DURGA PUJA 2008

BAGH, Inc.

www.baghonline.org
Taste of India welcomes you to taste our exotic flavors of authentic Indian cuisine, with a few delicacies from North and South India. The exotic flavors are those special spices exported from India. India’s cuisine is a combination of subtle tastes where the flavors are as varied as India’s climate and as exotic as India’s people.

Fragrant, zesty, and warm spices India are delicately blended to create the dishes we present to you. Ingredients are used to tempt your appetite. Each dish boasts its own distinctive flavor and aroma thanks to the fresh spices that are prepared every day. The blending and preparation of fresh spices is an exacting, centuries old craft indispensable to Indian cuisine.

The menu at Taste of India includes all the favorites:

- Chicken, Lamb and Shrimp Curries in every degree of spiciness
- Delicious meats and seafood roasted in the Tandoori oven
- Lamb, Chicken and Shrimp
- A variety of freshly baked Indian breads

We hope to see you here with us soon...
Durga Puja Program

Friday, October 10

Pratima Installation and Decoration 6:00 PM

Saturday, October 11

Morning Schedule 9:00 AM

Pratima Sthapan, Shasthi, Saptami, Ashtami, and Navami Puja

Pushpanjali 12:00 PM

Afternoon Schedule

Prosad and Lunch 1:00 PM

Evening Schedule

_Bajlo Tomar Alor Benu_: A Unique Mix of Songs and Dances. Performed by Local Artists 5:00 PM

A _Play_, Staged by Porichay

Dinner 7:00-8:30 PM

Featured Guest Artist:
Srimati Antara Choudhuri

Sunday, October 12

Morning Schedule

Puja 10:00 AM

Afternoon Schedule

Prasad and Lunch 1:00 PM

Featured Guest Artist’s Songs:
Haimanti Rakshit Mann 2:00 PM

Featured Guest Artists:
Madhu and Gopal Burman
Tabla and Sree Khol - Jugalbandi on Drums
Welcome from the President

On behalf of the Executive Committee of the Bengalee Association of Greater Hartford (BAGH, Inc.), it gives me great pleasure to welcome you and your friends and families to the 2008 Durga Puja Festival. We celebrate and worship the Supreme Goddess, Ma Durga, to purify our souls and remove all obstacles, pain and suffering inflicted in our world. We pray to Her for guidance so that everyone may reach a more fulfilled and happier life in all corners of this Greater Hartford community and beyond.

Our age-old tradition and sacred scriptures will guide us in welcoming and serenading Ma Durga. Ultimately, the Durga Puja would evolve into a genuinely collective desire of all for peace and harmony in the lives of all creatures in this universe.

The prayers and festivities surrounding our Puja are intertwined with a definitive sense of pride in our heritage. Such heightened sense of community and friendship certainly include good food and great entertainment for both mind and spirit.

I hope you will find time to share cheer and camaraderie, renew friendships, and that you will take this opportunity to make new friends. Welcome to the celebration. With Puja greetings,

Saumitra Banerjee
President, BAGH, Inc.

Executive Committee

Saumitra Banerjee  President
Tapas Bandyopadhyay  Vice President
Arindam Dasgupta  General Secretary
Subhojit Maitra  Treasurer
Tirthankar Choudhuri  Cultural Secretary
Ruma Basu  Member
Gopal Das  Member
Gautam Maulik  Member
Vivek Mukherjee  Member
Nitis Mukhopadhyay  Member
From Editor’s Desk

This brochure includes nearly forty pages of literary work and artwork combined. It highlights the work of writers and artists from our local community and beyond. Some local children have also contributed masterful essays, stories, and poems with remarkably expressive ideas. I am indebted to all who have graciously contributed their original work for everyone to enjoy. Thanks to all these contributors.

I am humbled by the fact that Dilip Bhowmik, Bimal Sinha and Lakshman (Raju) Thakur accepted my invitation to send their original work. They are well-known literary figures, lyricists, composers, as well as widely-recorded musicians and performers. Raju is an acclaimed Hindi Poet who has organized a number of leading Hindi Kavi Sanmelans in this country, especially in the northern and eastern United States. Thanks to these friends.

In a number of places, I have added fillers with some paintings available from the Internet. I have also used Sayan Ray’s prior paintings with his permission. In each instance, I have acknowledged the source.

A brochure clearly depends on its sponsors and I thank them. I also thank those who helped me, especially, Debanjan Bhattacharjee. Kudos to all!

Before I end this note, I should add that BAGH, Inc., its members, members of its Executive Committee or I are not responsible in any shape or form for any opinion expressed (or implied) by an artist, author or advertiser.

Happy reading and have a great time. Wish everyone the happiest of this Durga Puja season.

Enjoy, enjoy, and enjoy some more!

Nitis Mukhopadhyay
Member, Executive Committee
মা দূর্গা যে আমাদের সকলের মা

উল্লাস রোল
মিলমেটোন, কানাদারাইট
কালীন পুস্তিকার মেলায় একটি অংশের অভ্যন্তরে একটি পাতায় পাঠাতে হবে। এর জন্য সচিবের পরিকল্পনা এবং প্রয়োজনের বিভাগে এই অংশ সম্পর্কে প্রশ্ন করা হয়।

ফিল্মের প্রচারনার প্রেক্ষাপটে একটি প্রচারনার বিভাগে প্রদর্শনী করা হয়। এটি নাটকের মধ্যে একটি প্রচারনার প্রেক্ষাপটে প্রদর্শনী করা হয়।

সাধারণ খাদের সমূহ সাধারণ ব্যবহার প্রচারনার একটি প্রকল্পে প্রদর্শনী করা হয়।

ফিল্মের প্রচারনার প্রেক্ষাপটে একটি প্রচারনার বিভাগে প্রদর্শনী করা হয়।
The Deity Is in the Making in Kumartuli, Calcutta.
দুটি শ্যামানগীত

নিনা সিনহা
কলকাতা, বেদীশাপত

শাম যা জেন তিনজনী?

সব দেবীরহে দুটি নন্নন - প্রায় সব দেবীরও তাই -
তুই নন্নন মাত্র তিনজনী ভেরে সারা হই।

এমন তো মা নানা কালোবরণ - তার ওপরে তিনটি নন্নন -
যুদ্ধে আমি পারিনা মালাগো কেন (এত পৃথক তুই)

লেরে বলে মা পুজার ছেল - আমরা যখন দেবীতলে -
ইতার ভেরের অর্থা সাজুরী - নুননা ফলে মুলে -
পুজার শেষে যখন মা তুই - দুটি মুখটি বার পরে -
তিনটি নন্নন ছেলে নাকি পেটটি মা তোর জনে।

কেঠ বা বলে মেজের নাকি (এত পাপের বোকা -
কাম মুরেতে গোল্ড মেজের হরেহই তো মা সাজু -
ইতার দুজনের আর্থবারি মা - সহজেতে নারী মেজে -
তিনটি নন্নন মেজেলে পরে - মেজের গণ্ডে বেহুতো তারা।

আমি জানি তো নন্নন মালা তিনটি নন্নন ইতার -
আমা মায়ের ফুলের শেষ নেই যে - সারা জীবন তোর -
যখন মালা দিনের শেষে ইনের ফুলে বিজনের সামনে আসে -
'মা' মা বলে কুরিন ওঠে নারী নন্নন জনে তাসে -
সব লালসার মহিমা মা তুই - বসকে টোলে নিয়ে -
ইতার প্রভাববারি সে কালে পাড়ে তিনটি নন্নন দিয়ে।

শাম যা কি চাই?

সত্য কোরে বলু দেখি মা -
ইতার পুজোর কি কার জড়ে -
লেরে বলে মা তুই রাখও - যতই সাজুরী চাই মা আসা।

আমে মা ইতার সাজুরী (এতে - ফুলে ফলে ভরা কতে -
তবু মা ইতার মুহুটে কাজী - রুপি আসা পেলে তালো হোতো।

কেএহ পুজো নিয়ে সোনা - কেহ গোলে বারা আসা -
কেনও বলে মা তুই করপারী - খুলি পেলে খোঁষানান।

আমি ভাবি অমার পার্ব - নাই তো কোনো উপর তারা -
কি দিয়ে মা পুজো ইতারে - তেরে যে হই দিষ্টানো।

আমার পুজো চাই যদি মা - আমি যদি খুলো মুখে ইতার পুজো মা করবো আমি শুধুই আমার চোখের জলে।
সত্য কোরে বলু দেখি মা - খুশী কি তুই নন্ননজলে।

http://www.math.umbc.edu/people/sinha.htm
The Divine Mother: The All Auspicious
Divine World

Monoranjan Roy
Portland, Connecticut

“Sar-Mongala Mongallye
Siva Sarvrtha – Sadhike,
Saranye Tryambake Gouri,
Narayani Namastu Te”

“O Thou All-Auspicious one,
O Gouri, Bestower of the gifts Divine,
O thou Refuge, Mother of Three World,
Obeisance to Thee, Narayani Benign”

Such is our divine mother, our very own, our loving and gracious mother. And possibly, no other season could have been more idyllic to serve as the ‘back to welcome’ the Goddess Durga. She makes her annual visit in autumn, the most pleasant and delightful season in the country, especially in Bengal.

Strangely enough, the Durga Puja, held in the remote past was celebrated in a less pleasant circumstance during the spring season. It is well known that the present form of Durga Puja celebrated in autumn was initiated by Sree Ramachandra who had to invoke the grace and blessings from the Divine Mother, Durga, to conquer the demon king, Ravana. This took place in autumn and the present Puja known as Akal Bodhan or the untimely invocation has since been accepted by all. The former Puja, popularly known as Basanti Puja, is still held in some quarters during the spring. But it is a rather quiet and tame affair compared with the grandeur and pomp of the traditional Durga Puja season that we celebrate today.

In many parts of India, especially in Bengal, Durga is viewed as a loving daughter who returns to her paternal home after a year long stay at her husband Lord Shiva’s abode at Kailash, the Himalayan region in the north. But her visit is brief. Countless worshipers wait anxiously throughout the year to get a glimpse of Mother Durga during a handful of days of her visit here. There is mirth and merry-making all round. For a short while, people try to forget all differences and diversions. The air is charged with a full-blown festive mood and spirit.

Nature, too, cooperates, sending its message through various agencies, the clear blue sky, the lovely carefree white clouds, the golden sunshine, the ripening corn, and the lush green meadows. Above all, the gentle breeze laden with aroma of sweet-scented flowers of variegated hues and odors all bring the news that the all-auspicious Durga will be arriving soon to embrace the path of righteousness, thereby leading to immortality.

The concept of accepting the divine mother as a daughter is something that is absolutely novel. Gone are the rigidities, the formalities and normally associated complex of fear. After all, who has ever heard of keeping away from one’s daughter, notwithstanding her greatness, might, divinity, and supremacy? A daughter remains as loving and dear forever. And the communion thus established between the devotees (or bhaktas) and the Supreme Being through this simple and touching medium of love, affection and attachment is a very unique phenomenon in Indian life.

A Puja season or another similar occasion also offers us the opportunity to take a fresh look at ourselves. It is sort of introspection, one may say, when it is imperative to delve deep into our hearts, search and discover how much we have prepared ourselves to celebrate the homecoming of Mother Durga to benefit our souls.
Over the years, in Bengal, it is noticeable that the display of pomp and splendor often reaches a point of vulgarity that has far out-weighed the simplicity of pure devotion that once was the hallmark of the Puja season. Other parts of India are not far behind in this unfortunate race!

One is reminded in this connection of those beautiful lines of Tagore, who in one of his masterful poems referred poignantly to a neglected little girl who had no one to take care of her:

“Ma Jadi Na Tabay Aaj Kisher Ustab??”

That is, if the motherless one did not receive motherly affection and love, then what was the point of having this festival? Today, many such unfortunates having no one to look after them are groaning and suffering for no apparent faults of their own. Let us pause and think over their plight. Let us do whatever we can to wipe our tears. If we can alleviate that from one soul and illuminate the dark chamber in just one person’s heart with kindness and sympathy, then that will be the best way to celebrate the Puja season. This way, we can try our best to make the visit from our Divine Mother into this care-ridden and misery-afflicted world of ours both significant and memorable.

Meanwhile, let’s join the prayer that should reverberate around the silent harps of our hearts:

“Ya Devi Sarvabhutesu Matriupena Samasthita, Namastasyai, Namastasyai, Namastasyai Namo Nama.”

The Goddess who is present within all creatures, the form of Mother Divine, Obeisance to Her, Obeisance to Her, Obeisance to Her, Mother Benign.

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শ্রীগৌরাঙ্গ দেব

দিক্পীল গোমিক
রাজগুলিল, মেরীলাঙ্গ

জন্ম নিলে তুমি নিমাই
চন্দ্র প্রভু করে।
ফির যে অনন্য নক্ষত্রের স্থান
সেই অপূর্ব লগনে॥
তুমি এলে আলো করে
সেনার নদীয়ায় ॥
ধনা হলো নবদ্বীপ
তোমার মহিমায়॥
নিমাই নামে জানতো সবাই
প্রতি ঘরে ঘরে।
মায়ের দেওয়া বিশ্বভূত নাম
রাইলো অগাচরে॥
পৌর অব ছিল বলে
পৌরাঙ্গ তাই নাম।
নদীয়াতে শুঁট তুমি,
নবদ্বীপেত থাম॥
কৈরেইল হল তুমি
নায় রাতের গুণী।
শিক্ষা নিতে তোমার কাছে,
আসতো সবাই শুনী॥
কত পাঁচিত তোমার কাছে
তরক করার ছলে।
এসে তারা পালিতে বেত
পারাজাের ফলে॥
লক্ষ্মী নামে বনভাগের
ছিল যে এক কন্যা।
রূপে ও গৌরে, সবার মাঝে
ছিল যে অনন্য॥
নিমাই লক্ষ্মীর হোক এ বিরে
পিতা ছিল সাধ।
এই মিলনে মাতাও যে তার
করেন অশীরিবাদ॥
যোগনিতে লক্ষ্মীদাঁবী
হলো মেয়োর জায়।
সর্পায়েত ইহুলোকের
কাটিয়ে যে যোন মায়া॥
পত্নীবিহীন কাটে একা দিন
জীবন শুরু মুধে।
ভক্তি প্রেমে ভাসিয়ে নিজেকে
বাধা তবু বাধে বুকে॥
কৃষ্ণ প্রেমে বিভূত হবে
সাকারে নেই মন।
পুত্র দশায় শ্লোচাত
বাকুল অনুকূল॥
অতি সুখের, পশ্চিম এমন
সুখেরা এই পুত্র।
নব বাহু ঘরে, আসবে কী করে
চেষ্টা পাওয়া চাই সেই॥
বিকৃতিয়া হলেন শেখে
তোমার জীবন সাধী।
সংসারেতে কলাই না মন
তবু বাহারতি॥
ঈশও পুরী ছিলো গয়ায়
বিখ্যাত ব্রাহ্মচারী।
ঈশাক নিলে তার কাছে যে
সব কিছুকে ছাড়ি॥
ভক্তির রোপ অকূল হয়ে
ঘুরেন নানান দেশ॥
ভদ্রতাও সব সঙ্গ নিল,
তুঃ করি ক্রেষ॥
দত্তকেশভ ভারতীর কাছে
কাটোয়াতে এসে।
সরাস ধর্ম ঈশাক নিলে,
তুমি আবর্তন॥
গৃহতালী হলে তখন
মা ও পত্নী রুক্ষে।
ভক্তি প্রেমের ভাষী শুনলে
সরাস বিশু থেকে॥
ভক্তির কথা প্রচারের মুখে
বাধা আসে কী করে।
জগায় মধুকৃত পথ রক্ষে দেয়,
করলে ও অকরলে॥
তোমার মধুর লোকত বাণীতে
ওরা শেখে হলো ভক্ষ।
পবিত্র এই চারচারের পথে
হলো কাক অনুরুপ॥
ধামানি কোথাও চলেছ যে পথে
এলে শেষে নীলাচলে।
হরি, মুকদ, নিত্যানন্দ
ছিল যে তোমারই দল॥
জগনাথদেবের মন্দিরে এসে
হলো গোলে তুমি স্বর।
দেবদর্শনে মূর্তিত হলে
ছিল না মুখে যে শাব॥
তুমি শ্রীল, পূর্ব ভ্রাত
ব্রহ্মকে তুমি শিহ।
কৃষ্ণ প্রেমে সদা ছিল ভরা
তোমার হাথি মল্লিদর।
পুরীর সাগরে দেব দিয়ে
ছোট্ট তুমি গোলে চলে।
এলেন তাঁর ফিরে তুমি প্রভু
হারালে সাগর জলে॥

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msword/kobita/gouranga
ডাক ছাড়লেও কিছুদিন বাঙালি বাসনা হয়।
জান না কিছু ঢেকে বাংলাদেশ যেন শুধুমাত্র ছেড়ে দেওয়ার প্রতি ভালো হয়।
আবার শুধুমাত্র আমি।
আমি যেন আমার দেশী বাঙালি হয়ে যাই।
আমি যেন আমার দেশ হয়ে যাই।

dিকে আছে কি? আমি বাঙালি হয়ে যাই তো কি?
চার হলে কেন আলাদা হয়ে যাই?
সুরমা হুঁকুক, সুরমা হুঁকুক।

dিনি যে কথা ভাবিয়ে যাই তো কি?
নারী দুর্বলের ঝুঁকি একে সরানি যাই —
স্বাধীনতার যে জড়িয়ে আসে তো কি?
রাখাল আছে নি আমার মনে।

dিনির যে কথা ভাবিয়ে যাই —
নারী দুর্বলের ঝুঁকি একে সরানি যাই —
স্বাধীনতার যে জড়িয়ে আসে তো কি?

কেন বলবে তোর কথা?
কেন বলবে তোর কথা?
কেন বলবে তোর কথা?

কেন বলবে তোর কথা?
কেন বলবে তোর কথা?
কেন বলবে তোর কথা?

কেন বলবে তোর কথা?
কেন বলবে তোর কথা?
কেন বলবে তোর কথা?
Four Couplets:
Shimmering Durga

Patrick Colm Hogan*
Storrs, Connecticut

Bows, bows, Unreachable One, maker of peace.
Bows, bows, Mother who takes away grief.

Across the three worlds, radiant and without form,
You spread out the brilliant dawn.

....

Pain and poverty will never touch
Whoever sings your praise with so much love.

Whoever sees you with adoration in the heart
Sees release too from any part in death and birth.

*Translated freely from Hindi by Patrick Colm Hogan,
Professor of English in the University of Connecticut-Storrs.

*http://www.econ.uconn.edu/Faculty/ray/ray.htm
Laws of Life

Anishaa Mukherjee*
Rocky Hill, Connecticut

Laws of life are like every rain drop that falls to the ground except they are not ignored. They are very precious and they are yours to go by. Without them our lives would be confusing and you wouldn't know right and wrong. The law of life that means the most to me is appreciation.

“Why, why them?” My first thoughts were when I read Journeys (a magazine). Going to bed I read an article that changed my feelings about the poor and unfortunate families out there in the world living their lives the harder way. There was this one article that was about a family living in India. It was the only one that stood out to me and made me realize how lucky I am. How lucky we all are to have enough money to feed our empty stomachs, to have a shelter which protects our heads and to get an education which fulfills our needs of learning something new everyday. This article was about a boy whose mother sews 100 socks a day and walked over to drop them off at this sock store. And guess how much she got paid? $.051. This is how she fed her family. Her husband did not really have a job except for pulling weeds from a pond though he didn't get paid. I cried to the last word of the story and was able to rethink my past. I always say to myself, “I have so many things. I have so many books to read, toys to play with and a mom and dad who work so hard to protect me and feed me.”

To appreciate is to thank. To appreciate is to be grateful for someone or something. But to appreciate to me is when you thank your parents for what you have and how they taught you everything that is needed to be known. Always seeing my mother and father working so hard can make my thoughts about them very satisfied. Satisfied in the sense of being protected. I appreciate them doing all this work just to help me and teach me how to live life. When they wash the dishes, clean the house, or maybe even make good I help them just to show that I care for them as much as they care for me. When you do something for others you get this sort of feeling which is very happy. This feeling is appreciation.

Trapped

Anishaa Mukherjee*
Rocky Hill, Connecticut

Trapped is the color of grey smoke,
It sounds like a stranger knocking on your door,
It tastes like bitter, dark chocolate still in its wrapper.

Trapped smells like air emptied from a balloon,
It looks like a bird being forced to stay in its cage,
It makes you feel suffocated.

*Anishaa Mukherjee is a 7th grader at Griswold Middle School, Rocky Hill. She received the best writer award as a whole when she finished her 6th grade.
The Alien Invader

Oisharya (Moon) Dasgupta*
West Hartford, CT

It was a Wednesday last spring. After coming back from school, like usual I was drinking milk, sitting at my favorite place in the kitchen. I looked at my blue Beta fish, Lucky, when he suddenly came up to the surface and said, “Hi Moon, can I have my snack too?”

I was so surprised that I almost choked on my milk. How could a fish talk? “H-How d-d-did you say that?” I stammered. My fish replied with ease, “Last night some crazy looking guy came and pointed at me with a weird, red thing. About two seconds later it asked me to say something. So I said ‘what’. Satisfied, the thing went outside and got into a saucer-like object. In about a flash, the saucer started to rotate up and then it disappeared into the night sky. Now can I have something to eat, I am starving.”

My mom, who was in the next room, asked, “Moon, who are you talking to?” “Mommy, you wouldn't believe what just happened?”, I exclaimed. “What?” asked my mom. “Lucky is talking. Lucky is talking”, I jumped up and down. “Stop the nonsense, Moon. And do your homework”, said my mom without much attention. “No, really. He just asked me for food”, I protested. I ran to the family room and practically dragged her back to the kitchen. “Lucky, say something,” I demanded. But Lucky decided to keep quiet and swam to the bottom of the bowl. “Oh Moon, you and your imagination,” smiled my mom.

That night I lay awake thinking about what happened that day. “I have got to catch that alien if it comes back,” I told myself. But this needed careful planning. I thought for some time and decided on what to do.

At about midnight, I saw a strange, blue glow coming from the backyard. “The Alien must have arrived,” I muttered. I grabbed my badminton net and raced downstairs. I went into the mudroom and sprung my trap. Suddenly I heard the doorknob turning. I quickly hid myself. After a few minutes of silence, I heard a soft screech. I ran into the mudroom to see if my plan had worked. My heart was pounding. When I got there, a dwarfish, green creature with three eyes and two heads pointed a long bony finger at me and angrily said, “Sabasikjoplh!”, which must have meant something nasty in Alienese. Ignoring the other wild things he said, I unhooked the net from the ceiling.

I carefully brought the net to the bathroom so that he could not escape. I snatched his light saber from him and stuck it in my belt. Next I shook the net over the toilet so that the Alien fell in. “Have fun in the sewer, Mr. Alien. That will teach you not to sneak into other people's houses and play with their pets,” I said flushing the toilet. I took the light saber from my belt and wondered what to do with it.

I realized that the light saber has unique powers and it will not be good of it to fall in the wrong hands. So I decided to hide it and not tell anybody about my mini-adventure. But before I did that, I had one last thing to do. I went to the kitchen, pointed the light saber at my fish and wished that my fish would be normal again. Then I went back upstairs and dropped the saber in a box of unused toys. For the rest of the night I slept comfortably and never told anyone about it again. Till today that is.

*Oisharya (Moon) Dasgupta is currently in 4th grade in Aiken Elementary School, West Hartford.
গৃহে আছেন?

নিজের উঠান জানি না।

কেনা নিয়েছি? নিয়েছি উঠান না।

ভাল মনে হয়ো, তাহলে উঠান না।

কেনা মনে হয়ো?

উলাম হয়, নিয়েছি উঠান না।

জন্মদিন দিনের জন্মদিনে কি করছিল দিনে?

কিছু করার কথায় উঠেছি উঠান

কিছু করার কথায় উঠান, তবে আসলে করাই

কিছু করার কথায় উঠান না,

তবে এখান থেকে কিছু করার কথায়?

নিজের উঠান থেকে কিছু করার?

(১২০৫) উঠানে কিছু করার কিছু করার

নিজের উঠানে কিছু করার, নিজের

কিছু করার কিছু করার কিছু করার

কিছু করার?

নিজের উঠান থেকে কিছু করার?
Among the many rituals of Durga Puja that remind us that we are a part of a greater indivisible whole; for instance, the Tvat Tamasi lesson of Chandogya Upanishad is reflected through the ritual raising and immersing of the goddess from the depth of our being. The priest, on our behalf, brings her forth from within the individual being, invests her image with qualities befitting a goddess, and on dashami, ritually submerges her back into the individual-of-the-universe. As individuals, and as collectivities, we are supposed to follow this ritual of looking within ourselves, “raising” the set of values represented through the array of goddesses and gods with their animal and plant associates, to the forefront of our consciousness, as a way of connecting our lives to a greater whole every day. This central principle of Hinduism — to become more human by acknowledging and enacting our connections to the universe — is likely to be familiar to many people who gather to celebrate Durga Puja.

But, recently, as I worked with a group of women who originally came to the US from different parts of India, Nepal, Bangladesh, and Pakistan, to publish a book about our experiences of living our religion, I was confronted with the question of whether I could draw the same inspiration about these values and principles if I focused on people who live/d among us. It is an intriguing question; after all, if I truly believe that our goddesses and gods are personifications of what we imagine to be within the realm of the possible, then these values and qualities should be in evidence among real people. So, to try and answer this question, I began to think about who would come closest to Durga, Lakshmi, and Saraswati, among the women whose lives and deeds have significantly enriched our lives as Bengalis. Instead of reverting to the example of the children — the Kumari — who are worshipped as embodiments of Durga, I focused on adult women, whose conscious choices and activities, have framed ours.

While I began to think about many people across many countries who could qualify for these designations, I decided to limit myself, for now, to people who were born in Bengal, or spent most of their lives in the region. I also decided to limit myself to the 19th and 20th centuries, since this history ushered tumultuous changes in our lives. Many of us can directly trace the legacy of our parents and grandparents who participated in the nationalist uprising or social and religious movements of the time. This was also the historical period when Durga became our cultural icon. She was worshipped earlier by sections of people, one among many goddesses. During this period she became the mother goddess whose worship pierced hierarchical walls of caste, gender, and class, as her worship was infused with a series of social and cultural meanings that wove together newer forms of Bengali religious and cultural nationalisms.

Goddess Durga is the demon slayer. She represents fearless-ness, strength, valor, extraordinary energy and power to challenge and defeat a mighty adversary, whose untrammeled unregulated use of power was wrecking havoc in the world. Goddess Durga is also a mother-figure, her ability to confront and destroy what is unjust is balanced by her creative force as she presides over her “children” — learning, wealth, valor, and obstacle-remover--so that, together, these qualities make for ideal families, communities, societies. In my mind, the living goddess who exhibited such powers — the power to mobilize against political and social injustice, to challenge and confront it, while spreading education, fostering valor, and empowering people to act on their own behalf — during this historical period, was Sarala Devi Chaudhurani.

Sarala Devi was born in 1872. Her mother, Swarnakumari Devi was a sister of Rabindranath Tagore’s, the editor, from 1884, of the journal Bharati, the founder of the Ladies Theosophical Society, and the founder of Sakhi Samiti, a women’s support group that paid particular attention to the need of widows. Sarala Devi was one of the earliest female graduates of Calcutta University (via Bethune School and College). She worked as the Assistant Superintendent of a girl’s school in Mysore in 1894 and returned to Calcutta to take on the editorship of Bharati.

1Bandana Purkayastha is, most recently, the author of Negotiating Ethnicity, on the children of immigrants from India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and India, and the co-author of Living Our Religions, on the experiences of Hindu and Muslim women in the US and in their countries of origin. She is a professor at the University of Connecticut-Storrs.
The “demons” of the time were the British colonial power and the lack of mobilization and among men and women to act against social stasis. In her seminal history of the women’s movement in India, Radha Kumar writes that Sarala Devi threw herself into a maelstrom of organizing to cultivate strength among men and women. She started with the antaranga dal, organizing young men who had to lay their hands on the map of India and pledge that they were ready to sacrifice their lives in the cause of India’s freedom. As her realm of influence increased rapidly, she introduced a series of bratas, including martial arts training, as a way of getting young Bengali men to hone their mental and physical prowess. In 1904, for the Congress session in Calcutta, she trained the group to sing Bankim Chandra’s Bande Mataram, and in 1905, through the Suhrid Samiti, she indelibly linked this homage to a motherland to the rallying call of the Indian nationalist movement. She started a Birastami festival to commemorate valor on the second day of Durga Puja where young people recalled past heroes and took a vow to fight imperialism. She was an outspoken supporter of the railway workers strike against the British in 1899. Undaunted by the attacks by large sections of Hindus who castigated her for behavior unworthy of a Hindu woman, she moved onto the national stage. In 1905, after the partition of Bengal and a rapidly rising fear among Hindu and Muslim women of being raped by British soldiers who were “keeping law and order,” she began to organize self-defense lessons for women as well.

In 1910, she organized the Bharat Stree Mahamandal, the first, and formal Indian women’s organization. The aim of the organization was to spread female education, but, acknowledging that purdah and child marriage were the main obstacles to women’s education, she began to organize money to send teachers into homes to teach women. Well aware of the efforts of the missionaries to reach the “recesses of the zenanas” to impart a “civilized education” to Indian girls and women, this organization created Indian texts to emphasize vernacular cultures, brought women’s crafts and skills to the public arena through mahila silpa melas, and created avenues for bringing women’s visions, women’s writing to the public sphere. At the same time the organization organized relentlessly against child-marriage and purdah, two causes that were later taken up by a large number of other newly formed women’s organizations. Sarala Devi’s work is key to understanding women’s participation in the nationalist uprising, formally through public participation in protests, boycotts, and later the students “terrorist” uprising, but also through the significant “private” participation of choosing only swadeshi products, the circulation of nationalist bratakathas through women’s circles, of harboring and aiding male nationalist “brothers and sons” who were fleeing from the British, through arandhans which served as means to raise family consciousness to protest British political decisions. While recent historical reconstruction has credited Gandhi, solely, with moving women into the sphere of politics, Sarala Devi’s work had been in-force for decades before Gandhi returned to India and started the Satyagraha movement. Her Durga-like combination of intellectual force, fearless-ness, valor, and steadfastness of principle was recognized by Swami Vivekananda, who, when he was buffeted by attacks of Christian missionaries in the US, wrote to Sarala Devi: “if talented and bold women like yourself, versed in Vedanta, go to England and preach…speak [to] America, if an Indian woman in Indian dress preach[es] there … there will rise a great wave which will inundate the whole Western world…you have power, wealth, intellect and education, will you forego this opportunity?” (quoted in Shamita Basu, in Religious Revivalism as Nationalist Discourse, 2002, p.158).

If Sarala Devi is my choice for Durga, then my choice of Saraswati centers on two remarkable women, Begum Rokeya Hussain and Sister Nibedita for their remarkable work in stretching the boundaries of our intellect. For any individual, who may have been amazed at my choice of a Muslim woman and an Irish woman as Hindu goddesses, it is important to remember that the best traditions of Hinduism do not rely on ethnocentric distinctions. Ramakrishna’s life is an exemplar of learning from many religious practitioners; his famous dictum, popularized by Vivekananda, about the many rivers which lead to the same ocean is a reminder to us that we can be good Hindus by not shrinking our human lives, by not letting our “clear stream of reason” die in the “dreary desert of dead habit” within the confines of “narrow domestic walls.”

Goddess Saraswati reflects learning and wisdom. Her associate the swan, is credited with the ability to sift through the mud and impurities in the water, just as the lotus, on which she sits, frequently rises, as a thing of beauty, above the scum and filth under the waters of the ponds. Begum Rokeya was born in 1880; she was secretly educated in English and Bengali by an older brother, before her marriage, at age 16, to Khan Bahadur Sakhawat Hussain, the Judicial Magistrate of Bhagalpur. Her husband encouraged her writing till his death 11 years later. Begum Rokeya wrote a series of remarkable essays and satires on the social boundaries that crippled women’s lives; her 1905 work in English, Sultana’s Dream, remains relevant to our lives today! In order to foster learning among Muslim women, she created
Sakhawat Memorial School for Girls, facing down, just as Sarala Devi did, the orthodox outpourings of outrage. Begum Rokeya was also active in other spheres for women’s empowerment; she founded the Bengali Muslim Women’s Association, which focused primarily on women’s status and education, till her death in 1932. Since she did not have the advantages of extraordinary social capital like Sarala Devi, her actual achievement, of founding a girls’ school, has endured beyond her lifetime, appear to be quite remarkable. Like Bethune school, founded in 1849 as the first formal “public” school for girls in India, Sakhawat Memorial School for Girls, now run by the West Bengal Government, remains a historical icon in Bengali history.

Sister Nibedita, though best known as Swami Vivekananda’s associate, is, in my mind, the central facilitator of the Bengal renaissance movement, the new forms of literature and art that broke away from European hegemonies. Through Nibedita, an ardent champion of Indian glories, we find the intersections of the streams of ideas emanating from Ramakrishna-Vivekananda movement, the Tagores, and Sri Aurobinda’s and his and of revolutionaries. If we now recognize Nandalal Bose’s path-breaking art, that created an alternative form of modernity for India, a great deal of credit goes to Sister Nibedita, who insisted that Nandalal spend time learning from the Ajanta frescos. If we are able to revel in the erudition of Amartya Sen in his recent social commentaries on Indian multi-rooted civilization, or feel proud of the luminous array of contemporary Bengali artists, or simply recognize the cosmopolitanism of Bengali culture, then we owe a debt to Nibedita, who was, with Rabindranath, one of the chief architects of the intellectual horizons that were created and concretized during this time. Thus if learning is about the process through which we imagine and live lives beyond the confines of what the familiar, then, women like Begum Rokeya and Sister Nibedita, much like the goddess of learning, have played a significant role in shaping how we perceive the connection between our learning and the rest of the world of which we are a part.

Unlike Durga and Saraswati, it is more difficult to designate someone as Lakshmi, the goddess of wealth, whose associate the owl reminds us not to be dazzled by wealth, to see through dark-ness and, consequently, use wealth wisely. Despite the icon, real women have not, very often, been in a position to control and manage wealth. I could choose the untold number of women who turned over their jewelry for the nationalist cause, literally financing aspects of the nationalist movement, and designate their use of stri-dhan, as reflective of Lakshmi’s values. But their individual names have not been recorded in history. So, for my iconic living goddess, I will delve further back in time and pick Rani Rashmoni who used her wealth to for just purposes.

Rani Rashmoni was born in 1793 and was married off at the age of eleven to a wealthy landowner. She was widowed while she was still young, and, despite her remarkable wealth, lived the austere personal life of a Bengali widow, till her death in 1851. As a wealthy landowner she was struck by the unjust-ness of a new British — East India Company — tax on the daily catch of fisher folk in the area. Since many fishermen survived on a near-subsistence basis, this tax negatively affected their chances of survival. Rashmoni decided to challenge this tax. She leased a stretch of the Ganga for Rs. 10,000 (a remarkable sum for the time) from the British, who were enthusiastic about getting the money from her, instead of chasing down individual fishermen. Once the lease was complete, she ordered her minions to stretch a set of chains across the river, to mark the boundaries of her leased property. The riverine traffic ground to a halt and the British protested. Rani Rashmoni proclaimed her right to protect her property. The tax on fisher folk was then rescinded. While her wealth was managed by her son-in-law Rani Rashmoni was credited with a number of socially conscious, financial decisions. She demonstrated a principle later preached by Vivekananda: that performing religious rituals in temples is of no use if we do not address the hunger and suffering of nara-narayans (human-gods). Once, she had arranged to go on pilgrimage; the food and provisions for this journey filled 30 boats. At this time, famine stalked a part of Bengal; hearing about the sufferings of her people she donated the entire resources for this pilgrimage to the hungry people. Her endowments created many of the Bengal landmarks: the temple of Dakshineshwar, the scene of Ramakrishna’s remarkable priesthood, was endowed by her; Presidency College and National Library, in their original iterations, were endowed with her money. The stories about her reflect this unique combination of wealth and wisdom that exemplifies Lakshmi.

The stories of Goddesses and Gods tell of demons they have to overpower. But they remain distant from us because they seem not to be constantly buffeted by the kind of challenges we face everyday. But the lessons of the lives of these living goddesses exemplify the challenges and possibilities of being “tied by a thousand bonds while we seek mukti.” Their lives, like ours, are tempered by failures and successes. Thus they can continue to act as our inspirations, as we rededicate our lives to living our dharma through everyday ethical acts of humane-ness.
হে বন্ধু মোর

নীতিশ মুখোপাধ্যায়
গ্যাটন্টনেরি কানেটিকাট

হারিয়ে ফেলা

কাল এইতো ছিলে, এইখানেইয়া
আজ হঠাৎ হারিয়ে গেলে, কোথায়?

একেবারে গা দেওয়ে আগুন, তোমার
ঝুন ঝুন কালি কালে বাজে, হঠাৎই
মনে হোলে বেলে তুমি পাশে নেই -
অনেকবার ত' হয়েছে ঠিক এমনটাই, যখনই মুঁছেছি এ পথে দুজনায়, অল্প প্রতিবার ফিরে পেয়েছি নতুন তোমায়।

সেদিনও তোমার আঁকা ছবি, দেখেছি
পাশাপাশি তোলে প্রাকাপি মৃত বাঞ্চ, শেয়ালি
তোমার গানের সুরে পুজোর সানাই, খেয়েছি
আজন-ঘন মিছিলের ছবে দোলা, চলেছি -
মনে হোলে বেলে তুমি পাশে নেই
বহবার হয়েছে ঠিক এমনটাই, যখনই
মুঁছেছি-ঝুঁথেছি এ পথে দুজনায়, অল্প
বারাবার ফিরে পেয়েছি নতুন তোমায়।

কাল ছিলে অল্প আজ নাই -
চলেই যায়? তবে ত' ধরে রাখা মিছে
তখনো সানাই ধনা। কেন করেছ রাখা পিছে
- বিধাতার বলি তা' আজ এলো, শুধু
অনাদিত অনির্দিষ্ট প্রেম রেখেছ যাও, তবে
দিয়ে তাই বলিয়ে মনের জীবনের যত গান
মেলে দিও আকাশের গায়ে পৃথিবীর সব তান।

ঠিক এমনই শরৎ-গল্পে
তোমাকেই পাশে পেতে চাই
মন তোমাকেই চায়, শুধু তোমাকেই -
অশু ঢাকা দশমীর দেগুঁরা সানাই
কাল ছিলে সাক্ষী মনে পড়ে তাই।

১২ ফেব্রুয়ারী, ২০০৮

সুর ও বাণী

ভালবাসা মোর গান হয়ে করে
তোমাকেই দুঃখানে দুঃখানে
তব আঁখিবায় নাচে বীর লয়ে
মূর্দুল সমীরে বাহিয়ে।

অম্বে এলো হতের পড়েতে রেলে
মাটি মন সুরে ও বাণীতে
নাবলা বাণী কংকুত দুইকো
উলাল তব মোহিয়ে নোঙরিয়ে।

বাণীর্ভাবে গান হলে সারা
কিছু সুর মনে তোমাদের মনে
- নেই গান কেন কেনে ক্ষুদ্রে ক্ষুদ্রে
তারায় তারায় কেনে অম্বে?
“বাণী থেকে সত্ত্ব” বলে যাই তবে
মোর হানি-গাত্রা দেন সদা জাগে
তব উজ্জ্বল নয়নকোচে।

১৭ সেপ্টেম্বর, ২০০৮

http://merlot.stat.uconn.edu/~nitis/
Translations of Three Favorite Poems

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[1]: Sharing My Feelings

[Rabindranāth Tagore’s verse #248, without a title, from Gitabitān (pages 370-371)]

On this day she could be told
In this overpowering incessant rain
As hard rain sounds thunderous –
Sunlight fades in thick darkness
On a day like this she could be told.

No one else will listen to this ever
Solitary and desolate everywhere
Face-to-face each filled with deepest of hurt –
Endless tear falling from sky
Feeling none else is in this world.

Society and family are pretty lies
Lies too are this life’s murmurs
Glances alone exchange eye-full ecstasy
Feeling each other heart to heart
Everything else disappears in darkness.

In this universe who is inconvenienced by this
If I can only rid of my heartache
Once in a corner as monsoon deafens –
If I share my feelings for her
Why and how does that affect anyone?

Fierce wind anxiously whips by
Lightening repeats flash-dances
Muted words from my life that lives in me –
Those exact sentiments could be shared
’Midst such enchanting monsoon pour –
On a day just like this
I believe I can share my feelings with her.

March 12, 2007

[2]: In the Evening

[Nirendranāth Chakravarti’s poem (page 78, Nirbāchito Prēmēr Kabitā, 1992)]

Now, again, in what game of yours
Want to tie me going round and round?
Deep inside heart knots come loose
in the evening.

Stone in the middle of the lake
You threw when? I recall nothing
Nothing stirs my memory any more
in the evening.

September 12, 2008

[3]: My Work

[Subhāsh Mukhopādhyay’s poem, Āmār Kāj (pages 109-110, Shrēstho Kabitā, 1970)]

I wish to make words stand on their feet
Want to watch each shadow’s eyelids open
Wish still photos to go for a walk.

Don’t desire anyone calling me a poet.
Until the last day in life
Shoulder to shoulder
So I can go on marching.

So that I can leave my pen
next to a tractor
I wish I can proclaim –
Now I say goodbye
Brothers, make me a small fire.

September 15, 2008

*http://merlot.stat.uconn.edu/~nitis/
Rabindranath Tagore in China

Sib S. Ray
Newington, Connecticut

Starting nearly two thousand years ago, India and China enjoyed a unique relationship in the history of mankind. It was neither initiated by monarchs to expand territory nor by merchants to enhance profit. It started with the spreading of message of love and freedom by monks and scholars from India who traveled through inhospitable mountains and deserts. China reciprocated by receiving them cordially and sending her own to India. Recalling this one Chinese scholar observed: “Since ancient times India has communicated with us, made great presentation to us, whether it is philosophical thought, or religious belief, or morality, or art and literature, even brothers and relatives would not be so generous”. This relationship continued for about eight centuries and then stopped for over a millennium with the change of political situation in both the countries. By the beginning of the twentieth century both countries fell from grace, India under foreign occupation and China under constant turmoil from within. Their old memories faded and new concepts about each other took shape. In the eyes of the Chinese, India, once a heavenly Kingdom, was now a dead country. In the eyes of the Indians, China was largely a nation of opium consumers where men sported pigtails.

Then, suddenly came the surprising news that one among such Indians "Taige'er" (Chinese transliteration of Tagore) won the Nobel Prize in 1913, and that this "Tage'er" was busy traveling in the Western countries lecturing to the ruling elite of the Western powers whose representatives were treating the Chinese in China like dirt. The Chinese noted it, translated some of his works in Chinese from English and in 1923 invited him to visit China on a lecture tour. Tagore accepted it with great enthusiasm.

In his welcome speech for Tagore before a gathering of several thousand students in Beijing, Professor Liang Qichao, President of Universities Association, paid a glowing tribute to ancient India’s cultural and spiritual contribution towards the development of Chinese society and summed up the present situation saying, “After a thousand years of separation during which period, however, we two continued to cherish thoughts of love for one another, this elder brother of ours has once more come to us animated with fraternal sentiments. Both of us bear lines of sorrow on our face, our hair is grey with age, we stare with a blank and vacant look as if we are just awakened from a dream; but, as we gaze on each other, what recollections and fond memories of our early youth rise in our mind, --- of those days, when we shared our joys and sorrows together! Now that we have once more the happiness of embracing each other we shall not allow ourselves to be separated again.” He then went on to pay a glorious tribute to India for her spiritual and artistic contributions to China.

Professor Liang ended his speech this way: “I wish, in concluding, to say something of great practical importance to you. Rabindranath Tagore has come to visit us; and we ought to remember that when in the old days thirty-seven representatives came from India there were actually some one hundred and eighty seven people to return the visit. We hope that on this occasion the love between China and India will not terminate with the one or two months which Rabindranath Tagore is able to spend in this country. The responsibility that we bear to the whole mankind is great indeed, and there should be, I think, a warm spirit of co-operation between India and China. The coming of Rabindranath Tagore will, I hope, mark the beginning of an important period of history.”

On another occasion at the scholar’s dinner in Beijing, Mr. Lin Changmin, while welcoming Tagore had this to say: “We welcome Dr. Tagore, not as a sage or a metaphysician, not as a religious reformer or even as an educator, but as poet, a very great poet, a world poet, and as one who will exert a great influence on our own poetry. Last year when the news came that we might expect a rival of our own poets, our expectation and enthusiasm were aroused. He is here now. We cannot tell him how moved and touched we are by his presence. His appearance, his eyes, his deportment, his beard, his clothes, ---- everything about him is poetic. He is in fact poetry itself. We hope our poet will give us strength, courage and audacity.”

I quote these two at length because they basically summarize the effusive enthusiasm for Tagore from a section of Chinese scholars. I say “a section of Chinese scholars” because not all were favorably disposed towards him. While one group was yearning for reestablishing cultural ties with India and welcoming Tagore’s influence on Chinese poetry the other group was opposing him just on those grounds.
Opposition to Tagore came from two groups --- the Chinese Communist Party and a section of Chinese writers. Communists were apprehensive that Tagore’s influence would turn the Chinese youth away from the path of revolution. In this matter Tagore might have some guilt of association. Liang Qichao, Hu shi, Xu Zhimo, Liang Shuming, who were among his hosts, were thought to be members of a group opposed to the newly organized Marxists. Since they were the people taking interest in Tagore, the poet appeared to have posed a threat to the radicals. Therefore, he must be opposed. Yun Daiying, one of the founders of the Communist Party of China, wrote: “We will not attack Tagore personally out of any malice. But there is a possibility that he will be used by others. We, therefore, have no option but to oppose him.” The party leader, Qu Qiubai, made a sarcastic remark: “Thank you, Mr. Tagore! But we have already had too many Confuciuses and Menciuses in China!” Ironically, however, Tagore was translated in Chinese first by a founding member of the Communist Party.

Some were concerned that Tagore’s idea of spirituality and pacifism will tranquilize the Chinese youth. Mao Dun, in an article entitled “Our Expectations from Tagore” wrote: “But we do not welcome the Tagore who loudly sings the praise of the Oriental civilization, nor do we welcome the Tagore who creates a paradise of poetry that has made our youth intoxicated and self-complacent. We welcome the Tagore who works for the uplift of the peasantry (though we do not support his method), the Tagore who passionately sings, ‘March alone’ … We also want the youth of China to know that the gift we expect from Tagore is not a spiritual realization of life, not an empty Gitanjali, but a gift of those words that arouse agony and enthusiasm, words such as ‘March alone’ …”

This I quote to show the expectation of another kind. By 1920s, the Chinese intelligentsia was greatly polarized between radicals and moderates, and Tagore found himself in the middle of it. But criticism was not new to Tagore before or after his visit to China and he dealt with it in his usual dignity. During his farewell speech in Shanghai, he made a slight reference to it: “I have done what was possible, --- I have made friends ..... It has not been all sunshine of sympathy for me. From the corners of the horizon has come occasional growling of angry clouds.”

In spite of protests from some quarters, Tagore’s sojourn in China went well. He spoke to students, teachers, scholars and ordinary citizens. His 64th birthday was celebrated in Beijing and on that occasion Liang Qichao presented the poet with a stone tablet inscribed on it: Zhu Zhendan, a Chinese name for Rabindranath. Two of his plays, Chitra and Sanyasini, were staged during his visit. He visited the tomb of Confucious and also the young emperor who, though deposed by then, was still living in the forbidden city.

Well, what was Tagore’s message to the Chinese? Basically he said what he was saying all his life. He spoke against imperialism and materialism, against violence as a means of achieving one’s goals, he spoke of the need for unity amongst Asian nations, of Asia’s message of love and spirituality to the world. Besides, there were also some autobiographical talk, a talk about his newly founded institution, Viswa Bharati, his view of education and religion.

Tagore was saddened by the rising militarism in Japan. To the boys and girls at Pei Hei, Beijing, he remarked, “There it hurts me deeply that the East should not be humble when it had come into sudden good fortune. We ought to know that it is a dangerously critical period in her history when a country is suddenly surprised with a political success that is stupendous. It is a difficult trial, requiring from her all the strength she has in order to save herself from the dust-storm of arrogance that obliterates the path of wisdom.” Again in his first public lecture in Beijing, he spoke against use of force: “My warning is, those who would have you rely on material force to make a strong nation, do not know history, or understand civilization either. Reliance on power is the characteristic of barbarism; nations that trusted to it have already been destroyed or have remained barbarous.”

Tagore lamented that Asia’s relationship with Europe was not on the equal footing. “The West came, not to give of its best, or to seek for our best, but to exploit us for the sake of material gain. … We did Europe injustice because we did not meet her on equal terms. The result was the relation of superior to inferior, of insult on one side and humiliation on the other. We have been accepting things like beggars. We have been imagining that we have nothing of our own.” But Tagore never bore any animosity towards Europe. He said, “I say again that we must accept the truth when it comes from the West and not hesitate to render it our tribute of admiration. Unless we accept it our civilization will be one sided, it will remain stagnant.” About our dealing with the West his view was, “Let us try to win the heart of the West with all that is best and not base in us, and think of her and deal with her, not in revenge or contempt, but with goodwill and understanding, in a spirit of mutual respect.”
Was Tagore’s mission to China successful? The answer depends on who we ask. To his opponents of the time, it was not. One of them, Lu Xun, blamed his hosts for projecting Tagore as a living idol. Another critic blamed his hosts for not presenting a complete picture of Tagore. He was presented as a saintly poet who created poems out of his meditations amidst nature in seclusion. But there was another side of Tagore which, at the sight of demonic designs of fascists, the militants and other devils, flared up in anger and created poems and essays as sharp as swords. His hosts did not emphasize this.

Expectations from Tagore’s visit was spelled out in Liang QiChao’s welcome speech — restoration of cultural ties between the two countries and Tagore himself had similar aspirations and expressed them as follows: “My friends, I have come to ask you to re-open the channel of communication which I hope is still there; for though overgrown with weeds of oblivion, its lines can still be traced.” How much of that was achieved in his six-week visit? For that we may turn to Dr. Hu Shih’s reply to Tagore’s farewell speech in Shanghai: “…I am sure I speak for all present when I say that all of us sincerely hope Dr. Tagore and his friends will return feeling that they have not failed in the great task they have put before us today, so sympathetically and so feelingly. Rather I would ask them to return with the assurance that they have succeeded nobly and admirably in their task. The task is tremendous one, this task of preaching truth, in cementing two great peoples, whose relationship has been interrupted for ten centuries, in bonds of mutual sympathy and understanding. I wish to point out how right the poet is when he says that this must be accomplished through the mutual study of language. For mutual understanding cannot be accomplished in a short period of time. He has made a beautiful and successful beginning, one that will grow and show results far beyond the expectation of all those present here today, not excepting the poet. A beginning has been made and the seed that has been sown in our hearts will never be lost. It has been placed in fertile soil and it will bear fruit in the ages to come. I sincerely hope that Dr. Tagore and his friends will return to India with the conviction that they have succeeded nobly in the mission they set out to accomplish.”

This was not simply a nice gesture to an honored guest. Efforts were made to strengthen cultural ties between the two countries. Professor Liang QiChao was invited and he agreed to come to Santiniketan. Unfortunately the visit did not materialize. Actually, China was going through a tumultuous period in her history.

But, aside from the contemporary assessment, eighty-four years later, if I am to answer the same question I will emphatically say “Yes”. His only failure was to identify that one compatriot from China who could carry out his mission.

Every visionary needs some followers to carry out his vision and such a person did come not too long after. In 1927 while Tagore was in Singapore on his way to Java, a young Chinese Tan Yun Shan came to meet him. An idealist Budhist, Tan was an admirer of Tagore and read all his lectures delivered in China even though he was teaching in Malaysia while Tagore was visiting China. At Tagore’s urging, Tan joined Santiniketan in 1928 and there started a long and productive chapter in Sino-Indian cultural relations. In 1933, through tireless efforts of Tan Yun Shan, the China chapter of Sino-Indian Cultural Society was formed in Nanjing with Professor Tsai Yun-Pei as its first president and Tan Yun Shan as its first secretary. Next year the India Chapter of the Sino Indian Cultural Society was established with Rabindranath Tagore as president and his son, Rathindranath Tagore, as secretary. Tan continued his efforts in raising funds for fulfilling Tagore’s dream of having a Chinese studies center in Santiniketan. Tagore allocated a prime piece of land at the heart of the campus for the project. And finally, mostly endowed by donations from the Chinese government and individuals, Cheena-Bhavana --- the Chinese Studies Center --- was completed in 1937.

During his address at its opening ceremony on April 14, 1937, Tagore said, “The most memorable fact of human history is that of path-opening, not for the clearing of a passage for machines and machine guns, but for helping the realization by races of their affinity of minds, their mutual obligation of a common humanity. Such a rare event did happen and the path was built between our people and the Chinese in an age when physical obstruction needed heroic personality to overcome it and the mental barrier a moral power of uncommon magnitude. The two leading races of that age met, not as rivals on the battle fields, each claiming the right to be the sole tyrant on earth, but as noble friends, glorying in their exchange of gifts.” Recalling the situation of the time, Tagore observed, “But, unfortunately the contacts that are being made today have done more to estrange and alienate peoples from one another than physical inaccessibility ever did. We are discovering for ourselves the painful truth that nothing divides so much as the wrong kind of nearness.”

Cheena-Bhavana was the first center for Chinese Studies in India and until 1949 all expenses for its maintenance came from China. Tagore appointed Tan Yun Shan as its first director, a position which Tan held till 1966. In this respect he surpassed Huen Tsang, the Budhist scholar who spent fourteen years in India in the seventh century. Scholars and
students from both China and India and from other countries came to study at the Cheena-Bhavana and for a while Santiniketan could boast of a mini Chinatown.

What Tagore started continued after him. Jawaharlal Nehru, a great admirer of Tagore, visited China in 1939. During Japanese invasion in the 1930s a group of five Indian doctors went to China to offer their voluntary services and one of them died there. Generalissimo Chiang Kai Shek visited Santiniketan in 1942. After India’s independence, Nehru’s foreign policy towards China was largely influenced by Tagore’s vision. Chian’s Prime Minister Chau En Lai visited Santiniketan in 1956 and thus Santiniketan had the distinction of being the only educational institution in India to be visited by two Chinese heads of state.

How far Tagore was successful in uniting China and India culturally can be seen from the following episode narrated by Tan Chung, son of Tan Yun Shan: “Ambassador C. V. Ranganathan related to an interesting evening in Beijing when Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi’s special envoy, Mr. P. N. Haksar, and a Chinese scholar, Professor Wu Xiaolin vied with each other in reciting verses from Kalidasa’s Meghdoot. How Gurudeva (Tagore) would have smiled if he had come to know this small realization of his “Great Course.” Professor Wu learnt Sanskrit in Cheena-Bhavana (in 1941-45).

India’s Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee gave back to China a measure of what Tagore received from her. On June 23, 2003, he laid the foundation for a center for Indian Studies on the campus of Beijing University and said, “Today we repay in some measure by pledging our support for a center for Indian Studies in this University.” If Sino-Indian cultural relations ever attain the level of the good old days, the names of Rabindranath Tagore and his disciple, Tan Yun Shan, will be remembered with great reverence for initiating it.

Acknowledgement:

1. Speeches of Tagore and that of his hosts are from Talks in China as reproduced in The English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore, Vol.2 published by Sahitya Akademi, New Delhi, India.
2. Materials for opposition to Tagore are from The Controversial Guest: Tagore in China by Sisir Kumar Das, Across The Himalayan Gap (Internet).

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Bikash Bhattacharjee’s Painting

হিসেব মেলে না

শ্রী অশোক কুমার চক্রবর্তী
চেষ্টায়, কান্নকটিকাঁটি।

এক সময়ে 'পিঙ্গলরা' জাগত।
তালবালে ওদের সবাইই গতি।
ওদের দুঃখ, মিশেস্ত, অসহযাত্রা
পুজো লিখ।
এখন আর 'তা' হয় না।

দেখেছি শেষের দশকের দৌড়ে,
রমণীকে ধরণ করে-,
তেমনি দেখেছি।
কথ 'অলাভা' স্বালা-উদ্ধার,
পরিবারে শ্রীমান কমল, সন্তানের চরে।
বদন, সন্তান কিছুই আছে এই আরের মেলায়।
চেষ্টাতে হল অথু আলোচনাই দেববে।
আর মন হয় -----।

আমি তাই আর চুটি না
কেন কিছুই আশাকর্মে।
হরতা বরাবর আর হেটের যে লল, 
বর্ণালীক্ষ কামনা চাপাই ফিরিয়ে নেওয়া --
আর তখনই দেখি যত উত্পাটিতা
এলামেলা সব চলে।

হিসেব মেলে না,
আজ আর কেন কিছুই হিসেব মেলে না।
বিধানীর কাজ ঘটা মনে হয় না,
মিশিয়ে বার্তা, সরাসরির হরত, 
প্রত্যেকে আশাপ্রাপ্ত সস্তবক।
মহৎ, আইন- ---- ধরান।
ওদের চিন্তা আলাদা আলাদাই দম।
বেশাইয়ের নিকট তাকা একটিটা গুপ-ইনারা সমজয়ের মন্দান।
খিলা, দুর্গীন-ই, উটয়লুদম- বেশাইয়ে বিধানের নিজগত পীরতুম্বক দেখা শর্প্রস্ত ছিল,
ছিল দেশ ভ্রাতারাত্রক,
তারা এমনি দেশ পার্থিবতা প্রস্তাবে,
একই মিঠাি বাঁচায় নিজেদের কমন গণ করে চলেছে।
দেখ দেখ না-;
পরিবারের সন্তান প্রাণ না পাওয়ালে
আজ তামাটি- বিচিত্র কোথা করে।
আমি তাই নিদম কেন সেখানেই কচি-কাচারে,
কোটী বারণ হলে,
কোটী সামান্য হয়ে,
'প্রুথিয়া' তরামাটি পাওয়া যাবে।
শেষাপাশে: 'তোমারকে কথা দানান,
প্রত্যেকে দাও সামনাতনা।'
Leela - the Rhythmic Dance that Makes the Universe Go!

Chandrasekhar Roychoudhuri*
Storrs, Connecticut

Hey kids,
**Move it, move it, move it**
**Let’s move it.**

Why?
‘Cause it just feels good!
Let’s move it.

Where does it feel good?
It’s all over my body

**Let’s move it.**
**Move it, move it, move it.**

But Why? Why? Why?
‘Cause it feels good in my mind too!

**Move it, move it, move it**
**Let’s move it.**

What is “feel good”?
What is body?
What is mind?

I don’t know!
**Just move it, move it, move it**
**Let’s move it.**

It feels good when it is rhythmic
When the steps are rhythmic
When the undulations are rhythmic
When the gyrations are rhythmic
When the movements are rhythmic

**So, move it, move it, move it**
**Be rhythmic, rhythmic, rhythmic.**

Why rhythmic feels better than random?
I don’t know!
Why plucked guitar strings make rhythmic music?
Why struck piano keys make rhythmic music?

Why clapping hands makes rhythmic sound waves?
Why dropped stone in water makes rhythmic waves?
Why? Why? Why?

Don’t know
**Just move it, move it, move it**
**Be rhythmic, rhythmic, rhythmic.**

Ah!
Rhythmic movement must be life.

**So, move it, move it, move it**
**Be rhythmic, rhythmic, rhythmic.**

The Sun comes up rhythmically every morning.
The Moon comes up rhythmically every night
Stars do too
Every night
Tides in oceans and rivers come and go rhythmically
Seasons come and go rhythmically
New babies are born and very olds die
Stars born and die
Galaxies born and die
That’s rhythmic too!

**So, move it, move it, move it**
**Be rhythmic, rhythmic, rhythmic.**

Hold hands
Make many many radial lines like the spokes of a wheel
Now make the spokes of the wheel rotate in a steady periodic motion

Ah!
That is like a circular galaxy
Now each one of you is a star!

**So, move it, move it, move it**
**Be rhythmic, rhythmic, rhythmic.**

*http://www.physics.uconn.edu/people/faculty/storrs/roychoudhuri/*
Now curve the outer edges of the lines a little
As if they are merging into an imaginary outer circle
Now all of you rotate in a steady periodic motion

Hey!
That is a spiral galaxy!
And. You are all stars!
Or, at least made out of star dust!

**So, move it, move it, move it**
**Be rhythmic, rhythmic, rhythmic.**

Hey!
Hold it, hold it, hold it
What did you say?
Stars born and die
Just like babies are born and elderly die.

But how are we star dust?
Why do they die? Where do they go?

I don’t know, I don’t know
**Just, move it, move it, move it**
**Be rhythmic, rhythmic, rhythmic.**

All stars are made out of atoms
All of earth and planets are made out of atoms
Plants and all animals are made out of atoms
But atoms in the living things are organized as complex molecules
With life information coded by DNA molecules in our genes
And makes me a unique “me” even though we are all so similar.
How can everything be made out of same things called atoms?
And yet everything is so uniquely different.
We have six billion people and everybody behaves a little different.
We have billions of galaxies and they all are distinguishable.
We have billions of stars in every galaxy and they are all different.

Many stars have planets like those that our Sun has but they are all different.

Why? Why? Why?
I don’t know!
Some dances are promoted by Shiva
Whose violent dance (Tandob Leela)
Transforms old into beginnings of new
But, are we going any further?

At least, now you know the limit of our current knowledge.
You are immortal atoms.
You are immortal electrons, protons and neutrons.
You are undulations of the immortal Brahmha or ether field.

You are just assembly of rhythmic dances
You can never be destroyed.
You are all deathless!
You can only be transformed

So move it, move it, move it
Be rhythmic, rhythmic, rhythmic.

But be congruent with the rules of the biosphere.
Otherwise it cannot sustain you
And when you become space travelers
Traveling from planet to planet in other stars
Remember to strictly follow the rules of the cosmo-
To keep the rhythmic dances in you sustainable

So move it, move it, move it
Be rhythmic, rhythmic, rhythmic.

Wait a minute!
I am just rhythmic dances in Brahmha or ether field!

But what is ether?
What is Brahmha?
Why does it undulate as vastly different entities?

Why is it rhythmic?
Whoever has created it?

My! That’s a load of questions!
I don’t know!

West does not want to recognize the ether field as reality.
Even though we know we are real & full of electrons.
And our technologies using matter & electronics works for real.
And the equations can explain them!

East converted the Brahmhanic science into a religion.
Visualizable Gods and Goddesses
So it is only an abstract spirituality
Not some objective reality

So, the time has come to synthesize
The tendencies to mathematize and visualize
To bring the East and the West into real cross-cultural intercourse
Let diversity play out
And keep on asking – Why? Why? Why?
Let’s dance to that consummation!
That’s the final path to peaceful evolution

So, move it, move it, move it
Be rhythmic, rhythmic, rhythmic

And be happy!

Wait! Hap-py?
Happiness is an inside job
Job of the mind
But what is mind?

Oh! Please, leave me alone!
I don’t know what mind is
Just let me be!
And, you just be!

But, no matter what -
Move it, move it, move it
Be rhythmic, rhythmic, rhythmic

This will keep us happy most of the time!
**Two Hindi Poems: Agraha and Prem**

**Lakshman S. Thakur**

Tolland, Connecticut

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**आग्रहः**

लक्ष्मण सिंह टॉल्ड, कনेक्टिकट

अलको तो ध्वस के बादल
प्राण इन्हें विचित्रित रहने दो।
शोध मूलता के निवन्ध की
फिर फिर अर्थ लगाती चित्रयुक्त
अंधकार के पीछे, निरंभय
उपयोगिताएँ का अंकुर अनुपम।
उपयोग तन प्रायों के कलिमाल
प्राण इन्हें सुकुमित रहने दो।१ अलः

व्यंजित दाणी का दुरसाह
शतों शीघ्र चिठड़कता जाता
निपुण कल्पना के आधारों
निरंभय सत्य सिद्धि जाता।

भावसपत शायों के संवल
प्राण इन्हें मुखित रहने दो।२ अलः

शीघ्र-थीर निर्भेदान देहीं
के पीछे जो दिपा सांस है
शैलेंद्रियों के अंतराल में
निरंभय तक रही आस है।

अंतर्भूत जीवन की कल कल
प्राण इसे प्रसिद्धि रहने दो।३ अलः

स्तों के कथित की सुचुमा
जिन रागों की संपत्ति बनती
सांसों की उभया की गरिमा
जिन शानों की संगति बनती।

पतंग में गांव की छल छल
प्राण इसे विचित्रित रहने दो।४ अलः

संस्कृति मांगों के पीछे
प्रेम
लक्ष्मण सिंह
दलैंड, कमेब्रिकट

वक्त की आगों जला है,
प्रेम का सम्बंध, प्रियतम!

रीतियाँ की धमनियों में
कर चुका संघार है यह
तंतुओं में हदय के, बन
प्राण चिर उपहार है यह।
देह के धारों सिला है,
प्रेम का सम्बंध, प्रियतम!१

सांझ पतझर जनम देती
बसती उषा मनोहर
व्यास की पंजडियों रिस
तृप्ति का भरता सरोवर।
भूख की तापों गला है,
प्रेम का सम्बंध, प्रियतम!२

जाकड कर संपूर्ण जीवन
कांपती गोरी कलाई !
पवेंत्रों में घाटिया सी
दरशिं किंचित शवयाराई।
व्यास के भागों जुड़ा है,
प्रेम का सम्बंध, प्रियतम!३

कहें कोई, गीत मेरा
शब्द मघु घण्यत्र केवल!
दुःख सुख की भवना यह
पक्वियों का यंत्र केवल !
झुट के घायों भरा है,
प्रेम का सम्बंध, प्रियतम!४

सत्य के विस्फोट अगणित
जब हदय भीतर वसे हैं!
दुःखना क्या दिग दिगारतर
दीप जो अब तम डंसे हैं?
छंद तर शाखों कटा है,
प्रेम का सम्बंध, प्रियतम!५

गीत गायक एक कहता
गह चुका यह अर्थ भी रा !
सिलबों में शब्द की छुप
चांद ज्यों बन कर अंधेरा !
भाव का विस्मय-कला है,
प्रेम का सम्बंध, प्रियतम!६

सुंहारिन, आंचल सजा दो
झुक नयन के ज्योति-बादल
सांझ की पीयुष भिला
मागता यह पोतंत घायल !
रक के दारों धुला है,
प्रेम का सम्बंध, प्रियतम!७
वक्त की आगों जला है,
प्रेम का सम्बंध, प्रियतम!
Debu and Paanchu are pulling heavy carts up an incline. The road is busy. Trucks, buses and cars pass them by. Smoke fans their faces.

Stop! Cries out Debu.

Why?

I think your cart is less loaded than mine.

What!

Yes. Look, you are ahead of me.

I am just stronger than you.

That is not going to wash with me. I think my cart is heavier than yours.

I am just inches ahead of you!

Inches! That is at least three feet. Who are you trying to fool?

This is three feet! Are you blind? Look where you are and where I am. I can touch you easily. Don’t waste my time.

Paanchu glares, stops, and rests his cart. The crates creak and the ropes holding them groan. Debu stops too. He carefully measures the distance between the carts with his feet. He puts one foot in front of the other so that they touch toe to heel. Then he repeats the process. He does it five times till he finds himself face to face with Paanchu.

See! Debu says.

See what! Obviously you are wrong.

Wrong my foot! You are ahead of me. Your cart has to be lighter.

Even if it were, what on earth are we supposed to do about it?

We have to re-arrange everything.

Are you insane? In the middle of the road!

Ohh! Me insane! What about the appalling injustice of you carrying the lesser load and me, carrying the greater burden?

---

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Oh God! I will never work with you again.

We will see about that.

Paanchu lets his cart down in disgust.

Debu quickly cuts the ropes loose with a knife in both the carts. Then he moves one crate from his own cart to the other. Then he shifts another one.

Hey wait! Paanchu shouts.

What!

Why are you shifting two crates? One was enough!

I am not sure whether two are enough! But I will let it go for now.

What are you, a weighing machine?

I have experience. You are new to the trade.

Huh! Experience! All this is hot air.

Debu ties up his own cart again with an expertise that is obvious to the eye. His companion takes time and finally when the job is done, they start off again.

The heat is up. The sun is roaring. The incline is steep and they both sweat and struggle.

Wait! Paanchu cries out.

Huh!

You are ahead of me now. You scoundrel, you cheated me.

Stop lying! You are just going slowly on purpose. You can’t fool me.

Paanchu was not ready for this. He struggles for an answer.

Let’s keep going, says Debu. We have to get to the factory in time. We have only half an hour more and there are two more kilometers to go. If we are late we won’t get our due wage.

Now I know why no one else likes to work with you.

To hell with your knowledge! Trying to fool me with slow speed! I am too experienced for all this.

They eye each other with distrust. Their arms strain as they reach the top of the incline. The muscles spring out and the veins tremble. The descent is even harder. They balance themselves on their shins as they wobble down. A bus driver passing by curses them for blocking the way.

At the factory, they collect their wages. Paanchu is fuming with anger. He has no idea how he can take revenge but he feels he must and on the spot if possible.

They count their wages. Then Debu says, “I know another place where there might be some work. Let’s go there."

Hey! Who are you to command me! I am my own master and will go where I will, Paanchu says hotly.
Oh ho! What a great man I have run into! I am sorry I didn’t know that you are a film star in disguise.

Stop this nonsense!

Look, if you don’t want to starve we better go now.

Paanchu thought to himself: Well, here is a chance I have to cheat this rascal. I should not let it go.

Well, okay, let me see you fool me this time, he says.

Ahh! I see, still thinking about that. Hot to the touch, huh. A true film star! Well, well, in our profession you will have to grow above such pettiness.

Pettiness! Paanchu seethes with rage.

They walk to the next factory. They get work as expected. A small man with a sun-burnt face barks at them and shows them the crates they have to load. His voice is hard and has an edge of violence to it. They jump and run whenever the man speaks.

Paanchu realizes that this is his chance to get even. But Sun-Burnt-Face intervenes.

Which of you two lazy bones can tie the crates faster? He growls.

I can, says Debu.

Good. Get cracking.

They quickly load the crates and Paanchu watches with dismay as his cart grows heavier. He can feel the sun boring a hole into him. He can do nothing while Sun-Burnt-Face stands over them. He can’t believe that this is happening to him. He feels helpless. Debu stacks up everything and ties it all up.

Better satisfy yourself that the weights are the same, says Debu. He picks the carts one by one and pretends to pull at them.

Yeah, they look the same to me. Now don’t complain about it, OK. I am a fair man.

Paanchu wants to hit out but Sun-Burnt-Face is watching closely.

They set off. Paanchu groans and grumbles. His eyes pop out as he pulls at the cart. He looks angrily as Debu romps ahead.

Hey wait! Calls out Paanchu.

What! I can’t hear you.

I said wait!

The traffic is too noisy. Can’t hear you. We will talk when we get to our destination.

Cars and scooters and buses and rickshaws honk past them. Passerby spit past them.

By and by, Debu gets quite far ahead. He is a mere speck in the distance.

Paanchu strains and pulls. When he reaches the yard, Debu is waiting for him.
You took a long while, he says and smiles.

Paanchu takes off a piece of cloth tied around his head and wipes the sweat off his whole body. He feels like caving in. Revenge is still swelling in his head.

They collect their wages from a lackey of Sun-Burnt Face and decide to rest.

What will you eat? Says Debu cheerfully.

Nothing.

What are you all upset about? You think you got left behind because I had overloaded you. It is just the sun. I have more experience. You are a rookie. That is why you were lagging behind.

A sea of fury surges within Paanchu. Hunger gnaws at his stomach as well.

They both eat under the shade of a tree. Paanchu keeps silent and feels lost. Debu seems boisterous. His spirits are high. He talks of everything – his wife, his children, the slum he lives in, the water supply in the summer, the general corruption everywhere. His talk never seems to end.

After lunch, Debu said that he will take a nap before taking another shot at finding work.

Paanchu thought this over: the only way to take revenge is to make sure that this fellow gets no work. I should simply desert him. Alone, he will never find work.

He excused himself and said he wanted to see if he can drink some cold water somewhere.

You won’t get it anywhere at this time of the day.

I can try.

Debu lies down with a huff.

Paanchu walks away. The heat pulsates. The air simmers. Paanchu’s throat is parched. He keeps walking, trying to get as far away from Debu as possible. He rests for a while under the shade of a bush. He knows he must look for work. He hasn’t earned enough for the day.

He dozes off for a while and then wakes up. Then he hunts for work. He walks to factories and depots and yards known to him in the area. At some places he spots Debu, tying up crates, pulling away cheerily. He backs off immediately. At some places he has to wait for another lone laborer to come by. Sometimes pairs of laborers come and take the work. Finally, he finds a small mango cart to pull. The wage is appalling.

Evening approaches fast. The sun glowers. The sky is low and melting. Paanchu makes his way home, weaving his way amongst the traffic, which is beginning to overflow as the offices and the factories close for the day. He feels angry and tired.

At home, his child is playing outside with a ball made of wrapped and rolled up newspaper found in the trash. The child’s eyes sparkle as he sees his father. He throws the ball at his father’s feet. Paanchu rushes up to the child and slaps him hard twice.

Get in, you damned curse.

The child bawls. Paanchu is swept away by remorse for what he has done. But, he ignores his feelings, manages to hold himself together, and quickly steps inside his shack.
আজি কেন চেষ্টা করা

অরিজিত সিনহাব*  
স্টোর্স, কানোটিকার

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Hair Getting Cut

Riddhi Adhikari*
Merrick, New York

One of the oldest memories I can recall is of fiddling with my grandmother’s hair, hair that was very long and black with snowy white mixed in. I can very clearly remember thinking to myself, Ma’s hair is that long, too. Was it a tradition or something? In the end, I came to the conclusion that yes, it was a tradition and something I wanted to do, too.

That was probably the biggest conscious decision I made, you know, pre-third-grade and all. And so, after years of not cutting it, my hair went from also shoulder length to past my waist. An unthinkable length – something I haven’t seen people my age do much, if ever.

But I wanted something to remind me of that time when I was surrounded with a group of strangers that I had known in point of time and apparently were supposed to stand with me forever and ever and ever. To a time when I was surrounded with my entire family in a place where I wasn’t particularly different.

When I walked around with my ridiculously long hair, I showed it proudly, almost like a banner to remind everyone of the heritage and the people I couldn’t tell them about, all one-by-one. Because that is what I am, completely proud of all that makes me.

Unimaginable was it that I would actually cut my hair. In fact, I didn’t quite understand myself why I wanted my hair, which was the product of years of commitment, cut off. It wasn’t because I was a teenager (because is a pretty general thing to say and sounds it like you’re trying to over simplify the mentality of a teenager) and it wasn’t because I hated my hair the way it was. I think it was just because I change was necessary.

And I think I understand why I did it now better than I did before. It was probably since, when sever such a huge weight from your head, it becomes lighter and you’re able to hold your chin a little higher. And because you don’t need a banner to show who you are – you can just show it in every good action you do that you didn’t need to and every kind thing you said just because it was a nice thing to say.

Heritage and culture might be technically something about your clothes and food and government system or something, but a key thing is forgotten in all this. To truly show when you have a heritage that you’re proud of, you don’t need to list off all your country’s accomplishments back to your ancient ancestors discovered zero, just kind and courteous and thoughtful. Make them think, Wow, what a wonderful person. Because that’s what really make a good culture, people who practice what they preach.

*Riddhi Adhikari is a 9th grader at the John F. Kennedy High School, Bellemore, New York.
Father, War, We Are Alone

Matthew Mercure*
Storrs, Connecticut

Father

His eyes stare down at his tray and linger.
Carefully he wraps his fingers around the cup before lifting.
He draws in water, slowly letting it seep to the back of his throat.
Adding contemplation to the flow. To the taste.

Picking up the hamburger, he takes a bite. Chewing deliberately.
Now and again we look up and stop pretending there is nothing more.
Our gazes brush past one another, quickly find new focus.

The captivating scene:
The colorful advertisements. Ketchup bottles half full.
Grains of pepper in the saltshaker. Loose crumbs of bread
From a previous meal. Streaks of moisture slowly fading.
The reflection of our world in the window.
Smeared yellow headlights on a dark, wet canvas.

The uncertainty, curious. This realization, foreign.
In the time between two bites.
I stare at the God I once knew.

Now fallen.

War

It was one of those summer days that go down as average.
Nothing of note passing the threshold of our senses.
The sun’s brightness suggesting it was hotter than it really was.
Just when I thought this day would recede into the realm of routine,
A strange buzzing sound promises difference. A light thump.
A recognizable metronome. But not quite.

Looking up at the overhang of the wooden shed I saw a small wasp’s nest.
Beneath it a spider web. And in the web a spider.
A wasp stuck, tangles of steel rope entwined around his middle.
It stirred, flapping its wings rapidly. Repeating the process every few seconds.
Sensing fatigue, the spider would close in, only to retreat at the threat of a sting.
The spider waiting for it to go limp, always testing to see if there was fight left.
I could only watch for 5 minutes.

*Matthew Mercure is a graduate student, NEAG School of Education, University of Connecticut-Storrs.
At first rooting for the spider, who was clever enough to build its web under the hive. Then, I changed sides, rooting for the wasp, thinking what a tragic fate it was.

Maybe something symbolic lay at the heart of this. Maybe something universal that could be applied to life from watching this struggle. Or, maybe, nothing at all.

**We Are Alone**

We are all alone because we can’t explain the happiness we feel. How from the top of the mountain the whole valley lay before us. No one acknowledging our scars. Or our panting breath.

We are alone because we can’t explain the guilt that eats us whole. The people that we let down, the choices we regret. The justifications that make sense only to us.

We are alone because all emotions have an epitome. And our imaginations are vivid. And comparison begets only disappointment.

We are alone because the child within us is quiet. Sleds collect dust in sheds. Tree houses quietly gather moss. And we look on our children with sympathy.

We are alone because life is easier that way. We don’t have to explain why dark corners scare us. Or why we hope for gray clouds in the morning.

***************

**Abstraction: What Is It?**

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Editor’s Acknowledgment: Sayan Ray’s painting on the cover of BAGH, Inc.’s 1995 brochure
Consider this: Calcutta has produced one of the greatest cricketers in world history. He appears at or near the top of all Indian record books, whether in Test matches or in one-day matches. In terms of career runs scored in Tests, his name appears fourth, after only those of fellow greats Gavaskar, Dravid, and Tendulkar. But, in one-day internationals (ODIs), his performance is even more legendary. His statistics in ODIs compare to those of the very best players around the world who have ever played the game. He is fourth in overall runs scored with only ul-Haq, Jayasuriya, and Tendulkar scoring more, while it is a fact that these other cricketers have all played many more ODI innings. He is also fourth in making centuries, with 22 centuries to his credit, second among those who scored in fifties, and has hit more sixes than any other Indian cricketer in history. And he holds many more records that speak volume of his dominance in the one-day format of cricket. He was, for instance, the fastest player in history to reach 9000 runs – he achieved this feat in fewer innings than such legendary batsmen as Tendulkar, Lara, and Ponting. Put this together with his form for India in the past year, and it is quite clear that he should be a central figure in Team India.

The man, of course, is Bengal’s Sourav Ganguly, an Indian legend in both major forms of international cricket. But, to the surprise of many pundits, and the acrimony of millions of Indian supporters, Ganguly has been left out of the Rest of India team for the Irani Trophy. This has once again roused a huge controversy surrounding India’s former captain and the world number one ODI batsman.

The Irani Trophy traditionally ranks as one of the most important domestic Indian cricket tournaments, as it is often used as a selection trial to finalize the strongest possible team India can field for major international series, and indeed it will undoubtedly be a selection tool for the national committee of selectors for the upcoming home series against Australia beginning in October. The exclusion of Ganguly from the squad is a clear message that the selectors are not confident in his batting ability, and additionally his athleticism, which has certainly deteriorated with age. But while Ganguly was never very athletic, his main threat came with the timing of his stroke-play and his ability to
deftly caress the ball to the cover boundary with minimal lateral movement of his arms and a single, simple, proficient step towards the cover.

His exclusion comes as a bigger surprise because Ganguly was actually in blinding form in the 2007 calendar year, when he made his comeback from being dropped out during the Chappell era (during which it was widely believed that Ganguly ran into a biased selection committee and, quite certainly, a biased head coach in Greg Chappell). After kicking his comeback off with a lively 98 in the first of five ODIs against the West Indies in February 2007, and later collecting a Man of the Series award in a Test series against Pakistan on Indian soil, Ganguly was eventually named the Asian Cricketer of the Year.

While it is true that during the summer, Ganguly’s form dipped against Sri Lanka, the same statement can easily be said of almost all Indian batsmen who took part in that series. Furthermore, Ganguly’s replacement in the Test team is likely to be Mohammed Kaif, an athletic fielder but below-par middle order batsman who appeared in the Indian Test team thirteen times between 2000 and 2006. He and Yuvraj Singh are likely to fill the middle order for Rest of India during the Irani Trophy. Ganguly has ample reason to feel as if he was treated unfairly by the selection committee. In addition to the fact that both players first got their chances and emerged under Ganguly’s captaincy, they both have alarmingly poor Test records. Certainly, they have not put in any performances good enough in the recent past to oust Ganguly from his spot in the Indian batting order. Furthermore, one could easily make the case that there are Indian players who have performed far worse than what Ganguly had in the past year, and that they should be dropped well before Ganguly’s place in the lineup is questioned.

It would seem, then, as though Ganguly’s batting form is not the main issue at hand, and, accordingly, questions regarding the selection committee’s political alliances and geographic biases have been raised. Most notably, former India coach Sandeep Patil has expressed the concern that the exclusion of Ganguly from Rest of India actually has nothing to do with his cricketing ability, but instead may have more to do with Ganguly’s political alliances, namely that with the reemerging and hugely influential Jagmohan Dalmiya, head of the Cricket Association of Bengal. If this is indeed the case, then it must be said that the national committee’s priorities are, conservatively speaking, disappointingly biased.

In any case, Bengalis around the world will no doubt hail Sourav Ganguly, still the Prince of Calcutta and the city’s most accomplished and most visible living celebrity. Having risen to the very pinnacle of a major sport as India’s ambassador of cricket to the world for five years, Ganguly is the finest athlete that our vast city has ever produced. As we remember the career of a true sporting legend and icon of Bengal, let Ganguly’s name bring a sense of pride to Bengalis the world over.
What Happens At Night

Mitali Bandyopadhyay*
Farmington, Connecticut

Ever wonder what happens at night?
The markers begin drawing on the
   Cleaned board
And the pencils begin to dance.
Soon the books begin to prance.
The globe starts to skip and
   Papers begin to flip
Because that is what they do
   At night.
Six hours later …
   It is the crack of dawn
Then they all began to
   Yawn.

“The sun is up
   We’ve had our fun” they
Say
And then return to their
   Places without delay.

So that is what happens at night!

*Mitali Bandyopadhyay is a 5th grader at West Woods Upper Elementary School, Farmington, Connecticut.

Editor’s Acknowledgment:
Deep Mukhopadhyay is a graduate student in the Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics, University of Connecticut-Storrs.
কিছুকাল পরের কাছে রাতের সময় কিছুটা স্মৃতি প্রত্যক্ষ করতে পারি। সেই সময় তিনি মূলোক্ত মহিলার সাথে একটি সম্পর্ক গড়ে তুলেন। কিন্তু তার পর চিরকদের বিচার অভিযান অচলিত 195 এর পর্যন্ত চারনিং-এ সতর্ক হিসেবে চলে গেল। তাই কিছুদিন পরে তিনি একটি সাদা চেহারা সহ থাকতেন নি।


doesn't look well.

"তাকে এখানে দেখে না। শুধুমাত্র থাকবেন, নয় আরো করবেন, নয় সার্থক।"
Editor’s Acknowledgment: Sayan Ray’s painting on the cover of BAGH, Inc.’s 1994 brochure.
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Dr. Suresh Shah
Mrs. Dina Shah

and

Family
Durga Puja

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and

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Have you read these books?

Negotiating Ethnicity: Second-generation South Asian Americans Traverse a Transnational World.
(About the children of highly educated migrants who arrived after 1965)

Living Our Religions: Hindu and Muslim South Asian American Women Narrate Their Experiences.
(On women’s experiences of religion in the US, India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan)

Do you know:

On October 21st

Shri Shri Ravi Shankar (Founder, Art of Living Foundation)

M. J. Akbar (Former Editor of Times of India, Founder Editor of Covert),

Madhu Kishwar (Editor of Manushi, a journal on women’s issues, and a fellow at the Center for the Study of Developing Societies)

and others, including T. Jeremy Gunn (ACLU), David Coppola, Rosalind Hackett, Yehezkel Landau, Zahid Bukhari, and Bishop Desmond Tutu (invited keynote speaker)

Will speak at the University of Connecticut, Storrs
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We hope that all participants will enjoy the Durga Puja season with their families and friends and have a super time.

We pray that every heart will be filled with infinite cheers.

Please spread some cheer among those who could not attend this grand festival.

Please come back next year with family and friends for a great time.

Executive Committee, BAGH, Inc.
Durga Puja

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Nadi (River): A Painting by Upendrakishore Roychowdhury
Editor’s Acknowledgment: Paschimbanga, Rabindra Sankhya, 1994, page 67

বাংলার মাটি, বাংলার জল, বাংলার বায়ু, বাংলার ফল -
পুণ্য হউক, পুণ্য হউক, পুণ্য হউক হে ভগবান ॥

রবীন্দ্রনাথ ঠাকুর
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