



वेपारुद्धा इ क्वाी पुजा

2021



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WALES PUJA COMMITTEE

presents

DURGA PUJA 2021

at TEMPLE of PEACE*, Cardiff

12/10/21 to 15/10/21

MAHA SASHTHI : TUESDAY 12TH OCT

10.30–12.00 : Bodhon/ Ghot pratistha/ Puja

MAHA SAPTAMI : TUESDAY 12TH OCT

13.00–15.00 : Puja/ Pushpanjali / Prasad

19.00–20.30 : Arati/ Pushpanjali

21.00 : Prasad/ Food

MAHA ASHTAMI : WEDNESDAY 13TH OCT

10.00–13.30 : Puja/ Pushpanjali

13.30 : Bhog/ Prasad

18.00–20.00 : Sandhi Puja/ Pushpanjali/ Arati

20.00 : Dhunuchi Naach

21.00 : Prasad/ Food

MAHA NAVAMI : THURSDAY 14TH OCT

10.00–12.30 : Puja/ Pushpanjali

13.00 : Bhog/ Prasad

18.30–19.30 : Arati/ Pushpanjali

19.45–21.00 : Cultural programme

21.00 : Prasad/ Food

VIJAYA DASHAMI : FRIDAY 15TH OCT

10.00–12.00 : Puja/ Pushpanjali / Visarjan

12.30–13.30 : Sindur Khela

13.30 : Bhog/ Prasad

18.30–20.30 : Cultural programme

20.30 : Food

Entry through online bookings only – details to follow

*Venue: Temple of Peace, King Edward VII Ave, Cardiff CF10 3AP.

Paid council parking available in the front.

www.walespujacommittee.com

Our proud sponsors



Venue Partner



KALI PUJA, 2021
4TH November
Llandaff Rowing Club
The Boathouse, Bridge Rd, Llandaff,
Cardiff CF5 2PT
Further details will be announced closer to the date



From the Chairperson's Desk, Wales Puja Committee, October 2021

I switch my laptop on to pen my thoughts and it suddenly dawns on me that another year has passed. This is my second message as the Chairperson of the Wales Puja Committee, and we have not yet had a real-life Puja during my tenure. As I unwind in my garden staring vacantly at the blue sky and the cirrus clouds, sipping my Darjeeling tea, I can only reflect on the events of the past year, and what a year it has been. While the world was ravaged by a pandemic of a lifetime and almost all of us have lost someone we love or someone we know, our extended family of the Wales Puja Committee continued to bond and thrive together. The phrase 'getting together' opened up a brand-new possibility - the world of "virtual reality".

Durga Puja 2020 was unique. The entire process of the puja being live streamed was new to us. Thanks to the technical brilliance of Neeleem and Sayantan, the hard work of Sudipto, the devotion of Anirban- Tamasree and the superb anchoring / management of Liza, WPC Durga Puja 2020 was brought not only to our homes in in the UK but also to our relatives in India. We all had the opportunity to participate in the 'Puja with a difference'. Using the 'Streamyard' platform we even managed to offer 'pushpanjali' and the ladies participated in their favourite 'sindur khela'.

Children and adults performed in the virtual cultural programme. While Miku and Moon took anchoring to its new heights, Liza organised a brilliantly heart-warming 'adda' with some of our members who reminisced about their life experiences. This brought the 'virtual' even closer to the 'real' Pujo experience that we are used to. It highlighted our strengths in leadership and organisational skills, made us think outside the box and innovate. The success of the Durga Puja experience helped us in organising the Kali Puja and Saraswati Puja seamlessly in the subsequent months.

Despite the success of the first year of our virtual Puja, there were certain aspects that we dearly missed. The camaraderie of working together, the buzz of decorating the Puja 'mandap', the splendour of puja preparations, the excitement of 'chanda' collection, sharing tea and snacks, cooking and serving food for the hundreds of visitors and devotees and most importantly, celebrating the joyous occasion of Ma Durga's annual homecoming, 'baaper bari asha'.

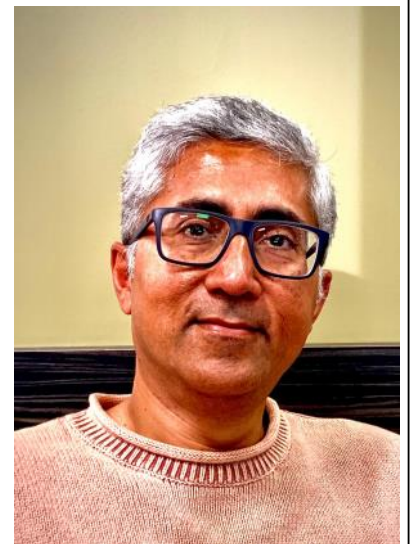
As the pandemic started to ease and lockdown rules began to be were relaxed, we all got excited about a 'real' Puja for 2021. Thanks to the efforts of Neeleem, Sandipda and Dipakda, a sizeable grant has allowed us the luxury of holding the WPC Durga Puja in Cardiff, in a venue as grand as the Temple of Peace.

We are all looking forward to Durga Puja this year, where we are able to come together in-person. Of course there will be many rules and restrictions to be followed, but times have changed and WPC is an organisation that knows how to adapt with changing times and situations. Our brilliant team had been combing through the finer details, working tirelessly behind the scenes, to ensure a memorable yet safe Durga Puja.

I look forward to welcoming you all at the Temple of Peace for our Durga Puja 2021. I am sure it will be a grand success. We need your blessings, your presence and your contributions for the WPC Durga Puja to be what it always had been - an event for ALL.

SHUBHO BIJOYA

Dr Kausik Mukherjee



From the Secretary's Desk, Wales Puja Committee, October 2021

These have been strange and horrifying times for all, a time of great loss of friends and family, the loss a way of life. It has been a year when we haven't always been able to reach out physically have been forced to watch with growing dismay from a safe distance.

We have not managed to celebrate our festivals as we did before and have retreated to safe grounds of the virtual, a time when the need to stay safe has overcome our of desperate need to be together.



For the Wales Puja Committee this has been an equally challenging time and we've had to think, rethink and reinvent over and over again in order to bring you our festivals in the best format of the times. I'm proud to say that we have a wonderfully dedicated and skilled team and we have adapted to and overcome a lot of these challenges. I have a great sense of gratitude and admiration for our members for repeatedly managing the near impossible. The Pandemic has taught us the art of conducting Pujas and Cultural Programmes virtually.

Special mention for this should go to the Dynamic Duo, the powerhouses that are Sandipda and Neeleem who are always thinking of ways ahead for our organisation. Our Chair, Kausik has been an inspiring presence and his voice of quiet authority has ushered us through many a meeting on virtual platforms. Our Treasurer is a treasure, Pankaj has been exemplary with his eye on every minutia of our accounts. Our Cultural Secretary Liza has shown amazing leadership and ability to organise programmes and indeed our festivals in completely new and different ways ensuring great quality and participation. She has met the very many challenges thrown her way with aplomb. Our Catering Team have had a very different year with the amazing WPC food taking a step back. However, they have been constant inspiring presence, helping plan the catering for this Puja, spreading awareness and much more. Sayantan, Neeleem and SudiptoMohan have been amazing towers of help with their IT skills, ability to edit and present the most amazing videos and for always being there. It has been a pleasure to help compere and host several virtual programmes and I have really enjoyed working with Moon and Liza, we all have very different styles but the chemistry has been terrific. And through all of this I must thank all our senior members and others for their encouragement and invaluable words of wisdom.

Puja is impossible without our priests and at the heart of all our festivals have been the amazingly dedicated team of Anirban and Tamasree. They have been tireless, sacrificing the comfort and safety of their homes during the strictest lockdowns to bring us live streamed Pujas which sometimes felt more personal and immediate than ever before.

I cant thank Debanjali enough for offering to edit the souvenir, often a thankless task hidden away from public view. For years I have been working tirelessly to improve the quality of our publications and it has been fantastic to finally have a talented partner in this effort who brings a fresh vision with her.

Charity is important to the WPC. Earlier this year we all experienced the horrors of the Pandemic striking India, many had friends and relatives struggling for hospital beds and the very stuff of life, oxygen. Kolkata was one of the epicentres of this tragedy. Help was needed and fast. The Hope Foundation who were looking at purchasing 4 ventilators and send funds to their tireless colleagues working round the clock to save the lives of those with significant Covid 19 in a 100 patient unit at the Hope Hospital in Kolkata. In April we rapidly raised £2050 towards their Emergency Covid Appeal.

We also donated £1001 to help Antim Sanskar Group, Wales acquire a site at Llandaff Rowing Club on the banks of River Taff for the dispersal of funeral ashes after cremation of our loved departed ones.

We are all excited to see what the new venue, the Temple of Peace brings us. We have had to restrict numbers attending to comply with Covid rules and alas, I know that this is bound to disappoint many. We hope and pray that next year things will be back to the normal.

SHUBHO BIJOYA FRIENDS

Dr Shiladitya Sinha



From the Treasurer's Desk, Wales Puja Committee, October 2021

Dear All,

I am pleased to present the Wales Puja Committee accounts for 2020 - 21. Over our last accounting year we have organised Durga Puja, Kali Puja and Saraswati Puja on the virtual platform. Durga Puja being virtual, collection was less but a significant amount was received from extended WPC families for various charitable causes.



I am thankful to all who donated generously throughout the year during different events. I am grateful to Mr Neeleem Saha and other WPC Executive Committee members for their initiative and hard work to secure community event grant for Durga puja 2020 which is going to be used for this year's Durga Puja event.

I am indebted to Mr Dipak Kundu, Dr Sandip Raha, and Mr Neeleem Saha for their support and guidance to carry out gift aid work to claim tax from the HMRC; consequently we have ended with a surplus.

Looking forward to your patronage, I convey my best *sharadiya* wishes and regards,

Pankaj Kumar Sarkar

Wales Puja Committee Accounts 2020-21				
Registered Charity No: 1050138				
DURGAPUJA	Expenses(in £)		Income(in £)	
Durgapuja Venue	432		Online Donations	2380.01
WPC Durga Pratima Photo Frame	62		Flower Donations	48
Sweets	30			
Puja Samagree/Fruits /Grocery	204.93			
Flowers	95.13			
Car Hire	158.5			
Excess Protection /Road side Protection	97.5			
Car fuel	26.21			
Cultural Programs				
Guest Artists from Kolkata (Rs15000)	159.88			
Pujor Jolsha	250			
Streamyard (\$75)/ Puja Broadcasting	58			
TOTAL	1574.15		TOTAL	2428.01
	Surplus	853.86		
KALIPUJA				
Kalipuja Venue	114.75		Online Donations	1162
Flowers/ Sweets	85.12			
Puja Samagree/Fruits /Grocery	112			
Car Hire	180			
Car fuel	20.77			
TOTAL	512.64		TOTAL	1162
	Surplus	549.36		
SARASWATI PUJA				
Flowers/ Sweets	95.5		Online Donations	718
Puja Samagree/Fruits /Grocery	264.48		Pronami	33
Streamyard / Puja Broadcasting	71.67			
TOTAL	431.65		TOTAL	751
	Surplus	319.35		

CULTURAL & SOCIAL ACTIVITY

Bengali Music Concert by Mr. Rupankar Bagchi	112	Online Tickets	112
Online Yoga sessions by Molly Crowther (6 weeks)	320		
Stream yards /Zoom video call (Sep'20-Aug'21)	187.07	BAWSO grants	1900
Selfie Sticks for Quiz contest winner	20.97		
Laptop for recording and Broadcasting	575		
Dual Handheld wireless microphone system	427		
Amazon gift cards for Antakshari & selfie competitions	160		
TOTAL	1802.04	TOTAL	2012

CHARITY

ASG(Antim Sanaskar Ghat) by HCW <i>(£260 gone through wpc a/c)</i>	1001	Online Donations	741
Hope Foundation U.K(Covid) <i>(£524 gone through wpc a/c)</i>	2050	Online Donations	1526
TOTAL	3051	TOTAL	2267

GENERAL EXPENSES & INCOME

Intercity Removals (Protima Storage) <i>(12 months @£90)</i>	1080	Attendance fees from NMW	150
Microsofts and Norton antivirus	134.98	Gift Aid from HMRC	1479.47
Screen	115	Gift Aid from HMRC	1987.12
HCW membership	100	Interest received from bank	4.71
		Sundries	11.53
		<i>(Has not been claimed yet)</i>	
TOTAL	1429.98	TOTAL	3632.83
Grand Total	8801.46	Grand Total	12252.8

Overall Surplus during 2020-21 accounting year	3451.38	Current A/C balance	6239.86
Total in Bank on 31/08/2020	25949.1	Savings A/C balance	22959.1
		Charity A/C balance	201.61
Total in Bank on 31/08/2021	29400.5	Total in Bank	29400.5



Members of the WPC Executive Committee & Office Bearers 2021-22



Chair Person	Dr Kaushik Mukherjee
Vice Chair	Mr Neeleem Saha
Secretary	Dr Shiladitya Sinha
Treasurer	Mr Pankaj Sarkar
Cultural Officer	Dr Liza Mukhopadhyay Vacant
Catering officer	Dr Madhuparna Mukherjee, Mrs Christina Roy
Events Officer	Vacant
Puja co coordinator	Mrs Tamashree Mukhopadhyay

Members:

Mr Rahul Aich	Dr Chandana Banerjee	Mrs Aditi Basu
Mrs Raktima Bhadra Sarkar	Mr Niladri Chakraborty	Mrs Sinjini Chakraborty
Mrs Maitreyi Das	Dr Sankar Das	Mr Sayantan Das
Dr Sakti Guha Niyogi	Mr Dipak Kundu	Mr Anirban Mukhopadhyay
Dr Ashok Mukherjee	Mrs Mahua Mukherjee	Dr Sudiptomohan Mukherjee
Mrs Abha Narayan	Dr Kanti Nath	Mrs Shikha Nath
Dr Sandip Raha	Dr Anjan Roy	Prof Hashmukh Shah
Mrs Sharada Sharma	Mrs Banani Sinha Roy	

Honorary Members:

Mr T K Kar	Mrs Jharna Majumdar	Dr RD Narayan
Dr Mohan Nath	Dr Satya Kishore Sharma	

Trustees:

Chair of Trustees: Dr Kanti Nath	Dr Sankar Das
Dr Sakti Guha Niyogi	Dr Ashok Mukherjee
Dr Ravi Narayan	Dr Sandip Raha
Dr Satya Kishore Sharma	Dr Kaushik Mukherjee

Chair of Exec committee is an ex officio Trustee during the tenure



2020: Reflections On A Year, Bizarre!

Unnoticed, yet as certain as daylight, time keeps slipping by. Disentangling itself from the day before and seamlessly mingling with the day ahead. After 365 repetitive transitions from day to night, light to dark, summer to spring - a year is born.

Thus dawned the historic year 2019, when, on 31st. December, a strange death- belching cloud arose from the East, consuming the entire world. Nations large and small, powerful or weak, West or East all fell prey. Unprepared and exposed to a life- threatening assault by a tiny virus. The world was in shock and came to a virtual standstill.

With the New Year celebrations on the horizon, people around the globe were buzzing. Friends and families were together and nations were connected as never before. With every move people made to get and stay together, the virus was tightening its vice- like grip. The weak feeble and the fallible fell first. The strong robust and the young too succumbed when the virus turned on its demonic mutations. No one was to be spared!

Governments around the world engaged scientists, doctors and epidemiologists to put a halt to the spread and perhaps, find a cure. There was death on a global scale, and as always, the opportunists set the tune for more confusion, deceit and fear- mongering. As the governments showed uncertainty, the opposition pulled out their battle axe. Heads were ready to roll, but there was no one capable or competent enough to cast the first stone. No one knew and there was no knowhow.

A total shutdown!

People imprisoned in their own homes. Social events cancelled; schools closed. Pubs, cinemas, restaurants shopping centres, all sealed! Local and international travel banned. Empty supermarkets, lifeless motorways, haunted parks, all giving the feeling of an impending Armageddon.



Time however, did not stop.

The first 6 months of lockdown were like a little game. All eyes open and ready to take on the day. But as 6 turned to 12 months, there was overt concern particularly because the death toll around the world was spiralling. The near and dear, close friends and even family were in the fray.

We as humans have tremendous potentials to outlive ourselves through our grit and unyielding spirit. We find ways and means to defy and outwit challenges. We bring back our joy and hopes through resolute and targeted deployment of our available resources. Comes 2021 and a bit of clarity in our vision.

We learn to live with our restrictions. The media, despite its many ills, has for once kept people together.

Now coming to us, the people of Cardiff, and in particular, the members of the WPC- though still in a haze of a continuously- changing face of Covid, we have survived. This survival is more of the spirit than of the body. I personally dedicate this challenging effort to keep our spirits afloat, to the Wales Puja Committee who through various means have kept the family together. Despite lockdowns, social restrictions, mental and physical stress, the young WPC-ites through their hard work, innovation and the help of social media gave us 'Puja 2020' as never before. For the first time in my lifetime have I witnessed a full devotional Virtual Durga Puja. And that too, of a very high quality. My heart felt congratulations to all those who made the Virtual Puja possible. WPC will remain ever-indebted.

Puja 2021 is happening, fingers crossed.

We will follow all rules and regulations set down by the government, the venue authority and the executive committee of WPC. Though we regret some inconveniences, we know you are with us in this effort to break the Covid- Human chain.

Stay safe and keep others safe.

Dr Ashok Mukherjee



Mahishasura Mardini, Year 2020 Our Cultural Officer Looks Back at the Year that Didn't Want To Be

The month of Ashwin was not far away. Bengali devotees of Cardiff were wondering how to overcome the curse of the pandemic and usher our Devi Parvati amongst ourselves. Shri Chandi Mahamaya was Chinmoyee, in our mind, we had to worship our Mrinmoyee. Wales Puja committee has been worshipping Devi Katyayani for the last 42 years. The thought of having a punctuation in that rich tradition was unbearable.

After a lot of discussions, we came up with something that hasn't happened before. What other route could we have taken in this hyper-connected world of today?



'Durke korile nikata bondhu'-Stream-Yard and online meetings came to our rescue.

The technological solution of our Vedic tradition from *Kālikā* and *Bṛhadharma Purāṇa*, was full of surprises. An exclusive Puja in a different location with help of our Purohit family of Sri Anirban and Srimati Tamashree Mukhopadhyay, had its traditional flavour.

Three days of puja of Bhagabati Gauri had *bodhon*, *Sandhipuja*, *Chandipath*, *aarati*, *pushpanjali*, *dhaker baddi* and even *bisorjon* all live streamed straight to our drawing rooms by and to our 'bondhu's across the city and far beyond to India, USA and Australia. People managed to offer Maa Dashabhujā their prayers online in different batches. While staying safe, our strategy was successful.

We extended our endeavour to Kalipuja as well in the following month.



The tailor-made cultural programme proved to be as vibrant and colourful as before.

In fact, it was a different experience altogether with people watching from home on their TV sets. We prepared our songs and dance videos at home, edited them and uploaded to be streamed on time. 'Group dance' and 'Natok' rehearsals were online, recorded and painstakingly edited by our friends and broadcasted on the day. People could comment live and even have banter ('aawaaj deoa') during the Natok.



An immense pleasure of creativity, hard work and feeling the warmth of closeness while watching it together online was the ultimate test for our passion for our roots.

Liza Mukhopadhyay

Some Famous Durga Temples in India dating back to the 8th- 12th century



দুর্গাদেবীদের বাহন

নমস্তে শরণ্যে শিবে সানুকম্পে
নমস্তে জগদ্ব্যাপিকে বিশ্বরূপে।
নমস্তে জগদ্বন্দ্যপাদারবিন্দে
নমস্তে জগত্তারিণি ত্রাহি দুর্গে ॥

শরতের আকাশে আলোর বেণু বেজে উঠেছে। নরম রোদে গাছের পাতায় যেন মায়ের ছোঁয়া। সেই আদরে শিউলি ঝরল, পদ্মপাপড়ি খুলল। নদীতীরে কাশের ঝাড় চামর দোলাল। শিশির মায়ের চরণ ধুইয়ে দিল। অমর্ত্যলোক থেকে সপরিবারে মা মর্ত্যে এলেন। যাঁরা বহন করে আনলেন সেই বাহকরা আজ আলোচনার নায়ক।

প্রথমেই আসব মা-র বাহক সিংহের কথায়। গিরিরাজ হিমালয় মাকে এই বাহন উপহার দেন। দেবী হলেন নিখিল চরাচরের রাজ্ঞী আর, সিংহ হলেন পশুদের রাজা। দেবী দশপ্রহরণধারিণী, দন্ত ও নখ হল সিংহের অস্ত্র। দেবী জটাজুটসমায়ুক্তা, সিংহ কেশর-যুক্ত। দেবী মহিষাসুরমর্দিনী, সিংহ মহিষের যম যাঁর থাবার ঘায়ে তাঁর মস্তক চূর্ণ হয়। সত্ত্বগুণী দেবী আজ্জাবহ রজোগুণী সিংহের উপর বসে তমোগুণী অসুরনাশিনীতে পরিণতা হয়েছেন। সর্বলোককল্যাণরত সিংহ তাই প্রণম্য।

দুর্গাপূজাকালে সিংহপূজার মন্ত্র হল ---
সিংহস্তং হরিরূপোসি বিষ্ণুদেবঃ ন সংশয়।

পার্বত্যাবাহন সিংহঃ

অতঃ পূজামি দেব অহম্ ॥

॥ হ্রীং হ্রীং মহাবলায় সিংহায় হ্রীং হ্রীং ॥



এবার গণেশবাহন মূষিকের (ইঁদুর) কথায় আসব। কোনো গুপ্ত কাজে নামলে সেই কর্ম সিদ্ধির মন্ত্রটি শুধুমাত্র নিজের অন্তরে রাখতে হয় আর কাজটিও খুব গোপনে করতে হয়। তাই মন্ত্রগুপ্তি, আত্মগুপ্তি তাঁর অস্ত্র। বনে কোণে তাঁর গুপ্ত সাধনা। কখন কোন্ ফাঁকে যে তিনি সন্ধানপনে কার্যসিদ্ধি করবেন তা কেউ জানে না। মূষিকের ধৈর্য ও অধ্যবসায় প্রবল যা সিদ্ধিলাভ করায়। কাম-ক্রোধ-লোভ-মোহ-মদমাৎসর্যের মধ্যে ডুবে থাকা মানুষের দোষগুলি তাকে পাশবদ্ধ করে মুক্তি পেতে দেয় না। ঐ মুক্তি-কামীর পাশের জাল মূষিক ছেদন করেন। বিবেক-বৈরাগ্য হল তাঁর তীক্ষণ দুই ছেদনদন্ত। গণেশের জন্মের পর ভূদেবী নবজাতককে দেখতে এসে মূষিক উপহার দেন। মূষিকের বাস মাটির মধ্যে, গর্তে, ভূমির গন্ধ তাঁর গায়ে মাখা। পৃথিবীর প্রাকৃতিক সৌগন্ধ বা গন্ধতন্মাত্র মনোরম ও আনন্দ - দায়ক। তাই মহানন্দে শিশু গণেশ তাঁকে বাহন করেছেন।
দুর্গাপূজায় মূষিকের পূজামন্ত্র হল---
বৃষাকার মহাভাগ বৃষরূপ মহাবল।

ধর্মরূপ বৃষঃতংহি গণেশস্য চ বাহন ॥

॥ হ্রীং হ্রীং মুষিকায় হ্রীং ॥



এবার ময়ূরের কথায় আসব। কার্তিকের বীর্য, ক্ষত্রতেজ, সৌন্দর্য তাঁর বাহন ময়ূরের প্রতি প্রযোজ্য। শক্রজয় ঐর ধর্ম। ময়ূর সদলে থাকতে ও সমভাবে খাদ্য গ্রহণ করে প্রভুর আজ্ঞাবাহী সৈন্যের মত নিয়ম-অনুবর্তী হতে পছন্দ করেন। তিনি ক্ষত্রিয়সুলভ দর্পে দর্পী।
দুর্গাপূজাকালে ময়ূর -পূজার মন্ত্র হল---
নানা চিত্রবিচিত্রাঙ্গ গরুড়ঃ জনকং তব।
অনন্ত শক্তিসংযুক্তং অতঃ প্রণমাম্যহম্।।
।। হ্রীং এং ময়ূরায় ক্রীং।।

মাতা বাগ্‌দেবীর বাহন হংস। শুক্লামাতার মত ইনি নিত্যধারণ ও অনিত্যবর্জন করেন। জল মেশানো দুধ থেকে তিনি কেবলমাত্র দুধ গ্রহণ করেন যা বিবেক-বিচার। তাঁর পালক ঝাড়লে অনিত্য জল চলে যায় - যা নিবত্তি। হংস অজপা মন্ত্রসিদ্ধ, সর্বশাস্ত্রে পারদর্শী। হংসের কৃপায় গায়ত্রীমন্ত্রে যে সাধক সিদ্ধ তিনি পরমহংস। জ্ঞান জল-স্থল-অন্তরীক্ষ সর্বত্র সঞ্চারী আর হংসের-ও তেমনই বিচরণ। তাই জ্ঞানদায়িনী তাঁকে বাহন নির্বাচন করেছেন।
হংসের মন্ত্র----

।। ॐ শ্রী হংস দেবতায় নমঃ।।



মাতা কমলা দেবীর বাহন পেচক। ইনি ধানের শত্রু বিনাশ করে ধনরক্ষা করেন। পেচক দিনে অন্ধ তাই জাগতিক বস্তু দেখেন না, পরের ধনের প্রতি তাঁর কোনো লালসা নেই। ইনি রাতে জেগে বনের কোণে কোটরে বসে নির্জনে তপস্যা করেন। ধনরক্ষক পেচককে ধনদেবী তাঁর বাহন নির্বাচন করেছেন।
পেচকের মন্ত্র----

।। ॐ শ্রীপেচকায় নমঃ।।



বাহনরা দেব-দেবীদের বিশিষ্ট ভাবের ভাবী। দেবতারা আপন সত্তায় একাত্ম পশুপাখিদেরই বাহন রূপে বেছে নিয়েছেন। মহাষষ্ঠীর বোধনভূমিতে আসন গ্রহণ করেছেন যে মহাসংবাহকের দল, যাঁরা শারদীয়া মহাপূজায় আমাদের আনন্দে মগ্ন করতে দেব-দেবীদের বহন করে এনে ধন্য করেছেন, সেই পূজনীয় বাহকবৃন্দের চরণে প্রণাম নিবেদন করছি।

।। ॐ নমশ্চন্ডিকায়ৈ ।।

ডঃ সুমিত্রা মিত্র ঘোষ



Our Children's Corner



Durga **Ashmit Saha, Age 13**
Self portrait of a Three-year-old
Roop Bhadra Sarkar, Age 3

Our youngest contributor has not had his official "haate khori" yet.

At three- and - half, he can already read simple words and sentences and is fascinated with writing and drawing.



The Eagle

Maharshi Ray, Age 8

I painted this picture just after Christmas last year.

We had been stuck in our house for several months due to the Covid outbreak.

Sometimes I looked through the window watching the birds flying around. I wished I could fly like them.

So I painted this Eagle which is a symbol of freedom.



Holi in a different light: The art of Quilling

Shivangi Das, Age 11

During winter lockdown, talented Rayee (Shivangi) taught herself the art of quilling. In between online classes, singing and dancing, she spent several hours experimenting with what she could create. She decided to send a picture of her efforts to BBC and there she was, winning the prestigious "Silver" Blue Peter badge!

In her own words:
"Holi celebrates the arrival of spring, the end of winter and the blossoming of love."

The festival is mainly celebrated in the Indian subcontinent where people smear each other with dry powdered colours and drench each other with water guns or water-filled balloons.

People come together to share laughter, food, drinks and celebrate happiness.

It is a festive day to meet others, play and laugh, forget and forgive, and repair broken relationships."



Holiday at home

Poem and drawing by Aarjo Mukhopadhyay, Age 9

It's a holiday at home,
Does it even make sense?
Come on now let's
Look it under a lens!

We stay in our homes
imagine the street as the sea,
and imagine the trees are the
people
coming down to chat to me.

The bush behind the fence
Looks like a mountain,
The tap water running down
Looks like a fountain.

There is the old shed at the back
faraway castle it was mine,
the conifer was the gallant knight
the deck was my shrine.



We hope we hit the road soon
Not long, I'm sure,
Life will get back to normal
COVID will soon have a cure.

A Poem on Covid 19

Ananmay Banerjee, Age 11

Corona - it has been more than a year -
I can't believe it is still here!
It's here and there -
Oh, it's everywhere!
It's taking so many lives away,
There is nothing more horrid, I say.

It's good that factories were not going on,
And cars were parked till sunset from dawn.
But staying at home
With nowhere to roam-
Not good at all!
No playing any cricket or football.

This virus has spoilt our childhood;
We couldn't go to school when we should.
When will this pandemic end?
On God, with hope, I depend.

I know people dying is so sad,
But even with Covid, not everything is so bad.
The sky is more blue,

I know, we couldn't roam outside anymore,
But we paid attention to our hobbies galore.
We also learnt the importance of family,
And how, with them, we can live happily.
So, every bad thing has a positive side, without
a doubt.
And, that is what my poem is all about!

Forget me not

Orchita Roy, Age 8

During the summer of 2021, I fund-
raised for the Alzheimer's Society for
a project called Forget me not. I love
my grandparents and both of them
forget things.

I wanted to help the Alz-
heimer's Society spread
more information and do
Research on Dementia and
Alzheimer's.

So I created some book-
marks and greetings cards using my
creative skills which I sold and it
helped me raise £215. I feel happy to
have done something like this for the
first time!



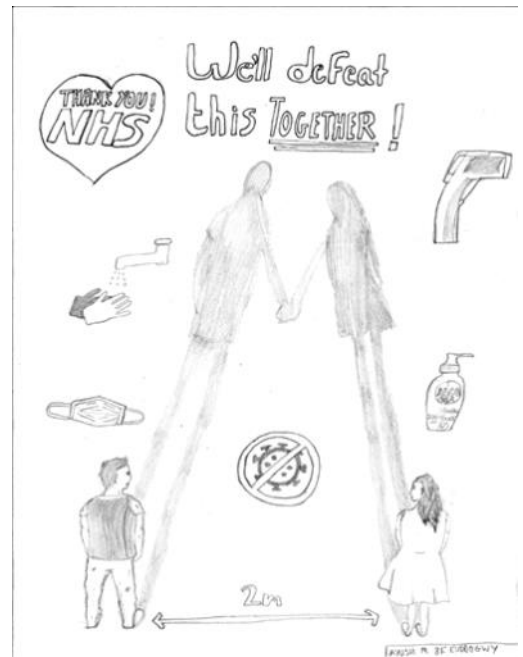
Covid-19 – Writing at Home

Ayush Mukhopadhyay, Age 13

It is 6:56am, March 2020. The streets are quiet. Barren wilderness of tarmac, cement, and white paint. The gush of wind whistles through the trees, rustling the newly emerged leaves in spring. The stone is cold, untouched for a few days now, the complete lack of outdoor activity. A scarce sound occurred. The passing by of a car, which seemed like a rare phenomenon nowadays, as the rumble of the engine slowly faded into the distance of the suburbs, until inaudible. It was like every man, woman and child had left, never to return.

It is currently 14:47pm, end of November 2020. The schools are silent. The hustle and bustle of school life remains dormant, not any sign of reemerging. Only a few cars lie in the car park, alone, just like us in times like this, away from everyone else. Through the foggy window, is a room of computers, with children sitting behind them. The clickety-click of the keyboard, the ticking of the clock on the wall, and the teacher unusually speaking into the screen as if someone is inside, stuck, with nowhere to escape. However, Christmas approaches, but not as we expect.

It has just now turned 19:29pm, June 2021. There are people all around the cinema. To view the new movie Fast and Furious 9: The Fast Saga. Although people wear masks on their faces, you can still tell that they are smiling beneath full of the joy and happiness movies bring. It seems back to normal, except social distancing and face masks, the final obstacles to overcome. Stay safe as we are 2m apart, but now closer than ever.



Megh's Worry Monster

Megh Bhattacharya, Age 9

During COVID-19, then -8year-old Megh was super worried thinking something was going to happen to Mummy and Daddy. They are both frontline doctors looking after sick patients, many of whom had COVID.

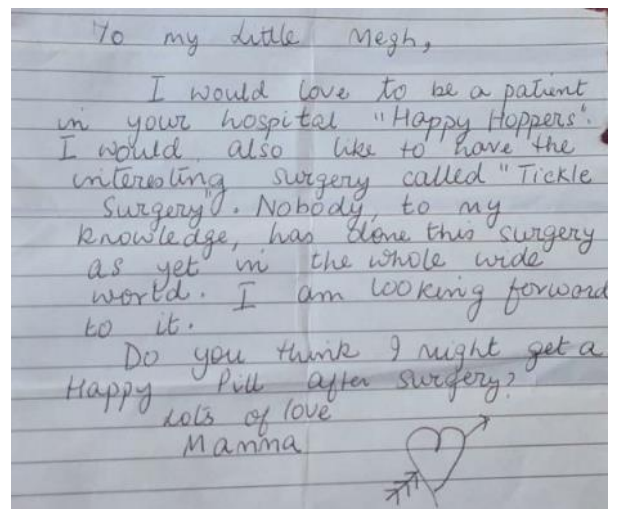
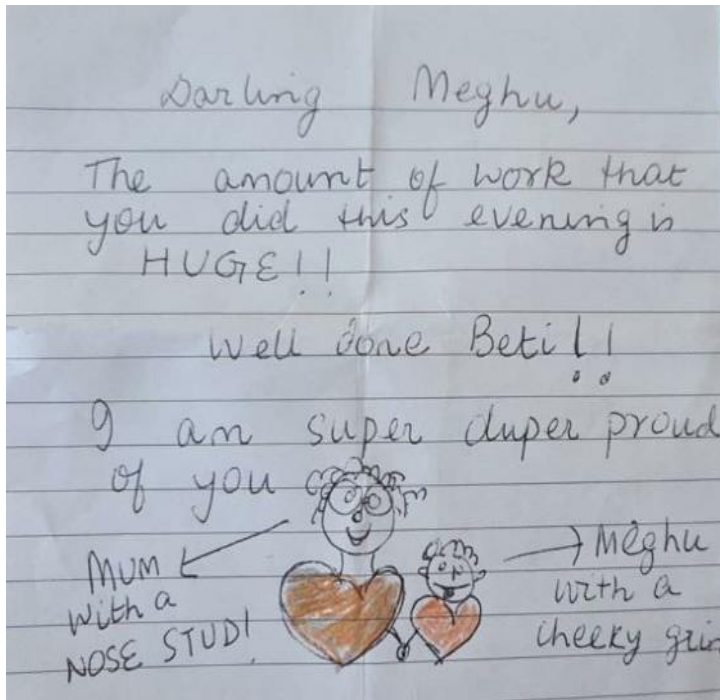
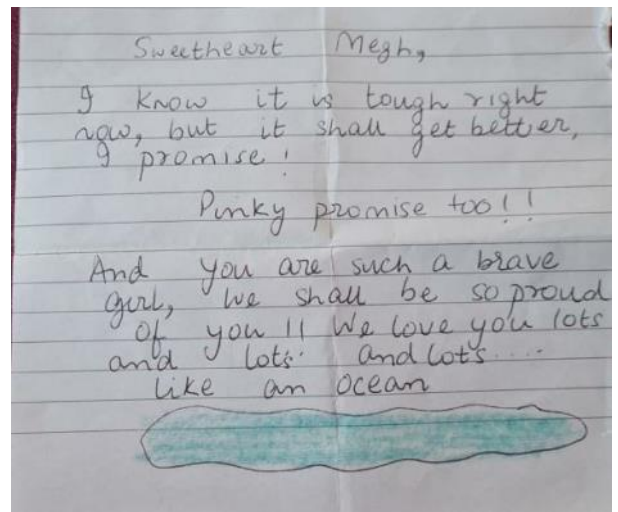


She had a brainstorm, she created this envelope and named it 'Megh's Worry Filter'. Her parents loved the name, and secretly wished adults had something like this too!

Every evening before bedtime, Megh would put an imaginary 'worry' into her filter, and in return, would get a note from her parents. Many of these notes were discarded after she overcame her

fears and no longer needed the 'filter'.

Thank goodness her parents saved a few, just to remind themselves of those times.



Our River Walks

Jishnu Bhattacharjee, Age 7

I always loved our afternoon strolls. We started in lockdown and carried on even afterwards. It started with me climbing the gate- behind it is a path and next to the path is a river. It is our favourite "river walk".

We picked up stones and threw them into the river; my big brother is good at skimming them. Sometimes we hid the best stones inside a hole on a tree trunk - we called it the "stone bank". We climbed trees and jumped off the branches. Someone had put a swing on a branch, we loved swinging on it.

Along the river walk we saw many little crafted doors that we called "fairy doors". They were made of coloured lollipop sticks and had numbers on them. There were loads of small painted rocks in every nook and corner of our river walk and we were always excited to spot them.



The path on the other side of the river was through lots of shrubs and bushes. We loved smelling the wild garlic and brought some of them home to make garlic butter. We also picked loads of blackberries and ate them on our way.



After walking for about a mile we would reach the Cefn Mably estate. It was a large field, with a hill to our left. If we climbed up the hill, we could have a bird's eye view- cows, sheep, trees, and greenery. The first time I climbed up there, I asked Daddy if we needed to call the Fire Services to bring us down!

Bright Spots

Aaruni Bhattacharjee, Age 10

The past one year has had many ups and downs, but if there was one bright spot on the horizon, it's the online Robotics lessons that I've been taking with CERA- the Cambridge Electronics & Robotics Academy. My mentor, Sujit Bhattacharya, has been teaching us how to work with the BBC Micro: bit.



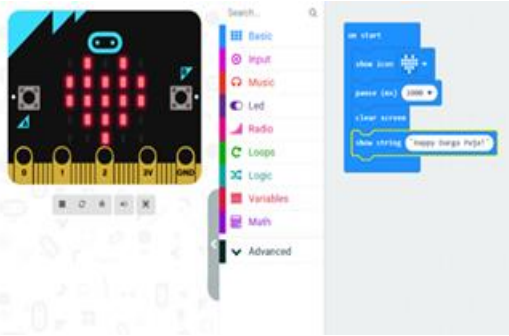
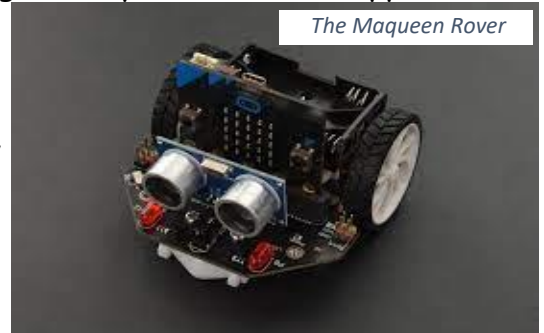
The Micro: bit is a small, programmable computer which can detect the temperature, become a compass, detect light levels, show you the sound level, transmit radio signals to another Micro: bit, and, when plugged into correct devices, make a mini rover named the Maqueen move forward, follow a line and make it dodge obstacles! Every code is unique, each one giving a different output. Some coders make their codes from the beginning while others prefer to add on to work that has been provided. Either way, the outcome is always extremely good quality, and the code uses all 4 principles of STEM in one project.

As a software we use Makecode, a coding platform that can not only code the Micro: bit, but also the LEGO Mindstorms EV3, Arcade, Cue, Minecraft and Chibi Chip. It contains many varieties of blocks and can show you where you've gone wrong. It also contains a JavaScript and Python mode, designed for advanced learners. It includes tutorials that help beginners to understand how to code simple things, such as sending simple messages by radio.

We have also been taught how to work with external devices, such as the Maqueen, a small, affordable robot that is Micro: bit friendly. This contains even more sensors, such as ultrasonic sensors, infrared sensors and motors. Although it may seem small in appearance, this mini rover has more to it than meets the eye.

With this different equipment we made many demonstrations, all so much fun to code, test and demonstrate since there are many fun ways to program, test and play with the BBC Micro: bit! Every week I sit down and just code, and for hours, I get absorbed in it. This, surely, has to be the best part of my week.

With this different equipment we made many demonstrations, all so much fun to code, test and demonstrate since there are many fun ways to program, test and play with the BBC Micro: bit! Every week I sit down and just code, and for hours, I get absorbed in it. This, surely, has to be the best part of my week.



My mentor is the best I could possibly wish for. He has many degrees and has even worked with NASA!! He is friendly, and teaches us in an understandable way, going from as simple as 2 blocks of code to creating a space invaders game. But I don't just learn to code. I have learnt about how ultrasonic sensors work, showing how features of the Micro: bit imitate human body parts, have been shown an anti-gravity experiment and so much more. This course will definitely help me in other subjects in the coming years.

The Micro: bit, Makecode and Maqueen are excellent ways to spend time, and, as people from even NASA have said, "It's always good to know a little bit of coding. It's a life skill." I, personally, agree with them.



HOLLYWOOD BLOCKBUSTERS IN THE STYLE OF JAMINI ROY

GUESS THE MOVIES



Healthy and low- budget Bengali recipes

Christina Roy, Catering Officer

Over the past two years of the pandemic, I have persistently promoted healthy eating on a low budget for families struggling simultaneously with health issues and poverty. These simple recipes, full of goodness of flavour and nutrients can be helpful to any family.

Tetor Daal

Ingredients:

200 gms mung daal/yellow daal
1 sliced bitter gourd
1 crushed ginger
1/2 tsp mustard seeds
1 bay leaf
Salt according to taste
Water as needed
1 tbsp oil



Method:

Boil the *daal* with water and salt.
Once boiled, use a beater to smooth out the *daal*.

Fry the bitter gourd slices in the oil and keep aside.

Add mustard seeds.

Add a bay leaf and pour the *daal*.

Add the crushed ginger.

Cook well and serve hot with boiled rice.

Lau Ghonto

Ingredients:

3 cups of thinly -chopped courgette/*lau*
1/2 tsp cumin seeds
1 tbsp oil
1 green chilli
1 tsp each of turmeric, cumin, coriander powder
Optional- fried *bori* /prawns
A sprinkle of coriander leaves
Salt according to taste



Method:

Heat up the oil. Add cumin seeds and chilli.

Then add all vegetables. Cover and cook till soft. Add all powdered spices till every-

thing mixes smoothly. Garnish with fried *bori*/ prawns and coriander leaves.

Serve hot with boiled rice.

Chicken Keema curry

Ingredients:

500 gms chicken mince
1 medium chopped onion
1 tsp cumin seed
2 tbsp sunflower oil
1 tsp tomato purée
1 cube ginger garlic paste
1 tsp cumin powder
1 tsp coriander powder
1 tsp chilli powder
1 tsp turmeric powder
1/2 cup frozen peas
1 tsp garam masala powder



Method:

Heat up the oil in the saucepan. Add cumin seeds for tempering. Add ginger garlic paste. Add mince. Individually add all other ingredients. Cover n cook for 15 mins. Sprinkle garam masala powder at the end. Serve hot with rice, pasta or any type of bread.

Christina Roy

Cooking with WPC- a Trip down memory lane

Chandana Banerjee

When Wales Puja Committee moved its functions to Penyrheol Community Centre in the mid-1990's, a momentous decision was taken to perform the catering in-house. Costs of outside catering had escalated, grants were not readily available during those days and the type of cuisine served by caterers in Cardiff was very limited. Previously, for Pujas in the old Empire Pool venue, food for lunch would be cooked in-house during the week but numbers of attendees were increasing in the evenings so the costs of outside catering was not really affordable at the time.

No one amongst the Committee members and close associates of WPC had any experience with mass catering but that was no deterrent! Necessary equipment was purchased - pots, pans and gas burners, the Catering Officers (always female!) drew up a menu agreed to by the Committee, shopping lists were compiled and we were on our way. Those were the days before everyone had a mobile phone. The internet, google and emails belonged to a future world, communication was by land lines or in-person meetings. But the commitment of members made it work.

During our first time in Penyrheol, gas burners were set up in the smaller hall adjoining the kitchen where bhog is cooked. Subsequently this moved to the kitchen at the other end. There was a large room adjoining the kitchen with a big table which was used to chop vegetables. There were no hired kitchen helpers: a small crew of members and their families did almost all the hard work. Not only the ladies- men joined in as well and did the hard physical work of lifting and washing heavy pans, stirring heavy pots filled with food for two hundred people. Catering Officers drew up rotas for mornings and evenings which were attached to the fridge door.

The menus were very tastefully drawn up, with the emphasis on Bengali cuisine in the morning and a wider selection in the evenings including North Indian 'kadhi' and 'chole'. *Begun bhaja* was a must at lunchtime and on an Ashtami morning we usually had pulao, cauliflower curry and *payesh* amongst other items. *Puris* were purchased from outside.

It was hard going at times but it was great fun as well. None of us had cooked such volumes of food before and us ladies did wonderfully well with our estimates of the amount of ingredients added to prepare the dishes. I look back and smile when I think of occasions when we would look at each other with dismay as we realised the crowd gathering was far in excess of our estimates. We would run back to the kitchen in our fine silk saris to cobble up another dish so that no one left hungry.

I remember once the crowd was well over 250 and we were lucky during that period to have a family member of one of our members who would calmly step in and cook singlehandedly to make up for any shortfalls. Gradually, '*mangsho*' was introduced for the Dashami night, cooked for many years by a friend of WPC accompanied by the men of WPC. And they made sure they had their rewards with a liver appetizer.

One of the highlights was our preparations for Diwali. There was a time when Diwali celebrations were a big event in Penyrheol. We would arrive at the hall mid-morning and dive into food preparation with great enthusiasm. Our children were in charge of the decor of the hall, and their enthusiasm was even greater! By evening, the hall would be unbelievably transformed, with garlands decorating the entrances and walls amidst beautiful ethnic decor and decorated candlelit tables. The most delicious food, starters, mains and desserts would be served. After the Lakshmi Puja, the hall would be filled with chatter, music from the DJ and raffle collection by our youngsters, followed by food and dancing.

Did things always run smoothly? Of course not! Sometimes volunteers could not turn up, we ran out of ingredients for a particular dish, sometimes there was a tinge more or less of salt. There was praise, and also rarely, unnecessary comments and differences of opinions. But these challenges were always overcome with good humour and ingenuity. It says a lot for the patience of all, particular those who had to make numerous trips to obtain missing ingredients.



As time passed, we all became more adept, food safety regulations (introduced in the UK in 1990) were adhered to, albeit at my insistence with some resistance and plenty of jokes but persistence paid off.

We were all proud that WPC catering reached such a high standard at such a low cost so quickly. It continues to flourish with new heights being achieved till this day with great credit to our younger members.

Next are versions of a dishes cooked frequently at the WPC. The quantities of ingredients have been omitted so that it can be served to fewer people: you must use your own "*aandaj*" but don't be afraid of trying it out!



Alu Kumror Tarkari

Ingredients:

Potatoes, pumpkin, asafoetida (*hing*), whole red chillies, *paanch phoron* (a mixture of 5 seeds: mustard, cumin, nigella, fennel and fenugreek), bay leaves, ginger paste, turmeric, cumin powder, chilli powder, salt and sugar, oil (mustard / sunflower oil).



Method:

Cut the vegetables into small chunks.

Heat oil, add *paanch phoron*, bay leaves, dried red chillies and *hing* and sauté for a minute.

Add the potatoes and fry till light brown.

Add ginger paste and sauté for a minute. Don't let it burn.

Then add the pumpkin, turmeric, chilli powder, cumin powder, salt and sugar. Sauté for few minutes, then add a little water.

Cover and cook on low heat till the potatoes and pumpkin are cooked.

Serve with rice or puris.

A recipe from a Diwali, which went down very well was Palak Paneer. On that occasion we could use onions and garlic because it was celebrated after the religious day. Again, quantities are omitted for adapting to the number of persons being served.

Saag Paneer

Ingredients:

Defrosted frozen spinach, paneer (shop bought - cut into cubes) tomato (small quantity), onions, ginger, garlic, green chilli, turmeric powder, chilli powder, *garam masala* powder, *kasoori methi*, single cream (small amount), lemon juice, oil/ ghee and salt.

Method:

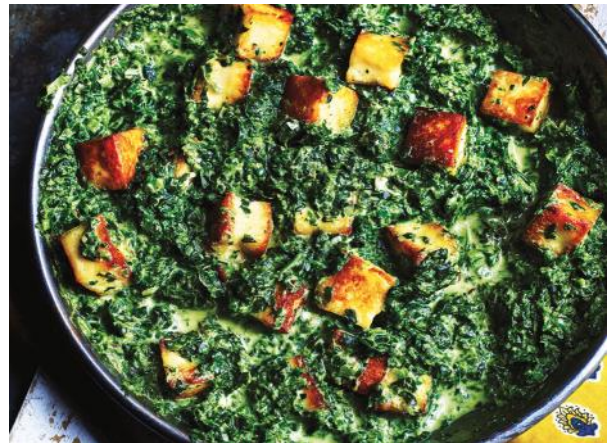
Chop the onions.

Blitz the spinach with the ginger, garlic, tomatoes and green chillis in a blender to a coarse paste.

Heat oil (or ghee).

Add the chopped onions and cook till they are translucent, then add the puree and stir frequently, till the spinach is cooked. A little water can be added to prevent it from sticking.

Add the turmeric, red chilli powder, paneer and salt. Let it cook for a few minutes, then add the *garam masala*. Keep the heat low and slowly add the cream. Simmer for 3-4 minutes, add *kasoori methi*. Turn off the cooker and add the lemon juice to finish it off!



Chandana Banerjee



...And Madhu

Jagannath Bhadra

...And Madhu, was spending his days almost like a prisoner. Not behind bars but captive in his own residence, as if under house arrest. He was innocent, but the Lady Police Chief, his only daughter who now lives in UK, had issued the strictest possible order- "Do not go out, at any cost".

Madhu's co-prisoner wife has also been playing the role of a 'police informer'. Madhu had been an employee in a government bank till a decade ago after which he had retired. He loved being a globe-trotter at this stage in life and was following his dreams but the long COVID lockdowns imposed by the government ruined every plan of his.

After a few months, Madhu started to adopt an untraveled path. Along with some of his friends, he joined a migrant workers' Helpline from the periphery of his own residence. Together they patiently tried to contact people in distress over the phone and internet with their limited resources. This was at the time when lakhs of migrant workers were neither getting transport to return home (some of which were hundreds or thousands km away) nor afford to stay at their workplace- jobless and bankrupt. Even those workers were beaten up by the police, sprayed with chemicals all over as they tried to walk back home in the scorching summer heat family including very young children. They died in thousands due to fatigue, starvation, and accidents.



Gradually through their relentless efforts, Madhu and his friends achieved some success. With private as well as government support that they secured, they arranged transport for as many migrants as possible to return to their homelands safely. They also organised supply of some food and essentials to them on a limited scale. Though tiny in comparison with the enormity of the crisis, it inspired people in distress to regain their self-esteem, confidence, and the undying spirit of 'live

and let live'. A few such stories are shared here.

Yadu had been working as a helper to a mason in Kerala and somehow returned to his residence in Bengal. For a few days he survived with handouts from different sources. Finally, he decided to be a fresh fish vendor, knocking on one door to another with his headload of fishes. It had a steady demand in the area and his list of customers increased with each passing day. Yadu has survived with dignity.

Ram was an employee of a fruit merchant; he mainly worked as salesman in his employer's shop. The ongoing Covid crisis ruined his employer's business and Ram was laid off. His plight increased day by day since he couldn't earn anything during the prolonged lockdowns.

At last, he hired a manual van rickshaw on a daily basis to be a mobile vendor. He decided to be a door-to-door fruit vendor because he had enough experience with the seasonal fruits as a fruit salesman. Ultimately, Ram started to move to his known people with apple, banana, pears, orange, grapes etc. depending upon the availability in wholesale market. Due to his soft-spoken nature and competitive prices, he won over his customers' neighbours as well. Ram is now in a stable position to earn his livelihood.



Jhpu Adhikari
'Migration', 24" x 20", Oil on canvas, (1998)

Rahim worked in a bedding store where he made cotton pillows and mattresses before the pandemic hit the country. Lockdown compelled the bedding stores to close. Rahim was literally a destitute on the streets. He realised mattress-making couldn't feed his family anymore. He tried to be a hired labour for miscellaneous odd jobs, but alas! Rahim failed miserably.

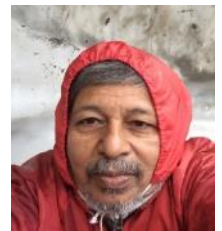
Finally, he felt that vegetables are essential commodities which have a persistent demand among all sections of the society. Rahim became a doorstep vegetable vendor supplying fresh vegetables as cheap as possible. Now, he is inspiring his friends and relatives too.

...And quiet flows the life of common people,
defeating the distress of the ongoing pandemic ...
(Based on anonymised experiences of real characters)

Jagannath Bhadra



Jhupu Adhikari
'The Embrace'
Mixed media on canvas
2005



Journey of an Ethnic Minority Diabetic during COVID 19

Christina Roy

Cardiff is a multicultural city with people from around the world- 19% of them are from the various ethnic minority communities. Statistics say 1 in 6 individuals from ethnic minority background has a chance of Diabetes. So, ethnicity and chronic illness have gone hand in hand for many families in Cardiff.

Some like me were not in the 'vulnerable group' for shielding but was under a higher risk for catching the virus and had to choose to socially distance. I am not only diabetic but also have asthma and an Exocrine Pancreatic Insufficiency. All these factors along with my ethnic background pushes me a point higher on the risk assessment category.

Staying positive was my aim during lockdowns. I stayed busy with my work with the community- I kept them engaged and educated through a variety of activities. I stayed in touch with my parent learning group to reassure them for any queries, to help them with parenting and kept them afloat. A small group of mums to make face masks and scrub bags for the care homes. They were engaged in two projects - a 'Memory Blanket' and a 'Cookery Book'. This not only helped them improve their literacy and IT skills but also kept them emotionally resilient. We got involved with the Food Fareshare project to make Wales sustainable and feed many families in need.

Like several ethnic minority families, my family is also a three-generation family with multiple health conditions. So, it had been a good challenge to keep a balance between caring, home schooling and working from home. I am happy that I stayed connected with communities, have spread some awareness for Covid 19 and educated and engaged them with learning. I am now getting ready for the 'new normal' in 2022!



Have we changed in Pandemic?

Dr Sandip Raha

Who would have thought in February 2020, when we were all buoyant in Saraswati Puja, that our lives would be upside down within a month! We remember flying to India two days after Saraswati Puja and visiting Dharamshala, Amritsar, Delhi, Kolkata, Ranchi and Goa over a period of 3 weeks and returning to UK at the end of February 2020.

March 2020 saw our first lockdown; the rest of the story is familiar to us all. Our lives were completely shut down and we quickly realised that this once- in- a- generation experience soon became unbearable. We could hardly believe the information coming from media be it news, social or otherwise. All our hospitals were under unprecedented pressure, treating record numbers of patients and devastatingly, losing many of our staff in the process. We lost many of our near and dear ones all over the world.

Have all these traumas changed us? At that time we could not think how. Eighteen months later as the world opens up and life is limping back to some sort of normality, we have the time to reflect. It will possibly take years to return to what we called "normal" in the pre-2020 era of our lives.

Some of us have spent nearly the entire period without any meaningful social activity outdoors or within the community. Psyche and thoughts have become insulated into our own well being to such an extent that many may not be able to see beyond the clouds yet. Some of us are afraid to go out to public places, are apprehensive about cinemas, theatres, markets, shopping malls and certainly holidays to other countries. This is reasonable, as this pandemic is a lifechanging event and many of us need longer time to adjust to such trauma.

Our communities are resilient; with proper support and reassurance we will surely come out of this. We will see the community, country and world return to a normal we know: busy streets, malls, shops, public places, festivals and entertainment venues. We may take some time to adjust to it but *Homo Sapiens* are survivors and fighters for over several millennia.

Is this the time to reflect what we have and how precious is our community, our society and the people we love? Friends, family members, work mates each have a significance which is reinforced far more today than before. We have realised that it is difficult to function and survive without the community, without our social activities and our camaradery.

Wales Puja Committee's celebrations, gatherings and cultural events stopped in real world but continued in the virtual domain. It provided social and psychological community support to many of us and we realised its strength and importance even more over the last eighteen months. I hope our love and care for this community organisation grows to be more important now that we have experienced life without it. Let us reinforce our bonds of friendship / care / fun / well-being through our Durga Puja 2021 and take extra steps to make it memorable.

Happy Durga Puja and Dussehra to all.

Sandip Raha



। দায়ী।

সন্ধ্যা নামছে ধীরে, শান্ত তপোবন।
সন্ধ্যাপ্রদীপ ঘিরে বসে পাঁচজন, আফ্রিক সমাপন করে।
বেদ অভ্যাসে থেকে সারাদিন ধরে,
কৃষ্ণদ্বৈপায়ন ব্যাস বসেছেন প্রিয় চার শিষ্যের সাথে,
ডান পাশে পৈল ও সুমন্ত, বাঁয়ে জৈমিনি, সামনে বৈশম্পায়ন,
গুরুর রচিত 'জয়' কাব্যটি হাতে।
সারাদিনমান গেছে নিরস সূক্তদের তত্ত্বালাশে,
ব্যস্ত সময় কাটে ঋক সাম অথর্ব যজুর বিন্যাসে,
সন্ধ্যার পরে আর ওইসব আলোচনা গুরুর বারণ।
সে সময় 'জয়' পাঠে চারজন করে থাকে অনিন্দ্য কাহিনীর মধু
আহরণ।

হঠাৎই বলেন পৈল, ঋকবেদ-হোতা,
'ক্ষমা করবেন গুরু দীনের মূঢ়তা,
শেষ অবধি বিনষ্ট হলো এগারোটি বীর বাদে সব ক্ষত্রিয়,
এমন ভয়ঙ্কর সমরকথন নেই কোথাও দ্বিতীয়।
কুরুক্ষেত্রে সেই ভারতবিনাশের দায় দেওয়া যায় কোন চরিত্রকে?
সেকথা স্পষ্ট করে লেখা নেই আপনার আট হাজার শ্লোকে।'

ব্যাস হেসে বললেন, 'তোমাদের অভিমত শুনি?
দুর্যোধন দুঃশাসন কর্ণ শকুনি,
শুধুই এদের জন্য আসেনি বিনাশ, বুঝেছো তা ঠিকই।
তাহলে সে কে ছিলো, নেপথ্য থেকে জ্বালে যে আগুন ধিকি,
বলো দেখি ভেবে। যুদ্ধের দায় খুঁজে কার কাঁধে দেবে?'

বললেন জৈমিনি, 'আমি তো দোষ দেবো গান্ধারীকে।
প্রতিশোধে বিধে দিতে অন্ধ পতিকে,
চক্ষুশ্রুতী হয়ে তিনি দৃষ্টিবিমুখ,
নাহলে বুঝতেন ঠিক, শুরুতে বিনষ্ট হতো ঈর্ষা অসুখ।'

'প্রতিশোধ?' চমকে বললেন সুমন্ত,
'পতিপরায়না তিনি, প্রতিশোধী নন তো!'
মুদু হাসলেন জৈমিনি,
'তাহলে চোখ না বেঁধে স্বামীর দৃষ্টি হয়ে বাঁচতেন তিনি,
আলোর পৃথিবীর যাবতীয় অনুভব তবে ধৃতরাষ্ট্রের হতো না অধরা,
অন্ধের সাথে পরিণয়ে যেই অন্যায়া, তার প্রতিশোধে ওই চোখে পটি
পর।'

'তাহলে তো ভীষ্মই দায়ী! মুখ খুললেন বৈশম্পায়ন।
যখন চেয়েছে তাঁকে কুরুসিংহাসন,
এড়িয়ে গেছেন দায়।
যোগ্য পুরুষ ছেড়ে বিচিত্রবীর্য রাজা, রাজ্যের সাথে সেটা ঘোর
অন্যায়।
ভাই মারা গেলে, কেন তিনি বিয়ে করে নিজেই নেননি তুলে শাসনের
ভার?
ক্ষমা করে গিয়েছেন দুর্যোধনের ভুল, কখনো টানেননি রাশ তার
স্পর্ধার।'



'সে ক্ষেত্রে তো দায়ী করে যায় আমাদের গুরুকেই।'
পৈলের অভিযোগ শুনে আর কারো মুখে কথা নেই,
দৃষ্টিরা ঘুরে গেছে মহর্ষির দিকে।
মুদু হেসে ব্যাস বললেন, 'জেনেশুনে ঔরসে জন্মাতে দিয়েছি দুই
প্রতিবন্ধীকে,
সেটাই বলবে জানি।
তাতে আমি কেন হতে যাবো বলো অভিমানী,
জয়ের চরিত্র ব্যাস আমারই কল্পনা বাটে, তবে আমি নই।
আজ থেকে সহস্র বছর পরে যাতে লোকে মনে রাখে, কে লিখেছে বই,
তাই ওকে করেছে সৃজন।
হতে পারে, তোমরা খুঁজছো যাকে ব্যাসই সেই জন।'

'না গুরুদেব, দায়ী অন্য অশ্বগুরু, মহাবীর দ্রোণ।'
বললেন বৈশম্পায়ন।
দ্রুপদের প্রতি তাঁর প্রতিশোধ নিতে,
যে মূল্য বললেন দক্ষিণা দিতে,
তারই অপমান থেকে জন্ম যাজ্ঞসেনীর।
তাঁকেই কেন্দ্র করে তাবত যুদ্ধকথা এই কাহিনীর।'

'যুধিষ্ঠির নন কেন? সুমন্ত স্পষ্টত এতে অসম্মত।
পাঁশাতে অমন বাজি নাই যদি হতো,
যদি অভিসন্ধি বুঝে ফেলে যদি উঠে আসতেন ঘুঁটি ফেলে ছুঁড়ে, দূরত্ব
থেকে যেতো ইন্দ্রপ্রস্থ আর হস্তিনাপুরে।'

'তাহলে তো কুন্তীই দায়ী হন ভাই!
বক্তা জৈমিনি, যজুর্বেদ-জ্ঞানী, তিনিও উত্তেজিত যারপরনাই। শতশৃঙ্গ
থেকে হস্তিনাপুর আসা ছিলো শুধু আশ্রয় চাওয়া না সিংহাসনের
দাবীতে?
অবদান কম নয় তাঁরও সেই যুদ্ধের ভিত গড়ে দিতে,
কর্ণ নিপাত করা মাতুলস্নেহের অছিলায়
অথবা দ্রৌপদীকে বর্চন করে দেওয়া পাঁচটি ভ্রাতায়,
তাঁর ক্ষমতালীপ্সার কথা করছে প্রমাণ।'

আর কৃষ্ণ? বললেন পৈল। যুদ্ধের দায় তিনি কিভাবে এড়ান?
কর্ণের পরিচয় যুধিষ্ঠিরকে দিলে,
তাঁকে রাজা মেনে নিতো দুপক্ষ মিলে,
বরং বিপরীতে গিয়ে তিনি ধনঞ্জয়কে টেনে নামান সমরে,
ত্রিকালদর্শী তিনি, ধ্বংসের দায় তাই তার ওপর পড়ে।'

'তোমরা জ্ঞানীশ্রেষ্ঠ, বেদ বিভাজন করো তর্কাতীত দক্ষতাতে।
তবু নও একমত কেউ কারো সাথে,
কাব্যরচয়িতার লক্ষ্য সফল হয়েছে তবে। এ আমার নিশ্চিত শ্রেষ্ঠ
রচনা।'
বলে থামলেন ব্যাস। শিষ্যরা থামলেন গূঢ় আলোচনা,
সবিনয়ে ব্যাসকেই প্রশ্ন করেন চারজনে,
'যুদ্ধের দায়ী বলে আপনি ভাবেন কাকে মনে?'
হাসলেন ব্যাস। 'ওরা সকলেই, এবং আরো অনেকে।
যুগ থেকে যুগ যেন পড়ে লোকে শেখে,
একার কারোর নয় ধ্বংসের দায়।
সমকালে যারা কুশীলব, সকলের ওপরে সে দায় বর্তায়।'

একটা প্রদীপ ঘিরে চুপ পাঁচজন। ভাগীরথী কুলুকুল করে বয়ে যায়।

আর্যতীর্থ

Is COVID a wake-up call for Indian Healthcare?

Dr Raja Biswas.



MBBS (Cal); FRCP (Edinburgh); DGM(UK).
Sr Consultant. Department of Medicine.
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I am a Consultant in Medicine in a hospital in South Wales, United Kingdom. Apart from being one of the most beautiful places to live and work in, with many friendly and helpful colleagues, my place of work has another claim to fame. Tredegar, a mining town in South Wales was the birthplace of Mr Aneurin Bevan, who, as the Health Minister of the United Kingdom, is considered the founder of the National Health Service (NHS) in 1948. The NHS was founded on the ashes of the second world war when there was an appreciation for a more centralised health care service. Since its inception, the NHS has changed considerably. Speaking to some of my elderly patients, who have experienced life before NHS, the impact of NHS, on everyday life has been immense. However, what has not changed is the founding principle of the NHS, which is that services should be comprehensive, universal and free at the point of delivery—a health service based on clinical need, not ability to pay.

In the UK, the NHS offers a centralised service where the funding comes from the central government. Health care in India however follows a federal model and is devolved to the state. Article 21 of the Constitution of India guarantees protection of life and personal liberty to every citizen of India.

Considering the recent experience of Healthcare in India following the COVID crisis when many services in many states collapsed or were severely impacted, it may be time to ask a pertinent question – Is a centralised Service like NHS needed in India?

Although it's very tempting to say "Yes" to the above question, it may not be practical or easy to do so. The population of India is about 20 times more than United Kingdom. India is also a vast country, with 70% of the people living in a rural area with minimal access to primary healthcare. Doctor population ratio in India is about 1 in 1456, compared to the UK of 2.8 in 1000, which surprisingly is one of the lowest in the Western World. The burden of illness also is very different, with India having a predominant infectious disease spread compared to the UK, which deals with more chronic diseases.

There has been a lot of initiatives being taken to improve healthcare in India, notably Ayushman Bharat. However, participation in the scheme is dependent on states accepting it. This has caused a disparity of care between states. Along with that, the regulation of the service remains inadequate, resulting in fraud and corruption in the system.

However, there does exist practices in NHS, which the healthcare in India can try to learn and adapt from.

Temples from a bygone era in Western Bengal: In the footsteps of David Beglar

Sourav Niyogi

The Chhota Nagpur plateau south of the Gangetic plains in Eastern India is a culturally-rich region. It is dry, with tropical and sub-tropical forests consisting primarily of sal and palash trees. The archived history of the region dates back to 5th century AD and the rugged terrain and dry weather are reflected in the its art, culture and heritage. Taking advantage of a sabbatical from work, I explored some of the hidden gems of the area - terracotta and stone temples from a bygone era.

I visited the beautifully crafted temples at Begunia, Garui, Garh Panchkot, Achkoda, Telkupi, Cheliama and Banda from my base at the town of Asansol, 220 km from Kolkata. I owe my inspiration to visit these places to the works of an Armenian - Indian who worked for the Archaeological Survey of India- Mr Joseph David Beglar. He was an engineer, archaeologist and photographer whose works are preserved at the British Library. The trip is one of the best gifts I have given myself, leaving behind the negativity of the COVID pandemic.

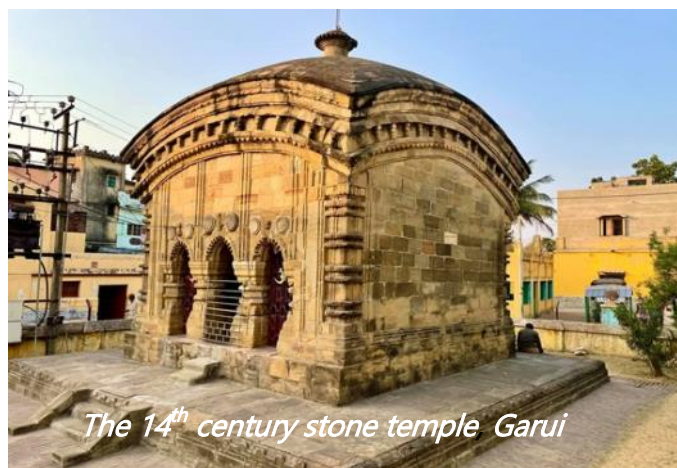


Two of the four stone temples in 'rekha deul' structure, Barakar

Barakar Begunia Temple Complex

I was navigating narrow and crowded lanes full of shops along the Barakar Station Road. With trepidation, I walked down the slope to a park where kids were playing cricket. Lo and behold, there stood in front of me- four marvellous stone temples, at least one of them thought to be 800 years old. Joseph David Beglar had written in 1872, "Barâkar, which is the terminus of the East Indian Railway Barâkar Branch, and is situated on the Grand Trunk Road, contains several very interesting ancient remains, in excellent preservation. There are four temples, whose towers at least are in entire preservation; besides some ruins." The temples are in rekha deul structure. Local folklore say the temples resemble aubergine or begun and hence the area is called Begunia.

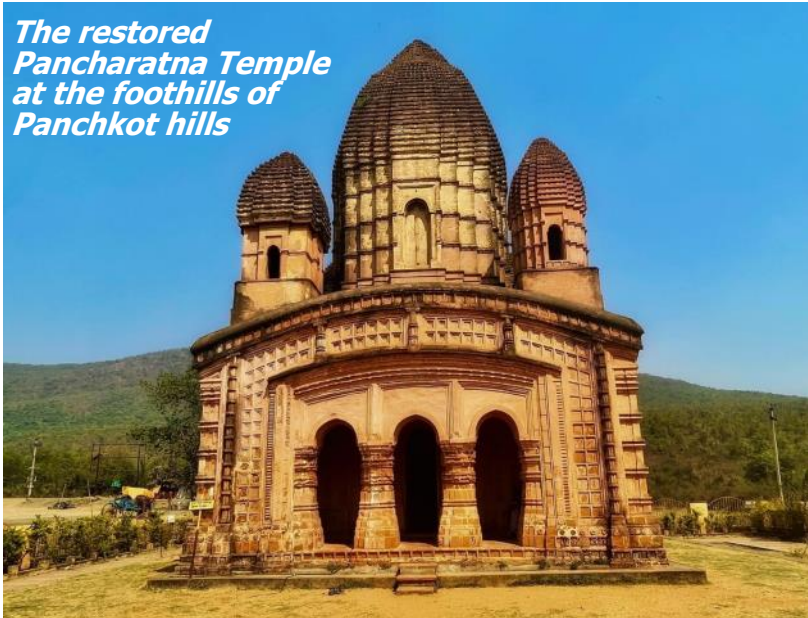
Garui



The 14th century stone temple Garui

Just off the National Highway 19 (previously known as NH 2) travelling west from Asansol, you blink and you will miss the quaint hamlet of Garui. The village is home to a wonderful 35 feet high stone temple in the style of a Bengal hut, the only one of its kind in the area. It is believed to have been built during the times of the Pal dynasty. It houses an idol of Lord Narayana apparently from the 14th century. The local villagers tell me that the idol is Damodar Shaligram Shila. The responsibilities of daily worship and bhog are shared among the 80 Brahmin families living in the village.

*The restored
Pancharatna Temple
at the foothills of
Panchkot hills*



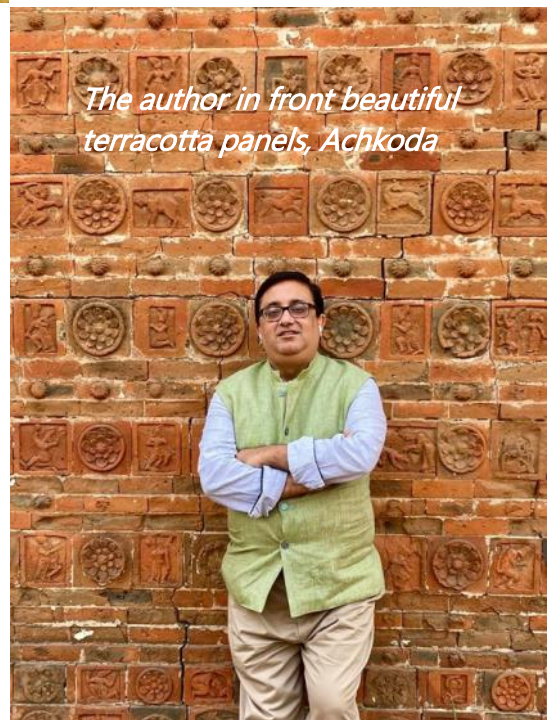
Garh Panchkot

The Chota Nagpur plateau is characterised by undulating lands and scattered hills. At the southern foothills of one such hill known as the Panchkot hills, lie the ruins of Garh Panchkot, a silent testimony to the Bargi attacks during the 18th century. Among the scattered ruins, lies one of the better examples of temple restoration - a beautiful Pancharatna temple which was once in complete ruins. The sanctum has a Radha Krishna idol, worshipped daily. There is also a Jor Bangla temple in ruins nearby.

Achkoda

A fine terracotta temple that is claimed to be at least 500 years old emerges surprisingly in the sleepy village of Achkoda. It needs careful restoration, though the terracotta panels are in good shape. The char chala temple is dedicated to Raghunath. The entire complex was established by the local landlord; there are two other temples in the complex said to be mortuary temples of two Vaishnava Sadhaks - Yadavananda Swami and Madhavananda Swami. The rear side of both of them are adorned with beautiful terracotta work. Unfortunately, one of these temples collapsed a couple of months ago due to lack of conservation.

*The author in front beautiful
terracotta panels, Achkoda*



*Submerged stone temple, Telkupi
(Photo Courtesy: Internet)*

Telkupi

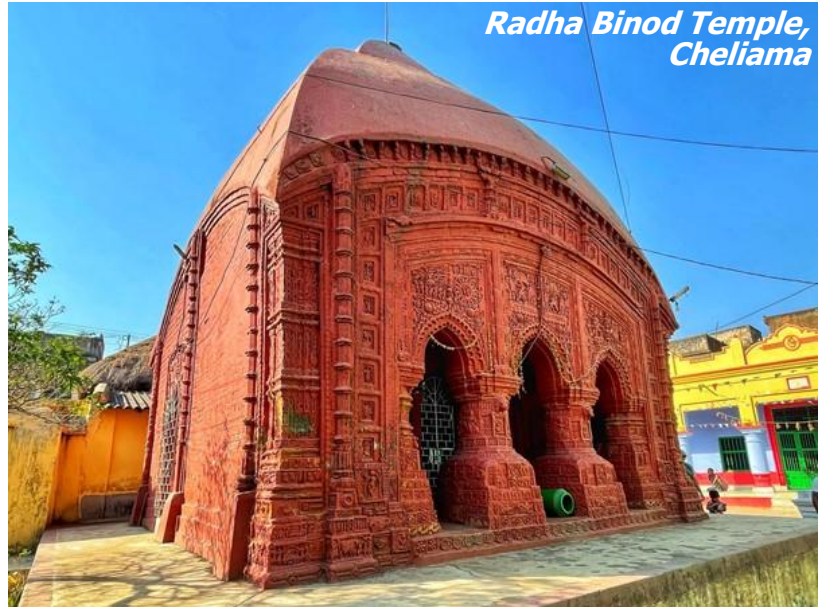
An important geographical feature of the Chhota Nagpur plateau is the Damodar trough - the valley of river Damodar and its tributaries. Construction of the Panchet Dam sadly submerged a wonderful set of temples in the village of Telkupi. The sight of temples submerged in water, makes subject for fascinating photography but depicts a sad story of

conservation.

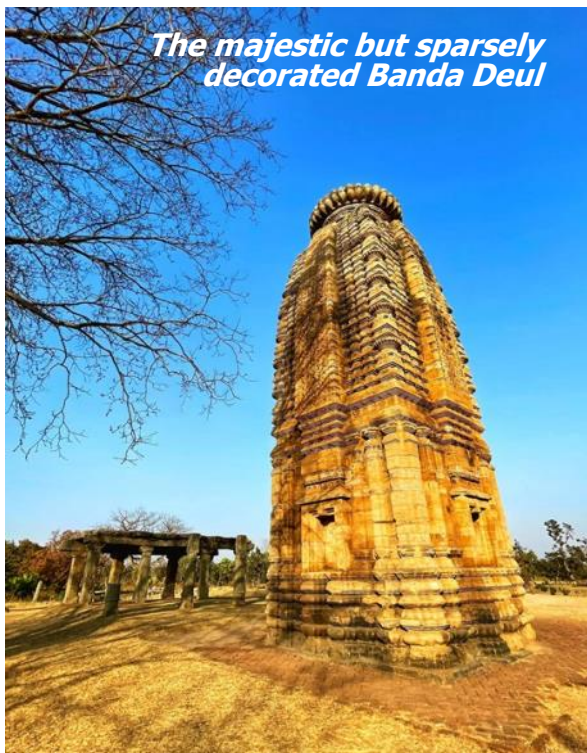
David Beglar wrote in 1872, "On the south bank of the Damuda river, is the village of Telkupi, containing, perhaps, the finest and largest number of temples within a small space that is to be found in the Chhota Nâgpur Circle in Bengal". I could only stand on the banks of the river and watch from afar one of the half-submerged temples, still standing strong given its stone construction in rekha deul structure.

Cheliama

Driving across the dry rugged landscape leaving behind a cloud of dust, we end up in the village of Cheliama. After a quick snack of kachoris, we approached the Radha Binod temple. My heart sank at the very first sight. The richly decorated terracotta temple has been painted over in gaudy crimson. The beautiful panels of terracotta with stories of Ramayana and Durga still exist. However, lack of sweating in the terracotta (constricted by the paint) is peeling the paint off and along with it, the fine detailed terracotta work.



*Radha Binod Temple,
Cheliama*



*The majestic but sparsely
decorated Banda Deul*

Banda

A short drive from Cheliama, we were in a forested area full of palash trees where in the middle of a clearing, stands another stone temple of rekha deul structure. The temple is believed to be of Jain heritage from the 11th to 13th century A.D. when Jainism is said to have flourished in the Chhota Nagpur plateau. David Beglar writes (1872), "It resembles the temples of Barâkar, and, like them, it consists of a single cell; like them, too, it once had a mandapa, in front of which the fragments, misarranged into a long-pillared hall, still exist".

My trip started at Barakar and finished at Banda - both sites of wonderful rekha deul -style stone temples. As I sipped tea, I turned towards the setting sun in its crimson glow, ready to set over the jungle horizon; it is amazing how quickly it disappeared. The engine of the Toyota revved up and I turned around to have a final long glimpse of the Banda Deul silhouette in the midst of the setting sun and dust from dry roads - an image I would carry with me for a very long time.

All photographs are shot by the author, apart from Picture 5 which has been sourced from the Internet. The source did not have any photo credits.

Sourav Niyogi



Mirage
Vikram Bose

Running will not protect you,
Hiding will not keep you safe,
The nemesis that pursues you,
Will infiltrate every gate!

No shield will deter this foe,
No jab can be an elixir,
One shield today, how many more,
While each jab weakens you further?

Snake oil salesmen have always thrived,
Mountebanks peddling their wares,
Seldom have they been more qualified,
Nor with more people on their side!

There is no substitute to building,
Your strength to resist from within,
Of foes, there are a million,
For each, will you take one more poison?

Man in his foolish arrogance,
Thinks to bend nature to his will,
But nature is cruel, though fair and just,
You ignore her at your own peril!

হলুদ পালক

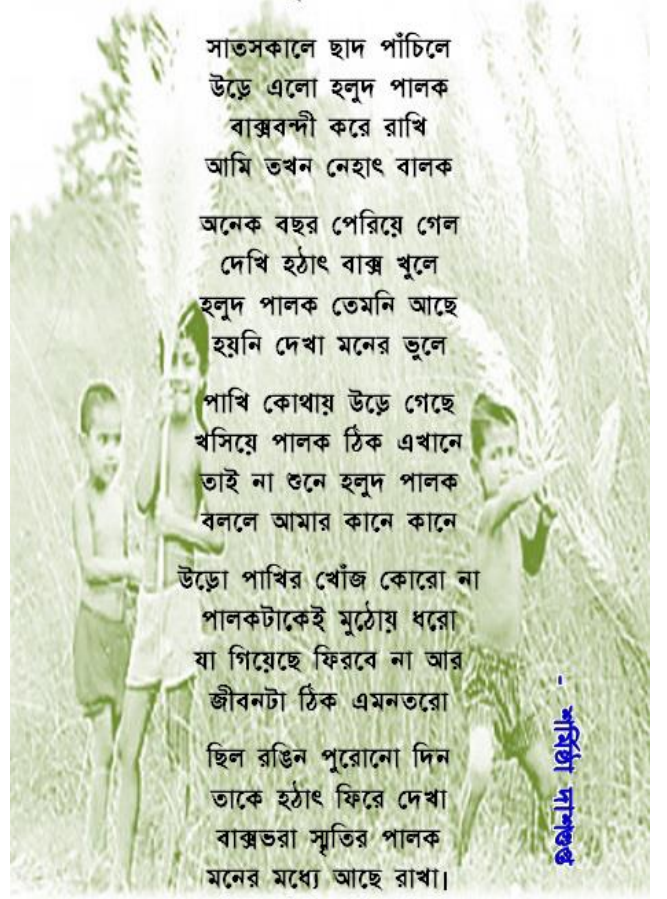
সাতসকালে ছাদ পাঁচিলে
উড়ে এলো হলুদ পালক
বান্ধবন্দী করে রাখি
আমি তখন নেহাৎ বালক

অনেক বছর পেরিয়ে গেল
দেখি হঠাৎ বান্ধ খুলে
হলুদ পালক তেমনি আছে
হয়নি দেখা মনের ভুলে

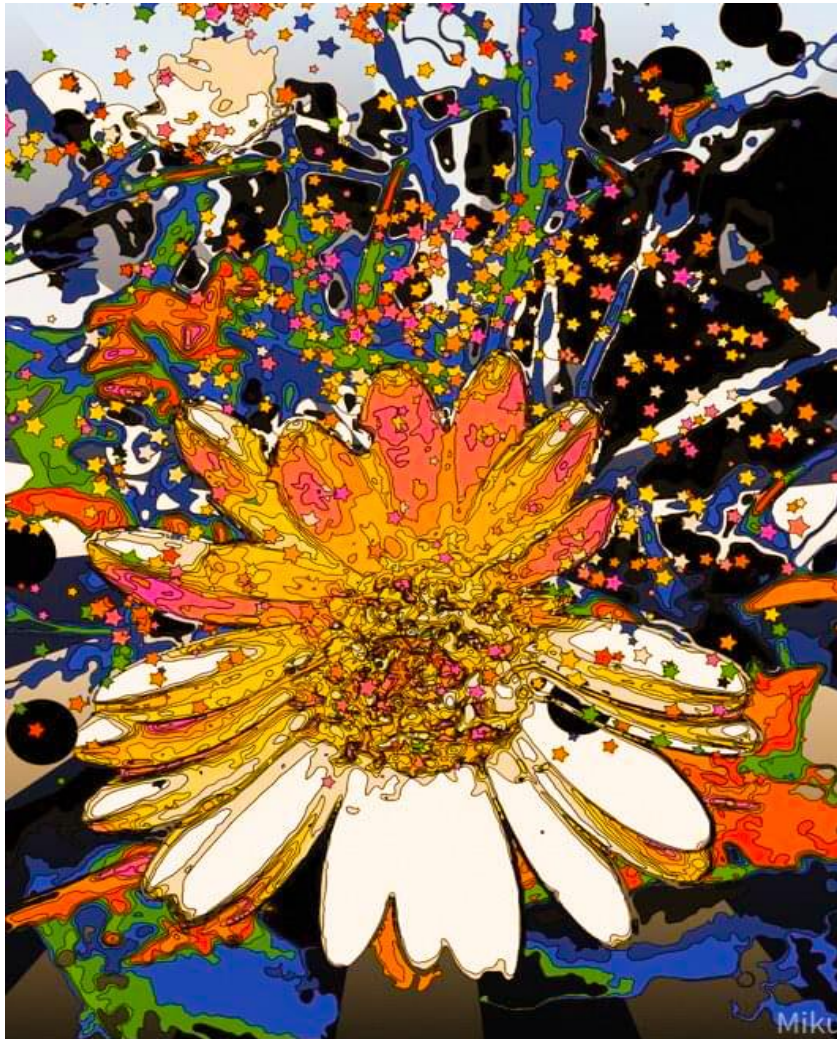
পাখি কোথায় উড়ে গেছে
খসিয়ে পালক ঠিক এখানে
তাই না গুনে হলুদ পালক
বললে আমার কানে কানে

উড়ো পাখির খোঁজ কোরো না
পালকটাকেই মুঠোয় ধরো
যা গিয়েছে ফিরবে না আর
জীবনটা ঠিক এমনতরো

ছিল রঙিন পুরোনো দিন
তাকে হঠাৎ ফিরে দেখা
বান্ধভরা স্মৃতির পালক
মনের মধ্যে আছে রাখা।



শব্দচিত্রা দলশিল্পী



Taliban, Afghanistan, Gandhāra, Kushan - *Sic Transit Gloria* Dr Ranjit Sinha Roy

Since the 15th century, the Latin phrase '*Sic Transit Gloria*' is uttered to mark the coronation of a new Pope. It means 'Thus passes the glory of the world' and expresses the regretful recognition that something has or is about to end, as all things eventually must.

The tumultuous and traumatic modern history of Afghanistan draws a similar. Yet when one looks back at the country's glorious past, one can only lament at the plight of this once glorious country. A major Buddhist intellectual hub for centuries with numerous early references in the Vedas, Ramayana and Mahabharata, Gandhāra or Afghanistan was once a locus of ancient Indian-Persian interactions, a centre of world trade and culture, a hub of the Silk Route.

In response to the gruesome attack on the Twin Towers in New York by the terrorist group Al-Qaeda, United States of America rolled out its 'War on Terror' on Afghanistan when the Taliban refused to hand over the perpetrators of the attacks on US soil. The war was intended to defeat the evil Taliban forces who was lording the country at the time, sow the seeds of democracy and capture and eliminate the Al - Qaeda network.

Alas however, the incredibly expensive two decade long 'War on Terror' came to an end in August 2021 as the US withdrew its troops in a rush leaving the once beautiful country of Afghanistan in tatters and in the hands once again of the resurgent Taliban bringing with it once again a harsh medieval intolerance. History will have to pass judgement on who takes the blame for throwing the country back into the lair of the ornerly, draconian and dreaded Taliban and turning away from a couple of decades of human rights, education and development. How do we ever measure the unmeasurable loss of human lives in a worn torn nation over many decades, the harm to women and children, to education, to human rights?

Torn by four decades of war (beginning with the invasion by USSR in 1979) and desperately impoverished and enchained by crippling corruption, Afghanistan is believed to be sitting on one of the richest mineral troves in its belly with an estimated value of \$1-3 trillion. Her vast reserves of gold, platinum, silver, copper, iron, chromite, lithium, uranium, and aluminium will now perhaps be fought over by new powers and players with China surely raising its stakes. Sadly as ever, it seems unlikely that her common folk benefit from this in the near future. Right now, the region will feel many aftershocks of a great many geopolitical battles played out amongst its beautiful terrain and poppy fields over its buried riches by nations great and small as the world anxiously waits on the impact of this on the expansion of fundamentalism and the export of terror.

China has another concern for the expansion of terrorism from the Taliban controlled Afghanistan along the narrow 'Corridor of Wakhan' connecting its Xinjiang province populated by the culturally distinct, much suppressed and dissident Muslim Uyghurs - a Turkic ethnic minority.

Well let us now look back through Alice's looking glass into the ancient history of the Gandhāra region for a moment. Once a major centre of trade and enlightenment, at the crossroads of the Silk Route, thousands of Buddhist statues and stupas once dominated its landscape. The Gandhāra region was taken over by Alexander the Great in 329 BC, the Greeks eventually surrendered to Chandragupta in 305 BC. The Gandhāra region remained a major centre for Greco-Buddhism under the Indo-Greeks and became famous for its unique Gandhāran style of art which was heavily influenced by the classical Greek and Hellenistic styles.

During the rule of Ashoka (Chandragupta Maurya's grandson) in the 3rd century BC, Gandhara became a major route of spread of Buddhism to Central Asia and beyond. Now a major world religion, Buddhism spread into Eurasia, China and South East Asia influencing numerous civilizations. Emperor Ashoka erected rock edicts enouncing the principles of Buddhism across this region often using the local Gandhāri language.

Gandhāra as a state attained its height from the 1st century to the 5th century AD under the great Kushans. The Kushans were probably one of the five branches of the Yuezhi confederation of Indo-European nomads of Tocharian origin, who migrated from north-western China (Xinjiang and Gansu) and settled in ancient Bactria. Bactria was an ancient land mass which covered a vast region including present day Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. The founder of the Kushan dynasty Kujula Kadphises followed Greek religious ideas and iconography after the Greco-Bactrian tradition. He also followed traditions of Hinduism and became a devotee of the Hindu God Shiva. From the time of the great Emperor Kanishka, the Kushans became great patrons of Buddhism and also started inculcating some elements of Zoroastrianism in their pantheon. The Kushan support of Buddhism and their establishment of secure trade routes from Gandhāra to Asia allowed Buddhism to continue its spread to Bactria, Central Asia and China along the Silk Road. Gandhāran missionaries were influential in bringing Buddhist culture to China during the Han-dynasty in 65 AD. This glorious period was ended by the rise of the Huns in the 6th century. The Gandhāra region fell under Arab rule in the 7th century AD and under the Ghaznavids in the 10th. The name Gandhāra disappeared after Mahmud Ghaznavi's conquest. Gandhāra was destroyed by Genghis Khan and again by the Turkic conqueror Timur, after which it was held by the Mughals. Mughal Emperor Babur built 40 giant steps up a hill in Kabul, cut out of the solid limestone, leading to inscriptions recording details of his proud conquests. Subsequent Muslim invasions of India caused further damage to the Buddhist culture in Gandhāra. Afghanistan or the land of Afghans as a state began in 1880 after the second Anglo-Afghan war. Kabul became the first capital of a unified Afghanistan.

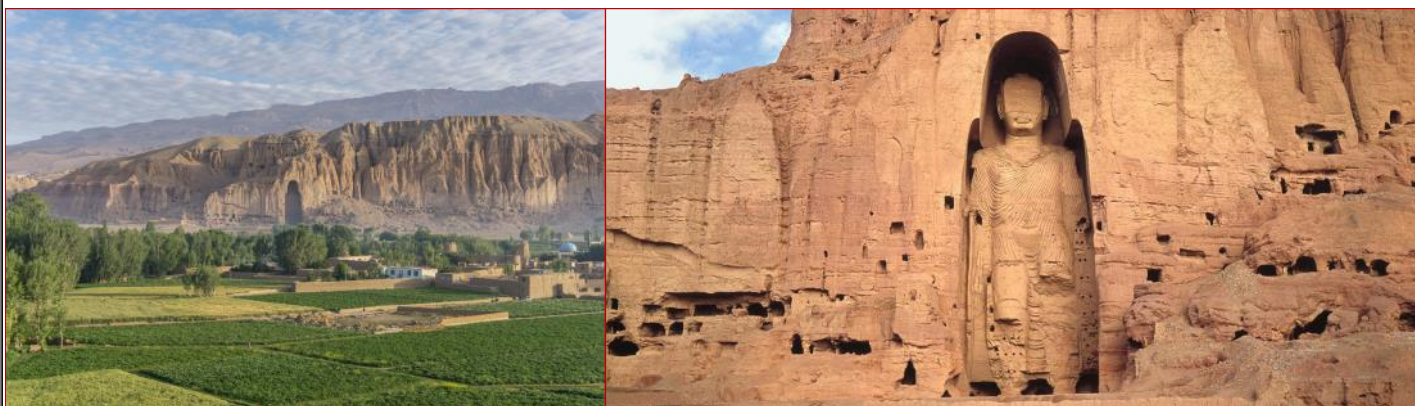
Monumental Buddha sculptures known as the 'Buddhas of Bamiyan' are believed to have been carved sometime between the 3rd to 6th centuries AD in the region of Bamiyan valley of central Afghanistan. Bamiyan was one of the important Buddhist cities of ancient times. The Chinese Buddhist pilgrim Xuanzang (Huen Tsang) visited the Bamiyan site in 630 AD and wrote a travelogue of his journey. Tragically two 6th century giant Buddha statues in Bamiyan were destroyed by the Taliban in 2001 during their first rule in Afghanistan (1996 to 2001) triggering huge international and local condemnation.

The infamous 9/11 attacks soon followed and the rest is history as we know it. The Al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden. Laden was hiding in Afghanistan during the American attack and eventually fled to Pakistan, then a Taliban safe-heaven with Pakistan's all powerful Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) providing political, military and logistic support. The ISI continued to support the Taliban throughout the last two decades empowering their return. Unfortunately, the corruption and misrule by propped up Afghan governments kept the benefits of Democracy away from the poor, illiterate and marginalised people of Afghanistan and also allowed for the Taliban's return.

One wonders what role India, once the source of so much of art, culture, education and civilisation may play in Afghan history over the next few decades.

Sic Transit Gloria, 'Thus passes the glory of the world' which was Afghanistan.

Dr Ranjit Sinha Roy



Friend

Dipak Kumar Kundu

I was coming home. It is always a happy occasion. In the city where I grew up, Kolkata, I try to enjoy every moment from the minute I land till I take my flight back.

We landed in the very early hours of the morning. A gust of warm fresh air gently brushed against my face. Beyond the sliding exit doors, in half-darkness, I could spot Rana waiting with his usual welcoming smile.

The darkness of the sky was fading away gradually; the small tea stalls were not open yet. As we drove off and reached Jessore Road, I saw many people had already started their day. Overloaded lorries with vegetables were rushing towards their destinations. A few taxis were getting cleaned at the petrol station.

'This is the place I belong to', I thought to myself.

Soon, we reached our apartment- Urmi was waving from the *verandah*. As Mani and myself walked in, that warm reassuring feeling of arriving home filled my heart. The room was filled with non-stop chatter till I needed rest. I fell asleep soon and was only woken up by very excited and loud voices from the lounge. Rinku, Mani's younger sister, had arrived. After a chat, I got dressed to go out. I promised I would be back before lunch time. But from experience, they all knew that I could be quite late.

"You will have to help yourself to foods after 2.00pm", Urmi warned.

"I will", I said.

I put on my old but well-cleaned *chappals* and left. They felt slightly stiff and I was sure they would ease up after half an hour or so. It was already hot at around 9.30; with a baseball hat on, I got into a taxi. It's the same traffic congestion nearer the Dum Dum bridge, same unruly buses, also auto and hand-pulled rickshaws. I asked the driver to go via Paikpara. By now it's too late to meet Partha at his Laughing Club at the Hrishikesh Park. So we stopped at the Keshab Sen Street crossing and I got out.

I breathed in deeply to feel the smell of everything around, the familiar smells since childhood. I crossed the road and looked around, with a hope to spot a known face. And there he was- my classmate Samir- sitting on a long wooden bench.

I tapped gently on his shoulder. He looked up and stood up with a big smile.

"When did you arrive!" he asked.

I sat down next to him and we started chatting.

"Do you know anything about Tarpan?" Samir asked.

"What about him?"

"Did you know that he cannot see any more?"

"Yes, I know". I said quietly. "It's very unfortunate indeed."

Two of us fell silent for a while. Friendships from childhood friendship probably create a unique bond between friends. A bond that is difficult to find in any other age groups. After a long pause, I shared my thoughts about Tarpan.

Walking down memory lane, I could not remember exactly when I met Tarpan for the first time. He was in my class in that little-known school of ours, probably the start. I was very restless and usually naughty. He was different. He was composed and spoke reasonably well, unlike others. But his words were at a different level, probably ahead of his age; sometimes, we could not fathom what he was talking about. So, there was a difference between him and the rest of us. During the last couple of years of our schooling, some of us maintained a distance from him. Both of us used to go to the same tutor. We used to meet there frequently but somehow a distance crept up between us.

As I joined college, I had less time for my school mates. We met up every now and then; Tarpan's style of presenting himself did not change. We completed our education, started working and yet kept in touch. We met up, discussed our present and future and talked about many other aspects. Tarpan did not change. We were from different worlds. The distance between us was still the same. In a few years I moved to another country.

When I visited home, we met a few times. We exchanged our good wishes, talked about old friends or our own families. The old ways of arguing over any random topic still went on over our cups of tea at Padma Cabin. During our conversations, we were still miles apart. As my family moving out of the area, we did not meet for a while.

A couple of years ago when I visited Kolkata, I heard from Partha that Tarpan had lost his vision. I was shaken up. A wave of memories flooded my mind. The following afternoon, I went to visit him with Partha at their flat in Kasba.

His wife opened the door - she knew Partha well and let us in. After hearing who I was, she woke Tarpan up from his nap and brought him into the room, helping him sit down next to me.

"Do you know who am I"? I asked.

- "You know, I cannot see." He replied. "If you don't mind, I can touch you first to see if I can recognise you. But your voice sounds very familiar indeed".

I did not mind. But I immediately felt something deep within. The distance between us probably woke up to face a challenge. I felt his two hands on my arms, they then moved on to my shoulder blades, shoulders, my neck, my ears, over eyes and stopped at the top of my head. The distance is immense and almost suffocating.

"I have little hair left on my head" I retorted. "I had very curly thick hair. I could not use a comb, they would break".

His fingers wriggled a little on my head and then stopped. He withdrew his hands immediately. Without the slightest of hesitation, he looked in my direction.

"Isn't it you, Dipak?" he asked calmly.

I was absolutely startled. The distance between us disappeared, my throat was giving away. I lost control and could not forbid my tears from flowing out. The three others there were no better either.

Tarpan was a friend, indeed. Beyond the barriers of all these years. Something had suddenly become smooth, something re-assuring was born. The feeling was unforgettable.

That day, sitting by Samir, I spent two hours talking about our past with a sweet and sour enchantment. I did reach home by 2. There were more faces waiting for me- this sheer joy of visiting what we still call 'home'.

Dipak Kumar Kundu



পুজো এলে আমিই অপু

কমলাদিদি। কাজ করত আমাদের বাড়ি। দুপুরে ভাত খেত। সকালে জলখাবার। মা আমার স্বয়ং অন্নপূর্ণা। 'মাগো, দুটি ভাত খাব' শুনলে ভিখারিকে নিজের ভাত তরকারি মাছ খাইয়ে মুড়ি খেয়ে থাকতেন। বড় হয়ে বুঝেছি, মাঘেরা কত বোকা! পুজোর গন্ধে মনে পড়ে হারিয়ে যাওয়া মাকে। আকাশের তারা হয়ে যাওয়া পিতাকে। মনে পড়ে কমলাদিদির পুজোর শাড়ি হাতে পেয়ে সেই অনাবিল পবিত্র হাসি। তেমন হাসি আজ আর হাসেনাতো কেউ।

দিয়ারায় থাকত কমলাদিদি। দিদির বড় ছেলে রাম আশ্বিন পড়লেই ট্রেনে চেপে হাজির হত আমাদের বাড়ি। বাঁশি বাজাত রাম। 'যাও যাও গিরি আনিতো গৌরী, উমা মা মা বলে ডেকেছে...'। শুনতে শুনতে কমলাদিদির চোখে মুক্তোর দানা। কমলাদিদির মেয়ে গীতা কয়েক বছর আগে হারিয়ে গেছে শ্বশুরবাড়ি থেকে। কিভাবে, কোথায়, কেউ জানে না। বাবা একদিন বললেন, কেদো না কমলা, এদেশে মেয়েদের হারিয়ে যাওয়া ফুরাবে না কোনোদিন।

চোখে জল। দৌড়ে কখন পৌঁছে গেছি পুজোর প্যাণ্ডেলে। মূর্তি বানাচ্ছেন সমর পাল। দেবীর দিকে তাকিয়ে একমনে বাঁশি বাজিয়ে যাচ্ছে পেছনে আসা রাম। 'জাগো, তুমি জাগো...'। থমকে গেছে আশ্বিনের অপরাহ্ন। নীল আকাশের মেঘের ভেলার দল স্থবির। ওরা যেন ভাসবেনা আর। শুধু কুণ্ডুদের বাড়ি থেকে বুকে ঢুকে পড়ছে বাঁকবাঁক বরা শেফালির গন্ধ। গঙ্গার পার থেকে ভেসে আসছে পুজোর সেই অতীত আনন্দঘাণ।

মূর্তি গড়তে গড়তে থেমে গেছেন শিল্পী। বছর পাঁচেক আগে বিহারের এক অচেনা গোয়লা এক লক্ষ টাকা 'কনেপণ' নগদ দিয়ে বিয়ে করে নিয়ে গিয়েছিল শিল্পীর মেয়ে রিনাকে। রিনা ফেরেনি আর। সেবার পুজোয় মূর্তি গড়েন নি পালমশাই। ঘটপুজো হয়েছে সেবার। ডানপিটে মেয়ে ছিল রিনা। গঙ্গায় সাঁতরে বেদম মার খেত মাঘের। গুঁইরাম ঘোষের বাগান থেকে কাশির লাল শাঁসওয়ালা পেয়ারা চুরি করে ভাগ দিত আমাদের। ক্লাসে সেকেন্ড হত রিনা।

পুজো এলে কমলাদিকে মনে পড়ে। মনে পড়ে রিনাকে। কাশফুলে বৈধব্যসাদা সিঁসুর এখন। এককালের তিনফসলি বিপ্লবী জমির নিষ্ফলা কঙ্কালের পাশ দিয়ে যেতে যেতে রামের বাঁশি ভেসে আসে কোন স্বপ্নপুর থেকে। হাতের খবরের কাগজে পুজোর ঝলক। 'ওদের পুজো নেই'।

'জানেন হেল্লাইনে ফোন করেও ফিরে পেলামনা মেয়েটাকে।' কাদছে বকুলতলির লতার মা। বাপটা পাগল হয়ে গেছে। 'জ্বালিয়ে দে, পুড়িয়ে ছারখার করে দে'। লতার বাবা চিৎকার করছে রাত্রিদিন।

শিউলির ঘাণে, কাশফুলের দোলায় বলির বাজনা। গীতা রিনা লতা কমলাদিদি, সবাই সামনে। ছায়াছায়া। ওদের আগলে সিঁসুরের তাপসী মালিক। আসিফা। নিভুয়া। গীতা লতা রিনারা কুয়াশায় হারিয়ে যেতে যেতে আত্ননাদ করছে, 'আমাকে বাঁচাও'! হারিয়ে যাওয়া কন্যারা ছুটছে তাড়া খেয়ে। হারিয়ে যাওয়া মেয়েদের মিছিল ক্রমশ দীর্ঘতর। নাইটমেয়ার। ঘুম ভেঙে যায় ঘেমনেয়ে।

মৃত অসুরের শেষ নিঃশ্বাস চোখের সামনে বদলে যাচ্ছে বাহুবলীর উৎকট উল্লাসে। দুর্গার চোখে জল। হতভম্ব অপু। হাউহাউ কাদছে সর্বজয়া। আমার কমলাদিদি। এদেশে আর থাকতে পারবে না মনোহর, দুর্গা, অপু। ভিটেমাটি ছেড়ে দুলতে দুলতে গরুর গাড়ি এগিয়ে চলেছে কনসেনট্রেশন ক্যাম্পের দিকে।

পুজোয় আর দুর্গতিনাশিনীর মণ্ডপে যাবে না অপু।

(আংশিক, পুরো লেখাটি একটি পুজোসংখ্যায় সদ্যপ্রকাশিত। এই বিষাদকাব্য কাউকে কষ্ট দিলে লেখক দুঃখিত।)



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**Cover art painted by
Dr Susupta Chaudhuri**

**A wonderful artist
&
Gynaecologist & Obstetrician**

From the Editor's Desk



আজ মহালয়া। বেজে উঠেছে আগমনী গান।

দেশে এখন পাড়ায় পাড়ায় চলেছে মৃন্ময়ীকে সাজিয়ে তোলার শেষ পর্যায়। এ পরবাসে সুদূর কার্ডিফে আমাদের পুজোর সঙ্কলনটিকেও সাজানোর পালা আমাদের সাজ হয়ে এল।

কতজন লেখা পাঠাবেন জানি না... এমন দ্বিধা নিয়ে নেমেছিলাম। কোথা থেকে এসে পড়ল একের পর এক চমৎকার নিবেদন। কচিকাঁচাদের থেকে শুরু করে প্রণম্য গুরুজন, সকলের প্রচেষ্টায় সমৃদ্ধ হলো সঙ্কলন।

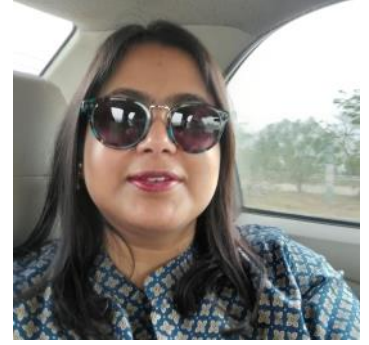
কার্ডিফ, কলকাতা, লন্ডন- বহু জায়গা থেকে মানুষ ভরে দিয়েছেন আমাদের বরণডালা, তাঁদের প্রত্যেকের প্রতি রইল আমার ব্যক্তিগত কৃতজ্ঞতা। আর যাঁর স্নেহ ছায়ায় সম্পাদনায় হাতেখড়ি হল, আমাদের সকলের প্রিয় সেই মিকুদা (শিলাদিত্য সিংহ) কে অসংখ্য ধন্যবাদ, এই সুযোগটুকুর জন্য।

পুজো সকলের কাটুক সুস্থতায় এবং আনন্দে।

Debanjali Bhattacharjee

**This Souvenir has been edited and compiled
by Debanjali Bhattacharjee**

Design and layout by Shiladitya Sinha



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