



PONDERING THE PAST



Glimpses of Our Society and Culture

VOLUME III



EDITED BY

Sutapa Sengupta



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Durga Worship— from a Cult to a Festival

Aditi Bose

In this paper, I will outline the regional confluences while establishing the chronology of worshipping Durga Puja in Bengal, till the early colonial period. The rites and the customs would be touched upon in a nuanced form. My argument primarily is linked to the fact that the celebration of Durga puja was nothing less than of a *utsab*, denoting the display of wealth, status and authority yet conforming to a syncretistic idea bypassing the popularity of Vaishnava traditions. I would want to establish the Durga puja as a cult based on *Shakti* and *Tantric* ideas. The socio-political factors embraced this festival which adhered to being the identity and the cultural mark of the Bengalis. I would elaborate on the fact that by interweaving the socio-cultural and economic reasons behind unmasking the *Sarbojanin utsab*. The question, therefore which lingers on was whether celebrating Durga puja acted as a social platform for admitting one-self into the upper echelons of the social heirarchy ladder or whether it could be simply regarded as the marker of identity with a specific vernacular speaking geographical region? The Goddess is celebrated in every form, aspect and quality, through music, art, ritual, mantra and meditation. She is honoured in women, the Earth, nature and the transcendent beyond all expression. Her worship is full of splendour, delight, mystery and wonder.

The mythical aspects have been dealt in other works at length, I would rather focus on the social aspects of the origin of Durga puja in Bengal. For a brief introduction, I would return to the mythical sources to link in my arguments. The political background was rather provided in details in the second chapter. Nadia as a district would play a major role in general. I would also provide information about the societal organizations existing in Bengal during that time.

In Bengal, during the medieval period, the challenge provoked by the Islamic intrusion into the socio-religious life led the conservative Hindu brahmins tried to revitalize the Hinduism by composing texts. The

About the Book

Pondering the Past: Glimpses of our Society and Culture, Vol. III, presents and analyses an intricate correlation between human society and culture from different perspectives through twenty six well documented articles. The volume, in its five sub sections tries to focus on diverse cultural inclinations through respective research areas reflecting political ideologies, economic activities, religious tenets, tradition and customs prevailing in a society. Among these sub sections '*Community, Life and Progress*' deals with the life, activities and socio cultural identities of different indigenous communities. The second sub section of this volume '*Religion Revisited*' claims a retrospect towards different matters related to religion. The third sub section '*Literature and Media: In Search of Social Testimonies*' reveals how documentation of social and cultural events is done by literature and media. The next sub section '*Human and Society: Changing Patterns of Human Habits, Hobbies and Behaviour*' gives an account of various human passions, inclinations and behavioural changes found in our society. The last sub section of this volume '*Beyond the Border: A Challenge to Existing Social Ethics*' testifies some ideas like prostitution, piracy or terrorism prevailing in the society against existing ethics and values. The volume encompassing different concepts, ideas, creations and activities related to human, has perfectly manifested various angles and approaches of our society and culture.

About the Editor



Dr. Sutapa Sengupta, M.A. Ph.D from Jadavpur University, is now working as an Associate Professor in History, at the University of Kalyani. She is now pursuing her research works on the folk religion, culture and different ethnic communities in India. Ethno medicine and nature therapy are the areas of her special interest. Her book *Ethnic Nature Cure and its Modern Usage* published by B.R.P.C, New Delhi in 2011, focuses on the vast knowledge of ethno medicines forgotten by our modern world but still in use within exclusive ethnic communities.

Her other book *Persecution and Protest: Women Workers and their Spokeswomen in Colonial Bengal*, published by Lambert Academic Publishing (Saarbrücken, Germany) in 2019 introduces a new approach in the field of conventional study of economic history through highlighting specifically the gender issues related to work and life of the industrial working class in the 20th century colonial Bengal. Apart from that, she has co-edited *Navigating Nationalism* with Prof. Chittabrata Palit and *Pondering the Past, Vol. II* with Dr. Aparajita Dhar. Her recent edited volume *Diverse Discourse: A Felicitation Volume in Honour of Professor Chittabrata Palit* has been published from Ababil Books, Kolkata. Economic and Cultural history of modern India are the areas of her special interest.

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