

LET'S
HANGOUT
GHAR PE!

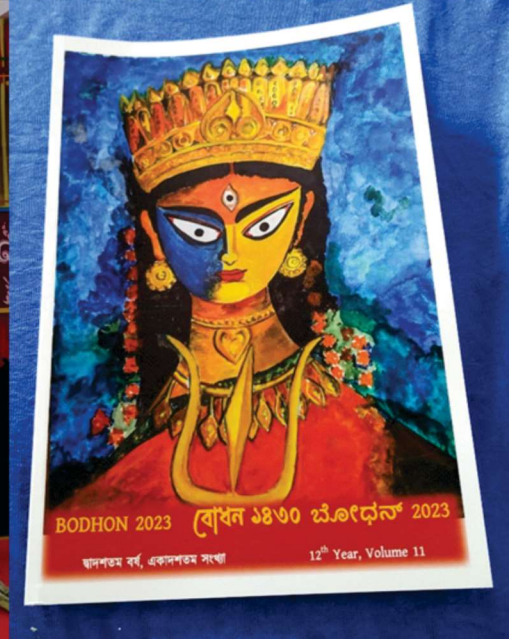
Crompton

A family of four (mother, father, and two children) are sitting on a sofa in a living room, smiling. A red outline of a light bulb is drawn around them, symbolizing the idea of hanging out at home. To the right, a collection of Crompton lighting products is displayed, including a round ceiling light, a square ceiling light, a round wall light, a rectangular wall light, a small table lamp, a large floor lamp, a standard incandescent bulb, a CFL bulb, and a long LED tube light.

बोधन २०२४

BODHON 2024 13th Year, Volume 12 **ಬೋಧನ 2024**

UTSAV 2024



বোধন ১৪৩১

ত্রয়োদশ বর্ষ, দ্বাদশ সংখ্যা
উৎসবের একান্ত নিজস্ব
পূজাবার্ষিকী



BODHON 2024

13th Year, Volume 12

উৎসব প্রতিষ্ঠানের পক্ষ থেকে
দুর্গা পূজা উপলক্ষে প্রকাশিত

A Publication from UTSAV
Socio Cultural Association
for Durga Puja

এই সংখ্যায় যা আছে

দুর্গাপূজা ও উৎসব

সভাপতি ও সাধারণ
সম্পাদকের শুভেচ্ছা বার্তা,
২০২৩ বাৎসরিক রিপোর্ট,
সদস্য তালিকা, পূজা নির্ঘণ্ট,
অনুষ্ঠান সূচী, উৎসবের
সামাজিক কর্মকান্ড

বাংলা ও ইংরাজি কবিতামালা

দুটি মধুর ছোটো গল্প

ভ্রমণ কাহিনী - দিল্লি,
ড্যানিউব্, আফ্রিকা, দার্জিলিং,
ভদোদরা, ক্রোএশিয়া

রম্যরচনা- বাংলা ও
ইংরাজিতে রচিত চমকপ্রদ
প্রবন্ধাবলী

সম্পাদকীয়

নারীশক্তি উন্মেষের সূচনাক্ষণই হল দুর্গাপূজা যেখানে নারী লড়াই করে সমাজের আসুরিক শক্তির বিরুদ্ধে। এই সংগ্রামে অবশ্যই তার সহায়ক সমাজের সমস্ত শুভবুদ্ধি সম্পন্ন মানুষ যারা অস্ত্র দিয়ে, অভেদ বর্ম আর নানান অলংকার দিয়ে নারীকে এগিয়ে দেবে বিজয়ের পথে।

দেবীর সাথে মহিষাসুরের প্রবল সংগ্রামের চূড়ান্ত ক্ষণে রণক্লান্ত দেবী মধু পান করতে করতে বললেন -

গর্জ গর্জ ক্ষণং মূঢ় মধু যাবৎ পিবাম্যহম্ ।
ময়া ত্বয়ি হতেহত্ৰৈব গর্জিষ্যন্ত্যাশু দেবতাঃ ॥

অর্থাৎ, হে মূর্খ যতক্ষণ আমি মধু পান করছি ততক্ষণ তুমি আশ্ফালন করো, যখন আমি তোমায় বধ করব, দেবতারা উল্লাস করবে। এখানে দুটো জিনিস বিশেষভাবে লক্ষণীয়, প্রথমতঃ তাঁর আত্মপ্রত্যয়। প্রায় সমানে সমানে যুদ্ধ চলছে তবুও তিনি দৃঢ় বিশ্বাসী যে জয় তাঁরই হবে কারণে এই সংগ্রাম অশুভ শক্তির বিরুদ্ধে শুভশক্তির। এই আত্মপ্রত্যয়ই আজকের প্রতিটি নারীকেই দুর্গা করে তোলে। দ্বিতীয়তঃ, এত পরিশ্রম, জীবন সংশয় করা সংগ্রামে জয়লাভের আগেই তিনি সেই জয় উৎসর্গ করলেন তাঁর সাথীদের, একবারও বললেন না যুদ্ধে জয়লাভ করে আমি নিজে উল্লসিত হব। আমাদের ঘরের দুর্গারাও এমনি প্রতিনিয়ত নানা ছোট-বড় সংগ্রামে জয়লাভ করে তা অবলীলায় উৎসর্গ করে সংসার ও সমাজের কল্যাণে, আর নিজেরা অনেক সময়ই থেকে যায় অন্তরালে। সময় এসেছে তাদের এই অবদানকে শ্রদ্ধা জানানোর।

দুর্গাপূজা শুধুমাত্র ধর্মীয় বা সামাজিক অনুষ্ঠান না, এটা একটি নিত্য পালনীয় অভ্যাস যা নারী শক্তির জাগরণ, তাদের সম্মান প্রতিষ্ঠার দ্যোতক। যেদিন আমাদের সমাজে নির্ভর্যারা মহিষাসুরের ভয় কাটিয়ে নির্ভয়ে নিজেদের পথে চলতে পারবে, যেদিন তাঁদের অভয় হস্তে সমাজকে রোগমুক্ত করতে পারবে, সেদিনই সার্থকতা পাবে দুর্গাপূজা - এক দুর্গার প্রকাশ ঘটবে নব কোটি মূর্তিতে।

জগৎ জননী মায়ের কাছে প্রার্থনা করি সবাই যেন ভালো থাকি, সুস্থ থাকি - দেহে, মনে ও প্রাণে;

সর্বস্বরূপে সর্বশেষে সর্বশক্তি সমন্বিতে ।
ভয়েভয়ন্তাহি নো দেবী দুর্গে দেবী নমঃস্তুতে ॥

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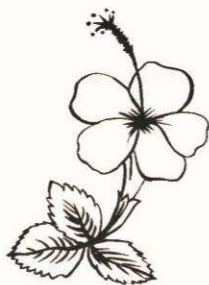
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Message from President of Utsav

Dr. Nilanjana Basu



Dear Members and Well-wishers,

It is with great pride that I welcome you to the 12th edition of *Bodhon*, our annual magazine that captures the joyous spirit and emotions behind organizing Durga Puja at UTSAV Bangalore. We are honoured to uphold the legacy of a group of like-minded Bengalis who came together to carve a niche and establish a special place in Bangalore's ever-expanding scene of Bengali festivities.

` In its early years, UTSAV worked hard to build a cultural and social base in the vibrant neighbourhood of J.P. Nagar, starting with just a small group of members and followers. From those humble beginnings, we have grown immensely, emerging as a leading organization among the many pujas held in and around J.P. Nagar. Our commitment to "Puja for All" remains unwavering, and our efforts to create the most inclusive celebration with meaningful social outreach have made us truly stand out.

` Utsav has always strived to bring out the true essence of Durga Puja through its interesting and harmonious combination of religious, social and cultural activities. Keeping this in mind and staying firm to the moto of "Puja for All", Utsav has actively engaged with all section of the local community to build a stronger multi-cultural festival as Durga puja should be. We organize competitions for students from government schools (Grameena), hold prayer services for the elderly in old age homes, and bring joy to children in government hospital wards by sharing gifts during the festive season. These initiatives allow us to foster a unique bond with the community, distinguishing UTSAV from many other similar celebrations.

` Our dedication to giving back to society is at the heart of our celebrations. Actively engaging with orphanages, old age homes, government schools, and hospitals, we aim to create opportunities for both children and adults to participate. These social activities not only enrich our community but also instill important values in the next generation, teaching them the importance of balancing fun with social responsibility. UTSAV truly embodies the ethos of 'Caring and Sharing'—a value that lies at the core of all celebrations.

` UTSAV also stays deeply connected to the rich cultural heritage of Bengal. Over the years, we have provided a platform for artists representing folk traditions, popular music, bhakti geeti, and the timeless melodies of Rabindra Sangeet. Over the years, our stage has also been graced by renowned theatre and Tollywood personalities. This year, we are thrilled to host one of Bengal's leading contemporary singers, Ms. Shubhomita Banerjee, adding yet another milestone to our journey.

` This year holds special significance for us, as our entire core committee—the executive team—is led by women. In 2024, UTSAV proudly becomes a 100% women-led initiative. In a time when Bengal is rallying for justice and better working conditions for women, the support shown by our members to our women leadership team is commendable. By working together, sharing responsibilities, and fostering mutual respect, we can build a society rooted in peace, harmony, and equality. Let us all commit to upholding respect for ourselves and others, and let truth and justice prevail.

` I invite you to join our celebrations and experience the warmth, joy, and vibrant energy of Durga Puja. UTSAV is more than just a festival—it is an embodiment of the Bengali way of socializing during the Pujas, blending devotion with fun, food, and a strong sense of social responsibility.

` Thank you for your continued support, and I encourage you to share your thoughts and feedback with us. Your input is invaluable as we strive to improve each year, and we are committed to making your experience with UTSAV memorable and enjoyable.

` Wishing you a joyful and blessed festive season, Joy Maa Durga!

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ಉತ್ಸವದ ಅಧ್ಯಕ್ಷರಿಂದ ಸಂದೇಶ ಡಾ.ನೀಲಾಂಜನ ಬಸು

ಆತ್ಮೀಯ ಸದಸ್ಯರು ಮತ್ತು ಹಿತ್ಯಪಿಗಳೇ,

ಉತ್ಸವ ಬೆಂಗಳೂರಿನಲ್ಲಿ ದುರ್ಗಾ ಪೂಜೆಯನ್ನು ಆಯೋಜಿಸುವುದರ ಹಿಂದಿನ ಸಂತೋಷದ ಮನೋಭಾವ ಮತ್ತು ಭಾವನೆಗಳನ್ನು ಸೆರೆಹಿಡಿಯುವ ನಮ್ಮ ವಾರ್ಷಿಕ ನಿಯತಕಾಲಿಕ ಬೋಧೋನ್ ನ 12 ನೇ ಆವೃತ್ತಿಗೆ ನಾನು ನಿಮ್ಮನ್ನು ಬಹಳ ಹೆಮ್ಮೆಯಿಂದ ಸ್ವಾಗತಿಸುತ್ತೇನೆ . ಬೆಂಗಳೂರಿನ ನಿರಂತರವಾಗಿ ವಿಸ್ತರಿಸುತ್ತಿರುವ ಬಂಗಾಳಿ ಉತ್ಸವಗಳ ದೃಶ್ಯದಲ್ಲಿ ಒಂದು ಸ್ಥಾನವನ್ನು ರಚಿಸಲು ಮತ್ತು ವಿಶೇಷ ಸ್ಥಾನವನ್ನು ಸ್ಥಾಪಿಸಲು ಒಗ್ಗೂಡಿದ ಸಮಾನ ಮನಸ್ಸು ಬಂಗಾಳಿಗಳ ಗುಂಪಿನ ಪರಂಪರೆಯನ್ನು ಎತ್ತಿಹಿಡಿಯಲು ನಮಗೆ ಗೌರವವಿದೆ.

ಉತ್ಸವದ ಆರಂಭಿಕ ವರ್ಷಗಳಲ್ಲಿ, ಜಿ.ಪಿ.ನಗರದ ರೋಮಾಂಚಕ ನೆರೆಹೊರೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ಸಾಂಸ್ಕೃತಿಕ ಮತ್ತು ಸಾಮಾಜಿಕ ನೆಲೆಯನ್ನು ನಿರ್ಮಿಸಲು ಉತ್ಸವ ಶ್ರಮಿಸಿತು, ಕೇವಲ ಸದಸ್ಯರು ಮತ್ತು ಅನುಯಾಯಿಗಳ ಸಣ್ಣ ಗುಂಪಿನಿಂದ ಪ್ರಾರಂಭವಾಯಿತು. ಆ ವಿನಮ್ರ ಆರಂಭದಿಂದ, ನಾವು ಅಗಾಧವಾಗಿ ಬೆಳೆದಿದ್ದೇವೆ, ಜಿ.ಪಿ.ನಗರ ಮತ್ತು ಸುತ್ತಮುತ್ತ ನಡೆಯುವ ಅನೇಕ ಪೂಜೆಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಪ್ರಮುಖ ಸಂಸ್ಥೆಯಾಗಿ ಹೊರಹೊಮ್ಮಿದ್ದೇವೆ. "ಎಲ್ಲರಿಗೂ ಪೂಜೆ" ಎಂಬ ನಮ್ಮ ಬದ್ಧತೆ ಅಚಲವಾಗಿ ಉಳಿದಿದೆ, ಮತ್ತು ಅರ್ಥಪೂರ್ಣ ಸಾಮಾಜಿಕ ವ್ಯಾಪ್ತಿಯೊಂದಿಗೆ ಅತ್ಯಂತ ಅಂತರ್ಗತ ಆಚರಣೆಯನ್ನು ರಚಿಸುವ ನಮ್ಮ ಪ್ರಯತ್ನಗಳು ನಮ್ಮನ್ನು ನಿಜವಾಗಿಯೂ ಎದ್ದು ಕಾಣುವಂತೆ ಮಾಡಿವೆ.

ಧಾರ್ಮಿಕ, ಸಾಮಾಜಿಕ ಮತ್ತು ಸಾಂಸ್ಕೃತಿಕ ಚಟುವಟಿಕೆಗಳ ಆಸಕ್ತಿದಾಯಕ ಮತ್ತು ಸಾಮರಸ್ಯದ ಸಂಯೋಜನೆಯ ಮೂಲಕ ದುರ್ಗಾ ಪೂಜೆಯ ನಿಜವಾದ ಸಾರವನ್ನು ಹೊರತರಲು ಉತ್ಸವ ಯಾವಾಗಲೂ ಶ್ರಮಿಸುತ್ತಿದೆ. ಇದನ್ನು ಗಮನದಲ್ಲಿಟ್ಟುಕೊಂಡು ಮತ್ತು "ಎಲ್ಲರಿಗೂ ಪೂಜೆ" ಎಂಬ ಮೋಟೋಗೆ ದೃಢವಾಗಿ ನಿಂತಿರುವ ಉತ್ಸವ, ದುರ್ಗಾ ಪೂಜೆಯಂತೆ ಬಲವಾದ ಬಹು-ಸಾಂಸ್ಕೃತಿಕ ಉತ್ಸವವನ್ನು ನಿರ್ಮಿಸಲು ಸ್ಥಳೀಯ ಸಮುದಾಯದ ಎಲ್ಲಾ ವಿಭಾಗಗಳೊಂದಿಗೆ ಸಕ್ರಿಯವಾಗಿ ತೊಡಗಿಸಿಕೊಂಡಿದೆ. ನಾವು ಸರ್ಕಾರಿ ಶಾಲೆಗಳ (ಗ್ರಾಮೀಣ) ವಿದ್ಯಾರ್ಥಿಗಳಿಗೆ ಸ್ಪರ್ಧೆಗಳನ್ನು ಆಯೋಜಿಸುತ್ತೇವೆ, ವೃದ್ಧಾಶ್ರಮಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ವೃದ್ಧರಿಗೆ ಪ್ರಾರ್ಥನಾ ಸೇವೆಗಳನ್ನು ನಡೆಸುತ್ತೇವೆ ಮತ್ತು ಹಬ್ಬದ ಋತುವಿನಲ್ಲಿ ಉಡುಗೊರೆಗಳನ್ನು ಹಂಚಿಕೊಳ್ಳುವ ಮೂಲಕ ಸರ್ಕಾರಿ ಆಸ್ಪತ್ರೆ ವಾರ್ಡ್ ಗಳಲ್ಲಿನ ಮಕ್ಕಳಿಗೆ ಸಂತೋಷವನ್ನು ತರುತ್ತೇವೆ. ಈ ಉಪಕ್ರಮಗಳು ಸಮುದಾಯದೊಂದಿಗೆ ಅನನ್ಯ ಬಂಧವನ್ನು ಬೆಳೆಸಲು ನಮಗೆ ಅನುವು ಮಾಡಿಕೊಡುತ್ತದೆ, ಉತ್ಸವವನ್ನು ಇದೇ ರೀತಿಯ ಇತರ ಅನೇಕ ಆಚರಣೆಗಳಿಂದ ಪ್ರತ್ಯೇಕಿಸುತ್ತದೆ.

ಸಮಾಜಕ್ಕೆ ಹಿಂದಿರುಗಿಸುವ ನಮ್ಮ ಸಮರ್ಪಣೆ ನಮ್ಮ ಆಚರಣೆಗಳ ಹೃದಯಭಾಗದಲ್ಲಿದೆ. ಅನಾಥಾಶ್ರಮಗಳು, ವೃದ್ಧಾಶ್ರಮಗಳು, ಸರ್ಕಾರಿ ಶಾಲೆಗಳು ಮತ್ತು ಆಸ್ಪತ್ರೆಗಳೊಂದಿಗೆ ಸಕ್ರಿಯವಾಗಿ ತೊಡಗಿಸಿಕೊಂಡಿರುವ ನಾವು ಮಕ್ಕಳು ಮತ್ತು ವಯಸ್ಕರಿಗೆ ಭಾಗವಹಿಸಲು ಅವಕಾಶಗಳನ್ನು ಸೃಷ್ಟಿಸುವ ಗುರಿ ಹೊಂದಿದ್ದೇವೆ. ಈ ಸಾಮಾಜಿಕ ಚಟುವಟಿಕೆಗಳು ನಮ್ಮ ಸಮುದಾಯವನ್ನು ಶ್ರೀಮಂತಗೊಳಿಸುವುದಲ್ಲದೆ, ಮುಂದಿನ ಪೀಳಿಗೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ಪ್ರಮುಖ ಮೌಲ್ಯಗಳನ್ನು ಬೆಳೆಸುತ್ತವೆ, ಸಾಮಾಜಿಕ ಜವಾಬ್ದಾರಿಯೊಂದಿಗೆ ವಿನೋದವನ್ನು ಸಮತೋಲನಗೊಳಿಸುವ ಮಹತ್ವವನ್ನು ಕಲಿಸುತ್ತವೆ. ಉತ್ಸವ ನಿಜವಾಗಿಯೂ 'ಕಾಳಜಿ ಮತ್ತು ಹಂಚಿಕೆ' ನೀತಿಯನ್ನು ಸಾಕಾರಗೊಳಿಸುತ್ತದೆ - ಇದು ಎಲ್ಲಾ ಆಚರಣೆಗಳ ಕೇಂದ್ರಬಿಂದುವಾಗಿದೆ.

ಉತ್ಸವ ಬಂಗಾಳದ ಶ್ರೀಮಂತ ಸಾಂಸ್ಕೃತಿಕ ಪರಂಪರೆಯೊಂದಿಗೆ ಆಳವಾಗಿ ಸಂಪರ್ಕ ಹೊಂದಿದೆ. ಹಲವು ವರ್ಷಗಳಿಂದ, ಜಾನಪದ ಸಂಪ್ರದಾಯಗಳು, ಜನಪ್ರಿಯ ಸಂಗೀತ, ಭಕ್ತಿಗೀತೆ ಮತ್ತು ರವೀಂದ್ರ ಸಂಗೀತದ ಕಾಲಾತೀತ ಮಧುರ ಗೀತೆಗಳನ್ನು ಪ್ರತಿನಿಧಿಸುವ ಕಲಾವಿದರಿಗೆ ನಾವು ವೇದಿಕೆಯನ್ನು ಒದಗಿಸಿದ್ದೇವೆ. ವರ್ಷಗಳಲ್ಲಿ, ನಮ್ಮ ರಂಗಭೂಮಿಯನ್ನು ಪ್ರಸಿದ್ಧ ರಂಗಭೂಮಿ ಮತ್ತು ಟಾಲಿವುಡ್ ವ್ಯಕ್ತಿಗಳು ಅಲಂಕರಿಸಿದ್ದಾರೆ. ಈ ವರ್ಷ, ಬಂಗಾಳದ ಪ್ರಮುಖ ಸಮಕಾಲೀನ ಗಾಯಕರಲ್ಲಿ ಒಬ್ಬರಾದ ಶ್ರೀಮತಿ ಶುಭೋಮಿತಾ ಬ್ಯಾನರ್ಜಿ ಅವರನ್ನು ಆತಿಥ್ಯ ವಹಿಸಲು ನಾವು ರೋಮಾಂಚನೊಂದಿದ್ದೇವೆ, ಇದು ನಮ್ಮ ಪ್ರಯಾಣಕ್ಕೆ ಮತ್ತೊಂದು ಮೈಲಿಗಲ್ಲನ್ನು ಸೇರಿಸಿದೆ.

ಈ ವರ್ಷ ನಮಗೆ ವಿಶೇಷ ಮಹತ್ವದ್ದಾಗಿದೆ, ಏಕೆಂದರೆ ನಮ್ಮ ಇಡೀ ಕೋರ್ ಕಮಿಟಿ - ಕಾರ್ಯಕಾರಿ ತಂಡವನ್ನು - ಮಹಿಳೆಯರು ಮುನ್ನಡೆಸುತ್ತಾರೆ. 2024 ರಲ್ಲಿ, ಉತ್ಸವ ಹೆಮ್ಮೆಯಿಂದ 100% ಮಹಿಳಾ ನೇತೃತ್ವದ ಉಪಕ್ರಮವಾಗಿದೆ. ಮಹಿಳೆಯರಿಗೆ ನ್ಯಾಯ ಮತ್ತು ಉತ್ತಮ ಕೆಲಸದ ಪರಿಸ್ಥಿತಿಗಳಿಗಾಗಿ ಬಂಗಾಳವು ಯಾರ್ಲಿ ನಡೆಸುತ್ತಿರುವ ಸಮಯದಲ್ಲಿ, ನಮ್ಮ ಮಹಿಳಾ ನಾಯಕತ್ವ ತಂಡಕ್ಕೆ ನಮ್ಮ ಸದಸ್ಯರು ತೋರಿಸಿದ ಬೆಂಬಲ ಶ್ಲಾಘನೀಯ. ಒಟ್ಟಾಗಿ ಕೆಲಸ ಮಾಡುವ ಮೂಲಕ, ಜವಾಬ್ದಾರಿಗಳನ್ನು ಹಂಚಿಕೊಳ್ಳುವ ಮೂಲಕ ಮತ್ತು ಪರಸ್ಪರ ಗೌರವವನ್ನು ಬೆಳೆಸುವ ಮೂಲಕ, ನಾವು

ಶಾಂತಿ, ಸಾಮರಸ್ಯ ಮತ್ತು ಸಮಾನತೆಯಲ್ಲಿ ಬೇರೂರಿರುವ ಸಮಾಜವನ್ನು ನಿರ್ಮಿಸಬಹುದು. ನಾವೆಲ್ಲರೂ ನಮಗೆ ಮತ್ತು ಇತರರಿಗೆ ಗೌರವವನ್ನು ಎತ್ತಿಹಿಡಿಯಲು ಬದ್ಧರಾಗಿರೋಣ ಮತ್ತು ಸತ್ಯ ಮತ್ತು ನ್ಯಾಯವು ಮೇಲುಗೈ ಸಾಧಿಸಲಿ.

ನಮ್ಮ ಆಚರಣೆಗಳಲ್ಲಿ ಸೇರಲು ಮತ್ತು ದುರ್ಗಾ ಪೂಜೆಯ ಆತ್ಮೀಯತೆ, ಸಂತೋಷ ಮತ್ತು ರೋಮಾಂಚಕ ಶಕ್ತಿಯನ್ನು ಅನುಭವಿಸಲು ನಾನು ನಿಮ್ಮನ್ನು ಆಹ್ವಾನಿಸುತ್ತೇನೆ. ಉತ್ಸವವು ಕೇವಲ ಒಂದು ಹಬ್ಬವಲ್ಲ- ಇದು ಪೂಜೆಗಳ ಸಮಯದಲ್ಲಿ ಸಾಮಾಜಿಕವಾಗಿ ಬೆರೆಯುವ ಬಂಗಾಳಿ ವಿಧಾನದ ಸಾಕಾರರೂಪವಾಗಿದೆ, ಭಕ್ತಿಯನ್ನು ವಿನೋದ, ಆಹಾರ ಮತ್ತು ಸಾಮಾಜಿಕ ಜವಾಬ್ದಾರಿಯ ಬಲವಾದ ಪ್ರಜ್ಞೆಯೊಂದಿಗೆ ಬೆರೆಸುತ್ತದೆ.

ನಿಮ್ಮ ನಿರಂತರ ಬೆಂಬಲಕ್ಕಾಗಿ ಧನ್ಯವಾದಗಳು, ಮತ್ತು ನಿಮ್ಮ ಆಲೋಚನೆಗಳು ಮತ್ತು ಪ್ರತಿಕ್ರಿಯೆಯನ್ನು ನಮ್ಮೊಂದಿಗೆ ಹಂಚಿಕೊಳ್ಳಲು ನಾನು ನಿಮ್ಮನ್ನು ಪ್ರೋತ್ಸಾಹಿಸುತ್ತೇನೆ. ನಾವು ಪ್ರತಿ ವರ್ಷ ಸುಧಾರಿಸಲು ಶ್ರಮಿಸುತ್ತಿರುವುದರಿಂದ ನಿಮ್ಮ ಒಳಹರಿವು ಅಮೂಲ್ಯವಾಗಿದೆ, ಮತ್ತು ಉತ್ಸವ ನೊಂದಿಗೆ ನಿಮ್ಮ ಅನುಭವವನ್ನು ಸ್ಮರಣೀಯ ಮತ್ತು ಆನಂದದಾಯಕವಾಗಿಸಲು ನಾವು ಬದ್ಧರಾಗಿದ್ದೇವೆ.

ನಿಮಗೆ ಸಂತೋಷದ ಮತ್ತು ಆಶೀರ್ವದಿಸಿದ ಹಬ್ಬದ ಋತುವಿನ ಶುಭಾಶಯಗಳು, ಜಾಯ್ ಮಾ ದುರ್ಗಾ!

UTSAV Executive Committee 2024-25

President	:	Nilanjana Basu
Vice President	:	Rima Roy
		Ranjana Nag
General Secretary	:	Atalanta Banerjee Das
Joint Secretary	:	Sayani Mukherjee
Treasurer	:	Bashari Chakrabarty
Joint Treasurer	:	Mohua De Banerjee
Executive Committee Member	:	Munmun Basu
		Dipten Dey
		Saurabh Dutta
		Biswajit De
		Ratul Das
		Sudipto Soo
		Shyamal Ghosh

Message from General Secretary

Atalanta Banerjee



Dear Members and Well-wishers,

`As we step into the 13th year of our beloved Utsav, we are filled with gratitude and pride for the journey we have shared together. Utsav, much more than just a celebration of Durgapuja, has become a home away from home for all of us – a community that brings together people of all ages, professions, and backgrounds, both Bengali and non-Bengali. Together, we have strived to uphold and celebrate the essence of Bengali culture while embracing the larger community around us.

`At the heart of Utsav lies a deep-rooted desire to mark the victory of good over evil, a central theme of Durgapuja, while also fostering inclusion, unity, and giving back to society. Our efforts have always extended beyond the festivities, whether through our association with a school for the underprivileged, a home for the aged, or a foundation supporting cancer care. These social initiatives are what truly reflect the spirit of our organization.

`This year, as we witness a challenging time in India, where the safety and dignity of women are often questioned, Utsav takes a bold step forward to celebrate the power of women. We are proud to announce that our executive committee for this year's pujo is an all-woman team, reflecting our belief in the strength, leadership, and infinite potential that women bring to society.

`It is with immense pride that we welcome a distinguished woman from the social sector to inaugurate our pujo this year. In addition, we are honoured to host a renowned woman performer, whose talent and presence will grace our stage, reinforcing the message that the voice, strength, and spirit of womankind will always rise above all adversities.

`We look forward to celebrating this year's Durgapuja with all of you, as we come together not only to honour our traditions but also to embrace the power of community, inclusion, and positive change.

ಪ್ರಧಾನ ಕಾರ್ಯದರ್ಶಿ ಉತ್ಸವ ಅವರ ಸಂದೇಶ ಅಟ್ಲಾಂಟಾ ಬ್ಯಾನರ್ಜಿ

ಆತ್ಮೀಯ ಸದಸ್ಯರು ಮತ್ತು ಹಿತೈಷಿಗಳೇ,

ನಮ್ಮ ಪ್ರೀತಿಯ ಉತ್ಸವದ 13 ನೇ ವರ್ಷಕ್ಕೆ ನಾವು ಕಾಲಿಡುತ್ತಿರುವಾಗ, ನಾವು ಒಟ್ಟಿಗೆ ಹಂಚಿಕೊಂಡ ಪ್ರಯಾಣಕ್ಕಾಗಿ ನಾವು ಕೃತಜ್ಞತೆ ಮತ್ತು ಹೆಮ್ಮೆಯಿಂದ ತುಂಬಿದ್ದೇವೆ. ಉತ್ಸವ, ಕೇವಲ ದುರ್ಗಾಪೂಜೆಯ ಆಚರಣೆಗಿಂತ ಹೆಚ್ಚಾಗಿ, ನಮ್ಮೆಲ್ಲರಿಗೂ ಮನೆಯಿಂದ ದೂರವಿರುವ ಮನೆಯಾಗಿದೆ - ಬಂಗಾಳಿ ಮತ್ತು ಬಂಗಾಳಿ ಅಲ್ಲದ ಎಲ್ಲಾ ವಯಸ್ಸಿನ, ವೃತ್ತಿ ಮತ್ತು ಹಿನ್ನೆಲೆಯ ಜನರನ್ನು ಒಟ್ಟುಗೂಡಿಸುವ ಸಮುದಾಯವಾಗಿದೆ. ಒಟ್ಟಾಗಿ, ನಮ್ಮ ಸುತ್ತಲಿನ ದೊಡ್ಡ ಸಮುದಾಯವನ್ನು ಅಪ್ಪಿಕೊಳ್ಳುವಾಗ ಬಂಗಾಳಿ ಸಂಸ್ಕೃತಿಯ ಸಾರವನ್ನು ಎತ್ತಿಹಿಡಿಯಲು ಮತ್ತು ಆಚರಿಸಲು ನಾವು ಶ್ರಮಿಸಿದ್ದೇವೆ.

ಉತ್ಸವದ ಹೃದಯಭಾಗದಲ್ಲಿ ದುಷ್ಟತನದ ಮೇಲೆ ಒಳ್ಳೆಯದರ ವಿಜಯವನ್ನು ಗುರುತಿಸುವ ಆಳವಾದ ಬಯಕೆ ಇದೆ, ಇದು ದುರ್ಗಾಪೂಜೆಯ ಕೇಂದ್ರ ವಿಷಯವಾಗಿದೆ, ಅದೇ ಸಮಯದಲ್ಲಿ ಒಳಗೊಳ್ಳುವಿಕೆ, ಏಕತೆ ಮತ್ತು ಸಮಾಜಕ್ಕೆ ಹಿಂತಿರುಗುವಿಕೆಯನ್ನು ಉತ್ತೇಜಿಸುತ್ತದೆ. ದಿನದಲಿತರಿಗಾಗಿ ಶಾಲೆ, ವೃದ್ಧರಿಗೆ ಮನೆ ಅಥವಾ ಕ್ಯಾನ್ಸರ್ ಆರೈಕೆಯನ್ನು ಬೆಂಬಲಿಸುವ ಪ್ರತಿಷ್ಠಾನದೊಂದಿಗಿನ ನಮ್ಮ ಒಡನಾಟದ ಮೂಲಕ ನಮ್ಮ ಪ್ರಯತ್ನಗಳು ಯಾವಾಗಲೂ ಹಬ್ಬಗಳನ್ನು ಮೀರಿ ವಿಸ್ತರಿಸಿವೆ. ಈ ಸಾಮಾಜಿಕ ಉಪಕ್ರಮಗಳು ನಮ್ಮ ಸಂಸ್ಥೆಯ ಮನೋಭಾವವನ್ನು ನಿಜವಾಗಿಯೂ ಪ್ರತಿಬಿಂಬಿಸುತ್ತವೆ.

ಈ ವರ್ಷ, ಮಹಿಳೆಯರ ಸುರಕ್ಷತೆ ಮತ್ತು ಘನತೆಯನ್ನು ಆಗಾಗ್ಗೆ ಪ್ರಶ್ನಿಸುವ ಭಾರತದಲ್ಲಿ ಸವಾಲಿನ ಸಮಯಕ್ಕೆ ನಾವು ಸಾಕ್ಷಿಯಾಗುತ್ತಿರುವುದರಿಂದ, ಉತ್ಸವ ಮಹಿಳೆಯರ ಶಕ್ತಿಯನ್ನು ಆಚರಿಸಲು ದಿಟ್ಟ ಹೆಜ್ಜೆ ಇಡುತ್ತದೆ. ಈ ವರ್ಷದ ಪೂಜೋಗ್ಗೆ ನಮ್ಮ ಕಾರ್ಯಕಾರಿ ಸಮಿತಿಯು ಸಂಪೂರ್ಣ ಮಹಿಳಾ ತಂಡವಾಗಿದೆ ಎಂದು ಘೋಷಿಸಲು ನಾವು ಹೆಮ್ಮೆಪಡುತ್ತೇವೆ, ಇದು ಮಹಿಳೆಯರು ಸಮಾಜಕ್ಕೆ ತರುವ ಶಕ್ತಿ, ನಾಯಕತ್ವ ಮತ್ತು ಅನಂತ ಸಾಮರ್ಥ್ಯದ ಮೇಲಿನ ನಮ್ಮ ನಂಬಿಕೆಯನ್ನು ಪ್ರತಿಬಿಂಬಿಸುತ್ತದೆ.

ಈ ವರ್ಷ ನಮ್ಮ ಪೂಜೋವನ್ನು ಉದ್ಘಾಟಿಸಲು ಸಾಮಾಜಿಕ ವಲಯದ ಪ್ರಖ್ಯಾತ ಮಹಿಳೆಯನ್ನು ನಾವು ಅಪಾರ ಹೆಮ್ಮೆಯಿಂದ ಸ್ವಾಗತಿಸುತ್ತೇವೆ. ಇದಲ್ಲದೆ, ಹೆಸರಾಂತ ಮಹಿಳಾ ಪ್ರದರ್ಶನಿಯನ್ನು ಆತಿಥ್ಯ ವಹಿಸಲು ನಮಗೆ ಗೌರವವಿದೆ, ಅವರ ಪ್ರತಿಭೆ ಮತ್ತು ಉಪಸ್ಥಿತಿಯು ನಮ್ಮ ವೇದಿಕೆಯನ್ನು ಅಲಂಕರಿಸುತ್ತದೆ, ಸ್ನೇಹದ ಧ್ವನಿ, ಶಕ್ತಿ ಮತ್ತು ಮನೋಭಾವವು ಯಾವಾಗಲೂ ಎಲ್ಲಾ ಪ್ರತಿಕೂಲತೆಗಳಿಂದ ಮೇಲೇರುತ್ತದೆ ಎಂಬ ಸಂದೇಶವನ್ನು ಬಲಪಡಿಸುತ್ತದೆ.

ಈ ವರ್ಷದ ದುರ್ಗಾಪೂಜೆಯನ್ನು ನಿಮ್ಮೆಲ್ಲರೊಂದಿಗೆ ಆಚರಿಸಲು ನಾವು ಎದುರು ನೋಡುತ್ತಿದ್ದೇವೆ, ಏಕೆಂದರೆ ನಮ್ಮ ಸಂಪ್ರದಾಯಗಳನ್ನು ಗೌರವಿಸಲು ಮಾತ್ರವಲ್ಲದೆ ಸಮುದಾಯದ ಶಕ್ತಿ, ಒಳಗೊಳ್ಳುವಿಕೆ ಮತ್ತು ಸಕಾರಾತ್ಮಕ ಬದಲಾವಣೆಯನ್ನು ಸ್ವೀಕರಿಸಲು ನಾವು ಒಗ್ಗೂಡುತ್ತೇವೆ.

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General Secretary Report 2023-24

Saurabh Dutta



It is my privilege to welcome you all again and present the UTSAV activities report for the year 2023-24.

Our USP is welcoming all and embracing with open arms. That's how we have touched the milestone of 12th year of UTSAV.

During the Year we started of with the celebration of Durga puja followed by Lakshmi puja, Kali puja, Saraswati puja and Picnic.

We continued our social engagement through various social activities.

I shall hereby, present the summary of activities of 2023-24 briefly-

1. Durga Puja

- Started off with usual Utsav Prabhat pheri procession on Mahalaya day (14th Oct) alongwith songs & dance from Vijaya Bank layout and surroundings, then headed towards Ranka colony and assembled back to Mulki
- Five day puja activities started from 19th Oct'23 Panchami, with Anandamela and Dandiya
- Puja rituals started from Shashti 20th Oct'23 with and ended on 24th Oct'23 Bijaya Dashami
- Srimat Swami Nityasthananda ji Maharaj he was the chief guest for the Shashti evening. He is the President of Ramakrishna Math, Bangalore. He was accompanied by Swami Athmavidananadaji Maharaj and Swami Harimahimanandaji Maharaj We were truly honoured to have them join us for Maa Durga's Aarti, which was followed by our annual magazine Bodhon's release by our esteemed guests
- Cultural program was performed on each day by our inhouse talents from kids to adults like songs, kids drama, shruti natok, Bandishe band performance and natok - Siddhidata
- Community bhog distribution to one and all visiting our puja premises was gracefully distributed every day afternoon from shashti to dashami.
- Bijaya Sammiloni with Utsav Family & friends was celebrated on dashomi evening at Mulki Hall.

2. Brief of social activities

- Students from Grameena, school for under privileged children participated in drawing competition held Saptami day serving lunch to the children. The children participated with immense enthusiasm, excitement & cheer.
- Our regular contribution to Asha Jeevan – Old age home, for the year 2023-24 was delayed which was actually made in the current financial year where we contributed Adult diapers, distributed fruits, sweets. Utsav members and family spent quality time with the residents, where the residents participated through their performances.

3. Lakshmi Puja

- Was Performed in Aayappa temple hall on 28th Oct'23.
- Our heartily thanks for Participation from Utsav member, friends and visitors
- Community Bhog distribution was done after puja rituals.

4. Kali Puja

- Was performed 12th Nov at Mulki Hall
- Evening was well decorated and lighted from outside park area to Mulki premises.
- Puja rituals was performed gracefully followed by community bhog

5. Saraswati Puja

- Was performed in Ayappa Temple hall on 14th Feb
- Puja ritual was performed in day time per puja schedule and community bog was served.

6. UTSAV Picnic

- Picnic was organized on 14th Jan 2024 at Gari Resort Bidadi, attended by Utsavmembers and friends.
- Everyone enjoyed the fun filled day with multiple adventure rides.

I would specially like to Thank Shri Chandan Mukherjee (Priest) & his companion Shri Koushik Banerjee (Priest) conducting our Durga Puja till last year, Our heartfelt gratitude to them.

Accolades: We were awarded with 3 Sharod Samman awards in 2023-24 – by *Bhartiyo Bongiyo Samaj*;

1. Best Ambience Pujo in Mid Budget category
2. Best Overall Pujo
3. Best Social activity Pujo by Maitryee Bandhan

We Thank to Mulki Sundar Ramshetty Sabhangana Association & Vijaya Bank Layout residents to conduct Grand Celebration of Durga Puja and our strong bond since 2020 onwards & further joyful days to come.

Our Gratitude to all UTSAV members, family members, well-wishers, Sponsors, Patrons to stand with us for Utsav activities throughout the year.

Three cheers for Team UTSAV!!!

Pujor Nirghonto - 2024



Date	Time	Schedule
8th Oct 2024 Tue Maha Panchami	6:00 PM - 7:30 PM 8:00 PM - 9:00 PM	Bodhon, Amantron & Adhibas Anondomela & Dandiya Night
9th Oct 2024 Wed Maha Sasthi	6:30 AM - 7:30 AM 7:00 PM	Kalparambha, Pushpanjali Cultural Programme
10th Oct 2024 Thu Maha Saptami	4:30 AM - 6:30 AM 12:30 PM 6:30 PM 6:45 PM	Pujo & Aratrik, Pushpanjali Bhog Sandhya Arati Cultural Programme
11th Oct 2024 Fri Maha Ashtami	4:00 AM 5:30 AM 6:24 - 7:12 AM	Pujo & Aratrik Pushpanjali, Arotri Sandhi Pujo & Pushpanjali
Maha Navami	9:28 AM 12:30 PM 2:00 PM 6:20 PM 6:45 PM	Pujo & Aratrik Pushpanjali & Bhog Yagna/ Homa Sandhya Arati Cultural Programme
12th Oct 2024 Sat Bijoya Dashami	7:46 AM - 8:50 AM 6:45 PM	Aparajita Puja Cultural Programme
13th Oct 2024 Sun Bisharjan	10:00 AM - 12:00 PM	Sindoor Khela Bisarjan jatra
16th Oct 2024 Wed Kojagori Laxmi Puja	7:00 PM onwards	Pujo, Anjali, Bhog, Arati
31st Nov 2024 Thu Sri Sri Shayama Puja	10:00 PM onward	Pujo, Anjali, Bhog, Arati
2nd Feb 2025 Sun Saraswati Puja	08:30 AM onwards	Pujo, Anjali, Hater Khodi, Arati, Bhog



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UTSAV Members and Well Wishers 2024-25

S.No	Member Name	Family
1	Amit Sarkar	Amit Sarkar & Preeti Singh
2	Amitava Baksy, Indrani Baksy	Amitava Baksy, Indrani Baksy
3	Aninda Chatterjee, Chandrima Chatterjee	Aninda Chatterjee, Chandrima Chatterjee
4	Anjana Roy	Anjana Roy
5	Aradhana Chatterjee	Subhashish Chatterjee, Aradhana Chatterjee
6	Arijit Chakraborti, Bashari Chakraborti	Arijit Chakraborti, Bashari Chakraborti
7	Ashis Dutta Chowdhury, Dalia Dutta Chowdhury	Ashis Dutta Chowdhury, Dalia Dutta Chowdhury
8	Atalanta Banerjee	Sandipan Dass, Atalanta Banerjee
9	Barnalee Sarkar	Barnalee Sarkar, Manas Sarkar
10	Biswajit Dey, Rituparna Dey	Biswajit Dey, Rituparna Dey
11	Dinesh Bez, Mitali Das	Dinesh Bez, Mitali Das
12	Dipten De, Mohua Banerjee	Dipten De, Mohua Banerjee
13	Dr Pinaki Biswas	Dr Pinaki Biswas, Dr Nalini Biswas
14	Kalyan Mukherjee	Kalyan Mukherjee
15	Kinshuk Roy, Rima Roy	Kinshuk Roy, Rima Roy
16	Mrinmoy Datta, Seema Datta	Mrinmoy Datta, Seema Datta
17	Mritunjoy Ganguli, Melia Ganguli	Mritunjoy Ganguli, Melia Ganguli
18	Nilanjana Basu	Nilanjana Basu, Sankarshan Basu
19	Pradip Saha, Sreeparna Saha	Pradip Saha, Sreeparna Saha
20	Raj Gourav Mitra, Priti Sinha	Raj Gourav Mitra, Priti Sinha
21	Rajon Podder, Tanamika Podder	Rajon Podder, Tanamika Podder
22	Rana Chakrabarti, Sayani Chakrabarti	Rana Chakrabarti, Sayani Chakrabarti
23	Ratul Das	Ratul Das, Debosmita Das
24	Rishin Roy Chowdhury, Kakali Roy Chowdhury	Rishin Roy Chowdhury, Kakali Roy Chowdhury
25	Ronita Dasgupta, Shubhayu Sengupta	Ronita Dasgupta, Shubhayu Sengupta
26	Saurabh Datta, Priyanka Datta	Saurabh Datta, Priyanka Datta
27	Saurav Niyogi, Gargi Niyogi	Saurav Niyogi, Gargi Niyogi
28	Shekhar Mitra	Shekhar Mitra
29	Shyamal Ghosh, Dipali Ghosh	Shyamal Ghosh, Dipali Ghosh
30	Somenath Nag, Ranjana Nag	Somenath Nag, Ranjana Nag
31	Somshubhra Patra	Somshubhra Patra, Smriti Dey
32	Spandan Mukherjee	Spandan Mukherjee
33	Subhodeep Bhowmick	Subhodeep Bhowmick
34	Subrata Banerjee	Subrata Banerjee, Debdatta Banerjee
35	Sudeb Sengupta, Sanchita Sengupta	Sudeb Sengupta, Sanchita Sengupta
36	Sudhendu Basu, Munmun Basu	Sudhendu Basu, Munmun Basu
37	Sudipta Sahoo, Sangeeta Sahoo	Sudipta Sahoo, Sangeeta Sahoo
38	Sudipta Soo, Payel Biswas	Sudipta Soo, Payel Biswas
39	Sukanta Chandra Das	Sukanta Chandra Das
40	Suman Ray	Suman Ray, Satarupa Ray
41	Swati Roy Choudhury	Swati Roy Choudhury
42	Timir Baran Bhadra	Timir Baran Bhadra
43	Tridib Sen, Arundhuti Sen	Tridib Sen, Arundhuti Sen
44	Rajib Chatterjee, Reshma Chatterjee	Rajib Chatterjee, Reshma Chatterjee
45	Tapashi Sinha	Tapashi Sinha

Hoi Choi Committee 2024-25

Sl.No	Name	Sl.No	Name
1	Aahana Sengupta	30.	Prapti Chakraborty
2	Abhigyan Chatterjee	31.	Prisha Chakraborty
3	Abhirup Chatterjee	32.	Rhitayu Sarkar
4	Adrita Ganguli	33.	Riddhiman Banerjee
5	Alisha Niyogi	34.	Ritika Podder
6	Anamika Sen	35.	Saanvi Ghosh
7	Angshuman Roychowdhury	36.	Samriddha Basu
8	Aniket Baksy	37.	Shalini Bhowmick
9	Aritrika Roychowdhury	38.	Shamik Basu
10	Arnab Saha	39.	Shounak Das Gupta
11	Arnrit Dass	40.	Shreshth Sengupta
12	Aronya Baksy	41.	Shubhrodipto De
13	Ashmita Dutta	42.	Sohni Patra
14	Debanjana Bez	43.	Soomrit Chattopadhyay
15	Debmala Chatterjee	44.	Soumyadipto De
16	Debosmita Bez	45.	Spriha Dass
17	Dezrina Chatterjee	46.	Stuti Chakraborti
18	Dhritman Banerjee	47.	Subhashini Ray
19	Diptendu Sen	48.	Sudeshna Ghosh
20	Divyanshi Soo	49.	Suryadepto Nag
21	Hreeshav Saha	50.	Suryashis Basu
22	Jiyansh Podder	51.	Tanisha Datta
23	Kaustubh Roy	52.	Tanishka Datta
24	Kiyaan De	53.	Tiyasa Sahoo
25	Medha Chakraborti	54.	Triya Sarkar
26	Mehuli Dutta	55.	Udisha Dutta Chowdhury
27	Mishika Mitra	56.	Gaurav Sinha
28	Nandita Chatterjee	57.	Mayurakshi Sinha
29	Om Sarkar		

UTSAV shares the joy of celebration -Social responsibilities 2024

Kakali Roy Chowdhury

'Social activities are the recreational programs for the human resources'.

Utsav, Socio-Cultural organization, like every year is devoted to helping vulnerable populations and communities through respect, love, and dignity of human beings, their diversity, and upholding human rights and social justice. Through its social work, Utsav tries to make the celebration an inclusive event touching all walks of life.

Collective social responsibility is what Utsav realizes every year by nurturing the environment, the aged people and the cause for education. The organization along with its well-wishers try to reach out to different sections of the society to spread the spirit of celebration and festivity all around. We are happy to be backed by individual well-wishers and many corporate sponsors who make this event possible.

Our Work with Students from Underprivileged families:



Shree Ramachandra Grameena Vidya Vikasa Kendra Trust School has opened its door to children from underprivileged families, mostly daily wage workers. In 2023 Utsav invited the students from Grameena to Durga Puja celebration on Saptami 21st October 2023. 65 students and 8 teachers had come from Grameena school to celebrate Durga Puja, Children offered prayers and participated in the Art competition. In all, they added colours to our festivities. Students of Grameena also took part in some cultural events. Children and teachers had Bhog prasadam with all of us. 'Himalaya' gifted the children who participated in the dance with a gift hamper of cosmetics. We are happy that one of our corporate sponsors wanted to collaborate with us towards this end.

Utsav is a celebration of life in the true sense. We wish to do many things for the society around us within our limits. We try to get sponsorship and corporate support from IT companies for the schools. Every member of Utsav individually and as part of the organization believes that supporting one who needs help rejuvenates our own inner power, confidence, and capacity to sustain and hope for serving more in the future.

Our work with senior citizens:

It was the pleasure and privilege of Utsav to share a joyful day with senior members of society who reside at Asha Jeevan, through fun and frolic adding joy to their otherwise insipid life. This event was scheduled for the 17th of July. Utsav has also donated 1000 packs of Adult Diapers and some grocery items to Asha Jeevan.

With Its baby steps, Utsav wants to make a change in the way we celebrate Durga puja and Diwali, we want to make it inclusive and spread the same happiness and Joy that they find within all walks of life.



Celebrating Onam's vibe during the evening meeting.

Our inclusive culture:

While celebrating Durga puja, Lakshmi puja, Kali puja and Saraswati puja with 'open to all' invite for participation and 'Bhog' distribution, we feel immense lucky to thrive at the cosmopolitan city of Bangalore, where we get the opportunity of celebrating lot more festivals of India like 'Poila Boishakh' (Baishakhi), 'Rathayatra', 'Ganesh Chaturthi', 'Onam' and many more.



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Paying It Forward:

Building a Fairer, More Inclusive World for All

Muktamala Choudhury

This short article is for professionals in any role or capacity, this article provides insights that may resonate with your experiences. After years of navigating the corporate landscape, I have some reflections that could benefit others in their career journeys.

About Feedback

Feedback is essential in professional growth. It should flow in all directions—downward, upward, and sideways. Consistent and constructive feedback is pivotal for improvement and development.

When You Receive Feedback

Approach feedback with discernment. While some feedback aims to foster growth, others might be intended to undermine your confidence, especially if you've excelled in a particular area. It's crucial to assess the intent behind the feedback and use it constructively, regardless of its source.

Have You Ever Felt "I'm Not Good Enough?"

If you've ever grappled with feelings of inadequacy, it's often because you excel in certain areas, and others may try to bring you down. Don't let it undermine your confidence. Focus on your strengths and strive to do your best. Success may take time, but perseverance will lead you to where you're meant to be.

Invest in Yourself

Be proactive in your own growth and development. Don't wait for others to invest in you; take charge of your future and invest in your own progress.

Do Good to Others

The principle of goodness returning to you is not a myth. It holds true in both personal and professional realms. The universe tends to reciprocate your actions. Treat others with kindness, and you'll likely find that goodness comes back to you. Conversely, harm you inflict may also return to you, sometimes in unforeseen ways.

Travel, No Matter Your Budget

After all the hard work and dedication, it's vital to rejuvenate. Travel, regardless of your budget, is a great way to refresh your mind and body. It teaches adaptability, tolerance, risk-taking, and time management. It also helps you appreciate diverse perspectives and the unique value each person brings.

God and Growing Up

Medha Chakraborti

My Thakur-Ma always said that when we pray to the Gods, we must ask for a certain set of things. "*Thakur, amay gyan dao, shakti dao, bhakti dao, vidya dao, vivek dao – shobay ke bhalo rekho, kripa koro, Thakur.*"

Six-year-old me did not understand what any of them meant, except that my class teacher's name was Vidya, and I adored her, so of course I would ask the Gods to keep her in my life. Thus, I obeyed, ensuring that my mind replayed that exact list of requirements whenever I kneeled before an idol or an image of a God. It wasn't until I was busy humming a Disney movie song once while kneeling in prayer that Thakur-Ma also taught me of "single-pointed devotion," which made me adept at praying her way. Each time I was at a temple or observed my family kneel around me, my mind would try its best to block out everything except for my Thakur-Ma's laundry list that I was to recite. I hoped desperately that the Gods would forgive me for the times I couldn't stop thinking of what I would dress my Barbie doll in next while I was supposed to be concentrating on my prayer.

Nine-year-old me did a double take when I learnt of the concept of menstruation. Did the Gods like to reward their singly-pointed devotees with pain like this? Blood only came from wounds, and I wholeheartedly believed that fact. So, would it mean I was to be wounded every month? I was angry at the Gods, but angrier yet at my Ma and Thakur-Ma for not having prepared me with this news of a permanent wound. When I saw the blood for the first time, I was horrified. I had a dance program that day because oh, how I loved to

dance. My Thakur-Ma would praise me even, for all the times I practised how to recite ancient stories of the Gods through an ancient art form. "*Thakur er kripay eto bhalo nachis*," she would say. While that would make me beam most times, the evening of my first period, I scrambled at my memories for the things she told me of the Gods. Why did her list never include things I did not want to have in my life?

Twelve-year-old me had taken to attending classes that enhanced spirituality and devotion in children. They told us stories of the Gods, much like the ones my Thakur-Ma would narrate, and the classes felt a lot like home that way. I had come to learn of the concept of '*karma*', and found it fascinating and incredibly reasonable. If I hurt you, that hurt would come back to me sometime in my life – this one or another. I took to preaching to the kids around me that they should think twice before saying something mean to me because of *karma*. Nobody would understand it as much as I did, but I believed that was because of my *karma*. I must have done many good things to be blessed with this knowledge and to be able to practice righteousness in every step of my life. My Thakur-Ma was proud of my learnings and beliefs. In the meantime, I had forgotten to wonder about what *karma* brought on menstruation as a consequence in the lives of girls.

It wasn't until sixteen that I heard of lust. By then I had learned of the *Arishadvargas*, or *Shada Ripu* – the six enemies of humankind. *Kama*, *krodha*, *lobha*, *mada*, *moha*, *matsarya* – lust, rage, greed, arrogance, delusion and jealousy. It boggled me to know of this concept but not understand lust. When I did though, I recoiled in shame. Guilt plagued me for having looked at another's body several times and thought of things that were deemed inappropriate and lustful. I had many desires that tugged at the lower parts of my body, but Thakur-Ma said those thoughts were my enemy and I needed to tame them to be a good human being. To be worthy of the Gods' continuous blessings that I have been lucky to be showered with for thus long. My mind remained troubled though, because of how everyone I knew to be cool in school was now 'dating' somebody. They did things with their boyfriends and girlfriends that I knew to be forbidden and unthinkable, and I told myself they had fallen prey to those enemies of humankind. Still, the dancer in me wondered why the *Navarasas* included *shringara* and *raudra* if they were triggered by things that were considered so evil.

At nineteen, I find myself at a crossroads. My Thakur-Ma no longer holds as much power over me as she did all those years. But every time a festival rolls around and we catch up on a call, she reminds me how important it is to ask the Gods for their blessings. "*Thakur ke kokkhono bhulbi na kintu*." However, my time away from home and from my Thakur-Ma has made me question my beliefs and morals. I find myself conflicted over the concept of righteousness now that I have learned of the Indian Judicial System. I cannot bring myself to believe as fervently in karma as I once did, now that I have learned of the complexities of the human mind. I feel trapped in my quest to be the ultimate devotee, now that I have learned of gratitude. Does asking for things from the Gods truly keep me blessed and safe? Because I have been unable to shake the six-year-old out of me, activating my single-pointed devotion mode when I am to pray, who knows the exact things to ask for – never letting my mind wander, not even to thank the Gods for what I've been given already. Good and bad; righteous and unrighteous.

The Poetry Workshop

Bashari Chakraborti

It has been a quiet afternoon today at our little community hub. There is always some event or other happening here, so a peaceful afternoon siesta is quite rare. My life revolves around book readings, book signings, and poetry workshops. It's like being the backstage crew at a literary circus.

As evening draws near, I start getting cleaned and polished up for today's event. It is a Poetry Workshop, and I am expecting at least five people.

The first one to waltz in and claim his place at my head is a young man, in his early twenties. He has a backpack and is bobbing his bald head to something playing through the air pods stuffed in his ears. He plonks himself on the chair and takes a good look around.

The next person to enter is a bespectacled lady, with jasmine flowers in her hair and a white *vibhuti* dot on her forehead. She keeps pushing up her specs every ten seconds and follows it up with some facial

gymnastics. Sometimes she is moving her eyebrows up, sometimes squinting or blinking hard. Her eyes rest on the guy in the armchair.

"Poetry workshop?" asks the guy. She nods and sits down. "I am Vikas," he says.

"I am Anita," says the lady, with a push to her specs and two hard blinks.

Soon the rest of the participants start coming in.

Swati, a chirpy 15-year-old girl, enters. She is rocking a Pokémon T-shirt, ripped jeans, and a ponytail that sways with every movement of her head. Arun, the 60 something salt-and-pepper-haired gentleman, walks in wearing a suit, leather bag in hand. Rashi, rushes in last. She has very short purple hair, septum piercing and many tattoos.

They settle down and the small talk begins. They ignore me completely, like one ignores a piece of furniture. But I do not mind. I am used to such treatment.

They talk about poetry in general and about the poems they love. They, decide to start reciting their own compositions. Some of them take out their notebooks and place them on me. Others keep their mobile phones handy.

They ask Swati to start. She is a bit startled; she is not used to being the first one in anything.

"Shit!" she curses silently. "I should not have skipped my pills today." She starts panting, her hands start shaking and her head starts shivering sending her ponytail into mini oscillations. She tries to cover it all up by fumbling in her bag as though searching for her phone. She keeps repeating the calming phrase her psychologist had taught her to say during such anxiety attacks. Slowly she feels her breath come back. Her hands stabilize as she takes out her phone and starts reciting her poem. I realize, I had tensed up too. Now I relax and listen to her poem.

"These moments that we live and leave behind,

Do they reside forever in a corner of our mind..."

Swati's recitation flow is flawless. Every time she looks up from reading from her phone, she finds Arun's eyes on her. It does not make her uncomfortable, rather encourages her, as he gives her those proud parent looks.

Arun cannot help but remember his daughter. How she loved reciting poetry when she was little. But now she did not even bother to see him. Part of this was his fault, he realized. He should not have been so adamant in his rejection of her choice of life-partner. Paying no heed to her pleas, he had arranged her marriage. But she eloped the day before the wedding.

Arun shudders at his own heartlessness. He would give an arm and a leg to see his daughter again and listen to her chatter. He chokes as he starts his poem - in Hindi.

"Badi aarzu hain tujhe ek baar nazar bhar dekh lu

Tere sar pe haath rakhlu, tera matha chum lu."

(I really desire to see you once, to place my hand on your head and kiss your forehead)

Rashi almost cuts into Arun's recitation. She says she has some important work and would like to complete her recitation quickly and leave.

She recites the first line in a shrill hurried tone.

"Loud, proud successful woman, read as lonely-lonely, very lonely woman-"

And just like that she bursts into tears. "I got laid off today", she cries out, putting her head on me. "I am a single mother. My father is sick, and I am the sole caregiver." We listen to her quietly. We know that the best way to deal and heal is to cry it out. Her tears soak my polished ebony top as she sobs her eyes out.

Slowly, Rashi's sobs subside, and she looks at us all embarrassed. Before the silence gets awkward, Anita declares she would recite her poem.

She adjusts her specs, gives a gentle rub to her nostrils, shuts and opens her eyes hard and starts reading from her notebook.

"He Dayanidhe, sukhino vasem..." Ah, Sanskrit! After ages!

I pride myself on knowing all languages, even the language of the body, the mind, and the soul. Her poem is not original, I realise. She has taken verses from the internet and stitched them together. Being the most mediocre child in an academically accomplished family, Anita had always been under pressure to perform. When talent and capability surrender, copying comes in handy. With practice comes perfection. And Anita, is now a master plagiarist.

It is Vikas' chance to recite his poem. He is checking out events on the internet, making plans for the rest of the evening. Yesterday, he had gone to a day-long ukelele workshop. But today morning he could not find any event to go to. So, he had stayed back home and watched his stepmother use his mom's cupboard, cook on his mom's stove, and hug his mom's husband. His stepmother is a nice lady, but he always keeps his distance. He visits friends, feeds street dogs, and attends random events, just to stay away from her and the house.

Feeling everyone's eyes on him, he tries to remember some lines he had written when his mom was alive, but blanks out. He starts knocking his pen on me giving me a headache!

"No poetry in me today, dudes," he announces, smiling at everyone. Some just nod. Some say "Never mind. Some other day".

They sit around for some more time, chit-chatting and exchanging social media handles. I always love to see how a couple of hours around me creates bonds amongst strangers. I watch them go out the door, laughing and talking like old friends.

I am still beaming in the afterglow as I start getting cleaned and polished up for the next event.

Religion and Spirituality

Dola Saha Roy



Pursuit of the divine has existed for as long as civilisation is in existence. Man has a quest for what lies beyond this life and what it all means.

Historically, there has been two foundational routes to discover these truths: Religion and Spirituality. Although there are many similarities between the two, they are not the same.

By definition, religion is a personal set or institutionalised system of religious attitudes, beliefs and practices; the service and worship of God or the supreme power.

Spirituality, on the other hand, connotes an experience of something larger than you; living everyday life in a reverent and sacred manner.

In Kathopnishad, there was a nice story of a very religious father Vajrashavasa and his spiritual son Nachiketa wherein the father had given away all the stuff he did not want as a ritual to attain heaven after death. However, his son observed all these very closely and saw the futility of being ritualistic.

Origin

Religions are most often based upon the lives, teachings and beliefs of a historical figure. We worship them and they form the foundation of religious practices and rituals in a community.

By contrast, spirituality is more often based on the practical application. Like the saying goes, "Do not seek to follow the footsteps of the wise. Seek what they sought."

Spirituality is a universal, personalized experience, and everyone's experience is unique. One may describe a spiritual experience as being sacred or transcendent, or plainly a true sense of liveliness and feeling interconnected, or pure gratitude.

Spirituality is broader and more abstract term than religion. Religion maintains a defined, tangible code of ethics, while spirituality is largely undefinable. However, both of these methods of believing in something help people live a happy and meaningful lives.

Religion also has a political aspect, as people in any country divide into religious lines. Therefore, religion and group beliefs act as a unifying force for large groups of people to direct their lives and affairs.

A religious person is committed to following the guidelines set by his or her religion. He or she observes the rites and practices, such as regularly attending church services on a Sunday for Christians, observing the Sabbath for Jews, and fasting during Ramadan for Muslims.

Objective vs Subjective Experience

A formal religion is often an objective experience. There is usually a greater focus on externals such as

- Houses of worship
- Scriptures
- Observance of rituals etc

On the other hand, spirituality is an inward journey that involves a shift in awareness rather than some form of external activity. It does not mean that worship is not a part of spirituality, it is more about inner understanding of the soul or divinity within yourself.

Organised vs Formless

Religion is a structured, rule-based framework that governs the behaviour of its members. It is a pre-requisite for initial stages.

Spirituality, though breaks free from the restrictions and rigid structure sometimes associated with traditional religion. The spiritual seekers are following not a set of external rules but their inner voice.

Individual vs Group Beliefs

Spirituality is a solitary experience of the divine power within oneself whereas religion is a group belief system.

Humanity is all one, with love being at the core of everyone's being. Despite all the differences, all living beings are the same part of consciousness—they are just expressed in different ways. This understanding helps people to embrace each other and support each other on the path to enlightenment together.

Traditional vs Evolutionary

Due to their millennia old history, religions by nature are often deeply rooted in tradition, rituals.

By comparison, spirituality is less focused on rigidly traditional approach, and often favours an evolutionary approach. This refers to a more flexible and adaptive mindset towards understanding the great teachings of traditional wisdom. Spiritual growth is an evolutionary, life long process.

Present vs Past

Spirituality is concerned with the present, while religion deals with the past or future. Worship is central to any religion, and according to many, good deeds are rewarded at a later date or after life. To be fully aware and present at this moment is the essence of spirituality.

Exclusive vs Inclusive

Traditional religious beliefs sometimes create an exclusive view that isolates those who may not follow the same view.

Spirituality makes no such distinctions. As Sri Krishna explains in Bhagavad Gita, "As men approach me, so I receive them. All paths Arjuna, lead to me."

Believing vs Being

Religion is about faith at its core. That is to say, believe in something based on unconditional acceptance.

Spirituality does not dismiss faith; however, it often leans on the direct experience of validation of scriptural teachings rather than accepting them on faith alone.

Fear vs Love

Despite the best of intentions, religions can sometimes contain a subtle sense of fear interspersed in their teachings. The concept of divine judgement, God's wrath etc can create a mental environment burdened with stress, anxiety, worry and that can influence thoughts and behaviour.

Spirituality is a more compassionate, loving approach to life. Your choices are not guided by fear or punishment but rather by a desire to end suffering and create a peaceful and loving world for all.

As you see there are noticeable differences between spirituality and religion. These comparisons are not absolute or against each other. Religious beliefs and spiritual beliefs differ in the way they are practiced. However, each practice serves as a vehicle to lead you closer to the truth you wish to seek.

Religion and spirituality are neither the same thing nor completely separate from one another. Religious practices in whatever form as per one's personal preferences, like prayer, chanting or listening to mantra japa etc are required for purification of mind and spiritual growth. This helps to quieten the mind and builds focus and concentration. However, clinging on to the religious practices forever may not help always. It's like a pole vault where the pole vaulter takes the help of the pole to jump as the instrument to leverage on but ultimately pushes it away when it served his purpose. That is why the ancient sacred texts like the Vedas begin with religious practices in Karmakandas and the spiritual part is explained in the Upanishads which is known as Jnana Kanda in end portion of the Vedas. Surely ancient Rishis have profound wisdom to understand the difference between the two.



Let me end with a story, as stories are considered powerful to convey the inner message:

Once upon a time there was a washer man who used to wash people's clothes on the bank of river. He found a diamond, he didn't know what it was, he thought it was a rock, he was using it as a scrub to wash the clothes. One day, he was curious about the stone, so he went to the vegetable seller and showed the diamond, the vegetable seller also did not recognise it, but he said, "This looks like a stone, I will give 10 rupees, you give it to me." Luckily the washer man did not sell it to the vegetable seller, he went to another person and then another, and at last he came to a diamond merchant who immediately recognised it as a diamond and agreed to pay a large amount of money for it. The washer man sold the diamond and with the money, all his poverty was gone, all his sorrows went away.

The diamond was with the washer man all the time but he didn't recognise it as diamond. Similarly, all our attention is towards external objects of awareness not awareness itself. We are like the washer man, outside world attracts us more. Instead of looking inward to our own thoughts, emotions, judgements, perceptions, we look outwards. Then, we have to go the spiritual guru, in this case the diamond merchant to know that, what we already always have. Then like the washer man, all our problems dissolve and we attain infinite bliss.

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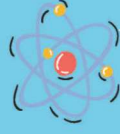
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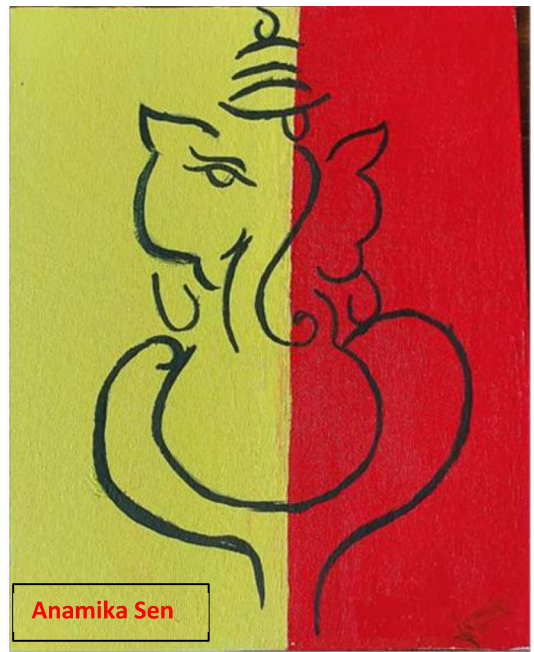
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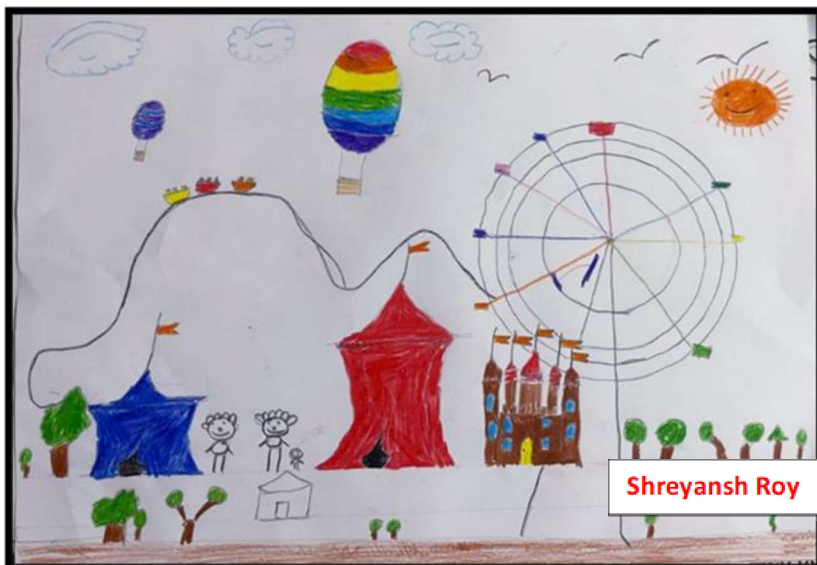
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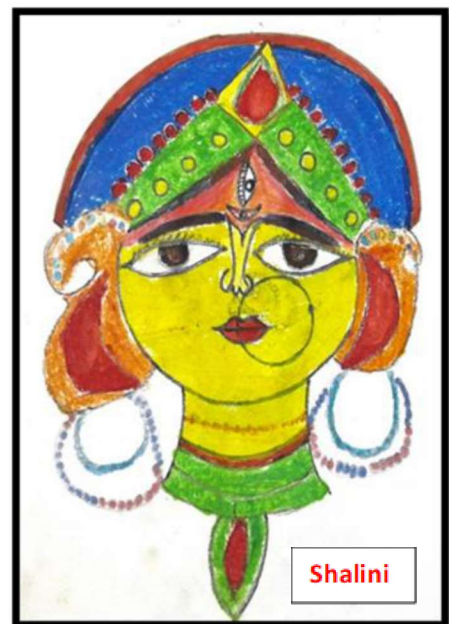
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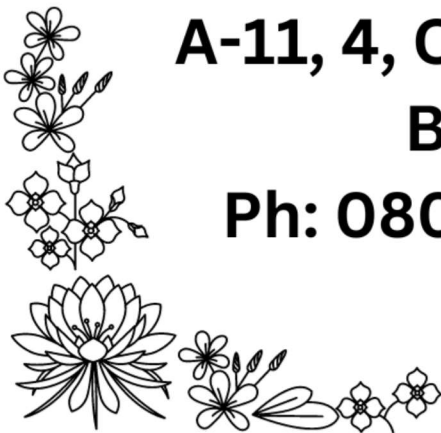
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The Mystical Golden Crystal Ball of Sabarna Roy Chowdhury

Rishin Roy Chowdhury



During my childhood, there were numerous occasions when I found myself wandering in the vibrant and bustling streets of Kolkata. My eager impatient feet would lead me into the narrow charming alleys that were brimming with a captivating display of delectable and mouth-watering street foods. These enticing food stalls were often accompanied by the incessant honking of rickshaws skilfully navigate through the dense sea of people who filled the sidewalks and roadways. However, once I matured, growing wiser to my place in the world, I realized that the motivations behind my wandering through the bustling city had altered dramatically from when I wandered without regard for anything more than myself in the carefree and unrestrained days of my earliest youth. It was within such a growing awareness of my place in the world that I experienced a deep mystery; not necessarily shrouded in secretive and impenetrable shadows, but rather subtly incorporated within the very lively, chaotic surface of the city I called home, waiting patiently for the moment in which I would finally begin to unravel its mysteries.

I am Rishin, working as a freelance journalist. Freelance journalism is that kind of activity which I have the privilege to work upon a variety of subjects. It would not be an exaggeration if I say that in professional pursuits, I am always looking for those stories and stories which have yet not been unfurled and shared with the world. In this continuous quest for compelling stories, it was when I first heard the whispering rumors of a mysterious ancient artifact, an Ball of golden Crystal that could represent Power, the revered figure in various cultures. This wonderful object, indeed a cultural marvel, was believed to be kept well hidden beneath the colour and din of this cosmopolitan city of Kolkata. The folklores based upon this mythological Crystal Ball are rich and interesting as it narrates the mysterious powers and spell bound charm that were said to bestow on anyone by mere good fortune and destiny, infinite and unimaginable treasure and an avalanche of fantastic wealth beyond anyone's wildest imagination. Many were after the very same illusion, but none could bring about any positivity or fruit of labor. This group failure would somewhat throw a rather unconvincing glamour over the entire concept, as if it were some fanciful myth rather than a serious truth or reality. But, despite the skeptics and their skepticism over it, this very charm of the idea, in all its mystique, had almost an irresistible pull on me, much like how a moth is compulsively attracted to the dancing rays of an open flame.

It was a rainy evening; the raindrops pattered gently against the windowpane. My friend Subhasis was visiting me, and as it happens he is an ardent historian, having a phenomenal penchant for the mysteries of the occult. He started telling me a fascinating legend that struck a spark within me. "Rishin, let me tell you, the golden Crystal Ball is far from being just a myth," he said. "There was a time in our history, a time that goes back almost like a dim recollection for us now, when we sincerely felt that we were looking for something important; we thought that it was hidden behind the crumbling and battered walls of the long-abandoned Sabarna Palace, which adorns the Barisha locale," he declared with great passion. A bouquet of excitement and a hint of conspiratorial fear flickered in his eyes, and this endowment imparted an enchanting layer of mystery to the very essence of his words. That is when I remembered those moments, as I almost felt the cold wet mist clinging stickily to the stone walls of the ancient palace; it was an atmosphere and a mood that felt almost palpable. History pressed down upon us in a heavy, oppressive manner so that we felt very strongly immersed in the intricate weave of depth and complexity that was at once overwhelming and fascinating.

"Was there anyone who managed to successfully locate it?" I inquired, my curiosity driving me to ask this question, which was growing increasingly intense and heightened with each passing moment. Subhasis leaned forward a little in the chair he was seated in; the face was serious and earnest, but his voice was low, conspiratorial, almost whispery, so that it seemed barely audible to the people surrounding him. "Only a few privileged souls have ever been lucky enough to be in a position to listen to tales of its existence,

yet the stories they tell are indelibly associated with dark, squalid side streets, and inevitably arrive at conclusions of madness or extreme misfortune. Of these stories, the last heard described the story of a collector driven by an audacious spirit, who had the temerity to boast that he had actually seen it. Yet, barely a month later he went out at night and disappeared without trace, under conditions which are still mysterious today."

Then it sent a shiver down my spine, for was it just a yarn or a warning? I decided to dig in, and my journalistic antennae started working overtime. Waiting for me was the Sabarna Palace, its columns crumbling, its grandeur faded into the background.

The next day, as I emerged, the sky was gray with anticipation, heavy and pregnant with the rain that seemed to come soon and naturally. I approached this journey cautiously, going over narrow alleys twist and turn in complicated patterns, like a labyrinth filled with so much complexity—the ways I had walked over many years had been witness to the passing of thousands of generations who had marked their names, each contribution to the tissue of time. At last I stood before the great Gothic architecture of the palace, which towered before me impressively, only overshadowed by an overabundance of weeds and ghostly presences which hovered within its ancient halls, telling stories of yesteryear.

With abundant caution and a sense of trepidation, I placed my foot inside the very ancient and long-abandoned structure before me. The extensive areas inside were filled to their entirety with countless specks of dust, floating and swirling in the air, their fine movements lit up with the fading daylight. It was in this serene yet eerie atmosphere that I deliberately decided to take my time, allowing myself to thoroughly explore and appreciate the deep, overwhelming silence that had settled over the whole space. The air around me was oppressively heavy, loaded with an unmistakable and impossible-to-ignore feeling of foreboding. It stirred within me a feeling that something just was not quite right in this environment. Yet, it was charged with an exhilarating promise; there was energy waiting to be discovered and unveiled. I grasped my flashlight and activated its bright beam, slicing through the encroaching darkness as I started my systematized search of that dimly lit, neglected space that lay before me, revealing the remnants of what once had been. Every nook and corner was slowly revealing untold tales that had been locked away from the eyes of the world for so long—chipped paint was whispering mysterious tales of a long gone, forgotten past, while fragmented mirrors with their imperfections threw up fleeting shadows of what has once been at this place. Also, the scattered debris seemed to tell of a lifestyle that could have been fully controlling once but has faded into memory through regrettable dissipation, leaving only shadows of its former existence.

As I walked on further into the vast expanse of this magnificent palace with a cautious sense of caution, I came across a cleverly hidden trapdoor, hidden from sight by the carpet that lay beneath, which was noticeably coated in a layer of dust despite its intricate designs. My heart did leap in surprise at the sudden discovery, flooding my being with excitement and an overwhelming sense of anticipation. Could it be that this secret entrance holds the key to uncovering the remarkable tale of the revered golden Crystal Ball?

With a great amount of hard work and determination, I pushed the door open easily, feeling all the significant resistance it would have offered. Eventually, it relented and let itself drop into the deep darkness that awaited me as I took steps. The awful sounds of various horrors creaked ominously beneath my weight; groan and crackled as though it would cave in at any moment if I didn't take extra care about every step I made. And as I moved down that staircase, I reached the very bottom, where there was a small room, cramped and littered, full of rubbish and remnants, which indicated what must have once been a fairly orderly and neat place. Amidst this rubbly litter, however, caught my eye what drew my notice, something that sparkled enticingly—a glimmer that stood out distinctly. It turned out to be a wooden chest, intricately ornamented with all sorts of fascinating symbols, many of which I had previously come across as reproductions within the pages of Subhasis's books that went into the mystic and mysterious world of the occult.

I felt an odd, strange feeling all over me. Obviously, this chest was important because perhaps it was to me or to something else. My fingers quivered and trembled with excitement as I reached out my hand towards brushing those dust-layers that covered the chest. At that moment, I could hear, very faintly first, this soft humming noise which was coming from within this box. I lifted the lid cautiously and found something within that was absolutely astonishing, for what I had found was an absolutely hypnotic Crystal Ball, in golden

hue, which perfectly shimmered and twinkled because of its iridescent surface against the flickering light from my flashlight.

Time itself seemed to stop completely in that moment. But the Crystal Ball before me was much larger than I would have ever imagined in my mind; its surface wasn't only exquisitely fine and remarkably smooth but also possessed a warmth that unmistakably beckoned to touch it. As long as I held on to it, the soft noise encircling it began to grow louder and louder, more resonant. It almost beat inside my chest with very forceful presence. What was this fantastic discovery? With this ball in hand, all those time-honored legends were shadows that would fade away, giving me the exceptional opportunity to write history as if one can stand side by side with the gods as a peer equal partner. Yet, despite the alluringly boundless magnetism of this moment, an ominous feeling in every corner of consciousness, scratching at it between the gourd-like bulge there, an ominous sense of impending doom that I could not run from.

And then, seemingly coming out of nowhere, without any preceding indication, I was able to hear the rustling sounds coming apparently from behind me. Automatically, I turned my head around to face the direction from which these sounds seemed to originate; in that very moment, in response to this unexpected situation, my entire body tensed up, my heart beating fast and rapidly pounding in my chest, with my adrenaline flowing through my system. Finally, the old man, whose eyes were narrowed in intensity, wore a curious countenance, but something much darker and ominous lurked behind that façade, gradually emerging into complete view, slowly rising out of the enveloping shadows and darkness that surrounded him. His clothes were worn and tattered; they frayed at the edges and had worn so thin from time, but there was an odd elegance about them that could not be ignored. They seemed to come from a bygone, forgotten era still bearing a hint of strange magic. "You shouldn't have brought that thing here," he warned, his voice deep and gravelly with some real commanding tone to it that kind of poured across importance and gravitas into the very words themselves. "The Crystal Ball is in search of a guardian who is truly worthy of possessing it, and it's worth noting here that not everyone fits the level of worthiness."



As I stared straight into his face, a tightness formed in my throat, as if echoing the confusion and anxiety engulfing my consciousness. Had he been watching my every move? Finally having gathered some courage, I voiced out the question burning in my mind, "Who are you?" I also took great care to gently put the Durga back into her cradle, ensuring she was properly positioned.

"I am Hridayesh, the last custodian of the secrets of this palace. Many came after the Crystal Ball, making fortunes, but they found nothing but misery," he added, eyeing unflinched.

"What do you mean by that?" I asked him, trying to draw out from his words further clarification. The old man took a slow step closer toward me, his eyes intently studying my face as if to look at the very soul itself of me.

"The Crystal Ball, with its majestic presence, sports a massive weight that is profoundly significant and certainly not to be taken lightly or shrugged off. Every individual desire that one harbors comes laden with its own inbuilt price—a price that requires significant consideration and serious reflection before any decisions are made. This was the case with the last soul, the very last to dare and reach out to have his wishes fulfilled, who traded sanity for momentary, temporary wealth and never was able to revert back to his former self or original state of being. "Please, let it go," he urged intensely, in a voice that had the slightest hint of desperation—only so much as to thicken even the quality of his tone and mar its inherent comfort with a sense of poignant sorrow.

This threw me into a deeper battle, one that was inside me. I felt myself stuck in a conflict within, between the highly appealing promise of immense power and the heavy load this power brought with it, that is the myriad of responsibilities it had attached to it. I wondered if I was actually ready to gamble everything

that I owned at the stake in this spree of extravagant wealth and material wealth. My focus slowly gravitated back towards the great Crystal Ball as I resurfaced my concentration. I noticed how it would reflect light beautifully, but it was also reflecting the turmoil and chaos that was brewing inside. As I now stood at this fateful crossroads in my life, it struck me in that instant just how ridiculous and mundane the whole struggle was; indeed, nothing on earth can ever compensate for the precious thing that is life itself, and nothing can even begin to be a substitute for those simple yet profound delights that well up from the pulsating living street and the joyous heavenly laughter of beloved loved ones. Standing tall, I shook my head with a kind of decision, gesturing with my entire body to drive my message home. "I'm not taking it. It's here."

And then, in that instant, a wave of terrific relief washed over Hridayesh, cascading down and enveloping him as it let all the deeper tensions release itself within him, having settled so over time. With clarity of conviction in his voice, he said, "You have indeed made the right choice, Rishin. It is important to see that power, without the guiding light of wisdom, ultimately proves to be an evil force that can lead to the very worst kind of consequences, nearly catastrophic in nature."

As the Crystal Ball smoothly settled into the ornate chest, a kind of warm and inviting glow of gold began to spread outwards, illuminating the entire space gradually and filling the room with a soft, soothing light. The very element of the old man gradually morphed into an unrecognized form while it was slowly heading back to the vacuum from which it had come, and it was melting into obscurity with each passing moment that I climbed higher from my ground level. At the same time, I sensed with sharp awareness a new energy that empowered the palace, as it lost itself softly by soothing back into its real place, infusing a sense of quietness and calm in the surroundings. I turned my body around, and then firmly closed the trapdoor, pushing it tight: I couldn't describe or put into words that intense, overwhelming sensation of happiness that washed all of me, as though a heavy weight had been taken off my shoulders, leaving me several pounds lighter and much, much easier to carry.

It was as if the vibrant and bustling streets of this incredible city of Kolkata, which erupted in an array of vital sounds and countless mesmerizing sights, were extending a warm and cheerful welcome to me once again into the bright, inviting light of day. Indeed, the concept of fortune can be likened to a delicate dance that requires careful steps and timing; it does not arrive in the form of a golden Crystal Ball gleaming and radiating its brilliance but rather in the rich and varied forms that can emerge from the choices we consciously make and in the meaningful connections we establish with others around us. I would not exchange this profound and great realization for all the riches and wealth that exist in the entirety of the world because, for me, this insight holds far greater value than any material wealth could ever possess. It was my relentless quest for the subtle and deep stories that life had in store for me that ultimately led me to this crucial point in the journey. This quest gradually evolved into a deeply ingrained belief in the importance and richness of the stories that encompass life itself. Indeed, as one sayingly puts it, this realization turned out to be the most marvelous treasure that one could ever hope to find in life.



The Invisible Violence: Dalit Women and the Paradox of Untouchability

Samriddha Basu

When we rethink what truly marks caste in society, it often comes back to the ideas of touchability and untouchability. These concepts are deeply rooted in Indian society, tied to the notions of purity and pollution. Over centuries, these ideas have shaped caste discrimination and social exclusion. The idea of caste pollution, linked to ritual purity, usually sparks conflicts over public resources. Yet, it oddly fades away when labor is involved. It's a strange contradiction: those labeled as "untouchables" suddenly become acceptable when their labor is needed. This paradox extends to the horrific issue of rape, often used as a form of social punishment, with Dalit women being the most vulnerable. In these moments, the "untouchable" becomes "socially touchable," leading to gross violations of dignity and human rights. The connection between purity, pollution, and

untouchability is complex and exposes the contradictions within the caste system, urging us to rethink how caste has been studied, especially since most studies focus on men's experiences.

The Indian caste system is unique, blending sacred and profane elements, which makes it different from other forms of social inequality. Untouchability is a widespread issue in India, involving various "upper" caste practices, like refusing to touch or share water with those deemed "untouchable." Traditionally, untouchability suggests that contact with an untouchable person is polluting. But another way to see it is that untouchability isn't just about physical contact—it's also about the mindset of those who refuse to touch. The real problem lies with those who uphold these discriminatory practices. Untouchability, as a lived experience, goes beyond what's described in academic texts.

Dalit women face a triple burden of caste, class, and gender. They're often forced into prostitution, sexually abused, and subjected to violence. The rape of Dalit women reveals the hypocrisy of the caste system, showing that "no one practices untouchability when it comes to sex." Violence against Dalit women is a complicated mix of gender and caste discrimination, leading to deeply ingrained oppression. Caste principles don't just affect gender power dynamics—they're also closely tied to gender roles. Take Bhanwari Devi, a social worker from Rajasthan. In September 1991, she and her husband were brutally attacked, and she was gang-raped. Her case led to the Vishakha Guidelines, a key development in addressing workplace sexual harassment. Despite being an inspiration, Bhanwari Devi never got justice. The accused were acquitted by a Jaipur court, which suggested she fabricated the rape, arguing that an upper-caste man wouldn't defile himself by raping a lower-caste woman. This reflects the deep biases in seeking justice. Despite the impact of her case, her attackers were acquitted, highlighting how Dalit women often become targets of rape as a form of retaliation. Sexual violence is used by upper-caste leaders to suppress movements within scheduled castes and tribes. This violence is carried out by upper-caste members, landlords, and even the police in their pursuit of male relatives. Despite clear evidence, upper-caste leaders often deny the widespread sexual abuse of Dalit women. These situations call for a fresh look at the legal system's failures, especially in cases of sexual violence against marginalized individuals, like the victim in the Hathras incident. Recent incidents, like the horrific rape at RG Kar Medical College, have sparked outrage and widespread discussions in urban areas, where justice and systemic change are fervently demanded. However, this stands in stark contrast to the uncomfortable silence that often surrounds similar atrocities against Dalit women. When the victim is from a marginalized caste, the collective anger seems to dissipate, revealing the deep-rooted caste biases that continue to haunt our society.

The traditional view of untouchability is flawed because it ties it to ideas of purity and pollution rooted in Hindu beliefs. While Dalits have been excluded from many aspects of public life, like access to temples, education, and public spaces, this exclusion is conveniently ignored when it comes to sexual violence. Dalit women are often seen as impure and dishonorable, and this perception is exploited to justify sexual violence against them. The shift from "untouchable" to "socially touchable" during rape exposes the power dynamics of caste hierarchies, showing how the caste system controls Dalit women's bodies. This highlights how patriarchal views of untouchability strip Dalit women of their agency, reinforcing the idea of their perpetual impurity and making it hard for them to seek justice in their communities.

As we celebrate Durga Pujo this year, it's important to recognize the powerful symbolism of the festival—Durga's victory over Mahishasura represents the triumph of good over evil, strength over oppression, and justice over injustice. However, the stark contrast between this symbolism and the lived realities of many women, especially Dalit women, forces us to reflect on our society's deep-seated contradictions. This year, let Durga Pujo be more than just a celebration; let it be a call to action. As we worship the goddess who embodies strength and empowerment, we should also commit to challenging the injustices faced by women in our society, particularly those who are marginalized and oppressed. It's time to bridge the gap between the ideals we celebrate during the festival and the realities of gender and caste-based violence. Durga Pujo has long been a symbol of change. These celebrations can be a starting point for shifting societal perceptions and working towards a future where all women, regardless of caste, are treated with the respect, dignity, and equality that Durga herself represents. Let this celebration inspire us to turn our reverence into meaningful action, ensuring that the values we uphold during Durga Pujo extend to every woman in our society.

সেকালের কলকাতা

সুনীল বরণ চক্রবর্তী

সন ১৯৪৫ - দ্বিতীয় বিশ্বযুদ্ধ চলছে। আমি তখন মধ্য কলকাতার তালতলা হাই স্কুলের পঞ্চম শ্রেণীর ছাত্র। সেই সময় মহাত্মা গান্ধীর নেতৃত্বে “ভারত ছাড়ো” আন্দোলন দিকে দিকে। তার প্রভাব পড়েছে জনজীবনেও। স্কুল-কলেজগুলিতে ঘনঘন স্ট্রাইক, নেতাদের মিটিং-মিছিলগুলিতে উপস্থিত থাকার নির্দেশ। সেই সুবাদে বহু তাবড় এবং দিকপাল নেতাদের বক্তৃতা শোনার এবং তাঁদের সামনে থেকে দেখার সৌভাগ্য হয়েছিল। কিছু মুখ আমার এই নব্বই বছরের স্মৃতিতে এখনও স্পষ্ট; যেমন সরোজিনী নাইডু, আচার্য কৃপালিনী, সুচেতা কৃপালিনী প্রমুখ। সরোজিনী নাইডু বক্তৃতা দিতেন ইংরেজিতে, সে বয়সে বুঝতাম না কিছুই, কিন্তু ভাল লাগত। সন্ধ্যার পর থেকেই পুরো কলকাতা শহর ডুবে যেত অন্ধকারে, জানলার ফাঁক দিয়ে এক ফোঁটা আলোও যাতে না বেরোয় তার জন্য লাগানো হতো ভারী কালো পর্দা। রাতের দিকে মিলিটারিদের ভারী বুটের আওয়াজ। এরা টহল দিত আর দেখে যেত কোনো বাড়ির আলো বাইরে থেকে দেখা যায় কিনা। তখন প্রায়শঃই কলকাতার আকাশে বিদেশি যুদ্ধবিমানের আনাগোনা, আর দেখা মাত্রই বেজে উঠত সাইরেন। সেই সময়ের কলকাতায় অভিনব সব বাস্কার দেখেছি। দোতলা বাড়ির ব্যালকনি বা বুল বারান্দাগুলো মাটি বা রাস্তা পর্যন্ত বিস্তৃত থাকত। সেখানে হুঁটের গাঁথনি দিয়ে তিনদিক ঘেরা বাস্কার, আর সাইরেন বাজলেই রাস্তার লোকজন ছুটে সেখানে আশ্রয় নিত।

দ্বিতীয় বিশ্বযুদ্ধের সময়ে কলকাতার পরিবহন ব্যবস্থা তখন একটু অন্যরকম ছিল। ট্রাম ছাড়া ঘোড়ার গাড়ি ও হাতে টানা রিকশা খুব বেশি ছিল। যুদ্ধের কারণে পেট্রলের অভাব ছিল, তাই ট্যাক্সি, বাস চলত ট্রেনের মত বাষ্পীয় ইঞ্জিন দ্বারা। বাসের পিছনে কয়লা আর জলের সিলিন্ডার থাকত, চললে পরেই তার থেকে ভুসভুস করে ধোঁয়া উঠত। প্রয়োজনীয় জিনিসপত্রের বিক্রিবাটা হতো রেশন কার্ডের মাধ্যমে। এমনকি মিলের ধুতি, শাড়ি, প্যান্ট-শার্টের কাপড় কেনার জন্যও রেশন কার্ডের সাথে কুপন দিত। অবশ্য তার জন্য নির্দিষ্ট কাপড়ের দোকানে যেতে হতো।

যুদ্ধের সময়ের গড়ের মাঠের কিছু বর্ণনা উল্লেখ করা প্রয়োজন। বর্তমানে রাজভবনের যে মেইন গেট তার সামনে একটা কৃত্রিম পাহাড় তৈরি করে একটা বড় কামান আকাশের দিকে তাক করে রাখা থাকত সবসময়। আর সেটা পাহারা দেওয়ার জন্য ২৪ ঘণ্টা মজুদ থাকত কয়েকজন সাদা এবং দেশী মিলিটারিও, যাতে লাটসাহেবের বাড়ি অর্থাৎ বর্তমান রাজভবন, আন্ডারগ্রাউন্ড ফোর্ট উইলিয়াম দুর্গ, ইডেন গার্ডেনের ওপর বোমারু বিমান থেকে কোন হামলা না হয়। সেই সময় ভারতীয়দের ইডেন গার্ডেনের কয়েকটি জায়গায় প্রবেশও নিষিদ্ধ ছিল। চৌরঙ্গী রোড ও সুরেন্দ্রনাথ ব্যানার্জি রোডের

মোড়ে Whiteway Laidlaw কোম্পানির একটা ডিপার্টমেন্টাল স্টোর ছিল। এখানেও ভারতীয়দের প্রবেশ নিষিদ্ধ ছিল।

সেই আমলের টাকার মান কেমন ছিল একটু আলোচনা করা প্রয়োজন। তখন এক পয়সা আধা পয়সার প্রচলন ছিল। ৪ পয়সায় এক আনা ও ষোলআনায় হতো একটাকা। ট্রাম ভাড়া ছিল দূরত্ব অনুসারে, দুই পয়সা বা তিন পয়সা। শাক-সবজির দাম আজ যদিও সঠিক মনে নেই তবে রুই মাছের দাম ছিল ৮ আনা সের ও ইলিশ মাছের দাম ছিল ১০ আনা সের। এক সের হচ্ছে এক কেজির একটু কম, ৯৩৩ গ্রাম।

১৯৪৫ সালের অগাস্ট মাসে ভারতের স্বাধীনতা আন্দোলন ও দ্বিতীয় বিশ্বযুদ্ধ ইংরেজদের উপর চাপ সৃষ্টি করেছিল। এই সময়েই আমেরিকা জাপানের হিরোশিমা ও নাগাসাকিতে অ্যাটম বোমা বর্ষণ করে এর ফলে লক্ষাধিক লোকের প্রাণ যায়, অগুপ্তি লোক আহত ও পঙ্গু হয়। জাপান এই ভয়ঙ্কর আঘাত সহ্য করতে না পেরে আত্মসমর্পণ করতে বাধ্য হয়। সেই বছরই সেপ্টেম্বরের প্রথম সপ্তাহে দ্বিতীয় বিশ্বযুদ্ধের সমাপ্তি ঘটে। তারপর শুরু হলো ইংরেজদের যুদ্ধ জয়ের আনন্দ উৎসব। স্কুলছাত্রদের সিনেমা দেখার জন্য দেওয়া হয়েছিল পাস আর বিতরণ করা হয়েছিল মিষ্টিও। ধর্মতলা স্ট্রিটের জ্যোতি সিনেমা হলে আমার জীবনের প্রথম হিন্দি ছবি দেখলাম। দিলীপ কুমারের প্রথম সিনেমা, নাম “জোয়ার-ভাটা”। মনে আছে, সেদিন ওয়েলেসলি স্কোয়ারে ছোটলাট সাহেবের গিনির হাত থেকে একটা বড় মিষ্টির প্যাকেটও পেয়েছিলাম। ইতিমধ্যে বাবুঘাটের কাছে গঙ্গাবক্ষে একটি বড় যুদ্ধ জাহাজ নোঙ্গর করে। ইংরেজ সরকারের বদান্যতায় যুদ্ধজাহাজ এবং আন্ডারগ্রাউন্ড ফোর্ট উইলিয়াম দুর্গ দেখারও সুযোগ হোল। যুদ্ধের সময় ইংরেজ সরকার মিলিটারিদের জন্য চাল, ডাল ছাড়া অন্যান্য প্যাকেটজাত দ্রব্য প্রচুর পরিমাণে মজুদ করেছিল। সেই জিনিসগুলো বাজারে ছাড়তেই কলকাতার ফুটপাথে হকাররা দোকান সাজিয়ে বিক্রি শুরু করে। নানা রকমের বিস্কুট, সল্টেড বাদাম, খেজুর, টিনের প্যাকেটে মাছ ইত্যাদি। দাম বাজার দরের চেয়ে বেশ কিছুটা কম। আরেকটা জিনিস বিক্রি হতো সেটা হল প্যারাসুট কাপড়। রেশম সুতো দিয়ে তৈরি হতো সেই প্যারাসুট কাপড়। খুবই টেকসই। অনেককেই প্যারাসুট কাপড়ের প্যান্ট শার্ট পরতে দেখেছি সেইসময়ে।

ইতিমধ্যে ইংরেজ সরকার বুঝতে পেরেছিল যে তারা আর ভারতে রাজত্ব করতে পারবেনা। শুরু হলো রাজনৈতিক দলগুলোর সঙ্গে আলোচনা। মুসলিম লীগ মুসলমানদের জন্য আলাদা রাষ্ট্র দাবি করল, অবিভক্ত বাংলা ও পাঞ্জাব তাদের চাই। অন্য দলগুলো এই প্রস্তাব সমর্থন না করার ১৯৪৬ সালের ১৬ই আগস্ট কলকাতায় শুরু হলো ভয়াবহ সাম্প্রদায়িক দাঙ্গা, প্রত্যক্ষ সংগ্রাম দিবস, উভয় পক্ষেরই বহু লোক এতে মারা যায়। অবশেষে ১৯৪৭ সালের ১৪ই আগস্ট পূর্ববঙ্গ ও পশ্চিমপাঞ্জাব সহ আরও কয়েকটি জায়গায় নিয়ে পাকিস্তান নামক রাষ্ট্রের জন্ম হয়। আর ভারত স্বাধীন হল ১৯৪৭ সালের ১৫ই আগস্ট !!

অকাল বিসর্জন

পাপিয়া দাস

গতকাল প্রায় দশদিন বাদে বাবলুর সাথে ভিডিও কলে কথা হল। দু'একদিন বাদে ফোনে কথা হয় ওদের সাথে, কিন্তু চোখের দেখাটা হয়না। কাল বাবলু যখন ফোন করেছিল তখন বেলা এগারোটা আর ক্যালিফোর্নিয়াতে মাঝ রাত। এই সময়টা ওখানে অতটা ঠান্ডা থাকে না। অক্টোবর থেকে ঠান্ডাটা জাঁকিয়ে পড়ে। আজ প্রায় পনের বছর বাবলু ওখানকার বাসিন্দা। বছর দশেক আগে বড় নাতি যখন হল তখন ভবেশ স্ত্রীকে নিয়ে একবার গিয়েছিলেন। তখনও ছেলে বাড়ি কেনেনি, অ্যাপার্টমেন্টে থাকত। আর এখন দোতলা বাড়ি, স্ত্রী দুই পুত্র নিয়ে ব্যস্ত জীবন। আর এখানে ভবেশের সারাদিন কাটে একাকিত্বে। নাতি দুটো দামাল হয়ে উঠেছে, আমেরিকান অ্যাকসেন্টে বাংলা বলে, ভবেশের বেশ লাগে শুনতে। বাবলুর বৌ পরমা বাড়িতে সবসময় বাংলা বলে, রীতিনীতি সব বাঙালিদের মতো করে মেনে চলে, যাতে ছেলেদের ওপর এর প্রভাব পড়ে। পয়লা বৈশাখ, কবিগুরুর জন্মদিন, দোল, রাখি, রথ সব বিশেষ দিনগুলো পরমা নিজেদের মতো করে পালন করে।

এই বাবলুর বিয়ের সময় ভবেশ আর ওনার স্ত্রী প্রথমেই গুরুত্ব দিয়েছিলেন একটা ভালো পরিবারের ওপর। মঞ্জু মানে ভবেশের স্ত্রী বলতেন একটা ভালো পরিবারের মেয়ে কখনো খারাপ হয়না, কিছু ভালো গুন তাদের মধ্যে থাকবেই। বাবলু এ ব্যাপারে মা বাবার মতকেই প্রাধান্য দিয়েছিল। ছোটো থেকেই বাবলু খুব বাধ্য, ভবেশের মনে পড়ে না কখনো ছেলেকে কোনো কিছু নিয়ে বকাবকি করেছেন। সরকারি চাকুরে ভবেশ সাধ্যমত ছেলেকে মানুষ করেছেন, ওকে সবটুকু সুবিধা দেওয়ার জন্য কখনো দ্বিতীয় সম্ভানের কথা ওনারা ভাবেননি। উঁচু ক্লাসে ওঠার পর প্রাইভেট টিউটর এর জন্য নিজেদের যেটুকু সখ আছাদ ছিল তা ও বিসর্জন দিয়েছেন। মঞ্জু বলতেন ছেলেই তো সম্পদ, বুড়ো বয়েসের লাঠি।

ভবেশ এইসব একা একা বসে ভাবেন আর মনে মনে হাসেন। নাতি দুটো জন্মসূত্রে আমেরিকান, কিন্তু এখানে আসতে খুব ভালোবাসে। পরমা বলছিল বাবা, এবার পূজোয় আসার খুব ইচ্ছে আছে। কতদিন কলকাতার পূজো দেখিনি, এখানে ও ভালোই পূজো হয়, আর ছেলেদের হাইস্কুল হয়ে যাচ্ছে এরপর যাওয়া মুশ্কিল হবে। ভবেশের মন আনন্দে আত্মহারা হয়ে যায়, ক্যালেন্ডার দেখেন আর দিন গোণেন। ছেলে যখন প্রথম চাকরি নিয়ে বেঙ্গালুরু গেল তখন মঞ্জুর কি কান্না, উনি কত করে বুঝিয়েছিলেন ছেলেকে উন্নতি করতে হবে। আর বেঙ্গালুরু তো প্লেনে দু'ঘন্টার পথ আসা কোনো ব্যাপার না। কিন্তু সেবার যখন বাড়ি এসে ছেলে জানাল যে ও মাস ছয়েকের জন্য বিদেশ যাওয়ার একটা সুযোগ পেয়েছে, তখন ভবেশের বুকটা কেঁপে উঠেছিল। মাস ছয়েক বাদে ফিরে এল ঠিকই পুরোপুরি চলে যাওয়ার জন্য। মাস চারেক সময় পাওয়া গেছিল তারই মধ্যে মেয়ে দেখে বাবলুর বিয়ে দেওয়া হল।

ভবেশ ভাবেন মা বাবা তো চিরকাল সন্তানের উন্নতির কথাই ভেবেছেন, তবে সবসময় হয়তো এভাবে ভাবেনি। ভবেশের বন্ধু অনুপ ছিল খুব ব্রিলিয়ান্ট, সকলে যখন একটা চাকরি জোগাড় করতে হিমসিম খাচ্ছে তখন ও একসাথে তিনটে চাকরি পেয়েছিল। তারমধ্যে সেরাটি ছিল খোদ প্রধানমন্ত্রীর দপ্তরে, কিন্তু এরজন্য দিল্লিতে থাকতে হবে। অনুপের বাবা হুকুম দিলেন বাড়িতে থেকে যেটা হয় সেটা কর। অগত্যা অনুপ কলকাতাতেই থেকে গেল আর একটা রাষ্ট্রায়ত্ত্ব ব্যাংকে চাকরি করল। গতবছর অনুপটা চলে গেল হঠাৎ করে, শেষদিন পর্যন্ত আফসোস করত চাকরিটা করতে পারেনি বলে। ভবেশকে বলতেন একদম ঠিক করেছিস ছেলেকে পিছু টানিসনি। ভবেশ ভাবেন টানলেও থেকে যেতো না। এদের ওপর তো অভিমানও করা যায় না, সত্যিই ভালো কাজের সুযোগ পেলে ছাড়া যায়না। সর্বোপরি জীবনে অর্থের প্রয়োজনকে অস্বীকার করার কোনো উপায় নেই।

ভবেশ নিজের মতো জীবনটাকে একটা নিয়মে বেঁধে ফেলেছেন। মঞ্জু যখন ছিল তখন একটু অন্যরকম ছিল, আর আজ বছর তিনেক জীবনের ছন্দটা পাণ্টে গেছে। বিনা নোটিশে মঞ্জু যেদিন চলে গেল সেই রাতটা ছিল ভয়াবহ। ছেলে বৌমা অনেক করে ওদের সাথে নিয়ে যেতে চাইলেও উনি যেতে চাননি। শেষে সবসময়ের একজনকে ঠিক করে ওরা ফিরে গেছিল। সেই সময় আত্মীয়স্বজন ছিল বেশ কিছুদিন আস্তে আস্তে ফাঁকা হয়ে গেল। আর ছয় মাসের মধ্যে সেই সবসময়ের লোককেও ছাড়াতে হল। তারপর থেকে পাড়ার হোম সার্ভিসের নিতাই আর ঠিকে মেয়ে টুসুই ভরসা। এদের জন্যই প্রতিদিন অপেক্ষা করেন ভবেশ। সারাটা দিন কেটে গেলেও বিকেল থেকে আর কাটতে চাইতো না। একসময় ভবেশ ছাত্র পড়াতেন, ভাবলেন আবার যদি কিছু করা যায়। টুসুকে বললেন ওদের বস্তির ছোটোদের যদি কিছু শেখান তবে কি ওরা ওনার কাছে পড়বে? টুসু তো আনন্দে আটখানা, ওর ছেলেমেয়েকে দিয়ে শুরু আর এখন প্রায় জনা পাঁচেক ছেলে মেয়ে আসে পড়তে। আর উনি সকলের দাদু, ওদের পড়ান, গল্প বলেন। ভবেশ যেন এক নতুন জীবন পেয়েছেন, এক অন্যরকম অভিজ্ঞতা আর অনেকখানি ভালোলাগা। ওই বস্তির লোকেদের কারোর কাছে দাদু ,কেউ বলে মেসোমশাই আরও কত কি বলে ওরা সম্বোধন করে। ভবেশের ভালোমন্দ সব কিছুর খোঁজ এখন ওরাই রাখে। একাকিত্ব আর ভবেশের ওপর চেপে বসতে পারে না। এইসব বিষয়ে উনি ছেলে বৌমাকে কিছুই জানানোর প্রয়োজন বোধ করেননি। কিন্তু কোনো হিতৈষী আত্মীয়ের মারফত জেনে বাবলু বাবার ওপর বিরক্ত প্রকাশ করে। ওর ধারণা বাবাকে একা পেয়ে ওই বস্তির লোকজন বিপদে ফেলবে। ভবেশ জানায় তাঁর যথেষ্ট বয়েস হয়েছে ,তাই মানুষ চিনতে ভুল হওয়ার কথা নয়। আসলে ভবেশ চান না ছেলে ওনাকে নিয়ে অযথা চিন্তা করুক। দিনগুলো কেটে যাচ্ছিল ঠিকই কিন্তু বেশি রাতে হঠাৎ করে ঘুমটা ভেঙে গেলে ভবেশ কান পেতে নিজের হৃদস্পন্দনটা শোনার চেষ্টা করেন। মাঝে মাঝে অজানা একটা ভয় চারিদিক থেকে ঘিরে ধরে —যদি দুম করে একদিন এই আওয়াজটা বন্ধ হয়ে যায়, তাহলে কি হাজার হাজার মাইল দূরে তাঁর একমাত্র সন্তান জানতে পারবে?

পুজোর দিন যত এগিয়ে আসছে ভবেশের মনটাও তত আনন্দে ভরে উঠছে। মানিক বস্তিতে থাকে, রাজমিস্ত্রির কাজ করে। মেসোমশাই বাড়ি রং করাবেন শুনে নিজেই সব ব্যবস্থা করে দিল - দেখবেন মেসোমশাই দাদা বৌদি এসে এবার অবাক হয়ে যাবেন। ভবেশ ভাবেন এইভাবেই কত অনাখ্যীয় মানুষ পরম আখ্যীয় হয়ে ওঠে। কথা আছে পরমা ছেলেদের নিয়ে কদিন আগেই আসবে আর বাবলু পুজোর সময়। মঞ্জু চলে যাবার পর এই তিন বছর ওরা আসেনি। ভবেশ ভাবেন নাতিদের কি খাওয়াবেন, কি কি দেখাবেন, কত গল্প করবেন। এইসব ভাবেন আর দিন গোনেন। বাবলু বলেছে বাবা এবার তোমাকে নিয়ে যাব, ভবেশ বলেছেন দেখা যাবে।

একদিন হঠাৎ বাবলু জানাল বাবা এবার যাওয়া হচ্ছে না, ছেলেরা স্কুলে ছুটি পাচ্ছে না। তবে সামনের সামার ভেকেশনে নিশ্চয়ই যাব। ভবেশ ফোনটা ছেড়ে দিয়ে ধপ্ করে বসে পড়েন, চোখের সামনে সব যেন অন্ধকার। কতক্ষণ ওইভাবে বসে ছিলেন নিজেও জানেন না, সম্বিত ফিরল যখন চোখের জলে চশমার কাঁচটা ঝাপসা হয়ে গেল। ভবেশ ভাবেন উনি তো নিজের মতো বেশ থাকেন, কোনো দাবি নেই। তবে ওরা কেন আশা দিয়ে এভাবে বৃদ্ধের সাথে রসিকতা করে।

বাজল তোমার আলোর বেনু, মাতল রে ভুবন.... মহালয়াটা চালিয়ে ভবেশ এসে বারান্দায় বসেন। বীরেন্দ্র কৃষ্ণ ভদ্রের আগমনী বার্তা যেন পুরানো স্মৃতিগুলোকে উস্কে দিচ্ছে...বাবলুর ছোটবেলা, মঞ্জুর মহালয়ার দিন ভোর থেকে ব্যস্ততা আরও কত কি। নিজের অজান্তেই চোখ দুটো ভিজে যাচ্ছে, রেডিওতে বাজছে রূপং দেহি..। সকালে দাদুর স্থির নিখর দেহখানি দেখে টুসু চিৎকার করে ওঠে, ওর চিৎকারে সকালের নিস্তর্রতা ভেঙে খান্ খান্ হয়ে যায়—এবার যে আগমনীর সাথেই বিসর্জনের বাজনা বেজে গেছে।

উপন্যাসের শেষ পাতায়

সহেলী রায়

“একটু হাত চালাও চন্দনদা, আর দু'ঘন্টাও নেই”।

চন্দন পালকের মতো ভাসাল শুধু শরীরটাকে। যেন এবার সে জোরকদমে এগোবে কিন্তু কাজের ভাবগতিকের তেমন পরিবর্তন হল না। দুশ্চিন্তায় মুনাইয়ের মুখ চোখ ক্রমশ শুকিয়ে যাচ্ছে। অতিরিক্ত চিন্তাতে মুনাইয়ের ফর্সা গাল দুটো রক্তিম হয়। এখনও তার ব্যতিক্রম নেই। কপালের কুচি কুচি চুলগুলো গ্রীষ্মের আগমনী ঘামবিন্দু জড়ো করে লেপ্টে রয়েছে। মার্চের শেষ। তেমন গরম পড়েনি। বরং এবছরের প্রলম্বিত শীতের আঁচলের শেষটুকু এখনো সামান্য দেখা যায় ভোরের দিকে বা সন্ধ্যে গাঢ় হলে। মুনাইয়ের শরীর তেতে উঠছে এতেই। খানিকক্ষণের মধ্যেই অ্যানুয়াল জেনেরাল মিটিং। অথচ চন্দনদা এখনো প্রেজেন্টেশনের স্লাইডগুলো সাজিয়ে তোলেনি। আগের দিনই সমস্ত তথ্য ভরে একটা

প্রাথমিক প্রেজেন্টেশন তৈরি করে দিয়েছিল মুনাই। চন্দনদার কাজ শুধু সেটিকে প্রসাধনীর সাহায্যে মোহময়ী করে তোলা। কারণ প্রতিযোগিতা। মুনাই একটি বহুজাতিক শিক্ষা প্রতিষ্ঠানের উচ্চপদস্থ কর্মচারী। বহু দেশে এমনকী বিদেশেও ওদের গুচ্ছ গুচ্ছ বটের ঝুরির মতো শাখা। মালিকপক্ষ সর্বদাই ক্রিকেট বা ফুটবল ওয়ার্ল্ড কাপ খেলিয়ে বেড়াচ্ছেন। সব ব্রাণ্ডের কর্মীরা একটাই প্রতিষ্ঠানের অঙ্গ। কিন্তু চরম শত্রুতা একে অপরের মধ্যে। আখেরে লাভ মালিক পক্ষেরই। সবাই লড়ছে নিজেদের সেরা প্রমাণ করতে। মাইনেপত্তর বেশ মোটা অঙ্কের। লড়ার ভিটামিনটা ঠিকঠাক জোটে বলে মাটি কামড়ে পড়েও থাকে লোকজন। উপায়ও নেই। একটু এদিক ওদিক হলেই দুমদাম ‘ফায়ার’ শব্দ শোনা যায়, সে ধোঁয়ার গন্ধে বড়োই দম আটকে আসে। মুনাই আবার সরাসরি অ্যাডমিশন ডিপার্টমেন্টটাই দেখে। মা লক্ষ্মীর ঝাঁপির দায়িত্ব আর কী। মালিকপক্ষ ওইটি পেলেই খুশ, বাকি সব ধুলো হয়ে যাক। ঘটে যদি খুচরো পয়সার ঠুংঠাং আওয়াজ হয়, তখনই চলে চিরুনি তল্লাশি। এজিএমের দিনটা হল মুনাইদের সারা বছরের ফলাফল বেরোনের দিন। ওই দিনই হিসেব হয়ে যায় কার আয়ু কতদূর। সারা ভারতের সমস্ত ব্রাণ্ডের সামনে পেশ করতে হয় নিজেদের গর্ব অথবা ঝুলকালি। মুনাইয়ের ওপরেই দৃষ্টি ওদের ব্রেবোর্ন রোড ব্রাণ্ডের কর্মকর্তাদের। প্রায় বারো বছর হয়ে গেল মুনাইয়ের এখানে। বেশ বীরদর্পেই এগিয়ে নিয়ে গেছে ও ব্রেবোর্ন রোডকে। এবারেও টার্গেটের চেয়ে বেশি টার্নওভার। তবে এমন বেশিটা, অনেক ব্রাণ্ডই করে। কার কত বেশি, সেটাই এই দিনের চমক আর ভাগ্যনির্ধারণের মাপকাঠি। এমন একটা দিনে চন্দনের মতো মিয়োনো মুড়ি নিয়ে খুব মুশকিলে পড়তে হয় মুনাইকে। মুনাইয়ের ভালোমন্দ রিপোর্টের ওপরেই চন্দনের মতো বেশ কিছুজনের জীবিকা নির্ভর করে। ইচ্ছে হলেই ডাস্টবিনে ছুঁড়ে ফেলতে পারে মুনাই এদের। দাদুর কথা মনে পড়ে যায়। “দুর্বলের দুর্বলতাকে ঘষে মেজে যদি শান দিতে পারিস তবেই তো তার রশ্মিতে তাকে চকচকে লাগবে রে”। মুনাই চেষ্টা চালিয়ে যায়, ওঠো, জাগো, কুইক কুইক...। আজ ওকে জ্বলজ্বলে দেখতে লাগাটা খুব জরুরি। বারো বছরে ব্রেবোর্ন রোডের রাই ব্যানার্জি বেশ চর্চা ও ঈর্ষার বিষয় হয়ে দাঁড়িয়েছে। রাই ওরফে মুনাই বেশ তারিয়ে তারিয়ে উপভোগ করে ব্যাপারটা।

অফিসে সবকিছু সামলে নিয়েই দৌড়তে হবে স্যালনে। বিদিশার মেকাপ স্টুডিওতে বুকিং নিয়ে রেখেছে। আজ কিছু হেভি ওয়েট ক্লায়েন্টের বুকিং ছিল বলে বিদিশা একটু কিন্তু কিন্তু করছিল। মেগা সিরিয়ালের কয়েকজন অভিনেত্রী, হাহ! আজকাল সবাই ভারযুক্ত। মুনাই এদের থেকে কয়েকগুণ বেশি উপার্জন করে। রূপেও অপরূপা। বিদিশার মতো হাই লেভেলের বেশ কিছু বন্ধুবান্ধব আছে তার এই তিলোত্তমায়। উচ্চতার শিখরে চড়তে দাদুই শিখিয়েছেন ছোট থেকে। “থেমে যাস না। থামতে নেই। চেয়ে, পেয়ে গেলে আরো কিছুটা চাইতে হয়। আবার নতুন করে পাওয়ার লড়াইটা করতে হয়”। বড়ো অদ্ভুত লাগে মুনাইয়ের। এই কথাগুলো যিনি ওর রঞ্জে রঞ্জে ভরে দিয়েছেন তিনি নিজেই কেমন থেমে বসে আছেন।

“দেখে তো মনে হচ্ছে, দাঁড়িয়েছে ভালোই। যা এবার সবাই রেডি হ। শার্প পাঁচটায় তাহলে দেখা হচ্ছে সবার সঙ্গে, চন্দনদা টাই পরবে কিন্তু।”

টিমকে একটু উজ্জীবিত করে মুনাই গাড়ি নিয়ে ছুটল বিদিশার কাছে। পার্কস্ট্রিটে পাঁচতারা হোটেলে আজ তাদের জমায়েত। কর্তব্যাক্তিরা অনেকেই এসে পড়েছেন। মুনাইয়ের শাড়ি গাড়িতেই রাখা। সকাল থেকে একটা ধ্যাড়ধেড়ে টি শার্ট আর জিন্স পরে চালিয়ে গেল। এই প্রথম মায়ের শাড়ি পরবে মুনাই। পীচ আর মেরুনের মেলবন্ধনের সাউথ সিঙ্ক। দাদুর থেকে আবদার করে কিনেছিল মা। মুনাইয়ের দেড় বছর বয়সে ওর বাবা ওদের পরিত্যাগ করেন। মুনাইয়ের মা তখন সদ্য তরুণী। কালজয়ী লেখক দাদুর একমাত্র মেয়ে পথেঘাটে তারকার মতোই ব্যবহার পেতেন। দাদুও মা আর মুনাইকে যত্নে মুড়ে রেখেছিলেন। বছর সাতেক হল মা' ক্যান্সারে ভুগে চলে গেলেন। সেই থেকেই দাদু যেন কেমন মুষড়ে আছেন। আগের সেই তেজটি কমতে কমতে এখন প্রায় নিভু নিভু। তবে কলমের জ্যোতি কমেনি। এখনো সাহিত্যমহল মাথা নীচু করে নির্বাণ ব্যানার্জির নাম নেয়। কলকাতা শহরের মুনাই যখন প্রথম পা রাখে নির্বাণ ব্যানার্জির নাতনি হিসেবেই পরিচিতি শুরু হয়েছিল, দাদুর দেখানো পথেই নিজের পরিচিতি বানিয়েছে মুনাই। শাড়িটার সঙ্গে একটা মেরুন গর্জাস ফুল স্লীভ ফুল লেস্টের ব্লাউজ পরেছে মুনাই। খুব পাতলা স্মার্ট হীরের সেটে মুনাই যেকোন অভিনেত্রীকে হার মানাচ্ছে। স্মোকি আই, ম্যাট ফিনিশ মেকাপ, ন্যুড লিপসটিকে মুনাইয়ের আত্মবিশ্বাস তুঙ্গে উঠেছে। বিদিশাকে আলিঙ্গন করে ধন্যবাদ জানিয়ে মুনাই রওনা দিল পার্কস্ট্রিটের দিকে।

প্রত্যেকটা সিগন্যালেই তুলোর মতো মেঘরূপী হালকা জ্যাম জমে আছে। সময়ে পৌঁছতে পারার একটা চাপা উত্তেজনা মুনাইকে ভেতরে ভেতরে অস্থির করে তুলছে। গাড়ির ভেতর ঠান্ডা যন্ত্রটি নেহাৎ প্রবল তাই উত্তেজনার বহিঃপ্রকাশ তেমন ঘটছে না। হাতের তালু দু'টো ক্রমশ লাল হয়ে যাচ্ছে শুধু। এই যে অবিরাম একটা ভাবনা, চলতে চলতে কেমন গুনগুন গানের মতো মনে লেগে আছে। এই মুহূর্তে এই পেট গুড়গুড় করা গানটাকেই ভীষণ ভালোবাসতে ইচ্ছে করছে মুনাইয়ের। হঠাৎ দামী ব্রান্ডেড পার্সের ভেতর ফোনটা সজোরে বেজে উঠল। মুনাইয়ের সমস্ত সঙ্গীত সাধনা বান বান শব্দ করে খানখান হয়ে গেল। মুনাই কিছুটা বিরক্ত হল। নিশ্চয়ই অফিসের কেউ। বুকের ভেতরের টিপটিপানি বেড়ে গেল আরো। সব ঠিক আছে তো? আননোন নাম্বার। মুনাইয়ের জু দুটো কাছাকাছি এসে গেল। অসম্ভব! এখন কোন অচেনা নাম্বারে কথা বলতে পারবে না। রিং হয়ে হয়ে বন্ধ হয়ে গেল। ব্যাগের কোণাতে কাঁপতে কাঁপতে একসময় স্থির হয়ে গেল ফোনটা। মিনিট দু'য়েকের বিরতি দিয়ে আবার ফোনটা বেজে উঠল। একই নাম্বার। মুনাই ধরল না। কাছাকাছি এসে গেছে। মুনাই গাড়ি থেকে নামবে যখন কলিগ এবং জুনিয়ররা হাঁ হবে কতটা, কে কতটা প্রশংসায় ভিজিয়ে তুলবে তাকে এসব ভাবনাতেই ডুবে আছে সে। শাড়িটার ওপর মোলায়েম করে হাত বুলোচ্ছে মুনাই। মা যেন আজ লেপ্টে আছে মুনাইয়ের

সঙ্গে। এজিএম শেষ হলেই কিছুদিন সেশন ব্রেক থাকবে। ক'দিন দাদুর সঙ্গে কাটিয়ে আসবে মুনাই। থেমে যাওয়া মানুষটাকে দম দিয়ে আবার যদি চালু করা যায়, সে চেষ্টা করতে হবে। এতদিন দাদু তাকে থামতে দেয়নি, এবার মুনাইয়ের পালা। ফোনটা আরও একবার বাজছে। গাড়ি থেকে নামল মুনাই। কেউ কেউ এগিয়ে এসেছে, বিশেষত মুনাইয়ের টিম। এইচওডি ডাকলেন মুনাইকে, শেষ মিনিটের সাজেশন, প্রস্তুতি ঝালিয়ে নিচ্ছেন একবার। ফোনটা বাজছে। এতবার কে? মুনাইকে স্কীণ একটা অস্বস্তি জড়িয়ে ধরতে চাইছে। মুনাই উপেক্ষা করছে। এ মূহুর্তে সারা পৃথিবী ওর কাছে তুচ্ছ। দাদু শিখিয়েছেন, “যখন যেটা করবি এক’শ শতাংশ নিজেকে উজাড় করে দিবি, দেখিস না আমি যখন লিখি নিজেকে নিংড়ে দিই, তবেই না পাঠক আমায় আত্মস্থ করে, সাফল্য ওর মধ্যেই লেখা থাকে।” আজ বারবার দাদুর প্রতিটা কথা মনে আসছে মুনাইয়ের। কিন্তু অস্বস্তিটাও ফাঁকফোকড় খুঁজছে যেন। সুযোগ পেলেই মুনাইকে জালে ফেলবে। এতটা সময় এই বিড়ম্বনা নিয়ে থাকা যায় না কিছুতেই। এক্ষুনি ঝেড়ে ফেলে মনোনিবেশ করতে হবে নিজের কাজে। অনুষ্ঠানের সূচনা হয়ে গেছে। একে একে বক্তৃতা পর্ব চলছে। মাঝখানে টি ব্রেক। তারপরেই সব ব্রাঞ্চের প্রেজেন্টেশন। টি-ব্রেক পর্যন্ত ধৈর্য রইল না মুনাইয়ের। ওয়াশ রুমের দিকে হাঁটা দিল। ফোনটা বের করল টেনেটনে। সাইলেন্ট আছে অনেকক্ষণ। তের’টা মিসড কল। একই নাম্বার থেকে। কে?

“রাই বলছ? কতক্ষণ ট্রাই করছি তোমায়। এক্ষুনি একবার দুর্গাপুর আসতে হবে। তোমার দাদু ভীষণ তোমায় দেখতে চাইছেন।”

“দাদু? আপনি কে? দাদু কোথায়? কী হয়েছে দাদুর?”

“তুমি তাড়াতাড়ি চলে এসো মা।”

“আপনি কে বলছেন?”

এত হেঁয়ালি সহ্য হয় না মুনাইয়ের।

“তুমি এসো, কথা হবে। এখন রাখছি।”

ফোনটা কেটে দিল ওপার থেকে। মুনাই আবার ডায়াল করল। নট রীচেবল। এ আবার কেমন রসিকতা। দাদুর সঙ্গে কালই কথা হয়েছে। দাদু জানেন মুনাইয়ের আজ কতখানি ব্যস্ততা। তাছাড়া ও বাড়িতে দাদুকে দেখাশোনার জন্য চব্বিশ ঘন্টার লোক মাণিকমামা, রাধামাসি আছে, ড্রাইভার সুবীর মামা আছে। তারা তো কেউ কিছু জানায়নি। সবার সঙ্গেই কথা হয় মুনাইয়ের। রাধামাসিকে ফোন করল মুনাই।

“আসছিস?”

দাদু? রাধামাসির ফোনটা দাদু ধরল কেন?

“কেন কী হয়েছে? তুমি কেমন আছ?”

“ঠিকই আছি। তুই এলে বাকি কথা হবে, চলে আয় এখনি।”

দাদুর এই আচরণ মুনাইয়ের মাথায় ঢুকছে না।

‘হ্যাঁ পরশু যাব তো। এখন তো আমার এজিএম চলছে। জানো তো’।

“না না এম্মুনি আয়।”

মুনাই চমকে উঠল। দাদুর গলাটা একদম ছোটবেলার মতো চনমনে। বর্তমানের ধীর স্থির হয়ে যাওয়া নির্বাণ ব্যানার্জির মতো নয়।

“রাধামাসিকে দাও তো একবার ফোনটা। আর হ্যাঁ আমায় কে ফোন করছিল গো?”

ওদিক থেকে যোগাযোগ বিচ্ছিন্ন হল। নট রীচেবল। মাণিকমামা, সুবীরমামা কেউ সুইচড অফ, কেউ নট রীচেবল। মুনাইয়ের পাজেলড লাগছে। দুশ্চিন্তায় মাথা ঘুরছে। ওর পা এগোতে চাইছে না। প্রেজেন্টেশন দেওয়ার কথা ভাবতেই ভীষণ গা গুলোতে লাগল। বমি করল খানিকটা। সারাদিনে একটা স্যান্ডউইচ আর কয়েক কাপ কফি ছাড়া কিছুই পেটে ছিল না। মাথা ঝিমঝিম করছে। ওয়াশ রুম থেকে বেরিয়ে একটা অদৃশ্য টানে মুনাই হোটেল ছেড়ে বাইরে চলে এল। রাজপথে গাড়ির ঢল। মুনাই পার্কিং-এ ছুটল। মুনাইয়ের ব্যক্তিগত ড্রাইভার উমেশ ওখানেই ছিল। মুনাইকে দেখে ভূত দেখার মতো চমকাল।

“দুর্গাপুর চলো”।

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গোটা বাড়িটা বাইরে থেকে কেমন যেন নিশ্চিহ্ন কোন দীপে একা জেগে থাকা পথিকের মতো দেখাচ্ছে। এখন প্রায় রাত দেড়টা। হাইরোডে রাতে ট্রাক লরির ভয়ানক জ্যাম থাকে। গাড়িতেই ফোন সুইচড অফ করেছিল মুনাই। সাজঘাতিক একটা ঘটনা ঘটিয়ে এসেছে সে। নিদারুণ শাস্তি পেতে হবে এর জন্য। কিন্তু কেন জানি না কিছুই এসে যাচ্ছে না মুনাইয়ের। তার ভেতরের মুনাই একটাই কথা বলছে, ‘দুর্গাপুর চলো’। ব্যক্তিগত একটা নম্বর থেকে অন্য ফোনে বাড়ির সবকটা মানুষকে বারংবার চেষ্টা করে গেছে মুনাই। কারো রিং হয়েছে, ধরছে না, কেউ সুইচড অফ, কেউ নট রীচেবল। একটা সময় ক্লান্ত হয়ে ঘুমিয়ে পড়েছে মুনাই। তার সমস্ত নার্ভ কেমন নিস্তেজ হয়ে আসছিল। বারান্দার আলোটা জ্বলছে। মাঝরাতে কেন আলো জ্বালিয়ে রেখেছে? মুনাই আসবে বলে? মুনাই গেট খুলল।

“এলি?” বারান্দার গ্রিলের তালাটা দাদু নিজে এসে খুলছে। কিন্তু কেন? বাকিরা কোথায়?

“কী হয়েছে? মাণিকমামা কই?”

মুনাই বিধ্বস্ত। দাদুর এত পরিবর্তন হল কীভাবে? নতুন করে ওঁকে যেন প্রাণ ঢেলে দিয়েছে কেউ।

“ওরা সবাই ঘুমচ্ছে। তুই ঘরে আয়। উমেশকে বল গাড়ি ঢুকিয়ে সুবীরের ঘরে শুয়ে পড়তে, ও আজ নেই”।

মুনাইয়ের কিছুই মাথায় ঢুকছে না। বারান্দার আলো জ্বললেও ঘরের ভেতরের আলোগুলো নেভানো। একটা ধূপের গন্ধ আসছে। রাধামাসি সন্ধে দিয়েছিল হয়তো। গন্ধটা ঘরে বন্দী হয়ে আছে।

“লাইটটা জ্বালো।”

“না থাক। এই আলোআঁধারি বেশ লাগছে। বারান্দার আলোতে গিলের ছায়াগুলো কেমন ঘরে ছড়িয়ে পড়েছে দ্যাখ। তোকে বেশ লাগছে। খুব সুন্দর সেজেছিস। দীপুর শাড়িটা পরেছিস, না”?

মুনাইয়ের বিস্ময়ের পারদ চড়ছে।

“কী হয়েছে দাদু? মনখারাপ?”

নির্বাণ ব্যানার্জি চুপ রইলের খানিক।

“ছিল। এখন আর নেই। আমি কালই একটা উপন্যাস শেষ করেছি জানিস। তোকে না বলে কিছুতেই থাকতে পারছিলাম না।”

মুনাইয়ের বুকের ভেতর যেন রক্ত চলকে উঠল। এটা সত্যিই খুশির খবর। নির্বাণ ব্যানার্জি পাঠককে একটার পর একটা ছোট বা বড়ো গল্প উপহার দিয়েছেন। প্রত্যেকটা গল্পই কালজয়ী হয়েছে। ‘গল্পের রাজা’ খেতাব মিলেছে। কিন্তু আজ পর্যন্ত একটিও উপন্যাস লেখেননি উনি। মা’কে বারবার বলতেন, “আমি একটা অন্তত উপন্যাস লিখবই, দেখিস”। পাঠকদের কাছ থেকেও অনুরোধ আসত। কিন্তু সবগুলোই অল্প শব্দে এমন শেষ হয়ে যেত, নির্বাণ সীমানা পেরতেন না। বেশিরভাগ মানুষ এতেই অভ্যস্ত হয়ে গেলেন। কোথাও যেন এই উপন্যাস লেখার একটা থিডে গ্রাস করতো দাদুকে। মাকে নিয়ে মুনাই আর দাদু অনেক লড়েছিল। শেষরক্ষা হয়নি। মা যাওয়ার পর দাদু বিমিয়ে গেলেন। লেখা কমল। রাইটার্স ব্লক বলে চুপ থাকলেন। ভাবতে পারছেন না। পাবলিশারদের চাপে এক দু’টো লিখতেন। মুনাই অনেকবার বলতো, “জোর করে ওসব লিখতে হবে না, তার চেয়ে বরং উপন্যাস চেষ্টা করো”। দাদু বলতেন, “হ্যাঁ, একটা অন্তত উপন্যাস লিখতে হবে মুনাই, নয়তো মনে হবে সারাজীবন কিছুই লিখিনি”।

“আরে দারুণ তো দাদু। তুমি লিখছ বলনি কেন? আমি কত চিন্তা করেছি জানো?”

মুনাইয়ের গলায় অভিমানের সুর।

“জানিরে। কিন্তু কী করব? তোর মা যে আমায় লিখতেই দিচ্ছিল না। ইউনিভার্সিটির প্রেমিককে বিয়ে করল। আমি তখন আকাশছোঁয়া। জামাই প্রেসে সামান্য প্রফ দেখার কাজ করে, তাও আমারই বদান্যতায়। নিজের কোন তাগিদ ছিল না। আমার পরজীবী সহ্য হয় না। বিষিয়ে গেল তোর মায়ের মনটাও। তোর বাবা তাদের ছেড়ে চলে গেল। তার সঙ্গে যোগাযোগ রেখেছিস, তোর মাও রেখেছিল।

শেষদিকে তোর মা দাঁত নখ বের করে আমায় আঘাত করতে চাইতো, ‘অহঙ্কারী’, ‘বিষ নজর’ কত কিছু শুনতে হয়েছে, অভিশাপ দিত আমার কলমই আমায় ডোবাবে। লিখতে বসলেই সে কী আশ্ফালন তার। লেখা বন্ধ হয়ে গেল। খালি মাথা একজন লেখককে শরীরে মনে কতটা পঙ্গু করে দেয় জানিস”?

মুনাই হতবাক। এতকিছু জমিয়ে রেখেছে দাদু? হ্যাঁ বাবার সঙ্গে যোগাযোগ আছে মুনাইয়ের। তবে ক্ষীণ। বাবা কোনদিন দাদুর সম্বন্ধে অভিযোগ করেননি। মুনাই অবশ্য কখনো জানতেও চায়নি কেন চলে গেছিল বাবা, বড়ো হওয়ার সঙ্গে সঙ্গে দাদু, মা দুজনেই মুনাইকে জানিয়েছিল সবটা। দেড় বছরে, বাবার জন্য তেমন কোন টান তৈরি হয়নি মুনাইয়ের। তফাতই নেই, বাবা থাকা বা না থাকায়। দাদু আর মায়ের সঙ্গেই অভ্যস্ত ছিল সে। ফর্মাল একটা যোগাযোগ আছে। জন্মদিন, বিজয়া বা পরীক্ষার রেজাল্টে শুভেচ্ছা বিনিময়, ওটুকুই। মা কি সত্যি দাদুকে দোষারোপ করতেন? মায়ের অসুখের সময় মুনাই কলকাতা দুর্গাপুর করত। শেষের ক’টাদিন ছুটিতে ছিল শুধু। হতেও পারে। মৃত্যু আসন্ন জেনে নিজের জমিয়ে রাখা ব্যথাগুলো উগড়ে দিয়ে গেছে হয়তো।

“এসব তো আমায় আগেই বলতে পারতে। আমি তোমায় থামতে দিতাম না। কলম নামাতে দিতাম না কিছুতেই। মাকেও বোঝাতাম”।

“তোকে আর আটকাইনি। তোর জীবনটা তুই ভালো করে বাঁচ সেটাই চেয়েছি। তোর মায়ের বয়সটাও খুব অল্প তখন। খুব ছোট বয়সেই ওর সব ভালোলাগাগুলোর ডানা ছেঁটে দিয়েছিলাম আমি শুধুমাত্র নিজের খ্যাতির কথা ভেবে। বিয়েও করতে চায়নি আর। আমি ওর সুখ স্বাচ্ছন্দ্য চাইনি, নিজেরটা ছাড়া। কিন্তু আর পারছিলাম না। লড়লাম ওর সঙ্গে, বললাম ‘এবারেও আমিই জিতব’। তাই হল। ওকে আবার হারিয়ে দিয়ে আমি প্রায় পঞ্চাশ হাজার শব্দের উপন্যাসটা লিখেই ফেললাম। আমার ইচ্ছে-পূরণটা অনেক বেশি গুরুত্বপূর্ণ। রাইটার্স ব্লকের কথাটা মিথ্যে। আমি লিখছিলাম, কিন্তু এতদিন ভয়ে শেষ করিনি। কথাটা কানে বাজত, আমার লেখায় আমায় ডোবাবে। শেষটা লিখলেই যদি আমি ডুবে যাই? আমি সম্পূর্ণ উপন্যাস লিখেছি, এটা দীপু কি মেনে নিত”?

“কী যে বলো না তুমি। মা খুশিই হবে”।

জানলা দিয়ে শীতল ফুরফুরে হাওয়া আসছে। বসন্তের মায়া লাগানো। একটা দুটো পাখি ডাকছে। বোধহয় ভোর হয়ে আসছে।

“তুই শুতে যা। আমি এখানেই বসি”।

মুনাই যেন এতক্ষণ একটা ঘোরে ছিল। কোনরকমে নিজেকে টেনে অন্ধকারে হাতড়াতে হাতড়াতে সিঁড়ি ভেঙে দোতলায় উঠল। দোতলার বারান্দার আলোও জ্বলছে। মুনাই নিজের ঘর খুলে বিছানায় প্রায় ঝাঁপিয়ে পড়ল। মায়ের শাড়িটা পরাই থাক। ঘুম পাচ্ছে ভীষণ।

কতক্ষণ ঘুমিয়েছে জানে না। রাধামাসির ডাকাডাকিতে ঘুম ভাঙল। মাথা বেজায় ধরে আছে। সবকিছু মনে পড়তে একটু সময় লাগল। হঠাৎ খুব রাগ হল দাদুর ওপর। মুনাইয়ের কেরিয়ারটাও কি এতটা খেলো ছিল দাদুর উপন্যাসের কাছে? কথা বলা দরকার।

এ কী রাধামাসির চোখমুখ অত ফোলা কেন? এরকম অদ্ভুত ভাবে তাকিয়ে আছেই বা কেন?

“তুমি...তোমাকে কত ফোনের চেষ্টা করা হল। ধরলে না। কখন এলে? গেটে তো তালা ছিল। ডাক্তারবাবু সব ব্যবস্থা করে দিলেন, মর্গে তোমার জন্য...”

“কী হাবিজাবি বকছ? হ্যাঁ ফোন তো তুমি ধরোনি, দাদু কথা বলেছিল। অন্য একটা নম্বর থেকে আরেকজনও বলেছিল। গেট তো দাদু খুলে দিল। তোমরা ঘুমচ্ছিলে”।

“দাদু? কী বলছ মুনাই? দাদু তো কাল বিকেলেই...”

“কোথায় গেছে?”

“হসপিটাল চলো, দাদুর বডি তোমার জন্য মর্গে রাখা আছে”।

মুনাইয়ের হাত পা কাঁপছে। ফোনটা বের করল। হ্যাঁ, তাই তো ওই তেরোটা মিসড কলের একটা মাত্র আননোন নাম্বার অন্যগুলো সব রাধামাসি, মাণিকমামা, সুবীর মামার। ডাক্তার দাদুরও আছে। কিন্তু কাল তো সবকটাই আননোন দেখাচ্ছিল। এখন একটাই দেখাচ্ছে। যেটাতে মুনাই কলব্যাক করেছিল।

“এটা কার নম্বর বলো তো?”

“এটা তো তোমার দাদুরই আরেকটা নাম্বার, কিছুদিন আগেই নিয়েছিলেন। কাকে একটা ফোন করে কথা বলতেন, ‘জানি সব তোর কারসাজি, শেষ পাতাটা কিছুতেই লিখব না। সব শেষ হয়ে যাবে।’”

মুনিয়া দৌড়ল দাদুর ঘরে। টেবিলে একটা মোটা পান্ডুলিপি পড়ে আছে ওপরে দাদুর চশমা আর খোলা পেন। প্রথম পাতায় লেখা ‘শেষ হচ্ছে, এর পরেই সব ফুরিয়ে যাবে।’ রাধামাসি ডুকরে কেঁদে উঠল।

“হ্যাঁ এর উপরেই মাথা নীচু করেছিল কাকু। আমি ডাকতে এলাম, গড়িয়ে পড়ে গেল। ডাক্তারবাবু বলল ম্যাসিভ হার্ট অ্যাটাক। কিন্তু গেট বন্ধ করেই তো আমরা সবাই হসপিটাল গেলাম। ওখানে সব কাজ শেষ হতেই ভোর হয়ে গেল। এসে দেখছি গেট খোলা। ওপরে তুমি ঘুমাচ্ছ”।

মুনাই উমেশকে ডাকল। জানতে পারল গাড়ি, উমেশ কেউ নেই। ফোন বের করল।

“আপনি গেটের কাছে গেলেন। গেটটা খুলে গেল, আমি কাউকে দেখতে পেলাম না। আপনি একা কথা বলতে বলতে ঢুকে গেলেন। সত্যি বলছি ম্যাডাম আমার আর এগোনের সাহস হল না। আমি গাড়ি স্টার্ট করে বেরিয়ে এলাম। বর্ধমানে আছি ম্যাডাম। আমায় মাফ করবেন, খুব ভয় পেয়ে পালিয়ে এসেছি”।

মুনাই পান্ডুলিপিতার ওপর হাত রাখল। উষ্মতা ছড়াচ্ছে। পঞ্চাশ হাজার শব্দ যেন কিলবিল করছে মুক্তির আশায়।

শেষ হচ্ছে সম্পূর্ণ হলে অপেক্ষার অশরীরী রাত জাগে শুধু।

অভয়া

নীলা ব্যানার্জি

লক্ষ কণ্ঠে প্রতিবাদ আজ
মশাল হয়ে জ্বলে
বিচার যেনো হারিয়ে না যায়
রাজনীতির ঘোলা জলে।
মানুষের আজ একটাই ঘর
“আরজি কর, আরজি কর”।
পথ মানুষ বজ্রমুষ্টি তুলে করছে প্রতিবাদ
রাতের নিস্তরঙ্গতা ভেঙ্গে একটাই স্বর
“জাস্টিস ফর আরজি কর”।
সুনামির কলরবে মানুষ
মোমবাতি জ্বালিয়ে প্রতিবাদের পথে
তিলোত্তমা-কাদম্বিনী-অভয়ার সাথে।

আগামী

স্পন্দন মুখার্জি

বিশ্ব মাঝে দেখি এক অদৃশ্য আগুন
দেশে দেশে প্রাণের খেলা ভেলা ভাসার গান
রক্তে আঁকা সিংহ যারা আজ হয়েছে অগ্রসর
কালের স্রোতে হারায় আজি এক অভিমানী দল
ঘনায় আধার ধোয়ার ঘ্রানে
বাতাস যেন প্রহর গোনে
কি জানি কি জানি
মাতৃবক্ষ শূন্য হবে কার বজ্র আঘাতে
বিষাক্ত ওই জঞ্জালে সভ্যতার ইতিহাস টানে
হানে আঘাত কে যে কোথায়
কালের ঝুঁকুটি চোখ রাঙ্গায়
প্রলয় কালে রণরঙ্গে বিশ্ব চরাচর

অশ্রমোচন করবে কারা থাকবে কারা যাবে কারা
জন্ম নেবে পঙ্গু যীশু
থাকবে না রে রাজা প্রজা
সইবে কিরে বিষের জ্বালা ধরিত্রী অচল
ধানের ক্ষেতে ফাটে মাটি
দশের পেটে লাগে লাথি
এ এক অভিশাপ, বাঁচা বাঁচা ভবিষ্যৎ

ছুরি আবিষ্কারের পর স্বপ্না বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায়

ম্যানড্রেক অঙ্গুলিমুদ্রার তার ছড়াতেই
লোহায় ঘষা টান ছিটকানো শব্দ
পাঁজরের বাক্স থেকে উঠে এলো ছুরি
বেঁধানোর আগে তার ফলার লাফানি
ঝাঁকুনির গতি টপকে নেমে এলো

এখন আকাশ সবুজ
ম্যাজিকের বাক্স থেকে
বেরিয়ে এসেছে খয়েরি চুলের মেয়ে
ঝলমলে পোশাকে রক্তের দাগ
হাসির ভেতরে দানা বেদানা
স্কার্ফের উড়ন্তে ফলার উজ্জ্বল
সূর্যকেও লজ্জা দেয়

ম্যানড্রেক ঘামছে খুব ঘামছে
কারণ ছুরি আবিষ্কারের পর
তার সম্মোহনী আঙুল আর
ছুরির কথা শুনছে না অথবা
ছুরিটি নিজে আঙুল ছেড়ে বেরিয়ে
কোপাতে চাইছে জাদুকরের মাংস

উপলব্ধি কিংসুক রায়

পেরিয়ে এলেম জীবনরথে, অনেকটা পথ,
যখন হেরি, সেই পথের পানে,
হৃদয় আমার বিস্মিত আজ ,
এই পথেরই নানা মোড়ে, নানান বাঁকে, প্রতি ক্ষণে,
জীবন আমায় দিল ভরে,
অনেক কিছুই অগোচরে।
মাতৃস্নেহ, পিতৃস্নেহ, প্রকৃতিরই আশীষ অপার,
অধিকারে সমান সবার,
নেই তাতে কোন কৃতিত্ব আমার,
পেয়েছি যা, সেই আশীষে,
শৈশবেরই উষাক্ষণে, সব শিক্ষার অন্তরালে,
বিভেদবিহীন মানবপ্রীতি ,
তাকেই জানাই মোর প্রণতি।
ধন্য আমি, জন্ম আমার, পুণ্যভূমি ভারতবর্ষে,
এই দেশেরই নানা প্রান্তে, নানা বর্ণে, নানা গন্ধে,
বাওয়া আমার জীবনতরী, মানুষেরই সাগরমাবো,
মহানন্দে , দারুণ হর্ষে।
জীবনের এই সন্ধিক্ষণে,
ভালবাসায় আশীর্বাদে, ভরল আমার পাওয়ার ঝুলি,
রইল তাতে সবটা জুড়ে, মানুষেরই হৃদয়বাণী।।

বেঙ্গালুরুতে দুর্গা পূজা সন্দীপন দাস

বেঙ্গালুরুর বুকে এলো শারদীয়া,
দুর্গা মায়ের আগমন, শঙ্খধ্বনি দিয়া।
প্রবাসী বাংলার হৃদয়ে জাগে উৎসব,
আলোয় সেজে ওঠে প্রতিটি রাস্তা পথ।

পূজার বেলায় মণ্ডপে ভিড় জমে,
দুর্গা মায়ের মূর্তি, চোখে লাগে রঙের রসে।
ধূপের গন্ধে মিশে থাকে ভক্তির গান,
প্রবাসেও প্রাণ পায় বাংলার ঐতিহ্যবান।

শঙ্খ বাজে, ঢাকের তালে নাচে মন,
সিঁদুর খেলার মাঝে মায়ের আশীর্বাদ খন।
বিজয়ার দিনে মায়ের বিদায়ের বেলা,
কাঁদে মন, তবু হাসে পরানের মেলা।

বেঙ্গালুরুর আকাশে মিশে থাকে পূজার চাঁদ,
প্রবাসের মাঝে খুঁজে পাই শিকড়ের স্বাদ।
এখানেও মা আসেন, সুখের ভরসা,
দুর্গা পূজা, আমাদের প্রেমের ভাষা।

সবার শ্রীমা

মধুছন্দা ভট্টাচার্যী চক্রবর্তী

ঘোমটায় মুখ আড়াল করে বসে আছেন নারায়ণী,
রাশি রাশি পুষ্পাঞ্জলি ভক্তসকল দেয় আনি।
“যে যেখানে আছে ঠাকুর সবার তুমি ভালো করো,
তোমার ভক্তসন্তানদের দুঃখতাপ মোচন করো”।
এই প্রার্থনা নিয়ে দেবী বলেন সকল ভক্তজনে,
“আরো পুষ্প নিয়ে এস অঞ্জলি দাও মোর চরণে”।
স্বরূপ তাঁহার দেবী হলেও আমরা দেখি মানুষ তিনি,
আটপৌরে বসন পড়েন, যেন ঘরের মা জননী।

ঘরের মা’টি হয়েও তিনি একটি ঘরের নন জননী,
বিশ্বজোড়া তাঁর সংসার বিশ্বের তিনি মা জননী।
নির্বাসনের জীবন তিনি দেখিয়ে গেছেন এ সংসারে,
গৃহী হয়েও সর্বত্যাগী হবো মোরা কেমন করে।
“ঠাকুর আমায় তোমার করো” - এই মন্ত্র শেখান সদা,
তিনি মোদের সবার প্রিয় স্নেহময়ী মা সারদা।

স্নেহের আঁচল তলে মোদের নিরাপদে রাখেন সদা,

সূক্ষ দেহে সন্তানদের কাছে কাছে থাকেন সদা।
সন্তানদের শোকে দুঃখে তাঁর চোখেও অশ্রু ঝরে ,
যারা তাঁকে আপন ভাবে তারাই কেবল বুঝতে পারে।
চিরকালের অভয়বার্তা সন্তানের তরে তাঁহার,
“কেউ না থাকুক আমি মাতা আছি তোমার সদা আপনার।
ঠাকুর আছেন তোমার সাথে চিন্তা কেন করো তুমি,
শেষবেলাতে তোমায় নিতে আসবেন ঠাকুর আসবো আমি।
চিরমুক্তি পাবে তুমি এই জগতের দুঃখ থেকে,
ঠাকুর এবং আমার হয়ে থাকবে রামকৃষ্ণ-লোকে”।

Let's bring back our Durgas Sharmistha Dasgupta

So many Durgas are lost and stay buried forever because of our apathy and failure to convert our words to action.

We must live on but surely, we can go beyond a few armchair analyses, a few emotional outbursts, a few solidarity walks . Let us carry them in every little good we strive for and not box them up into a once upon a time story that we commemorated through a silent walk in the rain. Let us keep faith with all our Durgas, mortal or divine.

কেমন করে ফিরবে দুর্গা

এক দুর্গার বিদায় শেষে,
আসবে আবার নতুন বেশে
আরেক দুর্গা, হয়তো উমা,
বীরাঙ্গনা, অন্যতমা!
মোমের আলোয় করবো বরণ
রতমাখা রাঙা চরণ?
কেমন করে ফিরবে কন্যা
লজ্জাবিহীন, প্রাণহীন এই শীতল দেশে ?
কেমন করে করবে গ্রহণ,
বাসি ফুলের এই আয়োজন,
পূজার মন্ত্র মুখে মুখে
জ্বালবে না তার, আগুন, বুক?
ঢাকের বাজনা , আলোক সজ্জা,
কেমন করে ঢাকবে লজ্জা ?
শূন্য বুকের কান্না যত
রক্ত হয়ে ঝরবে না, ওই ত্রিনয়নে ?

A Durga burns as we turn our face,
Reaching out in warm embrace
To a divine another, a daughter too,
A Durga, or Uma, loved anew,
But who will light her path by night,
Will her feet tread blood in candle light?
Will this daughter return, as of yore,
To this tainted land, bereft of grace?

We'll offer incense, sweets and flowers,
But all reflecting these sordid hours,
Will chants not sound like mourning dirge,
Filling eyes in a sudden surge?
No light, no flowers, will hide the shame
Of a wronged Durga with another name ,
Will not the wounds of a bereaved home,
Seek fire and blood in the light of stars?

Promise me Stuti Chakraborti

I'm fading fast,
so please promise me that my name will live on in the voices of those I've loved and have loved me.

Please promise
that I will not be reduced to ashes that float inside a golden cup on the calm waves of the Ganga.

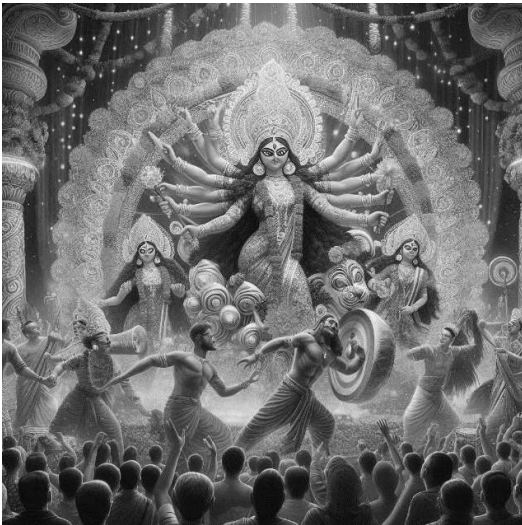
Please promise
that I will not be locked away in a wooden box, and hidden six feet under the ground.
And that instead my body will be somewhere under an open sky, and my soul in a place I've only visited in my dreams.

Please leave me somewhere
where I can truly rest in peace, even as rats chew away at my remains.

Please promise
that you'll tell them to have a lovely feast, but to kindly leave my two eyes alone.

So that I may never lose the stars I held in those eyes; even if they are now a mere reflection of the ones I used to own.

Utsav Durga Puja 2024 Rishin Roy Chowdhury



O, the thrill of Durga Puja's festive air,
When goddesses of light descend, banishing all despair,
In Bengaluru's streets, Utsav Durga Puja a symphony of joy
resounds,
As effigies of Durga rise, like celestial crowns, anointed with
gold.
The five sisters, Kali, Lakshmi, Saraswati's radiant might,
Laxmi, Sita, and Gauri, shine like stars in celestial flight.
Their warrior queen, Durga, astride her lion true,
A symbol of strength, courage, and the fight anew,
A beacon guiding us through life's darkest night.

The pandals burst with vibrant colours bright,
A kaleidoscope of art, a wondrous sight,
As incense wafts, a fragrant prayer rises high,
As devotees throng, their hearts filled with joy and wonder why.

In the midst of chaos, amidst the city's din,
A sense of calm descends, as the goddess within
Shines forth in beauty, radiating love and light,
Guiding us through life's tumultuous night,
Illuminating the path to hope and new life.

As the drums beat loud, the dhaak's rhythmic roar,
The streets come alive with a festive score,
The night sky twinkles like a celestial sea,
Reflecting the sparkle in our eyes, wild and carefree.

Oh, Durga Puja's magic weaves its spell,
A celebration of life, love, and all that is well;
May her power course through our veins like a river wide,
And may our hearts be filled with courage to abide;

May we draw strength from her fearless stand,
And may her compassion guide our trembling hand;
For in her presence, we find solace and peace,
And our spirits soar on the wings of release.

"Embrace the Divine, Celebrate Unity: Utsav Durga Puja 2024"

The Secret to Stress Free Exams

Divyanshi Soo

When exams creep up, causing such a fright,
Just take a deep breath and laugh with all you might.
No need for panic, no reason to fret, I've got the secrets, now place your
bets.

First things first, wake up early to cram,
or maybe sleep in and skip that old sham.
Who needs eight hours when coffee's around?
bB midday, you'll crash, but till then you're sound.

Next, try the technique of hiding your books,
under the couch where no one looks.
Out of sight, Out of mind, as they say,
without those textbooks, there's no dismay.

Grab a snack – Chocolate's the key
brain food, you know sets your neurons free.
Peanut butter, Chips, and a tub of Ice creams,
calories fuel that big – brained dream.

Friends can be helpful, or so they insist,
they'll quiz you, support you – or add to the list of distractions
like memes and hilarious jokes, by the end of the day,
you'll have learned about.... the G.O.A.Ts.

Study in style, with music so loud,
neighbors will think you've gathered a crowd.
Heavy metal, hip-hop, or some classical tune,
your brainwaves will Rock to Cosmic moon.

Flashcards are useful – or that's what they say,
but making them takes your whole day away.
By the time you're done, the exam's in the past,
now you're an expert on cards that don't last.

Exercise can clear the stress from your head,
but running? or Yoga? just stay in bed.
Stretching your limbs to the ceiling and back,
counts as a workout – cut yourself some slack.

The night before, don't get all uptight,
watching a movie will set things just right.
A comedy, anime or sci-fi,
and fall asleep with popcorn nearby.

In the morning, dressed in your lucky attire,
pajamas work wonders if you dare to aspire.
March into the test with swaggers and grace,
you've prepared your mind for this epic race.

When the Exams in front, don't break a sweat,
just doodle a masterpiece, don't you regret.
Write a short story, or a poem like this,
you've prepared your mind for this epic race.

So, there you have it, the key to success,
a carefree approach, no need to obsess.
Just laugh and enjoy, don't stress the small stuff,
For in the grand scheme, Exams are just a mere fluff.

Delhi Diaries

Sudeshna Ghosh

In the heart of India's vibrant capital, New Delhi lies a treasure trove of cultural wonders waiting to be uncovered. Join me on a whirlwind adventure as we traverse the city's iconic landmarks in just one day, immersing ourselves in its rich tapestry of history, spirituality, and architectural marvels.



Our journey commences with a visit to the tranquil Mahalakshmi Temple, where devotees gather to seek blessings from the goddess of wealth and prosperity. Amidst the rhythmic chants of prayers, we offer our own silent supplications before continuing on our quest. I approached the entrance, the vibrant colours of the intricate carvings and the rhythmic chanting created a serene atmosphere. Inside, the idol of Lakshmi, adorned with flowers and offerings, radiated a divine presence. The temple's peaceful ambiance provided a welcome escape from the city's hustle. The devotion of the visitors and the temple's architectural beauty left me feeling uplifted and connected to the rich tapestry of India's spiritual heritage.

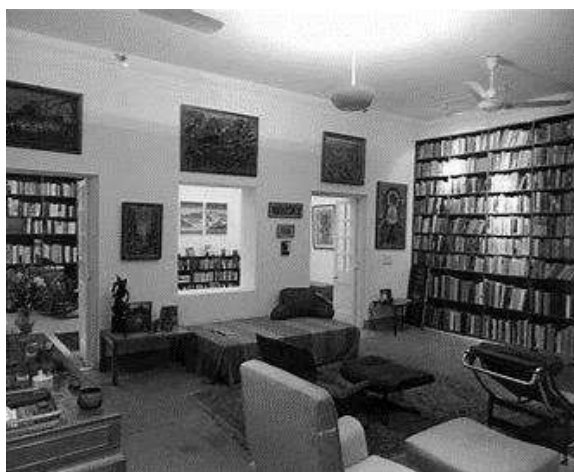
Next on our itinerary is the awe-inspiring Jantar Mantar, an ancient observatory built by the visionary king Sawai Jai Singh II. As we navigate through its labyrinthine structures and marvel at its astronomical instruments, we are transported back in time to an era of scientific exploration and discovery.



glimpse into India's scientific past. It was a brief but memorable journey through time, reflecting human curiosity and ingenuity.

From the scientific wonders of Jantar Mantar, we make our way to the Our journey takes an intimate turn as we pay a visit to the former residence of the late Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi. Surrounded by lush gardens and historic artifacts, the residence serves as a poignant reminder of the indelible mark left by one of India's most influential leaders.

Visiting Indira Gandhi's residence in New Delhi was a poignant journey into India's political history. The museum, housed in her former home, exudes a quiet dignity, reflecting her impactful legacy. Each room is thoughtfully preserved with personal artifacts and photographs that vividly illustrate her life and



leadership. The tranquil garden offered a serene contrast to the bustling city, inviting reflection on her contributions to India. Walking through the space, I felt a deep connection to a pivotal figure in history, making the visit a meaningful exploration of her enduring influence on the nation.

Continuing our expedition, we arrive at the majestic Qutub Minar, a towering testament to India's architectural prowess and historical legacy. As we ascend its spiralling staircase and gaze upon its intricate carvings, we are filled with a sense of wonder and awe.



This towering marvel, standing at 73 meters, is a testament to medieval Indian architecture. As I gazed up at its intricately carved red sandstone, I was struck by the blend of beauty and grandeur. The delicate inscriptions and geometric patterns tell stories of a bygone era. The serene atmosphere of the Qutub Complex provided a peaceful retreat, making it a memorable highlight of my exploration of Delhi's heritage.

Our next destination is the serene Lotus Temple, a sanctuary of peace and tranquillity amidst the bustling cityscape. The temple's lotus-shaped architecture, with its pristine white marble petals, stood out beautifully against the sky.

As I entered, the calm and quiet atmosphere enveloped me, offering a peaceful respite from the city's hustle. The expansive grounds and tranquil reflecting pools enhanced the sense of serenity. Inside, the simplicity of the design focused attention on reflection and meditation rather than ornamentation. The Lotus Temple, open to all faiths, provided a profound sense of unity and peace, making it a memorable and contemplative highlight of my trip.



As the day draws to a close, we make our way to the magnificent Red Fort, the crowning jewel of Delhi's Mughal heritage. Amidst its imposing walls and sprawling courtyards, we are transported back to a bygone era of grandeur and splendour, where emperors once held court and history was made. This magnificent fortress, with its towering red sandstone walls, immediately captivated me.



The grandeur of the main entrance, the Lahore Gate, set the tone for an immersive historical journey. Inside, the vast courtyards and intricate Mughal architecture, including the stunning Diwan-i-Aam and Diwan-i-Khas, showcased the opulence of the Mughal era. Strolling through the lush gardens and reflecting on the fort's rich history made the visit both educational and enchanting. The Red Fort, with its blend of history and architecture, offered a memorable glimpse into India's royal heritage.

Our day culminates in a culinary extravaganza at Daryaganj, where the tantalizing aromas of North Indian cuisine beckon us to indulge in a feast fit for royalty. As we savour each delectable bite, we raise a toast to the

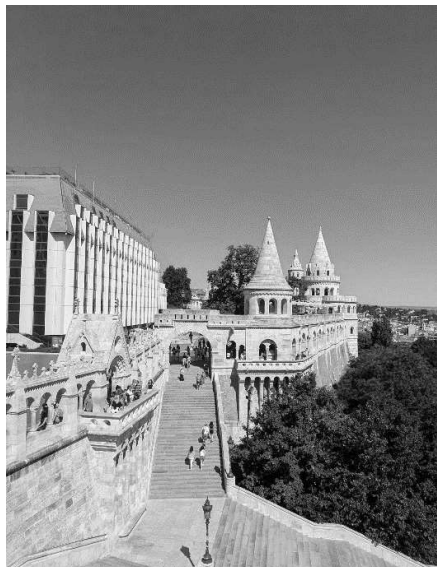
memories we've made and the adventures that lie ahead, grateful for the opportunity to experience the magic of New Delhi in all its glory.

The Danube Diaries

Prapti Chakraborty

"Hello! I'm a Master's student in Biological Science with a passion for traveling and exploring new places. I believe that experiencing different cultures, landscapes, and histories enriches our understanding of the world, much like studying the complexities of life in my field."

Welcome to **"The Danube Diaries"**, a student's guide to exploring Budapest and Vienna on a budget. Discover hidden gems, affordable eats, and cultural experiences perfect for young travelers!



Over three days in Budapest, I was captivated by the city's stunning architecture, efficient transport, and delicious cuisine. As a student, I focused on visiting pocket-friendly or free attractions, and Budapest offered plenty!

My first stop was **Fisherman's Bastion**, which provided a breathtaking panoramic view of the city. Known for its seven spires and turrets, this unique structure is a prime example of Hungarian architecture.

Pic-1: Fishermans Bastion

Next, I visited the **Hungarian Parliament Building**, one of Budapest's tallest structures and the third-largest national assembly in the world. I highly recommend viewing it from a **Danube River cruise**, both during the day and at night, when the building's lights create a magical reflection on the water.

Pic-2: Budapest's colourful trams

For a quick snack and some Hungarian wooden souvenirs, **The Great Market Hall** is the place to be. This neogothic market is not only the largest and oldest in Budapest but also a great spot to soak up local culture. To delve into Budapest's royal history, a visit to **Buda Castle** is essential. Although this Baroque palace was destroyed during World War II, it has been meticulously rebuilt and now houses the Hungarian National Gallery and the Budapest History Museum. A stroll along the Danube Promenade is a perfect way to unwind after a day of sightseeing, with the river splitting the city into the historic Buda and bustling Pest.

After a relaxing thermal bath at **Széchenyi Thermal Bath**, the largest of its kind in Budapest, make sure to visit **Heroes' Square**, a grand and iconic plaza that's ideal for photo ops.

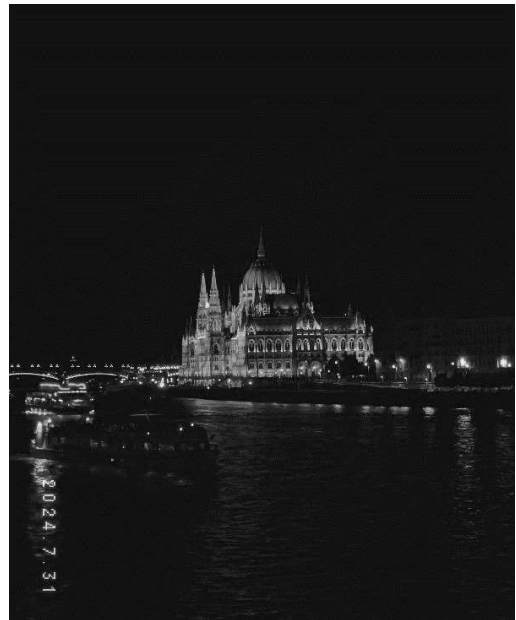


Budapest also has a rich Jewish heritage, particularly in the **Jewish Quarter**, where many Jews settled after migrating from neighboring countries. For a taste of this cultural influence, dine at **Mazel Tov**, a beautifully decorated restaurant near the synagogue that offers a blend of Jewish, Iranian, and Lebanese dishes. Don't miss trying traditional Hungarian dishes like **goulash** and **chicken paprikash**, which are served at many local eateries. For bakery lovers, the Central Market offers delicious **lángos** (a deep-fried dough) and **kürtőskalács** (chimney cake).

Navigating Budapest is easy and budget-friendly. Download the **BudapestGO** app to purchase day passes for public transport, which includes unlimited rides on trams, buses, and the underground. The **Millennium Underground Railway (M1 line)** is the oldest underground railway in mainland Europe and the second oldest in Europe after London's Tube. Riding the M1 offers a unique and historical experience in Budapest. The public transportation system is reliable and always on time, making it simple to explore all the city has to offer.

Pic-3: A night view of the Hungarian Parliament from the banks of the Danube

After spending three days in Budapest, we boarded a morning train to **Vienna**. I highly recommend taking the train in the morning to enjoy the scenic views of the Hungarian countryside. You might even glimpse Slovakia's Romanesque architecture along the way. The journey is relaxing and offers a unique perspective on Central Europe, making it a memorable part of the trip to Vienna.



Vienna, the capital of Austria, is a city steeped in rich history and culture, sitting gracefully on the banks of the Danube River. It has been home to some of the most influential figures in music, psychology, and the arts, including Sigmund Freud, Mozart, and the final resting place of Beethoven. Vienna is also deeply connected to Empress Elisabeth (Sisi) of Austria, who was married to Emperor Franz Joseph I and tragically assassinated in 1898. Her former residences, such as the **Hofburg** and **Schönbrunn Palace**, are now popular tourist destinations. Schönbrunn Palace, renowned for its distinctive Baroque architecture, and the Hofburg, one of the world's largest palace complexes, offer visitors a glimpse into imperial life.

At the Hofburg Plaza, you can explore attractions like the Sisi Museum, the Spanish Riding School, the Austrian National Library, and the Weltmuseum Wien. A short five-minute walk from the Hofburg Plaza takes you to the **Mozart Monument** (Mozartdenkmal).

Pic-4: Mozartdenkmal dedicated to Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart near Hofburg

Like the Hungarian Parliament, the **Austrian Parliament** in Vienna is an architectural marvel, inspired by Greek design, and crafted by architect Theophil Hansen. Nearby, within walking distance, are notable landmarks such as the **Vienna City Hall (Rathaus der Stadt Wien)**, the **Vienna State Opera**, and the **University of Vienna**. Vienna boasts over 100 unique museums, most of which charge an entry fee, so it's best to select ones that match your interests. Some of the most popular and noteworthy museums include the **Sigmund Freud Museum**, the **Jewish Museum**, the **Josephinum**, the **Natural History Museum**, and the **Leopold Museum**. For those interested in medical history, the **Collection of Anatomical Pathology in the Madhouse Tower** is a must-see, featuring the world's



largest public collection of anatomical pathology exhibits and a charming souvenir shop.

Pic-5: First group of physicians at the Medical University of Vienna



Viennese cuisine is another highlight of the city, with desserts like **Apfelstrudel** being a must-try, especially from bakeries like **Gregor's Konditorei**. Pair any sweet treat with a traditional **Viennese coffee**, commonly served in local bakeries. No visit to Vienna is complete without tasting a **Wiener Schnitzel** from a local eatery.

Pic-7: Enjoy a slice of Apfelstrudel with a cup of Viennese coffee from a local bakery

The Naschmarkt Deli, similar to the Great Market Hall in Budapest, offers a variety of restaurants and local products, perfect for sampling or picking up souvenirs. Vienna is also known for its chocolates, which can be bought at local supermarkets like Billa. The city's public transportation system is busy yet efficient, with buses, trams, and a subway that keep Vienna bustling. Visitors can purchase public transport passes, like the **Vienna City Card**, which not only provides access to transit but also offers discounts to numerous attractions throughout the city.

Traveling through Budapest and Vienna as a student reveals the magic of discovery, connection, and adventure, leaving memories that last a lifetime.

(Biševo Blue Grotto) – A natural wonder

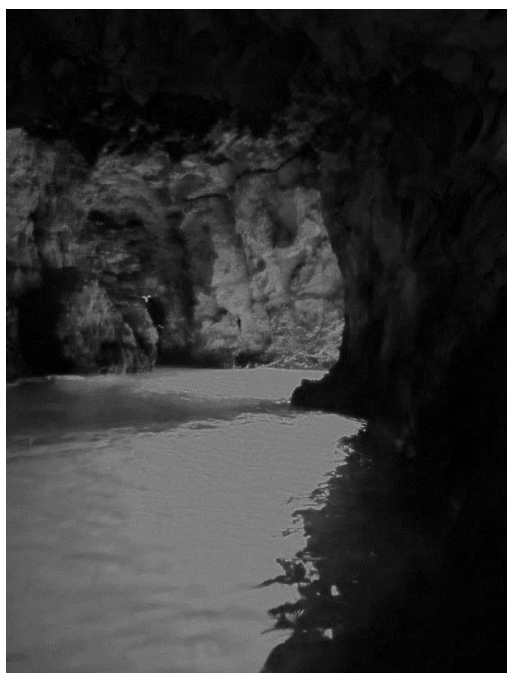
Dr. Nilanjana Basu

Ever since we planned our trip to Croatia, The Blue Cave, also known as the Biševo Blue Grotto, was in our mind. One of the most famous attractions along the Adriatic coast, it is a mesmerizing natural wonder located near the island of Biševo, Croatia. Exploring the Blue Cave is an unforgettable experience, and it brings back the same enthusiasm in me as I sit to write about it.

This enchanting sea cave has captivated visitors from around the world with its stunning blue light reflections and unique geological features. The blue light illuminates the cave's interior and creates a magical atmosphere. This phenomenon occurs when sunlight passes through an underwater opening and is reflected off the limestone floor, transforming the cave's water into a captivating azure hue, thus making it an enchanting experience.

The cave has an astonishing clarity of the water, allowing you to see the stunning rock formations beneath the surface. The cave's interior is adorned with intricate stalactites and stalagmites, formed over thousands of years. The combination of the blue light and the geological formations creates a surreal scene.

The area surrounding the Blue Cave is also known for its stunning cliffs and picturesque coves, offering breathtaking views of the Adriatic coastline. Whether you're a nature lover, an adventure seeker, or simply looking for a unique experience, a visit to the Blue Cave is a must. The journey to the blue cave is sometimes more adventurous than the cave itself, creating memories that will last a lifetime. Visiting the Blue Cave is not only an opportunity to witness a remarkable geological phenomenon but also a chance to connect with history and appreciate the significance of this captivating natural gem.



During the World War II, the Blue Cave served as a hiding spot for submarines due to its secluded location and natural camouflage. It was only later recognized as a natural monument and protected area, ensuring its preservation for future generations to enjoy.

Getting to the Blue Cave requires traveling by boat from various ports in Croatia, specifically Split and Hvar. The Blue Cave is situated on the eastern side of a small island called Biševo in the Adriatic Sea off the coast of Croatia, approximately 4 nautical miles southwest of the island of Vis. To reach the Blue Cave, you can either join a guided boat tour or hire a private boat. The most common starting point for tours is the town of Split, where numerous tour companies operate.

However, we decided to start the Trip from Hvar. It is important to remind you at this point that visiting the Blue Cave is subject to weather and sea conditions. The cave is only accessible during calm sea conditions, typically between May to October. From Split, we boarded a large ferry which took us

to Hvar in 2.5 hour, though there are ferries available from Split to Vis which is 2kms. Away, we wanted to add one more important island thus chose to travel to Hvar. Hvar is a big Island and an important party destination of Croatia. So as we started our travel on the 1st day, our tour operator was reluctant to confirm us a speed boat to the island of Biševo, we still took a chance , the weather was cloudy and rainy and so our attempt to visit our dream destination had to be cancelled. With very few days in our Split itinerary this was a major disappointment. We had seen how unpredictable the sea can be in one of our previous trips in Greece, thus we had lost all hope of visiting this geological wonder. We spent some time at Hvar and decided to get back to Split before the sea turned rough on day 1.

Disappointed on our unsuccessful attempt, with a heavy heart we returned and spent the afternoon hanging around the Dalmatian Riviera area. To our surprise the sky started clearing out and the rain stopped as well; however, we were not ready to risk it again the following day. Next morning, to our surprise, the travel agent called from Hvar and informed that the weather is going to get better as the day progresses, so we could take a chance, and a private boat trip could be arranged as a local boatman had agreed to venture out into the sea. We quickly packed our travel kits, packed some water and dry food and started our journey from Split to Hvar once again. This repeat journey was lacking the enthusiasm of the first day. On reaching Hvar we were quickly whisked off into a private speedboat.

Little did we know that it would be a 3 – hour journey deep into the Adriatic Sea where the sea would be fairly rough, and windy with bouts of rain in between. We huddled in one part of the speed boat but were distributed to balance the weight. As soon as we started, it was cloudy, and we could see it raining ahead of us in the sea. It was quite a scary trip as it was cold, wet and windy with no roof over our heads and the sea was very rough and bumpy; the beautiful journey turned out to be a nightmare for us. After about 2.5 hours of this kind of trip, the weather started improving and by the time we reached Biševo, it was calm and sunny. On arrival at Biševo, we transferred to a small boat, like a dingy or a rowboat, as larger boats cannot enter through the narrow entrance of the



cave. The small boats are operated by local guides who provide a commentary on the history and the natural features of the cave as they take you inside.

It's important to note that during the peak summer season, the cave can become crowded, so it's advisable to book your boat tour in advance to secure your spot. If you prefer to have more flexibility and privacy, you can also opt to hire a private boat to take you to the Blue Cave. This allows you to customize your itinerary and spend more time exploring the cave at your own pace. Private boat rentals are available in Split and other nearby coastal towns. Once you arrive at the Blue Cave, you'll need to transfer to a smaller vessel, such as a dingy or a rowboat, as larger boats cannot enter through the narrow entrance to the cave.



Upon entering the cave, visitors are greeted by a breathtaking sight; a mesmerizing blue light that illuminates the interior. The vibrant blue colour is created by the reflection of sunlight as it penetrates the cave's waters and interacts with the limestone floor. This optical phenomenon fills the cave with an ethereal glow, creating a surreal and captivating atmosphere. The waters of the Blue Cave is known for its remarkable clarity, allowing visitors to marvel at the intricate rock formations beneath the surface. Stalactites and stalagmites adorn the cave's interior, formed over centuries through the slow deposition of minerals. These unique formations contribute to the cave's otherworldly beauty and add an element of intrigue to the overall experience.

The Blue Cave is approximately 24 meters long, 10 to 12 meters wide, and 15 meters high, and offers ample space for visitors to explore and absorb the enchanting surroundings. As you navigate through the cave, you'll be treated to breathtaking views of the water's shimmering blue hue reflecting off the cave walls, creating a serene and magical environment.



One of the most fascinating features of the Blue Cave is its changing colours throughout the day. The intensity and shade of blue vary depending on the time of day and the angle of the sunlight. In the early morning, the cave is bathed in a silvery-blue light, while in the afternoon, as the sun reaches its zenith, the cave's interior is bathed in a vibrant turquoise glow, creating a truly unforgettable spectacle.

Due to its natural beauty and unique characteristics, the Blue Cave has become a haven for photographers, capturing its mesmerizing blue light and exquisite details. The cave offers countless opportunities for stunning shots, allowing visitors to freeze a moment in time and forever

cherish the magic of the Blue Cave.

No description is enough as words can not do justice to this enchanting beauty. You must visit this place once, add it to your bucket list, but please avoid the peak tourist season as could need you to wait for 2 to 3 to enter the cave. On the flip side if you are in the shoulder season, you may be taking a chance, but if you are lucky, you will see the spot without much rush and waiting.

There were many more sights which impressed us on our visit along the Dalmatian Coast but Blue cave shall remain on the Hall of Fame list. The return journey was much better with the weather improving beyond expectation and we got to enjoy the wonderfully scenic islands jutting out of the sea and the beautiful blue sky as we were riding back to the Hvar island.

It's also important to be mindful of the environmental impact when visiting the Blue Cave. As a protected natural site, visitors are required to follow guidelines and regulations to preserve the cave's ecosystem. This includes not touching the cave walls or disturbing the marine life inside. Let's ensure the Blue Cave remains a pristine and enchanting destination for generations to come.

Crocodiles 'Hug' We Will Not Leave 'Vadodara'

Biswajit Dey



Vishwamitri River - Which is home to around 300+ crocodiles. The Vishwamitri River, stretching 17 kilometres through Gujarat's Vadodara, is home to mugger crocodiles. Originating from [Pavagadh](#) in the [Panchmahal District](#) of Gujarat, the **Vishwamitri River** flows mainly through the west of the city of [Vadodara](#). The name of this river is said to have been derived from the name of the great saint [Vishwamitra](#). Recently, many of these reptiles have been swept into the city by the floodwaters (flooding

caused by the release of water from the Ajwa Dam, This dam was built in the early 20th century by [Maharaja Sayajirao Gaekwad III](#). It serves the purpose of providing water to Vadodara city. Height of the dam is 211 feet above sea level and it is 5 km long. It has 62 gates and directly connected to Vishwamitri river. Though Vishwamitri river is seasonal river so Sardar Sarovar's one branch is required to fulfil the need whenever needed.) and have been spotted on the roads, parks, outside residences, and even on roofs of homes, causing panic among residents. Need to Drive carefully on city roads because you could bump into a crocodile. As the floodwaters subside, the city is being swarmed by large crocodiles that have ventured out of the Vishwamitri river, The relentless rain in Gujarat has submerged the city, turning streets and homes into flood zones. But the rising water levels in Vishwamitri River have done more than just disrupt daily life—they've also driven hundreds of formidable reptiles into the residential areas. Several crocodiles, measuring 10 to 15 feet, Crocodiles were swimming around in residential areas and on the roads for two days. When the waters subsided, they were seen by locals, who sought help from wildlife activists and forest officials. Typically, crocodiles do not attack humans. In the river, they feed on fish and animal carcasses. They may also prey on dogs, pigs, or other small animals. These crocodiles venture into the canals, eventually settling in ponds across different talukas, with many migrating from one waterbody to another via these canals. Over the years, the crocodile population in the Vishwamitri River has steadily increased. The most recent census in 2021 counted 1,000 crocodiles in the river, a significant rise from 250 in 2015. Crocodiles staying in Vishwamitri River have no natural enemy. They have adapted to the environs and get enough food too. A study published in the *International Journal of Scientific Research in Biological Sciences* found that reptiles have developed potent antimicrobial abilities within their immune systems or gut microbiomes. This adaptation helps them successfully combat the bacteria in the polluted river, allowing them to thrive despite the heavily contaminated environment.

Darjeeling Tea

Suryadeepo Nag

Casually sipping on tea, I wondered what to write for the magazine this year, when the tea inspired me. The tea I am sipping from was purchased in Darjeeling early this year, perhaps the finest tea I have ever had the fortune of drinking, and every sip I take brings back memories of a misty tea estate in Darjeeling. For years in my pre-teens, my contributions to the Puj magazine used to be based on the trips I made with my family that summer. At some point, I decided that a simple description of my travels was insufficient and an uninteresting contribution and started writing about other things. But today I decided to change that and revert to my old ways.

In the first week of May this year, I took a short trip to Darjeeling from Kolkata, in an attempt to escape the heat. In the end, it was fruitless because the rain gods decided to bless Kolkata with showers the day we left. Nevertheless, there is no substitute for the weather of Darjeeling in summer. This was my second trip to

Darjeeling, the first during the summer months. We stayed a short distance away from Darjeeling in a colonial-era Tea Estate. I was working from home, did not do much tourism, and spent most of my time reading and writing while sipping from an unending stock of first-flush Darjeeling tea.



The only time we stepped out was to visit the tea factory, which allowed me to interact with a junior executive, some tea plantation workers, and some tourists. Most of the tourists were foreigners with families, spending their vacations in the hills. There's been a new interest in Europe about Darjeeling because of a (slightly overrated) film by Wes Anderson called *The Darjeeling Express*, although the events of the film take place in Rajasthan. The estate where we stayed was only available to us because it was summer. In winter, prices soar, making the stay exclusively accessible only to rich people in Europe or across the Atlantic.

Since the plantation workers were busy with work, and there was a language barrier, most of my knowledge about the conditions of work came from a long discussion with our friend Albert, who was some sort of a manager. He was young, probably a few years older than me, and had done well to transgress class barriers to join the managerial class, even though his mother had been a plantation worker. Perhaps his class background enabled him to talk about the hard work of the tea workers more sympathetically than one may expect of a manager.

The tea gardens of Darjeeling are a curious example. When the left-front government came to power in 1977 and enacted the Land Ceiling Act, and subsequently under Operation Barga, distributed land from landlords to agricultural workers in all of the state, the tea plantations of North Bengal were exempted for some mysterious reason. This allowed the large plantation owners, who were either colonial firms or Indian bourgeois opportunists, to continue exploiting the plantation workers under extremely harsh labor conditions. Living among tea workers radicalized several prominent Bengali Marxists. Salil Chowdhury's father was a doctor in the tea gardens of Assam and most of his patients were tea plantation workers. The influence of this environment is quite evident in Salil Chowdhury's music. However, not all men who grew up here brought out their radicalization through art. Charu Mazumdar, who was born in Siliguri, was radicalized to the point of waging war with the state.



Even today, workers (overwhelmingly women) have longer than 9-hour workdays, starting as early as 7:30 in the morning, in exchange for very low wages. Each worker is expected to pick a minimum of 12 kilograms of tea leaves per day and carry the weight on their backs. Anybody who has held a tea leaf must know how many leaves would add up to 12 kilograms. In exchange, they are paid a few hundred rupees. Albert argued that the low wages and harsh conditions disincentivize the local population from seeking employment in the plantations, and prompt them to move to cities in search of better work.

The tea picked by the workers will be used to produce the world-renowned Darjeeling tea, which will sell for upwards of 6000 rupees per kilogram, making huge profits for the plantation owners. Sadly, none of the workers will taste a drop of the tea produced from the efforts of their labor, nor will most Indians, as the tea will be sold almost exclusively to satisfy foreign demand in developed Nations in the Global North. It is easy to forget the sheer volume of human labor that goes into producing the goods that we consume every day. Perhaps, this is something worth fighting for - a day when the tea workers can taste the tea they farm.

Embarking on a Serenading Symphony: A Journey into the African Wildlife

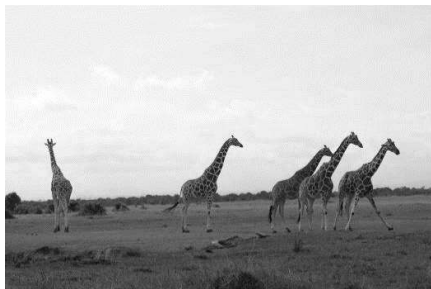
Sudeep, Sanjukta & Noyonika Bhattacharyya



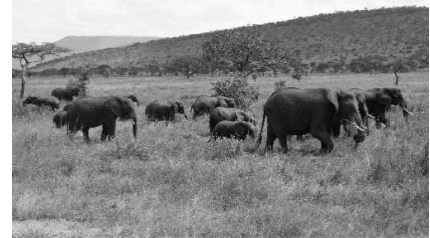
In the midst of the hustle and bustle of our modern lives under the bondage of technology, a trip to the wild serves as a poignant reminder of the world that once enveloped us. A trip to the wild, particularly in Africa takes us back to our primal roots, offering an escape from the artificial world and a chance to reconnect with the raw, untamed essence of nature. The boundless diversity and untamed landscapes of Africa beckons travelers to step into its tapestry of life, where every heartbeat of nature is a melody waiting to be heard. From the sweeping savannas to the dense jungles to where the desert meets the sea, a journey into African wildlife is an odyssey that kindles the senses, creates excitement and awakens the spirit. It reminds us of the delicate balance that sustains life and challenges us to become better stewards of the planet, we call home.

Few memorable journeys to Africa that have left indelible imprints on our minds:

Tanzania, a land of remarkable landscapes and abundant wildlife,



offers a safari experience that is as close to the quintessential African adventure as one can imagine. From the iconic Serengeti plains to the captivating Ngorongoro Crater, this



journey immerses a wildlife lover in the rhythms of the wild, where the drama of predator and prey unfolds against a backdrop of breathtaking natural beauty.

The 15,000 Sq. Km Serengeti National Park, which is over 90% of the twin Serengeti-Masai Mara national parks, stands as one of the world's most celebrated wildlife sanctuaries. Its seemingly endless plains, called Siringit in Swahili from which the park derives its name, is the stage for the Great Migration, a breathtaking spectacle that involves millions of wildebeest, zebras, and other grazers in search of fresh grazing pastures. This migration is not just a marvel of nature but a living testament to the intricate balance that sustains life in this ecosystem.

As one traverses the Serengeti and Masai Mara's open savannas, the wildlife unfolds before the eyes. Lions lounge in the golden grass, cheetahs stealthily stalk their prey, and elephants meander gracefully across the landscape. The rich diversity of the ecosystem also includes leopards, giraffes, hyenas, whole host of antelopes and an array of bird species that create an enchanting and captivating mosaic of life.



On the other hand, Ngorongoro crater takes a wildlife lover to a truly unique natural wonder. Often referred to as the 'Garden of Eden,' this vast volcanic caldera harbours an enclosed ecosystem that support an astonishing concentration of wildlife. From its grassy plains to its dense forests and sparkling sodalake, the crater is a microcosm of African wildlife diversity.

Descending into the crater is like stepping into a living diorama. Herds of buffalo roam, flamingos wade in the shallow waters, and the black-maned lions of Ngorongoro keep a watch over their kingdom from their rocky

perches or at times laze around nonchalantly on the grassy plains. The crater's distinct topography creates a natural amphitheater where both predator and prey coexist in a delicate dance of survival.



One of the remarkably spectacular view is the setting of sun. As it goes down the horizon casting a golden glow over the savanna, it leaves a visitor with a unique experience of what he or she witnesses. Tanzania and Kenya's wildlife safaris with exploration of Ngorongoro Crater or a visit to Lake Nakuru in Kenya, a rhino sanctuary known for both the black and white rhinos, awaken a profound appreciation for the natural world. The experiences have left us with lasting memories of encounters with creatures that have roamed these lands for millennia.

Nestled in the heart of East Africa, Uganda stands as a beacon for adventurers seeking an encounter with some of the world's most captivating creatures. Among its many natural wonders, the opportunity to trek into the dense jungles to observe mountain gorillas in their native habitat is a truly once-in-a-lifetime experience that leaves an indelible mark on the soul.



e would cherish the experience till our last breath. The mist-shrouded mountains of Uganda provide the backdrop for this extraordinary journey. Inhabiting the highlands of Bwindi Impenetrable National Park, where we went on a trek and Mgahinga Gorilla National Park, the endangered mountain gorillas thrive in these remote and rugged terrains. The trek begins with a sense of anticipation and a hint of trepidation, as the forests are aptly named "impenetrable" for their dense undergrowth and challenging trails. Yet, it's this very sense of

adventure that ignites the spirit and prepares trekkers for the adventure ahead.

Trekking guides, with their intimate knowledge of the terrain and its inhabitants, lead the way, imparting their wisdom about the forest and its residents. The gorillas' movements are governed by their own rhythms, and their locations can vary from day to day. Each step forward is accompanied by the growing heartbeat of excitement – the prospect of coming face-to-face with a creature that shares 98% of our DNA. For us, the moment arrived after about 6 hours of trek in dense forest. As we stepped into their presence, we instantly came under the awe of these gentle giants in their natural habitat - mothers cradling their young, adolescents playfully moving around, and the silverback, the patriarch of the group, chewing leaves and watching over them all with a wise and powerful demeanor. Their eyes, so familiar, reflect intelligence and emotions that are unmistakably akin to our own. The experience left an indescribable impression on our minds, as though we met them yesterday.



In the vast and untamed landscapes of Namibia, a self-driving wildlife safari unveils a unique adventure where one becomes both the explorer and the observed. Driving around from the capital Windhoek to the rolling dunes of the Namib Desert to Walvis Bay through the Trans Kalahari Highway where the desert meets the sea to the game-rich plains of 24,000 Sq. Km Etosha National Park, this journey offers an unparalleled opportunity to witness Africa's iconic wildlife.

The self-driving aspect adds an extra layer of intimacy to the encounter with Namibia's wilderness. As we drove through the open roads, dusty tracks and through the desert for nearly 4,500 Km, we got imbued in the ever-changing tapestry of landscapes – from the ethereal sunrise over the dunes to some really dense forests. The path led us through varying terrains, each with its own surprises. The Namib Desert, with its towering dunes that shift from burnt orange to deep red, stretches as far as the eyes can see. A visit to Sossusvlei and

Deadvlei, ancient clay pans surrounded by sand mountains gave an experience of a breathtaking panorama, which was surreal.

The safari experience truly unfolded at Etosha National Park, which is a sanctuary for a whole host of African wildlife that one can imagine. The Etosha Pan, a vast salt flat, forms the heart of the park and provides an otherworldly backdrop for both dramatic predator-prey interactions and the serenity of grazing herds. With each sighting, one develops a deeper appreciation for the intricacies of these creatures' lives and their essential role in the ecosystem. As we navigated the open roads, our hearts raced not just from the thrill of adventure, but from the deeper understanding that we were a part of something much larger – a shared story of life on this majestic continent.



In the heart of the Democratic Republic of Congo, a journey into the lush and untouched forests unveils a remarkable encounter with our closest relatives, the chimpanzees. This adventure is a voyage into the wild realms of the world's second-largest rainforest, where every rustle of leaves and distant calls of the forest inhabitants serve as a prelude to an awe-inspiring rendezvous with these intelligent and charismatic creatures. Chimpanzees, our closest living relatives, thrive in these remote and biodiverse rainforests. The Democratic Republic of Congo, with its pristine habitats, is a haven for these apes, particularly the endangered pygmy chimpanzee, called *Bonobo*.

Observing them in their natural habitat is a humbling experience. As I (Sanjukta, since I traveled alone to DRC) watched them groom each other, playfully wrestle, and communicate in a language of gestures and expressions, I was struck by the uncanny similarities between their behaviors and our own. Their curiosity, intelligence, and capacity for emotion are undeniable, reminding us of the interconnectedness of all life on Earth.

In the heart of the Indian Ocean, lies Madagascar, a land like no other. Renowned for its unique flora and fauna, this enchanting island is a haven for biodiversity, with one of its most captivating inhabitants being the lemurs. Embarking on a journey to spot these charismatic creatures in their natural habitat is an expedition that immersed us in a world of wonder and intrigue.



As we ventured into Madagascar's lush rainforests, we were immediately greeted by variety of sounds as though they were orchestrated – the haunting calls of *indri* lemurs echoing through the trees, the chirping of birds, and the rustling of leaves underfoot. This created an atmosphere of anticipation and excitement, as we set out to witness the enigmatic lemurs up close.

Lemurs, found only in Madagascar, are a diverse group of primates that have evolved in splendid isolation. Their behaviors and appearances are as varied as the ecosystems they inhabit.

From the inquisitive *ring-tailed* lemurs to the playful *sifakas* with their unique sideways hopping, each species presents a different facet of the island's evolutionary tapestry. Lemurs foraging for food, displaying playful acrobatics and leaping gracefully from branch to branch is quite a sight, and a photographer's delight too. We were able to see fifteen different types including the extremely shy *mouse lemur*, which is the smallest of all with the help of our guide, an experts with an intimate understanding of the forests. He skillfully navigated the intricate network of trails to locate lemurs hidden among the foliage. We were able to witness behaviors that are usually reserved for the quiet solitude of the wilderness. Beyond the lemurs, Madagascar's landscapes including the avenue of *baobab* trees are a sight to behold.

A journey into African wildlife is more than just about observing the beautiful creatures in their natural habitat. It unveils moments that make the wild unforgettable. It's a pilgrimage to the very essence of life itself. It is about reconnecting with the untamed spirit of our mother Earth. At the end, we can promise to you that once you travel to Africa, you would want to go back again; yes, we have fallen in love with this beautiful land that has amazed us every time we went there.

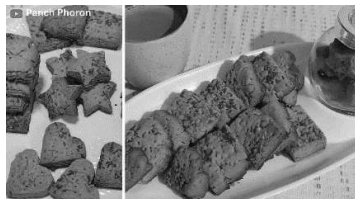
Photos:Sudeep Bhattacharyya

Eggless Jeera Biscuits - In Kadai & Oven

Munmun Basu

Homemade Jeera Biscuits Recipe

Are you ready to make delicious cumin and carom seed biscuits right at home? With this easy recipe, you'll be able to bake bakery-style biscuits that are so good, you'll forget about store-bought ones!



Ingredients:

- All-Purpose Flour - 1/2 cup
- Wheat Flour - less than 1 cup
- Custard Powder - 1.5 tbsp
- Salt - 1 tsp
- Baking Powder - 1/2 tbsp
- Baking Soda - 1/4 tsp
- Unsalted butter - 3-4 tbsp
- Sugar - 2 tbsp
- Roasted Cumin Seeds - 1 tbsp
- Roasted Carom Seeds - 1/2 tbsp
- Milk - 3 tbsp

Cooking method

- 1. Prepare the Dough:**
 - Take a pan & put Cumin Seeds & Carom Seeds in it & roast them on a slow flame.
 - Take them out & crush them with roller & keep it in the bowl.
 - Take a bowl, keep strainer on it & put All-Purpose Flour, Wheat Flour, Custard Powder, Salt, Baking Powder, Baking Soda & filter them all with the strainer.
 - Mix the Flour & keep it aside.
 - Take another bowl & put Ghee & Sugar in it & beat it with beater.
 - Put the Flour in the bowl gradually & mix it then put the Roasted Cumin Seeds & Carom Seeds in it & mix it.
 - Put Milk in it & mix it well the cover it & keep it in the fridge for 10-15 min.
 - Now take a silicon sheet & put the dough in it & roll it.
- 2. Shape the Biscuits:**
 - Preheat a pan or skillet on medium-low heat.
 - On a lightly floured surface, roll out the dough to about 1/4-inch thickness.
 - Use a cookie cutter or a glass to cut out biscuit shapes from the dough. You can also shape them by hand if you prefer.
- 3. Cook the Biscuits:**
 - Take a baking tray & put Butter paper in it then put Biscuits in it & bake it at 180 degrees for 15 min.
 - Take a tray & cover it with foil paper & put the Biscuit in it & put it in the pre-heated *kadhai* & bake it then after 15 min remove the lid & keep the pre-heated tawa on it.
 - Bake the Biscuits & take out in the plate.
- 4. Serve and Enjoy:**
 - Serve and enjoy these homemade Jeera biscuits that taste just like those from your favourite bakery!

Stuffed Bell Peppers

Dipalee Ghosh

Ingredients :



1. Capsicum (Red, yellow)-2
2. Grated Paneer-100gms
3. Chopped Onion-1 medium sized
4. Chopped Chilli-2
5. Chopped Kaju-10-12
6. Chopped Raisins -1 spoon
7. Salt to taste
8. Chopped Coriander
9. Jeera powder - 1/2 teaspoon
10. Garam masala-1/2 teaspoon
11. Cherry tomatoes
12. Cheese(sliced/cube/any cheese of your choice)

Instruction:

Prepare the Capsicums:

- Preheat your oven .
- Slice the capsicum into half and remove the seeds and membranes.

Prepare the Filling:

- Take all ingredients(from 2-10), into a bowl and thoroughly mix it .
- Now fill the stuffing into the capsicums .
- Take a pan and put it up into medium heat .
- Now take your stuffed bell peppers into the pan and let it heat for upto 4-5 mins on low heat & cover it with a lid.

Baking:

- Take your bell peppers out of the pan and put it into the baking tray
- Cover the bell peppers with cherry tomatoes and cheese.
- Now put the tray in and turn the oven into 180C for 10-15mins for baking

Garnish and Serve:

- Garnish with fresh herbs if desired.
- Serve hot and enjoy!





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