

# Tiger-lore in Bengal

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**Abstract**—This treatise aims at tiger-human interaction in Bengali heritage, folklore and culture. Tiger is the tantamount of threat for the reason that there is a profound annual toll of human bloods in West Bengal. People who are obliged to depart in to the forest to amass forest harvest like wood, honey, wax etc became the fatalities of it. Since tiger is a horror in coastal Sundarbans, many beliefs about the tiger logically are found in the oral tradition and these values were nothing but the way of survivals from time immemorial. In the Sundarbans region, the ritual of reverencing the tiger beneath the name Dakshin Ray, Lord of South, still continues. Irrespective of their religious conviction, the hunters, wood-cutters and honey collectors solicit their sanctions previous to their entrance into the forests. Tiger is also described in Bengali Proverbs, riddles, folk songs and rhymes. The remains of tiger are highly adored for use in Asiatic traditional medicines. Hence, erroneously, tiger has been shot out by indiscriminate poaching thieves and makes tiger a rear animal. It is important to note that special stamps highlighting tiger species, other felid cats, floral habitat and various other aspects of tiger have been issued from time to time in India and Bangladesh. As tiger anchors the folk life, it is closely associated in the nomenclature of personalities, places, rivers, fauna, flora, weapons and languages.

**Keywords:** Folklore, Philately, Tiger-lore.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Tiger is an incontrovertible component of heritage, culture and folklore of India. Its population is an imperative consideration of the stability of our eco-system. Being at the top of the ecological pyramid and the nature's food chain, its absence leads to serious imbalance in the whole food chain and the natural process that sustains life. Moreover, it is a forest guard without payment (Khan, 1999). Depictions of tiger are found in the rock art of central India going back nearly 10,000 years, followed by Indus Valley Civilisation seals of the period 3000 to 1700 BC (Thaper, 2013). There are references to the occult powers of tigers in the ancient literatures. But due to anthropomorphic pressure, tigers are often forced to stray out of their habitats and attack live stocks and fringe community. The Royal Bengal Tiger (*Panthera tigris tigris*) is not the exception and are also fast declining. It may be mentioned here that three subspecies of tiger, Bali, Caspian and Javan have become extinct, three other subspecies, South Chinese, Siberian and Sumatran are about to disappear. The Indo-

Chinese variety is also fast declining (Sen, 1999). West Bengal is only one state in India, where tigers are found with unique habits. This state is pioneering in India where wild life conservation is started way back in 1876 in Buxer Tiger Reserve and declaration of Sinchal Games Sanctuary in 1915 followed by Jaldapara and Chapramari in 1940. This state is also pioneering in joint forest management (Barman, 1999).

## 2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

For effective interaction an ice-breaking session, an equalizing exercise where both the local people and the outsiders come closer leading to creation of an environment wherein participatory learning exercises as a means of doing Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) may be accomplished more conveniently, for building rapport was held with the help of villagers. Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA), an intensive and systematic learning experience carrying out in a community, was the methodology for interacting with the villagers and the relevant folk people, understanding them and learning from them (Sen and Acharya, 2002). Bio-diversity walk along with knowledgeable and willing people was helpful to observe the tiger-lore.

The method of content analysis was used for analyzing the content of relevant literature. It is 'a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication' (Berelson, 1952).

## 3. OBSERVATION AND DISCUSSION

Medieval poet of Bengal Mukundaram Chakraborty (1579) wrote about tiger's embodied intimation in his famous manuscript 'Chandimangal' ('Bane Bagher Bhiti' – Tiger threat in the forest)—

Kanan bhitare bagh Payiachilo more lag

Hayiachilo baro paromad

Bishan bagher kop Jhanta para duta gonp

Gagane lagyachhe duta kan

Bikat dashangula Jemun magher mula

Jiwakhan khandar saman

Dhaite chanchal gati Nakhe anchraye khiti

Deuti saman duta ankhi

Ati tar khin majh Jeno dekhi mrigaraj

Chalite yuraye jeno pakhi.

It is a common saying that tiger is the tantamount of threat for the reason that there is a profound annual toll of human bloods in West Bengal. People who are obliged to depart in to the forest to amass forest harvest like wood, honey, wax etc became the fatalities of it.

Since tiger is a horror in coastal Sundarbans, many beliefs about the tiger logically are found in the oral tradition and these values were nothing but the way of survivals from time immemorial. Many folk beliefs connected with the tiger came to Bengal from the Malaya Peninsula.

#### 4. PROVERBS, FOLK SONGS AND RHYMES

In human society there is scarcely any subject that proverbs have not touched. Tiger is also described in Bengali Proverbs, riddles, folk songs and rhymes. A list of Bengali Proverbs is given herewith ---

1. Age gele baghe khae / pichhe gele sona pae.
2. Jekhane bagher voe / sekhanei sandhya hoe.
3. Bagher deekha, saper lekha.
4. Baghe moshe judda hoe / ulukhagar pran jae.
5. Kapale jar mritu lekha / tar ghare bagher dekha.
6. Sujog pele chharena nag ear baghe.
7. Jakhan jar kapal banke / dubbo bane bagh thake.
8. Bagh bhaluker rajye thaki / maner katha manei rakhi.
9. Magher site bagh palae.
10. Bagh buro holeo rag chharena.
11. Bagher satru feu.
12. Kukur holo sealer satru / bagher satru feu.
13. Jale kumir dangae bagh.
14. Bagher masi beral / asi bole ferar.
15. Beral bone gele bagh hoe.
16. Thekle bagh ghas khae.
17. Mara baghke kiliye mara.
18. Posher shit moser gae / magher shit bagher gae / aswiner shit sarbadae.
19. Karite bagher dudh mele. posh manena ghorel / bagh, bagdi sorel.

20. Char chokhe baghe khaena.

21. Hatire agun, suare jhanta / baghere lathi, pakhire bhota.

22. Khabe hatir bhoge / dekhbe bagher chokhe.

**Rhyme:** Rhyme is the correspondence of sounds at the ends of words or verse lines. There are many popular rhymes of Bengal relating to tiger ---

1. Singher mama ami Naraharidas
2. Bagh merechhi gota satash
3. Aro pai to aro mari
4. Kendo bagher talas kori.

Here 'Kendo bagh' means the Royal Bengal tiger

**Folk song:** An example of folk song may be given which is sang in the festival of Sonaraya by Koch-Rajbanshi of western Asam ---

*Bagh namilore chitika pakhela*

*Bhar byane namilo bagh manush kamera*

*Mular mato duita danth delir mato matha*

*Bhati hote namilo bagh manush kamera.*

Here the tiger species is Leopard (*Panthera pardus*) which is depicted as man-eater. It has two teeth resembling radish and its head is extra ordinary.

#### 5. FOLK TALE

In folk tale 'The tiger and the tree which bore Cowri Shells', a tiger marries a Brahmin girl and in course of time, the girl bears her husband a tiger child. Oneday the girl kills the tiger child and flees to her father's house. The tiger goes back to take revenge but it is ultimately killed with a vessel full of boiling hot rice water. In 'Bagher Mama' a tiger has been defeated by a young lamb. In the tales 'Enri Miri Kiri', 'Bagher Sadh', 'Khachar Bagh', the tiger has been described as a foolish animal wanting in intelligence

#### 6. FOLK DEITIES

Tiger is the concrete form of the deities of the forest who do not possess any physical shapes. Banbibi and Barkhan Gazi have anthropomorphic iconic appearance of warriors riding on tiger. In the Sundarbans region, the ritual of reverencing the tiger beneath the name Dakshin Ray, Lord of South, still continues. The associates of both Hindu and Muslim societies worship Dakshin Ray as the deity of tigers. Irrespective of their religious conviction, the hunters, wood-cutters and honey collectors solicit their sanctions previous to their entrance into the forests.

## 7. TIGER TOTEM

Totem is a set of objects, generally a species of fauna (sometimes a type of flora or inanimate object) that is considered by a clan, lineage, or other special group as having a special relationship to the social unit. Totemism is the root of the ethnic socio-political association in so far as kinship, marriage and relations are concerned. For instance, 'Bagear' (Tiger) is a Munda Sept or Clan pertaining to Tiger totem. Tiger totems among Oraon are 'Lakra' and among Kharia is 'Kiro'.

## 8. FOLK MEDICINES

The remains of tiger are highly adored for use in Asiatic traditional medicines. Hence, erroneously, tiger has been shot out by indiscriminate poaching thieves and makes tiger a rear animal. In tribal scheme of remedy the fat, skin, nail, bone etc of tiger are used as medicines. In *Chandimangal*, it is written that, a piece of tiger nail is hanging in the chest of *Kalketu*, an important character of the text.

Buke dole baghnakhe ranga dhula gaye makhe

Tanumajhe shovoye tribali.

## 9. PHILATELY

It is important to note that special stamps highlighting tiger species, other felid cats, floral habitat and various other aspects of tiger have been issued from time to time in India and Bangladesh.

Table 1: Tiger in Indian postage Stamps

### A. Special Stamps

Sl. No.	Year	Denomination	Particulars
1.	7 October, 1963	50 np	Tiger
2.	1 October, 1976	100	Leopard
3.	29 November, 1987	100	White Tiger - Rewa
4.	29 November, 1987	500	Snow Leopard

### B. Definitive Stamps

Sl. No.	Year	Denomination	Particulars
1.	1 October, 1974	15 p	Tiger
2.	15 July, 1975	15	Tiger

Table 2: Habitat of Tiger (Flora) in Indian Postage Stamps

Sl. No.	Year	Denomination	Particulars
1.	30 October, 2002	500	<i>Rhizophora mucronata</i>
2.	30 October, 2002	1500	<i>Sonneratia alba</i>

3.	30 October, 2002	500	<i>Nypa fruticans</i>
4.	30 October, 2002	500	<i>Bruguiera gymnorhiza</i>

Table 3: tiger related Indian Postage stamps

### A. Special Stamps

Sl. No.	Year	Denomination	Particulars
1.	24 January, 1976	25	Jim Corbett Centenary
2.	30 May, 1983	100	50 years of Kanha National Park
3.	22 November, 1983	200	Project Tiger
4.	15 December, 1986	100	50 years of Corbett National Park
5.	15 December, 1986	200	50 years of Corbett National Park

### B. Definitive Stamps

Sl. No.	Year	Denomination	Particulars
1.	30 April, 2000	500	Leopard Cat
2.	30 April, 2000	1000	Tiger Sundarbans Biosphere Reserve

## 10. NOMENCLATURE

As tiger anchors the folk life, it is closely associated in the nomenclature of personalities, places, rivers, fauna, flora, weapons and languages.

## 11. NOMENCLATURE OF PERSONALITY RELATING TO TIGER

1. Sher Shah of Sur (b. Farid Khan 1486, Sasaram, Bihar – d. May 22, 1545, Kalinjar), emperor of North India (1540-45) in the Islamic sur (Afgan) dynasty of 1540-57. At the battle of Chausa on June 26, 1539, he defeated the mughal emperor Humayun and assured the royal title of far-id-ud-Din Sher Shah. Here 'Sher' means Tiger.
2. Tigranes (Dikran) I the Great (c. 140-c.55 BC), king of Armenia from 95 or 94 BC, under whom the country reached a pinnacle of power unique in its history and became for a short time the strongest state in the Roman East.
3. Tiger of Mysore --- Tippu Sultan
4. Banglar Bagh – sir ashutosh mukhopadhyay, Ex- Vice Chancellor, Calcutta University.

**12. NOMENCLATURE OF PLACE, RIVER ETC.**

1. Tiger Bay – Inlet of Atlantic Ocean, on South-west coast of Angola.
2. Tiger hill – Mountain top in Darjeeling, West Bengal.
3. Tigre – Historical region of North Ethiopia.
4. Tigre (formerly Las Con-Chas) – Town, Buenos Aires Province, East Argentina.
5. Tiger Island – Island, Gulf of Fonseca, Honduras, Chief town Amapala.
6. Tyger (Tiger) – river, South Carolina, rises in North-west in Greenville.
7. Tigris – River, South-east Turkey and Iraq, rises in a lake in the mountains of Kurdistan.

**13. NOMENCLATURE OF FAUNA**

1. Tiger Cat – any of various wildcats of moderate size and variegated coloration as Clouded leopard, Marbled Cat, Serval, Ocelot, Margay.
2. Tiger beetle (Cicindela) – Common name for the 2000 species of the beetle family Cicindelidae under order Coleoptera. The name derives from their voracious eating habits. The elytra or wing covers of many species of Cicindela have scroll-like marks.
3. Tiger fish (Hydrocynus) – Any of several fishes as the Turkey fish and Piranha resembling a trigger in appearance or habit, belongs to the family Characidae and order Cypriniformes.
4. Tiger moth (*Apantesis virgo*) – common name for the nocturnal moths of the cosmopolitan family Arctiidae (order Lepidoptera).
5. Isabella Tiger moth (*Isia isabella*) – A typical arctiid
6. Tiger Shark (*Galeocerdo cuvieri*) – large dangerous shark of the family Carcharhinidae noted for its voracity and inveterate scavenging, as well as its reputation as a man-eater. It is found worldwide in warm oceans, from the shoreline to the open sea.
7. Tiger wolf – i) Spotted Hyena, ii) Tasmanian wolf
8. Tiger Snake – *Notechis scutatus* of Australia and Tasmania belongs to the Cobra family, Elapidae, variable in colour but often has brown and yellow bands.
9. Tiger Frog – *Rana tigrina* of India and Malaysia.
10. Tiger Butterfly
11. Tiger Mosquito
12. Tiger Python
13. Tiger Rattle Snake

14. Tiger salamander
15. Tiger Shell / Tiger Cowry
16. Tigon – Offspring of a tiger and a lioness. The tigon or tiglon is a zoo-bred hybrid, as is the liger, the result of mating a lion with a tigress. It is probable that neither the tigon nor the liger occurs in the wild, as differences in the behavior and habitat of the lion and tiger make interbreeding unlikely. The tigon and the liger possess features of both parents, in variable proportions, but are generally larger and darker than either.

**14. NOMENCLATURE OF FLORA**

1. Tiger Flower (*Tigridia pavonia*) Also called Aztec City or Shell Flower, any of 12 species of the genus Tigridia, plants native from Mexico to Chile and once prized by the Aztecs for the chestnut flavor of bulblike structure (corms). They belong to the Iris family (Iridaceae).
2. Tiger Orchid – Odontoglossum.
3. Tiger Wood – African walnut.
4. Tiger's Jaw – A south African Big marigold *Faucaria tigrinum* Syn *Mesembryanthemum tigrinum*
5. Tiger Lily – bulbous plant, Family Liliaceae. Flower in August in hills, Orange red flowers with purple spot in recurve spikes. *Lilium tigrinum*, *Lilium pardalinum*, *Lilium philadelphicum*.
6. Tiger Pear – *Opuntia aurantiaca*
7. Tiger maple
8. Tiger Barb (*Barbus sumatranus*, *Barbus tetragona*)

**15. NOMENCLATURE OF WEAPONS**

1. Tiger Tank – German heavy tank (56 tons) carrying a long-barellled 88-millimetre gun. It was first introduced in combat in World War II late in 1942.
2. Tiger Ware – 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> century English term for contemporary German stoneware having a brown, mottled glaze, made in the Rhenish Centres of Cologne and Frechen, Germany.

**16. NOMENCLATURE OF LANGUAGE**

1. Tigray Language – Tigrinya language
2. Tigre Language – Semitic language of the Northern Tiger peoples of the eastern and western lowlands of Eritrea, Ethiopia.

**17. CONCLUSION**

The folklore pertaining to tiger anchors in the folk life of Bengal. But the shelter and security of tiger is one of the biggest challenges in front of present days as the future

generations have the right to take joy and delight in the magnificent look of this royal animal and benefit from this. Therefore, there is an urgent need to hoist a further extensive attentiveness about wildlife misdeed towards tiger and to spot and see the illegal wildlife trade and arrest wildlife criminals. Moreover, quantitative and qualitative maintenance of tiger's habitat is essential in the present day. Escalation of trans-border collaboration is also needed with no time. The ideal eco-tourism along with folk-tourism is extremely desirable and in this aspect participation of local folk is obligatory for sustainable conservation management.

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