

# ARANI

VOL. 9- FALL EDITION

OCTOBER 2021



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



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## FROM THE EDITORIAL DESK

This is the busiest time of the year when Bengalis across the globe start planning for the much-awaited festival Durga Puja. 'Ma Aschen', as we chant it. Here in Srishti, Durga puja is much more than a festival. It is the carnival of emotions that marks the time of happy tides. Our families immerse themselves in the weekend gala of music, food, fashion, kid's activities, and cultural evening. The grandeur of the festival creates a special euphoria which makes Durga puja a cultural extravaganza that no Bengalis ever want to miss and all non-Bengalis want to experience at least once.

This is the 17th year of Srishti Durga Pujo and the various committee members

have already started working round the clock to finalize all the details. Last year was obviously a challenging one, yet all our members came together to make it another successful Pujo. This year will be no different as our Srishti families come together as a community to carry out the beautiful traditions.

The Year 2021 started in celebration of Saraswati puja, where members had the virtual option to give 'Anjali' and experience the pujo. For 'Poila Boishakh' and Holi, beautiful packets of 'misti' were distributed to all Srishti members. During the summer months, our youth community did a commendable job in keeping our Srishti kids engaged through various activities.

The annual picnic was a reunion of members where we celebrated our freshly minted graduates. As for me it was a jubilant meeting after a long time. Exhilarated with happiness and overwhelmed with joy, it was time for a lot of catching up.

Time and again, Srishti has been involved in giving back to the community. Raising funds for ASHA foundation, communicating with the elderly members of Walton Wood in Providence and helping the Covid victims marks the true spirit and passion of the organization.

As a member of the editorial team, it gives me immense joy to congratulate every member for their valued contribution. Your essays, artwork, interviews, stories, advertisements, have been thoroughly enjoyed. It is with great pride we can say that we have come a long way and we are here to stay. The Arani team works diligently to bring before you the finest work from our kids and adults.

Please enjoy reading the hard work of our members.

Happy Reading and Happy Pujo 2021!!

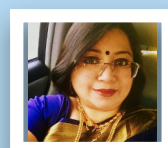
Regards,  
Ekata Saha.

## TEAM ARANI 2021

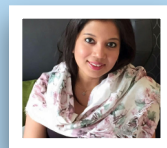
### EDITOR'S DESK



Shyama  
Parui



Promita  
Bhattacharya



Ekata  
Saha

### CREATIVE DESIGN

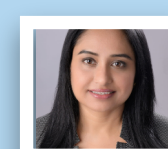


Priyanka Mandal

### FUND RAISING



Debsundar  
Dutta



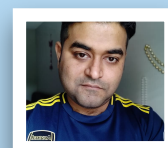
Shanta  
Dutta



Sekhar  
Naskar



Shomit  
Banerjee



Shubhadeep  
Mukherjee



Subrato  
Dey



Supriyo  
Basu

# Committee Members

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Saswati Collam

#### Board Of Directors

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Santanu Sarkar

Subashish Halder

Sumit Biswas

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Oindrila Sen

Priyanka Mandal

Shoma Sengupta

Suman Basu

#### Food

Prasant Behera

Somnath Das

#### Finance

Sekhar Naskar

#### Marketing & Communication (ARANI)

Partha Saha

Shyama Parui

#### Outreach & Fundraising

Debsundar Dutta

Subhodeep Mukherjee

Supriya Basu

#### Pujo

Monmotho Chakravarthy

Suryadeep (Sunny) Chakraborty

Swapan Bhattacharya

#### Logistics and Event Decoration

Debabrata Paul

Chiranjib Kundu

Sudeshna Kumar (Decoration)

#### Youth and Community Engagement

Anita Sarkar

## Table of Contents

From the Editorial Desk

Team Arani

Thanking the Women Who Came Before Us

Love for Art

Poems by Swastik Basu

Amazing Annika

Shirley

Hoi Choi

Anthropology of a Bong's Love for Saree

Marriage and Divorce

Sharodiya

Agomoni

Kichhu Golpo Shotti

Being Mortal

Abstract Art by Annika

Bottle Art by Sohini

Interview with Shubham Datta

Besties on the Beach

Catching Up with Our College Freshmen

Interview with Lopamudra Das Roy

A Very Scary Moment

TRAVEL DIARIES: COPENHAGEN- DENMARK

Essence of the Crown

Mash Up by Innerstyleguide

Art Showcase



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 the Carolinas. The organization's goal is to both preserve as well as pass on this rich and vibrant heritage to the next generation 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 to build leadership skills, learn and continue traditional art forms. Srishti of Charlotte actively partners and engages with various educational and charitable institutions in the Charlotte area as well as in India.

Over the last year it has been an honor to make the following contributions:

- **Monetary and school supplies donations to Renaissance West Community Initiative.** An innovative neighborhood redevelopment initiative to improve economic mobility and end intergenerational poverty. [Renaissance West Community Initiative - Community Wellness Home - Renaissance West Community Initiative - Community Wellness \(rwc.org\)](#)
- **Masks made and donated to the following local organizations:**
  - CMS schools
  - Iredell-Statesville Schools
  - Waltonwoods Senior Living
  - Atrium and Novant hospitals
- **Monetary donations for COVID relief in India**
- Vivekananda Study & Philanthropic Center of New York, USA to help in creating a 50- bed safe home for Covid19 patients near Belur Math.
- Sukriti Foundation to assist in procuring protective gear for volunteers, basic medicines, medical supplies and providing food and groceries to Covid patients in need of assistance.
- Matilal Bharat Tirtha Seba Mission Ashram for their continuing commitment to serving rural West Bengal.

Like every year, we are excited to host our largest annual event namely our Durga Puja / (Sharodiya Utsav) from Friday, October 15th to Sunday, October 17th, 2021. We expect over 200 viewers for our digital social and cultural extravaganza this year. 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 covers 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>



# THANKING THE WOMEN WHO CAME BEFORE US

By Shyama Parui

*Maa Durga's descent to Earth and the end of Mahishasur's destructive reign, exemplifies the power of Shakti – the feminine force that creates and protects our world from evil. Our annual celebration of Durga Puja holds a special place in every Bengali's heart and with it comes the reminder to honor and hone the strength of our girls and women. In the spirit of our favorite festival, I am sharing my article that was previously published in Saathee magazine (April 2021). It is dedicated to all the women who came before us and to those who may have been forgotten, overlooked, or perhaps have not received adequate credit for their innovations and groundbreaking work.*



Bertha Benz, Mary Anderson, Alice Huyler Ramsey, Florence Lawrence, and Dr. June McCarroll. Do their names ring a bell? A few months ago, I stumbled upon an article in AAA's "GO" magazine about them and much to my embarrassment, their names did not even elicit a faint chime. If it wasn't for the contributions of these incredible women, the automotive world would be without brake pads, windshield wipers, and the brake signaling system. In fact, Dr. McCarroll was the first woman to introduce centerlines in the middle of the road which she personally hand painted for a stretch because back in 1924, her town's board did not think it was an idea worth implementing. Can you even imagine roads without center or lane lines? It is easy to imagine a smart woman's practical and lifesaving idea being shot down by a group of male leaders. Why? Because unfortunately, it happens way too often.

History bears witness to the fact that every generation will benefit from the toil and tears of the previous generation just as they will pay a price for the mistakes. I often wonder what my life would be like if my mother had not supported my education, what if she herself had never been to school or if my grandmother had not survived childbirth. I am grateful that none of those things occurred as the consequences would, more than likely, have unfavorably affected three generations. I doubt that I would have had the ability or resources to share my views with the world through Namaskar Y'all. Every mother in my family, as in many others, has protected and cared for the wellbeing of the people under her wing with grace and tenacity. In the absence of their sacrifices, my journey would have been strewn with hurdles.

Let us humbly accept that unless you are a self-manufacturing machine, you cannot claim to be entirely self-made. The success and prosperity of both men and women are intertwined and it often falls on the women of the family or the larger social group to think about the physical and emotional care of its people. It is no coincidence that Hindu Goddesses that represent education, prosperity and protection are female forms of divinity. Yet, we seem to be moving at a snail's pace when it comes to giving women credit where it is due. It is hard to pinpoint the root cause of this global problem, but I would conjecture that it is a combination of multiple factors like patriarchal structure, sexual politics, and misogyny.

Faith, historical evidence, data from sociological studies, and plain old common sense provide multiple reasons to support equal rights for women, yet it is a struggle for women to claim what men receive as rightfully theirs. Having the basic rights to live, to feel

safe, to be treated as a human being, have been a challenge in some circumstances. To make matters worse, the court of public opinion is cruelly biased against women from every stratum of society. Despite these challenges, women across different cultures are breaking barriers every day to move closer to gender equity. Slowly but surely, we have made remarkable progress.

Democratic elections in Ancient Greece did not permit women to vote but protests by Women Suffragists prompted countries with modern democracies in Europe and in the United States to grant women the right to vote. Seeing Vice President Kamala Harris in office solidifies the belief that the marches and picketing of the 1900's has borne fruit. Queen Ka'ahumano's strong influence steered Hawaiians away from their ancient Kapu (code of conduct) as its rigid rules barred women from many privileges that were given to men. Things that we take for granted like eating meals with male members of their family and consuming bananas and coconut, were forbidden.

My hope is that we will continue to highlight the effort, successes, and accomplishments of women in all fields because every win matters. I propose an examination of the content being introduced to students. Why haven't we learned more about the Indian female freedom fighters? I am curious about how they broke tradition or perhaps wrapped up their household responsibilities before stepping out incognito to attend underground meetings. It would be worthwhile to learn the details of contributions by women such as Begum Hazrat Mahal, Dr. Annie Besant, Captain Laxmi Sehgal, and Kamaladevi Chattopadhyay rather than a one-line reference mentioned in our old history textbooks. Highlighting the work of Ada Lovelace as the world's first computer programmer, could inspire young mathematicians to the same degree that her father, Lord Byron's poetry inspired writers.

If publishers, book sellers, and libraries dedicated more shelf space for books that shared the stories of pioneering women, it would be a step in the right direction. The world of cinema could arguably redeem itself by a small margin if they replaced content that objectifies women with portrayals of successful female protagonists. Notable examples include Hidden Figures and Gunjan Saxena, The Kargil Girl. As women we should vow to honor and respect the opportunities we receive and pledge to support gender equality so that it becomes a way of life by the time our children grow up.

My sincere gratitude to all the trailblazing women, who have paved the way for us and our future generations.

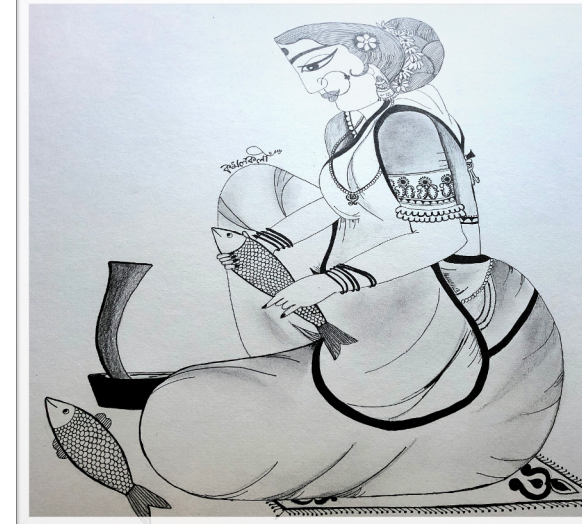
# Love for Art

Call it fate or the outcome of a plan, many of us have come from different family backgrounds, geographic locations and varied educational training and settled in the Charlotte area. However, a bond that holds us together is our enthusiasm for preserving Bengali traditions and culture. Throughout the year, we find our Srishti family members sharing their cultural expressions through music, dance, literature, art, food, and even fashion particularly in the form of sarees. These topics keep us entertained over *cha-ta and adda* but our fervor reaches its pinnacle during the



festive season. Some call it “Bangliana”.

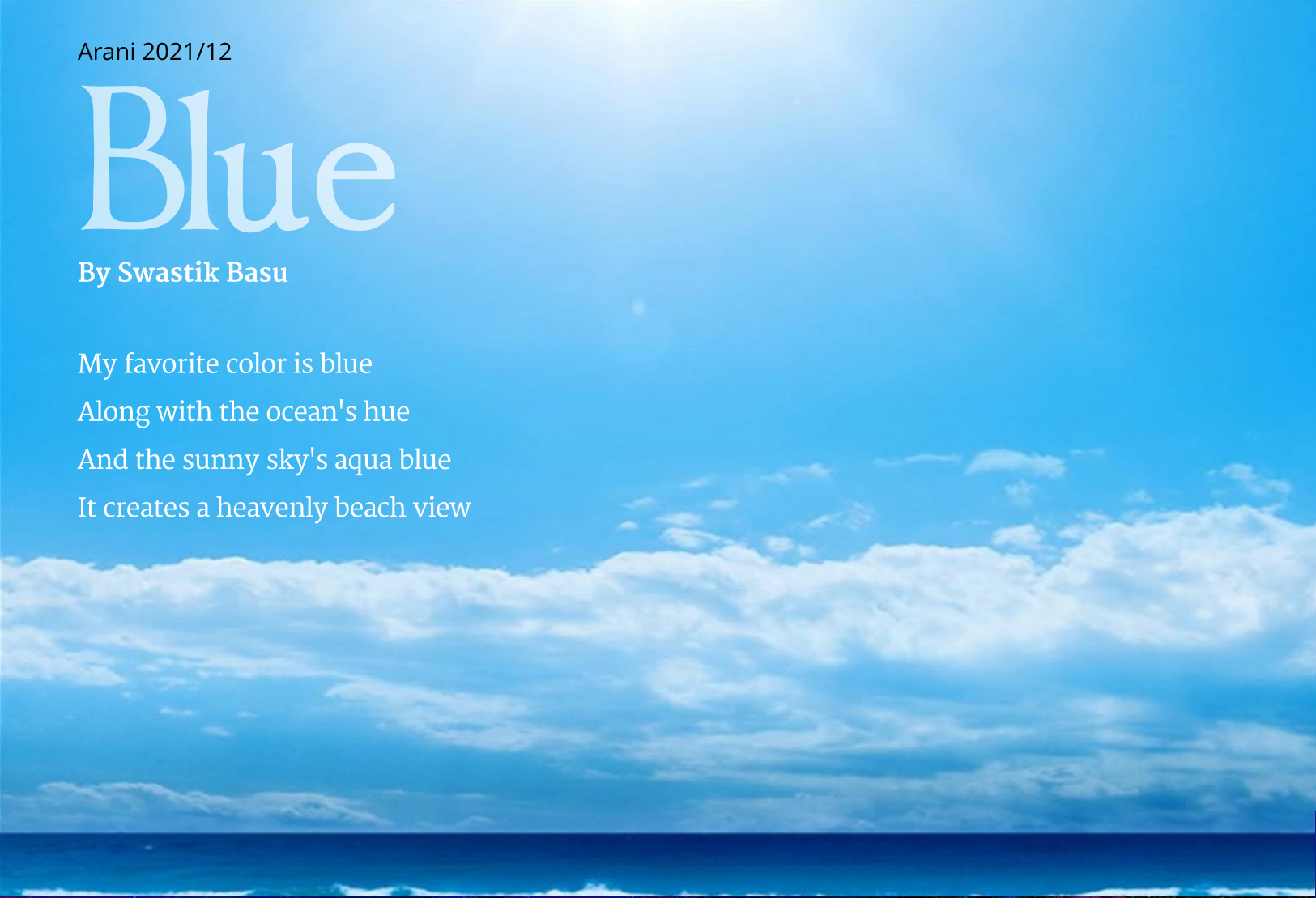
**Exemplifying Bangliana or the Bengali spirit here is our very own, Karli Bose.** Winner of the Mrs Asia International 2013 and Miss Bengal 1996 beauty pageants, she beautifully showcases traditional sarees from her wardrobe. While Karli may be a busy IT professional and Mom, she also carves out time to nurture her passion for art. Featured here are her favorite sketches depicting protagonists from Rabindranath Tagore’s novels.



# Blue

By Swastik Basu

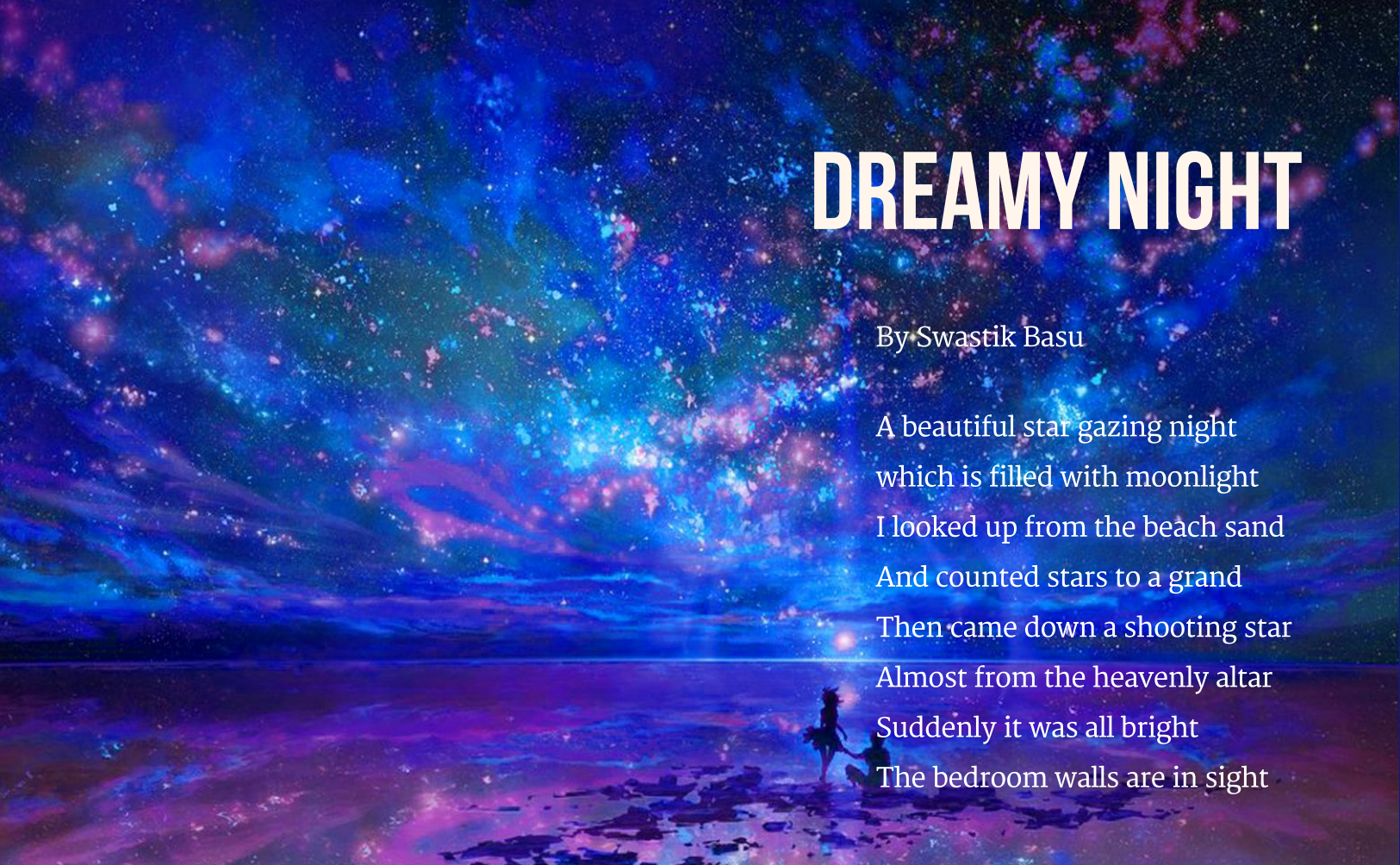
My favorite color is blue  
Along with the ocean's hue  
And the sunny sky's aqua blue  
It creates a heavenly beach view



# DREAMY NIGHT

By Swastik Basu

A beautiful star gazing night  
which is filled with moonlight  
I looked up from the beach sand  
And counted stars to a grand  
Then came down a shooting star  
Almost from the heavenly altar  
Suddenly it was all bright  
The bedroom walls are in sight



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# AMAZING ANNIKA

By Promita Bhattacharya

She has always been amazing, right from the day she was born. She is my rainbow child, giving me hope and faith after loss. Everyday she teaches me to be positive, my proverbial silver lining in every grey cloud.

She loves her school days so much that we have to go over our little calendar each week to prepare her for Saturdays and Sundays. On weekends she can often be found wearing her sparkly “Frozen” themed backpack and sneakers at home, asking to be dropped off at the carpool line. I hope her teachers recognize her passion to attend school like we do. Every school day probably goes by showing her pictures, giving her a choice of activity or a sensory break, they serve her lunch and she returns home with a good-job note on some days, but I wonder if they see the sweet, smart child inside so eager to learn new things.

She goes about her daily routine with a smile, mostly she is silent but sometimes the quietness of the moment is broken by little sing-song phrases from her favorite TV shows. She hums a tune, every note flawlessly represented as she sings a few lines of her favorite song, sometimes making up her own lyrics as she goes. I often hear her use different



tones to emulate voices of particular characters as she talks to herself. It always brings a smile to my face on a dull day. When I speak to her, she pauses and her eyes look soft and intense. Her silences are often thoughtful and deliberate. I know she understands us but most people only see a non-verbal child who does not quite meet their gaze or return their greeting. The world around us requires eye-contact and immediate compliance from a child.

Social gatherings are difficult for her – a loud, crowded world where children run and collide and rush past her and grown-ups loom over her making incessant small talk, repeatedly prompting her to meet, greet, hug, use an inside voice, sit quietly or keep her hands to herself – quelling her need to flap her arms like soaring wings, restricting her tiny skipping feet, keeping her sweet humming voice silent.

It is all too much to ask of a free-spirited child like her.

She is my backyard adventurer and nature is her favorite playground. She loves digging in the dirt and climbing trees and running free. She likes to fly up so high on the swing that her little feet clad in bright purple cros, fling upwards to touch the sunny blue sky, dotted with white billowy clouds. She lies in the shade of the tall maple tree watching the dazzling sunlight play peekaboo with the green leaves. On long walks she takes her time collecting rocks, picking up wild flowers along the roadside as she skips along the sun-dappled sidewalks, holding my hand tightly.

When we visit the neighborhood playground, she always makes a beeline for the shaded mulched area where she settles down quietly to play with the mulch or pick up fallen leaves and arrange them in unique patterns. She deliberately steers away from the loud laughter and busy areas. As she starts to walk quietly towards a vacant swing in the corner, it is often snatched away by a quicker child and she changes her direction to find yet another dreamy corner of her own.

The world has a hard time seeing the wonder I see in my beautiful girl. The way her fingers move magically over a blank canvas to create a rainbow hued masterpiece in minutes, the way her eyes light up when she sees sparkling stars in the dark night sky, her excitement when she rides a merry-go-round with twinkling lights or when we put up Christmas decorations, or when she goes running along the pumpkin patch to find the biggest pumpkin for Halloween. She has an uncanny way of knowing when we are sad. She can read our faces. On particularly difficult days, she comes up to me and tries to pull up the corners of my mouth





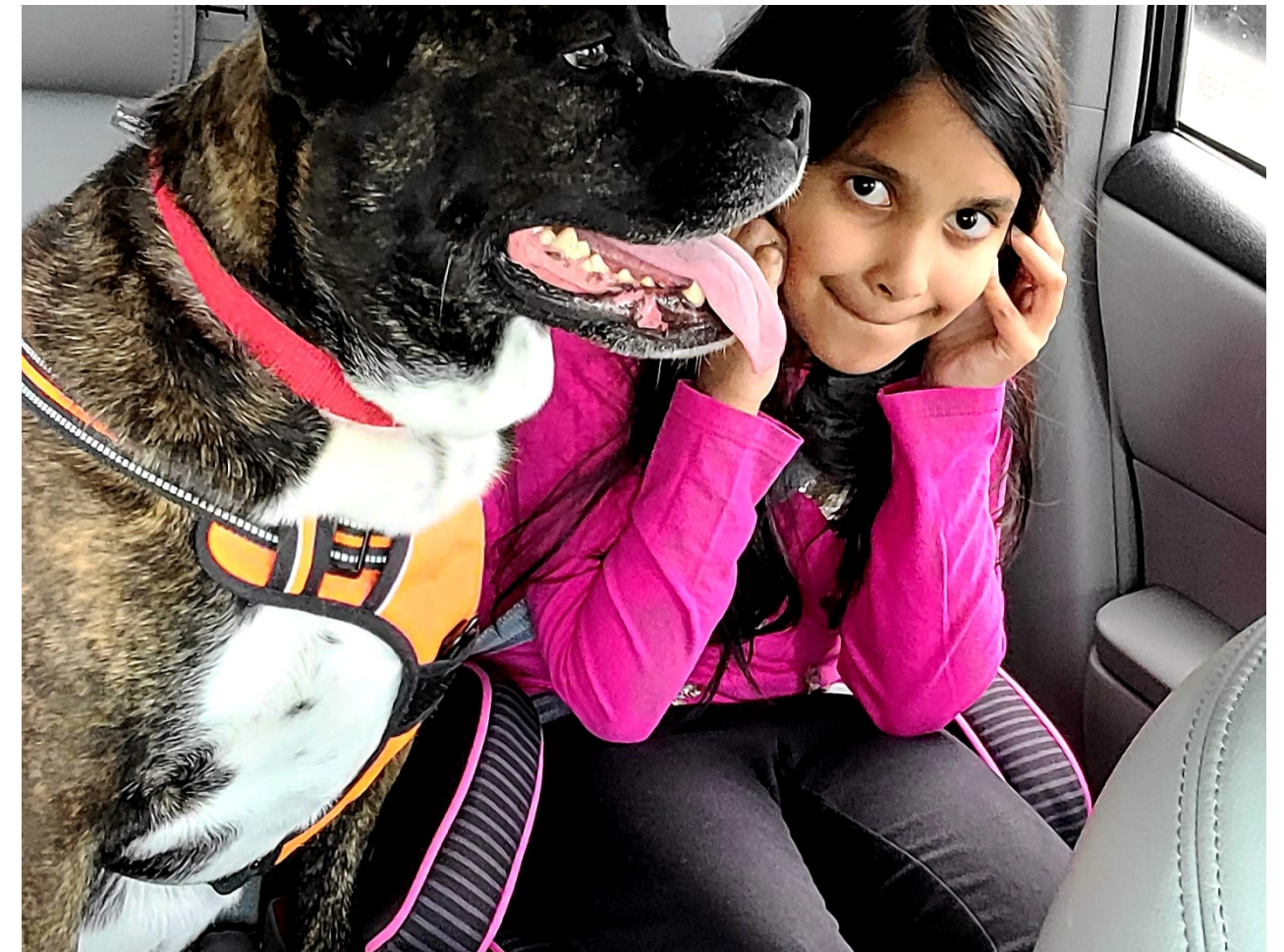


with her hands, saying “Mamma smile...” and it never fails to cheer me up.

Beaches are her most favorite getaways. I watch in amazement as she dances and skips along the rippling waves, her nimble feet pitter-pattering over the warm sun-kissed sand as she runs headlong to plunge into the water. She has no fear, no hesitation, she is just filled with the joy of the moment. She squeals happily as she is greeted by the cool rush of the ocean waves. She moves in unison with the rhythm of the waves, doing her own happy dance. She settles down quietly after a bit, content to sit cross legged in a shallow puddle of saltwater, as she burrows her fingers into the sand and plays with her toys to repetitively fill seawater into her blue bucket or scoop wet sand with her yellow shovel...it takes very little to make her happy.

As her mom, I realize how she notices minute details in everyday activities, or catches the wonder of a moment that perhaps no one sees. These will never be recorded or brought to anyone’s attention because the fascinating things she feels will remain silent words in her mind that rarely pass her lips. The world does not see her creativity, her quiet problem-solving abilities, her fierce independence or her resilience as she navigates an environment full of sensory dilemmas which often overwhelms her. However, the world does notice an eight-year-old girl humming or rocking or talking to herself or flapping and twirling at bright lights or loud music. And the world certainly notices her harried, anxious mom trying desperately to diffuse a meltdown in a fancy restaurant or trying to stop her as she tries to run away on a busy street or when she squeals excitedly in a quiet library.

Our special children feel no need to conform to the norms of the society and we should allow



them to learn and experience things at their pace. They may not always be able to use words to express and measure their feelings but they have their own unique abilities. My child is joyful, loving, giving and perfect in her own way. As I go through this journey of raising my daughter, I am constantly pressured to get her ready to face the world- but I wonder when she grows up, will the world be ready to welcome children like her? After all empathy, inclusion and acceptance should be lessons taught in every home, not only in mine. It takes very little effort to be kind and supportive, so let us all pledge to go the extra mile to show a bit of empathy and extend a helping hand to make this

world a better place for everyone, irrespective of their abilities.



# Kranthi Aella

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# SHIRLEY

## BY LILY BISWAS

Arani 2021/21

Once Upon time, there was a little girl named Shirley. In the Middle Nineteenth century she lived in London in a beautiful manor with her father. Her father was rich and she was always spoiled, but was greedy and snobbish and always asked for everything she wanted. She would tell her father “ Can I have a new doll?”, “ Father, when am I going to get a new lacy dress?”, or “I want a pretty horse NOW” and would whine if she didn’t get what she wanted, and of course she would get it. Her father never seemed to have enough time to spend with her, he was always busy.

She went to a private school, and there was a group of poor students who had to get a scholar to be able to attend the private school. She always made fun of them about how they were poor and had to study to get into the school, and they would feel hurt.

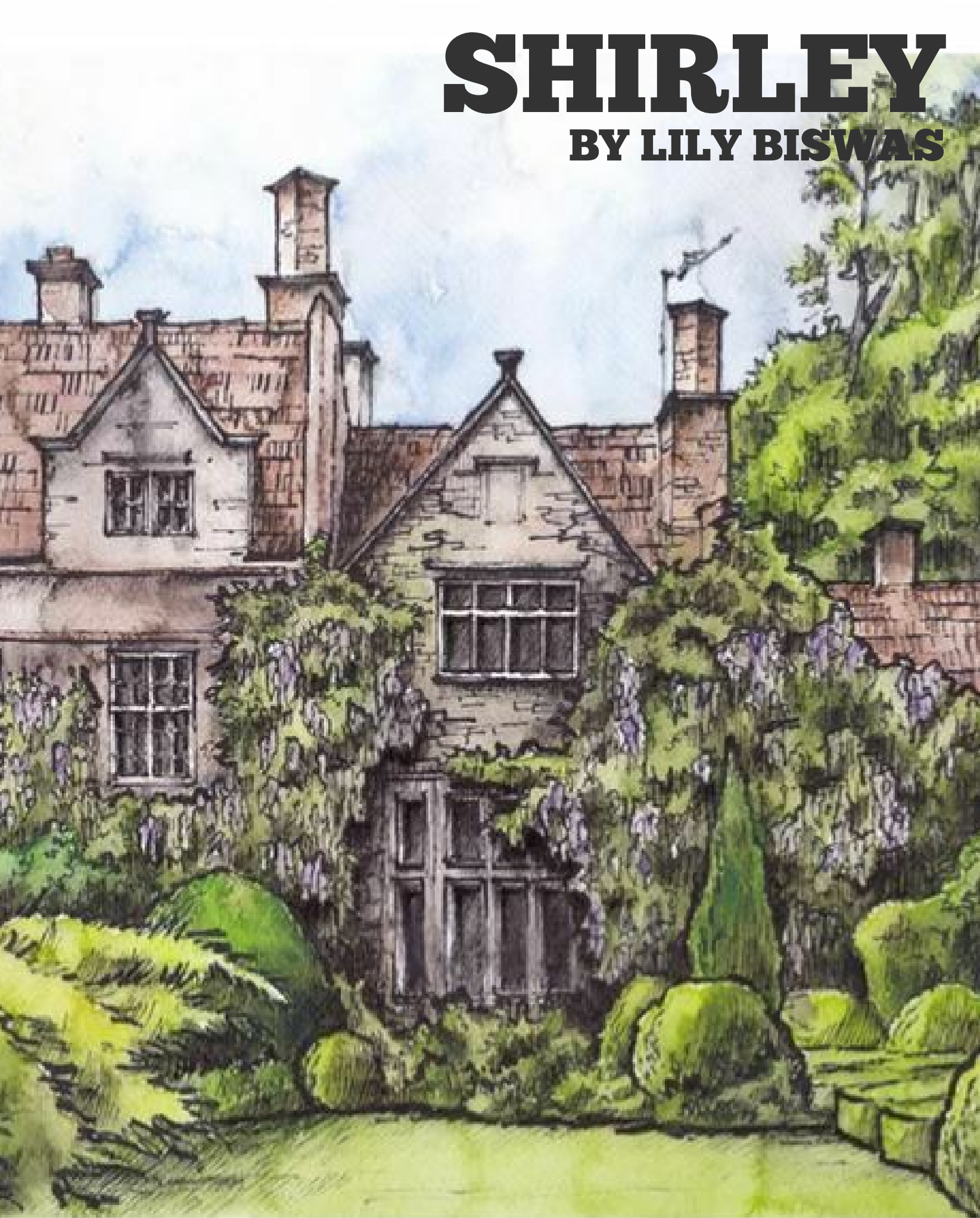
One day tragedy struck when her father died of an illness. She was horrified, but instead of worrying about him, she was distressed about what would happen to his money. It turned out that his father didn’t leave any of his fortune to her, and Shirley ended up with nothing. She had to give up all her possessions and no longer owned them and had to wear raggedy old donated clothes instead of stunning dresses. She was forced out of her manor and moved to an orphanage in Boston, Machusetshetts by a ship. When she arrived at the orphanage, it didn’t look like her former manor at all. She could tell that it was going to be hard to get accustomed to it, even since she spent most of her life so far in London. After about half a year, she nearly got used to it and the conditions, but it all changed when a new group of rich girls moved in.

They were like Shirley's past selves, but unlike Shirley they inherited their parent’s humongous fortune. They were treated like princesses, and even had their own servants. They were also very snobbish, and made fun of all the kids in the orphanage who didn’t inherit their parents fortune or a very little amount. Shirley was one of the poor kids in the orphanage. Every time they made a mean comment to her, she would try to explain that she used to be as rich as them, but they laughed and said that her dad probably didn’t think she was capable with his money. She suddenly knew how it felt to be one of the kids she used to pick on. She felt horrible and miserable. Not only did the rich girls get Shirley to understand how it felt to be one of the poor kids at her old school, but brought her to her deeper thoughts and emotions of how she always wanted to spend time with his dad, of how she always wanted to ask how her mother was like, and when she rode alone on a wagon back home from school, she would always want someone to be next to her, the fact that she felt so alone, and other things that could have been done. After a few months , she couldn’t hold it anymore, and wanted to go back to London to apologize to all the kids she picked on. It wouldn’t cure her heartbreak, but would make her less miserable.

She then boarded another ship to London. She then searched for her old private school, and remembered where it was. When she arrived at the location of the school, she didn’t see it. She went around the street multiple times and even streets close to it, but couldn’t find it. She then saw an empty clearing in the middle of the street where the school was, and went closer to it. She looked down and saw

a piece of a brick. She recognized the brick and knew it came from the school. She blinked many times, but it was no use, the school was gone. She became teary and couldn’t believe she was late and that she couldn’t apologize for her past mistakes. She then strolled through London at familiar places she had been or seen, and then decided where to go for her next destination, and it wasn’t back to the orphanage.

She then went to a hillside and found the place she was looking for. It was a huge building with many arches, pillars, bay windows, towers, and balconies, her old home. She stared at it, and then sobbed hysterically. She was seated where she could find a nice view to it, and continued to sob. She didn’t know how long she cried, minutes, hours, even days possibly, but still didn’t know. She couldn’t believe how selfish and greedy she was this whole time, and wished she could start life all over again. She didn’t care about food, rain, marriage, children, or a happy ending, not that she thought she deserved one. There may be a girl in the manor right now, and she hoped that she wouldn’t make the same mistakes Shirley did. Here was the place where everything could have been, but was now in her fantasy. She took a glance at the manor and, sadly, died right in front of a stunning view.





## Hoi Choi – Our first in-person gathering of 2021 was held in August at McDowell Nature Preserve

### ASHA Fundraiser

By Rika Parui

This year my sister, Nika and I participated in the Asha fundraiser. You may be wondering what Asha is. Last year, Srishti of Charlotte launched its annual fundraiser called Asha. The money collected through this is donated to worthy charitable causes.

To support this important drive, we decided to sell our handmade mug rugs (coasters) and donate a percentage of our profits to Asha. Anita Mashi encouraged us to involve more Srishti youth in this endeavor. We reached out to all the Srishti Youth Leaders and coordinated a youth led sale at Hoi-Choi, the Srishti picnic in summer. Our friend, Anushka Pramanik made and sold intricate bead jewelry. Nik & Maya Collam, another sibling duo, sold refreshing snow cones.

Nika and I spent about three weeks preparing for the big day. Our target was making 30 mug rugs including a few pre-ordered ones. We divided our work and checked all the orders so that they would be fulfilled on time. Making our items for the sale was hard work but we had a lot of fun. Along the way, we created reels to post on our Instagram page, made signs, set up our products and took measures to ensure we wouldn't lose any money or item. Meeting so many Srishti families for the first time since the pandemic was wonderful. Our friends, Neel Halder and Sarthak Das persuaded many people to buy from us and support Asha. Their persuasive tactics were amusing but very effective as all the items were sold out by the end of the event.



Srishti's Youth brigade was very proud and happy to jointly donate a total of \$157.49. We are grateful to have generous supporters, friends who work together and the willingness to work for a good cause. Thank you Srishti of Charlotte.

### CONGRATS GRADS

We were proud to see so many high school and college graduates among us in the 2020-2021 school year. We were excited to recognize them at the picnic and congratulate them in person.

Ayush Sengupta, Nikhil Roy, Mohnish Behera, Shourya Mukherjee, Ananya Roy, Ayushi Mazumder, Sharnali Ghosh Dastidar.

# Anthropology of A Bong's Love for Saree

Sudeshna Hazra

October brings with it some crisp, perky memoirs from Kolkata. Time for the large jars of vegetables, seasonings and oil, lapping up every bit of that golden sunshine to make their way into the pickle world, the fresh molasses suddenly stretching the Baangali appetite phenomenally with choices of amazing desserts such as "Nolengurer Sondesh/ Rasogolla, Peethey, Paayesh".

Those were the times when we reinvented our closet. Shopping for fresh additions were limited to occasions such as Puja, Poila Baisakh (Bengali new year) and birthdays unlike the whim to buy, today. The autumn sunshine often meant Ma and me emptying our closets and laying out saris in the sun. Am not quite sure, how many germs that killed and how much mustiness we really got busted but it was a way of

sharing stories and life events between my Ma and me. Each sari brought with it a little tale. The tales were often punctuated by occasional discoveries such as an old 'Taant' that needed some tiny repair work with our needle and thread, some 'Banarasi' that needed dry cleaning or just some TLC (Tender Loving Care). A damaged 'Jamdani' sari might often have a border that could be repurposed/reused on another sari, an almost faded French chiffon could be dyed back to its brilliance or just be re-invented in another color. A perfect silk might have bored my mother already and I would be more than ecstatic to bring it into my closet or vice versa. Sometimes the sudden salvage of a lost sari's blouse could solve the problem of a hunt for a special wear for an upcoming event with a happy exclamation.

In the aroma of naphthalene, we would often chance upon a letter or a picture postcard from a loved one in the folds of our saris. Over a semi-pickled slice of mango, I would thread in these memories to my saris over a laugh or a tear.

The days are gone and the memories are on the wane but the love for sarees remains fresh as ever.



# Marriage & Divorce

Sudeshna Hazra

Marriages and divorces have always harked two extreme polarities of emotions in me. I'm quite not sure yet of the entire process of moving in and moving on but somehow each time a kin or a friend decided to take the step, I've been in a lot of emotional whirlpools. Some stories are told and some remain untold. I recently revisited all these little trysts with each of them, since the time I was just a little girl to reconcile with a divorce of two very precious people in my life.

Disclaimer: Being in an exceptionally volatile emotional phase, I deem it appropriate to be biased in my own way.

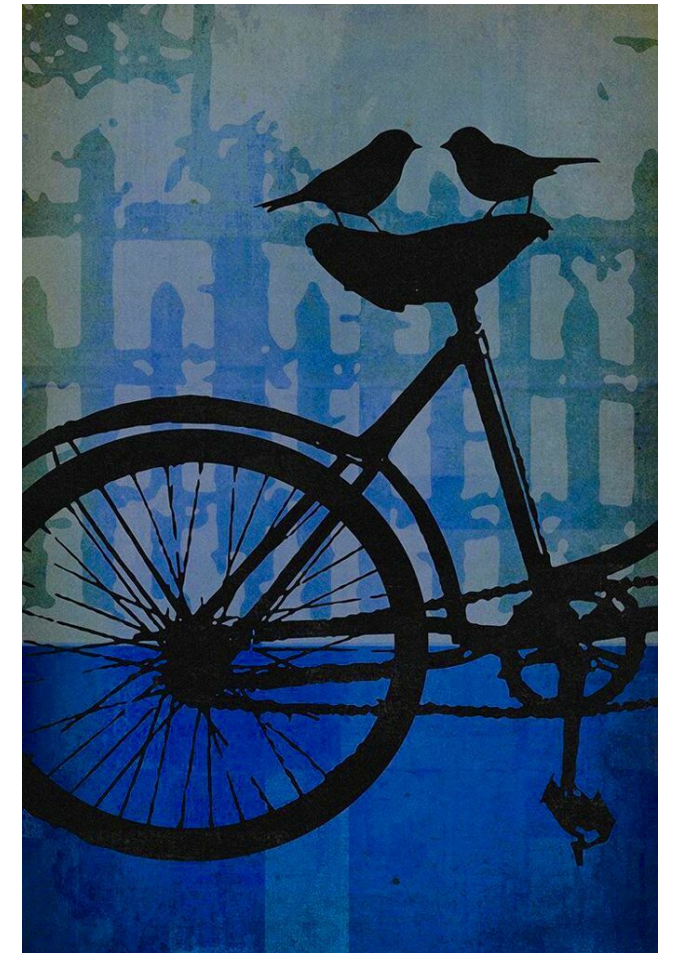
As a little girl, marriage meant a celebration with lights that looked like a sprinkle of gold and believed it ushered in magic, ambrosial culinary, roars of laughter, meeting old friends and relations, so parents offered a bit of that extra liberty. We could wear the kind of dresses that reminded us of those lightning bugs that adorned the scenery right through my window. I am not sure when I started being a part of these celebrations, but this was an account I derived from a sketch book I maintained at the age of five.

Then, it was divorce when my favorite aunt stopped adorning the lovely red bindi she'd wear and vermilion shine she'd put in between the parting of her hair. Somehow it felt like I lost the aunt I knew, although nothing else quite changed. I started noting a lack of something in her voice and in her gentle nudges. Perhaps it was a little bit of imagination. I however, failed to understand what aet them. This was a little note in my diary when I was nine.

Next was my eldest cousin's wedding with a German and my little crush on this German groom's brother - a multimedia person. With his looks, he was humble - quite unappealing; much to my awe, his imagination ran wild. Together we'd organize the weirdest games for the groom and the bride. These were those ceremonial plays that were meant to bond them closer and somehow, they managed to sprinkle some of its magic on us as well. After the wedding, there were some brilliant romantic exchanges between us until his letters started speaking of his weed and mine of chocolate and gradually, we decided, we'd let each other be content with our share of weed and cocoa. These were carefully accumulated from my diary at thirteen and our letters.

Divorce came in again, when this cousin parted ways with her once beloved (German) apple of the eye. She'd declared she couldn't live without him when my uncle, her father, had once opposed her decision of marrying him. The man she believed lacked vitality and she quickly divorced him to re-marry in a quarter of a year to be a mom to a bony baby. I was sad for a little while - a little bit for that man and a little bit for losing the last possible link to my first crush but when her baby was put to my arms, nothing else seemed important. I was overjoyed and till date she remains one of my dearest nieces. Together we've ran, flown kites, crafted toys and went wild on various things.

Thereafter, marriages and divorces came easy with me coming of age. My peers took their leaps in both, quite like the tempest. Some marriages I could



help bond and some divorces I could prevent to save a disaster. However, what has remained with me is the magic I've believed in each of the marriages I've seen and the mellow that even a possibility of a divorce has ever brought to me. Even today, when two decide to part their ways, I engage myself in my little musings, in some lonely corner of my mind, what could have possibly saved the divorce. A lot of times, I try those little things to save the fractured relationship and some other time, I do not just get a chance. In those days, I remember my lucky goldfish that helped me to make friends when I was alone. The fish now stays with Laachi, the little girl who got herself a home after losing one and all in a riot. She needed the goldfish the most ;)

## আগমনী

এসো মা শরদা এসো মহামায়া  
ভোরের শিশির মাড়িয়ে  
এসো আরাধ্যা হে সর্বজয়া  
বরাভয়ের হাত বাড়িয়ে ।

এসো মা দুর্গা দুঃখ মোচনে  
বসুন্ধরার বুকো  
প্রহরণ সাথে অশুভ দমনে  
বিশ্বায়নের সুখে ।

এসো মহামায়া মাটির ধরাতে  
বিশ্বকর্মা হয়ে  
পুজার মন্ত্রে অভিমেক হোক  
মায়ের চরণ ছুঁয়ে ।

শ্রীলেখা চ্যাটার্জী

## শারদীয়া

শিউলি ফুলের নহবতে আজ  
মায়ের চরণ ছুঁয়ে  
ভোরের শিশিরে পাথর ভিজিয়ে  
বেদনা পড়েছে নুয়ে ।

আগুন ঝরিয়ে এসো মহামায়া  
মাটির পৃথিবী জয়ে  
নিজেই গড়েছ নিজের মূর্তি  
অশী আর বরাভয়ে

এসো এসো মাগো অসুর দলনী  
জগৎ মোহিনী এসো  
অভয়া ভবানী সংহার বেশী  
ত্রি ভুবন জুড়ে এসো ।

শ্রীলেখা চ্যাটার্জী



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কিছু গল্প সত্যি

'না ঠিক ভুতের গল্প লিখতে বসিনি। নিজের জীবনে কিছু যুক্তিবুদ্ধির বাইরে ঘটে যাওয়া ঘটনা নিয়ে এই লেখালিখিতে বসি।

বেশ ছোট তখন। পূজোর ছুটিতে বাড়ি ছেড়ে বাইরে ঘুরতে যাওয়া নেহাৎই না-পসন্দ আমার। তবু যখন কাশ্মিরাং এর নাম শুনলাম তখন বেশ ফুরফুরে মন নিয়েই রাজী হয়ে গেছিলাম। ষষ্ঠীর দিন রওনা হলাম সপরিবারে। সব মিলে ছজন। তখনকার দিনে নিজেরা গাড়ি নিয়ে ঘুরতে যাবার চল ততটা ছিল না। বাসে করে জলপাইগুড়ি থেকে শিলিগড়ি তারপর ভাড়ার গাড়িতে কাশ্মিরাং। দিনের আলো থাকতেই পৌঁছব এই ছিল পরিকল্পনা। কিন্তু ভাবলেই কি আর সব হয়? শিলিগুড়ি পৌঁছুতেই দুপুর গড়িয়ে বিকেল হয়ে গেল। গাড়ি নিয়ে যখন কাশ্মিরাং এর হোটেল চুকছি তখন সন্কে নেমেছে। শরতের শেষে পাহাড়ী এলাকার জমানো ঠান্ডা সাথে টিপ টিপ বৃষ্টি। মনটা বেশ খারাপ হয়ে গেল। কোথায় পাড়ার মন্ডপে জমিয়ে বন্ধুদের সাথে আনন্দ করব তা নয়, বৃষ্টি ঠান্ডা সব মিলিয়ে যতসব উটকো বিপদ। একজন কেয়ার টেকার গোছের লোক এসে রাতের খাবার দিয়ে গেল। লোকটির চাউনি টা কেমন ভালো ঠেকল না আমার। কেমন মরা মাছের মত ঘোলাটে চাউনি। ক্লান্ত ছিলাম ভীষণ। বিছানায় শরীর এলিয়ে দেওয়ার সাথে সাথেই ঘুম। পরদিন বলমলে রোদ। স্থানীয় কিছু জায়গা দেখে নিলাম সারাদিন ধরে। গোল বাঁধল বিকেলে। একটা ঝর্নার কাছে দাঁড়িয়ে আছি, হঠাৎ দেখি রাতের সেই কেয়ার টেকার, সেই চোখ, সেই চাউনি। ভড়িঘড়ি পরিবারের অন্য লোকদের বিষয়টি জানালাম। তারা বলল কাউকেই নাকি দেখে নি। মনে একটা খুঁতখুঁতুনি ঢুকে গেল। কেমন একটা অস্বস্তি। হোটেল ফিরেও শান্তি নেই। বসে আছি আবার কখন সেই মুখ দেখা দেবে। কিন্তু অবাক করে দিয়ে একজন অন্য কেয়ার টেকার ঘরে এল। ফাঁক পেয়ে জিজ্ঞেস করলাম গতরাতের ভদ্রলোকটি কোথায়? চমকের আরও খানিক বাকি ছিল। জবাব এল গতরাতেরও নাকি ইনিই ছিলেন। এই তিন দিনের জন্য এবং এই ঘরের গেস্ট দের জন্য নাকি ওনাকেই দায়িত্ব দেওয়া আছে। এবার অল্প অল্প ঘামতে শুরু করলাম। মনে মনে ভাবছি মা কে জানাব কিনা। এটা বেশ বুঝতে পারছিলাম যেই হোক তাকে আমি ছাড়া আর কেউ দেখতে পায় না। রাতে ছেঁড়া ছেঁড়া ঘুম হল। সকালে উঠে গত রাতের কথা মাথা থেকে উবে গেল। পরদিন একটা মনাস্ক্রী দেখে তিব্বতী খুপ্পা খেয়ে স্থানীয় দোকানে কেনাকাটা করে কটালাম। এর মধ্যে আর খটকা লাগার মত কিছু ঘটেনি। মনে মনে স্বস্তির নিশ্বাস ফেলছিলাম। বিকেল বিকেল ঘরে ফিরে বাসপ্যাটেরা গোছাতে বসলাম। পরদিন বাড়ি। উফ! মনে মনে বলছিলাম পালাতে পারলে বাঁচি। এরই মধ্যে বাইরে একটা শোরগোল শুনে বেরিয়ে দেখি লোকজন সূর্যাস্ত দেখার ভিড় করেছে হোটেলের ডেক এ। সবাই মিলে আমরাও সেদিকে পা বাড়াতেই চোখটা আটকে গেল' ভিড়ের মধ্যে আবার সে! সেই চোখ সেই চাউনি। এবার আরও ভয়ঙ্কর সে চাউনি। পলক পড়ছে না। কি যেন আছে ওই চাউনিতে। পরিবার থেকে দূরত্রে পিছিয়ে পড়েছি বুঝতে পেরেও নড়তে পারছিলাম। শিঁড়দাড়া দিয়ে একটা ভয়ের স্রোত নামছে এবার। কি চায় এ? কেন দেখা দেয় বারবার? একটু অন্যান্যমনস্ক হতেই দেখি লোকটা আর নেই। এর মধ্যে পিছিয়ে পড়েছি দেখে বাবাও ডাকতে চলে এসেছে। সূর্যাস্ত মাথায় উঠেছে। ঘরে ফিরে এলাম। সে রাতে স্বপ্ন এল খুব। কোনোরকমে রাত টা কাটিয়ে পরদিন বাড়ি রওনা হলাম। পথে পুরো ঘটনাটা পরিবারের লোকদের জানাই। বাড়ি ফিরে মনখারাপ ভয় দুশ্চিন্তার মধ্যেও একটুকরো ভাললাগা নিয়ে আসে পাড়ার মন্ডপের মা দুর্গার মুখ। দশমীর সিঁদুর খেলা, মঙ্গলারতির ভিড়ে সেই মুখ আর খুঁজে পেলাম না।

তার বছর পাঁচেক পর সেই মুখ আরও একবারের জন্য আমার সামনে এসেছিল। কিন্তু ঐ একবারই, শেষবার। আর কখনো কোথাও তাকে দেখিনি। বুদ্ধি দিয়ে বিচার করলে হয়ত সত্যিই এর ব্যাখ্যা মিলবে না। কেন বারবার সেই মুখ আমাকেই ধরা দিয়েছিল আমি জানি না। এ রহস্য রহস্যই থেকে যাবে চিরকাল। সেই ঘটনার এত বছর পরেও যখন সেই মুখ স্মৃতির রাস্তা ধরে মনের ভেতর উঁকি দেয় - একমুহুর্তে পায়ের তলা থেকে মাটিটা সরে যায়, শিঁড়দাড়া বেয়ে নামতে থাকে সেই বছ চেনা, চোরা ভয়ের স্রোত।



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Domestic Violence Services for South Asians in North Carolina

# BEING MORTAL

**My personal journey towards accepting the Eternal Inevitable!**

**By Raj Banerjee**

The last year and a half has been a year of loss like no other experienced by us in our lifetime and probably our previous generations as well. From the loss of life, health, wealth, and other materialistic tangibles to that of common sense, logic, reasoning, and values - we have seen it all. From the greater macrocosm, where bodies floating down rivers were forgotten after some quivering, tumultuous sighs to a school teacher trying to stay afloat with her three children in



our microcosmic world, the picture is too vivid. We have seen it all, or so I would like to believe. But if I have learned anything from the last year, it's that life will definitely throw lemons at you and will not give you the time or chance to whine about how much you dislike lemonades.

It's hard to find a family untouched by some kind of tragedy or loss, by now. I am no exception. I lost my mother in January; not to COVID 19, though I believe that like both the world wars had an indirect cause, COVID was one in this case. COVID killed in more ways than one. The canceled routine doctor's checkups, the loneliness of not being able to see the loved ones in person, and the loss of people around us like leaves in Fall, these can be strong reasons to give up on survival. One day she was doing well and then one day she was not. I do not know how many of you who are reading my musings have seen the movie 'Cast Away'. For the uninitiated, it was a movie in which a FedEx plane goes down and one man survives the rough seas and an even rougher remote, deserted island, trusting and depending on only his own guts and grit. One of the very few earthly belongings he salvages from the waters is a volleyball made by the sporting company, Wilson. He personifies and befriends the ball and calls it Wilson. Wilson later becomes a symbol of hope and a reason for his living, a manifestation of his will that urges him to wake up every day and try harder to reach ashore - to civilization. After my father passed away my mother became my "Wilson" and losing her sent me adrift. I was living my life, doing my daily chores but in limbo, feeling from time to time that I was looking at my life from the outside.

This is when a dear friend gave me the book "Being Mortal" by Dr. Atul Gawande. Believe me, it's not a book for the faint-hearted, and one might ask who gives such a book to someone who just lost a loved one? The answer to that is

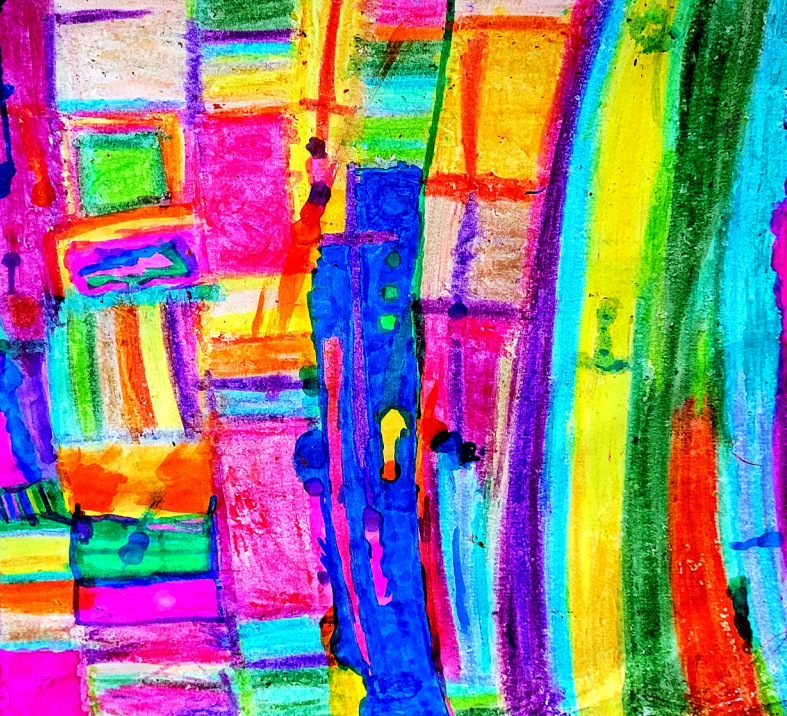


perhaps someone who believes in ripping off the band-aid at one go with no dilly-dallying. The book is about the inevitability of the end of a human life. It is like the journey of the proverbial rolling ball. It'll stop someday, suddenly if there is an external force, or taking its own time when the surface it is rolling on resists its motion or in this case when the body is unable to sustain life. I cannot call this a book review as the author is a physician and his point of view, knowledge, know-how, and queries are very different from mine - a bereaved. To me, the book is a beacon guiding me towards the realization and

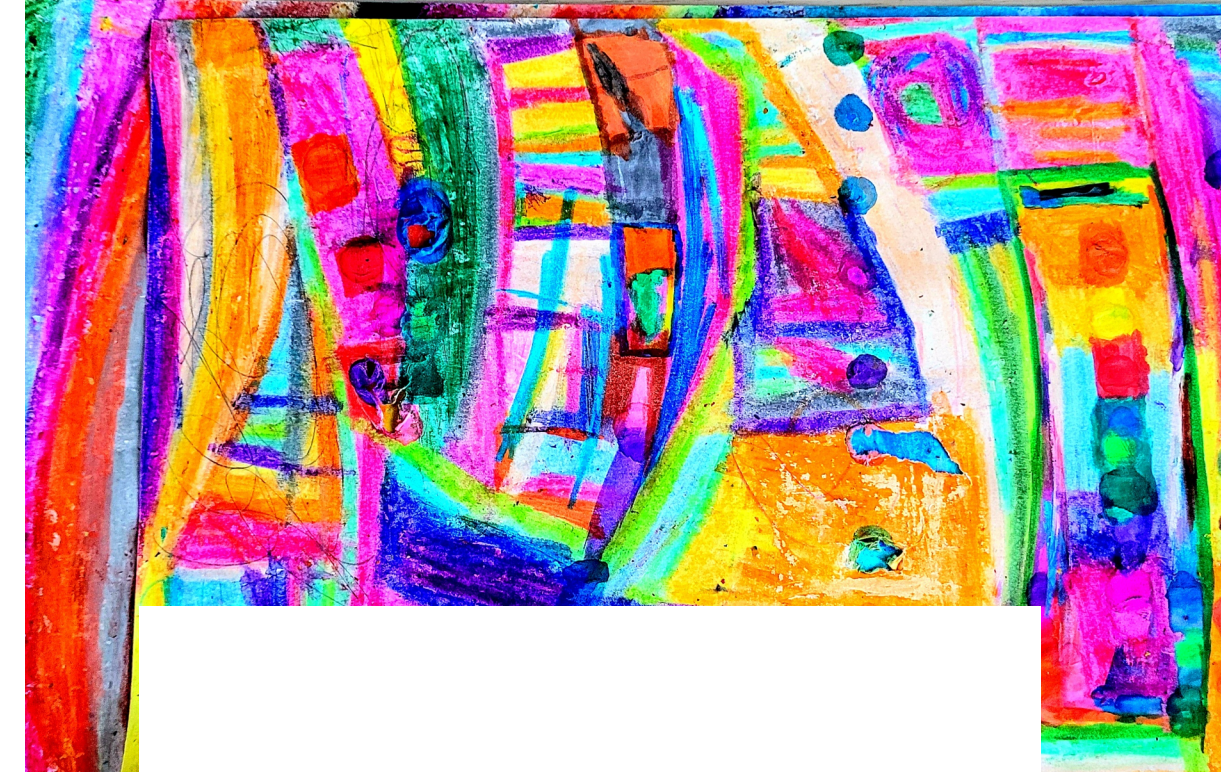
reconciliation of the fact that life is transient. In this book, Dr. Gawande has brought forth the merits and flaws of the geriatric or the elderly care system both here in the US and in India; of family care as opposed to the assisted living and skilled nursing homes. Having lost my mother-in-law the previous year, the last few days of her life in hospice care, I've been exposed to both sides of this saga. One thing that is an absolute certainty is that humans are mortal and this is at the core of this book. Like the author, I also do believe that a false hope of immortality should be refrained from everywhere. But how do we go on living our lives knowing that the end is eternal and inevitable? This is where the clichéd, almost hackneyed idea

that the journey is more important than the destination comes in. Aphorisms like '*carpe diem*', '*charaivati*' start to make more sense now. Seize the day, march forward and keep moving on. "*The honeybees are working, birds are flying, the sun is shining... keep moving forward*" (*Aitareya Brahmana, Rigveda*). Embracing the inner spirituality helps in the process of marching on. Fulfilling our life's purpose, values, and various relationships with people and nature can be the legacies that can keep us alive for eons.





Arani 2021/33



## Kaleidoscope Series

# Abstract Art- Annika Bhattacharya

Artist Georgia O'Keefe once said, "I found I could say things with color and shapes that I couldn't say any other way.... things I had no words for."

Annika is eight years old, and she is passionate about creating colorful abstract art on canvas. She is autistic and mostly non-verbal but her paintings speak for her as they are the best reflection of her joyful, artistic, quirky personality.

# Bottle Art By Sohini Sengupta



The pandemic has driven us to explore facets of our personalities that we didn't know existed, or rekindle old passions for arts and crafts or music and culinary skills that were buried under the mundane burdens of our busy lives. During this time, Sohini Sengupta discovered her talent for bottle art as a way to channel her creativity and fill a few free hours of the day. Here are some examples of her initiative where she repurposes and recycles things around her home to create these unique gifts for her friends and loved ones.

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INTERVIEW BY ANUSHA RAY

Shubham Datta, CPA, CA - Vice President of Corporate Development, CLIO

Hey everyone! My name is Anusha Ray and I'm 16 years old. I'm also a high school junior. I've had the pleasure of knowing Shubham Datta for my entire lifetime as he is a close family friend, and I knew he would be perfect for this interview. A Chartered Accountant by profession, Shubham is currently the Vice President for Corporate Development at CLIO. He currently lives in Toronto, ON, Canada and is very fond of travelling to different parts of the world. This interview was super important to me because I wanted to gain and provide some insight about life in the time of COVID. We discussed his experiences throughout the course of the pandemic and how to deal with everything positively + effectively!

***The world experienced big changes when the pandemic hit. How did the pandemic impact you, did you feel that you learned anything or grew as an individual?***

I didn't know how productive I could be working from home. Prior to the pandemic, I would work from home maybe once a month. But having to do so daily during the pandemic forced me into a different routine and now I don't think I could go back to commuting every day!

It's also important to set boundaries between your workspace and personal life if you can. This is key for work from home productivity.

***Before the pandemic, how did you visualize the years 2020 and 2021?***

Like 2019, I was looking forward to a few places to visit including San Francisco and Ireland. Unfortunately, those trips didn't end up happening.

As a big Toronto Raptors fan, I was very excited to see the Raptors get back to the playoffs and defend their 2019 championship which also didn't materialize.

Overall, 2020 and 2021 were very different from what I could ever visualize.

***From studying at a top-notch university to thriving in the workforce; how do you manage to maintain a healthy work-life balance?***

I've always had a strong work ethic. I don't think of it as a work-life balance. To me, that implies they must be equal all the time. I think of it as work-life harmony. The reality is there are certain times when you must skew more towards work or life. Having the flexibility in harmony to do, that is what I strive for, rather than balance. Some weeks may be heavy towards work while others are skewed towards life. In the long run, it ends up working itself out.

***If you could tell yourself something before the pandemic, what would that be?***

Enjoy the moment and be present, you never know when it will change!

# Besties on the Beach

## A Narrative Poem by Rika Parui

The anticipation grew stronger and stronger  
As we inched closer to the time of our lives  
In eight and a half short hours we arrived at the house  
A trip as rough as the choppy waters  
That come from Florida's storms aroused

Counting down the hours  
8+ disasters  
7 days  
6 girls  
5 teenagers  
4 crazy families  
3 little kids  
2 million memories  
1 house

A speeding ticket welcomes our friends to Florida  
Boy, were we wrong!  
When we thought this was the most eventful thing that would happen

A big house on Florida's sands  
Opened the doors to this unfamiliar land

First day out on the beach  
Kayaking and feeling the breeze  
It all looks so fun  
Until you are the one being stung

An angry bee  
Pierced me  
All because I couldn't see  
Kayaking no more,  
I had to rest up on the shore

A magnificent sunrise stretches across the horizon  
In the freezing cold  
To step out there you'd have to be bold

The waves wash trouble up on the shore  
And this trip continues to be anything but a bore

Wildlife circles around us  
We indulge in the oasis and take it all in  
Ignoring its beauty would be a sin

A runaway beach ball can't do much harm  
But that's until you have a splinter on your arm

We watch two sharks circling the pier  
And our excitement outweighs fear  
So, we become detectives and try to see  
Where more could be hiding beneath me

The very next day we head out to the water  
It's all fun and games until the shark wants to play  
They have swum far from the pier  
And they greet us here

We scream, we shout, we run out  
I fall and I stumble  
We abandon our floats  
The shore greets us with a smile,  
Holding us close for a while

Long walks on the beach  
Consist of sandy toes  
And sunscreen on our nose

The sun sets revealing sixteen layers of stars  
I'm glad the city is so far  
A soft, gooey, golden brown marshmallow oozes out of  
Two crisp graham crackers melting a milk chocolate piece  
For a moment time stops,  
As I take it all in

After a long day out on the beach  
A hoarse voice starts to complain  
Of pain in her throat  
And to my surprise others agree  
And I wonder how this could be

A negative covid test in hand  
But sickness spread over the land

A trip into town is nothing but a flop  
The local national park is also locked  
So, we call it a day  
And get on our way

Complaining kids is what we could be  
But looking back  
We handled everything nicely

A trip as playful as a breeze,  
As chaotic as a show on tv,  
As warm and wholesome as a cup of tea  
That's what this trip was to me

Random conversations float in the air  
We spot stingrays and stop to stare  
Stars in the sky let us know at last  
That stress leaves us to go live in the past  
Despite the trouble and the falls  
We've had each other through it all



# Catching Up With Our College Freshmen

By Nika Parui

Have you ever wondered about the college experience? Being without your parents for the first time! Experiencing life, making lifetime friends, learning new and complex concepts that will eventually lead you to your first job. Well I know I have. I am a sophomore in high school and the word college comes up more often than not. I know a lot of you can relate to that. So, I decided to do some research and reach out to the people who know a lot about the college application process. College freshman of course. I interviewed three college freshmen to ask them about their experiences and advice for incoming students.

Nikhil Roy-NC State

Ananya Ray-UNC Charlotte

Mohnish Behera- UC Berkeley

When you graduated high school did you decide to go to college? If so, which college and why?

NR: I am currently going to NC State and am studying engineering with an interest in working in the aerospace industry. My top reasons for picking NC State was because it was in-state, closer to home, and located in Research Triangle Park.

AR: Yes, when I graduated high school, I decided to go to college. I chose UNC Charlotte because I believed it was the right school for me considering my major (Math and Economics) and the beautiful campus.

MB: I decided to go to college after high school to pursue a degree in either computer science or data science. Ideally, I wanted to go to a school with a strong computer science and data science program. This led me to UC Berkeley.

What do you think about the college application process and what advice can you give to high school students and middle school students right now?

NR: I think that the college application process can be a bit difficult and seemingly quite large. Starting the process early will reduce a lot of the stress for applying to college. There is not much advice I can offer to middle school students except to get credit for high school courses if at all possible. Even then I would not



stress about college in middle school. For high school students, I highly recommend preparing for the ACT or SAT the summer before junior year and then try to get the highest score possible in fall of junior year. That way you can hopefully get the standardized test out of the way and have a good benchmark for your PSAT. Furthermore, finish 90% of the personal or common app essay before the start of senior year. Once senior year starts there will be plenty of essays to write for all the college applications, especially if you apply for early action, when the application deadline is around November 1st. Those would be my top two pieces of advice that I would give, but there are more factors to a college application than just essays and standardized test scores.



AR: Firstly, my college application process was different than many as I applied as an international student. But to middle school students, I'd say have fun, study hard, and have a blueprint to what you want to study in college. To high school students - have an idea about what colleges you'll apply to, research their requirements, and plan on how you will fulfill them. Even though the college application process is daunting, hard work and determination can really set you up for success.

MB: The college application may look daunting at first. However, if you start the application process early, it will be easier for you to navigate the application. For middle schoolers, I would focus on extracurriculars and test preparation. For high schoolers, I would focus on GPA, advanced courses, and extracurriculars.



What is your college life like? (Describe an average day in 3-5 sentences)

NR: I wake up around 6am and start class at 8:30am. Usually I have three classes in the morning and one class in the afternoon. Then towards the evening I have a meeting with a club. In between classes and different events, I get my work done and study at the library. By around 11pm, I am

Arani 2021/42

in bed.

AR: I chose to have most of my classes fully online. I only go to campus once a week for about 3-4 hours. With my online classes, I get to live on my own schedule. I do my classes when I feel it is the optimal time for me. Because of COVID, college life is different than I had envisioned 4 years ago. We all wear masks, social distance as much as possible, and because of that, it's hard to interact with others. But overall, I'm enjoying myself.

MB: So far, college has been a fun time, whether it is meeting new people at the dining halls or exploring the city around college. One major difference between high school and college, is that college professors are very lenient about class attendance and class scheduling. It is all on you, and there is a greater emphasis on personal responsibility and accountability.

Where do you see yourself in 5 years and how does that vision differ from your younger self?

NR: In five years, I see myself finishing up my undergraduate degree, applying for a masters program, or working in some capacity in the aerospace industry specializing in space robotics or rocket launch systems.

AR: Frankly, I haven't looked 5 years ahead. Over time, I've realized that taking it one step at a time helps me reach the bigger vision/goal. As for me, I haven't found it yet. Since I'm studying Math and Economics, I would love to work in that field. In terms of what my younger self thought of my future, she didn't even know that she'd be in a whole new country. That's why even though it may sound cliché it's important to live in the present and work with 100% of your effort.

MB: Once I complete college, I plan on working at a tech company as a data scientist or software engineer. This dream differed from my younger self in the sense that I was more geared towards computer engineering and the passion of computer hardware. Now, I am more interested in Machine Learning/Artificial Intelligence.

What are some things that no one tells you about college that would have been really helpful to know?

NR: One of the main concerns I had about college in high school was the increase in rigor. While I would not say college is more difficult, it presents different challenges along with taking a few more classes a

Arani 2021/43

semester than you might in high school. No doubt there is a lot of free time during the weekends and in between classes on the weekdays. It is up to you to manage your time wisely and study for tests, which make up the majority of your grade.

AR: I think I was well prepared for college, just have a good work ethic and stay humble.

MB: I would definitely recommend touring college campuses before applying and making connections with people in the local area especially if you are going out of state.

Lastly, what is the best memory you have made so far in college?

NR: My favorite memory in college so far happened in my first week. It was two days before classes started, and there was an event happening in my dorm community where we went to a high ropes course. Earlier that day there were some heavy thunderstorms, but it seemed the weather was luckily letting up for us. Unbeknownst to my new friends and I, Mother Nature had other plans. When we got to the high ropes course the sky decided to rumble and flash a bit of lightning, so we got back in the van hoping that the storm cell would quickly pass over. In a few minutes the sky opened their floodgates and with it came a torrential downpour. So, we decided to head back to campus and what would have been a fifteen minute drive turned into an hour and a half sit in traffic. To pass the time we played some UNO and introduced ourselves. Through our common misery we bonded and learned more about each other than doing a high ropes course together would have.

AR: Walking around campus for the first time in the school year.

MB: One of my best memories in college is meeting people with similar cultural norms and traditions.

Wow! Those were some great answers. I hope you learned a little more about college from a first person perspective and this eases your worries a little bit. Thank you so much for reading.

# An Interview with Dr. Lopamudra Das Roy, Founder & President, Breast Cancer Hub

By Anushka Pramanik

Dr. Lopamudra Das Roy, a distinguished cancer scientist and research professor, resigned from her career to create Breast Cancer Hub, a full-time pro bono humanitarian service. They are saving lives globally by making impactful sustainable changes working at the grassroots level and bridging the gap between the developed and developing countries.

## Could you tell me a little about yourself?

I was born in Assam, which is in the northeastern part of India in a family of physicians. Since my childhood, I was always inspired by my grandfather Late Dr. K.N Das, my father Late Dr. Chandra Sekhar Das, and my mother Mrs. Rita Das (a teacher & social worker), through their dedicated services towards the community.

I earned a Ph.D. in Genetics (Molecular Biology) from Assam University, with research experience in Biochemistry from Delhi University, India, and a Postdoctoral Fellowship in cancer immunology & metastasis focusing on breast & pancreatic cancer at the Mayo Clinic College of Medicine, USA. After this training, I joined the University of North Carolina at Charlotte (UNCC) as a Cancer Scientist and Research Professor.

I was awarded grants as Principal Investigator from the Department of Defense cancer research program & National Cancer Institute to investigate targeted therapies and signaling pathways in metastatic breast and pancreatic cancer. I was later working as an adjunct Associate Professor at UNCC and Research Director at OncoTab, Inc; Cancer Diagnostics & Therapeutics, a UNCC spin-off. I also received my MBA from Northwestern University – Kellogg School of Management.

## **What are Breast Cancer Hub's main focus and goals?**

We are a global family. All our services are free of cost and all donations are strictly driven towards our mission. Our vision is SAVER - Save Lives by



Awareness, Volunteering, Education, and Research. We fight breast cancer in all genders and stand together against all types of cancer via our BCH wings and cancer hubs through crucial steps including awareness and education; simple solutions breast self exam cards in many languages for all genders. Community outreaches and screening camps which include adopting villages. We go door to door for cancer screenings, treatment management and counseling. Each suspicious case is sent to a local cancer hospital for further diagnosis and treatment. We monitor each patient individually, case by case. We execute the Anti-Tobacco Campaign along with patient treatment aid to support the underprivileged populace in poverty especially in developing countries with diligent follow-ups of the financial assistance utilization. Global support groups are a huge contribution too as we publish stories and interviews of cancer advocates in local languages to inspire others fighting cancer. Our Global Support Groups are emotionally connected as we stand for each other with trust and love. Our epidemiological research & clinical data analysis penetrate untapped sectors for eye-opening insights and acts as a catalyst for change in healthcare policies. With Covid – 19, we conduct awareness sessions, distribute masks, execute safety protocols and create a comprehensive list of Covid-19

Arani 2021/45

treatment infrastructure resources to help the patients.

## **What inspired you to start Breast Cancer Hub?**

Over the years, being a cancer research professor, I have realized how many lives are lost to breast cancer in women, men, or other types of cancers due to taboo, ignorance, lack of awareness leading to late detection, inaccessibility to healthcare facilities, and inaccurate diagnoses. My heart sank when I saw young moms dying of breast cancer due to late detection. All these concerns motivated me to resign in 2017 from my rewarding career and create Breast Cancer Hub as a full-time pro bono humanitarian service with a dream to save lives by making impactful sustainable changes working at the grassroots level by bridging the gap between the developed and the developing countries. I am grateful to our community for stepping up, supporting the cause and the mission of Breast Cancer Hub, driving the change [#TogetherWeSaveLives](#).

## **What is the biggest stump you've faced in this field and how did you overcome it?**

We have been focusing over the years on huge scientific discoveries with breast cancer, but we forget the basic fundamental problems of late detection and death. It's the stigma of using the word "breast". Besides shyness, the other major player for late detection is ignorance. No one discusses issues with breasts since uttering the word breast is taboo and awkward. The other major concerns are the underprivileged sectors in rural areas, ignored and deprived, with no idea about cancer signs and symptoms.

Addressing these concerns, I structured the goals of Breast Cancer Hub to provide sustainable solutions at the grassroots level and the methods including breast self-exam cards in local languages for both women and men of all age groups, simple solutions for underprivileged sectors who cannot afford other screening processes, and the same for the educated populace from urban sectors in the developing world who are hesitant to go for regular breast screening due to embarrassment and ignorance, therefore accepting the breast self-exam cards. We take accountability as I share my contacts everywhere so that anyone can reach out with any abnormalities so we can channelize, counsel, and support in helping save their lives.

## **What keeps you motivated in times of adversity?**

Our cancer fighters are my heroes, motivating me to push myself harder each day and to find ways to provide sustainable solutions and help them. In the villages we penetrated, from zero awareness to now everyone is alert and mindful after our outreaches and reach out to us with any anomalies immediately. We have become the bridge to connect with the healthcare system, treatment care, and counseling, helping save the lives of those who had no one to take care of them.

*Therefore, nothing in life can be more satisfying than to serve the people in utmost need, that is my greatest reward, persuades me even during the hardest adverse times.*

## **What were you like as a youngster and how did that affect who you are today?**

As a youngster, I grew up openly discussing health concerns with my family and my father being a pediatrician. I always heard him talking to the mothers about the importance of breast milk. I also got familiar with the word "cancer" since my maternal grandpa got identified with it when I was a kid and he was very open about diagnosis and treatment. Therefore, I never realized that beyond the four walls of my home, existed the huge barriers to the words "cancer" and "breast".

I was 12-years-old when my friend's mother passed away. At the funeral, when I asked someone the cause of death, to my surprise, people were hesitant to mention the word "cancer" and hushed me up when I repeated "breast cancer". I was shocked and wondered, "is this the respect we give to a mother who lost her life that we can't discuss the disease that cost her life?" It was an incident that left a mark.

The pain stayed within me and over the years I realized how cancer became a household name of a death sentence because of late detection. I wanted to go deeper and understand the etiology of cancer, discover the pathways to find a cure, and develop treatment therapy. I am always urged to educate society about the concept of early detection and preventable measures so that we can significantly reduce the death rate worldwide.

In my heart, I believed that targeting the culture enforced embarrassment which is the key to success. Therefore, my mantra became [#BreakTheBreastTaboo](#), [#BreakTheCancerTaboo](#), [#KnowYourBody](#) as the fundamentals of Breast Cancer Hub, creating an inclusive culture by incorporating the male breast cancer scenario equally and creating an impact.

## **How can the younger generation help the cause you're striving for?**

The youth are the torch bearers to take my message forward on early detection and prevention of cancer by spreading information in their network of family and friends. I have created diverse mentorship programs inculcating the art of scientific thinking and thought leadership to the students to help with their career goals and motivate them to serve the community. They are leaders executing impactful roles like volunteers, ambassadors, and interns practicing the simple steps to help save lives.

# A VERY SCARY MOMENT

By Shireen Collam

Think of any time  
When you didn't feel so fine  
You don't need to be shy  
Because I will tell you mine

It started one fine day  
I went outside to play  
I thought there was no rain  
And went anyway

My dad had no clue  
Where was little Rup  
How had he lost track so soon  
What to do

Out the garage he peeked  
There was the girl he sought  
A sigh of relief  
What I was doing he couldn't even believe

Inside you come  
You've had enough fun  
There is no sun  
So, in you must run

This I heard  
I wasn't scared  
At first  
But then his mood turned

So in I went  
To play in my tent  
With toys, I don't recall from where they were sent  
Then was an indescribable pain I felt

An ear-splitting scream  
Mother came to see  
Me crying in fear  
Of a horrifying nail tear

Split down the middle  
It hurt more than a little  
It was so brittle  
That even a band-aid was brutal

But don't worry, alas  
This thing healed fast  
But I have a faint scar to last  
And that is a scary moment from my past

Arani 2021/47

## TRAVEL DIARIES: COPENHAGEN- DENMARK By Aditya and Raina Saha



Summer of 2017, our memories drift back 4 years, when we visited Europe's most beautiful and cleanest city, Copenhagen. The city's swimming pool, which I initially thought to be a lake or a river, but discovered it's the city's GREAT BATH, craze of many youngsters. From the window of our hotel room, we could view folks diving in. Ah, how we wished, were few inches taller.

It amazed us to see people using very little public transport unlike other European cities. People took pleasure in riding their bicycles to work. We walked most of the time. Mission was to make it completely carbon free, wow! We walked about 10 miles each day to tour the city.

Our next discovery was that Copenhagen was the home to Legoland. Those days Raina and I crazed Legos, we built towers and cities out of the tiny bricks. We quickly focused on the history of this man-made wonder Did you know where Danish pastries originated? It's Denmark. Where Cigar Pipes originated? Denmark again!

River Nyhavn runs through Copenhagen. Cities most sought after eateries are nestled on the banks of Nyhavn. The river was constructed by Swedish prisoners from the Dano-Sweden war, in 1670.

The most prominent symbol of Copenhagen is a bronze sculpture known as Little Mermaid, near the residence of the Danish Royal family. Raina and I played for a long time in the palace courtyard.

If you like a ride in a carousel, you will be happy to know that the Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen has the highest carousels in the world. Not to miss some thrilling roller coasters to chill your nerves. My parents made sure we spent some time with animals, so we visited the Copenhagen Zoo. Flamingos and bears took most of our attention.

While flying back we had a mesmerizing aerial view of the Oresund Bridge. Absolutely breathtaking. This Bridge connects Copenhagen to the Swedish city of Malmo, home of our favorite soccer player Zlatan Ibrahimovic. It is just a ten minutes' drive from Copenhagen, wish we had known before. There is always a next time and my next trip will surely be Malmo, Sweden.





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## Essence of The Crown By Richa Sharma

*“while beauty catches the attention, character catches the heart...”*

Before being crowned the titles of mother, homemaker, schoolteacher, Mrs. India International, Bollywood actor, Tollywood actor, model, fashion icon, social activist, like many of you, I believed – and still do – I am a woman having the strength to change society, country and even the world.

*When God created woman, he was working late on that day... An Angel came by and asked.*

*“Why spend so much time on her?”*

*God answered: “Have you seen all the specifications I have to meet to shape her. She must function in all kinds of situations. She must be able to embrace several kids at the same time. Have a hug that can heal anything from a bruised knee to a broken heart. She must do all this with only two hands. She cures herself when sick and can work 18 hours a day.”*

*The Angel was impressed. “Just two hands....impossible! And this is the standard model?”*

*The Angel came closer and touched the woman, “But you have made her so soft, Lord”. “She is soft”, said God, “but I have made her strong. You can’t imagine what she can endure and overcome”.*

*“Can she think?” The Angel asked...God answered. “Not only can she think, she can reason and negotiate.”*

*The Angel touched her cheeks... “Lord, it seems this creation is leaking! You have put too many burdens on her”. “She is not leaking...it is a tear” God corrected the Angel. “What’s it for?” asked the Angel....God said. “Tears are her way of expressing her grief, her doubts, her love, her loneliness, her suffering and her pride.”*

*This made a big impression on the Angel, “Lord, you are a genius. You thought of everything. A woman is indeed marvellous,”*

*God said. “Indeed, she is. She has the strength that amazes a man. She can handle trouble and carry heavy burdens. She holds happiness, love, and opinions. She smiles when she feels like screaming. She sings when she feels like crying, cries when happy and laughs when afraid. She fights for what she believes in. Her love is unconditional. Her heart is broken when a next-of-kin or a friend dies but she finds the strength to get on with life”*

*The Angel asked, “So she is a perfect being?”. God replies, “No. She has just one drawback. She often forgets what she is worth.”*

While this portrayal is not originally mine, it neatly brings about the true essence of a woman. Yet, with the crown and title of Mrs. India International comes additional responsibilities. Society, in essence, puts their hope on the winner to empower women and youth and engage in social work by uplifting the underprivileged and marginalized in order to make a positive change. The “crown winner,” in essence, is expected to represent India, her rich culture, heritage and beauty in the best way possible on the international arena.

Thus, started my journey to independence... after I was born to a traditional Hindu family in Kanpur, India. Like many of us, I was dominated by “helicopter parents” and siblings. I believed early on that beauty pageants are one of the best platforms to shine. Winners are expected to represent their nation globally as a civilized, socialized and a unified nation. In addition, I believed that the winner must deliver positive news about India, while fulfilling their main responsibility for which they are selected. The overly layered make-up and long hanging curls don’t make girls prettier, their influential talk, character and attitude are a must that I thought they must bear apart from the life in lights and magazines. While beauty catches the attention, character catches the heart. Nevertheless, I was not allowed to participate in Miss Kanpur.

Shortly, after I graduated with a Master’s degree in Chemistry, without any input from me, I was married off in an arranged setting. I landed in Kolkata as a “housewife” and daughter-in-law in another orthodox setting. I became a schoolteacher, but my aspiration to participate in a beauty pageant did not fade away. I had to brave my way through if I wanted to achieve my dream. A friend, Shivalika Sharma, who herself won

pageant. I sent pictures to the organizers and was invited to Mumbai for my grooming sessions where I was trained by experts in the field. My daughter was nine years old at the time. Adrita Khanna, the organizer of the pageant, was also instrumental to my success as well. After winning the Mrs. India title, I went on to represent India at the Mrs. India International contest in Atlanta where I was crowned the winner.

When I decided to participate in the pageant in Atlanta, USA, I knew different doors would open for the winner and thus, more opportunities opened up, but expectations were to do something special, other than participate in a glamorous competition and avail the opportunity to make a mark in the ambitious world of cinema and fashion. Although I would get a chance to showcase my intelligence and beauty, I wanted to do something for the public good too. That is where I wanted to make my mark.

It is said that with power comes responsibilities. Since, I believe I didn’t win the crown and title just like that, but because of my great spirit and inspiring nature. Being an Indian woman has neither been a privilege nor a hurdle for me. I successfully emerged and received the rightful recognition at home, nationally and internationally for my endeavors since being the winner of the Mrs. India International 2011 pageant in Atlanta, USA. After gaining widespread respect and recognition as a Bollywood and Tollywood actor and a fashion icon, I am also the brand ambassador for David & Goliath, a film production house, an Italian wine, olives and olive oil company. Additionally, I serve as a role model for motivating and encouraging other women to reach newer heights regardless of their background or the hurdles they face. I won a number of awards and accolades including, but not limited to, Naari Shakti from L N Mittal, and accolades from Brahmin Samaj, Rotary Sadan, Gaurav Samman, and The Times of India Award to name a few. I continue to work tirelessly with several NGOs towards the development of less privileged women and children in and around Kolkata.

Recently, I was the lead actor in a short film, “Every 68 Minutes”. The message is close to my heart, the film introduces the harsh realities of the dowry system and domestic violence which are still a common practice among many households. Many women are the victims of domestic violence and abuse. Not only in rural areas but also it has been “normalized” by many upper-class households. Shamefully, domestic abuse is still very much existent behind the close doors of many Indian households. Those who come out or raise their voice against this violence are often shunned by society. Its impact is being felt globally. The film has been officially selected in a number of acclaimed national and international film festivals, such as Calcutta International Cult Film Festival, 2020, Crown Wood International Film Festival, 2020, Cult Critic Movie Awards, 2020, Golden Valley Global Cinefest, 2020, Global Cinema Festival, 2020, White Unicorn International Film Festival, 2020. I have four other films on women’s issues in production in which I will be playing the lead.

In 1929 Virginia Woolf wrote, *A Room of One’s Own*. In it, Woolf raised questions that remain relevant about the lives of men and women today. She said, “in a hundred years...women will have ceased to be the protected sex,” adding that, “logically they will take part in all the activities and exertions that were once denied them.” Hopefully, she is right, as she technically has until 2029 for her prediction to still be valid. Going further, she even suggested that “all

assumptions founded on the facts observed when women were the protected sex will have disappeared.” Though things have gradually gotten a lot better for women since the sixteenth century, yet, an essence of what Woolf said is still felt today, as many assume women will eventually fulfill the stereotype of being a “housewife,” bearing a child, meeting its needs, cooking, completing everyday household chores and attending to their husband and in-laws.

Thus, the true Essence of the Crown is to ensure our society appreciates women and their work, instead of putting them into the stereotype that women are only made for being a “housewife”. The true Essence of the Crown is to ensure women should not have to fit society’s expectations and stereotypes. Even though many in our society have a set of ideas about how we expect men and women to dress, behave, and present themselves, the true Essence of the Crown will ensure more women are climbing to the top of the world’s highest peaks, diving into the ocean’s depths, and skiing across both poles, but it wasn’t long ago that women were discouraged from taking on these formidable adventures. The true Essence of the Crown is to assist in eradicating those clichés and their associated behaviors that put a label on women.



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## MASHUP by Innerstyleguide -Madhavi Kumar.




We wish you  
shubho  
Sharodiya  
and happy  
Durga Puja!

*Bjaya*  
*Greetings!*

 Dola Paul  
PHOTOGRAPHY | VIDEOGRAPHY

Living in America I have realized that getting Indian clothes of your choice and size is a challenge. Keeping that in mind, here I have come up with three mix and match styles with the pieces available right in my closet. As the festive season arrives, we all need tons of attires, some we can buy and others we can create!

Hope you like the looks and try them.

1)EARTHLING: This outfit is a total mashup of different pieces coming together from a wide range of places and times. Blouse belonged to a saree, the stole came with some other outfit and the gold lehenga was just there. Sustainable fashion is an art and whenever I can come up with something like this it gives me immense happiness and I feel like a responsible earthling.

2)KRISHNA: This look is dedicated to Krishna. This style is easier to tie than it seems. The Saree is almost over two decades old. I paired it up with a mirrored vest from my closet. To bring newness I wore this saree in a dhoti style and tied a plain blue belt to give a contemporary feel. Wore the chunky anklets as the statement accessory.

3)FUSION FIESTA: Wearing this 20 years old chamois satin saree with silver net palazzo pants, and grey knitted crop top. Completed the look with a floral brooch, a cute, beaded belt, pearl earrings, and crystal bangles. Keeping the look simple, as for me less is more. Also, the palazzos were made of a saree and the crop top has seen many seasons. Someone said- Keep the classic pieces, you never know when they touch an outfit to turn it new!

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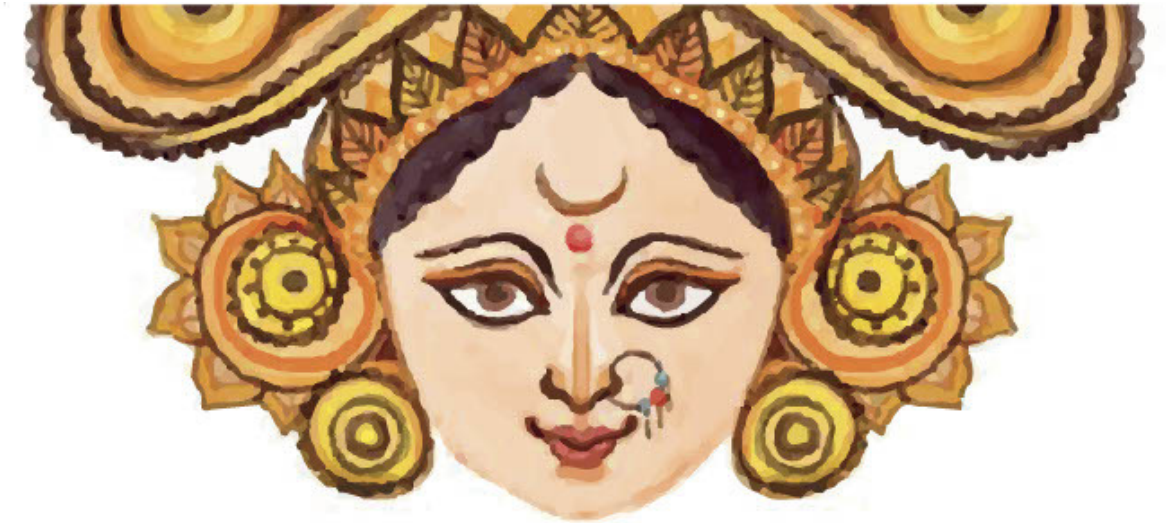
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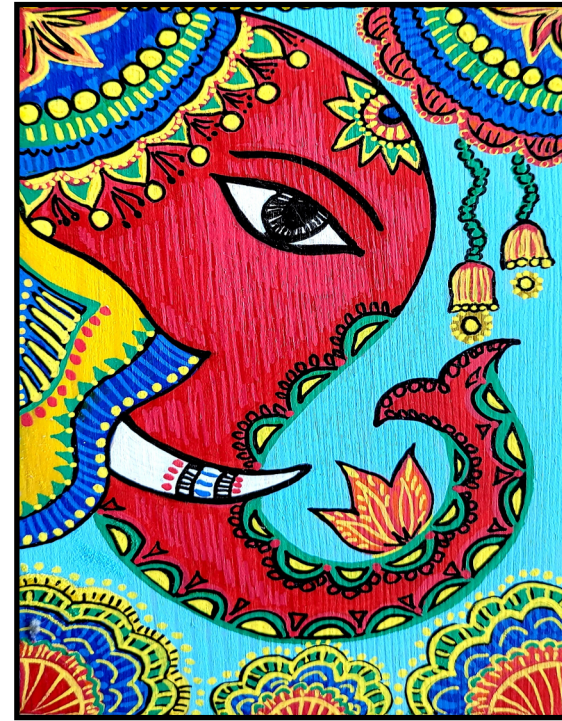
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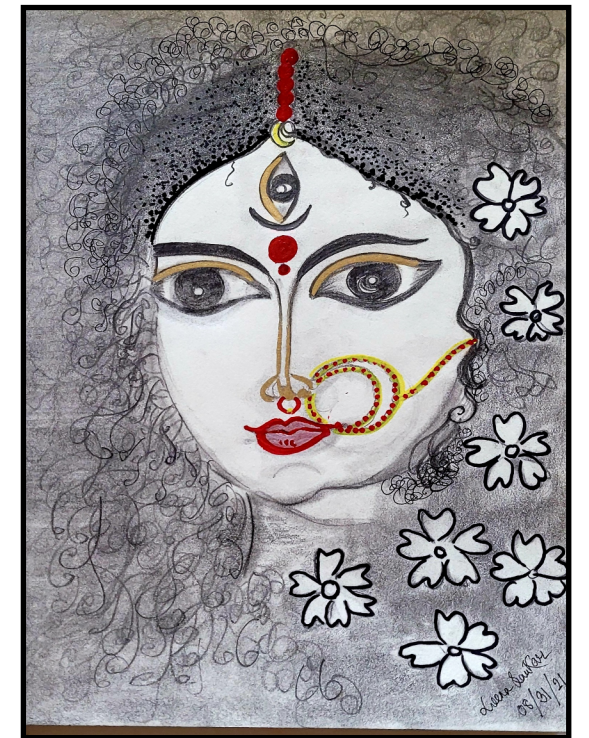
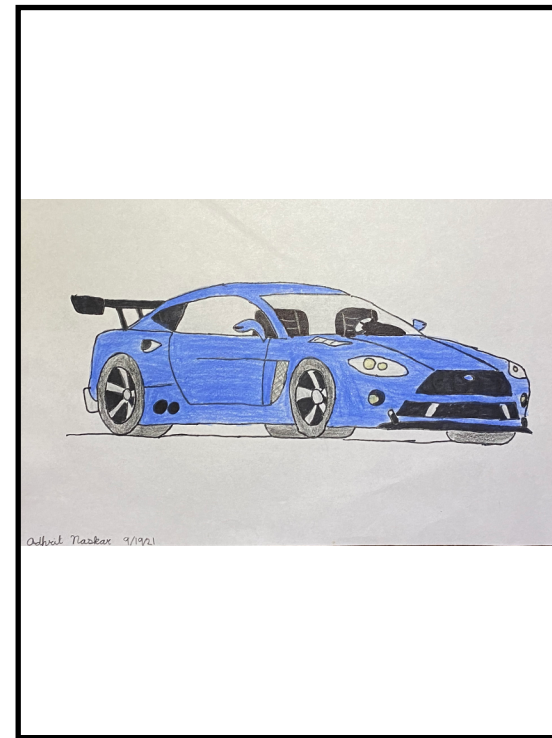
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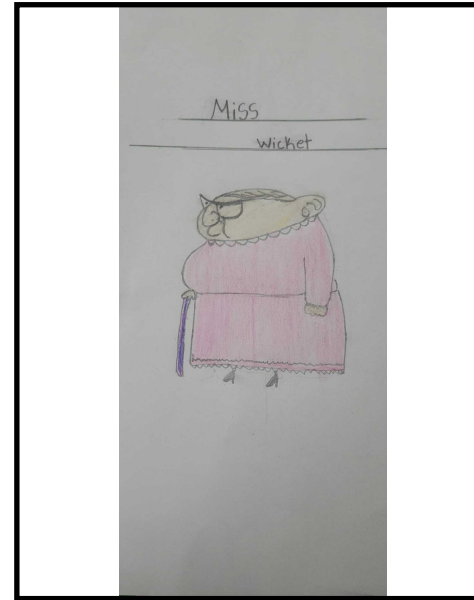
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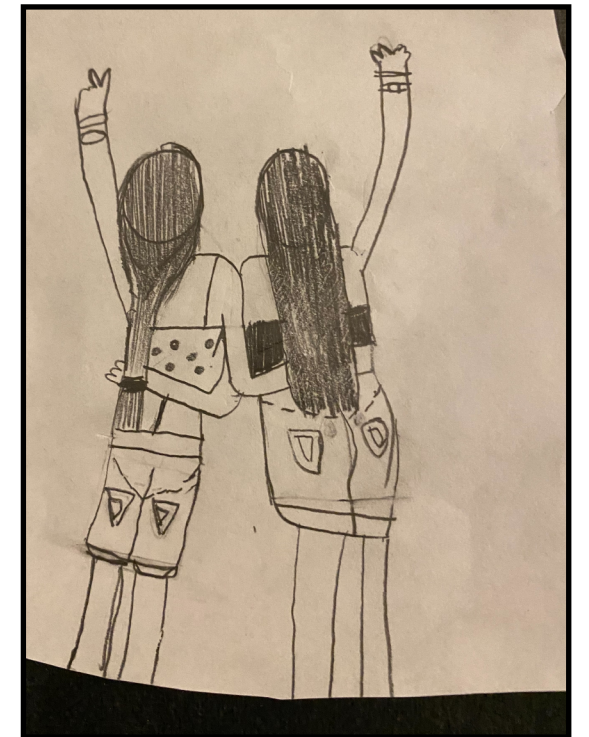
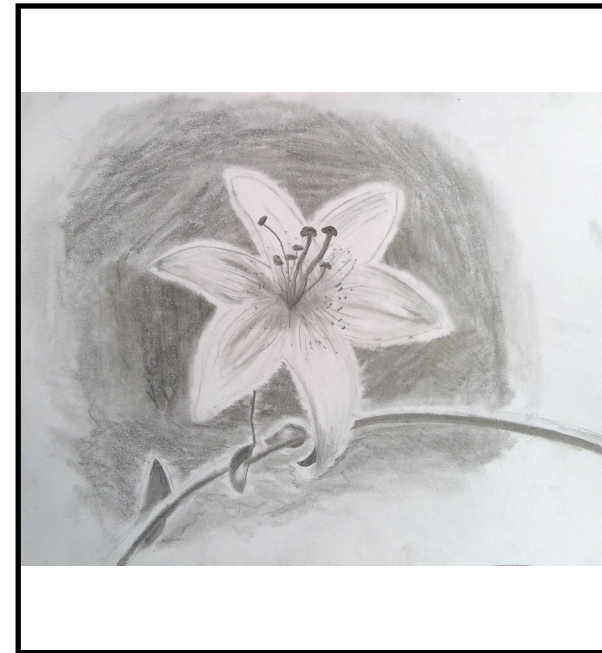
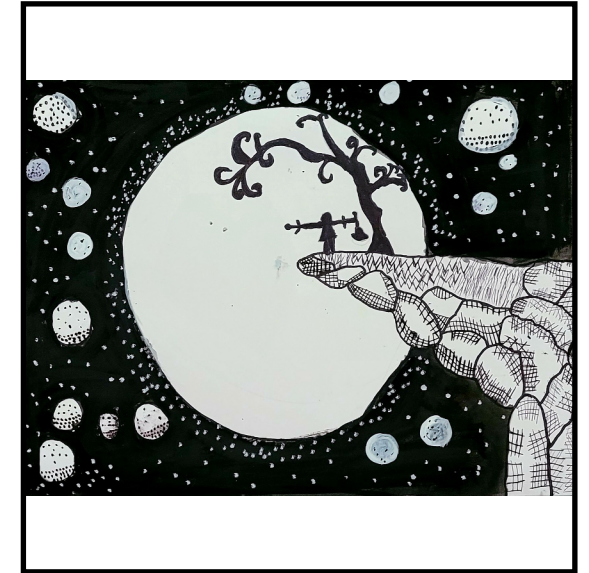
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# PHOTOGRAPHY BY SOUVIK CHATTERJEE



## A Place We Call Home

### Photographs by Subhadeep Mukherjee

North Carolina may have pulled us here for different reasons, but the natural beauty of this state is a convincing reason to stay and even put roots down. Subhadeep Mukherjee, an amateur photographer has captured the splendor of the beaches, the mountains, and the piedmont through his camera lens.





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