

The story of Durga Puja

RAJIB KUMAR DAS

Creation of Goddess Durga

Goddess Durga represents a united front of all Divine forces against the negative forces of evil and wickedness. The gods in heaven decided to create an all-powerful being to kill the demon king Mahishasur who was ready to attack them. At that very moment a stream of lightning dazzled forth from the mouths of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh and it turned into a beautiful, magnificent woman with ten hands. Then all the gods presented her with their special weapons. The image of Durga, the Eternal Mother destroying the demon Mahishasur is symbolic of the final confrontation of the spiritual urge of man with his baser passions.

Pandavas

As per our great epic Mahabharat, Pandavas, after wandering in the forest for 12 years, hung their weapons on a Shami tree before entering the court of King Virat to spend the last one year in disguise. After the completion of that year on Vijayadashmi, the day of Dussehra, they brought down the weapons from the Shami tree and declared their true identity. Since that day, the exchange of Shami leaves on Dussehra day became symbol of good, will and victory.

Lord Rama

This festival has immense mythological significance. As per Ramayan, Ram did chandi-puja and invoked the blessings of Durga to kill Ravana, the ten-headed king of Lanka who had abducted Seeta and had charmed life. Durga divulged the secret to Ram as to how he could kill Ravana. Then after vanquishing him, Ram, with Seeta and Laxman, returned victorious to his kingdom of Ayodhya on Diwali day.

Kautsa

Kautsa, the young son of Devdatt, insisted that his guru Varatantu accept "gurudakshina," after finishing his education. After lots of persistence his guru finally asked for 14 crore gold coins, one crore for each of the 14 sciences he taught Kautsa. Kautsa went to king Raghuraj, who was known for his generosity and was an ancestor



of Rama. But just at that time he had emptied all his coffers on the Brahmins, after performing the Vishvajit sacrifice. So, the king went to Lord Indra and asked for the gold coins. Indra summoned Kuber, the god of wealth. Indra told Kuber: "Make a rain of gold coins fall on the shanu and apati trees round Raghuraja's city of Ayodhya." The rain of coins began to fall. King Raghu gave all the coins to Kautsa, who gave 14 crores gold coins to his guru. The remaining coins were lavishly distributed to the people of Ayodhya city. This happened on the day of Dussehra. In remembrance of this event the custom is of looting the leaves of the apati trees is followed, and people present these leaves to each other as *sone* (gold).

During Durga Puja, God in the form of the Divine Mother is worshiped in Her various forms as Durga, Lakshmi and Saraswati. Though the Goddess is one, She is represented and worshiped in three different aspects. On the first three nights of the festival, Durga is worshiped. On the following three, Lakshmi; and then Saraswati Devi on the last three nights. The following tenth day is called Vijayadasami. Vijaya means "victory," the victory over one's own mind that can come only when these three -- Durga, Lakshmi, and Saraswati -- are worshiped.

Meaning of Durga

Durga is perhaps the most widely worshiped deity of Shakti. Maa Durga's divine characterization, including the entire Devbhagavatham, is dedicated to her. Durga means one who is difficult to approach. However, since she is the mother of universe, she is the personification of tender love, wealth, power, beauty and all virtues.

Implications of the idol

The complete image of Goddess Durga represents destruction of evil and protection of good, and reflects the point that in order to become divine one should keep one's animal instincts under control. Thus, by worshiping Durga the idea of ruthless destruction is invoked to annihilate all the desires and unfold divinity.

Its connotation

In Bengal, Goddess Durga is worshiped for nine days. In South India, an altar decorated with a stepped platform and filled with small images of gods, animals, birds and other beings, animate and inanimate, is worshiped for nine days. This altar is known as the Kolu. People re-dedicate themselves to their profession. On this day, a child also begins to learn the alphabet in a ceremony known as *aksarabhyasa*. This day marks the beginning of any type of learning. One offers gifts to one's teachers, seeks their blessings, and prays for success in one's new endeavours.

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Quest for safe meat

SHARIF CHOWDHURY

CONSUMPTION of vegetable and fruits has been a huge concern for the people of Bangladesh for the past year. Usage of formalin and other medicines has also raised health concerns in the case of fish as well. The latest concern is red meat. Harmful drugs are being widely used to fatten the cattle quickly for Eid-ul-Azha. Considering the after effects, the government has undertaken an initiative to identify the unnaturally fattened cows.

Eid-ul-Azha has its own distinct festive image when Muslims like to go to the cattle market and choose their own sacrificial animal. This practice has become an inseparable part of our tradition. From the purchase of the sacrificial animal to Qurbani and meat distribution, everything has to be done in a *halal* way. Therefore, regardless of social class, every Muslim tries to ensure that the meat is *halal* till the end. This year it is natural that the buyers will also take extra measures to ensure that the cattle were naturally raised and fed.

Greedy cattle owners are feeding the cows dexamethasone and similar medicines to increase their appetite, which makes them gain more weight in a short span of time. Other than these, the cows are being injected with steroids like Diclofenac, Decasone, Oradexon, Betneval, and Adam 33. These drugs damage their heart, kidney and liver and cause accumulation of fluid in the body, making them look fatter. Considering the risks, pharmaceutical companies banned Diclofenac and other medicines that are harmful for animals in 2010.

According to health experts, this excessive use of medicines is not only harmful for the animals but also has a negative impact on human health. Though there are different opinions among scientist regarding the consumption of steroid injected meat and its effect on the human body, some research results showed that it might cause hormonal imbalance in pregnant women. Males also face some significant health risks, and young children reach puberty earlier. These can be avoided if there are proper inspections while purchasing the livestock. One can easily identify the animals that were injected with steroids or other medications by pressing the cow's skin, which will indicate the presence of fluids. The animals fed on drugs are also more lethargic than normal cattle.

If the Qurbani is done in a proper way, all the toxic fluid comes out with the blood. Therefore, the *halal* process is healthy. One needs to ensure two things for a *halal* Qurbani -- firstly, sacrifice the animal in the name of Allah, and secondly, slaughtering the animal with a sharp knife and cutting all the veins properly.

The government recently issued directives to the authorities to take action against illegal cattle fattening. The High Court has given an order to form a specialised committee to take actions against the perpetrators who are causing health threats. This committee, consisting of seven senior officials of the government -- including secretary of home affairs, secretary of commerce, secretary of food and supplies -- along with reputed health and nutrition specialists and veterinarians will monitor the situation and initiate action plan.

But the concern is that, though Bangladesh already has strict law against such acts, some money-hungry businessmen are violating the laws. People can inspect, judge and purchase their desired sacrificial animal for Eid-ul-Azha, but what about the rest of the year?

There is no way to tell whether the meat in the butcher shops is from normally raised cattle or not. Therefore, along with the government, the authorities concerned should form a monitoring board. City Corporations and local governments can also play a significant role here. The number of butcher shops authorised by the City Corporations should be increased, along will proper inspection. Butcher shop owners will need to have the quality of the meat verified by an authorised person prior to selling it. Both anti-mortem and post-mortem should be done properly, and the number of inspectors has to be increased. This will raise the confidence of the customers, and they will be satisfied with the quality.

Inspection during Eid-ul-Azha is not going to protect the people all around the year. Therefore, proper regulations and guidelines for the meat business are much needed. Once the business takes a proper form, buyers will be able to purchase quality healthy meat throughout the year. Both government and private initiative is necessary to modernise livestock production, and to reduce and regulate drug usage.

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Malfunctioning school system

BITTER TRUTH



MD. ASADULLAH KHAN

THE recent digital fraud resorted to by the admission seekers in Dhaka University has awakened the citizens to the malfunctioning of our education system. Much to everybody's shock and disappointment, the GPA-5 holders couldn't prove their excellence in the Dhaka University admission test.

know that the textbooks prescribed for different stages at the primary and secondary levels, as well as the method of teaching, has not created any interest in the learners at the early stages.

It is necessary to introduce interesting textbooks, grammar and model translation books with split or scattered sentences given for exercise right from class six. If no attempt is made at the SSC level classes (up to class X) to increase students' vocabulary and skill to translate Bangla sentences into English following the rules of grammar, then how can they be expected to deliver the goods when it is called for? Our students are not born and bred in English culture and environment that they will learn the language without effort. Callous selection of textbooks and incompetence in teaching English have brought about the disastrous result.

These days, students in the mainstream type of schooling do not have to read any prescribed grammar book nor do they have to translate Bangla sentences or passages into English. They have no idea about conjugation of verbs and sequence of tense, so they write "I have caught fish," or "I had went there." To expect a student these days to write idiomatic expressions with correct use of preposition is an absurd proposition. This is hardly possible because at no stage of their schooling were students given lessons in grammar or Bangla sentences or passages for translation. The only English lesson they had was from a textbook titled Functional English. Sadly true, this functional English did not help them function well at any stage of their life. So the foremost need of the hour is to recast the English syllabus from the primary stage up to HSC level. Our experiment with Functional English for the last two decades or more, sans grammar and translation, has totally failed.

Parents want their children to learn better and be able to hold responsible jobs or attain professional skill. But how can it be possible when there has been so much decline in the standard of textbooks written and introduced in schools by so-called educationists? In the communicative Functional English Grammar and composition book for students of class VI to class VIII there are vulgar sentences galore. Examples are: (a) নুরী তাকে পাগল বানিয়েছিল : Nuri made him mad; (b) সে তাকে উষ্ণ রাখা: She keeps him warm; (c) তার বোন ছিলাল : His sister is a flirt. Sentences given for translation are: (a) মাধুরী পোশাক ছাড়ার পর পুকুরে গোসল করবে; (b) আমি যখন ঘুমাচ্ছিলাম তখন নাছুরীল আমাকে চুমু দিয়েছিল; (c) ঝুমুর নিয়মিত মাদক গ্রহণ করত

One wonders how an educationist of experience and knowledge could have written such a book for budding learners. It seems that there was none in the education directorate or Textbook Board experienced enough to scrutinise such books before prescribing them for the young learners. Irreparable damage has been done in the meantime, and the nation is now suffering the consequences.

Most of our once fine schools and colleges are in a state of decay because nobody, either in the administration or in the political arena, made any effort to look into the causes of their malfunctioning. In the late '50s, when we were studying in school, Range inspectors of schools routinely visited the high schools under their respective zones. All such visits would have tremendous impact both on teachers and students.

In the post-liberation days, when democratic governance of the country stalled, academic achievement took a beating. The educational institutions from primary to secondary level were in doldrums; and the situation has hardly changed till now. During the years, all the problems have spilled over to such a proportion that raising the standard of English is an almost impossible task. In such a situation, the basics must be corrected first.

The dismal performance of the present day learners in the national level examinations like the BCS, and in teacher recruitment test in schools, colleges and universities and government organisations, should have awakened the administration and the people to the pitfalls in the academic arena. The main things that have been ignored so far are development of the existing schools and improvement of the quality of teaching. Unless a student learns the basics at school, he can never fare well at higher levels.

Undeniably true, teaching in the institutions has suffered badly. There is hardly any teaching in the schools and colleges, nor are there class-tests to evaluate the performance of the students in a particular subject, or to improve the ability of the deficient students. Most of the teachers at the primary or secondary schools, and even in colleges, have started coaching, often at the expense of teaching in the classroom. Lured by the fast money the coaching business is fetching these days, hundreds of coaching centres have sprung up almost as a sort of commercial enterprise throughout the country. The system has bred corruption in the teaching profession, and must be stopped before it causes more harm.

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While the education minister has laid the blame on harder questions set in the admission test with some deliberate motive, noted educationists disagreed with his claim. Veteran educationists feel that the increasing number of A plus and high percentage of passes in SSC and HSC examinations have not ensured imparting of quality education from the school level. With about 80% of the students failing in almost all the units in the Dhaka University admission test, not to speak of getting qualifying marks, the question that has naturally arisen is whether the overwhelming success rate was really based on better student performance and better education.

There is a general agreement that the method of teaching and learning English in schools these days leaves much to be desired. Students are not interested in the language even from the primary stage. This is partly due to the nature of the textbooks and partly to the incompetence of the teachers. Educational administrators remain silent even though they

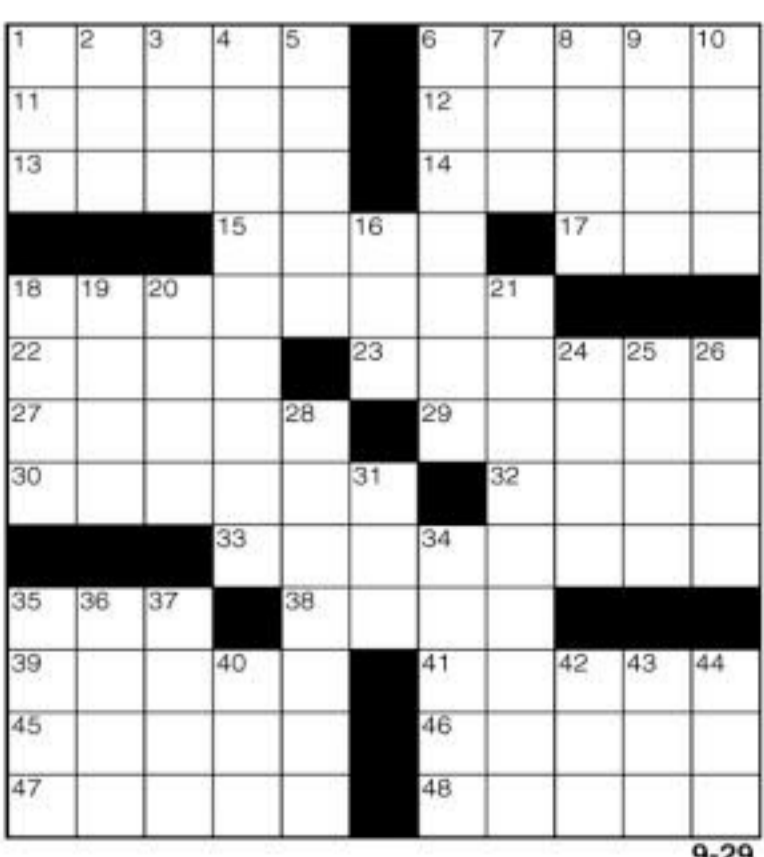
QUOTABLE Quote

The difference between perseverance and obstinacy is that one comes from a strong will, and the other from a strong won't.

Henry Ward Beecher

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph

- | | |
|--------------------------|------------------------|
| ACROSS | DOWN |
| 1 Saturn sight | 1 Border |
| 6 Resort spots | 2 Lupino of films |
| 11 Blockhead | 3 Wee bite |
| 12 Brother's daughter | 4 Jeweler of a sort |
| 13 Syrup source | 5 Teakettle output |
| 14 Long look | 6 Concisely |
| 15 Hyphen's kin | 7 Use a chair |
| 17 Young seal | 8 Bound |
| 18 Living end | 9 Beige |
| 22 Physics bit | 10 Ooze |
| 23 Kitchen come-ons | 16 Sailing site |
| 27 Masters of meditation | 18 Coral spots |
| 29 "Survivor" team | 19 Resting spots |
| 30 Out-pouring | 20 Roman garment |
| 32 Sketched | 21 Writer |
| 33 Telemarket's needs | 24 Deep mud |
| 35 Jetting spot | 25 Help in crime |
| 38 Enjoy the pool | 26 Usa a needle |
| 39 Japanese port | 28 Playground sights |
| 41 Home of the Marlins | 31 Spotted |
| 45 Smallest mammal | 34 Thin coins |
| 46 Old anesthetic | 35 Fence part |
| 47 Many new drivers | 36 Tennis great Arthur |
| 48 Some carpets | 37 Challenge |
| | 40 Boxer Norton |
| | 42 Cry of insight |
| | 43 Ryan of movies |
| | 44 Tax agcy. |



Yesterday's answer

C A B A L S P A R S
O P E R A R A V E L
V E S T S S C E N E
E X I S T S N O D
T E D S T L O U I S
S S E T R A D E R
E R A S E
A U L A I T A P E
D I S O W N S R E D
A R E S T A R E S
R O D E O A L I V E
T U T O R N O V E L
S T O N E D E E D S

CRYPTOQUOTE

ADODGBEGUD FN GQB NQVJUS ADVQAND ZQA LSEB LD SERD PQGD EN BSD ZDEA QZ BSD UQGNMJDGUDN.
- AQUUSDZQJUEJKP

Yesterday's CRYPTOQUOTE: THE SEA IS OUR SAVINGS ACCOUNT OF INSPIRATION AND WEE-BEING, AND WE DRAW FROM IT ONLY ON SPECIAL OCCAIONS.
- RHETA JOHNSON

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker



HENRY by Don Trachte

