghatanas* ("A *ghatana* happened at our home", "There was a *ghatana* when one day Kadir was picking tomatoes, Sutai came in and saw it") indicates the specificity in contrast with vagueness since they evolve around personal experience and are limited to known territory. In both situations, however, only one person was the central narrator. Others supplemented the narratives and facilitated the performance. In such events, everyone involved in the *gof* (conversation) may share narratives in turns. From this contrast, a definition of *ghatana* as a genre can be sought. It is a conversational narrative of personal experience, usually brief and mono-episodic, involving or without the supernatural, belief, and ritual but different from the mundane and hence highlighted as *ghatana*, i.e. event, incident, accident, etc.

The podcast thus far had a maximum of 19,000 live participants in 73rd Episode. It is certainly difficult, if not impossible, to interact and take turns with all participants in such a context. They unite in the live performance from various locations. The storytellers are not farmers, nor are they illiterate. They deal with a different reality. Hobib commented in 2013:

> How could rich people be there then? Everyone was poor. Suppose if there were rich, they had cattle, raised them and then sold them in the market. They would plough land and grow crops. Be it *vagi* [sublease] or one's own land, everyone was a farmer. Rich or poor, they would sell their harvest and buy groceries. Not everyone was a businessman. Business usually referred to a person who was *nirala* [did not have anything else to attend to]. He was supposed to be a person who only concentrated on business. Farmers had to work in the fields. Cowboys looked after cows. Can anyone look after cows after ploughing lands? A cowboy would go to plough land and work there for just a short while and then he would return home, eat his morning meal and then go to tend the

cattle. But the cultivator used to plough the land, harrow it, and then untie the yoke to return home. That's how the past was. But now, in this age [2013], everyone has become a *bideshi* [migrant] or a *master* [teacher/employee]. Where can you find cattle now? People may have a cow along with a calf so that you get milk. Are there any cattle more than this [in families who gave up cultivation in villages]?

With vast and diverse audiences, sources, and storytellers, *ghatanas* are not performed in conversational mode. There is no consistency in what storytellers narrate. The problem involved in the podcast is that the narratives are pre-selected and there is no conversation that would lead to the next narrative creating a context. Rather they are performed (or played and read out) one after another for the sake of performance. Six narratives from episode 1 of Bhoot.Com performed largely live are summarised below. The bracketed sections refer to the time of the event and the medium of sharing the narrative to the podcast.

1. The narrator, Riyad and his group, went to study an old edifice on a fieldwork trip where the event begins. They later went to a site beside a lake for their project work and soon after they became ill, because Riyad later learnt that this lake was the place where three women sacrificed their children in a **Voodoo** ritual. (2016, written text via email)

2. While in her *Aturghar* (temporary room for the newborn and the mother) as she bore a new baby, a mother was visited by a *Pishach* in the form of an aunt who was invited to visit them. But the lady was fearless and drove the *Pishach* away. (After 1947, live)

3. An anonymous person had an abnormal interest in *Jinn*. So, he started to study in different madrasas and learnt a great deal about *jinn*. A girl in his neighbourhood was possessed. He summoned the *jinn* who disclosed the reason for the girl's illness. Then he found the solution in a dream and applied it. The girl was cured. (Timeline not mentioned, live)

4. While beginning to live in a new apartment without performing any **Islamic ritual**, a man and his wife began to witness the presence of an **unearthly spirit**. But later, being advised by one of his aunts, he called in a mullah and performed the ritual. Thus, the problem was solved. (Timeline not mentioned, live)

5. A local union member harmed people while alive. His **grave** collapsed after he was buried. Even after his family repaired the grave several times and watched over to find out who smashed the grave, they could not see anyone doing it. Anyway, the grave came to be broken again and again with no one, not even animals doing it. (Before 1971, live)

6. While waiting for a subway train in Manhattan, Faysal smelled a terrible odour and encountered a **homeless man** from whom the odour was coming. Next as he alighted from the train near his apartment the same man asked for a dollar. He ran away toward his

apartment. Later his friend told him that a homeless man who committed suicide was seen by many in that area. (Timeline not mentioned, audio via email)

There is inconsistency in the timeframe of the *ghatanas*. Even the supernatural beings involved in 6 *ghatanas* do not follow any belief pattern and are randomly selected. They represent diverse supernatural beliefs such as voodoo, *pishachi*, *jinn*, *unearthly spirits*, and folk belief about graves that says if a bad person dies, the grave cannot withstand him. This shows that *ghatanas* have manifold beliefs rather than one. They even do not confine the taleworld to Bangladesh, nor do they confine the beings to any belief or region. The following table shows the type of beings in religious, local/syncretic, and unspecified categories. Those either not specified or not mentioned fall into the unspecified group:

Islamic	Hindu	Christian	Local/Syncretic	Unspecified
22	05	-	22	14

TABLE 2 TYPES OF BEING REFERRED TO IN THE NARRATIVES

Of the 63 narratives, 22 belong to the Islamic category (*jinn*, Azrael, etc.), 5 to the Hindu (*Jogini, Pishach, Petni,* etc.), 22 to local/syncretic belief (*Khijir*, Hairy Beast, *Nishi Daak* or the call of night, spirits, ghosts, etc.), 14 are non-specified (i.e. bodiless head, headless body, near death experience, paranormal, and terrifying figure). This list says that the podcast does not follow any specific religion. Of the 63 narratives, 59 are from various parts of Bangladesh while the remaining 4 are collected from outside Bangladesh through the Bengali diaspora. This can be seen as a presentation of how the Bengali-speaking population are diverse in belief and culture. In addition, it shows, which I underline, a dialogue between different traditions in the podcast in a virtual era that facilitates integration through mobility and networking and can be defined as syncretisation in a general, not religious, sense.

Unlike the vernacular use, g*hatana* in the podcast is lengthy, detailed and diverse in context. These are collected by moderators, emailed as text or audio by listeners who may hear it from someone else. This in turn creates a distance from the person who experienced the *ghatana* so that it ends up as a fictionalised event to the regular

storytellers who describe *ghatana* without linking it with their lives and hence personal details.

The description of the podcast on the Facebook group also fictionalises the narratives that they share as *ghatanas*.

> If you love bone-chilling horror stories, bhoot.com is the best place for you. Finding a good ghost story book is easy, but that may not give you the real experience of fear. You know it's just a story. This is why all the stories of bhoot.com will be collected by Russell to share with you. Be part of it. Share your story now with your full address and phone number. Let's create a new platform of fear.

The description in contrast to the stress on the truth value of the *ghatanas*, raises the question of what the group means by *ghatana*. The storytellers sometimes regard their *ghatanas* as stories. Afnan introduces his narrative saying, "…the story I am about to tell is also told by [Dulal]" (episode 52), "The story I am going to share now is collected by Hasan" (episode 45). There is an instance in episode 46 where Afnan used story and *ghatana* in a similar sense: "The story I am about to share seemed outstanding to me… the locations I will describe if any of you live nearby, or happen to visit there, will definitely allow you to verify the *ghatana*". Babu described his narrative as '*kahini*' (story/tale) at the first Episode. Story in Bengali is *galpa/kechchha/kahini*, contradicting the meaning of *ghatana*. This inconsistency is related to the distance between the *ghatana* and the storytellers. They may not always have the picture of what they narrate. But a *ghatana* in their performance needs to be convincing and credible. Therefore, this builds a performative challenge for the storytellers.

2.3 Syncretisation in Storytelling Performance and Rhetoric in the Network

The inconsistency mentioned above is a result of a shift in performance. Face-to-face events usually relate to a group of people. They share a common real, otherwise unpresentable, which facilitates the performance. Yet, with time, membership of the group involves greater adaptation and modification of views. Storytelling also reflects such alterations. Hobib's view on social changes in the previous sub-chapter bears testimony to this. With the introduction of the podcast, storytellers and listeners are no longer confined to a small audience in a face-to-face setting, an audience that would recognise the 'unpresentable' elements of narratives. Thousands of Bengali-speaking listeners from around the world, who may not necessarily share the same perception and lifestyle, listen to the *ghatana*s of the podcast. Therefore, the storytellers are bound to adapt their performative techniques to convince a wider audience to enter into a dialogue to syncretise the *ghatanas* they narrate with the network's reality. Their role becomes that of an agent of syncretisation, someone who collects narratives from across tradition and syncretises them to make them presentable.

Conventional storytelling involves rhetorical language both as ornament and as tool to entertain and convince listeners. Storytellers do so by word of mouth and draw on ways of speaking about and relating different things in extraordinary ways (Franzosi 2017; Mack 2017; Burke 2017). These tools facilitate any interaction and are interpreted as tropes and figures, such as metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, irony in everyday use (Burke 2017, Lakoff & Johnson 2017). For the claim of truth in narratives (legends in Oring's case), Elliott Oring (2008) provides a depiction of these tropes based on the narrator's persona (*ethos*), appearance, and tone (*logos*), and the audience's expectation (*pathos*). For persona, that claim of truth depends on the individual's authority, degree of risk taken, distance from the taleworld, judgement, reflexivity, alternative explanations, reluctance, ignorance, and testing by others, etc. For appearance and tone, the narrator's tone, facial and physical expression determine the success of the narrative. Conformation "to the *cognitive*, *emotional*, and *moral* expectations of…audience" also helps the claim (Oring 2008: 157, emphasis original).

The storytellers in the podcast use the conventional tropes as they perform verbally. They may present their story through a 'legend trip'; if what they heard happened or is supported by interlocutors, they present it as a *ghatana.*

> Neel: *Assalamu alaikum* Russell *vai…*The *ghatana* I am going to share happened in my country home. For the lockdown, schools and colleges are shut, we came back to our home in Faridpur. Very close to our house, 5-7 minutes walking distance, there is a house. This house has been abandoned for 10 years. Many people heard of many things, faced many problems. There are plenty of *myths* about that [house]. We thought that it's been ten years, if there is no *kahini* (real problem), then there is no reason to abandon such a big three storey building in Faridpur Town. A three storey building completely abandoned! We, four friends, decided to visit that house. I did not say anything to my family about this since everyone in the area knows that there might be something [supernatural] in there. They would not let me go there ever. I told them that I was going to a friend's house. We planned it like this. We went there in the evening, not at night fearing that folks in our families would be mad at us. (Episode 59, my translation)

Neel presents his judgment and reflexivity on his trip in performance to establish the narrative as a *ghatana*. Afnan uses stress on verification as his tool to make his narrative convincing.

> Afnan: One more thing, Russell *vai,* I want to inform the listeners through you, we [Bhoot.com storytellers] try to tell horrifying *ghatanas* but, the thing is, the biggest thing is that many people ask, "Bro, is that true? What you tell, is that true?" Now we see that…truly those of you do not rely on the *ghatanas*… we give you references, even though to believe or not to believe is completely your choice… but I gave you a reference to the places, if you go there, you will find it, those… references to those places. I always try to come with references. Especially now, I am very cautious so that listeners, if they want to go there themselves and collect information whether the *ghatana* is true, they can do so. (Episode 46, my translation)

Nevertheless, the conventional rhetoric during their performance may include an anomaly just by altering the landscape. "After waking up he found out that …all around him there was endless water. It occurred to him that he had entered sea. And yet, in the whole locality, there was no [watery] place as large as this" (Afnan, episode 45). The storyteller may also change the time and surroundings, and add different feelings together in an encounter:

> I just forced my head up as I was reclining on the bed and looked behind me, I saw the presence of a very tall, dark human shaped figure there. It was dark then; visibility was not good. The scanty amount of light that entered from the street – as our flat is close to the main road – with that scanty amount of light I could see that black [figure]. I totally freaked out seeing that. My head lowered automatically… Then I sensed that it was running its hand over my head. As if

somebody touched somebody's head, I was feeling [like] that, and the hand was as cold as a freezer. It felt like I could not breathe. My brain almost stopped working. I suddenly saw that the hand was taken away. I could not turn my neck to any direction, nor could I call my brother. When I could finally turn my neck, I found out that that thing gradually rose and walked out of the veranda while the gate was still locked at night. Since that morning I got really sick, unable to get up from bed. (Anonymous narrator, episode 44, my translation)

S/he may attribute ugliness to the being:

I used to notice that something beyond the figures of ordinary beings, how can I describe! It – with its terrible appearance noticeable in unusually long hair, a very ugly face, and terribly dark teeth – was eating the garbage in a sitting posture. Whenever I stared at it, it would stare back with a smile. (Anonymous narrator, episode 44, my translation)

To sum this up, narrator's or her/his acquaintance's experience is easy to present as a verifiable event and thus becomes convincing as a *ghatana*. Bhoot.Com storytellers mainly use this form. This is presented in the following table:

Personal g*hatana*	Acquaintance's *ghatana*	Long Time Ago/Seen by Many	Not Mentioned
15	31	12+3	02

TABLE 3 TYPE OF *GHATANA* IN TERMS OF EXPERIENCE (OUT OF 63)

Forty-five out of the 63 *ghatanas* either happened to the narrator (15) or are experienced by the narrator's acquaintances (31). Vague or non-verifiable narratives tend to use long time ago (12) or seen by many (03) while others do not mention anything (02).

But the supernatural narratives in the podcast performed in a different media by storytellers led them to syncretise their performance with contemporary reality. The reason they did so is best illustrated by an anonymous narrator on episode 59 who refers to a village by stating "they were fishing in the river at the opposite side of the village". That unnamed village, as a "taleworld" where the narrated event took place, becomes a fiction. Even the "storyrealm" (borrowing Katherine Young's terms qtd. in Koski 2008: 337) where the performance takes place and heard of in the podcast itself is imaginary

for the storyteller because Bhoot.Com and its host, regular storytellers, and audiences do not reside in the same physical territory at the time of the performance.

Hence, the challenge for the storytellers is that this is not a face-to-face performance in the "public domain" (Kapchan 2003: 130). While performing, either live or in recorded audio, they do not have any idea how the audience are reacting, and they cannot shift gear to ensure the gratification of the listeners. Kaarina Koski contends that "the closer to the reality the narrator locates the narrated events, the more realistic the story is bound to be" while "[p]recise details usually indicate that the narrator is seeking to convince the audience he's telling the truth" (ibid.: 337). There can rarely be any way to be closer to the reality of the diverse podcast audience with no scope of rectification of the performance. For this reason, storytellers must come up with new techniques to present the 'unpresentable' components of a narrative for the audience and make it convincing. Hence performance, in the podcast's setting, cannot be measured by Oring's standard alone.

Storytellers, as agents, are not limited to conventional rhetoric and tropes. Visual presentation, as in videos, photographs, links, etc., even though not present in the podcast, are becoming their tropes and are occupying their rhetorical repertoire. Afnan's narrative could be an example here:

> *Assalamu alaikum*. Greetings to all the listeners to Bhoot.com. I am Afnan. Now, I am going to tell you a story, listeners, which we, my team [the Haunt the Haunted team] and I, collected when we visited the Noapara Tea Estate in Habiganj District. You have already watched an interview. That person is Dulal *da* [brother]. He is a tea-garden worker. Basically, we collected the story from him. And you all have listened to a *ghatana* which was a story about a snake. We heard that from him. And the story I am about to tell is also told by him. At one point in our interview Dulal *da* was talking about a climbing plant. In their language, they call it *bhola lata* (lit. oblivious climber plant). So, he, later, shared this story with us. I am going to narrate it to you now. (Episode 52, my translation)

Bangladeshi people in times of change resort to virtual community life. This creates a new virtual shared real for them. Therefore, the narrator (in this case Afnan) improvises new rhetoric to fit in with that. This shared real (or referent) is created in the following way:

> Listeners, I have come here to the Nowapara Tea Estate… You can see in front of me that there is a pond. It is believed that a snake resides in this pond… More than one man died after seeing the snake. We walked a long distance to discover this place. A lot of dangerous stories [*galpa*] are in

40

circulation about this snake. There is a Shiba temple here. It is believed that after the locals saw the snake… they founded the temple. The snake I am talking about is very much a believed reality. The locals believe in it and even worship it. But what was the snake's story? To find that out, you must stay with us. We will share a brief outline of the story from a local man who is a leader of the tea estate worker's association and general secretary of the Bangladesh Tea-Garden Workers' Association. We are taking you to him. (BhootDotCom, 2021, my translation)

He visits a prospective location of the *ghatana* and shares videos of it, thus creating a virtual shared real for the whole podcast network. Another instance of this is given below:

Assalamu alaikum, listeners. I am Ariful Islam, Moderator of Bhoot.Com Jessore. Today I have brought you to Shantala Shamshan in Churumunkathi Union, Jessore District. The reason I brought you here is to give you an idea about the Shamshan and to describe the horror involved with the Shamshan. Let's move around the Shamshan. (BhootDotCom, 2021, my translation)

Both these invitations take viewers on a virtual journey to see the taleworld themselves with the Haunt the Haunted team. This began on July 28, 2020. As of June 9, 2021, they have 29 videos, along with frequent videos and pictures of the storyworld that regularly appear in their Facebook group through the many members of the network.

However, the significance of their performance cannot be measured in just this. As I introduced the storytellers as agents, they have a material reality today as a syncretising tool. They adapt a new and highly visual repertoire to describe the uncanny. They may contrast the being or scenario with cinemas: "[The palace] was so beautiful that he never saw the like even in cinemas" (Antar, episode 12). Or with any supernatural character in cinemas: "He became aware that something out of the blue began to run in circles around the boat. We usually see in Hollywood movies that a gigantic beast, like Godzilla, with a tail swims around in the sea, it was something close to that" (Afnan, episode 45). Even visual content such as pictures, narratives, memes, jokes, etc., appear regularly in the network[20].

The common tendency of the narratives that appear in the podcast is that they are meant to fit online platforms, and thus their structure is global. They collect from different traditions and present them in global form and fit them with the contemporary technological reality. The following excerpt bears testimony to that.

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[20] See Appendix 7 for the visual narratives shared in the podcast network.

[Nayan] was wondering perhaps he fell asleep and then these people got into the boat. He assumed it to be so. After assuming this he thought, "Since these people are sitting, I might take a picture of them as I have my mobile in my pocket." What he did was that he took their photo using his phone's flashlight. He could not but notice that they seemingly remained unbothered even when he photographed them. (Episode 45, my translation)

Use of a device to record or picture an uncanny encounter is a modification of events, a change in cultural reality. A person is accompanied by his device and hence that device, too, can be haunted. The supernatural described by Fotol would easily be offended at the slightest mistake. But here they "remained unbothered" enough to let Nayan photograph them using a flash. Afnan even added the smartphone as a part of the event, as he describes how "Hasan… could not but notice that again and again someone was trying to unlock… [Nayan's] phone". Then he "spread some powder on the phone screen" and noticed "a big thumb was trying to unlock it". He even validates it by quoting a *kabiraj* (exorcist) who told him, "Remember, you photographed them. Now in any way possible, they want to erase these pictures. They can't steal your phone as it is beyond their capacity. But they want to erase these pictures in any way" (Afnan, episode 45). This involves exorcism of the phone, as "*kabiraj* made him delete these images" and then "he spread some water [that he puffed by chanting something]".

Narratives in this virtually transmittable reality, or legends (distinct from what the podcast shares) as in Oring (2008), are not limited to oral face-to-face performances using different rhetorical devices to make them convincing and entertaining. Even if something is conveyed in conversational, face-to-face performances through physical movement, facial expressions and oral references to witnesses, specialist opinion, etc., there may be somebody recording or streaming it using a smart device and sharing it, providing the potential to break into online platforms. For this reason, instead of adhering only to conventional oral storytelling, the Bhoot.Com team has decided to introduce the Haunt the Haunted show live in their episodes to narrate actions as they visit different haunted sites. RJ Russell describes the plan[21] thus: "[w]e have already planned to divide the show into two parts. One consisting of Haunt the Haunted. You have already seen some videos [in Facebook and YouTube]" (episode 69, my translation).

Live and video streaming culture is widespread in Bangladesh. Apart from the rhetoric of oral convention, people utilise gadgets and devices to produce visual

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[21] They have not yet managed to do this because of lockdown in Bangladesh.

narratives resulting in a shift in verbal convention. This is an important aspect of Bangladeshi life and community as uncanny and visual presentation of it are becoming simultaneously present in people's minds. It may seem that visual transmission has subdued belief in them and created a visual rhetoric of evidence of the absence of the supernatural. Yet, the uncanny from its verbal depiction is being rendered to visual presentation by people who, with gadgets and gear, go to haunt the haunted. As mediator, or agent, of change, the storytellers in the podcast are amalgamating the conventional supernatural with the new social sphere, syncretising them with the technological era through their performances and eloquence. In doing so they come up with new metaphors, new repertoires, or overall new rhetoric and tropes. Storytelling, not only in the podcast but outside, is of greater value. An in-depth ethnography on the storytellers of today in virtual platforms, and outside, with close attention to their repertoire will offer an insight into the syncretic aspect of the technological era. The podcast's performance, only in its second year, is yet to go a long way. But their use of highly visual metaphor in presenting the supernatural already indicates a greater syncretisation in the making. The supernatural of oral convention are gradually entering the technological era. But these supernatural do not come from a single tradition. The *ghatana* they are performing, too, is a combination of different forms of prose-narrative. For this reason, perhaps, the narrators introduce them as *ghatana*.

Chapter 3: The Folk and Social Bases of the Podcast Network

3.1 Locating the Network, their Global Content and the Purpose of Storytelling

Performance-centred view of folklore (Bauman 1971), as I have shown in Chapter 1, helps to locate the social base of the podcast. Bangladeshi culture has evolved with the online world so much that it has become an inevitable part of people's identity. The emergence of the podcast is also the result of technological and consumer upheaval in Bangladesh. People form networks both offline and online share activities such as eating in restaurants, watching sports and movies, travelling in groups, etc. OTT platforms have furthered this (Chowdhury 2021) through a local versus foreign content campaign (Nusaiba & Nikita 2020). Hence, local and global podcasts and OTT platforms are appearing rapidly in Bangladesh (Sultana 2021) with content that is, rather than local, global in form and structure. Visual vernaculars such as pictures, videos, memes, news links, etc., are also global in form, with the same applying to the Bhoot.Com network. Rather than communicating and bonding with the members, group posts in Facebook tend to share these visual vernaculars, i.e., images and videos of haunted places meant for interaction through likes and comments.

The diverse physical locations of network members and their social base as differentiated people through interaction in performances makes the podcast an ideal example of contemporary reality as opposed to a homogenous and territorial perception of folk. The podcast members interact by listening together once in a week. The Facebook status update in the Bhoot.Com group by Monir Sarker "even today, we, 9000+ people, are listening to Bhoot.Com together" (my translation) is an example of this. Golam Rabby, a moderator of the podcast, also stresses this.

> We give equal service to both paying and non-paying users, bro. And we recommend people not to subscribe. The reason is, listen live if you want to listen. If you really want to listen to old episodes, you may subscribe to listen. Live is new and completely free. Everyone can listen together.

But this 'listening together' is different from the face-to-face performances. They go beyond the idea of shared territory by inventing an online shared territory as their location, promoting a feeling of togetherness with others for a moment, with some others next and then with another network and many more.

In Bangladeshi agrarian societies, those elder in age usually presided over events to entertain and teach people, to transmit belief and rituals. Small businesses like a tea stall, a small shop, the home sale of *biri* (a filterless tobacco cigarette wrapped in foliage) could get involved. All these were to ensure socialisation, bonding and the maintenance of social stability. As a host RJ Russell has adapted this. For this reason, I use the word syncretic, meaning that the podcast syncretises traditions and forms new ones. It defines humans in the podcast network through their virtual activity. With this shift between 'reality' and 'performance', the narratives' function in the podcast centres on entertainment, business, and syncretism.

The number of listeners and views is also the podcast's concern. Their success is measured in numbers of live listeners, live comments and messages, and subscribers.

> We are honoured to have received the prestigious ICT Award. Nothing is as prestigious and fascinating as getting national recognition. We are proud, we are overwhelmed with your love. With you all beside us we have become a huge family of 1.5 million subscribers. With your support the 'fear' [experienced listening to *ghatanas*] is spread, the waiting for a new Friday once one Friday passes, [waiting] for 11:59 pm. (Bhoot.Com page status update, my translation)

This award[22] acknowledges the reality that numbers are a parameter of success. Paid subscribers also bring profit for the app. To attract more subscribers the podcast offers consecutive *ghatanas* during 'lives'. This may stimulate how listeners perceive them. They are, therefore, trained to join this online territory to enjoy the role of listeners to *ghatanas* of large quantity. But their main activity is to listen to narratives, which is significant because they are the initial receiver and importer of the syncretic performances.

However, in Dorothy Noyes' words, society and community as "shared territory" allow "frequent interaction and mutual observation" (2016a: 30). Noyes also maintains that "disruption of … neighborhoods … breaks up networks" and create groups and communities and alienate people from "their accustomed occasions of personal respect

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[22] See Appendix 8 for the award reception picture.

and recognition" resulting in their relocation. This in turn inclines them "to become more interested in impersonal respect and recognition through the signs of status – education and consumers of goods" (ibid.: 30-31). This, as shown in the first chapter, is true about Bangladesh and hence about the podcast network. People join the network in search of new networks and communities. They share their *ghatanas* with the podcast for the entire network and feel the dignity of a performer.

The podcast is understood through Noyes' "network metaphor", members of which are "interconnected by migrations, marketplaces, and media" where all relations are not "face to face" (ibid.: 30). The members enjoy the *ghatanas* from their private comfort zones as they do not have to move out to a public place and attend such performances. They can even share memories.

> Hasibe Islam Bony: Such a jungle where a horse lives whose head was chopped off. This *ghatana* is in use in Aichgatee village in Khulna division. It was heard that many died after seeing the horse. But at present this jungle has become a habitable place. The *ghatana* being mentioned here, it is a *ghatana* of perhaps 1995 or '96. Whenever there was no moon in the sky, the horse whose head was chopped off used to come out of the jungle. Whenever people would notice there was no moon or [a] new moon, a weird feeling of terror would seize their minds because they knew that they would hear the sound of the horse running. I haven't yet been able to collect the detailed *ghatana*. As soon as I am able to collect it, I will share it with the Bhoot.com family.

> SH Shaykat [to Bony]: I listened to this *ghatana* three years ago on Bhoot FM, bro. It was really terrifying. When I listened to it on Bhoot FM, it went like this,,, Three friends were going through a road beside the jungle on bike,,, They noticed that a horse or cart pulled by horse was passing them,,, But the horse had no head plus there was a man on horseback,,, he also did not have a head,,, Right after seeing this, they got into a bike accident,,, I recall as far as this,,, but it was really terrifying. If the *ghatana* is shared again, I will very much enjoy it <3

> Hasibe Islam Bony: We are also trying to present the *ghatana* to you all in a different style. For example, you know the *ghatana* of bike, similar *ghatana* may have happened to someone else in a different way. We are searching for that different *ghatana*, if anyone knows you can inform us or you can email. (Facebook group post and comment, my translation)

The storytellers, however, present the narrated *ghatana* as different from the convention. Afnan at the start does that, stating "Let me make this clear that if you only listen to the first part, it may seem to you that you have listened to this sort of *ghatanas* every now and then". Then in the middle he does the same,

I was startled as I listened to this *ghatana*. The event of the fish, we read similar [stories] where someone is supposed to call a person, instead somebody else calls and these two people go together and g*hatanas* take place in a boat. We have listened to so many *ghatanas* of this sort. The beginning of this *ghatana,* too, resonates the same type at the start. But then when attempts to unlock the phone were being repeatedly made, they could not sleep a wink for the whole night. (Afnan, episode 45)

Entertainment seemingly lies at the core of the podcast, inherent to which could lie the lack of shared context. The storytellers and moderators use Facebook and YouTube to offer a visual presentation of the taleworld and witness the transformation of the 'shared real' from its 'unpresentable' (Kapchan 2003: 137) status to a presentable one in the virtual sphere by means of performance and by using rhetoric to syncretise the supernatural with this technological era. This virtual world of the podcast is a social base where public events such as storytelling, interaction and meeting take place and reach thousands of listeners.

3.2 Who are the folk in the Network: Host (RJ), Storyteller, Moderator and Listener/Audience

This title is partly inspired by the Alan Dundes' (1978) essay "Who are the Folk?" He maintains that

The term 'folk' can refer to *any group of people whatsoever* who share at least one common factor. It does not matter what the linking factor is – it could be a common occupation, language or religion – but what is important is that a group formed for whatsoever reason will have some traditions which it calls its own. (1978: 7)

People who relocate themselves in the online world and navigate across various traditions and cultures, move across borders need a global repertoire of identity that is shareable transnationally. The podcast network also bears these transnational aspects. The folks in the podcast are host, storyteller, moderator, audience or listener. Inherent in this categorisation is a lack of interaction between a large number of members. Their posts and comments are meant for RJ Russell and the podcast team indicating that members are usually fans of the host and the storytellers. Other comments involve complaints about the app's functionality. Interaction either does not continue for long or ends up unanswered, as with the case bellow.

This lack of interaction between the network members is not a required condition to form the network (Dundes 1978). It is created through another form of interaction: performing and listening to the performances. This performance of *ghatanas* is relatable to horror stories in a common global form composed against a background score and hence the relationship between storyteller and listener is that one performs while the other listens. This relationship facilitates virtual platforms on which narratives are the storytellers and those who organise are hosts. The storytellers, for this reason, utilise the shared technology in their performances and reach out to listeners. The 'audience' appreciate and criticise the narratives, appreciate and criticise the platform and the moderators attend to the audience's problems. Altogether they introduce and transmit supernatural beliefs and rituals from across traditions by moulding them for the network.

> Muhommod Anirban Islam: There is no way to deny the fact that there are mysteries and strange superstitions about Friday the 13th. Although it is observed as a Western custom, beliefs are also scattered across the world concerning Friday the 13th. Once I saw a custom in Japan on internet that is related to Friday the 13th. They say, if someone on that night stare at the water of any lake without blinking the eyes, then s/he will see an illustration of how s/he will die. Isn't it strange? You can find out a lot of such customs about this day. And, if any of you is keen to know what Friday the 13th is, then watching the movie *Friday the 13th* on internet will help you… However, next August 13th is also a Friday. That is, it's also Friday the 13th. I am hoping that Russell *vai* and the Bhoot.Com family will stream some special *ghatanas* for us. I will also try to send some supernatural *ghatanas*. Thank you everyone. (Facebook group status update, my translation)

Anirban shares something that is inauthentic for many members of the network, examples of which are given here.

> Md Soykout Rayhan Joy [to Anirban Islam]: Believing this is *shirk* [comparing someone with Allah favourably is a great sin in Islam].
>
> Muhommod Anirban Islam [to Md Soykout Rayhan Joy]: Brother, it does not stress on believing anything related to *shirk*. It is a peculiar custom of the Japanese.
>
> Md Soykout Rayhan Joy [to Muhommod Anirban Islam]: Their accountability is at their hand.
>
> Muhommod Anirban Islam [to Md Soykout Rayhan Joy]: Yep, I am also trying to say that.

A similar tendency is exhibited in member reactions to a post by Md Rahmat Ullah in which he wrote about 7 types of *bhoot* in Bangladesh[23].

> Suaib Islam to Shahirar: It's all made up nonsense. Talking about ghosts, I believe in *jinn*, nothing else. These names are given by humans, explanations are also baseless.
>
> Shahriar Akash [to Suaib]: Believing or not believing is solely your choice.
>
> Md Shovon: If there was anything at all called *bhoot-petnti*, all these would have been mentioned in the Quran and the Hadith. As there is no mentioning of these in Quran-Hadith, we can regard these as simply human's tales made up of imagination.
>
> Zerin Tasnem Mohona: Correct! These are perhaps tricks of mind. There is no ghost. I only believe in *jinn*.

However, their concern about *bhoot* is a reaction to an inauthentic tradition. I say so because they do not consider the name Bhoot.Com as anything false, rather they enjoy listening to performances. In fact, listening is an important network role. What Aditya Nigam (2020) stresses is, therefore, already manifest in the podcast, "…theoretical decolonisation is about standing on… [one's] own feet and thinking for… [one's] own sel[f]… - drawing resources for that thought like intellectual *bricoleurs*, from all manner of sources" (28, emphasis original).

The podcast (YouTube, Facebook, TkiTok and the like) also gives members a sense of being performers, that their voices and stories can be heard thus making them part of their daily lives and identities (cf. Kalia 2021). This imagination creates the value of the podcast. The *ghatana* becomes vital podcast content that makes members feel connected in the network, an imagined network located online, as per Monir's comment, "even today, we, 9000+ people, are listening to Bhoot.Com together".

Compared with a traditional offline network that shares a common territory for existence, this podcast does not have any such physical territory, nor does it stick to any specific religion, culture or tradition. In this sense the folk in the network are differentiated instead of homogenous, their entrance into the network creates the network itself, not necessarily because they are homogenous.

Their connection is facilitated by a host who is a mediator between the audience and the storytellers. During intervals, he reads out their messages with the listener's name

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[23] See Appendix 9 For the Bengali post in the Facebook group.

and creates a consensus among them as part of the podcast. Some of these mediations go like this:

> Welcome to you all, from me, RJ Russell. I hope that you all are doing great, and among the good [people]. I am inviting you all to listen to Bhoot.Com.
>
> I will go to the *ghatana* now. But before I do this, I will remind you, if you want to communicate with us or write to us, our email address is russell.bhoot.com@gmail.com. Write along with your name, email address, and mobile number the best *ghatana* that happened to you or that you know to this email address. Do mention at the heading whether you want to share it live from the studio or through email. Those of you are [listening] from abroad, you can record your *ghatana* or type it and email us.
>
> I have seen that many of you have already joined us. We will shortly read your messages out. As you all have been with us always, we hope that you will stay with us today. If you wish to, you can join our Facebook group as well. Our Facebook page is www.facebook.com/russell.shadhin. By joining the group, you can directly communicate with us.
>
> You are listening to Bhoot.Com and this is RJ Russell accompanying you. Before we go to the next *ghatana*, let me read some messages from you.
>
> I am trying to entertain you in the best way possible. But your responsibility is limited to sending us *ghatanas*. If you send us *ghatanas*, our Bhoot.Com [podcast] will go ahead.
>
> Once again, this is Russell welcoming you all. Hope you are doing great and are among the good [people]. I believe that you all are enjoying today's show together.

It is one of the host's roles to compliment listeners and to read out their messages. It is a way to keep them alert and connected throughout performances.

However, the problem is – as Noyes defines commodification "as the degree to which the expressive form can circulate without interaction between the points on its trajectory" (2016a: 35) – that there is no oral communication between the sender and receiver of the Bhoot.Com narratives. Unless a story is performed live, storytellers do not communicate with the host during the performance, making creation of context for the narratives difficult. It still can be minimally created if the narrator performs it in conversation with the host. Of 63 *ghatanas*, 16 were narrated in minimal conversational mode. Fourteen were shared before the pandemic in episodes 1-3. The majority of the *ghatanas* were minimally conversational at the beginning. On the contrary, this went down to 2 in episodes 44 and 45, and 0 in episodes 59-70. This shows how *ghatanas* were passed on via email as text or audio without interaction between the two points.

Noyes asserts that folklore continues through "actors seeking to accomplish their ends not as components of a system but as individuals in competition and conflict" and they are "connected to folklore not through the abstract linkage of group to tradition but through empirically traceable instances of performance" (2016b: 59). It is necessary to understand what ends the actors, even as individuals, are after. In the previous chapter, I have shown that entertainment is one of the purposes of the audience while the platform owners use it to engage more people into subscribing. RJ Russell, the host of the podcast, confirms this by urging members to purchase packages[24].

This defines, but does not limit, the role of the listeners, who crowdsource the podcast, with many of them buying their own product (*ghatanas*). But the storytellers, especially Afnan, tries to break the barrier of the 'unpresentable shared real' by integrating technology in performance and syncretising the long *ghatanas* with tradition and technology.

This performance is a repeated type of activity in a collective form creating collective identities that "become realities with the taking of collective action". "The performance itself adds something important, however, and can extend this feeling of community to a larger social body"; or put slightly differently, the "[c]ommunity is made real in performance" (Noyes 2016a: 42, 43). Collective action in the podcast is performance by the storyteller, listened to by the audience. The repetition of the performance thus makes the identities (host, storyteller, audience/listener, and moderator) of network members real. And their identity signifies a combination of ghostlore podcast and Bangladeshi convention. The celebration of Friday the 13th, as I have mentioned above, on 13th of August, 2021, with *ghatanas* from various traditions, embodies this syncretisation of tradition.

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[24] See Appendix 10 for a screenshot of the promotional video.

Conclusion

At a time when virtual media is taking the role of mediator in the increasing dialogue between cultures, traditions and beliefs, there is also a negotiation going on among scholars. They reach out to the world with their intellects, doing so in their native languages and disciplines (Nigam 2020: 44). This dialogue absorbs from and merges with traditions because the world is now "interconnected by migrations, marketplaces, and media" (Noyes 2016a: 30). For this reason, more than ever, there are interactions and dialogues between people of different locations, the result of which could be a better integration of diverse people and their identities. This is perhaps a reason why any local issue brings the world into conversation. This can be seen as one of the crucial aspects of the time. The output cannot be predicted, although people are more than ever aware of the existence of different beliefs, cultures and races. Perhaps with this dialogue, the quest for one authentic identity may turn into a belief, a practice of living with differences together. At least the Bhoot.Com podcast, with its diversity of narratives in terms of belief, culture, tradition and location, stands out as one instance of that.

The Eurocentric worldview, or European knowledge, was seen during the Bengal Renaissance as a universal model in connection with which people endeavoured to produce indigenous or national tradition, culture and religion. This persists in a different form among the cultural elites. Inherent to it is an apologetic tendency that sees local cultures as inferior, and hence an effort is required to prove the worth of the people by imposing a selected historical past as their authentic and superior identity marker to glorify them. With Europe being provincialised and the world seen as a polycentric base (Ganeri 2016 qtd. in Nigam 2020: 20) there is a communication of voices from across the world that attemptes to create a dialogue and perceive the world not in nationalist terms, or as 'our pure and superior' vs 'other impure and inferior', but rather in networks of performances syncretising different voices, traditions, cultures, and ideologies. In such a situation it is significant that a podcast, too, accommodates this tendency. The narratives of the podcast are not measured in their authenticity, but for their probability to be accepted, modified, and adopted across beliefs, cultures and traditions. The podcast as a network and its *ghatanas*, for their diversity in location, faith and culture, indicate an ongoing shift in the concept of singularity of identity and past glory of nation as a homogeneous entity.

With access to internet, the introduction of credit cards and online banking, Bangladesh is entering a reality where one will be able to shop online and get the commodity delivered to the private sphere without ever even interacting. One can earn money by working from home, can even perform and stream it via online platforms. One's virtual profile is largely the trajectory of one's social life. In such changed reality, why are the conventional forms reappearing? Continuity through transmission is the character of folk culture and hence this question. However, the common understanding of homeland is now superfluous, as Dorothy Noyes remarks: "European Scholarship anticipated a concern with location not as reified homeland but in network terms as a particular juncture of circumstances, actors, and resources" (2016b: 76). This understanding of circumstances, actors, and resources has necessarily effected the idea of territoriality and authenticity of culture and tradition, and most importantly created the possibility of interaction beyond the physical world that eradicates the spatial and temporal constraints of becoming part of networks and hence communities. From this viewpoint, Bhoot.Com in its second year is still a virtual network. The *ghatanas* shared in the podcast may not seem to be interactional genres because of the various sociocultural backgrounds of subscribers. However, the *ghatanas*, in addressing recurrent situations as genres, are "reified intentionality, collectively designed over time to address recurrent situations" (ibid.: 78). Hence, folk in the network has now taken a global and inclusive form of identity, that of host, storyteller, audience/listener and moderator.

This creates a debate about homogeneity in the sense that these identities are global, not local. But for quite a long time, and even now, the world has been witnessing the rise of nationalist regimes that, in their quest for "some pure *uncontaminated indigenous* self" and for a singular "pristine source of authentic knowledge" and "an indigenous *intellectual/philosophical* tradition" (Nigam 2020: 29, emphasis original) indulge in various forms of conflict. From this perspective what the podcast collects and adopts from across traditions through its network at one point becomes their own without ever worrying about authenticity and sources (Chakrabarti and Weber 2015 qtd. in Nigam 2020: 19). The folk of the podcast represent how fusion occurs between different cultures in virtual networks, or any other form of network, culminating in new culture and tradition. The podcast network also proves that a pluralistic world as opposed to a nation state (Bronner 2009) is already growing in the virtual (and also perhaps real) world by filling people's minds unconsciously with fusional components.

This ongoing fusion of culture, tradition, belief, ritual, etc., in the virtual podcast (in fact in this technological era) I underscore as syncretism, not in the sense that it involves belief, but in the sense of an amalgamation of various traditions.

The genre, however, the podcast deals with is *ghatana* in their view. But it basically contradicts with the real genre. The *ghatana* is not mono-episodic as compared with conventional use. Rather it is very lengthy and detailed. For the same reason the *ghatana* is not a legend, although I have shown in Fotol's performance how the concept of the folktale is not limited to Bascom's (1965) definition. Folktale may or may not have to deal with the imaginary, and it can possibly involve presentation of an event by combining a known place, location or person even though partly made up. However, Tangherlini's definition of legend applies to Bangladeshi legends, as evident in Fotol's belief and ritual-related narratives. It is also evident in the podcast *ghatanas* that they are fusions of the two forms of prose narrative, legend and folktale – and *ghatana*. This amalgamation itself proves that the podcast network (especially the storytellers) acts as an agency of what I regarded as 'syncretisation'.

The performance in the podcast subsequently takes a significant role in the syncretisation process and offers a great opportunity to study how storytellers as agents of the process act in the development. However, it was beyond the scope of this thesis to pay more attention to the effect of the podcast on society. It just establishes one of the key gateways of syncretism, that is, the podcast. But there is a substantial social network where performance is visual and tends to result in recurrent versions (and the folk belong to numerous networks, both virtual and face-to-face, connected by performances). Apart from the Bhoot.Com podcast, this is the network where, as opposed to the mainstream media, cross cultural traditions frequently appear and transmit to different traditions. This is not mere imitation or mimicry. One cannot view the network in the way the cultural elites, such as the media and nation states, regard them, as something to discard. They offer crucial ethnography on aspect. There were numerous occasions when I could not help noticing this cross-cultural fusion in the contents shared on such platforms. It would be of good use if further research on similar media, even on the podcast, were to be carried out based on this thesis.

The supernatural, as I have shown, is described in a conceitful way through metaphoric expressions. These metaphors, as well as other rhetoric, always evolve with

time. Bangladesh is entering a technological era and hence the supernatural and its description is entering this reality. Therefore, new metaphors, tropes and rhetorics of evidence are appearing. This does not mean that conventional language constructs are inapt for this and should be discarded. This is only a transitional phase in Bangladesh. Future years will perhaps show that the supernatural exists and is described in the changed reality. At this juncture it is more than ever possible to adapt supernatural beings to contemporary society, at least in terms of description. I have presented such changes, for instance a comparison of the supernatural with Godzilla, of a *jinn's* palace with palaces shown in film, and the haunting and exorcism of mobile phones. These at least hint at a metaphoric shift that may at some point omit real references, instead accepting metaphor for real (Burke 2017: 93).

At the onset, I mentioned the weakness of the research. Ulitmately, again, I want to stress this. Regrettably the podcast team remained beyond my reach. Further research to overcome this weakness will certainly be beneficial especially in a world where mobilisation, migration and adaptations are more than ever visible.

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Bhoot.Com taskuhääling kui uue meedia võrgustik: *ghatana* ja selle väljundid uues meedias

Bangladešis on viimastel aastatel virtuaalne suhtlemine kiiresti arenenud. Uued platvormid on mitmekülgsed ja populaarsed ning hõlmavad palju tegevusi. Mõned neist on võtnud üle kohaliku folkloori elemente, mille ülekandmine traditsioonilisest keskkonnast uude meediasse toob kaasa muutusi. Üks selliseid virtuaalse meedia näiteid on Bhoot.Com taskuhääling, milles sõna *bhoot* tähendab kummitust või vaimolendit. Taskuhäälingule annavad sisu üle maailma elavad bengalikeelsed inimesed, kes jutustavad teistele üleloomulikest kogemustest.

Selles uurimuses on kaks fookust: 1) taskuhäälingu jutud ja nende esitamine, ja 2) seda pärimust kandvad rühmad ning nende identiteet. Magistritöö põhiküsimused on järgmised: Miks ja kuidas kujunevad ning levivad Bangladeši uues meedias üleloomulikest kogemustest rääkivad jutud? Mis juhtub Bangladeši traditsioonilise rahvajutuga, kui see kantakse üle uude meediasse? Kuidas muutub žanr ja selle esitus? Kes on jutuvestjad, kes kuulajaskond? Käesolev magistritöö vaidlustab devolutsioonilist vaadet folkloorile (Dundes 1969), mõtestab folkloori praktikana (Bronner 2012), ja seab kahtluse alla arvamuse, et Bangladeši rahvausu sünkretistlik iseloom on kadumas, andes maad üheülbalisele transnatsionaalsele kultuurile (Rias 2009, Banerjee 2010, Rahman 2017). Töö teoreetilise aluse moodustab esituskeskne käsitus (Bauman 1971), mis heidab valgust avarale ja mitmekesisele suhtlusvõrgustikule, mis ületab grupi, territooriumi ja usulise kuuluvuse piire (Noyes 2016c).

Magistritöös analüüsitake *ghatana*'t ('juhtum, sündmus') bengali folkloori jutužanrina, mis käsitleb mistahes tõeseks peetud sündmust. Kõrvutan töös *ghatana*t, mida esitatakse taskuhäälingus, nende *ghatana*tega, mis esinevad konventsionaalses suhtlemises. Erinevalt (mono)episoodilisest ja vestlustoonil räägitud muistendist (Tangherlini 1990), on taskuhäälingu jutud pikemalt välja arendatud ning esitus lisab neile kunstilisust. Uurimuses selgitatakse sedagi, kuidas taskuhääling kui suhtlusplatvorm toimib võrgustikuna, milles osalevad sellised sotsiaalsed rollid nagu jutuvestja, võõrustaja, kuulaja/ publik ning moderaator. See võrgustik sulatab endasse elemente erinevatest kultuuridest; jutuvestjate repertuaar on uuenduslik ja seob varasema pärimuse virtuaalse meediaga. Niisiis on sünkretistlik kultuur endiselt elujõuline, hõlmates uskumusi,

rituaale, tavasid, mis saavad väljundi taskuhäälingus räägitud lugudes. Neis avaldub muutuv maailmapilt ning inimeste elu oma mitmekülgsuses.
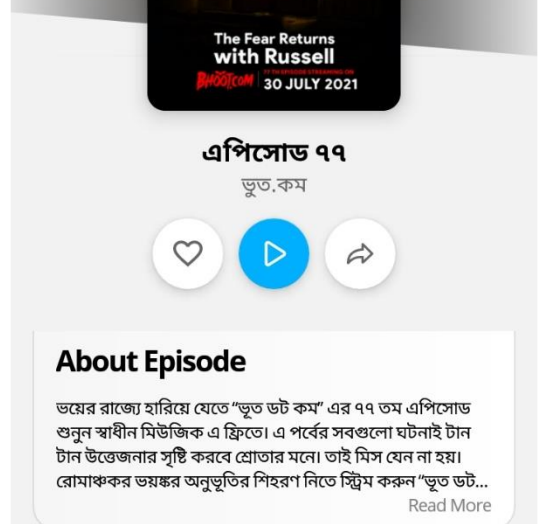
Appendices

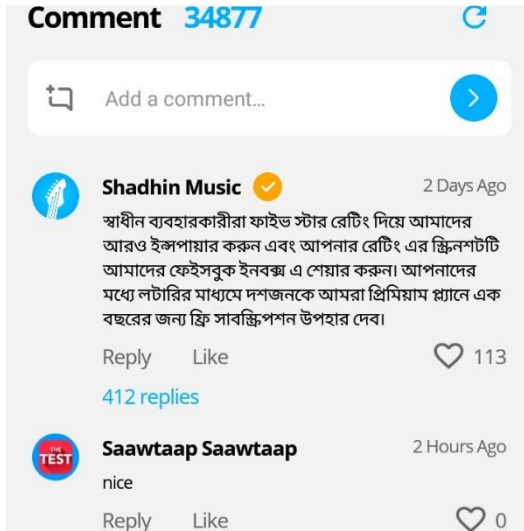**Appendix 1:** Screenshots of the Podcast app
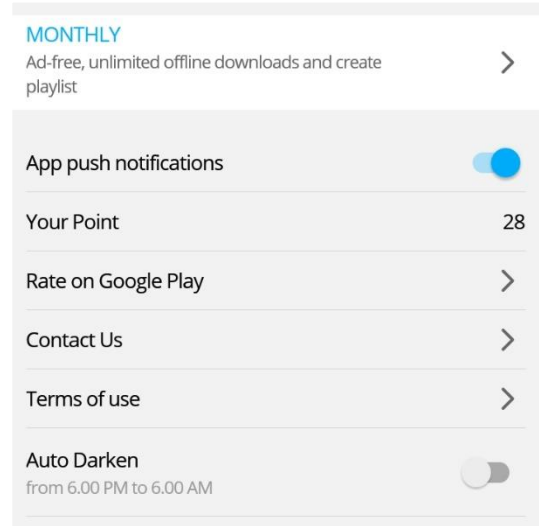
Live Podcast and Listeners Online
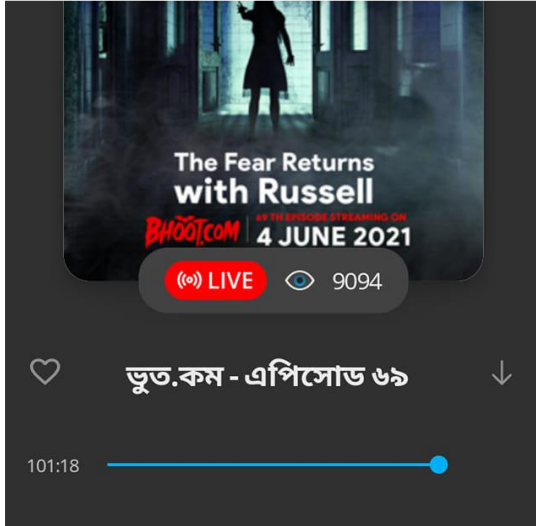
Podcast Episode

Audience Comments

Subscription

Appendix 2: Outlines of the narratives

Episode 1: 14.02.2020

1. Tallinn City (Title)

Duration: 19m47s

Source/Narrator: Riyad (Muslim, male, an anthropology student in Tallinn, via e-mail)
Personal-experience (Read out by RJ Russell, all 'emails' are read out by him)

When and Where: 2016, Old Town and a village in Tallinn Estonia

Outline: The narrator and his group went on a fieldwork trip to study an old building where the event begins. They later went to a site beside a lake for their project work and later ended up having physical illness, because Riyad later learnt that this lake was the place where three women sacrificed their children in a Voodoo ceremony. They later needed doctor's treatment).

Genre: *Ghatana*

2. Terror in Bikrampur (Title)

Duration: 10m25s

Source/Narrator: Kaushik (Hindu, male, livestream), heard from mother-in-law

When and Where: Post 1947, Segunbagicha, Dhaka (at the *Aturghar)*

Outline: While in her *Aturghar* (temporary room for the newborn and the mother) as she bore a new baby, a *Pishach* came in the form of an aunt who was invited to visit them. But the lady was fearless and drove the *Pishach* away.

Genre: *Ghatana*

3 Imprisioned inside the Bottle (Title)

Duration: 17m37s

Source/Narrator: Doctor Alif (Muslim male, streamed Live) heard from source anonymous

When and Where: Time not mentioned. First experience with *jinn,* Neighbor's house

Outline: This anonymous person had an abnormal interest in *Jinn*. So, he started to study in different madrasa and learnt a great deal about them. He also became a very *parhejgar* (pious) man. He also got the power to perceive supernatural presence. A girl in his neighbourhood was possessed. Many mullahs were renowned for putting *jinn* inside bottles. But the *jinn* spoke through the mouth of the girl, saying that only this young man could cure the girl. So, they needed to call him. But if they called him now (at night), he wouldn't pick up. They called him and he did not pick up. Next day he came and summoned the *jinn*. The *jinn* told him that a relative sent 100 *jinns* to kill her. After sending the *jinn*, the relative blocked the house from entering and exiting the house. The *jinn* was a good one and saw this and possessed her. But for the blockade of the house, he could not leave. So, the mullah did not give her any amulet as its *kufr* [anti-Islamic, denying the power of Allah], but rather a knife which she would use to drive away *jinns*. Then he found the solution in a dream and dug a hole, at night, under a tree and discovered a pot, while doing so he felt like he had an electric shock and lost his senses. But before that, he could hear hundreds of people weeping. When he gained his senses back, he observed no problem. And the girl was cured.

Genre: *Ghatana*

4. Fear in the apartment (Title)

Duration: 13m32s

Source/Narrator: Babu Vai (Muslim male, shared live from studio); heard from anonymous source

When and Where: Not Mentioned, somewhere in the proximity of the Bhoot.Com studio in Dhaka.

Outline: After moving to live in a new apartment without performing any required Islamic ritual, a man and his wife witnessed the presence of an unearthly spirit. But later, being advised by one of his aunts, he called in a mullah and performed the ritual.

Genre: *Ghatana*

5. Broken Grave (Title)

Duration: 12m07s

Source/Narrator: Afnan *vai* (Muslim male, shared live from studio)*,* collected from Saikat who heard it from anonymous source

When and Where: Began before 1971, Satkhira, Ashura Bazar.

Outline: A local member who did bad to people and after his death his grave broke apart. Even after his family people repaired the grave several times and watched over day and night to find out who smashed the grave, they could not see anyone doing it. Anyway, the grave came to be broken again and again with no one, not even animals doing it. (No treatment)

Genre: *Ghatana* but at times he also regards it as a story.

6. A Rail Station (Title)

Duration: 11m06s

Source/Narrator: Abrar (Muslim male from USA, shared as recorded audio via email,), experienced by friend Faysal.

When and Where: Winter at 2am, Manhattan, Madison Square

Outline: While waiting for a subway train, Faysal smelled a terrible odour and then encountered with a homeless man from whom the odour was coming. Later he was half asleep in the train and dreamt a lot of weird things. Then as he got off the train near his apartment he again saw a man who asked for a dollar to buy beer. The man was none other than the homeless man at the subways station in Manhattan. He simply ran away to his apartment. Later his friend told him that a homeless man who committed suicide was seen by many in that area. (No treatment)

Genre: *Ghatana*

Episode 2 21.02.2020

1. Hostel (Title)

Duration: 14m43s

Source/Narrator: Masuk (Muslim male young filmmaker, live), heard from an actor, seen by actor's aunt, happened to a Christian girl.

When and Where: Long time ago, at a student's hostel next to a 300 years' old Church in Bangladesh.

Outline: Aunt and her dorm mates observed one of their friends used to sleepwalk at night as they would see her jumping off the wall and go to the old grave near the Church. They took her to India to a mental asylum for treatment, and she came back alright. But as they returned from the mental asylum things started to change. Her family was progressive at that time and hence they let their daughter to stay in a dorm. In fact, did not believe in ghost. But with their daughter's illness they grew susceptible, and they would do anything anyone would tell them to do. They met a priest at the church one day and he told them that it was the grave of an old woman who was a foreigner. She died at night, almost about the same time as the girl sleepwalked to her grave. Perhaps this was the way the deceased lady found a relative after her death. (No treatment)

Genre: *Galpa* (Story), also uses the word *Ghatana*. But the most frequently used *galpa*. Also he refers to narratives about the place as *prachalita galpa* (stories in practice) about this area.

2. Hill of fear (Title)

Duration: 13m55s

Source/Narrator: Afnan (Muslim male, shared live from studio), happened to Mahendra di Silva (a Sri Lankan man), heard from a senior who attended an international workshop in India,

When and Where: Recent, most probably 5-10 years ago in a road called the Road of Bones, Oymyakon (the coldest city in the world) in Siberia

Outline: They were on their way to a conference along with a convoy. Suddenly their car engine stopped and they were stuck in that place for the night and had the experience of seeing thousands of people around. Later they found out that 1.5 million people died while constructing the road who were not buried properly. They turned into ghosts. (No treatment)

Genre: *Ghatana*

3. Who's making this noise? (Title)

Duration: 18m10s

Source/Narrator: Dr. Alif (Muslim male, shared live from the studio), experience of Saifur Rahman

When and Where: 2001, midnight, Khilgaon, Dhaka

Outline: Saifur Rahman was visioning a corpse-bed (*Khatia)* at his home several times along with some people in white cloak. He got alarmed when it was repeatedly happening. He even fell terribly ill after this experience. Later as he came back from hospital, he decided to meet a mullah for treatment. While on his way with his wife in a rickshaw, they were run over by a car killing his wife. After that, he never had such vision ever again. (Treatment by Imam and other mullahs)

Genre: *Ghatana*

4. Dark Shadow (Title)

Duration: 8m42s

Source/Narrator: Babu *vai* (Muslim middle-aged male, shared live from the studio), experienced by a deceased friend and his family

When and Where: During childhood at his residence.

Outline: Babu's friend's father owned some *jinn* who were released at the death of their lord. Even when he was a child, he could see the being, real tall and big, moving around their bed. Slaving the *jnn* is prohibited in Islam [in Babu's view] and they get enraged once they are free at the death of the person who enslaves them. After his father's death, they felt something was moving around the house, throwing stones. Everything in their house, even though they kept them organized, was messed up. Even Babu when h was a child, also saw two boys running ahead of him. H followed them. All of a sudden, there was no ground under him. He fell down in a well. There was another tenant at the *chilekotha* [a single room on the rooftop] saw two children running who as well were

flying on the roof. One day he saw his deceased brother whose head was turned backward, and he got terrified and had a fever. Afterward, he had symptoms of possession. Even were bricks thrown at the house once and his brother shouted at whoever was throwing these bricks at them. It only resulted in manifold increase in the number of bricks thrown at their house. They begged pardon and thus it came to halt. However, later, they sold the house to a builder. (No treatment, but mentions of *Azan* that scares the evil spirits away; but as people in the house didn't pray, the spirits only were away as long as the sound of *Azan* could be heard).

Genre: *Ghatana*

Episode 3 28.02.2020

     1. Haunted Pond (Title)

Duration: 7m15s

Source/Narrator: Mohammad Rakat Rahman Rafi (Muslim boy of 15-16, shared as a text via email) heard from his mom, happened to his aunt

When and Where: 1989 0r 1990, at 11pm, Narayanganj

Outline: Rakat's aunt was on her way back home from the wedding of a neighbor at about 11pm. On her way back she had to pass by 2 ponds and bamboo bushes. There are many ghatanas involving these places. When she reached one of these ponds, she saw a woman sitting there. She went to the *ghat* and asked the woman what she was doing there at such late hours. But as she neared the woman, by that time she noticed the woman was on white saree, she began to go down to the pond. Rakat's aunt followed her in a hypnotized way. The woman went deeper and deeper, his aunt followed her. But when his aunt came back to her senses and turned to reach for the *ghat*, the woman grabbed her and began to drown her. At this point, her mother came in search of her and saw someone there in the pond and rushed to the spot to rescue her devastated (*ardhamrita*). Later they took her to a *kabiraj* who summoned the evil *jinn* or *petni* in her and interrogated. The creature agreed to let he go on condition of sacrifice of goat.

Genre: *Ghatana*

2. Crimson Red *Jaba* flower (Title)

Duration: 20m50s

Source/Narrator: Rimjhim Khan (Young Muslim female, shared live from the studio), experienced by herself

When and Where: Began in December 2017 at night at a temple in Dhaka Cantonment.

Outline: Rimjhim was returning home from neighborhood one evening. When she neared a temple beside a *jarul* tree, she saw a child with its toes backwards and got scared. That night she could not say her nighttime prayer and dreamt 4 guys who started asking her about why she did not say her prayer. Next night, she dreamt a child who fell down in a well and woke up to see that baby for real staring at the ceiling fan and closed her eyes. When she looked again, she saw a woman beside the baby who was staring at the roof and stretched her hand towards the gate of the building. Seeing this, she lost her consciousness and somebody locked her room door from the inside and then her family people rescued her from her room that was full of water. Her paternal grandma had *jinns* and she communicated with her family with concern over Rimjhim. She sent a *jinn* to heal her. Earlier she was unable to walk and after that she got cured.

Genre: *Ghatana*

3. Pet Dog (Title)

Duration: 7m21s

Source/Narrator: Maruf Shubha (Muslim male, shared live from the studio), experience heard from his uncle.

When and Where: At night, at an old rented house in Old Dhaka

Outline: Shubha's uncle had a pet dog. They had a garden at their house where he used to let the dog loose. One night the dog came back barking and trembling with fear. He tried to force it outside again. But the dog wouldn't go out. Later, at one night, one of his neighbors, a woman, warned him not to move out at night. But he did move out the other night after hearing the dog bark again and encountered a woman on a tree. The woman

looked like the woman who forbade him to move out at night. But she looked dangerous than she seemed to be the other night. No treatment, changing house.

Genre: *Ghatana*

4. Deep Unfathomable (Title)

Duration: 9m16s

Source/Narrator: Maruf Shubha (Muslim male, shared live from the studio), happened to brother of a friend

When and Where: Not mentioned, Barishal at a shipyard on the way to village home

Outline: The family of Shubha's friend were travelling to Barisal, their village home. As they were boarding the launch, his friend's younger brother fell in the river from the dockyard. It wasn't that deep where he fell. But they could not find him for quite a while. But after some time his unconscious body surfaced at one side of the river. They took him to the hospital and did not want to go anywhere, nor did he want to talk. But his parents pressed him to talk and then he told them that he met his dead grandpa and others when he was underwater. But he could not move even an inch. And then he saw that some figure like his grandpa pushed him above. His grandma believed him while others did not. He also had a dream that told him that, as his grandpa died by drowning, a giant tail [could be of a nymph] hit him and he drowned and had died.

Hospitalization and consultation with a *hujur* (mullah) who advised him to arrange a *milad* ritual for his grandpa and they did so. He never had this sort of dreams again.

Genre: *Ghatana*

5. Tranquil (Title, in reaction to another narrative, a prompt performance)

Duration: 4m31s

Source/Narrator: RJ Russel (Muslim male, in his late 30s, shared live from studio) his close relative.

When and Where: Place and location not mentioned, in ICU of a Hospital where the patient had a vision

Outline: The person had this vision while he was in coma. He discovered himself in a very strange land with a dark tree. He was carrying a lantern with him and there he met two deceased relatives who told him that he was not supposed to be there. And they fetched him home by holding his hand. He was in a critical condition. But once he had this dream, he recovered. (Near death experience in my observation).

Genre: *Ghatana*

6. Mysterious House (Title)

Duration: 11m7s

Source/Narrator: Mohd. Ashikur Rahman (Muslim young male, shared live from the studio), witnessed by many people

When and Where: Not long ago at Mirpur Mazar Coloni (2nd Colony)

Outline: There is a house where lived a *Hajji* who only believed in 4 times prayer, not on 5 times. He had a daughter who looked like an ape. Narrator and his 4-5 friends went there to verify the mystery [can this be related to the use of the word *myth* on the 59th episode?]. A shopkeeper experienced a lot of troubles and left the shop. However, the narrator threw his sandal inside the building. And went in and brought it out and stressed on hearing the sound of water coming out of a tap which was simply impossible as there was no water source there and the house had been abandoned for a long time. Then, they came out and met a local man who warned them not to enter the house ever again. They asked him about the *ghatana* in the house. He told them about the *Hajji* and how he owned some wicked *jinn*. They used a ghost tracking device and heard an alert as in Horror films and a gush of wind began to blow and the light blinked several times. There were two security guards there who they fooled by using their camera with a Bangladeshi TV channel logo on it and wanted to interview them. They did not tell them anything save for saying that there was another guard before they came who talked about the house to people and the *jinns* punished him. No treatment was involved.

Genre: *Ghatana*

Episode 12 01.05.2020

1. Dream World (Title)

Duration: 12m 35s

Source/Narrator: Antar, (Young Muslim male, University student), happened to a man and a girl. Heard from his mom.

When and Where: 20 years ago, Brahmaputra River.

Outline: A girl miraculously drowned in the Brahmaputra River near a *dou* 20 years ago. He body was never found. Later after 8 years, a crippled man had a vision that an old white man was summoning him to the *dou.* As he went there and dived in, he found himself at a palace in front of the old man. He healed him and gifted him gold coins. He also so the lost girl who the old man, a *jinn* called Khowaj pir, married to his son.

Genre: *Alaukik Ghatana*

Episode 59 26.03.2021 (Moderator Episode)

1.Mysterious Phone Call (Title)

Duration: 26m 67s

Source/Narrator: Mostafa Alam Roman (Young Muslim male hobby painter, shared as an audio clip via email), personal event.

When and Where: March 2017, in Rajshahi at the new apartment they just moved in.

Outline: One evening on March 2017 Romman was working on his canvas as his teacher gave him some work to do. He was not aware of how long that task took him to finish. He was totally onto his work and hence was not aware of what was going on around him. Even though he did not answer to any phone calls during that time, later as he met his friends and asked them about the calls, they told him that he picked the calls. He denied that but his friends insisted. Then he noticed that the phone calls were answered as was checking his call list. Just to get an explanation to this, he consulted a mullah who told him that a *jinn* resided beside the flower plant. He did not want him to paint and did this. But if Roman still felt like to continue painting, he must do it inside his room.

2. Hairy Beast (Title)

Duration: 7m 42s

Source/Narrator: Mukta (Young Muslim female student, shared as a voice clip via email), event that happened to her *nana* (maternal grandpa)

When and Where: She did not remember the time of the event, somewhere on his way back home at the junction of four roads with a banyan tree, tamarind tree and a bamboo bush in the vicinity, in Kustia (she did not talk about the location name)

Outline: Mukta's maternal grandfather was a doctor who used to go to attend patients at different places. One night he went to see a patient and while returning from there, his torch was not functioning properly. So, he borrowed a *Hariken* (lantern) from the patient's house and started to walk. When he reached a junction of four roads surrounded by a banyan tree, tamarind tree and bamboo buh, the lantern in his hand went out several times. He, at one such moment, noticed some men wearing white cloth and white tupi (cap usually worn by mullahs) walked by him. He wanted to catch up with them but failed. Still, he continued to walk fast for a while until all on a sudden he sensed a hairy beast crawled bellow his toes and then he began to feel that he was floating. Then perhaps the beast threw him down as he felt that the beast is no more around him. He fell down unconscious. The next day he discovered himself at home.

Genre: *Ghatana*

3. Black Cat (Title)

Duration: 10m 37 Seconds

Source/Narrator: Neel (Muslim male teenager, shared voice clip via email), personal adventure event.

When and Where: In Faridpur during the lockdown following the Covid 19 in 2021. At an old house, right after the evening prayer (Magrib prayer).

Outline: Many 'myths' about an abandoned house were shared by people of Faridpur. That house was owned by an acquaintance of Neel. To verify these myths Neel decided to visit that house abandoned for ten years. He along with three other friends went there to find out whether the *kahini* (Story) centering the house were real. Nothing happened to them for the whole part and hence Neel started to believe that these *kahinis* (stories) were fake. So, they came out of the house. But one of their friends left his mobile back in the house. So, they went back in. This time a cat jumped on one of them and vanished immediately. Then they started to hear a person pushing one of the doors of the house to open it. They got terrified at this and came back home. After that Neel had a fever and his parents came to know everything. So, they called in a *hujur* who puffed over water and gave him to drink it.

Genre: *Ghatana*

4. Demon (*Daitta*) under water (Title)

Duration: 10m

Source/Narrator: Anonymous (Did not mention identity, shared as a text via email), happened to a person who the narrator introduced with an alias of Rahim.

When and Where: 2020, at a *dou* of a branch of the Jamuna river flowing beside the village called Malai in Jaipurhat, witnessed by thousands of people.

Outline: The deepest part of a river in different areas is known as '*Dou*' and the *ghatana* is about one such *dou* in one of the branches of Jamuna river. The monsoon season was almost over when Rahim (pseudonym) along with three of other friends went on a fishing trip. After catching fish, Rahim wanted to go home which is located on the other side of the river. The river was not full of tide as the end of monsoon neared, he decided to bathe there at the *dou* and then to return home. He swam for a distance and then suddenly he disappeared. His friends thought perhaps he crossed the river already and went home. But they were mistaken and was brought back to the fact by the scream of a person from the other side of the river. He told them that Rahim asked for his help to take him ashore. But before he could do anything, Rahim was lost under water. A lot of people began to search for him. But in vain. Fire service people, too, dived in search of him. But they came out without him and asked for Rahim's mother. When Rahim's mother was introduced to

them, they told her to make an offering of '*batasa*' (one type of sweet made up of sugar and flower) in order to get their son back, but not alive! When pressed by people for further explanation of this remark, they asked them whether they knew of any supernatural incidence in the '*dou*'. They said that there were two men who were drowned in there as well. At this the fire fighters told them that as they were searching for Rahim, they met a being with 'eyes all over its body' who advised them to leave to save themselves. Later people came to know that Rahim poisoned the water of the river to kill fish and they warned him in his dream not to swim in the river alone. That day he was swimming alone, perhaps he forgot the event in the past, now they had taken him as a punishment of poisoning the river.

Genre: *Satta Ghatana (*Real Event)

5. Corpse with eyes wide open (Title)

Duration: 6m 25s

Source/Narrator: Imitiaz Ahmed Mithun (Muslim male, employee, shared as a text via email), heard from a colleague named Sabab whose friend's (did not want to reveal his identity) sister committed suicide.

When and Where: When they used to be university students, on the way from Dhaka to Barisal.

Outline: The *ghatana* is heard from Sabab. Sabab's friend Kamal had a sister who attempted to commit suicide and was taken to Dhaka Medical College Hosipital. They rushed there to hear that the doctors declared her dead. They began the journey with the corpse in a hearse for Barisal. As they crossed Mawa and came out to the open [from Dhaka city] their car trembled. They got down from the car thinking the driver was drowsy. But they found out that the car's backdoor was open, and the corpse was on the road. They put the corpse back in and also warned the driver to be careful so as not to fall asleep again. They began their journey again. But the car would not run fast, no matter how hard the driver pressed the accelerator, it wouldn't work. They still travelled for a while and yet again found that the corpse was not in the car! Again, they found out that the door was open and there the corpse was on the road. This time they grew alert, asked the driver to splash some water into his face by parking the car somewhere beside the

highway. After that they started the journey again. Lo, Kamal found out yet again that the car door was open, and the corpse was not there. They ran quite a distance backward and found the corpse on the road. At this stage they managed to start their journey again. But as they went to a short distance, they started to feel that someone was pulling the car from behind. The car wouldn't run fast and then heard a sound of something falling. They rushed to the rear of the car and found out the backdoor wide open and the coffin's nails were bended, and the corpse was down on the road. They put it back in and prayed before they began their journey again. Yet they felt that someone was pulling the car from behind and at this point the lights of the car went off, and the engine, too, went down. Kamal and Sabab, this time, were terrified and yet went out to the rear and lo, the corpse was not there! Not even on the road. This time the car wouldn't start. Kamal decided that they would have to save their lives first. And then they requested the driver to move on at any cost. After driving for 2-3 minutes, they saw a corpse lying on the road in such a way that it blocked their way ahead. The driver was scared to continue ahead. Sabab was really brave and he went out ahead to the corpse and found out that the face was uncovered [the white cloak was untied from the face part] and the corpse's eyes were wide open. He, too, got terribly scared and still managed to read from the Quran and managed to lock his body for the spirits to harm him [*sharir bandha kara* by reciting five short suras from the Quran, also known as *hisar kara*] and then tied the *kafan* again. Then Kamal and he brought the corpse back. They, then reached a bazar and waited there till the morning *azan* was anounced in the mosque and people came out. Later as they reached home, Kamal developed some fever and saw a *Kabiraj*. He explained that Sabab had *Sharir Bandha* on that night otherwise there were many jinns who must have killed him.

Genre: *Ghatana/*Story/Galpa/*Kahini*

Episode 60 02.04.2021

1. Unsatisfied soul (Title)

Duration: 6m 53s

Source/Narrator: Anonymous (Muslim Young male, shared script via email), personal miraculous experience

When and Where: 2015, in one of the Busiests areas of Dhaka.

Outline: In the year 2015, the narrator and his friend Miraz (Pseudonym) were living in a *mes* (a cheap apartment shared by students, professionals by sharing a room with 2-4 or more other persons). Their room was for three while one bed (meaning sleeping space) was vacant. They used to spend time watching things on YouTube since they just got their wifie connection. One night the narrator saw something white in color flew through the balcony. Same thing happened in the following night. But he kept it to himself fearing others would laugh at him. Miraz, however, told him that he regularly noticed somebody passing through the balcony. The narrator, then, opened up about his experience. Later, they noticed something grainy in their room which made them suspicious. So, they went to the doorkeeper of that building who informed them about the murder at the student *mes.* No treatment.

Genre: Not Ghost related) but *Advut Ghatana* (Strange Event)

2. Wicked *Jinn* (Title)

Duration: 20m

Source/Narrator: Tanvir Tushar (Young Muslim male, shared as a recorded audio via email), personal incident of his maternal grandpa (he kept his name a secret)

When and Where: In the year 1984, at Gaibandha, journey back from a bazar and reached a haunted rail bridge known as Nowabandar rail gate, frequent suicides took place there.

Outline: Tanvir Tushar's grandpa (*nana)* owned a shop near the Nowabandar rail gate. One day he was returning home late from his shop. He was walking along the rail line as the roads were in terrible condition. He was walking and passed Uttam bazar, after which there was an empty land beside Alai River and then there was a *shamshan* (crematorium). He passed the *shamshan* saw three men carrying a dead body on a *khatia* (a cot specially made to carry dead body). These men requested him to help carrying the dead body to the *shamshan*. He readily accepted their request and held the right corner of the *khatia.* It was unusually light for him to carry. They went ahead and reached the rail gate. At this point, the *khatia* became heavier and heavier to carry. So, he, with much struggle, looked up behind him and saw that the corpse in its white cloak was sitting on his side of the *khatia*. He got scared at this and simply ran down to the rail bridge. The three man and the corpse

burst out giggling. As he was running, he encountered a man wearing white Panjabi (a traditional cloth for Muslim males) who offered to accompany him till he reached home. When Tushar's *nana* came closer to his resident the man revealed his identity as *jinn* and advised him not to visit the place alone. And also, to recall him whenever he needed help. Hearing this the man fell down on the ground senseless. Later when he gained his sense back, he found himself at home. He was treated by an Imam.

Genre: *Ghatana*

3. Lake of Panda (Title)

Duration: 8m

Source/Narrator: Mohd Sifat Haoladar (Young Muslim male, shared as a text via email), personal event (inexplicable incident). *Tablig Jamat*

When and Where: Not mentioned. At a mosque (anonymous) near the *Pandar Deeghir* field, of Shyampur in Rangpur.

Outline: Sifat went to *Tablig Jamat*[25] on a *chilla* to a mosque near Pandar Dighee. At night he was unable to sleep and so he looked around only to find out that a man was saying his prayers. At the same time, a wonderful smell filled the air inside the mosque. He was perplexed at this event. The man asked him for some food. He offered him some snacks that they had. When Sifat woke up in the morning to say his morning prayer, the man was not there. At the second night of his *chilla,* he saw him again. He talked with that man who introduced himself as Solaiman and invited him and his friends over for dinner. They went to his place along with him and ate large hilsa fish. When, at the end of dinner, Sifat and his two other friends from *chilla* were getting back to the mosque, Solaiman presented them *tasbih* and *surma.* On his way back, Sifat met their *jamat* Imam who asked him where he was. He answered he went to Solaiman's place for dinner. The Imam said where his other friends were. Sifat told that they were just behind him and looked back, there was nobody behind him. Then they asked the local people about Solaiman who confirmed that nobody called Solaiman lived in the village. And Sifat also

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[25] An international Islamic non-political organization who travel to different mosques in around the world for *Chilla* that means the person would stay with the team or *jamat* for a minimum of 3 days or for more, but he has to determine the number of days he would go for and stay there with the groups. They would pray and walk from mosque to mosque in line and preach the people who would come to say their prayers in the mosque.

found out that the place he went for dinner was an empty field. There was no house there. No treatment required. But he asked listeners whether that was a *Jinn?*

Genre: Inexplicable Ghatana

Two events were repeated later in episode 61

1. Hindu-Muslim inequal love affair
2. Piles of corpses ahead.

Episode 61 09.04.2021

1. Corpse covered in white cloth (Title)

Duration: 9m 38s

Source/Narrator: Sagar (Male of mid-thirties, Muslim, shared as a text via email), Personal experience.

When and Where: January, 2004, 17 years ago. Banvashamo, Lalmonirhat, Bangladesh.

Outline: The narrator was returning from a film show late at 1am without having permission of his parents and he was worried they would punish him. Anyway, on his way back home he remembered the accidental death of a person on the rail line he was nearing. A black cat kept on coming closure to his feet which he kicked and kept walking. After a while he heard a voice moaning from nearby. He used his torch to find out who was there and then he encountered the corpse without head, the moaning sound was coming from that. He began to run, terrified. Then he saw a head without body. He kept running and entered forest of betel nut plants and as he focused his torch forward to the place, a corpse covered in white cloak right in front of him was lying on the ground and as he focused his torch forward, the corpse rose and began to walk toward him. He screamed really loud, and someone came to accompany him home hearing him screaming. Later on, whenever he used to go to bed at night, he kept on seeing the corpse. *Mullah* treated him.

Genre: *Ghatana*

2. Mysterious Telephone Call (Title)

Duration: 7m 58s

Source/Narrator: Rabiussani Nuhash (Young Muslim male, shared as a text via email). Heard from his cousin Israt Jahan Safia and the *ghatana* happened to Rupa.

When and Where: 2018, no address!

Outline: Rupa used to study for her exam till midnight. She used to receive phone calls from a baby boy called Noor of grade 1 who lived on the 5th floor. Noor died while playing with another boy called Mahi on the roof from where he accidentally fell on the ground and died in a clinic later. The telephone was disconnected meaning no phone call was possible as they later found out. Later Rupa was treated by a mullah. Mahi also received same calls that forced his family to leave the apartment.

Genre: *Ghatana*

3. Hindu-Muslim inequal love affair (Title—Repeat)

Duration: 24m

Source/Narrator: Saddam Khandakar (Muslim male adult, shared as a recorded clip via email), heard from Rahul (Muslim man) whose friend Sharan (also a Muslim man) was in a relation with Ahona, a Hindu girl, who went through that experience.

When and Where: 2008, Dhaka.

Outline: Sharan, a Muslim man was in love with Ahona, a Hindu lady without knowing each other's religion. But later as they found out and let their families know of it, both families disapproved of their relation, especially the one of Ahona. But Sharan and Ahona got married and started off their conjugal life away from both families. One day Ahona saw a person jumping off the roof of their house and from then on, her nightmares began. She had a miscarriage involving an accident in the washroom. Later the narrator reveals that Sharan's parents went to a *kabiraj* who used black magic to bring Sharan back from that marriage. The problem was solved. But later Ahona's brother used black magic to make sure that she does not have any baby. Luckily that baby was saved.

Genre: *Ghatana*

4. Tragic end of fishing (Title)

Duration: 15m

Source/Narrator: Tanvir Tushar (Muslim Male adult, moderator of Bhoot.Com team, shared as a recorded audio via email), seen by many people of the village, he heard it from a person. Happened to a cop, he keeps his name anonymous.

When and Where: 2014, at his vacation time. Close to a graveyard of a village called Fulchori near Jamuna river, in Gaibandha.

Outline: A police officer on leave was catching fish when his fishing net got stuck under water. He asked from a person bathing there for help. That man went underwater only to return terrified. Even before he could warn the cop, the net that was tied to his wrist pulled him down. Later his body came out from under water without any symptom of death by drowning. In local memory this part of the river beside a Hindu temple is a haunted place where people never go for fishing alone, never at night and people witness gigantic snakes and experience *ghatanas* even now if they go to this place. No treatment.

Genre: Weird *Ghatana*

5. Mysterious Rickshawala (Title, Repeat)

6. Seven pitchers Under water (Title, Repeat)

Episode 62 16.04.2021

1. An Imam (Title)

Duration: 8m 41s

Source/Narrator: Anonymous (Muslim male, shared in text form via email), Imam's experience.

When and Where: Around 1980, at a mosque in Barisal.

Outline: An Imam went on a *shalish* (a meeting to settle dispute) in a distant village leaving his ailing son at home. On his way back at night he met some mysterious people when he went to say his *Esha* (nighttime) prayer in a miraculous mosque that he never knew existed. After his prayer these people asked him to dine with them, but he didn't being already upset about his son. Later when he reached the Jamuna River there was no boatman to take him to the other side. He had to wait till morning and then he met the same people in white cloth carrying a corpse on a *khatia.* They offered him to take him over the river, out of fear he denied the offer and asked where they were heading to with the corpse, they said they were heading to his house and disappeared under water. Later as he reached home, he found out that his son drowned himself once his fever increased by jumping into a pond. The Imam, then, resented that if he had dined with these mysterious people, his son would probably not have died.

Genre: *Ghatana*

2.Call of the night (Title)

Duration: 7m

Source/Narrator: Anonymous (Muslim, gender not mentioned, shared as a text via email), Karim (Muslim male), a boatman who carried patients and corpse as boat was the main transportat at that time.

When and Where: 1978, New Moon night, Address not mentioned but it happened at a shamshan (crematorium).

Outline: Karim, the relative of the narrator, was called by someone one new moon night to fetch a corpse from a neighboring village. He went out to the boat along with that man. As he kept on sailing and it was dark out there, he lost his way and entered a Hindu crematorium. Right at that moment, he heard a strange noise as though someone was munching on flesh. At that moment he tried to make sure his companion was there alongside him. But no, there was no one there. There was blood in that place instead. At once he tried to get out of the crematorium, right at that moment he encountered that person. But before that person could do him any harm, the muazzin began the morning *Azan* (call for prayer). He fell down unconscious only to find himself at home the next

day. Not mentioned, people claim it was an evil *jinn*, some claim it to be a *pishachi* and others claim it to be *nishi daak* (call of the night)

Genre: *Ghatana*

3.Diminishes when efforts are mad to catch it (Title)

Duration: 9m 48s

Source/Narrator: Ibrahim (Muslim male, moderator of Bhoot.Com, shared as an audio file via email), heard from Mahir Labib Chowdhury, happened to his uncle.

When and Where: Recent occurrence at a village where people see a guy walking who people follow and then the man would vanish.

Outline: Labib's uncle went to village home where he was strolling around in the afternoon only to see a stranger walking through his paddy field. When he was about to call him, that person vanished in the air. There was no explanation to this event regarding what spirit was involved. Also, there was no treatment.

Genre: *Ghatana*

4.Frequent encounter with jinn (Title)

Duration: 15m

Source/Narrator: Tamim (Muslim male, shared as an audio file via email), keeps his personal details anonymous.

When and Where: When he was 13 y/o. It happened in his madrasa and locality.

Outline: Tamim's father suddenly became very religious and admitted him to a madrasa where children memorize the Quran. Later he encountered a woman who vanished in the pond. At one night he heard his mum calling him out. He just walked to her in the dead of the night. Later his family began to consult a mullah for his treatment who drew a circle around him and also drew a dot on his nail and saw the *jinns* in the form of tiger, owl and a woman.

Genre: *Ghatana*

5.The Yogini who lives with Kali (Title)

Duration: 9m 38s

Source/Narrator: Shaon (Hindu male, shared as an audio file via email), ghatana at the neighbors of his uncle's.

When and Where: Not mentioned, Jhalokati, Barisal.

Outline: A man just returned from the Middle East and got married. Unfortunately on every new moon night something strange used to happen to his wife. But he could not perceive of that. On one such night she choked her husband to death by pressing his throat and hanging his body using her cloth. Later in the morning (as is the custom is to bring tea to the room of the newly wed in the morning) when they tried to serve tea to their room, there was no response from inside. They forced their way in to find out the wife sitting beside the dead husband. The wife's family called in a *Tantric* who asked the possessed wife to identify herself and then she told them that she was *Yogini* one of companions of Kali. She is a demon, while the other companion, *Dakini*, is benevolent.

Genre: *Ghatana*

6.A white cat (Title)

Duration: 14m

Source/Narrator: Mohammad Ujjal (Muslim male, shared as an audio file via email), experience of cousin named Manik.

When and Where: 2013, in Netrakona, at an auto rice mill in the village.

Outline: Manik worked in the auto-rice mill in his village on shifts. One day while he came to work for his shift at night, he forgot to bring his meal. While he was going home to bring his meal, he saw a white cat and at the same moment a very strange storm was shaking trees on top of his head. When he was on his way back to his workplace, he saw the cat again and it was following him and was also becoming larger and larger. He kicked the cat into the paddy field and lo, it was transformed into a kid who told him, "Give me

the tiffin box in which you have beef curry". He ran off from this place upon hearing that remark to the mill and fell down unconscious. He was later treated by a deceased *mullah.*

Genre: *Ghatana*

7.Seven pitchers underground (Title)

Duration: 7m

Source/Narrator: Mohd Arafat Islam (Muslim male, shared as an audio file via email), happened to his uncle (anonymous) and witnessed by people of the village

When and Where: During Ramadan, 2017. At a pond of a village in Faridpur full of wealth

Outline: Arafat's uncle was a poor and simpleminded person who from one Ramadan onwards used to sleep after his prayers and strangely woke up under a tree beside a pond. It happened several times and then on one such occasion he dreamt that there were seven pitchers one of which was open. He woke up immediately and went there. And found out the pitchers. Instead of being satisfied with the open one, his greed tempted him to go for all the seven pitchers. That brought the calamity on him. The four sides of the pond broke apart with a terrible noise that woke the people of the village. Upon returning home he fell terribly ill. Doctor and *kabiraj* failed to treat him, but a mullah healed him. Even now nobody could get to this pond.

Genre: *Kahini* and *Ghatana*

8.A mysterious Rikshawala (Title, repeat)

Duration: 6m

Source/Narrator: Anonymous (Male, shared as an audio file via email), Sajib (pseudonym, couin)

When and Where: 2017, at a place in Brahmanbaria

Outline: Sajib was on his way back from *Tuitioni* (home tutoring students) late owing to a storm. He got on a rickshaw which was there when he came out of his student's

residence. Later as the rickshwala told him that there were trees on the road, they had to take a different route only then he noticed that the rickshawala had blood all over his body and his head smashed. Still, he asked that rickshawala to run faster since he was in a hurry. The man on the pedal said, "I was also supposed to get to my home. But I could not." At that moment, one of the wheels of the vehicle hit something and Sajib fell down on the street and the man and his ricksha vanished. Later he met some people at a nearby shop who confirmed the death of a rickshawala during the storm. Later, Sajib never visited that village at night.

Genre: *Ghatana*

Episode: 63 23.04.2021

1.Bustle of jinn and fairies (Title)

Duration: 13m 06s

Source/Narrator: Amrita Adhikari West Bengal India (Hindu male, shared as a text via email), experience of a sister.

When and Where: Mentions no time, at a village (keeps it anonymous) in Khulna, Bangladesh.

Outline: Amrita's cousin after her marriage conceived a baby. During those days she had a feeling that someone was watching over her all the time. Once she gave birth to a baby girl who used to start crying in evenings as though someone was beating her. But Amrita's cousin did not realize that. Later, she became a mother of two daughters. One day she was resting on the bed with both her daughters. Suddenly she noticed that one of her daughters was missing. They searched everywhere but in vain. Then they called in a Tantric who told them that *jinn-pari* took their daughter. He also advised her to go to the palm tree nearby and request them to return her daughter. But that attempt failed. Later her *debar* (husband's younger brother) began to act in such a weird way as though he was carrying a baby. The tantric confirmed that he was possessed and through his rituals asked the spirits about returning the missing daughter. The spirit (not named by the writer) said the girl was taken by many of them. He alone could not return her. Then the *tantric* asked him to leave. He agreed and the tantric asked him to show them a sign of leaving the young man. The spirit carried a bucket full of water on the mouth of the possessed man and broke it as a sign of departure.

Genre: *Ghatana*

2.Bridge beside the Road (Title)

Duration: 8m 38s

Source/Narrator: Mohd Abu Hasan (Muslim male, shared as a text via email), personal experience

When and Where: When he was a student of class 8, at 9pm, Enayetpur, Belkuchi in Sirajganj

Outline: Hasan used to go to a teacher's house in the evening to get lesson (*Private Para* in Bengali) when he was in fifth grade. There was a storm on one such occasion for which his father could not get there to bring him home. So, he started for home alone. As he neared the rail bridge, he began to hear the screaming of a baby and people were whispering around. He felt scared and began to run. At this point one person showed up beside him and soothed him by accompanying him. As it was dark out there because of load-shedding (cut off in the supply of electricity), he could not see that person. Once the electricity came back, he noticed that there was no shadow of the man. So, he freaked out and fell down senseless. Later he was treated by *kabiraj* (anonymous) who said that it was a *jinn* who accompanied him.

Genre: *Ghatana*

3.Departure of a soul (Title)

Duration: 23m 37s

Source/Narrator: Afnan (Muslim male, shared as an audio file via email), Romana Reza's (a woman) personal experience

When and Where: 1991 and 2007, U-shaped Private Hospital in Dhaka (anonymous)

Outline: Romana Reza was accompanying her mom in the Hospital (she kept the name of the hospital a secret) where she attended on her day and night as she was ailing. On one such occasions she encountered a woman and her children who came with her. Her husband was in a critical condition. So, the doctor and nurses would not let them into the

cabin and Romana Reza asked them in her cabin. Suddenly Ms. Reza and her mom noticed a black cloud appearing from one of the walls flew through the other and disappeared. Almost at the same time, a nurse came to inform the wife of her husband's death. Romana believed perhaps Azrael carried the Soul in the form of a cloud through the western wall to the eastern wall.

Genre: *Ghatana*

4.Dead boy's getting back to life (Title)

Duration: 10m 43s

Source/Narrator: Abhijeet (Hindu male, shared as an audio file via email), experience of the cousin of a friend (anonymous).

When and Where: Happened long time ago during the ritual of *mukhe bhaat* (Feeding rice for the first time) in Brahmanbaria, village anonymous.

Outline: Prior to the event, the boy's mom went out to bring all the things she needed to dress up the baby for the occasion. Right at the moment when she entered the room, she noticed a cat was going out. She hit the cat with a stick, and it ran away. But alas! The boy seemed missing. They searched for him, but the search went in vain. Later, on the next day, a man found him beside the pond located close to the paddy field. He was still like a dead body. The boy was taken to the hospital where the doctor declared him dead. But they could not believe that. They went to a *kabiraj.* He gave them some amulets asking them to keep the body at their house for two days and wait. Two days went by and the boy wasn't showing any sign of life. So they decided to take him to the *shamshan* and cremate him. As they were about to move out, the boy came back to life with a cry. The *kabiraj* later informed them that Black Magic was used against him. From then on, until very recently, there was no problem with him.

Genre: *Ghatana*

5.Floating of teacher on air (Title)

Duration: 10m

Source/Narrator: Mahatab (Muslim male, shared as an audio file via email), experience of home tutor and people of the flat and locality

When and Where: No time, night between 2:30 am and 3am at Banasri, Dhaka

Outline: Before shifting to his new apartment, Mahatab's teacher was smelling *biriani* along with others of the neighborhood as well as hearing the sound of prayers. One night he was dreaming that he was floating in the air. He woke up only to discover that he in fact was floating. At that point, the muazzin began to convey the morning *Azan* (call for prayers) and he fell down with a loud noise. Neighbors rushed to the spot at that and from them he came to know of the murder of a person one Friday. While others were busy saying their Friday prayer, goons came in and killed that man in front of his wife in the same flat where the teacher resided in.   No treatment.

Genre: *Aloukik (*Otherworldly*) Ghatana*

6.Playing football with someone invisible (Title)

Duration: 9m 49s

Source/Narrator: Doesn't mention his name (shared as an audio file via email), Collected from his friend Mahir Labib Chowdhury that happened with his cousin Roni and his younger brother Ramim

When and Where: No time is mentioned, on the rooftop in Noakhali

Outline: Ramim and Roni's father was a government officer and he used to get posted in different places. On that particular day, their mom went out shopping. Ramim retuned from school one afternoon and went out of their flat to play football. Roni, later, went out to bring him back at home. But he was astounded by the scene! Ramim was kicking the ball toward his front and someone invisible was kicking it back. "He wasn't prepared to have witnessed this". The ruined house was haunted and local people share the same believe. No treatment.

Genre: *Ghatana*

7. Piles of corpses in front (Title)

Duration: 9m 42s

Source/Narrator: Ariful Islam (Muslim Male, shared as an audio file via email), heard of from Moshier who works as a labor

When and Where: 40 years ago, political rivalry. Jessore, Gheramara Shamsham.

Outline: Moshier and his group were seeking to avenge the murder of their group members. They were on their way to attack the opponent group when they encountered a Hindu old woman and a child. This old woman and the child were murdered by Pakistani military. It is a collective memory of the village about the genocide. But they believe the old woman did not want Moshier and others to fight and for this they saw her. Mullah, *kabiraj* treated them. **("Nobody would be prepared to see this" is a common sentence used in describing very tensed horror moment. Another version from the storytellers is, Trust me, Russell vai, I was not prepared to see this. This is widely used in Facebook posts and conversations in different cases, for fun, to express surprise, to express anger, etc. A very good example of transmission of component outside the podcast).**

Genre: *Ghatana*

Episode 64 30.04.2021

1.Dangerous House (Title)

Duration: 10m 16s

Source/Narrator: Anonymous (Shared as a text via email) Heard from a distant uncle

When and Where: About 15 years ago at an old house in Boston, USA

Outline: Narrator's distant uncle who lived in the USA once came at their resident for a visit and narrated the event to him. The apartment he used to live in in the USA was about to be demolished, so he moved out to a two-storey building in Boston. The caretaker of the building asked him not to bother about the noise that would come from the top floor that was blocked by wood at the staircase. On their second night at the house, they heard the scream of a woman and restrained themselves remembering the request of the caretaker. Same thing happened on the third night as well followed by a male crying

"Help me! Help me!" This time one of their friends went missing. They found out that the wooden fence at the staircase was broken. They went upstairs in search of their missing friend and found him with blood all over his body lying in one of the rooms. They took him to the hospital and cops were involved who informed them that the house they started to live in was abandoned for years. There was nobody living in that house. Later as the injured person became conscious, he told them that as he went upstairs, he saw an old woman in a decomposed and melting body attacked him. Soon After they came to know that that lady was the ghost of a woman who unattended by her family starved to death. No treatment was involved in this case.

Genre: *Ghatana*

2.Grandma and Grandson (Title)

Duration: 19m 15s

Source/Narrator: Afnan *vai* (Muslim male, shared live in the studio), personal experience of Mohd Farid Hasan collected by *Bhoutist* team member Sajib.

When and Where: 1996/1997, Fatehpur, Mirzapur, Tangail.

Outline: Farid, his cousin and grandma were waiting for his grandpa on their way back home from his maternal uncle's. His grandpa went to hire a van (a transport that carries passenger and goods) that afternoon during the harvest season. It was getting dark as their grandfather was not returning for quite a while now. So, they started walking by asking people which way to go. The same person guided them in different places and thus they ended up in a lake believed to be haunted. There two men showed up and told them that they would keep the two young boy and let the old lady go. She disagreed and at this point some farmers came on the spot and rescued them. But at night a *jinn* appeared in the dream of the grandma commanding her to slaughter a goat otherwise the *jinn* will harm the grandchildren. She did that and the children were saved.

Genre: *Ghatana*

3.Invisible Nishi (Title)

Duration: 15m 39s

Source/Narrator: Rabiussani Nuhash (Muslim male, shared as text via email), personal ghatana with cousin (sister) named Israt Jahan Safia

When and Where: 2013, at a new apartment. But did not mention the address.

Outline: Safia made a new friend called Nishi as they moved into a new apartment. Nishi once asked Safia whether she had ever seen *jinn*. At this Safia had a strange feeling and afterwards she observed abnormality at the flat of Nishi. Things even became worse when one day Nishi commanded Safia not to play with rope (*Darilaf*). At this Safia got angry and they stopped seeing each other. Safia began to play with rope on that very day. Later that night she developed some illness on her legs that she could not walk. Doctors were called and yet, nobody could heal this. Later she started to have a vision of a child in her dream regularly who was in danger. But she could not save her because of her incapacity to walk. But at one such vision she managed to walk and save the child. From that very day, Safia recovered and then Nishi came to visit her and told her about the child she protected. That startled Safia so she wanted to ask her. But she was already gone then. After a month she came to know from Nishi's mum that Nishi was not there with them as she ran away from home and got married along time ago. No mullah involved. And no explanation except for the talk about jinn at the beginning.

Genre: *Advut Ghatana*

4.Demon Fish (*Mechho Deo*) (Title)

Duration: 8m 57s

Source/Narrator: Jubair Islam (Muslim male, shared as an audio file via email), heard from his grandma that happened to her nephew called Hashmot Ali.

When and Where: About 30 years ago, Sirajganj, worked in a Jute Mill in Raipur and experienced in the Jamuna river.

Outline: Hashmot Ali the worker of a Jute mill used to go fishing in the Jamuna river with his friends. That day he also went there for fishing. While others were fishing a bit away from him, he was throwing his net and pulling it back without any fish. At one such moment, he noticed a piece of sweet potato floating near his boat. He just grabbed it and

munched on it only to find out that it tasted terrible, so he threw it back into the river. This time when he threw his net in the river, a big *boal* fish was caught in the net. As he pulled the net back to catch the big fish, it jumped off the net hitting him hard on his chest. Recovering from that pain, he noticed the big fish on the surface of the water. But all his attempts were in vain. Later in the evening as he returned home, he fell ill. Doctors failed to cure him and then they called in a *kabiraj* who put two pieces of turmeric in Hashmot's ear and summoned the demon. He told that Hashmot munched on the *Mechho Deo* (demon fish) who was swimming in the river in the form of a sweet potato and the *deo* is now inside his body. He would not survive that. Two days later Hashmot breathed his last.

Genre: *Ghatana*.

5.Getting life back through dream (Title)

Duration: 12m 12s

Source/Narrator: Anonymous (Young Muslim male, shared as an audio file via email), uses pseudonyms, experience of family

When and Where: 2006 or 2007, Old Dhaka.

Outline: The narrator describes the *ghatana* that his family witnessed. His brother's wife fell ill. The doctor informed she would live four-five months and after that she would die. Then one night at around 2:30am she dreamt that a gigantic man appeared through the wall and the roof became transparent before her eyes. He told her, "I am leaving a plant inside your blanket. Do not share it with anyone other than your mother-in-law. She will do everything for you." He also told her to buy a black hen and leave it in the junction of three roads at night. This would make them rich. Next day, in the morning, they found a plant in the blanket and the lady's mother-in-law followed the process and from then on, the wife was completely cured.

Genre: *Ghatana* at times the narrator also regarded it as *galpa* (story).

6.Terrifying Figure (Title)

Duration: 10m 24s

Source/Narrator: Habib (Young Muslim male, shared as an audio file via email), personal experience of friend witnessed by him and others.

When and Where: 8-9 years ago at Bandar, Chowdhury Bari, Narayanganj

Outline: They were enjoying gossiping among themselves when a guy with wounds in his body showed up. He told them that he was passing some time with his friends and then at one point he decided to leave. As he was walking through the isle (a small pathway that allows peasants to travel across lands) when he encountered a man. He asked the man who he was, but he did not reply. But instead the man stretched out his unusually long hands toward him and began to pull him. He tried terribly hard to cross the spot, but he could not. At one point when he was dragged almost toward the end of the field, through the crops, he started to read some prayers and suras from the *Holy Quran*. Only then, the creature left him. His friends heard his screams and rescued him from there. The sign of forceful dragging was visible in the field when the narrator and his friends got there to see the spot. But he did not comment on what the creature was and treatment, too, was not mentioned.

Genre: *Ghatana*

Episode: 65 7.05.2021

1.Lunatic Younus (Title)

Duration: 8m3s

Source/Narrator: Akhlak Ahmed (Young Muslim male, shared in text via email), personal experience while with friend Nazrul

When and Where: Saturday, 17th November, 2018 at 11pm, a bazar at Bajitpur, Kishorganj.

Outline: Akhlak and his friend went to visit a feed mill and they got late. While on their way they saw a white horse on the bridge. They were terribly afraid and freaked out. Then, suddenly a man who they knew as Younus *Pagla (*lunatic Younus) who had died few years ago came and told them to go as he would protect them from the horse. They got back to their home and Akhlak fell ill and was taken to mullah. He healed him and

explained the presence of a *shamshan* and the horse as an evil *jinn* and the Younus as a good *jinn*.

Genre: *Ghatana*

2.Smell of rotting corpse (Title)

Duration: 7m 31s

Source/Narrator: Hafiz Mohd. Rashidur Rahman Riad (Young mullah, shared in text form via email), personal experience

When and Where: Midnight in Winter, 2015 at Naya Beel, Sherpur.

Outline: To surprise his newly married wife by a sudden visit from his mosque where he worked, Riad began his journey using bicycle at night. He was talking to his wife while bicycling. Suddenly he saw something white in front of him. Then when a jinn came before him, he drove him away. Then he crossed one by one a *shamshan* (crematorium), Hindu household and then the piece of a banana leaf on which there were some eggs with candles lit beside them. He felt tempted to eat the eggs and right on that moment he heard someone calling out his name. This terrified him and went straight to his home. His wife said his body was smelling as though it was totally rotten. He understood the issue and healed himself using his method. But he did not clarify what spirits were involved other than the jinn.

Genre: *Ghatana*

3.Woman and Fear (Title)

Duration: 11m 36s

Source/Narrator: Anonymous (Young Muslim Male, shared in text form via email), Regular listener of the podcast, personal experience

When and Where: 26th Ramadan, 2018 in Rampur, Feni.

Outline: On the time of tarawih prayer during Ramadan this young man used to go to a bazaar in Rampur. Right at the periphery of the bazar, he had to cross the highway. While

waiting to cross the road, he saw a woman waiting to cross the Dhaka-Chittagong highway and suddenly she appeared before him which was unusual for a woman with two sacks on hand to cross the road at such pace. She was totally in veil and hence he could not identify her. She stopped before him and said, "Bloke, where are you going? I know you are going to do some devilish staff out there. But remember, if you do not say your prayers, you will go to *Jahannam*." The narrator really did not say his prayers and hence he asked the listeners about the woman, whether she was human or *jinn?* He consulted a mullah to make sure everything was alright with him.

Genre: Highway Centered *Ghatana*

4.Mysterious Child (Title)

Duration: 19m 12s

Source/Narrator: Anonymous (I could not identify the gender of the voice, Young Muslim, shared as an audio file via email) happened to anonymous family

When and Where: Lockdown time, April 2020, midnight, at a Private Hospital in Khulna

Outline: The narrator's youngest aunt was pregnant and was admitted to a private hospital for scissor. From the second day of their stay in the hospital, they heard a baby crying which was followed by the opening of the OT door. But they kept on ignoring this. But once their baby was born and they were sent back to their cabin. One night at around 12 their door opened itself this time following the sound of a baby crying. The aunt of the narrator was a *murid* (follower) of *Aatroshi Pir* and warned the being by the *pir's name*, then also requested that to go away and let her pray (recite the zikr askar). And suddenly they saw a tall woman with a devilish red eye was staring at them. But as they saw her, she was wearing the costume of a nurse, she smiled at them and walked away. Unexplained being. No treatment involved.

Genre: Story and *Ghatana*

5.Head without Body (Title)

Duration: 14m 50s

Source/Narrator: Mohd. Ananta (Young Muslim male, shared as an audio file via email), personal experience of his uncle Altaf.

When and Where: At the age of 7-8, Masimpur, Sirajganj at a haunted pond that would not dry up.

Outline: Altaf during his young age wanted to pet some ducks. His father bought him some on one condition that he never takes the ducks outside home. Few days later when the ducks went to a pond and returned, few of them went missing. It happened so for a few consecutive days when Altaf became concerned. So, he went to the pond while the ducks were bathing. Nothing happened on that day. But later, on the second day he noticed a head popped out of the pond and tangled one of his duck and disappeared under water. Next day, in the evening as he hid at one part of the pond waiting for the head to rise, it appeared again and this time Altaf grabbed the head by its hair and pulled it up only to find out that there was no body under the head. A shivering feeling of fear ran through his spines, and he swam towards the shore. But the head tangled him from behind with its hair. However, the *Azan* for the evening prayer came out loud simultaneously for which he could escape through some struggle. Later on, he faced many problems regarding this and consulted a kabiraj who asked him to offer a he-goat at the junction of three roads and never to look back while returning.

Genre: *Ghatana*

6.Desire to see the jinn (Title)

Source/Narrator: Mohd. Arman Huq (Young Muslim male, shared as a recorded audio clip via email), personal experience of a grandpa of the village. Heard from him.
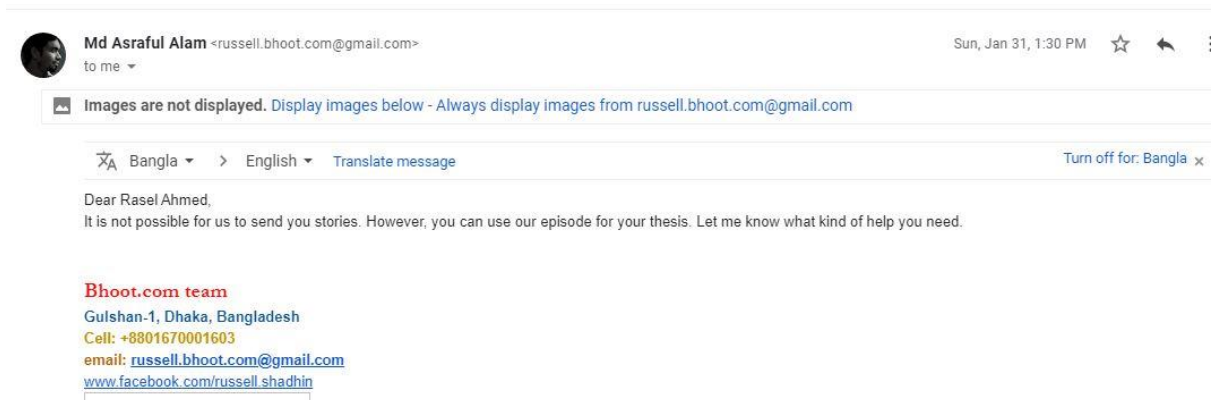
When and Where: Long time ago, about 70-80 years ago, at his young age. Bagerhat, at the riverbank of Koramara village.

Outline: Arman's distant grandpa during his young age along with his friends (over smart boys in Arman's term) planned to see the *jinn*. They went near the riverbank of their village in the pretext of a picnic. Later, as they finished their picnic, a sudden storm hit the area with heavy rain and thunderbolt. They began to run for their home. On their way they saw a hut where an old lady was sitting. They asked to get in, that lady let them in.

As it was dark in the hut, they wanted to light a lamp to make it bright. That lady dissuaded them. On that point, the place was lighted up by the lightning in the sky and they discovered themselves amidst a number of palaces. They could also hear a noise that was similar to the noise made by a cow when its throat is slit. One of them had courage enough to look at the scene and found out a person, whose both skin color and attire were white, was eating the cow. When they called out the old lady, she told them, "How dare you?" They ran out of the hut as they heard her voice. They reached a mosque when they heard a voice telling them, "You are lucky to escape today. Don't you dare to do this again." Later they described the *ghatana* to their parents and an Imam blew over them to make sure they would not suffer from any problem.

Genre: *Ghatana*

Appendix 3: Permission by RJ Russell to Use Podcast Data

Md Asraful Alam <russell.bhoot.com@gmail.com>   Sun, Jan 31, 1:30 PM
to me

Images are not displayed. Display images below - Always display images from russell.bhoot.com@gmail.com

Bangla > English   Translate message   Turn off for: Bangla

Dear Rasel Ahmed,
It is not possible for us to send you stories. However, you can use our episode for your thesis. Let me know what kind of help you need.

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Appendix 4: Transcribed podcast narratives

RJ Russell

Afnan *Vai*

1. Nail Inside the Pillow: Episode 44, 11/12/2020

Assalamu alaikum. I hope all of you are fine. I am also doing good. Well, I know Russel *vai* is good and for this won't ask him that cause he always belongs to the good side. We all wish to be the same. But may not always be able to be so. For some reasons I can't reveal my name to you. I live in a flat in East Jurain, Dhaka-1204. I will keep that [address] a secret.

At this point, let me tell you one thing. It hurts in my chest when I talk [his excuse for speaking in a low voice]. I hope you will pardon me for that. Let us go back to the *ghatana* [event, incident or accident]. It happened to me. Let me tell you one more thing here, believing in my *ghatana* or not is solely your issue. But who encounters this sort of *ghatana* only s/he would feel it, s/he would only know what happens there. And I will pray that what happened to me must never happen to anyone else. Because, the problem that follows and the pain that it causes… The *ghatana* started during my infancy when I was six months [old]. We lived in Diabari then. When I was six months old, my mom lulled me to sleep beside a window and she was cooking in the kitchen. As much as I know, there used to be a narrow gully facing the window between two buildings through which cats and humans come and go. It's like the space between two houses. The like of which you can see almost everywhere in Dhaka [capital city of

Bangladesh]. It was noon, right before the noontime prayer, when I began to weep a lot, quite a lot, as if I would never stop crying. I was six months old then. I would not stop crying. Mom tried all the possible ways [yet] she could not manage to stop me. In the next flat, there was a grandma who informed [mom] about the *mullah* who passed away few days ago. His name was *Motka Hujur*. Those who of you live in Jurain must have heard of him. They took me to him. [He] blew over me, blew over some oil and water [for him to use and drink]. Even put a nail inside the pillow I used to sleep on [indicative of the popular belief that iron prevents the supernatural from harming]. Everything, then, became normal in this way.

But the *ghatana* begins later as I grew up, I had felt [it]. You know what happened, Russell *vai* [vai means brother, and it could be seen as a semiformal way of addressing an adult man], I was probably 7 or 8 years old then—I do not remember this much, but mom does—when I was in class two, I developed asthma. It was so terrible that my condition was very critical. My papa got me treated, but it did not help. This sickness is still there in my body. As I grew up with time, from then on, the problem began. At night ma would not see me in the bed. Then at times it was noticed that I went out of my room in front of something. I was really young then. I did not know how to feel anything. Mama used to ask, "Where have you been at night?" I would reply that I dreamt that I went down water. I also used to not to have breakfast in the morning. Mom would urge me to eat. But I used to reply, "My tummy is full." Then she would ask, "What did you eat?"

"I ate many things. My tummy is full. I won't eat now."

At times when I used to wake up from sleep, mom would discover juices and grains of *rasagolla* on my pillow.

I was gradually growing up. I was in class seven then from when my *ghatana* set off severely. I used to be physically very weak. For which I used to sit at one place only and would fall asleep at any time. I used to sleep talk, smile! If asked about, I used to say, "I don't know". My brother [*vai*] and mom used to notice these.

You know what happened one day! I was asleep. For my illness pa and ma as they are old used to not to sleep on their bed. I used to sleep in my room with my [elder] brother. Because of my problem, mom and dad slept on the floor. But I have some specific areas of my problem. During summer days I sleep at night. I face problems after 3 [at night].

I woke up suddenly at [one] night, I was shivering with coldness which was not usual on a rainy day, not even usual in winter as well in Bangladesh. I found it hard, then, to breathe. As I was shivering with cold, I covered my body with quilt. Still the shivering didn't subside. My [elder] brother had a quilt on his side [he also grabbed that one], nothing worked. I did not notice that as I lied down [on bed, he stutters for a brief while], there was somebody standing right beside my head. If somebody is there behind you or you are lying on your bed and someone stands right behind your head, you can sense that, you can sense that properly.

I just forced my head up as I was reclining on the bed and looked behind me, I saw the presence of a very tall, dark human shaped figure there. It was dark then; visibility was not good. The scanty amount of light that entered from the street—as our flat is close to the main road—with that scanty amount of light I could see that black [figure]. I totally freaked out seeing that. My head downed itself automatically having seen that. Then I sensed that it was running its hand over my head. As if somebody touched somebody's head, I was feeling [like] that, and the hand was as cold as a freezer. It felt like I could not breathe. My brain almost stopped working. I suddenly saw that the hand was taken away. I could not turn my neck to any direction, nor could I call my brother. When I could finally turn my neck, I found out that that thing gradually rose and walked out of the veranda while the gate was still locked at night. Since that morning I got real sick, unable to get up from bed.

I shared the *ghatana* with mom. She replied, "All these happened to you?"

I answered, "Yes!"

Her reply, then, was that few days ago she noticed that, when on that night her sleep was disturbed, she got up and saw that there were three to four red, and blue lights blinking on top of my head, these were as tiny as are the lights of the glowworm. These lights vanished towards the veranda after she had seen them. She kept on wondering, "What was the *ghatana*!" She was also in a fix about what to do next.

Afterwards a mullah was called in from Barishal. He heals people possessed by jinn, or he does something like that. Dad called in [that] guy from Barishal. He told that, "This room is haunted." He also summoned his jinn. There was [another] guy with him [usually a libra who is conventionally used as a medium for the jinn to benevolently possess and as the jinn speaks through him]. He [that guy] informed [us] that the *bari*

101

[a very weird choice of word here because in cities, *bari*, denoting house, is not used, *basa* (apartment/flat), building, resident of floor etc. are used while in rural areas *bari* (home), *ghar* (house) are in use in Bangladesh.] used to be a crematorium. There lived a—what do they call that person who worship in the Hindu temples?—oh yeah, a priest. One of the priest's daughter was, as was claimed, pregnant. She hanged herself to death. I will narrate that *ghatana* some other time. Telling this now would only make this *ghatana* longer. What he [the mullah] told me, yeah well, he gave me an amulet and told me that I must preserve that with caution. The amulet must not be lost.

Russell vai, they [city corporation] were making a road in front of our *bari*. A new road. I was walking on that road. Suddenly there was a wind. This *ghatana* happened seven days later [after the mullah's treatment]. I still remember the day. It was Tuesday [In Bangladeshi folk belief Saturdays and Tuesdays are ominous days]. Well, I was walking. There was a strong wind suddenly. I had two amulets [hanging] around my neck. One was for asthma and the other was the amulet from the mullah from Barishal. The wind touched my chest for which both amulets fell on the ground. The road was absolutely fresh, fresh as it was a newly built road. Well, I found out one of the amulets. I found the one that was supposed to heal my asthma. But I could not find the one from the mullah.

Three or four days later, Russell *vai*, the *ghatana* began with me. I can't describe that in words! I don't know whether or not anybody will ever believe in this. Whenever I went on road, if there was any jinn—ghosts do not exist in Islam, ii is cleared in our Islamic religion that Allah created jinn and human—I saw a jinn at a junction of three roads it was eating garbage from the dustbin. That was a terrible situation, I can't explain to you in words what was my mindset at that time. No one else could see what I saw. I used to ask my friends who would accompany me, "Guys, do you see anything in here?

"No, we see nothing!"

I did not disclose what I witnessed fearing that they might think me crazy or anything of that sort. Right after exiting the gate of our *basa* (apartment), there is a shallow gully at the right side. It's a gully for all the inhabitants around [It might be important since this sort of gullies are avoided by people if possible, fearing the ghosts and other beings] who used to dump their domestic wastes there. There during noontime [Inauspicious

time of a day in popular belief include noon, evening and midnight] I used to notice that something beyond the figures of ordinary beings, how can I describe! It—with its terrible appearance noticeable in unusually long hair, a very ugly face, and terribly dark teeth—was eating the garbage in s sitting posture. Whenever I stared at him, he would stare back with a smile. How to tell you about this! Only I could see this.

The computer room that I had where I play games, there were only my PC, some birds those I petted, and a window at one side outside which there grew some bushes. There were no apartments on that side. After the *ghatana* of that night I found it difficult to sleep at night.

If I fell asleep before 2am, that's great cause only then I could sleep well. But if I stayed awake and the clock would reach 03:01am at night, I could not sleep a wink no matter how sleepy I would feel. I would never fall asleep. I still am suffering from this problem. It still is troubling me, even now I am sleepless. However, wherever I used to go, be it village or anywhere, I used to see [the jinn] be it sitting on a tree, or on a building, standing inside a narrow gully or on the roadside, be it in the form of a dog—jinn can take the form of a dog—I could see that. I could see more of them in the graveyard. But I did not travel there this much. If I would go to a graveyard, I would see a lot of them on top of trees.

One surprising matter is that—you know it is normal to be afraid but no to be afraid is abnormal, right?—at a time when I was halfway to finish my eighth grade and first started to experience seeing them, it became a regular habit that I could not walk out of our house alone. I don't know what they were, but I used to see them. But I could not share out of fear. But it stayed in my mind… Everyone in my family says prayers regularly five times a day. I also do… [corrects himself] I also did the same. But after that event it happened so that I stopped saying prayers. Fear from inside me, the fear that was inside me, it ceased to be there anymore. From then on things happen to me in different locations till 2018. Beginning in 2012 till 2018, wherever I used to go I could see them sitting, hanging, and smiling at me. Believe or not—well, I don't know if you would believe me or not—I never felt afraid. It so happened that I became ferocious. If anyone would tell me to kill someone, I could have done that. I did not have the slightest amount of fear in me. I did not know fear.

I used to tell mom, "Ma, I do not feel afraid."

She began to worry, "Why doesn't he feel afraid? It's normal to be afraid, isn't it?"

In the meantime, I got admitted to college, for a reason I was admitted to Louhajang Degree College located in Bikrampur. I had a bike accident there while going to college with a friend who was on the steering. I was [sitting] behind him. As we were turning from Mawa a dog came in front of us out of nowhere. Our bike hit that dog. It was a terrible accident. My friend lost 4-5 of his teeth, even his knee bone came out [the bone was bared as the knee slipped on the street most probably] and I was senseless. When I gained consciousness, I was in the hospital. I thought I had died. But I did not even have the slightest sign of a goosebump. I was thinking that it was nothing. My friend was bleeding and he was crying. But I did not feel bad. I was not afraid.

One more thing, when I used to go to village, the name of our village is Bikrampur—every year there is a gathering in our village. On the last day of *Chaitra*, before the Bangla New Year's day, there is a fair followed by nightlong singing and dancing. Later at night *Kali* possesses one of the worshippers—*Kali* the goddess to the followers of the Hindu religion. She possesses a person. People go there to ask this and that, do this and that. They even slaughter chicken [hen or cock, I also saw pigeons mostly] or goat. That year, I was also eager to go there to see the fair and the ritual. Ma said, "Son, you can't go there. You have so many problems. You must not go."

But my dada was very brave. He encountered many *ghatanas*. He is a very old-fashioned man. He told me, "Go for it, son. Don't be afraid."

I also told my mom, "I do not feel afraid. There will be no problem."

I went there on April 13th [30th of *Chaitra*, last day of the Bengali year]. I began my journey there in the evening. So, I stopped at my grandpa's once I got there. There, they had an old mango tree and two coconut plants. A gigantic jinn resided there. Perhaps none will believe in what I am saying. But these *ghatanas* are my own [experience]. I don't know if you would believe or not, I could see [them], I could see [them] live that they were there. There are few who perceive the presence of jinn [with their sixth sense]. But I could see them live that they were here, they were sitting there, they were in this position, they looked like this—I could see all these.

I will narrate the *ghatana* about Kali, the goddess who possesses at my grandpa's. I will narrate it later [since] my *ghatana* is becoming longer. I will narrate it later some other day.

What happened later was that, my elder sister had a female *hujur* [a teacher who teaches Arabic language mostly to teach children to read the *Quran*]. She taught her *Quran*. One day she came at our apartment and saw me. She stared at me for a long time. After that she called me and asked, "What's your name?" I told her my name. Then she told me to leave. And then she called my sister in and told her, "Your brother has this sort of problem."

She also explained everything to my sister. Then she called me in again. I told her everything. She asked me, 'Is there anything inside the room?" After she heard my reply, she became afraid. Then I told her, "I see [them] live at the gully that is at the opposite side of our apartment at noontime and in the evening. Or even [I see them] in our locality."

So, I told her everything. Then this female *hujur* bathed me at a junction of four roads at 12 in the night. She bathed me in water off hair [using which hair was washed: *chuler paani*]. Then she [ordered me] not to step out of my apartment for the next 21 days. She tied two amulets on my forehead, two on my arms and one [to be put] under the pillow during the time of my sleep, and one bellow the bed where I would sleep.

For the next 21 days, I did not go out of the apartment. I did not go anywhere. Then at the end of the 21st day when I went out, everything was normal again. I mean everything seemed to make me feel in such a way that whenever I looked at the places where I used to see jinn, I gradually began to feel afraid [to look at these places]. Earlier when I used to see them, they used to see me as well. They understood that I could see them. The funny thing is, they never harmed me. I wonder why. I used to see them, and they also saw me. But they did not harm me. I gradually began to feel confident that they would not hurt me. It felt normal that I could see them. It was absolutely normal to me. It was not an abnormal thing. But then as I started not seeing them, I would stare [at these places]. But there was nothing in these places.

After that I used amulets for about a year. But I have been disliking the idea of wearing an amulet since boyhood. But by the grace of Allah, I don't have any problem now. I still have one issue that is my asthma is still there. It doesn't get healed. [The female

hujur] told me that the asthma will never be cured. As they left me, they left this disease on me cause who possessed me was evil [jinn].

I am very thin and sickly; I do not gain weight. Those who healed me, I have heard, had been through difficulties for 3 or four days. I will narrate the *ghatana* of my village some other day once I get some time. Actually, I was thinking of sharing this *ghatana* with you for many years now. But for this or that reason I could not make it. The reason is I have been listening to *Bhoot FM* since I was a student of class five. After that I am a listener of *Bhoot.Com*. I have many *ghatanas* that happened to me. I did not share many of the *ghatanas* with you as I believe if I do so, it would cause me trouble. So, I will not share most of them. I pray that may *Bhoot.Com* last longer. I am with you today and I will be with you all my life. I hope that all of you stay fine. Pray for me so that I get completely healed. I have many more events of this sort. I will share it with you some other day. Stay well. *Assalamu alaikum*.

2. Afnan Vai, Episode 45 18/12/2020

Dear listeners and Russell *vai*, *Assalamu alaikum*. Hope you guys are doing great. *Alhamdulillah*, I am also doing fine by your blessing. I also hope that every one of you is fit and healthy [because of the Covid 19 situation]. Russel *vai*, the *ghatana* (incident, event, or accident) I am going to share with you is told by another person who, now, lives in Faridpur [a district in Bangladesh]. There, in Faridpur, he is the area manager of a renowned Bangladeshi company. I am not sharing the name of the company. His name is Hasan. His country home is at Dewantala in Gobindapur Upazila of Gaibandha District. He resides here [in Faridpur] and I am going to narrate the *ghatana*. By the way Russell *vai*, alow me warn you, the *ghatanas* I am going to narrate, after listening to the first part of it, you might feel that you have listened to a lot of such *ghatanas*. Yet, you must listen to this till the very end because it's not a very old *ghatana*. You can say, it's a fairly recent *ghatana*. Mmm, the *ghatana* I am going to start my narrative with took place in 2019. You can say it's a *ghatana* of a very recent time. Let me make this clear that if you only listen to the first part, it may seem to you that you have listened to this sort of *ghatanas* every now and then.

The man with who the *ghatana* happened is called Nayan. He was also posted in Faridpur. He, too, was an area manager of a similar company, of one… err… the edible oil that we use while cooking, he…err… was the area manager of one such company. His name is Nayan. He, well, since he came here [in Faridpur] because of his job, his hometown is in Bogra district. After he made it here, just to let you know that he was fond of exploring, I mean since the nature of his job was such that he has to roam around from place to place, look after the whole area [as an area manager], he usually travels to different places. One of these places was Charbhadrashan in Faridpur District. There's another place close to Charbhadrashan called Pukuria, those who of you are residents of the area [listening to this podcast now] will know this place. Boatmen, I mean, fishermen go to one of the places there for fishing. He [Nayan] occasionally purchased fish from there for himself. Any visit for work would also give him the opportunity to purchase fresh [caught just now] fish a*vai*lable there. For such frequent visits, he was acquainted with one young fisherman called Roni. Once they became well acquainted, you know Roni was a very amiable and friendly person, at one point of their conversation Nayan asked Roni to take him along the next time they would go out fishing. Roni agreed, I will take you along whenever we will go out fishing next. Mr. Nayan was expecting Hasan and three or four of their friends to join them fishing trip with Roni. He somewhat scheduled a timetable for to go out with Roni to catch fish. Once they agreed on a date and time, he returns promising to see him [Roni] on that very date. And they also agreed on a certain place from where they would start [their journey with boat].

Meanwhile, what happened on the scheduled night was that Roni showed up in Nayan's place and knocked on the door and said, Nayan *vai* [brother], let's go. It just slipped out of Nayan *vai*'s mind at that moment that he never shared his address with Roni. How did Roni, then, find out his place? This really slipped out of his mind. His brain wasn't really bothering about that this much. Hasan and others, too, were supposed to join them at that time. But all of them had this or that to do on the next day. They thought, "We will spend the whole night doing this and then there will be so much to handle at daytime." They decided not to go for this.

Now, Nayan stepped out of his place with Roni. Then from Pukuria they journeyed, they began their journey with an engine boat. They kept going and going until he [Nayan] found out that they reached a big…mmm… a river. After getting into the river Nayan *vai* asked Roni, "What's the matter, Roni? Why aren't you fishing tonight?"

[Roni] said, "*Vai*, I do that every day! Since tonight I have come with you, you will roam around. I will take you on a tour around the place until dawn. You can compensate me by paying me 300-400 taka [BDT, Bangladeshi currency]." Nayan, too, got cheerful hearing this. "Fishing would only be a waste of time, [I] would not be able to see many places[if Roni starts fishing]. It would be great if [I] roam around." So, Russel *vai*, they roamed about the place [on boat].

At this point, let me tell you one thing, one strange thing of which I have no explanation. This thing is when, at the end and at the beginning of the Lunar Month, we…ahem…see at the western part or western corner of the sky, like the moon denoting Eid or the start of Ramadan [month of fasting] mmm… we see the thin crescent moon. Nayan *vai* also saw a moon like this. When he boarded the boat that evening, he noticed the small, or rather, the thin crescent moon. He was travelling on the boat and was noticing that Roni did not at all have a conversation with him, did not even answer [to any query or comment]. Rather talked less. He would rarely respond to any comment. Nayan *vai*, too, felt annoyed. He, too, [for that] turning silent started to concentrate on the scenario around as much as he could manage to observe.

In the meantime, Nayan *vai* began to feel drowsy. With this feeling of sleepiness, he just fell asleep. He wasn't aware for how long he did sleep. But suddenly it seemed to him that the boat was shaking rather intensely. His sleep was spoilt. After waking up he found out that Roni was not on the boat. And all around him there was endless water. It occurred to him that he entered sea. And yet, in the whole locality, there was no [watery] place as large as this. There is a river, the Padma river from which both shores and other parts of the area were supposed to be visible, even the neighboring villages, too, should be visible to him. Even the weather, at that time, was not billowy. Rather, it was a bit cold out there. Hence, the possibility of the river to be billowy was zero. And Russell *vai*, he also noticed one more thing. It was that when, in the evening, he was boarding the boat, he noticed the thin crescent moon. But now, he could not help noticing that the moon turned into a full moon shining with its silvery light right on top of his head. He could not keep track of time— "What time is it really!"

He also never saw a moon on top of head like this. We see it a bit in an angular position, either to south or to north. Huge moon right on top of the head like the midday sun is not a usual sight for us. Upon seeing this he was perplexed, "What's the matter! In the

evening I saw the moon in one shape, now it's in another!" It felt odd to him. It felt even odder to him when he, as he was sitting on the boat as he awoke, discovered that Roni was no longer on board with him. Instead, four to five people were accompanying him. They formed a circle as they were sitting. Among them there was a person wearing white cloak. He had thin hair, bald at the top while a thick long tress of hair remained in the back of his head. I mean he was bald while some long hair was left in the back. Nonetheless, he had beads in his neck and he was chanting in a meditative stance. And others around him were praying which was almost like the way we [Muslims] perform zikr [remembering God by chanting his name loud in group or alone]. What they were chanting remained inaudible. The boat, on the other hand, was shaking.

He was wondering [that] perhaps he fell asleep and then these people got into the boat. He assumed it to be so. After assuming the matter like this he thought, "Since these people are sitting, I might take a picture of them as I have my cellphone inside my pocket." What he did was that he pictured them using the flashlight of his phone. He could not but notice that they seemingly remained unbothered even when he photographed them. They kept on doing what they were doing. He put the phone back in his pocket. Since it was dark out there [where did the moon go here?], he was uncertain whether flashlight helped taking [the pictures]. But later he noticed, "Oh, the pictures are good"—all those were sitting on the boat were in the picture.

He became aware that something out of the blue began to run in circles around the boat. We usually watch in Hollywood movies that a gigantic beast, like Godzilla, with [long] tail swims around the sea, it was something close to that. He saw that something of this monstrous size was swimming around his boat. It began to swim gradually and then gained so much pace that it generated a whirlwind. And the people sitting there in the boat were not disturbed by this, it was as if they were anticipating this moment. But he [Nayan] got immensely scared at this, "What's really going on?"

What he did next was that he gathered himself together and approached these men where they were sitting on the boat. He scrutinized that they were chanting by sitting in a circle. In between them was a remarkably large hilsa fish. They were chanting surrounding it. And he felt even more stunned, Russell *vai*, when he suddenly found out that the beast that was swimming around the boat came above inside the boat. And according to Nayan *vai*'s description this beast was neither human, nor an animal or an

idol [could also mean an eidolon]—it was complete nothing [usual in shape]. But it was spectacular that it just spread its hands forward—two giantlike hands—and then, you know what did the hilsa fish do? You remember the man in white cloak, he just handed the hilsa fish over to that creature. Once it was placed on its hand, it just faded away into the water with the fish after whirling around the boat for another couple of time. And then, these people continued chanting as they did previously.

Suddenly he became aware that the moon that was atop his head moments ago, just moved to the east. It turned red as it moved there. Usually, we notice this sort of redness, as was the moon, in the sun when it lies in the skyline. He began to wonder, "Why, all of a sudden am I witnessing a red moon! Wasn't it atop my head few minutes ago!" In fact, he became so numb that he could not manage to find where he was, or what time was it then! "What time is it?" His brain ceased to function properly. What happened next was that he became unconscious.

And at the dawn he came back to his senses only to find himself at some place called *Chairman Barir Ghat* [Ghat of the Chairman's house] in Charbhadrashan. He discovered himself at the river shore of the ghat area. He became aware of the fact that he was trembling with terrible fever, his body was soaked. There was a mosque by this ghat, few people were going there to say their morning prayers. He called them out loud. But it was as if nothing was coming out of his mouth. They came by and asked, "Why are you here?" [It should have been what are you doing here or how did you get here] He answered, "My dear brothers, I will tell you everything. Kindly rescue me from this place." They rescued him from here and took him to the mosque and gave him fresh cloth [where would it come from?]. The Imam of the mosque tried to heal him in his own methods as far as he was capable of. Then Nayan *vai* came back to his apartment.

And the *ghatana* does not end here, Russell *vai*. What I am about to tell now will seem weird to everyone of you. It is that, when he returned from the ghat he communicated with Nayan…[corrects the name] Hasan *vai*, I mean with Hasan *vai* to say that he had been experiencing some weird and out of the ordinary events ever since he got back home dangerous and unearthly events [like] he used to keep his cellphone at one place, then he would not find it there. The mobile would be found at a different place. And when his [he] used to go to bed at night, he would sense the presence of someone inside the room who would walk around targeting the mobile phone.

At one night he got terrified like hell. Then he rang Hasan *vai* [over phone]. [After hearing the event] Hasan *vai* said, "Get in my place then. You can stay with me". So, Nayan *vai* moved to Hasan *vai*'s place. Upon arriving there—what we usually do at night is that we charge our mobile phones overnight—Hasan *vai*'s cellphone was getting charged, Nayan *vai*, too, connected his mobile phone to another adapter, and they went to sleep.

All on a sudden Hasan *vai* observed that Nayan *vai*'s phone's dcreen was getting on and off automatically—usually, at one side of mobile phones, there is a button—to turn the screen on or off this button has to be pressed. For some strange reasons, the phone screen was getting on and off. Even once when the screen turned on—the way we lock our phones, you know the process we use our fingers to draw some [pattern] to unlock the phone—he clearly observed this sort of unsuccessful attempts were repeatedly made through drawing patterns to unlock the phone. After each attempt, the screen would go off. Then the next attempt would follow. He could not but notice that again and again someone was truing to unlock the phone. Hasan *vai* assumed that it was a delusion created by his mind. Or perhaps the phone had some issues. This was his thought then. But he wondered again, "Is this truly a delusion? Or is it real? Let me find out."

What he did next was that he spread some powder on the phone screen, some powder. After that they both noticed clearly that the mobile [phone] was unlocked and a big thumb [mark indicated that somebody] was trying to unlock it. I mean the clear mark of thumb on the powder that was trying again and again to unlock the phone.

I was startled as I listened to this *ghatana*. The event of the fish, we read similar [stories] where someone is supposed to call a person, instead somebody else calls and these two persons go together and g*hatanas* take place in a boat. We have listened to so many *ghatanas* of this sort. The beginning of this *ghatana,* too, resonates the same type at the start. But then when attempts on unlocking the phone were being repeatedly made, they could not wink their eyes for a moment the whole night. They spent the night by saying *nafal*[26] prayers throughout the remaining part of that night.

And next they visited a place in Charbhadrasan, I can't recall the name of that place they told me at this moment. There is a *kabiraj* there, they visited him. As soon as they

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[26] Denotes optional as opposed to mandatory and recommended prayers in Islam known as *Faraz,* and *Sunnat.*

stepped in his premise the *kabiraj* shouted from the inside, "Nayan, leave your phone outside." He forbade him to enter in if Nayan would carry his phone with him. Although they were not previously acquainted with each other, the *Kabiraj* [addressed him by Nayan's name] and ordered, "Leave your phone outside as you come in". As they entered in by leaving [that haunted] phone behind, the *kabiraj,* as you know Russell *vai*, they usually foster jinn who investigates things from the outside and informs him [K]. You know, we all always say immediately after we enter the chamber of the exorcist [kabirarj and all others who heal people], s/he describes the issue. This is nothing of any sort of their [miracle or power]. Jinns disclose the issue to them. This is a… I mean, this is our misconception regarding this matter. However, [the *kabiraj]* said to him [N], "I investigated into your issue. To be frank, they took you there to kill you. And the process they applied was that"—Russell *vai* I don't know how much of it was a fact or whether or not such things really happen—"they put your soul inside the hilsa fish, inside that large hilsa fish. But for some reasons they could not succeed." Because when he [N] noticed the giantlike creature in the boat, he started to recite from Quran and pray for which it could not succeed.

[The *kabiraj]* told, "They [the people on the boat] tried to erase the photos. Remember, you photographed them. Now in any way possible, they want to erase these pictures. They can't steal your phone as it is beyond their capacity. But they want to erase these pictures in any way."

Russel *vai*, [Nayan *vai*] later on showed these photos to Hasan *vai*. But there, mmhmm, was only darkness, there was pictures [of that night on the phone, but instead of the men] it was dark, there was nothing in the picture then. He did check the pictures immediately after taking them and saw that there were people in it. But there was sheer darkness instead whenever he checked the pictures. The *kabiraj* made him delete these images. And then he [k] spread some water [that he puffed by chanting something]. There were no further issues [on the phone] afterwards. Nayan *vai*, too, did not have any trouble. Things turned badly on Hasan *vai*'s side who took Nayan *vai* to the place [of the *kabiraj*].

What happened to Hasan *vai* was that, Russell *vai*, he used to see at night that a child was roaming around his room. [This] troubled him quite intensely. Now, how could he

get rid of this problem? He was unable to sort it out in any way. What he did was that he himself started to say prayers and recite from the Quran, started to pray to Allah.

One day he witnessed a *ghatana* infront of him. It was that he saw that the kid showed up and started to run across the room at deep midnight. Then, he had the vision of a woman in red sharee who took the boy from his room. From then on the kid was never seen in his room, in Hasan *vai*'s room. However, still tiny *ghatanas* continue to take place with him, I mean with Hasan *vai*. But this is the end of the *ghatana* with Nayan *vai*.

Now, listen to this Russell *vai*, that *kabiraj* informed them, "The boatman or the fisherman who was supposed to take you on the trip, go and find out about him. He is suffering from 106 degree fever." He instead of saying 104 said 106, go and find out yourself.

They really went there by at first reaching Pukiria. That fisherman's, I mean Roni's, house is in Kanaipur of Faridpur. Those of you are from Faridpur are familiar with all these places I am mentioning here. Kanaipur of Faridpur is very much well known for its jute business. [They] visited Roni's home there and found out that he was really suffering from fever. When Roni saw Nayan *vai* he said, "Sir, I was supposed to call you out. But I could not make it… I could not make it cause from that night on I had fever. I was unconscious. I just got a bit better today."

Then Nayan *vai* replied, "Get well soon". But he did not tell him the *ghatana* that took place that night onward. Later on, he disclosed the matters to Roni whose response was that, "I did not know that."

Anyway, Russell *vai*, we listen to many typical *ghatanas.* To be frank, I mean, after listening to the first part, I had doubts whether to narrate this *ghatana* here… But later as the different elements such as the unlocking of the mobile [phone], then the *ghatana* with Hasan *vai* where a kid used to haunt him, and then after he had started to pray [*amal kara]* a woman arrived and took the kid away—just like when a baby begins to run around, her/his mom comes and takes her/him—that woman showed up like this and took the kid. Even though this *ghatana* never repeated, *ghatanas* are still happening with Hasan *vai*. This is the end of my story, Russell *vai*.

3. **Afnan *Vai Bhola Lata*: Episode 52 05/02/2021**

Spirit, be here with me. [Woman's voice]

Ha ha ha ha [Laughter]

Who? Who are you?

Bhoot.Com! The fear returns with Russell.

Assalamu alaikum. Greetings to all the listeners of Bhoot.Com. I am Afnan. Now, I am going to tell you a **story**, listeners, which we—my team and I—collected when we visited Noapara Tea Estate in Habiganj District. You have already watched an interview [in their Facebook group and YouTube channel]. That person [in the interview] is *Dulal da* [equivalent in meaning with *vai* (brother), but used mostly to refer to Hindu men by Muslims in Bangladesh]. He is a tea-garden worker. Basically, we collected the story from him. And you all have listened to a ***ghatana*** which was a story of a snake. We heard that from him. And the story I am about to tell is also told by him. At one point of our interview *Dulal da* was talking about a climber plant. In their [indigenous] language, they call it *bhola lata* [oblivious climber plant]. So, he, later, **shared** this story with us. I am going to narrate it for you now.

Dear listeners, I did not know … err… anything about this *bhola lata*. After we talked to *Dulal da* once we got to Noapara Tea Estate, then we came to know of this matter. We never had any *ghatana* like this before. This one is the first [of this type]. Let's not waste our time and get directly to the story.

Listeners, since *Dulal da* is a worker of the tea-estate and since the *ghatana* he shared with us is the story of another worker of the tea-estate. He couldn't recall the worker's name. Even though he could not share the worker's name, he shared the time and details of the *ghatana* with us. They informed us one thing that the workers at times celebrate a yearly hunting festival. This is a very old custom. At a certain time of the year, they go hunting in groups. They still commemorate the traditional techniques of hunting in the form of a festival. Especially they go on hunting with bows and arrows. They usually hunt rabbits and wild boars those come down the hills or at the periphery of these hills. The **anthropological or small ethnic group[27]** people who live there**, of course**, differ in food

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[27] These are the signs of the Bengali Nationalist perspective towards the indigenous people. This is also interesting to notice how the narrator introduced the binary of us and them in the podcast as if he was addressing a homogenous group among which there were no one of indigenous identity.

habits from us. They go on this sort of hunting regularly. They go for it even more [in number and frequency] especially at a specific time of the year.

Listeners, when they go for this sort of hunting at night, as you can see, they go out one by one or in a group. They hunt throughout the night and return in the morning. If anyone's return is delayed or they do not return immediately in the morning, they do not worry [thinking] that perhaps he will return [later].

There was one such person who was braver than others. [At one such occasions] he thought he would go alone [on hunting]. There was a reason behind this [decision]. Supposing he went in a group and also supposing that the prey was not big enough and they would have to divide it among many, his share of the prey would be low. For this reason, many [of them] go on hunting alone. But usually, they always try to go in groups.

That person, too, went out alone. He went to a direction where he assumed that he would get more chances of hunting. He did not follow the direction of the group [because] he thought where everyone went would slim his chances of hunting. In reality, everyone would go [on hunting] as it was meant for merrymaking. Hunting was not the major prospect to them. Who hunts more would receive more appreciation in the society, that is all. So, he decided to go for hunting to an unknown place where nobody would want to go. When he moved out at night, he went out with his bow and arrow as was usual.

As he travelled about a kilometer or a half, suddenly he felt that something huge was moving inside a bush. He assumed that, since the movement denoted something large, it would probably be a wild boar. He was thinking like this and was gradually heading towards the bush. At that point, he noticed one thing that nothing came out of the bush and yet a bit farther from this bush, just a little distance away, there was another bush. There, it felt to him, something big was also moving. He started to hesitate, "What's the matter! I did not see [the animal] going out of here. It did not move out of this bush to there, to that one. Is there another inside the other bush as well then?" He also thought, "Great then, I might get more than one preys." Thinking so he started inching towards the second bush where he noticed movements. When he came closer to that bush, he saw some larger movements in another bush a bit farther from this one. He began to worry, "What's the matter?" Usually if a boar is there inside a bush and it hears the movement of humans or their stepping sound, it usually comes out of the bush and runs away. It may run out of one bush and hide in another. But the same thing was repeatedly happening in

this and that bush. However, he could not comprehend it in this way. He thought that perhaps there might be a group of boars inside different bushes. He moved towards the next bush.

When he neared the third bush, he found out that there was…err…no movement at all. Instead there were movements in another bush a bit distant from this one. He could not make any sense of what trouble would befall unto him next. He was assuming that the boar escaped his eyes while shifting bushes. He became stubborner to hunt that and find out what that was.

In this way, listeners, crossing one after another bush he completely lost the idea of where he was. At one point he discovered himself at a place surrounded by hillocks and there were many bushes around. He got there by rushing after the boar. He was not yet aware what he was chasing after. He did not even see the animal he was after. He did not even shout out for help from others as he thought to hunt it all by himself without taking any help from others. So, he did not even call for support.

The problem [for him] was that where he arrived there were no movements at all. He began to think, "What's the issue? There is no movement anywhere! Where can I shoot arrows and how can I get there in this darkness?" He got really confused about his next movement, "To which direction shall I move next? There are so many bushes! I shall wait for a while. I will listen to movements from anywhere. I will follow the direction from where it will come."

He waited for a long time. Almost after two or three hours he perceived of some sort of movement from behind him. He assumed that there could be some animal or something of this sort there. He slowly turned and looked there. Since it was dark then, he was unable to see anything there. Still, he decided to step ahead towards that direction slowly. He was bored to death and hence decided, "I will not walk with caution. I will chase after this time. Once I chase, this thing might start running. Then I could mark the direction to which it is running by noticing the movements of plants there." He became very tired [by this time] after chasing after this.

He chased once more. But to his dismay found out—no, nothing began running.

"If it begins to run, the plants there would tremble. But no, there is nothing of that sort."

He was really surprised, "What's the matter! It shouldn't be like this."

Suddenly he felt some climb plants got stuck with his legs. It was a usual thing. It would happen as he came inside the bushes. So, it should be normal that the climb plants would get stuck on his legs. He did not pay much heed to this and took the plants off his feet and began to walk forward.

Listeners, he walked for a long time and then he found out that he got back from where he took the plants off his feet. After roaming for such a long time, he just came back to the place where he started walking from.

He was shaken, "What's the matter! After walking for this long I came back to the same place! I was walking straight and never turned to any side. How did I get back to this place? Perhaps I made some wrong movements." He started to walk again.

After walking for a while, he again found himself at the same place from where he took the plants of his feet. How did he know that? There, in this place, some climb plants got stuck on his legs and he threw them off. Upon returning there—well, they go on hunting during moonlit nights during full moon—he could clearly see that he just came back to the same place yet again from where he threw the plants off his legs.

He attempted many a lot of times, again and again and again. But he could not move out of that maze. Suddenly he heard of some movements yet again inside the jungle. He began to wonder, "What is it really! I came this far chasing this. I have to find out what it really is." This time he decided to shoot his arrow towards the direction of the movement. Till then, he did not shoot a single arrow.

He aimed his arrow and as soon as he heard of the movement sound, he shot his arrow there. But, listeners, after shooting arrow to his assumed target, he found out that the arrow was there at the spot. But there was nothing there. And there was no sign or sound of movement in that place. He did not see any movement of that sort as well. This time he got scared. "What's happening! It is not supposed to be like this. I am neither hearing something running away nor am I seeing any movement of the plants. What, then, is it that I am chasing after? What is making me to chase after nothing? Who brought me here?"

He was not understanding the head or tail of this. He was also unable to understand [how] he ended up being in the same place again and again. He decided to get out of that place at any cost. "It cannot wait any longer!"

He, out of desperation, —since he belonged to the indigenous community, he knew many things of astronomy such as how to set directions if they get lost at night by observing the stars as a shared knowledge from generation after generation—observed the stars in the sky, then set a direction and started to walk. He thought, "If I keep on following the stars while walking, there will be no fear of returning to Dharabar."

He continued walking for about an hour. After walking—in places like Habiganj, Srimangal, and Sylhet there are many hillocks—by marking the stars for a while he yet again found out that he got back to the same spot. He also noticed one dangerous thing there that, at a time, movements began in all the bushes around him. It felt to him that many invisible creatures began to move at a time. But what was that? He could not see that. He was feeling terribly terrified. His fear got beyond his control as he thought, "What trouble have I got into now? I can't even find my way out by observing the stars. What is wrong with me?"

He was at the brink of consciousness and unconsciousness. He only remembered—this he shared with others later on—that before becoming unconscious he noticed that somethings long like the climb plants were crawling out. That was not a beast. He felt that these were the climb plants. These were crawling outwards like a snake and then towards him. He could not remember anything of what went on later.

On the other side, **people got worried as they did not see him return** [why not family, relatives, friends and acquaintances? Cause he does not feel them as humans even, perhaps]. "What's the matter, it already dawned, and he hadn't yet returned." When it was noontime and there was no sign of his return, people moved out in search of him. After searching for him for a long time, they found him there unconscious in the afternoon. They rescued him. [Later] he told them everything.

The eldest person in their village community told him, "Who made you disoriented was one kind of plant. It is called *bhola lata*." It is called *bhola lata* in their local language cause the plant can delude people if it wishes to do so. And in any way if somebody crosses it, he will most definitely be lost. He will in no way find his way of return until at least dawn. This is what happened to him.

My team and I collected this *ghatana* from *Dulal da*. I asked him, "Where can this *bhola lata* be found? He replied that now many places [with bushes] are cleared out—especially *bhola lata* appears in places with bushes at times during night—but [owing to the clearing

of the bushes] it is rarely seen. "Still", he said, "if there are two hillocks side by side and besides if there are bushes, then some people may fall in the grip of the *bhola lata*".

I had no idea about *bhola lata* before this. My perception was that notorious jinn turn people oblivious. But I would never know that a strange thing such as a plant could turn people lost until I met *Dulal da* at the Noapara Tea Estate. In fact, I would never know this. However, I hope, listeners, you all liked it. Stay well, stay healthy. I wish you all the best. Thank you so much Russell *vai. Assalamu alaikum.*

4. **Dream World, Episode 12 01/05/2020**

Assalamu alaikum. How are you, Russell *vai?* I hope you are doing well, amongst the well people. Russell *vai*, I am Antar. I am from Jamalpur. I am studying Disaster Management at Begum Rokeya University, Rangpur. Russell *vai*, the *ghatana* I am about to share today happened in Jamalpu. And I heave heard of the *ghatana* from my mother. Russell *vai*, let me begin the story without any farther ado.

Russell *vai*, the main *ghatana* took place exactly 12 years ago from today. And the *ghatana* began 20 years ago. The *ghatana* I am about to narrate is a miraculous *ghatana* the witness of which are all the people of the village where it happened. Russell *vai*, the *ghatana* is basically about the jinn community. The jinn community also, Russell *vai*, you may have noticed, like humans worship Allah. One of the jinn communities had a *pir,* this *pir*'s name was Khowaj pir. I am going to share the ghatana of Khowaj pir. Russell vai, [I have to share the ghatana in two part] I have to start with one part. Then I will go to the next part. How did the ghatana begin at first? Actually, Russell vai, listen carefully, at a remote village beside which Brahmaputra River flows when the water in the river dries up, little children go to bathe there. We also go when we could manage time. Few children went to bathe in the scanty amount of water. They were swimming. Suddenly… as they were bathing as usual—little children of that area—a wave, a sudden wave came. Russell *vai*, there was hardly any water in the river, even with a wave it would reach up to your waist level at most. The wave came suddenly. Once it was gone, they [children] found out that one of the girls was missing… They [elderly people] searched for her. There was no deep water to dive in and search for her [Indicates it is impossible to drown there, hence the miracle]. Close to this part, there was a *dou*. It is the name of that part of a river edge where tide is strong. The *dou* is so deep, almost as deep as the bottom of a sea. We also hear that there are many *dous* the bottom of which cannot be touched. It was quite away from the spot where the girl went missing. Professional

119

divers came and dived into the *dou*. But they could not find her. Then seven long years went by, or perhaps even longer. Everyone forgot the *ghatana*. There lived a boy in the village. He became an adult by this time. He had one problem that he could not walk. He was crippled since he was born. He could not make his livelihood for which he had to live through much hardship. He would live by begging by crawling from door to door. Besides, he had deep burden of sorrow in his heart. He always used to complain Allah about his sin [for which he was suffering]. Why his life was full of agonies.

I don't know, perhaps the one on the sky perhaps listened to his complaint. One night suddenly he had a dream, in his dream somebody told him, "Come to me. All your agonies shall be over." He did not bother about it at the first day. Then he had the same dream again on the second consecutive day. "Come to me. All your agonies in this life shall be over." He went to a mullah. He told him, "Perhaps you are complaining to Allah quite a lot [for which] perhaps some miraculous power is summoning you. Or what you think of day and night, you are dreaming that."

Few days went by when again he saw an old man as beautiful as light (*noor*) in his dream. That old man told him, "Come to me, all your agonies will be over." Then he…I mean a faith began to grow in his mind that perhaps his agonies will be over at one point. Then again he had dream. He was told that, "Come to this *dou*. Once you get there, just dive in. Make sure to drive before the Fazar Azan. If you dive, you will come to me. Come to me."

Fear peeped in his mind [since] the *dou* was haunted. If he fell down in that, chances of him being alive was thin. Yet he had deep hatred for this [crippled] life. By leaving everything, leaving his love for own life he woke up at a late night [before dawn]. Right before the Fazar Azar he reached the *dou*. Then dived in. He thought he would die. But as soon as he dived in, this is how he narrated the *ghatana* to us [and] as we heard, he described that as soon as he dived, he found himself in front of a palace. **It was so beautiful that he never saw the like even in cinemas.** He waited at the front of the palace. Then walked towards it. As he reached the gate, it automatically opened. And. Russell *vai*, you can't even believe, the palace was full of precious metals [*Shonadanay varpur*] that he never saw that in his life. He crawled in the palace. As he entered, he found himself in a maidan. Almost as kings—we have watched in movies, sit with their ministers—after reaching the maidan he saw that that old man was sitting on a throne who he visioned in his dream.

That old man asked him, "I summoned you quite some days ago, you were you delayed?" Russell *vai*, what could he say! What could the boy say. He was perplexed. He could not say a word. He [the old man] asked, "What do you want me to give you? All the gold that you see are, all these are yours. Carry as much as you can." But Russell *vai*, humans if they cherish something deep from their heart, greed cannot grasp that human. It could not tempt him as well. That boy replied, "No, just cure my legs. I want to walk as a normal man." Russell *vai*, the jinn replied…who people call Khowaj Pir… Khowaj pir replied, "Alright! I am curing your legs. But you have to make a commitment." "What commitment?" "I will make you self-reliant, provide you with riches. I liked your words. You cannot harm people and live purely, normally and with faith."

He agreed on. Then when he was about to receive the treasure, he [Khowaj pir] called someone "*bauma*" [daughter-in-law], "Give him some gold coins." When the girl came out of the house, Russell *vai*, [the boy] was surprised [to see] that the girl who drowned in the river, that girl handed him over the gold coins. And he recognized her straight away. He called her by her name, the girl responded to that. Then the jinn responded, "Yes, you recognized her. Well done. My son liked her pretty much. For this I abducted her and married her off to my son. If you recover, when you get back, let her family know that she is doing well. Mark my words, Russell *vai*¸when he…I mean when suddenly he noticed that he was ordered, "Close your eyes." He oblized with that and felt himself inside water and he was almost at the surface. He then got up from under water. As he tried to get up from the *dou*, he saw that his legs were perfectly alright. He could not believe it. He got back home from there soaked in water. People at his home were surprised, how could this happen! And there were gold coins with him. And, Russell *vai*, the whole village ran to him [and asked] "How did this happen? How did your leg get cured?" Then he shared everything with them. And now, he is self-sufficient and honest, his days are passing in peace. This is my *ghatana*, Russell *vai*. We all are witness of this miraculous *ghatana*. I hope that listeners will like it. Russell *vai*, if you do stream it, it will feel good. If I find more *ghatanas*, in sha Allah, I will send to you. Thank you.

Appendix 5: Pictures of the *pitha* making process.

Grinding Rice on *Dheki*
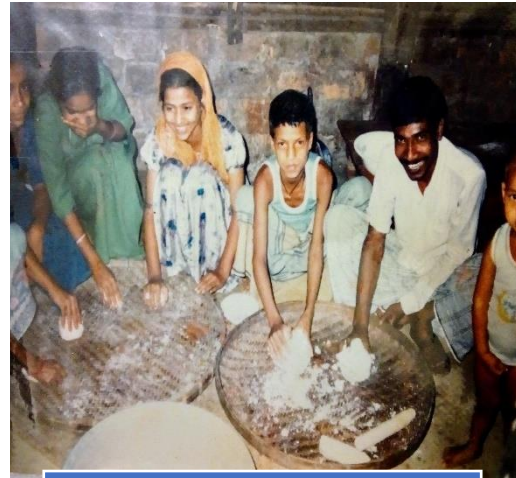
Pitha Bola (Making of *Pitha*)

Appendix 6: Detailed transcript of the Conventional Narratives

1. **Fotol's Kissa April 14, 2018**

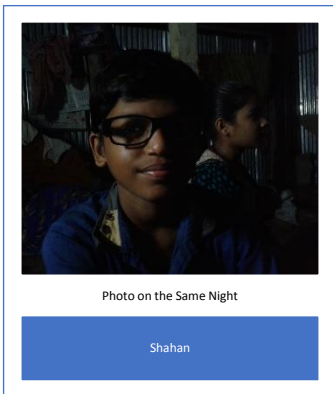Photo Taken by Me on the night when we went to him in 2018

Fotol

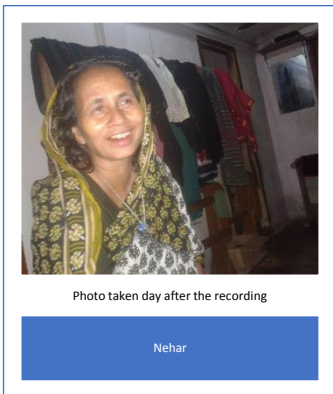
Photo on the Same Night

Shahan

Photo taken day after the recording

Nehar

Rasel: *Vaisab*, can you tell us a *kissa* [tale] today?

Fotol vai: What do you want to do by listening to these now? People do not believe in them anymore.

Rasel: But still I would love to listen to your kissa. Please, tell us some.

Fotol vai: Badshah Sikondor [Sikandar] one day decided to go to *bonij* [a trip to distant place for financial endeavors in the middle ages and even at the early 20th century in Bangladesh]. He prepared 13 dinghies for himself and for his 12 brothers. They kept on going and going until nightfall when they neared a hill. King Sikandar ordered his men to anchor the dinghies there.

"I am seeing dark cloud in the sky. We should not proceed any more for the day."

It was already evening then. Some of them anchored the dinghies, some of them went to the jungle, some others were doing this and that. In the meantime, it already drizzled. At that moment, the king's attendants heard the cry followed by weeping sounds from somewhere in the forest. They informed him about the event. "We are hearing the cries of human, presumably of a woman. She is crying so much that teardrops are rolling down her eyes continually." The king told them, "Search for her and find out why she is crying." All his men went in search and found out her sitting under a tree and crying. She wore a garment so charming that she looked mesmerizing [*bagu bagu karer*]. She was such a beautiful woman. Yet she was sobbing. Seeing her like this, everyone's heart became full of piety.

Badshah Sikandar neared her and enquired, "Are you monster, ghost, fairy or human? Please, tell me!" She replied, "I am human [*Adamjaat*]."

"How did you get here?"

"An enemy captured, beat and left me here. I am helpless surrounded by water. I don't have any way to go out. This is why I am crying."

"Really?"

"Yes!"

"Will you go with us if we take you?"

"If you would be so kind, I will definitely go!"

"Really?"

"Yes!"

"Let's get in the dinghy then."

They reached the dinghy, ate dinner and at the same time, Badshah Sikandar made up his mind to marry that woman. He sent his proposal through his boatman.

"I will marry him."

He married her. He travelled around for some days and then got back with her at his home and started to live. What she used to do to him at night, after midnight-1am, was that she would make him halfdead unconscious and would leave to the hills for a meal. She would return 1 or 2 hours before the morning azan [morning prayer call from the mosque] back in her human form.

Then one day, Lukman Hakim visited the Badshah. Lukman Hakim was the person who knew all the medicines and cures to diseases.

Rasel: Who was Lukman Hakim?

Fotol: He was a wise man who knew the functions of trees, plants and shrubs. Allah bestowed Lukman Hakim this knowledge.

Then he [Lukman Hakim] proposed, "There is a sea… [Interrupted by some guests], in this sea… Let's find out about the sea. Let's go there altogether."

They decorated their dinghies and sailed out through the Padma River [one of the major rivers in Bangladesh]. Suddenly, [as they] reached halfway through the river, Badshah Sikandar told, "Dear Badshah [*oba Badshah*]*!"*

"Please tell me!"

"You know everything about the world. The air pays tax to you. But can you tell me the depth of the river?"

"No, I cannot tell you that."

Badshah Sikandar asked again, "Who can answer that?"

"Your youngest wife who you married from the jungle can answer that."

"How can she tell that?"

"She can."

"Oh really?"

"Of course!"

Lukman Hakim secretly asked, "Have you any lead[(metal, *shisha*] in the boat?"

"What should I say! Yes, we have it!"

"Ask her to dive into the river."

The Badshah then commanded the youngest queen, "Dive into the river. Let us see how deep it is!"

She tried to resist at the start. But the Badshah commanded, "Why don't you jump into the water? Are we going to kill you and leave you here?"

As she was a monster, she began to stretch herself longer and longer as she was going down. Only both her wrists and above surfaced in the water. They began to hit her with the lead. By imprisoning her using the lead, Lukman Hakim ordered the men to set sail.

From then on till today that woman calls people to come using one hand and no using the other. She is still there summoning people to come using one hand and forbidding them using another. Really, whenever a boat or airplane would go to this location, she used to stop that because Lukman Hakim imprisoned her there using lead. It is still there in the Padma River.

Rahan [10 y/o boy]: What happens if someone goes there?

Fotol: Men, birds can't go there. She even brings down airplanes.

Nehar [45, widow]: She became a *maal* then. I heard of that as well.

Fotol: A man used to go fishing and come back immediately with a *kholoi* [basket] full of *bain* fish. He caught fish and skinned it. He did it for five or six months. Only *dhora* [the least venomous snake in Bangladesh]. He caught the snake on the head and skinned it. One day perhaps owing to rush a bit of the skin remained on the snake. Women were cutting them when they saw the skin. They screamed, "This man picks up *dhora* snake from anywhere!" They then asked him, "The fish that you bring every day, what are these?" "Aha, these are fish, *bain* fish!" "No, even though it is *dhora*, it's not a snake. It's a fish. But there is one snake in your *haor* (wetland). There is no other snake." They

125

replied, "Can you show us the snake?" "You have to give me some time. I have a sister who is a *dat goonin* [better sorcerror] than I am. She lives in Dhaka. I can catch the snake once she is here. Otherwise, I can't." They said, "Ask her to come here then." It was time of letter exchange. He wrote a letter [to his sister] that there is a snake, I told people about it. They want to see it. It is a monstrous snake [*deojati*]. I can't control it alone. You should come along. She replied, "I will come on that day." People spread the news using drum that a snake will be caught from this *haor* [marshland]. There is a *haor* on the other side of the Kuiasori river. He told them, "Make me a tall house by digging the soil. I will play my flute from the house and the snake will appear from the *haor*." They fixed a date. People began to gather around. "A big snake will come. Let's see." They spread the news by drumming in bazaars. People began to gather around since morning. His sister was on her way. People began to exhaust him with pressure. He told them, "If my sister doesn't come, I can't handle this." "Damn you, why can't you do it? Summon the snake. We will see." For their pressure, right before dusk he was unable to resist their request. He began to play on his flute. He continued playing on and on and on. The snake thin as a string began to appear. When the snake came in front of him, he stopped playing on his flute. The less he played on his flute, the angrier the snake became. As time kept moving, it kept enlarging its body. It became this big [indicated using his hands]. He sister was not still there. She was a bit far. She was, I suppose in Fesuganj, then in Sylhet. From Sylhet she got in a car to be here. The snake kept enlarging its body. The snake could not bear that. His sister, say for instance, was on the other side of the river. The snake came and held him on its mouth by his shoulder and went back to the *haor*. His sister arrived [after that]. She began to use her power [*goon chalaise*]. She kept on doing it and urged the snake, "Please, at least show me a glimpse of my brother!" It just showed her a glimpse of him and disappeared. You are talking about snake, the shepherd of the house [*rakhal*]. They are very dangerous. We have one in our house. They are called *maal*. When we were digging our pond, Azim nearly died.

Rasel: Why didn't the *maal* bestow his family with wealth?

Fotol: *Maal* only gives you wealth in return it cleanse the whole clan. Once you get wealth from him, and you give birth to a child, *Maal* will snatch him away from you. For this reason people do not want the wealth from *maal*. [Belief.]

Rasel: What does he do with human child?

Nehar Apa: He will turn you into *maal* and keep you as a family. [Belief]

Fotol: In the past, people, during an event of wedding, they would prepare a list written by a pious maulana and carry it to a *dor* [a gutter in the river, synonymous with *dou*] and place it there. Next morning, they would get ceramic plates and whatsoever they needed, *maal* would place them over the shore. They would bring these and perform the wedding ceremony quite wonderfully. Then they would wash and clean the objects received from *maal* and place it back to the shore of the *dor. Maal* would take them back. [Legend]

Rasel: I heard of this *gof* [conversation].

Salik: You can hear this *gof* in every house where a *maal* resides in. [A maal usually resides in ponds, *dou/dors,* wells, etc.]

Rasel: Would people have to please the maal in every way possible? A slight mistake would infuriate him, right?

Salik Vai: Yes… [Interrupted by Fotol].

Fotol vai: You know what a woman did, she saw a nice small bowl and kept it. They put the goods in the shore of the *dor*. But *maal* wouldn't take them back. Next day, the owner of the house was visited by him in a dream. "My porcelain bowl is left at the house of that person. Bring it to me. Else I will not take these stuffs back." The man woke up and went to that woman's house. He told her, "There is a porcelain bowl left at your house. Could you give it back to me?" The woman replied, "By Allah, I don't have any bowl here. See all the things I have are here. You can check, there is no bowl in there." The woman [*beti*] did not acknowledge this.

The following day, *maal* asked the man, "Where is my bowl?"

He replied, "The woman did not return it to me. What can I do?"

"Didn't she return it?"

"No, she didn't!"

Maal conjured her [*dhorilise*] in the next day. She began to have a loose motion and a terrible fever. Doctors, *kabirajs* failed to cure her. The woman died of this. After her death, they found the porcelain bowl. Another woman of that house, following her death, was conjured. They understood that it is a conjuring by *maal*. It will not even spare their

127

offspring to survive. They searched and found out at one corner of the house a beautiful bowl. They returned it and performed many rituals and a very powerful maulana like Fultali Saheb drove the curse away.

Rasel: I heard that you were the target of *baan* [*baan mara* to use magic to kill someone] once in your young days. How did it happen?

Shahan [8 y/o boy then): What is *baan*?

Rasel: It is to tie you using a rope.

Shahan: No, I know that but this is not what the word is used for. It has a different meaning.

Fotol: Children of these days will not believe these *gofs* of the past. A *kurula* [whirlwind] was blowing. A maulana wrote a list and dropped it in it. *Mishti, jilapi, long, elachi* [delicate sweets came in abundance. [Legend]

Rasel: Isn't *kurula* the sign of the journey of a monster?

Fotol: Yes, it is their *roth* [chariot] which runs in the form of *kurula*.

Salik: *Kurula* is *roth.* Have you seen *roth* going?

Fotol: *Kurula* is how they move from one place to another mostly during the noon time of the day. But it is occasional. *Roth* is another type that flies in every Saturday and Tuesday [*Shoni-Mongolbar*]. There was a *Talfa* [a maulana or a madrasa student who resides in a farmer's house during the time of his study or duty as a maulana] who had some knowledge like you (intended me). Ha ha ha ha… he wrote a token and put it in the *kurula*. They were going to funeral with a corpse. As he put the list in, they received it and came in angered and beat him so much ha ha ha that his hand was fractured and he was halfdead by the time they left him. The next day people found that *talfa* lying on the isle of the land. What happened? He was barely breathing. What happened to him? They took him to that maulana [who got all the delicate food from the *kurula*]. "I cannot do anything till next Saturday."

They went to him on the next Saturday. He wrote a list and dropped it in the *kurula.* Through this asked them, "Why did you beat this man?" They replied, "We were going to a funeral. He asked us for sweets. We were going to a funeral and he summoned us

for sweets. This is why we beat him." The maulana replied, "You did a great job then. He will not do it again." [Legend]
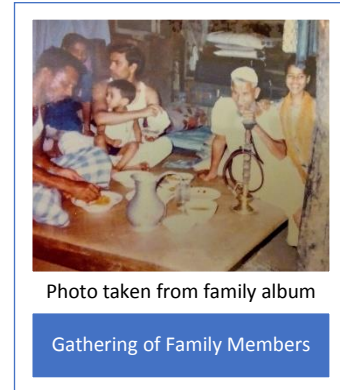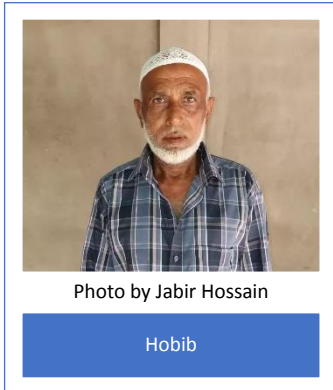
Nehar: Maybe it does not fly anymore?

Fotol: No, they do on Saturday and Tuesday. Not very far from here, the wife of the Hazi's house, Amir's wife and the daughter of Siraj, had a flower plant. Fairies [*fori*] used to have a gathering there. Her room was adjacent to the flower plant. It so happened that the fairies conjured her. They used to carry her with them every night after 12o'clock. She would not know that. They would bring her back prior to *azan* [call for Fazar or morning prayer]. This continued to happen regularly and then Amir married her. The fairies conjured her again. She told them, "I am a married woman. I have children. You would harm them."

"We will not do anything to your children. But you must control your husband."

One night, perhaps Amir made some movement while asleep as they were about to take her on a trip and woke up and saw everything. Upon arrival, she implored him not to interfere, "If you interfere, they will kill me." But he didn't pay any heed to her. When on the next Saturday they arrived, he neared them. They killed him instantly and conjured his wife who died of that later. But as they killed these people, they also returned them with riches. From then on, whatever they did turned out to be a huge financial success. That's how they became rich. They even won a lottery of 10 million Bangladeshi taka. Ten million taka of that is worth hundred million now. [Legend]

2. Hobib's Interview 10.10.2013

Photo by Jabir Hossain

Hobib

Photographed by me in 2018

Meeting of the elderly people negotiating a wedding

Photo taken from family album

Gathering of Family Members

Rasel: What was your boyhood like?

Hobib: We did so many things. I studied a little. I worked in the field with my dad and played a lot of games which you do not play now.

Rasel: Can I say that people were not this rich as they are now?

Hobib: How would rich people be then? Everyone was poor. Suppose if there were rich, they had cattle, raised them and then sold them in the market. They would plough land and grow crops. Be it sublease or one's own land, everyone was a farmer. Rich or poor, they would sell their harvest and buy groceries. Not everyone was a businessman. Business usually referred to a person who did not have anything else to attend to, he was supposed to be a person who only concentrate on business. Farmers had to work on field. Cowboys looked after cows. Can anyone look after cows after ploughing lands? A cowboy would go to plough land and work there for just a short while and then he would return home, eat his morning meal and then go to tend the cattle. But the person who used to plough land, harrow it and then untie the yoke to return home. That's how the time of plough was. But now, at this age, everyone has become a *bideshi* [immigrant], *master* [teacher/employee]. Where can you find cows now? People may have a cow along with a calf so that you get milk. Are there any cattle more than this?

Rasel: You said you could not study this much because you had to join the work of cultivation.

Hobib: I studied till class three. We had some financial problem then. My mom was sick, and we were many siblings in the family. But education was free till class five. Everything depended on cultivation. So, we helped our father in farming. Our concentration was more on that. We knew we had to grow crops, vegetables and other corns to live our lives. Now, a person who does not have anything also concentrates on education. He thinks about future—there is no agricultural work for him in coming days. [He does not want to become a farmer but aims at getting jobs and opening business.] To become a businessman, you need education. And to get a job, you can't help studying. To get employed in any modern sector, one has to get a higher certificate. If you do not complete I.A., and B.A. degree, you can't become a master [teacher/employee]. Different demands in different times.

Rasel: What did you do for fun?

Hobib: Days of past were of fun. After working for the whole day, the person who is a student, he would concentrate on his studies. They would occasionally go to *zatra* in groups. Youth those came [and started visiting there] when we stopped going to *zatra-pala.* We stopped going there at the age of 22 or 25. We went there at most when we were 25. Then we did not go to *zatra*. Because we had our families by then [wife and children]. I also married because it was hard to maintain the family. How can I go to *zatra!* The youngers would go there then. We used to go there secretly so that parents wouldn't know. Even we would return while they were asleep. Did you understand? My dad didn't realize whether we went out to *zatra* or to steal somebody's house. Upon return, I used to see them still asleep. At times, they would even wake up and went out for ablution. Whenever they would return to say their morning prayers, we would run into our room and pretend to be asleep.

[There were some irrelevant talks with others for sometimes. What was important there was the offering of betelnut, a tradition in Sylhet religion to guests. My friend Arafat and Hobib took it. And this irrelevant conversation led Hobib to narrate a *ghatana*.]

Hobib: A *ghatana* happened at our home. [Women of my family] grinded a huge amount of rice into powder [on *dheki*]. They kept these [in the kitchen]. A visitor came from somewhere and saw this on the bamboo tray [*dala*]. But it was not on occasion of Eid

[*Eid-Forob*, Islamic festivals when families bake cakes known as *pitha* in vernacular term], they grinded big amount of rice into powder. The lady saw that they were preparing *pitha*. Women mix the rice powder with water, right? They were mixing the powder when that lady arrived. The lady, who came as a guest, saw they were making *pitha*. They knew well the baking process. Yet when they put the *pitha* in the *gaiari* [a special pot with many small wholes at the bottom put on top of another pot filled with water]. Time went by as they kept on baking, but the *pitha* would not be cooked. What would they do about this incident? Who should they confer with? They failed to find out anyone who would be able to help them. What the woman did, as she saw that, she did not chant anything. But when she saw it, she only remembered the chant. One of the women suddenly told them, "You should go to this woman. She came here today. If you could get some puffed water [*pora paani*] from her…don't accuse her of doing this, she will not help." They went to that woman and said, "*Bhabi* [sister-in-law, wife of a brother or cousin]!" She asked, "What happened?" "Our *pitha* is not boiling." The lady blew over some water and gave it to them. Upon returning home with the water, they poured it in the *gaiari*. As soon as they did it, the *pitha* was boiled. It did not even take time. They took the *gaiari* off from the earthen oven perhaps ten minutes later and could eat the *pitha*.

Grandma: She probably enchanted [*thamilawa*] the *pitha*!

Hobib: No, she did not. She knew how to do it and it just popped in her mind. That's why it happened.

Grandma: I would say she enchanted [*thaamse*] it.

Arafat: It does not require to enchant consciously. Whatever Sutai would see, be it a plant or anything, would die out.

Hobib: There is no need to chant anything. Well, Sutai does not know any chant. It was his eye, if he would ever look at the *uloin* [udder] of the cow, that's the end of the cow giving milk. The *uloin* would have fractures as a result. The eye is evil. Not everyone's eye is benevolent. Some of us have evil eyes. Allah perhaps created them with eyes like this, whatever they would see rot, dry out or die. Allah may have created this. You know a *ghanta* when one day a Kadir was picking tomatoes, Sutai came in and saw it. Sutai only wished he had such tomatoes. In next few days all the plants dried out. People in our village are afraid of him. Whenever he would be around, they would try not to show him anything that they possess, plant or nurture.

3. **Interview with Abdus Salam mullah 04.02.2021** (In parts because the network is poor in his area and I had to call him back and forth. Ultimately I could not reach out to him for the detailed interviews)

1

Rasel: Are you continuing with your *jinn shadhona* [the phrase stands for the ritual required to keep in touch with the *jinn*] now?

Salam: Yes, I do. But it is less than I did in the past.

Rasel: Perhaps you got busy with other responsibilities and have less time now to devote to jinn?

Salam: [Skipped the question and asked me what my problem or disease is denoting the fact that he took me as his patent and wanted to go onto business, rather than talking about nonrelevant things, and ultimately the call got disconnected.]

2

Rasel: Did you face any trouble while treating patients?

Salam: It happened probably once. I am speaking about the year 2000. I did an *ajirat* [a ritual that involves calling the jinn in and asking about the problems of the patient] in Kulaura. I separated a group of people, both men and women, in a room and the rest of the house was locked and was emptied for the ritual. You know the *jinn-e-mu'min* [*jinns* those are Muslim are called so] I summoned, when they arrived it seemed like there was a storm. However, the woman unveiled her hair hearing this and started screaming dacoits and thieves are stealing the rest of the house. As soon as she took off the cloak covering her head, the jinn became enraged at me. **[It is a *ghatana*]**

The second *ghatana* is… I did *ajirat* while the jinns were going to the graveyard carrying their deceased fellow for burial. Ha Ha! I promised *shinni*[28]. The men in the house used to call me uncle. Whenever I visit them, they still fear *ajirat* and say, no *ajirat*, please! fearing the fury of the *jinn-e-mu'min*. [*ghatana*]

3

Salam: One night I was returning after attending one patient. I was crossing a 'Hakhom' [a foot-bridge] at around 2 am. When I got there at the river, it [the spirit] started skirmishing with me. There were two other men behind me. They got really terrified and retreated to the other side of the river. They didn't dare to come ahead… After

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[28] A type of food prepared to satisfy God and distributed among people from around

fighting for a while I remembered one thing [a charm or perhaps a verse from the Quran, he didn't want to reveal it] and recited that. As soon as I uttered it, it was gone with a scream. [*ghatana*]

4

Rasel: People offer 'Baona' [Food or domestic animal or bird dedicated to supernatural being or to Hindu Gods or Goddesses and put at the point where three roads meet] to satisfy them. For instance, if you intend to please *Bishhari* [Manasa's other name], you might need to offer Baona, right?

Salam: Now these [pleasing the Hindu Gods and Goddesses] are not required. We know the most powerful thing now. Quran is the mightiest, you know? Everyone, even Bishhari obeys that.

5

[In the area of Salam Molla, there has been a rise in the occurrences of theft of Domestic animals, especially of cows and his exorcism or healing now corresponds to that crisis.]

Salam: Thieves will not enter my premise as I took some precautions.

Rasel: What did you do to prevent theft? If it's not a secret, can you reveal this to me?
Salam: There is nothing secret in it. I dug holes at the four corners of the whole premise of my house and put something and buried them. So, thieves will not be able to enter. They will think that we are awake and alert.

Rasel: Does this involve any help from *jinn* or you did it using Quranic verses?

Salam: No, I used broken pieces of clay-made jars to inscribe verse. I am not sure if you would recognize Atab from Khan Tilla [a part of a village in his area]. He was abroad [in the Middle East]. I offered them my help. Theft took place in his neighboring households. But nothing happened to his household till today even though there is not a single male person at their household [to protect them]. [Quite a complex instance, nothing happened at the house and if it is known to people, it might spread as a *ghatana*]

Rasel: What else do you treat?

Salam: I treat Epilepsy, Ulcer, and… um… I treat almost little bit of everything. I found a lot of these in Quran Sharif.

4. **Renu (Female, 72 years of age)**

Renu: Mojoi's mom went to the ghat one morning and then got back home and became goddamn mad [*janun pagal*]. What to do now? She was a new bride then. They called in one of my aunt's [from her in-laws side] husband. I used to call him grandpa then, before I married my husband. He came and did "Ajirat" [this version of *Ajirat* involves asking the spirit that possesses the victim] on her. He asked, "Where did you come from? Why have you possessed this woman?" He [the spirit] replied, "Look, we were going home by crawling as lowly as we can on the ground. Why did this wretched woman step on our shadow?" My uncle asked, "How will you leave? Leave her now." The spirit replied that he would not quit her body. Then my uncle said, "Shall I put you inside a bottle then?" *Look, son! I heard of this from others. I did not witness the event myself.* "I will put you inside a bottle if you do not leave now." The spirit replied, "I will leave. Don't put [me] inside a bottle!" Then he left her and she became well. [This one is an example of *ghatana*, in its short, mono-episodic concise form.]

Rasel: When they leave, do they leave any proof that they left?

Renu: Yeah, they left leaving a proof once… um… in Mongla Bazar, it was related to one of my aunt-in-laws. Her brother, isn't he my uncle-in-law? He married and came home with his wife on a boat. Once she was brought home, she became dreadfully mad. He [Renu's uncle] came here from India [during the partition of 1947] and settled down at a new place and even went to a new place[29] and started a new relation ['Kutimita'][30]. What to do in such a situation at such a place where there is hardly any people nearby? Her father came to take her home. There wouldn't be any benefit to leave her at the household of a stranger[31]. My uncle-in-law [the brother-in-law of the bride] asked him for a second attempt to heal her. Few days went by after this. Then he went to a Mullah, well, not a real Mullah, but to a person who knew him… then he learned the whereabouts

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[29] A new place is called 'Anela Jayga' in the Sylheti language referring to a place where a person is new and hence susceptible to supernatural possession or harm.
[30] The word refers to new kinship through marriage.
[31] The husband's household is referred to as such in Sylhet.

of the Mullah and then brought him home. But before he came, he asked for a new room made with clay without dung[32]. There must not be any picture inside the house as well. Keep it as holy and clean as possible.

These houses were of Hindu's[33], long and big. They coated and decorated the room as was advised. It was the month of *Poush* [Mid December to Mid January] and there was terrible winter that time. For that coldness [I could not perceive of a word here because the internet fluctuated a lot] … people sat across one room. Then came the Mollah accompanied by the middleman. They took their seats as well leaving one or two chairs vacant next to them. They began to gossip as there were many others of different ages. He wasn't apparently doing the exorcist's act. As he and the others were gossiping, suddenly, the whole house shook with terrible sound. Even the lap was blown off. People were sitting as it grew dark in the room with the lamp being blown off and as there was this terrible sound, somebody [a spirit] sat at the empty chair. For the winter people were wearing jackets, sweaters or shawls, at that moment they started to feel scorching warmth inside the room. So, they took off their sweaters, jackets or shawls. The room became very hot. Few moments went by. The mollah then muttered, "Leave a sign before you leave!" The lamp was blown off and nobody could see anything. The room again made a terrible sound and then the spirit left and broke the top of a large mango tree just like a '*kachu* plant' [Colocasia esculenta plant]. That's how the bride was healed. [The genre of this one is a bit confusing. It happened during her young age. Perhaps for this reason a great bit of imagination and stress on detail.]

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[32] Very much connected with the Riot following the partition of India and Pakistan in 1947. The word here that she mentions is "Ala Mati" it refers to unmixed clay, also corresponds to the idea that there were houses built earlier by the Hindus by mixing clay with cow-dung who left for India and hence the houses were perhaps not holy for Muslims to pray, so the Mollas required a new house.

[33] The Hindus left for India following the events of the Partition and the Muslims came from India to Pakistan and accommodated these houses.
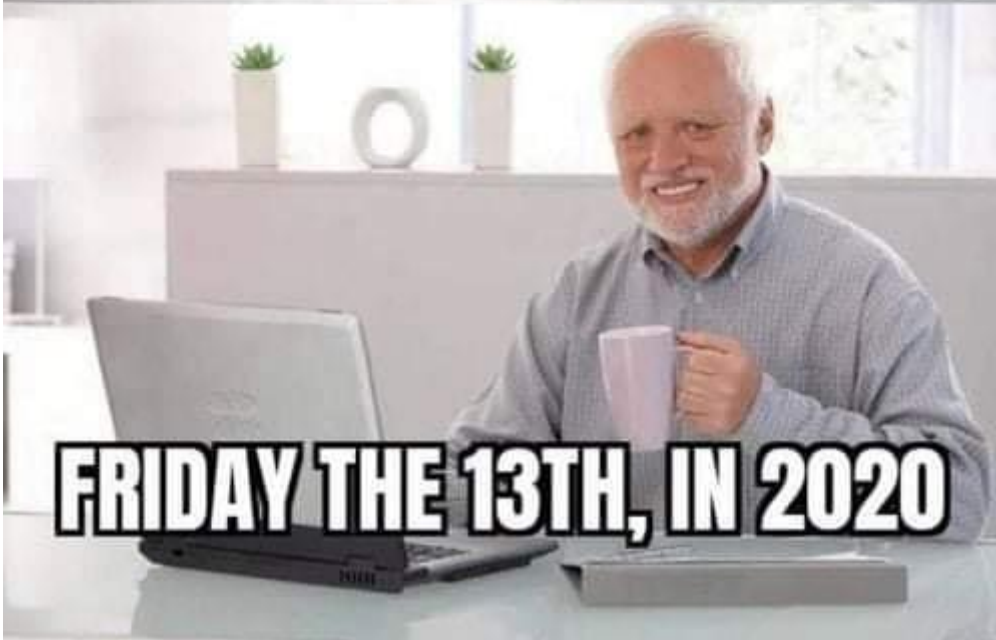
Appendix 7: The visual narratives shared in the Podcast Network
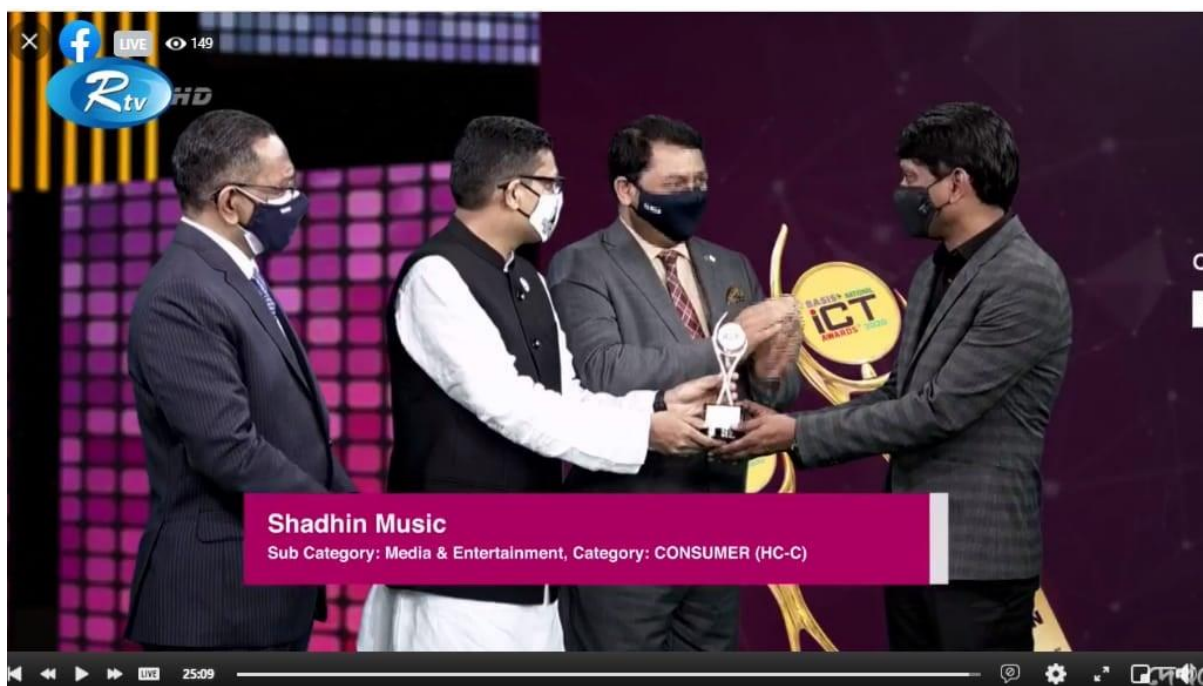

VISUAL NARRATIVE FROM BHOOT.COM GROUP 1 1
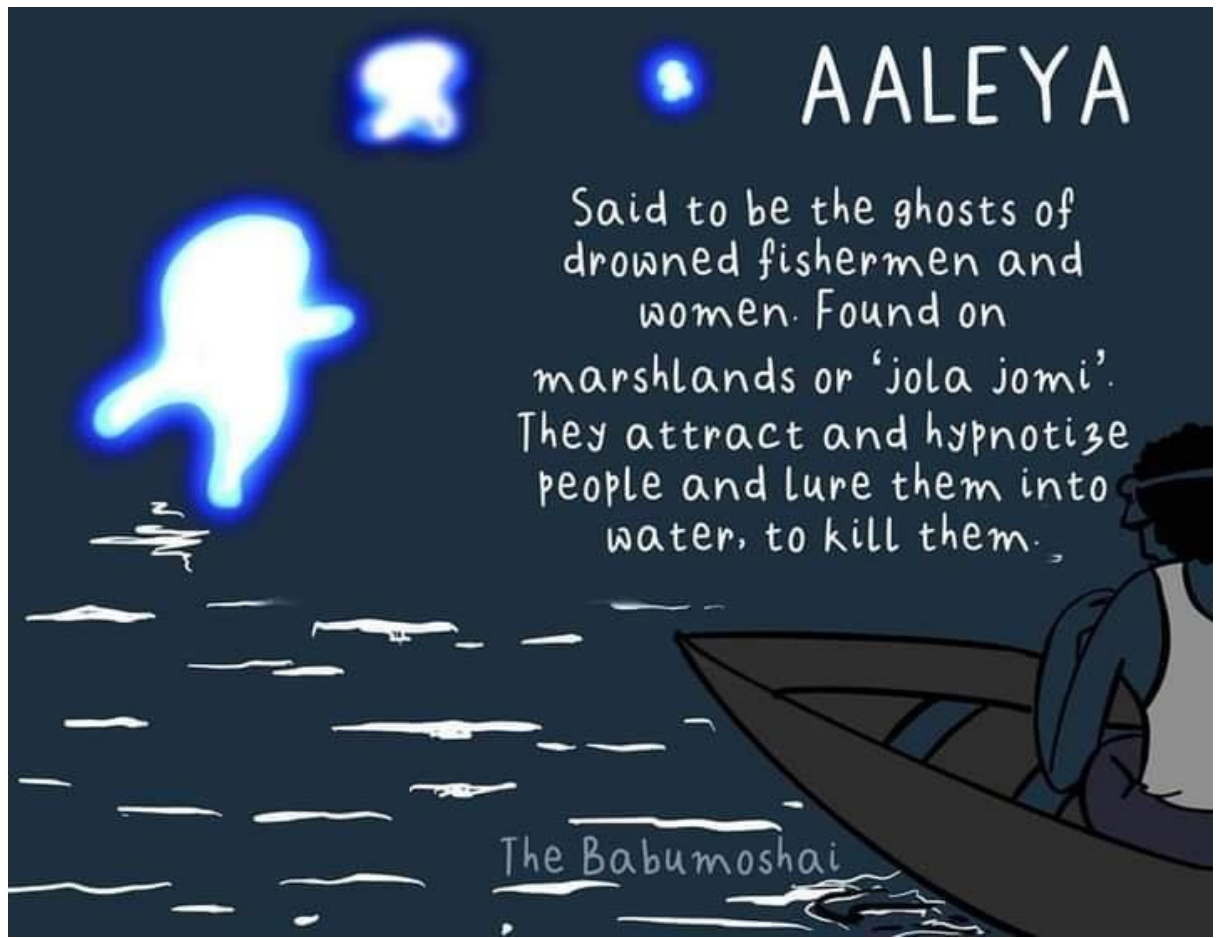
VISUAL NARRATIVE FROM BHOOT.COM GROUP 2

138

VISUAL NARRATIVE FROM BHOOT.COM GROUP 3

Appendix 8: The Award Reception Picture

Appendix 9: Bengali Post about *Bhoot* in Facebook Group

In line with Shahriar Akash and other's comment on seven types of *bhoot*:

Md Rahmat Ullah on June 25, 2021

Learn about 7 types of *bhoot*:

Upon a hearing the word *bhoot* a feeling of thrill and fear flows through the veins. It feels like somebody is lurking behind or somebody is about to twist the neck. What do ghosts look like? How many toes/legs, hands, and heads do they have, if they have any? Folk's curiosity about such issues is endless. Even though they feel afraid, many are fond of listening to ghost stories or watching horror films. Just as it feels really thrilling to listen to ghost stories in the darkness of the night, it also similarly makes the heart throb at the sight of an apparition at night. And if that particular night turns out to be the '*Bhoot Chaturdashi*', needless to say their presence will be felt more. It is in circulation, or at least Bengal tradition claims that plenty of ghost names can be heard if concentration goes in that direction. People may know the names varying from

Mamdo to *Shakchunni*, from *Daini* to *Skandhakata*; it is hard to find anyone who would be willing to meet them. However, many carry this curiosity in their mind – what do they look like? Why are they named differently?

Petni: In Bengali tradition, *petni* is a female ghost. Women who die with an unfulfilled dream or unmarried, their [spirit] is known as *petni*. *Petni* derived from the Sanskrit work *pretni*. *Petnis* usually roam around the world after death with evil intentions. They are usually very short-tempered and move around only to mess around with people.

Shakchunni: This name originated from the Sanskrit word *shakchurni*. It is believed that married women take this ghost form after their death. They roam around in the darkness of the night wearing a white saree (cloak) with a conch in their hand. At times they conjure married women. The reason is their goal is to live like a married woman [*sadhaba*, as opposed to widow] and to enjoy every moment of conjugal life.

Mechhobhoot: Many stories are in circulation about this ghost. They are called *mechhobhoot* for their fondness of eating fish. It is heard that they live more in number on trees beside ponds where plenty of fish are available. When returning home with purchased fish across an empty forest or along a lonely rural road of a village, the *mechhobhoot* usually comes to taunt [people carrying fish]. This sort of event is frequently heard about in villages.

Nishi bhoot: *Nishi* [night] is believed to be the most dangerous of all ghosts. In folk belief, an evil tantric seeks help from *nishi* to punish his enemies. *Nishi* calls its victim at midnight. Takes him out. That person never returns home. In folk belief, *nishi* can't call anyone more than twice. [For this] it is recommended that one should respond to calls after hearing one's name thrice at night.

Mamdo bhoot: In Hindu tradition the unsatisfied soul of a Muslim individual is called 'Mamdo'. Many call them *jinn*.

Skandhakata: *Skandha* means head. These ghosts are called so [*skandhakata*] because they don't have heads. People whose heads are chopped off become *skandhakata bhoot*. In folk belief, these ghosts always search for their heads.

Daini: *Daini* is not a ghost, they are living women. Usually, they are old. They harm opponents using black magic or using the wisdom of *Dakini* [one of the two companions of Kali, the other being Yogini]. They can keep themselves young even in their old age.

They usually lure boys. It is believed that they hypnotise young village boys and girls. Then kill them and live for years on their blood.

Apart from these, the names *gechhobhoot*, *aleya* [ignis fatuus], *beghobhoot* and *kanabhulo* are also heard in Bengali myth.

Modern or rational people do not believe in ghosts or spirits. They claim this to be an illusion of the human mind.

Appendix 10: Screenshot of the Promotional Video

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