

# RISE & Shine

THE ANNUAL MAGAZINE  
2024 ISSUE



RONGBONG



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# *Editor's notes*

It's a nostalgic moment. It takes me back to the year 2014 when a motley bunch of like-minded and equally enthusiastic Bengalis formed a small group and called ourselves RONG BONG. It's been a decade since then and this tribe of enthusiastic and committed group grew in numbers and thoughts. As we gradually moved on and gained momentum, the sense of social responsibility and cultural engagement became stronger. In 2022, we formed Rongbong Initiative for Sociocultural Initiative (RISE)

Our aim was to provide a platform where diverse voices can be heard, where we can immerse ourselves in the complexities of different cultures, and where critical discussions about societal changes and cultural transformations can thrive. We want to go beyond headlines and hashtags, delving into the realm of our surroundings, contribute and make an honest and sincere effort to contribute. As RISE, we participated in a few environmental cleaning and awareness drives. We have associated with Jeevan Samvardhan Foundation, an NGO working for the welfare of homeless girls, and Kshamata Foundation who relentlessly are rescuing girls from the dark shadows of human trafficking and forced prostitution. Additionally, we are associated with Karunya Trust, where we had the opportunity to plant 100 saplings of Mango, Guava, Lemon and Java Plum (Jamun) at Anepada and Tarwadi village in Thane district.

These endeavours helmed by the enthusiastic members of RISE gave rise to the need to express ourselves through a combination of thought-provoking articles, interviews with cultural icons, and in-depth features. We aim to also engage the younger generation by inviting them to participate in creative ways and involve them in the cultural expedition of RISE. These thoughts amalgamate to develop this publication, with the sincere hope of engaging you in conversations that matter.

Welcome to our first issue of RISE and SHINE, a magazine born from the belief that the stories we tell, the traditions we hold, and the societal shifts we witness all shape the way we experience our shared humanity. In an era defined by rapid technological advancements, globalization, and shifting cultural norms, it has never been more crucial to examine the rich tapestry of the societies we live in—both historically and in the present.

In this first issue, we focus on a kaleidoscope of thoughts revolving around traditions in a modern context. From the revival of indigenous art forms to the reimagining of festivals in the digital age, we explore how ancient practices are finding new meanings in contemporary life. We celebrate this year, the 3000-year-old artform of Pattachitra. Through these narratives, we hope to offer a mosaic of perspectives that reflect the beauty and complexity of cultural evolution.

Culture is not static. It breathes, it grows, it adapts. Through the pages of RISE & SHINE, we invite you to embark on this journey with us—to explore, to question, and most importantly, to understand. Our magazine will be an annual gathering of ideas, and we hope it will serve as both a reflection of the world as it is and a blueprint for what it can become.

Thank you for joining us in this exciting new endeavour. We look forward to the conversations, insights, and stories that the coming years will bring.

Tapan Roychoudhury,  
Chairman-RISE



RONG BONG  
DURGOTSAV



राष्ट्रपति  
भारत गणतंत्र  
**PRESIDENT  
REPUBLIC OF INDIA**

**Message**

On the auspicious occasion of Durga Puja, I extend my warm greetings and best wishes to all Indians living in India and abroad.

Durga Puja is celebrated as victory of good over evil. Goddess Durga is considered the symbol of Shakti. It is a festival of devotion and during this period we take our spiritual journey to a higher level of consciousness. This festival is an occasion to fully devote ourselves to Goddess Durga and promote unity and understanding among all religions.

Let us pray that Maa Durga give us strength, courage and determination to create a just, sensitive and equitable society.

On this auspicious occasion of propitiating Mahashakti, let us resolve to treat women with utmost respect & regard.

**(Droupadi Murmu)**

**New Delhi  
03 October, 2024**



सत्यमेव जयते

प्रधान मंत्री  
Prime Minister  
MESSAGE

**Pranaams at the Divine Feet of *Maa Durga*!**

It is heartening to learn about *Durga Puja* celebrations – one of the most important festivals of the Indian spiritual calendar. Heartiest greetings and best wishes to all the organisers of Rongbong Initiative For Sociocultural Excellence on this sublime occasion that marks *Maa Durga's* victory over evil.

A tribute to the divine, resplendent form of *Maa Durga*, this festival brings about an inner transformation in Her devotees, inspiring them to strengthen their innate goodness and filling them with new energy. It binds people with the common strand of devotion and spiritual emotion.

From *Mahalaya* to *Bijoya Dashami*, the celebrations showcase our glorious culture and traditions. The grand festivities transform temples and streets into vibrant hubs of activity, with artistically decorated pandals constructed on different themes, beautifully sculpted idols of *Maa Durga* and music and dance performances that keep the large audiences spellbound.

A symbol of social unity and coming together of communities, *Durga Puja* inspires us to march ahead with unity, harmony and mutual respect. It is a festival that celebrates *Nari Shakti* and conveys the power of women to achieve anything that they set their mind to.

May *Maa Durga* inspire an inner awakening in each one of us, bringing peace, hope and happiness. May She continue to shower Her blessings and grace upon humanity.

(Narendra Modi)

New Delhi  
आश्विन 06, शक संवत् 1946  
28 September, 2024

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Chairman  
Rongbong Initiative For Sociocultural Excellence  
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মমতা ব্যানার্জী  
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শারদ শুভেচ্ছা

২৬ সেপ্টেম্বর, ২০২৪



“শারদপ্রাতে শিউলি দিগন্তে  
মা আসুক, উৎসারিত আলোকে”

এলো আবার খুশির খবর, পুজোর সময় এলো কাছে। দুলবে আবার কাশের বন, ভাসবে আবার সাদা মেঘের ভেলা। শরতের টুকরো মেঘের আড়াল সরিয়ে ভোরের আকাশ হবে আলোকময়। ঢাকের তালে, আগমনীর সুরে, মা আসবেন সবার ঘরে।

শারদোৎসব আমাদের কাছে উৎসবের থেকেও অনেক বেশি। এ এমন আবেগ, যা সকলকে এক করে দেয়। তাই জাতি-ধর্ম নির্বিশেষে, বাঁধ-ভাঙা আনন্দ উচ্ছ্বাসে, সবাই মিলে আমরা ভাগ করে নেবো পুজোর আনন্দ – আনন্দ-উদ্দীপনার সঙ্গে পালন করব আমাদের শ্রেষ্ঠ উৎসব, দুর্গাপূজো।

প্রার্থনা করি, দশপ্রহরণধারিণীর বরাভয়ে আলোকিত হোক বিশ্ব চরাচর, দূর হয়ে যাক সব মলিনতা। আনন্দময়ীর আবির্ভাবে ধরিত্রী হোক প্রাণময়ী। ঘরে ঘরে বেজে উঠুক শঙ্খধ্বনি, জ্বলে উঠুক আশার প্রদীপ। উমা মায়ের শাস্ত্রত অভয়বার্তা বয়ে আনুক অপার সুখ, শান্তি, সংহতি, সমৃদ্ধি আর একতার বার্তা।

আপনাদের শারদোৎসবের আয়োজন সফল হবে, এই আশা রাখি। সকলকে জানাই শারদীয়ার প্রীতি, ভালবাসা ও শিউলি শুভেচ্ছা, আর অনেক অনেক অভিনন্দন।

(মমতা ব্যানার্জী)

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# Pattachitra

The venue decoration of RongBong Durgotsav 2024 was themed on Pattachitra, an ancient visual art form from Eastern India. Pattashilpa, a combination of both visual and performing arts, involves paintings on cloth scrolls, subjects spanning across religion, mythology, history and current affairs, which are displayed by the artisans with an accompaniment of relevant songs. The

tradition is often deemed as the first form of audiovisual animation.



All materials of Pattachitra art are sourced from nature. Vegetable colours are used to paint on recyclable canvases. Governments and agencies are currently facilitating Pattashilpa exponents in order to revive this eco-friendly art tradition, which was on a decline over the last few decades of the past century.

The Durgotsav decoration this year included scrolls, canvases, plates and baskets, all painted in the Pattachitra style, and was appreciated by everyone who laid an eye on them. The work was planned and executed under the guidance of Suchishubhrangan, an art and craft school associated with RISE for a long time.



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# *Importance of Sharing*

Sharing is super important; it lights up our day,  
it spreads joy and kindness, like sunshine in May.  
With a sandwich from Mom or a toy we can lend,  
we giggle with our buddies, showing love to our friends.

It's not just about giving; it's about making hearts shine,  
helping others feel cheerful, letting kindness align.  
A smile, a nice word, or some time that we share,  
in all the little moments, love is everywhere.

When we share what we have, no matter how small,  
we bring happiness to others and feel connected to all.  
New friendships blossom, and our hearts start to sing,  
because sharing, my friends, is an amazing thing!

*- Avishkar Das*

# *My Pet Dinosaur*

One day, I and my family went to Kolkata Science City. We went inside a tall building and there were structures of prehistoric creatures, including Parasaurolophus, Indominus Rex, Argentinosaurus and Stegosaurus.

I was startled to see so many prehistoric creatures! One of the Argentinosauruses was about to take the milkshake from my hand! I ran until I got trapped in the mouth of the Indominus Rex!  
We came home and I went to sleep early as it was a long day!

That night I was woken up by a strange sound! As I looked behind, I saw my bag was moving! I opened it and a baby Parasaurolophus popped out of nowhere!!! I was terrified at first, but afterwards I saw it was harmless! I played with it all night and at 10:00 next morning, the alarm rang!

I woke up to realise that we must go to science City today!

*- Advik Samaddar*



# *Sharing*

Sharing is a good habit. Kindness spreads with sharing. Those who know the value of sharing, also know how to increase kindness. If someone shares with those who don't, even they may get to know and share with more. Sharing is a way to spread kindness from just one person to a whole crowd! Sharing not just spreads kindness, but also makes everyone stay in peace. Sharing is caring. What if your friend is sad and you share something with him? How will your friend feel?

To find out, let us try to understand the importance of sharing. Imagine your friend has no one to play with and you start playing with him. He will be happy and will also get to know how to share that happiness with another friend. Sharing not only

spreads through people, but also through places. Places often fill kindness inside you and your heart. Sharing has so much value that it can spread kindness in the whole world. How would you feel if you have no toys to play with? Obviously, you would feel sad. Now, how would you feel if your brother or sister shared one with you? You would be happy. The emotion which you are showing now means you got the kindness that your brother or sister gave. What if your old friend is new in your society and he/she can't make any friends? What if you have a good friend whom you introduce to him? You will see the simile on his face.

*- Aryaraj Rajak*

# Mental health

Mental health is mental well-being, which allows us to handle stress, learn things well and make healthy choices. We also have some ways to prevent stress and keep our brains stress-free and relaxed in all ways.

Wake up in the morning, pray to God and remain blessed for what we have. Don't think about unnecessary things, look at the green trees outside, hear birds chirping and listen to calm, soft music. Go to the window, feel the fresh air and think about all the greenery and world's peace. You can make your mental health better by doing all these -- don't take stress and don't think about small things. Play with good friends and don't watch anything that makes you sad.

- *Ayaan Bhattacharjee*



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# *A memorable trip to Rameshwaram*

I was very excited on the day we started our trip. We boarded the Chennai Express that started from Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminal to Chennai Egmore Junction. Soon after we boarded the train, the guard blew his whistle and the train started moving! I felt very happy to start our journey. Going to Chennai was only the first half of our journey. From Chennai, we had to catch another train to go to Rameshwaram. The train slowly started gathering speed. I started looking out of the window. We had two lower seats and an upper berth. The family travelling with us had the two upper berths. The mother of the family requested us to give them the second window seat because her son wanted to look through the

window. Having no other choice, my mother had to give up her seat. Out of the window, I could see lush green fields, trees, plants, villages, large rocky, mountains, towns and much more. The reason I love train journeys so much is that I can see so many sights that I can draw later on and we get to interact with so many different kinds of people. After looking out of the window for some time, I began to feel hungry. I ate some chips and a bar of chocolate, and then I started reading a book.

I woke up at 9:30 the next morning. My parents were sitting on the lower bunk, drinking tea. I too got down to the lower bunk and packed my bag because the train would reach Chennai

within one hour. In Chennai, we saw the old Parliament house built by the British. We boarded another train from Chennai to Rameshwaram. This journey was going good and I was curious to see what awaited us at Rameshwaram. Out of the window, I could see that we were travelling on land when suddenly the view changed and I saw we were travelling on a bridge. Papa said that we were travelling on the Pamban Bridge, a massive bridge was made so that tourists could cross the sea to go to Rameshwaram, which is an island. In the Pamban bridge, there is a section that opens to allow ships to pass. We soon reached Rameshwaram station. We took our entire luggage and got off the train. We booked a cab which

took us to the hotel where we checked in. We changed our clothes and went to the divine Rameshwaram temple which was built by Lord Rama to perform penance to Shiva to cleanse his sin of killing Ravana, a learned man. There are 22 Kundas or wells in which if you take a dip in every one of them, you will get cleansed of the sins in your previous life and this life. We hired a panda, who took a bucket full of water from each of the wells and poured it over our heads. I enjoyed the bath because it was a hot and sunny day and the cool water felt refreshing. After coming out of the temple, we went back to the hotel and ate lunch at a restaurant named 'Vitamin R' and I could remember the name because of its delicious Paneer preparation.

The next day early morning we went

to the Dhanushkodi beach and I came to know that Sri Lanka is only 13km away. The sand was white in colour and the sea was brilliant blue. I saw a lovely orange sun rising from the deep blue sea. A ray of sunlight was coming through the clouds and it felt like god was giving his blessings to us. I collected sea shells and various types of stones. We walked on the beach and reached the ghost city which was destroyed by a cyclone in 1964. We saw a ruined church, clock tower, railway station and a few huts in that city. Then we visited Bibhishan Temple, Gandhamadan Parbat, Shita Kund and Laxman Temple where I was surprised to see a floating rock! The whole day we travelled around the city and I had a good time at Dr Abdul Kalam Museum. In the evening we went on a boat ride and witnessed the sunset in the middle

of the sea. It was so enchanting that I still remember it to this day. By the time we returned, it was night and it was a full moon night. Suddenly, there was a power cut. There was no other source of light except the moon. It was such a mesmerizingly beautiful scene. The waves were lit by the moonlight and I felt as if I were in a fairy tale. Soon the light came back and we returned to the hotel. For dinner, we had Shahi Paneer and rice, which was very tasty. After eating, we went to sleep. The next day was the day to leave Rameshwaram. I felt quite sad to leave but I knew that I could come back again one day.

*- Ojasvi Roy*



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# *The Lonely Fish*



There was once a fish named Luna. She was a solitary and shy fish. She was a little nervous because it was the last day of summer vacations and she was looking forward to making new friends at school. 10:00...11:00...12:00. Luna couldn't sleep. She started counting down from hundred. Slowly her eyelids started to get heavy and her body entered rest mode. She suddenly opened her eyes. It was 6 am. "Time for school", she thought gloomily. She quickly got up, took a bath and got



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ready. It was 6:45 am. She went down with her grandfather, George, and sat down beside him on a big coral bench. They lived on the Coral Coast. One of the most beautiful coral reefs in the world.

A sudden thought struck Luna's mind, "Baba, what if I'm not able to make any friends in school? I will be very lonely." Her grandfather said "Don't worry. Who wouldn't want to be friends with such a funny and beautiful fish? Maybe you will even have a boyfriend by year-end. Who knows!" "Baba! It's not funny!" Luna said. George chuckled.

Soon the school submarine arrived. She kissed George goodbye and boarded the submarine. She looked at all the corals and thought, "How beautiful! I hope my day is as wonderful as these corals". She reached school. "The Jellyfish Cram High School", she read. She entered class. Mrs. Rawls was the class teacher. She sat beside a timid-looking girl and said "Hi!"

The girl fish grunted. When Luna asked her her name she said "Oh can you leave me alone, I had enough of your 'getting to know me' attitude. Bore off!" Luna was a little taken aback by this. She was a little sad. She sat alone for the rest of the day on her bench. Everyone ignored her.

It was recess. Luna was feeling very left out and away from action. Even during PE, no one took her in their team. She returned to her bench after having the lunch of dried worms her mother had packed for her and opened her bag to keep her tiffin box. She was surprised to see what was inside--A beautiful blue seashell! "Who could have left this here?", she thought. She reached back home. George, her grandfather, was there to pick her up. She was swimming to her house. George noticed how puzzled and silent Luna was.

He asked her "Luna, what happened at school today?"

"Just the usual." Luna replied, "Baba, today when I opened my bag, I found a blue seashell inside it. Look!" Luna showed George the seashell

"Looks like you have got a secret admirer, Luna!" George smiled.

"I dunno baba..." Luna said.

It was Tuesday, the second day of school. Luna entered her classroom and found a small purple coral on her desk. On Wednesday, she found a purple bottle cap. This continued

till Friday and on that day something amazing happened! Luna was swimming through the halls of her school when suddenly someone kicked her from behind.

"So, you're the lonely one, eh? What was your name again? Lucia, Loretta, oh Luna! So, you have no friends which means you can be kicked and slapped and punched without any problems. I enjoy kicking others, you look like a good punching bag!"

"Stop right there!", said a kid from Luna's grade.

"And you are?"

"Berschand, Zachovick Berschand."

"So, some puny Russian with a funny accent thinks he can stop me!? Hahahaha!!!!!"

"You do not dare disrespect Berschand, you bully! Now go before Berschand calls a teacher!" said Berschand.

"Ugh fine, but this is not our final meeting!"

Berschand helped Luna up. "So," said Luna "are you always up to saving people?"

"Actually, Berschand never has saved anyone except you Luna", said Berschand.

"Hope zat you have appreciated the givts that Berschand sent you!"

"Oh! So, it was you!" Berschand gave an affirmative nod.

"Yes, they are very cute, thanks! Say Berschand, would you like to come to my home today?" Luna asked.

"Why, of corze!"

"Cmon then!"

When they reached home Luna introduced Berschand to George. George talked to Berschand for a bit and then turned to Luna. "Your new friend is very nice!"

"He is not my friend, he is a miracle!" Luna said.

George chuckled, "Remember Luna, friendship isn't a big thing - it's a million little things!"

*- Aarav Mishra*

*Book Review:*

# *JK Rowling's Harry Potter Series*

This is my review of JK Rowling's Harry Potter series of seven novels.

The Harry Potter series is truly stunning and proves why it was a bestseller. It has the right mix of humour, fantasy, magic and modernity and a little bit of romance and imagination.

It tells us of the journey of an orphan boy who lives with his domineering uncle, aunt and an annoying cousin. It speaks of a hidden world of magic so obvious, yet so impossible. And yet the impossible does become possible.

A magical world full of blissful sights, strange creatures, powerful beings and a bit of dark humour elevate the novels. But where there are light and happy sights, there are also dark places that exist.

The one thing that terrified me a bit was the concept of a Horcrux. The idea of splitting a soul into several pieces, eight if you count Voldemort's case, truly disgusted me. I was also appalled at how Harry's cousin Dudley went from bullying him at the start to finally respecting and holding a bit of love for

him. Funny what a creator can do with his creations!

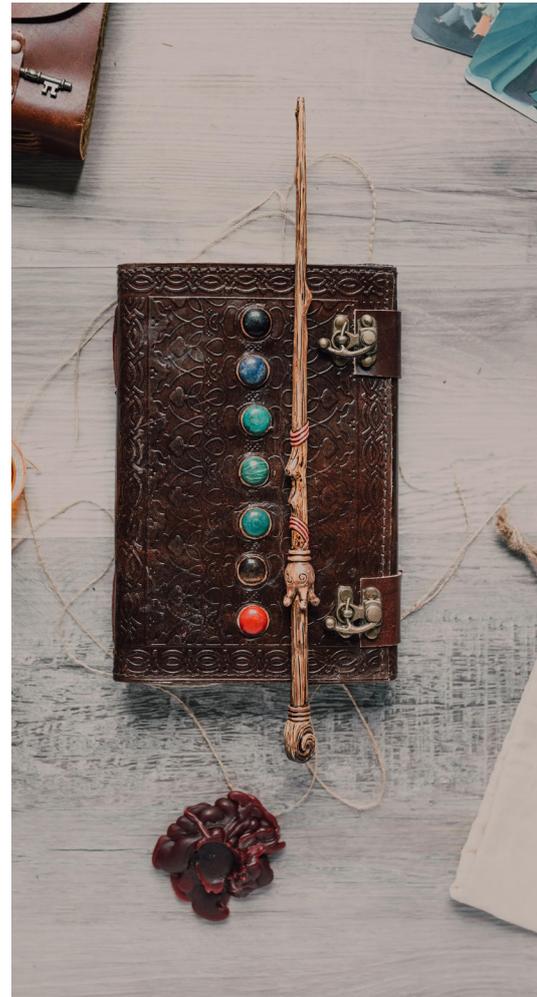
I also liked how the creator tried Harry out with numerous girls like Parvati Patil, Cho Chang & finally Ginny Weasley, although I am sometimes reminded of the terrifying image of Ron from the books when he walked in on Harry & Ginny (Ron's sister) "snogging".

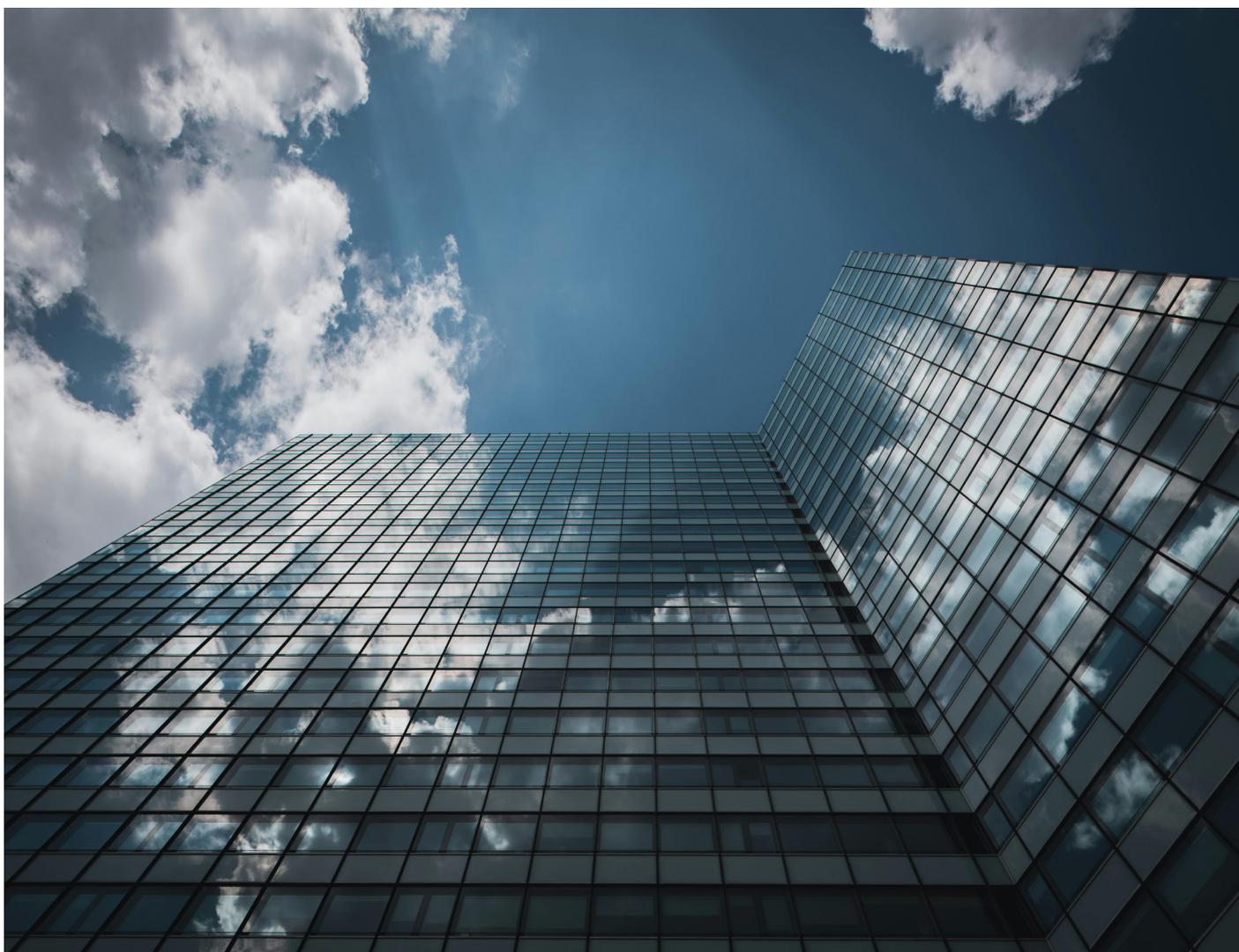
I also like how she displayed the main trio's character in three houses - Hufflepuff for Ron because he stayed true to his friends; Ravenclaw for Hermione who is sharper in logic than even the strongest wizards; and Slytherin for Harry as he, as Dumbledore stated, has a certain disregard for rules.

Joanne K. Rowling has truly created a bestselling series for generations to come.

May everyone enjoy Harry's journey as I have...

*- Nairit Ganguly*





# *What is a Cause?*

After completing a gruelling day at an internship in Corporate Mumbai and travelling around a hundred kilometres, round-trip, this funny question popped into my mind.

Is the fact that an upstanding member of society got brutalised with god and the government watching? Or is it the violation of the delicate sensibilities of a community who thought their city would never see such a day, a cause?

Why, we were asked, why take to the roads, when it was just one woman? Why should the men care - hogi unki behen/maasi/maa jo bhi, unhe kya? Do the celebrities really need more publicity? Perhaps the fact that young citizens just need a reason to shed responsibility and sloganeer is the cause.

However let me tell you, if you're human and have some breath left in you, your heart will shake and your knees will buckle at every instance of brutality.

We were not meant to be this aloof from each other that we forget that even one member of the pack hurt will cause untold damage to the rest. We were never meant to not share grief, our hands were designed to hold not to hurt.

So this author will remark this, maybe the cause doesn't exist, but most likely, our crumbling society just desperately needs a reason to burn.

***- Ambika Roychowdhury***

# *Engage Your Child: The Power of Gamification*

Gamification and game-based learning are transforming the educational landscape by integrating game principles into learning environments to boost engagement and motivation. Both approaches leverage elements traditionally found in games to make educational experiences more interactive and enjoyable, addressing some of the challenges of traditional teaching methods.

Gamification involves incorporating game-like features such as points, badges, leaderboards, and progress tracking into non-game contexts, including educational settings. By embedding these elements into learning activities, educators create a more dynamic environment that encourages students to stay engaged. For example, a classroom might use a point system to reward students for completing assignments or participating in discussions. This system fosters a sense of competition and achievement, motivating students to engage more actively

with the material. The use of badges and leaderboards can further incentivize progress and mastery, making learning more interactive and goal-oriented.

Game-based learning, on the other hand, uses actual games designed with educational goals in mind. These games are crafted to teach specific concepts or skills through interactive scenarios and problem-solving tasks. For instance, simulation games can allow students to experience historical events or complex scientific processes in a virtual environment, enhancing their understanding through hands-on experience. By immersing students in game-based scenarios, educators can create a more engaging and memorable learning experience. These games often include elements such as quests, challenges, and rewards, which make learning fun and motivating.

Both gamification and game-based learning capitalise on the intrinsic

motivations associated with games, such as exploration, competition, and reward. This approach can cater to diverse learning styles, providing opportunities for visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners to engage with content in different ways. The interactive and often collaborative nature of these methods also fosters social learning and teamwork.

Ultimately, gamification and game-based learning offer innovative ways to enhance educational experiences. By making learning more engaging and enjoyable, these methods can improve student motivation, deepen understanding, and support academic success. As educational technology continues to advance, these approaches are likely to become increasingly integral to effective teaching and learning strategies.

*- Amrita Sengupta*

# *Lobe-Love*

In Mumbai's bustling, crowded lanes,  
Lived a man with non-Bengali veins.  
He married a Bengali belle, so sweet,  
With fish and sweets, she was not the one to get defeat.

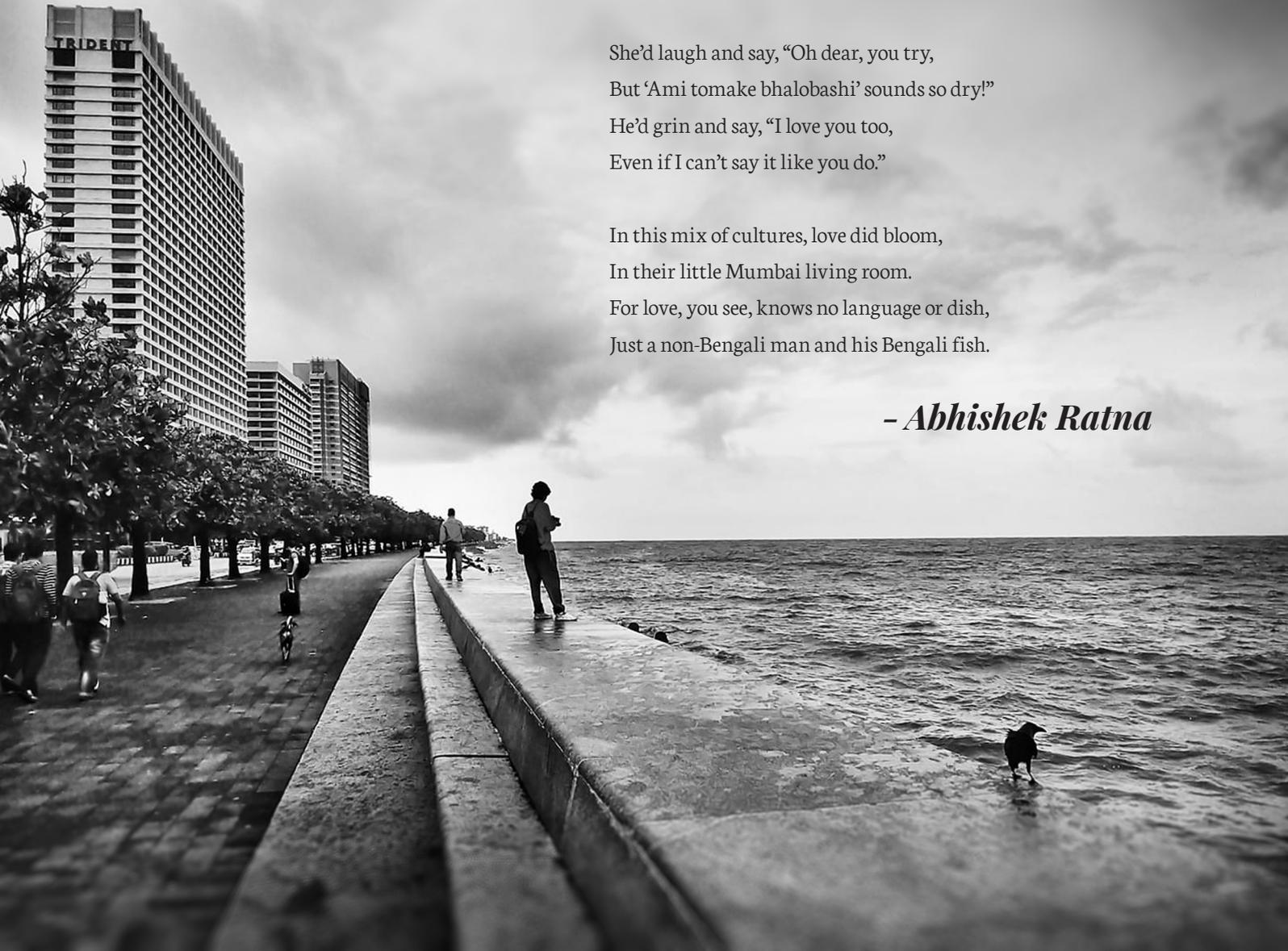
He loved his roti, she loved her rice,  
He thought her fish curry was quite nice.  
But when she spoke in rapid Bengali,  
He'd nod and smile, feeling quite jolly.

Her family came with traditions grand,  
Durga Puja, Rabindra Sangeet, all so planned.  
He danced in dhoti, tried to sing along,  
But his accent made the lyrics all wrong.

She'd laugh and say, "Oh dear, you try,  
But 'Ami tomake bhalobashi' sounds so dry!"  
He'd grin and say, "I love you too,  
Even if I can't say it like you do."

In this mix of cultures, love did bloom,  
In their little Mumbai living room.  
For love, you see, knows no language or dish,  
Just a non-Bengali man and his Bengali fish.

*- Abhishek Ratna*



# *The Power of Meaning*

At the dawn of 2021, I had to think of something appropriate, something that we could relate with where we are in our lives today, it could not be juvenile, nor overly matured to not be able to try or not reflect. I thought why not take up MEANING as a subject to ponder on...

General understanding is that the Purpose of Life is to pursue happiness and if you are successful in life then you will automatically be happy. So, we went in search of success, thereby in search of ideal work or business opportunity, perfect home, perfect wife or husband and other material pursuits indicating success, thereby indicating being happy...

Chasing happiness can also make people unhappy, lead to suicides, anxiety, hopelessness, emptiness for which you may not necessarily be clinically depressed to feel it. So, what truly makes people Happy?

Martin Seligman said "Meaning comes from belonging to and serving something beyond yourself and from developing the best in you."

Research says, those who have meaning in life are more resilient, do better in school and at work, and even live longer. (Yes! live longer... if you have

heard of IKIGAI, it's a Japanese secret to meaningful life. Okinawa in Japan has the highest life expectancy in the world, and maximum centenarians. More about this another time)

So how do we live meaningfully? Meaning that makes us 'Happy' and helps improve our wellbeing. Psychology, neurology, philosophy all put together suggest a few pointers, or you may call indicators, which are rock solid to understand and pursue a meaningful life.

1. **Relationships** - This is the 'numero uno' indicator of Happiness. Relationship is where we belong, we can cultivate our belonging with friends, family, peers etc. My relationships with all are good and I am good at connecting and maintaining it -- that's what we are thinking right now isn't it? Think some more... small details like... Are we looking into our phone while some one is talking to us? Or someone wishes 'good morning' and we just nod without wishing back, or say a friend reaches out to seek solace or advice and we let it pass thinking my friend does not need it or he may disregard... Leave things to assumptions with

family members or friends rather than having a clear communication, build wrong expectations from relations around us. What we have done is we have devalued the relationship, made them invisible, giving a feeling of unworthy, disrespect to the relationship... Relationship is the most essential source of meaning, those that bond with family and with friends? Each of us sure have a couple of those 2 a.m. friends, don't you? Well! I do.

2. **Purpose** - It's less about what you want than what you give. Someone has a purpose to feed stray dogs and cats while some have a purpose of nursing or healing unwell people. My wife's purpose was to give her time to raise the kids. So, the key to purpose is to use your strength to serve others. Purpose gives you some "WHY" to drive you forward.

3. **Worldliness** - This is where you feel connected to the higher reality. This is where you want to seek answer to your question "Who am I"? NO, NO, NO I am not saying being religious or going to the Himalayas to seek nirvana, nope... Each of us experience that in our regular life. Personally, I go off to a Kumbh Mela all by myself, when



I spent a week in the wilderness of a Jungle, when I write, I lose the sense of time and place. What do you do that gives you such a feel? What takes you in a FLOW, what gives a sense of you, being you...

**4. Writing or Storytelling** - This is my favourite. Creating situations from your own life events bring clarity to you, you will know how you became you. My life may be a sequence of events, but I can edit, interpret and retell my story even if I am constrained by my facts. Look at the autobiographies that are told. They are always with a twist or a difference. You may end up writing your story defined by redemption, growth and love. I always say that our life is made of stories, it's full of them, right from the moment we are born.

*Let's retell it and find our meaning through it...*

How would you do any or all the above? Some may need a therapist. I say do your own reflection and introspection thoughtfully, how it shaped you, what you lost, what you gained. Not everything will be goody, goody, there would also be pain. BUT, embracing those lead to new insights and wisdom, to find that good that

sustained you right through... So having a meaning in life is an ongoing process. We are constantly creating our lives, each day and adding to our stories. HOWEVER, you may get off track, what do you do then? Let me share what I do.

It was 1991. My elder sister's husband (I call him Swapan da) met with a fatal accident on the Jaipur Delhi Highway. While returning from his factory at Bhiwadi in a minibus, in which there were about seven people, three died on the spot including the MD's brother-in-law. Only four people survived. It was a near death experience for them. It was Batra Hospital, Delhi where he was hospitalized. My parents and I rushed there to be alongside them. Swapan da was under strong sedation because of multiple fractures, right from his pelvic bone, his right leg was broken into multiple pieces, a couple of fractures in his left leg, rib cage badly ruptured, some head wounds and scratches all over the body. Imagine how much pain he was in. But this guy was made of different metal. I have never seen a will power so strong, a survival instinct and a sense of humour, sedated though, who would have literally slammed the door on Yamraj's face and returned to where he belonged,

amongst his very own. Sheer grit and resilience, he would only talk of what all he would do as soon as he WALKS out of the Hospital. And that he did, he insisted he would walk out even if it was on clutches.

I evaluate, his emphasis was on the Relationships, he wanted to get better and go back to his family, enjoy his whisky with his friends, go back to his work; to his colleagues who stood by him. His Purpose that he defined for himself was he would WALK out of the hospital door. His Worldliness in his behaviour towards everyone who cared for him, in his acceptance and thankfulness for what he survived. And of course, he lives to tell his Story. It became more of my telling actually; this is what returns to me every time I go off track... Never to give up even when you are against all odds; strong will power; being resilient and find my meaning. THAT IS THE POWER OF MEANING, So, I say, all of us here should relook and redefine the MEANING in our life.

**- Tapan Roychoudhury**

# *Why do I care?*

My father was born in India (Obviously!!) But no, not India!! He was born in then India, today's Bangladesh. A Bangladesh that was formed with India's overt support & freedom struggle helmed by Sheikh Mujibur Rehman, yes that very Bangabandhu, whose head lies severed from a statue so revered by Millions, felled by those very people who owe their freedom to act as per their whims to him and his supporters!!

Incredulous, one will say, but such are the vagaries of South Asia. But we digress. My Dad & his siblings studied there right up to their college graduation. And no, they didn't move in 1947, nor did they move in 1971. They actually never felt the need to "run" away from their motherland. Unlike many others, my Dad or his family never really "migrated". A few came because of marriages, a few came because of those marriages. But not all came, we still have family there. I have never even seen them, let alone spoken, but I know they are still there. And SO I DO CARE!!

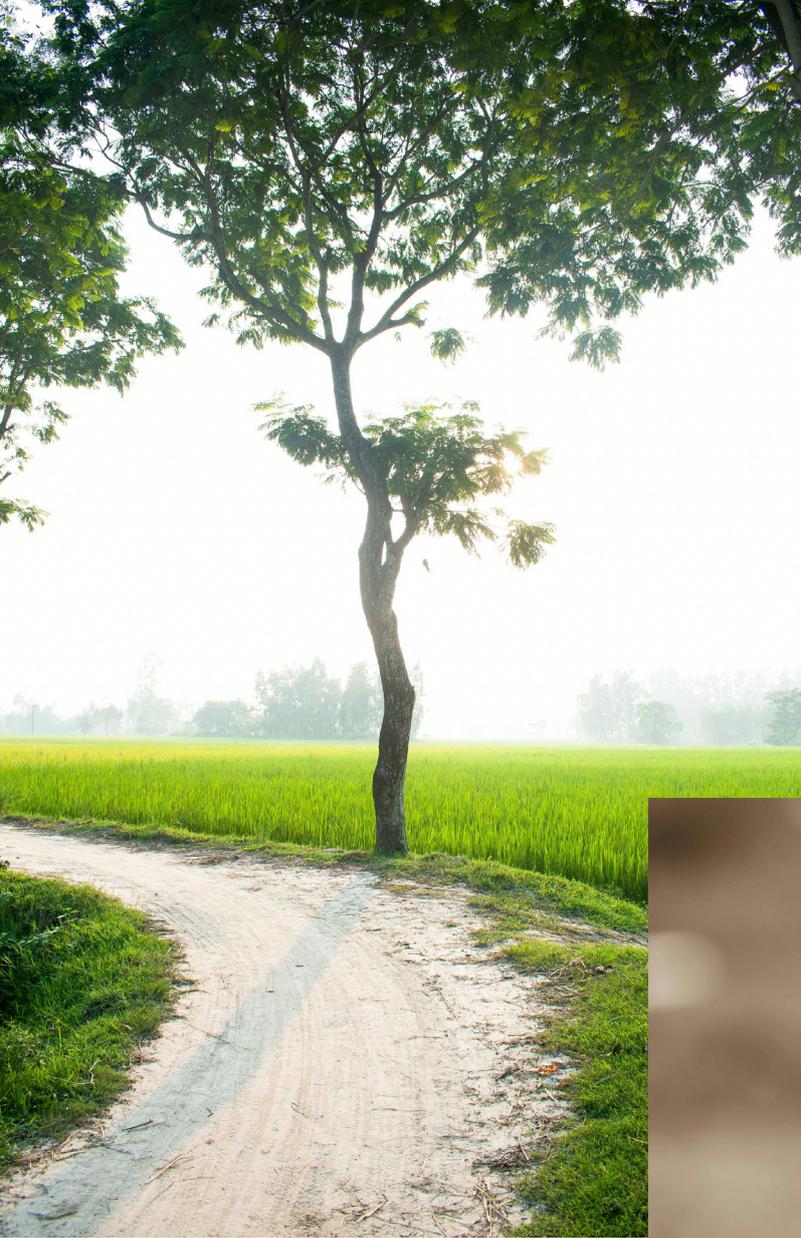
The years rolled by and we were well settled on the exact opposite coast of India in a small town in Gujarat. My Dad had never even stayed in West Bengal come to think of it. One would think being so far removed would fade things out, but you know right, you can take a Bengali out of Bengal, but never Bengal out of a Bengali!! Cut to the 1990 Mass Uprising Movement in Bangladesh. It marked the starting point

of Parliamentary democracy. Yes!! Parliamentary democracy of which we Indians are so proud of!! I glanced across at my dad, he of utmost strictness, was smiling., no not just smiling, his eyes were welling!! And SO I DO CARE.

In 1992, Harakat ul-Jihad-i-Islami/Bangladesh (HUJI-B) was formed which was a designated terrorist organization. You may begin to wonder why is this coming up!! Much later in 2004 they orchestrated an attack on the British High Commissioner in Sylhet. I could sense unease at home, Dad glued to the television. I was confused and even getting a little irritated. What's with the Old Man I wondered. And then it struck me!! My Dad was from Sylhet. The umbilical cord can never be cut. And SO I DO CARE.

In 2015, India and Bangladesh signed a "Land Boundary Agreement" which effectively ended their decades-long border demarcation dispute by exchanging enclaves along their shared border, marking a significant resolution to a 40-year issue between the two countries. I was speaking to Mom on the phone and I could hear the related news item on the tele in the background. I asked her how dad was feeling and she said, it feels like we are the same again!! And SO I DO CARE

Circa 2024 and the events that have unfolded in Bangladesh is none of my business



of things, there is always a thread, sometimes invisible that is piecing things together. And what happens around us can happen to us unless we keep our biases aside, remain vigilant and demonstrate compassion. Such are the vagaries of South Asia, and so I DO CARE, I will care and will always care till I am around.

*- Sujay Das*



any longer (my Dad passed away a few years ago, finally the umbilical cord was cut!!). But wait a minute, why am I following it on TV, Social Media, etc with so much fervour? I don't even know the names of my relatives, I have never been there, then why? Because the (supposed) origin of what has happened is also relevant to India, a nation truly diverse be it caste, creed, religion, any parameter you consider. And SO I DO CARE.

This is neither a eulogy to my Dad or an ode to where he was born. This is by no means a commentary on the last 50 odd years of Bangladesh's existence. This is simply a note to let you know that no matter where you are and how far removed you maybe

## বেসুর ছড়া

সপ্তমীতে যেই না বেজে উঠলো ঢাকের বোল,  
বললো অসুর, এবার তোরা প্লীজ আমাকে তোল!  
হাজার হাজার বছর ধরে খাচ্ছি পড়ে মার!  
একপেশে এই রাম-ঠ্যাঙানি ভাল্লাগে বল কার?  
মায়ের হাতের মার তবুও না হয় আশীর্বাদ,  
তাই বলে কি সাজতে হিরো হয় না আমার সাধ?  
বাচ্চাগুলোর খবরদারি, মাইয়া দুটোর চং,  
সিংহ ব্যাটাও গেরেমভারি, আমিই কেবল সং!  
মোষটা মরে কোনকালে ভূত, জায়গা-জমির খোঁজ  
কেউ রাখে না, গঞ্জে এসে মজুর খাটে রোজ  
আমার গাঁয়ের মানুষগুলো, আমার পরিবার,  
ধামসা-মাদল কোথায় পড়ে, খোঁজ রাখে কে তার...  
যেই না বলা, অমনি ঢাকের বাদ্যি দ্বিগুণ জোর  
ছড়িয়ে দিলো চতুর্দিকে ভক্তি অতি ঘোর!  
ভক্তজনের হৃদমাবারে খুশির সীমা নেই,  
দুর্গা হাসেন বলমলিয়ে, অসুর যে-কে-সেই!

- সৌম্য ব্যানার্জী



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# *Posto*

## *Colonial Lens on Bengal's Beloved Comfort Food*

It's interesting how after gorging on gastronomic delights on vacations, when you return home and eat the first morsel of home-cooked food, the blissful happiness and satiety of that meal is incomparable. Reminds me of the scene in *Ratatouille* when Anton Ego takes a bite of the dish and is immediately floated back to his childhood. We all have that comfort of ghar ka khaana, for me, and for most Bengalis, this comfort meal is "daal, bhaat, aloo posto".

Posto, also known as poppy seeds or khuskhus, is the queen of the Bengali kitchen. Aloo Posto is the delicious preparation of potatoes in a khuskhus paste cooked with rich mustard oil. It is an all-season, all-occasion dish in my family; in sickness and in health, we always have aloo posto by our side.

This delicacy of Bengalis has an interesting history attached to it. Posto, also mentioned in the *Dhanwantari Nighatu*, was used as a medicinal plant. Posto is not only relished for its taste but is also proven to be extremely healthy. It contains antioxidants, iron, potassium, manganese etc. In *Ayurveda*, poppy seeds paste is still used to cure swellings and skin irrita-

tions. All these qualities make Posto an overachiever among Indian spices and ingredients.

During Akbar's rule in the Indian subcontinent, poppy took the form of opium and was used as a recreational drug. After the gum that created the drug was extracted, the seeds were of no use and ended up in the Mughal kitchens, where its paste was used as thickeners for gravies and qormas. Soon after, with the reign of the British colonisers in 1757, the East India Company discovered the market opportunity for illegal opium trading to China. The farmers of Bengal and the neighbouring states were forced into poppy cultivation for the commercial use of opium. With little produce available to the everyday person to make a meal with, Indian women started experimenting with the 'discards' of the colonisers' indulgence and used these dried poppy seeds by making it into a paste which provided a nutty-caramelised flavour and was a good side dish with potatoes or dal.

After the Indian government clamped down on illegal opium trading post-independence, Posto

which had then become a staple was scarce. This scarcity further led to an added exclusivity and superiority to the ingredient. As Appadurai rightly mentions about Indian cuisine being a result of postcolonial and post-industrial processes, Aloo Posto is an appropriate example of this Oriental upbringing of our regional cuisine. Thus, the legacy of Aloo Posto stands out as an example of the survival strategies implemented during oppression and highlights the resilience of the working class in India.

Aloo posto is a simple dish yet the diversity of India and the cultures it houses, affect the varied preparations of aloo posto. My mother altered her style of preparation of this dish after her marriage as she transitioned from



a ghoti to a bangal household. Ghotis are the ones whose ancestors are from West Bengal whereas Bangals' ancestry goes back to East Bengal, now Bangladesh. There has been a hostile rivalry between these two communities since before Partition, whether it is about sports, cuisines or politics. Although post-independence, this rivalry turned into a more bittersweet banter and point of exaggerated comical addas, the social situation soon demanded mutual harmony leading to more inter-community marriages. The preparation of aloo posto in a ghoti household does not consist of turmeric but a generous helping of sugar whereas it's the opposite in the bangal household.

The urge to explore more about the cultural and generational influence of a dish like aloo posto made me ask my grandfather about his posto journey. My grandfather vividly describes the exceptional taste when the posto paste used to be done with a sil-nora (Indian mortar pestle) during his childhood. The grinding and





pasting of the poppy seeds with stone produce a rich creamy and fatty paste with dollops of nostalgia; one of the primary reasons why such richness cannot be induced through modern kitchen machinery. He also delightfully narrates the perfect summer cooling meal of his childhood, kolair dal, aloo posto and bhaat (rice).

Despite its universal fondness, Posto or poppy seeds are one of the most expensive ingredients today in the markets. As mentioned earlier, after the opium wars the government banned the illegal production of poppy and since then it has been exorbitantly priced. Companies like Sunrise, JK and Emami have started selling packeted posto and shorshe posto (with mustard) powders at a comparatively lower rate than the actual price of the seeds. The com-



mercialisation of posto is not only limited to such commodification but also its extravagant preparations in haute cuisine and gourmet restaurants. Zobet, a fusion food gastropub in Kolkata makes “Aloo Posto Seekh” which is a traditional posto grilled with a seekh in a clay oven and served with poppy seeds chutney and “Chingri Posto Paella” which features Bengali prawns served on Spanish paella made with local Bengal rice. Ritu Dalmia, a celebrity chef serves “potol aloo posto” (with bottle gourd) in her Indian haute cuisine restaurant ‘Cittamani’ situated in Milan.

Aloo posto has come a long way from being the result of a waste product to being served in the haute gastronomical world. It is also interesting to note how through a single dish we can map the regional culinary history and culture of India in a post-colonial approach. To conclude, even though I might have had a bias for this beloved dish, aloo posto is a classic like a Jane Austen novel or a Satyajit Ray film and classics never go out of style.

**- Sudeshna  
Roychoudhury**



# *A letter to A Mountain*

*My desire to go to you, to meet you, is being denied again and again... and it unnerves me. So, this is my fenceless letter to you.*

Dear mountain,

Gradually, when the reckoning begins to reverse, when every day's nature starts betraying me, when the rhythm of life starts straying from the path, when the mind wants to get out of bondage, forthwith, dear mountain, my soul wants to fly away to you.

I become enriched in my mind by staring at your calm, unwavering vastness, and I always find a new me in myself. When I suddenly break down on the way of life, I look at you and find the reason to live again, I find the desire to survive.

I've always fancied a flashy stream that nestles in your heart. I always come back to you again and again in the hope of becoming that flashy stream. Every time you give me endless love, every time you give me the opportunity to bask in your prosperity. I always fly away to you, and you always refine me with your touch.

I promise you - I shall be back in your arms. I must come back to you dear, even from the other side of my life's journey.

Just saying goodbye for some time. "See you again at your lap, my dear mountain."

Your obedient Disciple,  
*Payel Sengupta*



## সভ্যতা

রাজপথ, রাজপথ, কালো ধোঁয়া ওঠে  
চিৎকার ও স্লোগানে রাত ভোর ফোটে  
কী পেলে বা কী পেলাম, হিসেবটা থাক  
মানবতা এইবারে সুবিচার পাক  
সবুজ না লালরঙা, কালো নাকি সাদা  
ছাইচাপা পড়ে যায়, গরমিল ধাঁধা  
এই ভিড়ে কতশত মেয়েবেলা ক্ষত  
ফিসফিস করে বলা me too-র মত  
এ শহর এ হিসেব কখনও কি চায়?  
সভ্যতা ঢেকে থাকে আধুনিকতায়

-  
শুভ্রা মজুমদার



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**Hira Enterprises**





ART BY:

*Ojasvi Roy*



# *The Kshamata-RISE Collaboration*



**Kshamata** is dedicated to support survivors of human trafficking by focusing on empowering women and girls rescued from trafficking/exploitation. We collaborate with experts and volunteer groups to create better opportunities. RISE (RongBong Initiative for Sociocultural Excellence) happens to be one of our patron associates. Their members, Malabika and Anushila, conduct basic and spoken English classes, while Amrita offers computer training. Poulomi leads staff-building workshops that address psychological issues. Kshamata expresses gratitude for the ongoing support and encourages continued collaboration to enhance their services.

Following are acknowledgments from some of our staff and beneficiaries:

1. Malabika and Anushila didi play a significant role in making our spoken English class enjoyable and effective. Their support likely helped create a positive learning environment, making it easier for everyone to grasp the language.
2. Poulomi's sessions on emotional well-being have empowered our staff to recognize and validate their own emotions. This focus encourages a healthier work environment by promoting self-awareness and emotional intelligence, ultimately enhancing overall well-being and productivity.
3. Amrita Didi's computer basics classes have really transformed my experience with information technology. Earlier, I had no access to computers and felt intimidated. Her teaching style has significantly reduced my fear, and now I can handle a computer comfortably. I'm grateful for her support!





# *Karunya Trust*

**Karunya Trust has been working for 26 years in Mumbai and Thane,** focusing on marginalized communities such as those affected and infected by HIV/AIDS, children from rag-picking communities, and tribal populations.

The Trust addresses critical needs through five core themes: education, health, governance, environment, and livelihood.

Karunya Trust's work in education ensures access to learning for underprivileged children, while health programs focus on medical support for HIV/AIDS-affected individuals. Governance initiatives empower communities to engage in decision-making, and livelihood programs equip people with skills for self-reliance. The



Trust's environmental efforts, like the Greenhands Project, focus on sustainable practices. Together, these initiatives bring lasting change to vulnerable communities.

In partnership with RISE, a voluntary association, Karunya Trust recently undertook the Greenhands Project in Kalyan Taluka, where 15 volunteers from RISE planted 100 fruit-bearing tree saplings.

This initiative aims to benefit the local tribal community by providing them with sustainable food sources and income through the fruits these trees will bear.



# *Whispers of the Moonlight*

Silver light upon my skin,  
A midnight breeze whispering within.  
The shadows dance upon the wall,  
As the moon's soft voice begins to call.

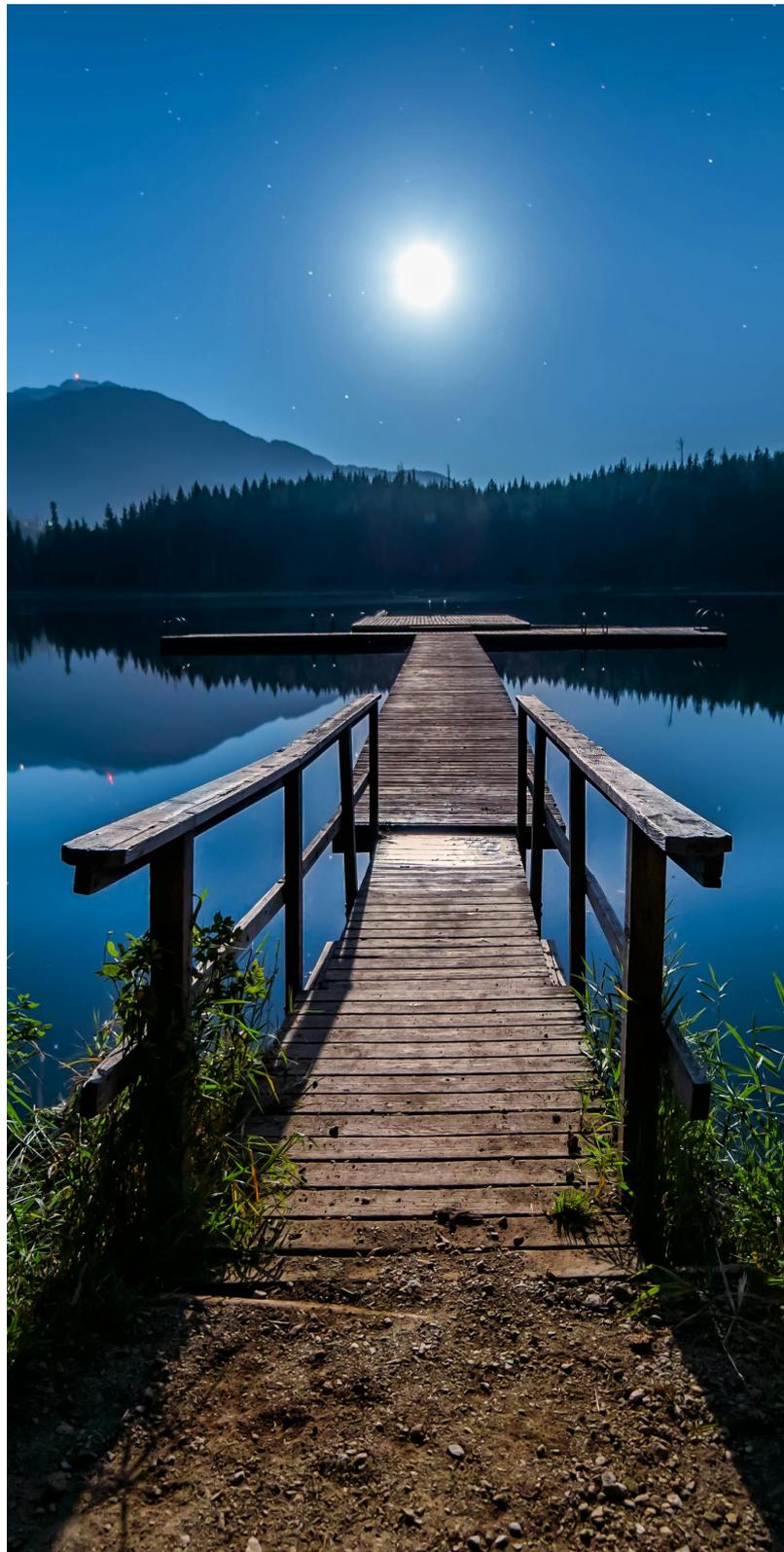
In the stillness of the night's dark shade,  
I hear the secrets that the heart has made.  
The stars above a twinkling sea,  
Reflecting a dream that only the heart can see.

The world is a hushed, peaceful sight,  
As moonbeams weave a gentle light.  
It guides me through life's winding way,  
And in its silence I find my own voice to say.

In this quiet hour I am free,  
To listen to the whispers of the sea.  
That echoes deep within my soul,  
A symphony that makes my heart a whole.

So let the moon's soft light descend,  
And in its whispers may my heart transcend.  
The noise of the day, the world's loud din,  
And find the peace that whispers within.

*- Saesha Das*



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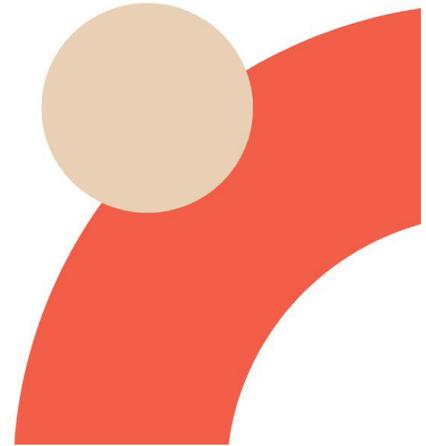
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# *Drama*



# *Dance*



## Unspoken Words

It was a bright day in May,  
My eyes flickered with the sun's ray.  
I saw my Mumma holding me tight,  
She had tears, maybe she had a fight.  
I couldn't console, I couldn't speak,  
I couldn't realise my mom was sick.  
"Where's Pappa?", my eyes curled,  
Oh! he was angry, I was a girl.  
A gloomy day for them, it was not the first,  
Another girl child, my mom was cursed!  
Yes, I had a sister I didn't know,  
I was sorry to make them feel so low.

A year passed by; it was my birthday,  
Alas! For my dad, it was the "worst" day.  
Alone and lonely, I was playing with a broken toy,  
Suddenly my dad shouted, "At last a boy!"  
I was happy, I was going to see my brother,  
But nobody noticed me, I had to suffer.  
I had feelings, I had pain,  
But it was opaque, of course I was a *vain*!

Days passed, I turned three,  
They debated on schools, where studies will be free.  
I dreamt to be a doctor, but it was lost with time,  
Then why do people say, female foeticide is a crime.

- *Priyanka Mohanty*



Thane Citizens Foundation (TCF) is a remarkable NGO making a significant impact in Thane, Maharashtra. Under the leadership of President Kasber Augustine, TCF has undertaken numerous initiatives to transform Thane for the better.

### **Environmental Conservation Efforts**

TCF has successfully saved thousands of trees in Thane and collaborated with the Thane Municipal Corporation to plant over 5,000 trees, replacing those cut down. Their initiatives promote Tree Plantation, Waste Management Drive, Thane Go Green Award.

### **Social Welfare Projects**

Some of their notable social projects include:

- Cycle Project: Providing cycles to underprivileged Adivasi children to enhance their mobility and access to education along with RISE and other organisations.
- Along with RISE, TCF has organised the clean Yeoor drive.
- Health Camps: Organizing health camps to provide medical care to those in need
- Voter Enrollment Drive: Encouraging citizens to exercise their right to vote

### **Covid-19 Relief Efforts**

During the pandemic, TCF played a vital role in supporting the community by:

- Facilitating vaccination drives
- Providing beds for affected patients
- Distributing rations and cooked food to vulnerable populations, including the poor and laborers

### **Support for the Destitute**

TCF has:

- Treated many destitute sick persons affected by gangrene and other sicknesses
- Reunited them with their family members upon request
- Admitted destitute individuals to homes in Mumbai and Navi Mumbai

### **City Beautification**

TCF's "Talking Walk Paint the City Wall" drive, in collaboration with Dulux Paint and Thane Municipal Corporation, has beautified Thane's walls.

### **Community Engagement**

TCF has also organized:

- Movie screenings for special children and waste management workers
- Lunch for inmates of various old age homes
- Celebrated Independence Day with slum children

TCF's commitment to the well-being of Thane's citizens is truly inspiring.- Lunch for inmates of various old age homes

- Celebrated Independence Day with slum children

***TCF's commitment to the well-being of Thane's citizens is truly inspiring.***



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