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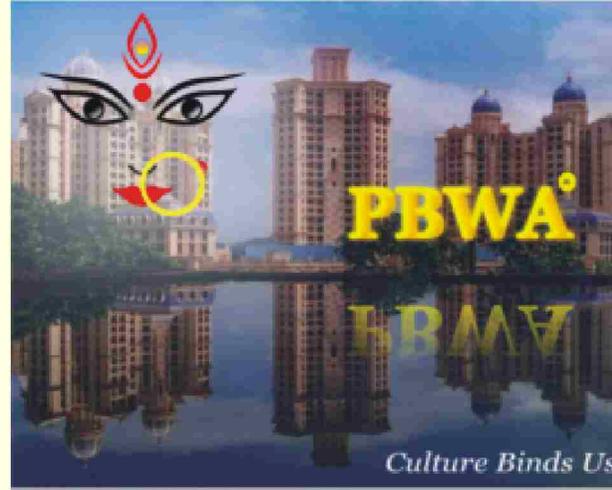
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Foreword.

Friends!

Durga Puja is on us again and in perfect unison with the season, our Bengali psyche begins to sway to a different tune, far away from the daily routine. A euphoric sense of well being overtakes the senses and other worldly affairs take a backseat. It is time to live and enjoy.

I refuse to be drawn into the morbid world of Covid which has anyway, reduced us to a daily life of precautions leaving the rest to fate. However, as we continue in the mainstream, there emerges a disturbing factor, more threatening than Covid. While we keep on enjoying the blessings of science, a blazing trail of damaging by-products have been created which have now developed into a ticking bomb, threatening our very existence on this earth. The environmental disaster that we have landed in, is something perhaps we are already late in tackling. What started as the biggest boon for mankind has now attained a demonic stature, ready to engulf its own creator. We are now in a state where catastrophic storms, rising sea levels and mutating virus are ready to move in Apocalypse I, from the movie screen to reality. I would like to disbelieve the predictions, but the facts, do indicate otherwise. An unbridled surge in population with spiraling living standards has had its cascading effect. High usage of power, destruction of forests for cultivation and dairy/meat production with utter disregard to the consequences, have landed us in this Catch 22 situation.

Scientists attribute these to the result of global warming. Climatic disasters were always there, but

it is the increased frequency, that is chilling. Parts of Canada experiencing temperatures in High-forties, Antarctica in the twenties and some countries in Europe inundated by floods not seen in a century are stark reminders to humankind that we have a lot of catching up to do to arrest these never-seen-before phenomena.

In India, 260 cloudbursts/glacier-bursts occurred in Uttarakhand between January and July-end in 2021. The most severe was at Joshimath in February when a large number of workers employed in two power generation stations lost their lives, bringing back memories of the Kedarnath devastation in 2013. There were some other lethal ones, subsequently.

The rising sea level of the Indian coastline, at higher than global rates, is another alarming factor. Considering that greenhouse gas emissions fluctuate between very low and very high levels, the coastal sea level would rise by 0.28mm to 1.88mm by the turn of the century. To get an idea of the magnitude, taking 1990 as the base year, greenhouse gas emissions in 2019 have risen by 45%. This will not only inundate most coastal cities but will also drown huge tracts of agricultural land leading to acute food shortage. Compounded with global temperature rise, the worldwide scenario develops into a horror picture. All this will be the legacy that we are leaving our children, to be faced in their middle age and not by a generation lost in the obscurity of time.

I am sure that we are all aware of the reasons leading to the present imbroglio, as well as the remedies. No doubt policies of regulated industrial growth, lesser population and use of alternate

energy sources, will hopefully reverse the cycle, but this is not possible without our individual contribution. Optimum use of comfort enhancing gadgets and appliances, use of green power, lesser meat consumption or vegan substitutes, will definitely lay the path ahead for a better, healthy and enjoyable future.

Powai Bengali Welfare Association, being a conscious organization, has also made a start to combat the situation at local levels. About a hundred trees were planted in our neighbourhood in Mumbai last monsoon. Their well-being is under constant supervision and it is heartening to note that damages are almost nil. Recently, water percolation pits have also been laid to raise the ground water level which will not only keep the grounds and adjoining areas moist in summer months, but also lower the peripheral temperature. In addition, we are also committed to the water conservation and supply project at our adopted village in Talasari, in Palghar district of Maharashtra. The details of the project are in process with co-ordination of the local authorities, and will be finalised, once the Covid menace settles down. With co-operation and awareness of our members, we hope to undertake more such projects in the near future.

Our future existence today lies in our own hands and it is for us to make it. Unfortunately, there will be no second chance.

On behalf of PBWA we wish one & all, a very Happy Durga Puja and Dushera.

-Amit Ghosh

PBWA - We Care for the Environment

In line with Maharashtra State Government's "Majhi Vasundhara Abhiyan" to mitigate effect of climate change, PBWA has implemented a Rainwater harvesting project. Five percolation pits have been installed in Hiranandani Gardens in Powai. This will have a sustainable impact in powai towards groundwater recharge.



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Rainwater Harvesting Percolation Pit

Benefits for Citizens

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-Subhajit Mukherjee

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Planet Powai

Your Friendly Community Newspaper

12 September - 18 September 2021

Ground Water Recharge Programme - A Powai Bengali Welfare Association in Hiranandani Gardens

Think about it - the challenge of the coming decades is not going to be the processing power of the microchip in your mobile device, but the quantity and quality of water in your kitchen tap. Climate change, water and food shortage are for real and the sooner we act the better it is. A healthy and sustainable Earth is the only inheritance that would matter to future generations.

In last two years, which saw world getting ravaged by the COVID-19 pandemic, a lot has been said about how this was Mother Nature's way of cleaning the planet of the desecration, brought about in the wake of mankind's unbridled industrialization and exploitation of natural resources. While this argument could be debatable, the one unequivocal fact is that the regenerative & life-giving power of Mother Nature is not infinite in its capacity.

Powai Bengali Welfare Association (PBWA) is our neighborhood NGO and charitable organization, and organizers of the famous Powai Saraswati Durgas in Hiranandani Gardens Powai. Over the past 15 years, they have always been at the forefront when it comes to contributing to causes which impact society positively. PBWA took its first steps towards environmental preservation and enhancement last year, when 60 Ashoka and Golden Ficus trees were planted at the Ground near BEST Bus depot in association with BMC.

In the same venue this year, they have laid the foundations of implementing a Rainwater Harvesting Project. Under the project, they installed 5 percolation pits in the ground which will have significant and sustainable local impact towards groundwater recharge.

SALIENT BENEFITS

- Urban flood control and reduction of water logging.
- Floor and surface temperature control
- Reduces use of drinking water for gardening purposes
- Borewell recharges and easier groundwater access

groundwater access

- Reuse of construction debris to create percolation layers.

This project is in line with the spirit of "Majhi Vasundhara Abhiyan", an initiative by state government of Maharashtra to have communities participate in local environment projects. The inauguration for this was done on Sunday, 5th September, 2021. And the best part is that these benefits far outweigh the costs. The project is easy to construct without much engineering support and has almost no maintenance cost. This goes a long way towards reducing the urban "Heat Island" effect.

OTHER NOTABLE SOCIAL WORK

Apart from environmental conservation, PBWA also has proven work record in areas of women empowerment and vocational up-skilling, food and nourishment of children, education, and tribal village adoption. PBWA has identified Palghar as an important intervention area which could give significant upside.

As part of its latest anti-Covid initiative to prevent spread of the third wave, they have donated to the Kana Subdivision Hospital in Dahisar and installed two HPNC machines, two SIPAF with Acaps, and one multi-param monitor with pediatric probes.

Under sustainable goals of GCL, PBWA also works towards graduation of hunger and nourishment of children. Despite Covid constraints, PBWA has continued to provide daily breakfast services to malnourished children in Aiyamal and Aptain schools of Jewhar block in Palghar.

PBWA welcomes everybody to wholeheartedly join in these endeavors to better our world, support the vibrancy of humankind and to celebrate the spirit of prevailing in the face of adversity. Let us together build a wonderful and sustainable world.

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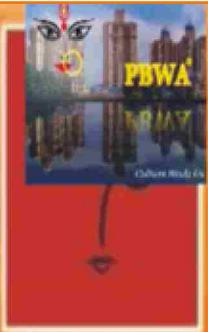
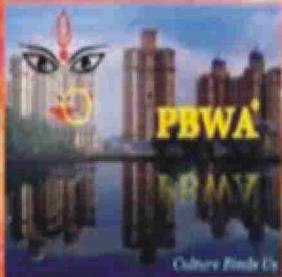
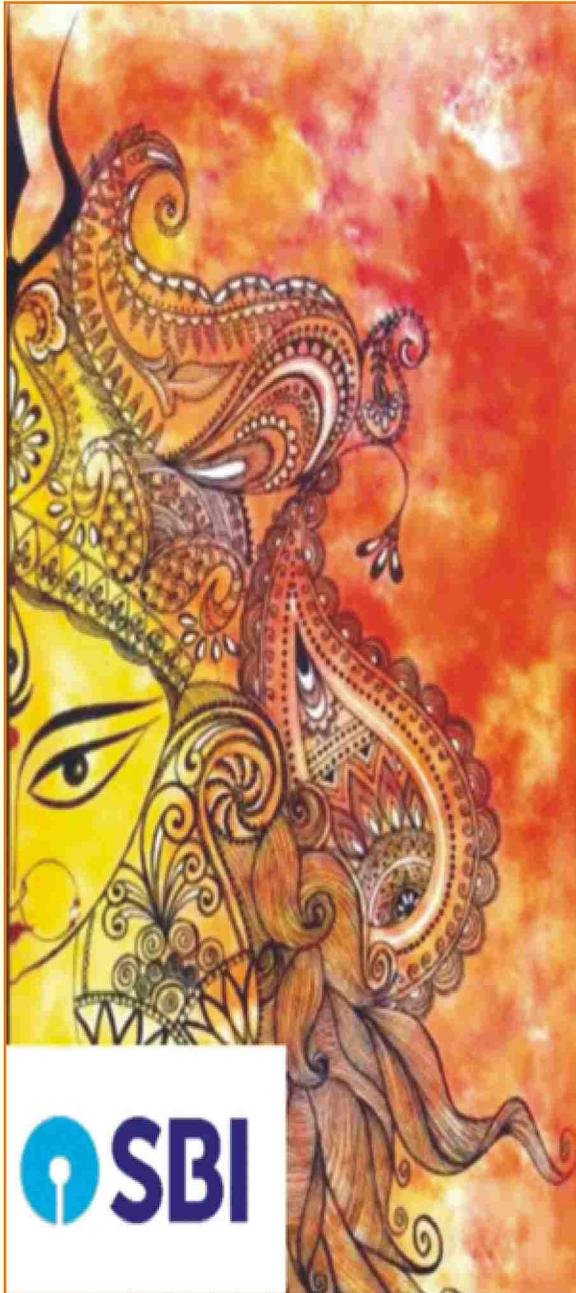
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Durgotsav 2020 - Our Flagship Event



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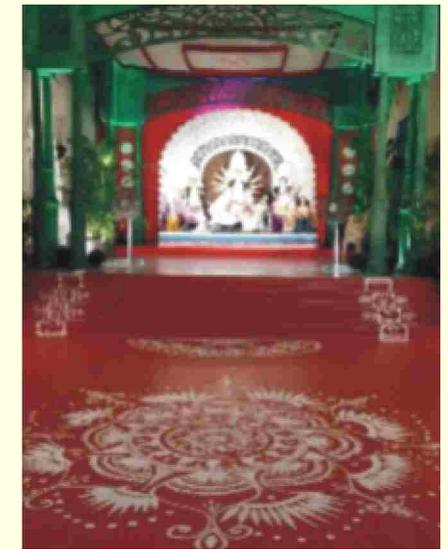
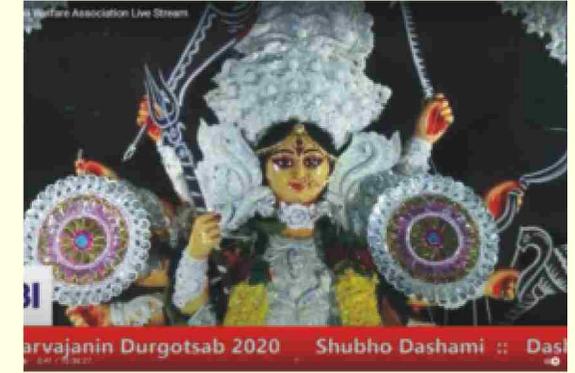
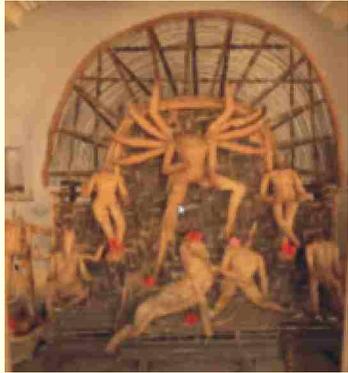


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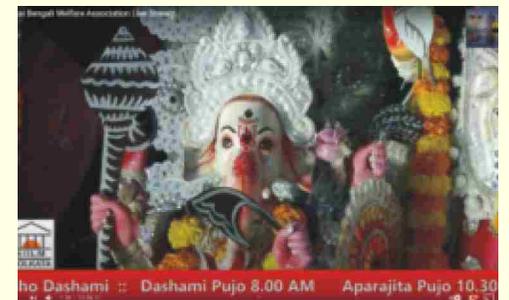


Durgotsav 2020 - A Pandal with a Difference...

The Pandemic compelled us to think out-of-the-box and this is the result. While PBWA has always created replicas of temples and historical structures, this time a replica of 'Dalan Bari' or Courtyard similar to Pujas conducted in the households of Zamindars in Bengal, was created. The decoration was done entirely in-house by members and their families.



Durgotsav 2020 - The Divine Mother & Her Children



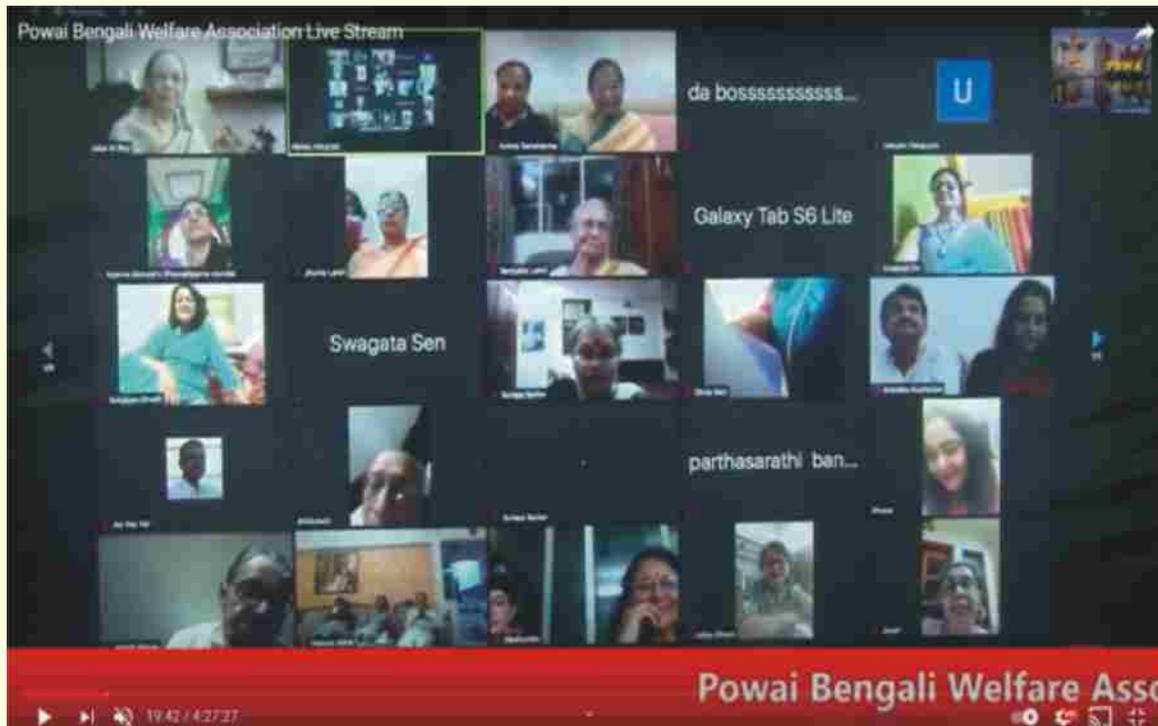
Mahalaya

Mahalaya is said to be the day when Goddess Durga defeated the demon, Mahishsura. The day signifies the end of Pitru Paksha Shradh and the beginning of Durga Puja for Bengalis. Pitru Paksha is a period of worshipping the ancestors and the deceased and to pray for the peace of their souls. In Bengal, Mahalaya also marks beginning of Devi-paksha, and the day that the Goddess Durga begins her journey from her mountain abode where she lives with her consort, Lord Shiva, to her parents' home. Typically Mahalaya is observed through listening to Sanskrit Shlokas and devotional songs played out in both Radio and Electronic media. In other years, members of PBWA would assemble at the under-construction pandal at 4.30 am and together celebrate the occasion. But so what if there is a pandemic? The members did wake up before dawn, got together on Zoom and again celebrated the occasion with equal fervour.



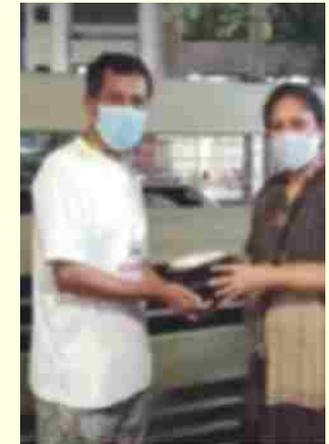
Moments Durgotsav 2020 - With Blessings from our Elders - We Begin

As has been our tradition over last 15 years, we commence proceedings of our Durga Puja with due blessings of the elderly members of PBWA. This year, because of the Pandemic, the traditional kick-off was conducted virtually and what a delightful experience it was to see and listen in to these wonderful ladies, completely at ease on a virtual platform.

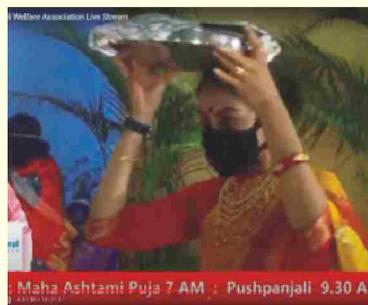
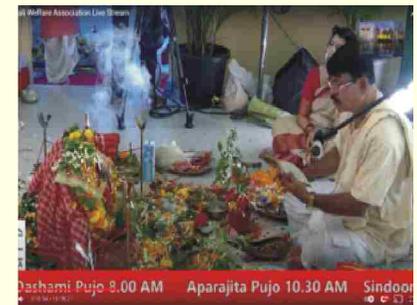
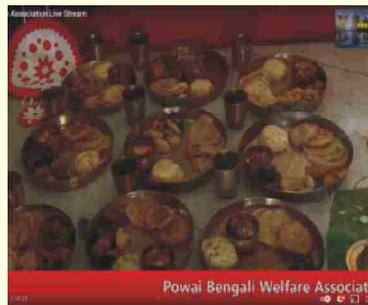
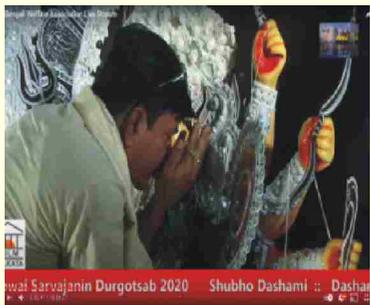
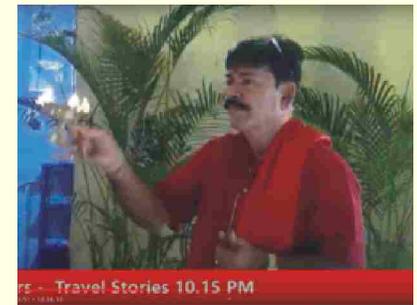


Durgotsav 2020 - Anandamela

Anandamela is a food festival organised a day before the Durga Puja officially begins. Typically food stalls are put up and mouth watering delicacies are served by members and their families. The pandemic of course could not be a spoil-sport to this important and enjoyable event. Sumptuous dishes, cooked at home, packed in sanitised containers and delivered at the doorstep of those who requested for them, in complete adherence to all COVID protocols. What more could one want!



Durgotsav 2020 - The core of the occasion - Puja Rituals



E-Pushpanjali in progress. Live streaming of the Puja enabled devotees far & wide to offer Pushpanjali from the comfort & safety of their homes

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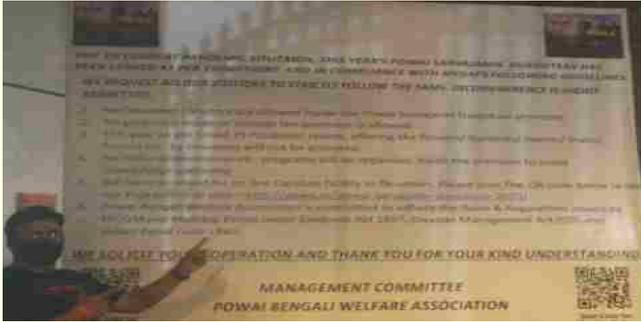
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All Covid Protocols in Place



The 'Alpona' comes alive



Happy Faces

Moments Durgotsav 2020



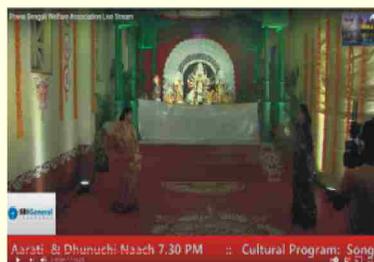
Pre-packed 'Bhog' or Prasad, ready for distribution



All hands on deck. Behind-the-scenes support

Durgotsav 2020 - 'Dhunuchi Naach'

The dance with Incense burners are an integral part of any Durga Puja and is part of the evening Arati ritual. While in previous years a competition, open to ALL, used to be organised, this year owing to the Pandemic, this was organized on a limited scale. But the ladies and Gen-next more than compensated for the absence of a regular 'Dhunuchi Naach' session with their energy, fluid movements and grace. The roll of the Dhaak, the smell of incense, the smoky ambience together with the swaying dancers truly make it a surreal experience.



Durgotsav 2020 - 'Boron' and 'Sindoor Khela' - Happiness & Prosperity for all

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.



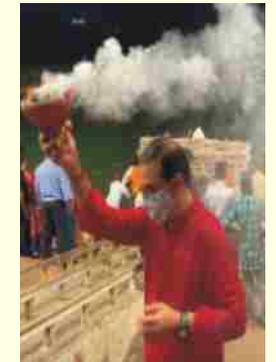
Durgotsav 2020 - 'Ashche Bochor Aabar Hobe' Farewell Mother - Till next year!



Getting ready for her journey back home



Boarded



Arti at the Immersion Ghats



Arti being performed prior to immersion journey

Final Journey

Cultural Programmes - 2020



'Sruti Natok' or Dialogue - only Drama by husband-wife team



Our dear anchors for the Cultural events

These young ladies surprised everyone with their impressive musical talents



Diverse stories of Durga Puja from around the world and trivia surrounding this event

Cultural Programmes 2020



*'Kotobaro Bhebechinu and
'Drink To me with only thine eyes'*

*A Celestial mix of
Tagore & Western
Truly a heady concoction of
Music & Dance*



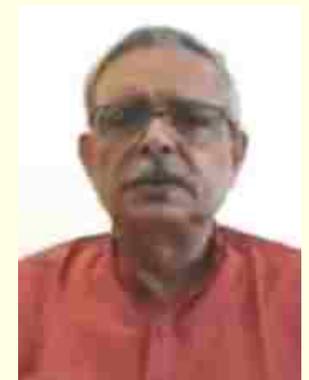
Recitation and Song recitals by lady members



This young lady eloquently brings out the boon and the bane of social media with a tinge of humour.

'Shorotei Hemonto' - Dhitaang

The in-house singing choir of PBWA presented a bouquet of melodious, soul-stirring, retro bengali songs - but with a difference. This being the legendary Hemanta Mukhopadhyay's birth centenary year, the choir paid a tribute to him through some of his melodious and popular Bengali songs.





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BALAJI FOUNDATION
Ms. Sushma Khemka

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HIND INDUSTRIES



Beche Thako Bhalobashai

Beche Thako Bhalobashai or 'Live in Love' a bouquet of dance recitals performed by in-house dance troupe of PBWA - 'Rupantar'. The entire presentation was put together by six dancer /choreographers, who brought out different shades of Love...Love which draws people together and strengthens bonds.



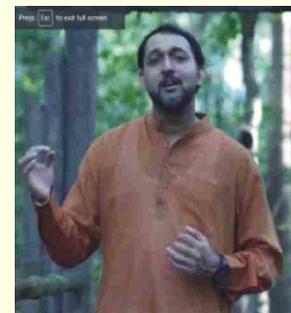
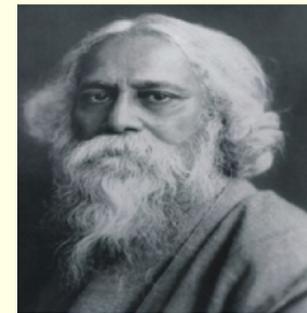
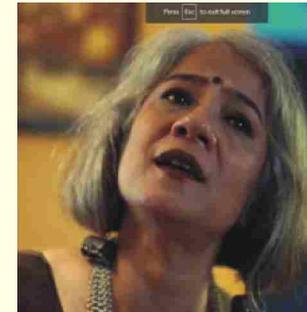
Wonderful narration of the theme prior to each recital

Beche Thako Bhalobashai



Phire Esho Mahaprithibi

In the grip of a raging pandemic claiming millions, a looming economic crisis crippling those who survived - horrifying news emerging from all quarters - celebration was difficult to imagine. 'Phirey Esho Mahaprithibi' was our way of saying that prayer we had on our lips, digging deep within to find the strength and the promise that Mother Earth will emerge victorious and prevail. We found the words to recreate our fears, hopes and fervent prayers for a return to normalcy through a melange of Tagore's songs and Jibonanondo's words - legendary poets who lived through turbulent times and lived to witness the world rise again from the ashes of crisis. 'Phirey esho' was also a very unique endeavour for us. We were taking our first steps outside in months, rehearsing through virtual meetings but the constraints of limited contact and no live performances forced us to reimagine. This year, instead of a live performance, we recreated our performance in a pre-recorded audio-visual production conceptualized, produced, performed and edited by PBWA members. In the process, we managed to reach not just our members but far beyond, to our friends across the world to bring in the message of the new normal, not far away.



Rangiye Diye Jao

In a world ravaged by the deadly pandemic, we seek solace in our mother goddess only to realise that while the blessings are omnipresent, we need to come to our own powered by our readiness and conviction to overcome our own challenges...



“Shukher Khonje” - In Search of Happiness

Once upon a time there was a King who was very unhappy. This story enacted by the Tiny tots of PBWA is an attempt bring a smile on the face of the King and hence his Kingdom, through showcasing different dance forms from all over the world, which ultimately made the King sing and dance in happiness. A stupendous effort by the kids as well as the choreographers.



“Shukher Khonje” - In Search of Happiness



finally, they found happiness...



Travel-adda - A Tete-a-Tete on Travel experiences

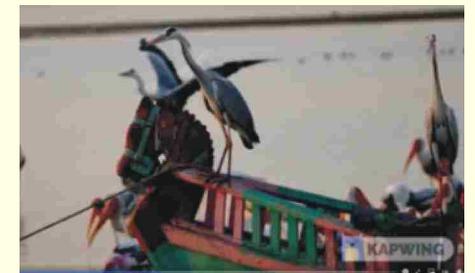
Bengalis have this Travel bug as part of their DNA. Stepping out on the slightest pretext is what makes them among the most-travelled community. This 'adda' brought out some fascinating experiences of some of our PBWA members, both domestic and international, which includes adventure, exploration and venturing out into the unknown - experiences which anyone would long for.



Lyaje Kathi - Tail Stick - Supriyo Lahiri



এই গল্পটা আসলে গল্প নয়, সত্যি। গত বছর পুজোর সময়ে এটাকে ভিডিও করেছিলাম, সবাইকে দেখানো, শোনানোর জন্যে। ছোটবেলার স্মৃতি খুব জীবন্ত হয়- দুঃখের ও, সুখেরও। এই স্মৃতিটা মন খারাপের আবার মন ভালো হবার। সেই যে জলাভূমি আমাদের বাড়ির কাছেই ছিলো, কি অপূর্ব জায়গা ছিলো। বর্ষায় ছোট ছোট ধারায় ভাসতো, কত ছোট ছোট জীবজন্তু, মাছ, পাখি, পতঙ্গ। সেই স্মৃতি বড় মধুর। তারপর সেই জলার সব জীবজন্তু পাখ পাখালিদের মেরে, তাড়িয়ে সেখানে হাউসিং কমপ্লেক্স তৈরী হয়ে গেলো। তারা সবাই নিশ্চিহ্ন। এভাবে আমাদের দেশে একটা একটা করে কত ওয়েটল্যান্ড, কত ড্রাইল্যান্ড ফরেস্ট ধ্বংস হয়ে যাচ্ছে! চল্লিশ বছরেরও বেশি পরে, যখন হঠাৎ মহারাষ্ট্রের এক গ্রামে, ছোটবেলার সেই গ্রীন বি ইটারকে দেখলাম, এক মুহূর্তেই চল্লিশটা বছর মুছে গিয়ে ছোটবেলায় ফিরে গিয়েছিলাম। তারই গল্প।



CEO Power Walk

The CEO Power Walk is a flagship event of every Durga Puja organized by PBWA, wherein, leaders from the Business world and other walks of life participate and share their thoughts on pertinent and contemporary subjects so as to enlighten listeners of their perspectives, their experiences and important takeaways. In 2020, although the CEO Power Walk was conducted virtually, thanks to the Pandemic, it received wide acclaim from listeners all over the world because of the sheer depth and quality of the discussion - which centred on “Impact of the Pandemic on Business, particularly the MSME sector and steps that could be taken to support them”. The panel comprised of a galaxy of leaders including, Anup Bagchi Executive Director, ICICI Bank, Arijit Basu, Former Managing Director, State Bank of India, Arundhati Bhattacharya, Chairperon & CEO, Sales force India, Dr Niranjana Hiranandani, Founder & MD, Hiranandani Group, Rajiv Rajagopal, MD, AkzoNobel and Shairee Chahal, Founder SHEROES. The event was ably anchored by Sukanti Ghosh, C-Suite Consultant & Keynote Speaker, who, incidentally is based out of the United States.



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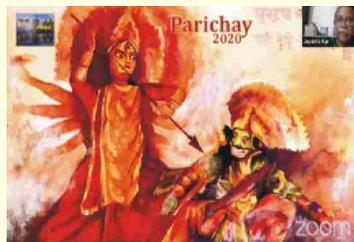


Lakshmi Puja

Performed on Purnima day four days after Vijaya Dashami, we seek Blessings of Mother Lakshmi for well-being and prosperity for all.



Welcome to the
Launch of
PARICHAY 2020



'Parichay' PBWAs in-house souvenir being launched virtually keeping the pandemic in mind. The digital copy was in a flip-book mode so as to enable readers to get as close to the physical feel of browsing through a book. Being in a digital form, Parichay could make its way to people networks across the globe.

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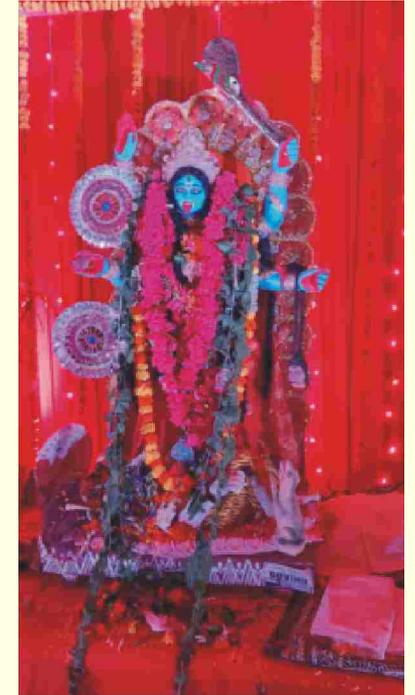
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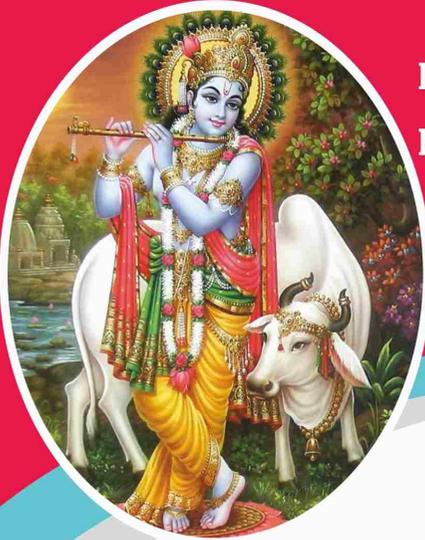
Tel: 022 2517 1220 / 2517 5227

Email: gulati_service_centre@yahoo.com

Kali Puja & Diwali

Our Salutations to Goddess Kali, once again to protect us from all evil. Unlike in previous years where 'Kali Puja' used to be celebrated along with lesser-privileged children of the society, the puja in 2020 was conducted keeping all restrictions and protocols in mind.





**Hare Krishna Hare Krishna
Krishna Krishna Hare Hare
Hare Ram Hare Ram
Ram Ram Hare Hare**

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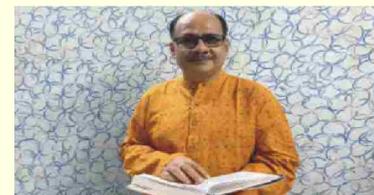
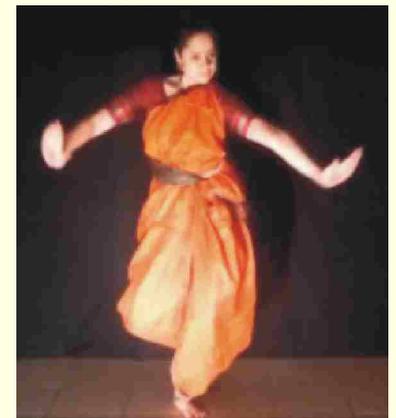
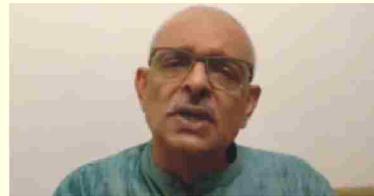
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Kobi Pronam

An important event on PBWAs calendar is the celebration of the great bard - Rabindranath Tagore's birth anniversary; popularly known as Rabindra Jayanti. This event is a cultural extravaganza of music, dance, drama, recitation, et al. This year also the Pandemic ruled out the conventional celebrations, but can even a Pandemic prevent PBWA'ites from remembering and celebrating the bard? No way! From the safety & comfort of their homes, came out recorded masterpieces of Song, Dance, Poetry and Narration. The programme aptly titled "**Kobi Pronam**" or 'Salutations to the Poet' - was presented on the bards's 154th birth anniversary over an online platform after being painstakingly edited and stitched together.



Our Digital Endeavours - Light years ahead! - Prateek Bhattacharya

I have been writing this annual update on behalf of PBWA's Digital Initiatives Team for our members and followers to cherish our Digital accomplishments over the past years. In this year's update I will both delve on the past and the near future of our Digital Initiatives.

The year gone by started with unprecedented challenges. Covid-19 started spreading in early 2020 and with that some of our year beginning initiatives came under a shadow of uncertainty. The Digital team took that as a challenge and in the month of May, as the first Fully Digital 'Rabindra Jayanti' Celebration was announced, the Digital team worked very closely to put together an online two hour musical and cultural show.

This was received really very well and also gave us the confidence that despite all external challenges, we can continue to pursue our cultural and social work using our Digital Infrastructure. With this confidence, the Digital team embarked on a journey to put the entire

Durga Puja online in 2020. This initiative was an end-to-end success, and using our Digital Assets - we went fully Live on YouTube and Facebook on all Days of the Durgotsav and integrated Zoom into our Live Productions and used it to do shows like CEO Power Walk that connected Corporate Leaders from India and US in real time.

With this we became the world's first and only end-to-end **Phygital Durga Puja**. People from all over the world viewed our Puja, gave their Anjali online and watched our beautiful cultural programs from the safety of their homes.

We were the only Durga Puja Internationally to be able to do this since they we had created Digital Infrastructure with many years of hard work which helped us to leverage our deep knowledge and resources in a new normal. This resulted in millions of views and impressions across over 150 countries (representing nearly 75% of the earth's population)



In the year 2021, we have taken the next logical step of further scaling up our Digital Assets by going for a transformation of PBWA's website - pbwa.in. This will be the centre-piece of the '**Phygital**' **Durgotsav 2021** and is a next generation website which is quite dynamic keeping in mind our future scale up plan (e.g. e-commerce for MSS products). This will be the landing point for all our Digital Assets and allow

one-view into the universe of PBWA's Digital Assets.

The new website will also help us in delivering world class Brand Support to our sponsors. In 2021, some of India's largest Brands and some of the best MNC Brands are Partnering with us on 100% Digital Only Campaigns - after experiencing our reach in 2020. Our new website and revamps in our Digital Assets will help us deliver much higher standards of Brand Experiences.

The Digital team has many second generation PBWA-ites and is an ever-growing community. We invite even more members to become a part of this world-class initiative.



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MISSION SWAYAM SIDDHA

Empowering Women through Self-Reliance

Unlocking Mission Swayam Siddha: Our Digital Journey

When we look back at the last few years, 2020 and 2021 will stand out as years of adversity, of adapting to a new normal, and of coming to terms with a situation as unprecedented as a global pandemic that disturbed life all around the world. Close to home, disruptions befell Mission Swayam Siddha (MSS, est. 2007), the flagship initiative of our association, the Powai Bengali Welfare Association, to empower socially and economically disadvantaged women. With the onset of the pandemic, MSS just stopped on its tracks. It all seemed like a bad dream!

Locked out of a livelihood

Since its inception, and prior to the onset of the pandemic, our women trainees used to work at the MSS workshop in Powai, acquiring various vocational skills. The exquisite products that they crafted were showcased primarily in various corporate exhibitions, the proceeds from which were the main source of livelihood for our trainees. The pandemic locked them out of life and livelihood without the slightest forewarning! Corporate exhibitions stopped, retail sales dwindled, and worst of all, our trainees could not step out to work. Their empowerment to become Swayam Siddhas was at stake.



Unlocking the digital potential

“In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity”- Albert Einstein’s words could not have been more applicable for us at MSS! Till date, MSS primarily functioned from our workshop - ‘offline’ in pandemic jargon. From time to time, we had been exploring ways to increase the reach of MSS products beyond exhibitions and local sales by going digital and establishing an online presence. The lockdown, perforce, presented MSS with the

perfect opportunity to embark on its digital journey. The task for ensuring a successful digital transformation was entrusted on us, the Gen-Next of PBWA. We wholeheartedly took this up as a challenge, inspired by our seniors who have been carrying forward the mission of empowerment to successfully make a difference to the lives of our trainees.

Taking off

To build up MSS’ online presence, we hit the road immediately. Around the months of July/August 2020, we had multiple meetings among ourselves to put the pieces together. The different waves of COVID did not help our cause but our enthusiasm knew no bounds!

We flagged off our journey with our first step, i.e building a repository of carefully-curated, high-quality pictures of all MSS products, which we can use on social media, in physical catalogues, brochures etc. After months of video calls, our team finally met up for our first session of product photo-shoots and never ending ideation. That first day turned out to be the first of many tiring, back-breaking, exhausting but extremely fruitful days and nights, where we would brainstorm on how we can best present each product, aesthetically and at the same time grab maximum eyeballs in the crowded online space. Facebook and Instagram were our chosen platforms.



Work can be fun

Midnight onwards was our chosen time slot for the photo shoots and strategizing, interspersed with blood curdling yawns and droopy eyes, and of course complemented by heavenly food across different cuisines! It was a mini-adventure of sorts. Funny behind-the-scenes videos, rolling around in fits of laughter over a lame joke someone cracked, late night ice-cream runs after work, were just a few of the many things that kept us going during this time.

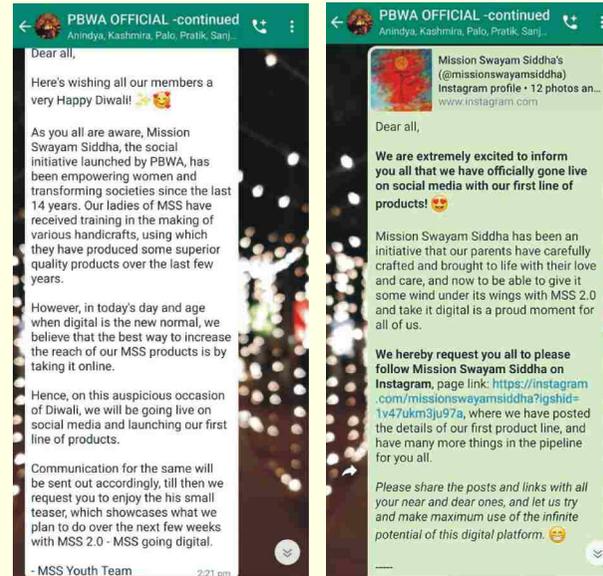
Behind all the fun was some serious business -- meetings and discussions about our online feeds, night-after-night of clicking creative photographs, deciding the aesthetics, making different kinds of content for our online viewers, tending to customers, figuring out the smallest aspects of the whole process.

Of course, Murphy's Law was at work often times, especially when least expected! However, all along we kept our spirits high, all of it done with the end goal in mind, i.e to launch the MSS brand online on the auspicious occasion of Diwali injecting renewed hope for our mission and its beneficiaries.

The launch

We did it! The planned launch on Diwali has to be one of our proudest moments, when we showcased our new social media assets to a Zoom call full of people! We fell in love with the fruits of our labor, both as creators and as customers. The feedback we received was so encouraging and almost immediately, we started getting orders for our products, with compliments galore for our presentation. The response motivated us to work harder and keep uploading content so that we can keep our little family of followers engaged. More than anything, it was a huge learning experience for

us to educate ourselves on what works / doesn't work on social media, the tricks of the trade, how to make a small business work online, how to get noticed.



The impact

We are a long way from where we want to be, but well-begun was half-done. The second wave of COVID in April 2021 did hamper our progress, but we have picked up the pieces again and are moving slowly but steadily, now operating also on a newly-devised commission model, which is nothing but an additional incentive for our trainees who painstakingly craft our MSS products with so much diligence and passion.

Our Instagram and Facebook pages showcase a variety of exquisite eco-friendly products such as jute folders, table runners, bags. The experience is seamless, from navigating our pages to ordering to receiving an order. That is the happy feedback we have received from our growing base of customers. Today we are proud to say, that due to MSS' online

presence on social media handles, MSS product sales have gone up exponentially. This simply translates to a continuous source of income for our trainees, to economic empowerment.

As of September 2021, we have had a cumulative reach of 1800+ accounts on Instagram, with 1100+ post interactions (likes, comments, shares etc.). We would like to see these numbers increase. Your patronage will make that possible. So without any further ado, place your orders, today!

- MSS Youth Team

Come; support Mission Swayam Siddha.

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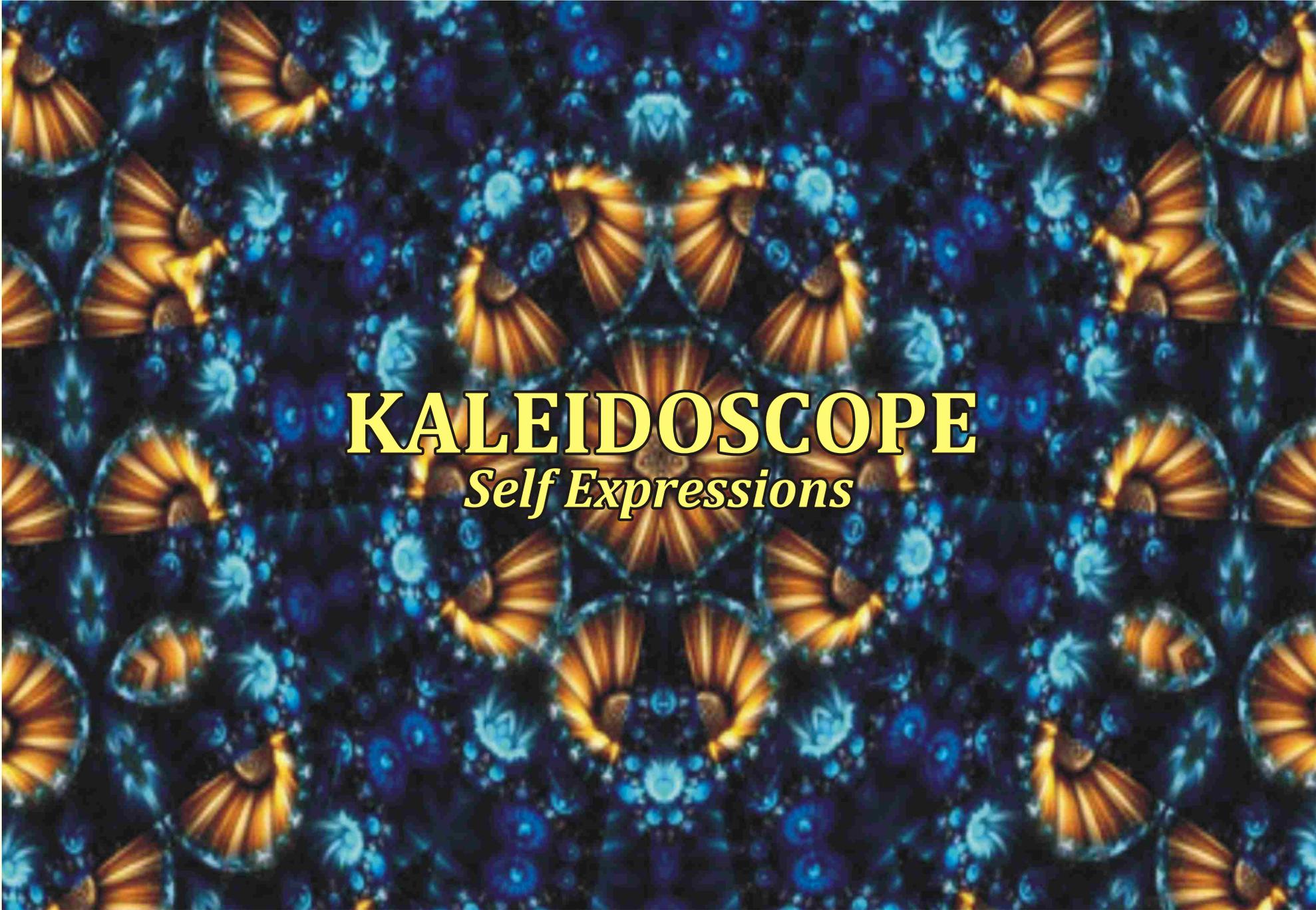


Gift Hampers for kids during Diwali



Rations for Women who lost jobs





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Pen & Brush - Aparna Mondal



The Highlands



Cherry Blossoms



Wild Flowers



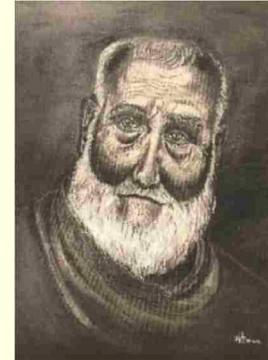
Morning Light in the Countryside

পৃথিবী আমার

আকাশ, সমুদ্র, পর্বত ও সমভল,
গাছ-গাছালী আর ফুলের সমারোহে
এই অপূর্ণা ধরিত্রী আমার,
মানুষজন ও পশুপাখি
সকলকে যেন ভালবাসি সমান করে আপনার।

ঈশ্বরের এই অনন্য উপহারকে
রক্ষা করার গুরু দায়িত্ব
হোক আমাদের সবাইকার।
চল সবাই ধরে হাতে হাত
এগিয়ে চলি সাথে সাথে
নতুন প্রজন্মকেও উদ্বুদ্ধ করি বারে বার।

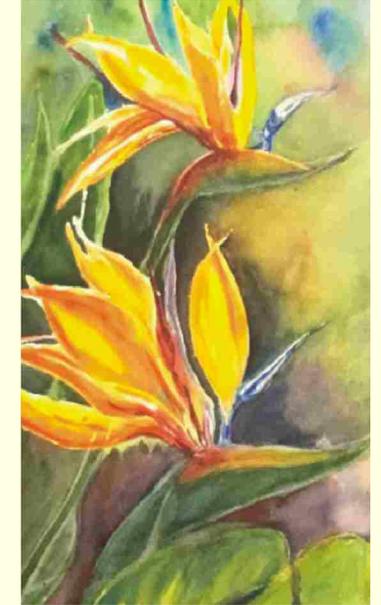
পৃথিবী ভূমি ছিলে আমার শৈশবে ও যৌবনে
থেকে ভাল আমার সাথে
আমার বার্ষিকে,
শাস্বত হোক তোমার অস্তিত্ব
আগামীকাল আর চিরদিনের স্বরে।



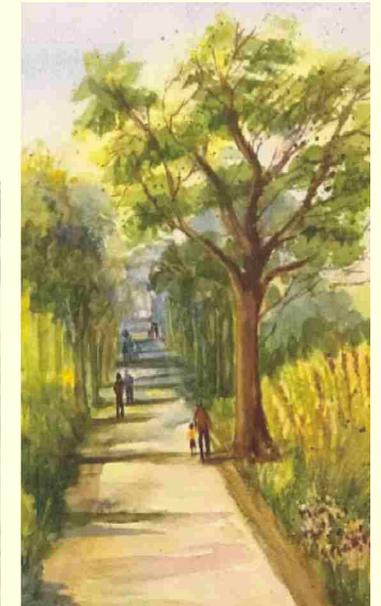
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Tough Old Lady



Bird of Paradise Flower



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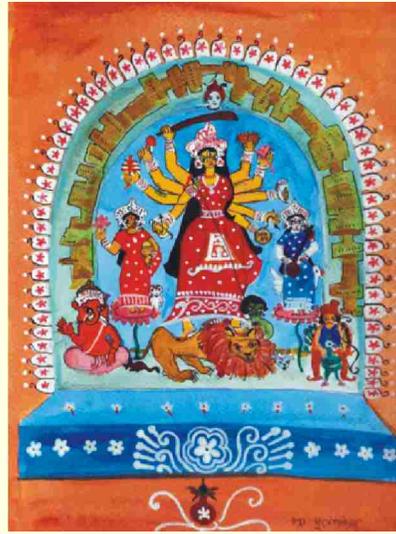
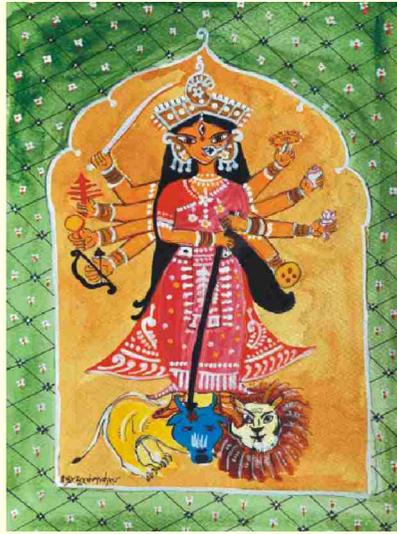
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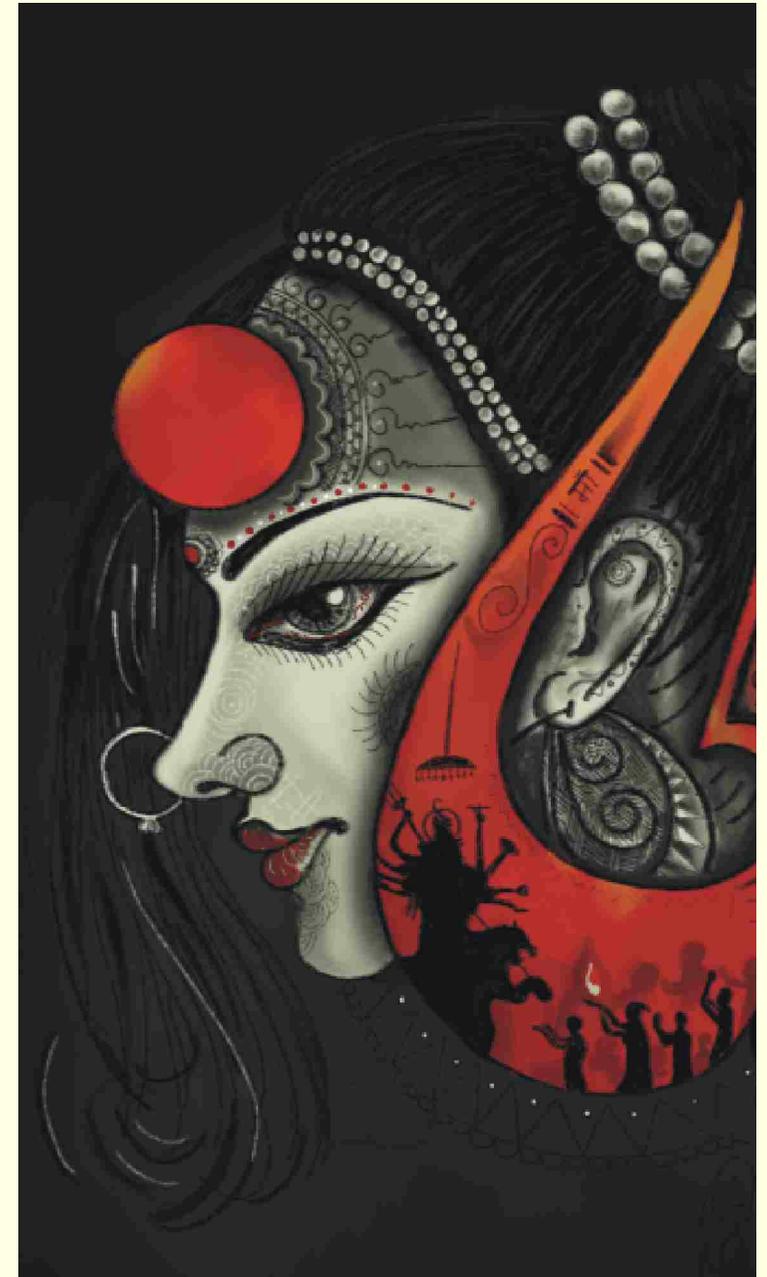
Shades of The Divine Mother



Chandra Mukherjee



Aparna Mondal



Ode to the Prowess of the Goddess Within - Aheli Sen

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DEBATES

*Bengalis are fiercely opinionated...
on anything under the sun! It is part of their
DNA and no forum is complete without an exchange,
quite often, animated and heated. This debate section,
features two sides of the coin on a couple of pertinent topics.*

Is Japan emerging as the next Super Power

Against the Motion - Arnob Mondal

"Japan is a great country. Japan is a world beater. Japan is the factory of the world. Japan is ahead of the curve on cutting edge technology. Japan is going to be the next superpower, and very soon. The next decade will belong to Japan..."

All the above statements are true. Except the conclusion.

It is as if all possible forces are conspiring to thwart Japan from its rightful superpower status within the comity of nations! And incidentally, nobody in their right mind seriously thinks that India will be the next superpower....

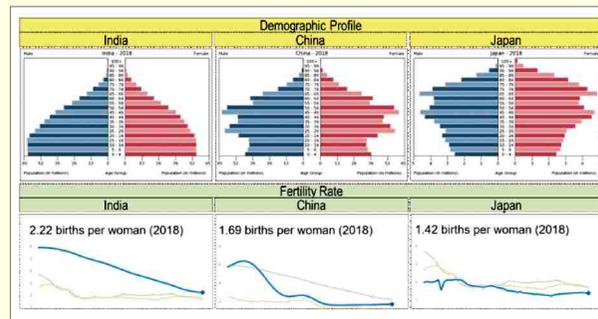
The psyche of a risen phoenix

The island nation is an inspiring case study of how a nation can be rebuilt while rising like a phoenix from the ashes of World War II. The Japanese people, when humbled before the world after the horrors of WW-II, stood with head bowed and underwent a collective catharsis in a manner that very few races have undergone. The psyche of the nation changed enmasse during that soul searing period following WW-II - and within a few decades, Japan was not just surviving but thriving. Unlike many countries which are beset with corruption, the Japanese people largely believe in "God-Country-Employer-Family-Self". And in that order. They are not only an extremely hard working and honest race, but often subjugate their personal interests for their country. It is no wonder that they attained developed country status so rapidly - to the extent that economists today use the term 'Asia ex-Japan' to indicate that unlike the rest of Asia, Japan is a developed nation.

Japan unfortunately faces multiple, strong socio-economic and geo-political roadblocks

A demographic time bomb..

One of the strongest (and insurmountable) impediments to economic growth is Japan's demographic profile. Unlike some countries which have favourable demographics (such as India which has a classic 'young' population pyramid), Japan has an inverted triangle profile (actually 'spinning top' shaped) which not only hobbles its growth due to an ageing population but is a harbinger of further economic contraction. Their population pyramid is, in fact, even worse than that of China (which has unfavourable demographics due to decades of single child policy rule). Unfortunately, the chances of improvement on this front for Japan over the next decade are also next to nothing, compounded by Japan's poor fertility rate (which is the lowest amongst the troika of India, China and Japan) - and to add insult to injury, Japan is also witnessing a shrinking population problem. A pictorial representation of the population pyramids and fertility rates of these 3 countries serves as a grim reminder of the intractable full-frontal hurdle that Japan faces on this count.



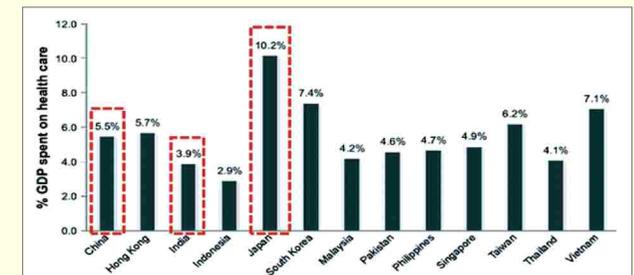
Japan's population has become a 'hyper-aged' one (with 65yr+ expected to constitute 40% of the population by 2060 and old-age dependency ratio expected to climb to nearly 80% by then). This is actually a gale force headwind for Japan.

The demographic profile with shrinking population

alone is a ticking and crippling time bomb that will take decades to correct, even with concerted multi-pronged measures - no country with intractable structures like this can aspire to become a world superpower for at least a few decades.

Healthcare costs are landing body blows

A concomitant outcome of poor demographics is the large bite-sized chunk that healthcare costs consume as a % of GDP in Japan - and it is axiomatic that healthcare costs are bad fiscal costs unlike infrastructure outlay which leads to economic growth. The following comparative chart of Asian healthcare costs highlights this in stark fashion:

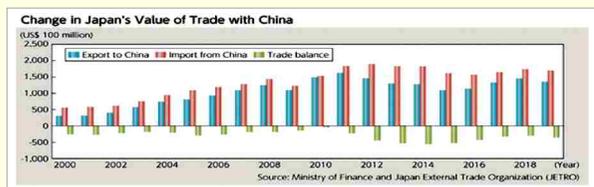


The fire-breathing dragon next door

Japan is largely a peace loving country despite its chequered past. It's immediate (and giant) neighbour, however, is not. China has been increasingly flexing its muscles and giving its Asian neighbours the hard-stare treatment on multiple fronts. And China is blatantly exhibiting hegemonic, salami slicing moves and overt wolf-warrior diplomacy - figuratively shouting "don't mess with me, I'm the 800 lb gorilla in the neighbourhood!". China today is the overpowering hegemonic Asian superpower and given the long history of wars and confrontations between the two nations, a yawning trust deficit has developed between them - one which shows no signs of abating. Frequent face-off over the Senkaku islands only aggravates the friction.

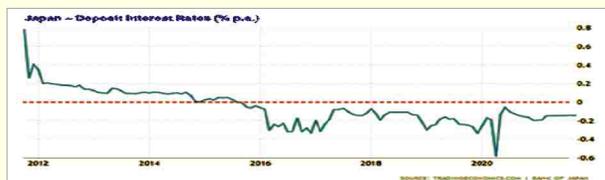
Is Japan emerging as the next Super Power

The menacing presence of a giant bully next door closely watching your every move symbiotically crimps economic growth - particularly when around 25% of Japan's imports comes from China (and China is as large a trading partner of Japan as is the US). This places China in a position where it can quickly erect trade and non-trade barriers to the detriment of Japan if it feels economically threatened in any way. The following graph highlights trade parameters between the 2 countries:



Negative Interest Rates:

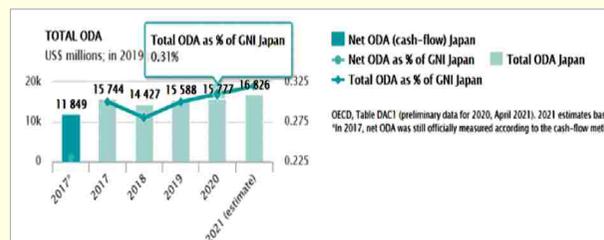
For the last 5 years or so, Japan has been grappling with negative interest rates - which effectively means that you have to pay money to the bank to park your money there! Negative interest rates hurt NIMs (Net Interest Margins) of banks, reduce the flow of credit to the economy and tend to delink stock valuations from reality - even though they give a competitive edge to exporters. Economists are also divided over whether negative interest rates help or impede economic growth. The trend of Deposit Interest Rates is illustrated below:



Does ODA (Official Development Assistance) really mitigate -ve interest rates?

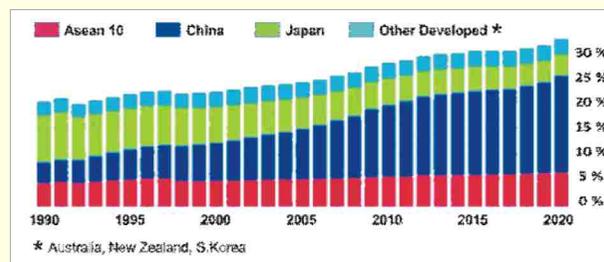
While votaries of Japan's economy cite strong, long tenor ODA (Official Development Assistance) loans

lines at positive interest rates, ODA is barely a small fraction (0.31%) of Japan's GNI (Gross National Income) - see chart below. And to put things in perspective, ODA loans by Japan are usually very soft loans which typically carry coupon of between 0.10% to 1.00% p.a (max 1.35%). ODA (part of which are also outright grants) thus does not really alleviate the impact of -ve interest rates in Japan in any appreciable manner.



Declining share within World GDP:

If the past is any indicator or precursor of the future, then amongst the large Asian economies, it is unlikely that Japan will acquire economic powerhouse status any time soon. Japan's share of world GDP on PPP basis has been shrinking in relative terms - which is all too evident from the following trend chart:



Stagnant GDP Trends:

While Japan is still the 3rd largest world economy, its GDP trend has been declining / remained flat for many years now. GDP statistics over the last 10 years illustrates this in all too bleak a manner:



The steel is not so strong as it seems

"Steel exports to the US are going to rapidly propel Japan to the top of the commodity exports league table in double quick time". Sure - maybe in a million years from now. The fact is that steel is a heavy commodity and freight costs play a significant dead-weight role in competitive pricing of exports. Digest this - while price of steel in the US has gone up by 200% since Mar-2020 (from 600 \$/MT to 1800 \$/MT), the cost of freight from Japan to the US West Coast has soared by 350% (to 500 \$/MT) and has thus made steel exports to the US prohibitively expensive - and unaffordable at the US end. The sharp spike in ocean freight over the FY21 (see graph) is also a long overdue correction of the flat line trajectory of Baltic indices over the last decade and is unlikely to exhibit mean reversion any time soon. The increasing shortage of containers (being choked by container production pullback in China) is further aggravating ocean freight tariffs.



Bottomline:

Shorn of extraneous peripheral factors, it is markedly clear that while Japan is a strong economic powerhouse with both technological prowess and soft power, it faces significant and overpowering structural headwinds that are likely to prevent it from becoming a leading superpower in Eurasia any time soon. Arigato!

Is Japan emerging as the next Super Power

For the Motion - Prateek Bhattacharya

Opinion Editorial

Most of our mindshare over the last few years has been dominated by what we hear about three countries-USA, China and Af-Pak (Af-Pak is technically not a country but let us stay with the Big Picture).

Be it the 4 years of Trump, the early failings of Biden's term, the US - China Trade war, China Virus and its Economic impacts, South China Sea skirmishes, China-India Border issues and re-emergence of QUAD, Belt and Road Initiative and the ongoing wars on Terrorism in Af-Pak, it has always involved one of these three countries.

I am not going to write about any of these three, but how one country (Japan) has intelligently used all that's going around the world to build a strategic foundation and using which - by the end of the current Decade - would likely emerge as the Third Superpower in the world after USA and China (some of my Indian friends may not like this view since in our hearts we all believe that India will soon become a Super Power and thereafter go on to overtake China and USA to become the biggest Super Power - so maybe I will write my view about India in a separate Op-Ed)

But before we speak about Japan's strategic moves, let us look at three geopolitical trends.

1. US is no longer as interested in Asia.

- For the last 50 years, Asia was a net provider of energy to US (read oil from Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq etc.) and it was in US's interest to protect its Oil supply related investments in the region. Now US is a net exporter of crude and petro - products post the fracking revolution. This is probably the real reason why US is unwinding in the Middle-East and Central Asia.

- After the Af-Pak debacle - I expect US to soften up on Iran's sanctions very soon. US's financial leverage on Iran is loosening (since China is now providing a large crude oil import conduit to Iran bartered against its exports) and with US's reduction in military enforcement capability in the region - its best case is a dignified negotiated exit to Iran's sanctions (& not wait for the Iran-China nexus to make US's sanctions irrelevant causing it further global embarrassment).

2. China's single largest Export Market is US, which it knows is unsustainable: China fully understands its need to expand its exports to break its economic dependency on US and the US Dollar (China is the largest holder of US Fed Debt) - and the Belt & Road initiative is the means to that end. **I put forth the argument that China is driven by an economic objective and not a military objective in its expansionist attempts** (much like US - when it created a military presence in many parts of the world to secure its economic expansion and not for territorial ambitions).

- China's Belt and Road initiative has 2 parts - the Belt (which actually means the Road) and the Road (which actually means sea lanes). **In my view the Road (Sea lanes) part of the initiative is the red herring.**

- China has kept the intelligence and media communities busy on the Sea front (called 'The Road') - emanating from moves of the likes of Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka, Gwadar Port in Pakistan, etc. **while the real success (& unwritten) success story has been written overland.**

- China has already operationalised a transport corridor from Beijing to Germany using a network of Highways and High Capacity Train lines which have helped it in scaling up its exports to many

under-served countries in Central Asia (the 'stans'), Russia and Eastern Europe. China will continue to invest in overland export markets in pursuit of diversification away from US.

- A key node in this overland network of highways and railways passes just miles north of Kashmir - and China will do whatever it takes to ensure security of this soft and vulnerable underbelly. This explains its recent aggressiveness in Ladakh and endorsement of Taliban.

- But this expansion is coming at a cost to China - a fast increasing pile of "High Risk Debt" (also called 'Junk Bonds'). China is having to shift away from the relative safety of the US Dollar debt to carrying risky bonds and debt issuances of financially stressed countries like Pakistan, Iran, and its BRI funded African nations. Thus the much higher "Credit-Risk" is the cost of Diversification that China is having to pay. In order to reduce the Credit-risk of its Debt book, China will increasingly be involved politically in its BRI investee countries.

3. China's largest non-oil imports come from Australia and Brazil: Iron Ore and Coal - required for making steel and running its power plants are imported from Australia and Brazil.

- China understands that with US announcing a multi-trillion infrastructure rebuilding program in the 2020s - it will become a huge consumer and potentially a much larger producer of steel - and will compete with China for Iron ore from Brazil and Australia.

- China is trying to hedge itself by investing in Iron Ore Resources from Liberia to Afghanistan and wherever it can find any kind of iron ore - since China to its credit has the ability to consume even lower grades of Iron ore (unlike US, Japan and South Korea - the other large producers of steel)

Is Japan emerging as the next Super Power

If you put the three trends together - what will likely happen is emergence of two large trading blocs - Americas and China-led Eurasia (ex-India)

- Americas would become self-sufficient but US led in Energy (Oil & Gas), Steel and Technology and US will either exit NATO or make it defunct.
- European nations will gradually align with China and a China-led Eurasia would also become self-sufficient in Energy and Steel. In Technology - China will fully build out its own technology platforms and propagate them in its investee countries but Europeans will not use China-based Technologies.
- With the two trading blocs less dependent on intra-continent trade flows, it is likely that they will de-escalate militarily on the seas but China will likely need to maintain a large overland military presence in Central Asia as a means to minimise the risk on its Debt investments.
- They may however spar occasionally on the Technology front (with attempts like China withholding rare earths required by US focused semiconductor companies, stealing US Technology, making e-intelligence attacks on US Govt. bodies etc.)
- There will likely be a third bloc - loosely comprising of India, Japan, Australia and South Korea which will continue to play to the season economically. They will trade with both the blocs opportunistically and will unlikely interfere militarily in any of the blocs.

It is conditions like this which will help one country the most - **Japan**.

- Just as a starting point, Japan's GDP was \$5+ Trillion in 2020 - which makes it the third largest Economy Globally. Many of you may have thought

that this would be UK, Germany, France or any other developed country, but the reality is that Japan is a Very Big Economy Already. (India at \$2.7 Tn will need to double its GDP to come close to where Japan is today.)

- Japan is the largest exporter and second largest producer of steel globally and as US invests in its Infrastructure revamp, Japan is likely to find a huge export market for its world-class steel. China's weaning off Australian Iron Ore & Coking Coal will allow Japan to access much higher grade and lower cost raw materials thereby improving its reinvestment abilities.
- Japan has one of the largest pipeline of high quality sovereign long term (30 years, 40 years, 50 years) positive coupon bearing debt (examples include Bullet Train in India, Mines in Australia etc.) - in a world where more than 10 Trillion US\$ of debt globally have negative Interest rates-when compared to US (which is a net Debtor) and China (which has a deteriorating Asset Quality problem).
- Japan has been the largest provider of FDI (Foreign Direct Equity Investment) in USA and a Japanese investment bank - 'Softbank' has invested in the largest pool of Tech companies Globally
- With an intelligent deployment of its domestic capital - in US equity, especially 'Tech' and Long-term positive coupon being low-risk Sovereign debt - Japan is poised to benefit from the economic development in all parts of the world without taking undue risks while growing itself further as an exporting nation
- Japan has done all of this noiselessly, staying largely under the world media's radar and by being almost self-effacing diplomatically. In a world where the projection of super-power will likely be less

muscular and more economic and technological, Japan starts from a strong base and has many tailwinds to help it with. Tokyo Olympics was just the start Japan needed to remind us of its **Super Decade**.

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Is India doing enough for sports and sports persons?

Against the Motion - Supriyo Lahiri

The response to this direct and uncomplicated question must also be as such; however, this must be approached from two perspectives, the role of the Government and that of the public including the corporate sector.

In sports powerhouses like China, Russia and South Korea, sports administration, funding and developmental programs are mainly led by governmental efforts, whereas in a strong sporting nation like the US, the private sector plays a huge role in spotting and nurturing talents and also in maintaining a grass-root level sporting infrastructure.

Role of the Government and budget allocation:

At the outset, let me quote from The Business Standard dated February 2nd, 2021:

The Central Government in the Union budget for 2021-22 allocated Rs.2,596.14 crore to sports, less by Rs.230.78 crore - or 8.16 per cent - allocated in the previous financial year.

And this, happened in an Olympic year! Unfortunately, we continue to see such dichotomy between what the Government says and what it actually does because this budget cut happened long before the 2nd wave of Covid-19 was upon us. Funnily, the much-publicized 'Khelo India' program launched in 2017-18 received a hefty increase while the allocation for National sports development fund, the National sports federations and even the outlay for meritorious sports persons all were cut to the extent of 16 to 40%!

UK spends close to Rs. 9K crore in its annual sports budget, India's allocation is not even one-third of that.

One must emphasize here that supporting sports doesn't only mean medal chasing in international events like the Asian games, Commonwealth games,

the Olympics or the individual championships. But performance in such events can't be ignored either because that gets the eyeballs of the public, interest in sports goes up, participation increases and so does the flow of sponsorships.

However, even on that count our score is far from encouraging. In the Rio Olympics we had sent one of the biggest contingents and returned with just two medals! In the Tokyo Olympics, our medal tally of seven is the highest ever which is very encouraging. However, in medal per-capita we continue to languish at the bottom! Nations, far smaller and much lesser developed, fare much better than us.

Of course, supporting and promoting sports is also not just about money. It's about having a well thought out, comprehensive and grassroots penetrating sports and sportsperson development program. The much-flaunted 'Khelo India' program looks good on paper but why did it have to come in vogue at the expense of all previous schemes. And how well is it being implemented?

Ground reality:

Let's look at some of the findings of the Government itself. The National status of education report (NSER 2018) was tabled after a survey of 9,000 primary and 7,000 upper primary schools across 596 districts.

Across states, less than 20% of the schools had a dedicated physical education teacher or a designated period for it. (Source NSER 2018).

Most of our prize-winning sportspersons come from rural backgrounds, where in spite of almost criminal negligence on the part of the state as well as the central governments, they brave untold miseries and shine by dint of their own talent and grit rather than a well-oiled support system.

Conversely, as per Forbes magazine, China is well on its way to fulfil their avowed objective of building

the sports industry to \$ 813 billion by 2025. The same article quotes Jingping who wants to have 70,000 new football grounds constructed by 2020!

Sports federations in India are havens of political leaders and businessmen who grab high positions in these bodies for the power, prestige and ill-gotten wealth they promise, rather than bettering the future of the sports that they head.

Sports as a vehicle for Nation building:

Swami Vivekananda exhorted the youth of a shackled nation by saying, "You'll be nearer to heaven by playing football rather than studying the Bhagavad Gita."

He knew the power of sports as a builder of not only powerful bodies but characters as well.

Participation in sports activities build:

- A) Sense of competitiveness
- B) Sense of belongingness
- C) Leadership
- D) Camaraderie
- E) Co-operation
- F) Discipline
- G) Openness of mind

to name just a few.

When boys and girls from different states and regions get together, and live together for a team event, it gives them a chance to see and experience the diversity of our country and develop a sense of oneness instead of narrow parochialism.

Unlike religion that also divides, sports is the only common thread that binds people together and helps people in developing a sense of patriotism and unity that can counter regional factionalism and the sinister designs of various parochial forces that are constantly putting the fabric of our nation under pressure.

Sports as a vehicle for social uplifting of the underprivileged:

In a country like India, an all-encompassing sports and sports person development program would be of immense value for this objective.

To excel at sports, one needs a well-nurtured and developed body. Providing boys and girls a balanced nutrition at the school level would go a long way to lift the pall of malnutrition and underdevelopment in the vast rural expanse of our country.

This would also increase the flow of young talents in different sports disciplines for future development, many fold.

Sports is a great leveler and lifter.

In Nairobi, Mathare Youth Sports Association (MUSA) has used football programs in the slums to bring change and hope in the lives of many children for many years. The program has helped thousands of children to overcome social ills like dropping out of school, drug abuse and other delinquent behaviour.

Closer home at Jharkhand, Yuwa India has become a beacon of hope for thousands of tribal girls. The organization encourages and supports these girls to participate in sports, hone their skills and compete in National and international tournaments.

A recent survey showed that in the families of hundreds of girls touched by the activities of the Yuwa India, social malaise like illiteracy, child-marriage, infant death and unemployment have taken a significant dip.

This demonstrates our point that development of sports in the country doesn't just culminate in earning a few medals in tournaments. Any government must take it as a major instrument for nation building and give it suitable priority in terms of organization as well as budget allocation.

Private enterprises:

It's a pity that corporate support for this cause has also been found to be severely wanting.

Apart from cricket, which is a money-spinner, very few organizations have come forward with sustained commitment in terms of investing money and efforts for the development of sports.

It's ironic to see the rat race of corporates to bask in their own glory by donating a measly sum of a few lakhs when a single athlete excels in the Olympics or some such high profile international event. The motive is cheap publicity rather than improving the future of sports in India.

This needs to change. The change has to be brought along by us, the common mass.

People must come forward, in the form of NGOs, associations, citizen's groups etc.

These organizations can take their own initiatives like Yuwa India and also form pressure groups to influence government policies as well as garner better support from the corporate world.

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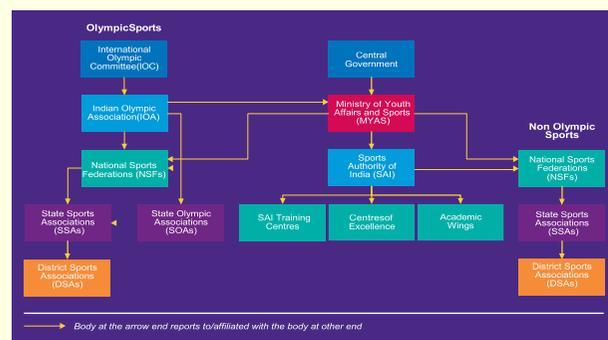
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Is India doing enough for sports and sports persons?

For The Motion - Moon Moon Mukherjee

Before we start, we must understand Governance Structure & their key Roles & Responsibilities. Sports In India are governed and managed jointly by Government Organizations at the center and state levels, along with autonomous federations and associations. There are two apex bodies which Govern Sports in India. MYAS and IOA. MYAS governs sports primarily through SAI, which is responsible for promoting various sports disciplines (Olympic and non-Olympic), implementation of government schemes and managing training centers and other sports infrastructure. On the other hand, IOA governs the Olympic sports by overseeing NSFs. The involvement of the government is high in Sports Governance in India, while that of the private and non-profit institutions is limited. Also, the government provides financial support to NSFs and sports persons, and thus, seeks accountability as well. Sports governance in India.



Roles and responsibilities of major governing entities:

Governing body:

Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports (MYAS)

Key responsibilities:

-The Department of Sports at MYAS develops infrastructure and builds capacity to help produce quality athletes to represent India at international events

-Introduces and implements policies (for example, the National Sports Development Code) for NSFs and other entities involved in sports governance Launches and manages sports development programmes and schemes, such as the Scheme of Assistance to National Sports Federations and National Welfare Fund for Sports persons

-Determines the guide lines for recognition of NSFs, the scale of assistance to be provided to them, conditions for their eligibility to receive government funding and release of funds to IOA

Governing body:

Sports Authority of India (SAI)

Key responsibilities:

Carries out MYAS' objectives, Promotes sports in India, and maintains and utilises stadia, including the Jawaharlal Nehru Sports Complex, Major Dhyani Chand National Stadium and Indira Gandhi Sports Complex Releases funds to NSFs and supports them in identifying and training sports persons, provide infrastructure and equipment, and any other assistance as per the government guidelines Runs schemes, such as SAI Training Centres (STC) Scheme, National Sports Talent Contest (NSTC) Scheme and Army Boys Sports Companies (ABSC) Scheme Manages and runs two academic wings - Netaji Subhas National Institute of Sports (NSNIS), Patiala and Lakshmi Bai National College of Physical Education (LNCPE), Thiruvananthapuram-to produce competent coaches, sports scientists and physical education teachers.

Governing body:

Indian Olympic Association (IOA)

Key responsibilities:

IOA is affiliated with the International Olympic Committee (IOC), Olympic Council of Asia (OCA) and the Commonwealth Games Federation (CWF) Manages the preparation and participation of sports persons in international sports events, including the Olympic Games, Asian Games, South Asian Games and

Commonwealth Games Receives facilitations from NSFs of each Olympic sport and other institutions, such as the NSNIS Organises the National Games that is typically conducted every two years Liaises with the Government of India for financial support, governs NSFs, and also promotes Olympic sports in the country. Governing body:

National Sports Federations (NSFs)

Key responsibilities:

NSFs are typically affiliated with international bodies representing their respective sport; NSFs of Olympic sports also need to abide by the guidelines set by IOA and those of the Olympic Charter of IOC Promote their respective sports across the country, for which SSAs and DSAs assist them. Scout for talented sports persons, support their training, and organise tournaments and championships within their respective jurisdictions

Facilitate participation of Indian sports persons at international events for their respective sports. Well, going by statistics and enough data in public domain, it appears that while the gap between desire / target and actual could still be there, there seems to be concerted efforts to progressively bring down this gap and that directionally India is on the right trajectory as far as promoting and assisting its existing and latent talents in sports / games is concerned.

Let us make a modest attempt to deep dive into a recent event, the Tokyo Olympics, and analyse. A. Indian medalists in Tokyo 2021.

- (1) Neeraj Chopra: Gold medal in Javelin throw at 87.58m
- (2) Mirabai Chanu: Silver medal in Women's 49 kg weightlifting.
- (3) Lovlina Borgohain: Bronze medal in Women's welterweight boxing.
- (4) PV Sindhu: Bronze medal in Women's singles badminton.
- (5) Ravi Kumar Dahiya: Silver medal in Men's 57kg wrestling.

(6) Indian hockey team: Bronze medal in Men's hockey.

(7) Bajrang Punia: Bronze medal in Men's 65kg wrestling.

By and large, quite an impressive haul as far medal tally of India in any Olympics so far, right (including the first gold)?

B. Support rendered by Indian Govt. towards some of these winners

To quote Mirabai Chanu, "I would like to specially thank Sports Authority of India and Target Olympic Podium Scheme for extending every possible support for my continuous training in the country and abroad. This medal is only possible because of the teamwork. Thank you once again."

Mirabai travelled to St. Louis, USA with support through the TOPS scheme to work with renowned physical therapist, strength and conditioning coach Dr. Aaro Horschig ahead of the Olympics at a cost of Rs.70 lakhs.

This decision to send Mirabai to USA was taken in a matter of a few hours after it became apparent that the USA would close down for Indian travelers. She boarded a flight on May 1, a day before the US ruled not to let Indians fly there due to growing Covid-19 incidences in India.

Lovlina, Borgohain was presented Rs 1 Crore and offered the post of deputy superintendent of police (DSP). The Government has also decided to give Lovlina. Rs.1 lakh per month as a scholarship for her preparation for Paris Olympics in 2024 and will continue to do so till the Games in 2024.

Similarly, PV Sindhu has also gone on record acknowledging Govt. support at many stages in her career.

C. Salient Govt. Interventions – few examples

PV Sindhu (Badminton)

(1) Visa Support Letters for various international competitions and foreign training

(2) Physiotherapist and Fitness Trainer supported under TOPS for International Competitions and

foreign training (e.g., Gayatri Shetty for 3 months in 2018)

(3) Financial assistance towards 52 International Competitions in the current Olympic Cycle

(4) Provided Game Ready "Recovery System" for carrying to Tokyo to support quick rehabilitation of those who needed.

(5) Special training at Gachibowli Stadium in collaboration with Telangana State, including funding for the Court Mats placed there.

(6) Provision for Individual Foreign Coach - Park Tae Sang under ACTC.

(7) Logistical support for international competitions during COVID

(8) National Coaching Camp under ACTC

(9) Conducted sensitization programs for understanding of Covid-19 protocols, "Life at Tokyo", Anti Doping and travelling from India with pride.

Financial Assistance

TOPS: Rs 51.28 L

ACTC: Rs 3.47 Crores

TOTAL: Rs 3.98 Crores

Motivational steps

Padma Bhushan (2020)

Padma Shri (2015)

Rajiv Gandhi Khel Ratna Award (2016)

Arjuna Award (2013)

Coaching assistance

Grassroot Coach: Mehboob Ali (Age:8-10), Mohammad Ali, Arif Sir, Goverdhan Sir & Tom John (Age:10-12)

Development Coach : Pullela Gopichand & Various at Gopichand Academy

Elite Coach : Mulyo Kim, Dwi Rifan & Park Tae Sang (2018 onwards till now)

Ravi Kumar Dahiya (Wrestling)

The Haryana government had announced a reward of Rs 4 Crores for the wrestler Ravi Kumar Dahiya for winning the Silver medal. The wrestler also got a Class

I government job as per the State's policy and a plot of land at 50 % concession. An indoor stadium for wrestling would be constructed in his village.

Indian hockey team (Bronze medal in Men's hockey)

The boys of Punjab would receive a cash award of Rs 1 Crore each

Bajrang Punia (Wrestling)

Government gave Rs. 2.5 Crore, a government job and a plot of land at 50% concession to wrestler Bajrang Punia for winning bronze medal at Tokyo 2020.

Neeraj Chopra (Javelin)

The entire country was swept with a wave of euphoria when javelin thrower Neeraj Chopra won India's first-ever Olympic gold medal in athletics. With a throw of 87.58m, Chopra won the hearts of 1.38 billion people of the country who revelled in the glory of Olympic gold.

Neeraj received government support worth Rs 7 crore for the following purposes: Visa support letter for training and competing in events across Europe when the country was facing a lockdown. He received financial assistance towards the procurement of sports gear and recovery equipment. Finance was allotted separately for hiring a bio-mechanist expert cum coach for his training at the National coaching camp and for foreign exposure. Injury management and rehabilitation along with Federation and NGO He was given financial assistance towards 26 international competitions in the current Olympic cycle.

One thing standing out at the 2021 Tokyo Olympiad is that despite the prevailing pandemic this was the Olympiad where the Indian Contingent did the best, winning 9 medals.

On the face of it, would not have been feasible without the structured interventions by the Govt. on these select talents, right?

While the country maybe short of resources to be able to do effect these kind of assistance to every deserving sportsperson, with whatever we can, channelization in a planned manner seemed to have been done for those few who had the maximum promise for the country.

Uttam Kumar or Soumitra Chatterjee - Who is the real Superstar? The eternal debate!

While Uttam was the conventional good looking hero who sang, romanced and emoted with a flourish, Soumitra was a more understated and down-to-earth actor. While Uttam excelled in subtlety and spontaneity, Soumitra shone in versatility and diversity even in art-forms outside of Cinema. In Theatre, Poetry, Music and Direction. While Uttam reached the pinnacles of glory in his relatively short life, Soumitra continued to entertain almost till his last days as an eighty five year old. While Soumitra was the actor of choice by the maestro himself - the legendary Satyajit Ray - Uttam didn't quite find favour with Ray. Yet the masses and Soumitra himself acknowledged Uttam as the 'Mahanayak' or Superstar.

But this debate during one of the Durga puja evenings, amongst PBWA members was fiery, full of banter, roaring laughter and of course - no winners!!! With Bengalis on both sides of the divide none can win, right?



Pride, Tears, Laughter - Bratati Sengupta

কান্না, হাসি, অভিমান

ব্রততী সেনগুপ্ত

মানুষের যতই বয়স বাড়ে ততই শৈশবের কথা মনে পড়ে। বাল্যকালের তুচ্ছ তুচ্ছ ঘটনাগুলো মনের আয়নায় জ্বল-জ্বল করে ভেসে ওঠে। চট্টগ্রামে আমাদের জমিদারি ও বাড়ি ছিল। বাড়িতে অনেক কাজের লোক ছিল, কিন্তু কাউকেই আমরা পর মনে করতাম না। মাসি, পিসি, দিদি এইসব বলেই ডাকতাম। ওরাই আমাদের দেখাশোনা করত। কোনো মনম'ত কাজ না হলেই ভ্যা করে কান্না জুড়ে দিতাম। ছোট ছোট কারণে কেঁদে ভাসাতাম। তখন ঐ মাসি পিসিরাই আমার কান্না থামাতে ব্যস্ত হয়ে যেত আর আমার কান্না থামত। অনেক ক'রে যখন কান্না থামত তখন আবার মুখে হাসি – কখনো হি হি, কখনো বা মুচকি হাসি। ওরাও তখন স্বস্তির নিশ্বাস ফেলত। কখনো কখনো সামান্য কারণে রাগ করে ভাত খাবো না ব'লে চোট ফুলিয়ে অভিমান করে “খাবো না” বলে অন্য ঘরে চলে যেতাম। তখন ঐ মাসি পিসিই আমাকে ভোলাতে ব্যস্ত হয়ে যেত। এবং ক্ষানিক্ষণ সাধাসাধির পর খাবার ঘরে যেতাম।

আমার দিদিরা যখন পাঠশালায় পড়ত, আমিও কখনো কখনো ওদের সাথে পাঠশালায় যেতাম। সারাদিন আমবাগানে, ফুলবাগানে ঘুরে বেড়াতাম। নানান রকমের প্রজাপতি ধরার জন্য ওদের পিছন পিছন দৌড়ে বেড়াতাম। ফড়িংও ছিল নানান রকমের। সকালে পাখিদের গান শুনে ঘুম ভেঙে যেত – বড় সুন্দর সে সকাল।

আমার যখন ৫/৬ বছর বয়স তখন ভারত ভাগ হল – দিদিরা সবাই কলকাতা চলে এল। ওখানে পার্ক সার্কাস ময়দানের পূর্ব দিকে দরগা রোডে একটা বাড়ি ভাড়া নেওয়া হয়েছিল। কিছুদিন পরে শুনলাম, আমাদেরও কলকাতা চলে যেতে হবে। একদিন বাবা-মা আমাকে প্লেনে তুলে দিল। দাদা আমাকে কলকাতা এয়ারপোর্টে নাবিয়ে নিলো – দাদা আমার থেকে অনেক বড়ো ছিল। আমার কিন্তু একা কলকাতা যেতে মোটেই ভয় লাগে নি। কলকাতায় নেমে আমি হন হন করে এগিয়ে গেলাম – কিন্তু ওখানকার লোকের আমাকে আটকে দিল। কি না কি সব কাগজের গন্ডগোল ছিল – দাদা তখন এগিয়ে এসে ওদের সাথে কথা বলে সব মিটমিট করে দিল – আমার নামের নাকি কি গন্ডগোল ছিল। সব মিটে যাবার পর দাদার সাথে ট্যাক্সি করে গেলাম দরগা রোডের বাসায়।

সেই সঙ্গে কলকাতা এয়ারপোর্টে আমার শৈশবটাকে পিছনে ছেড়ে এলাম।

Faith - Anindita Dasgupta

The word Faith stands for a belief that comes from within a human being mainly to protect himself from any harm. Faith can be on God-almighty, it can be on a friend, it can be on parents, it can be on an employee. This Faith develops inside a human because he / she always craves for a mental support to rely on and be guided and protected. All human beings are created equal by God or that Supreme being. None of us has ever seen God. All that we know about God is that it is a supreme power which is beyond the control of any scientific explanation. We describe this unknown power as The Almighty-mightier than anyone else. Since we mortals have to co-exist with nature in this world, we start developing Faith on this unknown power of Nature by developing various Forms and shapes of the supreme power so that we can believe to physically see it and worship it for our well-being. Therefore, Faith in different parts of the world gives rise to different shapes and forms of supreme power. Faith also gives rise to different rituals of their own, in order to worship their respective form of supreme power. Hence, for some the Faith and rituals then takes the shape of God and Goddesses. All Gods and Goddesses are representation of the same unknown power. So, we should understand we all belong to the same world community co-existing with the same Nature around us. When a natural calamity destroys and displaces hundreds of people in a region, every single person prays to the same Supreme power to have mercy on them. At that time, we get direct help from our friends, relatives, community and our fellow human beings. Therefore, we as human beings need to build our Faith mainly on each other without fighting for trivial materialistic things. We should start working top reserve Mother Nature as one world community. I think that will be the real reverence and salutation to the unknown supreme power. So let us celebrate all festivals with its rituals and have Faith on Humanity so that the Almighty bestows His Blessings on us all.

Facts not Fiction - Dr Nitya Gopal Sengupta

আজগুৰি নয় মোটেই

ড: নিত্যাগোপাল সেনগুপ্ত

সে অনেকদিন – না না অনেক দিন নয়, অনেক বছর আগেকার কথা। ১৯৪৫ সাল। আমার তখন ৮-৯ বছর বয়স। দ্বিতীয় বিশ্বযুদ্ধ চলছে – জাপানে তখনও অ্যাটম বোমা পড়ে নি। বোধহয় মে / জুন মাস হবে – বৃষ্টি তখনও শুরু হয় নি। তবে বলি শোনো, তখন কেমন ছিল গ্রাম বাংলা। তখন বিজলী বাতিই নেই – রেডিও, টিভি টেলিফোন তো দূরের কথা। অবিভক্ত ভারতের পূর্ববঙ্গে বরিশাল জেলায় আমাদের গ্রাম গুটিয়া – জমিজমা, ক্ষেতখামার, পুকুর-দিঘী সব সেখানেই। শুধু নুন, চিনি, কেরোসিন আর যেসব মাছ পুকুর বা দিঘীতে হয় না – যেমন ইলিশ, তপসে, আড় ইত্যাদি – কেনার জন্য আমরা হাটে যেতাম। আমাদের যৌথ পরিবারে প্রায় ১৯/২০ জন রোজ খেত। তাই মাছও লাগতো অনেক – কারণ আমরা দুবেলাই মাহ-ভাত খেতাম। মাছ কিনতে মূলত আমার জেঠামণি এর সাথেই যেতাম হাটে – ওনার সাথেই নিমন্ত্রণ বাড়ি, সামাজিক অনুষ্ঠান সব জায়গাতেই যেতাম আমি। উনিই আমায় লেখাপড়া, তাস ও দাবা খেলা, গাছে চড়া, মাছ ধরা সব শিখিয়েছেন। আমাদের বাড়ি থেকে প্রায় ১ ১/২ মাইল দূরে নদী – তারও মাইল থাকেন দূরে প্রতি রোববার হাট বসত। এই হাটে সবকিছু প্রয়োজনীয় জিনিসপত্র পাওয়া যেত, তাই গ্রামের সব লোক এই হাট থেকেই সব কেনাকাটা করত।

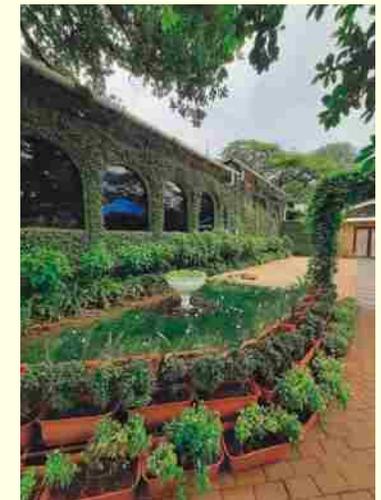
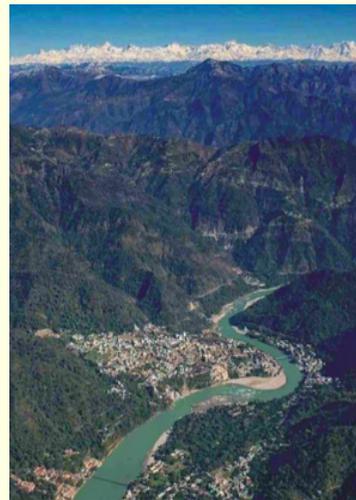
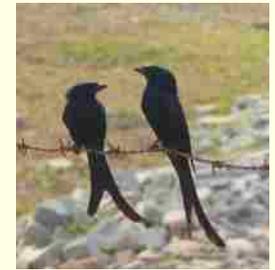
এক রবিবার বিকালে আমি আমার জেঠামণির সাথে ঐ হাটে গেলাম। আমরা কেনাকাটা সেরে ২টো ইলিশ, গোটা ২০ তপসে, একটা বড় ভেঁকটি নিয়ে বাড়ি ফিরছি – তখন সন্ধ্যা হ'ব হ'ব করছে। হাট থেকে বাড়ি ফিরতে প্রায় আধঘন্টা লাগতো। বাড়ি থেকে সিকি মাইল আগে একটা কালীবাড়ি ছিল – আর ঐ পথের দুধারে প্রচুর গাছপালা। আমরা যখন কালীবাড়ি পেরিয়ে এলাম তখন প্রচুর গাছপালা থাকার দরুন বেশ অন্ধকার অন্ধকার ভাব – যদিও গোম্বুলীর আলো তখন অল্প অল্প রয়েছে। সন্ধ্যার আগে বাড়ি ফিরে যাব বলে সাথে টর্চ-লাইট ও রাশি নি আমরা। কালীবাড়ি ছাড়িয়ে যখন রাস্তায় এলাম, গা ছম ছম করতে লাগলো – মনে হল কিছু একটা ঘটনা ঘটতে চলেছে। হঠাৎ জেঠামণি এক বাটকায় আমাকে ওনার সামনে নিয়ে এলেন আর মাছের ব্যাগটা নিজের হাতে নিয়ে নিলেন। সাথে সাথে পিছন থেকে নাকে নাকে গলায় আওয়াজ এল : একটা মাঁছ দৈ নী, কঁত মাঁছ নিয়ে যাঁচ্ছিস – একটা আমায় দৈ। জেঠামণিই আমায় চুপিচুপি বললেন, একদম পিছন ফিরে তাকাবি না, কোনো কথা বলবি না – সোজা হনহন করে হেটে বাড়ির দিকে চল।

আমরা প্রায় আমাদের সদর পুকুরের পাড়ে চলে এসেছি – কিন্তু নাকে নাকে আওয়াজটা আমাদের পিছন পিছন আসছে – কঁতদিন মাঁছ খাঁই নি, একটা দৈ নী, একটা দিলে তৌদের কি আঁর কঁম পঁড়বে? আমরা এক দৌড়ে বাড়ি পৌঁছলাম – জেঠামণি ভেজানো সদর দরজায় ধাক্কা দিয়ে ভিতরে ঢুকে দরজা বন্ধ করে দিলেন। আমি তো ভয়ে ঠক ঠক করে কাঁপছি। জেঠামণি আমাকে কাঁধে তুলে নিয়ে রান্নাঘরে গিয়ে মা কে বললেন, “সেজ-বউ মাছগুলো তাড়াতাড়ি রান্না করে ফেল, দেরি ক'রো না একদম”। জেঠামণি ঘরের মধ্যেই নিজের হাত ধুয়ে নিয়ে, আমার হাত ধুয়ে দিলেন আর তারপর আমায় কোলে নিয়ে হলঘরে গিয়ে জেঠাইমা কে সব বলতে শুরু করলেন। আমি জিজ্ঞাসা করলাম, “ওটা কি ছিল?” উনি বললেন এখন নয়, কাল সকালে বলবেন। এমন সময় বিকট চীৎকার, “ওঁরে বাঁবারে আঁমায় শৈষ কঁরে দিল রেঁ, গঁলা জঁলে গৌল, মুঁখ জঁলে গৌল, বুঁক জঁলে গৌল, কি বঁজ্জাত মৌয়েছেলে গৌ, শঁয়তানটা আঁমায় জঁলিয়ে দিলে গৌ”। আমার তখন অজ্ঞান হবার যোগাড়, হাত-পা সব ঠান্ডা হয়ে গেছে। জেঠাইমা আমায় একটু একটু গরম দুধ খাইয়ে চাঙ্গা করে ঘুম পড়িয়ে দিলেন।

পরদিন সকালে উঠে য শুনলাম তা অবিশ্বাস্য ব্যাপার। জেঠামণি বললেন ওটা, “মেছো পেঞ্জী ছিল। যাদের মাছ খাওয়ার ইচ্ছা পূরণ হবার আগেই অপঘাতে মৃত্যু হয়, তার মেছো পেঞ্জী হয়ে অমনি ঘুরে বেড়ায়”। আরো জিজ্ঞাসা করতে মা বললেন যে ঐ পেঞ্জীটা রান্নাঘরের জানালা দিয়ে মাছ চাইছিল – তখন মা এক হাতা গরম তেল ছুড়ে মারে ঐ পেঞ্জীটাকে। তাই আমরা ঐরকম বিকট আওয়াজ শুনেছি।

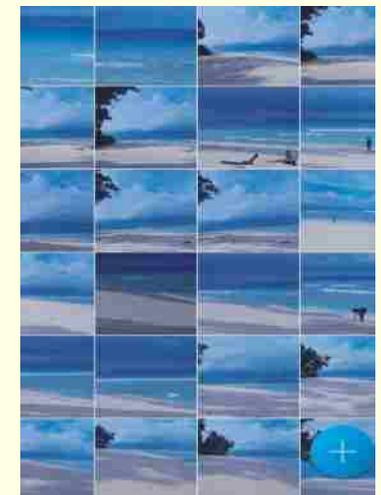
আমি কোনদিন ভূত দেখিনি – তোমরা কেউ দেখেছ কি?

Nature thru the Eyes of a Budding Environmentalist - Kuhu Bhattacharua



the petal of a flower
with a drop of mist
the thunder rolling clouds
with lightning rolling from amidst
the silence deafening
serendipity
as it slowly disappears
tranquillity
a rainbow emerges
the clouds move apart.

~ Kuhu Bhattacharya



Gone With the Wind - Pradip Mitra



Why do the childhood days fly away so fast like a breeze, without being able to unwind?
Why can't we slow down those wonderful days and, hold them in our mind?

Those lovely songs of Shamshad Begum, Geeta, Talatji and evergreen Suraiya, kaisey bhuley bhaiyya?



And the reserved slot in radio Ceylon for legendary Kundan Lal Saigal, at 7.55 am on the dot?
Or the unbeatable anchor Ameen Sayani on Binaca Geetmala, Wed 8 pm reserved spot?



All of these on the baby Murphy radio operated on valves, with the chubby cheek Baby?
Never for a moment during all these entertaining shows, did we ever feel sleepy!
Oh lo and behold those cricket Test matches so well covered, by the radio commentary,
Vijay Merchant, Melville D'Mello & the groggy Vizzy, who would always sound weary!
Or those unforgettable advts of Saridon and Vicco Vajradanti, still clear in our mind,
And the Bourn Vita Quiz Contest anchored by none other than, Hamid Sayani, one of a kind!



And the slow transition to B&W Television on Doordarshan, just 4 hours a day.
Packed with news, skits, movies, serials such as weekly Chayageet, so very juicy,
Advts such from Thumbs Up, Fabina, Plamolive, B. Jagjeevandas, Not forgetting the serial I Love Lucy!



Marathi programs like Gajra, and Chimanrao Ani Gundyabhau, Saptahiki, the TV Guide, Gujarati programs like Aao Mare Sathi, Santakukdi, That we all saw with pride!

How can we forget our newsreaders Shobhana Jagdish, Sunit Tandon While they read, we never needed a Saridon!



A Shammi Narang with his heavy voice and Neethi Ravindran with her unique voice, that we could immediately recognize.

Vinod Dua with his unique style doing election analysis with Prannoy Roy, that we would all enjoy!

The best of the lot were the Hindi serials like Malgudi Days and Buniyaad, showcasing the life of a common man.

The current rage SRK in serials like Fauji and Circus, that helped him to become King Khan!

Will we ever forget Vinod Nagpal in Hum Log or Pankaj Kapoor in Karamchand, along with Sushmita creating her own brand?



And of course the epic serials of Ramayana and Mahabharat when the entire country would come to a standstill.

With the opening songs by Harish Bhimani and Mahendra Kapoor, that would commence our Sundays with a thrill!



Can we forget the heroes and heroines of yesteryear, who were a class apart from our current lot,
Be it Dilip, Dev, Raj or Meena, Madhubala, Suchitra Who simply can't be erased from our thought!



What about the simple games we played,
Be it kho-kho, chor police, kitikiti, or langdi,
All were so enjoyable that we just loved being part of it,
Whether we were in high rise or in a shanti!!



And can we ever get back those long but enjoyable train journeys and platforms?

Pestering Mom for change just to check my weight on scale.

The Wheeler bookstall on platform, and all the irresistible comics,

And using Dadaji's trunk as our own special seat without fail!

The thrill of anxiously rushing to find our names on list pasted outside the coach,



Counting all our bags and chaining before anyone can encroach!

Fighting with siblings for grabbing the window seat, for a view worth fighting for, A naughty look at the alarm chain, wondering should I, shouldn't I?

Fighting for the top berth, that was no less than a war!

Morning trip to loo with wobbly knees between two bobbing compartments, Honing that special skill of putting paste on my toothbrush in moving train,

Enjoying the sweet alarm that sang, "Chaii, Chaii, Garmagaramchaii!

Craving for the steaming cuppa again and again!

And the small ritual that brought in meal times with a hot and spicy thali,

Finally on reaching the destination, looking out for a coolie!!

Finding awe in his superhuman strength to carry all our luggage so coolly,

Every train journey was indeed a memorable one, truly!!

And now with a sigh all we can say...Gone with the Wind!!!

- Pradip Mittra

Durga Puja - Shantimoy Chatterjee

দুর্গাপূজা

প্রতিবছরই শরৎকালে অত্যন্ত জাঁকজমক সহকারে বাঙালিদের এই অন্যতম শ্রেষ্ঠ পূজা অনুষ্ঠিত হয়। কাশফুল ও শিউলি ফুল মা দুর্গার আগমন বার্তা ঘোষণা করতে থাকে। মহালয়ার দিন অতি ভোরে চন্ডীপাঠ একটা বিরাট উৎসবের আবরণ সৃষ্টি করে; জানিয়ে দেয় পূজা এসে গেছে। অবশ্য সাজসাজ রবটা অনেক আগেই শুরু হয়ে যায়।

আমিও প্রতিবারই পাড়ার পূজায় সাংস্কৃতিক অনুষ্ঠান, পংতিভোজ এবং অন্যান্য অনুষ্ঠানের ব্যবস্থাপনায় অংশগ্রহণ করে থাকি কিন্তু বিগত পাঁচ বছর আগের পূজার মত তৃপ্তি ও অনাবিল আনন্দ আর কোনদিন পাইনি।

সেবার অষ্টমী পূজার দিন দুপুরে একজন মধ্যবয়সী ভদ্র মহিলা জনাদেশক অক্ষ ছেলেমেয়েকে আমাদের মন্ডপের ঠাকুর দেখাতে নিয়ে আসেন। ওরা প্রতিমার সামনে অনেকক্ষণ হাত জোড় করে দাঁড়িয়ে থাকে এবং দেবী প্রণাম করে।

ভদ্রমহিলার সাথে আলাপ করে জানতে পারলাম উনি অতীতে একটি অক্ষ বিদ্যালয়ের শিক্ষিকা ছিলেন। বর্তমানে উনিই ওদেরকে লালন পালন করেন। ওরাই ওনার কাছে সব। ওদের সব দায়িত্বই ভদ্রমহিলা পালন করেন। ওদের কোন গোত্র বা পদবী নেই। নামই ওদের সম্বল, ব্যবহারই ওদের পরিচয়।

সেদিন ওরা কি দেখেছিলো এবং কা'কে প্রণাম করেছিল জানি না কিন্তু এ কথা স্বীকার করতে দ্বিধা নেই; সেদিন আমি ওদের মধ্যে ঠাকুরকে দেখতে পেয়েছিলাম।

ওদের আপ্যায়ন করে খাইয়ে যে তৃপ্তি লাভ করেছিলাম তা চিরদিন মনে থাকবে।

শান্তিময় চ্যাটার্জী

Bhutu Babu's Reward - Kabir Dutt Naik

দুর্গাপূজা

এক যে ছিল দেবী নারী সার্বভৌম
 প্রাণে মগ্ন নাগরী সনে মগ্নে গালা
 এম্ব ছিল দুর্গাবু মল্লি বহুই সাদ্য
 তাকে দেখে মনীষা সনে হুত বদ্য।
 বললে মনী ওরে দুর্গু তাকে নাগে বহু ভালো
 দেব তাকে প্রকটি সোচ্চা রুটিটি স্বাহার কালো
 দুর্গু বলে ওরে মনী, ওরে আশ্বাস ব্রহ্মি,
 বেগনবগতানু গিয়ে অগ্নি কেমন করে ব্রহ্মি।

লেখক: কবীর দত্ত নায়েক

বয়স: ৬

Just Do it Now! - Dr Amita Ray

Barely the day started and... it's already six in the evening.
Barely arrived on Monday and it's already Friday.
... and the month is already over.
... and the year is almost over.
... and already 40, 50, even 60 years of our lives have passed.
... and we realize that we lost our elders, friends, colleagues
and we realize it's too late to go back...
So... Let's try, despite everything, to enjoy the remaining time...
Let's keep looking for activities that we like...
Let's put some color in our grey...
Let's smile at the little things in life that put balm in our hearts.
And despite everything, we must continue to enjoy with serenity this time
we have left. Let's try to eliminate the afters...
I'm doing it after...
I'll say after...
I'll think about it after...
We leave everything for later like " after " is ours.
Because what we don't understand is that:
Afterwards, the coffee gets cold...
Afterwards, priorities change...
Afterwards, the charm is broken...
afterwards, health passes...
Afterwards, the kids grow up...
Afterwards parents get old...
Afterwards, promises are forgotten...
afterwards, the day becomes night...
Afterwards life ends...
And then it's often too late...
So... Let's leave nothing for later...
Because still waiting see you later, we can lose the best moments,
the best experiences,
best friends,
the best family...
The day is today... The moment is now...
We are no longer at the age where we can afford to postpone what needs to
be done right away. So, Let's do it NOW!!!

African Tribal Art - Swarnali Chowdhury



FOOD

'Paet Pujo' or 'Belly worship'

*- The relationship of Bengalis with food -
of all kinds, is almost one of reverence.*

*So much so, that even daily meals also turn into
gastronomical indulgences in many households across the globe.*

*This new section brings forth recipes of lip-smacking dishes
from some of our members.*

“Magur Maacher Salad” (Catfish Sald) - Ketaki Dasgupta

Ingredients:

- 1 kg Magur (Assam Catfish), sliced to steaks
- 3-4 bay leaves
- 1 teaspoon fennel seed
- 4-5 green cardamom
- 2-3 cinnamon sticks
- 1 tea spoon turmeric powder
- 1 tea spoon Kashmiri chilli powder
- 4 medium onion paste
- 1 ginger paste
- 200 grams home-made curd
- 50 grams raisin paste
- 2 teaspoon green chilli paste



The Process:

- Slice the fish as moderate sized steaks and fry them after applying a light coat of turmeric and salt.
- Warm up white oil with a spoon of ghee in a kadai
- Put whole bay leaf, fennel seed, green cardamom, clove and cinnamon and wait for a minute or so for the aroma to come out.
- Put a paste of ginger and onion and fry till golden brown.
- Put a bit of turmeric, red chilli powder, salt and a tinge of sugar to taste.
- Strain out water from home-made white curd and that water to the kadai.
- Add raisin paste.
- Add two teaspoons of green chilli paste.
- Allow the gravy to attain consistency and then add the fried fishes to the kadai.
- Allow it to cook on high flame for few minutes.

This is best enjoyed with steamed rice.

Gondhoraj Bhetki - Nivedita Dasgupta

Ingredients:

- Bhetki fillets - 1 kg
- Gondhoraj lime - 2
- Garlic crushed roughly- 4-6 pods
- Coriander leaves - 10 sprigs
- Green chilli - 1
- Fresh cream - 50 grams
- Oil to fry - 1 ½ tbs
- Salt to taste

The process:

- Marinate the fillets in the juice of 1 Gondhoraj lime, salt and zest of about a quarter of the lime for 30 mins.
- Make a paste of the coriander leaves and the chilli and keep aside.
- Whisk the cream once very gently and keep aside
- Heat oil in a flat bottomed pan and fry the crushed garlic till lightly golden.
- Add the fillets one by one and turn them over very gently, the moment they change colour (or become opaque).
- When the other side changes colour too, add the chilli coriander paste and let it cook for a while till the oil separates from it.
- Add the juice of half a lime and mix.
- Add the cream over very low flame and gently turn around so that it blends in without breaking the fillets.
- Remove from heat and plate it.
- Garnish with lime wedges and chillies (ref picture).



Kala Jamun with Rabri - Paramita Banerjee

Ingredients: Rabri

1. 2 litres of full crème milk
2. 5-6 table spoons of sugar
3. ½ tea spoon of cardamom powder
4. A few strands of saffron
5. 1 teaspoon rose water
6. A few almonds chopped
7. A few pistachios chopped

Process:

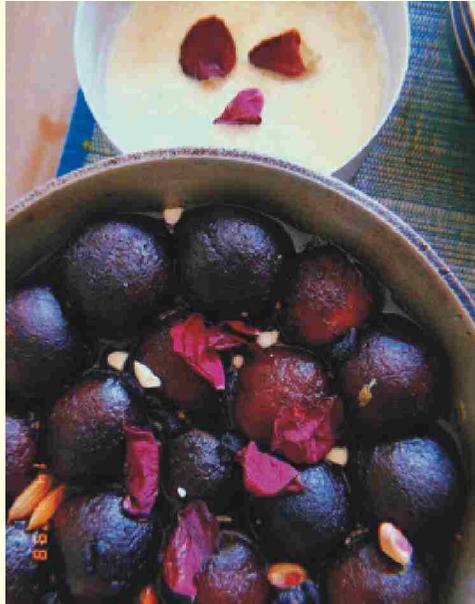
1. Bring the milk to boil and reduce the flame
2. Keep the pistas and almonds chopped without skin
3. Transfer 3 tablespoons of milk to a cup and add saffron strands in it
4. Keep stirring the milk as it gets thickened otherwise there are chances of getting scorched at the bottom
5. When the milk thickens and gets reduced to nearly half the original quantity, start scraping the milk from the side to the milk its adds flavour to the rabdi
6. Add the almonds and pistas , saffron milk and cardamom powder
7. Remove the rabdi from the flame and cool it. Put in inside the refrigerator for additional cooling.
8. Serve with Hot Kala Jamun

Kala Jamun:

Ingredients Sugar Syrup:

1. Sugar Syrup should be ready before making the Kala Jamun
2. 1 cup sugar
3. 1 cup water
4. Cardamoms (grinded / powdered)
5. 1 tbsp lemon juice

Boil the water and sugar till it becomes concentrated and add cardamom, add lemon juice to it. when the liquid thickens add cardamom powder in it and keep it aside.



Kala Jamun Ingredients:

1. ½ cup paneer
2. 1 cup khoya/mawa
3. ¼ maida or all purpose flour
- 4 . Pinch of baking soda
5. 2 tbs water/milk
6. Oil for deep frying
7. Firstly, in a large mixing bowl take crumbled paneer.
8. Mash the paneer till it forms a smooth dough.
9. Mash till the paneer forms a smooth dough without any paneer particles.
10. Now add prepared khoya and mash well.
11. Furthermore, add maida and combine with paneer khoya mixture.
12. Add a pinch of baking soda and water or milk if required to get moisture.
13. Mix the dough properly and make medium balls for jamuns
14. Heat the ghee on low flame and when the ghee is moderately hot, fry the jamuns.
15. Fry till the balls turn black.
16. Immediately, drop the hot kala jamuns into hot sugar syrup.
17. Cover the lid and rest for 2 hours.
18. Finally, serve kala jamuns when doubled in size with a tablespoon of rabri and add a few rose petals.

Shrimp and Bean Bharta (Bean Chingri'r Bharta) - Prarthana Chakraborty

Popularized by:

Kishwar Chowdhury in Masterchef Australia, this could be a great addition to your Bharta repertoire.

Ingredients:

(not putting in any specific measures. To each his own perhaps. However, will try and give you what I did)

French beans (green beans) - 200 gms

Shrimps (5 to 6 if medium, 10-12 if small)

Holud guro (turmeric powder) - half a teaspoon

Salt - to taste

Dried Red chilli - 2 to 3

Green chilli - 2

Garlic pods - 3 to 4

Onion -1, thinly sliced

Mustard oil - 2 tablespoons

Blanche the beans. Marinate the shrimps with salt and turmeric. Lightly fry the shrimps. Blend the beans and the shrimps together with a pinch of salt, green chillies and garlic pods. Heat one tablespoon mustard oil in a kadhai. Fry the onion till slightly red (be careful not to make it Beresta red). Put the beans and shrimp mix and keep frying till the moisture dries up. Adjust salt and turmeric. And it's done. Layer it with mustard oil while still hot. You can add a few fried shrimps for an additional crunch.



Mutton Khada Korma - Sharmishtha Bhattacharya

Ingredients:

1. 500g mutton

2. 2 big onions and 1 small onion-roughly sliced

3. 2 tablespoon crushed ginger garlic

4. 10-12 whole red chilli

5. 2 teaspoon whole coriander crushed

6. 1 inch stick cinnamon

7. 1 black cardamom

8. 4 green cardamom

9. 4 cloves

10. Half cup curd beaten

11. Half cup mustard oil

12. 2 tablespoon of ghee

13. Salt to taste

Procedure:

1. In a deep bottom pan / pressure cooker, add oil.

2. Add all whole spices-Do not fry.

3. Add sliced onions and fry until it turns pink. Do not fry till it turns red.

4. Add mutton.

5. Add ginger garlic.

6. Cover and cook for 10 minutes.

7. Add curd.

8. Fry for 5 minutes.

9. Add salt to taste.

10. Pressure cook on low flame for 20 minute.

11. Switch off the flame and let the pressure release by itself.

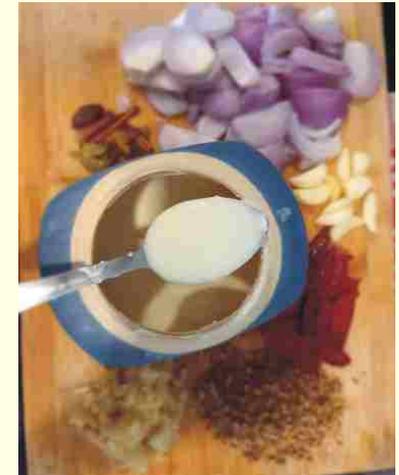
12. In another pan, heat the ghee.

13. Fry one onion until red.

14. Strain the mutton from the gravy and add it to the ghee.

15. Fry until oil separates.

16. Add the reserved gravy; adjust seasoning.





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Far & Near - Rina Ghosh

কাছে কাছে, দূরে দূরে...
রীনা ঘোষ।

কাছেই অথচ কেমন যেন অনেক দূরে। তার কাছে না গেলে তো দূরেই লাগবে। তার আর কী দোষ!

বর্ষা আসা মানেই মনের উচাটান হয়ে পড়া। ঘরবার করে মন। বৃষ্টির ঝরঝর বারে পড়ার শব্দ, আকাশ জুড়ে জলভরা মেঘের আনাগোনা বৃষ্টির সঙ্গী হতে চায় মন। মন কখনও ফড়িং, কখনও প্রজাপতি...

তবে চাইলেই তো হবে না। পরিস্থিতি তো প্রতিকূল। চারিদিকে ভয় ভয় ভাব। নিতান্ত প্রয়োজন না হলে বাইরে বেরোন বারণ, ভিড়ভাট্টায় তো একেবারেই না- সেই অদ্ভুতভেদে নাকি ওত পেতে বসে আছে মানুষ ধরার জন্য।

সে থাকুক। না হয় সত্যিই হল তাই, কিন্তু বর্ষার ডাকে সাড়া দিয়ে খানিকটা ভিজে বাতাসের ছোঁয়া পেতে, বৃষ্টিভেজা চকচকে সবুজ পাতায় চোখের পাতা মেলানটাও যে আমার কাছে একটা নিতান্ত প্রয়োজনীয় কাজ - তা অস্বীকার করি কি করে!

তাই এই 'নিতান্ত প্রয়োজনের' টানে ভিড়ভাট্টা এড়িয়ে ছোট্ট করে হলেও, বলতে গেলে প্রায় বাড়ির কাছে ছোট্ট গ্রাম- বৈঁচিফলের নামে নাম 'বৈঁচিগ্রামে' চলে গেলাম।

শুনেছি পর্যটকদের কাছে এখনও এই গ্রামটা অনেকটাই অপরিচিত থেকে গেলেও শস্য শ্যামল রূপ অকৃপণ ভাবে ছড়িয়ে আছে এখানে। শহুরে মানুষের সবুজ পিপাসু চোখ তো এই রূপেই মজতে চায়! তার সাথে উপরি পাওনা প্রাচীন ঐতিহ্য মন্দির 'জগৎ গৌরীর মন্দির' আর 'রাখাল রাজা' মন্দির।

চার বন্ধু মিলে বেরিয়ে পড়লাম - বৈঁচিগ্রামের উদ্দেশ্যে - হুগলী জেলার ছোট্ট একটি গ্রাম। চন্দননগর থেকে দূরত্ব মাত্র ৪৬ কিমি। পথে যদি কোথাও থামা না হয় তবে মোটামুটি ১ঘ: ১৫ মি: পৌঁছে যাওয়া যায়। রাস্তাও বেশ ভাল, গাড়ির গতি বাধা পায় না।

গাড়ি ছুটে চলেছে, সাথে সাথে সরে সরে যাচ্ছে জল থৈ থৈ কচি ধানের ক্ষেত, চাষি বৌদের ধান রোয়ার ছবি, কানায় কানায় উপচে পড়া পুকুর, দীঘি -

গতরাতের বৃষ্টিভেজা ঝকঝকে তকতকে তরুরাজি আর আকাশপথে কোথাও বা জলভরা কালো মেঘ, কোথাও বা সাদা-নীল মেঘমালারা।

তবে এবারে যেন এখনও বর্ষার তেমন সমারোহ নেই। সারাদিনে সকালে বা বিকেলে নমোনমো করে জল ছিটিয়ে সরে যাচ্ছে, সারাদিনের বউ কাঁটকি বৃষ্টিরও তেমন আনাগোনা নেই।

আজও দেখছি একই রকম অবস্থা। বর্ষায় বেরিয়ে যদি গাড়ির উইন্ড স্ক্রিনে বৃষ্টির ফোঁটা এসে ভিড় না জমায়, ওয়াইপার দ্রুতগতিতে জলের ধারা সরিয়ে দিতে দিতে সামনের বাপসা হয়ে আসা দৃশ্য আবার স্পষ্ট না করে তোলে তাহলে বেড়ানোটা ঠিক বাদুলে হয়ে ওঠে না, কেমন যেন কাটখোঁড়া হয়ে পড়ে।

পথে পড়ল সিমালা কালী বাড়ি। মাকে এক বলক দর্শন করে গাড়ি এগিয়ে যেতে লাগল গন্তব্যের দিকে। বৈঁচি পেরিয়ে বৈঁচিগ্রামে গাড়ি ঢুকতেই শহরজীবনের কোলাহল পিছনে পড়ে রইল। রাস্তা সরু হয়ে এসেছে তবে মেঠো পথ এখন আর তেমন নেই, তবে মাটির ঘর, ঘরের সামনের খোলা জায়গায় হাঁসদের কোমর দুলিয়ে একসাথে প্যাঁক প্যাঁক করে হাঁটাচলা, মুরগীর ছানাদের আগলাতে মা-মুরগীর ব্যস্ততা, মাটির দেওয়ালে ঘুঁটের ভিড়, গাড়ির সামনে হঠাৎ ছুটে আসা ছাগলছানা, ঘরে ঘরে ধানের মরাই সব আগের মতই আছে।

এভাবেই এগোতে এগোতে গ্রামের লোকেদের থেকে জেনে নিলাম মন্দিরের ঠিকানা। একজন জানাল এখন থেকে সোজা গিয়ে যেখানে গাড়ি আর রাস্তা পাবে না সেখানেই মন্দির। বুঝলাম গ্রামের শেষ প্রান্তে মন্দির। মায়ের মন্দিরের সামনে গাড়ি থামতেই এক পশলা বৃষ্টি এসে সারা রাস্তা বৃষ্টি না হওয়ার খেদটা অল্প হলেও মিটিয়ে দিল।

অতি প্রাচীন জগৎ গৌরীর মন্দিরটির গঠন খানিকটা অন্যান্যরকম। মূর্তির সংস্কারের কাজ চলায় মূর্তি বেদী থেকে অন্য জায়গায় সরান আছে, মুখ ঢাকা দেওয়া। তবে পূজো বন্ধ নেই। মন্দির ঘুরে বেরিয়ে আসতে যাচ্ছি একজন সেবাইত এসে আমাদের ভোগ খেয়ে যেতে বললেন, ভোগ খাওয়ার এই অপ্রত্যাশিত সুযোগ পেয়ে বেশ ভাল লাগল। স্বীকার করতে দ্বিধা নেই, খিদে একটু পেয়েছিল। সঙ্গে ছিল ভোগ খাবার লোভ।

Rimjhim - Rina Ghosh

রিমঝিম... রিমঝিম... রীণা ঘোষ

সর্ষে।
আরে সে তো রান্নায় লাগে! রান্নাঘরে কৌটোয় তার বাস।
কে বলল, সে শুধু কৌটোতেই থাকে?
আরো এক জায়গায় সে থাকে।
সে পায়ের তলাতেও থাকে।
বুঝলে কিছু?

কথায় বলে 'বাঙালির পায়ের তলায় সর্ষে'।

তাইতো বাঙালির রাজকার একঘেঁয়ে জীবনে বেশিদিন বাঁধা পড়ে থাকতে মোটে
ভালোবাসে না।
'খাই- খাই' এর মতো 'বেড়াতে যাই-বেড়াতে যাই' করে।

একটা বেড়ানো শেষ হল কী হলনা আর একটা বেড়ানোর পরিকল্পনা -
'স্টার্ট লাভ অল' হয়ে যায়। আমরাও কজন তার থেকে আলাদা নই।

আর বেড়ানোর প্রিয় সময়টা যদি হয় বর্ষা, তাহলে তো কথাই নেই। বর্ষা যেই রিমঝিম,
ঝামঝাম, ঝরঝর, ঝিরঝিরি গানের তালে তালে গাছের মাথায় মাথায়,
ঘরের ছাদে নাচতে শুরু করে তখন তো আমার মন বাইরে বেরিয়ে ঐ নাচ-
গানের আসরের একনিষ্ঠ শ্রোতা আর দর্শক হয়ে উঠতে চায়।

কিছুদিন আগেও বেড়ানো মানে আমরা বুঝতাম অনেক দূর চলে যাওয়া। দেবাদুন-
মুসৌরি, নৈনিতাল... নিদেনপক্ষে পুরী।

কিন্তু এখন তো সে গুড়ে বালি। তাই কাছে পিঠের নানা অজানা জায়গা আমরা খুঁজে নিচ্ছি।
সত্যিই অজানা। একদিক থেকে এই ব্যাপারটা আমার বেশ দারুণ লাগছে।

ঘরের কাছেই যে কত অজানা জায়গা আছে...শুধু জায়গা বললেই কম বলা হবে, ইতিহাস
প্রসিদ্ধ স্থান আছে যা আমাদের ঐতিহ্য ও সংস্কৃতির বাহক তা দেখে যাকে বলে চক্ষু চড়কগাছ
হয়ে যাচ্ছে। এসব জায়গাকে আগে কেন যে পান্তা দিইনি!

বেরিয়ে পড়েছিলাম দশঘড়ার বিশ্বাস জমিদার বাড়ির উদ্দেশ্যে। বর্ষায় সাধারণত আমরা
গ্রামের দিকেই যাই। ফলে গন্তব্যে যাওয়ার পথটাও বেশ উপভোগ্য হয়ে ওঠে। পথে যেতে
যেতে ভরা নদীর স্রোতে মেঘের ছায়া, জলের উপর জলবিন্দুর নাচ, আকাশে মেঘের উপর
মেঘের ঘটা, বেড়ানোর আনন্দকে তুঙ্গে তুলে দেয়।

আর এই বেড়ানো যদি ইতিহাসকে ছুঁয়ে যায় তবে তো আর কথাই নেই। সে তো, সনে পে
সোহাগা। এই সময়ে দাঁড়িয়ে কল্পনার সেতুতে ভর করে অতীতের সেই জীবনে কয়েক মুহূর্ত
বেঁচে দেখার যে কি সুখানুভূতি রয়েছে তা বলে বোঝানো যাবে না।
দশঘড়া এমনই এক জায়গা।

দুর্গাপুর রোড ধরে আমাদের গাড়ি পাই পাই করে ছুটে চলেছে দশঘড়া গ্রামের দিকে। আমরা
যাব বিশ্বাস জমিদার বাড়ি। চন্দননগর থেকে মাত্রই তেতাল্লিশ কিমি দূরে এই গ্রাম।

আগলপুর, গোপীনগর, ইছাপুর, দিধরা, বঙ্গেশনগর ইত্যাদি দশটি গ্রাম নিয়ে গড়ে উঠেছে
দশঘড়া।

রাস্তার দুপাশের জলে ভরা ধানক্ষেত, বৃষ্টি ধোয়া সবুজ গাছদের বাই বাই করতে করতে ঘন্টা
দেড়েকের মধ্যেই পৌঁছে গেলাম জমিদার বাড়িতে।

জগমোহন বিশ্বাস এই বাড়ি তৈরি করেছিলেন। এই এক মুশকিল এখন, যা দেখতে হবে বাইরে
থেকে দেখ, প্রবেশ নিষেধ। উন্মুক্ত প্রকৃতির আনন্দ উপভোগ করতে করতে এসে তালাবন্দী ঘ
রের সামনে থমকে দাঁড়াও। দর্শন অর্ধ সমাপ্ত রেখে ফিরতে হয়। তাহোক যতটুকু পাওয়া যায়
তাই না হয় স্মৃতির মনিকোঠায় ধরে রাখা যাক।

জমিদার বাড়ির সিংহদুয়ারের মাথায় বিরাট এক সিংহ মূর্তি বসান আছে -
- স্থাপত্যের এক সুন্দর নিদর্শন। যদিও বাইরে থেকে, তবু একে একে দেখলাম নহবতখানা,
পাশে শিবমন্দির, অপরদিকে রাসমঞ্চ, দোলমঞ্চ। আর আছে কাছারি বাড়ি। দেখিনি তবে
শুনলাম এখানে চার হাত বিশিষ্ট দশভূজার পূজা হয়। দেবীর পাশে থাকে কার্তিক আর গনেশ
। লক্ষ্মী সরস্বতীর স্থান নেই।
মেয়েরা বাদ !! আচ্ছা আমাদের ছাড়া চলবে এই পৃথিবী?

খুব ভাল লাগল রাধা গোপীনাথ জিউর মন্দির। চারশ বছর আগে সদানন্দ বিশ্বাস এই মন্দির
প্রতিষ্ঠা করেছিলেন। এই মন্দিরের দেওয়ালে অপরূপ তেরাকোটোর মূর্তি দিয়ে তুলে ধরা
হয়েছে রামায়ণ মহাভারতের নানা কাহিনী। এ ছাড়া আছে শ্রীকৃষ্ণের ছোটোবেলার বিভিন্ন
ঘটনা। চারশো বছর ধরে ঝড় জলের ঝাপটাকে অগ্রাহ্য করে অটুট আছে মন্দিরটি। ভাবলে
অবাক হতে হয় অত বছর আগে গঠন পদ্ধতি কত উন্নত ছিল। তুলনায় আধুনিক কালের ঘর
বাড়িতে তো সেইভাবে কোনো শিল্পও নেই, স্থায়িত্বও নেই। কংক্রীটের খাঁচা।

জমিদার বাড়ির সামনের পুকুর এখন বর্ষার জলে টলটল করছে। পুকুরের ঘাট দেখার মত।
কত যে অজানা গল্প লুকিয়ে আছে এই ঘাটে... অনেক আনন্দ, কষ্ট, চোখের জলের সাক্ষী এই
পুকুরঘাট।

কিছুটা দূরে রায়দের জমিদার বাড়ি। স্থানীয় লোকজনরা বললেন ওই বাড়ি এখন আর দেখার
মত নেই, সবই প্রায় কালের গ্রাসে শেষ হয়ে গেছে।

ঝিরঝির করে বৃষ্টিও শুরু হয়েছে। গাড়ি থেকে নামা যাবে না। তাই এবার ফিরতে হবে।

ফেরার পথে বাড়তি পাওনা সেনেটের মা বিশালক্ষ্মীর মন্দির দর্শন। মনোরম পরিবেশে সুন্দর
মাতৃমন্দির দেখে আমাদের বেড়ানো শেষ হল।

এই যাঃ। একটা কথা তো বলাই হলনা।
মুড়ি--

তেলে ভাজা, আহা! সোনালী সোনালী টোপা টোপা ফুলুরি আর চ্যাপ্টা আলুবড়া। গোল,
চ্যাপ্টা আলুর ওপর সোনালী বেসনের লেয়ার আর ঢাবলা ফুলুরিতে সবুজ কাঁচা লঙ্কার

টুকরো... অমৃত-
অমৃত। এই রে! অমৃত তো লিকুইড। এ তো সলিড। সে যাকগে। উঃ আঃ করতে করতে ধোঁয়া
ওঠা আলুবড়া-ফুলুরি-সে তো অমৃতই।

তারপর মাটির ভাঁড়ে চা... আহা।

স্টার্ট লাভ অল --- এরপর কি মেমারীর কাছে আমাদপুর?

Work From Home - Boon Or Bane?

- Sanjukta Kar Datta

As COVID-19 began to spread across the globe in March 2020, social distancing became the new norm for everyone. Amongst the many changes this pandemic brought about in our lives, one of them is the way employers and employees reworked their ways of continuing to do business successfully and provide services to their customers. Companies big and small, national and international, took a unilateral decision to WORK FROM HOME (WFH). In pre-Covid times, WFH, particularly in India, was often frowned upon, looked at with a lens of suspicion and allowed only when absolutely necessary. However the pandemic has changed this paradigm and now, working from home has pretty much become a reality in almost every household. While many have become accustomed to this 'new normal', some are eagerly waiting to return to their offices.

Let us look at the different facets of this new concept

- WFH saves commuting time, especially for those in metropolitan cities where one gets to experience serpentine traffic queues during rush hours. An hour saved in commute means an hour more work done. And less traffic means less pollution, a boon for the environment.



But, travelling to and from work gives you some me-time which is such a rare commodity these days. It is a time to unwind, disconnect from your professional responsibilities, reflect and just be yourself.

Working from home provides fewer distractions. If concentration and focus is needed, working alone in a room at home is ideal to get work done. But being alone day after day and connecting with co-workers just over a call can start affecting one's mental health. But that same distraction, makes the office environment enjoyable and work-friendly. Walking over to a co-worker's cubicle to break the strain. Or gathering at the coffee machine for a casual chat. Or stepping out for some fresh air. These are all 'synergy effects' which arise from interpersonal interactions leading to a higher output, both at an individual and organizational level.



Working from home offers greater flexibility in organizing work and family life and that seems to significantly reduce stress for many people. For example, you could supervise an urgent repair work at home while attending a conference call. Lunch time could be an opportunity to make a quick dash to the local grocery store. For those jet-setting travelling professionals, work from home truly is a boon since they can spend a lot more time at home with their loved ones.

But, it is much more difficult to set boundaries and relax when the place where you work is also a place of rest and relaxation. You are always "on duty" when homeworking, physically present but mentally spent. WFH could disrupt the work-life balance, resulting in a loss of creativity and focus.



For working parents, especially mothers, WFH is definitely a blessing in disguise. They get to watch their children play and grow in front of their eyes as well as attend work meetings and fulfil professional commitments, like a boss! But, on the other hand one has been hearing of a sudden upsurge in separations since the pandemic struck. A lot of WFH couples are finding it difficult to keep their sanity (and relationship) intact. For even the closest of couples,



seeing their partner's professional persona and being around each other 24x7 is taking severe adjustments, which many are unable to make. 'Love is all you need' isn't really working for many as far as dealing with this new reality is concerned!

When Covid hit and the world went into strict lockdown, the only people who couldn't take the liberty of staying 'locked-in' were our doctors, nursing staff and healthcare workers. They led the battle from the front and truly have been our heroes. But due to the preventive measures enforced, effective doctor-patient communication was hampered for non-Covid patients. This is where WFH became a big boon. Doctors who earlier refused to treat anyone without in-person examination started doing so virtually.

E-Pharmacies started to deliver medicines at the doorstep. But on the flipside, medical students who are studying for their degrees are doing everything online, including practicals, which form a major chunk of medical education. Just imagine having to visit a heart surgeon or a neurosurgeon in the near future who got his/her degree by watching practical videos online! Scary right?



It took a pandemic to remind the human race aware of its possibilities. Since Covid barged into our lives, we have been struggling but we have also found ways to fight back, to survive, to keep ourselves sane and to value our loved ones amongst many others. As far as working from home is concerned, it has been hunky dory for some. But for others it hasn't been their most pleasant experience so far. While WFH is the 'new normal', it can still be said with absolute authority that it is not a universal formula, nor is it a 'one-hat-fits-all' scenario. So boon or bane? My heart says bane because I miss stepping out for work and meeting various people but my head says boon since it gives me an opportunity to stay within the safe confines of my home, an opportunity which many less-privileged people in the world still do not have.

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Top 10 Ways to Beat The Pandemic Blues in Covid Year 2 - Debashis Banerjee

Q: What is a 'Life Changing Event'?

A: In normal times, a life-changing event is something that makes a significant change or changes a person's life entirely. It can be of two types - Positive or happy life-events like completion of education, first job, marriage, first kid, or negative ones like a war, a crippling accident or a catastrophic natural calamity.

Very few people of our generation would have even imagined that we would be going through an apocalyptic life-changing event ourselves, an event that came suddenly, took us completely by surprise, and shook us all to the core - the horrific COVID-19 pandemic.

That being said, a life-changing event does not come only with down sides, it is up to us whether we allow such an event to change our lives for the worse or for the better. I am obviously speaking for those lucky souls who have managed to survive the pandemic till now!

The pandemic is far from over at the time of writing this piece, and fear is looming over our heads about new waves, new mutants and variants. Keeping that in mind, it is fair to share a few thoughts on pandemic survival strategies at this point in time. These thoughts would come in handy even when the pandemic gets over, and I pray that it happens very very soon!

For me, there are umpteen lessons learnt from Covid-19, and I value my existence many times more than I did prior to March 2020.

So, here's my top 10 list to beat the pandemic blues in Covid Year #2:

1) Become tech-savvy

One skill that most of us have had to pick up in the

last one and a half years is becoming 'tech savvy'.

Each one of us, regardless of our age or digital literacy level, have taken at least a few steps forward in the 'digital' direction, whether to download and use the Aarogya Setu app or to order groceries from a grocery app or to create that perfect background for our 'Zoom' calls.

Our ecosystem has never been more 'digital' as it is today, accelerated greatly by the pandemic. Hence, it's imperative that we master digital and technology, so that we can use them to solve our own problems rather than having to rely on more tech-savvy friends and family members.

2) Watch less OTT

Probably the most difficult resolution to make, getting over your OTT addiction is easier said than done. Many of us have watched more TV during the pandemic than in our entire lives, and with content getting more and more enticing every week, it's easy to lose yourself in the labyrinth of the Net flixes and Hot stars of the world.

A great alternative to OTT would be listening to audio stories on your phone. Sounds boring, but isn't so. There's a goldmine of audio and radio content available on You tube and other platforms like Audible.

One of my personal favourites during the pandemic has been the weekly 'Sunday Suspense' stories on Youtube - Radio Mirchi in Bangla. They have a large bank of audio stories enacted in Bengali from celebrated authors around the world, including my favourites-Satyajit Ray and Saradindu Bandopadhyay. I have also discovered old gems on YouTube like a radio version of Feluda's 'Baksho Rahashya' performed by the original trio of Soumitra Chatterjee (Feluda), Santosh Dutta (Jatayu) and Siddhartha Chatterjee (Topshe). You can listen to such stories without straining your

eyes and do a lot less harm to yourself than watching TV for hours, and disturbing others at home.

3) Go for a walk

'Work From Home' used to be a joy for a lot of 'workers' like us before Covid, particularly in metros like Mumbai where commute is a real pain. However, prolonged exposure to WFH has surely changed our stance towards it, and going out into the open is now a necessity rather than a pastime.

For people living in 'green' areas like Powai, going out for a walk can be a godsend during these locked-in times, albeit with a mask. You don't just give those legs some much-needed exercise, you also run into friends, neighbours and friendly pets, who can really make your day.

A good walk or a refreshing run can wash away those pandemic blues faster than you think!

4) Explore your interests

Staying locked in during such times of disease and death, a lot of thoughts would creep up in your mind, mostly negative and morbid ones. Keeping such thoughts at bay, and rather focusing on thoughts and ideas that interest you seems like a much better way out, doesn't it?

In my school days, history was a subject I used to dread and abhor. I just couldn't bring myself to go through pages of old, ancient recordings that seemed to have been force-fitted into my academic curriculum with no use in my future life.

However, in recent times, mainly in the past few years, I have finally realized the importance of history, and that it's history that has moulded our lives until this day. I have also developed a keen interest in a particular field of history - ancient history or the earliest days of our civilization.

Today, exploring history is much more interesting as you can experience history in multimedia, on your

phone, in videos and audio. Definitely way more exciting than our history text books in school.

I have been reading up and watching a lot of interesting content on the world's oldest civilization-the Sumerian civilization of Mesopotamia (ancient Iraq) that thrived over 6,000 years ago, around 4,000 B.C. There are records of the first ever king of the world, King Sargon of Akkad, and the epic of Gilgamesh – a hero-king of Uruk, and one of the most legendary rulers of the Sumerian empire.

5) Make an effort with friends

Friends can be a lifeline for people like us living here in Mumbai, staying away from immediate family. It's during these trying times when you realize that friends are more than just those people who you hang around with, chill out and have a good meal or drink with.

Our good friends are like-minded people, they share a lot of similarities and synergies with our own lives, and perhaps understand us better than anyone else. In the pandemic days, I found it important to make an effort with my 'real' friends, not just because I needed a support system, but to also reach out and show my friends that I care for them and will be there during hours of need.

A lot of us have been through personal tragedies caused by the pandemic, and it's our friends who have stood by us all through, helping us and sharing our burdens as fellow human beings. I'm sure all of us have realized the difference an ecosystem of friends can make in our lives, particularly in times of crisis. Hence, we need to express our gratitude towards our real friends.

6) Eat well and make it yourself

Well, Bongs and good food are like two sides of the same coin. Even those Bongs who claim that they like food connoisseurs to people outside Bengal.

Remember the early days of the pandemic when people were quite wary of ordering outside food (supposedly laden with the Covid virus), cooks were not allowed in, and food ordering apps like Swiggy and Zomato were operating with limited services?

It's precisely during this period that a lot of us started exploring recipes and cooking food on our own. There came overnight sensations like the homemade 'Dalgona' coffee and other new inventions. The pressure and the urge of eating well far outweighed the efforts of gathering raw material or the pain of cleaning up afterwards.

A lot of my friends who were greenhorns in the kitchen pre-Covid are now full-fledged cooks and boast of exotic creations from pastas to cakes to kababs. I have personally learnt and mastered two dishes - the Bengali Malpoa and the North-Indian Chicken Malai Tangdi Kabab, something that I am quite proud of now!

7) Stay Cool & Focused

While a good walk or a run can really perk up your mood and make you feel fit physically, mental health can be a major cause of concern for most of us living and working in stressful jobs or situations.

Yoga, meditation, listening to good music, eating light & healthy, are some ways to keep your mental health in perfect condition during Covid. While this might sound like cliched and hackneyed advice, I benefitted from this immensely during the past year or so.

Looking ahead and not letting the current circumstances or steady flow of negative news affect me have been my mainstay during the pandemic. I have focused my attention on keeping myself physically and mentally fit, reading positive news articles, keeping my cool during stressful discussions and not allowing detractors to derail me from my mission to stay cool and positive.

8) Love thy neighbour

As the saying goes "You cannot choose your parents or your boss". Perhaps the same goes with your neighbours as well, unless you're a star like a Shahrukh Khan or a big politician!

Loving your neighbour might not be an easy thing to achieve, but it can do wonders if you want to live smartly and peacefully.

Imagine a situation where your entire building is locked down for weeks, and you are unable to go out beyond your own floor. Nightmares like this played out in real life in the not-so-distant past for many of us, where the only people that we had access to were our neighbours.

People who have good neighbours, or rather have made an effort to develop and nurture a healthy relationship with their neighbours have been the biggest winners during the pandemic. Neighbours are instant support-systems, you can reach out to them in real-time when a crisis might occur, unlike friends or family who might not be able to even visit you in a locked down, isolated home or when time is a luxury.

I have heard tear-jerking stories from my friends of how alert and helpful neighbours have helped avert grave tragedies when all members of a family were down sick and it was only the neighbours who had both the wherewithal or the intent to help out and practically save lives.

9) Write

Penning down your thoughts about your life, on something that is of interest to you, or a professional or career-related topic can be quite an experience.

Writing long articles or stories or letters have become a thing of the past for most of us, as we have begun thinking of everything in social media language, with 'the shorter the better' content philosophy.

During these defining times, it can be a good idea to start writing rather than wasting time on other non-productive pastimes, while also letting the world know about your very philosophy in life or your perspectives and also your superior content development skills.

Writing makes you think, introspect, do some research and makes you engrossed in something that expresses the 'real you'. While the importance and goodness of reading can never be over-emphasized, writing can be an even better exercise where you can express your inner thoughts without boundaries or getting constricted by the apprehension of being judged while speaking your mind publicly or for some of us, the very fear of public speaking on a wide-based topic.

10) Talk to Ma

No one has known or will know you better than your mother. So, whenever you can, speak to your mother, or pick up the phone and give her a call. No time is more appropriate to call her than these times of crisis. Remember, many people do not even have the luxury of a mother to talk to.

Mother knows your moods, your health, your allergies, some simple 'totkas', small nuances about your life, everything. This being a health crisis, the best person who can give you a tip or two to stay healthy would be your mother who has bred you and seen you grow in her own lap.

Mother also knows a thing or two about keeping you in the right spirit and mental state, as she comes with the right amount of 'experience'. Moreover, both sides feel happy and content after a conversation, and hence 'Ma knows best' is a good thing to keep believing in!

The pandemic has been a great leveller, as everyone regardless of their wealth, age, gender or social standing has been reduced to being mere mortals. It's a wake-up call for the lucky ones like us to look at life a tad differently, with more positivity, vigour and a do-good attitude.

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When you don't know what to say... -Devraj Brahmachari

I have often been amazed at the fear that public speaking evokes in many, if not in most individuals. It has been described as paralytic by nature, one that numbs all your senses and faculties to sheer immobility of thought & action. You feel a dark shadow creep up behind you and grab you by your throat. You scream out for help in exasperation, but it's a silent one, and all that emerges is a whiff of breath as your vocal cords go dry. Coherent thoughts, which would otherwise come to you as naturally as daylight, suddenly seem to have deserted you like light in a moonless night. The trickle of sweat dripping from forehead to chin, the throbbing temples and the pounding heart are the only sounds you hear amidst the deafening silence of the auditorium. And in stark contrast to your own blurring vision, the piercing gaze of the audience ultimately tears down the last remnants of your self-respect and existence. Time stops.

Interestingly, if you ignore the first sentence of this paragraph, the rest of it pretty much describes the experience of a person who has been to Hell & back as per Christian mythology. And for the ones who experience these fears & manifestations, it is indeed no less an ordeal. Nightmares are, for when you sleep, but here, you are wide awake and facing people who are out to judge you in some way or the other. Now, there are dime a dozen and some very expensive and extensive courses on how to overcome this fear, yet I feel most are quite didactic & theoretical by nature, for ultimately there is no alternative to repeated practice. Though, this for sure does not mean they are ineffective, just that I am strongly convinced there is an easier, practical, and more "jugaadu" way. I have spoken & performed on large & small public platforms innumerable times and have managed to hold my own. Was I good

from day zero? A resounding "NO". My parents are not Winston Churchill & Indira Gandhi, which leaves out DNA, and I haven't been through any trainings either. I have only my own learnings & reflections and keen observations of people to help me decode this myth of being a good public speaker. Hence, this attempt at exorcising the fear of the stage through some very simple techniques. For those Philip Kotler fans, here are the cliched 4Ps juxtaposed to my own framework: Preparation, Posture, Practice & People.

Preparation: Better & more experienced the speaker, more he needs to prepare! Not because he has a reputation to protect but because that is the only way, each time, no matter how big or small the event or how easy or esoteric the topic is. Be sure the final edition of what you are going to speak, contains your own thoughts & not somebody else's. Only in this way would you be able to logically follow your train of thoughts & manage to vocalize them on stage. Don't try to memorize - just let it flow. Many people have this inferiority complex arising out poor vocabulary. Please do not try to do a Tharoor, there are no brownie points for saying "countenance" instead of "face". Rather if you do have a penchant for fancy words, curtail it - because on most occasions your audience is no Tharoor either! Same goes with pronunciation. If you think you sound bad In English, just think of the French, German & Chinese who are worse, and yet have a firm standing on the world stage be it in every field.

Posture: Surprisingly, the way you stand on stage, goes a long way in establishing how you speak. It is a direct manifestation of your confidence levels, and more importantly your comfort. The more comfortable you are, the less conscious you are, and the more you will sound confident. Ensure you are also comfortable with the light & airiness of the stage as well as the sound & volumes of the

microphone & speakers. There is no shame in asking these to be set to your satisfaction levels before you start speaking - it is your right as a speaker. But remember not to take "being comfortable" to the extreme. For example, some people find it comfortable to pace while speaking and be mobile instead of being rooted to a spot. The stage is not a jogging track, and neither are you SRK. Please do not do the hands-on-your-hips posture aka "the Rambo" and stand with your feet wide apart. Neither should you be covering your crotch in the "fig leaf" posture! The best option is to keep changing between the "hands on your side", "hands half raised" and "praying hands" with your feet spaced apart just that much to give you a good balance, which is key.

Practice: The same rule of Preparation goes in here as well. It is just that in the former we were referring to content while here we are focusing on delivery. No one is born a speaker, you become a speaker only when you speak. That repetition may sound idiotic, but it is true. Start with reading (seeing) & reciting to develop your own style of diction. From then graduate onto simple topics on which you write on, read, and then speak about it without seeing. Finally, post-graduate with extempore when you speak on a topic without writing something down. Yet, in most extempore speeches too, the speaker does jot down a few notes or bullet points as a guiding rail. It is important for each person to develop her own style, and it isn't too different from dressing up! And your best friend & teacher in this endeavor is your Mirror on the wall - honest to God! Look what you are doing & you shall do right.

People: The audience is the most important element in public speaking; after all it is for them that all this is relevant. And it is them, who possibly instill the deepest fear in the speaker. If you feel uneasy, there are some hacks here as well!

Tip 1: don't look at somebody specific in the audience, keep shifting your gaze and look into the horizon. This will prevent you from picking up any negative vibes.

Tip 2: don't seek feedback when you speak, even if it is your dear friend, it is very distracting and sometimes erroneous. Do that later.

Tip 3: be honest - if you do forget something & get stuck or say something incorrect, don't embarrass yourself by starting to scratch your head. Instead, simply admit that you have forgotten & move on. In fact, it is easier on the audience too.

Tip 4: Finally, if nothing works to put you at ease, remember the golden rule: "anengaged audience is better than a disinterested one", with the key word being "engaged". You may have badly messed up and had the audience in splits whereas somebody would have said everything correctly but insipidly, without eliciting even a murmur from the crowd - trust me, you have done better than the other person. You will be remembered and that is very important.

Finally remember, even the best speakers have been afraid at some point or the other. In fact, they continue to be afraid even today in some degree or the other. Fear is not a negative emotion; it is something that gives gravitas & purpose to everything we do. It makes us much more careful and curious. If we did not have the fear of failure, we would never savor the taste of success. Remember the concept of the mirror that you practiced with at home. The audience's eyes are really like mirrors - it is more often not showing you what they feel, but a reflection of what you are feeling. You feel good, they feel good. Cheers!

Akal Bodhan - Sandeep Lahiri

অকাল বোধন

----সন্দীপ লাহিড়ী

করোনার মারে দাঁড়াতে পারি না,
শিরদাঁড়া গেল ভেঙ্গে,
ভুখা ফাকা থেকে কাটানু একাল,
কিছু নাহি আছে সঙ্গে।

বহু আশা নিয়ে ধীরে ধীরে উঠি,
ভাবিনু এবার হবে রুজি-রুটি,
ধরিলাম হাল দেখাব কামাল,
পূজো আসিতেছে সঙ্গে।

কচিকাঁচা দুটি আশা করেছিল,
দুবছর গেল, বাবা, জামা নাহি দিল,
এবার বুঝি কোন ফাঁকি নাহি,
জুতো জামা বাঁশি সব লব চাহি,
পূজার কদিন সারারাত ধরি,
মেলা গজা খাব মেলা ঘুরি ঘুরি,
বাবা মা'র সাথে হাতে হাত ধরি,
আমরা মাতিব সঙ্গে,
কচিরাও ভাবে
খুব মজা হবে,
পূজো আসিয়াছে সঙ্গে।

হঠাৎ না জানি কবে কি যে হলো,
অঝোর বারিধারা ধরাতে নামিল,
ধান গেল ডুবে, চাল গেল ভেসে,
বাড়ি ঘর দোর গেল যে নিমেষে,
বস্ত্র যা' ছিল তাও নিল শেষে,
কিছু রহিল না সঙ্গে,
ভেবেছিনু কিছু উপায় করিব,
মাতা আসিতেছে সঙ্গে।

মাথে হাত, চাহি শূণ্যের পানে,
কান ভরে যায় আগমনী গানে,
কি দেব কাকে,
শুধাই যে মা'কে,
বলে দাও মা ত্রিভঙ্গে,
বড় আশা করি বুক বেঁধেছিনু,
তুমি আসিতেছে সঙ্গে।

Shei Somoy Ei Shomoy - Dhaka Chronicles **- Srirupa Sen Ghosh**

While growing up in the 80s and 90s, I was completely oblivious to the fact that there is a concept called “Ghoti” and “Bangal” in the Bengali community since I went to a Convent School in Orissa and then a Marwari school in Kolkata and both these schools had a predominantly cosmopolitan crowd. I only have faint recollections of seeing a booster installed at home so that we could watch the Bangladeshi TV programmes and the heated debates in the neighbourhood when there was a Mohun Bagan and East Bengal football match.

As I set foot into my late teens and entered Presidency College, in the heart of central Kolkata, the first question that I was asked was whether I was a Ghoti or a Bangal. That is when I decided to dig deeper and went straight to my Thakuma (grandmother) who was an avid bookworm and also an expert in family history. She explained to me that our ancestors originally hailed from Bikrampur district in Dhaka in current Bangladesh but the family had moved to Kolkata in the late 18th century where my grandfather’s father had arrived to pursue his higher studies. She regaled me with a lot of stories and anecdotes and by the time I transitioned into my twenties I had a fair idea about the land where my ancestors lived long ago.

Hence in the year 2009 when I first came to know that I would be visiting Dhaka on an official trip, I was filled with a great deal of trepidation and excitement. There were no direct flights from Mumbai during those days and hence I had to go via Kolkata. Once I landed in Dhaka, the first thing that struck me was the sheer number of people outside the airport, it was very crowded and everywhere

you looked you could only see pedestrians and vehicles and animals. The people looked so much like the people in Kolkata, the same faces, the same smiles, the same attire in most cases. At work I was immediately put at ease when I heard so many people speaking in my mother tongue. Initially the staff didn’t realise that I was a Bengali and I had my share of humorous moments when I overheard conversations regarding how the auditor from India was troubling them a lot and how they were hoping for my visit to end, but once they realised that I spoke the same language there was a sense of relief. In fact one gentleman told me that he was very happy that he didn’t have to translate into English when he chatted with me. People were mostly warm and hospitable and very focused on food, in fact the spread in the office canteen was to die for. In my almost 20 years of corporate career, I have never seen such a delightful office canteen, they had different varieties of fish, from Rohu to Pomfret to Prawns as well as other non-vegetarian delicacies. A colleague of mine who is a pure vegetarian and who had travelled with me to Dhaka had a tough time and she survived only on fruits during the period that we spent there.

Another thing that struck me about Dhaka is the huge enthusiasm with which people celebrate their Bengali culture and ethos. During my first visit, it was the time of Bengali New Year and all around I could see people dressed up in red and white, Bengali magazines filled with articles on Bengali culture, literature and music and streets decorated beautifully to usher in the New Year. I have never seen such levels of fanfare and excitement in Kolkata where it was largely limited to wearing new clothes and visiting family members for the New Year.

Dhaka was also a delight to watch in terms of the names of places and stores, they have names like

Banani, Banasree, Bailey Road (famous for Dhakai Jamdani sarees), Gulshan, Motijheel (I understood the origin of Motijheel in DumDum area of Kolkata, a place where a lot many migrants from East Bengal had settled) and stores have names like Kirtonkhola, Nagardola and Aarong. It was a nice shift from the traditional stores names in Kolkata which sounded quite mundane in comparison.

Another interesting experience was to hear people speak in the Bangal dialect. Till then I had only heard my grandparents speak in that dialect and hence getting to hear youngsters speak in Bangal was a revelation. Once I had shared with a Bangladeshi colleague that my maternal grandmother’s family was from Comilla district in Bangladesh and she had fond childhood memories of visiting Comilla during holidays since she was born and raised in Kolkata. The next day many people came up to me saying “Shunlam apni Comillar maiya” (We heard you are a daughter of Comilla). Thereafter I spent the entire day telling everyone that I am a daughter of Kolkata and not Comilla.

Dhaka in my eyes is a bundle of contradictions, on one hand it has palatial houses and only imported cars, on the other hand it has the highest number of beggars I have seen in any city. Since I was on an official trip I couldn’t explore much except for the restaurants in the evenings and the famous Aarong which was at a stone’s throw away from my office in Gulshan. I asked a few people and found out that Bikrampur was an hours drive away from Dhaka and it still remains a bustling locality. Unfortunately I could not visit Bikrampur due to work commitments although I have visited Dhaka 5 times, but I do hope that someday I will be able to visit Dhaka and other parts of Bangladesh on my own and explore it like any other tourist. Till then it will remain in my Bucket List.

কন্যা কাহিনী

শব্দ - কল্প - দুডুম

পর্ব - ১

মুম্বাই-এর ঘোর বর্ষা। Whatsapp-এর তাজা খবর যে বৃষ্টির নাকি সামনে কোন পরীক্ষা রয়েছে। তাই সে ভীষণ পড়ছে। পড়ছে তো পড়ছেই। পড়েই যাচ্ছে। খামার কোনও নাম নেই। তা বর্ষার এমন রোমান্টিক আবহাওয়ায় বাঙালীর মনে রবি ঠাকুরের আনাগোনা তো স্বাভাবিক ব্যাপার। মন তাই গুনগুনিয়ে উঠল... এমনও দিনে তারে খাওয়া যায়, এমনও ঘনঘোর বরিশায়...

হেঁ হেঁ ঠিকই ধরেছেন, বৃষ্টি দেখে মনটা ইলিশ মাছের জন্য একেবারে হু হু করে উঠল। উপরওয়ালার দেখলাম খুবই সদয়। মুম্বাই-এর এই ঘনঘোর বর্ষার মধ্যেও স্নেহ একটা ফোন কলেই কার্যসিদ্ধি। ইলিশ মাছ স্বয়ং বাড়ীতে এসে হাজির। এইবার চট করে দুপুরের মেনুটা ঠিক করে নিতে হবে। বর্ষায় খিচুড়ি-ইলিশ মাছ ভাজার পারফেক্ট কম্বিনেশনের যে আমার মনবাসনা, তাতে পুরো জল ঢেলে দিয়ে বর-বাবু (পুরো বর্বর) হকুম তামিল করলেন গরম ভাতের সঙ্গে সর্ষে-বাটা ইলিশের। ফলে বর-বাবুর শ্রমমাতা মানে খোদ আমার মাতৃদেবীও একেবারে চলে পড়লেন সর্ষে-বাটার দিকে।

তিনি এবার মঞ্চে অবতীর্ণ হলেন।

শারীরিক অসুস্থতার কারণে তাঁর চলা-ফেরায় অসুবিধে, তাই তিনি নিজের হাতে কোনও কাজই আর করতে পারেন না। কিন্তু তা স্নেহেও কবীর সুমনের কথামত হাল না ছেড়ে, স্নেহ কণ্ঠ ছেড়ে তিনি কাজ হাসিল করেন। যেমন এক্ষেত্রে, তাঁর প্লাস্টিকের সিংহাসনটি বগলদাবা করে নিয়ে গিয়ে তিনি রান্নাঘরে বসে পড়লেন, এবং তাঁর চোস্ত বাঙালী হিন্দীতে (এটা কিন্তু হিন্দী ভাষার আঞ্চলিক শাখা হিসেবে মর্যাদা

পাওয়ার যোগ্যতা রাখে বলেই আমার বিশ্বাস) তিনি আমার অবাঙালী রন্ধন-সহায়িকাকে প্রবল ভাবে ইনস্ট্রাকশন দিতে শুরু করলেন।

এই রকম ঘটনা আগেও ঘটেছে এবং সেই খাবার-দাবার খাওয়ার পরেও আমরা সবাই দিব্যি বেঁচে-বর্তেও আছি। তাই বিশেষ চাপ নেই এই সিচুয়েশনে। তবে কিনা ইলিশ মাছ বলে কথা। তাই খানিকক্ষণ একটু ঘুর ঘুর করলাম রান্নাঘরের আশে পাশে। একটু আলগা সুপারভিসন আর কি। দেখলাম প্রোগ্রেস ভালোই হচ্ছে। কড়াই, খুন্তি, সর্ষের তেল ইত্যাদি তাদের গর্ত, মানে ড্রয়ার থেকে বেড়িয়ে পড়েছে। ইলিশ মাছ ও স্নান-টান সেরে প্রায় রেডি। মনে ভালোই বন্দোবস্ত। যাকে বলে সাপও মরল, লাঠিও ভাঙলো না। ইলিশ মাছও খাওয়া হল, আমাকে খুন্তি নাড়াতেও হল না। একেবারে উইন-উইন!

আমিও তাই খুশি মনে নাচতে নাচতে এবার নিজের স্নানটি সারতে গেলাম।

বেরোলামও খুশি মনে নাচতে নাচতে। ইলিশের স্বপ্নে ভরপুর হয়ে। মনের আনন্দে ভাসতে ভাসতে চললাম রান্নাঘরের দিকে। এতক্ষণে নিশ্চয়ই মাছের রানী সাজুগুজু শেষ করে রান্নাঘরে অপেক্ষায় রয়েছেন কতক্ষণে টেবিলে আসবেন। কিন্তু, কিন্তু, তাহলে সেই মন কাড়া আঁশটে গন্ধ কেন পাচ্ছি না এখনও? ব্যাপার খানা কি? এই সব ভাবতে ভাবতেই পৌঁছে গেছি রান্না ঘরের কাছে। এমন সময় শুনি মাতৃদেবীর বজ্রনির্ঘোষ, “বাটাটা লাও”।

এর মানে কি?? বাটাটা লাও?? আমি যুগপত্ পুলকিত এবং স্তম্ভিত!!

পুলকিত কারণ মাতৃদেবী হিন্দী বলছেন। শুদ্ধ হিন্দী বলছেন শুধু তাই নয়, বাড়ীতে বসে বসে তিনি শুদ্ধ মারারিও শিখে নিয়েছেন (আলুর মারারি নাম বাটাটা কিনা)।

আর স্তম্ভিত কারণ ইলিশ মাছ ও আলুর মেলবন্ধন বিশেষ সম্ভাবনাময় বলে তো জানি না কোনোদিনও। বিশেষ করে আজকের মেনুতে।

ব্যাপারটা কাল্টিভেট করবার জন্য ঢুকতেই হল রান্না ঘরে। ঢুকে দেখি অবাঙালীনি ফ্রিজ খুলে তার মধ্যে বাটাটা, অর্থাৎ আলু খুঁজছে, আলু-থালু হয়ে। কি হচ্ছে বোঝার আগেই মাতৃদেবী আবার হুঙ্কার ছাড়েন, “আরে বাবা ডিপ ফ্রিজ-এর ভেতর থেকে বাটাটা লাও বোলতা হয় না।”

আমি এবার সত্যি সত্যিই ঘাবড়ে গেলাম। একে ইলিশ মাছের সাথে আলু, তাও সেই আলু ফ্রিজ-এর মধ্যে, আবার এখন শুনছি ফ্রিজার (বাংলায় যাকে বলে ডিপ ফ্রিজ) থেকে বেরোবে! এতো কেস বড্ড বেশি ঘোরালো হয়ে উঠছে দেখছি!

ইতিমধ্যে আমাকে দেখতে পেয়ে দুজনেই যেন হাঁপ ছেড়ে বাঁচল। আমার সহায়িকা কাঁদো কাঁদো মুখে জানায় যে মাস্তি যা যা বলেছে, সে তো সব তাই-ই করেছে। কিন্তু মাস্তি ফ্রিজ থেকে যে কি গুপ্তধন বের করতে বলছে সে কিছুতেই বুঝতে পারছে না।

মাতৃদেবী সঙ্গে সঙ্গে ঝাঁপিয়ে পড়েন “আরে কালকের রান্নার জন্য যে সর্ষেবাটা করা হয়েছিল তার খানিকটা বাড়তি ছিল। তাই আমি ছোট টিফিন বাক্স করে সেটা ডিপ ফ্রিজে তুলে রেখেছিলাম। আজকের রান্নাতে ওইটুকু দিয়ে দেওয়া যাবে। কখন থেকে বলছি কালকের সেই বাটা-টা ডিপ ফ্রিজ থেকে বের করতে। কিছুতেই কথা শুনছে না। বলতো ওকে....।

যাক অবশেষে বাটাটা রহস্যভেদ এবং সর্ষেবাটা-টা, খুড়ি, সর্ষেবাটা ইলিশেন সমাপয়েৎ। শেষ ভাল যার সব ভাল তার॥

পর্ব - ২

ইসস, বড্ড বেলা হয়ে গেল আজ। স্নান সারতেই সাড়ে-বারোটা বেজে গেল। ঘড়ি দেখে মনে মনে হিসেব কষতে থাকি, ১৫ মিনিটে কোনও রকমে পুজোটা সেরে নিতে হবে, তার মানে সময় দাঁড়ালো পৌনে একটা, তারপরেই ১৫ মিনিটে পড়ি কি মরি করে রোজকার মেডিটেশনটা। তাহলেই বেলা ১টার মধ্যে হয়ে যাবে আমার আর তাহলেই ছেলেদের খেতে দিয়ে দিতে পারবো সময় মতন।

সত্যি বলতে কি, এই অন-লাইন স্কুলিং-এর চক্রে হাড় মাস একেবারে কালি হয়ে যাচ্ছে।

আগে কি ছিল?

সকালবেলা নবাব পুত্রদের বাবা-বাছা বলে ঘুম থেকে তুলে দিয়ে, কোনরকমে দুধটা - কলাটা গলঃধকরণ করিয়ে, খাবার ভরে বাক্স প্যাঁটেরা গুছিয়ে দিয়ে, দরজায় একপ্রস্থ হামি, টাটার পর বারান্দায় গিয়ে আরেক প্রস্থ বাই-বাই, ক্লাইং কিসি অবধি হলেই ছিল নিশ্চিন্দ।

তা-র-প-র আমার ছিল পাক্সা আট ঘন্টার লম্বা ছুটি!

কিন্তু এখন?

সকালে দুধ-কলা, তারপর তাদের স্নান। তারপরে স্কুল শুরু হবার আগেই মুখের সামনে ধরে দিতে হবে একটা লাইট অথচ হেলদি স্ল্যাক (কি চাপ ভাবুন), যাতে মিনি বিদ্যাসাগরদ্বয় কোনোমতেই খিদের বাহানায় ল্যাপটপ ছেড়ে উঠতে না পারে। এরপরেই তোড়জোড় শুরু হয়ে যায় একটা ঠিকঠাক ভারী কোন প্রাতরাশ তৈরীর, (যাকে আমরা আজকাল বলি প্রপার হেভী ব্রেকফাস্ট), আবার সেটাও হেলদি হতে হবে! তবেই বলুন, চাপ কি আর গাছে ফলে? আঞ্জের না, চাপ সংসারে ফলে।

স্কুল থেকে প্রাতরাশের সময় ধার্য করে দিয়েছে বেলা সাড়ে দশটা থেকে এগারোটা। সুতরাং তার মধ্যে তাদের খাওয়া এবং দাওয়া চুকিয়ে দিয়েই শুরু হয়ে যায় মধ্যাহ্নভোজন পর্ব। তারও তো আবার নির্দিষ্ট সময়

আছে, বেলা ১ - ১.৪৫। এখন বুঝলেন তো, আমার এত তাড়াহড়োর কারণটা কি, আর কেনই বা ১টার মধ্যে আমাকে ছেলেদের খেতে দিতেই হবে?

তা যাই হোক, এবার আসল গল্পে আসি।

ভাগ্যিস রান্নাটা সেরে ঢুকেছিলাম স্নানে, এবার টুক করে খাবারটা বেড়ে দিলেই হল। তাই আর দেরী না করে পুরো পি.টি. উষার স্পীডে পুজোটা সেরে নিয়ে, দুতী চাঁদের স্পীডে চট করে একটু মেডিটেশন নামিয়ে দিয়ে, সেই স্পীড পুরোমাত্রায় বজায় রেখে এবার ঢুকে পড়লাম রান্নাঘরে। ঘড়িতে তখন বাজে ঠিক দুপুর ১টা বেজে ১ মিনিট। নিজের টাইম ম্যানেজমেন্টের জন্য মনে মনে নিজের কলারটা তুলব বলে সবে ভাবছি, এমন সময় রান্নাঘরের দৃশ্য দেখে আমার চক্ষু চড়ক গাছ!

আমার মাতৃদেবী, যথারীতি, মেয়ের ১ মিনিট দেরী দেখে, নিজেকে আর ধরে রাখতে পারেন নি। তিনি তাঁর প্লাস্টিকের সিংহাসন ও আমার সহায়িকাকে সঙ্গে নিয়ে মঞ্চে নেমে পড়েছেন, মানে রান্নাঘরে বসে পড়েছেন। আপনাদের আগেই জানিয়েছি যে শারীরিক অসুস্থতার কারণে তিনি নিজের হাতে কোনো কাজ আর করতে না পারলেও, নিজের গলার জোরে তিনি সব কাজই করিয়ে নিতে সক্ষম। তাই তাঁর ইনস্ট্রাকশানের খরস্রোত শুরু হয়ে গেছে দেখে আমি বিন্দুমাত্র আশ্চর্য হলাম না।

কিন্তু আশ্চর্য হয়ে গেলাম আমার অবাঙালী সহায়িকাকে দেখে। শুধু যে আশ্চর্য হলাম তাইই নয়, একটা বিশাল জোরে হাঁচটও খেলাম।

মাতৃদেবীর নানাবিধ, নানাভাষার (বাংলা, হিন্দী, ইংরেজী, বাংরেজী, হিংরেজী, বাল্দি, কি নেই তার মধ্যে) ইনস্ট্রাকশানের মধ্যেও, অল্পবয়েসী হিন্দুস্থানী মেয়েটি রান্নাঘরের মাটিতে পদ্মাসনে বসে, তার চোখ বন্ধ ও মুখে অদ্ভুত প্রশান্তি!!

কিমাশ্চর্যম!! এতো দেখি রান্নাঘরের মাটিতে বসে মেডিটেশন করছে!! ব্যাপার স্যাপার দেখে আমার তো চোখ কপালে। একেবারেই ভিন্ন জাতি-

ধর্ম-বর্ণাবলম্বী নেহাতই ছেলেমানুষ মেয়েটির এই অভ্যেসটি তো এতদিন জানা ছিল না মোটেই। আজও অবধি একবারও তাকে দেখিনি এমন কাজ করতে। তাও আবার এই হট্টগলের মাঝে, বেলা ১ টার সময়, কাজকর্ম সব ফেলে, রান্নাঘরেই মাটিতে বসে পড়ে। তবে অবাধ হওয়ার সাথে সাথে, একটু আত্মশ্লাঘাও বোধ করলাম বইকি। নিশ্চয়ই আমায় দেখেই অনুপ্রাণিত হয়েছে মেয়েটি! হতেই হবে! হতে বাধ্য!

এই যে সংসারের হাজার বাধা বিপত্তি পেরিয়ে, নিয়ম করে আমার রোজকার মেডিটেশন, তা সে যতই হোক না কেন পি. টি. উষা বা দুতী চাঁদের স্পীডে, তার একটা ইতিবাচক প্রভাব কি আর নেই? এই তো চাক্ষুষ দেখাই যাচ্ছে। হাঁ হাঁ বাওয়া, সে যে যাই বলুক (পড়ুন, বাড়ীর বাকী সদস্যরা), জ্বলন্ত প্রমাণ একেবারে চোখের সামনে। মেয়েটির বসা, শ্বাস নেওয়া, শ্বাস ছাড়া, অবিকল আমি যেরকম করে থাকি সেরকমই তো !

মন্ত্রমুগ্ধের মতন আমি আমার একলব্যা কে দেখতে থাকি। আহা, কি ডেডিকেশন! না জানি কতদিন ধরে আমার অলক্ষ্য আমাকে অনুসরণ করে আজ সে এই জায়গাতে পৌঁছাতে পেরেছে। আহা রে, হয়তো ভেবেছে যে আমি যে সময় মেডিটেশন করি, সেটাই সঠিক সময়। তাই বোধহয় স্থান-কাল-পাত্র সব ভুলে একনিষ্ঠভাবে আজ বসে পড়েছে। আর এমনটা সে করতে পেরেছে বলেই না আজ আমি জানতে পেরেছি, সাক্ষী হতে পেরেছি এমন এক দুর্লভ মুহূর্তের।

এই সব ভাবনা-চিন্তার মধ্যে, নিজেকে যখন দ্রোণাচার্য টাইপের কেউকেটা বলে ধরেই নিয়েছি, ঠিক তখনই, মাতৃদেবীর নজর পড়ল আমার ওপর, এবং তিনি একেবারে রে-রে করে উঠলেন, তাড়া-টা নেহাৎ করতে পারলেন না, তাই রক্ষ্য!

মাতৃদেবীর বক্তব্য যে আমার দেরি দেখে (১ মিনিট), তিনি নাকি পই পই করে মেয়েটিকে বললেন বাচ্চাদের খেতে দিয়ে দেওয়ার জন্য।

Paintings - Ashna Bose

কিন্তু কি অদ্বুত মেয়ে। তা না করে সে কিনা মাটিতে চোখ বন্ধ করে বসে পড়ল! এ সবে মাতামুগু কিছুই বোঝা যাচ্ছেনা। ডাকাডাকিতেও সে মেয়ে কিছুতেই তো উঠছে না। কি বিপদ! কোভিড কাল চলছে, কিছু আবার শরীর টরির খারাপ হল না তো!!

মাতৃদেবীর এহেন বাক্যবাণে, আমার একলব্যা এবার ধীরে ধীরে চোখ মেলে চাইল, তার আচার্য্যাকে সামনে দেখে স্মিত হেসে সে উঠে দাঁড়াল। তার পরেই ভীষণ (অ)শান্তভাবে হাত-পা নেড়ে হিন্দিতে যা বললো, তার বাংলা করলে দাঁড়ায় এই যে, মাতৃদেবী তাকে পাঠিয়ে ছিলেন আমাকে তাড়া দেওয়ার জন্য। কিন্তু আমায় ধ্যানস্থ অবস্থায় দেখে মেয়েটি তার সুবিবেচনা বোধে জানায় যে চিন্তার কিছু নেই, দিদি ধ্যান করছে, এফুনি হয়ে যাবে (হায়রে এই আমার রেপুটেশন, ধ্যানে বসলেই এফুনি হয়ে যাবে)!! কিন্তু মাতৃদেবী তার কথা কিছুই বুঝতে না পেরে, খুবই অসহিষ্ণু হয়ে উঠছিলেন। তাই জন্য সে খুব বুদ্ধি করে মাটিতে বসে ধ্যান করার ‘অ্যাকটিং’ করে দেখাচ্ছিলো। যাতে মাতৃদেবী ঠিক ঠিক বুঝতে পারেন।

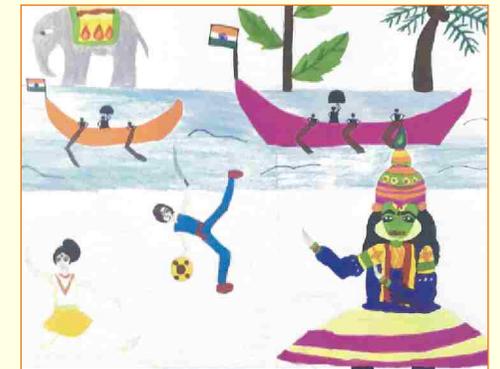
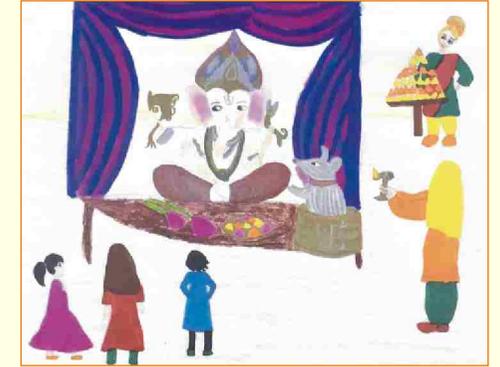
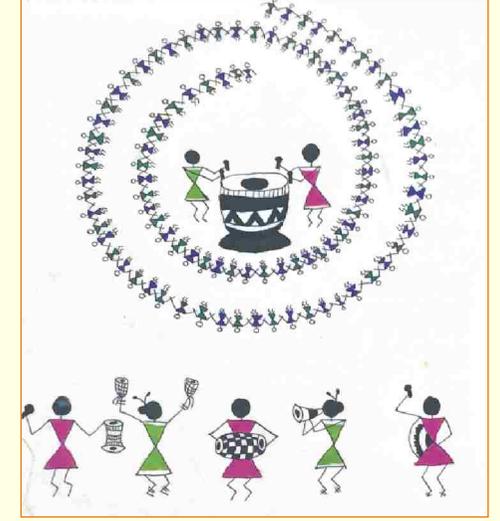
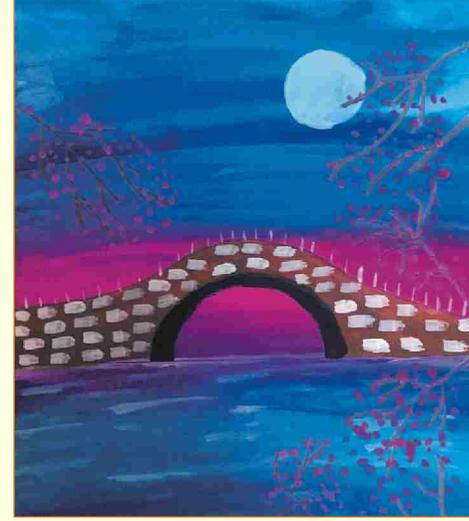
এবং তারপরেই একগাল হাসির সাথে তার সরল প্রশ্ন, “দিদি আভি থানা লাগা দু ক্যা?”

হা হতোস্মি!!

কোথা সে দ্রোণাচার্য? কোথা বা সে একলব্যা?

হায় রে কপাল! হায় রে কলিকাল!!

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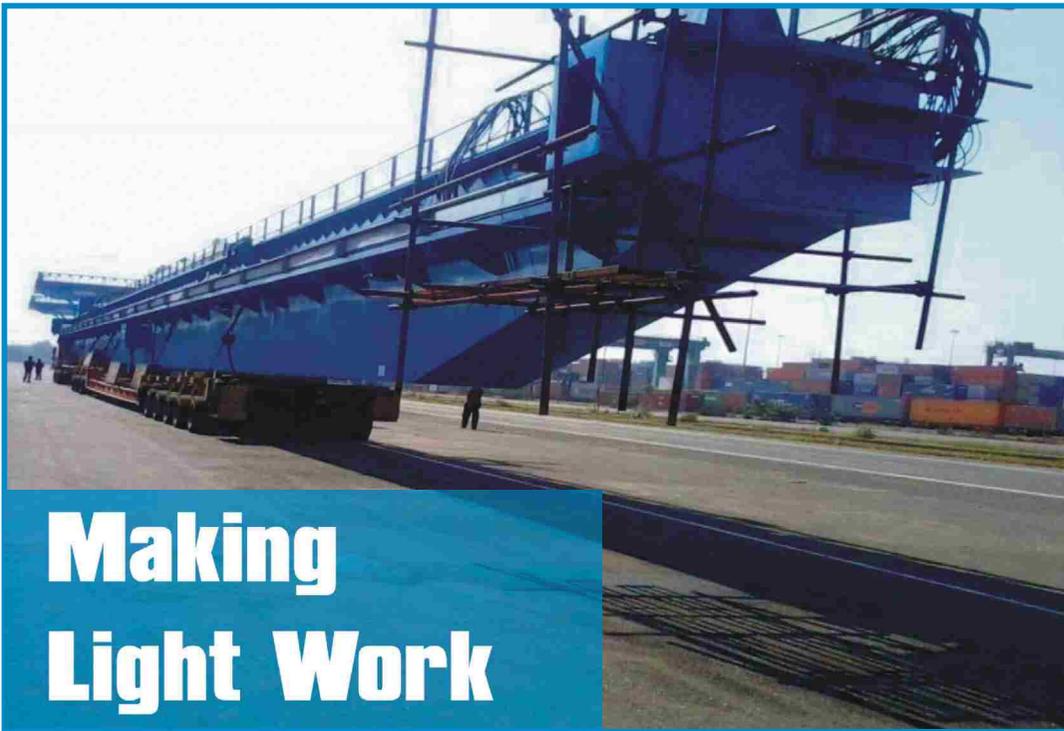
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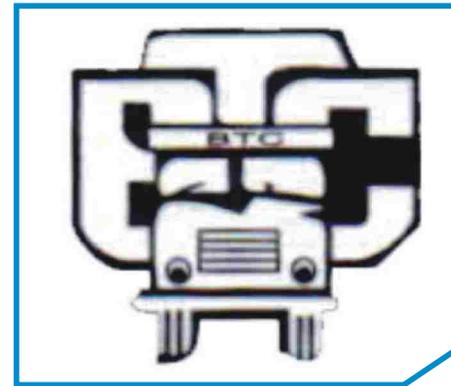
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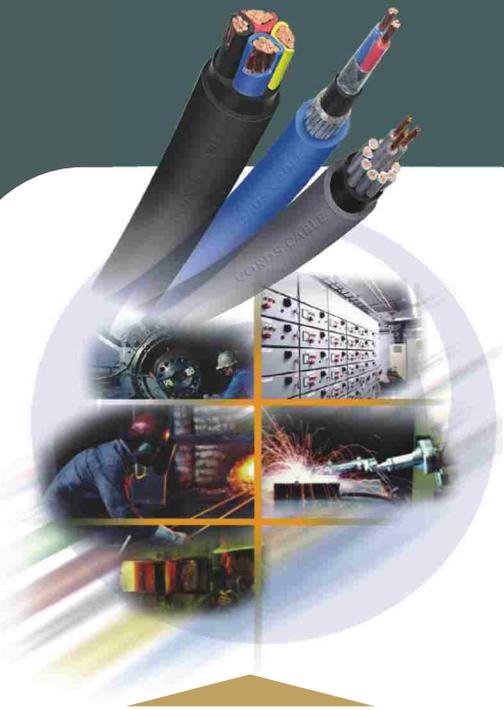
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