

ਪ੍ਰਿਥਿ ਕਲਮ

੧੪੨੨



মিলনী

The Bengalee Association of Colorado



Milonee 2015 Executive Committee

*Anindya & Sraboni Basu
Devojyoti & Deblina Bhattacharya
Arabinda & Ruchira Barman
Soumya & Sumana Gangopadhyay
ParthaSarothe & Dipika Ghosh Moulick
Koyeli Bhoumik
Arindam Halder
Somnath & Sudatta Mukherjee
Soumyajit Mukhuty and Piya Sengupta
Avijit Sur & Munmun Chowdhury
Arindam Sinha & Aparupa Das
Suchismita Ganguly
Sourav & Priyanka Sinha
Soumyadeep & Bidisha Acharya*

*Durga Pujo 2015- Nirghonto
October 24th -25th*

<i>Time</i>	<i>Event</i>
10:00 am	Puja Starts
12:00 Noon	Pushpanjali
12:30 pm	Prasad & Kids' Lunch
1:00 pm	Adults' Lunch
3:00 pm	Cultural Program
5:00 pm	Snacks Break
8:00 pm	Dinner

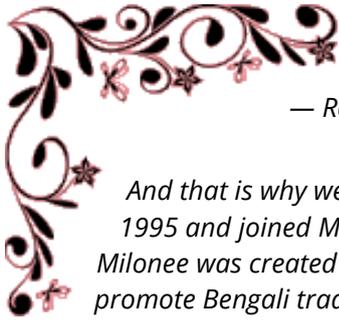
*Pujo performed by Joydip Bhaumik &
Ananyo Bandhopadhyay*

Editor: Piya Sengupta (Special thanks to Somnath & Sudatta Bhattacharya, Riya Sengupta, Anindya and Sraboni Basu)
2015 Tulikolom Cover page: Josh Ghosh Moulick
2015 Pujo Stage and pandal design: Suchismita Mukherjee

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FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK



*"When a culture vanishes, humanity is the loser."
— Rohinton Mistry, Family Matters*

And that is why we hold on to our culture so dearly here in Milonee. I came to this country in 1995 and joined Milonee committee that same year. It still had the essence of a large family. Milonee was created way before that by a small group of Bengalis as a platform to practice and promote Bengali traditions, customs and culture. We have evolved and grown since then. This year we started with Saraswati Puja. We had an outstanding attendance from the community. With the help of our younger generation we organized a coat drive and donated the warm clothes to the Denver Rescue Mission. This was a baby step in giving back to the larger community of Colorado. We revived our summer cultural event 'Srabon shandhya' (held on July 25th 2015) where we had a fantastic Rabindra Sangeet / Folk performance by Iman Chakraborty along with local performances. We invited the Bangladesh community in our summer event and they participated with much enthusiasm.

I am sure the community members noticed that the Milonee website went through a complete makeover and has a brand new look-n-feel!

In celebrating Durga puja so far away from home we try to bring a slice of Bengal to you during our 2 day celebrations here in Colorado. We have been successful since the last few years to bring famous artists from Kolkata who have entertained us immensely. We are proud to present the famous Bangla Band Bhoomi along with Lakhan Das Baul and Kinjal Chattapadhyay during Durga Puja this year. I hope you will enjoy their performance and make it a very successful event. We will also celebrate Lakshmi Puja on the 31st of October this year.

Maya Angelou, my favorite poet said:

"It is time for parents to teach young people early on that in diversity there is beauty and there is strength."

I am happy to see that in addition to parents, Milonee instills a strong sense of Bengali culture, builds a sense of responsibility and fosters kinship among our next generation. They learn to respect diversity and are proud of their heritage, their roots. The shifting sands of time through which we live will shape our kids. For them Milonee is the platform where the marriage happens between the Occident and the Orient. They participate in the Durga Pujo cultural program, play basketball, volunteer at our events and develop a lifetime bond amongst themselves. Cultural influences cannot be measured; they can only be seen through the traces they leave behind. You will see this in their thoughts in the magazine this year. The cover page of our magazine has been done by our very own Josh Moullick. Josh has given back to us such a beautiful gift. Some of our kids have left the state to pursue education elsewhere but I think they take a part of Milonee with them in wherever they go. They will reflect on their upbringing, their ties to Milonee in music, arts, culture and their belief in the confluence of east and west.

On a personal note during this one year tenure I have suffered a personal loss. My mother left for her final abode in May. I am still going through the grieving process but I could not have been functional without the support of the community members. They have helped me tremendously to accept this loss and carry on with my duties at work, home and for Milonee. This is the beauty of having a community like Milonee. We have a home away from home where you can share your happiness and sorrows with fellow community members.

I have been very lucky to have a wonderful and talented team of Committee members. Every team member worked tirelessly to make each event successful. They took ownership and pride and worked with a lot of enthusiasm.

I feel honored and humbled to have served as a president of this esteemed organization. I have learnt a lot and have grown as an individual. Memories were created during this one year that I will go back to. The help and support that the community provided to our team has been overwhelming. On behalf of the committee I would like to thank each one of the donors who contributed so generously towards the Milonee fund. I would like to thank the previous committee for extending their support to us at every step of the way. If I have succeeded as a president the credit goes to the entire team. The failure is mine and I take responsibility for that.

As I am ready to pass on the baton to the next President I wish Milonee success in the coming years. I dream that one day Milonee will be compared with the coastal pujas like Kallol and Prabashi. My hope is that the love and care with which Milonee was created will be continued not just next year but in the coming years as well. We will all be there to support Milonee and witness the growth of this outstanding community.

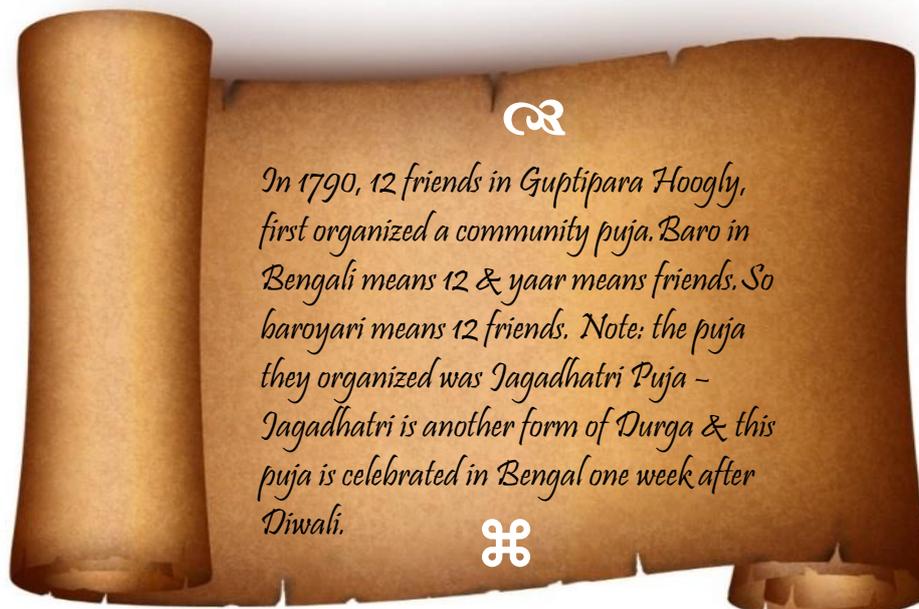
Shared Subhecha to all!

Thanking you.

Sraboni Basu

President - Milonee Executive Committee 2015

Colorado, US



COLORS OF CHANGE by Anuradha Kamath Gangopadhyay

*Have you ever watched an autumn leaf?
Slowly float, twirl, and rest upon the welcoming earth below?
And wondered what its life was like before the fall?*

*A fresh new green bud sprouting with hopes
Of never-to-be-forgotten memories
To a blossoming leaf thriving in glory
In the long sunny playful summer days
Shading and comforting those in need
Resisting not the change that is inevitable
But, accepting transformation as the key to unlocking
The treasures of a new world.*

*For it is only with a new lens we can see
A more beautiful tomorrow
The golden earthen hues
Of yellows, oranges, and reds
Signify our richness of being alive
Experiencing feelings, love, and affection
Emotions of joy, sadness, pain, and peace
All inherent in what we call Life
All yet fleeting and never permanent!*

*Oh to have a fall as graceful, satisfying and fulfilling
As those beautiful leaves
Of a life well lived, cherished, appreciated, and loved
For it is only when we fall
We can pick ourselves up again
To new beginnings!*



Time by Obin Basu

I was staring at my lava lamp when it happened. My bedside table started shaking, and the shaking gradually built up. It eventually felt like a mini earthquake was happening in my room. I jumped out of my bed, startled and afraid. Then, a small hole appeared in my room.

"No it-it can't be!" I said. Earlier that day in science, we were learning about black holes. This looked exactly like the ones we were looking at that day. I felt a vacuuming motion so I tried to run away to the other side of the room. But I was too late, and the hole sucked me in.

I seemed to be floating in some weird museum gallery in another dimension. I looked around and saw many videos playing. As I looked closer, I realized they were videos of.... me! They were moments from my past. As unreal and crazy as it sounds, I'm pretty sure I was time traveling. At a random moment, I turned and walked into a moment from my past.

I landed in my front lawn with a grunt. There were a lot of cars parked in the driveway and down the road. I realized some event must be happening. There seemed to be a lot of noise coming from the backyard, so I opened the gate and walked in. There were a lot of small children running around and a lot of adults too. I looked at a huge sign taped on the top of my porch and froze. The sign read: *Happy 3rd Birthday Obin!* I realized that if I found my younger self, I would break the most important rule of time traveling. Meeting my younger self could rupture the current time line. I realized that time was not something you messed with. I turned to run, but I was greeted by a small child with a very familiar looking face.

"Why are you leaving my birthday party Mr.?" I realized I was talking to now three year old me.

"Um. I forgot your present! Be back in a flash kiddo!"

"Ok. But don't miss the cake. I heard it's going to be really good." I do remember really good cake that year. I nodded and left. I found the black hole that somehow no one noticed. I felt the vacuuming motion again and stepped back in.

I awoke and jumped out of my bed, realizing it was a dream. Though it was not real, I felt that destiny was sending me a message. Time is precious and we have so little of it on this Earth. I advise any one reading this to go live your life to the fullest. Because before you know it, it'll be over.



The Robot *by Rajarshi Bose*

I hate homework more than anything!

It's so boring and it doesn't teach you anything other than science, history or math. It's also a huge waste of trees and papers. Once the teacher grades it, she just gives it to you and, you most likely throw it away. My dad is a bio engineer that means he makes machines related to biology, like robots and artificial organs. One day I got fed up with all this homework coming



home and I thought of a plan that could change everything, the homework machine.

If you insert an unfinished homework or essay, it will come out 100% correct and finished.

So that night when everyone in the house was asleep, I sneaked down to the basement and I started snatching boards, plugs, wires, screws, nails, and everything else I need for my revolutionizing contraption.

But then I thought my invention should be a robot that can think and move and should still be able to finish my homework. Now that I had everything I scrambled up to my room and started building my robot, by dawn I finished all the programming. And so every night I returned to the robot until I finally finished.

I put 7 batteries in him and his blue eyes slid open and his TV on him displayed "Robot". I waited for a minute and finally he said:

"Hello Friend ". I thought about my writing essay I brought home today and asked him if he can finish this for me. I put it on a tray which went into his body. There was whizzing and whirring for a few seconds. But in no time it flew out of his body and was perfectly finished and was written in beautiful cursive. This was the best day of my life. But I knew he could do more things than that. I asked him if he could play the movie 'Inside Out', and a projector slid out of his head and the movie started playing. He could make a variety of foods from hotdogs to roasted duck. Robo loved soccer even though all he did was hover over the grass.

But the best part was that my parents didn't even know about him, and his capabilities.

He helped me with everything for 3 years. But one day I was getting some milk from the fridge when suddenly slipped on a tennis ball and I poured milk all over Robo. Sparks started zapping out of him and battery fluid started leaking from his mouth. The last thing he said on his TV was H.W. then the TV exploded and set fire to all the cabinets in the kitchen, I was glad my parents weren't home; it took me only 5 minutes to stop the fire though. I wondered what H.W. was as I sadly cleaned the robot's mess. I got on my computer and searched up H.W. and I found a file, I clicked on it and I saw a boy about my age and he said even though his robot form was destroyed, he will always be in this computer, but the moment you think he is gone, he will slowly fade away. But I never forgot about my friend because I knew he will always be with me where ever I could be.

WISE-CRACKS by Mita Mukherjee

- *Wishes do come true! ---JUST HAVE TO WISH HARDER!*
- *Opportunity knocks twice!—ONCE TO SAY “HELLO” and SECOND TIME TO SAY GOODBYE!*
- *Every cloud has a silver lining—ONLY SOMETIMES WE NEED GLASSES TO SEE IT!*
- *When a door closes, a window surely opens---SOMETIMES YOU NEED A LADDER TO REACH IT!*
- *Every interaction is an opportunity to learn—THAT IS IF WE ARE INTERESTED IN IMPROVING AND NOT PROVING AND BLAMING!*
- *Look before you leap: think before you speak! STOP BEFORE YOU OVERREACT!*
- *Life is short—spend it with people who bring out the BEST in you—however sometimes you have no choice in the matter!*
- *Happiness is in the heart—LET IT BLOOM!*
- *Prayers do get answered—however “HE” DOES IT IN HIS OWN TIME!*
- *Life is like a flute, full of holes and emptiness—but if you work on it, it can play beautiful melodies—ONLY IF YOU ARE AROUND PEOPLE WHO APPRECIATE!*
- *A pot must find a lid that fits—so it is with a man and woman!*

সীমান্ত - অনিবার্ণ চক্রবর্তী

১) আমাদের বাড়ীতে আফিজা দিদি কাজ করত। আফিজা দির বর যখন আরেকটা নিকা করে তখন আফিজা দির বয়েম ২৫ বছর ও ৩ টি বাচ্চা। আফিজা দির বড় ছেলেটা কে মর্বাশিষ্কার স্কুলে পাঠাত। দুপুরবেলার খাবারটা ওখানেই হয়ে যেত। কিছুবছর বাদে ছেলেটির ১২ বছর বয়েমে যখন বিড়ি খেতে শিখেছে হটাৎ একদিন আফিজা দি কে বনল মেদনাপুরে যাবে হারামির কাজে। আফিজা দির কোনো নিষেধ বা অভিশাপ কাজে লাগে নি। কাল আফিজা দি র ঝটোনে বড় ছেলেটার ছিন্নভিন্ন শরীর শোয়ানো ছিল। হাত ,পা কিছু নেই। আরেকটা নোক এমে যখন ফটো তুলছিল, আফিজা দি র মাথাটা বাঁশ এর ঝুটিতে হেলানো ছিল। এক পার্টির দাদা এমে বনল ছেলেটা নাকি বোমা বানাত। আরেক পার্টির দাদা এমে বনল ফেঁজ জিজ্লেম করলে যেন বলে বাজি কারখানায় কাজ করত ছেলেটা। ৫০০ টাকা দেবে এও বনল। আফিজা দির মাথাটা ঝুটিতেই হেলানো ছিল।

২) মিমম উইলিংটনের বাড়ী গির্জের পাশ দিয়ে যে মোরামের রাস্তা তা মোজা চলে গেছে পাহাড়ের দিকে তারই শেষ প্রান্তে। স্বামী রনের একটা খামার আছে। কিছু না হলেও প্রায় ২০ টা গরু, ১৪ টা মশন শুয়ার ছিল। গরু শীতে ,একটা শুয়ার অবিশ্যি মারা গেছে। এমেনা আর ডির্ক মিমম উইলিংটনে র দুই ছেলে মেয়ে। এমেনা বড়। ডির্ক ছোট। খেলাধুলায় ২ ডাই বোন ই বেশ ভালো ছিল। স্কুল এর প্রিন্সিপাল জানিয়েছেন ফ্লার্ট টীম এর ২ জন নোক নাকি ডির্ক কে স্পট করেছে। ওরা ডির্ক এর সাথে কথা বলেছে। স্কুল এর পাঠ শেষ করার পরেই ২ জন নোক চলে গ্যামো ডির্ককে নিয়ে। ভূমধ্যমাগরে নাকি কোন এক জাহাজে ডির্ক থাকবে। কাল ডির্ক এর কফিন শোয়ানো ছিল মিমম উইলিংটনে র বাড়ীর পাশের গির্জা টায়। হাত ,পা কিছুই নেই। মিমম উইলিংটনের মাথাটা গির্জের দরজায় হেলানো ছিল। অরকারী দুই অফিমার জীবন বীমার অর্থ নিয়ে কিছু বনল মিমম উইলিংটন কে। কিছু কাজে মই ও করতে বনল। মিমম উইলিংটনের মাথাটা তখনও গির্জের দরজায় হেলানো ছিল।

৩) বরিশাল টার্ন এ কৃষ্ণ প্রামাদ দার বাবা,মা কে যখন খান মেনারা পুরুরে গলা জ্বলে দাঁড় করিয়ে শুলি করে মারে তখন ভোরের আনো ঠিক করে ফোটে নি। ৪ বছরের প্রামাদ দা র এটা মনে ছিল কারণ দিন শুরু হওয়ার ওই আনোতেও বাঁশ বাগানের ভেতর দিয়ে ব্যাপারটা স্পষ্ট দেখা যায়। প্রামাদ দার প্রতিবেশী আবু চাচা প্রামাদ দা কে লুকিয়ে দেশের বাড়ীতে পাঠিয়ে দিয়েছিল। প্রামাদ দা পানিয়ে ইন্ডিয়াতে আমে নি অবিশ্যি। ঢাকা ইন্ডিনিভার্সিটি থেকে পদার্থবিদ্যায় মাস্টার্স করে হাই স্কুল এর মাস্টার হয়। আবু চাচার কাছে যখন অরকার খবর পাঠিয়েছিল প্রামাদ দার হাত আর গলাকে কগরা চাপতির কোপে আনাদা করেছে ,তখন আবু চাচার ছানি পরা চেখে পানি এমেছিল কিনা জানা যায় নি। ঘোনাটে চেখে আবু চাচা শুধু জাম্বুরা গাছটার দিকে তাকিয়েছিল। শীতকাল ছিল। আবু চাচার গায়ে একটা পুরনো চাদর ও ছিল।

৪) এখন আফ্রিকা দি আর মিমের উইলিংটন পাশাপাশি থাকে। মিমের উইলিংটন আফ্রিকা দি কে ফুট কেফ করা শেখায়। আফ্রিকা দি কাল মিমের উইলিংটন কে নতুন শুরুর মন্বেশ করে খাইয়েছিল। সূর্য যখন অস্ত যায় ২ জনে পাশাপাশি হাতে হাত ধরে বসে থাকে। আফ্রিকা দির মাথাটা ঠুঁটিতে হেলানো থাকে আর মিমের উইলিংটন এর মাথা গির্জের দরজায়। ওদের বাড়িটার দাওয়ায় আবু চাচা এখনো একটা চাদর জড়িয়ে রোদ পোহায়।

৫) আমার বন্ধুর ৫ বছরের ডাগে একটা ছবি এঁকেছিল।যেখানে আকাশটা ছিল সবুজ। জলটা ছিল বেগুনি। আর একটা নাম লোক হাত পা চিৎ করে মেই জমে ভেমে আছে।

মাতৃবন্দনা - মন্দিরা ডাদুড়ী

আমি একটু অদ্ভুত। মেটা আমি জানি। আস্তে আস্তে বুঝতে পারছি আমার বাড়ির সবাই অদ্ভুত। তাদের মধ্যে মার কথা সবাই আগে বলা উচিত। অবশ্য এটা আমার মার পড়া উচিত কিনা তা বনতে পারছি না। ডানো ডানো শুনশুনো আগে বলে নেওয়া দরকার। মার সাহিত্যপ্রীতি অসাধারণ। তেমন স্মৃতি। এখনও ফোন করে মাকে জিজ্ঞেস করি, “ মা , কোন অনুকূপা দেবী...?” মেমব উত্তর মার কণ্ঠস্থ। বা;না সাহিত্যের প্রপের ক্ষেত্রে আমার মা আমার কাছে ‘ শ্রুশ্রু মার্চ’ আর কি। এছাড়া মেলাইতে অনবদ্য। মেমব স্মৃতিস্ম আমার দ্বারা হল না। ওরকম মেম অফ হিউমার-ও আমি পাই নি। অবশ্য মা এই শ্রুশ্রু মন্তো করেছেন আমাদের দিয়েই। আমি মার ব্যঙ্গ করার সূত্রাবের জন্য নাম দিয়েছি, ‘ ব্যঙ্গমা’।

মার একরকমের হাসি আছে, অনেকটা যাত্রার ডিনেন টাইপের, হা হা হা হা করতে করতে মেটা ধাপে ধাপে ওঠে।

ছোটবেলায় মামারবাড়ির সামনের গলিতে আমাদের পিছু খেলা মাকে মাকে বন্ধ হয়ে যেত ওই আওয়াজে। আমার বোনের নাফি রে ?”

এমব আমলে ভূমিকা। আমার মার জীবনে ডাইডি; ফোর্ম হচ্ছে কোতুল।ওটাই মাকে চানিয়ে নিয়ে যায়। প্রত্যেকের জীবনের গহনতম গোপন কথা শোনার জন্য মা মরে যান। কিন্তু প্রশ্রুশ্রু হই খুব আদা আপটা, “ এই তোর মেম্ব নাইফ আছে?” এই রকম আর কি।আমার বোন বিবাহিত, তাকে প্রশ্রু করে মা মফল হয়েছেন।আমার ক্ষেত্রে নানাভাবে এই প্রশ্রু বছরার এমেছে।অবশ্য আমার মা উত্তরের অপেক্ষা যে বিশেষ করেন, তা নয়।তঁর নিজস্ব একটা থিয়োরি থেকে থাকে নানা বিষয়ে। মেইমব দিয়ে চানিয়ে যান। বাড়ির লোকদের নানা রকম প্রশ্রু করে যে মা ক্ষান্ত হন তা নয়।পাশের বাড়ির লোকজন, ওপরের তলার লোকজন, ওইরকম ব্যস্ত হাফা করা বিবেকানন্দর রোডের পাশে পাশের বাড়ির লোকজন, মফলের জন্ম-মৃত্যু-বিবাহ- আশ্রহত্যা -ভগবান জানেন আর কী কী খবর, এমবই মার জানা আছে।

ব্যাপারটা কতদূর যেতে পারে, মেটা বনার জন্যই এই মেখাটা।বিবেকানন্দ আর বিধান মরনির মোড়ের ট্র্যাফিক পুলিশকে মা জিজ্ঞেস করেছিলেন রাস্তার মাকে দাঁড়িয়ে, “ আচ্ছা, এশ্রুশ্রু দাঁড়িয়ে দাঁড়িয়ে আপনার হাত-পা ব্যথা করে না ?” মোক্ষম প্রশ্রু। পুলিশ নিমেষে তার কণ্ঠ ফেনে মাকে বোঝাতে থাকে, “ আর বনবেন না মামীমা, এই বাতের ব্যথায়...।

আজ আপনি জিজ্ঞেস করলেন, কিন্তু ফের্ড তো বোঝে না, এই দাঁড়িয়ে দাঁড়িয়ে...” , যেদিন বিবেকানন্দ রোডের ট্র্যাফিকের কী হাল হয়েছিল তা বারান্দা দিয়ে নিজেই চোখে দেখেছি।

ট্র্যাফিক পুলিশের ব্যথা বেদনা তো জানা হল। এবার মা পরলেন ডিথিরিদের নিয়ে। একটু পাগল মত শান্ত মধ্যবয়সী এক ডিথিরিনী আমাদের পাড়ায় ঘোরাফেরা করত। মা আকৃষ্ট হলেন কারণ যে পয়সা টয়সা চাইত না। কারোকে মনে রাখতেও পারত না। অনেকবার পুলিশের সাথে মা আমার সঙ্গে যেই ডিথিরিণীর পরিচয় করিয়ে দিয়েছেন, এই যে আমার মেয়ে, ”যে অত্যন্ত ভদ্রতার সঙ্গে স্মিত হলে মাথা নেড়েছে প্রতিবার। মা তাকে ডিথিরিদের ফ্রেড অক্রেট অম্পর্কে জিজ্ঞেস করেছেন, “তোমার এক জায়গায় দাঁড়িয়ে দাঁড়িয়ে ডিস্ক করলে বেশি পয়সা ওঠে, না ঘুরে ঘুরে ডিস্ক করলে?”

যেও মাফে বলেছে, “ঘুরে ঘুরে ডিস্ক করলে বেশি পয়সা পাই। “মার প্রশ্ন, “কোথায় থাক রানে?”

পাগলের উত্তর, “নিরাপদ গমিতে। “ আমাদের পাড়ায় নিরাপদ নামের কোনো গমি অবশ্য নেই।

এই অবধি মশ্য করা যায়। কিন্তু মা অনেক দূর গেছেন। আমাদের পাড়ায় রাস্তায় মূর্গির দোকানটা যে উঠে গেছে, তার কারণ মা কিনা আমি জানি না, অবশ্য ঘোর অন্দেহ আছে আমার যে মা এ জন্য দায়ী। মূর্গি কিনতে গিয়ে মা দোকানদারটিকে জিজ্ঞেস করেছিলেন, “ এই যে আপনি রোজ রোজ জ্যন্তু মূর্গি কাটেন, আপনার কষ্ট হয় না? ‘মূর্গিওয়ালার হাতের ছুরি খেমে গেল, যে করুন মুখে মার দিকে তাকিয়ে বলল, “ওরকম করে বলবেন না মামীমা। “মা অবশ্য উচিত শাস্তি হাতে হাতে পেয়েছিলেন, পাশে দাঁড়ানো একটা লোক হি হি করে হাসতে হাসতে মাফে বলেছিল, “মামীমার লোভ আছে, অথচ মূর্গি কাটা দেখতে পারেন না। “ফিরে আমি মূর্গিওয়ালার কথায়। পরের তিন চার দিন দোকান বন্ধ ছিল। মনে হয় মূর্গিওয়ালার ঘোর অবস্থাদের মধ্যে চলে গেছিল। তারপরে দোকানটা উঠেই গেল।

এছাড়া ছোটোখাটো প্রশ্ন মেগেই থাকে। মা একজন ডাক্তারকে জিজ্ঞেস করেছিলেন, তিনি চলে কলপ দেন কিনা। উত্তরটা এখন মনে নেই। হয়তো আর কারোকে জিজ্ঞেস করেছেন তার দাঁত বাঁধানো কিনা। কলকাতায় গেলে ভয়ে ভয়ে থাকি, এমন যেন আমার সামনে না হয়।

মা প্রশ্ন করতে যেমন ভানোবামেন, খবর দিতে আরো ভানোবামেন। মাকরাস্তিরে আমাদের বারান্দায় দাঁড়ানো রাস্তার এক অন্য জীবন চোখে পড়ে। রাস্তায় কোন অমকামী একটা বুড়ো কোন একটা অল্পবয়সী ছেলের বিছানায় গিয়ে শুয়েছিল, ব্রেফকাস্টের অময় আমাদের মেমবও শনতে হয়েছে। বিশেষ করে অবিশ্বাস্য পরিমাণে মৃত্যুর খবর মার কাছে থাকে।



আবার মার এরকমের বিশ্বাস আছে যে একটা মৃত্যুর খবর পেলে তিনটে মৃত্যুর খবর পেতে হয়। আজ অবধি প্রতি মাস্তাহে তিনটে মৃত্যুর খবর আমি পাই নি এরকম হয় নি। অনেক অময় এরকম হয়েছে অনেক দূর অম্পর্কীয় আশ্রয়ী মারা গেছেন,

বাবা-মার দূর অম্পর্কীয় বন্ধুর বন্ধুর দূর অম্পর্কীয় আশ্রয় মারা গেছেন। ফলে গোড়া থেকে তাঁদের মৃত্যুর জন্য দুঃখ পেতে গিয়ে তাঁদের গোটা জীবন কাহিনী শুনতে হয়েছে।

এম্ব করে বাবার সঙ্গে আর ফোনে ডালো করে কথা বলাই হয় না। বাবা একদিন বিরক্ত হয়ে মাঝে বললেন, “আরে, তোমাকে তিনটে মৃত্যুর খবর দিতে হবে না, কলম অনলাইন আনন্দবাজার খুললে অনেকগুলো মৃত্যুর খবর ও পেয়ে যাবে। এখন ফোনটা আমাকে দাও। আমি কথা বলি।

আর একটা বৈশিষ্ট্যের কথা বলে আমি মাতৃকাহিনী শেষ কর। মা অন্যের গোপন কথা শোনার মত নিজের গোপন কথা বলতেও ভালোবাসেন। খুব গাম্ভীর্যের সঙ্গে আমি একটা গভী প্রাণ দিয়ে রক্ষা করেছি। ওটা যে করেই হোক আজীবন রক্ষা করে যাব। আমার এক দিদি মাঝে বলেছিলেন, “ফ্রয়েড তোমাকে দেখলে অবাক হয়ে যেতেন, তোমার কোনো আবহাওয়া নেই।” একদিন বিকেলে দেখলাম হামিহামি মুখে একটা মেটে নাম বিশাল শতরঞ্চি বগলে করে বাড়ি চুকছেন। আমি জিজ্ঞেস করলাম, “কে? কখন গেল? বলনি তো। মা বললেন, “আরে, আশ্রয় করায় ইচ্ছে হচ্ছিল। শতরঞ্চি কিনে মনটা ভালো হয়ে গেল। ফিরে এলাম কেমন হয়েছে, দেখ তো।”

আশা করি কলকাতায় আশ্রয়প্রার্থীদের যেকোনো অভাব নেই, তেমন শতরঞ্চিরও অভাব নেই।

মন্দিরা ভাদুড়ী যাদবপুর বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের তুলনামূলক সাহিত্য বিভাগের প্রাক্তন। বর্তমানে শিকাগো ইউনিভার্সিটি-তে বাংলা বিভাগে অধ্যাপনা করেন। অবসর কাটে নানান লেখাজোকা আর ছবি আঁকায়। শিকাগোতে এবং বাঙ্গলাদেশের ঢাকায় ওনার বেশ কয়েকটি ছবির প্রদর্শনী হয়েছে গত কয়েক বছরে।



The Das family puja at Shakhariola lane is called Bhuter Barir Pujo. The house where the puja is performed was earlier used as hospital in colonial era.



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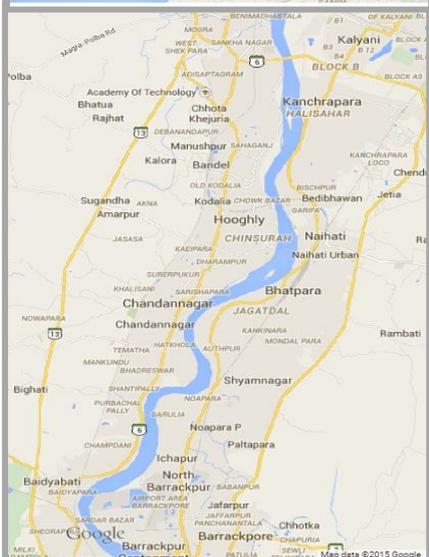
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DISCOVERING KOLKATA'S EUROPEAN HERITAGE by Dr.Biswadip Ghosh

Kolkata (formerly known as Calcutta) has a history that spans over 325 years of intrigue. Kolkata's European roots are visible in the many buildings that remain from the early years and as well from the customs and culture of the current inhabitants. Kolkata was established in 1690 by the British East India Company as a trading center. At the time, the capital city of Bengal and the seat of the Mughal Empire was Murshidabad about 100 miles to the north. But Kolkata with its position at the



Howrah Bridge from Millennium Park



mouth of the Hooghly River, had a strategic location that attracted the British East India Company traders, as well as other early European traders from Portugal, France, Holland and Denmark. But the early origins of Kolkata can be traced back to the late 1500's, as the Portuguese traders, who were based at Chittagong (now inside Bangladesh), document a village named "Kalikata". In 1717, the

Mughal Emperor Farrukhsiyar granted the East India Company trading privileges and in 1727 by the order of King George I, a civil court was set up, the city corporation was established and Hallwell became the first mayor of Kolkata. The city developed rapidly under the British rule and was declared the capital city of the British Indian Empire in 1772. Indeed, the residents of Kolkata remain proud of their European history, which is nicely preserved and can be enjoyed in a full day tour. Kolkata's unique personality can be experienced today on a day trip by visiting the city and its surrounding areas – Chinsurah, Chandernagore, Serampur, Bansheria, Bandel and Murshidabad.

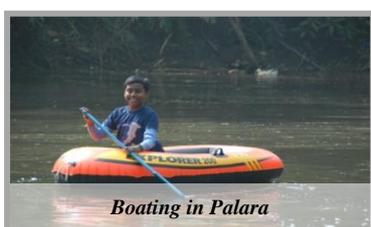
My day started in the area known as the Esplanade. The Esplanade area is regarded as the city center of Kolkata from the early times. Some of the colonial buildings in the area include the Writer's building, the Governor's residence, the Eden Gardens, the Grand hotel, the race track, Victoria Memorial and Fort William.



Ethnic Village House

After catching the sights around the city and I had breakfast at Flury's and then visited Millennium park, pleasantly situated with a wonderful view of Howrah bridge – a beautiful cantilever bridge connecting Kolkata with its twin city, Howrah.

After breakfast, I headed along the Hooghly River by car to visit the outskirts to soak in the rich



Boating in Palara

history. My first stop was 30 miles way at Palara, a fully functioning century's old, ethnic village. I observed the villagers in their daily life – cultivating bananas, leeches, jackfruit, mangos and papaya.

I then joined the villagers in their morning prayers, which was conducted by the local village priest. I also had time to navigate the narrow village roads through bamboo forests where jackals have their dens, while my son, Avishek navigated the serene village ponds in his canoe. The village ponds serve many utilities, such as washing clothes, cleaning, irrigating plants and farming fish.

We drove for another 5 miles on the Grand Trunk road, which was built in the 1500's by Mughal Emperor, Sher Shah Suri to the town of Chandernagore.

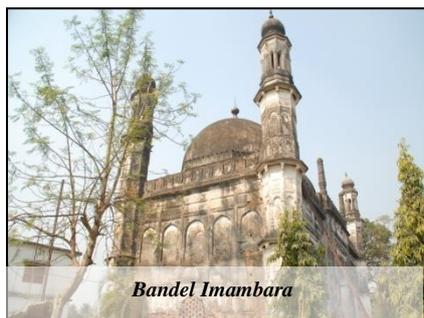
Chandernagore was established by French traders and is also situated on the banks of the Hooghly. It has many old colonial relics such as the French College, the former French Governors house, a beautiful church, modeled after the Notre Dame cathedral in Paris and the Strand along the Hooghly banks.

A stroll along the 1 km long pavement of the strand, enjoying the mild breeze and watching the small boats sailing by was very refreshing.

Travelling another 2 miles north on the Grand Trunk Road is the town of Chinsurah, a former Dutch colony. Chinsurah was established in 1635 by the Dutch to trade in opium, salt, muslin and spices. In 1656 the Dutch also erected a factory on the site of the town. Many prominent Dutch settlers and rulers are buried at the Dutch cemetery here. I visited the white domed tomb of Susanna Anna Maria, a Dutch lady who married Pieter Brueys (1730-83; Dutch Director of Bengal, 1783) and others.



Susanna is locally famous as 'saat saheber bibir kobor' (tomb of the wife of seven Europeans). Local lore holds that she had married 7 men (although records mention only two), all of whom had died under mysterious circumstances. The Anglo-Indian writer, Ruskin Bond's *Susanna's Seven Husbands* (based on which a Bollywood film, *Saat Khoon Maaf* was made recently) is supposed to have been inspired by Susanna Anna Maria of Chinsurah. This small town also has the Hooghly District Court, which is the longest building in West Bengal.



Bandel Imambara

I made my next stop is the town of Serampore, a pre-colonial town on the west bank of the Hooghly River which was part of Danish India under the name Frederiksnagore from 1755 to 1845. The town developed and became elegant and prosperous under the Dutch and merchants of both foreign and indigenous origin began to arrive and live there. Perhaps the most notable Dutch heritage building. I visited was the stately Serampore College. The college was established in 1818 and was the first college in Asia to award

a degree. My next stop was at the town of Bandel to visit the Basilica of the Holy Rosary, commonly known as "Bandel Church", which is one of the oldest Christian churches in West Bengal. It was founded by the Portuguese in 1599 as they began settling around the area and dedicated it to Nossa Senhora do Rosário. Around 1571, the Portuguese were given permission by the Mughal Emperor, Akbar to build a town on the Hooghly and they enlisted the services of a band of Augustinian Friars from Goa. A ship's mast stands in front of the church; it was presented to the

church by the captain of a vessel that had encountered a storm in the Bay of Bengal, and its rescue was attributed to Mother Mary. The balcony also provides spectacular views of the Jubilee Bridge spanning across the Hooghly. The Jubilee Bridge, built in 1887 on the Golden Jubilee of Queen Victoria's reign, is one of the oldest operating rail bridges in the world. Bidding farewell to the Bandel Church, I headed for the Hooghly Imambara, which was built in the memory of the great philanthropist Hazi Muhammad Mohsin.

The beautiful structure took 20 years to build and was completed in 1861. Designed by architect Keramtulla Khan, the two storied building is centered round a rectangular courtyard, decorated with fountains and pools. But the prime attraction of the Imambara are its two 85 feet high towers.

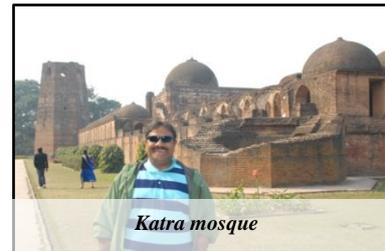
My next stop was a visit to the Hangseshwari temple, which is one of the most unique temples in West Bengal. It was built in the 19th century for deity, Hangseshwari, a manifestation of Goddess Kali. The temple is 21 m high and has 13 towers. The peak of each tower is shaped as a lotus flower. The structure of the temple is the representation of "Tantrik Satchakrabhed". Near to this temple there are also two other important temples named Ananta Basudeba Temple, which is decorated with very rich teracotta pointed plates and Swanbhaba Kali Temple



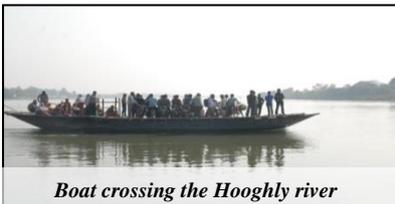
Hangseshwari Temple

built by Nrisinhadeb in 1788.

While the European colonialists imposed their administrative rule, culture and religion on the people of Bengal, the local people did benefit from the development of real-estate, factories, trade and education that took place. Bengal was the



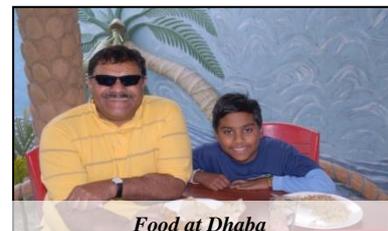
Katra mosque



Boat crossing the Hooghly river

most thriving region in all of India. Many people belonging to the lower economic stratum sent their children to the monitorial schools, which provided a basic education and seized the opportunity for higher education by sending their children to the academic institutions of the missionaries. In the process, there emerged a class of local gentry, who had a

favorable attitude towards the Europeans. The European traders also got involved in the collection of merchandise directly from the local producers, and offered incentives to the local artisans in the form of earnest money. They encouraged local craftsmen to make high quality products and created a class of trading middlemen, such as agents, banias, mutsuddis and stevedores.



Food at Dhaba

The admiration towards the European culture and European institutions is still ingrained in the people of Kolkata, which sets them apart from the rest of the Indian people. These are even more apparent with visits to establishments such as Flurys, a famous swiss confectionery in Kolkata.

The roadside is lined with restaurants, known as "Dhabas", that offer a freshly cooked fare that one can rarely find elsewhere. After a meal of tarka dal, tandoori roti and chicken champ, I continued my travels.

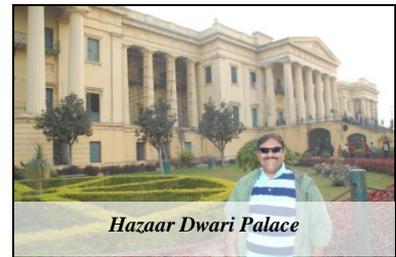


Chandannagore Church

Our final destination on our Bengal heritage tour is a stop at Murshidabad, the seat of the Mughal Empire of Bengal. While the European traders were situated 100 miles south in Kolkata, the Nawabs of Bengal carried on the Mughal dynastic rule from Murshidabad.

It was established by Nawab Murshid Quli Khan in early 1700's and served as the last capital of independent Bengal until 1793, when Bengal was brought under the British colonial rule with Kolkata serving as the capital. Murshidabad is filled with many beautiful 18th century monuments. A prominent landmark in Murshidabad is the Hazaar Dwari Palace, now a museum, which boasts of a fantastic collection of paintings, curios, china and weapons, including the swords of Ali Wardi Khan and Siraj-ud-Daulah and the cannon fired by Murshid Quli Khan. The skill of gifted craftsmen is still on display at the Khagra Bazaar in Murshidabad, but ivory carving has given way to sandalwood etching.

Also interesting are the Khush Baag on the banks of the river in Murshidabad where lie the tombs of many Mughal Nawabs including Shiraj ud-dullah and his grandfather, Ali Wardi Khan. Other notable monuments in Murshidabad are the Imambara, the Kaath Golar Bagaan palace estate, and the five-domed Katra Masjid, the largest mosque in West Bengal where 2000 people could read the Quran together.



Hazaar Dwari Palace



Victoria Memorial

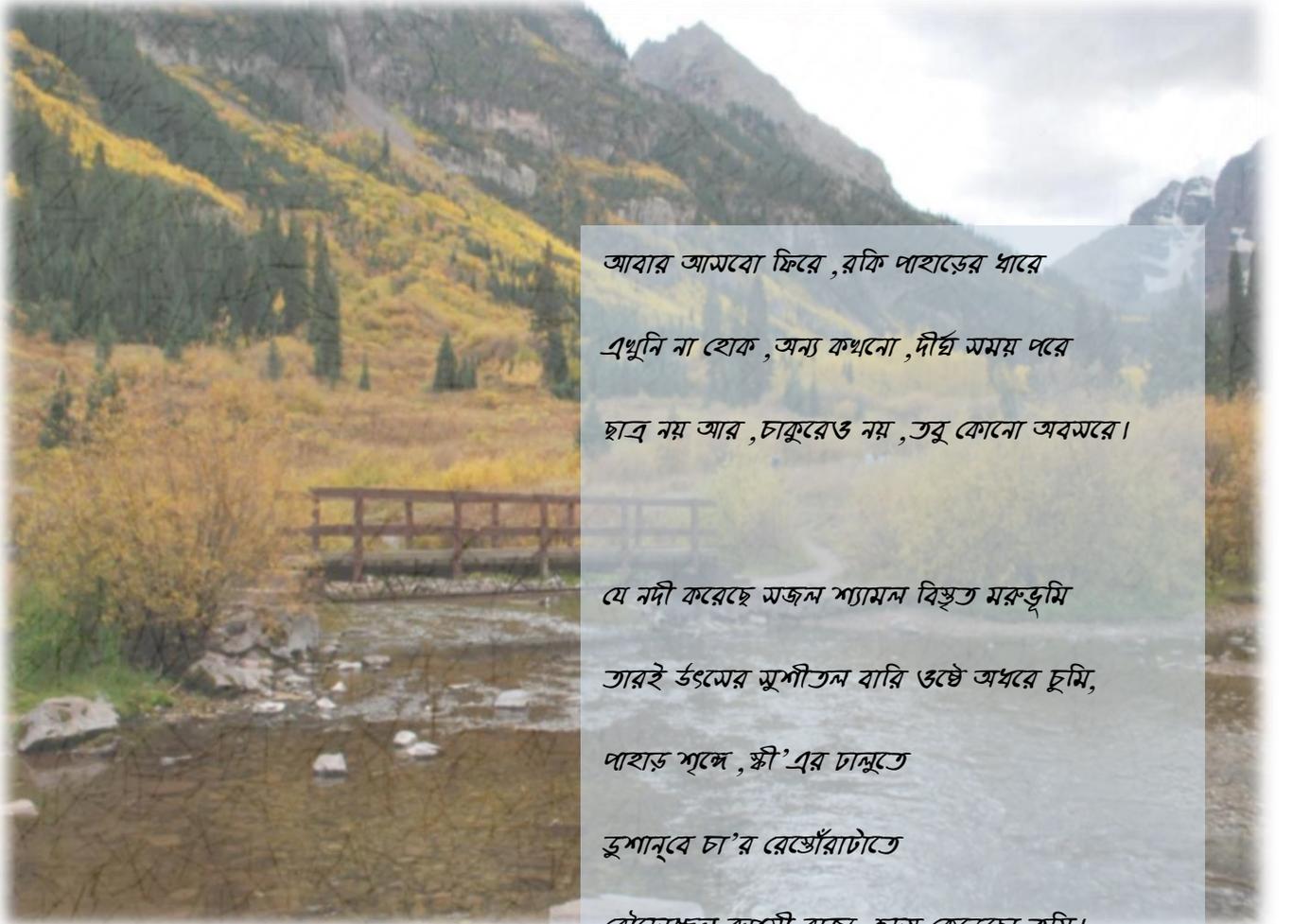
Having spent a day along the banks of the Hooghly River, I was able to transport myself 300 years back to a time of trickery, conflict, political intrigue and economic development. While the regions continues to abound with the natural beauty of the forests and the meandering Hooghly River, the many perpetrators from the 1700-1900's are long gone. They have left an incredible multi-cultural heritage that will remain in the composition and outlook of the people of Kolkata forever.



The Muslim singer who gained huge popularity in Bengal for singing Agomoni gaan (devotional songs dedicated to Durga) in 1914 was Md Kashem. He used a Hindu name K Mullick on the disc title since the official of The Gramophone Company of India (HMV) had an apprehension that people will not accept Hindu devotional songs in the voice of a Muslim singer.

ৰূপমী কনোৱাডো - শুভময় গাঙ্গুলী

(জীবনানন্দ দাশেৰ কবিতা অবলম্বনে)



আবাৰ আমবো ফিৰে ,য়কি পাহাড়েৰ ধাৰে
এখুনি না হোক ,অন্য কখনো ,দীৰ্ঘ সময় পৰে
ছাব নয় আৰ ,চাকুৰেও নয় ,তবু কোনে অবম্বৰে।

যে নদী কৰেছে মজল শ্যামল বিস্তৃত মৰুভূমি
তাৰই উৎসেৰ মুশীতল বাৰি ওষ্ঠে অধৰে চুমি,
পাহাড় শৃঙ্গে ,স্কী'এৰ ঢালুতে
ভূশান্বে চা'ৰ ৰেস্তোঁৱাটোতে
ৰোঁদোজ্জ্বল ৰূপমী ৰাজ্য ,হৃদয় কেড়েছো তুমি।

আজ চমি ,তবু কথা দিয়ে যাই — আবাৰ আমবো পৰে
ছাব না আৰ ,চাকুৰিও নয় ,তবু কোনে অবম্বৰে।

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Shinigami Photography

CALCUTTA: THEN AND NOW by Asha Banerjee (Columbia University)



I did not even know that Etihad Airlines existed. (How does such a tiny country like UAE have two major airline carriers?) When I was little, only British Airways and Lufthansa flew directly to Calcutta. Now, perhaps reflecting a shift in global money and priorities, it seemed like only the Middle Eastern airline carriers went. It was all so different. Yet, the reason we went—for the signing of legal documents—seemed like an ancient task.

Calcutta was an old city with plenty of importance during the British Raj, but not so old like Delhi to be studded with relics from sultans and emperors, or like Goa with its Portuguese churches. However, with around four and a half million people and a large young, educated population, Calcutta had obviously changed to fit the times. Like so many other cities across the world, would Calcutta struggle to find a balance between new and old? Would the old dominate and render the city irrelevant or would the city become so new that it was unrecognizable? I had 10 days to figure it out. Or at least listen and learn as much as possible.

The newness of Calcutta struck you right from your first step off the plane. Dum Dum, long since renamed as Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose International Airport, now pulsated with futuristic steel pillars and modern glass architecture. The urban landscape reflected the new environment: old neighborhoods, Charu Market and Tollygunge, once familiar to my parents, had completely changed. The roads remained the same but all the shops, people, and edifices of the previous generation had been uprooted. Befitting any changing, modern city, Calcutta now had its crop of artsy, oddly-named restaurants for the younger crowd. (My cousin had a get-together with friends at “Codfather” restaurant. I give points for creativity, but is cod even found in India?) Perhaps the most impactful change was technology and the burgeoning app market.

Apps like Ola which call a car and give rides (and can only be accessed via a smartphone) were commonplace. Maybe the days of the clunky Nokia phones with the game Snake were truly gone. The consequence or achievement of this new technological bubble was perfectly witnessed in India’s last election. It can be said that Prime Minister Modi’s use of Twitter and other social media during his recent political campaign was even more sophisticated and far-reaching than President Obama’s in 2012.

Yet, beyond the apps and buildings, remnants of the old Calcutta peeked at you wherever you turned. If you looked close enough and read enough signs, the shards of the old were still visible.

Professions, long extinct in other parts of the world, stayed vibrant, such as cobblers, suitcase/bag fixers (it doesn't quite translate well into English), and butchers. I even saw a sign advertising a sign/billboard creator. Nothing truly died. Everything changed into something else. Old newspapers became funnel-shaped packets, and plastic wrapping was reborn as shopping bags. Aging houses shed loose bricks which built portable stoves on which *atta ruti* puffed up, and the aged residents of those brick-shedding houses lined up to buy the *rutis*.

Old food joints of my parents' generation like Jimmy's Kitchen or Gupta Brothers continued to serve fabulous food. As a student of economics, I remained amazed and awed that despite high demand for Arsalan's products, they continued to price a plate of their Special Mutton Biryani at 255 Rupees (around four dollars), instead of raising it to increase profits. And although we visited the new malls and "multiplex" movie theaters, a great bulk of what we took home, such as Darjeeling tea (Lopchu red), *dal boris*, and large packets of mustard oil, did not come from large supermarket chains, but from the downstairs level of Gariahat market.

After having endured the monsoon, the sultry heat, the crowd, and the Alipore court, it took a car ride at 2 AM to prove to me that Calcutta remained a unique city, unbowed by any potential invasiveness of modern technology and change. In the dead of night, with only streetlamps illuminating the normally teeming city, I encountered it.

The darkness evoked the haunting spirit of the city. Wafts of memories and the past were all enshrined in these different buildings-- a winter circus in the Park Circus *maidan*, columned British administrative buildings in the Dalhousie district, the pale white Roman structure of Prinsep Ghat under the towering new Hoogly Bridge and the old Howrah bridge, and of course, the eerie black angel on Victoria Memorial keeping a watchful eye on the city.

It dawned on me that the architecture of the steely, sprawling airport or glittering, new, bypass hotels, the most prominent projection of the "new" Kolkata that I had observed, was actually a shining testament to the Calcutta of old-- of my parents' generation, of my grandparents' generation, and much before.

In my opinion, the banks of the Ganges were perhaps the best place to feel both the old and new of Calcutta/Kolkata without becoming overwhelmed by either. I was surprised to find that a beautiful promenade had been constructed along the river. I stepped on the newly painted brick walkway of the promenade and listened to that ancient river quietly churn and flow. Then, I felt, with all my senses, that I was a part of this beautiful river, flowing through this vibrant network of a city which simultaneously evoked the past and emitted the future with every ebb and flow.

Pic courtesy: www.titanleathers.com



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THE BRAHMO SAMAJ MOVEMENT *by Partha Chatterjee*

The nineteenth century is known as the Bengal Renaissance; however it could very well be called the Indian Renaissance. It was a period of great social and religious reform whose effect is reflected in modern Indian life. Much of what happened during that period can be attributed to the role played by the Brahmo Samaj. The social reforms included abolition of the evil practices of Suttee, child marriage and the caste system; widow re-marriage; propagation of English education for Indians and most important of all advancing women's education and emancipation. Religious reforms included emphasizing Monotheism in the Vedanta and a call to abandon all forms of idolatry and superstition; countering conversions to Christianity and proclaiming the Harmony of Religions.

To appreciate what future generations owe to Brahmo Samaj we have to understand the conditions of the time and get a glimpse into the personalities of the three men who were the leaders of the movement.

With the burden of her old civilization, and a profound religion, ancient India has often appeared to decay only to rise again with a new spirit. For several centuries India had been the meeting ground of people of different cultures and religions. Centuries of Islamic rule had impacted the Hindu way of life. But in the 17th and 18th centuries a perceptible impact was felt on her religion through contact with the Western nations who first came as traders and then as rulers. Bengal felt this impact the most as it was the British capital along with other European settlements. Possibly to counter these effects the Hindu society in Bengal had imposed on itself many self-suffocating practices and rituals. The Vedas and the Vedanta were lost to the people of Bengal. At this time there appeared a person of giant intellect who has been universally acclaimed as the Father of Modern India. This was Rajah Rammohun Roy.

First Phase - Rammohun Roy (1774-1833) was born into a wealthy orthodox Vaishnava family. He was educated at home in the vernacular, Sanskrit, English and in the Islamic language as was the custom at the time. At a very early age he studied the Koran, Euclid and Aristotle which aroused a spirit of free thinking in him. He felt an urge to abandon idol worship, polytheism and superstitious practices. This annoyed his father and he was sent to Benares to study the Hindu scriptures. After careful studies he discovered Monotheism in the Vedanta and on his return home he started to preach the elements of Monotheism from the Vedanta and urged the people to give up idol worship. He was taken to be a heretic and was exiled from home. He then traveled extensively to learn for himself the religious practices of other lands.

Rammohun returned home to Calcutta in 1792 and after a few years came in contact with a highly educated and cultured Englishman, John Digby, who introduced him to Western literature, history, philosophy, the American War of Independence and the French revolution.

While posted at Rungpore (1809-1814) he started the 'Discussion Society' for the study of Hindu Scriptures and modern thought. On his return to Calcutta he was at once recognized as a leader of Hindu Society. In 1815 he started the 'Atmiya Sabha' or 'Friends circle' to discuss the actual texts from the Scriptures, the validity of Monotheism, modern Western ideas, the need for English education and abolition of evil customs. He entered into open controversies with the orthodox leaders of Hindu Society.

His fame as a scholar and reformer spread and humanitarians like David Hare sought his acquaintance. Under his guidance the Hindu College was established in 1817 to provide English education to the natives.

Rammohun mastered many languages and studied the Bible in Hebrew and in Greek. He got into controversies with the Christian church over the concept of Trinity, miracles and re-incarnation of God. The Unitarians of England and America appreciated his work.

- 1) In 1828, Rammohun started the 'Brahma Sabha' where he organized a new form of Divine worship.
- 2) In 1830 he built a house of worship of the one true God and called it the 'Brahma Samaj'. Texts from the Vedas were read; hymns based on Vedic verses composed by Rammohun himself in Bengali were sung. Personally Rammohun went through various stages of experience regarding Brahma Upasana. In his treatise Tuhfat-ul-Muwahhiddin (A gift to Montheists) he made the distinction between religion of habit and the religion of natural inspiration.
- 3) During his time only Brahmin priests were appointed to conduct the service and though he professed the brotherhood of humanity, following Hindu tradition, people of lower castes were not permitted where the Vedas were being chanted. Of course women were not allowed in public.
- 4) In 1829, with his help, Lord Bentinck, Governor General of India, passed an Act prohibiting the evil custom of Suttee. Although Rammohun sowed the seeds of Theistic worship the early Brahma Samaj remained wedded to orthodox Hindu Society. In August 1830, Rammohun sailed for England on a political mission. In England he was welcomed with honor by the intellectuals and the elite of society. Unfortunately he suddenly fell ill and passed away in Bristol in 1833. He was initially buried at Stapleton Grove but later his friend Prince Dwarkanath Tagore removed his mortal remains to Arno's Vale.

Although 'Freedom of Reason' had been established the pioneering reform ideas launched by Rammohun did not take root in India as the ground was not ready. For about 10 years the Brahma Samaj kept up only routine church service conducted by Pandit Ram Chandra Sharma. In 1843 there appeared a God sent man to take up the work of the Brahma Samaj. This was Devendranath Tagore, eldest son of Prince Dwarkanath Tagore and father of many talented children.

Second Phase - Maharshi Devendranath Tagore (1815- 1905) had known Raja Rammohun from his childhood days but he had never been to the Brahma Samaj.

Although Devendranath was born into an orthodox Hindu family, his father Prince Dwarkanath was a very progressive thinker. Devendranath received his early education at home under qualified pundits and later attended the Anglo-vernacular school founded by Rammohun before attending Hindu College at a time when Henry Derozio and D.L. Richardson were leading the 'Young Bengal' movement and Dr. Alexander Duff was busy converting scholarly Indians to Christianity. 'Young Bengal' had neither faith in God nor respect for any customs but they were truthful, fearless and humanitarian in spirit.

Devendranath had formed the 'Tattwabodini Sabha' or Truth Seekers Society in 1839. Two intellectual giants of the Bengali Renaissance, Akshoy Kumar Dutta and Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar were its earliest members. Although members of the Tattwabodini Sabha shared the values of 'Young Bengal' Devendranath's leadership drew them to the study of the Upanishads.. One day while sitting in his study a piece of paper with a Sanskrit verse was blown in front of him by a gust of wind. At that time he was engaged in the pursuit of a 'higher' knowledge. On the advice of friends he sent for Pundit Ram Chandra Sharma, the Acharya of the Brahma Samaj.

At first Devendranath was utterly disappointed to see the actual practices in the Samaj. He introduced radical changes to make the Brahmo Upasana more rational and inward based on the ideals of the Upanishads. First, he sent four pundits to Benares to study the Vedas. He himself joined them and finally gave up the infallibility of the Scriptures.

Secondly, He concluded that spiritual inspiration is the authority of truth. Pantheism had no place in his religion. He held that the relation between God and man is strictly personal. He coined the term 'Brahmo Dharma'.

Thirdly, while he still retained the practice of appointing Brahmin Acharyas, he allowed Sudras to be in the room where the Vedas were being chanted.

Fourthly, he selected theistic texts from the Vedas and Upanishads, freely modified some texts in keeping with his spiritual aspirations and published the Brahma Dharma Grantha as a guide book.

Fifthly he changed the structure of the Divine Service from a rational to a more spiritual form based on the Upanishads. Divine worship and welfare of humanity were considered essential. .

Sixthly, He published the Tattwabodhini Patrika in 1843 as the organ of the Brahma Samaj.

Finally, by travelling to distant places in India he carried the message of the Brahmo Samaj to the elite and intellectuals of India.

Devendranath was also at the forefront of the nationalistic movement and strongly opposed conversion to Christianity.

At first the rationalists and social reformers like Vidyasagar and Akshoy Kumar Dutta helped the movement but differences arose due to their rational approach and Devendranath's social inaction. Devendranath could not convey his spirituality to them, became disheartened and left for the hills to practice meditation, spiritual communion and to study Western philosophy. He returned to Calcutta in 1858, and found a change in the environment and was delighted to find an ideal young man after his own heart who had joined the Brahma Samaj in his absence. This was Keshub Chunder Sen.

During Devendranath's time 'freedom of the spirit' was achieved. The Brahma Upasana was given a beautiful form by including songs and hymns, women's education was promoted and he remained active in Nationalistic movements. However his work remained short of total liberation from orthodox Hinduism due to his reluctance to offend his contemporaries.

Third Phase- Keshub Chunder Sen (1838-1884) was born in an orthodox Vaishnava family. His grandfather, Dewan Ram Kamal Sen, had risen from humble beginnings to the position of Dewan of the Mint and was also the first Indian Secretary of the Asiatic Society of Bengal. His family had thus been influenced by Western enlightenment and courtesy. He received early vernacular, Sanskrit and English lessons from Pundits at home and in due course was admitted to the Hindu College. He was a brilliant student with a voracious appetite for knowledge and studied advanced books on history, literature, logic, science and psychology under the guidance of eminent professors. From his childhood he was a thoughtful, persevering and God fearing man. His three principles were Viswas (Faith), Vivek (Conscience) and Vairagya (Ascetic Spirit). He refused to be initiated into the mantra from a guru for to him life itself was religion including behavior, work ethics, character, devotion and the harmonious development of life. Keshub Chunder Sen was only 19 when he joined the Brahma Samaj. His pure character, insight, knowledge of many subjects coupled with his majestic countenance and a gift for oratory in both English and Bengali quickly made him a charismatic leader.

Keshub was a born organizer and even as a student organized many societies and activities. 'Colootola Evening School' for serving poor neighborhoods.

The 'Dramatic Club' for the performance of ethical dramas.

'The Goodwill Fraternity' for collectively cultivating devotional spirit in the company of religious personalities and eminent professor. At first Keshub faced a difficult time. The Sepoy Mutiny had just ended and left its mark on the Indian mind. 'Young Bengal' and intellectual ferment,

intemperance and atheism were playing havoc with the youth. The condition of women and the tillers of the soil were deplorable. His first act was to found the 'Brahmo Vidyalaya' in 1859 for teaching the philosophy of theism. Devendranath lectured in Bengali while Keshub lectured in English on Mental and Moral philosophy. This attracted about fifty students many from Young Bengal. Keshub drew their attention to social reform by staging the drama 'Bidhabha Bibaha' on widow re-marriage, by Umesh Mitra thus re-enforcing the work done by Vidyasagar.

In 1860 he formed the 'Sangat Sabha' for cultivating mutual intimacy among the students irrespective of caste and other orthodox practices.

In 1861 Keshub started the famous journal Indian Mirror. Fired with idealism and patriotism four young men Keshub Chunder Sen, Protap Chunder Mozoomdar, Aughore Nath Gupta and Bejoy Krishna Goswami gave up their professional work and formed the first batch of dedicated Missionaries. In 1862 Keshub started the 'Calcutta College' with a special syllabus.

At this time Devendranath endowed the title of 'Brahmananda' on Keshub and appointed him as the first non-Brahmin Acharya of the Brahmo Samaj, causing dissatisfaction among the old Brahmin Ministers. Nonetheless Keshub's mission work at Krishnanagar in 1861 spread his name far and wide. He most ably refuted Christian attacks on Hinduism and stopped conversions to Christianity.

In 1864 Keshub went on an all-India tour, a first of its kind. He lectured extensively in Madras, Bombay and other cities on the need for non-sectarianism, social reforms and Indian integration from the platform of universal religion. Several sister organizations grew out of his ideas.

On his return Keshub published a Bengali journal 'Dharmatattwa' for acquainting the people of Bengal with the various religions and cultures found all over India.

A hundred and seventy three branches of the Brahmo Samaj came into existence all over India. People of all races and denominations, rich or poor, learned or illiterate, were taken into its fold with equal status. They went beyond Hinduism and started studying other religious scriptures such as the Koran Shaeif, the Bible, Lalit Vistara, the Bhagawad, They gathered spiritual food from the devotional faith of Sri Chaitanya, the precepts of Jesus, the faith of the Buddha, the spirit of equality of the Prophet Mohammed and the purity of Zoroastrianism.

Devendranath and the older group could not keep up with this rapid progress and finally came a parting of the ways in 1866. The older group constituted the Adi Brahmo Samaj while Keshub and the younger generation marched forward under the banner of the Brahmo Samaj of India. Scriptures of different religions were revered and unity in diversity was accepted. There was no place for mediators, gurus or idols. They accepted the position of great men of all religions. The 'Sloka Samgraha' a compilation of theistic texts from the scriptures of Hindu-Sikh-Christian-Islam-Chinese-Zoroastrian- Buddhism and Jainism was published.

At this time Keshub came in close contact with some Hindu religious personalities like Paramhansa Ramkrishna, Dayananda Saraswati and Pahari Baba. Their attachment to Keshub is historical. Keshub was instrumental in making the public aware of the reclusive mystic Ramakrishna. The marriage system in India was reformed to improve the condition of women. Inter-marriage irrespective of caste, race or religion and widow re-marriage was emphasized. Polygamy and child marriages were made illegal.

Worship of God was conducted in the spoken language instead of Sanskrit. The form of worship was universal. It combined Hindu bhakti, Buddhist dhyana, Muslim monotheism and equality of humans and Zoroastrian purity. People irrespective of caste, creed, race, sex, pecuniary status, education and religion were given equal place in the prayer hall. Beautiful hymns of Rammohun, the classic compositions of Devendranath's time and the stirring sankirtan's of Trailokyanath Sanyal were an integral part of the Upasanas. The missionary tours of Keshub and his missionaries roused the spirit of India as well as people from foreign countries.

Several journals on different subjects were published. The Indian Mirror (1861); Bamabodhini Patrika (1863); Dharmatattwa(1864); Sulav Samachar(1871); Mad na Garal?; Dharma Sadhan patrika(1872); Sunday Mirror (1874); Paricharika(1878) Balak bandhu (1879); Bisha Bairee(1881);

The New Dispensation (1881); Liberal and the New Dispensation (1882); The Unity and the Minister (1885).

With the new movement the position of women changed beyond recognition. Keshub's wife Jaganmohini was the first lady to launch a new era of women's emancipation by attending her husband's ordination ceremony at the house of Maharshi Devendranath. A beginning was made with male members educating their female members at home. Gradually Antahpur Upasana and Streesiksha were organized followed by 'Bamabodhini Sabha'. The 'Brahmica Samaj' was organized by the ladies themselves in 1865. The Ladies Normal and Adult School was founded by Keshub in 1870. In 1871 Keshub started the Victoria College for Women. Thus the way was paved for the position which Indian women occupy today.

In 1876 Keshub established another institution of great importance the 'Albert Institute' Its objectives were to promote literacy among all classes.

Keshub was regarded as the greatest Indian leader of his time. What he practiced in the Brahma Samaj on a small scale was communicated to national life and to the world at large. During his visit to England he was honored by Queen Victoria and many European and American philosophers.

In 1878 the British rulers recommended to marry the Maharaja of Cooch Behar to the eldest daughter of Keshub, Sunitee Debi. A great controversy, which is a separate history in itself, followed within the Brahma Samaj, and a group used the occasion to break away and form the Sadharan Brahma Samaj with Shiv Nath Shastri as its leader. Ananda Mohan Bose was its first President. Under Shivnath's leadership they continued their religious and social activities much in the same spirit as Keshub and achieved much. The Mahila Vidyalaya, the Tattwakaumudi Patrika, the City School, the Chatra Samaj, the Sakha, the Sunday School for Children, the Brahma Balika Shikshalaya, the Sadhanashram were all established though the joint efforts of Shivnath and Anandamohun.

Rammohun's freedom of reason led to Devendranath's freedom of spirit and with Keshub this reached freedom of the will and in 1880 he declared 'The New Dispensation' or the 'Religion of Harmony' as the goal of the Brahma Samaj.

The church's activities were reorganized to work on an all India basis. Individual missionaries were designated to study in-depth the scriptures of Christianity and Western culture; the study of Islam which led to the first Bengali translation of the Koran; study of Buddhism; another dove deep into the ocean of Hindu scriptures; 'Nanak Prakash' was published after studying the Sikh scriptures. Trailokyanath Sanyal continued to compose beautiful hymns. The term 'Brahmasangeet' became synonymous with spiritual songs. In 1883 Keshub issued an epistle for 'One World for Love and Peace' to the great nations of the world, to the followers of all great prophets and religions, and to the rulers of different countries to shun sectarianism and separateness and instead to establish harmony. Within 10 years of this epistle the World Parliament of Religions was organized in Chicago by the Unitarians. Keshub, a believer in the concept of Church Universal, had left this world by then.

After twenty five years of ceaseless work and advancement Keshub left this world in 1884. The Brahma missionary and great orator Protap Chuder Mozoomdar in one of his lectures said, 'We ask that the Christians remain Christians; the Mohamedans remain Mohamedans; the Hindus remain Hindus. Let each of them worship in his heart so purely, so spiritually and in such a spirit of love that all men may be brethren and that in spite of differences of nationality and climate recognize each other as members of the kingdom which their God will some day establish. After Keshub the work of the Brahma Samaj was carried on for several years by his followers. The list of people who became Brahmos or followed the Brahma creed reads like a Who's Who of India at the time.

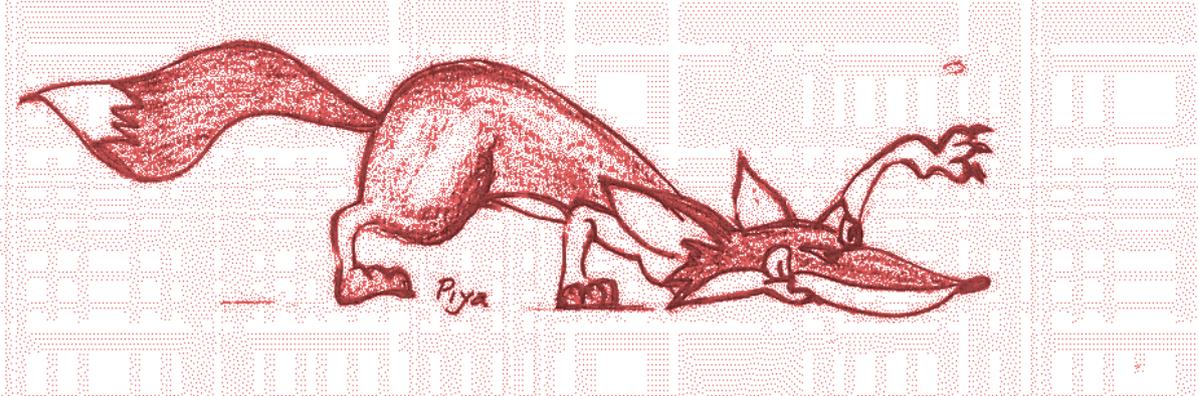
Acknowledgement: Much of the material for this essay is taken from 'A Short History of the Brahma Samaj and the evolution of Nababidhan' by Late Sati Kumar Chatterji.

FOX MASTER *by Anindya Basu*

A translation of 'Sheyal Pandit' from Thakurmar Jhuli'

There was a fox his dad so skilled
A nice wall the dad himself built!
No less was his son
He had intention!!

The son got ready, twirled his big moustache and opened a school in the ginger patch. Pretty soon he had all kinds of students.



Crickets, hoppers, turtles, centipedes
Worms, Scorpions, long leg arachnids
Roaches, beetles, frogs and toads
Grubs and crabs all critters enrolled!!
Each student screeches!!
As the fox master teaches!!

The forest came alive with all that noise. Watching this, a crocodile thought, 'Hello! Everyone is getting free lesson from the fox master. Why shouldn't my kids get any?' So he took his seven kids to the fox master. For starters, the crocodile kiddies learnt to read A, B and C. The clever fox assured the crocodile that each one of his kids will become a scholar in seven days! The crocodile was quite pleased and left his kids in the fox master's charge and went back home. The mean fox snacked on one crocodile kid –a-day for six days! Meanwhile the crocodile thought, 'All my kids will become scholars tomorrow!! I should visit them today.' So he told his wife, 'Darling! Cook some nice cat-fish pickle, salmon cake and snail stew so that our children can have a hearty meal tomorrow.' Then the crocodile wrapped a nice gunny cloth around him and put on a torn fish-net sweater. Next, he put on a dinghy hat on his head and stuffed a handful of moss in his mouth to chew on and rubbing his belly started off towards the fox master's school. Soon he arrived at the fox master's school and inquired, 'Hello Fox master! Let me see how well my kids learnt so far?' The fox master welcomed the crocodile and called out to his students, 'Dung beetle! Go get some tobacco for Mr. Crocodile. You there! Grasshopper! Get Mr. Crocodile a snuff box. Now let's see, where are the croc-kiddies? Why don't you take a seat, Mr. Crocodile? I will go get your sons.' He went inside the hole and grabbed the last of the crocodile kiddies. Then he propped him up through the hole on the ground seven times to fool the crocodile! Then he said to the crocodile, 'Now that you have seen your kids, why don't you wait just a day longer? All your children are almost there! One more day and they will all become scholars!' Satisfied, the crocodile said, 'Alright then!' And the foolish crocodile left for home. The fox master ate the last one of the crocodile kiddies and then shut his school down and ran away. Run! Run! Run! The next day, the crocodile came back and found out that the school was shut down. The patch was

empty! The crocodile slapped his own cheek, slapped his own forehead and then started crying. Finally he swore, "I shall see that murderer fox master!"

Crabs -aren't you ever going to eat some?
By the stream, aren't you ever going to come?
Yes you will

Then you shall become
The Crocodile's kill



The Crocodile went and hid in the stream. Few days went by. The fox master walked around the stream but didn't dare step into the stream. But he couldn't wait any longer. He was so hungry! So he forgot everything and stepped into the stream. As soon as he did that, the crocodile grabbed his leg by his saw like teeth. Then he dragged the fox out to the saw-grass jungle. Immediately the fox master tore a tall saw grass and laughed and shouted, "The foolish crocodile has now grabbed the saw grass instead of my leg. Go ahead! Eat the saw grass leaf then!" The foolish crocodile thought, 'Crud! Did I grab a grass leaf instead?' So he let go of the fox-master's leg and went for the saw-grass leaf! As soon as he let go, the fox jumped out of the

stream and ran away! While running, he mocked the crocodile,

Mr. Crocodile, hooooowww!
I will open another school!

Send your kids there too fool!

Again few days went by; the crocodile could not even find a trace of the fox. One day he made a plan to trap the fox. So he lay down on the grass by the stream and opened his mouth and pretended to be dead. The fox was passing by. He saw the crocodile and thought gleefully 'Oh goodie! The crocodile is dead. Let me go get my wife and show her!' But he was very clever. So to make sure he said out loud, 'Holy cow! The crocodile is dead!! How do we know? Dead crocodiles flap their ears and wag their tails. Uh-oh! He is not dead!!'

The stupid crocodile thought 'Oh bother! I should move my ears and wag my tails to prove that I am dead!' and so he did. Near-by some shepherds were herding cows. They spotted the crocodile and came running with sticks and bricks and chased the crocodile away! The fox ran away thinking, 'That was a close call, dear! Let's get out of here!'

The fox finally entered an egg-plant farm.

Hungry was he surely
He ate much merrily
Ouch! A thorn stuck in his snout
He tried very hard to pull it out
But nothing doing!
He started bleeding!

So he went to the barber and asked, 'Mr. Barber! Are you 'bout? If you are then please come out!'

The barber was a good man. He came out and saw the fox and he felt sorry for the fox. He Said, 'Poor Mr. Fox. You are in much pain! Let me get my tweezers and you will get relief in no time'. But, no one



can predict accidents! While pulling the thorn with his tweezers the barber pulled it too hard and the fox's snout got sliced!

The fox was all upset and furious. He kept shouting,

'Hooo-oo-www! You foo-oooo!

Fix my nose fast. Else today is your last.'

The good barber got very scared. He pleaded, 'Please forgive me! I made a mistake. Please don't kill me!' So the fox said, 'Okay. I will let it go if you give me your tweezers as a penalty'.

So the barber reluctantly gave his tweezers to the fox. The fox took the tweezers and said good-bye to the barber and off he went. While he was passing by the potter's house, the potter called out to him, 'Hello Mr. Fox. What's that in your mouth?' The fox said, 'It's only a pair of tweezers.' The potter needed tweezers for himself. So he said, 'Come, let me see how good they are.' The fox gave the tweezers to him and the potter started examining it. Uh-oh! He broke the tweezers by mistake. The fox was very upset and he threatened the potter, 'You must give me back my tweezers intact!' Unfortunately, there was no black smith available in that village. The hapless Potter pleaded, 'Mr. Fox, I am so sorry! Please forgive me!' The fox said, 'Okay. Give me a clay-pot instead.' Potter gave the fox a nice clay-pot and breathed a sigh of relief. The fox started walking again holding the clay-pot in his mouth. At that time, a wedding party was passing by. They were blasting crackers and lighting fireworks. A stray cracker hit the clay-pot and the clay pot shattered into pieces! The fox was very upset. He ran up to the groom and said, 'How dare you shoot crackers at me! Give me back my clay-pot at once!' The groom was very scared. He said, 'Mr. Fox, I am very sorry! Please forgive us. Please don't kill us!' The fox said, 'Nothing doing! You got to hand over your bride instead to me and you can go where ever'. Reluctantly the groom let the fox take his bride. The fox took the bride and set off on his way. He went to the drummer's house and called out, 'Mr. Drummer, please come out and gather your band members for a performance! I want to marry this girl. Keep this girl in your house while I go get the priest.' And off he went in search of a priest.

The poor bride was very tired and she dozed off sitting at the drummer's kitchen table. The drummer's wife was cutting some vegetable at the kitchen table with a big knife. The bride fell asleep while sitting and fell on the knife. She got sliced into pieces by the big sharp knife! Drummer's wife was shocked and scared to death. So she quickly hid the dead bride in a hay stack. Meanwhile, the fox came back with the priest. The fox looked for the bride, and then demanded, 'Get me my bride at once!' The drummer's wife started crying and pleading. The fox was very angry. He said to the drummer, 'You must give me your drum.' Hastily, the drummer's wife gave the drum to the fox and breathed a sigh of relief. The fox took the drum and climbed up on a palm tree. He started playing the drum and sang,

Ka-boom! Ka-boom!

Egg-plant thorn got stuck in my snout – ka-boom! Ka –boom!

Pulled the thorn and sliced my nose – Ka-boom! Ka-boom!

Nose got sliced. Got me tweezers – Ka-boom! Ka-boom!

Tweezers broke. Got me a clay pot –Ka-boom! Ka-boom!

Clay-pot shattered. Got me a bride – Ka-boom! Ka-boom!

Bride got sliced. Got me a drum-Ka-boom! Ka-boom!

Ka-boom-ka! Ka-boom-ka! Ka-boom! Ka-boom!

The silly fox started dancing happily up on the tree top. And he slipped and-----!!!!

অরঞ্জন - পুরবী বসু

ডোর হইয়া ও হইতেছে না, মুদুমন্দ বাতাস বহিতেছে চারিদিকে।শেফালী ফুলের মৌরভ আর মাদা কমনার অপূর্ব মমাহার রাধা বিছানা হইতে স্পষ্ট টের পাইতেছে । গুত্রকাল রাত্ৰিতে স্বামী, শাশুড়ি অথবা ননদিনী, কাহার সঙ্গে কোনরকম বচসা হয় নাই রাধার, যাহা যখন তখন, মেইখানে প্রতিদিন ঘটিয়া থাকে । শরীরে বাড়াতি উন্ডাপ নাই, এতএব জ্বর যে হয় নাই তাহা বলাই বাহুল্য। অন্য কোনোরকম দৈহিক বৈকল্য অথবা ক্লান্তি ও অনুভব করিতেছে না মে ।

বাহিরে বৃষ্টি নাই। আকাশ পরিষ্কার । সুনীল ।

শীত অথবা উষ্ণতা কোনটাই বিরক্তিকর পর্যায়ে উপনীত হয়নাই। রাধার একমাত্র মন্থান মাখন সম্পূর্ণ সুস্থ ।

স্বামী ও পুত্র এখন পর্যন্তও পাশেই নিদ্রানিমগ্ন। তবু রাধা ঠিক করিল আজিকে মে রাঁধিবে না।

রাঁধিবে না তো কিছতেই রাধিবে না ।

রাধা আজ রাঁধিবে না ।

সূর্য কে ডাকিয়া রাধা বসিল, 'আজ তুমি দেয়িতে উঠিবে। কারণ আমিই অনেকক্ষণ বিছানায় থাকিব ।'

অরুণকরের মহিত কোথা বসিবার সুযোগ হইল না। কেননা রাধার সিদ্ধান্ত গ্রহণ করিবার পূর্বেই আধার বিদায়ে লইয়াছে ।

পাখিকে ডাকিয়া বসিল রাধা,' তোমরা আজ ঘুম ভাঙ্গানিয়া গান থামাইওনা। আমিই জাগিয়া জাগিয়া শুইয়া শুইয়া মেই গান শবন করিব । '

মেঘ কে ডাকিয়া বসিল, 'সূর্য কে সাহায্য কর। উহাকে লুকাইয়া রাখো তোমাদের শাস্ত্রীর অঞ্চলে।'শেফালীকে লক্ষ্য করিয়া উপদেশ দিনো 'আর ঝড়িয়া পরিয়ে না। মনে কর রাত্ৰি পরভাত হয় নাই ।'

শিশির কে বসিল, 'তুমি বিন্দু বিন্দু ফোটায়ে ঘামের ওপরে নামিয়া আয়িতে থাক ।'

সূর্য কথা শুনিল রাধার । অনেকক্ষণ মে আকাশে উদ্ভিত হইলো না। মেঘ আয়িয়া সুনীল আকাশ ঢাকিয়া রাখিল। পাখিরা রাত্ৰি শেষের গান ক্রমাগত গাহিতে লাগিল ।

শেফালী বেঁটা শক্ত করিয়া আশ্চর্য উজ্জ্বল লইয়া বৃক্ষে শোভা পাইতে লাগিল। শিশির বিন্দু অনবরত ঘামের ওপরে ঝড়িয়া পড়িয়া তাহাদের ডানোবাঝায়ে মিস্ত্র করিল ।

রাধা আনমনা ভাঙিয়া এপাশ হইতে ওপাশ গড়াইয়া শুইল । ইতোমধ্যে বাড়িতে ছলছল পড়িয়া গিয়াছে ।ঘুম ভাঙিতে অকনেরই বিস্তর বিলম্ব ঘটিয়াছে আজ। নামতা আর আদর্শমিপি ভুলিয়া মাখন পুণ্য পুণ্য বাহিরে দৃষ্টি নিক্ষেপ করিতেছে । রাধার স্বামী আয়ানের হাটে যাইবার সময় উপস্থিত। ননদিনী বিদ্যালয় যাইতে প্রস্তুত। প্রভাতী উপায়নার মাল করিয়া শাশুড়ি ঠাকুরঅনু দিনের প্রথম আহার গর্হন করিতে উল্লসিত ।

অথচ রাধা তখনো শয্যায়ে। রাধা আজ রাঁধিবে না ।

রাঁধিবে না তো কিছতেই রাঁধিবে না। রাধা আজ রাঁধিবে না ।

'কি হইলো? হইলো টা কি? অকনেরই কি উপবাসী হইবে আজ? ব্যাপারটা কিছতেই বোধগম্য হইতেছে না ।' মমস্বরে শাশুড়ি ননদিনী ও স্বামীর ব্যাকুল প্রশ্ন ।

রাধার বিন্দুমাত্র ঙ্গক্ষেপ নেই । শয্যা আরিয়া মে মস্তর গতিতে মাতিতে নামিল। ঘরের কোণায়ে রক্ষিত কলমি খানা কাঁখে লইয়া পীরে পীরে পুরুরের দিকে ধাবিত হইলো ।

'পুত্র কি আমার বিনা আহারেই কাজে যাইবে আজ?'রাধা নিরুত্তর। শাশুড়ি ক্রোধ ।

'বনি এঁটো দেমাগ কোথা হইতে আয়িল? হইল টা কি?'রাধা নিরুত্তর। স্বামী বিস্মিত।

'বর্ডান, আমার পাঠশালায় যাইবার সময় হইল।'রাধা নিরুত্তর। ননদিনী বিষণ্ণ। চিন্তিত।

পুত্রের ঘাটে আমিমা জন্মে পা ভুবাইয়া ছুপ করিয়া বমিয়া আছে রাখা। পশ্চাতে মিনিত কণ্ঠের শুঙ্কন নয়-
রীতিমতো চিৎকার। ইতিমধ্যে তীব্র বিন্যাসের মাধ্যমে পারা-প্রতিবেশির কয়েকজনকে একত্রিত করিয়াছে শাশুড়ি।
রাখা নির্বিকার। জন্মের দিকে দৃষ্টি নিক্ষেপ করিয়া চূপচাপ বমিয়া আছে যে। পুঁটি, বজুরি, খনিয়া, আর
কাজনী কাঁক বাধিয়া দৌড়াইয়া আসে রাখার পায়ের কাছে।

‘যাও, তোমরা এইবারটি অরো। তোমাদের কথারো জন্য আহার আনি নাই আজিকে।’

মাছেরা তবু আনন্দে ভিগবাজী খায়। রাখার ঊপস্থিতই তাহাদের চঞ্চল করে। অন্য কিছু চাহে না তাহারা।
আকাশের দিকে দৃষ্টি নিক্ষেপ করে রাখা। মুখ টিপিয়া সূর্য হায়ে।

‘রাগ করিয়াছ?’ সূর্যের প্রশ্ন। ‘কেন, আরেকটু বিনম্র মহিল না তোমার? ‘অভিমান- বিষ্করু স্বরে রাখার
জিহ্বায়া। ‘ক্ষেত্রের শস্যমূহে দৃষ্টি বুলাইনেই বুমিবে আর মুহূর্ত কাল বিনম্র হইলে কি ঘটিত।’

রাখা পুত্রপাড়ে মৃতপ্রায়ে শস্যক্ষেত্র অবলোকন করে। ‘ভহার বাঁচিবে তো?’ রাখা চিন্তিত।

‘তুমি একবার হামিনেই ভহার আবার জাগিয়া উঠিবে।’

রাখা দাঁড়াইয়া পড়িল। নিজের চারিদিকে একপাক ঘুরিয়া মন খুনিয়া হা হা করিয়া হামিয়া উঠিল। তাহার দুই
বাছ দুই দিকে শূন্যতে প্রমারিত।

রাখা হামিতেছে। হামিতেছে। হামিতেছে।

অবুজ শস্যক্ষেত্র যেন এইমাত্র ঘুম হইতে জাগিয়া উঠিল। নড়িয়াচড়িয়া মোজা হইয়া দাঁড়াইয়া পড়িল তাহারা।
রাখা হঠাৎ আবিষ্কার করিল তাহার স্বামী আমিমা দুই হাড় ধরিয়া কাঁকাইতেছে তাহাকে।

চোখের অম্মখে শাশুড়ি অগ্নিদৃষ্টি আর কঠিন বাক্যবান দিয়া তাহার অম্পূর্ণ শরীরের ছল ছুটাইতেছে। ননদিনী
অভিমনে ক্রন্দন করিতেছে। রাখা তবু হামিতেছে। হামিতেছে। হামিতেছে। রাখা হামিতেছে।

রাখার সঙ্গে তাল মিনাইয়া শিরশির করিয়া হাওয়া বহিতেছে।

পুত্রের জন্ম ছোট ছোট তরঙ্গ তুলিয়া খিলখিল করিয়া ডাঙ্গিয়া পড়িতেছে।

পাখিরো কিচিরমিচির শব্দে অর্ধ সূর্যের কাঙ্কার সৃষ্টি করিয়াছে। মাছেরা নাচিতেছে- ডামিতেছে- ভুবিতেছে।

ছন্মেরা পাতার মহিত একতা ঘোষণা করিয়া মৃদুভাবে মাথা নাড়াইতেছে।

রাখা হামিতেছে। হামিতেছে। হামিতেছে। কেন্দ্রানিত স্বামী আছাড় দিয়া ভাতের হাঁড়ি ডাঙ্গিয়া আতুঙ্ক অবস্থাতেই
হাটের পথে যাত্রা শুরু করিল। শাশুড়ির বিন্যাস আর আভিলাপ ঊচ্চলয়ে বাজিতে থাকে। ভীত ননদিনী এক-পা
দুই-পা করিয়া প্রতিবেশীর বাড়ি অরিয়া পড়ে। পুত্র মাখন আস্তে আস্তে আমিমা দাঁড়ায় পুত্রের কিনারায়।

রাখা তবু রাঁধিবে না। রাঁধিবে না তো কিছুতেই রাঁধিবে না।

রাখা আজ রাঁধিবে না। রাখার মাথাটা হঠাৎ এক পাক ঘুরিয়া যায়।

বমনের ইচ্ছা একবার বুক চাপিয়া উঠিয়া আসে। কোনোমতে তাহা দমন করে যে।

মাটিতে বমিয়া পড়ে রাখা। আবার তৎক্ষণাৎ উঠিয়া দাঁড়ায়। যে যে অসুস্থ নহে সেই অম্পর্কে যে অবগত।
জীবনের অবচাইতেই সূত্র প্রক্রিয়া স্বাভাবিকভাবেই যে অসুস্থতার জন্ম দেয় রাখা কেবল তাহাই অনুভব করিল
একবার। সূত্রবাৎ যে ভীত নহে।

‘মা আমার ঋধা লাগিয়াছে।’ দুর্ হইতে কে যেন আবার বমিল, ‘মা আমার খুব ঋধা লাগিয়াছে।’

রাখার হৃদয়ে একটা বড়রকম সোলপাড় শুরু হইল। শান্ত অমুদ্রে হঠাৎ ঊপস্থিত হইল প্রচণ্ড ঋড়ের শাশু
। পুত্রকে বুকে জড়াইয়া যে একদৃষ্টিতে তাকাইয়া রহিল জন্মের দিকে।

তারপর আকাশের দিকে। সূর্যের দিকে। তারপর গাছ, পাখি, ফুল, পাতার দিকে। রাখা তাহার চারিদিক
গভীরভাবে নিরীক্ষণ করিতে থাকে। একটা কাক উড়িয়া আমিমা টুপ করিয়া একখান ছোট পাকা পেঁপে ফেলিয়া
গেল রাখার কোলে। দুই হাতে তাহা খুনিয়া রাখা পুত্রের মুখে পুরিয়া দিল। মাখনের ঋধা তাহাতে মিটিল না।
রাখা মাছরাঙাকে ডাকিয়া কহিল, ‘পুত্রের মধ্যখানে যে শাপলা ঝাড়, তাহার মধ্য হইতে অবচাইতে বড় ঢাঁপটা
তুলিয়া আন আমার মস্তানের জন্য।’ ঢাঁপটা আকরে বৃহৎ- ঋধা নিবারনের জন্য যথেষ্ট। কিন্তু রাখার পুত্র

তাহার কিষ্কিণ্ণমাত্র ভঞ্জন করিল । ‘মা আমার খুব ঝুঁধা পাইয়াছে। তুমি রাঁধিবে না?’

চতুর্থ বর্ষ সমাপ্ত করিয়াছে মাখন। ঝহার ঊদরে এখন প্রচণ্ড ঝুঁধা। গাছের সামান্য ঐ ফল কেমন করিয়া পারিবে এই ঝুঁধা নিবৃত্ত করিতে?

‘মা তুমি রাঁধিবে না?’ বুক ডাকিয়া যাইতে চাহে । আর বুকি পারা যাইবে না । তবু কোনোমতে রাখা কহে ‘না।’ রাখা রাঁধিবে না। রাঁধিবে না তো কিছুতেই রাঁধিবে না।

রাখা আজ রাঁধিবে না।

মাখনকে বন্ধে চাপিয়া পুকুরঘাট হইতে রাখা ফনের বাগানের গহীনে চমিয়া আয়ে। জোড়ামন কাটিয়া ঘামের ঊপরে বমিয়া পুনর্বে কোনের ঊপরে শোওয়াইয়া দেয়। তারপর একবার এইদিক একবার এইদিক অশ্রুতর অস্থিত দৃষ্টি নিষ্কোপ করে। আশেপাশে কেহই নাই। হাওয়ার দাপটে জামরুল আর কাঁঠাল গাছগুলির ডালপাতা নড়িয়াচড়িয়া রাখার চারিদিকে একটা মৃদু বেষ্টিতীয় সৃষ্টি করে। রাখা আশে আশে বৃক্ষের কাপড় সরায়। খোলা আকাশের নিচে তাহার ঊল্লঙ্ঘ্য বন্ধের স্তম্ভ ও স্তম্ভে স্তনযুগল সূর্যের আনোতে কলমল করে। রাখা তাহার বাম স্তনবৃত্ত স্তনানের মুখে তুমিয়া দেয়। আর তাহার দক্ষিণ হস্ত অনবরত মাখনের মাথা, চুল, কপাল আর চক্ষে আদর বিনাইতে ব্যস্ত থাকে। অনভ্যস্ত মাখন প্রথম কয়েক মুহূর্ত ঘটনার আকস্মিকতায় চমকাইয়া যায়। তাহার পর ধীরে, খুব ধীরে যে মায়ের স্তনকনি অতি আগ্রহে মুখের ভিতর টানিয়া লয়। প্রথমে একটু, তারপর আরও একটু জোরে, তারপর অমস্ত শক্তি দিয়া মাখন তাহার অবচাইতে নিরাপদ খাদ্য মায়ের শরীর হইতে শুষিয়া লইতে চেষ্টা করে। রাখা চিন্তিত। রাখা ঊল্লঙ্ঘ্য। কিছুই ঘটতেছে না। এখন যে কী করিবে? মেরুদণ্ড মোজা করিয়া হাঁটু ছড়াইয়া আরো আরাম করিয়া বসে রাখা। চারিদিকে একবার দৃষ্টি বুলায়। দাঁতে দাঁতে চাপিয়া, দাঁতে ঠোঁট চাপিয়া রাখা কিছু কামনা করে-ইচ্ছা করে। আর ঠিক তক্ষুণিই তাহা ঘটে। কনার মতো কুল কুল করিয়া, অমস্ত শরীর শিরশির করিয়া কাঁপাইয়া কাঁপাইয়া, দুই পাড় প্লাবিত করিয়া, বাঁধডাঙ্গা বন্যার মতো নামিয়া আয়ে কিছু তাহার বক্ষ ভেদ করিয়া। রাখা তাহায় স্তনানের মুখের দিকে। খিলখিল করিয়া হামিতেছে মাখন আর তাহার ক্রিয়াশীল ঠোঁটের দুই কষ বহিয়া আদা আদা দুখের ফেনা করিয়া পড়িতেছে মাটিতে টুপ টুপ করিয়া।

রাখা হামিতেছে। মাখন হামিতেছে।

মেঘ আমিয়া সূর্যকে ঢাকিয়া রাখিয়াছে। এক পায়ে দাঁড়াইয়া দাঁড়াইয়া শানিক বিশ্রাম লইতেছে। মৃদুমন্দ বাতাস বহিতেছে। রাখা হামিতেছে।

মাখন হামিতেছে।

রাখা ঠিক করিয়াছে আজিকে যে রাঁধিবে না।

রাঁধিবে না তো কিছুতেই রাঁধিবে না।

রাখা আর রাঁধিবে না।



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ON INSTINCT, INTUITION AND SIXTH SENSE *by Mita Mukherjee*

Sixth-sense: It was dark, a fog was rolling in; I could feel it in my bones.

It was only six o'clock in the evening, but the darkness that crowded into the room was unnatural. I had been working late trying to finish up the research work that I had been working on. The boss was getting a bit antsy and had been giving me a lecture on diligence and in-depth studies etc. So I was determined to finish my work that evening. Suddenly the overhead light blinked a couple of times and went out.

My office was in an old building in Kolkata. It used to be bungalow in the British times, where a British official may have lived with his family; in its heyday bright chandeliers hung from the ceiling, Persian carpets: covered the wooden floors, Mahogany furniture resplendent in their shine used to be scattered around the house. Now the house was like a shell, waiting to be devoured by the modern times, if only the walls could talk!

I had been very surprised when my boss showed me the house and said we would be temporarily shifting there, while a brand new office was going to be built for us in the back yard adjoining the house. Once the new offices were built, this house would be razed to the ground and a modern structure would be built in its place.

My computer screen, glared at me for a few seconds and then it too went out!
"Great!" I thought—"must be a power outage!"

My first thought was that, these old houses probably have faulty wiring, hopefully my computer didn't get wrecked, and in that case all my hard work would go down the drain.
"GRRR! Here I was almost done, just a couple of finishing touches, and I would have concluded my paper." "There has to be a flash light or candle somewhere" I thought.

As I scraped back, my chair, I felt a sudden "WHOOSH" of air as the door to the outside hallway, shut itself with a loud thud, as if someone had forcefully shut it. Then a sudden creaky noise made the hair on my neck stand on their end, and a cold chill enveloped me---The old mahogany armoire, the only furniture left over from British time's-- gaped open slowly, creaking ominously, behind me! I was petrified!

"How did those sturdy doors open up? I had tried them before and they were firmly locked! All sensible thoughts had deserted my brain---I was caught in a time warp. All of a sudden I could feel the house wake up around me. Bright lanterns sent light and shadows around me, ladies dressed in gowns whispered in their British accents, the gentlemen wearing pantaloons and shiny boots walked around!
I shook my head—was I dreaming?

No I was in my office, sitting in the darkness, but the darkness was no longer menacing, there was a sliver of light coming through the crack in between the curtains, I was no longer turned to stone! I looked around as a yellowed piece of paper fluttered out of the open armoire, I picked it up and went to see where it had come from, somehow my hand went straight to the bottom shelf and a felt something solid.

It felt like a hard bound book. As soon as I took it out and turned my back on the armoire, the doors creaked shut!

Somehow not feeling afraid anymore, I groped towards the door of the room, almost afraid to open it, because the thought came to my mind that I might be locked in the room for the night! However as soon as I touched the handle it opened without a protest. In the faint light that was coming through, I packed up my bag and computer, very gently put the book in my bag and headed home. Once outside, I sighed with relief!

However the whole episode had a dream like quality—had I dreamt it all?

No –the piece of paper and the book was evidence that something or someone had wanted me to find the book. I stayed up all night trying to decipher the book, it was yellowed and had holes and cracks between pages; It turned out to be a diary of a young woman, named Philippa, who had married a colonel, in the British Army and set up house in my mysterious house. She had lost her husband at some point but had elected to stay back in India; established a school in the house; At one time it must have been a lively little place.

I felt as if the house was reaching out to me to save it from destruction—I didn't know if I could, but I would surely TRY!!

That episode reminded me that I do possess a –sixth sense!

Instinct: Instinct, I think is a basic programming in humans. In animals it manifests as an awareness of danger, which could be another animal, or a storm or an earthquake or tsunami etc.

In persons it is more of a like/dislike factor, instinctively we gravitate towards other people who think alike, or we stay away from people we don't feel comfortable with; We have likes and dislikes towards food, clothes, habitat etc.

Intuition: Intuition has been called our greatest resource, and a way to discover our inner wisdom; many authors have expounded on how to hone one's intuition so it would be easy to predict events.

A simple example is when you stand in front of a bank of elevators, and without consciously thinking about it, you know which one would open; or you are thinking about a friend, and haven't heard from them for years and lo and behold, they call up that afternoon!

I have heard of a true story about a young man, who was travelling on a train, to Madras (Chennai as it is called now), and he got off at a station to get some food, and all of a sudden the train started moving and he ran after it, he almost had a foot on top of the bottom stair, when a weird feeling came over him;

He just let go and stepped back on the platform; He was feeling frustrated with himself, thinking of having to get another ticket, all his luggage left on the train etc.

Imagine his surprise when he found out that the train had derailed in the middle of the night, leaving hundreds dead and wounded! One of the worst train disasters in history of Indian Railways.

Some authors say that intuition can be developed by using alternate thinking and focusing the mind in a different way.

We become like automatons, going through the everyday tasks, watching TV, playing with our phones so that we ignore the vast resource that the MIND--has to offer.

Just wanted to present a little insight about instinct, intuition and sixth sense.

THE LITTLE ART CORNER #1



Memories of Oia, Santorini by Aahana Nandy



Unicorn, by Rajarshi Bose

MY PROGRESS, MY COMMUNITY'S CONTRIBUTION by Navajyoti Ray Barman (Meet) Duke University

It seems like any time I accompany my parents to a Bengali party nowadays, interested aunts and uncles always approach me very enthusiastically, asking for updates on my studies and extracurricular. A lot of the times, parents ask me for recommendations on their own children's academic endeavors. Don't get me wrong, I'm honored to be of any help.

I have some work to do personally, but I can nonetheless say I'm content with my academic place and path. What I'd like to expose in this article is that while many people thought that I did everything on my own to reach my current standing, that statement is false.

Of course, my parents supported me through the long nights in high school when I would come home from school at 9 PM after many hours of extracurricular and leadership activities, just to do my homework 'til about 2 or 3 AM. Many times I would even get upset with them for staying up with me for that long, refusing to go to bed until I myself was ready to sleep. I appreciate that a lot now. But it was through the support of this Bengali community that I received through my middle and high school years that also encouraged me to never hold back in my passions and endeavors. Sure, I had academic drive, but I don't believe that defines me as Meet.

This community and its various functions provided an outlet for me to share whatever new passion or hobby I took on, which for me, turned out to be mostly musical. For those who may be reading this, if you think back to Milonee functions 3 or 4 years ago, I would be the lanky, long-haired boy who shyly straggled onto the auditorium stage with a guitar; my first real, self-initiated attempts at performing for people.

I look back on those days now, and I can honestly say it is through the praise, encouragement, and love I felt from members of this community that bolstered my confidence and prompted me to play guitar for a number of Durga Pujas every October.

With the newfound enthusiasm for performance that the Bengali community had provided me, I even got a few of my friends to perform with me at several pujas; some performances turned out fun, and others, well, were probably only fun for us and not the audience.

Those Milonee performances were a safe haven for me to explore my growing passion for music, and the enthusiasm of the community granted me the self-confidence to pursue bolder musical endeavors in high school. The truth is, if the community, including my parents, was any less open-minded or accepting to new experiences or ideas, I wouldn't have continued guitar or started rapping. Those small, seemingly casual performances at Puja secretly prepared me to a great extent to perform at outside venues, including schools and restaurant, both as a solo performer and as a part of my high school band.

And so, when parents go on to praise my seemingly amazing solo achievements, I can't help but be humbled by the fact that any of the achievements of the younger generation is spurred by the love and affectionate attentiveness of the older community we are surrounded by. Now, when I come home from Duke, and go to the various Bengali functions and parties, I find myself smiling each time at the thought of how lucky I am to have grown up in a community like this. The love and respect I continue to receive from the community is what inspires me – really, any of us – to continue doing what we love to the best of our ability.

I still have a long way to go, but it is with your blessings I look toward the future with excitement and hope.

MAGGI পাঁচালি -দয়িতা রায়

[পাঠকদের কাছে অনুরোধ লক্ষী পাঁচালির মতন সুর করে পড়ুন!...]

ঘরে ঘরে হাহাকার, বুক ভরা ব্যথা,
শোন সবে বলি আজি Maggi ব্রতকথা ।
যে জন পড়িবে ব্রত দিয়া প্রাণ মন,
অন্নপূর্ণা-র কৃপা দৃষ্টি পাইবে অনুষ্ণণ!
অগাধ সুস্বাদু Maggi আসিল জীবনে,
মর্তবাসী পড়িলো প্রেমে, নিশ্চিত মনে ।
ভাত ডাল রাঁধিবার নাহি প্রয়োজন,
দুমিনিটে Maggi হয়, খুশি জনগণ!
পিতামাতা রাগি কহেন খাও ভাত বসে,
শিশুগণ Maggi চায়, ফোলে গাল রোষে!
অতঃপর পিতামাতা মানিয়া নেন হার,
Maggi -র জিত হয়, অতি অবিচার ।
ঘরে ঘরে শুরু হয় Maggi-র জয় গান,
অবিদিত মর্তবাসী পুলকিত প্রাণ ।
দুমিনিটে Maggi রাঁধো সহজ উপায়,
ছেলে বুড়ো সকলেই খুশি মনে খায়!
হোস্টেলে Maggi যেন মায়ের আশির্বাদ,
ক্ষুদার্ত ছাত্রদের বন্ধ আর্তনাদ।
ভোলাভালা প্রজাগণ রাখেনা খবর,
জানেনা খুঁড়িছে তারা নিজের কবর!
লক্ষ্মিরে উপেক্ষা করি, ডাকিতেছে যম,
স্বৈচ্ছায় বিষ পান, হয় বৃদ্ধিতে অক্ষম!
ভেজাল খেয়ে বড় হয় মর্তবাসীর ছানা,
বিশুদ্ধ কাহারে কয় নেই তাদের জানা!

দৈবযোগে করিল টেস্ট কোনো সুধিজনে,
দুখী হলো মর্তবাসী Maggi -র পতনে ।
Maggi তে যে ঠেসে ভরা ঋতিকর সীসা,
শুনি সব গুনি জনে হারাইল দিশা!
ধনমদে মত্ত Nestle করিয়াছে হেলা,
ঢালিয়াছে বিষ পেটে, অসামু এ খেলা!
বুদ্ধিমান অমিতাভ ও পড়িলেন এ ফাঁদে,
অলৌকিক Maggi খাইয়া জয়া দেবী কাঁদে!
মাধুরী মোহিনী তবুও জড়াইল কেস-এ,
খেয়েছিল এক বাটি বিজ্ঞাপনের শেষে!
গাল ভরা টোলে আজ ডুবিয়া মিস জিনতা
এদিকে সিনেমা নেই তারওপর এই চিন্তা!
না জানিয়া শুনিয়া কেন করা বিজ্ঞাপন?
অভিযুক্ত হলেন এরা, ঝামেলা অকারণ!
ভয়ে ভয়ে মর্ত হোতে বিদায় নিলো Maggi,
আবেগপ্রবণ মর্তবাসী হন গৃহত্যাগী ।
Facebook এ স্মৃতিচারণ, সেকি হাহাকার,
Maggi প্রেমী মর্তবাসী করিছে প্রচার।
সুস্বাদু হইলেই তাহা হিতকর নয়,
লোভ মোহ ত্যাগই হলো জীবনের জয়!
স্বাস্থ্যকর খাইয়া ভালো থাকো ভক্তগণ,
অন্নতে ফিরে যাও, করো লক্ষীর পূজন।
Maggi -র ব্রতকথা হইলো সমাপন,
ভাত ডাল খেয়ে বাঁচো, জয় লক্ষীনারায়ণ!

দয়িতা রায়: জন্ম জামশেদপুর, পড়াশোনা সূত্রে দুর্গাপুর, বেনারস, জাপান ঘুরে আজ কর্মসূত্রে হল্যান্ডবাসী।
কাজের ফাঁকে ফাঁকে ছড়া লেখা একটা নেশার মতন। দৈনন্দিন জীবনের ঘটনাই এই সব ছড়ার মূল বিষয়বস্তু।
" হিজিবিজি আমার Stress buster " হিজিবিজি পড়তে পড়তে পাঠকদের মুখের হাসিই আমার সব থেকে বড় প্রাপ্তি।

MY MUSIC *by* Aloknanada Dasgupta

Early on I was exposed to the Indian classical dance, Odissi, classical piano, films, literature and paintings. Eventually, I got steered towards music, keeping my passion for dance intact. My education in English Literature at St. Xavier's College perfectly complemented my musical journey. Studying music at York University further enabled me to have a lucid perspective on how to leverage the most creative music within myself. In Mumbai, I began exploring the experimental Bollywood music scene. I started to assist a composer in this field and learned certain technical and business aspects of creating experimental music for Bollywood films.

I learned music programming and electronic music. I then started scoring for films.

I wanted to create a balance by merging my background in western classical music with the quirky parallel Bollywood trend. My work (including songs and background scores) reflect both styles. I wish to grow and broaden these horizons further in my career.

As a child, I remember being exposed to world cinema while learning the piano. My father wanted me to be a Pianist and my late mother wanted me to be an Indian classical dancer.

It was a lovely dilemma. Cinema seemed to be the foundation for both.

Being the daughter of a film maker and having taken "Film studies" as an elective in graduation, I was naturally expected to follow the same. Instead, I chose to study and compose music.

After completing my grades for Royal School of Music, London, I completed my Bachelors in Music degree from York University.

I wanted to be a composer but I also wanted it to be associated with film making.

The obvious choice was to score for films. I have always been very fond of background scores and movie soundtracks. I wanted to explore the magic of how music supports the visuals.

It seemed challenging but equally rewarding. My passions ultimately lead me to Mumbai where I started my career.

I wish to pursue this passion throughout my life.

Hollywood composers have noted that to be a successful film music composer, one must have a thick skin, have the ability to work around the clock, and be able to manage business relations.

The truth in these statements has become very evident to me of late.

The goal of filmmaking is to be able to convert one's vision onto celluloid and make it aesthetically palatable for the audience. Creatively, it's challenging to procure an impeccable script and translate it for the big screen.

In addition, a filmmaker must also understand the roles of cinematographers, editors, casting directors, etc., as these jobs are vital to filmmaking process. Working with producers to fund and distribute the film are concerns in addition to the competition a film faces upon release.

Box office potential is commonly the deciding factor when striking a balance between producing commercial cinema and cinema for passion. A composer must acknowledge these conditions when making important creative decisions.

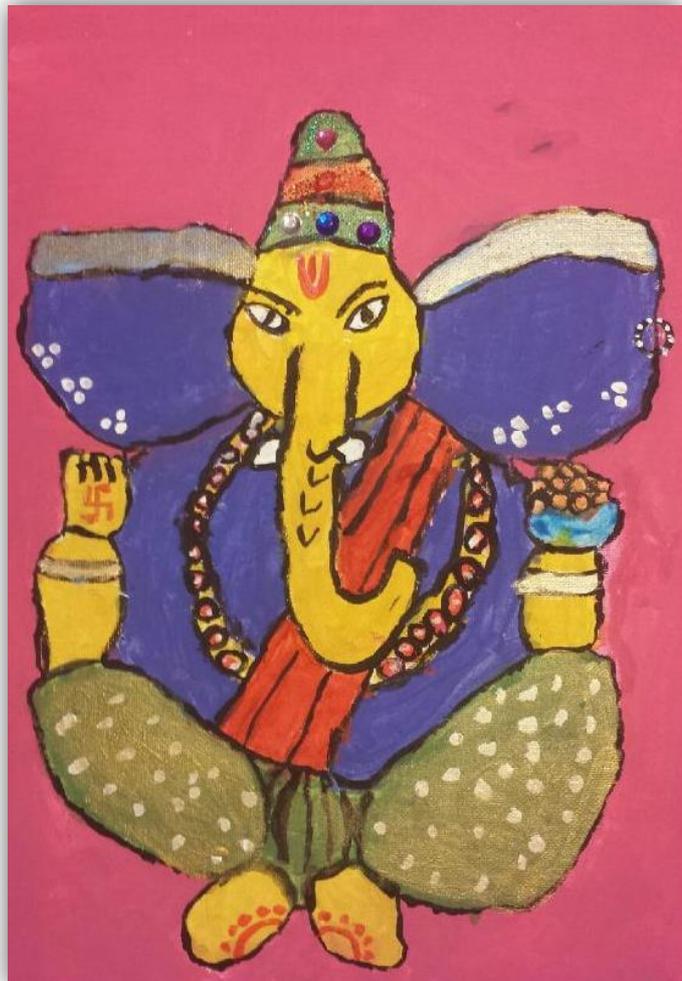
SOMETHING ABOUT PUJO AND MUSIC -Waking up at 4am to the music of "Mahalaya" on the radio has been an annual ritual since I was a baby. For a person who hates early mornings, this was a huge exception. Waking up to Birendra Kishore Bhodro and to "jago tumi jago" was something that became an intrinsic part of childhood as well as adulthood

The feeling is indescribable; the joy, the excitement of Pujo. For most of us our lives have changed since we live away from Kolkata. Yet we haven't been able to dissociate ourselves from the nostalgia of it all. The dhak, the kashor ghonta and the music of pujo in the air is what still makes us feel at home, makes us feel Bengali at heart and makes us crave for those golden days. I miss it a lot and would give anything to relive those memories.

Alokananda Dasgupta is a composer based in Mumbai. She is the daughter of filmmaker Buddhadeb Dasgupta. She holds a Bachelors of Arts degree with Honors in English Literature from St. Xavier's College. She received a Bachelor's of Music with Honors in Theory, Composition and Piano at York University, Toronto. Alokananda gravitated naturally towards music composition for films which lead her to work in National award winning Marathi films like Shala, Fandry and Labour of Love and was one of five selected for the Mumbai Composers Lab in 2013. She received the Prabhat Purashkar (2014) and the Sankshiti Kala Darshan (2012) awards for best background score. She's also done the music for the critically acclaimed Hindi film B.A Pass and scored the music for a few of her father's films, Woh, Treyodoshi, and the upcoming Anwar ka Ajab Kissa. She has composed for short films, documentaries and was the music assistant to Bollywood Composer Amit Trivedi on the film soundtrack for Udaan and No-one killed Jessica.



The official name of Kola Bou which is worshipped during Durga Pujo is Nabapatrika - it is a form of Devi Durga as the Goddess of agriculture & it has no relation to as Ganesh's wife. Ganesh's wife is Pusti.



Ganesh by Eshana Bhounick (Rai)

SHADOW, THE PUPPY by Kojagoree Ganguly

He really is the best;
Has a small white spot on his upper chest.
Blacker than a thousand nights,
(Eyes) brighter than the brightest lights. Oh yes, that's him,

A smart little doggie who's not a bit dim.
When he gets happy we hear a sound,
Thump-thump-thump - his tail hits the
ground!

Loves to eat
(And) pants in the heat.

Is a bit small,
(But) walks as if he's the biggest of all.
His ears droop down
(He's) famous all over town.
(He's) not afraid of the vet,
Not afraid of him yet.
When ready for bed
Down droops his head.
But is always on his feet
To meet and to greet!



Cartoon: Subir Ranjan Sengupta

(Was part time Architect;Part time Engineer;Part time Bike and Dog Lover.Part time teller of stories;Part time cartoonist and wanderer, and a full time father)

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THE PORCELAIN DOLL *by* Roshmi Bhaumik

Once upon a time, there was a handsome woodcutter named Keith Wood. He lived in a small cottage near a forest with his mother. Every morning he went into the woods to collect fallen trees and broken boughs. He cut them into smaller pieces with his heavy axe. In the afternoon, he sold firewood at the town market. With the money, he bought milk, bread and meat for his



family. He returned home in the evening, tired and hungry. Keith often wished to snack on a slice of cake. Unfortunately, he never had enough money to buy the expensive cakes at the baker's shop.

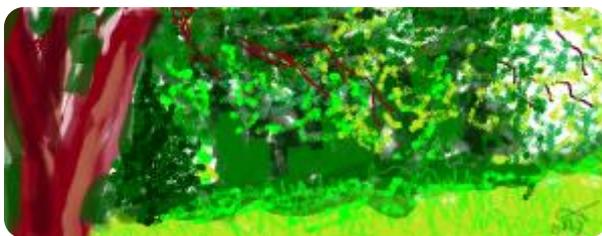
One day he had an idea. He thought of making cakes at home. So he started to save some money everyday. Soon he saved

enough to buy a packet of flour, sugar, butter and some eggs.

He went home happily and asked his mother to bake him a cake. Keith's mother was old and weak. Preparing the batter took a lot of strength. Keith tried to help her though his cooking skills left a lot to be desired. Finally the cake was ready and they loved every bite. However, the poor woodcutter understood it was hard work to make cakes. If only someone strong and capable could help his mother, he would be able to enjoy cakes more regularly.

Next morning he got up very early and went to the forest. While collecting the branches, he noticed a clearing behind the trees. In the opening, he saw a young girl in a pink dress, dancing on the grass. She had a melodious voice and sang to her heart's content. Keith was mesmerised by her beauty. Suddenly he heard a loud crack behind him. He turned quickly and saw some birds flying away. He looked for the girl again but there was no one around. Eventually, with a heavy heart, he went back to his work.

Many times that day, he found his thoughts returning to the girl. His heart longed to see her again.



At night, he had a terrifying dream. He was trying to save a lovely princess. The maiden was attacked by a huge dragon with long black nails dripping blood. Keith bravely fought the dragon, for a seemingly endless time. In the end, the dragon used its forearms to strangle him. Even with his strong arms he could not pull himself free. The young man was getting dizzy and everything around him got blurry. He was about to die when

suddenly his mother's call woke him up from the nightmare.

While returning home that evening, curiosity consumed the lonely woodcutter.

He went to the same spot to look for the girl of his dreams. In the twilight, the deserted dell had a magical attraction. Keith crossed the grassy patch and found a narrow path between some

overgrown bushes. He proceeded on the path with caution. It led him to a dark cottage, half covered with mosses, ivy and other creepers. With abated excitement, he approached the left side. There was a small window.

He looked inside through it. Keith saw a long table lined with glass retorts. Green fumes were coming out of them. There was a huge figure with its back turned to him. The person was wearing a black cloak, a black pointed hat and mumbling some incoherent words. Keith was scared. He felt like running home as fast as he could.

All of a sudden his eyes fell upon a pretty porcelain doll on a table near the window. He was surprised to find that the figurine was a miniature replica of the girl he saw. The table on which the doll stood was almost within the reach of the woodcutter.

In his curiosity, he gave the window a firm push. The window pane flung open. Keith stuck his hand in, grabbed the doll and quickly pulled it out. The small doll was dressed in the same pink dress. Her hands, her feet and every feature was impeccably copied. Alas! If he could make it bigger and make it come alive. His wishful thinking was interrupted by a loud roar and the most grotesque face appeared before him. A witch was roaring in anger and muttering a spell on Keith. There was a loud clap at the end. To his utter dismay, he found himself turning into another porcelain doll!

The evil woman stooped down to pick up both the dolls. She hurried back to her cottage. Surprisingly, the cottage was clean and tidy, unlike the other room he saw through the window. There was an inviting smell of freshly cooked food, which made the witch's stomach growl.

She walked over to the kitchen counter to put the dolls down. Several delicious dishes were waiting for her there. The greedy woman gobbled up the food with pleasure. Keith looked on with longing eyes when she relished the huge carrot cake all by herself. At the end of her meal, she went to her bedroom and fell asleep. As soon as she started to snore the magic spell was broken. Both the dolls came back to life. Keith was still holding his axe and carrying his grocery bag on his shoulder.

He stood motionless, caught in a dilemma. He could run home to safety or he could try to save the young woman from the evil one. At this moment, she turned and smiled at him. It sent a ripple of joy through his heart. Before him stood the most beautiful girl he had ever seen. Keith could not leave her even if he had to risk his life.

He smiled back at her. "I am Keith, the woodcutter.

I have not eaten anything since this morning," he explained. Since all the food was consumed, the girl started to prepare dinner. She put some potatoes to boil. The hungry woodcutter gave her the food he had bought. She used part of the milk to prepare mashed potatoes. She added some spices and baked the meat.



She cut up the bread and sauteed it in butter, flavored with garlic. She made custard with the rest of the milk.

While cooking, she told him her story. Her name was Regina White. Her mom died of cancer when she was twelve years old. Shortly afterwards, her father married another woman.

Her new mom hated Regina. She hid her books, homework and even her school bag. Regina's teachers complained to her step-mom who accused the daughter of being stupid and lazy. Finally Regina failed her grade and was taken out of school.

This was the opportunity she had waited for. Her stepmother made her do all the housework. All through the day, she would experiment with black magic. Her face would change to a horrible one. In the evening, she turned back to normal. She even pretended to her husband that she had been cleaning and cooking. After a couple the years, the gentleman found out the truth. When he questioned her, she strangled him to death. She tied up Regina and brought her to this cottage inside the forest.

The sad orphan girl moped around as she grieved her father's death. One day while cleaning the cupboards, Regina found a book that had a curious rhyme written on the center page. There was a hand drawn map below it.

Abrakdabra Shazam Khazam
Hid my life in the little black ram
Detach head with no blood on the grass
Will spell the end as forever I will pass
Every blood drop the grass will see
Will produce another stronger me!!



The witch was enraged to see Regina reading the book. She put a magic spell to turn her into a porcelain doll. Fortunately, the magic wore away every time the witch was asleep. The other day when Keith saw her, she had escaped out of the cottage to enjoy her short-lived freedom.

Keith pondered over the story while he ate. He remembered once losing his way and ending up in a farm with lots of sheep. It was past the forest in the south-west direction from his house. He knew this because the kind farmer had given him a compass to find his way

home, that day. Soon, with Regina's help, he found the book in a cupboard in the untidy room with glass retorts. He studied the map carefully. It showed the forest, the cottage and the farm on the southern side of the forest, labelled "Shepard's Farm". He asked Regina for a piece of chalk, a thick rope, a bucket, a large plastic sheet and some food scraps. He planned to go to the farm but could not cross the forest in the night. He stood by the window, contemplating and waiting for dawn.

Keith started as soon as he saw a faint light behind the dark leaves and branches. After covering every few yards he put a mark on the nearest tree trunk. He did that to help him trace his way back easily. The path ahead got easier as he proceeded. The dingy giants looming over him

turned into greener and kinder shady trees. But when he was almost half-way towards the farm, a black shape appeared in the same path. It halted briefly behind the same trees. It was several miles behind Keith but started to gain distance as it proceeded. It appeared as if the dark shadow was flying.

Keith reached the farm a little after sunrise. The sheep were grazing behind a split rail fence. He spotted the single black ram within a few minutes. He was focused on the job at hand, unaware that the wicked woman had woken up and had been following him. He never imagined that Regina had been turned back to a porcelain doll!

The witch spotted Keith from a distance. He was spreading a big plastic sheet under the bucket. Silently, she proceeded towards the woodcutter. By then, he had lured the ram to the fence with a bucket of food scraps. The ram put his head inside the bucket and fed hungrily. Keith lifted his heavy axe. He gave a quick sharp blow at its neck. The ram let out a terrible scream. The loud sound drowned the muffled cry from Keith. Almost simultaneously the witch had come behind Keith and strangled him with both hands. He struggled for breath but was determined to complete his task. He lifted the axe again with every ounce of strength left in him. He dealt another blow with all his might. Not a single drop of blood fell on the grass. The plastic sheet held all the spill. As soon as the ram's head fell inside the bucket, the witch too dropped dead. Keith crashed to the ground, pushed by the weight of the corpse. The lifeless hands came apart and his neck was free.



Keith's mom woke up worried. She had dreamt that her son was calling for help. She ran into the forest looking for him. She found chalk marks on the trees that led her to the old mossy cottage. She entered through the door that was left ajar. She found her familiar grocery bag in the kitchen. She searched around the house for Keith. However, all she found was a beautiful porcelain doll. It was indeed a remarkable doll. As she looked at it closely, the eyes seemed to come alive. The left eye had a tear drop that glistened in the sunlight.

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THE LITTLE ART CORNER #2



Sunset by Rajarshi Bose



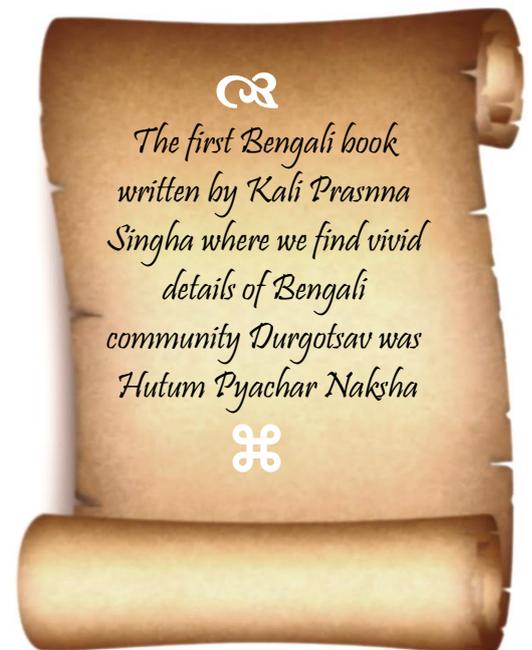
Village by Rajarshi Bose

The Mystery of the Robbery in Venice by Roopkatha Biswas

Ereca Froserly is a detective girl from California, USA. She was on vacation in the mysterious and lovely city of Venice. It was a city with no streets but only waterways. She was so excited to visit Venice. She packed her bags and her mother, Mrs Froserly and her father Mr Froserly took out the car. They drove to the airport. Now the plane travelled for 10 hours stopping once at Atlanta, Georgia. They reached Venice and entered the hotel. Ereca freshened herself and start her sightseeing. Just then the boat driver arrived with Mr Froserly. Her father was looking so tensed and worried. He said "I have lost my 10,000 dollars at the boat booking counter". "Oh no I have heard that many pickpockets stay in Venice. But my only suspect is....." Ereca glared at the driver. Then the driver said that he had not taken the money. He was feeling uncomfortable. Anyway the tour had started. Ereca sat in the boat and saw a small cloth on one side of it. Then she asked the boat driver "Excuse me, why is there a cloth on this side?" Driver answered "It's nothing, just my hanky". When it was evening they all went home except Ereca. She went to the boat and removed the cloth. She saw a white spot. She noticed that the boat had a hollow end. She reached under the boat just where the white spot was. Now she knew what happened actually. The driver took the money, hid it in the hollow end of the boat and put a chalk mark to remind him where it was. The next day Ereca revealed to everyone the white spot and the money which the driver had robbed. The man was arrested for being a cheater. Ereca, having spent a nice detective vacation, went home the next day happily.



Dīwali by Roopkatha Biswas



মস্তমীর ভোর - সৌমিত্র রায়

ওমা, তুমিই তো
তুমি তো আমার ছোটবেনার মস্তমীর মেই ভোর,
এতটুকুও বদলাওনি দেখছি;
মেই আশাবাঁধা চার্ভনি, কপালে চলে যাওয়া বর্ষার
রেখে যাওয়া এক ছোট্ট মেঘের চিহ্ন;
মেই হালকশীতের নিঃশ্বাস
আর, তোমার মেই আকাশভরা হামিটা;
দেখছো কেমন মনে রেখেছি তোমায়।
বল ভোর কেন্ পাগল আবার পাঠিয়েছে
তোমায় আমার পুকুর পাড়ে,
না কি নিজেই পথ না ভুলে তিরিশ বর্ষা পেরিয়ে
আজ আবার দেখা দিনে,
অবাক হ'য়ো না আমায় দেখে
আমি মানুষ রোজ বদলাতে হয় এই সংসারে,
তোমার মতন তো আর আমি মস্তমীর ভোর মেজে
সময়ের দোলনায় দুনে দুনে যুগ শুনতে পারি না।
দিয়ে দেখো না আমায় একটু সময় ঝলহা
দেখবে কেমন হ'য়ে যাব পশ্চিম দালানে
ঠাকুমার চুলের রেখে যাওয়া নারকেন শ্রমের অতীত স্মৃতি;
দেখবে কেমন হবো নিরামিষ বারান্দায়
কড়াইতলে ক্ষীরের চাচি,
দেখবে নাচব কেমন, জগদীশ ঢাকির
ঘুম ভাঙান বোনের তানে তানে;
দেখবে অষ্টমীর মঞ্জিপূজায় কেমন হবো
নতুন বর্ষের চোখে নুগনো ঘুম,
হব পশ্চিমপাড়ার কনো মেয়েটার
পূজার নতুন জামার মোলাইয়ের ডুলটা;

দেখবে শান্তি জন্মের ছড়ান যাত্রায় হব মাথি,
আর তোমায় গাঁথা সন্ময়ের মালা দেব মায়ের চরণে অঞ্জলী।
তাকিয়ে থেকে না তুমি, হ'য়ো না অশান্ত
পুকুর পাড়ের পুরনো পথটার খোঁজে,
মেই পথেই তোমাকে দেখেছিলাম
তোমার খামি এক ফুলের ডালি হাতে নিয়ে
আমনে দুই দাদাটা আমায় মাঁটার শেখাবে বলে,
আমার পাড়া শির্ভনিফুল শ্রমো বদলে নিয়েছিল,
কি বীরের মতন দাদা দৌড়ে এয়ে
ঝাপাত এই গভীর পুকুরে, মনে আছে?
অবাক হ'য়ে তাকিয়ে থাকতাম।
আজ তোমায় উষার আনোয়
শির্ভনিফুলের ডালিটা কেমন যেন
নেচে উঠল আবার।
দেখো, মেজদির দেওয়া আলনা
মায়ের পূজার ঘরটা আরো আনোয় ভরে দিন।
দেখো ভরে দিন মায়ের চোখে
গোটা শারদের জমানো আনন্দের জল।
দেখো ছুটে আনছে আবার পুকুর পাড়ে
মেই ছোট ছোট বাচ্চারা
তারা নতুন করে একে দেবে
তাদের নরম খামি পায়
মেই হারানো পথ,
ভরবে তারা ফুলের ডালি
আনন্দের গান গেয়ে
উঠবে তারা; মেয়ো না, থাক না ভোর আরও কিছুক্ষন ॥

Soumitra Ray is the Song writer, Composer, Lead vocalist, and percussionist of the popular Bangla band Bhoomi.
Pic courtesy: Telegraph India



THE WALKING TALKING BUSINESS *by Iftekar Ehsan*



“One of the best ways to really get to know people is by walking slowly among them”

(From the blog GoBeyond)

I was born to Rajasthani parents into a clan of people known as Rangrez. We've always dyed cloth for living. Since we moved to Calcutta and started dyeing in factories, the romance was taken away from the craft. I did not enjoy doing that, so I moved away and started exploring other businesses. I dabbled in several projects before this, but none of them agreed with me. But each failure was important to teach something or the other. I started with a cyber cafe, then selling CDs, then working for an event management company, followed by a Pepsi distributorship. All were good while they lasted, but they did not make me happy. I stumbled upon the idea of Walks of India when I was hosting some friends from the U.S. and Turkey. We'd hired a local guide to show them around, but she was focusing on the monuments of the city and did not really exude any love or enthusiasm for what she was showing. Also, we saw that travelers coming to Calcutta were shepherded around in cocooned manner from air-conditioned flights, to A/C airport, to A/C cars and hotels. We thought this was too protected setting for anyone to get a real travel experience. And hence, we decided that we must get them out and get their hands dirty, for them to get a real feel of what our city is all about.

I found out people who were doing walks in India and outside, met them and did some walks with them, and finally settled with a model for Calcutta Walks. Some of the cities I walked included London, Singapore, Shanghai, Ahmedabad, Bombay, Goa, Varanasi, etc. I realized that I already knew and loved most parts of my city, and that these tours would have to be an extension of my personality. I've followed that model so far and have been pretty successful. The walk is led by a person in love with the city/locality and showing it with enthusiasm. We call our guides 'Explorers', simply because we do not claim to know it all and want to present ourselves as lovers and explorers of the city. The less rehearsed the lines are the better. In fact, we don't even want to have fixed routes. Whenever a new person joins us as an Explorer, we tell him/her to learn a locality as well as they could, and then lead a walk however they want. But yes, they must have enough fodder on the tour to go on for hours on end. They should not use all that information in one walk -instead, tease the travelers with bits of information on various things.

One also needs to make some pit stops along the way- at interesting workshops, markets, food stalls etc. The idea is to make it a treat for all of the travelers' senses. Our walks are continually evolving. When we started out, we were told that no one would walk with us, listen to our chatter and pay us money for it. But it has so happened that in the last five years of our existence, we've doubled every year. From a few walks in a month, we have now begun to operate more than one walk every day. We now intend to create walks based on the life of Calcutta-greats like Tagore, Bose, Vivekananda, etc. There are also photography walks as well as literature walks on the anvil. It has been an interesting learning experience for me. I've come to appreciate the different points of view that people come with

from around the world. I used to be more rigid in my thoughts but like Gulzar says: *Acche bure ke farq ne basti ujaad di, Majboor ho ke milne lage har kisi se hum*. Since I've never been a history buff in school or college, I picked up my facts on the job. Of course, I always enjoyed reading novels and that made my knowledge deep and varied. But there has been times when some things I'm not too sure of are caught by some walkers. Once, I showed a World War airstrip which is now a major road of the city, and mentioned that fighter jets used to take off and land there. There was an American pilot and flying enthusiast in the group. In the middle of the walk, he took me aside and said that jets weren't even invented until the end of World War II. We laughed out loud, but kept this secret from the other walkers. On another occasion, I had a group of three Jewish people from America and Australia, and I went on and on against the Israelis and the atrocities they committed against the Palestinians. They went back and we had long email conversations after that, in which we debated our points of view. It was challenging but fun. Through 'Walks of India' <www.walksofindia.com>, I have encouraged and mentored walking tour operators in a few cities so far. We intend to have walking tours in all major and minor cities of the country. The sharing of culture is one of the most beautiful exchanges in the world and left me transformed.

(Passages from the archives)

The last known map of Calcutta and its environs was from the 1790s. Centuries later, Iftekhhar collaborated with railways junkie and cartographer Samit Roychoudhuri on a project none had taken up in the last two centuries: a Calcutta Tourist Map. "Calcutta is a storytelling place," Iftekhhar tells me, between sips of chai from his clay kullar, stressing the City of Joy's old name. "It tells stories; great stories... But this map does so much more. Nesting locations of migratory birds, directions to used book shops, street food zones, and markets; a plate of three yellow ladoos marks Sweet/Confectionery stops in the city- **The Hindu**

"The grey, gorgeous sulk of the Kolkata monsoon is best spent in bed, listening to the intense, melodic rain. I found another way. On a grey Sunday morning in July, I made my way stiffly to join a group of five for a walking tour of central Kolkata. My co-walkers are an



Chatty happy walk through the galleys of North Calcutta with Iftekhhar of Calcutta Walks. Many many stories — of family feuds and house divisions, of the British Raj and Bengali Babes, of old homes and architectural styles, of temples and a mosque, of water from the Hooghly flowing into the streets, for people to wash themselves, cars, vessels... of Bengalis and their idiosyncrasies, of travels and food... and happily, of Mirza Ghalib and Abida Parveen! 27.08.2012

*American family, and I imagined they were judging me for my Indian tardiness. But Iftekhhar Ahsan, the leader of the walk, waved away my apology so cheerfully that I felt the sullen knot in my chest loosen. Ahsan was taking us on a tour of the most culturally diverse part of the city, the Kolkata that came up between the older Black Town of Bengalis and the White Town of European settlers, literally the grey area, as Ahsan called it. Dirty Calcutta, my father had called it the evening before, looking at the map of the walk; his words unfortunately proved to be too true. It was dirty. And it was wet. But it was still the most fun I've had in a while."- **Sohini Chattopadhyay, Outlook Traveller.***

অমম্যাময়িক - যশোধরা রায়চৌধুরী

অনিঃশেষ রূপকল্পের কাছে এসে , বমে থাকি অমম্যাময়।

ওদিকে আনো করে সূর্য ওঠে,

এদিকে নিবিড় করে রাত হয়।

তার মধ্যে আমরা ক্ষুন্ন ছোট ছোট বাক্য

নিখে চমচ্ছি আমাদের জীবিতের শুষ্ক অন্ন

জন্ম দিয়ে থেয়ে ফেলার কথা।

মততায় এখন ধার নেই।

মানবিকতার এখন মোজা আদা ঝপচার নেই।

এখন কনমিমার তন্মায় অল্প রোমকষায়িত চোখ

বা সূর্য, আমাদের বিশ্বাস গোপন করে।

মেঘের মন্দির থেকে একটু একটু করে করে পড়েছে রঙ।

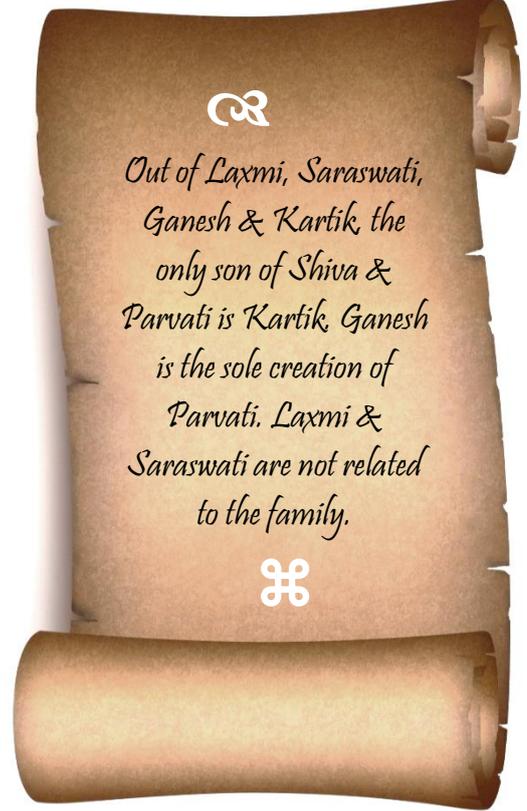
আর আমরা বাস্পের মত

ফেৎনির মত

আস্ত্রনের মধ্যে পটে পটে করে পুড়ে যাওয়া ভুড়ার মত

একটু একটু জ্বলচ্ছি ধূমোচ্ছি

আর নিখে রাখচ্ছি অমম্যাময়িক।



যশোধরা রায়চৌধুরীর জন্ম কলকাতায়- প্রেসিডেন্সি কলেজ ও কলিকাতা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের দর্শন বিভাগের প্রাক্তনী। বর্তমানে ইণ্ডিয়ান অডিট অ্যান্ড অ্যাকাউন্ট সার্ভিসে সরকারি কাজে নিযুক্ত। কাজের সঙ্গে সঙ্গে চলেছে লেখালেখি। প্রকাশিত কবিতার বই: মাতৃভূমি বাস্পার (সপ্তর্ষি, ২০১৫), পণ্যসংহিতা (কবিতা পাঙ্কিক, ১৯৯৬), পিশাচিনীকাব্য (কবিতা পাঙ্কিক, ১৯৯৮), রেডিওবিতান (প্রমা, ১৯৯৯), চিরন্তন গল্পমালা (কবিকথা, ১৯৯৯), আবার প্রথম থেকে পড়ে (আনন্দ, ২০০১), মেয়েদের প্রজাতন্ত্র (সপ্তর্ষি প্রকাশন, ২০০৫), ভার্সুয়ালের নবীন কিশোর (আনন্দ, ২০১০)। ১৯৯৮ সালে কৃতিবাস পুরস্কার। ২০০৬ সালে বাংলা আকাদেমির অনিতা-সুনীলকুমার বসু পুরস্কার। ২০১৪ সালে প্রকাশিত হয়েছে সলিটেরার নামে গল্প সংকলন। লেখালিখির বাইরে অন্য শব্দ ফরাসি ভাষা ও অন্যান্য লাতিন ভাষা চর্চা।

IMAN CHAKRABORTY – A tête-à-tête



Iman is an extremely talented Rabindrasangeet & folk singer with a unique singing voice and an amazing stage presence. Among her many achievements, here are a few:

- Best Female Singer Award, All India Radio (2007-2008)
- Best Light Classical Singer Award on Saufest, Bangladesh 2010
- National Scholar of Rabindrasangeet 2011

We were all extremely lucky to have her perform in Milonee's Programme Shraban Sandhya on 25th July. Being extremely down to earth and friendly, my interview with her was more an adda (chat session) than a formal interview. Sharing the tête-à-tête with all our readers:

গান বাজনা কি ভাবে শুরু হল?

গান বাজনা শুরু হয়েছে আমার মায়ের কাছ থেকে। মা নিজে অসীম শিক্ষিকা ছিলেন, Don Bosco তে গানের departmental head. আমার বাড়ি একেবারেই musical ছিল না, কিন্তু আমার মা নিজে যখন এই বাড়িতে এলেন, গোটা বাড়িটাকে musical করে দিয়েছিলেন। আরে তিন বছর বয়স থেকে তাই মায়ের কাছেই আমার গান শুরু।

জীবনের সবচেয়ে বড়ো অনুপ্রেরনা কে এবং কেন?

আমার মা আর বাবা। আমার মা নিজে একজন উচ্চ শিক্ষিত মহিলা ছিলেন, একুশ বছর বয়স থেকে আমি মায়ের জীবন এ চলে এয়েছি। তার পর থেকে শেষ দিন পর্যন্ত মা যা করেছেন আমার কথা ভেবে। বাবা এবং মা নিজেদের সমস্ত সময় আমাকে দিয়েছে। তারা যদি যেই সময় এবং dedication না দিতেন তাহলে আমি

আজ আমি হতাশ না। বাবা মায়ের কাছে তো ফের্ড কৃতজ্ঞ হয়না , তাই আমি আমার জীবনে তাদের মতন হতে চাই। আমি যেটাই করব সেই dedication নিয়ে যেন করতে পারি।

এত দেশ বিদেশ ঘুরে show কর, যে কন একটা মজার ঘটনা share কর ।

তখন আমি সদ্য গান শুরু করেছি, আমি M.A ও পাশ করিনি। তখন বনগাঁ তে এক প্রোগ্রাম এমেছে। আমরা তখন সবাই ছোট, খুব উন্মত্তনা। নিজের গাড়ি নিয়ে গেছি। গিয়ে দেখছি প্রচুর মোক, সবাই নুঙ্গি পরে বসে আছে। প্রথমে এক রবীন্দ্রমঞ্জীত দিয়ে শুরু করলাম। তারপর হাততামি পড়লাম। এর পরে সবাই বসতে শুরু করল হিন্দি item number করতে হবে, তা ছাড়া কন গান শুনবে না। আমি ও সব গান জানিনা, কোন মতে পানিয়ে বেচেছিলাম। আমাদের গাড়ীর চাকা তে পেড়েক লাগিয়ে দেওয়া হয়েছিলো। মাঝ রাত্তয়ে গাড়ি puncture. তারা রাত বাইরে কাটাতে হয়েছিল। এই এক অদ্ভুত অভিজ্ঞতা। এখন মজা লাগে ভাবতে, কিন্তু তখন একেবারেই লাগেনি। বেশ ভয় পেয়েছিলাম।

Denver এ শো করার অভিজ্ঞতা কেমন লাগল?

Denver এ শো করার অভিজ্ঞতাটা আমার কাছে একটু অন্যরকম। অনেক জায়গা তে show করেছি, একেবারেই বসতে হয় বসে বসছি। খুব ভেতর থেকেই বসছি। এখানে যা আনন্দ পেয়েছি, অনেক জায়গাতে পাইনি। যখন নিজের যন্ত্র / বাদ্য মঞ্জী রা থাকে, তাদের সাথে শো করার তো আনন্দ মজা আছেই। কিন্তু বিদেশের মাটি তে গিয়ে, এত ভালো musician পাব, সেটা ভাবতেই পারিনি।



মৌম্যজিত আর রিতব্রত, এদের কাছে আমি কৃতজ্ঞ যে এরা আমাকে দিয়ে দায়িত্ব নিয়ে rehearsal করে যে গান করিয়েছে। আমি একদম rehearsal করে শো করার মেয়ে নই। আর আমি মিলনীর প্রত্যেকজন সদস্যর কাছে কৃতজ্ঞ আমাকে এত ভালবাসা দেওয়ার জন্য এবং সহ্য করার জন্যে।

গান ছাড়া আর কি ভাবে সময় কাটাতে ভালোবাসো?

মারাদিন ঘুম থেকে উঠে, ঘুমাতে যাওয়ার আগে অবধি তো গান নিয়েই থাকি। গান গাওয়া, শোনা, শেখানো। কিন্তু এছাড়া আমি মিনেমা দেখতে খুব ভালো বামি। দেশ বিদেশের অনেক মিনেমা দেখি। তা ছাড়া কলকাতার যানজট এ গাড়ি চালাতে খুব ভালো বামি। এর বেশি আর কিছু নেই।

ভবিষ্যৎ এর স্বপ্ন কি?

আমি ভবিষ্যৎ নিয়ে ভাবিনা, বর্তমান নিয়ে থাকতে ভালো বামি। ভবিষ্যৎ এ কি হবে আমি জানিনা। তবে গান নিয়ে থাকব সেটা জানি। তবে একটা স্বপ্ন আছে, রাত্তায় বাচ্চারা যারা গান শিখতে চায়, তাদের গান শেখানোর ইচ্ছে আছে। যদি কখন পারি, নিশ্চয়ই করব।



KRYPTONITE by Suprotim Sengupta

The little boy never smiled.

I had been watching him for some time playing some game on a mobile phone. Restless. Bored. An empty plastic packet fluttered in the wind next to him, almost taunting him to come play. He never once looked up.

I turned my attention to the rest of the compartment. The boy's father was on the berth above me, rhythmically snoring with the lazy mechanical chugging of the train engine. The mother was lying down listlessly on the berth opposite. It wasn't difficult to see where the perpetually bored expression of the little boy came from. She half smiled at me, strategically adjusting her chiffon saree so that her cleavage showed a bit more. She seemed disappointed when I hurriedly looked away. The family had announced their arrival in no uncertain terms, pushing and screaming, amid great chaos, at the last station. The father dumped their three overstuffed suitcases and immediately settled down to sleep.

I am jealous of people who can sleep on trains. I never can. I have this weird feeling I will wake up in some other country or in some other century and no one would know me. Baba told me once that trains were among the last remaining time travel devices and this got stuck somewhere in my Medulla Oblangota or wherever these things get stuck in our brains.

The only other passenger in our compartment was a thin anxious looking man who kept getting down at each station to buy snacks. He smiled at everyone, the sort of smile that usually preceded a polite approach for a small money loan. Maybe he was a LIC agent. Each time he would squirm his way through the crowds and the heat and just about make it back with some unnecessary snack before the train left the platform. As a station approached, he would stand at the door, a mass of coiled pent up energy, like a diver waiting to dive into a lake full of sunk treasure. Was it actually the food? The adventure? Or like bored serial killers often confess, was it to see if he could get away with it?

But each time he came back with such a triumphant look on his face that I couldn't help smile to myself.

The little boy, however, didn't smile.

He never even noticed all this. Or the lights and houses and trees and hills and lakes which rushed past our window like they had to be someplace very soon. Somehow this bothered me. The world is doomed if kids stop looking out of windows.

The boy looked up suddenly as if he had heard me. Curious little eyes.

'Do you know any Superhero stories?' He asked. It was almost like a challenge.

'Superhero stories?' I sounded unsure.

In a flash, some secret virtual door was slammed on my face and he was back to his mobile game. I looked out of the window as the train continued to gobble up the landscape.

The rhythm of the world rushing past was hypnotic. I could almost see my life flash in front of my eyes. It played out in a random order of sounds smells and images. Like a low budget B grade movie with bad lighting and crazy continuity jumps. Into the little compartment came a rush of people and ghosts. Maybe it was that fluttering plastic packet. Maybe it was the couple of quick drinks I had before boarding. Or maybe trains really are time travel devices.

But there it was. My life. Randomly flashing past. In glorious Technicolor.

I closed my eyes. But the images became even more intrusive. I latched on to one of them, before my head burst.

I found myself staring at an overcast sky. Stale flowers stamped on by a million shoes. And cloyed blood trickling down from the chest of the clay Asura. I was five and I was arguing with my friends that it was actually a superhero called Plastic Man who had defeated the Asura and let the goddess Durga take all the credit.

A fat little boy, I forget his name, says 'But she has ten hands. And so many weapons. Why would she need anyone else?'

'Have you ever seen a girl beat up a boy?' I asked.

My friends are quiet. Gender stereotypes had already corrupted our little brains. Girls sang songs and danced and played with dolls. Boys fought heroically. The Asura was not just any other boy, he was a badass.

'What kind of a name is Plastic Man? Why is he called Plastic man?' The fat boy persists.

'You don't want to know.' I answer dramatically. 'He gets angry if anyone asks him this. What do you think happened to the Asura?'

All the kids look at the clay idol of the Asura. His face contorted in pain. Looking over his shoulder, scared. One thin little boy asks, though he already knows the answer in his heart. His freckles looked ready to pop in excitement.

'He made Plastic Man angry?' I smile at him with as much mystery and enigma I could muster on my small angular face. The other kids now talk in hushed whispers. But the fat boy is still not convinced. I really should remember his name. He irritated me all the time.

'Are you telling us our parents have been lying all along about Ma Durga?' He keeps his voice down so that his parents or the goddess doesn't hear him.

'Parents never lie. They just don't know sometimes.' I leaned forward. 'Especially if it's a secret.'

There. I had used it. The S word. Our third most favorite word after dinosaurs and planes. If we had to keep something secret, it must be true.

At that very moment Baba comes back home from work. He slumps on one of the chairs and bites into a shingara. Tired, drooping shoulders, spectacles, food crumbs smattered near his mouth and a boring looking attache case. He doesn't look anything like a superhero. The kids look at him disappointed.

Hushed whispers again. I was losing my audience. I run to baba, eyes sparkling.

'Baba, Do it once... that thing that you do... just once...'

Baba secretly glances back at the airport on the horizon. Low rumbling sounds of an airplane taking off. We lived right next to the airport. Half my childhood was spent keeping track of those low rumbling sounds, watching planes takeoff and land over our heads. And Baba had this almost supernatural understanding with those planes.

He finishes his shingara and nods. My friends come closer, excited.

'Step back. This might be dangerous.' warns Baba

He really knows how to play an audience. The kids get even more excited. The boy with the freckles was literally having a kid orgasm. Baba closes his eyes. His right hand is already closed in a tight fist, but with his left he does elaborate gestures as if performing a magic trick.

Slowly he opens his eyes. And then his palm.

Behind him, way back in the sky, there is a little plane flying off, like a butterfly that he released from his hand. Baba choreographs his movement so perfectly that it seems like the plane had actually come out of his hand. Almost magical.

The kids are thrilled. They clap and shout as the little plane disappears across the sky.

'Do it again. Do it again.'

There are no more planes taking off so Baba shakes his head.

'What else can he do?' They ask me as they make their way towards the pandal.

The fat disbelieving kid tries the 'plane coming out of hand' trick on his own. He opens his little fist willing a Boeing 747 to come out of it.

Of course, nothing. The other kids laugh.

Baba ruffles my hair and I hug him, giddy with redemption and pride. The joyous sounds of the dhaks filled my world. At least that's how I remember it.

The train stops at a station. I leaned forward and whispered to the little boy.

'I do know a superhero story... But it's a true story... so I can tell you only if you promise to keep this a secret.' I stressed on the 'secret' part. The poor word, like that unclaimed plastic packet, sat there helplessly. The little boy kept playing with his phone.

I took out an old picture of my father from my wallet. Baba, in his fifties, wearing a cheap printed shirt, standing with his fourteen vintage bikes, a big smile on his face.

'This is Subir Roy. My father... And he is a superhero.' The little boy would be about six or seven years old. He gave me a look which veered somewhere between pity and contempt. The man chasing snacks decided not to get down for snacks, intrigued. Even the mother peered down from her bunk again.

I could see they were not very impressed by the photograph. 'Well, I know what you are thinking... he doesn't look like much... as you can make out... average height. Definitely balding. Not particularly strong. I mean I had never seen him stop trains and trucks or anything. Or leap buildings in a single bound. He was rejected thrice by the Indian army when he tried to enlist because of his specs and weak eyesight. He definitely never wore his underwear outside his pants.... But take it from me... and I know my superheroes... this man... my father... is a superhero'

Everyone looks one more time at the photograph. Then the mother rolls her eyes and turns over to the other side. The snack man gives me a big smile and walks off in search of more food. And the little boy puts on his headphones and goes back to the game.

There is something tragic about a story no one wants to hear.

But the memories were chewing up my brain. I could even smell some of them now. I never knew memories had such strong smells. I remember the smell of wet clothes and burnt milk. And Baba sitting on the steps of our house and crying. The peculiar triangular patterns on the steps and that they were partly green because of moss. I remember not seeing my mother for a

long time and thinking to myself she never left me alone for this long. And I remember lots of people who I had never seen before in my life hugging me.

Then when the house was completely empty I remember us still sitting on the steps. Father and son. Silhouetted against the sappy moonlight.

I was three but somehow I remember all this. When the train slowed down I rummaged through my bag and took out a pair of scissors. I caught hold of the plastic packet and starting cutting it. The little boy watched me with his curious eyes. I pay no attention to him. I continue cutting mysteriously.

His headphones come off after a while.

'You said this is a true story.' He finally asks. He wants in.

Take that technology.

'Absolutely true. You think grown ups ever lie?'

'Your father is a superhero?'

I nod. He steals a glance at his snoring father. I was losing him again.

'You want to hear the story or not?'

The little boy didn't seem entirely sure. But the foodie was back with some oily samosas wrapped in a newspaper and he smiled encouragingly.

'Nothing like a nice story on a long train journey' he declared.

I declined the samosa that he offered me, which seemed to make him even happier. I didn't need any more invitation.

'I was a little younger than him.' I pointed at the boy, trying to involve him in the story. 'My mother had died in a car accident. And poor Baba had his hands full trying to take care of me. One night I wouldn't stop crying. Baba tried his best but I was really missing Ma and kept on whining and sobbing.'

They say in the deepest darkest moments of human history great heroes are born. And so it was.

Baba punched two holes on a bright red plastic carry bag. He put it on his head like a mask. An old blue striped single bedsheet doubled up as his cape. And he started prancing around doing weird things. I remember being a bit scared in the beginning, but the cape fluttering in the air somehow distracted me and I stopped crying. And when his cape accidentally covered his eyes and he stumbled over the sofa comically, I remember I actually started smiling.

I was three but I remember this.

That was the day Plastic Man was born.

The mall and supermarket boom had already begun and everything started being packed in bright colorful plastic carrybags. Luckily for Plastic Man this meant new masks every week. Who wanted the same old boring getups like Batman and Spiderman day in day out? Certainly not Plastic man. So one week he was a green Pizza joint. One week a white Saree shop. And then a navy blue electronics store. Even the color of the capes changed correspondingly. He must have been a designer's nightmare, but whenever the world needed saving, which in our life largely meant I was scared or sad or being plain difficult, Plastic Man would appear in all his mismatched colorful glory.

Like most superheroes, even Plastic Man needed a boring alternate identity. Peter Parker was a photographer. Bruce Wayne a businessman. Subir Roy also known as Baba, was an architect and a structural engineer. It was our secret. I couldn't even tell my closest friends or my loudmouth cousins. Baba said if they got to know I would have to share him with them. And Plastic Man was my shiniest toy.

I was not sharing him with anyone.

We lived on the ground floor of our building in Jamshedpur. Baba taught me to use windows to leave the house. 'You never know who is waiting for us outside the door' he used to say. Every morning Baba in his boring formal clothes, black attache case in hand would climb out through the window. He would then pull me up and through it. We never used the door. He would drop me to school in his old Rajdoot motorcycle. When he came back from work he would run straight into the bedroom and hide behind the cupboard. My task was to quietly sneak out and latch the door. Then panting and out of breath Baba would come out and tell me about his rousing adventures for the day.

Baba was great at spinning stories. Every day was a different story and he could go on for hours. Sometimes, exhausted after a hard day at work, when he used to fall asleep in the middle of the story, I would try complete it. I don't think my versions would ever make sense but he nodded encouragingly, desperately trying to stay awake.

Like Batman and Robin, we were a team. We even had a halogen light covered with a blue plastic wrapper which beamed up on our wall, like the Bat signal.

The train stopped abruptly at the next station. The thin man was off on more food adventures.

'The oranges of Nagpur are the best. The best. Continue. Continue. Don't wait for me. I'll be back.' He smiled sheepishly as he got off.

It was just the little boy and me. Had he been listening?

'It's boring. Aren't there any fights? Who were the bad guys? Every superhero has villains.'

He suddenly reminded me of that irritating fat boy from my childhood. Why can't I remember his name?

'I was coming to that' I replied curtly.

Well, every superhero does have villains.

And Plastic Man's arch villain was our cat Einstein.

Baba woke up one day and started pelting poor Einstein with coasters. I don't exactly remember how or why it started. But soon it became a routine. Our cat suddenly found himself under attack everyday by an over excited little kid and a funny looking man in a cape. When Einstein produced a fresh litter, Baba said that he was fed up with Plastic Man always winning and was spawning his own army. A smaller mask was made from a small elastic underwear for me and together we took on Einstein and his evil kittens. It was a no contest. Einstein stopped coming back to our place for months. We left her favorite fish and soya milk cookies out on the porch, but I guess he had had enough. In the evil cat world Plastic man and Elastic Boy were legends. And Einstein the clever cat that he was didn't want to mess with such awesomeness.

When he was not busy fighting evil Plastic Man taught me a great many important things. Like how to catch frogs in the rain and how to escape from fat aunts who insisted on pulling your cheeks. How to bark like dogs and imitate crows and remember the names of all of Jupiter's moons. If I refused to have my milk, he would tell me how he got his strength from having fallen into a tub of milk as a baby. Since I was scared of injections he always took one just before me though he himself was petrified of blood. Best of all Plastic Man taught me the secrets of teleportation. Like in Star Trek. So many times I fell asleep on the sofa and ended up in bed. Sadly, this does not work anymore.

When I was a little more grown up Baba would take me to his construction sites. He was very proud of the buildings he used to build. He had scores of men waiting to his bidding. One of them even made Maggi for me. Baba used to wave his hands like an opera conductor and lines of buildings would collapse in a heap. I used to love watching that. Baba would turn around and wink at me. Only he and I knew Plastic Man was behind that.

Baba had his detractors though. A lot of them. They pointed out the number of times he forgot to pick me up from school and the fights he got into with my teachers. Others pointed out the times he was cheated out of money by his clients who took advantage of his absentmindedness. His drinking problem. My aunts fussed about how much we used to eat out. And that though we didn't have too much money, Baba kept his broken down vintage motorcycles. All fourteen of them. They didn't even know about the times that he paid the electricity bill late and we ate by candlelight. That and other such things were our secret.

But when I climbed up and sat on Baba's shoulders, my feet dangling far above the ground, I felt bulletproof and nearly ten feet tall.

He used to ruffle my hair in a peculiar manner. It was almost like a question. His way of asking 'Do you love me Abhi? Are you proud of me?'

I used to answer by hugging him tight.

The last really happy memory I had of Jamshedpur was when I was fourteen. It was Durga Puja. Baba and I were sitting on the ledge of an under construction building looking down on the city. The sun was setting. It was like one of those heroic still images from the Spiderman or Batman movies.

Baba told me how he would never leave Jamshedpur. Jamshedpur was home. Jamshedpur was where his legacy was, where he had built so many houses. Jamshedpur had all we ever needed. I didn't realize it then but he was scared of me leaving. I didn't realize it then but my larger than life father was actually lonely. He was eccentric and forgetful and difficult to get along with, didn't have many friends. I was what kept him going, what held him together.

I didn't realize all this, because to me he was just my father, my hero.

He was Plastic Man.

'Life. It's incredible you know? Initially you're overwhelmed. But gradually you realize it's like a wave. Resist, and you'll be knocked over. Dive into it, and you'll swim out the other side.' His voice sounded deeper and more magical than usual.

I believe that what we become depends on what our fathers teach us at odd moments, when they aren't trying to teach us. We are formed by little scraps of wisdom.

Baba didn't mean for those words to change my life. Much like me, he was just trying to make sense of this overwhelming thing called life.

But because of those words I left home.

Because of those words I became a writer.

All that came much later. At that moment, perched high up on that ledge, as we looked down at the hundreds of people swarming on the streets celebrating Durga Puja, we felt invincible.

Plastic Man and Elastic Boy.

The thin man looked at me impressed.

'I didn't know you were a writer.'

'Not there yet. Still trying.'

'I could make out from the way you were telling the story. You have a way with words. I could tell' I smiled.

'Any books published yet?'

'A couple. Not very good though.'

'Keep trying. That's what I tell myself everyday. Doors will be slammed on your face. But keep trying.'

I suppressed this overwhelming desire again to ask him if he was an LIC agent.

Instead I asked, 'Do you know what kryptonite is?'

The little boy shrugged.

The thin man peeling an orange, shrugged.

'It's the only thing that makes Superman weak. The only thing he can't fight back against.'

The thin man bit into a slice of orange and said 'For me, that's my wife'

'I don't like Superman. I like the Avengers.' Says the little boy. In his world any sort of weakness was unacceptable.

It was uncanny how much he was reminding me of that fat boy. And he wasn't even fat.

'That's not the point. I meant to say all superheroes had their own kryptonite. Something that makes them weak, leads to their demise.' I argue on.

'The Avengers don't. Or Spiderman. They can defeat everybody.'

Like the plastic packet and the ignored six letter word, I felt deflated.

I was sixteen. I had aced my higher secondary exams and got admission in Saint Xavier's College Kolkata. Arrangements had been made. I would stay in the hostel there.

Baba came to drop me at the station. It was very emotional. The first time I was staying away from him. There were tears and outbursts.

It wasn't by me.

Baba even found Einstein the cat and got him home to convince me to stay back. Einstein was old and psychotic now. Not having a roof over his head hadn't worked out well for him.

'Not so high and mighty any more is he? We fixed him well and good' I laughed.

'What if this whole thing is an act? As soon as he knows Plastic Man and Elastic Boy have separated, he might launch a fresh attack' countered Baba.

'Well. You know where the blue distress signal is. Anytime you need me just point west and flash that light. Elastic Boy will be here in a jiffy.'

We laughed but both of us knew that we were staring at the end of something. We didn't know what it was then. But something was ending.

As the train pulled away from the station tears started rolling down Baba's cheeks. In an instant he looks surprisingly old. And alone. An old lonely man and an old lonely cat standing on an old lonely platform. The tears wouldn't stop.

The ticket collector looked concerned. 'Is your father going to be ok?'

I nodded smiling at him, trying to reassure myself.

Plastic Man's nemesis was not a white tabby cat called Einstein.

It was me growing up.

Time. That was the deadliest kryptonite.

The train had settled into a nice comfortable cruising rhythm. The thin man tried to stifle a yawn but couldn't. I smiled at him and resumed cutting the plastic packet with my scissors.

My initial days in Kolkata were quite lonely. A big city. New people. Everyone was always stepping on your toes and going somewhere. Life was nothing like it was back in our Jamshedpur. Every second day I would line up outside the STD booth next to our hostel and talk to Baba. I would tell him about my life. He would tell me about his. Plastic Man still made sporadic appearances in his stories.

I told him about my messy South Indian room mate and my gay English Literature professor. He complained no one was building new homes in Jamshedpur and that the new breed of engineers knew absolutely nothing. I told him about Olypub in Park Street and having my first drink. He complained about one of his precious bikes not working. I told him how I wasn't getting enough sleep. He complained 'that bastard cat Einstein' had died on him and he had to bury him in our garden.

'Einstein is dead so I am 'relatively' sad', he said.

We laughed.

I told him about my new job, my demanding girl friend, Dil Chahta Hai and Eden Gardens. Soon he stopped complaining and only listened.

I was brimming with stories. Baba was running out of complaints and stories that mattered to me.

That year I went back to visit Baba during the Pujas. I found him on a ledge wearing a Plastic Mask and cape, doing heroic poses for a group of kids. He was enjoying himself and the kids were clapping.

He saw me through the slits of his ridiculous mask and hastily got off the ledge. As if I had caught him red handed doing something very wrong.

My girlfriend had come along with me to see the pujas in Jamshedpur. I pushed her forward awkwardly and introduced her to Baba.

Plastic Man had faced many deadly adversaries in his glorious crime busting career and he always had a great quip or a comeback line. This time he had none.

For a moment, our watches refused to keep time.

'You never told me' complained Baba, finally breaking the silence.

'It was meant to be a surprise'

Both Baba and I looked at each other guiltily.

Then Baba took off his Plastic packet and hugged her.

'This is what I look like normally...Not much of an improvement is it?'

My girlfriend smiled.

Inside, when I had a moment alone with him, I shook my head and told him off for climbing the ledge at his age.

'Those little buggers insisted.' Baba said. He wasn't the least bit convincing.

At night we could hear Baba and our maid fighting over sleeping arrangements.

Our maid was taunting.

'She will sleep in his room?'

'Of course not. Where is he going to sleep then?' Asked Baba.

My girlfriend smiled at this. But for some reason I had started feeling a bit embarrassed. I didn't know what to talk to Baba about anymore. How many times could you bring up Jupiter's moons in a normal conversation? I had become a version of myself I never thought I would. I had become the fat boy. I was slowly turning into kryptonite.

While I hugged him goodbye I promised I would call him over the weekend.

I got very busy and something came up. Then something else.

I did not call Baba that Saturday. Or the next. Or the one after that.

Its not that we didn't keep in touch. But I was too caught up and he was too proud and between us neither knew how to handle a proper grown up relationship.

Some years later Baba came to visit me in Bombay for the first time.

I was married by then, had a son, had written three very average books of fiction and was hard at work on my fourth. Things were not easy. My son had been diagnosed with Eisenmenger Syndrome, which basically meant he had a serious heart condition. He needed constant and expensive medical care. Both my wife and I were working in bank jobs we hated trying to make ends meet. Its as if someone had pressed the pause button in our lives. We were crabby, irritable, frustrated. Our small little Mathunga flat reflected our struggles but of course Baba was oblivious to all this.

He was just happy to be there. He chatted up everyone. Tried to infect everyone with his contagious enthusiasm. From our watchman, right down to the Eureka Forbes guy who came to clean the filter. He tried the hardest with my three year old son Rohan. He barked like a dog, cawed like the crows, drew his funny cartoons.

But no one had time for him. Not the Eureka Forbes guy. Not my wife and Rohan. Not even me. I think Baba felt lonelier here among all of us in this metropolitan of twenty million people than when he was alone back home.

One evening my wife and I came back from work to find Rohan crying. He looked scared, miserable. We found Baba wearing a plastic packet on his head and doing funny things with an outstretched table cloth. He looked disturbing, deranged.

Did he always look like this?

Did I find this amusing when I was a kid?

My son keeps on crying.
Baba sits quietly on a chair, looks really defeated.

After putting my son to sleep that night, my wife made Baba sit down. She told him a lot of things which she shouldn't have said. I stood next to him, as if on trial with him. I knew exactly what he was doing, but I didn't defend Baba. For someone who wanted to be a writer, I couldn't come up with a single word to comfort the old man. Or protect him.

I sat next to the window smoking. Frustrated, angry, helpless. Baba came and sat next to me like we used to all those years back.
Plastic Man and Elastic Boy.

We were quiet for a long time before he finally reached somewhere deep within and spoke.
'Do you love me Abhi?'
'Don't be dramatic Baba. Go sleep.'
'But do you still love me? Are you proud of me?'

He had never actually asked this. I had not asked this of myself in a long time. It was like he wanted some sort of validation of his life.

'It's not that simple. That shallow overrated word cannot solve everything'.
'It is a nice word. Some people like hearing it' Baba said.

'Of course I love you.' I quickly added.

It had been raining. The clothes had been brought inside to dry. As Baba stood up, the lamp behind him cast his shadow on the wall. One of the sheets drying on the clothesline looked like his cape in the silhouette. Fluttering in the wind. And for a second I saw him again in all his Plastic Man glory.

He ruffled my hair like he always used to and went off to sleep. The next day he packed his bags and went back to Jamshedpur. He never visited us in Bombay again.

Some weeks later Baba sent me a draft for a sizeable amount of money. He had sold off his beloved vintage motorcycles. All fourteen of them.

'I couldn't sleep. I thought I saw the blue light on my wall', he wrote. 'I thought you needed help. Send it back if you don't need it. If you do it before the 31st I can still get one or two of those old bikes back. P.S: I fired Niva again. Love. Baba'

The money was just a blip in the amount we needed for Rohan's treatment. But somehow as I stared at the letter, it felt like everything would be all right. Like a weight had lifted from my shoulders.

In my late teens and early twenties, my father was so ignorant I could hardly stand to have the old man around. But now, I was astonished at how much the old man had learned in the last few years. Plastic Man was alive and kicking. Like the normal story arc of a superhero, he had reinvented himself, risen up from the dead in the third act.

Nothing bad could ever happen on his watch.

I found myself thinking about the definition of a superhero.

We love our superheroes because they refuse to give up on us. To remind us we are worth saving. We can analyze them out of existence, kill them, ban them, mock them, and still they return, patiently reminding us of who we are and what we wish we could be.

Sometimes superheroes didn't leap tall buildings or stop bullets with an outstretched hand; they didn't wear boots and capes. They bled, and they bruised, and their superpowers were as simple as listening, or loving. Behind the masks and capes some Superheroes were ordinary people who knew that even if their own lives were impossibly knotted, they could untangle someone else's.

And maybe that one act could lead someone to rescue you right back.

That's it? Asked the little boy, incredulous.

'That's it' I replied, controlling a violent urge to pour the watermelon juice the thin man was sipping on the boys head.

My plastic mask was ready. The thin man tried it on enthusiastically. I could see him making faces inside the mask and wanted to tell him that no one could see his facial gestures. .

'Was this like one of those masks that your dad... you know...?' He smiled when he finally took it off.

'Something like this. He made them better'. I said as I handed it to the little boy.

The train stopped at Jamshedpur station.

Baba would be waiting at the platform. I wondered if he would be wearing his Plastic Man mask.

I hope he doesn't. I hope he knows by now that he is Plastic Man.

He doesn't need the mask.

The thin man gave me his card and an awkward hug.

'I knew you were a writer the moment I saw you. Keep at it. And remember a joke here and there never hurts'.

And he rushes behind a dosa vendor out onto the platform, like he was on a secret spy mission.

I looked at the card. Asim Biswas. LIC agent.

There was one digit missing in the phone number provided.

The other family heaved and hauled their overstuffed bags and got down.

I found the plastic mask lying unclaimed on the seat. The boy had left it behind.

I felt a bit sorry for that poor father. Those heavy bags were the least of his problems. As he disappeared into the crowd I was left wondering. Would he ever be a hero for his son?

Would I ever be a hero for mine?

Every kid needs a hero.

They teach us about courage, about ideals. About life.

Most of the times superheroes are easy to spot. But sometimes they turn up in unlikely places. Like in the ground floor of an old broken down building next to the airport in Jamshedpur. Wearing a red plastic mask which says Bata by choice.

They need us to believe in them, to make them feel invincible.

But sometimes the rest of us need them more. I finally remember that fat boy's name. It was Jojo.

I wish he was still watching.

Because on the platform there was an old man waiting for his son. His eyesight was very weak now. Yet among those thousands of people coming back home for the pujas that day on the platform, he would spot his son in an instant.

That was another of his super powers.

For this old man on the platform was a superhero.

THE END



Suprotim Sengupta has worked in advertising, television and films for the last twelve years with Walt Disney, UTV and other leading entertainment brands. He currently lives in Mumbai with his red notebooks and dishevelled hair, churning out scripts for Hindi films in his dark brooding writer's corner. He has no cats but has informed the editorial team that his father really was a superhero.



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A Different Ending *by* Piya Sengupta

I won't write about you.
It may be autumn again, cheerful and blue
Azure memories echoing in the crispy air,
But this time, I won't write about you.

I'm searching for a panacea...
Can I ever find one?
While I walk memories' dusty lanes,
And known faces fade in the sun

But someplace far, far away
In a city drenched with rains
We often fell in mindless love
While we walked these by-gone lanes...

My mind bursts with half-said words
But I still won't write about you,
For somewhere while we were growing up,
We have lost our stories too.

It was a strange life in strange times
Happy scribbles on life's slate
It smelled of my mother's smile
And moonlight trapped in plates

Now, there is still a life
Where it's just you and I
An autumn leaf slowly drifts away
It's not time that's passing by

The sun rises once more where I live
Bursting with light in all its glory
I start writing again with hope,
I won't end my favourite story.

পেটে- পূজা

Rashapuli- Sraboni Basu



I belong to the generation where Durga Pujo was fun not only in terms of festivities and *no porashona* but Durga Pujo meant homemade food. The 4 days of pujo was also a foodie's paradise with plenty of mouth-watering dishes. And then there was Bijoya where in lieu of a pronam we would be served nimki, different mishti, ghugni etc. From snacks to sweet dishes, Bengali food has something to offer to all food enthusiasts.

When we grew up there was no apartment culture like the modern days where the kitchen is closed for 4 days and the entire population of the apartment complex eat at the community halls. During our time, I have seen our mothers slaving in the kitchen in anticipation of pujo. Getting the special ingredients from the market was very exciting as was the thought of preparing new and authentic dishes for the family.

This generation is fast disappearing but good thing is that restaurants like 6th Ballygunje place and Bhojohori Manna are fast growing in Kolkata where you can go and try out the real authentic Bengali cuisine starting from luchi, aloor torkari, begun bhaja, cholar daal, sandesh, shukto, aloo posto, mochar ghonto, tyangra macher jhol, shorshe ilish, chatni, mishti doi, malpua etc.

Rashapuli is one such dessert that I associate with Durga Pujo since maa would prepare it during the pujos.

Ingredients

- 1 coconut (medium size) /1 packet frozen coconut
- 250 grams sugar
- 2 liter milk
- 250 grams sooji or semolina
- 4 cardamom (elaichi)
- 2 tablespoon ghee



Method

1. Scrap the coconut using a scraper. You can also use frozen grated coconut that is readily available in Indian stores.
2. Boil the milk in a saucepan and allow it to condense over an oven till 2 liters is reduced to 1 ¼ liters, stirring intermittently.
3. Make a rough paste of scraped coconut and sugar in a mixing bowl.
4. Add Semolina/sooji to the paste and mix it well
5. Heat 2 table spoon of ghee in a kadai or deep pan. Add the mix to the Kadai and roast the mix till it turns light brown and sticky. It will take around 15 to 20 minutes.
6. Take the roasted mix in a dish and make small oval shaped globules while it is still hot. Then allow the balls to cool.
7. Add these balls to the boiling milk along with cardamom. Boil the whole content for 2-3 minutes and then take it off the stove. Enjoy the Rashapuli!

Chilli Chicken /Prawn Fried Rice – Sudatta Bhattacharya Mukherjee



পূজো মানে নতুন জামা, নতুন জুতো,
পড়াশুনা বন্ধ, পূজো মানে খাওয়াদাওয়া, ঠাকুর
দেখা, কগশফুলের গন্ধ। ছোটবেলাতে দুর্গাপূজো
মানে আমার কগছে একটা-ই পূজো ছিল,
আমার মামার বাড়ির পূজো। ছোটবেলা থেকে
বড়বেলা, আমেরিকা-তে আমার আগে অবধি
পূজো বলতে মামার বাড়ির পূজো ছাড়া
বারোয়ারি পূজো অম্পর্কে তেমন ধারণা
ছিলনা।

পূজোর দু-তিন মাম আগে থেকে জামা,
জুতো, চুলের ক্লিপ, ম্যাচিং নেল-
প্যামিশ, নিপস্টিক অব যিনে অপেক্ষা

করতাম কখন পঞ্চমী আসবে, আমি বাবা-মা রওনা দেব বর্ধমান থেকে শান্তিনিকেতন-এর পথে। আমরা তখন
বাবার চাকরি-স্ববে বর্ধমানে থাকতাম, আমার দেশের বাড়ি শান্তিনিকেতনে, আর মামার বাড়ি শান্তিনিকেতন থেকে
কুড়ি মিনিট দূরে আদিত্যপুর বনে একটি গ্রামে। শান্তিনিকেতনে আমার জন্য মন ছটফট করতো মহানয়ার দিন
থেকে। বছরে হাতে গোনা কয়েকবার আসতাম - দোন্, গরমের ছুটি, পূজোর ছুটি, পৌষমেলা। তার মধ্যে
দুর্গাপূজো অবচেয়ে বড় আকর্ষণ ছিল। চতুর্থী-র দিন স্কুলে ছুটি পড়লেই মনে একরাশ আনন্দ নিয়ে বাড়ি এয়ে
ব্যাগ শুছিয়ে, পঞ্চমী-র দিন অফনে শান্তিনিকেতন এক্সপ্রেস ধরে প্রথমে শান্তিনিকেতনের বাড়ি পৌঁছে যেখান

থেকে মামার বাড়ি চলে যেতাম। তিনশো বছরের-ও পুরনো পূজা, মারা বছর মামার বাড়িতে ফেঁদ-ই থাকেননা, কারণ চাকরি-সুনে অফেনেই বাইরে থাকেন, পূজার সময় অফেনেই ছুটিতে মামার বাড়িতে আয়েন, মামা-মামী, মামি-মেয়ে, ডাই-বোনেরা, মামার বাড়ি গম্গম্ করে। পূজার চারদিন হইহই করে ফেটে যায়, মাথে রকমারি খাওয়া-দাওয়া, অষ্টমী-তে মাছ, অষ্টমী-তে লুচি/আবুর খিচুড়ি, নবমী-তে মাছ, দশমী-তে মাংস। এছাড়া গরম রসগোল্লা, বোঁদে, অফেনে তরকারি-মুড়ি, বোঁদে-মুড়ি। বীরভূমের খুব জনপ্রিয় খাবার মুড়ি, যেকোনো কিছু দিয়েই মুড়ি খেতে পারে বলে প্রচলিত কথা আছে। রান্ধিবেলা-তে রিঞ্চা করে প্যাঙ্কেনে প্যাঙ্কেনে ঠাকুর দেখে অবাই মিনে বাইরে কোনো রেস্ফুরেন্টে খেয়ে ফিরতাম। এখন শান্তিনিকেতনে বেশি রেস্ফুরেন্ট ছিলনা। শাল-বীথি এবং ঘরে-বাইরে এই দুটো রেস্ফুরেন্ট ছিলো। যেখানে খুব-ই নিমিটেড কয়েক-টা মেনু জনপ্রিয় ছিলো। তার মধ্যে অন্য অনেক খাবারের মাথে ফ্রায়েড-রাইস এবং চিনি-চিকেন খুব খেতাম আমরা। পূজার স্মৃতি-তে এই দুটো রেস্ফুরেন্ট শেয়ার করলাম অফেনের মাথে। করে দেখবেন যদি ভালো লাগে।

প্ন ফ্রায়েড-রাইস

উপকরণ

- ১ কপ্ বাসমতী চালের ভাত বানিয়ে রাখা (ভাত-টা আগের দিন বানিয়ে রাখা থাকলে ভালো হয়),
- ১ টা ছোটো পেঁয়াজ অরু করে কটা
- রসুন-ফুচি ১/২ চা-চামচ
- ১/২ টা ক্যাপ্‌সিয়াম-ফুচি
- ২টো ডিম ভেজে ছোটো ছোটো করে ফেটে নেওয়া,
- ১ কপ্ চিংড়ি মাছ নুন গোলমরিচ দিয়ে ভাজা
- পেঁয়াজকনি-ফুচি ৪ টেবিল-চামচ,
- ময়-অম্ ৩ চা-চামচ
- মাদা-তেন ৪ টেবিল-চামচ
- নুন ও গোলমরিচ স্বাদ-অনুযায়ী।

প্রণালী

প্রথমে কড়াই-তে মাদা-তেন দিয়ে তারমধ্যে রসুন-ফুচি দিয়ে হালকা নাড়াচাড়া করে পেঁয়াজ দিয়ে ভাজতে হবে। পেঁয়াজ বাদামি বর্ণ হলে তাকে একে একে ক্যাপ্‌সিয়াম, পরিমাণ মতো নুন গোলমরিচ দিয়ে আগে থেকে ভেজে রাখা চিংড়ি মাছ এবং ময়-অম্ দিয়ে নাড়াচাড়া করতে হবে

এবার আগে থেকে বানিয়ে রাখা ভাত দিয়ে অবশিষ্ট একসাথে মিশিয়ে ভাজা ডিম ও পেঁয়াজকমি ছড়িয়ে গরম গরম পরিবেশন করুন।

চিনি চিকেন

উপকরণ

ম্যারিনেশন: চিকেন (বোন-লেস/বোন-অমেত) ২ পাউন্ড

- আদা-রসুনবাটা ১-১/২ টেবিল-চামচ
- ময়-অম্ ১ চা-চামচ
- চিনি-অম্ ১ চা-চামচ
- নুন ১ চা-চামচ
- ১ টা ডিম
- ১ টা স্বেবুর রস
- কর্নফ্লাওয়ার ৬ টেবিল-চামচ।

অবশিষ্ট একসাথে মাথিয়ে ৪০/৪৫ মিনিট রেখে দিতে হবে।

গ্রেভি-র উপকরণ

- ১ টা বড় পেঁয়াজ ডুমো ডুমো করে কাটা
- ১ টা বড় ক্যাপ্‌সিকাম ডুমো ডুমো করে কাটা
- চিনি-অম্ ২ টেবিল-চামচ
- ময়-অম্ ২ টেবিল-চামচ
- টমেটো-অম্ ৩ টেবিল-চামচ
- কাঁচা-লবঙ্গ চেরা ৫/৬ টা
- গোটা-গোলমরিচ ১/২ চা-চামচ
- রসুন-কুচি ১ চা-চামচ
- পেঁয়াজ কমি ৪ টেবিল-চামচ
- গোলমরিচ ১ চা-চামচ
- চিনি ১/২ চা-চামচ, নুন স্বাদ-অনুযায়ী
- ডিপ্-ফ্রাই এর জন্য পরিমাণ-মতো আদা-তেল ও রান্নার জন্য আদা-তেল ৩ টেবিল-চামচ।

প্রণালী

প্রথমে চিকেন ডিপ-ফ্রাই করে নিতে হবে গাঢ় বাদামি হওয়া অবধি।

এবার তেলে গোটা-গোলমরিচ ও রসুন-কুচি দিয়ে হালকা নেড়ে তাতে পেঁয়াজ ও ক্যাপ্‌সিকাম দিয়ে হালকা বাদামী করে ভেজে চিনি-অম্, ময়-অম্, টমেটো-অম্, নুন স্বাদ-মতো, চিনি ও গোলমরিচ দিয়ে নাড়াচাড়া করে ভাজা চিকেন দিয়ে অল্প আঁচে ৫/৬ মিনিট ঢেকে রেখে দিতে হবে। এবার ঢাকনা খুলে কাঁচা-লবঙ্গ এবং ১ চা-চামচ কর্নফ্লাওয়ার অল্প জলে গুনে দিয়ে দিতে হবে। ফুটে উঠলে পেঁয়াজকমি ছড়িয়ে গরম গরম ফ্রায়েড-রাইস এর সাথে পরিবেশন করুন।

Maasor Tenga (Tangy Fish Curry) -Snigdha Laskar

Maasor Tenga (Tangy Fish Curry) is a light and tangy dish, and is one of Assam's signature preparations. The key ingredient in a **tenga** (sour) is the use of a souring agent which lends the dish a tart tangy taste. There are wide variety of souring agents that can be use to prepare this dish, ranging from the commonly available lemon, tomatoes or sour spinach or thekera (*garcinia pendunculata*).



Ingredients

- **6-8** pieces of river fish, preferable Rohu
- **3** ripe tomatoes, chopped
- **1** small potato boiled cut in pieces
- **½** tsp fenugreek seeds
- **1** small onion chopped
- **1 1/2** tsp ginger-garlic paste
- **1** tsp cumin powder & **1** tsp turmeric powder
- **1-2** green chili or dry red chili (optional) □ 2 tsp lemon juice or as per taste
- **1** tablespoon mustard oil □ Extra mustard oil to fry the fish
- **3** tablespoon chopped coriander
- 2 cups of warm water □ Salt according to taste

Method

Sprinkle the fish pieces with half a teaspoon of the turmeric powder and salt and leave to marinate for twenty minutes.

Heat oil in a deep pan set over medium heat and fry the fish until lightly browned and just cooked through, keep aside. Heat one tablespoon mustard oil in a separate pan. Tip in the fenugreek seeds till it splatters.

Add the green chilies and chopped onions, fry until it turns light brown. Now add turmeric powder and cumin powder and ginger- garlic paste followed by the chopped tomatoes and boiled potato. Stir well and cook until the tomatoes have started to mushy and release their liquid.

Add salt and stir well. Gently slide in the fried fish pieces. Add water and lemon juice, cover it and simmer for ten minutes. Reduce heat and remove the cover, boil it for another 5 mins.

Garnish with chopped coriander and turn off the heat, now serve with some steamed rice.

*Colorado Songwala wishes you
Shubho Bijoya.*

Keep beating to the rhythm of life.



