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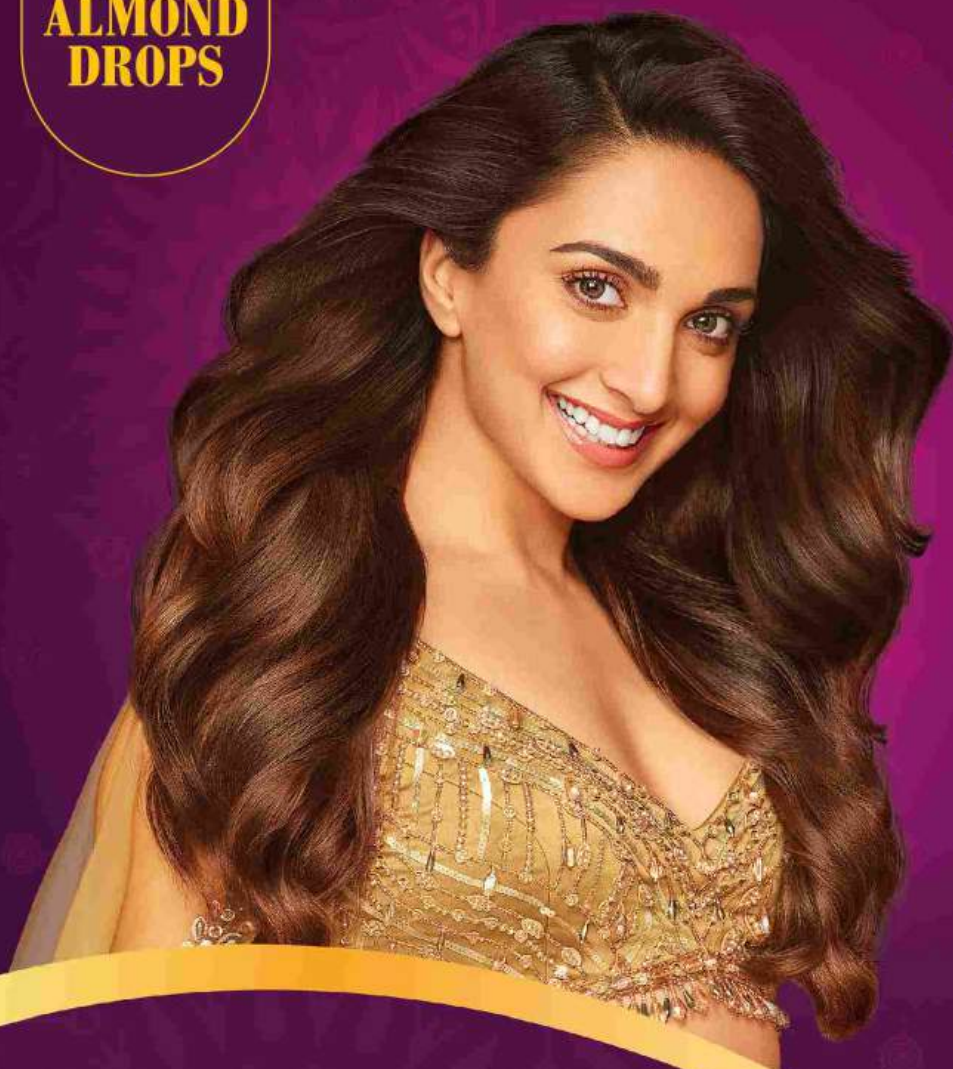


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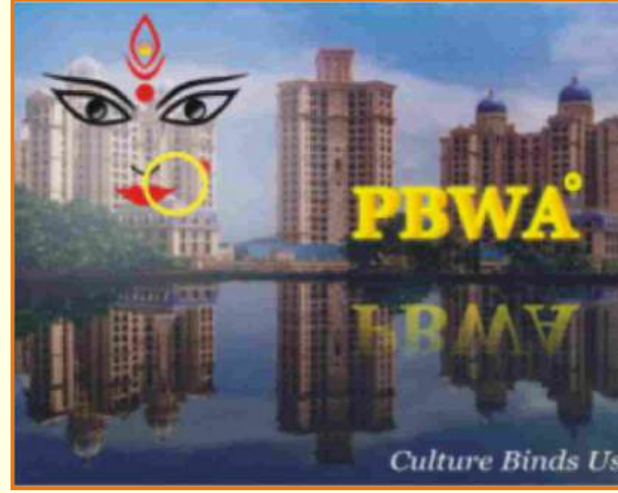


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### **'PARICHAY 2024'**

is a publication of Powai Bengali Welfare Association (PBWA).

The publication reflects the association's activities and creative expressions of its members.

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### **POWAI BENGALI WELFARE ASSOCIATION**

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## Foreword

"Come from England, come from Scotland,  
come from Ireland.

Come from Holland, come from Poland, come  
from any land

If you're looking out for a pleasant holiday

Come to Bombay, come to Bombay, Bombay  
meri hai!"

These immortal words sung back in the early  
70s by Uma Pocha (sister of the famous Usha  
Uthup) typifies the welcoming and lively  
spirit of Mumbai and what Mumbai is all  
about.

She goes on to sing:

"Bom Bom Bom Bom, Bombay meri hai! Bom  
Bom Bom Bom, Bombay meri hai!

Ladies are nice, Gents are full of spice. Come  
to Bombay, come to Bombay, Bombay meri  
hai." (the last sentence is actually a tad  
different so this is a bit of artistic liberty).

This year, we are celebrating the inclusivity,  
the vibrancy, the resilience, and the never say  
die DNA of our beloved city of Mumbai. This is  
our homage to Amchi Mumbai. A city that

never sleeps, a city where you can transform  
yourself from a person at a humble station in  
life to a millionaire if you have the fire in your  
belly, a city where you will find traffic on the  
roads even at 2 am, a city where 5000  
dabbawalas reach home-cooked meals to  
200,000 office goers with an error rate of 1 in  
16 million deliveries, a city where public  
transportation is a lifeline like no other city in  
India, a city where a commoner can suddenly  
find himself beside Shah Rukh Khan or Sachin  
Tendulkar while shopping in Linking Road, a  
city which has put Vada Pav on the world  
cuisine map, a city which springs back after  
every natural calamity such as car-deep  
floods once every few years - and most of all, a  
city which has embraced Bengali culture (and  
we probashi bangalis i.e., Bengalis settled  
outside Bengal) with open arms over all these  
years.

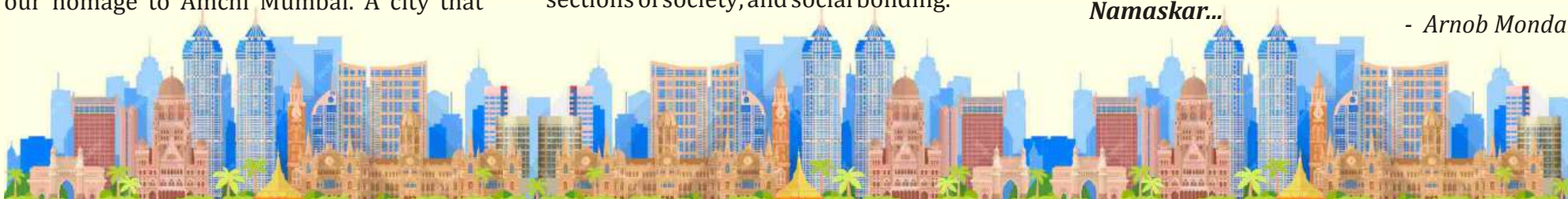
This is the city that has enabled our PBWA  
Durgotsav to grow from humble roots in  
2006 to the majestic, socio-religious event  
that it is today. An event which is a unique  
admixture of religiosity, culture, cuisine,  
song, dance, drama, support to needy  
sections of society, and social bonding.

Our Durgotsav continues to tower over its  
peers in Mumbai. The scale, the grandeur, the  
cultural events, the bhog (holy community  
lunch that we serve on 3 days during the  
utsav), the piety of our members who  
fervently follow the intricate religious rituals  
over 4 days, the bengali cuisine on offer, the  
splendid imposing pandals that we create  
year after year, the bonding and camaraderie  
that our 250 strong member families share,  
the unparalleled digital outreach and so much  
more... it is difficult to describe the awe-  
inspiring panoramic utsav that we have been  
staging year after year. This year we have  
taken one more step towards integration of  
our community into the vast, all-  
encompassing milieu that our Amchi Mumbai  
is today. This year our Durgotsav is themed  
around Mumbai in all its many-splendored  
hues.

Today we stand as one with the city of  
Mumbai. This is our narrative of dedication  
towards the city that has given us space, has  
warmly welcomed us into its fold, has given  
us so much opportunity to thrive, and above  
all has made us one of its own.

***Namaskar...***

*- Arnob Mondal*







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Durga Puja

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# Social Commitment







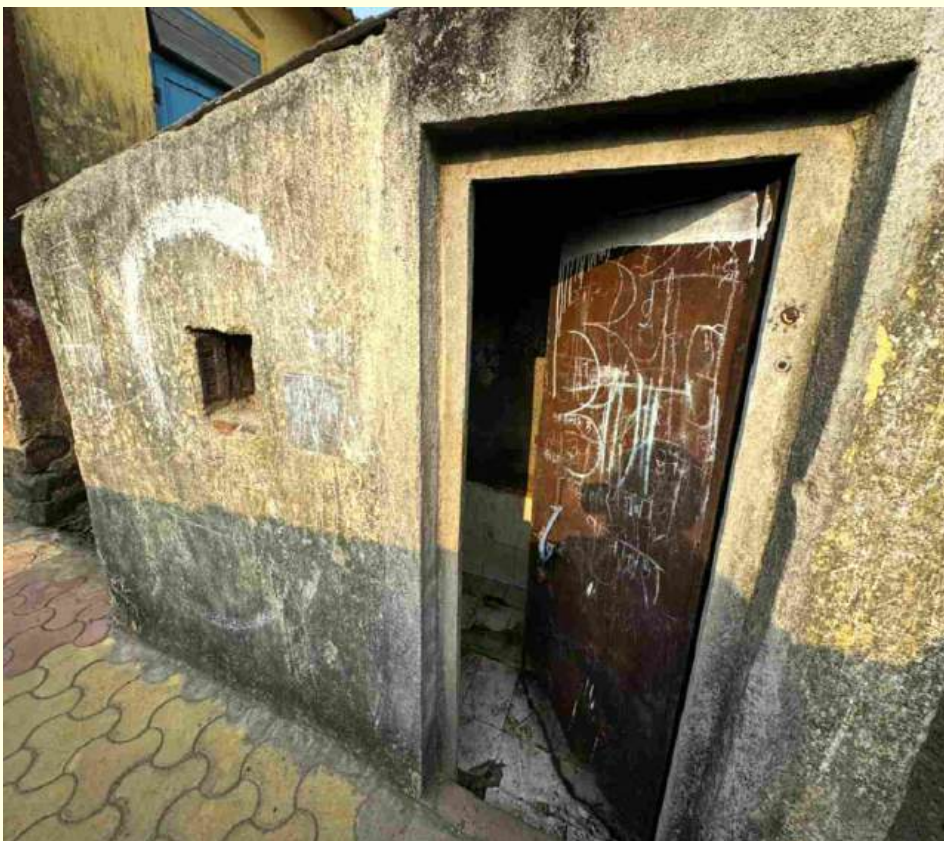
*PBWA continues to extend their hand for the marginalised sections of the society and the lesser privileged. This includes the LGBT community, Sex workers, Children, Women, Cancer afflicted, those suffering from Tuberculosis and more. As a socio-cultural organization while we shine culturally, we remain focussed on going the extra mile for the less fortunate.*



## PBWA Embarks on WASH (Water, Sanitation & Hygiene) program

Poor quality school toilets increases healthcare expenditures for children who fall sick with infections caused by poor sanitation. Thus students miss education time which also reduces family income from missed work.

Our goals of this project is to renovate / refurbish the sanitation facilities at the tribal Zila Parishad School in Aspirational Talasari block, Maharashtra, focusing on improving conditions for the students, particularly girls. We have undertaken renovation / refurbishment / construction of toilets. Through this crucial project we aim to provide children with a safe and hygienic environment.



## WASH Program

A) PBWA aims to prioritize improvement of toilet facilities in schools, ensuring a safe and healthy environment for the education of all children, irrespective of gender.

B) We meet **two of the UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) targets: 4.a-to provide safe and effective learning environments for all & 6.2-to ensure equitable access to safe sanitation and hygiene.**





## WASH Program undertaken to construct / refurbish 77 school toilets, 36 in the first phase



### Tweet



**bdotalasari**  
@bdotalasari

Hats off to collective efforts of Powai Bengali Association & Education Dpt. of Talasari block, school toilets are getting a much-needed makeover 🙌 This toilet facility of Acchad Industries School is now revamped & adorned with the ABP logo, signifying its progress in Talasari 😊👏

*Tweet of appreciation by the BDO,  
Talasari, Dist. Palghar, Maharashtra*



## An Illustration of work in past years



Coding Tool without Computer



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100% SSC Pass Result



Cycles to Girl students



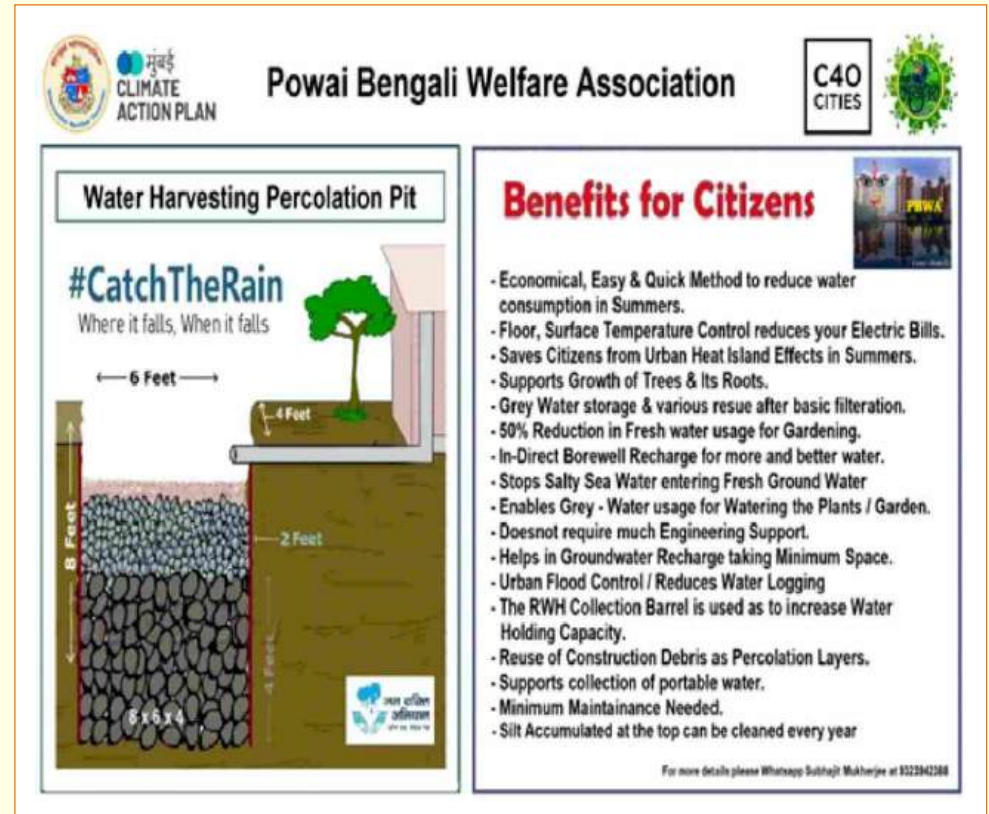
Poshan Bag distribution for  
families of TB patients



Covid Vaccination Drive

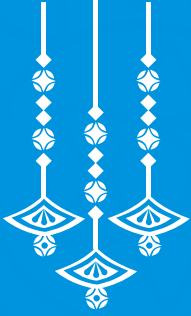


Blood Donation Drive



Water Harvesting Drive





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## “Swadheen” @ Mission Swayam Siddha

**Swadheen**, a powerful word with origins in Sanskrit, when used as an adjective, translates into "independent" in English. It embodies the values of self-determination, personal empowerment, and the ability to govern oneself without external interference. It is the essence of Mission Swayam Siddha (MSS), a social initiative founded in 2007 by the Powai Bengali Welfare Association to empower socially and economically less advantaged women through vocational training in several skills to create beautiful and unique hand-crafted products. In their journey towards empowerment, MSS trainees have increasingly experienced a greater sense of freedom and independence as individuals. This journey acquired a larger meaning in 2024, when providentially, MSS was chosen to participate in “**Swadheen**,” a retrospective exhibition to pay homage to the life and times of Padma Vibhushan Shrimati Jankidevi Bajaj, who was a freedom fighter, a social reformer, and a proponent of Gandhian values. During her lifetime, she promoted the “Fabric of Freedom,” Khadi. The exhibition showcased the artistry and modern possibilities of hand-spun Khadi and to this effect, featured Textile Art and Installations demonstrating the fabric’s adaptability in modern aesthetics.

MSS was commissioned to make an embroidered wall installation on Khadi. MSS trainees Smt. Pushpa Jaiswal and Smt. Rekha Patil created the installation and all trainees attended the exhibition and experienced firsthand the spirit of independence. They were enthused to find that the work done by them was exhibited on such a prestigious platform and was appreciated by one and all. Participation in this event was a milestone for MSS and a testimony to their dedication and hard work in their journey towards being **Swadheen**.

Using this unique achievement and experience as a backdrop, we asked some of our MSS trainees who have been in this journey of empowerment what it means to be “Swadheen.” The testimonials from them beautifully illustrate what it means to be “Swadheen” and how its essence is being experienced in their lives.



**For Kiran:** "Swadheen" represents personal transformation and empowerment. Before joining MSS seventeen years ago, her life was confined by traditional roles and limitations. MSS helped her discover and use her skills more effectively, leading to a more active role in her family-run eatery joint. MSS gives her the much needed "ME" time to get away from her daily chores allowing her to relax and engage in activities she enjoys such as fine embroidery and training new joiners.



**Archana's** understanding of "Swadheen" is deeply tied to financial and personal independence. Her thirteen years at MSS has enabled her to work towards becoming economically self-reliant. By managing her household expenses and supporting her son, she experiences freedom in making life choices on her own terms. Her painting skills acquired at MSS and working part time as a cook further is a testimony to her ability to shape her own future.



**Manju**, having been with MSS for fifteen years, associates "Swadheen" with freedom of speech and personal expression. MSS has provided her with opportunities to engage with diverse people through corporate exhibitions, boosting her confidence and enabling her to voice her opinions and ideas. Her skills find wings through her sewing machine through which she has mastered to stitch beautiful bags and home-décor items. She also works out of her home to take stitching orders which gives her a feeling of economic independence and sense of self.



**For Asha**, "Swadheen" involves practical empowerment and financial self-sufficiency which she has strived to achieve in her thirteen years at MSS. MSS's support in managing banking transactions and saving money has given her a sense of control and contentment, allowing her to handle her finances with confidence and independence. She expresses her sense of freedom through her paintings after she learnt to use a colouring brush for the first time at MSS and discovered the budding artist in her.



**Rekha** perceives "Swadheen" as the freedom to pursue her own interests, supported by her husband. This environment allows her to explore and learn new things at her own pace, embodying the essence of personal empowerment and self-determination. She is happy that her embroidered work found its pride of place at the wall installation at the Swadheen exhibition, and convinced her that her quest for freedom that began a decade ago, is bringing her laurels.



**For Kismati**, "Swadheen" translates into the independence she gained from basic English learning sessions at MSS. She finds joy in her ability to sign her name and understand English terms, which contributes to her self-reliance. The extra income she has earned in her twelve years at MSS is dedicated solely to her personal expenses, reflecting a sense of financial autonomy and self-sufficiency. Her mastery of newspaper bags at MSS is unmatched and this gives her a great deal of pride and self-confidence to continue her journey.





**Manisha** exemplifies "Swadheen" through her proactive approach to learning and self-improvement. Her involvement with MSS since the last eight years, has not only boosted her confidence but also inspired her to engage in entrepreneurial activities (by joining Bhachat Ghat Community for Women Enterprise), such as preparing and selling snacks within her community. She is now pursuing further ambitions, including learning to drive an Autorickshaw, viewing these steps as part of her ongoing journey toward achieving her personal goals of being economically independent.



**Pushpa's** journey of a decade at MSS illustrates a profound transformation in her understanding and experience of "Swadheen." Initially an introverted trainee confined mostly to her home, MSS has played a crucial role in her personal development and professional growth. One of the highpoints in this growth process that she is proud of is of her being chosen as one of the two trainees to execute the commissioned work for the installation at the Swadheen exhibition. Now, alongside her work with MSS, she also serves as a helper in a kindergarten school. Pushpa's ability to manage both jobs successfully embodies the essence of empowerment for her. Her journey from isolation to becoming an active, self-reliant individual underscores the transformative impact of MSS on her life



And as for myself, **Rashida**, I have been entrusted with the role of being the Office Manager, here at MSS and my experience since I joined thirteen years back, has been both profound and humbling. For me, the term "Swadheen" transcends beyond mere freedom or independence. It embodies a deeper sense of self-awareness along with the sheer pursuit of personal joy and happiness. Working with MSS over the years, has provided me with more than just a desk job; it has enabled me to explore new opportunities, make independent decisions and handle challenges with diligence and problem-solving skills. I have also been given the opportunity and entrusted with overseeing the production process of MSS products and I believe that this role has allowed me to express my creativity and manage my tasks from start to finish. It is a role that has also enhanced my ability to interact with others and express myself freely, with confidence.

*Swadheen@Mission Swayam Siddha is more than a theoretical idea; it is a lived experience that includes personal growth, financial empowerment, confidence in self-expression, and the freedom to make choices aligned with their values and dreams. May our journey continue in the spirit of independence.*

*Come, visit us!*

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# Durgotsav 2023





## Khuti Pujo 2023



Khuti Puja ritual signals commencement of the construction of the pandal where Goddess Durga and Her children will be worshipped. A wooden frame, named as “Kathamo” signifying the frame on which Goddess Durga will be positioned, is worshipped.





## Mahalaya

Mahalaya is said to be the day when Goddess Durga defeated the demon, Mahishasura. The day signifies the end of Pitru Paksha Shradh and the beginning of Durga Puja for Bengalis. Pitru Paksha is a period of worshipping the ancestors and deceased family members and to pray for the peace of their souls. In Bengal, Mahalaya also marks beginning of Devi-paksha, the day Goddess Durga begins Her journey from Her mountain abode where She lives with her consort, Lord Shiva, to her parents' home. PBWA members assembled at the under-construction pandal at 4.30 am and celebrated the occasion together.





## Inauguration

PBWA has had the tradition of inaugurating Durgotsav by elder members of the PBWA family. Their good wishes and blessings augur well for smooth conduct of the Durgotsav and other social activities all year round.







  
**Debi Boron 2023**  
 'Debi Boron' is a ritualistic welcome of the Mother and Her Children before the actual Puja rituals commence. While typically this is done by the Ladies, PBWA also includes members of the LGBTQ community in this ritual to make it an all-inclusive festival.



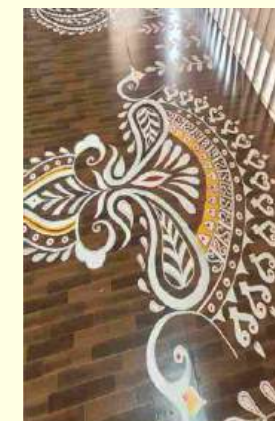




## Art & The artists

Family members of the association adorn the sanctum sanctorum with the “Alpona” - a type of Rangoli.

As part of the creative efforts, members of ‘Urban Sketchers’ captured various facets of the Puja pandal and the general ambience.







## Moments captured in frame







## Our Pandal, Our Pride

### Lord's Pavillion: Ma's abode during the festivities

Pandal with a Difference...

With the ICC Cricket World Cup in progress during the Durgotsav, PBWA's theme for the Durgotsav was "Celebrating Cricket". The pandal was an exquisite replica of the Lords Cricket pavilion, the Mecca of cricket. A feast for the eyes indeed.





## The deity and her devotees

- When devotion meets divinity







## Bhog 2023

This is a community lunch (Prasad) offered free to ALL visitors to the pandal on three main days of the Puja.

The organization of this is a mammoth task but served with a lot of love and faith to all, irrespective of where one belongs.



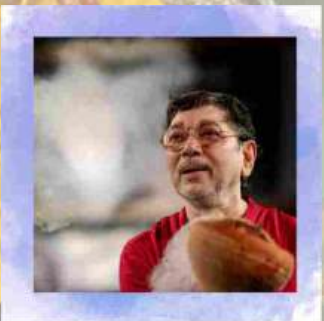




## Dhunuchi Naach



This Dance with Incense burners' is an age-old Durga puja ritual. While this is typically performed during the evening 'Arati', people across, age and gender participate in it. The roll of the Dhaak, the smoky incense, the grace and fluidity of the dancers truly make it a surreal experience.





## Sindur Khela

On 'Dashami' the last day of Durga Puja, the Mother and Her Children are bid farewell by married ladies in a ritual called 'Boron' wherein they symbolically offer sweets, apply vermillion and seek blessings. New bonds of friendship forged, old ones strengthened.





## **'Bhashan' - Asche bochor aabar hobe**

Farewell Mother - Till Next Year





## Sudesh Bhosle Night

Ashtami evening was lit up by a rocking performance from the inimitable Bollywood personality - "Sudesh Bhonsle". His choice of songs, his connection with the audience along with a brilliant orchestra left the audience dancing all the way through and asking for more.



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## Lagnajita Enthralls

Lagnajita Chakraborty, a promising singer from Kolkata entertained the audience early Navami evening. Besides singing on stage, Lagnajita is also an accomplished playback singer having lent her voice to several Bengali films, one of which, 'Basanto Eshe Gache' from the film 'Chotushkone', catapulted her to limelight.






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## Triumph over evil - Dona Ganguly

The curtains on the cultural events of Durgotsav 2023 came down with a mesmerizing performance by globally acclaimed Odissi dancer, Dona Ganguly. Over a marathon two hours, she and her troupe lived through every moment of Ma Durga's journey of winning over evil. Such was her persona and grace that she and her co-dancers kept the audience glued to the performance. Truly a treat to remember for a very long time.





## Dhitang's Hridoyer Gaan

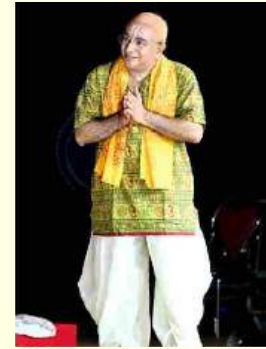
'Dhitang' - PBWAs in-house band, presented a unique bouquet of songs from the heart - 'Hridoyer Gaan'. Why was it unique? The lyrics were written by one of our own members and then laced with popular internationally acclaimed tunes. A treat to the ears, the audience just loved the concept and the presentation. For the first time, there was a repeat performance on strong demands by the audience.





## Natok - Pore Pawa Sholo Ana

This is a story about exploitation... of the poor by the so-called rich. Our Natok, "Pore Pawa Sholo Ana" also revolves around this reality... Here too, a landlord or Zamindar, used to force his servants to serve him without paying a penny. But, a lottery ticket creates lot of confusion. The landlord bought this lottery ticket and gave it to his servant, very sure the ticket won't win. However when he discovered that his ticket had won, he along with few more money-hungry people tried to overpower the servant & take the prize money ticket back. However, they were not successful as the servant rebelled. In society, we have to fight for our Rights. Nobody hands it to us!





## Ashombhober Chchonde (Rythm of the impossible)

“Abol Tabol” a magazine of nonsensical, weird, fantasy-filled, poems & stories by the late Sukumar Ray has enthralled readers across generations for over a century. Later, his illustrious son Satyajit Ray, carried on the legacy having had the distinction of translating Limericks of the famous English author and poet, Lewis Carroll. Some of that ‘nonsense’ was beautifully presented through songs, dance and poetry by the children of PBWA members. Truly a fantastic effort on fantasy!





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## Tiny Tots Present - Mahishasurmardini

The ultimate triumph over evil is signified by the slaying of the demon “Mahishasura” by Goddess Durga, thus restoring peace and order on earth as well as in Heaven. This entire act was depicted by our in-house Tiny tots. Such was their passion, skill and application that the audience was simply left awe-struck.





## Tabogeet Shudharoshe (Melodies of Emotions)

Our innate emotions are often classified as nine rasas or Navarasas in our Vedas and Upanishads. Nature also expresses herself through the various seasons. But just as nature does not limit herself to any one season, Tagore's songs and poetry transcends beyond any one particular emotion or 'Rasa'. This presentation by in-house artists of PBWA depicted expanse of Tagore's understanding of Navarasa through a bouquet of melodious songs, poetry and dance. An overwhelming experience indeed.





## Leaders' Speak

The Leadership Power Walk is a flagship event of every Durga Puja organized by PBWA, wherein, leaders from various walks of life participate and share their thoughts on pertinent and contemporary subjects so as to enlighten listeners of their perspectives, their experiences and important takeaways. In 2023, the discussion centred around "Sport & Empowerment". Panel members included Rajiv Gupta - President, Policy Bazar; Sudipto Roy - CEO, L&T Finance; Sanjiv Mehta - Country Leader - Enterprise Sales AMD India; Rahul Sengupta - Advertising Professional & Film Script Writer. The session was moderated by none other than Dr Boria Majumdar, noted Cricket Historian and Sports commentator, who kept the audience mesmerized with real-life examples from the sphere of sports and how it has directly and indirectly empowered common people. Overall, a highly enriching discussion and experience.





## Lakshmi Puja

Performed on Purnima day, four days after Vijaya Dashami, we seek Blessings of Mother Lakshmi for well-being and prosperity for all. The occasion also marks the release of PBWAs coffee-table book "Parichay".



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## Kali Puja

Our Salutations to Goddess Kali, to protect us from all evil. This year too, gifts, and food items were distributed to under-privileged children and other NGOs.





## Kobi Pronaam

An important event on PBWAs calendar is the celebration of the great bard - Rabindranath Tagore's birth anniversary; popularly known as Rabindra Jayanti. This event is a cultural extravaganza of music, dance, drama, recitation, et al. The entire PBWA family got together to enjoy masterpieces of Song, Dance, Poetry and Narration. The grand finale of the evening was a presentation by Rabindra Sangeet exponent Ms Swagatalakshmi Dasgupta who mesmerised the audience with her soulful renditions of timeless compositions of Rabindranath Tagore.





## PBWA's Annual Digital Initiatives Update

Through this annual Parichay column on behalf of PBWA's Digital Initiatives Team, I am elated to share our journey of 2023 and the early part of 2024.

### Recap (especially for our New Member Families)

Our Digital and Social media assets, painstakingly built through a decadal Digital journey (Circa 2013 to 2023), have led us to create a 360-degree presence on Digital and social media. We've now scaled-up over the last decade to become the largest online Bengali community Globally with Lakhs of Followers and Subscribers. Our online Assets include - a Website, a Google Business Profile, a YouTube Channel, The Times of India microsite, an F.B. Page, Twitter and Instagram handles. In 2023, we added a LinkedIn profile to our assets.

**www.pbwa.in** is a dynamic website designed to provide an overview of all the four pillars of our work (Cultural and Social) and hosts our Annual Souvenir e-book Parichay. It is also cross-linked with our social media pages, and allows visitors to have a single view of all our social media updates as well.

PBWA's **YouTube channel** (youtube.com / @PowaiBengaliWelfareAssociation) with nearly One Billion video impressions, 2 Lakh+ subscribers and 750+ videos is amongst the Largest Global Online Libraries of Bengali Arts and Culture, apart from having a distinctive library of Live Concerts of the finest singers -

from Anjan Dutta, Rupam Islam and Anupam Roy to the late KK, Shreya Ghoshal, Alka Yagnik and many others. So far, most of the videos released were Song-wise, and allowed viewers to enjoy the individual songs; now we have started releasing the Full Concert Videos of all our Past Performers - many of them in full HD and with audiocorrections (e.g. Mono to Stereo for the Older concerts).

The **F.B. Page** (facebook.com/pbwaofficial/) is the first stop for all updates and member-engagement, and is a vibrant community of nearly 4K members. Our Instagram Profile (instagram.com/powaiBengaliWelfareAssociation) and Twitter (Now 'X') Handle (twitter.com/pbwadurgapujo) mirror the large followership of PBWA online, and further aid an integrated amplification of our communication efforts.

Our **Google Business Profile** displays 10,000+ pictures uploaded by visitors to our Puja (U.G.C.) and drove almost 3 lakh visitors, using search-based Apps like Uber and Ola to Durgotsav-2022.

### Circa 2023-2024 in perspective

Using all our Digital & Social media assets in an integrated Durgotsav social media campaign named "Divine Innings," based on the 2023 ICC Men's Cricket World Cup, was a key achievement in 2023. High quality video and pictorial posts were simultaneously released across FB, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Google

Business and WhatsApp. This integrated campaign and its organic amplification efforts gave us Millions of impressions in just 5 days.



*Glimpses of the Integrated Social Media Campaign Posts*

The transition to a Single PBWA-Official WhatsApp Group was successfully carried out, given the enhanced participant limits available. This has allowed us to bring all Members and their families onto one communication platform and this will certainly help us in increasing the seamlessness of member communications.

Additionally, web-links (i.e. URLs) and details of all PBWA's Website, Social Media handles and contact details are now available as part of the Description of the PBWA-Official WhatsApp Group - so that you never miss out on your favourite posts, pictures and videos.

**- Kuhu Bhattacharya**



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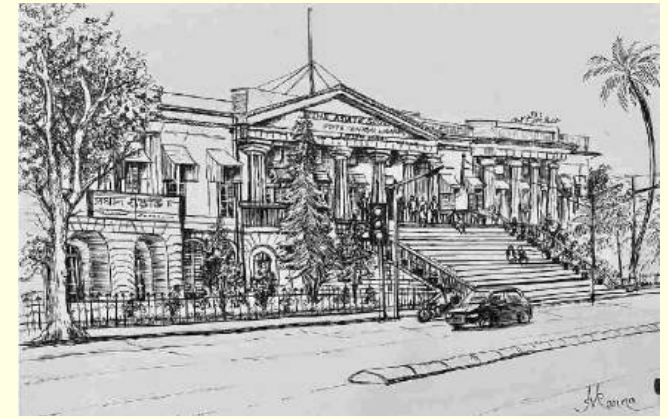
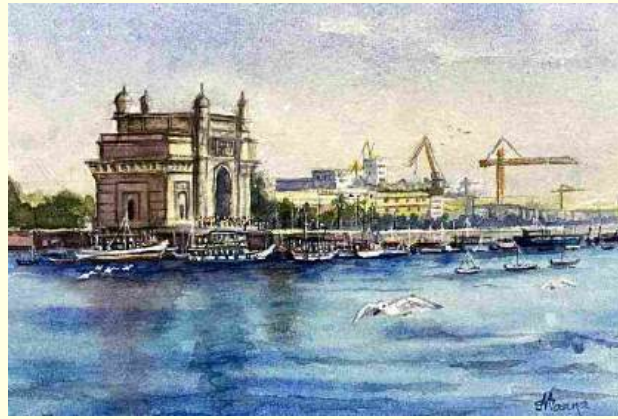


# Brush Strokes





## Mumbai Diaries - Aparna Mondal







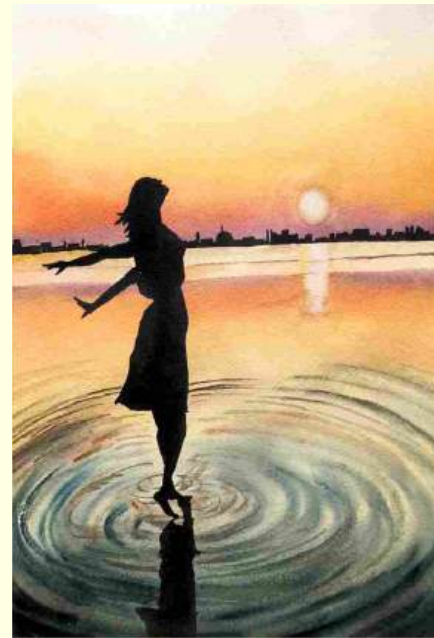
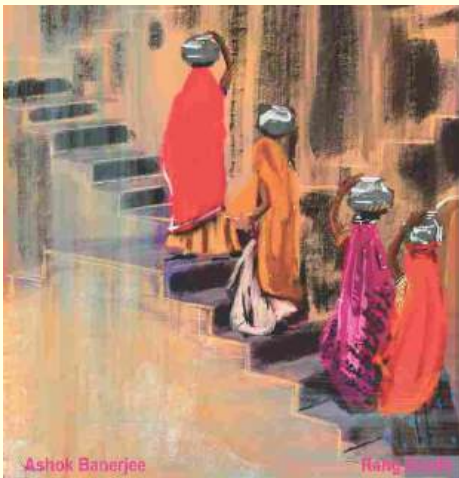
*Goddess Durga : Aparna Mondal*



*Paintings by: Jayitta Bhowmick & Taareni Bhowmick*



Paintings by: Ashok Banerjee



Painting by: Kajari Roy



Pencil Sketch by: Soumyanil Maji



Painting by: Anahita Banerjee





## The Poet's Corner





## Bound Yet Unbroken: The Silent Struggles of Every Girl

"Congratulations, it's a baby girl!  
Goddess Lakshmi is born today,"  
the young nurse's voice reverberates  
through the bustling hospital corridors.  
The father's eyes brim with tears  
as he etches this new life into his heart forever,  
yet society whispers with disdain,  
"The firstborn should have been a boy."  
Her glistening eyes, innocent face, and warm smile  
spark joy in her grandparents' lives.  
Yet society's shadows darken this light, saying,  
"Her skin tone defies the norm."  
Her parents open her world with books and dreams,  
yet society narrows them down, asking,  
"Where are your dolls? The kitchen set?"  
As her body blooms with new curves,  
her parents teach her to embrace them with pride.

Yet, as she bleeds, society shrouds it in shame,  
warning, "Stay away from the sacred; you're 'impure.'"  
"May I go to my friend's party tonight?" she asks.  
"Yes, but be home on time," society throttles her freedom,  
saying, "Good girls don't stay out past dusk."  
As she excels in martial arts, her parents cheer for her,  
Yet society's gaze weighs her down, insisting,  
"Avoid the sun; why not dance and sing instead?"  
Brilliant in her studies, she dreams of cities far and wide,  
but the world crushes her hopes, suggesting,  
"Stay close; local colleges will suffice."  
"Maa, I am not ready for marriage yet," she pleads.  
"Age will soon be against you, and don't forget,  
men like voluptuous girls and their might," society retorts.  
"I want to work now, not bear children," she asserts.  
The world scorns, "Don't be selfish; career can pause,  
but your body clock won't reverse."

"Wear all hats - daughter, wife, mother,  
daughter-in-law-and  
excel in every role," society commands.  
"You're a woman; bring no disgrace," it warns.  
Her parents remind her,  
"It's okay to falter, break free from every shackle.  
Rise and chase your dreams with no restraint."

***To all the girls with dreams untamed:***  
*Soar high and rise above the shadows.  
In the world's cacophony, remember -  
honour yourself, not because you are  
named Durga or Lakshmi, but simply  
because you are uniquely you!*

- Sarmistha Neogy



## A world, in which we are proud to be

My great grandfather died last year. He was 103!  
He spoke of a world that was different from what I imagine and see  
He had lived in the times of great people like Gandhi, Ambedkar and Bose  
He told me stories of empires fall and governments depose  
He would often talk about the partition, and the second world war  
He would talk about green lands and clean rivers that he had left afar  
He talked about a broken country that was in pain and in grieving  
He said that he believed in a future that was bright and gleaming  
Together with the others, both young and old  
The dreams of this nation he swore to behold  
He built the bridges, he built the dams,  
He laid railway tracks with his own hands.

I reap the fruits of that vision, that dream  
His wisdom and courage in the freedom, I redeem  
Today I sit in my room, comfortable, without any struggles  
I forget to thank the hands joined in purpose, despite their troubles.  
I promise to uphold the legacy and honor the past  
To hold this land together, diverse and vast  
I will build this nation further with energy that is clean  
With the fury of winds and the sunlight's gleam  
I will leave for my great grandchildren a world with hearts unburdened and spirits free  
Where compassion blooms like spring dancing its own symphony  
I will talk to them about the fabric of history and the stories I weave  
A world, in which they will be proud to be.

- Joyitta Bhowmik



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দিনগুলি মা তোমার সাথে।

- Aparna Mondal

## My friend, my mentor: The Clock

Tick tock tick tock goes the clock  
Fills the silence with its monologue  
In the darkness of the night, when all is still  
It gives me company with a persistent will  
From slumber it awakens with its bounding sound

It is the dearest friend that I have found  
It sits on wall essaying the days  
A mentor in time's intricate maze,  
It recorded my first steps, my joys and sorrow

It gives me a schedule that I must follow  
7 o'clock is school and I am back home by 3  
It guides me through my day, diligently  
It tells me to seize each second as it unfolds

In a steady pace, is what I am told.  
Its hands gracefully move forward and  
never turn back  
Encouraging me to succeed and never slack  
It tells me not to hurry, but never to pause  
To keep my course and stay true to my cause

I heed to its lessons, clear and true  
To value each second in all that I do.  
The clock is my teacher, silent and wise  
With timeless teachings beneath its guise.

- Taareni Bhowmik

## Strings of Memories

As she looked back to see...  
A little girl with trinkets in her hand,  
Fond of jewelry and dresses to match,  
A hazy childhood with humble past times,  
She smiled and walked on...as she looked at her hand,  
There was a string of memories from the times that went past her,  
Of laughter and innocence, and wonder and cheer.

Unforgettable serenity still in her mind,  
There were so many more friends now beside,  
So lovely were the walks under the beaming sun,  
Playful runs till her breath started to subside,  
She smiled and walked on...and as she looked at her hand,  
There was a string of memories from the times that went past her,  
Of a fortuitous identity, and wonder and cheer.

She got her glasses on, and a canvas lay before her,  
Her life was surely getting molded, now in a different gear,  
An unusual maturity beheld for a kid that age,  
She was the elder one with a younger one beside her,  
She smiled and walked on...and as she looked at her hand,  
There was a string of memories from the times that went past her,  
Of blissful golden days, and wonder and cheer.

She was young now, unrelenting in her dreams she sought,  
Bashful and surprised at the uncanny attention she got,  
She wasn't ready for this stage...oh she was so benign,  
Was thrown into this muddle, in life's brutal design,  
She still smiled and walked on...and she looked at her hand,  
There was a string of memories from the times that went past her,  
Of slated dreams...and wonder and cheer.

Midway on the road, as she walked on and looked ahead,  
Holding onto the strings she'd gathered all along,  
Which ones to leave ... are they the ones that no longer belong?  
Which ones to take ... maybe the ones that weave her favorite song.  
She walks on and smiles to herself as she notices,  
The memories she strived to keep impeccable all these years,  
She chooses to hold on to those strings unfailingly,  
The strings of her memories, of wonder and cheer.

Tejsvi Uttarwar



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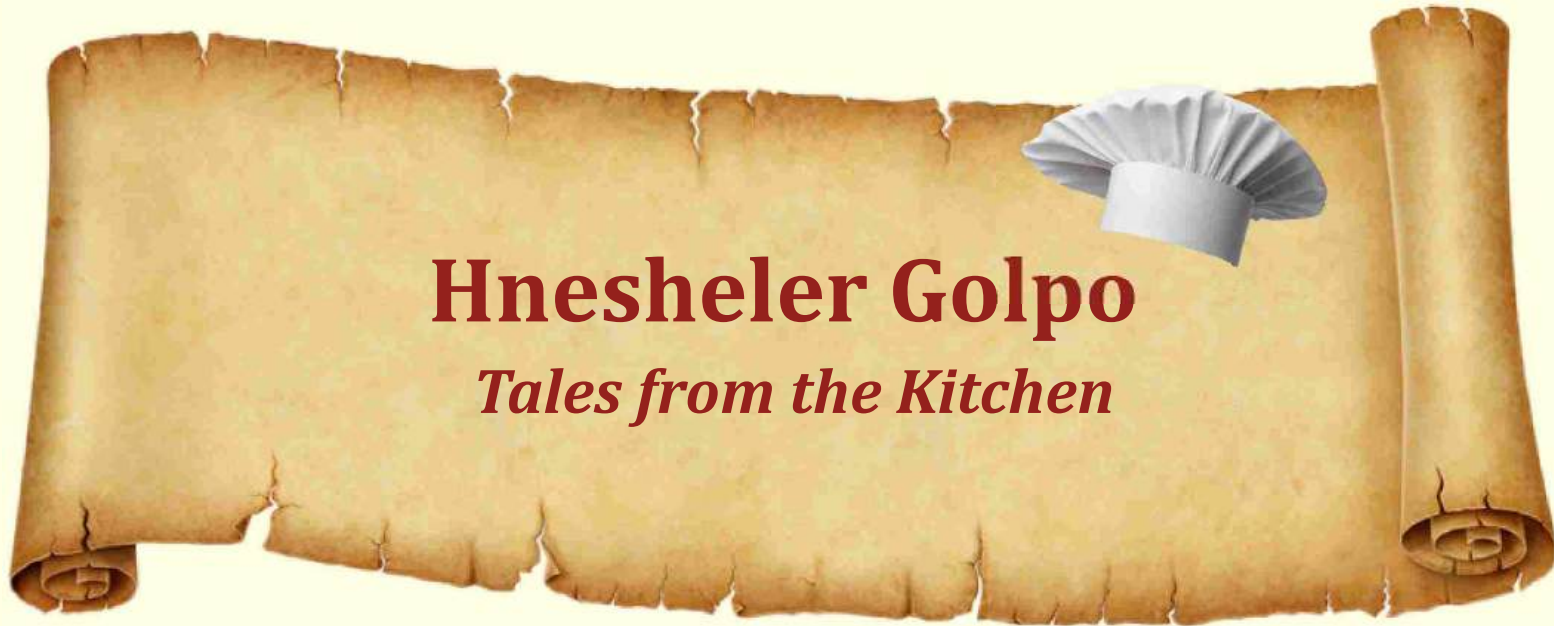
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# Hnesheler Golpo

*Tales from the Kitchen*





## Kakori Keema Stuffed Mushrooms - Ratna Neogy

Kakori Kababs, a Mughlai specialty, derive their name from the Kakori town on the outskirts of Lucknow, the capital of Uttar Pradesh. Traditionally made with minced meat (chicken, mutton, or lamb) mixed with Indian spices, these kababs are known for their robust flavour.

In this recipe, I have created a fusion starter using my star ingredients – Kakori keema and mushrooms. I hope you enjoy this delightful dish!

### Serves 4

#### Ingredients:

- 200 grams of large fresh white button mushrooms (thoroughly cleaned)
- 250 grams minced mutton (keema)
- 2 medium-sized chopped onions
- 10 - 12 cloves of garlic
- 1 tablespoon cornflour
- 2 tablespoons Kashmiri red chilli powder
- 1 teaspoon shahi garam masala
- ¼ teaspoon turmeric powder (haldi)
- 1 teaspoon sugar
- 10 each of dry fruits: raisins, cashew nuts, and almonds
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 2 tablespoons oil (sunflower, soyabean etc.)
- 5 cheese slices
- 4 teaspoons diced mozzarella cheese
- Salt to taste
- Water as required

#### Method

##### Step 1: Prep well

- Tenderize the minced mutton by cooking it with ½ cup of water in a pressure cooker. Cook under pressure for 2 whistles, then set aside.
- Heat 1 tablespoon of oil in a non-stick frying pan over medium heat. Once hot, add the chopped onions and garlic cloves. Fry until golden brown.
- In a mixer grinder, add the raisins, cashew nuts, and almonds with 2 tablespoons of water to make a smooth paste.
- Next add the boiled mutton, fried onions, and garlic to the mixer grinder and blend until smooth. Once you are done with the preparation, let's start cooking!

##### Step 2: Make the Kakori Keema Mixture

- Heat 1 tablespoon of oil and 1 tablespoon of butter in a non-stick pan over medium heat. Add the mutton keema paste, followed by the dry fruit paste.
- Next, add sugar, salt, red chilli powder, shahi garam masala and cornflour. Stir continuously till the mixture dries up and fat starts to separate.
- Turn off the heat and allow the mixture to cool. Mix in the diced mozzarella cheese.

##### Step 3: Stuff the Mushrooms

- Remove the stems from the mushroom caps and stuff each cap with the Kakori keema mixture.
- Heat 1 tablespoon of butter in a non-stick pan over low heat. Place the stuffed mushroom caps upside down in the pan, ensuring they do not overlap.
- Place the cheese slices over the stuffed mushrooms. Cover the pan with a lid. Cook until the mushrooms release their water. No need to stir the mushrooms.
- Once the water evaporates and the cheese melts, turn off the heat. Leave the pan covered for 5 minutes.

Serve the mouth-watering stuffed mushrooms hot, garnished with onion and cucumber salad.

**Bon Appetit!!**

## চিংড়ির রঙ্গোলি ~ দীপশিখা চৌধুরী

উপকরণ : বাগদা চিংড়ি বড় মাপের ,লেবুর রস,গোলমরিচ ,ক্যাপসিকাম (লাল,হলুদ,সবুজ),পেঁয়াজ ,রসুন,মাখন,সাদা তেল,ময়দা,শুকনো লঙ্কাগুঁড়ো।

প্রণালী :প্রথমে চিংড়ি ধুয়ে পিঠের খোসা ছাড়িয়ে শুধু ল্যাজের আগাটা রেখে পিঠের ময়লা ফেলে পরিষ্কার করে জল ঝরিয়ে বেশ শুকনো করে নিতে হবে।

একঘন্টা পরে একটা পাত্রে খানিকটা ময়দা নিয়ে তাতে অল্প নুন,লঙ্কারগুঁড়ো ,গোলমরিচের গুঁড়ো মিশিয়ে সেইটাতে মাছগুলো একটা একটা করে এপিঠ ওপিঠ করে মাখিয়ে নিয়ে রাখতে হবে।

এবার ওই তেলের মধ্যে এক চামচ মাখন দিয়ে দু'চামচ মিহিকরে কুচোনো রসুন দিয়ে একমিনিট নেড়ে ডুমো ডুমো করে কাটা পেঁয়াজ দিয়ে ভাজতে হবে। এবার একে একে চৌকো করে কাটা সব রঙের ক্যাপসিকামগুলো দিয়ে ভাজতে হবে। নুন আর গোলমরিচের গুঁড়ো ,লঙ্কাগুঁড়ো দিয়ে কষতে হবে। এরপর একচামচ ওরিগানো ও এক মুঠো ধনেপাতা কুচি ও দু'চামচ মাখন দিয়ে সামান্য জলের ছিটে দিয়ে অল্প সময় রেখে ভালো করে মিশিয়ে মাছের ওপর সসটা ঢেলে ঢাকা দিয়ে রেখে দিলেই তৈরী হয়ে যাবে চিংড়ির রঙ্গোলি।



## কচুপাতায় চিংড়ী পাতুরি ~ Sonali Samanta Maji

একে চিংড়ী, দুয়ে পাতুরি, তিনে কচুপাতা। আহা! বাঙালীর তিন প্রিয় উপকরণের সুস্বাদু সম্ভার কচুপাতায় চিংড়ী পাতুরি।

কচুপাতা এমন একটি পাতা, বাঙালীরা যাকে শাক বলে না। কচুশাক উপাধি অধিকার করেছে ওই গাছের আর একটি অংশ। তাই আমার এই রেসিপি, শাকের রাজ্যে অন্তর্ভুক্ত না হওয়া কচুপাতা নিয়েই। আসুন ঝটপট বলে দিই অতি সহজে কী করে বানাবেন **কচুপাতায় চিংড়ী পাতুরি**।

**উপকরণ:** দশটি চিংড়ীমাছ (মাঝারি মাপের), দশটি কচুপাতা, হলুদ গুঁড়ো (এক চা চামচ), জিরে গুঁড়ো (এক চা চামচ), লঙ্কা গুঁড়ো স্বাদ মতো, লবণ স্বাদ মতো, বাটা সর্ষে (দুই চা চামচ)/ সর্ষে গুঁড়ো (চার চা চামচ), সর্ষের তেল (চার থেকে পাঁচ চামচ)/ অন্য রান্নার তেলও ব্যবহার করতে পারেন, কাঁচা লঙ্কা পাঁচটি অর্ধেক করে কাটা এবং কচুপাতা বাঁধার জন্য সুতো ও কাঁচি।

### প্রণালী:

- কচুপাতার বৃন্ত কেটে বাদ দিয়ে, পাতাগুলি ভালো করে ধুয়ে জল ঝরিয়ে নিতে হবে। তারপর প্রত্যেক কচুপাতায় হাত দিয়ে তেল মাখিয়ে নিতে হবে।
- মাখা ছাড়া পরিষ্কার চিংড়ীমাছে অল্প লবণ মাখিয়ে নিতে হবে।
- একটি বাটিতে এক চা চামচ জলে সর্ষে বাটা নিতে হবে, আর যদি গুঁড়ো সর্ষে হয় দুই চামচ জলে মিশিয়ে নিতে হবে। ওই একই বাটিতে হলুদ, জিরে ও লঙ্কা গুঁড়ো মেশাতে হবে। এরপর দুই চা চামচ তেল ও স্বাদ মতো নুন দিয়ে সব কিছু ভালো করে এক সাথে মিশিয়ে নিতে হবে।
- এক একটি চিংড়ী ওই মিশ্রণে ভালো করে মাখিয়ে, মিশ্রণ সহ কচুপাতায় রাখতে হবে। কেটে রাখা কাঁচালঙ্কা উপরে রাখতে হবে। কচুপাতাটির বাকি অংশ চিংড়ীমাছের উপর ভাঁজ করে রেখে সুতো দিয়ে ভালো করে বাঁধতে হবে।
- হাঁড়িতে জল দিয়ে তার মাথায় দ্বিধ্রুয়ন্ত পাত্র তেল মাখিয়ে বসিয়ে দিতে হবে। এই পদ্ধতি মোমো খোকলা বা ইডলি বানাবার পাত্রে করা যায়। জল ফুটতে শুরু করলে পাত্রে চিংড়ী বাঁধা গুলো রাখতে হবে ও ঢাকা দিয়ে দিতে হবে।
- মিনিট পনেরো কুড়ি ভাপা করতে হবে। তারপর ঢাকা খুলে চিংড়ী গুলো উল্টে দিয়ে একই ভাবে অন্যদিক মিনিট পনেরো ভাপা করতে হবে। উনুন বন্ধ করার পর আরও মিনিট কুড়ি একই ভাবে গরম ভাপে রেখে দিতে হবে।
- সুতো কেটে গরম সাদা ভাতের সাথে পরিবেশন করুন। আপনার কচুপাতা চিংড়ী পাতুরি সবার প্রশংসা পাবেই।



কচুপাতায় চিংড়ী পাতুরি

## পনির মালাই কোফতা ~ Soma Chakraborty

### উপকরণ :

### কোফতার জন্য :

পনির কোরানো 200 গ্রাম ,মাঝারি আলু বড় 1টা কোরানো,খোয়া ক্ষীর কোরানো ৫০ গ্রাম,দেড় ইঞ্চি আদা টুকরো বাটা,2-3 কাঁচা লঙ্কা বাটা,ধনেপাতা কুচি,নুন আর চিনি স্বাদমতো,আধ চা-চামচ গরম মশলা গুঁড়ো,3-8 টেবিল চামচ কর্ণাওয়ার,4-5 টেবিল চামচ করে কাজুবাদাম ,পেস্তা, কিশমিশ আধবাটা।,ভাজার জন্য সাদা তেল।

### গ্রেভির জন্য :

সাদা তেল,ঘি,ক্রীম,মাখন ,মাঝারি মাপের পেঁয়াজ ২টো,আদা 2 ইঞ্চি মাপের বাটা ,রসুনবাটা,কাঁচালঙ্কা ২টো বাটা,কাজুবাদাম 6 – 8 টা বাটা, টমেটো 2 টো বাটা,ধনেগুঁড়ো,জিরেগুঁড়ো,হলুদগুঁড়ো,কাশ্মীরি লঙ্কাগুঁড়ো,কাসুরি মেথি, 2-3 টেবিলচামচ টকদই , গরমজল।

**ফোড়নের জন্য** - গোটা এলাচ,লবঙ্গ,দারচিনি,তেজপাতা।

**প্রণালী :** প্রথমে কোফতার পনির,আলু,খোয়া ক্ষীর,আদা লঙ্কা বাটা,ধনেপাতা ,গরমমশলা,নুন চিনি সবগুলো একসঙ্গে হালকা হাতে মিশিয়ে মাঝারি মাপের গোলা বানিয়ে নিতে হবে। এরপর একটা পাত্রে আধবাটা কাজু,পেস্তা,কিশমিশ মিশিয়ে ছোটছোট গোলা বানাতে হবে। এরপর এই গোলাগুলো পনির গোলার ভেতরে পুরের মতো করে ভরে,ডুব তেলে হালকা সোনালী করে ভেজে নিতে হবে।

এরপর কড়াইতে একটু তেল দিয়ে গ্রেভি তৈরী জন্য রাখা পেঁয়াজ,আদা,রসুন,কাঁচালঙ্কা, কাজুবাদাম সব একটু ভেজে মিশ্রিতে বেটে,ছেঁকে নিতে হবে। এরপর অন্যপাত্রে একটু তেল ও ঘি মিশিয়ে গরম হলে তাতে গোটা গরমমশলা ফোড়ন দিয়ে বাকি গুঁড়োমশলা ও দেড় চামচ মতো আদা রসুন বাটা ,দই মিশিয়ে ,সামান্য গরম জল দিয়ে নাড়াচাড়া করতে হবে। তারপর ছেকে রাখা মশলা পুরোটা দিয়ে স্বাদমতো নুন চিনি দিয়ে ভালো করে নেড়ে কাসুরি মেথি দিয়ে 1 কাপ মতো গরমজল দিয়ে ফুটতে দিতে হবে। এরপর কোফতাগুলো দিয়ে 2-3 কাপ গরম জল দিয়ে অল্প আঁচে ফুটতে দিতে হবে ,ঘন হয়ে এলে গরমমশলা গুঁড়ো আর অল্প ক্রীম দিয়ে নেড়েচেড়ে 1 মিনিট গ্যাস বন্ধ করে রেখে এক বড় চামচ মাখন দিয়ে নামিয়ে নিতে হবে।

গরম ভাত ,পোলাও বা পরোটার সাথে অন্যাসে এটি পরিবেশন করা যেতে পারে।





চিতল মাছের মুইঠা ~ Soumita Sinha

Introduction:

I am a ghoti ( originally from west Bengal) and I never thought that one day, I would make chital macher muitha. I don't have any memory of eating muitha before moving to my in laws house in 2005. My mom-in-law is bangal( originally from Bangladesh) and hence is a great cook . I learned the recipe from her only after becoming a "Bangal barir bou". Mostly in Bangal homes you find a wide variety of fish being cooked. And chital macher muitha, probably because of the hard work and patience, is usually cooked only during some special occasion. As it's my husband's favorite dish it must be served on his birthday. Hence, I slowly gained expertise in making this special dish for the loved ones in the home.

\*উপকরন:

৫০০ গ্রাম কাটা ছাড়িয়ে রাখা চিতল মাছ ২টি সেদ্ধ আলু ২ চা চামচ ধনে গুঁড়ো ১ চা চামচ হলুদ গুঁড়ো ১ চা চামচ লক্ষা গুঁড়ো ১ চা চামচ আদা বাটা ২টি পেঁয়াজ কুচি/বাটা ৪ টি কাঁচা লক্ষা ১ চা চামচ গরম মশলা গুঁড়ো ১ চা চামচ জিরে গুঁড়ো ২টি তেজপাতা স্বাদমতো নুন ১ চা চামচ চিনি পরিমাণ মতো সর্ষের তেল প্রয়োজন অনুযায়ী ফোঁড়নের জন্য গোটা গরম মশলা

\*প্রণালী:

চিতল মাছে খুব কাঁটা। তাই প্রথমেই মাছের গাদার অংশ থেকে চামচ দিয়ে আসতে করে কাঁটা ছাড়া মাছ ছাড়িয়ে আনতে হবে। এই ভাবে মাছের কিমা বানাতে হবে এক বাটি। এই বাটিতেই এবার আলু সিদ্ধ, আদা বাটা, জিরা বাটা, নুন, হলুদ, চিনি, গরম মশলা আর ময়দা মিশিয়ে নিন। ভালো করে সব উপকরণ এক সাথে মেখে নিন। হাতে তেল লাগিয়ে মাছের মাথাটা নিয়ে লম্বাটে (sausage র মতো রোল ) অথবা এক মুঠোর মধ্যে যতটা কিমা ধরে ততটা নিয়ে ছোটো ছোটো মুইঠা তৈরি করুন। ফুটন্ত গরম জলের মধ্যে একটি একটি করে মুইঠা ছাড়ুন আর সিদ্ধ হতে দিন। 10 মিনিট হালকা আচে ফুটলে পর নামিয়ে ঠান্ডা করুন।

\*মাছের curry র জন্য\*:

মুইঠাগুলো যতক্ষণে ঠান্ডা হবে ততক্ষণে ছোট ছোট করে আলু টুকরো করে নিন। তেল গরম হলে মুইঠাগুলো হালকা করে ভেজে তুলে রাখুন। এবার আলুর টুকরো গুলো লাল করে ভেজে তুলে রাখুন। আলাদা করে তেলের মধ্যে ফোরণ দিন শুকনো লক্ষা, তেজ পাতা, দারচিনি, এলাচ, লবঙ্গ আর গোটা জিরা দিয়ে। একটু নাড়াচাড়া করে নিয়ে তাতে পেঁয়াজ কুচি, আদা বাটা, জিরা বাটা, হলুদ গুঁড়ো, গরম মশলা, লক্ষা গুঁড়ো দিয়ে ভালো করে মশলা তৈরি করে নিন। মশলা থেকে তেল ছাড়তে শুরু করলে মাছের জলটা অল্প করে মিশিয়ে নিন। এবার মুইঠাগুলো ছেড়ে দিয়ে 10 মিনিট অল্প আচে ঢাকা দিয়ে ফুটতে দিন। এবার পরিমাণ মতো নুন,চিনি আর ভেজে রাখা আলুর টুকরো গুলো মিশিয়ে নিয়ে বাকি জলটা মিশিয়ে ফুটতে দিন যতক্ষণ না মাখামাখা হচ্ছে। নামানোর আগে অল্প করে ঘি আর গরম মশলা দিন। ধনে পাতা কুচি ও চেরা কাঁচালুকা দিয়ে সাজিয়ে নিন। আর পরিবেশন করুন গরম বাসমতী চালের ভাতের সাথে।

জোয়ান চিকেন মখমলি ~ শর্মিষ্ঠা ভট্টাচার্য

উপকরণ : চিকেন আধ কিলো,সেদ্ধকরাআলু দুটো,জোয়ান এক চা চামচ ,আদা রসুন বাটা(খুব মিহি নয়) দুটেবিল চামচ, মাখন এক চা চামচ,সাদাতেল দুটেবিল চামচ,টকদই আধ কাপ ,হলুদগুঁড়ো আধ চা চামচ,ধনেগুঁড়ো,আধ চা চামচ,নুন ,পাতিলেবুর রস,কাঁচালক্ষা 3-4টি আর ধনেপাতা কুচি সামান্য।

প্রণালী : প্রথমে সেদ্ধকরা আলু আর মাখন একসাথে মিশ্রিতে পেস্ট করে নিতে হবে, এরপর এই পেস্টে টকদই , জোয়ান, আদা রসুন বাটা, কাঁচালক্ষা, হলুদগুঁড়ো, ধনেগুঁড়ো ,ধনেপাতা কুচো দিয়ে ভালো করে মাখিয়ে রেখে দিতে হবে। অন্যদিকে,চিকেন, লেবুর রস ও সামান্য নুন দিয়ে মাখিয়ে কিছুক্ষনের জন্য রেখে ম্যারিনেন্ট করে নিতে হবে একটু নরম করে নেওয়ার জন্য।

এবার কড়াইতে সাদাতেল দিয়ে,তেল গরম হলে,তাতে ম্যারিনেন্ট করা চিকেন দিয়ে সামান্য নাড়াচাড়া করে নিতে হবে,যতক্ষণ না চিকেন হালকা লালচে রং ধরছে। এরপর এতে সেদ্ধকরা আলুর পেস্টটা দিয়ে আধকাপ জল দিয়ে ঢাকা দিয়ে 15-20 মিনিট রাখতে হবে। এরপর ঢাকা সরিয়ে চিকেন মাখামাখা হয়ে গেলে নামিয়ে নিতে হবে।

গরম ভাত বা পরোটার সঙ্গে এটি পরিবেশন করা যেতে পারে।



## Biscoff Cheesecake - Taposi Basu

### Ingredients:

- 25 Biscoff Biscuits
- 5-6 tbsp Butter (melted)
- 1 ½ cups Cream Cheese
- ½ cup Biscoff Spread
- 1 ½ cups Whipped Cream
- ½ cup Biscoff Spread (for topping)

### Instructions:

#### 1) Prepare the Crust:

- Blend the Biscoff biscuits into fine crumbs.
- Mix the crumbs with melted butter until the mixture resembles wet sand.
- Press the mixture into the bottom of a 6-inch square glass dish or 6-inch removable bottom round cake mould to create the crust.
- Place the dish in the refrigerator to set while you prepare the filling.

#### 2) Make the Filling:

- In a mixing bowl, whisk together the softened cream cheese, whipped cream, and Biscoff spread until smooth and creamy.

#### 3) Assemble the Cheesecake:

- Pour the cheesecake filling over the chilled Biscoff crust in the square dish or the removable bottom round mould
- Spread the filling into an even layer.

#### 4) Chill the Cheesecake:

- Refrigerate the cheesecake for at least 4 hours, or until it is firm.

#### 5) Add the Topping:

- Spread an even layer of Biscoff spread over the chilled cheesecake.

#### 6) Decorate:

Decorate the top with additional Biscoff biscuits or crumbs if desired.

**Bon Appetit!**



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# Hodophiles

## *Travel Diaries*





## The Azerbaijan Adventure: June 2024

- Neelaj Sengupta

Central Asia had long intrigued us, particularly the lands that stretch along the Silk Route, the ancient trade path connecting Xi'an in China to Byzantium (now Istanbul) and Damascus. This is the route where trade flourished between 2nd century BC till 14th century AD, between the East and the Mediterranean. Actually, during the fiery and bloody reign of the mighty Mongol Emperor Genghis Khan, who overran almost the entire Central Asia right till Persia, little do people know that trade, through a system of protected trade and relay stations, was effectively revitalized by the Mongols and rose to its peak, while the warfare and annexation spree continued. In mid-14th century AD, the Ottoman Empire closed off the West End of this 1500 year plus trade route.

A magical country, closer to East European, Russian, and Turkish influences by way of culture and people, than any conventional Muslim country (though 96% population follows Islam). Flanked on the entire Eastern Side by the world's largest land-locked water body, the Caspian Sea (a major facilitator to Silk Route trade), on the South by Iran, on the North by Russia (Dagestan province), on the North-West by Georgia and on the West by Armenia and Turkey.

With a shared love for history and adventure, along with our long-standing family friends, Jayanta, and Romita, we decided to explore Azerbaijan, a gem along this storied path. We were joined by our son Tuhin for this June 2024 journey.

### Some interesting facts about the country we were about to visit:

- Baku, the capital city, and the only metropolis (with an international airport) has a population of just about 24.3 Lakhs, just one -tenth of Mumbai's population!
- The entire country's population is ~ 1 Crore, against

India's ~143 Crore. On per capita basis, the GDP of the country stands at ~7126 USD, more than thrice of India's.

- The currency, Azerbaijani Manat (AM) is about 49 times stronger than the Indian Rupee
- The country is an oil and gas rich region, and engaged in both offshore and onshore oil exploration since 1823. At current consumption levels, it had enough oil reserves to sustain itself for next 200 years, and gas reserves to sustain for next 100 years!!
- Surface transport, therefore, no wonder, is cheap, with retail petrol and diesel prices per liter being less than half of India. At same standard of living, cost of living at Baku would be somewhat cheaper than Mumbai.

We took the shortest flight to Baku on 9th June early morning: Mumbai-Sharjah-Baku, with less than an hour stopover at Sharjah. Well, one of the motivations was certainly to fly over Iran during daytime and shoot some of the snow-clad mountain peaks of Iran from the plane itself.

### Day 1 (9th June): Arrival at Baku and some city tour in the evening

Upon arriving at Baku, we were welcomed by our friendly driver, Vugar Vito. After a quick stop for currency exchange and local SIM cards, we enjoyed a traditional lunch at a classy restaurant and checked into the Midtown Baku Hotel. We were picked up around 5 pm and saw three places within the city in the evening.

- **Flame Towers:** famous for their unique modern architectural design, these buildings were shaped like a flame indeed and the evening lighting show on their glass exterior mirroring Baku's freedom movement and eventual driving out the Russians in 1990, was a spectacle to watch.



- **Martyrs Lane:** Martyrs' Lane is an exhibition of Azerbaijanis' courage against Soviet occupation. It is a solemn pathway with inscription ridden and fresh flower laden tombstones of notable social and cultural leaders of Azerbaijan who laid down their lives while ousting the Soviets out on the fateful Black Saturday of 20th January, 1990. The pathway terminated at a lovely memorial like Central Tower where a fire burns continuously (no dearth of natural gas in the country!)





- **Uphill Park:** Daghustu Park ("Uphill Park"), just adjoining Martyrs Lane, offered us stunning views of the city from a height, including the Baku Ferris Wheel and the Seaside National Park of Baku.

Post that, we went to just stroll around the magnificent Baku Boulevard by the Caspian Sea, and watched the light show on the Flame Towers from a distance, before heading for dinner and returning to our Hotel.

#### **Day 2 (10th June): From Baku to Gabala:**

We departed Baku for Gabala, a scenic four-hour drive through diverse landscapes. We stopped for local tea brewed over a wood fire before checking into the stunning Hotel Gabala.

- **Tufandaq Ski Resort:** Our first stop after leaving the Hotel was The Rope way of Tufandag - a summer-winter tourist complex, an ideal place to enjoy the fresh breeze of Caucasus Mountains and take in incredible view of Gabala City from a height. Needless to add that we did take a Ropeway Ride and took pictures to our heart's content. From a height, we could also observe the ruins of the ancient town Kabala (Chuhur Gabala), located in 15km from the city centre. For 600 years this was the capital of Caucasian Albania.



- **The 7 Gozel Waterfalls:** Another beautiful photo spot, showcasing 7 gentle waterfalls at 7 different levels - each could be seen as we progressively ascended an old cobble-stoned stairway.



- **The Nohur Lake:** This tranquil lake had its usual quota of boat rides etc. However, we decided to take some photos and enjoy a leisurely local lunch in one of the many open-air dining kiosks that flanked one of the shores of the Lake.

It must be mentioned that though peak of the summer, we never experienced a temperature of more than 27-28 degrees C during daytime and evening time would invariably be 24 degrees C or less, with pleasant winds throughout. So, with a minimal protection with umbrellas and caps, we could easily walk around. heading for dinner and returning to our Hotel.

We ended the day with lovely dinner on local cuisine at a Resort styled restaurant with individual dining log cabins, with a gurgling mountain stream rushing alongside. There was a sudden heavy downpour, which induced a slight chill in the air.

#### **Day 3 (11th June): Local sightseeing in and around Gabala.**

Our first stop after leaving Hotel was the Sheki Khan Palace. On this day, we covered 3 more places after seeing the Palace.

- **The Sheki Khan Palace:** The Palace was built in 1762 as a summer residence for the Khan of Sheki. During the construction of the building, not a single nail or glue was used. From inside, all the walls of the Palace are full of paintings and each painting has its own philosophical meaning. In the garden outside of the palace, there were 2 plane trees that are reportedly 500 years old.





- **Karavansarai / "Caravanserai":** This historical complex comprises two buildings, "Yukhari" and "Ashaghi," which means "Upper" and "Lower" Caravanserai - translating from Azerbaijani into English. Construction of these caravanserais is dated back to the 18th-19th centuries AD. These are places where the merchants and traders travelling the Silk Route used to stay and rest. "Lower" caravanserai has a rectangular shape with a large inner yard, at the center of which is located a pool. Total area of these caravanserais is estimated to be 8000 sq m., and dimensions are about 55x85 meters. Four entries lead to the central courtyard from all four corners.



- **The Xal-Xal Falls:** Veering off the highway onto a uphill stretch and forested patch patrolled by army (known to be somewhat sensitive area), the Xal-Xal Falls soothed all our senses by the sheer peace and scenic beauty. While returning from the Falls, we lunched on absolutely fabulous local food, served by an Azerbaijani family, under the trees, in the forest. The kind of warmth exuded by this family was a humbling experience indeed, despite the apparent language barrier. By this time, we had mastered the art of pointing out from the menu card and communicate through sign language what we wanted to eat!



- **The Lavender Garden:** After resting a bit post lunch, driving through a off-highway stretch of almost 4 km through cultivated land, the panoramic Lavender Garden suddenly loomed large, making us catch our breath. Miles after miles of blooming Lavender shrubs, gently swaying in the breeze, till the eye can see. Obviously, a much coveted photo-spot, including couples just engaged or just about to be married or just married. There were tourists from many nations present in this spot, soaking in the almost surreal experience.



#### Day 4 (12th June): Sightseeing on the way back from Gabala to Baku

It was quite heart-breaking to say good-bye to Gabala, but we had further things to see, both on way back, and at Baku. Hence, after breakfast, we checked out from Hotel Gabala and saw 4 places before checking into our Hotel (Midtown) at Baku.



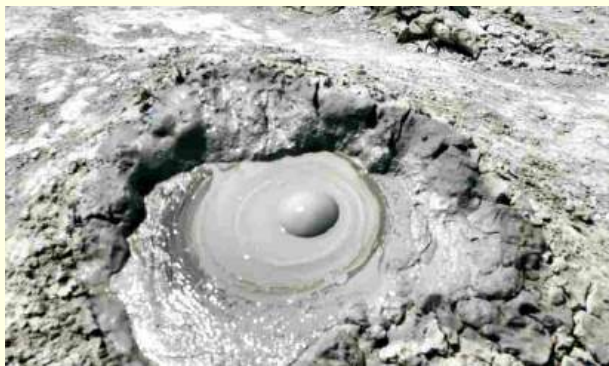
**Gobustan:** The 500 hectares of Gobustan State Preserve is full of archaeological monuments. It has over 6,000 cave paintings and is an UNESCO World Heritage Site. Petroglyphs dating back between 5,000-20,000 years left by the hunter-gatherer people who populated this region in times past were seen both in the open-air as well as within the Museum. Distinctive, highly stylized images showing early men in Mesolithic Period, animals, hunters, ritual dances, bulls, camel caravan, and depictions of the sun and heavens - were portrayed through the Petroglyphs, by pecking, grinding, scratching and carvings designs onto a rock's surface. Showcased within the Museum were ancient



human bones, work tools, ornaments, weapons and artefacts used by the ancient settlers.

This is one of the largest known concentrations of petroglyphs in the world. The Rock Art provides a window into the past rituals, beliefs, and artistic abilities of its creators. Because of its scientific, aesthetic, and religious significance, Gobustan became a popular State Park and a valuable mine of Azerbaijan.

**Mud Volcanoes:** The taxi drive to Mud Volcanos was an unforgettable experience on a dilapidated but yet sturdy old Russian Lada taxi over hinterland at 80 kmph, while we clutched onto anything for dear lives, silently praying that we arrive at our destination quickly. That is because only these taxis and not other tourist vehicles are allowed to operate in this terrain. Well, once we arrived, we did quickly conclude that the “adventure” was every bit of its worth. Azerbaijan retains its the first place in the world by the sheer the number of mud volcanoes. About 300 mud volcanoes are in Azerbaijan - at the shore, in the sea and on islands. From Gobustan, we visited a spot with concentration of these volcanoes near the Caspian Sea shore - the underlying hot lava in this volcanic region boils the ground water to levels such that the water tries bubbling out along with mud through conical mud dunes formed by underneath tectonic pressure over the ages, and is a sight to behold.



**Yanar Dag:** History has it that thousands of years back, a shepherd tried lighting a fire in this zone full of excess natural gas, so much so that at several places, the gas simply seeps into the atmosphere through cracks in the ground. Since the fire was attempted to be lit near a large crack in the ground through which the gas was streaming out, it immediately caught fire. That fire continues to burn till date, whether summer, monsoons, or winter. No wonder a tourist spot.



**Bibi Heybat Mosque:** Driving through a fascinating view of Sixov Beach, old oil pumps, operational onshore and offshore oil exploration machinery, dazzling seascapes, and intriguing semi-deserts, when we were almost at the outskirts of Baku City, we stopped to see this beautiful mosque. Originally constructed in the 13 th century, this was demolished during Russian occupation by Bolsheviks in 1936, and once again reconstructed to look almost like a replica of the original, in the 1990s.



Post this, we broke for lunch and thereafter checked into our hotel. In the evening, we strolled to Philharmonic Fountain Park, and enjoyed the sunset, the fountains, the many inland artificial streams and multitude of cafes. Many children occupied the Park, some roller skating, some playing football, while the doting mothers were animatedly engrossed in conversation with each other. Quite a few tourists like us also were strolling and enjoying the Park.





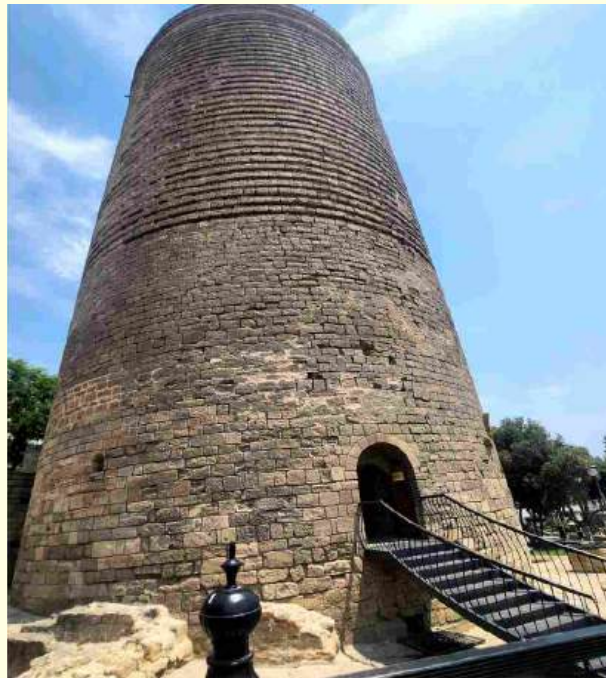
### Day 5 (13 th June): Baku City Tour:

Post breakfast, we left the Hotel with a plan of covering at least 3 major locations.



**The Old City “Ichari Shahar”:** The various phases of evolution of Baku since its establishment in the 5th century through Soviet era up to its Independence seemed to have left their imprint on this part of the city, housing many old buildings and remarkable monuments. It is a beautiful maze, full of narrow sights, old wooden balconies, stone roads and an atmosphere that one might never forget. Palace of the Shirvanshahs the central part of ancient Shirvanshahs kingdom is one of the impressive monuments in this complex, the other one being Maiden Tower - a mysterious monument, built in the south-east part of the Old Town around 12th Century, with many legends connected with it. The Maiden Tower also is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. We sipped juices, coffee, and some lip-smacking mid-day snacks at one of the cafes in the complex, before proceeding to our next stop.

**Few popular legends connected with Maiden Tower:**



A king had a tower built on the cliffs to protect his daughter from a snake bite, as warned by a fortune teller.

- A king gave his daughter in marriage to a man she didn't love, so she begged him to build the tower and postpone the wedding until it was finished. When the tower was completed, the king insisted on the wedding, and the girl jumped from the tower into the sea.

- A fiery-haired virgin girl saved Baku's people from slavery. This legend is rooted in Azerbaijan's Zoroastrian culture and beliefs and continues to be relevant today.

**Baku Boulevard:** There is a portion in the upper approach to the Boulevard which we went through while arriving at the Old City. This is a main Street of Baku, Torgovaya, meaning the trading street. Until 90s this street was full of merchants trading souvenirs, vintage accessories, and clothing. Today of course it is a 8 lane runway-finish road with Formula 1 car racing watch stands coming up on the left, walkways on the right, and Caspian Sea on further right. On the left, are also major Hotels, Corporate Offices, Banks and Financial Centres. At this time (month of June), a section of this Road that would be used for Formula 1 car racing later this year, was already prepared to withstand speeds of more than 350 kmph and higher. The city was also getting prepared to host COP28 Climate and Environmental Global Summit. We returned to Baku Boulevard area multiple times during our stay, more about this on Day #6 when we describe our visit to Fountain Park, adjacent to Baku Boulevard.

**Nizami Street:** This buzzing street is home to various outlets, from banks to fashion stores sporting almost all the global brands, and is one of the most expensive streets in the world. The street also accommodates the embassies of Germany, Norway, the Netherlands and Austria, as well as the European Union Delegation to Azerbaijan.



The street is famous for its restaurants and one can choose from, traditional Asian and European cuisine, from very affordable to very expensive. Of course, we spent a good time here exploring the various shops and bought few ethnic stuff, and then had a leisurely local meal.

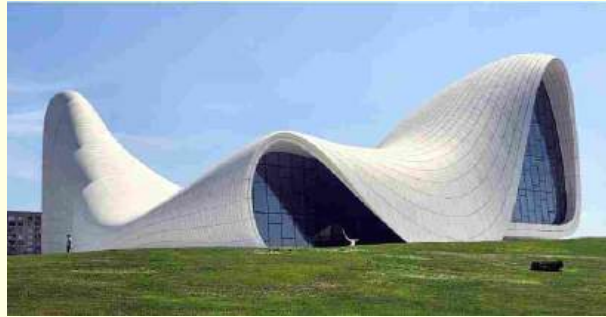


#### Day 6 (14 th June): Baku City Tour - remaining places

Post breakfast, we left the Hotel to see the few major attractions within Baku City, that were yet to be seen.

**Palace and Culture Centre (Heydar Aliyev Centre):** Covering a massive area of more than 57,000 square meters, the Heydar Aliyev Center is a 57,500 m<sup>2</sup> building complex smack within the main business district area, yet surrounded by lush green lawns and numerous selfie spots. Designed by the famous Iraqi-British architect Zaha Hadid and noted for its distinctive architecture and flowing, curved style that eschews sharp angles, construction was started in 2007 and the facility was opened to public in 2012. The multifunctional hall hosts different educational and scientific competitions and projects for the development of science, education, health, sports, culture, and economy. It also hosts solo exhibitions of the world-famous artists, sculptures, and photographers. There are various museum halls within showcasing Azerbaijani ethnic dresses and headgear, pottery and utensils, musical instruments,

figurines, and decorative items etc.



**Fire Temple (Ateshgah of Surakhani):** The Ateshgah, often called the Fire Temple of Baku, is a castle-like religious temple in Surakhany town, a suburb of Baku. Based on Iranian and Indian inscriptions, the temple was used as a Hindu, Sikh, and Zoroastrian place of worship. The pentagonal complex, which has a courtyard surrounded by cells for monks and a tetra pillar in the middle, was built during the 17th and 18th centuries. It was abandoned in the late 19th century, probably due to the dwindling of the Indian population in the area. The natural eternal flame went out in 1969, after nearly a century of usage of the petroleum and gas in the area, but is now lit by gas piped from the nearby city.



**Funicular Railway:** We enjoyed a short trip in this lovely cable train, which took us up from Fountain Park area near Baku Boulevard till a spot near the Uphill Park, and brought us down as well. We took pictures of

Baku city up from a reasonable height, utilizing angles which are otherwise infeasible to harness from any other convenient point.



**Fountain Park:** As the sun was going down, we sauntered with ice-creams on the Baku Boulevard. The schools had closed that day due to commencement of summer vacation, and there were many school children who were having a good time, along with regular locals and tourists like us. And, since the lovely Fountain Park, with abundant interconnected water bodies and rivulets including gondola rides, was addictively adjacent, how could we let go of that opportunity. No way! This was one of the first ever parks created in Azerbaijan and lined with mansions of oil magnates.



Next day, post breakfast, we left the Hotel for our ride back to Baku Airport, with fond memories and a resolve of coming back again to this picturesque, historic yet modern, quaint country of awe-inspiring sights, sounds and smells.



## An Offbeat Paradise - Aratrika Mitter Sen

Holidays are loved by one and all and if it is a beach holiday then that is the icing on a cake. But when we start planning an international beach trip the countries that usually come to mind are Thailand, Mauritius, Maldives, Vietnam and the like. Although these countries are gorgeous and are perfect travel destinations in their own way, there is a country near East Africa that feels like heaven on earth.

Seychelles, an archipelago (an extensive group of islands) of 115 islands is situated southeast of mainland Eastern Africa in the Indian ocean. The azure waters and pristine white sands are breathtaking. The country is easily accessible, as it is just a 4 hours direct flight from Mumbai, ideal for a short week-long international trip. Safe, family-friendly with extremely warm and welcoming locals, this tiny island paradise ticks off everything from the checklist. An abundant variety of activities like snorkelling at Bird Island, rock climbing at Constance Ephelia, ziplining at Constance Ephelia Resort, hiking at Anse Marron, windsurfing at Grand Anse beach, kayaking at Port Launay, hiking in Vallee de Mai etc will keep you amused all along. When in Vallee de Mai do take some time out to appreciate the Coco de Mer, commonly known as sea coconut, endemic to the islands of Praslin and Curieuse. Well, after browsing through the endless list of activities on offer, if you feel this tiny piece of heaven is not for you as you are not an adventure junkie, think twice. There is a lot to do for people who are not looking for an adrenaline rush. You can feed giant Tortoises and marvel at the exotic flora at the National Botanical Garden, visit the Arulmigu Navasakti temple at Victoria Market, glance through the beautiful local handicrafts at the Creole Craft Village and maybe purchase a few, learn about the local natural history in the Seychelles Natural History Museum and also admire the one of a kind woodwork on display, go for a relaxing walk on the gorgeous Anse Lazio beach, click pictures to your hearts content at the Anse Intendance beach, sip on chilled mocktails/cocktails to beat the heat at the numerous beach restaurants (do try the local Takamaka Rum) or just simply dig into scrumptious Creole dishes that are spicy enough to suit an Indian palate. Seychelles has something for everyone.

The best part of visiting this beach country is you can travel light- just pack some beachwear and a few cotton outfits and hop on to an Air Seychelles flight. We (me and my husband) had a blast on our trip and now it is your turn to experience bliss!

Tip- The best time to visit Seychelles is from April-May and October-November. Also do pick up some souvenirs made from the famous Coco de Mer to gift family and friends.



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## Jaisalmer - The 'Eken Trail'

- Aratrika Mitter Sen



Jaisalmer, a tiny city steeped in history went unnoticed until the great filmmaker Satyajit Ray decided to shoot his film 'Sonar Kella' set against the backdrop of the majestic Golden Fort (Sonar Kella) Jaisalmer Fort. After the film released, tourists started flocking to this hidden gem located in the state of Rajasthan. I too had added a visit to this royal fort, to my wish list.

As time flew by my list was put on the back burner. Then one day, after several years had passed, a film by the name of 'The Eken: Ruddhaswas Rajasthan' was released which rekindled my desire to witness the grandeur of the only 'living fort' in the world. The way this film has captured the sheer essence of Jaisalmer left me enthralled. Therefore, I booked my flight and took off in a jiffy. It was not necessary to put together an itinerary as I was going to simply follow 'Eken Babu's Trail.' I had booked a direct flight instead of the conventional way of landing in Jodhpur and then reaching Jaisalmer by road which saved me a lot of time and I could start exploring right away.

Adhering to the film's trail I started with visiting Bada Bagh- a garden complex with a set of intricately carved royal chhatri cenotaphs with a stunning view of the surrounding desert landscape. My next stop was the 'jewel in the crown' of the 'golden city' of India,

Jaisalmer Fort. Situated atop Trikuta Hill this magnificent yellow sandstone fortress glistens like Gold in the sun. A breathtaking sight to behold. It is laden with innumerable attractions like the former residence of Maharawal Jaisal (founder king of Jaisalmer), Jain temples with elaborately carved columns, beautifully decorated havelis of local merchants, vibrant handicraft shops and aesthetically designed cafes situated on the top which provide gorgeous views of the cityscape. After a good dose of history, it was time to revel in the tranquillity of the Gadsisar Lake. The man-made lake was originally built by Maharawal Jaisal who named it Jaisalasar but later Gadsingh Bhati rebuilt it and hence came to be known as Gadsisar Lake. Afterwards I stopped at the Vyas Chhatri (not shown in the film). This sandstone cenotaph is dedicated to Vyas Muni who authored the Mahabharata. Going back on the trail I continued to Patwon ki Haveli, which is a cluster of five havelis built by the Patwa family. Its beautiful architecture tells a story of affluence and artistic finesse. Once home to the Patwas, it has now been occupied by Rajasthan government's Art and Craft department. The unique collection of paintings, mirror work and wall carvings left me mesmerized.



Subsequently I headed to Kuldhara, an abandoned village in the midst of the desert. Once occupied by Paliwal Brahmins the place was abandoned overnight for some unknown reason. The village has remained

vacant since the early nineteenth century. Locals narrate different stories of paranormal activities but the truth is still unverified. Although no such activity occurred when we were around, the atmosphere was quite eerie. Unwilling to encounter any spirits I pushed off to my next destination, the Jaisalmer War Museum where I got to witness a fabulous light and sound show narrating the story about the bravery of our daunting soldiers in the famous Battle of Longewala.







The following day I decided to head over to the Longewala Border after a brief stop at the Tanot Mata Mandir. As it is not allowed to loiter around the border for long, I quickly started for Sam Sand Dunes to reach my desert camp. There was an exciting desert safari awaiting me. At the end of the safari a cultural extravaganza was organized by the camp authorities. Local Rajasthani hits were belted out by talented folk artists as vibrantly dressed dancers performed Ghoomar (the local dance). Sitting around a bonfire under a clear starlit sky with a slight nip in the air, enjoying local cultural performances was an out of the world experience. There was one last activity before I hit the sack, stargazing, the highlight of the day. An unmissable part of a trip to Jaisalmer is a stargazing session. Getting a clear zoomed look at our Milky Way, planets and stars felt surreal. It was something I had never witnessed before. Concluding the trip with some shopping and savouring some delectable local dishes like Dal Bati Choorma, Pyaz Kachauri, Ghotua Laddoo and my favourite Ghevar (from Dhanraj Ranmal Bhatia which is the most popular sweet shop of Jaisalmer) was the best idea. I enjoyed my trip to the 'golden city' through and through and hope you do too, if you ever decide to visit. Ram Ram Sa (bye in local language).

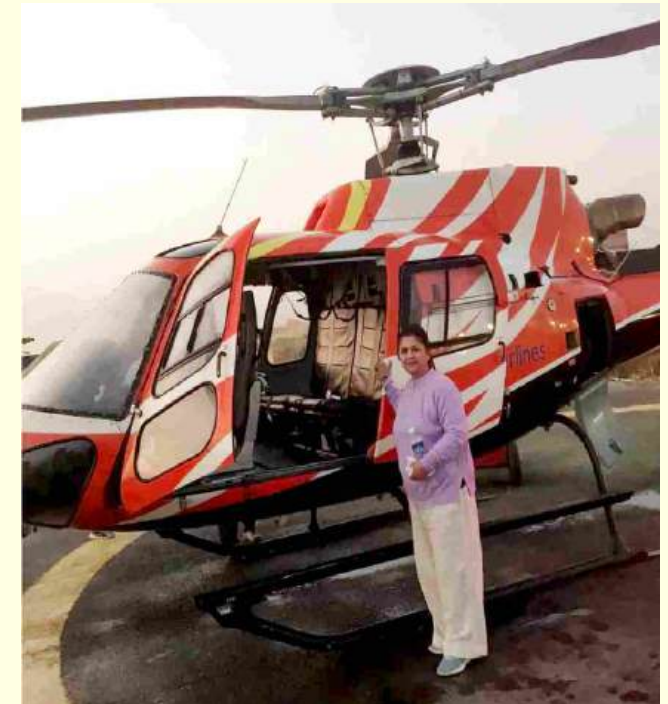
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## **My Dream Moment - an Encounter with Mt. Everest - Sourav Mitra**

I had never thought of such a possibility; when suddenly an opportunity came by. Paloma, my daughter, an avid trekker had planned her trek to Everest Base Camp. So, we all decided to go along up to Kathmandu & then take the helicopter route. With my better half, Rakhee, my adventure began in the early hours of a chilly December morning in Kathmandu. We were headed for an experience of a lifetime-a journey to the heart of the Himalayas, where the towering peaks of Mt. Everest awaited us. Buddhi, owner of Himalayan Holiday Service whose service we had taken for this expedition briefed us on the previous night about the various Dos and Dots especially with regards to sudden height gain. Meanwhile Paloma was readying herself to go on a 14-day trek to Everest Base Camp. The excitement in hotel room was palpable. All three of us hardly slept that night. Buddhi came in the morning and picked us from the hotel at 4.30 am. After brief check in formalities with our height, weight, signing of bond etc. we headed towards the helicopter; our first helicopter ride ever. The helicopter, a sleek marvel of modern engineering, stood ready on the tarmac. The only female pilot of Nepal, Priya was our commander. As per set protocols flights could not start before sunrise. It was a 5-seater machine. Apart from Rakhee & me, there were 2 foreigners-one Portuguese, one Australian. The sky was clear as we took off, the excitement in our hearts soaring as the altitude we were about to gain.

As the helicopter lifted off, Kathmandu slowly receded below us. The cityscape gave way to the lush green hills that cradled it, then it transitioned into a more rugged, mountainous terrain. The contrast was striking, the transition from the city's vibrant chaos to the serene, untouched landscape was both sudden and exhilarating. The helicopter's steady

hum was accompanied by the breath-taking view of terraced fields, tiny hamlets and the meandering Doodhpathri as well as several other rivers that glittered like silver threads in the early light.



*All set, for a once-in-a-lifetime experience*

Our first destination was Lukla, a tiny mountain airstrip known as the gateway to the Everest region. The flight was smooth and awe-inspiring. The Himalayas started to reveal themselves in the distance, their snow-capped peaks glistening under the morning sun. As we approached Lukla, the landscape transformed dramatically. The once gentle hills gave way to steep, jagged cliffs and deep gorges. Lukla airstrip, renowned for its challenging approach, was a narrow strip of tarmac flanked by towering peaks, making for an exhilarating landing. I have fear of heights- particularly while airborne, but the excitement of the adventure overtook all my fears.

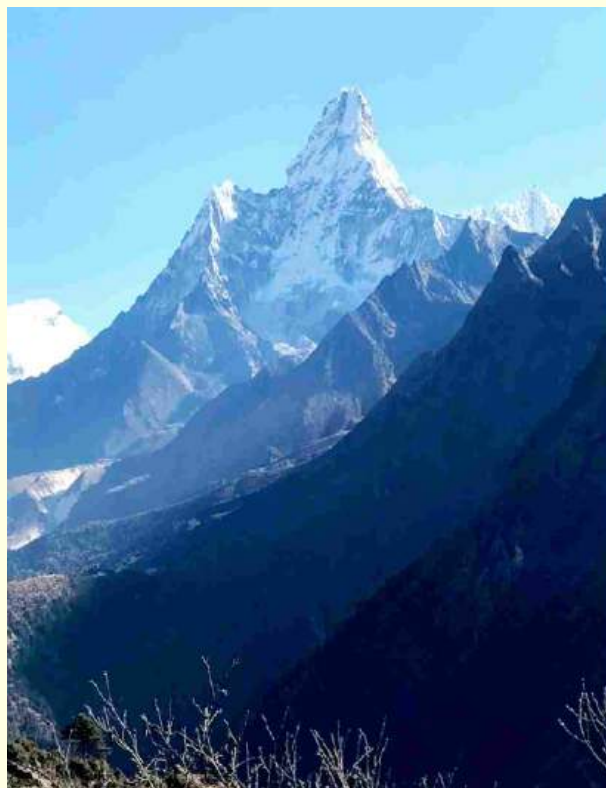


The best part of the helicopter ride was it takes you through various mountains (am sure it has its charted route). As Priya, our commander was taking us through various twists & turns to give us fantastic view of tall snow-capped mountains, I must have irritated her the most with countless questions about the mountains, their name, what challenges she faces while negotiating those treacherous mountains and so on. The helicopter touched down with a gentle thud on the rugged Tenzing-Hillary airport, Lukla. The helicopter unloaded some fuel at Lukla. It was about 10 min halt. Lukla is about 9000 ft & now that we would go to higher altitudes & the helicopter needed to be light. Lukla's small airport was abuzz with activity-local porters, trekkers preparing for their own Everest expeditions, and the ever-present hum of mountain life. The vibrant energy of Lukla was infectious, and our excitement only grew as we prepared for the next leg of our journey - PHERICHEY.

The experienced commander traversed through the intricate routes through the narrow mountain passes while showing us various gorgeous snow-clad mountain peaks. As we ascended, the scenery became even more dramatic. The landscape unfolded below us in a series of breath-taking vistas, craggy peaks, deep valleys, and vast stretches of snow-covered terrain. The sheer scale of the mountains was both humbling and awe-inspiring.

Our flight took us to Pherichey & touched down in a place nestled in the shadow of Mt. Amadablam. Pherichey is at 14500 ft. & is known for its stark beauty and holds its position as a key acclimatization stop for trekkers heading to Everest Base Camp. Helicopter needed to be made further light. It could now fly with only 2 passengers. Rakhee and I disembarked. The decision to drop us off was serendipitous, it allowed us a brief, unfiltered encounter with the serene beauty of the Himalayas. In biting cold we were surrounded by the tall Kumbhu glacier mountains.

For thirty minutes, Pherichey was our personal sanctuary. It was quiet, a deafening silence all around. The crisp, clean air filled our lungs with every breath, invigorating us with its freshness. The surrounding tall mountains loomed large, their snow-covered peaks towering over us, as if it was looking down at us to have a measure of the two intruders. It was a majestic display of nature's grandeur. Suddenly Rakhee & I realised that we were speaking in a low voice. We didn't feel like spoiling Nature's silent zone. We took a leisurely stroll. There was the sound of a gently flowing stream. The peace and solitude offered a rare moment of tranquillity & I was imagining myself in a different planet. Even the grass was different.



*Mt. Amadablam - Paloma's favourite mountain, where we nestled in Pherichey.*

The sound of helicopter broke our dream. Now it was our turn. Helicopter dropped off other 2 passengers who were on the return leg. Rakhee and I were now airborne again on way to Kalapatthar at 18400 ft. The ascent was thrilling. The helicopter navigated over various cliffs, the snow-covered peaks becoming ever more prominent. Each turn brought new, breathtaking views, glaciers sparkling like diamonds, deep valleys carved by ancient glaciers, and the ever-present, awe-inspiring silhouette of Mt. Everest.



*Pherichey - in a different planet. Best 30 minutes of my life*

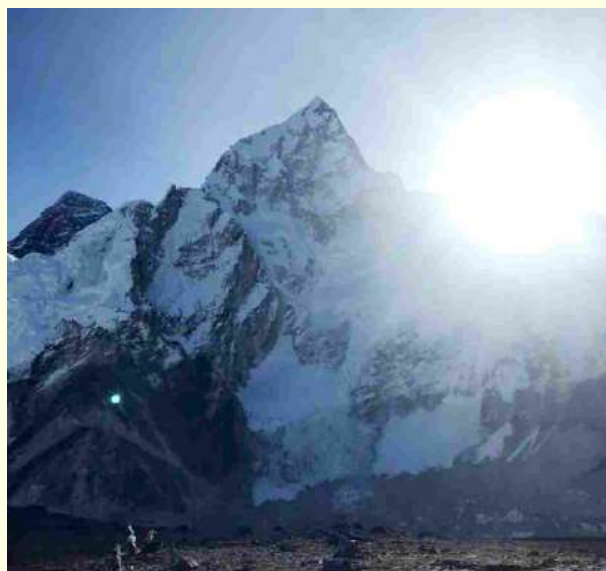
As we approached Kala Patthar, the excitement in the helicopter was palpable. Rakhee and I were trying to absorb every possible view of the gorgeous panorama. Kala Patthar, a renowned vantage point, offered an unrivalled view of Mt. Everest. The helicopter touched down on a small, rocky plateau, and as we disembarked, the scale and majesty of the Himalayas overwhelmed us. Due to sudden change of altitude it could become challenging as Buddhi had told us the previous evening. The Commander told us that other two foreign passengers who came in the earlier sortie felt giddiness and nauseous. Standing at Kala Patthar, we were greeted by a panoramic vista that defied description. Mt. Everest stood towering and majestic, its snow-capped summit piercing the sky. Oh My God!! For few moments couldn't believe what we have been witnessing. THE Mt Everest. It was simply overwhelming, with multiple emotions of joy, happiness and excitement. For a few minutes I went blank. I simply didn't know what to do. I simply kept looking at it. The Pilot called and said we would get only 5 minutes. The air was thin here. People fell ill here since there had been no acclimatisation time.

But I was too excited and felt no discomfort. Neither did Rakhee. After that warning we realised that we had to capture this once in a life time moment. I took off the gloves and clicked a few photos. These photos would never do justice to the magnificent scene all around. I realised it would be futile exercise to capture Nature at its best, so I decided to make full use of those limited time in front of God. We stayed in this paradise for about 7 minutes, soaking in every moment which would be our treasure for a life time. The surrounding peaks of the Himalaya range formed a dramatic backdrop, their jagged outlines softened by the morning light. Nuptse (another 8000 er) appeared a stone's throw away.

The serenity of the moment was profound. The enormity of Everest and the surrounding peaks

seemed to shrink the world, focusing our attention on the raw, unadulterated beauty of nature. The silence was broken only by the occasional gust of wind and the soft crunch of snow beneath our boots. It was a moment of introspection and awe, a chance to appreciate the grandeur of a landscape that had inspired adventurers and dreamers for generations. I bowed down to Mother Nature. Pronam. I submitted myself to almighty, the creator, my beloved God.

After exploring Kala Patthar, we boarded the helicopter for the final leg of our journey. Our next destination was Everest View Hotel. The Everest View Hotel lived up to its name in every way. The terrace where we had breakfast offered an unobstructed view of the entire mountain range. The sky was a brilliant blue, and the peaks, shimmering in the sunlight, seemed almost within arm's reach. Breakfast was an indulgent affair, each bite of delicious food accompanied by the stunning backdrop of the Himalayas.



*Mt. Everest. Dream moment of life.  
Thank you, my beloved God, for this sight.*

As Rakhee and I sat on the terrace, savouring our meal, the scale of the mountains and the tranquillity of the setting made for an unforgettable experience. The entire range, from the towering Everest to the surrounding peaks, was bathed in the morning light, creating a scene of unparalleled beauty. It was a fitting conclusion to a journey that had been as exhilarating as it was awe-inspiring, a perfect encapsulation of the majesty and serenity of the Himalayas.

After a sumptuous breakfast with a breathtaking view at the Everest View Hotel, we boarded the helicopter for the return journey to Kathmandu. As we flew over the snow-capped peaks and lush valleys, the landscape gradually transformed back to the familiar terrain surrounding Kathmandu. Touching down in the city felt surreal, as if we were returning from a dream..... Buddhi greeted us with a big smile.



*Kalapathar: Rakhee and our pilot Priya.  
Mt. Everest in the background and Mt. Nuptse in the front*



## Nippon - the Land of the Rising Sun

- Tania and Santanu Sen

This is a humble visual attempt to share a flavor of our recent visit to Japan, during what is believed to be the most enchanting season in the country, the season of Sakura (Cherry Blossom). This in no way is representative of the diverse, fascinating, culturally rich yet mysterious, known to well-preserve the oldest civilization of the world, while embracing the most modern of technology.

On arrival at Tokyo from Mumbai, we travelled to Osaka by the Shinkansen (bullet train). Thereafter, we visited Kyoto, Nara, Okinawa & Miyajima islands, Nagao, Mount Fuji, Shizouka, Hiroshima and Toyota factory, covering mostly central Japan. Our 12 days travel was marked by visits to shrines & temples, museums, parks, locals experience of sushi, tea tasting and Sumo wrestling, shopping arcades and a combination of awesome, exclusive and local eateries.

These photos are hardly representative of the vast expanse of this beautiful country, though an honest attempt to represent the experience with authenticity.

Also, do remember to read a few fun-facts, a dozen Trivia, at the end, that I have specially curated for Parichay.



**Cherry Blossoming** - From the first bloom to the full. The emperor's visit marks the opening of the Cherry Blossom season and this year around 3.73 million visitors experienced this natural bloomcore.



### Chidorigafuchi (pre & post the Blossom)

The Chidorigafuchi Moat is a 700 meter long walkway that runs along the outside of the Imperial Palace (in Tokyo) has probably the most widely planted cherry trees in Japan. It is one of the top spots for Cherry Blossom viewing, the lantern festival and the night lighting.



The **Yasukuni Shinto Shrine**, Chidoya, Tokyo, founded in 1869 to commemorate those who died in service of Japan.



**One can certainly not make this out!!** All eateries, big or small, fast food joints or fine dining, display models of all the items in their menu in such intricate details, all made in plastic.





The **Meiji Jingu Shinto Shrine** in Shibuya, Tokyo is visited by millions every year, famous for its daily ceremonies, incredible architecture, and scenic grounds and is dedicated to the deified spirits of Emperor Meiji and his wife, Empress Shōken.



**Shibuya Crossing**, Tokyo, is the largest pedestrian crossing in the world. It's an amazing spectacle. It is reckoned that over 3,000 people cross where 7 cross roads come together and the lights all turn red at the same time. And then thousands of pedestrians cross at the same time. Also, popular for the monument of Hachiko, the Japanese Akita dog remembered for faithfully waiting for the return of his deceased owner for more than nine years until his death.



**Sumo wrestling:** Sumo wrestling, Japan's national sport, was born as a Shinto ritual to entertain gods. It was believed that if the gods are not pleased, they would not bring a good harvest season. The sumo stage, dohyo, considered very sacred, the roof dressed by the purple curtains and tassels that represents the roof of a Shinto shrine. An average Sumo wrestler is around 150 Kgs, wears a loincloth belt (about 6-7 meters long), and consumes around 20,000 calories of food a day.





The breath-taking **Golden Pavilion Kinkaku-Ji Temple**, Kyoto, is a Zen Buddhist temple that features 14th and 15th century Japanese styles, most renowned and recognizable historical and cultural properties.



**Todai-Ji (Great Eastern Temple)** is a Buddhist temple complex that was once one of the powerful Seven Great Temples, located in the city of Nara, is home to numerous national treasures and cultural assets, and so the temple itself was registered as a Historic Monument of Ancient Nara by the UNESCO World Heritage Convention in 1998.



**Japan's Manhole Covers** - We were generally primed to look up while walking on the streets of Japan. But one must travel slowly in Japan as there's so much to take in. It's easy to overlook seemingly commonplace objects like, say, a manhole cover. These unique stylized manhole covers can be found just about anywhere in the country, each more beautiful and intricate than the next. These ornate drain covers in wrought iron, often plain, sometimes brightly painted, dot the pavements, separate street life from the sewers that run below. The motifs used are often rooted in local history, geography and culture. They include the usual traditional cherry blossoms, landscapes, castles, bridges, birds, the wind and the Moon. Today there are almost 12,000 artistic designs among the 15 million manhole covers nationwide. These urban ornaments apparently connect to a long-standing historical urban planning concept, "machizukuri", a term which combines machi ("community" or "shared space", a place both physical and intangible in which community comes together and social activities take place) with zukuri ("producing" and "nurturing"). The idea connects urban planning with community building; an idealistic philosophy that aimed to improve the everyday environment through a bottom-up transformation, involving citizens, experts and local officials. We could experience a few of the intriguing ones while visiting some of the prefectures viz., Tokyo, Osaka, Kyoto, Nagoya, Nara, Miyajima, Shizuoka & Hiroshima.



**The Hiroshima Peace Museum:** Hiroshima alongside with Tokyo and Kyoto should be one of the three essential cities ingrained in any itinerary of a Japan trip...one must not go to Japan without visiting Hiroshima.

Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum - Yes it is not called a War Memorial... It is too disturbing to focus your camera on. the contents the museum. But the horrors that is preserved here need to be reminded to the world thousands and thousands times over....lest we forget.



**Mt Fuji** We were fortunate to catch a glimpse of Fuji San on our flight into Tokyo. It is the highest mountain in Japan, at a height of 12,388 ft., is an active stratovolcano and in its graceful conical form, it is considered a sacred symbol. It has 5 stations and weather supporting, we were able to drive up to Station 3.





**Itsukushima Jinja** is Shinto shrine in Hatsukaichi, most famous for its dramatic Floating O-Torii (gate) on the outskirts of the shrine, accessible from the mainland by ferry at Miyajimaguchi Station.



**Osaka** The second largest metropolis, Osaka is a port city and an important commercial center, known for its modern architecture, street food, fun and night-life in the neon-lit extravaganza of Dotombori.



**Senso-Ji temple** is an ancient Buddhist temple in Asakusa, Tokyo, a five-story pagoda, trails of incense and vast eaves, dedicated to Kannon, the bodhisattva of compassion.





## Modern Japan





**The Food Trail:** Beyond Sushi, I strongly recommend Teppanyaki style preparation like Okonomiyaki, Udon, Ramen or Soba noodles with seafood or red meat, the Tempura, Octopus Takoyaki, salmon stuffed, Onigiri, Beef Yakitori with Sake or Shochu , and of course the simple Japanese Curry Rice (kare-raisu). However, when you visit, do not miss out to grab a Bent-o-Box. You will probably go back for one more. This write-up has not ignored the dessert or the description of alcoholic drink- maybe for another day.



*The Tokyo Station by night:*



#### **A DOZEN TRIVIAS (some of the below are unverified):**

01. Originated in Japan, the followers of Shintoism believe that spiritual powers exist in the natural world (Kami- a polytheistic and animistic religion). A Shinto shrine has large, wooden, torii gates, stone stairs, decorative stone lanterns and Chōzuya or temizuya – fountain to cleanse one's hands and face.
02. Back in 1889, before any video games, Nintendo used to develop card games in Japan. To this day, it is the main playing-card maker in Japan, still producing Hanafuda decks.
03. In Japanese, "Nominication", a well-established cultural practice, means “to build a good relationship by drinking together”, allowing for open and frank discussion between team members, colleagues from different groups or levels of seniority. No wonder the Asahi Tower is built to look like a mug of beer.
04. The Yellow Bullet Train or Dr Yellow the is the nickname for a series of high-speed diagnostic trains, run through the night making it rare to see them in operation or at stations. Most Japanese have never seen one. Shinkansen or the bullet train, with a top speed is 362 kms per hour, had almost no passenger accidents.
05. There are no public dustbins in Japan. In 1995, a cult called Aum Shinrikyo committed a sarin attack against the public and 19 people died. After that happened, Japanese got extremely sensitive against unknown objects left in stations, and all trash cans immediately disappeared from the stations
06. The company registration by the Toyoda family was mistyped as “Toyota” . And, hence the name.
07. Japan’s constitution does not allow production, possession, or introduction of nuclear weapons. A learning from the tragedies of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.
08. Many Japanese are born as Shinto, marry as Christians and their funeral is conducted as a Buddhist.
09. Japanese call their tea as “cha” . Serving of Matcha to a guest is influenced by the Zen Buddhism and represents Harmony, Respect, Purity and Tranquillity. Japanese Tea Ceremony used to be a men-only event & only rich nobles such as samurai and monks could afford to drink the matcha tea.
10. The State of Liberty at Tokyo was gifted by France
11. When you enter a Japanese Temple, the first step is a high step, that helps you make a natural bow.
12. The Aokigahara forest around Mt Fuji, also said to be home to Yūrei, the ghosts of the dead, has the unfortunate distinction of being the world's second most popular suicide place, after the Golden Gate Bridge of San Francisco.



## A Memorable Trip to USA

- Moushumi Roy

Our long cherished dream of visiting USA got fulfilled when we received an invitation from UC Berkeley for attending graduation ceremony of our son. We embarked on our journey on a warm afternoon at beginning of May. When we reached San Francisco, it was evening and the city was engulfed in a golden glow as our son drove us to our destination. Soon we reached our Airbnb accommodation at Berkeley- it was love at first sight. Nestled amidst beautiful gardens, stood our bungalow where we occupied an incredibly comfortable 2bhk apartment on 1st floor. It was impressively decked up with carpets, clean upholstery, antique furniture and wooden floors. Dinner was served with lots of love and care by my prince charming. Post dinner we chatted to our heart's content having met after so long.

Golden rays of sun and clear blue sky welcomed us early next morning. We embarked on exploring the beautiful neighbourhood with bungalows surrounded by flower gardens at the front and veggy garden at the backyard. Golden yellow Meyer lemons of huge size were hanging from trees and almost every house had one of it. The flower gardens were mesmerizing and we simply couldn't take our eyes off them. People were very cordial and even unknown people were wishing and smiling at us making us feel at home. We couldn't wait to see the world renowned UC Berkeley campus and walked for hours together to discover the magic of an institution which being established in 1868, has gifted the world with countless noble laureates. The clock tower, library building, Greek Theatre coupled with buildings belonging to various departments, nestled amidst curated lawns that dotted the campus looked magnificent. Same evening we visited the ISKCON temple and attended the evening aarti followed by Indian dinner as prasad. It was amazing to meet so many Indians there- foreigners too were

found partaking the dinner fondly.



Our son's exit seminar was lined up next afternoon and he was preoccupied with the arrangements. We had an early lunch and proceeded towards the university campus where he showed us his lab. Our hearts filled with gratitude to the Almighty as we found him delivering his defence flawlessly and answering questions from audience with full confidence. It took me back to his childhood days when coaxing him to sit at one place and make him study was the most difficult task. His transformation really left me speechless. We also met his guide and conveyed our heartfelt gratitude to her for guiding him towards his goal of earning a doctorate from the institute. Post the exit seminar, tea was served with sweets and namkeen carried by us from India and the entire audience enjoyed them to their heart's content.

Long lost friends and relatives settled in USA invited us to their beautiful homes and meeting them after ages, cherishing memories of our college days left us overwhelmed. All of them stay at picturesque bungalows amidst beautiful gardens. While visiting my college friend at San Jose whose beautiful garden left me spellbound, we also visited the famous rose garden having endless colours of roses with incredible sizes. We got to taste varieties of cuisines -Mexican, Japanese, Thai, Himalayan and many others. We visited Golden Gate, Wharf 39, Union Square etc. in city tour of San Francisco where we shopped for American chocolates to be shared with our friends in India. We

also visited the Pacific beach and Half Moon Bay which were spotlessly clean and the clear blue waters cast a magical spell on us.

We proceeded to Monterrey on weekend- a 3 hours drive from Berkeley. We checked into a cosy hotel- Coulton inn with spic and span rooms. As usual the beaches were outstanding though very chilly. Next day we proceeded to the aquarium where we got to see huge rooms of glass spanning across floors and the varieties of fish, penguins, octopus left us speechless. We visited the art gallery very close to our hotel where local children were performing, in an open to all concert. On our way back from Monterrey, we visited Santa Cruz with an outstanding turquoise blue sea and golden beach where lot of people were bathing and fishing. Had an unforgettable meal at a restaurant overlooking the sea and returned to Berkeley with incredible memories.

We also drove down to Napa Valley famous for its wines and the Beryesse lake- a huge expanse of pure blue water dotted with swans swimming along with their kids. The moment they spotted us seated peacefully by the side of the lake, they ventured out and started speaking to us in an unknown language. Love transcends all boundaries and with my motherly instinct I guessed they were asking for food. Packets of cookies which we carried were shared with them which they devoured promptly before bidding us goodbye. Our hearts filled with an unknown contentment. The wine tasting facility at Napa Valley was within a centuries old historic castle where wine was offered free for tasting. All of us being teetotallers, had to content ourselves with grape juice. Overall it was a wonderful day spent amidst nature.

There were lot of places yet to be visited at Berkeley and not much time left. We visited the huge botanical garden which displayed native plants from each continent in demarcated areas and the ambience was extremely soothing. We hiked for some time in Tilden



Park Hills soaking in sights and sound of nature. The Lawrence Hall of fame displayed experiments for children to instill curiosity among young minds. Berkeley Marina was also another spectacular beach where we had a long stroll inspite of the chilling winds. Berkeley Rose garden was another captivating spot with roses of endless colors and hues. The entire credit of this wonderful journey goes to my son who not only chalked out the tour plan but also drove us to all these wonderful places tirelessly for the entire duration.

On one of the evenings, our Airbnb accommodation landlady invited us to her garden for tea. She took us through all the veggies and herbs she had grown in her backyard and also gifted us with some meyer lemons from the tree in her garden. She is 75 yrs of age and it really surprised us that she still continues to tend and maintain the garden so well. We gifted her with some sweets which we carried from India much to her delight. The tea that was served with herbs from her garden, left us amazingly refreshed.

Finally the time arrived for the graduation ceremony- the long awaited event. Our hearts filled with pride at the sight of so many students from various nationalities securing their doctorates, cheered heartily by friends and family. There were refreshments arranged by the university which all the invitees enjoyed amidst taking pics endlessly. Apart from the good wishes of everyone, the students received countless bouquets and gifts and the overall atmosphere was so festive- it shall remain etched in our memory forever. Lunch and dinner that day was with my son's friends and their families.

Our return was scheduled next night and we commenced packing with a heavy heart. We realized we should have planned a longer tour. As we embarked on our return flight, bidding goodbye to our son, it dawned on us that the beauty and warmth of USA had far exceeded our expectation. It shall continue to tug at our heartstrings forever not only because it is so incredibly beautiful but also for the warmth of its people. Looking forward to visting this heaven on earth again to meet my son who has stayed back to commence his teaching profession at Pennysylvania state. Goodbye to the most enigmatic country till we meet again. A big thanks to Sun God for always shining so bright on all these days, rendering our journey so enjoyable.



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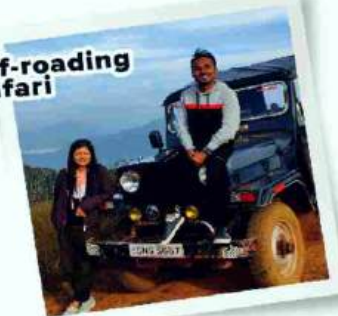
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# Perspective



## Chingri Malai Curry - Exploring the Flavourful and Aromatic History of this Popular Dish - *Sarmistha Neogy*

According to Taste Atlas' latest ranking of the top 50 seafood dishes, Bengali Chingri Malai Curry, also known as prawn malai curry, has earned the 31st spot. It is also the only Indian dish to secure a place in this coveted ranking. The exquisite cuisine holds a special place in the hearts of every Bengali. Cherished across generations, Chingri Malai features on the menu at celebratory events such as Poila Baisakh, Durga Pujo, weddings, and even relaxed Sunday lunches.

Calcutta's piscophiles have a deep-seated affection for freshwater fish, and this passion extends to the preparation of Chingri Malai Curry. The dish truly shines when made with the finest freshwater jumbo prawns, known locally as golda chingri. These prawns, with their large heads, infuse the curry with a rich, deep flavour as they cook, and their essence melds beautifully into the oil. That said, Chingri Malai Curry is equally delightful when prepared with large tiger prawns, or bagda chingri.

The use of whole spices - bay leaf, cloves, green cardamom, and cinnamon stick - along with ginger paste, red chili powder, and pungent mustard oil, adds immense aroma to the curry. However, it is the creamy coconut milk that truly elevates the dish, mellowing the spice levels and providing a perfect balance of sweetness. Surprisingly, Chingri Malai Curry is not only rich in flavour but also has a history that is subject to much debate.

### The Mystery of Its Origins

Many Bengalis, including myself, have long believed that the word "Malai" in the dish refers to the cream (Malai) of the tender coconut in which the prawns are cooked. However, another theory suggests that the name 'Malai Curry' may have Malaysian roots; 'malaikari' could be 'Malay' curry, which over time was transliterated as 'malai' curry.

Sociologist Rituparna Patgiri from IIT Guwahati argues that there is no historical or sociological evidence of Malaysian influence on Chingri Malai Curry. "However, there are records showing that Malaysian traders explored the Indian subcontinent in the 12th century so the Malaysian influence on the prawn dish is plausible," she adds. Interestingly, Bengali Chingri Malai Curry tastes very similar to Malay Kari Udang (coconut prawn curry) and Laksa (spicy coconut soup), which are considered early influences.

Popular food blogger Indrajit Lahiri (Foodka) supports the idea of a Malay origin but acknowledges the confusion surrounding its identity. He remembers, "At our home, Chingri Maccher Malai Curry was always cooked with grated coconut for convenience, and with coconut milk if time permitted. This was done to ensure a smooth texture." Kalyan Karmakar, an author and renowned food blogger, finds the Malaysian

influence agreeable. "But then, the same could apply to Kerala's Moilee preparation too, which tastes similar. This makes me wonder if the story is apocryphal," he adds. Despite the debate, chef Ananya Banerjee, a multi-cuisine gourmet expert, sums it up succinctly: "Whatever the source, the dish is absolutely delectable."

### Cherished Memories and Cultural Significance

Chingri Malai Curry's rich history is mirrored in the personal and cultural significance it holds. For Lahiri, his heirloom recipe of Chingri Macher Malai Curry was with diced potatoes and laden with ghee. "This had to be paired with steamed rice. Coming from a middle-class family, this was a celebratory dish for us - making it even more special," he shares.

Chingri Malai Curry mainly features in Bengali special events, partly due to the expensive ingredients, such as prawns and coconut milk. Professor Patgiri notes that working-class families prefer simpler dishes and use resources that are easily available. "These luxurious components make the dish a special choice for significant occasions rather than everyday meals," she explains.

Chef Banerjee highlights the dish's role in family gatherings and festive occasions. "The fondest memories revolve around the anticipation and excitement that built up in the kitchen as the dish was prepared. My mother and grandmother would meticulously clean the prawns, marinate them with turmeric and salt, and then cook them with love and care," she recalls. Karmakar's cherished memory involves cooking Chingri Malai Curry for his Parsi wife, who always enjoyed it.

### Impact of Global Recognition

Taste Atlas is a well-respected platform that highlights authentic, traditional dishes from around the world. Chef Banerjee believes that being featured on such a list brings Bengali cuisine into the global spotlight, introducing it to a wider audience who may not have been familiar with it before. "This recognition can create curiosity and encourage food enthusiasts and travellers to explore more Bengali dishes," she says. However, Lahiri questions whether a dish that has been around for so many years needs re-validation.

Karmakar, however, remains sceptical about the impact of a single dish's mention on such a list. He argues, "To truly elevate Bengali cuisine on the global stage, we need more than just a spot in the ranking. We need dedicated ambassadors like Asma Khan of "Darjeeling Express", US-based senior food writer Chitrita Banerjee, and Kishwar Chowdhury, who gained fame for Panta Bhat on Master Chef Australia. Additionally, food writers from Bengal should actively share our culinary stories in ways that resonate with a global audience." While Chingri Malai Curry's global recognition is a significant step, it is only a part of a larger journey towards celebrating and understanding the full spectrum of Bengali cuisine on the world's foodscape.



## Women and Wealth - *Srirupa Sen*

In today's world, we see numerous women who have established themselves academically and are excelling in all professions be it as CEO of a company or a scientist or an entrepreneur, a venture capitalist and even an Uber driver.

However, what is concerning is that women and their relationship with wealth creation. Across all asset classes and all investment products, women continue to be less informed and thereby do not manage their own money and finances the way men do.

Across the last few years, I have come across multiple instances wherein women both employed and non-employed are highly reliant on their spouses for any decisions regarding money. In those cases, in the unfortunate event of the spouse not being around, the world comes crashing down for them and they have to struggle to come to terms with the new reality.

The other end of the spectrum is instances of single earning women who have not been able to invest wisely and their passing away has left their immediate family with huge financial burden.

As on date, most women do not buy property themselves since real estate is still considering a patriarchal set up. This has to change. Till date, a lot many women end up having ULIPS (Investment linked insurance policies) that are really bad investment products and only burn a hole in your pocket without any benefits. They fall prey to bank sales staff who sell them these ULIPS to achieve their own sales targets.

Women need to build an emergency fund corpus for difficult times and they need to have adequate health insurance and term insurance for any rainy weather. They need to invest wisely to beat inflation (stocks, mutual funds etc) and not get restricted to Fixed Deposits, Post Office savings schemes and PPFs. National Pension Scheme (NPS) is also an option which most women don't get into but they need to evaluate for their old age pension income.

With women, Gold is a very popular item but what they often don't realise is buying gold jewellery is not profitable at all since making charge expenses are huge. Hence Gold investments in Sovereign Gold Bonds or Gold coins are better informed options to invest in gold.

Most importantly, women need to start investing very early on in life, they can start as early as their teens with guidance of parents and this has to be enhanced once they enter the workforce and start earning. Starting early has multiple advantages like low health insurance premiums, enhanced compounding of equity investments etc.

As a woman in her forties, I am sharing my experiences and would urge all women across all age groups to start your wealth journey now and have control over your finances and life, always be aware and be in charge.

## EveryDay Heroes - *Oishi Chatterjee*

We appreciate a lot of things in life, but what about the everyday heroes who make a valiant effort to help us? They are mostly given injustice, oppression (in ancient times) and not enough respect. I am not talking about the doctors, nurses or other celebrated professions who anyways are our heroes and contribute to our growth and wellbeing more visibly.

Our soldiers, fire fighters who protect and save us are assets to our society - and are also applauded by all of society.

But how often do we acknowledge and appreciate the contributions of our garbage cleaners, farmers, fire fighters ?. We dream to only become lawyers or doctors but what about our every day heroes who keep the city clean? Do they get the respect and dignity of their labour from us? The answer is possibly no.

My mind goes back to history as I soul search for the answer - Dignity of labour was it missing from our early days? During medieval times, people willingly became shudras to serve the higher castes. Even when they did this willingly, they were not respected and treated as second class citizens. They weren't allowed to study the mantras, hymns and the Sanskrit texts. This shows us the injustice we have inflicted.

Should we not now change this? Small gestures - a simple thank you for our every day heroes for their contribution to society is the easiest and smallest token of appreciation from us. Have you said a thank you and smiled at our everyday heroes today?

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## The Sydney Funnel Web Spider - *Daebi Chatterjee*

Scurrying around the land of Australia is the world's most venomous spider- The Sydney Funnel Web spider also known as Atrax Robustus. The Sydney funnel web is a large, black aggressive spider with long powerful fangs.

The Sydney funnel-web is glossy and dark coloured with medium -large sized body ranging upto 5 cm.

Funnel-web spiders live in moist burrows under rocks/logs/rot-crevices of trees and rarely in open environments like a sunlit lawn. Their burrows can be distinguished from other holes in the ground by the presence of their web; the spiders often line the entrance of the burrow with silk 'trip-lines'.

Sydney funnel webs are shy creatures and are known to run and hide from people. They leave the burrow in breeding season, once they reach maturity, which takes about five years. General symptoms of a spider bite can include sharp pain, nausea, vomiting. The deadlier bites (from Sydney funnel-web spiders) have caused thirteen documented deaths mostly from male species.

Due to their specific habitat conditions, funnel-web spiders face a higher risk of extinction due to their vulnerability to disturbance and habitat loss as a result of urbanisation.

## Bengali Saheb of Glastonbury

- Aparna Mondal

Life is an amazing journey. We, the ordinary travellers in this wonderful planet called Earth, come across so many people. Some are our close ones like our kith and kin who are destined to spend time with us for a greater part of our lives. There are others who too make their appearance when our paths cross. We usually do not care to remember them. But once in a while, someone, for certain reasons creates an everlasting impact on us and lives on in our memories.

This is one such story of one such man, an ordinary man who me and my husband chanced to meet in another land.

My husband, Arnob spent some years of his childhood in the United Kingdom when my in-laws were pursuing their specialisation in Medicine. He developed a special bond with the country and has fond memories of his childhood.

My cousin Tublu has also been living in the UK for the last ten years with his family, and we hence keep visiting the UK quite often. Tublu on many occasions has taken us to various places like Land's End, Robinhood's Bay, Moor Lands near the North Sea and Knowsley Safari park.

Together we also visited Fyling Hall School where Arnob once studied many decades ago. Then in the year 2015, we were travelling along the Devon coast by road. This time Tublu did not accompany us. We chose a package trip with a set schedule. We started off from London and once we reached a small town called Exeter, we were put up in a hotel there. From there we used to travel every morning to different places. We visited the Stone Henge, Dartmoor, Tavistok (a small English village), Bath and several other beautiful English villages. We also tasted the delicacies of those places in local restaurants and motels. We enjoyed the beauty of the English countryside. Some of those places are steeped in rich history.

On one of those days, we visited a town called Glastonbury. It is renowned for its medieval sites and rich mythology. The place is famous for its connection with King Arthur and his knights. There is an Abbey dating back to the 7th century. This is the Glastonbury Abbey which also houses the burial place of King Arthur. The Abbey is practically in ruins, spread over a vast area. Only

the stone walls stand as silent witnesses to a bygone era. We roamed around and learned a bit about the history of the place - and came to know that Glastonbury also hosts a five-day long festival of performing arts every year. In addition to contemporary music, the festival also hosts dance, comedy, theatre and circus. This festival attracts people from all over the world and finds a place in most tourism maps of England.

There was an Abbey store near the entrance to the Abbey. So while returning, we thought of buying some souvenirs of this interesting place. We entered the shop and picked up some curios, some homemade chocolates, some fudge, and a few gift items for friends back home. There was a tall lanky middle-aged bearded Britisher at the cash counter who packed all the items nicely and with care so that we could carry everything safely back home. While paying the bill I handed over my debit card to the gentleman. He took a good look at my card and asked "Aparna Mondal? Aapnara Bengali? (are you people Bengali?)" in impeccable Bengali. Both of us were gobsmacked at hearing a Britisher speaking fluent Bengali and that too in a remote place like Glastonbury - a place where we least expected something like this.

We were still in awe of him but asked him where he managed to learn such good Bengali. He said that he learnt the language when he was in Chhattisgarh. Chhattisgarh is not a Bengali speaking state, so I asked him in Bengali "Chhattisgarh! That means Madhya Pradesh." Pat came the reply "Na, tokhon Madhya Pradesh Chhattisgarh hoye geche jekhoni Aami thaktam Okhane" (Madhya Pradesh was already Chhattisgarh back then when I lived there). I further asked him how he learnt Bengali there, as Chhattisgarh is not a Bengali speaking state. He answered (in proper Bengali) that he came in contact with a group of Boishnob singers there and fell in love with the Boishnob Padaboli, culture and the songs. He needed to learn Bengali to sing the songs. He put in a lot of effort to learn it and loved doing so. He also added that he intends to visit Bangladesh too to learn the folk songs of that country. Completely astonished, I asked him again whether he was part of Iskon at any point in time, but he said no. He learnt the language solely from the group of bards but learnt it with a lot of dedication.

We would have loved to extend our conversation and know more about this interesting man, but we reluctantly had to leave as it was time for us to return and join our group for our next destination.

We were thoroughly impressed and completely floored - and carried a feeling of pride that somebody from this faraway land fell in love with our mother-tongue, and learnt it well. It touched us even more to see that he could identify us as Bengalis from our surnames and made it a point to strike up a conversation with us in proper Bengali. This clearly shows that he not only loved Bengali Boishnob songs but also harboured sweet memories and fondness for the Bengali people. He pronounced the word 'Boishnob' in a proper Bengali accent not as Vaishnav like many Indians would pronounce it.

We were so amazed and were in a trance that even with a camera, we forgot to click a photo of this man. I did not even ask him his name. But the signed cash memo of the goods that we bought indicated that his name was Anthony. What a coincidence! This man shares the same name with the famous Anthony Firingee of Bengal ('Firingee' meaning foreigner in Bengali) who was a folk poet of Portuguese origin! He too fell in love with Bengal, learnt the Bengali language and devotional songs in the early part of the 19th century. Anthony Firingee rose to fame for his own compositions ('Palagaan').

This Anthony from the small town of Glastonbury will probably never make his name known in Bengal but we will surely remember him for his love for Boishnob Padaboli and Bengalis - although it is unlikely that we will ever see him again.





## Marathon Diaries - Souvik Mukherjee

Someone rightly said, "Running is the greatest metaphor for life, because you get out of it what you put into it". When things are not going your way there is always this temptation to give up. However, the trick is to trick the mind to be resilient enough not to obey the body and its discomfort. Strong will power and determination can yield positive results even under acute adversities.

Having run in three different continents and multiple countries, here is my little bit on the addictive nature of marathon running.

My first notable marathon was my third, and the first out of Mumbai, in the land of Charminar and exotic Biryani, Hyderabad. It was August 2016 and I registered a timing of 4:04:54 which was below my Personal Best (PB) of 3:37:50 registered in Mumbai earlier that year. The intermittent elevation, which makes Hyderabad one of the most challenging in the Indian running circuit took its toll after a smooth half marathon mark under 1 hr: 45 min.

My first international marathon was at Amsterdam the same year, running on the track which hosted the 1928 Olympics and the route undertaken by some of the most esteemed marathon runners. Registered my personal best of 3 hr:29 min: 49 sec (my first sub-3:30 run) @ average speed of ~12.1 kmph beating my previous best by ~ 8 min. The final 5 odd km was a revelation where I was able to accelerate a bit finally enabling me to break the 3:30 barrier. A great experience running amongst a huge crowd of international runners through some of Amsterdam's iconic locations and a stretch through its countryside.

January 2017 saw me getting an opportunity to train with the elite group of runners from Africa on Marine drive in Mumbai before the Stanchart Mumbai marathon. The winner clocked 2:08:35 that year. What an experience it was, running with them. Each

movement of theirs is poetry, such is the rhythm and balance. I was able to run couple of km at sub 4 min per km with them (perhaps the best 2 km timing in my running career) and then had to slow down. A lifetime experience indeed.....

Personally, I registered a Personal Best (PB) of 3:27:50 in the Mumbai marathon and ranked amongst top 100 amongst ~5000 odd participants for full marathon and amongst top 10 in my age category - both within top 2 percentile.....first time broken the top 100/10 barrier in a major marathon.

May 2017, I attempted the Prague marathon after the gradual build up to the run being shattered by a freak accident the morning before, when I tripped on Prague's tram tracks during my practice run and fell badly injuring both my knees. Although I enjoyed running through Prague's imposing monuments and structures, gardens, its myriad gothic architecture, alongside Vltava river etc and inspired myself to complete the run, I completed the Prague Marathon in 3:44. Relatively slow timing compared to some of my earlier sub 3:30 runs. The knee injury, road elevation and cramps in the final stages did not help my cause. A memorable experience all in all. Great place to run around amongst the city landmarks. Lot of crowd support all through and good arrangements. The highlight of this run was completing the halfway mark (equivalent to a half marathon) in sub 1:35 which would rate to be my personal best for that mark.



Despite not healing completely from my fall at Prague, I attempted the Berlin marathon in September 2017. Incidentally Berlin Marathon is rated as the fastest in the international marathon circuit with the current men's WR being recorded here in 2014 by Dennis Kimetto of Kenya with a timing of 2:02:57 (my PB effort of 3:28 is at ~60th percentile of this), 6 such WRs recorded between 2003-2014 and 7 of the world's top 10 men's marathon timings registered in Berlin Marathon. That year saw the participation of the greats - Eliud Kipchoge, the then Olympic champion and rated as one of the greatest long-distance runners ever and Wilson Kipsang. Personally, I overcame one of the most enduring painful days of my life as I struggled to finish the BMW Berlin Marathon in 5 hrs:07 min - by far my slowest marathon and that too by a fair distance. It was a run dominated by strength my mind all through from the very first km with my suffering from pubis osteitis / abductor muscle tear making it extremely difficult and painful. I tried managing a decent speed of ~12 kph till the first hour mark and then it was almost all over with the pain becoming intolerable. However, I resisted any thought of giving up and challenged myself on completing the race. As someone said - "The only one who can tell you 'You can't' is you. And you don't have to listen."

And then I was off to Rome in April 2018, to get a taste of running a marathon amidst the ruins and epicentre of erstwhile majestic Roman Empire. While still recovering from 'abductor muscle tear/pubis osteitis' and therefore hoping to cover only a part of the 42.2 km distance, I targeted half the distance before backing out so as not to aggravate the injury. This provided me with adequate experience of running at yet another exotic venue so as to cherish the experience once I retire from running.....as my son wished me with saying "The reason God gave us feet is to Run for Joy."

After a few months rest, I was off again in December 2018 to run in Singapore where my love affair with

running started about 10 years back. It had been a slow and patient recovery from the injury (diagnosed as pubis osteitis, an acute abductor muscle tear) suffered the year before.

The Tata Mumbai Marathon 2019 was one of my slower runs with a timing of 4:03:41 @ 5:47 min/km (35 min off from my personal best of 3:28 in Mumbai two years back) as I was circumspect of not stretching the limits too hard. And then I was on my way to participate in my next international marathon after a span of 18+ months (last one being Berlin in Sep 2017) at the great city/place of love and romance, Paris, France. What better way to acknowledge its beauty than to run 42.2 km across the various iconic and architectural landmarks of the city indulging in its beauty. Registered a Personal Best of 3 hr: 23 min: 54 sec (@~12.4 kmph) at the Paris Marathon, an improvement of 4+ min over my previous PB. As someone rightly quoted "There is a magic in the misery; Ask any runner" and the magic perhaps is special when a runner overcomes adversities and still performs. It was quite an astonishing run amidst a cold chilly morning at Paris (started the race at 2 degree C). A great crowd support all through (best amongst all places I've run so far) made it even more special. Thoroughly surprised myself with the performance as I had almost given up hope of another sub 3:30 hr marathon run post the injury. Perhaps it was all in the Paris air and its beauty!

My first cross country Full Marathon, in September 2019, along the Sierra Nevada mountain range, Spain, amidst some beautiful setting was my 12th international Full Marathon. I was happy to register my PB of 3 hr:12 min:18 sec @ 4:34 per km (13:14 kmph) which was a 11+ min improvement over Paris Marathon timing registered earlier this year. That gave me an opportunity to qualify and shoot for the Boston marathon.

The Athens Marathon in November 2019, (they call it

the Authentic one) made me experience running on the historic 26-mile route where Marathon took birth in 490 B.C. when the Greek messenger, Pheidippides ran from Marathon town to Athens. I completed the Athens Marathon with a timing of 3:38:31 @ 11.6 kmph. Relatively a slower run to cope up with uphill gradient on most of the route from Marathon village to the Panathenaic stadium, Athens (which hosted the first modern Olympics in 1896) and heavy rains amidst a chilly day at Athens. This run was another example of how things can get increasingly difficult under adverse conditions and that's when the power of mind over body gets tested even more. There were spells in between (21-30 km mark with the gradient being punishing and rains lashing down) when I wanted to give up, with the body not willing to co-operate anymore and just settle for an extended 4 hr+ completion. But that's when the mind took over to inject its power and I was quite surprised by the tenacity the body showed after the 30 km mark just as an obedient student does in front of a strict unforgiving teacher. Such are the lessons a marathon run teaches you. As someone rightly said - "Your body will argue that there is no justifiable reason to continue. Your only recourse is to call on your spirit, which fortunately functions independent of logic".

And then came the Coronavirus pandemic and resulting lockdown. Like innumerable sporting events across the globe, several global marathons had been cancelled or postponed. A real disappointment for the running fraternity. These included the runs at Boston, New York, Chicago, London, Paris etc. My participation at Chicago Marathon on 11 Oct was deferred to 2021/22. Have been granted an automatic registration for the same. I was also scheduled to run the Jonkoping Marathon (a picturesque nature marathon) at Sweden on 14 Aug which was also deferred to Oct or if the situation got better.

The disappointment of not being able to run in Chicago on 11th Oct still looms heavily over me, till date!

Having naturally qualified based on timing criteria post injury recovery, which is always a challenging milestone to achieve I chaffed at the bit. To overcome the same and push the body to experience running another marathon, I registered for a back-to-back half and full virtual Chicago Marathons - criteria being both runs must be completed during the week of 5 - 11 Oct. I elected to run at our residential complex - The Address, Mumbai. Mumbai, however, was not too kind offering a hot, humid and sultry weather, characteristic of early October. Was glad to accomplish and complete the two runs, however, not with the best of timings.

My first international marathon post the Covid hiatus was the Sydney marathon in September 2022. What started as an enjoyable and well-paced run (was tracking a ~3:40 finish) graduated into a crippling affair with acute cramps and spasms setting in after the 24k mark. The next 18km phase was a painstaking affair of just pushing myself to somehow grind to the finish line where my son (who had started his undergrad classes at UNSW that fall) was waiting to receive his father.

As I recollect, so many things went through my mind - why would I want to punish my body, why endure the pain, what is in there for me in it after 1 ultra marathon, 17 full marathons, 50+ half marathons etc. But perhaps there is an element of spiritualism in enduring pain and challenge to achieve something, however trivial it may be, that gets us marathoners going. As someone said "Running means continual transcendence, and that is also the message of our inner life".

Registered a rather slow 4:02:45 @ 10.4 kmph at Mumbai Marathon 2023. While the mind wanted a sub-4 hr mark, customary body cramps in the last 15 k and a cold cum cough infection (which affects the breathing rhythm) stretched the timing. Completed the Half Marathon (21.1 km) mark in 1:44 and 25k mark in 2:04, comfortably tracking 3:30-3:40 timing, but then things went awry after that. However, it felt good to complete my 19th FM, 6th one in Mumbai.



After a forgettable run at Hyderabad in August, I travelled to the Scottish Highlands for my 21st Full Marathon on 1 October. The venue was the Loch Ness, spanning 23 miles (and we covered 26.2 miles alongside) between Inverness and Fort Augustus. Life of a marathoner carries this unique anxiety on how the race day play out. No degree of training, history, experience etc guarantees an outcome - such is the unpredictability of an endurance test. The body, the mind, the thoughts etc get into this severe entanglement of survival and enduring pain, that the world closes for a few hours before opening once one reaches the finishing line.



I completed the Baxter Loch Ness, Scotland marathon with a timing of 4:06:25 (@10.3 kmph). Another of those ~4 hr run which was characterised by a daunting 2nd half amidst the various climbs that Scottish highlands had to offer. I covered the first 21.1 km (half marathon mark) in 1 hr:41 min and then had to surrender to the challenge. Ranked 859 amidst ~6,000 runners and 122 in my age category which had ~1,200 participants.

The day started with getting drenched amidst dark overcast conditions while embarking the bus at

Inverness to go to the starting line. The highlands, mountains and Loch Ness were shrouded by clouds. After a 1 hr ride, the weather started to lighten up and eventually the run ended under a basking autumn Scottish sun. The course was characterised by exquisite beauty but offered significant undulations (more than 50 inclines and declines) all through which makes running difficult in terms of rhythm and tempo. More importantly such hill running takes its toll on the knees/legs compared to an even topography. Saw lot of seasoned runners getting impacted towards the final ~15 km which had more inclines compared to declines. My legs too felt the agony of pain and discomfort. The mind took over to steer the body through, albeit at a slow pace.

Not one of my greatest runs. However, every completed marathon is special, and I had now ticked my 21st one. As the run concluded, nothing resonated more strongly than the following: "Time ceases to exist. Pain fades, as does rational thought. The only thing on your mind is the beat of sneakers against pavement, the pulse of your heart, and the steady, even rhythm of your breaths coming in and out like meditation. And like meditation, what long-distance running trains is focus. Focus not on your goal, but on the journey itself."

July 2024, I embarked on another international marathon, this time at the gorgeous sun-kissed Gold Coast, Australia. My second full marathon in Australia after Sydney in 2022 and 24th FM overall. Ranked amongst the top ~35% overall and top ~20% in my age category. Like with few of my recent FMs, this ranks amongst one of my slower runs (4+ hr timing).

Was off the starting block rather smoothly pacing myself well @12 kmph for the first 12 odd kms, as the day broke here across the Pacific Ocean on a 14-degree, sun-kissed, cloudless golden day. One of the new elements that came into play, rather early in the run, was ~20-25 kmph strong sea breeze which started

hurting the speed, soaking up more energy with each pounding of the feet. Soon came a point where the body caved in to the demanding circumstances and developed severe cramps. Reached the half way mark with a timing of 1:53 but slowly needed to taper off further to fight the breeze and cramps. No excuses but such are the vagaries and uncertainties of a FM. All your preparations, experience etc almost gets eroded in the whiff of an air (in literary sense today). But despite the struggle, it was an experience to savour to run alongside the marauding waves of Pacific Ocean and some great crowd support with little children donning the running path with their hands stretched out to encourage touches from the runners.

As someone said "Running! If there's any activity happier, more exhilarating, more nourishing to the imagination, I can't think of what it might be. In running the mind flees with the body, the mysterious efflorescence of language seems to pulse in the brain, in rhythm with our feet and the swinging of our arms".

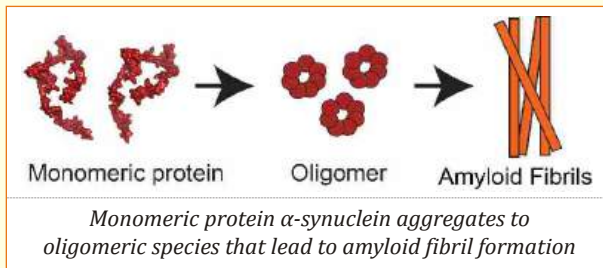
As I look forward and approach another marathon sometime in near future, nothing motivates me better than realising that "there have been years, months, days when I didn't know (or ever dreamt) if I can run a marathon.....now there is a lifetime knowing that I have run a few".



## Ageing and Neurodegenerative Disease: India-specific problem and progress

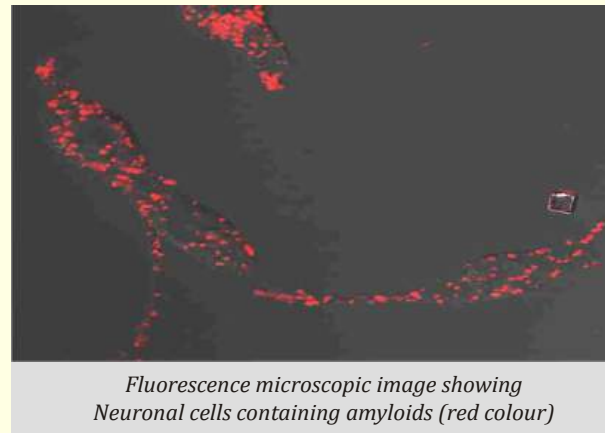
- Samir Maji

The rapid advancements in science and technology, along with significant economic growth, have revolutionized our healthcare system, increasing life expectancy to approximately 72 years. However, this progress brings a new challenge: managing healthcare for an ageing population. By 2050, it is predicted that our country will be among the significant ageing nations, with about 20% of the population over 60 years old. While our healthcare system is focused on managing various tropical and life-threatening diseases, parallelly, we also need to address and combat the rising incidence of age-related neurodegenerative disorders (NDs), such as Alzheimer's disease (AD) and Parkinson's disease (PD). Estimates suggest that millions of people worldwide suffer from PD and AD, with India contributing a prevalence of approximately 1.5 million cases of PD and 8 million cases of AD and related dementia.



Research has shown that specific proteins, which generally perform essential functions, misfold and aggregate into structures called amyloids in these diseases. This misfolding leads to a loss of normal protein function and the gain of toxic properties, such as inducing cell death. For instance, in PD, the protein  $\alpha$ -synuclein aggregates to form Lewy bodies, leading to the death of dopaminergic cells, which coordinate our body movement. Similarly, in AD, amyloid-beta ( $A\beta$ ) peptides or Tau protein aggregate, producing toxic

amyloid formations that cause cell death. Initially, mature amyloid aggregates were believed to be the primary culprits, but recent studies suggest that the early-stage protein oligomers are more harmful. These oligomers are challenging to target due to their transient nature and complex structure. There is also a concern that amyloids associated with AD and PD might be transmissible, possibly increasing the risk of developing the disease. This idea is supported by evidence that individuals who received hormone therapy from pituitary organ donors with AD later developed the disease.



The major challenge in addressing NDs is the lack of a clear understanding of their pathogenesis. These diseases are often multifactorial, with ageing and a weakening of molecular and cellular defence mechanisms playing a role. Most cases are sporadic or idiopathic, with environmental factors and lifestyle potentially contributing to the disease onset. Only about 10% of these diseases are familial, linked to genetic mutations that lead to early onset.

Unfortunately, individuals suffering from NDs and their caregivers face significant challenges due to the lack of a cure and the difficulty of early diagnosis. Symptoms often appear only in the late stages when much of the affected brain regions have already suffered neuronal death. Early symptoms, particularly in PD and AD, are

easily missed, complicating diagnosis and patient management. However, scientists worldwide, including India, are working on early detection methods.

For example, amplifying ultra-low concentrations of misfolded and aggregated proteins circulating in blood or cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) has shown promise as an indicator of PD and AD. Despite intensive research, there is still no complete cure, and current medications only provide symptomatic relief. Treatments such as deep brain stimulation for PD can improve quality of life. New drugs for AD, including an immuno-therapeutic drug recently approved by the FDA, offer some hope by potentially slowing the disease progression.

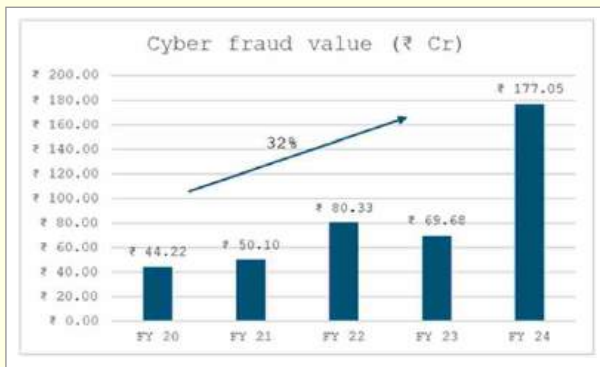
As a nation, we should take pride in our historical knowledge of neurodegenerative diseases, as many of them were well described in our ancient medical texts. For example, PD (Kampa vata) was well documented in Charaka Samhita (~300 BC) long before British surgeon James Parkinson (1817) described it. Traditional Indian treatments with velvet beans (*Mucuna pruriens*), which contain levodopa, are the basis for a multi-billion-dollar symptomatic drug for PD. India is making significant efforts to combat these diseases, with centers and institutes nationwide actively engaged in genetic analysis, stem cell research, and the development of new detection and assistive technologies. Along similar lines, my research group focuses on understanding PD at the cellular and molecular levels. We have recently discovered a novel mechanism by which  $\alpha$ -synuclein aggregation occurs, involving the formation of droplet-like structures that eventually convert into amyloid fibrils. This finding offers hope for a better understanding of the disease mechanism and the development of new drug targets. Additionally, IIT Bombay has recently established the Sunita Sanghi Centre for Aging and Neurodegenerative Disease (SCAN), dedicated to studying AD, PD, and Frontotemporal Dementia (FTD). The centre's primary mission is "D3" (Data, Device, and Detection), which aims to pioneer new diagnostic tools, such as the potential development of the first blood test for PD.



## Be Vigilant Against Latest Cyber Frauds!

- Arnab Dutta

Cyber fraud cases are on the rise, with fraudsters employing increasingly innovative methods to deceive the public. Even seasoned professionals from financial services and the legal sector have become recent victims. The Minister of State for Finance, Mr. Pankaj Chaudhary, reported in a written reply to Parliament in August that the money lost due to cyber fraud has more than doubled from ₹ 69.68 crore in FY23 to ₹ 177.05 crore in FY24. The Compounded Annual Growth Rate (CAGR) over the last five fiscal years has been 32%.



Given this alarming trend, it is crucial not only to protect personal confidential data such as Aadhaar/PAN Card details, passwords, OTPs, and user IDs but also to be vigilant about the channels and sources from which we receive or share information. Fraudsters often impersonate bank employees, law enforcement officers, or even people we know and trust. To safeguard ourselves, it's important to understand the latest deceptive machinations used by fraudsters and the ways in which we can tackle them.

**Modus Operandi of Cyber Fraudsters & Ways to Tackle Social Engineering:** Fraudsters may pose as someone known to you, such as a spouse, sibling,

parent, business partner, or colleague, or even as a reputable organization offering lucrative opportunities. They may manipulate you into sharing confidential information and banking credentials.

Another tactic involves creating a sense of urgency by showing distress or trauma of someone known to you and requesting immediate transfer of money. For example, you might receive an email urging you to make a vendor payment from a fraudster posing as your boss, or a relative asking for money for an urgent medical procedure.

Such scams, however, have evolved from simple emails to more sophisticated methods, including the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI). We will discuss these advanced techniques in the going ahead in the article.

**Spoofing:** In spoofing, fraudsters impersonate trusted individuals or institutions, sometimes using algorithms for this purpose. Their intent is to steal personal information, and confidential data, request money, or infect devices with malware. Always be cautious when responding to emails; slight changes in spelling or character substitutions (e.g., 'l' instead of 'I') can indicate impersonation. For example, an email address like xyz@lway.com might be altered to xyz@lway.com.

**Deepfake:** Deepfake technology uses AI to create realistic but fake videos and audio. For example, you might have come across videos of Mr. Ashishkumar Chauhan, NSE's MD and CEO, urging you to join WhatsApp channels for trading tips. This content is generated using AI to superimpose fake voices and movements over real footage/images. Apart from such videos, deepfakes also use AI generated speech for impersonation. For instance, you could receive a call from someone pretending to be your child, requesting money as he has met with an accident and calling from a Samaritan's phone, while it is a fraudster using AI-generated voice for this conversation.

**Fake Mobile Apps/APKs:** Fraudsters are increasingly using fake mobile applications that mimic legitimate banking apps to steal confidential information. APK stands for Android Application Package, which is the utility to distribute and install mobile apps. Typically, these fraudsters encourage you to download it under the guise of addressing your pending credit card or loan queries or urging you to redeem loyalty points quickly. Once you install these fake apps, they would ask you to divulge confidential information. These apps might be distributed via WhatsApp or SMS, often claiming to address pending queries or offer quick rewards.

**Digital Arrests:** A new social engineering scam involves fraudsters posing as law enforcement officers who claim you are under investigation for illegal activities. You might receive a video call over WhatsApp or a phone call from an unknown number. The fraudster then threatens you with dire consequences and demands money to resolve the situation. Recent reports include a case where a retired army major general was deceived into transferring Rs. 2 crore to the scammers.

**Trading / Crypto Scam:** Fraudsters exploit the lure of high returns to attract victims to fake trading or cryptocurrency investment schemes. You may encounter advertisements or messages promoting investment opportunities through WhatsApp or Telegram groups. Once you join such groups, you will be told to invest money through a fake investment website or mobile app. You might also be allowed to withdraw a small amount of your investment initially. These schemes often start with small investments and show high returns but eventually lead to significant losses when the scammers disappear.

**10 Tips to Tackle Cyber fraud:** To protect yourself from scams like the trading/crypto fraud described above, and other forms of cyber fraud, here are some quick tips.

To protect yourself from scams like the trading / crypto fraud described above, and other forms of cyber fraud, here are some quick tips

- Never share confidential personal information like Aadhaar / PAN Card details, passwords, OTP, MPIN of mobile banking apps and login Ids.
- Be wary of unexpected communications and verify the sender's authenticity.
- Check email addresses and URLs for subtle alterations.
- Do not answer calls or video calls from unknown numbers.
- Always download apps from trusted sources like the Google Play Store or Apple App Store.
- Steer clear of unknown investment groups and always invest through SEBI-approved brokers
- Avoid using unsecured Wi-Fi, public or shared networks
- Do not use public charging points to charge your mobile phones or tablets
- Update your devices with latest operating systems and security patches
- Use reliable antivirus software on your devices and update regularly

#### How to Report a Fraud?

If you suspect you have fallen victim to a scam or want to report a fraudulent activity, use the following resources:

- **National Cybercrime Reporting Portal:** [www.cybercrime.gov.in](http://www.cybercrime.gov.in)
- **National Cybercrime Helpline:** 1930
- **Bank Reporting Channels:** Report directly to your bank through their official website or branch.
- **Cyber Police Stations:** Dedicated stations in various states for reporting cybercrimes.
- **Maharashtra Police Helpline:** 100
- **Chakshu** - Report Suspected Fraud Communication: [sancharsaathi.gov.in/sfc/](http://sancharsaathi.gov.in/sfc/)

Even if you consider yourself tech-savvy or educated enough not to fall for these tricks, remember that the only way to avoid becoming a cyber fraud victim is to always remain VIGILANT!

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## क्यों, पता नहीं!

*Kaushal Srivastava*

वहाँ बैठा, कल मैं,

सागर से दूर जाते, झुरमुटों से झांकते अस्ताचलगामी सूरज को  
निश्छल मनोभाव से, अपलक निहार रहा था  
ऐसा लग रहा था जैसे आकाश के हल्के पीले आँगन में, बिखरे चंपई फूलों की उदासी  
एवं सूरज के मलिन होते किरणों की, सागर में तैरती और टूटती परछाईं,  
मानो कुछ कहने को आतुर, मेरे अंतर्मन को सहलाती अपनी और खींच रही थी गोधूली की इस  
शुभ बेला में, प्रकृति के इस प्रति पल बदलते अद्भुत रूप का रसपान करता यूँ तो मैं अकेला  
था, पर अकेलेपन का कोई अहसास नहीं

ऐसा लग रहा था जैसे हल्के पीले आकाश के पश्चिमी छोड़ पर, किसी ने लाल छीटे वाली  
पीले रंग का बिछौना बिछा दिया हो, और उसपर चम्पई रंग के फूलों को बिखेर दिया हो  
इसके पहले की, मैं रंगों के इस इंद्रजाल को जी भरके देखता और आँखों में भरता  
जाने कौन, इस हल्की पीली चादर को उदास फूलों के साथ ही समेटने लगा था

ऐसे में प्रेमातुर हो अनंत को छूती चूमती, संगम पथ पर लहराती उफनती थरथराती  
तरुणी जलनिधि, मानो हवा के गर्म झोंको को छूकर धीरे धीरे पिघल रही थी जिसे देख रवि-  
रश्मि ने भी अपना तेज, धीरे धीरे अपने कवच में बंद करना शुरू कर दिया था पंछियों का  
रुक रुक कर चहचहाना, अब उनके घोंसलों में लौटने का इशारा कर रहे थे ऐसा लग रहा था  
मानो, प्रकृति अपनी संध्या रानी को सजाने शृंगार कक्ष में जा रही हो संध्या रानी के स्वागत में,  
सागर के लहरों को छूकर लौटती मस्त हवाएं भी सब तरफ़ मादक खुशबू फैलकसर,  
वातावरण को और भी मनमोहक बना रही थी झूमती लहरों के संग, हवाओं ने मानो प्रणय  
गीत छेड़कर कानों में मिश्री घोलने लगी थी

देखते देखते अरुण, हम सबसे दूर अस्ताचल में शून्य हो चुका था,  
साँवली रात की श्याम सलोनी चादर पसरकर, चारों ओर अपना जादू फैला चुकी थी

आत्मविस्मृत हो, मैं दिवास्वप्न की डोर थामे, कल्पनाओं की दुनिया में खोने लगा था  
कभी साँसों की गर्मी से मदहोश होती आँखें, तो कभी फूलों के कोमल स्पर्श की चुभन  
इसी प्रतीति के साथ कल्पनाओं के सागर में डूबते पैरते, जाने कब भोर हो गई

घुँथलके में, जैसे किसी ने सिलवटें भरी साँवली चादर को समेटना शुरू कर दिया था  
पूरब में क्षितिज के सुंदर कपोल, सिंदूरी रंग लेकर एक बार फिर से दमकने लगी थी  
आकाश के लाल कपोल को छूते सागर की लहरों में, जैसे अनगिनत लाल डोरे तैरने लगे थे  
ऐसा लग रहा था, जैसे चंचल लहरों ने भी आकाश की थोड़ी लाली चुरा ली हो  
उषा किरणों को बिखेरती उदित हो रहे सूरज के साथ, सिंदूरी आकाश ऐसा लग रहा था  
मानो माथे पे लाल बिंदी लगाये, किसी स्वप्न सुंदरी तरुणी ने अंगड़ाई ली हो  
प्रकृति के इस आभा को आँखों में उतारता सोच रहा था, काश! ये क्षण यहीं रुक जाता

प्रकृति के इस पल पल निखरते रूप को देख, सपनों का भँवर धीरे धीरे शांत होने लगा था  
कल की कुछ यादें धीरे धीरे पिघलकर, आँखों को नम कर रही थी,

भारी मन और भरी आँखें, जाने किसे ढूँढ़ रही थी,  
कोई थी जो मुस्कुराकर, यवनिका के पीछे हमेशा के लिए गुम हो गयी थी,

क्यों, पता नहीं!!!!



এই আজকের সমাজে কি থিয়েটারের কোন দরকার আছে ! – Jayanta Chattopadhyay

এই প্রশ্নটা করার কি খুব দরকার আছে এখন ! এই বিতর্কে কি আজকালকার ব্যস্ত মানুষ যোগদান করবেন, যখন কারুর কাছেই সময় নেই এইসব non - materialistic কথা শোনার বা তা নিয়ে আলোচনা করার ! আমি জানি না... কিন্তু আজকের এই ভয়ংকর দ্রুত দুনিয়াটাকে দেখে মাঝে মাঝে আমার খুব ভয় হয় – আমরা, মানে মানুষ সমাজ ঠিক পথে এগোচ্ছি তো ! সবই কেমন যেন এক বিপদজনক গতিতে ছুটে চলেছে। তা শেয়ার বাজারই হোক বা বৈজ্ঞানিক অনুসন্ধান । কারুর যেন অপেক্ষা করার সময় নেই – একটু দাঁড়িয়ে ভাবার সময় নেই – as if, 'there is notomorrow ' ... বৈজ্ঞানিক আবিষ্কার হয়েই চলেছে – এই যেমন ধরুন না chat-gpt - একটা আবিষ্কার হয়ে গেল – কিন্তু কেন হল এই আবিষ্কার ! কার সুবিধার্থে এই আবিষ্কার ! বা এই আবিষ্কার না হলে কি ক্ষতি হতো ! এই আবিষ্কার আজকের এই সমাজে, এই পৃথিবীতে কি কি সর্বনাশ নিয়ে আসছে – কেউ কি ভাবে ! না ভাবার সময় আছে কারুর ! সবাই তো ছুটে চলেছে চার্লি চ্যাপলিনের বিখ্যাত ছবি “মডার্ন টাইমস” এর সেই প্রথম দৃশ্যের মতো, নিজস্ব তাগিদে । যখন স্টীম ইঞ্জিন আবিষ্কার হল, তখন প্রায় এক শতাব্দী ধরে সমগ্র মানুষজাতি সেই আবিষ্কারের কেমন সুফল ভোগ করল বলুন – যখন প্রথম বিদ্যুৎ আবিষ্কার হল, ভাবুন তো কেমন একটা সম্ভাবনা তৈরি হয়েছিল এই পৃথিবীতে – যখন প্রথম ইনকাপোসেন্ট ল্যাম্প আবিষ্কার হল – প্রচুর মানুষের কাছে কাজের সময়টা হঠাৎ দ্বিগুণ হয়ে গেল – সুইচ টিপলেই দিন , অন্ধকার বলে কিছুই রইল না। সব আবিষ্কার থেকেই আপামর জনগণ পেতে থাকলো এক উন্নত জীবনের সম্ভাবনা – কিছুটা স্বাচ্ছন্দ্যের আশা । দ্বিতীয় বিশ্ব যুদ্ধের পর থেকে মানুষের মধ্যে আয়ের ব্যবধান কমতে থাকলো ১৯৯০ পর্যন্ত - দ্বিতীয় বিশ্ব যুদ্ধের পর মানুষ মনে করেছিল যুদ্ধ মানবজাতির এক কলঙ্ক – মানুষ আর যুদ্ধ চায় না । আর বুঝি যুদ্ধ হবে না । কিন্তু একবিংশ শতাব্দীতে আসার পর সব কেমন যেন উল্টোপাল্টা হয়ে গেল।

ধনবন্টনের অসামঞ্জস্যতা ক্রমে ক্রমে এক নগ্ন রূপ নিতে আরম্ভ করলো – কিছু মানুষ তার দৈনন্দিন বেঁচে থাকার তাগিদে দিনরাত এক করে দিচ্ছে – তার মানুষ হিসাবে এই পৃথিবীতে বেঁচে থাকাটাই একটা প্রহসন । কিন্তু অন্যদিকে কিছু মুষ্টিমেয় মানুষ টাকার পাহাড়ে তলিয়ে যাচ্ছে সত্যজিত রায়ের “নায়ক” সিনেমার সেই শেষ দৃশ্যের মতো । এর ফল স্বরূপ তৈরি হচ্ছে এক চরম নৈরাশ্য । এরজন্য কি মানুষ নিজেই দায়ী । “After The Fall “ নাটকে আর্থার মিলার কি এই কথাই বলতে চেয়েছেন – কোন সমাজ ব্যবস্থা নয়, কোন রাজনৈতিক ধ্যান ধারণা নয়, কোন অর্থনৈতিক অবস্থান নয় , মানুষের অবশ্যস্বার্থী বেদনা-বিশৃঙ্খলার জন্য ব্রষ্ট-চরিত্র মানুষের অন্তর্নিহিত পাপ ও অন্যায়ই দায়ী । এই নাটকে মিলার ব্যক্ত করছেন, মানুষের এই করুণ অবস্থার জন্য মানুষের প্রকৃতিই আসলে দায়ী । আজকে কি সেই নাটকের প্রতিফলন আমরা দেখতে পাচ্ছি না আমাদের এই সমাজে – মানুষের লাগাম ছাড়া লোভই কি নিয়ে যাচ্ছে না মানুষকে তার সেই ভয়ংকর পরিণতির উদ্দেশ্যে , যেখানে জীবনের লাগাম ছাড়া গতিই হতে পারে তার ধ্বংসের কারণ ।

ফল স্বরূপ, আমাদের চারপাশে ঘটে চলেছে বিভিন্ন সামাজিক সমস্যা, নারী নির্যাতন, দাম্পত্য কলহ, অত্যাধিক মাদক দ্রব্যের সেবন, দুর্নীতি, চরম একাকীত্ব, সাংবাদিকতার অসততা ইত্যাদি । এই প্রসঙ্গে মনে পড়ে ইবসেনের কথা । যিনি উনিশ শতকের শেষের দিকে, এই সব সমস্যার কথা বললেন তার বিভিন্ন নাটকে মধ্যে দিয়ে – a Doll's house, Ghosts, Hedda Gabler ইত্যাদি নাটকের ডেউ শুধু নরওয়েতে না থেমে আছড়ে পড়ল সমগ্র ইউরোপে – এমনকি অনেক পরে আমাদের বাংলাদেশেও । সাথে যোগ দিলেন Oscar Wild, Barnard Shaw, Emil o'jiye, Ujin Briya র মতো একদল নাট্যকার । Shakespeare এর প্রায় দু'শো বছর পর নাট্য জগতে এক বিবর্তনের ডেউ আছড়ে পড়ল । ড্রাইংরুম ফারসের বাইরে বেরিয়ে এঁরা বললেন সমাজের বিভিন্ন সমস্যার কথা, বেদনা বিদীর্ণ মানুষের কথা । এখানে আর এক নাট্যকারের কথা না বললেই নয় – বাঙালির খুব প্রিয় চেখভ এর *দ্য চেরী অর্চার্ড*, *ম্যারাজ প্রোপোজাল*, *দ্য থ্রি সিস্টার্স* এর কথা না বললেই নয় – রাশিয়াতে যখন জারতন্ত্রের বিপুল বিস্তার তখন রাজনীতির কথা না বলেও গ্রামের পশ্চিম মানুষের হতাশার কথা, বেদনার কথা , নিষ্ক্রিয়তার কথা, অনীহার কথা, ক্লান্তির কথা, অবসাদের কথা কি সাধারণ ভাবেই বলে গেলেন তার নাটকে।

আজকের সমাজ supposed to be very well connected – ফেসবুক, টুইটার ইত্যাদি সব স্যেশাল মিডিয়ার বদান্যতায়। যারা নাকি এক সময় বিনি পয়সায় সারা পৃথিবীর মানুষকে বন্ধুত্বের বন্ধনে বাঁধার এক মহান সংকল্পের ব্রত নিয়ে ছিল । কিন্তু যা ফেক, তা সে যতই ফেসবুক হোক না কেন, একদিন তার আসল রূপ মানুষ দেখতে পাবেই। একদিন তাদের বাণিজ্যিক দিকটা কদর্যভাবে প্রকাশ পেল – তারা মানুষকে ব্যবহার করল শুধুমাত্র Data Collection এর একটা প্রধান source হিসাবে – খুলে গেল Economics এর এক নতুন দিক – Behavioural Economics -যা আঘাত করল Classical Economics বিসমিল্লায় , মানুষের Economic Decision কখনোই rational নয় , তা প্রভাবিত হয় বিভিন্ন Biasness এর দ্বারা । আর সেই Biasness তৈরি করেছে ওই স্যেশাল মিডিয়া । এর প্রভাব এখন এতো প্রবল যে মানুষের কি আছে এর থেকে নিষ্কৃতি ! “পৃথিবীর মানুষের বন্ধুত্বের বন্ধনে” জড়াতে গিয়ে কি সে হারিয়ে ফেলল না তার পাশের বাড়ির বন্ধুটিকে, তার নিজের ভাই কে ? মানুষ কি ভীষণভাবে একা হয়ে পড়ছে না ? মানসিক ডিপ্রেসন কি তাকে আট্টেপুটে জড়িয়ে ফেলছে না ? একটি পরিসংখ্যান বলছে, একবিংশ শতাব্দীর সবথেকে wide spread disease হতে চলেছে “একাকীত্ব” । এই প্রসঙ্গে মনে আসে August Strindberg এর কথা – উনবিংশ শতাব্দীর শেষের দিকে এবং বিংশ শতাব্দীর একদম গোড়ায় তাঁর অধিকাংশ নাট্যচরিত্রগুলি আধুনিক নিঃসঙ্গ মানুষের প্রতিনিধি – সম্ভবত ইনি প্রথম আধুনিক নাট্যকার যিনি মানুষের অচেতন এবং অবচেতন মনকে করলেন তাঁর নাটকের মুখ্য বিষয়বস্তু। তাঁর শেষের দিকের নাটকগুলি “দ্য রোড টু দামাস্কাস”, “এ ড্রিম প্লে” ইত্যাদি আর কোন বিশেষ স্থান বা কালের বাঁধনে বাঁধা পড়ল না – নাটকের ফর্মে এল এক fluidity – তাঁর নাটকে ট্রাজেডি ও কমেডি একেবারে মিলেমিশে একাকার হয়ে গেল। তাই বোধহয় নাটকগুলি হয়ে উঠল বড় ভীষণভাবে কমিক বা Comically tragedy ।

এখানে August Strindberg এর দ্বারা প্রভাবিত আর এক নাট্যকরের কথা না উল্লেখ করে পারছি না , Pirandello – ইতালীয় এই নাট্যকার যদিও প্রথমদিকে ফ্যাসিস্ট মুসলিনীর পৃষ্ঠপোষকতায় লালিত ছিলেন ,কিন্তু ,পরবর্তীকালে তার থেকে বেরিয়ে এসে সৃষ্টি করেছেন কিছু অনবদ্য নাটক । ইনিই মনে হয় আধুনিক নাট্য জগতে প্রথম যিনি রোম্যান্টিকতার বাইরে বেরিয়ে মননশীল নাটক সৃষ্টি করলেন – মানুষকে বারবার প্রশ্ন করলেন কেন তাদের এই দুঃখ , কিসের যন্ত্রনা , সরাসরি কোন উত্তর না দিলেও, নিরলসভাবে মানুষকে ভাবতে বাধ্য করলেন মানুষের জীবনের এই জমাট অন্ধকার থেকে বাইরে যাওয়া সম্ভব নয়। এই জন্যই বোধহয় অনেকেই তাঁর নাটককে absurd নাটকের সাথে গুলিয়ে ফেলেন। “Sixcharacters in search of an author” নাটকের উল্লেখ এখানে অবশ্যই প্রয়োজন বলে মনে হয়।

কিন্তু এতদিন পর্যন্ত নাট্যচর্চা চলছিল সেই আদি সত্যের ওপর ভিত্তি করেই যার ভিত্তি প্রস্তর স্থাপন করেছিলেন আরিস্টটল তার “পয়েটিকস” বইতে – যাকে বলা হয় নাটকের ওপর লেখা প্রথম তাত্ত্বিক বই । উনি আমাদের বললেন নিয়তির কথা , ফ্যেটালিসিম এর কথা , পৃথিবীর ও মানুষের এক চরম পরিণতি রয়েছে আর যে সেই pre- determined structure কে challenge করবে তারই হবে ট্রাজিক পতন। একটা হেজেমনি সব সময়ই তার প্রভাব বিস্তার করার চেষ্টা করে চলেছে বিভিন্ন সময়ে – সমস্ত কিছুকেই সে একটা অর্ডারে বাঁধতে চায় – যাতে তার সুবিধা হয় সমস্ত কিছুকে নিয়ন্ত্রণ করার । Bertolt Brecht আঘাত হানলেন এই ভিত্তিটার ওপর – ফ্যেটালিসিম এর তত্ত্বকে ফুৎকারে উড়িয়ে দিয়ে সৃষ্টি করলেন এক অন্য নাট্যদর্শ । Brecht বলতে চেষ্টা করলেন মানুষই পারে তার সাম্প্রতিক পরিস্থিতিকে পাল্টে ফেলতে , আর তার থিয়েটার যোগাবে সেই ভাবনা । চূড়ান্ত ভাবে মার্ক্সের ভাববাদে প্রভাবিত একজন নাট্যকার, যিনি বললেন আমার নাটকের দর্শক হবে ফুটবল এর দর্শকের মতো – যে খেলার সমস্ত নিয়ম মেনেই দেখতে আসে খেলা – প্রতিটি বল সে অনুধাবন করে নিজের মনে বিশ্লেষণ করে, পাস টা ডান দিকে না দিয়ে বাঁ দিকে বাড়ালে কি বেশি ভাল হতো। তার নাটকের অভিনেতাদের তিনি বললেন, দর্শক জানে কি ঘটে চলেছে তাই সেটার উপস্থাপনায় বেশি মনোযোগ না দিয়ে কি প্রক্রিয়ায় ঘটনাটা ঘটছে সেটার দিকে দর্শকের দৃষ্টি আকর্ষণ কর , তবেই তার দর্শক ভাববে কিভাবে তার সাম্প্রতিক পরিস্থিতিকে সে পাল্টাতে পারবে, যখন সে ফিরে যাবে নাট্যশালার বাইরের, real world এ । উনি বললেন the theatre hitherto interpreted the world, the point is to change it – Change the world, it needs it ! তার নাটকের ভাষা অত্যন্ত সহজ, সরল – কিন্তু সত্যকে নগ্ন ভাবে প্রকাশে যথার্থ ভাবে সমর্থ। তার নিজের কথায় – the very simplest words are enough ----- that you'll go down, if you don't stand up for yourself । Brecht এর নাটক মানুষকে দাঁড় করিয়ে দিল absolute reality র সামনে – আর ভাবতে উদ্বুদ্ধ করল কি করে এই অবস্থার পরিবর্তন করা যায় । ওনার কয়েকটি নাটক এখানে উল্লেখ না করে পারছি না – লাইফ অফ গ্যালিলিও, মাদার কারেজ এণ্ড হার চিলড্রেন , দ্য থ্রি পেনি অপেরা , দ্য ককেশিয়ান চক সার্কল ইত্যাদি । এখানে রবীন্দ্রনাথের রক্তকরবীর উল্লেখ হয়তো অপ্রাসঙ্গিক হবে না – ওই massive সিস্টেম কে, যেটা সমস্ত দেশকে শোষণ করে তাল তাল

সোনা আহরণ করে চলেছে, নন্দিনী যে ভাবে আঘাত করল আর আনলো এক পরিবর্তন, তা কি আজও খুব প্রাসঙ্গিক নয় ! আমাদের দেশে অনেক নাট্যকরের মধ্যে কয়েকটি নাম উল্লেখ না করলে খুবই অন্যায হবে – তাঁরা হলেন উৎপল দত্ত , অজিতেশ বন্দোপাধ্যায়, রুদ্রপ্রসাদ সেনগুপ্ত, সৌমিত্র চট্টোপাধ্যায় এবং আর আগে বিজন ভট্টাচার্য্য, শিশির ভাদুড়ি, গিরিশ ঘোষ প্রমুখ । আর একজনের নাম বিশেষ ভাবে উল্লেখ্য, বাদল সরকার – ফ্রি থিয়েটার এর জনক – শুধু বিষয় বস্তুর উপর ভিত্তি করে, উৎপল দত্তের মতো সরাসরি রাজনীতির কথা না বলেও কিভাবে সাধারণ মানুষের কথা বলা যায় তার এক শ্রেষ্ঠ নিদর্শন “ভোমা” নাটকটি।

এই এতক্ষণ যা আলোচনা হচ্ছিল তার মূলে কিন্তু ছিল একটা সত্যকে খোঁজার চেষ্টা, ভাবনা, গভীরভাবে ভাবনা যা কিনা আমাদের সাহায্য করবে আমাদের বর্তমান পরিস্থিতির পরিবর্তন করতে – কিন্তু আমার মনে হচ্ছে কোথায় যেন সেই সত্যকে খোঁজার চিন্তায় একটা ভাঁটার টান এসেছে – আমরা যেন ভেসে চলেছি আফিমের ধোঁয়ার মধ্যে দিয়ে, যাকে আজকাল বলা হচ্ছে dopamine age – নেশাগ্রস্তের মতো – ডাঃ ড্যানিয়েল ক্যানেম্যানের ভাষায় Thinking Fast এর প্ররোচনা – কারণ slow thinking takes pain – অনেক বেশি ক্যালরি খরচা লাগে তাতে । আসুন deep thinking এর চেষ্টা করা যাক – আর নাটক আমাদের সাহায্য করবে, Brecht এর কথায় : ‘জীবনের যে মাল মশলা নিয়ে আমরা কাজ করি তার মধ্যে অনেক কিছুর ব্যাখ্যা পাওয়া যায় না – কিন্তু ধী ও মনন কাজে লাগালে ব্যাখ্যা পাওয়া যেতে পারে – বুদ্ধি মানুষের নিজস্ব সম্পদ , এর সম্ভাবনা অপরিমীম । আমাদের মনে রাখা দরকার যে আমাদের প্রতিটি পদক্ষেপই বুদ্ধি ও মনন দ্বারা পরিচালিত, স্বতঃস্ফূর্তির তাৎক্ষণিক আবেগের বশবর্তী (Thinking Fast) কাজ বলে কিছু নেই’ । ভাল নাটক দেখুন ও ভাবুন – নাটক আজও আমাদের সমাজে সমান ভাবে প্রযোজ্য যা কিনা ছিল বিগত শতাব্দীতেও । এই আমার দৃঢ় বিশ্বাস । ভাল থাকবেন ।



## Marvels of Indian Culture: Temples and places of worship - Mudita Bajpai

*"In India, we celebrate the commonality of major differences; we are a land of belonging rather than of blood." - Shashi Tharoor*

An awe-inspiring country that is India, it boasts of one of the most extensive cultures, encompassing an incredible array of songs, music, dance, theater, folk traditions, performing arts, rituals, paintings, and literary works that can truly be celebrated. These can very well be referred as the 'Intangible Cultural Heritage' (ICH) of humanity.

In the early days of Hinduism, the construction of temples was a rare occurrence. The sacred texts of Hinduism reflect this, depicting ancient agrarian communities where the essence of Sanatana Dharma flourished, yet permanent edifices were seldom erected. Instead, Yagnas and various rituals took place outdoors or within makeshift shelters. This practice is documented in the Puranas.

This may come as a surprise to contemporary Indians, but during that period, there were no Hindu temples. When the temples came into existence, they have withstood the tests of time. At the heart of the appeal of these temples lies the elaborate artistry and skilled craftsmanship that embellishes their walls, columns, and ceilings. The temples found throughout the country are not just sites for worship; they also represent the vibrant artistic heritage of India.

Not only temples India is host so many faiths and religions, and such places of worship exist that just bring peace to our minds and joy to our soul. Let's delve into these remarkable locations and uncover the fascinating tales they hold, stories that will ignite our imagination and captivate our hearts.

### **Bhagwant Mandir at Barshi, Solapur Maharashtra**

The idol of Vishnu, sculpted from striking black shaligram stone, showcases a conch, a discus, and a

mace. Beneath Vishnu's feet lies the statue of Raja Ambrish. Legends tell of a Shivling resting on Vishnu's forehead and the footprint of Bhrigu Rishi imprinted on his chest. It is said that Lakshmi grew discontent with Vishnu for making space for others while neglecting her. To appease her, Vishnu invited her to ride on his shoulders. Remarkably, the back of the idol features Lakshmi's face, visible in a mirror positioned behind it! The temple is accessible from all four directions, with the main structure built of stone, while the forecourt impressively showcases wooden craftsmanship. A place that symbolizes the unity of Shiv and Vishnu and teaches us that we all after all are one.



### **Bathu ki Ladi Temple, Jawali, Kangra Himachal Pradesh**

The Bathu temples, referred to locally as Bathu ki ladi, constitute a group of temples situated in the Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh, India. The principal temple is dedicated to the deities Parvati and Lord Shiva. In the early 1970s, these temples were submerged due to the creation of the Maharana Pratap Sagar reservoir by the Pong dam. As a result, they can only be visited from May to June when the water level recedes. Access to the temples is possible via boat from

Dhameta and Nagrota Surian, as well as by road from Jawali. Several small villages in proximity to the temple site include Guglara, Sugnara, Harsar, Jarot, Bajera, Katnor, Khabal, Ludret, and Bhial.



### **Gurdwara Hemkund Sahib Chamoli district, Uttarakhand.**

This text pertains to Guru Gobind Singh (1666–1708), the tenth Sikh Guru, and is referenced in the Dasam Granth. The location features a glacial lake encircled by seven mountain peaks, each crowned with a Nishan Sahib on its cliffs. According to the Survey of India, it is situated in the Garhwal Himalaya at an altitude of 4,572 meters (15,000 feet). Access to this site is via Govindghat, located along the Rishikesh-Badrinath highway, with the nearest town being Joshimath. The lake at Hemkund is positioned at an elevation of approximately 15,000 feet.



### Nagina Masjid, Agra Uttar Pradesh

While the world flocks to Agra to see Taj Mahal in all its glory, nestled among the busy city is Nagina Masjid. Commonly referred to as the Jewel Mosque, this structure is situated within the Agra Fort, a designated UNESCO World Heritage Site. Constructed from pristine white marble and characterized by its unadorned architectural style, this exquisite mosque was commissioned by Mughal Emperor Shah Jahan during the years 1631 to 1640 CE.



### Aeroplane Gurudwara, Jalandhar, Punjab

Aeroplane Gurudwara or Shaheed Baba Nihal Singh Ji Gurudwara is one of its kind in the country. This holy shrine is frequented by visa-seekers. It is believed that if you pray in this temple and offer a toy aeroplane, you will get your visa soon enough. No one knows who came up with this unusual idea of offering aeroplanes to the shrine. However, there is a story behind this strange belief among locals. Many years ago, a group of boys who were waiting for their visas offered toy aeroplanes at the gurudwara and prayed for the fulfilment of their wish to go abroad. And their wish was granted! Since then, the shrine is popularly known as Aeroplane Gurudwara or Hawai Jahaz Gurudwara. At the end of each day, the toy planes are collected and

given to youngchildren who come here to pay their respects as prasad.



### Om Banna or Bullet Banna Temple, Pali, Rajasthan

Rajasthan is a realm of extraordinary temples, each telling its own unique story, and among them stands the remarkable Bullet Banna Temple. Nestled in the Pali district, this shrine honors a Rajput Thakur named Om Singh Rathore and his beloved 350cc Royal Enfield Bullet motorcycle. The tale behind this unconventional temple is as captivating as the shrine itself.

According to local lore, Om Singh Rathore tragically lost his life in a motorcycle accident. After the incident, his bike was taken to the police station, but mysteriously vanished the following day. To everyone's astonishment, it reappeared at the very site of the accident. The police, baffled by this phenomenon, returned the bike to the station, drained its fuel, and secured it with chains and locks. Yet, the bike disappeared once more, only to be found again at the accident scene. This series of events was deemed

miraculous by the locals, who began to revere the motorcycle itself. They believe that the spirit of Om Singh Rathore watches over travelers along that route. Those passing by often leave offerings of flowers, coconuts, sweets, red thread, and vermilion, praying for a safe journey ahead.



As we honor our nation and its vibrant spirit, let us cherish the narrative that binds us together. Each day, let's pursue what brings us joy and contributes positively to the lives of everyone around us. For as, Erin Reese has said ***"India will reveal to you the places in your heart that must be purified."*** ***"Om Hari"***.



## Ma Durga's first Train Journey - Advay Dutta

Durga Thakur's First Mumbai Local Train Journey

Advay Dutta

Durga Thakur was in Mumbai. She wanted to take the Mumbai local train. I said, "I will take you!" She was very happy.

We met on a Sunday. I had no school. There was traffic on the road. I WhatsApped her "Sorry, I will be late."

She was waiting at Thane station. There were many people and Durga Thakur was scared.

She was listening to the train announcements. We got on a crowded train. Durga Thakur was holding the train handle with her ten hands. She was hungry and ate a Vada Pav. I told her, don't eat the chili; it is jhaal.

Durga Thakur was exercising near the door. I scolded her that you will fall.

We reached Sion station. Durga Thakur was walking with her legs and it started paining. I took her to a foot spa; She was so happy.

Durga Thakur was hungry again. She had chilli chicken, pasta and french fries. We had fun.

I told her, "It is late I will go home now. Tomorrow is my school. Tata Dugga Dugga!" 😊

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## ববি বাঘুটিয়া ~ Nidhir Chakravorty

সময়টা ১৯৪৫ এর মার্চ-এপ্রিল মাস,বর্ষা না এলেও সব জায়গায় জল ভরে গেছে। আমি সুরমা মেলে চাঁদপুর আসি,তারপর স্টিমারে গোয়ালন্দ ঘাট। সেখান থেকে রেলের কালুখালী বদলে ভাটিয়াপাড়া লাইনে আড়কান্দি। আড়কান্দি রেলস্টেশন থেকে লোকের ভিটার ওপর দিয়ে দিয়ে বাড়ি যাচ্ছি। রাস্তা জলে ডোবা,দুপাশের খালে ঘড়িয়াল,মেছো কুমির ঘুরে বেড়াচ্ছে। আমার স্কুলের গরমের ছুটিতে বেড়াতে বাবা দেশের বাড়ি বাঘুটিয়া পাঠালেন। আমার ছোটভাই নিমুর সাথে ও দেখা হবে, ও বাঘুটিয়া বাড়িতে থেকে রাজবাড়ি স্কুলে পড়ে।একটা বড় ভিটা পড়ল,'কৈলাস মিস্ত্রির'ভিটা। কৈলাস মিস্ত্রি বাঘুটিয়ার সবচেয়ে সম্পন্ন গেরস্থ। তার বিশাল কাঠের কারবার ও ফার্নিচার বানানোর ফ্যাক্টরি ভিটেতেই অবস্থিত। একই সাথে দরজা জানালা ও তার চৌকঠ ও বানানো হয়। চারচালার লম্বা চারিদিক খোলা কারখানার শেড। তাতে একপাশে কৈলাস মিস্ত্রি একটি সুদৃশ্য চেয়ার টেবিল নিয়ে বসে কাজ তদারকি করেন। সূঠাম দোহারী উজ্জ্বল শ্যামবর্ণ চেহারা,কালো মাথায় একমাথা বাবরি কাঁচা পাকা চুল,পরিষ্কার সাদা পপলিনের সেলাইকরা নিমা গায়ে, মালকোচা দেওয়া ধুতি পরনে,লোকটিকে দেখলেই বেশ করিতকর্মা বলে মনে হয়। পায়ে এক বল্টু ওয়ালা খড়ম,যেটা অনেক কাল ব্যবহারের ফলে আঙ্গুলগুলির জায়গায় একটু 'ইমপ্রেশন' হয়ে গেছে। প্রথমেই যা চোখে পড়ে সেটা ওঁর গলায় ঝুলছে একটি জ্বলজ্বল করা মোটা সোনার লম্বা চেন। বেশ অবস্থাপন্ন বোঝাই যায়! গ্রামে কারো কোন দরকারে শুনেছি উনি সর্বদাই এগিয়ে আসতেন। লাগে টাকা দেবে গৌরী সেন ,মানে কৈলাস মিস্ত্রি।

টেবিলে মাপার ফিতা,ফুটরুল,স্কোয়ায় এঙ্গেলস,স্পিরিট লেভেল,খাতা,পেন্সিল ইত্যাদি রাখা আছে।কামলা ও কার্পেন্টার মিলিয়ে ৬/৭ জন কারিগর সারাদিন কাজ করে চলেছে। বিশাল কাঠের গুড়ি ও সবরকম কাঠের,যেমন সেগুন,শিরিশ,গরাণ,গামার ইত্যাদি ইজারার জঙ্গল থেকে যোগাড় করে এনে একপাশে ফেলে রাখা থাকে। বিশাল করাত দিয়ে তাকে চেরানো হয় । সেই প্রায় ছয় সাত হাত লম্বা করাত দুদিকে দুজন ধরে চালায়। বছরখানেক চেরা কাঠকে বাইরে গ্রীষ্ম ও বর্ষা খাইয়ে সিজনিং করানো হয়ে থাকে।আমরা ভাই বন্ধুদের সাথে ওখানে গিয়ে সময়

কাটাতাম। কাঁচা কাঠের সুঘ্রাণ ও তার চেয়ে বেশি যেখানে ফার্নিচারের শেষ পালিশ করা হত সেখানে,সেই পালিশের গন্ধ আমাদের খুব আকর্ষণ করত। পরে বুঝেছি ওটা যে স্পিরিট ব্যবহার করা হত (এলকোহলের) জন্য।বাড়ি থেকে প্রায় প্রতিদিনই সকালে আমরা তিনজনে চলে আসতাম সেই কাঠের কারখানায়। আমি উৎসাহ করে কিছু করবার জন্য আবদার করতাম। আমাকে কাঠের রয়াদামারা (jack polish),ঘাট কাটা,এঙ্গেল কাটা,তুরপুল চালানো (hand operated drill), কাঠের পেগ দিয়ে দুটো কাঠের জোড়া দেওয়া,সব একে একে বড়মিস্ত্রি শিখিয়ে দেন, অবশ্য কৈলাসের অনুমোদনে।আমি নিজের হাতে একটি ছোট জলচৌকি বা স্টুল পায়া সমেত বানিয়ে ছিলাম,মনে পড়ে।সাধারণ একটি জলচৌকি বানাতেও যে কতখানি কারিগরি লাগে তখন তা উপলব্ধি করি।এই কাজ কে সাধারণ কাজ বলে তুচ্ছ তাচ্ছিল্য করা কখনই উচিত নয়। এই অভিজ্ঞতা আমার পরে ইন্ডিজিনিয়ারিং কলেজে কাজে আসে। অনেক দিন কাজের মধ্যে সময়ের খেয়াল থাকত না,বাড়ি থেকে হুসেন কাকু ডাকতে না এলে যেতাম না ।এই পুকুরের জলে কোনরকম বাসন মাজা,কাপড় কাচা,স্নান করা বারণ। কেবল খাবার জল,শাক সবজি,চালডাল, আনাজ ধোয়া যাবে। এর কারন আমি পরে বুঝেছিলাম,যখন মা,পিসিমা ও কাকিমাকে দেখতাম পরিষ্কার কাপড় পরে আম কাসুন্দি বানানোর জন্য কচিআম ও সরষে আরো কি কি,কেটে ঝেড়ে বেছে ধুতে এই পুকুরে আসতেন। কাসুন্দি যাতে অনেক দিন থাকে তার জন্যই এটা একটা ritual এর পর্যায়ে পালন করা হত। কোন সিক্রেট মশলাদেওয়া হত কিনা 'প্রিজারভেটিব' হিসেবে,আমার জানা নেই।

হ্যাঁ ,যে কথায় ছিলাম,হোসেনের সাথে আমি কৈলাস মিস্ত্রির ভিটা পেরিয়ে এলাম বাঘুটিয়া বাজারের দিকে। পথে পড়ে মতি বাগচীর পোড়ো বাস্তুভিটা,সামনে আর এক বিশাল মজে যাওয়া দিঘি। কেউ যদি সত্যজিৎ রায়ের মনিহারী সিনেমার দিঘির কথা মনে রাখেন তবে এর সাথে মিল খুঁজে পাবেন। এই দিঘির জল যদিও পরিষ্কার কিন্তু চারিপাশে এত শ্যাওলা জমে আছে ও আগাছার ভিড় যে কেউই এখানে জল নিতে আসে না। কেবল কাপড় ধোয়ার জন্য এবং গরু মোষের চান করার জন্য এই জল ব্যবহৃত হতো।এখানে আমরা মাঝে মাঝে এসে কাগজের নৌকো বানিয়ে খেলতাম।কিন্তু এখানে দুটো কামঠ (কচ্ছপ) ঘুরে বেড়ায় দেখে খুব ভয় পেতাম। শুনেছি এখানে একবার একটি মেয়ে চান করতে এসেছিল,জলে নামতেই একটা কামঠ,ওর আঁচল কামড়ে ধরে টেনেছিল। কোনমতে মেয়েটি দৌড়ে পাড়ে উঠে প্রাণ বাঁচায়। কেউ চান করতে গেলেই কামঠ দুটো পাশে চলে আসতো কিছু খাবার পাবে বলে।

পোড়ো বাড়ি সম্বন্ধে গুজব,অনেকেই ভুতের ভয়ে ও পথে যায় না। ওদের বংশের কেউ নাকি এখানে ওই দালানকোঠার একপাশে থাকেন। আমাদের বাড়ির



লাগোয়া এই পোড়ো বাড়িতে আমরা খেলতে গেছি; বাদুর আর চামচিকা ছাড়া কিছুই চোখে পড়েনি। সাপ বা বিষ্ণুর ভয় ত থাকবেই। পা থপ থপিয়ে গেলে নাকি ওনারা সরে যান বলে শুনেছি।

এবার এল বাঘুটিয়া বাজার। অনেকটা জায়গা জুড়ে এই বাজারের ভিটা বা জায়গাটা। এমনিতেই চারিপাশ থেকে উঁচু এর জমি। বাজারের মধ্যে সারি দিয়ে একটু উঁচু মেঝেতে একচালা ছাউনি আর এক দিকে কয়েকটি টিনের পাকা দোকান। সেখানে মুদি খানা, স্টেশনারি, কাপড় ইত্যাদি পাওয়া যায়। আর এক বিশেষত্ব এই বাজারে রোজ টাটকা দুধ ও মাছ ওঠে। মাঝে মাঝে নদীর ইলিশ ও পাওয়া যায়। দূর দূরান্ত থেকে অনেকেই এখানে বিকিকিনি করতে আসে। যেমন কুমোড়পাড়া থেকে গরুর গাড়ি বোঝাই করে কলসি হাঁড়ি, তৈলো আরও কত কি আসে যায়।

বাঘুটিয়া বাজারের পাঠশালা। একটা পাঠশালার অস্তিত্ব এই বাজারের স্ট্যাটাস অনেকটাই বাড়িয়েছে। এবার সেই পাঠশালা তথা মুদিখানার কথায় আসি। আমাদের বাড়ি বাঘুটিয়া যেতে পথেই বাজারটা পরে। তারপরেই একটু দূরে বাড়ির রাস্তা দুপাশে খালের মাঝখানে বাঁধের ওপর দিয়ে গেছে। বাঘুটিয়া বাজারের কথা যখন এসেই গেল তখন বাজারের ভিতর ত্রৈলোক্য মহারাজের মুদির দোকান তথা পাঠশালার কথা না বললেই নয়। বাজারের একপাশের কোনায় একটু উঁচু ভিত করে দোচালা টিনের ঘর। তিন পাশে দরমার দেয়াল ঘেরা। সামনে একফালি বারান্দা, তাতে অর্ধেকটাতে তিনফুট উঁচু পাঁচিল দেওয়া। বাকিটা খোলা, মেঝেতে পাটি বিছানো।

পাঁচিলের পেছনে কার্ঠের বারকোষের সারি, তাতে আনাজ চাল ডাল, চিনি মুদিখানার দ্রবাদি সাজানো। তেলের টিন, বস্ত্রাভর্তি চাল গম ইত্যাদি। একটা বাঁশের মাচায় বসে খালি গায়ে ভুঁড়ি বাগিয়ে ত্রৈলোক্য মহারাজ একপাশে মুদিখানার দিকে নজর রাখছেন, আর অন্য পাশে মেঝেতে আসন পাটিতে বসে পাঁচ থেকে দশ বছর বয়সের ছেলেরা দুলে দুলে সুর করে নামতা আউড়ে যাচ্ছে, ---- এক অঙ্কে এক, দুই অঙ্কে দুই, ---- তিন চারে বারো, ---- চার চারে ষোল ---- ইত্যাদি। মেয়েরা! না, কেউ নে। মেয়েদের আবার স্কুল কি! পড়াশোনা! সেই তো সংসারের ঘানি ঠেলতে হবে বড় হলে! ত্রৈলোক্য মহারাজের মাথা জুড়ে টাক, পেছনে টিকির কাছে একগোছা তেল চুকচুকে কালো চুলের গোছা। কালো গায়ে শোভা পাচ্ছে একটি ময়লা পৈতে, পরনে সেই রকম খাটো ধুতি। হাতে একখানা তালপাখা নিয়ে মাঝে মাঝে হাওয়া খাচ্ছেন। ওঁর সামনে একটা তালা দেওয়া ক্যাসবাক্স আছে, তার ওপর একটি ফাঁক কাটা, যার মধ্যে বিক্রির পয়সা কামলা হারান ফেলতে থাকে। তার

পাশে একটা দাঁড়িপাল্লা ছাতের রড থেকে ঝুলছে। মাচার একপাশে একটা পানের বড় ডিক্বা ও অন্যপাশে একটা পিকদানি, দুটোই পেতলের চকচক করে মাজা। রোজ সকালে দোকান খোলার আগে গিল্লি পানের বাটা ‘রিফিল’ করে দেন সাজা পান, চুন, খয়ের,

পানের বোঁটা, কুচোনো সুপারি ও পানমশলা সহ। কয়েকটি আস্ত পান পাতাও থাকে। গন্যমান্য কেউ এলে তাদের উনি পান ‘অফার’ করেন। এমনিতেই সবসময় পানের জাবরকাটা চলতেই থাকে। মাঝে মাঝেই পিকদানি বাঁ হাতে তুলে তাতে লালা রস নিষ্ক্ষেপও চলে। পাশে একটা ভিজো গামছা হাত ও মুখ মোছার জন্য নিবেদিত। নয়ত লাল ঠোঁটের দুপাশে লালা রসের ধারা শোভা বর্ধন করতো। হঠাৎ তিনি হংকার দিয়ে উঠলেন, ----

“এই হারান্যে, কি করলি, আমি দেখলাম ওরে তুই দুই সের মুগির ডাল দিলি আর ক্যশবাক্সে খালি ছয় আনা ফেললি। আর দু আনা কি হইল? এই হোনা মুগির ডালি গি দিলি পর থিরির তার অয়, তা জানস না?”

“না কত্তা, ও বাড়িতে আসার সময় ওরে ছয় আনা দিছে, দাম যে বাইরে গেছে, তিন আনার জায়গায় চাইর আনা সের হইছে হেইটা ওর মায়ে জানতো না। বলছে পরে আইস্যা দিব।”

“ঠিক আছে, না দিলি পর তোর পয়সা থেকে কাইড়া নিমু।”

হঠাৎ পাঠশালার দিকে ফিরে আরেক হংকার, ---

“এই সারান্যা তোরে না মুরগি হতো বলছি, নামতা ভুল করছস বল্যা, উঠ্যা পরলি?”

“না গুরুমশাই, দশ মিনিট ত কবেই হইয়া গেছে তাই উঠ্যা পরছি”।

“এই ছরু, তোদের সপরিবলা পাইকছে হনলাম, দেখতে পাইলাম না এখনো?”

পাশে রাখা দুটো বড় বড় বেতের ধামার একটাতে ছেলেরা যে যা ফলমূল সবজি এনে রাখে। অন্যটা আঁশধামা, তাতে মাছ, ম্যাংস জাতীয় দ্রব্যের জন্য নির্ধারিত। রোজ যা আসে তাতেই ওঁর সংসার চলে। পাঠশালার আর কোন মূল্য দিতে হয় না। তবে কে কি দিল তার দিকে গুরুমশায়ের তীক্ষ্ণ নজর অবশ্যই থাকে।

“আজিকার মত অঙ্ক শেষ, ধারাপাত বন্দ কর। এবার বাংলা। ম্যাঘনাদ কাব্য থিকে-----

এই শব্দু, আয়তো, আমার পিঠের মধ্যখানে খাউজাইয়া দে, ঘামাচিগুলান বড্ড জালাইছে”

“না গুরুমশায়, মায়ে আমার নক আইজ কাইট্যা দিছে, আপনি সাথারে কন”

“এই সাথা, তুই আয় তো, খাউজাইয়া দে”।

সাথান গিয়ে ওঁর পিঠে চুলকে দিল।

“হাঁ, যা কইছিলাম, কাব্যের কথা এইরকম -----

“গম্বিরে অম্বরে জথা নাদে হাদম্বিনী”। আরেকবার শোন---“ গম্বিরে অম্বরে যথা নাদে হাদম্বিনী”।

“এর অর্থ এইবার বিশ্লেষণ করুম।”

“এ্যাহন গম্বিরে অর্থ গুড়গুড় হন্দ কৈরা।

অম্বর অর্থ হইছে আহাশ, আর এক অর্থ কাফড়, য্যামন নীলাম্বর, পীতাম্বর মানে নীল আর হলদে

কাফড়”।

“হাঁ রে পিতাম্বেরা, তোর নামের মানে জানস? মারে কইবি হলুদ ছোপাইয়া কাফড় তোরে পরাইব। তৈলে

তোর নামের সাথে মিলব”।-----

“নাদে অর্থ হন্দ করে, আর এক মানে বাজ্য করে, এহনে এই অর্থই হইব।

হাদম্বিনী অর্থ হইছে ম্যাগ, আর হইছে উত্তরপাড়ার মহেশ ভট্টাচার্যের কনিষ্ঠা হন্যা হাদম্বিনী”।

“তৈলে সমগ্র অর্থটা হইল গিয়া”-----

“উত্তরপাড়ার মহেশ ভট্টাচার্যের হন্যা হাদম্বিনী গুড় গুড়াইয়া প্যাড়প্যাড়াইয়া কফড় ভৈরা হাগছে”। -

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“আঃ দত্তের পো টা কি ল্যাখনটাই না ল্যাখছে” !!!

(এটা নিছকই হাস্যরসের জন্য, কাউকে ঠেস দেওয়ার জন্য নয়, কোন মিল থাকলে তা নেহাতই

অনিচ্ছাকৃত)

অবশেষে হোসেন মিয়া ও আমি বাড়িতে এসে পৌঁছলাম। আমার ঠাকুরদা বনমালী চক্রবর্তী বাইরের ঘরের বারান্দায় চেয়ারে বসে একটি সুদৃশ্য পেতলের গড়গড়া থেকে নলের সাহায্যে তামুক সেবন করছিলেন। বলে উঠলেন, “হোসেন, তোয়াগর এত দেৱী হইল ক্যান ? আমি সেই কখন ট্রেনের হইস্যাল শুনছি”।

“হাঁ কত্তা, রাস্তায় কাদা ছিল বলে ভিটা ভিটা ধরে আইছি। মাঝে মাঝেই কেউ বলে হরুম খেতে, নয়ত রবিবাবু দাঁইড়ে যান চারিদিকে দেখতে, য্যামন কৈলেসের মিস্ত্রিখানায়, মোতি বাগচীর দিঘির পাড়ে, আবার বাঘুটো বাজারে। হয়তো পুরানো কথা মনে পড়ছে। তাই একটু দেৱি হইয়ে গেল।”

“আচ্ছা, যা ওর বাস্কাটা ভেতরে ছোট বৌমাকে দিয়ে আয় গে। আর তামুক খেতে চাস ,তো তোর হঁকা কলকে আর গুল নিয়ে একটুকুন আগুনের টিকি চাইয়ে নিস”।

“রবি, তোর আড়কান্দি স্টেশনে আসতে কোন অসুবিধা হয়নাই তো ? এবার তো একাই আসতে পারলি”।

“না, কোন কস্ট হয় নি”।

“যাক, এবার তোর বাপ মায়ে একা আসতে ছাইড়ে দিছে তাতে আমি খুব খুশি হইছি”।

আমি দাদুকে পায়ে হাত দিয়ে প্রণাম করি। দাদু মাথায় হাত দিয়ে আশীর্বাদ করেন। আমি জিপ্তেস করি,

“আচ্ছা দাদু তোমার এত নক্সা কাটা চেয়ার টেবিল দুটো দেখছি একদম কৈলাস মিস্ত্রির চেয়ার

টেবিলের মত”।

“হাঁ, ও ই তো আমাকে এই দুইটা ফার্নিচার দিছে। যা কাপড় ছাইড়ে হাত পা ধুইয়ে ভাত খেয়ে নে।

কুয়াতলায় পরাণ জল তুলে রাইখছে আগে থেকে। ”

পরাণ একজন ভাগচাষী, আর অন্য সময় বাড়িতে কাজকর্ম করে।

এই কুয়ো থেকে জল তোলার ব্যাপারটা একটু innovative. একটা কপিকল বানানো আছে, দুটো বাঁশের খুঁটির আগায় একটি লম্বা বাঁশ বাঁধা। তার একদিকে দড়িতে একটি ছোট বালতি অপরদিকে একটা ভারি ওজনের কাঠের গুড়ি



বাঁধা(counterweight),যাতে জলভরা বালতি আপনে আপ উঠে আসে। পাশে একটা সিমেন্টের পাটাতনে(slab)একটা কল লাগানো ড্রাম রাখা,তাতে পরান রোজ সকালে এসে জল ভরে দিয়ে যায়। কল খুললেই জল ! টুকটাক কাজর জন্য বার বার কুয়ো থেকে জল তুলতে হয় না।

“আচ্ছা,কাকাবাবুকে দেখছি না”।

“সুরেন ওর ওষুধ কিনতে রাজবাড়ি গেছে। অসার সময় নিমুরে সাথে লইয়া আইব ওর জ্যাঠার বাড়ি থেকে। বিকালের গাড়িতে আস্যা পড়ব। ওর স্কুলের ছুটি হইয়ে গেছে “।

“ভালো ”,তবে ওর সাথে দেখা হবে। আমাকে তো আবার এক মাসের আগেই ফিরে যেতে হবে,কেননা বাবার ছুটিতে(annual leave)এবার আমাদের শিলং যাবার কথা।

বড় পিসেমশাই এর বাড়ি কিন্তু আমাদের পাশের ভিটায়,যেটা দাদুর দেওয়া জমিতে অবস্থিত। একটা মাঠে(ছোট পুকুর) কেটে তার মাটি দিয়ে উঁচু করে বানানো। শুনেছি দাদু নাকি ওকে পছন্দ করে বড়পিসি স্নেহলতার(মাখন) সাথে বিয়ে দেবার সময় জানতেন না ওঁর আগের এক বৌ আছে,তবে তার সাথে আর কোন সম্পর্ক বোধ হয় ছিল না।

পিসেমশাই কিন্তু রোজ সকালে খেয়ে দেয়ে তৈরি হয়ে জামালপুর দোকানে আসেন ও রাতে ফেরেন,কোন ভয় ডর না করে। পথে একটা গো ভাগাড় পরে ( huge pit on the common ground, where all dead animal carcasses are thrown)।

স্বভাবতই সেখানে অনেক গো ভূত ও অন্যান্য ভূতেরা থাকে,আমরা পারতপক্ষে দিনের বেলায়ও খেলতে গিয়ে ওদিকটা যাই না। এমনকি সেদিন জামালপুর থেকে ফেরার পথে সন্ধ্যা নেমে যাওয়াতে বেশ ভয় ভয় করছিল। কাকাবাবু ও দোকানের কামলা থাকাতেও যায়গাটা তাড়াতাড়ি পা চলিয়ে আসি।

উত্তরের ঘরের পেছনের “গবা” আমগাছে যখন আমগুলো বেশ বড় হয়েছে। আমি ও মঙ্গল মিলে সেই আম জড়ো করে বাঁটি দিয়ে ছাল ছাড়িয়ে আঁচার ও কাসুন্দি বানানোর জন্য তৈরি করে রাখতাম। আর ছিল ক্ষীরশাবতি,তালজটা,দুঁদুলে,কাঁচা মিঠা,আরও কত নামের আমগাছ,এখন সবটা মনেও পড়ে না! একদিন চিড়া বানানোর সময় টেকিতে পাড় দেবার বৌ না আসাতে আমি হিরো হয়ে ভলান্টিয়ারি করতে গেলাম। অন্য মেয়েটি এসেছিল,যে পাড় দেবার তালে তালে চিড়ার জন্য তৈরী চাল গর্তে দেয় ও ঢেকির মুশল ওঠার সাথে সাথেই চ্যাপটা চিড়া তুলে নেয়। এ এক অপূর্ব গ্রাম্য টেকনিক,আধুনিক ‘সিনচিত্রনিজশন’কে হার মানায়। আমি ছাদ

থেকে ঝোলা দড়ি ধরে ঢেকির পায়ে উঠে দাঁড়ালাম,অনেক লাফালাফি চেষ্টা করলাম,কিন্তু ঢেকি “নট নড়ণ-চড়ন নট কিচ্ছু”,আমার ওজনে পাতাই দিল না। মেয়েটি বলল,“বাবা,বড় কাউকে পাঠাও,তোমার কস্ম নয়”।আমি লজ্জা পেয়ে পালিয়ে বাঁচি।

মাঠেলে এর মধ্যেই জল ভরে গেছে,উপচানোর মত অবস্থা। বাড়ির নৌকা শুকনো মরসুমে ওই

মাঠেলে থাকে,তার মেরামতি আলকাতরা রং করা ইত্যাদি হয়ে থাকে। রং করার আগে সব সামুক গুগলি(barnacles)ছাড়িয়ে নেওয়া হয়। সেবার দেখলাম কাঠের ফাঁকে তামার ক্লিপ(পাটাম) গেঁথে জোড়া হল,জল ঢোকা আটকানোর প্রস্তুতি হিসেবে। অবশ্য কয়েকটি এলুমিনিয়াম বাটি থাকে জল ছেঁচার জন্য,দাঁড়,বৈঠাগুলো ছাড়া। অনেকটা বড় বিল পার হবার সময় এর দরকার পড়ে। নচেৎ জল ভরে নৌকা ডুবির ভয় থাকে। আমাদের একটা খেলা ছিল নৌকার গলুইতে চড়ে মাঠেলে এর ওপার করা,জল ভরে যাওয়াতে খুব সুবিধা হয়েছিল। বেশ খিলিং লাগছিল। তবে মাঠেলে বাইরে যাওয়া বারণ ছিল। আমার ছুটি ফুরিয়ে এল,তাই ঐ অভিজ্ঞতা এবারের মত হল না।

## Amio Durga - Revamping the arsenal of the Modern Goddess - *Sattam Datta*

Legends say that eons ago the world and the heaven were relenting under the terrorism of the Buffalo Demon (Mahishashur). He had received a boon from Lord Brahma, that no man or God could be responsible for his death. This had made him so formidable, that he had led his devilish Asura army to stampede over the entire world. He had even attacked the heaven, uprooting the Gods from their abode.

With no solution in sight, the Gods approached the supreme Trinity of Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswar. During the deliberations, the Holy Trinity and all the Gods unified their collective Skakti to create Goddess Durga, the embodiment of Power, Justice and Feminine Energy - for the sole purpose of defeating Mahishashur.

Not only that, to prepare the Goddess for the battle of justice, the Gods gifted her with an impressive armory as follows -

1. Trishul or Trident by Shiva
2. Sudarshan Chakra by Vishnu
3. Lotus by Brahma
4. Sword by Yamraj (God of Death)
5. Spear by Agni (God of Fire)
6. Vajra (Thunder) by Indra, the King of Gods
7. Axe by Vishwakarma
8. Bow and Arrow by Gods of Sun and Wind
9. Conch by Varuna (God of Water)
10. Snake by Shiva

It is said that after 9 days of fierce battle Goddess Durga defeated Mahishashur and restored peace and order on both earth and heaven. We have been celebrating this victory of Divine Justice over Evil every year since then.

We no longer live in those mythological times. But both our scriptures and culture teach us to treat every woman as Goddess Durga (Ya Devi Sarbavuteshu...). However, the society and environment we live in have transformed drastically from the times of the Goddess's origin - so have the evils and challenges lurking around us. Amidst this massive transformation, today's Durga (the women around us) requires a completely revamped arsenal to tackle the Mahishasurs of the modern world.

Let us try to imagine what could comprise of the armory of today's Goddess Durga -

**1. Information** - this is the fuel for the modern world. Access to information and ability to filter, process and apply data, can actually ensure victory in any endeavor

**2. Technology** - This can take different forms and shapes, but technology prowess is one of the most necessary skills required to navigate today's world effectively - be it AI models to automate professional chores or the latest domestic gadgets to boost productivity.

**3. Multi-tasking** - While Durga had a very well-defined primary objective (defeating Mahishashur) today's Goddesses are faced with a multitude of objectives that demand their attention and skills, both in professional and personal spheres. Hence, ability to juggle multiple tasks, while ensuring timely and quality conclusions, is a must have.

**4. Wits** - Today's Durga need to possess supreme communication skills - whether to coax the loved ones or to drive intense negotiations in hallowed board rooms.

**5. Leading Teams** - Most of Devi's Durga victories were solo battles with the villains. However, today's Durga needs to assimilate and lead teams of different sizes and capacities for the attainment of a plethora of objectives of varying dimensions and intensities.

**6. Adaptability** - Mahishashur not only had a limited bag of tricks, his ego made him a very evident target. Today's world is evolving at an unpredicted rate. Hence the modern Durga need to be right on top of the emerging trends, constantly upskilling herself and staying abreast of the latest developments.

**7. Empathy** - While the mythological Durga achieved her objective mostly through appropriate channelization of aggression on the battlefield, today's demons are not so evident. The modern Goddess would need excellent interpersonal skills to empathize and connect with her fellow beings for attainment of complex objectives - be it in a family group or a project team.

**8. Resilience** - The ability to show up every day, being consistent and rising up every time life knocks you down is what would transform a normal woman to a modern-day Goddess.

**9. Passion** - While battle victories immortalized Goddess Durga, the modern Goddess should possess utmost passion for a cause larger than self, to drive her along the path of immortal deeds.

**10. Agility** - Today's Durga needs to embrace flexibility with the utmost intent, in order to be able to navigate the labyrinth of the complex modern world.

Let's pray that with this revamped arsenal, the modern day Durgas are able to attain unprecedented levels of success and contribute towards a better world for all of us.





## What IPL auctions taught me about Infatuations, Break Ups and Moving On - *Sattam Datta*

"I love you too - but as a friend" - she said - "Please promise you won't break the friendship, you mean so much to me"

"No way, let's continue being friends" - he replied, wishing in his heart, what if things change for better (?) - someday.

Sounds familiar? I guess most of us have gone through this or some other form of relationship pitfall at different stages of life. Ever wondered how such dilemmas enact during IPL auctions?

Here are 5 real life resemblances to relationship pitfalls / dilemmas being acted out on IPL auction tables at different stages of the last 9 seasons of the league

**1. Infatuation** - Let's start with the scenario stated above, that of extreme infatuation - when you are so much in love with someone that you go beyond your limits, against all practicality, in your endeavour to "acquire" that person and make her/him a part of your life.

IPL auctions provide multiple instances of a franchise going all out for one most-sought-after player, shelling out more money than it should. This only skewed both the balance and dependence of the team. And in cases when that star player was not in good enough form, the entire team suffered.

MI itself has couple of cases, **Hardik Pandya** - transferred for 15 Cr from Gujarat Titans, just before IPL 2024 and directly made the captain of the side. Not only was his performance dismal (216 runs @ 18 average, and 11 wickets @ 9.1 economy), this move robbed the franchise of the loyalty of a major chunk of their fans. Jofra Archer was bought for 8 CR during 2022 auctions, but was available only for 5 matches over the next 2 seasons.

**Yuvraj Singh** - the highest recorded transfer twice in the history of IPL - \$2.33M to RCB in 2014 and \$2.67M to DD in 2015. And he scored just over 600 runs in 28 matches

in both seasons combined, with 120 strike and took just 6 wickets - costing over \$8000 per run! Another such infatuation (turned failure) was Kevin Pietersen, highest paid player of 2009. When the league ended RCB had paid \$14,500 per run he scored, at an average of 19, and 109 strike rate.

In all the above cases the corresponding team finished the league last but second - simply because they ran out of enough money to get more quality players.

You cannot build an entire team (or life) on a single pillar. Get some core players (or values) and build enhancements around them - like the ever successful (entirely cricketing success) CSK did around Dhoni, Raina and later Ashwin and Jadeja - more recently Ruturaj.

**2. Successfully Moving On** - Break-ups can be stressful, whatever the cause for it. But once you actually get over it, you are an enhanced version of yourself with redefined abilities to script stories you never imagined - as the following players and franchises did in IPL.

The biggest example in this category is **Suryakumar Yadav** - in the 4 years he was part of the KKR squad, he scored ~600 runs @ 120 strike rate. On his release, he was snatched up by MI at 3.2 CR in 2018 auctions - and the rest is history! He is now the top ranked T20I batsman on the planet and has contributed to the several laurels of both MI and India.

Without encouraging any controversy, and with due respect to the best captain of India - Dada was never a good luck charm for KKR. It was only after Gambhir took the reins in 2011, KKR has ended in top 4 in four out of next six seasons.

So next time you feel break ups are bad - speak to the KKR management.

**3. Breakup Hangover** - On the flip side, if you are among those very fortunate (or unfortunate) ones where your first love seemed so perfect - that (obviously after the break-up) no-one else seemed to be worthy enough to deserve you? The IPL careers of the following players do have a striking resemblance to relationship hangover.

**Yusuf Pathan** was one of the most remarkable finds of the inaugural season of IPL, with a strike rate of 170+ in the first 3 seasons. The performance in RR saw KKR shelling out whopping \$2.1 M in 2011 for him. But it seems Yusuf never got over RR - his strike rate hovered around 130 in the subsequent seasons - much below par post his honeymoon with RR.

A surprise addition to the list would be Shane Watson - man of the series twice and instrumental in RR's inaugural win, he averaged over 35 with 145+ strike rate till 2015. He was bought by RCB in 2016 and he averaged only 13, with 130 strike rate.

**4. Finding the right one** - During IPL auction (or life) it's important not to over-invest your money (or efforts) on a "perceived" ideal match. If something is not to be, do not resist it - who knows you might have someone much better waiting for you in the list of auctionees (or suitors)

Think of DD's fate in 2014 auction - Having lost the bidding wars for Du Plessis (\$750 K to CSK) and Piyush Chawla (\$ 800K to KKR) - they bought Quinton De Kock for \$560K. Most would agree that De Kock was a much better long term addition to any team than definitely Piyush Chawla, maybe even Du Plessis.

A similar incident in 2016 auctions was when Pune lost out to DD in an atrocious bidding war for Pawan Negi. But Pune later ended up with a much wiser value-pick Mitchell Marsh - costing only half the money they were bidding on Negi. Even DD realized the mistake and released Negi for auction this year.

**5. Arranged Marriages** - They say - "Matches are made in heaven" - and Indian parents only "arrange" them (although the number is decreasing significantly in today's age). I know it's weird to associate someone like **Chris Gayle** to arranged marriage, but what else would you say about him replacing injured Dirk Nannes (bought for \$650k) in RCB squad, after he went unsold in Auction for IPL 2011. This resulted in a honeymoon lasting 6 seasons and still continuing - Gayle averaged ~45 with a 150+ strike rate since IPL 2011. RCB literally did (or paid) nothing and got the most impactful and also consistent IPL opener into their team.

## Letter to my 15-year-old self

- Sattam Datta

As I had (relatively) more time to introspect during the lockdown, I happened to take the time machine to visit a distraught teenager in the early 2000s, 2003 April to be precise. The young boy was doubly sad - firstly because of India's defeat in WC Finals just few weeks back - his long term dream of seeing his childhood (and teenage) hero of lifting the WC had fallen so awfully short of reality. Secondly, he had failed (?) again to secure a perfect 100 in maths, just by a few numbers. Unlike most of his age, he actually loved maths, it's only the results of maths exam that he dreaded - anything less than 100 he considered to be unfair, as if he had missed something he genuinely deserved. To complicate things more, he is now regretting the few hours spent watching the match, thinking probably if he had practiced instead for the exam 2 days later, he might have secured a perfect 100.

While I was amused at these "problems" that used to distraught the young(er) me, I could not help but sympathize with the lad. Wishing I could genuinely help him, I penned down a letter for him.

Dear 15-year-old Me,

I of all people can realize what "exactly" you are going through now. So this is just to comfort you and equip you to face what lies ahead. Be prepared to bust quite a few myths that form an integral part of your current belief system - but trust me, the sooner the better!

- **It's ok to be the bearer of bad news** - Believe me you will be appreciated one day for this, if you can point out pitfalls early enough before they become potentially damaging for the project/organization (in the current scenario, your acads). Don't be afraid of setbacks - to resume stronger and wiser, communicate and ask for help.

- It's absolutely fine to admit that you don't know - never be afraid of seeking help, asking questions and

never ever stop learning. This is a crucial life skill - to identify what you lack today and learn to make up for it tomorrow. Wherever required communicate promptly and ask for help - you'd be amazed at the possibilities tapping into others' minds can open up. It is not practically possible for one to know or accomplish everything alone - but that should not stop you from setting ambitious goals.

- Purpose of setting a goal is NOT necessarily to achieve it - but the knowledge and experience you acquire, as you prepare and strive to achieve it. Setting achievable goals will only limit you to your current capabilities. You do not know what you can do, till you try - I am witness to several such things, that you consider impossible today. Because every challenge you are through, there will be a bigger one waiting for you.

- Don't think life will be easy after 12th / graduation - contrary to what you are told every day - but that doesn't mean you are better off lazing around. Let me take an example of your favorite sport to explain this - you are just learning the game of life, and the amount of efforts you put in now will determine the level where you would possibly end up - a district regular or an international celebrated cricketer. Wherever you land, life will present worthy challenges - the higher the level you are at, the tougher the challenges and greater the payouts - so are the risks, because you will not always win!

- Learn to live with imperfections - life is not limited to a syllabus - the heart of your routine right now. There will be lots of ambiguities, uncertainties and unfairness in the real world. While it's better to have a plan, learn to be spontaneous and to dwell with lack of clarity. Sometimes it's much wiser to just let things be and play out on their own.

- Learn to let go - Take a timeout, every now and then. Doing absolutely nothing is another important life skill. It helps you reset and start tomorrow with a

better perspective. There will always be something troubling you, learn to let go of such anxious thoughts, and take time to appreciate what you really value - which, as you would eventually realize, is quite different from what you are chasing today.

- Don't judge self or anyone by grades / designations - While in the academic world grades seem to be the universal barometer, the real world has no such scale. It is very important to be sensitive to others' perspectives and situations. This will open yourself to a lot of possibilities, which will otherwise be limited to your knowledge and experience only. Not always will life fit into your way of thinking.

- Finally, STOP over-thinking and over-planning - Practice upward delegation. Sometimes your quest for an answer will be futile. Learn to accept life as it is, but only after you have possibly tried your best. Have faith in the Person who knows better than you and is a way better planner - things will turn out to be fine, probably much better than you could have planned.

That's all buddy, hope I knew some of these at your age! As I said, things would get tougher than you can imagine, but so would you - I am quite certain of that. Just never limit yourself to what you are today - tomorrow will find a new way. Enjoy the ride!

Yours lovingly,

32-year-old Me

I was very much tempted to brighten the boy up by mentioning that one of his dreams (like many others) would come very much true in the coming years, 8 to be precise, during the 2011 Cricket WC. But refrained, thinking it would not be fair to steal the anticipation and thrill from him.



## আগমনী মাসির ভূত দেখা ~শর্মিলা চক্রবর্তী

তোমরা কেউ কি আমার আগমনী মাসিকে দেখেছো? হয়তো ওরকম দু'চার জন আগমনী মাসির মতো মানুষ দেখেছো, তবে অমন জেদী, সাহসী, তেজী মহিলা দেখেছ কিনা সন্দেহ। না তোমাদের কৌতূহল আর বাড়াবে না। এবার আগমনী ওরফে আমার মায়ের খুড়তুতো বোন 'আগমনী মাসির' বর্ণনাটা একটু দিয়েই ফেলি। মাসির ডাক নাম ছিল মিনু। মাসি প্রকৃতিতে মহিলা হলেও তাকে মহিলা বেশে পুরুষ বললেও কিছু ভুল বলা হবে না। মাসি ছোট বেলা থেকেই খুব সাহসী ছিল।

কোনো কিছুতেই ভয়ডর ছিল না। পাড়ায় পাড়ায় দস্যুপনা করে বেড়ানো, সাঁতার দিয়ে পুকুরের এপার ওপার করা, সাইকেল চালানো, পাড়ার বাড়িতে বাড়িতে গিয়ে আম, পেয়ারা ফলপাকড় চুরি,

ছেলেদের ফুটবল খেলা, কাবাডি খেলা এসব ছিল তার দৈনন্দিন কাজের অঙ্গ। পাড়ার মেয়েরা তো দূরের কথা, ছেলেরাও তার ভয়ে থরহরি কম্প ছিল। ওকে জন্ম করার বহু ফন্দি এঁটেও কেউ সফল হতে পারেনি। এহেন মাসি একবার জেদ ধরলো শশধর মেসোর কাছে যে তাকে ভূত দেখাতে হবেই। মাসি জেদ ধরলে তা না করে কোন উপায় নেই। তাহলে ঘটনাটা বলেই ফেলি।

আমার মায়ের কাকা অর্থাৎ আগমনী মাসির বাবা দুঁদে পুলিশ ইন্সপেক্টর ছিলেন। ওদের বিয়ের দশবছর কোন সন্তান হয়নি। বহু পূজা, মানত, তাগা, তাবিজ ইত্যাদি করে তাঁদের সন্তান, ঐ মাসি জন্মায়। কাজেই তোমরা বুঝতেই পারছো ছোটবেলা থেকেই কি আদর আহ্বাদে মাসি মানুষ হয়েছে। তাই বড় হওয়ার সাথে জেদটাও বাড়তে থাকে। শশধর মেসো আমার মেজো মাসির বর। উনি যেমন বলতে কইতে পারতেন সেরকম রসিকও ছিলেন। মাসির সঙ্গে তো তাঁর জামাইবাবু শালীর সম্পর্ক ছিল। আর কেউ মাসির ধারে কাছে না ঘেঁষলেও মেসোর সঙ্গে

খুবই ঠাট্টা, ইয়ারকি, রসিকতা চলতো। এসব কথা আমার মায়ের মুখ থেকে শোনা। আমার তখন জন্মই হয়নি। আমার মায়ের বিয়েও হয়নি তখন। আমার মামাবাড়ি ছিল রাজশাহী, এখন বাংলাদেশে, সেটা মেসোর স্বশুর বাড়ি। উনি আমার মামার বাড়ি প্রায়ই আসতেন কাজের সূত্রে। আমাদের একাল্লবর্তী পরিবার ছিল। তাই মা, জ্যাঠতুতো, খুড়তুতো ভাইবোনরা সব এক সাথেই মানুষ হয়েছে। ঐ সময় আশুতোষ

কলেজ, তা যখন যোগমায়াদেবী কলেজ হয়নি তখন মিনু- (আগমনী মাসির ডাকনাম) ঐ কলেজে ইংলিশ অনার্স নিয়ে বি.এ পড়ত। মাঝে মাঝে ছুটি ছাটাতে দেশের বাড়ি রাজশাহীতে যেত। একদিন দুপুরবেলায় থাওয়া দাওয়ার পর সবাই হলঘরে জমায়েত হয়েছে। শশধর মেসো, মিনু মাসি, মা, চিনু মাসি অর্থাৎ আমার মেজোমাসি সবাই আছেন। সকলেই নিজের নানা অভিজ্ঞতার কথা বলছে। কেউ ভূত দেখার গল্প, কেউ

চার ডাকাতির গল্প। শশধর মেসো তাঁর নানা ভৌতিক গল্প বলছেন। মিনু মাসি ব্যঙ্গের হাসি হেসে বলে, "ওসব সব গাঁজাখুরি গল্প। আমি একটুও বিশ্বাস করি না। জামাইবাবু আপনি কি কোনোদিন ভূত দেখেছেন?"

মেসো এক কথায় বলে বসেন, "নিশ্চয়ই দেখেছি, অনেক দেখেছি। তুমি চাইলে তোমাকেও দেখাতে পারি। তুমি নিজের চোখে দেখলে বিশ্বাস করবে তো?"

"তাহলে ভেবে দেখব" মাসির উক্তি।

"ঠিক আছে তবে হয়ে যাক। কবে দেখতে চাও?" মেসো বলেন। মনে মনে ভাবলেন মাসিকে বোকা বানাবার এই সুবর্ণ সুযোগ কোনোমতেই হাতছাড়া করা যাবে না। তারপর সবাই মিলে নানা আলাপ আলোচনার পর ঠিক হয় সামনের অমাবস্যার রাত্রে ভূত দেখা হবে। তবে কোথায় আসর বসবে !

আমার মামাবাড়ির পেছনেই একটা পোড়ো জমিদারবাড়ি আছে। সেখানে এককালে বহু লোকজন ছিল, জমজমাট ছিল, এখন ওখানে কেউ নেই। শোনা যায় একজন ওখানে আত্মহত্যা করে। এই প্রেম সংক্রান্ত ঘটনা আরকি। তারপর থেকেই রাতে বেরাতে কাউকে ঘুরে বেড়াতে দেখা যায়। লোকে বলে, সত্যি মিথ্যা জানা যায়নি। বহু অভিজ্ঞতার সাক্ষী বহন করে জীর্ণসার বাড়িটি দাঁড়িয়ে আছে। তবে মেসো প্রথমেই ওইদিন কোন চোদ্দ বছরের ছোট বাচ্চাদের যাওয়া চলবে না বলে দিলেন। ছোটরা ঐ জমিদার বাড়ির নাম শুনে নিজে থেকেই দমে গিয়েছিল, তাই তারা বেশি ওজর আপত্তিও তুললো না, মেসোর নির্দেশটা মেনে নিল। বড়দের মুখেও শুনকো শুনকো ভাব দেখা গেল। কেবল মিনু মাসির উৎসাহই সবচেয়ে বেশি। সে বললো, "অনেকবার আমি ঐ বাড়িতে গেছি। কেবল ইদুর বাদুড়ের উৎপাত। সাপথাপও থাকতে পারে। একটু দেখে শুনে যেতে হবে, এই যা। সেদিন কয়েকটা বড় বড় জোরালো টর্চ নিয়ে রাখতে হবে।" মেসো সবাইকে বললেন আরো যারা যারা ভূত দেখতে চায় তারা যেন সবাই ঐ দিন এ বাড়িতে রাত ৮টার পর চলে আসে। সবাই অধীর আগ্রহে ঐ দিনটির প্রতীক্ষায় আছে কতরকম জল্পনা কল্পনা চলছে ঐ দিনটিকে ঘিরে। যাই হোক অবশেষে ঐ বহু আকাঙ্ক্ষিত দিনটি এসেই গেল। সকাল

হতেই সবাই জোগাড় যন্ত্রে জুটে গেল। গঙ্গাজল, ধূপ, ফুল, বেলপাতা, ঘট, তামার পাত্র সব জোগাড় করা হল। বাড়ির কাজের মেয়েকে পাঠিয়ে জমিদারবাড়ির বড় হলঘরটা পরিষ্কার করানো হল। ঘরের চারদিকে সেন্ট ছোটানো হল। নাহলে তো বাদুড়, চামচিকের গন্ধে মানুষ কেন ভুতও পালাবে। মাসিকে সন্ধ্যাবেলায় স্নান-টান সেরে লালপাড় সাদা শাড়ি পরে আসে বলা হয়েছে। চুলকে সাবান দিয়ে থোলা রাখতে বলা হয়েছে। এমনিতে মাসির গায়ের রং চাপা, মুখখানি গোল বাটির মত। তাতে একটু পুরুশালী ভাব। মা, মেজোমাসি, বাড়ির চাকর বাকর সবাই এসে পড়লো। বড়রা সবাই একে একে জমায়েত হতে লাগল। ছোটদের ঢোকা বারণ, তারা একটু উঁকি ঝুঁকি মারতে লাগলো জানালা দিয়ে। সবাই এসে গেলে জানালাগুলো বন্ধ করে দেওয়া হল। রাত ঠিক ৮টা নাগাদ শশধর মেসো গরদের ধূতি, খালি গা, কাঁধে একটি চাদর, পায়ে খড়ম, কপালে চন্দনের তিলক পরে একটি থলি নিয়ে উপস্থিত হলেন ও এবার দরজাগুলো বন্ধ করার নির্দেশ দিলেন। ঘরের কোনাতে আগে থেকেই চন্দনধূপ জ্বালানো হয়েছিল। ধূপের ধোঁয়ায় ঘরের পরিবেশটা কেমন মায়াময় মনে হচ্ছিল। ঘরের মধ্যে নৈশব্দ বিরাজ করছে। শশধর মেসো পিঁড়িতে বসেই চারদিক গঙ্গাজল ছিটিয়ে শুদ্ধ করে নিলেন। এক মনে শুদ্ধ উচ্চারণে সংস্কৃত শ্লোক আওড়াতে লাগলেন। ঘরে সূচীভেদ্য অন্ধকার। সকলের নিঃশ্বাসের শব্দ ছাড়া আর কিছু শোনা যাচ্ছে না। মাসটা শ্রাবণ তাই বাইরে ঝিরি ঝিরি করে বৃষ্টি শুরু হয়েছে। ঝিঁঝিঁ পোকের আর ব্যাঙের ডাক ছাড়া আর কিছুই কর্ণকুহরে প্রবেশ করছে না, প্রায় ঘন্টা খানেক এইভাবে কাটলো। মেসো একসময় মাসিকে সামনের আসনে বসতে বললেন। তার সামনে থলির ভেতর থেকে বের করে একটা ছোট মাটির হাঁড়ি রাখলেন। পাশে ফুল, বেলপাতাও ছিল একটি তামার পাত্রে। মেসো মন্তোচ্চারণ সাথে সাথে মাসিকে নির্দেশ দিচ্ছেন কি করতে হবে। কোথায় হাত রাখতে হবে। এইভাবে মাসিকে হাঁড়িতে হাত দিতে বললেন পরে কপাল ছুঁতে বললেন। এইভাবে একে একে নাক, কান, গাল, গলা সব জায়গায় হাত ছোঁয়াতে বললেন। ক্রমাগত মন্তোচ্চারণ চলছে আর মাসিকে নির্দেশ দিচ্ছেন এরপর কি করতে হবে। এইভাবে আরো আধঘন্টা কেটে গেল। ঘরের মধ্যে সবাই নিঃশব্দ ভাবে বসে আছে। বাইরে কেবল ঝিঁঝিঁ পোকের ডাক শোনা যাচ্ছে। সকলেই অধীর আগ্রহে ভূতের অপেক্ষায় আছে। হঠাৎ মেসো বলে উঠলেন, "কি আগমনী খুব ভয় পেয়েছো বুঝি। হাত এত বরফের মত ঠাণ্ডা কেন?" এর উত্তরে মাসি কি বললো শোনা গেলো না। কেবল ঘড় ঘড় করে গলা দিয়ে কি একটা আওয়াজ বের হল। এবার শশধর মেসো নির্দেশ দিলেন লণ্ঠনগুলো জ্বলে দেবার জন্য। আলো জ্বালাবার সাথে সাথেই সকলের চোখ ধাঁধিয়ে গেল। মেসো ততক্ষণে তাঁর হাতের আয়নাটা মাসির মুখের সামনে তুলে ধরেছেন। মাসির পেছনে যারা বসেছিল তারাও আয়নার দিকে

তাকালো। কোন চেহারাই দেখতে পেল না তারা। ব্যাপারটা কি বোঝবার আগেই সরুলে দেখলো এক দমকা হাওয়ায় বন্ধ দরজা খুলে গেল। সঙ্গে সঙ্গে মাসি দুহাত দিয়ে মুখ ডেকে বিদ্যুৎগতিতে ছুটে বেরিয়ে গেল। পেছন পেছন শশধর মেসোও দৌড়লেন। ঘরের মধ্যে যে যার জায়গায় স্তব্ধ হয়ে ভাবাচাকা খেয়ে বসে আছে। একটু পরেই মেসো ফিরে এলেন

ঘরে ও ধপ করে নিজের পিঁড়িতে বসে পড়লেন। ঐ সময় সকলে তাকিয়ে দেখলো আগমনী মাসি দরজায় দাঁড়িয়ে। মেসোর দিকে তাকিয়ে মুচকি হেসে বললো, "কি জামাইবাবু আমাকে বোকা বানাতে পারলেন না তো?"

সকলে তাকিয়ে দেখলো মাসির পরণে একটা ছাপা শাড়ি, চুলটা দুপাশে বিনুনি করে বাঁধা। মুখে

কালির চিহ্ন মাত্র নেই। ব্যাপারটা কেউই আঁচ করতে পারছে না। সকলে ভাবছে মুহূর্তের মধ্যে মাসি কি করে শাড়ি বদলে মুখের কালিঝুলি ধুয়ে এলো! মাসি ছাড়া সকলেই জানতো হাঁড়িটাতে কালি মাখানো ছিল। তখন মিনু মাসি রহস্যের সমাধান করে বললো, আমি জামাইবাবুর মতলবটা আগেই বুঝেছিলাম। তাই আমি এখানে আসার বদলে আমার এক বান্ধবীর সঙ্গে সিনেমায় গিয়েছিলাম। এই তো ফিরলাম। এই দেখো, সিনেমার নাইট শোয়ের টিকিট। তখনো সবাইয়ের মুখ হাঁ হয়েই আছে। হঠাৎ একটা জোর আওয়াজ, সকলেই তাকিয়ে দেখে শশধর মেসো মেঝেতে অস্ত্রান হয়ে পড়ে আছেন। চোখে মুখে জল ছিটিয়ে স্ত্রান ফেরানো হল। মুখ পাণ্ড বর্ণ ভাবলেশহীন দৃষ্টিতে আগমনী মাসির দিকে তাকিয়ে রইলেন। মুখে কোন কথা নেই। কিছুক্ষণ বাদে অস্ফুট কর্তে মাসির দিকে আঙুল দেখিয়ে জিজ্ঞাস করলেন, সবার মনেই একই জিজ্ঞাসা, তাহলে মাসির মত যে একটু আগে ছুটে ঘর থেকে বেরিয়ে গেল সে তাহলে কে! এই রহস্যের সমাধান আজও হয়নি। তারপর থেকে মেসো কান মলেছেন ভবিষ্যতে আর কাউকে ভুত

দেখাবার চেষ্টা করবেন না। ঐ করতে গিয়ে নিজের বিপদ নিজেই ডেকে আনছিলেন আর কি! ভাগ্যিস! এ যাত্রা বেঁচে গেছেন। তাঁর আরো একটা ব্যাপারে এখনো খটকা লেগে আছে। উনি মন্তোচ্চারণের সাথে একবার যখন হাঁড়িটা স্পর্শ করেছিলেন তখন একটা হিমশীতল হাতের স্পর্শ পেয়েছিলেন। তিনি যেন মরা মানুষের গায়ে হাত দিয়েছেন, এরকম মনে হয়েছিল। তখন শিউরে উঠে উনি হাত সরিয়ে নিয়েছিলেন। পরেও সবাইকে এ ব্যাপারটা বলেননি। চিনু মাসি অর্থাৎ ওনার স্ত্রী তাকেও নয়। ওনার তো পেটে কোন কথা থাকে না, সাথে সাথেই পাঁচ কান করতেন। কেবল চুপি চুপি মাকে কথাটা বলেছিলেন। তবে কি ওটা বিদেহী আত্মা ছিল! তবে কার! আজো কেউ জানে না।



## ভারতীয় মহিলাদের ঐতিহ্যবাহী পোশাক শাড়ি : উৎপত্তি ও প্রচলন

–Sonali Samata Maji

শাড়ি হল ভারতীয় মহিলাদের অন্যতম প্রিয় একটি পোশাক। ভারতীয় শাড়ি সনাতনী। ঐতিহ্যগতভাবে এই পোশাকের মূল্য অনেকখানি, কারণ শাড়ি শুধু একটি সাধারণ পোশাক নয়, এটি যুক্ত ভারতীয় সভ্যতা ও সংস্কৃতির সাথে। একসময় মনে করা হতো ভারতীয় সংস্কৃতিতে পরিধান মানে গুরুজন ও পরিবারকে সম্মান জানানো। আজও আমরা ভারতীয় মহিলারা যেকোনো শুভ আনন্দ অনুষ্ঠানে ও পূজোপার্বে শাড়ি ছাড়া অন্য কোনো পোশাক ভাবতেই পারিনা।

এই ঐতিহ্যপূর্ণ ভারতীয় শাড়ি বর্তমানে ফ্যাশনের জগতে এক অন্যতম পোশাক।

ফ্যাশনবিদরা নানারকম গবেষণা ও উদ্ভাবন করে চলেছেন শাড়ি নিয়ে। নতুন ভাবে শাড়িকে প্রদর্শন করা হলেও, এই শাড়ির প্রচলন অনেক পুরোনো, অনেক সনাতনী। ইতিহাস বলে, শাড়ির প্রথম প্রচলন শুরু হয়েছিলো উত্তর পশ্চিম ভারতের সিন্ধু উপত্যকা অঞ্চলে ২৮০০-১৮০০ খ্রিষ্টপূর্বে (BC)। 'শাড়ি' শব্দটির উৎপত্তি হয়েছে একটি সংস্কৃত শব্দ 'শাটিকা' থেকে। এই 'শাটিকা' আসলে তিন টুকরো কাপড়, আর তার থেকেই উৎপত্তি আজকের লম্বা অথবা শাড়ির। কিন্তু আজও ভারতের বিভিন্ন প্রদেশে টুকরো শাড়ির প্রচলন দেখা যায়। সেই কথাও বলব আপনাদের সাথে। শুধু তাই নয়, বলব ভারতের বিভিন্ন রাজ্যে প্রচলিত বিভিন্ন রকমের শাড়ির, যা প্রদর্শিত করে সেই রাজ্যের শিল্প ও সংস্কৃতিকে।

ভারতীয় সভ্যতায় শাড়ির প্রচলন শুরু হয়েছিলো কটন বা সুতির শাড়ির মধ্য দিয়ে। বর্তমানে বিভিন্ন রকম সিল্ক ও তসরে ভারতীয় শাড়ি সমৃদ্ধ। যেমনি অপূর্ব ভারতীয় তাঁতীদের হাতের বয়নশিল্প, তেমনি অতুলনীয় সুচিকর্ম। ভারতে এতো রকমের শাড়ি আছে যা নিয়ে আলোচনা করতে হলে পাতার পর পাতা লিখে যেতে হবে। না, আমি সেটা করবো না, শুধু বিভিন্ন রাজ্যের কিছু বিখ্যাত শাড়ির নাম বলব আর সেই সম্পর্কে দুই চারকথায় বর্ণনা দেব।

আমি একজন বাঙালী তাই শুরু করবো পশ্চিমবঙ্গের শাড়ি দিয়ে আর বর্তমানে মুম্বাইতে থাকায়, শেষ করবো মহারাষ্ট্রের শাড়ি দিয়ে।

পশ্চিমবঙ্গের হাতে বোনা তাঁতশিল্প খুবই প্রসিদ্ধ তা সে টাঙ্গাইল হোক কিংবা জামদানী।

অপূর্ব আঁচল ও বুটির কাজ থাকে এই শাড়িগুলিতে। জাতীয় পুরস্কার প্রাপ্ত পশ্চিমবঙ্গের ঐতিহ্যপূর্ণ শাড়ির নাম বালুচরি শাড়ি। হাতে বোনা রেশম সুতোর বালুচরি শাড়ি বিখ্যাত এই শাড়ির পাড়, বুটি ও আঁচলের কাজের জন্য। বালুচরি শাড়ির আঁচলের মধ্যে সুতো দিয়ে বোনা

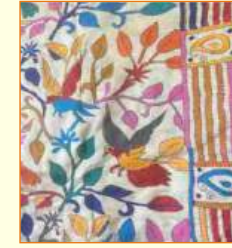
হয় বিভিন্ন পৌরাণিক গল্প। মুঘল, নবাব আর ব্রিটিশ আমলে বালুচরির আঁচলে সামাজিক গল্পও ফুটিয়ে তোলা হতো। হাতের এম্ব্রইডারি কাঁথা সেলাই শাড়িও পশ্চিমবঙ্গে খুবই প্রসিদ্ধ। এছাড়া বাংলার পটচিত্র শাড়ি, বেগমপুরি, বিষ্ণুপুরি ও মুর্শিদাবাদ সিল্ক আর বাটিকের কাজ আজও ঐতিহ্যবহন করে।



Baluchari



Jamdani



Kathastich



Bengal Patachitra

ওড়িশার বয়নশিল্প খুব ঐতিহ্যপূর্ণ। ওড়িশার প্রত্যেক গ্রাম ও অঞ্চল তাদের নিজস্ব শিল্পশৈলীর জন্য বিখ্যাত। ওড়িশা শাড়ি সুতির এবং সিল্কের হয়। এই শাড়ি টাই (tie) ও ডাই (dye) অর্থাৎ বাঁধা অবস্থায় রঙ করা হয়। ওড়িশার থান্দুয়া শাড়ি বিখ্যাত কারণ এই শাড়ি ভগবান জগন্নাথ পরিধান করেন। এছাড়া পাশাপল্লি, বমকাই, সম্বলপুরি, বিচিত্রপুরি ইত্যাদি শাড়ি বিখ্যাত। রঘুরাজপুর গ্রামটি ওড়িশার শিল্পগ্রাম হিসাবে পরিচিত কারণ এখানকার কারুশিল্প খুবই প্রসিদ্ধ। রঘুরাজপুর পটচিত্র শাড়ি খুবই ঐতিহ্যপূর্ণ।



Khandua



Pasapali



Odisha Patachitra

কেরালার সনাতনী শাড়ি হল সোনালী পাড়ের মাখন রঙের সুতোর শাড়ি যা কসাবু শাড়ি নামে পরিচিত। আজকাল সোনালী পাড়ের বদলে রূপালী পাড়ের প্রচলন দেখা যায়। কেরালার ঐতিহ্যবাহী শাড়ি কিন্তু অখণ্ড শাড়ী নয়, দুই টুকরো শাড়ি যা সেটমুগু বা মুগুনারিয়াতুম নামে পরিচিত। এছাড়া কেরালার মুরাল চিত্রকন শাড়ি খুবই প্রসিদ্ধ।

আসামের বিখ্যাত শাড়ি মুগা ও এরি সিল্ক সুতোর হয়, এছাড়া আসামের পাটসিল্ক শাড়িও বিখ্যাত। আসামের ঐতিহ্যবাহী শাড়িও অখণ্ড শাড়ি নয়, দুই টুকরো শাড়ির নাম মেখলাচাদর। নিচের টুকরোটি সেলাই করে স্কাটের মতো করে সামনে ভাঁজ করে পরা হয় যামেখলা বা মেখলা নামে পরিচিত। অন্য টুকরোটি চাদর বা সাদর নামে পরিচিত যা আঁচল করে পরা হয়।

গুজরাট বিখ্যাত ঘরচোলা শাড়ির জন্য। এই শাড়ি সিল্কের হয় এবং জরির চেক থাকে। ফুল নির্যাস ও ভেষজ থেকে রং তৈরী করে, হাতে কাটা কাঠের ব্লক দিয়ে ছাপানো এক অপরূপ ছাপা শাড়ি গুজরাটে পাওয়া যায়, যা পরিচিত আজরাখ প্রিন্ট বা ছাপা নামে। সুতি, সিল্ক, তসর সবতেই এইধরনের ছাপা হয়ে থাকে। এছাড়া গুজরাটের সিন্দি কড়াই ও কাটচি সেলাইয়ের শাড়িও খুব বিখ্যাত।



Set Mundu



Mekhala



Gharchola



Sindi Kadai

উত্তরপ্রদেশ বিখ্যাত বেনারসি শাড়ির জন্য। সিল্কের উপর পাড়, বুটি ও আঁচলে জরির কাজ থাকে এই শাড়িতে। উত্তরপ্রদেশের আর এক বিখ্যাত হাতের সেলাইর কাজ চিকনকারি। এই কাজ সুতি ও জর্জেট শাড়িতেই বেশি দেখা যায়।

তামিলনাড়ু প্রসিদ্ধ সিল্ক শাড়ি জন্য। অত্যন্ত উৎকৃষ্ট মানের সিল্ক শাড়ি তামিলনাড়ুতে পাওয়া যায়। চওড়া জরি পাড় ও আঁচলে অপূর্ব জরির কাজের সিল্ক নাম কাস্তিভরম।

গোয়ার শাড়ির নাম কুনবি শাড়ি যা ওখানকার এক আঞ্চলিক জাতির নামে নামাঙ্কিত। কুনবি শাড়ি সুতোর চেক কাটা নকশা হয়। সাধারণত এটি লাল রঙের হয়, বহর একটু ছোটো হয়, তার ফলে কৃষিকাজে মহিলাদের সুবিধা হয়।

তেলেঙ্গানার অতি পরিচিতি শাড়ির নাম হলো পচমপল্লি শাড়ি। এটি অপূর্ব কাজের খুব নরম একটি সিল্ক শাড়ি। পচমপল্লি শাড়ি সুতোয় বেঁধে ও রং করে অত্যন্ত দক্ষণশীলতায় এক বিশেষ জ্যামিতিক নকশাতে বানানো হয়।



Benarasi



Chikankari



Kanjibharam



Pachampalli

অন্ধ্রপ্রদেশের বিখ্যাত শাড়ির নাম কলামকারি শাড়ি। বাঁশের কলম দিয়ে শাড়িতে নকশা আঁকা হয় তাই এর নাম কলামকারি। কলামকারি শাড়িতে প্রাকৃতিক রং দিয়ে আঁকা হয়।

পাঞ্জাব বিখ্যাত ফুলকারি সেলাইর জন্য। তাই পাঞ্জাবের শাড়ি বলতে ফুলকারি সেলাইয়ের শাড়ির কথাই বলবো।

বিহারের শিল্প বহু সনাতনী। বিহারের মধুবানি চিত্র জগৎ বিখ্যাত। তাই বিহারের শাড়ির কথা বলতে গেলে মধুবানি চিত্রের শাড়ির নাম প্রথমেই আসবে। এছাড়া বিহারের ভাগলপুরি তসর শাড়ি খুবই প্রসিদ্ধ।



Kalamkari



Phulkari



Madhubani



ছত্রিশগরের বিখ্যাত শাড়ির নাম কোসা সিল্ক শাড়ি। এটি একটি তসর জাতীয় শাড়ি।

ঝাড়খণ্ডের শাড়ির নাম কুচাই সিল্ক। এটিও একটি তসর জাতীয় শাড়ি। মনিপুর প্রসিদ্ধ মইরাংফী নামক একরকম সুতির ও সিল্কের শাড়ির জন্য। মনিপুরে টুকরো শাড়ি পরার প্রচলন আছে।

রাজস্থান বিখ্যাত বান্কেজ বা বাঁধনি শাড়ির জন্য, এছাড়া এখানকার লেহেরিয়া নকশার শাড়ি ও জগৎবিখ্যাত। রাজস্থানের গোটাপতির কাজও অতি জনপ্রিয়। তবে রাজস্থানী শাড়ির মূল বিশেষত্ব হলো এখানকার শাড়ির রঙের বাহার।



Kosa



Moirangphee



Laheria

কর্ণাটকের ঐতিহ্যবাহী শাড়ি হলো ইক্কল শাড়ি। ইক্কল শাড়ি সুতির ও সিল্কের দুই প্রকারেরই হয়, এছাড়া আরও একটি হাতের সেলাইয়ের বিখ্যাত শাড়ি হলো কাসোটি এম্ব্রয়ডারি শাড়ি।

মধ্যপ্রদেশ প্রসিদ্ধ ঐতিহ্যবাহী চান্দেরী শাড়ির জন্য। সোনালী পাড়ের এই শাড়ির মূল আকর্ষণ, এর অপূর্ব আঁচল। এছাড়া মধ্যপ্রদেশের আর একটি বিখ্যাত শাড়ি হলো মাহেশ্বরী শাড়ি।

কাশ্মীরি শাড়ি মানেই প্রথমে পাশমিনা শাড়ির কথাই মনে আসে। এছাড়া কানি শাড়ি ও কাশিদাকারি হাতের সেলাইয়ের শাড়ি জগৎ বিখ্যাত।



Ilkal



Chanderi



Maheswari

মহারাষ্ট্রের ঐতিহ্যবাহী শাড়ি হলো নয় গজের নৌভরি শাড়ি এবং মহারাষ্ট্রের অতি বিখ্যাত ও অপূর্ব কাজের শাড়ির নাম পৈঠানী শাড়ি। এই শাড়ির মূল আকর্ষণ এই শাড়ির অপূর্ব কারুকাজের আঁচল। এছাড়া মহারাষ্ট্রের খুন (khun) শাড়ি অন্যতম পরিচিত একটি শাড়ি।



Kashidakari



Paithani



Khun

ভারতের যেইসব অঞ্চলে শাড়ি পরার প্রচলন আছে, আমি আপনাদের সামনে সেই সব অঞ্চলের শাড়ির কিছু কথা বললাম। একজন মহিলা হিসাবে শাড়ি আমার অত্যন্ত প্রিয় একটি পোশাক। একজন ভারতীয় নাগরিক হিসাবে আমি গর্ব অনুভব করি যে, ভারতীয় মহিলাদের ঐতিহ্যবাহী পোশাক শাড়ি, তবে নিছক এক পরিধানের গন্ডি থেকে অনেক এগিয়ে শাড়ি আজ এক ভারতীয় ঐতিহ্যের শৈল্পিক নিদর্শন, রুচিবোধের বাহক।

জনগর্জন চলছে চলবে - Sumela Dutta  
(Roar of the Masses)

সাম্প্রতিক কালে ঘটা বেশ কিছু নৃশংস ধর্ষণের ঘটনা আমাদের চারপাশের মানুষ জনকে নাড়িয়ে দিয়েছে / আমরা মনে করতাম আমাদের দেশ যে দ্রুততার সাথে উন্নতি করছে তাতে খুন ও ধর্ষণের মতো সামাজিক অপরাধ গুলি ক্রমশই হ্রাস পাবে/ অথচ বাস্তব পরিস্থিতিটা দেখছি ততটা উজ্জ্বল নয়/অপরাধের হার কমেইনি, কমছেনা নারীর উপর হওয়া নির্যাতনও/দেশ তথা সমাজ যত উন্নত হবে সেখানকার প্রতিটি নারী শিক্ষিত, সুরক্ষিত ও স্বাধীন হবে/দুর্ভাগ্যজনকভাবে, ২০২১ সাল থেকে ভারতবর্ষ বিশ্বের পঞ্চম বৃহত্তম অর্থনীতি হয়েও সেই জায়গা থেকে অনেক দূরে বিচরণ করছে/

সমাজের সব চেয়ে ঘৃণ্যতম অপরাধ হল ধর্ষণ/আর আমাদের দেশে ধর্ষণ এবং ধর্ষণ করে খুনের ঘটনা ঘটেই চলেছে/ন্যাশনাল ক্রাইম রেকর্ডস ব্যুরো অনুসারে ভারতবর্ষে প্রতিদিন গড়ে ৯০ টি করে ধর্ষণের ঘটনা ঘটে থাকে /এই তথ্য অত্যন্ত হতশা জনক /

২০১২ সালে ঘটেছিল নির্ভয়া কান্ড / নির্ভয়ার মৃত্যুর পর সারা দেশ উত্তাল হয়েছিল / সেবারে দোষীদের উপযুক্ত শাস্তি দেওয়া হয়েছিল / প্রশাসনের তরফ থেকে মেয়েদের সুরক্ষার জন্য বেশ কিছু নতুন পদক্ষেপ নেওয়া হয়েছিল /মনে হয়েছিল, যে কঠোর শাস্তির দৃষ্টান্ত রাখা হল তা ভবিষ্যতে সমাজে এই ধরনের অপরাধ রোধ করতে সাহায্য করবে/ তবু তার পরেও ২০১৩ সালে কামদুনির ঘটনা, ২০১৭ সালে উন্নাও র ঘটনা ও ২০২০ সালে হাতরাসের ঘটনা আমাদের দেখতে হল/কামদুনির ও হাতরাসের ঘটনা তে ধর্ষিতাকে খুনও হতে হয়েছিল /

আবার ঘটল এই একই ঘটনার পুনরাবৃত্তি ২০২৪ র ৯ই অগাস্ট এ /তিলোত্তমা কলকাতা কে কলঙ্কিত করে এশিয়ার স্বনামধন্য আর .জি.কর মেডিকেল কলেজের সেমিনার রুমে রাতের অন্ধকারে ঘুমন্ত অবস্থায় কদর্যভাবে ধর্ষিত ও খুন হতে হল কর্মরত তরুণী চিকিৎসক কে/ এই হাড় হিম করা নারকীয় ঘটনায় মানুষ স্তম্ভিত ও হতবাক ,এই ঘটনা সমাজের সকল স্তরের মানুষের চेतনাকে সজোরে ধাক্কা মেরেছে/এখানে বলি ,অন্যান্য ধর্ষণ ও খুনের ঘটনার থেকে এই ঘটনার আলাদা তাৎপর্য আছে কেননা এখানে শুধু ধর্ষণ ও খুনই ঘটেনি , এই ন্যাকারজনক ঘটনা ঘটার পর পুলিশ ,প্রশাসন ও শাসকদলের তরফ থেকে অপরাধ কে চাপা দিয়ে অপরাধীদের আড়াল করার ও বিভিন্ন প্রমাণ লোপাটের আপ্রাণ চেষ্টা করা হয়েছে /আর এই কারণেই জনরোষ দ্বিগুণ হয়েছে /তাদের ক্ষোভ ও উন্মাদ দাবানলের মতো দিকে দিকে ছড়িয়ে পড়ছে /চার দিকের তীব্র প্রতিবাদ দেখে মনে হচ্ছে আমাদের ব্যস্ত জীবনের ক্ষুদ্র স্বার্থপরতা ও স্বকেন্দ্রিকতা আমাদের মানবিকতাবোধকে এখনো হারিয়ে দিতে পারেনি/প্রতিবাদ করার সাহস ও ভাষা আমরা হারিয়ে ফেলিনি/ঘটনার পাঁচ দিনের মধ্যেই ১৪ই অগাস্ট রাতে এক অরাজনৈতিক ছাত্রীর "মেয়েদের রাত দখলের " ডাকে যে ভাবে সারা শহর , রাজ্য , দেশ ও এমনকি বিদেশে থাকা ভারতীয়রা সাড়া দিয়েছেন তা নিঃসন্দেহে নজিরবিহীন ও অভূতপূর্ব /

শুধু ১৪ই অগাস্ট নয় , তারপর থেকে বিভিন্ন দিনে বিভিন্ন সময়ে পথে নামছে নাগরিক সমাজ , ক্রমশ গর্জে উঠছে তারা /জুনিয়র ও সিনিয়র ডাক্তার রা তো প্রথম দিন থেকেই প্রতিবাদে সরব হয়েছিল , তাদের সাথে হাত মিলিয়েছে সমাজের সকল পেশার মানুষ /আইনজীবী থেকে শিক্ষক, অভিনেতা - অভিনেত্রী থেকে গায়ক - গায়িকা এগিয়ে এসেছেন স্বনামধন্য বিশিষ্ট নাগরিকেরাও , এমনকি ফুটবল প্রেমী মানুষেরাও একত্রিত ভাবে প্রতিবাদ জানিয়েছেন /ব্যানারে , স্লোগানে, কবিতায় , গানে মুখরিত কলকাতার রাজপথের আকাশ -বাতাস/দাবি একটাই , তিলোত্তমার বিচার চাই/ চিকিৎসক কে আমরা ভগবান বলে মানি তাই সেই ভগবানকে কোন অসুর বা কোন কোন অসুরেরা বধ করল এবং কেন করল তা মানুষকে জানতেই হবে /আর সেই অসুরদের উপযুক্ত দৃষ্টান্তমূলক শাস্তির ব্যবস্থা যতদিন না হবে ততদিন চলতে থাকবে এই জ্বলন্ত প্রতিবাদ/এখানে কোনো এ-দল , ও-দল নেই ,শাসক , বিরোধী সবাই দেখে নিক মানুষের কত জোড়/ধীরে ধীরে প্রতিবাদ রূপ নিচ্ছে আন্দোলনের /শুধু শহরে বা রাজ্যে নয় , এই আন্দোলনের স্বর ও সুর ছড়িয়ে পড়ছে দেশ-বিদেশের বিভিন্ন প্রান্তে/গণমাধ্যম ও

সদর্থক ভূমিকা পালন করে চলেছে /লাগাতার দেশের বিভিন্ন ভাষার খবরের কাগজ , নিউস চ্যানেল ও সোশ্যাল মিডিয়ায় এই নিয়ে চর্চা চলছে / এত তীব্র জন জাগরণের ছবি সাম্প্রতিক কালে আমরা দেখিনি /

এরই মধ্যে উত্তরাখন্ডের নৈনিতালে , মহারাষ্ট্রের রত্নাগিরি ও বদলাপুরে আবার ঘটেছে ধর্ষণের ঘটনা/নৈনিতালের মহিলাটিকেও খুন হতে হয়েছে / বদলাপুরে ধর্ষিত হয়েছে এক চার বছরের নাবালিকা আর রত্নাগিরিতে এক সতেরো বছরের কিশোরী /তাই শুধু দিল্লি বা উত্তর ভারত নয় ,কলকাতার মতো তথাকথিত নিরাপদ শহরেও যদি এতবড় ঘটনা ঘটতে পারে তখন বুঝতে হবে দেশের কোনো কোণ ই সম্পূর্ণ ভাবে সুরক্ষিত নয় /সেই কারণেই এই আন্দোলন কোনো একটি রাজ্যের নয় , এই আন্দোলন গোটা দেশের /ধর্ষণের মতো ঘৃণ্য অন্যায়ের বিরুদ্ধে এই প্রতিবাদ থামলে চলবেনা , বরং দিকে দিকে দাবানলের মতো ছড়িয়ে দিতে হবে "ওই ওয়ান্ট জাস্টিস" এর প্রতিধ্বনি/ আর তাই তিলোত্তমার বলিদান বিফলে যাবে না , এই ধরনের ঘৃণ্য অপরাধের প্রতিবাদের প্রতিরূপ হয়ে সে আজীবন রয়ে যাবে /প্রতিবারই প্রতিবাদের ব্যাপ্তি যত বাড়বে , তত সুনিশ্চিত হবে ন্যায়বিচারের আশা / মানুষ এবারে শপথ নিক প্রতিকারহীন শক্তির অপরাধে বিচারের বাণীকে তারা কিছুতেই নীরবে নিভুতে কাঁদতে দেবেনা /

আমার বিশ্বাস সর্ব স্তরের মানুষ এভাবে একত্রিত হয়ে সরব হলে অপরাধীরা ভয়ে পেয়ে পিছু হটতে বাধ্য হবেই হবে/অপরাধ প্রবণ মানুষের কাছেও আগামী দিনের জন্য এক কড়া বার্তা যাক যাতে তারা এরকম কুকাাজ করার দুঃসাহস আর না দেখাতে পারে /সেই সঙ্গে দেশের আইনি ব্যবস্থা কে আরো কঠোর ও তৎপর হতে হবে / অতীতে যেমন সতী দাহ প্রথা হ্রদ বা বিধবা বিবাহ কার্যকরী করতে দেশের আইন বড় ভূমিকা নিয়েছিল তেমন এখনও এমন আইন আশা উচিত যাতে এই ধরনের ঘৃণ্য সামাজিক অপরাধের দ্রুততার সাথে ন্যায় বিচার হয় এবং অপরাধীরা দৃষ্টান্তমূলক ভাবে সাজা প্রাপ্ত হয় /

এতে অবশ্যই ভবিষ্যতে নারীর আত্মবিশ্বাস অনেক বাড়বে, তারা ভয় কে জয় করে সামনে এগিয়ে আসবে /তারা বুঝবে তারা একা নয় , তাদের সাথে আছে শুভ বুদ্ধিসম্পন্ন , প্রগতিশীল মনোভাবাপন্ন বহু পুরুষও /রাতের অন্ধকারে বাড়ির বাইরে পা দিতে বা প্রয়োজনে কাজে বেড়োতে তারা বিন্দুমাত্র কুণ্ঠা বোধ করবেনা/

আগামীদিনের প্রতিটি নারী আত্মরক্ষার প্রশিক্ষণ নিয়ে শারীরিক ও মানসিক ভাবে আরো দৃঢ় হোক /বাক-স্বাধীনতা থেকে অর্থনৈতিক স্বাধীনতা, নিজের জীবনের ছোট-বড় সিদ্ধান্ত নেওয়ার স্বাধীনতা, দেশের প্রতিটি নারী চলুক পুরুষের সাথে পায়ে পা মিলিয়ে/আমরা গড়ে তুলি এক প্রকৃত অর্থে উন্নত দেশ ও সমাজ /আসুন,সেই দিন আনার জন্য নব জাতক ও নব জাতিকার কাছে আমরা দৃঢ় অঙ্গীকার রাখি /



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