



INTO THE *BAOLIS*: STEP-WELLS OF BANGLADESH

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ABSTRACT

Baolis or step-wells are a water storage technique of the historical period and a unique example of subterranean architecture that can generally be seen in India, Pakistan and also in Bangladesh. Research shows that baolis or the stepwells were used not only for water conservation, but also for social and religious gatherings, and relaxation in the hot summer months. In Bangladesh, this kind of architecture is not very common and did not get enough attention from the scholars. Only four baolis were documented previously by several scholars. A new baoli was discovered in North Bengal during archaeological explorations by the primary author which is the fifth addition of this kind in Bangladesh. All the baolis of Bangladesh, except one, are situated in North Bengal, and related to the Natha Sect of Hinduism. It is proposed to discuss this newly detected fifth baoli and the adjacent temples of the Vaisnava Gosai.

Keywords: Baoli, step-well, Natha sect.

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Introduction

Baoli (Step-well) is an Urdu and Hindi word (Ahmed: 1991:60-68). The step-well is a water storage technique of the historical period and an architectural wonder seen only in the Indian sub-continent. Architecturally, these types of step wells

are deep dug trenches or rock-cut wells or rock or brick-built water tanks reached by a winding set of stairways or steps. The earliest reference to a step-well in the Indian subcontinent is known from an inscription dated to circa fifth century CE. Some scholars claim that the origin of step-wells may

be traced back to the Indus Civilization, but the baoli flourished during eighth to eighteenth century (Swarnkar: 2011). In India, this type of structure is known as 'bawdi', 'baoli', 'vav', 'vavdi', 'vai', 'kalyani', or 'pushkarni'. The Sanskrit *Silpa-Shastras* and ancient inscriptions refer to them as 'Vapi' or 'Vapika' (Chandra: 2015: 12-13). Generally, In India, in dry regions like a desert or areas of low rainfall, where the water lies far below the surface, step wells are constructed on a vast deep area that can be filled with rainwater (Singh & Singh, 2020:). Since Bangladesh is a riverine country and water is easily available everywhere, wells, particularly *baolis* are very rare here but more common in the region of present day northern and western India and also in Pakistan.

In North India *baolis* are simple in construction and rectangular or polygonal in plan, medium and large in dimension and built of either bricks or stone (Chandra: 2015:13). *Baolis* were generally constructed close to religious centres such as *dargahs*, mosques, Hindu *ashrams*, palaces, residential buildings, *sharai khanas* (inns) and besides important commercial roads. Sometimes *baolis* are meant to be sacred water bodies, which, in addition to religious beliefs, are used for aesthetics, recreational and harvesting purposes.

Baolis of India

The western Indian *baolis* are known as "wāv" or "vavdi" which is a Gujarati word. The "wāv" *baolis* are not merely functional but examples of rich and skilful architectural specimens. Percy Brown observed, that the "wavs" of Gujrat were not merely structures over well shafts but took the form of extensive subterranean architecture. The style of construction of these "wāv" *baolis* is unique. They have circular wells and along one of their banks, some three-storied rooms have been constructed which are connected by stairways and embedded into the walls of the wells. These were intended to afford a cool atmosphere in these rooms during the heat of the day (Brown: 1967:56-58).

The term for conventional step wells is "baoli" or "bavadi" in Rajasthan, Northern India. They are non-religious edifices with water being available for everyone, and were built by noblemen partly

for strategic and partly for humanitarian reasons. In some cases, these wells are decorated with statues and inscriptions, which indicate their social and artistic relevance also. The location of step wells showed the purpose of their use. If the well was situated in a settlement or at its margin, it was a location of public meetings and gatherings. If the well was found between settlements along a trading route, it functioned as a rest area. It is to be noted that the *baolis* close to *majhars* or *darghas* are for ablutions but the palace *baolis* are quite different in purpose. They are meant for a cool and calm atmosphere inside a palace or residential building during the scorching heat of the day.

Baolis of Bangladesh

Baolis of Bangladesh are few and only five *baolis* are known to exist till date. The *baolis* of Bangladesh are simple in construction, being circular or rectangular in plan. Of the five *baolis* one is of stone while the other four are made of brick. One of these *baolis* is situated close to Kartalab Khan's Mosque near Begam Bazar in old Dhaka city. The other four are located in the districts of Bogra, Natore and Thakurgaon in North Bengal.

It is relevant to mention here that out of the five *baolis*, four have been noticed and described by some scholars but very shortly. The first author of this article noticed a fifth baoli at Fakir Chand Vaisnava Gosair Ashram at village Ramkantapur under P.S. Lalpur, district Natore during his explorations in the area in 2008. Close to this *baoli*, there are the ruins of some temples belonging to the Vaisnava Gosai. The *baoli* and these temples have so long escaped the notice of scholars. Hence, the main purpose of this paper is to draw the attention of the scholars to this baoli and the adjacent temples of the Vaisnava Gosai. Before discussing the present *baoli* and the temples nearby, it is deemed necessary to discuss the other four *baolis*.

The Mughal Baoli of old Dhaka

One brick *baoli* close to Kartalab Khan's Mosque near Begam Bazar in old Dhaka was noticed and documented by Ahmed Hasan Dani (Dani: 1961:202) and some other scholars. According to Dani, this *baoli* belongs to the same period of

Kartalab Khan's Mosque (1704 CE). It is circular in shape. The diameter of the *baoli* is 6.71 metres. Towards its western side a flight of steps descend down to the water level under a covered two-centred simple archway. The entrance of the *baoli* is encumbered by a modern building (Dani. 1961:202).

During a survey on September 2020, it was noticed (by the second author of this paper) that the *baoli* was covered and converted into the basement of the new extended part of the mosque. Local people said that the *baoli* was converted and used as a water tank for several decades and that now it does not exist anymore (Fig. 1, 2 & 3). This *baoli* or step-well was regarded as the only one example of *baoli* in the then East Pakistan (now Bangladesh) (Dani: 1961:204) but this is not a fact since four more *baolis* survive in North Bengal.

Baolis of North Bengal

Of the four *baolis* of North Bengal, three are of brickwork while the other one is of stone. Among the three brick *baolis*, one is situated close to the so called Parasuram's palace (Sen: 1929) inside the eastern rampart of Mahasthangarh of Bogra district. This is locally known as "*Jiyot Kunda*" which means the well of life (Ahmed, 1981: 47).

The "*Jiyot Kunda*" of Mahasthangarh

Local legend relates that Parasuram the local Hindu king resuscitated his dead soldiers with the water of the well during his fight with the Muslim saint Shah Sultan Balkhi Maheswaare and his soldiers (Sen: 1929:4-5). The saint is said to have polluted the water of the well by throwing a piece of beef into it with the help of a kite that eventually led to the defeat and destruction of the Hindu king (Sen: 1929: 5). The inner diameter of the well is 3.80 metre at the top (Ahmed: 1981:47). A huge granite stone block, rectangular in shape, 2 m long, 0.5m wide and 0.46 m in thickness lies across the eastern side with 0.64 m projection inside (Fig.4). This stone block was probably intended for the facility of drawing water (Ahmed:1981:48). Besides, a series of other stone blocks in tow rows are firmly embedded into the brick masonry of the well, which probably served the purpose of steps, for they descend down to the bed of the well (Fig.5).

The well has been constructed with small sized bricks laid in lime *surki* mortar. The stone blocks used in the construction of the well had probably been collected from a nearby Hindu temple or a structure of the earlier period. According to Nazimuddin Ahmed, the structure locally known as the "*Jiyot Kunda*" may be dated to the eighteenth or early nineteenth century CE (Ahmed:1981:202).

The Baoli of Yogir Bhavan

Another brick *baoli* exists at *Yogir Bhavan*, an important archaeological site in North Bengal. This is under P.S. Kahalo of Bogra district. *Yogir Bhavan* is the settlement of the Natha sect of *Saiva Sannyasis* (Sen: 1929; Ahmed: 1981). H. Beveridge, Prabash Chandra Sen, Nazimuddin Ahmed and some other scholars documented this *baoli* and the shrines of *Yogir Bhavan*. The *baoli* of *Yogir Bhavan* is locally known as "*Kanach Kua*" meaning, the well of "*Shingi fishes*". Unlike the "*Jiyot Kunda*" of Mahasthangarh, the *baoli* of *Yogir Bhavan* is considered to be sacred and invigorative, 'the well of life'. According to a local belief, the waters of the well have the power to cure all disease or fulfil the desires of people.

The *baoli* of *Yogir-bhavan* is built of brick and rectangular in plan measuring 4.27m east west by 2.74m north south. Along its southern side a flight of steps, descend down to the bed of the well. It is locally gathered that water prevails in it throughout the year. Even in summer, twelve to fifteen steps of the *baoli* remain visible above water (Fig.6 & Fig.7). According to a local legend, the well has a connection with the adjacent pond on the east through an underground channel.

By the southern side of the *baoli* there are the ruins of six shrines and three small *samadhis* (tombs) belonging to some *Saiva sannyasis* (ascetics). One of these shrines is located close to the main entrance on the south of the site. It is known as "*Dharma-Dungi*" (Sen: 1929:13). According to a brick inscription fixed over the entrance of the shrine it is dated 1741 CE (Sen: 1929:13). In front of *Dharma Dungi*, there was another shrine which is called "*Gadi Ghar*" where a fire was kept burning at all hours. It no longer exists.

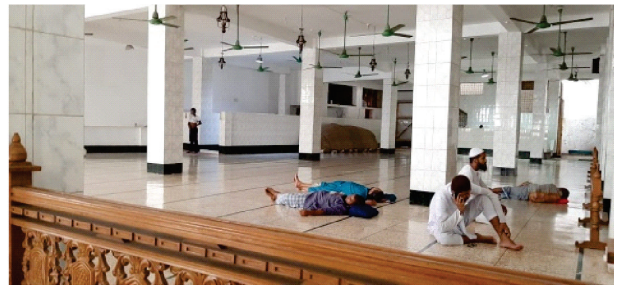
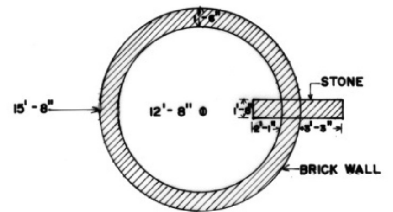


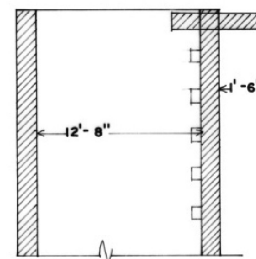
Figure 1 & 2: The covered *Baoli* within the Kartalab Khan's Mosque at present



Figure 3: The covered *Baoli* steps within the Kartalab Khan's Mosque present



PLAN OF JIYAT KUNDA
SCALE: 1/8" = 1'-0"



SECTION OF J.K
SCALE: 1/8" = 1'-0"

Figure 4: Plan and Section drawing of the Jiyot Kunda



Figure 5: The Jiyot Kunda

Source: Google image



Figure 6: Close-up of the descending steps of the well (Baoli) of Yogir Bhavan



Figure 7: Close-up of "Kanaca Kua" (Baoli), Yogir Bhavan

By the eastern side of *Dharma-Dungi* and *Gadi Ghar* are four temples, dedicated to Kala Bhairava, Sarvamangala, Durga and Gorakshanatha respectively. The Kalabhairava temple and the Sarvamangala temple are dated in 1766 CE and 1681 CE (Sen, 1929:10). The Durga temple and Gorakshanatha temple appear to belong to a later period and was probably erected in the last quarter of the eighteenth century CE.

According to Prabash Chandra Sen the *Yogir Bhavan* is the headquarters of the Natha sect of Saiva *sannyasis* and two other branches of this sect are at *Yogi Gopha* (under P.S. Patnitala of present Naogaon district) and *Gorkh Kuwe* (under P.S. Ranisankail of present Thakurgaon district). Sen further observes that the Saiva *sannyasis* are a class of men who attained success in their austerities and yoga-practices; hence they were regarded as super human beings or *natha*. They were objects of veneration and they had a large number of disciples. One of their “*Gurus*”(preceptors) named Gorakshanatha who was originally a Buddhist under the name of Ramanavajra became a Saiva and was thus hated by the Buddhists as a renegade. These *sannyasis* introduced a form of secret and mystic worship, which with political changes in eastern India brought about the downfall of Buddhism in the region (Sen: 1929:10).

Yogigopha is another important centre of *Siva Sannyasis*. Some remains of the *sannyasis* are marked at the site. Sir Alexander Cunningham (1980: 121), Abul Kalam Muhammad Zakariya (1984: 55-8) and Md. Mosharrof Hossain (1993: 41-3) noticed and described the relics of the site. Among the remains one half-buried structure, a two-storied building and a stone *stupa* are important.

The half-buried structure was probably a temple of Siva. Cunningham calls it “The Gupha”. Inside the “Gupha” he observed a *Siva linga* (Cunningham: 1980:121). He also refers to two *Siva lingas*, a four-armed figure of Visnu and a broken female figure lying on a bed with a child on her lap.

The two-storied building is known as the abode of the *sannyasis*. This is dated in the nineteenth century CE (Hossain: 1993: 41-3). The *stupa* is built of sand stone consisting of four gradually diminishing terraces; it is 1.37m high from the ground level (Hossain, 1993: 25-50).

The stone baoli of *Gorakh-kuwe*

Gorakh-kuwe is the third centre of Saiva *sannyasis* in Northern Bengal (Sen: 1929: 12). The ruins of five shrines and a stone *baoli* are found here. Abul Kalam Muhammad Zakaria presumes that the shrines of *Gorakh-kuwe* are one hundred fifty to two hundred years old (Zakariya: 1984: 55-58). According to him, the *baoli* belongs to the pre-Muslim period. The stone *baoli* exists inside a roofless half-buried building, probably a temple of an earlier period, and contemporary to the *baoli* (Zakariya: 1984:55-58). The temple is rectangular. Its floor is 1.27m below the top surface. The floor is built of sand stone. In the middle of the stone paved floor survives a small stone *baoli* with two stairways on the eastern and western side (Hossain: 1993:20-50). The stairways are built of the same material, i.e. sand stone. The diameter of the *baoli* is 88cm and its depth is 2.23 m. Unlike the other *baolis* of the Hindu religious places or *ashram*, the stone *baoli* of *Gorakh-kuwe* is also considered sacred (Hossain, 1993:20-50).

A local legend relates that the water of this *baoli* is inexhaustive and invigorative. Every year, a fair is held here and thousands of disciples of the Saiva *sannyasis* assemble here on this occasion. Local people believe that like other *baolis*, its waters also have the power of curing all disease.

The stone baoli of *Gorakh-kuwe* is very much important since there is no second example of a stone *baoli* in Bangladesh. The stone *baoli* exists inside the stone paved floor of a brick temple and they both belong to the same period. Whether the stone baoli of *Gorakh-kuwe* is a monument of pre-Muslim period or later, the matter can be confirmed by deep digging (close to the *baoli*) to determine the chronology of the shrines of the site.

Newly discovered Baoli at Fakir Chand Vaisnava Gosair Ashram

The first author discovered a fifth *baoli* at Fakir Chand Vaisnava Gosair Ashram at village Ramkantapur under P.S. Lalpur of Nator district during his official exploration in the area. Close to the *baoli* are the ruins of a few temples belonging to the Vaisnava *Gosais*. Two of the temples have rich architectural design and decoration. According to local history, Fakir Chand Vaisnava Gosai is

said to have been born in a Brahmin family in the village of Radhakantapur under P.S Taban of West Bengal, India towards the end of eleventh century B.S. and died in 1274 B.S. (corresponding to 1867 CE). He was a devout follower of the Vaisnava religion preached by Sri Chaitanya (1486-1533 CE). In the course of his wanderings, Fakir Chand Vaisnava Gosai came to Ramkantapur in Natore and here he met Pranchand Vaisnava Gosai. They settled down under a banyan tree locally known as “*Akshoytala*” (Fig no.8) which lies by the southern side of the Ashram. A fire (flame) was kept burning in perpetuity at the site. This attracted the notice of people living nearby. Fakir Chand Vaisnava Gosai is said to have been endowed with divine power and many people are learnt to have been cured of their diseases by his blessings. As his disciples grew in number Fakir Chand decided to establish an *ashram* for his disciples. Upon his request the local Hindu Zamnidar, Rai Bahadur Lakshmi Narayan of Noapara granted him ten acres of rent-free land.

The *ashram* is eight km to the west of Lalpur P.S. headquarters, one km to the north of river Padma and one fourth km to the south of Lalpur-Bagha metalled road. The *ashram* is approachable by a village pathway that springs from Lalpur Bagha road noted above. It is an enclosed area having an impressive gateway on the east. By the southern side of the gate way is an old pond which appears to be contemporary to the early temples of the *ashram*. The entrance gateway leads to a courtyard where there are eight temples; two residential buildings, one kitchen and a brick *baoli* which is the main focus of this paper.

The residential buildings are meant for the devotees and the *sebayets* (disciples) living in the *ashram*. The style of construction, the use of iron beams supporting the flat roof above and the large size of bricks used in their construction indicate that these two residential buildings might have been erected in the second half of the nineteenth century CE.

The Temples

Of the eight temples of the *ashram*, three are in a row on the eastern side of the courtyard; three on the western side and two on the southern side which are said to be the *samadhi* (tombs) of Khepi Mata and

Joymangal Sadhu. The three eastern temples are also locally known as *samadhis*. Inside the temples are three small *samadhis* which are known to have been dedicated to Sakhyamoyi Mata, Sundara Mata and Santadala Mata. These three temples are rectangular in plan and covered by a *chou-chala* type of roof (Fig.9). The flat entrances of these temples, their multi-cusped blind arches designed in plaster and the horizontal cornice and the large size of bricks used in the construction indicate that these three temples might have been erected in the second half of the nineteenth century CE. Among the temples of the *ashram*, the *samadhis* of Fakir Chand Vaisnava Gosai and Pran Chand Vaisnava Gosai are very much important for both architectural design and decoration (Fig. 10 & 11). These two *samadhis* are situated on the western side of the courtyard.

The *Samadhi* of Fakir Chand Vaisnava Gosai

The *Samadhi* (tomb) of Fakir Chand Vaisnava Gosai is square internally measuring 12.19 m×12.19 m including a 2.13m wide veranda that runs on all sides and is crowned by a *char-chala* type of roof. Access to this temple is from the eastern courtyard by a flight of steps. The veranda is pierced by three flat entrances. Here decorated teak wood shutters have been used. By the side of the entrances and also above profuse flower decoration and multi-cusped blind arches in plaster are marked. Over the veranda is a vaulted roof.

The main chamber is also square measuring 6.31m×6.31m externally. It has only one entrance in the middle of its eastern side. Here also decorated wooden shutters are noticed. A marble stone kept inside the temple records the demise of Fakir Chand Vaisnava Gosai in B.S. 1274 corresponding to the Christian era 1867 CE. The style of construction, the architectural design and decoration as well as the large size of bricks used in the construction corroborate the date. It may be presumed that the *samadhi* of Fakir Chand Vaisnava Gosai was erected immediate after his death.

The *Samadhi* (Tomb) of Pran Chand Vaisnava Gosai

The *samadhi* or tomb of Pran Chand Vaisnava Gosai lies by the southern side of Fakir Chand Vaisnava



Figure 8: *Akshoytala*



Figure 9: Tombs



Figures 10 & 11: Tombs



Figure 12: Previous (2008) image of the Baoli



Figure 13: Present (2019) image of the Baoli



Figure 14: View from opposite side of the staircase



Figure 15: Close view of the inside of the Baoli



Figure 16: Stairs under water (2008)



Figure 17: Stairs from the “Rosai Mandir”

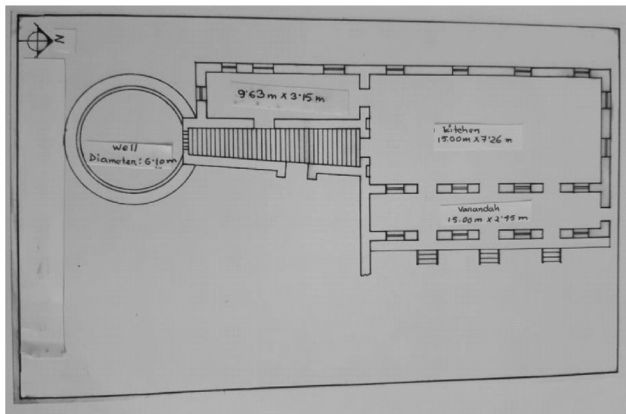


Figure 18: Plan and Section drawing of the Baoli at Fakir Chand Vaisnava Gosair Ashram

Gosai’s *samadhi*. In plan, architectural design and decoration, both the *samadhis* are similar. However, the *Samadhi* of Pran Chand Vaisnava Gosai is a bit smaller in dimension externally measuring 9.30m×9.30m including a 1.52m wide veranda in front which is covered by a vaulted roof.

The main chamber of Pran Chand Vaisnava Gosai is also square; 4.26m×4.26m externally and is covered by *char-chala* roof. It has only one entrance in the middle of its front wall that has beautifully

carved wooden shutters. The exterior of the temple has profuse flower decoration and multi-cusped blind arches in plaster. It was probably constructed during the last quarter of the nineteenth century CE.

The Southern Temples

About 9 m to the south-east of Pran Chand Vaisnava Gosai Samadhi are the ruins of two temples of which one is relatively modern and crowned by a *sikhara*. The other one lies on the eastern side. It appears to be the oldest of the group of temples of the *ashram*. Its roof is no longer there. The temple is rectangular, externally measuring 9.70m by 3m. It might have been built in the first quarter of the nineteenth century.

“Bhab Mandir”

By the western side of Fakir Chand Vaisnava Gosair *samadhi* exists a rectangular building internally measuring 15.4m×5.49m with a veranda in front on the east. This is locally known as “Bhab Mandir”, probably the feeling exchanged between the “Guru” and his disciples. The temple consists of two rooms. The roof is vaulted and rests on six rectangular pillars. In between the rooms, there are seven semi-circular archways. The style of construction, the architectural design and the size of bricks used in its construction suggest that the temple (Bhab Mandir) was erected in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

The Baoli and the Kitchen

By the northern side of the above temple, there exists a brick *baoli* which is the most important of all the monuments of Fakir Chand Vaisnava Gosai Ashram. This *baoli* is locally known as “Amirta Sagar”. Its water is considered to be highly delicious and an invigorative drink that makes the drinker immortal. The *baoli* is built of bricks laid in lime, surki, mortar. The inner diameter of the baoli is 6.20m at the top. Its wall is 0.28m wide and the remnant above the surrounding levels is 0.79m in height. At the time of the author’s first visit (on 31-08-2008), the water level of the *baoli* was 3.50m below from its top. It was noticed that the *baoli* is connected with a rectangular building locally known as “Rosai Mandir” (kitchen), by a long

staircase, which springs from the eastern door way of the southern wall of the kitchen.

The staircase is 11.50m long and 2.32m wide on an average. One-step of the *baoli* is 30cm wide and 14cm in rise. At the time of our visit to the site sixteen steps of the *baoli* were visible above water while the remaining steps were covered by water. The steps of the staircase descend down to the bed of the well piercing its wall. The staircase is clearly visible from the northern side but kept concealed from view from the southern side by a short wall raised over the northern edge of the well (Figs. 12 -16).

The “*Rosai Mandir*”; the kitchen is rectangular, 15m×7.26m internally with a veranda in front on the east and a 9.63m×3.15m oblong room that extends towards the south along the western side of the staircase (fig.17). The roof of the kitchen and its veranda are supported on iron beams. Tiles have been used on the roof. The style of construction, the size of bricks and thickness of wall etc. indicate that the kitchen and *baoli* have been built at the same time, probably in the last quarter of the nineteenth century CE. (Fig. 17 & Fig.18)

According to local lore, the Fakir Chand Vaisnava Gosair Ashram at village Ramkantapur under P.S.Lalpur of Natore is an important centre and the meeting place of the Vaisnava Gosais in North Bengal. The principal centre of the Vaisnava Gosais is at Khetur and Premtali under P.S. Godagari of Rajshahi district. Ethno-archaeological study shows that, three religious festivals of the Vaisnava Gosais are held at Fakir Chand Vaisnava Gosai Ashram every year. The first festival is held in the Bengali month of *Ashar* when the devotees take their bathe in the river Padma not far from the Ashram. The second festival held in the month of *Agrahayan* which is called “*Nabannaya* festival” when four to five thousand disciples assemble here. This festival lasts for three days. The third festival is held in the month of *Chaitra* on the occasion of Sri Krishna’s birth anniversary, when the devotees use “*Abir*” on their body and play “*Holi*”.

Khetur is the principal centre of the Vaisnava Gosais in Bangladesh. It is 1½km to the north of Premtali near the river Padma. L.S.S.O’ Melly observes that Khetur has a repute of sanctity (Melly, 1916:164). It was the home of Norottam Thakur,

a renowned Vaisnava saint and a follower of Sri Chaitany Deva, the great Hindu reformer of the sixteenth century.

A large religious fair which lasts for three days is held in Khetur during October every year (Melly: 1916:164). The fair is attended by thousands of persons. The number varies from ten to twenty thousands. It attracts Vaisnavas and *Bairagis* of all dominations, more particularly from Rajshahi, Pabna, Nadiya and Murshidabad. The custom is for the pilgrims to bathe at Premtali and then to visit the temple at Khetur (Melly: 1916:164).

Local legend relates that the great Vaisnava apostle Chaitanya in the course of his wanderings crossed the Padma (Ganga) and bathed at Premtali - the place of spiritual love; here also a fair is held at the same time as the fair at Khetur (Melly: 1916:165).

The above legend is corroborated by historical evidences. Abdul Karim (1977:378-82) and Sukshamaya Mukherjee (1981:133-85) refer to Chaitanya’s travels to Bengal, Gaur and Gaya. They further disclose that once Chaitanya bathed in the river Ganga (Padma) at Premtali (Karim,: 1977:378-82).

Norottam Das is described as the princely son and heir of Raja Krishna Chandra Dutta (Mukherjee: 1981:133-85) of Srikhetur. Although he was a kayastha by birth, the influence of Norottam was so great that many scholarly Brahmins like Ganga Narayan Chakravarty became his willing disciple and acknowledged him as their spiritual head. He was called “Thakur”, a title generally applied in Bengal to Brahmins only. His place of meditation was near a cluster of tamarind trees; west of the temple of Khetur which is still a hallowed spot. O’Malley further discloses that the temple of Khetur is an insignificance building, but it consists of the images of Gauranga (Chaitanya), of his wife Visnu Priya Devi and one of his chief disciple Nityananda.

Besides, Fakir Chand Vaisnava Gosai Ashram at Ramkantapur of Natore Khetur (of Rajshahi), the relics of the Vaisnava Gosais are known from Sherpur and Dhunat of Bogra, Mahiganj of Rangpur, Kalagachia under P.S. Bandar of Narayangang in Bangladesh and Jiaganj of Murshidabad of west Bengal, India.

The Gosai community are very much respected in Hindu society. They play the role of “Gurus” in the field of religion. Unlike the Sufis in the Muslim society, the Gurus are engaged in meditation in order to attain spiritual knowledge.

Conclusion

It is noteworthy that in India, the step wells were used not only for water conservation, but also for social and religious gatherings and relaxation during the hot summer months. However, the purpose of making step-wells in Bangladesh is still unknown as neither is it a dry region nor is the water level too low. Rather, except the baoli of old Dhaka, all the other four *baolis* are situated in Northern area of Bangladesh and have some religious values as like some of the *baolis* of India and Pakistan. As well as in India, some *baolis* have very rich ornamentation which is almost absent in the case of *baolis* of Bangladesh. *baoli* at Fakir Chand Vaisnava Gosair Ashram and the temples at village Ramkanta pur under P.S. Lalpur, district Natore, have so long remained unpublished. The objective of this article is to document this newly discovered Baoli.

As this type of architectural remains are uncommon in Bangladesh, they must be identified, listed and documented in detail so that they can be protected from encroachments and development measures.

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