A civil war of the soul

The bitter and on-going struggle that has defaced Bangladeshi politics since its inception is nothing less than a civil war for the soul of the country, writes

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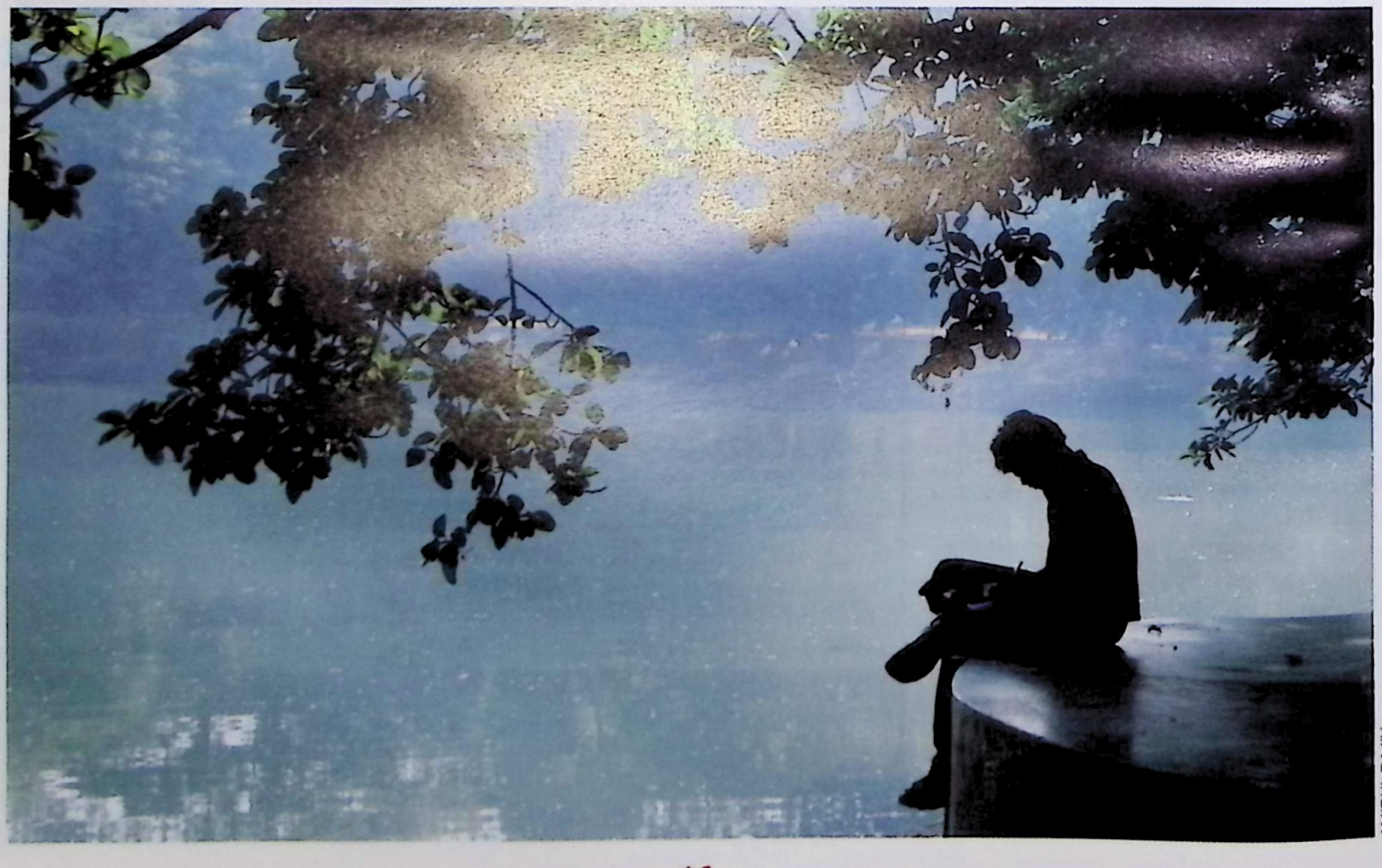
ONCE upon a time, it was said that: "What Bengal thinks today, India will think tomorrow." Sadly, that is no longer true, and neither "lesser" nor "greater" Bengal can any more claim the limelight as prima donna of political adventurism in South Asia. What is true is possibly almost exactly the opposite, as Bengal implodes in a journey of self-discovery and inevitable rebirth.

This is not to imply that such a sojourn is necessarily either regressive or, in any manner, degenerate. On the contrary Bengali renaissance survives, and the instinct for self-expression acquires new dimensions with each new experience. However, unlike a text-book intellectual awakening, the frontiers of philosophy today are a living phenomenon affecting almost every aspect of ordinary lives.

In Bengal the battle for doctrinal supremacy is an interactive theatre. The drama is deadly serious, with potentially disastrous consequences -- and abundant opportunity for rewarding self-fulfilment. The challenge is communal and collective, as well as intensely personal.

In these extraordinary times, when uncensored liberalism must defend itself from the point of the sword, conscience alone is no match against the fury of the fundamentalist. Thus, self-discovery is more often then not reduced to self-preservation, and "enlightenment" under siege can, at best, light the path to the nearest safe sanctuary. This bitter struggle is the struggle for the soul of Bangladesh. This search for identity is nothing less than a civil war of the soul.

To exorcise the dilemma and recognise ourselves in the chaos of conflicting cultures it is important that we search our souls and ask, in the words of the French painter Paul Gauguin: "What are we, where do we come from and where are we going?" The Bengali species is suicidal in the pursuit of its dreams, and can, therefore, reasonably look forward to the respect of all those who cherish a dream and an unbiased examination of our vices and virtues, our aspirations



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