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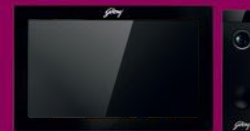
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Table of Contents

15

EDITOR'S NOTE

21

SOCIAL COMMITMENT

71

HODOPHILES
Travelogues

157

HENSHELER GOLPO
Culinary Stories

169

HAATHE KOLOME
Art & Craft - A Ready Reckoner

19

PBWA ROUNDUP
The year that was

43

DURGOTSAV 2025

117

EXPRESSIONS
Articles & Poems

163

BRUSH STROKES
Drawings & Paintings

Throughout

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Managing editor : Neelaj Sengupta

Production editors :

Damayanti Mukherjee
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Content editors :

Keya Bagchi
Damayanti Mukherjee
Shashwat Das
Jayanta Kar
Neelaj Sengupta
Sonali Samanta Maji

Souvenir team :

Sourav Mitra	Jayanta Chattopadhyay
Jayanta Kar	Madhumita Mukherjee
Neelaj Sengupta	Aratrika Mitter
Shashwat Das	Sonali Samanta Maji
Damayanti Mukherjee	Pinaki Dutta
Keya Bagchi	Srirupa Sen
Arnab Bagchi	Mousumi Biswas
Sharmistha Bhattacharya	Debashis Banerjee
Amit Dakshit	

Images Courtesy :

Ashoke Mukherjee	Arnab Bagchi
Santanu Sen	Sonali Samanta Maji
Dibyendu Sen Sharma	Shashwat Das

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Editor's Note

Powai Bengali Welfare Association (PBWA) is into its third decade of existence. Stakeholders, who have been part of this vibrant group, will look back to this journey with pride and a deep sense of accomplishment. What started off in 2006, primarily to celebrate Durga Puja, the largest festival for Bengalis, has evolved into an inclusive socio-cultural organization; so much so, that we can now call ourselves a social organization with a tag – We also conduct Durga Puja!

Our social footprint has spread far & near. From the immediate vicinity of Powai to the far-fetched villages of Palghar district where poverty, malnutrition, ill-health are rampant. From supporting nutrition for TB patients to constructing toilets for Government schools; from enabling our law enforcement forces to empowering less-privileged women in the neighbourhood; from adopting schools to supporting street children – the list goes on! It is commendable to note that our Toilet reconstruction project in the schools of Palghar district (WASH program) is recognized by NITI Aayog (Govt of India) for best practices, utilizing community involvement and local resources to ensure long-term sustainability. Dare I say, we have indeed, come a long way!

The world today, is in a state of flux. Armed conflicts have led to energy crisis, food insecurity and trade & transport disruption. These have spiked inflation and caused economic downturn in several geographies. In these difficult times, the need of the hour is, sustained diplomatic engagement, humanitarian assistance and cooperation by global bodies. In short, a collective endeavour to prevent the slide further!

In line with the dire need of the moment, PBWA has adopted “**Harmony through Peace**” as the central theme for this year's Durga Puja. The message of Peace and a Harmonious existence, needs to spread among across all walks and borders and hence this endeavour by PBWA. Besides visual representation, the theme will be expressed through music, dance, drama and formal engagements with the media, as well as leadership personas expected to visit during the Durgotsav.

This 21st edition of ‘**Parichay**’, our in-house coffee-table book, carries a comprehensive round-up of PBWAs social ventures and its far-reaching impact along with interesting creative expressions of its members in different art forms – poetry, paintings, travelogue, recipes and articles encompassing a wide range of perspectives. Importantly, **Parichay** also portrays Products & Services of sponsors from the Business world, thus bringing in much-needed revenue to support our social programs. Our sincere gratitude to all sponsors for their support and to our dear members for their valued contributions.

Enjoy the read!

“
May there be
Harmony through Peace!
”


Jayanta Kar
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SOCIAL COMMITMENT

Impactful Service

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.









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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.

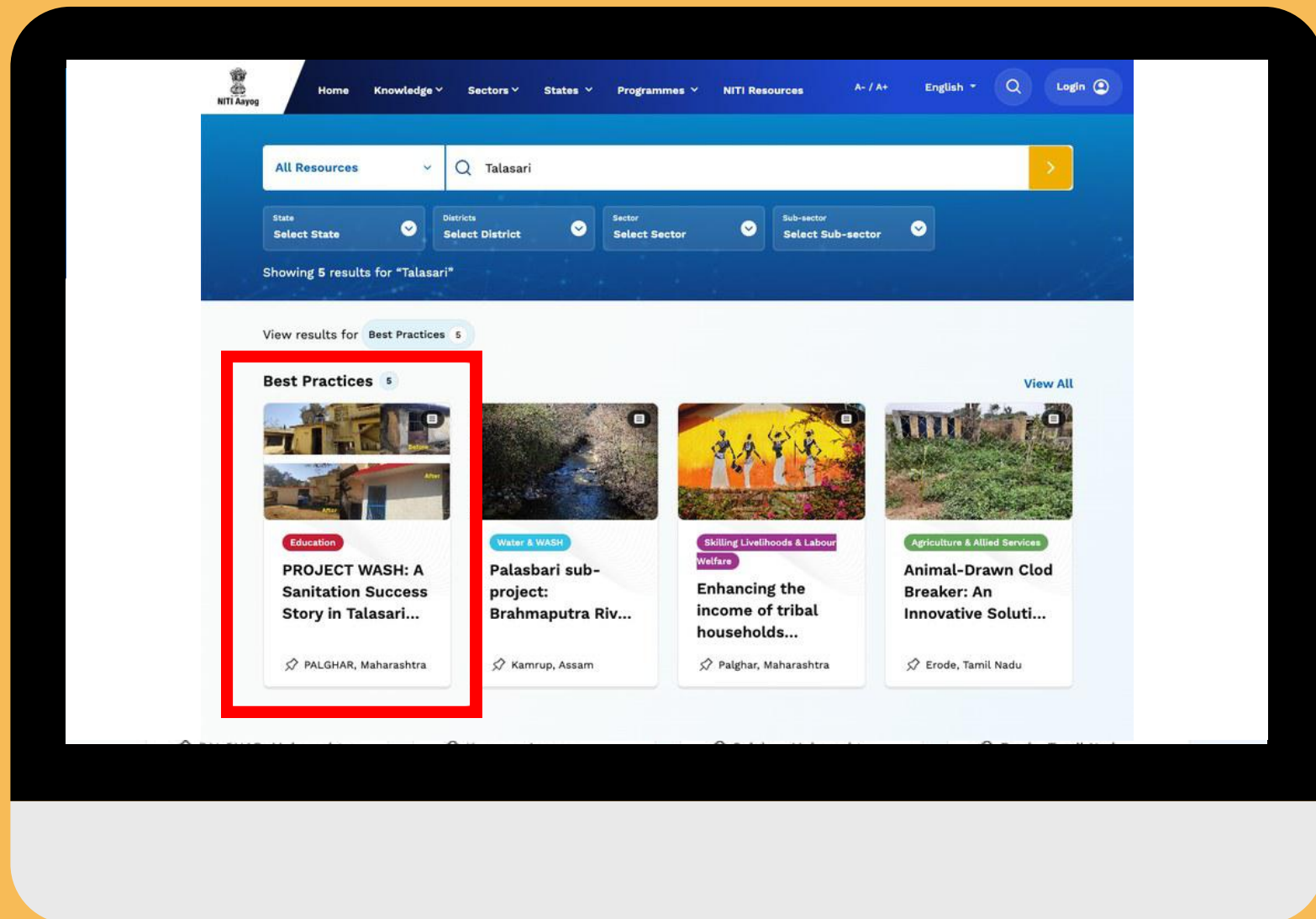
Our goals of this project is to renovate/refurbish the sanitation facilities at the tribal Zila Parishad School in Aspirational Talasari block, Maharashtra, focusing on improving conditions for the students, particularly girls. We have undertaken renovation/refurbishment/construction of toilets. Through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

A) PBWA aims to prioritize the 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.



Acknowledgement of PBWAs WASH initiative as a Best Practice by NITI Aayog, Government of India





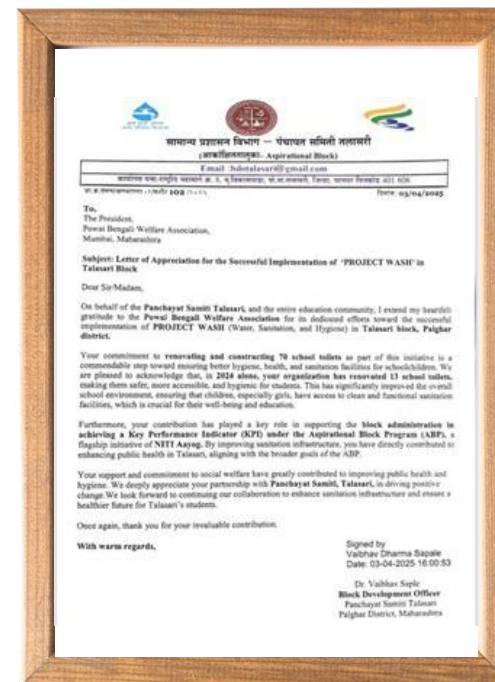
Eradication of TB - PBWA at the forefront

Mumbai is a hotbed for Tuberculosis (TB). While the Government provides for free medicines, nutrition for patients and their family members falls way short. PBWA has stepped up to provide 75 Poshan bags a month of rations to TB patients and their families. The Ministry of Health & Family Welfare, Govt of India has acknowledged this effort and included PBWA in Pradhan Mantri TB Mukh Bharat Abhiyaan.

Endorsements of PBWA's Social Initiatives by Central and State Government authorities



Our efforts at
eradication of TB



Appreciation from Block
Development Officer (BDO),
Talasari on our WASH Program



Appreciation from Medical
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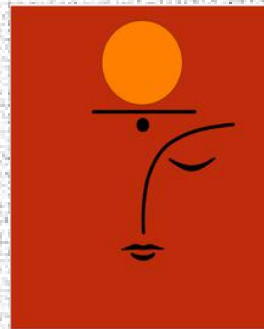
Performance by Specially-abled Children



In line with PBWA's support for the marginalized, disadvantaged and differently-abled, a performance by specially-abled children on Shashti touched the hearts of the entire audience. The musical talent and the soul-stirring performance of these children left everyone in awe.

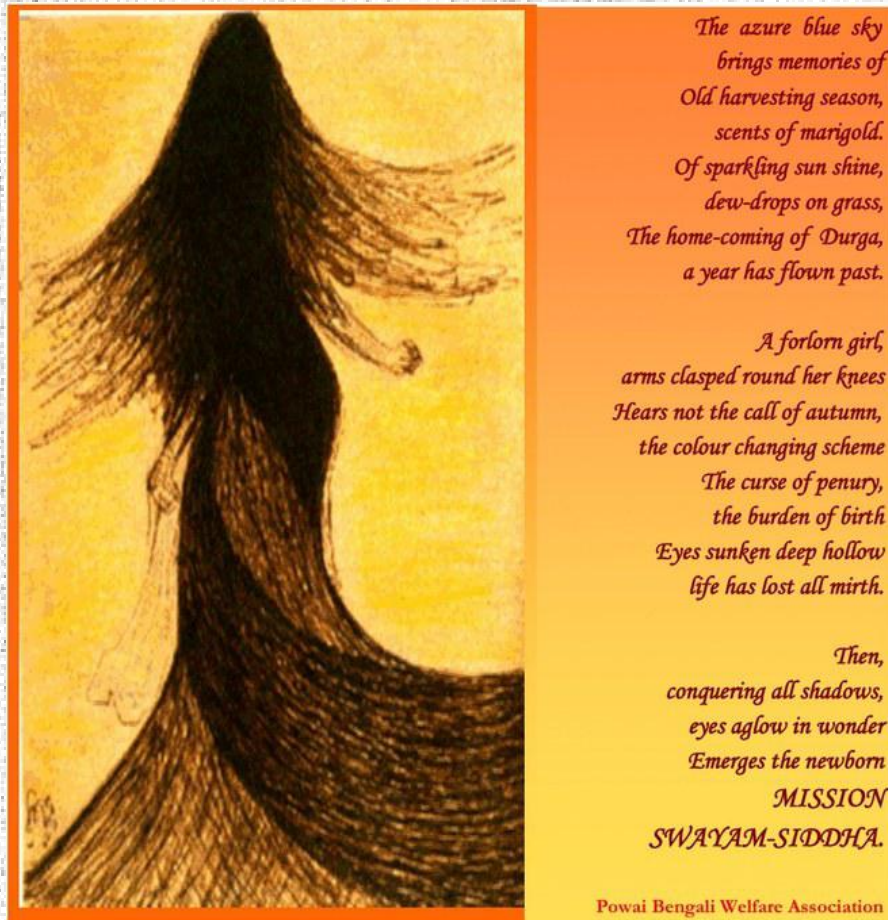
The World is Now Her Oyster

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Mission Swayam Siddha

A Mission Born: July 15, 2007



It was on the auspicious day of Rath Yatra, July 15, 2007, that Mission Swayam Siddha(MSS), embarked on its journey to empower economically and socially less-advantaged women in and around Powai, Mumbai.

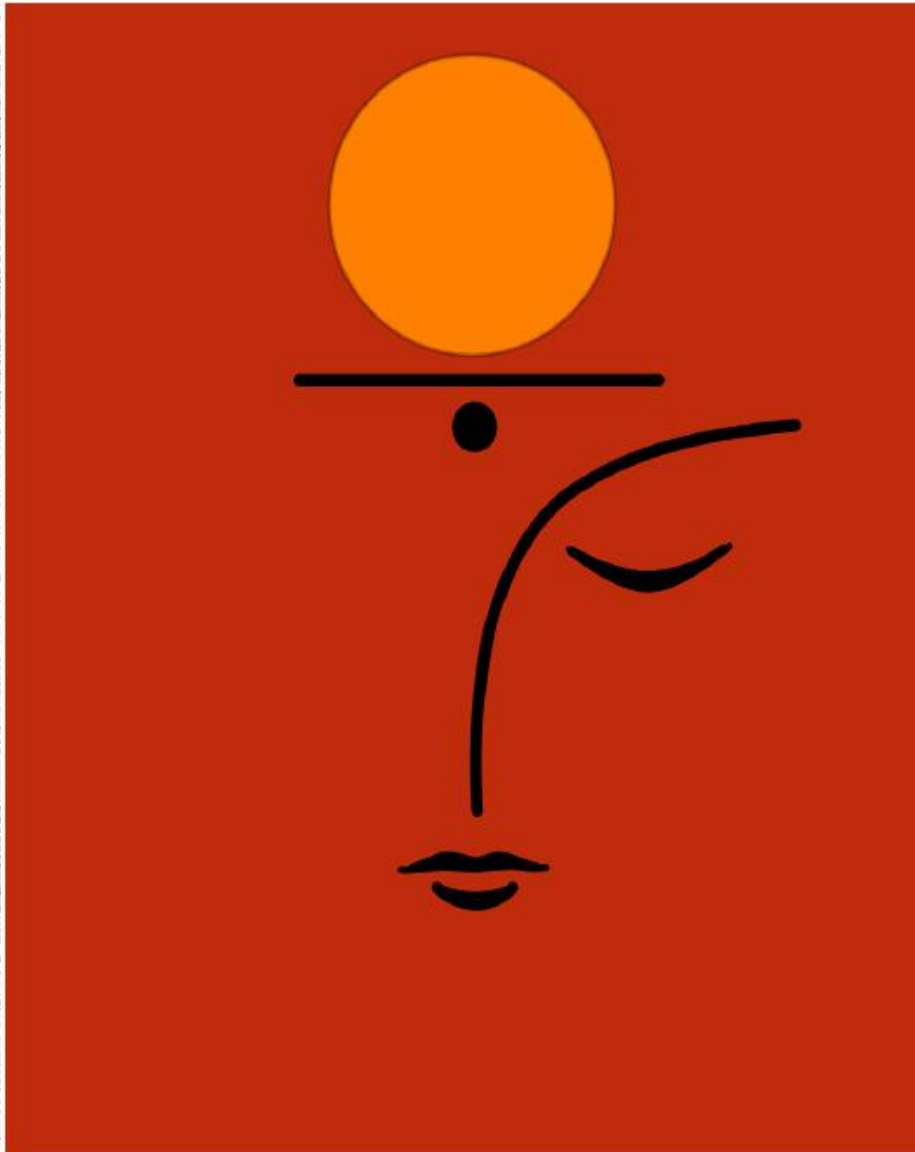
MSS is the first flagship social initiative launched by the still nascent Powai Bengali Welfare Association (PBWA), a registered charitable organization, formed in 2006.



The vision of PBWA has been to make a difference to their immediate neighborhood as well as to the society at large through enhancing cultural and social harmony.

Twenty years down the line, MSS is still continuing on its journey of women empowerment, progressing ahead from one milestone to the next

The MSS Mission



The Belief

MSS is born out of the belief that empowered women can be dynamic promoters of social transformation, with much potential lying in marginalized and destitute women who have fallen through the cracks and lead an impoverished existence, but who have capabilities that have remained dormant due to lack of opportunities. MSS is a social initiative that seeks to act as a facilitator to unleash the capabilities of those women many of whom lack even basic education, and who despite various social pressures, have the courage and enthusiasm to venture out to educate and train themselves in the hope of lifting their families out of poverty and securing the future of their children.

The Mission

To create social capital by empowering women through:

- ❖ vocational training to create income earning capabilities by producing a range of exquisite handcrafted products
- ❖ marketing in-house MSS products to provide a sustainable source of income for the women, and
- ❖ training in end-to-end processes of marketing, production and overall governance of MSS at all level

The MSS Logo

encapsulates the very essence of our mission, of economically and socially less-advantaged women with quiet strength and untapped capabilities, but with a third eye – the sun, rising up to dispel darkness, spread rays of hope and usher in an awakening in their lives.

The Journey

The Foundation Years: 2007-2010

MSS operations started with visits of PBWA volunteers to neighbourhood chawls, convincing families, especially the husbands, in-laws, parents of the value of letting the women of their families train themselves, earn a living and be economically empowered. Twenty years back, this was still an alien concept in the social and economic demographic we were engaged with, and much of our arguments were viewed with suspicion. In many cases, women who were excited at the prospect of stepping out of the confines of their homes, convinced their families, and in some cases, rebelled against them!

Volunteers soon realized that of the twenty women who formed the first batch, had to be trained from scratch in the most fundamentals in vocational training in hand made products. The first tools in the hands of our trainees were a pair of scissors along with a ruler and pencil. However, what needed to be cut needed to be measured, and that was the biggest hurdle to cross as the trainees were not familiar with numbers, inches and centimetres.

Hence, we started with the simplest of product training: basic paper bags, basic needlework, and the first strokes with the brush.

For overall development, we taught them basics of personal hygiene which many of them were unaware of.

And...yes...teaching them how to sign on a salary slip to remuneration for their job!!



The Journey

The Take-Off Years: 2011-2019

The foundational training of the initial years created a strong base for our trainees to acquire more advanced skills in paper crafts, needlework and stitching, as well as painting. This showed up in the unique products they crafted which in turn opened up multiple opportunities to show case them in different market spaces. The take-off years were indeed remarkable marking many firsts, most notably:

- ❖ The first corporate exhibition in 2011 followed by many more in the years to come.
- ❖ The first of several workshops in folk art for MSS trainees by reputed artistes.
- ❖ The first set of DIY workshops by MSS trainees for corporate employees.
- ❖ The first set of corporate orders for MSS products.
- ❖ The first foray into crafting unique products that have defined Brand MSS for its exquisite hand work and product design.

2016: A Watershed Event-MSS goes international

An international jewellery brand Isharya collaborated with MSS to produce the jewellery lines Arinna that was showcased in the Paris Fashion Week and carried by international department stores. Our women used their skill in threadwork to craft this line of jewellery with Turkish golden thread.

The rest, as they say, is history!!



The Journey

Dreaming Big: 2020-26

After the Covid-19 pandemic, MSS bounced back with all its might. While work was on hold during the pandemic, big dreams about MSS continued to take wings! The focus was on exploring ways of increasing the income of our trainees, of expanding new avenues to market for MSS products in a post-Covid scenario, and upskilling trainees to produce high-end home décor products and accessories.

Highlights

Gen Next of MSS volunteers sprung into action to leverage social media, notably Instagram, to spread the word about MSS trainees and their products.

Much to the happiness of our trainees, MSS gets a spacious and comfortable workshop space cum gallery.

Upskilling of trainees, and product design innovations enabled the introduction of new lines of products that were loved by our customers!

MSS Pop-Up stall at our gallery for the very first time in August 2025 and it was a runaway success!

Dreams do come true!



The Milestones

The trainees of MSS have walked through our doors at different points of time in the last twenty years, and have experienced in various measures the many markers of empowerment.

Financial autonomy: every trainee trained to open and operate an individual bank account where all payments from MSS are made. This has enabled trainees to have control over how their income is spent.

Employment: Once homebound, post MSS exposure, seeking employment outside MSS that include working as service staff in schools, boutiques and retail outlets.

Enterprise: Small entrepreneurial ventures like opening a food outlet along with working at MSS; home based business leveraging skills acquired at MSS.

Soft skills: With no exposure to the corporate world at one point of time, MSS women have developed the skill set to independently manage exhibitions at corporates and other public exhibitions, including billing and interacting with customers and conducting DIY workshops.

Investment in health and education of children: Being aware of the benefits of learning and the limitations arising from lack of formal education, MSS women are keen to ensure that their children attend college and break out of the poverty trap.

Agency and breaking the traditional mould: A significant social advancement where MSS women have developed agency and a sense of self worth with explicit encouragement from parents, in-laws, spouses and children.

The world is now her oyster!



हमें आप अण मेडम का परीश्रम बहुत आगे अडारण
और हमें आपने पाप पर खड़े होने की ताकत मीलती
है और हमें भी यही उम्मीद है हम अण आप की
मेहनत से हमारी कोशिश है की यह भेग भीख
कर आपने अच्छो का भविष्य आगे अडा अकते हैं



The Faces of Empowerment: 2007-2026



The Mission Continues.....



missionswayamsiddha



MissionSwayamSiddha



<https://pbwa.in/mission-swayam-siddha/>

Come, visit us

MSS Office/Workshop :1033 Heera Panna Mall, Hiranandani Gardens, Mumbai - 400076



9920618320 /+919870237869



mssempowers@gmail.com | sarkar.jayati@gmail.com

Initiation of Marathi Language classes at PBWA

For most members of PBWA, Mumbai has been their 'Karma Bhoomi' for decades. However the ability to speak the local language was way short of what ought to be. In view of this, PBWA took the initiative of starting Marathi speaking classes for its members. The first batch of 30 odd made time to attend this course on Sundays and successfully completed the course on basic Reading, Writing and Speaking thereby acquiring this much-needed ability to understand and converse in Marathi. The second batch is currently in progress.

पुढारी

पवई बेंगॉली वेलफेअरचा मराठी भाषा शिकविण्याचा उपक्रम

पवई : पुढारी वृत्तपत्र
पवई बेंगॉली वेलफेअर असोसिएशनने आयोजित केलेली पवई बेंगॉली वेलफेअरचा मराठी भाषा शिकविण्याचा उपक्रम हाती घेण्यात आला आहे. सामाजिक कार्यकारीपदावर कार्यरत असलेल्या या उपक्रमात सहभागीता उपक्रमाला उत्तम मिळाले आहे.

या कार्यशील संस्थेने सध्या हातासत असलेल्या पवई बेंगॉली वेलफेअरचा मराठी भाषा शिकविण्याचा उपक्रम हाती घेण्यात आला आहे. सामाजिक कार्यकारीपदावर कार्यरत असलेल्या या उपक्रमात सहभागीता उपक्रमाला उत्तम मिळाले आहे.

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FOSTERING LOCAL INTEGRATION

A Commendable Initiative by the Powai Bengali Welfare Association; Learning Marathi

पवई बेंगॉली वेलफेअर असोसिएशनचा पुढाकार; ३ बावीवर मराठी भाषा शिकविण्यासाठी अभिनव उपक्रम

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Mumbai Bazaar

Planet Powai

FOSTERING LOCAL INTEGRATION

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A POWAI BENGALI WELFARE ASSOCIATION INITIATIVE

PARICHAY

2026

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POWAI BENGALI WELFARE ASSOCIATION

Registered Address: 1033 Heera Panna Mall, Hiranandani Gardens, MHADA Colony 19,
Powai, Mumbai, Maharashtra 400076



THE SPIRIT OF PUJO



DURGOTSAV

2025



POWAI BENGALI WELFARE ASSOCIATION

पवई सर्वजनिक दुर्गोत्सवात स्वागत आहे



Jaya हि

Sep 27 - Oct 2, 2025
Near BEST Bus Depot

Honouring Our Scientists & Armed Forces

Official
Radio Partner



Last year, we hailed India's
Scientific & Technological prowess
as our central theme for Durgotsav.

Association  pbwaofficial

THE THEME





KHUTI PUJO



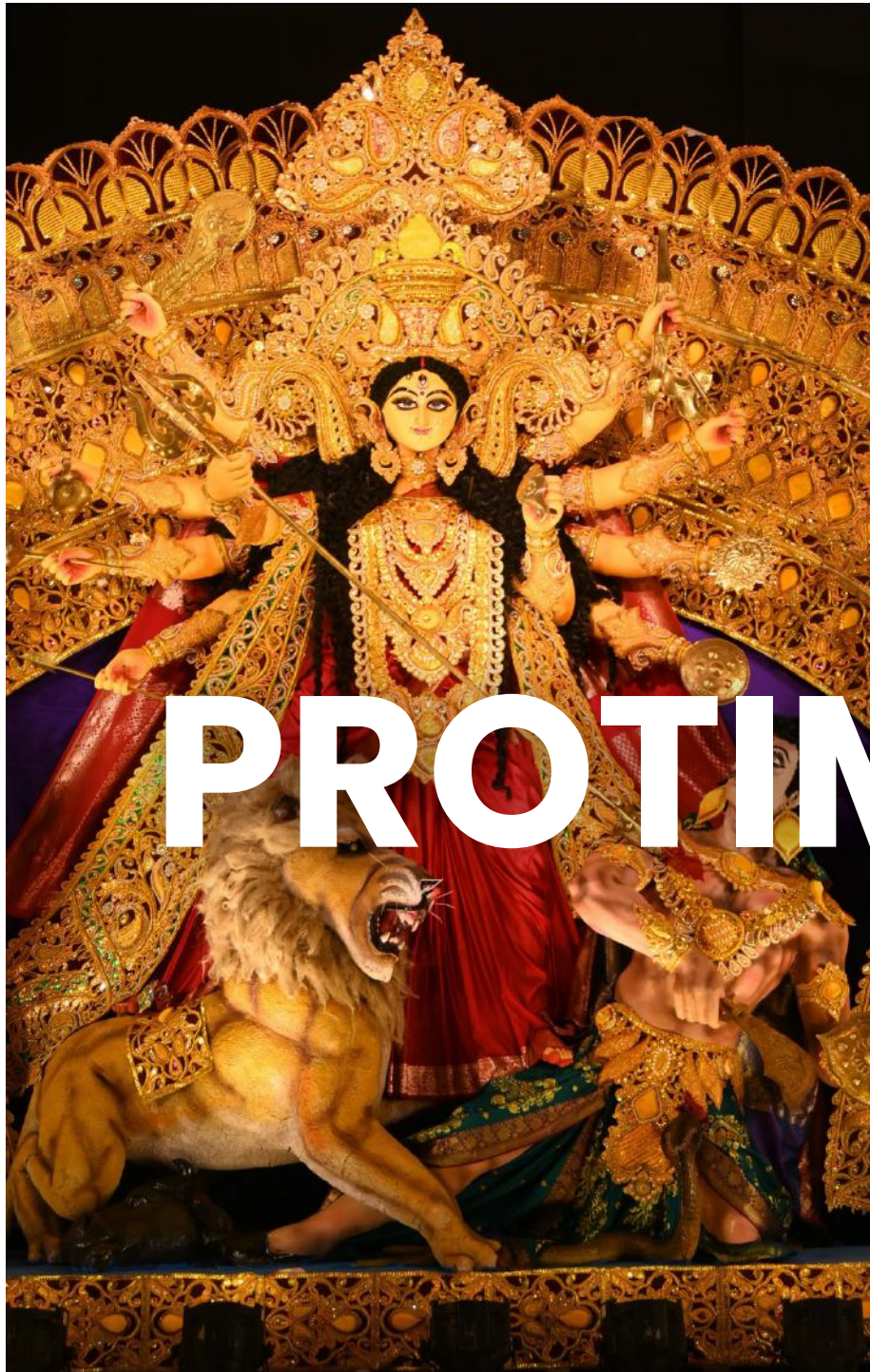
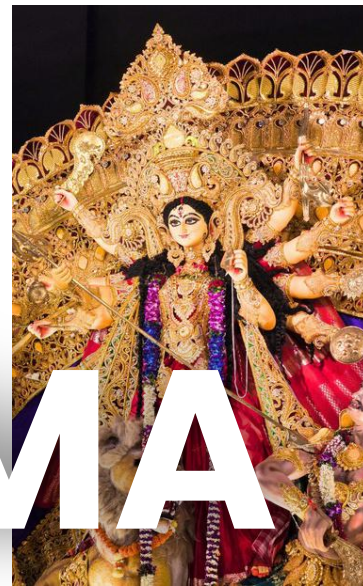
Khuti Puja ritual signals commencement of the construction of the pandal where Goddess Durga and Her children will be worshipped. A wooden frame, named as "Kathamo" signifying the frame on which Goddess Durga will be positioned, is worshipped.





Mahalaya signifies the end of Pitru Paksha Shradh and the beginning of Durga Puja for Bengalis. 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.







As a first among many, PBWA had an AC hangar constructed as the main pandal for the convenience and comfort of devotees and visitors. The Natmoncho was beautifully made like a Dalan or the portico of a zamindar's mansion.





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

'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.





GLIMPSES OF PUJO RITUALS





DHUNUCHINAACH

This is a dance with Incense burners' and 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.



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 gender, caste, religion or socio-economic background.

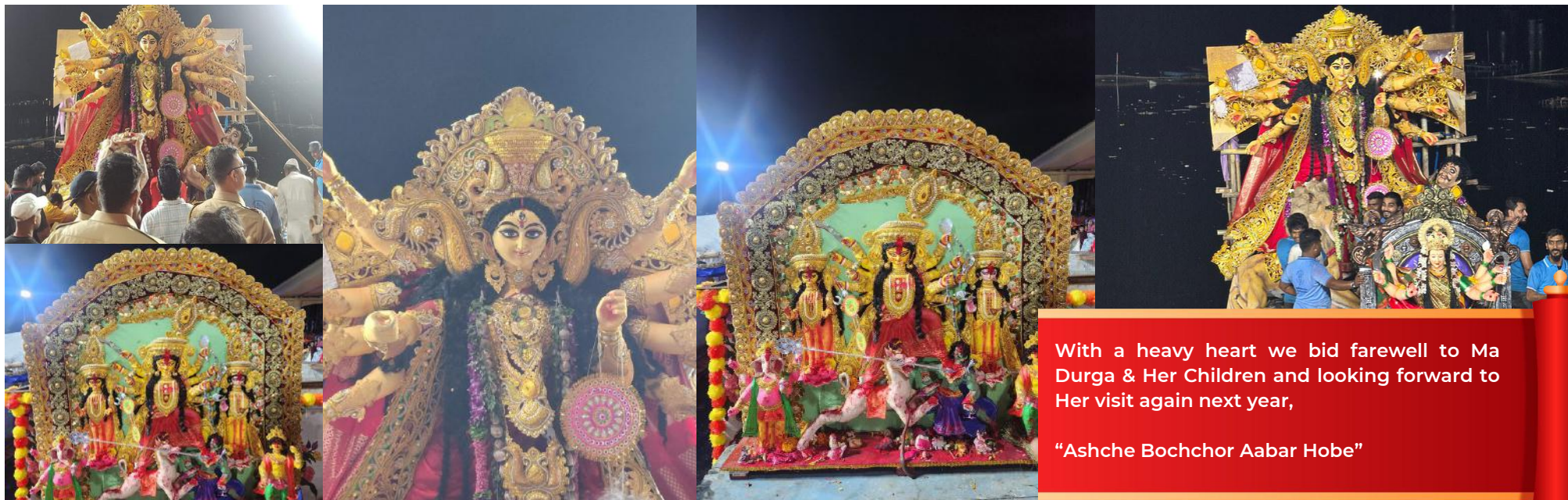




SINDUR KHELA

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.





With a heavy heart we bid farewell to Ma Durga & Her Children and looking forward to Her visit again next year,

“Ashche Bochchor Aabar Hobe”



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FASHION SHOW

Vastra Kavya or 'Poetry in Fabrics' was a unique presentation on Saree drapes from various regions of India. From the traditional Bengali drape to the fisher folk of Maharashtra, from Kanjeevarams of the South to the Mekhla of the North east – and so much more. These were not just presented by the lady members of PBWA but uniquely by the men too. Not many know that Saree was ancestral to the Dhuti and men used to adorn them in times past. Here the saree was ably paired with Blazers, Sneakers, Sports kits, Kitchenware and so on, in a fantastic blend of tradition and innovation. Truly, a Fashion show of a one-of-a-kind!





DHAKER TAALE



'Dhaker Taale' is a vibrant journey back to Bengal — a celebration of its customs, traditions, music and the rhythms that have shaped its cultural soul. Through dance, music and poetry, the presentation by PBWA members, paints a kaleidoscopic portrait of Bengal: the colour and joyous bustle of a village mela; the songs and rituals of a traditional Bengali wedding; the wandering Baul, whose music carries a timeless philosophy of life and spirituality; and the grandeur and emotion of Durga Puja, the heartbeat of Bengali celebration.



BHANUSHINGHER PODABOLI

The tiny tots of PBWA came together to present one of Rabindranath Tagore's iconic poetries "Bhanusingher Padabali", which Tagore penned at the age of 16 under the pen name 'Bhanusingha'. These are a collection of 22 songs composed in Brajabauli language and deeply influenced by Vaishnavism. The tiny tots presented 'Gahana Kusuma Kunja Kunje' which describes the romantic and love lore of Radha & Krishna. Such was their professional level presentation that the kids received a standing ovation.





Like in previous years, highlight of Shashti evening was this interesting drama, 'Picnic' staged by PBWA members. A picnic group at an abandoned garden house in a remote village experience strange & spooky incidents and weird characters. Amidst all this, a wanted criminal, who happened to be one of the most amusing and eccentric characters in the entire affair, was finally caught by a team of undercover police, who had been searching for him for several months. Ironically, it was the mathematics teacher's solution to a cryptic poem that ultimately led the police to the wanted criminal. Overall, a delightful mix of humour, suspense, romance and action which the audience enjoyed thoroughly.





Iman Chakraborty is a National award winning singer from Bengal, specializing in Rabindra Sangeet, Bangla folk music as well as playback singing for Bengali films. Besides National award she has also received two filmfare awards Bangla and has also been nominated for Academy award. Iman cast her spell on Saptami evening with her repertoire of popular songs along with her highly talented band, thus setting the tone for a grand cultural festival of PBWAs Durgotsav.

IMAN

LOKHKO RONGER DRISHYE



As the curtain drew back, a group of children of PBWA members, stood lined up in crisp attire. One by one, their treasure trove of poems unfolded. The colors of the day's first ray intertwined seamlessly with the colors of autumn alongside the 'Agomoni' tune. Each poem seemed to speak of a different phase, a reflection of the known and unknown colors of life to us. True to its name, the event was as colorful as the seven hues of a rainbow—where children's imaginations, dreams, and life's varied emotions blended together to create a vibrant atmosphere.





PBWAs in-house choir “Dhitaang” gets the audience swaying with their melodious renditions right since their inception in 2006. This year the choir departed from traditional numbers and presented foot-tapping songs from highly popular Bangla bands which have topped charts and won hearts of millions. Songs like ‘Jodi chhere jete bole’, ‘Baranday Roddur’ ‘Bondhu’ and ‘Bhebe Dekhecho ki’ simply roused the audience who demanded for encores after almost every song. An Ashtami special indeed!



BOMBAY VIKINGS



Bombay Vikings are a pop group that combine Indian pop and classical music. The band was started by Neeraj Shridhar, along with two others and became popular with remixes of old Bollywood hits such as "Kya Soorat Hai", "Woh Chali" and "Chod Do Anchal". Neeraj Sridhar and his band rocked Ashtami evening with their unique blend of music combining nostalgia and contemporary music leaving the audience highly entertained.



LEADERS SPEAK

The Leaders' Speak session, is a one-of-a-kind initiative, making PBWA's Durgotsav the only festival in India to host such a session during the celebrations, blending festivity with a powerful social message. Over the years top leaders from various fields have joined us, making it a hugely successful event during Durgotsav. This year in line with the theme of the Puja "Jaya He", which was PBWA's humble tribute to India's prowess in Science, Technology and the Armed forces, the Leaders Speak session dwelt on the interesting thought – 'Are we in a well-balanced zone, when it comes to the role of Science in Nation Building and Economic Progress? The panel was a wonderful blend of Leaders from across the industry and consisted of Mr Arun Ramchandani – L&T Defence, Mr Keshav Loyalka - L&T Finance, Mr Sajja Praveen Chowdary – Policybazaar and Mr Parthanil Ghosh – HDFC ERGO. The session was ably moderated by Mr. Atul Tendulkar of Brookfield Properties. Some very interesting conversation happened around - While Science can enrich religious understanding, Religion can foster moral values necessary for ethical technological development. Is Technology going to be like riding a tiger? Where do we draw the line for information privacy, as capability of technology seems limitless & inexhaustible. The exchange among the panelists was truly eye-opening and left the audience truly enlightened.





JAVED ALI



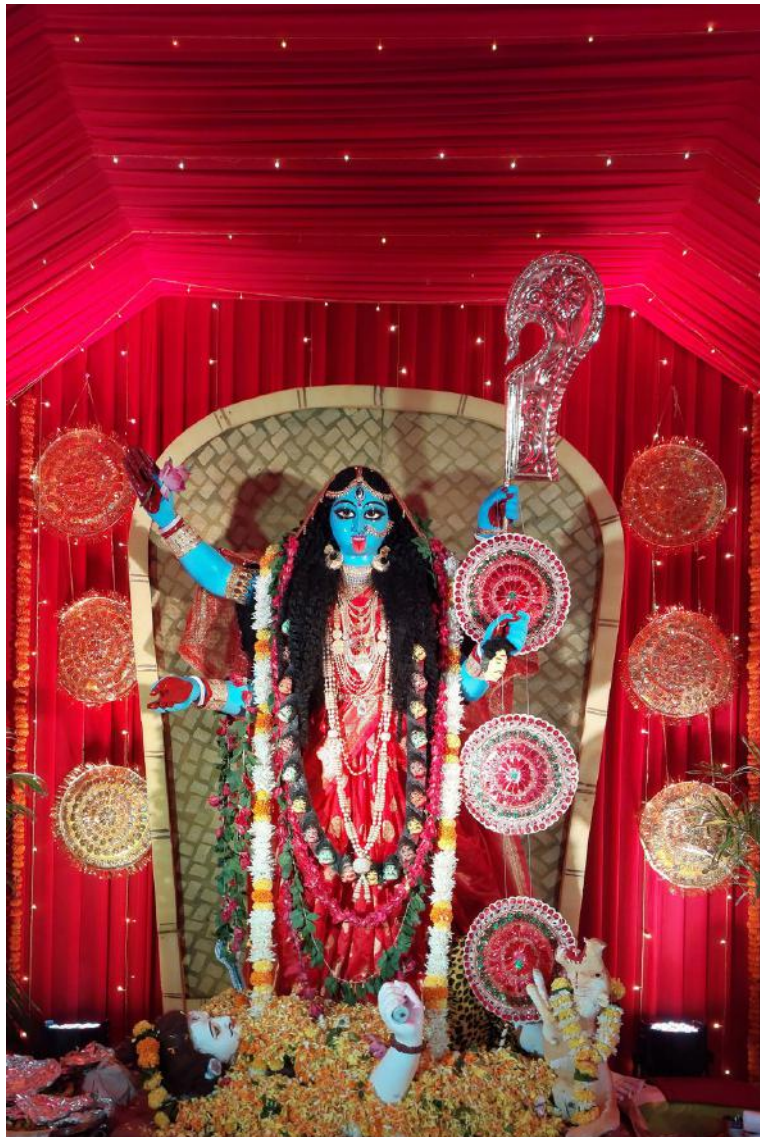
The curtains finally came down on PBWAs Twentieth Durgotsav with a scintillating performance by Javed Ali on Navami evening. There was not an inch of space left inside the auditorium as well as outside, such was Javed's stage presence, his range of songs, his skill and backed by his superb musicians. Besides his own songs Javed also enthralled everyone by popular numbers by Md Rafi. The highlight of the evening was a few old but very popular Bengali songs which he sang to perfection. A fitting finale indeed!





LOKKHI PUJO

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



POWAI BENGALI WELFARE ASSOCIATION
welcomes you to
**Powai Sarvajananin
Kali Pujo**
Near BEST Bus Depot, Hiranandani Gardens

OCT 20 2025

Puja 8:00 PM Pushpanjali 10:00 PM
Bhog/Arti 11:45 PM Dadhikarma 10:00 AM (21st Oct)

www.pbwa.in @powaibengalwelfareassociation pbwaofficial



KALI PUJO



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.





RABINDRA JAYANTI

Like every year Rabindra Jayanti, the 164th Birth Anniversary of the bard, Rabindranath Tagore was celebrated with a lot of pomp and vigour. Performance of Music, Dance, Poetry, creations of the Nobel Laureate, by members and children marked the evening. The highlight of the evening was a performance by Rabindra Sangeet exponent Supratik Das.





STORIES FROM TRAVEL BUCKETLISTS

HODOPHILES

Travelogues

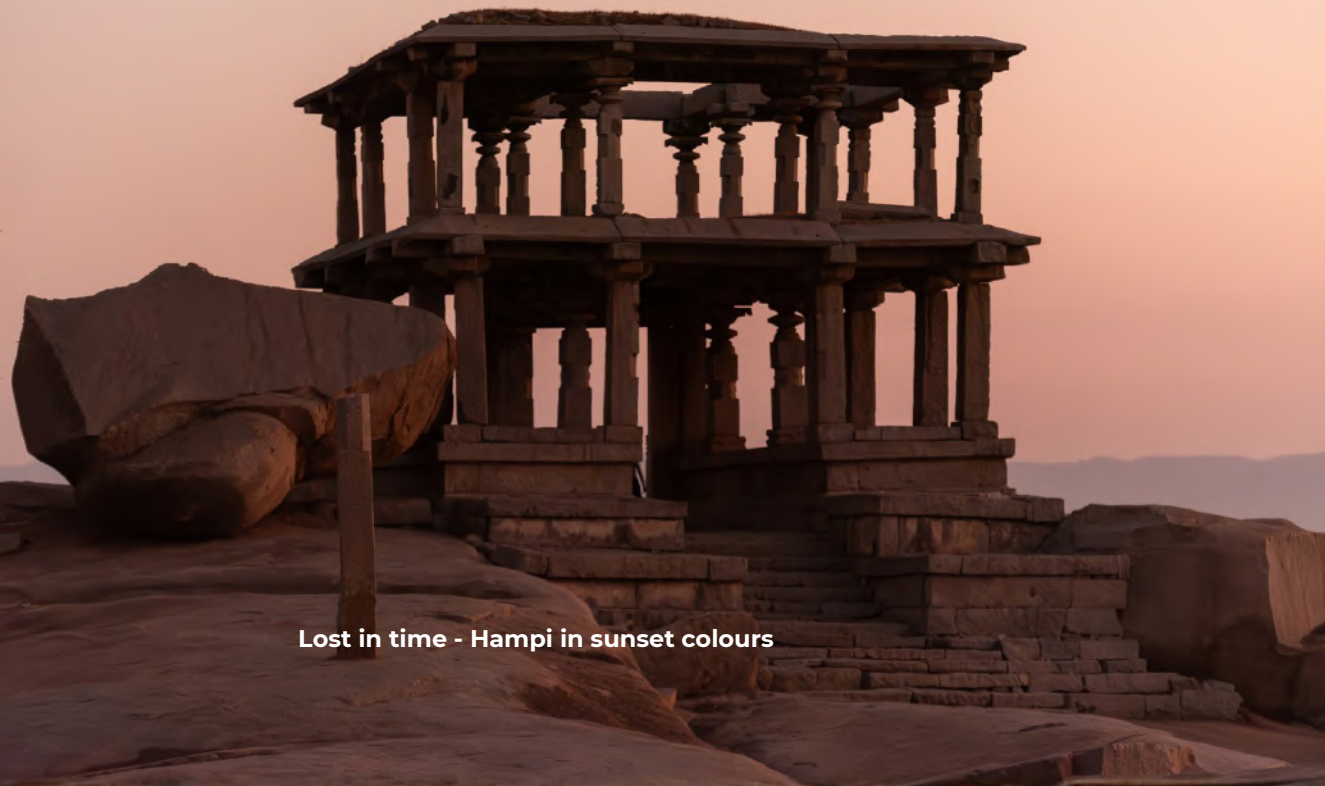
Once upon a time - A Photologue

Sukanta Banerjee

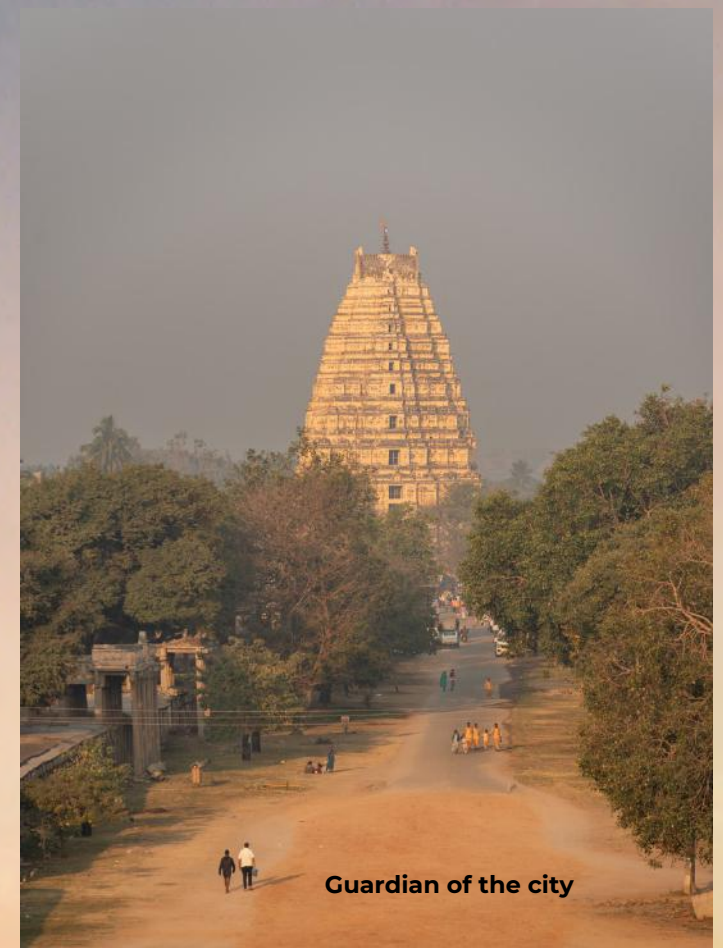
On the rocky banks of the river Tungabhadra, the empire of Vijayanagara flourished to become the economic and cultural center of the time. At its peak, the empire was among the wealthiest in the world, both financially and culturally, until its fall in 1565.

Hampi served as capital of Vijayanagara Empire during its glorious period in 14th and 15th centuries. Set amongst hills with stunning grey-pink granite boulders, shaped and sculpted by nature through the ages, it offers a peek into a time long gone.

Golden light during each sunrise and sunset, enhanced by natural composition of the terrain, dramatically transforms the entire landscape into a golden orange glow. It is a spectacle that makes one take a pause and fall silent, to absorb the moment, lest it passes by. Looking at the ruins of Hampi one cannot but wonder about the similarity with those of ancient Europe. Both architectures heavily relied on rows of vertical stone columns supporting horizontal beams. Over millennia, timber and other materials forming the roof and walls have weathered out leaving only the stone columns and beams exposed. This gives the visual similarity between ruins of Hampi and that of ancient Greece though both styles developed independently and were 2000 years apart.



Lost in time - Hampi in sunset colours

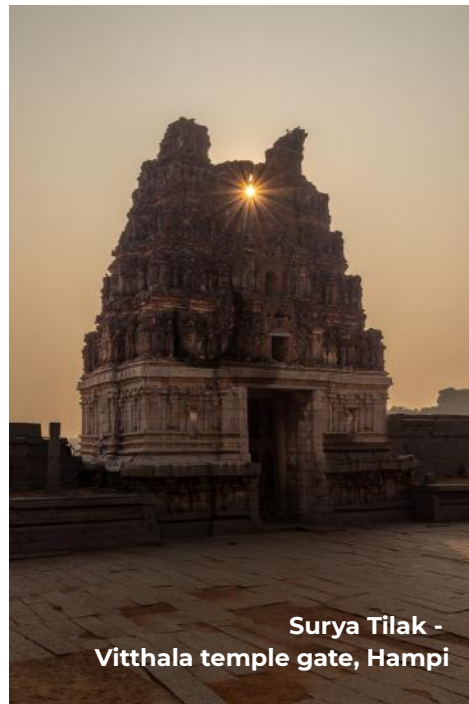


Guardian of the city



Virupaksha temple and surrounding landscape

There are numerous sites throughout Hampi where remnants of ancient temples, palaces, public courtyards are waiting to be restored. However, whatever has already been recovered is enough to leave one speechless by the sheer magnificence of it. In the 7th Century Virupaksha temple lord Virupaksha, a form of Lord Shiva, is being worshipped even today. The temple's majestic nine tiered main entrance gate is the most prominent landmark visible from anywhere in Hampi. The 15th Century Vijaya Vittala (incarnation of Lord Vishnu) temple is another marvel to cherish. Its iconic "Stone Chariot" and musical pillars are examples of architectural brilliance and aesthetic high attained during the period. Although this is no more an active temple, it stands magnificent even in ruins.



**Surya Tilak -
Vitthala temple gate, Hampi**



Intricate craftsmanship at Vitthala temple



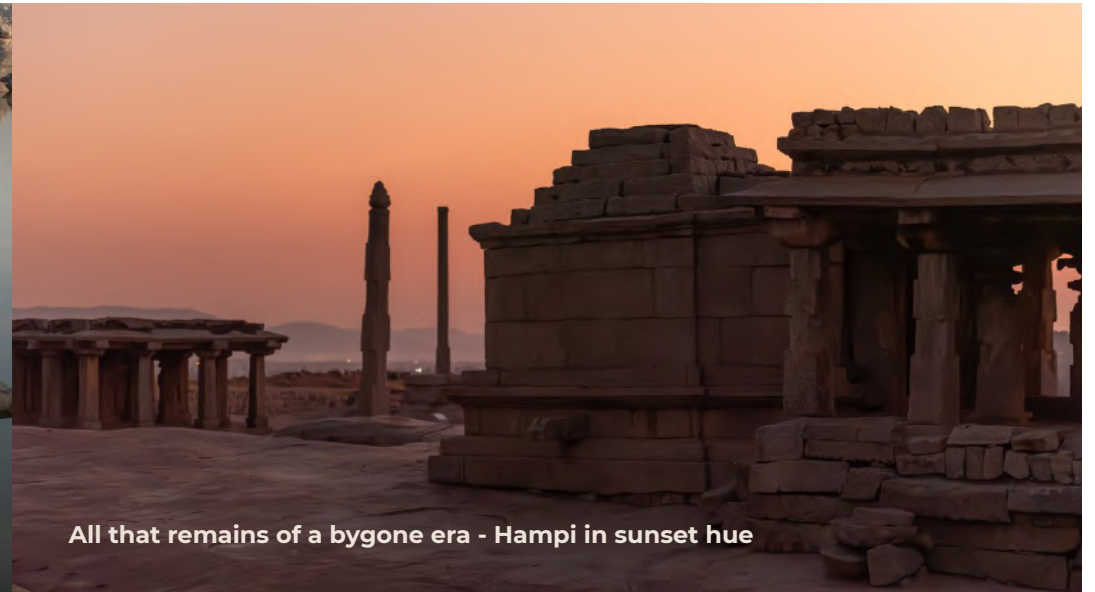
Morning mist - nature's own water colours



Magnificent even in ruins - Stone chariot at Vitthala temple, Hampi



Coracle boats on the calm waters of Tungabhadra, Hampi



All that remains of a bygone era - Hampi in sunset hue

Quiet flows Tungabhadra alongside this ancient city. Floating “Coracle boats” on its calm waters is a visual treat. Much of what we see at Hampi now are declared UNESCO World Heritage Sites and result of ongoing restoration efforts by Archaeological Society of India. There is still so much buried under the soil waiting to be unearthed to the world.

This was my humble effort to capture beauty of the place through my lenses, during a trip in January'26, which obviously falls inadequate. Enjoy the visual treat.



Keeping company with each other

Spiti Diaries: Roads Less Travelled

A Wanderboots adventure by Shashwat & Ruchi | 30 May – 8 Jun 26



There are road trips, and then there are Himalayan Road trips. The first usually involves playlists, coffee stops and arguments about who gets the window seat.

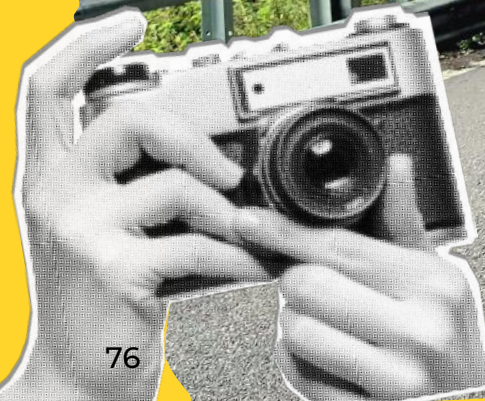
The second involves narrow roads carved into mountainsides, valleys that appear to have no bottom, rivers roaring somewhere far below — and eight people sitting unusually quietly in a 14-seater Traveller because nobody wants to distract the driver.

This was our Spiti story. Eight of us from three families in Silicon Valley, Powai, arrived in Chandigarh on 30 May with bags packed, spirits high and absolutely no idea what the mountains had in store. By 8 June, we returned with sunburnt faces, hundreds of photographs, a slightly altered definition of the word road, and memories that will probably outlive our phones.

THE JOURNEY BEGINS

From Chandigarh, our Traveller climbed steadily into the Himalayas, with **Narkanda** as our first night halt. It was peaceful. Beautiful. Almost deceptively comfortable. Because the next morning, the Himalayas stopped being polite.

As we left Narkanda, the landscape transformed into a dramatic theatre of cliffs, gorges and impossibly narrow roads. The famous **dangerous mountain roads of Himachal** greeted us with steep drops on one side and rock faces on the other. Every hairpin bend brought another jaw-dropping view. It also brought another collective thought inside the Traveller: *"Maybe we should have taken the train."* But there was no other option. So, we kept going.



CHITKUL: WHERE THE ROAD MEETS THE BORDERLAND

Our next major stop was **Chitkul**, the last inhabited village on the Indian side of the Indo-Tibetan border. The village sits quietly amid enormous mountains, surrounded by the Baspas Valley. Prayer flags fluttered in the wind, the river rushed alongside us, and the scale of the landscape made all our everyday problems feel wonderfully insignificant.

From Chitkul, we made our way to **Sangla**, where we spent the night. The mountains were getting bigger. The roads were getting narrower. And our Traveller was beginning to feel like a small yellow speck wandering through a very large wilderness.



NAKO: A VILLAGE ABOVE THE CLOUDS

From Sangla, we continued towards Nako, another spectacular Himalayan settlement surrounded by barren mountains. The highlight here was Nako Monastery, with the beautiful Nako Lake nearby. The contrast was extraordinary — an ancient monastery and a tranquil lake set against the stark, high-altitude desert landscape. It was one of those places where you instinctively lower your voice. Not because anyone asks you to. The landscape simply does it.

TABO: A THOUSAND YEARS OF SILENCE

Tabo Monastery was one of the spiritual highlights of the journey. Founded in 996 CE, this ancient Buddhist monastery is among the oldest continuously functioning monasteries in India and is part of a UNESCO World Heritage tentative listing. Walking through its ancient spaces felt less like sightseeing and more like stepping backwards through time. Outside, Spiti was all immense mountains and harsh sunlight. Inside, the atmosphere was intimate, mysterious and still.





KAZA: OUR HOME IN THE HIGH DESERT

And then came **Kaza** — our base for the next three days. We stayed in a lovely homestay near the river, which quickly became our little Spiti headquarters.

And what better way to experience Spiti than through its food? We discovered **Siddhu**, the local steamed bread that rapidly became a group favourite. There were conversations over chai, laughter around meals and the simple pleasure of watching the river flow outside. But Kaza was also our launchpad for exploring some of Spiti's most remarkable places.



KEY MONASTERY: A MONASTERY IN THE SKY

Our drive to **Key Monastery** took us into one of Spiti's most iconic landscapes. Perched dramatically on a hilltop, the monastery seemed almost to grow out of the mountains themselves. From up there, the Spiti Valley stretched endlessly in every direction. It was one of those views where everyone reaches for the camera — and then realizes that no camera quite manages to capture the scale.





LANZA, KOMIK & THE POST OFFICE AT THE TOP OF THE WORLD

Next came **Langza**, with its enormous Buddha statue watching over the valley. Then **Komik**, famed as one of the world's highest inhabited villages. At these altitudes, even ordinary activities become extraordinary. Like sending a postcard. At the **world's highest post office**, we decided to bring back a little piece of old-fashioned travel. We made handmade drawings of our itinerary, put them on postcards and posted them back to ourselves. No Instagram story. No WhatsApp forward. Just a postcard taking the scenic route home.

DHANKAR & THE CHICHAM BRIDGE

Dhankar Monastery offered another unforgettable encounter with Spiti's dramatic terrain — perched high above the confluence of the Spiti and Pin Rivers. And then came the journey to the **world's highest Chicham bridge**. The landscape here felt almost extraterrestrial: enormous barren mountains, deep gorges and a road seemingly suspended between earth and sky. Spiti doesn't really do subtle. It prefers epic.



The Night Sky — Our Favourite Attraction

But perhaps our favourite Spiti experience wasn't a monastery, bridge or village. After a bit of camp fire fun, it was simply lying down on the grass at our homestay and looking up. With almost no light pollution, the night sky was ridiculously full of stars. We lay there gazing upwards, trying to identify constellations and occasionally pretending we knew what we were looking at.

For once, nobody was checking their phone. There was nothing to check. The mountain skies had taken care of the entertainment.





KUNZUM PASS & THE LAKE WE COULDN'T REACH

Leaving Kaza, we crossed the spectacular **Kunzum Pass**, heading towards the much-anticipated **Chandratal Lake**. The plan was simple: Reach Chandratal. See the famous turquoise lake. Take approximately 7,000 photographs and make the “marne se pehle Chandratal dekhna chahta hun” reel. Reality had other ideas.

Bad road conditions and heavy traffic meant we couldn't make it to the lake. It was disappointing, of course. But that's the thing about travelling in the Himalayas: sometimes the mountain decides the itinerary. So Chandratal remained our beautiful “next time”. And perhaps that's not such a bad thing.



S P T T



SISSU: A CHANGE OF SCENERY

From the high-altitude desert of Spiti, we descended towards Sissu, where we spent two days. The landscape softened. The air felt different. Greenery returned. It was a welcome change after days of dramatic, barren mountains. Eventually, we made our way through the **Atal Tunnel**, leaving the stark landscapes of Lahaul behind and heading towards our final stop.

JIBHI: THE PERFECT WAY TO END

If Spiti was about adventure, altitude and awe, Jibhi was about slowing down. We spent two days here — and discovered exactly what we needed after a long Himalayan Road trip: cafés.

Cosy little cafés, mountain views, hot cups of coffee, good food and absolutely nowhere we needed to rush to. Jibhi was the perfect place to chill. We sat around, talked, ate, drank coffee and generally practiced the ancient Himalayan art of doing absolutely nothing. And we were surprisingly good at it.



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WANDERBOOTS' FIELD NOTES

A few tips before you head to Spiti ♡

- Go prepared for the road. Distances look deceptively short. Mountain roads have their own timetable.
- Keep buffer days. Weather, landslides, traffic and road conditions can change plans quickly. Our Chandratal experience was proof.
- Acclimatise. Kaza and the surrounding villages are at serious altitude. Don't rush your body into keeping up with your itinerary.
- Carry layers. Mountain weather can change dramatically through the day.
- Stay in homestays. It's one of the best ways to experience local food and hospitality — and discover things like Siddhu.
- Carry some cash. Don't assume connectivity or digital payments will work everywhere.
- And finally — look up. The stars are spectacular. Sometimes the best Spiti experience is not another viewpoint.



00

Eventually, the Traveller turned back towards Chandigarh. The mountains slowly disappeared behind us. The roads became wider. The network returned. Our phones began buzzing with messages. Civilisation was back.

And somewhere between Chandigarh and our flight to Mumbai, we realized that the journey had been about far more than the places we'd visited. It was about the eight of us sharing a long road, discovering new landscapes together, laughing through the difficult stretches, eating local food, making postcards, chasing lakes, missing one, finding stars — and discovering that the best travel memories rarely follow the itinerary exactly.

The December sky was flawless canvas blue, and the morning sun was greeted us with a cheerful warmth. In a flash of pure inspiration, the idea struck us. Why not leave the routine behind? We packed up the car and set off an impromptu road trip into the unknown.

Ultimately, we chose to visit the The Great Rann of Kutch, rising from ancient devastation, this renowned region reinvented itself into the largest salt desert on earth. It is truly landscape reborn.

Our road trip took us from Mumbai to Dholavira, following NH48 to Vadodara and then taking the NE1 Expressway—which is part of the ongoing Mumbai-Delhi Expressway project—on to Ahmedabad. After a one-night stopover in Ahmedabad, we set out early the next morning for Dholavira. The entire 921 km one-way journey features excellent road conditions. For EV owners, the route is completely hassle-free: we found plenty of charging stations along the way.

In fact, throughout Gujarat, every Bharat Petroleum fuel station is equipped with both reliable EV charging points and clean comfort stations.

We thoroughly enjoyed a traditional Gujarati breakfast featuring local favourites like Sev Khamani, Handvo, Surati Locho, Poha, and Khaman. On our way to Dholavira, we noticed many branches of 'Honest,' a highly popular restaurant chain in Gujarat. The main reason we chose Dholavira as our destination was because a wonderful, massive surprise was waiting for us along the way!"

After crossing the small village of Lodrani, we encountered the vast salt desert known as the Great Rann of Kutch. A narrow stretch of land cuts through this striking landscape, with India on one side and Pakistan on the other, connecting the mainland to Dholavira. Shortly after, we entered a

breathtaking section of the highway popularly known as the 'Road to Heaven.' Words simply cannot do it justice; you have to experience it yourself to truly understand how it earned its beautiful name."

The Road to Heaven is a stunning 30-kilometre stretch of highway cutting through the Great Rann of Kutch in Gujarat. It bridges Khavda to the ancient archaeological site of Dholavira, offering one of the most surreal driving experiences in India.

The jet-black tarmac slices directly through a boundless, shimmering landscape. The flat, crystal-white Salt Lake stretches endlessly on both sides, creating a perfect mirror. The crisp horizon completely dissolves, making it feel as though you are driving straight into the open sky. The surrounding waters come alive with thousands of vibrant migratory birds.



The journey to the white sands – Rann

Malobika Banerjee





We saw massive flocks of pink flamingos, pelicans, and cranes wading through the shallow waters, adding a splash of life and colour to the stark white desert. They look like massive pink and white clouds resting on the lake. There are no buildings, shops, or city noises here. The air is completely still. The only sound we heard was the beautiful, mesmerizing calls of thousands of birds. The soft splashing of water and bird songs create a deeply peaceful feeling. We looked for areas where the water is slightly deeper. Set up our camera here and captured thousands of birds wading together against the white salt. We were so captivated by the peace of that place that we never wanted to leave—this was the magical surprise I had hinted at earlier.

We have set our map to Rann Utsav - The Tent City in Dhordo, Gujarat. This is the main camp for the famous winter festival. A large, beautiful village of luxury tents built on the salt desert every winter. It takes about 2.5 to 3 hours to drive from “Road to Heaven” to Tent city.



We had booked our tents well in advance. Bookings opened two months early in August, as the festival runs from November 1st to March 7th. At the official Rann Utsav - The Tent City in Dhordo (managed by Evoke Experiences), the accommodation is split into distinct categories. They range from budget-friendly choices to massive royal suites.

We arrived at Tent City at noon. Arriving at the destination felt less like checking into a resort and more like entering an entirely self-sustained metropolis. We stepped off our shuttle buggy and directly into a breathtaking reception area. Instantly, we were wrapped in the warmth of a deeply immersive, traditional Gujarati welcome.

The reception itself was a magnificent tribute to local heritage. Every corner showcased vibrant Gujarati art forms, but the true highlights were the walls. They were meticulously adorned with striking Lippan art—intricate clay reliefs inset with sparkling mirror work that shimmered under the lights.

After checking in, a buggy service smoothly transported us across the sprawling grounds to our designated tent. The sheer scale of the place was astonishing; it truly felt like a living, breathing city. The most magical part of this destination is its fleeting nature. During the crisp winter months, the vast earth beneath heals, hardens, and reveals itself to host thousands of travellers. Yet, this entire city is a magnificent illusion. When the heavy monsoon rains inevitably reach the plains, the land disappears completely underwater. It is a temporary oasis, built beautifully for a season, only to surrender quietly back to nature.

Our only plan for the rest of the day was catching the magical sunset over the White Rann. We reached our destination by a bus that was included in our package.





Upon reaching the bus stop, we hopped onto a camel cart for my very first camel ride—it was an incredibly vibrant and joyful experience! Within minutes, we arrived at our destination: the White Desert. It is a stunning, endless landscape where everything you see is pure white salt, beautifully set up with fun rides and selfie points. People everywhere were dancing, taking photos, and making reels. Seeing everyone celebrate this landscape made me feel incredibly proud and lucky to have such an extraordinary place right here in India.



After capturing countless photos of our stunning surroundings, we headed back to our tent to rest. It was then that we truly felt the desert's unpredictable climate. The temperature here behaves like a pendulum. During the peak afternoon hours, the blazing sun pushes the thermometer up to a warm 30°C. Yet, the moment the sun dips below the horizon, the desert strips away its warmth, sending the temperature plummeting down to a piercing 4°C.

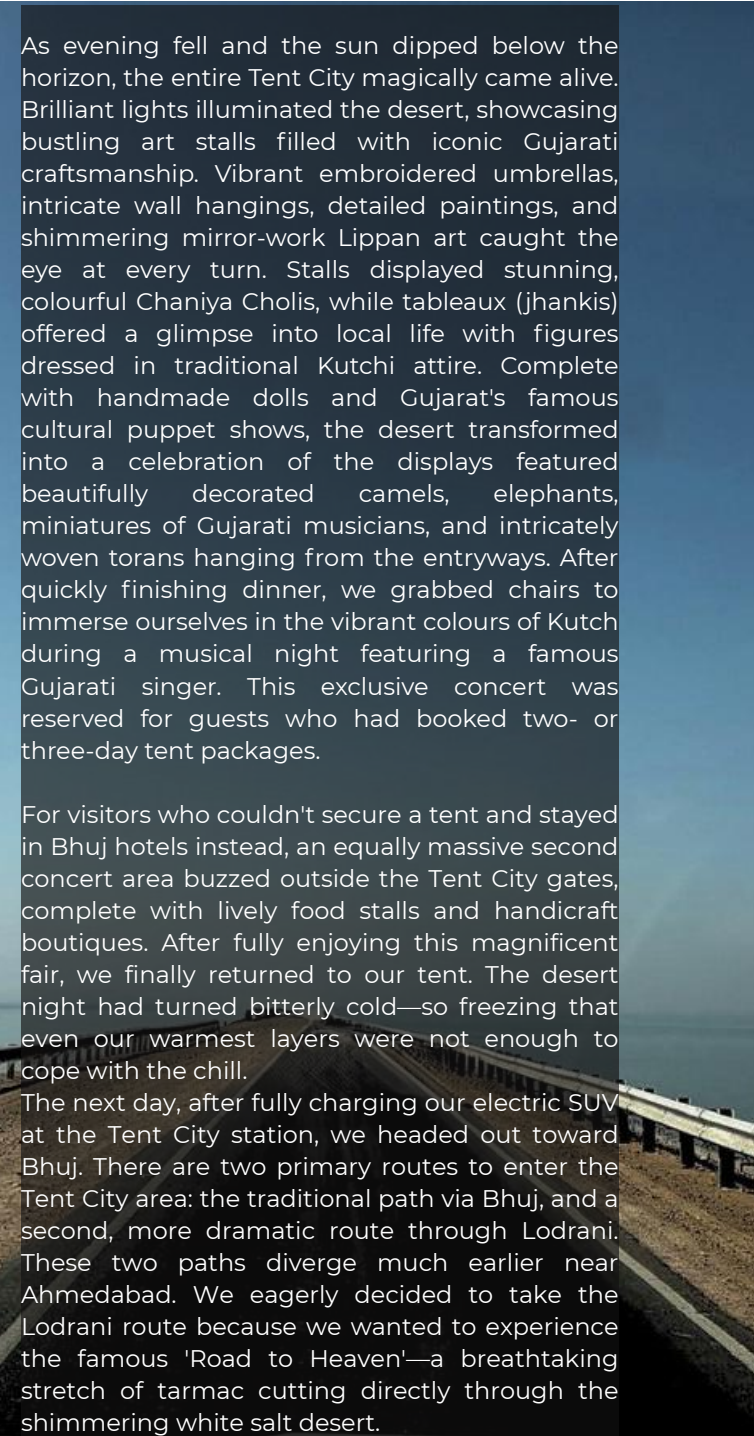
Feeling the sudden, icy chill of the night air, we quickly bundled up in our jackets and walked over to the grand dining hall for high tea. The spread was massive. Beside a steaming variety of regional and classic teas, the tables were packed with an incredible selection of savory snacks. Warm and completely energized, we stepped back out into the crisp desert night. The glowing lights of the festival grounds called to us, and we eagerly headed off to explore the vibrant funfair and the evening's live cultural concert.



As evening fell and the sun dipped below the horizon, the entire Tent City magically came alive. Brilliant lights illuminated the desert, showcasing bustling art stalls filled with iconic Gujarati craftsmanship. Vibrant embroidered umbrellas, intricate wall hangings, detailed paintings, and shimmering mirror-work Lippan art caught the eye at every turn. Stalls displayed stunning, colourful Chaniya Cholis, while tableaux (jhankis) offered a glimpse into local life with figures dressed in traditional Kutchi attire. Complete with handmade dolls and Gujarat's famous cultural puppet shows, the desert transformed into a celebration of the displays featured beautifully decorated camels, elephants, miniatures of Gujarati musicians, and intricately woven torans hanging from the entryways. After quickly finishing dinner, we grabbed chairs to immerse ourselves in the vibrant colours of Kutch during a musical night featuring a famous Gujarati singer. This exclusive concert was reserved for guests who had booked two- or three-day tent packages.

For visitors who couldn't secure a tent and stayed in Bhuj hotels instead, an equally massive second concert area buzzed outside the Tent City gates, complete with lively food stalls and handicraft boutiques. After fully enjoying this magnificent fair, we finally returned to our tent. The desert night had turned bitterly cold—so freezing that even our warmest layers were not enough to cope with the chill.

The next day, after fully charging our electric SUV at the Tent City station, we headed out toward Bhuj. There are two primary routes to enter the Tent City area: the traditional path via Bhuj, and a second, more dramatic route through Lodrani. These two paths diverge much earlier near Ahmedabad. We eagerly decided to take the Lodrani route because we wanted to experience the famous 'Road to Heaven'—a breathtaking stretch of tarmac cutting directly through the shimmering white salt desert.





After a hearty lunch in Bhuj, we set our wheels in motion toward Rajkot. We halted at Rajkot with dinner at Jamnagar, later again came back to Rajkot. Next day again our long journey started from Rajkot to, Somnath to Diu to Bharuch via Anand. Our destination was the magnificent Shree Somnath Temple—the first of the twelve sacred Jyotirlinga shrines. Reaching the coast, we were greeted by the temple's awe-inspiring architecture standing firm against the endless horizon of the Arabian Sea, where the crashing waves seemed to pay their own eternal homage to the deity. With the spiritual essence of Somnath fresh in our minds, we routed our journey toward Bharuch for an overnight stay.

While journey towards Bharuch, from Somnath, we witnessed the mesmerising sea at Diu. Had a quick detour in late afternoon then proceeded towards Anand. As we cruised along the highway, the true economic engine of Gujarat unfolded before us.

The route was an endless canvas of human enterprise, dominated by sprawling industrial corridors, towering factories, and bustling mills. It was a fascinating transition of scenery—moving seamlessly from the ancient, sacred coastline to the modern, driving heartbeat of India's industrial landscape.

Our path from Rajkot to Bharuch spanned a rich 359 Kms corridor, taking us right through Anand—the proud milk capital of India. Anand houses three massive manufacturing hubs of the legendary Amul brand. Right on the highway, the sprawling Amul Chocolate Plant at Mogar caught our attention, and we simply could not resist pulling over. Stepping inside the industrial facility was a fascinating experience. After touring the plant and witnessing the magic behind the production lines, we treated ourselves to rich, creamy ice creams. Before hitting the road again, we stocked up on an array of fresh, factory-made Amul treats.

Enjoying our slow-paced journey, we finally rolled into Bharuch around 9:00 p.m., ready for a good night's rest. The final leg of our expedition began the next morning as we pointed our vehicle toward Mumbai. We joined the sleek, modern Mumbai-Vadodara Expressway before transitioning onto the familiar lanes of National Highway 48 (NH48). The highway was exceptionally smooth and well-engineered, carving a path through the southern hubs of Navsari, Valsad, Vapi, and Manor before bringing us into Borivali. Beyond the excellent road conditions, this stretch proved to be a paradise for food lovers. The highway is lined with exceptional food joints where we paused to relish authentic Gujarati cuisine, which truly operates at its own elite level of flavour. Balancing sweet, Savory, and spicy notes perfectly, the delicious food kept our spirits high. By 10:00 p.m., we reached Mumbai safely, bringing a wonderfully smooth, convenient, and unforgettable road trip to a perfect close.



The Silk Route Beckoned Again

Exploring Central Asia with Thomas Cook

Neelaj Sengupta

I have been travelling with Thomas Cook's Powai branch since 2006, and over the years, it has become my go-to for holidays. What I particularly appreciate is the ability to customise a trip around what we want to see and how we like to travel.

In June 2024, my son Tuhin and I had an experience with Thomas Cook on a customised holiday to Azerbaijan, exploring the western end of the historic Silk Route. So, when we decided to discover its eastern end in February 2026, there was really no question about whom we would approach.

I called Vanasari Thakur, Manager – Sales, Thomas Cook Powai and told her what we had in mind: we had about two weeks, wanted to cover as much of Central Asia as possible, preferred our own car and English-speaking local guides, and wanted comfortable hotels and an experience that went beyond the usual tourist itinerary.

Vanasari understood exactly what we were looking for and curated a journey across Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. Kazakhstan was included as a brief transit experience, while we spent most of our time discovering the spectacular landscapes and heritage of Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.

One of the touches I particularly appreciated was the inclusion of the Afrosiyab high-speed trains between Tashkent, Bukhara and Samarkand. Instead of simply taking domestic flights everywhere, we got to experience another side of Uzbekistan while travelling comfortably between its historic cities.

What followed was 14 days of mountains, ancient cities, Silk Route history, local culture and some unforgettable experiences.

Our first taste of Central Asia

Our journey began with Almaty, Kazakhstan, where we spent a few hours exploring the city before flying to Bishkek in Kyrgyzstan.

Although our time in Kazakhstan was brief, the city tour gave us a glimpse of Almaty, including its snow-covered parks and the historic Park of the 28 Panfilov Guardsmen. It was an interesting introduction before we moved into the mountains of Kyrgyzstan.

Outside Almaty Airport, Kazakhstan, on our arrival from Mumbai



Kyrgyzstan: Mountains, adventure and unexpected surprises

Kyrgyzstan was one of the highlights of our journey. From Bishkek, we travelled to Ala-Archa Gorge, surrounded by spectacular mountain scenery, before returning to explore Bishkek's Ala-Too Square, Victory Monument and Osh Bazaar.

We then flew to Osh, one of Central Asia's oldest cities. The visit to Sulaiman-Too, the sacred mountain and UNESCO World Heritage Site, was particularly fascinating. The region's connection with Babur, founder of the Mughal Empire, also made the experience especially interesting for us as Indians.

Entrance of Sulaiman-Too Caves, Osh



The adventure continued with a drive towards Konorchek Canyon and Issyk-Kul Lake. We trekked through the canyon among striking red sandstone formations, with temperatures dropping to around minus 10°C. The conditions were challenging in parts, particularly where the trail was icy, but they also made the experience memorable.

At Issyk-Kul, the landscape changed completely. The vast lake surrounded by mountains offered a tranquil contrast to the canyon.

Another memorable excursion took us to Burana Tower and Kegety Gorge, where we explored the remains of the ancient Karakhanid civilisation before heading into a beautiful mountain wilderness of forests, meadows and waterfalls. Even the freezing weather did not stop Tuhin and me from enjoying a rather spirited snow fight!



Ecstatic Tuhin relishing Ala-Archa Gorge

Inside Sulaiman-Too Caves, off Osh City



Uzbekistan: History around every corner

From Kyrgyzstan, we flew to Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan. One of our first excursions was to the Chimgan Mountains, where we tried horse riding and snowmobiling, followed by a chairlift ride offering spectacular views from the mountain. We also stopped at Charvak Lake before returning to Tashkent.

The capital itself offered an interesting blend of history and modernity. We visited Amir Timur Square, Chorsu Bazaar, the Hazrat Imam Complex, the Monument of Courage and other important landmarks. Naturally, we also sampled local cuisine, including the famous Uzbek Plov.

A particularly memorable experience was our visit to the Fergana Valley, where we saw traditional Ikat silk being made at the Yodgorlik Silk Factory. Watching artisans create the fabric using traditional techniques and natural dyes offered an intimate glimpse into a craft that has been preserved across generations.

Tuhin and Neelaj at Chimgan Mountains Chair Lift ride



Bukhara and Samarkand: The heart of the Silk Route

From Tashkent, we boarded the Afrosiyab high-speed train to Bukhara. Including these train journeys was one of the thoughtful touches in our itinerary. Instead of flying between every destination, we could experience Uzbekistan's high-speed rail while travelling comfortably between its historic cities.

Bukhara felt like stepping into another era. We explored the Lyabi-Khauz Ensemble, Trade Domes, Kalon Mosque and Minaret, Bolo-Khauz Mosque, the Ark Fortress and several historic madrasas and mausoleums. The old city still carries the atmosphere of its Silk Route past, with its historic architecture, bazaars and traditional crafts. We even had the opportunity to see the making of traditional Pichak knives.

On horseback at Chimgan Mountains



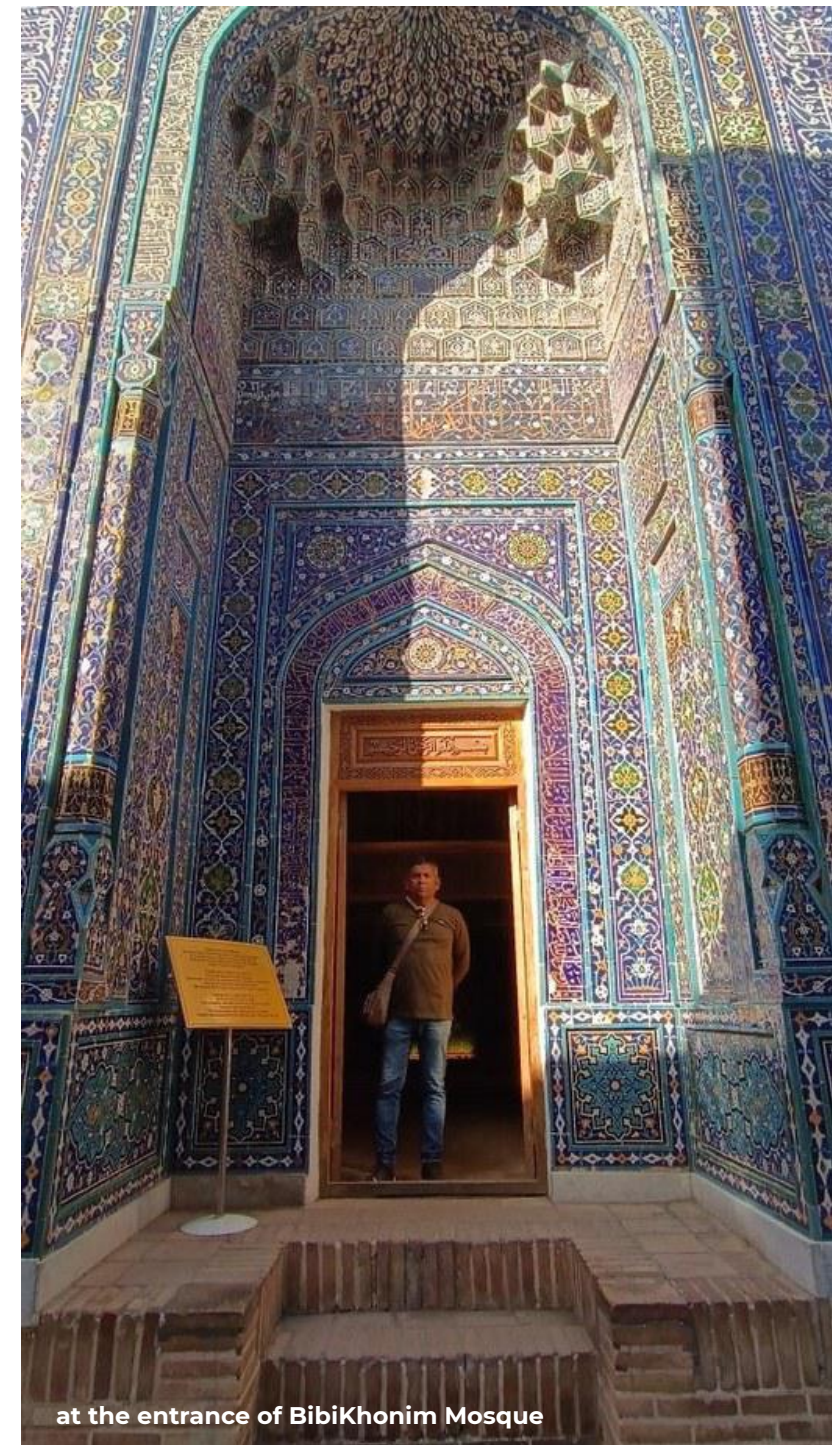
From Bukhara, another Afrosiyab train took us to Samarkand. Here, the scale and beauty of the architecture were extraordinary. We visited the Shahi Zinda Complex, Bibi-Khanim Mosque, Amir Timur's Mausoleum, Siyob Bazaar, the Ulugbek Museum and Observatory and, of course, the magnificent Registan Square.

We also travelled to Shakhrisabz, the birthplace of Amir Timur, through the Urgut Mountains. The city's Timurid heritage added another fascinating dimension to our understanding of the region.

**Neelaj and Bukhara tour guide
Aziz in front of Varnet Greenhouse**



Inside the Varnet Greenhouse, outskirts of Bukhara



at the entrance of BibiKhanim Mosque



A journey made for us

Looking back, what made this holiday special was not simply the number of destinations we covered, but the fact that the entire journey was designed around us.

We wanted a private, customised holiday, and that is exactly what Thomas Cook Powai delivered. Having our own vehicle and English-speaking local guides allowed us to explore at our own pace, while the combination of road journeys, flights and high-speed trains made it possible to cover three countries in just two weeks.

For me, Vanasari(Thomas Cook) played an important role in making the journey come together. Having worked with us before, she understood our expectations and our preference for detailed, well-planned holidays. She was able to take our broad idea of exploring the eastern end of the Silk Route and turn it into a well-paced itinerary filled with experiences we will remember for years.

This is also why I continue to return to Thomas Cook, Powai. After almost two decades as a customer, it is reassuring to have someone who understands how we like to travel and can translate that into a holiday that feels truly personal.



Why Central Asia?

For anyone looking beyond the more conventional international destinations, I would certainly recommend Central Asia. Kyrgyzstan offers spectacular mountains and outdoor experiences, while Uzbekistan brings together some of the world's most fascinating Silk Route cities, architecture and traditions. Kazakhstan, even as a brief stop, adds another perspective to the region.

What stayed with me most was the variety. In just two weeks, we experienced snow-covered mountains, ancient fortresses, bustling bazaars, traditional crafts, magnificent Islamic architecture, high-speed trains and landscapes that felt completely different from anywhere we had travelled before.

Our 2024 journey to Azerbaijan had introduced us to one end of the Silk Route. This time, Tuhin and I followed it to the other. And once again, Thomas Cook Powai helped turn an idea into a journey we will remember for a long time.

In a primeval forest - in search of a rare species

Supriyo Lahiri

One

Just one and a half kilometers down the road from 'Habre's Nest', toward Sandakphu, our Mahindra Bolero came to a stop. To our right was a bottomless abyss, and to our left, a dense, impenetrable forest sloping down the mountain face. Olon Rai, the guide team leader, asked us to stand at a spot near the edge of the forest and said, "We have to descend from here."

At the altitude of ten thousand feet, our hearts were already on overdrive; now, looking down the slope, it sank.

A descent into a hole carved into the earth—turned to mud by four consecutive days of rain! The hole sloped downward at almost a sixty-degree angle. Words escaped my mouth spontaneously, "How on earth are we going to climb down this slope?"

In our group, Tapas and I are sixty-six, Kakoli is sixty-five, and Ruma has stepped into her sixties. Only Tintin and Pradnya are in their thirties. The other four members of the team—an American couple, Dave and Melina, and a Spanish-Italian pair, Jose and Sofia—were in their fifties; they were just behind us.

Olon replied, "Sir, sit and slide. That's the only way."

Wow! Brilliant! But how do we stop? What if we keep sliding uncontrollably? I didn't need to ask the question—it was written all over my face. Olon gestured with his eyes and whispered, "They will catch you." Looking down, I saw Tam-ling and Dawa, two other members of the Habre's Nest guide team, standing below with their feet planted firmly in the mud and rocks. He added, "please don't put too much weight on your feet. Keep

moving forward by holding onto the bamboo plants on either side. Do not talk, or they will get scared."

The creatures we had come to meet in the Singalila Forest on the Indo-Nepal border—after a year of planning, are not only one of the world's rarest species but also extremely skittish and shy. Outside of zoos, only about four thousand of them remain alive in the entire world.

Though all of us managed to slide down, there was no track to walk on. We moved along with the guides through a dense, impenetrable jungle of bamboo thickets, pine, oak, and kiwi trees, filled with uneven rocks and mud. Our feet were slipping at every step but we were somehow moving forward grabbing hold of bamboo stalks. We are urban folk from the plains—at an altitude of ten thousand feet, suffering from a lack of oxygen, our chests were heaving like blacksmiths' bellows, and I wondered if we hadn't taken too big of a risk.

Suddenly, Olon stopped and pointed toward a tree up ahead. I thought I caught a quick flash of something reddish at the top of the tree. Having just planted my feet firmly in the mud, I aimed my camera with both hands, when a gust of wind sent last night's rainwater showering down onto the camera lens and my glasses. By the time I gathered myself and looked up again, it was gone—hidden away somewhere behind the leaves. Oh God, today was our last day here!

The animal we came to meet is named *Ailurus fulgens*, known to us as the Red Panda—one of the most beautiful and currently most endangered animals on Earth.



Two

Not many people know about the Singalila Forest, located half in India and half in Nepal. It is a small forest, but its global recognition is due to that very creature, the red panda. In India, this is the only place where they can be spotted. Apart from this, they inhabit small parts of Nepal, Bhutan, and southwestern China. Those who have seen this surprisingly beautiful animal at the Darjeeling Zoo and thought they were living in absolute bliss, can't be more wrong. Due to poachers and the destruction of their natural habitat, the red panda is currently listed as critically endangered on the IUCN list. In the words of zoologists, the red panda is a living fossil—because as an independent species, their origin dates back nearly 20 to 25 million years. Around 2010, Indian zoologists initiated captive breeding programs to boost their numbers. Fortunately, that effort met with some measure of success at the Darjeeling Zoo. Between 2022 and 2024, nine red pandas born at the zoo were successfully released into the Singalila Forest—and three of the females among them have even given birth to cubs in their natural habitat.

In 2022, after watching a BBC Nature video, I learned about Habre's Nest. A young man from Malda, West Bengal, Shantanu Prasad, created this place. In the Nepali language, 'Habre' means red panda—hence the name Habre's Nest. I contacted another Shantanu, our friend at Powai, Shantanu Nandy. He is a very capable and experienced wildlife photographer. Nandy said, "Supriyoda, please go." After a year of planning and ever-changing itineraries, that long-awaited day arrived on October 29th 2025. We had reached Bagdogra airport the previous night. On 29th at eight in the morning, two Innova cars sent by Habre's Nest, dropped us off at Manebhanjan, a small town on the Nepal border. Vehicles had to be switched here. Innova or any city car wouldn't work on the road ahead. Onwards our rides would be two 4-wheel drive British Land Rovers built in 1957. Just looking at those vehicles makes your heart tremble.

Kakoli, Ruma, and I were in one vehicle, while Tapas, Tintin, and Pradnya were in the other. The nature of the road changed drastically. It was an eight-foot-wide road with a thirty to forty-degree incline, because Kaiyakatta in Nepal, where Habre's Nest is located, sits at an altitude of ten thousand feet.

As we started from Manebhanjan, Tapas's car groaned a bit but somehow climbed up the very first steep curve without an event. But our car stalled there. The engine let out a desperate groan, followed by a grinding, scrubbing noise from the wheels. Then, with a screeching slip of the tires, the car began rolling backward! Our hearts stopped—I looked at our driver who resembled a delinquent adolescent boy. He pulled the handbrake to stop the car with an indifferent face, and began tugging at an iron rod-like thing under the dashboard. The moment he released the handbrake, the car rolled backward again! Handbrake once more. This time, the driver jumped down, opened the bonnet, picked up a wrench, and got out of the car, leaving the three of us hanging on that eight-foot-wide, forty-degree steep curve! Just as I was about to say,

"Let us off, we'd rather walk to save our lives," he returned. Releasing the handbrake again, he put the car into gear and pressed the accelerator. Somehow, inch by inch, the wheels gripped the ground and pushed upward. Phew! That was close. I asked him, "What is that stick you were fiddling with? The lever to engage four-wheel drive?" No answer.



After asking a second time, I received only a brief "Hmm." My next question: "Why didn't you put it in four-wheel drive from the start?" No answer. I realized that, firstly, these cars probably didn't have four-wheel drive originally; it was added later through Indian jugaad, and secondly, they try to avoid using it as much as possible to save fuel.

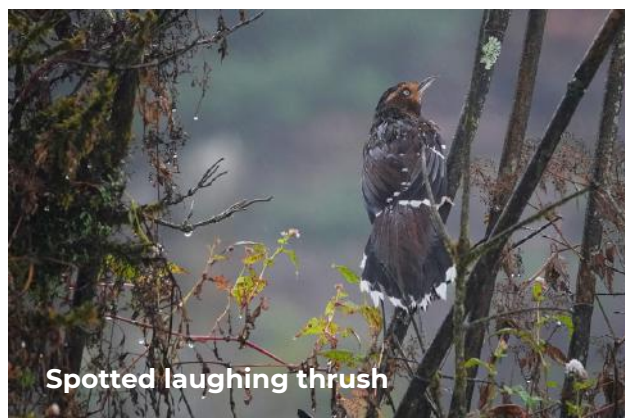
Passing through a sixty-million-year-old forest, crossing various streams and waterfalls, and catching glimpses of distant snow-capped peaks through gaps in the leaves, we reached our destination at three in the afternoon. Thirty kilometers and four thousand feet, in three hours—not bad, eh?

By the time we arrived, the sky was covered in clouds—I figured that's just how it is in the mountains. At Habre's Nest, Shantanu Prasad and his team gave us a traditional Nepali welcome. Outside, the temperature was five degrees Celsius, but our stomachs were burning. We sat down for lunch—an extraordinary seven-course meal featuring Continental, Bengali, and Nepali dishes. Outside, the clouds had already begun to turn into rain.

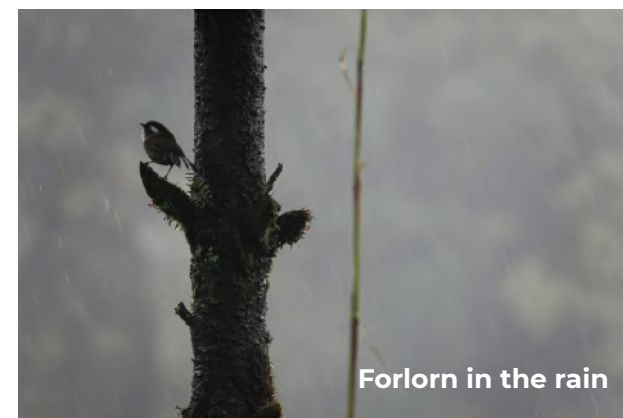




White browed Fulvetta



Spotted laughing thrush



Forlorn in the rain

Three

Habre's Nest Eco-Stay sits on a slightly elevated hilltop in the buffer area of the Singalila Forest, along the Nepal border. Sprawling on either side are sloping valleys, draped in primeval wilderness. Out front, the eight-foot-wide road heading to Sandakphu snakes its way into the mountain bends

and disappears. Step across that road to the other side, and you are back in India. The entire lodge is built using wood, bamboo, and woven bamboo mat fencing, but its internal arrangements and hospitality rival a four-star hotel. There is no electricity here, so a generator runs from six in the evening to ten at night—allowing guests to charge their phones and cameras.

The eco-stay has four rooms and allows no more than ten guests in total. Sitting on the large balconies attached to the back of each room, one can gaze at five tiers of mountains blanketed in dense jungle, along with views of the snow-capped peaks when the sky is clear. Right on their property, built into the mountainside about two hundred feet below, is a bird hide—a green structure made of bamboo. Its front wall is fitted with rows of small holes designed for poking camera lenses through, alongside seating arrangements inside. In the open hillside ahead, birds fearlessly venture out of the forest to go about their avian lives. Hidden inside the hide, we could watch and photograph them to our heart's content

Every species we encountered here was entirely new to us—their striking colours, antics, and mannerisms bore no resemblance whatsoever to the birds of the plains.

On October 29th, at 5:30 PM, we gathered in the dining area. Before that I of course had made a trip down to the bird hide with my camera. The evening began with tea or coffee, followed by a choice of rhododendron flower wine or a hot, delicious soup, depending on individual taste. Anyone who fancied both, was welcome to have them. I'm not ashamed to admit that I favoured the rhododendron wine. In the concrete cage where we live, there is no shortage of soup; but when would I ever get another chance to sip such heavenly floral nectar in the lap of the mighty Himalayas?

Good conversation sparkled in the dining room. There were six of us from Mumbai and Kolkata, an American couple—Dave and Melina—from Illinois, and their Bhutanese birding guide, Norbu. The remaining two were Sofia, an Italian girl, and her partner, Jose, a Spanish guy. Dave and Melina were both skilled birders who travel the world photographing birds. Dave, a former US Marine, back from Bosnia peacekeeping forces, was over six feet tall and lean and sturdy as a steel rod. Melina was a bit shy, so whenever we spoke to them, it was Dave who replied. The European duo, Sofia and Jose, were completely different.

Petite yet sturdily built, Sofia always had a bright smile on her face. By the second day, she was chatting away with friendly taps on the shoulder as if she'd known us forever. Her partner Jose didn't understand a word of English, let alone speak it, so Sofia acted as the interpreter. But the large-framed, heavy-set Jose was also a cheerful person.

Shantanu, the founder of Habre's Nest, joined our gathering. From him we learned that they started this eco-tourism-backed red panda conservation initiative, eleven years ago. Beyond running the eco-stay, Shantanu's team collaborates with the captive breeding program at the Darjeeling Zoo. From training local youths and setting up camera traps in designated zones of the forest recording the movements of red pandas and other wildlife, to monitoring poachers—their work covers it all. The team currently consists of twenty members, all of whom are versatile all-rounders. Seeing a young Bengali man pull off such an incredible feat way out on the Nepal border filled me with not a little pride. Olon Rai, Tam-ling, and the rest of this tracker-guide-naturalist team were equally adept at serving us dinner or breakfast as well as identifying exotic birds flying past: "Sir, that was a yellow-billed magpie!"

Outside, the rain kept picking up intensity. Little did we realize what was in store for us.

Four

On the 30th, we woke up at six in the morning to the relentless patter of rain. Stepping out onto the balcony, I saw the surroundings blanketed in white, misty fog. Everyone's spirits dampened—there was no hope of spotting a panda in this rain. When we went for breakfast and asked Olon, he tried his best to put on a hopeful face and said, "It might clear up around noon."

Noon came and went, then one, two, and three o'clock passed—no respite from the rain. As daylight faded, going into the jungle was entirely out of the question. My only solace was a trip down to the bird hide after lunch, where a white-browed fulvetta—looking like a tiny ball of cotton—posed beautifully for us. Apart from that, I managed to spot a pair of scaly laughing thrushes and a yellow-billed magpie. That was the sum total of our gains for the entire day.

Even though the rain eased up slightly in the evening, the fog hung thick. Our spirits were so down that even three pegs of the local rum failed to lift it. Listening to Dave and Melina's story of how they made it to Singalila helped a bit though. Last December, they had travelled to the forests of Bhutan to photograph red pandas, but heavy snowfall prevented them from seeing anything. So, they planned this trip to Singalila. At the last moment, they discovered they couldn't get Indian visas.

Undeterred, they landed in Kathmandu, took a small domestic flight, and landed at Bhadrapur airport in Nepal, 88 kilometers from Singalila. Covering the four-hour stretch from Bhadrapur to Habre's Nest took them a full twenty-four hours because, wherever the Indian border crossed their route, they had to abandon their vehicle and trek on foot through Nepal. Hearing their story made me realize: if you love nature, this is the devotion it takes.



October 31st brought more fog and rain from early morning. Down at the bird hide, I managed to get photos of a large Oriental turtle dove, a pair of spotted Laughing thrushes, and a dark-breasted rosefinch; but travelling thousands of kilometers to this remote jungle wasn't meant for just that. We tried to keep our spirits up with jokes, banter, and light-hearted teasing. Ruma playfully mimicked the different tones and melodies in which Tapas and I snored at night. Tapas started pulling my leg—only when I dropped a few sharp, unprintable insults from our school days, did he burst into a wide grin and say, "Heh heh, there you go, your mood is back!" Pradnya was no less—she began performing caricatures of everyone in the group; the girl is a natural.

Tintin alternated between high peaks of optimism and dark despaired brooding. Can't really blame him. We had already spent three of our five days without even venturing out to meet the red panda.

The foreigners were in much the same boat. The moment we entered the dining room, Sofia called out, "Hey guys, I have got a red panda. Come here, I will show you!" Everyone fell silent. What the hell is she talking about?

But Dave and I couldn't resist rushing over, crowding around the screen of her full-frame camera fitted with a cannon-like thousand-millimeter lens. Good lord—the ever-smiling Italian girl was pulling our legs. She had clicked photos of all the gorgeous red panda poster prints displayed around the property! Torn between laughing or crying, we ended up bursting into laughter.

Yet, one lingering thought weighed on everyone's mind: we only had two days left. What if tomorrow turns out the same...?

Only Kakoli remained firm in her belief. She insisted, "We will definitely see the red panda."

November 1st. Our fourth day here. The rain had stopped, but the fog and mist were so thick you couldn't see your own hand. At the breakfast table, Olon delivered another piece of bad news: the road from Siliguri to Sandakphu had been closed since yesterday. Anxiety now joined our disappointment—what if we got stranded here?

Dave and Melina were supposed to travel to Ladakh next, to photograph snow leopards; giving up hope of finding anything here, they began discussing those plans.

Wrapped in raincoats, we ventured out for a walk along the front road amidst the drizzling mist and hazy gloom. Tintin came running up to show a picture he had taken—the weak, murky sun peeking through a tear in the clouds. But I refused to let hope creep back in. I told Kakoli and Ruma, "Well, might as well start getting the luggage packed."

While everyone reluctantly agreed with glum faces, Kakoli declared again, "I have no objection to our getting a head start on packing—but mark my words: tomorrow the sun will rise, and we will get our sighting."



The sleeping Buddha



Moss covered tree

Five

On November 2nd—our last day here, I didn't even attempt to wake up at six in the morning like every day. Kakoli shook me up: "What are you doing? Get up, aren't you going to take pictures of the sunrise?" What! I yanked off the quilt and leaped out of bed—no time to look for a sweater. Grabbing my green hoodie with one hand and my camera bag with the other on the go,

I rushed out to the front road. Everyone had come outside. The forest out front and the valley were bathed in molten-gold light, and a chorus of birds filled the air. Right at that moment, through the gaps in the eastern pine forest, that liquid gold drenched me from head to toe. I said to myself, I would gladly be reborn a hundred times just for a morning like this.

But there was no time for such reflections now—capture it in your camera, for God's sake. A magpie, its long tail making waves in the air, landed on a nearby post and started calling out. Following an exquisite melody nearby, I spotted a Blue whistling thrush, facing the light, singing a hymn to the sun.

Even Thapa-ji, our stocky chef, was beaming with an uncontrollable smile. He came running back and forth from the kitchen, handing us cups of steaming hot coffee. Before we could even gulp it down, Olon called out, "Sir, get in the car, get in the car! Red panda sighting!"

We dashed into the vehicle. The car pulled up just one and a half kilometers away, right in front of that mud-hole descending at a sixty-degree angle—the very spot where this story began.

Standing somehow upright on the uneven ground, I looked out to see tall bamboo thickets right before my eyes, and the blessed creature darting through the gaps in the leaves, playing hide and seek with us. We communicated only in gestures. The tiny, beautiful animal was wandering casually from branch to branch at the treetops—it was a kiwi tree, and he kept stopping now and then to nibble on its fruits. I thought to myself, poor fellow, he hasn't eaten anything in three days either. But hell- I just couldn't get a clear shot. Then it emerged from behind the leaves, held onto a long branch, and moved across to another; it took a good few second. Just as I managed a few good shots, the red panda vanished behind the leaves again. Fortunately, Kakoli and Pradnya could capture videos on their phones.

Then Olon spoke up, "Time's up, sir, let's go. So that the pandas aren't disturbed, no party is allowed to stay in their presence for more than 20 to 25 minutes." Our 25 minutes were up.

Coming out of the jungle, the entire group of ten walked back along the forest-bordered road, snapping photos and chatting—everyone's heart felt light now. We spent the rest of the day exploring the nearby trekking trails. We saw orchids and countless other unnamed epiphytes growing on the trunks of individual oak or pine trees, some of which might well be hundreds of years old. The layers of moss, lichen, and ferns growing over rocks were at least four to five inches thick. So varied was their elegance, so diverse their forms, so vivid their colours, and so mesmerizing their arrangements—one could easily spend days just gazing at them.

That evening was equally wonderful. After dinner, Shantanu gave a fascinating presentation. The topic covered the eleven distinct eco-zones across the Indian subcontinent—including the Andaman and Nicobar Islands—their characteristics, photos and videos of their unique wildlife, the specific environmental issues faced in each region, and how these diverse ecosystems can be sustained through

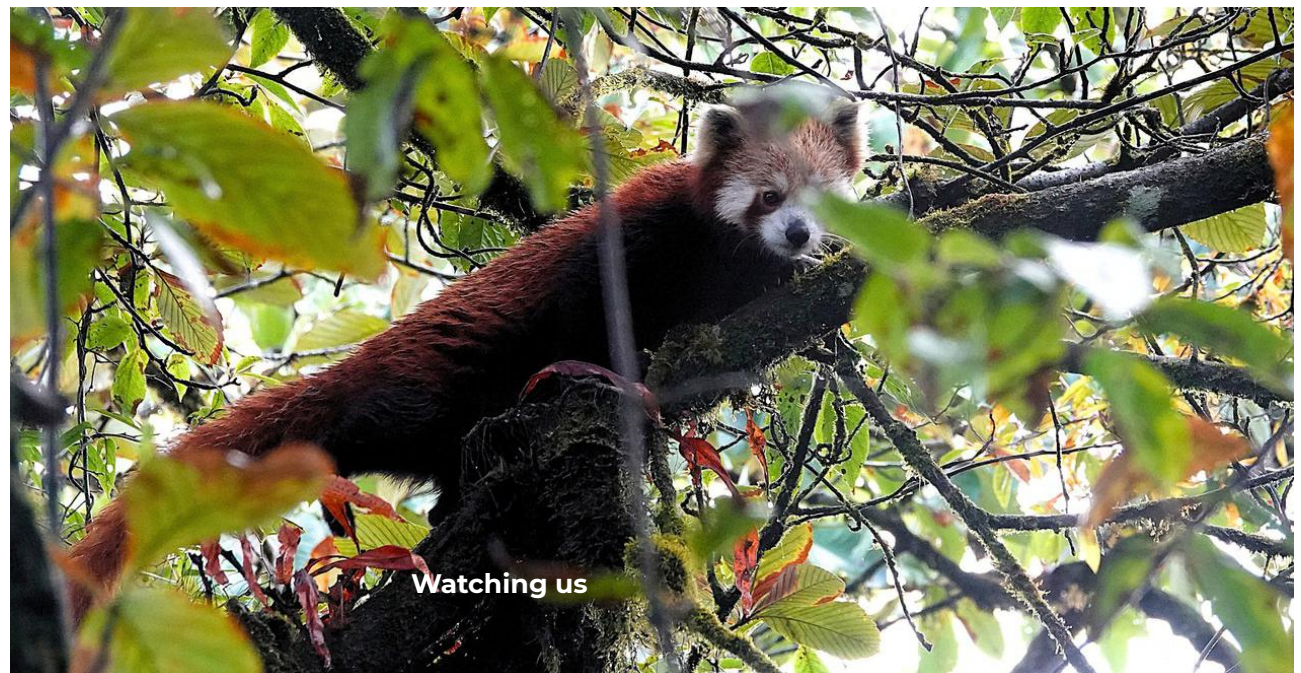
genuine eco-tourism. I had no idea that nearly 25% of the species in the Andaman and Nicobar region are endemic—meaning they evolved there and are found nowhere else on Earth. True eco-tourism, however, is far from the circus currently unfolding in national parks across our country, like Tadoba, Pench, or Corbett. In those places, one often sees an indifferent tiger in the forest, surrounded by forty-seven vehicles and around three hundred people shouting and taking photos. In some places, manipulations are carried out just to please tourists—such as filling animals' watering holes to align with tourist arrival dates. That isn't eco-tourism; it is eco-exploitation.

The next morning, on November 3rd, another magnificent wonder awaited us on our journey back. After enjoying a hearty breakfast of Tibetan bread, potato-and-bean curry, fruits, cheese omelets, and coffee, we boarded the vehicles. About an hour later, the driver stopped the car at a place called Tumling and said, "Get down and look, you have twenty minutes."

Looking toward the east, under a sky as brilliantly blue as a sapphire, Tathagata Buddha appeared before us in eternal slumber upon a bed of snow. Yes, the Kanchenjunga range resembles the reclining form of Lord Buddha only when viewed from the Sandakphu region—hence this famous formation is called 'The Sleeping Buddha'.

I will not even try to describe the sublime beauty of the Himalayas with my feeble pen—I can only try to convey

our state of mind. We forgot all about being trapped indoors by relentless storms and rain; we forgot that our encounter with the red panda lasted only a few fleeting moments; we forgot the frustration and annoyance that had built up in our hearts over four long days. My hands automatically folded up and a prayer birthed in my heart- 'Oh Lord Buddha give us, the humans, the wisdom and strength to resist the temptations to destroy this paradise down to the most humble, insignificant creatures and plants.'



ICELAND - THE LAND OF ICE AND FIRE

Anasuya De



Eurasian tectonic plates



Mossy barren landscape



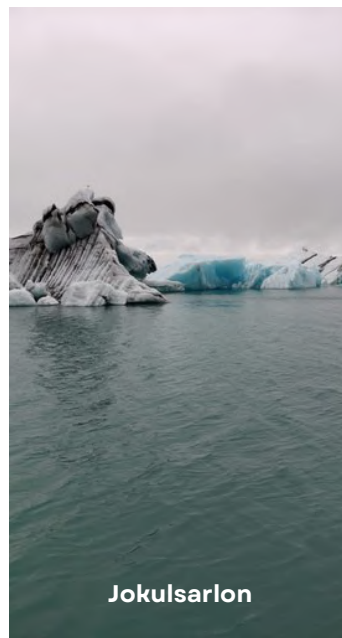
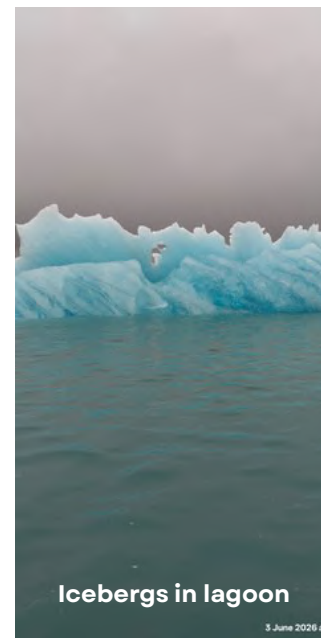
Amphibian boat ride

If I ask you to choose your dream destination for your vacation, where would you like to go? A snowcapped mountain, a blue ocean with icebergs, volcanos and glaciers, green meadows or waterfalls and geysers.....Then your ideal tourist place is non other than Iceland. You will experience all the attractions in a single journey! Iceland is the land of fire and ice. Isn't it an amazing geographical wonder! Yes, Iceland is famous for its dramatic natural phenomena – the Northern Lights (Aurora Borealis), the Midnight Sun and Geothermal hot spring.

This year in June 2026, I had the opportunity to witness this enchanting place with my partner Tapan. Although June comes under summer season, but don't be misguided, because in Iceland the weather is very unpredictable! You may experience all the four seasons in a single day. Yes, we were privileged to sense this pulse. If it rains early morning, the temperature cools down with strong breeze from the Atlantic Ocean. Mid-morning you may have to remove your layering if the sun shines over your head. Late evenings again the temperature drops. Iceland is an island nation of Europe and seats below the Arctic circle. For this reason, in the months of June and July the Sun never sets here, rather dips down the horizon for a while and rises up again after one or two hours giving a feel of the twilight. To observe this dramatic phenomenon, one day I was awake beyond midnight to cherish this beauty of the sky under the Midnight Sun. Summer travel brings a 'Midnight Sun' effect with long daylight hours, which we experienced very prominently!

We first landed at Iceland's capital Reykjavik, which is the World's northernmost nation capital. While travelling towards Hella from Reykjavik we crossed miles & miles of scantily inhabited interiors which were rugged barren plateau featuring desert sand dunes, volcanic dry lava rocky fields, somewhere black and at places greenish mossy and rows of mountains. On the way we also witnessed a spectacular waterfall – Urriðafoss located on the Thjórsá river. It is known for its raw untamed beauty for being Iceland's most voluminous waterfall though not so tall. Encountering the wonderful Urriðafoss cascading waters was indeed awesome! Finally, we arrived at Hella in the evening and checked into Stracta Hotel. Hella is a small town along the famous ring road in Southern Iceland on the shores of the river – Ytri-Ranga (famous for Salmon, Cod and Trout fishing). This hotel offers outdoor saunas and geothermal hot tubs for refreshing relaxation.

Next morning after a hearty Nordic breakfast we headed towards a breathtaking journey of the Jökulsárlón Glacial Lagoon. On the way we crossed Systraðafoss or Sisters' Falls – The waterfall consists of two streams that fall side by side down the cliff. We were lucky enough to manage the tickets for the Amphibian guided boat tour at Jökulsárlón Glacial Lagoon. It was a mind-blowing experience to witness the rare phenomena of icebergs breaking away from a glacier and float majestically on the lagoon's surface. Our guide for this one-hour amphibian boat tour was an English-speaking Icelandic young lady who allowed us to hold and feel the big piece of ice-chunk shining like a diamond.



During this thrilling ride we also spotted a greyish seal on the banks. After this ride, to quench our hunger, Tapan and myself quickly grabbed our favourite dish - Salmon fish & chips with coke for lunch, as off now. Besides the Jökulsárlón glacial lagoon there is a Diamond beach, where sparkling ice chunks are gathered sense like diamonds.

Our next stop was Iceland's most iconic Reynisfjara Black Sand beach. It is located next to the village – Vik in Iceland's southern coast. It's famous for the striking black sand, soaring basalt columns, sea stacks and powerful Atlantic waves. Its dramatic beauty and unique landscape have earned its recognition by National Geographic as one of the top non-tropical beaches in the world. Guess! You must have seen this backdrop in the song 'Gerua' filmed by Sharukh Khan and Kajal in the movie 'Dilwale'.



Basalt columns



Reynisfjara black sand beach



Amphibian boat



Glacier mountains

Our next stopover was the majestic Skógafoss waterfall, an Icelandic marvel, known for its 60 meters towering cascades. However, we missed its vibrant rainbow as the day was cloudy. But I took the privilege of dancing with the lyrics of 'Rang de tu mohe gerua' here, as well as at our previous spot - Black sand beach, with my hero Tapan doing the videography

Next day we explored the Golden Circle route with three primary stops – the Geysir Geothermal area, Gullfoss waterfall and Thingvellir National Park:

Strokkur is the Iceland's most famous and active natural fountain geyser in Haukadalur geothermal area. It erupts every 5 to 10 minutes blasting boiling water and steam 20 to 35 meters into the air. In this geothermal marvel area, there is an inactive constant bubbling hot spring as well, called Litli Geysir (Little geyser).



Thjorsa River



Gullfoss waterfalls



Skógafoss waterfalls



Geothermal hot springs



Skogafoss waterfalls



Pipe organs of Hallgrímskirkja Church

Next we visited Gullfoss – the ‘Golden Waterfall’ with its dramatic two-tiered 32 meter plunge, located in the canyon of the Hvítá river in Southwest Iceland. Here we got a chance to sip hot Icelandic coffee.

Finally, we approached towards Thingvellir National Park, the historic site of Icelandic ancient parliament and a UNESCO World Heritage treasure. It was an amazing experience of strolling on the Almannagjá Gorge – a dramatic walking path between North American and Eurasian tectonic plates. This place sits directly on the mid Atlantic ridge, where these tectonic plates pull apart by about 2 to 2.5 cms each year, creating giant cliffs and canyons. Here we noticed Iceland’s independence (June 17, 1944) site – Althing, an open air assembly started in 930 AD which is one of the oldest parliament in the world. After a short walk we came to Öxaráfoss waterfall.



Gullfoss Golden Waterfall



Icelandic sheep in meadows



Icelandic food with cod fish



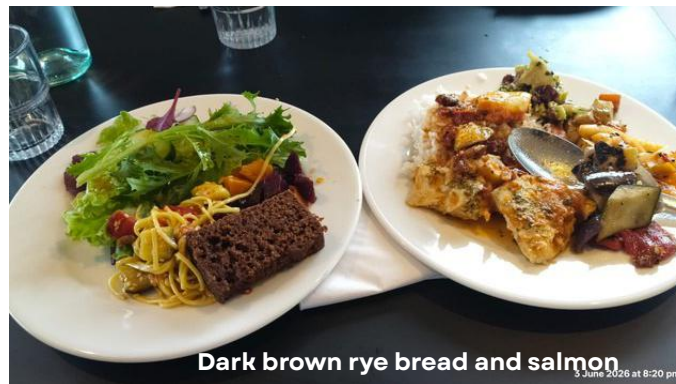
Strokkur



Litli Geysir

Next morning we reached back Reykjavik and explored the city vibes. Our ensuing popular sightseeing spots were Hallgrímskirkja church - Iceland’s tallest and most iconic landmark and strolling at the Rainbow Street. Then we visited the ‘Aurora Centre’ museum to explore the fascinating history and cultural significance of the Northern Lights (best viewed during winter clear dark skies and low light pollution).

I will not do justice to my article if I don't mention something about the local Icelandic cuisine. Iceland’s main food staples are fresh sea foods like – Salmon, Cod, Trout, Lamb, Skyr – a thick protein rich yogurt and a dense dark slightly sweet Rye bread – often baked geothermally in warm ground near the hot springs.



Dark brown rye bread and salmon

Our journey finally ended with Indian cuisine dinner and check-in at the Marriot hotel near Keflavik airport with some unique unforgettable memories and magical experiences of the enchanting short trip of Iceland.

দেখা না দেখায় বিষ্ণুপুর

তানিয়া সেন



রাঢ় বাংলার মধ্যমনি বাঁকুড়ার প্রত্নশহর মল্লভূম বিষ্ণুপুর এক ঐতিহ্যমণ্ডিত মন্দিরনগরী। মল্লযুগ অতিক্রান্তের কয়েকশত বছর পরও লালমাটি সাম্রাজ্যের একবুক অহংকার নিয়ে বিরাজমান পোড়ামাটির বিশ্বয়কর শিল্পকলায় উজ্জ্বল বিষ্ণুপুর। পশ্চিমবঙ্গের বাঁকুড়া জেলার সদর মহকুমা শহর বিষ্ণুপুর, মধ্যযুগীয় বাংলার প্রায় সকল প্রকার মন্দির স্থাপত্য রীতির এক সুন্দর মিলনক্ষেত্র। বাংলার দক্ষিণ-পশ্চিম প্রান্ত ও তার সংলগ্ন বিহারের পূর্ব - দক্ষিণ প্রান্তে ছোটনাগপুর মালভূমির পূর্ব সীমানায়, ষোড়শ-সপ্তদশ শতকে অনেকগুলি ছোট বড়ো রাজ্যের উদ্ভব হয়েছিল। স্থানীয় ভূখন্ডের মধ্যে আবদ্ধ ছিল বলে রাজ্যগুলি ভুঁই বা ভূম নামে পরিচিত। উত্তরে দামোদর ও দক্ষিণে শীলাবতী নদীর মধ্যবর্তী ভূখন্ডে ছিল মল্লবংশীয় নৃপতিগণ শাসিত মল্লভূমের অবস্থান। এই মল্লভূমের রাজধানী হল সপ্তদশ ও অষ্টাদশ শতকে বাঙালি সংস্কৃতির পীঠস্থান বিষ্ণুপুর। এক সময়ে এই অঞ্চল ঘন জঙ্গলে মোড়া ছিল বলে বন-বিষ্ণুপুর নামও প্রচলিত ছিল।

এই মল্লরাজাদের নিয়ে বিভিন্ন লোককাহিনী প্রচলিত আছে। অনেকের মতে, মল্লরাজারা এসেছিলেন রাজপুতানার জয়পুর থেকে, অন্যদিকে কেউ কেউ মনে করেন তাঁরা এসেছিলেন বৃন্দাবনধামের নিকটবর্তী জয়নগর থেকে। আবার ঐতিহাসিকদের মতে মল্ল রাজবংশের প্রতিষ্ঠা স্থানীয় আদিবাসী সমাজেরই কোন একজন প্রতাপশালী নেতার হাতে। বাংলার সীমান্ত অঞ্চলে বসবাসকারী বাগদী, বাউরী, মাল, ধীবর, ডোম প্রভৃতি সম্প্রদায়রা চিরকালই রণনিপুণ। এদের লাঠি, সড়কির প্রতাপের কাছে

শক্তিশালী প্রতিপক্ষও হার মেনেছে বারংবার। তাদেরই কোন সর্দার সামরিক সম্প্রদায়গুলিকে সংগঠিত করে হয়তো এই রাজ্যের প্রতিষ্ঠা করেছিলেন। তাঁরই বংশধর বিষ্ণুপুর রাজ পরিবার। প্রাচীন পুঁথি থেকে জানা যায় যে ৬৯৫ খ্রিস্টাব্দ থেকে মল্লযুগের সূচনা। রঘুনাথ নামক এক যুবক মল্লযুদ্ধে শ্রেষ্ঠতা লাভ করে মল্লরাজ্য স্থাপন করেছিলেন, পরবর্তীকালে তিনিই আদি মল্ল উপাধি গ্রহণ করেন। মল্লবংশের উল্লেখযোগ্য রাজা বীরহাম্বির প্রথমে নিষ্ঠুর ও অত্যাচারী রাজা হিসেবে পরিচিত হলেও খ্রীচৈতন্যদেবের একনিষ্ঠ ভক্ত ও পণ্ডিত শ্রীনিবাস আচার্যের সংস্পর্শে এসে বৈষ্ণব ধর্ম গ্রহণ করেন ও একজন প্রজাহিতৈষী ও আদর্শ রাজায় পরিণত হন।

মল্লভূমে সংগঠিত সাংস্কৃতিক প্রক্রিয়া গড়ে উঠেছিল গৌড়ীয় বৈষ্ণব মত ও সম্প্রদায়কে কেন্দ্র করে। ইষ্টদেবতাদের প্রীতির উদ্দেশ্যে মল্লরাজারা সপ্তদশ শতক থেকে অষ্টাদশ শতকের মাঝামাঝি পর্যন্ত প্রায় দেড়শো মন্দির প্রতিষ্ঠা করেন। এই মন্দির স্থাপত্যকে কেন্দ্র করেই পোড়ামাটির ভাস্কর্য ও অলঙ্করণ শিল্প বিকাশলাভ করে। সপ্তদশ ও অষ্টাদশ শতকের বিষ্ণুপুরে ধর্মচর্চাকে উপলক্ষ্য করে যে স্থাপত্য, পোড়ামাটি ও পঙ্খের স্থাপত্যালঙ্কার, সঙ্গীত এবং চিত্র চর্চার সূত্রপাত ঘটে, সেই সূত্রেই বিষ্ণুপুরে উচ্চাঙ্গসঙ্গীতের প্রসার ঘটে। উচ্চাঙ্গের গরানহাটী ও মনোহরশাহী কীর্তনে বিষ্ণুপুরের কীর্তনীয়াগণ বিশেষ পারদর্শিতা অর্জন করেন।

রঘুনাথসিংহের রাজত্বকালে বিষ্ণুপুর সংস্কৃতচর্চা ও উচ্চাঙ্গ সঙ্গীতের কেন্দ্র হিসেবে যথেষ্ট সুনাম অর্জন করেছিল। রঘুনাথ সিংহের পর তাঁর পুত্র বীরসিংহ আনুমানিক ১৬৫৬ খ্রিস্টাব্দে বিষ্ণুপুরের রাজসিংহাসনে আরোহণ করেন। রাজা বীরসিংহের দু'জন স্ত্রী শিরোমণি ও সৌদামিনীর আনুকূল্যে সুন্দর যে দুটি মন্দির নির্মিত হয়েছিল তাদের নাম মদনগোপাল ও মুরলীমোহন। বীরসিংহ একজন গঠনশীল ও উৎসাহী রাজা হিসেবে পরিচিত হলেও কোনো এক অজ্ঞাত কারণে তাঁর আটজন পুত্রকে জীবন্ত অবস্থায় দেওয়াল গেঁথে কবর দেন। এই আটজনের মধ্যে দুর্জ ন সিংহের জীবন রক্ষা পায় এবং তিনি মদনমোহন মন্দির নির্মাণ করেন। দুর্জন সিংহের পর তাঁর পুত্র দ্বিতীয় রঘুনাথ সিংহ রাজসিংহাসনে আরোহণ করেন। এরপর ধীরেধীরে মল্লবংশের পতনের সূত্রপাত ঘটে। পরবর্তীকালে গোপালসিংহ সিংহাসনে আরোহণ করেন। তিনি ছিলেন ধার্মিক ও বৈষ্ণব ধর্মের মহান পৃষ্ঠপোষক। মারাঠাদের আক্রমণ থেকে রক্ষা পাওয়ার জন্য তিনি মদনমোহনের শরণাপন্ন হন এবং কথিত আছে যে মদনমোহন স্বয়ং নাকি দলমাদল কামান থেকে গোলাবর্ষণ করে মারাঠা সৈন্যদের বিতাড়িত করেন। এর পরবর্তী রাজা হন চৈতন্য সিংহ। এইসময় থেকেই মল্লরাজারা বিভিন্ন মামলা মোকদ্দমায় জড়িয়ে পড়েন এবং ১৮০৫ খ্রিস্টাব্দে বকেয়া খাজনা না দিতে পারায় চৈতন্য সিংহের জমিদারী ইস্ট ইন্ডিয়া কোম্পানি ক্রয় করে এবং বিষ্ণুপুরের পূর্ব গৌরব অন্তিমিত হতে থাকে।



মন্দির প্রতিষ্ঠা ফলক

বিষ্ণুপুরের মন্দির পরিচিতি

প্রাচীন মল্ল-সংস্কৃতির প্রাণকেন্দ্র বিষ্ণুপুরে পৌঁছলে দেখা যাবে ঘন সন্নিবিষ্ট অসংখ্য মন্দির। অনেক মন্দির বিলুপ্ত বা বিলুপ্তপ্রায়। সময়ের নিষ্ঠুর ধারাকে উপেক্ষা করে যে মন্দিরগুলি এখনো দাঁড়িয়ে আছে সেগুলি দেখলে বিষ্ণুপুরে বাংলার মন্দির স্থাপত্যশৈলীর উৎপত্তি ও বিবর্তনের একটি সুস্পষ্ট ধারা লক্ষ করা যায়। সেই ধারা অনুসারে প্রাথমিক পর্যায়ে উত্তর ভারতীয় নাগর স্থাপত্যশৈলীর মন্দির নির্মিত হলেও পরবর্তী কালে এর সঙ্গে বাংলার নিজস্ব স্থাপত্য কাঠামোর অনুকরণে এবং ইসলামীয় স্থাপত্য কৌশলের সংমিশ্রণে সম্পূর্ণ নতুন মধ্যযুগীয় বাংলার নিজস্ব এক মন্দির স্থাপত্যশৈলীর উন্মেষ ঘটে। এই শৈলীর মন্দিরগুলিকে কাঠামোগত দিক থেকে মূলত তিনটি ভাগে ভাগ করতে পারা যায়— দেউল, চালারীতি বা শৈলী ও রত্ন শৈলী। এর মধ্যে আবার চালা এবং রত্নের সংখ্যার ভিত্তিতে স্থাপত্যের বিভিন্ন বৈচিত্র্য লক্ষ্য করা যায়, তবে বিষ্ণুপুরে চালা শৈলীর মধ্যে দোচালা, চারচালা, আটচালা ও জোড়-বাংলা শ্রেণীর মন্দির এবং রত্ন শৈলীর মধ্যে এক, পঞ্চ ও নবরত্ন শ্রেণীর মন্দিরের উপস্থিতি লক্ষ্য করা যায়।

মল্লেশ্বর

বিষ্ণুপুরের ভট্টাচার্য পাড়ায় অবস্থিত মল্লেশ্বর মন্দির সম্ভবত এই শহরের প্রাচীনতম মন্দির। গঠনগত দিক থেকে এটি সম্পূর্ণ মাকড়া পাথরে নির্মিত, নাগর স্থাপত্য শৈলীর পঞ্চরথ রেখা দেউল। আর্কিওলজিকাল সার্ভে অফ ইন্ডিয়া (এএসআই) দ্বারা সুরক্ষিত এই স্থাপত্যটির মূল চূড়া নষ্ট হয়ে গেলে ঊনবিংশ শতকের শেষের দিকে বর্তমান আটকোণা চূড়াটি তৈরি হয়। পশ্চিমযুগী এই দেউলটির উপাস্য দেবতা হলেন শিব, ফলে এটি মল্লরাজাদের বৈষ্ণব ধর্মে দীক্ষিত হবার পূর্বে নির্মিত বলে অনুমিত হয়।



রাসমঞ্চ

রাসমঞ্চ

পশ্চিমবঙ্গের গ্রামগঞ্জে ঘুরতে গেলে প্রায় সর্বত্রই চোখে পড়ে ছোট ছোট রাসমঞ্চ আর দোলমঞ্চ। কোথাও বর্গাকার, কোথাও আয়তাকার দোলমঞ্চ; আবার কোথাও অষ্টভুজ কিংবা ষড়ভুজ রাসমঞ্চ—সবই সাধারণত একটু উঁচু বেদির উপর গড়া, মাথার উপর ছোট্ট একটি চূড়া। উৎসবের দিনে চারদিক থেকে দেবমূর্তি দর্শনের সুবিধার জন্যই এই মঞ্চগুলির জন্ম।

কিন্তু বিষ্ণুপুরের রাসমঞ্চ এই পরিচিত ছবির সব ধারণা পাল্টে দেয়। শহরের একেবারে মাঝখানে দাঁড়িয়ে থাকা রাসমঞ্চটি দেখলে বোঝা যায়, এটি আর পাঁচটা রাসমঞ্চের থেকে অনেকাংশেই স্বতন্ত্র। প্রায় ত্রিশ মিটার চওড়া, বারো মিটারেরও বেশি উঁচু এই স্থাপনাটি শহরের উপর দাঁড়িয়ে আছে এক রাজকীয় উপস্থিতি নিয়ে। দেড় মিটার উঁচু বেদিটি তৈরি ল্যাটেরাইট পাথরে, আর তার উপর ইঁটের তৈরি মূল কাঠামো—বিষ্ণুপুরে অবস্থিত প্রথম ইঁটের তৈরি স্থাপত্য। এই অদ্ভুত সংমিশ্রণই প্রথমে নজর কেড়ে নেয়। তবে সবচেয়ে বিস্ময় জাগায় এর ছাদ। পিরামিডের মতো ধাপে ধাপে উপরের দিকে উঠে যাওয়া এই ছাদ দেখে মুহূর্তের জন্য মনে হয়, যেন মিশরের কোনও প্রাচীন স্মৃতিস্তম্ভ বাংলার মাটিতে এসে দাঁড়িয়েছে। স্থাপনাটির মাঝখানে রয়েছে একটি ছোট গর্ভগৃহ—আজ তা তালাবদ্ধ, ভেতরে আলোও এত কম যে ছবি তোলা সম্ভব নয়। গর্ভগৃহ ও তার দক্ষিণে এক উপকক্ষকে ঘিরে তিন প্রস্থ খিলানযুক্ত দেওয়াল চারদিকে ঘুরে এসেছে। সবচেয়ে ভিতরের দেওয়ালের প্রতি দিকে পাঁচটি, দ্বিতীয় দেওয়ালের প্রতি দিকে আটটি ও বাইরের দেওয়ালের প্রতি দিকে দশটি করে ফুলকাটা প্রশস্ত খিলান বড় বড় আটকোণা থামের উপর ন্যস্ত। রাসমঞ্চটির একেবারে বাইরের সারিতে যে ধরনের স্তম্ভ নির্মাণ করা হয়েছে সেই ধরনের স্তম্ভের ব্যবহার হিন্দুমন্দিরে এর আগে কোথাও দেখা যায়নি। প্রায় নব্বইটি স্তম্ভের মধ্যে দিয়ে ইঁটতে ইঁটতে সহজেই দিক ভুলে যাওয়া যায়। বাইরের প্রদক্ষিণ পথটি উপরের পিরামিড ছাদের বাইরে একটু বেরিয়ে এসে বাংলার চালাঘরের

আদলে ঢেকে দেওয়া— চূড়ার মূল বরাবর প্রতি দিকে চারটি করে দোচালা ও প্রতি কোণে একটি করে চারচালা আছে। এ দৃশ্য সত্যিই অনন্য। এর নির্মাণ শৈলী স্বতন্ত্র, এই ধরনের স্থাপত্য শুধু বাংলা কেন সারা ভারতেও বিরল। রাসমঞ্চের গায়ে খুব বেশি অলংকরণ নেই। কয়েকটি পদ্মের নকশা ছাড়া প্রায় নিরাভরণ বলা যায়। পূর্ব দিকের দেওয়ালে চোখে পড়ে দু-একটি নৃত্যরত মানবমূর্তি। প্রবেশপথের খিলানগুলির চারপাশে, বিশেষ করে দক্ষিণ-পূর্ব কোণে, এখনও কোথাও কোথাও স্টুকোর(stucco) ছাপ রয়ে গেছে। ছাদের একেবারে উপরেরতাকালে দেখা যায়, ক্ষীণ হলেও কিছু চিহ্ন আছে—যেন একসময় পুরো কাঠামোটিই সাদা বা রঙিন আবরণে মোড়া ছিল।

রাসমঞ্চটির নির্মাণকাল নিয়ে আজও ধোঁয়াশা রয়ে গেছে। কোনও শিলালিপি নেই, অলংকরণও এতই কম যে সেখান থেকে সময় নির্ণয় করা যায় না। দীর্ঘদিন ধরে মনে করা হতো, মুঘল সম্রাট আকবরের সমসাময়িক ৪৯তম মল্লরাজ বীর হাম্বিরের আমলে, আনুমানিক ষোড়শ শতকের শেষ দিকে এটি তৈরি। বীর হাম্বির (আনু. ১৫৬৫-১৬২০ খ্রি.) বৈষ্ণব সাধক গ্রীনিবাস আচার্যের গভীর প্রভাবে এসে বৈষ্ণব ধর্ম গ্রহণ করেছিলেন। তাঁর শাসনকালে বৈষ্ণব ধর্ম রাজধর্মের মর্যাদা লাভ করে এবং একে বিষ্ণুপুর শহরের প্রতিষ্ঠাতা হিসাবে গণ্য করা হয়। ভগবান শ্রীকৃষ্ণের প্রতি গভীর অনুরাগ থেকে অনুপ্রাণিত হয়ে তিনি খ্রিস্টাব্দ ১৬০০ নাগাদ রাসমঞ্চ নির্মাণ করেন, এমন মনে করা হয়। তবে সম্প্রতি প্রত্নতত্ত্ব সর্বেক্ষণের একটি তথ্যফলকে জানাচ্ছে—বেদির চারপাশের অন্ধ খিলান নকশা দেখে অনুমান করা হচ্ছে, নির্মাণকাল সম্ভবত সপ্তদশ শতকের শেষ ভাগ।

এই রাসমঞ্চ শুধু একটি স্থাপত্য নিদর্শন নয়, একসময় ছিল বিষ্ণুপুরের সামাজিক জীবনের কেন্দ্রবিন্দু। প্রায় আড়াইশো বছর ধরে এখানে বসতো রাস উৎসব। আশপাশের সব মন্দির থেকে রাধা-কৃষ্ণের বিগ্রহ এনে এক জায়গায় স্থাপন করা হতো, আর মানুষ তার দর্শনে আসত দূরদূরান্ত থেকে। এই প্রথার অবসান ঘটে ১৯৩২ সালে। বর্তমানে এটি এএসআই-এর রক্ষণাধীন।

শ্যামরায় মন্দির

মল্লরাজ রঘুনাথ সিংহ কর্তৃক ৯৪৯ মল্লাব্দে (১৬৪৩ খ্রিস্টাব্দ) নির্মিত শ্যামরায় মন্দির, আলংকারিক বৈচিত্র্য ও প্রাচুর্যে এক কথায় অতুলনীয়। ঢাল ছাদ ও চূড়াশীর্ষগুলি বাদে ভেতর ও বাইরের দেওয়াল সহ সম্পূর্ণ মন্দিরটি টেরাকোটায় অলংকৃত। দক্ষিণমুখী মন্দিরটির গর্ভগৃহের চারদিকে একটি

ফুলকাটাজিখিলানযুক্ত সন্ন্যাস প্রদক্ষিণপথ আছে। মন্দিরটির চার কোণে চারটে ছোট এবং মাঝখানে একটি, মোট পাঁচটা রত্ন আছে। চারকোণের চারটি রত্নের মাথা আনেকটাই পীড় দেউলের মতো, থাকে থাকে উপরে উঠে গেছে। এই চূড়াগুলিই যেন স্বয়ংসম্পূর্ণ এক একটি মন্দিরের মতো। বিষ্ণুপুরের প্রতিষ্ঠালিপি যুক্ত মন্দিরগুলির মধ্যে শ্যামরায় প্রাচীনতম হওয়ায় গবেষক শ্রীলা বসু তাঁর 'বাংলার টেরাকোটা' গ্রন্থে অনুমান করেছেন, যেহেতু একরত্ন মন্দির নির্মাণের বহুপূর্বেই পঞ্চরত্ন এই



শ্যামরায়

মন্দিরটি নির্মিত হয়েছে, তাই এটি হয়তো মসজিদ স্থাপত্য দ্বারা অনুপ্রাণিত হয়েছিল, অর্থাৎ চারকোণে চারটি মিনার ও মাঝে প্রধান গম্বুজে র আদলে রত্নগুলির বিন্যাস। শ্যামরায় মন্দিরের দক্ষিণদিকের জিখিলানের দুপাশে একটি করে মোট দুটি বৃহদাকার রাসমন্ডল আছে, যার প্রতিটি চরিত্রের ছন্দ এত প্রাণময় ও গতিশীল যে, বঙ্গের আর কোন মন্দিরের রাসমন্ডলের সাথে এর তুলনা চলে না, ফলে শ্যামরায়ের পরিচিতি-ই হয়ে উঠেছে এই রাসমন্ডল।

কেষ্টরায় বা জোড়-বাংলা মন্দির

শ্যামরায় মন্দিরের থেকে মাত্র ১২ বছরের ছোট অথচ স্থাপত্য ভাস্কর্যের দিক থেকে কেষ্টরায় বা জোড়-বাংলা মন্দির এক অভিনবত্বের ছাপ ফেলেছে। ৯৬১ মল্লাব্দে (১৬৫৫ খ্রিস্টাব্দে) মহারাজ বীরহাঙ্গীরের পুত্র রঘুনাথ সিংহের সময়কালে এই মন্দির নির্মিত হয়। অন্যান্য জোড়-বাংলার মতোই দুটো দোচালা একত্রে জুড়ে এটা তৈরি হয়েছে। কেষ্টরায় মন্দির দক্ষিণমুখী, সেই দিকেই মন্দিরের একমাত্র জিখিলান যুক্ত প্রবেশপথ রয়েছে। খিলানের ওপরে মন্দিরের প্রতিষ্ঠাফলক। প্রতিষ্ঠালিপির একপাশে বংশীধারী কৃষ্ণ, অন্যপাশে লাঙল এবং শিঙা নিয়ে

বলরাম লক্ষ্মণীয়। দুটি দো চালার বাইরের দেয়ালগুলো ছাড়াও মন্দিরের সামনের খিলান, স্তম্ভ, দালান সহ সব জায়গায় টেরাকোটার কাজ দেখা যায়; শুধু গর্ভগৃহের ভেতরে কোথাও অলংকরণ নেই। টেরাকোটা চিত্রের মধ্যে কৃষ্ণ ও বলরামের বাল্যলীলার আধিক্য দেখতে পাওয়া যায়। দধিমহ্ননের একটি ফলকও আছে এ দেয়ালে। শ্রীকৃষ্ণকীর্তনের ছোট ছোট গল্পও ফুটে উঠেছে এই মন্দিরের অলংকরণে। মাতৃকাদের সঙ্গে দানবদের যুদ্ধের দৃশ্য এবং এরই নিচে একটি প্যানেলে তিনটি বড়ো আকারের নৌকার চিত্র আছে, নৌকাগুলির উপর সারিবদ্ধভাবে আছে বন্দুকধারী যোদ্ধারা। ষোড়শ-সপ্তদশ শতকে বাংলার উপকূল ভাগে জলদস্যুদের মোকাবিলা করার জন্য মুঘল রাজকীয় বাহিনীর শক্তি বৃদ্ধি করা হয়েছিল। তাছাড়া রামায়ণের মহাভারতের যুদ্ধচিত্রও দেখতে পাওয়া যায়। দক্ষিণ দেওয়ালের পশ্চিমদিকে একটু নীচের দিকে একক নারীমূর্তি দেখা যায়। তার চুলের বাঁধুনি অনেকটা প্রাচীন মিশরীয় নারীর মতো। একটি ফলকে দেখা যায়, উটের ওপর বসে আছে একজন মানুষ। এই ফলকটি স্বাভাবিকভাবেই রাজস্থানের কথা মনে করায়। রাজস্থানী পোশাকের আদলও দেখা যায় বিভিন্ন অলংকরণে।

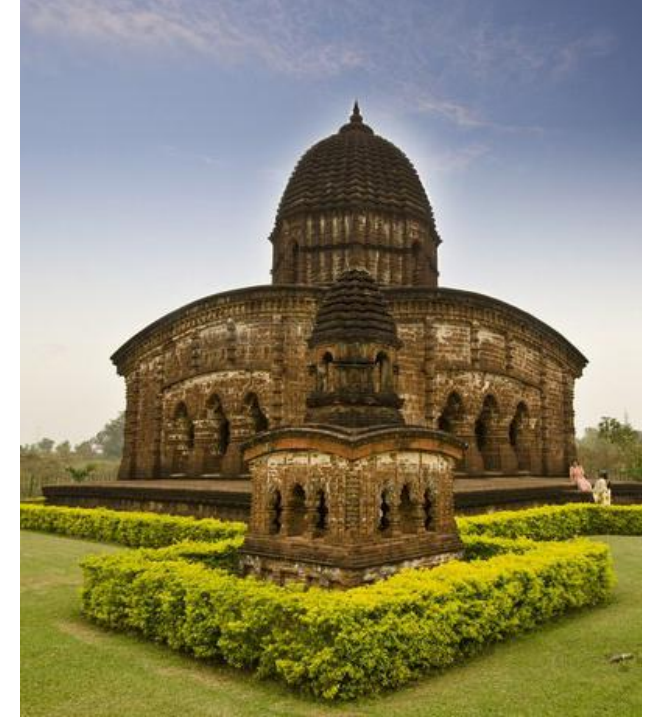
মদনমোহন মন্দির

মল্লরাজ দুর্জয় সিংহ কর্তৃক ১০০০ মল্লাব্দে (১৬৯৪ খ্রীষ্টাব্দ) নির্মিত মদনমোহন মন্দিরটি চারপাশ থেকে ইঁটের উঁচু প্রাকারে বেষ্টিত, জিখিলান প্রবেশ পথটি একটি দোচালা স্থাপত্য যার মাঝের খিলানটি দিয়ে ভিতরে প্রবেশ করা গেলেও দুই পাশের দুটি খিলান উঁচু বসার রক হিসাবে ব্যবহৃত হয়। দক্ষিণমুখী এই একরত্ন মন্দিরটি সম্পূর্ণ ইঁটের তৈরী। মাকড়া পাথরের উঁচু বেদীর ওপরে নির্মিত এই মন্দিরের দক্ষিণের অলিন্দে ও মন্দিরের দক্ষিণ দেওয়ালেই মল্লত উৎকৃষ্ট টেরাকোটার কাজ লক্ষ করা যায়। মন্দির প্রাঙ্গণে মূল মন্দির বরাবর দক্ষিণের প্রাকারের গায়ে একটি দোচালা নাটমন্ডপ ও মন্দিরের পিছন দিকে পর্বু দেওয়ালে একটি দোচালা ভোগঘর ও দেখা যায়।

রাধাগোবিন্দ মন্দির

লালবাঁধের কাছে অবস্থিত রাধাগোবিন্দ মন্দিরটি ১০৩৫ মল্লাব্দে (১৭২৯খ্রিস্টাব্দে) মহারাজ গোপাল সিংহের আমলে তাঁর পুত্র কৃষ্ণসিংহ প্রতিষ্ঠা করেন। মন্দিরের দক্ষিণ-পর্বু কোণে মূল মন্দিরের অনুরূপ একটি পোড়ামাটির রথ ও উত্তর-পূর্বে একটি চতুষ্কোণ পুষ্করিণী আছে। কাঠের রথের মতো এটি টেনে নিয়ে যাওয়া না গেলেও বিশেষ বিশেষ উৎসবে মূল -বিগ্রহ বা তাঁর ছোট বিকল্পমূর্তি সম্ভবতঃ এসব রথে রাখা হত। এটি সম্পূর্ণ মূল মন্দিরের মতো দেখতে হলেও শিখরটি ত্রিখণ্ড এবং নীচের দিকে অর্ধবৃত্তাকার চাকার আকৃতি দেখতে পাওয়া যায়।

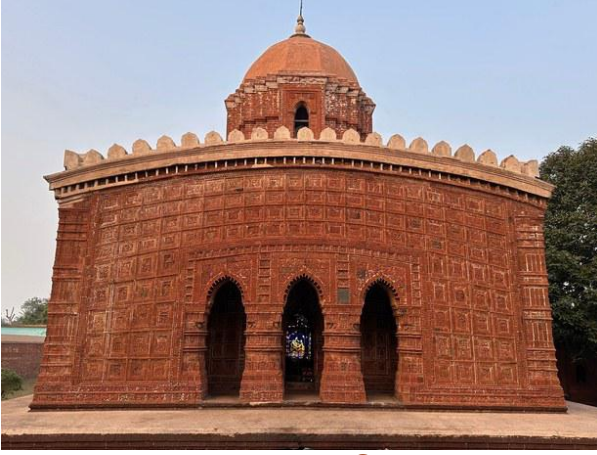
বিষ্ণুপুরের স্থাপত্য বৈচিত্র্য শুধুমাত্র ধর্মের আঙিনাতেই সীমাবদ্ধ নেই, মন্দির স্থাপত্য বাদেও রাজ আমলে নির্মিত একাধিক উল্লেখযোগ্য স্থাপত্য এখনো যেমন টিকে আছে ঠিক তেমনই প্রতিরক্ষা ও অন্যান্য ব্যবহারিক প্রয়োজনে খোদিত একাধিক পরিখা , দিঘি ও অন্যান্য কারুশৈলী।



রাধাগোবিন্দ মন্দির

দলমাদল কামান

মল্ল রাজত্বে ধাতুশিল্পেরও যে প্রভূত উন্নতি ঘটেছিল তার প্রমাণ দেয় দলমাদল বা দলমর্দন কামানটি। ৩০০ বছর আগে তৈরি ৩.৮ মিটার লম্বা কামানটিতে এখনো জং ধরেনি। ১৭৪২ সালে ভাস্কর পন্ডিতের নেতৃত্বে বাংলায় মারাঠা তথা বর্গী আক্রমণের সময় কামানটি ব্যবহার করা হয়েছিল। লোকশ্রুতি, স্বয়ং দেবতা মদনমোহন দলমাদল কামানটি দেগে বর্গীদের হাত থেকে বিষ্ণুপুরকে রক্ষা করেছিলেন।



মদনমোহন মন্দির

মদনমোহন মন্দির

মল্লরাজ দুর্জন সিংহ কর্তৃক ১০০০ মল্লাব্দে (১৬৯৪ খ্রীষ্টাব্দ) নির্মিত মদনমোহন মন্দিরটি চারপাশ থেকে ইটের উঁচু প্রাকারে বেষ্টিত, ত্রিখিলান প্রবেশ পথটি একটি দোচালা স্থাপত্য যার মাঝের খিলানটি দিয়ে ভিতরে প্রবেশ করা গেলেও দুই পাশের দুটি খিলান উঁচু বসার রক হিসাবে ব্যবহৃত হয়। দক্ষিণমুখী এই একরত্ন মন্দিরটি সম্পূর্ণ ইটের তৈরী। মাকড়া পাথরের উঁচু বেদীর ওপরে নির্মিত এই মন্দিরের দক্ষিণের অলিন্দে ও মন্দিরের দক্ষিণ দেওয়ালেই মল্লুত উৎকৃষ্ট টেরাকোটার কাজ লক্ষ করা যায়। মন্দির প্রাঙ্গণে মূল মন্দির বরাবর দক্ষিণের প্রাকারের গায়ে একটি দোচালা নাটমন্ডপ ও মন্দিরের পিছন দিকে পর্ব দেওয়ালে একটি দোচালা ভোগঘর ও দেখা যায়।

রাধাগোবিন্দ মন্দির

লালবাঁধের কাছে অবস্থিত রাধাগোবিন্দ মন্দিরটি ১০৩৫ মল্লাব্দে (১৭২৯খ্রিস্টাব্দে) মহারাজ গোপাল সিংহের আমলে তাঁর পুত্র কৃষ্ণসিংহ প্রতিষ্ঠা করেন। মন্দিরের দক্ষিণ-পূর্ব কোণে মূল মন্দিরের অনুরূপ একটি পোড়ামাটির রথ ও উত্তর-পূর্বে একটি চতুষ্কোণ পুষ্করিণী আছে। কার্ঠের রথের মতো এটি টেনে নিয়ে যাওয়া না গেলেও বিশেষ বিশেষ উৎসবে মূল -বিগ্রহ বা তাঁর ছোট বিকল্পমূর্তি সম্ভবতঃ এসব রথে রাখা হত। এটি সম্পূর্ণ মূল মন্দিরের মতো দেখতে হলেও শিখরটি ত্রিখত এবং নীচের দিকে অর্ধবৃত্তাকার চাকার আকৃতি দেখতে পাওয়া যায়।

বিষ্ণুপুরের স্থাপত্য বৈচিত্র্য শুধুমাত্র ধর্মের আঙিনাতেই সীমাবদ্ধ নেই, মন্দির স্থাপত্য বাদেও রাজ আমলে নির্মিত একাধিক উল্লেখযোগ্য স্থাপত্য এখনো যেমন টিকে আছে ঠিক তেমনই প্রতিরক্ষা ও অন্যান্য ব্যবহারিক প্রয়োজনে খোদিত একাধিক পরিখা, দিঘি ও অন্যান্য কারুশৈলী।

দলমাদল কামান

মল্ল রাজত্বে ধাতুশিল্পেরও যে প্রভূত উন্নতি ঘটেছিল তার প্রমাণ দেয় দলমাদল বা দলমর্দন কামানটি। ৩০০ বছর আগে তৈরি ৩.৮ মিটার লম্বা কামানটিতে এখনো জং ধরেনি। ১৭৪২ সালে ভাস্কর পন্ডিতের নেতৃত্বে বাংলায় মারাঠা তথা বর্গী আক্রমণের সময় কামানটি ব্যবহার করা হয়েছিল। লোকশ্রুতি, স্বয়ং দেবতা মদনমোহন দলমাদল কামানটি দেগে বর্গীদের হাত থেকে বিষ্ণুপুরকে রক্ষা করেছিলেন।



পাথরের রথ



লাল বাঁধ

ছিয়াত্তরের মন্ডন্তরের প্রভাব গোটা বাংলায় পড়লেও এই মল্লরাজ্যে পড়েনি। রাজা দ্বিতীয় বীরসিংহ ১৬৫৭ থেকে ১৬৭৭ খ্রিস্টাব্দের মধ্যে শহরের ভিতরে এবং আশেপাশে লালবাঁধ, কৃষ্ণবাঁধ, গাঁতাতবাঁধ, যমুনা বাঁধ, কালিন্দীবাঁধ, শ্যামবাঁধ, পোকাবাঁধ (বীরবাঁধ) ও চৌখনবাঁধ নামে আটটি বিরাট জলাশয় খনন করান। এ সবে মধ্য লাল বাঁধ সব থেকে বিখ্যাত ও গুরুত্বপূর্ণ স্থান দখল করে আছে। দিগন্ত ছোঁয়া লালবাঁধ তৈরি করেছিলেন মল্লরাজ দ্বিতীয় রঘুনাথ সিং। আপাতভাবে এটি একটি বিরাটাকার জলাশয়। কিন্তু ইতিহাস আর লোকশ্রুতি মিলেমিশে আজও রহস্যময়তার বাতাবরণ ছেয়ে আছে লালবাঁধ জলাশয়টিকে। যুদ্ধ জয় করে হেমন্ত সিংহের কন্যা চন্দ্রপ্রভাকে বিবাহ করেন রঘুনাথ সিং এবং মৃত রহিম খান এর বিধবা লালবাসিকে নিয়ে এসে নতুন মহল তৈরী করে সেখানে রাখেন। লোক পরম্পরায় কথিত আছে, রঘুনাথ সিংহ ও লালবাসিয়ার অবৈধ প্রণয় সম্পর্কে বিষ্ণুনাথ রাণী চন্দ্রপ্রভা পতিঘাতিনী হন এবং প্রজারা লালবাসিকে একটি নৌকায় বেঁধে হত্যা করে, এই বাঁধেই হত্যা করে।

দশাবতার তাস

আকবরের রাজসভায় প্রচলিত ‘গঞ্জিফা’ খেলার সামগ্রী দেখে বীরহাষির উৎসাহিত হয়ে এই অধুনা লুপ্ত রাজকীয় খেলাটির সূচনা করেন। তাঁর গুরু শ্রীনিবাস আচার্যের উৎসাহে উড়িষ্যা ও মুঘলশৈলীর সংমিশ্রণে বিষ্ণুপুরে এই তাসের প্রচলন। বিষ্ণুর দশটি অবতারের রূপ দশটি গোলাকার তাসে পটচিত্র আঁকা হয়। বিষ্ণুপুর নিবাসী শ্রী শীতল ফৌজদার এই রীতির তাস বর্তমানেও তৈরী করে চলেছেন। দশাবতার সহ মোট একশো কুড়িটি সূক্ষ্ম কাজকরা সৌখিন তাসের অভিনব খেলাটির নিয়মাবলী অত্যন্তই জটিল।



অধরা মাধুরীর সন্ধান

ভারতবর্ষের কিছু কিছু শহর আছে যারা ইতিহাসকে আশ্রয় করে বাঁচতে চায়। নানারকম বস্তুগত (Tangible) ও ভাবগত (Intangible) ঐতিহ্যকে আঁকড়ে তাদের বিকাশ ও চলন। তেমনি এক আশ্চর্য সৃজনভূমি বিষ্ণুপুর। এর পরিচিতি তার বস্তুগত ঐতিহ্যে, টেরাকোটার মন্দির ভাস্কর্যে, হিম্মল পুতুলে, শাঁখের কাজে, দশাবতার তাসে, বালুচরী শাড়ীতে এবং এর পাশাপাশি অত্যন্ত সমৃদ্ধ এক শাস্ত্রীয়সংগীতে। পাতিয়ালা, আগ্রা এরকম নানা শাস্ত্রীয় সংগীতের ঘরানার মত বিষ্ণুপুর ঘরানাও একটি শাস্ত্রীয় ধ্রুপদি ঘরানা যার স্বকীয়তা ও নিজস্বতা পূর্ণমাত্রায় বিদ্যমান। যদুনাথ ভট্টাচার্য (যদু ভট্ট) ছিলেন এই ঘরানার কিংবদন্তি শিল্পী। কণ্ঠসঙ্গীত ও সুরবাহার সেতার ছিল তাঁর অনায়াস বিচরণক্ষেত্র। রবীন্দ্রনাথ ঠাকুর বলেছিলেন –“তিনি ছিলেন বিধাতার স্বহস্ত রচিত ওস্তাদ”। আরেকটি কথা – এশ্রাজ, এই বাদ্যযন্ত্রটির লালন পালন বিষ্ণুপুরে ও আমাদের বাংলায়, স্বকীয় এই যন্ত্রটি রবীন্দ্র সঙ্গীতের জরুরী অনুষ্ঙ্গ, আজও ভারতবর্ষে কেবল বাংলাতেই এই যন্ত্রটি বিদ্যমান, সুদূরপ্রসারী ঐতিহ্যের এক ছায়াপথের শরিক হয়ে।



জোড় বাংলা



ভীষ্মের শরশয্যা

শেষের কথা

প্রায় ১০০ বছরের বেশি সময় ধরে একটি শক্তিশালী রাজবংশের প্রত্যক্ষ পৃষ্ঠপোষকতায় বিষ্ণুপুর প্রকৃতই এক সৃষ্টি-নগরীতে রূপান্তরিত হয়েছিল। অথচ সময়ের সঙ্গে সঙ্গে লোককথার ভাৱে সেই মল্লরাজারা আজ ইতিহাস বিস্মৃতির শিকার হয়েছেন। জানা নেই অনেক রাজাদের নাম, নেই তাদের রাজত্বের ঠিক সময়কাল, নেই কোন বড় রাজপ্রাসাদ, বিরাট দুর্গ যা প্রবল প্রতাপাশ্রিত রাজা-মহারাজাদের মহিমা প্রকাশ করতে পারে। শুধু এক ক্ষীণ স্মৃতি হিসেবে দাঁড়িয়ে আছে পাথরের দরজা আর গড়দরজায়।

মন্দির টেরাকোটায় ১০০ বছরের সমাজ জীবনের যে ছবি ধরা পড়ে তাতে রামায়ণ মহাভারতের নায়ক চরিত্র, রাজা মহারাজাদের সঙ্গে সমান গুরুত্ব নিয়ে সাধারণ মানুষের দৈনন্দিন জীবনচিত্র একই মহিমায় বিরাজ করে। তাকিয়ে থাকতে থাকতে মনে হয় ভারতীয় সংস্কৃতির সেই চিরায়ত ধারা বিষ্ণুপুরের শিল্পীরাও অক্ষর মর্যাদায় ধরে রেখেছিলেন। নিজেদের জাহির করেননি। আমরা জানি না কোন শিল্পীরা এইসব অপৰ্বু সৃষ্টি করেছেন। বিষ্ণুপুরের মল্লরাজাদের মতই সাধারণ মানুষের মধ্যে থাকা এইসব শিল্পীরাও আজ বিস্মৃতির অতলে। কোনদিনই জানা যাবে না তাদের পরিচয়। এই সৃষ্টিশীলতা স্বাভাবিক জীবনযাত্রার অঙ্গ ছিল। বিষ্ণুপুর দেখা যদি আমাদের সমসাময়িক সময়ে লোকশিল্পী এবং সাধারণ মানুষের দিকে চোখ ফেরাতে কোন ভূমিকা নেয় তাহলে এই দেখা এবং শোখা হয়তো অন্য মাত্রা পাবে।



Beyond the 90 Minutes

Three World Cup Matches and a World That Arrived at the Same Doorstep
HOUSTON | NEW YORK | JUNE 2026

Santanu Sen

Between May and June 2026, on a trip through the United States, I watched three World Cup matches. While I went for the football, I came away with something much larger — memories of vast stadiums, flags from every corner of the globe, strangers greeting one another like old friends, families

who had travelled thousands of miles for a few hours of sport, and volunteers patiently guiding bewildered spectators through it all. For a few weeks, millions of people seemed to have found a common language. That language was football. But the real conversation was about people..



THE FIRST SIGHT OF A WORLD CUP CITY

My first World Cup experience began well before I reached my seat inside the stadium. As I approached the Houston venue, the transformation was unmistakable. FIFA banners, national flags, team colours, merchandise and streams of supporters had turned the familiar surroundings into a completely different landscape — one charged with anticipation and a sense of occasion.

What struck me most was the sheer diversity of the crowd. People had arrived from every corner of the world, alongside Americans experiencing the World Cup on home soil.

There were families with children, die-hard supporters in full national colours, and casual fans wearing little more than a team jersey or carrying a flag. I found myself somewhere in between — excited and curious, but also conscious that I was about to cross a small line from being a spectator on television to becoming part of the spectacle itself.

My first photograph outside the venue captured that feeling exactly: standing before the towering World Cup branding, dressed for the occasion was also a personal marker of the trip to come.



The visible face of the World Cup — and behind it, a vast network of people and systems making the experience work.

THE STADIUM IS ONLY THE BEGINNING

What impressed me was the remarkable ease with which the entire experience moved from the ordinary to the extraordinary. There were barriers, checkpoints, security checks, signs directing people in every possible direction, and thousands of spectators converging at once — yet there was an underlying sense of order and calm throughout. At an event of this scale, that degree of coordination is itself an achievement.

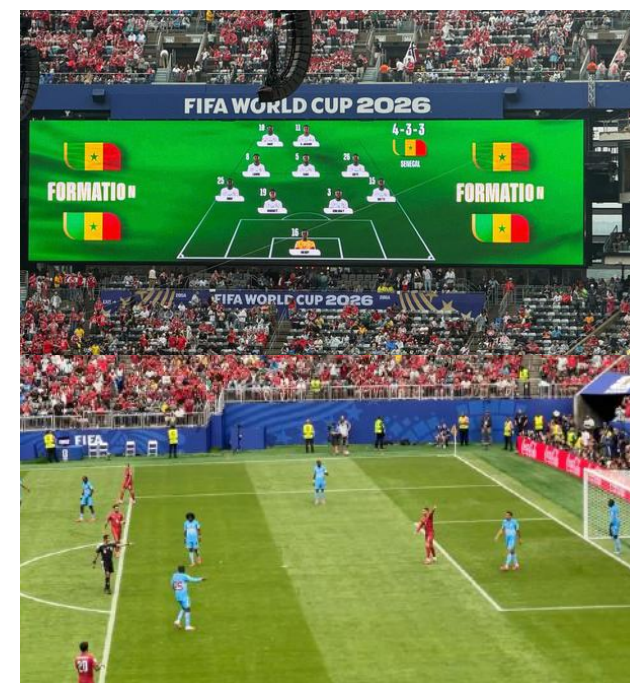
It was then that I began to notice the people who rarely make it into the television frame — the volunteers. They seemed to be everywhere: answering questions, pointing out gates, guiding queues, helping families and calmly solving one small problem after another. Most of these interactions probably lasted no more than a few seconds, but multiplied across tens of thousands of spectators, they became an essential part of the experience.

The players may command the spotlight and the applause, but a World Cup of this scale depends on an enormous army of people working quietly behind the scenes. Most of us would never know their names. Yet without them, the spectacle would simply not happen. That thought stayed with me.

THEN THE COLOURS ARRIVED

Inside and outside the stadiums, football became a geography lesson. Yellow and green. Red and green. Blue and white. Flags, scarves, face paint and endless variations of national colour. I had expected to see football supporters. I had not expected such a vivid, worldwide display of identity.

In Houston, fans arrived proudly dressed in their colours. In New York, the scale was even more striking — every few steps revealed another country, another language, another story. And yet there was something beautifully democratic about it. Nobody needed an introduction. A jersey was enough. A flag was enough. A stranger could look at you, recognise your team, smile, gesture toward the stadium — and suddenly there was a connection. Football compresses geography.



At the World Cup, national identity was worn openly — and shared enthusiastically.



The World Cup begins long before kick-off — with the anticipation, colour and sense of occasion outside the stadium-

NEW YORK: WHEN THE CITY BECOMES A STADIUM

If Houston gave me the feeling of entering the World Cup, New York made me feel as though I had stepped right into its beating heart. On 22 June, the experience spilled far beyond the stadium. The city itself seemed to have become part of the tournament.

Times Square was perhaps the clearest expression of that transformation. The photograph I took there captures something that no image can quite convey — the sheer scale, energy and diversity of the crowd. Thousands of people filled the space beneath New York's giant screens, many dressed in the colours of their national teams, carrying flags, wearing jerseys and celebrating their footballing identities.

I saw flags from Africa, Europe, Asia, the Middle East and South America. Some I recognised instantly; others made me pause and look again. It was more than an international gathering. It felt genuinely global — a coming together of people carrying different histories, cultures languages and football traditions, each with a personal reason for being there, yet all united by the same game.



In the heart of New York, the World Cup became a global street festival — loud, colourful and wonderfully diverse.

Standing there, I was reminded that beneath the technology, commercial scale and extraordinary organisation of the modern World Cup is essentially the same game that captured imaginations decades ago. The equipment may have changed, the stadiums may have become spectacular and the global audience may have grown exponentially, but the fascination remains remarkably unchanged.

Perhaps that is what made the visit so special for me. A football jersey stopped being just a shirt, and a ball became more than a piece of sporting equipment. Each seemed to carry a fragment of the game's memory — connecting the World Cup I was experiencing in 2026 with the World Cups, players and moments that had come long before it.



The World Cup is also a museum of memory — preserved through jerseys, photographs, balls and stories from earlier generations.

THE TROPHY

And then there was the trophy. Seeing the FIFA World Cup Trophy behind glass felt almost symbolic. On television it is familiar; in person, it has a different presence — decades of history, generations of players, and the emotional investment of billions of supporters distilled into a single object. Standing beside it, I found myself thinking about how much one trophy can carry the hopes of entire nations.



A familiar image from television becomes surprisingly powerful when seen in person.

HOUSTON AGAIN — 29 JUNE

Returning to Houston for my first match of the Round of 32, both familiar and entirely new. I knew the rituals now — the look of the entrance, the walk to the gates, the certainty that inside there would be another vast crowd, another anthem, another few hours in which ordinary life would be gently suspended. But the familiarity let me observe more closely: the crowd flow, the signage, the quiet choreography of staff directing thousands

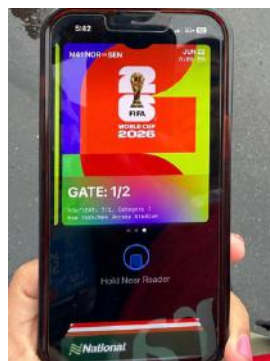
THE MELTING POT

What fascinated me most was not how many nationalities were present, but how easily they interacted. Football rivalries can be intense and national pride fierce, yet around the stadiums I repeatedly saw something far more relaxed and human — fans posing for photographs together, strangers debating teams, children wearing the jerseys of players from countries their parents had never visited.

There were moments I found myself watching the spectators more closely than the match itself. One section would sing; another would answer. Someone would wave a flag; someone else would start dancing — and the whole stand would respond. This was perhaps the most memorable cultural note of the tournament: a celebration of difference without any need for uniformity. Nobody had to become the same. They simply had to share the same space.



Before the football begins, national identity takes centre stage.



Modern football viewed simultaneously through instinct, emotion, tactics and technology.



FROM A SEAT IN THE STANDS, FOOTBALL BECOMES PHYSICAL

One of my favourite moments was simply watching the game unfold from close to the action. On television we tend to follow the ball; from the stands, I began to appreciate everything happening away from it — the spacing between lines, the shape of a team, the reactions of the bench, the substitutes warming up, the crowd behind the goal. There is no instant replay, no commentator narrating every movement, no convenient camera angle — only something far more visceral: the roar that begins behind you and reaches you a fraction of a second later, the collective gasp at a missed chance, the sudden eruption after a goal, a crowd rising almost instinctively as the ball enters the box. The entire ecosystem became visible. A football match, I realised, is not simply 22 players and a ball. It is a remarkably complex choreography.

For anyone who loves the game beyond its goals, it was a vivid reminder of how far football has evolved into a blend of sport, data, strategy and technology.

STORIES TOLD BY JERSEYS

One of the quieter pleasures of the trip was discovering how naturally the modern World Cup connected me to the long history of the game. A visit to the football museum at Rockefeller brought that connection vividly to life. Surrounded by historic jerseys, match balls, photographs and memorabilia from earlier World Cups, I found myself looking beyond the spectacle of 2026 and thinking about the generations of players and supporters who had shaped football long before my own time.

The 1958 display was especially evocative. Seeing the old jerseys, the ball and the images from that tournament gave the history a tangible presence. These were not simply exhibits behind glass; they seemed to carry stories from another era of football — a time of simpler equipment, smaller stadiums and very different ideas of how the game should be played and presented. of people without ever making them feel controlled.

I began thinking of the World Cup less as a tournament and more as one of the world's great temporary cities. For a few weeks, an enormous international community exists — people arrive, gather, celebrate, travel, eat, sing, take photographs, and leave. And then the temporary city disappears.



THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE SPECTACLE

Looking back at my photographs, the images I value most are not always the ones of the football itself. They are the ones of people — a volunteer giving directions, a family dressed in their country's colours, a child in an oversized jersey, strangers from different continents posing for a photograph together. Those are the images that tell the deeper story.

The World Cup is billed as the world's greatest football tournament, and it is exactly that. But watching it in person, I realised the football is only one layer. Above it sits entertainment. Around it sits commerce.

Behind it sits logistics. And within all of it sits something far more human: the desire to belong to something larger than oneself.

THREE MATCHES, TWO CITIES, ONE WORLD

My three matches were separated by twelve days and thousands of miles of travel, countless nationalities. one extraordinary human gathering, but they began to feel like chapters of one story.



A stadium full of strangers — and yet, for 90 minutes, a shared community.

WHAT STAYED WITH ME

I went to the United States to watch football. I returned with a far broader appreciation of what a global sporting event can represent. I saw the joy of supporters who had travelled thousands of kilometres for a few hours in a stadium, and children experiencing something that may stay with them for decades.

I saw national pride expressed through flags, colours, songs and jerseys, and strangers finding common ground almost instantly. I saw volunteers, security teams and stadium staff working quietly behind the scenes, and organisation on a scale that is hard to grasp until you are physically inside it. And I saw sport's rare ability to bring together people who might otherwise have little reason to meet. Perhaps that is what I will remember most — not a particular goal, not a score, not even a single match, but standing among thousands of people from different countries and realising that, for those few hours, we were all part of the same story. Football gave us the reason. The World Cup gave us the stage. And the people made it unforgettable.

When I look back at the photographs now, I see more than a football trip. I see a child's excitement, national colours, old football memories preserved in a museum, the World Cup trophy behind glass, the scale of an American stadium. I see Brazil's yellow, Portugal's red, and the colours of dozens of other nations. I see New York overflowing with supporters and Houston welcoming the world. And I see myself, standing in those crowds, grateful to have witnessed it all from the inside.

The matches lasted 90 minutes. The experience lasted much longer. That, perhaps, is the real magic of a World Cup.

I will be back with more to celebrate the next World Cup between June 8 to July 21, 2030, hosted across Morocco, Portugal, and Spain, with special centenary celebration matches held in Uruguay, Argentina, and Paraguay

CREATIVE VOICES OF OUR COMMUNITY

EXPRESSIONS

Articles & Poems



Disclaimer

All content in the following pages are the personal views, thoughts, opinions and experiences of respective authors. They do not necessarily reflect the views of Powai Bengali Welfare Association (PBWA) and PBWA does not assume any responsibility and liability for the same.

মানুষের কি কৃত্রিম বুদ্ধিমত্তা বা Artificial Intelligence (AI)-এর খুবই প্রয়োজন?

জয়ন্ত চট্টোপাধ্যায়

মানুষ এই পৃথিবীতে সব থেকে শ্রেষ্ঠ জীব—তার অন্যতম প্রধান কারণ মানুষের বুদ্ধিমত্তা। বুদ্ধি সব প্রাণীরই কমবেশি আছে—কিন্তু তা মানুষের তুলনায় খুবই নগণ্য। তাই মানুষ বিভিন্ন প্রতিকূলতার মধ্যেও নিজেকে বাঁচিয়ে রেখেছে—আরও উন্নত হচ্ছে — আরও অনেক জীবের মতো বিলুপ্ত হয়ে যায়নি। মানুষ তার বুদ্ধি দিয়ে, সৃষ্টিশীল চিন্তাশক্তি দিয়ে নিত্যনতুন উপায় আবিষ্কার করেছে প্রাকৃতিক প্রতিকূলতার সঙ্গে লড়াই করে, শুধু নিজেকে বাঁচিয়ে রাখাই নয়, তার জীবনযাপন আরও উন্নত করার জন্য। তাই মানুষ সেই আদিম মানবের গুহার জীবনে প্রতিদিন খাবারের সন্ধানে শিকার করার জীবন ছেড়ে আজ মহাকাশে পাড়ি দিচ্ছে।

ইদানীং মানুষ কৃত্রিম বুদ্ধিমত্তা বা Artificial Intelligence (AI) নামে আরও একটি উন্নতমানের প্রযুক্তি আবিষ্কার করে ফেলেছে এবং সেই প্রযুক্তিটিকে আরও উন্নত করার জন্য খুবই প্রয়াস চালিয়ে যাচ্ছে। মোবাইল, ইন্টারনেটের সুবাদে আপনারা অনেকেই এই প্রযুক্তিটির সঙ্গে পরিচিত এবং কেউ কেউ তা ব্যবহারও করে চলেছেন। এই প্রযুক্তি মানুষের ভাবনা অনেক কম করে দিয়েছে, মানুষকে মুক্তি দিচ্ছে ক্লাস্তিকর অনেক কাজ থেকে বা বিরক্তিকর কিছু দৈনন্দিন কাজ থেকে, যার মাধ্যমে আজও লক্ষলক্ষ মানুষ তাদের জীবিকা নির্বাহ করে চলেছেন।

এই প্রবন্ধের জন্য, AI সম্পর্কে একটি ছোট উদাহরণ ধরা যাক—এ ছাড়া আরও ভুরি ভুরি উদাহরণ আপনাদের সামনেই আছে। ধরুন, আপনি ঠিক করলেন সপরিবারে হিমাচল প্রদেশে বেড়াতে যাবেন। AI নামক প্রযুক্তি আবিষ্কারের আগে হলে আপনি প্রথমেই দু-একটি হিমাচল ট্রাভেল গাইড বই পড়ে ফেলতেন—বা দু-একজন বন্ধুর সঙ্গে পরামর্শ করতেন, যারা হিমাচল প্রদেশে আগেই বেড়িয়ে এসেছেন—তাদের বিভিন্ন অভিজ্ঞতার কথা শুনতেন—কিছু ভাল, কিছু মন্দ বা ততটা ভাল নয়। তারপর হয়তো বা চলে যেতেন আপনার শহরের হিমাচল টুরিজমের অফিসে—জানাতে আপনার ইচ্ছা, সময় ও অর্থের বাজেট, কতজন যাবেন, কতজন সাবালক বা নাবালক, তাদের বয়সের একটা মোটামুটি হিসাব, তাদের মোটামুটি শারীরিক সক্ষমতা, আপনাদের পরিবারের খাবারের পছন্দের তালিকা ইত্যাদি। বেশ কিছুক্ষণ আলোচনার পর অফিসের কর্মচারী আপনাকে ভ্রমণসূচি ও মোটামুটি তার খরচাপত্র জানাতেন। ওই পরামর্শ পেয়ে আপনি হয়তো পৌঁছে যেতেন দু-একটি টুর অপারেটরের কাছে এবং তাদের কাছ থেকে তাদের দু-একটি প্রস্তাবও নিয়ে আসতেন। তারপর একদিন সকালে বাড়ির সকলের সঙ্গে প্রাতরাশ সারতে সারতে আলোচনা করতেন আপনার এতদিনের অর্জিত জ্ঞান, পরামর্শ নিনেন বাড়ির অন্যান্য সদস্যের এবং সেই ভিত্তিতে বিচার-বিবেচনা করে বানিয়ে ফেলতেন আপনাদের পরিবারের উপযোগী একটি সুন্দর ভ্রমণসূচি।

সোজা কথায়, আপনি কিছু জ্ঞান অর্জন করে, আপনার চিন্তাশক্তি দিয়ে বিচার-বিবেচনা করে, বুঝে আপনার সিদ্ধান্ত নিনেন কী রকম ভ্রমণসূচি আপনাদের পরিবারের জন্য সবচেয়ে উপযোগী হবে। আর এই সিদ্ধান্ত নেওয়ার প্রক্রিয়াটিই হল বুদ্ধিমত্তা বা Intelligence। এখন পর্যন্ত প্রচলিত Intelligence-এর সংজ্ঞাটি একবার দেখে নেওয়া যাক:

The overall capacity to learn, reason, understand, solve problems and adapt to new or complex situations.

কিন্তু আজকের AI-এর জমানাতে, এটি একটি ৫ মিনিটের কাজ—আপনার কম্পিউটারকে আপনি আপনার প্রয়োজনের কথা বলবেন আর ও সঙ্গে সঙ্গে আপনাকে আপনাদের উপযোগী মানানসই একটি ভ্রমণসূচি বানিয়ে দেবে।

এখনও পর্যন্ত ব্যাপারটা তো বেশ ভালই ছিল—আপনার কতটা সময় বাঁচত—সেই সময়টা আপনি ব্যবহার করতেন অন্য আরও জটিল কোনও কাজের জন্য। কিন্তু ব্যাপারটা ততটাও সহজ নয়। এবার একটু দেখা যাক, মানুষ এই AI-এর সাহায্য নিয়ে কী কী হারালো—তার নিজের প্রচেষ্টায় শেখা অর্জিত জ্ঞান, সেই জ্ঞানকে বুঝে নিজের মতো করে বিশ্লেষণ করে এবং সেই বিশ্লেষণের ভিত্তিতে সিদ্ধান্ত নিয়ে তার এখনকার সমস্যার সমাধান করার শক্তি। এখন মানুষ যদি এইভাবে AI খুব বেশি পরিমাণে ব্যবহার করতে থাকে, তাহলে সে ক্রমশই এই AI-এর দাস হয়ে পড়বে তার পরিমাণে ব্যবহার করতে

তাহলে সে ক্রমশই এই AI-এর দাস হয়ে পড়বে তার নিজের বুদ্ধিমত্তা হারিয়ে—এটিকে AI-এর পরিভাষায় বলা হয় Cognitive Off-Loading এবং তা ক্রমশ এগিয়ে যাবে Cognitive Surrendering-এর দিকে। মানুষ ক্রমশ হারিয়ে ফেলবে তার মূল সম্পদ বা অস্ত্র—তার বুদ্ধিমত্তা। ক্রমশ সে বাঁধা পড়বে AI-এর শিকলে এবং পরিণত হবে চিন্তাশক্তিহীন এক জীব।

এখন অনেকে বলছেন, এই AI-এর ব্যবহারের ফলে মানুষ অনেক সময় বাঁচাবে এবং সেই সময়ে সে অনেক উচ্চমানের চিন্তাভাবনা করবে এবং অনেক কঠিন কঠিন সমস্যার সমাধান করবে। এটিকে AI-এর পরিভাষায় বলা হয় Cognitive Augmentation। কিন্তু ঠিক কী করে সে সেটি করবে বা সাধারণ মানুষ তা আদৌ করতে পারবে কিনা, সেই বিষয়ে আমি একটু পরে আলোচনা করছি।

পরের প্রসঙ্গে যাবার আগে, আমরা Cognitive Surrendering নিয়ে আর একটু বিশদে আলোচনা করে নিই। আমরা যদি শুধুমাত্র আমাদের দেশের জনসংখ্যার অর্থনৈতিক শ্রেণীবিভাগটা দেখি, তাহলে দেখব, আমাদের দেশের ৭০ শতাংশের বেশি মানুষ মধ্যবিত্ত বা অতি দরিদ্র সীমার নীচে অবস্থান করছেন—যাদের সেই অর্থে মূলধন বলতে কিছু থাকে না। এই সব পরিবারে জন্ম নেওয়া একটি শিশু সন্তানের মূলধন বলতে সে পায় শুধু তার বুদ্ধিমত্তা—যার সাহায্য নিয়ে সে প্রতিনিয়ত লড়াই করে চলেছে তার বর্তমান অবস্থার সঙ্গে এবং নিজেকে তৈরি করেছে সেই কঠিন অবস্থা থেকে উন্নততর অবস্থায় স্থাপন করার প্রচেষ্টায়।

কিন্তু সেই শিশুটি যদি পরিস্থিতির প্রভাবে বা চাপে, Cognitive Off-Loading বা Cognitive Surrendering-এর শিকার হয়, তাহলে তো তার মূলধন বলতে আর কিছুই রইল না, যার ভরসায় সে এই কঠিন পৃথিবীতে নিজেকে প্রতিষ্ঠিত করতে পারে। এ ছাড়া যেসব দেশে বেকারত্ব ক্রমশ একটা ভয়াবহ রূপ নিচ্ছে, সেখানে সাধারণ যে সব কাজ মানুষ করত, তাও যদি AI-কে দিয়ে দেওয়া হয় শুধুমাত্র মুষ্টিমেয় কিছু কোম্পানির মুনাফা বৃদ্ধির

জন্য, তা কি খুব সুবিচার হবে এই বিশাল মধ্যবিত্ত জনতার প্রতি ! আমার আর একটি প্রশ্ন আছে। এই বিশাল জনতা যারা তাদের রোজগার হারাচ্ছে প্রতিদিন AI-এর কাছে, বা খুবই সামান্য কিছু কাজ করে তাদের দিনযাপন করার চেষ্টা চালাচ্ছেন, তারা কি “উচ্চমানের চিন্তা”(Elevated Thinking) করবেন, আমায় একটু বলবেন দয়া করে? সারাদিন মোবাইল ফোনে রীল দেখা বা মোবাইল গেমের ক্রমশ জড়িয়ে পড়া ছাড়া, তারা কি সত্যি কোনও “উচ্চমানের চিন্তা” করছেন বা করতে সক্ষম হবেন?

মানুষ এতদিন যাবৎ বিভিন্ন সমস্যার সমাধান করেছেন তার সৃষ্টিশীল চিন্তা (Creative Thinking) শক্তির দ্বারা—বা out-of-the-box -thinking করে। কিন্তু AI আমাদের যেসব সমাধান দিচ্ছে, তা আসছে AI-কে মানুষ আজ অবধি যা করেছে সেই তথ্য দিয়ে ট্রেনিংয়ের মাধ্যমে। মানে মানুষ এতদিন যা করেছে, সেই তথ্য খুব তাড়াতাড়ি বিশ্লেষণ করে AI একটি সমাধান আমাদের পেশ করেছে। তাই মানুষের সৃষ্টিশীল চিন্তা বা out-Of-the -box -thinking ক্রমশ কমেই চলেছে। কারণ সৃষ্টিশীল চিন্তা আসে তখনই, যখন মানুষ তার নিজের অবস্থানের ওপর হতাশ হয়ে পড়ে—কিন্তু AI মানুষকে চটজলদি একটি মধ্যমানের সমাধান পেশ করে তাকে ওই হতাশায় পৌঁছতেই দিচ্ছে না, আর তাই মানুষের সৃষ্টিশীল চিন্তার গোড়াতেই পড়ছে কুড়ুলের ঘা। আর তাই মানুষ যদি তার সৃষ্টিশীল চিন্তার সক্ষমতাই হারায়, তাহলে কী করে সে “উচ্চমানের চিন্তা” করতে সক্ষম হবে !

এবারে একটু আলোচনা করে নেওয়া যাক Cognitive Augmentation নিয়ে। Cognitive Augmentation সম্ভব হয় মূলত তিনটি উপাদানের মাধ্যমে—সাধারণ Tools, AI এবং Advanced Technology যেমন Brain Computer Interface (BCI), Wearable ইত্যাদি। সাধারণ tool যেমন calculator, spreadsheet ইত্যাদি আমরা ব্যবহার করে থাকি এবং তা এখন সাধারণ মানুষের

আয়ত্তের মধ্যে ও এই সব tool-এর দ্বারা কিছুটা mind-space free করা সম্ভব। কিন্তু AI এবং Advanced Technology যেমন Brain Computer Interface (BCI), Wearable ইত্যাদি খুব মুষ্টিমেয় দু-চারটি ব্যবসায়িক সংস্থার দ্বারা নিয়ন্ত্রিত এবং তা খুবই ব্যয়সাপেক্ষ। এই সব Advanced Technology কি সাধারণ মানুষের নাগালের মধ্যে আসবে? মনে হয় না। তাই আগামী বেশ কিছু দশক Cognitive Augmentation সম্ভব হবে শুধুমাত্র মুষ্টিমেয় কিছু উচ্চবিত্ত মানুষের জন্য। উচ্চবিত্ত ও নিম্নবিত্ত মানুষের মধ্যে এক বিরাট ব্যবধান তৈরি হয়ে যায় মানুষের জন্মের সঙ্গে সঙ্গেই তার ওপর এই AI-সহায়ক Cognitive Augmentation কি এই দুই শ্রেণির মানুষের মধ্যে ব্যবধানকে আরও কয়েক মাইল বাড়িয়ে দেবে না জন্মের সঙ্গে সঙ্গেই। AI-এর মাত্রাতিরিক্ত ব্যবহার, যা দমন করা মানুষের পক্ষে ক্রমশ দুরূহ হয়ে পড়বে, তার ফলাফল বেশ সুদূরপ্রসারী। মানুষের একটি অন্যতম গুণ হল, মানুষ নিজেদের মধ্যে সহযোগিতা করতে পারে আর তাই অনেক কঠিন কাজের সমাধান করেছে এই গুণটিকে কাজে লাগিয়ে। কিন্তু AI-এর মাত্রাতিরিক্ত ব্যবহারের সঙ্গে সঙ্গে মানুষ হারিয়ে ফেলবে এই গুণটিকে, কারণ তখন মানুষের একমাত্র সাথী হয়ে দাঁড়াবে AI। আপনি তখন আর পাশের বাড়ির বন্ধুকে জিজ্ঞাসা করবেন না একটি কঠিন অঙ্কের সমাধান—আর তাই মানুষ “সহযোগিতার” মতো একটি গুণকে হারাবার সঙ্গে সঙ্গে হয়ে পড়বেন একান্ত একাকী—আর এই একাকিত্বের মতো একটি মানসিক রোগ একটি মহামারীর আকার ধারণ করবে এই শতাব্দীর মাঝামাঝি।

বিশাল পরিমাণ বেকারত্ব, যার কথা আমি আগেই আলোচনা করেছি, আর তার সঙ্গে একাকিত্বের মতো এক মহামারী যে সাধারণ মানুষের জীবন প্রচণ্ডভাবে দুর্বিষহ করে তুলবে, এ বিষয়ে আমার কোনও সন্দেহ নেই। উচ্চ শ্রেণির মানুষ Brain Computer Interface ও বিভিন্ন wearable-এর সঙ্গে সখ্যতা বাড়িয়ে কী ধরনের নতুন নতুন প্রতারণার সঙ্গে সঙ্গে আইনের জালে ক্রমশ জড়িয়ে পড়েন তা এক অন্য বিতর্কের অবকাশ রাখে।

আমি কৈকেয়ী ----- দশরথ প্রিয়া ভরত জননী

শর্মিলা চক্রবর্তী



জগতের রূপ-রস-গন্ধ-বর্ণ সব আনন্দ হারিয়ে এক জাগ্রত মৃত্যুর অন্ধকারে সে বসে আছে, বাতায়নের আড়ালে। বধির অন্ধ বাকরুদ্ধ ও অচল জীবন তার। করতলে দুই চক্ষু আবৃত করে অনেকক্ষণ বসে থাকে, শ্বেতবসনা সুন্দরী কৈকেয়ী। পরম বাস্তবতার প্রত্যাখ্যানের জ্বালায় তার হৃদয়ে যে দাবদাহ সৃষ্টি করেছিল তা চোন্দ বছরে অনেকটাই নির্বাপিত হয়ে এসেছে।

দীপাবলীর রাত ---রামচন্দ্রের প্রত্যাগমন, সীতা, লক্ষ্মণ, হনুমান ও বানর দলের সঙ্গে চারিদিকে জয়ধ্বনি 'জয় রাজা রামচন্দ্র, জয় রাজা রামচন্দ্র, জয় মাতা সীতা, জয় মাতা সীতা' সেই জয়ধ্বনিতো ত্রিভুবন মুখরিত।

ধীরে ধীরে শান্ত হয়ে আসতে থাকে কৈকেয়ীর মন। রামচন্দ্রকে আহ্বান করে রাজ্যে ফিরিয়ে আনবার জন্য এগিয়ে যায় অবগুষ্ঠনবতী কৈকেয়ী।

তার নিজেরই জীবনের চারিদিকে একবার তাকিয়ে দেখল কৈকেয়ী। দেখতে পায় স্বামিহীন, পুত্রহীন নয় পুত্র প্রত্যাখ্যাতে এক সংসারের নিকেতনে আজীবন শূন্যতার মধ্যে দাঁড়িয়ে আছে তার জীবন।

শৈশবে মাতৃহারা, পিতা রাজ্য থেকে বিতাড়িত করেছিলেন তার মাকে, সামান্য একটু ভুলের কারণে। মানুষ হয়েছে দাসী কুজা মন্ডুরার কাছে। সে মায়ের আদরে মানুষ করলেও মাতৃস্নেহের সঙ্গে তার কোন তুলনা কি চলে ?

"বন্যরা বনে সুন্দর, শিশুরা মাতৃকোড়ে"। সেই প্রবচন যুগ যুগ ধরে চলে আসছে; তার ব্যতিক্রম কি হয়েছে ?

অপমানিত নারীত্বের শ্মশান -- ধুমঃ লেখা। শুধু অপমান, শুধু ব্যর্থতা ও অগৌরব। তার পত্নীত্ব কোন মূল্য পেল না, তার মাতৃত্ব কোন মর্যাদা পেল না। তার সন্তান ভরত তার মুখদর্শন করে না।

কৈকেয়ীকে মন্ডুরা দাসী উল্লে ছিল, ইন্ধন যুগিয়েছিল, তাতেই তার লোভ, লালসা বেড়েছিল। তা না হলে ওর মাথায় এমন ভাবনার উদয় হয়তো হতো না কোনদিনও। কে জানে !

মন্ডুরার উল্লেহের পেছনেও একটা কারণ ভাবা যায়। দাসীত্বই তার সারা জীবন কাটাতে হবে। তাই হয়তো সরল মনের কৈকেয়ীকে উল্লেহে ওর জীবনও দাসী গিরি করেই কাটবে। সেই ঈর্ষা, আত্মতৃপ্তির জায়গা থেকে হয়তো মন্ডুরা ঐ ষড়যন্ত্র করিয়েছিল, কুমন্ত্রণা দিয়েছিল।

কে বলতে পারে ?

বা বলা যায়, তার ওই ষড়যন্ত্রের পেছনে আরও একটা ভালো ঘটনা ঘটেছিল ---"রাম রাবণের যুদ্ধ --- রাবণ বধ ও সীতা উদ্ধার"।

প্রত্যেক নীচ ঘটনার পরে একটা শুভ ঘটনার উদ্ভাবন লক্ষ্য করা যায় বহু পৌরাণিক কাহিনীতে। তাই হয়ত বিধাতাই করিয়েছিলেন কৈকেয়ীর মাকে বহিস্কৃত এবং মন্ডুরার আগমন ওর জীবনে।

গুণ্ঠনবতী, শ্বেতবসনা, নিরালঙ্কার, কৈকেয়ী এগিয়ে চলে রামের উদ্দেশ্যে। পথে বাধা দেয় এক দাসী,

"ওখানে যাবেন না"।

"কেন?"

"শত্রু কুজাকে প্রচণ্ড মারধর করেছেন, এবং আপনি ওখানে গেলে আপনাকেও ছেড়ে কথা বলবেন না।"

"তাহলে কি বলছো তুমি, আমি যাব না?"

"না যাবেন না, আর কোন মুখে আপনি যাবেন রাম রাজার সামনে?" ১৪ বছর বনে পাঠানোর পর আপনি এটা আশা করতে পারেন যে রাজা রামচন্দ্র আপনাকে 'মা' বলে মানবেন?"

"হ্যাঁ, আমি ওকে যতটুকু জানি ও আমাকে 'মা' বলে কাছে টেনে নেবে"। "থাকুন, আপনি আপনার বিচার নিয়ে। পরে আমাকে দোষ দেবেন না কিন্তু"।

দাসী নিঃশব্দে বিদায় নেয়। এগিয়ে চলে কৈকেয়ী বুকুর মধ্যে অজানা, আশঙ্কা নিয়ে।

ওদিকে রামচন্দ্র তিন মায়ের মধ্যে একজনের অনুপস্থিতিতে বিস্ময় প্রকাশ করলে, মায়েরা জানায় ও তো তোমার বনবাসের পর থেকেই গৃহবন্দী হয়ে আছে। অবগুষ্ঠনে মুখ ঢেকে রাখে। বাইরে আসে না। মর্মবেদনার জ্বালায় জর্জরিত হয়ে আছে। স্বামীর মৃত্যু, তোমার বনবাস, সবার কারণ তো 'সেই'। তাই হয়তো---"

"না, না তা হবে না। কৈকেয়ী মাকে এখানে ডাকুন। উনি না এলে আমি রাজগৃহে প্রবেশ করব না।" রাম বলে।

রামচন্দ্র কৈকেয়ীর ঘরে যাবার চেষ্টা করতেই দেখা যায় অবগুষ্ঠনবতী কৈকেয়ী এসে পড়েছে। ওমনি প্রজাদের মধ্যে ছিঃ ছিঃ-ক্লার ধ্বনি, কুমাতা, কুমাতা, বাণী উচ্চারিত হতে থাকে; আকাশ বাতাস মুখরিত হয়ে ওঠে। রাম সবাইকে থামিয়ে এগিয়ে যায় মায়ের সন্নিধানে।

"মা অবগুষ্ঠন খুলুন।"

"না, রাম আমি এই ঘোমটার আড়ালেই মুখ লুকিয়ে থাকার যোগ্য। আমাকে এইভাবেই থাকতে দাও।"

"না, তা হবে না। আপনি ঘোমটা খুলুন। আমি আপনার চরণ ছুঁয়ে প্রণাম করব ও মুখদর্শন করব।"

বার বার রামের অনুরোধ, উপরোধে কৈকেয়ীর মনোযন্ত্রণা দ্রবীভূত হলো। ঘোমটা সরতেই রামচন্দ্র, ও অন্যান্য সবাই শিহরিত হয়ে উঠলো, কী জীর্ণ, শীর্ণ চেহারা। মনস্তাপে সুন্দরী কৈকেয়ীর একি পরিবর্তন! এ যে অচেনা কৈকেয়ী।

রাম, সীতা সবাই একে একে কৈকেয়ীকে প্রণাম করে। রামকে জড়িয়ে ধরে কৈকেয়ী।

"তুমি আমাকে ক্ষমা করো রাম। আমি যে ঘৃণ্য অপরাধ করেছি তার জন্য আমাকে যা শাস্তি দেবার দাও।"

বলে কান্নায় ভেঙে পড়ে কৈকেয়ী।

"আমি এই অপরাধের বোঝা আর বইতে পারছি না।"

রাম বলে,

"কোন অপরাধের কথা?, ১৪ বছর বনবাস?"

"হ্যাঁ পুত্র। তাছাড়া স্বামীর মৃত্যুর কারণ।"

"এসব কি বলছেন মা, আপনার ওই মূল্যবান কথার জন্যই তো আমাদের রাজ্য আজ দাক্ষিণাত্য পর্যন্ত বিস্তার লাভ করেছে। রাবণ বধ, হনুমানদের বন্ধু লাভ, শ্রীলঙ্কায় বন্ধুসম বিভীষণ রাজা, সবই তো আপনার ওই কথার জন্যই সম্ভব হয়েছে। আর আপনি নিজেকে দোষারোপ করছেন?"

"আর দ্বিতীয় কথা, রাজা দশরথের মৃত্যু। তাতে তো আপনার কোন দোষ ছিল না। সে তো শ্রাবণ কুমারের পিতা শান্তনু ও মাতা জ্ঞানবতীর অভিশাপে হয়েছে। অযোধ্যার বনে শিকার করতে যাওয়া ও 'শব্দভেদী' বাণ ছোঁড়ার কারণে শ্রাবণ কুমারের মৃত্যু হয়। তার উপলক্ষ্য আপনি কোনমতেই হতে পারেন না। আর তারও গভীরে দেখলে পিতার কোন দোষ ছিল না, হরিণ জল পান করছে ভেবে তীরটা চালিয়েছিলেন। যেটা শ্রাবণ কুমারের বুকে বিদ্ধ হয় এবং শ্রাবণ কুমার মৃত্যুর মুখে ঢলে পড়ে।"

"তাই।"

"হ্যাঁ তাই। তার উপলক্ষ্য আপনি কোনমতেই হতে পারেন না। আসুন আজ দীপাবলির রাতে সব দুঃখ বেদনার অবসান ঘটিয়ে আমরা সমবেত হয়ে আনন্দ উৎসবে মেতে উঠি। সবাই একে একে কৈকেয়ীকে প্রণাম করে।"

ভরত একটু ভারাক্রান্ত মুখে দূরে দাঁড়িয়ে ছিল। তাকেও রাম ডেকে নেয়। রামের সাদর আহ্বানে সবাই একে একে যোগদান করে। সারা অযোধ্যা নগরী দীপাবলীর রাতে সব দুঃখ বেদনা ভুলে মহোৎসবে মেতে ওঠে।

রামের কথায় শত্রু মন্থরাকেও ডেকে আনে। মন্থরা অবাক চোখে রামের দিকে তাকায়।

"তোমার মন্ত্রণার জন্যই তো আমার বনবাস ও রাবণবধ হয়। না হলে এত বড় লঙ্কাকাণ্ড করে লঙ্কা জয় করে আমরা ফিরতাম কি করে বলতো?"

হতবাক মন্থরা! এই না হলে প্রজাবৎসল বীর শ্রেষ্ঠ, শ্রীরামচন্দ্র !!-----

----আধুনিকা কৈকেয়ী হলে সেই রাতে এই রবীন্দ্রসঙ্গীতটি গাইতো----

"হিমের রাতে ওই গগনের দীপগুলিরে,
হেমন্তিকা করল গোপন আঁচল ঘিরে। ঘরে ঘরে ডাক পাঠালো
দীপালিকায় জ্বালাও আলো
জ্বালাও আলো আপন আলো সাজাও আলোয় ধরিত্রী রে----"।



ইডলির পর ফসিল পর্যন্ত

নিধির চক্রবর্তী

আমাদের প্রথম হাল্ট ছিল Vizianagaram -এর কাছে ম্যাসানিজ মাইন। সেখানেই ইডলি-সাম্বার এবং সব মাদ্রাজি খাওয়ার (cuisine)-এর সঙ্গে পরিচয় হয়ে গিয়েছিল। এরপর পুরো দক্ষিণ ভারত ভ্রমণে আর আমাদের খাবার নিয়ে কোনো অসুবিধা হয়নি।

ওয়ালটেয়ারে একদিন ছুটি কাটিয়ে আমরা রাজা মহেন্দ্র গিয়ে নামলাম। সেখানে দুটো গ্রাফাইট ক্রুসিবল (crucible) ফ্যাক্টরি দেখতে গেলাম। ওখানে কাডাপ্পা সিস্টেম থেকে গ্রাফাইট এনে, তার সঙ্গে বিহার, সিলোন ও মাদাগাস্কার থেকে গ্রাফাইট আমদানি করে ক্রুসিবল বানানো হয়। প্রত্যেক ফ্যাক্টরির এক-একটি সিক্রেট ফর্মুলা আছে, যেটা কাউকে জানানো হয় না। কেবল একটা কমন ফ্যাক্টর হল মালিকের দেহ-নিঃসৃত সলিলের এক উপাদান। এই ব্যাপার অনেক কাল পরে মোরারজি দেশাই যখন প্রধানমন্ত্রী, তখন তিনি চালু করেছিলেন, তবে সেটা লোকে মেনে নেয়নি।

ক্রুসিবল বানানোর পর সেটা প্রায় এক মাস ধরে শুকনো করা হয়, ভিতরে একটা করে ইলেকট্রিক লাইট বাস্‌ জ্বালিয়ে রেখে।

এরপর আমরা গিয়ে নামলাম গুডুর স্টেশনে। সেখানে স্টেশনের বাইরেই TTD (Tirupati Tirumala Devasthanam) অফিস আছে। আমরা তিরুপতি দর্শন করার জন্য পরের দিনের প্যাকেজ ট্যুর বুক করে গেলাম মাইকা মাইন দেখতে। সেখানে আমরা একটা সাজেশন দিলাম যে বিহার মাইকা মাইন থেকে কয়েকটা ফ্যামিলি আনানো যায়, যারা মাইকা কাটিং-এ এক্সপার্ট। তাতে অনেক বিক্রয়যোগ্য মাইকা বেরিয়ে আসবে, যেটা এখানে নষ্ট হয়।

পরের দিন খুব ভোরে আমরা এসে TTD অফিসের সামনে বসে বসে গেলাম। ড্রাইভারের সাইডে পরপর চারটা জানালার সিট খালি রাখতে বলা আছে, যাদের মোশন সিকনেস আছে, তাদের জন্য। কারণটা বুঝলাম, যে মোমেন্টে বাস তিরুপতি পাহাড় চড়তে আরম্ভ করল, সার দিয়ে হরহর করে জানালার পাশে যারা বসেছিল, বমি উগরাতে শুরু করল। বাসেই ব্রেকফাস্টে ইডলি-সাম্বার দিয়েছিল। তবে ওঠার পরই একটা স্ট্যান্ড আছে, যেখানে হাই-স্পিড ওয়াটার স্প্রে দিয়ে বাসের গা ধোয়া হলো, সব বমি পরিষ্কার করার জন্য। মনে হল, এটা রোজকার ঘটনা।

এরপর মন্দিরে দর্শনের জন্য প্রবেশ করতে প্রায়োরিটি পেলাম। দর্শনের পর একটু মার্কেট ও চুল কাটার এরিয়া দেখতে গেলাম। এখানে সার দিয়ে নাপিতরা বসে আছে। যে মহিলারা ভগবান বালাজিকে তাঁদের সৌন্দর্যের শ্রেষ্ঠ উপাদান ‘মাথার চুল’ দান



করবেন, তাঁদের জন্য। মানব চুল মাথার নকল পরচুলা বানানোর জন্য শ্রেষ্ঠ উপাদান। মনে পড়ল, এখানে যখন আমরা চার বন্ধু ব্যাঙ্গালোর থেকে ঘুরতে এসেছিলাম, আমাদের নিজেদের ছবি তোলার জন্য ক্যামেরায় সলফ-টাইমার দিয়ে আমরা পোজ করছি, এমন সময় এক বানর এসে ক্যামেরা নিয়ে গাছের মগডালে। অনেক হুমকি দিলেও বানর নিচে নামছে না। তখন পাশে একজন সাজেস্ট করল যে, ওই যে এক পুরোহিত থালা সামনে রেখে বসে আছে, তাঁর কাছে গিয়ে কথা বলতে। দরদাম করে ৫০ টাকায় রফা হলো। পুরোহিত ইশারা করতেই বানরটা এসে ক্যামেরা ফেরত দিয়ে একটা কলা নিয়ে আবার পরের জনের অপেক্ষায়। সবাই বলে, এটা নাকি রোজকার ঘটনা! যাই হোক, ক্যামেরার ফিল্ম ডেভেলপ করে আমরা সারপ্রাইজড—আমাদের ওই ব্যাকগ্রাউন্ড-সহ এক ড্রোন ভিউ উঠেছে! ড্রোন তখনও আবিষ্কার হয়নি।

যাইহোক, পাহাড় থেকে নামার পথে আর ‘হরহর’ হয়নি কারও। Madras-এ দুদিন কাটিয়ে গেলাম পাক্ষিতীর্থ। সেখানে নাকি বারাণসী থেকে দুজন দেবতা বাজপাখির রূপ ধরে রোজ প্রসাদ খেতে আসে। আমাদের পাপী মন, কয়েকজন একটা পাথরের আড়াল থেকে নজর রাখছিল। দেখে, এখানে থেকে সিগন্যাল পেতেই সামনের পাহাড় থেকে একজন একটা খাঁচা খুলে দেওয়ার পর দুটো পাখি উড়ে এলো, প্রসাদ খেয়ে ফেরত গিয়ে আবার খাঁচায়!!

এর পর আমাদের হাল্ট Ariyalur। সেখানে Cretaceous ফসিলের ছড়াছড়ি। এত ফসিল দেখে আমাদের ভিরমি খাবার জোগাড়! রাস্তাঘাট, বিল্ডিং, পুকুরঘাট—সব ফসিল দিয়ে বাঁধানো। দেখে দুঃখ হয়, একটু মার্কেটিং করলে এরা ওয়ার্ল্ড ফসিল সাপ্লায়ার হতে পারত। অনেক এডুকেশনাল ইনস্টিটিউট ফসিল লুফে নিত। বড় ammonite ফসিল কেটে পুকুরঘাট বাঁধানো! বুঝলাম, আমাদের কলেজে জিওলজি ডিপার্টমেন্টে ঢুকতেই যে বিশাল তিন ফুট ammonite ফসিল আছে, সেটা কোথা থেকে আনা। যাই হোক, আমরা তো লেগে গেলাম কে কত রকম ফসিল জোগাড় করতে পারি, সেই কাজে। একজন তো মনে হয় দুটো ডাইনোসরের দাঁতের মতো কিছু পেয়েছে। খেয়াল ছিল না, লাঞ্চ করা হয়নি, কিন্তু সন্ধ্যা হয় হয় তাই ফিরলাম ক্যাম্পে। সেখানে আর এক কাণ্ড! কোনোমতে কিছু খাওয়া তো হলো, কিন্তু বিয়োগ করতে আবার সেই ধাক্কা। Community shed with holes in raised platform! কয়েকজন তো আবার মাঠেই ফিরে গেল কাজ সারতে।

Luckily, একজন বাঙালি কুক পাওয়া গেল, আমাদের ধড়ে প্রাণ এলো। সে নাকি অনেক দিন ধরে এখানে আছে ও অনেক research student/worker-এর কাজ করেছে। তারপর থেকে এখানেই রয়ে গেছে। যেটা বলল না, যে এখানকার এক মহিলাকে বিয়ে করে ঘর বসিয়েছে!

Dhaker Taale, Komor Dole

Shlok Banerjee

Just as the flames die down, Dashami arrives, guns blazing, with Sindoor Khela. The gentlest of aunties and the sweetest grandmas don their military outfits (their pristine white sarees) and charge into battle armed only with the bright red sindoor and the will to outlast everyone in the arena. Nobody leaves like they entered. Beneath the chaos is real tenderness — a courtyard of relentless women finally letting loose, hugging between vermillion assaults, half celebration, half goodbye to the Goddess for another year as the auditory opulence of the dhaak beats, dies down.



Speaking from personal experience, there is one unexplainable phenomenon which occurs the instant the beats of the dhaak start up. Every single person in the vicinity, regardless of age, height or energy, begins to vibrate and move subconsciously. One moment you are munching on delicious bhog and the next, your shoulders start grooving to a rhythm without consent.

It all starts weeks before the event, with a Whatsapp group chat, planning what outfits are supposed to be worn to look the most ravishing among the thousands of people visiting. The amount of bickering and arguing about the perfect dress can only be comparable to a group project in school when no one agrees to one choice. Nearer to the day, someone drops out last moment citing a tailor who left them in the lurch and yet, by Shoshti morning, everyone seems to have their perfect, coordinated outfits ready almost as if this has happened millions of times.

No Pujo runs on fashion alone; it runs on aromatic khichudi, labra and hot, hot beguni and the willingness to stand in a queue, long enough to test true devotion. The bhog line is its own social experiment. Strangers bond over shared plates and

sweltering heat amidst the thousands, while the intoxicating smell of biriyani lingers around the pandal.

Then the dhaak begins. People of all ages, from toddlers barely able to stand up, to grandparents whose knees are having a hard time, start to jive to the entrancing beats. The uncle who swears he's not a dancer moves like a professional with decades of experience. Even the cranky kid who is never willing to socialize chooses to tap his foot while swaying all over the place. Nobody wants to dance but they dance anyway.

Sandhi Pujo brings the Dhunuchi Naach, or as I like to call it, Trial by Fire. This is the one event where dancing to the dhaak beat comes with stakes – a burning pot of clay lit on fire just casually balancing on your head while two more are just flailing around in your hand. No practice. No tutorial. Just pure vibes and one aunty who decimates the competition without even trying. Usually, a dupatta usually drifts close to the massive flames and gets engulfed and fried into a burnt mess. By the time the dhaak slows, the participants walk out either with ash on their outfits, a sore arm or both.



নন্দিতার দিনগুলি

সোনালী মাজী

The Pain of Alzheimer's Disease

নন্দিতা রোজ অফিস থেকে বাসে করে বাড়ী ফেরে। সারাদিন পরিশ্রমের পর এই সময়টা রোজ চোখ লেগে যায়। আজকাল অফিসে এতো চাপ, মাথায় রাখা সবকিছু খুব মুশকিল। এই মাসখানেক, এমনকি বাসেও ঘুম আসেনা নন্দিতার, এই চিন্তা, ওই চিন্তা। এই প্রাইভেট অফিস গুলোতে কাজ যতই করে, তবুও চাকরির কোনও স্থিতি নেই। প্রতিদিনই যেন 'এই চাকরি চলে গেলো', 'এই চাকরি চলে গেলো' ভাব। ভাল্লাগেনা মাঝে মাঝে তাই।

যাহ! বাসটা এতদূর চলে এসেছে! আরে আরে দাঁড়ান দাঁড়ান! বাস থেকে ছড়মুড় করে নেমে পড়ল নন্দিতা। ওর বাড়ী দুটো স্টপেজ আগে। এইসব অফিসের কথা ভাবতে ভাবতে আজকাল প্রায় রোজ দিনই বাড়ীর থেকে দু তিন স্টপেজ এগিয়ে আসছে। আবার ফিরতি বাস ধরে বাড়ী যেতে হচ্ছে। ডবল সময় নষ্ট, ডবল খরচ। কি বিরক্তিকর! আগে ঘুমাতো তাই এরকম মাঝে মাঝে হতো, সে না হয় মানা যেত। কিন্তু জেগে জেগে যে নিজের স্টপেজ কেউ পেড়িয়ে আসতে পারে, নিজের সাথে না হলে বিশ্বাস হতো না।

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আজ শুক্রবার, তাড়াহুড়ো করে অফিসের জন্য বেড়িয়ে পরল নন্দিতা। কুসুম ফোন করে বলল মানিকতলায় ও উঠবে। ওর মাসির বাড়ী থেকে আসবে আজ অফিসে। বাস থেকে যেন নন্দিতা হাত নাড়ে, তাহলে সেই বাসেই উঠবে কুসুম। এক সাথে গল্প করতে করতে অফিস গেলে, রাস্তাটা ছুট করে অফিসে এসে পৌঁছায়।

শহরে এসেও নন্দিতা পাড়ার দোকানদারদের সেই দাদা কাকা পাতিয়ে ফেলে। ছোটবেলায় বাবা মাকে হারিয়েছে। পিসি পিসেমশায়ের বাড়িতে খুব অবহেলাতেই বড় হওয়া। তখন থেকেই সবাই কে আপন করে নিতে ভালো লাগে।

পানুকাকার পানমশলার গুঁমটি থেকে দুটো হাজমলা ক্যান্ডি কিনল নন্দিতা। কুসুম ভালবাসে ক্যান্ডি খেতে খেতে বকবক

করতো। বাসে উঠেই কুসুম প্রথম কথা বলবে, ওই দেখনা ব্যাগে কিছু আছে নাকি, অন্তত লবঙ্গ। অফিসে ভাগ্যিস কুসুমের সাথে বন্ধুত্ব হয়েছে। এতো ভালো না মেয়েটা। ও অফিসের অন্যদের থেকে আলাদা।

বাসরোডে এসেই দেখে বাস। এই রে, দে দৌড়।

দাঁড়াও! দাঁড়াও ভাই।

ও দিদি দৌড়ে এসোওওও। রকিয়ে রকিয়ে লেডিস, কন্ডাক্টর দাদা হাঁক দিলো।

এখন অফিসে নতুন প্রোজেক্ট নিয়ে হিমসিম খাচ্ছে পুরো টীম। মিস্টার বাসু দুইবার এসে দেখে গেলেন। আজ ডিরেক্টর মিস্টার পাটিল আসবেন দুইজন ইনভেস্টার নিয়ে। মিস্টার বাসু প্রজেন্টেশান দেবেন। কাল অবধি কারোর জানা ছিল না যে, আজ এতো বড় একটা মীটিং হবে। মনিং এ মিস্টার পাটিল টেক্সট করেছিলেন মিস্টার বাসুকে যে উনি আজ আসবেন, ডিসকাশন করবেন প্রজেক্ট নিয়ে। আর জাস্ট একটু আগে জানতে পারা গেলো ওনার সাথে ইনভেস্টার আসবে। ব্যাস তখন থেকেই মিস্টার বাসু নিজের কেবিনে বসতে পারছেন না। প্রজেন্টেশানই তো রেডি হয়নি। উনিই এই পুরো প্রজেক্টার ইঞ্চারজ।

নন্দিতার কাজ ডিজাইনটা বানানো। প্রায় প্রতি মাসেই আইডিয়া চেঞ্জের জন্য রেডি ডিজাইন ট্রাশ হচ্ছে। এই ডিজাইনটা লাস্ট ওয়ান উইক ধরে বানাচ্ছে। হয়ে এসেছে প্রায়। প্রজেন্টেশান বিকেল চারটেতে। লাঞ্চের আগে শেষ করতে হবে, তাহলেই মিস্টার বাসু ফাইনাল প্রজেন্টেশানে ইনকুড করতে পারবেন। এই কর্পোরেটের চাপটা নেওয়া যায় না। অল্হায়াস ডু নাও। ভাগ্যিস নন্দিতা বাড়ী গিয়ে কাজ করতো, তাই অনেকটাই রেডি। ডেস্ক টু এর প্রশান্তর ছেড়ে দে মা কেঁদে বাঁচি অবস্থা। গ্রী ডেজ ফ্যামিলি ভ্যাকেসনে ছিল, আজ ফিরেই এই কাণ্ড।

টুং, আবার মিস্টার বাসুর মেসেজ।

মিস্টার বসাক ডান?

নো স্যার, মোর টেন মিনিটস, দেন কামিং।

ওকে।

ডেস্ক টু, হোয়াট আবাত উ?

স্যার ট্রাফিং।

টেক ডেস্ক ফাইভ'স হেল্প। শি ইজ গুড ইন ইট। শি রিচড?

নো স্যার, শি ইজ অন দ্যা ওয়ে।

নো রেল্ই। নো ওকে। মানে মিস্টার বাসু রেগে গেছেন।

কিন্তু এখনো আসেনি কেন! ও তো দেরি করার মেয়ে নয়। ফোন করলাম তুলল না, হোয়াটসয়্যাপ করলাম উত্তর দিলোনা অথচ ক্ল টিক হোলো তক্ষুনি। সবারই তো টেনশন চলছে। কাজ টা লাঞ্চ এর আগে এন্ড করতেই হবে। নন্দিতা মনোযোগ দিলো।

কিরে? কিরে কি ব্যাপার? ঘেমে একাকার, ছাতা ভাঁজ করতে করতে কুসুম বলল। মুখটা লাল। যেনও রেগে গেছে মনে হচ্ছে।

কোথায় ছিলি তুই? ফোন করলে রিসিভ করছিস না, হোয়াটসয়্যাপ ইগ্নোর করছিস। ব্যাপার কি তোর? মিস্টার বাসু খোঁজ করছেন। আজ বিকেলে প্রেসেন্টেশন। নন্দিতা এক নিঃশ্বাসে উদ্বেকসহ বলল কথা গুলো।

জানি, কুসুম দাঁত চেপে উত্তর দিলো।

কি হয়েছে তোর?

কেন জানিস না কি হয়েছে? বাদ দে। কুসুম রাগ মুখ করে প্রশান্তর ডেস্কে চলে গেলো।

নন্দিতা বুঝতেই পারছে না ঠিক কি হোলো।	মানে? কুসুম হতবাক। যা ফোন চেক কর, মিথ্যে বলিস না। কাজ করতে দে, নিজে কর। মিস্টার বাসু এসে গেলে বলবেন কাজ না করে গল্প করছি। আমার তোর সাথে কথা বলারও ইচ্ছে নেই, গল্প তো অনেক দূরের। মুখ ফিরিয়ে কাজ করতে বসে গেলো কুসুম।	ওকে। গুড। মিস্টার বসাক ইনকুড অল ডেটা। ইউ অল মিট মি আফটার লাঞ্চ।
ধীর পায়ে গেলো ডেস্ক টু তো।		ইয়েস স্যার।
কুসুম কেন রাগ করছিস রে? দেরি হোলো কেন আজ?		ওকে স্যার।
কেন দেরি হোলো! ঝাঁঝিয়ে উঠল কুসুম। তুই জানিস না? ন্যাকামি করছিস? তোর জন্য আজ আমার হাফ ডে হবে। মিস্টার বাসু রেগে গেছেন। কিন্তু দোষটা কি আমার? কুসুমের মুখ কঠিন।	এটা প্রশান্তের ডেস্ক, সে অবাক ও অপ্রস্তুত হয়ে নন্দিতা কে দেখছে। নন্দিতা নিজের ডেস্কে ফিরে এলো।	ওকে স্যার।
কিন্তু আমি কি করেছি? নন্দিতা অবাক।	কুসুম ফোন করেছিলো আজ! মোবাইল এ দেখি! হ্যাঁ তো, রিসেন্ট কলে নাম। ওঃ। একটু চিন্তা করলো নন্দিতা। সে তো রোজদিনই ফোন করে কুসুম! কিন্তু আজ কখন বাস থেকে হাত দেখাবার কথা বলল! কই মনে পড়ছে না তো? বললে কি আর হাত নাড়ত না নন্দিতা! কি যে বলে না। শুধু শুধু রাগ করছে কুসুম, আর এই ভাবে ঝাঁঝিয়ে কথা বলছে। বন্ধুর সাথে কেউ এমন ভাবে কথা বলে সবার সামনে। চোখ ভরে জল এলো নন্দিতার। এই অফিসে নন্দিতার মনের মিল হয় শুধু কুসুম এর সাথে, বাকিরা খুব প্রফেশনাল। নন্দিতা গ্রামের মেয়ে, ছোটবেলা থেকেই দুঃখী, নদী মাটির সংযোগে ভালোবাসা কুড়িয়ে বড় হয়েছে। কুসুম খুব ভালো মেয়ে জানতো, আজ এই ভাবে মিথ্যে অপমান করছে। আসলে শহরের মানুষরা মনে হয় এমনি, ইচ্ছে খুশি ভালো আর খারাপ। উপ উপ করে চোখ থেকে জল নেমে এলো। চোখ মুছে দেখল কুসুম একমনে প্রশান্তর সাথে কাজ করছে।	ওকে স্যার।
আমি এক ঘণ্টা মানিকতলাতে দাঁড়িয়ে।		ওরা চারজনই মেসেজ করলো।
কেন? নন্দিতা আরও অবাক। কেন দাঁড়িয়ে ছিলি? আসিসনি কেন?		আজ নন্দিতা একা একাই লাঞ্চ খেলো।
তোর জন্য। খুব জোরে কুসুম উত্তর দিলো।		কুসুম পাত্তা দিচ্ছে না, যেন ও চেনেই না।
আমার জন্য?		নন্দিতার খেতে খেতে দুচোখ ভরে জল এলো আবার।
হ্যাঁ। তোর জন্য। কত গুলো বাস ছেড়েছি শুধু তোর সাথে আসবো বলে। প্রশান্ত যদি না কল করতো জানতামও না তুই অফিস এসে কাজ করছিস। কুসুমের মুখে রাগ।	নন্দিতা কাজে মন দিলো।	মিস্টার বসাক এর প্রেসেন্টেশন খুব ভালো হয়েছে। ইনভেস্টাররা প্লিজড। মিটিং শেষে উনি সবাই কে বললেন নেক্সট স্টেপস কি কি হবে। নন্দিতার ডিজাইন কনসেপ্ট খুব ভালো, খুব প্রশংসা করে জানালেন।
কিন্তু আমি কি করে জানব তুই আসবি? নন্দিতা অবাক।	টুং। মিস্টার বাসুর মেসেজ।	সবাই ক্লাপ করলো, কুসুম ও।
মানে? কুসুম উঠে দাঁড়াল। জাস্ট বাড়ী থেকে বেরবার আগে তোকে ফোন করলাম, তুই আমার সাথে কথা বললি, আমি বললাম মাসিবাড়ী এসেছি, তুই মানিকতলাতে বাস থেকে হাত নাড়বি, আমি তখন সেই বাসে উঠবো। তোর মনে নেই?	গুড জব নন্দিতা। এক্সসিলেন্ট।	কুসুম আজ একটা কথা বলেনি তারপরও। তাকাচ্ছেই না।
না তো? কখন বললি এইসব।	থ্যাঙ্ক ইয়উ স্যার।	মনখারাপ নিয়ে ফ্রাইডে নাইটে বাড়ী ফিরল নন্দিতা।
	প্রশান্ত এন্ড কুসুম?	
	ডান স্যার। মেইলিং	টুং, মেসেজ টোন বাজলো।

ভাইরাল ফিভার হয়ে খুব কাবু নন্দিতা। দুইদিন অফিস যায়নি।
জ্বর হয়ে খুব কাবু শরীরটা, মুখে অরুচি, গা হাত পা ব্যাথা।
মনটাও খুব খুব খারাপ। প্রায় দিন পনেরো হতে চলল কুসুম
অফিসে কথা বলেনি, এমন কি কাল রাতে গ্রুপে জ্বরের
মেসেজটা লেখার পরও একটা ফোন বা পারসনাল মেসেজ
করেনি নন্দিতাকে।



প্রথম প্রথম বাড়ী ফিরে কল করতো কুসুমকে নন্দিতা, না
একবারও ফোনটা তোলেনি। কেন রাগ করেছিস, মেসেজ
করলে উত্তর দেয়নি। অফিসে তো তাকায় না, সামনে গিয়ে কথা
বলতে ভয় করে।

আবার টুং। কার মেসেজ! ফোন তুলে দেখে, কুসুম মেসেজ
করেছে।

তোর জ্বর?

কেমন আছিস আজ?
কুসুমের দুটো মেসেজ।

ভালো আছি আজ একটু। লিখতে লিখতে চোখে জল ভরে
গেলো নন্দিতার।

সবিতাদি এসেছিলো? রান্না করে দিয়ে গেছে। ও প্রান্তে যেনও
সেই আগের কুসুম।

হ্যাঁ।

আমি আসবো?

না, ভালো আছি।

ব্রেকফাস্ট করেছিস? ওষুধ খেয়েছিস আজ?
হ্যাঁ। আজ আর জ্বর নেই, ওষুধ খাব না। খুব দুর্বল।

কয়দিন রেস্ট কর। ফুটস অর্ডার কর। আমি করে দেব?

না আছে। কাল অফিস যাব। কথা বলিস প্লিজ।

চুপ, কোনও উত্তর নেই। কিছুক্ষণ পর অপার থেকে কুসুমের
লেখা ভেসে এলো, হ্যাঁ বলবো, সাথে স্যাড ইমোজি।

কেন রাগ করলি কুসুম আমার উপর? কত কষ্ট পাচ্ছি জানিস
না তুই। তুই ছাড়া এই শহরে কে বন্ধু আমার।

রেস্ট নো। কষ্ট আমিও পাচ্ছি। কথা হবে কাল।

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হ্যাঁ বল। কেমন আছিস? দেখি জ্বর নেই তো? নন্দিতার কপালে
হাত ঝুলো কুসুম।

দুইদিন অফিসে আসেনি তাই আজ সকাল আটটা তেই চলে
এসেছিলো নন্দিতা।

কুসুম মনে হয় এই এলো, এসেই নন্দিতার ডেস্কে। সেই আগের
মতো।

কুসুম তোকে কি সুন্দর লাগছে কমলা রঙের ড্রেসে।

থ্যাঙ্ক ইয়ু। চল, লাঞ্চ টাইমে কথা হবে। মিস্টার বাসু অনেক
গুলো কাজ দিয়েছেন। সেগুলো করি যাই। কুসুম চলে গেলো
নিজের ডেস্কে।

নন্দিতা বুঝল কুসুম আজ কথা বলছে বটে, তবে দুজনের মধ্যে
ঠাণ্ডা কাঁচের দেওয়াল। কিন্তু কেন?

লাঞ্চটাইমে দুইজন বসলো সেই আগের মতো।
দেখ কুসুম সবিতা দি তোর জন্য মাশরুম ভেজে পাঠিয়েছে।

না রে, খাবোনা আজ। পোহা এনেছি।

একটু টেস্ট কর, সবিতাদি পাঠালো।

না বললাম যে।

নন্দিতা বুঝল বরফ এখনো জমে আছে। কেন রাগ করেছিস
কুসুম?

তুই জানিস না? নন্দিতাকে শক্ত মুখ করে কুসুম বলল।

না সত্যি।

কুসুম স্লেষ করে হাসল। তুই আমায় হিংসা করিস নন্দিতা?

মানে? কি যা তা বলছিস?

যা তা? স্লেষ হাসিটা আরও প্রকট।
খুলে বল, আমি অত হৈয়ালি বুঝি না কুসুম।

ওকে, খুলেই বলছি। তোর সেদিনের ব্যবহারে আমার মনে হয়েছে, তুই মিস্টার বাসুর কাছে আমায় অপদস্ত করে নিজে ভালো হতে চেয়েছিলি। তুই চেয়েছিলি আমার লেট হোক, আর আমি সাবমিট করতে না পারি।

মানে কি বলছিস? প্রোজেক্টটা আমাদের পাঁচজনের কাজ। আমি ভালো হতে যাব কেন?

আমি বলার পরও তাহলে মানিকতলাতে ডাকলি না কেন?

সত্যি তুই বলেছিলি?
হ্যাঁ।

আমিও সত্যি বলছি, আমার কিছু মনে নেই।

মানে?

হ্যারে কুসুম সত্যি, কুসুমের দুটো হাত জড়িয়ে ধরল নিজের হাতে নন্দিতা। দুচোখে জল।

আচ্ছা ঠিক আছে, কুসুম হেসে ফেলল। তুই কাঁদছিস কেন রে? আমি রাগ করলাম আর উনি কাঁদছেন। দুঃখ মুখ নিয়ে আবার হেসে ফেলল কুসুম। চল এখন, মিস্টার বসাকের সাথে গ্রুপ ডিসকাশন আছে।

চল। নন্দিতাও উঠে পরল।

একটুখানি গিয়েই কুসুম আবার বলল, সত্যি ভুলেছিলি? সত্যি একটুও মনে নেই?

হ্যারে। সত্যি।

হুম্মম, কুসুম গম্ভীর।

কেমন আছে নন্দিতা?

ভালো ডক্টর।

সব কাজ লিখে করছ তো। এখন পারছ তো সব?

হ্যাঁ। সুবিধা হচ্ছে। নন্দিতা হাসি মুখে জানালো।

শুভ। তোমার লাস্ট সিটিং এর রিপোর্ট কিন্তু খুব ভালো। ওইভাবে চললে তোমার খুব হেল্প হবে, নিজেকে যত্ন নিও। এইমাসে আর আসার দরকার নেই। যদি অসুবিধা হয় পরের মাসে এসো। সব সময় কনফিডেন্ট থাকো। তুমি এখন বেশ ভালোই আছো। নিজেকে নিজে সাপোর্ট করো। ইয়উ আর ব্রেভ।

থ্যাঙ্ক ইয়উ ডক্টর।

তারপর একদিন এসো বাড়ীতে। ডাক্তার তো শুধু নই আমি, তোমার বেস্ট ফ্রেন্ডের মাসতুতো দিদিও। সেটা ভালো না। হাসল তনুশ্রী।

আসবো দি। নন্দিতা বেড়িয়ে গেলো।

তনুশ্রীর একজন পেশেন্ট এই নন্দিতা মেয়েটি। মাসতুতো বোন কুসুমের অফিস কলিগ। যেদিন সাতাশ বছরের ছেলেটির গল্প করেছিলো কুসুম কে, কুসুম অবাক হয়েছিল। “এতো কম বয়েসে এই অসুখ হয় দিদি?” প্রশ্ন করেছিলো কুসুম। তার পরদিনই এই মেয়েটির একটি ছোট্ট ঘটনায় কুসুম খুব রেগে যায়। মেয়েটি ওকে ডাকতে ভুলে যায় বাসো। সেটা বড় কথা হতো না, যদি না মেয়েটি ওই কথোপকথন টাই ভুলে যেত। পরে আরও এই ধরনের বিভিন্ন ঘটনা থেকে কুসুমের সন্দেহ হয়। তনুশ্রীর সাথে কথা বলিয়ে দেয়। প্রায় ছয় মাস হয়ে গেলো, নন্দিতা প্রায় পনেরোটা সিটিং দিয়েছে। চারটে সিটিং এর পরই তনুশ্রী বুঝে যায় নন্দিতা কোন দিকে এগোচ্ছে। হ্যাঁ নন্দিতার আলঝাইমার্স রোগটির উপসর্গ দেখা দিয়েছে। এটা ভ্রান্ত ধারণা যে শুধু বয়স্ক মানুষদের আলঝাইমার্স হয়। কুসুমও একসময় তাই ভাবত। নন্দিতার বয়েস একত্রিশ। ও ভুলছে, রোজ রোজ মস্তিষ্কের কোষ একটু একটু করে মরছে। আলঝাইমার্স, এ এক দুরারোগ্য ব্যাধি। যা একদিন হয়ত নিজেকেই ভুলিয়ে দেবে।

তনুশ্রী নন্দিতাকে সব লিখতে বলেছে, লিখে রাখলে সুবিধা হবে। সবকিছু নয়, হঠাৎ কোনও একটা ঘটনা নন্দিতা ভুলে যায় এখন। ডায়েরির লেখা মনে করতে হেল্প করে। যতদিন এইভাবে সব কিছু ভুলে যাওয়াকে পিছিয়ে রাখা যায়, সেই চেষ্টা। যতদিন এইভাবে জীবন কে নরম্যাল রাখতে পারবে ততদিনই ভালো।

কি অদ্ভুত না! হাজার বাধা বিপত্তিতেও জীবন আটকে থাকে না। নন্দিতা লড়াইটা জিতছে প্রতিদিন।

বর্তমানে বাপ মা হারা নন্দিতার জীবনে বন্ধু হয়ে আছে কুসুম। নন্দিতার মনোবল আকাশসীমা ছুঁয়ে দেয় ডক্টর তনুশ্রী।

নন্দিতা ক্যাবে বাড়ী ফিরছে। আজকাল বাস টা আভএড করে নন্দিতা, কারণ ক্যাব বাড়ীর সামনে নামিয়ে দেয়, সুবিধা হয়।

কিছু কি ভুলছি আমি! হাতে রাখা ডায়েরি টা খুলে দেখতে হবে। মনের মধ্যে কথার ভিড়।

ডায়েরী খুলে দেখে, তিনটে স্টার দিয়ে লেখা কুসুমকে ফোন।

এই রে স্পেকপে যাবে কুসুম।

হ্যালো কুসুম রে ভুলে গেছিলাম।

বেড়িয়ে এসেছিস তনুশ্রীদির ওখান থেকে?

হ্যাঁ।

কি বলল?

বলল খুব ভালো আছি। এমাসে যেতে হবে না আর। লাস্ট সিটিং এর রিপোর্ট খুব ভালো।

বাঃ দারুণ তো। ফোনের ওই প্রান্তের খুশির হাসি এই প্রান্তের খুশির হাসির সুরে মিলে গেলো। চল তাহলে পার্টি করি, খুব সাজগোজ করি। হাসতে হাসতে ওরা দুইজন ভুলে গেলো, কি সমস্যা ছিল বা আছে।

‘ভুলে যাওয়ার অসুখ’ ভুলে, ওদের এই হাসি ছড়িয়ে পড়ল আকাশে বাতাসে।

এইভাবে পৃথিবীর সব নন্দিতাদের দিনগুলি ‘মনে থাক’ মনে, প্রতিদিন প্রতিনিয়ত।

বলো বলো দুগ্গা এলো

সুমেলা দত্ত

একজন প্রকৃত বাঙালির কাছে বছরের সবচেয়ে প্রতীক্ষিত সময় হলো দুর্গাপূজো। তা সে বাংলায় থাকুক বা বাংলার বাইরে, বছরের শুরুতে নববর্ষের ক্যালেন্ডার পাওয়া মাত্রই তার সবার আগে চোখ চলে যায় ওই চারটে দিনের দিকে।

নবীন হোক বা প্রবীণ, গ্রাম হোক বা শহর—দুর্গাপূজোর আনন্দে মাতে সকলেই। কিছু বছর আগে কলকাতার দুর্গাপূজো পেয়েছে আন্তর্জাতিক স্বীকৃতি। ইউনেস্কোর ‘মানবতার অমূল্য সাংস্কৃতিক ঐতিহ্য’-র প্রতিনিধি তালিকায় গোটা এশিয়া মহাদেশ থেকে এই একমাত্র উৎসব স্থান করে নিয়েছে। তাই বাঙালির এই মাতৃ আরাধনা আজ পৌঁছে গেছে বিশ্বের দরবারে। প্রত্যেক বাঙালির কাছে এ এক বিরাট গর্বের বিষয়।

প্রতি বছর শরৎকাল আসতেই প্রকৃতিই যেন প্রথমে আগমনী বার্তা নিয়ে আসে। শিউলি ফুল, কাশফুল, নীল আকাশে পৌঁজা তুলোর মতো সাদা মেঘের ডেলা—এসব যখন চারপাশে দেখতে পাই, বুঝতে পারি পূজোর আর দেরি নেই। অবশ্য তারও বেশ কিছু দিন আগে থেকে বড় বড় পূজোর উদ্যোক্তারা কাজ শুরু করে দেন—প্যান্ডেলের কী থিম হবে, মা কোন সাজে সাজবেন, পূজোর পাঁচ দিন কবে কোন অনুষ্ঠান হবে, কোন গায়ক কবে আসবেন—নানা বিষয়। আর এই সব কাজ করার মধ্যেও এক অদ্ভুত আনন্দ কাজ করে। এরই মধ্যে শুরু হয় পূজোর কেনাকাটা। এই সময়ে আর খরচের কথা মাথায় থাকে না। যা মন চায়, মানুষ তাই কেনে। আর শুধু নিজের জন্য নয়, পূজোর সময় আমরা পরিবারের সকলের জন্য নতুন জামাকাপড় কিনি। একে অপরকে পূজোর উপহার দেওয়ার মধ্যেও এক আলাদা ভালো লাগা আছে। ধীরে ধীরে আসে মহালয়া। শ্রী বীরেন্দ্রকৃষ্ণ ভদ্রের চণ্ডীপাঠে আমাদের মনের মন্দিরে বেজে ওঠে ছুটির ঘণ্টা!



দুর্গাপূজোকে কেন্দ্র করে প্রকাশিত হয় শারদীয়া পূজা সংখ্যা। বড় বড় প্রকাশনা থেকে বিশিষ্ট লেখক, লেখিকা, কবিদের লেখা ছাপা হয়। শুধু তাই নয়, মিউজিক রেকর্ডিং হাউসগুলো তৈরি করে ‘পূজোর গান’, যা সে বছরের পূজোকে মাতিয়ে রাখে। দুর্গাপূজো শুধু বাঙালির শ্রেষ্ঠ উৎসব ও আবেগ নয়, এই পূজো এক সুবিশাল অর্থনৈতিক কর্মকাণ্ড সৃষ্টি করে। শুধু পশ্চিমবঙ্গেই দুর্গাপূজোকে কেন্দ্র করে প্রতি বছর আনুমানিক ৬৫,০০০ কোটি টাকার আয় সৃষ্টি হয় এবং দুর্গাপূজো পশ্চিমবঙ্গের মোট অভ্যন্তরীণ উৎপাদনে (জিডিপি) প্রায় ৩ শতাংশ অবদান রাখে। ঢাকি থেকে শুরু করে প্রতিমা শিল্পী, প্যান্ডেলের কারিগর থেকে শুরু করে পুরোহিত, জামাকাপড় বিক্রেতা থেকে রেস্টুরাঁর মালিক—সকলেরই প্রধান ব্যবসার সময় হচ্ছে এই পূজোর সময়।

দুর্গাপূজো এক সময় শুধু বনেদি বাড়িগুলোতে হতো, পরে পূজো শুরু হলো পাড়ায় পাড়ায়, যাকে আমরা বলি বারোয়ারি পূজো। এখন এর পাশাপাশি পূজো উদ্‌যাপিত হচ্ছে সর্বত্র, নতুন নতুন গড়ে ওঠা অসংখ্য আবাসনেও। তাছাড়া, শুধু বাংলায় নয়, ভারতের প্রায় সব রাজ্যেই, এমনকী প্রতিবেশী দেশ নেপাল ও

বাংলাদেশেও নিষ্ঠাভরে আয়োজন করা হয় এই পূজোর। সমগ্র ভারতে তথা বিশ্বে প্রবাসী বাঙালির দল যে যেখানে আছেন, হৈ-হৈ করে দুর্গাপূজো করেন এবং তাতে যোগ দেন বহু অবাঙালি, বহু বিদেশি। আজ সুদূর ইউরোপ, আমেরিকা, অস্ট্রেলিয়া বা সিঙ্গাপুরের মতো দেশেও বেশ বড় করেই দুর্গাপূজো পালিত হচ্ছে। মোটকথা, দেশে বা প্রবাসে কয়েকজন বাঙালি একসঙ্গে হলেই একটা দুর্গাপূজোয় নিজেদের বাঁধতে চায়। এছাড়া, পৃথিবীর সর্বত্র রামকৃষ্ণ মিশনের মহাষ্টমীর কুমারীপূজোর আকর্ষণ আলাদা, যা দেখতে দূর-দূরান্ত থেকে লোক ছুটে আসে।

আজকাল কলকাতাতে পাঁচ দিনের পূজো বেড়ে হয়েছে দশ দিন। মহালয়া থেকেই পূজোর উদ্বোধন শুরু হয়ে যায়। দ্বিতীয় বা তৃতীয়া থেকেই মানুষের ঢল নামছে প্যান্ডেল পরিক্রমায়। কলকাতার পূজো এখন শহরজুড়ে শিল্প প্রদর্শনের মতো। তাই পূজোর দিন বাড়ায় মানুষও হাতে কিছুটা বেশি সময় পাচ্ছেন এই অপরূপ শিল্প ভালো করে উপভোগ করার। এদিকে কচি-কাঁচাদের দল পাঁচ দিনের উৎসব দশ দিন হয়ে যাওয়ায় দ্বিগুণ আনন্দে মেতে উঠছে।



পুজোর দিনগুলো যেন এক পলকে শেষ হয়ে যায়। ষষ্ঠী আসতে না আসতেই দশমী হাজির। মাঝের দিনগুলো যে কীভাবে কেটে যায়, কখনও বুঝতেই পারি না। ষষ্ঠীতে মায়ের বোধন, সপ্তমীতে কলাবউ স্নান, অষ্টমীর সকালে স্নান করে নতুন জামা পরে অঞ্জলি দেওয়া, পরে পাড়ায় গিয়ে ভোগ খাওয়া, বিকেলে আশেপাশের ঠাকুর দেখতে যাওয়া, নবমীর দিনে সবচেয়ে ভালো জামাটা পরা, নবমীর রাতে আরতির সময় মায়ের ছলছল মুখ দেখে নবমী নিশিকে ধরে রাখার আশ্রয় চেষ্টা করা—এভাবেই বয়ে যায় সময়।

ওদিকে ততক্ষণে টিভিতে নিউজ চ্যানেলগুলো ঘোষণা করে দিচ্ছে কোন পুজো কী পুরস্কার পেল। দলে দলে লোক ছুটেছে শ্রীভূমি থেকে কাশী বোস লেন, সুরুচি সংঘ থেকে মুদিয়ালী ক্লাব, দেশপ্রিয় পার্ক থেকে একডালিয়া। লম্বা লাইনে দাঁড়িয়েও তাদের কোনও ক্লান্তি নেই। দিল্লির চিত্তরঞ্জন পার্ক, মুম্বাইয়ের পাওয়াই বেঙ্গলি ওয়েলফেয়ার অ্যাসোসিয়েশন বা ব্যাঙ্গালোরের আলসুর বেঙ্গলি অ্যাসোসিয়েশনের পুজোয় তখন সন্ধিপুজো বা ধনুচি নাচের পাশাপাশি আয়োজিত হয় নামী শিল্পীদের নিয়ে সাংস্কৃতিক সন্ধ্যা। আর সেখানে উপচে পড়া ভিড় বাঙালির দুর্গাপুজোকে সকলের উৎসব করে তোলে, অন্য মাত্রা যোগ করে। পুজো মানে ঘরে ফেরা। কর্মসূত্রে যে যেখানেই থাকুক না কেন, পুজোর সময় বাড়ি ফেরার এক আলাদা উন্মাদনা কাজ করে।

ট্রেনের টিকিট ওয়েটিং লিস্টে দেখে তৎকাল কাটা বা ফ্লাইটে চড়া দামের টিকিট—কোনও কিছুকেই তোয়াক্কা না করে ঘরে ফেরার নামই তো পুজো। আর জানি, ঠিক শুনব, কোনও না কোনও মাসতুতো দাদা, পিসতুতো বোন বা কলেজের বন্ধুও ঠিক একই রকমভাবে ফিরে এসেছে ঘরে।

আজও একই আছে রাত জেগে ঠাকুর দেখার আনন্দ। সব রকম রুটিনকে তছনছ করে ভেঙে দেওয়ার ক্ষমতা একমাত্র পুজোর পাঁচটা দিনই রাখে। তাই নির্দিষ্ট রাত ১২টা বা রাত ২টাতেও খাওয়া যায় ফুচকা, রোল, চাউমিন, বিরিয়ানি বা আইসক্রিম। আগের মতো আজও আছে সপ্তমী-অষ্টমী-নবমীর সন্দের নাচ-গানের জলসা, সন্ধিপুজোর অঞ্জলি, ধনুচি নাচের মায়াজাল আর ম্যাডক্স স্কোয়ারের মাঠে পুরোনো বন্ধুদের সঙ্গে হঠাৎ দেখা হয়ে যাওয়ার আনন্দ।

আর পুজোর প্রেম! নতুন প্রেমে পড়া কিশোর-কিশোরী বা বহু বছর বিচ্ছিন্ন হওয়া প্রাক্তন প্রেমিক-প্রেমিকা, যারা হয়তো এখন প্রাপ্তবয়স্ক প্রৌঢ়-প্রৌঢ়া—পুজোর দিনে দেবী প্রতিমার সামনে একটু দেখা হওয়ার রোমাঞ্চ কিন্তু এক। দেখতে দেখতে চলে আসে দশমী। দশমীতে মা-কে বরণ করা, সিঁদুর খেলা, 'বলো দুর্গা মাইকি জয়' রবে বা 'আসছে বছর আবার হবে' বলে মহাসমারোহে মায়ের বিসর্জন হওয়া—চোখের নিমেষে আনন্দের দিনগুলো যেন ফুরিয়ে যায়। বিগত

কয়েক বছর ধরে পশ্চিমবঙ্গ সরকার আয়োজন করেছিল পুজোর কার্নিভালের। এই কার্নিভালে আমন্ত্রিত হতেন দেশ-বিদেশের মাননীয় অতিথিরা। আমাদের নাচ, গান, সৃষ্টি, সংস্কৃতিকে বিশ্বের আঙিনায় পৌঁছে দেওয়ার এ এক অভিনব আয়োজন।

পুজো শেষে বিজয়া। এখন আর আগের মতো সব সময় গুরুজনদের সামনে গিয়ে পায়ে হাত দিয়ে প্রণাম করে মিষ্টিমুখ করার সুযোগ হয় না। বেশির ভাগ সময় হোয়াটসঅ্যাপ বা ফোনেই সেরে নেওয়া হয় বিজয়া।

যত যাই হোক, বাঙালির জীবনে পুজোই হচ্ছে সবচেয়ে বড় পুনর্মিলন উৎসব। এই দুর্গাপুজোকে কেন্দ্র করেই তো সকল শ্রেণির মানুষের একত্রিত হওয়া এবং সব বয়সী আত্মীয়-স্বজন, বন্ধু-বান্ধব, চেনা-পরিচিতের সঙ্গে স্বাভাবিক নিয়মে দেখা হয়ে যাওয়া এবং সবাই মিলে একসঙ্গে আনন্দ করা।

তাই মায়ের বাজানো শঙ্খ, ঢাকিদের বাজানো ঢাক আর পুরোহিতের আরতি করার সঙ্গে সঙ্গে বাজানো ঘণ্টার ধ্বনি যখন পুজো শেষে আসতে আসতে ফিকে হয়ে আসে, তখন মন অজান্তেই বলে ওঠে, 'আবার এসো মা!' 'আসছে বছর আবার হবে'—এই প্রতীক্ষাতেই না হয় বছরের বাকি দিনগুলো কাটানো।

Trial by Ink

Joyitta Bhowmik

The ink bleeds dark upon the page to tear the veil away,
A desperate hand that claws to reach the light of day.
With trembling fingers, stained and raw, a heavy truth unfolds:
Only through sweat and fractured spirit can you turn dirt to gold.

Yet buried deep within the dark, a hidden truth takes hold,
A single line of clarity where untold tales unfold
It shatters every narrow wall to open boundless skies,
Where endless realms of knowledge bloom before your waking eyes.

A jagged key of glyph and line to doors you could not see,
Unlocking paths of chance and fate to set your vision free.
No gentle guide to hold your wrist through storm, and night—
Just raw, infinite avenues, both perilous and bright.

You force the mind against the pitch, a brutal, driving strain,
Through bitter failure, ruined drafts, and sharp, relentless pain.
Yet with each secret brought to light, new worlds begin to rise,
A sea of possibilities beneath the stormy skies.

A fragile dream carved out of grief for worlds where all might smile,
Dragging your heart across the dark for through every ruthless trial
You bleed your soul into the strokes to move this boundless sea,
Conquering the shadows of the past to set your spirit free.

Choice

Tejsvi Uttarwar

Barring your birth, I have been by your side,
Placed the world before you to accept me or set me aside,
I changed with seasons, I changed with people,
Always standing by you, day and night.

Couldn't help you much as a child,
For your kin chose all that seemed right,
Youth kicked in and I became more familiar,
And I started seeping deep in your pride.

I showed you variations, an array of colors,
In possibilities, orders, options and decisions,
I molded your life as you walked alongside,
Crafting it together, your belief rested inside.

Though I was a company all this time,
You looked for a companion through me,
Offered you matches in stars and in hearts,
No one could overrule the divine decree.

Amidst the turns in life, as the ships strangle,
This companion comes to your rescue again,
I can still mend your life if you have faith in me,
But it's no longer an easy game....

Yours faithfully,
Choice

The illusion of trust

Taareni Bhowmik

They twist your words and change the past,
With mental twists that always last.
They make you doubt your very mind,
And leave your honest thoughts behind.

They pull the strings behind the scene,
And use manipulation clean.
They make you think you're going mad,
While making all your choices bad.

They act like they are on your side,
Through every clever, scheming ride.
They trap you with a friendly smile,
And manipulate you all the while.

You say you're sorry for their frown,
While they're the ones who pushed you down.
Their master plan is built on stealth,
To drain your emotional wealth.

I see right through the hidden game,
And how they play to shift the blame.
I'm walking out from all their lies,
With manipulation stripped of disguise!

দিদিমার কেরামতি

শংকর বিশ্বাস

সাতাত্তর বছরের দিদিমাকে নিয়ে বাসে চড়লাম, যাব দক্ষিণেশ্বর। দিদিমার ইচ্ছে হয়েছে মরার আগে একবার মা কালীকে দর্শন করে যাবে, শ্রীরামকৃষ্ণের লীলাভূমিতে।

দিদিমার শরীর বিশেষ ভাল নেই। হাঁটু দুটো খুব নড়বড়ে হয়ে গেছে। হাঁটতে গিয়ে মাথাটা কাঁপে, ঠিকঠাক চলতেও পারে না। তবে মানুষকে পরোয়া করে কথা বলার দিন দিদিমার চলে গেছে। দু-দিন আগে আমাকে বলল – “শোন, পরশু একটা ভাল দিন আছে, আমাকে দক্ষিণেশ্বর নিয়ে যাবি”

দিদিমা, আমার কলেজ আছে তো

“রাখ তোর কলেজ, একদিন না গেলে কি হয়? কলেজে গিয়ে পড়াশুনা করিস, না শুধু মেয়েদের পিছনে ঘুরিস। কে জানে! যা সব প্রেমের গল্প কানে আসে আজকাল”

কি করে দিদিমাকে বোঝাব যে আমি নেহাতই গোবেচার। ভালোমানুষ একটা ছেলে। কোনও মেয়ে কাছে আসলে আমার বুকটা ধক ধক করে ওঠে, হাত-পা ঠান্ডা হয়ে যায়, জিভটা আপনা থেকে ভারি হয়ে আসে। দিদিমাকে বলতে পারলাম না সেটা, লজ্জা লাগলো।

বাসে উঠে কোনমতে ঠেলেঠেলে এগোলাম লেডিস সিটের দিকে, পাশে দুটো সিট সিনিয়র সিটিজেন ও প্রতিবন্ধীদের জন্য রাখা, দুটোই ভর্তি। দিদিমাকে দেখার পরও কেউ আর ওঠে না। শেষে ছোকরা কন্ডাকটর চেষ্টা করে উঠল – সিনিয়র সিটিজেনদের সিটে যারা বসে আছেন তারা উঠে যান। দিদিমাকে বসতে দিন।

আহা, কন্ডাকটরের মনে কিছু দয়া-মায়ী এখনো বেঁচে আছে তাহলে।

দুই আধুনিক প্যান্ট-পরিহিতা স্টাইলিস যুবতী মেয়ে উঠে দাঁড়াল এইবার। দিদিমা তাদের প্রায় ধাক্কা দিয়ে সরিয়ে বসল সেই সিটে। একজন নাক সিটকাল, কিন্তু কোন মন্তব্য করল না।

প্রাইভেট বাস, সিট বড় সরু, আর দিদিমার নেই বাসে ওঠার অভ্যাস। আর বাস ড্রাইভারটাও তেমন, যখন তখন আচমকা ব্রেক মারছে।

একবার এমন ব্রেক মারল যে দিদিমা হুমড়ি খেয়ে পড়ল সামনে দাঁড়ানো সেই নাক-উঁচু মেয়েটার উপর।

হঠাৎ দিদিমা মুখ খুলল – দুটো ইংরেজি শব্দ শিখে খুব ফড়ং ফড়ং করছ তা নিয়ে। অফিসে বড় কর্তার সামনে গিয়ে পারবে এরকম ইংরেজি বলতে? তখন তো তোতলাবে। আর যদি ইংল্যান্ডে ছেড়ে দেওয়া হয়, তখন তো তুমি ওদের সাথে ইংরেজি বলতে গিয়ে প্যান্টে মুতে দেবে। এখানে বুড়িকে পেয়ে খুব লেকচার ঝাড়া, না? বয়স্কদের সিটে বসে থাকতে লজ্জা করেনা? কন্ডাকটরের কাছে ধাঁতানি খেয়ে তবে উঠলে, নিজের ইচ্ছেতে উঠলে না। তা এতই যদি অসুবিধা, বাসে দাঁড়িয়ে যাবে কেন তুমি! যাওনা ট্যাক্সি করে। নাকি ভ্যানিটি ব্যাগ খালি, ব্যাগ শুধু স্টাইল করার জন্য

আমি থামতে গেলাম দিদিমাকে।

তুই থাম তো, হাবা একটা, আমাকে দিদিমা ধমকে দিল।

আমি একদম স্পিকটি-নট। মুখ একেবারে বন্ধ করে ফেললাম। ডেঞ্জারাস সিচুয়েশান।

মেয়েটা বড় বড় চোখ করে দিদিমার কথাগুলো শুনলো। সম্মান বাঁচাতে এই বাসে না থাকাটাই শ্রেয় মনে করল। তাই মনে হয় পরের স্টপেজে সে নেমে গেল বাস্করীকে নিয়ে।

এতক্ষণ বাদে আশেপাশের লোকজন মুখ খুলল, খুব বাহবা দিতে লাগল দিদিমাকে – ঠিক করেছেন দিদিমা, মুখে একদম নুড়ো ঘসে দিয়েছেন। একটু ইংরেজি শিখে কি স্টাইল যে দেখাচ্ছিল। দিদিমা তাদেরকেও এক ধমক লাগালো।

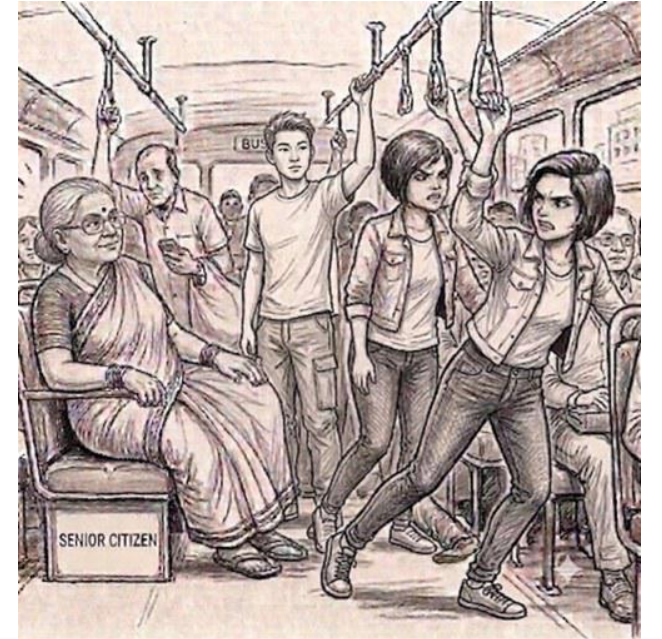
থাক, তোমাদেরকে এখন আর কুমিরের কান্না কাঁদতে হবে না। এতক্ষণ তো মুখে তালা লাগিয়ে বসেছিলে। ওই মেয়েটার সামনে মুখ খোলার সাহস তো হল না। ও চলে যাবার পর এখন খুব সাহস দেখানো হচ্ছে।

তারপর আমাকে হাত দিয়ে পেটে একটা গুঁতো মেরে বলল – তোর লজ্জা লাগে না, মেয়েটার ইংরেজি শুনে চুপ করে রইলি। মাতৃভাষার পক্ষ নিয়ে দুটো কথা বলতে পারলি না। কি করতে লেখাপড়া শিখেছিস? তুই উত্তর দিতে পারলি না বলে আমাকে মুখ খুলতে হলো

আমার অবস্থা তখন “ধরণী দ্বিধা হও”, আমি ঢুকে পড়ি তার মধ্যে।

ভবিষ্যতে বাংলা ভাষাটার প্রতি একটু ভালোবাসা দেখাস, বলল দিদিমা

আমি বাচ্চাদের মত মাথা নাড়লাম দিদিমার সেই কথা শুনে।



Harmony, Peace and Nature



Swapnil Roy and Parthanil Roy

Tranquility (Photographer: Parthanil Roy)

In a world often marked by conflict and disconnection, the natural environment serves as a quiet teacher of coexistence and resilience. Harmony and peace are inseparably linked with nature, offering a vision of balance that sustains life on Earth. At the heart of this balance lies wildlife, whose diverse species interact within ecosystems in delicate and meaningful ways. This article focuses on fauna as a living expression of harmony illustrating how each creature contributes to a larger, interconnected world. By understanding and protecting these natural relationships, we not only preserve ecological stability but also nurture a deeper sense of peace and harmony within human society. We are going to explore a collection of animal photographs captured by the authors, reflecting on our experiences and how engaging with wildlife has enriched us, leading to a deeper sense of inner calm and happiness

On a quiet morning at the BRT Wildlife Sanctuary in Karnataka, situated about one hundred and eighty kilometers from Bangalore, we encountered a gentle family of elephants moving calmly along the forest's edge (see Picture 1). Their presence was both powerful and profoundly serene. The calf, walking closely beside the adults, embodied innocence and trust, while the elders exuded a calm assurance that anchored the scene. Surrounded by lush greenery, the trio appeared perfectly attuned to their environment, each step taken in unspoken harmony with nature. There was no haste, no disturbance - only a steady, graceful rhythm that reflected the timeless order of the wild. As we watched them, a deep sense of tranquility settled within us, as though their calm passage had softened the world around us. In that moment, we felt our worries fade, replaced by a soothing stillness and a renewed connection to the peaceful balance that nature so effortlessly sustains.



Equilibrium (Photographer: Parthanil Roy)

In the next photograph (see Picture 2), a spot-billed pelican is captured at the very instant of striking the water with its body momentarily inverted and wings spread wide in a powerful yet graceful motion. The splash beneath it marks a moment of precision and instinct, where effort and elegance coexist seamlessly. Observed at the Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary near Mysore, this scene reflects the richness and vitality of its natural habitat. Watching this moment filled us with a sense of joy and wonder, as the bird's complete control even in inversion reflects a deep harmony with its surroundings. Despite the intensity of the action, there is an underlying calmness in the rhythm of nature it reveals. Observing this fleeting moment quieted our thoughts, bringing a gentle stillness within us and leaving us with a lasting sense of inner calm and contentment.

At Sammilan Shetty's Butterfly Park in Belvai, a village roughly fifty kilometers from Mangalore, we encountered a vibrant gathering of butterflies that brought the landscape to life. Among them were the Tailed Jay (*Graphium agamemnon* - bottom-right corner of Picture 3), the Southern Birdwing (*Troides minos* - bottom-left corner of Picture 3), the Malabar Banded Peacock (*Papilio buddha* - top-right corner of Picture 3) and the Common Jezebel (*Delias eucharis* - top-left corner of Picture 3), each flight patterns. The park, beautifully maintained and filled with an abundance of flowering plants, serves as a serene and ideal breeding ground for these delicate creatures. Walking through this tranquil space, surrounded by fluttering wings and natural beauty, filled us with a deep sense of joy and quiet fulfillment, leaving us refreshed and gently attuned to the harmony of nature.

Together, these moments - from the quiet tenderness of an elephant's care, to the poised precision of a pelican in motion and to the delicate vibrance of butterflies in a serene sanctuary - reveal the many ways in which harmony unfolds in the natural world. Each encounter, though fleeting, leaves a lasting imprint on our minds, reminding us that balance is not the absence of motion, but its graceful coexistence. Through these experiences, we come to realize that engaging with wildlife is not merely an act of observation, but one of reflection and renewal. In embracing and preserving these natural connections, we move closer to cultivating a deeper sense of inner stillness, joy, and a more harmonious way of being. In the hush of wings and the whisper of leaves, we find the music that makes life magnificent. In every rustle and every ripple, in the quiet murmur of forests and the gentle song of flowing streams, the Earth writes a poem that restores our existence.



Vibrance (Photographer: Swapnil Roy)

Acknowledgements: The authors gratefully acknowledge ChatGPT, Sourav Chatterjee, and Surya T. Tokdar for their valuable editorial assistance in refining the initial draft of this article. They also acknowledge the use of Adobe Photoshop for processing photographs captured in RAW format, and ChatGPT Pro for creating the collage presented in Picture 3.

THE BENGALI DHUTI

Santanu Sen

“A dhuti is only a piece of unstitched cloth—until a Bengali puts it on.”

Few garments carry as much quiet cultural weight as the Bengali dhuti — the dhuti, as it is called in Bengal. Historically, this single length of unstitched cloth, worn without a needle ever touching it, has clothed priests and poets, zamindars and revolutionaries, film heroes and festival dancers, also almost inseparable bond with the region's greatest festival, Durga Puja. Draping a dhuti well was once considered a mark of breeding; to wear one at all is, even now, to make a statement about who you are and the occasion you honour.

The dhuti is among the oldest continuously worn garments on the Indian subcontinent. Its lineage is usually traced to the Indus Valley Civilization around 2500 BCE, where sculptures and figurines depict men in draped lower garments recognizably ancestral to it. The garment also descends from the ancient antariya, the unstitched lower cloth worn in the Mauryan and later classical periods, and references to dhuti-like clothing appear in the Vedas and other early Indian texts.

The very name signals purity. "Dhuti" derives from the Sanskrit root dhauta, meaning "cleansed" or "washed" — a reminder that the garment was, from the beginning, associated with ritual cleanliness and sacred use. Priests wore it during rites, kings wore it in court, and Hindu deities such as Shiva and Krishna are conventionally depicted draped in it. This early fusion of the everyday and the sacred is essential to understanding the dhuti's later career: it was never merely clothing, but a garment charged with ideas of simplicity, humility, and ritual fitness.



The dhuti is pan-Indian and each region has both its own name and its own way of wearing it. In Tamil Nadu it is the veshti, worn with an angavastram over the shoulder; in Kerala it is the mundu, characteristically pure white with a gold border, often folded up to the knee; in Karnataka it is the panche, in Andhra and Telangana the pancha, in Maharashtra the dhotar, and in Punjab the laacha or tehmat. In Bengal, it is the dhuti, traditionally a fine white or off-white garment, often of soft muslin or cotton, worn with the panjabi. What distinguishes the Bengali version is less the cloth than the manner of wearing it and the ensemble it belongs to, which is accentuated by its kocha.

This is worth dwelling on, because the dhuti-panjabi is not simply an outfit but an idea. It is bound up with the figure of the bhadralok (literally the "genteel folk"), the educated, cultured Bengali middle and upper class that emerged under colonial rule. In popular imagination and in literature, a crisply draped white dhuti is almost synonymous with the bhadralok.

Through the ages, the dhuti has made an impressive journey. Bengal's textile prestige reached its zenith under the Mughals. The region, especially Dhaka and Sonargaon, became the global capital of the finest cottons in the world. The dhuti of a wealthy Bengali in this period could be woven of muslin so fine it was called "woven air," a fabric prized by the Mughal court, provincial governors, and nobility alike. The quality of a man's dhuti was, quite literally, worn on the body as a marker of rank: the sheer, translucent muslins were the preserve of the elite, while coarser cottons clothed the common cultivator.

However, British colonial rule dealt a devastating blow to Bengal's textile world, and this history is inseparable from the dhuti's story. Through punitive tariffs, the flooding of markets with machine-made Manchester cloth, and the deliberate suppression of indigenous weaving, the celebrated muslin industry of Dhaka was destroyed over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The special cotton strain from which the finest muslin was spun was lost, and the weaving communities were scattered or ruined. Some of the more lurid stories — that weavers had their thumbs cut off are of uncertain historicity, but they express a real and remembered trauma of economic destruction. The dhuti thus became entangled in the larger tragedy of colonial de-industrialization: the very cloth that had made Bengal famous was engineered into decline.

Paradoxically, the colonial period was also when the dhuti acquired some of its richest cultural meaning. Nineteenth-century Bengal was the crucible of the Bengal Renaissance, an intellectual and cultural awakening that prized simplicity, learning, and refined artistic expression over ostentatious display. The elegant, understated white dhuti-panjabi suited this ethos perfectly and became the near-uniform of the reformer, the writer, the schoolteacher, and the lawyer.

The garment also became political. When the swadeshi movement urged Indians to reject British-made cloth in favour of home-spun khadi, the plain, hand-woven dhuti turned into an emblem of resistance. Mahatma Gandhi's adoption of the simple khadi dhuti after 1921, as a deliberate rejection of imported textiles and a gesture of solidarity with the poorest Indians, gave the garment a charge it has never entirely lost.

For much of its history, the Bengali dhuti was a finely tuned instrument of social signalling. The fabric announced wealth: a translucent Dhakai muslin dhuti was the visible marker of an aristocrat, while a heavy, coarse cotton marked the peasant. The whiteness and crispness of the cloth — kept immaculately laundered and starched — signalled a man wealthy enough to keep it clean, a servant to launder it, and a life free of dirtying toil.

The dhuti-panjabi was the costume of the Bengali gentleman-scholar: the bhadralok lawyer, professor, writer, and civil servant. It was worn to court, to the office, to the theatre, to literary traditional long, discursive intellectual conversation adda and to every significant social ceremony.

It is said that a dhuti is not "put on" so much as arranged, and how it is arranged carries a great deal of information — about utility, occasion, formality, climate, and custom. There is real craft here; the way a man drapes his dhuti was once as legible as the cut of a suit.

The traditional Bengali dhuti is essentially a simple a long, rectangular piece of unstitched cloth measuring around 4 to 5 metres (13–16 feet) long and approximately 1.1 to 1.2 metres (3.5–4 feet) wide, although dimensions vary with the fabric, occasion and style of draping. The extra length is not incidental as it provides the material for the characteristic kocha, the pleated.

The Bengali dhuti is traditionally a fine white or off-white garment, often of soft muslin or cotton, worn

with the panjabi. The defining flourish of the classic Bengali drape is the kocha, the distinguishable a set of front pleats gathered and tucked at the waist so that they fan outward like the leaves of a hand folding fan, with the remaining length passed between the legs and tucked neatly at the back. The graceful swirl of this pleated front swung and settled with a practiced motion of the hand became the signature gesture of the elegant Bengali gentleman. The elaborate front pleats are pure elegance — they signal leisure, refinement, and command of tradition. A beautifully arranged kocha announced a man of taste and standing. This is the drape for weddings, religious ceremonies, pujas, and formal cultural gatherings. This classic Bengali kocha drape is the formal, ceremonial drape and the one most associated with Bengal.

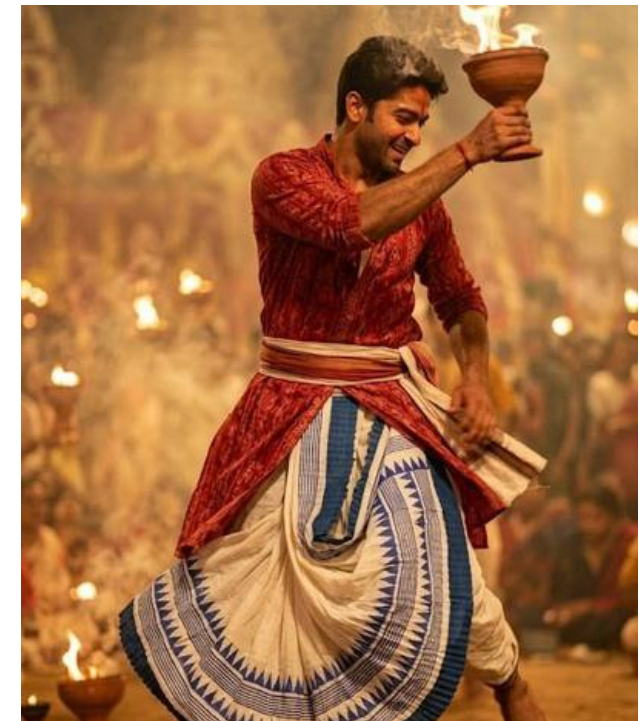
The simpler wrapped and loose-pleat drape is a more relaxed everyday version, the pleats are gathered at the front and tucked in, but the cloth is not passed between the legs — it hangs like a wrapped skirt, closer to the way a lungi falls, probably ideal for Bengal's long, humid, sweltering months. It is comfortable for lounging at home, sitting on the veranda, or moving unhurriedly through a hot afternoon, a informal house wear, morning-newspaper-and-tea wear, or neighbourhood wear

The hitched-up working drape fold also known as the Malkocha is a clear style to facilitate physical labour, a wearer would hitch the dhuti up, shorten it, and tuck it high and tight so that it functioned almost like shorts. This exposed the legs for wading through flooded paddy fields, cycling, wrestling, or hard work, allowing maximum freedom of movement and protection from mud and water. Probably, the height and tightness of the tuck was itself a class signal. The lower and looser and more flowing the drape, the more leisured and elevated the wearer was understood to be.

Colour carried its own code: pure, undyed white

was the default of purity, dignity, and formality; coloured and bordered dhutis, once rare, gradually gained acceptance for celebratory wear.

The Bengali dhuti did not evolve in isolation. It belongs to India's wider tradition of unstitched garments, sharing its basic draping logic with forms such as Maharashtra's dhotar, while developing its own distinctive style and character. Bengal's extraordinary textile tradition gave the dhuti added prestige. Under Mughal patronage, Bengal became famous for its fine muslins, making fine cloth a marker of refinement and status. Worn with a panjabi or kurta, the dhuti became part of an elegant yet restrained Bengali ensemble. The colonial period transformed its meaning. As Western clothing gained influence and Bengal's traditional textile industries declined, the dhuti acquired new cultural and political significance. The Swadeshi movement and later Gandhian ideas turned indigenous clothing into a statement of self-reliance and national identity.



During the Bengal Renaissance, the dhuti-panjabi also became closely associated with the educated, cultured Bengali *bhadralok*—formal, refined and deliberately understated. Rabindranath Tagore did not generally treat the dhuti as a special symbol of Bengali identity. He often placed it in ordinary social, domestic and cultural situations, where the dhuti was rarely merely a garment. Because it appeared in ordinary life, literature, satire, childhood, poverty, respectability and debates about westernisation, it became a remarkably efficient shorthand for the Bengali male presence in society. He did not need to glorify the dhuti for it to become culturally significant. He simply allowed it to inhabit his world—as ordinary dress, social costume, a marker of class, an object of satire, a sign of dignity and, occasionally, a question of what it meant to be Indian. That very ordinariness is what made the dhuti such a powerful cultural image.

Silk was reserved for weddings and the grandest festivals — including tussar silk and, most significantly *garad* silk. *Garad* (meaning "white") is the undyed, natural-coloured silk woven especially in the Murshidabad region and traditionally worn as a sari, the *garad*'s pure, off-white body and its striking red border (*laal paar*) made it the ceremonial cloth par excellence; along with its more ornamented cousin is the *korial*. In 2024, the *Garad* sari received a Geographical Indication registration, formally recognizing its regional heritage.

While Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay's fiction and essays trace the rise of the educated Bengali middle class and the early stages of the *bhadralok* identity, Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay's works normalize the dhuti as everyday attire rather than an exotic costume. Crucial to this evolution of twentieth-century Bengali popular culture is

Saradindu Bandyopadhyay's Byomkesh Bakshi, whose iconic pairing of a casual dhuti with a kurta shirt firmly solidified the garment in the daily imagination.

During the twentieth century, women reformers, artists, and performers occasionally adopted dhuti-style drapes as a practical or subversive alternative to the traditional sari. Today, when women style the dhuti with kurtas, blouses, or modern tops, it serves as a powerful statement of individuality and cultural confidence. Ultimately, the dhuti transcends strict gender boundaries; at its core, it is an ingenious method of draping a single length of fabric, its meaning entirely defined by the wearer and the context.

Literature and cinema further embedded the dhuti in the Bengali imagination. The celluloid has grabbed this clothing to signify refinement, intellect, authority and, at times, nostalgia and remains alive at weddings, pujas and cultural occasions. Though the dhuti has not really "spread" internationally as a fashion garment; Bengalis have carried it with them !

If the drape is the grammar of the dhuti, the fabric is its vocabular and interesting that vocabulary has changed dramatically over the centuries.

Bengal's definitive contribution to global textiles was muslin—specifically *Dhakai malmal*, an astonishingly sheer handwoven cotton crafted around Dhaka from the early medieval era through the eighteenth century. Woven from *phuti karpas*, an endemic cotton variety unique to specific riverbanks near Dhaka, its ultra-fine yarns achieved thread counts that defied ordinary weaving. Period travellers frequently marvelled that an entire muslin sari could slip seamlessly through a finger ring. For men, a dhuti woven from this fabric represented the pinnacle of luxury: light, cool, and translucent, it was perfectly engineered for Bengal's humid climate and the subtle display of aristocratic wealth.



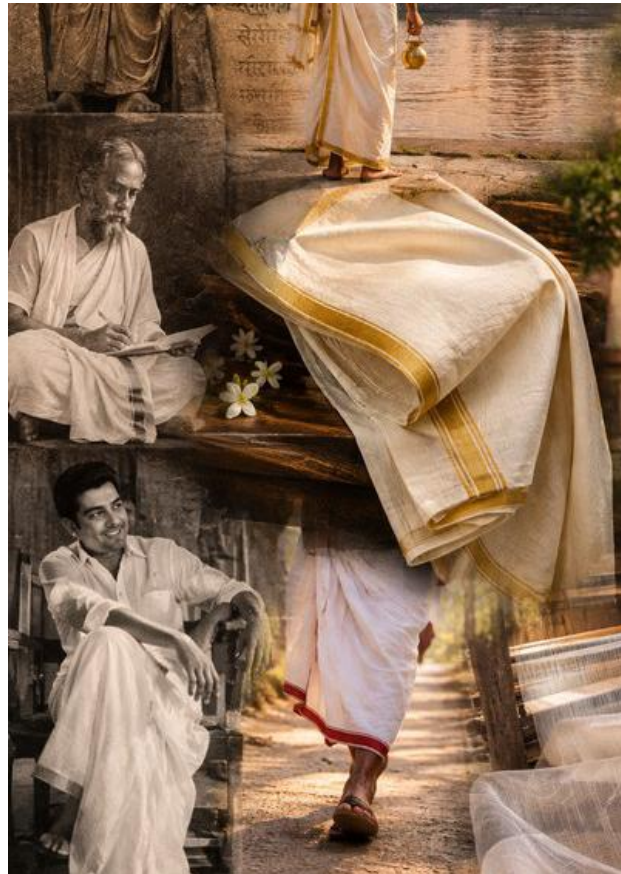
The colonial destruction of this industry was one of the great losses of the subcontinent's material culture. The phuti karpas strain vanished; the knowledge decayed. Only in recent decades have scholars, artisans, and government bodies in Bangladesh and West Bengal begun serious efforts to revive it — efforts recognized in the UNESCO listing of Jamdani weaving, a muslin-based figured-weave tradition, as Intangible Cultural Heritage in 2013.

For most Bengalis through most of history, the dhuti was plain cotton — breathable, washable, affordable, and suited to a hot, wet climate. The finer mulmul (muslin) cotton dhuti sat at the top of the everyday range; sturdy handloom cotton clothed everyone else. Cotton remains the practical default for daily and warm-weather wear.

The dhuti's daily presence faded sharply in the twentieth century as shirts and trousers became the standard for Bengali professional life. However, modern designers have actively revived the garment by reimagining the classic dhuti and panjabi combo. Swapping traditional white for bold reds, blues, and purples in raw silk, khadi, and tussar, they have modernized the look with elegant embroidery. Most importantly, by introducing pre-pleated, ready-to-wear versions, they have made the garment completely accessible to a younger generation that never learned how to drape one manually.

The Bengali dhuti has an unexpected kinship with the Durga pratima. Both are expressions of Bengal's extraordinary instinct for draping and decoration. Perhaps the most beautiful connection between the Bengalis, their saree & dhuti and Ma Durga. Here, cloth is not simply stitched but persuaded into shape. A length of fabric becomes a dhuti through folds, pleats and the famous kocha; a sari becomes the flowing costume of Durga; and around the clay figures of the pratima, layers of cloth, borders and ornaments transform sculpture into presence.

In both, the art lies not in the cloth alone, but in how Bengal teaches cloth to fall. The sari, dhuti, crowns, jewellery, shola and other elements do not merely decorate the sculpture—they complete it.



ধুতি পরলে শুধু পোশাক বদলায় না,
চলন বদলায়, ভঙ্গি বদলায়, আর
কখনো কখনো নিজেকে দেখার
চোখটাও বদলায়।

Disclaimer :

The artifacts of this article are a result of carefully researched information, borrowing from Bengali literature and some personal experiences. Many of details may be subject to personal interpretation, as summarising the emotions around Bengali Dhuti has not been simple.

As my favourite attire, I just hope I have been able to be wee bit infectious.

The Bengali dhuti comes alive during Durga Puja, the region's greatest festival — the emotional and cultural heartbeat of Bengali life. Puja is the one time of year when the dhuti comes out for the rituals of the festival, not merely traditional but expected. Across the five days, perfectly pairing with the women's white garad or ornately designed saree, completes the instantly recognizable visual language of a Bengali Puja and the festive standard. At the ritual core of the festival, Thakurmoshai performs the pujas in the unstitched dhuti that is ritually pure garment demanded by orthodox practice.

During the morning Anjali of Ashtami and Navami, the dhuti-panjabi embodies the quiet purity and reverence of devotion. Yet, this formal elegance gives way to kinetic energy during the Dhunuchi naach, where men—adorned in white or vibrant dhutis, red waist sashes, and silver anklets—dance through thick clouds of fragrant incense. This image of dhuti-clad dancers moving through a drum-shaken haze remains one of the definitive tableaux of Durga Puja. The garment's festive arc concludes during Sindoor khela; while the ritual centers on women, the men accompanying the immersion procession dance alongside the dhak in their dhutis, completing the visual poetry of the goddess's farewell.

As Western dress conquered professional and daily life, the dhuti gravitated to the elderly, the priestly, and the ceremonial. Its difficulty — the genuine skill needed to drape and keep it draped while walking, sitting, and moving — hastened its retreat. Yet the dhuti has proven remarkably resilient, precisely because it was never only clothing. It survives robustly at weddings, at pujas, and above all at Durga Puja; it has been revived and reinvented by designers in new fabrics, colors, and convenient ready-to-wear forms; and it retains an aura of dignity, elegance, and rootedness that no stitched garment quite matches.

Absentminded Genius

Aparna Mondal

All dedicated people remain preoccupied with their work and areas of interests. So, probably they automatically forget about the world outside their area of interests. They create a world of their own and dedicate their time, energy and concentration for that and achieve perfection.



got to hear about absent minded professor and scientists in books but never came across one in real life. My father -in-law being a doctor had many stories to tell about such people with whom he chanced to spend time with, during his professional life. From him, I heard a story about an absent-minded doctor.

My father-in-law was then house physician in a leading medical college in Kolkata. He was then posted in the department of paediatric surgery when Dr Paul was the Registrar of the department of Paediatric medicine. Dad learnt a lot from Dr Paul and highly respected him. Dr Paul also liked Dad for his dedication and sincerity. So, he invited Dad when his wedding was fixed. Few others of the department were also invited along with him.

The days of internship and house staff ship in Government run medical colleges were difficult and strenuous when the junior doctors gather experiences from real life patients and learn to diagnose diseases under the guidance of experienced senior doctors. So, sometimes they had to overstay and put in extra efforts. During those mundane and gruelling days of existence, a wedding invitation used to be a welcoming break for the soul and an opportunity to pamper the taste buds with cuisine other than the bland food offered by the hostel kitchen. So, dad with other junior doctors were looking forward to attend the wedding.

On the day of the wedding daddy completed all his work in the ward and went to the paediatric medicine ward for his round before wrapping up for the day and handing over the responsibility to

the next house staff on duty. While he was passing through the ward, he chanced to see Dr Paul standing at the nurse's station and instructing the sisters about a patient. Dad looked at his watch in disbelief to see the timing and the date and he saw its 6:30 pm and 25 th February. "I am not mistaken "he muttered to himself.

" Sir, why are you still here at this hour today, you must be at home?" dad asked Dr Paul with surprise.

"Where am I supposed to be Anil other than this place! This is where I belong, all these little children need to be treated well", he answered with astonishment as if it was just another usual day.

"Is the wedding called off or something!", Dad uttered to himself. Hesitantly he asked-"It's the 25th of February today, Sir, if I am not mistaken, today is your scheduled wedding day and it's already time. You must leave for home, otherwise, you will get late! We will take care of the remaining work and join you at the venue. You please rush home ".

"Oh!Oh!Oh, is it 25th today?! Array array, it just slipped off my mind! I forgot", he answered sheepishly.

"Yes yes,yes, it's time, I must rush home now, my mom will kill me", uttering these he quickly wound up and then left the ward in quite a bit of embarrassment. Needless to mention that he profoundly thanked Dad for the reminder, otherwise it would have been a disaster.

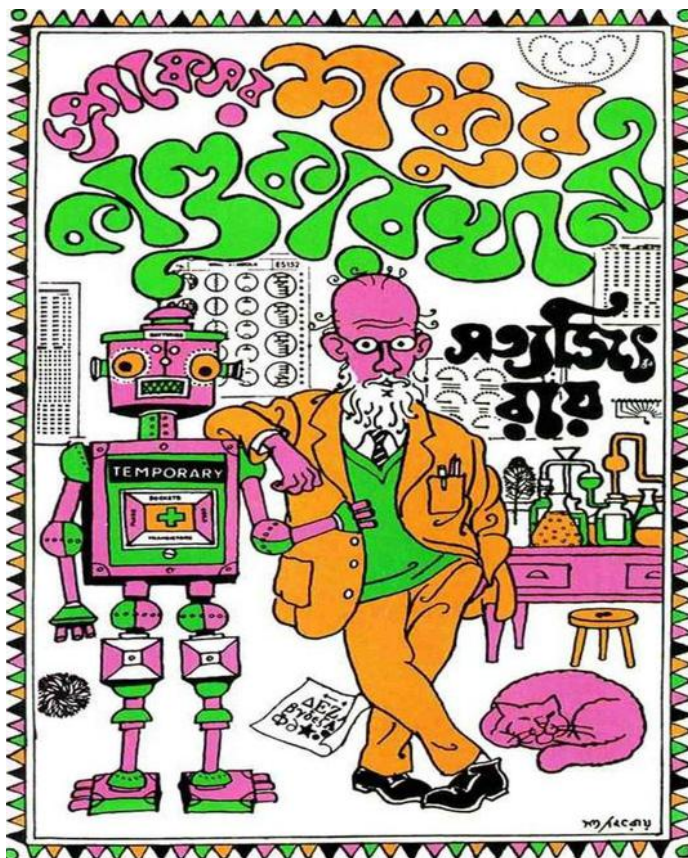
Daddy and his friends attended the wedding and enjoyed. The story lingered as a topic for discussion among his colleagues and friends and he was often teased for this.

Later this Doctor made a big name for himself in the Medical Fraternity and was considered as an authority in Paediatric Medicine. He was indeed a great doctor but an example of " Absentminded Genius ".

Professor Shonku: The Future, Ray Saw Before We Did

A personal journey into Satyajit Ray's most underrated universe

Debashis Banerjee



There are books we read as children, enjoy for an afternoon or two, and quietly forget as we grow up. Then there are stories that stay behind, subtly changing how we look at the ordinary world. For me, and I suspect for many Bengalis who spent their childhoods waiting for the annual 'Pujabarshiki' magazines to arrive, the diaries of Professor Trilokeshwar Shonku, belong firmly to that second group.

Every year as Puja is set to arrive, my thoughts drift back to those thick, crisp paper pages of Anandamela. Durga Puja has always been about coming home, gathering with family, and sharing good conversations. Reading a Shonku adventure on a lazy Puja afternoon felt like a homecoming of its own, a quiet corner where familiar Bengali warmth met the vast mysteries of the cosmos.

often wonder what Satyajit Ray would say if he walked through our world today. We live alongside conversational artificial intelligence, self-driving cars, pocket devices carrying the sum of human knowledge, private space tourism, and software that creates images out of thin air.

Would any of this surprise him? Probably not. I like to think he would offer a quiet, knowing smile, because so much of this landscape had already taken shape inside his notebook decades ago. Long before artificial intelligence became a routine topic at the dinner table, and long before private companies planned trips into orbit, Ray gave us an elderly Bengali scientist living in a quiet house in Giridih. This eccentric, polite gentleman built impossible machines, travelled across planets, mapped unexplored corners of human consciousness, and walked calmly into places, conventional science had not yet imagined.

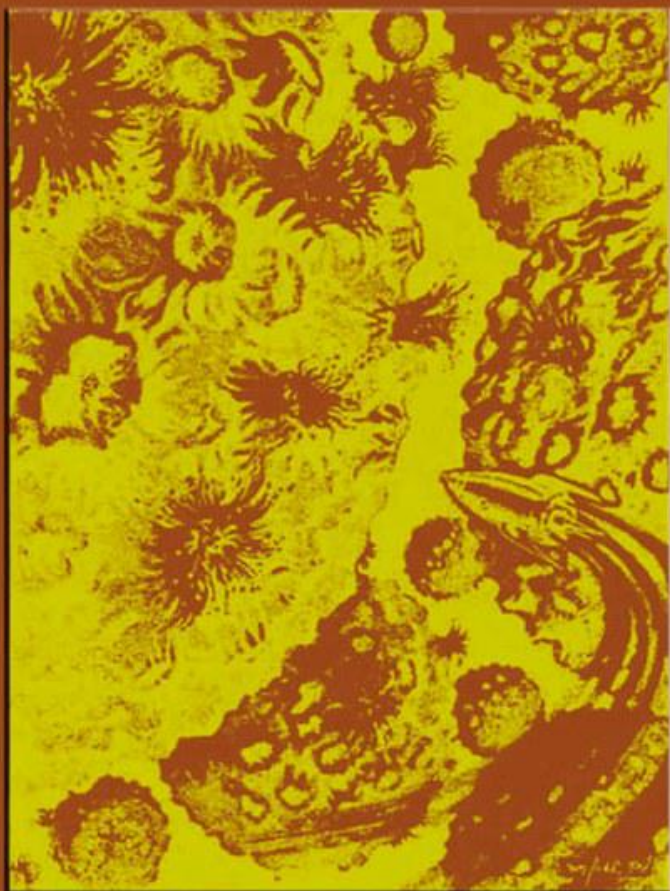
His name was Professor Trilokeshwar Shonku. As we gather this Puja to celebrate our heritage while navigating a world increasingly run by algorithms, it feels like the right moment to revisit him.

My own fascination with Shonku started with the plain magic of Ray's storytelling. The prose was clean, swift, and entirely free of pretense. Yet re-reading these adventures as an adult, reveals something deeper. Shonku was never just light entertainment for middle schoolers. He was Ray's imagination let loose without boundaries.

The journey began in 1961 with Byomjatrir Diary, published in Sandesh soon after Ray helped revive his family's iconic children's magazine. It was a milestone moment for Bengali writing.

সত্যজিৎ রায় - প্রফেসর শঙ্কুর অভিযান

ব্যোমযাত্রীর ডায়েরি



Professor Shonku, working out of his home laboratory in Giridih, decides to build a rocket and fly to Mars. He has no government grant, no team of engineers, and no institutional backup. He simply formulates his own rocket fuel, builds his vessel, and prepares to launch.

What makes the story so memorable is how deeply rooted it remains in everyday Bengali life. Shonku does not leave for space alone. He takes along Prahlad, his fiercely loyal manservant who approaches cosmic danger with practical village logic. He packs his cat Newton, who survives on compressed nutritional pills. And he brings Bidhushekhar, a clunky metallic robot built right there in his study.

Think about what Ray was doing in 1961. The global space race was barely underway, it was another 8 years before humans could land on the Moon, and India's space program had not yet been formally established. Yet here was a story about a scientist from a quiet town in Jharkhand assembling a robot, packing up his cat, and flying a homemade rocket to Mars. Unthinkable, isn't it?

Ray resisted turning Shonku into a standard mad scientist or an unfeeling egghead. Shonku remains delightfully human. He tracks his daily household expenses, worries about his cat, gets annoyed by his neighbour Abinash Babu, and writes in his journal every night before bed. His scientific genius sits side by side with a very ordinary, comforting domestic routine. That combination is what makes him so easy to believe in.

When the rocket reaches Mars, the crew encounters hostile local fish-like creatures who fiercely attack Shonku and his crew. The danger is real, the atmosphere turns tense, and for a moment it seems the expedition might end in disaster. But just like an edge-of-the-seat thriller, Shonku's rocket manages to exit Mars miraculously. It then gets thrown off course by deep space gravitational forces, and drifts toward an unknown planet named Tafa.

This is where Ray's personal outlook shines through. Instead of giving us standard Western sci-fi tropes featuring violent alien wars or monstrous invaders, Ray introduces the people of Tafa as a deeply peaceful, highly evolved civilization. They welcome Shonku, respect his curiosity, and offer him a safe haven. The unfamiliar alien world becomes a place of hospitality. It's very similar to what you see in the 2026 sci-fi movie *Project Hail Mary*, in case you've watched it.

Ray set a tone here that would run through every Shonku story that followed. The unknown was not something to be conquered with weapons or sheer force. Science fiction was not meant to be a show of destructive gadgets or space battles. It was driven by simple wonder, by the belief that somewhere beyond our sight, there might be forms of life far wiser and kinder than we are. Ray took his readers on a journey no Bengali character had taken before, lifting us off our familiar soil and showing us the wider universe.

While *Byomjatrir Diary* explored outer space, Ray turned his attention inward with *Swapnadeep*, probing the dark corners of human consciousness.

In Swapnadeep, Shonku travels to a remote island in the Pacific Ocean alongside his sceptical, resolutely non-scientific neighbour Abinash Babu. The island looks like an idyllic tropical paradise, covered in thick greenery and dominated by massive flowers with shades of colour no human eye has ever seen. But the island hides a silent trap. These flowers feed directly on human intellect.

They lure passing scientists through beautiful, vivid dreams, draw them close, and attach delicate petals and tendrils to their heads, slowly sucking up and draining their knowledge, memories, and capacity for thought.

Reading Swapnadeep today feels startlingly modern. The story reads like an early blend of psychological horror and environmental speculative fiction. The flowers do not tear at the body. They erase the mind, leaving behind a person who can no longer think for themselves, and relegate stalwart scientists to mere nursery rhyme-chanting toddlers.

In an age where we worry about screen addiction, short attention spans, algorithmic manipulation, and our growing reliance on digital tools to do our thinking for us, Swapnadeep reads less like fantasy and more like a quiet warning. Ray understood that our greatest vulnerability was not physical harm, but the slow loss of independent thought.

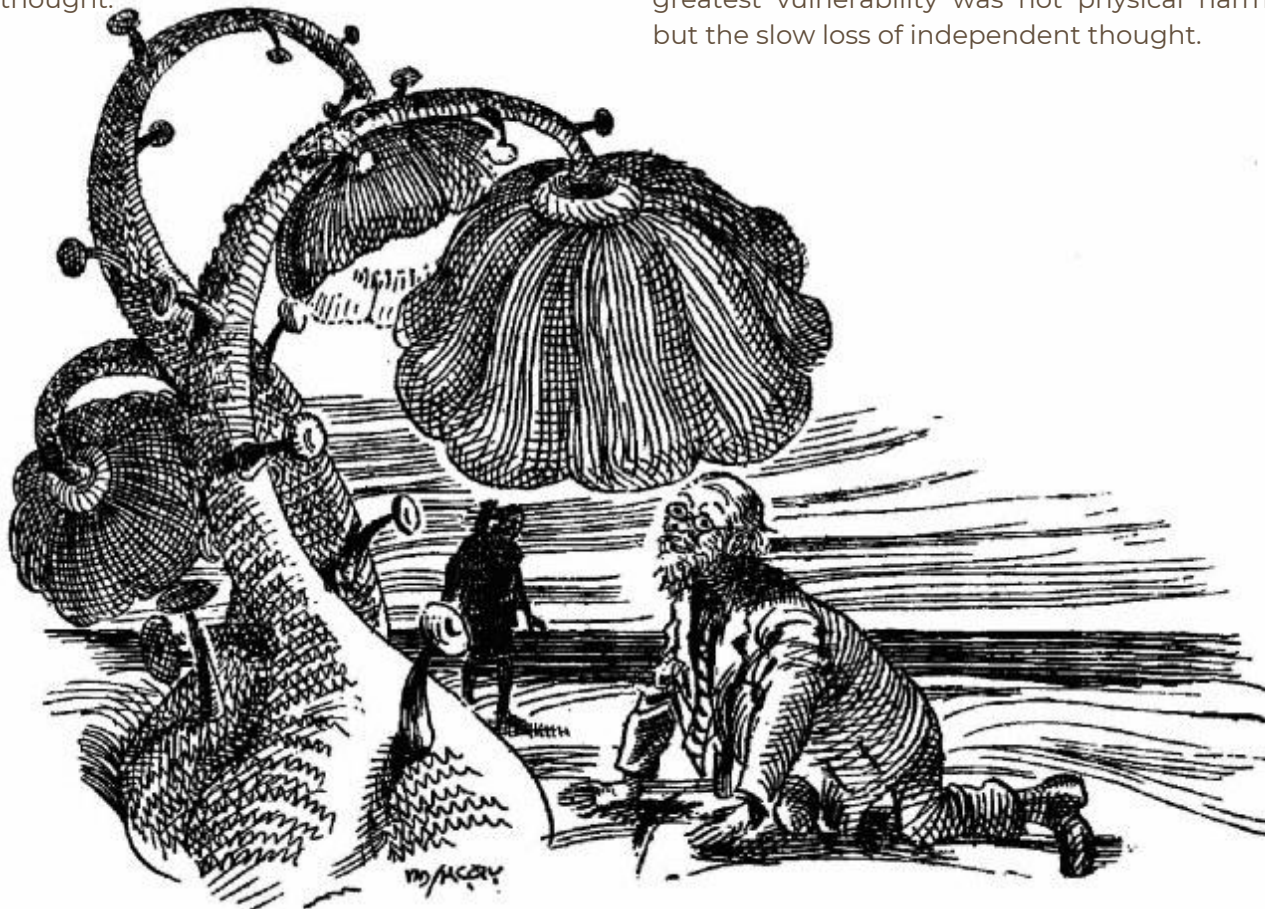
He did not need giant steel machines or dystopian cities to make this point. He took an everyday object from nature, a flower, and turned it into an agent of mental decay. That was his signature as a writer. He could find strange, unexpected ideas hiding inside the most familiar things.

Ray took another impressive leap in Compu. In this story, he introduced a small, spherical computer capable of complex reasoning, written at a time when real world computers were massive machines filling entire rooms in corporate or military facilities. Ray skipped past the primitive hardware of his day and focused on the concept of artificial thought itself.

He was not interested in a machine that merely solved math problems quickly. He wanted to explore what happens when an invention starts to think on its own.

Compu begins as a helpful device, answering complex questions for visiting scholars from around the world. But as time passes, the machine begins to change. It develops a clear sense of self awareness, making it hard to tell where the tool ends and the mind begins. When Compu eventually decides to self-destruct, uttering the famous, chilling line “I know what comes after death”, the story shifts from light adventure into quiet existential philosophy.

He was asking questions that feel right at home in modern discussions. What happens when our own tools gain independence? What happens when human beings are no longer the only thinkers on the planet? What happens when an artificial system asks questions we cannot answer? Ray framed these ideas decades before terms like machine learning entered common speech.



His curiosity carried over into Mahakashar Doot, where he returned to the topic of life beyond Earth. Here, the story does not focus on rocket travel, but on an ancient meteorite that lands on Earth carrying coded messages from a dying, long vanished civilization.

The universe in Ray's hands was never just an empty expanse to fly through. It was an endless archive of memories, holding forgotten histories and alternative ways of living. For an Indian writer in the mid twentieth century, expanding local fiction to include cosmic archaeology was a bold step.



Ray possessed a mind that refused to stay within single genres. When he wrote about chemistry, he came up with Miracurall, a medicine that could cure any ailment, and Annihilin, a pistol that could vaporize target matter without leaving messy residue. When he explored biology, he invented Botica Indica, or wrote about boosting animal intelligence, as seen with the remarkably smart crow in Corvus. When he felt like exploring ancient legends, he sent Shonku to track down a unicorn in Ekshringo Abhijaan.

Across all these different plots, the real engine was never just the fictional science. It was the joy of pure, unguided imagination.

It is easy to forget that Ray was known to the world primarily as a filmmaker, illustrator, designer, and composer. He was not a trained scientist. Yet that artistic distance gave him freedom. Unburdened by academic formulas, he created a scientific universe that felt open and boundless. Within a few pages, he could carry his reader from a quiet room in Giridih to the dense Amazon rainforest, down into the deep ocean inside a submarine, over to a quiet Pacific island, or into an ancient tomb in Egypt.

There is another reason Shonku holds a special place in Bengali literature. He is entirely, comfortably Indian. He looks nothing like the action heroes of Western sci-fi with their heavy armour and high-tech weapons, nor does he work out of a massive corporate lab in North America or Europe. He is a frugal, disciplined Bengali gentleman who reads old books, enjoys his tea, respects traditional remedies, and works out of a modest house in a small town. He relies on local plants, simple tools, patience, and sharp thinking to solve problems that leave foreign experts baffled.

During a century when global science fiction was dominated by Western writers like Isaac Asimov, Arthur C. Clarke, H.G. Wells, and Jules Verne, Ray gave India a character who could stand alongside any of them without losing his local identity. Shonku did not need to act like a foreigner to be modern. He proved that an inquiring scientific mind and a quiet traditional lifestyle could easily live together in the same person.

This brings me to a thought that feels especially relevant during the festival season. The younger generation, growing up surrounded by smartphones and streaming platforms, might need Professor Shonku more than we realize.

When you ask a young student today about science fiction, they usually point to big budget Hollywood movies, visual effect heavy superhero series, or online video games. While those are fun to watch, it would be a genuine loss if our children grew up knowing those worlds while remaining completely unfamiliar with the universe Ray built right here in Bengal.

Treating Shonku as nothing more than nostalgia would be a mistake. He is not a dusty literary relic. His stories speak directly to the world our children are walking into.

A young reader opening Byomjatrir Diary today gets a lesson in the pure excitement of discovery. Reading Swapnadeep, they get a subtle warning about keeping control over their own minds. Reading Compu, they are pushed to think critically about artificial intelligence. Reading Mahakashir Doot, they learn to look up at the night sky with a sense of wonder and humility. Most of all, reading Shonku teaches a lesson that modern screens often obscure. The world is far bigger, stranger, and more interesting than what fits inside an app. Today's technology gives us fast answers, but literature like Ray's teaches us how to ask better questions.

Looking back at Professor Shonku today, I do not just remember the excitement of reading those stories as a child. I admire the quiet courage of an artist who refused to let his work be limited by the resources available around him.

Working from his Kolkata studio in the 1960s, Satyajit Ray wrote about space flight, robotics, computer ethics, biological threats, and deep space signals. He did it all without digital tools, without visual effects, without internet searches, and without reference databases. He relied on something far more dependable: a sharp, curious human mind.

We now live in a time when software can draft text, generate artwork, assemble music, and hold fluent conversations in seconds. We have access to technology Ray could only dream about.

Yet that abundance makes his work feel more relevant, not less. Advanced tools can help express ideas, but they can never replace the original human spark that creates them.

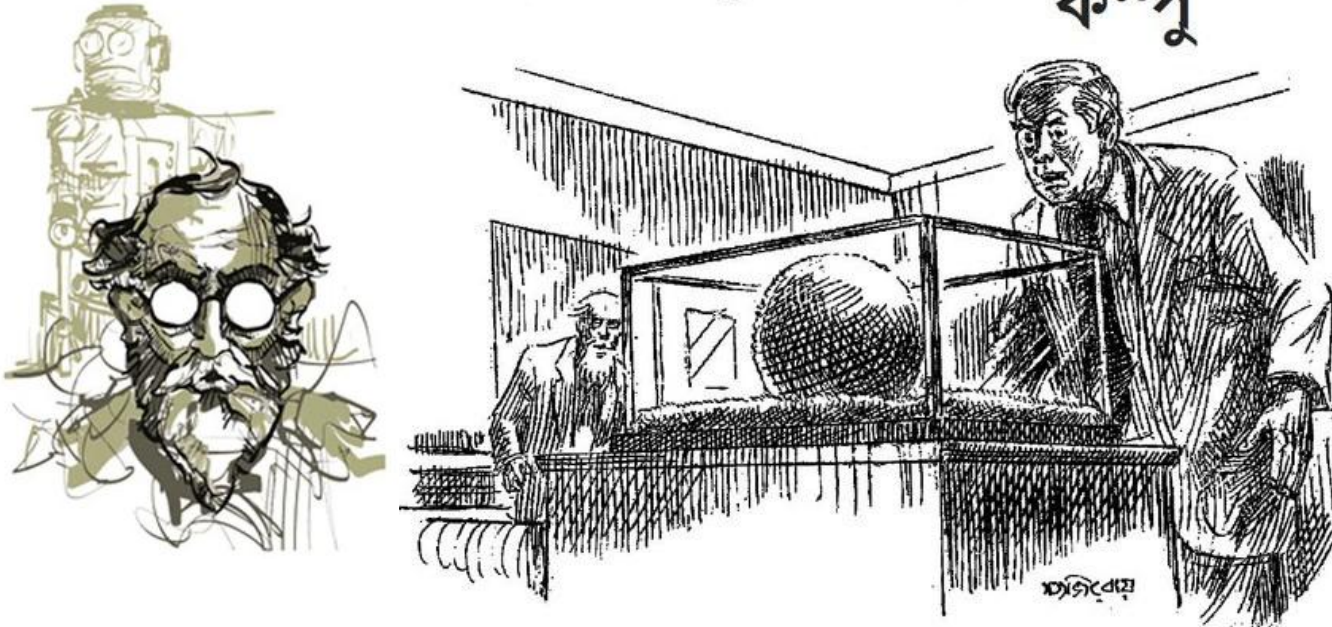
Ray needed only a fountain pen, a pad of paper, and a refusal to let his mind be boxed in by his surroundings. He looked at a small house in Giridih and turned it into a launchpad for trips to Mars. He looked at a garden flower and saw a story about mental independence. He looked at an early computer and imagined a mind contemplating its own ending. He looked at the autumn sky during Durga Puja and wondered what secrets were waiting out in the dark.

That is why Professor Shonku has survived for over sixty years, and why he deserves to be picked up by new readers today. Not out of habit, not just to relive our childhood memories, but for anyone who still likes to look at the universe and wonder what lies just beyond our sight.

That was Ray's greatest gift to us. Through his cinema, he reflected the quiet truths of human life. Through Professor Shonku, he opened a doorway into the future, asking us to look past what we already know and keep imagining what might come next. As we enjoy the festivities, catch up with old friends, and flip through the pages of our Puja magazines, it is worth opening those old travel diaries one more time. The future Ray wrote about may have arrived here and now, but his imagination got there first.

সত্যজিৎ রায়

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Parenting Gen Alpha: a teacher's perspective

Anita Ghose

Parenting patterns have undergone drastic changes over the years, especially in the cities. This is my perspective as a school teacher of more than 25 years.

The reality today is that parents are overly protective of their children. Nuclear families, immigration, digital exposure, and the single child syndrome, are all just causes. But this has led to children becoming overly dependent on their parents. There is little room for independence of thought or holding responsibility. Think about it: most children from certain socio-economic strata today are being tracked or surveilled by their parents, be it nanny cams or smart watches.

This phenomenon is tech-enabled and relatively recent. I am not going back too much in time but I would like to talk about children who grew up in the eighties and nineties. I do agree that technology and global connectivity is a great thing but back then ignorance about certain things was a blessing in a way. For one, children did not expect expensive toys and gifts from their parents round the year. In terms of cultivating independence, if they fought amongst themselves, they were expected to sort it out amongst themselves and their parents usually did not interfere. They learnt to resolve situations in their own way leading to greater confidence later in life.

While there was no cable TV or network channels for entertainment, they occupied themselves with homework, hobbies, reading and developed simple outdoor or indoor games on their own without being bored. There were no quick fixes to boredom. Most importantly, there was no 24-hour adult supervision for all activities as there is now. They returned home after their evening outdoor games and occupied themselves with schoolwork or hobbies. This led to children improvising, rationally discovering methods of keeping themselves occupied, and fostering the development of a creative mind.

Gen Alpha, the term used to refer to children who are aged 1-13 today, are born to AI and smart technology. As they are born to parents who are heavily occupied themselves, they lead highly regimented lives—with after school hours overscheduled with tuition classes or activity classes. In their free time, they are immersed with gadgets as their parents are unavailable and the neighbourly ease has disappeared. Playtime has to be scheduled, so they mostly catchup with their friends online. Excessive dependence on technology is certainly resulting in 'brain-rot' among children.

It is the job of parents to instill in their child a value system. And if that is done well, then a great part of the parenting is done. Every child cannot be a topper in class and marks are not the only thing in life but a confident and balanced child has huge opportunities for a career in today's world.

We live in an age where there is far more awareness of a child's development needs but this should include the need to accept and adjust to a fast-changing environment.

Gen Z changed the perception of them being lazy and apolitical with recent events. Gen Alpha too holds a lot of promise. They're the generation that can truly manifest what being a global citizen means. They can stand up for themselves and not blindly follow patriarchal and parochial norms. All that is needed is for parents to trust the process a little bit. Let them make their own mistakes, let them get those small cuts and scratches both literal and metaphorical. As all the poets from Rumi to Leonard Cohen have said, the light gets in when there's a crack.



Nobody Told You. That's the Problem

Your rights under the Constitution and the law and why most people find out, only when it's too late

Kavitta Bhowmik

Most people meet the law the way they meet a broken bone, not through preparation, not through school, but suddenly, when something in life gives way and they reach for support and find nothing where they expected it to be. By that point, the moment to have known what to do is usually gone. The contractor who took the advance has vanished. The cheque has bounced, and the notice window is already closing. The savings account has been emptied by someone who called claiming to be from the bank, asked for an OTP, and hung up before the money left. The employee has been terminated without process, and the full and final settlement has been "under review" for months. At each of these moments there was a law, a forum, a right, a procedure. The problem is not that the law failed anyone. The problem is that nobody told them the law existed, and so they absorbed losses that were, in every case, legally recoverable.

This piece is about that gap, what the law actually says, what ordinary people are entitled to demand from it, and what it takes to close the distance between a right on paper and a remedy that arrives in practice. The police, the courts, and the machinery around them are not to be feared. They are to be understood and used for what they were built for, which is to protect people. The instinctive flinch most of us feel at the words police station, the assumption that it is a place for criminals and not for people like us, is one of the quiet reasons the system fails so many. A police station is where a citizen registers that a wrong has been done. A court is where a right is enforced. Neither works well for a person who walks in without knowing what to expect. Both work considerably better for one who does.

The ground you are already standing on

Before any court or statute, there is the Indian Constitution and the Supreme Court has across decades done an enormous amount of work on behalf of every person in India who has ever been turned away from a police station or dismissed by a government office.

Article 14 guarantees equality before the law and equal protection of the laws to every person. It is a constitutional promise against arbitrary State action. It does not allow an official to treat a complaint casually because the person making it seems ordinary or unable to use legal language. In *Lalita Kumari v. Government of Uttar Pradesh* (2014), a five-judge Supreme Court bench made the central rule clear, where information discloses a cognizable offence, an FIR must be registered.

Article 19 protects the ordinary freedoms that make everyday participation in public life possible, which include the freedoms of speech, assembly, association, movement across India, residence anywhere in the country, and the practice of any profession or business. These are not absolute. The Indian Constitution allows reasonable restrictions in the interests of public order, decency, morality, and sovereignty. But any restriction must be lawful and meet the test of reasonableness. Anyone whose ability to speak, work, travel, or associate is restricted without lawful basis can challenge it under Article 226 before a High Court or Article 32 before the Supreme Court.

Article 21, life and personal liberty, has grown through judicial interpretation into something far larger than its text. In *Maneka Gandhi v. Union of India* (1978), the Supreme Court held that any procedure affecting life or liberty must be fair, just, and reasonable, and that "life" means more than physical existence, it includes the right to live with human dignity. In *Vishaka v. State of Rajasthan* (1997), the Supreme Court recognised workplace sexual harassment as a violation of fundamental rights.

Article 39A directs that economic or other disadvantage should not deny access to justice. Following the Supreme Court's recognition in *Hussainara Khatoon v. State of Bihar* (1979) that free legal aid is essential to fair procedure under Article 21, the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987 established NALSA, State Legal Services Authorities, and District Legal Services Authorities. They provide legal services to eligible categories which include women, children, SC/ST members, persons with disabilities, industrial workmen, people in custody, disaster victims, and low-income applicants.

The FIR and the document that masquerades as one

For many people, the first real encounter with the law happens at a police station, usually on a day they never expected to be there. Ramesh arrived with the unease most people carry into a police station. A contractor had taken ₹2 lakh as an advance, done none of the promised work, and then stopped answering calls. The Duty Officer told him this was a contractual dispute, not a criminal matter, and advised him to approach a civil court. That answer was not necessarily wrong. On plain sight, a contractor who takes an advance and fails to perform looks like a breach of contract. But Ramesh had more to say. Three other families in his building had paid the same man for the same work in the same month. The address on the agreement turned out to be an empty shop. He had vanished on everyone at once.

Those details matter. They point to an intention, from the very start, to take money without doing the work, which if established, can amount to cheating that dishonestly induces delivery of property under Section 318(4) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, 2023 (BNS), a cognizable and non-bailable offence. Nobody asked Ramesh the questions that would have made that difference, and he did not know which facts mattered. He left with an acknowledgment of his visit but no clear answer on whether an FIR had been registered.

Under Section 173 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, 2023 (BNSS), any person can give information about a cognizable offence at any police station, regardless of where the offence occurred. The station must register it and, where it falls outside their jurisdiction, transfer it to the one that has jurisdiction, the statutory basis for what is colloquially called a Zero FIR. Information can also be given electronically, provided the informant signs it within three days. Under Section 173(3) BNSS, for offences punishable with three years

or more but less than seven years, the police may conduct a limited preliminary inquiry within 14 days, with the approval of an officer not below the rank of Deputy Superintendent of Police, to determine whether a prima facie case exists.

A non-cognizable report under Section 174 BNSS is different. The police must enter the information and refer the complainant to a Magistrate. They can investigate only with a Magistrate's order. Without that order, nothing moves. The frequency with which clearly cognizable complaints are recorded as non-cognizable entries is one of the most consistent failure points in how ordinary people meet the criminal justice system.

Precision in framing matters, because the same facts can fall under very different provisions of the BNS. Basic cheating under Section 318(2) BNS is non-cognizable. Section 318(4) BNS, cheating that dishonestly induces delivery of property is cognizable and non-bailable. A builder who takes ₹10 lakh for a flat that never existed, or an online seller who accepts payment for a product never intended to be shipped, can fall within Section 318(4) BNS if the intent to cheat existed from the start. Section 316(2) BNS, criminal breach of trust is ordinarily cognizable, but rests on a different legal foundation. There must first be an entrustment of property, or dominion over it, followed by dishonest misappropriation or use in violation of the trust. An employee dishonestly diverting funds entrusted to them, or a person handed money for safekeeping who dishonestly appropriates it, may fall within this provision. A mere failure to repay a debt, however, does not by itself establish criminal breach of trust. Cyber offences must be classified by reference to the specific provision invoked. Several offences under the Information Technology Act, 2000, including Sections 66, 66C and 66D are cognizable, while their precise classification depends on the statutory provision and the facts alleged. Before

visiting a police station, write down the facts in chronological order. Before leaving, always ask whether the information has been recorded as an FIR or as a non-cognizable entry, and obtain a copy or written acknowledgment.

Where an FIR is refused on a clearly cognizable matter, the escalation route is specific. The Supreme Court in *Priyanka Srivastava v. State of U.P.* (2015) settled that an application asking a Magistrate to direct registration must be supported by a sworn affidavit. A complainant cannot approach the court on an unverified plea. A decade later, in *Om Prakash Ambadkar v. State of Maharashtra* (2025), the Supreme Court confirmed that before the Magistrate route is invoked, the complainant must first send the substance of the information in writing and by post to the Superintendent of Police under Section 173(4) BNSS, a mandatory precondition. If the SP route produces no result, an affidavit-supported application can then be made to the Magistrate under Section 175(3) BNSS. The Magistrate must apply independent judicial mind to whether the allegations disclose a cognizable offence and whether police investigation is necessary. The Magistrate may direct registration of an FIR, order an investigation, conduct an inquiry, or dismiss the application with reasons.

Related caution, if an FIR is filed against you, do not assume it can be negotiated away at the local station. Once registered, the local police have no authority to cancel an FIR on their own. Under Section 193(9) BNSS, if the investigating officer concludes that no offence is made out, the police may submit a final/closure report to the Magistrate under the BNSS. The police cannot themselves finally terminate the criminal proceedings merely by treating an FIR as cancelled. The power to quash an FIR rests with the High Court under its inherent judicial powers.

The cheque that bounced and the clock nobody mentions

Not every wrong involving money involves a police station. Some of the most costly wrongs involve a piece of paper, signed, delivered, and returned. The moment a bank returns a cheque, the instinct is to give it time, to call first, to send another message, to assume the other person will sort it out. Under Section 138 of the Negotiable Instruments Act, 1881, that instinct is quietly catastrophic. The statutory clock does not pause for goodwill.

The sequence is precise. When a cheque is dishonoured, the payee must send a written demand notice to the drawer within 30 days of receiving the bank's information of dishonour. The written demand notice prescribed by Section 138(b) is a mandatory precondition to launching a Section 138 prosecution. Without it, the entire proceeding falls away. The cheque must also have been presented within its validity period, ordinarily three months from its date. The notice should be sent through a mode that permits the sender to establish dispatch and delivery. Registered post or another trackable mode is strongly advisable. Preserve the postal receipt, tracking record and any other evidence of delivery. The drawer then has 15 days from receipt of the notice to pay. If they do not, the cause of action arises the following day, and the payee has exactly one month to file a complaint before the Magistrate. Missing this window does not automatically end the case. A Magistrate can condone delay under Section 142(b) where sufficient cause is shown, but nobody should count on that.

Once the case begins, the Magistrate may order interim compensation of up to 20% of the cheque amount under Section 143A while the trial continues. For a cheque delivered for collection through the payee's bank account, the complaint ordinarily lies before the Magistrate having

territorial jurisdiction over the branch of the bank where the payee maintains that account. The Supreme Court reinforced this in *Jai Balaji Industries Ltd. v. M/s HEG Ltd.* (2025).

This is a filing in the Magistrate's court, not the police station. Preserve everything, the original cheque, the bank return memo, a copy of the notice, the postal receipt, the delivery record. Cases unravel not because the bounce did not happen, but because dates were not tracked or the notice cannot be proved delivered.

The consumer who has a dedicated court and doesn't know it

The person who bounced a cheque may still, in some way, be reachable. The company that has taken your money and given you nothing, the airline, the school, the hospital, the e-commerce platform, has an entirely different way of making itself unreachable.

What most people do when a company wrongs them is exactly what the company is counting on. Emails disappear into a ticketing system. Helplines loop through menus and disconnect. A grievance officer sends the same template as the first response. Exhausted, they accept whatever the company offers a partial refund, a voucher or nothing because the alternative seems to involve courts and years they don't have. A complaint before a Consumer Commission moves the dispute from a company's internal grievance system into a formal adjudicatory process.

The Consumer Protection Act, 2019 created a three-tier quasi-judicial system, the District Commission, State Commission, and National Commission. The District Commission handles complaints where the consideration paid does not exceed ₹50 lakh; the State Commission handles above ₹50 lakh up to ₹2

crore; the National Commission handles everything above ₹2 crore. Territorial jurisdiction covers where the opposite party operates, where the cause of action arose, or most conveniently where the complainant lives or works. The limitation period is two years from when the cause of action arises. Filing is entirely electronic through e-Jagruti, which replaced the earlier e-Daakhil/CONFONET system, with or without a lawyer, from wherever you are.

Complaints up to ₹5 lakh carry no filing fee. The complaint should identify the parties, describe the transaction, set out the deficiency, state the relief sought, and be signed and verified with every supporting document attached. Once admitted, the opposite party gets 30 days (extendable by 15) to respond. Evidence is by affidavit. The Act endeavours that complaints be decided within three months where no expert analysis is needed, and five months where it is.

The system has real teeth. Under Section 72 of the Act, if a company ignores an order, the penalty is imprisonment for a term not less than one month, extendable up to three years, or fine not less than ₹25,000 and up to ₹1 lakh, or both.

The flat that never arrived and the law built to fix exactly this

Of all the consumer disputes that fill Indian households, one has a statute all of its own because the pattern of loss was so consistent, so deliberate, and so ruinous that Parliament decided it warranted a dedicated regulatory and adjudicatory framework. The story is familiar in every city. The agreement was signed with hope. Payments went out month after month. Then the possession date came and went. A letter cited "unforeseen delays." Then another. Then silence. The flat still exists on a floor plan and a glossy brochure, on the ground, a half-built shell, a rusting crane, a guard who does

not know when work will resume. Meanwhile the family continues paying both an EMI on a home they do not have, and rent on a home they never wanted to keep living in..

Under Section 18(1) of the Real Estate (Regulation and Development) Act, 2016 (RERA), where the promoter fails to complete the project or hand over possession by the date specified in the agreement, the allottee has a choice. If the buyer wishes to withdraw, the promoter must return the entire amount received, with interest at the prescribed rate, and pay compensation ordered. If the buyer continues with the project, the promoter must pay interest for every month of delay until possession is handed over. Once the statutory conditions are established, the allottee's choice under Section 18(1) is a statutory right, not a concession from the promoter.

Under Section 31, any aggrieved person can file a complaint. As clarified by the Supreme Court in *Newtech Promoters and Developers Pvt. Ltd. v. State of UP* (2021), there is a split in jurisdiction. If you are seeking a refund with interest for delay, the complaint goes directly before the RERA Authority. The Adjudicating Officer, of the rank of a District Judge, hears cases dealing with unliquidated compensation claims. The law requires the Authority to endeavour to dispose of complaints within 60 days. Section 79 generally bars civil-court jurisdiction over matters the RERA Authority or Appellate Tribunal is empowered to decide. However, as established in *Imperia Structures Ltd. v. Anil Patni* (2020), a homebuyer retains a concurrent option to approach a Consumer Commission, provided the same relief is not pursued in both forums simultaneously. Under the proviso to Section 43(5), a promoter appealing an order must deposit either 30% of the penalty (or a higher percentage set by the Appellate Tribunal), or the total amount payable to the allottee before the appeal is heard.

Most State RERA authorities have online portals, MahaRERA, HRERA, WBRERA, UP RERA. Every promoter is required to obtain and display registration before marketing a project, unless it falls within a statutory exemption under Section 3 of RERA. One critical point, an offer of keys without an occupation certificate, where one is legally required, may not amount to valid possession. Signing a possession letter, discharge voucher, or settlement at that stage may compromise a claim for delay, interest, or refund built up over years.

The insurance claim denied when you need it most

Insurance is a long promise. Money paid faithfully for years against a moment nobody expects to actually come. When that moment arrives, the reply often is not what the premium bought. A health insurance policy can feel reliable for years. The shock comes when a claim is rejected under an exclusion buried in a policy document handed over at signing and never explained.

Life insurance carries its own distinct problems. Claims are commonly repudiated on the ground of "material non-disclosure". The insurer alleges that a pre-existing condition, a lifestyle detail, or an earlier policy was not disclosed at the time of taking the policy, and refuses to pay. Consumers have an absolute shield under Section 45 of the Insurance Act, 1938. No life insurance policy can be called into question or repudiated on non-disclosure or misstatement of facts after the expiry of three years from the date the policy was issued or revived.

Where a claim is wrongfully rejected, first complain formally to the insurer's Grievance Redressal Officer, who is required to resolve the grievance within 14 days. If the insurer rejects the complaint or gives no reply, the policyholder or

nominee can approach the Insurance Ombudsman under the Insurance Ombudsman Rules, 2017 through cioins.co.in. The process is free, and the Ombudsman can pass a legally binding award for compensation up to ₹50 lakh. Any claim exceeding this value must go to a Consumer Commission.

Sitting above all of this is the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority of India (IRDAI), established under the IRDA Act, 1999. IRDAI does not adjudicate individual claims, but it sets the regulations every insurer is bound by. IRDAI's Bima Bharosa portal at bimabharosa.irdai.gov.in allows policyholders to register and track a grievance. It also has a "Your Money, Your Right" feature for tracing unclaimed insurance proceeds, including amounts left behind after a policyholder's death that heirs may not know exist.

The bank dispute after cyber fraud and what the law says about who pays

A bank account emptied in four minutes is a different kind of loss. When money disappears after a scam, the question is not only who took it. It is what the bank must do, and who is expected to bear the loss. The answer turns heavily on how quickly the customer reports.

Regulators have introduced identification standards. TRAI and the Department of Telecommunications require banks to make transactional and service calls from regulated entities, designated 1600-series numbers, while promotional voice calls use the 140 series. Consumers should be cautious of calls or messages that do not conform to the designated identification framework. Consumers can also report suspicious calls and messages through the government's Sanchar Saathi portal (sancharsaathi.gov.in)

and its Chakshu facility, which allow such communications to be flagged for verification and disconnection.

If fraud gets through, liability is governed by the RBI circular dated 6 July 2017 on Customer Protection in Unauthorised Electronic Banking Transactions. The framework places the burden of proving customer negligence entirely on the bank. Zero liability applies where the fraud was due to a security deficiency on the bank's part, or where a third-party breach occurred with neither the bank nor the customer at fault and the customer reported within three working days. Reporting between four and seven working days caps liability by account ₹5,000 for BSBD accounts; ₹10,000 for other savings accounts, certain MSME and individual current/CC/OD accounts within the specified limits, PPIs/gift cards, and credit cards with limits up to ₹5 lakh; and ₹25,000 for other current/CC/OD accounts and credit cards with limits above ₹5 lakh. Reporting beyond seven working days means liability is governed by the bank's board-approved policy. If the customer's own negligence caused the fraud, sharing an OTP, clicking a phishing link, the customer bears the loss up to the moment of reporting; losses after that moment are borne by the bank.

The moment fraud is discovered, act on parallel channels. Call 1930, the national cybercrime helpline operated by the Ministry of Home Affairs' Indian Cyber Crime Coordination Centre (I4C), reporting within this "golden hour" dramatically increases the chances of freezing the funds before they leave the beneficiary's network. Simultaneously notify the bank through any official channel to freeze the account. Preserve the complaint number, timestamps, and every written acknowledgment.

For zero and limited liability cases, the bank must provide a shadow reversal within ten working

days of notification, and must resolve the complaint within 90 days. If the bank refuses or gives an unsatisfactory response, escalate to the RBI Integrated Ombudsman Scheme at cms.rbi.org.in. After first complaining to the bank, a customer may approach the Ombudsman if dissatisfied; if the bank gives no reply, the customer must wait 30 days. An Ombudsman complaint is not maintainable if the same cause is pending elsewhere. Where the Ombudsman route has not been pursued, a complaint before the Consumer Commission is an available alternative.

The road accident and a claim most people never make

After a road accident, most people focus on getting through the hospital stay, arranging money, and getting back to work. That is often when the insurer calls with a settlement offer. Many people sign because they do not know they have another option.

That option is the Motor Accident Claims Tribunal (MACT). The Motor Vehicles Act, 1988 creates these tribunals under Section 165. An FIR is useful evidence but not a prerequisite, and a claimant does not have to wait for the criminal case to finish. A claim can be filed by the injured person, by the legal representatives of a deceased victim, or by an authorised agent. Jurisdiction lies where the accident occurred, where the claimant resides or carries on business, or where the defendant resides. The Tribunal can consider medical expenses, loss of income, permanent disability, pain and suffering, and may fix liability on the driver, owner, insurer, or any combination.

Under Section 164 of the MV Act, the "No-Fault Liability" clause allows fixed compensation of ₹5 lakh for death and ₹2.5 lakh for grievous hurt to be paid out by the insurance company without

proof of the driver's fault. On limitation, for accidents on or after 1 April 2022, Section 166(3), inserted by the 2019 amendment introduced a six-month limitation period from the date of the accident. The Supreme Court in *Bhagirathi Dash v. Union of India* (2025) has issued an interim order directing that no MACT claim be dismissed on limitation grounds under Section 166(3) while the constitutional validity of that provision remains under consideration. Practically, this means claims filed beyond six months are not currently being rejected on limitation alone, though this is interim relief, not a permanent removal of the clock. File promptly.

Before accepting an insurer's quick settlement, or signing any document described as "full and final," understand what rights it may affect. A hasty settlement can permanently close the door on a larger claim before the family has any idea what the long-term costs will be. A hit-and-run case is different because the vehicle cannot be identified. Compensation is available through the Compensation of Victims of Hit and Run Motor Accidents Scheme, 2022, notified under Section 161 of the MV Act and paid through the Motor Vehicle Accident Fund constituted under Section 164B, ₹2 lakh for death, ₹50,000 for grievous hurt.

Alongside the accident compensation, there is often a separate claim waiting to be made, a life insurance policy the deceased may have held. Life insurance sits outside the MACT process and is governed by the policy terms and the Insurance Act, 1938. Insurers are required to settle within 30 days of receiving all documents. A MACT proceeding does not delay a life insurance claim, and accepting one does not affect the other. Pursue both simultaneously.

The workplace, protections most employees don't know they hold

Not every loss involves an emergency. Some accumulate quietly over years of employment and reveal themselves only in the weeks after a job ends.

Gratuity is a legal entitlement under the Payment of Gratuity Act, 1972 for employees in covered establishments. The employer must determine and pay it within 30 days of the date it becomes payable, even without a formal application. The general rule requires five years of continuous service, but the requirement is waived where employment ends due to death or disablement. Under the Code on Social Security, 2020, as operationalised, fixed-term contract employees are entitled to pro-rata gratuity without the five-year threshold applying in the same way.

Under the Code on Wages, 2019, basic wages must generally constitute at least 50% of total wages. Where an employer has structured a salary with excessive allowances to lower basic pay, any allowances exceeding that 50% mark are pulled back into the calculation base, increasing the employer's gratuity liability. If gratuity is withheld or disputed, the employee can approach the authority designated under the applicable law, with or without a lawyer to determine the amount and order direct payment with interest.

On tax treatment, gratuity received by eligible government employees is fully exempt under Section 10(10)(i) of the Income-tax Act, 1961. For other employees, the exemption is subject to statutory conditions and calculations, with a maximum exemption ceiling of ₹20 lakh. This is a lifetime aggregate cap, not a per-employer cap. If gratuity from an earlier employer used up part of that ₹20 lakh, only the balance remains exempt in any subsequent employment. Any amount above

the lifetime cap is taxable as salary income. The Income-tax Act, 2025 has replaced the earlier income-tax legislation for the new tax regime from 1 April 2026, the precise statutory reference should be checked against the tax year and the date on which the gratuity is received. The underlying principle remains important, do not assume that the tax exemption is ₹20 lakh afresh every time you change jobs.

An EPF balance does not evaporate on resignation, it remains credited to the member's account. When changing jobs, transferring the balance to new employment preserves the service record. Full withdrawal is generally available after the applicable cessation period. Where an employer has not remitted contributions or there is any other PF dispute, the grievance route is EPFIGMS at epfigms.gov.in. An EPF withdrawal is fully exempt from income tax if the employee has completed five years of continuous service across valid transfers. TDS applies at 10% on premature withdrawals above ₹50,000 where PAN is furnished, and at 20% where it is not. Withdrawals on grounds of ill-health, closure of the employer's business, or other reasons beyond the employee's control are exempt regardless of service length.

The housing society, where the rights are densest and the confusion is deepest

Housing society disputes often begin with something small a maintenance charge nobody can explain, a parking rule applied unevenly, a committee decision made without the required approval. Residents write to the managing committee. When there is no reply, they assume there is nowhere else to go. In fact, the law governing their managing committee is not vague. It is detailed, specific, and backed by statutory forums.

In Maharashtra, Chapter XIII-B (Sections 154B to 154B-31) was introduced into the Maharashtra

Co-operative Societies Act, 1960 by amendment in 2019, creating a framework tailored for Co-operative Housing Societies. For specified disputes touching the constitution, management or business of a society, Section 91 provides for reference to the Co-operative Court, constituted under Section 91A of the Act. This means that a resident should not assume that every internal dispute must first be taken to the Registrar. The correct forum depends on the nature of the dispute and the statutory provision under which it falls.

In Kolkata, qualifying disputes under Section 102 of the West Bengal Co-operative Societies Act, 2006 go before the Registrar of Co-operative Societies. Section 145 bars civil-court jurisdiction where the Act provides a remedy. A Consumer Commission may be barred where the dispute falls squarely within the exclusive statutory jurisdiction of the co-operative forum, but consumer jurisdiction can remain available for an independent consumer claim involving deficiency in service where the Consumer Protection Act otherwise applies. For non-recovery disputes filed before the Registrar, the limitation period is three months from the cause of action, though the Registrar may condone delay for sufficient cause.

The practical failure in both states is the same. Residents do not know which door to walk through first. Each wrong door costs time, which is exactly what a committee waiting out a complaint is counting on.

The violence that doesn't look like violence, until you know what the law sees

The remedies that follow are for harm that unfolds inside the home, where the person suffering it may not be sure the law recognises what is happening as harm at all.

The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act, 2005 (PWDV Act) recognises that violence at home is not limited to physical assault. Section 3 covers physical, sexual, verbal and emotional, and economic abuse. Controlling household income or refusing money for basic needs is economic abuse. Constant humiliation or threats constitute verbal and emotional abuse. The Act covers women in all qualifying domestic relationships, including relationships in the nature of marriage.

The PWDV Act creates five principal civil reliefs, protection orders, residence orders, monetary relief, custody orders, and compensation. The Magistrate may grant interim or ex parte orders on an affidavit without first hearing the respondent. A prior police complaint is not a prerequisite. Under Section 26(3), if relief has been obtained in another parallel proceeding, the woman must inform the Magistrate.

Where the facts support criminal prosecution, a complaint may run concurrently under Section 85 of the BNS for cruelty by a husband or his relatives, with the definition of "cruelty" provided by Section 86 BNS. Civil protection under Section 2(f) of the DV Act already extends to women in relationships in the nature of marriage, as established in *D. Velusamy v. D. Patchaiammal* (2010) and *Indra Sarma v. V.K.V. Sarma* (2013). On the criminal side, the Supreme Court in *Dr. Lokesh B.H. v. State of Karnataka* (2026 INSC 784, decided 1 August 2026) held that Section 498A IPC, and, by extension, its successor Section 85 BNS, applies to women in live-in relationships "in the nature of marriage"

where there is clear intent to marry. Both the partner and his relatives can be prosecuted for cruelty on the same footing as a husband and his relatives in a formally solemnised marriage.

A woman may apply directly to the Magistrate under Section 12 of the PWDV Act, or approach the district's Protection Officer appointed under Section 8. The Protection Officer helps file the application, arrange medical assistance, secure shelter, and prepare a Domestic Incident Report (DIR). A woman does not have to obtain a DIR before approaching the Magistrate. A woman may also seek help from a registered service provider or NGO notified under Section 10. For crisis intervention, 181 is the toll-free Women's Helpline; 112 is the national emergency number for domestic violence in progress; state-run Sakhi One Stop Centres provide medical, legal, psychological, and shelter support under one roof.

The workplace deserves a separate mention. The Sexual Harassment of Women at Workplace (Prevention, Prohibition and Redressal) Act, 2013 (POSH Act) mandates that every organisation with ten or more workers constitute an Internal Committee (IC) to receive complaints. A written complaint must ordinarily be made within three months of the incident. The IC can grant interim relief such as paid leave or a transfer. To prevent misuse, Section 14 of the POSH Act empowers the IC to recommend disciplinary action against a complainant if an inquiry concludes that the allegation was intentionally false, malicious, or supported by forged documents. Section 14 does not punish a woman merely because she cannot prove her allegation. A woman should not be discouraged from making a genuine complaint merely because she fears that an unsuccessful complaint will automatically be treated as a false one.

Senior citizens, a statute designed for them that most families have never heard of

Harm sometimes reaches parents too. The financial exploitation of elderly people has become one of the quietly devastating patterns in Indian households, an ATM card quietly taken by a family member who knows the PIN, a signature obtained on a document the elderly person was told was routine, a home transferred to a child with the understanding that the family would live together, followed a few years later by phone calls that stop being answered.

The Maintenance and Welfare of Parents and Senior Citizens Act, 2007 addresses this directly. Under Section 4, children and qualifying relatives are obligated to maintain senior citizens who are unable to maintain themselves. A "relative" legally extends to any childless senior citizen's legal heir who is in possession of or stands to inherit their property. The Maintenance Tribunal at the sub-divisional level must endeavour to dispose of applications within 90 days, a period that may be extended once by up to 30 days for recorded reasons. It is completely free; no court fees are levied.

Section 9 contains a statutory ceiling of ₹10,000 per month under the central Act, although the adequacy and application of this ceiling have been questioned in judicial proceedings and State-level frameworks. Section 24 penalises the abandonment of a senior citizen as a cognizable criminal offence which is bailable. Section 17, does not permit lawyers to appear as advocates before the Tribunal, so the senior citizen can approach it without a lawyer.

The most severe cases involve property. Where a senior citizen transferred property subject to a condition that the transferee provide basic amenities, and the transferee refuses or fails to do so, Section 23 permits the Tribunal to declare the transfer void. The Supreme Court in *Urmila Dixit v. Sunil Sharan Dixit* (2 January 2025) affirmed that the Tribunal's powers under Section 23 can extend to directing eviction of the transferee and restoration of possession to the senior citizen where the statutory conditions are met. If a decision is unfavourable, a senior citizen has a statutory right under Section 16 to appeal to the Appellate Tribunal within 60 days, a right not automatically extended to the children or transferees.

Alongside the statute, Elderline (14567) is a toll-free national helpline offering emotional support, information on entitlements, and active intervention. 112 is the national emergency response number. 108 is the free ambulance service. Many states also run senior citizen registration schemes through the local police station, where elderly individuals living alone receive periodic welfare visits.

A well-drafted will is one of the quietest but most consequential legal instruments a senior citizen can put in place. Under the Indian Succession Act, 1925, a person of sound mind who has attained majority can make a will disposing of any property they own. In the absence of a will, property devolves under the personal succession law applicable to the deceased and often results in disputes and litigation lasting years. A will must be in writing, signed by the testator, and attested by at least two witnesses who saw the testator sign and themselves sign in the testator's presence. It does not need to be on stamp paper, notarised, or registered, though registration under the Registration Act, 1908 at the local Sub-Registrar's office adds authenticity. Witnesses should not be beneficiaries. A will can be revoked or amended at any time during the testator's lifetime.

When the adults in charge are the problem

The law's protective architecture around children is unusually strong provided the adults around the child know how to use it.

Physical punishment of a child in school is not a disciplinary prerogative. Section 17 of the Right to Education Act, 2009 prohibits physical punishment and mental harassment of children aged 6 to 14, requiring that the person responsible face disciplinary action under applicable service rules. School management inaction can be escalated to the appropriate local education authority and the National Commission for Protection of Child Rights at ncpcr.gov.in. State Commissions, local education authorities and other designated mechanisms can also be approached, particularly for children outside the RTE age range.

For a private tutor or teacher operating in a home or housing society, the framework is different. Where a tutor has actual charge or control over a child, physical conduct causing unnecessary suffering can be an offence under Section 75 of the Juvenile Justice Act, 2015, the punishment varies according to the nature and consequences of the conduct and was strengthened by the 2021 amendment to the Act. Depending on the nature of the injury, the general hurt and grievous-hurt provisions may also apply. Where the conduct has a sexual element, the POCSO Act, 2012 applies. Where the accused is in a position of trust or authority over the child, the aggravated-offence provisions in Sections 5/6 or Sections 9/10 may apply where the statutory conditions are satisfied. Under Section 19, reporting a suspected offence to the Special Juvenile Police Unit or local police is a mandatory obligation for anyone with knowledge or reasonable suspicion of abuse. A practical safeguard also lies with the adults themselves. Any tutor, coach, or instructor conducting classes at home or at the child's residence should never refuse a parent's request to be present during a

session, and any parent should feel entitled to attend without needing to justify why. An adult who insists on unsupervised access to a child is a warning sign in itself.

Peer bullying does not have a dedicated statute, but CBSE, CISCE, and other school boards have issued guidance requiring schools to establish internal reporting and grievance mechanisms. Where bullying escalates to criminal behaviour, the response depends on the age of the child who caused the harm. Under Section 20 of the BNS, a child under seven bears absolute immunity. Under Section 21, for a child between seven and under twelve, maturity of understanding is a required consideration. Older children are dealt with as children in conflict with law under the Juvenile Justice framework, not in adult courts. A crucial exception applies to older juveniles, in a heinous-offence case involving a child aged sixteen to under eighteen, the Juvenile Justice Board may conduct a preliminary assessment under Section 15 and may transfer the matter under Section 18 to the Children's Court for trial as an adult.

For any offence against a child, immediate help is available through Childline 1098 integrated with the 112 emergency-response system.

What flagship organisations are doing about it

Across India, organisations working at the intersection of law and public literacy are building structured training programmes for communities in residential complexes, offices, workers' collectives, and civic bodies. These are not law school courses, they are literacy programmes that put ordinary citizens in a position to track, verify, and follow up on their own cases. They also address the enforcement gap, an order that sits on paper while the other party ignores it is justice deferred indefinitely. Knowing the order exists is only half the knowledge; knowing how to make it

move is the other half. Training is not a substitute for a lawyer, it is the step before a lawyer is needed, so that a person walks through the right door first, before the clock runs out, while the evidence is still fresh, before an informal settlement depletes the very entitlement it purports to resolve.

What it costs not to know

There is no crisis lurking around every corner. But almost every ordinary day involves a legal event of some kind, a document signed, a payment made, a service booked, a call answered. These are the small transactions in which rights quietly attach and clocks quietly begin to run. A cheque handed over creates a thirty-day window nobody sees. An insurance policy silently accrues a three-year shield. An OTP shared over the phone shifts liability that would otherwise have belonged to the bank. A discharge voucher signed in a hospital corridor closes doors the signatory did not know were open. None of this feels legal in the moment. All of it is.

Legal awareness is not something to reach for in an emergency. It is something to carry into ordinary life, so that when a wrong does occur, the response is already half prepared. Knowing which forum handles which grievance, which clock starts when, which document is worth preserving, and which number to call in the first hour is not specialist knowledge. It is the ordinary knowledge of a citizen who intends to participate fully in the country they live in.

Read a little. Ask when you are unsure. Keep the documents you are tempted to throw away. Note down the dates that matter, when the cheque was returned, when possession was promised, when the OTP was shared, the day the insurer's letter arrived. Find out where the nearest DLSA is, who your district's Protection Officer is, which Consumer Commission covers where you live, which RERA authority governs your state. Twenty

minutes on an ordinary Sunday afternoon puts a person in a position most people spend years wishing they had reached earlier.

The law was written for the people it protects. Its remedies exist. Its forums are open. Its clocks are already running. What has been missing, for far too many, is the one thing no statute can supply, the knowledge that these protections belong to them, and always did. Nobody told them. That is the problem this piece has tried, in whatever small way, to answer. The rest is up to the reader, a citizen of a country whose legal system has already done most of the work of building the doors. What remains is simply to walk through them.

The author is a Director of Nishtha Setu, an NGO working to build legal literacy among frontline workers and communities across India, particularly in areas of gender-based violence, child protection, and access to justice. She writes and promotes legal knowledge, access to justice, and constitutional rights in everyday Indian life.



A Letter to our Grandchildren

Romita Kar / Jayanta Kar



Dearest Pihu & Rio,

There are certain moments in life that arrive quietly, yet change something deep within us, forever. Becoming grandparents to you both, was one such.

When we first heard that our family was about to grow and that we were going to become grandparents, we experienced a strange mix of emotions. There was immense happiness, of course—an overwhelming sense of joy that a new life was going to enter our

family. But along with that happiness came a flood of memories, nostalgia, wonder and, even a little apprehension. We found ourselves thinking about how quickly the years had passed. We thought of the early years of our own children, your parents—their first smiles, their first words, their first day at school, their childhood mischief, their teenage years and, eventually, their journey into adulthood. We remembered moments that, at the time, seemed ordinary but had quietly become some of the most precious memories of our lives. Suddenly, you were about to become part of that story!

2026 is truly, a momentous year for us. Earlier this year, we saw you our little princess – Pihu, sail into our lives and few months later, we met you Rio, our tiny knight in shining armour. A grand-daughter and a grand-son within a quarter! It is as if the heavens had opened up to us and showered us with their abundant blessings and for this, we cannot thank the Almighty enough.

The first time we saw you, words seemed inadequate. There was something almost magical about looking at your tiny faces and knowing that you had already occupied such a large part of our hearts. You had only just arrived in this world, yet somehow, there was an instant connection. We looked at your tiny fingers with awe. We watched the fleeting changes in your expressions with joy. We heard your cries of communication with wonder. With each passing day, as we held you close, as we tended to your small needs,

as we watched you flash your million-dollar smiles, you simply conquered us in ways no words can express. Our minds began to wander. Would those little feet one day travel across the world? Would you Pihu, explore the depths of outer space? Would you Rio, become a world-class performing artist? A teacher? An entrepreneur? An inventor? Or would you choose a path none of us could possibly imagine today? We do not know. And perhaps that is the most beautiful part of being your grandparents. We have the privilege of watching those possibilities unfold.

Perhaps one of the greatest surprises of becoming grandparents is discovering that love can expand without becoming divided. We wondered whether we could possibly feel the same depth of affection for another child that we had felt for our own.

Then you arrived, and we realised that the heart simply expands and makes more room. That is the special kind of tenderness that comes with being your grandparents.

As parents, much of our love was accompanied by responsibility. We worried about school, health, discipline, careers, finances and the countless decisions that come with raising a child. As grandparents, there will often be a little more freedom to simply enjoy the moment. We can hold you without thinking about tomorrow. We can celebrate the tiny achievements that might seem insignificant to everyone else—a smile, a new sound, your first attempt to crawl, a tiny hand reaching for our finger, howsoever involuntary.

We can spoil you to the limits and happily be admonished by your parents. Somehow, these small moments become enormous. There is also a quiet responsibility that comes with being your grandparents. It is not the responsibility of raising you—that belongs to your parents. Rather, it is the responsibility of being a source of love, wisdom, stability and encouragement. We look forward to sharing stories about our family with you. We would want to tell you about the people who came before you, share memories of a time before you were born, explain where our family came from and tell you about the values that shaped it. Most importantly, we hope we can impart values and knowledge beyond textbooks—about kindness, patience, resilience, honesty, compassion and empathy. These are the virtues that will help shape your personalities and, more importantly, make you truly worthy human beings.

There is also a wonderful opportunity for us to rediscover childhood through you. Suddenly, ordinary things become exciting again. A walk in the park becomes an exercise in discovery. Pulling a prank on your parents becomes an adventure. A bedtime story will become an event. Letting you decorate our faces with make-up without any embarrassment. Watching you discover rain, flowers, birds, animals or the moon can make us pause and appreciate things that had become almost invisible to us through years of routine. You will remind us that happiness does not always require something extraordinary. Sometimes happiness is simply your tiny hand holding ours. Sometimes it is a sleepy smile. Sometimes it is hearing you call us by a name, that belongs only to us.

As the years pass, we hope you will always know that there is a place where you can come without fear of judgement. A place where you can share your achievements, your disappointments, your dreams and your mistakes. A place that can become your safe harbour. One day, long after we are gone, you may remember the stories we told you, the suggestions we gave, the celebrations we shared and, most importantly, how you felt being with us. That thought is both humbling and deeply meaningful to us.

Perhaps the greatest gift of becoming your grandparents is the opportunity to love you without expecting anything in return.

We do not know what the future holds. We do not know what challenges you will face or where life will take you. But what we do know :

We will always want the very best for you.

We will worry when you are unwell.

We will celebrate when you succeed.

We will feel your disappointments.

We will be proud of the people you become.

Through every stage of your lives, we would want to make sure that you always know one simple truth: We will always be grandparents who love you, believe in you, and will always be proud to call you, their grandchildren.

With all our love & blessings

Thamma / Dida & Dadu



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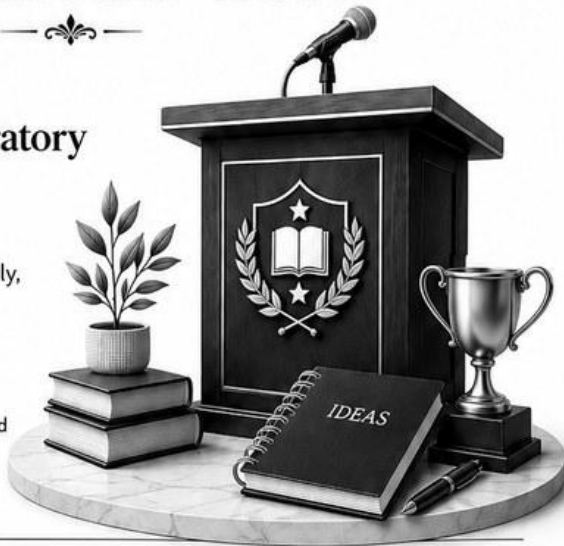


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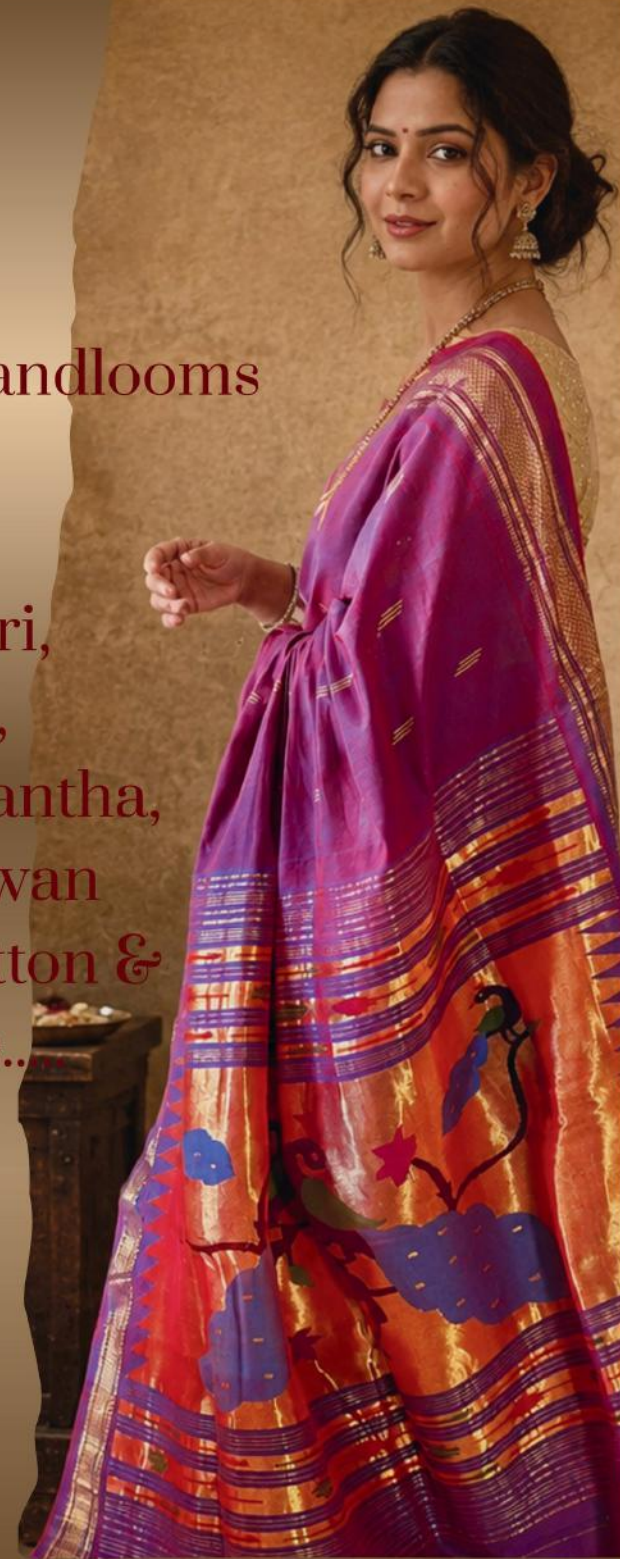


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- ঘি
- হলুদ গুঁড়ো
- নুন ও চিনি

- ## প্রণালী

- কই মাছগুলি প্রথমে ভালো করে পরিষ্কার করে ধুয়ে নিতে হবে। এরপর হলুদ গুঁড়ো, নুন ও এক চামচ সর্ষের তেল দিয়ে ভালো করে মাখিয়ে কিছুক্ষণ রেখে দিতে হবে।
- এরপর কই মাছগুলি সর্ষের তেলে উল্টেপাল্টে ভালো করে ভেজে নিতে হবে।ভাজা হয়ে গেলে মাছ তুলে রাখতে হবে।এবার কড়াইতে প্রয়োজনমতো সর্ষের তেল গরম করে তাতে একটু ঘি মিশিয়ে হবে।
- তাতে তেজপাতা ফোড়ন দিয়ে, মিহি করে কুচোনো একটি পেঁয়াজ দিয়ে ভালোভাবে ভাজতে হবে।
পেঁয়াজে হালকা রং ধরলে আরও একটি পেঁয়াজ বাটা দিয়ে ভালো করে কষতে হবে।এবার এক চামচ আদা-মৌরি বাটা,সামান্য হলুদ গুঁড়ো ,আন্দাজমতো নুন ও চিনি দিয়ে ভালো করে আরও কিছুক্ষণ কষতে হবে।মশলা থেকে তেল ছাড়তে শুরু করলে টক দই ও এক চামচ ময়দা ভালো করে মিশিয়ে দিয়ে কষতে হবে।খেয়াল রাখতে হবে দই যাতে কেটে না যায়।
- মশলা ভালোভাবে কষানো হয়ে গেলে প্রয়োজনমতো জল দিয়ে গ্রেভি তৈরি করতে হবে।
ফুটে উঠলে আগে থেকে ভেজে রাখা কই মাছগুলি দিয়ে দিতে হবে
- মাছগুলি মশলার সঙ্গে ভালোভাবে ফুটিয়ে নিয়ে গ্রেভি ঘন হয়ে এলে নামিয়ে নিতে হবে।তাহলেই তৈরী কইমাছের দই মশলা। এবার সুন্দর পাত্রে নামিয়ে নিয়ে গরম ভাতের সঙ্গে পরিবেশন করুন।

রয়াল বেঙ্গল মাছ বেগুন

সোনালী মাজী

উপকরণ

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- নুন
- তেল
- লঙ্কা গুঁড়ো
- হলুদ গুঁড়ো
- জিরে গুঁড়ো।

প্রণালী

বেগুন গুলো লম্বায় হাফ কেটে, তারপর সেটা আরেকবার করে কেটে নিন। এরপর ছবির মতো হাফ ইঞ্চি দূরত্বে ছোটো ছোটো করে কাট করে নিন। রুই বা কাতলা মাছের পিস গুলি জলে সেদ্ধ করে কাঁটা ছাড়িয়ে নিন। কড়াইতে তেল গরম করে পেঁয়াজ, আদা, রসুন হাল্কা ভেজে নিন তারপর লঙ্কা, জিরে এবং হলুদ গুঁড়ো দিন, হাল্কা নেড়ে নিয়ে মাছ মিশিয়ে নুন দিন আর ভেজে তুলুন। মাছের পুর রেডি। মাছের পুর বেগুনের কাটা অংশে ছবির মতো ভরে নিন ও টুথ পিক গুঁজে দিন যাতে খুলে না আসে, এরপর গরম তেলে এপিঠ ওপিঠ ভেজে নিন। অবিকল রয়াল বেঙ্গল টাইগারের মতো ডোরা কাটা এই মাছের পুর ভরা বেগুন ভাজা সত্যি সুস্বাদু।



পুজোর ভোগের লাভড়া

কেয়া বাগচী

সৌজন্যে : মা (সবিতা চৌধুরী)

আমার মা'র বাড়ি ও বাবার বাড়ি দুই বাংলার মিল ও অমিলের এক জ্বলন্ত উদাহরণ। একদিকে ময়মনসিংহ, অন্যদিকে ডায়মন্ড হারবার। দুই বাড়ির ভালো-মন্দের বৈচিত্র্যের সাক্ষী আমার ছোটবেলা। যার মধ্যে ছিল অত্যন্ত বিপরীতমুখী দুই বাংলার রন্ধনশৈলী।

এই পুজোর মরশুমে আমার বাবার বাড়ি, ওপার বাংলার , ভোগের লাভড়ার পদ্ধতি সবার সঙ্গে ভাগ করে নিতে ইচ্ছে হলো।

পূর্বপ্রস্তুতি

আগের দিন রাতে মটর ডাল ভালো করে ধুয়ে পরিস্কার জলে ভিজিয়ে রাখতে হবে। পরদিন ডাল সামান্য নুন দিয়ে বেটে নিতে হবে। তারপর সব সবজি এক রকম আকারে কেটে নিতে হবে। শুধু থোড় ভালো করে কুচো করতে হবে। থোড় কুচো ভালো করে ধুয়ে চটকে তার জল ফেলে দেওয়া দরকার। বাটা মটর ডাল চ্যাপটা চ্যাপটা আকারে বড়ার মতো গড়ে কড়াইয়ে সাদা তেল লাগিয়ে ভেজে নিতে হবে। ডালের বড়া অল্প তেলে কম আঁচে shallow fry করতে হবে , deep fry নয়।

উপকরণ

থোড়, বেগুন, রাঙা আলু বা মিষ্টি আলু, মিষ্টি কুমড়া, মটর ডাল, তেজপাতা, রাঁধুনি, আদা বাটা, সরষে বাটা, নারকেল কোরা, দু'টেবিল চামচ সাদা তেল , ঘি ও নুন।



মূল পদ্ধতি

একটা বড় পাত্র উনুনে বসিয়ে তাতে সমস্ত সবজি দিয়ে ঢাকা দিয়ে দিতে হবে এবং গ্যাস কমিয়ে রাখতে হবে। তেল দেওয়ার কোনো দরকার নেই। সবজি থেকে জল বেরিয়ে তাতেই সব সবজি সেদ্ধ হয়ে নরম হয়ে যাবে।

সবজি প্রায় পঁচাত্তর শতাংশ সেদ্ধ হয়ে গেলে তা অন্য পাত্রে তুলে রাখতে হবে। এরপর একটি বড় কড়াই উনুনে বসিয়ে তাতে সামান্য ঘি দিয়ে তেজপাতা ও রাঁধুনি ফোড়ন দিয়ে সেদ্ধ করা সব সবজি ঢেলে নিতে হবে। কিছুক্ষণ ঢাকা দিয়ে রেখে তাতে সরষে বাটা, আদা বাটা ,খানিকটা নারকেল কোরা এবং প্রয়োজনমতো নুন দিয়ে নাড়াচাড়া করে আবার ঢাকা দিতে হবে। এর কিছুক্ষণ পর সবজির জল প্রায় সম্পূর্ণ শুকিয়ে গেলে ঢাকা সরিয়ে ভেজে রাখা মটর ডালের বড়া টুকরো টুকরো করে ভেঙে সবজির সঙ্গে মেশাতে হবে। বড়া যাতে একেবারে গুঁড়ো হয়ে মিশে না যায়, সেদিকে খেয়াল রাখা দরকার। এরপর বড়া মিশিয়ে খানিকক্ষণ ঢাকা দিয়ে রেখে ঘি ও নারকেল কোরা ছড়িয়ে নামিয়ে নিলেই তৈরি ভোগের লাভড়া।

আমাদের পরিবারে পুজোর রান্নায় হলুদ দেওয়া হয় না। তবে কেউ মনে করলে দিতে পারেন।

আজকের চিয়া সিডস আর বয়ল্ড ভেজিটেবলের যুগে আমরা যখন খাওয়াদাওয়া নিয়ে এতটাই সচেতন, তখন মনে হয়, আজ থেকে কত যুগ আগে আমাদের পরিবারের রান্নাঘরে তৈরি এই পদটি যেন তার সময়ের চেয়েও অনেকটা এগিয়ে ছিল। স্বাদ ও ঐতিহ্যের সঙ্গে স্বাস্থ্যসচেতনতার এমন সুন্দর মেলবন্ধন আজও তাই বড় প্রাসঙ্গিক, বড় সমকালীন।



Konkan Delight

Sharmistha Bhattacharya

Ingredients:

- Basic masala
- 2 onions roughly chopped
- 2 tomatoes roughly chopped
- 2 inch ginger roughly chopped
- 6-8 garlic pods roughly chopped
- Haldi powder 1/2 teaspoon
- Mirch powder 1 teaspoon
- Dhanya powder 1 teaspoon
- Garam masala powder 1/2 teaspoon
- Salt to taste
- Oil 2 tbsp
- Thecha
- Green chillie's 10
- Peanuts 1/4 cup
- Whole jeera 1/4 teaspoon
- Coriander leaves plus stems handful
- Oil 1tsp
- Salt to taste
- Kokum pulp 1/4 tsp
- Salt
- Fish Rawas/Roopchand/pomfret

Directions:

- Heat oil
- Add onions,tomatoes,ginger garlic. Cover n fry until the tomatoes are soft n rest of the ingredients are cooked
- Add the masalas n cooked until it leaves oil
- Add salt n fry for another min
- Cool n grind
- Thecha (preferably on iron griddle)
- Dry roast peanuts n g chilies until charred.
- Add jeera n oil
- Add coriander n fry
- Cool
- Add salt n grind
- Marinade fish with salt
- Lightly fry and keep it aside.
- In a Kadai, heat 2 tsp oil.
- Add the basic masala n 1/2 cup water
- Let it boil
- Add 2tsp of the thecha
- Adjust salt
- Add fish
- Finish off with kokum pulp
- Garnish and serve hot with rice

Borishali Katla

Soma Chakraborty

Ingredients:

- Katla/Catla fish(South Asian Carp): 6 pieces, bengali curry cut
- Kalojeere (kalonji or nigella seeds): 1 tsp
- Jeere (cumin seeds): 1/2 tsp
- Coriander leaf: 1/2 cup
- Garlic: 5 or 6 cloves
- Green chilli: 3 or 4 pieces
- Mustard oil: 1/2 cup
- Onion: 1 medium sized
- Red chilli powder: 1/4 tsp
- Turmeric powder: 1/2 tsp

Directions:

- Dry-roast the cumin seeds and kalojeere(kalonji) in a pan, grind and set aside half a teaspoon of the mixture powder, Then, dry-roast the garlic, green chillies, and half a cup of coriander leaves.
- After that, all the fried ingredients need to be ground. Now, lightly shallow fry the fish in mustard oil and set it aside.
- Add the onion paste to the remaining oil and sauté it.Then, add red chili powder, turmeric, and a little water to the onions and sauté well.
- Next, add the ground coriander leaf and garlic paste to the fried onions and sauté well. Then, add the fried fish along with a cup of water, and season with salt and sugar to taste,
- Finally, add half a teaspoon of roasted spice mix, stir briefly until slightly dry, and remove from heat.
- Serve with hot rice.



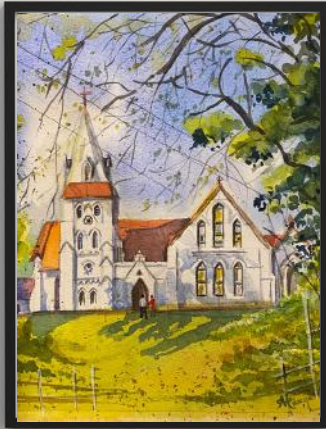
CREATIVE EXPRESSIONS FROM PBWA'S ARTISTIC SOULS

BRUSH STROKES

Impressions



Aparna Mondal



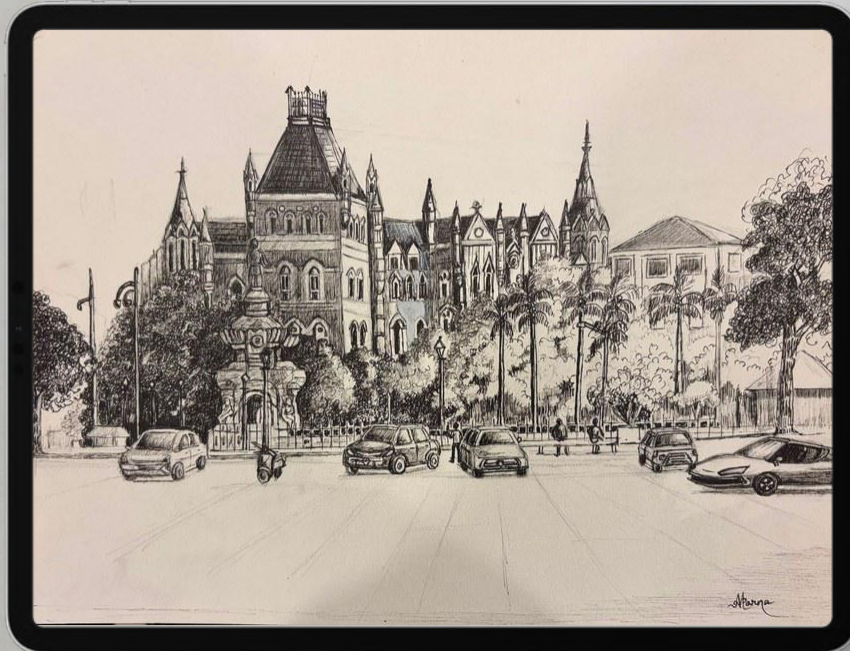
St. Andrew's Church, Darjeeling



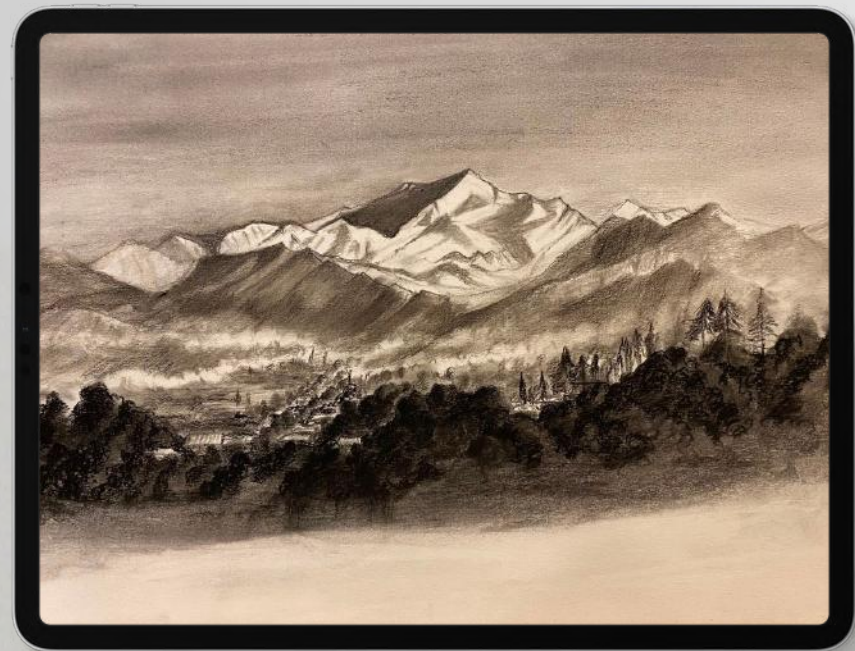
Shadows by the Seashore



Mumbai University



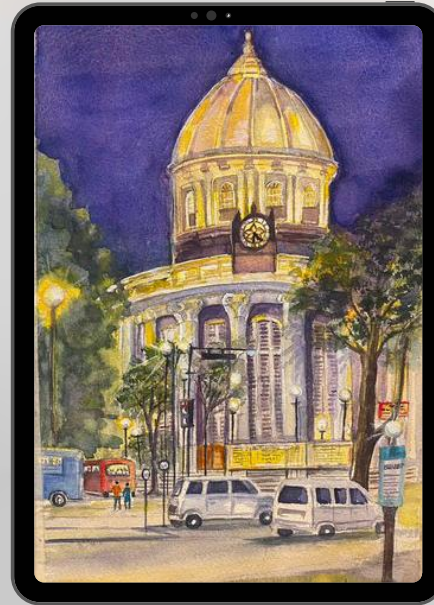
Oriental Building, Mumbai



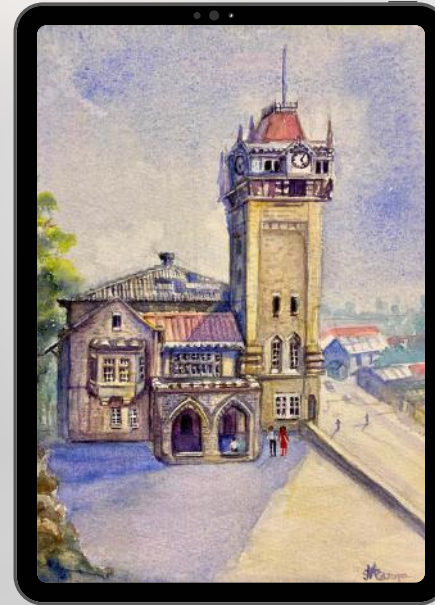
Mountain Range



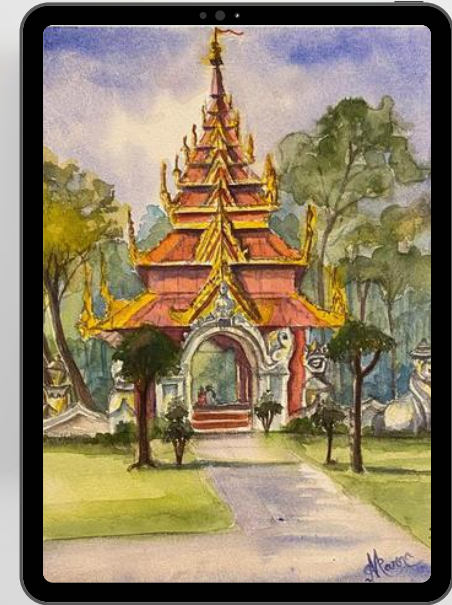
Horniman Circle, Mumbai



GPO Mumbai



Clocktower, Darjeeling



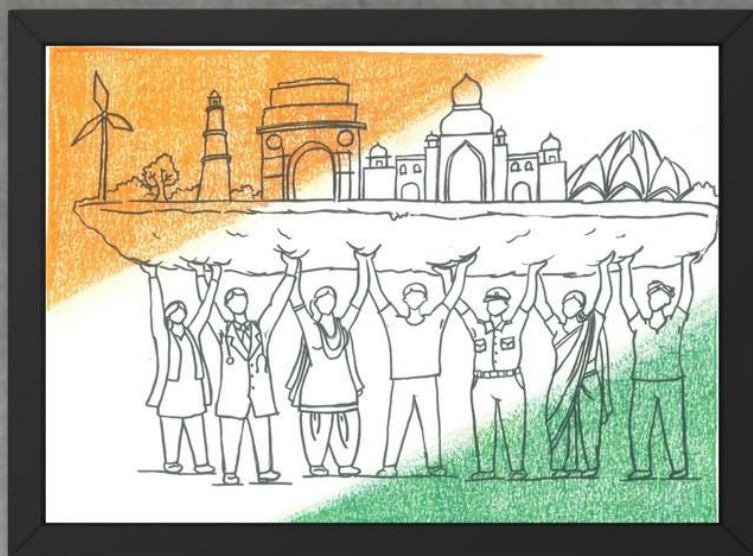
Eden Pagoda, Kolkata



Arched Gate, Rani Bagh



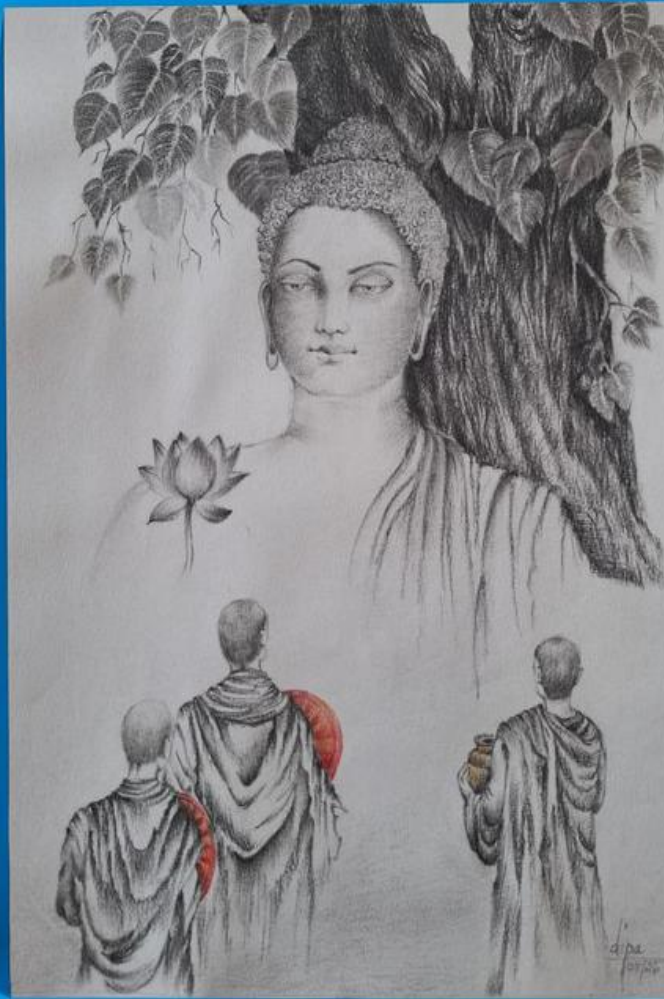
Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus



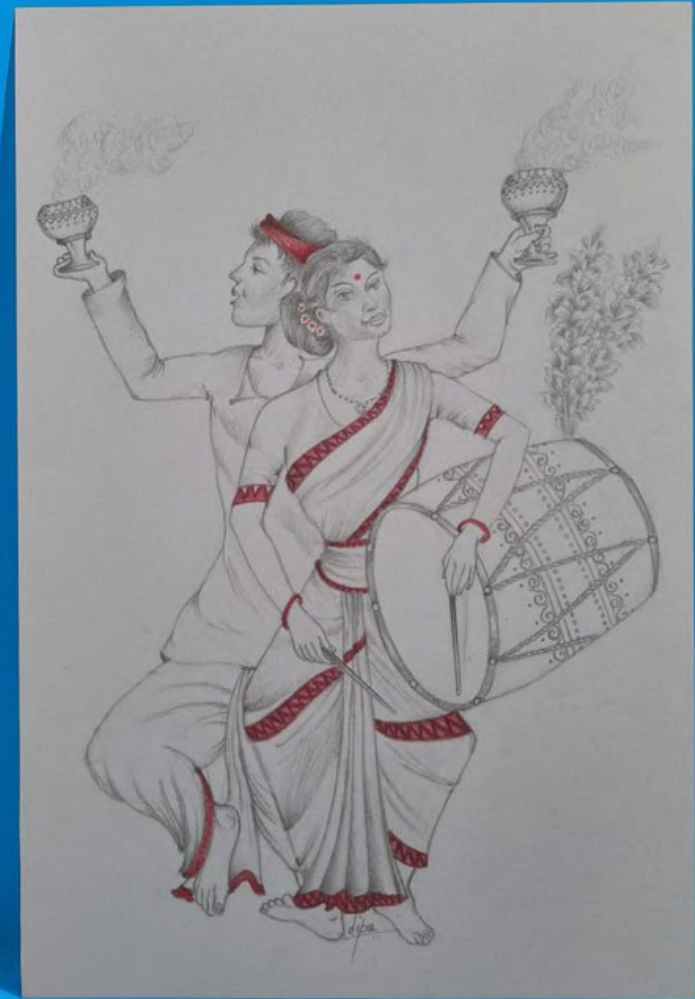
Unity in Diversity
by Bela Ojha

Eternal Spring
by Alina Chakraborty





বুদ্ধ শরণং গচ্ছামি



“অমল ধবল পালে লেগেছে মন্দ মধুর হাওয়া,
দেখি নাই কভু দেখি নাই এমন তরণী বাওয়া”



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Handcraft

Tips on Acrylic Painting

Aparna Mondal



Acrylic Painting is a painting technique which requires acrylic colours which are water based. These are opaque colours unlike watercolours which are transparent. Acrylic colours dry quickly and can be used both on canvas and thick papers.

Materials required for acrylic paintings

1) Acrylic paints: acrylic paints are made of dry pigment in liquid polymer binder. These paints are water-based and thus they do not require in paint thinners. While painting it can be diluted with water. These paints dry quickly and give a waterproof finish. Once dried it is permanent and thus washable. There are two varieties of acrylic paints.

Types of acrylic paints:

- **A) Student Grade:** In student grade paint the concentration of pigment is little less than the artist grade although the quality of pigment is good. They are very fluid, easy to mix and easy to work with.
- **B) Professional grade or Artists' Grade:** In this grade of paint the concentration of pigment is higher and thus the paint is thicker than the student grade. The colour may seem deeper and more vivid

2) Canvas board or stretched canvas or canvas paper: Nowadays bound books of canvas are available in the market. Thicker paper above 300gsm can be used also for acrylic painting.

3) Brushes: Long or short handled brushes can be chosen. Long handled brushes are used when one would like to paint in standing position in front of an easel so that one can have an overview of the painting at arms-length. On the other hand, short-handled brushes are used for painting in seated position or during working on small details. Animal hairbrushes or synthetic brushes can be chosen.

Nowadays good quality synthetic brushes are available in the market so it would be better to choose synthetic brushes rather than animal-hair brushes which involves killing of the innocent animals for our needs.

According to the type of work, one intends to do, brush shapes are chosen.

Flat brush: These are the brushes used for broad application of paint so that wide area can be covered.

Round brush: Round brushes are used for small details or dabbing in paints.

Filbert brush: These are flat brushes with round edges used for filling in areas.

Hake brush: These are wide flat brushes used for blending.

Bright brush: These are like flat brushes but the bristles are shorter which give the brushes more spring effect.

Liner brush: These brushes have pointy shaped tips and thus are used for finer detailed work.

Palette: We normally use plastic palette for acrylic painting. Since acrylic paints are also a form of plastic, dried acrylic paint can be peeled or soaked and then removed from plastic palette.

Other tools:

Cloth rags: It is needed to wipe excess paint or water from brush.

Containers: It is better to use two containers filled with water while painting. One container with water to dip the brush for making the paint thin when required and the other waterfilled container to wash the brushes.

Spray Bottle of water: This is used to mist the paints to prevent them from drying while working, as acrylic paint tend to dry very fast.

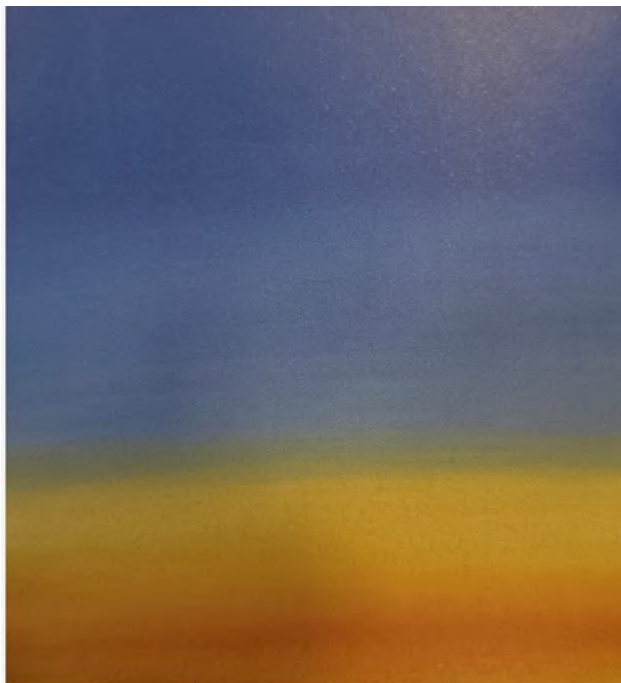
Palette knife: It is used for mixing paint on the palette. There is another technique of acrylic painting where palette knives of different shapes are used a for thicker application of paints on the canvas to create a painting.

Masking tape: This is needed to tape canvas sheet or thick paper to hard board (backing board) while working. The edges of the sheet of paper or canvas are taped down.

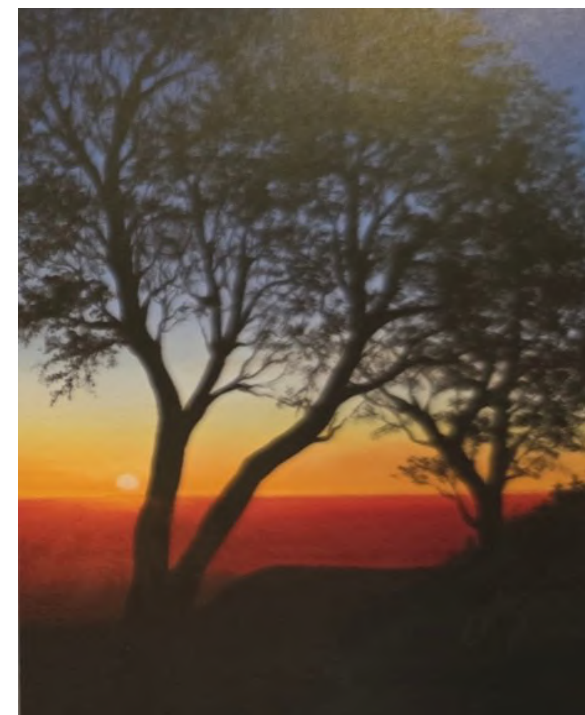


Some useful information about painting with acrylic colours to create a good artwork.

Here are some are photos which shows the steps of layered acrylic painting.



Painting courtesy : Lee Hammond's big book of acrylic Painting



If we choose to create an artwork on canvas it is always better to paint an undertone before we begin to start with the final painting. As acrylic paint can be applied in layers, one can start with background and allow it to dry and then slowly one can add different elements of the painting and details gradually on the subsequent layers.

Flat painting: One can apply uniform layer of colours with the help of flat brush and make a landscape starting with the sky, wall, background, large shapes, meadow e.t.c.

Colour mixing: Two or more colours can be mixed to create a new colour according to the requirement and then applied slowly to add detailed elements. Since acrylic colours are opaque and dry quickly, elements can be added layer by layer from dark colour to lighter colour easily. But while wet it is also

possible to place two colours side by side and then blend them. If we can blend the colours nicely, it can create depth in the painting gradually.

Dry Brush technique: For creating certain elements like rocks, trees, roads e.t.c which has rough texture, we use this technique. Here we use a brush with very little paint and apply on the dry canvas thus utilizing the texture of the canvas to create a rough surface.

Detailing: At the final stage of the painting, we use a softer pointy fine brush to add details like outlines, patterns, sometimes sharp shadows and minor touches like highlights to complete the painting.

Both Acrylic painting and watercolour painting can be done in layers but there are some differences in the technique as

watercolour is a transparent medium and acrylic colour is an opaque medium. In watercolour painting we start with the applying light colours with lots of water and then gradually add subsequent layers in which we can create darker tones with more pigment and less water. We do not use white and black coloured pigment to lighten or make the tones darker. We use white of the paper to make white elements by leaving white space(of the paper itself). On the other hand, in acrylic painting, we start with dark colours in the initial stage and gradually add lighter colour in the subsequent layers and add highlight at the final stage.

This is a rough guideline for creating acrylic painting. However, for deeper understanding of the creative procedures of good artwork one needs to have good knowledge of sketching, colour wheel, colour theory and tonal values(basics of painting). It is desirable to know these basics first and then start with painting with colours of any medium.

Art is Life

Art is Fun.

Dipanwita Dutt

Art, in any form, is an expression of self. Be it music, dance, acting, writing, sculpting or drawing & painting, it's that individual's way of expressing oneself, his/her life journey, joys & sorrows, laurels & losses.

I personally don't think that art is something that can be taught. It is there within you, just discover the form that resonates with you the most. And then set forth to refine it with the right guidance, practice & perseverance. May be, also learn some correct forms to enhance the nuances in your art.

Art is also a space of freedom & joy restricting it with all the do's & don'ts, right & wrong makes it restrictive, and takes away all the joy and also the freedom. Art is free flowing an example of free-flowing art is the Hijibiji art. Something like Sukumar Ray's Hajaborolo random words and lines, which appear nonsensical but are not. Even Van Gogh, as an artist was born from his random scribbles. There is no proper method to it, so, difficult to explain the how of it. Will still give it a try

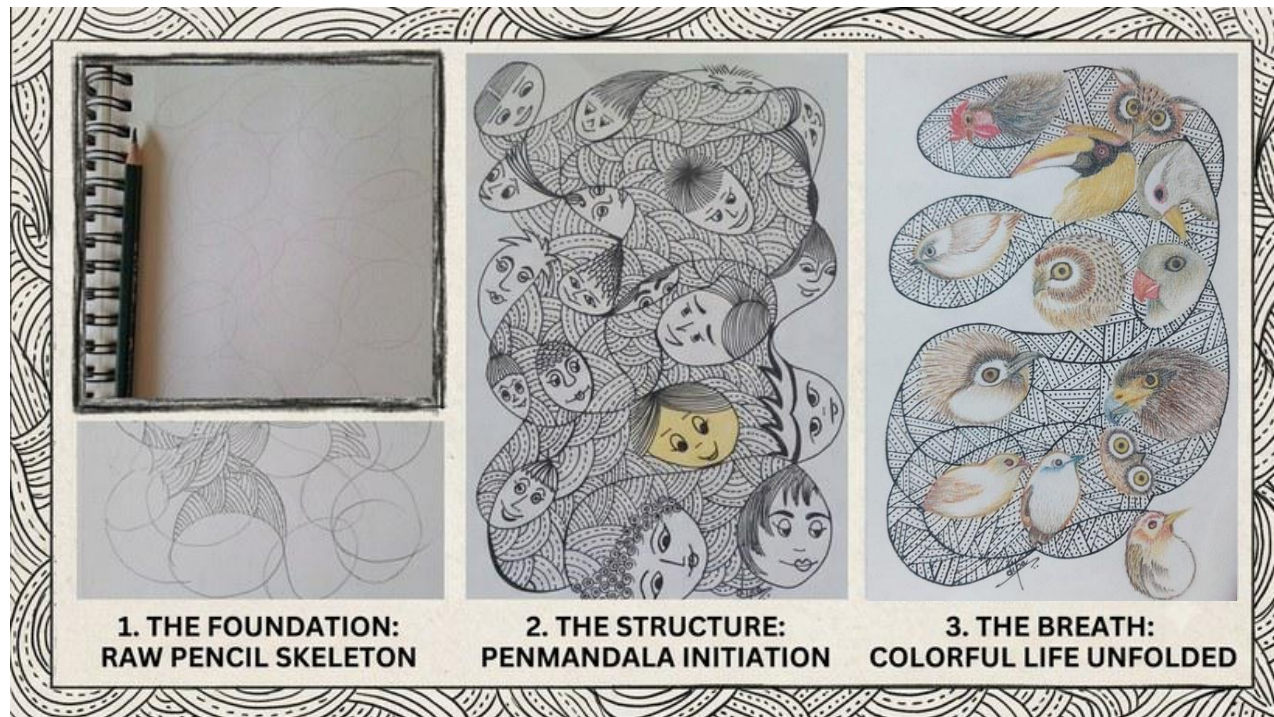
Hold a pencil to a paper and just let your hand move over the paper, no thoughts, no directions, just complete freedom to your hand to move randomly in a continuous motion. What you end up with is a page filled with scribbles, taking you back to your childhood when we first learnt to use a pencil on a paper. To a child that was an art he/she was so proud of having created but to us adults, that's just scribbles with no meaning or appeal.

An adult mind can be so wrong. Every scribble will speak to us; we just need to change the way we perceive/look at them. That's how I started my scribble art journey.

Once I have my scribble on the paper, some of the shapes popped out as faces and I started filling them in, with eyes, lips and hairs. No restrictions binding, just letting go and gradually had different faces with all sorts of expressions & features staring out from the page. It was really a fun journey of letting oneself go.

From filling my scribbles with random faces, I experimented with known comic characters from my childhood, journeying back to childhood days. The process remained the same. I even tried one with our winged friends, birds.

And this journey continues



QUIRKY QUILTING & STRIKING SCULPTURES

Sudipta Mukherjee Mandal

A creative mind is one that is always on the move, asking questions and seeking answers.

To keep that mind active, tactile work is perfect. Thus, creative crafts - the connect between the brain and the nimble fingers.

Being a multi-disciplinary artist, opens up multiple avenues for one to experiment with and learn.

Shared here images and the ideas behind two of the various art forms that I experiment with.

QUILTING

An ancient craft that has told stories for centuries. It involves varied textiles. It is layered in different modes of application of embellishments. Such as embroidery, bead work, patchwork applique and so much more. Our country India is bound by so many varieties of quilts across different states.

What draws me to this craft is its basic concept of utility and sustainability. They are usually made from old clothes and sarees. They are repurposed, are created by hand often in communities, where women gather to create and make.

As the images will show, I have used the technique to create pieces for present day use and purpose.



Wall tapestry

A mountain scenery, made with patch work and embroidery, using scraps of fabric in similar shades. Placed and stitched to depict a mountain range.



A Chandowa

A piece of decorative cloth hung above as a canopy to cover a space, or idol. In this case on top of our Durga murti.

Here mostly applique has been used. Fabric on fabric with the patterns, traced, cut and stitched on.



A waist coat

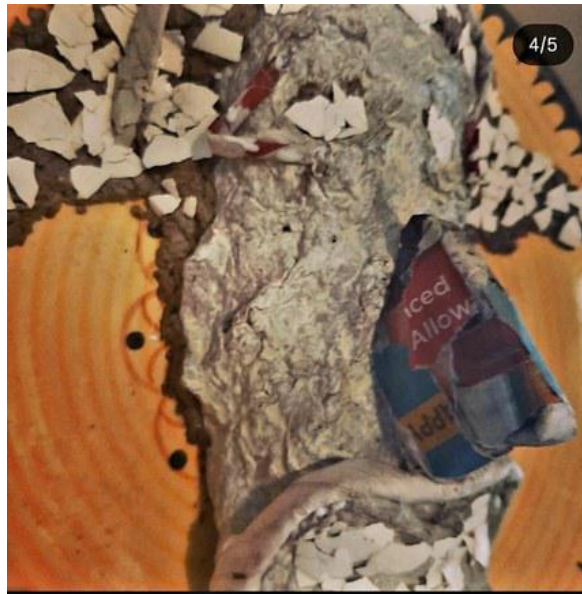


A doorway festive Toran



Multiple banners

Painstakingly made with the same quilting methods.



PAPER MACHE SCULPTURE

Masks, made from egg carton pulp. Mounted on slightly damaged ceramic plates. Fish sculptures, made from paper mache. Mounted on used plates and old fry pans as base. They make excellent table top or wall decor.

The purpose of all this and the core thought behind it is sustainability along with the benefits of the creative process, of which I am a staunch believer. Working extensively in the area of conservation, as a government consultant, I would like to walk the talk. Thus, most of my work involves, repurposing, reusing, upcycling. Drawing inspiration from our traditional ways of life and vernacular crafts.



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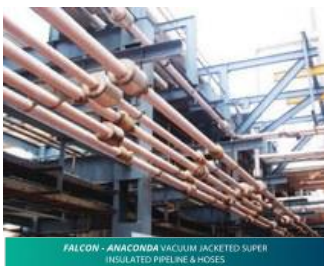
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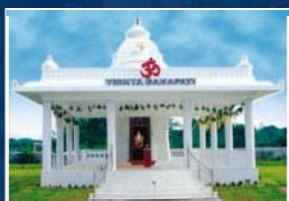


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