



Mamunur Rashid's Eid celebrations Past and Present

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

"I have many cherished memories of Eid celebrations in my childhood. If Eid was held during the monsoon, the festivity of a boat race added an extra colour of joy. If it was held in winter, we would organise village theatre. We invited near and dear ones and vice versa and would roam around visiting friends and relatives. In our time during Eid-ul-Azha, the distribution of meat among the impoverished was fair and they had a large share of protein. Once, we decided not to sacrifice cattle as many cattle died due to the dreadful cyclone of 1970.

"Folk performing art forms

like jatrapala were held marking Durga Puja and Chaitra Shongkranti Mela (fair). However, folk performing art forms including jatrapala were marginalised and lost their appeal due to the emergence of fundamentalism during the military rule.

"Accomplished jatra artistes are absent as they have stepped away from the profession. What we have now is a sort of decadence in the name of culture. Many popular folk entertainment forms like 'Lathikhela,' bullfight and cockfight are rarely held in our village during festivals.

"Earlier, such rural sports were held spontaneously. To revive or bring back the golden time of

cultural affluence, we'll need a cultural movement -- a movement not merely supported by cultural activists but also through diffusing a cultural conscience among the masses so that our folk or performing art forms cannot be commercialised in the era of globalization.

"It is a good sign that theatre has marched forward many miles in post independence-Bangladesh. But the village theatre practice has vanished. Marking Eid or Puja, the community festivals are out of existence.

"This Eid will come on a solemn note, as my father passed away on August 25. We are going to hold his chehlam on the third day of Eid-ul-Azha."

Zia clears schedule to unwind



STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ziaur Rahman Zia is one of the most popular rock musicians of the country. Despite this being the busy time of the year for musicians, the bassist-songwriter of urban rock band Shironamhin has plans to spend a quiet, relaxed Eid with friends and family -- as he shared with The Daily Star:

What's usually on your schedule during Eid?

Zia: Specifically for the Qurbani Eid, we're usually busy during the day with the sacrifice and the meat and everything, so that constitutes a large part of the day's plan. We also usually have live performances on TV and radio on the schedule, but we wanted to take a break from that this year. We are also scheduled to play at some concerts after Eid, but I guess that will depend somewhat on the political scenario of the country.

Do you usually spend your Eid in Dhaka, or go out of town?

Zia: My home is here in Dhaka, so I have nowhere else to be at this time of the year. Most of my band-mates are also here. Although Tuhin's native home is in Chittagong, he celebrates the festival here. Our keyboardist Rashel's family lives in Italy so he usually goes there during Eid, but he'll be in Dhaka this year as well.

Anything special you're planning this year?

Zia: Our good friend Kanak (Kanak Aditya from Joler Gaan) has recently moved to the suburbs of Hemayetpur, where he has a beautiful home. It's very peaceful, has a pond, and space for kids to play as well. We might be headed there on Eid day, to spend a relaxed time with friends and family. I'm looking forward to it.

Cook out with Sharmin Lucky

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Sharmin Lucky, the popular co-host of the equally popular "Siddiqua Kabir's Recipe" is now busy hosting a show on Radio Foorti. With Eid almost on us, Sharmin shared her mother's special recipe to cook up a delicious Doi-Illish:

As an introduction, she said, "My mother is a great cook. Though she rarely enters the kitchen now, there was a time when she would turn out mouth-watering delicacies that we eight siblings would feast on during festivals. Among her delicacies, Doi-Illish is an all time favourite that I occasionally serve at my house parties, more so during the monsoon."

Sharmin's recipe:
The large size Hilsa -- paka Illish is in abundance during the rainy season. For this, all you require is half a cup sour curd (tok doi), one tablespoon



ginger paste, one tablespoon coriander paste, a tinge of red chili powder and cumin seeds (jeera), oil and salt. Mix the ingredients with the fish pieces and add half a cup of water. As the ingredients thicken, add a few green chilies and lo!

You have the tastiest Hilsa dish to lap up.

In recent times, Sharmin has been busy working as celebrity Radio Jockey for Radio Foorti. She runs a busy schedule with the live show "Total Time Pass with Sharmin Lucky". The programme runs through Sunday to Thursday between 1pm to 4pm, she adds.

The programme focuses on lifestyle, travelling, recipes, health tips and art films, among other subjects.

"My special show on Puja was aired on Saturday," she informed. "On the third day of Eid, I have a special music show with Shahed, Miles and Joler Gaan to be aired at noon from 12pm to 4pm."



Navapatrika-- the worship of the creative force of nature

SHUMON SENGUPTA

The five-day long Durga Puja festival has begun in India, Bengal in particular.

Since long, one of the most abstract, curious and intriguing images of the Durga Puja for me has been that of the Navapatrika (also known as the Kola Bou) - the anthropomorphic Banana plant, clad in a Saree (generally white, with a red border).

I have always wondered what the esoteric Navapatrika image and the ritual associated with it meant and this time during my annual sojourn to Kolkata, I decided to investigate this in some depth. I headed for the Ahiritola Ghat (the flight of steps on the landing on the river bank) in North Kolkata, which is one of the major scenes for the ancient Navapatrika ritual.

We headed for the Ahiritola Ghat driving through the lanes and by lanes of North Kolkata around five in the morning to witness the ritual live, in order to unpack its origin and significance.

The Navapatrika ritual and installation of the sacred pot:

Navapatrika marks the beginning of the Durga Puja in which nine different plants (agricultural, horticultural and herbal) are tied together representing the different anatomical and morphological features of a woman. The ensemble is then given a ritual bath in the river, wrapped in the nine-yard saree to represent a newly-wed bride and then carried off for installation at the main worship altar. The nine plants of Navapatrika - the Banana plant; the Colocacia; Turmeric; Jayanti (sesbania seban); Bel or wood apple; Pomegranate/Fig; Ashoka tree (saraca indica); Arum plant and the rice plant represent nine deities, or the nine different forms of Goddess Durga.

The ritual started early in the morning and we witnessed groups of devotees bringing the Navapatrika ensemble to the river bank, give it a ritual bath and then wrap it in a nine yard Saree, to the accompaniment of beating of drums, bells and gongs, the chanting of ancient mantras and waving of ceremonial lamps and incense, hoisting of colourful ceremonial parasols, the blowing of the conch and swaying of ceremonial fans. Offerings of raw and cooked foods were also made.

At the old Ahiritola ghat by the river Hoogly (a branch of the Ganges, draining into Bay of Bengal) we encountered and jostled with hundreds of devotees in full ritual fervour, conducting the Navapatrika ritual.

Along with the consecration of the Navapatrika, the priests also assembled the Mangala-ghatam -- or the sacred earthen or brass/copper pot holding holy water. The pot of water is symbolic of the womb and also of life giving water and is worshipped with mango leaves, a tender coconut, vermillion and turmeric -- once again symbolising fertility and fecundity. Goddess Durga is considered to reside in the sacred pot during the four days of the Durga Puja. Both the Navapatrika and the sacred pot were then carried in colourful processions to the wor-

ship alters.

At the Ahiritola ghat, we struggled alongside the devotees to get a good foothold on the slippery steps and secure the best angles and frames for the photographs. The sights, sounds and smells combined to transport us into an ancient and mysterious time wrap.

Vestiges of the ancient practice of nature worship and a fertility ritual:

While the Navapatrika ritual has found its way into the mainstream contemporary Durga Puja festival, originally it was a popular agricultural ritual performed by the peasant folks for a prosperous harvest. It was during the autumn (Sharat), the time for reaping crops (the Aman paddy) that the peasants wor-

ship ritual had managed to survive for thousands of years through to the present day. It linked modern India with its distant, ancient past and represented a great civilization and cultural continuity that is difficult to find anywhere else in the world.

However at the same time, there was an immense contradiction which did not escape me. While being a grand spectacle and a delight to the senses, sadly for me the ritual was not representative of the reality of our daily lives in South Asia, where we are witnessing very high incidence of gender-based violence, oppression and discrimination and a total disregard to environmental protection. In my mind, the ritual stood in stark contrast to the real status of women in our society and



PHOTO: RIDWAN ADDI RUPON

shipped the Navapatrika deity for a good harvest. One can therefore safely conjecture that the Navapatrika ritual was a precursor to the Durga Puja in that it represents a primitive form of Goddess Durga. The Navapatrika ritual is in many ways also a thanksgiving ceremony to nature for her bounty. It is a living relic of the practice of nature worship by the ancient people of the subcontinent and predates the emergence and predominance of idol worship in Hinduism.

For me, the Navapatrika ritual stood as a fascinating symbol of the celebration of female power and the regenerative and restorative aspect of nature, which many Hindus consider as divine Mother. What amazed me most was that an ancient harvest and

increasing environmental degradation and loss of biodiversity in the subcontinent.

Pregnant with important symbolism, ancient rituals such as those associated with the Navapatrika will attain their true value only when these are translated into a positive individual and societal attitude towards girls and women and towards our natural environment on the whole. Or else, such rituals will be at best tokenistic vestiges of an ancient past and at worst, a gross contradiction and hypocrisy in contemporary life in South Asia.

The author is currently the country director of an International Aid and Development organization in Sierra Leone. He is an avid traveller, aesthete and blogger.



Mim recalls childhood Puja days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Lux-Channel i Superstar Bidya Sinha Saha Mim has secured her position firmly as model and film and TV actress.

Mim shared her childhood Puja memories with The Daily Star.

"My busy shooting schedules have ruled out Durga Puja celebrations over the last few years. Though I do manage to visit Puja Mandaps, I don't get as excited as before. It would of course be different if I wasn't working at Puja time.

"Though I have shooting scheduled this time, I have managed to buy a gorgeous sari for Puja day. Although I will be in Qatar with my mother on Dashami, I plan on wearing the sari.

"Both my grandfather and maternal uncle's homes are in Rajshahi where I had great fun at the festival in my early childhood. We are two sisters. Both of us used to wear new dresses and generally hang out on Puja day.

"My father was a professor at a government college, and I spent my childhood mostly in Comilla town. There I had a lot of friends of whom I have many fond Puja memories. As a child, I made sure that my Puja attire was not the same as that of others. I still haven't forgotten those days.

"We used to have a lot of fun at our home in Rajshahi at Puja time. A boat race was held that day. I still go to Rajshahi if I have spare time. However, when I arrive in Rajshahi, I face an embarrassing situation as people flock around the house.