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Milonee Executive Committee 2013



First Row (from back): Jaydip Bhaumik, Ambarish Roy, Tara Sankar Roy, Ananyo Banerjee, Tirtho Chaudhury, Biswadip Ghosh, Sourin Maiti, Krishnendu Kumar Das

Second Row (from back): Roshmi Bhaumik, Rituparna Ghosh, Anuradha Mitra, Barnika Roy, Swagata Banerjee, Nipunika Chaudhury, Dalia Ghosh, Soma Maiti, Gargi Pal, Sucharita Das

Second Row (from front): Tanisha Roy, Amrita Nag, Juhi Ghosh, Anushka Pal

Front Row: Aditya Roy, Abhishek Roy, Toshani Roy, Aniket (Raj) Bhaumik, Avishek Ghosh, Ishani (Neha) Bhaumik, Rayan Das, Rivan Das

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President's Column

Dalia Ghosh

(President 2013 Milonee of Colorado)

Milonee of Colorado serves as our home away from home. For many of us, Milonee also represents our extended family. This December marks my 25th year of involvement with Milonee, and I can safely say that Milonee has helped shape me into the person that I am today. I can still remember some of my first Milonee experiences such as making begun bhajas for Saraswati Puja (held in a club house!) back in February of 1990, or coordinating the green room over the years as our kids got ready for their performances. I have been blessed to have raised my family in such a wonderful and welcoming community. The Milonee community extends beyond the boundaries of an annual Puja, and reaches into our homes, and into our children's homes. I have had the pleasure of seeing the impact that our Milonee community has had on our children; they have carried their experiences and friendships through their lives, and now, as they are spread across the country, they still embody the ideals impressed upon them by the Milonee of Colorado. So it is with a lot of honor and gratitude that I accepted the responsibilities of leading Milonee as the President this year.

While I was also on the Milonee Committee in 1992 and 1996, I can say that our Bengali community and the Milonee organization have changed greatly over the years. We are a much larger community and as such planning and organizing our events require a lot of energy and sophistication. I am thankful to have had a great group of people with a variety of talents on the executive committee this year who have devoted countless hours to the tasks at hand. The strong participation from our members made the events this year quite successful. As part of the 2013 events, we celebrated Saraswati Pujo and Milon Mela Picnic with all of your participation and with grand success. At the picnic in June we organized "Sports" after 21 years. It was a pleasure to see our children join and participate in the same competitions that we had participated in when we were school kids growing up in India. Now we are celebrating the most cherished program of the year "Durga Pujo". I am sure; many of us can relate the auspiciousness, fun and pleasure of this event that we remember from our days in Kolkata. With careful management, we were able to lower event subscription rates throughout the year in spite of rising costs for the venue, food and supplies and yet continue to have excellent programs. We are on track financially to also build on the Milonee reserve funds and leave a higher balance for the incoming committee to start with.

Seeing the full effects of Milonee on our Bengali community over the last 25 years has made me exceptionally proud to make my mark on the community. While we have grown from having Pujas in club houses, I hope that we continue to maintain the principles of the original Milonee of Colorado, as our community is still small and do not enjoy the economies of scale similar to the larger organizations in the coastal cities. We rely heavily on the contributions and participation of all our limited membership and should never take hasty decision to overreach financially or increase our future burdens. I hope that everyone who joins us feels as welcome as I did when I first became a part of Milonee. Milonee can only thrive through our active participation and commitment and only through its success, can we continue to perpetuate our Bengali traditions, festivals and pujas in Colorado.

I like to end with wishing all of us "Subho Bijoya" and welcoming the new 2014 Milonee executive committee and look forward to their contributions in the coming year.

Editorial / সম্পাদকীয়

Durga Puja is a special celebration for Bengalis all over the world. This festival truly goes beyond the word “Puja”. মহালায়া marks the beginning of দেবীপক্ষ। I remember, as a kid, me and my brother would wake up to the alarm at 4 am and huddle under the mosquito net on my parents' bed. With rapt attention we would listen to the special broadcast on All India Radio. Sri Birendra Krishna Bhadra's voice cut through the darkness, full of vigor and quivered in reverence as he chanted যা দেবী সর্বভূতেশু, describing the various divine forms or রূপ of Ma Durga, দুর্গাতিহারিনী। The chanting was interspersed with inspirational melodies like বাজলো তোমার আলোর বেণু or জাগো দুর্গা দশপ্রহরণধারিনী। As the early light of dawn appeared on the horizon, অখিল বিমানে, তব জয়গান, filled our hearts with hope and joy. Durga Puja means new clothes, getting dressed, going out with friends to see the Durga pratimas, big pandals, cool lightings, delicious foods at stalls, entertaining programmes with music and dance. We cannot forget the Puja edition magazines. This year, I had a lot of fun collecting writings and art work from our greater Denver Bengali community, especially from kids and compiling them into our own Puja edition magazine, Tuli Kolom with Tirtho. It was amazing to see the talent and enthusiasm expressed in the numerous entries, covering a wide gamut of relevant topics from culture, spiritualism, traditions and challenges of everyday life...

Editor: Roshmi Bhaumik



ছোটবেলায় প্রতিটা বাঙালী যারা বঙ্গদেশে কাটিয়েছেন, তারা বোধ করি পুজোর ছুটির কথা কেউ ভোলেননি। যতদূর মনে পড়ে আমার বয়স তখন আট- দশ। স্কুলে পুজোর ছুটি কিছু দিন বাদেই পড়বে। স্কুল বাসে করে যাতায়াতের সময় কলকাতার নানান জায়গায় তখন প্যাভেল বাঁধা শুরু হয়ে গিয়েছে। রোজ বাড়ি এসে মা কে শুধু একই প্রশ্ন, “মা, পুজো আসতে আর কত দেরী?” আর মায়ের উত্তর হত, “ওরে, আসবে রে আসবে, এখন তো দুর্গা ঠাকুর শিব ঠাকুরের সঙ্গে ঝগড়া করছে বাপের বাড়ি আসবে বলে। যেই শিব ঠাকুর রাজি হবেন, অমনি মা দুর্গা আসবেন।” শিশু মনে তখন মায়ের এই গল্পটা মেনে নিতে কোনদিনও দ্বিধা হয়নি। তাই খুব রাগ হত শিব ঠাকুরের ওপর, মনে মনে বলতাম, তাড়াতাড়ি মা দুর্গা কে পাঠাও আমাদের কাছে।

আমাদের বাড়িতে সেই সময় ক্যাসেটে গান শোনার খুব চল ছিল; তাই পুজো এলেই, বাবাও বোধ করি একটু নস্ট্যালজিক হয়ে পড়তেন। তাই পুজোর এক মাস আগেই, আমাদের বাড়িতে একটা গান খুব শোনা যেত; সনৎ সিংহ এর “এক এক কে এক, দুই এক কে দুই, ছেলেরা সব নামতা পড়ে পাঠশালার ওই ঘরে...মন বসেনা আজ...।” এখনও সেই গান স্পষ্ট ভেসে আসে কানে। পুজোর আমেজ বাঙালীদের জন্যে একদম অন্যরকম। কলকাতায় পুজোর সেল দোকানে দোকানে, মানুষের ভিড় শহরের সমস্ত রাস্তায়। শিশু মন খালি প্রশ্ন করত, “এবারে পুজোয় কটা জামা, আর কোনদিন কি পড়ব?”

সে আজ অনেক বছর আগের কথা। আজ আমরা সকলেই যারা মার্কিন যুক্তরাষ্ট্রে বাস করি, সেই আনন্দ থেকে কিছুটা হলেও বঞ্চিত। তাই এবার যখন তুলি কলম এর সম্পাদক হওয়ার সুজোগ পেলাম, সেই আনন্দ টাকে দ্বিগুণ করার প্রয়াসে লেগে পড়লাম। ছোটবেলায় পুজো সংখ্যায় ভরে যেত আমাদের বাড়ি। ‘আনন্দমেলা’, ‘শুকতারা’ থাকত আমাদের জন্যে, আর বড়দের জন্যে ‘সানন্দা’, ‘দেশ’ বা অন্যান্য শারদীয়া পত্রিকা। আমাদের মিলনীর ‘তুলি কলম’ ও কিন্তু ঠিক তাই। পাঠক সংখ্যা সেই সব পত্রিকার তুলনায় অনেক কম হলেও শারদীয়া সংখ্যা পড়ার সুজোগ কিন্তু আমরা কেউই ছাড়তে চাই না। আর এতো একই পত্রিকায়, নানান রঙে নানান তুলির টান, নানান কলমের ছোঁয়া। সত্যি সার্থক পত্রিকার এই নামকরণ। তাই আজকে যখন পুজোর দিনে, এই পত্রিকা আপনাদের সকলের হাতে তুলে দেব, শুধু এই মনে করব, যে সেই বঙ্গদেশের পুজোর আমেজে যেন ফিরে আসে আপনাদের মনে। সেই শারদীয়া সংখ্যা পড়ার সুজোগ করে দিলাম আজ। আশা করি আমাদের এই প্রচেষ্টা আপনাদের ক্ষণিকের জন্য হলেও, আনন্দ জোগাবে।

সম্পাদকঃ তীর্থ চৌধুরী



Artist Bio: Gopal



Neil Sen

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Brushworks magic Abstract Expressionism

Neil Sen (aka **GOPAL**) is a renowned contemporary Bengali artist in Houston, TX. His paintings have been exhibited all around USA. He has created illustrations for books & magazine covers. He paints with a flurry of colors and goes into meticulous details using a broad range of styles and medium depicting the human beauty especially in its female form.

In 2007, Neil received an award from SANSKRITI Art Association, recognizing his contribution in enriching Indian Art. He was chosen as the Artist of the Month (Nov) at the Artist's Alliance of Sugarland. He also received accolades for his exquisite works at the Sugarland Area Artist Convention, 2010. This year 2 of his painting was awarded 1st place by the Lone Star Guild, the biggest Art organization in Texas. He currently holds the position of **Director of Arts for three institutions: Anjali Art Academy, Sugarland Artist Alliance and Kala Bhavan Art Academy.**

Gopal loves to portray women in a large spectrum of emotions, in his distinctive style. These emotions come alive in explicit colors using realism, accentuated with a touch of abstract, wherever necessary. His expressive works sometimes create a disquieting clarity, reaching well beyond the depiction of his subjects. His illustration use familiar objects as context. This gives his work a sense of scale, meaning and proportion.

Gopal has portrayed the spiritual power of women in many of his latest work. The central theme dwells on contrasting emotions of sadness and self-esteem, blazing conviction, resilience and spiritual strength. His art shows hope and liberation in the mind and spirit of women, even though they are immersed in traditions.

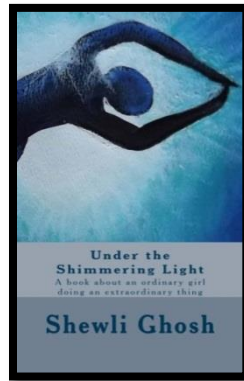
Gopal states "I simply wish to convey the sublime emotion I find within melancholy beauty." In his endeavor to bring out hidden feelings and sentiments, he uses colors which are warm and bold yet somber and subtle at the same time. He believes in bringing clarity of expression with a soft mystifying form that elicits beauty and positive passion. He hardly ever relies on negative deformity and ambiguity. He believes that through his simple realistic approach, his audience can understand and appreciate the hidden complexities of his subjects. Art enthusiasts are able to comprehend, respond and feel thoroughly comfortable looking at them.

Neil is involved in teaching numerous classes both for kids and adults (over 100 students) and has been doing so for over a decade. He is widely known in the community for his inspirational teaching and his passion for art. He is a natural teacher and is in the process of writing a book for children which will work as a guide for kids to learn art easily.

Neil has done numerous exhibition all around the country from Jan 2012 to showcase his painting to the art lovers of Indian Origin. He is presently involved in numerous commissioned works for clients around the country. Please feel free to contact him if you know of anyone who is interested.

Under The Shimmering Light

Shewli Ghosh



(An excerpt from the book)

I was the youngest swimmer on board that day and there were others on board who were drawing inspiration from me. They all wanted to know how old I was and where I lived. The conversations got me going and I stopped feeling so weird about the swim. I chatted with my mom and played a quick game of rock paper scissors with my brother.

All of a sudden the ferry started slowing down. Next, it cut its engines and came to a gradual halt. It was time to make the jump. The knot in my stomach came right back. Last minute instructions were blared out over the loud speakers about the jump. There would be two sides of the boat that we swimmers could jump from and we would jump in pairs or threes. Someone would be at the door to clear us for the jump.

We got into the queue to make the jump. dad took it all in and whispered into my ear to hold my swim goggles against my face when we jumped, bob up as soon as possible and to swim away from the sides of the ferry immediately to avoid being jumped on. He said that as soon as we were a few strokes away from the boat we would regroup and then start the swim.

As we were gently pushed forward by the crowd, I looked back at my mother once more and could see her look of concern and brave face. I could imagine that sending your daughter into such a huge challenge in rough weather could not have been an easy decision. I remember my mother telling my dad to be by my side for the entire swim and look after my wellbeing. I saw them exchange a brief look of trust, strength and reassurance.

We were suddenly standing at the edge of ferry side and being encouraged to take the jump. My dad and I had paired up and it was just us jumping together. WHAT IN THE WORLD WAS I DOING? I looked out at the sea. It was rough with high swells. The rain caressed my face, and it felt cold. There was no turning back now. I knew I was ready. I had prepared in the lakes of Colorado, and I had swum the distance with my dad next to me. I heard, "You are next. Jump and clear the area, Good Luck, You can do it!"

I jumped doing just what we had decided to do. I held my glasses against my face and stepped off the side. I could hear my dad giving out a tribal whoop as we accelerated to the waiting cold. I think we must have jumped about twelve to twenty feet before hitting the water feet first. As I plunged into the icy waters, I kept going under with the momentum. I must have gone about 6 to 8 feet before my mind screamed to me to stop my descent and head back to the surface. Talk about a massive brain freeze. This is different. In addition to a ten ton hammer slamming on my head, all my exposed skin on my face, wrists, fingers, ankles and toes were almost flash frozen.

Bobbing up from the jump, I wanted to take a gasp of life-giving air. My dad had warned me about this, and I waited just a second before taking that breath. It gave me a chance to figure out where I was in relation to the sea surface and waves so I took a gulp of air rather than sea water. I touched my face to check if I still had my goggles on.

I saw my dad come up next to me; he quickly brought me back to reality. We took a few moments to get oriented and he pointed to the two buildings we wanted to use for sighting. Once we had that sorted out, we stuck out for the Aquatic Park landing 1.25 miles away.

I knew I had to swim away from the boat in order to avoid getting jumped on, but my body was still in shock. As I started to swim, ice cold water seeped into my wet suit drop by drop. Parts of my body started freezing up to the sudden exposure of cold H₂O. It felt like a vampire was sucking every last drop of warmth out of my body. For the first time in my life, I felt like the skin of my face was peeling off.

As I swam, I knew I was slowly getting colder and colder so I knew I had to speed up. In a pool that would be easy but the San Franciscan water does not yield much to you and has a very chilly embrace. The short practice swim I did the day before couldn't have prepared me for this plunge into the water from such a height and the effects of cold after that or the crazy weather or rough waters. The swells were huge, the wind and rain were making the waves very unpredictable. My goggles started to fog up my vision as I stopped for the first time. Apparently, that was a bad idea. As I waded vertically in the water, salt water flooded my mouth. The salty water was horrible. I looked around and the distance gave me a mini heart attack. We were so far from the shore. All I could think about was, "What happens if I don't make it? Would that make me a failure?" then I realized that this was just my first stop! I couldn't give up already! So I pushed on. As swells carried me up and down, I felt like I was a surfer. Because the water was murky, you had to look down and swim. I could have sworn it looked red. Maybe it was the sun's reflection? Wait, where was the sun?

The weather was getting worse by the minute as we continued swimming. I was concentrating on my swimming method. The side breathing also allowed me to keep track of my proximity to my Dad. The large swells were making it difficult to execute my strokes as it was like punching into a liquid wall and each and every impact hurt my shoulders. Regular side breathing was a challenge as you could take a mouth full of the bay if you did not time it right. How could you time your strokes and breathing if the waves were doing the Macarena on you and were totally unpredictable? Should I give up? My grandmother would never give up, and neither would I.

I have moved on to High school now and experiencing new things every day. My swims have been a learning experience of overcoming fears and challenges much larger than day to day life of a pre-teen. I feel a lot surer of myself now that I know what I am capable of under pressure and the challenges. My teenage years are daunting but I know it will not hurt me. I know I have the love and encouragement of my family and community.

I am an ordinary girl with the most normal life and regular challenges like all other children of my age. These swims have been very personal to me. By sharing the lessons learnt with my peers, I have gained strength and pride of being a contributing member of this society and the world.

(Now available on Amazon: http://www.amazon.com/Under-Shimmering-Light-ordinary-extraordinary/dp/1478345616/ref=sr_1_fkmr0_2?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1365701386&sr=1-2-fkmr0&keywords=Undering+the+Shimmering+Light)

Visit: <http://shewli.blogspot.com/>





অকাল বোধন - তীর্থ চৌধুরী

***** এক *****

“চা, চা, গরম চা”, মাথার পাশে অনেকক্ষণ ধরে চাওয়ালার হাঁকে ঘুম ভেঙ্গে গেল শিলারা। মাথা ঘোরাতেই শিলার চোখে পড়ল এক উজ্জ্বল সাদা আলো। বোধহয় কোন স্টেশনে দাঁড়িয়েছে ট্রেনটা। আর তাই স্টেশনের আলোয় কামরা একদম আলোকিত। কিন্তু এতো রাতে কোন স্টেশন? হাতের ঘড়িতে প্রথমেই চোখ গেলো শিলারা।

ঘড়িতে এখন আড়াইটো। পাশের বার্থে সন্দীপ অঘোরে ঘুমোচ্ছে। মাঝে মাঝে নাসিকা গর্জনের আওয়াজও পাওয়া যাচ্ছে। মুচকি হেসে প্ল্যাটফর্মের দিকে চাইল শিলা। প্ল্যাটফর্মের পিলারের গায়ে কি যেন লেখা। হিন্দিতে চিরকালই একটু কাঁচা ও। বলতে পারলেও, পড়তে একেবারেই অক্ষম।

“ওই চায়-ওয়ালা, ইধর আও।”

চায়-ওয়ালা ডাক শুনে দৌড়ে এলো শিলার কাছে। চায়-ওয়ালা ছোট্ট ছেলো। বয়স বোধহয় দশের কাছাকাছি। পরনে নীল রঙের জামা আর কালো হাফ প্যান্ট। মনে হয় পেটে তার অনেক খিদে। করুন চোখে, অসহায় কণ্ঠে সে জবাব দিল, “ক্যা চাহিয়ে মেমসাহেব? চায় দু এক কাপ?”

চা খাওয়ার সময় মোটেই এটা নয়। তবুও শিলার কি যেন মনে হল। “ঠিক হয়, এক কাপ দো।” বালিশের তলায় গুঁজে রাখা পার্সের দিকে হাত গেল শিলারা। পার্স খুলেই বুঝল মুশকিলা “এই তুমহারে পাস খুচরো হয়?”

“নহি মেমসাহেব, চায় তো সির্ফ দো রুপায় কা হয়।”

শিলার হাতে দশ তাকার নোটা একবার ভাবল চা মানা করে দেবে, কিন্তু তারপরে কি মনে হল, ছেলেটার হাতে দশ টাকা দিয়ে বলল, “ঠিক হয়, বাকি প্যায়সা অপনে পাস রাখো।”

হাসি মুখে পকেটে টাকাটা গুঁজে নিয়ে চাওয়ালা দিল ছুটা। শিলার মুখেও স্নিগ্ধ হাসি। ইতিমধ্যে ট্রেন যেন হঠাৎ দুলে উঠল। ট্রেন আবার ছেড়ে দিয়েছে। মনের আনন্দে শিলা চায়ের কাপে দিল এক চুমুকা।

এটা বোধহয় বিলাসপুর ছিল। সেইবার নাগপুর থেকে আসবার সময় ঠিক এই রকম একটা স্টেশনে ওরা নেমেছিল চা খেতো তা আজ থেকে দু বছর আগেকার কথা। সেটা ওদের বিয়ের পরে প্রথম পুজোয় বাড়ি যাওয়া। মজায়, আনন্দে, সেবার সারা রাত ওদের চোখে ঘুম নেই। ‘কখন বাড়ি যাব’, এই চিন্তায় খুব চঞ্চল ছিল ওদের মন। বার বার স্টেশনের দিকে চেয়েছিল ওরা। ‘আর কত দেরি? আর কটা স্টেশন?’ এই ছিল ওদের প্রশ্ন।



বর্ষার মধ্যেও শিলা জল ঠেলে গেছিল এসপ্ল্যানেডে জুতো কিনতো।

শিলার বাড়ি উত্তর কলকাতায়। স্কুল, কলেজ, সবই ওর উত্তর কলকাতায়। সন্দীপ আবার দক্ষিণের ছেলো। হাজার মোড়ে ওদের বাড়ি। ওদের আলাপ কিন্তু এসপ্ল্যানেডে পুজোর সময় বাজার করতে গিয়ে। প্রায় তিন বছর আগে, পুজোর ঠিক একমাস আগে ওদের দেখা লিভসে স্ট্রিটের শ্রীলেক্সার্স দোকানের সামনে। তখন কলকাতায় বেশ জমিয়ে বর্ষা নেমেছে। সেই ভরা

দোকানের সামনে যখন দীর্ঘ লাইনে দাঁড়িয়ে শিলা অস্থির, ঠিক তখনই কানে হেডফোনস্ লাগিয়ে পিছনে কে যেন খুব জোরে গান শুনছে। সেও আবার কোন সাম্প্রতিক কালের বাংলা ব্যান্ডের গান। পিছনে তাকাতেই যার দিকে নজর পড়ল শিলার, তাকে হিন্দি সিনেমার আমির খানের মতনই বললে চলো। গায়ের রং ফর্সা নয়, সাদা। মাথায় তার এক বাঁক চুল আর উদ্দীপ্ত তার দুই চোখ। অন্য যে কোন মেয়ে হলে, প্রথম দেখাতেই মাথা ঘুরে যেতো কিন্তু এ যে শিলা। বড় বড় চোখ করে, মুখ ভেংচিয়ে পিছনে তাকালো। তার কিছুক্ষণ পরেই পিছন থেকে আওয়াজ এলো, “সরি, আমি বুঝতে পারিনি। এত জোরে হেডফোনস্ চলছিল, আমি ঠিক বুঝিনি। আমি খুব দুঃখিত।” শিলা আবার পিছু ঘুরে তাকাতেই, ছেলেটার নির্দোষ হাসি দেখেই বুঝল, মন-ভ্রমরা এবার গুন গুন করছে কানের পাশে। তাই সঙ্গে সঙ্গে চোখ নিচু করে, মার্জিত কণ্ঠে বলেছিল,

“ও কিছু না, আমার তো ভালই লাগছিল শুনতো।”

সেই ওদের প্রথম দেখা আর প্রথম কথা বলা। তার পরে কয়েকবার একসঙ্গে সিনেমা যাওয়া, হাজার মোড়ে ফুচকা খাওয়া, আর দু-একবার হাত ধরে ময়দানে ঘুরে বেড়ান। ঠিক ছয় মাসের মধ্যে ওদের বিয়ে ঠিক হয়।

আজ প্রায় তিন বছর হতে চলল ওদের বিয়ের। নাগপুরেই থাকে এখন ওরা। সন্দীপ এক নাম করা সফটওয়্যার কোম্পানিতে কাজ করে, আর শিলা এক স্কুলের শিক্ষিকা। দুজনেই চলেছে কলকাতার উদ্দেশ্যে পুজোর ছুটি কাটাতো। সারা বছর যেখানেই থাকুক না কেন, পুজোর সময় বাড়ি যাওয়া চাই। সে ব্যাপারে দুজনেই একমত। পুজো মানেই অনেক খাওয়া দাওয়া, আর অনেক বাজার করা। ছোটবেলা থেকেই শিলার সেটাই সবথেকে বড় এ্যাট্রাকশন। কলকাতার নানান দোকানে জামা কেনা আর সেই অজুহাতে বাইরে নানান রেস্টুরাঁয় খেয়ে বেড়ানো। গত বছর ওরা অবশ্য কলকাতায় পৌঁছে বাজার করেছিল। তবে এবার আর সে সুযোগ হবে না। কারণ আজই তো ষষ্ঠী। দেবীর অকাল বোধন তো আজকেই। আজ যখন ওরা গিয়ে হাওড়ায় নামবে, তখনই তো দেবীর আগমন প্যাণ্ডেলে প্যাণ্ডেলে।

“কি হল ঘুমোওনি?” হঠাৎ পাশের বার্থ থেকে সন্দীপের নিদ্রাছন্ন গলায় উক্তি।

শিলার মুখে হাসি।

“তুমিও তো ঘুমোওনি। আসলে আমার খুব অস্থির লাগছে। মায়ের কাছে যাব তো তাই। আবার বাবাকে দেখব। তোমার মনে হচ্ছে না?”

আচ্ছা তুমি বেরোবার আগে তোমার মা কে একটা ফোন করেছিলে তো?”

সন্দীপের ঠোঁটের কোলে হাসি।

“আচ্ছা তোমার কি মনে হয়? মা কে ফোন করে বেরোলেই, মা এর চিন্তা শেষ? আর তুমি তো গতকাল ফোন করলেই, আমি আর তাই করিনি”

কথা বলতে বলতে আবার ট্রেন থেমে গেল।

“আজকে ট্রেন টা খুব লেট করবে মনে হচ্ছে। আজকাল যা হয়েছে!”

শিলা সন্দীপের কথা না শুনে, একমনে বাইরে তাকিয়ে থাকল। হঠাৎ কিভাবে যেন সব কিছু চাঁদের আলোয় ঝলমল করছে। অন্ধকার নিমেষে উদ্ভাও।

“এই এদিকে তাকাও একবার, বাইরে দেখো না। সব কিছু কি সুন্দর দেখাচ্ছে চাঁদের আলোয়। আমার একটা রবি ঠাকুরের গান মনে পড়ে গেল, জানো তো? ‘আজ জ্যোৎস্না রাতে সবাই গেছে বনো’”

“ঠিক বলেছ তো। খুব সুন্দর দেখাচ্ছে। চাঁদকে নয় তোমাকে। তোমার এলোমেলো চুল যখন মুখ ঢেকে দিচ্ছে আর চাঁদের আলোয় তোমার মুখটা কেমন উজ্জ্বল হয়ে উঠছে মাঝে মাঝে। আমার তো ওই গানটা মনে পড়ে গেল, ‘চাঁদ দেখতে গিয়ে আমি তোমায় দেখে ফেলেছি’, সন্দীপ গেয়ে উঠল।

শিলা জোরে হেসে ফেলল। ওরা দুজনেই খুব সুংগীতানুরাগী। গানের মধ্যে দিয়ে কথা বলা ওদের একটা পুরোন খেলা।

“এই কি হচ্ছে? সবাই ঘুমোচ্ছে। এখন গানের খেলা শুরু করবে নাকি? এইবার আমাদের ট্রেন থেকে নামিয়ে দেবে, বুঝলে?”



সন্দীপ ও মুখ চেপে হাসতে শুরু করল, ওপর এর বার্থের দিকে তাকিয়ে ট্রেন আবার ছেড়ে দিয়েছে। খোলা জানলা দিয়ে ঠাণ্ডা হাওয়া কামরার মধ্যে ভেসে এলো। শিলার চুল আবার ওর মুখকে ঢেকে দিল। ওদিকে সন্দীপ এক দৃষ্টিতে ওর দিকে চেয়ে আছে।

“এই শোন, মা এর শাড়ী আর বাবার ধুতিটা সুটকেসে রেখেছিলে তো? আমার কিন্তু মনে নেই।”

“হ্যাঁ, রেখেছি। তোমার আবার কখন কি মনে থাকে বল? গতবার তোমাকে কত করে বললাম, পুতুল পিসিমার শাড়ীটা রাখতে, আর তুমি সেই ভুলে গেলো”

“আমি তাই তোমাকে সবসময় বলি, কলকাতায় গিয়ে বাজার করবো। কি দরকার এত দূর থেকে সব কিনে নিয়ে যাওয়ার।”

শিলা হেসে বলল, “সে অবশ্য ঠিক বলেছে। তবে এইবার তো সময় ছিলে না একদম, কাল তো ষষ্ঠী, পূজো শুরু। আমি তাই নিজের সব কাটা শাড়ী ওখান থেকেই কিনে নিয়েছি। তবে বেশী কিছু কিনিনি, শুধু দুখানা। তবে শোন, এইবার এতো দেড়িতে বাড়ী যাচ্ছি, একটু বেশী দিন থাকলে হয় না? কি বল? তোমার ছুটি একটু বাড়ানো যায় না?”

“সে দেখা যাবে, আগে গিয়ে পৌঁছই, তারপর।”

“তার মানে হ্যাঁ বলছ? মানে কিছু সম্ভাবনা আছে?”

সন্দীপের মুখে আবার হাসি।

“এই দেখেছ, কথা বলতে বলতে, চা টা ঠাণ্ডাই হয়ে গেলা”

সন্দীপের প্রশ্ন, “এতো রাতে চা?”

“কি করব বল, ঘুম ভেঙ্গে গেল, তারপর কিছু করার ছিল না।”

“হুঁ, বুঝলাম। যাই, আমি আবার শুতে যাই। তুমিও এবার শুয়ে পড়, আর তো কয়েক ঘণ্টা পরেই উঠতে হবে”, বলেই সন্দীপ বালিশে মাথা রেখে চোখ বুজল।

শিলার হঠাৎ ওর ছোটবেলার কথা মনে পড়ে গেলা যখন পূজোর সময় ও ওর বাবার হাত ধরে প্যাভিলে ঠাকুর দেখতে যেত। ওর মা ওকে নিজের মতন করে নিত। নতুন জামা পড়িয়ে সাজিয়ে দিত। আর ওর মা বলত, “যখন তোর বড় হয়ে বিয়ে হবে, দেখবি তোর বর তোকে কত জামা কিনে দেবে।” আর শিলা বলে উঠত, “আমার বর কি আমাকে সাজিয়ে ও দেবে মা?” ওর মা তখনই খুব হেসে উঠত। শিলা ওর বাবা মায়ের একমাত্র মেয়ে। অনেক যত্নে মানুষ। ওর বাবা মায়ের চোখের মণি যাকে বলা যায়। তাই যখন সন্দীপ কে বিয়ে করবে বলেছিল, শিলার বাবার খুব অভিমান হয়। শিলা বুঝেছিল ওর বাবার কোথাও একটা ভয় ছিল, ‘সন্দীপ ভালো ছেলে তো? আমার মেয়েকে সুখে রাখবে তো?’

তবে গত তিন বছরে ওঁরা ঠিক বুঝেছেন যে সন্দীপ ওদের হীরের টুকরো জামাই। স্বভাবে, চরিত্রে তার তুলনা নেই। আধুনিক হলে কি হবে, সন্দীপ খুবই সংসারী ছেলো। শিলা সুখী বলে ওর বাবা মাও খুব খুশী। এই সব পুরোন কথা ভাবতে ভাবতে, কখন যে শিলার চোখ জুড়িয়ে এসেছে, ও টেরই পায়নি। ঘুমিয়ে পড়ল শিলা। একদিকে সন্দীপ আর অন্যদিকে শিলা। কামরার মাঝের টেবিলে, সেই চায়ের কাপটা ট্রেনের ঝাঁকুনিতে দোদুল্যমান।

***** চার *****

“এই উঠে পড়ো, হাওড়ায় গাড়ী ঢুকছে, উঠে পড়ো”, সন্দীপের গলার আওয়াজ ভেসে এলো শিলার কানো।

শিলা তাড়াতাড়ি উঠে পড়ল। ঘড়ীতে তখন ভোর সাড়ে ছটা।

ব্যাগ এর সাইড থেকে চেন খুলে, ব্রাশ আর টুথপেস্ট নিয়েই শিলা ছুটে গেল বাথরুমের দিকে।

“ইশ্ বড্ড দেরী হয়ে গেল”, ভাবতে ভাবতে যখন শিলা ওর মাল বার করছে বার্থের নীচ থেকে, ট্রেন তখন স্টেশনে ঢুকে পড়েছে। কুলিরা তখন হাঁক দিচ্ছে।

“সন্দীপ! আমার ব্যাগটা কই? খুঁজে পাচ্ছি না!”

“এই তো এখানে, ধর, ধর, হাতে ধরা তাড়াহুড়ো কর না। সবাই নেমে যাক, তারপরে নেমো ধীরে সুস্থে!”

“তাই ভালো।”

***** পাঁচ *****

শিলার বাবা মা এত ভোরবেলাতেও স্টেশনে হাজিরা উদ্বিগ্ন চোখে বগির দিকে হাঁটছেন।

“এই শিলার কোন কামরা বলো তো? এস্-ফোর বলেছিল না?”

“হ্যাঁ, এস্-ফোরা আমি কত করে বললাম এসি তে আয়া শুনল না আমার কথা। বলল ঠিক ম্যানেজ করবো ওরা নাকি প্রতিবার এমনই স্লিপারেই আসে।”

দূর থেকে ওরা শিলাকে হঠাৎ ভিড়ের মধ্যে থেকে হেঁটে আসতে দেখল। মেয়ের চেহারা অনেক খারাপ হয়ে গেছে। দেখতে তবো শিলাকে এখন সুন্দর। লম্বা চুল, সুন্দর ফিগার। পরনে নীল রঙের হাফা শাড়ী। কিন্তু গলায় কোন গয়না নেই। মেয়ের এই বেশ দেখে মা এর চোখে ভেসে এলো জলা।

আজ মহাষষ্ঠী। দেবীর এবার দোলায় আগমন। দেবী তাঁর পুত্র, কন্যা সহ মর্তে আগমন করেছেন। প্যাণ্ডেলে প্যাণ্ডেলে প্রতিমা প্রতিষ্ঠা শুরু হয়ে গিয়েছে। চারিদিকে উৎসবের মহারোহ লেগে গেছে।

“বাবা ভালো আছো? মা ভালো আছো? তোমরা এতো সকালে কেন এলে? আমি তো বললাম ট্যাক্সি নিয়ে চলে আসবা আর একি মা? তুমি কাঁদছ কেন? আমি তো এসে গেছি!”

“শিলা তুই ভালো আছিস তো মা?” ওমনি মায়ের প্রশ্ন।

শিলা হেসে ওর বাবার দিকে চাইলো।

শিলার বাবা বলে উঠলেন, “আমি বলেছিলাম না? আমাদের মেয়ে পারবো শিলা পারবো ওকে আমরা যেভাবে মানুষ করেছি, ও পারবো আর তাছাড়া সন্দীপ আজ নেই তো কি হয়েছে, আমরা তো রয়েছি। তাই না মা?”

সন্দীপ আজ ছ-মাস হল নেই। নাগপুরে গাড়ী দুর্ঘটনায় ও প্রাণ হারায়। শিলা সেদিন স্কুলে পড়াচ্ছিল। হঠাৎ প্রিন্সিপাল ডেকে পাঠায় ওকে। খবর পেয়ে সঙ্গে সঙ্গে দৌড়ে যায় হাসপাতালো। কিন্তু তখন অনেক দেবী হয়ে গেছে।

পরে শিলার শশুড়, শাশুড়ি, ওর মা, বাবা সবাই পৌঁছে যান নাগপুরে। মেয়েকে কলকাতা ফিরে যেতে বহুবার বলেন ওনারা। কিন্তু শিলার জেদ। সন্দীপ আর ও দুজনে মিলে নাগপুরের ওই বাড়ি সাজিয়েছিল। ওই বাড়ি ছেড়ে ও কখনই আসবে না। পরে ওর বাবাকে বলেছিল, “বাবা, তোমাদের মাঝে সন্দীপ কোথাও হারিয়ে যাবে, কিন্তু এখানে ও সব সময় জীবিত থাকবে, আমারই চারি পাশে আমাকে থাকতে দাও বাবা।”

ছয় মাস পর আবার ওর বাবা মা এর সঙ্গে দেখা শিলার।

“কে বলল আমি একা, বাবা? সন্দীপ তো আছে আমার সঙ্গে, প্রতিটা মুহূর্তে তোমার জামাই কি আমাকে একা ফেলে যেতে পারে?”

মুচকি হেসে বলল শিলা।

ওর বাবার হাতে সুটকেসটা দিয়ে, পিছনে ঘুরে একবার চাইল শিলা, ট্রেনের কামরার দিকে। ট্রেনের জানলায় সন্দীপ বসে রয়েছে। বলছে,

“ভালো থেকো শিলা, তোমার পুজো ভাল কাটুক। এবার না হয় কিছু দিন বেশী কাটিয়ে যেও।”

***** সমাপ্ত *****

শুভ বিজয়ার প্রীতি ও শুভচ্ছা



জ্ঞানপনা চৌধুরী সিন্ধা

ও

ডঃ কৃষ্ণ কুমার সিন্ধা

Light at last

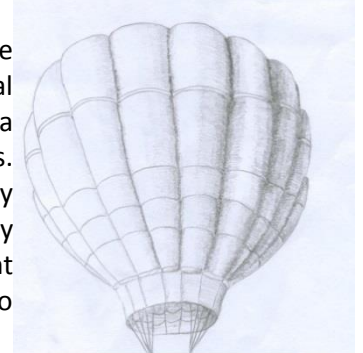
Roshmi Bhaumik

The second Wednesday of June 2013 was a pretty ordinary day for the inhabitants of a mid-sized town in northern Colorado. Piya Sengupta, an inquisitive girl, barely in her twenties, woke up as usual stretching out her hands and letting out a big yawn. She had a slender athletic structure and stood five feet four inches tall. When she walked up to the aquarium to feed the fish, she heard grunting noises as if an animal was exhaling deeply. Her black tresses were coming over her oval face and her dreamy eyes. Moving the long curls away and tucking them behind her alert ears, Piya peered through the blinds. She saw that a rainbow-colored hot air balloon had landed in the street next to her house. She sprinted down the stairs to go outside and look at it more closely. Forgetting about her mom's nightly ritual, she opened the front door and walked out onto the porch. Her sharp nose caught a mixed smell of wet grass, roses and Russian sage. She was admiring the bright colors of the balloon that towered over the roofs of the two-story houses in her neighborhood and ignored the beeping sound that started as soon as she stepped out. In sixty seconds the meek sound morphed into a blaring alarm. This woke up her mom who came home late from her job at the hospital. The neighbors, watching the balloon got startled. Piya quickly sped across the living room and kitchen up to the back door. She punched in the code with fumbling and terrified fingers. "Oh! What was I thinking?" she thought.....

When she got back to the porch, the balloon was deflating and the colored fabric envelope slumped on the dark pavement. She saw Mr. Brown, her neighbor across the street, standing in his yard. The elderly man waved to her. "Hi Piya! How is it going?" greeted Mr. Brown. The question marred her enthusiasm for a bit. She had been trying hard to be optimistic about her life. She was reminded of the day about five months ago when her father left their house. He was having an affair with his secretary. He moved out shortly after this secret was discovered. Before this incident, she believed that he would always be there for her. "He is almost a stranger under the spell of his girlfriend," she reflected bitterly. "Doing good. Thanks!" she said out loud with a forced smile.

A 10-year-old girl with her hair in pigtail, was getting out of the wicker basket with the help of her dad and the balloon pilot. A middle-aged lady was standing next to her, smiling proudly at her brave princess. It brought back a flurry of childhood memories for Piya with her happy family that had been torn apart. Several summers, she had worked with her dad in the yard. He had taught her how to trim the bushes, mow the lawn and pull out the weeds. She also remembered how a few years ago, she went skydiving with her dad. It was easy to jump off the aircraft simply because her protector was watching her. Piya was always eager to follow her father's advice. She thought her life was heading for success under his guidance. This stealthy surprise came from nowhere and robbed the innate trust on which she thrived. Her world of confidence dwindled down like the giant balloon reduced before her eyes.

The thick ropes that were used to hold up the balloon somehow got intertwined in the process. Piya saw that the little girl's right leg was caught in the ropes. Her initial struggle to get it out made it worse and even her parents' help could not free her. Piya spontaneously walked up to the basket. She knew she was good at undoing knots. Many times her mom asked her assistance when the thin gold chains in her jewelry box got entangled. She focused on the knotty mess of ropes for five minutes. Pretty soon, the girl's leg was free. The balloon pilot thanked Piya. He gave her a discount coupon for a balloon ride with their company. Meanwhile, Piya's mom came by to remind her that it was getting late.



Piya barely made it to work on time, with a slight headache, probably from that sound of the alarm from the nether world. She had a part-time job as a server at a local coffee shop. She had been doing this every summer since she was fifteen. Her mom knew the owner of the coffee shop, who arranged for her to work there once a week. On other days she tutored at the Math and Science Learning Center.

Her first customer was a young girl who came with a little baby in an umbrella stroller. She had on a navy blue blouse with a plunging neckline that showed her cleavage and the flower tattoo on the upper part of her right breast. She wore dark eye makeup and her hair looked as if she had just got out of bed. Piya wondered if she had seen her in high school. As the girl approached the counter she was aware of a strong stench that reminded her of frat parties that she was occasionally invited to. It was the unmistakable smell of marijuana. Piya smiled and addressed her. "Hello, what will you have today?" "Um.. a large size spiced latte, please." The girl looked as if she was disconnected from everything around her. Piya kept up a friendly disposition but felt her headache getting worse. She found herself

lacking energy and enthusiasm, just going through the motions of her job. She fumbled and spilled a little coffee while preparing the cup. She decided to take a little break. She made herself a cup of strong Columbian coffee. She picked a chocolate-dipped almond biscotti to go with it. It was undoubtedly the perfect remedy for her headache. "I should not have skipped my morning java in my hurry to get here," she figured. Piya meant to inform her supervisor about her little refreshment but she had to quickly get back on the job. A group of four ladies in pretty summer dresses were waiting to be attended. "Ms. Guzman would surely understand," she assumed. Talking to them, she forgot all about her headache and even letting her boss know about her snack.



Around lunch time, Mr. Brown stopped by with his girlfriend. He smiled at Piya and asked her about her studies. "What are you doing working on such a nice summer afternoon? Girl, go have some fun!" Piya was reminded of her dad. He was adventurous, fun-loving and reckless. On the other hand, her mom was hardworking, organized and risk-averse. Piya used to love playing soccer with her dad in the park near their house. She often felt very lonely without him. "How could he leave me like that?" She remembered the scene that took place before he left. Piya had refused to talk to him about his affair. She was furious. "Don't show us your face again," she had screamed. Her mother sat in a corner sobbing away as if someone had died. "He hardly got a chance to explain himself," Piya reflected. Suddenly, she saw a brawny mean-faced middle-aged man, approaching the counter. "A large white chocolate mocha for me, please" he smiled showing his dirty uneven teeth. Piya got a little scared even though she managed to maintain her professional facade. She handed back a tall cup with a hesitant smile. The man sat down at a nearby table with his drink and shamelessly eyed her for some time.

At the end of the day, Piya went to the store manager, Ms. Guzman, a stern middle-aged lady, to collect her meager paycheck for the month. She looked at the check and was surprised to see the amount was fifty dollars less than the usual amount. She had put in her regular hours this month. The serious woman narrowed her eyes and looked at her coldly. "I deducted those fifty dollars to adjust for your daily refreshments. Do you know that it is against our company rules to consume merchandise on duty? This is your final warning," she pounded on the table. After the initial disbelief, anger swelled in her brain and she muttered a few expletives under her breath. "You cannot deduct fifty dollars for a cup of coffee and biscotti" she retorted irritably. Her supervisor's answer was even more drastic. "Please don't make a scene here. Just leave."

Piya plodded out of the store with a deep sigh. Even though she did her job sincerely, Ms Guzman judged her based on a single mistake. She seemed to be fighting her losing battles all alone in this unfriendly world. Tears trickled down her pale cheeks. She looked at the grey asphalt and saw little dark spots on it. When she looked up a few droplets landed on her face. It had started to rain. The gloomy evening was mirroring her frustrations. In a few minutes it was pouring heavily as Piya drove back home, crying.

Piya pecked on the dinner with little interest. Her thoughts were confused. "How can a person be good and bad at the same time?" Her mother saw her sad face and did not force her to eat more. "Don't worry about it, shona. Things work out in the end. " Piya asked her mother, "Ma, does Mrs. Guzman hate me? But I did not mean to make her angry." Her mom nodded. "I know that you didn't. Most probably your dad did not mean to hurt us either." Piya could not agree with her mom's reasoning. "Ma, you never fight against the wrong. Why? Why don't you file for divorce? You can find someone else to spend the rest of your life with." "Piya, I don't need to. Initially, I thought I lost everything. Then you came and hugged me. I realized I was not looking at the opportunities that life has already offered me. I have someone to live for. I have a job, friends and a comfortable place to live," Dr. Sengupta smiled.

Piya wished she too could find happiness around her." Here is riddle for you, my little one. It is the thing you need most. The funny part is you have to give it in order to get it back. What is it?" Piya needed to clear her mind. After dinner she slipped on a light jacket and went outside for a walk. Staring into the vast emptiness above, she wondered if the answer was "love". She still had one question. "Why do I end up hating the people I meant to love?"

The night was clear after the shower and the air was fresh and crisp. The northern Colorado sky was teeming with tiny sparkles of bluish white, pale yellow and light pink. They spread out in intricate patterns over the great expanse. Piya sat down on a bench in the open park area near her house. Looking at the stars for some time, she discovered shapes that were familiar. Gazing on carelessly, she found the patterns dissolve and melt into something else. It made her wonder if the nature was living and breathing, springing surprises in unexpected ways. "Is that a little bunny

hiding behind a bush?"

She was suddenly aware of some scratchy noise behind her. Piya turned her head sideways and saw a dark form of a tall well-built man approaching the park. There was something rectangular sticking out of his pocket. A cold sweat ran down her spine. "Was that a revolver in his pocket? Could it be that sly-looking man from the coffee shop," her



mind raced. She felt uncomfortable remembering how he had ogled her earlier. "I hope he does not see me in the dark," she feared. She glanced back again and saw the man coming closer towards her bench. In a quick reflex, Piya got up from the bench and started to run as fast as she could. The shadow form stopped abruptly and waited for a few seconds near the bench, as if startled. Piya was running away from the park towards the opposite sidewalk. The street lamps provided a dim lighting, enough to reveal the slim attractive figure of the young girl. The shadow form turned its head in her direction and reacted immediately. The

stranger started to run after her with big strides.

Piya took a turn into a narrow dingy side-road, thinking she would lose him. Unfortunately, the person was fast enough to notice her before she disappeared round the corner. He kept on behind her even though it was pitch dark. The tall man was gaining on her with the long strides. Piya surged forward with a heaving chest and a growing awareness that it was but a lost race. He finally grabbed her jacket collar and turned her around to face him. Piya struggled to free herself but the man gripped her by the shoulders and pinned her against his body. His hold was very strong and she gave in. Exhausted, she rested her head on his chest, she was aware of a strangely familiar perfume. "Is this the perfume I once bought Dad for his birthday? But it couldn't be," she thought. It was strong and provocative. The masculine body made her desirous for a split second. In the next moment she was horrified by her thoughts. "What is happening to me? This rascal could rape me and technically it won't be a rape," she shivered with revulsion.

The strange man picked her up in his muscular arms and started to head back towards the park. A few seconds went by in silence when she imagined the iron grip becoming loose. He finally released her on the ground. At that terrifying moment, she closed her eyes and her mind went totally numb. Maybe he would kill her with that gun in his pocket after he was done using her. Piya's heart stopped in anticipation of the danger that was imminent. She was shaken out of her stupor by a familiar voice nearby, calling her name. "Piya !!! What's the matter with you? Look at me," it commanded her. She opened her eyes slowly. In the dim light of the street lamps, she perceived a pair of dark intense eyes looking at her. The man had a fair complexion, short dark hair and was in his late twenties. He had a partly confused but expectant look on his handsome face. Piya sprung to her feet. "Dan? What are you doing here?" Piya asked. "You had scared the life out of me!! I am surely glad that you are not the crook from the coffee shop."

Dan and Piya were studying in the same college. Dan was in his senior year as a graduate student in the Astrophysics department. Piya was a sophomore in the undergraduate Astronomy program. They first met in the Astrophysical Instrumentation class last fall. For the sophomore, a lot of the theory was brand new. Dan was amused and intrigued by the questions Piya asked Professor Duncan, in class. In a short time, Dan found himself attracted to Piya. One day, Piya came in late and in a hurry to sit down, slipped and fell on the ground. The whole class roared with laughter. Piya's cheeks grew red with embarrassment. She was about to cry when she noticed a kind face smiling at her reassuringly. Later, he spotted her in the library poring over an astrophysical journal. Sitting down at the same table, he made a funny remark about how he once slipped in the mud while playing soccer. Piya burst out, giggling.



They shared general information about each other. Piya found out that his mother worked at the same place as her dad. They also talked about astronomy. Dan suggested, "The best way to learn a subject is to actually work on it. Why don't you write a resume' and apply for a Research Assistantship position in the department?" Piya took this advice seriously. She wrote up her resume' and later showed it to him for feedback. They started to meet regularly at the library to work on their assignments. Sometimes when it got late, they would go have dinner together before he dropped her home. On one such night, Dan saw Piya's father, Mr. Sengupta.

It was a spring afternoon. Dan and Piya were walking together to the cafeteria. The cherry and crab apple trees looked pretty with the burgeoning branches of white and pink. The sky was clear and blue with wisps of white clouds.

The bright golden sunshine made everything happy. But Dan had something unpleasant to share. He cleared his throat and chose the words carefully. "When I got home, last night, I saw your father coming out of my mom's bedroom." Piya was shocked. She thought Dan was lying. Was this an extremely mean joke he had conjured up? She ran off and called her mother. But by then, her dad had already broken the news to her mom. This painful development abruptly ended their young friendship.

"Remember, you gave me your resume few months ago? I showed it to Professor Duncan after he came back from his semester long sabbatical." "What did he think?" Piya hesitated to ask. "Oh, he is really interested! He wants to meet you at 10:00 AM tomorrow." Dan had been trying to reach her for the past two hours without success. Finally, he decided to come to her house and give her the good news. "Have you lost your phone or changed the number?" Piya had left her phone in the car when she got home. She was so dejected that it never occurred to her that she did not have the phone on her. "How did you know to come to here?" she wondered aloud. "Your mom asked me to look around the neighborhood park," he replied. However, Piya could not let her guard down.

She could not fathom why Dan was carrying a handgun in his pocket. May be Dan's mother had sent him to kill her after all. Then her dad will never be able to come back to Piya. The job offer was probably just a bait to distract her. "Um...Sorry, if you got scared but I really wanted you to get the message. I actually have to run back now. I have a submission tomorrow," Dan said scratching his head and turning to go. Piya waited with bated breath as he lowered his right hand on to his pocket and felt for the square article. Her body trembled for a moment when the last shred of strength seemed to leave her. But what happened afterward did not match her expectations at all.

"Oh wait! Here's something to celebrate." Dan pulled out a chocolate bar from his pocket and handed it to her. Piya scrutinized the white cardboard package in her shaking hands. It had a picture of a brown square piece of Swiss chocolate. It looked nothing like a firearm from any angle. The light and shadow had played tricks with her mind. She was silently laughing at her own folly.

By then, Dan had his back towards her and was slowly disappearing into the dimness of the night. "Dan, please don't go," she cried. The urgency of the parting moment made it clear that she desperately longed for his company. His feelings were not too different either. He was looking for an excuse to stay and her request was reason enough. He retraced his steps back to the street-lamp, much to her relief and joy. Piya opened her arms wide and gave her friend a big bear hug. "You are the best!" A broad smile brightened his face as he finally got the reaction he had always longed for. Finding her so close, he kissed her lightly on her forehead. Together, they sat down on the bench, happily munching on the treat.

Dan told to her was that Mr. Sengupta was really nice to him. They had gone hunting and fly-fishing together, a few times. "But he often seems sad and lost. Then he gets into these long arguments with mom over little things that make no sense." It seemed to Dan that her dad wanted to have a reconciliation with Piya. "He really misses you," he added before heading back. Piya ran home to tell her mother that all hope was not lost. Her mom hugged her and agreed. She had good news for her too. She was working on a cure for depression and had discovered the perfect medicine. Her work received official recognition that evening in the national news.



That night Piya went to bed still thinking about the riddle. She found herself high up in the sky in a colorful balloon. She was wearing a sun hat and a flowery dress. It was calm all around. She looked at the tiny houses and roads below. It reminded her of those childhood toys. She wondered if it was her world of imagination build by LEGO pieces. A sudden gust of wind blew away her hat. In an effort to hold on to it, Piya reached the edge of the wicker basket and was about to lose her balance. Fortunately, a hand came at the right moment and grabbed her. This helped her stabilize. Piya turned back and saw her dad right next to her. "Daddy, I thought I had lost you forever. I am so glad you are back. It felt horrible to be angry with you," she smiled at her father. Piya put her head on his shoulder and wrapped her arm around him. "I love you," she said. Her father put his palm on her head and ran his fingers through her hair. "I will always be by your side" he promised. "So why did you leave me earlier?" Piya asked. The old man had a twinkle in his eye. "I hid myself. How else could I know that you truly love me?"

he remarked. Piya's lips trembled and tears of joy poured from her eyes.

When My Voice Is Important

Rohan Baishya (Age: 14 yrs)

To some people my voice...is just the sound produced in my larynx that is uttered through my mouth as speech; but in reality, it is much, much more. My voice has a very clear purpose and the way in which I use my voice can impact every single person or thing around me. It reflects everything about me from my favorite food down to my principles of life. My voice is more than just words; it represents who I am and what I'm like, and more importantly, my goals and desires to make a difference. But before I begin to elaborate on this, let me just say, not everyone listens to my voice, some would rather ignore it, and some people may even just not like it. However, that is no reason to give up on one's voice. I have pride and honor in my voice; my voice has power beyond almost everything in the world, and that is what makes the difference.

People have all sorts of problems, some lost someone or something very dear to them, others have just lost themselves in a confused mess; one person has a broken limb, another person has a broken heart. Everybody suffers...it's part of life...but maybe instead of wallowing in my own grief, why not help others face and conquer their problems? This is when my voice is important; it has the power to encourage someone who is down in the dumps to get back up and strive for happiness. It can give strength and words of wisdom from its own experiences and lessons learned, to friends and family that are in desperate need of support.

And yet, it doesn't end there. The country that we live in is the United States of America. Here we have democracy. And if there is one thing that characterizes democracy, it's that it gives everyone's voice an opportunity to be heard. The government of the U.S. is a people's government; it gives us all an opportunity to be heard. Utilize this chance and make a difference in our country. Vote for what you believe is right and will benefit our nation, or for even what our nation will do to benefit the world as a whole. We all have this power, and it is best to use it and let our voices to be heard. This is when my voice is important.

There are some problems though. Not everyone's voice advocates what is right. Some people are just selfish, and some really don't care how their voice affects other people. Yes, their voice is important as well and everyone deserves an opportunity to be heard, but sometimes, some ideas are often best left as sounds from an individual's larynx. But yet again this is when my voice is important. People can change... and all of us have the power to change each other for the better! Each and every one of us has to step forward, let our voice be heard and set good examples as brothers and sisters. We all have the power to inspire others, who in turn will inspire many more. But the idea is, we do have the power to make this planet a better place, all it takes is unity and a little love, and we can succeed. Everybody has the self-determination to achieve; it's just buried deep... in our larynx. We just need to let out our voices and help out those who cannot hear them. This is when my voice... no... our voice is important.

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My Short Life as an Indian Princess

Krittika Krori (Age: 12 yrs)

I woke up one sunny June morning with sleep still in my eyes. I sit up and look out the window. I see a mesmerizing scene of the city of Mumbai. The Marketplaces are crowded with people trying to see what the vendors are selling. Wait a minute..... that's not my bed. Where's my grandma? I swear that she was sleeping right next to me. I don't see the city when I look out my window. I see wide streets with houses on both sides. I look around me; this isn't the room I slept in last night. This place probably isn't my own flat! I walk to the center of the room, freaking out. I look down at my clothes, I'm not even wearing pjs instead I am wearing an elaborate pink *saree* with anklets. Now I know where that jingling was coming from. I look around the room seeing silk curtains, a halo shaped mosquito net, a big dresser, a bigger closet and there's a temple attached to the room.

At first I think I'm going insane then I hear a knock at the door. I open and find a lady standing there. "Princess, I made you your breakfast." she says, holding out a tray. I look at it, there's fruit, some biscuits and a glass of milk. I grab the tray and sit on the bed. "Who are you?" I ask, eating the food because I really am hungry. "I am your servant and governess" she responds. "You call me *Choto Ma*." she tells me. "You are being very..... unlike yourself." she says. Not like myself? How am I supposed to act then? First, I wake up in a different room and now I have a servant? It was too much for me to handle.

All of a sudden, it hits me. I'm a princess! I guess I should've known before when my governess called me princess but I was too concerned over whether I was going insane or not. It explains the *saree* and the odd room. Oh my gosh! I'm a princess! This means that my parents are the *maharani* and maharaja (king and queen) of the land. I ask my governess if I can see my parents. She says yes so I leave my chamber to go downstairs. The staircase is so long and beautiful to look at, it simply takes my breath away. I try to find my "dad" but instead I hear a bunch of men talking so I hide behind a plant. "You sneak the poison into his food at lunch." One man says. "Then I'll be king!" he shouts. "Okay." The other voice tells him quietly. What? They're going to poison the king so that this man can become king? Why? This is not good at all.

I don't know what to do so I just head to the sitting room where my "father" is sitting. He doesn't look like my own dad at all. He looks up at me and gives me a hug. "*Beti*, did you sleep well?" he asks. I nod yes. "Well then, go see your mother. She wants to tell you about the feast that's going on at lunch. She'll be in the kitchen." He tells me. Where the heck is the kitchen? I see a servant carrying a tray of fruit, so I follow him. I find my "mother" who surprisingly, doesn't look like my own mom at all. She tells me that there's a feast at lunch and that I should go and get ready. I just ate breakfast! I find my way back to my chamber where a bunch of female servants are waiting for me. They help me get dressed and I gaze at myself in the mirror. *Not bad for a princess, I think*

It's already the afternoon when I head down the stairs. The guests are already here and there's lots of partying going on. I talk with everybody and then it's time for the feast. I see a young man serve my father with food and then another older man comes with a drink. "Here drink this, my dear brother." He says. So the man I heard is the king's brother, I mean my uncle. I shout before it's too late. "Stop!" I holler. "Don't drink that!" I exclaim. He's trying to poison you." I say. I show him that the food and the drink were poisoned. "How could you brother?" He asks. "Take him away!" he bellows to the guards. The guards drag him away and he turns to me. "My dear daughter, you've saved me and the kingdom." He tells me. Then the party passes by in a blur..... "Diti, Diti, DITI! Wake up!" My grandma yells. "You must have fallen into a deep sleep didn't you?" She asks. "I guess I did." I reply. I'm in my own room in the flat. I guess what happened was all one crazy dream. I go to the living room to eat breakfast. *It feels good to be home again* I think to myself.



India's Influence on Me

Biswadeep Mukherjee (Age: 19 yrs)

I am what is known as a second generation Indian. This means that although I was born in India, I spent the majority of my life in the United States. Even though I left India, India never left me. It is horrifying for me to see so many second generation Indians become so absorbed so quickly into the American culture. It took time for me to assimilate and while I have for the most part become Americanized, there are parts of me that to this day stay true to Indian culture. I like attending pujas not because of the religious worship necessarily, but because of the dances and other events that happen.

Singing and dancing are an integral part of Indian culture and those are my favorite things to do. I very often listen to Indian songs because of the beat and rhythm and sometimes the lyrics just seem to click with me. I also like singing Indian songs. In the past, I have sung a variety of songs on stage, mainly Rabindra Sangeet. These days, however, as always, I sing songs as a hobby. I prefer Hindi songs to Bengali songs, but when I listen to Bengali songs, I prefer modernized versions of Rabindranath Tagore's songs as their tune is very melodic and catchy and easy to sing without the song itself in the background.

Whenever I sing songs, I tend to sing the song when the song itself is playing, but if the song is incredibly catchy, then I will sing it without the song playing or hum it or whistle it. I find listening to Indian songs very soothing when I'm feeling sad as some are very sad and some are about love and some are about death etc. Whatever the song is about, it usually ends up elevating my mood and often when I listen to those songs, I imagine myself and my friends within the song as the singers.

Growing up, in addition to listening to a lot of Indian music, I also saw a lot of Indian movies (mainly Hindi, but sometimes Bengali). In fact, I learned to speak Hindi from watching Hindi movies. Hindi movies all seem to have one common theme: Love. Whether the periphery of the plot is surrounded by such topics as war, politics, business partnerships etc., the major story revolves some kind of romance between the two main characters. They also involve a lot of dancing and singing, which I like because of the dance moves that the characters do. I also very often picture myself in the role of the hero and keep the heroine the same, but sometimes I will picture who I see to be the perfect heroine and place her in the role. Often, if I watch a really good Hindi or Bengali movie, the movie will teach me a life lesson or change my thought process and force me to think critically about the moral of the movie. My favorite actor growing up was Shahrukh Khan. Nowadays I'm a much bigger fan of people like Ranbir Kapoor and Akshay Kumar. I never really had a favorite actress because I have seen so many actresses and they are all very good at acting.

Even though I've lived in America for about 14 years now and am pretty well assimilated with American culture and American society, I have never lost my Indian roots and will always be proud to be an Indian. It is important to maintain a healthy balance between the culture you were raised in and the one that you live in now. I'm glad I'm an Indian because while there are negative aspects to being an Indian, such as being stereotyped as good at math and science, there are also positive aspects, such as great music and great food. Not to mention the films and actresses!



An unknown companion

Amrita Purkayastha (Age: 13 yrs)



As Bilbo Baggins ran to the prison cells to check on the dwarves, Bobby, Bilbo's older brother, secretly followed behind. Since Bilbo was invisible, Bobby couldn't actually see him, but he could always hear him, for he had excellent hearing.

"Bilbo has no sense at all," thought Bobby as his little brother went from cell to cell to check if each dwarf was still sane. "If he was smart, like me, he would have gotten everyone out by now." Although, what Bobby didn't know was that Bilbo had a plan in mind, whereas Bobby had no idea how to help the dwarves escape.

Bobby had been secretly following them during the whole journey with the dwarf group, since the day they had started. They were on an adventure to defeat the humungous dragon and now they were all in the prison. Bobby had listened from next door as Bilbo got invited to come on the journey, and felt as if they had the wrong Baggins. He knew that Bilbo was not the kind of hobbit to go on an adventure to defeat a dangerous dragon.

Bobby had been the adventurous one throughout their whole childhood. When they were children, Bobby was the one who jumped fences and disturbed neighbors so that he could have the time of his life riding a pony, while Bilbo walked home in his perfect clothes so he wouldn't be late for dinner. So when Bilbo wanted to go, Bobby decided that if Bilbo went alone on the journey without anyone to protect him, he would die. He also wanted a chance to prove to his brother that Bilbo needed him. If Bobby came and saved Bilbo, he would be a hero to the others, and that would be his time to shine. So Bobby followed Bilbo and the dwarves around secretly since the day they took off. Throughout the whole journey, he was walking behind everyone. Sometimes he almost got caught. Once, he was walking, and he got a little too far behind, and got lost. Luckily, Bilbo and the dwarves took a short stop, and Bobby was able to find the dwarves again.

Bilbo and Bobby had the same tree-wood colored hair shuffled in a mess on their heads, and the same big hairy, leathery feet. The only difference was that Bobby was much skinnier and athletic, than Bilbo. Bilbo was rather plump, since all he did was eat muffins and sit around smoking his pipe. Bobby loved Bilbo very much. He just didn't know it because he was always jealous of him since he got the chance to do something that Bobby really wanted to do.

After many days of following the dwarves, Bobby saw that his little brother could not survive on his own. If Bobby hadn't jumped in to save everyone, they would all have died by now. When they had to get through hungry trolls, Bobby had distracted them, and fought one of them on his own when Bilbo and the dwarves were trapped in sacks. He had always been a mystery to the dwarves. They kept wondering why the trolls were struggling, and who had rescued them when they thought they would die. When the dwarves were trapped in silky spider webs, and Bilbo had to defeat the giant spiders, if Bobby hadn't come in to kill the other spiders, and save the dwarves from suffocation and spider poison, Bilbo and the dwarves wouldn't have made it. When the dwarves were caught in the elf territory, they got captured, and were put into prison. Luckily, Bilbo was able to use his magic ring and turn invisible. Now the dwarves were locked in jail cells in an elf castle, and Bilbo was trying to save them.

As Bobby followed Bilbo around the castle, he noticed that Bilbo spent a lot of time examining the water gate. Then, when Bilbo told Thorin, the head dwarf, his plan of escape, Bobby soon understood.

"When the time is right, I will unlock all the gates, and let the rest out," Bilbo whispered. "We can escape by getting each dwarf into a barrel, and travel down the river, until we hit land."

"Barrels!" Thorin exclaimed a little too loudly.

"It will be safe. Don't worry." Then Bilbo quickly disappeared back into his hiding spot. Bobby was extremely surprised. He didn't think that Bilbo could come up with such a brilliant plan. After following the company throughout this whole journey, saving his cowardly brother, he finally saw that his little brother had transformed into a fighter, a hero.

One night, when the night guard fell asleep, Bobby decided to show himself to Bilbo. He came out of his hiding spot, and nudged Bilbo a little.

"Hey Bilbo!" He whispered. Bilbo quickly turned in fear, but then, relief flooded his face when he saw the friendly face of his older brother.

"Uh... Bobby—what—huh...?" Bilbo stuttered. He was so surprised he didn't know what to say. Then, after he collected his thoughts, he gave him a big hug. "I thought I'd never see you again!"

"I came here to protect you so that you would be safe," said Bobby. Bilbo's mind couldn't stay together. His older brother, who has always tried to be better than him in their childhood, has come on this dreadful journey just to protect him! Was he the mysterious one that killed the enemies and saved the company when they were in trouble?

"Listen Bilbo, you don't have much time to escape, so I am going to help you." Bobby whispered. "We are going to escape tonight.

"Alright, so here's the plan. I will open the gate doors after the guards are gone. We can wait until they are asleep, and then take the keys from the guard. Then, we can free the dwarves, and lead everyone to the Watergate," said Bilbo. "We need to get the guards unconscious somehow."

"I have these sleeping pills," Bobby suggested. "I can put these into their drinks."

Bobby ran quietly to the dining hall, and put sleeping pills into the guard's wine, so that they would be unconscious when the dwarves escaped. The two brothers waited patiently for the guards to get their wine. Right when they left, Bilbo woke up all the dwarves and told them to get ready. The guards began to drink and laugh merrily. Soon, they began to feel drowsy, and then they fell fast asleep. Bilbo unlocked all the cells, and led the dwarves to the water gate. Each dwarf got their own barrel, and they stood in a line waiting for Bilbo. Bilbo turned to give his grateful thanks to Bobby. If it weren't for him, Bilbo wouldn't have been able to survive.

If Bobby turned back now to go home, he wouldn't make it for he didn't have a map. The only way was to follow Bilbo and the dwarves, and join them on the treacherous journey. He decided that he had to reveal himself to the dwarves, so after they reached the island, Bilbo gathered his friends.

"I have a secret to tell you," he said. "You all know my brother Bobby, right?" They nodded. "We have an unknown companion." Bobby walked out from behind a tree he used as a hiding place. He looked at each of the dwarves.

"I am now part of the company, and I shall join you for the rest of the journey."



Hinduism

Mita Mukherjee

I would like to direct this article towards the youth growing up in foreign lands, away from Hindu culture and again I would like to welcome comments and questions. In my previous articles, I touched upon the philosophies underlying Hinduism; the basic ideas and practices. This time I would like to address some of the rituals we have, as HINDUS; and some of the auspicious occasions and their symbolism.

The most common word we come across is “puja”. Puja means worship. The letter “PA” stands for papanasana, where “papa” is un-divine actions or sins, “nasana” is exhaustion or getting rid of. “Ja” stands for Jaya, which is victory, or “janmavichheda” which means cessation of cycle of births and deaths—in other words, “moksha”. So Puja (PA-JA) means victory over sins and the ultimate freedom of moksha; (as I had mentioned in my previous article the one and only goal of mankind is to realize the divine, or moksha— and to know that all of us are blessed with divinity within us). Thus puja is that action whereby we evolve spiritually, culminating in the exhaustion of sins and ending punarjanma, or the cycle of birth and death.

The “BRAHMAN” or the supreme consciousness, call it god, truth, self-etc. is formless; however to make it easier for common man to focus on something tangible—so that they can devote their energies on a concrete object, numerous deities, with names and forms have evolved. So we have Brahma, the creator, Sara Swati, goddess of learning, Vishnu the sustainer, his consort, Lakshmi, goddess of wealth, Shiva, the destroyer, his consort Durga, the goddess of strength, plus several other gods and goddesses. Throughout the year usually according to the lunar cycle we have specific times when we worship these deities; now, worshiping or performing a puja, usually involves certain rituals. At first we clean the idol or the picture of the god or goddess we are getting ready to worship; we bring flowers, fruits and sweets and set these before the deity; chandan or sandal wood paste is an integral part of the puja. The priest actually performs a ceremony like bathing the deity, with milk, chandan, ghee and water, and then does the “pran prathishtha” or bringing life into the deity; then we offer the food and flowers with specific mantras (chants).

First we invoke Lord Ganesha, he is the remover of obstacles; and then the priest invokes the god or goddess we are worshipping by chanting mantras that are specific for that deity. Lastly we do the arati with the oil lamps, showing our ultimate devotion to the God or Goddess we invoked. Final part is the visherjan ceremony or the culmination of the puja, which means giving up; we now give up the idol for the ideal; meaning now that we have worshipped the “infinite” by making it “finite” by giving it names, forms and attributes, we have realized the infinite, so now we can let go of the finite. One of the main pujas we perform is “Durga-puja”. Ma Durga is the consort of Shiva; Durga is depicted as a goddess with ten hands killing the demon, Mahishashur—this depicts the victory of the divine over the demon or un-divine, which resides in all of us. The puja goes on for ten days, symbolizing the five senses of perception and five organs of action; the last day is called “Vijaya-Dasami” signifying the victory of our higher self over the lower self. Following this is “Lakshmi puja” goddess of wealth, symbolizing the contentment in the mind, once un-divine qualities have been overcome, the concept of material want drops off, this is the highest prosperity, and wealth does not depend on bank balance, but the happiness and contentment of the mind.

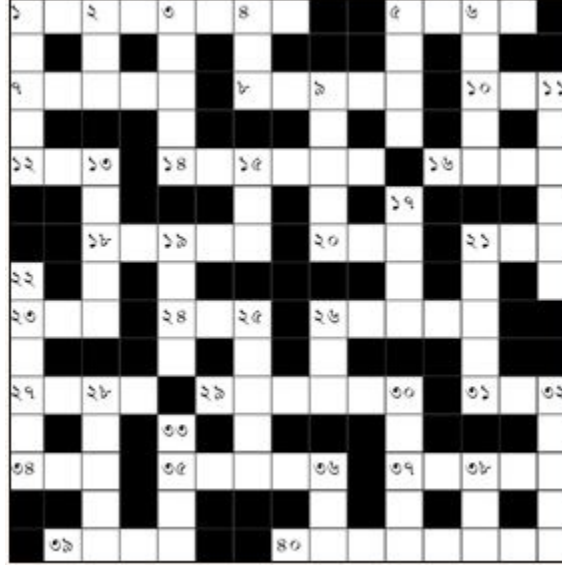
Next is “Kali puja” or “Diwali” symbolic for the concept of constructive destruction—we use great strength to remove the remaining un-divine qualities within us. Final puja is the puja of goddess Saraswati, the goddess of “enlightenment” and creativity; only when the page is totally clean can we draw on it and create something new, similarly when the mind is clear and pure only then can we meditate upon the formless divine and be enlightened. There are several other pujas that we celebrate, for example, Ram-navami, birthday of bhagwan “Sri-Ram, Janmashtami, birthday of Sri Krishna, Sivaratri, and puja for lord Shiva. Depending on one’s inclinations and tendencies, one can choose a certain deity to worship and focus their energies on that deity, and that is the fun of Hinduism.

In conclusion, the number of gods and goddesses we have are confusing, but there is a symbolism hidden in their attributes and manifestations, when we know that we can choose the manifestation we feel comfortable with and, also the rituals do have meanings and when we know the significance, it becomes less confusing.

শব্দ-সন্ধান

পাশাপাশি

- ১ ‘মোদের গরব মোদের আশা
আ মরি বাংলা ভাষা’ –র স্রষ্টা।
- ৫ দখল করা হয়েছে এমন।
- ৭ ভাগ্যের অনুকূল্য।
- ৮ হ্যাঁ – বাচক।
- ১০ পাণ্ডবদের প্রতিপক্ষ।
- ১২ আড়দৃষ্টি, বিরুদ্ধ সমালোচনা।
- ১৪ সদয়।
- ১৬ নতুন বছরের হিসেবের বই।
- ১৮ অদ্ভুতদর্শন।
- ২০ গরিবের সহায়, দীননাথ।
- ২১ আচ্ছন্নতা, তন্দ্রা।
- ২৩ বিহীন, বর্জিত।
- ২৪ জামায় থাকে প্যান্টে ও থাকে।
- ২৬ ফুলের তোড়া।
- ২৭ বেদের যে অংশে যজ্ঞাদি কর্মের
বিধান আছে।
- ২৯ খাওয়াদাওয়া।
- ৩১ রসজ্ঞ।
- ৩৪ যে পৃথিবীকে ধারণ করে আছে।
- ৩৭ ওজন বহন করে যে।
- ৩৯ প্রকাশিত বা প্রচারিত হওয়া।
- ৪০ বাগধারায় ক্ষণস্থায়ী রাগ বা অভিমান।



উপরনিচ

- ১ অপ্রয়োজনীয়।
- ২ বুলছে এমন।
- ৩ ‘দৈশ্বরের মূর্তি আছে’, এই মত।
- ৪ সশস্ত্র প্রহরী।
- ৫ কুকাজ।
- ৬ কারিকরি, কর্মপদ্ধতি।
- ৯ ‘ইন্দ্রিয়গোচর জগৎ-ই সত্য’,
এই মতে আস্থাশীল।
- ১১ অন্যের বশীভূত হওয়া।
- ১৩ আঘাতে আঘাতে ছিন্নভিন্ন হয়েছে এমন।
- ১৫ বাংলায় চতুর্দশ অক্ষরের ছন্দ।
- ১৭ খরগোশের মতো অতি চঞ্চল।
- ১৯ কষ্টেসৃষ্টে কার্যসিদ্ধি করা।
- ২১ আড়ম্বরপূর্ণ।
- ২২ প্রহ্লদের পিতা এই দৈত্যরাজ।
- ২৫ অতি রমণীয়া।
- ২৬ সঙ্গীতের অপরাধকালীন এক রাগিণী।
- ২৮ অনাথ আশ্রম।
- ৩০ প্রচুর মণিমুক্তার আধার।
- ৩২ স্বর্ণচম্পক।
- ৩৩ বিশ সের বা আধ মণ ওজনবিশিষ্ট।
- ৩৬ পেষণ, - রগড়ি।
- ৩৮ ব্যাঘাত।

সমাধান ৫৯ পৃষ্ঠায়



My Paris Journal

Tanisha Roy (Age: 11 yrs)

Since I was a little girl, I wanted to go to Paris and finally that day had come. Whenever I asked someone how they would describe Paris, they would say it is beautiful, but when I went to Paris, I feel it was more than beautiful, it was beyond belief.

Previous Day

I was sitting on my bed learning some French words. It was 11:00 pm and my parents kept telling me to sleep but I was too anxious to sleep. What would Paris be like? Would it be crowded? Questions were overflowing thru my mind. My mom made me put my book away and go to sleep. I eventually fell asleep and took off with my dream. When I woke up, I realized that I was dreaming of Paris.

First Day in Paris

I woke up at 5:30 in the morning because of my eagerness of going to Paris. I woke up my family. We all got dressed then ate a breakfast before going to the airport by Super Shuttle. We went through Security Check then to our flight. The whole plane ride was boring since we didn't have personalized TV and the movie was a boring one. Plus, I have never like plane rides because it gives me butterflies in my stomach. We landed at Washington, Dulles where we took a flight to Paris. This flight wasn't so boring since we had personalized TV. When we close to landing, I looked out the window and the sight was awe-inspiring. There were green shades of agriculture everywhere and there was the Siene River with its beautiful blue swirls running through France. I was a little disappointed when the plane's wheels finally touched the ground. We went through Customs and Security Check before going outside. We waited for our bus for what felt like a generation. We climbed on and it took us to our hotel. There, we put our bags in our room and got fresh, and then we contacted Roshmi Mashi and her family to go with us to Sacré Coeur. If you're wondering what that is, it is a Church for Catholic. It was very beautiful in fact. There were two statues of King Saint Louis IX in front of the Church and much greenery. Inside however, it was..... exquisite. There were paintings of Jesus on the ceiling, telling the stories of Jesus. We saw how the Catholics prayed then lit candles like everyone else. We even tried some of their Holy offering. It was a sweet cracker and another cookie with jelly filling in it. They were quite delicious. We had dinner at an Indian Restaurant and said our goodbye to Roshmi Mashi and her family.



Second Day Paris

Today I decided to go to Versailles of Louis the XIV. I heard that it is very beautiful. Well, let's see what I think of it. It took us a 45 minute train ride to get there so this better be worth the time. When I got there, I got a sound recording that taught us the use of each room. Some rooms had a TV on the walls that went with the sound recordings. I learned that the palace wasn't as big as it is today but overtime, people who lived there built more chambers which made it to its current state. We saw the painting that covered the palaces and took pictures of them as well. This was definitely worth the time. The paintings were war scenes, court scenes, and portraits of people who once lived there. Outside, in the Versailles Garden, there were statues of famous people in French history. There were also beautiful fountains surging out water. The trees were cut into patterns and made into a maze. We spent the whole day there and were quiet drained by the time we went home.

Third Day in Paris

Today, my brother got sick and it was raining cats and dogs so we stayed in and watched movies.

Fourth Day in Paris

Today was the last day I would be touring Paris. Tomorrow, I would be waking up and leaving. Today I decide to go to the one place Paris is known for the most, the Eiffel Tower. Instead of taking a train there, we took a Hop-on Hop-off bus. A Hop-on Hop-off bus is a bus that you can hop on and hop off at any time. We hopped off at the Eiffel Tower sight and went all the way up. The view up there was.....radiant, glorious, anything to describe beautiful. I could see the entire city. It was like I could touch just the clouds. And from up there, it was beyond belief. After the Eiffel Tower we went to the Museum de Louvre. We saw the beautiful works of art there including the Mona Lisa. It was the treasure of Paris. Worth 1 Billion dollars and yet the artist may have never thought it would be worth so much. It was worth the money though. If I could only live in Paris. We visited Notre Dame and bought some souvenirs from a souvenir shop and went home.

Goodbye Paris

I woke up in the morning and took a bath and ate some breakfast before I left my room and to our flight. Well, this trip has surely been something to remember. Farewell Paris.



2013 Milonee Sports

Dr. Biswadip Ghosh

Sporting events always capture our imagination, because of the amount of preparation and effort needed from their participants. Some, such as the Super Bowl are held annually. But other international events, such as the cricket/soccer World cups or the Olympic games are held every four years. Such time lag only builds excitement and expectations for these events. *Will Roger Federer last another 3 years to compete in his 5th Olympic games for that coveted tennis singles gold medal in Brazil in the 2016?* So goes the Milonee Games – an event that was again held on June 15, 2013 after 20 years since the last time they were organized in 1992! In 1992, there had been several races – 100m, 400m, 3-legged race and several individual/group/team competitions like tug-of-war and tennis and musical chairs. The 2013 games featured a 100m race, a lemon and spoon race, 3-legged races for kids and adults, a father and child relay race, musical chairs and antakshari. To offer variety, there was a “knowledge hunt” for kids and a double-wicket cricket tournament for the adults.

These events witnessed some amazing performances that will endure in our memory. The tremendous concentration put on display by the kids in the lemon & spoon race to balance tiny key-limes as they darted over the patio or the endurance of those kids to run uphill and then downhill to complete the 100m dash, were quite remarkable. The adult's 3-legged race was won by Debayon and Ratul with an incredible galloping finish over the last 15 meters. I have never seen such a “*three legged gait*” moving at such speed in any prior 3-legged races! The kid's version of the 3-legged race was a clinical demonstration of coordination as Avishek Ghosh and Aritra Ghosh left the other teams well behind to finish first. The eve of Father's day seemed an apt date to pit fathers and their kids in joint competition for bragging rights in a 100m relay race. The fathers were asked to run uphill and kids ran the downhill lap. The Father and child relay race was won by a father daughter combination (Sonakshi and Saket Srivastava).



(Lemon and Spoon Race in Progress)



(Kid's 100 Meters Race in Progress)



(Adults 3-Legged Race Runners-up)



(Winners of Father and Child Relay Race)

Lemon and Spoon Race:

1. Raj Bhaumik
2. Sonakshi Srivastava
3. Avishek Ghosh

3-Legged Race (kids):

1. Aritra Nag+Avishek Ghosh
2. Nova Dam+Sonakshi Srivastava

100 Meters Race:

1. Aditya Roy
2. Aritra Nag
3. Avishek Ghosh

3-Legged Race (Adults):

- Debayon+Ratul
- Sourin Maiti + Soma Hait
- Saket + Shikha Srivastava

Father and Child Relay Race:

1. Sonakshi and Saket Srivastava
2. Aritra and Amit Nag
3. Neha and Jaydip Bhaumik



(Finish of 3-legged Race)



(Kid's 3-legged Race Winners)

After the races, 10 pairs competed in the double wicket cricket tourney for the 2013 Cricket Champions Trophy. The large, flat, oval shaped patio at the Centennial Center Park provided the ideal venue to play a cricket match. As the seating around the patio filled in with spectators from our Milonee group and other park visitors (most locals perhaps witnessing a cricket match for the first time in their life), the venue felt like a hallowed cricket field like Lords or Eden Gardens. Each pair batted for 3 overs and received a point for each run scored, and negative 3 points for each out. The fielding pairs took turns to bowl an over at a time and collected 3 points for each wicket taken and 1 point for catches and run outs. Two teams (the first team to bat and the last team to bat) distinguished themselves in a batting barrage that resulted in each of them putting up over 49+ runs in their 3 overs (18 balls)! The fact that the last team to bat (Jaydip Bhaumik and Sidhartha) had to hit a 6 on the last ball of the last over to beat the first team (Debayon and Ratul) by 2 points, showed how exciting and close this double-wicket competition was. The points system placed enough emphasis on bowling and fielding so that third place was captured by Krishnendu and Biswadip, whose team did not score a lot of runs but captured the highest number of wickets (5). The efforts of Kaushik Dam in making 3 catches (including a gem of a diving catch onto the concrete patio) at the short cover position were quite amazing. Kaushik (and Sutanu) finished in the top 6 and had the elbow scrapes/scars to show for his brave fielding efforts.



(Debayon & Ratul batting and blasting runs!)



(Jaydip Bhaumik hits a 6 off the last ball of last over!)

Double-Wicket Cricket:

1. Jaydip Bhaumik+Siddharta (51-0 = 51 runs +1wk +1ct = 55pts)
2. Debayon+Ratul (49-3 = 46runs +2wk+1ct = 53pts)
3. Biswadip+Krishendu (28-6 = 22runs+5wk+0ct = 37pts)
4. Arabinda+Joydeep (26-9 = 17 runs+5wk+1ct = 33 pts)
5. RishiRaj+Sishir (30-9 = 21runs +2wk+2ct = 29 pts)
6. Kaushik+Sutanu (25-9 = 16 runs + 2wk + 3ct = 25 pts)
7. Swagata+Sabyasachi (21-3 = 18 runs + 0 wk + 0ct = 18 pts)
8. Ananyo+Tirtho (13-3 = 10 runs + 1 wk + 0 ct = 13 pt)



(Cricket Champions)



(Krishnendu bowling his Magic!)

The park had many interesting facts about geology, science and Colorado engraved on stones and walkways and walls around the facility. The “knowledge hunt” placed the kids in a race against time and themselves to find the answers to 20 questions as fast as they could. The fastest all-correct completion was recorded in 56 minutes by Amrita Nag. The antakshari event was a hit among the music aficionados and won by the combination of Sucharita and Shreyoshi. The final event was musical chairs, where Gayatri held off Kaushik Dam to capture that final remaining chair and claim the first prize. As the chairs were being pulled each round, the sheer joy of landing an empty chair brought out many wide-smiles among the participants (e.g. below photo of Munmun Mukherjee).

In the end, I may say that I am glad that I had a seat to witness these wonderful moments at the 2013 Milonee Games and will surely remember these memorable performances till the next manifestation of the Milonee Games, whenever and wherever they might be organized next!



(Knowledge Hunt in Progress: Participants finding and recording answers to the 20 questions)



(Father's Day celebration: Cake cutting by all fathers)

Musical Chairs Winner:
Gayatri

Antakshari Winners:
Sucharita and
Shreyoshi



(Musical Chair and Antakshari prize winners)



(Musical Chair game in progress)



Memories Of A Lifetime

How often have you thought of climbing the Eiffel Tower in Paris, sailing down the Grand Canal in Venice, cruising the Caribbean, surfing Hawaiian waves, seeing the Great Pyramids of Egypt or strolling the streets of historic London?

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The Garden Island of Hawaii

Roshmi Bhaumik

Imagine you are lazing on the beach, watching the sapphire ocean curve against the pale yellow sands as far as you can see. The blue skies above meet the waters at the horizon. The tall dark palm trees whisper in the mild breeze. The refreshing sip of pina colada soothes your senses and creates a peaceful carefree feeling all around. If this is your idea of a perfect vacation, the place to experience it for real is **Kauai**.

Base Camp at Grand Hyatt:

We chose to stay at Grand Hyatt, Poipu for its family friendly activities. After finishing with the check-in at the front desk, we went to satisfy our gastronomical urges. Our concierge had helped us with the restaurant bookings, ahead of time so that we could enjoy a dinner at Dondero's. The ambiance was quiet and romantic which was much appreciated after the long exhausting flight. Many young couples were enjoying a date night. We sat inside but could hear the tireless sound of the lashing waves and the wind blowing softly through the leaves. The food was refreshing. From the happy look of the others, I got the feeling that the verdict was unanimous. It was 10:30 pm local time when we scrambled to our hotel room. We had planned to do more but were absolutely ready to crash.



Waimea Canyon:

Using the four hour time difference to our advantage, all four of us showered and got ready by 8:00 am. We had planned to hike in and around the Waimea Canyon State park that day. We had our car in the valet parking. A medium aged lady, with a white flower in her hair, greeted us with a smile and "Aloha" and brought us our car keys. She explained that in Hawaii, people say "Aloha" to mean hello, goodbye, love and more. The morning air was fresh and mild. It made us hungry. We had some breakfast bars in our backpack but we did not have anything to drink. We stopped by a grocery store to buy some muffins and drinks. The grocery store was not very big but it had all the things we wanted. The store keeper was very friendly and complimented the girls on their island outfits. On the way out, I saw a chicken, wandering about in front of the grocery store. It reminded me of remote village areas in India.



We took the Koloa Road and then Kaunualii Highway (Hwy 50). On the way, there were a couple scenic lookout points. These areas had reddish soil and uneven terrain, characteristic of the western part. When we took the turn into the Waimea Canyon Drive, our GPS acted up and started to take us the wrong way. The road had a steep slope downward and at one point we started to see the ocean at a distance. Luckily, the driver sensed something wrong and decided to turn the other way. His argument was that the Waimea river cut through the high terrain before it headed down to the ocean. That logically meant that our way should be up the slope and not going down.

It took about 20 more minutes on the Waimea Canyon Drive to get to the Waimea Canyon lookout. This canyon reminded me of the Grand Canyon but of course was smaller in scale. In some ways, that made it more interesting. It felt like we were looking at a zoomed out view and was able to fathom the features of the landscape in totality. The river was visible way at the bottom, between the steep hill like sides of the bank. We could see the water marks, striated on the eroded banks indicating the former courses of the Waimea river over a few millions years.

We saw helicopters flying over the top of the canyon to give the visitors a closer look. Some of formations looked like a elephant's head with a long trunk. Near the lookout, there was a small makeshift shop selling various dry foods, unique to the island. The mango and sweet potato chips were delicious!

Going further north for a few more minutes we reached the Kokee State park. The visitor center had a plethora of

information about hiking trails in and around Waimea canyon and other interesting facts about the area. We saw a model that showed average rainfall in Kauai at various locations.

The place that records the highest rainfall for the past 12 years is Mt. Waialeale, with a record rainfall of 683 inches in 1982, making it one of the wettest spots in the world. We also saw a jaw bone of a full grown shark and a vertebra of a whale. Each tooth was the size of an adult human thumb. The vertebra was about a foot across in diameter. We saw displays of local birds in taxidermic models. We also saw wood specimens of local trees like Koa, Hala, Kapok and Kukui. Some of them especially that of Koa tree, were very dense and heavy. It is there that we heard about the Kalalau lookout point that was only a little way further north on the Kokee road.

Kokee State park had a huge park area with picnic tables under the shade of big trees set on a rolling lush green carpet. It also had clean restrooms at one end of the park making it a perfect place to enjoy a picnic. We also saw numerous chickens and chicks roaming about. We obviously got curious about these wild chickens. The lady at the store adjacent to the visitor center enlightened us on the mystery of the feral chickens, now seen everywhere in Kauai. A powerful cyclone, Iniki, had struck Kauai in 1992. It had destroyed all the chicken coops.

The chickens got released at that time and are running wild all over the island, ever since. We wondered if people caught them for meat. Unfortunately, these chickens were more muscular and less tasty. The story has it that if you boiled a Kauai wild chicken and a lava rock, most probably the lava rock would taste better. Obviously, after hearing that, we started to look at them a little differently.



It was a treat to visit the Kalalau lookout point. It had breathtaking views of the northwestern edge of Kauai, the Na Pali coast. A series of dark steep rocky cliffs jutted out right from the edge of the beaches and contrasted against the unending expanse of the Pacific Ocean. Away from the coastline, the water had variations in the blue color as if from shadows of giant clouds. These were lava flow submerged beneath the ocean, cooling over time to form beds of coral reefs. The beautiful aquamarine color of the waters turned a bright turquoise green near the edge of the land. There was very little vegetation on the rocky slopes especially at the top parts. The colors black, blue and green were spectacularly laid out to create a picture from a different world. We could see the small white tour

boats passing by at a distance. We were scheduled to take the boat ride the next morning. Having seen the trailer, we were charged with curiosity and anticipation about what was in store for the next day.

Na Pali Coast:

Natural beauties have a special appeal to our aesthetic senses. The majesty of Na Pali coast was in a class by itself. The Hawaiian words "Na Pali" literally translates in English to "many cliffs". The northwestern part of this Garden Island is very pristine. There is no road access to this part. The only two ways of approach are through sea and air.



For the benefit of the tourists there are several boat tours and helicopter tours to enjoy this unique landscape, preserving its primordial grandeur. We took a boat ride on the Southern Star. We started early and reached Port Allen in 20 minutes. The boat tour was scheduled to leave at 7:30 am. We were made aware of the possibility of sea sickness and asked to take a medicine for that. Our Captain was a jovial middle aged gentleman with a very relaxed disposition. At his signal, we all followed him across the road to the dock. A big white high-end catamaran was waiting out there. It had leather sofas and tables in the cabin and the back,

restrooms on either side in the lower level, a full kitchen, grill and bar. There was a trampoline right in front of the deck where we could sit or lie down. We were given strict instructions not to jump on it. The reasoning was very simple. We would jump off the trampoline but land in the sea. We left our bags in the cabin and went to the back of the boat and got settled in the cushy sofas. For breakfast there were sweet rolls, fresh cut pineapples and guava juice. Everyone helped themselves generously. The crew members consisted of the Captain, the chef, the snorkel instructor and a hostess.

The service provided was top notch. Within half hour of leaving the coast, we slowed down to enjoy the dolphins playing

around the boat. After a while, the flat shores disappeared in a distance and we could see the black rocky cliff rising close to the edge of the land and the lovely emerald waters.

The top of the cliffs were so high that they were hidden in the clouds. This coastline was the shooting location for many famous movies including the Jurassic Park. Even though we saw a few waterfalls from the vantage point of the boat, the famous waterfall pictured in Jurassic Park was not visible from the sea. We would have to take a helicopter ride to see that. There were areas where we saw green vegetation growing at the bottom half of the cliffs.

There were not tall but provided ground cover and added beauty and color to the steep slopes. We saw beautiful white sandy beaches formed in parts of the shoreline. A few people with special permits were camping out there. At other places the rocky cliffs went right into the sea. The powerful waves lashing at the igneous rocks over the years formed sea caverns.



The catamaran stopped near one of these caves for us to explore the waters in our snorkeling gears. The water was a little murky there with pale white coral formations at the bottom. There were big and small brightly colored fish swimming close by. The variety was amazing. The longer we lingered under water, many more different kinds of fish could be spotted. We spent about half an hour in the waters.

Shortly after climbing back on the boat, warm lunch was served to the hungry tourists. On the way back, the boat picked up speed. The waves were bumping against the bottom of the catamaran with load thuds at times. We got back to Port Allen at around two o'clock.

Mahalo:

We were just getting a hang of the laid back island attitude when it was time to go. The sign at the airport said "Mahalo (thank you), till we meet again..." Leaving the Garden Island was difficult after the fun filled week. Our vacation was We learnt about the age old customs and traditions of the island people, the dances, the music, the food, the hospitality, the gratitude and love. It broadened our views of the world. Mother Nature showed us her bounty and power. Without visiting Kauai, it is hard to imagine such picturesque landscapes even existed in reality!



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Odissi, a Traditional Dance

Swagata Banerjee

Dance is often described as a rhythmic movement of the body. It is a non verbal conversation performed in many cultures in various ways; sometimes as an exercise, sometimes as a social interaction or sometimes as a visual form of art. For some, dance is an expression of joy, happiness and fulfillment. India is a land of diversity and her diverse nature can be witnessed in the dance forms. India has a rich tradition of classical dances. There are majorly eight codified classical dance forms- Kathak, Bharatnatyam, Odissi, Manipuri, Kuchipudi, Kathakali, Mohiniyattam, Sattriya.

With the joy of learning three classical dance forms- Kathak, Bharatnatyam and Odissi, I realized dance has always been a passion for me. But, learning Odissi and getting connected to the lost tradition has surely taken me to a new world; the world of artistry, grace, sculptures and emotions. The 22 years of journey with dance has inclined me to go deeper and deeper into its root.

Odissi originated about 2000 years ago in the temples of Odisha, India. The breathtaking carvings of the temples depict the different postures of Odissi dance. It remains a mystery whether the dance is inspired by the timeless beauty of the temple sculptures or the sculptures depict the eternal grace of the dancers.

The first reference of this majestic dance form was in Bharat Muni's 'Natyashastra'. 'Natyashastra' is the oldest surviving text on Indian classical dance, music and drama. It is of immense importance to the cultural history of India as this is the only text which gives detailed information on every aspect of dance, music and drama such as stagecraft, make-up, instruments. In Natyashastra, this art form was known as 'Odramagadhi'. Later in the 20th century the dance acquired its present name 'Odissi'. The earliest evidence of the dance is preserved in the embossed relics of the Ranigumpha caves near Udaygiri. The dexterous statues of dancers are magnificently stored in the walls of the temples which approximately date back to the 2nd century B.C.E.



Odissi gives an impression of soft and sensuous movements. However, the movements are extremely challenging and rigorous to execute with immense control and precision. Body balance, intricate footwork and torso movements are the most important features of the dance. The detailed study of the body positions, hand and feet positions and torso movements are elaborated in 'Abhinaya Chandrika' written by Maheswara Mahapatra.

Odissi was performed by three categories of dancers: Mahari (the temple dancers), Nartaki (the royal court dancers), and Gotipua (young male folk dancers). Mahari dance was performed by devadasis of the temples who used to dedicate their dance to Lord Jagannath. The art of Odissi was developed majorly by them. For centuries Gotipua dance was performed by young male dancers who dressed up as females to praise Lord Jagannath and Lord Krishna. Gotipua dancers had extraordinary flexibility and performed acrobatics inspired by the life of Radha and Krishna. The dance tradition of Nartaki was developed in the Royal court.

During the Mughal period, Odissi was an extremely respected and dignified form of art. But the status of the dance declined during the British rule in India. The entire dance form was reconstructed and revitalized during the post independence period. In the post independent India many scholars and noted dance practitioners formed a group called "Jayantika" and started to publicize the dance positively. Through the combined efforts of all the dancers and scholars,

Odissi regained its classical status. The dance became more famous with the immense efforts of the iconic teachers like Guru Pankajcharan Das, Guru Kelucharan Mahapatra, Guru Mayadhar Raut and others.



Odissi Music: Oriya music is different from Hindustani and Carnatic classical music having been influenced by Buddhist and Tantric music. Later on it developed into Odia Sangeet. The musical instruments consist of 'Pakhwaja', 'Bansuri' (bamboo flute), 'Manjira' (metal cymbals), 'Sitar' and 'Tanpura'.

Odissi repertoire consists of five sections Mangalacharan, Batu, Pallavi, Abhinaya and Mokshya.

Mangalacharan is the beginning item of Odissi dance where the dancer shows respect to the Mother Earth, audience and the Guru (tutor).

Batu is performed in honor of Lord Shiva. The dance piece entralls me and takes me to the sculpturesque poses of the temples which depict the different instruments used in Odissi. The dance postures, hand gestures (Mudras) bring out the correlation between the dance and the dance sculptures ornamenting the temples. Batu consists of intricate body balance, footwork and expression and is thus considered as the toughest dance piece in Odissi.

'Pallavi' is a pure dance with elaborated torso movements, eye movements and complex footwork. While performing pallavi, I feel like it is just like blooming of a flower. As a flower gradually starts blooming from a bud, the dancer also starts blossoming upon the stage with a series of stylized symmetrical postures and complex footwork. Pallavis are set to definite tunes or ragas. The beautiful body movements and footworks are very eye catching.

'Abhinaya' is an expressional dance. In this dance piece, the dancer narrates a story by using facial expressions and hand gestures (Mudras). Usually, 'Abhinaya' in Odissi dance is based on different life stories of Lord Krishna. Narrating these stories through dance takes me to the world of fairy tales.



Mokshya Mangalam is my favorite dance piece. The ultimate aim of life is believed to attain salvation or Mokshya. Art is one of the greatest ways of attaining salvation. Here, the dancer is released from all earthly attachments and become united with God. This dance is performed in fast tempo as a prayer for everyone's peace signifying the achievement of salvation.

The fame of Odissi has reached far and wide through the performances of stalwarts like Madhvi Mudgal, Sanjukta Panigrahi, Sonal Mansingh and many others. The style is continuously evolved through traditional format, group choreography and dance dramas. Odissi is truly a celebration of human beauty through incredible grace and astonishing movements offered joyously as a prayer to the Divine.



Visiting the South American Cone

Dr. Biswadip Ghosh

Anyone familiar with a world atlas knows the shape of the South American continent is similar to an ice cream cone. So, *what is the best part of an ice cream cone?* Well it is the ice cream filling that always settles at the bottom of the cone. All the flavors accumulate there, just waiting to be enjoyed. *But alas!* To reach the bottom of the cone means working tediously through the entire top part of the cone first. The same holds for travelling to the bottom of the South American cone – usually a long 7-8 hour flight from a gateway city such as Bogota or Caracas or Lima before one can begin to experience the incredible places down at the bottom. So, my journey began in Lima, Peru after a 7 hour flight covering 3600 miles from Denver. But my goal was to visit the glaciers and alpine lakes in Patagonia. Reaching that was yet another 3000 more miles from Lima. To conquer such distances and begin to enjoy the goodies down at the bottom of the cone, one needs an “*Open Jaw*”, literally. No, I do not mean stuffing the entire cone into one’s opened jaw. The “*open jaw*” is airline jargon for an itinerary that has the same starting and ending points but the round trip could encompass two cities in between. So for my trip, it translated to flying from Lima to Buenos Aires, Argentina and flying back to Lima from Santiago, Chile. This allowed me the opportunity to make a land-based border crossing between Argentina and Chile and fully experience the Lake District between Bariloche, Argentina and Puerto Varas, Chile.

So, after a long 7 hour flight, I arrived in Buenos Aires, where soccer legend, Diego Maradona is a living god. His face is plastered all over the walls and I encountered dozens of his statues and look-a-like costumed imposters, willing to give me *his* autograph! Buenos Aires is built truly on a grand scale with wide boulevards, lovely city parks and European styled palaces. Buenos Aires has the widest street in the world – “Avenue 9 de Julio”, the name is in honor of Argentina’s Independence Day, July 9, 1816. The avenue has up to seven lanes in each direction and is flanked on either side by parallel streets of two lanes each. There are also two wide medians between the side streets and the main road. The Torre monument, Retiro railway station, the Recoleta, Teatro Colon, the elaborate gravestones in the Recoleta cemetery and the pink presidential palace and uncommon looking library building stand out as unique elements of Buenos Aires’ architecture. The city’s proximity to the Atlantic ocean on the east side and the wide deltas of the Plate river to the north, give the city a breezy feel that make it so wonderful to explore the Tango Halls and the Rodizio cafes at night.

On the other side of the Plate river from Buenos Aires is Uruguay, which offered a very contrasting and bucolic experience, which I felt during my visits to Colonia and Montevideo. The Uruguayan side is rustic with un-spoilt beaches and fishing villages still habituated by fishermen, reminding me of the laid back spirit of Latin America. I also visited the “*Porteno*” (nickname for residents of Buenos Aires) get-a-way town of Tigre, north of Buenos Aires to experience the densely forested delta region of the Plate river. Many “*portenos*” have second homes in Tigre and use the town as a weekend resort to escape the hustle and bustle of the city.

From Buenos Aires, I headed south to the frontiers of Patagonia – the town of El Calafate. As my airplane was circling to land at the airport, all I could see was vast stretches of white ice and snow covered fields. The barren and frontier feeling of the town of El Calafate made it seem as if I had reached the edge of civilization. I visited numerous glaciers around Lake Argentino on a full day boat ride. Among the many glaciers I visited, the Perito Moreno glacier was the largest single one (also the largest glacier in the world). The beautiful and peaceful blue ice faces of these glaciers hide the activity that is constantly in process. It must be experienced to see the blocks of ice break and drop into the lake below to witness how a very, very old glacier can indeed change at such a rapid rate. Perito Moreno is not just another “*ordinary piece of ice*”, it is truly remarkable in size (over 150 feet high walls and several miles in length and width) and activity. Visiting the Perito Moreno glacier changed my outlook similar to a visit to the Grand Canyon or any other natural wonder. To celebrate, a complementary glass of champagne is included in the price of admission to the glacier site and is offered at the visitor center.



Clockwise from top left: Piramide on Ave de 9 Julio in Buenos Aires; Perito Moreno glacier; Lake District; Valparaiso, Chile; Santiago, Chile and Colonia, Uruguay.

From there I went to the Lake District to the town of Bariloche. The town is surrounded by alpine lakes and steep, snow-capped peaks of the Andies Mountain range. From there, I started the journey to Puerto Varas, Chile on the “*Cruce Andino*” over 2 days using a series of 3 bus rides inter-spaced with 3 boat rides crossing three lakes - the Nahuel Huapi lake, Frias lake and Todos los Santos. The scenery was truly amazing as we were in the middle of winter with lots of snow on the peaks. The overnight stay at a lodge in Peulla, Chile at the mouth of a mountain pass was stunning. The Natura lodge had a sitting room with a 20 foot by 15 foot window overlooking native pine forest, which turns out, provided some of the inspiration for our current residence on Angie Court!

After completing this unique cruise (Cruce Andino), I reached my last stop in the South American Cone – Santiago, Chile, which is in the foothills, a mere 50 miles from the Andies range. Unlike Denver, where the mountains are always to the west of the city, in Santiago, the mountains are always to the east of the city! Visiting Pinochet’s palace, the relics of the coup of Salvadore Allende and the districts of the Providencia, Bellavista and the charming old district of Barrio Brasil are a must-see in Santiago. I also made a trip to the coastal cities of Valparaiso and Vina Del Mar. Valparaiso still retains the character of an old Spanish port and the seafaring culture. The city is laid out on a hill and strolling along the old streets leads to incredible vistas and visible opulent remnants of the old glory days, when it was known as the “*Jewel of the Pacific*”, before the Panama Canal led to a reduction in ship traffic and dealt a major blow to the city’s finances.

There are several wineries in the Maipo Canyon foothills along Santiago and I visited the Concha y Toro winery, which is the largest producer of export wines in Chile. What can be more rewarding to culminate my trip enjoying a glass of merlot with a cut of pampas steak on a restaurant terrace overlooking the Maipo Canyon? These are the memories of a truly amazing trip venturing deep down into the cone of South America.

My Fantastic field trip to Snow Mountain Ranch

Medha Pan (Age: 11 yrs)

Before the Trip

Hi, my name is Medha Pan. Now I go to 6th grade, and I want to tell you about my amazing field trip (Outdoor ED) to the YMCA Snow Mountain Ranch Winter Park, Colorado that was 3 days and 2 nights long. I was very excited as it was my first multi-day field trip away from my parents. It was from June 5-7, 2013, I was still in 5th grade, and my teacher was Mrs. Moller. Mrs. Moller gave us a list of things to pack in our suitcases, such as some clothes, some soap, and a pair of hiking shoes among several other things we might need during the trip. Sadly, we were not allowed to bring electronics on the trip other than small cameras. Then, she gave us a list of what to bring on the trail, such as sunscreen, a water bottle, a hat, and a pair of sunglasses among with some other things in our daypack. Since we were going to be 10,000 feet above sea level, it was important to drink lots of water and to put on sunscreen. Lastly, she told us to come to school at 8:30 am on June 5th so that we can get on the buses early before school starts and we can reach our destination before lunch, because it takes 2 hours and 15 minutes to get there.

First Day - June 5, 2013 Wednesday

On June 5, I woke up excitedly, got ready, ate breakfast, and got in the car. I was sad to leave my parents for the first time, but my mom told me that I will have so much fun that I will forget about them, and before I know it the trip will be over. My mom drove me to school and I dropped of my packed suitcase and daypack on Bus #3. I said bye to my mom and headed off to class. In the class we discussed how excited we were to go to Outdoor ED. Before we got in the bus, Mrs. Moller handed out the necklaces that we made before, each with our name and academic group we were in.

After receiving our necklaces, our journey began. We got on our designated bus and got to pick our seats. My friend Emarie and I sat together. We started off to Snow Mountain Ranch with a convoy of three buses each full of 5th graders. The experience on the bus was very neat. The seats were well cushioned; there was a bathroom, and also a TV so that we would not get bored. On the way there, Emarie and I ate snacks, watched the movie "The Lorax", talked, and drew pictures. We all got very excited when we finally reached there.

First, we unloaded our suitcases and our daypacks from under the bus. We then went inside our lodge where we would stay, The Silversage Lodge. Sadly, we were not allowed to go inside our rooms. Instead, we put our luggage in the basement of the lodge. We only took our 100% disposable lunches and our daypacks to the picnic area outside. I had a lunchable which contained a sub sandwich, some pringles, Hershey's kisses, and some water. Along with that I had some cherries and some yogurt. As we finished we each filled up our water bottles and put on sunscreen. After that we found out our groups and group leading teachers. The name of our group was Bison and there were 7 girls and 10 boys. The guide from Snow Mountain Ranch for our group was Mr. Jerry. The teacher from my school was Mrs. Moller.

Then, all the groups split up and started their activities. Our first activity was a 6 mile (round trip) hike to the Beaver Dam. Since this activity was really long, we didn't do any other activities for the day. On our way, we passed a farm. In that farm there were sheep, chicken, horses and cows. When we reached the 3 mile mark, we began to look for beavers. Sadly, we didn't find any, but we did find trees that were cut in half and had beaver teeth marks on them. After exploring for a while, we started our 3 mile hike back. Since we were going downhill, we reached our destination quicker. By the time we reached our lodge in was siesta time. We brought our suitcases upstairs (the girls stayed in the 1st floor and the boys stayed in the 2nd floor). We rested and got ready for dinner. At dinner I ate macaroni and cheese and salmon, with some powerade, some salad, and some jello. Next it was rec. time. Rec. time was for an hour and we had the choice of the pool or kiva, and for that night and next I chose kiva. In the kiva there was roller skating, basketball, dodge ball, volleyball, ping pong, and soccer. I did a little bit of volleyball, dodge ball, and roller skating.

After that, it was nearly 9 pm and it was time to go to go to bed. My roommates were Erin, Lexi, Emarie, and Savannah. We all got dressed, brushed our teeth and went to bed. The teachers came into our rooms and said goodnight. After closing the doors, they put tape on outside, so if we opened our doors, the tape would break, and in the morning the teachers would know that we opened our doors.

Second Day - June 6, 2013 Thursday

We woke up, brushed our teeth and got ready for breakfast. I ate biscuits and gravy, with fruit and milk. After that, we filled our water bottles and put on sunscreen. For the first activity, we went to an old fort that was built in the 1950's. Our next activity was archery. Out of 10 shots I got 7. Then, it was time for lunch. I ate rice with hungarian chicken, salad, and powerade. After lunch it was rock climbing time. There were 4 levels, and I completed 3 of them. Our last activity was a game of jail break. After that, it was siesta time. We rested and got ready for dinner. I had pasta and shrimp with some salad, a cookie, and powerade. Once again it was rec. time after that, my friends and I did ping pong and volleyball. Since it was the last night in Outdoor ED, we had a campfire. During the campfire we had smores and told scary stories. After the campfire it was time to go to bed. We headed back to the lodge, brushed our teeth, and the teachers taped our doors at nearly 10:00 pm.

Final Day - June 7, 2013 Friday

On the morning of the last day, we woke up early to brush our teeth, get dressed and to get packed. Then it was time to for breakfast. Before breakfast we put our suitcases in our designated buses. For breakfast, I had pancakes and sausages with fruit and milk. We put on sunscreen and filled up our water bottles for our last activity in Outdoor ED, which was a game of camouflage in the woods. I got in 2nd place and my friend Lauren got in 1st. After that it was time for lunch. I had a sandwich with chicken noodle soup and salad and coke (we were not allowed to drink soda there but since we were the "best group" there so far, we were allowed). We then said bye to the YMCA Snow Mountain Ranch, got on our buses and drove back home. On the way back we watched the movie "UP" in the bus.

When we reached our school, we were very sad to leave Outdoor ED, but happy to see our parents. We said bye to everyone and went home. For the next two days I was so tired that I slept most of the time. For the very little time that I was awake, the only thing I thought about was my exciting field trip.



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মেথি চিকেন ড্রাই নিপুণিকা চৌধুরী

উপকরনঃ

চিকেন – ১/২ কেজি
আদা-রসুন বাটা – ১ চামচ
মেথি বাটা – ১ চামচ
মেথি – ১/২ চামচ
লাল লক্ষা গুড়ো - ১/২ চামচ
নুন – ১ চামচ
ডিম – ১
ভিনিগার – ১ বড় চামচ
কর্ন ফ্লাওয়ার – ১ বড় চামচ
টম্যাটো কেচাপ - অল্প

প্রণালী:

- ১) প্রথমে ১/২ কেজি চিকেন, নুন, ভিনিগার, আদা-রসুন বাটা, মেথি বাটা, লাল লক্ষা গুড়ো, ডিম, কর্ন ফ্লাওয়ার দিয়ে ম্যারিনেড করে ২-৩ ঘন্টা ফ্রিজে রেখে দিন।
- ২) এরপর চিকেন এর টুকরো কে গরম তেলে ভেজে নিন।
- ৩) চিকেন ভাজা হয়ে গেলে, চিকেন সরিয়ে রেখে দিন।
- ৪) এইবার গরম তেলে মেথি দিয়ে দিন।
- ৫) পড়ে থাকা চিকেন এরপর ওই তেলে ঢেলে দিন।
- ৬) সব শেষে একটু টম্যাটো কেচাপ দিয়ে নাড়িয়ে নিন।
- ৭) এইবার গরম গরম মেথি চিকেন স্ন্যাক্স পরিবেশন করুন।

With Best Wishes from

ইনস্ট্যান্ট চকোলেট মুস্ নিপুণিকা চৌধুরী



উপকরনঃ

মার্শমেলো – ৩ কাপ
ডার্ক চকোলেট চিপস – ১ ১/২ কাপ
হেভি হুইপ্লিং ক্রিম – ২ কাপ
মাখন – ১ স্টিক
চিনি – ২ বড়ো চামচ
ভ্যানিলা এসেন্স – ১/২ চামচ
স্ট্রোবেরিজ্ অথবা চকোলেট – সাজাবার জন্য

প্রণালী:

- ১) একটি নন স্টিক পাত্রে, মার্শমেলো, ডার্ক চকোলেট চিপস ও মাখন ঢেলে অল্প আঁচে গলিয়ে নিন।
- ২) এই চকোলেট মিশ্রণ টি নাড়তে থাকুন যতক্ষণ পুরো মাখন আর চকোলেট মিশে গিয়ে থাকে।
- ৩) লক্ষ রাখবেন যেন মিশ্রণে কোন সাদা দানা পরে না থাকে।
- ৪) এইবার একটি মিক্সি বা ফুড প্রসেসরে হেভি হুইপ্লিং ক্রিম, চিনি এবং ভ্যানিলা এসেন্স দিয়ে, একটু ঘন মসৃণ ক্রিম বানিয়ে নিন।
- ৫) লক্ষ রাখবেন ক্রিমে যেন বেশী জলিয় না হয়।
- ৬) এরপর গরম চকোলেটের মিশ্রণ, ক্রিমের সঙ্গে সাবধানে, আলতো করে মিশিয়ে নিন। মিশ্রণটি ফ্যাটাবেন না।
- ৭) এইবার ছোট ছোট বোল্‌স এ এটি ঢেলে দিন।
- ৮) এইবার পাত্রগুলি কে ফ্রিজের মধ্যে ১ ঘন্টা রেখে দিন।
- ৯) ১ ঘন্টা পরে, পাত্রের অপরে হুইপ্লিং ক্রিম, চকোলেটের টুকরো বা স্ট্রোবেরিজ্ দিয়ে সাজিয়ে পরিবেশন করুন।



শসা বাটা দিয়ে আলুর দম

মল্লিকা চন্দ্র

উপকরনঃ

শসা – ২ (কোরানো)
আলু – ৫০০ গ্রাম (ছোট আকার)
পেঁয়াজ – ২ (বড় আকারের হলে ১)
রসুন বাটা – ১ চামচ
টক দই – ২ চা চামচ
জায়ফল/জয়ত্রী – ১ চামচ (গুড়ো)
নুন ও চিনি – স্বাদ মত
সাদা তেল – পরিমাণ মত
ঘি – ১ চা চামচ

প্রণালী:

- ১) আলু সিদ্ধ করে রাখুন।
- ২) কড়াইতে তেল দিয়ে, রসুনবাটা এবং পেয়াজ বাটা দিয়ে টিমে আঁচে নাড়ুন।
- ৩) সুগন্ধ বেরলে টক দই (ফেটানো), নুন, চিনি দিয়ে দিন।
- ৪) তারপর সিদ্ধ আলু কড়াইতে দিয়ে কষিয়ে নিন।
- ৫) প্রয়োজন সামান্য জল দিন।
- ৬) তারপর শসা কুড়ানো, জায়ফল-জয়ত্রী গুড়ো আলুর অপর ছড়িয়ে দিতে হবে।
- ৭) আরও কিছুক্ষণ নাড়াচাড়া করে, নামিয়ে নিন।
- ৮) এরপর ওপরে ঘি ছড়িয়ে দিন।
- ৯) এবার গরম গরম সাদা ভাতের সঙ্গে পরিবেশন করুন।



পনির ধোকা

মল্লিকা চন্দ্র

উপকরনঃ

ছোলার ডাল – ২৫০ গ্রাম (বাতা)
পনির – ২৫০ গ্রাম
জিরে ভাজা – ৫০ গ্রাম (গুড়ো)
টক দই – ২০০ গ্রাম
সাদা তেল – ২০০ গ্রাম
নুন ও চিনি – স্বাদ মত
আদা বাটা – ৪ চা চামচ
রসুন – ২ কোয়া (গোটা)
কাঁচা লঙ্কা – ২ (গোটা)
টম্যাটো – ১/২ কাপ (পিউরী)
হিং – সামান্য
গরম মশলা – সামান্য (গোটা)
তেজপাতা – ২
ঘি – ১ চা চামচ

প্রণালী:

- ১) ছোলার ডাল সারা রাত ভিজিয়ে রাখুন।
- ২) পরের দিন, রসুন ও কাঁচা লঙ্কা দিয়ে ডাল বেটে নিন।
- ৩) এরপর ছোলার ডাল বাটার সঙ্গে নুন, চিনি, হলুদ গুড়ো, ভাজা জিরে গুড়ো দিয়ে ভাল করে মেখে নিন।
- ৪) এবার একটি কানা উঁচু পাত্রে সেটা ছড়িয়ে দিন।
- ৫) ঠাণ্ডা হলে বরফির আকারে কেটে নিন।
- ৬) এবার কড়াইতে তেল দিয়ে ধোকা ও পনির ভেজে নিন।
- ৭) আবার কড়াইতে তেল দিয়ে আদা বাটা, হিং, গরম মশলা গোটা, তেজপাতা ফোড়ন দিন।
- ৮) সুগন্ধ বেরলে ফেটানো দই, নুন, চিনি ও টম্যাটো পিউরী দিয়ে ভাল করে কষুন।
- ৯) ভাল করে কষানো হয়ে গেলে ধোকা ও পনির সামান্য গরম জল দিয়ে একটু সময়ের জন্য রেখে নামিয়ে রাখুন।
- ১০) এরপর ওপরে ঘি ছড়িয়ে দিন।
- ১১) এবার ওপরে জিরে ভাজা গুড়ো ছড়িয়ে গরম গরম পরিবেশন করুন।



FOB - FRESH OFF THE BOAT

Mita Mukherjee

Some of us, who came to this country (USA) in the late sixties or early seventies from India, have some embarrassing stories to relate, which, now looking back seems strange and funny. I think young people who come these days are so well informed in this information ridden world have nothing to fear, whereas when I first came to this foreign country, I was a nervous wreck; I guess the term “FOB” came from all the immigrants who used to land at Ellis Island, and brought their cultures and language and ways and had their own quirks.

I would like to share a couple of those stories with you.

My husband had already started his Master’s program in the University of Tulsa, Oklahoma.

I was finishing my master’s degree in Kolkata and was supposed to follow him in the month of September. On the way I was to visit my uncle in England. My mother had informed them that I might need some winter clothes;

So one September evening, amidst teary goodbyes, and all kinds of advice, I boarded a “BOAC” flight with my little boy who was one year old. I was carrying three bags, one filled with baby stuff, even a portable pink potty, and my purse, which I was told to guard with my life, and an overnight bag filled with necessary items.

Luckily my mama (uncle) and mamima (aunty) were waiting for me at Heathrow; I heaved a sigh of relief. Now I was carrying 3 bags plus Tota, (son) who was fast asleep, getting heavier by the minute.

So the first half of the journey went well, after spending a few days in England I was getting ready for the 2nd part of my journey to Tulsa .My Mamima heaped a bunch of winter clothes on me. Then when we went to close the suitcase, it felt like it would come apart at the seams. She kept saying, “why are you taking all these saris and petticoats and stuff, leave them here, nobody wears saris—start wearing pants, here see how this fits. “She handed me a pair of pants, which fit me well. However, I wasn’t about to part with my beloved saris.

At that point, she hit upon a brilliant idea. She said, “I tell you what, since we can’t fit all this in the suitcase, wear the pants first, then wear two petticoats, then wrap the heaviest sari over it, put that sweater on top of the sari, and then carry the winter coat in one arm—there, now you won’t go over the weight limit and the suitcase won’t blow up.”

I reluctantly agreed, so I set forth looking like a “pashbalish” (side pillow), pants,2 petticoats, a green sari wrapped around me, carrying the 3 bags plus a jacket and holding on to my son with one hand.

Now I was about to get on the escalator in the airport, picture me, a green pashbalish, one arm full of bags, other one holding on to my son, as soon as I stepped on the first step----“WHOOOA” I immediately went backwards toppling down bag baggage and all! A strong arm suddenly shot out and propped my back.

Luckily a strong young man was behind me, he literally carried me up the escalator and set me down—I could have cried

with embarrassment.

“Thank you, sorry, so sorry” I kept saying. “Ay don’t mention it—glad to help a young lady out!” He said in a heavy British accent, waved and left.

After the eight hour flight I arrived in New York, it was a hot and humid day, here I was all wrapped up in sweaters and coats, I had even put a little blue jacket on my son (a gift from mama), the stewardess smiled, “Oh looks like you are all ready for winter—it is still September you know.” I smiled and nodded not understanding her sarcasm.

Following other people I stood in line at immigration, filling out the form as best as I could balance on bags, holding on to my son at the same time, lest he toddle off. I go to the end of the line, the lady took one look at the form and barked—this is not acceptable; I can’t even read the writing, please go to that counter and fill it again—NEXT!!

I hung my head stepped out, looked at the long line that snaked after me, and almost cried. I was hot, itchy sweaty, all those clothes making me uncomfortable, then I pulled my son and headed to the back of the room, at that point he decided to start a screaming fit, everybody looked at me in disgust, it seemed.

I start writing on the form, I hear a page, “Mrs. M Mukherjee please go to the nearest curtsey telephone”!

I was flustered, “why was I being paged, what did I do? I was entering a foreign land for the first time, did I do something wrong?”

Thoroughly nervous now, I asked someone where I could find a phone, luckily I found one and picking it up asked, why I was being paged, and they said, “Your relatives are waiting for you.”

Heaving a sigh of relief, I headed to the back of the line, luckily my son was at the whimpering stage, he was tired and sleepy. This time the immigration officer was very nice and clucked sympathetically and I let me go.

I stepped out, seeing my sister-in-law and brother –in law waiting for me, I ran towards them; my sister in law looked at me quizzically, thinking I must have gained a lot of weight since she last saw me!

Finally we were in the car, heading towards Connecticut, I looked out at the 8 lane high way in awe, In India, if roads were devoid of rickshaws, cows and bullock carts it was a “good” road!

Suddenly my brother-in-law asked, “so when is your flight to Tulsa? on Sunday?”

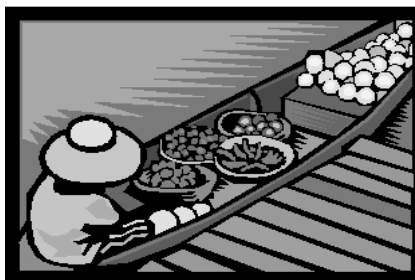
“Flight? Yes, let me see.” I looked in my purse, turned it upside down, and couldn’t find the tickets.”

My sister-in-law looked at me in concern, “Where are the tickets?”

“I can’t find them” I said, horrified. In those days, you had to have the paper copy, there was no online booking—remember?

My brother in law shook his head, and started negotiating the eight lanes to take the next exit and we returned back to the airport, luckily they had found it in the immigration counter and gave it to the BOAC counter; I thanked God !

I am sure all of you have fun stories to tell, but I still vividly remember that day when I landed in this country, fresh of the boat!



Lost in France

Tuhin Sur

It was the summer of 2010. 10-year-old Luke was vacationing in France with his family. One evening he went biking in Champs Elysees by himself. He saw beautiful shops, bakeries, florists and cafes. He was mesmerized! He had 30 Euros. So he decided to buy his family a pot of sunflowers with 10 Euros. The florist gave him a warm, sunny smile. He said “Merci!” and went his way. Then he bought French Macaroons with the remaining 20 Euros. The streets were wide and people were beautiful and friendly. They had pretty printed umbrellas and wore fancy rain jackets.



But while coming back Luke could not find his way back to the hotel. He made a left. He made a right. He looped around the same streets over and over again. He searched and searched for a hotel but no buildings were there! He was lost! Suddenly he looked on his left and saw a huge shadow! He was so nervous he fell off his bike and started running. He ran and ran until ... he saw footprints! He was sweating. He quickly hid behind a tree that had Madeline blooms.

He took his flashlight out looked at the address of the hotel on his phone. He texted his mom 91168, Champs de Elysees. Suddenly he heard a phone ring! But it wasn't his phone. There was someone else besides him. He grabbed his bag with flowers and macaroons. He thought of all the stories that his mom read to him when he was a kid. This was like a page out of those books. This was real! Then he started running! He ran fast! He ran and ran until he found a hotel. It was locked! Suddenly an arrow came straight towards him. He ducked and tried to unlock the hotel door. But the key fell out.

It turned out that the building was not a hotel. It was a castle. A castle from his history books. Tall towers. Beautiful gardens. Big bells. What was happening? Where was he? What was that shadow? Whose were those footprints? What was that smell? Was it macaroons? No, it was his favorite French butter croissants. Soft and fluffy. He opened his eyes. And saw his mom by his bed with a plate of croissants and a glass of milk. He was in hotel room. He had never left it. “Wake up Luke dear. It's time to go back home.”



In the flight he enjoyed macaroons, sipped lemons ginger tea with his family and enjoyed his favorite movie – Ghost and the Darkness. It was a funny vacation. He was such a good boy on the plane. The air hostess gave him a special gift when they reached Denver – a beautiful pot of sunflowers!



Ghost Lover's Tales

Mita Mukherjee

It is always fun to write for Tuli Kolom, so this time when I got word from Roshmi that articles are needed, my eyes lit up—now I can flex my “writing muscles” again and it will actually be seen in print in a beautiful book!

However, what do I write about? I remembered that last time I had written a couple of ghost stories that were other people's experiences, this time why not write about my own experience!

So here I am, taking up the “KOLOM” / computer keys actually to recount some of my own ghostly experiences.

This was the year 1997. We had been transferred from Denver to New Orleans; Every time we move, and we have moved often, from city to city, from house to house at least 14 times, I cried!

I hated to quit my job, I hated to leave the house that I had so carefully decorated, and I hated leaving my friends, my community, even the dentist.



My husband painted a wonderful picture of New Orleans—it has the best food in the US, lot of culture! And a lot of ghosts!! I wasn't convinced, however what to do, if the job takes us somewhere, we have to go!

So after saying a tearful goodbye to everyone, I boarded the plane. We settled in a house in a place called Slidell, the houses looked grand—kind of like Scarlet O'Hara's plantation homes, slowly I stopped moping around and put my energies into redecorating the house we had bought. (After looking at 20/30 houses, I am ashamed to say).

Somehow this house had welcomed me! I felt a serene energy in it.

Tall pine trees surrounded the house, a play of light and shadows all day long. The kitchen was large, separated from the living area, which I loved—the aroma of Indian spices, do have a way of pervading the house. This way I could close the kitchen door, and the smell wouldn't go anywhere.

A small living room and formal dining area took up the front of the house; a living room with large glass windows was in the back, adjoining the master bed room.

A grand staircase snaked its way up on to a bridge which ran from the left to right connecting the four bedrooms, upstairs. To tell you the truth, that is the best house, I have ever lived in; whoever first built it put a lot of care and thoughtfulness into it.

My husband was out of town, this was the first time I would be alone at night, it is always a little scary, even though I am not one of those who can't be alone at night, still being in a strange city, with no one that I could actually call on was a bit uncomfortable. As dusk fell, I went around locking all the doors, had a simple dinner, and settled on the sofa with a good book, while the TV droned in the background.

A sudden chill woke me up! It was night now, I must have fallen asleep. I distinctly heard a “creak” on the stairs. “creak---creak” it went, as if someone was slowly coming down the stairs. The TV had gone off by itself, static lines flashed on and off.

The hair on my neck stood on end! If I was chilled, it got chillier. From my angle on the sofa I could not see the stairs; “Who's there?” I tried to say, but my voice came out as a croak.

The creaks stopped; I looked up and there was this swirl of a faint fog almost like cigarette smoke hanging on the bridge, and I caught a whiff of cigarette smoke. Nobody smoked in the house, and I had it thoroughly cleaned before we moved in.

Now I was scared! Mustering an enormous amount of bravado, I jumped up and started switching on all the lights, at the same time chanting all the mantras that came to my mind.

I turned the TV off, ran up and down the stairs, the swirl was gone, there was no smell either, and everything seemed back to normal.

Never the less clutching a picture of one of the Gods—I went to my bedroom, barring the door between the living room and my room, I slowly crept into my bed, my logical mind trying to make sense of my experience.

Finally I put it down to my imagination and the mystery novel that I had been reading, and fell into a deep sleep.

The sun streamed in through the window in the morning, I had forgotten to draw the curtains.

My heart skipped a beat, there was someone looking at me through the window, a hazy face with both hands by their face, as if trying to peer in. A faint face but no- body attached!

“Hey who is it?” I jumped up and ran towards the window, the face disappeared. The sunlight gave me courage, I ran out the back door to see if I could catch the person, there was no one there and no footsteps on the muddy patch either, a gangly plant stood brushing the window—was that what I had seen? I thought to myself. I went back into the house, a nice pot of tea would help, I thought and put the kettle on. To this day I haven’t been able to explain the strange experience.

My other experience was in New Orleans also, they say it is a city where ghosts abound. My friend, her husband, and her two kids had come to visit from Florida.

Our kids were of similar ages, teenagers at that time. “Let us do something fun tonight,” one of them said—“want to go on a ghost tour?” I asked, I had a flier recounting the exciting tour. “Yes!!” everybody but the husbands cried.

“What a waste of time and money, let us go and have an authentic Cajun dinner,” one of the husbands said.

“We can do both! Cholo, (come) let us go—“We climbed into our car and headed towards the city, I had called and booked our tickets.

The tour started at one of the hotels, the husbands settled down to a glass of beer, while my friend and I with kids joined the tour.

The well-lit streets, like Bourbon Street gave way to dark, dim streets our feet clattered on the cobble stones. The lady giving the tour was dressed in black, with dark lipstick covering her lips, her skin was unnaturally pale, and she looked like a ghost herself.

Her voice was husky, but she did have a dramatic way of telling stories; as she led us through different locations, she recounted occasions where paranormal phenomenon had been observed.

She took us in front of the abandoned court house, where they would hang slaves; at night, people had seen lights go on and off in different rooms, when checked, there was no one there! She took us to a building where a little slave girl had been pushed from the fourth floor and her screams still reverberated on some nights. All very interesting! Now we were getting tired and hungry, the kids had started complaining. The girl said, “this is almost the end of the tour, if some of you want leave this is the way back to the hotel”

We did a quick conference, the kids wanted to go back—I convinced them to stay, which they did reluctantly. I will tell this story in the tour guide’s own words:

“This house that you see in front belonged to a plantation owner, see that window ledge, pay attention to that, it is an integral part of my story.

“This was around 1850, New Orleans was a place for rich plantation owners and their slaves.

There were a lot of illicit love affairs between owners and their slave ladies, but it was kept hush hush; At that time there was a rule that young men of plantation owners were brought up with every kind of indulgence; It was an absolute rule that they would have to marry another plantation owner’s daughter, and it was arranged between parents, who their bride was going to be. However to educate the young men into ways love, a young slave girl was chosen and they would have to have one eight-th slave/ black blood, “octroons” as they were called.

So one such young man found himself paired off with a beautiful young sixteen year old, and these girls were brought up as ladies and were educated just as any other white girl. Their black blood enhanced their beauty, they sometimes had olive skin, dark eyes, luxurious hair; the young lady in my story was such an attractive girl. When they met, there was an instant attraction, and in training in love, they actually fell in love. After sometime, the young lady kept insisting that they run away to a different state and gets married, because in Louisiana, a plantation owner's son could not marry an octroon.



It was a chilly December night, couple days before Christmas, there was a huge argument between the two. She wanted to elope on Christmas day, she had packed her bags and was ready to go, but the young man wasn't ready, knowing he would lose his inheritance if he took such a drastic step.

So to put her off, he told her if she would promise him something, he would marry her the next morning.

She was very excited and said "what is it? I will do anything for you—you know that!"

He said, "I want you to take your clothes off and stand on that ledge outside of the bedroom for an hour or so—I will come and find you there, I have to have proof!—if you can do that I will marry you the next morning!"

The young girl in all her innocence took her clothes off and went to stand on the narrow ledge of the bed room window. She slid the window close, because she didn't want the room to get chilly.

The night went on; the young man with all his friends went partying, then came home drunk, late into the night and didn't bother to see where the girl was.

The next morning one of the servant girls found her on that narrow window ledge, frozen stiff, with one hand curled around the window. She had tried opening the window when she realized this was a stupid joke—but the window was stuck and wouldn't open!

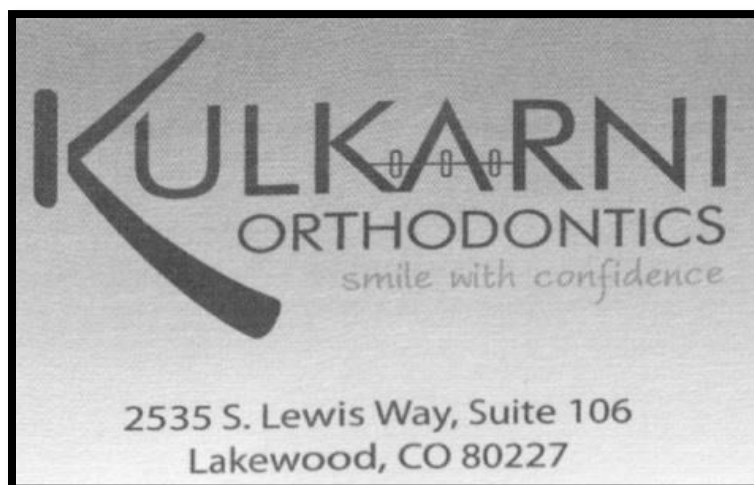
To this day,--- on a cold December night, one can see an apparition on that window ledge!"

The guide concluded her story and we all looked at the window ledge expecting a figure to appear—it was such a sad story.

We headed back to the hotel, and suddenly I realized, that this day was actually two days before Christmas, some instinct made me look back one more time—and there it was ---a smoky swirl forming on the ledge!

I ran to my friend, and nudged her, we both stopped and turned, "what is it?" she said. We both, turned and looked back at the ledge, but now the swirl was gone—there was nothing there, must have been my imagination, or was it?

Durga Puja Greetings to All



Winter

Aunya Mallick (Age: 10 yrs)

The whole street is white
The first snowfall was today
Winter is here now

The Dark

Aunya Mallick (Age: 10 yrs)

Watching you
With huge eyeballs
Hiding something
Big and scary
Just like a storm
I jump out at you
And watch you scream
Until you can't scream
Anymore

I am like a monster's home
I am your worst fear
I am the dark



Rain

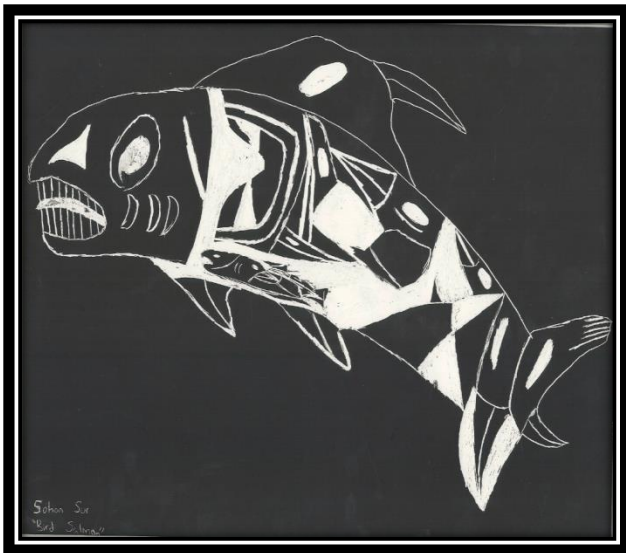
Avishek Ghosh (Age: 10yrs)

Drop, drop, drop, drop
Plop, plop
The rain is falling
The rain brings life
The rain is god's tears
The rain is wonderful.

Inside Lightning

Aditya Roy (Age: 12 yrs)

Coming down to earth.
Falling from a cloud at supersonic speed.
Hotter than the surface of the sun.
Causing destruction wherever it lands.
Say goodbye to life.
Inside Lightning.



'Bird Salmon' by Sohan Sur

আবার নীরার সঙ্গে

অমিত নাগ

তখনও প্রকাশ্যে প্রেম করার বয়স হয় নি
তবে প্রেমপড়ার অভ্যাস হয়ে গিয়েছিল বেশ।
গরমের ছুটির দুপুরে দোতলার ঘর থেকে
বশ না মানা চোখ পাশের বাড়ির জানলায় পড়তেই
মাথায় সে যেন হাজার হাতুড়ি পেটার শব্দ,
অবহেলায় বুকের ওপর ফেলে রাখা কাপড়টা
একটু না ধরেও কেমন দু হাত উঁচু করে
কি অনাশয়ে চুল আঁচড়ায় নীরা। অবাক লাগতো ভেবে,
দাঁতের কামড়ে ধরে রাখা ফিতে সহ নীরার
সেই প্রোফাইল ছবি ছিল নিষ্ঠুর নিদ্রা হস্তারকা।
অথচ সে কথা কাউকে বলা যায় না।
আমি মনে মনে নীরাকে ভালবাসি, নীরা আমাকে
ভালবাসে না, নীরা আমার দিদির মতো যে,
সে বরং নিলুদাকে ভালবাসে।
ওর বোন রীনা কিন্তু ততদিনে আকারে ইঙ্গিতে
বোঝানোর চেষ্টার কসুর কম করে নি
আমাকেই পছন্দ করে সে আর পাঁচ জনার চেয়ে।
তবু কেন জানি সে বয়সে ভাল লেগে যেত শুধু,
নিজের থেকে বয়সে বড় মেয়েদেরই।
তাই যখন নীরার বিয়ের সন্ধ্যায় ভিড়ের ফাঁকে
রীনা আমাকে বিয়েবাড়ীর বাগানের শেষে
নদীর ধারে নিয়ে এসে কিছু বলতে চেয়েছিল,
হয়তো আমাদের দুজনের সম্পর্কের ভবিষ্যৎ নিয়ে
আমার চোখ ছিল নদীর ঘাটে বাঁধা সোনার তরীটিতে।
সোনার তরী বেয়ে স্বপ্নদেশে যেতে বিভোর আমি
রীনার একটা কথাও ঠিক মতো শুনতে পাই নি সে রাতে।
ভুলে যাবার আগে এখানে আরেকটা কথা বলে রাখা ভালো
নীরা কিন্তু নিলুদাকে বিয়ে করে নি।
সেই ছিল শেষ দেখা নীরা বা ওর বোনের সাথে
সমুদ্র পারের তুষার ধবল নতুন দেশে আসার আগে।
অনেক কেই বলতে শুনি বরফ পড়ার দৃশ্য নাকি
ভারী রোমান্টিক, কথাটা হয়ত খাঁটি
তবে সে ছুটির দিনে ঘরের উত্তার পরশে জড়িয়ে

জানলা দিয়ে দেখার সৌভাগ্য হলে,
যা কিনা আ পোড়া দেশে মেলে কালে ভদ্রে,
তাদের বলি মশাই, ভোরবেলা আপিস যাবার জন্য
বাড়ী থেকে বেরোনের প্রস্তুতি হিসেবে হরদিন
ঘণ্টাখানেক বরফ ঠেলতে হলে বুঝতেন।
নদী ও সময়ের বয়ে গেছে কারো জন্য থামতে
এ কথা আমরা সকলেই প্রায় জানি
কাল নদীর স্রোতে গা ভাসিয়ে চলছিলো তেমনি
দিনগত পাপক্ষয়ের হুঁটে গাঁথা বছরগুলো
মাঝে মধ্যে কখনো সখনো ঘুরে আসা দেশ থেকে
হলুদ ঘাসের বনে হারিয়ে যাওয়া নাকছবিটির খোঁজে।
সে দিন তেমনি খোঁজে বেরিয়ে গড়িয়াহাটের মোড়ে
হটাৎ দেখা নীরার সঙ্গে, সে তখন
তার পুরনো ভুবনমোহিনী কপট রাগ আশ্রয়ী হাসিটি দিয়ে
তরুণ দোকানদারটিকে করে ফেলেছে ধরাশায়ী প্রায়।
আমাকে দেখে খিলখিল করে বলে উঠল কি রে,
কতদিন পরে দেখা, এ কি চেহারা করেছিস।
তুমিও তো বেশ বড় বাড়ির ভারিঙ্কি গিমির মতো
হয়েছ দেখতে বলায় আগের মতই কপট রাগে
হাত তুলে হেসে ফেলেছিল নীরা।
আমাদের সেই পুরনো দিনের খুনসুটির মাঝে
একটু দূরে দামী গাড়ীটার পাশে দাঁড়িয়ে থাকা
মাঝ বয়সী সুপুরুষ মানুষটার দিকে ডাক দিয়ে
বলেছিল চিনতে পারছো একে?
এক মিনিট, আসছি বলে, ভদ্রলোক তখন
টাকা নিয়ে দরাদরি করছিলো ফুটপাথবাসী
অনাথ ছেলের দলটার সাথে হয়ত যারা, জোর করে
তার ইমপোর্টেড গাড়ীর কাঁচ ধুয়ে দিয়েছে এই মাত্র
দুটো পয়সা পাবে এই আশায়, অনিচ্ছা সত্ত্বেও।
নীরার বলমলে শাড়ী, আধুনিক রুচির হাতব্যাগটির দিকে
তাকিয়ে থেকে কেন জানি মনে হল,
নিলুদাকে বিয়েটা করলেই পারতো নীরা!

কত দিন পরে দেখা, কথার কি শেষ আছে,
পিছন পানে এক সাথে হাঁটতেই আবার সেই
আগের মতোই বুকের মাঝে ধুকপুকুনি
বলি, নিলুদার খবর কিছু জানো নাকি?
সে বাউভুলে মানুষ, পড়ে আছে হবে
কোনও পাহাড়ে জঙ্গলে, হাজারটা কাজ থাকে
তার কথা ভাবলে আমাদের কি চলে !
কথা ঘুরিয়ে বলে তুইও তো চেয়েছিলি কষ্ট দিতে
রীনাটাকে , অতটুকু সরল মেয়েটাকে সেদিন

দুবাইয়েতে বর ছেলেমেয়ে নিয়ে সে থাকে
বাড়ী গাড়ী বছরে দু বার বিদেশ সফর
অভাব কিছুই রাখেনি তার বর।
এরপর কিছু বলা মানেই সাফাই গীত গাওয়া
বলি আজ চলি, হয়তো আবার হবে দেখা কোনো এক দিন
হাঁটতে হাঁটতে ঘাড় ঘুরিয়ে আর এক বার দেখতে
ইচ্ছে যে করছিল না তাইবা বলি কি করে,
কিন্তু ট্যাক্সি ধরতে যে সামনে যেতে হবে এগিয়ে
পেছনে তাকিয়ে হাঁটলে হোঁচট বা ধাক্কা লাগতে পারে!

অভিপ্রায়

তীর্থ চৌধুরী

পশ্চিমের সূর্যাস্তের রক্তিম আভা,
যেন জীবনের ভাগ্যলিপির শেষ অধ্যায়,
যেন চিন্তামগ্ন জীবনের অবসান।

তবে কেন রোজ বয়ে চলে আশার হাওয়া?
কেন সে ছুঁয়ে বলে, ‘এগিয়ে চলো, থেমো না’?
কেন তার নেই কোন শ্রমক্ষয়, কোন সংশয়?
কেন তবে ভোরের রবি জাগায় মনে আনন্দ?
কেন তবে শীতের হিম বলে, ‘এখনি আসবে বসন্ত’?

তবে কি সূর্যোদয় জীবনের শুরু? কি তার আগমন বার্তা?
জীবনে কত ভোর, কত সন্ধ্যা পেরিয়ে যায়,
মায়ার খেলায় অবুঝ মন তবু ছুটে বলে,
প্রশ্ন করে, ‘আজ কি শুরু, না কি শেষ? কি তোঁর অভিপ্রায়?’

যা দেখি যা শুনি

কৃষ্ণেন্দু কুমার দাস

বসে পড়ি কাগজ কলম নিয়ে
অতি দ্রুত কিছু লেখার তাগিদে
চিন্তাধারায় রাখি শান দিয়ে
সাত সকালে ঘুম থেকে উঠে

বুদ্ধিটাকে ঘসে মেজে তুলে
মগজ কোটরে হাতড়ে বেড়াই
রোজকার সব নিয়ম ভুলে
কল্পনার মেঘে চড়ে উড়ে যাই

হটাত ভাবি কোথায় করব শুরু
অনেক কিছুই রোজ মনে আসে
আবোল তাবোল যুক্তি তরু যত
লাল নিলসব তারা হয়ে ভাসে

সময় অতি দুর্লভ জিনিস
প্রতি মাসে আছে সাহিত্য সভা
ছোট ছেলেটা জোরে কেঁদে ওঠে
হয়ে যায় লেখার দফা রফা।

Life

Advika Jayanti (Age: 10 yrs)

Why is life even there?
Everyone knows it's never fair.
When we're born, why do we die?
The purpose is just to make us cry...
What is Life?

Why are people sad, mad, happy and more?
Is this what life is from the core?
Why can't people get along together?
Are our feelings too fragile...like a feather?
What is Life?

Why do families sometimes fight?
Is it just to drive us away from the light?
Every angry action is full of might
every words spoken is as dark as night.
What is Life?

Is life only about making our career?
Every time I lose, I grudge and fear

All I want is to sing, weave dreams and to fly
Parents gave me the wing, than why do I shy
What is Life?

Our mind is a seed, grows like a sprout
But why my heart has so many emotions to pout
Every day is a clue..to unfold it, I will strive.
What's the purpose to my life, it will always linger and thrive..
To me, life seems all just like a mystery , WHAT IS LIFE????



A Brave Soul

Roshmi Bhaumik

The gentle smile that touches the heart
The calm and bliss pervades
In the midst of challenges
The trust and excitement flows on
The big plan is in sight
Little setbacks are but ripples
Flowing over the broad Ganga
With little impact on its course.
Ganga accepts flaws and virtues
And turns them pure with a magic touch
Heading strong to the confluence
To meet the Great one,
The ocean of peace and love.

The Midnight Creature

Srijita Ghoshal (Age: 10 yrs)

In the moonlight, you come out, out of sight
Your beautiful eyes twinkle and glow bright giving off an intensive light
Your black and orange stripes cannot be seen beneath the shadows you hide between
Your rapid speed doesn't give other animals much of a lead
Your four tremendous paws all equipped with sharp claws
Your amazing strength lies in your faith
Your jagged jaws acts like an aggressive saw
Everyone believes in fright when they see you out in the night

Waiting For A New Day

Tuhina Saha

Lying in my catacomb of darkness,
Caught in the vicious circle of
Night after night
Afraid of shadows I never see
Parasites relishing victuals
Days, weeks, and centuries? An eon?
Since when do I wait?
Forgotten by friends
Forgiven by enemies.
My bones wither like Ozymandias.
Agave blooms, I bore. My duties done
Leaving behind happy memories...
Salvation was imminent?
The pen and the paper, long neglected
Avengeful, had the last laugh.
The pen bleeds nothing. Blankness fills crevices.
Another day, a new sun awaits me somewhere
With a challenge for me to finish, that I started long ago.
Like unfurled gnarled branches, I twist.
I turn in the sad night of my creativity. I break.
I bleed.
And
I wait the coming of dawn
I wait for a new day.



Dressing for Winter

Rahul Ghosh (Age: 8 yrs)

Put on your snow mask
My parents said
I think I'll wear masking tape instead
Put on your jacket
My parents said
May be I'll wear a cape over my head
Put on your red mittens
My parents said
How about if I paint my hands red
Put on your snow boots
My parents said
But crocs are so much fun
I begged

Moms are Awesome

Kritika Krori (Age: 10 yrs)

Moms are awesome in many ways, so here is a little something to make her day.
Soft red- black hair that has lots of flair is my awesome MOM!
She is very awesome because she helped me blossom.
When she frowns she turns my world upside down.
I would do anything to make her smile even walk a mile.
My mom loves to cook, even though she gives her food weird looks.
My mom loves to move because she always has the groove.
My mom loves me so much, she always have the perfect touch.
You will love them so much and they will love you too.

SUPERNATURAL

Mita Mukherjee

Oooooh
Sudden sensitivity of the senses-esp!
Up and down the spine!
Pin prickles on the skin!
Eyes red—glowing!
Rotating round and round!
Nobody around!
An icy cold breath of air!
Touch as light as feather!
UGH!!!
Run—run—run!—can't !
Am rooted to the spot!
Let me out, HELP! Please let me out!
AAAAH! It is but a dream!!

Birthday

Rahul Ghosh (Age: 8 yrs)

It's your birthday, you dream of a cake
Especially one with a milk shake
With lots of sprinkles
That gives you giggles
But then Mom says, "Oh Honey! it's time to wake!"



Thoughts on-----"THOUGHTS"

Mita Mukherjee

I have often wondered, what is a "THOUGHT"?
Where does it arise and where does it go?
Our mind, like a river, channeling the water
Thoughts, angry, happy, quiet or peaceful, ebb and flow
They affect the body and the mind
Thoughts of anger and ire play havoc,
The Blood pressure climbs, and heart rate jumps
Loving thoughts on the other hand, soothes the body, quiets the mind
So what are thoughts? I feel
We are what our THOUGHTS make us out to be!

The Amazing Sight

Ishana Banerjee (Age: 10 yrs)

The bright yellow sun
beams with pride
like someone receiving a medal
and showing
their big achievement.
The calm cool breeze smells
like cherry blossoms trees,
the navy
blue sea slowly and softly ripples to the shore.
I smile
and laugh
as my toes dig in
the petal soft sand. It's a joyful world.
We play in the big soft salty ocean.
It's so peaceful
like a dove's first flight.
The shiny collection full of
unique speckled sea shells.

It's beautiful
Full of calm
IMAGINATION



'Horse by Tirtho Chaudhury



'Reindeer' by Tirtho Chaudhury



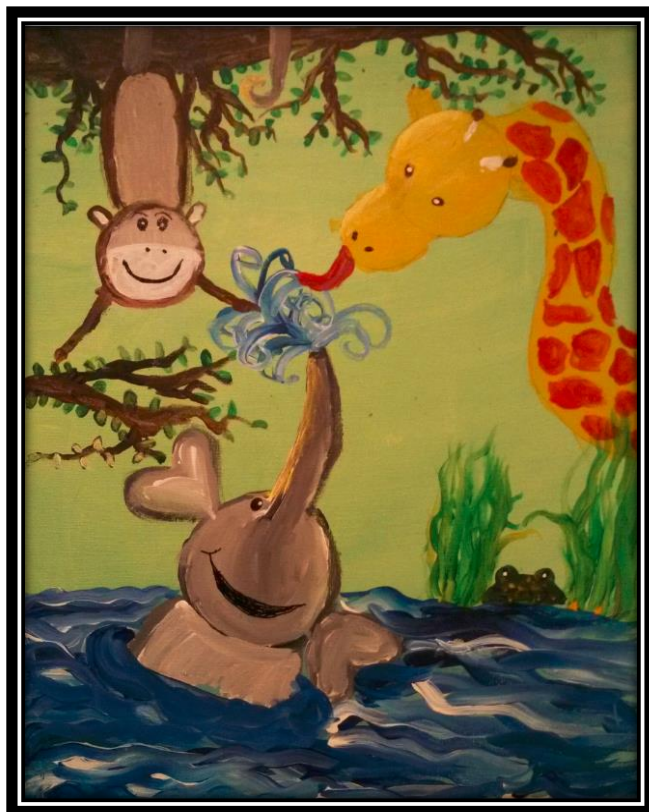
'Far away from the hassles of life' by Swagata Banerjee



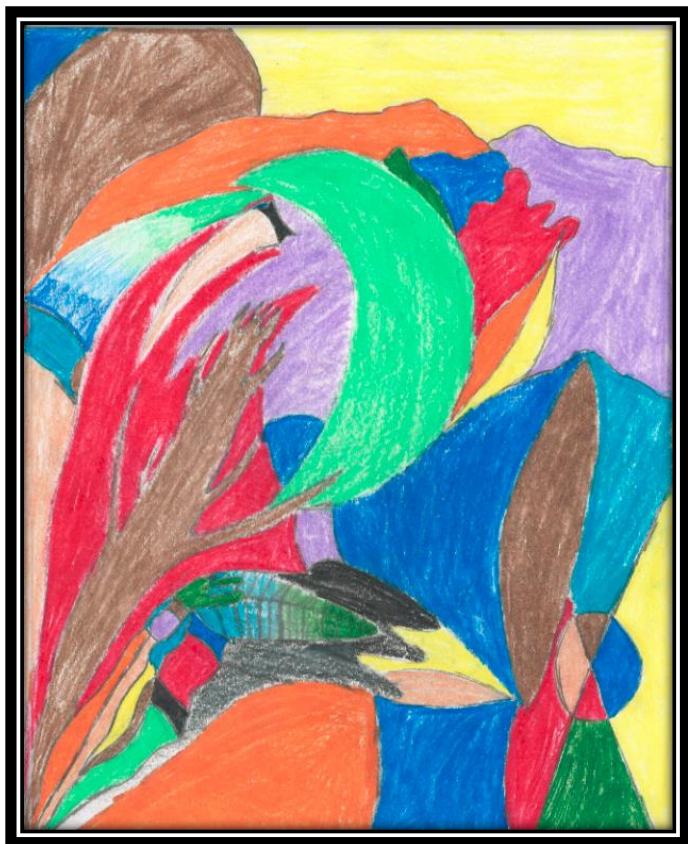
'On a Spring Morning' by Swagata Banerjee



'Elk in the Marshes' by Rajarshi Bose (Age: 7 yrs)



'Happy Forest' by Rajarshi Bose



'Abstract' by Sohan Sur (Age: 11 yrs)



'My Dream Pet' by Rajarshi Bose



'Banjaran' by Nipunika Chaudhury



'Euphoria' by Swagata Banerjee



'The dream must stay alive' by Swagata Banerjee



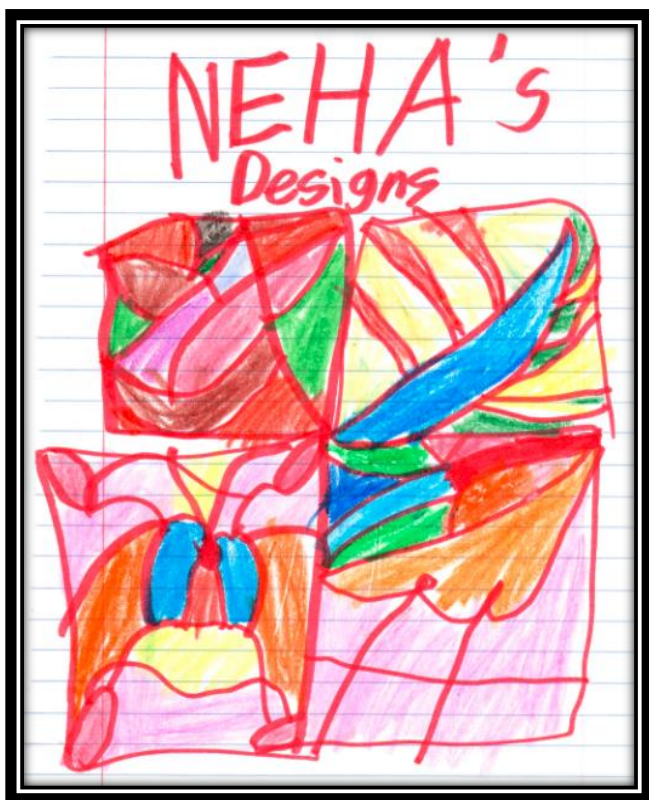
'Colorado Dreams' by Nipunika Chaudhury



Painting by Reema Baishya (Age: 7 yrs)



'Girl wearing ghagra & necklace' by Neha Bhaumik



Designs by Neha Bhaumik (Age: 8 yrs)



"Tropical Tucan" by Shania Banerjee (Age: 7 yrs)



'Castle' by Aunya Mallick (Age: 10 yrs)



Painting by Anushka Singha Roy (Age: 6 yrs)



Painting by Arnab Ghosh (Age: 7 yrs)



Painting by Rahul Ghosh (Age: 7 yrs)

শুধু পনেরো মিনিট

অনন্য ব্যানার্জী

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স্থান- Yellowstone National Park

সময়- ৬:৪৫ (MST)

তারিখ- ২০ জুন

সায়ন তার মা-বাবা আর স্ত্রী পুত্র কে নিয়ে দুদিন হল এসেছে। Yellowstone National Park দেখার অনেক কাল ইচ্ছে ছিল তার মা-বাবার। সায়ন নিজেও এখানে আসেনি কারণ Denver যে সাড়ে নয় ঘন্টার রাস্তা। ও সবসময় চেয়েছিল মা-বাবাকে নিয়ে আসতে। আজকেই ওরা ফিরে যাবে Denver। এখন প্রায় সূর্যাস্তের সময়। Denver পৌঁছতে ভোর চারটে বাজবে আর কালকে থেকে আবার সায়নের office। এখন ওরা সবাই অপেক্ষা করছে Old Faithful Geyser দেখার জন্য। যারা Yellowstone-এ এসেছেন তারা জানেন এই দ্রষ্টব্য জায়গাটার কথা। প্রতি নব্বই মিনিটে এই Old Faithful Geyser জেগে ওঠে। এখন আনুমানিক পনেরো মিনিট বাকি। সায়নদের সঙ্গে আরও অনেক টুরিস্ট অধীর আগ্রহে এই পনেরো-কুড়ি মিনিটের অপেক্ষা করছে। সায়নের মা ভাবছেন এইটা দেখতে পেলে পনেরো মিনিটের এই অপেক্ষা আর এতদূর Yellowstone দেখতে আসা সার্থক হবে। সায়নের বাবা অবশ্য বলছেন "রাস্তা এখন অনেকটা, অনেক তো দেখলাম। এইটা কি না দেখলেই নয়"। সায়ন বলল "বাবা, মাত্র তো পনেরো মিনিট, একটু দেখেই যাই না"।

তারা গত দুদিনে অনেক কিছুই দেখেছেন আর আজ এইটা দেখেই রওনা হতে হবে। হঠাৎ সায়নের ছেলে মিহির চৈঁচিয়ে উঠল "বাবা, শুরু হয়ে গেছে"। সায়নের মা-বাবা তখন প্রত্যক্ষ করলেন এক জাগতিক দৃশ্য। কিছু জিনিস এই পৃথিবীতে আছে যা শুধু যেন USA এসেই দেখা যায় যেমন Yellowstone, Niagara Falls এবং আরও বেশ কিছু। মাটির ভেতর থেকে বেশ কিছুক্ষণ ধরেই ফুটন্ত জল বেরোচ্ছিল। হঠাৎ সেই ফুটন্ত জল যেন ৩০-৪০ ফুট ওপরে উঠতে শুরু করল। যেন কেউ মাটির ভেতর থেকে একটা ছিদ্র দিয়ে অনেক জল পিচকিরীর মত আকাশের নীলকে পৌঁছবার চেষ্টা করছে। অদ্ভুত ব্যাপার যে এই জলের ফোয়ারা যেন ৩-৪ মিনিট চলল আর কেউ যেন কোনো ম্যাজিক শো শেষ করার মত তার উচ্চতা আবার আগের মত ১-২ ফুট-এ নামিয়ে নিয়ে এলো।

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স্থান- গৌরীকুন্ড

সময়- ৭:১৫ (IST)

তারিখ- ২০ জুন

অয়ন তার মা-বাবার সঙ্গে গরমের ছুটিতে কদার-বদরী বেড়াতে এসেছে। ক্লাস ৭ থেকে ৮-এ সে এবছর উঠেছে। পাহাড় দেখতে সে খুব ভালবাসে তবে দার্জিলিং সে দুবার গেছে আর তাই সে আবদার করেছে অন্য কথাও পাহাড় দেখার। অয়নের মা পূজো-আর্চা করেন কিন্তু কদারনাথ দর্শন আজ পর্যন্ত হয়ে ওঠেনি। এখন তারা সকালের জল-খাবার খেয়ে বেড়িয়ে পড়েছে। হরিদ্বার থেকে তারা এসেছে দুদিন আগে। বিকেলের মধ্যে কদারনাথ পৌঁছতে গেলে, আজ তাদেরকে পায়ে হেঁটে ১৪ km যেতে হবে। অয়ন অবশ্য আজ খুব সকালে উঠে

তৈরি হয়ে গেছে। কলকাতাতে গত কয়েক সপ্তাহে রোজ সকালে উঠে ২-৪ km দৌড়ে নিজেকে এই ১৪ km trekking করার জন্য তৈরি করেছে সে।

গৌরীকুন্ড থেকে এখন তারা ১ km এসে গেছে। আজ সকাল থেকে একটু বৃষ্টি পড়ছে। গত দুদিনে উত্তরকাশীতে প্রবল বৃষ্টি হয়েছে। নদীগুলো সব যেন ফুলে উঠেছে। এত প্রবল বেগে জল বইছে যে তার দৃশ্য যেমন অপূর্ব তেমনি ভয়ানক। তবু অয়নদের সঙ্গে আরও অনেক দর্শনার্থী আজ চলেছে কদারনাথের পথে। হঠাৎ অয়ন একটা পায়ের তলায় একটা অদ্ভুত কম্পন অনুভব করলো। ভূমিকম্প হচ্ছে নাকি, সে ভাবলো। দর্শনার্থীদের মধ্যে অনেকেই একই জিনিস অনুভব করে একে-অপরের মুখ চাইছে। নদীর জল এদিকে যেন খুব তাড়াতাড়ি বাড়তে শুরু করেছে। এর পর পনেরো মিনিটের মধ্যে যে ঘটল, তা অয়নের জীবন কে উথাল-পাতাল করে দিয়ে গেল। হঠাৎ ভয়ানক গর্জনের সঙ্গে প্রবল জলের স্রোত নদীর পার উপচে বইতে শুরু করল রাস্তার ওপর দিয়ে।

তীর্থযাত্রীরা জলের স্রোতে দাঁড়িয়ে আর্তনাদ করতে শুরু করল। কেউ ভাবছে সামনে এগোবে আর কেউ রাস্তা থেকে বেরিয়ে চড়াইএর দিকে দৌড়োবার বিফল চেষ্টা করল। অয়নের বাবা বলল "তোমরা দুজন হাত ধরে থাকো আমার, একসাথে ওই গাছটার পাশে যাই"। তিনজনে তারা রাস্তার পাশে একটি গাছের পাশে কোনোমতে দাঁড়ালো। স্রোত যেন এদিকে আরও বেড়েই চলেছে। অয়ন তার বাবার কাঁধে ভর করে গাছ বেয়ে হাতের নাগালের ডালের ওপর বসল। অয়ন বলল "আমি পারলাম বাবা, তুমি আর মাও চেষ্টা করো তাড়াতাড়ি"। হঠাৎ অয়নের মা ঘাবড়ে গিয়ে সামনে এক সুনামি-র মত ঢেউ আসতে দেখে আর্তনাদ করে তার বাবার হাত ছেড়ে দিল। মুহূর্তের মধ্যে অয়ন দেখল তার মা জলের স্রোতের সঙ্গে কোথায় যেন ভেসে গেল। অয়নের বাবা চীৎকার করে মা'কে ধরার চেষ্টায় গাছের থেকে বিচ্ছিন্ন হয়ে প্রবল স্রোতের মধ্যে ভেসে গেল। অয়ন চীৎকার করে তার বাবা-মা কে ডাকলো কিন্তু তার মা-বাবাকে সে আর দেখতে পেলনা। অয়নের মনে পড়ল যে ভুগলে সে flash flood সম্বন্ধে পড়েছিল কিন্তু সে কখনো ভাবেনি যে এইরকম flash flood তার জীবনে এসে তার জীবন হারখার করে দিয়ে যাবে। নীচে তাকিয়ে সে একের পর এক মানুষ জলের স্রোতে দূরে ভেসে যেতে দেখল। সাহস হল না যে একবার নীচে নামার, এই স্রোতে সে যে কিছুই করতে পারবেনা। মা-বাবাকে হারানোর দুঃখে সে গাছের ডাল আঁকড়ে কাঁদতে লাগল। ঘড়ির দিকে তাকিয়ে দেখলো বাজে ৭:৩০।

অন্যদিকে, পৃথিবীর অন্য প্রান্তে, Yellowstone National park থেকে Denver ফেরার পথে সাইনের মা গাড়িতে বসে অনেক কথার মধ্যে একটি কথা বললেন সাইনের বাবাকে. "দেখলে তো শুধু পনেরো মিনিট অপেক্ষা করাতে কি অসাধারণ দৃশ্যটা দেখলাম বলো তো?"

৩

স্থান- কলকাতা

সময়- ৭:১৫ (IST)

তারিখ- ২০ জুন

সৌমিত্র ঘোষ তারাতলাতে একটি প্রাইভেট কোম্পানি তে চাকরি করে। রোজ সকালে সে গড়িয়াহাট থেকে তারাতলা যাওয়ার অটো ধরে। প্রতিদিন ৭-টার মধ্যে সে অফিস ঢোকে। আজ সকালে রাসবিহারী avenue তে একটা accident-এর কারণে traffic jam এবং ছেলেকে স্কুলে পৌঁছে অটো ধরতে তার দেরী হয়ে গেছে। সৌমিত্র ভীষণ punctual এবং এই কারণে তার সুনাম সারা অফিস জুড়ে। তার ম্যানেজার দীপক রায় যেমন তাকে ভালবাসে, আবার কাজের ব্যাপারেও খুব strict। তাই সৌমিত্র পরিবারের সঙ্গে সময় কাটাবার জন্য তাড়াতাড়ি অফিস পৌঁছে দিনের সব কাজ শেষ করে সাড়ে চারটের মধ্যে বেরোবার চেষ্টা করে।

আজ বোধহয় তাড়াতাড়ি বেরোনো যাবেনা। এই কথা ভাবতে ভাবতে সৌমিত্র পকেট থেকে নিজের রুমাল বার করে ঘাম মুছে সিঁড়ি দিয়ে উঠতে লাগলো। আজ সে পনেরো মিনিট late। নিজের cubicle -এ ঢোকান আগে দীপক রায়ের সঙ্গে দেখে হয়ে গেল। দীপক বলল "কি সৌমিত্র আজ হঠাত পনেরো মিনিট late? তোমার তো এরকম সচরাচর হয়না? Any problem?" সৌমিত্র কিছুটা লজ্জিত হয়েই বলল "না দীপকদা, রাসবিহারীতে একটা accident -এর কারণে দেরী হয়ে গেল"। দীপক বলল "তাতে কি হয়েছে, মাত্র তো পনেরো মিনিটের ব্যাপার। সৌমিত্র, তুমি না বড্ড বেশী punctuality নিয়ে ভাবো। আমি এমনি প্রশ্ন করলাম। আচ্ছা বলোতো সৌমিত্র, সামান্য পনেরো মিনিটে কি হয়?" সৌমিত্র ভাবলো "সত্যি তো, পনেরো মিনিটে কি বা হয়? তাড়াহুড়ো করে অটো ধরে আমি যে এই সময়টা বাঁচাবার চেষ্টা করলাম, তার কি সত্যি কোনো দরকার ছিল?"

অন্যদিকে গৌরীকুন্ড থেকে ১ km দূরে এক গাছের ডালে বসে অয়ন দু চোখে জল নিয়ে ভাবল "কিছুক্ষণ আগেও তার জীবন মা-বাবার সঙ্গে কি দুর্দান্ত ছিল। ছুটিটা যেন স্বপ্নের মত কাটছিল। কিন্তু কোথা থেকে জীবনে গত পনেরো মিনিট তাকে হঠাৎ অনাথ করে দিয়ে চলে গেল।"

সত্যি, পনেরো মিনিট কি এতটাই সামান্য?

শব্দ-সন্ধান সমাধান (পৃষ্ঠা ২০ দেখুন)

অ	তু	ল	প্র	সা	দ	সে	ন			অ	ধি	কৃ	ত		
না		দ্বি		কা		পা				প		ং			
ব	রা	ত	জো	র		ই	তি	বা	চ	ক		কৌ	র	ব	
শ্য				বা			স্ত		র্ম		শ		শ্য		
ক	টা	ক্ষ		দ	য়া	প	র	ব	শ		হা	ল	খা	তা	
		ত			য়া		বা		শ					দ্বী	
		বি	ক	টা	কা	র		দী	নে	শ		চ	ট	কা	
হি		ক্ষ		না					বা		ট			র	
র	হি	ত		পো	তা	ম		পু	প্প	স্ত	ব	ক			
ণ্য				না	নো		র					দা			
ক	র্ম	কা	ও		আ	হা	র	বি	হা	র		র	সি	ক	
শি		ঙা		আ		রি				ভ্র				ন	
পু	তু	ল		ধ	র	গী	ধ	র		ভা	র	বা	হ	ক	
		খা		ম				গ		ঙা		গ		টা	
	জা	না	জা	নি				বি	ডা	লে	র	আ	ডা	ই	পা



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