

Esho hey Baishakh



MUHAMMAD ZAMIR

Baishakh is a month I have always greatly enjoyed. It is a period of the year, which heralds the arrival of summer, of severe dust storms, dark skies in the northwest and violent northerners. I have always admired this period as a symbol of re-awakening. It is as if Nature takes her broom and cleans all dirt and filth out of her environment. One feels the change in the air. There is heat, hot and humid conditions, fierce storms, rain and then freshness all around us. Rabindranath Tagore was quite right when he wrote-

that nearly two hundred fairs are organised throughout Bangladesh on this occasion, either on the first day of Baishakh or in its first week. This in its own way, has a huge impact on the grassroots economy. In addition, in many urban centres, including the city of Dhaka, the holding of book fairs and the exchange of books, particularly books of poetry as gifts, mark the day. This reflects the sentimental aspect of the Bangladeshi psyche. In the last few years, younger people, particularly students, have also initiated the vogue

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Consequently, it was seen as a great sign of courage, when Chhayanaut, a cultural body composed of some progressive intellectuals and lovers of art and music, decided to organise a programme of Rabindra Sangeet on the first of Baishakh in the Ramna Park in Dhaka. This bold step in more ways than one, was the second success in the struggle to establish our cultural identity as a Bangladeshi nation. Subsequently, it became the focal point in Dhaka's cultural calendar. Those associated

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There are no political overtones in the celebration of Baishakh except in the minds of some sick individuals, who because of their twisted understanding of religion, frown on the gaiety and spirit associated with this date.

I have dedicated this column to Baishakh because the eternal child in me believes in fairy tales, in the power of good over evil. Every time Baishakh comes around, it reminds me of the Bangladeshi ethos and the unity we displayed during the dark days of 1971.

Let us, in the beginning of this New Year, promise to embark on the path of constructive engagement in the political process. Let us try to share happiness and help our neighbour. It might sound naive but it would be worthwhile to seriously consider the dictates of Nelson Mandela. That great man, in his quest for understanding, did not hesitate to follow the path of justice and reconciliation. Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman also did the same.

"Come, come, O Baishakh, come! With your severe hot breath blow away all that is frail".

The first of Baishakh (Pahela Baishakh) has now evolved its own cultural connotations. On that date, businessmen, particularly in the rural areas, and most importantly within the Hindu community, open a special ledger book bound in red cloth for maintaining accounts. The whole process is called initiating the 'hal khatra'. The customers on that day are treated to sweets and delicacies in general exchange traditional food items.

This first day of the Bengali Year is also associated with 'melas' (fairs), filled with local agricultural products, handicrafts, masks made with paper-mache, kites, preserves, achars (pickles), balloons of all kinds, and rides of all descriptions. Observing this day becomes a festival for the children.

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