

**Reflection of Court Culture and Local Political affairs during the  
reign of Alauddin Husain Shah of Bengal: A View from  
Mangalkavya**

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**Abstract:** *This paper is based on two Managalkavyas, one is Padampuran of Vijay Gupta and the other is Manasavijay of Vipradas Pipplai. Both poets belong to the fifteenth century, when Alauddin Hussain Shah was the ruler of the Gaud. Vijay Gupta and Vipradas, both poets, portray tensions between Hindus and Muslims. In Vijay Gupta's version, a Muslim official arrogantly disrupts a cowherd's ritual, which leads to conflict. In Vipradas's account, cowherds attack a Muslim slave who entered their ritual space. These reflect how local officials misused their power and how ordinary villagers perceived Muslims as a distinct social group. This paper employs textual analysis of Mangalakavya, particularly Manasamangala, and secondary sources.*

**Keywords:** *Court Culture, Manasamangal, Medieval Bengal, Political Affairs etc.*

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**Introduction**

Alauddin Husain Shah was known as *Syed Husain Sharif Makki*. Earlier, he served as the *wazir* of the Abyssinian ruler Shamsuddin Muzaffar Shah. He killed him and seized the throne.<sup>1</sup> He ruled Bengal from 1493 to 1519 A.D. Husain Shah was the most famous ruler of the Husain Shahi dynasty. Many poets, such as Vijay Gupta, Vipradas, and Shankar Kinkar Mishra, among others, mentioned him in their works. During his reign, Bengali literature proliferated in Bengal. Religious texts were produced in large numbers, and many Sanskrit works were translated into Bengali. Under his patronage, many important works were written, including *Manasavijay* by Vipradas, *Gaurimangal* by Shankar Kinkar Mishra,

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*Padmapurana (Manasamangal)* by Vijay Gupta, *Mahabharata* by Kavindra Parameshwar Das, and *Krishna-Lila* by Yashoraj Khah.<sup>2</sup> Scholars note that after the arrival of Islam, Bengal underwent cultural, political, religious, and economic changes. Before the establishment of the Turkish empire, the Sena rulers ruled over the Gaud. The Senas, especially Ballala Sen, promoted Brahmanical traditions known as the kulin system, which strengthened the caste hierarchy, untouchability, and social divisions.<sup>3</sup> Sanskrit had been a classical language before the advent of the Turks. Religious texts were written only in Sanskrit. Brahmins cursed Bangla literature. According to them, Sanskrit was the *deva bhasha* and other languages were inferior to it.<sup>4</sup> After the invasion of Bakhtiyar Khilji, Lakshman Sen had to flee to Vikrampur. Bengal came under the Delhi Sultans until 1338, after which Bengal remained independent under sultans for 200 years (1338–1538).<sup>5</sup> These independent rulers were the Ilyas Shahi dynasty, the Raja Ganesh dynasty, the Abyssinian rulers, and the Husain Shahi dynasty.

Before the Turks, Sanskrit was elite and the language of the Brahmins. Ordinary people used the vernacular. After the Turkish conquest, Persian became the official language. Independent sultans of Bengal encouraged the translations<sup>6</sup> of Sanskrit works into Bengali and promoted vernacular poetry, which was written in Bengali. For example, Krittivas Ojha's *Ramayana* was composed in this period. Under Ilyas Shahi rulers like Rukunuddin Barbak Shah and Yusuf Shah, Maladhar Basu (Gunraj Khan) composed *Sri Krishna Vijay*.<sup>7</sup>

After the arrival of Islam, a special genre of poetry emerged in Bengal, focusing on non-Aryan deities. These deities were often linked to animals or diseases. For instance, Manasa was the goddess of snakes (*Manasamangal*), Chandi was the goddess of forests and wild animals (*Chandimangal*), Shitala protected against smallpox (*Shitalamangal*), Shashthi was the protector of children (*Shashthimangal*), and Dakshin Ray was the god of tigers (*Raymangal*). Among these, *Manasamangal* was written during the rule of Husain Shah. Several *Manasamangal* poems were composed at different times by Ketakadas (17th c.), Narayan Deb (15th c.), Dwija Banshidasa (16th c.), and Vijay Gupta (15th c.). Among them, Vijay Gupta's *Padmapurana or Manasamangal* and Vipradas Pipilai's *Manasavijay* belong to the period of Husain Shah. These Mangakavyas reveal essential details of society, politics, economy, and culture of that time. In Vijay Gupta's *Padmapurana*, the poet records about himself. He mentioned that he was born in Mulk Fateyabad Bagjoda Takshim at Fullashri

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village, when Husain Shah was the ruler of Bengal. He praised Husain Shah's reign, where people lived peacefully.

*ritu shashi ved shashi parimit shak  
sultan husain raja prithavipalak.*<sup>8</sup>

There was another poet named Vipradas Pipilai. He was the Pipilai brahman, a sub-clan of Vatsya, the school of Samaveda. He lived in Badudya village near Batagram. His father's name was Mukunda Pandita. He mentions Husain Shah in his poem. Here is a citation-

*Sindhu indu ved mahi shak pariman  
nripati husain shah gauder pradhan.*<sup>9</sup>

These two poets existed in the latter half of the fifteenth century. Vijay Gupta was Vaidya, and Vipradas was Brahman. Both poets depicted the cruelty of local officers.

## Reflection of Court Culture and Local Political Affairs

*Mangalkavya* reflect the Persian court culture and the local political affairs of medieval Bengal. A famous *Mangalkavya Annadamangal* was performed at the court of Maharaja Krishnachandra Ray of Nadiya. It was the first *Mangalkavya* that was performed at the court.<sup>10</sup> Bharatchandra Ray wrote it in the command of Maharaja Krishnachandra Ray. It was an eighteenth-century text that reflected the political affairs between Maharaja Pratapaditya of Jassore and Mughal governor Mansigh, and also depicted the Bargis. It was written in the eighteenth century when the Mughal empire was already established. Most of the upper classes adopted Persian or Islamic traditions. The earliest *Mangalkavya* was *Manasamagal*, written in the fifteenth century, during the reign of the Sultans in Delhi. At the same time, Independent Muslim rulers overruled the Bengal. People began adopting Persian traditions. Local kings imitated Persian court culture. *Mangalkavyas* depicted it. Most of *Mangalkavya*'s poets depicted how local officials tortured common people. Khemanada Ketakadas mention in his poem that his family had to leave their patrilineal land because of corrupt land revenue officials. Mukundaram Chakravarty also depicted the atrocities committed by officials. This paper discusses two *Manasamangals*: Vijaygupta's *Padampuran* and Vipradas's *Manasavijay*.

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Vijay Gupta and Vipradas's Hasan Husain segment reflects the court culture and local politics of medieval Bengal during the reign of Husain Shah. Their texts show the relationship between ordinary people and local officials of rulers. Mainly, they portrayed disputes between the cowherd, Vaishnava Brahmins, and Muslim local officials such as the qazi and haldar. Both poets mention Hassan and Husain, two brothers. But Vijay Gupta mentions they were the son of the Qazi. Qazi means chief justice. So, Hassan and Husain were not Qazi, but they benefited from their father's post. On the other hand, Vipradas mentioned them as king. There was another official, a *haldar* named Abdulla. He was the brother-in-law of Qazi Husain. Another official, Maulla Takai, was also related to Qazi. We find officials named from Vipradas Manasavijay, such as Gora Mina, who was the head of Hassan Husain's farmers. He had some slaves. So, we found some official chains that were related to each other. In *Manasamangal*, Hassan Husain's segment, there is a brief incident involving Gora Mina's slave. The slave of Gora Mina went for a bath in the river where some cowherds worshipped Manasa. They started to hit Gora Mina's slave. Slaves fled away, and Gora Mina came with all his farmers for revenge. But somehow, they were killed, and only one farmer was left, whose name was Bhadu. He went to the Qazi palace and told him everything. Qazi also wanted to take revenge. So, here we found that a minor clash transforms into a colossal battle.

Vijay Gupta's poem tells a similar story to Vipradas but with a slightly different one. Takai Maulla entered the cowherd's house without permission and had to go for breaking the Manasaghat. That's why all the cowherds bit them. Then he went in front of Hassan and Hussain. Both texts are the same but slightly different. According to Vijay Gupta, Muslim's status looked like they were fearless because they believed themselves to be superior; they had the right to do anything. But Vipradas' text shows that the status of Muslims was not so strong because Gora Mina's slaves did not do anything to the cowherd, but they hit them because he came there during their worship time.

*Jekhane rakhalgan puje mansay  
Devjoge se golam tathakare jaye  
Krodhjukta hailo sabe turuk dekhiya  
Dhar dhar dak chhari gelo khedariya.<sup>11</sup>*

So, this text shows that Hindus, whether they were of a lower status, hate to see Muslims while they are busy in religious or pious celebrations.

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Vijay Gupta also depicted how Muslim officials tortured them. *Haldar*, who always hit Brahmans when they had basil leaves (*tulsi Patta*) on their head. Muslim officials also humiliated brahmans when they showed *paita* or *janeu* (white sacred cotton thread). They spat on brahmans and struck them on their backs. In contrast, *Vipradas* records that Husain himself respected the *tulsi* leaf, showing the complexity of Muslim attitudes toward Hindu traditions. Here, the poet Vijay Gupta discusses the Hindu-Muslim conflict. In his poem, he depicts the dominance of Muslim officials over the Hindus. He describes how Muslim officials oppressed Hindus and destroyed their religion.

*jadi giya lag pam jatek hinduya  
jati nas karibo aji gost khilaiya.*<sup>12</sup>

Basically, this segment created a kind of sectarian circumstances in which people started to hate the other community.

This text also reflects the warfare and court culture at that time. *Manasa* desired to punish the *turuk* (muslims), that's why she went to *Hassanpuri* or *Hassanhati*. *Vipradas* portrays *Hasan's* court or *sabha*. He was happy with his many wives. They ate betel nut. There were many slaves busy with their work, some of them massaging the body, some of them waving white fans, some of them bringing *hukka*. *Qazi* holds the *Quran* and recites the verses in the court.

*Kaji majlish kari            ketab koran Dhari  
Khatagula tajbij kare  
Soyar peyadfa kato        majudat shat shat  
Sada panch hatiyar dhare.*<sup>13</sup>

So, the atmosphere in *Hasan Nagar*, or *Hassanhati*, was peaceful. But suddenly, a farmer informed him that all the farmers had been killed. Then he became angry and went for revenge. He went with a huge military. Elephants, horses, camels, and donkeys were included with their military. Many eunuchs, *Mulla* and so on went with *Hasan Husain*. These massive military forces could not win against *Manasa's* troops. All *turuk* were killed except *Hassan*. When he worshipped *Manasa*, everyone revived, and *Manasa* was also worshipped by Muslims.

Lakha lakha hati ghoda mahish bistar  
Asankhya apar astra bahe uth khar.<sup>14</sup>

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## Conclusion

Vijay Gupta and Vipradas, both poets, portray tensions between Hindus and Muslims. In Vijay Gupta's version, a Muslim official arrogantly disrupts a cowherd's ritual, which leads to conflict. In Vipradas's account, cowherds attack a Muslim slave who entered their ritual space. These reflect how local officials misused their power and how ordinary villagers perceived Muslims as a distinct social group. Vijay Gupta also describes how Muslim officers used to torture Brahmins – for example, tearing their sacred thread and humiliating them if they used *tulsi* leaves on their heads. In contrast, Vipradas records that Husain himself respected the *tulsi* leaf, showing the complexity of Muslim attitudes toward Hindu traditions. Overall, the *Mangalkavyas* of Vijay Gupta and Vipradas not only highlight Hindu-Muslim encounters but also reveal Persian court culture, local politics, abuses by lower officials, and glimpses of everyday life in Husain Shah's Bengal.

## Notes and References

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  - <sup>2</sup> Kazi Zafarul Islam, *Maidhya yuger Muslim Shsakerai Bangla Shahityer Sthapati*, Bangladesh Co-operative Book Society Ltd. Dhaka, 1999, p. 44
  - <sup>3</sup> Ashutosh Bhattacharya, *Bangla Mangalkabyer Itihas*, A Mukherjee and Co., Kolkata, 2015, p.10
  - <sup>4</sup> Kazi Zafarul Islam, *Maidhya yuger Muslim Shsakerai Bangla Shahityer Sthapati*, Bangladesh Co-operative Book Society Ltd., Dhaka, 1999, p.12
  - <sup>5</sup> Sukhamay Mukhopadhyay, *Banglar Itihaser Duiso Bachhar*, Bharati Book Stall, Calcutta, 1960, p.26
  - <sup>6</sup> Some scholars argue that in the Indian context, translation theory and process are not implacable, because the narrators (writers) of the story were retelling the story in their own version. (like Sandhya Sharma, *Literature, Culture and History in Mughal North India 1550-1800*)
  - <sup>7</sup> Kazi Zafarul Islam, *Maidhya yuger Muslim Shsakerai Bangla Shahityer Sthapati*, Bangladesh Co-operative Book Society Ltd., Dhaka, 1999, p. 44
  - <sup>8</sup> Dasgupta, Srijayantakumar, *Kavi Vijaygupter Padampuran*, Calcutta University, Calcutta, 2009, p. 8
  - <sup>9</sup> Sukumar Sen, *Vipradasa's Manasa-Vijaya*, The Asiatic Society, Calcutta, ?, p.3
  - <sup>10</sup> Chatterjee, Kumkum, *The Culture of History in Early Modern India: Persianization and Mughal Culture in Bengal*, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 2009, p.95
  - <sup>11</sup> Sukumar Sen, *Vipradasa's Manasa-Vijaya*, The Asiatic Society, Calcutta, ?, p.63
  - <sup>12</sup> Dasgupta, Srijayantakumar, *Kavi Vijaygupter Padampuran*, Calcutta University, Calcutta, 2009, p.127
  - <sup>13</sup> Sukumar Sen, *Vipradasa's Manasa-Vijaya*, The Asiatic Society, Calcutta, ?, p.67
  - <sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p.70