

The Supreme Mother vision of Divinity

PREM RANJAN DEV

THE world civilisation is now in a state of transition. The transition that we have to effect today, if we are to survive, is a moral and spiritual revolution which should embrace the whole humanity. In this context, a penetrating thought and look into the totality of divine blessing alone can save the cosmic existence and sanctify the times ahead. The Vedas, the ancient Holy Scriptures, uphold the timeless truth of eternal existence of the supreme power Mother Vision of Divinity — Durga.

The Hindu tradition, followed by over 900 million people today, is one of the oldest, richest, and most influential traditions on earth. Whatever sphere of the human mind one selects for study — language, customs, art, traditional sciences, polity, literature, architecture, painting or music — one has to look into this, because some of the most valuable and insightful materials in the history of humankind are encompassed within this tradition. For example, Aurveda, Yoga, Dhyan, astronomy, astrology, vegetarian experiments and spiritual disciplines have all been of continuous interest and much sought after by people cutting across all national and religious barriers.

Yet, despite their universal appeal, it is Hinduism that holds the key to understanding the full richness of these traditions. In recent years, there has also been a burgeoning interest in Hindu thought among philosophers theologians, psychologists, sociologists, and anthropologists, worldwide. More and more scientists are discovering the convergence of Hinduism and modern scientific thinking. Unfortunately, this rich culture and civilisation can provide no source of ready reference for students and teachers. Therefore, an authentic, objective, insightful, scholarly, critical and contemporary presentation of Hinduism is needed as a standard source of reference.

The Hindu tradition does not derive from any one prophet or founder. It has neither a uniform creed nor any organised church. Its history and prehistory are ageless. The Vedas are unique in character. We find in the Vedas a great variety of subjects and a great flexibility of doctrines. This flexibility persists in Hindu doctrine. For example, there are several interpretations of the Upanishads, Brahmasutras and the Bhagavadgita, and they are all considered authoritative. This is the result of freedom from dogma. But with the passage of time man has



She is the fountain-head of the highest good — both spiritual attainment and material prosperity. The worship of the Mother Durga would ensure our communion with Her. The constant communion of universal fraternity. We pray to the Divine Mother for succor to save us from a confused world order.

Man is the maker of his destiny and he can exercise his free will, but at the same time he has taken upon himself the responsibility to ensure full participation in the entire cosmos and consequently between man and God, man and nature, man and other living beings and finally between man and man. And here evolves the most coveted relation between mother and child.

Great American poet Walt Whitman thought of a mother vision, mundane or supreme, and welcomed it:

"Mother, always gliding near with soft feet, Have now chanted for Thee a chant of fullest welcome?"

Then I chant it for Thee, I glorify Thee above all,

I bring Thee a song that, When Thou must indeed come Come unflatteringly!

Mother is always great, always welcome to a child, whether you tend to worship her as Supreme Being or adore her as mundane but the most nearest.

created such an environment that it reacts unwholesomely upon him. Mankind is terribly heading as if towards a total annihilation by committing licentious suicide. Heart rending cry for peace, happiness and equality is heard from all corners of this bewildered world. The state of affairs resembles that of the Devas in the reign of Mahisasura. In the course of the eternal strife of the Devas (gods) and Asuras (demons), the former being defeated, the latter reigned supreme in the heaven inflicting unbearable suffering upon the Devas. The helpless Devas came to Brahma, the creator of their distress, who then led their commission to Vishnu and Shiva for appraisal of the grave situation and redress.

The tales of intolerable atrocities of Mashisasura raged vehement anger in Vishnu and Shiva and in a feat of this came out their vital energies in the form of burning flashes. This created similar reaction among the gods whose vital energies too came out in like manner. These energies took the form of an unmatchable, sublime and superb woman. She is Divine Durga. This Divine-embodiment of all spiritual energies had decoration with the numerous weapons offered

by the gods. Thus descends the Divine mother, the Supreme Being. Energy incarnate who embodies in herself the multifarious modes of life. She happens to be too affectionate to Her children to become fierce to those who tend to do evil to them. On the other hand Durga is also daughter of Bengali Hindu.

Durga is tranquil and turbulent, serene and fierce, Shoumya and Rudra at the same time. This is because Her all embracing motherliness makes Her intolerant of those that are inimically disposed towards Her human and divine children. This Mother Durga in a feat of destruction raised such a tumultuous uproar that the frightened Asuras came out in large numbers equipped with armours and weapons and the fierce war that followed between Her and the innumerable Asuras brought the ruin of Mahisasura. The other Asuras met the same fate. The heaven was recovered and the Devas cheered the victory with a befitting hymn addressed to the mother. Durga is the progenitor of the universal process in its entirety. She is the presiding principle of the cosmic manifestation and the source of ultimate goal of all perfection and attainment of all existence. She is essentially Unique and One.

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CPA boycott Opposition sticks to its position

JAMILUR RAHMAN

THE controversy revolving around the Awami League's decision to boycott the CPA conference continues to win headlines — at least in the first two days of the week.

After some manoeuvring, which the main opposition party did to defend its stand, it finally announces its decision — a blow to the government's hope that it would budge from its position at the last moment.

A torrent of accusations and counter-accusations follow. The speaker writes to AL chief Sheikh Hasina, assuring fulfillment of all the opposition demands, but fails to elicit a positive response. The AL calls it a delayed and deceptive move.

That said, neither side appears to be oblivious of the repercussions of holding the CPA conference without the participation of opposition lawmakers. The AL sends a special emissary to London to make the Commonwealth leaders understand that it is boycotting the conference to protest the extremely 'uncooperative' attitude of the government. The AL feels it has been denied the position it deserves, the BNP does not quite agree. It would be interesting to know how the Commonwealth leaders themselves apportion the blame.

BNP leaders are unhappy with the disobliging guests (opposition lawmakers) and blast their decision

as a great blunder. They offer good counsel, though not solicited, to the AL; remind it of the hazards of boycotting the conference; and reach the conclusion that the opposition's plan is to disgrace the nation. The AL is trying hard to be understood, particularly by the CPA parliamentarians, but is not moved by the BNP's appeal.

The leaders of other political parties, who do not have much to do

mentary elections were not above controversy. So the JP leader is not surprised by what is going on between the BNP and the AL.

The AL's decision is not a natural one, but political analysts are not surprised when they consider it in terms of the party's highly antagonistic relations with the BNP.

The AL, for its part, knows it has swallowed a strong pill, and is now trying to neutralise the likely ill

carried by the press. The incident brought forth an avalanche of condemnation from different quarters throughout the week.

Values and norms appeared to be the biggest casualty of politics degenerating into a crude brawl. Its crudeness became all the more manifest in the attack on the women pickets.

AL rallies and meetings came under attack on Monday also. It seems the political atmosphere has suddenly been charged by the opposition's resolve to go for a vigorous movement against the government and the latter's determination to take a tough stand on it.

Home Minister Altaf Hossain Choudhury — whose overly simplified presentation of truths did not always please his party in the past — makes another startling disclosure. He says 70,000 cases filed against BNP adherents by the past AL government have been withdrawn! That is transparency at its unmistakable best, but what about fair play, law and justice?

The revelation might cause as much embarrassment to the AL as to the BNP. The AL may feel uneasy with the unusually high number of cases filed against their political opponents, while the BNP high command will consider it an unnecessary invitation to its detractors to launch another assault.



WEEKEND NOTES

from the sidelines, have also begun to speak. JSD (Inu) chief Hasanul Haq Inu takes the first shot at the organisers of the conference in an interview with a local television channel. He questions the rationale behind holding the conference in Bangladesh, where, he believes, the democratic institutions are not functioning smoothly and terms the conference a luxury that Bangladesh cannot afford.

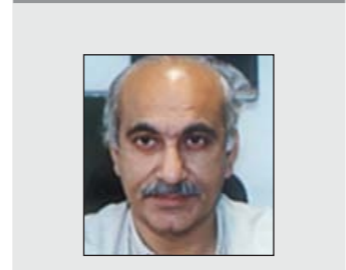
JP (Manju) Chairman Anwar Hossain Manju, however, takes a totally different view of the situation. He says there was no consensus on any issue whatsoever between the major parties in the past and it is pointless to expect that the 'big two' will ever be able to reach any understanding in future either. Manju claims that even the last three parlia-

effects. The BNP is there to tell it that the effects will be hard to manage.

Though the government is blamed for the way it has handled the preparatory phase of the conference, most political leaders believe the opposition should not boycott it. Observers still hope that something dramatic might happen before the conference begins. The million-dollar question is, will the AL change its mind? So far there is no indication that it will.

Meantime, the political scene is getting murky. The AL called a countrywide hartal on Saturday and its women pickets came under a brazen attack. Policewomen tugged at the clothes of the pickets and that cut deep into the mass psyche. There was a plethora of photographs of 'women in distress'

My way, or the Highway



M.J. AKBAR

MONTREAL: When America wants to see the world, it stands in front of the mirror. When the world wants to see America it takes a long shot. If America does not find the world transformed in its own image, it seeks to change what it does not like. The rest of the world ponders the cost, and checks the exchange rate of collateral damage.

If America looms across the world, then it broods over Canada. To be a peacetime neighbour of America is to win a lottery in destiny's stakes. To be a neighbour when America has been wounded in war, is a test of nerve. The brooding has become a growler ever since Canada waded out of Washington's familiar embrace and refused to send troops to help America's occupation of Iraq. The Bush administration has been either sulking or fretting ever since. Geography makes no difference to America's inability to appreciate that others may have genuine reasons for their stance. Washington is as clueless about Ottawa as it is about Timbuktoo. Canada's Iraq policy is a manifestation of not what America has become as about what Canada has become. This nation is reinventing itself, once again, as a warm experiment in multi-culturalism, or even multinationalism, as it becomes home to a hundred different displaced communities from around the globe. It is a slow fusion perhaps, but the Canadian government is determined to represent the ethnic rainbow that now nestles among the branches of the national maple. Its Iraq policy is driven by an internal dynamic. But here also lies an extraordinary opportunity, for Canada can become the bridge between Washington and the world that Washington has lost through haste, ignorance and over-reach.

IRAQ hovers over every conversation like Banquo's ghost; and to Colin Powell's "evidence" for the return of normalcy to Iraq: he claimed that Parent-Teacher Associations were opening up in schools in Baghdad! Even more outlandish is the fact that some eight billion dollars, or nearly one third of the reconstruction budget that George Bush seeks for Iraq, is slotted to be spent on Iraq's postal service. I wonder who thought up the formula: if you keep the Iraqis busy writing letters they won't shoot. One of Frank Sinatra's most famous songs was 'My way'. George Bush has a remix version titled, "My way — or take the highway".

It might seem odd that I am going to send you the latest about Afghanistan from Montreal, but this is September, the hunting season when the world's leaders choose the opening session of the United Nations General Assembly to make their fixed trip to the United States. President Pervez Musharraf happened to be in Ottawa this week, and happy to offer information and advice to the media. So here is the news, as delivered by Pakistan's Supremo.

Osama bin Laden is alive, well and taking long walks in the mountains between Pakistan and Afghanistan. "Yes, indeed. I am reasonably sure." How? Ahem... "technical means... we were getting close, we knew he was in the mountains. Either across or on our side. But he was in the mountains..." Who is 'we'? The ISI and the CIA, of course. So who is to blame for the fact that Osama is still as free as a bird. "Let it be clear to everyone: if I am to blame, if ISI is to blame, then the CIA is equally to blame..." The border is porous, there is no doubt about it." So how did the doubts disappear? Intercepts of Al-Qaeda communications. By the way, free-as-a-bird Osama could have dropped in to visit Rawalpindi as well: "It's a possibility. I won't rule it out."

And how about the Taliban? How were they doing in the war they had restarted against the United States? "They are far better than any other soldiers in the world. If you go into the mountains they will beat you. They are more faster. They know the routes. They are more hardy." So what next? Send more troops, pals, or friend Hamid Karzai to toast while America gets burnt. Send the extra soldiers where? To the provinces, where the warlords still rule, and will turn to whichever side they find is winning the war.

And now to some domestic news. President Pervez is a firm believer in democracy, particularly of the sustained kind, and even more particularly if it empowers women. So when will he get out of the way of democracy? "The moment I see democracy stabilised and functioning I will remove my uniform." When could that happy day come? A few months? Chuckle. "No, not months. More than months." He also has "a system in place" to make sure that Islamic extremists never come to power, particularly through democracy.

None of this will ever be denied, but just in case: the quotes are from the interview and reports published in The Globe and Mail of Friday 26

protected from Pakistanis. There were suppressed giggles at the rather desperate manner in which a programme was sought to be manufactured for the President's visit. He even wanted to appear before a parliamentary committee on foreign affairs and trade, and drop in on a conference on Canada and Islam in the 21st Century. President Musharraf gets a much warmer reception south of the snow-line, in America. Which internal hurricane drove him north?

There was much innovative imagery during the speeches at the conference in Montreal. One Canadian senator took out white, brown and black doughnuts from a bag, placed them on top of one another and declared that this was the harmony that made Canada unique. A feisty Thai-Muslim politician then took out three plastic forks and offered his own Theory of Three Forks to describe the world. This was the cutlery he had got on the airline coming to Canada, he declared, while the rest of the passengers got steel knives and forks. Why? Because he had asked for a Muslim meal. Muslim-mealwallahs could only be trusted with plastic; steel would be injurious to everyone else's

health. Fortunately, there was a sensible interlocutor to break the deadly impasse between the Three Doughnuts and the Three Forks. He intervened to point out that since Iraq Canada was virtually broke, it provided no meals at all, so Canada was safe from all charges of bias.

Since every conference has to have an airline joke, here is the chestnut I heard in the lift. Passenger to airline ticket officer: "Could you please book me to Hawaii and my baggage to Singapore?" Ticket officer: "No, sir, we can't do that." Passenger: "Why not? You did it last year."

All right, maybe that is not the best joke of the year, but take it from me: any joke has its uses during an East-West conference on Islam.

CANADIANS are proud to tell you that they discovered the telephone, cellphone and personal computer. What they keep a closely guarded secret is the fact that no Canadian ever made money out of these inventions. Canadians got the idea and Americans made the money. On 25 September 1973 Mers Kutt, from Toronto, showed the world his invention, a typewriter-sized microcomputer called MCM-70 with between two and eight kilobytes of random memory and 14 kilobytes of read-only memory. This was arguably the world's first PC, and appeared four years before Apple bit into the game. But Kutt was squeezed out of his own company when he sought money to expand. He therefore is left with the memories while Bill Gates is left with the money. Another Canadian now says he has produced a cure for the common cold, and suggests you take nine tablets on the first day and six on the second if you see a cold coming. My first reaction is that this was probably just enough Vitamin C to stop any mild sniff. But the makers say that their secret formula is based on ginseng. If ginseng can cure impotence in Korea there is no reason why it can't cure the common cold in Canada.

Did you know that Queen Victoria's left hand was significantly shorter than her right one, and a bit withered as well? Neither did I, until I visited the splendidly colonial buildings that house the Parliament of Canada beside the Rideau river. No wonder all the great sculptors of the Empire concentrated on her nose, generally tilted about twenty degrees to the north.

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