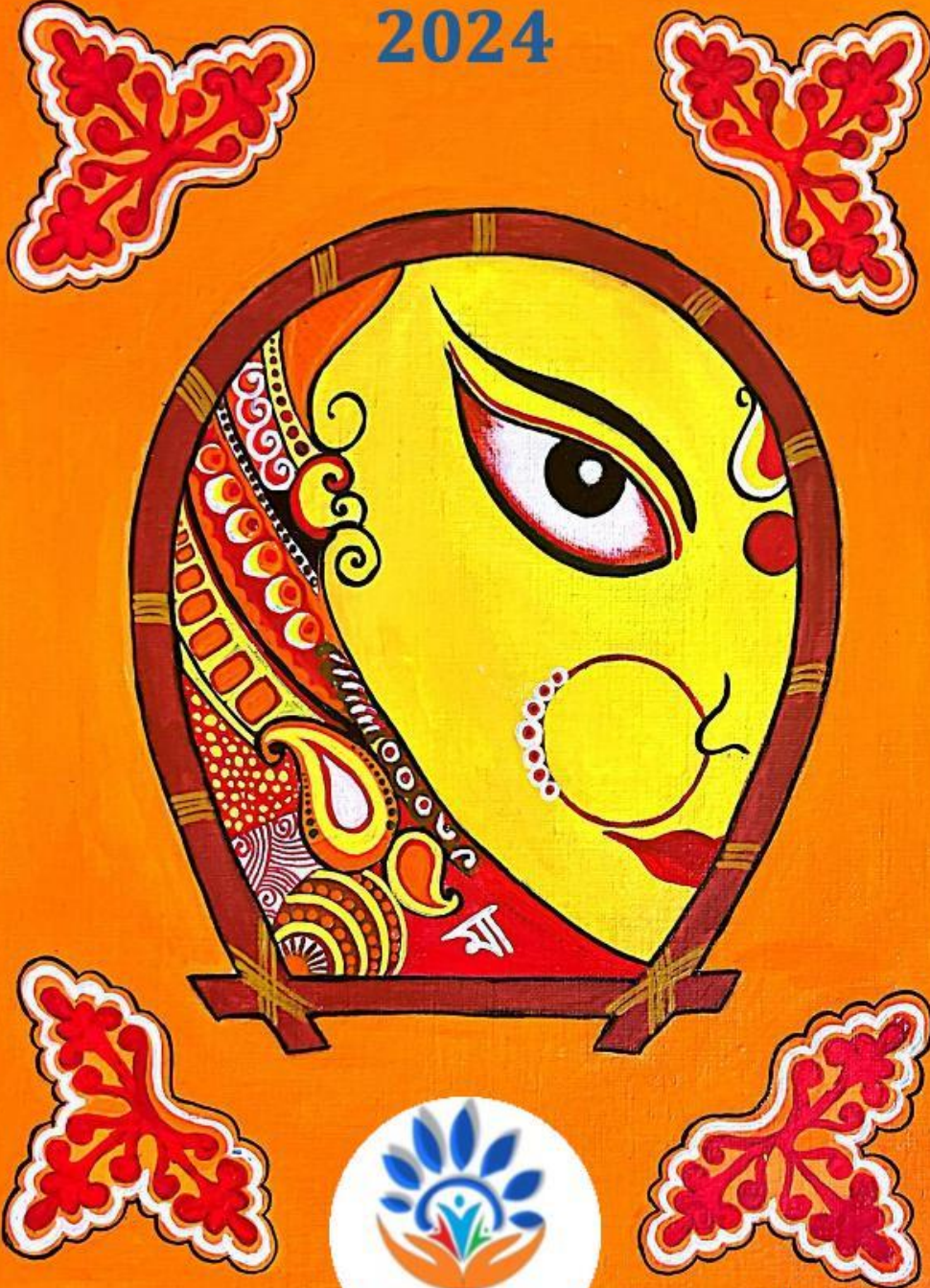


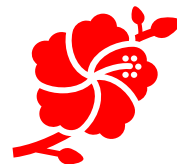
SANSKRITI

SHARADIYA MAGAZINE

2024



SAMHITA CULTURAL ASSOCIATION
OF ARIZONA



Smita

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From the editor's desk

Shabarni Basu

Turning the pages of this magazine, we embark on a journey that mirrors the sacred rhythm of Durga Puja where each moment is infused with deep respect, fiesta, and the timeless values that this festival embodies. It is with immense joy and deep gratitude that we present to you this year's edition of Sanskriti, woven together with the rich tapestry of devotion, culture, and community.

Durga Puja, a festival that traverses beyond rituals, reflects life and social interaction. It commemorates the eternal victory of positivity over all negative forces, light over darkness, and hope over despair.

Samhita Cultural Association of Arizona strives to provide an inclusive society away from India. The bond mirrors the core ethos of an Indian anatomy and endures to cater to each member's societal needs. At Samhita, the celebration is not just limited to merrymaking but projects an integrated journey that sees members putting up an arduous task of crafting every single essence of this magnanimous gala.

This magazine is a humble effort to bring together voices from across our community. From thought-provoking articles to visual treats and travel tales, every page is a testament to our shared spirit and the bonds that unite us.

In these pages, you will find echoes of our past, reflections on our present, and visions of a future where the values of Durga Puja—resilience, compassion, and justice—continue to guide us. We would, especially, like to acknowledge the thoughtful contributions this year given the present scenario back home that has shaken the entire society. We hope Sanskriti not only serves as a keepsake of this year's celebration but also inspires contemplation on the deeper meanings of this beloved festival.

To the writers, artists, photo enthusiasts, EC members, and volunteers, your contributions are the heartbeat of this magazine, and your unwavering support is cherished beyond words. Let this Puja be a time of renewal, where the spirit of love and unity blossoms in every heart. I wish you an exciting read as you buckle up for this creative ride!

President's Message

Anirban Bhattacharya

Dear Samhita Family Members,

As the joyous occasion of Durga Puja approaches, I feel a deep sense of gratitude and pride in being part of this wonderful community that comes together each year to celebrate our cultural heritage. Durga Puja is not just a religious festival; it is a time of unity, celebration, and renewal of our collective spirit. It serves as a reminder of the eternal triumph of good over evil and the power of resilience.

Our Puja celebrations have always been a reflection of our shared values, traditions, and the vibrant culture that binds us together. This year is no different, and I am thrilled to see the enthusiasm with which all our members have come forward to contribute their time, energy, and creativity. Whether it is in organizing events, decorating the pandal, preparing cultural performances, or simply participating in the celebrations, your efforts truly embody the spirit of our community.

The Durga Puja magazine, which you now hold in your hands, is yet another testament to this collective effort. It is a beautiful showcase of the talents, ideas, and reflections of our members. Each page is filled with stories, poems, essays, and artwork that capture the essence of our festival and the diverse voices within our community.

As we worship Maa Durga, let us also take a moment to reflect on the values she represents—strength, compassion, and courage. In these times, more than ever, we need to embody these values in our personal and collective lives.

On behalf of the entire organizing committee, I extend my heartfelt thanks to everyone who has made this year's Durga Puja celebration possible. I look forward to celebrating with all of you and creating memories that will last a lifetime.

Wishing you all a joyous and blessed Durga Puja!

AZ Samhita EC Members & Teams

A special shout-out to the force behind the Durga Puja '24



*Tanushree Baishya
Cultural Secretary*



*Rita Chattopadhyay
Puja Secretary*



*Chayan Bhattacharyya
General Secretary*



*Rajeev Ranjan
General Secretary*



*Biswajit Saha
Treasurer*



*Anirban Bhattacharya
President*

Advisory Board: Babu Raman K, Sandip Chattopadhyay, Samar Bhunia, Arnab Ghosh & Soumik Maiti

Puja Team: Rita Chattopadhyay (lead), Chandrani Ghosh & Mrityika Ganguli

Decoration Team: Mamta Ojha (lead), Smita Panda, Rupali D Parimisetty & Kumar Abhishek Singh

Cultural Team: Babu Raman K, Tanushree Baishya & Esha Bhattacharya

Social Media Team: Soumyadev Sarkar & Abir Deb

Durga Puja

Srinika Das/ Grade 5, Age 10



Durga Puja is that festive time of the year which every Indian but mostly Bengalis await. We celebrate and honor Goddess Durga during this puja.

We celebrate Durga Puja for many reasons. Primary reason is that we believe Ma Durga is coming to visit Earth to her parents' house with her kids - Ganesh, Karthik, Lakshmi, and Saraswati. The other reason is that Ma Durga brought peace to the universe by killing the evil demon Mahishasura. These are the reasons we celebrate Durga Puja.

We start the preparations for the puja towards the end of July. All the families meet every Sunday to plan and make the decorations, practice for dance and drama. We all have fun at every gathering and slowly prepare for the final gala. All the effort pays off during the days of Durga Puja. We celebrate Durga Puja for three days, pray to Ma Durga and seek her blessings.

We have such a great time amongst my friends. Bollywood night is always fun with lots of dancing. I also perform dance and drama with all my friends at the puja. There are lots of people and food. Overall, me and all my friends have a great time.

Durga puja is a grand celebration that every Bengali enjoys. We all look forward to it next year.

"অমল মহিমা লয়ে তুমি এলে, অরুণ প্রভাতে মন ছুঁয়ে গেলে"

অনিন্দিতা রায় বিশ্বাস

কাল টিভির রিমোটটা অন করতেই জীবাংলায় মহিষাসুরমর্দিনীর প্রোমো চোখে পড়লো, আর সঙ্গে সঙ্গে গোটা শরীর বেয়ে শিহরণ.. পূজো তাহলে চলেই এলো!! হঠাৎ করে রাস্তার ধারে গাড়ির rear-view mirror এ চোখে পড়ে গেল দিগন্তবিস্তৃত আকাশধোওয়া নীল আর তার কোলে একরাশ কাশফুলের শিরশিরে হাওয়ায় মাথা দোলানো। দেরি না করে একগোছা তুলে নিয়ে এলাম ঘরে ...এই সাত সমুদ্র পাড়ে মরুরাজ্যেও পূজো এসে গেছে!!



দ্রষ্টব্য: সঙ্গের ছবিগুলো মহালয়ার সকালে আমার প্রয়াত বাবা অসিত রায় তুলে পাঠিয়েছিলেন বছর কয়েক আগে; যাঁর হাত ধরেই আমার জীবনে ফটোগ্রাফির প্রতি প্রথম ভালোবাসার শিক্ষা। আমার ছোটবেলার বাড়ি, বাগান, পাশের সবুজ ছায়া পড়া

পুকুর, ঝরা শিউলি, নারকেল গাছের ছায়া বা রেডিওর সুর- আজও শরৎকে বেঁধে রেখেছে সমান ভাবে.. মহালয়ার ভোরে ।।

মনে পরে গেল উৎসবের দিনগুলোর টুকরো টুকরো কোলাজ.. আমার বাড়ি, বাগানে স্থলপদ্মের মনকাড়া সুবাস, ফুলে ভরা শিউলিতলা, ঢাকের বোল আর নতুন জামার গন্ধ...হ্যাঁ পূজোর একটা নিজস্ব গন্ধ আছে..আছে একটা ঝলমলে আনন্দের রং, আর মহালয়ার এক অদ্ভুত সুরেলা মাদকতা। যদিও বা গুগল সার্চে অনলাইন মহিষাসুরমর্দিনী শোনা, রাত পোহালেই চোখ কচলে বিছানায় বসে রেডিওতে মহালয়া শোনাটাকে রিপ্লেস করে দিয়েছে তবু 'আশ্বিনের শারদ প্রাতে জেগে উঠছে আলোর মঞ্জুরী'-কথাগুলো শুনলেই সারা গায়ে কাঁটা দেওয়া অদ্ভুত যে এক আবেগ, সেটা কোনদিনও একবিন্দু কম হবেনা।

মাদুর্গা বাঙালির কাছে শুধু দেবী নন, তিনি ঘরের মেয়ে..ছেলেমেয়ে-স্বামী নিয়ে যার ভরভরন্ত সংসার। বছর ঘুরলে যেমন মেয়ে বাপের বাড়ি আসে মাতৃরূপে-কন্যারূপে মাও তেমনি আমাদের ঘরে আসেন। বিশ্বকর্মা পূজোর শেষেই হালকা হিমেল হাওয়া জানান দিত আর কিছুদিন পরেই মহালয়া-দেবীপক্ষের শুরু। কেন জানি না পূজোর দিনগুলোর চেয়েও মহালয়া থেকে ষষ্ঠী অর্ধি এই 'পূজো আসছে' ভাবটাই আমার বেশি প্রিয় ছিল।

পড়াশুনার পাট গুটিয়ে নতুন ছেপে বেরোনো আনন্দমেলা পূজোবার্ষিকীর পাতা উল্টোনো, পাশের পুকুরে অজস্র শালুকের ভিড়, সার্বজনীনতলায় জেগে ওঠা মগুপ আর পাড়ার দরজির কাছে ছিটকাপড় হাতে লাইন এসব মিলেমিশেই এসে পড়ত আগমনীর দিনগুলো। বাড়ির গেটে ঢুকতেই শিউলিগাছটা বাগানে ফুল ছড়িয়ে জানান দিত শরৎ এসেছে..মহালয়ার আলো-আঁধারি ভোরে কোঁচড় ভরে তুলে আনতাম সেই একরাশ খুশি।

মহালয়ার আগে চারিদিকে চলত অপার প্রস্তুতি- ঘরদোরের ঝুল ঝাড়া, চাদর কাচা, নতুন সাজানো ফুলদানি আর বাগানে নারকেল গাছ থেকে নারকেল পাড়া। মা পাড়ার সবাইকে গাছের নারকেল দিত আর কাকিমনি-জেঠিয়ার রান্নাঘরে যখন সেই নারকেল ভেঙে তাতে নলেন গুড় ঢেলে কড়াইয়ের গরম আঁচে পাক দেওয়া হত, তার প্রাণকাড়া গন্ধে ম-ম করতো আমাদের গোটা পাড়া !

মহালয়ার আগের দিন আলমারির সব জামাকাপড় বের করে ছাদে রোদে দেওয়া হত আর সেইসঙ্গে আমার আর বাবার ডিউটি ছিল ঘরের দেয়ালজোড়া আলমারিগুলোতে থাকা অগুস্তি বইগুলোকে একে একে নিয়ে লম্বা বারান্দায় জলচৌকিতে মাদুর বিছিয়ে

রোদুরে দেওয়া। সাথে সাথে টেপ রেকর্ডারে চলত হেমন্ত,মান্না দে বা লতা-আশার পুজোর গান।

এর মাঝেই পাড়ার দাদাদের চাঁদা নিতে এসে মাকে অষ্টমীর অঞ্জলীর টাইম বলে যাওয়া ,নবমীতে নরনারায়ণ সেবার আয়োজনের জন্য বাবার পরামর্শ নেওয়া ,নতুনকাকীর কাঁচের বয়ামে দিয়ে যাওয়া সদ্যভাজা নিমকি মুখে পুরে পরম তৃপ্তিতে চিবোনো-এসবই চলতে থাকতো। রাতে বাবা অ্যালার্ম দিয়ে রাখতো ঠিক ভোর চারটেয়। মশারির ভেতর থেকে আধো ঘুমে বীরেন্দ্রকৃষ্ণ ভদ্রের গমগম করা কণ্ঠে -‘যা দেবী সর্বভূতেশু’ আর সুপ্রীতি ঘোষের কণ্ঠে ‘বাজল তোমার আলোর বেণু ’ শুনতে শুনতেই চমক ভাঙতো - মা তাহলে এসেই গেলো !!

সকাল হলে বাবা-কাকুর গঙ্গায় তর্পণ করতে যাওয়া ,টিভি তে দূরদর্শনে মহালয়ার অনুষ্ঠান দেখা, দুর্গামন্দিরে প্রতিমায় শেষ তুলির আঁচড়, নতুন বানানো জামাটা আরেকবার পরে ঝালিয়ে নেওয়া, সন্ধ্যাবেলা ভাইবোনেরা জড়ো হয়ে গান-আবৃত্তির জমজমাট আসর এসব মিলিয়েই শুরু হয়ে যেত আমাদের শারদোৎসব।

হ্যাঁ পৃথিবীর নানা প্রান্তের দুর্গাপূজো উদযাপনের মধ্যে পার্থক্য আছে। তবু মা আসেন,আমাদের মতো পূজোপাগল মানুষগুলোর কথা ভেবেই আসেন, বাংলাদেশের/ভারতের সীমা ছাড়িয়ে পৃথিবীর বিভিন্ন শহরে রূপম দেহি জয়ম দেহি মন্ত্রে বিশ্বচরাচর মন্দির করতে।

ক্যাপ-বন্দুক হয়তো নেই - কিন্তু নতুন জুতোর ফোঁস্কা আছে,রেডিও ঝেঁড়ে-পুছে ফ্রিকোয়েন্সি চেক হয়তো নেই - অনলাইন রেডিও অ্যাপে মহালয়া শোনা অবশ্যই আছে, শিউলিফুল কুড়োনো নেই- কিন্তু বান্ধবীর সাথে লিপস্টিকের শেড আর শাড়ির ম্যাচিং blouse নিয়ে হোয়াটস্যাপে আলোচনা আছে।নারকেল নাড়ু নিজে হাতে বানিয়ে মেয়েকে খাইয়েছি ..পুজোর স্বাদ এখানেও আছে-এখনো আছে। আছে আমাদের মননে-চিন্তনে-অস্তিত্বে ,তা কখনো যাওয়ার নয়। সময়ের সাথে শুধু মোড়কটা বদলায় মাত্র - স্মার্টফোন হ্যাশট্যাগের মহালয়াই সাথে নিয়ে চলবে মরফি রেডিও-বীরেন বাবুর মহালয়ার ঐতিহ্যকে!



Prayer

Babu Raman K



Means: **The one who bestows auspiciousness on one and all, the one who accomplishes all objectives, to the mother of the three worlds, O Gauri, I bow again and again before you.**

What is a prayer: It is a direct conversation between a human and God. It is a **spiritual communication between man and his creator**, a two-way relationship in which man should not only talk to God but also listen to Him. (Here man means human).

It's the architecture on which faith rests... It's a pillar of support to mankind, without it we would be so lost, not knowing what to do. When we pray, we seek help from that supreme power.

It is a personal communication or petition addressed to a deity, especially in the form of supplication, adoration, praise, contrition, or appreciation, or any other form of communion with one's God.

So, on this auspicious occasion of Maa's visit, let us all have a conversation with her, tell her all our woes, ask for her blessings, let's adore her for the short period she is visiting us and appreciate all her blessings.

Jai Maa Durge.

Shuvechha ar antorik obhinondon.



Babu.

The Sacred Feminine: Women's Reverence and Durga Puja Symbolism

Soumyadev Sarkar

In a world that is rapidly evolving, the call for gender equality and respect for women has become more urgent than ever. The festival of Durga Puja, one of the most revered celebrations in Hindu culture, holds a profound symbolism that speaks directly to this issue. It is not just a religious festival; it is a powerful reminder of the strength, dignity, and divinity of women. Durga, the supreme goddess, represents the embodiment of feminine power, courage, and compassion—qualities that must be recognized and honored in all women.



Image: When two goddesses meet, their silent conversation echoes a powerful truth—women, like Durga, are both creators and protectors. Yet, in a world where they remain vulnerable, it is time for society to restore their respect, dignity, and security. The strength within every woman must be

honored, just as we honor the goddess. / Soumyadev Sarkar/ Kolkata/ 2017/ NikonD3200 with AF-P 18-55mm f/3.5.

The Divine Feminine: Durga as a Symbol of Strength

Durga is worshipped as the protector of the universe, a warrior goddess who fights against injustice and evil. Her triumph over the demon Mahishasura signifies the victory of good over evil, of justice over oppression. This battle is not just mythical but symbolic of the ongoing struggle women face in society, where they are often subjected to harassment, discrimination, and violence. Durga's power and grace are a reminder that women, like the goddess, have the strength to overcome adversity and deserve respect for the roles they play in families, communities, and the world.



*Image: Victory of Light over Darkness, as the Goddess Smiles upon the Vanquished Evil.
/ Soumyadev Sarkar/ Kolkata/ 2019/ NikonD3200 with AF-P 18-55mm f/3.5.*

Durga Puja: A Festival of Reverence for Women

The worship of Durga is a ritual that inherently celebrates the feminine divine and, by extension, all women. The goddess is worshipped as a mother, protector, and source of life. This veneration extends to every woman, as the festival serves as a reflection of the respect and honor that women deserve in society. In an era where gender inequality persists, Durga Puja serves as a cultural reminder that women are not to be subjugated or dismissed but are central to the fabric of life itself. The reverence shown to Durga should translate into real-life respect for the women around us.

Relevance in a Changing Society

As society progresses, there remains a troubling undercurrent of gender-based violence and harassment that women continue to endure. In workplaces, public spaces, and even homes, women are still subjected to mistreatment, often silenced by societal norms. The values embedded in the worship of Durga become even more significant in these contexts. Durga represents both the nurturing and the fierce aspects of femininity, reminding us that respect for women must be holistic—it includes recognizing their strength, supporting their independence, and protecting their dignity.

Durga Puja, with its rituals of worship and celebration of the goddess, should inspire us to confront the injustices faced by women. It challenges the stereotypes that limit women's potential and speaks to the need for a society that not only protects women but also empowers them to live freely and confidently.



Image: Embodiments of Chaos Await Their Fall—Evil Must be Conquered for Dharma to Prevail. / Soumyadev Sarkar/ Kolkata/ 2019/ NikonD3200 with AF-P 18-55mm f/ 3.5.

Moving Beyond Rituals: The Need for Real-World Action

While the festival of Durga Puja is a beautiful cultural celebration of feminine power, its true meaning must transcend the rituals. In a time where women face increasing harassment and discrimination, it is crucial to translate the respect shown to the goddess into everyday actions. This means standing against harassment, advocating for women's rights, supporting their leadership, and creating safe spaces where women can thrive without fear of prejudice or violence.

Worshipping Durga is not just about religious reverence—it is about acknowledging the sacredness of womanhood and translating that respect into tangible actions in our lives. The spirit of Durga Puja should inspire us to fight for justice for all women, ensuring they are treated with the honor, dignity, and equality they rightfully deserve.

Conclusion

Durga Puja is more than just a festival; it is a celebration of feminine strength and a call to action for society to respect and protect women. In a world where women continue to face harassment and inequality, the symbolism of Durga—her power, grace, and determination—stands as a beacon of hope. By embracing the values she embodies, we can create a society where women are not only respected in religious rituals but also empowered in every aspect of life. Let Durga Puja serve as a reminder that respecting women is not just a tradition but a necessity for a just and equal society.

Dedicated to Abhaya/Nirbhaya/Tilottoma...



Image: A vibrant depiction of Goddess Durga, radiating divine energy, surrounded by symbols of the sacred feminine such as lotuses, a trishul (trident), and crescent moons. Around her, women of different ages and backgrounds, dressed in traditional Bengali sarees, perform rituals and offer flowers, embodying reverence and strength.



শান্তিরূপেন্ রাজশ্রী ব্যানার্জী

পরিবর্তনই জগতের
নিয়ম। তবে সেই
পরিবর্তন যদি কোন কিছু
ভালো করার জন্য
হয়, সংসারের কল্যাণের
জন্য হয় তাহলে সেটাই
সকলের কাম্য। বর্তমান
যুগে উন্নতি তো সব

জায়গাতেই হয়েছে শুধু উন্নতি হয়নি কিছু সংখ্যক মানুষের মনের। এখনও তাদের দৃষ্টিভঙ্গির কোন পরিবর্তন হয়নি। আজও তারা নারী পুরুষের মধ্যে পার্থক্য করেই চলেছে। মেয়েদের পদানত করে রাখতেই তারা পৌরুষের শ্রেষ্ঠ প্রমাণ বলেই মনে করেন।

এ সমাজে আমরা মেয়েরা এখন কোন জায়গাতেই পিছিয়ে নেই বরং কিছু কিছু জায়গায় আমরা ছেলেদের থেকেও অনেক অংশে এগিয়ে আছি কিন্তু সমাজের ঐ গুটিকয়েক নিচু মানসিকতার মানুষের চোখে মেয়েরা এখনও শুধুমাত্র কামনা এবং বাসনার বস্তুমাত্র। তার উজ্জ্বল উদাহরণ হয়ত আমরা সকলেই দেখতে পাচ্ছি আমাদের প্রিয় কলকাতা শহরের বুকো ঘাটে যাওয়া সাম্প্রতিক একটি ঘটনার মাধ্যমে।

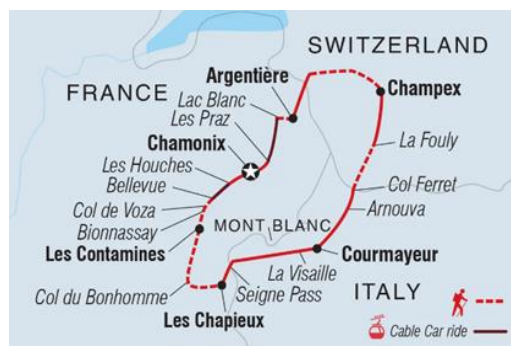
যে মেয়েটি সমাজের সেবার জন্য রাত্রিবেলায় ডিউটিতে কর্মরত ছিল সেই সময় শুধুমাত্র একজন অথবা কয়েকজন পাশবিক মানসিকতার মানুষরূপী পশুর শিকার হয়ে নিজের জীবন হারাতে হয়েছে। একমাসের বেশি সময় কেটে গেছে কিন্তু এখনও বিচার পায়নি মেয়েটি শুধুমাত্র আমাদের দেশের বিচার ব্যবস্থার জন্য। মেয়েটির পরিবারের পাশে যদিও এসে দাঁড়িয়েছে সমাজের অনেক বিশিষ্ট ব্যক্তি থেকে সাধারণ মানুষ সকলেই। কিন্তু সত্যিই কি যতোচিত বিচার পাবে মেয়েটি? সত্যিই কি মেয়েটির বাবা-মার চোখের জল কিছুটাও মুছতে পারবে এই বিচারব্যবস্থা?

কিছুদিন পর আমাদের বাঙালিদের শ্রেষ্ঠ উৎসব দুর্গা পূজো। আবারো হয়ত আমরা সকলে সবকিছু ভুলে উৎসবে মেতে উঠব। কিন্তু এই উৎসব কি আনন্দের উৎসব? সত্যিই কি দেবী দুর্গাকে আমরা আরাধনা করি? যিনি অসুর নিধনে নিজের মাহাত্ম্যের প্রকাশ ঘটিয়েছিলেন। শুধুমাত্র নতুন জামা কিংবা শাড়ি পরে মণ্ডপে ঠাকুর দেখতে যাওয়াই উৎসব নয়। আমরাই পারি সমাজের মধ্যেই লুকিয়ে থাকা মানুষের মতোই দেখতে এই অসুরগুলোর বিনাশ করতে। শান্তি ফিরিয়ে আনতে। যেখানে নারী পুরুষের এই বৈষম্য থাকবে না। সকলেই আধুনিক যুগের আধুনিক মানসিকতার প্রকৃত মানুষ হয়ে বাঁচবে।

চিত্র : অভিষেক মিত্র।

Tour Du Mont Blanc: Our Alps hiking experience

Rita Chattopadhyay & Sandip Chattopadhyay



Tour du Mont Blanc route

In the summer of 2024, we embarked on an unforgettable hiking tour in the Alps mountains. Tour Du Mont Blanc or TMB is one of the most famous hiking tours that circles the Mont Blanc peak, the highest peak in Europe at 4805 meters or 15748 feet.

Our hiking experiences were limited to day hikes only. TMB is a multiday hiking tour. It covers 100 miles in 6 to 10 days. We booked a guided tour that manages the logistics of booking accommodations for each night, luggage transfers, etc. This tour covers around 70 miles in 6 days on foot and the rest by cable car, bus, and taxi. This tour starts from Chamonix. This quintessential French town is a paradise for winter sports and hiking.



We met our guide in our Chamonix hotel a day before our hike started. We discussed about the hiking route, weather conditions, essential items to carry in our personal bag pack, etc.

Day 1 activity included the Gondola ride from Chamonix to a ski resort called La Flegere. We started our hike from La Flegere. We hiked to Lac Blanc (White Lake) and

then walked down to another French Town called Argentiere. Our guide told us that many people come to Chamonix to hike the Lac Blanc only.



On day 2, we took a taxi from our hotel to cross the border and enter Switzerland. Our hike started at a place called Forclaz Valley. From the valley, we hiked to Col Forclaz. In Europe Col means saddle. From Col Forclaz we descended to a sweet little Swiss town called Champex in the evening.



Day 3 hike started with a bus ride to Ferret Valley. From there we hiked to the Col Ferret. One side of the Col Ferret goes down to Switzerland and the other side descends to Italy. On this hike, we saw cows grazing on the Swiss Alps and glaciers everywhere. Our descent from Col Ferret took us to the magnificent and breathtakingly beautiful hiking town of Courmayeur in Italy.



Day 4 started with a scenic bus drive to La Blanche Valley in Italy. We hiked from the valley to Seigne Pass to cross the border back to France. We got a clear view of Mont Blanc Peak for the first time on the 4th day of our hike. We descended to a remote French village called Les Chapieux. From there we took a shuttle to our hotel at Saint Bourg Maurice.



Day 5 was the toughest hike. It was 15-plus-miles hike with nearly 3500 feet of elevation gain and 5000 feet of elevation loss through mud, old snow (almost ice), and rain! It took us nearly 10 hours to reach to our destination Les Contamines in France. On this hike, we crossed an ancient bridge over a gorge. This bridge was built by the Romans.



Day 6 was a cakewalk. We walked through several of the mountain villages in France. On the way we saw the house where astronomer Alexis Bouvard lived. He is famous for his careful observation of the irregularities in the motion of Uranus and his hypothesis of the existence of an 8th planet in the solar system. Neptune was discovered based on Bouvard's hypothesis after his death.



Without any doubt, those 6 days in the Alps were one of our best vacations ever. Every day was a new adventure. Our whole body ached in the evening after the hike. We got exhausted after reaching the new destination, but every night we slept like a log. The mornings were so refreshing because of sound sleep, fresh air and an abundance of natural beauty in front of us. Every day was a new day with a purpose that we enjoyed!

The Thrilling World of Dragon Boat Racing

Abir Deb



DOMINATION

because there's a whoooole lotta '1's in this picture

Introduction

Dragon boat racing is more than just a sport; it's a cultural phenomenon that has roots steeped in history and tradition. Originating from ancient China over 2,000 years ago, this vibrant and exhilarating activity has evolved into a global sport that emphasizes teamwork, endurance, and strategy. As teams of paddlers propel their beautifully decorated boats through the water, they showcase not only their physical prowess but also their commitment to collaboration and shared goals.

Similarities with Vallam Kali (boat racing) in Kerala, India

Dragon boat racing and Kerala boat racing share several similarities, reflecting their cultural significance and the communal spirit they foster. Kerala boat racing is deeply rooted in local traditions and is often linked to festivals, particularly in the backwaters of Kerala.

Both events showcase regional pride and are celebrated through vibrant festivities.

The Structure of a Dragon Boat Team

A typical dragon boat team comprises **20 paddlers**, a **drummer**, and a **steerer**. Each role is vital to the boat's performance and requires a distinct set of skills and responsibilities.

Paddlers

The paddlers are the heart of the dragon boat team. They are usually divided into two rows of ten, sitting side by side, each equipped with a single-bladed paddle. The primary responsibility of the paddlers is to synchronize their strokes to maximize speed and efficiency. Effective paddling requires not just physical strength but also rhythm and coordination, as every stroke must be timed with the others to ensure the boat glides smoothly through the water.

The paddlers can be further categorized based on their positions:

- 1. Stroke Paddler:** The stroke paddler sets the pace for the team generally the first two rows. This individual is responsible for establishing the rhythm and cadence of the strokes. A strong and experienced stroke paddler can make a significant difference in the team's overall performance.
- 2. Power Paddlers:** These paddlers are typically stronger and focus on generating maximum force with each stroke. They often occupy the middle positions, where their power can be harnessed effectively to maintain speed.
- 3. Steering Paddlers:** Usually positioned at the back of the boat, the last two rows, these paddlers are responsible for steering and guiding the boat in the right direction. They must communicate effectively with the steerer to navigate through courses, especially during competitive races.

Drummer

At the front of the boat, the drummer plays a crucial role in maintaining rhythm and morale. Using a large drum, this individual beat out the tempo for the paddlers, ensuring that everyone stays in sync. The drummer also acts as a motivator, encouraging the team to push through fatigue during races.

Steerer

The steerer, often a coach or an experienced paddler, is located at the rear of the boat and is responsible for steering and direction. This role requires a deep understanding of water dynamics and the ability to communicate effectively with both the paddlers and the drummer. The steerer is crucial for making strategic decisions during a race, such as when to execute turns or adjust the pace.

The Importance of Teamwork

Dragon boat racing is fundamentally about teamwork. Each member must trust and rely on one another, not just for their performance but for the success of the team as a whole. This reliance on

collaboration fosters a strong bond among team members, creating a sense of community and camaraderie.

Practicing together builds the necessary chemistry for effective communication and synchronization. Teams often engage in various drills to enhance their paddling techniques and improve their collective performance. These drills help in developing the muscle memory needed to paddle in unison, making it easier to adapt to the rhythm set by the drummer and the pace determined by the stroke paddler.

National and International Presence

Dragon boat racing has grown exponentially in popularity across the globe. While it remains deeply rooted in Asian culture, especially during the Dragon Boat Festival, it has gained a significant following in countries like Canada, the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom.

Numerous national and international competitions celebrate this vibrant sport. Events like the International Dragon Boat Federation (IDBF) World Championships attract teams from all over the world, showcasing the best of the best in thrilling races. Local clubs and organizations host races throughout the year, fostering community spirit and encouraging participation at all levels, from amateur to elite.

Conclusion

Dragon boat racing encapsulates the essence of teamwork, endurance, and cultural heritage. As paddlers synchronize their movements and drumbeats echo across the water, they embody a spirit of unity and determination that transcends individual effort. With its growing national and international presence, dragon boat racing not only preserves its rich traditions but also invites new generations to experience the thrill of racing and the joy of camaraderie. As this exhilarating sport continues to evolve, it remains a testament to the power of collaboration and the human spirit.

A scene at the Airport

Sharmistha Bhattacharyya



Image of an airport scene/ Soumyadev Sarkar/ Los Angeles/ 2024

An airport is an interesting place where you can find people of all ages. Most of the flyers are often in a hurry to get to their airline gate, from where they will board the flight. Men, women, old and young all are walking or running through the crowd to catch their respective flights.

There are so many different stores starting from restaurants, bars, souvenir shops, smoothie places, cookie and candy stores and even a book stall.

Kids traveling with their families are often tired and restless. They are throwing tantrums; parents are trying to pacify them with sweet treats or an ice cream of their favorite flavors. A family who is getting a bite to eat or a single guy sitting in a sports bar with a tall glass of beer all are happy that they made it to the airport on time. Starbucks always has the biggest queue amongst all the stores. Flyers like to draw their caffeine intake while waiting.

A couple of people like to read on the flight, are checking out the bookstore, others are busy getting a sleep pillow for their redeye flights. Some fly for business, some for pleasure. A guy is flying to attend his best friend's wedding whereas a lady is flying out to be present at a loved one's funeral.



A kid is flying alone for the first time is boarding the plane to spend his spring break with his grandparents and right across the gate, a group of enthusiastic orchestra students from a high school are dragging their instruments to get in their flight to perform in a new city.

We get to see often a military man is going home to his wife and the kids who missed them like crazy while serving the country. A baby in a stroller sleeping peacefully at a terminal through all the hustle and bustle of the airport.

A 90-year-old lady in a wheelchair is pushed by an airport attendant who after her husband passes away moves to a different state to be close to her children and grandchildren leaving behind everything and everyone once she knew.

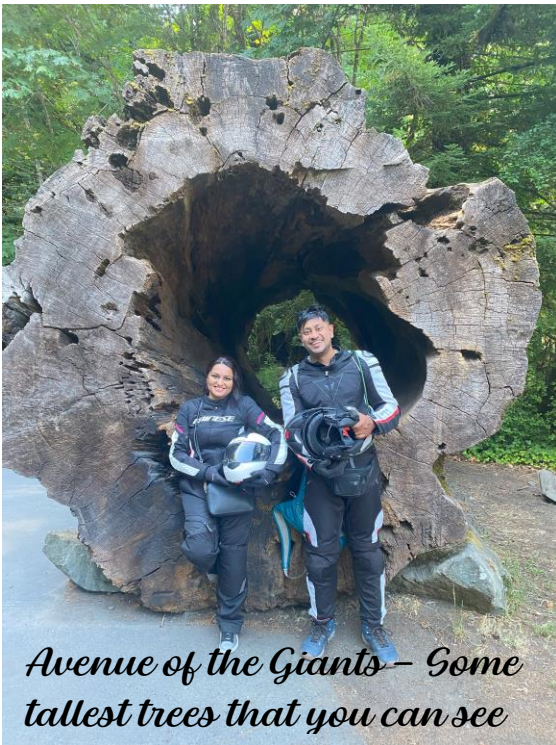
Each flyer at the airport has a story behind the travel and all of them have a single mission to reach their destiny on time and safely.

The Joy of Long-Distance Motorcycle Riding

Abir Deb



Somewhere in Flagstaff



Avenue of the Giants – Some tallest trees that you can see

Doing the Route 66 in Arizona



For me, long-distance motorcycle riding is not just a hobby; it's a profound passion that combines freedom, adventure, and the thrill of exploration. There's something incredibly exhilarating about hitting the open road, feeling the wind against my face, and experiencing the world from the unique perspective of two wheels. Each trip offers new landscapes, cultures, and memories waiting to be made, and I relish every moment spent on my trusty motorcycle.

One of the most memorable journeys began when my wife decided to join me as a pillion rider for the first time. We had just purchased a Ducati Multistrada, a machine designed for both performance and comfort, making it the perfect choice for our adventures. With excitement and a touch of nervousness, we set out from the Bay Area to Phoenix, determined to make the trip in one go, stopping only for gas.

This was not just a significant milestone for me; it was a brave step for her, too. The prospect of a long-distance motorcycle trip can be daunting, especially for someone new to the experience. Yet, she embraced the challenge wholeheartedly, proving her adventurous spirit. As we cruised along the highways, I could sense her exhilaration and newfound appreciation for the thrill of the ride. The miles melted away beneath us, and we forged an unforgettable bond as we shared the joys of the journey.

Since that initial trip, we've explored many stunning destinations together. Our travels have taken us to **Joshua Tree, Las Vegas, and White Sands, and we've traversed the entirety of California, covering around 3,000 miles in just 12 days.** Each location brought its own unique beauty and charm, and I loved watching her soak it all in. Touring on a motorcycle offers a sense of openness that you simply can't experience in a car. The smells of the landscape, the sounds of the road, and the stunning vistas are all part of the adventure, wrapping around you like a warm embrace.

Of course, there are challenges, especially when it comes to packing for long trips. Striking the right balance between bringing essentials and keeping our load manageable can be tricky. When you pack heavily, it can affect the motorcycle's handling, making turns and maneuvers more difficult. But we've learned to embrace the simplicity of traveling light, which adds to the experience and enhances our enjoyment of the journey.

Weather can add an unpredictable element to our trips. Riding in extreme temperatures can be tricky; intense sun can drain your energy and make hydration essential, while unexpected rain can turn a pleasant ride into a slippery ordeal. We try to travel during a season which is pleasant overall and with minimum possibility of rain.

What I cherish most about these adventures is the spirit of exploration they embody. Every mile is an opportunity to discover new places, meet interesting people, and create lasting memories. Riding with my wife has only deepened my passion for motorcycling, allowing us to share these incredible experiences and the joy of the open road together.

In conclusion, long-distance motorcycle riding is a thrilling adventure that allows me to explore the world in a way that few other experiences can match. I am grateful to my wife for taking that leap with me and embracing this passion. Together, we've turned our motorcycle journeys into unforgettable stories, and I look forward to many more miles and adventures ahead. The road is calling, and with her by my side, I know we'll answer that call time and time again.



Chandanshamala Library: A Global Hub for Education and Innovation

www.chandanshamalalibrary.org



In today's fast-paced world, where access to education and technology often determines the success of individuals and communities, the **Chandanshamala Library** stands out as a pioneering force for **empowerment and innovation**. Established in **Goalpara, Assam, India**, on **July 9th, 2011**, and incorporated as a **501(c)(3) non-profit organization** in the United States on **September 21st, 2013**, the library has a clear mission: to **popularize and proliferate STEM/STEAM education**. By offering essential facilities, coaching, and resources, Chandanshamala Library ensures that children and young adults have the opportunity to reach their full potential, regardless of their background.

With locations in both **Goalpara, Assam, India**, and **Chandler, Arizona, USA**, Chandanshamala Library is a global initiative focused on bridging educational gaps and fostering a culture of learning, innovation, and community development. The

library serves as a hub for STEM education, offering a wide range of programs and activities aimed at preparing students for the future.

A Vision for the Future: STEM and STEAM Education

The cornerstone of Chandanshamala Library's mission is its dedication to **STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics)** and **STEAM (STEM with Arts)** education. The library's founders recognized that many talented children, especially those from underserved communities, often lack the learning platforms, guidance, and resources necessary to succeed. Chandanshamala Library fills this gap by offering **hands-on training, mentorship, and access to cutting-edge technologies.**

In **Chandler, Arizona**, the library focuses on high school STEM/STEAM activities, offering courses in **robotics, machine learning (ML), and artificial intelligence (AI)**. Students are encouraged to participate in **research, development, and competitions** that challenge their problem-solving and innovation skills. The Chandler branch also hosts teams for the **Makers of Change Challenge**, where participants work to develop **assisted living technologies for children**. By engaging students in real-world applications of STEM, the library prepares them for future careers in rapidly evolving industries.

Teams from **Chandanshamala Library** also actively engage with the community in Chandler by visiting **schools and innovation fairs**, showcasing science, robotics, ML, and AI experiments. These visits provide students and community members with hands-on exposure to cutting-edge technologies, fostering interest in STEM/STEAM fields and encouraging innovation. By demonstrating real-world applications of robotics and AI, the library teams inspire young learners to explore new possibilities in science and technology, promoting these disciplines as vital for shaping the future.

CSL Labs: Expanding Frontiers in Technology

In 2023, Chandanshamala Library took another significant step in advancing its mission by opening **CSL Labs in Guwahati, Assam, India**. The laboratory currently offers courses in **robotics, machine learning, and artificial intelligence**, providing high school students with access to advanced technological education that is often unavailable in traditional educational settings.

Looking ahead, **CSL Labs** plans to introduce additional courses in **3D printing, data science, and cybersecurity**. These classes will not only equip students with the technical skills needed to succeed in a technology-driven world but also help them

become **innovators and leaders** in their communities. By offering these advanced courses, CSL Labs ensures that students are prepared for the challenges of tomorrow's job market.

Community Impact: Goalpara, Assam

While Chandanshamala Library's efforts in Arizona and Guwahati focus on advanced STEM education, the original branch in **Goalpara, Assam**, remains dedicated to **community development**. In Goalpara, the library offers regular classes in **arts, basic computer and software skills, robotics, and chess**, providing children with a well-rounded education that combines creativity and technical knowledge.

The library also organizes special annual events to engage the community, such as a **free health check-up camp on Mother's Day** and a **chess competition on Father's Day**. These events foster a sense of belonging and encourage families to prioritize education and well-being. Additionally, the Goalpara branch conducts **disaster management and relief training, a bicycle rally, educational tours, and hikes to natural attractions**—activities that not only build essential skills but also promote **environmental awareness and physical fitness**.

Fostering Lifelong Learning: San Jose Chapter

The **San Jose chapter** of Chandanshamala Library extends the organization's reach by holding a yearly **robotics and electronics workshop for Boy Scouts**, giving young participants hands-on experience with technology and encouraging them to pursue careers in STEM fields. This initiative highlights the library's commitment to inspiring and educating the next generation of innovators, ensuring that youth from all backgrounds have access to learning opportunities.

Creating a Brighter Future: Success Through Education

Chandanshamala Library measures its success not only by the number of students it serves but by the **positive impact** it has on their lives. The library's ultimate goal is to help children become **good human beings** who achieve their **full potential** and give back to their communities. Over the years, many children who have participated in the library's programs have gone on to pursue careers in STEM, contributing to their fields and communities in meaningful ways.

The library's mission is driven by three key outcomes:

1. **Helping children become good human beings**, instilled with the values of kindness, responsibility, and service.

2. **Empowering children to reach their full potential**, both academically and personally, through access to quality education.
3. **Inspiring others to give back to their communities**, fostering a culture of responsibility, learning, and mentorship.

How to Support Chandanshamala Library

As a **501(c)(3) non-profit organization** in the USA and an **NGO in India**, Chandanshamala Library relies on the support of donors, volunteers, and community members to continue its mission. There are many ways to get involved, including:

- **Volunteering:** The library welcomes volunteers who can help mentor students, teach classes, or assist with organizing events.
- **Donating:** Financial contributions are essential to sustaining the library's programs and expanding its reach. Donations go toward purchasing educational materials, funding scholarships, and maintaining the library's facilities.
- **Advocating:** By spreading the word about Chandanshamala Library's mission and accomplishments, supporters can help raise awareness and inspire others to contribute.

A Global Initiative with Local Impact

The **Chandanshamala Library** is more than just a library; it is a **movement** dedicated to transforming the lives of children through **STEM/STEAM education** and **community engagement**. Whether through its advanced technological programs in **Arizona** and **Guwahati** or its community-driven efforts in **Goalpara**, Chandanshamala Library is making a profound impact on the world, one student at a time.

As it continues to grow, the library remains committed to its vision of providing **equitable access to education**, empowering young learners, and fostering a global community of innovators, thinkers, and leaders. By ensuring that every child has the opportunity to thrive, Chandanshamala Library is shaping a brighter, more promising future for all.

দ্রৌপদীর বস্ত্রহরণ রঞ্জন মুখার্জী

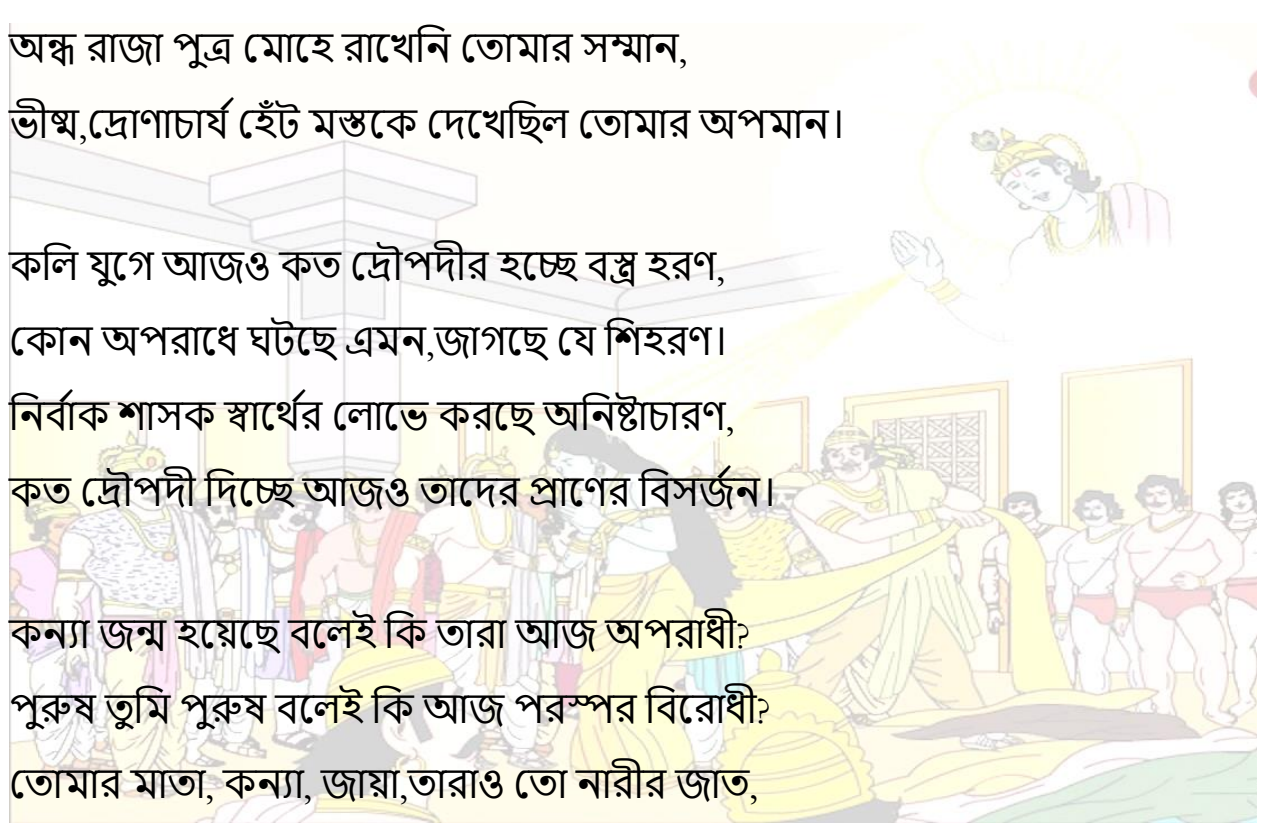


দ্রৌপদী তুমি দুৰ্যোধন কে কভু করেছিলে অপমান,
তাই নাকি সে ভরা দরবারে রাখেনি তোমার মান।
অন্ধ রাজা পুত্র মোহে রাখেনি তোমার সম্মান,
ভীষ্ম, দ্রোণাচার্য হেঁট মস্তকে দেখেছিল তোমার অপমান।

কলি যুগে আজও কত দ্রৌপদীর হচ্ছে বস্ত্র হরণ,
কোন অপরাধে ঘটছে এমন, জাগছে যে শিহরণ।
নির্বাক শাসক স্বার্থের লোভে করছে অনিষ্টাচারণ,
কত দ্রৌপদী দিচ্ছে আজও তাদের প্রাণের বিসর্জন।

কন্যা জন্ম হয়েছে বলেই কি তারা আজ অপরাধী?
পুরুষ তুমি পুরুষ বলেই কি আজ পরস্পর বিরোধী?
তোমার মাতা, কন্যা, জায়া, তারাও তো নারীর জাত,
নারীকে অসম্মান করতে তোমার কাঁপে না কেন হাত?

দ্রৌপদীর মান বাঁচাতে তবু কৃষ্ণ এসেছিল তার ডাকে,
ভগবান তুমি আসো না কেন আজ নারীরা পড়লে বিপাকে?
ধর্মের অধর্মের লড়াই এ আজ অধর্মের হচ্ছে জীত,
তাই তো নারীর দুর্দশা এমন আজ যে কল্পনাতীত।



নারীর অধিকার

বুড়ো শিব



নারীর জীবনে কেন এত সংশয়,
প্রতিদিনের পথে কেন থাকে ভয়?
অধিকার চাইলেই বন্ধন শত সহস্র,
স্বাধীনতা যেন তার কাছে পরিহাস।

রাতের অন্ধকারে শঙ্কা বাড়ে আরও,
রাস্তায় পা ফেলার আগে ভাবনা কত রকম!
সমাজের চোখে নারী যেন দুর্বল এক,
তবু তার মনের শক্তি অটল অক্ষয়।

তার সাহসই তো ভেঙে দেবে সব শৃঙ্খল,
অধিকারের পথে সে জ্বালাবে আলো।
শক্ত হবে তার জন্য সময়ের নতুন কাল,

নারীর সম্মানেই সভ্যতা পাবে ঠিকানা,
নিরাপত্তা হবে তার প্রথম অধিকার,
তবেই গড়বে সমাজে এক সমতার দিশার।

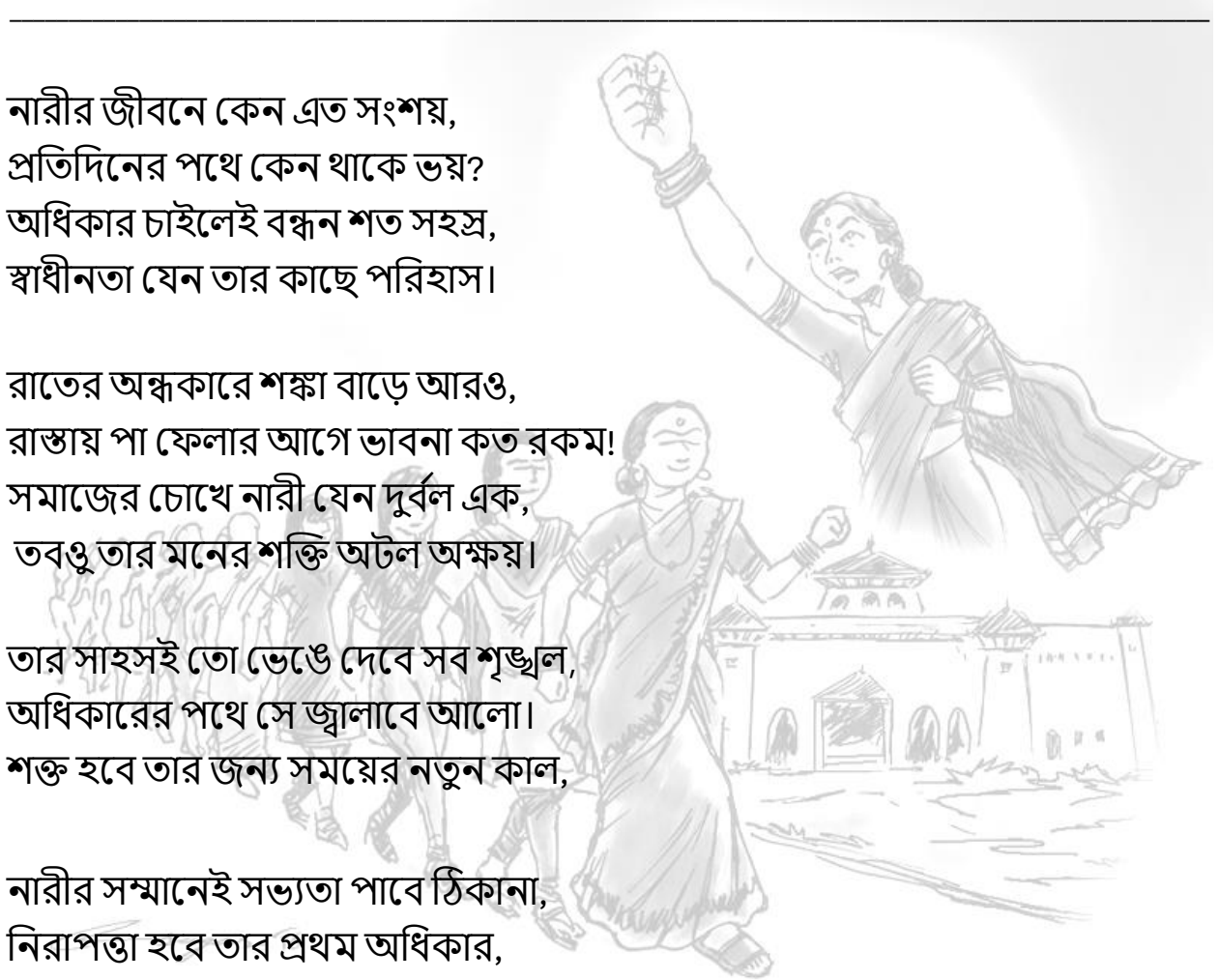
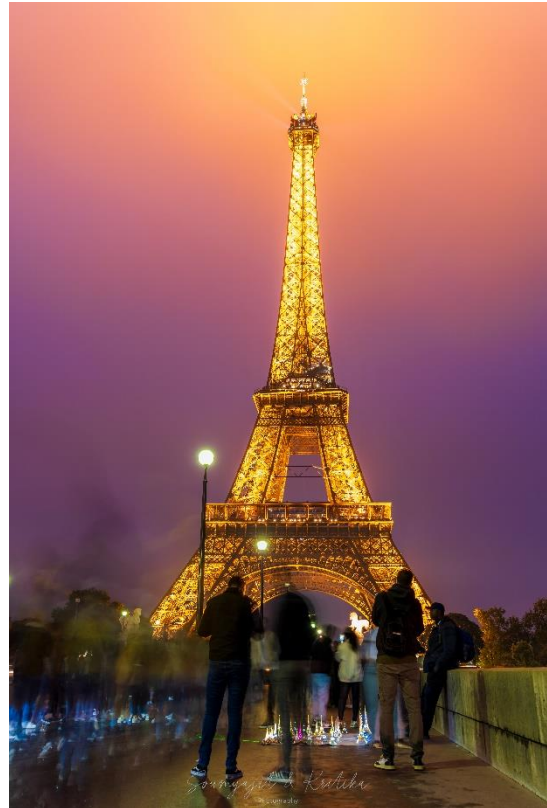


Photo Gallery

Soumyajit Routh & Kritika Saha



In view Eiffel Tower, Paris (top) & Burano Island, Venice (bottom)



Travel Photography

Smita Panda



In view Tulips, New York (top) & Tonto National Bridge State Park (bottom)



Nature photography

Dilip Chakrabarty



“Nature never goes out of style” – Unknown



*“Art should be something that liberates your soul, provokes the imagination and encourages people to go further.” – **Keith Haring***



Artist: Adhrit Singh, Age: 9 years

Portrayal of Maa Durga



Artist: Anaya Bhattacharya, 10 Years



Artist: Nabyanshaa Biswas, Age: 9 years

Pencil on Paper



“Drawing is the artist’s most direct and spontaneous expression, a species of writing: it reveals, better than does painting, his true personality.” - Edgar Degas

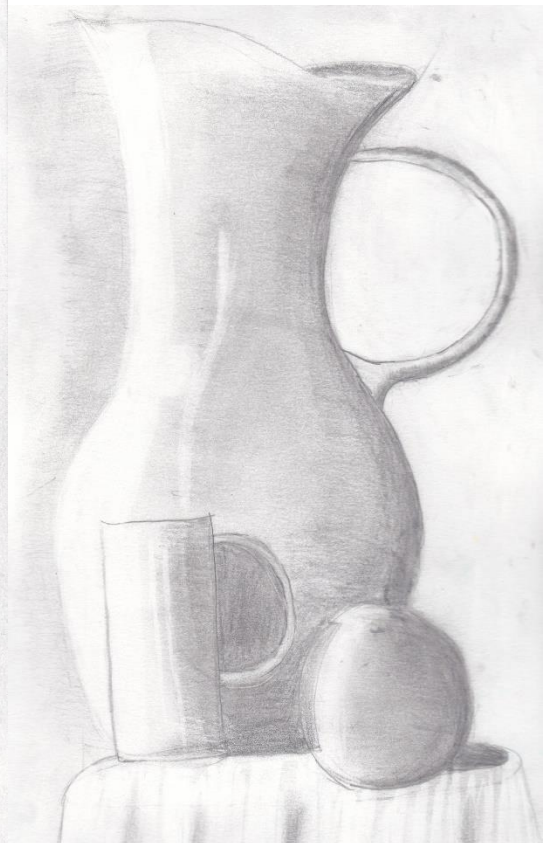
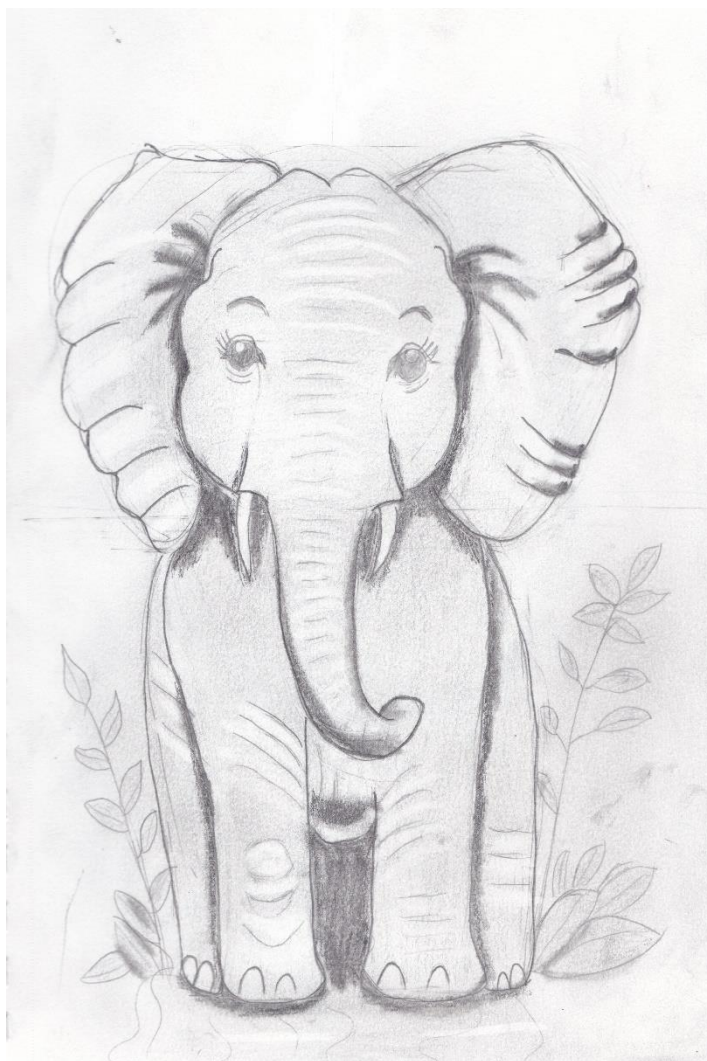


Artist: Mohanraj, Age: 8 years

Pencil on Paper



*“Learning to draw is really a matter of learning to see – to see correctly – and that means a good deal more than merely looking with the eye.” **Kimon Nicolaides***



Artist: Srinika Das, Age: 10 years

Crayon Art



"You can't do sketches enough. Sketch everything and keep your curiosity fresh.- " John Singer Sargent



Artist: Abir Banerjee, Age: 9 years



Artist: Ishani Banerjee, Age: 5 years

Acrylic painting of a romantic balcony lit up by the moonlight

Sharmistha Bhattacharyya



Samhita events at a glance

Saraswati Puja '24



Picnic '24



Holiday Party '23



Highlights of Durga Puja '24

An auspicious Puja with Chandipath, Aarti, Kumari Puja & Sindur Khela



Bollywood Night, Cultural Program by Members & Dhunuchi Dance



Make an Impact

Last year Samhita Youth, worked and identified 4 causes of different interests. You can donate using the below QR codes to any of those campaign directly. Donate and Create an Impact!

- **Central Arizona Animal Rescue**

gofund.me/bd211f2c



Scan to donate



- **Singleton Moms**

gofund.me/80066cf4



- **Si se Puede Foundation**

gofund.me/4f3e8933



- **Save The Family**

gofund.me/5f0a131d



या देवी सर्वभूतेषु शक्तिरूपेणो संस्थिता।
नमस्तस्यै नमस्तस्यै नमस्तस्यै नमो नमः



SCAN ME

Conceptualized, curated, and crafted by Soumyadev