

Shankha

Volume 6, 2026





Aritra Saha, 10 years
Winner - MBA Art Competition, 2024

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Management Committee 2025-2026



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From the President's Desk

Nomoshkar!

"Language is the blood of the soul into which thoughts run and out of which they grow."

As we unveil the 6th edition of our Shankha Magazine, these words feel more resonant than ever.

In an age of rapid digital consumption, the act of sitting down with a collection of Bengali literature becomes an act of preservation. It is a tribute to our Bangaliana — that unique blend of intellect, emotion, and artistic flair.

This year's issue reflects the diverse voices of our community. From the nostalgia of our elders to the vibrant, experimental energy of our youth, these pages bridge the gap between our roots and our aspirations.

Our editorial team has worked tirelessly to curate a selection that not only fills pages but also sparks conversations. I invite you to immerse yourself in these stories and poems. Let them remind you of the monsoon rains, the scent of old books, and the timeless wisdom of our culture.

We look forward to your participation, contributions, and presence at our upcoming events.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

Jayantha Kumar Sen Gupta
President (2025–2026)

Mandala Artwork

— by Sneha Mazumdar —

This is a Mandala artwork of Goddess Maa Durga & Lord Ganesha. Mandala is a design composed of geometric patterns and colors, but every element has a symbolic value. The totality of these elements tells a story. Construction of Mandala design represents the symbolic transposition of reality, subconscious mind or personality.

I have used Black Gel Pen to make all the designs and Red Gel Pen for outline. It took me 1 week to complete this masterpiece and make this painting presentable in all forms.



Amadpur

The Heritage Village

— by Dr. Arup Mukherjee —



Introduction

Tucked away in the scenic landscapes of West Bengal lies Amadpur, a charming village that is a treasure trove of cultural heritage, traditions, and communal spirit. This quaint village not only offers breathtaking views of the rural countryside but also serves as a living museum of historical significance and vibrant celebrations, most notably the renowned Kali Puja.

Villages dotted with terracotta temples are nothing uncommon in the Gangetic Bengal region, but Amadpur, located about 3.5 km north of Memari in Bardhaman District, on Howrah – Bardhaman main line (train line), appears to be a typical Bengal village that offers a unique combination of terracotta temples along with its heritage & culture that has not been lost or diluted during the process of modernization.

Historical Significance of Amadpur

Amadpur's history is woven with threads of diverse influences, reflecting the broader socio-political narratives of West Bengal. The village's origins trace back to ancient times, and its name is believed to derive from the Bengali words "Amad" (to assemble) and "Pur" (place), hinting at its historical role as a gathering place.

The architecture in Amadpur showcases a harmonious blend of local and colonial styles. Traditional Bengali homes, with their distinct terracotta motifs and sloping roofs, coexist with colonial-era buildings that narrate stories of the past. Many villagers engage in crafts such as pottery, weaving, and folk art, preserving skills passed down through generations. The temples, built from sturdy materials and adorned with intricate designs, stand as symbols of architectural brilliance and community devotion.

The Rich Cultural Fabric

The cultural fabric of Amadpur is vibrant and multifaceted. The village is known for its unique traditions, including folk music and dance forms (Santali Songs & Dance) that are performed during festivals and gatherings. Local artisans play a significant

role in maintaining these cultural practices, ensuring that the art forms flourish.

The community is predominantly agrarian, with agriculture being the primary source of livelihood. This connection to the land is evident in the villagers' deep respect for nature, which is often reflected in their festivals and rituals. The agricultural cycles dictate the rhythm of village life, with harvest festivals bringing communities together to celebrate the bounty of their labour.

A closer inspection of Amadpur reveals several mansions, Terracotta Temples, Ponds etc most of which belong to the Chowdhurys, Mukherjees, Naths, Nandis and many other families

However, the Chowdhurys, who probably settled in Amadpur in the late 1600s have never abandoned their family home. The Chowdhury family traces its lineage to one Sribatsa Sen Sharma from late 11th or early 12th century. According to records, it was Krishna Ram Sen Sharma who was given the title of Chowdhury by the Mughals under whom Bengal was a Subah or district.

Amadpur Heritage Walk to cover the places of interest:

Amadpur is best explored on foot (The Heritage Walk) with local friends/guides who take visitors along the winding roads. They narrate an amazing tale with an interesting mix of history and folklore.



**Village Scenes, Amadpur Heritage Walk,
Rathayatra, Amadpur, Memari, Purba Bardhaman**

The first stop of the The Heritage Walk is the Rath that brings all the villagers together during Ratha Yatra celebration. The next stop could be the nearby Anandamayee Temple.

In this temple, the Kali Mata is unique, different than others... it is seen to be sitting on a Lotus flower that rises from the navel of Lord Shiva.



Anandamayee Kali Mata and the Temple built in 1842

On the day of Holi (Dolyatra), the family deities of Radha-Madhav are brought from the nearby Radha Madhab Temple and placed on the elevated Dol Mancha in the early hours of the morning for public display where puja is conducted. Debdol is a unique event in which Abir or coloured powders are first given to the God and later people play Holi.

The temple complex consist of a Dol Mancha and four temples – three are of Bengal's traditional aatchala style (eight roofed) and one is a hexagonal dedicated to Lord Shiva. All the temples contain terracotta panels and have undergone renovation.



Temple Complex with Dol Mancha at the centre, Amadpur

Dol Yatra & Janmastami are some of the popular celebrations in our ancestral home at Amadpur





Dol Dighi, Amadpur

At the back of the Dol Mancha, there is a large lake, a unique place to spend the evening in the lap of nature, surrounded by the mango orchard, known as Dol Dighi.

The next stop is the famous *Puja Bari* of the Chowdhurys hosting a plethora of Festivals round the year like *Durga Puja*, *Kali Puja*, *Kartik Puja*, *Rashyatra* and *Saraswati Puja* are held with pomp and gaiety. *Dolyatra*, *Phul Dol*, *Snanyatra*, *Rash Purnima* and *Rathyatra* (chariot festival) are also held every year for centuries.



Entrance to the Durga Bari



Kachari Bari



Chowdhury Family Nat Mandir, Amadpur built in year 1662

Next stop is the Radha Madhav Temple. Built in 1739, this beautiful triple-arched aat-chala temple features exquisite terracotta panels on the pillars and base. Although much of its rich, intricate terracotta is no longer visible, the panels in the pillar and base remain well preserved.



Radha Madhav Temple, Amadpur

Amadpur houses several ruined mansions and among them the Bagh Bari definitely stands out. The name is derived from the pair of lions of British styled coat of arms, which crowns the dilapidated mansions even to this day. As per my limited knowledge about this monarchy, the Bagh Bari (Tiger Mansion) belonged to one Mukherjee family. Renowned characters, freedom fighters such as Radha Kumud Mukhopadhyay & Radha Kamal Mukhopadhyay emerged from this family who closely worked with famous characters such as Satish Chandra Mukhopadhyay, Aurobindo Ghosh, Sister Nivedita, Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose, who were honoured the Padma Bhushan.

But the Bagh Bari is no exception to Amadpur, there are several ruined mansions, temples and gateways. It creates an amazing mix with the modern buildings and temples of Amadpur.



Bagh Bari, Amadpur



Ruined Mansions and Gateways of Amadpur

The Shiva Temple of the Nath Family stands in an open ground next to the Nath family residence. This temple, built in the late 18th century, also has a triple-arched entrance porch and a rich terracotta facade.

Approached by a triple arched entrance the temple contains elaborate terracotta ornamentation of its front surface. The arch panels mainly consist of floral motifs but the base, wall and corner panels contain several figurative terracotta panels.



Terracotta Temples of Amadpur. On the left: Banerjee Family, Centre: Nath Family, Right: Nandi Family Temples



A collage of Terracotta Panels from Nandi Family Temple, Amadpur

The terracotta odyssey of Amadpur continues past the ruined Panchnantala Temple and on wards to the small Shiva temple of Nandi Family. This is a small aat – chla temple with a single arched entrance and is located next to the temple of Baro Kali Mata.

Although small, it is totally in ruins. But the base panels of this tiny temple have meticulously survived. The panels contain some elaborate war scenes along with boats and ocean-going scenes.



Baro Kali Temple, Amadpur



Terracotta Panels, Nandi Family Temple, Amadpur



Shiva Temple at Shiv Dighi

The next terracotta temple of the Amadpur Heritage Walk, but not the last, is the Temple of Banerjee Family. Built in 1730 the aat – chala temple has a triple arched entrance porch and its terracotta facade has rich and very artistic vegetal and figural decoration.

Beside the Baro Kali Temple, the must-see is the famous Behula River (Behula Nodi). It is told that Behula sailed with her dead husband in a raft towards the heavens to bring her husband back to life. Although she faced many dangers during her incredibly long and arduous journey, she eventually reached heaven and pleased all the gods with her enchanting dance.



Behula River, Amadpur

Nishanka Sadhu Bari Ashram (Narmadeshwar Ashram) is a must visit place to end the Heritage Tour. After a brief stopover at the temples, it is time to take the village road. While there is a main road to reach Nishanka, the short-cut road meanders through the mango orchard leading to the opposite side of Dol Dighi.



The road continues through agricultural fields and past several ponds towards the Narmadeshwar Ashram.

The Narmadeshwar Ashram is centred round a more than a thousand years old huge banyan tree. Although there are doubts about the authenticity of their claim, the tree with its innumerable hanging roots really looks ancient.



Ancient Banyan Tree, Narmadeshwar Ashram, Amadpur, Memari, Bardhaman

Apart from Dol, Rathyatra, Kali Puja and Durga Puja are also celebrated with pomp and show in Amadpur. Kali Puja is the largest and the most popular festival in Amadpur which attracts multiple of thousands of visitors during the Puja days.



Kali Puja: A Celebration of Divine Energy

Among the myriad festivals celebrated in Amadpur, Kali Puja holds a place of utmost reverence and excitement. Dedicated to Goddess Kali, the manifestation of shakti (divine feminine energy), this festival is emblematic of the villagers' spirituality and cultural ethos. Kali Puja is celebrated on the new moon day of the month of Kartika, typically falling in October or November, coinciding with the joyous festival of Diwali. In the weeks leading up to Kali Puja, the atmosphere in Amadpur transforms into a vibrant tapestry of preparation. Local artisans commence the creation of exquisite idols of Goddess Kali, often crafting them from clay and painting them with vivid colors. The attention to detail in these idols reflects the devotion and artistry of the village.

The process of making the idol starts a few months before the puja. The structures are made of Bamboo, Dry Rice Plant and Mud before finishing with vibrant colours.

Villagers gather to set up elaborate pandals (temporary structures) decorated with flowers, lights, chandeliers, and intricate designs. Each pandal becomes a focal point for the celebrations, where rituals and prayers take place. The sense of community intensifies as each household contributes to the preparations, resulting in an atmosphere brimming with enthusiasm and collaboration.

Our family puja & the Kali Mata is known as Buri Kali Mata, which is more than 400 yrs old. Following family tradition, we prepare a garland made of Billa Patram / Bel Pata (leaf of Golden Apple / Stone Apple / Wood Apple) and offer it to our Mata every year. It's a gigantic task that takes almost a full day of 8-10 family members. It is usually prepared during the day before the puja day (the day of Chaturdashi).



Kali Puja transcends religious observance to encompass a broader cultural celebration. The festivities are marked by music, dance, and theatrical performances that depict the triumph of good over evil. Local artists and performers come together to showcase their talents, engaging the entire village in joyous merriment. More than two hundred Kali pujas are conducted in Amadpur and some of them are popularly known as Buri Kali, Baro Kali, Mejo Kali, Sejo Kali, Choto Kali,

Siddi Kali etc, a few of them are 15-20 ft tall. On the evening of the puja, the idol of Goddess Kali is ceremoniously placed in the pandal, and the rituals commence. Devotees engage in offerings of fruits, sweets, and traditional dishes, along with chants and hymns that resonate with spiritual fervour. The aarti (devotional song) performed in praise of the goddess fills the air with a divine ambiance, illuminating the night with flickering lamps.



*Buri Kali Mata
(my family puja)*



Chowdhury Family Puja



Baro Kali Mata



Mejo Kali Mata



Sejo Kali Mata



Choto Kali Mata



Trishakti Mata



Shiva Puja

All the idols are usually immersed on the next day. The idols are put in a frame/structure made of Bamboo and are carried around the entire village on shoulders of devotees, irrespective of their big sizes, by the light of the burning Mashal (torch) which are lit using Cow Dung Cake soaked in Kerosene oil and are danced to the beats of the Dhaak.



Bisorjon Yatra

The uniqueness of this ‘Bisorjon Yatra’ is very special and unique that attracts thousands of people from around the world visit this village to watch and experience this heritage. The most desired moment is the scene when the entire village and those thousands of visitors eagerly await for the big Kali Matas to meet face-to-face during the Bisorjon Yatra and dance together to the beats of the Dhaak. Usually all will be awake whole night to experience this moment as this happens very late at night, mostly the early morning next day as the procession of the big Kalis starts quite late to give space to the smaller ones to finish their Bisorjon Yatra first.

Finally the idols are immersed into the big lakes/ponds in the village with everyone chanting continuously and vigorously “Joi Ma Kali... Asche Bachor Abar Hobe” (Jai Maa Kali... next year will happen again). Thus, the famous Kali Puja comes to an end for the year and all visitors go back home with their minds filled with what they enjoyed the last 2 days and with the hope to return next year.

Community Spirit and Resilience

The enduring festival of Kali Puja symbolizes more than devotion; it embodies the spirit of resilience and unity that characterizes Amadpur. In a rapidly changing world, the villagers have managed to preserve their roots and cultural traditions through these celebrations. The festival encourages young and old alike to engage with their heritage, ensuring that the legacy of Amadpur is shared with future generations.

The Name ‘Kali Gram’

Considering the popularity of Kali Puja, Amadpur became popular as “Kali Gram” as well. It was even featured in the popular Bengali program “Dada Giri” anchored by famous ex-Indian Cricket Captain Sourav Ganguly as a question for the participants.

Conclusion

Amadpur village is a living testament to the power of heritage, community, and spirituality. The rich cultural tapestry woven through its historical significance and the electrifying celebration of Kali Puja offers a glimpse into the heart of rural India. As Amadpur navigates modern challenges, its traditions and vibrant spirit continue to thrive, making it an enchanting destination for those seeking to experience the true essence of Bengali culture.



STORY OF MY PARENTS

— by Dr. Taposi Chaudhury —

He was a dashing young lad from far away Malaya, doing his Engineering degree course in Jadavpur university and she was a pretty, young gal in the heart of India. An uncanny chance that they would meet and fall in love, but they did and had an emotional journey together. This is the enchanting story of Mr. N. G. Chaudhury and Mrs. Sephali Chaudhury, my beloved parents, known fondly by many here as Nanida and Sephali Boudi.



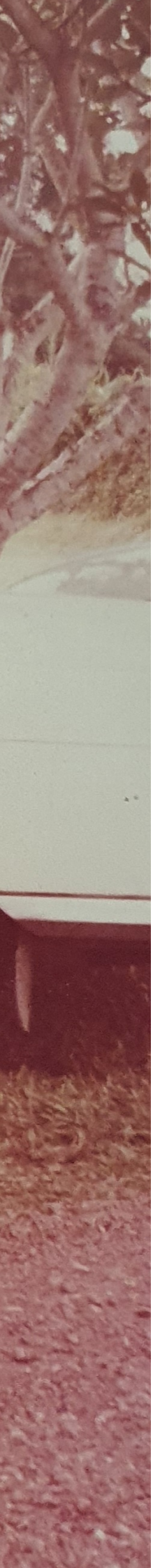
At a time when arranged marriages were the norm and love marriages were unthinkable, they chose the unthinkable.

My dad though he was born in India, had come to Malaya at the age of two years in 1926. He was studying at the St. Paul's Institute in Seremban, when the Japanese invaded and captured Malaya in early 1942. Inspired by the clarion call to liberate India from the British colonial rule by the charismatic

leader Subhas Chandra Bose, he joined the '*Tokyo Cadets*' at the tender age of 17, a select group of 46 young men handpicked by Bose, for Officer training in Tokyo, as part of the Indian National Army (INA). Netaji was killed and everything fell through. At the conclusion of WWII, with the surrender of the Japanese, the entire INA personnel were taken as POWs to India, by the British, the very people they were trying to overthrow from occupying India; after the Red Fort trial, all INA POWs were released. The Indian government, then, rewarded these young INA patriots by granting them free tertiary education in their universities; Dad graduated in 1950 as a mechanical engineer. It was at this magical time that my parents met each other.

My mom was a true child of Bengal. Trained in all the fine arts, poetry, literature, music, dance, she was the epitome of the ideal Bengali girl. She was as beautiful as she was well mannered and cultured. Well spoken, articulate, brave and dignified, these were her other attributes. It was a magical time in India. During her teen years she lived through the period of independence struggle in India. She was 15 in 1945, when World War 2 ended. 1945 to 1947 were the years when India was in the throes of freedom fighting and great





minds like Mahatma Gandhi, Nehru and Rabindranath Tagore united the whole nation with the cry of Vande Mataram. It was a time of great emancipation and awakening.

It was at this time that the twain met. He was older by 6 years, a guy from a foreign land, who had seen the world, fought for Mother India, a very capable and knowledgeable person. She had seen him from close quarters when he went to his village to visit his aunt who was married to her Jetha. She was mesmerized by his charisma and decided that she would marry him against the wishes of her other family members objecting sending her overseas. They then dated for a while and at the ages of 26 and 20 years they married in Calcutta, in independent India, in 1950.

He came back to Malaya, as a fully qualified Engineer with his beautiful wife by his side, to the joy of everyone here. And they lived happily ever after, amongst family and friends with many trips to India and Bangladesh, never losing touch with her roots. As parents, they were the perfect pair. The yin and the yang; he was the science, the voice of reason, and she was the art that added beauty in our lives.

Come 1957, they embraced Malaya

and became citizens, but the fire and passion for India thrived, always. He was the second gen diaspora of India, his father being the first generation.

What do you do after 'happily ever after'? – you pursue your dreams, and Malaysian Bengalee Association (MBA) was their passion. MBA meant everything to them, their umbilical cord to their origins. This was where they connected with the community and held sway in many-a-heart. They played a pivotal role in MBA; he was always a staunch supporter and even became president once. My mom made immense contributions to the then young and novel MBA, breathing life into it, helping put up dramas, songs and dances, teaching the young ones to foster close relationships and cultivate the various performing arts.

As with all other Bengalis here at the time, my parents too reveled in nurturing MBA. They are no longer here today, but we hail their lives, their contributions and the legacy that they left behind.

The MBA that they truly loved and cherished, is the greatest gift that our forefathers bequeathed upon us all; its legacy should prevail and hold us together for many more generations to come.

A New Bong Boudi in Town

— by Sharmistha Pal —

When I left for Malaysia with a child and an infant in the year 2018, my heart was filled with trepidation. What lies ahead? Will the people be friendly? The weather, I heard, was very hot! Wonder what the medical system will be like. But mostly I worried about how welcoming the local folks would be. Although the worries were not unfounded, I was quickly put at ease on most counts.

Very soon we got to know a few of the Bengalis and people from other parts of India. Some here for generations, others who were freshly dropped like us. This of course meant we were quickly pulled into various kinds of parties and activities. Yet the Bong heart felt incomplete. What's life without Durga pujo! We attended Durga pujo in Kuala Lumpur at Malaysian Bengalee Association (MBA) in 2019. I remember walking in very unsure and extremely self-conscious at the pujo



venue in Bagunan Peladang. The sight of Debi Protima filled me with joy. But what I saw all around in and around the hall, was astounding. All around everyone seemed to be doing something – some people helped arrange materials with the priest, some were cutting fruits and vegetables, some were decorating the hall, some were cooking, some managing the visitors! Surprisingly not a single person was dawdling or slacking!

It was not even a few minutes that I had stood admiring the industriousness of community goers, that a firm hand on my shoulder got my attention. An elderly lady posed a couple of queries to which I responded with positive nods – “Are you



new here? Can you cut some vegetables?” Thereafter, I was promptly stationed at a table with a knife in my hand and an entire mound of humongous radishes piled on my left. To the left and right I peeked to see a few comrades giving me quick smiles of relief. Thus started my 7-year association with MBA.

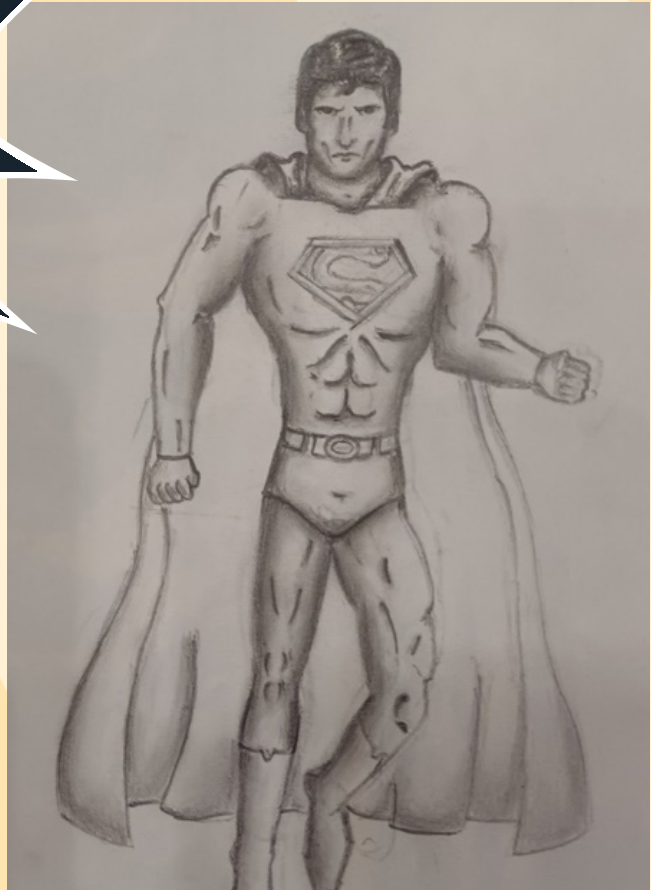
Time has flowed, people have come and gone, numerous pujos and programs participated in, so many members permanently left after a lifetime of dedicated service and so many bittersweet interactions! MBA still goes on with gusto serving the larger community with commitment, organising the pujos with fervour and bringing all Bengalis from all walks of life together in joy.



SUPERMAN

— by Aritra Saha —

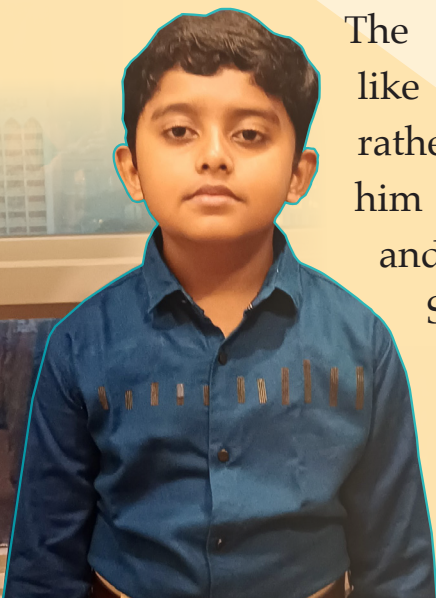
Superman is the best superhero to me. It is because he is strong, kind, polite, and possesses many other beautiful traits and powers. He was born on a different planet named Krypton. His actual name is Kal-El. He was born to Jor-El and Lara. Superman is susceptible to kryptonite (a mineral which absorbs Superman's powers), magic, and other things. Despite these weaknesses, I like him a lot. There are a lot of Hollywood movies made based on the story of Superman, like Justice League, Batman vs Superman, etc.



house and offered me a costume the same as his. He took me to the roof of our house and we both set off on a journey. Before we started, he asked, "Are you scared?" I said, "Not as long as I am with you."

We flew above the vast Pacific Ocean, the hot and yellow Saharan Desert, the peak of Mount Everest, and finally reached a wonder planet. Everything was very colorful there—the pink, red, and yellow trees and plants, green flowers, and the purple-colored roads running through the beautiful garden. I started running around here and there, touching the plants and flowers. God! They could talk in a

The way I started to like Superman was rather unusual. I saw him in a cartoon, and that very night Superman arrived in my dreams. He arrived at my



strange language which I could not understand. There were also monster-like aliens. I was so engrossed that I did not realize Superman had disappeared in the meantime.

Suddenly, the new-found wonder started to fade away from my mind, and fear started to engulf me. I heard a strange noise behind me. There was a colossal monster behind me. I started running as fast as I could, but I slipped and started falling into what felt like an endless tunnel. Thud! Suddenly, I found myself lying on the floor and surrounded by my parents.

“Are you okay?” Mother asked worryingly.

Father was laughing. “He must have had a dream,” he said.

I was quite embarrassed and simply said, “Yes,” without elaborating further.

The next few days, Superman was all over my mind. I spent a lot of time reading about him on the internet. Within a few days, I bought my Superman model. It was a high-quality toy. Thereafter, I would take him with me wherever I went—be it holidays to my grandparents’ house or a holiday destination.

I have many sweet memories with

him, and also a couple of scary incidents, like forgetting him in a taxi and descending from the train leaving him behind. Luckily, the co-passenger uncle sitting next to us came running and handed him over to me while we were still standing on the platform and the train was yet to start.

Till today, Superman is my favorite toy, until one day I accidentally broke its hand. I was so sad. I tried fixing it but could not. My father and I looked for the same model at each toy shop in the city. Hard luck—we could not find a similar one.

Months later, when I came to Malaysia, I tried searching for a Superman toy on Amazon and, oh! I was probably the luckiest man on Earth! I found it on Amazon. My father also agreed in no time. I bought it immediately. I was over the moon! Now, my Superman is back with me, and I am well off with it, playing and making lots of new memories.





Fish Shami Kebab

Ingredients:

300g Rohu Fish/Siakap

$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp Turmeric Powder

1 tsp Red Chilli Powder

1.5 tbsp Ginger, Garlic, Green Chilli Paste

4 tbsp Roasted Gram Flour

1 tsp Garam Masala

1 tsp Roasted Cumin Powder

1 tsp Sugar

$\frac{1}{2}$ cup Fried Onion

A Handful of Chopped Coriander Leaves

1 Egg

1 tsp Lime Juice

Salt to Taste

Oil for Frying



Method:

Take the fish and mix in salt, turmeric powder, red chilli powder, ginger garlic green chilli paste, and boil it until the fish is cooked. Cool and remove the bones and skin. Add all other ingredients and mix well. Keep it in the fridge for 1 hour. Grease your palm with oil and take a lemon-sized portion of the mixture, shaping it into a ball. Slightly flatten the balls and fry in hot oil.

Serve with sliced onion.

Mini Gulab Jamun Cheesecake

125g Marie Biscuits

65g Melted Ghee

12 pieces of Gulab Jamun

300g Cream Cheese

200ml Condensed Milk

1 tsp Cardamom Powder

100ml Gulab Jamun Syrup

Chopped Pistachios and

Almonds to Garnish

Method:

Preheat the oven to 150C. Line a 12-hole muffin tin with paper liners. Crush the biscuits into powder and mix in the melted ghee. Divide the biscuit mixture between the cupcake liners and press to form a firm base. Refrigerate for 20 minutes. In a bowl, mix cream cheese, cardamom powder, condensed milk, and Gulab jamun syrup until no lumps are present. Pour about 2 tablespoons of the mixture into the cupcake liners. Place a Gulab jamun in the center. Take a larger tray and fill it with hot water. Place the baking tin in the bigger tray and bake for about 25–30 minutes. Let it cool to room temperature and then refrigerate for 2 hours. Garnish with chopped pistachios and almonds before serving.

—by Reshmee Roy—



The Great Bengali Wedding

Luchi weds Alurdom

In the heart of Kolkata, under a pandal strung with fairy lights and the faint whiff of mustard oil in the air, the most awaited wedding of the decade was about to take place. Not of film stars. Not of politicians. But of culinary royalty Luchi was finally tying the knot with her long-time sweetheart, the ever-spicy and soulful Alurdom.



Act I: The Love Affair

Luchi, round, delicate, puffed-up with pride (and hot oil), had always been the belle of every Bengali breakfast. But for years, she'd been seen at gatherings, pujas, weddings, Sunday brunches, cosying up to her favorite: the smouldering, masala-smeared Alurdom. They were inseparable one puff, one bite. People whispered, "They're just meant to be."

But of course, there had been a scandal.

Act II: The Mangsho Mishap

Ah, Mangsho. Rich, robust, and deeply aromatic. He was Luchi's wild fling during the Durga Puja of 2017. He arrived late to the bhog but made a dramatic entrance tender, spicy, dripping with gravy. One spoon of him, and Luchi went weak at the gluten. They were caught in a passionate swirl, much to Alurdom's horror.

Alurdom took it like a boiled potato silently and with some turmeric but his heart was crushed like kasundi under a shondesh press. For a year, he sulked in

corner dishes, often paired with paratha in protest.

But Luchi returned. Mangsho was too heavy for everyday life, he left her with cholesterol and complicated emotions. She realised Alurdom, humble and grounded, was her true soulmate.

Act III: The Wedding Banquet

The wedding guest list was legendary.

Chholar Dal came dressed in golden raisins and coconut flakes, trying to look important.

Beguni floated in wearing a purple gown dripping in oil.

Mishti Doi was the official matchmaker, sweetening every bitter fight over the years.

Papad was too crisp to sit still and broke during the ceremony.

And Rice, the silent elder blessed the union from the sidelines with quiet starch-filled wisdom.

As the Shankha blew and the phool-shojja thali was laid out, Luchi arrived on a silver plate, puffed and perfect. Alurdom rolled in, garnished with fresh coriander, looking hot enough to cause a food coma.

And just before the rituals, Luchi took a brief nostalgic moment remembering her innocent childhood days spent swirling in a

bowl of rosh gur, sticky and sweet, before she ever knew the spice of love.

Mangsho? Oh, he came too late again, swaggering with gravy but sat at the “exes and extras” table, sipping mutton soup and watching the couple dance.

Act IV: Happily Ever After

Their honeymoon was a trip to Shantiniketan, packed in a tiffin box. They now live happily in every Bengali household, waking up early on Sundays to be devoured together, always with love, sometimes with extra chili.

As for Mangsho? He found solace in Pulao, and rumor has it they’re seeing each other casually on holidays.

And thus ends the tale of Luchi and Alurdom ... a match made in heaven, fried in mustard oil, and served with endless joy.

Burp!





Laugh Out Loud

• **Why don't skeletons fight each other?**

They don't have the guts.

• **What do you call fake spaghetti?**

An impasta.

• **Why did the scarecrow win an award?**

Because he was outstanding in his field.

• **Why don't eggs tell jokes?**

They'd crack each other up.

• **What do you call cheese that isn't yours?**

Na cho cheese.

• **Why did the bicycle fall over?**

Because it was two-tired.

• **What do you call a bear with no teeth?**

A gummy bear.

• **Why can't your nose be 12 inches long?**

Because then it would be a foot.

• **What did one wall say to the other wall?**

I'll meet you at the corner.

• **Why did the math book look sad?**

Because it had too many problems.





A Poem About My Pets

by Sriyanshi Dutta, 9 years

*I have a cat
She loves to roll on a mat
I also have a dog
She's the colour of a log
My dog loves food
It can change her mood
They're both very cute
But of course, they're not mute
They're as beautiful as a flower
But they don't like taking a shower
I am making an oath
That I'll always love them both*



Rescue Successful

— by Shruti Samanta —

One day, my sister Janet and I were playing in the back yard. My sister was only 6 years old. She had a peachy complexion, sapphire blue eyes, and sooty black hair. We were having the most interesting game of ball when I accidentally threw the ball into the house. In a flash, I ran to get it. When I came back, my sister had disappeared!

I found a note in the garden addressed to my parents, so I ran into my house shouting, “Mum, Dad, Janet is gone!” My parents rushed to me in trepidation. I told them what had happened and handed over the note. Inside, in small, barely legible script it was scrawled *“We have taken your daughter. If you ever want to see her again, you must pay \$3,000,000,000 by Thursday night. Bring the money to the top of Rackshal Hill and your daughter will be returned.”*

I was devastated and started crying.



What would we do now? We didn't have that much money! I ran to my best friend, Lila's house and told her what had happened. Later, we went to the backyard and found another note.

This time in my sister's writing. It said, “Red Lawn”. My parents perceived that my sister was probably in the only house in Red Lawn, Roseway.

I was so excited! It now seemed feasible to get my sister back. I made up my mind to try to rescue her. My parents were reluctant to let me go but they saw that I was determined so they relented. I made Lila promise not to come, but I asked if she would mind letting her dog, Scott accompany me. Meanwhile, my mother telephoned the police to tell them about the situation.

As night fell, Scott and I trudged along to Roseway. It had barred gates and high walls. I scaled the gate and opened it for Scott. We found a coal-hole that succoured us onto the house.



As we went through the corridors, I heard loud snores coming from two rooms and quietly locked both from the outside.

We climbed upstairs and noticed that one of the rooms there was locked. I nervously unlocked it and saw my sister! I rushed to her in relief, and hugged her. What I didn't notice was that there were people in the next room. Hearing the noise, they managed to lock us inside before we could discern their presence. However, Scott slipped through.

He snarled at them until they rushed into their room and shut the door. I was very worried now. It was a bad situation. The men were too scared

to venture out and we were locked in. After a few minutes, I heard Scott give a joyful wuff. Soon, I heard Lila's voice. "Lucy?" I was so elated. Lila let both me and Janet out. I hurried to lock the kidnappers from outside. Lila, Scott, Janet and I went back home dishevelled and hungry.

My parents were super relieved and vowed to never let Janet out of their sight ever again. I was exhilarated. There was nothing more blissful than having my sister back. The next morning, I got wonderful news. The kidnappers had been caught by the police and were going to have to serve a lifetime in prison. I laughed joyfully. Everything was perfect again.

Mother's Day - A Day for Veneration and Worship



Contributed by
Suparna Sen Gupta,

Manusmriti glorifies mother as “maataa prthivyaa moortih” Mother is like Goddess Earth. Mother's Day is a Day for venerating all Mothers and a Day for Worshiping Goddess Mother Earth. Second Sunday in May every year is celebrated as Mother's Day all over America. May 10, 2026 will mark 112 Years of Mother's Day celebration. Mother's Day is an American invention though called International Mother's Day. Mother's Day should have been singular possessive, for each family to honor their mother, not plural possessive commemorating all mothers in the world as per the intentions of Anna Jarvis who worked hard for establishing Mother's Day- A Day of Veneration to individual mothers and worked hard for National recognition as a day of celebration. But today it is a day of celebration honoring mothers, motherhood, maternal bonds, and the influence of mothers in society. In due course this has also been given a religious importance in America as special masses are held in all churches honoring mothers.

Mother's Day is not directly descended from the many Western celebrations of mothers and motherhood that have occurred throughout the world over thousands of years, such as Greek cult of Cybele, the Roman festival of Hillarie, the Christian Mothering Sunday celebration etc., as well as celebration of Mother Goddess in many traditions in the ancient cultures of the world.

In 1868, Ann Jarvis, mother of Anna Jarvis – created a committee to establish a "Mother's Friendship Day" to reunite families that had been divided during the Civil War. Jarvis – who had previously organized "Mother's Day Work Clubs" to improve sanitation and health for both Union and Confederate encampments undergoing a typhoid outbreak – wanted to expand this into an annual memorial for mothers, but she died in 1905 before the celebration became popular. Her daughter continued her mother's efforts and also worked hard to make it a day of remembrance of her mother and her struggles.



On May 10, 1913, the US House of Representatives passed a resolution calling on all Federal Government officials (from the President down) to wear a white carnation the following day in observance of Mother's Day. On May 8, 1914, the U.S. Congress passed a law designating the second Sunday in May as Mother's Day and requesting a proclamation. The next day, President Woodrow Wilson issued a proclamation declaring the first National Mother's Day. The Grafton church, where the first celebration was held, is now the International Mother's Day Shrine and is a National Historic landmark.

The modern Mother's Day has been assimilated into Indian culture and it is celebrated every year on the second Sunday of May. In India, mothers are always considered as goddess to their children by Hindus. Taittareeya Upanishad in its Sikshavallee instructs the student graduated out of Vedic school to worship the Mother as the first God, “Matru devo bhava”. India does not celebrate the occasion as a religious one, but do their best to thank their mothers on this day for all the care and love showered upon them. Traditionally, mothers are given great importance in Indian culture whatever may be their religious following. The day is celebrated mostly in urban centers, by performing special acts to honor mothers and their contributions to the family following American culture. As per Hindu religious tradition, mothers are paid homage on Saraswati pooja day during Devi Navaratri, with "Maatru Pooja" (worship of mother). In Hindu tradition outside India Mother's Day is called "Mata Tirtha Aunshi" or "Mother Pilgrimage fortnight", and is celebrated especially in Nepal. The holiday is observed on the new moon day in the month of Baisakh, i.e., April/May. These celebrations were in vogue long before the invention of the US-inspired celebration.

In the United States, Mother's Day remains one of the biggest days for sale of flowers, greeting cards, and the like. Moreover church going is also popular on Mother's Day, bringing the highest church attendance after Christmas Eve and Easter. Many worshipers celebrate the day with carnations, colored if the mother is living and white if she is dead. Hindu Americans do not lag behind. The temple is kept open for long hours on Mother's Day and treated as special religious events day unlike in India. Mothers are also honored with special worship to Goddess Parvati if it is a Saivite main deity based temple or Lakshmi if it is a Vishnu presiding deity based temple or the presiding Goddess if the temple is any other Devi temple. Many Hindus touch the ground and then touch their forehead stepping out of bed as a mark of respect and veneration to Mother Earth.

To all Hindus Earth is their spiritual mother. It provides all the needs of mankind just as mother provides the needs of a child. Our body is constituted of minerals that come from within the earth and the environment that surrounds. The water we drink and the medicines (oshadhyah) we consume also come from the earth. All of us are indebted to Mother Earth for her bounty. Hindus feel guilty that they are forced to trample upon her and so apologize to her in all their prayers at the same time expressing their gratitude: *Samudra vasane devi parvatasthanamandite | vishnupatni namsthubhyam paadasparsam kshamasva maam—* One who is covered with the great oceans as clothes, one who cares for all the living beings in the universe, one who gives life through the streams of milk that flows in the form of rivers, one whose breasts are in the form of great mountains, O Mother Earth! Consort of Vishnu, forgive me for placing my feet upon you! When we sleep on bed covered with a sheet or blanket, the temperature of our covered feet rises. Under such circumstances one should not place one's feet on the ground. The feet are particularly sensitive to varying temperature and transmit it immediately to the body.

To avoid sudden change in temperature that can affect health, it is appropriate that one should uncover the body, permit the temperature to stabilize, and rise gradually after offering prayers to Mother earth. Hindu tradition is so designed you can always find scientific or healthy explanations for many of them as I have enumerated in many of my earlier discourses at appropriate context.

Mother's day is the ideal and most suited day to honor Goddess Mother Earth. No Hindu Worship ever takes place without honoring Mother Earth. Hindu temple visit starts with paying respect to Mother Earth at the flag-post. As a devotee gets the vision of the temple he or she prostrates at the flag-post, takes a little dust from the ground and applies it on the forehead as a mark of respect to element earth whom he worships as Mother Earth. Brahman in his omnipresent aspect is worshiped as Vishnu. He pervades the entire Earth and is the sovereign ruler of Earth. Perhaps the concept of worshiping female deity in Hinduism started with Bhoodevi when she was lifted out from Paataala (Netherworlds) by the second incarnation of Vishnu, Varaha. Sakta concept of worship came much later.

Mother Earth pervaded by Vishnu is considered as his consort and called Bhoodevi. Vishnu is always worshiped with Bhoodevi along with Sridevi. It is strange that while there are many days earmarked for special worship for Sridevi and other Hindu Goddesses there is not a single day earmarked for special worship of Mother Earth in Hindu Temple Tradition. But processional deity of any incarnation of Vishnu is invariably accompanied by Sridevi and Bhoodevi. No worship starts without praying for Bhoodevi in the form of Sthala Suddhi (purification of the ground) and asking for her permission to conduct the ritual.



It is also not understandable why there are no exclusive temples to Bhoodevi though Parvati is worshiped as Bhuvanesvari and Lakshmi as Jaganmata in temples where they are presiding deities. There is a lone temple for Bharatmata in Hardwar which has been inspired by the patriotic song of Bankim Chandra Chatterji to kindle National spirit in Hindus to fight for freedom.

Bharatmata refers to the land of independent India today plus the land it lost to Pakistan and Bangladesh if not Burma and Afghanistan which was donated away earlier by the British during their sovereignty. Bharatmata does not represent the whole world and so does not go well with the Vedic concept of vasudhaiva kutumbkam whole world is one family. Vasudhaa represents the entire world with all its oceans while Bharat refers to India only. Often reference to Bhoodevi in Vedas is to the three worlds—Bhoo, Bhuvah and Suvah—Earth, Mid-region and Svarga.

Normally one's country of origin or birth is addressed more often as Motherland than Fatherland. But Mahaanaraayana Upanishad glorifies Earth as the Universal Mother in its Mantra as follows: "Mother Earth is mother of all beings such as gods, Gandharvas, human beings, pitrus or manes, asuras and she is signified by names such as Medhini, Mahati, Mahee, Saavitri, Gaayatri, Jagati, Urvee, Prithvee, Bahulaa, Viswaa, Bhootaa, Katamaa, Kaa, Yaa, Satyaa, Saa, and Amritaa. Her greatness is so great that it can't be adequately described; thus did sage Vasishtha praise Mother Earth". Mother Earth is the most celebrated deity in Vedas and Upanishads. Mantras glorifying Bhoodevi are contained in Mrittikaasooktam and Bhoosooktam.

A mantra in MNU glorifies Bhoodevi thus: "The Earth is the giver of happiness like the milk cow (Dhenu), the sustainer of life and support for all living beings". Representing as such the earth is addressed: "Thou wert raised up by Krishna in His incarnation of the boar having hundred hands". Vedas hail her as Bhoomi, Dhenu and Dharanee. All things are produced on earth. So she is called Bhoomi. She is called cow because all desires are showered by her like the mythical cow Kamadhenu. As she is stationed with stability for us to build houses and live on she is called Dharanee.



Trees and plants became her children. Humans found food, clothing and shelter in the bountiful arms of Bhoodevi and expressed their gratitude through rituals, yajnas, vratas and worships. But Vena did not feel obliged to thank Bhoodevi, Vishnu being the benefactor in his opinion. Under his leadership people stopped all worships and rituals to her and began looting the wealth of Earth-goddess. Afflicted and pained sages rose in revolt and killed Vena. Exploitation still continued and Mother Earth was furious and the earth became barren. Merciful Lord took the incarnation of Prithu and begged Bhoodevi to restore fertility and past glory. Bhoodevi did not give in and took the form cow and ran away.

Prithu agreed to be cowherd and assured to protect her from the wicked. Prithu made her his consort and so she was called Prithvee. Prithu taught people art of agriculture, cattle rearing, mining and trade. He instituted principles of prudent economics Artha that supports human society without harming nature. Bhoodevi satisfied every one's needs. She was worshiped and adored by all as Prithvee, the beloved of Prithu.

All thanked Vishnu for bringing prosperity appeasing Bhoodevi. But Bhoodevi was skeptical. She still had the fear that another Venu may reappear in the future. Vishnu then instituted Dharma--Laws that will guarantee well-being on earth. He also assured whenever the laws were broken he will descend upon earth to punish the transgressor.

Today the world is decaying, degenerating and drifting towards destruction. The earth is being polluted, plundered, heritage is being ignored and culture is being eroded making true the fear of Mother Earth. Therefore let us seriously think and respect Mother Earth, save the environment and protect the world until the next cataclysm as per schedule and not hasten it. What better day is there than Mother's Day to think of her, worship her and take steps to protect her and restore her pristine beauty to share her customary bounty which she is ever willing to share with us as a loving mother and as per the laws of Dharma established by her benefactor?

*Bhoomir_dhenur-dharanee lokadhaarinee |
Mrittike hana paapam yanmaya dushkkritam kritam |
Mrittike brahmadaattaci kaasyapena abhimantritaa |
Tvayaa hatena paapena jeevaami saradah satam |
Mrittike dehi me pushtim tvayi sarvam pratishthitam
(Mahaanaaraayana Upanihad)*

English translation of the above:

"The Earth is the giver of happiness like milk cow (Dhenu), the sustainer of life (Bhoomi) and support for all living beings (Dharanee). Oh Goddess Earth! Please destroy my sins; destroy whatever bad deeds done by me. Oh excellent Earth! Thou art a gift from God to all Creatures. Thou art prayed over by Kaasyapa. May I live a hundred winters (hundred years) after my sins have been destroyed by your blessings! Please bestow on me nourishment—everything depends on you!"



Oh Heavenly Father,

The world is blinded by their ignorance. As it is said in this Kali Yugam evil and narrow minded thinking, filled people with the worst of human qualities – lust, jealousy, hatred, ego & revenge. This leads people to anger and anger to destruction.

Being Destroyer of Anuvam (Ego), Karma (Sins) and Mayae (Illusions), I humbly urge upon You to destroy these bad qualities of man and restore Dharma (Good Deeds), Unmai (Truth), Neethi (Justice), Anbu (Love) and Shanthi (Peace) on Earth.

I Pray for Bhoomi Matha (Mother Earth) to attain Shantham (Inner Peace), I Pray to You as Athi Shangara (Supreme God) to bestow the feeling of equality and respect among all human and living things. If we see every one as equal... God's created beings and respect the way they are, the world will attain Peace, Prosperity and Harmony.

Just like how you have touched me with Your Divine Infinite Love... Fill this world with Your Ever Lasting Love so that mankind, animals and plants will live forever in peace and harmony.

রেডিও

কাকলী দেব



নীতা র একটা রেডিও কেনার খুব শখ। নিজের স্কুলের চাকরির যা মাইনে তাতে কোনও শখ বা বিলাসিতা আর সম্ভব হয়না। সে মেয়ে অন্ত প্রাণ ! তার একমাত্র পাঁচ'বছরের মেয়ে কে , সে যে কত যত্নে আর আদরে বড় করছে তা একমাত্র সেই জানে। সুশীল রাজনীতির কাজে আরও জড়িয়ে পড়ছে। সংসারে সামান্য টাকা দিয়ে, নিজের সিগারেট খাওয়া আর যাতায়াতের খরচা টুকু রেখে পুরো টাই পার্টির ফান্ডে দিয়ে দিচ্ছে। রেডিও র কথা কখনো বললে, সুশীলের কঠোর জবাব শুনতে হয়, "রেডিও কিনে কি হবে, ওসব বিলাসিতার মধ্যে কেন যাব ?"

নীতা ভাবে, তাহলে ভাড়াবাড়ী ছেড়ে এই সরকারী ফ্ল্যাটে উঠে আসা, সেটা ও কি সংগ্রামী রাজনীতির কাছে বিলাসিতা নয় ? এই একটা কাজ নিজে উদ্যোগ নিয়ে সুশীল করেছে, এই ফ্ল্যাট টা জোগাড় করা !

একটু একটু করে কিছুটা টাকা জমেছে, একটা রেডিও এবার কিনে ফেলতেই হবে ! কিন্তু সারা সকাল স্কুলের পরে দুপুরে বাড়ীতে এসে অনেক কাজ থাকে। সংসার টা গুছিয়ে করতে তার ভালই লাগে! তারপর মেয়ে ছোট , তাকে অনেক টা সময় দিতে হয় ! মেয়েকে আদর করে, খুকুমনি বলে ডাকে আর ভাল নাম রেখেছে, 'মননীতা' , নিজের নামের সঙ্গে মিল রেখে। এ পর্যন্ত লেখাপড়া শেখা, সব মা নীতার কাছেই। কাছের ভাল স্কুলে ভর্তি হয়েছে ক্লাস ওয়ানে। আগের পাড়ায় এক প্রাইমারী স্কুলে নার্সারি আর কেজি পড়েছিল। বিকেল, সন্ধ্যা, মেয়ের সঙ্গেই কেটে যায়।

মেয়ের স্কুলে ভর্তির আগের সময় টা, যখন সে আরো ছোট ছিল তখন, তার মনিং স্কুল বলে, বাড়ী তে না ফেরা পর্যন্ত সুশীল ই সব দায়িত্ব হাসিমুখে পালন করেছে। মেয়েকে খুব ভালও বাসে, কিন্তু এখন এই বড় হওয়ার সময় যে বাবা মায়ের দায়িত্ব আরও বেড়ে যায়, সেটা ও বুঝতে পারছেন।

এক শনিবার স্কুলের ছুটি, নীতা ভাবল, বেশ বিকেল বিকেল বেরিয়ে নিউ মার্কেট গিয়ে রেডিও টা কিনে নিয়ে আসবে। মেয়ে র বেড়াতে যাবার খুশীতে তাড়াতাড়ি দুপুরের খাওয়া হয়ে গেল, নাহলে খাবার নিয়ে বসে থাকে। স্কুলের টিচার বন্ধুদের কাছে শুনেছে যে নিউ মার্কেটে খুব ভাল রেডিও র দোকান আছে। ওদের বেলেঘাটা থেকে আসতে দুবার বাস বদলাতে হল। এমনিতে তার মেয়ে খুব শান্ত, কিন্তু আজ মার হাত ধরে নিউ মার্কেট ঘুরতে ঘুরতে একবার এদিক, একবার ওদিক দৌড়ে দৌড়ে দেখছে ! এত রকমারী চোখ ধাঁধানো দোকান ও এর আগে দেখেনি। অবশেষে বড় একটা ইলেকট্রনিক জিনিসের শোরুমে ঢুকল। কত যে জিনিস সেখানে ! নীতার ই অবাক লাগছে দেখে ! কিন্তু ওর চাহিদা খুব স্বল্প, ক্ষমতা ও সীমিত ! সোজা রেডিও র সেকশনে গিয়ে দেখতে চাইল ! সেলসম্যান তাকে বিভিন্ন মডেলের গুনাগুন বোঝাতে লাগলেন। অনেক কটা দেখার পরে মাঝারি গোছের একটা রেডিও অবশেষে নীতার পছন্দ হল। এটা ওর সাধ আর সাধ্য দুটোই পূরণ করবে। নীতা দরদাম করতে পারেনা।

দোকানের লোক বিল বানিয়ে দিলে নীতা দাম দিয়ে, পেছন ফিরে খুকুমনি কে খুঁজল ! এতক্ষন এত মন দিয়ে রেডিও দেখাদেখি করতে গিয়ে আর মেয়ের কথা মনে নেই ! খুব সামান্য সময় সেটা ! মেয়ে তার কাছেই দাঁড়িয়ে ছিল। কিন্তু এখন কোথায় গেল ! নীতা দোকানের ভেতরে চারিদিক দেখে মেয়েকে দেখতে না পেয়ে অস্থির হয়ে ওর নাম ধরে ডাকতে ডাকতে দোকানের বাইরে বেরলো , সবাই কে জিজ্ঞেস করতে লাগল, একটি লাল রঙের ফ্রক পরা মেয়েকে কেউ দেখেছে কিনা ! নাঃ,

কেউ বলতে পারছেন। দোকানের কর্মচারীরা ও দৌড়াদৌড়ি শুরু করে দিয়েছে। সবাই ডাকছে, নাম ধরে, উৎকণ্ঠিত হয়ে। কোথায় গেল বাচ্চা মেয়েটা? নীতা দোকানের সিঁড়ি তে বসে আছে মাথায় হাত দিয়ে, 'একী হল তার জীবনে, তার মেয়ে কি হারিয়ে গেল? এরকম তো সিনেমা গল্পে হয়, তার ই জীবনে হল? খুকুমনি কে ছাড়া তো নীতা বেঁচেই থাকবেন। এই মেয়ের জন্য ই তার জীবনের সব আনন্দ! আর সুশীল কে কি করে মুখ দেখাবে? 'যখন এইরকম ভয়ে, হতাশায়, ব্যাথায়, নীতার চোখ থেকে অব্যোরে জল পড়ছে, চারিপাশে জড়ো হওয়া লোকেরা কেউ বলছে, পুলিশে খবর দিতে, কেউ বলছে, ছোট বাচ্চাদের চুরি করে সঙ্গে সঙ্গেই পাচার করে দেয়, তাকে খুঁজে পাওয়ার আশা বৃথা, তখন দূর থেকে একজন ভদ্রলোক একটি লাল জামা পরা মেয়েকে কোলে নিয়ে এদিকেই আসছেন। কে ও? নীতা দৌড়ে যায়, সৌম্য দর্শন মাঝবয়সী লোকটি, নীতার কোলে খুকুমনি কে দিয়ে বলেন, "খুব মিস্টি আর বুদ্ধিমতী মেয়ে আপনার! একটু ঘুরতে গিয়ে হারিয়ে গেছিল, কিন্তু কান্নাকাটি না করে চুপ করে ঐ দূরের কোনার দোকানের সামনে দাঁড়িয়ে ছিল! আমার কীরকম সন্দেহ হওয়াতে এগিয়ে গিয়ে জিজ্ঞেস করি, এখানে একা কেন দাঁড়িয়ে আছে সে! কি সুন্দর, তখন গুছিয়ে বলল, "আমার মা আর আমি রেডিও কিনতে এসেছিলাম, মা যখন রেডিও কিনছিল তখন আমি সামনের পুতুলের দোকানে পুতুল দেখতে গেছিলাম কিন্তু তারপর আর ঐ রেডিওর দোকানটা খুঁজেই পাচ্ছিলাম।"

"ভাবুন, কি সাহসী মেয়ে আপনার, শুধু বিপদটা তখনই হত, যদি কোনও বাজে লোকের নজরে পড়ে যেত! খুব ভাগ্য ভাল, তা হয়নি।"

মেয়ে কে বকবে কি, ওকে বুকে জড়িয়ে, বুকের ধকধক আওয়াজটা বন্ধ করার চেষ্টা করল! ভদ্রলোক কে ধন্যবাদ দেবার ভাষা খুঁজে পাচ্ছেনা! চারিদিকের ভীড় কমে যেতে লাগল, কেউ বেশ হতাশ হয়ে গেল, একটা ভয়ঙ্কর পরিনিতি খুঁজে পেলনা বলে! কেউ আবার সত্যিই তার আনন্দে খুশী হয়ে উঠল, মেয়ের গাল টিপে, মাথায় হাত বুলিয়ে অনেকে আদর করে দিল! সাহসিনী খুকুমনি এখন সব সাহস হারিয়ে, মা কে শক্ত করে জড়িয়ে ধরে, মার বুকে মুখ লুকিয়ে আছে।

দোকানের লোকজন ও যেন নিশ্চিন্ত হল, মালিক নিজে এসে রেডিওর বাক্সটা দিয়ে গেলেন। দাম আগেই দেওয়া হয়ে গ্যাছে। এবার তাড়াতাড়ি বাড়ী ফিরতে হবে।

ভদ্রলোক তখনও পাশেই দাঁড়িয়ে আছেন। বললেন, "কিভাবে ফিরবেন, কোথায় যাবেন? আকাশের অবস্থা দেখছেন তো? বাস টাস পাওয়া মুশকিল হয়ে যাবে!"

নীতা এতক্ষণ লক্ষ্যই করেনি যে, কি ভীষণ কালো মেঘের ঘনঘটা আকাশে! দেখতে দেখতেই মুষ্ণ ধারে বৃষ্টি নামল! বুঝতে পারছে না কি করবে সে, নীতার চিন্তিত মুখের দিকে তাকিয়ে ভদ্রলোক, জিজ্ঞেস বলেন, আপনি এখানেই থাকুন, আমি দেখছি যদি কোন ভাবে ট্যাক্সি পাই! বৃষ্টির মধ্যেই ভিজে ভিজে উনি অনেক চেষ্টা করলেন, একটা ট্যাক্সিও এই দুর্ঘোণে বেলঘাটা যেতে রাজী হলনা, ইতিমধ্যে ঘড়িতে দেখছে সাতটা বাজে! ভদ্রলোক বললেন, "আপনার রিকশায় যেতে আপত্তি নেই তো? রিকশা হয়তো যাবে।" নীতা বলে, আমাকে একটা রিক্সা ধরে দিন, তাহলেই হবে, আমি চলে যেতে পারব!" "না না, কি বলছেন, তাই হয় নাকি, এই দুর্ঘোণে ছোট বাচ্চা নিয়ে আপনার একা যাওয়াটা ঠিক হবেনা। আমি যাব, আপনাকে একেবারে বাড়ীতে পৌঁছে দেব।"

নীতা নিজেও বুঝতে পারছে, কেউ একজন থাকলে সত্যিই খুব সুবিধা হয়! মেয়ে এখন কোল থেকে নামতেই চাইছেন, একহাতে রেডিওর বাক্স! 'কিন্তু এই লোকটি কে তো সে চেনেই না! কোনও খারাপ লোক নয়তো! এত আগ বাড়িয়ে উপকার করতে চাইছে কেন?"

অবশেষে বেশী টাকার লোভ দেখিয়ে একটা রিকশা জোগাড় হল! নীতা, মেয়ে কোলে উঠে বেশ দূরত্ব বজায় রেখে বসার চেষ্টা করল, ভদ্রলোক উদাসীন ভাবে পাশে বসলেন, বললেন, বাক্সটা আমাকে দিন, আমি ধরছি। "সারাটা পথ তেমন বিশেষ কথা কিছু হলনা, আবহাওয়া আর কলকাতার বিরক্তিকর যানবাহন নিয়ে কথা ছাড়া। মেয়ে তো প্রায় ঘুমিয়েই পড়ল।

যখন নিজের ফ্ল্যাট এর সামনে এসে পৌঁছাল তখন যেন নিঃশ্বাস ফেলে বাঁচল ! ভদ্রতা করে বলল,
"আসুন না বাড়ীতে, একটু চা খেয়ে যান " লোকটি স্থিত হেসে বললেন, "আপনি ঘরে যান, আমিও
এখনই ফিরব, এই রিকশা তেই , আমার বাড়ী অবধি অবশ্য রিকশা যাবেনা, আমার বাড়ী বেহালায় !"

সুশীল তখনও ফেরেনি, বোধহয় ঝড় জলে আটকে পড়েছে, মেয়ে ও ঘুম থেকে জেগে উঠে বলে, "মা
,ঐ ভাল কাকু টা চলে গেল ? আর আসবে না ?"

স্তব্ধ হয়ে বসে থাকে নীতা,' মানুষ তাহলে আজও একেবারে নিঃস্বার্থ হয় ?'

পরবর্তী কালে তার এত কষ্টের জমানো টাকা দিয়ে কেনা রেডিও টার দখল যখন শতকরা নব্বই ভাগ
সুশীল আর দশ ভাগ, মা মেয়ের ভাগে জুটল, তখন মাঝে মাঝে ঐ মানুষ টা র কথা, নীতার মনে
পড়ত ! উনি না আসলে, না তো নিজের মেয়ে কে ফিরে পেত, আর না হত রেডিও কেনা ।





Our Journey in Malaysia

— by Subhasis Roy Chowdhury —

Over the past eleven years, our journey in Malaysia has been nothing short of transformative. Arriving in a new country always brings excitement and uncertainty, but with time, Malaysia has become not just a place we live, but a place we call home. The experience has been shaped by its vibrant culture, diverse culinary traditions, tropical climate, quality education, and the close-knit Bengali community flourishing here.

Malaysia's culture is a rich tapestry

woven from Malay, Chinese, Indian, and indigenous traditions, creating a society where diversity is just not present, but celebrated. This multicultural harmony is visible in everyday life; be it the variety of festivals, the fusion of languages, or the way people respect each other's customs. From the bright lanterns of Chinese New Year to the colourful open houses during Hari Raya, the diyas and flower garlands of Deepavali, every celebration is

shared openly, making us feel included and appreciated. Beyond festivals, the energy of Malaysia is felt in its everyday life, from the morning markets to the bustling Pasar Malam, where families stroll, vendors call out in lively chorus, and the air is perfumed with the aroma of fresh food and fragrant spices.

If culture is the soul of Malaysia, then food is its beating heart. Over the years, we have fallen in love with the country's culinary scene. The street food culture is especially memorable—from hawker stalls offering nasi lemak, satay, curry puffs, roti canai, and laksa—have become flavours we return to again and again, each bite carrying a little piece of Malaysia's soul. We have also seen how the food landscape blends traditional recipes with modern innovation, offering something for every palate. For us, the shared meals with friends from different backgrounds have been some of the most heartwarming experiences.

Living in a tropical country has its unique charm. Malaysia's weather is warm throughout the year, with occasional heavy rains that bring freshness to the air. While the heat can be intense at times, the lush greenery and abundance of tropical fruits more than make up for it.

Malaysia is a vibrant tourism destination that lives up to its slogan, "Malaysia Truly Asia", and is known for its blend of modern attractions and natural beauty. From family trips to the cool highlands of Cameron and Genting, to exploring cultural gems like George Town and Melaka, each journey offers a vivid glimpse into Malaysia's rich heritage, while Kuala Lumpur dazzles with its skyscrapers, shopping, and street food.

One of the highlights of our stay has been access to quality education. Malaysia offers a variety of schooling options, from national to international curricula, allowing students to receive a global perspective while rooted in local values. The international schools with their mix of local values and global perspectives, have given our children more than academics—they've taught them resilience, respect, and curiosity. We've watched them grow into confident individuals who can navigate a multicultural world with ease, something we consider one of our biggest blessings from living here.

And then, there's our Bengali community here, which has been a living piece of home, keeping our traditions and connections alive. Despite being far from our native land, we have found a second family among

fellow Bengalis. The community has kept our traditions alive, from celebrating Naboborsho, Durga Puja to hosting cultural programs. It has provided a support network during joyful and challenging times, ensuring we never feel truly far from home. Looking back, our 11 years in Malaysia have been filled with

learning, friendship, and growth. It's where our children grew up, where friendships turned into family. The country's openness, cultural richness, and sense of belonging have left an indelible mark on our lives. Malaysia has not just been a host nation; it has been a teacher, a friend, and a HOME.



The Importance of Family

— by Mirra Majumder —

The importance of family is huge in our lives. We all get love and support from our loved ones in a family. The word family holds great meaning in all our lives. The word “family” is not only a word but a feeling, an essence. To be an ideal family, nobody has to be perfect, but all the members have to make an effort and support their loved ones in difficult situations and always care for each other.

All the members of the family have to be together and sanguine in difficult times, shielding each other. That is the true meaning and essence of being a family. Some people do not have families; they are quite unfortunate as they do not get that immense support and the feeling of togetherness in difficult as well as good times. Some people are fortunate to have friends who are like their family and care for and love them equally.

The majority of families in this world are not perfect. They often fight, argue, or quarrel with each other, but at the



end of the day, it is resolved, and they stand up for each other in difficult situations and celebrate in good times. This reminds me of an OTT series on Prime Video called “Yeh Meri Family”, which

is about a middle-class family of the 90s. This series shows the importance of always being together in difficult times and how the family understands and supports each other. It also shows the love and care between the two siblings, “Rishi” and “Rittika.” They support each other and fight together against difficult situations, and when they get scolded by their parents, they try to save each other—capturing the love they have for one another. The elder sister, “Rittika,” also gives moral support to her brother, “Rishi,” when he needs it, fulfilling the duties of an elder sister. Their parents and grandmother also try to understand the children, always encourage them, and whenever needed, give them advice. All of these meaningful messages are spread in a humorous and witty way. All these families are imperfectly perfect and are

actually ideal. We should also never take our loved ones for granted and give them the same support and love they deserve.

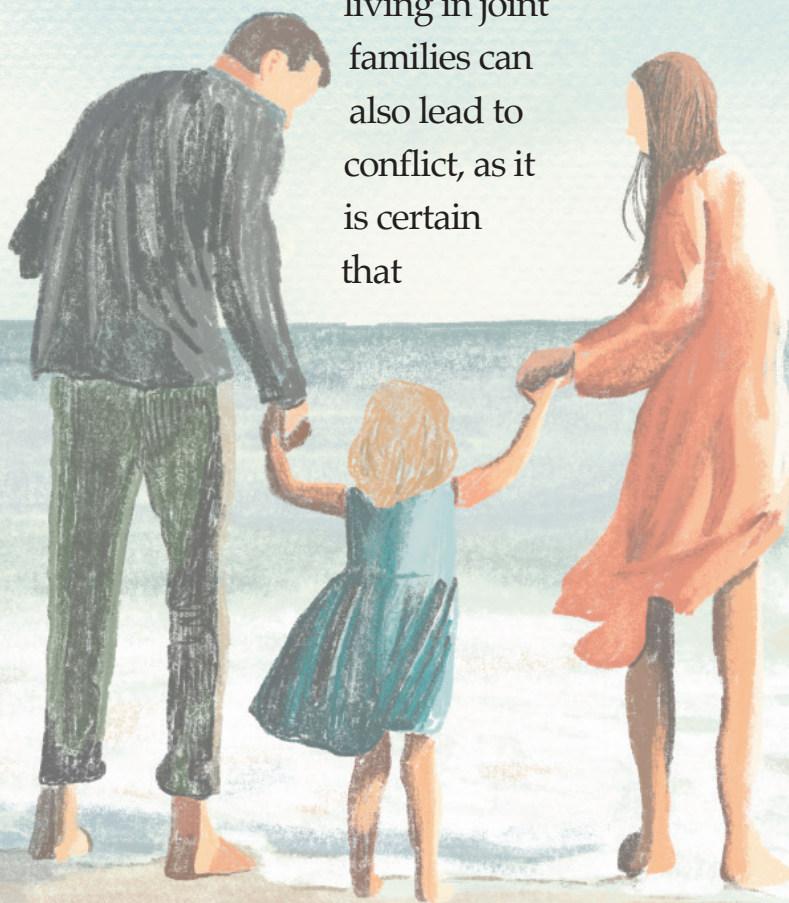
In olden times, there used to be joint families, which have now been fragmented into nuclear families. Joint families offer support during hardships and face them together. Living in a joint family also helps with culture preservation, as everyone follows the same traditions that the members of that family have carried forward for many years. They celebrate their traditions together and all share responsibilities, so the pressure of one person doing all the

work is not there. However, living in joint families can also lead to conflict, as it is certain that

there will be fights if many people are living together and sharing the same house due to differences. There is limited privacy in joint families because many people live together in a shared space.

On the other hand, nuclear families provide independence and privacy and focused family time. Due to fewer number of members, they lack extended support, and the responsibility of childcare and household work may be heavier. Nuclear families may feel disconnected from extended family members, especially if they move away for work or other reasons. Regardless of whether we live in joint or nuclear families, it is important to remember the true meaning of the word “family.” Both types of families have advantages and disadvantages, but we have to be strong together.

During hardships, we should never break like glass but stand strong as a rock, facing hard times. There are both good and bad times in life. Just like the passing of good and bad times and as the saying goes, “Time and tide wait for none.” Therefore, we should remain strong throughout the journey of life, which comes with many obstacles, but if we face them together, we will be able to go through them and reach the end—our destination.





A Journey to The Mysterious Island: Ilha de Bonecas

— by Ushnarathi Chakraborty —

Once upon a time, on a dark and stormy night, a group of five friends decided to embark on a journey to a mysterious island rumoured to be haunted.

The friends—Sarah, Jake, Emily, Tyler, and Megan—had always been fascinated by the supernatural and were eager to explore the unknown.

As they boarded the small boat that would take them to the island, the wind howled and the waves crashed



against the sides of the vessel. The friends huddled together, their hearts racing with excitement and fear. Sarah, the brave and adventurous leader of the group, steered the boat towards the looming island in the distance.

As they neared the shore, the friends were struck by the eerie beauty of the island. The trees swayed ominously in the wind, their branches reaching out like skeletal fingers. The air was thick

with the scent of decay, and the sound of distant whispers filled their ears.

"We shouldn't be here," whispered Emily, her voice trembling with fear. But Sarah was undeterred. She was determined to uncover the secrets of the island and prove that they were not afraid.

The friends stepped onto the sandy shore, their feet sinking into the soft earth. They followed a narrow path that wound its way through the dense forest, their flashlights cutting through the darkness like beacons of light. Suddenly, they heard a rustling in the bushes and stopped in their tracks.

"What was that?" Tyler asked, his hand gripping his flashlight tightly.

"Just a raccoon or something," Jake replied, trying to sound brave. But Sarah knew better. She could sense that they were not alone on the island, that something sinister lurked in the shadows.

As they continued their journey, the friends came across a clearing in the forest. In the centre of the clearing stood an ancient stone altar, covered in moss and vines. Sarah approached the altar, her heart pounding in her chest. She had a strange feeling that they were being watched.

Just then, a figure emerged from the darkness, its eyes glowing with malevolence. It was the ghost of a long-dead pirate, his tattered clothes hanging off his skeletal frame. The friends gasped in horror as the pirate spoke in a spectral voice.

"Beware, intruders," he warned. "This island is cursed, and those who dare to trespass here will never leave."

But Sarah was not one to be easily frightened. She stepped forward, her chin held high.

"We mean no harm," she said, her voice steady. "We only seek to uncover the truth of this island and put an end to the curse."

The pirate's eyes narrowed, and he raised a bony finger, pointing towards a dark cave at the edge of the clearing.

"In that cave lies the source of the curse," he said. "But be warned, only the bravest and most pure of heart can hope to vanquish it."

With that, the ghost vanished into thin air, leaving the friends alone in the clearing. Sarah turned to her companions, her eyes shining with determination.

"We must go to the cave and confront whatever evil lies within," she said, her voice ringing with authority.



The friends nodded in agreement, their hearts filled with a mix of fear and excitement. Together, they made their way to the cave, their footsteps echoing off the walls of the rocky passageway.

As they entered the cave, a cold breeze blew through the air, chilling them to the bone. The walls were lined with eerie symbols and strange carvings, and the sound of dripping water echoed throughout the chamber.

Suddenly, they heard a low growling coming from the darkness ahead. They stopped in their tracks, their hearts pounding with fear. And then, out of the shadows emerged a monstrous beast, its eyes glowing with hunger.

“We must stand together and face this creature as one,” Sarah said, her voice unwavering.

The friends banded together, their hearts united in bravery and purity. They fought the beast with all their might, using their wits and courage to outsmart it. They devised clever strategies, setting traps, using narrow passageways to their advantage, and hiding in concealed areas.

In the end, the monstrous beast became trapped in a narrow passage, unable to escape. Tyler, the bravest of them all, stepped forward, clutching his sharp

dagger. With a leap, he pounced on the beast, aiming a deadly blow at its head. A blinding flash of light erupted as the beast’s soul was finally released.

Their victory was complete. The ancient curse that had plagued the island was lifted, and peace returned to the land. Overjoyed, they prepared to depart, but a surprising discovery awaited them. A gigantic chest, overflowing with precious jewels over 5,000 years old, lay before them. Stunned and speechless, they gazed upon the treasure.

As they made their way back to the boat, the friends knew that they had forged an unbreakable bond. They had faced their fears and conquered the unknown, emerging stronger and braver than before. They embraced each other, their hearts filled with joy and gratitude.

As they sailed away from the island, the friends decided to donate the treasure to charity, ensuring that its benefits would be shared by all.

And as they sailed away from the cursed island, a single star twinkled in the sky above—a silent witness to their incredible journey and the power of friendship and courage in the face of darkness.



CONNECTION

— by Dr. Esha Sinha —

*The kite ascends, its string held tight,
Bound by a bond of fragile might.
One without the other is none,
Together, they soar beneath the sun.*

*The budding flower, in gentle grace,
Thanks the tree for its nurturing embrace:
“My bloom, my life, I owe to thee—
Our connection roots and nourishes me.”*

*The setting sun spreads colors wide,
Painting the sky with evening’s pride.
Its hues entwine with twilight’s glow,
A bond eternal, as day lets go.*

*Lyrics and melody, when they align,
Craft a song that stands the test of time.
A harmony born of their connection,
Touching hearts with deep affection.*

*The mother and child, a sacred thread,
Love so pure, with nothing unsaid.
In all creation, vast and rare,
No bond like theirs can compare.*

*Everywhere I turn, near or far,
Connections glimmer like guiding stars.
In this universe, rich and fair,
It’s the threads of connection that shine everywhere.*

সংযোগ

ফুরফুরিয়ে উড়ছে ঘুড়ি
লাটাই আরেক হাতে
ঘুড়ির সঙ্গে সুতোর বাঁধন
সংযোগ সেই সাথে
কোমল কুঁড়ি বৃন্ত মূলে
বলছে মৃদু ভাষে
আমার হাসি তোমার ডালের
সংযোগে প্রকাশে
আকাশ পানে দেখি চেয়ে
সূর্যি নামে পাটে
যাবার বেলায় রঙের খেলায়
সন্ধ্যে নামে বাটে
সুরের সাথে কথার মিলে
গানের মূর্ছনাতে
মন কে দোলায় দুঃখ ভোলায়
সংযোগেরই সাথে
শিশুর সাথে মায়ের খেলা
ভালোবাসার ডোরে
তোমার প্রেমের প্রতিচ্ছবি
জাগলো যে অন্তরে
সুদূর চরাচরে আমি
যেদিক পানে চাই
সংযোগের ই নানান ছবি
হেরিনু সদাই

এষা সিনহা

THE AMAZING BENEFITS OF YOGA: A PATH TO WELL-BEING

PHYSICAL BENEFITS

IMPROVED HEALTH & STRENGTH



INCREASED
FLEXIBILITY

STRENGTHENED
MUSCLES

BETTER POSTURE
& BACK PAIN

BETTER POSTURE
& ALIGNMENT

ENERGY
LEVELS

MENTAL & EMOTIONAL BENEFITS

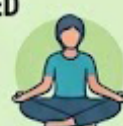
CALMER MIND & FOCUS



REDUCED
STRESS
& ANXIETY



ENHANCED
MOOD &
ABILITY



ENHANCED
MOOD &
POSITIVITY



IMPROVED
CONCENTRATION
& CLARITY



BETTER
SLEEP
QUALITY

CULTIVATES
MINDFULNESS

OVERALL WELLNESS

ENHANCED BODY & MIND



STRONGER
IMMUNE SYSTEM



LOWERED
BLOOD PRESSURE



REGULATED
METABOLISM



DEEPER
BREATHING



DETOXIFICATION

SPIRITUAL & LIFE BENEFITS

INNER PEACE & GROWTH



SELF-
AWARENESS



CONNECTEDNESS
TO SELF



STRESS
RESILIENCE



INNER CALM
& BALANCE



ENHANCED
WELL-BEING

BALANCING THE “INNER ENVIRONMENT”

— by Tanusree Dey Paul —

The word Yoga is derived from the Sanskrit root Yuj, which means the union of one's will with the will of God. It simply denotes that Yoga is a technique by which the restless, dissipated mind is calmed.



Yoga is also known as the science of purification, cleansing the body internally. Most of us know that Yoga has many health advantages. So, we do our best to find time to exercise, keep fit, build strength, socialize, or just release stress.

However, when work gets in the way, exercising is often the last thing on our minds, especially if we have to beat the traffic to get to the fitness center or yoga studio, which can be quite demotivating. But we can motivate ourselves to maintain the practice by setting a routine, picking a specific time each day, setting realistic goals, trying new yoga poses, and practicing with a group. Besides improving flexibility and strength, Yoga is known to help in managing not only stress but also depression, developing flexible joints and muscles, improving concentration, and keeping diseases at bay. Some diseases that can be cured by yoga are arthritis, asthma, diabetes, heart disease, liver problems, lower back pain, scoliosis, sinus issues, migraines, hypertension, polycystic ovary syndrome, and digestive disorders. Move forward steadily no matter how slow your progress.

Relaxation: Shavasana is the most natural way of re-energizing the body and mind. Shavasana allows us to recover from any physical stress brought on from previous yoga postures. It gives the body a chance

to rejuvenate. When the body is completely relaxed, the breath naturally slows down. By focusing on this breath, we can calm the mind, soothe the nerves, and purify ourselves of sensory distractions. Even modern science acknowledges that Shavasana reduces anxiety and squashes stress. Shavasana can be practiced after a hard day's work, prior to sleeping, and at any time that the body or mind is tired. It is absolutely essential to incorporate it as part of our yoga asana practice.

Yoga isn't merely physical exercise; indeed, it's a holistic approach to the body, mind, and spirit. It continues to guide individuals towards a healthier, more fulfilling life amidst chaos.



Get hooked on healthy eating

— by Tanusree Dey Paul —

A healthy lifestyle is a way of living that reduces the risk of serious illness. While we can't prevent all diseases, many can be avoided by adopting certain behaviors, with food playing a key role. A healthy diet involves eating a variety of foods in the right proportions and maintaining a healthy body weight. Eating healthy snacks can prevent excessive hunger, helping you avoid overeating and poor food choices.



Recipe: Oatmeal Bread

Ingredients:

- Oat flakes
- A pinch of salt
- 2 teaspoons baking soda
- 4 teaspoons mixed seeds
- 400ml yogurt
- 2 eggs
- 2 teaspoons apple cider vinegar
- Raisins



Procedures:

1. Mix all ingredients and preheat the oven to 180C.
2. Combine salt, baking soda, oat flakes, and mixed seeds in a bowl.
3. In a separate bowl, whisk eggs, apple cider vinegar, and yogurt. Combine wet and dry ingredients, mixing well.
4. Grease a 20x10 cm baking pan and pour in the batter, leveling it out. Sprinkle with dry roasted pumpkin seeds, flax seeds, and white sesame seeds.
5. Bake for 30-35 minutes, checking doneness with a toothpick.
6. Once baked, let it cool before slicing. Add avocado, peanut butter, or toppings of choice. Enjoy with coffee or tea for a healthy breakfast.





Pulin Bihari Paul - My Dad

— by Nomita Paul Balasingam —

Pulin Bihari Paul was born on November 2, 1893, as the youngest of five boys to Mr. and Mrs. Chandra Kishore Pal/Paul in Satmura, a village in the district of Cumilla in East Bengal, undivided India/Bengal. He had a twin sister, the first daughter in the family, which led to him feeling neglected



as she received more attention. Despite this, growing up in a joint family with many relatives and siblings around, he developed into a stable young man with a sense of adventure and patriotism.

Sent to study medicine at the University in Mymensingh, Pulin

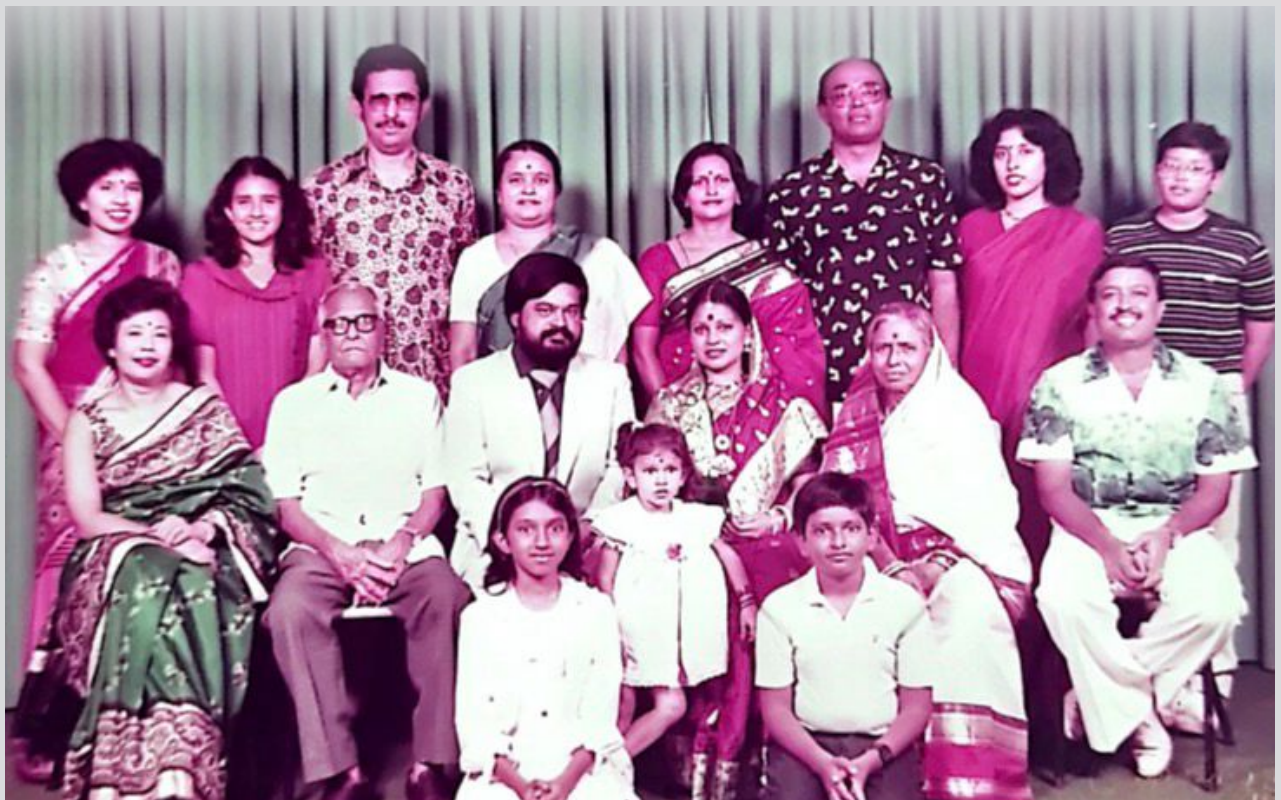
Bihari Paul became involved in the Patriotic Movement against British Rule, leading to his arrest. Due to his brothers' intervention, he was deported to Malaya instead of being sent to the Andaman Islands. He underwent cataract operations and, in his late thirties, decided to get married for companionship due to his poor eyesight.

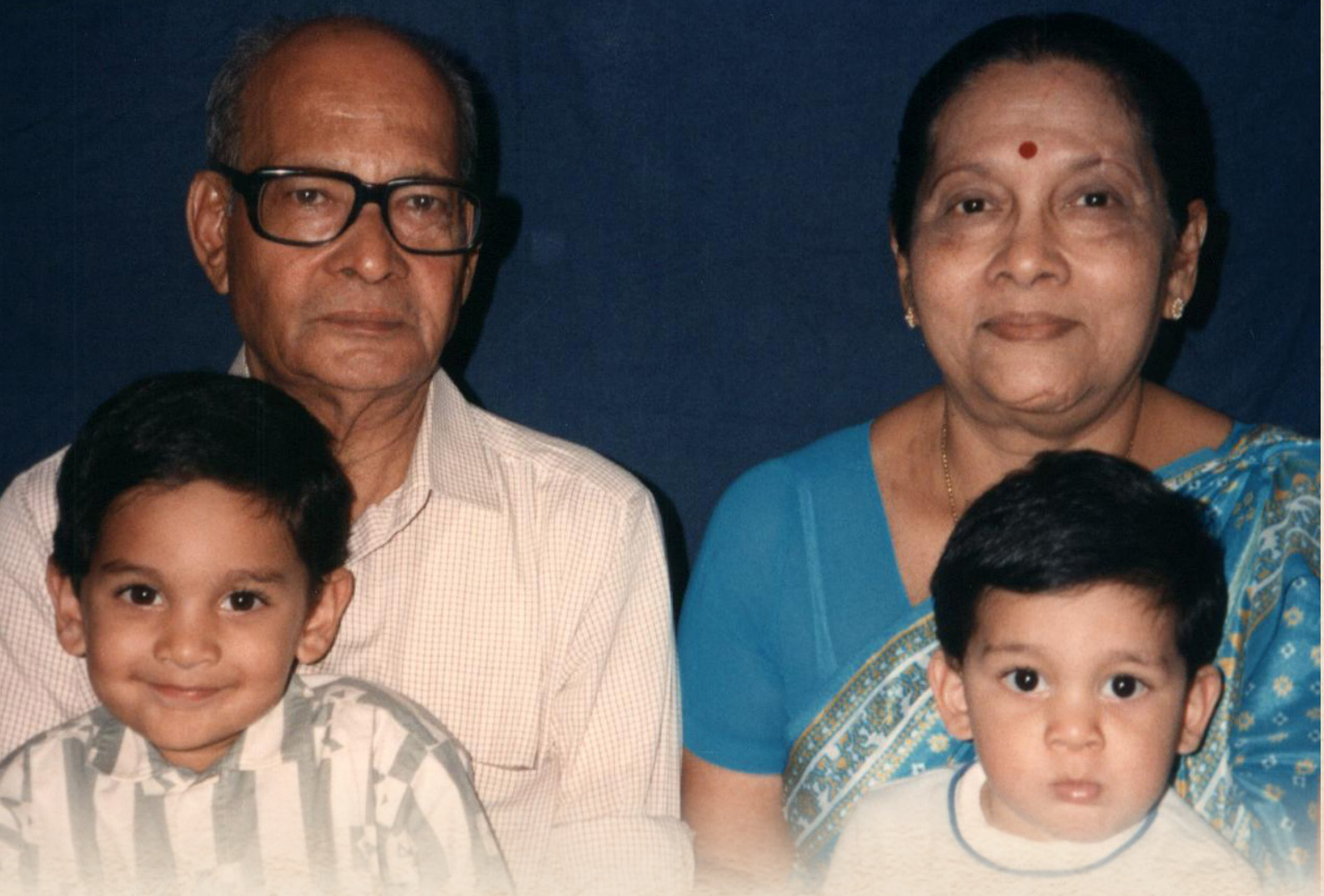
In 1935, he traveled back to Bengal for an arranged marriage with Kalpana Dhar, a 16-year-old girl from Kurighar village. Together, they had five children, four girls and a boy. Pulin Bihari Paul worked as a Hospital Assistant in the rubber estates of Malaya, providing medical care to the staff and employees. During World War II, he joined the Indian National Army (INA) under Subhas Chandra Bose's leadership, serving until the end of the war.

After returning from the war, he faced

the loss of family members, including his brother and nephew, who were involved in the freedom movement. Pulin Bihari Paul took charge of the family, ensuring their well-being and education. He emphasized the importance of education and saw all his children achieve academic success. His daughter, Dipti/Rumu, even pursued a career in classical dance and music.

Pulin Bihari Paul was an active member of the Malaysian Bengalee Association, known for his culinary skills and dedication to the community. He continued to participate in events and functions until his retirement. Despite facing challenges and tragedies, he remained a pillar of strength for his family and community. His legacy lives on through his children, grandchildren, and the memories of those who knew him.





My Dida - Late Mrs. Gayatry Roy

— by Mario C. Batres —

My Dida was magical. And I don't mean she was exceptionally genial, magnetically present, or any other way we often hear people described as magical. I mean my Dida could make miracles.

The first and only time I met her, I was six years old. I was a boy twice-removed from the motherland of West Bengal, born in the southwestern United States without easy access to the cultural touchstones that exemplify Bengali culture. I grew up feeling like



an outsider amongst my own people, a penance I still carry as a grown man. I've spent a lifetime searching for the things that make me Bengali just to come right back home and find the culture was with me all along.

See, my family loves pranks. This might not be the first characteristic that comes to mind when describing my heritage, but it's born of a deep-seated need to force a smile onto the faces of the ones we love. A people hardened by generations of pain, displacement,

and even terror, have taken the art of making each other laugh to the level of sport. When my Uncle Johor, a lifetime resident of Kuala Lumpur, told my mother to pick up a package from him sixteen-thousand miles away in Texas, none of us could be ready for when that package turned out to be him, standing behind a rolling camera, filming our mix of shock and joy. My mother was so dumbstruck by the surprise she jumped from her car without putting the brake on, leaving the vehicle rolling as she cleared two roadways to embrace him. What was going to be a day of errands turned into a little brother's homecoming.

"Can I stay?" he asked with a goofy grin.

"Are you stupid?" was my mother's reply.

And so it was fitting that the first time I was to set foot in Kuala Lumpur and see my grandparents' home for the first time, it was unannounced and under the cover of sworn secrecy. It was a warm and deeply humid summer's night. My mother, three jetlagged young children in tow, met her brother at KLIA long after civilized hours, threw us into the back of a car, and breathed the air of her childhood for the first time in over a decade.

We drove an hour all the way back to my Dida's and Dadu's house. Well, almost all the way - my uncle parked a block up the street and instructed me to take my siblings unaccompanied

to the door of the humble house and wake up the elderly inhabitants.

"I told them I was out for a nightcap," I remember him saying. "They have no idea you're in the country."

And so, possessing neither the language nor cultural awareness of what the implication of three strange children disturbing the sleep of venerated elders might hold, I took the hands of my siblings, walked up to the door and knocked. My Dadu answered first.

"What do you want?" he spoke in Bengali. He stared down at us, unrecognizing. In a world before video calls and email, he had only ever seen his grandchildren through dated photos sent by post. Not understanding him, we stood silent.

"What is it? It's late. Why are you here?" He continued in Bengali. He was getting annoyed, one hand holding up his sarong, the other bracing the door frame, supporting his sleepy legs. Someone stirred behind him. He turned.

"Hey, come here! There's three weird kids outside, I don't know what they want," he called.

And she appeared.

Unlike my Dadu, she recognized us instantly.

"Lovey?" she said, addressing me by a pet name reserved exclusively for family. She beamed at us. If possible,

the night got warmer with her smile.

"Let them in!" she shouted at her confused husband. "These are our grandkids!"

Realization set in for all of us. Even if it was our first time there, we were home.

The rest of that summer is just snapshots of memories. I remember that first night she made scrambled eggs because "of course, it's breakfast time for you in the US right now." I remember watching in awe as she and my uncles haggled with vendors in Petaling Jaya for bootleg Power Ranger toys, three languages flowing simultaneously and effortlessly in something between a linguistic duel and a dance. I remember watching the blend of Malay, Western, and South Asian television in their living room. And most of all, I remember her food.

The smells are smells I can still conjure up in my mind - things that I sometimes get a reminiscent whiff of that send me back to that summer. Pantuas and rosogollas, crab and goat curries, spiced yogurt, dhals, and things my Western tongue may never pronounce correctly. She spared no effort. We dined like royals. For someone who had no idea she would be hosting extra houseguests for a

About the author

Mario C. Batres is the grandson of Late Mr. P. C. Roy and Late Mrs. Gayatry Roy. He is the nephew of Past President, Mr. Prodeep K. Roy and Hon. Secretary Mr. Pulok K. Roy.

Mario is an alumnus of Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois, and currently resides in Los Angeles, CA.

full summer, she was remarkably prepared. She conjured delicacies from thin air, and, in a single season, solidified in my mind what 'home' would forever taste like.

We had arrived on the cusp of the rainy season and the summer, which meant often during our stay the skies opened up

in downpours. One such day we sat, three bored kids used to Nintendos and comic books with nothing to do. Dida took her daily newspaper and taught us to fold boats. We took our creations and floated them down the street gutters, seeing who might make it the farthest. "Only boring people get bored," she said, echoing words I'd heard my mother say when I was being particularly childish. There was never an excuse to lay discontent around them. My Dida was born of immense resilience - and this shone in her ability to make every moment memorable.

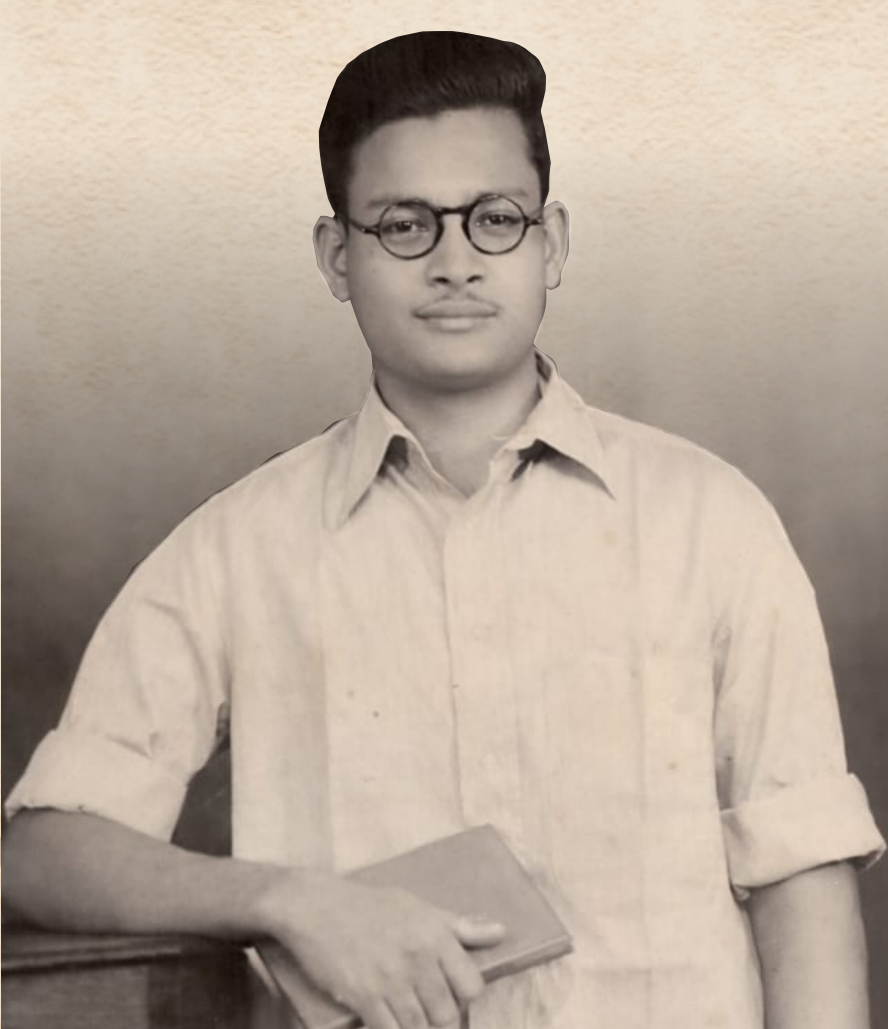
I remember another night the lights went out. The sky was blackened with rain clouds while thunder shook the trees. My brother and I lay on makeshift cots in the living room, a rotating fan panning over us. It was then that my Dida introduced me to my favorite historied tradition of all: storytelling.

She kept us up through the night recounting the stories of Rama rescuing Sita from Ravana, of how Ganesha came to have his elephant-head, and other stories of giant serpents, vicious tigers and mysterious jungles. We were enraptured, terrified, and never satisfied with just one. She could spark light in the night with a tale equally capable of wringing tears as it was for doubling you over in laughter.

Four years later she died. In a cruel twist of irony, she died while I was on a flight to come see her for a second time. I stepped onto the plane ready to relive that summer. I stepped off the plane into funeral preparations.

“Just believe,” were her final words to my mother, now emblazoned on my forearm. Whether she meant believe in yourself, the world, or faith at large, I’ll never really know. I like to think she meant it all. There’s beauty in ambiguity.

As I navigate the still-confusing world of my own cultural identity, I’ve learned at least three things that have come to mean so much to me in my journey back to my roots. Firstly, I’ll never miss an opportunity to make my family smile, no matter the cost. I’ll forever tell our stories with the hope that the next generation can do the same. Finally, and most importantly, I will always believe.



Mr Salil Kumar Chakravarti

A Short Biography of My Dadu

— by Eshan Nandan Roy —

*(Contributions from my Mashis and
Mama: Basanti, Aroti, Malati and Ashok)*



My Dadu, Salil Kumar Chakravarti (SK Chakravarti), was also fondly called Joguda within the Bengali community, or Paki (or T) a nickname given by my Didima, Manoramam.

Dadu was the eldest son of a Brahmin couple - Kogendranath and Jibon Tara Chakravarti. He was born in Jarang Padang settlement in Negeri Sembilan on 24th July 1928. At that time, my



boro Dadu (my great grandfather) was the mandor / supervisor in the Guthrie estate there. When Dadu was about 7 or 8 years old his parents decided to settle in Sridharapur, Jessore district, Bengal. Although my Dadu was from the Zamindari (Jomindar) class and a Brahmin, he was not a keen believer in the various norms that stemmed from the caste system. Being a very practical and open-minded person, he instead broke many caste rules and mingled freely with people of all castes.

Bangabasi College, Kolkata, (founded in 1887) was where Dadu studied at college level. Sometime around 1946, as a college student, my Dadu participated in the Civil Disobedience Movement. This was a significant initiative by his college to rid India of its colonial masters (the British). Early August 1947 witnessed the partition and creation of India and Pakistan. The borders of Bangladesh were established due to this separation. Terrifying

outbreaks of sectarian violence, upheaval and rapes occurred in the district in which Dadu and his family were residing. Fearing for their lives and sisters' protection, my Dadu and his family fled at midnight one day by train. Leaving his ancestral land forever, they headed for a safer place - Ichapur, West Bengal. During that same period my boro Dadu was stuck in Malaya. The complications that arose after the Japanese Occupation (1946) and the unstable political scenario made it difficult for him to be with his family during those crucial times.

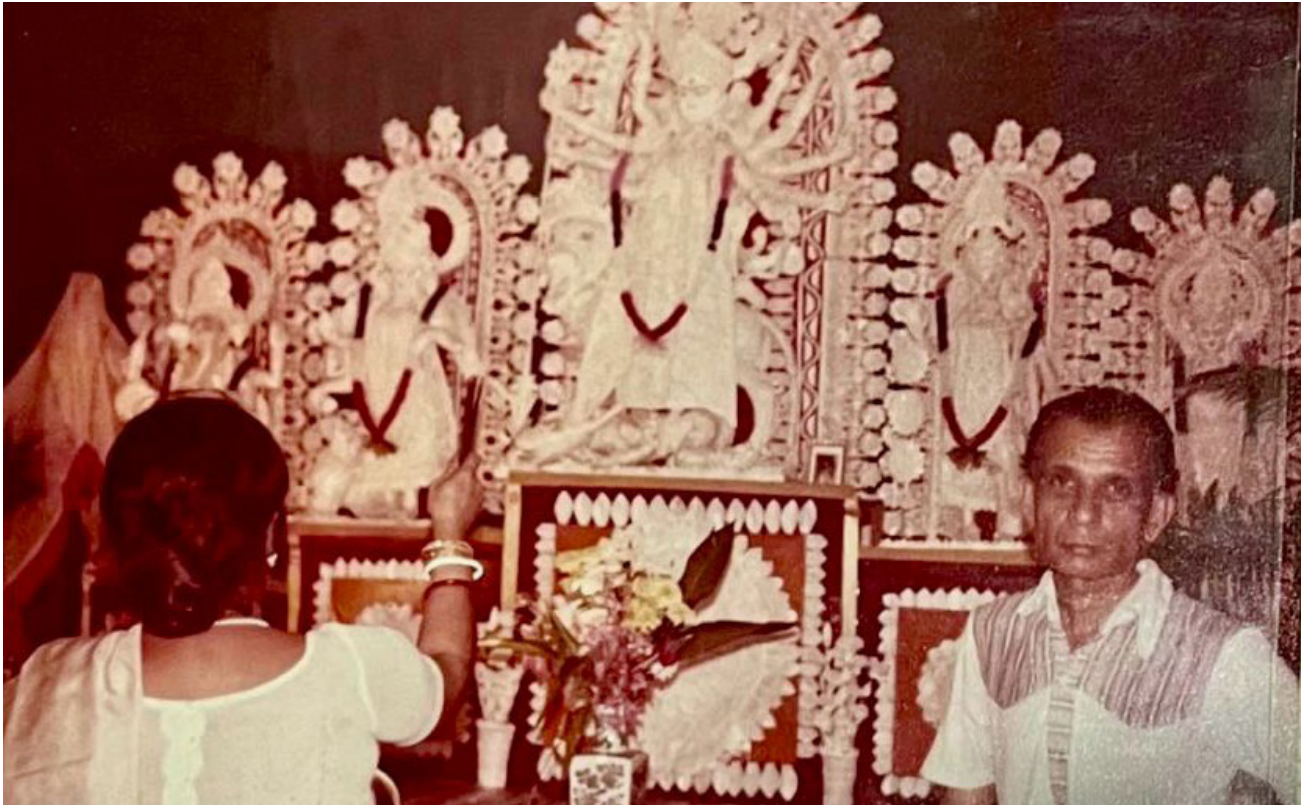
In 1951, Dadu and his brother Sushil Chakraborty were requested to return to Jarang Padang, Malaya to assist his father run their family-owned grocery shop. The mundane chores of working on the estate and looking after BoroDadu's cows and goats bored my Dadu. With his sights towards Singapore, and due to better job opportunities there, Dadu left Negeri Sembilan. In 1954, Dadu started work for the Singapore Immigration. He was 26 years old.

In Singapore, Dadu became acquainted with an elderly Bengali lawyer, Mr Mitra. With Mr. Mitra's encouragement, he began studying law on a part-time basis at the then University of Malaya in Singapore. Unfortunately, he could not pursue into his third-year due to work, financial constraints and his father wanting him to get married.

On January 17th 1959, Dadu tied the knot with my Didima, Manoramar DC Bhatachaje. The wedding took place in my boroma's (Didima's mother) residence. The wedding was done on a grand scale with home-cooked food and much gaiety. Dadu was good at letter-writing and thus wrote many love letters to my Didima. Some of these letters have still been kept as family treasures. Botanical Gardens or the Polar Cafe was their favourite jaunt during courtship.

In early 1964, Dadu was part of the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC, Singapore branch). He was part of the organising committee for various sporting events that encouraged Indian youths to participate.





In November 1970, during the catastrophic Bhola cyclone that hit Bangladesh killing almost 500,000 people, my Dadu volunteered his services. He acted as a Bengali translator for The Singapore Armed Forces Medical Mission. On 1 December, he travelled with the Singapore Mission to assist in the cyclone relief effort.

The first Durga Pujo was the brainchild of my Dadu. He was then the Honorary Secretary of the Bengali Association Singapore (BAS). Together with Mihir Chakraborty, they collaborated to celebrate Durga Pujo at Singapore in 1978. A Durga Pujo Committee was also set up. In 1979, the Durga Protima and the other deities were flown in free of charge by Air India from Kolkata.

Dadu was the main priest for Durga Pujo which was then held in Perumal Temple for 3 years followed by 2 years in Kamala Club. Besides Durga Pujo, Dadu also did Saraswati pujos. During those busy pujo times, my Dadu and Didima would buy the pujo items in Little India and pack them carefully into a blue rattan basket. They worked with full commitment ensuring the pujo went on smoothly. The credit also goes to the dedicated Durga Pujo Committee and Bengali Association members who worked tirelessly.

Dadu always kept himself busy. He was a frequent contributor to the Straits Times, 'Letter to the Editor' page. His views were always highly appreciated and received good responses from the various

Government Ministries. He joined the Ang Mo Kio Resident Committee in 1981. He started off as an RC secretary and then moved up to becoming a chairman by popular vote. Mr. Lau Ping Sum, Member of Parliament for Yio Chu Kang even suggested that my Dadu become NCMP (Non-Constituency Member of Parliament). My Dadu declined as he wanted to have more family time with his grandchildren. When Dadu retired in 1989, from the government service, he became a free-lance Bangladeshi Interpreter. He worked up to the age of 79. Dadu also took a breather after he retired and went travelling with my Didima to Europe, the USA and India.

Dadu being a well-read man, always had a lot of great stories to share with his grandchildren. He never missed his Straits Times newspapers and always waited eagerly every morning for the delivery man. With his garam sweet-scented chai, Dadu read almost every page fervently. The other favourite periodical Dadu subscribed to was India Today and the weekly Tabla newspaper. Playing football during the weekends was his favourite pastime. When we grandchildren visited Dadu during the school holidays, we would head off to the Ceylon Sports Club to play football. It was a game full of laughter and fun.

Black Label was a 'thirst quencher' every evening for Dadu. At 7:30pm, Dadu would pour himself a glass or

two. It was at that time, we got to enjoy his melodious voice. While enjoying his drink, he would talk about his childhood, politics and even crack jokes to amuse my Didima. Another of his favourite times was to listen to the evergreen Bengali and Hindi songs - S. D. Burman, Hemanta Mukherjee, Mohammed Rafi, Lata Mangeshkar to name a few of his favourites.

As Dadu started becoming weaker, he was unable to read much due to his failing eyesight. He would instead just touch the covers of the books or the newspapers. He became more silent. Even though he was unsteady in walking, he would take short walks in the afternoon by himself. Combing his hair, wearing his soft cotton shirt, putting on his wristwatch were what he did before going for his walk.

Dadu passed on at the age of 94 on 21st February 2023. I really miss my Dadu. With his intelligence, humorous self and his 'ready-to-help' attitude, he treated everyone with equal respect. There was so much I learnt from him - his quiet self, the advice and care he gave to his eight grandchildren, so thoughtfully and selflessly. Dadu has motivated me to achieve my goals, no matter how difficult it may be. His family and friends still have fond memories of him as he touched so many of us with his kindness. I am so blessed to have such a wonderful Dadu.

“Tagore for All Malaysians” A Clarion Call to Action

— by Dr. Lalita Sinha —



Rabindranath Tagore, the first Asian to win the Nobel Prize in Literature, was a global figure whose ideas on humanity, justice, nature, and education remain relevant today. In the 1920s, his visit to Malaya became a part of the nation’s history. A new project aims to use his legacy to strengthen Malaysia’s shared future, particularly among the youth of our third and fourth generation Malaysian Bengalis. This initiative seeks to build on the universal themes in Tagore’s work that transcend ethnicity and religion.

Tagore’s work has inspired Malaysian scholars and artists who see connections between his song-poems and traditional Malay sung poetry. His ideas on humanism and universalism have been studied alongside those of Malaysia’s National Laureate, A. Samad Said, as a way to promote national unity. The project also highlights a shared appreciation for Tagore’s works among Malaysian leaders, including the Prime Minister and the Governor of Penang.

The main goal is to create a commemorative centenary volume

and organize cultural activities to mark 100 years since Tagore’s visit to Malaya in August 1927. It was during this visit, while waiting at Penang harbor, that he composed one of his most famous Rabindra Sangeet, “Kharo Bayu Boi Bege.” The centenary offers an opportunity for all Malaysians to reflect on their history of global connections. The project, which includes a crowdfunding campaign, will deliver a book of essays, poetry, and bilingual translations of Tagore’s works in English and Malay. It will also support cultural activities and skills workshops.

This initiative is a nation-building movement that aims to create a new model for how diverse communities can celebrate their unique heritage. It’s a response to the risk of the Bengali language and culture fading away in Malaysia, a loss that would weaken the country’s national identity. The project aims to:

- Enrich the national narrative: By exploring the historical moment when a Nobel Laureate influenced local thinkers.

- Build cultural bridges: By using Tagore’s universal themes as a platform for collaboration among all Malaysians.
- Preserve heritage: By creating a successful template that other Malaysian communities can adapt.
- Reclaim Penang’s history: By restoring its reputation as a translation hub in the 1930s.

The two-year project will go beyond the traditional activities of talks and books to create tangible opportunities. The crowdfunding initiative will support:

- Multicultural arts workshops: These sessions will bring artists from different backgrounds together to create hybrid works, such as blending the rhythm of the *kompang* with a Tagore song.
- Literary translation incubators: Workshops will train young Malaysian translators in English and Malay, with the potential to expand to other languages like Kadazandusun, Chinese, and Tamil.
- Instructive content: Educational materials will be created to introduce students to this part of Malaysian history, literature, and arts.
- Accessible multimedia content: Bilingual documentaries, podcasts, and articles will make this story available to everyone.

Here is a small sample of our translation efforts from
“The Postmaster”:

নূতন পোস্টমাস্টার আসিল। তাহাকে সমস্ত চার্জ বুঝাইয়া দিয়া পুরাতন পোস্টমাস্টার গমনোন্মুখ হইলেন। যাইবার সময় রতনকে ডাকিয়া বলিলেন, “রতন, তোকে আমি কখনো কিছু দিতে পারি নি। আজ যাবার সময় তোকে কিছু দিয়ে গেলুম, এতে তোর দিনকয়েক চলবে।” কিছু পথখরচা বাদে তাঁহার বেতনের যত টাকা পাইয়াছিলেন পকেট হইতে বাহির করিলেন। তখন রতন ধলায় পড়িয়া তাঁহার পা জড়াইয়া ধরিয়া কহিল, “দাদাবাবু, তোমার দুটি পায়ে পড়ি, তোমার দুটি পায়ে পড়ি, আমাকে কিছু দিতে হবে না; তোমার দুটি পায়ে পড়ি, আমার জন্যে কাউকে কিছু ভারতে হবে না”-- বলিয়া একদোড়ে সেখান হইতে পলাইয়া গেল।

ভূতপূর্ব পোস্টমাস্টার নিম্বাস ফেলিয়া হাতে কার্পেটের ব্যাগ বুলাইয়া, কাঁধে ছাতা লইয়া, মুটের মাথায় নীল ও শ্বেত রেখায় চিত্রিত টিনের পের্টরা তুলিয়া ধীরে ধীরে নৌকাভিমুখে চলিলেন।

(Original in Bengali, Tagore, 1891)

“Ratan, my dear,” he began, “I never gave you anything. But let me offer you this small token. Keep it, it should help you for a while.”

From his pocket he drew out his month’s salary, keeping a bare minimum for his travel expenses. Ratan, stunned, flung herself in the dust clutching at his feet:

“O Dadababu!” she murmured tearfully, “Please, I beg of you! There’s no need! Please! I don’t want anything! No, no, there is no need for anyone to take care of me.”

(audio recording in Bengali to English, Sinha, 2025)

“Ratan yang kuhargai,” dia memulakan bicara, “Sebelum ini aku tak pernah memberi apa-apa kepadamu. Izinkan aku hadiahkan kepadamu sedikit cenderahati. Simpanlah, mungkin dapat membantumu untuk beberapa waktu.”

Dari poketnya dia mengeluarkan gaji bulanannya, hanya mengambil sejumlah kecil untuk perbelanjaan perjalanannya. Tersentak kaget, Ratan melemparkan dirinya ke tanah berdebu, lalu berpaut pada kaki lelaki itu:

(Translation in Malay, Aida Harun, 2025)

“Oh Dadababu!” rintihnya dengan linangan air mata, “Tolonglah, saya merayu! Tidak perlu saya diberikan apa-apa! Tolonglah! Saya tidak mahukan simpati! Tidak, tidak, tidak perlu untuk sesiapa pun menjaga saya.”

(English to Malay, Aida, 2025)

This project is a call to action for all Malaysians to invest in a living part of their collective identity. By supporting this initiative, whether by pre-ordering the centenary book

or contributing to the campaign, people are helping to ensure that every story, language, and tradition adds value to the nation. The goal is for the echoes of Tagore’s visit to continue inspiring a more connected and culturally rich Malaysia for future generations.

Join us! Together we can make this dream a reality! Contact Lalita Sinha today at:

+6 0142456104 (Mobile/WhatsApp)
or lilakshatriya@gmail.com (email)

“1927: Tradition & Modernity”

Hu Yew Seah Building, Penang (left) for which Tagore laid the foundation stone on his visit to Penang in 1927, and a mural of Tagore on the Hu Yew Seah Chinese School, Penang (right). In the background is the iconic Komtar Tower, Penang. Photo credit: Lalita Sinha, July 13, 2025



Photo 2

“2027 Centenary Project”

Multiethnic participants and panel presenters at a public event held in Brickfields, Kuala Lumpur, organized by Uthaya Sankar SB, founder of Kavyan (Sasterawan Kaum India), on July 27, 2025, to introduce the Tagore project.

Photo credit: Uthaya Sankar SB, July 27, 2025.



HOUSE FIRES

— by Dr. Lalita Sinha —

*L*ila remembered the first fire from when she was seven. A hungry, wild dance, leaping into the night sky from a sacred pyre in the sprawling grounds of Bengal House. Her Baba, a man who expressed his love through rules and reminders to speak only in Bangla at home, loosened his usual insistence. The occasion was the all-night Kali Puja - worship of the Great Mother, graveyard dancer, skull-wearer, scimitar bearer. To young Lila, She was both awesome and awful.

Lila's Bengali parents had arrived in Malaya in the 1930s, bringing a Calcutta-inflected Bengali, tiffin-carrier nostalgia, and a need to preserve that which, in a couple of generations, would begin to slide

into oblivion. Their walls were lined with books and magazines in Bengali wrapped in brown paper, their prayer room emitted dhoop smoke and shonkho bajano, their Ramakrishna bhajans alternated with Rabindra Sangeet, and their kitchens produced patla jhols and watery dals. Her ma lived as though suspended between worlds, her eyes always elsewhere, on some remembered rice field in Bardhoman.

Naming and addressing were quite unique. Growing up, Lila thought the 'S' in Baba's initials stood for "Sunchho." Ma never called him by name and when pushed, would refer to him as "Omuk babu." All nine of us had daak naam and good names.



Off and on, Ma would tell Baba, "Sunchho. Cholo na ekbar deshe ghure aashi." For Lila, this - here - was desh! Life was a profusion of seasons and celebrations: durian, rambutan, and mangosteen, or Raya Haji, Hungry Ghost and Bhoot Chaturdoshi in succession. Then there were their Irish "Sisters," the nuns in colonial convent schools, and sari blouses with puffed sleeves from Ma's Singer sewing machine. Lila knew how to pleat a sari by her teens and curse in Hokkien by early adulthood. Throughout Baba's government service, the family moved many times on his postings, each time sharing family and food on a daily basis with neighbours like Auntie Mariam and Nyonya Chong. It would be a long time before Lila understood the notion of "others."

She became fixated on how fire affects human life, forming a sequence in her mind: sacred fires, funeral pyres, kitchen stoves, smouldering silences, ashes of relationships. They marked life in a way calendars do not.

When the flames of her ma's death arrived, Lila could make no sense of it. It was like a bolt of lightning, just when she felt life was at a high point. Pregnant with her first child, career on track, and materially stable, the loss fanned a burning anger at the unfairness, held lifelong in secret places of her heart.

Lila married a Malaysian Tamil, the

son of her father's best friend. Years went by. Children came along. At first, the strife felt like small things. Food. Language. Music. Especially food. The Bangla cooking was mild, apologetic almost, whereas the Tamil was spicy, assertive, claiming a rightful place among "others" in Malaysia.

"Why your curry so sad, ah?" her husband asked half-jokingly. He habitually called her sorshe batta ilish "cockroach curry", and magur mach, "hagur mach." At least he learnt some words, she had to give him that!

Her daughter once asked: "Ma, why lah, Bengali dal so watery?" Lila wanted to say: this is the texture of survival, what happens when you try to keep an identity alive on expired spices. Like her own Bengali-ness, there was just too little to keep the flame stoked.

One of her trips to Kolkata with her adult children was an eye-opener. She hoped they would feel something. They all got violently sick. Her daughter pronounced it "a stomach upset of death." Lila harboured a deep resentment at her brown, bilingual, and betraying body. Her well-travelled cousin bhai laughed, "You 'Ma-loi-shiyens' are soft!" Another large relative, sprawled over a divan, declared derisively, "These people have lost their jat. They crossed the black waters." Her inherited exile was inevitable, yet she felt a visceral ache for the Malaysian self she held with

quiet pride. Language was another wound. Her Bengali had the wrong inflections, and relatives constantly corrected her, smiling indulgently. An upstart young emigrant relative at a family wedding asked, "Why do you speak like that? Are you Singaporean or something?" Lila would not dignify the comment with a response.

Her children made faces. Her Tamil in-laws smirked politely. Her siblings rolled their eyes, more resigned to the dilution of their cultural ethos than her. "Mixed marriage like that lah, as if you don't know!" Lila would retort, tartly.

Still, she persisted. She wore cotton saris throughout her teaching days, made payesh for Poila Boishakh, aloo bhaja and luchi on Sundays. She spoke of Tagore to her children long after they stopped listening, and now, to her teenage grandchildren. She tried to keep alive what her parents had carried across oceans, wondering if the black waters had swallowed memory, too. But decades later, her children would grow to love the food, surprise her with a phrase nonchalantly spoken in Bengali, listen to a Vivekananda podcast. Kali's primal pull, perhaps?

With marriage behind her and life-threatening illnesses managed, Lila settled into a quiet life. Her children and grandchildren had their own paths. She learned to make peace with solitude, even to like it. The old wooden Bengal House was long gone, renovated from wood to brick. She began thinking about fire again,

not the sacred kind, but of fire as transformation.

The final fire of cremation. She planned the logistics - clean, no fuss, no mess on the children. But where would the ashes go? Her current home felt wrong. A quiet longing surfaced, not for Bengal, but for the memory of Bengal House. The beach behind it, the sound of waves threading through rituals she had only half understood, but always felt. She wanted her ashes taken to Port Dickson, to the sea that lulled her to sleep as a child while sacred flames leapt up to Kali's dance. She wanted to dissolve into the waters where memory and myth, belonging and not, did not matter.

She played the recording of her sisters-in-law singing "Purano Shei Diner Kotha." Falsetto, with much gusto, infinitely endearing. That was one fire she had left out, the fire of hearth and family. Not always available but suffice to know it was there. She lit the stove to boil a pot of kolaiyer dal. It bubbled - slimy, yellow, stubborn - to be tempered with mustard oil, panch phoron, and hing, paired with begun bhaja. Yes, kitchen fire was a salve for the soul. Fire is not an end, she thought, but necessary for some things to begin again. It would not fix everything, but could mark special moments, leave a trail, because she had passed through.

When it was time, she would finally make peace with the awesome and the awful. She liked to think they would get on. Maybe like a house on fire.



Living Abroad With Bengali Traditions

— by Koruna Dutt Pathak —

Where does one begin to summon childhood memories of Kali Pujo at Puja Bari in Port Dickson? Mine reach back to the 1960s, when preparations started almost a month in advance. The air hummed with anticipation: lists of Pujo gifts were written and rewritten, the clatter of pots and pans and the sweet steam of rasgullas and sandesh drifted from kitchen to courtyard, and rooms were swept, repainted, and rearranged until every corner felt ceremonially new. For three glorious days the house

swelled with relatives and friends—laughter spilling into the late hours, old stories retold over endless cups of tea, strangers arriving and becoming family by sundown.

My sisters and I always knew when Kali Puja was approaching. The signs appeared long before the calendar confirmed it. The clearest sign of all was Dadu (Late Pulin Bihari Paul).

Weeks ahead of time, he would have his bags packed, ready to check into what we fondly called “Hotel Pujo

Bari.” He had his own room there — a simple single with a bed and a dresser. The window opened toward the Straits of Malacca, and during the day a gentle breeze would drift through, carrying with it the smell of salt and sea. That room felt like his command center. Dadu would arrive at least a day before everyone else, making sure the kitchen fires were ready for mass cooking. He supervised everything. The Pujo did not truly begin until he was there.

Soon after came the Didas, settling onto their bhoti to cut vegetables for the many lunches and dinners ahead. From as early as I can remember, we were aware that this was not just a festival — it was a community gathering. The food was always homemade, always simple, and always scrumptious. There was

something about food cooked in large quantities, by loving hands, that made it taste richer.

Pujo Bari was not only about prayer; it was about performance.

Everyone looked forward to the local programs. The youngsters would showcase dances, and the adults would stage Bengali dramas. Many years ago, both my father (Late T. K. Dutt) and mother (Rani Dutt) performed in those productions. Dad would rehearse his dialogues for months, pacing and projecting his voice long before the Pujo season arrived. On the few occasions my mother joined him, we had front-row seats to their practices at home. We were too young to understand the storylines, but we understood the seriousness with which Dad guided Mom — correcting her

diction, shaping her pauses, refining her delivery. I remember seeing them on stage together only once. The memory is faint, like an old photograph left too long in the sun, but I remember them side by side.

Eventually, they stepped away from acting, though never from



enjoying a good drama.

My mashi (Dipti Paul) took up the mantle of performance in her own way, choreographing dances for my sister and me — often to songs by Rabindranath Tagore. We performed on the old stage at Pujo Bari, which in my childhood memory felt enormous. It had mysterious nooks and crannies and smelled of musty curtains that were opened only during Puja season. That scent — old fabric and anticipation — still lingers in my mind.

Sports Day was another highlight of our gathering. Everyone participated. The little ones balanced eggs on spoons, racing with fierce concentration. There were 100-meter dashes and sack races for the adults.

Our grandparents sat in the shade, cheering loudly and instructing us to run faster, their voices full of laughter rather than pressure. It was a time when everyone felt like family — not just related by blood, but by shared ritual and joy.

Kali Pujo itself began late at night. Dedicated to the goddess Kali, the rituals stretched into the early hours. As children, we were encouraged to stay and observe the proceedings, though more often than not we drifted off to sleep before it concluded. My mother and grandmother were deeply involved in the rituals and would emerge the next morning visibly exhausted, their devotion etched across their faces.

When we were very



young, my father would book the government bungalows near Pujo Bari. After the night-long Puja, everyone would gather at the nearby beach for the immersion. The morning air would feel different — heavy with both completion and quiet reflection. The sea would receive the deity, and with that act, the festival would gently close its circle.

Looking back, Pujo Bari was never just a place. It was a season of belonging. A rhythm we returned to year after year. Everyone had a role — the supervisors, the cooks, the performers, the runners, the worshippers, the watchers.

And in that shared rhythm, we learned what community truly meant.

Leaving that world to build a home far from family meant digging deep to find footing in new communities. My first taste of communal life in the U.S. was Indiana, where a handful of Bengali families gathered with warm smiles and open doors. Our circle overlapped with Gujarati and South Indian neighbors: Holi picnics stained our clothes with color, Diwali lights braided through neighborhood lawns, and potlucks turned cultural recipes into shared memories. Song, dance, and prayer anchored those meetings—the rituals of our childhood quietly

stitched into our American days so the children could inherit them.

When I moved to Tampa, Florida, I found a burgeoning Bengali presence that still relied on Orlando for many festivities. It quickly became clear we needed our own center, and in 2003 I helped found Soikot Tampa Bay. That moment felt like handing my childhood rituals a new home: choreographed bhog offerings, the smell of mustard oil and incense at pujas, the nervous

but proud first-generation performances by youngsters. Soikot grew—membership, events, and spirit—transforming into a living bridge between generations.

My community ties expanded beyond Bengal. I joined the Florida Oriya community in Tampa, where traditions intermingle—pithe and holi sweets are shared without regard to origin; clay lamps, vibrant saris, and communal songs blur regional lines. Navaratri, Durga Puja, and Diwali here are celebratory spectacles: Navratri Garba nights pulse with young dancers in swirling lehengas and mirrored cholis, tickets snapped up weeks ahead. Diwali arrives with puja, fragrant dinners, and fireworks that sprinkle the night like tiny, reverent stars. The Gujarati Samaj's

India Fest each November draws some 10,000 visitors in a single day—stalls selling chaat and jalebi, sarees and home decorations, classical music and dance competitions on stage, and kids chasing sparklers—making it Tampa’s largest Indian mela. Watching neighbors unfamiliar with our roots join in—their curiosity turning into delight—has been profoundly moving. Distance from home makes holidays

ache with longing, but a vibrant, thriving community has allowed me to preserve the lessons of my parents and grandparents. It’s given me a place to celebrate, to teach, and to let our children learn through taste, rhythm, and ritual. Passing these traditions on—and owning them in our new soil—keeps the spirit of Pujo alive, as bright and welcoming as the lamps that greet us each year.



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