

Forgotten Phenomenon, Lost Songs: Chandrabati and Her Literature in Modern Bangladesh

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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I, Sumaya Afrin Eku declare that this thesis, is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Master of Arts (Research), in the Faculty of Arts and Social Science at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise reference or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

This document has not been submitted for qualifications at any other academic institution.

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Abstract

This thesis focus on the first woman poet of Bengal, Chandrabati and her literary works. Chandrabati who was born in the sixteenth century has written many songs and ballads which contain important elements and insights of her time. Her songs were one of the very first depictions of Bengali women, written from a woman's perspective. Moreover, her version of *Ramayana*, for its content, style and approach, can be attributed as one of the most important and unique retellings of *Ramayana* in Bengali.

The search for the relevance and importance of Chandrabati's songs and ballads to the people, especially the women of present-day Bangladesh brought out the sad reality of Chandrabati's disappearance of people's memories and lives. Beside exploring Chandrabati's life, the unique qualities of her songs and ballads, and their importance in writing the history of medieval Bengal, this thesis aims to find out the reasons why the people of Bangladesh forgot the poet they once adored. Besides this thesis demonstrates the journey of some contemporary cultural activists who are trying to reintroduce Chandrabati and her songs in modern Bangladesh and tells the story of their struggles and triumphs. It also describes what inspired the activists and singers to pursue this task. With a combination of semi-structured and in-depth interviews and observations, data was gathered. Using Thematic and Narrative analysis this thesis outlines the prevailing status of Chandrabati and her songs in modern Bangladesh.

This thesis does not confine itself to the past and present. Bangladesh, since its birth as an independent country in 1971 has experienced many changes in its social, cultural, political and religious scenario. The attitude of people is also an ever-changing aspect in the modern world because of globalization and extensive use of technologies. Entertainment industry too has changed all over the world, offering too many options for the public. In this context, with careful observation of the social, cultural, religious changes that are taking place in Bangladesh, and also taking consideration of the natural tendency of Bangladeshis, this thesis tries to predict, as an old indigenous cultural aspect, how Chandrabati's songs will be regarded in Bangladesh in the future.