



Durga Puja Special

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A Festival All the Way

by Waheedul Haque

THE whole of the Caucasian great race has from the beginning been fiercely patriarchal — the last word in male domination. So were the pale-coloured tall people who came in a thousand-year influx into the sub-continent, speaking dialects of some Indo-European language. They were met by native populations several notches above them on the scale of civilisation. The so-called Aryans saw here for the first time brick-built multi-storied houses and towns and cities full with them, apparels made of woven cotton yarn etc. etc. And they saw images of gods and goddesses — the Aryan pantheon had only the elements as their gods and idol-worshipping was unknown to them.

What followed in the wake of the first encounters between the native coloured population and the incoming hordes could be a most interesting study in cultural dynamics if it only could be uncovered in any detail. By now it is largely accepted that beginning from the supreme divine triumvirate of Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva the gods now being worshipped for two thousand years are mostly of native origin — and not Aryan imports. Although it may be an odious generalisation, it is full worth the hazards to say that the conquerors won the wars and imposed themselves and their will on the losing natives but in return were defeated culturally by the latter — almost gobbled up except for the continued supremacy of that most wonderful achievement of human ingenuity — the Sanskrit language.

Will it be far wrong to as-

sume that in that millennium-spanning cultural vortex the fierceness of Aryan male domination, not a wee bit less than the Roman *paterfamilias* tyranny, was tempered down a great deal by the native's matriarchal traditions? And is it not due to this that we find several goddesses at the top rung and one from whom all other gods-heads come — the Adi Mata or Adyashakti?

The Aryan invaders took time to push into the east and south of the subcontinent. Their taking over of the south is celebrated by the epic Ramayana. Why isn't there something to sing the glory of Aryanisation of the east, meaning Magadha and the Bengal states including Pragjyotisha or Kamarupa. Why? Perhaps the Aryanisation on this front did not go too well. There are Mahabharata figures journeying up to the forbidden eastern swamps and hills. But heroic conquests? No. Arjuna's triumph over Chitrangada was more than negated by his humiliation by Babhrubahana.

Can't the Bengalee people's ardent love for Goddess Durga, called Devi elsewhere in India, be tracked down to the eastern people's success in keeping their pre-Aryan matriarchal roots reach down centuries?

Arnada Shankar Roy writing recently in a ruminating mood recalls his stint as a civilian at the town of Bahrampur. He heard there a universally respected Muslim lawyer uttering a piece of wisdom that Roy has treasured all his life.

Said Maulvi Samad: How can one explain the Hindus having so liberal a religion and so rigid a society and the Muslims being socially so generous and yet having a most rigid religion! Such striking contrast travelled a course to violent conflict in the last five decades. But why didn't this contrast — living side by side for centuries — lead to tempering the extremes of the two and emphasize the liberal aspects of both so that one complemented the other? This

of the community's superiority over all others. This is the tragedy the peoples of the sub-continent have been living very painfully specially in the last hundred years.

The Puja which is literally an offering of flowers to the deity, has come to mean much more a festival embracing all across religious, communal and class divides. The Durga Festival is peculiarly Bengalee, the corresponding up-country Dussera being quite a different story involving Rama and Ravana.



could very well have been the social scenario of the subcontinent in the twentieth century. Unfortunately, specially for us Bengalees, divisive forces, neither quite religious nor quite social, prevailed to set at naught all that was positive in this subcontinent's continuous civilisation of three thousand years.

A liberal and almost secular set of religions was the subcontinental legacy. Religious tolerance was the hallmark of subcontinental social and cultural development. One reason for that can be the native religions' growing out of the soil and being constituted wholly of historically derived cultural elements — unlike Islam or Christianity which comes down from a fixed rigid body called the creed. What has bedeviled Indian civilisation is social intolerance and injustice and it is a pity that the religions' come-one-come-all provision for all beliefs and opinions to jostle alongside towards a meaningfully dynamic society, lost miserably to the social inequalities created, ironically, in the name of religion. An almost total absence of castes in Islam made Muslims a throbbing society of equals, at least theoretically. But this benign social phenomenon could not do anything to mellow the Muslim's religious rigidity which easily led to intolerance and obscurantism, a baseless and hollow idea

Durga and her full complement of offsprings, Kartika and Ganesha, Saraswati and Lakshmi do inform a Bengalee's life, be he a Muslim or Christian, Buddhist or a Hindu. For the members of other communities the turns of speech involving their names and references have no religious connotation. It is purely cultural. The Indonesian example of devote Muslims holding all of Ramayana and Mahabharata characters in deep respect — treating Rama and Arjuna almost as national heroes — can well illustrate this point. It is reasonable to think that some two centuries back our situation vis-a-vis religion and culture was not much dissimilar to Indonesia's. That we have garbled the distinction between the two and forsaken certain of our absolutely cultural adjuncts of life, led to believe that these were Hindu things and not secular Bengalee assets — is a gift of British colonialism. The communalistic delusions arising in the forties and fifties led the Bengali Muslims to exult in the exploits of a non-Muslim Rustam and weep over the suffering of Shirin and Farhad, the Central Asian tragic duo of pre-Islamic times and to pride in the charities of Hatim Tai, a pre-Islamic Arab. The hangover continues through deliberate ministrations to communal vulnerabilities in the current insistence that a *pradip* is Hindu but a candle is Muslim.

These are silly yet inordinately harmful positions betraying the fact that many Muslims have yet to come out of a minority's touchiness and suffer from inferiority complex. This creates a problem for not only them but the entire society. Breeding religious intolerance, this seriously weakens culture and as such the state and society. Religious intolerance is the first enemy of human rights. For us it is more than that. It pushes us inexorably on the path of cultural death.

Durga has many manifestations and as many names if not more. Rabindranath was strictly anti-idolatry, believing in not one of the millions on the Hindu pantheon of god-heads. He believed in a personal god who was *ekam-advitiyam* — one and without a second. He loved to call Durga as Anandamayee — the fountain of joy and happiness. Why? He did not believe in Durga and never in the Jorasanko Tagore mansion was Puja held after Devendranath's taking over the house. Then why?

Because autumn was such a dear time and the Puja drums made all hearts leap up in an indescribable abandon that has nothing of the constricting religious associations. Allowing this aspect of the Puja to grow, this can contribute to bridge the gulf that exist between the minds of the two great communities in spite of the founding of the secular Bangladesh in 1971.

Durga — the Ashta Sakti

by Dr Mahanambrata Brahmachari

SAKTI — the source, support and end of all Existence and Life, is one and unique, but She does retain the potentiality of manifesting Herself in innumerable forms. Expressing, as She does, motherly affection, She is preeminently a Mother, so tender, so benignant, but controlling, as She does, the destructive agencies. She is terrific and fierce. She is Kali of extremely black complexion. She is Uma of golden hue. Uma imparts highest knowledge to the enlightened devotee. Kali devours her own sucklings and keeps them in bondage in the all embracing totality of Saktis that is Mahasakti.

Force is inherent in existence, so is Sakti in Sada-Siva, the eternal Brahman. The primordial Sakti is identical with Brahman, the Absolute. The objective universe is a projection of Her inner being. She is endowed with all will, all knowledge and all action. She is Mahadevi. Multifarious are Her emanations and She is one in many.

The Mystic Eight

The eighth chapter of the Saptasati Chandi throws abundance of light on the subject from another angle of vision. Let us being from the context.

Chanda and Munda, the two general of the demon king Sumbha, were beheaded by Chandika by her dazzling sword, and when that information reached Sumbha, he was mad with rage and very wrathfully issued an order to all his battalions to proceed to the war front and fight their utmost to win. "Pull that proud Durga by hair to my harem or finish her for good" — was the standing order of the demon king.

The mighty army, headed by Raktabija, whose each drop of blood could produce another Raktabija of equal valour, marched onward and Mahadevi cast a significant glance at the enemy, stood erect, blew Her conch and threw down the gauntlet. The devas in heaven, however, were much troubled in hearts and out of the emotion

came out of the devas their respective Saktis.

These Saktis were in fact inherent in Mahadevi as an integral part of Her all-absorbing being, hitherto unmanifest and then incarnate.

Seven matronly Saktis descended and one more came forth, out of her own person, and thus the mystic number Eight was reached, such as Brahmani, Maheswari, Kaumari, Vishnubai, Barahi, Narasinghi, Aindri and Chandika.

Brahmani

In the forefront of the retinue of Sakti stands out Brahmani, not merely a consort but the very essence of Brahma's creative genius. In and through Brahmani, Brahma would find His creative excellences fully manifested and without Her, He would cease to function as Brahma.

Her physiological formation of the figure, ornamental decorations of the limbs, martial weapons and active tendencies all were exact counterparts of those of Brahma himself. This was true of all the Saktis that were to follow.

Brahma is exoterically the creative energy of the Universe. But esoterically She is the Sabda-Brahma, the Logos of the Greek Philosophy.

Brahmani alighted from Her Swan Plane, the swan being a symbol of the realisation of identity between individual and universal Being. The realisation constitutes the conveyance, the Bahana or the Logos. In Her beautiful hands, She carries a rosary in one and a jar in another, the former for uttering mantras and the latter for carrying the animates the devotees with piety and love and also destroys the diabolical tendencies of the demons.

Maheswari

Brahmani is followed by Maheswari. She embodies the essence of the energy of Siva. Her main activity consists in destructive affairs. She is

seated on a bull, hold a trident in hand and carries a crescent on forehead which is a symbol of universal compassion. Two serpents, signifying attraction and repulsion of the forces, wind Her wrists.

Kaumari

Kaumari, the third in the series, comprises all the energies of Kumara, the commander-in-chief of the gods. She is expert in all the arts and crafts of warfare. She holds an iron spear symbolising martial energy. She sits and moves about on the back of a peacock. Peacocks slay snakes that may bring death. Hence the peacock symbolizes conqueror of death (Mrityunjay). Kaumari is an eternal maiden, no death or decay is known to Her and to Her devotees.

Barahi

Following the Vaishanabi Sakti, the Barahi Sakti steps in the scene. She is the innermost energy of the Divine Boar, who by his teeth lifted the earth and saved it from sinking in the abyss of unrighteousness. Hiranyaksha, literally, one who constantly puts his eyes on gold, was killed by the Boar by dint of pleasures — must be done away with for the moral uplift of the world. This is precisely the function of Yajna. This is why She is called Yajna Barahi. A disc of Karma and a mace of Dharma, She carries in Her hands. Around Her head flashes the locks of flying brushes, indicating victory everywhere.

Narasinghi

The next in the series is Narasinghi. Her person is very much akin to the body of the great man-lion, whose essential Sakti She embodies, making the stars in the firmament trembling and shooting by the movement of Her mane. She makes Her august appearance. The first manifestation of the main lion took place during the killing of Hiranyakshaipu, literally meaning one-lasting for gold — symbolising gross world-

liness. The Sakti destroys abject worldliness. Her eyes glow like melted iron. Her breast is big but waist thin. Her body is covered with hair having moonlit lustre. She embodies horror and detestation in her person.

Aindri

The seventh in the series is Aindri. She is the power-incarnate of India, the king of the devas. She manipulates the royal activities of the heaven. An elephant signifying royal dignity is Her carrier. Even as an empress She possesses golden colour and valuable ornaments.

Indra is also the presiding deity of the indriyas (senses). The inner relation between eyes and light, ears and sound and so on is ordained and maintained by Indra. Aindri Sakti signifies this energy. She controls natural forces such as cloud etc. from within. She rules inner forces of mind and senses from within. She stands for virtues that are majestic.

Chandika

The seven Saktis, spoken of above, came from Chandika, the eighth and last of Ashta Saktis, manifested from the very person of Mahadevi Herself. She is, so to say, the Sakti of the Saktis. She is otherwise named unconquerable one. She is the emblem of dismay and dreadfulness. She remains surrounded by innumerable jackals, who inhabit in graveyards and live on carcasses. In brief, Chandika stands for Death itself.

Chandika is essentially the transforming energy of Time, which works from within and makes every object on the mundane plane attain maturity. Everything that is mortal is controlled and conditioned by the great time energy.

Chandika, though dismal and indomitable, has Siva, the goodness as Her envoy, indicating thereby that all transformations aim at ultimate excellence. Death, though terrible in appearance, is in reality the single gateway to a realm of beautiful existence.

সর্ব মঙ্গল মঙ্গল্যে

আনন্দময়ী মা, মনের গভীরে তুমি
চিরদিন জেগে আছো। তোমার
আশীর্বাদ নিয়েই বেঁচে আছি আমরা।
মানুষের সর্ব যন্ত্রণা আর বিভেদ ঘুচে
যাক তোমার মহাশক্তির আগুনে . . .
আসুক অপার শান্তি। আসুক আনন্দ।
এসো মা, আলোর দেশের উজ্জ্বল
প্রতিমা . . .

শারদ শুভেচ্ছা

বিজয় কৃষ্ণ দে

অমৃতলাল দে এন্ড কোং লিঃ

(কারিকর বিড়ি)

হাসপাতাল রোড, বরিশাল

বরিশাল পৌরসভা

বরিশাল

শারদীয় শুভেচ্ছা

নৃত্য পটীয়সী বর্ষার নুপুর হ্রদ গেছে থেমে, আশ্বিনের রোদে
সোনার কুচি, দেবীপঙ্কের আকাশে কিশোর চাঁদের ফালি, শরৎ
এসেছে বাংলায়। ঢাকের বুকে পড়েছে কাঠি, উঠেছে বোল
ঢাম-কুড়া-কুড়-কুড় . . .।

শারদীয় পূজার উৎসবে মেতেছে বাংলার মানুষ। সাম্প্রদায়িকতার
উর্ধে থেকে পূজার এই উৎসবকালীন দিন-গুলির মতো ৫ তিদিনই
সুসময় ও আনন্দময় হোক বরিশাল পৌরবাসীর জীবনে।

মোঃ আহসান হাবিব কামাল

চেয়ারম্যান

MITSUBISHI

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