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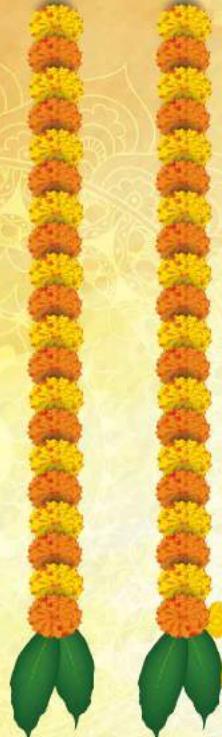
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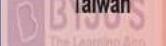
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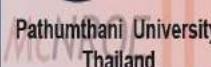


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Award received from CNBC TV 18 endorsed by

CMO Global, World Federation of Marketing & WFHRP on 6th May 2022.

■ Received "Times Best B-School in Placement in Management" award in "Times Business Awards", West Bengal, 26th April 2022.

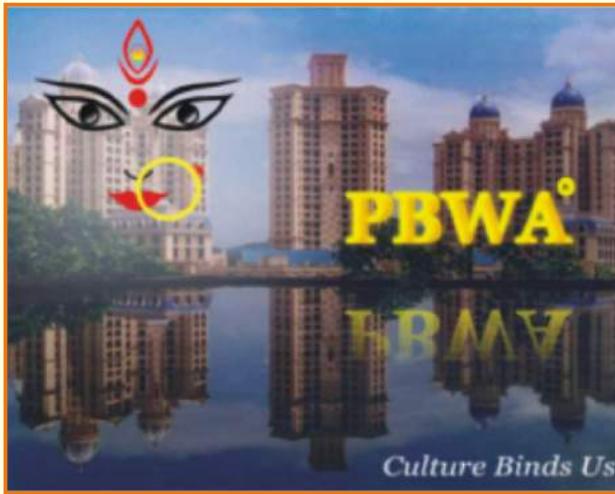
■ Ranked 1st in "Top Eminent B-Schools of Super Excellence"
– CSR-GHRDC B-Schools Survey, November 2021.

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'Parichay 2022'

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

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

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Foreword.

"All our dreams can come true, if we have the courage to pursue them." - Walt Disney

This famous utterance aptly summarizes the journey that PBWA has traversed since 2006 when we first commenced our Durgotsav journey.

We have come a long way since then and have left an indelible stamp on the Durgotsav map of Mumbai. Our magnificent pandals, the grandeur of our Utsav backdrop, the sheer artistry and variety of our riveting and noteworthy cultural programs, the resplendent and deeply revered Ma Durga flanked by her 4 children, the exquisite Bengali cuisine on offer, the sumptuous Bhog Prasad lunch that is offered to thousands of visitors on three successive days, the piety and devotion with which our esteemed members immerse themselves in the actual puja over the days of the Durgotsav, the camaraderie and the bonding between our members that is so evident during these days, and so

much more - these are the hallmarks of the grand spectacular event that we host every year.

Our PBWA family has coalesced into a unique ecosystem over the years. An ecosystem where some members steadily work throughout the year for betterment of our society and one in which ready support is spontaneously offered when any member requires help. An ecosystem which enables us to uphold and perpetuate our glorious culture. An ecosystem that provides a platform for our members to periodically interface with each other, be it during the Durgotsav, the annual sports, the picnics or other notable cultural events that we periodically organise such as Rabindra Jayanti. An ecosystem that enables us to bond with each other as a true community.

The last 2-year period was one where the whole world as knew it came crashing down. The pestilence which seared all countries, large or small, did not, however, defeat us at PBWA. We still staged a Durgotsav within our

limited means, albeit on a much smaller scale but equally rich in content - largely aided by online tools which enabled us to reach out to all our members and our community during that difficult period.

This year we are back in no uncertain fashion - with all the splendour, the magnificence, the gaiety and the awesome majesty of our Durgotsav that Mumbai has come to expect of us.

You, dear Patrons and members of this august assemblage have made all this possible. We are grateful for your patronage and look forward to a continuing association that can only grow stronger over time

- Arnob Mondal



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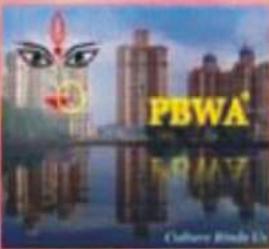
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prosperity & peace



Durgotsav 2021 - Our Flagship Event



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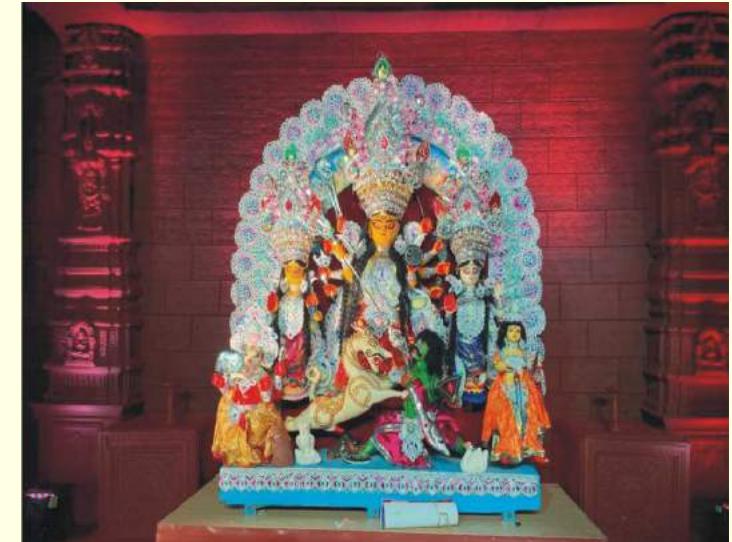
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Durgotsav 2021 - A Pandal with a Difference

While PBWA has always created replicas of temples and historical structures, this time a replica of a "Straw roofed Village Hut" as is prevalent in the villages in Bengal, was created. The decor was created entirely in-house by members and their families.



Durgotsav 2021
The Divine Mother & Her Children



Mahalaya

Mahalaya is said to be **the day when Goddess Durga defeated the demon, Mahishasura**. The day signifies the end of Pitru Paksha Shradh and the beginning of Durga Puja for Bengalis. Pitru Paksha is a period of worshipping the ancestors and 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. PBWA members assembled at the under-construction pandal at 4.30 am and celebrated the occasion together.

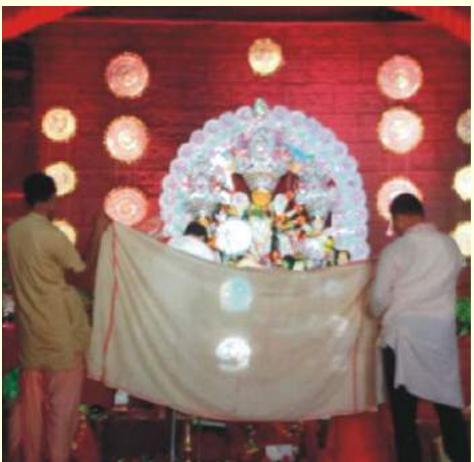


Moments Durgotsav 2021 - With Blessings from our elders, we begin

As has been our tradition over last 16 years, we commence proceedings of our Durga Puja with due blessings of the elderly members of PBWA. Such is the spirit of these elderly ladies that some even joined the occasion remotely through collaboration platforms. The inauguration was ably anchored by our lady members



Durgotsav 2021 - The core of the occasion - Puja Rituals



Shondhi Puja

Bhog offering for The Mother

The Holy Fire

Pushpanjali in progress



The Divine Mother arrives



*The Broadcast Team
who ensured virtual viewing*



Finishing touches to the Donation Box



Puja Team



The 'Alpona' comes alive



Moments Durgotsav 2021



All hands on deck. Behind-the-scenes support



Always in the mood for a jig



Happy Faces



Celebrity presence - Noted Bollywood composer & Music Director, Pritam seeks blessings & mingles with the crowd



Some members of the Puja Team



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

Moments Durgotsav 2021



Just Irresistible



Bytes for the Media



Drumming up the Pujo Spirit



Telecast of Vaccination & Blood Donation Drive

Durgotsav 2021 - '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 2021 - '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 2021

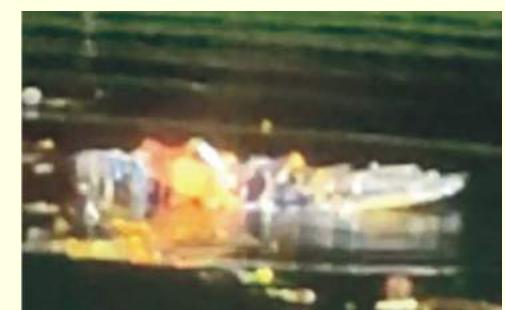
'Ashche Bochor Aabar Hobe' Farewell Mother - Till next year!



About to Depart



*'Shanti Jol' - Blessings in the form of Holy water sprinkles.
Rituals finally end*



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by members and
Gen-next*



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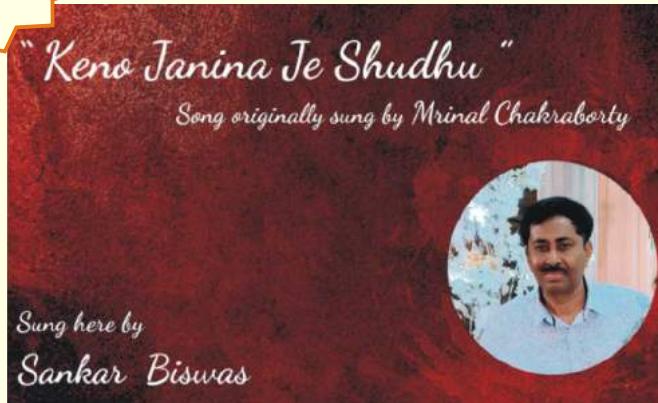
Krishna Murari



Dance Recitals



*Sruti Natok -
"Paka Dekha"*



Violin Recital



'Manik Mala Gaantha'- is a tribute to the one-and-only, All-in-one, the legendary Satyajit Ray on the occasion of his birth centenary (1921 - 2021). As a child, Ray was much adored and coddled and hence his nickname 'Manik' or Jewel, in Bengali. And that is how he was referred to by his close ones. Indeed, he remains amongst the brightest Jewels of all time in Global cinema. These tiny tots, ably directed and choreographed, gave a fitting tribute to the maestro. **"Maharaja Tomare Selaam"**



Our seasoned narrator

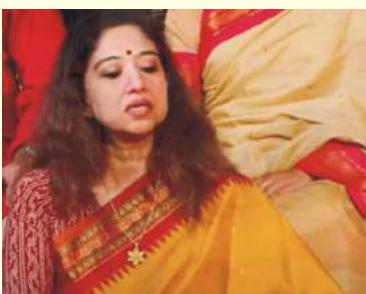


'Ja Gaache Ta Jaak' - Let Go! A dance presentation, presented by our members on this theme was a fresh break from the then mood of heaviness looming in the air. The recital relived the tunes of Bengal's favoured play back singers such as Shyamal Mitra and others. To enhance the mood, the recital was garnished with recitation in both Bengali and English skillfully articulated by our members. All in all, a range of senses covered from Recitation to Song and Dance.



“Anonto Nakkhotrobithi Tumi, Andhokarey”

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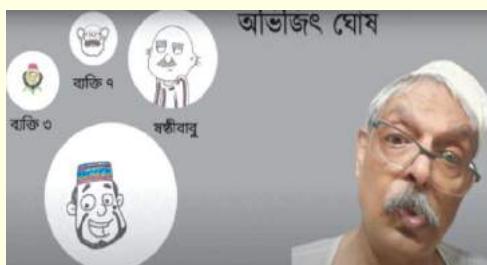


This musical presentation is an ode to those stars of literature, poetry, music & theatre from Bengal, who are no more, yet, their brilliance continues to shine on us, just as those countless stars in the Heavens whose light, even after their death, continue to blaze through the universe like an eternal comet in the dark void.

Shotorupe Aami - or 'A hundred incarnations'- Women adopt different roles in everyday life and how ! From a gentle Homemaker to an aggressive Upholder of the Law; from a Boardroom executive to a practitioner of fine arts; from a Life-giver to a Life-saver - women have this innate ability to wear multiple hats as has been so beautifully portrayed by this group of actors and dancers.



Chikitsa Sankat - is a re-enactment of the humorous Bengali novel 'Chikitsa Sankat' (Treatment Dilemma) by Rajshekhar Basu, commonly known by his pen name, "Parashuram". The plot humorously revolves around pitfalls of various kinds of medical treatments. Uniquely presented through comic sketches and background narration this was a first among many and thoroughly enjoyed by all.



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The Whistler



Director



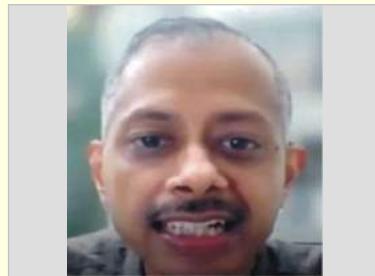
The Narrator

CEO Power Walk & Talk

The CEO Power Walk is a flagship event of every Durga Puja organized by PBWA, wherein, leaders from various walks of life participate and share their thoughts on pertinent and contemporary subjects so as to enlighten listeners of their perspectives, their experiences and important takeaways. In 2021, 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 **SUSTAINABILITY**, a topic widely deliberated upon, across forums right from Class rooms to Board rooms. The panel comprising of a galaxy of leaders who shared their thoughts and their own contributions on how they have made sustainability, actually impact the common mass through research and entrepreneurship.



Sukanti Ghosh,
Sr. Vice President at
Albright Stonebridge Group
& Moderator



Professor Anand Rao,
Centre for Technology Alternatives in
Rural Areas, IIT Bombay



Anjan Mukherjee,
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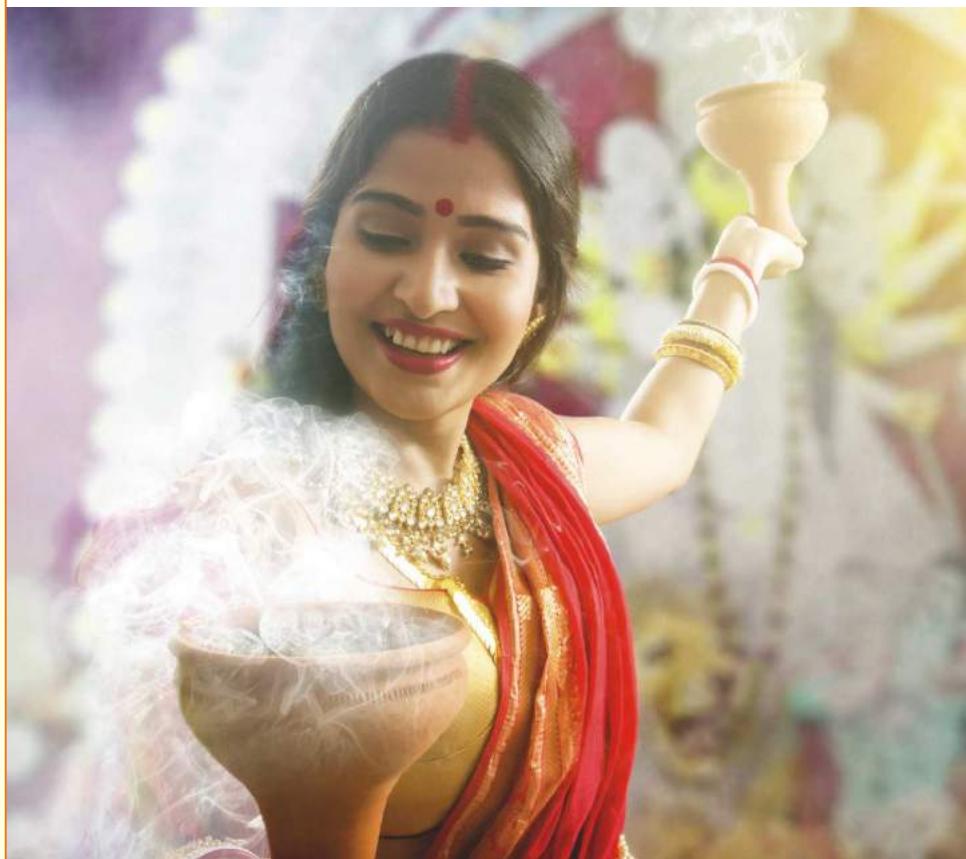
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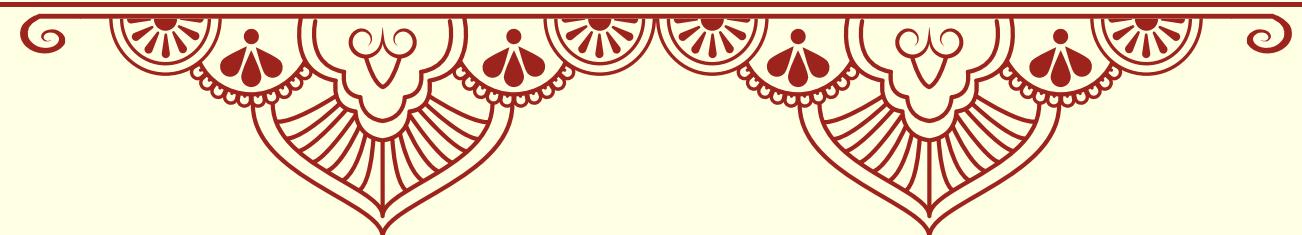
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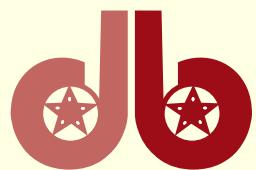
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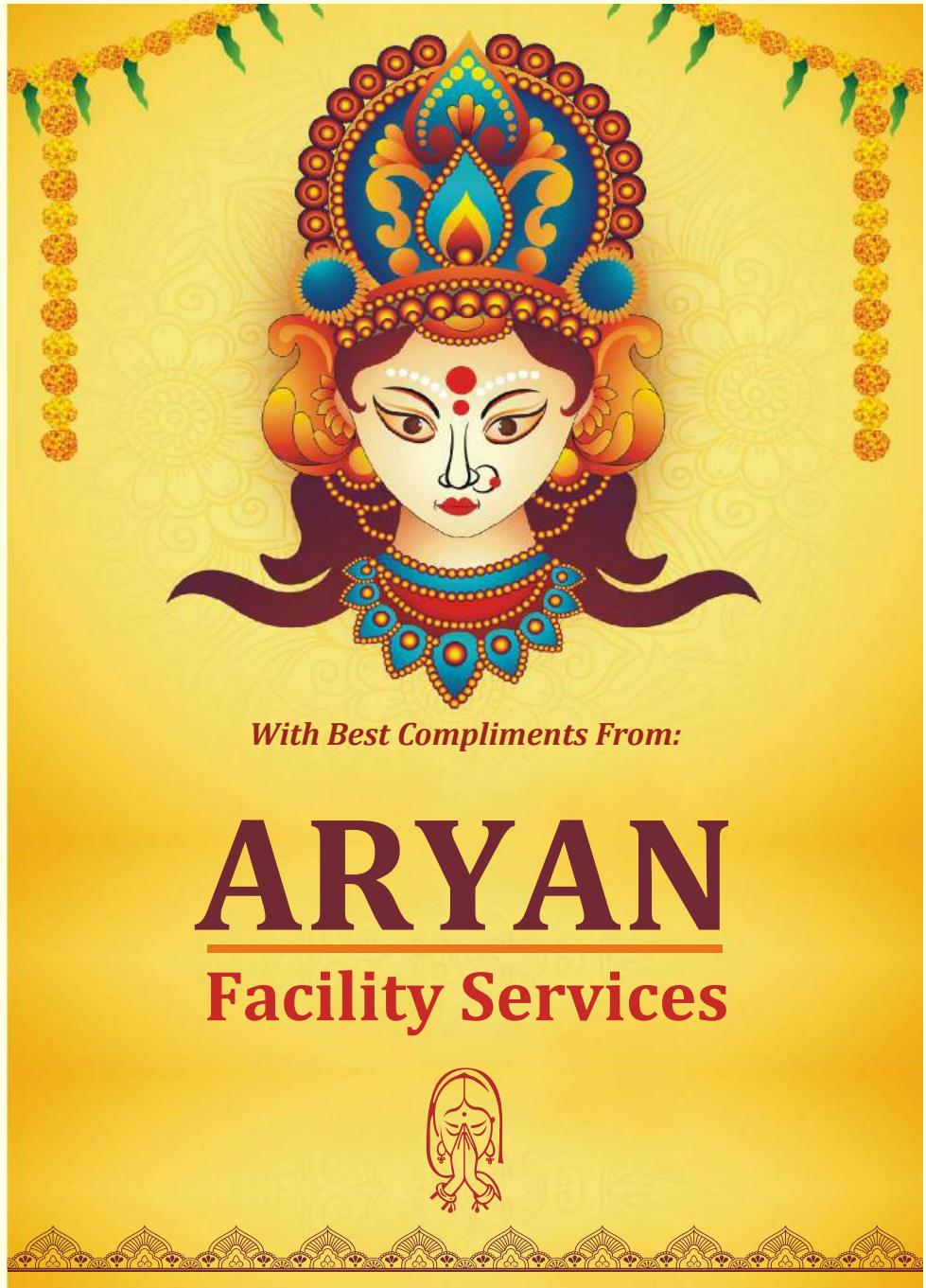
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Lakshmi Puja

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



'Parichay' PBWAs in-house souvenir being e-launched 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 made its way to devices & hearts across the globe.

A pleasant task practised over the years - All Behind-the-scenes actors - Security, Catering, Pandal creators, Housekeeping, Ground helpers, etc. are publicly acknowledged through a token reward.

Kali Puja & Diwali

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



Kobi Pronam

An important event on PBWA's 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. After two years when the pandemic played spoil-sport, the entire PBWA family got together in person and what followed, were masterpieces of Song, Dance, Poetry and Narration. The programme aptly titled "Kobi Pronam" or 'Salutations to the Poet' - was presented on the bard's 161st birth anniversary at a local auditorium.

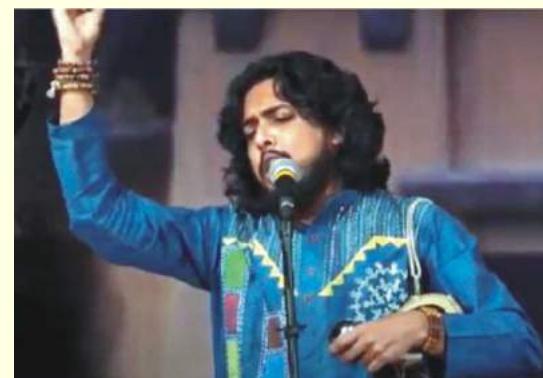


Kobi Pronam



Kobi Pronam

Dohar - which literally means 'chorus' is a Kolkata based band specializing in folk music of Bengal, Assam & Bangladesh. The group left the audience mesmerised with their foot-tapping compositions and their carefree, un-inhibited style of singing.





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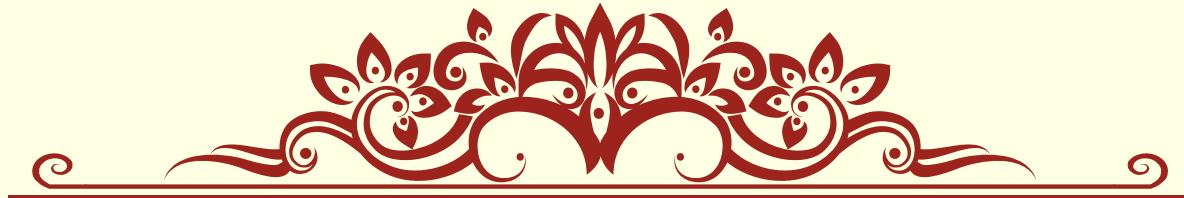


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PBWA's Digital Update

In this annual column on behalf of PBWA's Digital Initiatives Team, I am proud to share our journey of 2021 and the early part of 2022, as we cheer-lead PBWA into the last quarter of India's First Independent Century.

This year also marks the recognition of Durga Puja as a UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage which is a one of a kind recognition of the Bengali culture and community.

We celebrated Durgotsav 2021 Phygitaly, and were scale up the success of an Online Durgotsav in 2020 by beaming all our 2021 Programs Live for the first time nationally via a **dedicated Channel on Tata Sky**, Den Cable TV, YouTube Live and Facebook live.

Last year, we had mentioned about our plans to revamp our website and make it contemporary and scalable. The entire Digital team worked tirelessly and we were able to Go-live in time to conduct the entire live telecast of the Durgotsav 2021 via our website. This also allowed us to have a landing home for all our Digital Asset feeds and in one view our

followers could get an entire spectrum of information and updates in one window. The website has been unprecedented viewership during and post-Durgotsav and continues to be the flag bearer of our Digitalisation journey.

A Glimpse from our Revamped Website Home Page

Our Digital Assets like YouTube and Facebook have also delivered remarkably. Our YouTube channel now has over 45 million video views and almost 2 Lakh subscribers and 5+ Billion view impressions. The channel now has over 700 videos covering all our Cultural Programs from 2006 to 2021 as well as Rabindra Jayanti 2022 and is a repository of our many nostalgic memories.

Our Facebook channel has seen significant followership growth and has been at the forefront of live streaming many programs to our members and followers.

The Digital Team is working on delivering two new initiatives in 2022.

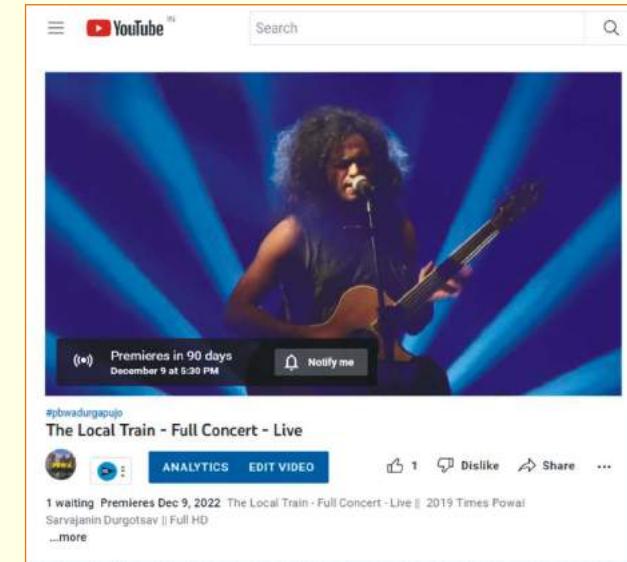


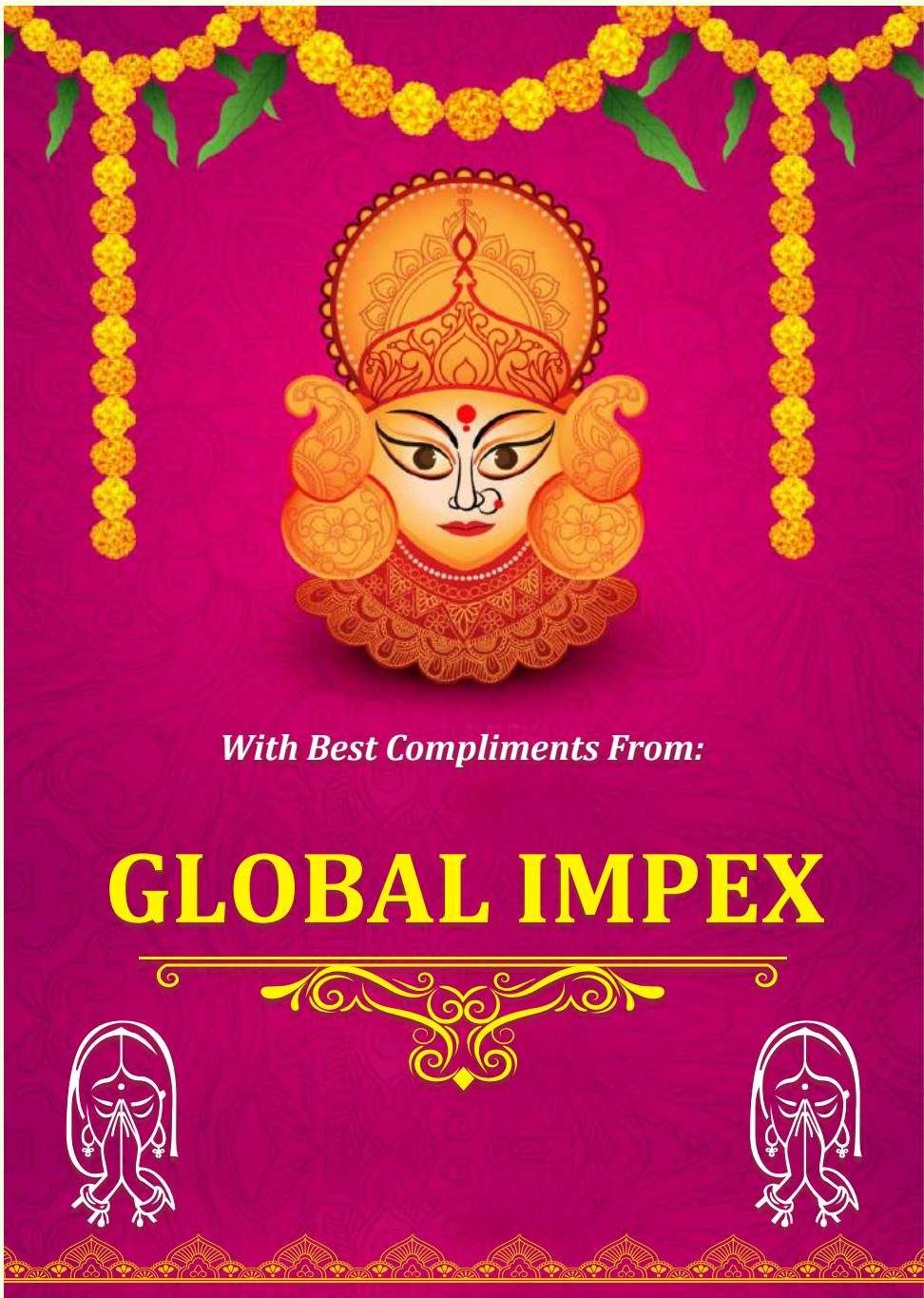
This will be the first time that our **Durgotsav Auditorium Stage Backdrop will be in full LED**. This mega LED display will allow the props for our various programs like Natok, Dance etc. to go Digital and will also allow us to have Act-wise transitions of images and videos as well as prep up the backdrop of the Live performances by various Bands.

We are also working on **releasing the Full Concert Videos** of all our Past YouTube Performers. So far, most of the videos released were Song-wise, and allowed viewers to enjoy the individual songs, and now we will start releasing the Full Concert Videos - many of them in full HD and with audio corrections (e.g., Mono to Stereo for the Older concerts) - which will allow us to enjoy the entire concert of performers like 'The Local Train', 'Shreya Ghoshal', 'Rupam Islam' and many YouTube others.

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

- Prateek Bhattacharya





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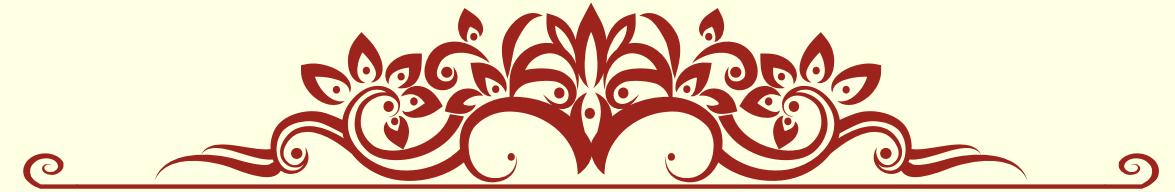


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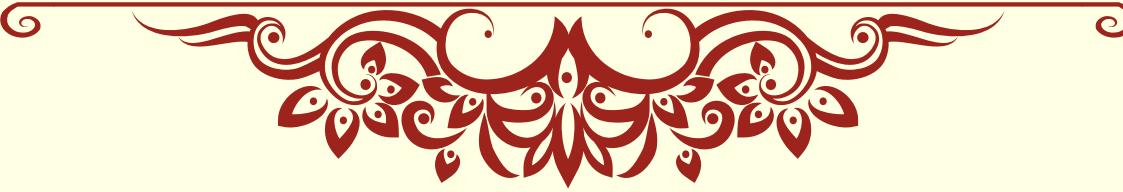


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MISSION SWAYAM SIDDHA

Building the New: Back to Work @Mission Swayam Siddha

"It is during our darkest moments that we must focus to see the light." - Aristotle

The light seems to have finally shone through the darkness that had descended upon us during the Covid-19 pandemic. This is particularly relevant for the lives and livelihood of women trainees at Mission Swayam Siddha (MSS) - a social initiative of the Powai Bengali Welfare Association (PBWA) to empower economically and socially less privileged women. These 'Swayamsiddhas' as we choose to call them, are back with a bang at their workplace in Powai, doing what they do best - handcrafting beautiful products that find their way to homes and hearts all over the country & beyond.



Kiran Gupta

I am Kiran, working at MSS since 2007. When I joined MSS I did not know anything, I was shy and timid. Gradually all Didis at MSS taught me embroidery, making paper bags, jewellery and I was amazed that I could pick up the skills so soon that within a few years I was made a trainer to teach other trainees.

During the pandemic: we used to receive our earnings / salary regularly from MSS even when all the work stopped. During the lockdown, we also received groceries from MSS for a while. This was a great help.

Starting my own business: As I was home the whole day, I utilised this time to open our own little food stall after the second lockdown. Till date, the business is going on very well.

However, the pandemic actually threatened to turn back the clock to their pre-MSS existence of these trainees. It seemed that the lives that MSS set out to transform since 2007, had hit an impenetrable road block because the training and production would have to stop, income earning opportunities would dry up, and the social and economic transformation of our MSS trainees would grind to a halt. Not so! MSS and its trainees stood up together to buck the trend, devising coping strategies to continue with the mission, and turning challenges thrown up by the pandemic into opportunities for further growth and empowerment. 'Mission Swayamsiddha' took on a new dimension!

Presenting here, stories of some of our Swayam siddhas, in their own words, transcribed in English, - snippets of their lives during the pandemic, and their renewed dreams as they continue on their journey towards self-reliance and empowerment with MSS by their side.

"The secret of change is to focus all of your energy, not on fighting the old, but on building the new." - Socrates

- Jayati Sarkar

Come, Help Mission Swayam Siddha in its journey forward!

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I wake up early in the morning and manage all the cooking while my sons take care of other things, so that I get free by noon.

Back to work and more: Now that training at the MSS office has started fully, I am very happy to go back to work. I enjoy MSS work even after a tiring day. The best part is that I can now manage both my MSS training and production along with having my hands full with the food stall work!! This is the confidence I have acquired from being associated with MSS for the last fifteen years! I feel an ideal mind is a devil's workshop, and hence I like to be always occupied with productive work.



Kamini Upadhyay

I am: Kamini working with MSS for over 10 years doing cross stitch and embroidery work.

The pandemic changed my life in many ways. Before the pandemic started, my monthly earnings from MSS helped me buy my husband's medication. With the work at MSS coming to a halt during the first lockdown, since my sons and I had no fixed job during the pandemic, all my savings got exhausted on house rent and other household expenses. It was a very tough time to survive especially because of my ailing husband.

Working from home: After the first lockdown was over, I started receiving work to be done from home from MSS. It was indeed much relaxing getting back to my regular work which was also like a small

distraction from the stress which I was going through.

Loss and a turning point: When things were getting normalized a little, I lost my husband in August 2021. I was completely shattered but I knew I had to be strong for my children and meet their educational expenses. Eventually I gathered the strength to take up a full day job which gave me stability and a fixed Income.

With MSS forever: Although I am compelled to do a full day job now, I still make it a point to take back MSS work home and try to put in a little extra effort to do something creative also earn extra income. I am very grateful to have been receiving strength and support from MSS. My ten years at MSS has empowered me in all ways and I hope that I can always be associated with it wherever I am or whatever I do in future.



Asha Patil

I am Asha I have been with MSS since 11 years. I do painting on Jute bags and Paper Bags.

During the pandemic: MSS has always been a pillar of support for me since the time I had joined as a trainee, and more so during the pandemic. Although the MSS workshop was closed due to the lockdown, it still paid us monthly stipend for more than a year which was a great support as my husband lost his job.

Back to MSS and a new job: MSS has taught me more than just painting! It has taught me to challenge myself and push my limits. I am making up for my lost time and lost earnings during the pandemic by working as a lady attendant at Gopal Sharma Blooming

Buds pre-school since last month. I have not given up my training at MSS though! I work at the school between 7:30 a.m. and 3:30 pm and then go to the MSS workshop soon after I complete my work shift. I am definitely excited to get back to MSS and hope we flourish even more.

Exploring new avenues: The pandemic has motivated me to do something of my own like a start-up which would make me self-reliant and would further add to my creativity. Didis at MSS keep on encouraging us in this respect. However I am struggling with a full proof idea or a plan. The main aim is to have a "Swayam Rozgaar"! I am sure I will fulfil my dreams with MSS by my side.



Archana Gaikwad

I am Archana and I am working with MSS since 9 years. I have learnt painting during my tenure and I can now confidently paint on jute bags and paper bags. I also work as a cook apart from daily coming to MSS.

The pandemic has been a very tough period for me, as I and my husband moved out of Powai just before the lockdown and then could not return back to Powai. My husband also lost the job for which we had shifted and we both were without any income. There were days when I felt like ending my life, since no one was there to help even for a penny, would always think what will happen tomorrow, how we will survive.

Support from MSS: I am very glad to receive my monthly earnings and ration from MSS throughout the lockdown, which helped us to survive during our worst times. We got back to Powai soon after the first lockdown eased and managed to get some cooking work, soon after work from home started from MSS too. It was a relief to have finally got our normal lives back.

Back at work: I am very excited that MSS has started its full operations now after a long time. I am looking forward to more orders for MSS products and more exhibitions and am hoping that we never get to confront that phase of life ever again and can move ahead happily.



Sunita Gangwane

I am Sunita and I am associated with MSS since five years. I do cross stitch on jute and stitching work here. I have 2 daughters and 1 son, all of them are studying in college, only my younger daughter is yet to get admission in college.

The pandemic has been a nightmare for me, as I lost my father and brother and I was so helpless that I could not even attend their last rituals. I am very shaken by this, even today when I think of it, I feel very sad.

MSS as our backbone: Although MSS had always supported us in every way during our tenure here, but it had been our backbone during the covid pandemic. It came out as a saviour for me and my

family. Also the ration that we received from MSS came as a boon to us. I will always be grateful to MSS for this gesture during our difficult times.

Work from home policy of MSS gave us a smile on our faces as we could see hope again. It in a way motivated us that life has to go on.

Back to work: I am happy to come to MSS again, to be able to meet my friends and cherish the moments that we have together. I simply like the fact how we work as a team, learning and working becomes fun.

I really hope we continue to work the same way in future keeping all our household worries and stress aside. When we are here, we just ourselves, hence I would always want to be associated with MSS.



Urmila Mishra

I am Urmila and have been associated with MSS since 2019. Although I have learnt Cross stitch and embroidery, but I am still in the learning phase.

During the pandemic, MSS was a saviour for me, as the earnings which I received from MSS was utilized for household expenses. My husband drives an auto rickshaw and he was at home too which lead to zero income. We had to send our children to native place as it was impossible for all of us to survive under one roof.

Back to work: I am now happy to be back in MSS and would like to learn new things which I have not got a chance to do so in the last two years.



Meena Patil

I am Meena, and am associated with MSS since nine years. I have keen interest in doing cross stitch and embroidery work. I always aim for perfection in my work.

During the pandemic, My children and I had been to our native place in Jalgaon to attend a wedding in March 2020 prior to the Covid Lockdown, and then we were stuck there for around 4 to 5 months. My husband on the other hand was all alone staying at home in Powai and had a difficult time surviving on his own but the ration distributed by MSS helped him a lot. The monthly earnings received from MSS helped me very much, I could take care of my children's basic needs with the help of the same.

Spirit of survival: Prior to the pandemic I was working with Poddar International School, Powai as a lady attendant in the pre-primary

section. But that income had also stopped since schools were shut and we were temporarily taken off from our services. I did not give up. While at my native place, I took up work in the farm from 8 am to 2 pm at very low pay. When in Powai, while the MSS workshop closed, we were given the opportunity to work from home. That gave us all hope to get back on our feet and the strength to carry on.

Back to working harder: Now I am back to my old work at the school and am taking MSS stitching work back home. However, now I plan to go to MSS immediately after my school shift. With changing times, we have to try to channel our productive energy in a way so that we can fit in in two places and work even harder to give a better future to our kids. This, I have learnt in these nine years at MSS.



Rekha Patil

I am Rekha Patil and I have been with MSS since 2015. I do cross stitch and embroidery work.

Covid pandemic days were definitely not good, as being locked in house is something which no one would prefer. I am grateful to receive ration and monthly earnings from MSS as my husband's salary was slashed. It took care of our household expenses.

Working from home: After lockdowns were over, we used to come to MSS workshop on a particular day assigned to us and used to take our share of work. It felt as if finally we had some work to divert our attention to something more productive.

Back at work: Now that we have started coming to MSS on daily basis, it is back to old days. I am very delighted to meet my friends.

Looking ahead: I wish we do even better than before. I will always be proud to be associated with MSS.



Niranjan Patel

I am Niranjan Patel, associated with MSS since 2019. I came to MSS through Kiran Gupta. I am very grateful to her to introduce me to MSS.

During the covid pandemic, my parents went to our native place, and I was the only one looking after my sisters. I am thankful for the ration and monthly earnings that I received from MSS. This support helped me to take care of household expenses.

Work from home: I could not do MSS work from home as we went to our native place as soon as the lockdown eased. After getting back, I had my personal health issues which kept me away from doing any work.

Back at work: I am now in the pink of my health and happy to get back to MSS on a daily basis. I strive for perfection hence I always try to give my best at work.

My dreams: I could not finish my education as I failed in my 10th std exams and thereafter lost interest in studies. I want to pursue a beautician course very much. I hope someday I can achieve my dreams and also wish that MSS reaches great heights.



Manju Rajbhar

I am Manju working with MSS since eleven years and now a trainer here. I found my true potential in stitching work which I enjoy doing the most.

During the covid pandemic, my husband's income became zero since he was working as a freelancer electrician before the pandemic. I am very grateful to MSS for providing us with our monthly stipend during the lockdown during the most trying times. Every day we used to think that how things will turn up without work and sitting at home.

Work from home: thanks to MSS for starting to give us work to be done from home. We used to go to the office once a week and get the work, and then submit the work after a few days.

New opportunities: The stitching skills that I have acquired in MSS over all these years started coming in handy during the pandemic.

To supplement my income, I started taking blouse stitching orders. I have also got associated with a boutique in Powai and have now started getting full day work orders. In spite of my additional income opportunities, I have continued working for MSS as I just cannot let MSS go out of my life.

Back to work: Now that MSS has started its regular operations, I definitely feel very content that we can now go back to our normal life. More work is coming from everywhere which is a good sign. In the two years of pandemic, economically we have lost so much that we will now have to work much harder to be able to succeed in life. With MSS by my side, I know I will make up for lost time and work in the last two years.



Kismati Sharma

I am Kismati, working at MSS since the last seven years. I specialize in making paper bags, but also do cross stitch. I always enjoy learning new things.

During the pandemic, I went to my native place as none of the members of my family were getting paid here. I was glad to get my monthly earnings from MSS which helped me in some way.

Work from home: Since I was in my native place when work from home started in MSS, I could not take work and I felt sad about it.

Back at my workplace: I am very excited to get back to MSS as being at home made me feel sick. I wanted a "ME" time for myself and here at MSS, it feels good interacting with my friends and other team mates.

I hope we do better and better in future and take MSS to the next level.



Rashida Arsiwala

I am Rashida, working as a manager at MSS and PBWA since 2011. It has been a great learning experience for me here and I have enjoyed my association with MSS every step of the way. It has helped me evolve both personally and professionally.

The pandemic definitely took a toll on MSS operations and revenue as corporate exhibitions and orders - the most important source of income for our trainees, suddenly stopped. The training and production at the workshop came to a grinding halt all of a sudden.

Shifting to work from home mode: After the first lockdown, we introduced work from home, giving stitching and painting work to our trainees which they took home, maintaining all covid precautionary measures. My job responsibilities and way of work suddenly changed, but I was ready to step forward and take charge of the new way of running MSS production so that MSS trainees could keep on earning and feel secure.

MSS products going online: With our normal income sources drying up amid lockdowns, the only way to generate income for our

trainees was to go online. Our in-house team devised social media strategies and launched MSS products online, displaying and selling its products through our Instagram handle. We have even booked a virtual stall space at the Kala Ghoda Fest for the year 2022. Going online has been a great learning experience for me!

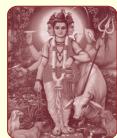
Our very first pop-up stall was the most heartening experience for all of us at MSS. Just before Diwali, our trainees on their own initiative, put up an exhibition at Hiranandani Gardens, proudly exhibiting their beautifully handcrafted products to one and all! The exhibition was a runaway success and almost all products were sold out. I feel, the success of the pop up stall was a great boost for the morale of our trainees in the middle of all the hardship they were facing.

Back to work and ready for new challenges: Now that we have started our regular MSS production and training in full swing, I hope that we can put to use all that we have learnt during the pandemic and get ready to face fresh challenges of rebooting MSS in our cause of empowering women in a post-pandemic world.



Pop-up stall of MSS at Hiranandani Gardens, Powai

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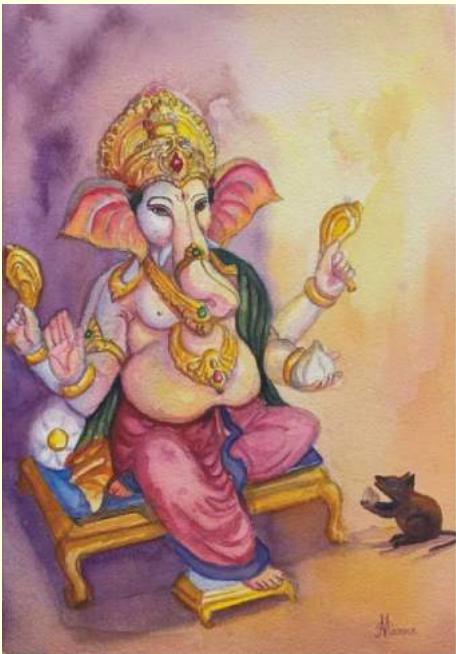
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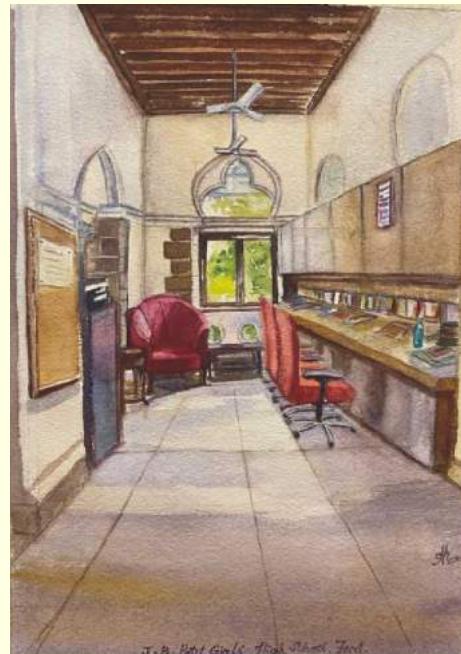
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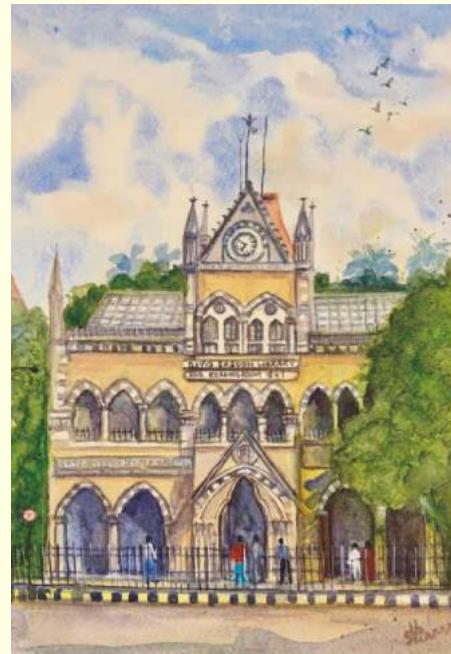
Glimpses of Mumbai - Aparna Mondal



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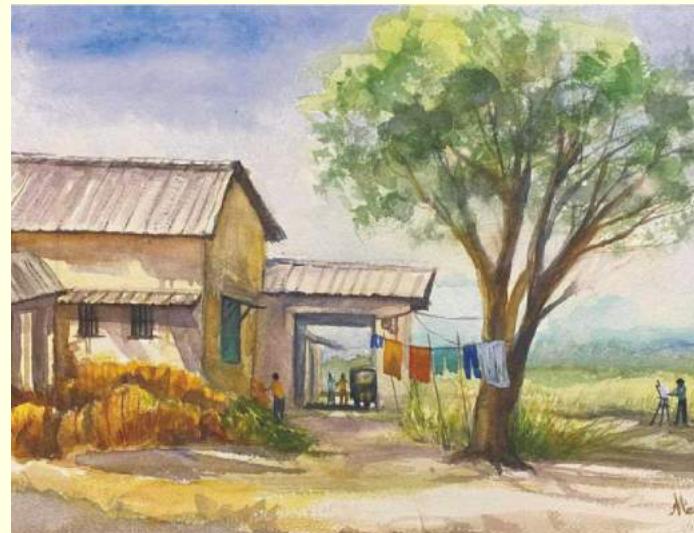
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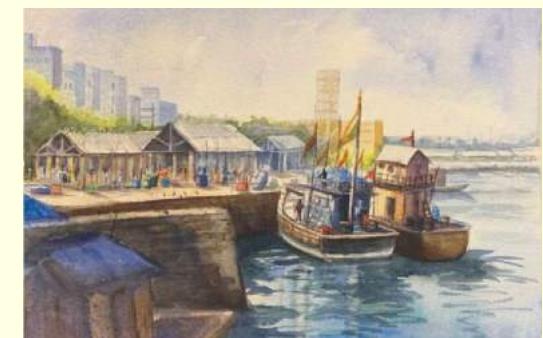
Dr. Bhau Daji Lad Museum



Dr Sasoon Library



Dairy Farm - Aarey



Sasoon Dock



Mahim Koliwada

Poem

শিউলিফুল ও কাশের মাঝে
তোমার আগমন,
হিল্লোলেতে উঠুক নেচে
সবার অন্তর ও মন।
প্রাণের পরে সঞ্চার হেক
শান্তি ও শীতলতা,
দূর হেক রোগভোগ ও
সকল মালিনতা।
উদয় হেক পুনরায় রংবেরংয়ের
দিনগুলি সব ফিরিয়ে দাও মা

Flavours of Maharashtra - Aparna Mondal



Karneshwar Temple Sanghameshwar



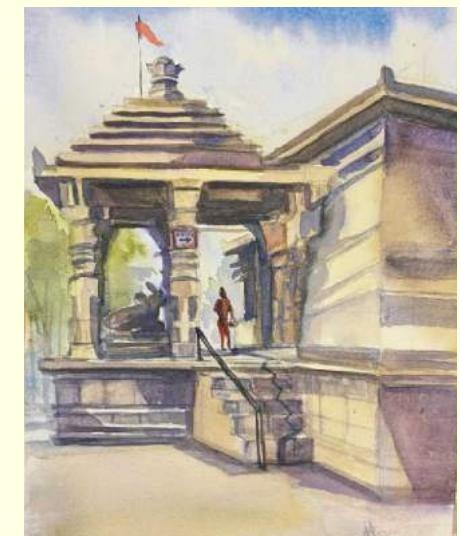
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DEBATES

*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 OTT Killing Big Cinema?

Against the Motion - Ananya Dutta

"No, it isn't."

Content and consumption patterns have always been in a state of flux in the last decade. This is especially so in recent years, with the advent of accessible and affordable internet, this has led to a whole cross-section of local and global streaming services becoming commonplace in every household.

Streaming platforms are no longer limited to slightly expensive subscriptions like Netflix or Amazon. Players like MX and JIO have leveled the playing field, bringing a wide range of content from across the country to the lowest common denominator in the populace. During the pandemic, the consumption pattern further changed with theatres, and even television, shutting down for good and everyone with net access, moving to these OTT platforms. At one point, it did seem like eventually, when the world went back to relative normalcy, community institutions like Movie theatres might just become obsolete. However, that has not been the case. It can be charted down to a few broad reasons -

- OTT has definitely impacted content consumption, it has **expanded** the base and not **restricted** it. This means - apart from increasing their consumer base, OTTs have also **expanded the choice of content** available. Audiences started viewing streaming movies and shows that they would not have otherwise gone to the theatres for, thus increasing the number of content pieces they consumed overall. If people were watching 4 movies a month previously, now they are probably watching 8-10 in the same time span. This has also led to free access to content across regions and languages, which audiences otherwise might not have indulged in. For Ex - Minnal Murali, a South India small budget film would not have garnered as many eyeballs in the theatres across India, as it did on Netflix.

Smaller projects and regional content (Indian as

well as International) have gained prominence due to online streaming, which might have been a blindspot otherwise.

- This willingness to expand into newer or different content has actually had an interesting effect post pandemic, especially noticeable in western countries like US. Due to the affinity being created by these platforms, people are more likely now to give differentiated content a chance, even in theatres. In the US, documentaries which have had theatrical releases have garnered better footfall than pre-pandemic times, because over the last couple years, more people have become attuned to watching documentaries than before.
- Streaming, while having become a daily part of our lives, has also not replaced the feeling of a "Theatre". Streaming is now commonplace, something as casual as sitting on a sofa and turning on the cable channel. However, just like cable cannot deliver on the theatre experience, streaming cannot either. With people having gone through extremely tough years, now more than ever, people want to go back to doing things that gave them joy, i.e., going outside, traveling, flocking back to the movies for a day out and trying to get back to some semblance of a less complicated past.
- This "need" to go out after being restricted to the confines of their homes for 2 years, has been further compounded with highly anticipated "Theatrical" releases of films like RRR, KGF 2 as well as franchises like Batman and Thor. These films are made for theatre viewing and attracted audience basis their Visuals, which could not be justified or fully appreciated on a smaller screen. The "Spectacle of theatre" was what films like these were marketed on.

In this case, RRR becomes a very interesting case-study.

On its release in Indian theatres, RRR was a huge hit

within the country. Film twitter was going crazy over the film. However, it hadn't had as much impact beyond the country. It wasn't until it released on Netflix and became accessible to the western audiences, that the movie suddenly blew up in the US. People started catching it on Netflix, and then going back to rewatch it in the theatres because of the visual spectacle. Theatres across US, which were screening RRR, increased their shows, and even brought it back to more screens, with weekends being sold out, and even bypassing box office collections of Batman on one.

So, arguably, while OTT provided easy access for the film to garner its audience, the Theatres actually benefitted from this as well.

To conclude, while OTTs are a formidable competition, it doesn't take away from Big Cinema the visual spectacle that it offers. In fact, if anything, the advent of OTTs has raised the bar very high, which now demands that makers put their best foot forward, in order to pull their audiences back into the theatres. For ex - a family film like Jug Jug Jeeyo might not be spectacular enough for audiences to go to a theatre for, but KGF 2 will definitely have a theatre audience who want the "Cinema" experience. Therefore, now it is more about the Makers understanding what kind of content would garner what kind of views. This means that a wider range of topics can get made, experimental subjects can be backed depending on whether the target audience is primarily OTT or Theatre: case in point - AK v/s AK or Darlings which would grab eyeballs on streaming platforms while anticipation of movies like "Pathaan" or "Dunki" which are clearly being projected for Theatre audiences.

OTTs instead of replacing Big Cinema, has forced Cinema to up its game. It is not leading to a slow death of theatres, but proving to be a formidable opponent, causing the Big Cinema to rediscover, reinvent and re-emerge as a stronger self.

Is OTT killing Big Cinema?

For the Motion - Kuhu Bhattacharya

"Change is the only constant"

With the onset of Covid, we saw various OTT platforms gaining popularity. With the bad boys in the house - NetFlix, Amazon Prime and Disney+Hotstar dominating the industry, it does make one wonder, will these platforms dominate the future?

Can you name India's first OTT platform? While most of us may not have heard of it, BigFlix, by Reliance, was India's first. Only that it came out at the wrong time - the time when the world hadn't popularised smartphones as much and the Internet was expensive.

20 years ago, the excitement of booking the first day, first show ticket was the race almost everyone partook in. Be it Shah Rukh Khan's film's hitting the theatre after a hiatus or simply a social outing, such 'occasions' have been replaced with 'Watch Parties', with Popcorn and PJ'S at the comfort of one's home - at an almost negligible cost.

Whereas one single movie would probably run up the bill to a minimum 1000 (adding the cost of popcorn and coke), OTT gives you the pleasure to watch unlimited films and TV shows, at nearly 1/4th the price and time. This is the most important feature of an OTT - its Flexibility. Unlike big screens, these can be accessed just through any device, at any given point of time, giving the user a sense of control over their binge.

The battle between OTT and Big Screen cinema also depends on another factor, money. Perhaps at the start of NetFlix's era, the company could not afford big-shot Bollywood actors to play leads in their films, but with its gaining popularity and audience, movies such as Ludo, Sacred Games and Dasvi do say otherwise. More and more actors and producers are collaborating with such platforms because they have seen the sudden spark in the desire for unique

content rather than the typical cliques on the Big Screen. Even more, they aren't

burdened with censorship issues and have the opportunity to reach their maximum capacities of creativity.

OTT gives the option of experimental storytelling with a comparatively lesser budget. There have been several instances in the past 2 years where OTT films have hit the top of the charts. Furthermore, it encapsulates the viewer. A recent example of the same would be AK vs AK. The essence of rush in such films can only be captured by a TV Screen or a mobile phone.

Another boon of OTT is its variety. The users of OTT platforms are exposed to a great variety of films and tv shows across the world, the most famous ones being Stranger Things and Money Heist. It allows for a broader domestic viewership in a linguistically diverse country like India.

This variety has led to a great increase in the number of viewership hours. A simple

three-hour movie can be stretched into a series of 6 episodes, leaving the watcher captivated and wanting more. These films and shows can also be viewed on other social platforms, giving the chance to connect with distant family and friends, something which would seem almost impossible to do physically.

The market isn't just limited to urban areas. With the globalisation of the internet, even the most rural parts of India can enjoy such content.

Genz's interest in on-the-go and non-tabooed content certainly fueled the path of OTTs. In simple words, it is consumer mandated. The present generation of teenagers and millennials are more likely to opt for an online source of entertainment whereas the older generations may choose not to lose out on experiencing the charm of Big screen cinema.

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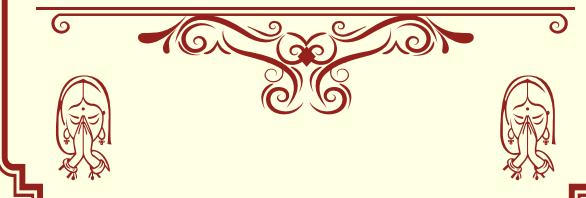
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Is Book Reading a thing of the Past?

Against the Motion - Supriyo Lahiry

The debate is over. More people are reading physical books. According to industry tracker NPD Books can, printed book sales have increased 13.2 percent from 2020 to 2021, and 21 percent from 2019 to 2021.

"Usually a good year means going up maybe 3 or 4 percent," says NPD books analyst Kristen McLean. "The growth that we saw last year and this year is pretty unprecedented."

So, in short, 'books are not dying out'. Not by far. I have put the most telling fact in support of my argument, right at the start. Going by the above data, the debate seems to be over. But just for the sake of nicety, let me proffer a few more arguments.

What does the above data mean?

It means that in spite of the advent of all kinds of electronic media, the so called onslaught of e-books, audio-books and such, the doomsday predictions are nowhere near reality.

Since the first known printed book, 'The Diamond sutra', a Buddhist treatise from 868 AD during the Tang dynasty rule in China, printed books were there, are there and will be there in the future.

Why does this notion that printed books are dying, resurface again and again?

There's a simple answer to that question. Data shows that while the number of printed books and their total sales have grown continuously, sales of individual titles have taken a dip. Modern technology has made the ways and means of getting a book printed, more accessible to the general public. So, the number of printed books from different authors are going up. But the sales of an individual title may have come down.

Let's examine a well known example. Sales of Amish Tripathi's printed books since 2010, is nearing a billion copies only in the Indian subcontinent!

When many publishers turned down the manuscript of his first book, 'The immortals of Meluha', he decided to self-publish it. And the rest is history.

I was checking the websites of the top ten Indian publishing houses, browsing through the synopses of their top titles. I have no shame in admitting that I didn't know 90% of those authors but was astounded by the excellent literary quality of most of their writings.

So, in summary, the advent of technology is not killing the printed book, technology is boosting it.

Why people should prefer a cumbersome physical book over a sleek digital device?

E-books have quite a few advantages. However, so do conventional books and they outweigh the e-versions comfortably. Let's have a look at some major points.

1. People like to own things, hold their loved things in their hands, touch them, feel them, even smell them. This can never happen with an e-book. You don't really own those books; they sit in a disembodied server owned by the publisher far away.

2. You can pick up a book and start reading anytime you feel like. However, one needs a charger, power supply and internet connection to read an e-book.

3. Book lovers also say, browsing through a favourite book or flipping back a few pages to re-read a favourite portion is a joy with a printed book. Whereas even with the most popular book reading device, Kindle it's a horrible bother to scroll back, say 50 pages. In fact, I personally find this to be the most unattractive feature of e-book readers.

As per the earlier predictions, physical book industry should have died out by 2015 but let's look at some hard facts. But that has not happened. To understand why, go through the following points.

- According to the Association of American Publishers, e-book sales haven't diminished the popularity of paper books. Today, e-books comprise

just 20-30 percent of book sales. In fact, e-book sales declined 4.9 percent in January 2019, compared to the same period in 2018.

- Better for children - Studies have shown that babies and children learn better with paper books. The more interaction a child has with an object, the better he or she learns. Parents and children also talk and interact less when using e-readers, compared with reading paper books.
- Better for your health - According to a Harvard Medical School study, reading a light-emitting e-book before bed hinders your ability to sleep, decreases your alertness the next morning and negatively affects your overall health. Paper books don't create the same adverse effects. They also bring a wealth of benefits, including increased language skills, enhanced mental development and improved memory.
- Better at conveying information - A study reported in the Guardian concluded that people using e-readers were less likely to recall events in a short story than people who read the same story in print. The research suggests that the tactile experience of using an e-reader doesn't offer the same benefit.
- Better for the environment- Some activists wrongly point to the wood cut to produce paper to prove that paper books pose a threat to the environment. However, experts have now agreed that paper books are environmentally much better because, the electronic waste generated by devices is non-biodegradable. And woods can be regenerated.

So, friends the jury is not out on this one. They have come back and their verdict is,

E-books will never replace paper books. They will always remain as a supplementary medium rather than a replacement of the conventional way one enjoys a book.

And that's really good.

Is Book Reading a thing of the Past?

For the Motion - Srirupa Ghosh

Book Reading is increasingly becoming a thing of the past and that is a sad reality of our times.

Why do I say this ? Am I guided by some figures /data to vouch for it ? No, I am guided by what I see when I look around in my communities.

School going kids in today's world are so burdened with studies that they find it a bane to read any other books. Out of 10 kids surveyed at any given point in time, only one child will say that he or she loves reading books. Book reading is no longer a favourite hobby amongst kids.

What has led to it ? The main driver is the easy accessibility of mobile phones amongst today's school going children. Wherever you go, be it a restaurant or a mall or any other public place I see older children with mobile phones and even the younger ones are handed those when parents find it difficult to make them sit in one place. This is the age of instant gratification when with a swipe you move across from one platform to another, YouTube, Netflix, Amazon Prime etc. And this makes the element of imagination very elusive unlike book reading that stretches the boundaries of your imagination.

Even amongst the kids that actually do read books , it is limited to Harry Potter and a few other popular paperbacks that have been on the bestseller list. Do they read Alexander Duma or Charles Dickens or Mark Twain or any other classics ? The answer would be a resounding "No".

And they cannot be blamed either since the combined pressure of academics and social media is such that there is simply no inclination towards reading classics. Even the standard bookstores that are also very few and far between , only stock what is popular as per the so called "Best Seller List". So how will the children be able to separate the grain from the chaff?

While we were growing up in Kolkata, every neighborhood had a Paribar-er-dokan where you went looking for Thakurmar Jhuli and Abol Tabol to start with and moved on to Feluda, Tintin, Professor Shonku, Ghanada, Tenida and then graduated towards the literary classics penned by Tagore, Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay, Sharadindu Bandopadhyay, Bonophool, Asha Purna Devi, Lila Majumdar and many others in Bengali and Charles Dickens, Jane Austen, Alexander Duma, Oscar Wilde, Thomas Hardy, Hemingway and others in English. The neighborhood bookstore owner and the local librarian both knew what books you had already read and which titles that you were earnestly waiting for you. These concepts do not exist in today's times where instant gratification rules.

Amongst adults, book reading is as sporadic as rains in the deserts or Rajasthan. When we have to finish watching Game of Thrones, Money Heist, The Crown , Bridgerton, Delhi Crime, Panchayat and may more, we somehow find the time but struggle to find time when it comes to reading. I have been part of a few Book Clubs in both Singapore and Mumbai and apart from the devout members of such book clubs who do make a sincere effort to read a book and share their insights during the meetings, I have rarely found adults who indulge in the same. Even in my personal experience for the last three years, I have been buying books but haven't managed to read most of them as I juggle between work and personal commitments. This also drives home the point that books sales do not necessarily translate into a book reading culture. Display of books especially the likes of Tagore and Shakespeare is also a part of home décor styling for many people who when you probe any further may not have turned the pages even once. They want to appear well read which is not the same as being a true blue bookworm.

Earlier this year I had visited the Kolkata Book Fair and the long queues in the food stalls were ample

evidence to the fact that love for books is not the only reason why people set foot in the premises. This annual grand book fair concept is also very limited to a city like Kolkata, I haven't heard about similar Mumbai or Bangalore events. Hence every year I do look forward to the Boi Para (book stall) set up by PBWA in the Durga Puja ground where the sheer variety and count of book titles on display brings comfort to the parched eyes and yearning soul.

To conclude , book reading is visibly on the decline and as a society we need to inculcate the book reading habit , as parents, as teachers , as fellow humans. Schools should have book appreciation sessions and parents must read out books to their children at bedtime regularly to ingrain the love for books at a very young age. Children imitate adults to the "T" and if we change our habits then only our kids will gravitate towards reading books.

Else it will be a matter of time before social media takes over and book reading will be like Golf, Paragliding, Bungee Jumping etc that only very few people indulge in.

“আমাৰ ছেট শহৱেৰ পুজো” - Small Town Durga Puja - Arnab Bagchi

দুর্গা পুজো কি শুধুই এক ধৰীয় অনুষ্ঠান ! চার দিনের নিশ্চিত ছুটি ! কঞ্জি ডুবিয়ে থাওয়া আৱ অগণিত সেলফি পোস্ট কৰা ! বিৱাট এক বাণিজ্য মেলা নাকি এক বিৱাট সামাজিক মিলন উৎসব ! পুজো বোধহয় একেক জনেৰ কাছে একেক রকম।

পুজো আসলেই ছেটবেলাৰ কথা মনে পৱে। আমাৰ ছেটবেলা কেটেছে আসাম এৱ এক ছেট শহৱে। তিনিদিক ব্ৰহ্মপুত্ৰ নদী দিয়ে ঘৰা বাঙালি অধৃষ্টিত এই শহৱে জমজমাট পুজো হতো। পুজোটা শুৰু হতো পুজোৰ অনেকদিন আগে থেকে। আসাম এৱ কুখ্যাত বন্যা আৱ .প্যাচপ্যাচে বৃষ্টি শেষ হয়ে আকাশটা কেমন পৱিষ্ঠার হয়ে উঠতো... পাড়ায় পাড়ায় পুজোৰ মিটিং শুৰু হয়ে যেত। সবাই খবৱ নিত অন্য পাড়ায় কি ডেকোৱেশন হচ্ছে। সঙ্গে শুৰু হতো পুজোৰ ফাংশন এৱ প্ল্যানিং। কে কিভাবে অন্য পুজোকে টেক্কা দিতে পাৱে।

বাড়িতে চলতো অন্য আলোচনা। দাদাৱা হোস্টেল এ থাকে। এবাৱ কতদিন ছুটি আছে, কবে আসতে পাৱবে। সঙ্গে শুৰু হতো কেনাকাটাৰ আলোচনা। তখন পুজোয় শুধু নিজেদেৱ নয়, কেনাকাটা হতো কাছেৰ লোকদেৱ জন্যেও। তখন আমাদেৱ জন্মদিন আৱ পুজোয় একটা কৱে জামা বৱাদ ছিল। তাই পুজো আসলেই একটা অপেক্ষা থাকতো। শপিং মলেৰ জন্ম তখনো হয় নি। দৰ্জি কে দিয়ে শার্ট প্যান্ট বানাতে হতো। ছেট শহৱে গুটি কয়েক দোকান ছিল। মা বাবাৱ সঙ্গে কিনতে গেলে প্ৰথমে কিছুক্ষন গল্প কৱতো দোকানি, তাৱপৱ জিনিস দেখাতো। জিনিস নিয়ে রাতে বাড়ী ফেৱাটা একটা বেশ উভেজনাৰ ব্যাপার ছিল। আসামে সেইসময় স্ল্যাটেৱ প্ৰচলন হয় নি। আমাদেৱ সবাইই আসাম টাইপ এৱ বাড়ী ছিল। একতলা, সামনে পিছনে অনেক টা কৱে জায়গা যাতে শখেৱ গাছ গাছালি থাকত। অনেক গাছেৱ সঙ্গে আমাদেৱ বাড়িতে শিউলি ফুলেৱ গাছও ছিল। সকালে ঘুম থেকে উঠে বাৱান্দায় আসলেই দেখা যেত লন সাদা হয়ে রয়েছে শিউলি ফুল। মাৱ সঙ্গে ঝুড়ি তে কৱে ফুল তুলে ঠাকুৱ ঘৱে রাখা এক কাজ ছিল। এইকৱে দেখতে দেখতে পুজো এসে পড়ত। পঞ্চমীতেই দাদাৱা এসে পড়ত যে যাৱ হোস্টেল থেকে। সব বাড়িতেই এক ব্যাপার। যাৱা অন্য শহৱে থাকতো তাৱা সবাই এইসময় বাড়ি ফিৰে আসতো এই ছেট শহৱে।

এই সময় দিনগুলো খুব আনন্দেৱ হতো, পড়াশোনাৰ চাপ নেই, বাড়িতে একটা বেশ হইহই ব্যাপার। অনেক রাত অবধি গল্প হচ্ছে। আশেপাশেৱ কাকু কাকিমাৱা আসছেন দেখা কৱতো। বাবা সকাল সকাল বাজাৱে যাচ্ছে কে কি থেকে ভালো বাসে হিসেব

কৱে আনতো। মা স্পেশাল মেনু বানাচ্ছে। সব মিলিয়ে জমজমাট। বৰ্ষী থেকেই পুৱে শহৱে বাড়ীৱ বাইৱে। ছেট শহৱেৱ পুজো যাৱা দেখেনি তাৱা কল্পনা কৱতো পাৱবে না পৱিষ্ঠাবেশটা। এত কৰ্পোৱেট ব্যাপার স্যাপার ছিল না তথনকাৱ পুজোয়, পুজো ছিল অনেক সহজ ও আনন্দৱিক। ছেট শহৱে হলেও অনেকগুলো প্যান্ডেল হতো। সাবা শহৱে আলোয় ভৱে উঠতো। ছেটো শহৱে সবাই সবাইকে চেলে, যেকোনো প্যান্ডেল চুকলেই হলো। একৱাশ গল্প। পুজোয় বাড়ী ফেৱাৱ টাইম এ কোনো নিয়েধাজ্ঞা থাকতো না। দাদাৱা ফিৰত অনেক রাত কৱে। তাৱপৱ শুৱহত আৱ এক প্ৰস্থ গল্পেৱ আসৱ। শহৱে তখনো কোনো রেঞ্জেৱা ছিল না। শুধু ছিল অনেক মিষ্টিৱ দোকান, তাই বাইৱে ডিনাৱ কৱে আসাৱ ব্যাপার ছিল না। তবে ছিল বাড়ীৱ স্পেশাল থাওয়া আশেপাশেৱ বাড়িতে স্পেশাল কিছু হলে সেটাও আসতো। যেত আমাদেৱ বাড়ী থেকেও। তখন ক্যালোৱি, কলোষ্টৱেল, ডায়েট এইসব কঠিন ব্যাপার গুলো ছিল না। তাই পুজো মানেই জমিয়ে থাওয়া। পুজোৱ আৱো একটা আকৰ্ষণ ছিল পুজোসংখ্যা। দেশ পুজোসংখ্যায় বেৱোতো ফেলুদাৰ গল্প, যাৱ জন্য আমৱা অপেক্ষা কৱতাম সাৱাৰছৱ। এখনকাৱ মতো সিটি বাস, উৱেৱ, অটো এসব তো তখন ছিল না। শহৱে ঘোৱাৱ জন্য ছিল রিঞ্চা। সপ্তমীৱ দিন বাবা ও মা বেৱোতো রিঞ্চা কৱে। আৱ আমৱা টহল দিতাম দল বেঁধে হেঁটে। অষ্টমী তে একটা সমস্যা ছিল। কড়া অৰ্ডাৱ ছিল যে সকাল এ উঠেই ঘন কৱতে হবে কাৱণ অঞ্জলিৱ সময় হয়ে যাবে। পাড়ায় পুজোয় অঞ্জলি। সঙ্গে 'কি কেমন পড়াশোনা চলছে!' গোছেৱ বিৱক্ষিকৱ প্ৰশ্ন। অষ্টমী তে দল বেঁধে বসে ভোগ থাওয়া ছিল একটা দারুন ব্যাপার। বাড়িতে খিচুড়ি হলেও প্যান্ডেল এৱ ভোগেৱ খিচুড়িৱ টেস্ট কথনো আসে না। অষ্টমীৱ সন্ধে প্ৰচও ভিড় হতো। ঢাকেৱ আওয়াজ, কোনো একটা প্যান্ডেল এ গেলেই দেখা হতো অনেকেৱ সাথে যাদেৱ সঙ্গে সাধাৱণ ভাৱে দেখা হতো না। তখন সেলফি, ইনস্টাগ্ৰাম, ফেসবুক কিছুই ছিল না। ঠাকুৱ দেখাৱ থেকে ছবি তুলে পোস্ট কৱাৱ চাপ ছিল না, তাই গল্প হতো অনেক বেশি। দেখতে দেখতে অষ্টমী শেষ, নবমী আসতোই মন থারাপ এৱ শুৰু। পুজো শেষ হয়ে আসছে। দশমী হতোই বাড়ী খালি হয়ে যাবে, তাই নবমী তে সব কিছুই স্পেশাল। যেনো পুজো শেষ হওয়াৱ আগে সব কিছু কৱতে হবে। লুটি দিয়ে দিন শুৰু। বেস্ট মেনু সেদিন। সবচেয়ে রাত পৰ্যন্ত আজ্ঞা সেদিন। চাৱটে দিন ঝাটকৱে শেষ হয়ে যেত। দশমীৱ দিন কাছেৱ পুজোবাড়ীতে হতো ঢাক কম্পিউটিশন। সে এক দারুন ব্যাপার ছিল। শহৱে এৱ সেৱা ঢাকিৱা আসতো। দুপুৱে শুৰু হতো ঠাকুৱ নিয়ে সাৱা শহৱে ঘোৱা, ট্রাক এ কৱে। পুজোয় আৱ একটা স্পেশাল ব্যাপার ছিল ব্ৰহ্মপুত্ৰ

ନଦୀତେ ବିସର୍ଜନ ଏର ପ୍ରସେଶନ । ଅନ୍ତର ୫୦-୬୦ ଟି ପୁଜୋର ପ୍ରତିମା ବଡ଼ ବଡ଼ ଲୋକାୟ ନିଯେ ନଦୀତେ ପ୍ରସେଶନ । ମାଝେ ମାଝେ ପୁଲିଶ ବୋଟ ଘୂରଛେ । ବିଏସେଫ ହାଉଇ ଛୁଡ଼ଗେ ରଂବେରଂୟେର । ପୁରୋ ଶହର ଭେଣେ ପଡ଼ିଥିଲା ନଦୀର ପାଦେ । ଦୁଇ ଲୋକାର ମାଝେ ପାଟାତନ ଏ ଠାକୁର । ଦୁଇ ଲୋକା ସରେ ଯେତ ଦୁଦିକେ । ବିସର୍ଜନ ଏ ଯେତେଣ ଠାକୁର । ସବ ବିସର୍ଜନ ହୋଯାର ପର କେନା ହତେ ପାଢ଼ୁଥାଳି ପ୍ଯାନ୍ଡଲେ । ଚାର ଦିନେର ହୈହୈ-ଏର ପର ହଠାଂ କରେଇ ପୁରୋ ଶହର ଶାନ୍ତ । ପ୍ଯାନ୍ଡଲେ ଠାକୁର ମଶାଇ ଶାନ୍ତି ଜଳ ଦିତେନ । ତାରପର ଶୁରୁ ହତେ ପ୍ରଣାମ । କୋଲାକୁଳି ଏର ପାଲା । ବିଭିନ୍ନ ବାଡ଼ିତେ ବିଜ୍ୟା କରତେ ଯାଓଯା ସେଇସମୟ ଆର ଏକ କାଜ ଛିଲ । ପ୍ରଣାମ କରତେ ଭାଲୋ ନା ଲାଗଲେଓ ତାରପରେ ଯେଟା ଆସତେ ମେଟାର ଦିକେ ଆମାଦେର ଆକର୍ଷଣ ଥାକତେ ବେଶ । ସବ ବାଡ଼ିତେଇ ନିମକି ନାଡୁ ଇତ୍ୟାଦି ହତେ । କୋନୋ କୋନୋ ବାଡ଼ିତେ ଆରୋ ବେଟାର ଅପ୍ରସନ୍ନ ପାଓଯା ଯେତ । ଆମରା ଥବର ରାଖତାମ କୋଥାଯ କି ହେଲେ । ମେଇ ଅନୁଯାୟୀ ତୈରି ହତେ ବିଜ୍ୟାର ପ୍ରଣାମ କରତେ ଯାଓଯାର ରୁଟ ।

ହଠାଂ କରେଇ ଯେନ ସବ ଶେଷ ହୟେ ଯେତ । ଦଶମୀର ପରେର ଦିନଇ ଦାଦାରା ଫିରେ ଯେତ ହୋଷ୍ଟେଲ । ବାବା ଚଲେ ଯେତ ଦେଶେର ବାଡ଼ିତେ । ହଠାଂ କରେଇ ବାଡ଼ିତେ ଶୁଧୁଟି ମା ଆର ଆମି । ...ଛୋଟ ଶହରେର ଏହି ଏକ ସମସ୍ୟା, ଅନେକକେଇ ପଡ଼ାଶୋନା , ଚାକରିର ଜନ୍ୟ ବାହିରେ ଥାକତେ ହୟ । ତାଇ ପୁଜୋ ଶେଷ ହତେଇ ସବ ବାଡ଼ି ଥାଳି । ତଥନ ପୁଜୋର ପର ଥେକେଇ ଅପ୍ରା ଅପ୍ରା ଠାଙ୍କା ପଡ଼ିଥାଳି । ପୁଜୋର ସମସ୍ତ ଆଲୋ ବଞ୍ଚା । ଭୀଷଣ ଆନନ୍ଦେର ପରେ ଜୀବନ ହଠାଂ କରେଇ ଫିରେ ଯେତ ଆବାର ମେଇ ନିୟମିତ ରୁଟିନେ ।

ଆଜ ଏତକାଳ ପରେ, ଏତଗୁଲୋ ଶହର, ଏତଗୁଲୋ ବାଡ଼ି, ଏତ ଚଢ଼ାଇ ଉତ୍ତରାଇ ପେରୋନୋର ପରେଓ, ପୁଜୋର ମେଇ ସିପିରିଟଟା ଯେନ ବେମାଲୁମ ଏକଇ ଆଛେ । ମେଇ ହଇହଇ । ମେଇ ଅଞ୍ଜଳି ଦେଓଯା, ପୁଜୋର ଭୋଗ, ମେଇ ଆଜ୍ଞା , ପୁଜୋସଂଖ୍ୟା, ମେଇ ଫାଂଶନ, ମେଇ ଥାଓଯା ଦାଓଯା । ଏହି ବିଶ୍ୱାସନ ଏର ଯୁଗେଓ ଦୂରୀ ପୁଜୋ ତାଇ ଏତ ସ୍ପେଶାଲ । ବହର ଶୁରୁ ହତେଇ କ୍ୟାଲେନ୍ଡାର ଏ ପୁଜୋର ସମୟ ଦେଖା । ଆର ପ୍ରତୀକ୍ଷା କରା ଆବାର ଏକ ପୁଜୋର ।

ଅର୍ଥବ ବାଗଚୀ ।

With Best Compliments From:



Tryst with the Himalayas - Paloma Mitra

Ever since I was a little child (still am), I was curious and easily fascinated by things that were beyond my comprehension.

From gulping sleeping pills like candy to drinking fermented rice starch water, from climbing our front door gates and crawling beside the pond when I could barely even stand, to getting off at random railway platforms while my parents were peacefully dozing in their cozy berths, I had done it all by the age of three.

I was never afraid, but rather full of questions, as I tried to make sense of the new world around me. I guess I took the "You-Only-Live-Once" principle rather seriously and continued my "adventurous" journey all through school and college only to be greeted at home by my mom with sweet words like "nirlojjo", "bodmaish mei", "Shaaper paach pa" and all that.

But nothing could pacify my soul. I realized that all these thrill-seeking moments, although fun, were momentary, that had little or no impact on me on a deeper level.

After my graduation, I decided to do my M. Phil and PhD as a part of my "adventurous journey", not having a clue as to where it would take me, but I rode along and probably it was the best decision ever!

I remember, before submitting my M. Phil thesis, I was in the middle of writing the conclusion to my final chapter when I had an epiphany of majestic, jagged, snow-clad mountains drifting across my laptop screen, as if beckoning me to greet them.

I snapped back to reality, paused, looked at my hostel roommate, and asked her 'Uttarakhand jana hai?'. Without thinking twice, she immediately started making an itinerary while I checked for flight tickets, knowing that my submission is in two days. This was the beginning of a journey that would change the course of my life, perhaps forever.

Needless to say, so beautiful is the state of Uttarakhand, with every town having a charm of its

own. Surrounded by the lower Himalayas on all sides, with the river Alakananda meandering in between, we traveled in awe from Dehradun-Mussourie, crossed all the Prayags to finally reach the upper Himalayas in Auli.

It took us nearly 14 hours to reach the district of Chamoli from Dehradun. The journey was getting chilly by the hour as we approached the Himadri ranges, which is the second tier of the Himalayas ranging from 4500-6000 metres.

It was pitch dark by the time we reached Auli and as the winding roads led up to our hotel, I tried to get a glimpse outside from the frosty windows of our car. I could see huge dark patches

and tried to follow the length and height of this silhouette when I suddenly shuddered, just shut my eyes in reflex, and felt a chill running down my spine. Till the time we reached our rooms, I did not dare look outside. We were tired but more than that, we were curled up in extreme cold even though we sat right by the heater. As we prepared to go to sleep, I cautiously walked till our balcony door and gently opened it, this time, my eyes gazed at the floor.

The chilly winds felt like a 100 needles poking my body but eventually, I could feel myself being able to withstand the sub-zero temperatures and I mustered up the courage to slowly, very slowly look at this giant looming shadow right in front of me.

I took some time and gradually shifted my glance upwards, one sight at a time, and saw the frightening dark silhouettes taper into illuminated peaks glistening under the moonlit, diamond-studded sky. I could feel my heart beating faster, not understanding why, but I felt a deep sense of devotion and reverence and whispered to myself "Does God Exist?"

I was so enamored by its magnanimity that my head automatically bowed down, in silence. Such was their power! I couldn't sleep that night and felt extremely restless.. the kind one feels when they are about to meet their loved ones after a long time.

The following morning, as we woke up and drew the curtains, we saw a whitewash all around! The mountains were fully covered in patches of snow and our surrounding area seemed like a white canvas. Suddenly my eye caught a unique-looking mountain with a snow plume billowing over its peak, and I felt like going closer but that was obviously not possible.

We had planned to see Auli and went by cable chair cars over the mountains to a tourist spot which is famous for skiing. Since it was in the last week of February, there wasn't much crowd and the snow slopes were mostly occupied by the Indo-Tibetan Border Force who were sharpening their skiing skills.

My friend experienced breathlessness so she decided to stay back by the artificial frozen lake while I decided to explore, just like my childhood days. My ever-curious mind kept wondering 'what's beyond that slope? Let's check it out!'

I kept following a trail up the slopes not realizing how high I had ascended, and came across the last check-post of the forest ranger. You need a green pass, a forest permit to go further up. Moreover, you have to be accompanied by a guide because beyond that point, the dense forest line begins and there is a threat of encountering wild bears, foxes and snow leopards, and of course chances of losing the trails because of snowfall and getting lost.

I had not thought of climbing uphill so I didn't bother to get the permits and local guides, but my mind had other plans. I told the forest ranger I wouldn't go up too far and that I'm right behind him, which I was for a considerable amount of time. I guess over time he was confident.

I wouldn't go anywhere and never looked back. Looking around, I aimlessly climbed a few meters when I realized the slope was getting steeper and the snow, deeper, and I had nothing with me, not even a sip of water! I didn't have adequate clothing for that altitude but fortunately, it worked in my favour as it was a bright sunny day and I was confused thinking

how can one feel so hot when they are knee-deep in snow!

Anyway, I was spellbound as I soaked in a 180-degree view of the Himalayas right in front of my eyes. But that wasn't enough. I had to know what was beyond the slope and could see the forest line, but before I knew it, I had already entered the dense forest.

At this moment I sensed I may have done something wrong. There was pin drop silence and nobody in sight...just the huge pine forests and me. The forests were humming a music of their own. Each little rustle of the leaves, howls of the winds and the crisp noise made by my boots as they fell on soft snow made me shudder.

I had to pay remarkable attention to details which I never knew I possessed, as we barely use our sensory faculties to their fullest, otherwise. I steadily navigated a fixed trail within the forest, having an immense belief that something up here is protecting me.

With that faith in mind, I marched on for hours till I reached a clearing. As I looked back, I realized the tree line was over, and before me lay nothing but a vast expanse of huge snow dunes.

Now, I was definitely scared, but somehow it didn't feel evil. I could either go back down right away or stay trapped in fear. But something lured me to move uphill, so I did, almost as if in a trance. I was all alone, but not for a minute did I feel lonely. I felt so much relief and contentment that I almost felt confident about my decision to come up here. When did that fear turn into assurance, I do not know but I was certain, that I was getting closer to my unanswered question.

After climbing a couple of hundred meters, I could see a distinct peak, separate and cut off from all the other ones. That entity stood alone and wore the snow plume like a crown on her pearly head. My eyes were fixated on her, realizing this was the peak I had seen from the room, and kept walking towards it.

With each step, she kept getting bigger and bigger, flaunting her immense power, magnanimity, and stature. She, the mighty Nanda Devi, emanated grace and ferocity at the same time.

I traveled till the end of the trail before it started sloping downhill in another direction. I fell to my knees, admirably staring and thanking her, for allowing me to greet her. I bowed down instinctively, found myself weeping and asking yet again, "How did I do this alone? Does God exist?".

After spending some time in silent introspection, in her presence, I decided to go back down, having found the clarity to my countless existential doubts. My heart was calm and at peace. I

bid her goodbye knowing I would meet her soon.

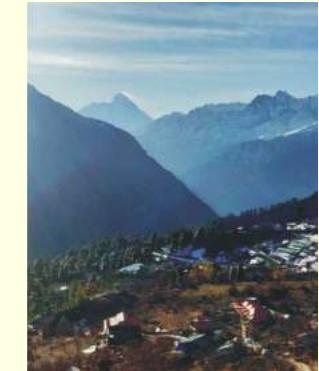
And so started my journey of finding her presence whenever I needed to. This simple need turned into an obsession with climbing one Himalayan peak after another.

I've often been asked by my near and dear ones, "What is the purpose? Why put yourself through so much exertion? The answer isn't easy, and to be honest, every climb has its own set of challenges, which indeed makes it quite brutal. But there is an immense beauty, relief, passion and contentment that comes with it... for when you set your mind for the most improbable, and put greater demands on yourself physically and mentally, the blood flows more sweetly from the release of all that tension.

And perhaps, that is the rationale I hoped for, that's the rationale for all risky sports. You raise the ante of effort and concentration to clear your mind off trivialities, be at peace with what you do, and realize who you are. I have known now, the power of faith and belief. Such is the Call of the Mountains!



*Wandering alone
in Kuari Pass.*



*Nanda Devi as seen
from my hotel room.*



Nanda Devi from Gorson Bugyal / Kuari pass trail



Views of Dhauladhar from Rani Sui



Views of Pir Panjal enroute the top of Rani Sui



Summit at Mt. Renok Peak / Mt. Pokhriyal



Rockcraft at Dudh Pokhri, Sikkim



Glacier Training at Rathong Glacier, Sikkim Himalayas



Summit at Friendship Peak, Pir Panjal ranges



Summit push for Friendship Peak



*Hanuman Tibba as seen from
Lady Leg, Base camp of Friendship Peak*

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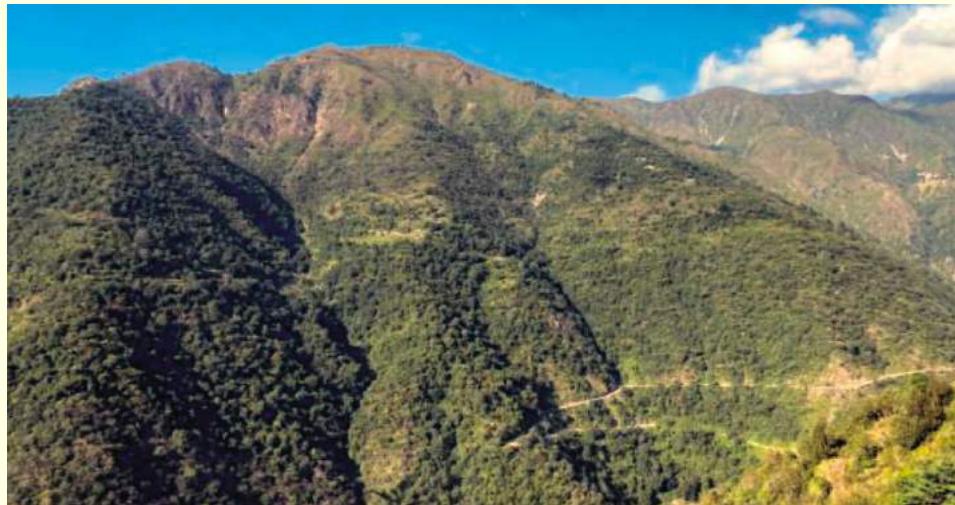


Dieu Tech Engineers



“হর কি দুন” – এক স্বপ্নের ট্রেক - “Har ki Dun” - A Dream Trek : Jayanta Chattopadhyay

অনেক বাধা বিপত্তি কাটিয়ে আমাদের ট্রেকের দিনক্ষণ শেষ পর্যন্ত ঠিক হল – অক্টোবর ২০২১। সকাল সকাল এয়ার ইভিয়ার ফ্লাইট এ চেপে দেরাদুন – বেলা ১১ তে লাভিং এবং সেখান থেকে Innova চেপে সান্ধরী – প্রায় ৩০০ কিলোমিটার পথ – সময় লাগবে ৮ ঘণ্টা। তাই পনিয় জলের ২ ডজন বোতল সংগ্রহ করে ছেড়ে দেওয়া হল গাড়ি। কিছু সময় পার হতেও শুরু হল পাহাড় – আমাদের স্বপ্নের পাহাড় –



পাহাড় শুরু

ঘন সবুজ পাহাড় অতিক্রম করতে করতে আমরা এগিয়ে চললাম – মাঝে কিছু কিছু বিশ্রাম – চা জলের বিরতি – রাত ৯ টার সময় আমরা পৌছে গেলাম সান্ধরী – altitude 7000 feet। সান্ধরী একটা ছেট গ্রাম এবং এখান থেকে শুরু হয় বেশ কিছু Himalayan ট্রেক। আমরা যখন সান্ধরীতে পৌছলাম তখন বৃষ্টি পড়ছে এবং বেশ কনকনে ঠাণ্ডা। আমাদের হোস্ট সুমন তখনও এসে পৌছতে পারেনি তার আগের ট্রেক থেকে – কারণ, উত্তরাখণ্ডের তীব্র বৃষ্টি। কিন্তু তার জন্য আমাদের কোন রকম অসুবিধা হল না। রমেশ এবং তার টিম আমাদের জন্য সব বন্দোবস্ত করে রেখেছিল – গরম তিনার এবং সাথে গরম বিছানা। মাঝরাতে সুমন এসে হাজির – এবং সোজন্য বিনিময় – সুমন আমাদের টিম লীডার। সকালে যখন ঘুম থেকে উঠলাম, একেবারে বাকবাকে নীল আকাশ। তাজ আমাদের রেস্ট এবং acclimatization ডে। তাই ব্রেকফাস্ট করে বেড়িয়ে পড়লাম সান্ধরী গ্রাম ও তার আশপাশ ঘুরে দেখতে।



আমাদের শঙ্করীর আস্তানা



দূরে snowclad mountain – আমাদের ফাইনাল ডেস্টিনেশন

আমরা প্রায় দশ কিলোমিটার হেঁটে নিজেদের বেশ কিছুটা acclimatization করলাম 7000 feet উচ্চতায় – তারপর আমাদের আস্তানায় ফিরে গ্র্যান্ড লাঙ্ঘ। অঞ্চল বিশ্রামের পর আবার সান্ধরীর পথের – ভাল acclimatization জরুরী – কালকে থেকে আমাদের ট্রেকিং শুরু – গতব্য “হর কি দুন” – উচ্চতা প্রায় 13000 feet।

পরের দিন সকাল ৭ টার সময় জীপ এসে হাজির – গন্তব্য তালুকা গ্রাম –। ঘন্টা জীপ যাত্রা – উচ্চতা সান্ধরী থেকে 1000 feet কম – 6000 feet। ভয়াভ সে এক জীপ যাত্রা – যেকেনো সময় মনে হচ্ছে গাড়িটা শিরিখাতে চলে যাবে – নিচে বয়ে চলেছে সুপ্রিম নদী – যার পাস দিয়ে আমরা হেঁটে হেঁটে উঠে “হর কি দুন” পর্যন্ত। যাইহোক এক ঘন্টার জীপ যাত্রার পর আমরা এসে পৌছলাম তালুকা – এই অঞ্চলের শেষ motor-able গ্রাম। আমরা যখন একটু চা পান করে ফিরে এলাম, দেখি বিশাল এক টিম আমাদের জন্য অপেক্ষা করছে – ৪ টে mule, যাদের পিঠে চড়ে যাবে আমাদের টেন্ট, গ্যাস সিলিন্ডার, রান্নার জিনিসপত্র, খাবার-দাবার, sleeping bags, ইমার্জেন্সি অর্জিজেন সিলিন্ডার ইত্যাদি। সাথে mule চালক, cook, 2 জন পার্সোনাল porter – ছেটু নেবে ফটোগ্রাফীর যাবতীয় সরঞ্জাম আর মিংগলু নেবে রেইনকোট ও আরোকিছু টুকিটাকি, লোকাল রুট গাইড – রমেশ। আমাদের ৫ জন এবং আরো ৬ জন আর ৪ টে mule নিয়ে আমাদের ট্রেকিং শুরু হল তালুকা থেকে বেলা ৯ টার সময়।



কখনো তীব্র চাঁড়াই আর কখনো কিছুটা সমতল
পথ ধরে এগিয়ে চলল আমাদের ট্রেকিং টিম।



পাশ দিয়ে বয়ে চলেছে খরপ্রতা সুপ্রিম বা “হর কি দুন” নদী –
কখনো বা কল কল রবে কখনো বা তীব্র গর্জন করতে করতে।



প্রায় 1000 feet altitude gain করার পর আমরা এসে পৌছলাম পরের গ্রাম – গংগার



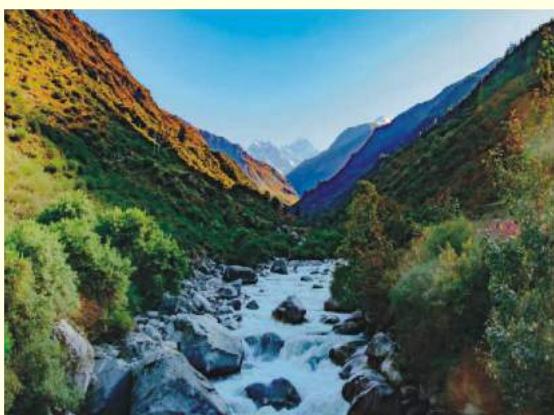
আজকে আমাদের উঠতে হবে আরো প্রায় 1000 feet – মানে প্রায় 8000 feet উচ্চতায় – আমাদের আজ তাঁবু পড়বে ওসলো গ্রামের পাদদেশে। কঠিন চড়াই পার করে বেলা 4 টের সময় আমরা এসে পৌছলাম আমাদের আজকের গন্তব্যে।



ঠিক এর পাড়ে আমাদের আজকের রাত কাটানোর ঠিকানা



সকলেই বেশ ঝাল্ট – সাথে প্রচুর খিদে – আমাদের সদা হাস্যময় কুক, বানা আমাদের একটা দরুন ডিলার প্রজেক্ট করলো কয়েক রাউন্ড চা আর পকড়ার পর – আহা সে যেন এক অমৃত ভোজন – আজকে উপলক্ষি করলাম খাবারের সবথেকে উত্কৃষ্ট উপাদানটি হল “এক পেট ভর্তি খিদে”। আপনার পরখ করে দেখতে পারেন! রাতে শোবার আগে আদাৰ জুস এর গরম গুলীয় – যা শরীরকে গরম রাখবে আৱ রঞ্জ চলাচলে সাহাজ কৰবে। রাত ৪ টায় লাল তাঁুৰ ভিতরে sleeping bag এর মধ্যে চুকে কখন যে ঘূমইয়ে পড়েছি খেয়াল নেই। পরেরদিন সকাল ৬ টায় ঘূম থেকে উঠে ৭ টার মধ্যে ব্ৰেকফাস্ট করে আমরা বেঁৰিয়ে পড়লাম পৰের দিনের যাত্রায়। আজকের গন্তব্য kalkattidhar – উচ্চতা 1100 feet – পথে ওসলো গ্রাম ঘুৰে যাওয়া – আৱও একটা আকৰ্ষণ আছে – পৰে বলছি। Foothill থেকে ওসলো গ্রাম ভীষণ চড়াই – প্রায় 45 ডিগ্রি inclination। কিন্তু পথের সুন্দৰতা সব ক্লান্তি দূর কৰে দিল –



খাড়াই পথ ভেঙে আমরা এগিয়ে চললাম ওসলো গ্রামের দিকে – পথে দেখা এদের সাথে –

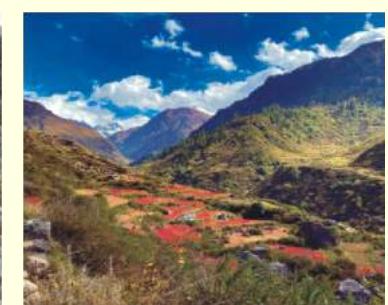


আমরা প্রায় 2 ঘণ্টা তীব্র চড়াই অভিযান কৰে পৌছলাম ওসলো গ্রামের একদম মাঝখানে – দুর্বোধনের মন্দিরে – আমাৰ জানা পৃথিবীৰ এক মাত্ৰ দুর্বোধনের মন্দিরে – এই গ্রামে সবাই কৌৱতদেৱ পুজো কৰে –



মন্দিরের আঙিনায় কিছুটা নিশ্চাম কৰে আবাৰ চলা শুৰু –

তীব্র দুর্গম সে পথ –



আমরা এগিয়ে চললাম – উচ্চতা ক্রমশ বাড়ছে – আৱ প্ৰকৃতি তাৰ সৌন্দৰ্য যেন উজাড় কৰে দেখাতে থাকলো আমাদের –



যেদিকে দুচোখ যায় শুধুই প্ৰকৃতিৰ লীলাখেলা –

But every show has to come to an end - আবহাওয়া বেলা একটার পর থেকে খারাপ হতে আরম্ভ করল – ঘন বাদল আকাশের দখল নিতে শুরু করল –



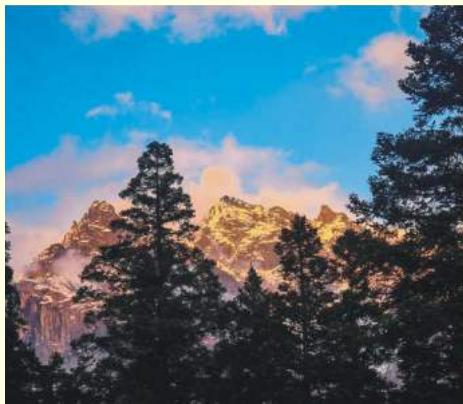
কিন্তু পথ তো এখনো অনেক বাকি – তাই এগিয়ে চলতে তো হবেই –



পথ চলার ক্লাস্টিও ক্রমশ বাড়তে লাগলো – দূরের পাহাড়ে তুষারপাত শুরু হয়ে গেছে – মিশ্র এক অনুভূতি মনের ভিতর আসতে শুরু করল – গত তিন দিন আমরা communication range র বাইরে – যদি আমাদের পাহাড়েও তুষারপাত শুরু হয় – যদি ভীষণ তুষারপাতে পথ বন্ধ হয়ে যায়। গত সপ্তাহে আমাদের বর্তমান অবস্থানের 5000 feet ওপরে ঘটে গেছে এক দুর্ঘটনা – প্রাণ হারিয়েছেন 7 জন ট্রেকার – তুষার চাপা পড়ে – বছরের এই সময়ে তুষারপাত এই Region এ হয় না – কিন্তু এবার প্রকৃতির খামখেয়ালিপনা যেন একটু বেশি – এর জন্য কি আমরাই দায়ি নই ? এই সব ভাবতে ভাবতে এগিয়ে চলা পরের ক্যাম্প সাইটের দিকে – হয়তো আমাদের মনের কথা বুরতে পেরে আকাশ একটু পরিষ্কার হতে শুরু করল –



আমরা যখন ক্যাম্পসাইটে পৌছালাম আমাদের greet করলো এমনই এক দৃশ্য –



পাহাড় যেন তামা এবং সোনার গয়নায় সেজে দীঘিয়ে আছে আমাদের greet করার জন্য।

কিন্তু এই রূপ ছিল ক্ষণস্থায়ী – চাপা কুয়াশা ক্রমশ আমাদের ক্যাম্প সাইট প্রাস করতে লাগলো – হওয়া একদম বন্ধ হয়ে গেল – আমাদের টিম লীডার সুমনের মুখে প্রথম দুশ্চিন্তার ছাপ দেখতে পেলাম – ও বলল রাতের দিকে বৃষ্টি হলে ভাল, নচেৎ কাল সকালে তুষারপাত নিশ্চিত। আলো ক্রমশ কমে এল –



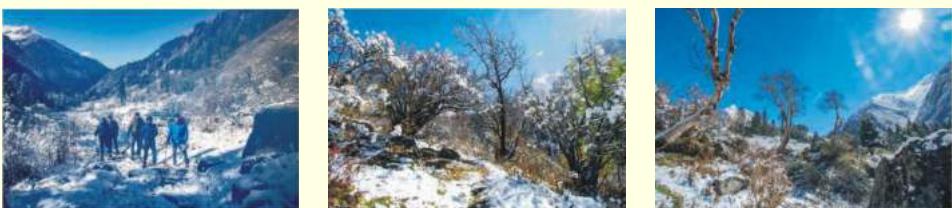
বেশ দুশ্চিন্তায় রাতের খাবার শৈয় করে তাড়াতাড়ি আমার sleeping bag এর ভিতর চুকে পড়লাম – ঘুম যখন ভাঙল তখন দেখলাম আজ প্রকৃতি একদম অন্য খেয়ালে – মুখ ভার করে বসে আছে – সুমন তার special ওয়াচ দেখে বল্লাল, atmospheric pressure খুব fall করছে – তুষারপাত শুরু হ'ল বলে – বেলা 11 টায় শুরু হ'ল hailstorm – শিলাবৃষ্টি – ক্যাম্পসাইট ক্রমশ সাদা হয়ে যেতে লাগলো – বেলা একটায় শুরু হল ভীষণ তুষারপাত – আমরা ডাইনিং ক্যাম্পে বসে আড়া দিতে লাগলাম, সাথে চা আর তাস – সময় আর যেন কাটতে চায় না – বেলা 4 টের সময় থেকেই নামল আঁধার – তুষারপাতের বেগ ক্রমশ বেড়েই চল – আমরা আমাদের শোবার ক্যাম্পের মধ্যে চুকে পড়লাম আর ভিতর থেকে ক্যাম্পের ছাদ নাড়াতে লাগলাম, যাতে বরফের চাপে ক্যাম্প ধসে না যায় – রাত 3 টে পর্যন্ত চলল এই খেলা – তারপর তুষারপাত কিছুটা কমলে, কখন যে ঘুমিয়ে পড়েছি বুরতেই পারিনি। পরদিন যখন ঘুম ভাঙল দেখি আকাশ বাকবাকে নীল আর চারিদিক বরফে মোড়া – সে এক মনোরম দৃশ্য –



সুমন ঠিক করলো আমরা ট্রেকাররা porter দের আর রেমেশ কে নিয়ে “হর কি দুন” যাব আর বেলা 1 টার মধ্যে এই ক্যাম্প সাইটে ফিরে আসব – এবং আমাদের অবতরণ শুরু করব 2 টির মধ্যে – কারণ আবার তুষারপাতের সম্ভাবনা আছে as per his experience। টিপ্প ব্রেকফাস্ট সেরে আমরা “হর কি দুন” এর দিকে রওনা দিলাম – 3 ঘণ্টা climb , 1 ঘণ্টা descend এবং 1 ঘণ্টা ফটোগ্রাফি। পথের এবং আমাদের স্বপ্নের “হর কি দুন” এর সৌন্দর্য আমাদের সব ক্লাস্টি ভুলিয়ে দিল – আহা বরফ ঢাকা পাহাড় ও জঙ্গল যে কি সুন্দর হতে পারে, সামনে থেকে না দেখলে বিশ্বাস করা যায় না –



আরো কিছুটা ওঠার পর আমরা গিয়ে পৌছলাম সুপিন বা “হর কি দুন” নদীর উৎপত্তিস্থলে -



3 ঘণ্টা কঠিন চড়াই বরফ ঢাকা পথ পার হয়ে আমরা পৌঁছে গেলাম স্বর্গদ্বারে - “হর কি দুন” -



13000 feet উচ্চতায় tree line পায় শেষ – শুরু হল আমাদের অবতরণ –



আমৰা বেলা 2 টোৱ সময় আমাদেৱ kalkattidhar ক্যাম্প সাইট থেকে ওসলোৱ দিকে অবতৰণ শুৰু কৱলাম – বেলা 3 টো থেকে ওপৱেৱ পাহাড়ে তুষারপাত শুৰু হল – আমৰা তখন অনেকটা altitude loose কৱেছি – ধনৰাদ দিলাম সুমনকে, ওৱ অভিজ্ঞতাকে - 6 টোৱ সময় ওসলো গ্ৰামেৱ নিচে আমাদেৱ তাঁৰু পড়ল – আমৰা celebrate কৱলাম আমাদেৱ ট্ৰেকেৱ সফলতা –



পৱেৱদিন সকল 7 টো থেকে শুৰু হল আমাদেৱ তালুকা ফেৱাৱ যাবা –



আমৰা ফিৱে চললাম আবাৱ গড়নিকা প্ৰবাহে যোগ দেৱাৱ তাগিদে –



KANYA KRONICLES - Sukanya Ghose

THE L-OV-E OF MY LIFE

Children grow up in the blink of an eye and in no time they are ready to fly the nest. But the growing up years leave behind a treasure trove of memories to cherish forever. Recounting one such cherished memory from my treasure trove.

During a particular summer vacation, in Kolkata, my darlings Om-Ved, my OV, my l-OV-e, were gifted with a tool kit each. They were very excited with their individual kits and immediately set to work.

OM got extremely busy with his own set of tools. He started working on a path-breaking technology, in our sitting-room 'lab', during which his toy car would take-off straight through the balcony grill, carrying all his friends, family, & most importantly, ALLLLLLL his girlfriends in it.

The poor scientist was so engrossed in his work that he did not have any time for lunch or any other mundane activities, he had to be fed his 'mangsho-bhaath' (chicken curry and rice), though he could very easily distinguish the minuscule, smuggled veggie pieces through his scientific endeavors. He also managed to get his hands on the real screw-driver set, and then, he obviously needed some real screws as well and the saga continued...And when he didn't find anything lying about, he promptly removed some from the table-clock (which was left lying on the table with its back open and face down). Next, he wanted a micro-chip and was absolutely disgusted on knowing that we didn't have any at home. The genius had to make do with his beyblade parts, for the time being but with clear instructions to mamma to get some from the local market in the evening. He had also asked for some petrol from the car but I, his mamma, had firmly put my foot down and our young scientist was definitely not very happy about it.

Not to be left behind, VED, in the meantime, appointed himself as our new carpenter and asked his granny to call him for help. Granny promptly obliged and asked him to fix the door. But on arrival, to everyone's amazement, the self-appointed carpenter announced that he didn't fix doors, he wanted to repair the television set instead!

The carpenter/mechanic then went about his job very seriously, declaring that he had to stay for ten days, repairing the television every day and then only the set would work again! Dear old granny was extremely alarmed at the novel prospect of housing a television repairman for ten days, and politely asked him what kind of food would he like to have during his stay. T-h-a-t did the trick. First VED was completely bewildered about why he had to have food at all (people who knew them then might know what I mean), then suddenly he devised a new quick-fix solution for the television set following which the repair-man left hurriedly.

And for all this, we had to keep a perfectly straight face, otherwise the world might have come to an end.

All in a day's work, I would say.

“আমার জীবনে রবীন্দ্রনাথ”- Tagore's Influence on my Life - Sumela Dutta

লেখাটা লিখতে বসে প্রথমেই মনে হচ্ছে, এতদিন কেন নিখিনি এই বিষয়ে! আমার চির-পুরাতন, চির-নতুন রবীন্দ্রনাথ! সেই জ্ঞান হওয়ার আগে থেকে যাঁর সৃষ্টি আমার জীবনের সাথে জড়িয়ে গেছে, বহুবার চেতনে-অবচেতনে প্রভাব ফেলেছে, সেই আত্মপ্রক্রিয়া থেকেই আজ এই লেখা।

আমার সৌভাগ্য আমি কলকাতা শহরের নব নালপ্দা স্কুলে পড়াশুনা করেছি। আমাদের স্কুল যাঁরা তৈরি করেছেন সেই আর্য মিত্র ও ভারতী মিত্র মহাশয়-মহাশয়া শাস্ত্রিনিকেতনের ছাত্রছাত্রী ছিলেন। ফলতঃ, তাঁদের তৈরি শিক্ষা প্রতিষ্ঠানে রবীন্দ্রভাবনার ছায়া থাকবে, এ কথা বলাই বাহ্যল। স্কুলে বরাবর মহাসমাজের পালিত হয়েছে রবীন্দ্র-জয়ন্তী উৎসব। সহজ পাঠ হাতে পেয়েছি জ্ঞান হওয়ার আগে থেকেই, মুখস্থ করেছি “কুমোর পাড়ার গরুর গাড়ি, বোঝাই করা কলসি হাঁড়ি।”, “তাল গাছ এক পায়ে দাঁড়িয়ে, সব গাছ ছাড়িয়ে উঁকি মারে আকাশে”, পড়েছি ‘মেঘমালা’ র গল্প। তখন অবশ্য তিনি কে কিছুই বুঝতাম না, শুধু তাঁর কবিতার মাধুর্যের ছন্দ উপভোগ করতাম।

ছেটবেলা থেকে নাচ শিখেছি, নাচের স্কুলের নাম রবিতীর্থ। স্বয়ং সুচিত্রা মিত্র এই রবিতীর্থ গড়ে তুলেছিলেন। তাই এখানেও পেলাম তাঁর ছোঁয়া, শিখলাম প্রথম রবীন্দ্র-সংগীতের সঙ্গে নাচ “মেঘের কোলে রোদ হেসেছে, বাদল গাছে টুটি, আজ আমাদের ছুটি ও ভাই আজ আমাদের ছুটি”, “ধানের খেতে রোদ ছায়ায় লুকোচুরি খেলা রে ভাই, লুকোচুরি খেলা।” সেই বাল্যকাল থেকেই স্কুল, নাচের স্কুল সব জ্যায়গাতেই পেয়েছি এই মহীরহের ছোঁয়া।

ছেটবেলা থেকে দ্বাদশ শ্রেণী অবধি বাংলা পড়েছি। ইতিমধ্যে পড়েছি রবীন্দ্রনাথের বহু কবিতা, গদ্য, প্রবন্ধ ও ছোট গল্প। সামান্যক্ষতি, নগরলক্ষ্মী, পূজারিনি, পুরাতন ভৃত্য, দেবতার গ্রাস, দুই বিঘা জমি... কৈশোরবেলায় পড়া এক একটা কবিতা শিখিয়েছে একেকে রকমের মূল্যবোধ। ওনার ‘ছেলেবেলা’ ও পড়েছি আমার মেয়েবেলাতেই। ওই যে কথাটা, “এখনকার সম্পন্ন ঘরের ছেলেদের দেখি তাহার সহজেই সব জিনিস পায় বলিয়া তাহার বারো আনাকেই আধ্যাত্মিক কামড় দিয়া বিসর্জন করে” আমার কৈশোর মনে এতটাই সুন্দর ভাবে দাগ কাটে যে ওই কথাগুলিকে ভুল প্রমাণ করার জন্য আজও তৎপর থাকি।

যৌবনে রবীন্দ্রনাথের সৃষ্টির সমুদ্রে এসে পড়লাম। প্রেম, ঈশ্বর প্রেম এই সবেরই প্রথম উপলক্ষ্মী রবীন্দ্রনাথের গান থেকে, “সখি, ভাবনা কাহারে বলে, সখি, যাতনা কাহারে বলে,” কতবার ভেবেছিনু আপনা ভুলিয়া, তোমার চরণে দিব হাদয় খুলিয়া, “তুমি রবে নীরবে হাদয়ে মম, ” আমার বেলা যে যায় সাঁঘ বেলাতে তোমার সুরে সুরে মেলাতে, “ভালোবাসি, ভালোবাসি - এসব গান ছাড়া কি প্রেম হয়!

কলেজে শ্রতি নাটকের স্ক্রিপ্ট লিখতে গিয়ে একবার চোখে পড়ল এক অপূর্ব পংক্তি-“আমার সকল নিয়ে বসে আছি সর্বনাশের আশায়, আমি তার লাগি পথ চেয়ে আছি, পথে যে জন ভাসায়, যে জন দেয়না দেখা, যায় যে দেখে, ভালোবাসে আড়াল থেকে, আমার মন মজেছে, সেই গভীরের গোপন ভালোবাসায়” — অনুভব করলাম গোপন প্রেমের অনন্য অনুভূতি। প্রকৃত প্রেমের অনুভূতি যে চিরকালীন, অনন্ত তার খোঁজ দেন কবি, ‘হঠাতে দেখা’ কবিতায় যেখানে তিনি লিখছেন, “রাতের সব তারাই আছে দিনের আলোর গভীরে।

মাঝে মাঝে অবাক হয়েছি, ‘পূজা’ র গান কে ‘প্রেম’ র গান ভেবেছি আর ‘প্রেম’ র গান কে ‘পূজা’ র গান। পরে একদিন সুনীল গঙ্গুলীর রবীন্দ্রনাথ সম্বন্ধীয় এক সাক্ষাৎকার দেখে সেই দ্বন্দ্বের অবসান হয়েছে। সেই সাক্ষাৎকার থেকেই জানতে পারি “দেবতারে প্রিয় করি, প্রিয়রে দেবতা” এই ধারণা আমাদের উপমহাদেশে রবীন্দ্রনাথ ই প্রথম করেন। কি অদ্ভুত সুন্দর কনসেপ্ট! মন শিখরিত হয়! কাদম্বরী দেবীর

সাথে রবীন্দ্রনাথের যে আধ্যাত্মিক টান বা প্রেম, লোকে যে যাই বলুক না কেন আমি বারবার অন্তরের সেই শুন্দি ভালোবাসাকে কুর্নিশ করেছি এবং আমি জানি আমার মতো অনেকেই করেছেন।

শুধু কি প্রেম! যৌবনের প্রারম্ভে এসে রবীন্দ্রনাথের সমাজ ভাবনা আমাকে অনেক পরিণত করেছে। ‘লোকহিত’ পরে গভীর ভাবে চিন্তা করেছি, সত্য কোনো মানুষের উপকার করতে চাইলে কেমন ভাবে করা উচিত; শিক্ষা নিয়ে তিনি যা বলেছেন, “শিক্ষাকে আমরা বহন করিয়া চলি, বাহন করি না, ” বা “বিদ্যা আবরণে, শিক্ষা আচরণে” - এই কথাগুলি চিরপ্রাসঙ্গিক। হিন্দু মুসলমানের সহাবস্থান নিয়ে ওনার ধারণা আমার ধর্মনিরপেক্ষ মন কে ওনার প্রতি আরো আকৃষ্ট করেছে।

সক্রিয় রাজনীতি তিনি কোনওদিন করেন নি (কেন করেননি তার ব্যাখ্যাও তার বিভিন্ন লেখায় পাওয়া যায়) কিন্তু তাঁর মতো একনিষ্ঠ দেশপ্রেমিক আমরা ক’ জন! ইতিহাস বই তে যখন পড়েছি ১৯০৫ সালে বঙ্গভঙ্গ আন্দোলনের সময় তাঁর কাণ্ডারির ভূমিকা, জালিয়ানওয়ালা বাগ হত্যাকাণ্ডের পর নিজের নাইটরহড’ উপাধি ফিরিয়ে দিতে বিদ্যুমাত্র দ্বিধাবোধ করেননি, তখন তাঁর দেশপ্রেমের ভাবাবেগ আমাকেও স্পর্শ করেছে। তিনি রচনা করেছেন কত অজস্র কালজয়ী দেশপ্রেমের গান, সেব গান শুনে সব সময় উদ্বৃদ্ধ হয়েছি। ‘জন গণ মন অধিনায়ক জয় হে’ গান টি যখনই শুনি হাদয়ে এক অবগন্য অনুভূতি হয় এবং যথেষ্ট গর্ববোধ হয় এই ভোবে যে এই জাতীয় সংগীতের প্রস্তা আমাদের বঙ্গদেশের বাঙালির অতিপ্রিয় রবীন্দ্রনাথ।

শুধু দেশপ্রেমেই নিজেকে আবদ্ধ রাখেননি কবিগুরু, তিনি জয়-জয়কার করেছেন বিশ্ব-সৌন্দর্যের। একাদশ শ্রেণী তে উঠে যখন রাষ্ট্র-বিজ্ঞানে “ইন্টারন্যাশনালিস্ম” পড়া শুরু করলাম তখন রবীন্দ্রনাথের চিন্তা ভাবনা কে নতুন করে বুঝতে শিখলাম। প্রথম বিশ্বযুদ্ধ বা দ্বিতীয় বিশ্বযুদ্ধ-কোনো যুদ্ধই তিনি মেনে নিতে পারেননি, তাঁর সৃষ্ট রচনা থেকে বারবার আমরা যুদ্ধবিরোধী বার্তাই পেয়েছি।

‘বঙ্গমাতা’ কবিতাটি আমাদের পাঠ্য বইতে থাকার দরুণ কবিতাটি মুখস্থ করে ফেলেছিলাম। বঙ্গমাতা কে বলা কবির প্রতিটি কথা মর্মে প্রবেশ করেছিল। “দেশ দেশান্তর মাঝে যার যেখে স্থান, খুঁজিয়া লইতে দাও করিয়া সন্ধান”, কবি এবং কবির পরিবার যেমন নিজেদের কে বাংলার বাইরে তথা ভারতের বাইরে ছড়িয়ে দিয়েছিলেন, তেমন ভাবে তিনি আমাদেরকেও বিশ্ব মাঝে বিস্তৃত হওয়ার ইঙ্গিত দিয়েছেন। আর কী অপরাপ মেহময় ভঙ্গিতে তিনি বঙ্গমাতার সমালোচনা করেছেন। তিনি বাঙালির ভুল আবার ধরিয়ে দিয়েছেন ‘পূর্বন্ত আশা’ কবিতায়। তাঁর কবিতাগুলি পরে এই উপলক্ষ্মী হয় যে, আত্মসমীক্ষা সব সময়ই গঠনমূলক, তাই নিজ জাতির ভুল শুধরে দিয়ে তিনি আমাদের নতুন দিশা দিয়েছেন।

“চিন্ত মেঘে ভয়শূন্য, উচ্চ যেথে শির” ... ‘প্রার্থনা’, আমার প্রিয় এই কবিতাটি বিভিন্ন বিদেশি ভাষায় অনুবাদিত হয়েছে। আমেরিকার রাষ্ট্রপতি ব্যারাক ওবামাও তাঁর বক্তৃতায় এই কবিতাটির উল্লেখ করে স্বরণ করেছেন যে তিনি কবিগুরুর এই ভাবধারায় প্রভাবিত।

“সংকোচের বিহুলতা নিজেরে অপমান” বা “ধর্ম যেবে শঙ্খ রবে করিবে আহান, নীরব হয়ে, নম হয়ে পণ করিয়ে প্রাণ” - এই কথাগুলি আমায় আজীবন অনুপ্রেণা দেয়। ২০২০ থেকে যখন Covid এর কালো ছায়া সারা পৃথিবীতে ছেয়ে আমাদের প্রত্যেকের জীবন দুর্বিষহ করে তুলল তখনও অন্যদের মতো আমিও আশ্রয় নিয়েছি রবীন্দ্রনাথের গানে/কবিতায়, কখনো গেয়েছি “জানো না রে অধো-উর্ধ্বে বাহিরে অন্তরে, ঘোরি তোরে, নিত্য রাজ্যে সেই অভয় আশ্রয়” কখনো গেয়েছি, “সকাতরে ওই কাঁদিছে সকলে শোনো শোনো পিতা” কখনো বাঁচীনের প্রতি রাগে, অভিমানে আবস্থি করেছি, “যাহারা তোমার বিষাইছে বায়ু, নিভাইছে তব আলো, তুমি কী তাদের ক্ষমা করিয়াছ, তুমি কী বেসেছো ভালো ?”

আসলে জীবনে চলার পথে বাঁচতে শিখিয়েছেন রবীন্দ্রনাথ। পথ যতই ঢাড়াই উত্তরাই হোক তার মধ্যে থেকেই বেঁচে থাকার আনন্দ খুঁজে নিতে হবে আমাদের। আনন্দের ডালি নিয়ে প্রতি বছর আমাদের উপহার দিয়েছেন রবীন্দ্র-জয়ন্তী উৎসব। আহা! রবীন্দ্র জয়ন্তী ছাড়া আমাদের বাঙালির সংস্কৃতি জীবনের কী যে হতো কে জানে!

এমনি এক রবীন্দ্র জয়ন্তীর দিনে বাবা-মায়ের সঙ্গে একবার জোড়াসাঁকো ঠাকুরবাড়ি বেড়াতে গিয়েছিলাম, সেই অভিজ্ঞতাও দুর্দান্ত। সুবিশাল অট্টালিকা, না জানি কত মহৎ স্মৃতির অধিকারী, সারি সারি ঘর, বারান্দা স্বনামধন্য ঠাকুরবাড়ির ঐতিহ্য বহন করে চলেছে। মনে হল, আভিজাত্যে মোড়া এরকম এক ধনী পরিবারে জন্ম হয়েও কী করে তিনি দরিদ্রদের মনের কথা বুঝতে পারলেন, কেমন করে লিখলেন, "এ জগতে হাত, সেই বেশি চায়, আছে যার ভুরি ভুরি" কী ভাবে অনুভব করলেন শাস্তি 'গল্লের গ্রাম্যবধু' চন্দ্রা'র যত্ননার বা 'পোস্ট অফিস' নিতান্ত সাদামাটা 'রতন' র মনের কথা!

প্রথম যখন শাস্তিনিকেতন গেলাম, চারধারের পরিবেশের এক অদ্ভুত প্রশাস্তি অনুভব করলাম। মনে হল, এমন নিম্ন পরিবেশেই তো কালজীরী সৃষ্টিরা কলমে আসে। নিজের অভিজ্ঞতাই গেয়ে উঠলাম, "আকাশ-ভরা সূর্য তারা, বিশ্ব ভরা প্রাণ।" আর অনুভব করেছিলাম কবিগুরুর আকাশের মতো উদার মন কে, কত অন্যায়ে এই জমিদার পুত্র তাঁর স্থাবর, অস্থাবর যা কিছু আছে উজাড় করে দিয়েছেন আমাদের মতো জনসাধারণের কাছে, তাই না স্ট্রিট হয়েছে বিশ্ববিন্দিত বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় বিশ্বভারতী।

"তোমারেই করিয়াছি জীবনের ধ্রুব তারা" হ্যাঁ সত্যি, প্রজন্মের পর প্রজন্ম ধরে আমরা আমাদের এই বিশ্বকবির কাছেই জীবনবোধের পাঠ নিয়েছি। জীবনে সুখ, দুঃখ, প্রেম, শোক সবেতেই সঙ্গী হয়েছে রবীন্দ্রনাথ।

একবার কলকাতা বইমেলা থেকে একটা বই কিনেছিলাম, নাম, "তুমি রবে নীরবে", কবির জীবনে অকালে চলে গেছেন তাঁর মা, স্ত্রী, এক পুত্র, এক কন্যা এমনকী শেষ বয়েসে এক নাতি ও, সেই বিষয়ে ছিল বইটি। প্রিয়জনের এই বিয়োগ ব্যাথা কীভাবে তিনি জয় করেছেন জানতে বইটি পরে শিউরে উঠলাম। এছাড়া, নিজের মৃত্যু নিয়েও তাঁর কালজীরী গান, "যখন পরবেনা মোর পায়ের চিহ্ন এই বাটে" আমায় শিখিয়েছে জীবনের চরম সত্যকে নির্বিকার চিত্তে মেনে নিতে।

"ভালো, মন্দ যাহাই আসুক, সত্য রে লহ সহজে"-কী নিখাদ বাণী তাঁর। দুর্লভ কবিতাটিতে লিখছেন, "দেখা হয়ে নাই কচ্ছ মেলিয়া, ঘর হইতে শুধু দুই পা ফেলিয়া, একটি ধানের শিশের উপরে একটি শিশির বিন্দু।" জীবনের ছেট ছেট অনুভূতির সন্ধান দিয়েছেন তিনি। তিনি শিখিয়েছেন দুঃখের মধ্যে দিয়েও বাঁচার রসদ খুঁজে নিতে, কঠিন পরিস্থিতিতেও নয় থেকে জীবন পণ করতে, কেউ সাড়া না দিলেও একলা পথ চলতে, পুরানো সম্পর্ক/বন্ধুস্তুকে কখনো না ভুলে যেতে; আবার সেই তিনি প্রকৃতির মধ্যে প্রাণের স্পন্দন অনুভব করেছেন— বারা পাতা, কাশফুল, শিউলি ফুল এরা প্রাণবন্ত হয়ে উঠেছে তাঁর কবিতায়, কখনও শুষ্ক গ্রীষ্মকাল কে স্পন্দিত করে গেয়ে উঠেছেন, "এসো হে বৈশাখ, এসো, এসো" কখনও বসন্তকাল কে "পথভোলা পথিক" বলে সংশোধন করেছেন, আবার চরম আধ্যাত্মিক ভাব চেতনা থেকে লিখেছেন, "রয়েছ তুমি একথা কবে, জীবন মাঝে সহজ হবে" বা "তোমারে যেন না করি সংশয়"।

ছেটবেলা থেকে স্কুলে না বুঝেই গেয়ে উঠেছি কবিগুরুর বিখ্যাত প্রার্থনা সংগৃহীত "আগুনের পরশমনি ছোঁয়াও প্রাণে" আবার "আমরা সবাই রাজা আমাদেরই রাজাৰ রাজত্বে" এই গানটির প্রকৃত মর্মার্থ বুঝেছি এমবিএ করার পর। তাই আমার জীবনে চলার পথে তাঁর প্রভাব অশেষ, আজীবন।

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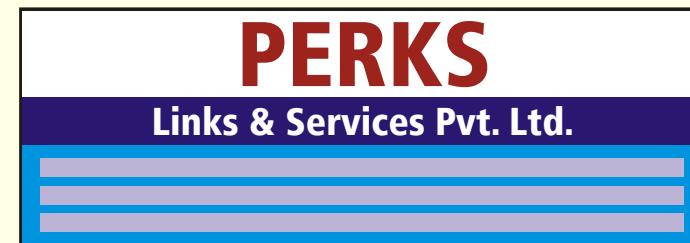
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FOOD

'Paet Pujo' or 'Belly worship'

Paet Pujo' or 'Belly worship' - The relationship of Bengalis with food - of all kinds, is almost one of reverence.

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

So much so that food has become as much as treat to the eyes as the buds.

This new section brings forth some recipes which are pure work of art.

Bon Appetit!

Healthy Snack - Paromita Banerjee

Rinse $\frac{1}{2}$ heaped cup dried chickpeas (120 grams) in water first and then soak in enough water overnight or for 8 to 9 hours. After soaking the chickpeas will double in size and volume.

Next day, rinse the chickpeas in water first a couple of times. Drain all the water and add the chickpeas to a 2 litre stove top pressure cooker.

Add $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt.

Add 1 pinch of baking soda. Adding baking soda softens the chickpeas really well and gives them a melt in the mouth texture.

Add 1.5 cups of water. Pressure cook on a medium heat for 11 to 12 minutes. When the pressure settles down on its own in the cooker, then only remove the lid and check the chickpeas. Mash them with a spoon or with your fingers. You should be able to mash them completely. They should have no rawness in them. You can even taste them and there should be no bite in them. They should melt in the mouth.

If they are not cooked properly, then add some more water and pressure cook for some more time. Drain all the water. Cover and keep aside.

Heat a small pan. Keep heat to a low. Add 3 tablespoons of white sesame seeds. On a low heat stirring often roast sesame seeds. Roast till they become crisp and start crackling. No need to brown them. Let them cool down.

In a food processor, mixer-grinder-blender or food chopper take the roasted sesame seeds. For a food chopper use a really good and sturdy food chopper.

- Add 1 teaspoon chopped garlic.
- Add 1 to 2 tablespoons of lemon juice
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice works fine for us. You can add more lemon juice if you like the tangy taste.
- Add 4 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil or about $\frac{1}{4}$ cup

- Sprinkle salt as per taste. While adding salt do note that the chickpeas will also have some salty taste in them as salt was used when cooking chickpeas. So add less salt first. Later you can add more salt if required.

- Add 1 teaspoon cumin powder.

Grind or blend to a fine or semi-fine consistency. Grind or blend till smooth and light. If you are unable to grind, then add 2 to 3 tablespoons of water. Hummus is ready now and all you need is to scrape the jar and place hummus in a serving bowl or bowls. While serving make a round pattern with a spoon on the hummus. Drizzle a bit of extra virgin olive oil. Sprinkle paprika or red chilli powder or black pepper powder or any of your favourite spice powder.

Serve hummus with pita bread / Laavash or with steamed or roasted veggies. The remaining hummus can be stored in an air-tight container in the refrigerator and used later.

Its an amazing, healthy snacks for kids.



"টুকিটাকি" - Snacking Time

- Sharmishta Bhattacharya

উপকরণ: ফুলকপি কুড়োনো এককাপ, লাউয়ের খোসা কুচোনো হাফ কাপ, আলুর খোসা কুচোনো হাফ কাপ, পালং শাক কুচোনো এককাপ, রাঁধুনি $\frac{1}{8}$ চা চামচ, কাঁচা লঙ্ঘা থেঁতো আদা থেঁতো স্বাদমত, ভজা বড়ি $\frac{7}{8}$ টা, $\frac{1}{8}$ চা চামচ, হলুদ গুঁড়ো, নুন স্বাদমত।

প্রণালী: পাত্র গরম হলে প্রথমে ঘি দিয়ে দিন। এরপর তাতে রাঁধুনি ফোড়ন আদা লঙ্ঘা থেঁতো দিয়ে একেএকে লাউয়ের খোসা, আলুর খোসা দিয়ে কিছুক্ষন নাড়াচাড়া করে ঢাকা দিয়ে রাখুন। খোসা একটু নরম হয়ে এলে তাতে কুড়োনো ফুলকপি দিয়ে আবার ঢাকা দিয়ে কিছুক্ষন রাখুন। ফুলকপি নরম হতে এলে তাতে পালংশাক দিয়ে দিন। নুন হলুদ দিয়ে আবার কিছুক্ষন ঢাকা দিয়ে রাখুন। মশলা ভাল করে মিশে গেলে ভাল করে নাড়াচাড়া করে মনমত পাত্রে ঢেলে ওপর থেকে বড়ি ছড়িয়ে দিন। গরম ভাতের সাথে পরিবেশন করুন।

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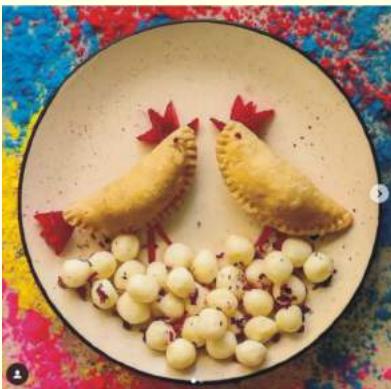
Food Art - Natasha Ganguly



Curd Rice with Salad



Mini dosa roses made with beetroot and spinach batter



Holi-some treats
Gujiyas & Mini Rasgullas



Orange & Pomegranate
footsteps



Cheese mouse & Cherry to
mato ladybugs

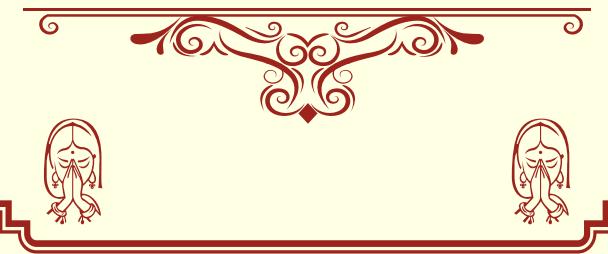


Bunny Special
Made with Idlis, Coriander, Chilli Chutney,
Omelette, Carrots and Cheese

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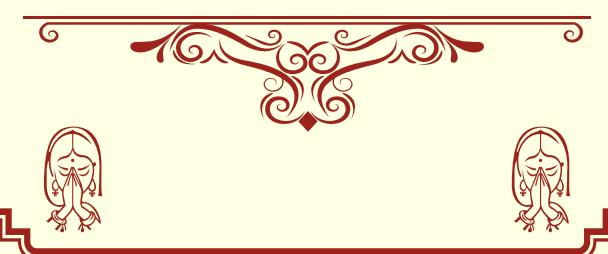
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Damodar Press



Superpowers of a different kind

Actions speak louder than words, is a phrase everyone has heard and is familiar with. But this phrase hit me at an all new level when I entered this restaurant with a unique concept.

It was a warm and humid day. And we entered this place looking for some calm and quiet. Needless to say, we got all that we were expecting and also a big dollop of the warmth of the serving staff. We were shown to our table by the manager and were introduced to this young man named Pramod, who is deaf and who would be taking care of us. He introduced himself to us in sign language. And that was the beginning of an absolutely enchanting afternoon. We all were eager to learn this sign language and Pramod was doubtlessly an excellent teacher.

The whole afternoon was filled with fantastic food and some great conversations sans words. Pramod, born deaf, did his schooling from a deaf school in Mumbai. After his education, he did some odd jobs and ended up as a server at Madeira & Mime. And has been with them ever since.

Pramod was an excellent server who made us feel immensely welcome and at home. The manager explained that they employ only deaf waiters, and



how the ordering worked, and told us that he would be available any time there was a communication gap. But there was hardly any need for that. That's how simple and easily navigable the menu was, we could use the sign language to order the dishes or simply point to the dish in the menu. And I was quite intrigued at myself that I could communicate seamlessly with him even without knowing the ABC of sign language.

The place didn't scream but rather whispered gently that one could come here to relax, unwind, sit back and enjoy the eclectic mix of delectable food and fascinating cocktails. The ambience was amicable and pleasant but it was the servers who added copious amounts of warmth to the place. It was a delight to interact with them. The way they were going about their work with an effortless smile on their faces was heart-warming indeed. They were having a friendly banter amongst themselves and unbeknownst of us we ended up laughing along with them. The serving staff added their own personal charm and panache to the atmosphere. And it was magical to say the least.

The back of their shirts had this saying- I KNOW SIGN LANGUAGE. WHAT IS YOUR SUPERPOWER? What's yours? And that is pretty accurate to say that they were indeed people with superpowers, ordinary



people living their lives in extraordinary ways. They were just regular people teaching us, subliminally, how to live life in a special way. And that is the kind of superpower the world needs more of.

It was a warm and humid day which ended in the most heart-warming way. And how can we not click a picture with all of those people with superpowers, right? And so we did. And our server, Pramod, asked us, in sign language, if we were going to post the picture. When we replied in an affirmative, he shared his Instagram handle with us and asked us to tag him. Well, when I did tag him, I found that he has huge number of followers on Instagram, much much more than my account. And I wasn't surprised at all, remember those superpowers, right?

I saw that Pramod was following a page which was of a salon, Mirror & Mime where the services were provided by SHIs. Now I was intrigued. And after going through their page, I knew I had to visit them and see for myself how the experience would be.

I made an appointment with Mirror & Mime for the subsequent week. I was pretty excited and curious as to what it would entail. But one thing I was sure of was that it would be an impeccable experience because I knew it was served by people with Superpowers.



On the said day, when I entered the salon, the same warmth engulfed me. The manager greeted me and explained the concept of the entire salon. The beauticians and hair stylists were SHIs and they would be the ones giving the services. I was then introduced to Sheetal, who would be giving me a facial. She welcomed me in sign language and a beautiful smile. The manager then told me that in case there was something I wanted to communicate, there was a bell placed in the facial room and I could ring it and one of the speaking staff would come to the aid.

And trust me, there was never any need for me to ring the bell. Sheetal was extremely proficient at her job and the facial she gave me was outstanding. I walked out of the room thoroughly relaxed and feeling fresh. Now it was time for my hair spa. And Deeksha was going to be my hair expert. I was super impressed with the care and attention and dexterity with which she handled my spa treatment, the whole time with this lovely smile on her face. It sure was a wonderful experience with wonderful people. And I was a satisfied customer with a perfect spa day.

One thing I noticed is that people with superpowers, both, at the restaurant and also at the salon, was their smile. And it was not a fake put on smile for the customers or patrons, but a heartfelt, genuine smile that reached their eyes, always and every single time. They are a happy lot, working alongside us, and making this world a lot brighter and more cheerful, by just being themselves in their actions. And actions do speak louder than words, and we all know that.

As I reached home, I couldn't help but use Google to search for some statistics. To my amazement, I found that India has almost 13mn employable deaf people and a dismal 15% had formal jobs. The reasons were simple – no one to train them, no one wants to employ them, and even if employed, no one wants to include them. Not because it is difficult. Just because they don't know how. And here are two organisations that have literally created businesses around deaf people, not by just including them, but rather including speaking people into the other world. SHIs are highly efficient because they deliver from memory and not by logic. So once well trained, there is little chance that they miss out or make mistakes unlike speaking people.

Only if there are more organisations like Madeira & Mime or Mirror & Mime who realise the potential of SHIs and their skills and offer them jobs that don't need them to use the regular talking skills and still work super efficiently, and most importantly - without compromising on their productivity. My study revealed that they are best suitable for roles in hospitality, logistics, and professional services.

The Author is a die-hard fan & a regular customer of Madeira & Mime restaurant and Mirror & Mime salon

With Best Compliments from



PTC
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Rejoice... You're a Survivor! - Debasish Banerjee

Congratulations,

You are being awarded the title of "Survivor of the Century"

-Authorities on Planet Earth

All people reading this, I am referring to the physical, flesh & blood humans, and not ectoplasmic envious beings from another world who haven't been as lucky, as truly deserving recipients of the above title.

Each of us are true winners, people who have survived three or perhaps more waves of the apocalyptic pandemic that engulfed us over the past few years and wielded enough power to end our world as we know it.

And, winners should celebrate... which they are doing, and how!

The human race is back with a bang, squeezing as much out of their life on Earth as they can. It's all around for us to see, experience, and feel good (or bad) about.

People are traveling like never before

Despite pandemic-related travel restrictions and lockdowns in certain parts of the world, like China, international tourism is seeing a strong and rapid rebound. 2022 recorded over 300 million international trips worldwide until June, with numbers slated to go up much faster in the year's second half.

In India, places like Jammu & Kashmir and Sikkim are experiencing unprecedented tourist interest, and are set to break all records by the end of this year. People are just waiting for an excuse to go out. All of us would have experienced that sense of 'jealousy' when our friends keep posting those 'pouty' selfies from their exotic vacations on Facebook & Instagram.

Cinema is back in fashion, at least the South ones

People are flocking to movie theatres with a vengeance, though they have become much more discerning and selective due to the plethora of options presented by the ongoing OTT Television revolution.

This year saw the release of two of the biggest blockbuster movies in Indian cinema - **KGF Chapter 2 and RRR**, both grossing over Rs. 1,200 crores worldwide, and are now among the top 5 highest-grossing films ever in Indian movie history.

Despite the failures of some highly-anticipated Bollywood releases, the South Film industry seems to have salvaged India's reputation for producing big, successful movies.

Weddings are back!

People seem to have finally found the right moment to get married. Weddings being more of show-off events, a low-key, limited-guests pandemic wedding just ain't cutting the ice!

In the US alone, the number of weddings in 2022 is set to cross a record 2.6 million, as most couples had kept their plans on hold due to so many restrictions posed by the pandemic.

India, by sheer numbers, will be a leading market for weddings this year with over 10 million weddings forecast for the year. So, hard luck if you aren't getting invited to at least a few weddings this year!

Sports is back in action

This year has been a landmark year for Indian sports, with other sports and events playing catch-up with cricket. India's stellar performance at the Birmingham Commonwealth Games is helping sports like badminton, hockey and wrestling rise several notches on the Indian sporting ladder.

Cricket, which became a major 'pandemic casualty' is back with a bang, with a highly successful IPL 2022, and big tournaments including the T20 World Cup in Australia slated to be held later in the year. IPL too,

continues its charm, with telecast rights getting lapped up for a mind-boggling \$6.2 billion recently.

Shopping at Real Stores

Offline brick-n-mortar retailers are thanking their stars, as shoppers are rediscovering the joy of shopping at a real store. While e-commerce or online shopping accounted for 17% of overall retail sales in 2020-21, the number has dropped to 14% in 2022, indicating that people still love shopping with real touch & feel.

Here in India, the retail boom continues with global brands like Ikea, 7-Eleven, Popeye's Chicken and Victoria's Secret launching and expanding their presence in a big way.

Events and Celebrations

Starved of the joy and fun of celebrating festivals like Holi and Diwali, Indians are going all-out in their celebrations this year. This is the first time in 3 years that we celebrated a proper Holi, Eid and Ganesh Chaturthi.

Festivals like Durga Puja, Diwali and Christmas-New Year promise to be real blockbusters when all of us will be able to let our hair down and celebrate our win over Covid-19.

With the fears of the pandemic finally fading away for real, and traditional 'harmless' diseases like dengue, influenza and normal 'jawr' (fever) coming back, we should all feel happy because we seem to have gone back to our normal lives, finally!

There is a lot of happiness and optimism in the air all around us now, there are many reasons to be thankful, and we should enjoy every moment from now on.

Cheers to life!

Work Life Balance is a Myth - is It?

- Nivedita Dasgupta

"I have told my son I will quit my job, the day you start working."

"The day I have 3 crores worth of savings in my bank account, I will leave for a road trip for 3 months."

"I will volunteer five days a week at the Remedial learning centre in my locality, when I retire."

These are some snippets of conversations I have had with several people over social meet ups in recent times, and a recurrent theme that emerges is that people want to get on with their careers in the 'work' phase and they want to start their 'life' after that. It is because, classically people look at work as a source of sustenance or a means of building a corpus which will aid in sustenance.

And just as we proceed to conclude that people of our generation have accepted their lot, that WORK LIFE BALANCE IS A MYTH, a new-age concept of 'Quiet Quitting' has hit us and its everywhere. The number of articles, posts etc on social media on it is mind boggling, and of course the world is divided somewhere in the centre. Platitudes and theories about choices and consequences are being bandied around and new alliances are being made and old ties are being broken because of the same. For the rare population who have missed this fad, 'quiet quitting' is about putting bare minimum effort at the workplace just to get by. Search google for memes and reels and you will be flooded. So, have the millennials found the magic spot? Is this then the answer to work life balance?

Well, if "getting by" is the motto, then yes. However, some basic questions sneak in. Is it just the momentary mantra of a so-called entitled generation, who already have everything provided for? Is it just the backlash of a set of employees, who are having to deal with a need to hustle in a recessionary economy

post the gruesome pandemic? Has ambition, aspiration, hunger for growth, achievement and several such things become redundant? Is work more than "getting by"? Is work more than surviving without being caught on the radar?

Having a growth mindset in place to be a better person, working hard and achieving the best for ourselves, working towards our vision, having the constant urge to grow and be better, all that is great and is something that I too personally vouch for. But, here's the catch, we'll burn ourselves out very soon chasing all these elements, that contribute to self-improvement, if we don't give ourself permission to take breaks from work and from chasing our goals day in day out. And most importantly there is no right or wrong in it. It depends on the way we look at ourselves. I recently came across an article by Radhika Gupta, MD & CEO, Edelweiss where she concludes her article on hustle culture and the near-violent reaction to it with these words, "P.S. I have lived most of my life doing the long hours, the crazy travel, the quick return from maternity... I choose a hectic pace of life because it makes me truly happy. No regrets.

P.P.S. Don't troll me :)". I loved the PPS, because I know how strongly people feel about it.

So, is WORK LIFE BALANCE REALLY A MYTH? Is it common to believe that this balance cannot be achieved? Is it a difficult task that most struggle with?

I believe the answer lies in the fact as to how we frame the definition of work and what really is the definition of life. I guess the most common definition that people attribute to 'work' is that it is an activity that we undertake to earn money. It could be a job, or a business, or I trade my skills and talent in return of money. Work is livelihood. Work is routine. Work is mundane. Work is boring. On the other hand, what is 'life'? I read somewhere and this definition resonated -'Life a journey from B to D. From Birth to Death, But

what's between B and D? It's a "C" So what is a "C"? It is a Choice. Our Life is a matter of choices, Live well and it will never go wrong'. Living well are different things to different people. We live for fulfilling our aspirations and obligations for ourselves, our careers, our families and our communities, and more often than not, this is not evenly aligned.

When 'work' and 'life' fulfil entirely different purposes, the disengagement becomes palpable and dissonance between the two becomes shrill. When one is passionate about their work, and they are absolutely in love with what they do for a living, then work becomes the most pleasurable aspect of their lives and the line between the two gets blurred. And if someone asks me, what is that one thing which makes a person manage this balance, my answer would be, "to be mindful while making choices and honouring those choices, once they are made". Self-care is not selfish. The paradigm that, looking after ourselves versus others (others may include career, family &even community), is a zero-sum game needs a thorough review. When we look after ourselves; our abilities to understand and look after others, pursue our 'work' goals, and lead a meaningful 'life' is nourished and nurtured. Life is about finding the middle path or the golden mean. In this golden mean, we find that life is not about balance but finding an upward virtuous cycle.



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IOT - Smart Farm - Anindya Chakravorty

The Indian Economy depends on agriculture. More than 50% of the Indian GDP comes out of the farm sector. Therefore, it is imperative that the IT and technology space where Indian IT companies dominate in the world also looks at this sector at home as an apt candidate for innovation.

Any innovation in India's farm sector will result in higher per acre crop yield and thereby increase the disposable income at the hands of the Indian farmer. As you may also know that India tops the world with a gruesome figure of farmer suicides.

Innovation in the farm space can be driven by both botanical and genetic ones, the water and irrigation direction, and labour-saving initiatives. Therein comes the use of IoT for farms.

Broadly it can be categorized into two parts - Seeding, plantation time & Maintenance times. In both, **Internet-of-Things (IoT)** can be used. IoT, as many are aware, is an Internet-enabled network of connections - between devices, equipment, animals, humans and Technology / Software as the backbone - to carry out pre-designed functions without human intervention. Reliance Industries has a use-case of drone-based IoT seeding of large agricultural lands which can be fed by their soon-to-come 5G Networks. This was announced at their recently held AGM, by no less than the Chairman himself.

In the maintenance area, we can look at IoT-based smart watering systems for the farms which are accurate to the extent that only parts of the farm, which actually need water will be watered.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=agj9jWF66Qg> This concept is easy to build and can revolutionize the Indian farm space, also leading to less wastage of precious water resources in the country. We know that tomorrow wars will be on water, including the ongoing one between Ukraine and Russia which was triggered not just by Ukraine's NATO entry wish, but also by Ukraine cutting off water supply to Russian-held Crimea.

This small sub Rs. 1,000 module can make the life of the Indian farmer much easier too, with him able to see when a specific part of his farm would need watering, and then watering only that part through his mobile phone, anywhere in the world.

IoT devices outnumber human population and are multiplying faster than human growth, and are slated to reach 25 billion by 2030 by most estimates.

Can India afford to stay behind?



My Love for Extinct Animals - Daebi Chatterjee

I will be talking about some of my favorite extinct animals. Yes, I am in love with them since whenever I hear or see their stories, I start visualizing and get transferred to their amazing worlds. Too bad that they are no longer there, and if we do not take care of nature we will not have what we see around us today.

Unfortunate that they are not around anymore, but I am ever inspired to bring them back to live, as soon as I become a Paleontologist!

Did you know about the **Megalodon**? This is one of the biggest sharks in possibly the entire history of the world. It was supposedly 60 feet long and weighed 50 tonnes (Imagine the number of zeros in its weight). I am fascinated about its extinction story and that nothing of the Megalodon's remains, apart from its gigantic teeth. How did they go extinct? I am fascinated by its possible reasons that scientists give - Could it have been due to: Its preys going extinct? Or did the Megalodon's preys move to cooler waters where the Megalodon could not follow? Or could it have been an unknown activity that killed off these large animals?

And the one that I fancy the most - do they still exist in the Marianna trench in South Pacific Ocean? Or is the Megalodon the **Black demon shark** in the Sea of Cortez. No evidence of these animals exists apart from tales from fishermen.

And now for some interesting land animals that have gone extinct - The **Mammoths** from Siberia. I really hope and wish that the scientists can bring the mammoths back to life. But will they be able to survive in this new world where temperatures are going up steadily?

I eagerly wait for this miracle!



Star Fairy



Faces of Human

"She sells sea shells on Seychelles' shore"

-Apurva Mukherjee

It all unfolded with one such travelogue printed on the glossy pages of a travel magazine. A couple of years ago, my father discovered paradise on earth. Seychelles had always been on his mental radar ever since. Finally, time and circumstances allowed us to visit this archipelago on 5th August 2022.

Before we delve into our experience, I want to enlighten the readers about this country. Comprising 115 islands in the Indian Ocean, Seychelles is located northeast of Madagascar. It is the only African country classified as a high-income economy by the World Bank. The capital, Victoria, is situated on the island of Mahé. Seychelles was under French rule before becoming a British colony more than a century ago. Since gaining its independence in 1976, Seychelles has become a dream holiday destination thanks to its rich cultural and natural diversity. Creole is spoken by most Seychellois.

When one hears about an island nation, their thoughts typically conjure up the same mundane sight of some sea and some sandy beach with some sunbathers. However, the Seychellois sceneries are all unique; white beaches lining turquoise waters with giant boulders on one side and lush green mountains on the other - totally, a postcard view!

4th August found me and my parents in the sea- a sea of people at the airport! It was exciting to be boarding an aeroplane for the first time after 2018. We arrived in Mahé via Dubai, the following day.

The magnificent sky and the golden sun halfway up seemed to welcome us. After acquiring a visa stamp at the airport, we proceeded from the international terminal to the domestic one. After breakfast at their aesthetically pleasing airport, we waited for a couple of hours, before boarding Air Seychelles which would take us to Praslin, also known as the Garden of Eden.

That flight was quite different from others. The islands looked divine from the air- diverse flora on the

hilly topography with neat clusters of small houses surrounded by the pristine blue ocean. Soon, we reached Praslin, aerially, 42 kilometres away from Mahé. The employees of Acajou Beach Resort warmly greeted us. We had made it a point to try the traditional Creole cuisine all throughout our stay. Red snapper, jobfish, prawns, pork, beef, you name it- we had it!

The next day, we headed for Vallée de Mai Nature Reserve, a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It is renowned for its endemic species of Coco de Mer (*Lodoiceamaldivica*), a type of palm with the largest seed. The gestation period of this palm is similar to that of humans. The local guide introduced us to five other types of palms such as the Lattanyen Lat. We missed seeing the Seychelles Black Parrot but we did spot the popular Takamaka trees and Green Day Geckos. The trail through this forest gave us a dose of wilderness that refreshed our spirits. The swaying branches and rustling leaves sounded like tranquil waves lapping against the coast.

Mount Zimbabwe is the highest point on Praslin. I felt as if I was on top of the world as, I could oversee most of the island from there. Following this, we stopped at a nearby beach. Dead coral fragments beautifully littered the fine white sand. Water from either side of a large rock crashed against it and gave rise to a picturesque landscape.

Our trip would have been incomplete without having the local delicacy- coconut octopus curry with saffron rice! At one of the most beautiful beaches of Praslin- Anse Lazio, as soon as we spread out our beach mat under a shaded place, we made for the water. The salty air and cyan sea gave us a sensory overdose. The waves came back and forth, humming a soothing lullaby for those who were sunbathing. Later that night, I was enthralled by the clear night sky with a full moon wrapped in a blanket of jewel-like stars.

It was the 7th of August and we took a speed boat to Curieuse Island. Strong winds and choppy waters ensured a bumpy ride. Gripping onto the rails and

praying for our safety, we ultimately reached. Seaweed clumps washed up on the beach. The tiny granite island houses more than 300 giant Aldabra tortoises ranging from 0 to 120 years old. We stroked their loose, leathery skin and hard shell. A boardwalk led us through mangroves to the Doctor's House on the other side of the island. Hungry, we were tantalized by the smoke and crackling sounds of the barbecue. Flame-grilled tuna and chicken, rice and lots of salad satisfied our cravings.

We were then taken to the uninhabited island of St. Pierre in the bay of Côte d'Or on Praslin. This rocky islet is the perfect spot for snorkelling. Seychelles has a strong maritime influence. The splash made by the boat cutting through the waves was invigorating. The hotel's evening activities included dinner and Seychellois music performed by local musicians.

A daylong trip to La Digue island was the next on our itinerary. We had an open truck ready for our pickup after a ferry ride from Praslin. We were really amused by the idea of an entire truck being booked for only three people when the driver informed us that it was arranged for only two for the next day! We started off at Anse Source d'Argent. A heavenly abode for travellers, this narrow beach is flanked by bizarrely shaped granite rocks. Perfectly placed are the little souvenir shops, cafes, swings and hammocks. Light rains made our experience special as the wind caused the droplets to brush our skin. The weather was just fine.

The Aldabra Giant Tortoise enclosure and vanilla plantations are popular tourist attractions in the l'Union Estate. Here, we fed these land giants some crimson leaves.

Neighboring this is a 40-metre monolith - the Giant Union Rock. The sea seemed like an opened roll of blue silk fabric. Post lunch, we drove back to the jetty. My father and I rode two rented bicycles around, till our ferry arrived. We explored the locality as the winds came crashing against our faces.

On the 9th, we reached Mahé by their 19-seater flag carrier. Hilton Seychelles Northolme Resort & Spa in Beau Vallon was where we stayed on this most commercial island. I was beyond thrilled to find an infinity pool in our room which fronted the sea. Leaving all my stuff, I headed straight for the pool! Mere words or photographs cannot do justice to the panoramic vista.

We had scheduled a full-day tour of Victoria as well as the other places in Mahé for the next day. Along the way, we laid our eyes upon the elegantly coloured houses below in patches of green and blue. We wandered the streets of Victoria's main square and found the 19th-century Immaculate Conception Cathedral and the Victoria Clock tower. We also visited the only Hindu temple in Seychelles, Arul Mihu Navasakthi Vinayagar which is built in a south Indian architectural style with pastel-coloured deities dawning the walls. There is a small but well-maintained National Museum that provides extensive insight into Seychellois history and culture. The Sir Selwyn Selwyn-Clarke Market selling seafood, spices, local jewellery and clothes was swarming with people. Since tourism is Seychelles' largest sector, the residents were badly affected during the pandemic. Their government played a big role in helping the people monetarily.

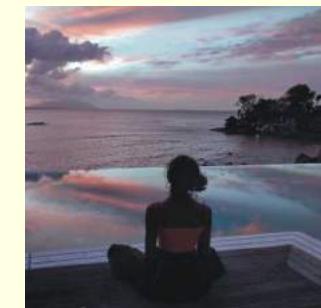
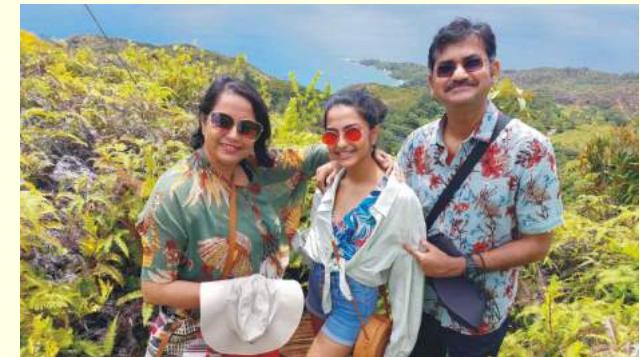
Upon reaching one of the island's highest points, we got a bird's eye view. It was plain breathtaking- little hilly islands, residential and commercial complexes located in the blue expanse. We were able to witness the landing of Viking Air DHC-6-400 Twin Otter at the airport in slow motion. Eden Island is a posh artificial island built on reclaimed land. It has a yacht marina, a mall and multiple hotels and restaurants. Post lunch there, we went to visit the Domaine de Val des Pres - Craft Village. Artisans sell their wares in small vibrantly painted huts.

Subsequently, we crossed the prominent Takamaka Rum Distillery on our way to Seychelles' most famous

artist- Michael Adams, M.B.E. Hundreds of paintings in watercolours, silk screens, calendars and postcards are all the magic that is stored in a handsome white house. Adams' distinct style of scintillating artwork of nature and his other sights has won him international acclaim. This 85-year-old painter and his wife were very humble and warm in their welcome. The Sauzier waterfall marked the end of the day's trip. We reached the hotel room just in time to see the changing hues of the sky; candy floss drifted across an artist's unfinished canvas. The lilac-blue base with peach and neon pink streaks is something truly unforgettable.

During our glass-bottom boat ride the following morning, we passed container ships, windmills, sailboats, surfers and fishing boats. Fish feeding was number one on our agenda. All the passengers were given slices of bread to attract fishes. We saw some blue fish through the glass. In 2016, due to the increased sea temperatures, most of the corals underwent depigmentation. I spotted black and white striped fish, long white fish, and green, brown and white coral underwater while snorkelling. A nature trail in the Ste. Anne Marine National Park of Moyenne island brought us to some peculiar rocks and interesting points.

12th August was when we departed from this beautiful country. After a stopover at Abu Dhabi, we finally reached Mumbai on the 13th. What a fantastic holiday it was! A holiday from worrying about studies, exams, assignments or projects. Despite the cost, you won't regret visiting Seychelles! I'm grateful to my parents for having planned this vacation. It was a much-needed, long-due getaway that rejuvenated our senses.



Paintings - Pranali Narayanan



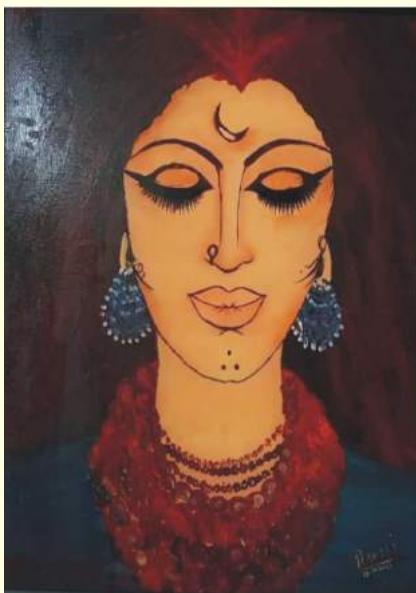
Ma Durga, Child Ganesh & Lord Shiva



Arpan



Ma Yashodha & Kanha



Naari Shakti



Rejuvenation - Swarnali Chowdhury



Damsel - Keya Bhattacharya

Durga Puja - Oishi Chatterjee

Durga Puja is celebrated for four days in a year, when Goddess Durga descends to earth along with her children. On her arrival, she is worshiped and showered with love, similar to a daughter who comes to her mother's place once every year. People look upto her as a mother, as a daughter and as a protector.

My family and I are an integral part of such celebrations, whether in Mumbai or in Kolkata. This is also a time when we meet our relatives and celebrate with all of them. I had the opportunity to spend a few of the pujas at Kolkata. The whole city comes to a halt and people in thousands are on the streets. The city is fully lit up, and every one is dressed in their best traditional clothes to celebrate.

Mumbai has also caught up in terms of the celebrations. There are a lot of Puja mandaps around. This helps me connect to a part of me which I otherwise miss out since I am not in Kolkata. I keep hearing from my parents as to how they would celebrate when they were young. Times change but celebrations don't and the strong bonds of culture definitely does not.

However, the saddest part is Dussera when Ma Durga returns to her abode in Mount Kailas. What starts with Khuti Pujo ends with Bijoya Doshomi. But with every ending there is a hope of new beginnings - and every year we say "Asche Bochor abar hobe" meaning "Next year, once again".

Bagh Kothi - Tadoba Diaries - Santanu Sen

Every jungle has a story. This adventure was like no other-Tracking the most popular tigers of India at the Tadoba Andhari National Park, located in Nagpur district of Maharashtra. This was our second visit to the park.

It had been a while that we were at the jungle and COVID restrictions certainly did not help. It all started with a two-year-old booking that needed to be utilised. So, defying the sizzling summer and the hangover of fairly two hectic months, we, the ever enthusiasts for a jungle safari, set off for Nagpur, the nearest airport for Tadoba, on 28th of April, with a few friends, a group of 5 in total.

The flight to Nagpur was on time and we landed at around 8.30 pm. As we stepped out of our aircraft, were we unconsciously expecting the first smell of the big cat? Or, was the sheer Jungle-mania play tricks with our minds?

After a quick dinner stop spiced up by Bong group cacophony, we the brave 5, headed towards Bagh Kothi, aka our nest at Tadoba. Three hours' drive through the city on a desolate but clear night did not matter because our minds were filled with what lay ahead.

Day 1 - Our first glimpse of the jungle:

Our first safari of this trip started at 5 am the following morning. The zone, Ali Zanza and the sighting goal Chota Matka, Jharni, Bunty and Babli; the stars of this region. Tigers usually have their assumed territory and hence the possibility of specific tiger sightings at a particular gate, supplemented by local intel is always there. We reached the park gate well in advance, eager to be the first ones to enter the jungle and experience the breeze, chill, the smell, the sound

We jumped on to our safari vehicle outside the forest gate, booked for us. I was excited about the first safari, dreaming about what lies ahead. Embarking on a

jungle safari to this tiger reserve I was also eager to see other mammals and reptiles and of course the beautiful birds in the sky as Tadoba is rich in its diversity of forest inhabitants.

Once we entered the gates of the park, I felt a certain thrill in me like never before. The prospect of seeing a tiger gave me butterflies in my stomach. At first, the silence of the jungle was exciting as ever but once you enter the park you can hear certain typical calls of birds and animals that are as soothing and relaxing. One seems to be able to experience a unique sound and smell like nowhere else.

The biting enthusiasm paid off around 7AM, when Choto Matka chose to walk the talk. As we took a turn into a narrow dusty road, we saw him. Oh, what a sight. As he walked out of the bushes ahead of us and we literally drove past him and stopped to behold the beautiful creature from the front. Not that he cared, as he walked past us for some time down the dusty path and into the jungle with his confident, powerful and yet charming trot. Under the shadow of the adjacent trees and at times, under the bright sun; his coat changed colours from brown to bright yellow, criss-crossed with his dark stripes and a long muscular & grand tail to complement. As he started walking away into the forest, we tried manoeuvring our vehicle to get a better view of him until finally he was not visible anymore.

We drove around for a while, spotting deer, sambar and birds, till we stopped in the park for breakfast that our hotel staff was so kind to pack for us that early in the morning. This stop is usually a random clearing with a simple wired fence, approximately 7 to 8 feet in height, with a few stray benches, washrooms and at times attached a settlement of few houses or a one-off place of worship. The food packets that are packed for this journey is quite modest. Also, one does not really care to waste time to eat. Anyway, our jeep pulled up right outside this space and he stepped out for a short pause.

Never did we imagine that Chota Matka was looking for a short recess, as well!!

We had packed up our food box and some of us had already boarded the vehicle, except the daring us! Which is when we saw him leisurely walking towards our pit stop. Oh blimey!! I was a moment of coordinated muscle brain freeze and we were dumbstruck in admiration as we saw him walk past the fence, just a few yards away, as he crossed three parked vehicles. In the next few minutes, we probably shot a thousand photos of Matka. My wife seemed to get this accelerated streak of courage and she followed him for a few steps outside the fenced enclosure, with an unobstructed view, all the while trying to capturing him in her camera and me next to her, capturing the moments on video. The memory of these endless 5 minutes will remain eternally etched in our minds.

On our way out of the forest, we saw a few deer and birds though that memory seems to be blurred by the glamour of Panthera Tigris.

For the evening safari of Day 1, we had booked our safari from Kolara Madanpura gate to go into the Core Zone of the forest and our sighting target this time was Maya, Balram and Sharmili

As if the morning exhilaration was not enough!! It did not take us much efforts to jump back to our jeep at around 4 PM, notwithstanding the scorching sun. The logistics at the forest gate was similar. Though our unreasonable expectations saw no bounds and +40 degrees Celsius just did not seem to matter much.

We drove around a few water bodies, sighted a few exquisite & colourful birds, Chausingga, barking deer and probably the biggest Indian Bison also called the Wild Gaur that I have ever seen. After an hour or so, we reached a water hole which seemed like the most popular evening destination for our tiger friends. It seemed that nearly all the allotted safari vehicles had reached this water hole and its passenger all waiting

in anticipation. Quite a sight to experience, more than 50 people crammed on a few jeeps braving the hot forest for a few glimpses of the king of this jungle. But he was not to show up so easily!!

After a long wait we decided to go around the water hole and wait in the logical path of the tiger's water hole visit. Maybe he has finished his drink for the day and was lazing under a cool shade. Just as we moved ahead, we heard the safari vehicles behind us, rev up and moving. We realised later that the tiger had visit the water hole just a few minutes after we had moved on and all the vehicles were trying to align to his walk back

It was a different experience, all the vehicle rushing up and down, as if they had decided the path of the tiger walk, while some listening for in deadly silence trying to capture the tiger call, usually raised by the deer and the monkeys. And there he was!!

Mataura showed up on the path, right ahead of our vehicle, look a short pause, as if offering us the photo-opportunity in lieu of our long wait and with a fluid grace walked into the tall grasses of the forest, slowly disappearing from our line of sight. As we were craning our necks for the last views, there was a sudden uproar. Now, what was that!!

Juna Bhaiseemed to be following Matka!! She did a similar trip down to the water hole, through the forest clearing and now across our path, where we were parked. Double excitement even though it was a brief encounter. She was probably heading back to her 3 cubs who are now a couple of years old (one male & two females).

Quick trivia: Matkasur is one of the most celebrated tigers of Tadoba, currently referred to as the King of Tadoba; he has fathered the third litter of Maya, the current Queen of Tadoba. His claim to fame is due to his repeated victory over Gabbar, another popular, aggressive and intimidating inhabitant of Tadoba. As the story goes, he has often been seen by Maya, the love of his life. His huge body and a distinct pot-belly

got him his name.

On the way back, we spotted a leopard camouflaged behind a dry rugged foliage and a red terrain. It was at a fair distance and the binoculars gave us a good view. Though the sharp camera lenses did not fail to capture the beautifully patched and spotted coat of the beast.

Day 2, morning safari- The next day our journey was planned through the Belara gate. Today, we were hopeful to see a pair of migrant tigers, new to this area of the forest and the locals.

The luck of sighting another striped charmer was not with us today. Or, maybe he was somewhere around but invisible because of his striped fur, which blends in with the trees.

Our jeep with the driver and the experienced, knowledgeable guide zoomed into the Tiger Reserve and with the curious eyes, were searching for some real adventure like Tiger in front of our jeep! Nothing of that sort happened, though. it was a few hours of mesmerizing experience in a beautiful jungle.

Tadoba is an unusual wildlife reserve that gains its uniqueness because of the southern tropical dry and deciduous beauty it upholds. About 87% of the forest teak comprise of bamboo, ain (crocodile bark), bija, dhauda, hald, salai, semal and tendu. The park is also dotted with patches of lush meadows, and many medicinal climbers and plants. For us it was a day to enjoy the beauty of the dense forests, the beautiful Tadoba Lake, patches of grassy meadows and sprawling valley.

We passed red sandy trails, well-constructed roads and raw paths in the dense forest. It was nothing short of a privilege to see nature's inhabitants in their natural habitat, displaying raw emotions. As someone said, if I have to give up one, I will keep the ear and give the eye. So, true is the fact that it is possible to understand the picture only by smell, but cannot experience smells, just with your eyes. Some of the

beautiful species that our eyes savored during this safari were tiger's dentist, doel, Bulbuli, kingfisher, woodpecker and a few other gems like the owl, eagle, drogma, green bee eater, Indian roller, Lupwig, red headed ibis and black headed ibis, rooster, paradise fly catcher bharadwaj, kingfisher. The crisp and clean air was therapeutic.

Though the tiger eluded us this morning, we came back refreshed and revitalized.

On the afternoon of Day 2, we could not get a safari booking.

Our tour organizer dropped us from the hook at the last moment. Apparently, the forest officials had to entertain senior government officials. Though, we were very frustrated, the forced break worked out well. We took the time out to experience the resort and did a night crawler exploration of the city. In fact, there were quite a few things we found out.

Our resort at Bagh Kothi, really borders the core area of the forest, perched right outside the original Kolara gate, something we realised during our evening walk with Swapnil, our resort owner. Truly, our resort shares a common fence with the forest and the original gate to the forest. Earlier, this gate also served as the shortcut from Tadoba to Chandrapur . As we were walking towards this gate, Swapnil narrated a story on how, a woman forest guard was mauled to death by a Maya, a 10 years old tigress then, around a water body, just around the precincts of this gate. Interesting, this is now the territory of Rudra There are other stories of death of forest guards & labourers. Hence, abundant caution is most essential. Based on his suggestion we took a night drive around the forest, travelling through the Chandrapur area on a rather dark night. Our journey started at 10 PM, Past Kolar and Madnapur and Shirkhada gate, past Gondmoahali Boating resort, our destination was Mul village, while our driver Md Mohin narrated few interesting details of these places.

Day 3: Morning. This time it was the Kolara Gate on a canter vehicle. Our sighting target for our last visit was Rudra - the Great.

The experience of an open canter, with a group of 12 others was very different. While there were a few of the cacophony sorts, a few dressed to the teeth for a few others it was one of their many safaris and their experience spoke. Nonetheless, it was a lovely mix of safari goers. It was clearly a different part of the forest. With a darker hue of red soil, many more water bodies and a distinct smell of moisture.

Patience is bitter, but its fruits are sweet. Or should we say that Anticipation driven assurance. We drove around the forest for quite a while and minds were hitting the snooze button from the excitement and exhaustion of the last two days.

As we manoeuvred through the forest in the last hour of the allotted safari time, we spotted Rudra. He was absolutely stunning and great and big in every sense. He emerged from behind the bushes across a water body and tiptoed into the blue water with a matching swagger that only matches the swag of a King. At times waist high and in other instances all the way to his neck and seemed to be truly enjoying being in the water. His beauty was mesmerizing yet he so dangerous looking. It is said that Rudra is the current King of Tadoba, overthrowing Matkasura.

Behind the glamour & glitz is an unsettling bloodbath, a chaos between the tigers and the survival of the fittest continues.

On our way out, we sighted a few amazing species of birds, a lake whose border is infested with crocodiles and a terrain that will always remind me of a big forest.

The afternoon was the start of our journey back. On the way to the airport, it was only customary to pick up a few boxes of orange barfis from Heera Sweets, at Sadar area, bid goodbye to the city with a promise to come back soon.

I do want to leave a small note about our stay. Our stay

at the resort was extremely comfortable and very well managed by a group of very courteous staff. Bagh Koti is the latest addition to the many resorts around the forest. It is collection of six luxury machan cottages, each with a jungle facing veranda and an amazing machan that gives you feel of an open clear star-studded sky and a deep smell of the jungle.

Before I sign-off from my story on the Land of the Tigers, a few interesting facts. This great forest of Tadoba is named after the tribal god Tadu, who fought against a tiger. The Tadoba-Andhari Tiger Reserve part of the Chandrapur District is Maharashtra's oldest & largest National Park. Tadoba National Park was created in the year 1955. The Andhari Wildlife Sanctuary was formed in the year 1986 and was amalgamated with the park in 1995 to establish the present Tadoba Andhari Tiger Reserve.

It has six entry gates leading into three core zones - Moharli, Tadoba North Range, and Kolsa South Range, covering approximately 1700 Square Kms. It is believed to house over a tiger population of 100 and home to other mammals, including Indian leopards, wild dogs, sloth Bear, Nilgai, barking deer, sambhars, jungle cats, etc. and other species like the marsh crocodile and India Star Tortoise and reptiles like the Indian Cobra and the Russell Vipers and close to 200 species of birds like Grey-headed Fish Eagle, Crested Serpent Eagle, Peacock and, Jewel Beetles, Wolf Spiders, all famous and wildly seen rich in flora and fauna. The park is open for visitors from 15th October to 30th June every season and remains full-day closed on every Tuesday. Private vehicles are not allowed and one has to hire government approved open top Gypsy vehicle at the forest gate. The number of vehicles & visitors are restricted so make sure that you have made your reservation well in advance.



A matter of Perspective - Jayanta Kar

Our home, planet Earth, is made up of vast expanse of oceans, some of abyssal depths, majestic & imposing mountain ranges, dense rain forests, parched barren deserts, desolate icy continents and so much more. Measuring 40,000 Kms around the equator, our planet is large.

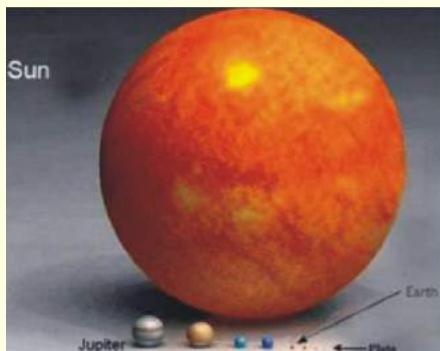


Or is it?

If the earth is large, then Jupiter, the largest planet of our solar system, is huge! So huge, that approximately 1200 earths can easily fit inside Jupiter. In fact, The Great Red Spot, the storm raging in Jupiter for over 400 years, is bigger than the earth.

So, if Jupiter is huge, what about our star, the Sun?

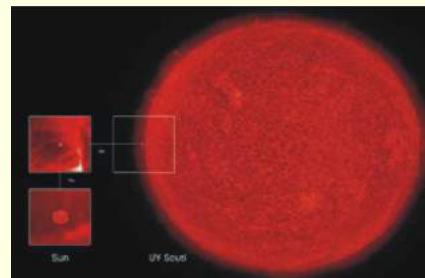
The Sun is so large that approximately 1.3 million earths can fill into it. And if that is not enough, the sun accounts for almost 99.86% of the mass in our solar system. Now that is indeed massive!



The Earth is but, just a dot

Or is it?

Our home Galaxy, the Milky way, is a moderate sized galaxy and home to an estimated 300 billion stars, each with their own set of planets, satellites, asteroids and so on. Supposedly, the largest star in the Milky way is one named **VY Canis Majoris** which is approximately 1500 times bigger and 270,000 times brighter than our sun. That is undoubtedly big but, the **largest known** star in the universe is one named, **UY Scuti**. Perspective goes for a toss when you try to imagine that, almost **5 billion suns** could fit inside a sphere, the size of UY Scuti.



*The Sun,
barely a pixel.*

Another entity in the universe is as mysterious, as terrifying and as humongous as anything can be - The Black Holes!!! Armed with infinite gravity, any form of matter including light cannot escape its clutches once close and hence the name - 'Black' holes. These exist in various sizes.... from extremely small ones (say the size of a city) to Supermassive ones, particularly like the one at the centre of our Galaxy. Named 'Sagittarius A', this monster is 4.3 million times the size of our sun and growing - with its insatiable appetite for matter of all kinds. If that is our largest, then the largest known Supermassive Black hole in the Universe resides in a faraway galaxy and that monster of monsters, is **130 billion kms in diameter** and could gobble in, over **20 billion suns!!!** Well, Sagittarius A is truly a midget in comparison! Fortunately, as on date, there are no 'Black Holes' in the immediate vicinity of our solar system. So, chances of us being 'spaghetti-zed' is almost non-existent - at least for now!

Now some perspective on distances.

Our solar system extends to just about 6.5 billion kms from the Sun which is a paltry 0.0007 Light years(1 Light year equals approx. 1 trillion kms). The star nearest to us, after our sun, Alpha Centauri, is just about 4 Light years away. At maximum speeds of current space-ships, it may take us around 30,000 years to get there. Our immediate galactic neighbour, the Andromeda, with about a trillion stars, is just about 2.5 million Light years away. Incidentally, the Milky way & the Andromeda are on a collision course, rushing at each other at a speed of approximately 500,000 kms an hour. At this speed, the collision is likely to happen in about 4 to 5 billion years. Sadly, humans are not going to be around to witness that cosmic spectacle or cataclysm.

While the Milkyway measures approximately 120,000 Light years end-to-end, the largest galaxy discovered till date, **Alcyoneus**, is over **16 million Light years** across!!! While the Milky way contains roughly 300 billion stars, the Alcyoneus, is home to an estimated 100 trillion stars.



*The Milky
way Galaxy*



*The
Alcyoneus
Galaxy*

The recently launched James Webb Space telescope brought us pictures of a small patch of sky containing thousands of galaxies, billions of light years away. How large is this patch of sky? As large as a grain of sand held at an arm's length!! One will never know if these galaxies still exist as light from them have travelled billions of years to reach us. Yet, the fact that we see them, only blows away our mind on the size & infiniteness of the cosmos.



Cluster of distant galaxies in small patch of sky

In the recent past, scientists have strongly hypothesized on the concept of Multiverse - or multiple universes, (as if one wasn't enough) each separated from another, each distinctly different, each with its own set of galaxies, stars, planets and so on.

In context of the unfathomable vastness of the universe, that presumably came about from an infinitely dense point, 13.8 billion years ago, we Homo Sapiens hardly assume any significance. We appeared on the scene approximately 200,000 years ago and who knows may not be around after a few thousand years. Well, with the kind of abuse we inflict on our planet, our shelf-life as a specie, could barely be in hundreds!

Our home planet will of course live on, for another 4 to 5 billion years but we humans, who pride ourselves to be masters of all we survey, to be the know-all and end-all of everything, with our bloated egos, our pettiness and with all our self-conceived aura - are hopelessly stacked against this gargantuan play of the cosmos. So, preachy as it may sound - while we are around for this extremely short span, may we live and let-live, love, smile, laugh, embrace, touch, share, care for one another and for mother nature in our own little ways.

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A festive Durga Puja card with a red background. In the center is a white decorative frame containing a colorful illustration of Goddess Durga with four arms, wearing a tall, ornate crown and a blue sash. She has a red bindi and is surrounded by yellow floral garlands. Below the frame, two lit oil lamps (diyas) are placed on either side of a circular logo. The logo features a stylized building structure above the word "MANISH" and "CONSTRUCTION" below it. To the left and right of the central image are vertical columns of yellow floral garlands. At the bottom, there is a decorative border with intricate patterns. The text "With Best Compliments From:" is written above the logo, and "MANISH CONSTRUCTION" and "Proprietor Manish Nishad" are written in large, bold, white and yellow letters respectively. Contact information is provided at the bottom: Email: manishcons.1957@gmail.com and Mobile No.: +91 76666 98676. Two small white icons of hands joined in prayer (namaste) are located at the bottom corners.

Thoughts & Reflections - Gayatri R Chowdhary

The infinity loop

Is this what life is going to be about? A repeating loop of events?

Or do we feel so because of social media?



Watch people trying to stay relevant, become relevant, achieve glory, have it all only to detox their way out of it. Flames flirting over Instagram stories, upping their simping game, moving over from the talking stage, to majorly crushing on each other, getting all high on vibes and then closing their chapter.

A good time ends, life goes on and on and on and on and on and another song trends on Instagram. A music that never took off that well suddenly hits the top 10. A music that you swore you'd never succumb to becomes an earworm and you find yourself grooving to it as you swipe up.

Netflix catches your attention and you watch a nice series that you can finally brag about to your friends who kept debating about it all weekend only to find out that they discovered another cool one. You put up a meme on your IG Story and people respond to it, reactions keep coming in until they stop.

And then you're left with a void - that's okay, life goes on and on and on and on and you look up. You're in the bus, you look around; everybody around is on their phone. They're all a part of the same loop that you are in. The same loop that you and I will continue being in until; well, until, a song long forgotten becomes a trend and joins the loop.

We're all in this. We're all in the same loop.

Is this what life is going to be about? A repeating loop of events? Or do we

Healing



One of the best feelings in the world is when you feel the nectar of healing all across your senses. You're happy by yourself and feel the love that you receive from the people who love you. You're no longer forcing emotions, friendships and relationships. You acknowledge that everything that has happened in your life during this entire period - whether good or bad has led you to this peaceful version of yourself. You understand that things and people change for you when you change your perspective towards them. You are free. Free from your past, from regrets, guilt, mistakes. Free from unwanted desires. Free from that baggage you carried all along. You're free and you feel the beauty within yourself. You feel beautiful inside-out. This feeling is not far away.

Just hang in there. Don't give up. You're almost there. You're almost there.

A thousand heartbeats

*A glimpse it was supposed to be -
a mere reflex of an action,
that the eye beholds,
when it comes across another form.*

*A glimpse that turned into a thousand heartbeats,
leaving me smitten after a very long time,
as though I came across a magical being.*

*Eyes so dark, if I had another glance,
I'd surely discover the universe in them.*

*An aura so, so bold, strong and mystical,
as though he were sent from paradise.*

*A glimpse that turned into a frozen moment,
leaving me asking for yet another glance.
Just another glance.*

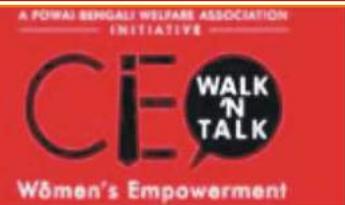
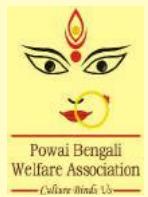
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Glimpse of visitors in a typical evening



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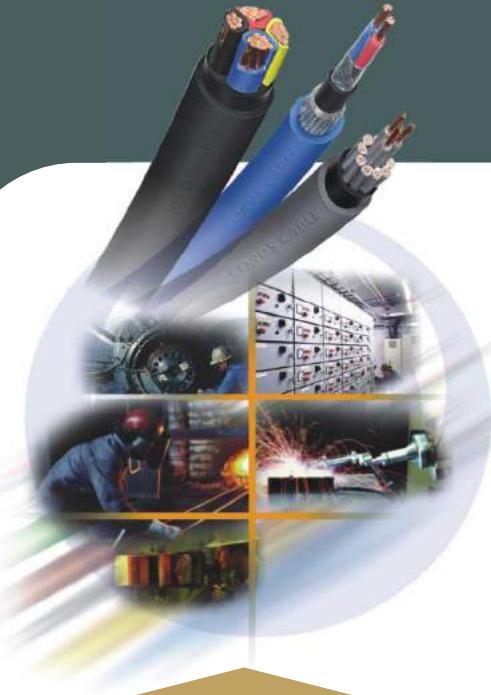
Aparna Mondal for the beautiful Cover painting

*Ashoke Mukherjee, Jaideep Nandi, Gautam Chatterji, Santanu Sen
for the frozen moments*

Members & their families for the literary contributions

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