

Christmas: Mystery of God's love

As we look on baby Jesus in the manger we see that he is the answer to today's problems. Instead of violence, in baby Jesus we see gentleness. Instead of hatred, in baby Jesus we see tenderness. Instead of selfishness in baby Jesus we see love for us.

FATHER PATRICK GOMES

TODAY is Christmas, feast of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus! The whole Christian world celebrates this feast with great joy as Christmas is the feast of God's great love for mankind manifested in Jesus.

A baby easily wins the heart and love of anyone with human feelings, but how much more does baby Jesus win our heart and love? A call to Christian brothers and sisters: Let us kneel before baby Jesus and thank him for coming to save us in your own words. A call to all: Let us practice childlike simplicity, humility and win everybody's heart.

Imagine, Jesus, the Son of God and our Saviour born in a stable and placed in a manger instead of a cot! When God comes he usually comes in humility, silently and peacefully, without causing a great disturbance. God's humble coming in Jesus would not surprise us if we knew God better. But of course we will never know God sufficiently to understand. So no matter how much we try to understand God becoming human in Jesus we will not be able to comprehend, it will remain a mystery. On this day of Christmas, let us reflect on the mystery of God and reflect how he is ever present in our midst in the midst of many sufferings.

To this above mentioned mystery the best reaction is that of the shepherds, simply to praise God. Let us praise God now in our own words. The angel sings: Glory to God in the highest, peace to men of good will. Today, the Christian community sings Kirton as a group. The choir sings and praises God who has come



down to us born in a manger. Let us be always grateful for all good things that we are receiving from God.

As we look on baby Jesus in the crib we think of the mystery of God's love for us. Why did God, who is almighty and all-powerful, become small and powerless as a baby? Quite simple, out of love for us. God became human so that we might become more like God. If Jesus had not come as a human like us, we might have had difficulty in

believing that God really loved us. But now we know for sure. John the Evangelist says: "This is the revelation of God's love for us, that God sent his only Son into the world that we might have life through him." Let us thank God for revealing his love for us in Jesus, that he who is so big and powerful became so small and weak for us, that he became one of us, to help us be more like him, to have life through him. As we see baby Jesus in the manger we reflect

on God's way being a way of gentleness and tenderness. God's way is not one of violence. There is a lack of goodness and love in the world but God is tender and loving.

We are frightened by the severe violence, cruelty and hostility; we are horrified by the weapons ready to banish human lives and destroy properties. Nation against nation is also a reality of today.

As we look on baby Jesus in the manger we see that he is the answer to today's problems. Instead of violence, in baby Jesus we see gentleness. Instead of hatred, in baby Jesus we see tenderness. Instead of selfishness in baby Jesus we see love for us. This year's Christmas calls for tenderness and gentleness; calls for loving reconciliation and understanding of the mystery of God-becoming man.

Let us ask baby Jesus who is God-made-man to help us be gentle, tender and loving with those around us as he was in the manger.

Jesus in the manger, you give us hope. In the darkness of our world, your light has shone. Your coming in gentleness encourages us to hold out the hand of reconciliation, to help one another, to work for peace. We remember the message of the angels: "Glory to God in the highest heaven and on earth peace." Baby Jesus, help us be people of peace and to spread peace everywhere we go. Let us pray now for peace: peace in our personal life, peace in the family, in the society and peace in our country. To all our brethren, Hindu-Muslim-Buddhist-Christians: Merry Christmas!

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Rediscovering Chittagong and its lost stories

ANAN MORSHED

WHAT happened to my Chittagong, the verdant, hilly, and storied Chittagong of my childhood? That's how I felt during the ride from Shah Amanat International Airport to the city centre. It seemed almost banal to imagine that Chittagong's urban identity has always been driven by various claims of "uniqueness." The uniqueness of its geography, its historic origin, its local dialect, its multi-faith social amalgamation, its history of anti-British movement, its *Porto Grande* global attraction through the ages, among others. Uncharacteristic mountainous terrain in a predominantly flat deltaic country has always been an essential part of the city's mythology.

local dialect. Place names, such as Alkaran (*Al Qarn*) and Sulak Bahor (*Sulukal Bahar*), demonstrate Arab influence. The use of negative before a verb in *chatgaiya*, Chittagong's local dialect, is another instance of Arabic contribution to the culture of the port city.

Portuguese explorers in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries frequently called it the "City of Bengala." Duarte de Barbosa, one of the earliest Portuguese writers to offer a geographical account of the African and Indian coasts in the early sixteenth century described Chittagong as a natural attraction for traders, missionaries, and fortune-seekers from far-flung places.

The history of Chittagong is richly crisscrossed by actors of all sorts: Buddhist mendicants, Hindu *zamindars*, Arab saints,

rades captured the armory of the British Raj in Dampara Police Line in 1930. The gallows in the Chittagong Central Jail, where Surya Sen was hanged, is considered an archetypal symbol of popular resistance. Bedabrata Pain's 2012 film, Chittagong, recaptures the sentimental history of the city's gallant fight against the British Raj.

Chittagong has other, more recent, stories, steeped in a combination of patriotism, political intrigue, and entrepreneurship. The nation's independence was declared on the radio from Kalurghat, a sleepy outpost steps away from the Karnafuli River. The much venerated journey of modern-era microcredit began from an impoverished but now famous village named Jobra in the vicinity of the University of Chittagong.

rise to a widespread culture of land-grabbing and hill-cutting. The Chittagong City Corporation and the Chittagong Development Authority are both oblivious of and complicit in these illegal and harmful actions.

The city's western ocean front from Faujdarhat to Bhatari and beyond is, as the BBC hauntingly noted, "where the world's ships go to die." The ship-breaking industry's corrosive effect on the area is no less an environmental "genocide." Having spent six childhood years at the nearby Faujdarhat Cadet College, I recall fond memories of playing football on the Faujdarhat beach. The seafront's tranquility, however, has been replaced by the disquieting industrial wasteland of half-cut ships and desperately poor

Circuit House (built in 1913 as a guest house for government officials) provided a lush forecourt. During the mid-1990s, driven by the era's wrong-headed development plans, the site was taken over to create a garish theme park for children

Consider J. M. Sen Hall, a town hall built in 1920 during the pivotal days of *shawdeshi andolon*, The well-known British-trained barrister and anti-colonial revolutionary, Jatindra Mohan Sengupta of Chittagong, commissioned the city's first town hall in honour of his father, advocate Jatra Monan Sengupta. A political hotspot for anti-British gathering during the 1920s, J. M. Sen Hall later became the heart of cultural activities in Chittagong. J. M. Sen Hall now stands hopelessly with a quiet melancholy amidst tower-



The Chinese traveler poet Hsuan Tsang's 7th-century depiction of the city as "a sleeping beauty emerging from mists and water" was no doubt a reference to Chittagong's hilly idyll.

Alas, a profiteering building boom, a preening consumer culture, and the tyranny of billboards across Chittagong has either hidden or erased the city's stories.

Legend has it that the Buddha came to a *vihara* or a *chakrashala* located in Patiya, a southern town of greater Chittagong, employing his miraculous powers for disembodied travel. According to some historians, Buddhism spread to Chittagong during the time of the Buddha himself, over twenty-six centuries ago, when Plato was not yet born!

Within a century after Islamic forces under the leadership of Tariq ibn-Ziyad crossed Gibraltar in 711 CE to colonise most of the Iberian Peninsula, Arab sailors began to arrive on the shores of Chittagong. They left enduring marks in the port city's life and

Mughal governors, European traders, British colonialists, anti-British revolutionaries, Western development experts, wealthy industrialists, national leaders, and globally known entrepreneurs. When history becomes a jigsaw puzzle of people, events, places, and narratives, myths thrive!

Thus, to know Chittagong and to imagine its future, one must first learn to negotiate its stories. The city's *genius loci* is found not just in its people, hills, *dighis*, rivers, and sea, but also in its stories, myths, fables, and allegories. The fantastical tales of the Buddha's divine voyage to Chittagong or the Muslim dervish's lighting a *chati* on Cheragi'r Pahar to drive away demons are as important as the city's life-giving river, Karnafuli.

Many historic events that occurred in Chittagong fuel Bengal's collective folklore. The city was a real-life theater for revolutionary sagas during the heyday of anti-British agitation. In a much mythologised political action, Master Da Surya Sen's young com-



But, like all stories, there are darker sides. One of the tragic failures of Chittagong's urban administrators and planners has been their inability to hear the city's stories. A visit to the port city today alarms the most casual of observers that when a crony development agenda takes precedence over a city's ecological wellbeing the result is disastrous.

Chittagong is a chaotically expanding, environmentally challenged metropolis. Its population jumped from approximately 200,000 in the early 1950s to over 5 million in 1991 and about 7 million in 2014. The metropolitan area is home to 3.4% of the country's population (Dhaka 10%). The economic performance of the city is noticeable, contributing 11% of the country's GDP (Dhaka 36%). Yet, livability is an acute issue. Chittagong, like other burgeoning metropolises of developing economies, has been experiencing a *laissez-faire* construction boom. Real-estate development has become a key economic driver, unfortunately giving

workers. The Brazilian photographer Sebastião Salgado's *Workers: An Archaeology of the Industrial Age* (1989) shows the tragic transformation of the pristine beach into a maritime graveyard and an environmental disaster.

The preservation of heritage buildings is a far cry. The famous Nalapara site of Rabindranath Tagore's civic reception in 1907, the Kamolbabu's Theater (established in 1906; later renamed as Bishwambhar Hall and then Lion Cinema Hall) has been razed to create an unsightly apartment building!

There were many buildings that shaped our childhood perception of the city. Window-shopping in the Chittagong New Market -- an American-style shopping mall built in 1964, the first of its kind in the then East Pakistan -- was a magnet for shoppers. It was even a domestic tourist attraction. Across the outer stadium located at Kajar Dewri -- where we played cricket -- the colonial-era

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ing apartment buildings. Today, Chittagong feels like a faceless, dusty, generic city, typical of developing economies around the world. The crucial question now is whether the city's administrators could bypass making the same planning mistakes of western metropolises in the early stages of their modern growth and leapfrog to the practices of sustainable urbanism that ensures the continued survival of the city's ecology and heritage.

The first step toward this end would be to start listening to the city's stories that provided Chittagong its physical persona and mental universe. It is not possible to return to a simpler past, because growth is inevitable. But it is possible to design the present and the future. The city's stories should be the guiding framework for moving forward.

The writer teaches architecture and urbanism in Washington, DC. He is the author of *Oculus: A Decade of Insights into Bangladeshi Affairs*.

QUOTABLE Quote "Life is what happens to you while you're busy making other plans." Allen Saunders

CROSSWORD by Thomas Joseph. ACROSS: 1 Mechanic's place, 7 Santa keeps one, 11 Laundry worker, 12 Neighborhood, 13 Sweet Christmas treat, 15 School paper, 16 Christmas, 18 Football play start, 21 Atlas pages, 22 Musical intervals, 24 Tax agency, 25 Bart, to Homer, 26 Big snake, 27 Skilled ones, 29 Palm setting, 30 Christmas tree topper, 31 Be overly fond, 32 Christmas song, 34 Sweet Christmas treat, 40 Wee bit, 41 Evening party, 42 Broad way's Verdon, 43 Ritzy home, DOWN: 1 Musician's job, 2 Onassis nickname, 3 Darling of baseball, 4 Toppers for Christmas trees, 5 --a-laying", 6 Goods, 7 Voice box, 8 Anger, 9 Mermaid's home, 10 Wee bit, 14 Washbowl, 16 Gridiron units, 17 Surprise win, 19 Ready to swing, 20 Give a ring, 21 Hamm of soccer, 22 Sinking signal, 23 Down in the dumps, 25 Backpack port, 28 Arcade chomper, 29 "Wait a minute!", 31 Nitwits, 33 Trick, 34 Greedy one, 35 De-pressed, 36 Salt lake City player, 37 S&L offering, 38 Volleyball need, 39 "My word!"

Yesterday's answer. CRYPTOQUOTE: JXOKXQCAV BC IAX OQI WN YXIIBPY CWFEXWPX JXCX IW KW CWFEXIABPY UWM TOPI KWPX SXZOMCX AX TOPIC IW KW BI. Saturday's Cryptoquote: I WOULD RATHER SIT ON A PUMPKIN, AND HAVE IT ALL TO MYSELF, THAN BE CROWDED ON A VELVET CUSHION.

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker. HENRY by Don Trachte. A XYDLBAXR is LONGFELLOW. One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.