

FOCUS

DURGA PUJA SPECIAL

Sanatan Dharma and Mother Durga

by Prem Ranjan Dev

SANATAN Dharma is the most ancient and insightful among the *dharmas* of the world; it is generally called Hinduism. The Vedas, *Sastras*, the *Puranas* and the *Gita* have dealt with it extensively. In fact Vedic Hinduism is an eternal and unfathomable ocean. Hidden beneath its surface are the pearls of wisdom and essence of life. Many sages and great men have travelled on the path to this goal of finding the truth and experiencing total enlightenment. They left behind their legacy to inspire and help mankind. At a time when the interest in Hindu thought and spirituality is increasing globally, scholars from many disciplines are discovering parallels between Hindu thinking and scientific thoughts. True spirit of Hinduism is very relevant to present times. It has answers to problems of relationship between man and man, and man and God; it brings man closer to man and creates love for all creations. Sanatan Dharma explains the way for attaining liberation at each individual stage in life. However, there are a number of concepts there which are rarely understood in their true depth of spirituality. But now man's superior intellect, wisdom and inventions have apparently failed to bring a real solution to the world's problems. An aggravation of all that is experienced on the other hand. And confusions rather help lead to a vicious circle.

Man has created such an environment that it reacts unwhole-

somely upon him. Mankind is terribly heading as if towards committing licentious suicide. Heart-rending cry for peace, happiness and tranquillity is heard from all corners of this bewildered world. The state of affairs resembles that of the Devas in the reign of Mahishasura. 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 intolerable sufferings to the Devas. The helpless Devas came to Brahma, the creator of their domain. Brahma, afflicted with the sorrows and sufferings of the Devas, led the commission of the gods to Vishnu and Shiva for appraisal of the grave situation and its redress. The tales of intolerable atrocities of Mahishasura raged vehement anger in Vishnu and Shiva and in a fit of this their vital energies in the form of burning flashes came out from them. This created similar reaction among the gods whose vital energies too came out in like manner. These energies took the form of an unmatched, sublime but superbly powerful woman. She is Divine Durga. This divine embodiment of multiple spiritual energies had decoration of 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, the

devotees, and becomes simply fierce to those who tend to harm them. Durga is tranquil and turbulent, serene and fierce, *sounya* 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. The Mother Durga in a fit of destruction raised such a tumultuous uproar that the frightened Asuras came out in large numbers equipped with armours and weapons and the severe war that followed between her and them brought the ruin of Mahishasura. The heaven was recovered and the Devas cheered the victory with an elegant hymn addressed to the mother: *jayang dehi disho jah*.

Durga is perceived 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. She is the fountainhead of the highest good both spiritual attainment and material prosperity. The worship of the Mother Durga would ensure the devotees' communion with her. The constant communion with her would promote the development of friendly relations and universal fraternity. We pray to the Divine Mother for succour, to save us from the tyranny and turmoil of life in 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 communion between man and God, man and nature, man and other living beings and finally, between man and man. Let the festival of Durga Puja regenerate the spirit of fraternity among all of us.

The writer is President, Bangladesh Jatiya Hindu Parishad.

DURGA Puja is a five-day Hindu festival in the month of Ashvin which celebrates the victory of goddess Durga over the demon Mahishasura after a long battle, representing the victory of good over evil.

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the Bengal seasons Sharat (autumn). The festival assumed its popular status due to the efforts of King Balal Sen.

According to Markendeya Purana and Devi Purana, Mahishasura was a buffalo demon. After doing penance for many years, he obtained a boon from Brahma granting that he would not be slain by gods, men, spirits or any form of nature. Believing that he was invincible, he began tyrannizing the whole world, getting rid of the gods and ruling in their place.

The gods turned to Shiva for help and he in turn suggested that he, Brahma and Vishnu should combine their power to create an extraordinary woman who would be strong enough to get rid of the demon. The demon had foolishly forgotten to name woman when asking for the vital boon. Durga, a combination of powers of the three gods had eyes that shone like the rays of the sun and a smile that was as cool as the moon. Each god gave her a special weapon and she had a lion, the near invincible king of the beasts, as her vehicle.

When Mahishasura learnt of Durga's beauty, he sent her a proposal of marriage and Durga in turn replied that she would marry him if only he could defeat her in battle. A fierce battle ensued with the demon firing a barrage of deadly arrows at Durga, and changing himself into the shapes of different animals to attack. Durga overcame every attempt of the monster and finally with the trident that Shiva had given her, she pierced his chest. Flowers fell on the goddess and the gods rejoiced. Shiva decided

that the tenth day of Ashvin would be celebrated as the day of victory over evil—Vijayadashami.

According to the local belief, Durga came to earth, her parental home, and returned to heaven on the 10th day. For the four days that she is here she is welcomed and honoured. Preparations for this day begin many days in advance. Traditionally images were carved out of clay and white cork which is a difficult technique. Today, the cork is used only to make her ornaments and crown while a red sari, worn traditionally by Hindu married women adorns her.

At places, the celebrations spread over 10 days. Artisans use their talents and techniques to decorate the venue. The Mandap, Hymns are recited on the first day to invoke the goddess. This special recital is known as Mahayatra. The next five days are spent preparing for the grand yearly visit of 'mother' Durga. On the sixth day the icon of the goddess is put on a raised platform in an enclosure. Durga is supposed to arrive with her children Ganesh, Kartikeya, Lakshmi and Saraswati. The priest claims life in the clay image and from now on till the tenth day the image is treated as goddess herself. It is necessary for the worshippers to clean their house and take purification baths and offer prayers in new clothes. Some believers fast on this day and break their fast at the evening 'arati'.

For the next three days, thousands of believers come for 'darshan' of the goddess and to offer her prayers. Every morning on these four days, flowers are

offered to the goddess. Between the eighth and the ninth day, 'Sandhi Puja' is performed in which animals are sacrificed in honour of the goddess at many places. The ninth day is considered doubly auspicious as the goddess is believed to have been conceived and sent to earth on this day. "Vijayadashami" (the victorious tenth day) is a day of both joy and sorrow, as this is the day the goddess slew the demon, got rid of evil from earth, but it is also the day that she returns home. On this day the idol is immersed in the water.

Before taking the icon to be actually immersed, the priest captures its reflection in a bowl of water. Married women take their last 'darshan' of the goddess, and use a large amount of specially consecrated "sindoor" lying around the goddess to anoint their head and that of their married friends and relatives, as this is believed to grant long life to their husbands.

Durga's idol is then accompanied by singers, dancers and musicians, lifted to the edge of the river and emerged with shouts of 'Durga Mata Ki Jai' (hail mother Durga) and "Aaschey bachhar aabar esho" (come again next year).

The yearly visit of the goddess is thought to bring wellbeing and happiness among the people. Due to her auspicious presence, better variety of food is consumed during this time. On the tenth day people visit each other's houses, the young, touching the elder's feet as mark of respect and enjoying sweets. The festival brings in a feeling of harmony and peace.

WORLD TEACHERS' DAY

For Productive and Meaningful Education

by Professor Quazi Faruque Ahmed

WORLD Teacher's Day is being observed today by the teachers in Bangladesh along with their counterparts in other countries. The community is 50-million strong across the world. October 5 is a day of celebration for them in view of the adoption by the ILO and UNESCO of the recommendations concerning the status of teachers on this day in 1966 in Paris at a special inter-governmental conference. The recommendation is immensely important and vital due to its wide ranging significance and implications in regard to educators in particular and education in general. For the teachers of Bangladesh, this year's World Teachers' Day has a special connotation. It has come in the aftermath of the 45-day long strike and other agitational programmes by the non-government teachers and employees for enhancement of the government portion of their salary and for recruitment of teachers through the Public Service Commission, and for acceptance of the provisions of the UNESCO/ILO Recommendation on the status of teachers which include, among others, "since education is a service of fundamental importance, it should be recognised as a responsibility of the state."

The Recommendation is still one of the most important international tools for bringing about improvements in the teaching profession, as well as development of education. The 145-paragraph document states, among other things, (a) "Since education is an essential factor in economic growth, educational planning should form an integral part of total economic and social planning undertaken to improve living conditions"; (b) "As the achievement of the aims and objectives of education largely depends on the financial means

made available to it, high priority should be given in all countries to setting aside within the national budget an adequate proportion of the national income for the development of education"; (c) "In order that teachers may discharge their responsibilities, authorities should establish and regularly use recognised means of consultation with teachers organisations on such matters as educational policy, school organisation and new developments in education service"; (d) "Authorities and teachers should recognise the importance of participation of teachers through their organisations and in other ways, in steps designed to improve the quality of education service in educational research and in the development and dissemination of new improved methods"; (e) "Teachers should be paid on the basis of salary scales in agreement with the teachers' organisations"; (f) "Teachers should be protected by social security measures in respect of all the contingencies included in the International Labour Organisation Social Security Convention 1952"; (g) "All aspects of preparation and employment of teachers should be free from any form of discrimination"; (h) "Authorities should recognise that improvement in the social and economic status of teachers, their living and working conditions, their terms of employment and their career prospects are the best means of overcoming any existing shortage of competent and experienced teachers and of attracting to and retaining in the teaching profession substantial number of fully qualified persons".

In America, President Bill Clinton had vowed to make education the priority of his second term. In his State of the Union address to Congress, the American President pledged \$75 billion to make US schools the best in the world. He called on Congress to increase federal spending on education by one-fifth. Clinton

The statistic provided by BANBEIS, an umbrella of the Education Ministry of Bangladesh, published in 2000, reveal

glaring disparity and discrimination:

Per student (capita) recurring cost

by type of institution: 1999

Type of Institution Per student cost

	(Taka)
Govt Secondary School	3,356.00
Non-Govt Secondary School	972.00
Govt Madrasa	6,254.00
Non-Govt Madrasa	1,183.00
Government College	14,933.00
Non-Govt College	1,689.00
Cadet College	56,537.00
Teachers Training College	6,046.00
	37,201.00

In the backdrop of all these existing anomalies, teachers recently resorted to strike for more than a month for both removal of disparity between government and non-government students as well as achievement of their rightful demands including enhancement of salaries. Bangladesh Federation of Teachers' Associations, representing both the school and college teachers, not only put forward demand for enhancement of pay and long due promotion to both government and non-government teachers, it has also initiated a campaign and mass awareness programme to eradicate the rampant unfair means in public examinations and for reforming the existing examination system. The Federation also asked the government to arrange proper subject-wise training for teachers, especially before bringing any change in the syllabus in any subject or discipline.

Half a million teachers in Bangladesh observe the World Teacher's Day today with the expectation and conviction that teachers would be duly consulted in the educational matters, and their creativity and innovative ideas as well as their skill and experience fully utilised by authorities in the greater interest of human development.

The writer is Secretary General, Bangladesh Federation of Teachers' Associations (BFTA) and Secretary General, Bangladesh College Teachers' Association (BCTA).

Peace on Earth when the Mother Comes Down

by Fayza Haq

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the highest possible standards in their professional work and maintain it throughout their life. Teachers shall have to be modest in nature with strong personality and ideal thinking. On this World Teachers' Day there should be a slogan 'be a good teacher and build a good nation'.

To commemorate the World Teachers' Day 2000 Koichiro Matsuura, Director General of UNESCO; Juan Somavia, Director General of ILO; Mark Malloch Brown, Administrator of UNDP and Carol Bellamy, Executive Director of UNICEF have sent a joint message paying tribute for the role of teachers in expanding the learner's horizons. The theme of this year is 'Expanding Horizons.' World Teachers' Day reminds governments and others the role of teachers and the need to improve their status and working conditions. It is an opportunity to show appreciations for their work in preparing the next generation.

The writer is President, Dhaka city committee, Bangladesh College-University Teachers' Association.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics

Census and Enumeration of Houses 2001 Project

Parishangkhan Bhaban

E-27/A, Agargaon, Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, Dhaka

No BBS/Cens/2001/Publicity-574 Date: 27-9-2000

Re-Tender Notice

Tenders in two-envelope system (technical and financial) in the pads of the respective advertisement firms and printing establishments with previous experiences for preparing designs and printing poster, sticker, banner, brochure etc. for conducting the publicity in order to gather information accurately for census under the 'Census and Enumeration of Houses 2001 Project.'

Schedule can be procured till 10-10-2000 from the date of publishing the notice in newspapers from the office of the undersigned on all working days from 2-00 PM to 4-30 PM on payment of Taka 750/- (seven hundred and fifty) only (non-refundable). Schedule can be procured by submitting an application before procuring schedule by producing original documents as for example: trade licence, income tax certificate, VAT registration certificate, bank solvency certificate and certificate regarding previous experience. Tenders will have to be dropped latest on 15/10/2000 till 3-00 PM in the tender box kept at the office chamber of this Project Director/Director General. Only the technical offers will be opened the same day at 3-30 PM before the tenderers present (if anyone remains present). The technical offers of the tenderers which will be considered to be acceptable by the technical committee, their financial offers only will be opened later.

DDP-23856-1/10/00
G-1741

Md Hamidur Rahman
Project Director

TOM & JERRY



James Bond



On the 5th October 1998 a joint message was adopted during Paris Conference on Higher Education. In that Conference Prof M Akhteruzzaman, President of Bangladesh College-University Teachers' Associations and myself attended as official delegates. The signatories to the message were Federico Mayor,