

Durga Puja Special

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 Aryans 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 gobblled 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 we 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 goddesses come — the Adi Mata or Adyashakti?

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সর্ব মঙ্গল মঙ্গলে...

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

শারদ শুভেচ্ছা
বিজয় কৃষ্ণ দে
অম্বতলাল দে এন্ড কোং লিঃ
(কারিকুর বিড়ি)
হাসপাতাল রোড, বরিশাল

বরিশাল পৌরসভা
বরিশাল
শারদীয় শুভেচ্ছা

ন্যূন পটিয়সী বর্ষার নুপুর ছন্দ গেছে থেমে, আশিনের রোদে
সোনার কুচি, দেবীপক্ষের আকাশে কিশোর চাঁদের ফালি, শরৎ
এসেছে বাংলায়। ঢাকের বুকে পড়েছে কাঠি, উঠেছে বোল
ত্যাম—কুড়া—কুড়া—কুড়া...।

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

মোঃ আহসান হাবিব কামাল
চেয়ারম্যান



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 nought 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 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-idolatrous, believing in not one of the millions on the Hindu pantheon of deities. He believed in a personal god who was *ekam-adityan* — 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 Debenanath'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.

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 subcontinent 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 Dussehra being quite a different story involving Rama and Ravana.

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Durga — the Ashta Sakti

by Dr Mahanambrata Brahmachari

came out of the deus their respective Saktis.

These Saktis were in fact inherent in Mahadevi as an integral part of Her all-absorbing being, hitherto unmanifested 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, Viashnabi, Barahi, Narashimhi, Aindri and Chandika.

Brahmani

In the forefront of the retinue of Sakti stands out Brahmani, not merely a consort but the very essence of 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 Sumba, were beheaded by Chandika by her dazzling sword, and when that information reached Sumba, 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 then, drawing the gauntlet. The devas in heaven, however, were much troubled in hearts and out of the emotion

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

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 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

universe attain maturity. Ev-

erything that is mortal is con-

trolled and conditioned by

the great time energy.

Chandika, though dismal

and indomitable, has Siva, the

goodness as Her envy, indicat-

ing thereby that all transfor-

mations aim at ultimate excel-

lence. Death, though terrific in

appearance, is in reality the

single gateway to a realm of

beautiful existence.

Barahi

Following the Vaishanabi, 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. Hiranyakashipu, 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 man-lion took place during the killing of Hiranyakashipu, literally meaning one lasting for gold — symbolising gross world-



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