

# It takes a village

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## *Lyric of a famous Bangla song*

“On the bank of the river Padma, I once had a small green village  
I still remember her name  
The song of boatmen there used to engulf my mind;  
Oh will I ever find it back again?”

A village belongs to human heart, a city is a construct of human intelligence. A village is Mother Nature’s gift to humanity; a city a human child’s demonstration to Mother Nature that she can change Nature, not out of love but out of necessity.

Thus a city is markedly different from a village; and it is not just in physical form, amenities or even in age; some cities are indeed very old. What sets a village apart is its integral linkage and proximity to nature. While ancient city states took pride in their canals and roads; ancient villages are little more than an extension of nature itself; a habitat fashioned out of the natural landscape with minimum intervention. If canals and aqua-ducts watered ancient and modern cities, a river not only waters the village but its water is part of the village itself. A forest near a village not only supplies the village with shade and fuel but in its very position against the blue sky it is part of the landscape of the village.

We have lived in villages for thousands of years, playing and sometimes fighting for the land; compared to that our city-bound existence is only a few decades; a twinkle of an eye. So genetically we are creatures of villages; selected and shaped by the uniqueness of that habitat, and sometimes by its conflicts. Strong in this manifestation is our craving for land, plant, water. One notices how people living in tiny apartments in big cities crave for a green plant, drive great distances to sit near water. The ancient mind ignores the glitzy artifacts of the modern city and invokes the habit of a lost life. And sometimes our constant need to start a conflict might be deeply rooted in such a selection of the past. I call it “gene for fighting for Chor” (a new piece of land

suddenly becoming available on the river-bed”). Not only does the mind want to see the river it also wants to own it!

Thus a Village lingers as a memory, nostalgia and habit, similar to the lyric of the song above, creating music and art, making us very enthusiastic workers of cultural festivities. Sad and lamenting, the modern mind wonders if she will ever get that past serenity back again. In many ways it is like crying for a mother who is no more.

At a stage of my own life I became deeply engrossed with the idea of ancient natural forces that shaped the human mind. And I discovered a part of my self that I think is also part of every human being but remains hidden to us in our modern existence. Integral to understanding this confusion is an understanding of our displacements from our original habitat.

In what is now called Bangladesh migration to cities started mainly after 1947, after the formation of the state of Pakistan. Through 1950's and 1960's this migration continued creating mega cities such as Dhaka. Much of our politics and culture now revolves around Dhaka and its many dramas, keeping us completely unaware of the actual forces that originally shaped our mind. After 1971, after our freedom, a similar migration started, scattering our people in large city states of Europe and USA, and economic centers of the world such as the Arabian gulf, Japan and Australia. The modern Bangladeshi “psyche” is the construct of these two generational migrations, created by lost souls displaced from the villages so rapidly that the mind still cannot quite fathom it.

Literally in the twinkle of an eye in comparison to civilised human existence these two generations were ejected from their centuries old habitat, and projected into a world to which they have no natural link and places where they are simply economic workers. Just like the logic of work ejected people from the villages in 1960's through 2000's and brought them to cities such as Dhaka and Chittagong; similarly starting in 1970's till today literally millions have taken shelters in overseas cities; completing this serial ejection from the natural land and habitat. And similar migration continues in other countries of the world too. This is probably the most amazingly vast human displacement since human beings in ancient times scattered out of Africa.

Depleted of the ancient cues that shaped the mind, and a prospect of no permanent return to the old habitat, the mind has rebelled, creating a plethora of

anguishes and unhappiness. The mind turns inwards; tries to imagine and invent nature in its inner core. It imagines relationships with imaginary kiths and kins. As Rabindranath wrote :”Oh how you have made the distances near, and brothers out of strangers”; it is a manifesto of peregrination of a migrant soul.

On a positive note It brought a new dynamism out of the loss of the ancient village; now it was time to march forward and discover new land.

However, having arrived at the new places, whether it was the city of Dhaka or sprawling Metropolis of New York or Sydney; the mind now craves the old green, the lost shades, the water and the music.

Why does she (the mind) want the old land back so quickly? Why cant she just let go and be happy in the shores of the new place on which she has planted herself? Why cant she accept the new season, the new music and learn to truly believe that in the new resides the old (Notuner majhey tumi puraton). Why does she want to get back not only the world that she lost at the age of 9; but also the world her mother lost at the age of 9.

Why, instead of discovering South pacific and Tasmania in December , she behaves like a migratory bird of northern winter, and fills up Singapore Airlines flights and gets back to that ancient land as a ritual act of transient return. Precisely which hormones in the brain trigger it.

As an unknown poet has written;

“ Oh my mind, in the theatre of this world  
Hardest it is to understand the mind of human beings”

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