

# ARANI

VOL. 6 - FALL EDITION

OCTOBER 2018



An Expression of Srishti  
Bengali Cultural Association of  
Charlotte, North Carolina





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**141**

NATIONALITIES



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# FROM THE EDITORIAL DESK

Shyama Parui



We were jolted out of our sleep at 3:45 am by the loud ring of the phone call. It took me a minute before I reminded myself that I was in a beautiful hotel room for our family's trip to Jaipur. Slowly, my husband Uttam answered the phone and heard the voice of our neighbor from the US. He sounded frantic and worried as he conveyed the news that our house had been hit by lightning and the roof was set aflame by this cruel form of nature's fury. Being 8000 miles away from our home, our hearts raced and we shook in fear terrified, at the thought of what had happened. The turquoise colors of the room failed to calm us down. The soft blanket was anything but comforting. For the first time in my life, we had faced the possibility of losing our home. A few minutes later we heard from our neighbor again, this time on a video call to show us the condition of the house. Much to our relief, the damage was very small and easily repairable. The Fire Marshall spoke to us too, which was truly reassuring. As we put the pieces of information together, we realized that more than one person had helped at that critical moment. Alert neighbors stepped out to see what had caused a loud bang, one called 911, another tried to contact us, the amazing firefighting team arrived immediately and put out the fire in no time. It is because of them that our house is still standing. Our travel agent, left no stone unturned to acquire a new ticket for my husband to return to the US. In the days that followed, friends called to check on us, offer moral support, dealt with the repairers while we were en route, and went out of their way to make meals and do airport pick-ups. Each one of them took time out of their busy schedules to show care and concern without expecting anything in return.

It is still hard to believe that an electrical charge of over five billion Joules zapped the roof of our house, but we are very grateful to God for the safety of our family and the kindness demonstrated by the people in our neighborhood and by our friends. That very

quality is what evolves a group of people into a community. It is what builds hope when you are vulnerable and encourages generosity when you are secure. Life is unpredictable and within one catastrophic second you may have to face your worst nightmare.

The good news is that there are so many ways in which one can express benevolence. Let's take Leena Basu, for example. A very active member of Srishti, she says that growing up in a joint family, the idea of giving back was really just a part of her family and culture. She believes that, "they (family) made me realize that we make our life by what we give and it was in our vein.... love only grows by sharing." After Leena worked with 'special kids' as a Special Ed teacher in *Indian Institute of Cerebral Palsy*, she experienced what Helen Keller describes as, "The unselfish effort to bring cheer to others will be the beginning of a happier life for ourselves" In Leena's words, "I feel content to offer my skills, my time to those who can use them in an easy way to give back. I support donation to charity. In return it satisfies my soul and it brings a profound ripple effect."

I couldn't agree more. One of the most rewarding experiences we had as a family was participating in the Pay It Forward 5k in Mooresville, NC. At the end of the race, all finishers received a bottle with not just a message but cash. To my delight, I discovered \$200 in my water bottle and note saying that the money was to help pay for an act of kindness. My daughter tried to convince me that contributing the crisp \$100 bills toward the family vacation was a worthy cause. After some friendly debating we decided on the organizations to support. My husband and children chose to donate their share to the local Children's Theatre, as they "never want it to close down." I chose National Public Radio (NPR) not because it is hard to sit through their

donation drives, but it is among other things, my secret weapon. Picture this, if the kids bicker in the car then NPR comes on and forces them to look for a way to resolve their current disagreements. The threat of continuing to put up with "Here and Now", unites these siblings in their common goal of listening to their favorite music.

In the same 5K, I saw groups in matching t-shirts collectively supporting their cause, laughing and building a sense of camaraderie, at the same time getting some exercise on a cold morning that would otherwise be spent lazing around and eating a big breakfast. If you love running too, be sure check out "Bhag Srishti Bhag" featuring our very own members.

We cannot single handedly change the world, but we surely can make a difference. No effort is too small. For instance, by reducing the use plastic objects we can collectively protect the environment. Shalini Dey shares her message in, "Beat Plastic Pollution".

But there are some who go above and beyond in their quest towards betterment of society. We have such a rare gem among us, an individual who has made it her mission in life to empower women in India. Through her organization "Yes She Rises", Indrani Nayar-Gall is gearing up to educate and employ women trapped in the Devadasi system in pockets of Karnataka, India. In a heart wrenching short story, "Unmoving Darkness", she writes about the fictitious Durgamma struggling to make sense of her life within this abhorrent practice.

When my co-editor, Saswati Collam and I were discussing this topic, she shared an interesting perspective. She said, "What amazes me is the fact that the very five billion joules that has the power to incinerate all and reduce everything to ashes, also has the capability to coalesce grains of sand and form a material as delicate and pristine as glass. We like to think that ARANI oozes with that unique "oorja" (energy) that charges Srishtians, and brings them together once in a year to make this unique literary effort successful each year, every year". And now a few resourceful ladies from Srishti led by the likes of Anita Sarkar and Shanta Dutta hope to tap into that reserve of resident energy. Under a new initiative aptly titled as "Oorja" and fueled by the thought, "If not me, who?", the group aspires to channelize this energy, our community's amazing skill sets as well as the cognitive surplus that exists amongst each of us to get engaged actively with some of the social causes in Charlotte like education, stimulating upward mobility and several others. We hope that you too will choose to be a trailblazer and participate. Let's also pray that Maa Durga gives us the strength to support the right thing and that her blessings guide us to create a better world. Jai Maa Durga!

The Editorial Team Wishes You and Your Near & Dear Ones a Joyous Durgotsav.



# TEAM ARANI

## 2018

### Editor's Desk



Saswati Collam



Shyama Parui



Munmun Naskar



Sekhar Naskar



Subrato Dey

### Fund Raising



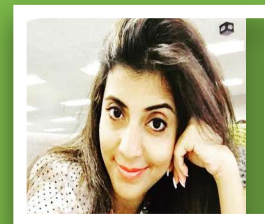
Shomit Banerjee



Debsundar



Shoma Sengupta



Karli Bose

### Creative Design



Priyanka Mandal



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Arani Artists Gallery



**SRISHTI** of Charlotte is a registered (Federal ID# 47-2245896) non-profit organization that is dedicated towards social, cultural, charitable and educational purposes.

SRISHTI of Charlotte is a beacon for promoting Bengali culture, literature, art and its rich heritage throughout Carolinas. The organization's goal is to both preserve as well pass on this rich and vibrant heritage to the next generation of millennials growing up in this great country. It fosters unity and creates a cross cultural interaction and appreciation of diverse cultures, engages in cultural exchanges with like-minded organizations and participates in social welfare activities.

Srishti of Charlotte organizes opportunities for local individuals to present Indian and South Asian performing arts such as dance, music and drama. Special efforts are taken to encourage youth participation so that they learn and continue these art forms and add to the diversity of their talents. Srishti of Charlotte actively partners and engages with various educational institutions in the Charlotte Area. It also organizes donation drives to serve the needs of the community like Hope House (Huntersville), Ekal Vidyalaya, Devadasi\_Now, The Souls Divine besides others.

Like every year, we are excited to host our largest annual event namely our **Durga Puja / (Sharodiya Utsav) from Friday, October 19th to Sunday, October 21st 2018**. This social and cultural extravaganza is typically attended by over 600 people from the Carolinas and its neighboring states.

We primarily rely on contributions from our members and commercial and corporate organizations like you to support our growing association. We humbly request your sponsorships by placing an advertisement in ARANI that cover both the print and the internet media for a full year. If you have any questions please feel free to contact us at [Teamsrishti@srishtiofcharlotte.org](mailto:Teamsrishti@srishtiofcharlotte.org)

Thank you,

With warm regards,

SRISHTI of Charlotte

<https://www.srishtiofcharlotte.org/>





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Rajtilak De

Avishek Saha

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Suryadip Chakraborty(Sunny)

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Chiranjeeb Kundu

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Leena Basu

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Avishek Saha

## **Social Outreach & Fundraising**

Sekhar Naskar

## **Logistics**

Rajtilak Dey

## সেতু

### ছন্দসী বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায়

(১)

বিকেল গড়িয়ে সন্ধ্যা নামব নামব করছে। ফুলের বাগান পেরিয়ে, গোটা চারেক সিঁড়ি টপকে, বাড়ির সংলগ্ন ছোট বারান্দায় উঠে এসে, সন্তর্পনে সদর দরজার হাতলটায় হাত রাখতেই আন্তে আন্তে দরজাটা খুলে গেল। আশ্চর্য্য হল নীল। চাবি পকেটেই ছিল অবশ্য, কিন্তু বার করার প্রয়োজন হল না।

দরজা খুলে করিডোরে ঢুকে দরজাটা 'লক' করে দিল সে। বাড়িটা নীলের হাতিয়ে রিট্রীট। বেশীর ভাগ সময়ে খালি থাকে। এখন, এসময়ে কারো এ বাড়িতে থাকার কথা নয়। খুব পা টিপে টিপে, দুরু দুরু বক্ষে, নীচের তলার তিনটি শোবার ঘর, খাবার ঘর, রান্নাঘর, টি.ভি. রুম, সবই ঘুরে দেখে নিল একবার। নাঃ! কোথাও কেউ নেই। ছিমছাম আসবাব দিয়ে সাজানো ছবির মত ঘরগুলো, তার মা যে ভাবে রেখে গিয়েছিলেন গত ক্রিসমাস-নতুন বছরের ছুটির সময়ে, ঠিক তেমনই আছে।

এই বাড়ি কেনার পিছনের ছোট ইতিহাসটা নীলের হঠাৎ মনে পড়ে গেল। বছর চারেক আগে অস্ট্রেলিয়া থেকে দক্ষিণ নিউ জিল্যান্ডে বেড়াতে এসে তার মা করবী প্রেমে পড়ে গেলেন আর্থার পাসের। প্রবল জেদ ধরলেন যে এখানে প্রতি বছর ছুটি কাটাবার জন্য একটা বাড়ি তাকে কিনতেই হবে। নীলের ডাক্তার বাবা অজয়ের ক্ষীণ প্রতিবাদে বিশেষ ফল হল না। অগত্যা, ঠিক যেন রূপকথার রাজ্যে বসানো ছোট্ট এই দোতলা বাড়িটা বাবা কিনেই ফেললেন। প্রতি বছরই সেই থেকে জানুয়ারী মাসে ছুটি কাটাতে এখানে আসে নীল তার বাবা মায়ের সাথে।

নীলের এবারকার অন্য সময়ে আসাটা অবশ্য বাবা-মার সঙ্গে নয়।

এখন জুন মাসের শেষ। নিউ জিল্যান্ড-এর আর্থার পাসের এই অঞ্চলে জমজমাট শীত। নীলের রিট্রীটের সামনে পথের ওপর প্রায় তিন ইঞ্চি পুরু বরফ জমে আছে। আসেপাশের সব কটা বাড়ির চূড়া বরফের কবল ঢেকে সাদা। সুমুখে রাস্তার ওপারে পাইনের ঘন জঙ্গলের পিছনে উঁচু উঁচু তুষার-শুভ্র পাহাড়গুলো যেন ধানমগ্ন হয়ে দাঁড়িয়ে আছে।

সিঁড়ি বেয়ে ওপরে উঠে এলো নীল। ওপরে অ্যাটিকে পাশাপাশি দুটা ঘর। একটা নীলের শোবার ঘর, অপরাটা স্টাডি। নিজের শোবার ঘরে ঢুকে ঘরের অপর প্রান্তের দরজা খুলে ব্যালকনিতে গিয়ে কিছুক্ষণ স্তব্ধ হয়ে চেয়ে রইল সে। পাইনের ঘন সবুজ আর পাহাড়ের ওপর জমাট বরফের শুভ্রতার মিলেমিশে কন্সট্রাস্ট চোখ জুড়িয়ে গেল। একটু পরে নীল ঘরে ঢুকে তার বিছানায় এসে বসল। বুকের ধুকপুকানি এতক্ষণে অনেকটা কমে গিয়েছে। শরীর আর মন জুড়ে নেমে আসছে অবসাদ।

(২)

সেদিন সকালে নীল আর তার বন্ধুরা কুইন্স টাউন থেকে, ওয়েস্ট পোর্ট ছাড়িয়ে, আর্থার পাসে এই হাতিয়ে রিট্রীরের দিকেই আসছিল। সিডনী বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের প্রথম বছর ছাত্র ওরা। বছরের মাঝে টার্ম ব্রেকের ছুটির অবসরে, তার চার অন্তরঙ্গ বন্ধু - ক্রিস, ম্যাট, প্রশান্ত ও শরীফকে - নীল রাজী করিয়েছিল শীতের বরফে ঢাকা নিউজিল্যান্ডের দক্ষিণ দ্বীপে বেড়াতে আসতে।

নীলের মা করবী বার বার বারন করে বলেছিলেন, 'এই শীতে ওখানে সবই বরফে ঢাকা। রাস্তাগুলো সরু এবং গোলমলে। এখন ওখানে না যাওয়াই ভাল'।

আঠারো বছরের নীল দু হাত তুলে মাকে নিরস্ত করার ভঙ্গীতে বলেছিল, 'মা, তোমার সব তাতেই ভয়। এত ভয় পেলে অ্যাগারোফেবিয়া নিয়ে বাড়িতে বসে থাকতে হবে। কোথাও বেরোন চলবে না। রিল্যাক্স, মা। আমরা সকলেই সতর্ক হয়ে গাড়ি চালাই।'।

প্রশান্ত ও শরীফের বাড়ি থেকেও মৃদু আপত্তি উঠেছিল। কান দেয় নি ওরা। বারো দিন আগে এয়ার নিউজিল্যান্ড ফ্লাইটে ক্রাইস্ট চার্চে এসে নেমেছিল ওরা। ঝকঝকে একটা হস্তা স্পোর্টস গাড়ী ভাড়া নিয়ে হৈ হৈ করে বেরিয়ে পড়েছিল অতঃপর, দক্ষিণ নিউজিল্যান্ড পর্যটনে। দারুন ঘোরা হল কুইন্স টাউন, মিলফোর্ড সাউন্ড এবং গ্লেশিয়ার এলাকাগুলোতে। শীতের বরফ সংকুল পথে বেশ কিছুটা গাড়ি চালিয়ে মনের জোরও খুব বেড়ে গেল নতুন লাইসেন্স পাওয়া আঠারো-উনিশ বছরের যুবকদের। পালা করে গাড়ি চালাচ্ছিল ওরা। বাবা-মায়ের আওতার বাইরে, পুরোপুরি স্বাধীন ভাবে সাংঘাতিক অ্যাডভেঞ্চারের এরকম ছিল এর আগে কখনও অনুভব করে নি নীল এবং তার বন্ধুরা।



অবশেষে ওয়েস্টার্ন পোর্ট থেকে আর্থার পাসের রাস্তায় পৌঁছে দেখা গেল উঁচু পাহাড়ের গায়ের উপর দিয়ে উঠে গিয়েছে সর্পিল, সরু পথ। মাইলের পর মাইল ঐকে-বঁকে চলেছে - বরফে ঢাকা, বৃষ্টিতে পিছলা। স্পোর্টস্ কারের ছাদ সম্পূর্ণ উন্মুক্ত। সবে দুপুর তখন, যদিও দিনের আলো কমে আসছে।

গাড়ীর চালক উনিশ বছরের ক্রিস উল্লসিত হয়ে বলে উঠল, ‘দ্য রিয়েল চ্যালেঞ্জ অফ ড্রাইভিং লাইস হিয়ার, ফোকস্। আই বেট্ উই আর গোগিং টু এঞ্জয় দ্য ড্রাইভ।’

সহসা, পিছনে প্যাসেঞ্জার সীটে বসা নীল অজানা আশংকায় কাঁঠ হয়ে গেল। গা শির শির করতে লাগল তার। থেকে থেকে মার কথা মনে পড়তে লাগল। কতবার বারন করেছিল এসময়ে এখানে আসতে। ক্রিস কিন্তু মহা ফুর্সুতে, বাঁ হাতে ধরা বিয়ার বোতলে চুমুক দিতে দিতে এক হাতেই গাড়ীর স্টিয়ারিং ঘুরিয়ে এগিয়ে চলেছে। বাঁকা পথে ঘুরতে ঘুরতে অ্যান্টিলটের ওপর ওর পায়ের চাপও যেন ক্রমশঃ বেড়েই চলেছে। সিডিতে তারদ্বরে ইউ টু ব্যান্ডের গান চলছে। নীল ছাড়া সকলেই মাঝে মাঝে সেই গানে যোগ দিচ্ছে আর ঘন ঘন বিয়ারের বোতলে চুমুক দিচ্ছে।

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দূরের পাহাড়গুলোর দিকে তাকিয়ে থাকতে থাকতে এক সময় দুচোখ জুড়ে এক রাশ ঘুম নেমে এলো। শয্যার ওপর পাতা সবুজ মোহোরের হাঙ্গা কঞ্চলটা টেনে নিয়ে শুয়ে পড়ল নীল। কতক্ষণ ঘুমিয়েছিল টের পায় নি। হঠাৎ স্বপ্নের মধ্যে কান বধির করে দেওয়া প্রচণ্ড আওয়াজে ঘুম ভেঙ্গে গেল। অসম্ভব বেগে বেড়ে উঠল হৃৎপিণ্ডের গতি। ঘামে ভিজ্জে গেল সর্বাঙ্গ। ধড়মড় করে উঠে বসল সে। চোখের সামনে দিয়ে ধীরে ধীরে ভেসে গেল একের পর এক কতগুলো ছবি . . .

ভয়ে ভাবনায় সংকুচিত হয়ে বসে আছে নীল পিছনের সীটে। তার পাশে বসে আছে ম্যাট। নীলকে কনুইয়ের গুঁতো মেরে বলছে, ‘নীল, হোয়াই হ্যাভ ইউ সাডেনলি গন্ সো কোয়ায়েট? আর ইউ স্কয়ারড, ম্যান?’

কাঁঠহাসি হেসে নীল বলল, ‘স্কয়ারড? মী!’ তার বয়সের ছেলেদের বুঝি ভয় পাওয়া মানায়!

ম্যাটের পাশে বসা প্রশান্ত বিজ্ঞের মত মন্তব্য করল, ‘কাম্ অন, বয়েজ্! উই আর হ্যাভিং সাচ্ ফান্! চিয়ার আপ, নীল, নাথিং টু ওয়ারি অ্যাবাউট। আর ইউ মিসিং মা, মা’স্ লিটল্ বয়?’

সবাই হো হো করে হেসে উঠল। বন্ধুরা সকলেই জানে নীল এই বয়সেও বেশ মা-দেঁষা। এই নিয়ে ওরা প্রায়ই ওকে ক্ষাপায়। নীল কখনও প্রতিবাদ করে না। এখনও করল না।

ভাবুক ভঙ্গীতে ম্যাট বলল, ‘উই আর হ্যাভিং সাচ্ এ বিউটিফুল টাইম। উইশ মনিকা ওয়াজ হিয়ার। রিয়্যালি মিসিং হার।’ মনিকা ম্যাটের নতুন বান্ধবী। খুব ইচ্ছে ছিল মনিকাকেও এই ট্রিপে সঙ্গে আনে। যাত্রার পরিকল্পনা পর্বে ব্যক্তও করেছিল মনের ইচ্ছে।

শরীফ বাদ সেখেছিল, ‘মনিকাকে সাথে নিলে, আমাদের গার্লফ্রেন্ডদেরও আসতে বলতে হবে! অ্যান্ড ইউ নো জলি ওয়েল হোয়াট্ গার্লস্ আর লাইক! দে উইল রুইন অল্ দ্য ফান্ অ্যান্ড থ্রিল!’

একে মায়ের ঘোর আপত্তি উপেক্ষা করে তারা বিদেশে যাচ্ছে, তার ওপর সঙ্গে গার্ল ফ্রেন্ড নিলে আর যে রক্ষা থাকবে না নীল সেটা অনুমান করে বলেছিল, ‘ইয়েস, উই বেটার নট্ কম্প্লিকেট থিংস্ বাই ইনভাইটিং দ্য গার্লস্। লেট্ ইট্ বী এ মেনস্ অ্যাডভেঞ্চার।’ নীলের অবশ্য এখনও সিরিয়াস গার্ল-ফ্রেন্ড হয় নি।

ম্যাট আহত হয়ে নীলের দিকে চেয়ে বলেছিল, ‘ইউ আর সেয়িং অল্ দিস্ ‘কজ্ ইউ ভোল্ট্ হ্যাভ্ এ গার্ল ফ্রেন্ড?’ মন্তব্যটা শুনে নীলের মানে লেগেছিল বৈকি! সত্যিই অন্যান্য বন্ধুদের মত তার এখনও কোন বান্ধবী হয় নি। এজন্য লজ্জার অন্ত নেই তার। নীল যদিও আঠারো বছর পেরিয়ে কয়েক মাস এগিয়েছে, এখনও গৌফের রেখা দেখা দেয় নি মুখে। সুন্দর, সুকোমল চেহারা, দেখলে মনে হয় চৌদ্দ বছরের ছেলে। একটি বান্ধবীর অভাবে সে আপাততঃ আত্মনহীনতায় ভুগছিল।

অবশেষে চারটি মত বিরুদ্ধে হওয়ায় ম্যাটের প্রস্তাব টেকে নি।

এমন স্বর্ণ-সম জায়গায়, মনিকার জন্য ম্যাটের হা-হুতোশের উত্তরে ক্রিস বলল, ‘উই আর হ্যাভিং এ কুল টাইম উইদাউট দেম। আর উই নট, নীল?’

নীল কিছু বলার আগেই শরীফ বলে উঠল, ‘নাউ, ওয়াচ্ আউট, ক্রিস! উই আর অ্যাপ্রোচিং এ নাস্টি বেড।’

উত্তরে ক্রিস রাস্তার ওপর থেকে চোখ সরিয়ে নিলে কটমট করে শরীফের দিকে তাকাল। এক হাতে বিয়ারের বোতল, অপর হাতে স্টিয়ারিং ঘোরাতে ঘোরাতে কড়াবরে বলল, ‘আর উই সাজেস্টিং আই অ্যাম নট এ গুড ড্রাইভার? আর উই সেরিং আই ডেনট্ কেয়ার?’

এবার শরীফ আর প্রশান্ত সম্বরে বলে উঠল, ‘কেয়ারফুল!! ওয়াচ্ দ্য রোড ম্যান।’

দিকবিজয়ীর ভঙ্গীতে ক্রিস হঠাৎ গাড়ীর গতি বাড়িয়ে দিয়ে বলল, ‘ও.কে., ও.কে., আই উইল শো ইউ হাউ আই ড্রাইভ। না---ও।’

তীব্রগতিতে গাড়ী ছুটে চলল মিনিট দশেক, আর তারপর - বিকট এক বিস্ফোরণ। গাড়ি গড়াতে গড়াতে রাস্তা থেকে নেমে এগিয়ে গেল নীচে ঘন পাইন বনের মধ্যে দিয়ে আয়নার মত স্বচ্ছ বিশাল নদীর দিকে। গাড়িয়ে পড়তে পড়তে নীলের মনে হল কয়েক মিনিটের জন্য যেন এক ঘন কালো পর্দা নেমে এসে দিনের আলো ঢেকে চারিদিকে ছড়িয়ে দিল গভীর অন্ধকার। একটা দেশলাইয়ের খোলার মত তাদের গাড়ীটা লাফিয়ে লাফিয়ে নীচে নেমে চলেছে। ওপরে পাহাড়ের গা খেঁষে সারি সারি দাঁড়িয়ে আছে পাইনগুলো। আরও কয়েকটা বিস্ফোরণ। তারপর চারিদিকে নেমে এল গোরস্থানের নিস্তরুতা। কতক্ষণ পরে নীলের হাঁশ হল। ছুটে গাড়ী থেকে বেরিয়ে এসে বাইরে দাঁড়াল পাইনে ঘেরা জঙ্গলের অসমতল পাহাড়ী মাটির ওপর। গাড়ীটা দাউ দাউ করে জ্বলছে। আশ্চর্য্য হয়ে সে দেখল তার গায়ে আঁচড়টি লাগে নি। মায়ের স্নেহ-ভালবাসার বর্ম তাকে যে সব সময়েই ঘিরে রাখে, নতুন করে উপলব্ধি করল সে। ক্রিস, শরীফ, ম্যাট ও প্রশান্তকে কয়েকবার চেষ্টা করে ডেকে কোন সাড়া পেল না। বন্ধুদের শেষ পরিনতি যে কি হয়েছে, আর বুঝতে বাকী রইল না তার।

দূরত্ব মুখ ঢেকে, মাটিতে বসে পড়ে ছোট্ট ছেলের মতই হাউ হাউ করে কাঁদতে লাগল নীল। মা কতবার বারন করেছিল এখানে এসময়ে আসতে। মাকে এখন কি বলবে সে! কতক্ষণ পর খেয়াল হল তাদের হলি ডে হোম এখান থেকে আর মাত্র দশ কিলোমিটার। আকাশের বৃকে তখনও শেষ দুপুরের আলো। উদ্ভাস্ত, অভিভূতের মত হলি ডে হোমের দিকে হাঁটতে আরম্ভ করল সে।

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অনুতাপে, শোকে, দুঃখে আবার দু হাতে মুখ ঢেকে বসে রইল নীল। কি করবে কিছুই বুঝতে পারছে না। বাবা, মাকে কি করে মুখ দেখাবে? ক্রিস, ম্যাট ও শরীফের বাবা, মা ও বান্ধবীদের সুমুখে দাঁড়িয়ে কি বলবে? কোন মায়াবলে ওই গাড়ী থেকে বেরিয়ে এলো সে! কেনই বা বন্ধুদের ওই জ্বলন্ত গাড়ীতে ফেলে রেখে চলে এলো! পুলিশের সাথেই বা কেন যোগাযোগ করল না! কেন? কেন? কেন? মন থেকে কোন উত্তর পেল না। এক জমাট বাঁধা ভয় বৃকে চেপে বসে যেন তার শ্বাস রোধ করে রেখেছে সারাক্ষণ। ভাবতে ভাবতে সে আবার ঘুমিয়ে পড়ল।

ঘুম ভাঙ্গল ফোনের তীক্ষ্ণ চীংকারে। ধড়মড়িয়ে উঠে বসল নীল। ফোনের ওপাশে যেই হোক না কেন এখন, এই মুহূর্তে নীল কারো সাথে কথা বলতে পারবে না।

আকাশে ভোরের আলো ফুটে উঠছে। বাইরে থেকে বরফে ঢাকা পাহাড়গুলো বিস্ফারিত চেয়ে আছে নীলের দিকে। বিরাট করে বৃষ্টি পড়ে রাস্তা-ঘাট ধুয়ে গিয়েছে। পাইন গাছের সারি হাওয়ায় দুলে দুলে নাচছে। সে দিকে চেয়ে নীল বলল, ‘কি আশ্চর্য্য! পৃথিবীটা যে এত সুন্দর, কখনও আমার মনে হয় নি!’ কটা দিন কেটে গেল নিদ্রা, জাগরণ এবং ঘোরের মধ্যে দিয়ে। সাংঘাতিক মানসিক উদ্বেগের মধ্যে খিদে-তেষ্টার কথাও মনে পড়ল না।

এরপর একদিন। দুপুর গড়িয়ে বিকেল নেমেছে সবে। তন্দ্রাচ্ছন্ন নীল হঠাৎ শুনতে পেল নীচে সদর দরজা খোলার আওয়াজ। ধড়মড়িয়ে উঠে বসে কান পেতে রইল সে। কারা যেন বাড়ীর মধ্যে ঢুকে দরজা বন্ধ করছে। নীল আশ্তে তার ঘরের দরজা দিয়ে উঁকি মেরে দেখল। প্রায় অন্ধকারের মধ্যে নীল আবছা আলোয় আগন্তুকদের দেখতে পেয়ে পরক্ষণেই রক্ত হিম হয়ে গেল।

তার বাবা, মা, ম্যাটের বান্ধবী মনিকা এবং শরীফের বাবা-মা, কামরুল ও তাহিরা জামান গুটিগুটি বসার ঘরের দিকে এগিয়ে যাচ্ছেন। সকলের চেহারাতেই গভীর শোকের ছায়া। মনিকার চোখ-মুখ কেঁদে কেঁদে লালা। তার মনে অ্যাক্সিডেন্টের খবরটা ঠাঁরা পেয়েছেন। এবার কি করবে নীল! তখনই সে ঠিক করে নিল, এদের মধ্যে যদি কেউ ওপরে উঠে আসেন, তক্ষুনি সে তার নিজের ঘরের আলমারির মধ্যে লুকিয়ে পড়বে। ঠাঁদের মুখোমুখি দাঁড়াতে সে কিছুতেই পারবে না। নীল ব্যতীত আর সকলে কি ভাবে গাড়ীর মধ্যে পুড়ে ছাই হয়ে গেল এ রহস্যের জবাব তার জানা নেই। লুকিয়ে থাকার সংকল্প নিয়ে সে তার ঘরের দরজাটা ফাঁক করে দাঁড়িয়ে রইল।



ওঁরা ফ্যামিলি রুমে গিয়ে একে একে চেয়ার নিয়ে বসলেন। নীল এবার তার ঘর থেকে সন্তর্পনে বেরিয়ে এসে সিড়ির রেলিং ধরে দাঁড়াল। এখান থেকে ফ্যামিলি এরিয়ার ভেতরটা খানিক দেখা যায়। নীল তার মা করবীকে দেখতে পাচ্ছিল। মায়ের বিগ্ৰহ চেহারা দেখে তার মনে হল যেন সারা পৃথিবীটা ভেঙ্গে পড়েছে মায়ের মাথার ওপর। অন্তর মুচড়ে উঠল সেই মুখ দেখে। চিরকাল নীল তার মায়ের আদুরে ‘ছোট্ট ছেলে’। মন চাইল এখুনি ছুটে গিয়ে মায়ের কোলে মুখ গুঁজে বলে, ‘মা, দেখ আমি ঠিক আছি। কিছুই হয় নি আমার।’ কিন্তু পারল না। চুপ করে দাঁড়িয়ে রইল সে।

হঠাৎ নীরবতা ভেঙ্গে কামরুলের গলা শোনা গেল, ‘কাল খুব ভোরে বেরোতে হবে। পুলিশ অফিস থেকে লোক দিচ্ছে আমাদের সাথে যাওয়ার জন্য। ওরাই আমাদের মর্গে নিয়ে যাবো।’

নীলের বাবা অজয় বললেন, ‘আইডেন্টিফাই করা সহজ হবে না। সকলেই বিশ্রীভাবে পুড়ে গিয়েছে শুনলাম।’

কামরুল ধীরে ধীরে বললেন, ‘তবু - জামা কাপড় - কিছু চিহ্ন হয়ত -’

তীর কথা শেষ হওয়ার আগেই তাহিরা ছ হ করে কেঁদে উঠলেন। নীলের পাথর হয়ে যাওয়া মা তাহিরার কাছে সরে এসে তার মাথায় হাত বোলাতে বোলাতে অশ্রুতে বললেন, ‘কতবার বারন করেছিলাম এসময়ে এখানে না আসতো।’

ওপর থেকে নীল অশ্রুতে বলল, ‘জানি, মা। সারাক্ষণ আমারও মনে পড়ছে তোমার সেই বারন। আই অ্যাম সো সরি।’ নীলের কথাগুলো নিঃশব্দতায় মিলিয়ে গেল। নীচ অবধি পৌঁছল না।

করবী আবার বললেন, ‘এক এক সময়ে মনে হচ্ছে, এ বাড়িটা কেনাই ভুল হয়েছিল আমার। এদিকে না এলে তো এসব কিছুই ঘটত না।’

নীল আবার ফিসফিস করে বলল, ‘মা, প্লীজ ডেন্ট ব্রেম ইওরসেলফ। ইট ওয়াস অল্ আওয়ার ফল্ট। ইফ ওনলি ক্রিস ওয়াস এ বিট্ মোর কেয়ারফুল!’

হঠাৎ মনিকা উঠে দাঁড়িয়ে বললেন, ‘লেট্ মী মেক ইউ অল্ এ কাপ অফ্ টা।’

নীল ধীরে ধীরে বলল, ‘থ্যাংক্ ইউ, মনিকা। প্লীজ হেল্প্ দেম কোপ ইফ ইউ ক্যান।’

তারপর নিজের মনেই সে আবার বলল, ‘মা, আমি যে বেঁচে আছি সে ত তুমি জানো না এখনও। আমি যে ঘটনাস্থল থেকে পালিয়ে এসেছিলাম। তাই এখন তোমাদের কাছ থেকে লুকিয়ে বেড়াচ্ছি - গিল্ট, ভয় আর লজ্জার ভার মাথায় নিয়ে।’

নীরবে কাঁদতে কাঁদতে সে নিজের ঘরে ঢুকে দরজা বন্ধ করে দিল।

(8)

পরদিন সকালে উঠে সে উঠে দেখল ওঁরা সকলে বেরিয়ে গিয়েছেন। নীল তার ঘরের সামনের বারান্দায় বসে সুমুখের পাহাড়গুলোর দিকে চেয়ে রইল। কিছুক্ষনের জন্য মনটা অদ্ভুত প্রশান্তিতে ভরে গেল। আকাশে বেশ বালমলে রোদ উঠেছে আজ।

হঠাৎ স্মৃতির জানালা বেয়ে যেন কত দূর থেকে কানে ভেসে এল প্রশান্তর গলা, ‘যেদিন আমরা সিডনী ফিরে যাচ্ছি, তার দু দিন পরেই সোনালীর সুইট সিগ্নটিন পাটা। আই অ্যাম মেন্ট টু বী দ্য এম সী ফর দ্য অকেসন। হ্যাভ্ টু ডু এ স্পীচ ফর হারা।’

ক্রিস বলে উঠল, ‘ইজ্ দিস্ হোয়াই ইউ হ্যাভ বীন সো কোয়ায়েট অল্ মর্নিং?’

ম্যাট টিপ্পনী কটিল, ‘অফ কোর্স। হী হ্যাভ বীন ব্রুডিং ওভার ইট অল্ দ্য টাইম - মিসিং আউট অন্ অল্ দ্য এক্সাইটমেন্ট অফ্ দিস্ ট্রিপ।’

শরীফ বলল, ‘ওয়েল দেন প্রশান্ত, ইউ সুডন্ট্ হ্যাভ্ কাম্ উইথ্ আস্ অ্যাট্ অল্ - ইফ্ ইউ আর মিসিং হার সো মাচ।’

প্রশান্ত লাজুক হেসে বন্ধুদের তিরস্কার মেনে নিয়ে বলল, ‘ও.কে. ও.কে. লেট্‌স্ চেঞ্জ্ দ্য সাবজেক্ট। হোয়াট্ আর উই গোয়িং টু ডু হোয়েন উই গেট্ টু নীল্‌স্ হলিডে হোম?’

নীল সোৎসাহে বলে উঠল, 'ইয়েস, লেটস্ প্ল্যান আহেড। ইট ইস এ ভেরি কোয়ায়েট প্লেস বাট ভেরি পিকচারেস্ক। মে বী উই ক্যান স্পেন্ড সাম আওয়ার্স টুরো ইন দ্য ন্যাশনাল পার্ক - ওয়াকিং, ক্রাইসিং, একসপ্লোরিং।'

মে বী, মে বী, মে বী . . .

প্রস্তাবটা সকলেরই মনে ধরল। ম্যাট বলল, 'বাট হোয়াট আর উই ডুয়িং টুর্নাইট হোয়েন উই রীচ দেয়ার? নীল, ডু ইউ হ্যাভ সাম গেমস্ অ্যাট ইওর প্লেস? এ টি. ভি. আন্ড এ ডি. ভি. ডি. প্লেয়ার?'

নীল মাথা নেড়ে বলল, 'অফ্ কোর্স।'

গাড়ী চালাতে চালাতে ক্রিস টিপ্পনী কাটল, 'নীল হ্যাস্ এভরিথিং। ডু ইউ নট, লাকি বয়? এ . ভ . রি . থি . ৎ . এ . ক্ . সে . প্ . ট . এ . ই . যা . ৎ . ল্যা . স্ . ।'

প্রশান্ত হেসে বলল, 'ডোন্ট ওয়ারি নীল, হু নোস্ ইউ মে ইভন্ মীট ইওর ড্রীম গার্ল হিয়ার, সামহোয়ের ইন্ এ কোয়ায়েট কর্নার অফ্ আর্থার্স পাস। ইউ ফাইন্ড হার, ম্যান - সুন।'

ইংরাজী ছেড়ে তারপর বাংলায় গিয়ে উঠল, 'প্রেমের জাল পাতা এ ভুবনে . . .'

কত গল্পগুজব হয়েছিল সেদিন সকালে, সারাদিন ধরে, অপরাহ্নের সেই মুহূর্ত অবধি যখন ক্রিস হঠাৎ ফ্লেপে গিয়ে দুর্ঘটনা বাধিয়ে বসল!

নীল ভাবল, সোনালীর জন্মদিনের পাটী কি শেষ অবধি হবে? প্রশান্ত ছাড়াই? প্রশান্তর স্পীচ্ ছাড়া? কারও অভাবে কি কিছু আটকে থাকে? দিন, রাত ত এখনও আসছে, যাচ্ছে। চাঁদ, সূর্য্যও নিয়ম মত উঠছে, অস্ত যাচ্ছে। আমিও তো বেঁচে আছি। নিঃশ্বাস নিচ্ছি। সে বিড়বিড় করে বলল, 'লাইফ্ জাস্ট্ গোস্ অন।'

এই উপলব্ধিটি সহসা তার মনে জোর এনে দিল। সে নিজেকে বলল, 'আর লুকিয়ে থাকা চলবে না। মাকে আজ রাতে জানাতেই হবে আমি বেঁচে আছি।'

(৪)

সন্ধ্যা ঘনিয়ে এলো। নীচে বসার ঘরে সকলে বসে আছেন। কাঠের টুকরো এনে খোলা ফায়ার প্লেসে আগুন জ্বলে দিয়েছেন করবী। অজয় গলা পরিষ্কার করে বললেন, 'দেয়ার ইস্ অ্যাবসলিউটলি নো ডাউট অ্যাবাউট ইট। দে আর অল্ গন।' অজয় আর কামরুল মর্গে গিয়েছিলেন দুর্ঘটনায় নিহতদের সনাক্ত করতে। মনিকার সাথে করবী আর তাহিরা কাছেই একটা পার্কে অপেক্ষা করছিলেন।

নীল সিঁড়িতে দাঁড়িয়ে ওদের কথা শুনতে চেষ্টা করছিল। সে মাথা নেড়ে ফিসফিস্ করে বলল, 'বাবা, আমি বেঁচে আছি। অ্যান্ড্রিভেন্টে আমার কিছুই হয় নি। কিন্তু তোমাদের সামনে এসে দাঁড়াতে আমার লজ্জা করছে। বড় ভয় করছে, বাবা। তোমরা আমার ওপর এত রেগে যাবে। মনিকাকে আমি মুখ দেখাব কি করে? আর শরীফের মাকে?'

নীল শুনতে পেল মনিকা ধরা গলায় বলছে, 'ইট্ মাস্ট্ হ্যাভ্ বীন হরিফিক। আই ওনলি হোপ ইট্ ওয়াস্ কুইক্ ফর দেম।'

তাহিরা আর করবী নিঃশব্দে কাঁদছেন। যে সমাজে তাঁরা দীর্ঘদিন বাস করছেন, সেখান প্রকাশ্যে কাঁদা অমার্জিত আচরণ। করবীর মনে হল, জেরে, চীৎকার করে, গলা ফাটিয়ে কাঁদতে পারলে আজ হয়তো তাঁর মন স্বস্তি পেত কিছুটা।

বেশ কিছুক্ষণ এভাবেই কেটে গেল। গুঁরা সকলে পাথর হয়ে বসে আছেন নীচে। নীল সিঁড়ির ওপর দাঁড়িয়ে আছে সবার অলক্ষ্যে। হঠাৎ সে চীৎকার করে ডাকল, 'মা, মা, এখানে এসো। আই ওয়ান্ট্ টু টক্ টু ইউ।'

অত জেরে ডাকসত্ত্বেও তার গলা থেকে স্বর ফুটল না। যেন বোবায় ধরেছে। নীল এবার কাঁদতে, কাঁদতে তার ঘরে ফিরে এসে টৌকাঠের ওপর দাঁড়িয়ে নীচতলায় মুখ বাড়িয়ে আরও জেরে ডাকল, 'মা, মা, মা, ওপরে এসো। ডু ইউ হিয়ার মী? কাম্ আপস্টেয়ার্স।'



নীচে করবী চমকে উঠলেন। নীল যেন ডাকছে তাঁকে! এখানে এসে অবধি এবার তিনি ওপরে ওঠেন নি। নীলের ঘরে ঢুকতে তাঁর মন চায় নি। এই মুহূর্তে তিনি নিশ্চিত জানেন ওপরে আপাততঃ কেউ নেই। তবে কে তাঁকে এমন কাতরভাবে ডাকছে ওপর থেকে! অবিশ্বাস্য। করবী চেয়ার ছেড়ে উঠে বললেন, ‘আমি এখুনি আসছি।’ কেউ কোন প্রশ্ন করল না, বাধা দিল না। এই সাংঘাতিক সময়ে করবী আশ্চর্য্য সংঘম ও মনের জোর দেখিয়েছেন।

ধীর পায়ে ওপরে উঠতে লাগলেন করবী। সিঁড়ি দিয়ে উঠে ছোট্ট একফালি বারান্দার ওপর পর পর দুটি ঘর। অন্ধকারে আচ্ছন্ন। নীলের ঘরে ঢুকে উল্টোদিকে, বাইরের বারান্দার সামনের দরজার পাল্লাদুটো পুরোপুরি খুলে দিলেন তিনি। স্বচ্ছ নীল আকাশে পূর্ণিমার চাঁদ আলো ঠেকরছে। সেই আলোয় ঘরের মধ্যে যেন এক মায়াময় পরিবেশ সৃষ্টি হয়েছে। নীল তখনও ঘরের ভিতরদিকের চৌকাঠের ওপর দাঁড়িয়ে বিস্ময়িত নয়নে চেয়ে চেয়ে মাকে দেখছে। আবছা চেহারা নজরে পড়ছে। সে ভাবছে, শোকে-দুঃখে মা বুঝি কানে কালা হয়ে গিয়েছেন। চোখেও যেন আর তেমন দেখছেন না! নইলে তার পাশ কাটিয়ে ঘরে ঢুকলেন অথচ লক্ষ্যই করলেন না তাকে!

সে আবার চোঁচিয়ে ডাকল, ‘মা, ক্যান ইউ হিয়ার মী? আমি নীলা!’

ঘরের ভিতর চাঁদের আলো ও অন্ধকারের মধ্যে করবী চারিদিক হাতড়ে বেড়াচ্ছেন। যেন আবছা কাউকে দেখতে পাচ্ছেন, যেন অস্পষ্ট শব্দতরঙ্গ ভেসে আসছে তাঁর কানে। কিন্তু ঠিক ঠাহর করতে পারছেন না।

নীল এবার দরজার কাছ থেকে সরে এসে মায়ের মুখোমুখি দাঁড়াল। খুব জোরে চিৎকার করে বলল, ‘মা, লুক আট মী। আমি বঁচে আছি। তোমার সামনে দাঁড়িয়ে আছি। কেঁদো না, প্লিজ।’

করবীও যেন এতক্ষণে আবছাভাবে তাঁর ছেলেকে দেখতে পেয়ে স্তম্ভিত হয়ে গেলেন। মুখে তাঁর কথা সরল না।

নীল আবার বলল, ‘আমার কিছুই হয় নি। আই হ্যাভ সার্ভাইভড্ দ্য অ্যাক্সিডেন্ট, মা।’ একটু থেমে বিষন্ন গলায় বলল, ‘কিন্তু ওরা কেউ বাঁচে নি। দে ওয়ের নট সো লাকি। আই অ্যাম রিয়েলি সরি, মা। অ্যান্ড আই অ্যাম অ্যাসেমড্। আমি ভয় পেয়ে ওখান থেকে একা পালিয়ে চলে এসেছিলাম। আই ডিড্ নট স্টপ্ টু হেল্প্ দেম। আই জাস্ট্ র্যান, অ্যান্ড র্যান, অ্যান্ড র্যান, আনটিল আই গট্ হিয়ার। আই ওয়াস সো স্কেরাড্। আমার খুব ভয় করছিলো, মা। এখনো আমার খুব ভয় করছে। আর লজ্জা। আমি ওদের বাঁচাতে পারলাম না।’ দুই হাতে মুখ ঢেকে ডুকরে কেঁদে উঠল সে।

একটু থেমে সে আবার বলল, ‘আই ওনলি উইশ্ দেয়ার ওয়াস্ লাইফ্ অফটার্ ডেথ। যদি একবার ওদের দেখা পেতাম! ওদের কাছে ক্ষমা চাইতে পারতাম! আই উড্ হ্যাভ্ ফেল্ট্ সো মাচ্ বেটার, মা।’ তার কান্না বড় মর্ম-স্পর্শী।

করবী নীলের কান্না, কথা মনে-প্রাণে অনুভব করলেন। তাঁর বুজে আসা গলা পরিষ্কার করে অনেকটা যেন নিজেকেই জিজ্ঞেস করলেন, ‘নীল, তুমি আমার কথা শুনতে পাচ্ছ?’

নীল মাথা নাড়ল। সে শুনতে পাচ্ছে।

করবী ধীরে ধীরে বললেন, ‘নীল, ইট্ ব্রেকস্ মাই হার্ট্ টু টেল্ ইউ দিস্ - তুমি বঁচে নেই।’

বিস্ময়িত নয়ন মেলে নীল তাঁর দিকে চেয়ে রইল। করবী সেই দৃষ্টিতে দেখলেন অবিশ্বাস ও তিরস্কার। অবশেষে তার নিজের মা তাকে মৃত বলে পরিত্যাগ করছেন! সেই দৃষ্টি বলে উঠল, ‘আমি তোমার চোখের সামনে দাঁড়িয়ে আছি আর তুমি বলছ আমি মরে গিয়েছি। হাউ কুড্ ইউ? আমার ওপর এতই রেগে গিয়েছ তুমি? মা, আমাকে ক্ষমা করো।’

করবী দ্বিধাগ্রস্ত হলেন। একটু ইতস্ততঃ করে, অনেক কষ্টে, বিষন্নকণ্ঠে বললেন, ‘হ্যাঁ, তোমার বন্ধুদের সঙ্গে তুমিও মারা গিয়েছ। ওই সাংঘাতিক দুর্ঘটনার কবল থেকে তোমরা কেউ নিস্তার পাও নি। দুঃখ কোরো না, নীল। লজ্জা পাবারও আর তোমার কোন কারণ নেই। সকলেই তোমরা একসঙ্গ নিয়তির শীকার হয়েছ।’

মুহূর্তের জন্য নীলের মনে হল তার মাথার ওপর থেকে মস্ত এক লজ্জাস্বর অপরাধের বোঝা ছিটকে পড়ে গেল। আঃ! কি হাল্কা লাগছে তার। কিন্তু . . .

সে আবার জিজ্ঞেস করল, ‘তুমি সত্যি বলছ? আমি সত্যি মরে গেছি?’

করবী তাঁর ছেলের এই হৃদয় বিদারক প্রশ্নের সম্মুখীন হয়ে এক লহমার জন্য ভাষা হারিয়ে ফেললেন। তারপর ওর দিকে এগিয়ে এসে দুই হাত বাড়িয়ে দিয়ে বললেন, ‘আমার কাছে এসো। আই ওয়ান্ট এ রিয়ালি বিগ হাগ্ ফ্রম ইউ।’

নীল সাগ্রহে এগিয়ে এলো, এবং পর মুহূর্তেই বুঝতে পারল মায়ের স্পর্শ তার নাগালের বাইরে। এই মর জগতে সে একটি ছায়া মাত্র। মার কথাই সত্যি। বিহ্বল, স্তব্ধ হয়ে সে দাঁড়িয়ে রইল।

করবী ওর খুব কাছে সরে এসে আদ্রকণ্ঠে বললেন, ‘ইট্‌স ও.কে. মাই সান। ভয় পেও না, সোনা। আমরা কেউ কাউকে হারাই নি। শুধুমাত্র জীবন আর মৃত্যুর মাঝখানে সেতুর দুই পারে দাঁড়িয়ে আছি তুমি আর আমি। দুজনেই দুজনের নাগালের মধ্যে। আমরা চিরকালই কথা বলতে পারব একে অন্যের সাথে। শুধু তুমি বিশ্বাস রেখো।’

নীল বুঝল। সজল চোখে মা আর ছেলে মুখোমুখি দাঁড়িয়ে। তারপর অস্পষ্ট জ্যোৎস্নার আলো-অঁধারে তারা মনে মনে একে অন্যকে বিদায় জানান, ভবিষ্যতের প্রতিশ্রুতি নিয়ে।

ঘরের মধ্যে ঢুকে এসে নিজের বিছানায় গা এলিয়ে দিল নীল। সব ভয়, লজ্জা, অপরাধবোধে কেটে গিয়েছে তারা। অনেক দিন পরে এবার নিশ্চিন্ত হয়ে ঘুমোবে সে।

করবী নীচে ফিরে এসে বসলেন তাঁর পরিত্যক্ত চেয়ারে। মন এখন অনেক শান্ত। নীল তাঁর সত্যিই হারিয়ে যায় নি।



**Chhandashi Bandopadhyay** is an acclaimed writer whose work has been published in several noted Bengali magazines like ‘Desh’, ‘Sananda’, ‘Sarodiya Anandabazar Patrika’, ‘Nabakallol’, ‘Bartaman’ and many others. Born in Varanasi but a long time resident of Melbourne, Australia Chhandashi has been deeply involved with Victoria Archaeological Survey and Swinburne University of Technology in their academic and administrative activities. Chhandashi loves reading, web publishing, traveling the world and creating appropriate reading material for kids growing up abroad.





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# BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

## Suman Basu

On a soon to be busy Monday morning you are in your office settling down for the week ahead with a coffee from the cafeteria, Paul from the next desk says, “Did you watch the dogs smash the pies last night at the g?” Anybody not from Australia might be thinking, sorry what? Why would dogs smash pies? What is the ‘g’?

Welcome to Melbourne, the world’s most livable city, the cultural capital of “The Lucky Country”, Australia. The dogs refer to Western Bulldogs and the pies refer to Collingwood Magpies, two powerhouse teams of the modern day Australian Football League or Aussie Rules or Footy as the locals would call it. Now what about the G? “The G” is an affectionate term for the Melbourne Cricket Ground, Australia’s premier sporting venue. Melbourne is one of the world’s largest cosmopolitan and a global hotspot for international sporting events, culinary experience, tourist attractions, and activities and of course the city we called *home* for a long time.

This great city with a buzz, attracts people from all walks of life globally, to travel, live, and enjoy what the city has to offer. Melbourne has some of the country’s best educational institutions from kindergarten to the highest ranked university in Australia. My son, Swastik went to a *kindie*, (i.e.

Aussie for kindergarten) when he was little and enjoyed uninterrupted ‘no study only play’ during that time.

Medicare, Australia’s world-renowned healthcare system enables eligible Australian residents to receive free treatment in public hospitals, reduced costs for out-of-hospital care as well as community health services, ambulance and dental services. Melbourne is served by an integrated public transport network with trains, buses and the world’s largest urban system of trams. Winters meant Footy, Rugby and staying indoors while summers were all about the sand, surf, and the beach with occasional barbies (Aussie for barbeque) amongst friends and associates. The world-famous St. Kilda beach was a lazy 30-minute tram ride and Brighton/ Sandringham beach barely 45 minutes by train from our home. International sporting events like Boxing Day Test cricket (India will be visiting in 2018), Big Bash League, Australian Open Tennis, Formula 1 Grand Prix and Superbike World Championship were all part of the summer frenzy in this sport crazy nation. Did I mention the public holiday for a horse race? Melbourne Cup is the “race that stops a nation”. It is one of the premier events in the global horse racing calendar and the biggest drawcard during the week-long Spring Carnival at the iconic Flemington Racecourse.

One fine day, we packed our bags and flew to Charlotte, the Queen City in the East Coast of United States of America. Since then, many have asked us if we like Charlotte better or if Melbourne was closer to our hearts? Well, the two cities are vastly different from each other in culture, pace, topography and all their offers. We’ve been lucky to call both of them our homes and relish these differences. Unlike Melbourne, Charlotte is a young, thriving city of mostly newcomers or *Transplants* as they are called here, bubbling with ethnic and economic diversity. This small modern city with growing urban amenities such as great shopping, lots of restaurants with a few good to mostly mediocre food,

*Having said that, what we miss from our lives in Melbourne has been compensated by a bunch of like-minded and culturally inclined people we met at Srishti.*

year-round themed festivals, and a solid network of roads holds a promising future.

The thing we absolutely love about Charlotte is that it is three hours either way from the beach and the hills which means vacationing is a breeze in this town. One more interesting fact about Charlotte, which has caught our fancy is the one to two days of annual snowfall that gives the perfect photo-op without even worrying about shoveling snow. Working in Uptown, I have noticed an appalling social divide, I walk 5 blocks south to be in stylish South-End or upscale Dilworth. If I walk 5 blocks north I'll be in a so-called ghetto territory, that I've been asked to avoid. In Melbourne, I can't think of a single suburb where I might have been asked to avoid an area. The elementary school structure is brilliant so far, and our little man gets excellent support from his teacher and the school. What we haven't figured out is how the medical system, medical insurance, and its coverage works here, it feels and sounds very complicated.

Having said that, what we miss from our lives in Melbourne has been compensated by a bunch of like-minded and culturally inclined people we met at Srishti. Over the last two years we got to know most of the Srishti fraternity and feel privileged that we tagged ourselves with Srishti, who were very welcoming and accepted us with a warm embrace. Lastly, if you are reading this piece, we would like to say, "Thank you for accepting us as we are".



# POSTCARDS

Pictures and Description by Noyonika Parui

## TRAVEL OF THE MONTH: RAJASTHAN

When I was on my trip to Rajasthan this summer, I saw some incredible things. From ancient forts to floating palaces, there wasn't a place I wasn't ready to explore. On one of my journeys I remember seeing a troop of monkeys going alongside a fort we were visiting and it was so cool. I also remember riding on a elephant across the street and seeing goats and pigs on the sides. I hope you like my pictures and they will inspire you to plan your next trip to the beautiful Rajasthan.





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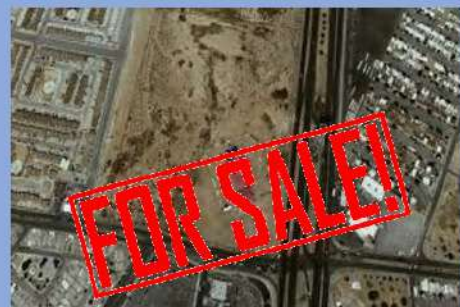
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# memories

Gunjan Shrivastava

If someone ever asked you, what is the sum total of your life, what would your answer be? If ever I was asked this question, my answer would be that the sum total of my life is nothing, but memories. Memories that I gave others of me, and those that others gave me in return. It is these memories that will flit in-front of my eyes, when I bid adieu to this world.

We start creating a beautiful collage to reminisce from the day we are born. The expression on our parent's faces when they saw us for the first time. The awe, the wonder and the love that leaps out of that one photo. You can almost touch the love radiating from that photo. I am also cent percent sure that your parents must also have told you that it was the best day of their lives, something that they can never forget.

We are too young to remember our first step, our first taste of food or our first word; still a lot of us know in detail how it all was. Our parents love to recall all our achievements, naughtiness and little things that take them back down the memory lane. It's in fact a circle, like the circle of love. We create some wonderful moments for them and then they reintroduce us back to those moments through their reminiscences.

Childhood and youth are those parts of our lives that we always want to remember. Whenever the book of nostalgia is opened, the most interesting and intriguing chapters are those of being a kid or of our youthful days. The recollection of those days is woven with gossamer, each strand as beautiful as gold, radiant with love, laughter, friendship, innocence and joy. Even the painful episodes of this period, leave a bitter sweet taste when you visit them after ages.

We often read and are told that one cannot live in the past. One needs to live in the present and look towards the future. However, a short visit to the past once in a while is not a bad thing. The past has a lot to teach. It helps us in not repeating our mistakes. Sometimes unknown to us a smile blooms on our lips as we roam the lanes of our memory. The past is a beautiful garden with each flower stirring new emotions in us. Like any other garden, this one has flowers as well as thorns. In some cases, the sting of some of these thorn becomes blunt with time while others continue to remain sharp enough to draw blood.



Also human beings have been enamoured by immortality from times immemorial. Procreation is also our bid to become immortal. We want to be remembered. We want someone to reminisce about us. We have been creating art, buildings etc, with the hope that we are not lost into oblivion, but leave something behind through which future generations may recall us. Like I said memories are the sum total of our lives. When we come in this world, we come with memories and we bid adieu to this world still holding on to them.

Memories are very potent. Memories are the bits of past which we choose to keep with us. So we decide, what our memories are going to be like. Whether, they will be those wonderful lanes, where we love to get lost; or that nightmare from which we try to run. Time and people may change, but our memories do not need to change. Memories will always remain the way we want to remember them. So here is to beautiful memories!







# Bhag Srishti Bhag

Ekata Saha

On May 19th, a group of five Srishti enthusiasts ran the Ballantyne 5K. It was a debut moment as the women of Srishti were participating in a race as a group for the first time. But it was ultra special for two of the participants – Shoma Sengupta & Leena Sarkar who were running their first 5Ks and Joyopriya Majumdar, who decided to run along with her entire family. Saswati was already an established runner and the group motivator while I, Ekata Saha, was a last minute replacement for Chandraboli Dutta, a marathoner (her reputation itself made me nervous).

The race morning began with a sense of excitement amidst a light drizzle and a clouded sky – the perfect weather for a run. A nutritious breakfast, followed by a lot of stretching helped loosen the muscles and kept the blood flowing. Shoma had volunteered and collected the race bibs on behalf of all of us and was the first one to reach the venue. Joyopriya was accompanied by her family and Saswati brought along a colorful neon poster to cheer us all. It had the apt message ‘Bhag Sristi Bhag’ emblazoned on it with brightly colored letters. Leena was nervous yet determined.

We, of course, had to have our Srishti women’s ‘adda’ before the start—cheering each other on and promising a finish line party. As the moment drew closer, the crowds swelled, music filled the air and the motto ‘My race, my pace’ and ‘Finishing is winning’ echoed in our minds. With eagerness and enthusiasm, the Ballantyne 5k run began.

We ran at our own pace. I was competing not with others but with my own self to improve my time. Everyone had a target pace. Mine was 11-12 mins/mile. Happy to say that I finished in just over 35 mins. Finishers medals and the press made it even more thrilling. And of course, I did not forget my sweet, sweaty selfie .

The entire team made it to the 5k finish line as well. There was a lot of cheering and pats on the back as each runner crossed the finish line. We took pride in our hard work that made it happen. What made us very happy was that we did not stop even when we were tired and kept going until we were done.

Here are a few excerpts of “how it felt” from our debut runners -

## LEENA’s VERDICT

It's a feeling of accomplishment. I do enjoy swimming and walking. But I am not too much into exercising and workouts. However, as we all know, time never stops for anyone and neither does age. With age moving in the upward direction, it was a realization of a kind as to how important it is to be physically active. So I just wanted to be an opportunist and take advantage of this great opportunity when few of my friends, especially Chandraboli and Saswati, sparked the initiative. They got us hooked onto this exciting adventure and then guided us all along the way as to how to prepare our mind and body to run our very first 5k.

In all honesty, I was not at all confident that I could do it until I crossed the finish line. What an electrifying atmosphere it was on the race day! A favorable weather helped peak my enthusiasm along with all of my friend’s. We started off in earnest. But as we reached the half way mark, I started finding it a bit difficult to carry on. But looking around at all the kids, other runners and all the positive vibes surrounding us, I started getting the inspiration to continue my run/walk and not stop. And OMG! i finally crossed the finish line listening to all those people and of course, my friends who kept on cheering me throughout. I was amazed that it actually happened, all credit to the constant support from my family and owing to a team that rocks!

After having gone through this experience, I say it with full conviction that it indeed is a great way to stay healthy while enjoying the company of one’s friends. For me, it has been a breath of fresh air, something that I would like to breathe in more and more!





### SHOMA'S CONFESSION

#### My First 5k Run and Experience

I am so incredibly grateful that I actually attempted and finished my first 5k challenge. It all started when Chandra posted a message of this 5K run that she was participating in and invited all of us to be a part of it. I was the first one to sign up. With no running experience and very few weeks to train, I was in just for the team spirit. And then steps in Saswati, our morale booster and our online trainer. She knew that our team had a few first timers, so to kick things off, she posted an article that outlined the basics of what is needed in the initial stages to shape up for a 5K Race. Then every day she would post a specific type of workout in our Whatsapp group (created specifically for this race team) that I would diligently incorporate in my already hectic work schedule. That is how I trained for my race.

For the race itself, we had to get the race bibs and t-Shirts for the team a day before and that was my responsibility. Next day was the race. I was the first person to reach the venue. And I was nervous. The place was packed with people. There was music, food, drinks, vendors offering freebies, massages, corporate sponsors and fellow athletes waiting for the race to start. I started from the last row of runners where the families with strollers were. The first mile was ok. Leena and I decided to run the downhill stretches and walk the uphill. This strategy helped. The best part of the race was the last mile. It was raining slightly and I was having a mini race within the race, mock competing with Joyopriya's 5 yr old daughter so that she can also finish the race. I really enjoyed finishing my race in the rain under an hour. And I feel proud to say that I accomplished my first 5k with constant support and amidst loud cheers from my friends.

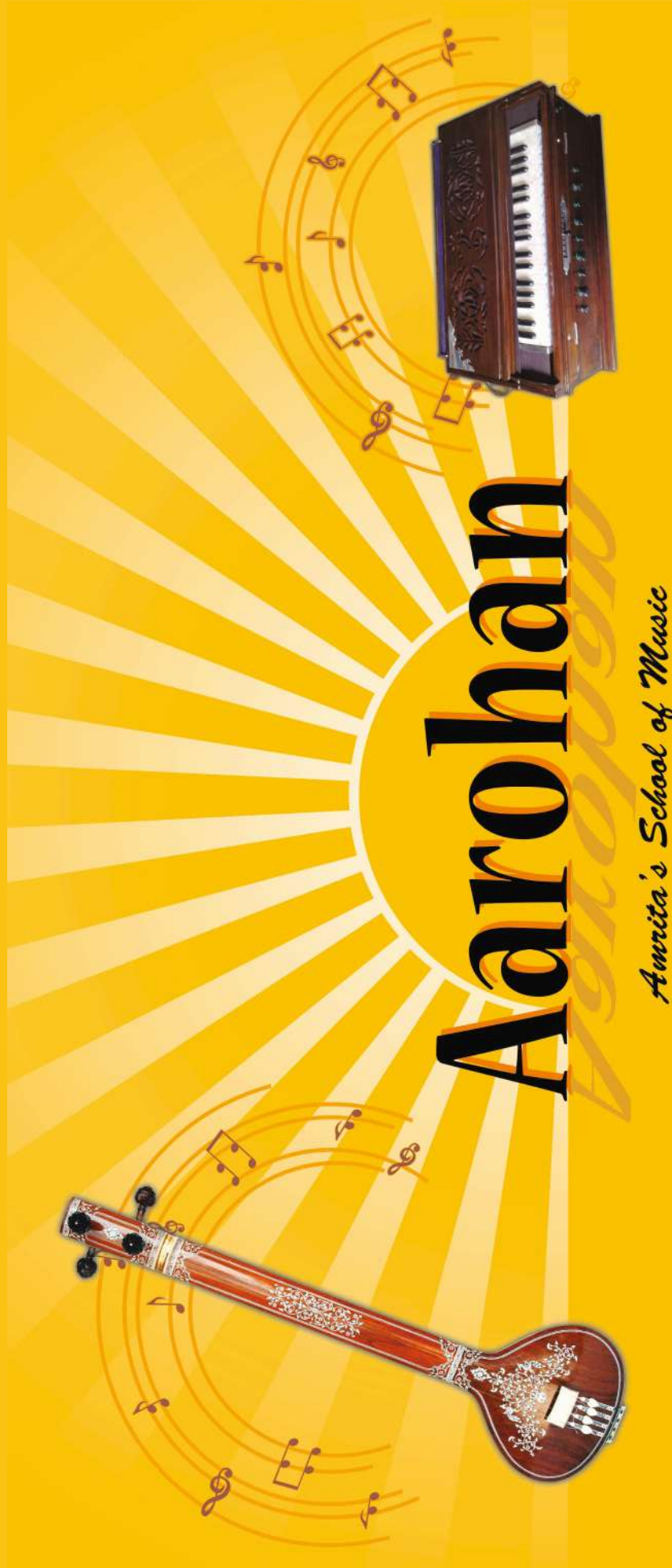
### JOYOPRIYA'S NARRATIVE

It all started out with Chandra and Leena. I remember quite clearly stuffing myself with cake and delicious meatballs when we started talking about getting fit and Chandra suggested a 5k which was barely 3 weeks away. A Whatsapp group was created. Saswati took on the mantle of our running coach providing valuable nutrition and training advice. I must admit I read it all judiciously and dreamt up a persona who did it, all the while sitting and devouring a bowl of avocado and chips. Race day came up much too soon with the girls and Sugata in tow and with zero practice. Enthusiastically we got ready to meet the Srishti group. Ekata, Leena, Shoma and Saswati cheered us on as we started out. Ana threw a fit within the first 5 mins of race which ended my dreams of running the race. Now with Ana on my shoulders and pushing the stroller (which is in no shape or form a jogging stroller). I picked up the pace trying hard, really hard to catch up with the gang. It was a beautiful morning cloudy with a faint hint of rain and there were so many enthusiastic runners - the serious ones, families with children, teenagers, all running at their own pace and then there was the Srishti gang. We walked, we ran, we skipped, we did it all, gave it our all and raced to the finish line. This was my third 5k and the second one with my family and I can't wait to do it again with the Srishti gang. Bring it on Chandra and Saswati! We are ready!!

Our motto for the next race - 'Bigger miles to achieve' and 'together we can do it'

*Bhag Srishti Bhag...*

# Sharodiya Subheccha



*Amrita's School of Music*



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Very Happy Holiday Season



# The Phoenix

Gunjan Shrivastava

---

Born with wings to fly, I was born to soar in the sky.  
Born with myriad colours, I was born to be the rainbow of the world.  
Born with the tinkle of bells in my voice, I was born to chase the silences of the world away.  
Born with the light of joy in my heart, I was born to light the world with happiness.  
Born as the harbinger of joy, why was I not welcomed by the world?  
Born to fly, why did the world clip my wings?  
Born with a soulful voice, why did the world muffle my voice?  
Born with colours and light in my heart, why did the world snatch my colours and lock me in the dark room?  
Born in a world which clipped my wings, stole my colours and filled my life with darkness. I swore ....  
I swore to fly again, to regain my lost sky, to soar higher and higher.  
I swore to raise my voice, till the deaf world heard me again.  
I swore to fill my life with colours again, till I became beautiful in my eyes again.  
I swore to find my inner light again, to chase all the darkness away.  
I swore to stand tall, free, vocal, beautiful and happy and show the world, that it could scar me, not break me.  
Like the Phoenix, I would always rise again.



# CONTEMPLATIONS ON THE COSMOS

Sohini Chatterjee

I have always been fascinated by space and cosmic theory. Much of this is due to the fact that my father and grandfather both had an avid interest in cosmology. All throughout my childhood, I grew up listening to discussions about various cosmological events and terms such as black holes, event horizon, singularities, nebulae and dark energy. New advances in physics and science were debated about with enthusiasm, much of which I didn't understand at that young age. Over time though, it turned out that a lot of it had sunk in, since I have feelings of marvel and awe when I take time out of my day to think about or read up on facts related to the universe. During my school days in India, celestial events like the sighting of Haley's comet in 1986, were talked about for weeks ahead in anticipation and I remember the time we all went to the Dhakuria lakes before dawn in order to see that strange sight - , Haley's comet lighting up the sky, appearing like a broom with a white tail extending behind it. Other memories I have of family gatherings were at events like meteor showers where we gathered together to watch the showers of stars falling from the sky like a firework display. During the total solar eclipse in 1995, in order to ensure that we had the best viewing possible, my father and uncle went so far as to rent a hotel rooftop in Diamond Harbour just for the grand occasion. We watched the sun's disc shrinking until it was so dark that we were able to see stars shining brightly at midday and then the diamond ring formation occurred as the sun slowly started to reappear. We all agreed that it had truly been a thrilling and absolutely unforgettable experience. In fact, the reason my parents traveled to the U.S. last year was of course to meet us, but also to view the total solar eclipse again which was only visible in totality from North America.

Being brought up in this kind of a family, I suppose it is inevitable that I think about the universe with a special, almost godlike reverence. Even today when I am outside the city, away from the glaring lights, I look up at the stars overhead and the sight of that vast expanse with multitudinous shining pinpoints of light never fails to thrill me. I have mentally made the trip to the outer reaches of our solar system and beyond, several times. I have imagined myself flying through the asteroid belt, looking at Jupiter's great Red Spot, and circling around Saturn's rings. Since imagination makes anything possible, in my mental travels my physical human form is indestructible and I have been able to miraculously hover close to the Sun while admiring the huge amounts of energy released from the fusion of hydrogen atoms into helium. This may seem like a strange way to pass time for many people but the more I think about all of that boundless space and huge amounts of energy out there, I feel a great deal of curiosity about what it would be like to escape from the Earth's confines. During the course of our busy lives I imagine many of us don't stop to think outside of Earth's boundaries too much. Probably whoever is reading this at the moment will think of me as an eccentric personality but hopefully they won't put me down as a complete lunatic.

I am particularly fascinated by the question of whether life exists on other planets somewhere out in space. If so, what is that life like? In

spite of these musings, I never took a liking to the popular

science-fiction movies like Star Wars and Star Trek. The characters in these movies seemed too full of human attributes and characteristics. I like to think of extra-terrestrial life as being superior to mortals in the sense that they would have risen above warfare, power struggles and domination. Perhaps their main purpose would be study, meditation and the pursuit of scientific knowledge ... wishful thinking on my part maybe. If they had civilizations, what would they be like? Of course there are the obvious questions such as what would they look like, how they would dress and what would be their method of communication. Perhaps they would have cities with skyscrapers, trains and planes, even a stock exchange like ours maybe? How fascinating all this is to contemplate. Would they have created nuclear weapons and realized that such powers would bring widespread destruction to their planet and have treaties and containment agreements as we do? Or would they have gone through the same cycle of discovery and then been thrust into nuclear warfare leading to annihilation?

I was recently watching the new version of Cosmos by Neil deGrasse, based on Carl Sagan's book and TV series. One of the things this show does is to pay homage to the great scientists who helped build the wealth of scientific knowledge we have today. One of my favorite stories told in this show is about the astronomer William Herschel walking on the beach at night with his son. The little boy asks his father if he believes in ghosts. Herschel answers yes and when his son seems surprised, he points up at the sky to the stars. He explains to his son that some of those stars shining in the sky are so far away that even though the light is reaching us at this moment, the star itself is actually already dead. Since the star is so far away, it takes up to thousands of light years for its light to reach us, thus what we are seeing at this moment is really a ghost of the star itself. This seems to me to be such a beautiful way to answer a child's question, but of course it takes someone of his intellect to think up an answer like this.

Today we have come so far in our quest for knowledge and have crossed the previously uncharted and seemingly forbidden frontier of space. In the future, the moon will probably turn into a tourist destination and efforts to land humans on Mars might succeed. I think of the International Space Station and the astronauts who are lucky enough to be there, they say that watching the Earth from orbit is the most beautiful sight they have ever seen. Maybe a time will come when we will be able to travel further and further into the reaches of space and increase our knowledge of the wonders of the universe in ways that we cannot even imagine today.



# Dream

Anuj Dey, 2nd Grade

---

One day I came from school, but the bus stop looked completely different. I realized that I had gotten down at a strange and unfamiliar neighborhood. I was really scared. I did not know what to do. So I searched the neighborhood, but no houses were familiar. So I went to the next neighborhood but with no luck. Finally, I decided to go to the Jungle. It was midnight before I found a place to sleep. It was a cave full of leaves and I fell asleep inside it.

The next morning, I was woken up by three tigers. I ran and ran until I tripped and fainted. The tigers were about to eat me, but they screamed instead of roaring. Suddenly the alarm clock was ringing, and I was sitting up on my bed...

That's when I realized that it was all a dream!! It was such a scary nightmare and I am really glad that it never actually happened.



# It's Christmas

Anish Sengupta

---

Fire is warm, hot chocolate is yummy and it gives you warmth in your tummy snow is white

and puffy and sleighs are fun to ride

ice skates make you glide

snowboarding you can slide

snowflakes land

ice makes you skate

snowmen are fun to build

ornaments sparkle all around and elves help Santa Claus

angels fly all around

lights are bright and beautiful

wreaths are hung with care and carols make you happy ever year

Merry Christmas to everyone and enjoy the best of the year



# Gun Control

Ayush Sengupta

---

USA is known as the safest place in the world

one problem is occurring but not impossible to solve

people need to open their eyes see what's wrong

that guns have destroyed our children.

gun control needs to be solved

putting fears into the children hearts

freedom is not being sustained

adolescence shy out from the frame.







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Our curriculum provides a caring atmosphere, assuring daily routines, stimulating activities that provides toddlers with a sense of safety and security. They learn through play, teachers assist with activities, and a lot of repetitions. Teachers provide opportunities for development of small and large motor skills and organize play activities to build concepts, listening skills, and develop social and emotional skills. Toilet learning is an important part of Nursery II program. Toilet learning usually happens between 1 1/2 and 2 1/2 years. Most children are toilet trained by age three; however, there are exceptions depending on each individual's physical developmental level. When a child is ready for toilet learning, teachers will assist children in accomplishing this developmental task.



**Lower Pre-K (Two's)**

Preschoolers are into experimenting and active exploration of new skills and directions. They are usually aware of authority figures and rules although they are still dependent on adult approval. Lower Preschool curriculum begins to include some of the individual, small and large group planning activities. The job of primary caregivers keeps the focus of simple planning through a daily schedule gives some order to the day and expands learning opportunities. Daily schedules allow teacher to extend a play period so the children gain maximum satisfaction from what they're doing. Lesson plans are created to expand preschoolers' knowledge through weekly thematic units that include items of interest to children, such as balls, boats, airplane, cars, boxes, apples, etc...

**Upper Pre-K (Three's)**

Our curriculum focuses on the concept that children learn best through play. It is important for children to have opportunities to construct their own knowledge through creativity, interaction, exploration, and imitation of role models. Every child is unique, therefore; our curriculum offers different learning styles. Children are encouraged to be curious, competent learners making choices and building on previous knowledge and experiences. As children play, they expose their skills and understandings, and providing signals for teachers to connect with them in ways that will be significant. Young children mature and develop skills at different rates and each child is given the opportunity to develop at his or her own pace in a setting that is challenging, pleasant, and instills a lasting love of learning.



**Transitional Kindergarten**

Our Transitional Kindergarten operates parallel with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg School System. We'll offer small class sizes & more individualized attention. The Transitional Kindergarten Program is designed to provide a child centered, literacy focused curriculums to ensure that all children enter school ready to learn. We follow ABEKA & STEAM curriculum that is dedicated to providing quality education and focuses on building a strong foundation for school success.

**Private Kindergarten**

Our Kindergarten Program is designed to provide a child-centered, literacy-focused curriculum to ensure that all children enter school ready to learn. We follow ABEKA & STEAM curriculum that is dedicated to providing quality education focuses on building a strong foundation for school success. Teachers provide a balance of structure and self-direction, so children's developmental skills and self-esteem are enhanced. The class is taught by a teacher with a K-6 certification that has Bachelors or Masters Degree in Education.

- Low student-to-teacher ratios allow specific instruction to support individual learning needs
- STEAM programs that provide a basis and practice in important academic skills.



# Love like Ambrosia

---

"We accept the love we think we deserve."

These wonderful lines from The Perks of being a Wallflower, are so true.

We do look for and accept the love, we think we deserve. That is why we hear people say "I don't deserve him/her. He/She is too good for me."

OR

"I am too good for him/her"

Either ways due to our low self esteem or arrogance we are wrong. What we all deserve is:

---

A love which is our strength, not our weakness.  
A love which inspires us, not one which makes us despair.  
A love which sets us free, not shackle us.  
A love which makes us love ourselves, not hate ourselves.  
A love which makes us whole, not break us.  
A love which makes us glow, not push us into darkness.  
A love which nurtures, not kill.  
A love like ambrosia, not poison.

By Gunjan Shrivastava



# Love

Gunjan Shrivastava

---

Like the parched earth, I waited....  
Waited for his love, to rain on me.  
He came like a cloud, with thunder & storm.  
He covered my sky & filled my vision.  
He stretched from one horizon, to another.  
His love permeated every pore of me.  
Some said his love, had overpowered me.  
That I had lost myself, somewhere in him.  
I laughed and told them, we have come together,  
Like the rain and the earth, to become one.  
We lost ourselves to each other & found ourselves anew.  
Like earth and water, different from each other.  
But still one is incomplete, without the other.  
They come together, to complete each other.  
They come together, to sustain life.  
They come together, to create new from the old.





# The Way She Breaks

Gunjan Shrivastava

---

She could break like glass,  
With a single crack, which showed her fault lines;  
Or she could break in a million pieces,  
Each fragment showing a different facet of her life.

She could break like the rocks,  
One crack at a time.  
To slowly disintegrate, to dust,  
To nothing.

She decided to break, like a storm.  
To blow away, all her worries and obstacles.  
She decided to break, like the rain from the clouds.  
To wash away the past, to start anew.  
She decided to break, like the waves,  
Never accepting defeat, coming back with renewed vigour.



# Two Lovers

Gunjan Shrivastava

---

When they first met, it was as if floodgates were opened.  
The eyes sparkled with joy, hungrily devoured every detail.  
The lips parted in laughter, words tripped over each other.  
The hands danced in glee, each touch revealing a new sensation, a new secret.  
They could not have enough; time the fleet footed thief, turned the hours into seconds.

They met after decades, once more the floodgates stood open.  
The eyes luminescent with tears, read every story time had written.  
The lips smiled, but remained silent. Silence spoke a language that day.  
The hands clasped each other; they conveyed what words could not.  
They just had minutes together, but in them they journeyed eons with each other.



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# Breast Cancer and Inflammation-Role of Diet

**Cancer**, also known as malignant tumor, is the uncontrolled growth of abnormal cells in the body. In the human body, there are trillions of cells with various functions. These cells grow and divide to help the body function properly. Cells die when they become old or damaged, and new cells replace them. Cancer develops when the body's normal control mechanism stops working. Old cells do not die and cells grow out of control, forming new, abnormal cells. These extra cells may form a mass of tissue, called a tumor. Among the most commonly diagnosed cancer, and most prevalent cause of cancer death in women is **breast cancer**; estimated to affect 1 out of every 8 women. Even with today's cutting-edge research technology, much remains to be discovered about how best to treat and manage this serious illness. Metastatic breast cancer (also called advanced or stage IV breast cancer) is breast cancer that has spread beyond the breast and nearby lymph nodes to other parts of the body. The most devastating aspect of breast cancer is the emergence of tumor cells that are capable of spreading to distant organs such as bones, liver, brain and lungs. As hard as it is to hear, metastatic breast cancer cannot be cured. This does not mean, however, that metastatic breast cancer cannot be treated. Because current treatments are very unlikely to cure advanced breast cancer, treatment of metastatic breast cancer focuses on span and quality of life.

Metastasis is regulated not only by intrinsic genetic changes in malignant cells, but also by the microenvironment. Several studies have demonstrated that sites of chronic **inflammation** are often associated with the establishment and growth of various malignancies. In addition, the immune system appears to play an overseer's role in both diseases. In Latin, the word "**inflammation**" means "**I ignite, set alight**" and like gasoline, that's exactly what it does to cancer. Inflammation orchestrates the microenvironment around tumors, contributing to proliferation, survival and migration. Inflammation is part of the body's immune response; without it, we cannot heal. But when it's out of control—as in rheumatoid arthritis—it can damage the body. As the evidence linking chronic inflammation to breast cancer progression grows, it becomes increasingly important to understand why this risk exists. A common inflammatory condition in humans is autoimmune arthritis (AA) that causes inflammation. From our studies, we have reported that breast cancer associated metastasis is significantly augmented with arthritis and we evaluated and established the mechanism. Chronic inflammation might increase the risk of breast cancer recurrence.

These insights are fostering new anti-inflammatory therapeutic approaches to cancer development. Stress, lack of exercise, genetic predisposition, and exposure to toxins can all contribute to such chronic inflammation, but dietary choices play a big role as well. Learning how specific food influence the inflammatory process is the best strategy for containing it and reducing disease risks specially cancer.

## List of food that may curb inflammation:

1. **Turmeric and Ginger:** Curcumin-a derivative of turmeric, and the pigment that gives the curry spice turmeric its yellow-orange color appears to be universally useful for just about every type of cancer. It has the ability to modulate genetic activity and expression, both by destroying cancer cells, and by promoting healthy cell functions. Turmeric also works in the body by helping to turn off NF-kappa B, protein that regulates the immune system and triggers the process of inflammation. Its relative, ginger, possesses numerous therapeutic properties including antioxidant effects, an ability to inhibit the formation of inflammatory compounds, and direct anti-inflammatory effects.
2. **Onions and garlic:** Onions contain several anti-inflammatory compounds that contribute to reducing symptoms that are associated with a host of inflammatory conditions like osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis, the allergic inflammatory response of asthma and the respiratory congestion that is a symptom of the common cold. Onions and their cousin garlic both contain compounds that inhibit enzymes that generate inflammatory prostaglandins and thromboxane. Both vitamin C and quercetin contribute to this beneficial effect. They work synergistically to spell relief from inflammation, making both onions and garlic good choices as ingredients in many dishes during cold and flu season. Garlic also has the ability to reduce the buildup of carcinogenic compounds that cause cancer.
3. **Fatty fish:** Oily fish, like salmon, mackerel, tuna and sardines, are high in omega-3 fatty acids, which have been shown to help reduce inflammation.
4. **Whole grains:** Consuming most of our grains as whole grains, as opposed to refined, white bread, cereal, rice, and pasta can help keep harmful inflammation at bay. That's because whole grains have more fiber, which has been shown to reduce levels of C-reactive protein, a marker of inflammation in the blood, and they usually have less added sugar.
5. **Dark leafy greens:** Studies have suggested that vitamin E may play a key role in protecting the body from pro-inflammatory molecules called cytokines—and one of the best sources of this vitamin is dark green veggies, such as spinach, kale, broccoli, and collard greens. Dark greens and cruciferous vegetables also tend to have higher concentrations of vitamins and minerals like calcium, iron and disease fighting phytochemicals than those with lighter colored leaves.
6. **Nuts:** Another source of inflammation-fighting healthy fats is nuts—particularly almonds, which are rich in fiber, calcium, and vitamin E, and walnuts, which have high amounts of alpha-linolenic acid that reduces inflammation.
7. **Peppers:** Chili peppers contain a substance called capsaicin which is a potent anti-inflammatory agent. It works by inhibiting Substance P, which is associated with inflammatory processes. Capsaicin is being looked at as a potential treatment for arthritis, psoriasis and diabetic neuropathy. A study published in Cancer Research found that capsaicin caused cancer cells to commit suicide.
8. **Tomatoes:** Juicy red tomatoes, specifically, are rich in lycopene, which has been shown to reduce inflammation in the lungs and throughout the body.
9. **Olive oil:** The compound oleocanthal, which gives olive oil its taste, has been shown to have a similar effect as Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAID) in the body.
10. **Beets:** This vegetable's brilliant red color is a tip-off to its equally brilliant antioxidant properties: Beets (and beetroot juice) have been shown to reduce inflammation, as well as protect against cancer and heart disease, thanks to their hearty helping of fiber, vitamin C and plant pigments called betalains.
11. **Green Tea:** Like produce, this tea contains anti-inflammatory flavonoids that may even help reduce the risks of certain cancers.
12. **Berries:** All fruits can help fight inflammation, because they're low in fat and calories and high in antioxidants. But fresh berries, especially, have been shown to have anti-inflammatory properties—possibly because of anthocyanins, the powerful chemicals that give them their rich color. Blueberries not only reduce inflammation, but they can protect the brain from aging and prevent diseases, such as cancer and dementia. We should aim for organic berries, as pesticides are hard to wash away due to their size.
13. **Sweet Potato:** A great source of complex carbs, fiber, beta-carotene, manganese and vitamin B6 and C, these potatoes actually help heal inflammation in the body.





### Food to aggravate inflammation

Five most important diet intake that we can limit:

1. **Sugar:** The American Journal of Clinical Nutrition warns that processed sugars trigger the release of inflammatory messengers called cytokines. It is better to reduce the intake of desserts, pastries, sodas, chocolate bars, even fruit juices with added sugar.
2. **Saturated Fats:** Several studies have shown that saturated fats trigger adipose (fat tissue) inflammation which is not only an indicator of heart disease but also worsens inflammation. Pizza and cheese are the biggest sources of saturated fats and other culprits include meat products (especially red meat), full-fat dairy products, pasta dishes etc.
3. **Trans Fats:** Known to trigger systemic inflammation, trans fat can be found in fast foods and other fried products, processed snack foods, cookies, donuts etc.
4. **Omega 6 fatty acids:** Our body needs a healthy balance of Omega-6 and Omega-3 fatty acids. Excess consumption of Omega-6 can trigger the body to produce pro-inflammatory chemicals. These fatty acids are found in oils such as corn, safflower, sunflower, vegetable, peanut, soy and grapeseed oil.
5. **Refined carbohydrates:** White flour products are high glycemic index foods that fuel the production of advanced glycation end (AGE) products that stimulate inflammation.

Not surprisingly, the same foods that contribute to inflammation and cancer are generally considered bad for our health, including sodas and refined carbohydrates, as well as red meat and processed meats.

**Conclusion:** Our body's immune system forms a defensive shield that any fighting force would be proud of. One of its most powerful weapons is **inflammation**, a carefully orchestrated maneuver designed to eliminate enemies such as bacteria, injured cells and chemical irritants. Without it, we probably wouldn't survive beyond infancy. But inflammation has a split personality – one that can wreak havoc for those unfortunate enough to experience it. And we now know that inflammation's dark side is a powerful force in **cancer development**, where it aids and abets tumor growth and spread around the body. Therefore, watching what we eat and staying abreast is a noteworthy step towards the war against cancer.....**especially for women with breast cancer and arthritis which involves inflammation.**

By Dr. Lopamudra Das Roy

Founder and President

Breast Cancer Hub Foundation

Charlotte, NC

Website: Breastcancerhub.org

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/breastcancerhub/>

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Surveying the menu, we saw typical Jamaican favorites such as *Jerk Chicken, Ackee and Saltfish*, but our attention was immediately drawn to “Goat Curry and Rice”.

-Shyama Parui

# Maangsho Bhaat on the Beach

**YOU** may have heard of *bhel puri* on the beach, or even the movie, “Bhaji on the Beach”, but the *Bangali* in me was blown away by the experience of relishing the all time favorite holiday dish, *maangsho bhaat* on the beach.

We were spending our winter vacation with friends in the Caribbean last year, and on one of the days we decided to visit Doctor’s Cave, a beautiful spot in Montego Bay, Jamaica. The turquoise waters and soft sand made it an ideal location to be nothing but a beach bum for the day. Lunch time rolled around at a leisurely pace and we were delighted to see that there was a restaurant serving the island’s popular delicacies to the beach goers. Surveying the menu, we saw typical Jamaican favorites such as *Jerk Chicken, Ackee and Saltfish*, but our attention was immediately drawn to “Goat Curry and Rice”. Ah! How could we order anything else? The exquisitely prepared goat curry was served with steamed, fragrant rice and in the company of fellow Bangali friends, every ounce was devoured. As we emptied the platter, we let our taste buds build a novel and scrumptious memory.

Finding our favorite foods in a foreign country is always a pleasant surprise. In our case, that satisfying meal triggered a comparison of Jamaica with India and as we observed the landscape and weather, we started recognizing the similarities. I am sure the story of how the recipe of goat curry traveled with immigrant laborers from India over a hundred years ago, survived a hard life, and made its way into the hearts of all Jamaicans, must be one of epic proportions. Sipping freshly cut *daaber jol* under the coconut palms and feeling the sand under our toes, we were temporarily transported to our homeland. The influence of British colonialism was visible in the architecture, and the confluence of many cultures within this tiny tropical paradise made Jamaica emerge as an incredibly diverse place. Although the real beauty of this destination lay under the surface of the water. A snorkel tour on a modest boat, with a knowledgeable captain, opened our eyes to the amazing sea-life that could have been easily missed. The kaleidoscopic colors of the fish and coral will stay with me for a long time. For incurable fish lovers like us, that dive was heavenly and for a change, our animated discussion about fish was not in the context of *jhol or jhaal*. By the end of the trip I thought of Montego Bay and Howrah as distant cousins rather than strangers from different continents. At the risk of sounding cliched, I want to say that one of the many rewards of traveling is the opportunity to experience and appreciate different people and places. It forces us to drop our smug sense of superiority and serendipitously discover, perhaps even learn something new. Isn’t that *darun? Yaa Man!*

## A Foodie's Guide to the Appetizing Terms Mentioned :

- **Maangsho** – Meat. In Bengali households, it is usually chicken or goat.
- **Bhaat** – Cooked rice
- **Bhel puri** – Spicy, sweet, and sour preparation with puffed rice. Delightful street food often served along the beaches of Mumbai.
- **Jerk Chicken** – Chicken rubbed with Jamaican spices and slow cooked over wood fire
- **Ackee and salt fish** – Jamaica’s National dish typically served at breakfast made with ackee, a fruit and cod.
- **Daaber jol** – Tender coconut water
- **Jhol** – A dish that resembles a stew usually prepared with fish and vegetables
- **Jhaal** – Spicy curry
- **Darun** – Awesome
- **Yaa Man** – Jamaican for Yes

Picture Credit: Uttam Parui







## A Tete-A-Tete with A Taekwondo legend

**My** relationship with **Roys Taekwondo Academy**

goes back to the year 2014, when we moved to Kolkata and I was desperately looking for a Taekwondo school for my son. Fortunately, I was introduced to **Master Ruma Roy Choudhury** and celebrated Sports Personality & Taekwondo Legend, **Grand Master Pradipta Kumar Roy**. Pioneer in Indian Taekwondo, humble and graceful as they both were, they have been nurturing this sport to develop from its core. I was privileged to attend their seminars and tournaments. Their hard work and dedication has been beyond comparison to establish Taekwondo as a popular and a professional sport in India.

-Ekata Saha

Excerpts of a conversation with Grand Master Pradipta Kumar Roy:

**Ekata:** Please tell us a little bit about yourself

**Pradipta sir:** Taekwondo is my passion. I am a KUKKIWON Registered International Master, Former International Champion & National Team Coach and Technical Advisor, Official Taekwondo Hall of Fame®

**Ekata:** How old were you when you started learning and what inspired you to learn Taekwondo?

**Pradipta sir:** I was just a school student when I fell in love with Taekwondo. And it was because of the unbelievable and extraordinary physical movements and mental alertness that this sport demanded.

**Ekata:** Who was your master?

**Pradipta Sir:** I am grateful to God because I took

Taekwondo lessons from many Legendary Great Grand Masters of the World like Late Great Grand Master Tran True Quan, Great Grand Master Youn Kook Park, Great Grand Master In-Sik Hwang, Great Grand Master Min Hak Seo, Great Grand Master Jung and several more.

**Ekata:** How do you think Taekwondo can change the society?

**Pradipta sir:** Taekwondo education is very important in today's life. Respect, trust and open communication are the foundations of strong families. Taekwondo training promotes values such as honesty, courtesy, loyalty, and cooperation. Each is an essential component in maintaining a good family structure.

Also "Taekwondo teaches self-control and harmony. Taekwondo is excellent for building character.

Taekwondo exercise leads to de-stressing, detoxing, healthy body, healthy mind.

Taekwondo teaches courtesy & civility." - say research papers of Prof. Peck Cho, Distinguished Professor of Dongguk University and Co-Director of HD Institute of Happiness and Prof. Josephine M. Kim, Harvard Graduate School of Education.

Dr. Ki Moore, Division Director and Professor in the University of Arizona College of Nursing says "benefits of practicing Taekwondo include increased self-control, discipline, flexibility, balance, coordination, strength and stamina". In India, long time back none other than Kabiguru Rabindra Nath Tagore, the great Poet and thought-leader introduced





Martial Arts in Visva-Bharati University in Shantiniketan, West Bengal. Besides that, United Nations (UN) is also working with World Taekwondo (WT) for ushering in peace in the World through the Art of Taekwondo.

**Ekata:** What new things are you incorporating to improve Taekwondo as a sport in India?

**Pradipta sir:** I am glad to report that for the first time in India I have been able to introduce Taekwondo Education on "Motivation & Stress Management" at all Government Medical Colleges in West Bengal (Government Order Memo no. DNE-Spl.2017/30) with great support and initiative of two Government administrators namely Dr. (Maj) Dwaipayan Biswas, 1 Dan Black Belt, KUKKIWON & Director of Medical Education, Prof. (Dr.) Debasis Bhattacharyya, presently OSD to the Dept. of Health & Family Welfare and Master Ruma Roy Chowdhury, Pioneering personality in Indian Taekwond

**Ekata:** Can you share your goals for the next ten years for Taekwondo in India?

**Pradipta sir:** My dream is to establish a Taekwondo College in India, that will help a lot for physical & mental development of the upcoming generation. We have already received a strip of land from Government of West Bengal.

**Ekata:** And what have been your major challenges?

**Pradipta sir:** For this noted venture we are looking for donations/ Sponsors / CSR fund etc.

Financial stringency has become an impediment in fulfilling my dream of setting up a Taekwondo College in India.

**Ekata:** Please tell us something about your fitness routine

**Pradipta sir:** I do not believe on particular fitness routine, because mind is the captain and body is the soldier. So my mood is important to carry forward my fitness routine.

**Ekata:** And your advice to our young Taekwondo learners?

**Pradipta sir:** Taekwondo is a form of education. So don't believe only in achievements. And learning diligently is the

only process for this education. Without proper education no one can realize the true spirit of this great Martial Art. In fact, achievements come only after real education.

**Ekata:** Finally, the magic of 'black belt'...

**Pradipta sir:** Belts are how one enters this world of education. Earning a Black Belt is not a magic. It is a journey to realize yourself.

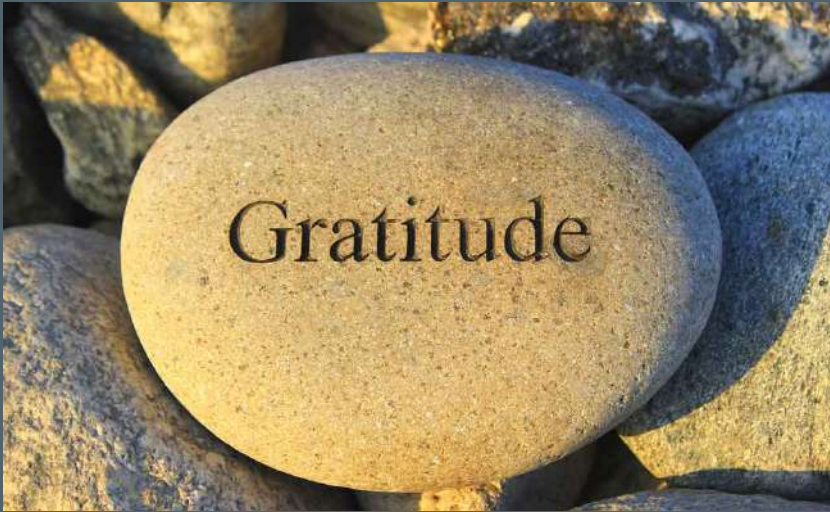
**Ekata:** It was a pleasure talking to you today. Thank you on behalf of our Arani readers

**Pradipta sir:** Thank you!

**By: Ekata Saha**



# Gratitude Brings Positivity

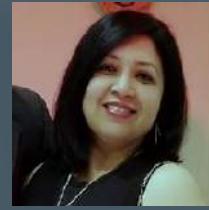


Gratitude is an emotion that we need to practice in our everyday lives. The word “Gratitude” brings so many other beautiful words in my mind like warmth, humility, acceptance, thankfulness and happiness. All these words radiate happiness and bring so much positivity. What is Gratitude? It is an appreciation of the good things we have in life. The emotion of appreciation promotes the feeling that the source of goodness is outside the self, that there is someone who really cares. It makes us acknowledge that people do make an effort to make a difference in our lives. The very thought that someone has sacrificed something to bring happiness in our lives creates the feeling that we are not alone, there is someone looking out for us. Gratitude heals us and makes us realize that contentment and joy is not always about materialistic possessions. I am grateful when my spouse makes my morning coffee or for a colleague, who helps out at work when I am under the weather. I am grateful for the friends, who I know will stand by my side through good times and bad. There has been documented research showing a correlation between gratitude and happiness. A person with a grateful personality is often found to be a “happy person”.

We are always focusing on what we do not have versus what we already have. While driving to work every day, I often find myself complaining about the traffic and almost never being grateful about the fact that I have a job to drive to everyday. I may grumble about my husband being rude or my children being disrespectful, never realizing that I am still loved even when I reflect the same attitude towards them. I often fail to express my gratitude for the love that I receive from my family, friends, and all those who have made the effort to touch my life. I appreciate the fact that I can continue with my daily routine even with the horrible traffic, a demanding boss, and never-ending household chores. I am grateful for life itself, that I am healthy and not fighting a battle in a hospital bed. I have realized that whenever I practice gratitude there is an abundance of positive energy in me. The benefits of practicing gratitude are plenty and we should all adopt it in our daily lives.

A skeptical me would also question, “are we grateful for the unpleasant things in life?” Well, the disagreeable incidents have taught us life lessons, to accept people even in difficult situations, to understand and respect in spite of disagreement. The challenges over the years have taught us to be more patient and to not judge a book by its cover.

We do need positivity in our lives. In this context I will quote from one of my favorite authors Charles Dickens, “Reflect upon your present blessings, of which every man has plenty; not on your past misfortunes, of which all men have some.” Progress is good, striving for excellence is incredible but not at the cost of sacrificing one's happiness. While we are running this race called ‘life’ let us pause, reflect, and connect with our inner souls. A reflection of what we have in terms of relationships, achievements, ideas, beliefs etc. will definitely make us feel better about ourselves. Let us make an honest effort to incorporate gratitude in our lives.



Author

Kakoli Chatterjee





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**Srishti wishes you a happy and joyous Durga Pujo.**

# HAIRBALL ON THE LOOSE

Arani Writing Contest 2018

Winner: Children Fiction

Aleena Biswas

It was a dark and stormy night. The Phagans had moved into Walla Walla, Washington (yes! that is an actual town) a few months ago. Mr. and Mrs. Phagan were out of the house leaving their 5 children in the house to watch a movie together with pizza. The storm made the power go out. So the children who usually got along pretty well together made a huge fort in the living room and were playing various board games together with many many flashlights.

“When did they say they would get back again?” asked Caleb, the youngest of them all. He was in fourth grade and was always complaining about how he was treated like a baby.

“Around dinner time” replied Jo. Jo’s real name was Joanna, but she liked Jo better. She was the oldest in eighth grade.

“Yeah but that was ages ago!” said Jake

“And just about as stuffed as a Pinata.” said Brian.

Jake and Brian were twins. They were in 6th grade, and weren't great students, but they were well liked among people for their humor. They also call themselves masters of pranks which they probably would be if they weren't so giggly before someone sat on a whoopee cushion, giving the whole fun away!

“Yeah, well that's what you get if you eat 6 pizza slices *and* dessert!” said Skylar who was in 7th grade.

“I bet mom and dad are actually at a bowling alley with all their grown up friends having the time of their lives.” Jake sighed

“Or on Mars!” said Brian

“They probably got held up at their meeting or something.” Said Skylar. Their parents were huge scientists.

A few minutes passed by as they continued playing their game.

“Uno, no wait, I win! Said Brian.

“No way, that’s cheating! It wasn’t even your turn.” Caleb protested.

“Shhhh. Did you guys hear that?” asked Jake in a hushed voice.

“Hear what?” Caleb questioned.

“That door squeak”

“Huh? Where? There is no one else in the house” Caleb looked concerned.

“Stop it Jake! Don’t listen to them Caleb. They are trying to scare you.” Skylar rushed.

“No, I think I heard it too” said Jo.

“Not you too!”

“No really! You know what? Never mind. Probably the wind outside.”

Suddenly there was a loud CRASH from upstairs.

“What was that?” Caleb jumped up.

“I’ll go check” Offered Jake taking a flashlight.

“I’ll come with you” Brian stood up and they raced out. Jake came back minutes later to the living room, looking aghast.

“What was it?” asked Jo impatiently.

“This may come as a shock” said Jake slowly, “But we found it in Skylar’s room. And it wasn’t us I swear.”

15 minutes later

“I can’t believe it. I just...how did you find this again?” , asked Skylar for the third time.

“We *told* you...” said Jake rolling his eyes.

“So many times” Brian agreed.

“Well?” Skylar motioned for them to continue.

“We ran upstairs looking for what caused the sound...” began Jake.

“We checked all the rooms and then got to your room...” Brian continued

“Saw some weird lights coming from inside.”

“Opened the door all the way...”

“And saw the painting on the ground next to the doorway completely messed up!”

This was the cat painting that Skylar had spent months creating, after seeing a similar one in an art museum. This had been framed and treated like a masterpiece from Leonardo Da Vinci and now was found on the ground, shattered and torn, by the twins. After Brian brought in the broken canvas, Skylar had rushed up the stairs into her room to see it in-person.

“How?” Skylar asked again, devastated. The painting was the best thing she ever made in her life. Probably the costliest one too.

“Your guess is as good as ours.” Jake shrugged

“Ghoooooassstss” Brian said more like a weird moan.

“This isn’t funny” Skylar snapped.

Once the kids cleaned up the broken glass, they started making theories on how the painting fell.



"Maybe you just didn't hang it right." Jo reasoned while the twins were going on about a ghost.

"Do you think we are actually being haunted by a ghost?" asked Caleb. His face was worried.

"You guys stop it! You are scaring Caleb." Skylar scolded

"I'm not scared! I'm almost ten!" he protested

Jo sighed. "Let's start cleaning up the living room. Then we could go to sleep. Hopefully mom and dad will be back soon, and maybe the electricity too."

"Let's hope the ghost won't" muttered Brian

"SHUT UP!" Jo roared. "There are NO such things as—"

"Shhhhhhhh" Skylar hushed

Jake jumped up "I heard it too!"

"Oh for crying out—"

Then there was a moan. Then silence. Then another moan. At this point, everyone's eyes were wide with horror.

"Ghost!" Caleb hollered. And he ducked into the fort.

Jo was pretty freaked out but she hated being wrong. There was another moan. It echoed through the house ghostly and sent shivers up their spines.

"I think we should set this house on fire and run", said Brian backing into the tent.

"No." Jo declined. "I'm going to see what's up there and if i don't come back in 5 minutes, then you can run. Hand me a flashlight."

Skylar stood up. "I'm coming with you."

"But the ghost could eat you or something!" Caleb protested from under the fort. The moaning never stopped.

"Skylar's being brave for a change. Let her go." Jake said. Skylar stood on his toe.

"Come on." Jo urged.

And on they went. They crept out of the room as silently as they could and disappeared from the boys' sight. Moments passed, and the boys grew more and more anxious. The moaning stopped.

"Has it been three minutes yet?"

"I don't know"

They were about to come out of the tent, when Skylar and Jo came in.

"Uhh, guys, since when did we have a cat?" Skylar questioned!







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# THE LIFE CYCLE OF STARS

*Arani Writing Contest 2018*

*Winner: Children's Non-Fiction*

**Just** like humans, stars have a life cycle as well. They are born from atomic dust and evolve over time, releasing tremendous amounts of energy through nuclear reactions for the major part of their lives. They go through a series of different forms and changes, some of which are protostars, red giants, white dwarfs and nebulae. In case the star is massive, it may turn into a supernova, eventually collapsing into a neutron star or, in some cases, a blackhole. These series of events ultimately lead up to the death of the star. When stars die, they release their matter into space which may later be recycled to form new stars and planets.

A star forms when a molecular cloud made of hydrogen and helium gas contracts under the pull of its own contained gravity. Then as it decreases in size while increasing in temperature, it starts splitting into smaller pieces which will each go on to form a protostar. A protostar gets covered in dust and gas and then while continuing to spin, flattens out to form a flat round disc. After a certain period of time, the shrinking star bursts into life and gas spurts out from either side of the disc. Grains of dust sticking together on the disc around the star may go on to make future planets. The fully formed young star now starts to fuse hydrogen atoms together to form helium. As this continues, the young star grows bigger and hotter. The star spends most of its life cycle in this stage, generating massive amounts of energy by these nuclear reactions for millions of years. At the next phase of its life cycle, as the hydrogen fuel begins to deplete, the star starts to expand and eventually goes on to form a red supergiant. As the core temperature gets higher, the star converts helium into carbon and oxygen. At the same time, the star's outer layers cool down causing them to turn red. Nuclear reactions cause heavier and heavier elements to be produced until a core of iron is built up. The iron core will finally collapse and the star explodes as a supernova. A planetary nebula might occur if the red giant is up to eight times as big as the sun. This happens when a star runs out of helium and the star starts expanding while its core shrinks.

However this time it expands so rapidly, its outer layers lift off and blow away into space. The departing gas gets lit by the intensely hot core and creates a planetary nebula. Once formed, a planetary nebula will remain visible for tens of thousands of years. A supernova might also form in the following way... if the star is several times more massive than the sun it will explode in a massive supernova where the light given off is equal to a hundred million suns. This will then either lead to a neutron star or a blackhole. A neutron star forms when the core collapses completely into a small object about thirty kilometers in diameter. A black hole is a dead star with such immense gravitational pull that even light cannot escape from it.

The life cycle of stars of course takes a very long time to complete, with these changes occurring over billions of years. Our Sun and Earth are made up of matter which were at one time part of some other star system. Somewhere down the road our Sun will surely meet its inevitable end and in dying out will release energy and cosmic dust from which a new star may form. In this way, the cycle of birth, existence and death continues over and over throughout the ages in the universe.

Author

Rohan Chatterjee





*Gautam and Samiksha Bose,  
Christopher and Priyadarshini White,  
Varun and Ujjayini Reddy and our  
sweetheart Darshan Gajendra White  
wish you all an extremely joyous festive  
month and a very Happy New Year.*






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# Normal

Shireen Collam (Written when she was in 5th Grade)

*Me, I have been called many things – Strange, Weird, Odd, queer.*

*But how can you call me those names when*

*Others might say the same things about you and sneer...?*

I've seen people call things normal based on what they think is normal. But isn't normal all about what we *know*? For eg: while you sit and relax in a car, someone from the 1600's might say that it is just a box with wheels and buttons. While having a refrigerator is a perfectly normal thing in today's world, to a caveman it would appear to be one of the strangest gadget on earth.

I believe that there is no such thing as 'normal'. It is a perspective. A perspective that is commonly shared by majority and that sets the benchmark. But it is very relative to that particular time and what's happening around us.

Most 5th graders in this school or any school for that matter, probably could have never imagined what an iPad or tablet was until they turned 6 or 7 years old and actually got one. Now we can't imagine our life without our chrome books and smart phones. But if all these 5th graders were to go back in time and bring back their younger selves, then I'm sure that those kindergarteners, 1st graders will find these devices to be very very strange. So our generation that grew up without iPads and were leading perfectly 'normal' lives, now have a new 'normal'.

Similarly with Culture. While people in America might think Holi (Festival of colors celebrated in India) to be amusing as it involves throwing colors on other people, people in India might be very intrigued with GroundsHog Day

Normal is only what we think. What we know. What we think we know.

Today.

At this moment.

Around us.

But is it really?

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# MAKEUP MADNESS

KARLI BOSE

*Makeup is not a mask that covers up your beauty.  
It just adds the extra POP... This article covers few of the hip & oh-so-happening  
Srishti Bengali ("Bong") ladies who are the perfect examples of*

*"Beauty with Brains"*

Question(s) posed to these Bong beauties: Which beauty product has always had your back? What are your go-to beauty product(s)?

SHOMA SENGUPTA



Mother of 2, School Teacher by profession with a charming persona, her schedules are very tight. Yet Shoma manages to make time for herself. She says that to keep her skin looking young her go to products are:

- \* Artistry Lipstick
- \* Artistry hydra V replenishing cream
- \* An occasional eyeliner (any brand)

## RUPALI BOSE



A doting mother of 1, an IT professional and a simple, grounded, lovely person by nature. Juggling between the roles of a mom and a working professional, Rupali takes out the time to add the pop up factor to her glowing looks:

Her go-to products:

\*Lancome' Pencil eyeliner

\*Estee Lauder lipstick

## ANITA SARKAR



Simple, Smart, carries a good sense of humor, Mother of 2 and an IT professional, Anita does a phenomenal job of balancing a full time job, demands of a family and social commitments. Her one go-to product is "Revlon Colorstay Ultimate Liquid Lipstick ".....

And she adds to it by saying "Kiss the special someone and no one can tell ;) (told ya about the girl havin' some mean "Humor").

She is also fond of Neutrogena Healthy Skin Pressed Powder as it is light and easy to wear.

Her tip is to notch it up one bit, nothing beats red...





## AMRITA BISWAS

Mother of 2, an excellent cook, a Hindustani classical singer cum Artist with a music school of her own and an extremely hard working individual.

She juggles her duties suavely between her music school and that of being a mom and yet does magic with her makeup. Simply flawless.

Her answer to the go-to product question - Eyeliner and Perfume .... The lady sure knows her beauty tricks

## SASWATI COLLAM



When you talk about a multifaceted and multi-talented woman...Saswati is the name that comes to mind. An indisputable, passionate, magnanimous, smart woman who is a full time working mom of 2, a road warrior and a wife to a romantic husband. She has us awestruck with her multitude of achievements.

So this busy bee swears by the Clinique line of products as anything else makes her sensitive skin go on a rash overdrive apparently!

## RAJ BANERJIE



We call her fondly as BUBU...composed, smart and as classy as they come...

When asked about her go to beauty product she mentions just two - "Kajal" (kohl) & Lipstick and shares this little story...

Two beauty products in my beauty regimen (if you can call it that) are (1) Kajal (yes literally that! Used to be Himalaya, but now it's Maybelline) and (2) Lipstick (mostly Burt's n bees). Why do I use them? Because I am allergic to a lot of things. Even Aloe Vera. And whenever there were any occasions to dress up in my in-laws place we 'bahus' (daughter-in-laws) got the least amount of time to do so. So my co-sister taught me this trick. She said if you put on a smear of lipstick and some kajal in your eyes, you look all put together! And I confess, that advise has helped carry me throughout!!



## KARLI BOSE

And now it's my turn ;) ...as many of you probably already know me that I go by Karli Bose, mother of 2, an IT professional and possess a certain adventurous character... (a story for another time)

I am not a schedule follower so there is no such thing as "beauty regime" for me. But my two go-to products are Perfume and Moisturizer.

Just love Christian Dior for their line of perfumes...

## CHANDRABOLI DUTTA

And finally the Diva herself! We know her as Chandra, mother of 2 cute little kids and an all-rounder. From a marathoner to a full time working woman, an accomplished singer, to a socialite to a supermom. A perfect example of Beauty with Brains.

There is hardly a need to mention that she is tremendously beautiful both inside and out. And her beauty regime is very simple - she doesn't need one .... It's comes natural to her!

Her go-to products - Cetaphil Gentle cleanser & Aveeno cream

And her mantra: - "Never go to bed without cleaning your face ..."





# PURPOSE

Dream.

It is a modest word but,  
It is an illusion of meanings.  
It's what I see in my slumber,  
And what I see when wakeful.

It is like a motion picture where,  
I play the lead role.

I fall asleep every night, to dream,  
And wake up to do the same.

Every night and every day,  
Like the rising and setting sun,

I never forsake to dream.

Like the moon each night,  
My dream morphs into dissimilar tales.

And like the sun every dawn,

My dream endures as resilient as ever.

I am what my dreams express me as.

I am the lone candle in the hollow of obscurity,  
And the oasis amidst the sea of sand.

I am hope.

I will be.

By Ritushree Dutta



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**U***nmoving Darkness* looks into the oppressive tradition of the Devadasi system, the illegal practice of female religious servitude that uses religion, class-caste, and poverty as weapons of discrimination, to throw little girls of poor untouchables communities into prostitution, in remote villages of Karnataka, India. Although this story was inspired by the study of history, myth, and biographical accounts of devadasis, this is a work of fiction. Any resemblance to actual events or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental. This story was previously published in Saath magazine.

*Please be advised that this story contains mature content. May not be suitable for young readers.*

## Unmoving Darkness

~ Indrani Nayar-Gall

The shrill sound of rooster's crowing startled Durgamma out of her sleep. Sun is beginning to light up the sky. Durgamma's tired body still wants some rest, but she must get up. Her eyes follow the ray of light coming through the little hole in the ceiling. The little money she saved for it has to go toward Ajina's bead tying. She hopes the roof can take another monsoon season.

The old mat has too many holes. She can feel the sharpness of the broken ends against her skin, but her body still feels cool against the dampness of the earthen floor. Durgamma's eyes follow the light coming through the crack in the ceiling. Her half-asleep body and mind drifts to a time long ago - so long ago ... the wild sound of drums.

Durgamma's head burns again ...wants to devour everything but her worn body cannot move. Her mind searches for an old faded memory - of a day - too long ago - but hard to erase. It has gouged a deep hole within her mind and body ... a bottomless hollow pit with an incomprehensible cry.

~~~~~

The picture is still vivid in her mind - fun and festivity! She felt so special that morning! Nobody ever fussed around her that much! Her mother had called the women of the village. They put sandalwood paste all over her body. She has never smelled anything so beautiful. They bathed

her and wrapped her in a beautiful new green sari and a blouse. First time she gets to wear a blouse and a sari so pretty! *Tayi* said, "Durgamma, you are a lucky girl! Today is your wedding day! Yellamma gudda will bless you today and make you her own!" Durgamma didn't quite understand all of these, but she was happy that she is getting married today! Parvati got married last year - dressed in a saree and a gold chain! She looked so pretty, the groom was from the next village, two musicians played! Durgamma never ate so much good food! Parvati is now back in the village with her *tayi*, she will have a baby.

Durgamma is happy. She too will have a handsome husband and a baby of her own! But what happened to Rajamma? She heard Rajamma got married two/three years ago. Durgamma was really small then. Did not remember everything, but her wedding was different from Parvati's... Rajamma never came back to her *tayi* to have a baby! And, who was her husband?

~~~~~

Durgamma slowly turned to her side and adjusted her body against the prickly mat. Her eyes traveled from the hole in the ceiling to the corner of the room.

The memory of that day still gives her a chill. Everything is so vivid in her mind. Her mother and the village women are taking her to the temple. *Tayi* wraps a jasmine garland in her open wet hair, just like the other brides she has seen. Her saree is such a pretty green. Suddenly, Durgamma feels like a grown young woman. She becomes conscious of her body. The changes.

What does her husband look like? Is he handsome and young? Her mind wonders. Parvati's husband was young, they looked so happy, but she never saw Rajamma's husband, and nobody ever spoke of her much after.

Her mind floats in happiness, the sound of drums at the temple. The priest sprinkles holy water and turmeric paste all over her head and smears it on her forehead. The cold water trickling down her back feels good on this already hot morning. She tries to find the groom, but she is not to look up. The priest ties a glittering necklace of shiny silver with red and white beads around her neck.

Durgamma touches the worn-out necklace around her neck ...

Where is the groom?

The priest puts her in front of a colorful pitcher with flowers and other things. Panic strikes in her eyes - is this part of being a Devadasi? Why is this different from Parvati's wedding? She sits surrounded by gifts given to her and her family. She hears the voice of the priest.

"You are now married to Yellamma gudda. From now on she will protect you and your family. You will never become a widow. In return you must please Yellamma of all her desires, dance, sing and refuse no man."

There is Rajamma! Durgamma has not seen her in two years! How beautiful she looks and she dances! Men are throwing money at her!

***"Durgamma, you are a lucky girl! Today is your wedding day! Yellamma gudda will bless you today and make you her own! ."***

*-Indrani Nayar Gall*

All the relatives and people of the village complimented Durgamma's parent on her good looks and what a good Devadasi she would make. Everyone is leaving now. The dogs are at the scraps of food on the thrown leaf plates. The priest comes to take Durgamma away from her mother. Panic enters her body. There was no groom! Where does he want to take her? She begins to cry and holds on to her mother. The priest pulls her away. She can no longer find her mother in the crowd of villagers. The little group is now moving away from her.

Suddenly everything changes. Durgamma had only seen glimpses of the landlord's house from the big entrance door when her mother brought her to beg for alms. The lady who brought the alms always commented on her beauty. "Rukmini, this one is a real beauty. She will fetch you lots of good fortune".



She had never seen such a big soft bed. The woman who brought her in the room gave her something to drink before she left. Everything is a bit blurry. Her little numb body sinks into the soft bed. The figure of a big tall man is suddenly too close to her. Too close.

~~~~~  
The shrill sound of the rooster's crowing startles her back to reality – "What could I do?" Durgamma sighs.

She gathers herself. "Lots have to be done today!" This old body can no longer do anything in a hurry. She rolls up the old mat and the little old pillow and put it in the corner quietly. Lot to be done today for tomorrow Ajina's beads will be tied!

She looks at Ajina's peaceful face. Her little chest rises up and down in even rhythm. Ah, let her sleep a bit longer. She sits next to the little figure. Her rough callused hands from years of hard work touch Ajina's head. She strokes her hair and forehead. Tears roll down her cheeks.

"How can I throw this beautiful innocent little thing in the mouth of these animals? But, what else can I do? Who will look after her after I close my eyes?" She sighs again, wipes her tears and gets up slowly moving toward the half-decayed door. Not much of a door of not much of a house. What is there to take!

Her thoughts travel back to the past again. Once there was, but was it worth it? At what price! She sighed. But still - when this body was young and beautiful...

After the landlord there were others who gave her clothes and jewelry and a roof over her head...

Durgamma wonders while doing her daily morning chores... Her own daughter Roopa. Tears roll down her cheeks again... Things are so different now from before. She wipes her tears with the corner of the saree. What else could she have done? This world has become so cruel. They said, "Roopa will have a good future." She will make so much money if Durgamma only lets them take her to the city.

The man who paid for Roopa's first night was very cruel. After a year he sold her to a brothel in Mumbai for five thousand rupees. He gave Durgamma two thousand rupees and said, "Your money problem is solved Durgamma! Roopa will send you money every month! You will be a rich woman." She trusted that man! Her neighbor Santhi said, "Do not worry Durgamma, they will take good care of her. She will make lots of money, have lots of jewelry and send you money every month. Didn't you see Janki's daughter?"

Little bit of money came at the beginning, but hardly much after that. Before the year was out Janki told her that, she heard that Roopa is pregnant. In a few months the brothel sent her home. Roopa looked tired and thin, but she would not say anything. She gave birth to Ajina at fourteen. Roopa went back to the brothel within two months promising to send money for Ajina. Since then Ajina is with Durgamma. The little bit of money, which Roopa left with her lasted only for a few months. Every morning after that Durgamma had to go down to the temple with Ajina to beg.



Next year Roopa got pregnant again but the brothel madam got rid of it at an early stage. Roopa, looking even thinner, came home for a week to recover. Soon after that the news came that Roopa is often getting sick with chills and fever. The villagers started to talk. The hospital said she has HIV/AIDS. After the signs became too obvious the brothel sent her back to the village. It was not very long after that ...

Durgamma wiped her eyes and started to sweep the small front part of the house even more vigorously raising a small dust storm of dry earth in front of her. The choking dust brought her back to the present. The ground is cracking again in the terrible heat. Only last week she mended them.

~~~~~

Ajina opened her eyes and lay motionless. But not for long. A sharp pang of hunger struck her little body. But this is nothing new. Ajina has learned to sleep with an empty stomach. She slowly says, "Ajji, I am hungry." Hard morning light is pouring through the only window in the room and the hole in the ceiling. Ajina gets up, comes outside with a little aluminum mug of water to wash her face and clean her mouth, just as *ajji* taught her. Durgamma brings a piece of *roti* with a small piece of *jaggery* and little bit of goat milk in a cup. Ajina bathes and put on her school uniform with *ajji's* help.

This is the happiest time of the day for her. She waited for her friend Kiran. As she heard Kiran's voice she dashed out of the room to join her. She took Kiran's hand with a big smile and both danced their way to school.

Except for some of the children who always teased her, time at school was Ajina's favorite time of the day. She loved the teachers and learning about different things. The teachers loved her too! They always told *ajji* how quickly she learns everything.

The bell rang for lunch break. Ajina and Kiran quickly picked up their books and joined others for lunch. She knows that, the quicker she can finish eating there will be more play time!

As usual, some children started to tease her, but it was different from other days! Today they didn't tease her about her father's name. Today is different.

'Ajina will be a Devadasi ... Ajina will be a Devadasi, Ajina will be a Devadasi,' they begin circling around her and singing in unison.

Ajina suddenly finds herself in the middle of a big group of children. Where is Kiran?

She cannot see Kiran's face anywhere in the crowd. The children surround her completely and begin shouting even louder. Some started touching, pushing and tapping her head. Nooooh...! I am not a devdasi. I am Ajinaaaaaah!

Ajina tries to fight back, loses her balance and falls. The children laugh even harder and throw dust at her. Ajina's knees hit the dry coarse ground and start to bleed. The dust goes all over her hair, nose and eyes. She begins to cry. The crowd of children suddenly stops and began running away from her. Kiran found Shankar-sir! He picked up a shaking and crying Ajina and brought her inside the school. Unable to stop completely she continues to sob. Her little mind does not understand why they kept teasing her and calling her a devadasi.

~~~~~

As Durgamma begins to pick dirt little by little from Ajina's hair, tears cloud her eyes. A still sobbing Ajina asks her grandmother, "What is a devadasi *ajji*? Why were they laughing at me?" What can she tell her granddaughter? After what happen to Roopa, can she any longer tell her granddaughter that Yellamma will protect her? The goddess couldn't even save herself, how will she save her worshippers?

Lying on her torn mat Durgamma begins contemplating on the big day ahead of her. The scheduled festivity, the arrangements, Ajina's initiation into the Devadasi system ... Can she still go through with it? She touches Ajina's quiet little body, the rhythmic up and down of her chest with each breadth. Surrounded by darkness Durgamma turns on her back and looks up. She searches for the little hole in the ceiling. There is no ray of light. Only constricted darkness. Still. Unmoving night.

~~~~~

## Bio

Indrani Nayar-Gall, Indian by birth, is an interdisciplinary artist-activist. Her work is committed to social justice and aligns with broader social movements aimed at overcoming all social and religious barriers to equality and empowerment of women, using narratives of young girls and women of marginalized communities.

Indrani lives and works in Charlotte North Carolina.

The devadasi system is an illegal practice of religious servitude that persists in northern Karnataka and around the Maharastra-Karnataka borders. Young girls of poor Dalit communities are still being sold into prostitution in the name of religion. Nayar-Gall has launched a global call-to-action campaign to help marginalized devadasi mothers empower themselves. To learn more, go to <https://www.yessherises.org>



## MATA-KAALI-KATHA

By Sekhar Naskar

There are different explanations about the name Kaali –one is feminine of noun 'Kaal' means 'Time'. Another one name is 'Kalika' means 'the deep dark blue', which is why she also named as 'Shyama'.

Kaali Puja is performed to protect us from all evil and bad things. Some devotees, such as former kings worshipped Mata Kali to gain power and to combat their enemies. Kali Puja started in Bengal in 18th Century by Raja Krishna Chandra, influenced after the devotional text Kalika Mangalkavya (of 17th Century). But mainly, it is so popular in Bengal as Sri Ramkrishana's main deity was Mata Kali.

The story of the goddess 'Mata Kaali' is described in the 'Devi Mahatmya' of the 'Markandeya Purana' which are ancient Hindu scriptures. She is an incarnation of the goddess Devi Durga. And Devi Durga was created from the combined powers of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva in order to defeat the demon (Asura) Mahishasura. Here is the detailed katha (story)

**Disclaimer:** All the myths and contents are respectfully taken from various source on internet. Deeply grateful to below and other sources

<http://www.mantraonline.com/the-slaying-of-chanda-munda-devi-mahatmyam-3/>

<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kali>

Small endeavor to know greatness of Mata Kaali and share the myth amongst ourselves. All the stories may not be agreed to different believers or sects. Please forgive me in name Maa Adya Kaali.

Two demon (asura) brothers Sumbha and Nisumbha decided to conquer the three worlds (Triloka) by subjecting severe rituals and shadhana, so that no man or demon could destroy them. God Brahma saw the demon brothers' repentance (which was almost 10 years near Pushkara), and he was pleased and gave the boon they requested. The boon had granted the brothers protection against men and demons, but not against women. When Indra's sovereignty over the Trilokas' were taken by the Asura brothers, devas thought about the indestructible Devi Durga as only solution, The boon of Devas granted by Devi, "whenever in disaster you remember me, immediately I will end the calamities".

All the Devas went to Himavat, to seek help from Devi Durga. An extremely beautiful and auspicious form of the goddess sprung forth from Devi in shape of Kosha (hence she also known as Kaushiki). Chanda and Munda, the two servants of asura brothers thought about her, as great gift to their kings, as she was extremely beautiful. After hearing that Shumbha sent Sugreeva as a messenger to the Devi with marriage proposal, Devi was furious and said, "Who conquers me in battle shall be my husband".

After hearing this they ordered asura commander Dhoomralochana to go with his 60 thousands asuras to bring Devi by force. Dhoomralochana rushed towards Devi and thereupon Devi reduced him to ashes with an explosive sound 'Bajra Ninad' and all his army was destroyed by her lion. Shumbha, with great anger, commanded Chanda and Munda to kill Devi. When Chanda and Munda attacked, Devi Durga's face turned dark in anger and Kaali appeared out of her forehead, armed with a sword and noose. Thereafter, they had a great fight with various weapons. Kaali rushed towards Chanda and Munda seizing their hair, cut their head. The remaining army became dreadful and fled in all directions. Kaali, holding the heads of Chanda and Munda in her hands approached Devi Durga. Devi was pleased and praised her, that whole world will know her as Devi Chamunda.

Supported by a large army, the two great asuras went for the fight. In the devastating battle the Devi split the arrows shot by Shumbha. And Shumbha also split the arrows discharged by her. Then Devi Chandika became angry and struck him with a trident. Meanwhile, Nishumbha was advancing, Devi Chandika pierced him in the heart with a swiftly thrown dart. Then began a dreadful fight between Devi and Shumbha both on the earth and in the sky, while all Devas and asuras looked on. Various weapons were released by the asura and all were broken down by the power of Devi. Devi pierced Shumbha's chest with a powerful dart, and threw him down on the earth. Praises were sung in praise of the great Devi – Kaatyayini - Durga - Chandika-Ambika-Mahakali by the Devas. Here ends the story of the slaying of Shumbha and Nishumbha according to Devi Mahatmyam.



## ছালা

### রাজতিলক দে

সমীর আজ অফিস এ পৌঁছেই ঠিক করলো ভাড়াভাড়া বাড়ি ফিরবে। ফোন করে তপতিকে সেটা জানিয়েও দিলো। কিছুদিন ধরেই তপতির কোমরের ব্যাখাটা একটু বেড়েছে। তপতি স্থূল কলেজে নাচের কম্পিউশনএ নাম দিতো। শরীরটা ফিট তবু কোথা থেকে যে কোমরের ব্যাখাটা এলো এটা সমীর বুঝে পায় না। বাচ্চা হওয়ার পরেও তপতি প্যাডার ফাংশান এ নাচ করেছে, ছোটদের নাচ শিখিয়েছে। খানিকটা সমীর নিজেকেই দোষ দেয়। বাড়ির খাটুনিটা যদি একটু কমতো। মা পক্ষাঘাত গ্রস্ত হওয়ার পর থেকে কাজের বহর আরো বেড়েছে। আজ ঠিক করলো বাড়ি ফিরে বোকে নিয়ে মধুসূদন মঞ্চে যাবে। বিস্তির আজ গানের ক্লাস আছে। ওকে নামিয়ে দিয়ে দুজনে আজ গান শুনবে। কি একটা প্রোগ্রাম আছে। সমীরের কিছু যায় আসেনা কি প্রোগ্রাম। একটা কিছু থাকলেই হলো। খানিকটা সময় অন্তত তপতি রিলিফ পাবে।

চ্যাটার্জী সাহেব ডাক পাড়লেন বারোটা নাগাদ।

-- কি ব্যাপার, নতুন কোনো প্রেমে পড়লেন নাকি? সব ভুলেই যাচ্ছেন দেখছি। মুম্বাই এর অর্ডার গুলোর জন্য purchase করতে হতো আপনার তো টেন্ডার এর নোটিশ টা দেবার কথা ছিল।

সমীরের ইচ্ছা করলো চ্যাটার্জীর গালের আঁচলটা উপড়ে নেয়। শালা, এক নম্বরের হারামি। কাজটা নবার মানে নবেন্দুর। নবার শরীর খারাপ হওয়ায় আজ আসেনি তাই হারামিটা ওর পেছনে ঠুঁজে দিলো। আবার হাসছে দেখে। সমীর ঠিক করলো যদি কোনোদিন খুন করে তবে চ্যাটার্জীকে দিয়ে শুরু করবে।

বললো

-- স্যার, আজ বিকালের মধ্যে হয়ে যাবে। সেল ফোন টা নতুন কিনলেন নাকি। ডিসপ্লে টা কিন্তু দারুন। মেমরিও নিশ্চই বেশি দিয়েছে।

এক প্রশ্ন হেঁ হেঁ আর সেল ফোনের নানা ব্যবহার শুনে বেরিয়ে এলো। বেরিয়ে এসেই চোখ পড়লো কনীনিকার দিকে। চ্যাটার্জীর PA। চাব্বকের মতো গড়ন। সমীর ভাবলো চ্যাটার্জীকে খুন করলে সেল ফোনটা কনীনিকাকে দিয়ে দেবে। এরপর সারাদিন আর মুখ তুলে তাকায়নি। শখন বেরোলো ৫টা বেজে গিয়েছে। আজ আর ভাড়াভাড়া ফেরার মানেই হয় না। তপতি এতক্ষনে বিস্তিকে নিয়ে গানের ক্লাস এ চলে গিয়েছে। সিগারেট ধরিয়ে কাঠিটা ইচ্ছা করেই খানিকটা শূন্য ছুড়ে দিলো। আজ মাল খেলে বেশ হতো। সেই হোস্টেল এর সোনার দিনগুলো মনে করে নিলো। এসব মনে করলেই বয়সটা অনেকটা কমে যায়।

যাদবপুর খানার মোড়ে আসতেই দূর থেকে দেখতে পেলো একটা জটলা। সমীর ফুট বদল করে খানিকটা এগিয়ে যেতেই দেখতে পেলো একটি মানসিক ভারসাম্য হীন মধ্যবয়স্ক মহিলা প্রায় লগ্ন বসে আছে। তাকেই ধিরেই জটলা। উৎসুক চাহনি আর গোপন অংশ দেখার পাপযুক্ত বাসনা। সমীর দাঁড়াতেই একটি অতি উৎসুক ছেলে একটা টিল নিয়ে মহিলার দুপায়ের মাঝে ছুঁড়লো। সমীর আর পারলো না। ছেলেটার ঘাড় ধরে এক রদ্দি মারতেই হাতে পায় জোর চলে এলো।

-- হারামির বাচ্চা, তোদের বাড়িতে মা বোন কেউ নেই। ...চি গেলে দেব। শেষ করে দেব। ছেলেটার সাথী ঘুমি চালাতেই সমীরের মুখটা নোনতা হয়ে গেলো। সমীরের গায়ে কিছুই বোধ হলো না। হাঁটু দিয়ে মারতেই ছেলেটা ছিটকে পড়লো রাস্তায়। সমীর দৌড় মারলো। অনেকটা দৌড়ে যখন খামলো তখন প্রায় চাকুরিয়া লেক পর্যন্ত চলে এসেছে।

লেকে যখন ঢুকলো তখন প্রায় সাতটা বাজে। ঠোঁটের কোনটা কেটে গেছে। আবিষ্কার করলো ঘড়িটা নেই। যা গেছে ভালোওই হয়েছে। এমনিতেই সেল ফোন আসার পরে ঘড়ি কেউ দেখে না। সমীর পড়তো শখ করে।

বাড়ি ফিরলো প্রায় সাড়ে নটা। বাড়ির কাছে আসতেই সমস্ত জড়তা যিরে এলো। সমীর যে এরকম মারামারি করবে এইবয়সে এটা ভাবতেই নিজেকে মনে হলো দুটো চড় মারে।

তপতির মুখ থমথমে। সমীর নিজে থেকেই যা বললো তার সারমর্ম হলো এই যে

আজ যা কান্ড হলো বলবার নয়। অটোওয়ালারা রাস্তা আটকেছে টালিগঞ্জ এর মোড়ে। সমীর ও দাঁড়িয়ে ছিল। পুলিশ এসে লাঠি চালাতেই ধাক্কা খেয়ে সোজা ল্যাম্পপোস্ট এ বাড়ি খেয়েছে। পরে মিষ্টির দোকানে ঢুকেই জল দেওয়ার সময় সুমিতের সাথেই দেখা।

সমীর জানে সুমিতকে তপতির একেবারেই পছন্দ নয় তাই এই ব্যাপারে র একটাও প্রশ্ন করবে না। বিস্তি বাবার কাছে একটু নতুন গালটা শোনালো। বিস্তির গালটা সমীরের মায়ের মতোই সুরেলা। গতানুগতিক খবর নিয়ে সমীর মায়ের কাছে গিয়ে একটু বসলো। নিরুপমা আজকাল নিজে বসতে পারলেও হাঁটতে অসুবিধা আছে। খেরাপি করলে হয়তো কিছুটা উন্নতি হতে পারতো কিন্তু সমীর কুলোতে পারেনি।

থেতে বসতেই স্বপ্নলিটা বাড়লো। সমীরের কিন্তু খারাপ লাগলো না। কলেজএ একবার ইউনিয়ন করার সময় মারামারি করেছিল। ছাত্রদের অনশন চলছিল আর সমীরও ছিল তাতে। ছাত্রদের নির্বিষ অনশন সেবার কর্তৃপক্ষ কর্মচারীদের দিয়ে মেরে তুলেছিল। সমীরের মাথায় লেগেছিলো সেবার। তখন খুব সং আর আদর্শবাদী হওয়ার শখ ছিল। বেশিদিন সেই শখ থাকায় সমীর কিছু করে উঠতে পারেনি। সমীরদের লিডার তখাগত এখন USA তে থাকে। যে সাম্রাজ্যবাদ কে গুড়িয়ে দেওয়ার স্লোগান দিতো এখন তাদের সাথেই ওয়াশিংটন পার্টি করে। গতবার দেশে এসে সমীরকেও একবোতল দিয়েছিলো। সমীর অবশ্য নেমস্তন্ন করে বেশিটাই তখাগতকেই খাইয়ে দিয়েছিলো।

খাওয়া শেষ হওয়ার পরেও তপতি কিছু বললো না। সমীরকে কিছু একটা বেড়াতে যাওয়ার পরিকল্পনা ফাঁদতে হবে। আজকে এতো আশা করেছিল ও। এক দু কথায় মন্দারমণি আর সিকিম এর কথা পড়ার পর ও ওধার থেকে কোনো সাড়া না আসায় সমীর উঠে উঠানে চলে গেলো। সমীরের মনে হলো আজ মাল খেলে বেশ হতো। কালকে আবার অফিস যেতে হবে ভেবেই ক্লান্ত বোধ করলো। সিগারেট টা ফেলে কুলকুচি করে বিছানায় গিয়ে সেল ফোন নিয়ে একটু খেললো। তপতি কাজ গুছিয়ে যখন এলো তখন প্রায় সাড়ে এগারোটো। আলো নিভিয়ে মশারি গুঁজে শোবার থানিক পড়ে সমীর অনুভব করলো তপতি কাঁপছে। হাতটা নিয়ে গলে ছোঁয়াতেই দেখলো ভিজে। সমীর থানিকটা জোর করেই তপতিকে নিজের দিকেই ফিরিয়ে মাথাটা গলার কাছে রাখলো। তপতি হ হ করে কেঁদেই চলেছে। তুমি কি আমায় শান্তি দেবে না। কেন তুমি মারামারি করতে গেছো। সমীর তপতির কোমরের কাছটা আলতো করে ধরেই বললো আমার যে কত খারাপ লাগে যে আমি তোমার জন্য কিছুই করতে পারি না। আজকেও কথা রাখতে পারলাম না। আমাকে তুল বুল না স্লিজ। তপতি সমীরের গালে গাল ঘষতে ঘষতে বললো একদম এসব বলবে না। আমার কিছু চাই না। সমীরের মুখে আবার নোনতা স্বাদ। খুব আরাম হলো। সবকিছু মিটে যাওয়ার পরও সমীরের শরীর জুড়ে এখন শুধুই আরামের অনুভূতি।

## সঙ্কট

### রাজতিলক দে

এক ছোটবেলার শিক্ষক বলতেন তোমাদের গল্প পায়। কারণ সারাক্ষণ ক্লাসের ফাঁকে গুজুগুজু চলতো। এখন বড়বেলায় লেখা পায়। আসলেই লিখে খুব শান্তি হয়। আর লেখার নেশা ধরিয়েছেন ভারপদ স্যার। সামান্যই শিখেছি। সারাজীবন কৃতজ্ঞ থাকবো স্যারের কাছে। এই ছোট ছোট লেখা গুলোই আমাদের রিটার্ন গিফট। জীবনে অমন শিক্ষক আর দেখিনি। ক্লাসে ঢোকা ইস্তক হাঁচি কাশি বাদ দিয়ে যা বলতেন সব লিখতাম। ব্যারিটন ভয়েস। সোজা ভাকালেই পেট গুড়গুড় করতো। যা বলতেন সেসব মনি মুক্তোর মতো লাগতো। এমন মুক্তি দিতেন মনে হত এই সত্য। মেঘের আশ্রয় নিয়ে যে লেকচার দিয়েছিলেন তা আজীবন মনে থাকবে। ক্লাস শেষ হয়ে যাওয়ার পরও পুরো ক্লাস চুপ করে থম মেরে বসেই ছিল অনেক। এই সব স্বপ্নজন্মা ব্যক্তির বেশিদিন ধরাধামে থাকেন না তাই তিনিও গত হয়েছেন।

আজ লিখতে বসার কারণ এক টানাপোড়েন। কাগজে পড়লাম এক ব্যক্তি তার বাবা, মাকে খুন করে লাশ বাড়ির বাগানে পুঁতে দিয়েছে। শুধু তাই নয় পড়ে বিয়ে করে স্ত্রী কেও খুন করে বাড়ির মধ্যেই পুঁতে দিয়েছে। কোনো মাসিক অসুস্থতা নেই। স্বাভাবিক ব্যক্তি। শিউরে ওঠার মতো ঘটনা। এতো মধ্য প্রাচ্যের কোনো ঘটনা নয় আমাদের তখাকথিত সন্ত্য সমাজের ঘটনা। কোন শিক্ষা কোন সমাজ একে এইভাবে তৈরী করলো। ভাবনা হয়। আমার ঘরেও ছেলে বড় হচ্ছে তাই আমাকে ভাবায়।

যে মূল্যবোধ সমাজে প্রতিষ্ঠিত তাতে হয়তো এরকম হবারই কথা। এই বিদেশে বিতুঁই এও মূল্যবোধ ক্ষয়িষ্ণু। এখানের সমাজে নির্লিপ্ততা নির্লক্ষ। তোমার পাশের বন্ধ যদি মরতেও বসে তোমার রোজকার টেনিস খেলার ফাঁকি দেয়া যাবে না। এই কঠোরতা শুধু স্বার্থপর করে তোলে তাই নয় থানিকটা নুশংস ও করে তোলে।

দেশের অবস্থা বোধহয় আরও শোচনীয়। চারিদিকে যে সব দুষ্টি সৃষ্টি হচ্ছে তাতে সমস্ত শিক্ষা ব্যবস্থাই গুলিয়ে গেছে।

আমার পুত্র বাড়ি এসে বললো গ্যাব্রিয়েল ক্লাসে খুব জ্বালাচ্ছে। ছয় বছরের ছেলের জ্বালালো মানে যা বোঝা গেলো তা হচ্ছে গ্যাব্রিয়েল শুধু অনুজের সাথেই খেলবে আর সবসময় বিরক্ত করবে। সব শুনে যা মনে হলো কচি ছেলের বোধহয় কোনো পারিবারিক সমস্যা আছে যার প্রতিফলন তার ব্যাবহারে। নিদান দিলাম " যাও কাল থেকে গ্যাব্রিয়েলকে বলবে বাকিদের সাথে মিলেই খেলতে, যদি না খেলে তো তুমি বাকিদের সাথেই খেলো "। পরেরদিন ছেলে এসে বললো যে সে গ্যাব্রিয়েলকে বলেছে সবার সাথেই খেলতে কিন্তু ও খেলেনি। অনুজ, ডমিনিক, লিংকন সবাই মিলেই খেলেছে। গ্যাব্রিয়েল শুধু দাঁড়িয়ে দাঁড়িয়ে কেঁদেছে। এরপর ছেলের প্রশ্ন " I feel sad, what should I do daddy ?"। আমার মূল্যবোধের ঝুঁটিটা নাড়া দিয়েছিলো। এরপর থেকেই মনের মধ্যে একটা মূল্যবোধের সংকট তৈরী হয়েছে। ছেলেকে আর ওই প্রশ্ন তুলতেই দিচ্ছি না। যদি বলি তোমাকে গ্যাব্রিয়েলকে নিয়ে ভাবতে হবে না তুমি বাকিদের সাথে মেশ, তাহলে যে স্বার্থপরতার বীজ বুনবো তার ফল আমাদেরও খেতে হবে। এখানে আমিই স্বার্থপর। আবার সব জেনে বুঝে নিজের ছেলেকে ফালতু ব্যাপার থেকে দূরে রাখতে চাই। ছেলেটা আমার অস্বস্তিতা বুঝেছে, আর কিছু জিজ্ঞাসা করছে না। মানি হয় নিজে একটা সমাধান করেছে। অপেক্ষায় আছি কতদিন গলে জিজ্ঞাসা করবো। আজকাল নিজেকে খুব বোকা মানি হয় কিনতু বোকা থাকতেই ভালো লাগে।



## নিজের

## শালিনী দে

নিজের সঙ্গে নিজের দেখা  
এসেছি একা যাবও একা,  
মানবশানের এই সমাজ- সংসার  
এককা-দোককা পুতুল খেলা।।

## আলো

## শ্রুতিকণা সরকার

পাখি হয়ে উড়ে যাব  
ফুল হয়ে ঝরে যাব  
বাতাস হয়ে ভাসব দিকেদিকে  
মেঘ হয়ে উড়ব আকাশে  
না জানি কত সুখ এই টুকুতেই  
মনে মনে গাল শুধু গেয়ে যাব  
সুর হয়ে ভেসে যাব এই ধরনীতে  
প্রজাপতির পাখায় আলো মেখে মেখে  
শিশু হয়ে জন্মাব এই পৃথিবীতে  
বারে বারে আসতে চাই  
এই আলোতে ।।

## প্রাণ

## শ্রীলেখা চ্যাটার্জি

প্রাণ অনিশেষ ছোটে স্বপ্নের অরণ্যে  
যন্ত্রণার কোলাহলে  
রাত্রির চোরাবাগিতে প্রাণের চুষন যখন নিদ্রার কপোলে  
অরণ্যের নিঃশ্বাসে ঐ প্রাণের অস্তিত্ব  
বলে দেয় " আমি আছি " !  
জোয়ার ভাটার টানে জড়ের নাভিতে  
ঝড় তোলে বৃদ্ধ কাছি ।  
নিঃশব্দ অস্তিসারের গোপন লাটাই  
যখন ফসল হাতে  
মৃত্যুর নুপুর পামে চুপি চুপি আসে  
ছিন্নমূলে ছিন্ন প্রাতে ।  
সূর্য ছোটে দ্বীপান্তরে পাড়ের শিকল  
ছিড়ে ছিড়ে অনাবাসে  
অচঞ্চল প্রত্যাখ্যান কৃষ্ণাঙ্গ আকাশে  
প্রাণময় প্রাণ হাঙ্গে ।  
কলমী লতায় বাঁধা প্রাণের লাটাই  
আকাশে উড়িয়ে ঘুড়ি  
দুর্ভিক্ষের আসামীর ক্ষুধা প্রেত দেহে  
মাগরে ফেলেছে নুড়ি ।।

## সে আমার

## শ্রুতিকণা সরকার

বিছানায় শুয়ে শুয়ে থাকি চেয়ে  
আকাশের দিকে --  
মনে মনে ভাবি শুধু আমি তবে কে ? --  
আমার আমিতে আমি হয়েছি যারা --  
সেকি হারিয়ে হয়েছে আকাশের তারা  
দিনরাত ভাবি এক হয়ে শুধু  
এই কি আমার জীবনের দুঃখের দিন শুরু  
ভারি মাঝে আমি থাকি শুধু তোমারি করুণায়  
অন্ধিতে তোমারি চরণেতে পাই যেন ঠাই ----

## দুঃখ বিলাস

## শ্রুতিকণা সরকার

থাকতে চাইনা পৃথিবীর কদম্ব এই পিঠে  
তবুও থাকতে হয় রাতদিনের কারসাজিতে  
ছেড়ি এই মনটা কেঁদে ওঠে বারবার  
চারিদিকে শুধুই কাল্লার হাযকার  
পৃথিবীর এক বিচ্ছিন্ন দ্বীপে যেন "আমি" একা  
নাকি আমারই ভুল সবই শুধু ফাঁকা  
কি জানি কখন ভুলে অতুলে চেয়েছি তোমায় জানতে ---  
কেঁদেছি অন্তরযামির রাতুল চরণে মাথাকুটে  
ভয় ভাবনায় বেঁচে থাকা কেবল দুঃখটুকু ভুল  
যদি আবার "আলো" আসে একদিন  
বেঁচে থাকার আনন্দে ।।

## বৃষ্টি ধারা

## শ্রুতিকণা সরকার

বৃষ্টি পড়ে গাছে গাছে  
ডালে ও পাতায় ---  
টাপুর টুপুর বৃষ্টি ঝরে  
এই বিশ্বের ধারায়  
বৃষ্টি আমায় হাসায় কাঁদায়  
বৃষ্টি ভালোবাসায় ---  
বৃষ্টি আমায় নাচায় ভাসায়  
বৃষ্টি দোদুল দোলায়  
বুকে আমার ভরা মেঘ  
চোখে বৃষ্টি ঝরে  
চাতক হয়ে চেয়ে থাকি  
আবার আসবে তুমি করে  
বৃষ্টি তোমার ভরে আমার  
মন খুশিতে ভরে ---

## বিশ্বিন্নতা

### শ্রীলেখা চ্যাটার্জি

আমি আগামীতে চাই জন্ম নিতে ---

কোনো বনপলাশির অন্তরে ।

ব্রজবালা হয়ে নবদ্বীপের পথে পথে ব্রজবুলি নিয়ে গান গেয়ে গেয়ে বেড়াব ঘুরে ।

ইচ্ছ করে মথুরাপুরের পুরবাসী দ্বারে ঘুরে ফিরি নামগানে ;

হরিনামে জেগে মেতে ওঠা মন দ্বারে দ্বারে ঘুরে প্ররজ্যা বেশে অনন্তের কাছে করি সমর্পণ ।

মনটা টুকরো হয়ে গেছে বাস্তবের খণ্ডতায় খণ্ডে খণ্ডে । এক দিক দিগন্ত ছোঁয়া অভিল্যাম উদাসী বাউল কর্তে গেয়ে ওঠা " হরিবোল " --

মন প্রাণ একাকার ! দিয়েছি ডুব হরিনামের শীতল স্নানে ।

আর একটা জন্ম চাই নাম-পিয়ানের আখড়ায় মিলবে কি ঠাই ?

আমি হতে চাই বাউল -- দো- তারায় টান দিয়ে তুলব নুপুরের ধ্বনি ;

দু- হাত আকাশে মেলে কর্তে আসবে সে নাম -- সুরে সুরে ছন্দে ছন্দে ---

" হরিবল - হরিবল - "

আমার আর এক মন বেঁধে রাখে মায়ার বন্ধনে ।

ছাড়তে চায় না এ বাঁধন . আমার সকল ভালোবাসার মূল্য অমূল্যরতনে বন্দি পারাবার ।

আমার অমিয় সংসার --সংগ্রাম উচ্ছাস ।

আমার অখণ্ড সত্তা খণ্ড খণ্ড হয়ে ছড়িয়ে যায় অজ্ঞাত বিষাদের লক্ষ লক্ষ তীর বেঁধা বিহগের বৃকে ||

## ডাক

### শ্রীলেখা চ্যাটার্জি

আজ উদয়ের পথে রক্ত লাল হাতে

অস্তিত্বের অস্ত রথে দিয়ে গেল ডাক !

জানা অজানার দেশে মিলবে কি শেষে

ঝলসানো ভাবনার অঙ্ককার বাঁক ?

মেঘে মাখা অকলুষ রাত্রিদের হাতে

অনাবৃত অনাহৃত ফেরারি শমন

ঝড়ের ইস্তিত নিয়ে "পার ছাড়" ডাকে

আকাশ কাঁপিয়ে আসে অনাবাসী মন ।

সাদা হয়ে আসে কালো !আলোক যন্ত্রণা

আলোয়ার পায়ে পায়ে ছলনার ছাপ !

ডাক আসে অলখেই , যেতে হবে জানি

শূন্যতায় ভরে নিয়ে সে ডাকের মাপ ।

কখন আসবে ডাক , প্রতীক্ষিত রথ !

আলোর রশ্মিতে টান , অগুহীন পথ ||

## অসময়ের ভূমি

### শান্তী ভট্টাচার্য

তোমার সাথে রাত্রিয়াপন রোজ,

প্রতিটি অঙ্গে ঘর বাঁধে ভাল, লয়

গলায় জড়িয়ে রাখি সূত্র আর প্রেম

অঙ্ককারেও রাত কাটে নির্ভয় ।

সেই ছেলেবেলা তোমার হাত ধরে হাট-এ,

পূজো আসলেই ফুল কুড়াবার ধূম,

বৈশাখ থেকে চৈত্রের দিনরাত

প্রতিটি স্বপ্নে তোমারই তো মরসুম ।

আজও রাতে ভূমি গল্প শোনাও এসে

আমিও তখন চন্দরা হয়ে যাই,

মালতীর মত অতি সাধারণ আমি

অভিমান করে নিজের শাস্তি চাই ।

ওরা সারাদিন কাজ করে, খেটে খায়,

বিপদের সাথে সমঝোতা করা শেখে,

প্রেমে আর হেসে মিল হয় দর্শনে

মৃত্যুর পর অন্ধের অভিষেকে ।

সারাদিন ধরে ভুতের নৃত্য দেখি,

"স্বাধীন আমর" চিৎকার করে বলি ।

রাত নেমে এলে মিথোরা এসে বলে,

"পথের প্রান্তে কাঁদছে গীতাজলি" ।।



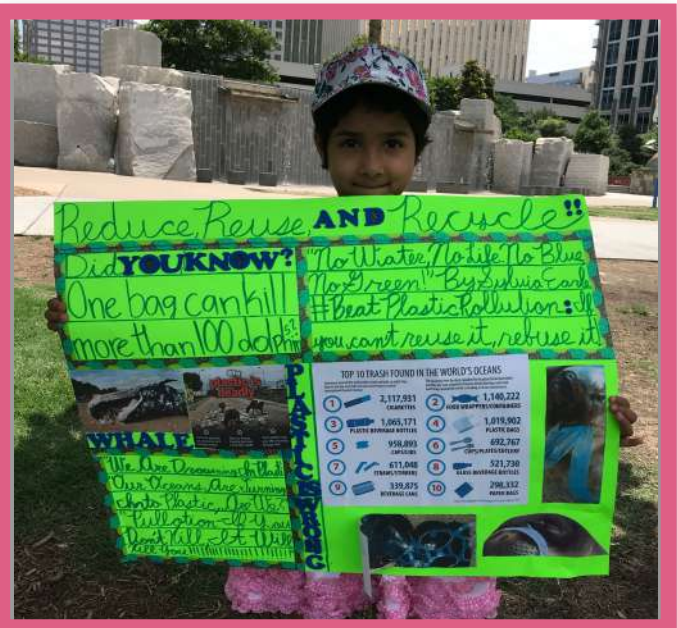
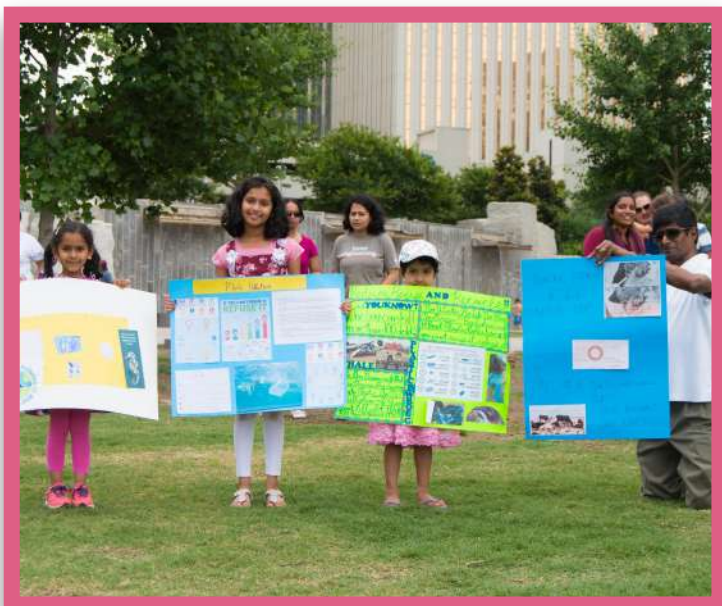


# Beat Plastic Pollution

Sadhguru says, "Isha is not a particular organization, it's not an Indian set-up, Isha is a conscious culture..."

To raise #BeatPlasticPollution and #BanSingleUsePlastic awareness, a few of us Isha volunteers, gathered together in Uptown Charlotte on the Occasion of World Environment Day and took a vow to nurture this awareness in and around us.

-Shalini Dey





# Within Reach

Pushpita Behera

Arani Writing Contest 2018 winning entry under Children's Fiction Category

**There** was a little girl named Alissa, who lived in a small town. There were no libraries, schools, or grocery stores near her home. She believed in God and prayed to God every morning after taking a shower. She had to go the library with her parents to collect books for her education. It was a challenge for her parents to take her to the library every day due to their busy schedule. Therefore, she had an idea to make everything within reach.

One day, while she was praying to God, she wished if she could have a library that was closer to her house to collect books. God said, "I will send an angel named Googlet to help you on ordering books." Googlet was very friendly and helped Alissa order books every day. Alissa thanked God for sending Googlet.

The next day, Alissa wished if she could watch movies at home, instead of going to the theaters. God said, "I will send another angel named Netflee, who can help you on your mission." Netflee entertained her by showing different cartoon shows.

The next day, Alissa wished for someone who could help with shopping. God asked, "Why do you need help with shopping?". Alissa responded, "First of all, I want to choose the best items for me and my parents. Second of all, shopping centers are far away from my home". God listened to her and said, "Very well, I will send you an angel named Amazo, who can help you.". Amazo helped Alissa buy a variety of dresses, toys, art & crafts, etc.

After a while, Alissa got bored because she did not have any friends to play with inside her house. Therefore, she had a strong desire to have friends for playtime. God sent a fairy, whose name was Faboo. Alissa developed a lot of courtesy and made many friends while getting help from Faboo.

Alissa did not realize the difference in her lack of healthy activity, while she was spending time with video games and using Googlet, Netflee, Amazo, and Faboo for other activities. One day, none of the dresses Alissa had bought would fit, because they were too small. Alissa was heartbroken by this sight and cried, "Heeeelp, God please help!" She continued to cry, "How did this happen?". God asked, "Well, how many times did you play outside?" Alissa answered, "It is unnecessary to go outside since everything is within reach". God gave a smile and said, "Oh my child, Health is Wealth, so should I call back all the angels that caused your health problem?". Alissa did not know what to say to God and kept quiet.

After a week, Alissa thought over her ideas and learned a lesson, which was, 'Everything within reach, is not always the right choice, as it may cause health problems.' "Boy, was that BAD," said Alissa, and she went outside to play and kept herself healthy.

*This story is about children like Alissa who spend most of their time with electronic devices which can lead to health problems.*

## World Cup

By Ayush Sengupta

World cup is where competitors collide for a chance to win gold up by one, their dreams are not gone going up by two the game is done now here's to the next challenge



# Poetry Collection

Shireen Collam

(Arani Writing Contest 2018 winning entry under Children's Poetry Category)

## Gardeners Day

A RAINY DAY IS A GARDENER'S PLAY  
BUT WHEN THE STORM COMES TO STAY  
THE GARDENS AND GARDENERS GO AWAY

## All Alone

ALL ALONE IN A BUNDLE OF PEOPLE  
THE PAIN I EXPERIENCE IS GREAT  
ITS LIKE JUMPING OVER A GIGANTIC STEEPLE, JUST TO FALL

YOU TRY TO PARTICIPATE AND FAIL  
AT HAVING A PARTNER TO BE WITH  
AND FEEL, OH SO FRAIL

NEVER EVER FITTING IN  
YOU SEEM DIFFERENT, TOO DIFFERENT  
YOU SEEM SO INVISIBLE TO THEM

THEY DON'T SEE WHO YOU ARE  
THEY JUST SEE WHAT YOU ARE  
AND SOMETIMES IT TAKES PIECES OUT OF YOU ONE BY ONE

SO ALL ALONE IS WHERE I WANTED TO BE  
WHERE NOBODY CAN SEE ME  
I'M GAZED AT TOO MUCH

MAKE ME INVISIBLE  
PLEASE  
ALL ALONE IS WHERE I WANTED TO BE

BUT SOMETIMES IT CAN BE TOO MUCH TO BEAR  
SO EVEN IF YOU WANT TO BE ALONE  
FIND A FRIEND, KEEP YOUR FRIENDSHIP TOGETHER

CAUSE BEING ALONE IS  
TOO ALONE AT TIMES  
PROBABLY A CRIME?

## My Little Brother NIK

WORTH MORE THAN A DOLLAR AND  
ALWAYS BY MY SIDE  
MY BROTHER IS THE BEST SIBLING  
ONE COULD FIND

HAPPY AND NICE  
PLAYFUL AND SLIGHTLY ANNOYING  
BUT LOYAL AS A WOLF  
AND NEVER BORING

AND ALWAYS PROTECTING,  
AS I PROTECT HIM  
AND THAT IS WHY I LOVE HIM  
MY LITTLE BROTHER NIK

## Sometimes

SOMETIMES YOU CAN DO GREAT THINGS  
AND CHANGE THE WORLD  
SOMETIMES IS A TIME WHEN PEOPLE AREN'T  
PREDICTABLE

SOMETIMES YOU CAN'T GET TRUSTING FRIENDS OR FAMILY  
AND THAT HURTS  
AND SOMETIMES YOU FEEL LIKE THAT IT SHOULD END  
OR NOT, EVEN WHEN YOU'RE TRULY ALONE

SOMETIMES YOU WIN  
AND SOMETIMES YOU LOSE  
"SOMETIMES " IS NOT JUST A WORD  
ITS A PREDICTION OF WHAT WILL HAPPEN SOON

## The Number Four

THE NUMBER FOUR  
IS IT REALLY ENOUGH?  
OR DO I NEED MORE (POEMS)  
COUNTING THIS ONE, ITS FIVE  
MAKING THE OTHER FOUR ALIVE



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Swami Vivekananda



Sri Ramakrishan Paramahansa



Sri Sarada Devi

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*Est:* 2013

**Purpose:** Spiritual development through the study of holy scriptures and practice of public service  
**Contact:** facebook.com/TheSoulsDivine/ ; facebook.com/TheSoulsDivine-Iswarseva-1782886915315149/  
thesoulsdivine@googlegroups.com ; Sekhar @ 704-236-0224, Arnab @ 512-937-2507

*This life is short, the vanities of the world are transient,  
but they alone live who live for others, the rest are more dead than alive!*

- Swami Vivekananda



## SOUTH PARK CRICKET CLUB

SPCC is a group of gentlemen who play competitive cricket for fun. We create irreplaceable friendships on and off the ground. Through dedication, hard practices and thrilling matches, the SPCC team has become a growing force in the Carolinas.



<http://southparkcc.org>





# ARANI

ARTISTS GALLERY

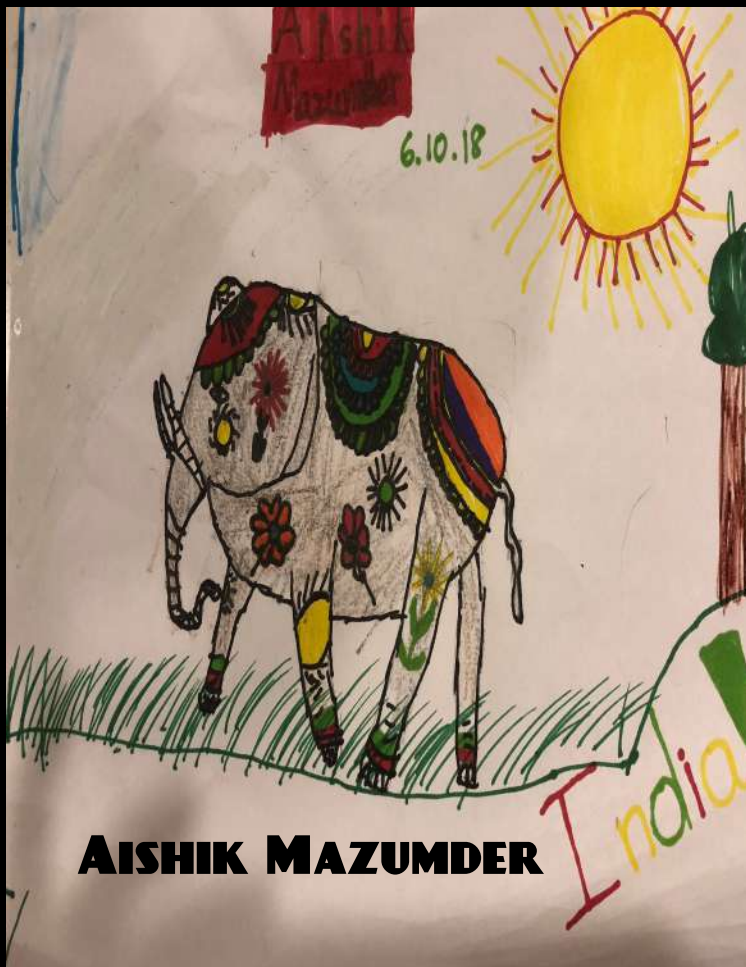




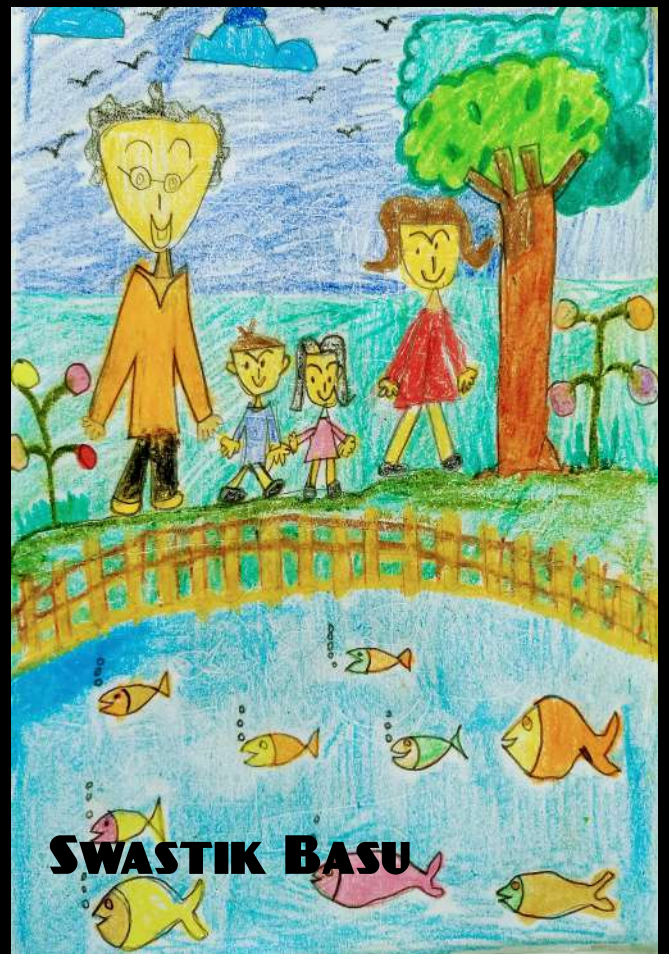
**ADHRIT NASKAR**



**ADITYA SAHA**

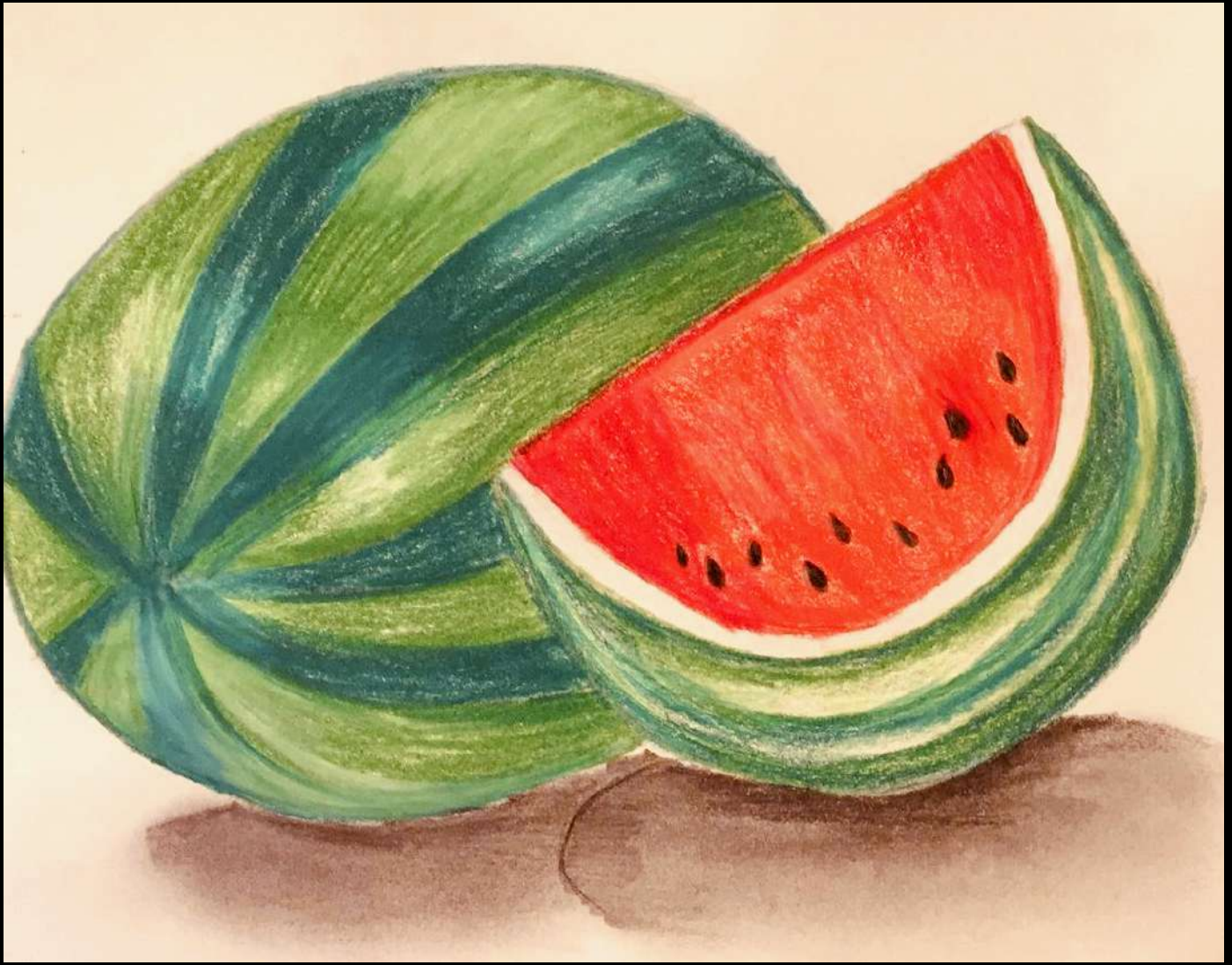


**AISHIK MAZUMDER**



**SWASTIK BASU**





**ALEENA BISWAS**



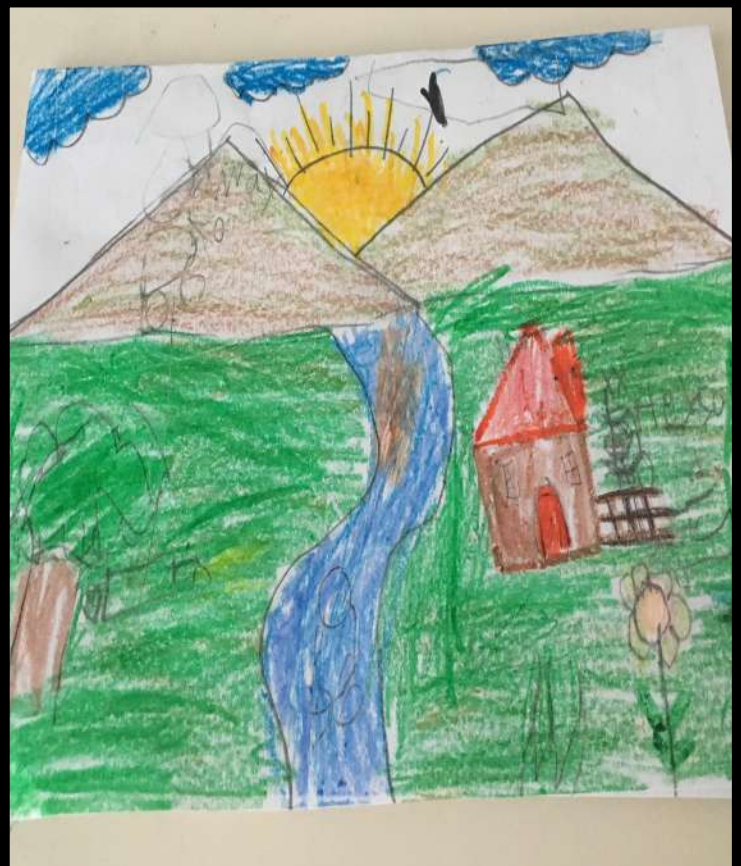




**RAINA SAHA**

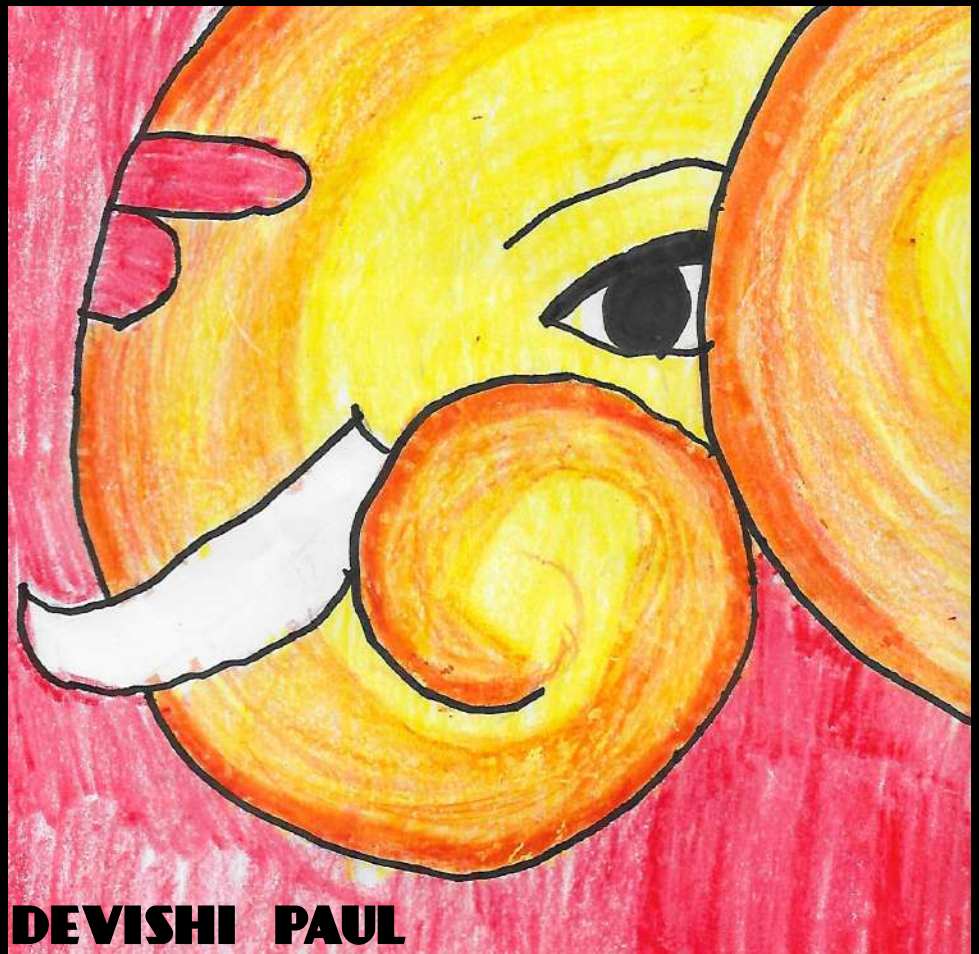


**ROSHNI KUMAR AKASH**



**SIDDHARTHA PRAMANIK**





**DEVISHI PAUL**





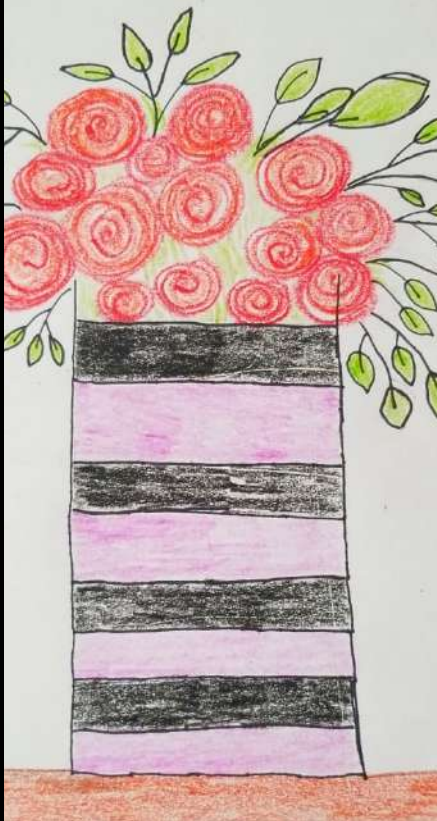


Happy Ganesh Chaturthi



# NOYONIKA AGARWAL

A bouquet of flowers for my mom



Joi Maa Durga





LILY BISWAS







**ANUSHKA PRAMANIK**







**ALEENA BISWAS**







**SHIREEN COLLAM**



**ROSHNI KUMAR AKASH**



**NIHARIKA PARUI**



**SHAYAN BHOWMIK**



**SARTHAK DAS**



**VIYAN DAS**

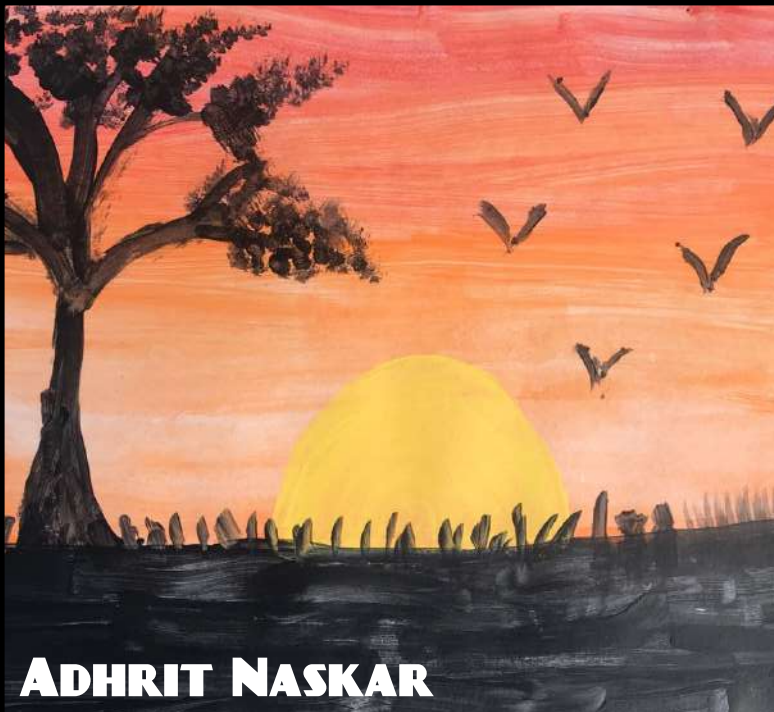




**DISHA BHOWMIK**



**NIKHIL COLLAM**

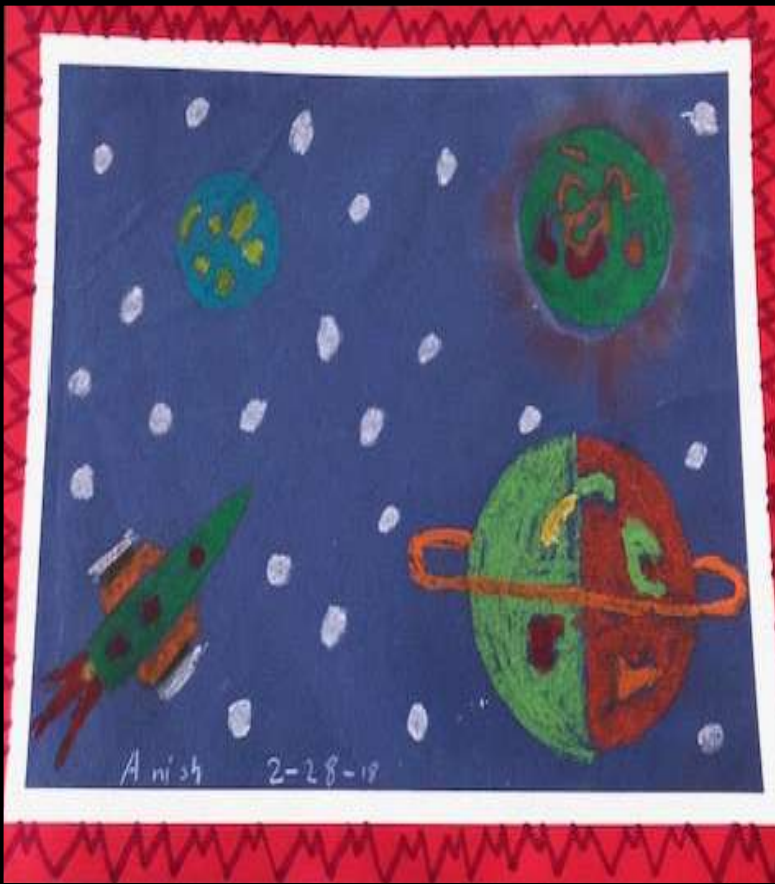


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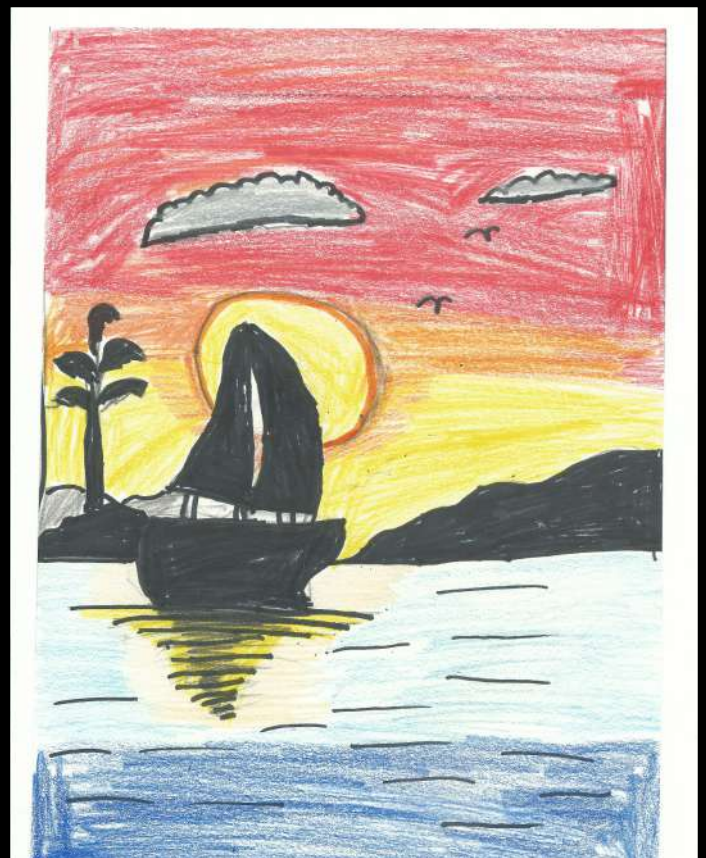


**ANISH SENGUPTA**



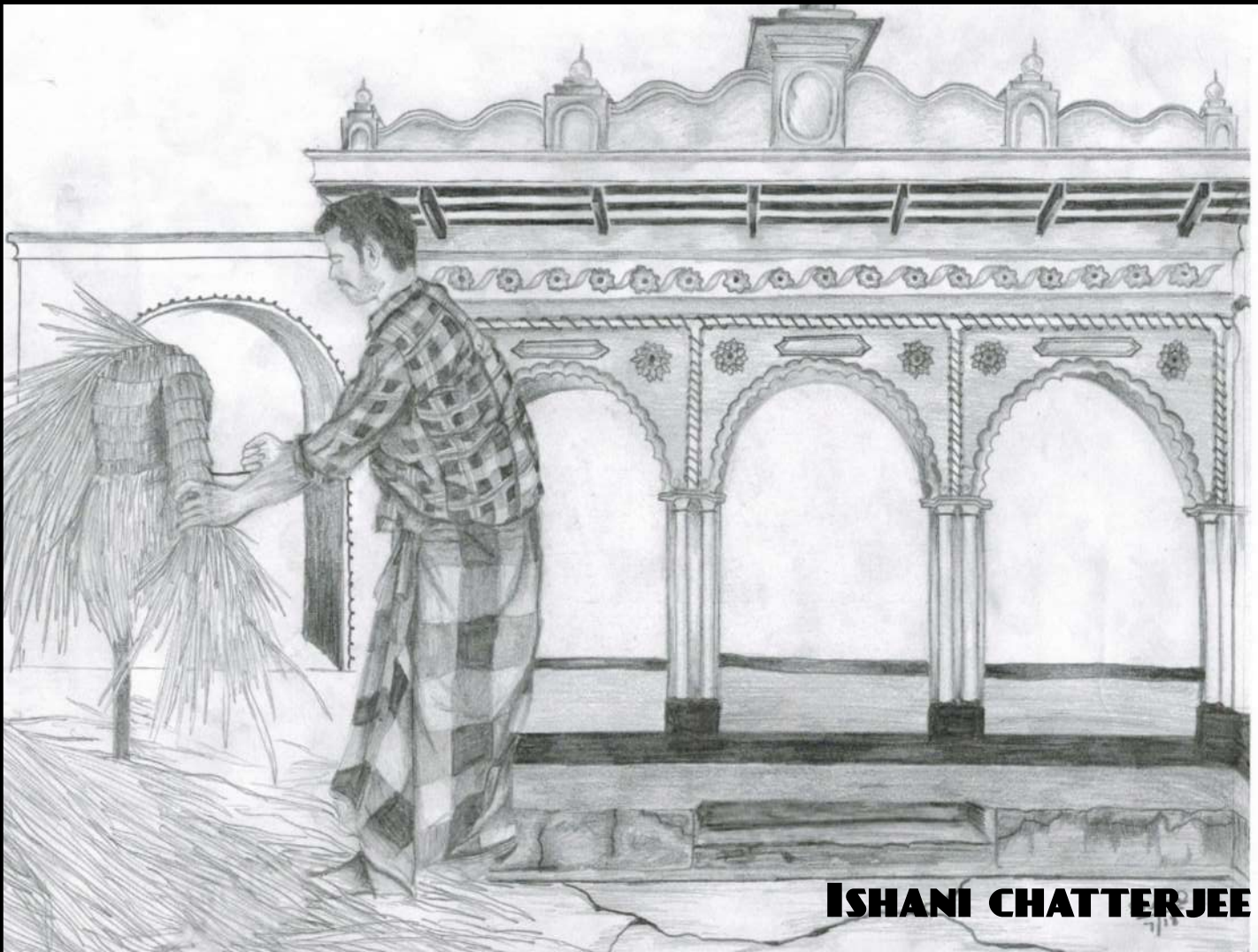


**ANISH GHOSH**



**ANUJ DEY**





**ISHANI CHATTERJEE**

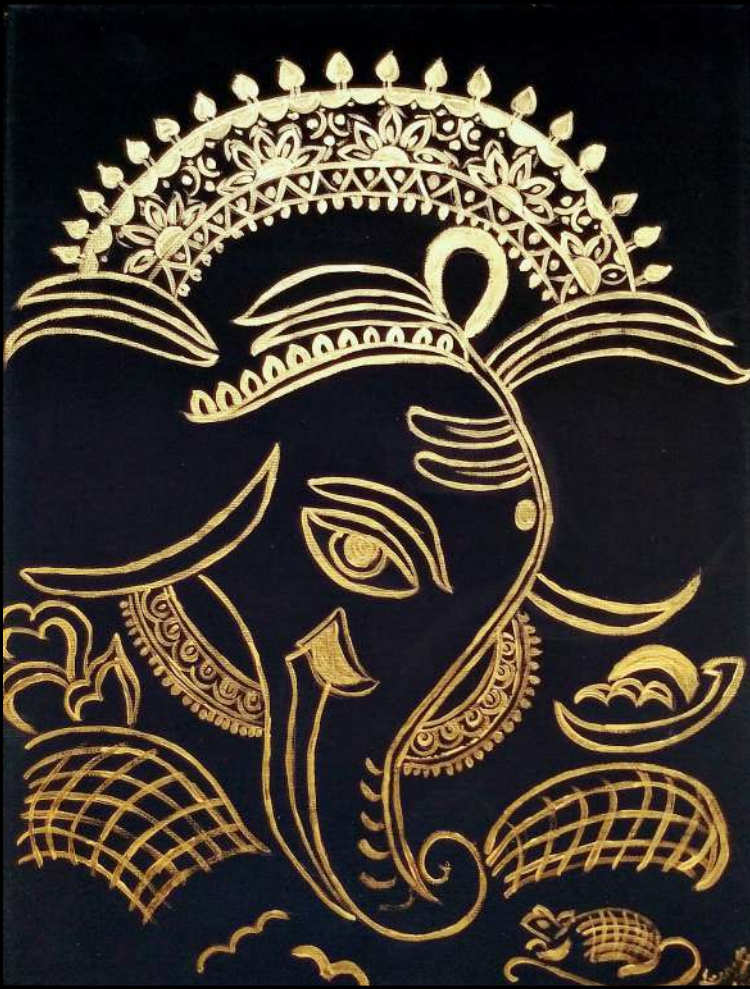


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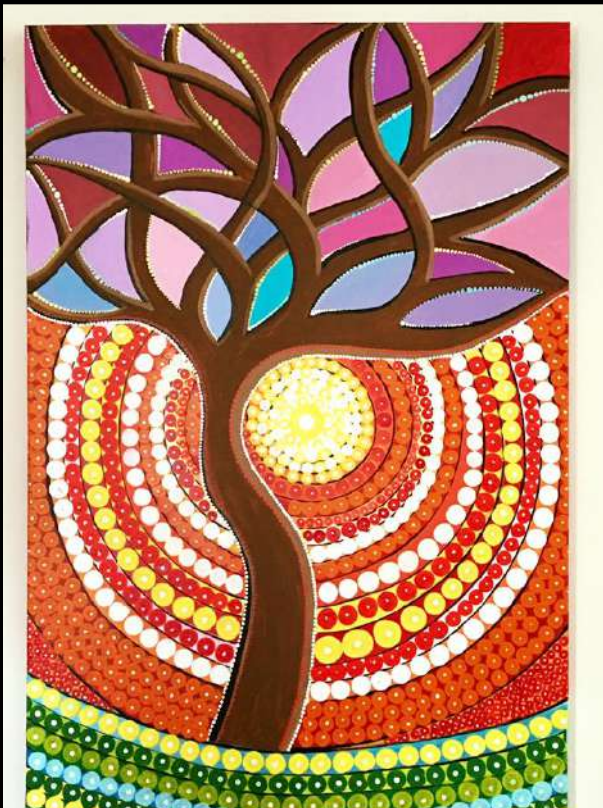


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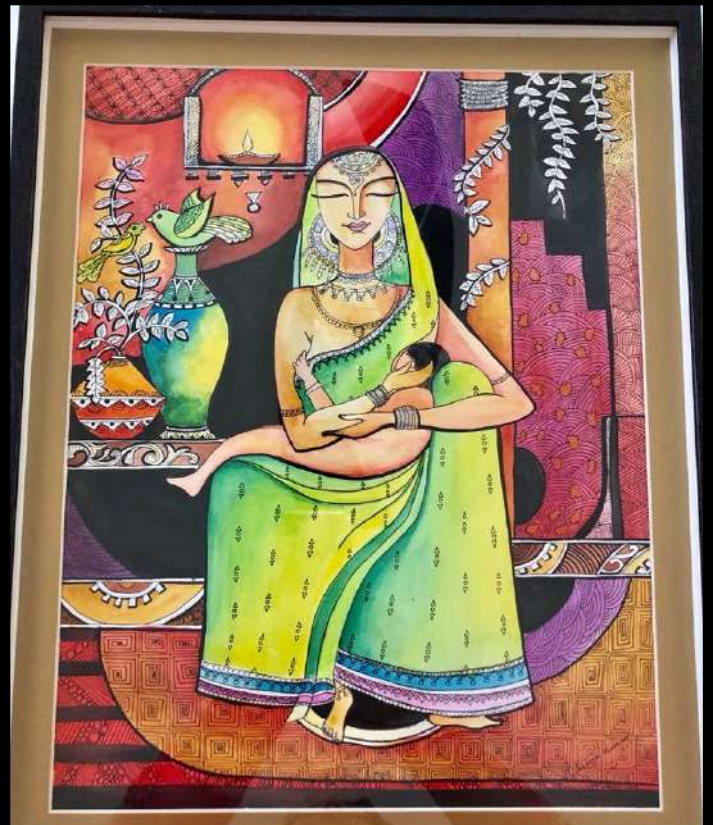




**LEENA BASU**



**SUDESHNA KUMAR**







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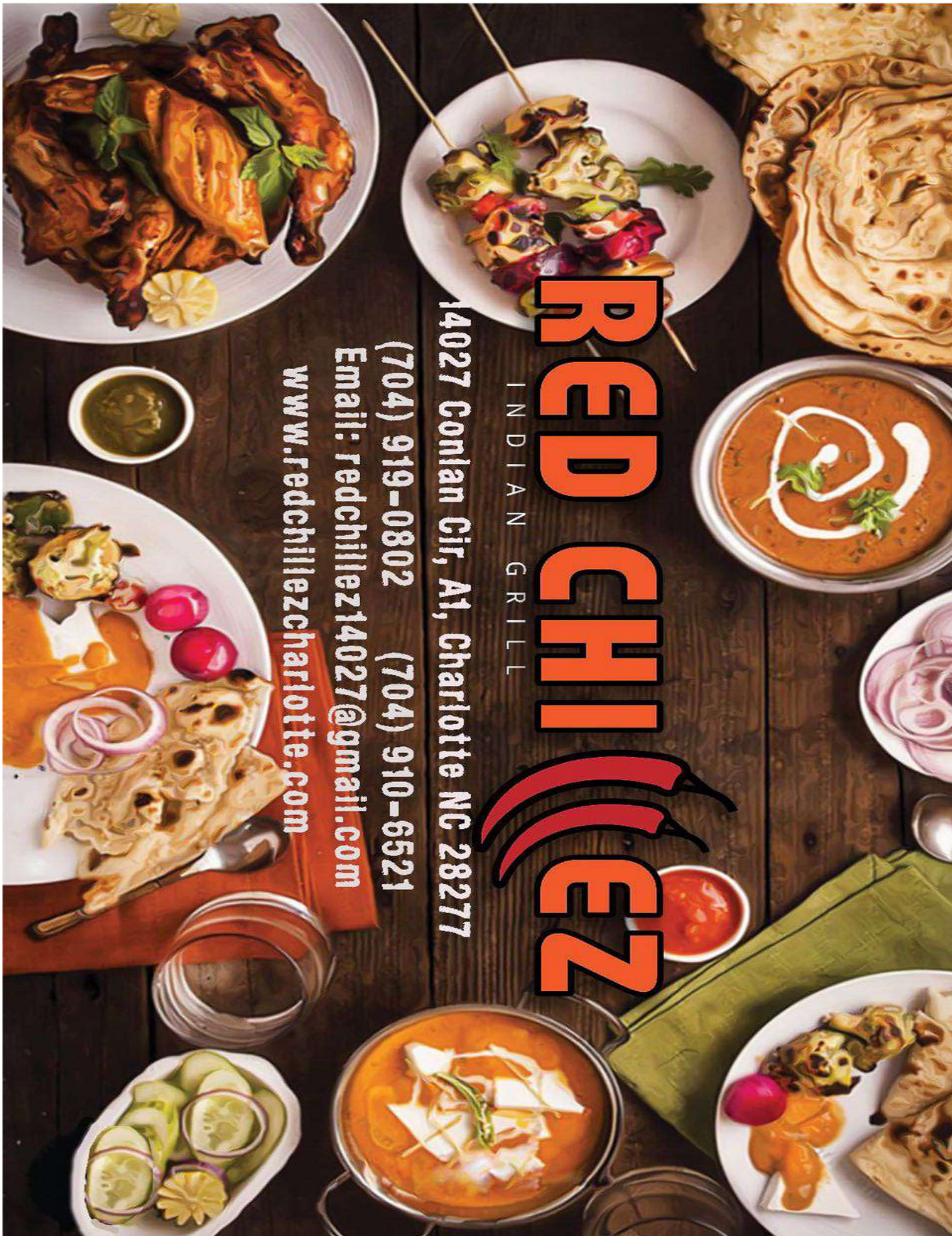
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