

Identity in Flux:
A Comparative Study of Manta and Beday

A Thesis presented by

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Abstract

Manta is one of the oldest traditional occupational communities who live in the southwest region of Bangladesh. This traditional occupational community lives on a boat which is severed as their own residence where they have their household furniture. They were born here, raised here and many of them also died inside that small boat. Fishing is the only profession of these people and only source of earning. All the members of the family, including children and women, go to catch fishes. Their sorrow, happiness everything lies on the boat. They have their own socio-cultural and occupational status, religious beliefs and traditions as a distinct culture. On the other hand, there is another traditional occupational community who are called Beday. They are the nomadic people whose life is also connected with the boat. They are also known as river gypsies. Beday people do different kinds of business, like- selling jewelry, catching a snake, treating snake bitten patients; some of them also catch fishes, plays with monkey or parrot, do circus, fortune teller and other works. If we look at Manta and Beday community we will be able to see that both of their social-cultural uniqueness, lifestyle, tradition, language and culture is similar in some way or other. On the other hand, there is a particular Beday community who lives in Savar who call them Manta. This research was conducted to understand whether there is any difference between Beday and Manta community or not; whether they are an offshoot of each other or not; Lastly, to know about both of their tradition and socio-cultural uniqueness through which this traditional occupational community living in this region over hundreds of years.

Glossary

B

Bahar-	One cluster of Manta and Beday Boats, Fleet of boat.
Beday-	Snake charmer
Bhela-	Raft
Borshi-	One kind of fish hook, which is used to catch fishes.

C

Char-	
Churi-	River Island
	Bangles which is made by glass.

D

Dalal-	Agent or middle man.
Dingi-	Small tiny Boat

E

Eid-	Biggest Muslim Festival.
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F

Fakir-	Religious Leader or Holy Man.
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G

Gram-	Village
Guccho Gram-	Cluster Villages
Gamcha-	Towel

J

Jajabor- Bohemian, Nomad

Jele- Mainstream Fisherman

Jal- Fishing net

Jat- Caste

Joutuk- Dowry

K

Khal- Canal

M

Matari- Women who work in other's household.

Mahajan- Middleman

Mela- Fair

N

Nouka- Boat

O

Ojha- Traditional healer, who cures different kind of diseases.

S

Sardar- Headman of Manta and Beday community

Sana / chiruni- Hair Brush

Shirni- Sacrifice food and other goods toward Goddess.

Salish- Arbitrator

T

Tabijkoboj- Charm/Armlet

Thana- The lowest Administrative Unit in Bangladesh

P

Pitha- Sweets or Desserts

Podobi- Naming Title or Family Title

Palki - Panaquiline

U

Uthshob- Festival

Identity in Flux: A Comparative Study of Manta and Beday

Introduction:

Pahela Baishakh, the first day of the Bengali New Year which is also known as Nobo Borsho. It is one of the most joyous occasions celebrated with new hopes, joy, enthusiasm and well-being by all the Bengalis regardless of religion, status, communities and locations. This occasion bears a great significance for us which reflects our tradition and culture. Traditionally, Panta which is the leftover rice soaked in water along with Ilish bhaja (Hilsa fish fry) with different kinds of bhorta, Chomchom, rosogolla which are a different kind of sweets has been the famous foods to celebrate the Noboborsho. One of the most important item for the Pahela Baishakh cuisine is Hilsa fish which is an immensely popular fish in Bangladesh. This perhaps fits well, in a wellknown cite in Bengali culture "মাছে ভাতে বাঙালি" which means, 'fish and rice make a Bengali'. This is one of the most famous cite to mark Bengali people. By which, we can easily get the idea that there is a deep connection between Bengali people, fish, and rice. Bangladesh is known as a riverine country. There are almost 700 rivers and tributaries and distributaries which flows throughout the country. The total length of all rivers including tributaries and distributaries is about 22,155 kilometers. Rivers play an important role in our agriculture, economy, communication, trade and commerce and our livelihood. This river contains numerous fishes. As well as, they are also helpful for our

agriculture and our rice production. That is why there is a huge link between fishes and rice. Many people earn their livelihood by catching fishes, who are known as “Jele” (fishermen).¹¹

Indeed, fishing is the major livelihood of many Bengali. There is another fishing community who lives in the south-west coastal region who is known as a “Manta”. They are one of the oldest fishing community who has their own socio-cultural status, customs, religious beliefs, occupational status and traditions as a distinct culture. They have their own unique traditional occupation and cultural identity which is all related to fishing, boat and river. All aspects of the life of this community are entangled with Fishing. Unfortunately, they are still not considered as a fisherman of this country. They are only considered as a “Manta” because of having their own cultural, occupational and traditional uniqueness which is not similar to the lifestyle of the local jele. Some also call them gypsy. Other call them a tribal community. They live on a boat. This small boat is severed as their own residence where they have their all the basic needs of household things, including furniture, Pots and pans, Stove, Dresses, fishing instruments and so on. This boat is considered as their residence. They are born here, raised here and many of them also died inside that small boat. Fishing is the only profession and only source of earning of these people. All the members of the family, including children and women, go to catch fishes. Their sorrow, sufferings, and happiness everything lies on the boat. They float on the boat from one place to another. This Manta community lives throughout the southwest coastal region. Barisal, Patuakhali,

¹ Jele is the local term which is used by Bengali people to call the Fishermen.

Bhola, Pirojpur, Jhalokathi, Barguna are the places where they are often found. Basically, as they are people who are connected to water and fishing is their one and only occupation. Their life is intertwined with water. It is one of the main reason why they live in this region. As, these places have more rivers, canals, tributaries, sub-tributaries more than any other region in Bangladesh. Rather than calling them a tribe or gypsy, I would prefer to call them a traditional occupational community. Tentulia, Rangopaldi, Ramnabad, Buragourango, Darchira, Agunmukha and there are many other rivers where they often found. ²



Picture: A Manta Bahar. Picture was taken from Tulapara, Bauphal. (Taken by: Nosin Nahian Shejuty)

They have their unique socio-cultural position, tradition which separates them from local jele. Firstly, they lived on a boat, many of them do not have the permanent settlement on the land. Secondly, and the unique one, their women went

² As fishing is the only livelihood of Manta community. These are the rivers, where they most of the time roam around for fishing. Except that, they often go to other canals, big rivers and places to sell fish and to catch fish.

for fishing. Men, women children all of the people of one residence go together to catch fishes. Thirdly, they are all obliged to their headman who is known as a “Sardar”, each 9 to 10 boats consist of one Sardar, and all these boats together made up one “Bahar”. They often moved to one place to another in the bahar. If we give a deep observation at this distinct cultural community we will see that they have many similarities with Beday community. Not only their social relation, language, culture, physical structure but also both of their life is intertwined with boat and water. Their livelihood depends on it. If we look at both of the groups, a question may arise, are they belong to the same community? Is Manta offshoot of Beday? Or is Beday offshoot of Manta? There are few Myths, stories and historical evidence are found about their arrivals into this subcontinent, about their ancestors. All of those stories say, how Manta become Beday or Beday become Manta. Though there are very limited works which are done on Manta community. Among the works I found, those say that Manta is the offshoot of Beday community. On the other hand, there is a Beday community who lives in Savar, who call themselves Manta. They prefer to call themselves Manta rather than Beday. In that case, an identity politics also comes here. So, what makes the fishing Manta and Beday Manta different? Why there is a continuous shift in the identity? Sometimes they are Beday, sometimes they are Manta and sometimes they are nothing.



Picture: Beday Bahar. Picture taken from Kalaiya Launch Ghaat, Bauphal. (Taken by: Nosin Nahian Shejuty)

As a student of Anthropology, and as I have found limited resources, works, articles, journals or books on Manta community. Also, there are very less official documents and historical information about their ancestors, their arrival, their living, and their life. I will not give and focus on any particular statement. Also, I will not say that Manta is the offshoot of Beday, or Beday is the offshoot of Manta. As there are very limited resources and works done on Manta, it is quite difficult to assume and give a particular set of answer. Rather I will like to put all the historical evidence, Myths, Stories and also, I will write the answers I found during my field works. In nutshell, in this short thesis, I sought to argue that community identity and its boundary is never been given or characterized by its fixity. Rather, it is continuously shifting and changing. Throughout this shifting and changing process,

it takes a shape of its own, only to transform once again. This all Manta and Beday are all about.

Methodological Consideration:

When I went to have a conversation with a writer and researcher Ronjona Bishwas, whose book, "বাংলাদেশের বেদে জনগোষ্ঠীর নৃতাত্ত্বিক পরিচয়" (Bangladesh'er Beday Jonogosthir Nri-taktik Porichoy) helped me throughout my thesis pervasively. She asked me, "When there are so many other topics to work, why did you choose this topic?"

In my opinion, learning about culture means, learning about one's history, tradition, language, politics, rituals, religion, arts and so on. Where you may or may not be a part of it directly or indirectly. Among the four-field approach of anthropology, cultural anthropology is one of them. Culture is a context in which we live our lives which has certain rules, desires, traditions, rituals which are all different from one another. It always fascinates me to understand how all the beautifully different individuals or human being, sharing their own culture or tradition are living together under the one sun. There is always a historical, political and socio-economic reason how and why each community become the way they are. Learning about culture enables to accept more rather than judge what makes all of us different.

Moreover, as I am a student of anthropology, I need to write an undergrad final thesis paper. Coming towards the end of undergrad life the most difficult question what bugs an undergrad student the most; is, what will be my thesis topic! Everyone wants to do a research which is different from other. My village is situated near Tentulia River, kalaiya union and name of the village is Shoula in

Patuakhali District. As it is a very small rural village, there are very less visiting sites and places where the villagers or the local people go for refreshment. One of them is the “Bogi Khal Par” which is also known as “Tulapara”. I often go to the place while visiting my village, as you can see the whole big Tentulia River, which is as big as a sea and is surrounded by plenty of natural beauty. This river is considered as one of the longest coastal rivers of the Ganges-Padma system and a major flow of Meghna River. The river flows over Bauphal and Galachipa Upazila. The total length of the river is about 84 km and the average width is 6 K.M. Dhulia Bazar, Gangapur Bazar, Manipur Bazar, Kalaiya port, Dasmina Bazar are some of the important places on the bank of the river. Also, there are many small and big ‘Chars’ or islands which is surrounded by Tentulia River. Standing in this pool of Tulapara or Boga Khal par, you can observe all the natural beauty, such as- the beautiful Tentulia River, numerous fishing boats, launch, cargo, steamer by which people are going from one place to another. This pole is connecting two different villages. In one site it has Bogi and other it has Shoula. Throughout the small “Khal” or canal, you can see there are many boats which are different from the usual fishing boats. Those boats may attract you, as you can see clothes are hanging over the boat, there are women and children who are either weaving the Jal (net) or cooking or busy in catching fishes. You can see pots and pans, along with other necessary household items. Throughout my childhood whenever I visited my village I used to know that there is a “Bebaijja” (Manta) community who lives in Bauphal. They often come from different places of Bangladesh with snakes or some of them lives in this Tentulia River who catches fishes. In the last Ramadan, I again

went there, I saw that some of the ladies on the boat are catching fishes. I asked one of the local businessman, “who are they?” He replied, “They are Manta, they are often called as Bebaijja. They live in this boat and catches fish”. I again asked, “Are they Beday?” He replied, “No they are Manta. Beday is the different ‘Jat’ of Manta. Manta catches fish and Beday plays with snakes”.

In anthropology, among the four-field approach of Franz Boas. Culture is one of the main parts. Throughout the history of anthropology, many ethnographic research works are done on the different culture. The work of Bronislaw Malinowski on Kula in Turbine Island or Clifford Geertz work on Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight or Margaret Mead's work on coming of age in Samoa always fascinated me to know and to learn a new culture, new community, and society. One of the first anthropological definitions of culture is given by Edward B. Tylor. Sir Edward B. Tylor's definition of culture (1871)-

"Culture... is that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by [a human] as a member of society."

As I have learned that every culture has own uniqueness which is related to many other factors of their life. To understand their traditional uniqueness and how they maintain or preserve their cultural uniqueness or how they preserve their socio-cultural modernity. There might be different factors which are associated directly or indirectly with it. After coming back home, I searched articles, books on Manta community. I find that a very little work has been done on them. In spite of

knowing, it might create a problem to conduct the research. I took it as a challenge as I wanted to know about this community; their rituals, traditions, customs and cultures. Also, I want others to know about them. When I started my field visit, taking interviews, and looking at different research works done on Beday. I saw, there are similarities between Beday and Manta. Also, there is a continuous shift between their identities. Manta people maintain or preserve their cultural uniqueness in the traditional way of life, which in some way or other similar to the Beday community where a question may arise, if they are an offshoot of Beday or if Beday is an offshoot of them or not. On the other hand, in order to preserve their uniqueness, they often have the continuous shift in their identity, for which they sometimes become Manta and sometimes become Beday.

One of the major roles a research should play is, he or she required to attain the full competence of the research subject to be able to fully describe their culture. Moreover, he or she should be unbiased. When I started doing my fieldwork, the very first thing I tried to do is not to let them know from which house I belong to. As I belong to one of the elite families of that village; I knew, Manta community will not take it easily and they will not answer my questions. I knew it will hamper my research objectives. So, I tried my best, not to let them know. In my first two visits; they thought I am a random girl, like other journalists who have interviewed them earlier. Some of them also thought I am an NGO worker who will bring relief to them. I noticed that most of them were very excited as they want to let the world know about them. They were very helpful, communicative and supportive. Unfortunately, on my last visit; they came to know from where I belong. At that

time, I saw the changes in their languages, behavior and they started treating me differently what I feared once. What I did not want throughout my research. That time, it become a bit difficult for me to make them easy and make them answer my question.

On the other hand, it was very difficult for me to take the interview of the Beday community. I found them a bit aggressive, very reserved who don't want to share their stories. The most difficulty I faced doing this research is, there are very fewer documents I found on Manta. There are no documents, written evidence about them in the District gazet office. Only, fewer books, researchers are done on them.

For the first time, I went to my home, not for a vacation but to conduct a research. Going to my own place as a researcher, it was bit fascinating and a bit different experience for me. Also, I was afraid to. I found there were both sides of doing a research at your own place. It may seem very easy but it is also very problematic. Problem arise, when you are known by other individuals who knows that you came from a privilege position of the community. Because of that sometimes they do not want to give you proper information. They also might think you as an opportunity to take some money or other beneficial facilities. At the time of my field visits, I had a different conversation than usual with other individuals of the local community along with my own relatives who lives in the village. All the casual conversations I had with them was based on my research topic directly or indirectly. As at the time of my field study my research topic was the only thing running through my mind.

To conduct a field research the whole point of the research is based on the negotiation. How the researcher negotiates during her fieldwork. As a student of anthropology, negotiation is one of the most important parts what I need to do during my research. Going to a community which has nothing to do with me, negotiation was the only way to get all the necessary information I was needed to conduct this research. First of all, I saw the fear in the eyes of both Manta and Beday communities for telling me their life stories in the first place. It may occur because of the class hierarchy. They are being segregated by the local community. The reason why they think themselves as an inferior. On the other hand, to them, I was the outsider. It may be another reason why it took a plenty of time for the Manta community to get easy with me. Because no matter how much I try to get closer to them I will be the outsider. When I told them, I am doing an academic exercise. I will write a book on them, I want the world to know about them. Some of the Manta people were supportive and helped me by answering all the questions I asked them. Others, left the place as they thought I came from the privileged position of the society. So, I could give them financial support or get some relief for them. This negotiation was also a bit different with the Manta people living on the land who considered themselves as upper class and the Manta people living on the boat who considered as the lower class. It was easy to get all the information from the upper-class Manta, who is now staying on the land. On the other hand, a bit difficult to negotiate with the Manta people who still lives on the boat.

The first day when I went to my field, there was an old man from the local community. At first, he tried to help me by telling me stories about Manta. Giving

the idea of how many years Manta is staying in that particular place and other. Though I did not ask any. As I found that Manta people were not feeling comfortable to talk to me in front of him. The reason was, that old man belongs to the local community. While I finished taking my first-day interview and supposed to come back home. This local man asked me, 'won't you give me anything?' At first, I did not get his point. Later, my cousin told me he wants some money. I was bit amazed. As he was the local people who do not need any kind of help. He belongs to the privileged position of that locality who has home, land, and everything. Still, he wants money in the name of doing me some help. He was standing in front of my auto and did not let me go until I gave him something.

During my field study, I also need to dress up accordingly; not very fancy dress or no makeup and I tried to talk with them in the local language. I also took two of my cousins who stay in the village during my field visit. As they are the local people, it was even a bit easier for me to communicate with them. As I need to build a bonding where they might feel comfortable to talk to me. It becomes fascinating to me when I get the idea that how we both (me and my research subject) were studying each other. I, as a researcher, was studying them as they were my research subject. On the other hand, to them, as I was the outsider they were also studied me. In the first day of my field research, they only told me all the sad stories which are associated with their life. Maybe, in the hope of getting some financial help from me. It took a plenty of time to make Manta people easy and get all the information from them. My first few interviews had not produced the results I get

in the end, but I considered it as a necessary learning stage. Another thing what I need to do during my research was the participant observation. In that case, it was important for me to put aside my personal feelings and not to look at my subject throughout my own cultural lens. I could not look at them the same way I look at my own culture. Participant observation, helped me to gain the deep knowledge about that community. (It becomes easy for me to get the knowledge what they could not able to tell me or did not want to tell me.) I had to make false stories and ask them, so that they could correct me, thus I got the correct information. Participation observation is also very useful because by it you can easily understand the difference between what people really do and what they say.

Terminologies:

I have tried to do a qualitative research which is primarily exploratory research. As it is used to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations. So, it is an explorative research on a particular traditional community who are involved in fishing, and also the similarities and dissimilarities between them and another community whom we call Beday. Here I tried to look at whether they belong to the same historical background or not. On the other hand, in some way of auto ethnographic research which is a form of qualitative research in which I tried to use my self-reflection and to explore my personal experience and connect this autobiographical story to wider cultural, political and social meanings and understandings. So basically, it means I myself is a subject of this ethnographic research. As also a part of the local community of that village and often visiting that place every year in several times. I will like to write about my own self-reflection on them. So, I have used my personal experience here too. It was an inductive research, as it is one that begins with the final stages of scientific research, typically observation and works backward to form a hypothesis. My observation method was participant, natural and direct observation. I took direct and indirect both interviews. My Interview method was semi structured. As semi-structured interviews begin with a set of questions where you have the flexibility to add additional questions based on the interviewees responses and information you need. As well as, this form is much more flexible which allows for more specific questions to each interviewee.

Although for secondary data, there are very limited resources. In my research, I used a book, "বাংলাদেশের বেদে জনগোষ্ঠীর নৃতাত্ত্বিক পরিচয়" (Bangladesh'er Beday Jonogosthir Nri-taktik Porichoy) wrote by Ranjana Bishwas. Along with "মানতা সম্প্রদায়ের জীবিকার সংকট ও জীবনযাত্রার মানোন্নয়নের পন্থা উদ্ভাবন" (Manta Somproday-er Jibikar Songkot O Jibonmatrar Manonnoer Pontha Udhhabon) by Shankar Lal Das. Also, an ethnographic research by Anik Asad called, "Social and Cultural Construction of Exclusion of The Manta Community in Bangladesh: An Anthropological Study on Denial of Rights". I took pictures, collected local newspaper articles. I also saw a documentary done by Sheik Siraj in 'Hridoye Mati O Manush' which also focused on the Manta community of Galachipa union. The research was framed by primary and secondary data. As Field research includes data collection.

As a researcher and to do this research I visited my research field for two times in February and one time on the march. I went to three different locations and took interviews of different age group. From young girl or boy to old man and women. Also, I took interview of the local people and Mohajon or the middleman. In my last field visit, I take an interview with the Chairman of Kalaiya union, a journalist of the local newspaper, TNO of Bauphal Upazila and also some renowned people of the village. I did the participant observation which is one of the most important parts of an anthropological qualitative research. I need to use this method throughout my field research what helped me to understand and gather information more about my participants. The method originated especially by Bronislaw Malinowski and his students in Britain, who are the students of Franz Boas.

Bernard (1994) says that most anthropologists, need to maintain a sense of objectivity through distance. He defines participant observation as the process of establishing rapport within a community and learning to act in such a way as to blend into the community so that its members will act naturally, then remove oneself from the setting or community to immerse oneself in the data to understand what is going on and be able to write about it. Participant observation is characterized by such actions as having an open, nonjudgmental attitude, being interested in learning more about others, being aware of the propensity for feeling culture shock and for making mistakes, the majority of which can be overcome, being a careful observer and a good listener, and being open to the unexpected in what is learned.

As I mentioned before, there are very limited works which are done on Manta community. They live in the southwest coastal region. The works I have seen and have on my hands, most of them are done on the Manta people living in the Galachipa union. On the other hand, very fewer information is given on the community that are living other places, surrounding Tentulia River. I focused on the Manta community that is living in Boufal Upazila. As a very large number of them living in this place as well. I basically focused on three different 'Gram ' (villages). Where they are living in three different locations. Bogi Tula para, Kalaiya bazar and launch Ghat also Narayanpur launch Ghat. Also, a Beday bahar in Kalaiya launch ghat. On the other hand, I also take the interview for a writer and researcher Ronjona Bishwas who conducted researches on the Beday community. I will write my field notes that I took while conducting the research. All the

interviews were done in Bangla and recorded individually. I also take pictures of the community at a different time. The interviews, pictures and the recording were done with their permission.

Identity Construction and Its Perils:

"যুগ যুগ ধরে আমরা এই নামে পরিচিত, আমাদের বাপ-দাদা পূর্ব পুরুষেরেই এই নামেই ডাকছে,

আমাগোরেও এই নামেই ডাকে; কবে আসছে হে তো আমি বলতে পারি না।"³

When I asked Ansar Sardar, why they are called Manta and from where does this word Manta came from he replied. Ansar Sardar is the Sardar of the Bahar of Tula para, Bogi. At the time I went that place, there were about 11/12 families who were present. Others went to the mid-river for fishing. Ansar Sardar is one of the oldest members of the Manta community of that area and he is respected and obeyed by everyone as he is the Sardar of that Bahar. All other documents I have on my hand regarding Manta, no one able to give a clear definition of when and from where Manta people came from. From where the word Manta comes and why they become Manta, who made them Manta, who first called them Manta. On the other hand, when I went there for the interview I noticed similarities between them and the Beday community in many other different ways. What made me think whether they belong to the same ancestors or not. To explore all my queries, I went to the district collector office but there were no documents about Manta people. All I could do was take the interview of the TNO of Bauphal Upazila. Even there was not enough information in the district gazette of Patuakhali. Manta people also could not give me the proper information about their history. No authentic document has been found These are my field notes that I took while conducting the

³ Translation: Over the ages, we have been known by this name, our forefather, our ancestors were also called by this name. Thus, we are also called by this name. I cannot tell since when this name came.

research. Regarding the origin and historical background of this community. Anik Assad (2003) in his paper mentioned that,

“Only one source can be mentioned here regarding the origin of the word ‘Manta’.

According to Choudhury (1996) when the ancestors of the Beday community arrived in North India from Persia, they earned their livelihood by begging and hence they were referred as “Mangta” (one who ask or begs) and that becomes their title. The name of the community Manta is very similar to Mangta but no authentic evidence can be produced with the support of this assumption.” (P. 31 & 32)

Although he did not support this statement. Additionally, if we look at the history of the Beday community; we will see, Beday was living in this region historically. The writers and researchers who had worked on them said so. All these research work shows that Beday did not come here from Persia, rather they were living in this Indian subcontinent for hundreds of years. Ranjana Bishwas (2015) in her writing mentioned that,

"প্রাচীন ভারতবর্ষের লোকায়ত সমাজে সাপুড়ে তথা বেদে জনগোষ্ঠীর উপস্থিতি ছিল লক্ষ করার মতো। যার প্রভাব প্রাচীন সাহিত্যে না পড়ে পারেনি। এই আদি-অস্ট্রাল এবং অনার্য জাতটির কেবল বিনোদন প্রদর্শনকারী ভিক্ষাজীবী নয়, সর্পবিষ মোচনের ওঝা হিসেবে সর্পসংকুল বঙ্গ অঞ্চলে প্রচুর কদর ছিল। রাজসভায় তাই জাঙ্গলিক বা বিষবীদ্য সাপুড়েরা একদিন রাজ পুরুষের মর্যাদা পেয়েছিল। " (P. 25)⁴

⁴ The presence of Snake charmers or Vedas in the public society of ancient India was observable. This primitive Astral and Non-Aryan race was not only known as an entertainment showers, but also worked as Bishops to remove snake poison. As, there were very much snake, in the Bengal

Before starting this, she has mentioned about the research works from which we can find that the Beday population of this region are two hundred to four hundred years older. She mentioned that,

"বৈদিক সাহিত্যের এই অনার্য জাতিই নৃতত্ত্বের আদি অস্ট্রাল বা প্রোটো অস্ট্রালয়েড জনগোষ্ঠী।... আদি অস্ট্রাল ব্যালগ্রাহী বা সাপুড়ে শ্রেণীর উদ্ভব সম্পর্কে ব্রাহ্মবৈবর্ত পুরাণে বিশেষ ব্যাখ্যা আছে।... প্রাচীন বাংলায় সাপের উপদ্রবের কারণে সাপুড়ে শ্রেণীর উল্লেখ পাই বোধজাতক সমগ্র, তথা পালি সাহিত্যেও।" (P. 16 & 17)⁵

In her writing, she also added that,

"খ্রীষ্টপূর্ব আনুমানিক দ্বিতীয় শতকে মহাস্থান ব্রহ্মলিপিতে পুন্ডনগল বা পুন্ডনগরের যে উল্লেখ পাওয়া যায় তাতে ধাওনা করা হয় যে পুন্ড নামে কোন একটি কৌম জাতি এখানে প্রথম বসতি গড়ে তুলেছিল।" (P. 9)⁶

Furthermore, she said that this people often catches fishes in different rivers of the north region of Bangladesh and they were nomad, this non-Aryan race of Vedic literature, was Astral or Proto-Australoid population of anthropology. There is a special mention on the origin of Astral class, or the origin of the snake charm class in Brahma Vaavrutra. In the ancient Bengal, due to the disturbance of snake, the classification of snake charmers is also found in Pali literature.

region. May be that is why, rugged or poisonous snake charmers one day got the status of a prince in the Royal house.

⁵ This non-Aryan race of Vedic literature, was Astral or Proto-Australoid population of anthropology. There is a special mention on the origin of Astral class, or the origin of the snake charm class in Brahma Vaavrutra. In the ancient Bengal, due to the disturbance of snake, the classification of snake charmers is also found in Pali literature.

⁶ In the second century BC at the Mahasthan Brahmamalipa, there is a mention of Pundanagal or Pundranagara from where it is assumed that there is a community called Pundra, who had formed the first settlement here.

" আদিম পুন্ড্র বা পোঁদ দেৱ একটা অংশ আনুমানিক খ্ৰীষ্টপূৰ্ব একহাজাৰ বছৰ আগে গঙ্গা অববাহিকা এলাকা থেকে তাদের যাযাবৰ শিকারবিত্তি পরিত্যাগ করে উত্তরবঙ্গে চলে আসে ।... এদের উত্তর পুরুষের কোনো আদিম জীবনচারণ মৎস শিকার অব্যাহত রেখে এখনো ঘুরে বেড়ায় নদী-নালা ও জলাশয়ে ।" (P. 9)⁷

If we look at the history of Pundra/Pod people we will be able to see that there are many similarities between Manta community and Pundra community. Bishwas also added that, Manta people's physical structure also similar to the Pundra community. At the same time, from my interview of Manta people, some said that they were the different 'Jat' of Beday. Though they are catching fishes for hundreds of years, it might happen that their ancestors were Beday and gradually gave up snake business and started catching fishes. One other reason could be, in the southeast region of Bangladesh as it has more rivers than any other parts of Bangladesh. Catching fish is much easier than doing the snake business. Assad also mentioned it in his writing about Manta community. Additionally, some local people said that there were people who lost their houses and lands for river erosion. So, this people started living on a boat, made that boat their residence. As the women also join fishing with the man, women are called "Matari" from Matari the word "Manta" came.⁸

As can be seen, there are very limited official information and very limited works which have been done on Manta community. I do not want to put any final

⁷ About one thousand years ago, a part of ancient Pundra, abandoned the nomadic hunt life and from Ganges Basin area came to North Bengal. Their descendants still continue their ancestral living by continuing fishery, and still flows in the river-stream and the pond.

⁸ Matari is the term which is used to refer the women who works for others household. But here, the Matari is derogatory term. As it is used to insult Manta community which is used by the local people.

conclusion about their origin or from where the word Manta derived from. Historically there were different groups, communities who mixed up together; with the changes of the era many of the communities emerged with the new profession; chose the new way of livelihood. Manta could be a part of a Beday community who gave up the snake business. Meanwhile, it can also happen, Manta itself is a different community who emerged as Beday later.

“Not only Savar's Beday but almost the whole ‘Beday Gosthi’ of Bangladesh nowadays assert themselves as Manta,” said Ranjana Bishwas, during our conversation.

Moreover, from her writing, she wrote about a hunter people who live on the hill who were called “MONTONG”. They are Arakanese. There are two different words MON and TONG. In Chakma language Mon means raja/king and Tong means Pahar/hill. So, from Chakma MEN TONG>MON TONG means ‘Paharer Raja/King of the Hill’. Form তঞ্চঙ্গা (TonChonga) language Toino means Nodi/River. From that MON TOINO> MON TONG> MEN TONG > MANTA means “Nodir Manush/Raja” or “River people/king of the River”.

In her book she also mentioned-

"তঁারা হয়ত এক কালে পাহাড়ে বিচরণ কারী মানুষ ছিল। ... কালক্রমে নেমে এসেছে নদীর কাছে। হয়ে উঠেছে নদীর মানুষ, জলের রাজা, জলের পুরুষ। ... এভাবে প্রাচীন এক যাযাবর শিকারজীবী সম্প্রদায়ই হয়ত মানতা যারা আরাকান হয়ে এসে পড়েছে বাংলাদেশে।" (P. 44, 45)⁹

Bishwas (2015) mentioned that in 1638 AD (১৬৩৮ খ্রিস্টাব্দ) Mongot Ray who is also known as Bolal Sen along with his Mog troop came to flee in the Mughal Bengal. For his self-defense, he and his troop become Muslim. They also become the nomad. He also might force his troop to become a fisherman for his own protection. After he defeated by Aurangzeb, his people become weak and escape from the places and started living on the boat. Mongot ray died in the war. His people joined the Beday community who were living on the boat for their own protection from the Mughal army. As they were the followers of Mongot Ray they started calling them Mongota or Manta (Mongot>Manta). There is a pride of being the followers of the king. Additionally, as these Mog people got mixed with the Beday community of this country. Beday also started introducing themselves as a Manta. She also mentioned that from this mog people Beday become Muslim. So, Beday did not come from Arab, Beday were living in this place for hundreds of years. In essence, Mog people got mixed with Beday and named themselves Manta. Later who got split and started fishing in spite of snake business. Though there are no solid proof or evidence regarding that.

⁹ They may have been mountaineers and once roamed around in the mountains. By the time they came down to the river. They become the people of the river, the king of water, the men of the water. In this way, Manta may be an ancient nomadic survivor community, who came to Bangladesh from Arakan.

Classifications and Divisions:

Beday is generally divided into three classes what I find from my interview and books. They are- Mal Beday, Sandar Beday, Bajikor Beday. Among this groups, they also have different subgroups. The difference between three of them are given below:

Mal Beday: They generally do the snake business. They work with snakes. They do treatments. Also, they do different tabij-koboj.

Sandar Beday: They don't like the snake business, they do birds hunting, they made 'sana' which is also known as 'chiruni' (hairbrush), and they sell churi (bangles), put singa and catch fishes.

Bajikor Beday: They do circus. Plays with monkey, parrot. They are also a fortune teller.

One of the main difference between Manta and Beday is. Beday people do a different kind of works for their livelihood, hunting, circus, snake business, selling bangles and others but the Manta people only do fishing. Their livelihood and their life are only connected with fishing, boat, and river. Manta community is divided into two groups. Both of the group do fishing, they catch fishes and sell fishes. They are called- Lawa Manta and Gawsa Manta. The main difference between them is-

Lawa Manta: They are total 'Jajabor' (nomad). They live on the boat with their family. They do not have any permanent residence and address. They live in a

‘Bohor’. Each bohor is consist of 8 to 10 different families with their boats. Each family got 3 to 4 boats. Each bohor has one leader who is known as Sardar. Sardar is selected by succession formula. Their women and children both catch fishes. They keep their traditional occupation where they also use many modern facilities.

Gawsa Manta: They are the people who got residence. They don't live on a boat. Their women don't go for fishing. Men do fishing and also work as a Dalal. They are also connected to other fishing-related works and business rather than only catching fish. Many of them also got different other works. From my interview and field work, I find that they are the people who belong to the upper position than the Lawa Manta. They got residence and permanent address. They are being able to change their identity and get a closer connection to the local community. They don't like to represent themselves as Manta. They tried to change their identity. They are the people who changed their social mobility, where Sardar become Khan, Chowdhury, Kazi and other. In addition to my interview, I saw 3 families who changed their traditional occupation and got totally connected to the local community.

The main difference between Manta and local Jele is, local Jele have the permanent address, have the residence, they don't live on a boat. Their women also do not go for fishing. On the other hand, Manta women go for fishing, for what local Jele do not like Manta community and have problems with them. They saw Manta people as a lower-class Muslim community who don't have land and property and permanent settlement. This local community segregated Manta as an inferior. In past, the traditional Manta community catches fishes with ‘Borshi’ and

the local people catches fishes with 'Jal'. As Manta have their own occupational and socio-cultural status. During my field visit, I observe that local community looks at them as a lower-class Muslim and they have some sort of pride of being a higher-class Muslim. For what they do not even want to call Manta people by their original name, 'Manta'. Local people often call them by different other sardonic names, among them the most common names are - Bebaijja, Naia, Baijja, Baidda.¹⁰ They all are the very abusive term. On the other hand, Manta people also like to be called 'Sardar' rather than Manta. Manta's fishing occupation shapes the social and cultural construction of their lifestyle.

There are many similarities and few dissimilarities between Beday and Manta. The main and the most important similarities between Manta and Beday is, living under a headman, who is known as "Sardar". They both live in a Bahar or a cluster. Each Bahar is consist of one headman or Sardar. The whole Bahar moves one particular place to other together for livelihood and they follow the order of the headman. Both of them call themselves Muslim but they worship natural deities and prejudice. They practice some traditional acharyas. Beday changes their occupation but Manta doesn't. Both of them living in this region for hundreds of years as a nomad. Though the Beday community is scattered throughout Bangladesh Manta only lives in the southeast region. Once upon a time Beday also lived in a boat, but nowadays they came up to the land from the boat. On the other hand, Manta still lives in the boat. Beday has one permanent place, where all of

¹⁰ All of the terms are used to call Manta community. Which are used to insult Manta and Segregate Manta from the Local community.

them go in a particular time of the year. On the other hand, Manta does not have any permanent place to go. Beday has their own dress up, which is different from other but Manta wears local dress. Beday is known either as an ethnic group or river gypsy, whose information can be found in governmental documents, however, there is no information of Manta community. Beday have voting rights, voter or Identification card. However, there are very few Manta people who have voting rights or identification card. Manta and Beday both have their own language, which is different from the local language. One of the most important major similarities between them is the work of women. In both of the communities, women play a very important role. Women, children, man all of them work together for livelihood. Beday is divided into many groups, classes who do many different works. But Manta's life is only related to the fishing. From Beday division, we can see that they have a group who is called Lawa and in Manta, they also have a group who are called Lawa. Sankar Lal Das (2008) in his work said that Beday Lawa and Manta Lawa can be the same people. He mentioned-

"বেদেদের লাউয়া এবং মানতাদের লাউয়া একই গোত্রভুক্ত বলে ধারণা করা হচ্ছে। বেদেদের মধ্যে উল্লেখযোগ্য একটি গোত্র হচ্ছে মানতা। উপকূলীয় এলাকার আজকের মানতারা বেদেদেরই একটি অংশ, যারা পুরুষানুক্রমে উপকূলীয় অঞ্চলে বসবাস করছে। উপকূলীয় অঞ্চলে মাছ এর প্রাচুর্য বেশি। সাপ অনেক কম ছিল। তাই বেদে সম্প্রদায়ের এ গোত্রটি মাছ ধরা ও বিক্রি করাকে প্রধান পেশা হিসাবে গ্রহণ করতে বাধ্য হয়েছে।"(P.35)¹¹

¹¹ It is assumed that Beday Lawa and Manta Lawa came from the same tribe ... One of the notable tribes in Beday is known as Mantra. Today's Manta's from the coastal area are the part of the Beday, who are living ancestrally in the coastal areas of the country. In the coastal areas



Picture: Manta Women sewing fishing net, taken from Tulapara Bauphal. (Taken by: Nosin Nahian Shejuty)

Women and children:

In spite of being a patriarchal community, women play a very important role in the life of Manta. They go to catch fishes with their men. They catch fishes, sell fish also do the household works. They do a lot more work than the man. Children from a very little age also go to catch fishes. Even in many ways, children can catch fish more easily than the man. In that family orientation, Manta used to hate polygamy. Only the people who started living on a land nowadays do polygamy. They also work as a 'dai', when a new baby born. Among all the Manta's living in

there are more plenty of fish. The snake was less. Therefore, the tribe of the Beday community has been forced to accept fishing and selling as a major occupation.

the Tulapara, Bogi. Only one boy goes to the school. Mostly they did not go for the institutional knowledge or go to the School. From the very childhood, the boys and girls started learning about catching fishes and other household activities. Many of family thinks that, if son went to school it will hamper their business. So, son used to get training at the age of 5. In other words, women do better than men in the business. Nowadays, they started going to the village hospitals or the pharmacies. About the birth control thing, they are not aware. Most of them have six to eight children. They think that if people of the home increase the income will also increase. In other words, in the Beday community women and children's plays the similar role of the Manta woman and children. Though nowadays Beday people who live on the land, got many more facilities from NGO and from Government as well, for what their children's often get the institutional knowledge.

Manta usually eats two to three times a day. Panta and rice. Potatoes or other Vegetables, Fish and Pulses (dal). Rice and pulses are the main two items what they eat on the daily basis. Sometimes, they eat chicken. Either they toilet on the boat, or in the middle of the river, or in the jungle near the island. Another thing they love to eat is 'Pan'. One thing I noticed that the young children also eat Pan. Beday, love the foods made of rice. Like - chira, muri, Khoi. They love to eat sutki (dry fish), prefer duck more than chicken. They like to drink different local drinks. Pan is also one of their favorite thing to eat.



Picture: A Manta woman who was cooking, taken from Tulapara, Bauphal. (Taken by: Nosin Nahian Shejuty)

Clothing:

Manta man and women both wear the dresses like the local people. Married women and ladies wear printed sarees and man wear lungi with shirt or Tshirt. Once the man of the community used to keep the Gamcha with them; now using gamcha is very less. I saw one or two Manta men tying Gamcha (Towel) on their waist. The young children's, wear the local dresses like girls used to wear kamiz, and boys either wear pant-shirt or lungi. Women have much piercing on the ear and also on the nose. They nowadays also wear modern jewelry. Use cosmetics like lipsticks, shampoo, cream, lotion. On the other hand, there's a difference on Beday outfit. Beday ladies used to wear different colorful Saris which will consist of long Paar in the sari. Love to do a big hair bun, where they put flowers. Use colorful lipsticks.

Wear bangles on the hand. Among the divisions, there is a group of Beday who used to make tattoos in their body. They like to dress up well. Their man wears lungi, half-shirt, fotua.

Time of earning:

There are six months when Manta people earn. 'Choitro-Bhadro' six months are known as the fishing season. These are the months when they can catch fish more. 'Ashar, Srabon, Bhadro' are known as a full season. 'Ashine-Falguni' they find fishless. 'Ogahayon, Poush, and Magh'- in those days they become jobless.¹² Their day to day life depends on daily earning.

"আমরা দিন আনি দিন খাই; কোন কোন দিন গড়ে এক হাজার টাকা, পাঁচশ টাকা, আবার দুইশ টাকা ও হয়; সব নদীর উপরে"¹³ said by, Yunus Sardar. Once upon a time, the use of Borshi was more. Now they use Jal. On the other hand, Beday community moves around from one place to another for their earning. If they see that in a particular place earning is becoming problematic they move to another place. They do a different kind of works which they switch based on the need.

Residence:

Manta, boats are 10/12 hand wide. It consists of sail. Each member of the family knows how to ride the boat. Every family has 2 or 3 boats, one for the parents and another for the children. Most of their boats have 2 rooms, a small toilet in the

¹² Here few of the names of the month has been added which are all Bengali Month.

¹³ We are day laborer, so our income varies a lot. On any regular day our income ranges from an amount of 500 to 1000 Taka, and sometimes just around 200 depending on river condition.

middle of both the room. Number of the boats depends on the members of the family. All of the boats have Solar. Here few of the names of the month has been added which are all Bengali Month.

For fishing, they roam around the rivers like- Tentulia, Agunmukha, Gouranga, Meghna and also sometimes they went to Sonadip, Noakhali, Teknaf; wherever they thought they can catch more fish they went there. For fishing, they stay in a particular place for months and then again change the location. Their location depends on the availability of fishes in the river. Among them, few who shifted into the land; they bought the land, changed their occupation. Started doing farming; become auto drivers or choose other occupation.



Picture: Manta Boat, which is served as their residence, taken from Bauphal. (Taken by: Nosin Nahian Shejuty)



Picture: Beday Bahar, picture taken from Kalaiya launch Ghaat, Bauphal. (Taken by: Nosing Nahian Shejuty)

Beday who roam around here and there used to make a small tent with polythene or other and lives there. Once upon a time Beday also had a 'Nouka Bohor' by what they used to move around places. The main difference between Beday boat and Manta boat is; Beday does not use the sail. Many of the Beday now live on the land. Ranjana Bishwas (2015) mentioned that- "বর্তমানে সাভারে অনেক বেদের ঘর সেমি পাকা। আর পোড়াবাড়ি, বঙ্গারপুর সহ আশেপাশের এলাকাগুলোতে নজরে পড়ার মত অনেক মাচাং ঘর বা টোলঘর আছে, যা আদিবাসী বৈশিষ্ট্যের ধারক।" ¹⁴(P. 74)

¹⁴ At present, there are many buildings in Savar which are semi-well. And there are many machang houses or toll-houses which are eye-catching in the areas of, Parabari, Baktarpur. This house has indigenous traits.

Language:

When I went to take the interview of Manta people, they told me that they don't have any other language. They only talk in the local language. I found that there might be some tensions or fear. But when they were talking I saw there is a different tone of the language they were uttering. Shankar Lal Das (2008) mentioned Manta had their own kind of language what they don't use in front of the local people. It is their very private and personal language. During my fieldwork, I noticed they often use this kind of language privately where they also often use scurrility. Their language is called "ছেলা" (Chola). He mentioned few of the words:

"খামুর= গৃহস্থ, কুনি= টাকা, ছিলাইয়া= চলে যাওয়া, বনি= মহিলা, কউক= নৌকা, ঠিঙ= তুই, বতুন= ভাত, গেউল= চাল, ছাইম= মাছ, তরো ছিলাবি না= ঐ জায়গায় যাবি না, কাফি= পুরুষাঙ্গ" ¹⁵P. 103, 104)

On the other hand, Beday language is similar to "Thar" language. Which is similar to "Chak" language. In Bangladesh, chak people lives in Bandarban, who got no physical similarities with Beday. Only similarities on language, they don't even have similarities based on culture and tradition. Bishwas (2015) also added that Beday language is similar to China Tebbit. Few of their words-

¹⁵ I tried to translate few of the Manta words I heard during my field research and also from Shankar Lal Das's book. Manta speak is distinct dialect and their own language is much more complex.

"ঢাকা= তিহাৰ, ভাত= বতন, নৌকা= কোঠি, খামুৰ= গৃহস্থ, শুয়োৱেৰ বাচ্চা= গোদাৱেৰ থেলো,
কাপড়= তৰি, শাড়ি= ডগাৰ, সাপ= মুয়েল" (P. 103,105)

Many of the Manta people die while fishing in the mid of the river because of the storm and other natural calamities. On the river, they often need to pay the bribe to the coast guard. Sometimes they also got attacked by the pirates who took away all their limited property and boat. Nowadays, they can't even take fish like before because of not having availability of fishes on the river. They don't get facilities from the Banks and NGOs. When I asked Ansar Sardar about getting the loan from the bank, he said that if they take the loan from the bank it becomes very hard for them to give the interest. There are so many NGOs in the Baufal union, from where very few help them. On necessities and emergencies, they take the loans from the "Mahajan" but later it effects badly at the time of returning the money.

Rituals and Beliefs:

"কালী আসলি না কেনে পাগল হুতাশে

অদম্য লোকে তোরে সদাই ডাইক্যাসে কালী আয় আয় রে

পুব ধারে ডাকরে কালী,

কে বাইন্ধাছে তোরে সিন্ধি কাইটা আয়রে কালী এই মোদের আসরে

কালী আয় আয় রে"¹⁶

Song, which represents Radha Krishna. Manta people like to have “গানের আসর”. They use songs on weddings, fishing and other times. Murshidi, Marfoti, Love, Baul etc. are the songs they sing and like. Many songs, poems they themselves made which are based on boat and their life. Radha Krishna plays a very important role here. Dhormio Pala Gan is also famous among them.

Beday uses different songs prayers while catching the snake and other times. Ranjana Bishwas (2015) in her writing, wrote about few of them.

"বাইন্দারে তুই ঘরে ফিরে আয়

সারা দিন দেখি নাই তুরে

কই যে ঘুইরা বেড়াস

তুর আসায় থাকি চাইয়া

¹⁶ A Manta song which is dedicated to Krishna, where it shows Radha is singing for Krishna. Saying that Radha is waiting for Krishna, why Krishna is not coming.

নাওয়ার বটে বইয়া

বাইদারে তাড়াতাড়ি আয়

ঘরে ফিরে আয়"¹⁷

"কই যাও বাইদাননি কোমর দোলাইয়া

তোমার কোমরের বিছাখান আমায় দিবায়নি

কই যাও বাইদাননি কোমর দোলাইয়া"¹⁸

Different community makes the religion based on who they are. Based on their culture, politics and history. It is a production of a situation. It is a human process by which it is absorbed, it is mediated by history, politics, structure, internal accountability. Manta says that they are practicing Muslims, they pray Jumma on Friday, they celebrate Eid. They do fasting during Ramadan. On my interview, they said that "আমরা মাইজভান্ডার শরীফ এর মুরিদ, আমরা প্রত্যেক বছর চট্টগ্রাম এ যাই, আমরা গাজি কালুর নামে শিল্পীও দেই।" They attend the Orosh sharif. They go to Chittagong by launch, train or bus. They vow on special occasions, or on sufferings. They sacrifice gifts in the name of goddesses what they call Shirni or offerings. They believed in Ojha or Fokir, do Tabij Kobj. Despite all the fact that they are Muslim they worship some natural deities. They traditionally worship these natural deities as a part of their

¹⁷ It is a Beday song, where it is requesting to the Beday to come home.

¹⁸ Song dedicating to Beday women, here the singer is asking where the Beday women is going and singer want to have the ornaments the Beday lady is wearing.

traditional custom. They do Monosha puja, Shitala puja and few of them do Kali puja. Among them, Shitala puja is very famous.

Almost all of the members of Manta family go to the “Shanal Fakir” mela what is arranged every year in Saerberhat, Barisal. Also, they go to the Debi Shitolar Mela (fair) in Gouronodi. Das (2008) also mentioned that in his writing-

"বরিশাল জেলার সাহেবের হাটে প্রতি বছর মাঘ মাসের পূর্ণিমায় ৭ দিনব্যাপী সান্যাল ফকিরের মেলা অনুষ্ঠিত হয়। ঐ মেলায় হাজার হাজার হিন্দু-মুসলমান জমায়েত হয়। মানতারা বছর নিয়ে ঐ মেলায় যোগ দেয়। বরিশাল জেলার গৌরনদীতে প্রতিবছর চৈত্র মাসের ২২ তারিখ থেকে ৭ দিনের চাঁদশির মেলা মতান্তরে দেবী শিতলার মেলা অনুষ্ঠিত হয়। এ মেলাতেও প্রতিদিন হাজার হাজার হিন্দু-মুসলমান জমায়েত হয়। প্রতি বছর এ মেলাতে মানতারা দল-বেঁধে অংশ নেয়। তারা বিশ্বাস করে, দেবী শিতলারা সাত বোন; তাঁরা সকলেই ঐ মেলায় জাগ্রত হন। মানত পূরণের আশায় মানতারা এ মেলায় পূজা দেয়।" ¹⁹(P. 117)

Anik Assad (2003) mentioned in his writing that, “among several San-Antonio aacher some of the important and major festivals are Monosha puja (worship of snake goddess) for the safety from snake bite as they face the danger from snakes while fishing; Shitla puja (goddess of seasonal diseases) in order to be free from several seasonal diseases and epidemics; kali puja (Goddess of destruction and evil) to remain in peace and prosperity and to save them from

¹⁹ Sanyal Fakir Mela (fair) is held for 7 days, every year in the Magh month at the time of full moon in Barisal. There are thousands of Hindu-Muslim gathers in the fair. Manta joins the fairs with their fleet. Deity Shitla fair is held on the occasion of Chandshir fair for 7 days from the month of Chaitra every year in Gournadi of Barisal district. There are thousands of Hindu and Muslim gathers every day in this fair. Each year, the Manta also take part in this fair. They believe that the seven sisters of the goddess Shitla awakened in the fair. In order to fulfill the vow, the Mantas worship at this fair.

natural calamities during fishing.” As because their business is related to the river they might worship these natural deities.

On the other hand, Beday also, does many different pujas despite the fact that they are Muslim. They also do the Monosha puja, Shitla puja, and Kali puja. Some Manta elders told me that, their observing puja might have come from Beday tradition.

Marriage ritual:

Early marriage is a common scenario among both Beday and Manta people. Most of them got married at a very early age. Marriage occurs among their own community. In past years, marriage between Manta and Beday had also occurred. Girls got married by the age of 13/14 and boys by 15/16. They have cross-cousin marriage. In Islamic way, they say Kabul, register for marriage. In Manta community, the groom comes by boat to take away the bride. They sing different wedding songs. They do their first night on the boat. In past years as a part of the dowry, brides' family used to give Jal to the groom's family. Nowadays this ritual changed. The groom's family often gifted a boat to the newly married couple where they start their new life. There are two times when the bridesmaids take money as a gift. The first time, the bridesmaids took money when the groom enters the wedding night. The second time the next day when they do the ritual of fertility which is called “Toilo”. On Das (2008) writing, he mentioned that-

"শরিয়তমতে কলমা কাবিনের পরে গোসলপর্ব সম্পন্ন হয়। ... গোসল পর্ব নদীর তীরে সম্পন্ন হয়।...
পানি দিয়ে গোসল করানোর আগে বর-কনের গায়ে কাঁচা হলুদ, গীলা, সন্ধ্যা ও মেটি মাখা হয়। ...এই পর্বটি তৈল
নামে পরিচিত। ..." ²⁰ (P. 101)

On that time, they sing different songs, color each other, and enjoys the ritual. One of the songs which they sing dedicating to "Sondha" is-

'সন্ধ্যা তোমার জন্ম কোথায়

কালারাজার বিলে

সন্ধ্যা তোমায় বাটলে কি হয়

বিয়ার বাস আসে।" ²¹

Another famous wedding song which is known as "Hoyla" what they often sing on the wedding-

"ও মোর সওদাগর

অল্প বয়সে কুলসুমের বিয়ের ফুল ফুইটাছে

আমি নাকফুল দিমুনা মানা কইরাছি

ভাঙা নাকফুল দিয়াছে

ফিইররা রায়বার পাডাইছে

²⁰ Manta community do a ritual which is the ritual for fertility. This ritual is celebrated beside the river where the newly married bride and groom was showered by doing rituals by their family.

²¹ A wedding song which is sing dedicating Sondha.

নাকে দিয়েছি...

আমি ছায়া পিন্দুম না মানা কইরাছি

ফইররা রায়বার পাডাইছে

আমি পইরাছি।"²²

On any of their wedding, they invite all other Mantas from other areas. The whole program is arranged into the land, island near the khals they live. Bride's family gives the necessary Dresses to the groom. Two most important food of their wedding is Pitha and Pan. Nowadays, they prefer to give marriage to their daughter with the local people. They want their position to be changed. There was a man named 'Khalil khan', who got love marriage with a girl belongs to the local community. He shifted his position, changed his name, build a house on the land and now is an auto car driver. In the Beday wedding, they also observe different rituals. Do holud, put henna on brides' hand. The daughters' family give dowry to the groom's family. There is an interesting ritual what they do on the wedding. During my conversation with Ranjan Bishwas (2015), she said-

"কলমা পড়ার আগে বিয়ে বাড়ির আঙিনায় একটা উঁচু মাচা তৈরী করা হয়. ওই মাঁচায় বসে থাকে বর।

কনে মাচার নিচে এসে বরকে নেমে আসার জন্য অনুরোধ করে। বর না নেমে বলে, ' এখন থেকে আমি পইড়ে মরলাম '। কনে তখন বলে, 'না তুই পইড়ে মরিস না, সারাজীবন আমি তোকে কামাই করি খাওয়ামু '।"²³

²² Another wedding song dedicating the Bride and the Groom.

²³ It is a Beday wedding ritual. Before reading the Qalma, a high platform was made in the wedding courtyard. In that platform, the groom sat ... bride came in front of that platform and request the groom to come down. The groom does not come and say, 'From now on I have died' The bride then says, 'No, you do not have to die, I want to earn your whole life.'

Socio-political Discourses:

The most important part of Manta people is 'Sordar-Protha'. This system continues descendants. After the death of the father the son become Sardar. If the Sardar does not have a son, his daughter's husband becomes the next Sardar. Every Bahar which has 10/12 families consists of one Sardar. All of the members of the Bahar obliged to the Sardar. He takes all the important decision of that Bohor. They have the Salish protha. If anyone did any crime, all the members of the community sit together on the land and take the decision or do the Salish. They have their own law, which is known as "আট গ্রাম ও বাইশ গ্রাম" (At gram and Baish gram). At gram is a criminal court and the judge plays the role of a magistrate. Baish gram plays the role of a supreme court. They usually solve their problem by their law. At gram is obeyed by the people who are living in the south of Bauphal union of Patuakhali district. Baish gram is obeyed by the people who are living in the north of Kalaiya union. After father dies, Sardar equally distributes the property among all the members of the family. Girl and boy both got an equal property. Unmarried daughters' responsibility will be given to the mother or the siblings, who need to take her marriages responsibilities as well. On that Salish, other people can buy the things and the money will be divided equally among all the members of the family. Same goes for the Beday community if any of the members of the family die all the property will be divided by the Sardar.

Manta people got very limited surname or title, what they call as "Podobi". The uses of the title are very limited. Khan, Sikdar, Sardar are the three most used title. One and only title Sardar comes through descendant. If the father is Sardar

son will also have Sardar in his name. Except for Sardar, they do not have any other own title which comes from the descendant line. All others are made by the people. Among them, people who left the boat and started living on the land, they themselves use khan, Sikdar by them. From my interview I find, father's name is “Chunnu Sardar” and son become ‘Khalil khan”.

In other words, the young boys and girls only have one name, no other title they have.

Woman use the titles, ‘Podobi’ like ‘Bibi’ or ‘Jan’, Sardars wife are Bibi or Jan. Among them who started living on the land with their husband, they become Begum or Khanam, or Mosammat. Khan’s wife becomes Mosammat or Begum. They change their social mobility to cope up with the locality, to change their past identity. But the title ‘Sardar’ still plays a very important role. It represents a higher mobility among them.

Manta has some rules which are maintained by all of them. They don't start their journey to the new locality on Saturday. On Wednesday they won't go to the east and on Thursday they won't go to the south. On the Paush season, they won't cut their hair, if they take money from anyone earlier they will return the money and the things as well. Throughout the month they will live in a particular place. If they were in the mid of the river and storm comes, to stop the storm they will put sugar and salt in the water. They think that in this way storm will go away. After buying a new boat the newly married lady or a young girl of the family will at first push the boat with her right feet. They celebrate these occasions by offering foods

to other. They offer pan, sweets, sometimes with drinks like sorbot. They keep Milad for it or pray for the wellbeing of their income and home. All of their stories, happiness, and sadness is related to nature.

Ranjana Bishwas (2015) in her writing added that Among Beday community there are few rituals once they used to do which are now almost Extinct. "বেড়া ভাসানো" (Bera Bhashano) which means "ভেলা ভাসানো" (Bhela Bhashano) another one is called "ঝাপান উৎসব" (Jhapan uthshob). In the Bera bhashano ritual, they make a raft or float with the banana tree where they put candles, banana, Batasha puts Shidur, coins, money. They used to celebrate this festival with dance and different songs. They used to give Shirni in that raft in the name of God. So that, God will help them from all the odds and troubles. On the other hand, Jhapan means 'Palki' which means palanquin. At first, they decorate a cart well. Then a snake expert will sit in the cart with many snake baskets. The car slowly moves towards the road along with the crowd. Where the crowd sing, dance and enjoy the event. The person sitting in the cart starts to take out the snake one by one from the basket and put them into hand, neck, and head. In the name of the goddess Monosha, they used to celebrate this ritual.

Last Destination:

Nowadays, if any of the Beday died, they used to bury. In the past years, they used to float the dead body on a raft, if anyone died because of snake bite. They think that the dyed person will get life back just like Lalon. They called this term "Douka". After finishing Janaza the float they raft. While floating the raft,

some of them call the name of the Goddess Monosha, some of them recite Quran. On the other hand, in the Manta community; if any of the family members die in the mid-river, the bodies were floated in the river. Nowadays, they also buried the body in the land, the seek permission from the government officials for burning the body. In Bauphal, a particular Graveyard is given to Manta people. Where they now bury the dead body.

Authenticity and Shifting Identity:

One of the major and important parts of modernity is consists of gender role and women. In that case, if we look at Manta people. We can call them traditionally modern! Manta women have more power in doing the households and earnings rather than man. It was 5:40 pm, March 2018. I was taking the interview of Ansar Sardar. I was standing beside his daughter's boat, who is married to Ansar Sardar's nephew. She has three sons and one daughter, who is married. Among them, I was able to take the interview of her two sons. Their names are- Saiful, Badol. They are 10 and 12 years old. Ansar Sardar has 9 children. 8 daughters and one son. Among them, 6 of them are married. I noticed the dresses the young boys were wearing. Their mother was calling them because she will take her sons for fishing in that evening just before the Maghrib prayer. Her husband was for standing beside me, I asked him where she is going he said in the mid of the river, for fishing.



Picture: Manta lady riding the boat, along with her sons going for fishing, taken from Bauphal. (Taken by: Nosin Nahian Shejuty)

She will come by night. I noticed her husband do not even bother. It often says in the villages that women should not go out of home after Maghrib. The young Manta lady took her two sons on the boat, ride the boat and went away. Standing there I saw there were many Manta women who are riding the boat by herself. Who is holding the baby in her one hand and riding the boat by her other hand. One of the most important uniqueness of Manta community is the labor division among them. Though women tend to do a lot more work than Manta man, regarding households and fishing. They catch fish, sell them on the local market, they sew the net.



Picture: Manta, Bahar, place Tulapara. (Taken by: Nosing Nahian Shejuty)

In other words, from the beginning of my field trip till the end, I noticed all the Manta community lives in such canals; where it is connected to the locality. In bogi khalpar, the pool under they are living in the canal, on one side it has kalaiya, on the other side, it has bogi. Besides both of the side of the bridge, there are local

markets. I noticed the shops have televisions, grocery items, foods, along with tailor. All the necessary items for a living are available there. Modernity which consists of modern electronic devices, such as television, radio, use of mobile phone, going to cinema, movies, theaters and so on. There was a small girl whose name was Nupur, she was 8 or 9 years old. She was wearing salwar kameez, I ask from where she brought that kameez, she said from the local bazaar and the bracelet she is wearing in her hand, she brought it from the fair of Saiberhaat. Most of her dresses are brought from Kalaiya Bazar or siew it from the tailor. She sometimes goes to the local bazaar with her father and bought all the cosmetics when they are over. Like- fair n lovely, lipsticks, nail polish, lotion, powder. For shampoo she uses Sunsilk, she brought small Sunsilk packets from the shop near the pool. Either she bought the cosmetics from the local market or from the Mela. Her favorite actors are Salman Khan, Sakib Khan. On occasions, she along with her sisters and brothers goes to the cinema hall to watch movies. She told me, on last eid she went to saw a movie of Sakib khan with her brother in the cinema hall. Other time, she saw movies listen to video songs on the tv of the shop near the pool. Nupur was the youngest among all other children of her parents and she was the only one who is born in the hospital. Her all other siblings were born on the boat, where most of them are married. Saiful and Badol, told me they love to eat chips, French fries, chicken fry; they often eat them at the local fast food store. Saiful was wearing lungi and Badal was wearing jeans, t-shirt and had a chain with a locket in his neck. Among all the children of that community, only one of them goes to school. Others either don't like, want to go to school or cannot as their parents do not want them

to go. In that small residence, they also have chickens. They either eat the chicken or sell the eggs.



Picture: Local shops, beside Tulapara Bridge. (Taken by: Nosin Nahian Shejuty)



Picture: Bogi Bridge and khal, place where Mant people lives, taken

(Taken by: Nosin Nahian Shejuty)

The new generation Manta people, like to listen to Hindi, Bangla songs and movies. They also watch Kolkata Bangla serials, like Sat Bhai Champa and other. On occasions, they often rent the sound system from the local bazaar. However, the elder generation Manta man and woman more like their traditional Bangla songs. Rather than movies and serials. Many of them nowadays have radio what they use to listen to songs and it helps them to know about the weather updates. At the time of the relief, the TNO and the Chairman also includes them in the list and give them their necessary things what they need. One of the Manta men told me, in winter TNO gave those blankets. In Eid, he sent foods like Semai, along with Vaseline, body oil, lipstick. When I took the interview of the TNO he said that the chairman and he both of them tried to rehabilitate them in the land but most of the Manta people refuse to come to the land as it is their traditional occupation and it is their identity what they do not want to shift or change. Also, for living on the boat for generation after generation most of them feel safe living there rather come and settle down on the land. Moreover, their occupation is totally dependent on the river, for what they do not want to come from the boat.

On the other hand, most of the Beday now lives on the ground. They changed their social position. Most of them left the boat and got the settlement in the land. One of the biggest Beday community lives in Savar. The main reason for settling down in Savar is; it's easier to get the snake to that place. In one hand, they have connection throughout Bangladesh and Savar is the middle ground. In other words, it is near to the cosmopolitan city. Where they can easily have the access to the modern livelihood. Through it, they have connection with the postmodern city

like Dhaka. By which they can also get connected with the postmodernity. Additionally, from my interview with the Beday community, I saw that. Ones they used to roam around from one place to other by boat. But now, they roam around more in Bus, Truck or use another vehicle rather than the boat. Keeping their tradition of going to one place to other in a Bahar they move under the rule of Sardar. Their network chain is much wider. Beday has the connection with all over the country. They contact with each other by mobile phone. Beday, Baidda, Badia all are the terms which are used negatively. If the story of the Mangot Ray was true it might be the reason why Beday likes to call them Manta.

Like the Manta community, Beday women also do the same amount of works. Their labor is also equally distributed with their man. While conducting the field visit I noticed there was a young Beday girl who was married. She was hardly 9 or 10 years old. Child marriage is a common scenario in both Manta and Beday community. Where both the groom and the bride are young. In my opinion, I find that their marriage is a bit different from the usual Bengali marriage. The Beday and Manta child marriage occur more for the socio-cultural reason. Their marriage was decided after birth of the girl and the boy. This cross-cousin marriage will occur exactly the way it was decided earlier. In a way, it is an attempt to reinforce the community Identity. To keep the cultural and traditional authenticity within themselves. There are very few Beday girl or boy, who got married outside of their own community. Whereas, nowadays in Manta community marriage with the local community occurs. Where Manta wants to change their socio-economic position.

Further Research:

“Democracy is for the people, by the people, and of the people”

- Abraham Lincoln

Bangladesh is a multicultural country. Who has different ethnic groups and communities. In order to establish a democratic society without any single ethnic dominant group. It is important to bring all the group together within the democratic culture. It is essential to understand all of them based on their culture and cultural uniqueness. As anthropology tells us, we should not judge and find about exoticism, rather we should understand a community a society based on their history, their knowledge, their culture. All the ethnic groups should be understood based on their culture, knowledge, and perspective. In my opinion, there should be no hierarchy. Hierarchy of culture, the hierarchy of knowledge and hierarchy of language. There should not be dominant groups. Rather all the community should have opportunity and access to their tradition and culture.

In order to conduct field research, it is essential for a researcher to look at all the research ground and observe every single small detail of his or her research. Researcher, should not look at the ground through his or her own cultural assumption and his or her own lenses and talk about only one side. Rather, it is important to look and bring all the information together where he or she will not judge. Ngo works are basically based on funding. In the book of Sankar Lal Das, he tried to look at all the sufferings and sadness; also, he wrote about them. In my opinion, neither Das nor Assad looked at Manta community through their cultural

lens, their perspectives, and their traditions. So, without just talking about the sufferings and sadness of ones we should also talk about their unique cultural identity. What may seem suffering through our lens, might not be the same experience to them. They have their own kind of knowledge what they gather and learn from the childhood. They might not go to get the institution of knowledge but they have their own kind of knowledge which is different to us. For example: riding the boat, know about details of the boat, river, fishing, women's works and their position and so on. As there are very limited works which are done on Manta. In the future, if any further work should be done on them it will be necessary for a researcher to look at all the sites and aspects of their life.

If I get any chance to do further research on them I will like to go to Barisal's Saeberhat. As I heard a big community of Manta lives there. I wanted to go to the Mela which takes place every year in Saeberhat. I wanted to see their distinct cultural practices more closely. Having a very limited time, it was not possible for me to go there and observe those cultural activities. I also had limitations that I couldn't able to engage and become a part of them, by which I may able to get more information and observe their cultural uniqueness more. Maybe that is why, they also did not tell me few of the things, what I had to observe and find out indirectly. Like about their language and beliefs of their natural deities. To interview Beday community was often more difficult, Ranjana Bishwas said it took 6 months for her to get closer to that community and understand them. Having a very limited time it was not possible for me to do so. They try to distance themselves and say less about them. So, to conduct a research on Beday separately a researcher will need more

time and need to engage more in the research. I also want to make a documentary on Manta and Beday community. I will try my best to do that as soon as possible. I also want to continue my study on both of the community and their socio-cultural uniqueness.

Conclusion:

My research shows, there is a huge connection between Manta and Beday community. This connection has been constructed historically. My study shows that they are an offshoot of each other. I do not want to put a conclusive answer saying, Manta is the offshoot of Beday or Beday is the offshoot of Manta. Though neither of the historical evidence has solid proof from what we can say, from where Manta came from. How and when they got mixed with Beday. So, I would rather like to say that they are an offshoot of each other. I have tried to describe all the similarities I found between both of the community. Moreover, I found very less dissimilarity between them.

There is a certain continuity of the community boundary. It is not fixed, neither it is permanent. This continuous change happens for any reason. The reasons could be economical, social, cultural or other. This shift may also occur to keep the network chain, to keep the community bond. The example I gave in the previous chapter about the wedding of a little girl, it might occur to keep the network or the community bond. On the other hand, throughout the history people often moved from one place to another because of the survival or other reasons. By which all the different communities got mixed together and made a new community, locality and identity. Their tradition, culture also got mixed up and emerged in a new way. If we keep the Ballal Sen story in mind, it might happen that Manta and Beday both are two different communities who got mixed up together. Moreover, because of this reason, both of them now like to address them as Manta. Their lifestyle, their cultural and traditional practices, living on a boat,

believing in natural deities or San- Atoni Acharies, their language everything is similar in some way or another way. Where they both keep a distance with the local Bengali community and lives with their own cultural and traditional uniqueness.

However, these communities are indeed outside the Bengali cultural thing. Manta though tries to cope up and get closer to the Bengali community. But Beday, do not want to come and mixed with the Bengali community. There is a huge power relation which is associated in terms of community distinctions. Bengali look at all these unique traditional and cultural people as savages, subaltern and inferior. Bengali people either categorized them as barbaric, illiterate or think that these unique cultural people need to be saved. Class hierarchy and domination is not a new term in the history of the humankind. In the name of the saving mission, they often make this traditional occupational community as 'other'. Development always works as a discourse of power. This humanitarianism mission or development mission than represents as the new face of colonialism mission. In that case, some way or other the idea of the superiority and inferiority come. The way Bengali community segregated the people who live in the Chittagong or Bandarban hill tracts, is the same way Bengali segregated the Manta and the Beday community. It is the reason why Bengali people use all the abusive terms, such as- Bebaijja, Matari, Baijja, Baidda or others.

Hence, I would like to conclude saying that, every community have their own unique cultural, tradition and identity. It is very important to understand all the cultural unique community based on their culture. In order to create a democratic cultural society, it is important to give priority to all the ethnic groups and

communities along with their tradition, culture, customs, and rituals. All their culture, uniqueness and traditions should be preserved to make the world a more just place. As Martin Luther King said,

“Good and just society is neither the thesis of capitalism nor the antithesis of communism, but a socially conscious democracy which reconciles the truths of individualism and collectivism.”

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