

**English Translation:**

**Woman 1:** Isn't there a song in Bangladesh, there is no "*Moti* in Motijheel."<sup>1</sup>

**Woman 2:** There is no "*Hira* in Hirajheel."<sup>2</sup>

**Woman 1:** What is this? Didn't you tell us there is a story about Motijheel and Hirajheel?

**Woman 2:** Motijheel was originally a *jheel*.<sup>3</sup> The name of the *jheel* was Motijheel and Hirajheel was also a *jheel*. A *jheel* is a small lake. *Nawabs*<sup>4</sup> and *zamidars*<sup>5</sup> would go on boat rides on these lakes along with their families. Only the royal families were permitted to go to these lakes. When their families would come from abroad, they would take them to Demra and take boat rides from the pier. Hirajheel and Motijheel were like that. Zamidar houses were located around these two lakes. All the zamidar houses are located in Old Dhaka. The two lakes Hirajheel and Motijheel were filled to form Motijheel. Hirajheel was renamed Old Dhaka, Shambazar and Aloobazar. The Buriganga River<sup>6</sup> is situated there as well. When Siraj-ud-Dowla<sup>7</sup> escaped, he went through Hirajheel.

**Woman 1:** During the time of Siraj-ud-Dowla, all these events took place in Dhaka.

**Woman 2:** Yes, in Dhaka. The lakes are connected and are situated inside Dhaka city. There were not too many things at that time. The Buriganga River and Shitalakshya River<sup>8</sup> were surrounded by trees and forests. They also had small spaces where the Kings would come for pleasure. This was a place to have fun and spend time.

---

<sup>1</sup> *Moti* means pearl and Motijheel was the name of a lake. The lake was filled up, and now the area is called Moijheel.

<sup>2</sup> *Hira* means diamonds and Hirajheel was the name of a lake. The lake was filled up, and now the area has been renamed Old Dhaka, Shambazar and Aloobazar

<sup>3</sup> *Jheel* refers to a small lake.

<sup>4</sup> *Nawab* a designation indicating political rank and power in the Mughal administrative hierarchy. In the British period, the term was used for a state conferred honorary title of rank without any official attachment.

<sup>5</sup> *Zamidar* means landlord, and also pertains to kingly status, warfare, chase.

<sup>6</sup> Buriganga River a tide-influenced river passing through west and south of Dhaka City. There is a traditional story behind naming it. In ancient times one course of the Ganges used to reach the Bay of Bengal and Dhaleshwari.

<sup>7</sup> Mirzâ Mohammad Sirâjud Dawla, more commonly known as Siraj ud-Daulah (1733 – July 2, 1757), was the last independent Nawab of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa. The end of his reign marks the start of British East India Company rule over Bengal and later almost all of South Asia.

<sup>8</sup> Shitalakshya River originates from the Old Brahmaputra and bifurcates into two courses at Toke in Gazipur district. One of the courses named the Banar flows southwest and at Lakpur is renamed as the Shitalakshya.

**Woman 1:** So what is *Jinjira*?<sup>9</sup> In ancient times, it was the house of *Nawabs*.

**Woman 2:** Yes, the *Nawabs* lived in *Jinjira*...

**Woman 1:** Is it part of Old Dhaka?

**Woman 2:** It is part of Old Dhaka. On one side of the Buriganga River the village remained and on the other side, Dhaka city was formed. When Dhaka city was formed, all the establishments, for example the Lalbagh Fort,<sup>10</sup> the red building in Dhanmondi next to Labaid, a very beautiful structure. This was built in the time of Shaista Khan,<sup>11</sup> the Mughals,<sup>12</sup> and the Badhsah.<sup>13</sup> The other areas were filled with water. The entire Dhaka city was under water. The surrounding areas were all covered by water. Dhaka city was formed after the division between India and Pakistan. When I first came to Dhaka, New Market, the entire side was covered by forests. Completely.

**Woman 1:** Do you mean around Shyamoli?

**Woman 2:** Not just “Shyamoli, after Kalabagan and Asad Gate,”<sup>14</sup> the whole area was a forest. There were a lot of trees, and you could not see anything else besides trees. And this was a lake.

**Woman 1:** Your house?

**Woman 2:** Yes, this house was located right next to a lake. Surrounding this were beautiful trees. People would be scared to enter here after dark. When I came to Pongu Hospital -- do you remember when Chotan broke his leg? -- at that time you could not enter here after dark. There was nothing here, only dark land, a complete forest. It has not been long since today’s city came into being. Around 1986, 1988, Dhaka city moved to this side. Now there are many extensions towards Savar. When I first came to Dhaka, to New Market,<sup>15</sup> what you see now around New Market -- roads, cafes and the Bolaka Cinema Hall -- the entire place was only covered in big trees. The scenery in New Market and its surroundings were truly magnificent. The environment was neat, tidy, peaceful and beautiful, and in the middle was a small market. People came from near and far.

---

<sup>9</sup> The successor of Shaista Khan, Nawab Ibrahim Khan 2nd built the Jinjira Palace around 1689-97. It stood on the other side of the river Buriganga opposite Bara Katra. The Lalbagh Fort and the Jinjira Palace were said to have been connected by a wooden bridge across the river. The palace was surrounded by a moat.

<sup>10</sup> The Lalbagh Fort, or Fort Aurangabad, was constructed by Prince Muhammad Azam, Viceroy of Bengal and third son of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, in 1678 and his successor, Shaista Khan.

<sup>11</sup> Shaista Khan Mughal subahdar who ruled Bengal for long 24 years (1664-1688) with a break for a little over one year in 1678-79. His tenure of office as a subahdar in Bengal was the longest.

<sup>12</sup> Mughal (Persian) are a Central Asian tribe of Turkic origin settled Central Asia, Middle East and South Asia. The Mughal tribe is settled all over today’s Pakistan and India.

<sup>13</sup> Here *Badhshah* refers to royalty and mughal

<sup>14</sup> Places in Dhaka city.

<sup>15</sup> New Market, Dhaka, was built in 1952-54 as a shopping complex primarily to cater to the needs of the new population of Dhaka city that grew in Azimpur Estate and Dhanmondi Residential Area. Eventually, it attracted shoppers from all other areas of the city and places outside Dhaka. The market is located at Azimpur, with Mirpur Road on one side and Peelkhana Road on the other.

**Woman 2:** Dhaka?

**Woman 2:** Yes from Khilgaon.<sup>16</sup> There was nothing around the market.

**Woman 1:** I heard Khilgaon was also covered by trees.

**Woman 2:** Yes, but there were a few houses. In central Dhaka, apart from some stores and the Dhaka University,<sup>17</sup> apartment and housing had not yet developed.

**About CultureTalk:** CultureTalk is produced by the Five College Center for the Study of World Languages and housed on the LangMedia Website. The project provides students of language and culture with samples of people talking about their lives in the languages they use everyday. The participants in CultureTalk interviews and discussions are of many different ages and walks of life. They are free to express themselves as they wish. The ideas and opinions presented here are those of the participants. Inclusion in CultureTalk does not represent endorsement of these ideas or opinions by the Five College Center for the Study of World Languages, Five Colleges, Incorporated, or any of its member institutions: Amherst College, Hampshire College, Mount Holyoke College, Smith College and the University of Massachusetts at Amherst.

© 2003-2009 Five College Center for the Study of World Languages and Five Colleges, Incorporated

---

<sup>16</sup> A place in Dhaka City.

<sup>17</sup> Dhaka University is the State University of Dhaka. On the first day of July 1921, the University of Dhaka opened its doors to students. The University of Dhaka is dedicated to the advancement of learning and is committed to promoting research in all fields of knowledge.

