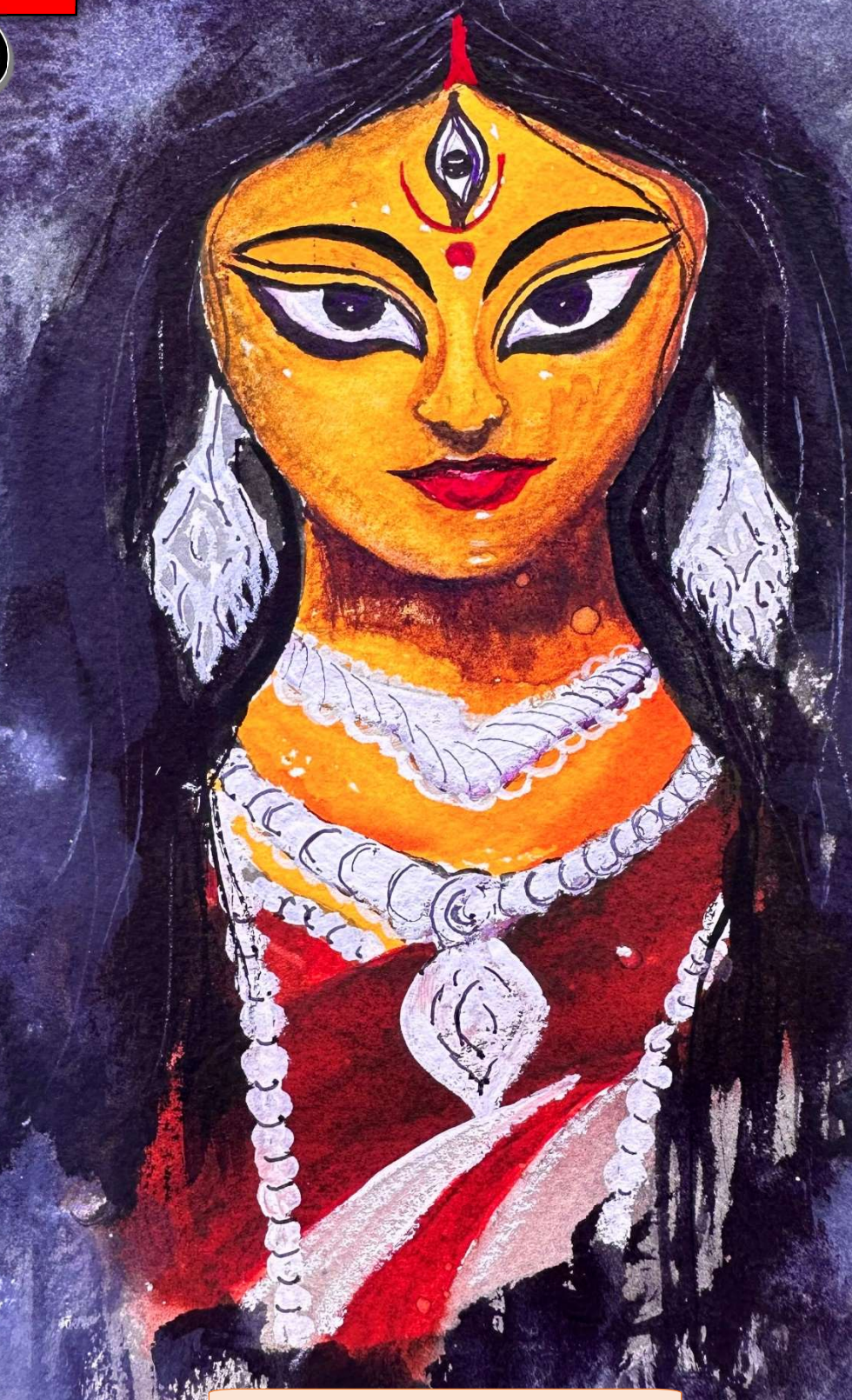


Chowrongee 2024



*The Oldest Bengali Association of
Greater Sacramento, California*

চৌরঙ্গী ২০২৪



23rd Annual Magazine

October 24



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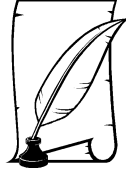
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সম্পাদকীয়

Editorial

চৌরঙ্গীর ত্রয়োবিংশ সংস্করণ আপনাদের হাতে দিতে পেরে আমরা গর্বিত বোধ করছি। আমাদের এবারের পূজাবার্ষিকী পত্রিকার প্রকরণ গত বারের মতই থাকছে - অর্থাৎ কচিকাঁচাদের এবং বয়স্কদের জন্য আলাদা অনুবিভাগ। এবছর উৎসবের তরুণ সদস্যরা 'প্যারানরমাল' অর্থাৎ 'অলৌকিক' থিম নিয়ে লেখালেখি করেছে। তদুপরি ভিন্ন স্বাদের গল্প, ভ্রমণ কাহিনী, ধর্মসংক্রান্ত আলোচনা, কবিতা, সাক্ষাৎকার এবং অন্যান্য নৈয়মিক রসদ তো থাকছেই। বাংলা এবং ইংরেজি ভাষী প্রেমিক দু'পক্ষেরই উপভোগ্য উপাদান এই সংযোজনে অন্তর্ভুক্ত।

আমাদের দৈনন্দিন জীবনের সব রোমাঞ্চই মোটামুটি সোশ্যাল মিডিয়ার সীমারেখায় আবদ্ধ হয়ে গেছে বা কম্পিউটার এর রঙিন পর্দার গন্ডি পেরোতে পারছে না। এই প্রসঙ্গে 'অলৌকিক' এর একটা উপাখ্যান প্রসঙ্গ-বহির্ভূত হবে না আশা করি। এমন কোনো ঘটনা বা আচরণ যা সাধারণ বুদ্ধির ব্যাখ্যার বাইরে, সেইসব বিবরণ 'অলৌকিক' এর অন্তর্ভুক্ত। ভূত এবং প্রেতাচার গল্প 'অলৌকিক' এর একটা খুব সাধারণ বিন্যাস, কিন্তু এছাড়াও ইউ.এফ.ও, এলিয়েন বা এক্সট্রা সেন্সরি পার্সেপশন এর মতন বিষয়গুলিও 'অলৌকিক' এর আওতায় পরে। শৈশব এবং কৈশোর অবস্থায় ভৌতিক কাহিনী শোনা বা শোনানো দুটোই উপভোগ্য বিনোদন ছিল। বিশেষত পারিপার্শ্বিক পরিবেশ যদি সেই বিবৃতির লাগসই হতো - যেমন বৃষ্টিভেজা অন্ধকার সন্ধ্যাবেলায় লণ্ঠনের আলোয় বসে ভূতের গল্প শোনা। এক্ষেত্রে কুশল বক্তার আখ্যান যে কোনো সোশ্যাল মিডিয়ার 'টুটকির' মতনই আসক্তিমূলক হতো। সেকালে ভৌতিক এবং সন্দেহ উদ্বেককারী প্রসঙ্গের একটা নিজস্ব মাত্রা ছিল - সেটা ছায়াছবি, গল্প, উপন্যাস, চিত্রণে অভিব্যক্ত হতো। প্রযুক্তির অগ্রগতির ফলে এসবের প্রচার-প্রসার নিম্নগামী। সেই প্রসঙ্গে উৎসবের কচি-কাঁচা এবং তরুণ - তরুণীদের এই প্রচেষ্টা সত্যিই প্রশংসনীয়।

চৌরঙ্গীর সম্পাদকমন্ডলীর পক্ষ থেকে আমি এবছরের সকল অনুদানকারীদের প্রতি কৃতজ্ঞতা জ্ঞাপন করছি। তাদের উৎসাহ এবং প্রচেষ্টা আমাদের এই পূজাবার্ষিকীর প্রত্যেক পাতায় নবীন রঙের ছোঁয়া দিয়েছে। আশা করছি পাঠকবৃন্দদের কাছে এই সংযোজনটি উপভোগ্য হবে। চৌরঙ্গীর মাধ্যমে আমরা উৎসবের ছোট এবং বড় সকল প্রতিভার অববাহিকা পুঁজিকৃত করার প্রয়াস করি। আশা করি ভবিষ্যতেও এই প্রচেষ্টা অব্যাহত থাকবে। সকলকে শারদোৎসবের প্রীতি ও শুভেচ্ছা জানিয়ে এবারের মতন শেষ করছি। সবাই ভালো থাকুন, সুস্থ থাকুন - আসছে বছর আবার হবে।

নমস্কারান্তে -
মৈনাক বঙ্গ

We are excited to present you with the 23rd edition of Chowrongee. Our format this year is like the last year – separate section for youths and adults. The youth section theme for this year is 'paranormal'. In addition, we have a book full of travel diaries, stories, spiritual articles, poems, interviews and other regular inclusions, (both in Bengali and English) to make your reading an enjoyable experience.

Since majority of the thrills in our lives have been confined to social media posts followed by reactions and computer games and videos; it would be apt to expand the 'para' a little bit. 'Para' indicates something that is not natural or cannot be explained by our perceived understanding of the subject matter. Most commonly it entails ghosts and spirits, but it can also include things like aliens, sixth sense etc. Even during our childhood, telling or listening to a horror story was considered a great pastime, especially if the ambience was apt, like a dark rainy night with a candle as the only source of light. With a skillful storyteller, it was equally addictive as any of the modern-day hookups. Horror and suspense occupied a realm of their own – movies, stories, illustrations depicting the theme were commonplace. With digitization the trend has gone down, however it is encouraging to see the young folks trying to relive the sensations we enjoyed so abundantly during our childhood.

On behalf of Utsav Literary Committee, I thank every contributor of Chowrongee 2024 for adding a little more flavor to the plate. I sincerely hope this magazine will give you something to connect to which would render our effort successful. As we see batches of Utsav youths progress from childhood to youth to adulthood, Chowrongee stands as testimony to their creativity, ingenuity and expressiveness. Let's promise to withhold it like that in the future. Wishing you all a great festive season and Subho Bijoya!!!

With Best Compliments,
Mainak Banga

Literary Committee

**Anupam Mitra
Ayantika Bhattacharya
Biswanath Mukherjee
Manas Ray
Manjistha Bose
Rajat Saha
Rashmi Nandi
Somen Nandi
Tanima Bhadra
Tapati Ray
Mainak Banga (Editor)**

Junior Members
**Esha Banerjee (Junior Lead Editor)
Abhirup Mukherjee
Anaya Bhattacharyya
Aratrika Paul
Siddhartha Dey
Renee Som Kiran**

Cover designed by **Ayantika Bhattacharya and Santana Das**

Since 2008, Chowrongee is online and can be accessed at <https://www.utsavsac.org/copy-of-magazine>

Disclaimer

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Utsav Committee Members

Governing Body Members (GBM):

Sangita Biswas (President/ Literary Liaison/Youth Volunteer Lead)
Anima Kumar (Vice President/Food Lead)
Subhra Gima (Cultural Secretary)
Rupa Chowdhury (Treasurer/Youth Volunteer Lead)
Santana Das (Website Lead/Pujo Lead)

Subhra Gima (Lead)
Alodipa Dutta
Ananya Nandi
Joydeep Ray

Snehungsu Guha
Sharmila Mukherjee
Soma Tapadar
Sunanda
Bandyopadhyay
Subhadra Sengupta
Ghosh
Trina Ghosh
Udayan Chanda

Community Council Members (CCM) and Election Committee:

Adi Choudri
Joydeep Ray
Rajat Saha

Registration Committee:

Prodosh Chakraborty (Lead)
Sangita Biswas (Lead)
Adi Choudri (Lead)
Subhra Gima
Shankha Sen

Literary Committee:

Adult Members

Mainak Banga (Lead)
Anupam Mitra
Ayantika Bhattacharya
Biswanath Mukherjee
Manas Ray
Manjistha Bose
Rajat Saha
Rashmi Nandi
Somen Nandi
Tanima Bhadra
Tapati Ray

Junior Members

Esha Banerjee (Lead)
Abhirup Mukherjee
Anaya Bhattacharyya
Aratrika Paul
Renee Som Kiran
Siddhartha Dey

Website Committee:

Santana Das (Lead)
Siddhartha Dey
Snehungsu Guha

Utsav Youth Volunteer Committee:

Sangita Biswas (Lead) Snigdha Banerjee (Lead)
Manjula Dey (Lead) Rupa Chowdhury

Food Committee:

Anima Kumar (Lead)	Koushik Das
Anirban Bhattacharyya	Mainak Banga
Arun Chowdhury	Prodosh Chakraborty
Avijit Bhattacharyya	Pulak Chowdhury
Barun Bandyopadhyay	Rashmi Nandi
Bhaskar Bandyopadhyay	Saumen Dey
Bhaskar Bhaumik	Shomeek Paul
Debashish Ghosh	Subhankar Mukherjee
Deb Biswas	Shyamal Roy
Anupam Mitra	Sudeep Sarkar

Puja Committee:

Mitra Choudri (Lead)	Paramita Bhattacharya
Santana Das (Lead)	Rupa Chowdhury
Sudeshna Basuroy	Seema Chanda
Shashwati Roy	Soma Nayak
Anima Kumar	

Cultural Committee:

Utsav Youth Member Participants:

Aayush Ghosh	Mahika A. Chowdhury
Abhirup Mukherjee	Rishan Dey
Anaya Bhattacharyya	Renee Som Kiran
Aradhana Paul	Sarthak Dutta
Aratrika Paul	Sanjoli Ray
Avi Sarkar	Shriya Banerjee
Avighna Bhattacharyya	Siddhartha (Sid)Dey
Ayan Banerjee	Siddharth (Neil) Ray
Dipannita Barman	Suhaan Devavarapu
Esha Banerjee	Veer Arjun Joshi
Evani Paul	

Welcome Committee

Sangita Biswas (Lead) - Folsom
Mitra Choudri (Lead) - Folsom
Supriya Mukherjee – UC Davis, Davis
Sanchita Dey (Soma) - Elk Grove
Sharmila Mallick - Roseville/Rocklin
Sharmila Mukherjee – Roseville/Rocklin
Suvra Mukherjee - El Dorado Hills
Monica Roy – El Dorado Hills

Message from the Utsav Governing Body

Dear Utsav Families and Friends,

On behalf of the Utsav Governing Board, I welcome you and your family to the auspicious occasion of our 2024 Sharodotsav, which is being celebrated at the Orangevale Community Center in Sacramento, during October 18-20. May Ma Durga bless all of us with health, happiness, prosperity, and peace! We also wholeheartedly welcome our new member families! Welcome aboard!

It is indeed remarkable to see how far Utsav has come in the last 23 years, and we are growing, not only in numbers but also in achievements. The seed that was planted more than 2 decades ago has been nurtured over time by our veteran and new members, and the roots have now grown very deep within the community. The current members of the Governing Board Member (GBM) had the honor and privilege of advancing Utsav's mission of functioning as a leading charitable organization, a cultural ambassador, a community leader, and a social platform. With more than 270 members (around 125 families), Utsav is a healthy organization, both financially and socially!

This year we have taken three initiatives. First, for Sharodotsav 2024, we have three days (Friday, Saturday, and Sunday) of exciting cultural programs to maximize the participation of our members. Second, in place of spending enormous funds on international artists, we have encouraged our members and local artists to showcase their talents at the festival. We are very impressed with the lineup of our talented members!! Third, we are engaging the next generation of members to take up leadership roles. Please refer to Utsav's official website for more details (<https://www.utsavsac.org>). We are also very thankful to our senior Utsav member Professor Biswanath Mukherjee for being our priest this year.

Although Durga Pujo continues to be our biggest event of the year, we also celebrate and organize Bani Bandana, Holi, and annual picnic during the year. Additionally, our youth members are an integral part of Utsav. Community service is a matter close to our heart, and we strive to imbibe that in our youth by actively engaging in charitable activities by raising funds through music concerts,

5K walks, serving meals at the women's shelter, etc. They also learn about Indian culture by participating in Utsav's cultural events. Last year, we formed the new youth literary committee, which is responsible for collecting and editing literary items from Utsav kids for publishing in the youth section of Chowrongee. Several outstanding youth volunteers were honored on the day of Bani Bandana with the President's Volunteer Service Award, which consists of a medal, a certificate, and a letter signed by the President of the United States!

Like previous years, our dedicated adult volunteer members have maintained the tradition of working tirelessly to bring a wonderful puja celebration for you and your family. I sincerely thank the literary committee for producing this wonderful edition of Chowrongee! I sincerely thank the pujo, food, and cultural committees for their seamless teamwork in setting up the puja mandap, preparing mouth-watering food on-site for 300 people, and a rocking cultural show, respectively!! I thank the Community Council Members (CCM) for always providing us with valuable advice. I would also like to thank our regular members, our platinum plus, platinum, gold, and silver level members, sponsors, and corporate donors for your generosity! Your generous support is vital to the existence and progress of our organization. At Utsav, we recognize and acknowledge each member's big and small contributions and cherish each other. I look forward to meeting and welcoming you all during Sharodotsav. Let us come together for three full days of dhak, dhol, dhunuchi nach, pujoshankhya, food, selfies, and endless "adda"!!!

With warm regards and best wishes for a Shuvo Sharadiya!

Sangita Biswas
President, Utsav 2023-24

Governing Body Members (GBM):

Sangita Biswas
Anima Kumar
Subhra Gima
Rupa Chowdhury
Santana Das

Utsav Accounts (July 2023 – July 2024) *

Opening Balance as per books 7/1/23		8,310.72
Opening Balance in the Saving Account as of 7/1/23		2,117.79
Description	Amount	Total
	Revenues	
FY23-24 Membership	49,592.99	
Concert Donation	792.00	
Donation for 5KWalk	30.00	
Donation from Benevity, CAF and members	4,377.06	
Donation for Durga Puja	1168.00	
2024 Bani Bandana	45.00	
2024 Holi	40.00	
Youth Activity Donation	180.00	
Go Fund Me Donation	330.42	
Interest on Savings + Cash Coins	12.28	
Grant from City of Rancho Cordova	1871.96	
Total Revenues		58,439.71
	Expenditures	
Annual Filing		50.00
2023-24 Annual Picnic and AGM		1147.23
Check Book		166.02
Concert Youth Group 2023-24		1,300.00
Donation Check to St. Johns Program		500
Groceries and Food expenses for St. John's Program		259.16
Insurance		784.00
Mail Box Rental		693.60
Storage		1,562.34
Website		578.00
2023 Durga Puja		33,314.67
Audio	3,200.00	
Award, Banner, Drama	650.54	
Cooking Utensils	348.00	
External Artist	4,250.00	
External Artist - Hotel Rental	279.11	
Facility Rental for Durga Puja	6,502.00	
Facility Rental Security Refund	(600.00)	
Flowers and Puja Items	874.58	
Food	11,112.99	
Kids Drama	85.00	
Kitchen Help, Cleaning Services	2,697.00	
Magazine	1,856.36	
Membership 23-24 refund	80.00	
Paper Goods and Kids Snacks	571.12	
Puja Officiation + Misc	210.00	
Repair Idol Boxes	232.09	
State and Lighting	465.88	
Transport and Setup	500.00	
2024 Bani Bandana		4702.01
Audio	800.00	
Facility Rental	600.00	
Food, Groceries, Paper goods	2,064.01	
Kitchen Help, Cleaning Services	638.00	
Puja Officiation	300.00	
Transport and Set up	300.00	
2024 Holi		1584.38
Facility Rental	520.39	
Groceries, Food, Picnic supplies	1,063.99	
Security Deposit for Durga Puja 2024		2,633.00
Youth Expo		1,871.96
Youth Activity 5K Walk		339.72
Total Expenditure		51,486.09
Balance at end of FY23-24 (Checking +Savings as of 6/30/24)	(1252.06 + 16,120.07 + 10)	17,382.13
<i>* To be Audited</i>		



Program Schedule* for the 23rd Utsav Sharodotsav, 2024

Venue: Orangevale Community Center, 6826 Hazel Ave, Orangevale, CA 95662

Friday, October 18, 2024

Mandap setup	12:30 PM – 06:00 PM
Registration	05:00 PM onwards
Bodhon and Aarati (Shashti)	06:00 PM – 06:30 PM*
Cultural Program	
Agomoni	07:00 PM – 07:30 PM*
Children's Dance Drama	07:30 PM – 08:00 PM*
Dinner (By RSVP only)	08:00 PM – 08:30 PM *
In house DJ	08:30 PM – 09:30 PM*

Saturday, October 19, 2024

Registration	From 09:15 AM
Sharodotsav (Saptami and Mahashtami)	09:30 AM – 11:30 AM
Aarati and Pushpanjali	11:30 AM – 12:30 PM*
Prasad	12:30 PM – 01:00 PM
Lunch (RSVP mandatory)	01:00 PM – 02:30 PM*
Break	03:00 PM – 05:30 PM
Shondhi Pujo (with 108 Lotuses)	05:30 PM – 06:20 PM*
Cultural Program	
Basu-Manohari Sandhya	06:30 PM – 07:00 PM*
Fashion Show	07:05 PM – 07:35 PM*
Utsav Volunteer Awards	07:40 PM – 07:55 PM*
Dinner (RSVP mandatory)	07:45 PM – 09:00 PM*
Bangla Natok	09:15 PM – 10:30 PM*

Sunday, October 20, 2024

Registration	From 10:00 AM
Sharodotsav (Nabami and Dashami)	10:00 AM – 11:30 AM
Aarati and Pushpanjali	11:30 AM – 12:00 PM
Prasad	12:00 PM – 12:30 PM*
Bishorjon, Dhunuchi Dance, and Sindur Khela	12:30 PM – 01:00 PM*
Lunch (RSVP mandatory)	01:00 PM – 02:30 PM*
Cultural Program	
Quiz Contest (by Rajat Chakravarty)	02:30 PM – 03:15 PM*
Shayanti Ghoshal-Bollywood Dhamaka	03:15 PM – 04:15 PM*
Snacks and Wrap-up	05:00 PM – 07:00 PM

*Subject to change

Community News

Ronit Mukherjee, son of Suvra and Joy Mukherjee, graduated from Smeal College of Business at Pennsylvania State University in December 2023. Following this milestone, he joined Technomics, Inc. as an Associate Consultant at their Arlington, VA office where he is a consultant for the US Navy doing Cost Analytics for building the next generation submarines.



Samriddhi Majumdar, daughter of Suchanda and Late Samrat Majumdar, graduated from Folsom High School this year; she is now attending Arizona State College, Tempe, to major in Computer Science. We wish her success in her undergraduate studies and beyond.



Nirvik Basuroy, son of Sudeshna Ghosh and Nirupom Basuroy, graduated from Folsom High School in May 2024. He is currently studying at Arizona State University, Fulton College of Engineering, Tempe, to major with a B.S. in Informatics.



Aditya Sarkar, son of Suman and Sudeep Sarkar and older brother to Aryav, graduated this year from Vista Del Lago High School in Folsom, where he excelled in academics and extracurricular activities. He is now pursuing his passion for medicine at the University of California, Irvine, where he is planning to study in the biological field. Aditya is looking forward to a future in healthcare, with aspirations to make a significant impact in the medical field.



Sneha Banerjee, daughter of Dr. Sunanda and Barun Bandopadhyay and elder sister of Hiya, has been accepted into the MD program at Georgetown University School of Medicine! After her dedicated efforts and graduation from UC Davis with a major in Neurobiology, Physiology, and Behavior, this acceptance marks a significant milestone in her journey to becoming a doctor. We are incredibly proud of her and grateful for the support from our friends and family who have cheered her on every step of the way.

Kankon Sen, daughter of Dipanjana and Shankha Sen, is pursuing her master's degree at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs (SIPA). She is studying economic policy, tech, and media. Prior to this, she graduated with a BA (Honors) in Economics from Yale-NUS College, Singapore, and worked for Oxford Economics, a British economic-impact consulting firm.



Subhadeep Sahoo, son of Pradip and Rina Sahoo of Belda, West Bengal, India, got married to **Priyanka Karmakar**, daughter of Parimal and Rina Karmakar of Belda, West Bengal, India, on January 30, 2024, in their hometown. The wedding was attended by friends and family.

Amrita Chakraborty, our member for the last three years and elder sibling of Debapriya Chakraborty, completed her master's degree in Transportation Technology and Policy from the University of California, Davis. Post completion of her degree, she is pursuing a career with SMUD and assisting in their 'zero carbon solutions' endeavors.



Sharod Nandi, son of Rashmi and Somen Nandi, graduated with a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of California (UC), Davis, in June 2024, with a double major in Environmental and Civil Engineering and a minor in Sustainability in the Built Environment. UC Davis College of Engineering Steel Bridge Team won third place in Construction Speed in the American Society of Civil

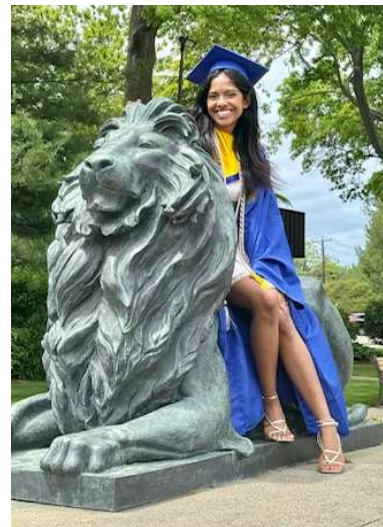


Engineers (ASCE) Student Steel Bridge Competition at the national level held in Louisiana Tech University, Ruston, LA, in May 2024 under Sharod's leadership as President of the UC Davis Chapter. He is currently pursuing his Ph.D. in Environmental Engineering at the University of California, Davis. We wish him a prosperous future.



Sunoy Nandi, son of Rashmi and Somen Nandi, has recently received the Innovation Award from the California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection where he has been working for nearly two years. His superior performance in demonstrating unusual creativity in the resolution of problems resulting in the ability to achieve objectives of wood products and bioenergy conservation in California is being recognized.

Dayita Biswas, daughter of Sangita and Deb Biswas, graduated Summa Cum Laude and Phi Beta Kappa from Hofstra University. She will continue her BSMD program next year. She will join the MD program at the Donald and Barbara Zucker School of Medicine at Hofstra/Northwell in New York.



Sonali and Tanujay tied the knot in a joyous celebration of love and togetherness on December 15, 2023. Surrounded by family and friends, they embarked on a new journey filled with dreams and promises for the future.

Utsav Award Winners (2003-2023)

Utsav gratefully acknowledges the winners of Utsav Awards in past years!

Cultural Award

2003: Somen Nandi
2004: Shyamal Chattaraj
2005: Nabanita Sen
2006: Shashwati Roy
2007: Sharmila Mukherjee
2008: Marvel Gima
2009: Joydeep Roy
2010: Mala Paul
2011: Tuhina Ghosal and Sanjib Sarkar
2012: Ajay Joshi
2013: Bipasha Chowdhury and Rajat Saha
2014: Joydeep Ray and Snehangsu Guha
2015: Sanhita Bandyopadhyay
2016: Tanushree Ganguly
2017: Suvra Mukherjee
2018: Manas Ray
2019: Tanusree Ganguly
2020: Poulami Chatterjee and Rittwika Ghoshal
2021: Joya Banerjee
2022: Dipanjali Banerjee
2023: Mala P. Mullins, and Shashwati Roy

Literary (and Educational) Award

2003: Arijit Chatterjee
2004: Arun Das
2005: Dilip Roychowdhury
2006: Rashmi Nandi and Pat Chatterjee
2007: Santana Das
2008: Manas Ray
2009: Rashmi Nandi
2010: Manas Ray
2011: Tapati Bhowmik
2012: Prodyot Bhattacharya
2013: Avishek Nag
2014: Shimika Basuroy
2015: Manju Roychowdhury
2016: Barin Kumar
2017: Tapati Ray
2018: Najmus Saquib
2019: Nirvik Basuroy
2020: Siddhartha Dey
2021: Mahika Chowdhury
2022: Suhaan Devavarapu and Evani Paul
2023: Biswanath Mukherjee and Anaya Bhattacharyya

Fundraising Award

2003: Udayan Chanda
2004: Deb Saha
2005: Anita Ghoshal
2006: Somen Nandi
2007: Deb Saha
2008: Anima Kumar
2009: Ajay Joshi
2010: Deb Saha
2011: Anima Kumar
2012: Deb Saha
2013: Joy Mukherjee

2014: Udayan Chanda
2016: Marvel Gima
2017: Sanjib Nayak
2018: Pradeep Devavarapu
2019: Shyamal Roy
2020: Subir Sarkar
2022: Bhaskar Bhaumik
2023: Somen Nandi

Outstanding Volunteer Award

2003: Suvayu Bose
2004: Shashwati Roy and Mala Paul
2005: Santana Das
2006: Joy Mukherjee
2007: Seema Chanda
2008: Rupa Chowdhury and Koushik Das
2009: Subir Sarkar
2010: Anima Kumar and Rashmi Nandi
2011: Koushik Das and Arun Chowdhury
2012: Biswanath Mukherjee
2013: Mitra Choudri and Pulak Chowdhury
2014: Subir Sarkar
2015: Shomeek Paul
2016: Prodosh Chakraborty
2017: Sangita Biswas
2018: Adi Choudri
2019: Mainak Banga and Saumen Dey
2020: Biswanath Mukherjee and Shomeek Paul
2021: Poulami Chatterjee and Sandipan Samaddar
2022: Tanima Bhadra and Rajat Chakravarty
2023: Barun Bandyopadhyay, Mainak Banga, Nirupom Basuroy, Sharod Nandi, Snigdha Banerjee, Manjula Dey, Ayantika Bhattacharya, and Trina Ghosh

Outstanding Youth Volunteer Award

(This award was initiated in 2004)

2004: Joey Chakraborty
2005: Mohana Roy
2006: Natasha Choudri
2007: Aninda Chowdhury
2008: Robby Chakraborty
2009: Arunav Sarkar
2010: Rudrani Ghosh
2011: Sunoy Nandi and Sharod Nandi
2012: Sunoy Nandi and Sharod Nandi
2013: Neel Chanda
2014: Avishek Umesh Jadhav
2015: Ayan Chowdhury
2018: Ena Nayak and Sayak Datta
2019: Siddharth (Neil) Ray
2020: Dayita Biswas
2021: Esha Banerjee
2022: Srija Bhowmik, Sonia Sarkar, Siddhartha Dey, Samriddhi Majumdar, Nirvik Basuroy, and Aayush Ghosh
2023: Esha Banerjee, Anaya Bhattacharyya, Siddhartha Dey, Shriya Banerjee, Aratrika Paul, Aayush Ghosh, Abhirup Mukherjee, Siddharth Ray, and Suhaan Devavarapu

ছোটদের বিভাগ

*Kids & Youth
Section*



Youth Editorial



Today, as we gather to celebrate the 2024 Durga Puja, we are happy to bring back our Youth Magazine Section, which was introduced last year. This section showcases the talents of many of our younger members, featuring original artwork, articles, poetry, and reflections. This year, we're excited to introduce a special segment for short story submissions revolving around the following prompts: a) Your teacher has been acting mysterious lately; after school, you notice a weird green light shining through the door of your classroom, b) A mysterious message appears in the code on your computer screen; what could it mean? We hope you enjoy reading these short stories.

2024 has been eventful! The Paris Olympics have recently concluded. Congratulations to all our athletes who competed and won medals for our country. Twenty world records were broken, and seeing all these countries put forth their very best was amazing. 2024 is also special since it's an election year. In the spirit of staying engaged, we want to remind everyone that if you're eligible to vote (18+), please vote in November to preserve our democracy. We are also currently seeing global unrest and protests for several issues. Let us stay optimistic, and let us all make the world a better place.

I thank all the junior editors who helped collect these literary and artistic works. We extend our thankful gratitude to all those contributors. Wishing you all a happy Durga Puja, and hope you enjoy the 2024 youth submissions!

*Sincerely Yours,
Esha Banerjee*

Utsav Youth Editorial Committee 2024



Esha Banerjee
Youth Editor-in-Chief



Abhirup Mukherjee



Anaya Bhattacharyya



Aratrika Paul



Renee Som Kiran



Siddhartha Dey



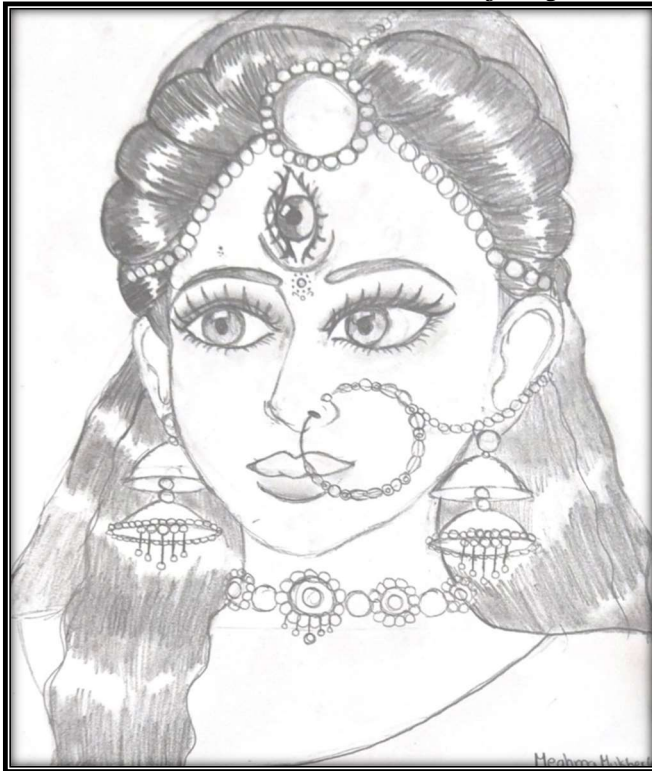
"Hibiscus" colored by Anaisha Mitra (1st grader)



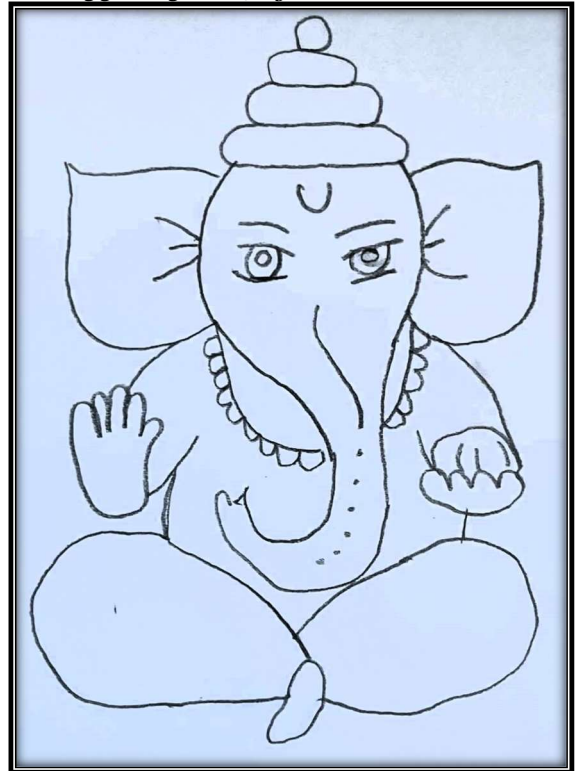
"City Corner" watercolor by Esha Banerjee (12th grader)



“Bloom with Grace” by Avighna Bhattacharyya [Ryan] (5th grader)



“Maa Durga” by Meghma Mukherjee (8th grader)



“Ganesha” by Sarthak Dutta (9th grader)



“Radha Krishna” by Dipannita Barman (Sophomore)



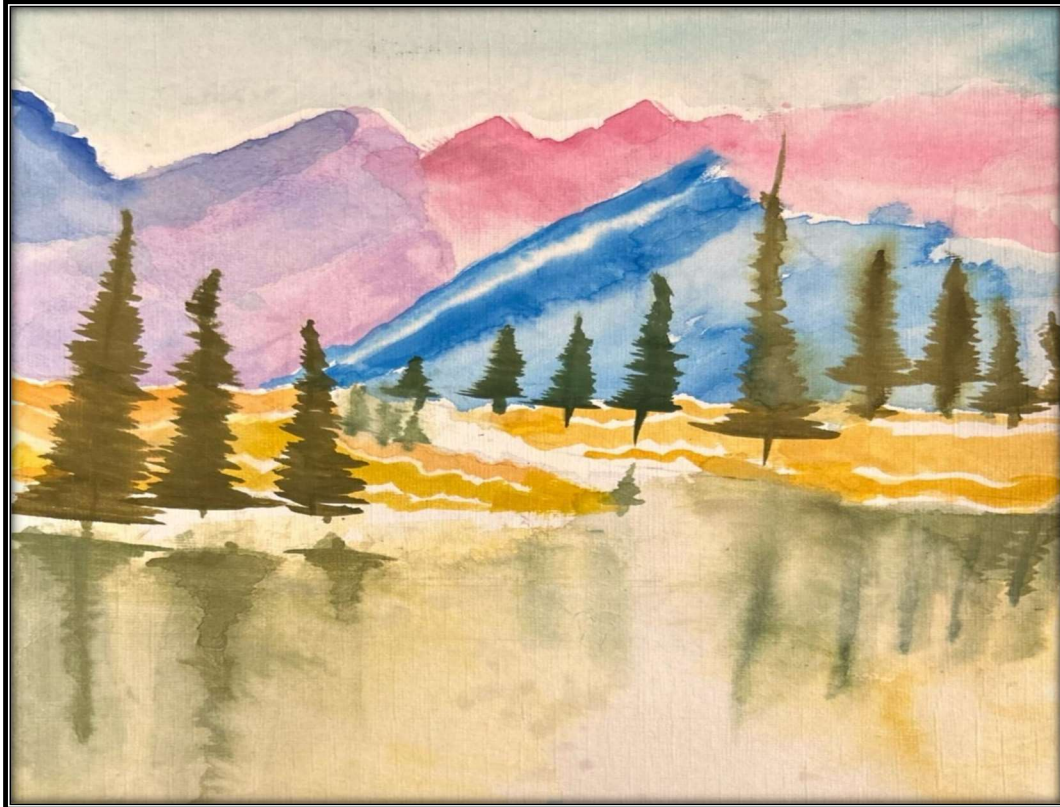
"Landscape" by Mahika Adishree Chowdhury (8th grader)



"Lotus" by Toushini Banga (5th grader)



"Our Trip to Oregon Zoo" by Vivan Mayukh Chowdhury (3rd grader)



"Sierra Foothills" by Rishan Dey (5th grader)

Hidden Magic

When I was younger, I would hide in the closet so I could see my mother do magic. She was a witch. I knew that it was a secret, so I couldn't tell anyone about it, and I couldn't let her know I was there. When she heard the keys jingling near the front door, she would perform one last act of magic before rushing to the front door to meet my dad, who was a witch hunter. He would tell her about all the witches brought to justice and how they had been burned at the stake. Even though she was trembling with fear, she would smile and congratulate him, calling him a hero.

When I was 11, I got my magic. At first, I wasn't that good at it and was scared that I would be caught by my mom or dad while I was doing it, so I only did a little bit every day. After a while, I got good at it, and I trained my ears to notice every single sound around the house. One day, I heard about how there was going to be a new witch-hunting program while listening to my mom gossip with her friends, but I wasn't nervous.

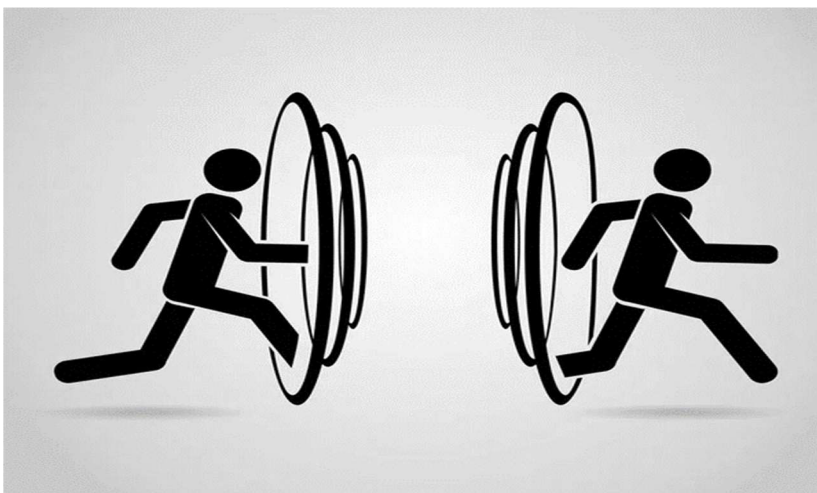
That was my mistake. I didn't know they would come in through the back or that they held a witch hostage to quiet all the sounds they made. They checked every nook and cranny for signs of witchcraft. They had gotten to my room and were almost done picking the lock when I heard them. Out of horror, I stopped using the

magic immediately, failing to remember that there was something right above my head. I just had to use magic again to stop it from falling on me. I was still using magic to bring the chair to the ground when the witch hunters came into my room. For a split second, we stared at each other before I smacked them with my chair. Then, I ran. I don't remember ever running that fast, but at that moment, I felt I was too slow. I ran for a while until I got to an old wooden bridge, ran across it, and then sent a ball of fire toward it. They had to wade through the river to get across, so I had more than enough time to quickly teleport to somewhere else. I was imagining a place where witches and maybe even other magical beings, if they existed, could live in peace and harmony.

When I was teleported, I threw up. I had only practiced teleportation a few times before, and that was from one side of my room to the other. When I stopped, I realized that I didn't have my mom with me. I begged my magic to bring her with me. When she appeared, I was overjoyed. My mom was able to easily become friends with the others in town, and after a while, we were a happy little family.

Aradhana Paul is a 6th grader at Valley View Charter Montessori School.

Teleportation is the hypothetical process of moving matter or energy from one location to another without crossing the space between them.



My Dream Alaska Trip

During the summer, my brother, my parents, and I all agreed that we should go on a vacation to Alaska. Since it was so hot, my brother suggested Antarctica, but we all said no for obvious reasons. So, we all got the suitcases and started packing. After a few days, my parents woke us up, saying we had to drop our dog Romeo off at the pet sitter and then go straight to the airport. The second I heard the words “Go drop off Romeo”, I flew out of my bed and rushed straight downstairs to give Romeo hugs and kisses goodbye. My parents said I was being dramatic because it was “Only a few days,” but I didn’t listen to them because I was scared if anything bad was going to happen to Romeo. “I don’t care about the dog sitter; I care about Romeo!” I said in frustration. My dad just sighed and told us to get in the car. I listened to my dad and got into the car, waiting for everyone else to come. Soon enough my mom came to the car with Romeo and put him in the back with me while she sat in the front. “What do you want to eat in Alaska?” asked my mom. Obviously, I didn’t know because it was my first time going there. “I don’t know, pizza?” I spoke. My mom just laughed. A few minutes later my dad arrived with the suitcases and put them in the trunk. He also got Romeo’s food and toys for the pet sitter. After a few hours we got to the pet sitter’s place and dropped Romeo off. It was sad, but it had to be done.

After that and another long drive to the airport, we finally made it to the airport. After all the check-in and security tests and a delicious chicken burger, I was ready to get on the plane! After a few minutes, we finally got on the plane. For the first few hours of the flight, I had to sit next to my brother and my mom. At the start of the flight, the flight attendant gave me a drawing pad so I don’t get bored. So anyway, my brother was throwing a tantrum because he wanted his Cheese Danish on the plane. Meanwhile, I was coloring in that drawing pad. Finally, after a 4–6 hour flight, we made it to

Alaska. It looked really cool in our first hotel, but it looked even cooler outside. I thought the first thing we would’ve done was go to sleep because it was the middle of the night; instead, we got a nice burger from a nearby McDonalds and then went to sleep. In the morning, my mom and dad woke us up to get breakfast. I had chocolate pancakes with whipped cream, while my brother had cookies with orange juice. After we finished our breakfast, we went straight upstairs to change our clothes. We had to wear warm clothing because we were going to a very cold place. When I asked my mom where we were going, she said that we were going to climb a glacier, more specifically, hike up a glacier. After we all got ready and took our showers, we went to the rental car my dad rented from the airport. I sat in the back while my brother followed me inside. I helped him put on his seatbelt and then waited for my parents. A little while later my parents came and got in the car; while my mom put our jackets in the back, my dad waited. Finally, my mom was done putting the jackets in the back and sat in the front. We could start our long car ride.

When we got there, there were two very cute-looking dogs. I asked my mom if I could pet the dogs, but she said after the glacier walk. The first thing we had to do was put on these orange helmets for protection; for example, if someone gets lost on the glacier, they will most likely find them in about 1 or 2 hours because of the bright and bold helmet color and all the noise they will be making. Anyways, after we all put on our helmets, we went on a not so long walk to reach the glacier. Finally, we reached a small bench or table looking for a place where we could put on the spikes on our feet so that we don’t fall on the slippery ice. It’s basically for gripping your shoes on the glacier. My brother and me needed some help putting them on, but when I saw my dad help my brother, I instantly knew how to do it. After putting on our spikes, we started to climb the glacier; we first went



somewhat to the bottom of the glacier and started hiking our way to the top slowly. The tour guide, Hannah, had this sweeper thing where she can sweep off mud from the ice. She let us try it, and I kid you not, that was the most satisfying thing I have ever done. After that, we started to head higher up the glacier. The second we got to a higher part of the glacier, I got really scared and nervous because I'm scared of heights and because it was an even higher platform than the previous one. Anyway, I was still brave and that's all that matters, right? WRONG, I may have been a little too brave. The second I stopped paying attention and got busy being brave, who would've thought that I would FALL INSIDE A GLACIER CREVAS! Yes, you heard me - I was so busy being brave that I wasn't looking, and I didn't know where I was going, and I FELL IN A GLACIER CREVAS. Thankfully, this kind lady who was also guiding her group saw this and helped me up saying that it was common for this to happen so I shouldn't worry much about it. I listened to her and said thank you and then left with my parents and tour guide. When we finished the tour, we were finally able to pet the dogs. One of the dogs looked like some sort of diluted Australian Shepherd that wasn't very cuddly or just not interested in anyone. The other dog was very friendly to me. It looked like a lightish colored Chow Chow dog breed. But anyways, we gave everyone hugs, said goodbye and did some final restroom checks and then drove off back to our hotel.

Fast forward three days later, we had to go on an ATV ride. My mom said it is basically a fast jeep ride and that I shouldn't be worried about getting mud on me. We all got dressed and again took our showers, and were able to get outside and have fun. Thirty minutes later we arrived at this office building. When I asked my mom where we were, she said that this was the place where we could check-in to get our ride. The second we got inside, an employee came up to us and asked us what activity we would be doing. "We have rented the ATV ride," said my dad. The worker looked like he understood my dad and then called someone by the name of John. "John?" the coworker asked. "Coming," said John. After a couple of seconds of waiting

John came out of his room. "So y'all rented the ATV ride, eh?" said John. My dad said yes. Previously I saw this weird jeep looking car outside. "Is that weird black looking jeep the ATV?" I asked. John said yes in an exciting way. When we got in the ATV, I asked my mom if I could sit in the front, and she said yes. While I was sitting in the front my brother came and sat next to me in the front seat. In the front there are three seats so two people can sit in the front while the driver is the 3rd person. My brother was sitting in the middle while I was facing outwards; as for my parents, well they were sitting in the back of the ATV. At first when the ride started, it was pretty slow because we had just started, but soon after, I felt this ride getting faster and faster. It worried me because I kept thinking that some disgusting residue from outside was going to get on me. For example, while we were going super-fast, I saw this really long branch that looked really spikey, and since it was a small trail, I was kind of panicking thinking that the branch would cut me. So, I sat super close to my brother - basically leaning so hard against him that if he was sitting outwards, he would've fallen off, even if he was wearing a strong seatbelt. Anyways, when we reached the top of a hill, we got to explore it a little bit. Since there was a wildfire, not so long ago, near this place, it looked dry, but at the same time it was so beautiful looking at all the new plants growing. Me and my mom saw lots of cool stuff too; for example, we both saw really cool looking lizards, one was yellow with little polka dots all over it, and the other one was plain blue. After a couple of minutes, we decided to get down because it was getting late. When we all got inside the ATV, it started moving really fast down the ground. This time, my dad was sitting outwards in the front so that he could take a video. Once again, I saw this large puddle that I thought would splash me, but instead of splashing me, it hit the bush near us. As soon as we finished the ATV ride, we said thank you and then left to go back to our hotel.

Fast forward one more day, the day my entire family had been waiting for - GLACIER DOGSLEDDING! After waiting for 10 days, we finally went dogsledding. The first thing we had

to do was a not so long drive to a small office building area. When we got in, the lady told us to wear these weird looking things on our feet, so that we don't get snow in our shoes. My brother and I needed help, but as soon as the lady helped my brother, I knew exactly what to do. When we all put the gear on, we had to wait for the next helicopter to come so that it could take us to the top of the snowy mountain. After a couple of minutes and a safety check, we were finally ready to get on the helicopter. When we got in, there were headphones with little speakers on it, but it also helps to protect the ears. When my brother put on the headphones, he started acting like a mad person screaming "1.88 come right now, we need the LAPD right now over, 1779 you bring the SWAT and the FBI" into the headphones. Thankfully my dad bribed my brother with chicken nuggets just so he would stop talking like a mad person on the mic. Finally, when we got there, all we saw was snow and excited dogs chained up on a rope with their own individual doghouse (not animal abuse). The first thing they told us to do was put on this special type of glasses, so we don't burn our eyes because it's so bright. When I asked our guide if I could pet the dogs, she said not yet but soon. The first thing we had to do was learn how to dogsled yourself, because you would get chances to ride and control the dog sled by yourself. My dad understood what the lady was saying, but me, my brother and my mom couldn't understand a single thing that came out of her mouth. After the long and painful talk, it was time to get to ride the actual dogsled. The first person to ride was my dad because all he wanted was to have fun and make us jealous; we weren't jealous for long because when my dad was supposed to press the brakes, he didn't and lost control and then fell in the snow with my mom coming and falling too. The guide said it was okay and it's fun, they call it being "ice baptized". After the first part with my dad, it was time for the last part. The guide suggested that my mom drive, but she was scared that she would fall again. I was hesitant, but I gave it a go. The guide said

this lap was the easiest part of the route and that I only needed to press the brakes once. The second the sled started moving, I was panicking on the inside, but I was pretending to be okay and not scared on the outside, though after a couple of seconds, I realized that it wasn't that hard and that I only had to press the brakes just once. So, I acted as excited as I could, and the excitement was all real, not fake. When the ride ended, we were able to pet the dogs. They say we pet the dogs only after the sledding because if you pet them before you start riding, they tend to get lazy and get sad when you stop petting them. But after the ride, they will be all tired, but also, it's like a reward they get for running and dragging a sled. After we pet all the dogs, we took pictures, shamed my mom for not riding the dogsled and received many compliments for riding the dogsled at a young age, I was finally ready to get back to the helicopter and go back to the hotel. I tried not to get too attached to any of the dogs, because when I finally leave them, I feel sad and feel like I want to cry that I can't see them anymore. But alas, I needed to leave - I didn't have much of a choice. After that we went to the helicopter and flew back to the hotel and took some rest because the next day, we had to leave for our flight.

The next morning, we had to get up super early so we could get to the airport. The second we arrived and completed the check-in, it was time to have another 4-hour plane ride. Nothing much, just a quick 4 hours back to Sacramento. When we got there, the first thing we had to do was pick up Romeo from the dog sitter. Me and my brother were sleeping in the back of the car, while my parents were picking Romeo up. The moment he got in the car, I burst out in joy "I missed you so much!" I said in joy. The rest of the car ride was pure happiness.

Ileena Saha is a 4th Grader at Westlake Charter School, Natomas, Sacramento.

Mr. Olga's Disappearance

"What's wrong son?" I snapped out of my coma.

It had been a weird week, especially in History. Mr. Olga, our usually laid-back, relaxed social studies teacher, had become distant. He, now, went on mumbling during classes, hurrying off just as the bell rang; something was off about him, something I couldn't place. Even today, he ended the class abruptly and rushed out of the room without even giving us homework. I wasn't complaining, but it was odd. The rest of us in class exchanged puzzled looks before slowly gathering our things.

At the end of the day, as I made my way down the hall, I noticed something unusual. A faint, eerie green light reflected on the small window of my social studies classroom door. I paused. The light wasn't there before, and I know I shouldn't intrude. But my curiosity got the better of me, and I crept back towards the classroom, my heart pounding through my chest with each step. I pressed my ear to the door, half expecting to hear Mr. Olga's voice. But there was nothing – only an unsettling silence. Slowly, I pushed the door open and peered inside. The classroom was dark, except for the green light coming from the front of the room where the teacher's desk was. Odd. As I stepped further into the room, the source of the light became clear. There, on his desk, was a strange, glowing orb about the size of a basketball. It pulsed with a steady rhythm, casting long shadows across the walls. I stepped closer, my hand reaching out instinctively to touch it.

"Don't!" a voice hissed from the shadows. I jumped back. Mr. Olga emerged from behind the desk, his face illuminated with the glow of the orb, but he didn't look like himself – his eyes were wide, almost frantic, his face more wrinkled than usual, his usual calm demeanor replaced by fear. "What is that?" I asked, my voice trembling. Mr. Olga shook his head, his eyes fixed on the orb. He seemed out of his

mind as if talking to himself. "Something I shouldn't have found," he whispered. "It's not from here." "What do you mean?" I asked, confused with how he was behaving. He hesitated. "I found it in the woods behind the school," he finally said. "It was buried, hidden away for who knows how long. At first, I thought it was an artifact, something ancient, maybe even valuable. But then... it started glowing." I stared at the orb, a mixture of fascination and fear churning in my stomach. "What does it do?" Mr. Olga shook his head again, more urgently this time. "I don't know. But it's been changing things. At first, it was subtle – small things out of place, a shift in the air. But now," he hesitated and finally looked at me for the first time, and whispered, "now I think it's affecting me."

I took a step back. "We need to get rid of it," I said, my voice firmer than I felt. Mr. Olga nodded, but there was a look of despair in his eyes. "I've tried," he said. "But it won't let go. It's like it's connected to me now."

For a moment, we stood there in silence. Then, with a sudden resolve, Mr. Olga grabbed the orb with both hands. The light intensified, filling the room with a blinding glow. "Go!" he shouted – his voice strained. "Get out of here, now!" I hesitated, but the look in his eyes told me he was serious. I turned and ran, not stopping until I was home. As I looked back at the building, I saw the green light fade, leaving the school in darkness once more. Mr. Olga never returned to school after that. The official story was that he took a leave of absence for personal reasons, but I knew the truth was far stranger. The classroom remained empty, and every time I passed it, I felt a shiver run down my spine. Whatever that orb was, I had a feeling it was far from gone, but I knew if I told anyone now, they would think I was crazy.

So, I replied, "Nothing, I am just a little tired."

Renee Som Kiran is a Sophomore at Vista Del Lago High School, Folsom.

My Visit to London

During my spring break this year, I went to visit my aunt and uncle in the UK. Right after my school had ended, my family rushed to the airport as we were so excited. The plane ride was very long and dreary, but it was worth every minute! At the London airport, my uncle and my little cousin, Maya, were waiting for us. My sister and I were very excited to see our cousins, Maya and baby Mira, because they had been born during the pandemic, and we hadn't been able to see them in person yet. My uncle drove us to their home in Purfleet, which is right outside the city limits of London and sits on the bank of the Thames River. While we drove, I enjoyed how green the country was even though London is a very big urban city. I also thought it was interesting how people drove on the left side of the road rather than the right. When we got to my uncle's apartment, we greeted my aunt and finally got to meet Mira. My baby cousins were the highlight of our trip - they were so adorable; everyone in my family had fun playing with them.

A few days later, I got to ride on the subway. Some of the stations we had to stop at were on the road, underground, and one was even going over the city! My family and I went to visit central London, and we saw the famous Big Ben clocktower, the Tower Bridge, and the City Hall—a big, uniquely shaped glass dome. Central London was very cold even in April, and everyone had to wear coats. Meanwhile, back in Sacramento, it was already in the 70 and 80-degree weather. So, we hurried back to the warmth of the apartment, we ordered food and watched a fun movie together. We also got to eat a red velvet cake that we bought from a shop while on the subway, which was my aunt's favorite cake shop.

London is also known for its Thames River, and it just so happens that in the area my cousins live in, you can see the river in a five-minute walk. Me, my dad, Maya, and my uncle went on a walk by the river. While on the way there, we got to see Maya's day care which was right next to a primary school. The

elementary and middle schools in London tend to be very small because it is more common for kids to walk to school. So, they choose to make a lot of smaller schools rather than one big school like in the US, to make it accessible to all the children.

My favorite part of the trip was getting to see the University of Cambridge. Walking through the historic campus and lush courtyards made me feel like I was walking through history. The university was founded in 1209 and is the third-oldest university still in operation today. The campus looked like a castle in some areas and more modern in others. The detail in the architecture of the King's College Chapel was especially exciting to see because it was so pretty, with big stained-glass windows.

We also went to visit the home of one of my mom's college friends from medical school. I thought it was so sweet how, even though it was Ramadan and they couldn't eat food throughout the day, they still took the time to make a lot of food so we could enjoy it. The family had a daughter named Areeba, and we became friends quickly. It was a little shocking speaking to someone with a native British accent, and I couldn't understand everything she was saying at first, but Areeba explained it to me, and I got used to it. I hope I get to visit them again soon!

Finally, on the last day of our visit, my uncle brought us to Brick Lane, in East London. It was a big market with lots of Asian shops sitting right on the roadside. From those shops, we bought lots of food like beguni, puri, chicken biryani and jalebi. It was interesting how, on Brick Lane, the road signs and street names were written in Bangla instead of English.

During my trip to London, I got to see so many famous landmarks that I had been wanting to see in real life. It was great to reconnect with my aunt and uncle and finally meet my baby cousins. Exploring the city and seeing famous

places like Big Ben and the University of Cambridge was amazing. Despite the cold weather and long travel, the time spent with family and discovering new things made the trip very enjoyable. I'll always remember this visit fondly.

Aratrika Paul is a Junior at Folsom High School.



Strange Connection

One day, I was all alone at home. I was doing my homework when I heard a calling bell. I opened the door and saw a stranger. Oh No. He is not a stranger; I have seen him in one of my soccer games. The first thing I asked him was, "Why are you here?" He said, "My truck's engine died, so is it okay if I shelter at your house for a few hours?" The boy seemed friendly, but there were two problems. My mom said that I couldn't put anyone in my house for entertainment purposes; then I thought he was not here for entertainment purposes and I have seen him before. But there was one more problem - my dog was extremely angry about the situation. I explained what was going on, and he seemed to understand. I let the boy come into the house.

We chit-chatted a bit, and after the initial awkwardness, I offered him a glass of soda, for which he seemed more than grateful. Gradually, I learned that he was a senior in my neighborhood high school and that he lives in Sacramento. After this, I played video games with him, and we had a great time playing with each other. Soon, he got a call from his dad that his tow truck had arrived, and he got ready to leave. Surprisingly, I found I was quite reluctant to let him go, and I realized that sometimes we made the greatest connections through the most unexpected interactions.

Avighna Bhattacharyya is a 5th grader in Mangini Ranch Elementary School, Folsom.



A Winning Mindset...

The sun was shining with all its might; I lifted my head only to be greeted by another steep hill. I wanted to quit; my legs hurt, my tummy ached, my lips were dry. I came to a complete standstill; the physical and psychological fatigue was at an all-time high. To make matters worse, there were no signs of any aid stations in the vicinity. I was annoyed with myself, for signing up for such a tough race. A fellow athlete passed by offering words of encouragement, and I was reminded that time is of the essence. Quickly stuffing another energy gel into my mouth, I put my pain and emotion in the backseat, charging towards the finish line. Giving up was not an option. I was participating in the Olympic distance USA Triathlon (USAT) State Championship in Oregon, competing with some of the regional elites, the nation's best athletes. This race was not going to be easy...

When I was eight, I had gone to Santa Cruz, California, to watch my dad participate in Ironman 70.3. For the unacquainted, my dad holds a 9-time Ironman title, a combination of 70.3's and five 140.6's. Yes, I have some big shoes to fill; hopefully, someday, I will get there ☐. Growing up, I have watched him participate in several races; his discipline, dedication to training, and preparation before a major event inspired me a lot. As much as I wanted to start competing early, it was nearly impossible as I had to be good at not just one but three endurance sports all at once - swimming, biking, and running. Sadly, swimming was not my strength, and I had to train very hard for years to build speed, stamina, and perseverance; only then, could I transition from a pool to open waters.

There were about 600 people racing on that cold summer morning in Oregon. The atmosphere was festive; with lots of campers, the venue had an old-west charm. The race marshal, wearing his signature cowboy hat, kicked off the swim segment by firing a shotgun. I jumped directly into the lake along

with hundreds of others; it felt like I was taking an ice-water plunge. But the biggest challenge came moments later when all the participants were cramped together in the water - aggressively kicking one another with their legs, on the head, or slapping each other with their hands to gain speed while moving forward. After finishing the swim, my balance was completely off; I felt nauseated and tired. I walked slowly towards the bike transition area giving my body enough time to recover from the grueling segment. The only thought crossing my mind at that point, "Did I pack bananas for the bike and run?"

Biking has always been my strength, but this



bike course was winding, extremely hilly, and tough, even for the most experienced riders. Interestingly, I was racing with some of the country's best athletes, and I was in awe of some of the gear they wore and the bikes they were riding on. I was able to enjoy the scenic beauty of the course and the greenery all around and could explore the beautiful city of Sweet Home, Oregon. Unfortunately, there were occasional crashes on bikes that were not fun to witness. After riding for 25 miles, I could finally hear the cheers and music playing, which meant I was getting closer to the transition area from bike to run. It was such a relief to get off the hard bike seat. Quickly parking it in the transition area, I was ready to hop on to the next one. Ok, two out of three done; let's go!

By the time I transitioned to the run segment, the sun was at its peak. I quickly took off my helmet and wore my running hat and shoes. I said to myself, I GOT THIS! I slowly started jogging out from the transition area to the running course, took the first turn and BOOM! A steep hill again! It took me over a mile or so

to activate my new set of muscles, the calves. I started cruising with a simple mantra - hydration, nutrition, repeat.

After crossing the finish line, the health consequences tripled in severity as the lactic acid buildup hit hard, and the inadequate nutrition left my stomach feeling like someone had taken a piece out of me. I was happy to hold the medal in my hand but too exhausted to celebrate. I waited for my dad to finish his race and simply wanted to leave and rest in the car. As luck would have it, there was no phone service at the finish line. We had driven thirty miles away from the race site when my mom called to inform us that I had secured a 2nd place for my age group, which qualified me for



the USAT Nationals. I could sense a bit of sadness on my dad's face as I did not give him a chance to see the final standings before we left the venue. Now that I qualified, he would have liked to see me on the podium at the award ceremony.

I felt accomplished finishing the race; being able to stand on the podium with others would have been an icing on the cake. However, I was

grateful for the experience on several fronts. From driving sixteen long hours back and forth from Sacramento to Oregon, I was able to bond with my dad, enjoy the countryside, and see the



snowcapped mountains of Mt Shasta. We even managed to eat a meal at an Indian Dhaba on the way! But I was most proud of myself - for racing an unexplored terrain and not giving up. As I prepare for the Nationals on 14th September 2024, to be held in Atlantic City, New Jersey, I take a moment to pause and reflect on my journey. As Paulo Coelho once said, "Maybe the journey isn't so much about becoming anything. Maybe it's about unbecoming everything that isn't really you, so you can be who you were meant to be in the first place." A few years back, my dad had asked me if I wanted to do a triathlon, and my answer to him was a stern NO. Fast-forward to now; with several triathlons under my belt, I can correlate to Paulo Coelho's quote. If you have the focus, determination, and right training, there is nothing that you can't accomplish to reach greater heights. The state championship is done and dusted; I now look forward to the Nationals. As I double down on my training, I am aware that this event will be twice as hard in intensity and competitiveness, with star athletes participating from across the country. Once again, I prepare myself to get out of my comfort zone and look forward to digging deep and achieving what I have not earlier.

Suhan Devavarapu is a Junior at Granite Bay High School.

Olympic triathlon distance is 51.5km (32 miles). This includes a 1.5km (0.93 mile) swim, 40km (25 mile) cycle, and a 10 km (6.2 mile) run.

The Black Mirror

Today I am narrating a true story that I recently heard from a childhood friend from Varanasi. Although my friend is a student of science, she also believes that there are forces beyond our comprehension that are responsible for many incidents that are impossible to explain based on science. Since this incident happened to her, I will narrate this story in her words.

“This incident happened about forty-eight years ago when I would have been about seven or eight years old. We used to live in a rented house in Varanasi. We lived on the first floor, and the tenants, an elderly couple, lived on the second floor. We called them uncle and aunt. The lady was around fifty years old and came from a rural background. They lived simply; their only prized possession was a beautiful ornamental box, which they called the “magic debia”. They claimed that this box could tell anyone’s past, present, and future.

One day, my cousin, who lived with his parents in our neighborhood, was nowhere to be found. After searching everywhere and waiting for a day, a missing person report was filed with the police. They thought that he had probably left the house in anger after a fight with his father. However, after he was missing for ten days, our family became very anxious. My mother, in her desperation, suddenly remembered the couple upstairs and their magic box. My aunt and uncle were in a state of despair and were ready to try any remedy at that time. So, they agreed to try this box.

The woman agreed to try the box. First, she told me to take a bath and change into a clean dress. The couple then sat right next to me. She had the red box in her hand. There was only a small black mirror inside that box. They slowly placed the mirror on their palm above my right eye and closed my left eye with their other palm. Then they spoke to me, “Betí, can you repeat what I say”.

They started to whisper, “Come on the sweepers... sweep, come on the sweepers... sweep”. I repeated the same... and you won’t believe, after a few minutes, a blurry scene started to form in the mirror. Although it was dark and blurry, I saw the silhouette of a strange person sweeping the floor. She asked me, “Do you see someone sweeping?”

My answer was “YES”.

Again she said, “Come place the seats... place the seat... place the seats”. I repeated after her, and now I saw a dark form appear and place a small stool.

She then said, “Come on those who spread the sheets... spread the sheets”.

Now I could see a dark form spreading a sheet on that stool. Now the woman said, “Bearded Babaji come... sit on the seat”. I slowly repeated after her, and saw that an old man who had a long beard appeared and sat down on the sheet.

The woman spoke again, “Babaji, her brother has gone missing... If he is alive, then shake your head in ‘yes’; and if he is not alive, then shake your head in ‘no’.”

When I repeated, Babaji shook his head in yes. When I told that Babaji has shaken his head in yes, my family members looked very relieved.

The lady asked again, “Babaji, where is her brother at this time? What is he doing?”

After I repeated the same, slowly I started to see a railway station with several trains, and my cousin was standing by a cart on the platform and looked tired. I told her what I saw.

The woman asked again, “Babaji how do I understand that this is a platform? What is the number of the platform?” When I repeated, the words, “Platform number five” slowly appeared but it was very blurry.

When I told them what I saw, my father asked in a hurry, "Which station is this?" I asked, "Babaji, tell us the name of the station". A very blurry image now formed, but I could read the words 'Lucknow Junction'. After that, the woman said, "We are grateful, Babaji." I repeated after her and the bearded Babaji got up and left.

The woman then took that box off my eye. My dad immediately booked a trunk call to his brother (the call had to be booked in advance due to lack of landline phones at that time) and told him to go to Lucknow. My uncle eventually found my cousin sleeping on platform number 5, at the Lucknow Junction railway station.

After a few months, we left that rented house and shifted to another house, and we lost

contact with the couple. But that Dibia experience is still fresh in my mind. Even today, I think maybe that woman had hypnotized me... But the appearance of Lucknow Junction station and my cousin being at platform number five can't be a coincidence. Even my scientific intelligence cannot find the answer to this."

After my friend told me this true incident, I found several documentations of similar events on the internet. There is indeed a world beyond the realm of science, the world of parapsychology which studies such phenomena.

Sangita Biswas is the current President of Utsav. She is a neuroscientist by profession. She has been a Folsom resident for the past 14 years.



The Secrets of the School Basement

At school, it was a regular, quiet Tuesday, until something strange happened in Ms. Thompson's computer class. The kids were busy with their coding projects when one computer screen started flickering. Weird colorful letters appeared.

Tommy noticed it first. "Mr. Thompson, there's something wrong with my computer", he said. Mr. Thompson looked at the screen, squinting.

Before he could do anything, the numbers spread infecting other computers. They crashed, and the whole network got messed up. Ms. Patel, the computer expert, was called in. She saw the computers and became pale. "This is no ordinary virus. It looks like it's going to take over the school's entire network." The class was in chaos, and Principal Lawrence began a meeting. "We need to stop it, what can we do?"

Tommy, who had been thinking, said, "What if we track the code to wherever it came from? We can stop whatever is behind it." Ms. Patel agreed, "Good idea."

The team worked and found out that the bad code was coming from an old computer in the school basement. Tommy, Mr. Thompson, and

Ms. Patel quickly unplugged it. As the old computer powered down, everything went back to normal, and the computers worked fine again. Ms. Thompson put a big lock on the door to the basement.

At the end of the day, everyone was happy and back to normal.

The mysterious code was defeated. Tommy had a smidge of an idea that it happened due to an angry student, irritated by exam season, but who knows! The problem was solved, thanks to everyone's quick thinking.

The next morning, there was chaos in the school again, everyone's desktop computer had a cryptic message on the screen. Ms. Patel and the students raced down to the basement to check out the old computer. She took out her keys and opened the lock and pushed the door open. The computer was plugged in, and cryptic codes were scrolling on the screen!! A few dark faces were lurking in the dark! We screamed and raced back up!!!

Aayan Banerjee is a 6th grader at Churchill Winston Middle School.



Mrs. Makken's Classroom

Lately, Mrs. Makken had been acting strange. Once the friendliest teacher in the whole school, now seemed quiet. The students whispered about it, but no one dared to ask.

One day after school, while walking along the hallway, I noticed something. The whole day had felt foggy and odd, but I was suddenly alert. Mrs. Makken's classroom door was slightly open, and a faint green light cast a green glow on the floor.

Curiosity got the better of me. I tiptoed closer and peeked inside. Mrs. Makken was standing in the middle of the room. The green light pulsed from a strange circular object on her desk that I had never seen before. She muttered something in what I think was a different language. It's hard to remember. The light from the orb intensified, casting strange shadows across the walls. I felt a cold shiver run down my spine.

I knew I should leave, but I couldn't look away. Suddenly, Mrs. Makken turned. They were no longer kind eyes. They were glowing with the same odd green light. "You shouldn't be here," she said with an odd, metallic sound in her voice. It was gargled and misshapen.

Before I could move, the green light engulfed me. The last thing I saw before everything went black was Mrs. Makken's face, not recognizable to me anymore. It was fuzzy... I can't quite remember what I was looking at.

When I woke up, I was lying on the hallway floor. The classroom wasn't anywhere near me. Had it all been a dream? I don't know. But I avoided Mrs. Makken's classroom, never daring to peek again. I couldn't shake the feeling that whatever I had seen in that green light was still watching me... waiting.

Can I ever go to school again???

Shriya Banerjee is an 8th grader at Churchill Winston Middle School, Sacramento.

My Trip to Niagara Falls

Last summer I went to Niagara Falls. It is the largest waterfall on earth and attracts millions of tourists every year. Its water is supplied by Lake Erie. The waterfall disposes over 600,000 gallons of water *per second*! It borders Canada and the USA. There are activities like walking, hiking, and boating that are available for tourists. My favorite activity was boating, so I shall narrate it.

Before going on the boat, we were provided raincoats because it was going to be very splashy. The boat went so close to the waterfall that its water was falling all over us! The boat was full of people. We could see the waterfall up close because we were at the front of the boat.

After we got off the boat, we hiked near the waterfall. I really enjoyed climbing up but climbing down was a bit scary because of the slippery rocks and I was afraid that I might fall. After all the fun, we walked around the waterfall and took pictures. We also went to the gift shop to buy a few souvenirs for home.

We left around 7:00 PM and ate dinner at a restaurant. It was a memorable and fun summer experience.



Toushini Banga is a 5th grader at Russell Ranch Elementary School, Folsom

The Red on Your Hands

I still remember
The last time we made pizza
Your cherry stewed dress
Your little red Corvette
From that Prince song

And don't you
Remember
The color of the sky?
It was dusk
And your roses
Were in full bloom

That was fun,
You know?
Like when tears
From cutting onions
Got in the stew,
And you laughed,
Your great booming laugh
That could make anyone feel better

Then we made
A gigantic mess
But that's okay
'Cause we always
Cleaned up later
And we would smile
At the tomato juice
Still on your hands

I can't remember
When we burnt the pizza
Your cherry stained pants
Your little red Corvette
Couldn't play that Prince song
And do you Remember
The color of the sky?
It was red
From the smoke
And your roses
Refused to bloom

Was it fun?
I haven't heard
Like when My tears

Didn't come from cutting onions
And got in the stew
"Just a little
Extra salt," You said
But your laugh
Your great, booming laugh
Couldn't make me feel better

And then I made
A gigantic mess
When you asked me
To chop tomatoes
I wasn't okay
And I felt like
My heart
Wouldn't want to beat
Anymore
And a devil
Was clawing at
The insides of my brain
I also knew
You would always
Clean up later

But you
Didn't smile
When I fell
To the floor
You didn't laugh
When the tomato
Was still whole
You didn't joke
At the little
Extra salt
Coming down your cheeks

There was just
A different type of red
Still on your hands

Anaya Bhattacharyya is a freshman at Vista
Del Lago High school, Folsom.

Durga Puja

The drums resound, the conch shells blow,
In every area, the colors glow
The goddess rides on a lion's back,
Durga Maa is here at last.

The shrine is lit with lights so grand,
Devotees gather, hand in hand
With marigolds, songs, and hearts aflame,
We call her power, praise her name.

The air is fragrant with incense, so sweet,
As prayers rise from crowded people in seats
For days we celebrate her visit,
Until next year we will relive it.



Shauna Mallick is a Junior at Westpark High School, Roseville.

Quiet Thoughts

Trapped in silence, all alone
These walls of fear, like bricks, overgrown.
Hands reach out, but do they know?
The silent screams inside of me that flow
while words choke back, swallowed by
thoughts.
The quickening of my heartbeat-
But will it ever go?
In the stillness, my voice must show.



Renee Som Kiran is a Sophomore at Vista Del Lago High School, Folsom.

My First Trip to Paradise: Oahu

The school day had ended, and I lay on my bed, exhausted and bored. About 30 minutes later, my mom called me for lunch. As I took the first bite of my sandwich, my mom said she had something to tell me. She said, “We are going on a trip to Hawaii.” I had to ask her again to be sure. After these long days at school, this news was a dream come true. My mom explained that we would stay at the Hilton Hotel at Waikiki Beach in Oahu, starting just as summer break began, in 2 weeks. I rushed upstairs, searched online for things to do and places to eat in Hawaii, and was captivated by the beautiful pictures. I was most excited about snorkeling, which had always been on my bucket list.

Two weeks later, the school was finally over. We were to depart the next day at around 9 AM, and so I spent the whole day packing all my clothes, stuffing every single thing I wanted to carry with me. At 5 AM, we headed to the airport. As we were walking toward the plane, I started daydreaming. During the flight, I wondered about how things in Hawaii may contrast with California. I was snapped back to reality as the plane descended. As I looked through the windows, the pristine shores and cities came into view.

The moment I stepped out, I was slapped in the face with such a thick atmosphere. I could feel the light breeze across the sky, but at the same time, it was extremely humid and moist as well. However, I found myself enjoying the outside, as the stark contrast from California’s dry, blazing summer. As we were on our ride, our driver introduced himself and expressed his love for the Aloha state of Hawaii. He explained to us that he was not traditionally Hawaiian, but was of Japanese descent; he had moved here because he had a passion for the people of this place and their kind nature.

After reaching our hotel room, I ran and opened the balcony door. I was blown away by the gorgeous view. It was everything that

somebody could have asked for: the calm shores and turquoise blue water, the yellow sandy beaches, a calm lagoon that was available to the right-hand side, and best of all, the marvelous sunset.

After we all changed, we stepped outside and decided to walk along the shore on the beach. I noticed how people were having so much fun in so many ways. While some enjoyed their evenings by playing volleyball on set-up courts, many of the others decided to utilize the water itself, surfing on the big yet peaceful waves. After walking for about 30 minutes, we noticed a dance was going on right next to the beach. As we walked closer, we saw the crazy amount of people that had formed a circle. We saw a group of people dancing as well as playing music in the middle. This was called the Hula dance, something that our driver had explained to us during our ride to our hotel.

The next day, around 6:30 in the evening, my dad let us know that he had contacted our driver two days ago and had asked him if he was willing to be our guide. When I asked where we would be going tomorrow, he simply said it was a special surprise. When the sunset started to roll around, I went straight for the balcony so I could get a solid view of the beach and shore. As I stared into the far horizon, I couldn’t help but wish that life was always like this. So peaceful and tranquilizing, yet so energetic and full of activities. I was lost in one thought only “How can I ever come back from such a place like this?”

By the next morning, my mom woke me up at around 6:45 in the morning, the usual time I woke up for school. Initially, I was so lost about why our room was bustling, but it finally hit me - we were supposed to be ready by 8 AM sharp. I immediately forced myself up from my bed, took a shower, and got ready. When our guide arrived and helped us carry our backpacks to the back of the car, I could feel the same warmth and welcoming presence that I felt the



first day that I met him. Along the way, the main attraction was the luscious green hills that made up a great majority of the road. There was something beautiful yet a little gloomy about this scene, where it felt like it had been raining for days on this side of the island. After around 30 minutes, we took a turn to the left, which took us uphill. However, the further we transcended up this hill, the more scenic the road became. It felt like we were going through a garden filled with many varieties of flowers. It was an extremely beautiful sight, and it truly felt like a paradise. As we ascended uphill, I could see what was coming into sight - a large temple hidden in the mist. It was truly an astounding sight. It was massive and magnificent, especially with piquant green trees that hung around in the back. It seemed that it had rained recently, and as a result, all the plant life was dark green. Our guide explained to us that this was called the Byodo-In Temple, a Buddhist temple made to commemorate the first Japanese residents of Hawaii. To my left, there was an extremely large golden bell that was around 10 feet tall. As I walked closer and got a better view, I could see many people ringing the bell. Once it was my turn, I struck the bell as hard as possible, which resulted in a loud gong. After spending some time at the temple, we headed to our next destination.

Our guide drove us to next spot, a spectacular beach! But it was unlike any beach I had seen before. There were an endless number of cliffs that went along the whole beach, where I saw many people jumping off and diving into the water. I could see many people snorkeling off in the distance, and with my new snorkeling gear, I decided to do the same for the first time. As my parents watched me from the back, I ventured far into the ocean, about 30 feet away from the beach. But the world underneath the water is what blew me away! I was mesmerized by how clear the view underwater was, and I could see groups of fish swimming around, venturing into the deeper water. However, as I was returning, I just happened to stumble across not one but two turtles. They were ahead of me, so I decided to catch up with them. The gracefulness with which they swam truly left



me awe-struck, and I wanted to float around with them. All I could do was just gaze at the way they moved. Afterwards, as I lay in my

hotel, I felt accomplished at having fulfilled a long-time dream of snorkeling with marine life, but I just couldn't help but wish for more.

Next day, my dad told us that he had bought tickets to the Polynesian Cultural Center (PCC). I immediately researched this place and found that this is where one could experience the life of various Polynesian groups, such as the Fijians and Tongas. Once we finally arrived at the PCC, driving our rented blue Ford Mustang, I was stunned by the amount of people that surrounded the place. On one side, many people lined up for a guided canoe trip, where we would learn about the different Polynesian cultures. As our canoe guide explained all the different cultures, I couldn't help but stare in awe as I saw many people perform traditions I had never seen before in my life. On my right and left, I saw a plethora of performances, ranging from dancing to playing the drums and even making food. As our canoe trip came to an end, one show had piqued my interest the most: The Tongan tribe show. After the canoe trip, we decided to head back.

I slept well that night, but before falling asleep, I could only wonder what was to happen tomorrow. The next morning my dad said that he had booked a ticket to Pearl Harbor and that we had to get ready immediately. We boarded a ship that took us to an island. As I walked inside the grounds in the passage, I immediately saw the graves commemorating many of the fallen soldiers that had died in the explosion of Pearl Harbor. The air was filled with sorrow and silence as people paid their respects to the fallen in complete silence. As we arrived back to the main island, I couldn't help but think of the historical significance that Hawaii had, rather than just its beauty. As we walked back to the shuttle bus, my parents informed me that they had another surprise for me next.

When the shuttle bus dropped us to a spot, off initially, I was very confused, I couldn't see anything in sight and was questioning what was going on. I walked a little forward to see where everyone was headed, and at that moment, I finally understood the craze. In front of me was the biggest battleship I had ever laid my eyes

upon. I just stood there, gawking at the enormous size that this battleship boasted. I hurried inside and climbed up the stairs, until I was on deck of the ship. The features of this 4-storied ship were plentiful. There were an infinite number of rooms within the ship. When I reached the highest floor of the ship, I was mainly attracted to the ship's helm from where the captain would commandeer.

We stood on the deck until one person came up to us and asked us our names, and then he strangely asked us to follow him. One minute later, he asked us to hop into a boat. I hopped in but was still confused as to what was going on. Once we were all on the boat, he looked at us, and with one large smile on his face, he announced, "Welcome to your new Snorkeling Trip"! I was astonished. I immediately looked towards my parents, at which they simply smiled. I couldn't believe it; my dream was finally coming true. I was going to be snorkeling with schools of fish. As we were on the boat, venturing deeper and deeper into the ocean, I could only imagine the experience of a lifetime that was about to happen right before my eyes. I could only imagine different colors of fish just swimming around, and beneath it all, a vast and colorful reef housing many reef animals.

Once we had reached the spot, I waited for the boat driver to give me the signal, and once he gave me the get-go, I jumped into the ocean. What lay before me was like a paradise. It was everything I had imagined, plus more. With the water as clear as glass and the beautiful setting of colorful schools of fishes whizzing past my head along the colorful reef about 25 feet deep, it was nothing short of a paradise. I was in awe of what was before my eyes. As I grew more confident, I wanted to see what was on the bottom of the reef that lay under me. I swam to the bottom of the reef and was able to even get a touch of the coral. The touch felt magical, and it felt that I too belonged amongst the fish underneath the vast reef. Suddenly, I saw two odd, shaped creatures approach me. The moment I became close enough, it had become apparent as to what it was. A couple of large turtles were swimming right beside me!

Keeping a distance, I decided to swim along with them, and I couldn't help but gawk at the gracefulness with which they moved. It was truly my favorite experience so far, something I would never forget for the rest of my life. I returned to the hotel exhausted but very happy!

When I woke up the next day, it dawned on me that it was our last day in Hawaii. I thought to myself about how I could never leave this paradise, but ultimately, I decided to make the most out of my last day before leaving. My dad found a great spot known as Sharks Cove; it was named such due to the cove being shaped somewhat like a shark. Around 2 hours later, we all got ready and brought all our gear with us in our car. We ended up reaching the cove soon, and promptly I noticed the amount of people in the cove, and just outside of it. I was amazed, as it felt like there were so many people who were just like me, who greatly appreciated the nature of the marine life that Hawaii boasted. Without hesitation, I put on my snorkeling gear and immediately went toward the ocean. While the water was initially cold, I was able to adjust to the chilling temperatures after a while. Immediately, once my whole body was underneath, I felt déjà vu from what I had experienced yesterday, it was the same exhilarating feeling of so many creatures whizzing past my body all around me. There were so many different species and colors of fish that I couldn't even count them all. I tried swimming the best I could with the fish, but they were too fast for me. If I could, I wanted to spend all my time with them, but as I resurfaced back up, I could hear my mom calling me in the distance, informing me it was time to move on. I complied, and after drying off, we headed back to the hotel.

Later, at around 8:30 PM, my parents asked me if I wanted to go on a walk to the beach. Of

course, I responded with yes, as the Waikiki beach that was right in front of our hotel was something I could go to any day, so, of course, I decided to tag along. When we reached the beach, I was surprised to see many people just lying and sitting on the beach, and I looked to see that my parents were surprised. We looked around as to what was going on. Eventually, my curiosity got the best of me, and I asked one of the people what was going on. They responded, saying that a fireworks show was just about to begin. Around 2-3 minutes later, the bombardment began. I began to see a plethora of colors shoot up into the sky, just to burst into small little dots across the sky. This view was such a sensational feeling, and I couldn't take my eyes off the scene for a single minute.

The next day, I could feel the smile on my face that I usually woke up with was gone. Immediately after waking up, all I could think about was how this would be my last day in this paradise.

As we got an Uber to bring us back to the airport, I couldn't help but stare at the beach while we started for the airport. I didn't want to say goodbye, but I knew our trip was coming to an end. As I took one last look at the beach before the exit, I could only think about the memorable memories that I had made. When we took our seats on the plane, and as the plane began to ascend, I could only look down at the whole city. My eyes were glued to the city and the beaches as I looked through the window, and all I could think about was all the beautiful experiences I had shared with my parents.

Abhirup Mukherjee is a Sophomore at Folsom High School.

Silver Lake Camping Trip

Did you know that our family went on three different trips this summer? First, my dad, brother, and I went on a camping trip to Channel Island National Park. For the second trip, we went on a ten-day-long road trip along the Oregon and Washington coastline. Well, my favorite was the last one, a camping trip with many of our friends to Silver Lake!

This trip had been planned for a long time, and my mom had decided that she would not go with us. She does not enjoy camping as much as we do, so we didn't force her. We had just gotten back from our Washington trip on Sunday when we had our camping trip the coming Thursday. When the day came to go to the campsite, we put our kayak on top of the car and drove almost two hours to the area. On the way, it did rain a little which had me worried because we had planned to go kayaking and swimming in the lake the next day.

Since we were a large group, our campsite was isolated from the other people, and it was actually great. That way, we had a large area to ourselves and didn't bother anyone. Some families had brought food from home, so we didn't need to make dinner. We also were able to make smores. I have two memories of making smores before, and both times the marshmallows were so burnt that they tasted horrible. So, I wasn't exactly enthusiastic about making them. This time, I only left it in the fire for a little bit, so it didn't have black parts, and it was so delicious. The only part I didn't like was how messy it was. That night we went to bed in our tents full of all the food. It rained during the night, but I got a pretty decent amount of sleep.

The next morning, we ate breakfast and went on a morning walk. There is a resort next to the campsite, so we went there. We drove to the lake, and the area around the lake was extremely muddy because of the rain but we were still motivated to have fun in the water. So we went back to the campsite, changed, and got ready for kayaking. The first time, I didn't go

very far into the lake because I was in the kayak with my brother, and he was not helping with the paddle he had. By the time we got back to the shore, my arms hurt from doing all the work with the paddles, so I decided I was done for the time being. After all the kids got a turn on the kayak, we decided to go to the resort for lunch.

When we were waiting for the food to come, we saw a bunch of people setting up chairs for a wedding. The actual ceremony was being held by the lake, and the reception was by the resort. That explained why the campsite was so filled up. We ended up making a lot of jokes about crashing the wedding for free food.

After lunch, we headed back to the lake to go kayaking some more. Upon arrival, we could not find our kayak anywhere. The foldable tent that we had been using to sit in was also gone. After some searching, we found that the tent was completely submerged in the water. It must have flown away. Thankfully there was nothing inside, but we still had to find our kayak. My dad was not happy and took a rental kayak to go searching for it. Someone must've mistaken it for a rental and taken it. We searched through the stack of rental kayaks, but it was nowhere to be found. Since we still had two other kayaks, after some other people had a turn, we headed back to the campsite without our kayak.

We started prepping for dinner even though my dad wasn't very happy. After the uncles and aunties started to cook, my dad went with an uncle back to the lakeside to look for the kayak once again. Fortunately, they were able to find it sitting by the lakeside. Someone had taken it to the other side of the lake, that's why we couldn't find it. Although we weren't able to find the people who took it, we were just glad it was back to us.

While everything was happening, all the kids (including me) sat in one of the tents and played cards. Although it was getting stuffy in

the tent, it was better than outside because the smoke from the grills was everywhere. There was A LOT of food that night, and we stayed up again making smores since this was our last night.

After dinner, we headed to the resort to use the bathroom before going to bed. The wedding reception was going on, so we watched some of the activities and then headed back. Once we returned to the campsite, we told everyone that the people at the wedding let us have some cake. Obviously, this was not true but they believed it. My dad was pretty jealous.

We headed to bed, and the next morning, we packed up our stuff. The last trip of the summer was officially over, and it was time to go home. This whole trip was a really fun experience and definitely my favorite summer trip of the year.

Mahika A. Chowdhury is an 8th grader at the Elizabeth Pinkerton Middle School.



বড়দের বিভাগ

Grown-Ups Section



অসূর্য্যমস্পর্শা

অসূর্য্যমস্পর্শা থেকে আমি নিজেই এক দ্যুতি,
অবলার বলেই আজ, আমার পরম স্তুতি
চিতা থেকে উঠে, স্বয়ং আমি চিতা
আঁতুড় ঘরের খেলনা নই, পৃথিবী পালিতা
নতুন আকাশে আমি একাই ধ্রুবতারা
আধুনিকতার সামনে তাই ধরছি আমি ধরা।

তবু আজও লাগে আমার উড়ন্ত আঁচলে টান
পরিণীতা হয়ে মাতৃ অঞ্চলে ফেলেছি মুঠো ধান
আজও কোন বন্ধন পায়ে লেগে আছে
চোখের চঞ্চল দৃষ্টি আঁচলে ঢাকা পরেছে।
আলোকিতা হয়েও মনন লোকে নিষ্প্রভ
এত শত মুক্তির মাঝে, আমি আজও কি বন্দী রবো?
কত কবিতায় আমি উলঙ্গ কত তুলিতে আমি আঁকা,
আমি আজও রয়ে গেছি আকাশের অচেনা কৃতিকা ॥

সাধারণ মেয়ে

আমি লক্ষ্মী নই, আমি চন্ডী নই
আমি সাধারণ মেয়ে -
একটা আকাশ আমার থাক
স্বাধীন উড়ানে ধেয়ে।

আমি দেবী নই, দানবী নই
অতি সাধারণ মেয়ে -
সমানতার এক বাস্তব থাক
সমাজের কোল ছেয়ে।

আমি শান্ত, আমি মুক্ত
সাধারণ এক মেয়ে
ভিক্ষার স্বাধীনতা নয়
বাঁচবো সম্মান নিয়ে।

যতদিন আছে কন্যাদান
রয়ে যাবে কেউ লাঞ্চিতা
একা নই এই অপমানে,
আছে পাখগলি আর সীতা।

মেয়ের ঘোমটা সরিয়ে
শরীরী উষ্ণতা ছাপিয়ে
দেখবে বুকের অলিন্দ গড়িয়ে?
আজও মানুষের গন্ধ ছড়িয়ে ॥

ঐন্দ্রিলা চক্রবর্তী, কলকাতার একটি একাধিক পরিবারে, বাংলা সংস্কৃতির
ছত্রছায়ায় আমার বেড়ে ওঠা। কলেজের গতি পার করতেই, কর্মসূত্রে বাংলার
থেকে দূরে থাকি। কবিতার সাথে বন্ধুত্ব ছোটবেলা থেকেই - তাই বাংলার থেকে
দূরে থেকেও, কবিতার মধ্যে দিয়ে নিজেকে বাংলার কাছাকাছি অনুভব করার
এ এক অকৃত্রিম প্রচেষ্টা।

ভালোবাসা

ভালোবাসা যে কি জিনিস এখনো বুঝতে পারিনা,
ভালোবাসার যে কত রূপ একদম চিনতে পারিনা।
ভালোবাসা কি রঙে, না ভালোবাসার রূপে?
ভালোবাসা কি অন্তরে, না ভালোবাসা স্বরূপে?
ভালোবাসা কি স্পর্শে, না ভালোবাসা অনুভবে?
ভালোবাসা কি আকর্ষণে, না ভালোবাসা স্বভাবে।

ভালোবাসা কি যত্নে, না ভালোবাসা রান্নায়!
ভালোবাসা কি হাসিতে, না ভালোবাসা কান্নায়!
ভালোবাসা কি সৃষ্টিতে, না ভালোবাসা কল্পনায়!
ভালোবাসা কি অভিব্যক্তিতে, না ভালোবাসার রচনায়।

ভালোবাসা কি জীবের বৈশিষ্ট্য, না ভালোবাসা প্রকৃতির অঙ্গ?
ভালোবাসার কি আবির্ভাব ঘটে, না ভালোবাসা জীবনের সঙ্গ?
ভালোবাসা কি সজীবের মধ্যে, না নিসর্জীবের আছে ভালোবাসা!

সন্তানের সাথে মা বাবার ভালোবাসা,
মানুষের সঙ্গে মানুষের ভালোবাসা,
জীবের সঙ্গে জীবের ভালোবাসা,
জীবজন্তুর সঙ্গে বনস্পতির ভালোবাসা,
বনস্পতির সঙ্গে প্রকৃতির ভালোবাসা,
প্রকৃতির সব কিছুর মধ্যে যে সম্পর্ক, সেটাই কি ভালোবাসা?
জীবজন্তু প্রাণী বনস্পতি এদের আত্মসম্পর্ক কি ভালোবাসা?
চন্দ্র সূর্য গ্রহ তারা এদের আকর্ষণও কি ভালোবাসা?

ভালোবাসার নামে কত কি হয়,
ভালোবাসার মানুষ কোথায় চলে যায়।
ভালোবাসা যে প্রকৃতিই কি জিনিস
সেটা কি কেউ বুঝে পায়।

রাণা ভৌমিক

প্রবাসী বাঙালি কবি, পেশায় ইঞ্জিনিয়ার
জামশেদপুরে বড় হওয়া, ক্যালিফোর্নিয়ায় অভিসার
শাস্ত্রীয় সঙ্গীতানুরাগী, বেহালা বাদক
সালসা বলিউড নাচে, যোগী সাধক
প্রকৃতি প্রেম, টেনিস খেলা, শৌখিনতায় পূর্ণ
বিদেশে থাকলেও কবি বাঙালি সম্পূর্ণ।



হাইকু

নির্বিকার গ্রহ
কালো গর্তের আঁধারে
বিশ্বব্রহ্মাণ্ড

সমুদ্র ডাকে
সাঁতার জানিনা আমি
কালবৈশাখীর ঝড়

মাছেরা ঘুমায়
চারদিক ঘিরে নীল জল
চোখের পাতা স্থির

সঙ্গীতময় প্রাণ
তোমাকে গান শোনাবো
সুরের ঝর্ণা বয়

বৃষ্টি ছন্দময়
গাংচিল মাছ খোঁজে
ঢেউয়ের পর ঢেউ আসে

বাবলা ফুল ওড়ে
বাবার হাত ধরে বেড়াই
পৃথিবী সুন্দর

রাত কত নির্ভয়
শীত চলেই যাবে একদিন
কোকিল ডাকবে আজ

রাত পোহাল সই
ফুলের মালা গাঁথেছি
সূর্যের তাপ বেশী

মরণতে চলে
সমুদ্রে সাইরেন বাজে
ভবঘুরের মন ।

本素あ 当晴の にら明 なし日、 るい夢、	何希望 でもなら、 も出ら、 来る	人光 はども、 去り行 く	希望、 空の下、 集まる
that tomorrow, a wonderfull dream, becomes true	If it is hope, we can do anything	Although the light, people leave each other	Under the sky, hopes gather

ডাঃ তপতী রায়, অবসরপ্রাপ্তা এনেক্সেসিওলজিস্ট, বাংলা ও ইংরেজি দুটি ভাষায়
লেখালেখি করেন, নিউক্যাসল, ক্যালিফোর্নিয়া নিবাসী।

অসংলগ্ন পংক্তি ত্রয়

১।
সারা দিন ঘাম ঝড়িয়ে পাহাড় চড়া
ঘাড় ঘুরিয়ে দৃষ্টি তবু নদীর দিকে,
নদী তুমি কি নারী

২।
লাইট হাউস হাতছানি দেয়
এস, পাড়ে এস
পাড়ে অপেক্ষায় আছে কি কেউ ...

৩।
চলার পথে দেখেছি তাকে
কোন বাঁকে ?
মনে পড়ে না, শুধু ভাসে মুখ ...

৪।
ভালবাসার কি শেষ আছে,
না শেষ জন?
এত না ভেবে ভালবেসে যাই ...



মানস রায়, ফলসম নিবাসী, প্রকৌশলী, চৌরঙ্গী প্রাক্তন সম্পাদক ও
সাহিত্যসাধক।

We Who?

We proudly flaunt our upper caste name
 Smear others with castist blame game
 For selective minority we always cry
 For our own brothers our eyes are dry
 We love women bandaged black
 Try to rewind clock 14 century back.
 Veiled faces in Kolkata Mall make us
 romantic
 West Bengal retrograding, it's fantastic.
 We should have decided to abandon Dhaak
 Melliflence of a Shankh can go on a walk.
 Only that day our dream will be true
 Seeing Ma Durga in a veil, black or blue.

Manas Ray, Folsom resident, engineer by profession, past editor of Chowrongee and literary enthusiast.



An Appeal to Time

Time don't rush me, let me behold the
 nature,
 that enthralls me forever.

Let me walk on the winding path in the
 wood,
 between the whispering trees
 and listen to the music of the rustling brook,
 and to the noise of twittering birds,
 to welcome the morning, Sun!

Allow me to enjoy the vibrant colors,
 of the blooming flowers, spreading over
 valleys
 like a painting on the canvas of nature,
 Let me enjoy the golden glow of the setting
 Sun,
 falling on the blue expanse of the ocean.

Life, just give me a moment,
 to bid farewell to the earth
 Which nurtured me with all its bounties,
 Throughout my life.

Adieu beautiful world!



Manjistha Bose has had a long career in High School teaching and educational development in Delhi, India. She has authored history textbooks for 6th to 10th grade students. She lives in Folsom. She enjoys writing stories/poems, etc., which she shares with fellow seniors in a creative writing group over Zoom every week.

What the Dhaak: Part 3

In delta breeze, where the sun shines bright
We Bengali *alarmists* unite
Over *kosha maangsho*, dismayed, we bawl:
"Too many "Others" at South City Mall."

The wives review their household cares
Men gloat of caste, cars, and shares
We preach of India, so rare, refined
For dollars, we voluntarily left behind.

When the pujas come along
We feign our culture, proud and strong
We gather funds to run a club
And fawn to elders we dare not snub.

Let's ~~elect~~ select some puppets as our crew
Then tear them down when things fall through
As paying members, there cannot be doubt
We might defect to "internal" or "sprout."

We invite the new, then brush them aside
While seniors cling to their precious pride
In cultural delusions, we thrive and strive
Clutching traditions like it's 1865.

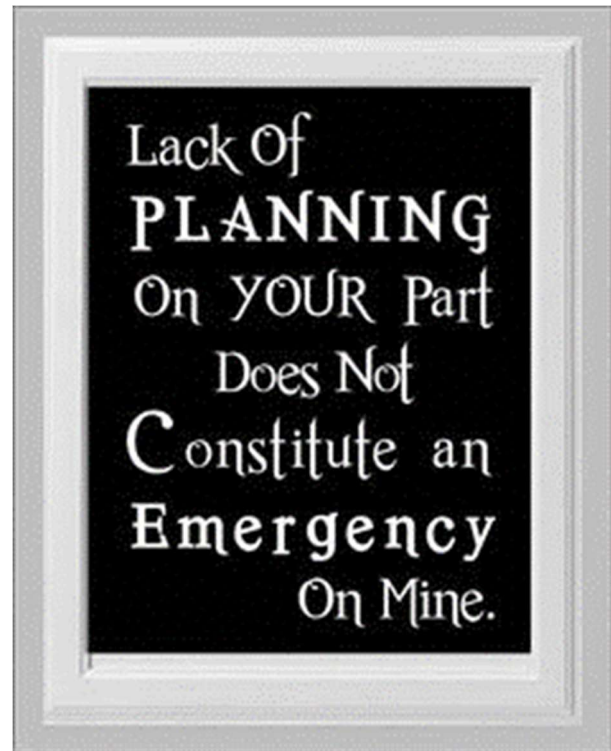
To join a committee, who knows how?
The process vague, unclear till now
The same few names fill up the ranks
With newcomers left to fill the blanks.

Events start late, or not at all
Tradition! We say, standing tall
We tell you eight, but wait till ten
Then act surprised you're mad again.

Our egos bruise with slightest word
Critiquing our club is quite absurd
A friendship spoiled; a bridge now burned
Invites to socials overturned.

Our ABCDs, with culture anew,
Don't feel the ties that once held true
While FOBs watch with little care
A dated worldview they don't share.

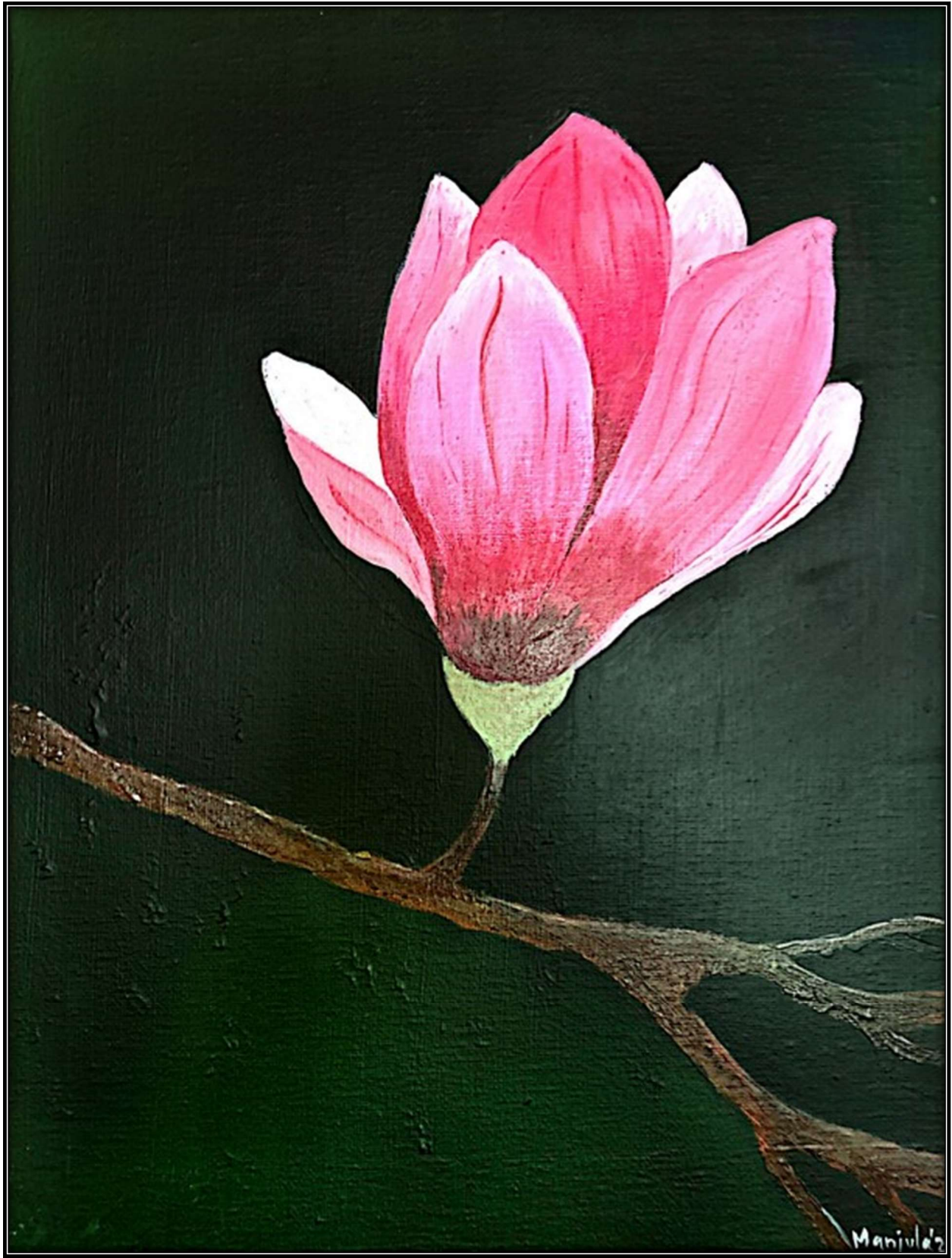
Our club now nears its 25th year
Yet still, the same old cycle's here
Unless there's change, we'll fade with time
Reduced to a subject of annual rhyme.



Rajat Chakravarty works as a machine learning and AI consultant for several Fortune 500 companies. Much like his work in creating things so that humans aren't needed, he dabbles in writing poems that no one should read.



"Mother's Love" acrylic painting by Pubasha Das



"Magnolia", painting by Manjula Dey

শব্দ বিভ্রাট

‘পরীক্ষার রুটিন বেরিয়েছে দাদুভাইদের?’ বেশ অনেক বছর আগের কথা, মায়ের সঙ্গে আমি কথা বলছিলাম, ফোনটা স্পিকারে ছিল, আমার ছেলেরা শুনতে পেয়ে অবাক চোখে তাকিয়ে থাকে, মুখে জিজ্ঞাসা চিহ্ন। বলে ওঠে দুজনে একসঙ্গে ‘পরীক্ষার রুটিন মানে কি?’ হেসে ফেলি, সত্যি এদের বোঝাই কি করে পরীক্ষার রুটিন বেরোনো কি জিনিস? আমাদের প্রচলিত বাংলায় কিছু কিছু ইংরেজি শব্দ এমন ভাবে মিশে আছে যা অন্যদের বোঝা বেশ কঠিন, তার ওপর আমাদের বড়ো হয়ে ওঠা ও আমেরিকার মাটিতে এদের বড়ো হয়ে ওঠায় বিস্তর ফারাক। বাড়িতে বাংলা, বাইরে ইংরেজি, তারপর একটু বড়ো হলে স্কুলে হয় স্প্যানিশ, নয় ফ্রেঞ্চ, নয় ম্যাডারিন বা অন্য কোনো ভাষা শিখতে হয়, অনেক কিছু এদের জানতে হয়, পড়তে হয় এবং সফলও হতে হয়।

আমাদের এক বন্ধুর স্ত্রী সদ্য সদ্য চায়না থেকে এসে ইংরেজি বলতে শিখছেন, প্রায়ই শব্দ এদিক ওদিক হয়ে যায়, একদিন দেখি তার মনটা খুব খারাপ, জিজ্ঞেস করে জানতে পারি তার ব্যানানার শরীর খারাপ তাই ভীষণ দুশ্চিন্তা হচ্ছে, আমি তো আকাশ পাতাল ভেবে পাইনা ব্যানানা মানে কলার শরীর খারাপ? এ আবার কোন দেশি কথা? কিন্তু কিছুতেই বুঝতে পারছি না যে সত্যি কার শরীর খারাপ, অনেক কসরৎ করে আকারে ইঙ্গিতে শেষে বুঝলাম ওনার ভাইয়ের শরীরটা ভালো নেই, ব্রাদার টা ব্যানানা হয়ে গেছে!

বাঙালিদের হিন্দি বলা নিয়ে অনেক হাস্যকর ঘটনা আছে, আমিও অবশ্য সেই দলেই পড়ি। আমার একজন অত্যন্ত নিকট আত্মীয় তিরিশ বছর হিন্দিভাষী অঞ্চলের বাসিন্দা হয়েও হিন্দির কোনো উন্নতি করতে পারেননি, ওনার মেয়ে একদিন শুনেছে মিক্সিকে নির্দেশ দিচ্ছেন - দেওয়াল দেখিয়ে বলছেন - ইধার পানি চুঁ চুঁ করকে গিরতা হ্যায়, তুমি ইয়ে ঠিকঠাক করকে দো। মেয়ে তো শুনে হেসে কুটোপাটি।

আরো একটা ঘটনা - যেমেনেয়ে এক বাঙালি বাবু এক ব্যাগ ভর্তি গম নিয়ে যাচ্ছেন, সেটা ভাঙিয়ে আটা হবে পরবর্তীকালে, রাস্তায় বন্ধুর সঙ্গে দেখা - ‘ইতনা হেভি ব্যাগ মে ক্যা হ্যায়?’ বন্ধুর প্রশ্ন, গম্ভীরস্বরে উত্তর ‘গম হ্যায় গম’, হিন্দিতে গম মানে দুঃখ কাজেই এক ব্যাগ দুঃখ নিয়ে উনি চলেছেন। কি কান্ড! বন্ধু বিভ্রান্ত!

গতবছর আমরা স্পেনে গেছিলাম, সঙ্গে আমাদের বড় ছেলে ছিল ভাগ্যিস, সে আমাদের অনুবাদক। আমার জ্ঞান তো উনো, দোস, ত্রেস, কোয়ারো, সিনকো অন্দি আর খুব বেশি হলে গ্রাসিয়াস কিংবা আদিওস, ও সঙ্গে ছিল বলে রেস্টুরেন্টে খাবার অর্ডার দেওয়া অথবা ট্যাক্সি কে গন্তব্যের নির্দেশ দেওয়া ইত্যাদি স্প্যানিশে যতটুকু সম্ভব বাদানুবাদ করা গেছে। এদেশে স্প্যানিশ ভাষা না জানলে আমরা বলি ‘নো এস্প্যানিয়াল’ আর ওদেশে গিয়ে উল্টোটা শুনতে হলো ‘নো এংলিস’।

সেরকমই এবছর ফ্রান্সে গিয়ে শিখলাম bonjour - যার অর্থ অভ্যর্থনা অথবা সন্তোষণ কিংবা সুপ্রভাতও হতে পারে, আর শিখলাম buena suerte যাকে বলে শুভ লাক ইংরেজিতে। খুবই শ্রুতিমধুর ভাষা ফ্রেঞ্চ।

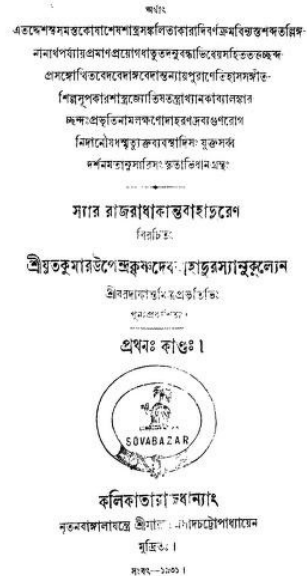
আমাদের ট্যার গাইড বেশ কিছু ছোট-ছোট শব্দ শেখানোর চেষ্টা করেছিলেন কিন্তু আমি বিশেষ কিছুই মনে রাখতে পারিনি। ভাষার দখল আমার বরাবরই দুর্বল।

একটা মজার ঘটনা না বলে পারছি না - আমাদের আদি বাড়ি ছিল বাংলাদেশের সিলেটে, বাবা-কাকা-পিসিরা বাড়িতে নিজেদের ভাইবোনদের মধ্যে সিলেটি ভাষাতেই কথা বলতেন, আমরা ছোটরা বেশ মজা পেতাম শুনতে, বুঝতে পারি সব, কিন্তু কয়েকটা শব্দ ছাড়া বিশেষ কিছু বলতে পারি না। তো এবার আমার বড়ো ভাইয়ের বিয়ের পর বাড়িতে নতুন বৌ এসেছে, আমার ছোট দু জন ভাই খুব মজা করতে ভালোবাসে, ওরা বৌদি কে গিয়ে ঠাট্টা করে জিজ্ঞেস করে ‘মনে করো তুমি ট্রেনে করে যাচ্ছ, সিলেট স্টেশন এসেছে বুঝবে কি করে স্টেশনের নাম না পড়?’ বৌদি তো হতবাক - এমন প্রশ্ন কোনোদিন শোনেনি, বলে ‘জানি না ভাই বলতে পারলাম না’ তখন দুজন হেসে বলে ‘যেখানে কাক গুলো ‘কা কা’ না করে ‘খা খা’ করে’। সবার জানা সিলেট, চাঁটগা, বা নোয়াখালীর উচ্চারণ একটু অন্যধরণের।

বেঁচে থাক নানান ভাষা নানান সংস্কৃতি নানান কৃষ্টি পৃথিবীময়, গর্বিত থাকুন নিজ নিজ ঐতিহ্যে।

মন গেয়ে ওঠে অতুল প্রসাদ সেনের গান ‘মোদের গরব মোদের আশা আ-মরি বাংলাভাষা’।

শব্দকল্পদ্রুমঃ



রশ্মি নন্দী, ক্যালিফোর্নিয়া গভর্নমেন্ট কর্মরত, ছোটগল্প লিখতে ও পড়তে ভালোবাসেন।

কৌটো পুরাণ

(১)

ভীষণ ব্যস্ত টুয়া। ঘর-বার সবকিছু সামলে এই সময়টুকুই যা একটু ফুরসৎ পায়। শরীর মন ভেঙে আসছে। আধা ঘণ্টা বা একঘণ্টা একটুখানি বিশ্রাম নিতে পারলে মন্দ হয় না। কিন্তু না, যত কষ্টই হোক, যে কাজটা শুরু করেছে তা শেষ করতেই হবে। এরজন্য ছেলেমেয়ে বা স্বামীর কাছ থেকে তাকে কিরকম উপহাস গল্পনা শুনতে হচ্ছে না! সে যাক, টুয়া তার যুক্তিতে অটল। বাবলু অনেকবার বোঝানোর চেষ্টা করেছে, এগুলো "ইউজ অ্যান্ড থ্রো", একবার ব্যবহার করে ফেলে দিতে হয়। টুয়া শোনেনি। সমস্ত কৌটো পরিষ্কার করে ধুয়ে, রোদে শুকিয়ে প্যাকেট বন্দী করে রেখেছে। আরে বাবা, এগুলোয় দ্বিতীয়বার খাবার দিলে কত আর ক্ষতি হবে? এই যে এত এত কেমিক্যাল যেসারের ব্যবহার, আনাজপাতি ফসলে পেস্টিসাইড ছোটানো, সেগুলো তো আমরা খাচ্ছি, এতদূর বিষ ঢুকছে শরীরে। শুধু সবজি কেন? মাছ তো আজকাল সব বাঁধানো পুকুরেই চাষ হয়। আর এই চৌবাচ্চার, (হ্যাঁ তাই, সিমেন্ট দিয়ে বাঁধালে যত বড়ই হোক না কেন, তা পুকুর নয়, চৌবাচ্চাই)। তো এই চৌবাচ্চার মাছগুলোকে যে খাবার দেওয়া হয়, সবাই জানে সেসব খাবার কর্সিনোজেনিক, মারণরোগ ক্যাম্পারের কারণ। শুধু আমায় নিয়ে লাগলে হবে?!

(২)

লাগোনা সারা দেশ নিয়ে! কত ধানে কত চাল বুঝবে কি করে। টানের না হলেও চাপের সংসার তো বটেই। সবদিক সামলাতে হবে না! আত্মীয়স্বজন প্রতিবেশীদের কিছু একটু দিতে ইচ্ছে করলে কত আর টিফিন কৌটো দেওয়া যায়? সেগুলো অনেক সময় ঠিকমতো ফেরতও আসে না, চাওয়াও যায় না। তার চাইতে এ-ই ভালো। কৌটোসুদ্ধ দিয়ে দিলুম বাবা। ফেরত নেওয়ার বালাই রইলো না। শুধু নেওয়াই বা কেন? দেওয়ার কথাও বলতে হয় বৈকি। কেউ কিছু দিলে খালি পাত্র তো আর ফেরত দেওয়া যায় না। এবার ভাবতে বসো কী বানিয়ে দেবো। খারাপ হবে না তো, কিছু ভাববে না তো... হ্যানাতানা, রাজ্যের ঝামেলা! তার থেকে অন্যেরাও যখন এই পাত্রে যুড়ি কৌটোয় পাঠায়, টুয়া হাসিমুখেই তা গ্রহণ করে। ফেরত দেওয়ার বালাই রইলো না। আরো কত কাজে আসে। আগের রাতে সবজি কেটে ধুয়ে গুছিয়ে কৌটোয় ভরে ফ্রিজে রেখে দাও। সময়মতো শুধু ঝটপট রান্না চড়ালেই হবে। আদা বাটা বেঁচে গেল, কি একটু বেসন গোলা, কিংবা খানিকটা বাড়তি তরকারি-----কৌটোয় ভরো ফ্রিজে ঢোকাও। আরও কত যে কাজে লাগে বলে শেষ করা যাবে না। আর শুধু কৌটোই বা কেন? বোতল!

(৩)

জলের, কোল্ড ড্রিংকসের, সব ফেলে দেবো! বোতলের গায়ে আলপনা দিয়ে, ছবি এঁকে রমারা কী সুন্দর পূজোর প্যাভেল সাজিয়েছিল। টুয়াও সাজাবে। অত অ্যামাজন থেকে, এখান সেখান থেকে পয়সা খরচ করে ছবি কিনে দেওয়ালে সাঁটানোর কি আছে? সব বাড়িতেই প্রায় একই রকম, যেন স্কুলের ইউনিফর্ম! বাড়ি সাজাবে বোতল দিয়ে, কৌটো দিয়ে। এক সময় সে ভালোই আঁকতে পারতো। কিছুই তো হল না। এবার নয় এগুলোতেই আবার শুরু করবে। এগুলোই হবে তার ক্যানভাস। টুয়া আর মন খারাপ করবে না। এগুলোতে গাছও তো করা যায়। অনেকেই করে। টুয়াও করবে।

এই থেকেই তো বিভ্রাট। টুয়ার মাথায় সেদিন বিদ্যুতের মতো খেলে গিয়েছিল ভাবনাটা। আসলে হয়েছে কি, টুয়াদের বাড়ি পালটাতে হবে। ওই আরকি। প্রতি বছর ভাড়া বাড়ানো আর নতুন এগ্রিমেন্ট। এরই জ্বালায় একটু দূরের একটা জায়গায় কম টাকায় একটা ফ্ল্যাট দেখা হয়েছে। সেখানে ওরা উঠে যাবে। এমনিতেই পুরনো পাড়ার আলাদা একটা মায়া আছে। ছেড়ে যেতে একদম ভালো লাগছে না। তার ওপর বাবলুর তর্জন গর্জন-- "নতুন বাড়িটা ছোট, এইসব জঞ্জাল আবর্জনা ফেলে দাও, ওখানে নিয়ে যাবার চেষ্টাও করবে না।" ইত্যাদি ইত্যাদি।

(৪)

টুয়া আর সহ্য করতে পারেনি। শান্ত আর তিক্ত কণ্ঠে বলেছিল "একটা কৌটোতেও হাত দেবে না। আমার তো নিজস্ব আর কিছু নেই, এগুলোই আছে-- আমি এই আবর্জনা নিয়েই থাকতে চাই।" আর তখনই ওর মাথায় সমাধানটা এসেছিল। কয়েকদিন ধরেই ভাবছিল চলে যাবার আগে পাড়ায় পরিচিতদের কিছু একটা করে দিয়ে গেলে হয়। কিন্তু অত পয়সা কোথায়? দু-একটা টিউশন ছাড়া টুয়া তো এত বছরে আর কিছু করে উঠতে পারলো না। তবেই যাচ্ছিল সাধ আর সামর্থ্য মিলিয়ে কি করা যায়। তখনই মাথায় এল কৌটোয় এঁকে গাছ দিয়ে সাজিয়ে প্রত্যেককে উপহার দিয়ে যাবে। রং আর গাছ কেনার পুঁজি ওর কাছে আছে। কষ্ট করে মাটি আনবে গঙ্গার পাড় থেকে। আর সবজির খোসা, গোবর, চা পাতা ইত্যাদি দিয়ে বানানো ওর নিজস্ব জৈব সারের প্রোডাক্ট তো আছেই। টুয়া কৌটোগুলো রং করে, শুকিয়ে, মাটি ভরার কাজ এগিয়ে নিচ্ছিল। ভাগ্যিস সেদিন বাবলুর কথায় রাগ করে কৌটোগুলো ফেলে দেয়নি। একটা ইচ্ছে তো ওর পূরণ হবে। সবার হাতে ও একটা কিছু তুলে দিয়ে যেতে পারবে। অথচ পয়সাও আহামরি খরচ হবে না। তাই কারোর কিছু বলারও থাকবে না।

(৫)

বাবলুর উপর থেকে সব অভিমান দূর হয়ে গেল। টুয়ার মনটা প্রশান্তিতে ভরে উঠলো। বেশ একটা আত্মতৃপ্তি। নিজের পিঠ চাপড়ে, নিজেকে নিয়ে বেশ গর্ব করতে ইচ্ছে করছে। পরম মমতায় ছড়িয়ে ছিটিয়ে থাকা রং করা, আঁকা কৌটোগুলোর দিকে তাকিয়ে রইলো টুয়া। দ্রুত হাতে বারান্দার কোণে রাখা মাটি দিয়ে তার সাথে সার মিশিয়ে কৌটোগুলোয় ভরতে লাগলো। মনের পর্দায় ভেসে উঠছে এক একটা পরিবার। কতজনের মুখ। চোখে ভাসছে নানান সাইজের, টোকো-গোল-লম্বা নানা আকৃতির, নানা রঙের কৌটো। টুয়া কি স্বপ্ন দেখছে। এক একটা কৌটোয় এক এক রকমের গাছ মাথা নেড়ে, পাতা নেড়ে, ফলফুল ফুটিয়ে হাসছে। টুয়া মেলাচ্ছে পরিবার পিছু, মাথাপিছু কোন কৌটো বা কৌটোর সেট কার হবে। টুয়ার নিজস্ব, একান্ত নিজস্ব রূপজগৎ তৈরি করতে করতে সে হারিয়ে যাচ্ছে সেই জগতেই।

আরতি সেন, রবীন্দ্রনগর কলকাতা নিবাসী, অবসরপ্রাপ্ত শিক্ষিকা। উনি সমাজসেবা এবং সাহিত্যচর্চায় রুচি রাখেন। উনি উৎসবসদস্য পুবাশা দাসের মা।

বসন্ত

এটা ঋতু বসন্ত নয়, এটা হল রোগ বসন্ত। এ যে এত কষ্টদায়ক যার হয় সেই জানে।

আমরা তখন জামশেদপুরে থাকি। পাশের দু-একটা বাড়িতে এই রোগে আক্রান্ত হয়েছে এমন পরিবার আছে। আমাদের বাড়িতে আমরা পাঁচজন খুবই সাবধানে চলাফেরা করি, বাজার থেকে আনা জিনিস পত্র না ধুয়ে ঘরে ঢোকাই না।

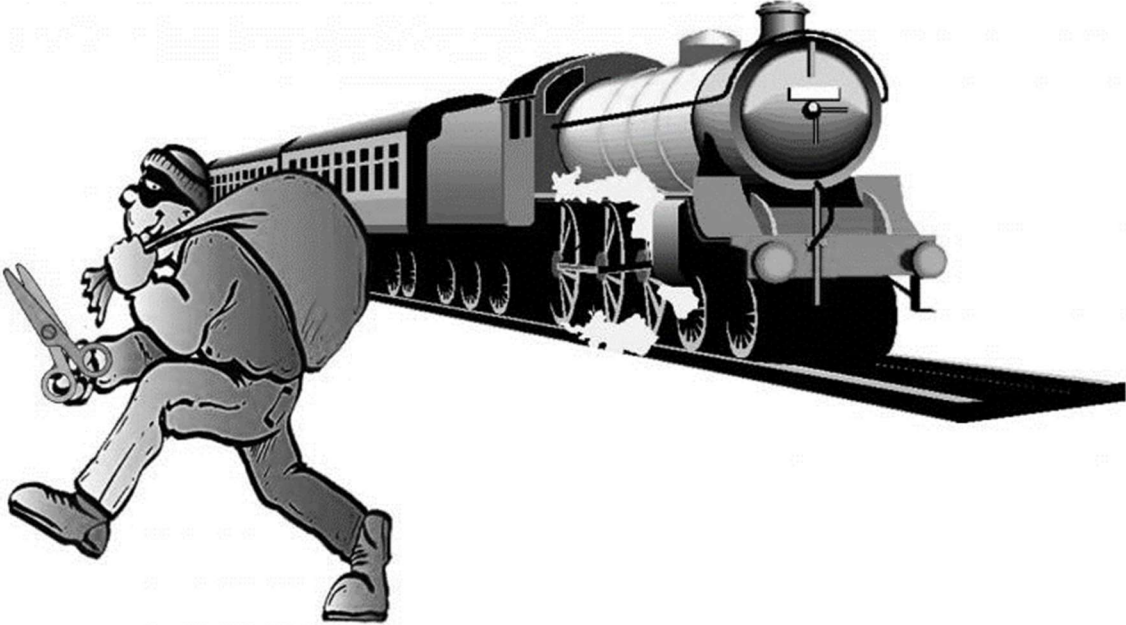
এর মধ্যে ছেলে পাঁচ-ছয় বছরের, স্কুল থেকে ফিরল জ্বর নিয়ে। গরমের দিন, তাও আবার বিহার। আর দুই-তিনদিন পর পিঠে-মুখে গুটি বেরোলো। আমি কোনদিন বসন্তের গুটি দেখিনি। শাওড়ি বললেন “মনে হচ্ছে বসন্ত হয়েছে”। ডাক্তার দেখাতে নিয়ে গেলাম। আমি বসন্ত রোগের নাম শুনেছি, এই রোগ কেমন হয় জানতাম না। দু-তিন দিন পর ছেলের বাবা বললেন “আমার শরীর ভালো লাগছে না”। জ্বর জ্বর ভাব - বিকাল হতে না হতে, তার গায়েও গুটি বেরিয়ে পড়ল। তখন শাওড়ি বললেন “যখন বাড়ি ঢুকেছে, সবারই হবে, সাবধানে থাকতে হবে”। এক সপ্তাহের মধ্যে আমার ও শাওড়ির দুজনের গায়ে গুটি। মেয়ে শুধু বাকি। আমার জ্বর বেশি না। বাড়ির কাজ করতে হয়। শাওড়ি যতটা পারেন আমাকে সাহায্য করেন। মুশকিল হলো বাজার করা। পাশের বাড়ির ওরা যত রকম ভাবে পারেন সাহায্য করেন।

যাই হোক, এক মাস রোগ ভোগের পর শরীর খুবই দুর্বল। ডাক্তার বললেন “একটু চেঞ্জ হলে তাড়াতাড়ি সুস্থ হবেন”। আমরা ও ঠিক করলাম প্রথম দার্জিলিং যাব, তারপর কিছুদিনের জন্য আসাম যাব - দিদির কাছে। তাই জিনিস পত্র একটু বেশি।

যথাসময়ে প্ল্যাটফর্মে ট্রেন ঢুকেছে, আমরা ছেলে মেয়ে আর জিনিস পত্র নিয়ে ট্রেনে উঠেছি। এবার জিনিস গুছিয়ে বসবো। ছেলে মেয়ে আমার সঙ্গে আর ওদের বাবা গেছেন খাওয়ার জল আনতে। আমি আমার হাতের ব্যাগটি সিটে রেখে স্টকেস গোছাচ্ছি। হঠাৎ নিচের দিকে তাকিয়ে দেখি আমার ব্যাগ সরে যাচ্ছে। একটা ১০-১২ বছরের ছেলে ব্যাগটা নিয়ে ট্রেনের দরজার দিকে যাচ্ছে। আমি চট করে ছেলেটার শার্টের কলার ধরে টেনে ধরে আমার দিকে টানি, আর কিছু লোক ছেলেটাকে বাঁচাবার জন্য ওকে ছাড়িয়ে নিতে চেষ্টা করছে। আমি এক হাতে ব্যাগ আর এক হাতে ছেলের গালে এমন দুখানা থাপ্পর লাগলাম যে তাতে আমারই হাত জ্বালা করতে শুরু করল। আমি ছেলেটাকে মারছি, আর আমার ছেলে মেয়ে অবাক হয়ে দেখছে আর নিজেরা আলোচনা করছে। এদিকে একটু ভিড় হয়ে গেছে। ওদের বাবা জল নিয়ে এসে দেখেন ওনার বাড়ির লোকের সঙ্গেই এইসব কাণ্ড ঘটেছে।

আমার সবচেয়ে মজা লেগেছিল আমার ছেলে মেয়ের কথা শুনে। ছেলে বলছে, “দিদি মার হাতে থাপ্পর খেয়ে ছেলেটা একটুও কাঁদলো না। কি সাহস বল?”। মেয়ে উত্তর দিল, “মনে হয় মা বেশ দুর্বল হয়ে পড়েছে। বদমাইশি যা করার তা এখনই করে নিই, মারলে বেশি লাগবে না”।

শিখা ভদ্র গত ছয় বছর ধরে ক্যালিফোর্নিয়া তে আছেন। ওনার একাডেমিক ডিগ্রীর সাথে আর একটি বিশেষ ডিগ্রী আছে, MOTT - মাদার অফ তনিমা এন্ড তনুয়।



‘দশ’ভূজা কেন?

অত্যাগ্রহী রসগ্রাহীরা কথাসাহিত্য, চলচ্চিত্র প্রভৃতি সম্বন্ধে অনেকসময়ই নানান ‘ফ্যান থিওরি’ (fan theory) প্রবর্তন করে থাকেন। ফ্যান থিওরি কাকে বলে? এমন কোনো তত্ত্ব বা তথ্য যা মূল কাহিনির অন্তর্ভুক্ত নয়, যা মূল স্রষ্টারাও প্রত্যক্ষভাবে স্বীকার করেননি, যা এক বা একাধিক পাঠক/শ্রোতা/দর্শক নিজস্ব কল্পনাশক্তির বলে ‘আবিষ্কার’ (অথবা ‘উদ্ভাবন’, যাই বলুন) করেছেন, অথচ যা কাহিনিতে ‘আলাদা’ মাত্রা এনে দেয় বা কাহিনির কোনো দুর্বোধ্য খুঁটিনাটি সহজবোধ্য করে তোলে, তাকেই বলে ফ্যান থিওরি। যেমন, ক্রস ওয়েইন (অর্থাৎ ব্যাটম্যান) ও হ্যারি পটার এই দুই জনপ্রিয় কাল্পনিক চরিত্র সম্বন্ধে দাবি করা হয়েছে যে, এরা আসলে মানসিক রোগী ও মনোরোগ-চিকিৎসা প্রতিষ্ঠানের বাসিন্দা; এদের সমস্ত রোমাঞ্চকর অ্যাডভেঞ্চার আসলে এদের বাস্তব জীবনের নানান ট্রামাকে এদের রুগ্ন ভ্রমগ্রস্ত মস্তিষ্কের দেওয়া কাল্পনিক রূপ! এই মর্মে বিভিন্ন অনলাইন ফোরামে বিশদ বহুপাক্ষিক আলোচনা পেয়ে যাবেন — এগুলিই ফ্যান থিওরির উদাহরণ।

আবার অনেক ফ্যান শুধু থিওরিতে নিজেদের সীমাবদ্ধ না রেখে নামিয়ে ফেলেন আস্ত-আস্ত ‘ফ্যান ফিকশন’ (fan fiction)। কোনো সুপ্রতিষ্ঠিত কাহিনি অবলম্বনে, বা সেই কাহিনির চরিত্রদের নিয়ে, সাধারণত মূল স্রষ্টার অনুমতি ইত্যাদির পরোয়া না করে কোনো গ্রাহকের রচিত মৌলিক কল্পকাহিনিই ফ্যান ফিকশন — তা সে মূলের প্রাক্কথন (prequel), পরিশিষ্টাংশ (sequel), প্রক্ষেপ (interpolation), বিকল্প (alternative) যাই হোক না কেন; আর মূলের সঙ্গে তার রসগত, রীতিগত, ঘটনাগত যত পার্থক্যই থাকুক না কেন। এই প্রসঙ্গে একটি নাম বলাই যথেষ্ট মনে করি — ব্যোমকেশ বস্তু।

কিন্তু ‘দশভূজা’ প্রসঙ্গে আমি হঠাৎ ফ্যান থিওরি ও ফ্যান ফিকশনের মত অত্যাধুনিক বিষয়ের অবতারণা করছি কেন? কারণ আছে। ইংরেজি ভাষায় ‘ফ্যান’ শব্দটির উদ্ভবের ইতিহাস জানেন? এটি হল ‘ফ্যানাটিক’ (fanatic) শব্দের সংক্ষিপ্তরূপ, যেটি এসেছে ফরাসি-মারফত লাতিন ভাষার ‘ফানাটিকুস’ (fanaticus) থেকে, যেটির মূলে আছে ‘ফানুম’ (fanum) শব্দ, যার অর্থ ‘দেবমন্দির’! ‘ফানাটিকুস’ শব্দের আদি অর্থ ‘দেবমন্দিরসংক্রান্ত’ অথবা ‘দেবতা কর্তৃক অনুপ্রাণিত’ — সেখান থেকে বিবর্তিত হতে হতে এখনকার ‘ফ্যানাটিক’ শব্দটি এমন ব্যক্তিকে নির্দেশ করে, আরাধ্য দেবতা বা যে-কোনো শ্রদ্ধাজ্ঞান অথবা ধর্ম বা যে-কোনো মতবাদের প্রতি যার ঐকান্তিক আন্তরিক ভক্তি চরম অন্ধত্ব বা উন্মাদনার পর্যায়ে পৌঁছে গেছে; আর ‘ফ্যান’ সাধারণত এমন কেউ যে শিল্প- বা বিনোদন-জগতের কোনো সৃষ্টি, ধারা (genre), বা ব্যক্তির প্রতি অনুরূপ মনোভাব পোষণ করে (যদিও ‘ফ্যানাটিক’-এ যতটা উগ্রতা বা কট্টরপন্থার ভাব আছে, ‘ফ্যান’-এ ততটা নেই বলেই মনে করি)। কাজেই ইংরেজির ‘ফ্যান’ কথাটির জায়গায় আমরা যখন বাংলায় ‘ভক্ত’ কথাটি

ব্যবহার করি, সেটিকে শুধু সঙ্কীর্ণ ভাবানুবাদ না ভেবে ‘ইতিহাস-সুরভিত’ আক্ষরিক অনুবাদ ভাবা হয়ত খুব-একটা ভুল হবে না!

তা না-হয় হল, কিন্তু ঠাকুরভক্তরাও কি ঠাকুরদেবতা নিয়ে থিওরি বা ফিকশন তৈরি করেন? করেন বৈ-কি! বেশির ভাগ দেবদেবী বা অন্যান্য গুরুত্বপূর্ণ পৌরাণিক চরিত্র সম্বন্ধে এমন অনেক ‘লোককথা’ বা ‘লৌকিক বিশ্বাস’-এর সঙ্গে আমরা অনেকেই অল্পবিস্তর পরিচিত, যা শাস্ত্র বা পুরাণ রূপে পরিগণিত কোনো সংস্কৃত গ্রন্থে পাওয়া যায় না — এগুলিও তো একসময় কোনো-না-কোনো উপাসকের মস্তিষ্ক থেকে উৎপন্ন হয়েছিল, তারপর লোকমুখে ঘুরতে-ঘুরতে ছড়িয়ে পড়ে তাদের বর্তমান আকার ধারণ করেছে (হয়ত এমন বহু কাহিনি কালক্রমে পুরাণের পাতায় স্থান পেয়ে আজ ধর্মীয় জীবনের মূলস্রোতের অঙ্গীভূত হয়ে গেছে, কিন্তু সে প্রসঙ্গ এখন থাক)।

দুর্গাঠাকুর আর দুর্গাপূজাকে নিয়ে কিন্তু বাঙালির এই ধরনের ফ্যান থিওরির কোনো অভাব নেই। মানতে অসুবিধে হচ্ছে? তাহলে বলি, এই যে পূজোর চারদিন দুর্গাঠাকুর স্বামীর ওপর গৌঁসা করে দু-ছেলে দু-মেয়ে নিয়ে বাপের বাড়ি চলে আসেন খাতির-যত্ন পেতে — এটাই কি জবরদস্ত একপ্রস্থ ফ্যান থিওরি বা ফ্যান ফিকশন নয়? দুর্গাবিষয়ক ছোটবড় সব ভক্ত-বিরচিত তত্ত্বকথা নিয়ে লিখতে বসলে একটা গোটা থিসিস নামিয়ে দেওয়া যায়; আমি এই প্রবন্ধে কেবল একটি প্রশ্নের উত্তর হিসেবে গড়ে-তোলা ফ্যান থিওরি/ফিকশনের দুয়েকটি নমুনা তুলে ধরব — মহিষাসুরমর্দিনী দুর্গার হাতের সংখ্যা ঠিক দশ কেন?

এই প্রশ্নের উত্তরে অনেকেই আমাকে এই সোজা হিসেব দেখিয়েছেন যে, দশজন দেবতা দশটি অস্ত্র উপহার দিয়েছিলেন, সেগুলিকে ধারণ করার জন্যই দুর্গা দশভূজা মূর্তি ধারণ করেছিলেন। মুশকিল হল, দেবী যে রূপে মহিষাসুরকে বধ করেছিলেন, সেই রূপের নাম কী আর তা কেমন দেখতে, বিশেষত তার বহুসংখ্যা কত — এই নিয়ে নানা মুনির নানা মত। এমন-কি মহিষাসুরবধের উদ্দেশ্যে দেবগণের সম্মিলিত তেজঃপুঞ্জ থেকে দুর্গামূর্তির উৎপত্তির যে কাহিনি মহালয়ার দিন আমরা শুনে (বা দেখে) থাকি, সেই কাহিনির প্রধান উৎস যে ‘শ্রীশ্রীচণ্ডী’ (যাকে ‘দেবীমাহাত্ম্য’ বা ‘দুর্গাসংগীতী’ নামেও ডাকা হয়), তাতে ভগবতীকে একবারও দশভূজা বা দশপ্রহরণধারিণী বলা হয়নি। বস্তুত সেখানে স্পষ্টত বলা আছে যে, মহিষাসুর যখন দেবীকে প্রথম দেখলেন, দেবী তাঁর একসহস্র বাহু দিয়ে সকল দিক পরিব্যাপ্ত করে অবস্থান করছিলেন (‘দিশো ভূজসহস্রৈঃ সমন্তাদ ব্যাপ্য সংস্থিতাম’ — শ্রীশ্রীচণ্ডী ২.৩৯.১); তাছাড়া দেবগণ যে-সব হস্তধারণযোগ্য বস্তু দেবীকে অর্পণ করেছিলেন, সেগুলির সংখ্যা দশের ঢের বেশি। তবে যে-সমস্ত ধর্মশাস্ত্রে শারদীয়া দুর্গাপূজার বিধান ও বিবরণ আছে, তাদের প্রায় সব-কটিতেই দেবীর ‘ধ্যান’^১ -এ

^১ পূজা বা সাধনার অঙ্গীভূত বিশেষ-বিশেষ ক্রিয়ার সময় উপাস্য দেবতার মূর্তরূপ মনে-মনে চিন্তা করতে হয় (আর সেইসঙ্গে কোনো-কোনো ক্ষেত্রে পূজক বা সাধককে কল্পনা করতে হয় যে, তিনি নিজেই সেই দেবতায় রূপান্তরিত হচ্ছেন); এই চিন্তাকর্মের সহায়িকা হিসেবে দেবতার মূর্তরূপের পুঙ্খানুপুঙ্খ বিবৃতি পদ্যাকারে পূজাপদ্ধতির বা সাধনপদ্ধতির অন্তর্ভুক্ত হয়ে থাকে — সেই পদ্যাংশকে ঐ দেবতার ‘ধ্যান’ বলে। মহালয়ার ‘মহিষাসুরমর্দিনী’

অনুষ্ঠানে ‘জটাজুটসমায়ুক্তাম’ দিয়ে শুরু যে গানটি গাওয়া হয়, সেটি বস্তুত অধিকাংশ শারদীয়া-দুর্গাপূজা-পদ্ধতির অন্তর্ভুক্ত দুর্গার ‘ধ্যান’। মূলত এই ধ্যানের ভিত্তিতেই অধিকাংশ দুর্গাপ্রতিমা নির্মিত হয়ে আসছে (অবশ্য কিছু-কিছু খুঁটিনাটি লিখিত ধ্যানের সঙ্গে মেলে না)। এই পদ্যাংশটি পাওয়া যায় মৎস্যপুরাণে ও ঈষৎ পরিবর্তিত আকারে কালিকাপুরাণেও।

আমরা তাঁকে ‘দশবাহুসমষ্টিতা’ রূপেই পাই; আর কোনো কারণে আবহমান কাল থেকে বাংলায় (তথা অসমে) এই দশভুজা ত্রিনেত্রা সিংহবাহিনী মহিষাসুরমর্দিনী দেবীমূর্তিই প্রাধান্য পেয়ে আসছে। অবশ্য দশবাহুত্বের একটা সরল ব্যাখ্যা সম্ভব, যার ইঙ্গিত রয়েছে শ্রীশ্রীচণ্ডীর উপরি-উক্ত উদ্ধৃতিতেই। ভারতীয় সংস্কৃতিতে প্রধান ‘দিক’-এর সংখ্যা দশ (উত্তর, ঈশানকোণ, পূর্ব, অগ্নিকোণ, দক্ষিণ, নৈঋতকোণ, পশ্চিম, বায়ুকোণ, উর্ধ্ব, অধঃ), তাই ‘দশদিক’ বলতে বোঝায় সর্বাঙ্গিক বা সব জায়গা। মহামায়া সর্বত্রই বিদ্যমান, বিশেষত যে-কোনো দিক থেকে হানা-দেওয়া অশুভশক্তিতে অমোঘ অস্ত্রে প্রতিহত করে সর্বত্রই নিজের শরণাগতকে রক্ষা করতে সদা-তৎপর —এই আশ্বাসের প্রতীক হিসেবে ভাবা যেতে পারে দেবীর আয়ুধভূষিত দশ বাহুর সমষ্টিতে।

কিন্তু এইধরনের প্রতীকি তাৎপর্য বর্তমান প্রবন্ধের প্রধান উপজীব্য নয়। প্রবন্ধের অবশিষ্টাংশে আমি বিশদভাবে আলোচনা করব আমার সংগৃহীত এমন দুটি ফ্যান থিওরি নিয়ে, যেগুলিকে তাঁদের উদ্ভাবকরা লিপিবদ্ধ করে গেছেন সংক্ষিপ্ত ও সুচারু সংস্কৃত পদ্যের আকারে, আর যেগুলি সুপরিচিত কোনো পৌরাণিক কাহিনিতে নতুন ‘টুইস্ট’ এনে পাঠককে চমকে দেয় ও নতুনভাবে ভাবিয়ে তোলে।



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রায়গুণাকর ভারতচন্দ্রের নাম আমরা কে না শুনেছি? মহারাজেন্দ্রবাহাদুর কৃষ্ণচন্দ্রের সভাকবি তিনি, ‘অন্নদামঙ্গল’-এর রচয়িতা, বাংলা সাহিত্যের মধ্য ও আধুনিক যুগের মিলনবিন্দু। আর তিনি যে মহামায়ার একজন প্রথম সারির ‘ফ্যান,’ তা কি আর আমার বলার অপেক্ষা রাখে? কিন্তু এ-কথা আমরা অনেকেই হয়ত জানি না যে, সংস্কৃত, ফার্সি তথা তৎকালীন আঞ্চলিক ‘হিন্দি’-তেও ভারতচন্দ্রের প্রশংসনীয় ব্যুৎপত্তি ছিল এবং সে-সব ভাষাতেও বেশ কিছু চমকপ্রদ রচনা তিনি আমাদের দিয়ে গেছেন। তাঁর এমনই এক স্বল্পজ্ঞাত – ও দুর্ভাগ্যবশত অসমাপ্ত – সৃষ্টি হল ‘চণ্ডীনাটক,’ যা দুর্গা কর্তৃক মহিষাসুরবধের কাহিনি অবলম্বনে পরিকল্পিত এক বহুভাষিক নাটক।

সংস্কৃত নাট্যশাস্ত্রের একটি নিয়ম হল, নাটক মঞ্চস্থ করার একেবারে শুরুতে নাটকটির সুষ্ঠু সমাপনের উদ্দেশ্যে কয়েকছত্র পদ্যে এক বা একাধিক আরাধ্যের বন্দনা ও আশীর্বাদপ্রার্থনা করা হয় – এই পদ্যাংশকে বলে ‘নান্দী’। চণ্ডীনাটক সেই নিয়মের ব্যতিক্রম নয় — নাট্যকার

ভারতচন্দ্র তাঁর আরাধ্যার চরণে নিবেদন করেছেন শাদূলবিক্রীড়িত ছন্দে-বাঁধা নিম্নলিখিত নান্দীটি, যাতে দশভুজা দুর্গাকে আমরা পাই এক অভিনব ‘অবতার’-এ:

সংগায়ন যদশেষকৌতুককথাঃ পঞ্চাননঃ পঞ্চভি-
বিক্রেবীদ্যবিশালকৈর্ডমরু কোথানকৈশ্চ সংনৃত্যতি।
যা তস্মিন্ দশবাহুভির্দশভুজা তালং বিধাতুং গতা
সা দুর্গা দশদিক্শু বঃ কলয়তু শ্রেয়াংসি নঃ শ্রেয়সে॥

॥বঙ্গানুবাদঃ পঞ্চানন মহাদেব তাঁর পাঁচ মুখে অজস্র সরস কথা-কাহিনি গেয়ে শুনিতে ডমরু প্রভৃতি বাদ্য সজোরে বাজিয়ে যখন নৃত্য করেন, সেই নৃত্যগীতপরিবেশনে যিনি দশ হাতে তাল ঠুকতে যান, সেই দশভুজা দুর্গা দশ দিকে আপনার (বা আপনাদের) প্রভূত কল্যাণ করুন, যাতে আমারও (বা আমাদেরও) কল্যাণ হয়। ॥

ব্যাপারটা আরো একটু খোলসা করা দরকার বলে মনে করি। ভারতীয় শাস্ত্রীয় সঙ্গীতে তাল গোনার নানা পদ্ধতি আছে, আর একাধিক পদ্ধতিতে একসঙ্গে দুহাতের ব্যবহার হয়ে থাকে —বস্তুত ‘তালি’ দেওয়ার অন্যতম উদ্দেশ্যই যে ‘তাল’ ঠোকা! এবার শিবের পাঁচটি মুখ একইসঙ্গে গানমুখর, আর প্রতিটি মুখ থেকে উৎপন্ন গানে তাল দেওয়ার জন্য একজোড়া হাতের প্রয়োজন —এ-কাজ একা করার যোগ্যতা দশভুজা ছাড়া আর কার আছে? এই কাজ করতেই যেন শিবজায়া দশভুজা হয়েছেন, অথবা দশভুজা যখন হয়েছিলেন তখন এই কাজটিও সেরে নিয়েছেন — এমন ভাবনাই রচয়িতাকে প্রণোদিত করেছে। আরেকটি লক্ষণীয় বিষয় হল যে, এখানে দশ বাহুর সঙ্গে দশ দিকেরও একটি যোগসূত্র স্থাপন করা হয়েছে।

সংস্কৃতকাব্যের বহুশতাব্দীব্যাপী বিপুল ভাণ্ডারে তাণ্ডবরত-শিব-বিষয়ক বহু কবির বহুবিধ পদ্যরচনা রয়েছে – এই কাব্যধারার প্রভাব ভারতচন্দ্রের উপর পড়ে থাকতে পারে। কিন্তু এই ধারার আর একটিও রচনা আমার জানা নেই, যাতে দশভুজা দুর্গার আবির্ভাব হয়েছে। অবশ্য রচয়িতা যেখানে অন্নদামঙ্গলের স্রষ্টা, সেখানে আরেকটি প্রভাবও অনুমান করা যায়। আমরা অন্নপূর্ণার ছবি বা মূর্তিতে শিবকে চূপচাপ দাঁড়িয়ে তাঁর কাছ থেকে ভিক্ষা গ্রহণ করতেই দেখে থাকি বটে, কিন্তু অন্নপূর্ণার ধ্যানে বর্ণিত হয়েছে যে, তিনি চন্দ্রশেখর মহাদেবের নৃত্য সহর্ষে অবলোকন করছেন (‘নৃত্যন্তমিন্দুশকলাভরণং বিলোক্য হস্তাং’)। নিজের মঙ্গলকাব্যের গোড়ার দিকে অন্নপূর্ণাবন্দনায় ভারতচন্দ্র এই ধ্যান অবলম্বনেই লিখেছেন:

ভুজাইয়া কৃন্তিবাস মধুর মধুর হাস
মহেশের নাচন দেখিয়া॥

আর উপরি-উক্ত নান্দীতে শিবপত্নী যেন দর্শকের আসন থেকে নেমে এসে নিজের রণরঙ্গিনী মূর্তি ধরে নিজেই এই তামাশায় যোগ দিয়েছেন!

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আমরা অনেকেই হয়ত জানি না – বা জানলেও খেয়াল করি না – যে, ১৯শ ও ২০শ শতাব্দীতে সংস্কৃত-সাহিত্যচর্চার অন্যতম প্রাণকেন্দ্র ছিল (বৃহত্তর) কলকাতা শহর। সে-যুগের বাঙালি সংস্কৃতানুরাগীদের একটি

বড় শখ ছিল 'উদ্ভটকবিতা' সংগ্রহ করা ও সমমনস্ক রসিক-পণ্ডিতদের সঙ্গে ভাগ করে নেওয়া। আধুনিক বাংলায় আমরা 'উদ্ভট' বলতে অদ্ভুত, বিটকেল, উৎকট ইত্যাদিই বুঝি (bizarre শব্দটিকে এর ইংরেজি প্রতিশব্দ ভাবা যেতে পারে), কিন্তু এই শব্দের মূল অর্থ ছিল উৎকৃষ্ট, দুর্ধর্ষ, প্রবল, অসামান্য (extraordinary)। 'উদ্ভটকবিতা' শব্দে সেই প্রাচীন অর্থ কিছুটা হলেও টিকে রয়েছে – যে স্বতন্ত্র, স্বয়ংসম্পূর্ণ, স্বল্পকায় (সাধারণত এক ছত্রেই সমাপ্ত) সংস্কৃত পদ্য তার ভাব বা ভাষার অসাধারণত্বের জন্য চমকপ্রদ ও স্মরণীয়, তাকেই বাংলায় বলা হয় 'উদ্ভটকবিতা'। অনেকে উদ্ভটকবিতার সংজ্ঞায় আরো দুটি শর্ত জুড়ে দেন: এর রচয়িতা অজ্ঞাত হতে হবে, এবং এটি কোনো বৃহত্তর শব্দবন্ধ (যেমন, কোনো মহাকাব্য) থেকে উদ্ধৃত হলে চলবে না; তবে সে-যুগে মুদ্রিত অধিকাংশ উদ্ভটকবিতা-সংগ্রহে এমন বহু পদ্যই স্থান পেয়েছে, যেগুলি শেষ দুটি শর্ত মানে না। তাই কার্যত ইংরেজিতে যাকে epigram বলা হয়, আবহমান কাল ধরে ভারতবর্ষের বিভিন্ন অঞ্চলে সুভাষিত, সুবচন, সদুক্তি, সূক্তি প্রভৃতি নামে যা সংগৃহীত হয়ে এসেছে, তেমনই এক-ছত্রের সারগর্ভ পদ্য সংস্কৃতে রচিত হলে তা-ই বাংলায় 'উদ্ভটকবিতা'-পদবাচ্য বলে মনে করা যেতে পারে। ২০শ শতাব্দীর বাঙালি উদ্ভটকবিতা-সংগ্রাহকদের মধ্যে অগ্রণী ছিলেন আশুতোষ কলেজের অধ্যাপক শ্রী পূর্ণচন্দ্র দে কাব্যরত্ন (১০.৮.১৮৫৭ – ১৮.১০.১৯৪৬), লক্ষাধিক উদ্ভটকবিতা বিভিন্ন সূত্র থেকে একত্রিত করে যিনি 'উদ্ভটসাগর' উপাধিতে ভূষিত হন। তাঁর এই বিপুল ভাণ্ডারের বহু অমূল্য রত্ন তিনি একাধিক গ্রন্থের আকারে প্রকাশও করে গেছেন — সেগুলির মধ্যে প্রসিদ্ধতম গ্রন্থের নামও 'উদ্ভটসাগর'; সংস্কৃতসাহিত্যে উচ্চশিক্ষা-গ্রহণকারীরা এই সংকলনটির সঙ্গে পরিচিত হতে পারেন। বইটি 'প্রবাহ'-নামাঙ্কিত তিনটি খণ্ডে বিভক্ত; আমি এখানে দ্বিতীয় প্রবাহের ৪৯তম উদ্ভটকবিতা উদ্ধৃত করছি, যা দ্রুতবিলম্বিত ছন্দে রচিত এবং সংগ্রাহক-সম্পাদক পূর্ণচন্দ্রের পর্যায়বিন্যাস অনুসারে 'শক্তিলীলা' পর্যায়ের অন্তর্ভুক্ত। দুর্ভাগ্যবশত রচনাটি উদ্ভটকবিতার গতানুগতিক সংজ্ঞার প্রত্যেক শর্তই পূরণ করে — এর স্রষ্টা সম্পর্কে কোনো তথ্যই এই গ্রন্থে পাওয়া যায় না!

পশুপতেরখিলেয় গলেয়ু সা যুগপদপরিভুং কুসুমস্রজম।
পরিণয়ে দ্বিভুজা হিমশৈলজা দশভুজা কিমভূদপি লীলয়া॥

॥ বঙ্গানুবাদ: সেই দ্বিভুজা হিমালয়কন্যা কি বিবাহকালে পশুপতির সবকটি গলায় একসঙ্গে পুষ্পমালা অর্পণ করার জন্যই লীলাচ্ছলে দশভুজা হলেন? ॥

বলাই বাহুল্য, শিববিবাহের একাধিক বর্ণনায় বিবরণ পুরাণে ও নানা ভাষার গানে-কাব্যে পাওয়া যায়, কিন্তু আমি আর একটিতেও পার্বতীকে

বিবাহকালে দশভুজা হয়ে উঠতে দেখিনি — এটি এই অজ্ঞাতনামা কবির মস্তিষ্কপ্রসূত মৌলিক খিওরি। এখানেও সেই শিবের পাঁচ মুখের সঙ্গে শিবানীর পাঁচ দুগুণে দশ হাতের সম্বন্ধ প্রতিষ্ঠিত হয়েছে, তবে এই কবির ভাবনাটিকে ভারতচন্দ্রের ভাবনার চেয়ে আরো মনোজ্ঞ বলে মনে করি।

একটা জিনিসে খটকা লাগতে পারে — এখানে কেবল শিবের পাঁচটি মুখ বা মাথা নয়, পাঁচটি গলার ইঙ্গিত রয়েছে ('অখিলেয় গলেয়ু')। পঞ্চগনন মহাদেবের অধিকাংশ ছবি ও প্রতিমায় আমরা কিন্তু একটি কণ্ঠের উপর অবস্থিত পরস্পর-সংলগ্ন পঞ্চমুণ্ডের সমষ্টিই দেখতে পাই, পৃথক পৃথক পঞ্চকণ্ঠ দেখি না। তবে অনুমান করা যেতে পারে যে, শিবের প্রতিটি মাথার নিজস্ব একটি গলা আছে, এমন একটি ধারণার অস্তিত্ব জনমানসে ছিল, যদিও তা কোনো চিত্রশিল্পী বা ভাস্করের হাতে রূপায়িত হয়নি। এই প্রসঙ্গে রাবণের উল্লেখও করা চলে — রাবণের দশটি মাথা থাকার দরুন তাঁর এক নাম 'দশানন' বটে, তবে সেইসঙ্গে তাঁর 'দশগ্রীব' (গ্রীবা = ঘাড়) ও 'দশকণ্ঠ' এই দুই নামান্তরও রয়েছে।

উপসংহার: দুটি ক্ষুদ্রকায় কবিতা, দুটির ভাষাই সংস্কৃত। কিন্তু দুটির মর্মমূলেই রয়েছে বাংলার সেই চিরন্তন মানসিকতা, যা দ্বিভুজা গৌরী আর দশভুজা দুর্গার প্রভেদ ঘুচিয়ে এসেছে। দুটিতেই যেন মহামায়া তাঁর দুই আপাত-বিপরীতধর্মী সত্তার মধ্যে অবলীলায় যাতায়াত করছেন। প্রসঙ্গত উল্লেখ্য, সকল পৌরাণিক ইতিবৃত্তে বা ভারতের সকল অঞ্চলে প্রচলিত চিন্তাধারায় শিবের গৃহিণী আর মহিষাসুরদলনী রণচণ্ডীর অভিন্নতা স্বীকৃত নয়; আবার অন্যদিকে এই ধারণাকে বাংলার মাটির নিজস্ব ফসলও বলা চলে না বটে। তবে উমা আর দুর্গাকে একাকার করার প্রবণতা বাংলায় যতটা প্রবল ও বঙ্গসংস্কৃতির সঙ্গে যতটা গভীর- ও ব্যাপক-ভাবে মিলেমিশে রয়েছে, তার জুড়ি মেলা ভার নিঃসন্দেহে। দৃষ্টান্ত হিসেবে তুলে ধরা যেতে পারে শিবদুর্গার পারিবারিক কলহ-বিষয়ক নানাবিধ রসিকতা, আগমনী-বিজয়ার গান, গিরিরাজ-গিরিরানি-গৌরী-গণেশ-সম্বন্ধিত নানা শৈলীর হাতে-আঁকা বা কাঠ-খোদাই ছবি, বিসর্জনের কনকাজুলি ও নীলকণ্ঠ-ওড়ানোর মত রীতিরওয়াজ, আরো কত-কি! আর আজ থেকে এই তালিকায় বঙ্গীয় বিদ্বজ্জন কর্তৃক বিরচিত বা সমাদৃত অর্বাচীন সংস্কৃত সাহিত্যের খান-দুয়েক নমুনাও সচ্ছন্দে জুড়ে দিতে পারেন।

মিথুন চক্রবর্তী যাদবপুর বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের বৈদ্যাতিন ও দূরসংযোগ-সংক্রান্ত প্রকৌশল বিভাগের স্নাতক। তারপর মার্কিন যুক্তরাষ্ট্রের সেন্ট লুইস-স্থিত ওয়াশিংটন বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় থেকে পরিগণক-বিজ্ঞানে পি.এইচ.ডি. উপাধি অর্জন করে, সিঙ্গাপুর বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ে আড়াই বছর অতিবাহিত করার পর বর্তমানে মিশিগান বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ে সহকারী গবেষকরূপে কর্মরত।

দিশারী লাইব্রেরি কেন প্রাসঙ্গিক

যুক্তিবাদী ভাবনা, পরিবেশ সচেতনতা, ধর্মনিরপেক্ষ সমাজ চেতনা এবং আমাদের বাংলা ভাষা ও শিকড় সম্পর্কে ধারণা গড়ে তোলার ভরকেন্দ্র হবে এই পাঠাগার

“মহাসমুদ্রের শত বৎসরের কল্লোল কেহ যদি এমন করিয়া বাঁধিয়া রাখিতে পারিত যে, সে ঘুমাইয়া পড়া শিওটির মতো চুপ করিয়া থাকিত, তবে সেই নীরব মহাশব্দের সহিত এই লাইব্রেরির তুলনা হইত।”

-রবীন্দ্রনাথ ঠাকুর (প্রবন্ধ: লাইব্রেরি)

আমরা প্রায়ই শুনি, যে বই পড়া মানুষের মধ্যে বেশ কমে যাচ্ছে। বিশেষ করে বাংলা বই। এবং এর কারণ হিসেবে বলা হয়, লোকজনের কর্মব্যস্ত জীবনে সময়ের অভাব। তাই ইচ্ছে থাকলেও কর্মব্যস্ততার অবসরে কাম-কাজ সামলে আর খুব একটা বই পড়তে পারছেন না মানুষ। কর্মজীবনের ব্যস্ততা ছাড়া আরও একটি কারণ হল অন্তরজালে বৈদ্যুতিক বিনোদনের সংস্কার। তারা হাজারো প্রকরণ নিয়ে হাজির - তা ওয়েব-সিরিজ হোক বা সোশ্যাল নেটওয়ার্কের অবিশ্রান্ত কলরব। বই পড়া কমে যাওয়ার পেছনে যুক্তি হিসেবে এই কারণগুলি অস্বীকার করা যায় না। কিন্তু আরো একটি সমস্যা হল বাংলা বইয়ের অভাব বা বই হাতে না পাওয়ার অসুবিধা। তাই এক সময়ে যারা নিয়মিত পাঠক ছিলেন, আজ ইচ্ছে থাকলেও, বই হাতে না পাওয়াটা, বড় অন্তরায় হয়ে দাঁড়ায় তাদের কাছে। আর এই চাহিদাটাই মেটাতে পারে একটি বাংলা ভাষার পাবলিক লাইব্রেরি।

রবীন্দ্রনাথের লাইব্রেরি প্রবন্ধে “শত বৎসরের মহা সমুদ্রের কল্লোল” এর ধারক যেমন লাইব্রেরি, তেমনি সে আবার আমাদের পথ প্রদর্শক ও বটে। বিশেষ করে আমাদের পরবর্তী প্রজন্মের জন্য। আর এই প্রজন্মের মানুষের কাছে? আমাদের এই আধুনিক যন্ত্র পরিবেষ্টিত জীবনে, যখন সব কিছু নিমেষের মধ্যে পেয়ে যাবার উপায় হাতের মুঠোয় - সে পন্যই হোক বা কোন তথ্যই হোক। এই রকম সময়ে দাড়িয়ে একটা প্রশ্ন উঠতেই পারে - একটি ইট কাঠে গড়া লাইব্রেরির কি আদৌ কোন ভূমিকা আছে? National Endowment of Humanities একটি প্রতিবেদনে জানাচ্ছে, অবশ্যই আছে। একজনের কথায়:

“In a country riven by racial, ethnic, political, and socioeconomic divides, libraries still welcome everyone. “We are open spaces,” says Susan Benton, the President and CEO of the Urban Libraries Council.”

(সূত্র:

<https://www.neh.gov/article/complicated-role-modern-public-library>)

অর্থাৎ লাইব্রেরি শুধু বই আদান-প্রদানের জায়গাই নয়, এটি মুক্তচিন্তা-চর্চার কেন্দ্রস্থল। লাইব্রেরি আমাদের শেখাবে সহনশীলতা। জোগাবে বর্ণ, ধর্ম, জাতপাত, অর্থনৈতিক ও সব বিভাজন ভেঙে ফেলার শক্তি। নয়া

যুগের লাইব্রেরি এমন ভাবনা ভাবতে শেখাবে যার প্রয়োজনীয়তা অপরিসীম। পরিবেশ সচেতনতা, যুক্তিবাদী ভাবনা, সামাজিক চেতনা, বাংলা ভাষা এবং আমাদের শিকড় সম্পর্কে ধারণা গড়ে তোলার ভরকেন্দ্র হবে এই পাঠাগার।

ক্যালিফোর্নিয়ার বে-এরিয়াতে দিশারী ফাউন্ডেশন ২০১৪ থেকে ১০ বছর ধরে বাংলা স্কুল চালাচ্ছে। দিশারীর তরফ থেকে ২০২১ সালে একটি বাংলা পাঠাগার স্থাপন করার পরিকল্পনা হাতে নেওয়া হয়। এই প্রতিষ্ঠানের মূল লক্ষ্য, আমেরিকায় বাংলা ভাষার প্রসার ও দুই বাংলার (বাংলাদেশ ও ভারত) ইতিহাস, সংস্কৃতি, শিল্পকলা, ভূগোল সম্পর্কে মানুষকে অবহিত করা। এবং এই কাজ আমরা করব কিছু ভাবনা সামনে রেখে - অরাজনৈতিক (non-partisan) ভাবে, ধর্ম নিরপেক্ষ ও লোকায়ত মতাবলম্বী হয়ে। লাইব্রেরি প্রকল্প ও দিশারীর কর্মসূচীর মধ্যে যথেষ্ট সাদৃশ্য থাকায়, এই কাজে ঝাঁপিয়ে পড়তে আমাদের অসুবিধা হয়নি।

লাইব্রেরি প্রস্তাব বাস্তবায়িত করার জন্য প্রয়োজন ছিল অর্থের, বইপত্রের এবং সর্বোপরি একটি জায়গার - যেটি হবে এই লাইব্রেরির আস্তানা-ঠিকানা। দেখা গেল জায়গা পাওয়াটা বেশ দুঃসাধ্য ব্যাপার। ভাড়া এত বেশি যে বেশিদিন তা বহন করা অসাধ্য। আমরা জনসাধারণের কাছে একটি অনুদানের জন্য আবেদন করি “ফেসবুক ডোনেশন” এর মাধ্যমে। এবং তাতে বেশ ভাল সাড়া মেলে, অনেকে এগিয়ে আসেন আর্থিক সাহায্য নিয়ে। অনেক বেএরিয়ার মানুষ লাইব্রেরি হচ্ছে জেনে প্রচুর বই দিলেন আমাদের। লাইব্রেরির দেওয়ালে টাঙানোর জন্য আমাদের শিল্পী বন্ধুরা দিলেন তাঁদের আঁকা ছবি। খুব অবাক হলো এমন কিছু দুঃস্থাপ্য বই পেয়ে যাতে মিলল লেখকদের হস্তাক্ষর বা তাঁদের হাতে লেখা কোন ছোট নোট। যেমন সৈয়দ মুজতবা আলি, নারায়ণ সান্যাল, শংকর, দক্ষিণারঞ্জন মিত্র মজুমদারের সহি করা একাধিক বই আমরা পেয়েছি। লাইব্রেরির অবস্থান যদিও উত্তর ক্যালিফোর্নিয়ায়, কিন্তু নানান সূত্রে খবর পেয়ে দক্ষিণ ক্যালিফোর্নিয়া ও ডিন রাজ্যের অনেক বন্ধুরা আমাদের বই পাঠালেন। এমনকি কলকাতা থেকে লোক মারফত কয়েকজন আমাদের বই পাঠিয়েছেন, কারণ বিদেশে বাংলা লাইব্রেরি হচ্ছে এই খবরটি তাঁদের কাছে যথেষ্ট গর্বের।

লাইব্রেরি শুরু করার প্রক্রিয়ার ভিতর দিয়ে আমাদের অভিজ্ঞতা হল যে সার্বিক ভাবে ক্যালিফোর্নিয়ার বেএরিয়ার মানুষ অত্যন্ত উৎসাহী এই লাইব্রেরির বিষয়ে।

আমাদের সবচেয়ে বড় প্রাপ্তি হল এই লাইব্রেরি পরিচালনা করার একটা দল তৈরী হল। কয়েকজন দক্ষ লাইব্রেরিয়ান এগিয়ে এলেন আমাদের সাহায্য করতে। তাঁরা দেখালেন কি ভাবে বাংলা বই নথিভুক্ত করা যেতে পারে। লাইব্রেরির বই সংগ্রহ-নীতি (Collection Policy) কেমন হবে, বইয়ের তালিকায় (catalogue) কি কি তথ্য থাকবে, ইত্যাদি। এরপর একটি Library Management System এর মাধ্যমে আমাদের লাইব্রেরি সবার জন্য খুলে দেওয়া হল। যে কেউ, অন্তরজালে ওয়েব সাইটে গিয়ে বই পছন্দ করে ধরে রাখতে পারেন। তারপর

লাইব্রেরিতে এসে বইটি সংগ্রহ করবেন। লাইব্রেরি বিষয়ে কিছু ব্যভারিক তথ্য নিচে দেওয়া হল :

দিশারী পাবলিক লাইব্রেরি কিছু তথ্য:

১: দিশারী পাবলিক লাইব্রেরির বই নেওয়া যাবে সম্পূর্ণ বিনামূল্যে। বই ফেরতের সময় ৩ সপ্তাহ তার পর বই আবার অনুরোধ করা যাবে।

২: ঠিকানা ও সময় :

301 South Abel Street, Milpitas

খোলা থাকছে শনিবার, ৩টে - ৬টা।

৩: Registration করার লিঙ্ক:

<https://library.disharifoundation.org>

৪. লাইব্রেরি তে কি থাকছে?

বই, ছবি, দুস্প্রাপ্য সিডি-ভিনাইল বিশেষ করে শ্রুতিনাটক, সাক্ষাৎকার, সংগীত যেগুলি ইন্টারনেটে বা অনলাইনে নেই। আমরা আপাতত বাংলা বই ও বাংলার ওপর রচিত ইংরেজি বই রাখছি। (এটা নিয়ে আমাদের আলোচনা করা প্রয়োজন।

দিশারী পাবলিক লাইব্রেরির কর্মসূচি

১. আলোচনা সভা, বক্তৃতা, গল্প কবিতা নাটক পাঠ ও আলোচনা

২. সাহিত্য, সংস্কৃতি, শিল্প, বিজ্ঞান, পরিবেশ বিষয়ে কর্মশালা বা Workshop।

৩. যেকোন ক্লাস, মিটিং, রিহাসাল এর জন্য অল্প খরচে ভাড়া নেওয়ার সুবিধা

৪. চলচ্চিত্র, নাটক বিষয়ে প্রদর্শনী ও আলোচনা।

দিশারী পাবলিক লাইব্রেরির খরচ কিভাবে জোগাড় হবে?

দিশারী লাইব্রেরির কোন আয় নেই, এবং সব পরিষেবা বিনামূল্যে প্রদান করা হয়ে থাকে কিন্তু অন্যদিকে আমাদের অনেক খরচ বহন করতে হয় যেমন বাড়ি-ভাড়া, বই কেনা ও নিয়ে আসার খরচ, আসবাব পত্র কেনা ইত্যাদি।

এই কারণে জনসাধারণ, সামাজিক সংস্থা ও বানিজ্যিক প্রতিষ্ঠান গুলির কাছ থেকে আর্থিক অনুদানই আমাদের এক মাত্র ভরসা।

যেহেতু দিশারী ফাউন্ডেশন একটি IRS অনুমোদিত 501(c)3 সংস্থা, তাই সব অনুদান থেকে কর-মুক্ত।

দিশারী পাবলিক লাইব্রেরি Benevity তে তালিকাভুক্ত মাধ্যমে অনেক সংস্থার "ম্যাচিং ডোনেশন" পাওয়ার ও সুবিধা আছে।

অনুদান (Donate) করা যাবে Zelle / Paypal এর মাধ্যমে info@disharifoundation.org এর ঠিকানায়।

দিশারী পাবলিক লাইব্রেরির ভবিষ্যত প্রকল্প:

১: বইএর সংগ্রহ বাড়িয়ে নিয়ে যাওয়া

২: আরো সেচ্ছাসেবীদের সাহায্য নিয়ে লাইব্রেরিটি সপ্তাহে দুদিন খোলা রাখা আরো বেশি সময়ের জন্য।

৩. ভ্রাম্যমান লাইব্রেরি করা যাতে মিলপিটাস থেকে দূরে বসবাসকারি মানুষ বই লেনদেন করতে পারেন লাইব্রেরি থেকে।

আগেই যা বলছিলাম, আমাদের লাইব্রেরির মুখ্য উদ্দেশ্য শুধু বইয়ের আদান প্রদান নয়। আমরা নানান ধরনের অনুষ্ঠান করে থাকি। কয়েকটি অনুষ্ঠানের কথা এখানে তুলে ধরলাম।

১. ১৯৪৩ র মন্বন্তরের ৮০ বছর পূর্ণ হলো ২০২৪ শে। এই ঘটনার প্রভাব বাংলা সাহিত্যে, নাটকে, চলচ্চিত্রে বহুভাবে আমরা পাই। কয়েকটি অনুষ্ঠানের মাধ্যমে সেই সময়ের ইতিহাস কে দেখার চেষ্টা করেছি। আমরা লাইব্রেরিতে। কলকাতার বিশিষ্ট নাট্য বিশেষজ্ঞ শমীক ববন্দ্যোপাধ্যায় জুমের মাধ্যমে একটি অসামান্য বক্তৃতা দেন "বিজন ভট্টাচার্যের নাটক, নবান্ন আজও কেন প্রাসঙ্গিক" বিষয়ে। এই অঞ্চলের একটি বই পাঠ সভা, "শিকড় ও ডানা" সহযোগতায় পাঠ করি নবান্ন নাটক ও পরিমল গোস্বামীর সম্পাদিত "মহা মন্বন্তর" এর মত সাহিত্য সন্তার। আলোচনা হয় জয়নুল আবেদিন এর ছবি নিয়ে। এছাড়াও টরোন্টো বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের অধ্যাপক জনম মুখার্জি তাঁর বই "Hungry Bengal" নিয়ে আলোচনা করেন। আমাদের সেচ্ছাসেবকরা উৎসাহ পান, আমাদের দিশারী লাইব্রেরিতেই একটি "১৯৪৩ মন্বন্তর" উপর একটি আলাদা বিভাগ করার বিষয়ে।

২. দিনটি ছিল ১৭ই ডিসেম্বর। শনিবার, ২০২২ এর। লাইব্রেরিতে উদ্যাপিত হয় বাংলাদেশের বিজয় দিবস। গান, কবিতা ও স্মৃতি চারণা দিয়ে পালিত হয় দিনটি। উদ্দেশ্য এদেশে পরবর্তি প্রজন্মের কাছে বাংলা দেশ ও ভাষার ঐতিহ্য ও গৌরবকে তুলে ধরা।

৩. University of California, Berkeley এর অধ্যাপক উপাধিসহ অবসরপ্রাপ্ত (emeritus) প্রনব বর্ধন তাঁর সদ্য প্রকাশিত বই, "Charaiveti", উপর বক্তৃতা ও আলোচনা সভা।

৪. প্রখ্যাত সাংবাদিক বীণা সারবার, এর কর্মশালা ও প্রামাণ্য চিত্র পরিবেশন। কর্মশালা টিতে অংশগ্রহন করেন প্রায় ২০ জন, যারা ভারত, পাকিস্তান, বাংলাদেশের মানুষ। এই অনুষ্ঠানটি করতে পেরে আমাদের মনে হয়েছে, লাইব্রেরি প্রকৃত অর্থেই মানুষকে মেলাতে পারে।

৫. বিখ্যাত চলচ্চিত্র ও নাট্য নির্দেশক, সুমন মুখপাধ্যায় কেও আমাদের লাইব্রেরিরতে আমরা পাই, এক অত্যন্ত ঘরোয়া আলচনায় যার বিষয় ছিল "নাটক ও সিনেমা"।

লাইব্রেরিতে একটি সিনে-ক্লাব চালাবার কথাও হয়েছে। আমাদের এখানকার একাধিক নাট্যদল ও অন্যান্য সাংস্কৃতিক দল আমাদের লাইব্রেরিতে রিহাসাল করার জন্য ব্যবহার করেন। এছাড়াও অনেক মানুষ

প্রতিনিয়ত আমাদের পাশে আছেন যারা আমাদের প্রচেষ্টা কে সর্বদা উৎসাহ দিয়ে চলেছেন।

আমাদের এই প্রকল্প চালিয়ে নিয়ে যাবার উৎসাহ, উদ্দীপনা, আগ্রহ দিনে দিনে বাড়ছে, এবং আমরা একে চালিয়ে নিয়ে যেতে বদ্ধপরিকর। "একলা চলো" দিয়ে শুরু হওয়া এই যাত্রায়, আমাদের ডাক অনেকে শুনেছেন, এবং এগিয়ে এসেছেন। তাই আজ আমরা আর একলা নই। আমাদের সঙ্গে যুক্ত হওয়ার জন্য সাদর আহ্বান জানাই প্রতিটি মানুষের কাছে। আমাদের সঙ্গে যোগাযোগ করার উপায় নিচে দেওয়া হল:

দিশারী পাবলিক লাইব্রেরির যোগাযোগ:
ইমেইল info@disharifoundation
হোয়াটসঅ্যাপ : +1(408)5691593



Conversation with Suman Mukhopadhyay



Annual Dishari Bengali School Celebration at the library



Bijoy Dibosh at the Library



Talk by Pranab Bardhan on his new book Charaiveti



Talk By Samik Bandyopadhyay

জয়দীপ দাস, সানফ্রান্সিসকো বে-এরিয়র বাসিন্দা, ক্লাউড ও তথ্য প্রযুক্তির পেশায় চাকুরিরত। দিশারী ফাউন্ডেশন বাংলা স্কুলের সহ-প্রতিষ্ঠাতা। মার্কিন যুক্তরাষ্ট্রে বাংলা বইয়ের বিপণন সংস্থা "বইপাগল (Bookmaniac)" এর প্রতিষ্ঠাতা।



Vedanta Society OF SACRAMENTO

51337 Mission Ave., Carmichael, CA 95608, Phone: (916) 489-5137
Email: society@vedantasacto.org, website: www.vedantasacto.org

Swami Prapannananda: Minister and Teacher
Swami Ishadhyanananda: Assistant Minister

The Society was started in 1949 and made a branch of Ramakrishna Math, Belur Math, India, in 1952.

Activities at a Glance:

- Daily **worship** and group **meditation** in the chapel, and **vesper service** on Sundays. **Sunday Lectures, Wednesday classes** on Vedanta scriptures, **Friday classes** on Vedanta scriptures, **Saturday classes** on the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda, and also **interviews** to students and spiritual aspirants.
- **Lectures** outside the Society.
- **Celebration** of the birthdays of Sri Ramakrishna, Holy Mother Sri Sarada Devi, and Swami Vivekananda, and also a few other **festivals**.
- **Spiritual Retreats.**
- A **library**, a reading room, and a **bookshop**.
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The Mystery of the Vanishing Idol

It was the last night of Durga Puja in Kolkata, and the city was alive with energy. The streets were bustling with crowds, the smell of fried street food hung thick in the air, and the dhaaks—those quintessential drums of Puja—thumped a steady, hypnotic rhythm. Strings of fairy lights twinkled overhead, casting a warm, golden hue over the pandals.

Amidst this sea of celebration, Abir Sen, private detective and Kolkata native, sat at his favorite roadside stall, sipping on a steaming cup of tea. It had been a quiet year for Abir. No major cases, just the usual background checks, cheating spouses, and the occasional missing pet. Nothing quite like what he used to solve back in the day.

But as he looked around the lively streets of Kolkata, nostalgia washed over him. Durga Puja always brought back memories of his childhood—growing up in North Kolkata, running around with friends from pandal to pandal, stealing glances at that girl in the red saree who lived two houses down.

Just as he was about to bite into a freshly fried luchi, his phone buzzed. It was his old friend, Suman, now a police officer with the Kolkata Police. Abir smirked; Suman never called unless there was trouble.

"Abir, we've got a problem," Suman's voice crackled over the line. "Someone's stolen the Durga idol from the Shobhabazar Rajbari pandal."

Abir nearly choked on his luchi. "Stolen? How can someone steal an entire idol? It's ten feet tall!"

"We don't know, but we need you here. Fast."

The Shobhabazar Rajbari pandal was one of the most prestigious in Kolkata, known for its century-old traditions. This wasn't just any theft. This was a scandal.

...

When Abir arrived at the pandal, the mood was somber, a stark contrast to the city's festive spirit. The idol platform was empty, except for scattered marigold petals, where Maa Durga once stood in her majestic glory. The local organizers huddled together, whispering anxiously, while Suman stood near the edge, arms crossed, his brow furrowed in frustration. Abir greeted Suman with a half-grin. "I leave the city for five years, and this is what happens? Pandals get looted?"

Suman rolled his eyes. "Trust me, I didn't expect this either. But we need to solve this before the immersion tomorrow morning. Imagine the headlines—'Kolkata's Most Famous Idol Vanishes!'"

Abir surveyed the scene. No signs of forced entry. No broken gates. The pandal, though quieter than usual, was still surrounded by people. The idol must've been stolen in the middle of the night when most people had left. A daring heist, no doubt.

Just then, a soft voice interrupted his thoughts. "Abir? Is that really you?"

He turned and froze. There she was, the girl from his childhood, now a woman, standing before him in a simple red saree. Her name was Rini, and Abir had been hopelessly in love with her when they were kids. She had left Kolkata years ago, but here she was, standing at the center of the chaos.

"Rini! I didn't know you were back in Kolkata," Abir stammered, suddenly self-conscious.

"I'm here for Puja," she said, smiling. "And now, this happens! I was just at the pandal yesterday. Can you believe someone would steal the idol?"

Abir nodded, feeling the same mix of nerves and nostalgia that always hit him when he saw her. "I'll figure it out."

She smiled. "You were always good at solving mysteries, even when we were kids."

Abir felt a warmth spread through him, but there was no time for romance now. A ten-foot goddess was missing.

...
The investigation kicked into full gear. Abir and Suman began interviewing witnesses. The pandal security guard, an old man who dozed off during his shift, claimed to have seen "a shadowy figure" in the middle of the night, but he couldn't remember much. One of the street vendors mentioned seeing a large truck parked nearby around 2 a.m., which seemed odd.

But the most peculiar clue came from a group of teenage boys who had been roaming the streets after midnight. One of them, still giddy from the festivities, swore he saw someone sneaking away with the idol—not in pieces or wrapped up, but the entire idol carried by a single person.

"You're telling me a person carried a ten-foot idol by themselves?" Suman asked, incredulous.

The boy shrugged. "That's what I saw. It was weird, but I figured it was part of some ritual."

Abir frowned. Something wasn't adding up.

After hours of questioning and chasing dead-end leads, they decided to take a break. And there was no better way to take a break during Puja than with food. Abir and Suman sat down at a nearby stall for plates of kathi rolls and steaming biryani. Abir was halfway through his roll when he paused, a thought striking him.

"Suman, remember that truck the vendor mentioned? What if the truck wasn't for transporting the idol? What if it was just a distraction?"

Suman frowned. "A distraction for what?"

"For something smaller. Something that no one would notice missing in the chaos."

The two of them hurried back to the pandal and asked the organizers to check the other ritual items. After a few minutes, one of the organizers ran up to them, panic in his eyes.

"The trident! Maa Durga's trident is missing!"

Abir had been right. The idol hadn't been the target. The thief had stolen the trident—a small but incredibly valuable artifact, encrusted with rare gems, passed down through generations of the Shobhabazar family.

Suman looked at Abir, half in awe. "How do you do this?"

Abir grinned. "I've been solving mysteries since we were kids, remember?"

It didn't take long for them to trace the truck to a warehouse on the outskirts of the city. Inside, they found a gang of petty thieves, along with the stolen trident, carefully hidden in a bag of rice. The idol, it turned out, had been left in a nearby field, untouched.

The next morning, as the city gathered for the immersion, Abir stood by the river, watching as Maa Durga was gently placed into the water, her trident returned to its rightful place.

As the idol sank, Rini appeared by his side. "I knew you'd figure it out."

Abir smiled, feeling that familiar warmth again. "Maybe I should stick around Kolkata more."

She laughed softly. "Maybe you should."

And as the sounds of the city swelled around them, Abir felt that for the first time in years, he was exactly where he was meant to be.

***Tanujay Saha**, also known as Rik, is currently working as a Machine Learning Engineer at Intel Corp., Folsom. He graduated with a PhD from Princeton University in 2022 and a BTech from IIT Kharagpur in 2017. He takes keen interests in sports like tennis, swimming, and football, and is a big fan of biographies and crime thrillers.*

What If

She scanned her Facebook posts, scrolling past the usual pictures of weekend parties with tables laden with food, sarees displayed, 110+ likes; she couldn't tell the parties apart anymore. Still, right now, they provided a much-needed distraction from her problems.

She almost missed the post languishing among the colorful party pictures - it was from Tisha, about N. The hospital's noises receded as her eyes devoured the words on the screen.

...

The day she had become aware of N was like any other school day. She was seated in the last row of the school bus; Smita was in the seat in front, kneeling on the seat to look back at her.

"Do you know N?" Smita asked.

All the girls knew N - at 16, in a culture where most people didn't date, he had been through three girlfriends and was now on his fourth.

"I know of him," she replied.

"He saw you at my house yesterday and wants to meet you. I can introduce you," Smita offered.

She felt a flutter in her stomach, a little thrill.

"I am not interested. Doesn't he have a girlfriend?" she asked. She didn't add that her mother would kill her if she even thought about a boyfriend.

She was 13, top of her class, class captain - the expectations of the entire world rested on her shoulders, or so her parents let her believe.

"You must become a doctor," her mother said every night as she massaged oil into her scalp. "Then you can treat the poor for free." They were middle-class Bengalis; education was the only path they knew to better their lives.

"He said he doesn't. He said you were cute."

Then, the courting began. The first time she saw N, he was wearing a yellow shirt. A tall, handsome boy with eyes the color of obsidian. Instinctively, she had known it was him. Then she saw him everywhere: walking to the bus stop, on her way to dance school, and on her way back.

Her friends noticed, too; "He is following you." In the evenings, he would ride his bike, circling her house.

One day, on her way home from dance class, he walked up and stopped in front of her. Her heart fluttered nervously.

"Would you like to be friends?" he asked. In those days, friends meant girlfriend or boyfriend.

"I am too young; I have to study," she replied seriously.

"When will you be old enough?" he asked, his gaze intense.

"After class 12," she replied.

"Five years?" He raised his eyebrows. She nodded mutely. He walked away.

Then, he became friends with Piya, her best friend, and began sending messages through her.

"Has she changed her mind?"

"No."

"He really likes you," Piya told her for the Nth time. She liked him too but had no desire to have her head severed from her body - *Mundupat*, her mother called it.

Another evening, as she and her mother walked home, she couldn't recall where they were returning from, N wheeled his bike right next to her and walked along for the 10 minutes it

took to reach their house. She didn't understand why her mother didn't say anything. Did she not notice him, or was she, like everyone else, charmed by his looks? He didn't say a word, just walked by her side - his bike, him, her, her mother, and her dancing heart hovering like a butterfly between N's and her shoulders. He wheeled his bicycle away as they approached her house. She felt bereft.

That evening, she marveled at a love so daring that it was unafraid of her mother.

He showed up outside their house on Holi. The neighbors had gathered outside - over 200 people; her friends, aunts and uncles, her parents. Younger children carried bottles of colored water, their clothes already wet, stained. The adults used *abir*, powders in the colors of the rainbow - but brighter.

N stood with a group of his friends. He walked toward her; she went toward him to get the meeting over with before the whispers started.

"Can we play Holi?" he asked. She saw he held a small bag of red *abir*.

"Only on my face," she said. There was a trend among ardent couples where the boy would put red *abir* on the parting in the girl's hair - to mimic the bright red vermillion that married Bengali women wore.

N touched his palms to her cheeks, lightly cradling her face. She felt the light caress, and her heart left the rib cage and fluttered outside between them, leaving a hollow behind. She dipped the tips of her fingers into his packet of *abir* and rubbed them on his cheeks. He left with his friends.

A few more months went by with him shadowing her and sending messages through Piya - always the same question. Then at the end of high school, when it was time for him to choose a university, he sent a different message.

"I've waited two years; I'll attend the college in town if you are willing. Otherwise, I will go to

Delhi, which is my parents' preference. I would rather be near you - you say the word."

"Say yes to him, he's been steadfast. Those stories about him are exaggerated - I have talked to him," Piya pleaded.

She was tempted, very tempted, but the colleges in their small town were subpar, not good enough for him.

"Tell him he should go to Delhi."

She heard he went to Delhi, the big city. She missed seeing him around; she had gotten used to him. Piya went off to a university in Kolkata.

She ran into him once, a year later, when he was back in town during summer break. Their eyes met briefly. She saw the flicker of something in his eyes, and then they went their separate ways.

Years later, she returned to town to visit Piya. She was a doctor by then. Her parents had moved, and she had lost touch with most of her school friends. They were at the club, sitting on the lawn, the evening breeze cool on their skins.

"You remember N?" Naina asked between bites of lukewarm fish fries.

"Of course she does," Piya interjected. "He spent two years trailing behind her."

With a faint pang, she learned that N had married Tisha, a girl from her school.

She remembered Tisha; she was a year younger. She used to have a boyfriend - a short, dark boy from the wrong side of town who failed to clear class nine two years running. You would take them for siblings. Tisha broke it off with him - "His status is not up to ours, my father says." Tisha must have been 14 then.

She had trouble imagining Tisha with N.

"He's at the club every evening - drinking," someone in the group mentioned. He wasn't there that evening.

“Comes straight from work,” Naina added.

She would have liked to meet him, see if he was still as handsome, see if he recognized her. What would he think of her now?

The next time she heard about N, Piya was visiting her.

“N is separated from Tisha. They have a child.”

“What happened?” she had asked.

“Who knows what goes on inside a marriage,” Piya had replied. She had nodded. She was married with a son - she knew marriages held secrets.

“I heard he had an affair. And the alcohol. He had a reputation, you remember?”

She recalled he was as loyal a love as a young girl could have desired.

And now, here was Tisha’s post.

My daughter and I mourn the death of N, her father, and my ex-husband. Though he was not in our lives, our hearts are heavy. These past years, I have wondered if I might run into him suddenly. I have waited with bated breath for a familiar-shaped head to turn, hoping it is not him. Now that wondering is done. We wish him peace wherever he is.

It felt intrusive, this lens into Tisha’s privacy, her grief.

He had just turned 47. She supposed it was the alcohol that killed him but didn’t know for sure. She wondered what it would have been like if she had said yes all those years ago. Would things be different in his life, in hers?

She knew each person brings out a different essence in another - the same woman could bring grace into one relationship and rage into another.

Could she have kept him from the destructive behavior he fell into in Delhi? Could he have brought gentleness into her life?

Perhaps then, he would still be alive, and she would have experienced less violence.

...
The first time her husband hit her, she was too surprised to react. It’s just a slap, she told herself. And he apologized immediately, profusely, and then with flowers. It happened again about a year later. This time his fist split the skin on her cheeks. She should have gone to the hospital but did not want another doctor to see her weakness. She made do with the first aid kit and a suturing needle. Over the years the frequency of the episodes had increased, and with it her shame.

But this morning, when he turned from hitting her to threatening her son, his knuckles taut over his belt, she had seized the hockey stick. She had meant to hit him on his arm, but he bent toward her son, and the stick connected with his face. He had crumpled to the floor, his face clutched between his hands, red seeping between the fingers.

She could have stitched the split skin; instead, a neighbor called an ambulance.

She read a few more of her Facebook feeds.

The U.S. might get its first woman president.

Bengalis were protesting the rape, murder of a female doctor. A closeup of her parents was posted; despair shimmered in their eyes. She hoped that they would get justice.

Her mind turned to her son, grateful that he was safe in the neighbor’s house; probably playing on his phone, she thought. She smiled and sat up straight.

Tanima Bhadra is a graduate of the Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur, and has spent most of her career in computer chip design. She is currently pursuing her interests in business and investments. She divides her time between Newcastle and Southern Oregon.

Royal Flying Doctor Service

“Alice Springs??? Like the chicken on the menu at Outback Steakhouse? And you are flying 48 hours to be there for 48 hours? Hmmm.”

Or “Oh, yeah, Uluru. I did not realize you enjoyed rock climbing.”

Or, just, “WHY???”

These were the reactions I got when I told people about my plan to visit Alice Springs for 48 hours.

I admit to feeling disappointed that so few people had heard of it.

And yet I was informed that Mashima, Mother of a close friend, widow of a Lt. Colonel, physician, and a Hero, wanted to read about my trip, specifically, to Alice Springs.

I heard about the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS) shortly after I arrived in Miami, FL close to 35 years ago, while looking into Outreach and Preventive Health options for doctors. It was in that list, with WHO (World Health Organization), Doctors without Borders, except that this brainchild of Reverend Dr. John Flynn functioned within Australia. As someone who worked in outreach and preventive medicine, in remote, inaccessible areas, including the Burma Border of India before leaving for USA, and appreciated the need for it, I was intrigued.

Imagine a sprawling 2,968,464 sq mi (USA is 3,796,742 sq mi and India is 1,269,219 sq mi) with medical access into the remotest of areas by small planes carrying emergency medical kits, nurses, and technicians, flying into formidable dense jungles, treating patients, or stabilizing them on the plane via instructions on the radio from doctors waiting for them in hospitals, by expert pilots flying over all that rugged terrain. Awe inspiring!

Life had other plans for me.

Fast forward to 2023; after touring both Antarctica and South Africa, I realized I had just one more continent left to visit out of seven continents on Earth; and achieving that became my next goal. Not having the luxury of month-long vacations, I had to make do with the long Memorial Day weekend. Alice Springs, NT, Australia, with RFDS, sprung to mind as the perfect destination. Netflix helpfully popped up “Pine gap,” a TV serial, based in and around Alice Springs.

The flight from San Francisco directly to Melbourne was slumberous. Lush green mountains greeted me through the window as we flew into Melbourne. The 90-minute interval between my flights was comfortably adequate and soon I was on the domestic terminal awaiting my flight with co-passengers nodding and smiling amicably at me. This genuine friendliness, with smiles extending to their eyes, seemed to be a general trait in all Australians I met. My seat, 5F, was midway on the plane; that’s where I tasted my first Tim tam biscuits and Bundaberg ginger beer. The next two hours by the window were pure magic. The variety of terrain we crossed was beyond my imagination. First, intense green mountains, displaced by night green hills, followed by endless orange-red hills and beige flatlands decorated with what looked like different patterns of black dots. The dots sometime bordered square areas or formed parallel lines around pitch-black thick lines ending at the horizon, or formed fascinating patterns lining red areas. Sometimes, they were shaped like skeletons of branches; sometimes, these pairs ended in elongated rectangular boxes. And then there were seemingly endless salt lakes, some white, while some had shades of cobalt and cornflower blue in the center. As we neared Alice Springs, I saw mountain ranges lumbering like massive caterpillars of different hues of vivid green, purple, orange against a vivid blue sky.

The airport was tiny and deserted. While walking to the exit I noted four or five tiny

white airplanes with red and blue markings in front of a hangar. Looking for a currency exchange, I was told by the airport store staff that there were none in the whole town, but everyone used credit cards, making this my first trip without cash transactions. The hotel staff I booked with were vague about taxi service in their emails. I watched as other passengers got picked up by friends and family in vans/trucks. Fortunately, the friendly shuttle driver offered to drop me off, and allowed me to book a return trip with her. The motel I booked was in the center of the town within walking distance of Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS). The reception clerk spoke chaste Hindi, and insisted on identifying himself as “Nepalese from Darjeeling and NOT Indian”, but was polite and helpful. He gave me directions to the nearby diners and RFDS but advised me not to be out after sunset and ignore people if they approached me. Trust me to fly from Stockton, CA, to, as a cabbie described it, “the crime capital of Australia”! Though I had booked two half-day tours the next day, I could not wait. I left my luggage in my room and walked through empty streets to the RFDS Tourist Facility (the other one is in Darwin) under a vibrant blue sky.

It being a Saturday evening, the center had few visitors, hence the staff were quite happy to entertain me. After playing the video describing the origin and functions of the RFDS, they gave a detailed walking tour of the prototype plane exhibit which displays how the airplanes are modified to accommodate the needs of stabilizing and treating critical patients as they are flown back to the base hospital, and the museum. There was a live map displaying the number of planes that were currently in the air, and their status, and there were over a dozen at that point. I learned that RFDS is one of the most comprehensive aeromedical organizations globally. In the early part of the 20th century, a Uniting Church pastor, Rev. John Flynn, set up his “Mantle of Safety” consisting of airplanes, hospitals, and radios to address the lack of medical help. They would provide extensive primary health care and 24-hour emergency service to people who live in the rural, remote, and regional areas of

Australia who could not access a hospital or general practice due to the vast distances of the Outback. It was established on May 15, 1928, with the first flight on May 17, 1928, when pilot Arthur Herbert Affleck flew surgeon Dr. Kenyon Welch from Cloncurry to Julia Creek, Queensland. The first hospital in this Red Center of Central Australia, “Adelaide House,” was built by Dr. Flynn. The Alice Springs Base provides 24-hour emergency evacuations and inter-hospital transfers by their team of Pilots, Flight Nurses, and Engineers. It serves an area of approximately 1.25 million square kilometers (776,714 sq miles) from Marla in northern South Australia to Elliot and Barkly Tableland in the Northern Territory, and beyond the border regions of Western Australia and Queensland. Crews also provide regular charter services to NT Health for the transport of health professionals working throughout Central Australia. I realized that those four little planes I had seen at the airport were part of the RFDS fleet. The Mental Health Services Rural & Remote Areas Program delivered by RFDS mental health clinicians is also based in Alice Springs. Further, the RFDS Alice Springs Base has 13 townhouses to accommodate staff and visiting clinicians. Alice Springs is also home to this award-winning RFDS Alice Springs Tourist Facility, which in recent years has undergone a major redevelopment to enhance its presence and improve the tourist experience for locals and visitors from all over the world; I was treated to VIP experience here.

After the tour, the lady kindly directed me to “Uncle’s Tavern”, their favorite haunt for unwinding. So off I went to this bar and restaurant. It was not crowded. There was a soccer game on the screens, with beer-drinking enthusiasts watching and cheering wildly. Not finding any kangaroo/wallaby meat, or anything that resembled “Alice Springs Chicken” on the menu, I ordered fried Barramundi fish to go with my Cooper’s Brewery original pale ale. And I reflected on the history of this unique town that most people don’t seem to be aware of. Alice Springs (202 sq km/126.4 sq mi) (AKA “Mparntwe” to Arrernte, the original inhabitants, meaning ‘the watering place’) was originally called Stuart

Town after John McDouall Stuart who led the first European Expedition to this Red Center in 1861-62. It is now the third largest town in Northern Territory after Darwin and Palmerston, renamed later after Mrs. Alice Todd, wife of Telegraph pioneer Sir Charles Todd; they say, she died before she could visit this town named after her. It is situated to the east of the McDonnell Ranges which the Arrernte (AKA Arunta/Aranda/Arrarnta) people refer to as Tjoritja (pronounced Choor-it-ja). In their lore and culture, the landscape was created by ancestral 'Yeperenye' (giant caterpillars) during a mythological time; it's the foundation of their spiritual beliefs and identity. It is home to the renowned ochre pits, and a few threatened species including the central rock-rat and long-tailed dunnart, as well as the black-footed rock-wallaby and MacDonnell Ranges cycad. Also found are numerous trees and plants of medicinal value, notable being Bush Coconut (*Cystococcus pomiformis*) whose sap is used to reduce fever.

The morning tour started sharp at 7 am, with a visit to the Tomb of Rev. Dr. John Flynn and Mrs. Jean Blanche Flynn in the heart of the McDonnell Ranges, passing through the Heavitree Gap, then onto Simpsons Gap, after crossing the tracks of the Ghan Train, Todd River, onto Stanley Chasm and back. The McDonnell Ranges are west of Alice Springs and stretch 161 km (100 miles). The entry into the ranges is through the Heavitree Gap (called Ntaripe in the Arrernte language, also a sacred site for the Arrernte people)

The first place we halted was the Tomb of Dr. and Mrs. John Flynn, the mastermind behind RFDS, where we paid our respects. Then we drove by Honeymoon Gap to Simpson's Gap (Arrernte: Rungutjirpa) which is one of the accessible gaps in the sprawling West MacDonnell Ranges. It is 18 km (11 miles) west of Alice Springs, on the Larapinta Trail. The gap is home to various plants and wildlife, including the black-footed rock wallaby. It is the site of a permanent waterhole, meaning, there is water visible on the surface. This might be a good place to talk about Todd River, which on the surface looks bone dry all year long but

has deep green trees along its banks. Though it looks dry all year, there is a constant stream of water flowing around 10 feet under the surface, and the water flow resurfaces at sporadic places, including Simpson's Gap and Stanley Chasm. Next, we drove to Stanley Chasm. Words cannot describe the vivid colors of the hills surrounding Stanley Chasm, nor the ever-changing play of sunlight and shadows, reflected in the water and on the multicolored ochre rich steep rocky hillsides, creating such a surreally beautiful effect around it that I was reluctant to leave, despite the heat. Though the serial "Pine Gap" had shown people climbing them, current laws have made climbing illegal.

The afternoon tour took us straight to ANZAC hill, then back into town with tours of School of the Air, Telegraph Office, Reptile House, and RFDS.

Beyond the town of Alice Springs stands ANZAC Hill, dedicated in 1934 to the ANZACS (Australian and New Zealand Army Corps) of World War I. In 1932, ANZAC Hill, the high school, and the oval were granted recognition as ANZAC Reserve. Dawn services are held on 25th April each year on ANZAC day here. Apart from its rich history, it offers spectacular views of surrounding areas, including the sprawling sidings and station of the Ghan train.

For the curious, Ghan Train is an experiential tourism-oriented passenger train service that operates between the northern and southern coasts of Australia, which runs 1851 miles (about 2978.9 km) through the cities of Adelaide, Alice Springs, and Darwin on the Adelaide-Darwin rail corridor (track of Afghan Cameleers in the 1800's). Its scheduled travelling time, including extended stops for passengers to do off-train tours, is 53 hours 15 minutes to travel the 2,979 km (1,851 mi) distance. The Ghan has been described as one of the world's greatest passenger trains. From there, we went straight to School of the Air.



School of the Air, Alice Springs, is one of several remote centers throughout 'Outback' Australia which consists of small and isolated communities and cattle stations, for which normal services do not exist, and education services and medical assistance in emergencies had always been a problem. This extensive radio network of Rev. John Flynn's "Mantle of Safety" became the platform the School of the Air was first built on. Education for people in remote areas from the 1920s was carried out by correspondence through the South Australian Correspondence School. The idea for the School of the Air came from a South Australian School Inspector, called Adelaide Miethkel, who travelled to Alice Springs in 1944 as a member of the Council of the Flying Doctor Service (as it was then named). On a trip to remote cattle stations during this time with a local teacher, Les Dodd, she recognized the difficulties outback families faced with correspondence lessons, and that children lacked social contact. It occurred to her that

radio could provide a community aspect to the education of children in the bush. She had heard about a nurse who gave a health presentation to outback women over the FDS radio and Miethke thought that if a nurse could give a presentation over the radio to outback women, then a teacher could give lessons over the radio to the children of the outback and that this may assist in breaking down their social isolation. In 1950, she approached John Flynn, seeking permission to run a trial over the RFDS radio of a "School of the Air". This trial was successful, and the first School of the Air was officially opened on June 8, 1951, at the Flying Doctor Base. Queen Elizabeth, then Prince Charles, and Lady Diana included it in part of their Australia tours. In 2002, they started the roll out of IDL or Interactive Distance Learning using satellite and broadband technologies. During COVID lockdowns, they helped other schools around the world develop remote learning capabilities.

Next stop: Telegraph Station - site of world's FIRST successful portable radio experiment conducted by Alf Traeger. In July 1862 explorer John McDouall Stuart led an expedition (his third and final attempt) through the Centre of Australia. Traveling to the north coast, he was navigating and mapping the country for European settlement. He survived where the likes of Leichhardt and Burke & Wills perished, because he studied how the aboriginal people lived and was able to travel much lighter and faster, foraging for food and digging for water rather than trying to drag tons of supplies through the desert. Following in Stuart's footsteps, the South Australian government allocated \$250,000 for the construction of an Overland Telegraph Line in October 1870. The line was to extend from Port Augusta in South Australia to Palmerston (now Darwin), a route closely following that of McDouall Stuart to make use of the water supplies he mapped out along the way. Construction of the Overland Telegraph line began in early 1871, involving around 500 men split into three sections. In December of that year, the first Morse signals were sent along the line's completed southern section. However, the Northern team encountered a violent monsoon that summer

which washed away more than a thousand of the telegraph poles they planted and cut them off from resupply until Todd was able to get a barge up the flooded roper river to rescue them. The north and central sections of the line were eventually joined on August 22, 1872, at Frew Ponds, near Dunmarra. The final cost of the line was nearly twice the original estimate, but the prestige for South Australia was immense. It was truly one of the great engineering feats of the 19th century! Becoming the center of activity in the area, outbuildings were gradually added to the Telegraph Station. These included policemen's quarters, harness and buggy sheds, a Stationmaster's residence, a battery room, blacksmith's shop, and a kitchen-mess room.

The Telegraph Station operated 24 hours a day and was one of 12 along the 3,000 km (1864 mile) line. It was basically self-sufficient, relying on provisions from the South only once a year. Sheep, goats, cattle, and their own vegetable garden ensured adequate food, and the blacksmith made much of their equipment. The Stationmaster (first being Johannes Mueller from 1872 to 1879), four telegraphist-linesmen, a teacher-governess, a cook, and a stockman-blacksmith made up the rest of the staff. More modern facilities were established later in the new township of Stuart in 1932, and the Telegraph Station ceased operation, but remains a tourist attraction.

The tour then took me, albeit reluctantly, to a Reptile House, and to my dismay I came to know that the three most venomous snakes of the world exist in this country, and they are the Eastern Brown Snake, Mainland Tiger Snake, and Inland Taipan. It is probably lucky that so focused was I on RFDS that I did not look at the other trivia regarding Australia. Never was I more relieved to scurry out to our last stop, the RFDS again, as it was the main reason for my crazy 72-hour trip across the world. While enjoying a repeat tour of that remarkable facility, the new thing I learned that day was that those rectangular clearings in the wilderness I had noted during my flight into town were runways where the RFDS pilots landed and took off from, and the faint dotted

lines getting lost in the woods were the unpaved roads traversing the Outback.

While waiting for my airport shuttle the next morning, I could not resist the urge to run across Todd Mall to the Red Kangaroo bookstore which specializes in Australian and indigenous books and staring longingly at the incredible art while passing the indigenous art store. I regretted not having checked in luggage.

On the return flight to Melbourne, I reflected that I was unable to ride on the GHAN train. Nor could I pay attention to the rich history of the Arrernte, or see a single wallaby, or figure out where Pine Gap (a joint United States-Australian satellite intelligence gathering and signals intelligence surveillance base and Australian Earth station) is located. And no restaurant in the town had heard of “Alice Springs Chicken”. You can Google the recipe if you want. I did.

And here it is, for the curious:

ALICE SPRINGS CHICKEN RECIPE (Honey Mustard)

Ingredients:

1/2 cup Dijon mustard (Grey Poupon)
1/2 cup honey
3 tbsp mayonnaise
fresh lemon juice
Chicken Ingredients:
4 boneless skinless chicken breasts halves
seasoned with salt and black pepper
8 oz mushrooms
1 tbsp butter
4 slices bacon cooked
6 oz Monterey Jack cheese shredded
6 oz Cheddar cheese shredded
chopped fresh parsley for garnish

Instructions:

In a small bowl, combine 1/2 cup Dijon mustard with 1/2 cup honey, 3 tablespoons mayo, and a squeeze of fresh lemon juice. Pour half the sauce into a small bowl, cover, and reserve for later.

Place the chicken in a large Ziplock bag. Pour the remaining marinade into the bag and toss the chicken to coat. Chill in the refrigerator for at least two hours. Preheat your oven to 400 degrees Fahrenheit. In a small skillet, melt 1 tablespoon of butter. Add the mushrooms and cook for 7-10 minutes, or until the mushrooms are tender and just starting to turn golden brown. Heat another skillet or grill pan to medium-high heat. Remove the chicken from the marinade and season each piece with salt and black pepper. Place the chicken in the preheated pan. Cook for about 4 minutes, then when the chicken is golden brown, flip the chicken and cook for an additional 4 minutes. The goal here is to just sear the chicken and get a nice golden-brown color on the outside. It will finish cooking in the oven later. Transfer the chicken to an oven-safe casserole dish. Spoon some of the mushrooms on top of each piece of chicken. Break a piece of cooked bacon in half and arrange the bacon over the chicken. Divide the Monterey Jack cheese and the cheddar cheese evenly and sprinkle over each piece of chicken. Place the chicken in the oven and bake for about 10 minutes (possibly longer if your chicken is thick), or until the internal temperature reaches 165 Fahrenheit and the cheese melts. Serve with remaining honey mustard sauce on the side. Sprinkle with chopped fresh parsley for garnish. Enjoy!

Dr. Shampa Sarkar is a graduate of R. G. Kar Medical College, Kolkata, India. She is a psychiatrist and moved to Northern California seven years ago.

What Happens After We Die?

Dr. Jeffrey D. Long is a professor of Religion and Asian Studies at Elizabethtown College, Pennsylvania. His first direct encounter with the Bhagavad Gita occurred unexpectedly in the parking lot of a Methodist church in Montgomery City, Missouri, where he spent much of his childhood. Raised Catholic, he found himself at the church with his grandmother for a flea market, where he was hunting for old sci-fi paperbacks and comic books. However, the Bhagavad Gita was on his mind, particularly after his father's painful death two years earlier, which had sparked a quest for answers to life's profound questions: the nature of suffering, life's purpose, and what happens after death. Influenced by Gandhi, whose writings he had explored after watching a film about the Indian leader, and by George Harrison's fascination with Indian spirituality, Jeffrey was eager to delve into the ancient wisdom that had inspired them. Despite the challenge of finding the Gita in their small town, fate led him to a copy of the *Bhagavad Gita* at the flea market. A particular illustration struck him deeply—a depiction of a grieving family and a serene Hindu sage, symbolizing the divine presence within each person. The caption, "The wise lament neither for the living nor the dead," resonated with him. Upon reading the verse referenced, which described the eternal nature of the soul, Jeffrey felt an overwhelming sense of understanding and peace. This moment marked the beginning of a transformative journey, as he found the answers he had been seeking in this ancient text.

The question of what happens after death has intrigued humanity for centuries, cutting across various cultures and religions. This exploration, known as eschatology, delves into the afterlife and the fate of the soul. In Vedantic philosophy, the concept of the soul and its

journey after death is particularly nuanced, offering a rich tapestry of beliefs that provide both comfort and profound insight.

What is Soul?

In Hindu philosophy, the soul, or Jiva, is considered an eternal entity that transcends the physical body. According to Vedanta, the soul, or Jiva, does not perish with the physical body. The soul is of divine origin, a spark of the infinite divine consciousness.¹ This belief is eloquently expressed in the Bhagavad Gita, where Sri Krishna explains that each soul is a part of the divine, akin to droplets from the vast ocean of consciousness. This divine spark is encased in a subtle body, made up of the mind and sense organs, and ultimately manifests in the physical body composed of the five gross elements: earth, water, fire, air, and space. This indicates that each Jiva is a reflection of the supreme consciousness, Brahman, much like how sunlight reflects off multiple surfaces. While Brahman is the singular, infinite source, the Jivas are the numerous reflections manifesting through various bodies.

What a grand idea! Each of us is a reflection, *aṁśa*, of the divine. We are not fallen; we are part of the divine, reflection of the divine. Let us not forget it.

This reflective nature of consciousness means that, while the physical body is subject to birth and death, the soul remains unchanged. The body and mind serve as temporary vessels that allow the soul to interact with the material world.

The Subtle Body and Transmigration

The subtle body, or *sukshma sharira*, is crucial in this framework. It consists of the mind and the inner senses, which are not the physical

¹ ममैवांशो जीवलोके जीवभूतः सनातनः।

मनःषष्ठानीन्द्रियाणि प्रकृतिस्थानि कर्षति ।। (Bhagavadgītā, 15.7)

senses we are familiar with but subtle counterparts that exist beyond physical perception. The physical body, termed the sthula sharira, acts as an outer shell that enables interaction with the material world. This arrangement allows the soul to experience life, engage in actions (karma), and enjoy or suffer the fruits of those actions.

When the physical body dies, the subtle body does not perish. Instead, it accompanies the soul as it leaves the deceased body and prepares to enter a new one. This process of transmigration is governed by the individual's karma, which dictates the conditions of the next birth.

The Bhagavad Gita uses a vivid analogy to describe this transition: the soul, along with the subtle body, moves to a new physical form, just like the wind carrying the fragrance of flowers.² Just as the wind, which is invisible, transports the invisible fragrance from the visible flower, similarly, the soul, an invisible entity, carries the invisible subtle body to a visible physical body. This metaphor emphasizes the continuity of the soul's existence, irrespective of the physical body's demise.

Transitioning to a New Body: Like a Leech

One of the most vivid analogies used to describe the soul's transition from one body to another is the leech analogy, found in Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad. Just as a leech moves from one leaf to another by first attaching to the new leaf before letting go of the old one, the soul secures a new body before relinquishing the old one. This analogy beautifully captures the idea of continuity and the seamless nature of the soul's journey: “Just

as a leech supported on a straw goes to the end of it, takes hold of another support and contracts itself, so does the self, throw this body aside—make it senseless—take hold of another support, and contract itself.”³

The process involves not just the transfer of the soul but also the subtle organs. These organs, invisible to the physical eye, move with the soul to the new body, where they align with new physical organs. For instance, the capacity to see (not the eyeball itself) moves and integrates with the new physical eye in the new body.

Role of Karma: Determining the Next Birth

The nature of the next body is determined by karma, the accumulated results of one's actions. Karma dictates not only the kind of body the soul will inhabit but also the circumstances of its new life. This cosmic law ensures that every action has a corresponding consequence, guiding the soul's journey through various lives.

One verse in Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad metaphorically describes how just as villagers prepare for a king's arrival, the elements and organs align for the arrival of the soul into a new body, guided by its karmic imprints.⁴

The Sentient Body: Evidence of the Divine

The Gita underscores that the presence of life in a body is evidence of the divine. The mind, as a reflection of Brahman, makes the body sentient. This idea is akin to seeing the light in a room and understanding it as evidence of the sun. Similarly, the life force within us points to the divine consciousness that pervades everything.

² शरीरं यदवाप्नोति यच्चाप्युत्क्रामतीश्वरः ऽ

गृहीत्वैतानि संयाति वायुर्गन्धानिवाशयात् ।।(Bhagavadgītā, 15.8)

³ तद्यथा तृणजलायुका तृणस्यान्तं गत्वान्यमाक्रममाक्रम्यात्मानमुपसंहरति । एवमेवायमात्मेदं शरीरं निहत्य अविद्यां गमयित्वा अन्यमाक्रममाक्रम्यात्मानमुपसंहरति ॥(Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad 4.4.3)

⁴ तद्यथा राजानमायन्तमुग्राः प्रत्येनसः सूतग्रामण्योऽनैः पानैरवसथैः प्रतिकल्पन्ते । अयमायाति अयमागच्छतीति एवं हैवविदं सर्वाणि भूतानि प्रतिकल्पन्त इदं ब्रह्मायाति इदमागच्छतीति ॥ (Brhadāranyaka Upaniṣad 4.3.37)

We may ask the question, if the subtle body is real, why can't we see it? Gita says that the enlightened ones, or those with the eye of wisdom, recognize the invisible soul, whereas most of us fail to perceive this reality.⁵

For example, Sri Ramakrishna, a revered mystic and spiritual teacher from 19th-century India, shared a profound mystical experience associated with Varanasi, particularly the Manikarnika Ghat—a sacred cremation ground. Sri Ramakrishna, in an exalted spiritual state, perceived the God Shiva himself performing a sacred duty at this ghat. According to his vision, Shiva, the great cosmic deity known as the destroyer of evil, was seen whispering the Taraka Mantra (a liberating mantra) into the ears of the departing souls. This act is believed to free the soul from the cycle of rebirth and lead them directly to liberation.

We see many such incidents in the lives of illumined souls who can see the subtle bodies of human beings.

Continuity of Experience: From One Life to the Next

The transition from one life to the next is not merely a change of bodies but a continuation of experiences and tendencies. The subtle body carries with it not just the senses but also the mind and its impressions (vāsanās). These impressions shape the individual's experiences in the next life, determining their desires, fears, and inclinations.

The Gita assures that spiritual aspirants, those who strive towards self-realization, are granted favorable circumstances to continue their journey towards liberation.⁶ This assurance is comforting, emphasizing that sincere spiritual effort is never wasted.

The Illusion of Death: A Misconception

The concept of death, as commonly understood, is merely an illusion. The Gita teaches that death is only the dissolution of the physical body, not the end of the soul. The soul, being eternal, merely transitions from one state to another, much like changing clothes. This understanding reframes death from a tragic end to a natural and inevitable transformation.

Those with spiritual knowledge perceive the eternal essence behind the transient phenomena. They understand that the soul's journey is part of a grand cosmic play orchestrated by the divine.

The Reflection of the Divine: Every Moment of Life

Every experience in life, every joy and sorrow, every pleasure and pain, is an opportunity to glimpse the divine. The very act of living is a manifestation of the divine consciousness. For the discerning, each moment is a revelation of Brahman, the ultimate reality. Just as electricity's presence is inferred from the functioning of electrical appliances, God's presence is inferred from the existence and functioning of life itself.

The Gita's teachings on life, death, and what lies beyond provide a profound and comforting perspective. The soul's journey is seen as a continuous flow, governed by the laws of karma, guided by the divine, and ultimately aimed at realizing oneness with Brahman. Death is not an end but a transformation, a transition to another phase of the soul's eternal journey. Whether we perceive it through the eyes of wisdom or remain deluded, the divine presence is ever-present, guiding and sustaining us through every moment of existence. That is the most excellent message of hope and optimism.

Swami Ishadhyanananda is Assistant Minister at the Vedanta Society of Sacramento, CA.

⁵ उत्क्रामन्तं स्थितं वापि भुञ्जानं वा गुणान्वितम् ।

विमूढा नानुपश्यन्ति पश्यन्ति ज्ञानचक्षुषः ॥ (Bhagavadgītā, 15.10)

⁶ न हि कल्याणकृत्कश्चिद् दुर्गतिं तात गच्छति (Bhagavadgītā, 6.40)

The Great Migration

From a young age, I was captivated by the stunning photography and insightful articles in National Geographic. An uncle of mine subscribed to the magazine and every other month, I would get access to a few issues, which I eagerly consumed over the whole week. While I was immersed in the stories, learning about people and the different cultures and tribes, it was the wildlife articles that I was truly drawn to. After migrating to the United States, I spent countless hours watching documentaries on National Geographic on South America, Asia, and Africa. Each time I watched, a place or two got added to my growing bucket list of must-visit places.

After years of thinking, talking, and planning for it, some of the items on my bucket list finally got crossed. In July, I was fortunate to witness one of the “Seven Wonders of the Natural World” — the Great Migration. It is one of the last mass terrestrial wildlife migrations on the planet, where almost two million Wildebeest, about one million Zebras, and other animals travel over 800 miles from Tanzania’s Serengeti National Park to Kenya’s Maasai Mara National Reserve and back to East Africa. It’s easy to see why this phenomenon is considered one of the greatest natural wonders in the world.

The Wildebeest typically inhabits the vast plains of the Serengeti in Southeast Africa. They graze the grassy savannas, and as the plains dry up, the animals follow the rainy season and migrate northwest towards the Mara grasslands in southern Kenya in search of greener pastures and water.

The trip was planned with a few goals: I wanted to capture the crocodile-infested Mara River crossing, photograph Africa’s Big 5 (lions, leopards, elephants, buffaloes, and rhinoceros), capture hunts and kills in the wild, and finally, glimpse the magnificent Mt. Kilimanjaro in Tanzania. Thanks to our outstanding guides and drivers, we met our goals, and the trip exceeded our expectations.

We traveled from the North to the South, spanning the country, and visited the Sheldrick Elephant Orphanage, a Rhino conservancy in Ol Pejeta, the Giraffe Center, Lake Nakuru National Park, Maasai Mara, Lake Naivasha, and Amboseli National Park.

We captured sights of lions and lionesses relaxing by the water, a leopard guarding her cub under her watchful eye, a coalition of cheetahs (two females and their seven cubs) teaching their young ones to hunt, and a pack of hyenas fighting with vultures over a leftover kill. Although we missed the hunt of two leopards one day, we arrived right on time to witness these exhausted big cats panting and guarding their fresh kill.

The pinnacle of our trip was watching a herd of hundreds of Wildebeest amass on a sand bar on the Mara River and then stampede as they crossed the river and thundered into the Mara grasslands. And where there is life, there is death. As we sat and ate lunch on the banks of the Mara River, we saw the bodies of dead wildebeest and zebras floating by, the large crocodiles in the water, and the vultures sitting on the trees — a reminder that, in nature, it’s all about the survival of the fittest.

We wrapped up the trip by capturing sights of herds of wild African elephants and giraffes, casually crossing between our land cruisers at the Amboseli National Park. We were blessed by a brief yet clear view of the snowcapped Mt. Kilimanjaro before she disappeared in a veil of clouds right from the grounds of our hotel.

As we traveled through Kenya, it was evident why Ernest Hemingway, author of ‘Green Hills of Africa,’ spent ten weeks in 1933 traveling through the country with his wife, Pauline. He returned for the second and last time in 1953 with his fourth wife to pen ‘The Snows of Kilimanjaro.’

We met some of the friendliest people wherever we went, and Indians are welcomed and held in high regard everywhere in Kenya. Our guide

gleefully shared that, after the 42 indigenous tribes, Gujaratis are considered the 43rd tribe of Kenya. We drove for hours traversing Nairobi, Nakuru, Mara, and Amboseli; and everywhere we went, we were greeted with big smiles and waves by kids in their school uniforms.

The late Anthony Bourdain once said, “Travel changes you. As you move through this life and this world, you change things slightly; you leave marks behind, however small. And in return, life — and travel — leaves marks on you.”



A herd of Wild Elephants



An African Rhino



Warthog in the bushes

We spent 11 unforgettable days in Kenya, and the beauty of the country, the warmth of the people, and the wildlife left an indelible mark on our souls. Here is a big THANK YOU to the safari team and our guides for a trip that has created a lifetime of memories!

Shomeek Paul grew up in Sacramento and has been an Utsav member since its inception. Currently he resides in the San Francisco Bay Area and enjoys wildlife photography.



Waterbuffalo Skull



Crocodiles on the Mara river bank



Giraffe crossing our path in Amboseli

The Ghost of Taj Mahal

The sun was sinking fast in the western sky - the last rays fell on the dome of Taj Mahal and painted it with ethereal colors. I had been watching the grand building, fascinated by the intricate marble work and the perfect proportions of this magnificent building erected by Emperor Shah Jahan as a memorial to his beloved wife Mumtaj who passed away at a young age.

Soon, most of the tourists were gone, and I found myself seated on the huge stone base of the structure while I leaned on the balustrade that ran around the platform. By now it was getting quite dark, but the Taj Mahal was glowing in the moonlight that was playing hide and seek with the clouds.

Suddenly I noticed an old man sitting a few feet away from me. He had a long white beard, and he was wrapped up in a blanket.

The old man asked me in perfect Urdu: "Young man, do you know the real story of Taj Mahal?" I said no. The man next to me started speaking in a soft voice.

"Mumtaj was a lady of extreme beauty and talent who was married to Mughal emperor Shah Jahan. When Mumtaj died in the year 1631 while delivering her 14th child in a war camp, Shah Jahan was grief-stricken for many months. The emperor decided to build a mausoleum over his queen's grave, the like of which the world had not seen - no expense was to be spared. He sent word out to get the best architects in the world.

The emperor had a simple test. The architect was shown the daughter of one of his ministers and then the architect was required to build a statue of the minister's daughter from memory. Failing to pass the test was punishable by death. A young architect came from Persia and was shown the daughter of the minister, and he started to build her statue. From time to time the girl would peek a look as her statue was being built.

The evening before the architect was to present the statue, the girl noticed that the architect had not put a mole on the statue that was on her face. She realized the architect would fail the test and would be killed - she came into the room and told the architect about her mole.

The handsome architect thanked her for saving his life and they fell in love immediately.

In the morning, the architect presented the statue. The emperor was ecstatic with the perfection of the work. He immediately ordered the young architect to start the building and name the price. The architect asked for the daughter of the minister to be given to him as his wife. The emperor immediately ordered the minister to give the hand of his daughter to the architect in marriage.

However, the minister had a dilemma. He had already promised the hand of his daughter to another prince. He could not disobey the emperor, and he could not break his word to the prince whom he had promised his daughter. So, at night, he was reluctantly compelled to kill his daughter.

It took 22 years for artisans and workers from around the world to complete the building. The emperor was very pleased with the work. But he did not want another building like the Taj Mahal to be built again. So, he ordered the hands of the principal workers to be cut-off below the elbows.

The emperor asked the architect to name his reward - whatever he wanted.

The architect told the king, when people look at the Taj Mahal it will remind them of the great love you had for Mumtaj. But my true love was killed for making this building. So, I have left a little defect in the building. All through the year, condensation will form inside the great dome and once a year a drop of water will fall

on Mumtaj's grave as the great building will shed a tear for my love".

Then, the old man next to me became very quiet.

It was getting quite dark and misty by now, as the old man got up to shuffle off from where he was sitting. Suddenly, a gust of wind blew the blanket off his shoulders.

I was shocked to see his hands had been cut off below the elbows!

Shyamal Roy was born in Old Delhi in India and is a graduate of the Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur. He studied photography under various masters in Paris, France, and attended the Nikon School of Photography.



Macher Dim aar Kumro Phul Bahari

Ingredients:

- Rahu Fish egg
- Kumro Phul
- Potato
- Eggplant
- Zucchini squash
- Radish
- Green beans
- Cilantro
- Green Chili paste (1 tsp)
- Onion diced and paste (2 tsp)
- Ginger paste (1 tsp)
- Red Chili Powder (1/2 tsp)
- Oil to cook (Preferably mustard but can use white oil too)

Preparation Time: 15 minutes

Cooking Time: Less than 30 minutes

Procedure:

Add some water, salt, and turmeric powder in a saucepan. Boil the fish egg for around 10 minutes. Please remember to use small amount

of water so that it can soak (make sure there is no extra water).

Break all the fish eggs in small pieces. After that, put some oil in a pan and fry the eggs. Take them out once done.

Add 2 teaspoons of oil in the pan and a small amount of kalijeera. Follow the steps:

- Add diced potato and sauté for 5 minutes.
- Add radish, beans, zucchini, and eggplant, and sauté for another 5/6 minutes.
- Add diced onion, onion paste, ginger paste, whole green chili, red chili powder, salt, pinch of sugar, turmeric powder, and sauté for another 5 minutes.

Add the processed fish egg and stir for 3 minutes. You can add a little warm water now. Cover the pan with a lid and keep for 5 more minutes.

Finally, add some chopped cilantro.

You can serve the above dish with rice and/or Paratha. *Happy eating!*



Visit to Santiniketan - a UNESCO World Heritage Site

About one hundred fifty kilometers away from cosmopolitan Kolkata's hustle and bustle lies the quintessential town of Santiniketan, whose name means "abode of peace" in Sanskrit. It is a very popular weekend vacation destination from Kolkata since it is very accessible by both train and car. Families come to this rural town in West Bengal for relaxation and rejuvenation in its picturesque countryside. Santiniketan is also the home of world-famous Visva-Bharathi University which became the 41st UNESCO World Heritage site in India in September 2023. It got recognized as a cultural and an educational hub that needed to be protected for future generations.

Therefore, it was indeed a privilege to visit Santiniketan for a relaxing vacation as well as for touring this world-famous UNESCO Heritage site that was started by the famous poet and philosopher, Noble Laureate Rabindranath Tagore, back in 1901 as a school. It was Tagore's vision that there would be global gatherings in Santiniketan to exchange ideas in art, music, philosophy, etc. in an open-air classroom under the trees. In fact, Visva-Bharati in Bengali means "the communion of the world with India".

We (my husband, Biswanath, and myself) visited Santiniketan on January 4th, 5th and 6th of 2024 while we were vacationing in Kolkata. We chose to go by hired car with a driver. Sonajhuri Homestay Resort was highly recommended by one of our family friends. Early morning of January 4th, we left Kolkata and reached Santiniketan around 2 pm – just in time to have a scrumptious mouthwatering lunch that included a huge *posto bora*. The vegetables in the entrees were from Sonajhuri's own garden. Around 5 pm, it was teatime that included delicious *beguni* with the eggplants picked from their garden. For dinner that night, we visited our friend Debasis at his flat. He treated us to a home-cooked meal combined with takeaways. After a relaxing dinner, we spent the evening catching up with

all the family stories. Then, Debasis made an offer that we could not refuse; he said he will give us a personal guided tour of Visva-Bharathi University and its surrounding sites with his students the following day – January 5th. (Debasis has been a professor at the University for over 35 years.) The catch was that we have to arrive at the designated spot at Visva-Bharathi Campus by 8:30 am and could not be late.

We showed up on time for the Campus Tour and learned so much in the short couple of hours that we were present with Debasis and his student. The tour began with meeting the school principal who runs the local school on the Visva-Bharathi campus. We got to witness the children learning in the outdoor setting under the tree or in an open field. When the school bell rings, the students go to their different teachers under different trees for each of their subjects. During summertime, the classes begin at 6 am because of hot and humid weather. During wintertime, the start time changes to 7 am. There are approximately 600 applicants for 50 placement that becomes available each year. Admission selection is done by lottery. During the rainy season, the classes are held inside the buildings. It was such a delightful experience to see the education of the young minds happening in a beautiful outdoor setting.

After the school tour, we looked at the various statues and sculptures present on the greater campus of Visva-Bharathi University. We also went into some of the art classroom like pottery and painting. We toured the different artistic architectural buildings. Then we took a look from the outside of the five homes (each of them very unique in architecture) where Poet Rabindranath Tagore used to live. He would rotate living inside the homes to get his inspirations and each of his homes had a very unique name. We were unable to go into all the homes as they were going through renovations. Last part of the campus tour involved visiting

the Tagore Museum on site which has housed many of his correspondence along with photos of earlier days of the Nobel Laureate in Santiniketan. At the end of this memorable Visva-Bharathi University visit, we got to have tea at Debasis' newly remodeled office in the Department of Agricultural Statistics and see the building.

Afterwards, we were off to our lunch reservation at Bonolakshmi for the scrumptious Bengali Thali — at this agro-tourism place — this restaurant is famous as most of the food is cultivated on the ancestral land of the owners who run it. There is a shop that sells some of the food products that are made on site. Their homemade brown butter or *ghee* is very famous among the circle of foodies. Also, one can purchase handicrafts, mementoes, paintings, etc. made by local artists as a souvenir to take back home.

After the food coma, we took a nap for an hour; then, we headed out to Sonajhuri Haat/Mela which normally takes place every Saturday in the forest filled with Sonajhuri trees on ground with red soil. (It has been extended to some other days also in winter.) It is an open-air market, where the artisans from all over West Bengal bring various handicrafts like wall hangings, clothing, purses, jewelry, jewelry boxes, leather goods, etc. to sell to the public at very reasonable prices. Also, there are street food stalls, baul music (mystic music) singers, and tribal dancers. The atmosphere is very festive, and it is a shopper's paradise with so many things to choose as souvenirs.

In the morning of our last day in Santiniketan, January 6th, we visited a famous pilgrimage site 15 kilometers away, called Kankalitala. The temple is situated by the bank of Kopai River in a very peaceful surrounding. While visiting the place, we got to see colorful tribal dance to the local music. Next, we returned to Sonajhuri Homestay to have an enjoyable simple feast of huge posto bora, cholar dal with luchi (indeed a foodie's paradise).

Unfortunately, our vacation within a vacation had to come to an end. Therefore, we returned to the hustle and bustle of Kolkata (City of Joy) and had to leave behind the serene picturesque Santiniketan. It is now a nostalgic memory in our minds, to be cherished forever. Every spoonful of Bonolakshmi Ghee transports us back to Santiniketan, a place started by West Bengal's visionary Noble Laureate Rabindranath Tagore over 120 years ago.

Supriya Mukherjee is a resident of Davis, California, for the past 37 years. She used to be a Social Worker in Yolo County, from which she retired in 2018.



With our friend Debasis and a colleague.



One of Tagore's House.



Sonajhuri Haat.

33G Notebook: Digha



33G is a travel notebook - penned by the author for Chowrongee since 2005. This edition of 33G Notebook is devoted to Digha, a favorite seaside resort of Bengalis, which the author visited recently.

During our Kolkata visit this past summer, we decided on a short trip to Digha. A favorite seaside resort for Bengalis, Digha is located on the southwest corner of Bengal, bordering Odisha, on the Bay of Bengal. People come here for vacation from all over, particularly Kolkata and its suburbs. (Their other seaside vacation spot is Puri.)

On our four-day, three-night trip, a car and driver accompanied us the entire time. Leaving from our South City flat at 8:00 am, the 200-km drive took about 5½ hours, with a 30-minute break in between. Our Hotel Seagull (in Old Digha) offered a nice view of the Bay of Bengal, with waves crashing into the coastal barrier. [Digha has no Hyatts or Marriotts, our go-to hotels, not even Taj or ITC brands; Seagull was one of the better hotels we found.]

Mid-morning, on our way to Digha, it was nice of the Seagull kitchen staff to call for our lunch order. We opted for a delicious (and typical) Bengali lunch: rice, *bhaja muger dal*, *jhuri alu bhaja*, *sukto*, *alu posto*, and fish *kalia*. In fact, for our entire stay, we opted for all our meals to be at Seagull, and not take a chance with street foods. All lunches were mostly similar with *poto posto* and fried fish as variations. Dinners were *roti*, mixed veg, *begun bhaja*, and chicken or egg curry. Breakfast was omelets and toast.

Nostalgic Journey

Long road trips (and train journeys) bring a sense of nostalgia since it's been 43 years that I left India, although I have been fortunate to return for frequent visits. On this trip, the sentiment started as we crossed the mighty Ganges River on Vidyasagar Setu (second Hoogly Bridge), watching many barges, boats, and commerce happening on the river. Driving west, we passed Satragachi, where the train station hugs the highway. Halfway through, we crossed Roopnarayan River and stopped in Kolaghat for snacks (which included omelets and *kochuri*). If you keep driving west, you will

reach Bombay; a southbound turnoff an hour later will take you to Kharagpur and Chennai.

This was my first trip to Digha in 45 years, but it was Supriya's first trip ever. My two previous Digha visits were when I was an undergraduate student at the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Kharagpur. First was a bike ride with five IIT friends; it took 10 hours to cover the 90-km trip. We started early in the morning in pitch darkness to beat the heat. It was an adventure as one bike had its tire punctured when the rider hit a road barrier that he did not see in the dark. My second visit was also brave (and silly) as a few friends and I decided at the last moment to visit Digha; we got on an 8 pm bus, reached Digha around midnight, couldn't find a hotel, slept on a hotel porch, got bit by mosquitos, and took a bus back to IIT the next evening after spending the day in Digha. (It was typical student behavior!)

From Kolaghat, the turnoff to Digha led to Mecheda, bringing back more memories. While riding the suburban train between Howrah and Kharagpur, I looked forward to the tasty alur chop and vegetable chop sold in the Mecheda-Paskura sector. What secret ingredients they use to make their snacks so tasty is a mystery! An hour later, we drove through Contai, which has turned into quite a big town.

All along the Kolaghat-to-Digha road, there were numerous villagers selling daab (young coconut), aakh (sugarcane), veggies, etc. I was surprised by the huge number of buses plying between Digha and relatively far-away places such as Naihati, Barasat, and others, in addition to Kolkata and Howrah. Seeing a Naihati bus every half hour meant that a lot of tourists were flocking to Digha!

While most people come to Digha by bus, Digha itself has changed a lot in 45 years, with many more tourists and hence more buses, hotels, and crowded beaches. What caught my eye was that concrete barriers had been built all along the coast where there were inhabitants. This was to counter the destruction caused by hurricanes; a recent famous one was Amphan.

Beaches Beaches Everywhere

Digha, like Puri and Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), has numerous beaches along its coastline. Most of these beaches are long and wide, although the ones in Rio are much wider. While Puri has enormous waves, the ones in Digha are very mild. Digha beaches are very flat, the sand here is very fine and firm, so motorbikes and cars are also driven on these beaches, which is a wonderful sight!

Digha's orientation can give a good idea about its beaches (see photo). Left-most (on the west) is Udaypur Beach at the border with Odisha. Moving east, we have New Digha Beach, then comes the main (or central) Digha Beach. This is the most crowded area as the main bus-stand is located here, along with numerous tourist lodges. Further east is the less-crowded Old Digha (and its beach), where Hotel Seagull is located. From here, a picturesque road called Marine Drive, will take you to the Digha Mohana Beach, where Champa River empties itself into the Bay of Bengal.

A detour to cross the Champa will take you to other beach towns (Sankarpur and Tajpur), eventually reaching Mandarmani Beach, which is gaining popularity. Further east, after River Hoogly Mohana, you will hit Gangasagar and Bakkhali. Eastbound, the Bay of Bengal coast will take you to the far-away beaches of Chittagong and Cox's Bazar! But let me not get carried away!

Udaypur Beach

Monsoons had started, so we encountered frequent rain showers. Instead of sitting in the hotel, we ventured out, and one morning we visited Udaypur Beach. The 10-minute walk from the car park to the beach was lined with many shops and food stalls; it was sad to see them empty because of the rain. On the beach, given that it is flat and firm, there were many restaurants, primarily selling seafood, as well as coconut drinks. They, too, were deserted due to the rain. I got to click a rare photo on the beach with rain and an umbrella!

All the way from Udaypur Beach to New Digha to (central) Digha to Old Digha and on to Digha Mohana, the entire coastline has been reinforced with concrete barriers, and there exists a walkway (about 15-feet wide) for pedestrians. In the main tourist area, vendors line these walkways to sell knick-knacks and (you guessed it) fried fish, shrimp, etc. Fortunately, Udaypur Beach is a little far from the dense tourist area, and because of the rain, we could avoid the crowds and enjoy our walk on the promenade and the sea breeze – all while getting our steps!

Mohana Beach End Point

The scenic Marine Drive from Old Digha took us to Digha Mohana Beach End Point. “Mohana” means estuary in Bengali, and this is where River Champa enters the Bay of Bengal. Marine Drive has many vista points, but you can also see many fallen light poles along the way, probably damaged from hurricanes; they had not yet been repaired.

Marine Drive ends at the Mohana End Point in a huge cul de sac or parking lot. A few thousand lorries were parked here when we visited one evening. Fishermen bring their catch from the sea, and the lorries transport them to places near and far. Besides the huge wholesale commerce, there are some retailers who will fry the fish for you on the spot – you choose the fish. The place certainly smells very fishy!

A long barrier of stones and concrete has been erected so that River Champa, when it enters the sea, does not disturb the Mohana Beach. People can walk on this barrier and get quite far into the sea. Mohana Beach is very flat and solid with mild waves. We saw boys playing soccer and cricket on the beach. I was tempted to join them, or at least kick a soccer ball, which I probably would have done if I was alone.

Mandarmani Beach

The 20-km drive to Mandarmani took about 40 minutes. We had to drive inland a little, and along the Champa, cross the river, drive

through other villages, and reach Sankarpur. We saw boats sailing upstream on Champa for fishing, and we passed many fisheries. A long coastal road built on the coastal barrier and then a bridge over Mandarmani River took us to Mandarmani Beach.

Mandarmani is the longest and widest beach in this region; the water here is very calm with mild waves. Cars and motorbikes can access the beach, and drive on the long, wide, and firm surface. The beach also has many restaurants, just like in Udaypur.

Mandarmani is a quiet place with hardly any crowd (when we visited), and bus service seemed nonexistent. Mandarmani has become the playground for the Kolkata bourgeois who want to avoid the Digha crowd, can drive over in their own cars, and can afford the costlier accommodations.

Biswa Bangla Park

A 5-minute walk from Seagull is the Biswa Bangla Park in Old Digha. It is quite new, open 24/7, and free. It is a long and narrow park, with the coastal barrier and walking promenade on one side and the main road of Digha on the other. The park is clean and well-decorated, including an adorable statue of Rabindranath Tagore (aka Robi Thakur).

As you might expect, there were a lot of people hanging out in the park, particularly in the evenings, walking on the promenade, watching the waves, and getting their dose of snacks and seafood from the vendors lined up along the walkway. The “I Love Digha!” sign is a popular photo spot! During our visit, one morning, while it was raining, we had the park all to ourselves.

Biswa Bangla Park has a small two-story building; its upper floor is a Barista coffee shop! What a joy it was as we could sip our coffee here in peace while admiring the sea (with no one else in sight due to the rain). And guess what? We came back to Barista several times during our short trip!

Other Attractions

Digha has several other attractions.

Chandaneswar Temple is located west of Udaypur, in Odisha. Our visit to this temple was on a Monday, in the month of Sravan, so many devotees had come here that day to offer their prayers to Lord Shiva. It was super crowded, rainy, and a mess. In a later visit, we could appreciate the temple.

Jagannath Temple (in construction) is a new temple being built on the Bengal side near Odisha border. Some people say that, since the Bengal Chief Minister was denied entry to the Jagannath Temple in Puri, she decided to build one in Bengal. We hope it will be completed when you visit.

Digha Cashew Garden is a research institute that we wanted to visit. But its director was out of town, so we could not talk to anyone. It's a pity that they did not have another person, who could give tours to visitors. We did see many cashew trees from various parts of the world in the garden.

Tailpiece

My favorite moment on this Digha trip was sipping coffee at the Barista and, from its elevated vantage point, watching the Bay of Bengal and its waves in the rain flowing into the empty shore. Wish you were here!

Biswanath Mukherjee is a Distinguished Professor Emeritus (and Past Chairman) of Computer Science at University of California, Davis, where he has been for the past 37 years. Readers can visit the author at: <http://networks.cs.ucdavis.edu/bmukherjee.html>



Udaypur Beach (with rain).



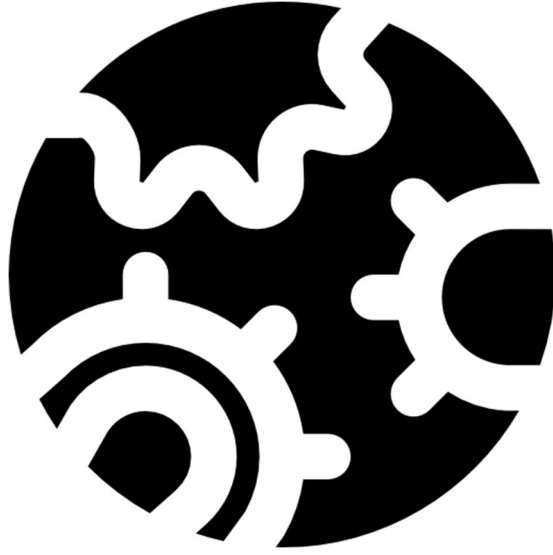
Biswa Bangla Park (with Robi Thakur).



Digha Mohana Beach (with Supriya).

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Miscellaneous



Interview with Mitra and Adi Choudri



My guests today are Mitradi and Adida, well known members of the Utsav community. I first met them at Utsav's annual picnic in 2019, where Mitradi introduced me to other members, and Adida chatted with us about many things including investing. Over the years, it became evident to me that their knowledge and wisdom would benefit the members of the Utsav community, hence this interview.

Tanima (TB): Both of you are well-known in the Utsav community. Still, tell us a little bit about yourselves.

Adi (AC): I came to this country in 1974; I was 21 years old, right after graduation from engineering college. My family didn't have a lot of money, although they came from a very

good, well-to-do family in Bangladesh, but that didn't matter. My father was a teacher and he was able to give all of us brothers and sisters a good education. I was pretty good at school; at that time, nobody from my town was able to come to the United States, and I was only able to come because I had admission to a couple of universities for master's programs. I saved up my scholarship money for airfare. The dollar was Rs. 8, I still remember Rs. 5400 was my airfare. With some help from the family, I could join the master's program in Operations Research. I started working as an Industrial Engineer – an Operations Research Analyst, and worked in that industry until I retired.

Mitra (MC): I joined Adi after we got married in 1982. I was born in Chennai. My dad was a mechanical engineer, and he was stationed

there. Later, our family moved to Calcutta. Most of my childhood was in a boarding school run by Irish nuns. I studied at National Medical College and was a physician when I joined Adi in Rochester, NY. My medical residency was in Michigan, where we lived for three years. While in Michigan, I took my licensing exams for California since California is one of the most challenging states in which to get a medical license. We were lucky to get jobs in the same city – Sacramento. Adi joined an aerospace company while I joined Kaiser Permanente, and we've spent 35 years in Folsom in the same house.

INVESTING FUNDAMENTALS

TB: *Adida, how did you get into investing?*

AC: In 1979-82, I started my MBA; that is when I became interested. I lost money on the first stock I bought. It was LTV Steel, and about to go bankrupt. I thought it was such a big company; there was no way it'd go bankrupt. But it did. Afterward, I got an investment advisor license, but my salary at my regular job was quite good, and I did not want to give it up. So, I worked as a part-time investment advisor, working on commission. I started noticing some things that did not seem right, like the recommendations not being best for the client. But then, if you don't push their recommendations, you don't get the commission. So I quit and decided that if I had to do it, I would do it on my own.

TB: *Did you start your own practice?*

AC: I never did that because you must jump in full-time, and I didn't want to quit my career. But I did advise Mitra's physician friends and our family members. I didn't charge them.

TB: *What is your investment strategy?*

AC: You must look at net worth – not just stocks and bonds. As Warren Buffet said, net worth must move in the right direction. It could include real estate, but it should not include your primary home since you need to live there. Look at the total of your assets and liabilities,

such as debts. Liquid cash – meaning how easily you can convert something to cash.

TB: *What are some of the variables you look at when you analyze stocks at first glance?*

AC: Earnings per share, cash flow, and management. With startups, sometimes there is no cash flow, so you look at the potential of the investment and the people running it. You look at the total addressable market and the moat. For instance, with Nvidia, I look at the moat.

*A company's economic moat indicates how difficult it is to breach its competitive advantage like the moats around medieval fortresses, castles.

TB: *Do you do technical analysis for trading?*

AC: I know about them, like using Fibonacci Numbers and Golden ratio. I do traditional analysis, but I don't completely disregard the bands used in technical trading. I did value investing earlier, but as our wealth has grown over the years and I can afford to take more risk, I have started looking at growth stocks.

TB: *What advice would you give to young people about investing?*

AC: To start early. Put away the maximum pre-tax dollars in 401K, other retirement or pension funds, or Roth IRA that you can. Take advantage of any matching from your company. The government allows you to put away the money tax-free; use that. I started with safe investments, value investments, and dividend reinvestment and watched the money grow. You need to have some decent amount of money saved to start investing; Charlie Munger used to say, "Find a way to get your hands on \$100,000". Then you can buy five to ten good stocks. I started investing in growth stocks once I could afford to take the risk. But even today, most of our investments are in value stocks and index funds. If you invest smartly, it is easy to become a millionaire in twenty years. So it's not too late, even if you are in your fifties.

TB: *How do you track your portfolio?*

AC: I used to do it monthly, now quarterly... to get a good measure of how we're doing and what needs to change. But in 2007-08, when the market took a dive, I didn't make a whole lot of changes because you don't want to sell when things are down, and within a year or two years, the market went up.

TB: *What do you consider a good return for stocks?*

AC: In the last 80 to 100 years, the S&P 500 has returned about 11% on average. So, if you beat that, then it is a good return. Most investment managers cannot beat it. Warren Buffet has returned 26% annually over the last 30-35 years.

TB: *Then there is the mathematician who used quantitative methods to return a phenomenal 66% annually over 30 years, which is very far from the norm.*

AC: Yes, Jim Simons of Renaissance Technologies. He was a mathematics professor at M.I.T. before he jumped into finance and went back and forth.

TB: *Any recommendations on books and news channels for our readers?*

AC: Wall Street Journal, Barrons, Zero hedge. I listen to podcasts like Value Investor, Bloomberg, CNBC, IBD, and others.

INVESTING WITH KIDS

TB: *So, Neil is also interested in investing. Did he learn from you?*

AC: Yes, my son saw me investing and became interested. He was only ten years old. In 7th grade, his teacher suggested that he write a paper on investing in stocks – since he was good at math.

MC: I gave him \$500 and said OK dad's going to teach you how to invest and at the end of the

games 50% is yours 50% is mine. He bought Apple, nothing else. Then with the money he made he bought Coca-Cola. Then his father helped him.

AC: I bought Disney and Wrigleys for him. These companies paid good dividends. Kids don't care that in 50 years they will retire with 1 million. Wrigleys sent boxes of chewing gum every year, and the kids were very excited, "Dad, they sent chewing gum again." You must find something that excites them. I feel children should be taught finance in school. And invest their money because they may spend it on things they don't need. I invested for my nephew at his mother's request, and it was three times that in a few years' time.

MC: On their birthdays, we would buy treasury bonds for the kids, \$500 - \$1000 worth.

AC: Then, show them how the interest increased the value of the investment. For young people, it doesn't register unless you show some real-life examples. Neil started studying on his own; he read my books.

MC: Later, when Neil joined Caltech, he became the head of the investment club. That was the first time he made real money; he made \$150K for the club by the time he left.

AC: We discuss investments with Neil. He has access to financial datasets and historical data that he bought when he traded currencies. I ask him to run some analyses for me from time to time.

(*These datasets are different from the Bloomberg Terminal.)

TB: *I assume Neil's strategy has diverged from yours.*

AC: Our analysis still uses basic principles. But Neil has also done crypto and currency trading. He understands blockchain technology and AI. He has built servers using Nvidia chips.

SERVING THE COMMUNITY

TB: *What is your passion Mitradi?*

MC: My passion is related to my profession, which is helping people. I love doing that in whatever form; it doesn't have to be for medical reasons. When new people arrive in town, I like helping them make new friends or, if they need something, helping them make connections. As a result, I get to meet new people, too, and I love that.

TB: *You were the first to welcome us to Utsav, and I know Utsav's success is dear to your heart.*

MC: Yes, because we've been here from its inception, and we have seen it grow. Before Utsav, we did Saraswati Puja, which rotated between different houses. Then, a young group of Bengalis who had recently moved to the Sacramento area approached us, and together we set up Utsav. Adi's family's Durga Pujo in Kolkata had stopped for various reasons; we were here and Adi was very sad. About the time that Utsav started, Adi mentioned that there was no one to revive the family puja. So, when we began the puja here, I told him, "Eyi nao, tomar Dunloper puja ekhaney eshey gachey".

TB: *I remember you telling me once that if you want to worship Ma Durga, she will find a way to make it happen. Any special memories from that first puja?*

MC: During the first puja, there wasn't an organization. Ramen-da, our priest, said we need someone's name on behalf of the organization. There was no president, and we were there to open the hall and get it set up. He asked if he could use our name; we didn't think much about it and said yes. So, the first puja happened with Adi's name. It is a special connection, and which is why we've always been platinum members. We've never hesitated to contribute.

TB: *What was your vision for Utsav?*

MC: Actually, it has two parts; one is keeping the community together, providing a community where people can feel welcome, and find a group they can fit in. Already, two

people called me recently - although there are three organizations in our area, somehow, we are still at the forefront. I try to match them with existing groups by age and interests. The second vision was that I wanted our kids to be involved in community service. I started the youth group; it was small, about seven kids.

TB: *Which Sangita has taken to a different level with the youth group.*

MC: Sangita is doing an awesome job with them. We started small, collecting clothes, and then we adopted St. John to help the women and children there. I think it makes you a better human being when you are involved with community service.

AC: It gives you a different perspective.

TB: *You once mentioned that you have thought about contributing funds to Utsav through a trust.*

MC: *Adi and I have talked about putting it in our will and trust that if the Utsav puja exists. Not necessarily for people to have fun and bring artists, but for the puja itself, we'll contribute.*

AC: There is the continuity issue too – the organization has to be there. Our kids are not interested, so we need the younger people who come from India to be involved.

TB: *So, how do you go from welcoming new people to making them feel included and vested?*

MC: I keep my feelers out. I use my communication skills to try to keep everyone happy and to see another perspective. I try to make sure the younger people maintain their culture; I ask, "Can you sing or dance? How would you like to be involved?"

TB: *So, open up participation in events – both behind the scenes and onstage; a fair process goes a long way towards avoiding controversy and resentment. Certainly, when people can be heard/seen, can make decisions,*

and have autonomy, it fosters a sense of belonging.

MC: People like being approached by me personally, and I do that happily. One of my first statements used to be, "Though this is a Bengali organization, we welcome non-Bengali speakers as well."

TB: *My family has found both of you to be very inclusive. And I would say that senior members of Utsav welcomed us. I am grateful for that. How do you instill that in the younger members?*

AC: Both Mitra and I mingle and walk around at events and social gatherings; we try to talk to everyone, including newcomers. I see many others just stay in their own groups.

TB: *Their comfort zone. Afraid of people who are different, perhaps?*

AC: I would like to know what the younger people are looking for in the organization. For

Utsav's interests, you can pool resources and do something big when you have a larger organization. In Houston, Chicago they have one organization, and they have a Durgabari, Kalibari.

TB: *Adida, you are in the CCM; you could solicit anonymous feedback. It'll be like tracking your portfolio and adjusting as needed. There are certainly many things that Utsav has done right, which is why it has survived for 23 years.*

Thank you, Mitradi and Adida. This was quite informative for me. Our readers will also learn many new things.

Tanima Bhadra is a graduate of the Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur, and has spent most of her career in computer chip design. She is currently pursuing her interests in business and investments. She divides her time between Newcastle and Southern Oregon.



Brief History of Utsav

“Utsav is a nonprofit, charitable organization promoting Indian/Bengali culture in Sacramento Valley. Utsav was founded in 2002, with one goal: creating a positive and enjoyable experience of friendship, happiness, charity, and harmony via our Indian/Bengali heritage. Although most Utsav members are from Bengal, we want to reach other communities as well. Membership in Utsav is not limited to any particular race, religion, color, or ethnic origin. Utsav believes in inclusion and in working together for the community.”

A Chronicle of the Utsav Bengali Diaspora

In the late 1970s / early 1980s, long before Utsav was formed, there were only a handful of Bengalis in the Sacramento / Davis area. Some of them who (along with their families) went on to become active Utsav members with unwavering support include Prodyot and Srilekha Bhattacharya, Satya and Pat Chatterjee, Subhrendu Kar, among others.

The mid-to-late 1980s saw the arrivals of the families of Barin and Anima Kumar, Biswanath and Supriya Mukherjee, Adi and Mitra Choudri, among others, to expand the Utsav Bengali Diaspora.

Before Utsav, these Bengali families would host Saraswati Puja annually by rotation in their homes. This Puja would be performed by the Head Swami from Vedanta Temple (1337 Mission Ave., Carmichael, CA), viz. Swamis Sradhhananda and Pramathananda in the past; and later by Swami Prapannananda, who continues to perform Utsav's Saraswati Puja to this date. For Durga Puja, these Bengalis would travel to Bay Area for Prabasi's Puja (which was then the only Durga Puja in Bay Area); later, Sanskriti started its Durga Puja, and today there are 30+ Durga Pujas in Bay Area. The Vedanta Temple, which was started in the late 1950s, also served as a meeting place of the Bengalis to celebrate various events in the Vedanta calendar.

The late 1990s, particularly due to the IT industry boom and Y2K issues, saw a huge expansion in our region's Bengali diaspora. The sheer weight of our community – with the old timers joining hands with the relatively-new arrivals (such as Deb Saha, Udayan Chanda, Somen Nandi, and Joy Mukherjee who went on to become Utsav Presidents) – dictated that we get organized with objectives stated above.

In July 2002, Utsav was officially formed. We celebrated our first Sharodotsav in October 2002,

with our dear friend Ramen Chakraborti as priest. Even before Utsav (as well as afterwards), Ramenda and Archana Boudi would travel to the various Bengali homes to conduct Satyanarayan Puja and other events as well as officiate Bengali weddings in our community. Participation in Sharodotsav 2002 was outstanding, and the joy was boundless. With time, the Utsav tree has expanded, the bonds among families have grown deeper, and the baton of responsibility has transferred to other able hands.

Utsav members include nearly 125 families, from which several individuals are elected every two years to serve as officers. (For the first few years, our elections were held annually.) So far, many of our members have ably served our organization with the leadership of our following Presidents:

- 2003: Arijit Chattopadhyay
- 2004: Udayan Chanda
- 2005: Mitra Choudri
- 2006: Biswanath Mukherjee
- 2007: Dipankar Chattopadhyay
- 2008: Deb Saha
- 2009: Adi Choudri
- 2010: Sharmila Mukherjee
- 2011-12: Joy Mukherjee
- 2013-14: Ajay Joshi
- 2015-16: Sanjib Nayak
- 2017-18: Rajat Saha
- 2019-20: Joydeep Ray
- 2021-22: Somen Nandi
- 2023-24: Sangita Biswas

Our Community Activities

We organize several annual events: Sharodotsav (Durga Puja), Bani Bandana/Bosontotsav (Saraswati Puja); Festival of color (Holi); Annual General Meeting (AGM) + Picnic; etc. Our events enjoy strong participation from our children and their friends. Our next generation – for whom exposure to Indian/Bengali culture is invaluable – is very active in our youth programs, charitable activities, cultural events, literary activities, and prayer for global peace. It is gratifying to note that many of our young members, even after going to college and/or while working, still come back for our community events and look forward to attending them.

Examples of our activities include:

- High-quality production of our Annual Magazine, **Chowrongee** (please visit our website for archives), thanks to Past and Present Editors: Dilip Roychowdhury, Arun Das, Rashmi Nandi, Manas Ray, Avishek Nag, Rajat Saha, and Mainak Banga.
- Cultural Program productions, as part of different local and international charities, Sharodotsav, Bosontotsav, Anandamela, India Day, North American Bengali Conference (NABC), Bay Area Natya Mela (Drama/Play Shows), California State Fair, among others.
- Promotion of Indian music and culture by showcasing the work of external artists. Our Past Sharodotsav External Artists include the following famous performers:
 - **Mala Ganguly (2002)**
 - **Lopamudra Mitra (2003)**
 - **Antara Chowdhury (2003)**
 - **Bhoomi (2004)**
 - **Rezwana Chowdhury Banya (2004)**
 - **Somdatta Basu (2005)**
 - **Utpalendu Chowdhury (2005)**
 - **Nachiketa (2006)**
 - **Sougata Ganguli (Sarod) (2006)**
 - **Jojo (2007 and 2016)**
 - **Anup Ghoshal (2007)**
 - **Raghab Chatterjee (2008)**
 - **Suchismita Das (2008)**
 - **Shubhomita (2009)**
 - **Arnab Chakrabarty (2009)**
 - **Kaya (2010)**
 - **Tanusree Shankar and Troup (2011)**
 - **Aneek Dhar and Anwesha (2011)**
 - **Parnava (2013)**
 - **Cactus (2016)**
 - **Abanti (2016)**
 - **Kinjal (2017)**
 - **Madhubanti and Dipayan (2018)**
 - **Sourendro and Soumyojit (2019)**
 - **Omkara (2019)**
 - **Dohar (2022)**
 - **Ujjaini Mukherjee (2023)**
 - **Shayanti Ghosal (2024)** (who grew up in Utsav community and now is a star!)

Youth / Charitable Activities

Utsav has organized several youth activities over the years; some highlights follow:

- In 2009-10, Dr. Mitra Choudri initiated a youth volunteer group, led by Utsav kids. They organized clothes drive and served a meal at St. John's Shelter, performed Spring Cleaning at Vedanta Center, and raised funds for Haiti Disaster.
- Later, Rupa Chowdhury led youth activities over many years; in recent years, Sangita Biswas has been leading our youth activities, such as Walk4Literacy, serving food at Saint John's Program for Real Change, etc.
- In December 2015, Utsav Youth Group volunteers (Aditya Chowdhury, Ayanta Chowdhury, Debanshu Das, Sharon Sarkar, and Neha Joshi) participated in the KVIE Public Television fundraising event during their pledge drive, attending the phone bank, accepting donations, etc. The group gave over 60 hours of their time in support of PBS and public television, and helped raise over \$6,500.
- Recently, Utsav's youth volunteers, Sayak Datta, Ena Nayak, and Dayita Biswas, led fundraising efforts for the flood victims of Texas and Kolkata.
- In 2018, Sayak Datta led a fundraising program for the Sankara Eye Foundation.
- In 2021, Utsav Youth Group raised over \$1,400 by making and selling leis for High School Graduation and donated that money to the noble effort of "Project Breathe" to help the victims of COVID-19 in rural India.
- Utsav Youth Volunteers sold over 50 T-shirts during Sharodotsav 2020, and along with matching fund from Utsav donated \$1000 to Sacramento Food Bank on November 24, 2021.
- Utsav Youth Group, with adult guidance, donated \$500 along with various food items to St. John's Program for Real Change on January 8, 2022, in Sacramento.
- Utsav Youth Volunteers participated in a fundraising event (Arts and Crafts Fair) to support St. John's Program for Real Change and the ongoing crisis in Ukraine. It was held on May 14, 2022, at North Natomas Regional Park, Sacramento.

- On June 25, 2022, Utsav Youth Volunteers, along with adult members, served a five-course lunch to 70 boarders of St. John's Program, which was highly appreciated by the boarders.
- Utsav Youth Volunteers organized a Musical Evening to support Leukemia and Lymphoma Foundation on August 14, 2022, at Folsom City Hall. The event included a special performance by Pandit Binay Pathak from Sohini Music Academy.
- First time in Utsav history Youth Volunteers along with Utsav adults raised over \$16,000 (in 2021) and \$5,000 (till August 2022), totalling over \$21,000 (2021-22) solely for charitable causes.
- On December 22, 2023, Utsav Youth Volunteers, along with adult members, served a Christmas lunch to the boarders of St. John's Program for Real Change.
- On May 20, 2023, Utsav Youth volunteers organized a graduation lei fundraiser, crafting and selling ribbon leis. The funds were utilized to feed women and children at a local shelter St John Program for Real Change, and support other service projects.
- On March 18, 2023, Utsav Youth volunteers conducted a clothing drive to reduce carbon footprint by clothing recycling.
- On December 22, 2023, Utsav Youth Volunteers, along with adult members, served a Christmas lunch to the boarders of St. John's Program for Real Change.
- Please visit [this link](#) for more information on Utsav Youth Activities.

Other Selected Charitable Activities

- **Transfusion** (November 2005; Producer: Mala Paul; Keynote Speaker: Dr. Ernie Bodai): Fundraiser for donating \$5,000 to Cancer Foundation of India.
- For St. John's Shelter, **Qawwali and Ghazal Night** by Sukhawat Ali Khan and Ensemble (December 2019).
- **The R. D. Burman Era**, featuring leading Bollywood musicians (October 2020); Utsav effort led by Suman Biswas, Subir Sarkar, and others, donating over \$7,000 to struggling artists due to COVID-19.
- **Project Breathe**: Utsav joined hands, led by Bay Area Prabasi (BAP), with a few other

organizations during April-June 2021, and raised over \$12,000 (+ \$3,000 directly donated by several Utsav members to BAP) to provide oxygen concentrators, medical kits, food, ambulatory services, etc. to the COVID-19 victims in rural India.

- **5K Charity Run (Oct. 3–10, 2021)**: Several Utsav members participated in this run and donated to various local charities.
- **5K Charity Walk (July 15, 2023)**: Several Utsav members participated in this walk, organized by Utsav Youth Group, to create awareness against child labor exploitations.
- **5K Charity Walk (August 11, 2024)**: Several Utsav members participated in this walk, organized by Utsav Youth Group, to create awareness against child labor exploitations.

Drama Productions and Other Cultural Activities

- **Public Servant** (written by Gautam Roy): drama directed by Somen Nandi at Utsav Sharodotsav in October 2002 and at Bay Area Natyamela in May 2005.
- Our participation in **23rd Annual North American Bengali Conference (NABC)** (Bongo Sammelan), Long Beach, CA, July 2003: Staged Drama **Bifole Mulyo Ferot** (written by Samir Dasgupta, directed by Somen Nandi); and Children's Dance Program production by Mala Paul. The same drama was staged at a Utsav event in October 2003.
- **Jampati** (Shruti Natok) (written by Sanjib Chattopadhyay): performed during Bosontosav, directed by Somen Nandi, February 2004.
- **Obak Jolpan** (written by Sukumar Roy): performed by an all-female cast under the direction of Sharmila Mukherjee, October 2006.
- **Panchatantra**: Kids drama performance directed by Sharmila Mukherjee, October 2007.
- **Babuder Dalkukure** (written by Manoj Mitra): performed at Bay Area Natyamela, June 2006, and during a Utsav event in October 2006, directed by Somen Nandi.

- **Apaharan** (Sruti Natak) (written by Baidyanath Mukhopadhyay): performed at Bay Area Natyamela, directed by Somen Nandi, June 2007.
- Our participation in **29th Annual North American Bengali Conference (NABC)**, San Jose, CA, July 2009: Dance Program (Production: Shashwati Roy and Mala Paul); and Drama **Hoitey Sabdhan** (directed by Joydeep Ray). The same drama was staged during a Utsav event in February 2009.
- **Ramayan**: performed by Utsav children, directed by Dr. Ajay Joshi, October 2009.
- **Chalo Kolkata**: a musical drama written by Manas Ray and directed by Mala Paul, October 2010.
- **Bir Purush** (written by Rabindra Nath Tagore): a children's drama directed by Paramita Ghosh, October 2010.
- **Halud Himu Kalo Rab**: A drama based on Humayun Ahmed's novel, directed by Manas Ray, October 2012.
- **100 Years of Bollywood**: A music and dance program directed by Nupur Joshi, October 2013.
- **Dance Pe Chance**: A comedy-drama directed by Joydeep Ray, October 2014.
- **Bengal Renaissance**: Revival of Bengal's musical past and its depiction in the modern world. Directed by Mala Paul, Script by Abhishek Roy, October 2014.
- **Naacher Taale Pujo Pandale**: Directed by Mala Paul and Manas Ray, October 2015.
- Our participation in **37th Annual North American Bengali Conference (NABC)**, Santa Clara, CA, July 2017: **Occupy Wal-Mart**, original script by Nobel Laureate Dario Fo, modified by Manas Ray, and directed by Somen Nandi; performed during Utsav Sharodotsav in October 2017 as well.
- **Live from Banglaville**: a comedy-drama written and directed by Joydeep Ray, October 2018.
- **Talent**: an original short film by Chandril Bhattacharya; script modified by Manas Ray and directed by Somen Nandi, October 2019.
- **Megh**: original play by Utpal Datta. Directed by Rajat Saha, October 2021.
- **Topa Masterer Bagan**: written by Mohit Ray. Directed by Rajat Saha and Manas Ray, October 2022.
- **Obak Ramayan – Ravan Haran (Play by Kids)**: concept and script: Rajat Saha. Directed by Ananya Nandi and Trina Ghosh, October 2023.
- **Shruti Natok: Oportola-Nichtola**: written by Sanjib Chattopadhyay. Directed by Pubasha Das, October 2023.
- **Children's Dance Drama**: Script and Directed by Pubasha Das, October 2024.
- **VLOG-ER Nesha Sorbonasha**: Directed by Rajat Saha. Music: Snehungshu Guha. October 2024.
- Other plays such as **Mamago** (written by Sukumar Ray), **Makuda Chole Gelen** (written by Gautam Roy), and **Hum Do Hamara Do** (written by Amal Roy) have been staged under the direction of Somen Nandi in various cultural community programs.

Information for this writeup is gathered from the past several years with the objective to help new and future members who are expected to take forward and improve the Utsav legacy of 22 years.

Dr. Satya Narayan Chatterjee

Dr. Satya Narayan Chatterjee lived life to the fullest in both style and substance.

He was born in Paikpara, Kolkata, one of six siblings.

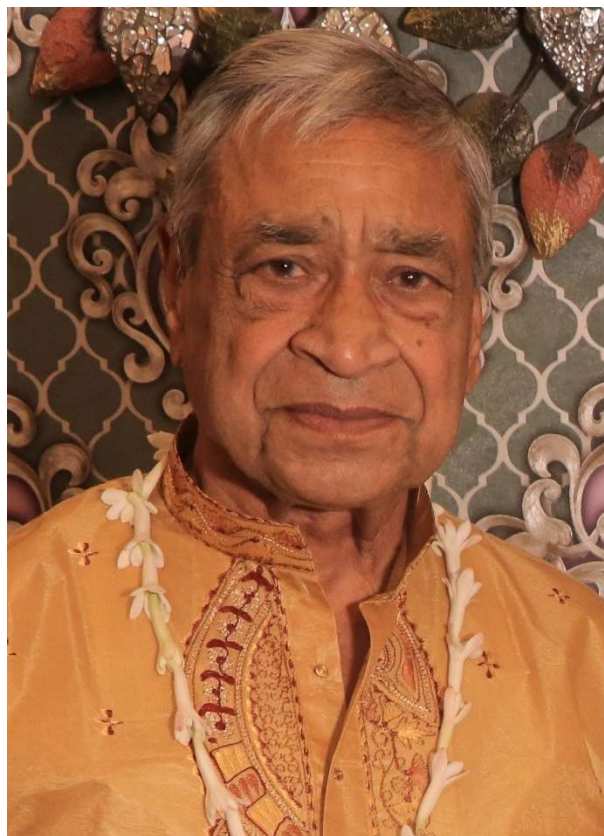
Satya was truly an academic man; he published more than 100 articles and four books. His knowledge of immunology and transplantation was extensive, and he was invited to give lectures worldwide.

After passing M.B.B.S. from R.G. Kar Medical Hospital in 1957, he spent a year practicing in Hanover, Germany. From there, he spent the next five years in England and earned triple fellowships, F.R.C.S. Edinburg and Glasgow. While working in a London hospital he met his wife, then nurse Patricia. The two wed on September 26, 1964, and moved first to Kolkata, then Margherita, Assam where Satya worked as Chief Medical Officer for McNeil and Barry. In the summer of 1969, Satya received an invitation to join Sir Michael Woodruff at Nuffield Transplantation Center in Edinburg. He accepted and spent the next four years training there. In November 1972, he was offered a transplant fellow position at the University of Southern California, and the family relocated to Los Angeles. In 1977, the family relocated again, this time to Sacramento, where Satya headed the startup kidney transplant unit at the University of California, Davis. In 1989 he left the university to start his own surgical practice.

California suited him. He loved American TV culture of the Rockford Files and Law and Order. His love of music extended to groups like the Ventures and particularly Journey. His favorite spot at Disneyland was the Country Bear Jamboree. However, nothing surpassed his love for Rabindra Sangeet.

Satya was a born road tripper, taking his family on action-packed adventurous car trips as well as many international trips. He and Pat

traveled extensively, touring China twice, vacationing in Spain, Goa and many other places, but often winding up at their beloved Kihei Sands condo in Maui.



Satya reveled in being a grandfather to his three grandchildren, Cameron, Mateo, and Jacob.

Satya leaves behind a vibrant legacy of festivity, a sly sense of humor, dedication to education and purpose, a superhuman stamina, and an endless flow of compassion for humanity.

He is survived by his wife of 60 years, Patricia, daughter, Dr. Sharmila Chatterjee and grandson Mateo, daughter, Shalini Morris and son-in-law John Morris, son, Arun Chatterjee and daughter-in-law Robin Chatterjee and grandsons Cameron and Jacob.

Utsav Sponsor Members (2024-25)

Platinum Plus Sponsors (contribution: \$2000 and above)

Bhattacharyya, Anirban and Sanchita (Auddy)

Chanda, Udayan and Seema

Choudri, Adi and Mitra

Gima, Subhra

Nandi, Somen and Rashmi

Sen, Shankha and Dipanjana

Platinum Sponsors (contribution: \$1200 and above)

Anonymous Utsav member

Banga, Mainak and Pubasha (Das)

Chowdhury, Tanmoy and Sushama

Das, Koushik and Santana

Ray, Joydeep and Dipanjali (Banerjee)

Gold Sponsors (contribution: \$600 and above)

Bandyopadhyay, Barun and Sunanda

Banerjee, Amit and Snigdha (Ghosh)

Barman, Deepak and Shilpi (Chakraborty)

Basu Shantanu and Rina (Roy)

Biswas, Deb and Sangita

Chowdhury, Arun and Rupa

Devavarapu, Pradeep and Sanhita (Bandyopadhyay)

Dey, Shuddho and Nandita

Kriplani, Indru and Pramila

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Mukherjee, Biswanath and Supriya

Nayak, Sanjib and Soma

Ray, Manas and Shashwati (Roy)

Silver Sponsors (contribution: \$400 and above)

Bangalore Kiran and Soma (Tapadar)

Bhattacharyya, Avijit and Ayantika

Bhaumik, Bhaskar and Sreeparna

Ghosh, Anjan and Trina

Gupta, Nikhil and Somosri

Paul, Prakash and Monica

Sharma, Kingshuk and Ashrukana

Syam, Paramita

Utsav Membership Roster

Adoni, Anand, Subhra (Chakraborty), Anish, and Aisha

*Bandyopadhyay, Barun, Sunanda, Sneha, and Hiya

*Bandyopadhyay, Bhaskar and Momtanu (Chakraborty)

*Banerjee, Amit, Snigdha (Ghosh), Esha, Shriya, and Aayan

*Banga, Mainak, Pubasha(Das), Toushini, and Soumini

*Bangalore Kiran, Soma (Tapadar), Ronav and Renee

*Barman, Dipak, and Shilpi (Chakraborty)

*Basu, Kumkum and Barun

*Basu, Shantanu, Rina, and Dhiya

*Basuroy, Nirupam, Sudeshna, Shimika, and Nirvik

*Bej, Aritra, and Sukanya (Mozumder)

*Bhattacharya, Anirban, Paramita (Chakraborty), Archita, and Zini
 *Bhattacharyya, Anirban, Sanchita (Auddy), and Anaya
 *Bhattacharyya, Avijit, Ayantika, and Avighna
 *Bhattacharya Arpan And Indrani
 *Bhattacharjee, Samayita and Sunil
 *Bhaumik, Bhaskar, Sreeparna, and Aritra
 Bhowmik, Niladri, Manomita, and Srija
 *Bhowmick, Rana, Oindrila (Chakraborty), and Family
 *Biswas, Debabrata, Sangita, Dhruba, and Dayita
 *Biswas, Priyam and Family
 Biswas, Shina
 Bose, Riya
 *Bose, Sudeshna
 Botu, Surya Teja
 Burman, Prabir and Family
 Chakraborty, Amrita
 *Chakraborty, Prodosh, Mita, Joey, and Robby
 *Chakravarty, Rajat and Torsa (Ghosal)
 *Chakraborty, Shyama
 Chakraborty, Sneha
 *Chanda, Udayan, Seema, Neel, and Natasha
 Chatterjee, Pat
 Chaudhuri, Debanik, Shampa, and Family
 *Choudri, Adi, Mitra, and Family
 *Chowdhury, Arun, Rupa, Ayananta, and Aditya
 *Chowdhury, Pulak, Sanchita (Dey), Mahika Adishree, and Vivan Mayukh
 *Chowdhury, Shyamal, Bipasha, Sudip, and Anindya
 *Chowdhury, Tanmoy and Sushama
 *Das, Koushik, Santana, and Debanshu
 *Das, Modan, Shilpi, Neil, and Raj
 *Das, Soukhin and Oindree (Basu)
 *Das, Nirmol Chandra and Family
 Datta, Jyotirmoy, Namita, Srijon, and Orjon
 Datta, Sandipan, Behnaz Hekmat, and Family
 *Dutta, Subrata, Alodipa, Sayak, and Sarthak
 *Devavarapu, Pradeep, Sanhita (Bandyopadhyay), and Suhaan
 *Dey, Shuddho, Nandita and Sneha (Riya)
 *Dey, Saumen, Manjula, Siddhartha, and Rishaan
 *Dutta, Supratik and Piyali
 Ganguly, Somnath, Tanushree, Shoyoma, and Sudhit
 *Ganguly, Titas
 *Ghosh, Anjan, Trina, and Aayush
 *Ghosh, Debashis and Subhadra (Mishtu) Sengupta
 *Ghosh, Debrup and Debapriya (Chakraborty)
 *Ghosh, Roop and Riya (Bose)
 *Ghosh, Rupa, Rudrani and Shobhik
 Ghosh, Sudipta and Mithu
 *Ghosh, Sumanta, Paramita and Family
 Ghoshal, Surajit, Tuhina, Tuli, and Tithi
 *Gima, Subhra
 Guha, Snehungsu and Tanusree (Dasgupta)
 *Gupta, Nikhil and Somosree
 *Joshi, Ajay, Nupur, Neha, and Veer
 Jhunjunwala, Aditya
 *Karmakar, Anindya
 *Kriplani, Indru and Pramila

*Kumar, Barin, Anima, and Family
 Majumder, Arijit and Srijita
 Majumdar, Abhigyan
 *Majumdar, Suchanda, Samriddhi, and Eshani
 *Majumdar, Tapas and Saptarshi
 *Mallick, Soumya, Sharmila, and Family
 *Mathew, Brandon, Tania, and Shikha (Bhadra)
 *Maitra, Toulak
 *Mitra, Anupam, Ananya, and Anaisa
 *Mitra, Subhaditya
 Moturu, Mahesh and Suranjana (Pal)
 *Mukherjee, Arun, Sharmila, and Family
 *Mukherjee, Biswanath, Supriya, and Family
 *Mukherjee, Joy, Suvra, Rinita, and Ronit
 *Mukherjee, Kokonad, Shatabdi, and Meghma
 *Mukherjee, Subhankar, Jaya, and Abhirup
 *Mullins, Mala P., Shane, and Evani Paul
 *Nandi, Somen, Rashmi, Sunoy, and Sharod
 *Nayak, Sanjib, Soma, Ena, and Ashna
 Pal, Supratim and Sudarshana
 Paul, Debashis
 *Paul, Manashi and Family
 *Paul, Prakash, Monika (Roy), Rai, and Raya
 *Paul, Shomeek, and Evani
 *Paul, Subrata, Soma, Dipto, and Sreeja
 *Ray, Joydeep, Dipanjali (Banerjee), Siddharth, and Sanjoli
 *Ray, Manas and Shashwati (Roy)
 *Ray, Tapati
 *Roy, Shyamal
 *Roy, Souvik
 Sadhukhan, Amitava and Sarmistha
 Saha, Deb, Nina Shetty, Rohan, and Ishaan
 *Saha, Gourab and Aindrila (Kar)
 *Saha, Rajat, Ananya, Ileana, and Ivaan
 Saha, Tanujay and Sonali
 *Saha, Subir, Seema (Chowdhury), Shopneil, and Spriha
 *Sahoo, Subhadeep and Priyanka (Karmakar)
 Saletore, Yogesh, Mohana (Roy), Akash, and Ayush
 Samaddar, Sandipan and Poulami (Chatterjee)
 Sarkar, Shampa
 *Sarkar, Sanjib, Hem, Arunava, and Sonia
 Sarkar, Subir, Lily, Sahana, and Sharon
 *Sarkar, Sudeep, Suman, Aditya, and Aryav
 *Sen, Shankha, Dipanjana, and Kankon
 *Sharma, Kingshuk, Ashrukana, Khounish, and Eashaan
 Singh, Vishal
 *Sinharoy, Balaram and Marina
 *Syam, Paramita, Mia, Krish, and Kiaan
 *Verma, Ravi and Barnali (Roy Choudhury)
 *Verma, Sumeet and Rashmi

** Denotes membership renewed for 2024-25 during press time. Our apologies if the information has any inaccuracy; please drop us an email at utsavpr@gmail.com with corrections.*

The member sponsorship levels have been calculated taking into account all donations (unless the member has specifically requested the GBM not to, and in writing). The correctness of the information provided is the responsibility of the GBM.

OCT 19, 2024

Utsav Fashion Show



Concept:
Subhadra Sengupta
Ghosh

SHARODOTSAV



Basu Manohari Sandhya

Oct
19



A Musical Tribute

Concept By Shubhra Gima & Coordination By Ananya Nandi

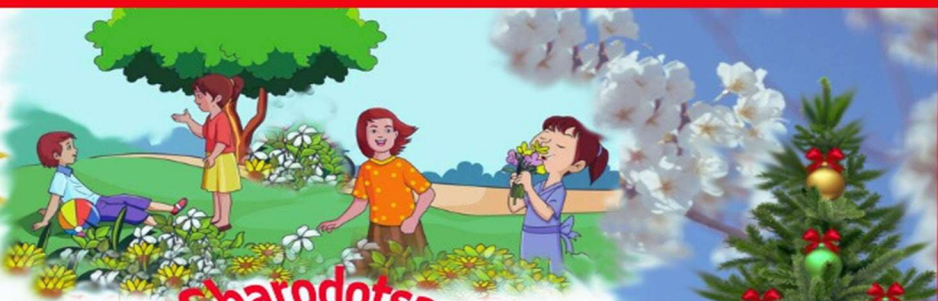
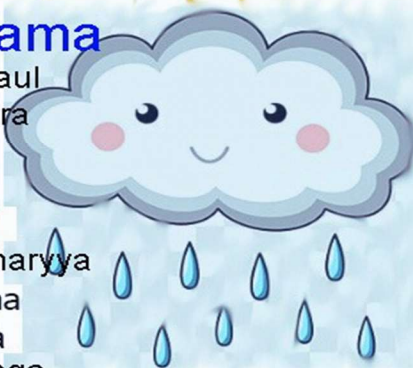
October 19, 2024 | 6:30 pm | Orangevale Community Center



UTSAV PRESENTS Ritur Majhe Khushir Khoje Dance Drama

Aradhana Paul
Anaisha Mitra
Kiaan Das
Krish Das
Rishan Dey
Avighna Bhattacharyya
Shopneil Saha
Spriha Saha
Toushini Banga
Ileena Saha
Vivan Chowdhury

Script & Direction
Pubasha Das



Utsav Sharodotsav 2024



Friday, October 18





Utsav Presents
Shayanti Ghoshal

OCT
20

A Bay Area Sensation

SUNDAY OCT 20, 2024

Orangevale Community Center
Orangevale

A rocking evening of Bollywood & Bengali hits