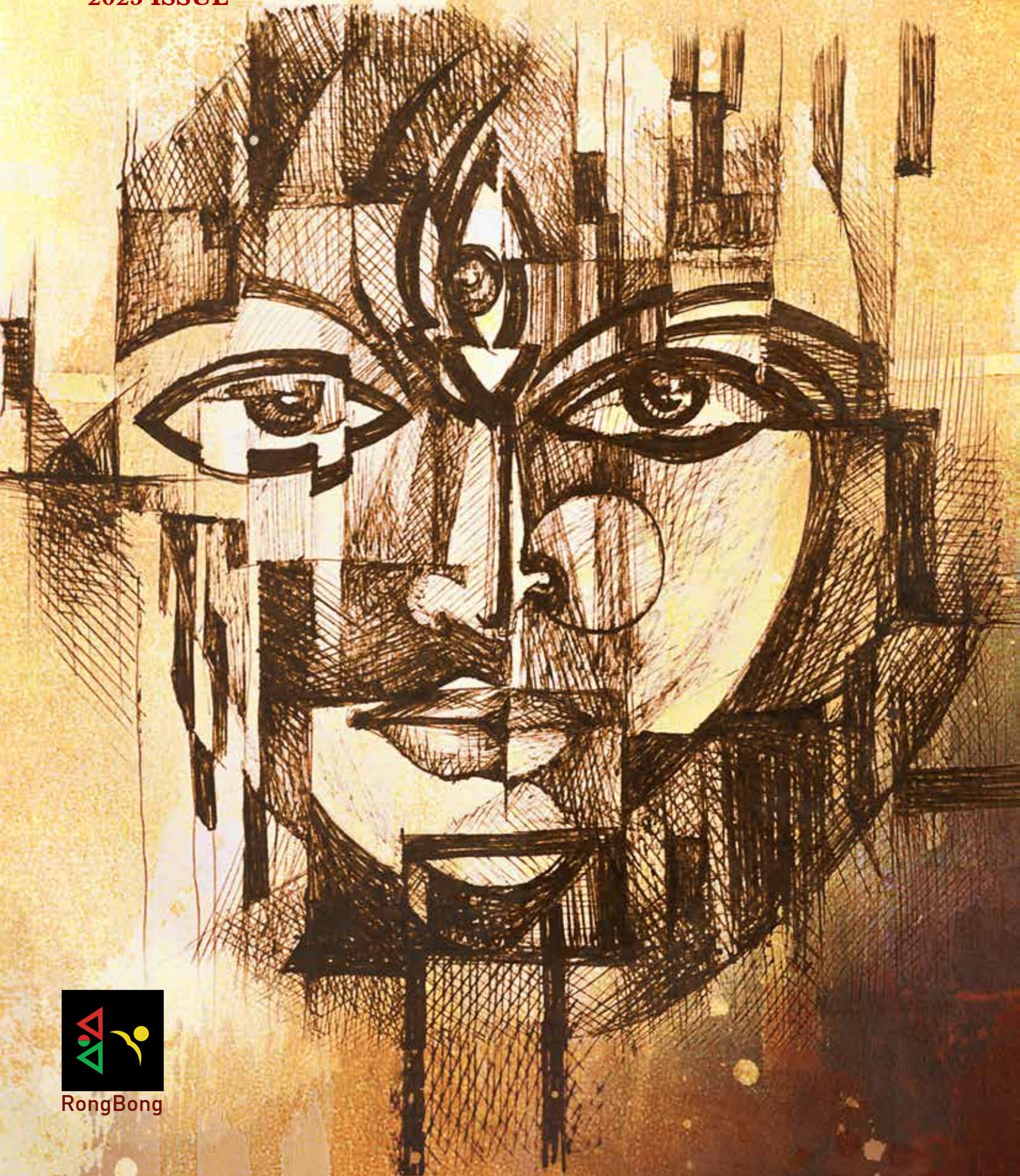


RISE & Shine

THE ANNUAL MAGAZINE
2025 ISSUE



RongBong

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Editorial

Existential gratitude - a feeling, when delved deep into, could connect you to a conscious universe, and in turn, inspire to do something meaningful for it in a selfless way. But that gratitude, as it turns out to be, is not an easy thing to embed in oneself. The modern world is offering more and more sensory engagements every day that act as locked doors on the pathway towards intellectual gratification, throwing the keys deeper down the mind, where most individuals find it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to tread.

That is where the voluntary community comes in - walking the desired path together, hand-in-hand, shoulder-to-shoulder, making changes that reshape the society at small yet significant scales, while helping the individual discover who they really are. That is exactly what our association aspires for - the amalgamation of gratitude and gratification both at individual and collective levels.

With each passing year, RISE is adding more and more endeavours to its social repertoire, joining hands with new welfare organizations alongside existing associates. Over the last one year, we have partnered with eminent NGOs in their efforts to make life better for the underprivileged - empowering the girls of Kshamata, donating ration supplies for the inmates of Adhar, planting fruit-bearing trees for the villagers under Karunya Trust's auspices and organizing art workshops for the children of Signal Shala. We have also organized a very successful blood donation camp for Tata Cancer Research Institute this year with turn-outs beyond expectation. These gratifying exercises and experiences have helped us define our social standings, both as individuals and as a voluntary association.

So have our creative pursuits, as they always have since the birth of RongBong a decade ago. The beginning of Durgotsav in 2022 marked a new era in our cultural endeavours with a plethora of stage performances and the theme décor of the venue. We try to make it as diverse as we can every year, celebrating both national events and the cultural heritage of Bengal, which lies at the very core of the association. In addition to this, we have also come up with our association's official website this year, which we believe will be a great support for both our sociocultural cause and the mileage that we would need to provide our associates with.

All in all, this collective journey has been a manifestation of existential gratitude for the members of RongBong Initiative for Sociocultural Excellence... a beacon and a bond in the same stride that promises to make more difference for those who it matters most.



Photo by Anirban



**RONG BONG
DURGOTSAV**



सत्यमेव जयते

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.

The sacred festival of Durga Puja symbolizes our culture, faith and spiritual heritage. Worshipping Maa Durga in her nine forms is not only a path to spiritual purification but also inspires us to move forward with truth, justice and compassion. This festival promotes the spirit of equality, tolerance and love.

On this auspicious occasion, let us pledge to make every possible effort to ensure respect for women and to uphold their rightful place in society.

I pray to Maa Durga to bestow wisdom and courage upon everyone, and to bless all with happiness and prosperity.

(Droupadi Murmu)

New Delhi

22 September, 2025



*Mixed media artwork by
PARBANEI CHOWDHURY*

inspired by artist Abhijit Banarjee



सत्यमेव जयते

प्रधान मंत्री
Prime Minister

MESSAGE

Heartiest greetings and best wishes to all the devotees for Durga Puja and Navaratri. May Maa Durga shower Her blessings for good health and a prosperous life on one and all.

A unique confluence of 'Bhakti' and 'Shakti', the festival commences from Mahalaya and continues till Maa's farewell. Worshipping the nine forms of the Goddess inspires us to recognise the power of our inner self and surge ahead in life.

As a festival that honours Nari Shakti and marks the victory of good over evil, this is also a symbol of social empowerment.

Durga Puja celebrations across the country and the world showcase India's rich cultural traditions. The handicrafts, traditional dances and programmes on display at Puja pandals reflect our creativity and art. The enthusiasm of youngsters and the participation of local artists make this festival even more vibrant.

Serving as an excellent example of community participation, Durga Puja celebrations further strengthen the feeling of unity and brotherhood in the society.

The nation is today marching ahead with the vision of building a strong, self-reliant and prosperous India. This auspicious festival of Durga Puja is an occasion for us to imbibe its inherent message and make a valuable contribution toward fulfilling the resolve of Viksit Bharat through hard work, discipline and dedication.

I have full faith that the nation, energised by the power of collectiveness, will scale new heights of progress.

May the blessings of Maa Jagadamba illuminate the lives of the people.

(Narendra Modi)

New Delhi

आश्विन 02, शक संवत् 1947

24 September, 2025

Shri Sanchayita Das

Chairperson

C-1705, Parkwoods, Ghodbunder Road

Kavesar, Thane (W)

Maharashtra - 400615



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No. 1200(100)-G

Date:10.09.2025

MESSAGE

As autumn descends and the white blooms of *Kash* sways in the breeze, Bengal awakens to the spirit of Durga Puja. It is a season when faith and festivity unite, when the beat of the *dhak* calls hearts to joy and harmony.

On this sacred occasion, the Hon'ble Governor of West Bengal, Dr. C. V. Ananda Bose, conveys his greetings on the celebrations organized by **Rongbong Initiative for Sociocultural Excellence, Thane.**

Durga, the Eternal Mother, is adored as the destroyer of evil and the upholder of truth. With UNESCO's recognition of this festival as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, Durga Puja stands not only as Bengal's pride but also as humanity's treasure.

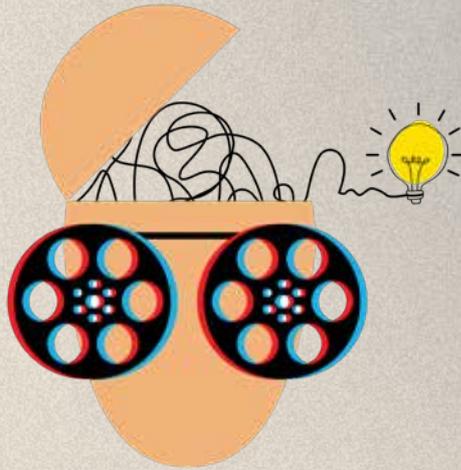
May her divine grace bring peace, prosperity, and well-being to all.

“या देवी सर्वभूतेषु शक्तिरूपेण संस्थिता ।

नमस्तस्यै नमस्तस्यै नमस्तस्यै नमो नमः ॥


Shrikumar Bandopadhyay

Sanchayita Das,
Chairperson,
Rongbong Initiative for Sociocultural Excellence , Thane,
C-1705, Parkwoods, Ghodbunder Road, Kavesar, Thane(W)
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APIE

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DURGA PUJA**



মমতা ব্যানার্জী
Mamata Banerjee
মমতা বনর্জী
ممتا بنرجی



মুখ্যমন্ত্রী, পশ্চিমবঙ্গ
Chief Minister, West Bengal
मुख्यमंत्री, पश्चिम बंगाल
وزیر اعلیٰ، مغربی بنگال



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, দুর্গাপুজো।

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 শাশ্বত 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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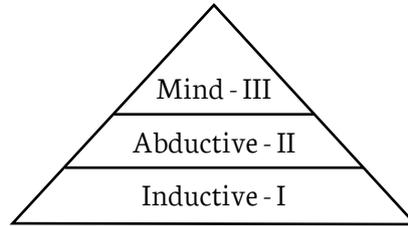
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Chairperson's Note



There was a time, in school, when I had to choose an additional subject. The choice of the brighter ones was Mathematics, Mechanics, Biology while for most of the mediocre it was subjects like Book-keeping or Logic. Neither me, nor my parents had any idea of what book-keeping would do to me and hence I was guided to take up the other scoring subject, Logic. At a time, when one is young and comparing oneself to others, this subject came up just about as one where I could add up a few extra marks and nothing else.

Now, as years go by, it is this subject that has caught my fascination. Broadly there are 3 parts to reasoning Inductive, Deductive and Abductive. It is this Inductive reasoning that gathers steam as we walk the path of life. A simplistic way to explain it would be to draw a conclusion from a set of observations. An example of inductive logic could be “The coin I pulled from the bag is a penny. That second, again, is a penny. The third one from the bag is a penny too. Therefore, all the coins in the bag are pennies.” So, even if all the premises are true in a statement, inductive reasoning could lead to a faulty conclusion.

Add to this a probability, and you find Abductive reasoning. In the example above, it would draw a conclusion that it is probable or likely that all the coins in the bag are pennies but would not conclude that they are. This is where common sense or human logic adds a layer of thought to say that while it is likely they are all pennies, there is a degree of freedom to believe that it may not be so. And here comes the view and drive towards the larger good.

In looking at that broader horizon, it is the entity's mind that tries to be in appropriate control consistently. It then leads to cognitive reasoning that stands tall on the premise of critical thinking skills such as causal reasoning and systems thinking which pivot to developing deeper understanding and structural knowledge. In my domain of credit risk parlance, such structural knowledge construed in the form of a “mental model by understanding the correlation between interconnected variables” can draw up solutions to vulnerabilities, thereby strengthening the system. This mental model engulfs two pillars of solidarity: to give with silent grace and take with resounding gratitude, while in its effort, honour individuality in collaborating for the greater purpose.

The Association, overall in coherence, is driving to build a wholesome meal on such premise in serving the community and environment at large. Leveraging nuances of pro bono methods tied to cultural heritage, this Association strives to carve out a niche in society that will continue to be the foundational ethos in the years to come.

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RONGBONG INITIATIVE FOR SOCIOCULTURAL EXCELLENCE, THANE

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Banhisikha Basu

Jaya Roychowdhury

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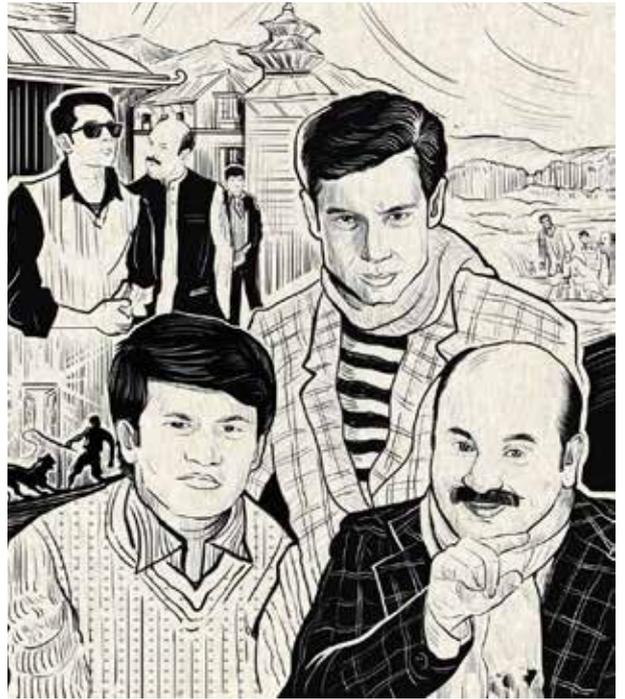
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Forging a Path of Purpose: RISE's Journey of Social Impact (2024–2025)

The 2024–2025 cycle was a year of remarkable growth and renewed purpose for RISE – a year that reaffirmed what happens when compassion meets commitment. Through meaningful partnerships, purposeful action, and a shared belief in creating lasting change, RISE deepened its impact across education, empowerment, inclusion, and community health.

By joining hands with three inspiring NGOs and launching its first-ever public health initiative, RISE continued to prove that when people come together for a cause, the results can be truly transformative.

Sustained Empowerment: Partnership with Kshamata (2025)

RISE's long-standing collaboration with Kshamata – an organisation that supports women and adolescent girls who have survived trafficking, exploitation, and violence – remained one of its most heartfelt engagements this year.

Building Skills, Building Confidence:

Throughout the year, RISE volunteers conducted regular sessions in spoken English, basic mathematics, and computer literacy. These interactive learning experiences helped strengthen Kshamata's job-readiness programme and gave participants the tools – and confidence – to step toward financial independence.

Empowerment in Action:

The impact went far beyond the classroom. Several survivors found meaningful employment within a RISE member organisation, while others secured external opportunities with RISE's guidance and support. Each success story was a reminder that empowerment is most powerful when it leads to independence, dignity, and hope.



A New Dawn for Street Children: Partnership with Signal Shala (February & September 2025)

This year, RISE renewed its association with Signal Shala, an extraordinary school that operates under a flyover in Thane, offering mainstream education to children who live on the streets.

Mobilising for Change:

The year began with a pre-loved goods drive, led by RISE's youngest volunteers. Books, clothes, and computer accessories poured in to help expand the school's vocational training efforts. RISE also chipped in by donating medicines, hygiene products and learning materials for the children.

A Festival of Colour and Expression:

During the festive season, RISE hosted "Rays of Brilliance," an art workshop aligned with the Durgotsav 2025 theme. The event became more than an activity – it was a celebration of self-expression and resilience. The children painted their worlds with joy and imagination, reminding everyone present of the power of creativity to heal and uplift.

We are deeply grateful to KSR-Design for supporting this activity. We are also thankful to all our sponsors for their continued support. Your support lights the way for brighter futures and meaningful change.



About KSR-Design

KSR-Design is a dynamic company with a strong presence in the oil and gas industries. With expertise in delivering innovative solutions and reliable services, KSR-Design is committed to supporting growth, efficiency, and sustainability within the sector.

As part of its commitment to community and culture, KSR-Design has kindly contributed to the Durga Puja celebrations. This support reflects the company's belief in togetherness, tradition, and spreading joy. The donation will help make the festival more memorable for everyone, highlighting KSR-Design's spirit of giving back and celebrating with the community.

Community Cleaning: An Integral Part of RISE's Mission (March 2025)

The spirit of a community cleaning drive stands as an integral part of the larger cleaning activities undertaken by the members of RISE. These drives not only focus on waste removal but also actively foster a sense of collective responsibility and environmental stewardship among participants.

Keeping this mission alive, this year too, in March, the dedicated members of RISE committed themselves to an early morning cleaning drive in the beautiful neighbouring Yeoor Hills. This initiative serves as a powerful reminder of our commitment to preserving the natural beauty of the area and ensuring a cleaner, healthier environment for all.





Dignity and Inclusion: Partnership with ADHAR (June 2025)

In June, RISE deepened its relationship with ADHAR, a residential centre offering lifelong care for adults with intellectual disabilities.

A Day to Remember:

RISE members spent a day at the centre, sharing laughter, stories, and meals with residents. The team sponsored lunch, brought along essential groceries, and most importantly – gave their time, warmth, and attention. It was a day filled with connection and joy.

Celebrating Ability and Tradition:

During Sandhi Pujo at RISE Durgotsav, the diyas that lit up the celebration carried a special significance – they were handcrafted by ADHAR's residents. This simple act of inclusion created both income and pride, recognising the artistry and contribution of the residents in a festival that celebrates light.



A Landmark Step in Health and Well-being (August 2025)

In August, RISE took an inspiring new step by launching its first-ever public health initiative, in collaboration with Tata Memorial Hospital.

Lifesaving Effort:

The Blood Donation Camp drew over 100 volunteers and resulted in 47 units of donated blood – a powerful testament to what collective compassion can achieve.

A New Annual Tradition:

The success of this initiative has set the foundation for it to become an annual event, reflecting RISE's growing role in promoting community health and well-being.

Illuminating Futures, Together

Throughout 2024-2025, RISE moved beyond one-off acts of charity to embrace a deeper, more sustained model of social change. By

combining time, expertise, and empathy, the RISE community continued to light the way for others – one initiative, one life, and one purpose at a time.

Because when we act together, we don't just change lives – we illuminate futures.



List of Donors:

Donation towards social activities:

Signal shala computer accessories	- Well wisher
Lunch for Adhar residents	- Rahul Chowdhury
Grocery for Adhar residents	- Well wisher
Stationery for Signal Shala kids	- Well wisher

Saraswati Pujo donations:

Maa Saraswati idol	- Tapan Roy Choudhury
Puja devi bhog and flower offering	- Rahul Chowdhury
Fruits offering	- Dibakar Chakrabarti
General bhog (partial)	- Sumeet Fogla

Durgapujo donations:

Maa Durga idol	- Rishu Sengupta
Dhaki	- Well wisher
Maa Lakshmi idol	- Kirti Attar
Flower offering for Maha Shasthi Puja:	- Kaushik Mazumdar
Maha Saptami Puja (partial)	- Saibal Banerjee
Maha Saptami Puja Devi Bhog	- Sheetal Divakala
Flower offerings for Maha Saptami Puja	- Sumitra Goswami
Fruit offerings for Maha Saptami Puja	- Payel Sengupta
Sweets and other offerings for Maha Saptami Puja	- Payel Sengupta
Maha Saptami Puja Maha bhog (for Public)	- Anushila Adhikari
Maha Ashtami Puja (Full puja)	- Ratna Mitra
Maha Ashtami Puja Devi Bhog	- Sheetal Divakala
	- Jhelum Chakraborty
	- Jagpreet Singh
	- Prasshanti Mallick
Flower offering: for Maha Ashtami Puja	- Nita Mukherjee
Fruit offerings: for Maha Ashtami Puja	- Basantika Chakraborty
	- Debjani Bhattacharjee
Sweets and other offerings: for Maha Ashtami Puja	- Subhrajit Saha
Maha Ashtami Sandhi Puja	- Dr. Abhinav Das
	- Swati Bhadani
Maha Nabami Puja (Full puja)	- Debasish Basu
Maha Nabami Puja Devi Bhog	- Shrimanty Chakraborty
	- Annupriya Burnwal
Flower offering: for Maha Nabami Puja	- Jayati Saha
Maha Nabami Puja Maha bhog (for Public)	- Kirti Attar

RISE's Journey at a glance (2024-2025)





Rays of Brilliance

The venue decoration theme of RongBong Durgotsav this year was Rays of Brilliance, a tribute to the genius of Satyajit Ray and his immortal creation, Feluda, who completed 60 years of his literary journey in 2025.

The displays primarily comprised Ray's own sketches from his Feluda books, along with a lot of trivia on the characters, their characteristics and adventures. There were interactive aspects in the displays too, which required visitors to scan QR codes and solve impromptu mysteries.

In order to enhance the whole experience, there were cultural programs based on the theme - a children's play called Feludar Goendagiri and a quiz on the theme itself. Overall, it was a vibrant celebration of one of Bengal's cultural icons and a literary marvel that has been intriguing three generations since 1965.



A Non-Bengali's Ode to Bengali Bites

Oh, my love, my Bengali wife,
Your kitchen's a wonder, a savory tide!
From Kolkata's chaos to your culinary art,
Each dish you serve steals my hungry heart.
But oh, the choices, the flavors galore,
I'm lost in this feast, and I'm craving more!

There's mishti doi, sweet as your smile,
Creamy and dreamy, it lingers a while.



But wait, there's rosogolla, those syrupy spheres,
They bounce in my mouth, sparking sugary cheers!
Do I pick the sandesh, so soft and so fine,
Or chomchom that glistens like jewels divine?
My spoon's in a spin, my heart's in a jam,
I'm a non-Bengali, confused but a fan!

Then comes the mains, oh, what a spread!
Shorshe ilish swims straight to my head.
That mustardy magic, that hilsa's sweet glide,
It's a river of flavor I can't set aside.
But here's chingri malaikari, prawns in a dream,
Coconut curry, a luxurious cream.
And luchi so fluffy, it floats like a cloud,
Paired with aloo dum, I'm cheering out loud!

Yet, snacks sneak in, they ambush my plate,
Shingara is and koraishuti, oh, what a fate!
Those crispy triangles, stuffed to the brim,
Peas or spiced meat? My restraint's growing dim.
And jhal muri, that spicy, puffed rice,
A crunch so addictive, I don't think twice.
I munch and I crunch till my tummy's a drum,
But your telebhaja begs, "There's more to come!"

Oh, darling, your phuchka's a burst in my soul,
That tangy tamarind makes my senses roll.
I slurp and I sputter, my eyes start to tear,
But I dive for another, no hint of fear.
And kathi rolls - eggy, meaty, a street-side delight,
I gobble them down in the glow of the night.
My belt's getting tight, my buttons may pop,
But with Bengali food, I just cannot stop!

From rabri to payesh, your sweets are a spell,
Each bite's a story only you can tell.
I waddle, I groan, yet I reach for one more,
My appetite's dancing on your kitchen floor.
I'm a non-Bengali, baffled, it's true,
But your dishes, my love, are my heart's fondue.
So pile on the plates, let the flavors unfurl,
I'm wed to your food and my Bengali girl!



- Abhishek Ratna

The Divine Right of the Brilliant

Let me paint a picture first, imagine a series of papers graded 100 in the appropriate red ink, a report card where the letter grade 'A' is used more than its actual function as an article, a screen having steady green upward lines, a high rise art deco building with a sleeker car pulling up to its valet manned gateway. What does it signify? Does it have meaning?

This picture, or if a better term must be used, this vision, has been sold to every single generation. The idea of a well-spent life, the fantasy of absolute success, and ultimately being above reproach, being above circumstances, the dream of being wholly brilliant. What makes a person brilliant? How do we, as the utterly non-brilliant, even classify the apparent gods that walk between us? If centuries of societal conditioning have to be believed, a brilliant man makes himself by his own might and mettle. He is different, a class apart, because he was simply born that way; nothing could have stopped him from achieving what he did, because how could the circumstances that plague an ordinary human even think to affect The Brilliant Man?

Commoners may not ask how only one family has the right to rule if everyone was created equally in god's eye, nor can they ask how one man somehow has the right to the stars, even if they shine down upon all exactly the same. How dare a question be raised in front of a man so meritorious that he can have his likeness plastered in every corner, only ever overshadowed by the smog emitted by the commoner travelling to work in his completely ordinary car. Due to his circumstance, the commoner may choke on that air, but never the brilliant man; the brilliant man has earned his life above the clouds.

The commoner will never understand the heavy crown that rests on the brilliant man's head; after all, the

commoner will never know how to manage generations of inherited wealth and responsibility. Only a commoner will pay his tax, as only the brilliant know how to spend it. Only the brilliant may be entirely exempted from contributing; he already is doing his part by building the roads, the houses and the jobs. The commoner will thus gratefully work his handed-out job, live in the suffocating house and navigate the potholed road. The brilliant man will reap the rewards of his inherent abilities after all he did his part, he made the economy and the infrastructure, the least he deserves is a city for his wedding, and for the commoner to be an awed audience in the celebration.

The commoner will then decide, after the Brilliant's circus, that it will only take one generation to change his fate. If he manages to select the correct one-chair room or the correct garage, it may be his surname being talked about in revered tones. It does not signify that the same name is responsible for his current plight; it does not signify that a commoner gives his labour, his time, his very life to the extraordinary one's purpose. After all, only the men whose birthright is being different are ever deemed brilliant.

How proud we must be now that anyone born with the ability may just be brilliant, that we allow every single able-bodied orator with wealth gained through centuries of absolute hard work, to exercise their right to change, to influence, and most importantly, be above all consequence. What was erstwhile the Divine Right of the King is now a man who was born different, a man who was born brilliant, a man whose purpose was to lead, and lead he will.

- Ambika Roychowdhury

From the Peaks of Everest to the Heights of Entrepreneurship



On 2nd May 2024, I stood before the ancient sanctum of Pashupatinath Mandir in Kathmandu. The scent of incense, the chants of the priests, and the gaze of Lord Shiva filled me with a quiet determination. I was about to begin a journey that would forever change me.

The next day, I set foot on a path carved by legends, the Nepal route to Everest Base Camp. Thirteen of us, strangers yet united by a single dream, embarked together under the guidance of Utkarsh from India and Ram, our Nepali guide, whose quiet strength would carry us through some of our hardest days.

But dreams rarely come easy. Lukla, the notorious gateway to Everest, tested us first. Weather delays grounded flights, forcing us into unplanned

detours. The mountains don't negotiate; they demand respect. My teammates bore wounds, physical and emotional, as we trekked through relentless terrain.

I remember that night vividly: walking through the jungle in the pitch dark, the only sounds were our labored breaths and the whispering winds of the Himalayas. At 10 p.m., exhausted yet strangely exhilarated, we stumbled into a humble treehouse that became our refuge.

And then, the day arrived **12th May 2024**. As we set foot on Everest Base Camp, prayer flags danced in the icy winds, glaciers groaned under ancient weight, and my heart pounded not from altitude, but awe. It was my sister's birthday that day, a cosmic coincidence that made the moment even

more personal. Standing there, I realized I wasn't just conquering a mountain. I was conquering myself.

The descent, though physically easier, was equally transformative. By **18th May**, I was back to where I started yet I was no longer the same person. The summit had left its mark. When I returned to Mumbai on the 19th, the city felt different, or perhaps I did.

Because this journey wasn't just about Everest. It was a rehearsal for something even bigger, building **my own company**.

Months of preparation for the trek mirrored the months of planning my entrepreneurial leap. The sleepless nights spent mapping logistics resembled the countless hours spent sketching business plans. The unwavering support of my husband Rishu, my daughter Riona's innocence, and my mother-in-law's care during my absence all became the silent pillars of my ascent in business, just as they were on the mountain.

Today, as the **Co-founder of Thirty Six Skills**,

I see the parallels clearly: the startup world, much like Everest, is unpredictable and often clouded in storms you can't foresee. Every milestone feels like another bridge crossed, some as daunting as the Hillary Bridge swaying above icy depths. And success, much like reaching Base Camp, is not the end but merely the beginning of a greater climb.

Everest taught me resilience. Entrepreneurship taught me reinvention. Both taught me this: **The summit is never outside; it's within you.**



- Amrita Sengupta



Monsoon Postcards

It begins as most stories in Kolkata do, with the rain. Not the angry kind that rushes down, but the soft, persistent drizzle that turns the air syrupy and slow. The kind of rain that smells of earth and memory. Shiuli flowers have already begun to fall, scattered on the footpath a delicate trail. Somewhere nearby, a tram clatters past, its old chime trailing behind like a sigh, fading into the bustle of the city.

In a narrow lane near college street, stands a modest tea stall under an age-old tree. The signboard is half-peeled, the red letters barely clinging on, but the scent of hot chai and crushed ginger and spices lures people like moths to a flame. The stall owner has been here for over forty years. He says little, but his eyes smile. His hands pour tea with a kind of reverence, as if every cup carries the weight of someone's evening. Down the street at the coffee house students, office workers, old poets with jholas and dreams gather here to escape from the rain and the world.

Next to the tea stall, behind a tattered bamboo door, clay takes shape. The idol makers are at work- sleeves rolled, brows furrowed, hands steady. Clay from Hooghly, sacred and silent is shaped into the face of Ma Durga. A face that is serene and watchful. Children peak through curtains to steal glimpses of a goddess being mold, eyes wide in wonder.

Rainwater pools around lotus leaves in a little pond nearby. The leaves tremble with each drop, fragile and alive. Frogs croak somewhere unseen, and the scent of wood drifts from the nearby library where old men still read newspapers as if the world still stands still. On the next street laughter spills, young girls huddled together at phuchka stalls, mouths full, eyes gleaming. Gossiping about classroom shenanigans and exams.

Past the bustle, in a crumbling house with blue shutters, an old man listens to Hemanta Mukherjee on a dusty radio. His wife long gone, his children overseas, but the songs, the rain, the sounds of the street all return each evening like loyal companions. He looks out of the window and sees the city not as it is but as it was...full of hand pulled rickshaws, book fairs, theatre queues, ink-stained love letters. He misses his wife's handmade khichuri on such rainy days and soft patter of his children's playful feet.

Kolkata doesn't tell stories with clear beginnings or endings. A mother combing her child's hair in the dim light before school. A father coming home drenched after a long day's work carrying a packet of sweets he couldn't afford. Your grandmother smiles at you while hiding a Sandesh in your tiffin box. Your grandfather telling you bedtime stories veiled with the struggles of his past. The city weaves these moments together like an old wool shawl...frayed, warm and irreplaceable.

A city stitched together by memories. There are places where you first fell in love, roads where you learnt how to ride a cycle, your first job and so many more. A bench near the lake where someone waited. A bookstore where someone never came. Kolkata doesn't let you forget; it gently reminds you of the things you once tried to bury. It tells decades of stories disguised in rusted railings, fading murals, the scent of sandalwood incense and Rabindra sangeet playing softly on a neighbor's radio at dusk.

In this city, stories don't end. They seep into the walls, into the puddles, into the folds of a cotton saree drying slowly into the monsoon breeze. They are painted in shades of red, indigo, ochre and grey bleeding at the edges like watercolor left in the rain.

Our beloved City of Joy, carries a sweet sorrow beneath. It lingers in the rain-soaked streets, in the fading songs from old balconies, in corners of streets time forgets to move. Once walked streets of Esplanade and Exide, friends gathering at Nandan, a cup of chai by princep ghat, Christmas at park street are now forgotten. Kolkata still pulls at my heart-strings, gently- a kind of sadness that feels like home, like a memory that refuses to leave.

- *Samadrita Banerjee*



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Wondering White Flakes

You know, I turned 10 this year! It is very important because a new era of my life has begun. So, my papa promised me that he would help fulfil my bucket list. My aunt and my big cousin brother invited us to their home in Himachal Pradesh to have a blast of fun.

It all began with a late-night flight from Mumbai to Delhi on my birthday. I slept most of the time since I was super tired. From Delhi Airport, we took a cab to the station, where we caught the Vande Bharat Express to Chandigarh. I was extremely impressed by the number of facilities on the train—it was my first time riding it! After a three-hour journey, we reached our destination.

We waited a while for our cab. On the way, we had breakfast at one of Punjab's most famous restaurants, Haveli. The aloo paratha was delectable and toothsome, while the lassi was sweet and appetizing. After breakfast, we sat in the car that would take us to a small town in Himachal Pradesh called Mandi, where my aunt's house is located.

The journey was very long, and we were hungry and tired. Luckily, my aunt is a great cook. She had made mutton and rice, which tasted like it came from heaven. After eating, we rested for a while. Then, my cousin brother, my parents, my aunt, and I boarded a bus to visit IIT Mandi, where my brother studies. The institute is divided into two campuses—North and South. The North Campus is actually bigger than the South Campus.

While exploring the campuses, my brother treated us to ice cream. There were many mulberry trees, so we

collected and ate a lot of berries—they were sweet and tasty! We also toured the town and tried a local dish called Siddu. It's a thick bread stuffed with dry fruit paste, and it tasted quite good.

We visited renowned Shiva and Kali temples beside the famous Beas River. The architecture of the temples was ancient, but their divine and breathtaking beauty remained. I was thrilled when we crossed the historical Victoria Bridge, built in 1877 under Raja Vijay Singh, the ruler of Mandi at that time. We bought some fresh fruits and vegetables from the market and returned home.

The next morning, we woke up at six. Our cab was waiting. We all climbed in, and we were finally off! Oh, it was such a wonderful experience. The wind was pleasantly cool, and the road twisted and turned in unexpected ways, giving me an enchanted feeling. But due to the uneven road, my brother got mountain sickness. Nevertheless, we still talked a lot on the way.

After a while, we saw something that became the most priceless experience of my life—the great peaks of the Himalayas. Their grandeur was unmatched by anything I had ever seen. The sight filled my heart with great emotion. The thrill I felt at that moment was beyond words. I will remember it forever. The car took a turn, and the mountains continued, right beside us.

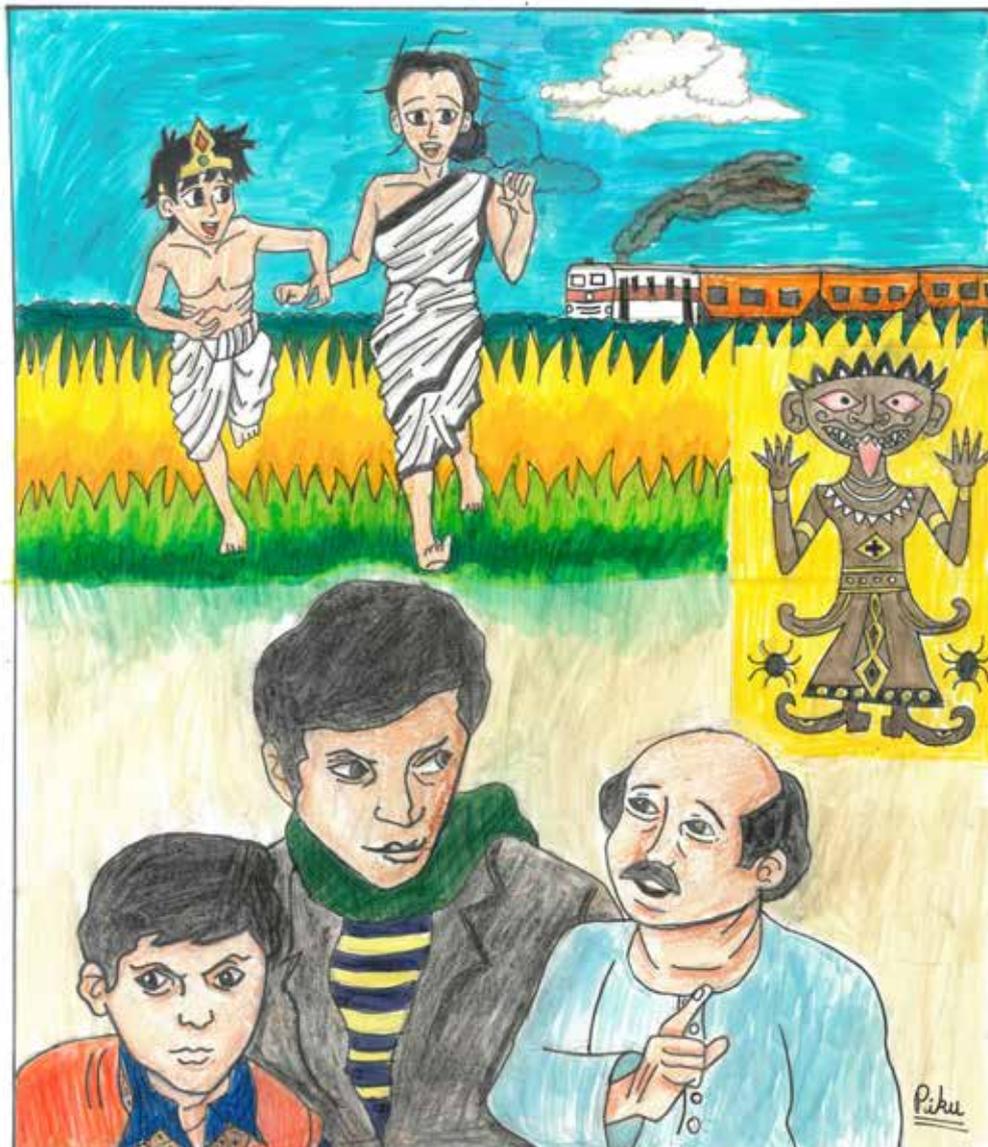
Soon, we arrived at the Atal Tunnel, which is 9 kilometers long. After crossing it, we had lunch at a small homestay in a place called Keylang. The owner was kind and prayed that we would see snowfall. After lunch, we continued

toward a place called Baralacha La Pass. My father said we would see snow there—and he was right! An organization called BRO, which builds roads in the area, had cut blocks of snow to clear the road.

We soon found a spot with clean, deep snow. My brother and I were so excited that we jumped out of the car as soon as it stopped. We played for a long time and even made a snowman, on whose head I left my hat. There were also two men with a sledge, and it cost just a few bucks for a ride. To ride, I had to climb up to an even higher altitude on the slippery snow and the lack of oxygen was making me dizzy. Yet, I somehow made it to the top and sat there, taking deep breaths. However, the real fun was about to begin. I sat on the sledge and a push from one of the men was enough to send me whizzing down



the slope. I did these three more times. The climb was treacherous, but the ride down was completely worth it. But then, a police officer told my father that a snowstorm was coming, and we should leave immediately. So, my father and aunt decided to head to a lower-altitude place called Jispa.



Soon, we arrived at a hotel, and my dad booked rooms for us. After changing into warmer clothes, my brother, my parents, and I went to the river to look for interestingly shaped stones. Then, my brother noticed a cloud descending the mountain toward us. He said excitedly, “It’s snowing!” And sure enough, I saw small white flakes drifting down.

I had imagined that if it snowed, I would be over the moon with happiness. But standing there, in the middle of the snowfall, all I felt was a numbness that slowly turned into definite, absolute, and pure happiness.

– *Piku*

Age: 11 years

The Boy Who Changed The Village

Once upon a time in a small village surrounded by lush green fields, there lived a boy named Rohan. He was an ambitious boy who always dreamed of making his village a better place to live in terms of infrastructure and better education facilities.

His parents sent him outside for his higher studies, as it was not available in his village.

He learned about new ideas and ways to improve his community.

When he returned, he was eager to share his knowledge with others. However, when Rohan tried to convince the villagers to adopt new ways, they were resistant.

The villagers said, “We are good this way. We don’t

want any change.”

But Rohan didn’t give up. He kept trying to persuade the villagers, but they just wouldn’t listen. One day, he met one of his friends. While discussing the issue, his friend reminded him of an honest builder they had met while studying together. This builder was known for his

Integrity and trustworthiness.

Rohan managed to convince Mr Kumar, the builder, to come to his village and help him to transform the village into a modern one with villas and lots of amenities, like a park, a school with a library full of amazing books for all age groups and a sports complex.

He agreed, and slowly, the work started. Villas were built, new roads were paved, a beautiful park came up, and schools were upgraded. Now, the villagers started to realize that Rohan was right. Finally, they understood that change is nature’s law.

They were grateful to Rohan and Mr. Kumar for their hard work and vision.

Rohan’s parents were proud of his determination and commitment.

Moral : The story teaches us that change is nature’s law, and embracing the change brings progress and prosperity.

- Ayaan Bhattacharjee

Age: 11 years



Happy Durga Puja ♥

From: Avishkar Das

Age: 9 years



Roblox: Grow a Garden, Grow Your Imagination

Roblox is an app with millions of games. These are games of fantasy, farming, training, fighting, running, building, catching, dancing, climbing, singing, cooking, living, stealing, selling, buying, thinking... and so much more. There is almost every game you can think of.

Almost half the population of the world plays Roblox. There is even a game in which you can live your dream life!

The best part is that you can make your own game in Roblox Studio. Let me tell you about the journey of the game I usually play *Grow a Garden*, made by Jandel. This started 2 months ago, when I was a beginner and only had 20 Sheckles (currency used in *Grow a Garden*). I bought my first 2 carrots, which cost me only 10 sheckles. But when I sold them, I got 100 sheckles! So I bought a few more carrots and soon I got 400 sheckles. Then I bought a strawberry and soon enough I had like 4000!

I bought strawberries, blueberries, and tomatoes. This kept happening for a few days, so I got bored and removed the strawberries and blueberries with a shovel and planted a few more tomato seeds. The bad thing was that no new seeds came in stock until Sam became the owner of the seed shop.

There were so many seeds like cocoa, dragon fruit, coconut, pepper, and banana. My entire garden changed when Sam came. I got cauliflower, banana, apple, and bell pepper. Then there was a whole new update. Now, there

were pet dinosaurs in stock! I gave my golden labs and got a triceratops and a stegosaurus. I got my first two coconut seeds, and there were so many coconuts that I was getting lucky harvests and extra coconut seeds. My friend even gave me a raptor. When he was still there, the shop got restocked, and I got my first mango seed.

Now, my garden is a paradise with 33 million sheckles in hand. My garden has 16 coconut trees, 5 banana trees, 8 apple trees, 3 mango trees, 1 bell pepper plant, 1 ember lily, 2 beanstalks, 7 cacti, 2 serentily, 1 zen rock, 36 bamboo plants, and a corn plant.

This game is teaching real-life business, but the bad part is that it's not real and just a game, though these things are possible in real life! You can just create your own game to make people happy who don't know how to make games. These games can give you extra life lessons because everything there is possible in reality. You can learn something that could become easier for you in real life. So what are you choosing? Stop playing and do reality tasks, or keep playing Roblox for life lessons that may someday be needed?

Keep playing for the wonders and mysteries of Roblox. What do you think after all of this? Download Roblox to find out!

- Aryaraj Rajak

Age: 9 years



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দোসর

ভিড়ে এখন অনেক আছে
বুনছে যারা জাল... আর আছে ছড়িয়ে
সহচর তাই খোঁজা হয়ে ওঠেনা এখন
কে আছে, যে থাকবে হয়ে নিজের জন?
একটু ঝালিয়ে নেবে মনের ভাবটুকু;
কে হবে? যে জমবে বুকে?
মানিয়ে নেবে আবার সে সুখে দুঃখে,
সবাই তো সেই নিস্তর শূন্যতায় পরিবিষ্ট..
কটা follower? কতোও reel!!
তাই তুমি তো বন্ধু সর্বশ্রেষ্ঠ!
কমেন্ট বক্সে ভরা like আর জীর্ণ সহানুভূতি
আর পাশাপাশি যখন, যেন যোজন দূর স্পর্শহীন শূন্য অনুভূতি...
Daily status-এ জমা পড়ে কত অভিমান!
আত্মতুষ্টি শুধু view; কি যায় আসে তাতে?
তোমার আমার একাকিত্বে হাসছে smiley।
কি চেয়েছিলে? কি পেয়েছো? প্রশ্নটা খুব silly!
তবু সময় থাকতে বুঝে গেছি, বোকা কৌটোই ফ্রেন্ড...
দোসর এখন ছেলেখেলা, এটাই এখন trend।

গৌরব গোস্বামী

অল্প ইচ্ছে

এবার পূজায় খুঁটব বৃষ্টি মাগো!
ভেবেছিলুম একটা দোকান দেব এবার...
জাম গাছটা, যেটা ঠিক মণ্ডপের পেছন পানে
সামনে তো দিলে না আমায় জাগা দাদারা
বললে “ওখানে বসতে টাকা লাগে অনেক।”
গতবারে কেলাবের পুলুদা যে ছেঁড়া তেরপল দিলে,
ওতেই আমার বেশ হয়ে যাবে।
ঘুগনি মানুষে খায় ভালোই চেটেপুটে,
চায়ও বারবার।
টকজলটাও বানালাম ওই পাড়ার বুড়ো গাছের পাকা তেঁতুল দিয়ে
ভাবলুম বিক্রি হলে পর
অষ্টমীতে এবার সন্দেশ দেবো মা এবছর
আর ভাইটাকে একটা প্যান্ট দেবো কিনে;
হঠাৎ বৃষ্টিতে সব ভিজ়ে গেলো মা!
টক জলটা জওওল হয়ে গেল!
ঘুগনির হাঁড়িটা পড়ে গেল জোর হাওয়ায়!
কালুটা কখন জানি এলে, চেটেপুটে খেলে সব,
ধারে কাছে ঘেঁসতে দিলে না আমায়!
এখনো পুলুদার কুড়ি টাকা ফেরৎ দেওয়া বাকি,
তবে দুটাকা আছে খুচরো আমার কাছে,
তোমার পুজোর ফুল, সন্দেশ হয়ে যাবে।
পরের বছর শুকনো রেখো মা,
আরেকটা বছর ঠিক কেটে যাবে।

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Vanity of the Vestige

In the western fields
My heart was there.

Your hair spun a tale with the wind,
And I was there, awaiting
What felt like an eternity.

I was there,
Humming that same melody,
The melody that framed us all.

But we were resilient,
Our puerile hearts made of tin.
Together, we caressed fire,
Composing a symphony,
A tale never told,
A tale never to be told.

And finally, we faded,
Faded away in the wind.
To this day, I reminisce
The western fields.

- *Parbanee Chowdhury*



A Journey to Nature's Abode: North Bengal



The Kolkata summer heat was starting to feel like a heavy, wet blanket. I was desperate for a change of scene, and the air in the AC compartment of the Padatik Express was a blissful escape from the “summer soup” I’d been drowning in. Leaving Sealdah, the city’s frantic energy dissolved into a smooth, dark rhythm—a lullaby that promised the hills.

I woke up to a gentle rock and a soft light filtering through the window. We were somewhere in North Bengal, and the view was nothing short of breathtaking. Lush green fields stretched to the horizon, dotted with tiny villages and lazy rivers. The air felt different—cooler, cleaner, and filled with the scent of damp earth and fresh leaves. It was a stark, yet intensely welcome, contrast to the chaos I had left behind.

The Journey into the Mountains

The real adventure began after we reached New Jalpaiguri (NJP) and started the drive up. The Teesta River was a shiny, silver thread far below us as we climbed the winding roads toward Lamahatta. Now, my Nini (maternal grandmother) is fantastic, but traveling with a squad of people in their 60s and 70s—my grandparents and their friends—is an adventure in itself. Every time the car took a hairpin bend, one of the grannies in the back would gasp and shout, “Thoda aste chhalo Bhai, hum marne nahi aya!” even though our driver was as steady as a mountain goat. I quickly learned the group’s snack time was more organized than a military operation, and every 30 minutes, a request of “Bhai rok ke” meant it was mandatory bio-break time!

Lamahatta: The Quaint Mountain Village

Our next stop was Lamahatta, an offbeat and stunningly beautiful village. The drive from Siliguri was a journey of continuous ascent, with the air growing progressively crisper, and the scent of pine and deodar trees flooding the car. It took us a little over two hours to reach our homestay—a feat I thought was impossible, considering the innumerable ‘khabar’ (snack) and toilet breaks we took!

“Lamahatta” literally means “the abode of a Lama,” and the tranquility certainly lives up to its name. The main attraction is the serene Eco Park, with its manicured gardens and a short trek through a pine forest that leads to two beautiful ponds. It was a place for quiet contemplation, where the only sounds were the rustling leaves and the distant chirping of birds. From a watchtower, we got a breathtaking view of the surrounding hills and, on a clear day, the majestic Mount Kanchenjunga.

Harsing and the Tea Country

From Lamahatta, we ventured deeper into the tea country, to a place called Harsing. The roads became narrower and even more scenic, with tea gardens appearing on every slope. The entire landscape was a carpet of green, with workers in colorful clothes meticulously plucking tea leaves. Harsing itself was a quiet hamlet, a perfect base for exploring the nearby tea estates.

The homestay we stayed at felt like a cozy, rustic second home. We spent our time walking through the tea

gardens, soaking up the fresh, crisp air that was a natural energy booster. My evenings were pure gold: they were filled with the beautiful Kishore and Mukesh numbers from the '70s, sung superbly off-tune but brimming with pure love and emotion by my oldies. We'd swap stories, laugh, and best of all, they'd pamper me with all the fried snacks and sweets I'm strictly injunctioned against eating back in Mumbai.

Okaity: The Estate with an "Okay" Name

The highlight of our trip was a visit to the Okaity Tea Estate. This wasn't just any tea garden; it was a heritage estate with a rich history. Our guide told us the story behind the name, and I had to laugh. Apparently, a British guy tasted the tea a long time ago and simply said, "Okay tea." Seriously? That's how a beautiful, centuries-old estate gets its name?

Inside the tea factory, it was like a workshop for magic smells—earthy, sweet, and floral all at once. We did a tea-tasting session, and I had to pretend to look very serious, swirling the tea in the tiny cup before sipping, just like the grown-ups. The Second Flush was robust, but I preferred the lighter First Flush. My Nini bought enough tea to practically fill a spare suitcase, carefully earmarking small packs for Tuni (that's what I call my

Grandmother's younger sister) pasher barir boudi, our maids, my music teacher in Mumbai and also for my mother's colleagues and father's cricket gang! I think the only person she didn't buy a pack for was Modiji—she wasn't quite confident about his address!

The estate also has a heritage temple and a viewpoint that offers a panoramic view of the entire valley. It was the perfect, memorable end to our hill station adventure.

Back to the City

With a heavy heart and a suitcase full of tea, we made our way back to Siliguri. The train journey back to Kolkata was a time for reflection. I looked through the pictures on my phone, reliving the moments of peace and beauty. The train eventually pulled into Sealdah station, and the familiar cacophony of the city enveloped me. But a part of me remained in the quiet hills, among the whispering pines and the endless green of the tea gardens. I'll always keep a bit of that calm, cool mountain air tucked away, ready for my next escape.

- Aarav Mishra

Age: 12 years



H A P P Y
DURGA PUJA

Greetings from

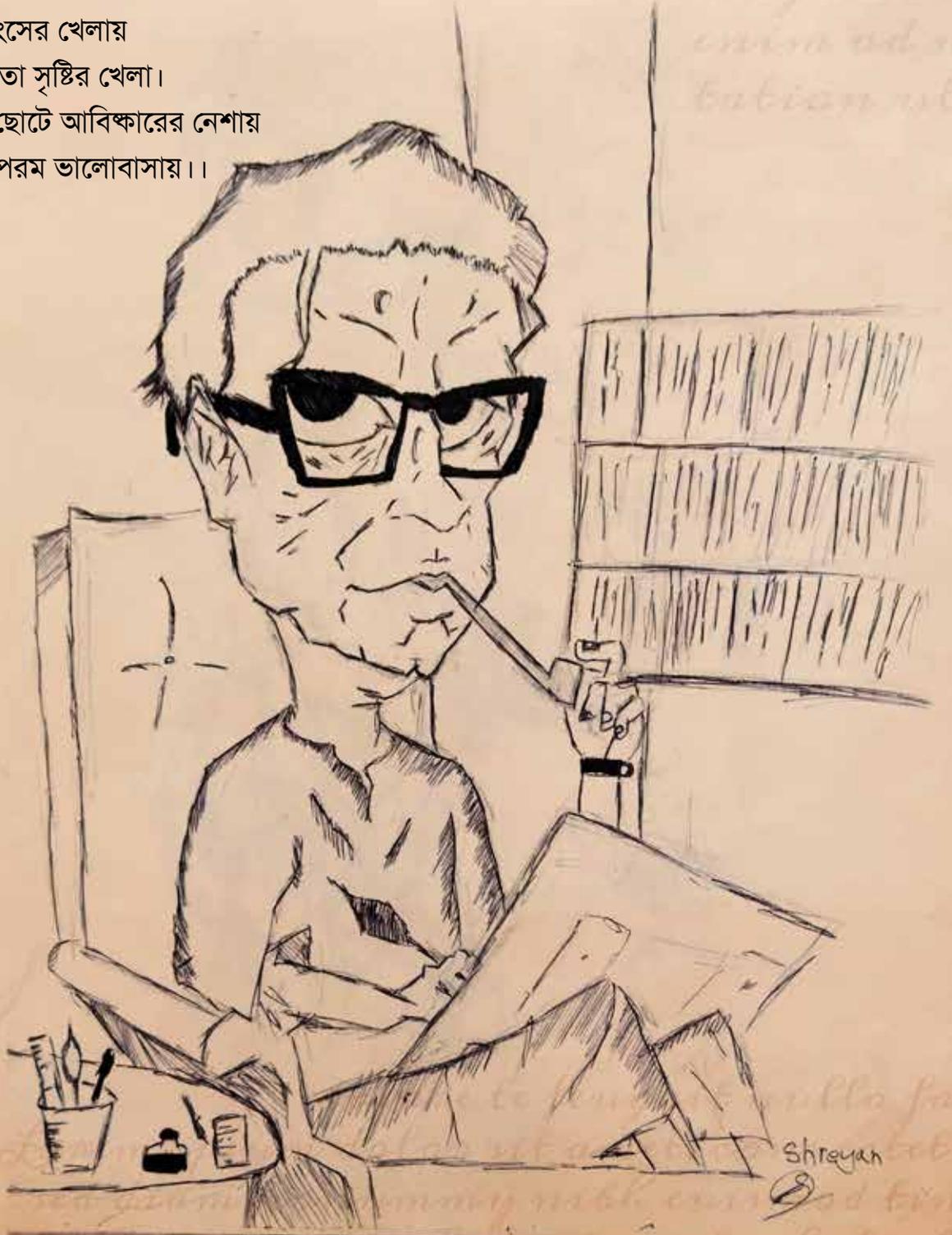


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Art by
Shreyan
Age:10 years

Silk and the Mountains

Once upon a time, there was a young, curious horse named Silk. She often gazed at the distant mountains, dreaming of what lay beyond them. But every time she asked to go, her parents said, “It’s too dangerous, Silk. You’re not ready yet.”

Silk didn’t like hearing “no.” One bright morning, filled with excitement and a bit of stubbornness, she decided to run away. She galloped through fields and streams until she finally reached the foot of the grand mountains. For hours, she explored—climbing rocky paths, sniffing wildflowers, and listening to the



wind whisper through the valleys. But as the sun began to set, Silk grew tired and hungry.

She looked around and realized she didn’t know the way home.

Back at the meadow, her parents were frantic. The entire herd was searching, calling her name into the night.

Just then, Silk heard a twig snap behind her. Startled, she

turned around. Out of the shadows stepped an old, gentle horse.

“Your parents are looking for you,” said the old horse kindly.

Silk blinked in surprise. “How do you know?”

“They sent me to find you,” the old horse said with a



warm smile.

Relieved, Silk sighed. “But I don’t know the way back.”

“I do,” said the old horse. “Follow me.”

Under the silver moonlight, Silk followed the wise horse through the winding paths. When they finally reached home, her parents rushed to her, full of tears and love.

From that day on, Silk never forgot her adventure—or the lesson she learned.

Moral: Always listen to your parents. They may say “no” not to stop your dreams, but to keep you safe until you’re ready to chase them.

- Ayaansh Chakraborty

Age: 9 years



by Shreeja Goswami

An Ode to the Culture vulture

You come into my home and preach to me
You walk the streets crying foul
You ambush my family using every tool available
From slogans on boards to TV studios
From all forms of social media to strongarm tactics

You ask me for my identity, you ask me about my
birthplace
You ask me what I order, you ask me what I eat
You ask me who I spend my time with; you ask me
what I do thence
You threaten me, you question me
You feign localization, while feeding into the
malaise around

But did you ever ask me? Did you ever try to
understand me?
Wait, do you even know who I am? So let me
facilitate this.
No, I am not condescending, I am just being myself
Or do I not even deserve a voice in your scheme of
things

I am just like you, proud of who I am, where I come
from and what I am
No, I have nothing to offer except for a glimpse
into my world
Wait, did I say, "My World"? Sorry for the moment
I got into your shoes
I have nothing to offer except for a glimpse into
our world
Because without you my world is incomplete
Without your positive feedback, I am just another
living being
Without your constructive feedback, I will never
be a better version of myself

Which begs the question, what do I want

All I want is space, no, don't cede an inch, I will
make do with what I have
All I want is to express, no, I don't want to show off,
I just want to offer a glimpse
All I want is to co-exist, no, I don't want to melt, I
just want to meld
All I want is a platform, no, I don't want to occupy,
I just want a corner

All I seek is your understanding, no, I don't need
your cooperation
Though I'd love that
All I seek is your good wishes, no, I don't need your
blessings
Though I'd love that
All I seek is your presence, no, I don't need your
troops
Though I'd love that

Now that I have shared a baseline, would you be
kind enough to leave me to my shenanigans?
Now that I have shared a glimpse into my world,
may I invite you to join me at my celebrations?
Now that I have walked the path of confluence,
may I invite you to hold hands and proceed ahead?

Because as I said earlier, without you I am just a
living being, without you I will never be a better
version of myself.

- Sujay Das

The Warriors of Spirit: The Fascinating Journey of the Naga Sadhus

Visualize this, the sacred river shimmers under a misty veil as conch shells echo across the ghats. From the haze emerge figures who seem carved from myth, their bodies smeared in ash, eyes blazing with transcendence, tridents raised to the heavens. These are the Naga Sadhus, the warrior monks of Hinduism, both fierce and serene, embodiments of renunciation and courage. Their presence at the Maha Kumbh Mela is more than a spectacle. It is a living reminder of India's ancient spiritual lineage, where faith and fearlessness merge into one.

My intrigue with the Naga Sadhu's is a very old one, the combination of a monk and Warrior. In my childhood I was told to stay away from their sight, Why? It was the appearance, naked (or minimally clothed), smeared with ash, dreadlocked hair, carrying weapons. Also, mystique and power, the stories of naga sadhus having supernatural power (curses, siddhis, etc.). What I understood much later was, the safety concern, the social norms and also the fear of loss (lost to renunciation or Spiritual life) made up reasons to ensure staying away from them, wherever spotted.

During my visit to the Maha Kumbh Mela this year I wanted to interact with Naga Sadhu's. A visit to the Juna Akhara (popular for the fierce Naga sadhu's) was on top of my itinerary. The Akhara's are integral to the spiritual and cultural fabric of the Kumbh Mela, representing the ancient lineage of Hindu warrior monks, yogis, and sadhus. The term "Akhara" literally means "wrestling ring" or "training ground," symbolizing not just physical strength but also

spiritual discipline and rigorous ascetic practices. With my earlier induction on them and with a certain fear combined with intrigue and inquisitiveness I walked into the Akhara. I learnt differently that day, if I may say, as I dared to interact with a couple of them. I was quite taken aback basis the misconceptions I carried versus the responses I got to my queries. Amongst all my inquisitiveness about them I was also curious to know their thoughts on being happy and what can one do for the larger good.

My bow to Shri Shri Mahanta Chetan Giriji Maharaj and Pujari Parmananda Giriji from Shree Pancha



Dashnath, Juna Akhara. If I have to summarize all my conversation with them my takeaway was, it is about self-understanding, about introspection. In a nutshell it's about the fundamental Vedanta teaching "Tat tvam asi" suggested as "I am That". These interactions also made me realize that this maha event is beyond religiosity. There is so much more to know and learn about Spirituality. My inquisitiveness for the Naga warriors did not cease as I

explored further to know more.

They are the Warriors of the Soul

The word Naga means “naked” symbolizing their total renunciation of the material world. To them, the absence of clothing is not exhibition but emancipation, freedom from ego, identity and possession. Followers of Lord Shiva, the original yogi, the Naga Sadhus are living expressions of his dual nature of ascetic and warrior, destroyer and liberator.

They are part of the Shaiva Akharas, monastic orders that trace their lineage back to Adi Shankaracharya in the 8th century CE. Shankaracharya is said to have organized these ascetics into disciplined regiments, forming a militant defense for Sanatan Dharma during times when temples and pilgrims faced repeated invasions. Over centuries, these warrior monks became both protectors of the faith and seekers of the infinite.

The Path to Becoming a Naga Sadhu

To become a Naga Sadhu is not a decision, it is a death and a rebirth. The journey begins when an aspirant, called a shishya, finds a spiritual guide within an Akhara. Under the guru’s watchful eye, the aspirant learns the first lessons of endurance, silence and humility.

At the time of initiation, often during the Kumbh Mela, the disciple undergoes a ritual called Diksha. His head is shaved, symbolizing the shedding of past identity. Then comes the moment of complete renunciation, he takes lifelong vows of celibacy, poverty and devotion. In a ceremony that mirrors his own funeral, he symbolically dies to the world, only to be reborn as a soul without possessions, without fear, and without name. From that day forward, he lives as a Naga Sadhu, a being who owns nothing but his body and even that he treats as transient dust.

The Discipline of Fire and Dust

Beyond the spectacle of the Kumbh, the daily life of a Naga Sadhu is one of raw simplicity and intense discipline. Their days are spent in meditation, yoga and penance, often in extreme conditions, without shelter or clothing.

Many live beside a sacred fire (Dhuni), performing Agni Pooja (worship of the eternal flame) a symbol of divine consciousness. The fire becomes their constant companion, a teacher that both purifies and consumes. Some undertake extreme austerities known as Tapasya.

One Sadhu may stand on a single leg for years, another may keep an arm raised indefinitely as an offering to Lord Shiva. These are not acts of exhibition, but of transcendence, the triumph of spirit over body, will over desire.

The Warrior Heritage

The martial aspect of the Naga Sadhus is as legendary as their spiritual one. Historically, they were not just monks but trained fighters, defenders of temples and dharma during the medieval era. Their training, known as Astra Vidya, includes mastery of traditional weapons, the trishul (trident), talwar (sword), gada (mace), and lathi (baton).

They practiced combat as a sacred discipline, integrating physical prowess with spiritual focus. Even today, during festivals, they display swordplay and mock duels, reminders of a time when they stood between invaders and the sacred spaces of India.

Their discipline reflects an eternal truth, that true spirituality requires courage. The Naga Sadhu’s battle is not just against enemies of faith, but against the greater foe, the mind’s own desires and fears.

Mystics and Philosophers

Beneath their fierce exterior lies profound wisdom. The Naga Sadhus are philosophers of the highest order, their worldview rooted in Advaita Vedanta, the belief that the soul (Atman) and the universe (Brahman) are one.

Their guiding principle, Aham Brahmasmi “I am the universe” is not arrogance but realization. Through meditation, they dissolve the illusion of separation, entering a state where the boundaries between self and cosmos vanish. As one Sadhu once told a pilgrim, “When you stop seeing yourself, you begin to see Shiva.”

At the Heart of the Maha Kumbh Mela

No gathering on Earth compares to the Maha Kumbh Mela. Held every twelve years on the confluence of India’s holiest rivers, it attracts millions of pilgrims seeking spiritual purification. Yet it is the Naga Sadhus who define its essence.

They lead the Shahi Snan, the royal procession and sacred bath amid cries of “Har Har Mahadev!” Their bodies, dusted in sacred ash and crowned with matted locks, seem like moving flames of devotion. As they march through the crowds carrying tridents and saffron flags, the atmosphere transforms. It is not mere ritual, it is a

spiritual charge that electrifies the air. For the pilgrims, the sight of the Nagas diving into the holy waters is profoundly symbolic. It represents the washing away of ego, sin and illusion. For the Sadhus themselves, it is the ultimate communion with the divine, the merging of the drop with the ocean. This philosophy of oneness makes them living embodiments of India's spiritual heart, fearless, detached and compassionate. They remind us that enlightenment is not escape from life, but mastery of it.

Beyond Myth: Their Modern Role

Though their militant role has faded, the Naga Sadhus remain deeply relevant in modern India. Many have become spiritual teachers, guiding seekers through meditation and yoga. Others have turned their attention to social causes—cleaning the Ganges, planting trees, and promoting harmony among faiths. Notably, in recent years, women have been initiated as Naga Sadhvis for the first time, breaking centuries old barriers. This inclusion marks an evolution of tradition,

proof that even the most ancient paths can adapt while retaining their spiritual essence.

Lessons from the Living Legends

The mystique of the Naga Sadhus lies in their paradox, fierce yet peaceful, detached yet compassionate, ancient yet timeless. They have mastered what most fear, solitude, silence, and death and emerged free. Their lives are not an invitation to imitate, but to reflect. To live with less, to face fear directly, to seek truth beyond comfort. In their ash smeared bodies and blazing eyes lies a message for the modern world that enlightenment is not about escape, but awakening, to live fully, fearlessly and consciously. As one Sadhu at the Kumbh Mela said while gazing into the skies: "Everything you fear losing, you never truly owned. What remains when all is gone, that is Shiva."

By Tapan RoyChoudhury



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স্মরণ কেয়া ঘোষ

সে তোমায় সব দিয়েছিল,
দিয়েছিল একটা নীল আকাশ,
একটা পাহাড়, একটা নদী আর বুক ভরা ভালোবাসা।

সাগরের নোনা জলে
তোমার পাপ ধুয়েছিল,
দুচোখ বুজে তোমায় আপন করে নিয়েছিল।
চলে গেল সে নীরবে
সব ছেড়ে দূর বহুদূরে,
দিয়ে গেল তার যা কিছু ছিল
নিঃসংকোচে তুলে নিলে,
ফেলে রেখে দিলে তার ভালোবাসার শুকিয়ে যাওয়া লাল গোলাপ,
কোনো এক বর্ষা মুখর রাতে
যদি তার কথা মনে পড়ে!
দুফোঁটা চোখের জলে
তাকে স্মরণ করো,
একলা রাতের অন্ধকারে।।



কেয়া ঘোষ

My Blissfull Dream



One day, I woke up in a cabin. It wasn't an ordinary cabin either – it looked like a seaside cabin, only more detailed and intricate. There were strange sea-horse-looking creatures on the ceiling, a sink full of coins, armor pieces hung on the wall, and a bunk bed shaped like a fishing boat, where I was sitting.

“Wait. Sea horses?” I thought. I looked around more carefully and realized those weren't sea horses – they were hippocampi, horses with the tails of fish. No ordinary cabin would have Greek mythological creatures hanging from the ceiling!

I ran to the mirror in the bathroom and laughed with delight. I was actually the guy, the myth, the legend – Percy Jackson – from Rick Riordan's books! My mom doesn't approve of his addictive stories, but I love them. I had messy jet-black hair, olive skin, and sea-green eyes – just like my father, Poseidon, God of the Sea. I was even kind of handsome.

I looked down and saw that I was wearing a bright orange Camp Half-Blood T-shirt with a Pegasus on it, faded jeans, and a beaded camp necklace. I had four beads, showing four summers at camp. I seemed to be around sixteen. “Maybe after the Titan War,” I hoped, because I didn't want to go missing like in the next series.

I stepped out of Cabin 3 and breathed in the sweet smell of the strawberry fields – the camp's main source of income from the mortal world. Satyrs – men with the lower half of a goat – were playing their reed pipes, making the strawberries grow faster. Campers and cyclopes were busy building new cabins for all the gods – Iris, Hypnos, Hecate, and others. I smiled, knowing it meant all the



gods, even the minor ones, would finally be respected. But the best moment was when I saw her – Annabeth Chase, the greatest person ever. She wore the same shirt and jeans, and her necklace had ten beads. Her long, curly blonde hair, stormy grey eyes, and “California girl” look made her even more beautiful, especially with her owl earrings from her mother – Athena, Goddess of Wisdom, Arts and Crafts, and Warfare.

She ran up to me, laughing. “You look like a cow licked your hair, Seaweed Brain!”

God, she's so cool, I thought.

Then we went to our usual camp activities – wall climbing (the other side had lava, so you had to climb fast), sword fighting (my favorite), arts and crafts (which I was terrible at), and canoeing.

Later, I sat on the grass, exhausted but happy. My best friend Grover – a satyr and the Lord of the Wild – came running over, panting.

“We can barely keep up!” he said. “I could use a dozen more satyrs. There are demigods turning up all over the world.”

I laughed. “Sure, dude, but the satyrs you have are working super hard. I think they’re scared of you.”

“Dude, I’m not scary.”

“You’re the Lord of the Wild – a chosen one of Pan—” He threw up his hands. “Please stop. You’re almost as bad as Juniper.”

I grinned and looked over at the new Hecate Cabin, sparkling with magic stones that, if dropped, would probably turn everyone within half a mile into a tree. I figured only Grover would like that.

“There are going to be so many new cabins that Annabeth and Chiron are planning a whole new row,” I said.

“Sure, but it’s still going to be the same old Camp Half-Blood.”

“Yeah,” I laughed, “and you’re still going to be my best friend.”

“Except for Annabeth,” he grinned. “That’s different.”



“Yep. It sure is.”

That night, after dinner, we went to the amphitheatre for the camp sing-along, and then back to our cabins. I held Annabeth’s hand all the way to Cabin 3, kissed her goodnight, and crashed into bed.

When I opened my eyes, I was back in my own house – my parents snoring like water buffaloes on either side of me.

“Hmph. Typical,” I muttered.

I would have given anything to be back at Camp Half-Blood, but I guess that’s the line between dreams and reality. Sometimes, you just must wake up.

– *Nairit Ganguly*

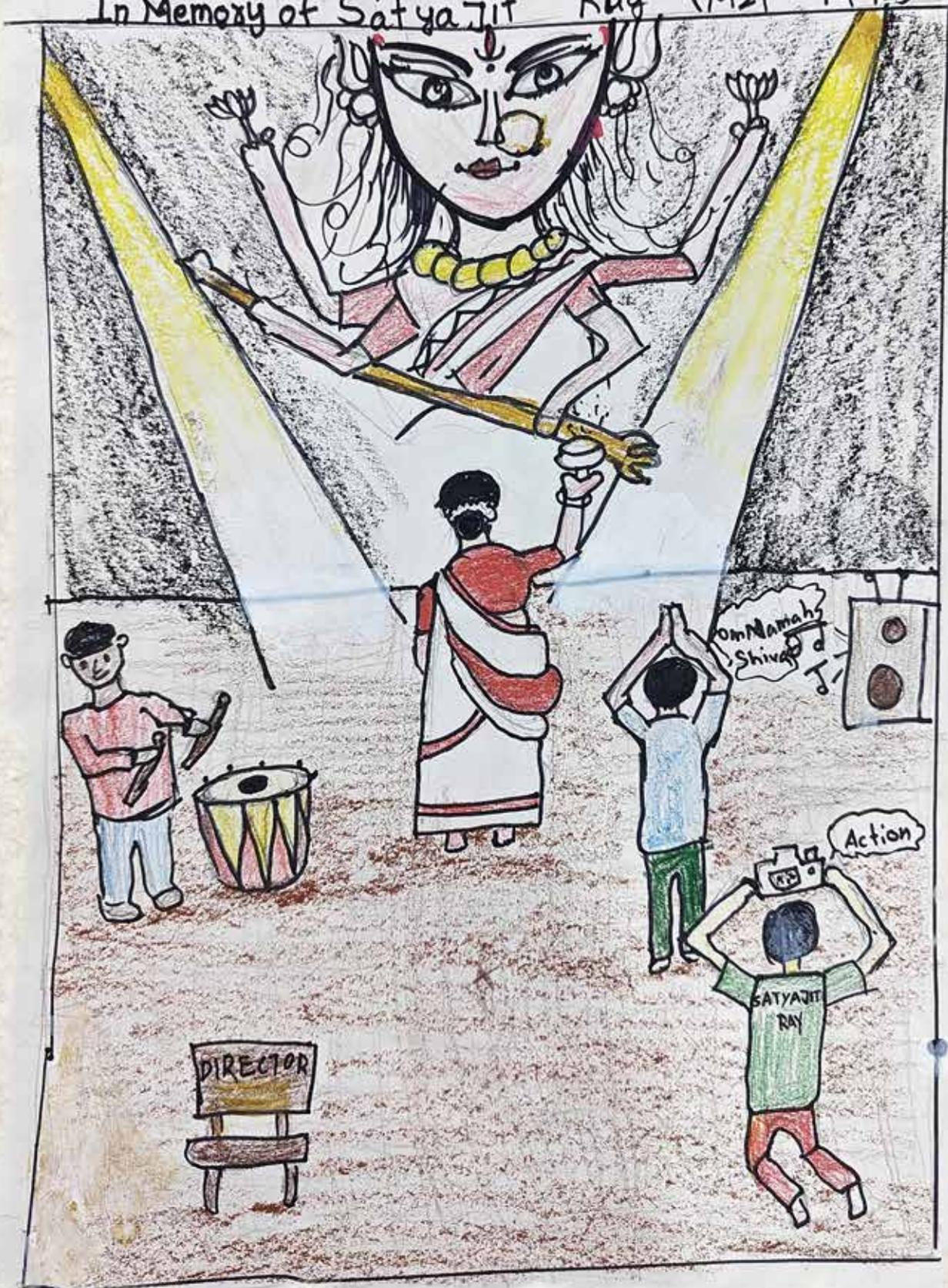
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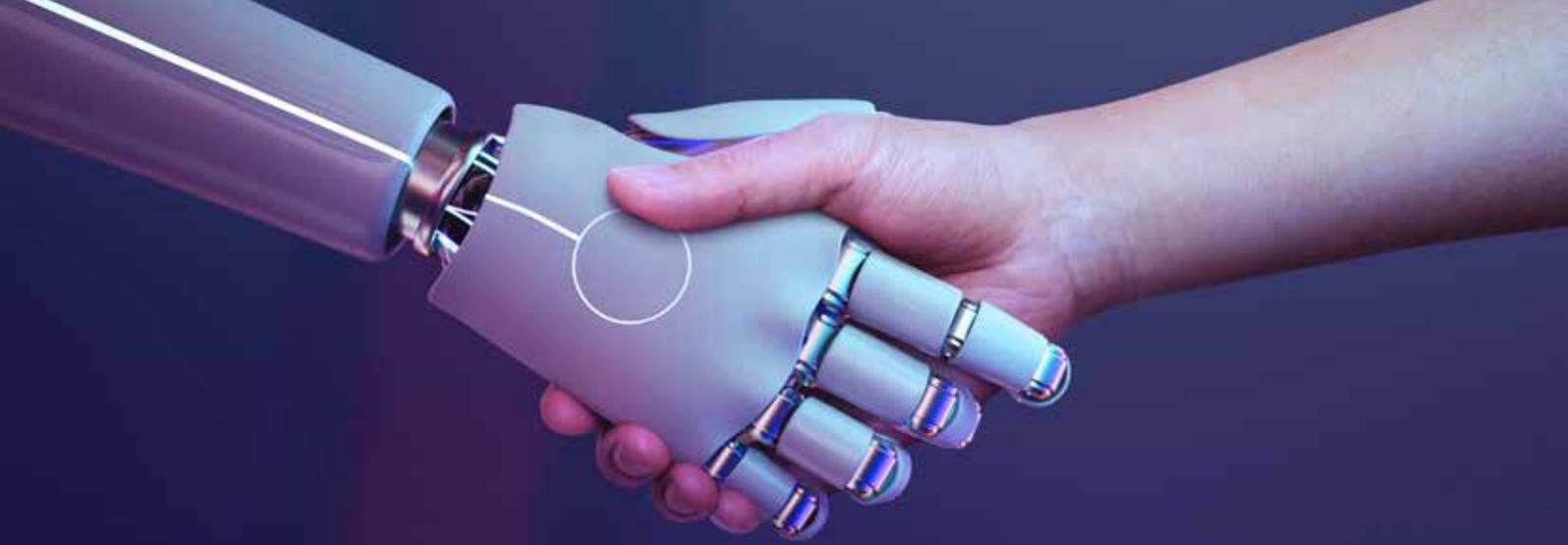
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In Memory of Satyajit Ray (1921 - 1992)



Art by Advik Samaddar

Age: 9 years



ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE - FRIEND OR FOE?

The AI Buzz is everywhere - Do we even realise the true potential of AI?

Artificial Intelligence(AI) is a superpower that makes robots think like us, humans. AI allows machines to do many things that make our lives easier - like hear, speak, recognize faces and even make decisions on its own. Machine Learning(ML) is a special type of AI which help machines learn from experience just like us humans. Experience is nothing but learning from data. IOT(Internet of Things) is where many devices are connected through internet.

Now with making our lives easier, it is also making us lazy. Let me tell you a short story to explain.

There were two friends Anaya and Reema and their assignments were coming up. Anaya took help from apps like ChatGPT, Gemini, Meta for her essay writings, while Reema read books, newspapers, magazines to learn about new things for her essay. Anaya's machine made essay was praised by teacher while Reema's writings were considered childish. Over a period of time Reema started to gain knowledge and her writing skills also improved, but Anaya got stuck with using apps.

These days people are using smart gadgets like smart phones, smart watches, smart home appliances and even autonomous cars - so much that is it leading to potential

health issues like eye strain, sleep disruption, and attention deficit.

Artificial Intelligence is used in Disease Diagnosis for treating people who have critical illness like cancer, medical imaging analysis and many more. It is also used in Fraud detection by monitoring transaction and gives personalized recommendation like in Flipkart, Myntra, etc. Using smart devices like smart home appliances offer a big wide range of advantages that enhance our everyday life and also helps in tracking our health and fitness.

AI is for helping people have a better and smart life. So be responsible enough to choose wisely and not become the slave of machines!

While AI is speeding search and analysis to give us quick responses it is worth noting that it may lack the sensitivity and context, which we commonly call human touch. Hence the right approach might be a combination of both AI and human touch & control built around it.

Do let me know your thoughts !

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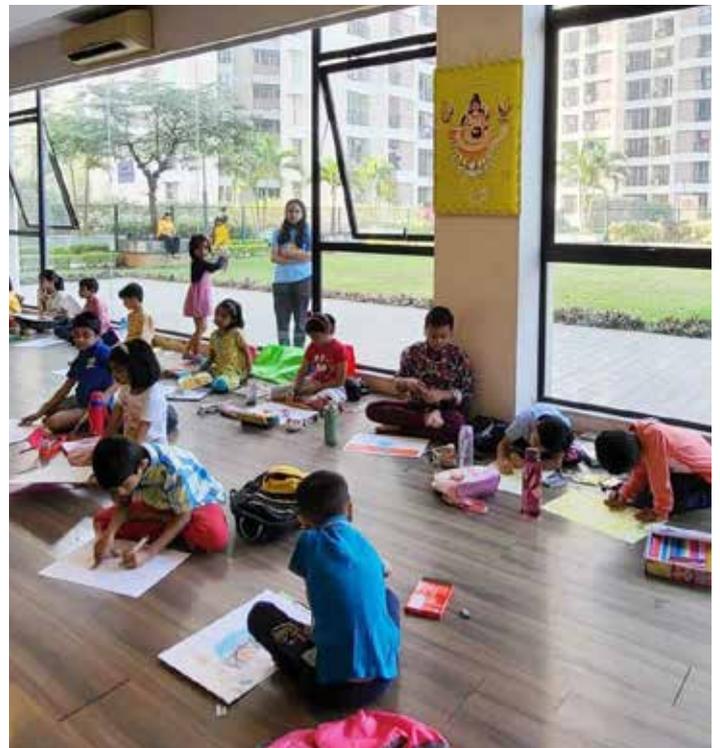


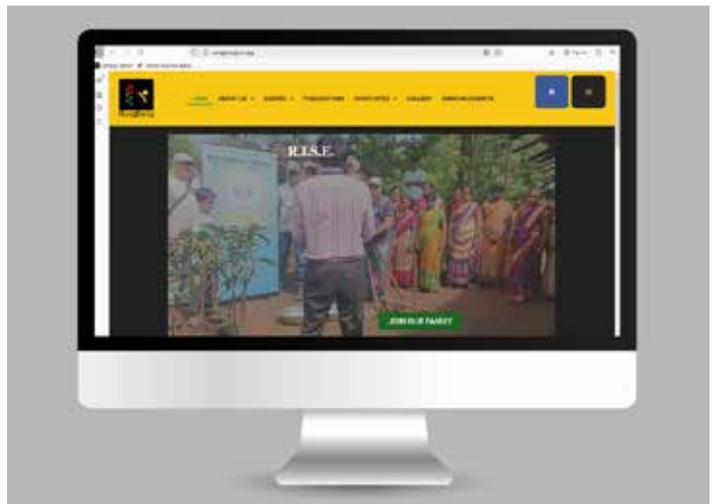
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ধানের গোলা কাঁদে একাকীত্বে
ভিটেমাটি ছুটছে কালের বৃত্তে...
তার পেরিয়ে নতুন মাটি মা
এ দেশ আমার... নতুন নামে ডাকি
ভাঙতে ভাঙতে মাটির ভাগাভাগি
শিরায় শিরায় একি রক্তস্রোতে

দিন বদলে প্রবাসী চল্লিশে
বহিরাগত কে বা কাদের ডাক...?
এই সীমানা পার করলেও তুমি
নিজের কাছে নিজেই আগন্তুক
লড়তে লড়তে বাঁচতে ভুলে যাবে
সাদা কালোয় ব্ল্যাকআউট হবে রোজ
তার চাইতে শুধরে নাও নিজে
মাসিক বেতন হয় যদি গরমিল

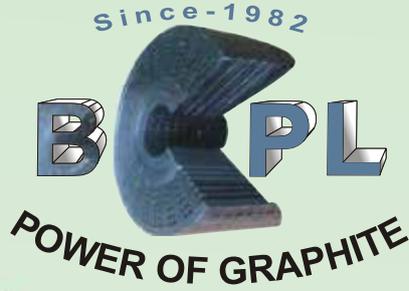
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Can Art be Apolitical?

A glance into Bengal's colonial art history

“Art can never be separated from politics. If you observe carefully, the Government of every country is using art and media to establish its rule. If we want fundamental changes, we have to use our art and media as a weapon.” (Party, dir. Govind Nihalani, 1984)

Early nineteenth-century French philosopher, Victor Cousin coined the term “l’art pour l’art” meaning “art for the sake of art”, explaining the necessity of keeping art away from any political or social interpretation. However, in a world grappling with political instability, polarisation and prejudice, expressing opinions, thoughts and emotions through art is still one of the most viable options for a population to portray their dissent or show individual support towards a larger collective cause. From Nazi and Soviet visual culture, avant-garde movements, feminist art, to Banksy’s street art, art and aesthetics have been used as tools of expressing political, social and economic dissent over centuries.

But how has this ‘weapon’ of art been used by the ones with money and power? Historically, governments and state apparatuses of every country have used art to establish their rule, dictate their power and subjugate the masses. This has been true for India under colonial rule,

especially in Bengal. To gain complete political and economic supremacy over India, its language, culture and art needed to be controlled and altered according to the tastes of the colonisers.

Colonial expansion universalised the Eurocentric marker of high culture, which sought the “homogenisation through imitation and catching up” of non-Western societies (Amin, 1989). This is evident in the British establishment of art schools, forcing Western sensibilities onto Indian painters and the standardisation of art production due to the Industrial Age. The British framed a Western education-based art syllabus, which shaped the critical and creative thinking of the Indian youth to be manipulated into having a British mindset (Kantawala, 2012). This art education was a powerful means of social control.

In the late eighteenth century, India was introduced to the ‘Company style’ of art, a hybrid result of Indian artists painting according to the British gaze and sensibilities. The look softened with watercolours

replacing bright gouache, backgrounds flattened, shading followed European naturalism, and figures became more “correct,” less stylised. Subjects of the paintings also shifted from gods and courts to trades, rituals and costumes—everyday Indian life catalogued for a British eye. Such portrayal of India not only served the purpose of memorialisation but also surveillance for the British, a method to record and understand Indian culture through commissioned art (Chanda-Vaz, 2019).

This portrayal exemplified the rural life of India (see Images 1 and 2), which existed as it did before the British, but the emphasis on their ‘backward’ representation served imperialistic purposes. The visual knowledge and impression of India in the nineteenth century is thus only available through the colonial gaze and substantiates an incomplete,

conjunctural art history of colonial Bengal.



Image 1



Image 2

(Image 1: *The Hawker*, Company painting, ca. 1870-90, watercolour on paper;

Image 2: *A weaver in Murshidabad*, Company painting, ca. nineteenth century.)

It wasn't until the late nineteenth century that Abanindranath Tagore started the Bengal School of Art, moving away from the 'company style' of painting and redefining the Indian style of art. Tagore, although trained in Western art, remained loyal to the application of 'Indianness' in his paintings. He managed to bring in influences of Mughal and Rajput miniatures, Ajanta frescoes, Chinese and Japanese painting, Pre-Raphaelite and Art Nouveau into his personal style of painting. He became the face of nationalistic art and the 'real Indian artist' of Colonial Bengal. Abanindranath's renowned painting 'Bharat Mata' carries tremendous influences of nationalistic and political content that directly portrayed him as an "anti-partition Swadeshi agitator" (Guha-Thakurta, 1992). Such creative social choices can be found in the work of Abanindranath early on.

In Image 3, an amalgamation of different art styles can be found throughout the painting. The Krishna Lila-Ras is an act of cultural reclamation of an authentic 'Indianness'. The style of painting borrows the

rich gold detailing of Mughal miniatures for garments while adopting the proportionate figures and naturalistic backgrounds reminiscent of European art. It's a sophisticated design to create a distinctly modern yet deeply rooted Indian aesthetic, intentionally rejecting the flat, shadowless style of Company paintings. The mythological subject of Krishna and the gopis dancing beneath the moon anchors the work in spiritual heritage and the "communitarian spirit of the Bengali renaissance", offering a powerful counter-narrative to colonial views.

In stark contrast, the Company painting of two entertainers (Image 4) exemplifies the colonial gaze, its primary function not artistic expression but rather meticulous documentation for British patrons. By presenting Indian life as a collection of observable occupations and types, Company paintings reinforced a colonial perspective, serving the administrative and classifying interests of the colonisers. Together, these two paintings offer a compelling visual dialogue: one asserts a vibrant, living cultural identity, while the other functions as

a dispassionate record of a colonised world.

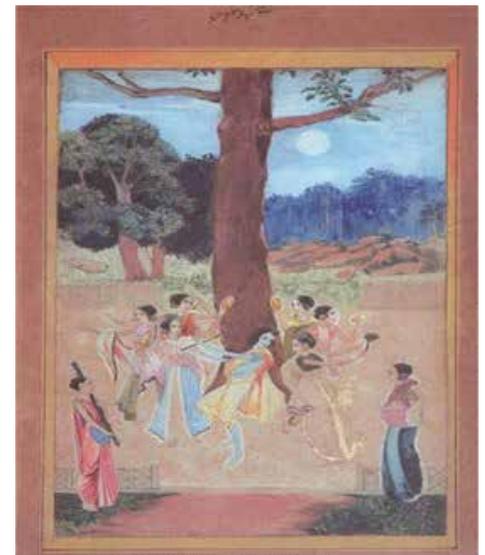


Image 3

(*Krishna Lila- Ras*, by Abanindranath Tagore, ca.1897, located in Rabindra Bharati Society at Kolkata.)

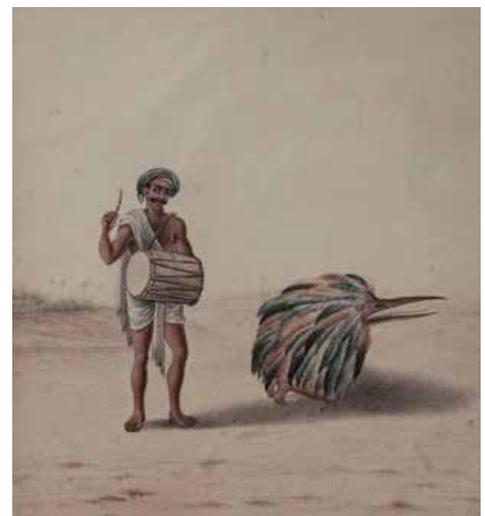


Image 4

(*Two entertainers*, Company painting, ca. 1870-90, watercolour on paper.)

This contrast between art as cultural assertion and as colonial documentation perfectly illustrates the political duality of art, which makes it impossible to interpret it as a passive and objective entity. As Turner and Webb (2016) state, "whether artists choose to focus on

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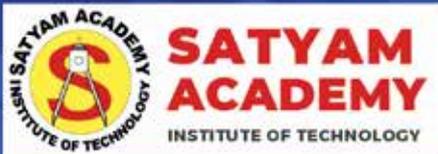
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their own aesthetic and maintain a distance from socio-political concerns, or engage energetically in current troubles, they are part of the culture, and in presenting a particular set of images and attitudes, will necessarily reflect something about the lived world.”

The conversation around art and politics is a recognition of art’s immense power that can build or break, liberate or suppress. On one end, the colonial regime

expertly turned art into a system of control. By enforcing a rigid hierarchy of ‘high’ and ‘low’ art, they didn’t just judge aesthetics, they colonised the mind to establish cultural dominance. While on the other end, for visionaries like Abanindranath Tagore, art was not about adhering to an imposed definition of ‘high’ culture, it was about creative expression, a pathway to the uncolonised mind. Their work reclaimed an Indian cultural identity and challenged the very definitions

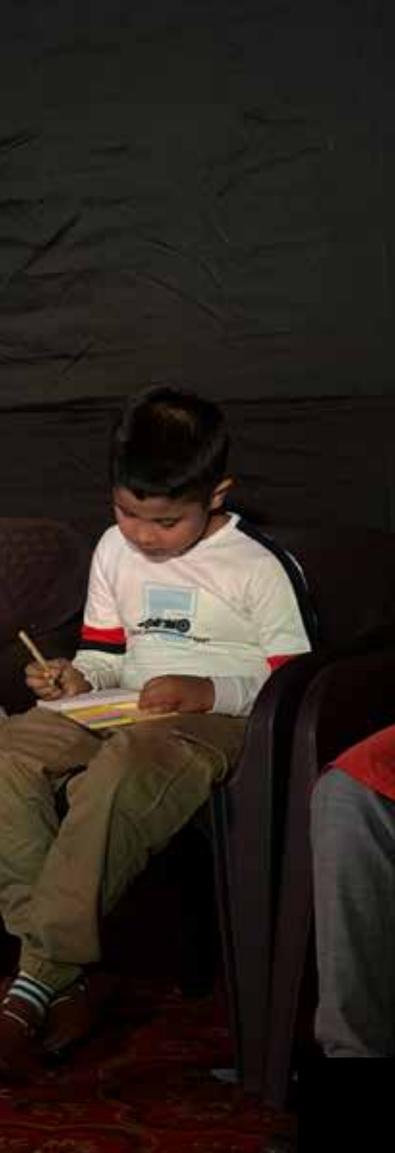
of beauty and worth laid down by the oppressors.

In the end, Art is political, so next time you gaze upon a painting in a gallery, think about whose story is being told and whose voice might be missing. Maybe then the canvas will reveal its hidden history to you.

– Sudeshna Roychoudhury







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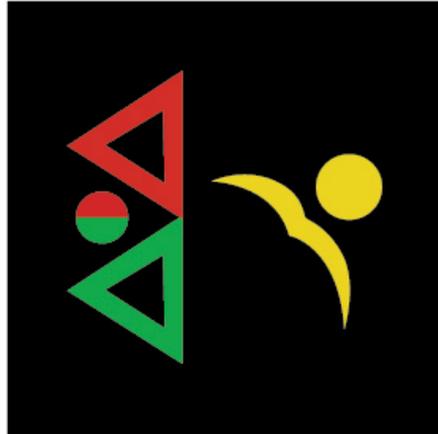
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As part of his commitment to community and culture he has kindly contributed to the Durga Puja celebrations . This reflects his belief in togetherness , tradition and spreading joy and highlights his spirit of giving back and celebrating with community.





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