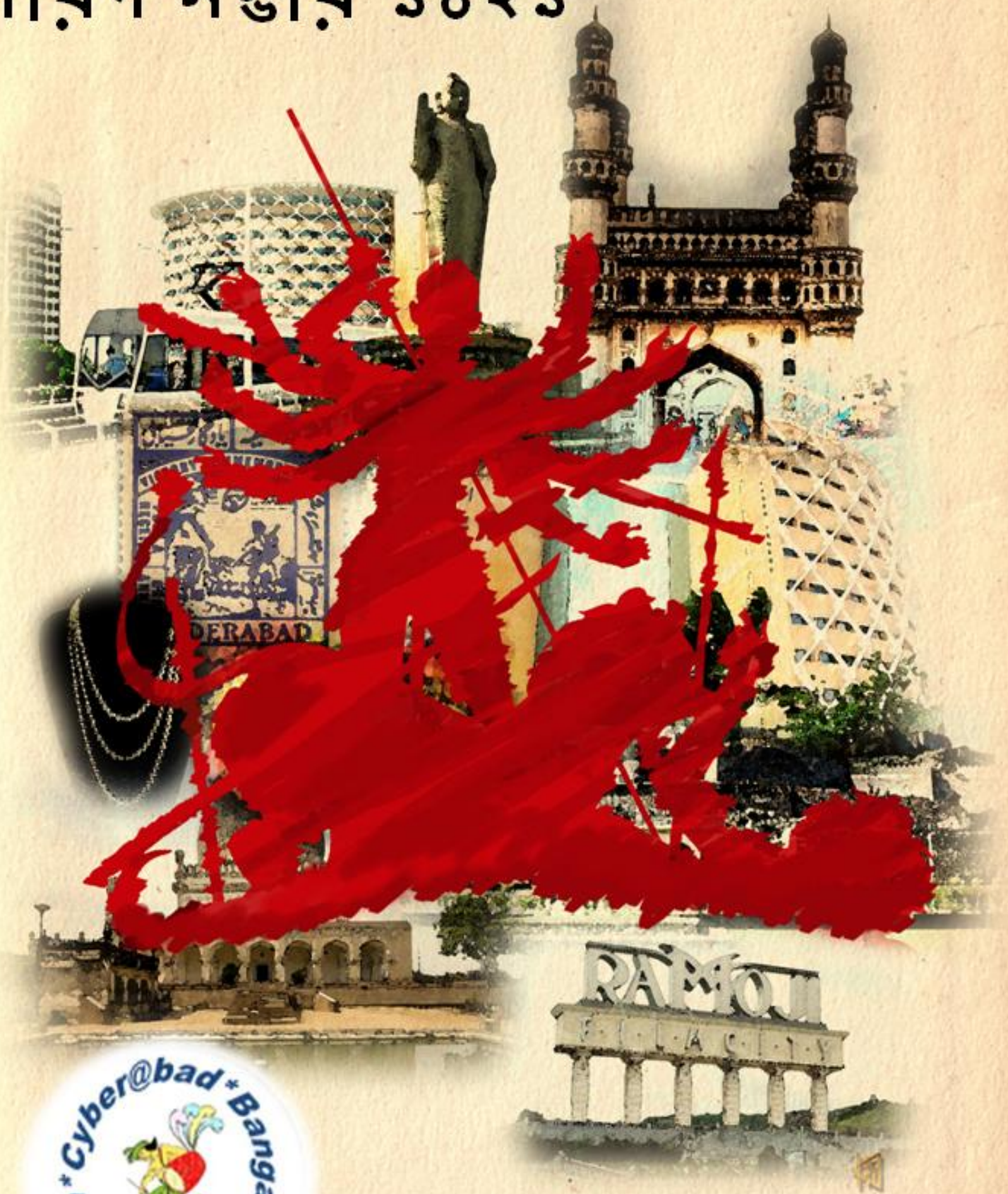


Sharad Sambhaar 2014

শারদ সম্ভার ১৪২১

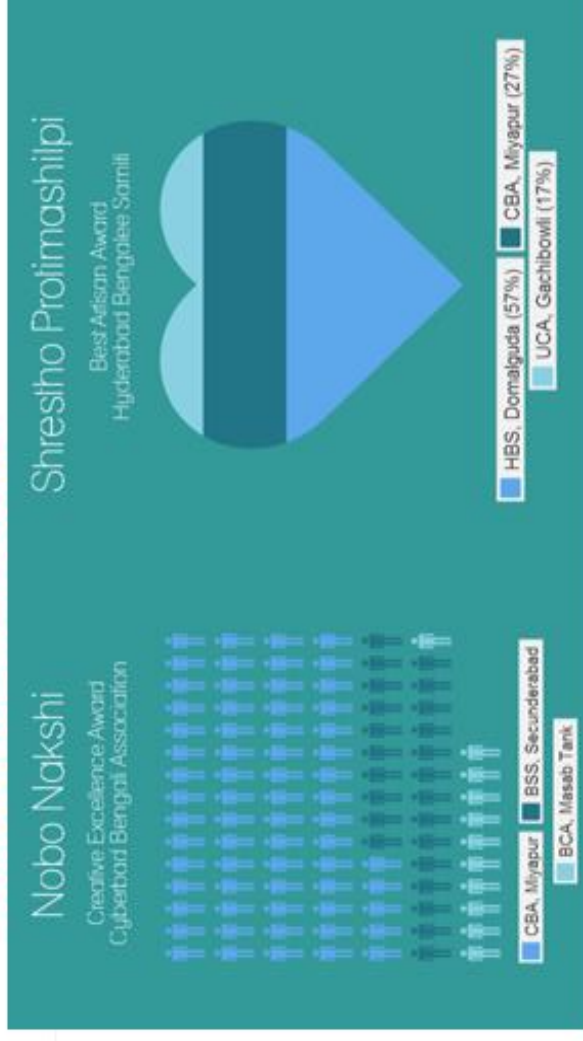
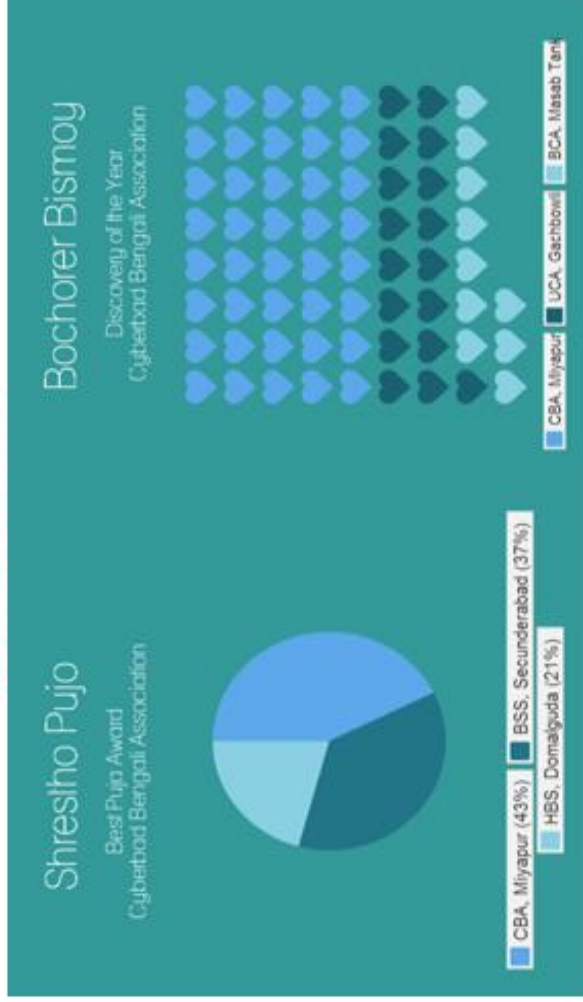


সাইবাবাদ বাঙালি অ্যাসোসিয়েশন

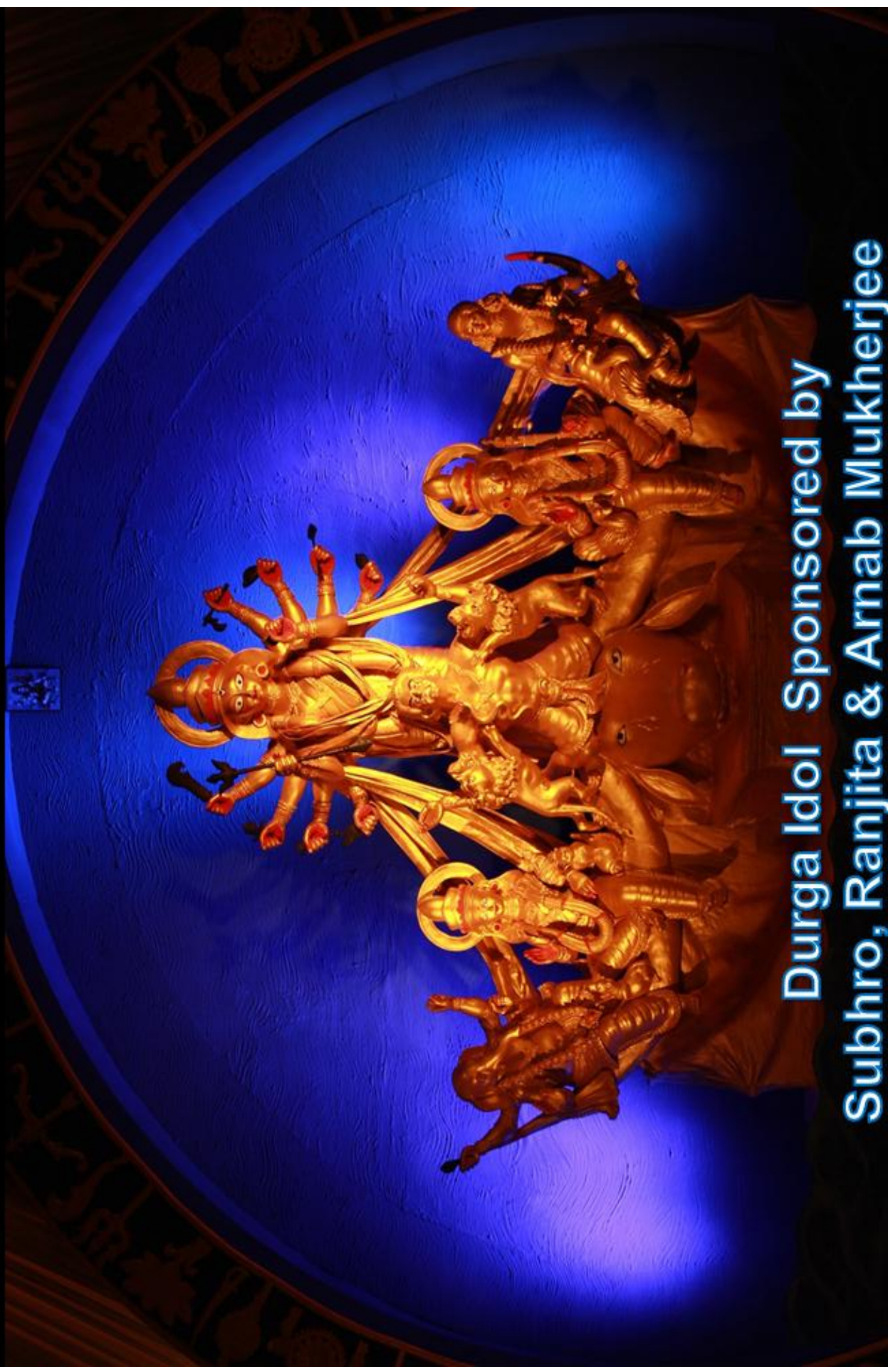
Bengalis in Hyderabad

Sharad Shamman 2014

Results in Infographics



The Cyberabad Bangali Association Durga Puja 2014



Durga Idol Sponsored by
Subhro, Ranjita & Arnab Mukherjee

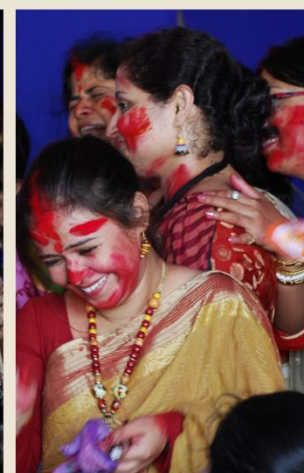
Tobo Achinto Rupochorito Mohima...journey with Ma Durga



Bajlo Tomar Alor Beena: Raju Das Baul, Supratik Das et.al.



Jago Tumi Jago...Women Power behind the Durga Puja



Amara Jaa Khushi Tai Kori, Tobu Or Kothatei Chori...Kids @ Durga Puja



Ogo Amar Agomoni...various hues and colors of Bengali Culture



The Editor's Page



Dear Friends

Jai Telangana!

We present the 6th edition of the "Sharad Sambhaar" covering the 2014 Sharadiya Durga Puja, the first in the new state of Telangana. At the outset, we would like to thank our members for having voted us to be the **Shresto Durga Puja 2014 in the BIH Sharad Samman**.

2014 has been a special year for the Hyderabadis, a year of achievements and hope. 2nd June saw the birth of the State of Telangana after a prologned struggle. We, the members of the Cyberabad Bangali Association, have a responsibility to participate in the state building activities along with other Hyderabadis.

Vision, commitment, teamwork, perseverance and collaboration help build institutions and we are on the journey of creating an institution called The Cyberabad Bangali Association. During the journey we have constantly innvoated like using the social media and mobile apps, online souvenir etc. to reach out to a larger audience and devotees over the years. The journey is long and we have areas of improvement in terms of involvement in social causes. Of course all of these would not have been possible without the love and affection of our members, patrons and sponsors.

I hope, as a member you had a good time, met and made friends and spent quality time with your family at the 2014 CBA Durga Puja and other events. If you are a sponsor, I would like to thank you again on behalf of the association and trust your association with us has helped your business in profitable ways. We look forward to continue the journey in 2015 and beyond with our members, partons and sponsors.

The next event for our members is the annual picnic at Qutub Shahi Tombs premises on 21 Dec and we hope you will enjoy that as well.

Take care and be a good Hyderabadis.

Surojeet Sengupta

সম্পাদকীয়



আমরা প্রতি বছর আশ্বিন-কার্তিক মাসে
 দুর্গাপূজার আয়োজন করি, আমাদের
 এই দুর্গোৎসবকে শারদীয়া দুর্গাপূজাও বলা
 যায়। ভারতবর্ষ জুড়ে নানা ভাবে নানা রূপে
 বিভিন্ন প্রদেশে পুজি ভিন্নরূপে গ্রাহ্যে আরাধনা
 করা হয়—। যেমন আমরা শারদীয়া দুর্গাপূজা করি
 তেমনি দক্ষিণ ভারতে নবদুর্গাপূজা, স্মৃৎদুর্গাপূজা ॥
 জগৎশ্রীপূজা, শ্রীম্মহালীপূজা ইত্যাদি ॥
 আমরা বাঙালী দুর্গাপূজা, মধ্যরাত অমরা
 শরৎকালে করে থাকি তার পরে এই পূজাকে শারদীয়া
 দুর্গাপূজা বলা হয়।

যেমন পদেস্তানতে পাতি রাহুগে রাহু রাহুর অনেক দুখকষ্ট
 কাহিনী। শ্রীমদ্ভগবদ্গীতা জ্ঞান ব্রহ্ম কল্যাণের ওই লক্ষণ
 ও হীতা কে নিরুৎসাহ বাস হয়তে থাকেন-জ্ঞান
 রাখন দুখে অতিশয় করে হীতাদেশীকে একে সেবে
 অপহরণ করে লক্ষ্যতা আর্থে রাখেন। এইমতে শ্রীমদ্ভগবদ্গীতা
 দেবীকে উদ্ধারকর। শ্রীমদ্ভগবদ্গীতা মায়ের পূজা রাখন
 এই জন্য এই শারদীয়া পূজা শরৎকালে করা হয় ॥

স্বাতি গুহ।

From the President's Desk



Dear Friends

I am extremely elated to know, that the CYBERABAD BANGALI ASSOCIATION is organizing its 8th Yearly Sharadiya Sri Sri Durga Pooja from 28th September to 3rd October 2014 at JP Nagar Community hall behind Dr Reddy's Lab Bollaram Road, Miyapur, Hyderabad - 49.

Our destiny has given us the unique opportunity of being a part of the growth and development of our New Telangana. I believe that we have to be an important positive force of our newly born Telangana State, where we live and earn our livelihood.

I congratulate all the organizations of Hyderabad who have helped us to organize the 8th year Sri Sri Durga Puja brilliantly.

I also, on behalf of Cyberabad Bangali Association, wish a happy Vijaya Dashami and all round prosperity in life and Happy Deepavali to all who have helped us and participated in all activities for the association.

Thanking You

S.N. GUHA

The General Secretary's Message



Dear Members and Patrons,

First of all, I would like to thank and congratulate each one of you for a grand Durga Puja. Such an event would not have been possible without your support and contribution.

I applaud the effort of our executive members, advisory board members and volunteers who worked tirelessly for months to ensure that all of us enjoy 6 days of Durga Puja with our family and friends. Their effort and dedication has helped *The Cyberabad Bangali Association, CBA* to grow exponentially over the years and reach a stage where we are considered one of the important Durga Puja venues in the twin cities.

CBA's reputation over the years, our member base and social media publicity attracted leading Newspapers to give us substantial coverage during the festival days. *The Hindu* had special mention of CBA whereas *The Times of India* had our mention thrice including publishing the picture of our Idol and Pandal on different days.

Our Durga Pratima (Idol) was exceptional and one of its kind in the city which was appreciated by all. We had a grand puja pandal and a separate food court area to provide adequate open space for enjoying the festivity.

The Cultural Committee started with a Mega event from renowned singer Supratik Das on Sunday (Chaturthi) which was a hit with all present. As per CBA's objective of promoting traditional art forms of Bengal, we invited famed Raju Das Baul. Our in-house talent as usual was exceptional, especially the song, dance, and band from the children. The in-house drama, *Ekti Abastav Galpo* was outstanding and left our Chief Guest spell bound.

The Puja Committee did a wonderful job in managing the early morning puja timings this year so that we strictly follow the Puja Nirghonto. Our ladies wing did splendid job and led multiple events this year.

Bhog Committee worked tirelessly to serve Bhog on all days from Panchami to Dashami. Though there was a delay on Asthami for the last batch due to an unprecedented number of people which crossed 2000, we managed to serve Bhog to all present. All members and visitors waited patiently and cooperated with the volunteers that is commendable. We managed to arrange for a special serving area for Senior citizens on Ashtami and CBA got the blessing of all our elders.

The people who mostly work behind the scenes like Sponsorship, Procurement, Transport, and Labour Management Committees require a special mention and have a big hand in the success of all our events.

We also tied up with an NGO, *Chitrika*, who work for improving the lives of Traditional artisans and weavers of Andhra region in an attempt to help a social cause.

Apart from Durga puja and Lakshmi puja, we also organized our Annual Picnic at Deccan Trails, Poila Boishakh and Taranga. Looking at the support and participation, we are trying to organize some more events this financial year.

Organizing events at such scale requires lot of planning and also manpower for execution which sometimes constrains us due to other commitments of our core working committee. We regret any mismanagement that may have caused inconvenience to any of you and want to assure that we are working towards addressing those. Please reach out to any of our executive committee members through email, phone, or social media if you have any suggestion or feedback and be rest assured that it will be acted upon.

Apart from providing feedback to improve, I request and welcome members to come forward and join the core working committee. Together we can and will make CBA grow manifolds and become one of the best in the twin cities.

Thanks again and have a great year ahead,

Subhro Mukherjee,

The Treasurer's Report



Dear Friends,

SUBHO VIJAYA and HAPPY DIWALI to all of you. First of all, I would like to thank our sponsors and members for their encouragement and support to make Durga Puja 2014 a grand success.

The CBA is one of the distinguished Bengali associations in Hyderabad today. Where we are having twenty Executive committee members, five among whom are new faces and four old Executive Members have been elevated to the advisory board.

This year our Durga puja has been a grand success, We have celebrated it in JPN Nagar community Hall. Performed Puja strictly as per Nirghanta. Our pandal was awesome, Idol was the best in the twin city, our cultural team organized a big event with a well-known singer SUPRATIK DAS and BAUL SONG by RAJU DAS BAUL, our Bhog committee made tasty food arrangement for all five days, lighting arrangement was excellent, and for all these, we had a big Durga Puja budget of RS 14.75 Lakhs .

Thanks to our sponsors and members who have extended their support and contributed for Durga Puja.

And special thanks to all the EC members who have put tremendous effort to bring the sponsorship. "Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the CBA."

We declare CBA as a financially disciplined organization with optimum transparency. We have already got our 2013-14 accounts audited by renowned Chartered Accountants in practice. The event wise consolidation of 2014-15 accounts is in process and will be completed after the end of the current financial year.

We will continue to uphold the status of The Cyberabad Bangali Association title.

We are committed to build a comfortable financial base of the association to combat with future uncertainties and commitments. We will publish the audited yearend financial results during AGM and make it available to all members.

On that note, I am sending out an open invitation especially to young generation to visit our association anytime and volunteer their contribution, all in the good cause of inculcating the association's mission to the community.

I would like to thank all EC members and advisors who have given me the opportunity to serve the association as Treasurer for Third time.

Good Luck!!

Debabrata Bala

The Cyberabad Bangali Association ORGANISATION

CBA Office Bearers 2014-15

President :- Mr. S.N. Guha
 Vice President :- Mr. Prabir Ranjan Paul
 Vice President :- Mr. Ashim Chakraborty
 General Secretary :- Mr. Subhro Mukherjee
 Jt. Secretary :- Mr. Sayan Jana
 Treasurer :- Mr. Debabrata Bala
 Jt. Treasurer:- Mr. Kingshuk Kumar Ray
 Cultural Secretary :- Mr.Subranshu Tripathi
 Jt. Cultural Secretary:- Ms Shabari Mitra
 Sponsorship Secretary:- Mr. Tuneer Ghosh
 Media Secretary :- Mr. Somnath Mukherjee
 Jt Media Secretary :- Mr. Tapas Biswas

EC members :- Mr. Sumit Biswas, Mr.Sabyasachi Sengupta, Mr.Susmit Sarkar, Mr. Siddhartha Das, Mr. Devojeet Mazumdar, Mr Shovan Saha, Mr. Sirsha Haldar, Mr. Amit Ray

Advisors

Mr. A.K Hom
 Mr. Deepak Chandra Das
 Mr. Arya Roy Chowdhury
 Mr. Surojeet Sengupta

Sharad Sambhaar 2014 Editorial Team

Mr. Surojeet Sengupta, Ms Swathi Sarbani Guha

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Mr. Surojeet Sengupta on behalf of The Cyberabad Bangali Association

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 First Runner's up- Mr. Ratan Das

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Contact Information:

Radha Kunj, Huda- B-3/12/33, Chandanagar, Hyderabad 500 050, A.P
 Phone: 9949414295, 9849488212, www.cyberabadbengalis.com, cba.info@yahoo.com



राष्ट्रपति
भारत गणतंत्र
PRESIDENT
REPUBLIC OF INDIA



MESSAGE

On the auspicious occasion of Durga Puja, I extend warm greetings to all my fellow citizens both in India and abroad.

Goddess Durga is the embodiment of Shakti. She is the divine feminine force that governs all cosmic creation, existence and change. Durga Puja celebrates the triumph of righteousness over evil.

May this festival help us rise above all man-made divides and spread peace, happiness and prosperity in our country. Let us pray that Goddess Durga bless us with strength, courage and determination so that we can succeed in our efforts to build a just, humane and equal society.

Let us, resolve to accord the highest of honour and respect to women at all times.

Pranab Mukherjee

(Pranab Mukherjee)

New Delhi
August 28, 2014

তোমার খোঁজে

কর্ম ক্লান্ত মুটে ঘুমোয় ফুটপাথের এক ধারে,
ঠেলাগাড়ি ওয়ালা ঘুমায় গুদামের অন্য পারে।
নিদ্রাহীন পায়রা করে টানাটানি, খালি খালি,
ঘাঁটে - পূজারীর ফেলে যাওয়া নৈবেদ্যের ডালি,
বাতাসার ঠোঙ্গা, ঘি, সন্দেশ, আর কপূরের শিশি,
পোহায় প্রহর মোর নিদ্রাহীন মন অহর্নিশ।

গরুগাড়ীর লন্ঠন দোলে, মেঠো পথ যেথা যায় ঘুরে,
প্রবীণ চাষী যায়, গহন রাতে, কোন খেয়ালের সুরে,
না, বেচতে আনাজ ভিন গ্রামে, দালালের চালে বেহাল?
নাকি, মদ্যপ লম্পট ভল্লিপতিকে করতে নাজেহাল?
তোমার খোঁজে, সেও কি চায় অনন্য নির্জন আশ্রয়?
শুনতে, মৌন লগনে অযুত তারার তান ভরা লয়?

জ্যোতিষ্ম গঙ্গোপাধ্যায়

যন্ত্রণা আছে তবু ভাল থাক

যন্ত্রণা ? ----

এ তো তোমাকে সইতেই হবে ,
উত্তপ্ত জ্বালামুখীর সম্মুখীন হতে হবে ।
যদিও তুমি কোমল , স্নিগ্ধ , নির্মল ।
কারণ ? অনাচার থাকবে , দুঃখ আছে ।
এ বেদনা কে তুমি তোমার ঘন কাল
চুলের তলে ঢেকে ফেল না ।
হাজার সমস্যার সমাধান হয়তো হবে না ;
স্নিগ্ধ কোমলতায় তোমার
বক্ষে মাঝে চেপে রাখ না ।
জলাশয়ে তরঙ্গ আসবে , যাবে ----

তবু ----

অসাবধানী বাঁকের ফাঁক দিয়ে ,
সাবধানে পেরোতে পারলেই ,
দেখবে জীবন তার খুশীর ডালা নিয়ে
তোমার অপেক্ষায় দাঁড়িয়ে ।
দুটি হাত বাড়িয়ে আলিঙ্গন কর যদি ভাল ।
মুখ ফিরিও না ; গ্রহণ কর তাকে ।
মানবিকতা আর সততার জ্বলন্ত দীপ হাতে ,
ধীর পায়ে এগিয়ে যাও ,
তোমার লক্ষ্যে দিকে -----
“অবলা নারী” ----- এই করুণা মাথা
উপাধী থেকে মুক্ত থাক ।

বীতা মোদক

চলো আরেকটাবার

চলো আরেকটাবার চায়ের
কাপে তুফান তুলি
কারণ ছাড়া তর্কে ভুলি
জগতটাকে
বর্ষা বিকেল আর ভেজা
সন্ধ্যা গায়ে মেখে
ভুতের রাজার জুতোয়
চেপে দুনিয়া ভুলি

টেলিস্কোপে ল্যাবের
ফাঁকে টেনিস খেলা
নন্দন আর গড়ের মাঠের
বইয়ের মেলা
কাঁচের বাটির জল তরঙ্গে
ফিজিক্স খোঁজা
তেলেভাজায় - তেলের
বাজার ভীষন সোজা
নতুন আমেজ প্রিন্স
হেনরির তামাক পাতায়
পয়সা কড়ির চিন্তা সবই
খেরোর খাতায়
ছাগল কিশ্বা প্রেমিক
পাগল সমান জলে
মিছিল, ভাষণ, জীবনমুখী
একই দলে
অনিন্দিতা -
নীলান্জনা গরম
বাজার
দুনিয়াটাকে বদলে
দেবার উপায় হাজার
সদ্যজাত গায়ক - কবির
নতুন ভাষা
প্রতিবাদের শব্দকোষে
মগজ ঠাসা
আবছা হওয়া দিনগুলিকে
জাগিয়ে তুলি
চলো আরেকটাবার চায়ের
কাপে তুফান তুলি

ইন্দ্রজিৎ

A Full Circle - Subrata Ray

The J P Nagar Community Centre, the venue of Durga puja of Cyberabad Bengali Association, was abuzz with activity after puja on the day of *Astami*. There was a large gathering at the puja venue, and with the visitors making their *pushpanjali* in batches, it took up to one o'clock when the last batch made their offering to the mother goddess. Sensing the urgency, the volunteers soon rushed to the open space before the pandal to distribute lunch to the people that assembled there. Very quickly they arranged tables as makeshift catering points and brought buckets of *khichudi* and curries to be served. In no time queues formed and distribution of *khichudi* started.

Sagar, who stood in one of the queues, was looking for familiar faces in the crowd. He made acquaintance of a few Bengalis in his office and elsewhere since he had joined a software company at Hyderabad three or four months back. He hoped to meet some of them as it was only natural for the Bengalis to come out and soak in the festivities on such a delightful day as *Astami*. But looking around, his gaze was fixed on a tall young woman seeming just too well known to him standing in the queue next to his only a few steps ahead of him. Clad in a sari, she appeared perfectly dressed for the puja day. Sagar looked at her more intently. And it did not take him much time to recognize her. Urmi! He could not just believe his eyes! In the sea of unknown faces, he found, of all the known people in the world, Urmi Chakraborty – the college girl he had written poems for and wanted to be in love with, but ultimately had to forget to move on with life! He was amused, but was at a loss as to whether to go and meet her or just let her be. He was not sure of striking up a conversation with a distant college mate who had studied a different stream of engineering and with whom he had had little or no contact during college days. He wished that her queue moved ahead faster than his so that she remained at a comfortable distance as with her standing so close, it was quite likely that they would just bump into each other any moment. But his wish was not to be fulfilled! Just as the queue moved, Urmi turned to talk to an old lady standing beside her. She happened to exchange glance with him almost immediately. She wrinkled her eyebrows as if trying to recall something and got engaged in conversation with her aged companion. With Sagar looking straight to the front, she seemed uncomfortable trying to avoid an eye contact with him. She looked aside, but eventually ended up exchanging a few glances with him before lining up with the queue again. Sagar was sure she recognized him. He thought he could introduce himself to her at an opportune moment sometime later. But she was not willing to wait for that opportune moment perhaps! Within a few moments, she suddenly turned and came straight to him and said, 'I presume you are Sagar Sen from BEC.'

Sagar was not prepared for it. 'What? Oh, yes, I'm,' he said taken aback by her sudden approach.

'I'm Urmi. Can you recognize me? How are you? Oh, meeting you after a long time.' She seemed very excited to have met Sagar.

'I'm fine. Thank you. After passing out from college, when do we get to meet like this?'

'I've been here for last two years. My mom's here with me.' Urmi called her mother and introduced Sagar to her as one of her old friends from college. Sagar touched the feet of her mother who blessed him and prayed for his happiness. Urmi was just about to tell him something when she got a call from someone in the queue to collect her lunch. She told Sagar, 'Well, we'll meet again after lunch. I've something to tell you,' and hurriedly went to collect the dishes for her mother and herself.

The geniality displayed by Urmi puzzled Sagar completely. And what was the 'something' that she had to tell him? He was curious to know. They had spent four academic years in the same college, but there had been no shared memory between them except the one concerning Piyush that she could talk about.

There was a knot in front of him as people were entering the queue arbitrarily and he was getting very restless. But after some time when he got his lunch, he was delighted to find the *khichudi* and curries very tasty. He got his dish refilled twice and ate his fill. Then he went looking for Urmi in the sprawling community centre. But where was she? He looked in everywhere – inside the pandal, before food stalls and stalls for cars – everywhere. But he found no trace of her and her mother.

Bewildered by the sudden appearance of Urmi, her having to tell him something and her disappearing act after lunch, Sagar came back to his apartment at My Home Jewel. The bygone days of college - the days spent in longing for Urmi - flashed through his mind. It was on one of the early days of his first year of engineering course at Bengal Engineering College that he spotted Urmi in the ghat on the bank of Hooghly, which was less than a kilometer away from their residential college. Sagar and his friends went to cool themselves in the breeze that would blow in the riverside in the afternoon. They sat on one of the upper steps of the ghat. The sky was lit as the Sun was setting and the launches were ferrying passengers to Babughat on the other side of the river. As Sagar was enjoying the sight, a group of first year college girls came, huddled together in a step near the water's edge and started chatting. Young and inexperienced in life away from home, they were like fledglings of a nest getting ready to make their first flight to the sky. Urmi, who wore a black tunic with a long skirt and was the tallest among them, caught his attention. Her long black hairs were getting disheveled in the breeze and she struggled keeping them in place again and again, as Sagar kept his eyes fixed on her from behind. After sunset, as the girls were leaving, he saw she was tall, dusky and neat in her build and movement. He soon fell in love with her; he fell in love with her chiseled looks, luscious hair and her dark eyebrows. He had interest in photography and occasionally wrote poems on nature. But now Urmi became his consuming passion and he wrote poems one after another in love for her in his diary. He would read out his poems to his roommate in the hostel and his friend Piyush, who would encourage him to write more of them. He was one way preparing to woo her with his poems. But alas, fate had something else in store for him! Little did he know that instead of romance, it was heartbreak and tragedy that were waiting for him in the coming days.

Urmi was seeing Shreyash whom she had known since XII standard. Urmi came to BEC to study Architecture while Shreyas went to Presidency College to study Physics. They fell for each other after they entered college. Sagar was heartbroken to get the news and as if this was not bad enough for him, within days, an accident took his friend Piyush's life. They went on a picnic to Baro Mandir ghat on the bank of Hooghly. Neither Piyush nor his friends knew swimming or knew it well enough to do in a strong river. Piyush went into the water in front of the ghat for a bath along with his friends. The undercurrent in the river was stronger than it seemed looking at the current on the surface. As no one noticed, Piyush slipped in one of the lower steps of the ghat, drifted into deep water and was swept away by the current. Sagar and his friends saw him in trouble at the last moment and could do nothing to save him as he drowned in water throwing his arms in an attempt to swim, but only ending up gulping water and gasping for breath and unable to even let out a cry for help to the people near him. But a day after, to utter surprise of Sagar, Urmi came down to his classroom to know about the accident! She was in grief because Piyush was her cousin! Sagar thought that if there was benevolence in hiding, Piyush set an example. Piyush hid it from him as he did not want to create an inhibition in his friend's love for his cousin. Sagar felt more bereft to have lost a true friend who so quietly tried to provide sustenance to his now stillborn love in all possible way he could.

Sagar tracked down Urmi's Facebook account. She was working in an architectural firm at Madhapur. She uploaded photos of medieval architecture at Golconda Fort, Qutub Sahi tombs etc. and also of modern architecture in city's new buildings. She had a long list of friends. But curiously enough, there was no photo of her boyfriend Shreyash nor was he in her friends list! A ray of hope flashed into his mind almost instantly before he could give a serious thought to it. Life had not been particularly exciting for him at Hyderabad. He felt somewhat like an alien in a place where he could not relate to the people and did not understand the language they spoke. He found himself confined to a domain defined solely by his needs. He tried to widen his sphere by pursuing his interest in photography. It was the rocks of Hyderabad that fascinated his view through the lens. He started doing a bit of photography of those rocks. Yet photography, rocks, watching movies at Talkie Town and occasional drink of whisky in the weekend failed to beat the boredom and loneliness of his bachelor life at an unfamiliar place. Assuming a break-up with Shreyash, could Urmi now fill the void and breathe life into his dull existence? He was not sure. With the baggage of a relationship, she could not be the girl he fell in love with and wrote poems for ten years back, he thought.

Puja holidays were over. The beats of *dhak* quietly receded into the fond memories of Durgapuja-2013 and life was back to daily routine for Sagar. He went to Kolkata House restaurant for lunch one Sunday. The restaurant was frequented by the Bengalis, but little did he expect that he would bump into Urmi there again! As he entered the restaurant, he saw that Urmi and her mother had just finished their lunch and were washing their hands in the basin. Seeing Sagar, Urmi called him outside and said, 'I'm sorry I couldn't meet you after lunch at Durgapuja venue. We waited for you for half an hour. Then my mother suddenly fell sick and we had to

leave.' 'Well, it took some time in the queue. Then I was relishing the lunch there,' said Sagar with a smile. 'I've something to give you back. When shall we meet? May I've your mobile number?' Sagar gave her his visiting card. 'I'm currently busy. But we'll meet sometime later for sure,' he said and lowered his voice to ask, 'You've something to give me back. That's surprising!' Urmi smiled and said, 'Yes, something to give you back. But it's not possible unless we sit together for some time. You may call my number when you've time.' She gave him her visiting card. Then she called an auto-rickshaw and hopped onto it along with her mother and went away.

Urmi dropped another bombshell! Now she had 'something to give him back'! What might it be? She almost made a habit of keeping him in suspense. Did she mean any physical object or something as abstract as love, kindness or favour? Had Piyush revealed his love for her to his cousin?

Sagar tried not to harbour any fondness in his mind for Urmi. Yet his heart grew tender for her sometimes. He had been floored by her looks; now her friendly nature was stealthily bringing to life, as it were, his infatuation with her ten years back. As he was torn between his heart's calling and head's intransigence, one fine morning an e-mail from Urmi surprised him completely.

Hi Sagar,

You must be wondering what I've to give you back. I'd just like to take you ten years back. Do you remember the following poem? This is but only one of the many you have in your diary.

On the bank of the river,

I was lost in dreams.

The river came dancing through

Mountain, desert and streams.

I told the river of her effortless grace;

I asked the secret of her restless pace.

Then you breezed in

On your nimble feet;

You kissed my eyes

With your velvet lips,

And blew my dream away.

We went up to the water's edge;

The river swelled and sent us her waves;

You sparkled in your floating image.

Then you giggled, the river gurgled.

You ran, the river gushed.

You screamed,

The river echoed your screams.

You let your hairs down,

The river went up and fell

In the deepest waterfall ever known.

We folded our hands

And offered our prayers.

The river ebbed

And went down with flair.

You flowed away

With song in your feet.

To hold you in arms and love

Would be heroic indeed.

You went away

With freedom in your leap.

To grab you in love

Might be a stifling grip.

You, Urmi, have the grace of the river,

I'd now have my boat sail in your water.

It's for you, my dear, I've lost my peace;

It's in you, oh, my love, I've found my bliss.

It was so refreshing for me to read your poem and I was so deeply touched by your love in this manner - I wish I could express my feelings in similar poetic language. Yet,

you won't believe, every time I read your poem, I'm filled with a sense of remorse that I didn't give what was due to you then. As you know, life sometimes presents us with difficult choices. I had to make a difficult choice ten years back. But I don't want to regret it. I'd rather like to move on with life like a 'river' that you found in me. I'm sorry I didn't return your diary which you may not know your friend Piyush gifted me a few days before his death. I'd like to meet you to return the diary. This Saturday I'm free. Would you like to meet me in the afternoon at Lumbini Park? Please reply. Bye.
Urmi

A sense of relief! That was how Sagar felt as Urmi lifted the veil of mystery around things she wanted to tell him or give him back. The e-mail also had a hint that she ended her relationship with Shreyash. Ten years back when the diary was lost, Piyush helped him search for it by looking in different corners of the room. He even asked the sweeper whether he had collected it as a scrap. He acted out his role as a concerned friend so well that Sagar could hardly imagine that he had stolen his diary and handed it over to Urmi. Now on the pretext of returning the diary, she was seeking a meeting with all the trappings – the Lumbini Park, the afternoon of Saturday and so on - of a date with him! What was more, she was trying to revive his love for her by citing his poem! She ought not to take any mileage from the sentiments expressed in his poem, Sagar grumbled to himself. Infatuated with her in the early days of his college, he composed some poems in love for her. Why did she not respond to his love then? He depicted her as free woman and by that he meant she would love him but would not necessarily remain tied down by her love and stop pursuing her goal in life. He did not mean that she should peddle her love to all and sundry in the name of freedom and would come back to him jilted by them. He still found her attractive. No one else had stirred his mind the way she had. But he was not so cheap. He was good looking and educated, and could easily get a worthy life partner for himself. If she had chosen someone else rather than him in spite of knowing his love for her, he was under no obligation now to run up to her and embrace her. If at all he wanted to have a relationship with her, it would be on his terms. He communicated his consent to meet her at Lumbini Park through e-mail, but stressed that it would be a brief meeting as he had other engagements, to which Urmi replied, 'OK'.

It was a sunny afternoon at Lumbini Park. They sat on a bench facing the vast Hussainsagar Lake. Urmi, dressed in shirt and jeans and looking poised, was in a reflective mood. This was the first time Sagar had her so close. In the college days, he saw her as a girl with an easy smile bubbling with energy and excitement. Now she was a confident working woman with striking appearance.

'It's a nice place, but I feel the river ghat near our college was better.' Urmi started the conversation.

'I saw Hussainsagar earlier. But I'm here for the first time. It's a fantastic place. But if you compare between a river and a lake, river naturally wins,' quipped Sagar.

'I'm happy, if river wins,' she said with a smile in an apparent reference to his poem and then added, 'But you'd agree the college days were so special - our first step

towards freedom. We can't forget them nor can we forget things associated with college life.'

'Yes, I agree. We've good and bad memories of college life. But there's nothing to forget. Good memories are easy to recall but bad memories are lessons not to forget for life.'

'Sagar, you knew Shreyash. He left for Germany for research two years back. He asked me to go to Germany. I've declined as I've a job here and I've my parents to look after. Last year my father passed away. My mother is with me. We haven't been in touch for last one year. He has chosen his career rather than me. He's now a closed chapter for me.' Urmi changed the topic deliberately and as if in single breath, informed him of the end of her relationship with Shreyash and so many other things about herself. Then she took out the diary from her bag and gave it to Sagar. He turned over the pages. The pages turned yellow over the years, but otherwise the diary was carefully preserved.

'Piyush gave me the diary wrapped in gift paper. He didn't like Shreyash for reasons best known to him. He wanted me to meet you. To show me the genuineness of your love, he sneaked out the diary and gave to me. But I didn't have the heart to spurn him as we had known each other since earlier days.' She was candid about her relationship with Shreyash.

As they were in conversation, some caretakers of the park came and told the visitors that the park needed to be renovated for the upcoming Christmas. They offered their apology and requested all the visitors to leave. Urmi suggested that they could go to Birla Science Museum and Planetarium, from where they could proceed to the nearby bus stop for going back home. Sagar agreed to her suggestion, forgetting the anger and pique he had after getting her e-mail. He was struck by her geniality and her poise and directness in talking about her past. He saw a side to her personality that was transparent and mature and thus reassuring.

The Birla Museum was not far from Lumbini Park and they decided to walk. Urmi made good use of the time by talking about herself and about how she admired Sagar from a distance during college days and about how happy and fortunate she was to have him at Hyderabad. On reaching Birla museum, she bought the ticket for museum and the show at the planetarium. They saw all the scientific equipment and exhibits. Then they went to the dinosaurium, where they saw a big skeleton of dinosaur, which was discovered in Adilabad district of Andhra Pradesh. There were also exhibits on the evolution of humans on the planet Earth. Sagar thought that the humans - the most intelligent of all species - were only slaves to their desires, emotions and feelings of love, hate, anger, pique etc. And they might not be able to even understand themselves fully in the entire span of their life!

It was six o'clock when they entered the planetarium for the evening show. Lights were off. Reclining in the chairs inclined backward, they looked up to the night sky that was projected on the inside of globular dome. A commentary on the universe was familiarizing the audience with the constellations. Urmi was excited. But Sagar was not able to concentrate on the show. His mind was engrossed in the thought of Urmi, her past and her yearning for him now. She had a relationship with someone.

She ended the relationship for her parents and her career. Now she wanted to requite his love for her. He saw no deceit in her approach. Then why was he unsure about her? Was it because of pique since in the past she had chosen someone else rather than him? Was her character in question because she was in love with someone else? Could she be held guilty of love? If he was piqued, Urmi could not now go back and erase her past. She did what she could do best in the circumstances. She shed the baggage of her past and loved him genuinely. Now she might be his or else the life never stopped in the wide world full of possibilities and would not stop for her either. He was in deep thought as the show came to an end. Urmi had to almost awaken him in his seat. He stood up and then they went out of the planetarium and left for bus stop.

One week passed. Urmi was expecting a response from Sagar - whatever it might be. One day she was busy with a client in her office. A call came from Sagar on her mobile. As she picked the call, he told her, 'How are you? I'd like to meet you soon to return the diary. Please let me know when and where you'd like me to meet you.'

'What? The diary is yours. Besides, what have I to do with it?' replied Urmi.

'I'd like to give it to the one for whom it's meant.'

'No, there's no truth in it. Your poems don't mean anything to me in real sense. They only mislead.'

'You must be someone very difficult to persuade, Urmi. But for me, now life will be true to my poems in every sense and I'll live out my poetry for the rest of my life.'

Urmi heard what she wanted to hear from him loud and clear. Reassured she said, 'Well, be true to your words as always. And please do come to my home any weekend you're free and have dinner with us.'

Sagar replied, 'Well, tomorrow is Saturday and I'm free. I'll be at your place by 7 pm for the most memorable dinner of my life.' Urmi had some problems hosting dinner for him the very next day, but she had no choice but to say, 'OK.' After all, this was the yearning she only had been trying to instill into him for so many days.

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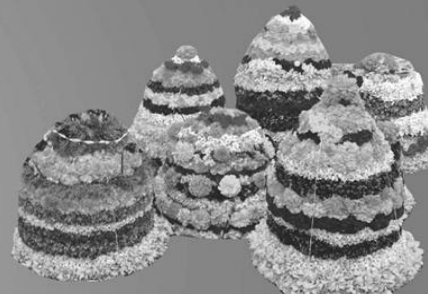
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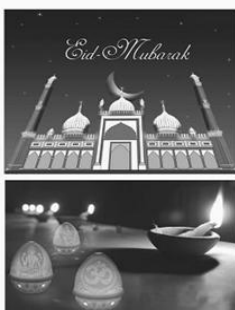
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Sri Sri Durga Puja of the Bengalees is here again for which we all eagerly await every year. 'Akai Bodhan' Sharadiya Durga Puja during this time of "Sharat kal" (autumn time) was said to have been started by Sri Ram while at war with Ravana. Now the celebration of Sharadiya Durga Puja with all gaiety is an integral part of our Bengali culture and festivity. As per our Vedic literature, killing of the demon Mahishasura by Goddess Durga is narrated in chapter of Devi Mahatmyam or Chandi (the second chapter of Markandeya Purana- one of the 18 Puranas).

In brief - after long penance, the demon king Asura received boon from Shiva that neither any Deva nor man would be able to kill him, but will be killed only in the hands of a woman. Thereafter arrogance of Asura made him to even terrorise heaven and earth and with killings. Devas fled away and took refuge to Lord Bhrama who took them to Vaikuntha to Lord Vishnu and Lord Shiva. Upon hearing the misdeeds of Ashura, all the Devas became extremely angry and this caused emanating pure energy from Brahma, Vishnu and Shiva – thus the trinity forming the pure energy of Godhood. Those energy and combined also with energies from all the Gods, it took the form of Goddess Durga. The Gods also gifted to Durga with fearsome weaponries to help her to battle with the tyrannical Ashura. Durga riding on her Lion engaged Asura in a fierce fight. Eeraged by the disastrous events on the battlefield, Asura took the form of a buffalo (Mahisha-Asura). At last, Mahishasura was beheaded by Mother Durga.

Following her victory, the Gods bowed to the Goddess, showered their praises and all sang with hymns of reverence. All these are beautifully described in verses in the holy book - Chandi.

The era of the mythological war between Mother Durga and Mahishasura cannot be really ascertained. But curiously, we can try to look back on the historical findings of centuries ago and may be surprised to observe the practices of worshipping of certain influential Mother figures in various forms which existed across the civilisations and beyond India.

A brief on the studies from various references are given here.

Indus Valley Civilisation, which developed in Harappa and Mahenjo-Daro in the basins of Indus River. (Presently these localities are in Pakistan). A seal found in Kaibangan (Harappa) shows Mahishasura mardini, depicting Devi Durga /Parvati spearing a buffalo, apparently Mahishasura, while Lord Pashupati watches. Another seal shows Mother Durga riding on a lion/tiger.

A seal of Lord Siva found was also found of the same era was also which dates back to 5780 BC (Archaeological determination by Carbon dating).

The people of those era obviously believed in the certain cult of Mother Durga and her war with Asura.

In the later years we can see the spread of Hindu culture and on the belief on Mother Durga across the civilisations and boundaries beyond India.



**Seal : Mahishasura mardini -
Harappa-Mahenjo Daro, Indus Valley
Civilisation**



**Seal: Durga/Parvati- Harappa-Mahenjo
Daro, Indus Valley Civilisation**

To Combodia – Hindu Goddesses like Durga, Laxmi adorn the walls at various places at the famous Hindu-Buddhist temple complex of Angkor Wat (12th century AD). Certain localisation of art form can be noted in these carvings, i.e. which were prevalent in east-south-east Asian countries.



**Durga carving Angkor Wat Temple,
Cambodia**



Durga – from Java (Indonesia)

To Java (Indonesia) –

32 Figures of Durga are on display in the "Museum Nasional", at Jakarta, Indonesia. They were found from various historical temple complexes of Java province and are dating from 700 to 1500 AD.

In far east - Japan, Korea , China –

One of Asia's and Japan's most beloved deities as of Lord of Compassion, Goddess of Mercy in both ancient and modern times is veneration of 'Kannon'. It began in Japan during late 6th century, soon after Buddhism reached Japan by way of Korea and China.

This deity of Durga (in form of Juntei Kannon, one of many other forms of Kannon–the Goddess of Mercy) is seen with a gentle expression and is generally called as "Juntei Butsubo" (i.e. "Chandi Bhagavati"; Readers may also note the similarities of the words originating from



Durga (Chandi) in Japan

Sanskrit). Here, Durga is portrayed with 18 arms and in some of them with flaming sword, rosary, vajra, conch shell etc.

Backdrop of Middle East –

Several thousands of years ago, people from modern Europe, Iran and India had common ancestors called Indo-Europeans. They slowly got divided into a multitude of tribes. One of these tribes, named Aryans, migrated eastwards and southwards to Iran and India. They also founded several civilizations in Mesopotamia and in the areas near Indus River.

In Mesopotamia / Iraq , Iran –

Mesopotamia of ancient times is an area which is mostly covered by present day Iraq.

Goddess Ishtar- She is the goddess of warfare and is worshipped in Mesopotamia. She holds a striking resemblance to those of goddess Durga. The goddess Ishtar was worshipped by the Sumerians, Assyrians, Babylonians and even Romans and Egyptians, since about 2000 B.C. and probably even before. Ishtar is depicted here as riding a lion and had multiple arms holding many weapons.



Goddess Ishtar- Mesopotamia



Goddess Inanna- Iran

Goddess Inanna - In ancient Mesopotamia or Sumer (roughly modern-day Iraq), Goddess Inanna was worshipped and revered for thousands of years. She shares many characteristics with Durga. She is depicted here as a deity with lions at her feet which is a symbol of her unrestrainable power.

Goddess Anahita –



Goddess Anahita – Iran (404-359

BC)



Goddess Nanâ –Iran (600-

700 AD)

This plaque from 404-359 BC is seen with figure of Goddess Anahita who is depicted as riding a lion and in the background of the sun. A striking similarity of Goddess Durga can be noted.

Cult of Nanâ - It existed in Mesopotamia from 300 BC. Nanâ later appears under different guises and with different names, spread to the eastern Iran and survived until the Muslim era. An archeological find of Sassania Dynasty (600-700 AD) shows a female figure with a de-capacitated Buffalo demon (Mahishashura mardini). This 7-1/2 in. re-constructed Silver figure originally was found crushed in the tombs nearby. It is now kept at Cleveland Museum of Art, Ohio, USA.

In Greece – During 6th century BCE in Greece, cults of mother-goddess “Cybele” is seen, who was a “Mistress of animals”, expressed by the lions flanking her.



Mother-goddess “Cybele”- Greece

This Plaque of the era of 2nd century BCE shows goddess Cybele drawn in her chariot by lions towards a sacrifice.

In Turkey –

Earliest till date ‘female figure with Lions’ has been found in the archaeological sites of Göbekli Tepe (in South eastern Anatolia Region of Turkey). The temple in this site is around 11,600 years old and is supposed to be the oldest constructed temple in the world.



Mother Goddess (6200 BCE) - now in Ankara Museum, Turkey

The picture shows the female figure sculpture of the Great Mother with Her lions (dated to ca. 6,200 BCE) was found at Çatalhöyük (settlement in southern Anatolia, which existed during 7500 BC to 5700 BC).

Interestingly, we can note that a cult existed in various civilisations about adoration of certain iconic warrior-mother figures and associated with lion. The cult of such warrior-mother figure appeared to have spread in various forms through its neighbouring geographical areas, when migration of population occurred due to trades or for spread of kingdom etc. Exchanges of traditions, social systems, mythological beliefs and religious practices etc. naturally took place. The Silk Route beginning 200 BC was also the main artery of cultural exchanges between China to the Mediterranean regions.

From pre-historic era of our country, we note that prolonged conflicts for supremacy continued between the superior Aryans and other comparatively lesser knowledgeable and lesser equipped local inhabitants (in the literatures they were identified as the non-Aryans or may be the Asuras).

Ramprasad Chanda, the reputed historian and archaeologist from erstwhile Bengal also wrote about the possibilities of original Durga being as war-Goddess who was being worshipped by shepherd dwellers of Himalayas and Vindhya and with advances of civilisation, the war-goddess was gradually brought into Brahmanic mythology (Vedic literatures).

It may be reasonable to consider that the cult of Durga worship from Indus valley civilisation gradually got integrated into the Vedic literature over a long period of time. As "shruti"(hearing) followed by "smriti"(remembrance) were the prevailing form of communication of the Vedic knowledge down the line, impact of diverse interpretations by many Acharyas and addition of literary ornamentations cannot be ruled out in the gradually evolving Vedic literature over periods of time. The Puranas were usually disseminated from one generation to another orally. Structured scripts like Brahmi developed much later in India (around 500 BCE), followed by Devanagari/Sanskrit.

But what evolved eventually as the Vedic literature and as we know now, is a wonderful classic with abundance of highest order of literary values, wisdom and knowledge covering

wide spectrum of the life, science and philosophy. The cults whatsoever in any civilisation do gradually evolve, they are time tested and get adopted only when beneficial. The populace in India got immensely blessed over the centuries by following the core values of Vedic literature (Sanātana Dharma /Hinduism) and also through symbolism of worshipping various Hindu iconic Gods and Goddesses. Worshipping of Mother Durga and its celebrations also got evolved across regions of India in diverse forms.

Community (Barowari) Durga Puja which started by 12 ('Baro') friends ('yar') sometimes during 1760 to 1790 in Guptipara, Hooghly, Bengal took the form of present day Bengali community Puja with all the grandeur and it became an wonderful cultural occasion around the world. All the Bengalees await for this yearly celebration. So continue to be it and all of us will be blessed....

Let me conclude with an extract from the Chandi....

...She is eternal (and is thus beyond our knowledge), embodied as the universe and pervades the world which may accordingly be called her form. Yet for the assistance of the lustrous souls, she appears in different forms....

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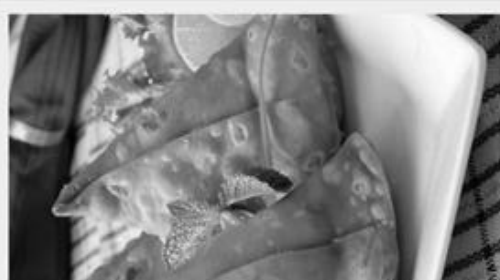
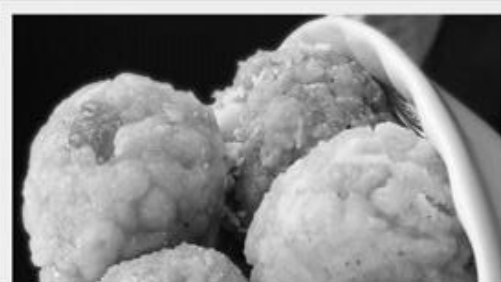
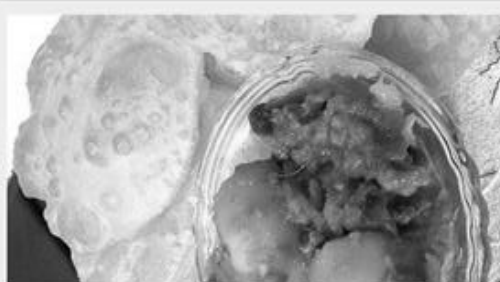
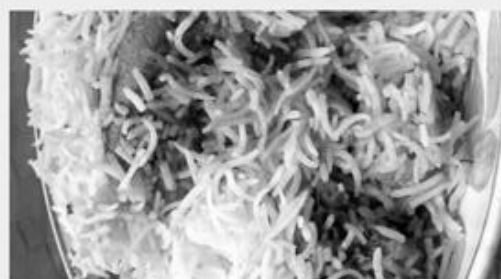
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Poems – Gargi Saha

INNOCENCE STOLEN

-
Apple was an apple
Rose a rose
Bird a bird
No difference between the wild lion or the mild herd.

Didn't know what's money-
What's called marriages
And that everyone ought to marry-
Mind was as soft as velvet, cool as ice, pure as a lily.

Didn't interpret good- bad, dark- white,
Everything was the same
All covered under a realm without any name
Day after day comprehended life richest to its core.

Interpret many meanings of a single idea
Replaced by gravitational grave the gaiety and gala
Simplicity replaced proof-
Extrovert remained aloof
Smile, laughter haunted by worries and dilemma of life's memories sweet sour

No more the same innocence
Endurance or escalating elegance
Day after day everything lost somewhere
Untraceable in the air
Is this advanced education?
Scarcely reaps optima pacification

That steals its purity
Embedded, embellished in artificial sophistry
The woe is indescribable
Never erasable
That's eternally immemorial
That creates ripples----- bubbles-----whirls-----

COMMONNESS

-
None can deny that they too feel the scorching heat of summer
The freezing ice of winter
None can deny that they too feel the vacuum of hunger
And sometimes feel the fire of anger.

None can deny that they too feel the same pain
Happy on the same gain
Bleed if something pierces-
Sorrow flowed by the ardent tears.

None can deny that they too feel the same greed

The same need
The same envy
The same irony!

None can deny that they too attach the same stigma of criticism
The same disdain
The same sentiments
The same expenses.

For we are all humans
The same homo sapiens group
The same love- hatred- shared in mankind
In the same debts bind.

None can deny that an informal feeling descends
Of this commonness, sameness
An identity is established
Of the fair and dark humanity.

Then why these walls?
Of the sameness
Of class, caste, religion?
Division----- Distinction-----Competition-----

None can deny the same similarity
And yet a difference.
That marks its essence
Of this embedded commonness.

FEELINGS THAT ARE BORN IN LIFE

-
From the deep, dark, ghetto of my heart
Innocence was swollen
Attraction crept
Love, affection peered
Envy with its burning neared.

From the deep, dark,ghetto of my heart
There was affiliation to feats, degrees, posts
Prestige, dignity, self esteem reached its climax
Greed swirled itself unbridled ardently
Escalated minutely but didn't tend to lose its business like strategy-

From the deep, dark,ghetto of my heart
Ego itself percolated down the 'Gehiren' to the feet
Itself's no fault or permission but the prerequisites to it warmly greeted
Anger that's superior to all marched ahead like a monarch---
Forgot its true worth and will descend only on to the grave

From the deep, dark,ghetto of my heart
They appear all within some spur

And finally will perish to dust without eternal impression
 In life how majestically royally rode--
 After death noble feasts at the worms abode.

THE CONSCIOUSNESS

-
 With every tick of the clock
 And the door's suspense
 Sometimes a great knock and the consciousness grows
 Like a red rose

Slowly, Softly, Silently
 Timidly, Taciturnly, Terrified
 Hesitantly, Slyly, Wisely
 In eta into an enormous not extinguishable hearth

Called the soul
 That burns unexhausted-----
 Absorbs, Acclimatizes, Accentuated
 And adheres to it for a short long time

Till the appointed moment
 To escape into another life
 Of stringent struggle and strife
 Yet with another tick

It becomes saturated sick
 Still assumes another form
 Totally different, fully divergent
 No past recollections, repentance of sentiments

Gathers, Collects, Shares
 Enjoys, Repines, Bears
 Stays, Dissolves, Sublimes
 Growth, decadence, degradation with the time.

HAPPINESS OF THE FIELDS

-
 The fields are happy and bright
 Green and light
 Flowers dance, essence fills-
 The light of happiness isn't still

Nightingale sings, fruits reap-
 In the small seeds, saplings peep
 Brightness all over springs
 From the greyest to multifarious wings

The field are but fresh and young
 No 'I' no ear, no tongue

But yet unnaturally burlesque, jubilant, gay
As if mortal stars of the tiresome way

They rejuvenate again the last mettle-
Every erupting lassitude settle
The eternal ecstasy of the soul, the synthesiser of millions
Love for all cheerless, hatred of none.

Telescope

How would appear the entire designed universe
Whose guidance will prove fruitful
Whose friendship be ever trustworthy
Which plant would endure health
Which animal's flesh, milk prove to be edible
Which perseverance would reap success
Who to land first on the moon
Who to sail the English channel
'He' knew them all
And could see everything before
And so placed everyone
Most appositely.

-*-

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Haw Par Villa - Gargi Saha

Haw Par Villa, also known as the Tiger Balm Gardens, has to be one of the [weirdest tourist spots](#) you can find in Southeast Asia, and the weirdest in Singapore. It is a Chinese mythological [theme park](#) in [Singapore](#), located along the [Pasir Panjang Road](#). Haw Par Villa, formerly called Tiger Balm Gardens, was originally constructed in 1937 by brothers [Aw Boon Haw](#) and [Aw Boon Par](#) the developers of [Tiger Balm](#). The site was purchased by Aw in 1935. The Aw family eventually sold the Gardens to the Singapore Tourism Board in 1979.

In English, Haw Par Villa stands for the Villa of the Tiger and the Leopard. The park was renamed Haw Par Villa in 1985 and re-opened in 1990, when it was converted into an [amusement park](#) and promoted with the name "Dragon World", with many of the statues and scenes replaced with fairground rides.

Aw Boon Haw then created an entertainment park to teach and preserve Chinese values. The park's colorful collection of over one thousand statues and one hundred and fifty giant tableaux centered around Chinese folklore, legends, history, and Confucian ideology. Morality tales included classic battles between good and evil and tributes to Chinese cultural heroes such as the famous pugilist Wu Song, who tamed a ferocious tiger with his bare hands. The attractions include statues of the [Laughing Buddha](#) and the [Goddess of Mercy](#), as well as dioramas of scenes from [Journey to the West](#).

The Attractions in the park include the Scowling 7,000-kg gorilla, a monstrous sumo wrestler, The Statue of Liberty, The Ten Courts of Hell, with gruesome depictions of hell in [Chinese mythology](#), all set in a 60 meter-long trail of a [Dragon](#). The other attractions include Water Gardens and live fishes, Thai Dancers, Panda, Ostrich and the Koala Bear.

It also has 'The Jade House' - This is a new addition to Haw Par Villa. It displays a wide collection of Jades that Aw Family has collected over the years. This 'Jade House' is in Haw Par Villa, a short distance away from the main entrance. There is a token admission charge into The Jade House. It is open daily. There is also a 'Tiger Car' - This is also a new attraction. It's a vintage car dressed up to look like a tiger. It's a replica of the 'Tiger Car' that the late Mr. Aw Boon Haw owned. Viewing the 'Tiger Car' at the 'Garage' in Haw Par Villa is free. The 'Garage' is open daily.

Like the Hindu Religion the Chinese mythology also espouses in the theory of rebirth and results of virtuous and vile deeds that are rewarded or penalized severely in the ten courts of hell, where a soul must pass through the ten courts of judgment, before being allowed into heaven, and Haw Par Villa has very detailed representations of these trials.

In the first Court Of Hell, King Oinguang conducts preliminary trials and each prisoner is judged according to his deeds in his past life. The 'good' are distinguished from the 'evil' and the King recommends appropriate reward or punishment. Punishment is then carried out in various courts. Those with virtuous conduct in the past life will be led over the 'Golden Bridge' to reach Paradise. Those whose past good deeds outweigh crimes committed will be sent to the 'Silver Bridge' to reach Paradise. Those who were evil doers in their past lives will be sent before the 'Mirror of Retribution' and then taken to a subsequent court of hell to be punished.

The second court of hell was governed by King Chujiang. Those who inflict physical injury and are robbers are thrown into the volcanic pit. For corruption, stealing and gambling the penalty is freezing them into the blocks of ice. Last but not the least, in this court, prostitutes are thrown into a pool of blood and are drowned.

In the third court of hell ruled by King Songdi, those who were ungrateful, showed disrespect to elders and escaped from prison in their past lives, their hearts were cut out while those who were drug addicts, tomb robbers and those who urged into crime and social unrest, they were tied to red hot copper pillar and grilled.

The fourth court of hell ruled by King Wuguan, the tax dodgers and those who refused to pay rent and business fraud were pounded by stone mullet. For the crime of disobedience to one's siblings and lack of filial piety led one to be grounded by a large stone. This accommodates those who were wronged and driven to death. They would be asked to view how their enemies receive retribution. They would then be judged on their past deeds and given an appropriate punishment.

King Yanluo who governed the fifth court of hell severely penalized those who plotted another's death for his property or money and money lenders with exorbitant interest rates were thrown into a hill of knives. The Viewing Home Tower is for the evil doers to see how their relatives and family are suffering as a result of their misdemeanor.

In the sixth court of hell those with crimes of cheating, cursing, and abducting others were thrown onto a tree of knives. Those who misused books, possessed pornographic material, broke written rules and regulations and wasted food their bodies were sawn into two. This court was reined by King Piencheng. King Taishan, the ruler of the seventh court of hell penalized rumor mongers and those who sowed discord among family members by pulling their tongues out. While rapists and those who drove someone to their death were thrown into a wok of boiling oil.

In the eighth court of hell dominated by King Dushi those who lacked filial obedience, caused trouble for parents or family members and cheated during the examinations their intestines and organs were pulled out. And those who harmed others for one own's benefit their bodies were brutally dismembered.

King Pingdeng, who reined the ninth court of hell chopped off the head and arms of robbers, murderers and rapists and crushed them under boulders, those who neglected the young and the old. In King Zhuanglun's tenth court of hell there is the 'Wheel of Reincarnation' and the 'Pavilion of Forgetfulness'.

After serving their sentences, prisoners arrive at the tenth court where King Zhuanglun passes final judgement. The prisoners are then brought to the 'Pavilion of Forgetfulness' where an old lady 'Men Po' gives them a cup of magic tea which on drinking, makes them forget their past lives.

They will then go through the 'Wheel of Reincarnation'. Depending on the prisoner's past life he would be reborn either as a human or an animal. Some would be reborn into a life of ease and comfort while others into sorrow and suffering.

After they have drunk the magic tea, the sinners leave the Ten Courts of Hell via one of the six paths of the Wheel of Reincarnation or Samsara.

Visiting the 'Haw Par Villa' one realizes the worth of virtuous deeds and the vile ones altogether. Poetic justice prevails even in the Chinese mythology and they are very God fearing people. Past lives, Courts of Hell, Soul Transmigration these theories transports one to a metaphysical level where science ends and religion spreads its golden rays

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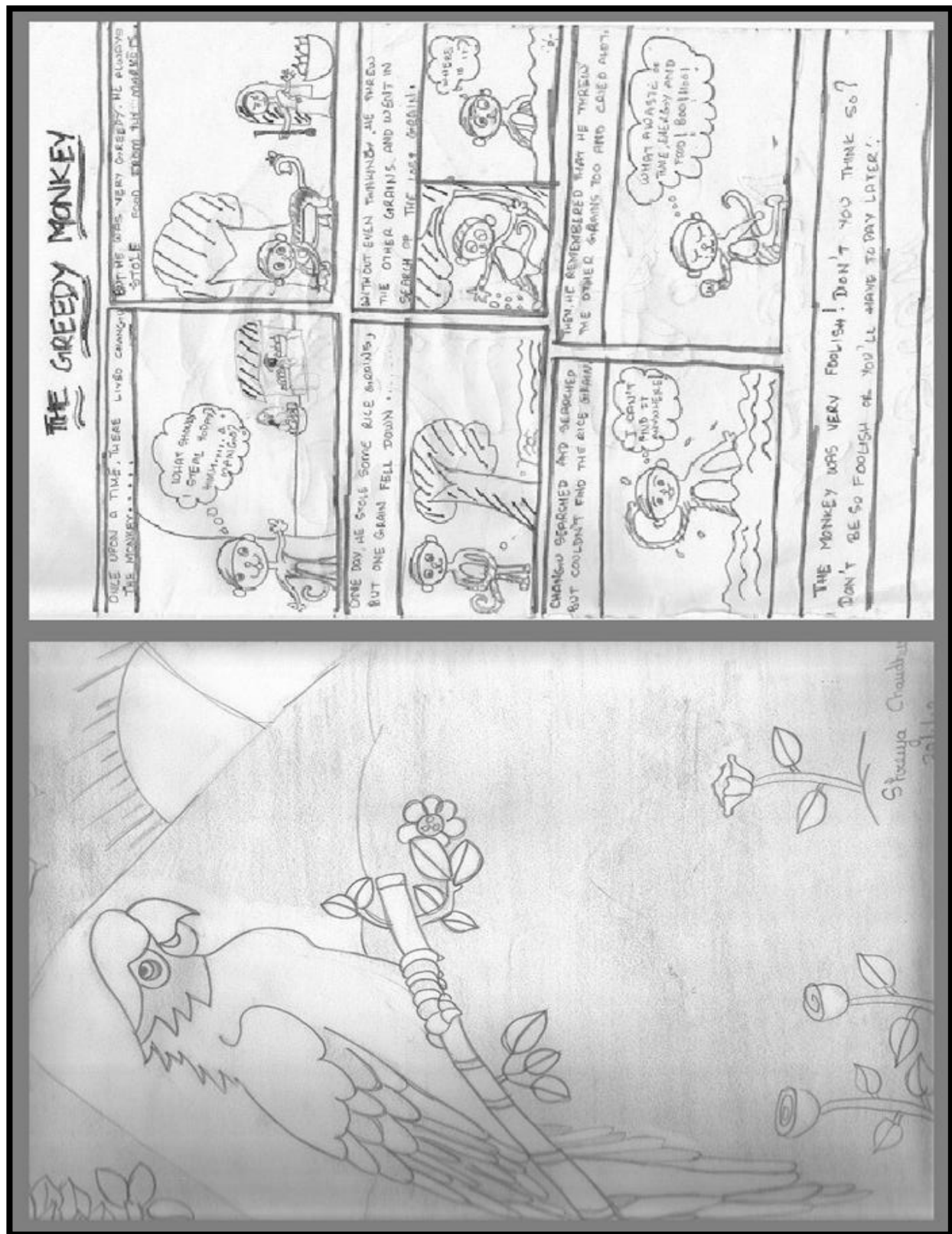
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A collage of 15 black and white photographs showing various swan and duck behaviors. The central image shows a large group of swans on a grassy field. Other photos show swans swimming, standing, and interacting with their young.

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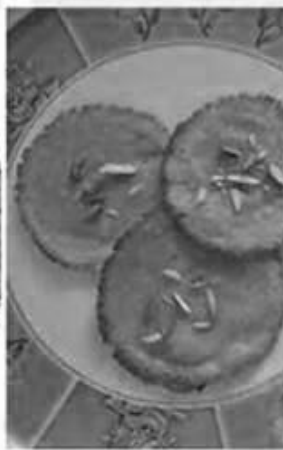
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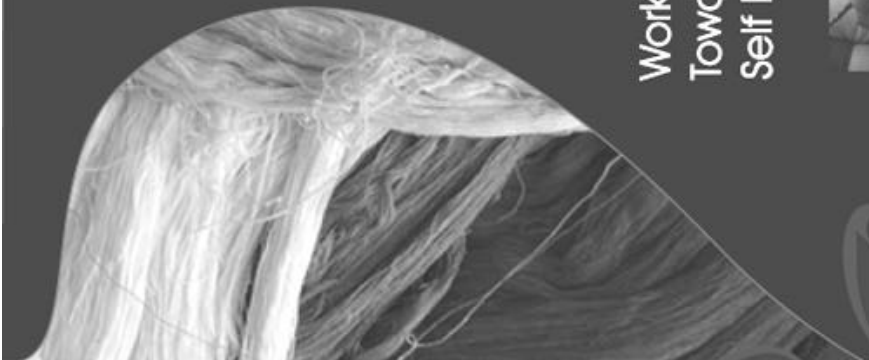
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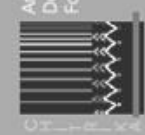
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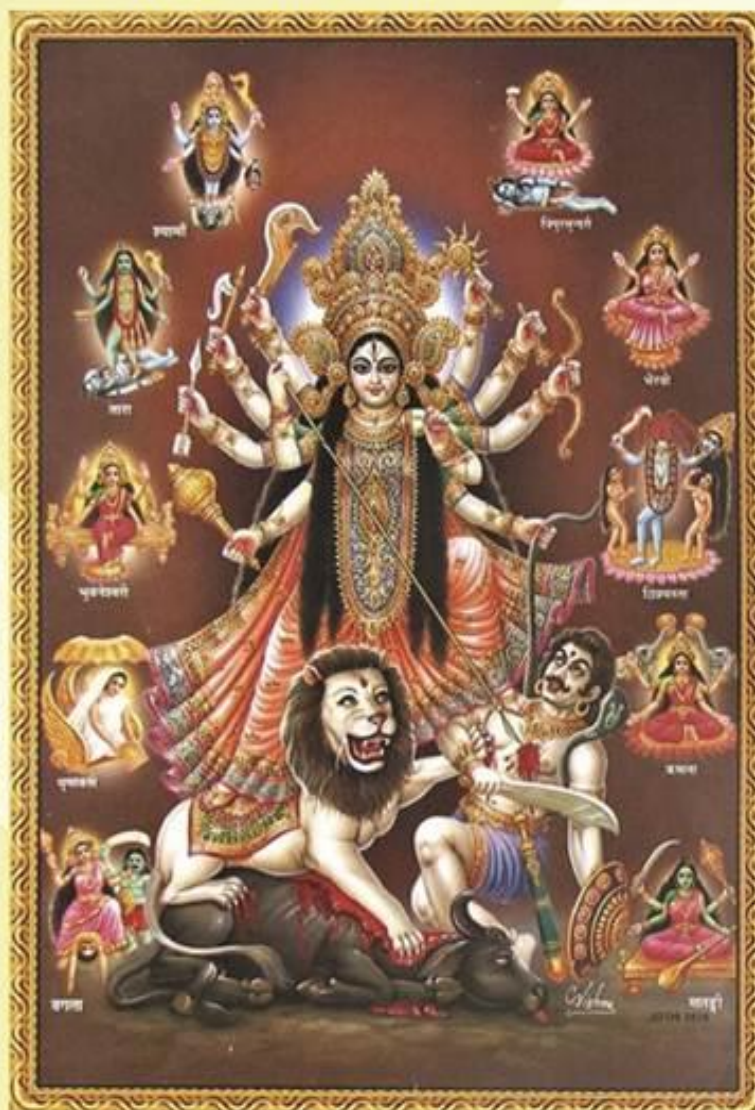
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