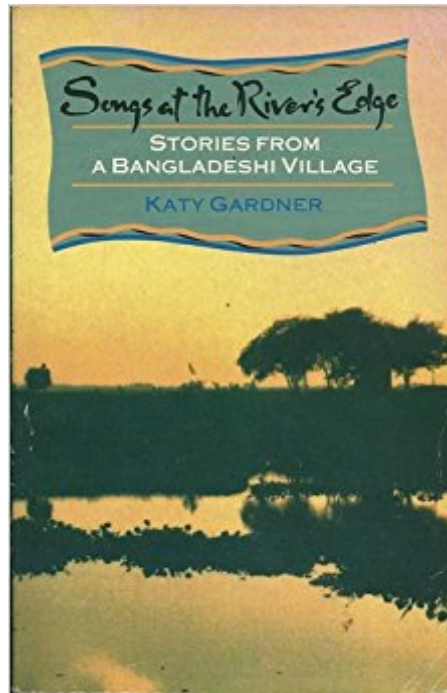




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Songs At The River's Edge: Stories From A Bangladeshi Village



Synopsis

Katy Gardner's account of her fifteen-month stay in the small Bangladeshi village of Talukpur has become a classic study of rural life in South Asia. Through a series of beautifully crafted narratives, the villagers and their stories are brought vividly to life and the author's role as an outsider sensitively conveyed in her descriptions of the warm friendships she makes. Above all *Songs at the River's Edge* is written from a deep respect of Bangladesh and its country. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

'Beautifully and simply written ... the characters emerge in all their humanity, frailty and humour. Gardner's approach is refreshingly honest ... [she] neither patronizes nor glamourizes the people of Talukpar but repays their trust by conveying their lives and experiences with dignity and respect. *Songs At The River's Edge* is a jewel of a book and the memory of it will stay long in the reader's mind.' --New Internationalist 'In reading [it], you experience a profound sense of entering another community and seeing it from the inside. Gardner's evocative description[s] and her ability to convey the emotional intensity of its people make this a memorable book.' --Literary Review --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

Katy Gardner is professor of anthropology at the London School of Economics and is the author of several books including *Discordant Development* and *Global Migrants, Local Lives: Travel and Transformation in Rural Bangladesh*. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

Thirty years ago, Katy Gardner conducted the fieldwork for her PhD in Social Anthropology in a small rural village in the Sylhet region of Bangladesh. Ten years later she wrote this book as a kind of companion to her thesis, weaving together her observations and experiences into a series of stories that together describe her 15 months of living in the village.

Chapter 1: Katy arrives in the village and is quickly drawn into the warmth and somewhat chaotic everyday lives of her host family. They are not wealthy, but they are not as poor as many of their neighbours and other characters that populate the small village. They despair at Katy's (western) inability to wash, dress and feed herself properly, as well as her propensity for occasional solitude.

Chapters 2-5: a birth, a marriage, an apparent spousal abandonment and a tragic death in the village. Children die in the villages of Bangladesh too often for public mourning to continue for very long. It is not that they are forgotten, or that their relatives do not grieve deeply; every family has its own dead children, its own small graves to remember and mourn when another household loses a child.

Chapter 6: an unaffordable new sari is the cause of laughter to the other women, but not so to the poor woman who bought it, as we read about domestic violence in the village. I still found it hard to reconcile religiosity with the uncompromising and unflinching acceptance of violence amongst most people in the village.

Chapters 7-9: evil and mischievous spirits are blamed for things that go wrong; the power of mother nature; and the importance of faith for maintaining a healthy body and soul.

Chapters 10-11: the stories of Alim and Ambia; one who attempts to leave the village for a brighter future, and the other who arrives at the village to put their past behind them and hopefully to make a brighter future for their family.

Chapter 12: Katy makes a tearful departure from the village. Rather than a cause of shame, public tears are given the utmost social approbation, so instead of repressing them as I had done when I had left Britain a year and a half ago, I now gave them every encouragement.

In amongst all of these stories we come to understand about economic migration, the subject of Gardner's thesis. The bad side of it - the poverty that causes it to happen - is the thread that ties the stories together. No one paid them any attention as they passed on the village paths. These were the *garib*, the poor who are always present in rural Bangladesh. They are in the background of every scene, always there but seldom noticed as they watch village life on its margins. And the good side - the success stories of those who leave and are able to support the family that stays behind.

This is not an ethnography as such, but a really accessible window into Bangladeshi village life. Gardner has gone on to become a successful novelist, and this is no surprise to me, as *Songs At the River's Edge: Stories From a Bangladeshi Village* reads like a novel. Recommended for anyone with a cultural curiosity about Bangladesh or the region.

Katy Gardner is a British anthropologist and lived for 16 months in a village in Bangladesh. She takes part in the everyday village life with its work, enjoyments, problems, accidents and habits. It's a very interesting book about a very hierarchical paternalistic society where women are discriminated. It gives a very interesting background to present day Bangladesh because this is the root that all Bangladeshis share. A necessary book if you want to understand the country!

I thoroughly agree with the one customer 5 star review so far and also with the 'official' editorial review; and I have little to add. This is an important book for understanding how Bangladeshi women live within a village practicing Islam. It's really quite sad that this wonderful book isn't more broadly available, as its lessons are quite current and can be applied beyond Bangladesh.

Katy Gardner has done a wonderful job in packaging her research as a secular anthropologist into a format that is both entertaining to read and intensely informative. While living with a Muslim family in Bangladesh she gained valuable insights that should be read by any outsider who is serious about understanding Bangladeshi village culture.

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