Living Paradox in Riverine Bangladesh: Whiteheadian Perspectives on Ganga Devi and Khwaja Khijir

Naveeda Khan *Johns Hopkins University*

Abstract: We begin with the words of rural and riverine women from Bangladesh recalling the events of their children's deaths by drowning. These events are cast as the work of supernatural beings, specifically Ganga Devi and Khwaja Khijir, who compel the mothers into forgetfulness and entice the children to the water. Is this a disavowal of loss and responsibility? This article considers that the women, specifically those from northern Bangladesh, assert not only their understanding of the losses that they have suffered but also their changing relationship to the river and its changing nature through their evocations of mythological figures. Alongside the many experiences of the river, the article takes note of its experience as paradoxical, with paradoxicality serving as the occasion for the coming together of the mythological, the material, and the social. The article draws upon Alfred North Whitehead to interrelate the strata of myths and their permutations, with the women's experiences of the river, and the river as a physical entity, allowing us to explore how the women's expressions portend the changing climate.

Keywords: river, Bangladesh, Khidr, Ganga, paradox, A.N. Whitehead

Résumé : Cet article introduit les récits de femmes du Bangladesh fluvial et rural, qui racontent les circonstances de la mort par noyade de leurs enfants. Ces accidents sont interprétés comme étant l'œuvre d'êtres surnaturels, notamment Ganga Devi et Khwaja Khijir, qui poussent les mères à l'oubli et séduisent leurs enfants dans l'eau. Faut-il interpréter ces récits comme un désaveu? Cet article soutient que ces femmes – notamment celles du nord du Bangladesh – expriment, par l'évocation de figures mythologiques, leur compréhension de leur perte, ainsi que leur relation ambigüe à la rivière et à sa nature changeante. Leurs expériences de la rivière sont abordées comme étant paradoxales, le paradoxe permettant de réunir les ordres mythologique, matériel et social.

Mots-clés : rivière, Bangladesh, Khidr, Ganga, paradoxe, A.N. Whitehead.

Whitehead within the Riverine Context

In a village in the southeastern part of Bangladesh, a woman tells a researcher about her state of mind at the time of her son's death by drowning in a pond close to their homestead:

> *I thought about nothing, had no memory of anything. Now I know (boy's name) is not alive. That day I cooked with such attentiveness it was as though I was childless. After finishing, I remembered that I hadn't seen (child's name). The other day he came to me many times, he touched the wood and searched for fish to eat. That day he did not come and I did not even notice.* (Blum et al. 2009, 1723)

The research article describes how respondents subscribe to the idea that supernatural beings live in the water and seek continual sacrifices or appeasements, sending out enticements to people. Says another woman of her young daughter's drowning death:

> *She didn't die due to drowning. Evil took her to the water and killed her. If anyone digs a new pond they must give some rice, egg, turmeric, chira (rice concoction), nose ornaments, and coins to the pond. But we did not do it so Gongima became dissatisfied and wanted a human being in revenge.* (Blum et al. 2009, 1723)

And it is not only women in the southeastern part of Bangladesh who speak thus. I also heard such charges against Ganga Devi, as Gongima is also called, in the northern part of Bangladesh where I carried out research on the sand and silt bars called *char*s that regularly form and erode in the middle of the Jamuna River, the largest of the three major rivers in Bangladesh. And here she was not alone in bearing the blame. Her consort, Khwaja Khijir, also known as Khidr, was similarly considered to entice children to early watery deaths.

Bangladesh is on the largest delta of the world, the Ganges Delta, which empties into the Bay of Bengal. It is criss-crossed by rivers, ponds, ditches, embankments, and lakes and faces monsoon rains, floods, and cyclones. It is one of the most watery landscapes on earth with 7 percent of its surface under water all of the time and two-thirds under water some of the time. Consequently, most people live in some proximity to water, and, of course, those who live on chars live by definition on the water. Drowning deaths are prevalent, particularly among the young between the ages of one and five. Such deaths are largely attributed to the inadequate supervision of children. Efforts are underway to have crèches or even cribs available for young mothers, who bear most of the burden of housework in rural homesteads, rich and poor alike (Blum et al. 2009).

Despite the seemingly self-evident explanation for children's deaths by drowning – that is, the ready access to standing water and inadequate supervision – two aspects of the women's responses are surprising and worth reflecting upon. First, there is the insistence by women that they had fallen into a state of forgetfulness, even indifference, while their children were lured to their watery deaths. This is quite unlike the case of the shantytowns in Brazil in which Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1992) has shown how the high rates of child mortality were met by a cultivated indifference by mothers toward their deceased babies. For one, child mortality has reduced substantially in Bangladesh in the past two decades. Furthermore, maternal love and care for the child by caring for oneself and the baby is encouraged from the commencement of pregnancy (Blanchet 1984). While mothers may not be able to lavish attention on their children, there is in fact a cultural inhibition against showing such open and preferential treatment, mothers are always mindful of their children's needs (see also Trawick 1992).

In addition, the death of each child remains with the mother. While child mortality rates in the chars is undoubtedly higher than in the adjoining areas on account of the lack of medical services, the difficulty of movement because of non-existent infrastructure and the general poverty of the population, *chauras*, or those who live on the chars, mourn the loss of their children, even the ones they were not able to know or raise, marking such deaths with *milad*s or prayer gatherings that they can ill afford. So the idea that mothers fall into a state of indifference signals less a state of their distraction wrought by busy lives and more the fact that they were compelled to forget and that they were controlled by some presence. Their insistence endures in the face of criticism by their husbands and in-laws, and it is set apart from their understanding of the deaths of children by other means. For instance, if a child does not survive infancy, they are as likely to say that the child lacked an attachment to life as that the mother did not eat nutritiously when pregnant or did not feed the child nutritious food. Thus, the insistence that the children were lured by Ganga Devi, Khidr, or other figures to their drowning death seems to comprise a class of explanations onto itself, expressing the idea that such a death is not inevitable or accidental – it does not arise from within the child or due to the mother's irresponsibility – but, rather, that it is brought about through the action of external forces. Therefore, at least in this class of explanations, there is a very strong sense of being affected, not by God, the all-transcendent figure who acts upon all of humanity, but, rather, by forces only prevalent here and strongly associated with water.

The second noteworthy aspect of the women's explanations is that they blame Gongima, a Hindu deity, for the loss of their children. The surprise in this lies in the fact that the women are all Muslim and have had little or no contact with Hindu traditions since many Hindus left this region for India or elsewhere during the 1970s due to the persecution they encountered when Bangladesh was still a part of Pakistan (Jahan 1972). Others simply left because their villages eroded as the Jamuna River moved westward, and they never returned after their lands came back. Ganga Devi, as Gongima is also called, has a long history in Bengal as both a deity and, in her manifestation on earth, as a natural entity – a river – yet one is hard pressed to find any temples, rituals, or invocations of her in present-day Bangladesh (Darian 1978).

It is not as surprising that the women also blame Khwaja Khijir, also referred to as Khidr, because he is associated with the Islamic tradition and has a presence in other Muslim riverine communities, but the women's charge against him is still surprising because he has traditionally been seen to be a protective figure, not one who deals in death (Albinia 2010). Also surprising is that he is Ganga's consort, suggesting the need for some explanation as to how the two come to reach across two different traditions to be together. Syncretism, a common explanation (Roy 1984), is not entertained here because, as Richard Eaton (1996) and Tony Stewart (2001) have shown empirically in Bengal, Hinduism and Islam have never been combined to produce a third way.

Instead, conversion has happened through the seeking of equivalence between figures across the two traditions and then either the steady eclipse of one by the other or the insertion and encasement of entirely different traditions within another. Carlo Severi (2004) writing

on the Apache ghost dance in North America has further shown how two traditions may exist in parallel, without syncretism or even conversion, through a relationship of paradox. For example, when the Shaman-Messiah, who had come to lead the Apache ghost dance, claimed himself to be Jesus, he was not inserting himself into the religion of the Whites or producing a new syncretic form of Jesus or putting himself in a relationship of equivalence to Jesus, but, rather, he was saying: "If I am similar to you, then I am different." What makes this not simply a contradiction but a paradoxical statement is that "a logical link is established between two contradicting predicates" (820). Thus, for Ganga *and* Khidr to be invoked together in the context of drowning deaths requires some inquiry into the paradoxical relations between the two and the possibility that paradox emerges from the river waters.

How then do we understand this unusual situation in which women explain their forgetfulness and the deaths of their children as being caused by a goddess who is no longer animated in their social milieu, one who has no referent within their usual frameworks for understanding their lives, and by a mythic prophetic figure who is also on the wane within the local practices of Islam? The research study on child mortality and other such studies imply that this mode of explanation is a survival of the past, one steeped in superstition, and that given sufficient education on the rightful causes of drowning deaths, these women will be able to overcome the hold of this mode of thinking. In this article, I ask instead that we entertain the possibility that the women's expressions help us to understand the present as a palimpsest of prior forms of life, each a fragmentary reference opening into a stratum of past modes of being and their permutations. I ask also that these fragments not be treated as survivals of a past in which Ganga and Khidr were lodged in people's lives and imaginations but, rather, that the continued, now much-enfeebled, reference to them suggests a standing means by which to produce bridges to the future and to discern patterns within the swirl of uncertainty that is the future. Given that Ganga and Khidr are so strongly associated with water, specifically that of the river, I suggest that we stand to not only understand women's changing relationship to the river through following their relationship to Ganga and Khidr and the relationship between Ganga and Khidr but that we also stand to learn something of the river's own changing nature. The river's physical transformation is laid bare for us along this stratum of changes and exchanges.

When I suggest that we can see the river through the women's discourse, I am not saying that the river is available to our analysis through its representation in the women's discourse but, instead, that their discourse is waterlogged, suggesting their embeddedness in watery environments. How are we able to claim such an immediacy of expressivity without the mediation of cultural frameworks and mental categories that have come to be established as the *sine qua non* of representation? Alfred North Whitehead, the scientist/philosopher noted for his commitment to propounding a philosophy of process, is salient here in allowing us to get beyond the dualism of representation and unmediated immediacy to consider how cultural categories – or what he calls symbolism – and physical processes work together. It is important to sketch some basic tenets of his thought to show how he achieves an immediacy between culture and nature rather than the outmoded notions of environmental determinism – the presumption of the historical domination of culture over nature or the comingling of the two as natureculture that is the standing position within anthropology.

Here I follow Whitehead's (1979 [1929]) ontological principle articulated in *Process and Reality* that "'actual entities' – also termed 'actual occasions' – are the final real things of which the world is made up. There is no going behind actual entities to find something more real ... And these entities are drops of experience, complex and interdependent" (18). When these women speak in this way, they speak metaphysically (metaphysical is meant here in the sense of the supernatural), and, based on the ontological principle, any metaphysical explanation must incorporate actual entities and occasions or else they would be deemed inadequate and revised (13). In other words, the women's descriptions must attend to their own experiences and those they have had before them that are congealed within other actual entities and occasions that they make their own. Within Whitehead's framework, it is through experience that existence unfolds in the world, with the women experiencing the lure of propositions from the world, undergoing a series of feelings called prehensions, to arrive at a feeling of self-satisfaction or concresence. This process is called an actual occasion with the women being a composite of many such occasions, including the occasion of the deaths of their children and that of narrating their deaths.[1]

This is a very schematic snapshot of Whitehead, but even in its "basicness" it is interesting placed alongside the recent ontological turn within anthropology (Kohn 2015). Whitehead would seem to support the idea of multiple worlds – in this case, of the women and children from the men and the elderly (see de Pina-Cabral 2014a, 2014b; Strathern 2006), in so far as the women's

prehensions align them into a nexus or society among themselves to the exclusion of those who do not have similar prehensions (Halewood 2014). However, the purity of separateness is not tenable within Whitehead as the women only seem to form a society with other women along certain lines of experience and expressions, while being in societies with children, men, and the elderly along other lines and, as I hope to show, in societies with prophets and goddesses and with silt and water. Whitehead thus presents a picture of us all as participants of many societies at once but within one world.[2] Note also that Whitehead is not speaking of humans or beings in their full consciousness, but, rather, he is attempting a descriptive apparatus that may be equally applied to a squirrel or an electron.

To return to my initial provocation, when the women speak about the presence of supernatural beings and their hold upon the women and children, they are expressing their watery environment. However, Whitehead cautions, while we may begin with their verbal expression, we must beware that language is problematic in that words are vague and ill-defined. We cannot go from their expression to how the world draws the women in. I read Whitehead as suggesting that while verbal expressions comprise both objective content and subjective form, those of religious or metaphysical nature such as the women's demand closer attention to the subjective form or the emotive feelings they express and arouse in the speaker and the hearer. What this means in a Whiteheadian framework is that the women's verbal expressions speak more to enduring eternal objects – another order of things in addition to actual objects or occasions – than to their immediate reality, but which are also active within the women's unfolding existence and actual occasions.

The feelings associated with eternal objects are more conceptual than physical feelings, suggesting that the women's relationship to the riverine environment, at least in this instance, is more determined by history, tradition, religion, and culture than with their physical responses to it. Thus, far from being an error in judgment, the emplacement of the supernatural being at the site of their children's watery deaths speaks to the women drawing upon mythology as a long-standing resource. It is therefore this closeness of eternal objects with actual occasions that makes it possible for us to move in this article from the women's verbal expressions of their mythological endurances, to the actual occasions of the feelings and experiences of the riverine environment, toward the particular occasion of the river as a physical entity, and back again.

I find this approach to the women's expressions to be more productive than other approaches within environmental studies and anthropology, in which women's expressions may be read as either risk perception (Amoore 2013; Douglas and Wildavsky 1983) or danger behaviour (Steiner 2013 [1956]). The modern language of risk brings in a presumption of calculative logics at work within the women's perceptions, and the older language of danger behaviour assumes clearly articulated taboos. These are overly deterministic, whereas expressions and referent experiences may be more inchoate and indeterminate. While the supernatural being may be a figuration of fear and dread, to focus on fear alone is to reduce the range of emotions, states, and actions to which the figure also provides access.

While I pursue folklore and mythology in this article by studying the changing permutations of the figure(s) of the supernatural, I do so somewhat differently than the usual studies in which folklore and myths are interesting only in themselves and in what they have to say about the structure of thought or the evolution of ideas, thus putting a wedge between being and the world.[3] A Whiteheadian informed perspective is careful not to perpetuate the fallacy of thinking that we are speaking of a sole tradition, a corporeal experience, a single event, or a simple location when speaking of actual occasions and eternal objects. It insists upon maintaining a continuous loop of interpretation through being and the world.

In what follows, I track the various permutations of supernatural beings introduced to us by the women, specifically the figures of Ganga and Khidr, across space and time, to show how it is paradox, other than risk, danger, or fear, that comes to be privileged, experienced, and inflected within the watery environments and riverine lives in the Jamuna. Paradox is, to remind the reader of Carlo Severi's (2004, 820) words, "a logical link … established between two contradicting predicates." However, here paradox is situated in the world, as a lure from the world, rather than housed within individual thought or psyche. To feel and remark on paradox is to note nature's working through one. This feeling – the tug of paradox – is productive in so far as it suggests both an openness to one's environment as well as the internal recursion and bifurcation of paradox within selves and societies. In other words, the feeling of paradox makes manifest a realm of experiences of the river that we cannot get at otherwise and that constitutes a part of the story of water that we need to tell in the face of its ongoing abstraction as a mere resource (Hastrup and Rubow 2014).

Thus, an important claim of this article is that paradox serves as the occasion for the togetherness of the mythological, the physical, and the social. Among some of the paradoxes we encounter as ordinary and everyday are those that sustain the relationship of Ganga and Khidr and that permute through Khidr but that also speak to people's experiences of the river and the truths of the river itself – such as, if one is dead one is immortal; if one is separate from an other, one is immersed in the other; in cruelty there is mercy, in stillness there is movement – until we arrive at what I feel to be the portentous element within the women's expressions that speaks to the possible future of the river within the context of the changing climate, notably in its forgetting there is remembering.

Ganga Ma and Khwaja Khijir: The Event of Paradox

As noted above, the supernatural being that the women in southeastern Bangladesh refer to as Gongima is also called Ganga Ma or Ganga Devi in other parts of Bangladesh, the appellation for the personification of the sacred River Ganges. She is often pictured as a beautiful woman sitting astride a crocodile or fish or an amalgamation of both known as Makara.[4] The most persistent representation of her that I came across was with Khwaja Khijir or Khidr, also mentioned above, within the context of a festival called Bera Bhasan. Khidr is often pictured as a white bearded man standing astride a fish. The twinning of the two provides insight into the way in which Islam found footing alongside Hinduism in Bengal.

During one of my early stays on a char within the Jamuna River, where I carried out my work, I accompanied a young male employee of the non-governmental organisation (NGO) that was hosting me on his weekly visit with one of his groups. These chars are geophysically made up of the sedimentation brought down by the river waters. The sediment is deposited along various filaments of the braided river, either alongside existing land or in island formations, and can exist anywhere between 3 and 15 years on average (Environment and Geographical Information Systems 2000; Islam 2010). Their relative temporariness is provided as the explanation for why chars are not well serviced by the Bangladeshi government. There is almost no infrastructure such as roads, bridges, water supply, and electricity grids. The people who live on them are either among the landless poor who cannot afford to live on the mainland, or those who claim that the chars house their villages and properties returned from the river. While farming and fishing are the main occupations on the chars, men living on them must seek work in other industries (such as brick making, weaving, construction) outside of these areas to sustain an annual living. Women, if they work outside of their homesteads, may take to cutting roads or working in Bangladesh's extensive garment industry. Otherwise, they are busy at home collecting water, cooking food, washing clothes and dishes, sweeping the household, and tending to their children, their gardens, and their animals. While NGOs target precisely this income group, known as the "hardcore poor," and provide them with microcredit loans and other provisions, the larger, more mainstream NGOs are leery of loaning to chauras who are considered to be at a risk for flight as they are prone to moving because of the vulnerability of their homes and lands to erosion and floods. This vulnerability is often read back upon their character, marking them as untrustworthy and immoral. However, I noted a much stronger streak of social conservatism within chars than in the villages on the mainland in that women have a very limited sphere of movement. Even if they go to cut earth, they travel in groups, and when they return they again restrict themselves to their households and immediate neighbours. At the same time, there is a more relaxed attitude toward illegal activities that are marked as immoral, such as drug use and gambling by the men and even occasional acts of violence. This combination of social conservatism and the acceptance of immoral behaviour is an indication of the ordinary ways in which gendered contradictions are manifest and managed within chaura lives.

The NGO hosting me was very local, created by those who are from char backgrounds, who know well the local histories and networks of people, and who can track down debtors through these links. Furthermore, they have in place mandatory savings for their members that are treated as collateral against loans. My guide, the young man from the NGO, was there to collect weekly payments on microcredit loans made by his NGO to these group members as well as their savings. After completing these duties, he carried out a short workshop on disaster preparedness, a central mode by which to render the chaura population more resilient to their environment but one with ambiguous effects (Khan 2014).

This group was well suited to my interest in studying how people cope with erosion as they had recently lost a large part of their village to the ravages of the river and were expecting to lose all of it soon, leaving them no choice but to move elsewhere. I found the group to be comprised of tightly knit family members who were proud of their *bongsho* (patrilineality) and village (patrilocality). Although they were moving less than

half a mile away to a place we could see with our naked eyes, they considered themselves to be moving to *bidesh* or foreign lands, suggesting how tightly drawn were the lines of belonging and order, with disorder prevailing outside of them.

In the context of being asked what they do to prepare for erosion and other natural disasters upon their lives, the women faithfully repeated the words of advice that they had just received from the young NGO worker. They were expected to have set aside money, food staples, and a portable mud stove should they need to move. At the same time, they recalled a childhood festival the Bera (raft) Bhashan (sending out), in which in a day in *pous* (January), after the monsoon and harvest seasons, they would float large leaves of the banana tree bedecked with flowers and sweets to expiate Ganga Devi and Khwaja Khijir. They insisted that it was always done for the two of them and not for one alone. They giggled, recalling the silly songs they sang about the upcoming nuptials as they pushed off their makeshift rafts:

Dol dol doloni
Ranga Mathayey Tchironi
Bor Ashbey Akhoni
Niye Jabey Tokhoni

Swing Swing Swing
A comb through your bright head
Your groom is coming at any moment
He will take you right away

It seemed that these festivals were no longer ongoing in the silt island, although the festival of Bera Bhashan is still held in different parts of northeastern Bangladesh, where elaborate rafts are constructed with the trunks of banana trees, richly decorated and set afloat amid much singing and fanfare (Sayidur 1991). However, these are much reduced in pageantry from sixteenth-century Mughal India, which saw an efflorescence of the festival as the Arab Muslim mythical figure of Khidr (the Green One), first introduced into Bengal in the thirteenth century, came to hold his own against the pantheon of Hindu gods and goddesses, of whom Ganga Devi was one (Haque 1995 [1975]). In the Mughal period, the festival was less about the expiation of Ganga or Khwaja (Lord), as Khidr came to be called in Bengal, and more a marking of the confluence of maritime and agrarian lives and the temporalities of trade, fishing, and harvest through an invocation of Khidr as the protector of all those who plied the waters (Mukherjee 2008).

Khidr had come to this appellation through an earlier series of associations with Alexander the Great's cook, who had imbibed the water of life rather than give it to Alexander, thereby gaining immortality; and within the Christian tradition, in the stories of the Prophet Elias or Elijah (Longworth Dames 2013). Within India, he was the equivalent of the Vedic god Varuna, the god of the waters and the lawgiver to the underwater world (Haque 1995 [1975]). While it was Khidr who was the exclusive patron saint of the festival of Bera Bhashan in the sixteenth century, folklorists note the introduction of other figures upon the stage of the raft by the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and a shift in meaning of the festival from an invocation of Khidr's protection to appeasing him and other malevolent beings who would do humans harm (Sayidur 1991).

Among the songs that used to be sung during Bera Bhashan was a *panchali* or the ballad of Ganga Devi's desire to marry Khwaja Khijir. This song was played with the child at one's breast, whom the woman loves and desires but who bitterly disappoints. I find a certain resonance here with the figure of the drowned child. In the ballad Khwaja and Madar are two orphans who grow up to become famous *pir*s or sages. This biography is patterned on the introduction of Islam into Bengal through individual saintly figures and the competition with figures in contending traditions (Eaton 1996). Khwaja acquires sovereignty of the waters. Ganga, who is the sacred manifestation of a river, seethes, presumably at his intrusion into her domain. She demands that Khwaja marry her because she is no longer a maiden. Khwaja demurs, saying that as a *fakir* or dervish he cannot marry. Ganga takes it upon herself to trick him into marrying her and goes through many guises before deciding on a particular one of herself as a beautiful young woman in a colourful sari. As she goes in search of Khwaja, she finds a child playing in the dust. When she asks after the child's parents, she learns that he is an orphan, or else why would he be found on the ground and not in his mother's lap? She feels such pity for the child that she takes him upon her lap and feeds him milk from her breasts. The child transforms into Khwaja. Ganga is so incensed that she hurls him to the ground, thus killing him, while she sheds tears of shame and regret. However, being a *zinda pir* or immortal, Khwaja revives, and, with him, Ganga's desires are renewed. The ballad ends with the promise that Ganga will marry Khwaja on the Day of Judgment, when everyone will be assembled on the Maidan-e Hashor, the Great Plain – the implication being that the entire Muslim community will witness this union, and every child will be a cherished guest at the wedding. Just as in the little ditty that the women group members would sing as young girls during Bera Bhashan, Ganga Devi

lives in anticipation of her groom's imminent arrival. And in one particular interpretation, it is said that it is the children who have died early deaths who will be welcomed by Khwaja Khijir and Ganga Devi at their marriage celebrations (Sayidur 1991).

Here I note the first element of paradox that attends to lives in the chars: that death by water – the tragic short-circuiting of a young life – is an invitation to a joyous celebration of union. Before I consider the particular knot of this paradox with material life on the chars, I want to consider further how these attenuated references to once-vibrant ritual practices opens us to the wider topography of Hindu mythological tales. This allows us to speculate about how Khidr comes to be twinned with Ganga, what Ganga introduces into the mix as both a mythic figure and a river, and how her inclusion deepens the paradox of death by water.

In one of the tales in the Mahabharata, the Sanskrit epic poem written between the years 540 and 300 BCE, Ganga is wedded to King Shantanu, who is disallowed from questioning her actions.[5] As we will later see, this is how Khidr is linked to the Prophet Moses within the Islamic tradition, as one who cannot be questioned, whose actions have to be borne without challenge or one risks losing a guide to divine knowledge. As Ganga births children, she drowns them one by one in the river, an action which bears an inverse relation to the drowning deaths of children in the women's stories in which the children are enticed to the water. Ganga's purpose for killing her children, as she explains to the silent but suffering Shantanu is to spare the children the pain of mortality. Shantanu stops her from killing the eighth child, who grows up to acquire the title of Bhishma or the immortal one and to whose immortal and chaste status Khidr bears a structural resemblance. The influence of this story upon the much later ballad of the joyous union of Khidr and Ganga in Maidan-e Hashor is to further transvalue the ascension to immortal life through death over a life haunted by mortality, rendering the paradoxical twinning of death with joyous celebration, and death with immortality.[6]

This paradox finds its mundane equivalent in the entwinement of the pleasure and the threat of being in water within everyday life. In *Sand and Water*, a beautiful and meditative documentary on lives on the Jamuna chars, the filmmaker Shaheen Dil-Riaz (2004) takes a few moments in the film to focus on young children playing in the water that captures well the paradoxes of tragedy and joy, of pleasure and threat. Among the children playing in the water, one child, perhaps eight years of age, is evidently the caretaker of two other children, perhaps five and two. She takes them ashore, putting them securely on the land before diving back to play with her friends. The two year old is bereft and immediately dives into the water. The five year old jumps in struggling to bring the youngest back. The eight year old must have caught sight of what was happening as one can hear her yelping and thrashing off screen as she reaches her two wards. She struggles with the two and drags them out of the water, with the two year old holding on with obvious delight.

The threat menacing this image recalls the words of the women group members who told me about Bera Bhashan from their childhood and the waning of this festival in the chars. Among them, Sonekha remembered a time when water was not so plentiful as it is today, just a pump of the tube well handle away. This must have been before the early 1970s when tube wells first became commonplace in Bangladesh. It was her *boyu kaal* (life as a young bride) when she had to bring water from far away wells and rivers in order to help her mother-in-law in household chores. When they were short of water and there would be only a cup or so left, she would be tempted to throw some lentils into it to wash the food so as to put to use the last bit of precious water. However, her mother-in-law would stop her, warning that throwing in the lentils was presaging the drowning of her children and would make her throw away the remaining water.

Was not using the remaining water an expiation of the water's vengeful qualities? In actuality, it was the lentils in the water that drew the mother-in-law's horror, as the lentils in the water were a figuration of drowning children, a miniature of helpless bodies in water and of the distracted purposiveness of the mother in putting them there in the first place. In another instance, I heard the women of a household blame a neighbour for the drowning deaths of her three sons because she had not taught them to swim as babies. This condemnation was followed up by saying that she had gone so far as to feed them milk from a feeder rather than from her breasts. These were both taken as signs not only of her overindulgence but also of forgetting her place in the world – of course at the bottom of the social hierarchy for being a chaura but, simultaneously, in the middle of the river. In their article, Blum et al. (2009) explain that women were customarily not allowed to attempt to save their drowning children for fear of becoming bewitched. The understanding was that the body was already enchanted and would contaminate them. Perhaps the fear was that the mother would be so contaminated that

she would attempt to drown her child, deepening the association of mothering with murderous instincts.

However, Sonekha laughed; nobody believes such *hastor* or sayings anymore. Everybody shrugged and laughed asking who would protect them now from the clutches of Ganga Ma and Khwaja Khijir, suggesting either a scepticism toward the efficacy of such ritual practices or an awareness of their radical vulnerability to their environs and psyches.

Khidr as Varuna/Shiva and/or Khidr as Ganga

While such paradox cannot be too far from the lives of the poor in Bangladesh, the fact that Khidr appears in many instances within the chars suggests that his nature is paradoxical and that it is in his nature to proliferate paradoxes. Earlier I mentioned that folklorists consider him to have become the structural equivalent of the Vedic god Varuna in the Bengal context (Haque 1995 [1975]). Varuna is interesting because he has a dual nature.[7] As the god of the waters, he rules through caprice, requiring sacrifices to appease him. At the same time, he rules through law as the lawgiver to the watery underworld. The expiation of Khidr in the ritual of Bera Bhashan speaks to his capricious nature, while another account of him in the chars speaks to the fact that he is less lawgiver, since within the Muslim context only God gives law and the prophets bring law to the world, and more the upholder of God's law underwater. As such, he bears Varuna's dual nature. An elderly chaura in Dil-Riaz's (2004) documentary film best articulates this second aspect of Khidr's nature:

> *When I was a child I closely observed erosion. Before erosion begins, the water bubbles up like in a rice pot. Churning water pounds against the riverbank. The current becomes very strong. The waves create whirlpools next to the shore. Big chunks of earth crash into the water and are carried away. Our forefathers said that deep in the water lives the Prophet Khwaja Khijir. He has many laborers. They dig under the soil below until big chunks fall down from above. We haven't seen it ourselves but it is really true. This lord of the water exists and so do his servants. In the winter months they measure how much earth they want to break away in the coming year. And when the monsoon floods come they fall upon the bank again.*

In another instance of this story, I was told that Khidr only does this because God has commanded him. He measures and erodes only as much land as is required to be given in taxes to God – hence his need for links and labourers for careful measuring. These point to the long-standing culture of land measurement for the settlement and resettlement of chars as they emerge and erode into the river waters as well as the colonial practice of taxation on land. However, it also points to the encompassment of daily lives by the word of God. Khidr is bound to His word, and through this relationship, we explore the specific nature of the paradox that the Arab Muslim Khidr brings to this watery milieu. For a less Vedic, later Brahmanic association, Khidr is also linked with the Nath traditions through the founding figure, Matseyendranath, who was said to have been thrown into the ocean by his parents and swallowed by a fish. There he stayed for many years until he heard Shiva's secret advice on the practice of yoga to Parvati and by means of which Matseyendranath became enlightened.[8] Thus, through the Nath tradition, Khidr acquires another duality, that of the creativity and destructiveness of Shiva.

Before we consider the Islamic figuration of Khidr and the paradoxes therein, I want to point to the fact that the structural equivalence between the Vedic deity Varuna and Khidr or between Shiva and Khidr only yields Khidr a dual nature, whereas the involuted relationship between Khidr and Ganga is perhaps generative of further theorisations of the inflexion between Islam and Hinduism in Bengal. This involution produces a Khidr akin to Ganga as the one whose actions cannot be questioned and as one begotten by Ganga in his congruence to Bhishma in the story from the Mahabharata, not only violently weaned at her breast but also sworn to be her consort in the ballad from Bengal. However, rather than assume a structural equivalence between Khidr and Ganga toward his overtaking of her, as Richard Eaton (1996) and Muhammad Haque (1975) might suggest, could one posit a relationship of paradox between them of the kind Carlo Severi (2004) suggests, but a little differently posed, as in: "If I am separate from you, I am in you"? I would further speculate that it is this relationship to Ganga that allows Khidr to have both mythological figurations and to be naturalised as a part of the physical landscape, as being literally within the Ganga in her manifestation as a river. As Steven Darian (1978) writes about Ganga in Bengal and Bangladesh, within the Marufati, Murshidi, and Baul mystical poetry and songs, Ganga is memorialised not as a divine figure but, simply, as a river with a contradictory nature, an archetype for all other rivers. Might then Khidr's separateness from her introduce new strains and tendencies within the river?

Islamic and Greek Prefiguration of Paradox

Although Khidr finds no explicit mention within the Qur'an, his presence has long been sensed in the eighteenth *sura* or verse, which is called *Sura Al-Kahf* (*The Cave*) (Brown 1983; Netton 1992; Omar 1993). The figure of Khidr drawn from this sura fits best that of the spiritual guide within Sufi Islam. In the events recounted in the Qur'anic verses, the Prophet Moses goes in search of the point at which two seas meet. The dried fish that he takes along with him as his meal miraculously regain life and swim away at a location where Moses finds, in God's words in translation, "one of our servants, whom we blessed with mercy, and bestowed upon him from our own knowledge." Moses requests this person, presumably Khidr, to allow Moses to travel with him so that he may learn from Khidr. To this statement, the latter replies: "You cannot stand to be with me. How can you stand that which you cannot comprehend?" Moses promises not to question Khidr's motives.

During the course of his journey alongside this mysterious person, Moses witnesses Khidr carry out inexplicable acts that fly in the face of mercy and wisdom, the very qualities bestowed on Moses by God (Omar 2010). Khidr hacks a hole in the boat of a poor man who had just provided them passage. This seemingly vindictive act is followed by an even more aberrant one of Khidr taking the life of a young boy playing among his mates. Finally, Moses witnesses Khidr restore the crumbling wall of a house whose inhabitants had just turned the two away without providing them food or refuge.

When Moses can no longer bear the injustice and cruelty of what he is witnessing, he demands an explanation from Khidr. Khidr derides him for his impatience, saying that Moses knows only how to act on the word of the law, betraying his lack of farsightedness and mystical intuition. Nonetheless, he provides Moses the explanations he seeks before dismissing him (Omar 1993). Khidr explains that the boat was best temporarily put out of operation so that it could escape the clutches of an unjust king who was impounding the boats of his subjects. The poor man who had given them passage would not have been able to survive if he had permanently lost his boat. The boy was best killed, as he was going to grow up to perpetrate many evils and bring unhappiness to his parents. While they might grieve him now, they would be rewarded with better offspring. The wall was best repaired so that it might continue to safeguard the treasure hidden within it destined for two young wards of the household when they came of age. If it were found before its time, their greedy guardians would surely have squandered their inheritance.

Although in each of these instances, Khidr has foreknowledge of what is to come and acts accordingly, his actions are inscrutable to Moses. And when Moses is told to accompany Khidr unquestioningly, their relationship, however short lasting, exemplifies for all times that between Sufi initiates and their spiritual guides. Within the history of Sufism, Khidr comes to be one of the few who can initiate people to mystical knowledge by appearing to them in dream or mystical illumination, without the intercession of a living master or the texts of masters (Omar 2010). As a figure close to God, Khidr enables not just direct access to divine knowledge but also the experience of theophany, a witness to God here robing Khidr in his divine attributes and a paradoxical retort to the problem of theodicy; the question as to why a benign God allows evil: "In cruelty there is mercy" (Netton 1992).

Beside his figuration as spiritual guide, Khidr appears in other personas within Islam, in dreams and visions, in solitary form or intermingled with others, and prophesising, giving advice, or communicating dictates (Longworth Dames 2013). These figurations and personas also dissolve. For instance, in the Qur'anic story presented above, Khidr comes as a vessel of God's knowledge, offering boons and dealing death, but by the time this story is retold within the poetry of Muhammad Iqbal, he is less a vessel and more an aspect of physical movement, a tendency of time, and a threshold across two conditions, naturalised as Ganga Devi is naturalised as a river. Iqbal (2003 [1924]), the "Poet of the East" who was born in the Punjab, the land of five rivers with which Bangladesh was once affiliated in undivided India and later in Pakistan, writes of interrogating Khidr in the poem titled "Khidr the Guide" in *Bang-i Dara* (*Call of the Road*), published in 1924:

> To your world-ranging eye is visible the storm
> Whose fury yet lies in tranquil sleep under the sea
>
> That innocent life – that poor man's boat – that wall of the orphan
>
> Taught Moses' wisdom to stand before yours wonderingly.

Khidr's prescience is to be able to see what furies lie beneath calm surfaces and to alight upon them toward intensifying them. Iqbal reads Khidr's actions as interventions into the eddies of time, as wresting the truth of life from time:

> You shun abodes, for desert-roaming, for ways that know.
>
> No day or night, from yesterdays and to-morrows free
>
> – What is the riddle of life?

As in the Qur'an, this Khidr also does not disappoint. He readily replies to this riddle:

> Constant circulation makes the cup of life more durable
>
> O Ignorant One! This is the very secret of life's immortality.

Thus, only in movement is life possible. And the perception and appreciation of movement in the midst of apparent stillness, including death, is Khidr's special attribute (see also Omar 2004).

When I ask the chaura men who are often to be found on the banks of the river, sitting and watching the waters, what they see, they point to the apparent calm surface of the river. They alert me to the *pakh* or eyes that promise whirls of water under the surface, hinting at the treachery of navigating these waters. So it is that many a boat capsizes when it is caught in these eddies, or when it approaches the riverbank, where the current is sometimes most ferocious, creating deeper ditches along the banks than in the middle of the river.

Women are very rarely seen sitting by the river. Instead, they are busy rushing to the water to bathe themselves and their children and washing their clothes and dishes. However, attending to the way they walk, I notice that their feet are almost always flayed, their toes gripping the soil as they walk. So instead of asking them what they see, I ask why they walk this way. They laugh and say that it is because while the land may appear more solid than water, it is more treacherous, constantly slipping away from under their feet. Prosaically, the soil in the char does have a sandy quality and requires a fierce grip if one is to move quickly across it. While Khidr and his consort draw our attention to the entwinement of tragedy and joy, the pleasure and threat in water, the dissolve of one in the other, Khidr, in his quality of movement in stillness and of threshold connecting contrasts, directs our attention to the continual motion of sediment and its transition from land, to water, and back to land again.

Paradox in the Pathways of the Char?

The Muslim Arab Khidr who made an entry into Bengal in the thirteenth century had settled down as a khwaja/nobi/pir/dervish with a Hindu goddess as his consort. A self-described lover of Khidr in the char, a well-kempt man for these parts, who was dressed in white garb with a bright green turban atop his head of oiled coils of hair, provided me two sermons on Khidr. These suggested how a Qur'anic version of Khidr was being newly taken up in the chars, providing another perspective on the women's association of Khidr with Gongima. Khidr's lover had heard these sermons from his spiritual guide, a locally famed pir of Sabri Chistiya affiliation named Maulana Nechari. These are his recollections of the maulana's sermons which describe Khidr in his Qur'anic aspect as guide to the Sufi knowledge of the invisible:

> A man goes on a journey with Khidr as he wants Khidr to open his inner eye. Khidr bids him to go to the nearest market to seek out the only man there. He wonders what Khidr means as men belong to markets and wouldn't they be there in plentiful? But when he gets to the market he finds that it is crowded with dogs, dogs barking at other dogs, dogs conducting the business of buying and selling and so on. He races around the market until, finally, he sees a man. He approaches the man and inquires after him. The man is grumpy in his answers but says that he is unafraid to give bold answers as he has nothing to fear, for he has divided up his wealth carefully to give one third to charity, one third to his family, keeping one third for himself (this being the usual formula for *zakat* or charity). So in meeting this man, the first man realises that Khidr had indeed given him the inner eye to make the real man visible to him.
>
> A child wants to pursue higher education to become a religious scholar. His family, particularly his father, is cruel to him, forcing him to tend their farm animals. He weeps to his mother who directs him to go sit on the road. There he encounters a person like no other, green in dress with a green turban and flashing green eyes, who asks him what he seeks. When he tells of his aspiration to pursue religious training, the man shows him the road to a Sufi lodge in India where he can get an education. His mother identifies the man in green as Khidr and sends him out into the night to pursue his studies. However, life in the lodge is not easy. He is again bound to a situation of tending cows and goats. When he wearies of ever learning anything, the head teacher bids him to teach his master class. He is too ashamed as he knows nothing but the teacher draws him to his chest and in so doing transforms him into a scholar. He is henceforth able to teach and so returns home.

These sermons, which bear structural resemblances to the Qur'anic figuration of Khidr as a Sufi guide, may be an indication of the onset of Islamicisation in northern Bangladesh. Yet there has always been an attraction to the reformist zeal within Islam in these parts (Choudhury 2001). In addition, the sermons may

be making visible or rationalising the long-standing importance of esoteric or *marufati* knowledge that is also intrinsic to these parts (Hatley 2007). This too is nothing new. Curiously, however, although the sermons showcase guidance that comes unexpectedly, through self-revelation, and the working of miracles, paradox is in short order within them. It may be because Khidr is so resolutely male in these expressions, not capricious like Varuna, a conscientious devotee of God undertaking His lawful destruction for Him, or a child on the lap of Ganga. And in these sermons he is only ever on dry land, secure in its identity as the market place or the road to the Sufi lodge in India. If previously it was Khidr who inducted paradox into the chars, drawing out the paradoxical nature of living with water, it now appears that it may have been Ganga or the women all along, those living on uncertain grounds, who intensified these qualities within Khidr. And so continues the loop of interpretation between beings and the world, those who draw paradox in, but also make it the preserve of the feminine.

Conclusion

I began by describing puzzling ethnographic encounters with women who had lost their children to drowning deaths. They blamed the deaths of their children on the evil of Gongima. There was no mention of Khidr. The women group members in the char spoke of Khidr in the past tense, as one who they used to invoke during Bera Bhashan but not since this festival had lapsed. In only a few places in Bangladesh is it undertaken by specific families, but this too may likely pass. Instead, the fear that was on the rise was that women were to be blamed for the deaths of their children, for wishing, willing, and participating in the deaths. The elderly man in *Sand and Water* recounted that it was his elders who had told him about this prophet who lives under the water, but he had never seen such a prophet for himself and could give no guarantee of Khidr's existence other than to point to the annual loss of land to erosion.

When I directly ask more women about Khidr, they profess not to know anything, not in the way that they know about Manik pir, a figure associated with the care of cows. It is worth noting that cows have made a new entry into the lives of the chauras, specifically for those women who tend to them in their homesteads. If the women recall a watery figure at all, they speak of Mayicha Dayo, a scaly being who lusts after fish. His name literally translates as "Give Me Fish." He rolls onto fishing boats to lie next to fishermen whispering his entreaties in his ghastly, unearthly, watery voice or he creeps as far as he can onto land to extend the stub of a limb to women to ask them for a share of the fish they are cooking, suggesting a different kind of haunting by lost children. And if there are sites in the landscape that are scary, it is not for their association with Ganga or Gongima but, rather, with Kali, for having once been a Kalighat, a temple of Kali, a goddess more readily associated with death or the consumptive element of life.

I was puzzled since Khidr ramifies in so many directions across time and space from the many expressions and gestures, however fleeting, that I had collected from the char. I asked the oldest woman I know, one who usually has many fantastical stories to tell about possessions by *jinn* – God's creations of fire – of men taken to the land of fairies and of Mayicha Dayo, what has become of Khidr? "He comes from the Book [a reference to the Qur'an] and that is where he lives. We common folk don't have the book knowledge or courage to call on him." So it would seem that all the while I was sensing his presence in the char he was ebbing away. Or it may be that he had ebbed a while ago, but his luminosity was only just fading.

If I am correct in pursuing a Whiteheadian perspective on Ganga and Khidr in the chars, this waning suggests something about the women's actual occasions. We have to tread carefully here because we cannot assume a one-to-one correspondence between verbal expressions and empirical reality. The women's actual occasions cannot be reduced to mere spurs to change metaphysical explanations or their narratives as a neutral reflection of their experiences. But if we pursue the element of paradox as a lure from the world, then it would seem that the world does not extend this lure as readily within the women's daily lives as it once did; and that they no longer enliven this lure through their ritual practices, invocations, and remembrances of Ganga and Khidr. And if we previously tracked this lure of paradox to draw out the diverse experiences of watery landscapes and riverine lives and the river's truth for itself, then perhaps water is not as threatening or as perplexing as it once was. I remember the amusement with which my research project was greeted when I first showed up at the chars. As I related that I was interested in finding out what it is to live on a river, everyone told me I had missed the river in its fierce persona: "It is now tame. It no longer roars." Perhaps with the ebbing of the enigmatic and the paradox-producing Khidr, we have a hint of the foresight among the chauras that the river will be no more? Could its demise also augur the passing of a known world?

Richard Warrick and Qazi Ahmad (1996) are among those who prognosticate the demise of the Jamuna River

in Bangladesh. They make the observation that the Jamuna River has already gone from being a perennial river to being a seasonal one. As glaciers melt up river, there will be a gush of waters through the Jamuna, but this will be for a limited period, and after that there will be no more snow melt to feed its flow. Even as the Jamuna changes its nature, Susan Crate and Mark Nuttal (2009) have shown that environmental change manifesting climatic changes do not simply impact existing forms of life in obvious ways but, rather, are threat multipliers. In other words, climate change ramifies in many directions. I have thus far claimed that the waning of Khidr in the women's expressions tracks the ebbing of the presence of the river in their lives and of the river's own diminution as a physical entity. It is my further claim that climate change also ramifies through the women's modes of thinking and expressing. In a recent article discussing the difficulties of integrating social science with climate change, Francis Moore, Justin Mankin, and Austin Becker (2015) remark on social sciences' discomfort toward the predictive bent of climate science and of its movement between simulation and the real. They resort to the position that climate science has to move down in scale to strengthen its generalisations. In so doing, they miss the opportunity to show how social science may attend better to the predictive nature of climate science if it is pointed out that their own interlocutors are given to making such predictions. While I cannot say if the women's words speak the truth of the eventuality of the demise of the Jamuna from a climate science perspective, I hope to have shown how environmental changes ramified in the direction of women's changing relationship to standing myths, how their mythic and figurative speech provide a sense of the multiplication and even transformation of threats in this milieu, and of how such speech may be given to portending through their action of forgetting. At the same time, given the centrality of paradox to Ganga's and Khidr's mutual modes of being, I wonder if this forgetting is a kind of remembering; if in being forgotten, the river is remembered and if in being remembered, it may yet be re-birthed?

Naveeda Khan, *Associate Professor, Department of Anthropology, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD. E-mail: nkhan5@jhu.edu.*

Notes

1 It is important to note that for Alfred Whitehead (1959 [1927]) all experience is emotional, with cognition and consciousness coming later, if it comes at all. Furthermore, he claims that for a proposition or lure from the world to come to constitute an object to the subject or actual occasion of the women, it must be apprehended emotionally, it must come to its fullest attainment as emotion and that this self-unity is the feeling of self-enjoyment or satisfaction. In other words, he is not referring to actual emotions, and in using him, I am not intimating that the women come to enjoy their expressions of the explanation that they give of their children's drowning deaths but that there is a entire process, its emergence, its becoming, its perishing, and its subsequent being for other processes that is enacted by the women's expressions and that make their expressions an actual occasion for them – one looped through the world rather than standing apart from, and commenting on, the world. See also Whitehead's (1967 [1933]) *Adventure of Ideas*. I thank Steven Shaviro for directing my attention to this source and to Whitehead's *Symbolism* in support of the arguments I am attempting here.

2 The presumption within Whitehead is that of one world, one of functional activity, in which everything affects everything else with these impingements being the occasions of experiences (see Whitehead 1959 [1927]). Perhaps this view of the world veers too much in the direction of what William Connolly (n.d.) has called pan-psychism, but I think this critique rests upon whether one has a maximal or minimal definition of experience. Having a minimal definition as I do would not obviate the human capacity to have complex experiences but would not make these experiences unique to humans alone, thus releasing them from the burden of being the sole exemplar of higher level consciousness or rather only capable of such. It would allow humans to be expressive of various levels of ambiguity, indistinction, and confusion, making these also constitutive aspects of our experiences. In *Symbolism*, Whitehead writes about those things that we sense to exert control on us: "But for all their vagueness, for all their lack of definition, these controlling presences, these sources of power, these things with an inner life, with their own richness of content, these beings, with the destiny of the world hidden in their natures, are what we want to know about" (Whitehead 1959 [1927], 57). What I hope to achieve in my explorations of these women's expressions is to show how fragments of a possible shared past with Hindus, now lived in ignorance of that past, in the ruins of once robust myths, also provides the opportunity to see how the women sense controlling presences in their lives and to see, again in Whitehead's words, "descriptions of human experience factors which also enter into the descriptions of less specialised natural occurrences" (Whitehead 1967 [1933], 184). This is how I intercalate the women's initial sense of Gongima's controlling presence with their experience of the river.

3 Claude Levi-Strauss (1992 [1955]) is the anthropologist who comes to mind as having written that myths are the cognitive means by which people try to think and unthink their cultural separateness from nature. While an earlier generation of his readers saw him as someone who subscribes to the separation of culture from nature, even as maintaining that culture creates itself through marking its difference from nature, a more ontologically inflected

reading of him by Eduardo Kohn (2015) and Eduardo de Castro (2014) shows him suggesting that thought is immanent in the world. If we follow through the Whiteheadian resonances, this would be akin to Whitehead (1959 [1927], 26) saying: "Abstraction expresses nature's mode of interaction and is not merely mental. When it abstracts, thought is merely conforming to nature – or rather, it is exhibiting itself as an element of nature."

4 I am thankful to Annu Jallais for making this connection.

5 I am grateful to Swayam Bagaria and Andrew Brandel for drawing my attention to this story and for helping me to think through the relationship between Khidr and Ganga.

6 I note here that this association of death to celebration is most commonly seen in the context of the annual *urs* (literally, wedding indicating the union with God) in the *dargah*s (literally, courts, indicating shrines) of saints that are densely scattered across the Bengal landscape.

7 The classic statement on Varuna is by Georges Dumezil's (1988) *Mitra-Varuna: An Essay on Two Indo-European Representations of Sovereignty*. Bhrigupati Singh (2015) utilises this work very effectively to show how state power in India operates through a twinned mode of capricious control and concern for the welfare of people.

8 I am grateful to Projit Bihari Mukharji for this association between Khidr and Matseyendranath. For an introduction to the Nath tradition, see Mallinson (2011).

References

Albinia, Alice
2010 Empire of the Indus: The Story of a River. New York: W.W. Norton and Company.

Amoore, Louise
2013 The Politics of Possibility: Risk and Security beyond Probability. Durham, NC: Duke University Press. http://dx.doi.org/10.1215/9780822377269.

Blanchet, Therese
1984 Meanings and Rituals of Birth in Rural Bangladesh: Women, Pollution and Marginality. Dhaka, Bangladesh: University Press.

Blum, Laura S., Rasheda Khan, Adnan A. Hyder, Sabina Shahanaj, Shams El Arifeen, and Abdullah Baqui
2009 Childhood Drowning in Matlab, Bangladesh: An In-Depth Exploration of Community Perceptions and Practices. Social Science and Medicine 68(9):1720–1727. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2009.01.020.

Brown, Norman O.
1983 The Apocalypse of Islam. Social Text 8(8):155–171. http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/466329.

Choudhury, Nurul H.
2001 Peasant Radicalism in Nineteenth Century Bengal: The Fairazi, Indigo and Pabna Movements. Dhaka, Bangladesh: Asiatic Society of Bangladesh.

Connolly, William
n.d. "Distributed Agencies and Bumpy Temporalities" (unpublished).

Crate, Susan A., and Mark Nuttall
2009 Anthropology and Climate Change: From Encounters to Actions. New York: Routledge.

Darian, Steven G.
1978 The Ganges in Myth and History. Honolulu, HI: University of Hawaii Press.

de Castro, Eduardo Viveiros
2014 The Cannibal Metaphysics. P. Skafish, trans. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

de Pina-Cabral, João
2014a World: An Anthropological Examination (Part 1). Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory 4(1):49–73. http://dx.doi.org/10.14318/hau4.1.002.
2014b World: An Anthropological Examination (Part 2). Hau: Journal of Ethnographic Theory 4(3):149–184. http://dx.doi.org/10.14318/hau4.3.012.

Dil-Riaz, Shaheen, director
2004 *Sand and Water* (documentary film).

Douglas, Mary, and Aaron Wildavsky
1983 Risk and Culture: An Essay on the Selection of Technological and Environmental Dangers. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Dumezil, Georges
1988 Mitra-Varuna: An Essay on Two Indo-European Representations of Sovereignty. New York: Zone Books.

Eaton, Richard
1996 The Rise of Islam in the Bengal Frontier, 1204–1760. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Environment and Geographical Information Systems
2000 Riverine Chars in Bangladesh: Environmental Dynamics and Management Issues, Support Project for Water Sector Planning. Dhaka, Bangladesh: University Press.

Halewood, Michael
2014 The Order of Nature and the Creation of Societies. *In* The Lure of Whitehead. Nicholas Gaskill and A.J. Nocek, eds. Pp. 360–378. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Haque, Muhammad Enamul
1995 [1975]
History of Sufism in Bengal: Muhammad Enamul Haque Rochonabali, vol. 4. Mansur Musa, ed. Dhaka, Bangladesh: Bangla Academy.

Hastrup, Kristen, and Cecilie Rubow, eds.
2014 Living with Environmental Change: Waterworlds. London: Routledge Press.

Hatley, Shaman
2007 Mapping the Esoteric Body in the Islamic Yoga of Bengal. History of Religions 46(4):351–368. http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/518813.

Iqbal, Muhammad
2003 [1924]
Bang-i Dara. *In* Poems of Iqbal. V.G. Kiernan, trans. Pp. 2–55. Lahore, Pakistan: Iqbal Academy.

Islam, M. Nazrul
2010 Braiding and Channel Morphodynamics of the Brahmaputra-Jamuna River. Saarbruken, Germany: Lambert Academic Publishing.

Jahan, Rounaq
1972 Pakistan: Failure in National Integration. Dhaka, Bangladesh: University Press.

Khan, Naveeda
2014 The Death of Nature in the Era of Global Warming. Wording the World: Veena Das and Her Interlocutors. Roma Chatterji, ed. Pp. 288–299. New York: Fordham University Press. http://dx.doi.org/10.5422/fordham/9780823261857.003.0016.

Kohn, Eduardo
2015 Anthropology of Ontologies. Annual Review of Anthropology 44(1):311–327. http://dx.doi.org/10.1146/annurev-anthro-102214-014127.

Levi-Strauss, Claude
1992 [1955] Tristes Tropiques. J. and D. Weightmans, trans. New York: Penguin Press.

Longworth Dames, M.
2013 Khwadja Khidr. *In* Encyclopedia of Islam, 2nd edition. Leiden: Brill Online.

Mallinson, James
2011 Nath-Sampradaya. Brill Encyclopedia of Hinduism 3: 407–428.

Moore, Francis C., Justin Mankin, and Austin Becker
2015 Challenges in Integrating the Climate and Social Sciences for Studies of Climate Change Impacts and Adaptation. *In* Climate Cultures. Jessica Barnes and Michael Dove, eds. Pp. 169–195. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. http://dx.doi.org/10.12987/yale/9780300198812.003.0008.

Mukherjee, Rila
2008 Putting the Rafts Out to Sea: Talking of “Bera Bhashan” in Bengal. Transforming Cultures eJournal 3(2): 124–144. http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/Tfc.

Netton, Ian Richard
1992 Theophany as Paradox: Ibn al-’Arabī’s Account of al-Khaḍir in his Fuṣūṣ al-Ḥikam. Journal of the Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi Society 11: 11–22.

Omar, Irfan A.
1993 Khidr in the Islamic Tradition. Muslim World 83(3–4):279–294. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1478-1913.1993.tb03580.x.
2004 Khizr-i Rah: The Pre-Eminent Guide to Action in Muhammad Iqbal’s Thought. Islamic Studies 43(1):39–50.
2010 Reflecting Divine Light: *al-Kihdr* as an Embodiment of God’s Mercy. *In* Gotteserlebnis und Gotteslehre: Christliche und Islamiche Mystik im Orient. Tamcke Martin, ed. Pp. 167–180. Wiesbaden, Germany: Harrassowitz.

Roy, Asim
1984 The Islamic Syncretistic Tradition in Bengal. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/9781400856701.

Sayidur, Mohammad
1991 The Festival of Bera Bhasan (Bera Bhasan Utshob). Dhaka, Bangadesh: Bangla Academy.

Scheper-Hughes, Nancy
1992 Death without Weeping: The Violence of Everyday Life in Brazil. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Severi, Carlo
2004 Capturing Imagination: A Cognitive Approach to Cultural Complexity. Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute 10(4):815–838. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9655.2004.00213.x.

Singh, Bhrigupati
2015 Poverty and the Quest for Life: Spiritual and Material Striving in Rural India. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. http://dx.doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226194684.001.0001.

Steiner, Franz
2013 [1956] Taboo. London: Routledge.

Stewart, Tony
2001 In Search of Equivalence: Conceiving Muslim-Hindu Encounters through Translation Theory. History of Religions 40(3):260–287. http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/463635.

Strathern, Marilyn
2006 Divided Origins and the Arithmetic of Ownership. *In* Accelerating Possession: Global Futures of Property and Personhood. B. Maurer and G. Schwab, ed. Pp. 135–173. New York: Columbia University Press.

Trawick, Margaret
1992 Notes on Love in a Tamil Family. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Warrick, R.A., and Q.K. Ahmad, eds.
1996 The Implications of Climate and Sea-Level Change for Bangladesh. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-94-009-0241-1.

Whitehead, Alfred North.
1959 [1927] Symbolism, Its Meaning and Effect. New York: Capricorn Books.
1967 [1933] Adventure of Ideas. New York: Free Press.
1979 [1929] Process and Reality. New York: Free Press.