



INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON  
**LITERATURE &  
FESTIVAL**

**DEC 25, 2020 | KOLKATA**

**Best of 2020**

LITEROMA INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON  
**LITERATURE & FESTIVAL - 2020**

*The Symposium That Made Festival Out of Literature and Inspired Literature from Festival*

The main objective that we – the team Literoma, had in mind while rolling out the ‘International Symposium on Literature and Festival 2020’ or ‘ISLAF 2020’ was to bring together the creative minds from across the globe so that people can get to know about different dimensions of literature and festivals. Keeping the pandemic in mind, initially, we expected the response to be decent. As the days progressed, we were happily surprised. More than the quantity, the diversity turned out to be simply great and we were completely blown away.

Authors described known festivals with flowing finesse; Authors brought out the unknown facets of lesser-known festivals with poetic elegance and most importantly, the creative brains from as many as eight different countries spread across three different continents effortlessly laid the bridge between literature and festivals and beyond.

On one hand, the symposium was privileged to have write ups celebrating festivals such as Christmas, Durga Puja and Diwali, while on the other hand writers threw light on festivals like Jhapan, Ganga Mahotsav, Bandi Chhod Diwas etc which are very much regional festivals with a potential global appeal. The other aspect which sets this symposium apart is the range of write-ups – we received stories which used festivals as the backdrop and vice-versa; We were thrilled to read some poems which sliced festivals literally and some which did so laterally; The writers of the articles simply amazed us with the structured thought process they brought out with their pensive penmanship and pen’woman’ship.

We’re pretty confident that you’ll enjoy reading this handbook as much as we did in compiling the same – after all, amidst all diversity and globalization, one thing that remains centralized forever is that human emotion which drives both literature and festival.

*Reetika*

**Reetwika Banerjee**  
 Honourary Director  
 ISLAF’20  
 Kolkata, India



LITEROMA INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON  
**LITERATURE & FESTIVAL - 2020**

~ Broad Topics ~

1. Impact of festivals on Indian literature
2. Impact of festivals on World literature
3. Role of festivals in background or climax setting
4. Indian festivals vs World festivals - A Detailed Comparison
5. Indians celebrate with lights, World celebrates with wine - An Introspection
6. Year 2020 in light of festival celebrations
7. Rare festivals of India and the world
8. Christmas and Secret Santa
9. Festivals have no influence on non-fiction - A long running debate
10. Digital celebration of festivals amidst Covid-19
11. Your favourite festival and why
12. Change in festival celebrations in last 25 years
13. Globalization of festivals
14. Importance of festivity in mythology
15. Festival celebrations must be stopped to prevent pollution - A debate
16. Regional festivals of India
17. Durga Puja - The grandest festival of Bengalis all over the world
18. Celebrating women empowerment through festivals vs reality
19. Diwali celebrations in Bengal vs Rest of India
20. Holi - The festival of love and colours
21. Historic Durga Puja and Kali Pujas of Bengal
22. Travel is an integral part of festival celebration
23. Overnight pandal hopping vs virtual tours
24. Food and festivals
25. Eid - The festival of unification

*(Note: Above topics were indicative only. We were open to any topic adhering to the symposium guidelines.)*

~ Hall of Fame ~

Reetwika Banerjee (Hon. Director)	Chandra Sundeep	Sonal Sharma
Subrata Bandyopadhyay (Chief Patron)	Amrita Mallik	Deepa Jandial
Nedeljko Terzić (GUEST - Serbia)	Jagdeep Kaur	Aarti Roy
Sabarna Roy (GUEST - India)	Sajal Kanti Basu	Tanushree Nag
Allison Whittenberg (GUEST - USA)	Paromita Mitra	Soumita Mitra
Hristo Petreski (GUEST - Macedonia)	Tamal Mukherjee	Rupali Gupta Mukherjee
Aleš Jelenko (Slovenia)	Aparna Bandyopadhyay	Panyam Datta Sarma
Sourabh Mukherjee (India)	Papia Ghosh	Soumistha Dey Nandan
Shreya Suraj (Qatar)	Neeti Parti	Sonali Ray
Rupama Basu (Singapore)	Shubhayan Chakrabarti	Shatabdi Mukhopadhyay
Alipi Das (USA)	Mahua Sen	Soumyadyuti Goswami (Student)
Debashree Basak (USA)	Shikha Gupta	Srijita Debnath (Student)
Lalitha Ramanathan (Singapore)	Prajna Dutta	Tamosiya Das (Student)
Alakananda Pramanik (USA)	Dimpy K. Tolani	Rituparna Sen (Student)
Capt. (Dr.) Rajesh Kumar Sinha	Ashwini U Nambiar	Anweshan Hajra (Student)
Dr. T. Sree Latha	Amrita Lahiri Bhattacharya	Masidd Khalate (Student)
Dr. Rakhi Sameer	Ruma Chakraborty	Pushpal Acharjee (Student)
Dr. Seema Sarkar	Subhasree Ray	Pritika Bhatt (Student)
Dr. B. Visalakshi	Tushar Sen	Deepshikha Mukherjee (Student)
Dr. Ratan Bhattacharjee	Anupama Dalmia	Sayak Mukherjee (Student)
Richi Simon	Aditi Lahiry	Nikhil Guru (Student)
Vittal Arigela	Sukhvinder Kaur	Bidipta Mandal (Student)
Gita Bharath	Sukanya Roy	Srijoy Mitra (Student)
		Ariana Ganguly (Student)

## 1. Aparna Bandyopadhyay

Aparna Bandyopadhyay is a senior octogenarian, born in British India. Indian freedom movement was at its peak when she was welcomed in this world. Her family members including grandfather, elder brother, parents and many kith and kins were directly or indirectly involved in Bengal uprisings. She had closely witnessed numerous bloodbaths that led to the independence of our nation. We have read many stories, incidents and historical events in books but here in this narrative, Aparna Devi has shared her first-hand celebration of India's freedom on the night on 14<sup>th</sup> August, 1947. After 200 years of British Rule, it was no less than a memorable festival in itself, if not the biggest festival of that year for any Indian.

### CELEBRATING FREEDOM – 14<sup>TH</sup> AUGUST 1947 MIDNIGHT (Translated by Reetwika Banerjee)

We were all waiting for the fall of midnight. The day was August 14, 1947. People were flocking to Barowaritala (public assembly hall) of Patuli village in Burdwan district. All the oldies of our village, young men and women, teenagers, children, kids...had gathered together. There was a smile on everyone's face, joy of victory in mind. After midnight tonight, our country, means India, would be independent. We would be free from the rule and exploitation of the British!

I was born in the year 1933. There was a tumultuous crusade going on throughout the country to liberate India from the oppression of the British. Prominent citizens of our country, school and college students, even housewives thought – if we could serve our countrymen in any way. The students in particular jumped into this movement with a heated blood.

Many bright scholars could not complete their studies due to their active (but stealthy) participation in revolutionary activities. My elder brother (Late) Mr. Dhirendranath Chattopadhyay is one such example. He was a leading revolutionary (member of 'Bengal Volunteers') from our village who had dropped out in his third year while studying in Calcutta Medical College and devoted himself in service of the nation. Many of his friends and associates used to take hideouts inside our house. Innumerable secret meetings, blueprint discussions, arm deals, attack plans etc used to happen at our backside garden.

My mother (Late) Smt. Karunamoyee Devi was my (s)hero. She misled the chasing policemen so many times! She was taunted, slapped, tortured but never opened her mouth. They arrested my elder brother and took him to prison for months. Only he knew how brutal the inmate treatment was, especially under certain jailors. But nothing could discourage them from their determination. That's how my days of childhood passed.

Over the entire nineteenth century, the repression of the British on our youth community had taken an extreme shape. The British used to forcibly imprison students playing various tricks. Under the able leadership of Netaji Subhash Chandra Bose, 'Bengal Volunteers' was slowly becoming a powerful revolutionary confederation. My elder brother was one of the associates from the same regiment. They had planned a clandestine operation called 'Operation Freedom' against the police despotism in Bengal, especially against their inhuman conduct with the political prisoners in detention.

I still remember my mother saying about Netaji's visit to our village. He had rested in our house. Netaji's speech had motivated us to devote our lives in honour of the country's freedom. He had personally explained to the people - "We are not born to serve the British. We will work for our own country and live independently." His magical words raised awareness in many. He had hugged my elder brother and his teammates. My mother, elder sister and other married women of our house also shook hands with the great leader. It was like a dream moment for all of us. There was only one mantra in everyone's mind then – we will no longer obey the domination of the Englishmen. We will live in an independent country, our Bharat Barsha, our India.

During the British Rule, the national grain stocks were seized by the English East India Company which often led to severe famines countrywide. Thousands of people would die in lack of food. Fortunately, we belonged to the elite class of the society with handsome wealth. Every day during those famines, I have seen people coming to our house begging for starch (Rice would be too much to ask for, hence they only begged for the extra starch to feed their hunger). I still shudder when I remember their weary faces. There was not a single



day, when I did not see my mother sacrificing her share of lunch or dinner, feeding the starving freedom fighters hiding in our village.

India is rich in natural resources (like iron ore, coal, mica etc). All through their reign of 200 years, the British had built several mines, utilized hard work of the people of our country and drained all the wealth to their treasury in London. And the poor Indians were left to starve to death. The youth of those years came forward in protest.

Fire was burning everywhere. Indian nationalist movement was at its peak. The police locked the suspected protestants in prison; tortured brutally, left them unfed for days; if proven guilty hanged them on the gallows, mercilessly. They used to even beat the young boys with hot iron rods to force surrender or disclose team secrets. My feeble eyes are still a testimony to many such marks on my grandfather's and brother's backs.

Many a times the revolutionaries went successful in fooling the police. At times, few Indian officers too helped them in eloping. After fleeing, they used to take refuge for food in our house, often knocking after midnight. I have also seen them coming in gangs of dozen as well. In those days, we used to sleep very early and midnight was the hour of the deads. I have witnessed several times, my mother to silently put Khichuri (healthy mix of rice, lentils and vegetables) on the wood fire at wee hours of the night. When in a hurry, they preferred quick bite kind of foods. So, we always kept enough stock of Chire (flat rice), Muri (puffed rice), banana and milk for them.

Other than food, they also needed money to purchase weapons. No battle can be won without arms. My father regularly donated lump sums to the Burdwan secret society and supported their operations with every possible financial aid. I still remember my mother to take off her jewelry and help the freedom fighters in dire need of funds.

Our family was always in the British Inspector General's radar. Like me and my sister-in-law, all the women in our house had to learn handling clubs and daggers for self-protection. Police sometimes raided our house in search of hidden weapons. Fortunately, we never got caught, though my elder brother was imprisoned a number of times.

As we all know, after many such revolts, bloody struggles, countless sacrifice of young lives, it was announced that our country India will be officially independent from August 15, 1947. That night was a true day to celebrate. Hundreds of people had been waiting on August 14 for midnight to strike. I also went to Barowaritala (local congregation point) that night holding the hands of my mother and sister.

At twelve o'clock, (Late) Mr. Phanibhushan Roy, the uncle of the house next to ours (village pradhan) declared the independence of the country in a long speech on the ground floor of Barowaritala. The first flag of our independent country was hoisted by the great leaders of our village including my elder brother and parents. The people around were rejoicing, dancing, singing, clapping and what not! Truly overjoyed! Loud sounds of conch shells, brass bells and bugles came from all around. No one could sleep for a moment that night. Our hearts were over-flooded in delight.

At the dawn, people from all over the neighbouring villages also came out with lanterns in their hands and sang Vande Mataram and other Swadeshi songs with the loudest of voice. It was such a moment of glory, moment of festivity! I too took a parade of our entire village singing aloud with my mother, sister, sister-in-laws and school friends. In those days, an elite teenager girl of fourteen to take a walking trip on the village roads conveyed a tremendous act of impudence.

With closed eyes, when I think of that night even today, my hands still tremble in ecstasy.



## 2. Reetwika Banerjee (Honourary Director, ISLAF'20)

Reetwika Banerjee is a Cyber Security professional but at heart she is a storyteller. She loves to observe people, places and incidents happening around her, which she believes, helps in character sketching and background setting in her stories. Many of Reetwika's stories have been adapted into award winning short films, often screened at prestigious film festivals like KIFF, Dada Saheb Phalke Film Festival, SASFF, Cinematheque and many others. Reetwika was also nominated for Padma Shri Award 2020 for her contributions to Literature & Education.

### CHITRA DURGOTSAV – THE FORT FESTIVAL

'Chitra-Durga' is an old Kannada phrase (where 'Chitra' means 'Picturesque' and 'Durga' means 'Castle'). As the name suggests, the fort is really scenic, lavishly built on top of an umbrella-shaped hill. Chitradurga is also one of the oldest districts of Karnataka, named after this fort, around 250 kilometers north of Bangalore. The place has immense mythological and historic significances, been reigned by a series of rulers starting from mythological daemons like Hidimba to Vijayanagar empire, Madakari Nayaka kings, Rastrakutas, Tipu Sultan and finally the British.

It was a chilly winter morning. By 9am we had reached the fort entrance. Getting there we could feel a festive aroma in the whole atmosphere. We were there on the auspicious days of Durgotsav – a three-day fort festival which occurs once in every five years. Innumerable vehicles had already flooded the parking area. We somehow managed a narrow slot. Right at the entrance, a marble plaque read 'Chitradurga', warmly welcoming the visitors inside.

As we walked through the entry portico, gigantic stone walls beckoned us inside the mysterious fortification. After crossing three serpentine zig-zag turns, each opening to the next inner level, we entered the central citadel. The walls were built with such architectural elusiveness that one cannot see the interior at once. The idea behind building such a ramification was to decrease visibility and prevent running speed of king's horses if attempted to attack the fort. At the end of third porch, it opened to a wide-open space with the 'bandi-khane' (jail) on right, a gigantic water reservoir on left at the foothills of the main fort. Right there, the Durgotsav cultural program was being staged.

We were already breathless by the time we reached the central citadel. It was almost an hour's trek from the starting point. We wanted a much-needed break before commencing the final hike to the hilltop. The rising sun was sapping us off, unlike winter mornings. To rest our limbs, we found ourselves a shady corner near the jail area when a mid-aged man approached us and introduced himself as a registered guide. Finding us to be Kannada illiterates, he offered to articulate thrilling stories about the fort in a south Indian Hinglish style. We liked his polite approach and so agreed to walk along.

He started off with the architectural facts of the stone fort – it houses 18 ancient temples, a mosque, 19 frontal entrances, 38 rear gates, 4 secret doors, a jail, a royal palace, stone swings, a holy Math (ashram), ramparts, granaries, oil pits and a huge water reservoir. Realizing our dropping interest, he quickly switched his contents from facts to the captivating history behind the fort festival.

During the epic times of Mahabharata, two man-eating daemons used to dominate the Chitradurga hill – Hidimba (brother) and Hidimbi (sister). Hidimba had left the villagers terror-stricken while his sister Hidimbi loved peace and had soft corners for the poor residents. During the exile of Pandavas, Bhima gave a tough fight to Hidimba, killing him in the encounter. Hidimba's body was buried inside the fort and even today the big boulders are believed to bear a testimony to Hidimba's entombment.

However, in the journey, Bhima grew love interest on Hidimbi and they got married at the hill crest. It was here their son Ghatotkach was born and brought up till ten years. Years later, to commemorate their mythological love story, a tall temple was built by the Vijaynagar Hindu kings at the summit of the castle which is now known as Hidimbeshwara Temple – our final destination for the day. The Durgotsav is celebrated even today in honour of this deity.

With many such gripping periodicals, our guide kept steering us along the rocky trek, taking intermittent breaks in between. I must say, perhaps due to the venerable stony architecture of the fort, the temperature was truly soothing inside the citadels, making our trek feel easier than reality. 'Natural AC' had what our guide coined to describe the pleasing ambiance.

Climbing up for seventy more steps, he showed us a secret opening between two big boulders and narrated another fascinating story about an old lady called Obavva. She was the wife of the fort's security guard during the reign of Madakari Nayaka. Hyder Ali's forces tried to furtively invade the fort through this hole.

That day, when Obavva's husband had gone for lunch, she was substituting him. Suddenly she found a couple of soldiers trying to make their way through the hole. She had nothing to fight against them except a tarnished 'onake' (a small farming chisel typically used by Kannada farmers during those days). With that, she kept slaying Hyder Ali's warriors one by one as they struggled to enter the fort through the small opening and silently threw their corpses into an adjacent 'tanniru doni' (a black well). Over a very short period of time most of the soldiers fell prey to her, without knowing the ill fate of their successors. Obavva's husband, upon his return was stunned to find her with a blood bathed chisel and hundreds of corpses around her.

Together they killed almost all the soldiers. Unfortunately, at the end, one of the warriors slaughtered Obavva and her husband. The hole in the rocks remained as a historical witness of the bloodshed even today. We could feel a chill running down our spine visualizing the bloody scene of that mass carnage. Ascending through the serpentine way for another fifteen steps we reached a small temple dedicated to Lord Ganesh which is believed to house baby Ghatotkach's footsteps who was a devotee of Baal Ganesh. On way we visited few more temples dedicated to various deities and a mosque built during Tipu Sultan's reign.

After climbing for over 150 steps, we reached the innermost citadel of the fort – opening to the Raja Rani Mahal and Chamundi Temple. During Durgotsav, these temples are brightly lit and decorated with flowers. Couple of massive royal stone swings used to be the then queen's play zone. The iron rings had been removed but the structures still stood strong.

Climbing for another eighty steps, we reached the Gopura – the entry portico to the private shell of the fort. On one side were the steps to the Hidimbeswara Temple and the other side leading to a prayer hall called Math housing the Gali Mantapa. At the base of Gopura, there were some engraved ancient designs. Came to know a mind-blowing information from our guide. The designs were made like playboards by the rulers from Vijaynagar Dynasty which actually depicted different war scenarios. The kings used to practice war tactics by means of small pebbles on these boards as a strategic pastime.

We visited the Math before climbing our way through the last fifty flights of stair. The steep stepladders were naturally formed of stone cuts with only thin iron rods on either side to take support while climbing – certainly, the toughest part of the hike. There were couple of turrets midway to take quick rests.

The natural coolness gave relief to our fight against the rising sun. But soon our relief turned to dread when we got to know that the Hidimbeswara temple is a leopards' den! Every afternoon, after the main gate shuts down, couple of leopards take their nocturnal refuge inside the temple. But the divinity of the place does not allow any violence. The guide too had encountered the feline beauties couple of times during his closing trip but had never been attacked. The fearless tone of the man made us shiver under the burning sun. Later we also got to know from him that there are three bears too who now live in the hole where Obavva had killed Hyder Ali's soldiers.

There is a dense natural forest at the rear side of the Chitradurga Fort where the animals hunt food during daytime and by evening come back to their dens inside the fort. The main gate is thus closed strictly by 4pm and no visitors are allowed beyond that.

Upon reaching the uppermost fort, the entire Chitradurga town could be seen. The view was such a treat. The temple had some old stone inscriptions, typically royal bonds from Rastrakuta's time. The deity was that of Hidimbi, however the shrine remains locked. Only the priest could open the gate during prayer hours. We took an hour's breather inside the temple before commencing our descent.

It took us almost two and half hours to climb up to the highest point of the bastion. But honestly, if you want to appreciate the entire length and breadth of the fort, keep aside at least three full days to substantially cover the entire area. Nevertheless, thanks to our fate, it was such a memorable experience. Chitradurga was a truly picturesque fort indeed. 280 steps, worth climbing!



## 600 YEARS' ANCIENT DOMESTIC KALI PUJA OF BENGAL

While most of the Indian states observe Diwali, the Indian state of West Bengal witnesses a traditional ethnic style of celebrating the first new moon night of Hindu calendar month 'Kartik' by worshipping Goddess Kali (also known as Shyama Puja as 'Shyama' is the other name of the deity). The same day is dedicated to the puja of Goddess Lakshmi by others, but Bengalis perform stringent devotional sacrifices towards Goddess Kali at home, public pandals and cremation grounds (especially where she is believed to dwell) on the eve of Bhoot Chaturdashi.

The household festivity of Goddess Kali was first adopted by Raja Krishna Chandra during early 18<sup>th</sup> century. Since then, it was patronized by eminent Bengali families and wealthy landlords as an annual domestic ritual. It is typically characterized by an overnight worshipping of the Goddess, followed by animal sacrifices at midnight.

The domestic Kali Puja of Somnagar village's 'Bandyopadhyay' family is one among those ancient heritage Kali pujas of Hooghly district which has been continuing with deep devotion since last 600 years. The village offers a pristine countryside full of lush green paddies, hardly 50 kilometers from Kolkata and is well connected by both rail and road.



Folklores say, centuries ago a young elite Brahmin named Sri Baladeb Bandyopadhyay, was travelling through this village. It was a summer afternoon. Out of immense fatigue, he chose to take rest under an old Banyan tree. He did not realize when his eyes caught a doze. It was in sleep he met Goddess Kali who instructed the Brahmin to institute her at Somnagar and worship every year on the new moon night of 'Kartik' month. A year later, he built a house in the village and constructed a big 'atchala' (temple with eight pillars) inside his domestic premises to patronize Goddess Kali in the household. Since then the 'Bandyopadhyay's are celebrating Kali Puja with loud pomp and show at their ancestral house in Somnagar. The 'Sankalpa' (holy oath) of the puja is still taken in the name of the Baladeb Bandyopadhyay and the present-day head of the 'Bandyopadhyay' family.

The idol is constructed at the temple premises on the same day of the puja and is completed before sunset. The rituals are also concluded after a ceremonious 'Home Yajna' (fire worship followed by animal sacrifices). Next morning, the sacred meat is distributed in the entire village as holy 'Prasad' (offering) of Goddess Kali.

Even today, the whole family gathers during the festival and enjoys the puja together. They also open doors to guests to experience their ethnic celebrations during the festive days. It's a lifetime experience indeed to witness such a vintage yet ceremonial celebration of the festival of lights around this corner of Bengal.





### 3. Nedeljko Terzić (Guest - Serbia)

Nedeljko Terzic (1949) born at Sremska Mitrovica, is a prominent Serbian writer, an author of fifty five book titles. The first verses he published as a high school student in 1967, and already in 1969 he published in the daily press, with his original signature. He is represented in more than a hundred anthologies and poetry elections in Serbia and abroad. He has won a number of literary awards and recognitions both in Serbia and abroad. His first book "Silence with the plains" he published in 1975. The first bilingual (Serbian-Slovenian) edition of the book of poetry "The Lake at a Glance" was published in 1980.

#### A BOOK IS BODY OF POETRY

Modern technology is trying in every possible way all what a man creates to transform into ordinary goods, to degrade the values, to emphasize its mental sense and to destroy the human soul. For a conflict always are enough only two men. One man has created beauty that remained into unbreakable bonds with nature, and another man has created the heartless technology of force and power which is against the nature. The forces are always against the beauty, as well.

The communication with poetry can be done via internet, but the question is if it should be done? It is the communication with a device, function of which cannot realize without supply of some other energy which will feed it. Poetry is fed by emotions from the human soul. In the modern informatics era Poetry should preserve its being.

A book is the being (essence) of Poetry. The book needs only the man energy and it will always be alive. All the other forms, fast communication in particular, with readers as the internet is, are unsure and uncertain like the artificial insemination. In a system of information the Poetry arrives as fast as lightning like ordinary banal goods to a market desk, nicely packed, without any charm and beauty and it easily disappears as it has never existed before. Without any taste and its special smell of letters and paper. It is necessary to set in motion following road maps, signs and directions pointed out by Poets. "Poetry for better life until we keep watch over a sweetness of the sea" says Saint-John Perse, the French Nobel Prize recipient in one of his verses from 1960th. The seas are the symbols connecting lands, people, life, arts. It means that we must keep vigil and be watchful over the destiny of Poetry. Internet, informatics, contemporary technologies are like a huge insatiable dragons, swallowing everything in front of them and serving all of us according to their recipe. They will accept Poetry and then they will take it away in front of our views by the speed of light.

Poetry reserved the road for itself a long time ago but something always comes up there to turn it off the road or completely destroy it. The same also does the modern society which is hungry of the new technology and hazardous challenges. The book is a form of Poetry travelling through the time. Therefore the importance should not be given to the new speed offered to us by the informatics because it is one more poorly built bridge according to those ones that already exist, about which also talks the verse of Ivo Andric - the Serbian Nobel Prize recipient in 1961. Don't destroy all the bridges, perhaps you will come back". That is to say that Poetry has roads, its bridge through the book for rather long time and therefore we must not let anything else to harm the book. We need to dream over the open book so that its open pages as the wide spread wings of bird carry us to endless dreams. One must not give up even of fear that the modern technology is powerful very much which the skilled, cunning and powerful world cooks create as an artificial speech of words coming out of the plastic mass and metal. Where the matter is here called sensibility?

Poetry is the specificity of the Universe.

Poetry is the only emotive voice of the man's sanity.

Against the new hostile technologies we cannot oppose with common words, ordinary speech; we should further and always talk with lofty language of Poetry and in such way even the super-technologies will be defeated. Is the modern informatics hazard for poetry? Yes, it is. Can Poetry be destroyed by the modern informatics? No, it can't. First it should be able to create it to get to know how to destroy it. Artificial creations do not speak the language of poetry. Poets know that. Poets are prophets. The prophets have always been poets. It is wonderful to live with Poetry. We write Poetry, it means we exist. As soon as we exist, we will write Poetry. To her Majesty Poetry the queen of arts, it is honourable and lofty to be a servant.



#### 4. Sabarna Roy (Guest - India)

Sabarna Roy is a much awarded, critically acclaimed bestselling author of 6 literary books: Pentacles; Frosted Glass; Abyss; Winter Poems; Random Subterranean Mosaic: 2012 – 2018, and Etchings of the First Quarter of 2020. He is the lead author of a technical book, which has been published from the European Union and has been translated into 8 major European languages.

He has been awarded the Literoma Laureate Award in 2019, Literoma Star Achiever Award 2020, Random Subterranean Mosaic: 2012 – 2018 won the best book of the year 2019, the A List Award for excellence in fiction by the NewsX Media House, Certificate for The Real Super Heroes for spreading a spirit of positivity and hope during the COVID-19 Pandemic from Forever Star India Award 2020, the Certificate for Participation in the Indo Russian Friendship Celebration 2020, and the Literoma Golden Star Award 2020: Lifetime Achievement.

**\*NH 44\***

My hands  
Calloused, weathered, and beaten  
By sowing seeds  
During kharif, and rabi.

In soils – hot, and frozen  
Hydrated, and desiccated.

Forever against the coldness of the cosmos.

I have provided stale food on the rusted iron plate of an impoverished soul  
I have provided gourmet cuisine on the ornate cutlery of oligarchs.

Tonight I stand on the highway with my comrades  
The night sky invisible in fog  
The fire that we lit to beat the freeze burns with a mystic halo.

The government – actually middlemen of oligarchs – do not listen to us with empathy  
For they do not understand what soil, air, and water have taught us.

Why is it that I who produce rice; with passing years, can no longer afford to eat any more rice  
Why is it that I who produce pregnant oranges; with passing years, can no longer afford to taste a slice.

In the name of policies you hurl bombs at me  
Unburden tear gas, and water cannons when I raise my voice.

Do not push me back beyond the wall that my spine bends against the steel of concrete  
And, I am forced to take up torches of fire,  
And throw them at you where I know you, and your cronies will burn, and melt  
I tear your larger-than-life-flag under which you want my unflinching loyalty, and trust  
I go berserk, amok like a rabid dog  
And, sting at you, and all your likes  
Who are compradors of oligarchs  
I know it will become easier for you to encounter-finish my body in the name of self-defense.

My friend, Sandy: the poet, who told me there is no meaning to life, and is otherwise a social misfit. Tells me tonight it feels wonderful to stand by a pulsating crowd engulfed in vaporous condensation dripping like rain in slow motion. A discotheque of life playing out on the highway on a winter night.



## 5. Allison Whittenberg (Guest - USA)

Allison Whittenberg is a Philadelphia native who has a global perspective. If she wasn't an author she'd be a private detective or a jazz singer. She loves reading about history and true crime. Her novels include *Sweet Thang*, *Hollywood and Maine*, *Life is Fine*, *Tutored* and *The Sane Asylum*.

### THE SHOWER

It's winter.  
The water runs cold.  
She is about the blizzards.  
She imagined it as a child.  
How she'd think of herself trapped.  
And far from home, the spring.  
With its gentle rain never coming,  
Those summers with their nights of heat lightning.  
Court and spark...

### YOUR JUNE

Picture the year as a clock and it's straight up 6. The world spreads before you like ketchup. Don't shade your eyes, you miss a minute. You are thirsty-bee pollen is everywhere, so many flowers, so many flowering chances. No vagueness, just brilliance, each color, every contour --  
Awake!  
Alive!  
Anew!

### YOU MADE MY LIFE A LIVING HELL

And I love you. Oh, oh, how I treasure our recreational arguments, the yellow worm, a pet of our pettiness. Our chemistry is our friction. Your benignly lacerating tone. The octopus-like suction cups of your attention. How can I live without you? How can I live without wishing every day I'd never met you? How can I forget to forget to remember that when you're not here to work this s\*\*\* out of me it's just a drag.

### THE MIND

Is  
As fragile as  
The dream  
It dreams.



## 6. Hristo Petreski (Guest - Macedonia)

Associate Professor Hristo Petreski was born on the 4th of February 1957, in Krusevo. He has a PhD in Teaching and Methodical Sciences and his topic was “Haiku poetry between the elite and the massive”. He is now an Associate Professor at the University for Audio-visual Arts – ESRA, in Skopje. He is also a journalist and an author of 25 books. His works are translated in many languages, including: Serbian, Croatian, Slovenian, Bulgarian, French, English, German, Slovak, Albanian, etc.

### THE PROMISE (Translated by: Elena Prendzova)

Promise is when you have nothing to say to anyone  
 So you wish to hasten, slur over and tell a lie  
 What about these funny poems  
 On serious philosophical subjects  
 Not a bit simple, not a bit plain, nor for a moment  
 So move on you idiot  
 You are doing it fine, you promising bastard hideous  
 Feel like the Great Gatsby  
 Beliving in great future  
 Hasten faster, stretch your arms further  
 A great(er) morning awaits you...  
 How optimistically and inspirative it sounds  
 When a simpleton instructs you instead of fooling around  
 Force yourself with the wherry against the current  
 For it constantly pushes you back into the past  
 But keep your head up high like a giraffe or a flamingo  
 And pay no attention to the pebbles in front of you, the holes or puddles  
 But believe the words only  
 They are promising and not a bit obligative  
 So undoubtedly they lead you as a leashed bitch  
 Into a tomorrow - more-than-obvious worse and bewitched!

### WASTE LANDS

There are no foxes running across  
 No weasels the lands to cross  
 White and grey rabbits are to the lands outsiders  
 And there are no webs of any spiders  
 Waste lands with no traces of foot or claw  
 Where we are closer and united with God  
 There are no birds to fly  
 Over the rose-hips, elder and brambles  
 No dog barks nearby  
 Since there have been no one to count the days, no such guy  
 Inhabit the heart of the waste lands  
 Because those are the only places where you needn't be  
 Disappear completely and vanish in no time  
 Unfreeze yourself and turn into high plant  
 Into a plant's stem that germinates and rots by itself  
 Into birds that have never flown over there  
 Into fish that have never swum like that into self-eating insects  
 Having nothing else to others to give or inject.



## 7. Sourabh Mukherjee (Keynote Speaker)

Sourabh Mukherjee is the author of multiple psychological thriller novels and short story collections, published by leading publishing houses of the country. Sourabh's books have consistently been in bestseller charts in bookstores and online stores. His books have been appreciated by prominent media houses like The Times of India, The Hindu, Yahoo! India, Zee News, Business Standard, The Week, Outlook India, Hindustan Times, The New Indian Express, Punjab Tribune, The Statesman etc. His books have been adapted into audiobooks in Amazon Audible and Storytel, and are in consideration for screen adaptations. In his day job, Sourabh works in a Senior Leadership role with a technology MNC, speaks on emerging technology trends in conferences across India and abroad, and sits in the Advisory Committees of prominent Engineering and Management institutions of the country.

### THE FESTIVAL OF LOVE

#### 15 days before Durga Puja

The sound of untimely rains lashing relentlessly on the street is the only sound that reaches my ears. I am in the balcony, reclining on a bean bag. I see a car turn the bend at the far end of the rain-washed road, slowly making its way through the dreary old houses. It stops a few feet away from our door. I get up and bend over the balustrade.

I see Abhishek-da getting out of the front seat. He still has his trademark thick curly hair. But now he also has a paunch that threatens to send his shirt buttons flying. Abhishek-da huffs and puffs around the car, barking orders at the driver, who has started unloading bags and suitcases from the boot and placing them on the pavement in front of their house.

The house right across the street belongs to Abani Jethu, Baba's distant cousin. Jethu passed away a couple of years back. Jethima had died before I was born. After his engineering studies, Abhishek-da, their son, had moved to Australia.

Just as the driver finishes off-loading all the bags from the car, the rear door opens and a woman steps out. I have never seen her before, and I assume that she is Abhishek-da's wife. She is in a fitted white top and faded blue jeans. She must be in her late twenties. She is full-bodied, her face a dusky oval with wide black eyes. Her hair is tied back in a ponytail. Stepping out of the car, she looks around. Her eyes sweep across the houses on my side of the road and then, they rest on me. She holds the gaze for a few seconds and my heart skips a beat. I keep staring at her as Abhishek-da fumbles with the keys. Once again, she looks up at my balcony. I look away immediately, only to be drawn by an almost magnetic attraction back to her. Abhishek-da finally manages to unlock the door and his wife disappears inside the house. The driver starts carrying their bags inside.

#### 12 days before Durga Puja

With Durga Puja only a few days away, there is a hubbub of activities in the neighbourhood. Clubs are gearing up for the biggest festival of the year. Club members are going around collecting last minute subscriptions. The narrow lane in front of our house has been blocked off to accommodate a pandal creating a traffic diversion. The lane will remain out of bounds for vehicles for weeks after Durga Puja, and well past Diwali.

In the last two years, our neighbourhood club won several prizes and we now have a plump budget. Decorators have been commissioned from Chandannagar. They are busy setting up elaborate lighting arrangements inside the pandal and along the roads leading up to the pandal.

Thick rain clouds, however, continue to hover ominously above the city.

\*\*\*

I keep staring at the ceiling, lost in my thoughts.

Most of us have a glorified idea about love. I think it comes from the staple diet of Bollywood movies we are all brought up on. Couples strolling on the beach, watching the sunset together, whispering promises of eternity into each other's ear and making love on satin sheets in wooden cottages overlooking the Swiss Alps. But life does not play out like this. The movies do not show the truth, what happens backstage. The love fades. The promises lose meaning. Monotony creeps in. Abhishek and I are fast approaching that stage in our marriage. I have noticed that the boy who lives right across the street seems to have taken a fancy to me. He is good-looking - square jaw, full lips, sharp nose, dark eyes, and unruly hair. He seems to take good care of his

physique as well. Well, he is not the first one to have shown interest. But then there is something about the way he looks at me that sometimes gives me goose bumps. I feel like I have gone back to my teens.

“Oh, that’s Shubho!” Abhishek said when I asked him casually about our neighbour the other day over dinner. “He’s a distant cousin, you know.”

“In that case, we should visit them one of these days, don’t you think so?” I asked.

Abhishek nodded in agreement.

However, we still have not visited them. It seems Abhishek has a thousand chores to take care of over the few days of our stay in Kolkata.

### 8 days before Durga Puja

As I ring the doorbell, I can hear my heart pounding. It is Wednesday and I have decided to skip college. I wanted to be sure she was alone at home when I turned up. I waited in the balcony since morning and made my move only after I saw Abhishek-da leave his house. The door opens. She stands in front of me. Her enquiring eyes rest on mine. Her hair is loose and still wet. She probably came out of the shower just now. She has on a purple top and pink pyjamas. She smells of expensive soap.

“Yes?” she asks.

“Hi... I...I stay across the road,” I stutter.

“I know,” she smiles. “Shubho, right?”

“Yes... I...I’m Shubho,” I run my fingers through my hair. How does she know my name? Abhishek-da must have told her. “I’m collecting subscription for pujo... I was wondering if –“

“Why don’t you come in, Shubho?” she gestures with her hand. “You’re sweating.”

She steps inside and walks ahead. I follow her.

She gestures to a settee and switches the fan on.

“My name is Atreyee. Please make yourself comfortable,” her voice trails off as she walks towards the kitchen. My eyes do not leave her for a second.

When she returns, she has a glass of cola and a dish with a few cookies.

“You’re visiting us for the first time, Shubho. I wish I had some sweets,” she sounds apologetic. “Abhishek and I have been meaning to drop by your house one of these days, but his work keeps him very busy. His firm has an office in Kolkata and he has to take care of a few things before the holidays begin here.”

She puts down the glass and the dish on a low table in front of me. I did not notice when she had looked up, and now her eyes are on me. She has caught me ogling at her. She hurriedly straightens up. I wonder what is going on in her mind.

“You seem to be rather curious about your neighbours, aren’t you?” she smiles. I realize that she is clearly referring to the occasions she has caught me staring at her from my balcony.

“Well, only about the interesting ones,” I smile back.

“What do you do when you are not checking out interesting neighbours or collecting pujo subscriptions from them?” she smiles.

“I’m in the final year of Electronics Engineering,” I say.

“That’s nice!” she looks impressed. Then she asks, “So, how much is the subscription this year?”

“Seven hundred,” I say. She turns around and disappears into an adjoining room.

I hear an almirah open and close.

After a few minutes, she returns with the money. With shaking hands, I write her a receipt.

“Thanks... I... I’ve to leave... some more houses to visit,” I look into her eyes as I walk towards the door.

She opens the main door and steps aside.

I step out of the house and then stop in my tracks. I turn around and say, “Thank you!”

She looks into my eyes and smiles.

Her face is flushed and her eyes have a glint.

### 6 days before Durga Puja

As I ring our doorbell, I hear a hearty laughter inside. Walking into the sitting room, I see Abhishek-da on the sofa, a cup of tea in his hand, and two rosogollas on a plate in front of him.

Abhishek-da smiles at me. “Shubho, long time, isn’t it? How old were you when I left? In your ninth, if I’m not wrong?”

I nod.

“And now you are in the final year of Engineering! How time flies!” he takes a sip of the tea and clears his throat. “Well, here’s what I wanted to discuss with you. Atreyee’s cousin – well, Atreyee is my wife, you’ve probably seen her – can’t make up her mind about which engineering college to apply for after school. She’s looking for some guidance. Atreyee mentioned that you are studying engineering. She suggested that, I take your phone number, so that her cousin, Saheli, can call you and discuss her plans. If that’s not too much of a trouble –“

“Oh, not at all! Shubho will be very happy to help,” Ma speaks on my behalf.

\*\*\*

I wake up with a start, wrenched from my dream where I was with Atreyee.

It was the familiar tone of a Whatsapp message. I reach for my phone on the bed stand. It is one in the night.

As I unlock the phone, I see that the message is from an unknown number.

“You look cute in the profile pic!”

“Who is this?” I type.

The wait seems endless. Whoever sent me the Whatsapp message must have gone back to sleep.

My phone beeps again.

“Looks like I’m not the only one who’s not getting any sleep tonight! <wink> “

This is followed up with, “This is Atreyee, in case you are wondering.”

My heart thuds. Atreyee must have got this number from Abhishek-da.

I send a blushing emoji.

I try to imagine her in her house. Where is she right now? In the living room? Or, in her bedroom, secretly texting me while her husband snores next to her? For some reason, I like the second situation better.

“Go back to bed. I just wanted to make sure I have a secret friend to talk to when I don’t get any sleep in the middle of the night.” Atreyee ends the message with a ‘heart’.

“So are we secret friends now?” I reply.

“You can call us whatever you want,” she follows that up with a “blush”. I sense a world of possibilities here.

I have not felt so alive in months.

### Panchami

I wake up to the rhythm of the dhaak bellowing from the pandal on our street. The trucks rolled in late last evening with the idols and half the neighbourhood was there. I joined the other boys from the club, offloading the idols from the trucks, setting them up in the pandal. The dhaakis beat up a frenzy as we broke into impromptu jigs.

I heard Ma on the phone with Abhishek-da last night, inviting Atreyee and him for lunch today.

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Atreyee walks in behind Abhishek-da, looking like a vision. Her hair is parted in the middle and left loose with a hint of shindoor in the parting. Her kohl rimmed eyes look fleetingly at me. Her full lips are moist with lip gloss. The thin straps of her blouse reveal a lot of her shoulders.

She wraps her aanchol around herself and holds it carefully as she bends to touch Baba and Ma’s feet. She smiles at me and thanks me for offering to help her cousin.

Ma disappears into the kitchen and a short while later, emerges with a tray loaded with cups of tea, rosogollas and sandesh.

“Must be the blessings of Ma Durga that the rains have finally stopped!” Abhishek-da exclaims, taking a generous bite of a sandesh.

“You are right, Abhishek,” Ma concurs. “Pujo comes but once in a year. Who would want to have these five days of celebrations washed out?”

“I would hate to miss the pandal-hopping in Kolkata after all these years if the rains play spoilsport,” Atreyee adds.

As she brings her cup of tea to her mouth, her eyes meet mine for a few fleeting seconds, and I can feel my pulse racing. We have been chatting till late all these nights, getting to know each other, sometimes being more than just two friends. She puts the cup down and says, looking straight into my eyes, “I saw you dancing with the other boys last evening. Not bad!”

“Oh, were you watching?” My ears suddenly feel warm. I am not sure if the others can see that I am blushing.

“I was. I don’t want to miss a thing. I’ve missed the pujo revelries in Kolkata for far too many years. I want to enjoy every moment of it this year!”

Atreyee looks around the living room and then looks at Baba who has not said much all this while, saying, “This must be a pretty old house!”

“It is,” Baba explains. “My father bought this house when he moved to Kolkata from East Pakistan during Partition, and we’ve lived here ever since,” Baba turns towards me and says, “Shubho, why don’t you show her around?”

“Sure, why not?” With my heart pounding, I smile and get up. Atreyee finishes her tea and puts her cup down.

“After you, Shubho,” she smiles at me and follows.

\*\*\*

By the time we reach the corner room at the far end of the corridor in the first floor, I can hear Ma laying out plates on the dining table downstairs. We are in front of what once was a guest room and now remains locked most of the time. I open the door and step in, Atreyee follows me.

Once inside, I shut the door. Atreyee walks to the window overlooking the pandal below. I stand at an arm's length behind her, her smell filling my senses.

I can hear voices in the dining room downstairs. "Shubho, we are ready for lunch," Baba calls out. "Be there in a minute," I holler to Baba.

I place a shaking hand on Atreyee's bare shoulder. She does not flinch and keeps looking out of the window. My heart pounds against my ribs, the fire in my breath fans her neck.

The sound of cutlery downstairs sounds ominous.

I move closer, my lips inches from her face. Atreyee closes her eyes. I see goose bumps on her skin.

Baba calls us one more time. There is frenzied beating of dhaaks in the pandal outside.

"Shubho, please... don't," Atreyee suddenly turns around, as if coming out of a trance. She pushes me away and runs towards the door.

### **Shashthi Evening**

"Do you remember me?"

Abhishek is being bombarded with that question from random strangers every two steps we take towards the pandal. Thankfully no one knows me here. So, I am spared the ordeal.

Of course, he does not remember any of these people. He smiles sheepishly and recites the same answer. "Yes, you look very familiar. But you know it has been years..."

My frustration shows on my face. Or, am I in a bad mood because I want to meet Shubho? Because in my heart of hearts, I miss him.

Then I see him - with a bunch of girls. I have never seen them around this place. They must be from his college.

One of them seems to be taking extra interest in him. I suddenly feel a rush of jealousy. And it surprises me!

This is not how I am supposed to feel about Shubho! We have only been flirting on the phone, and I have been alone with him only for a few minutes inside an old, dusty room.

\*\*\*

I am in our pandal with my friends. But right now, my eyes are looking for Atreyee.

Then I spot them. Abhishek-da waves and starts walking towards us, Atreyee in tow. My heart skips several beats as our eyes lock, only for a few fleeting seconds.

Abhishek-da lands a mock punch on my stomach. "Lucky man, huh? You have gorgeous friends!" He smiles warmly at the girls from my class. They start giggling, as I introduce them, "This is Anusua, this is Srijita, this is Susmita, and this is Parul –"

"His special friend," Anusua chips in, making Parul blush.

Abhishek-da cuts the conversation short and tugs at Atreyee's arm. "Come on, let's not bore them! They seem to be having a good time." Abhishek-da winks at me and walks away with Atreyee.

Suddenly, there is a bitter taste in my mouth. The pandal feels claustrophobic and the music, jarring. Surprisingly, I start wondering when I can go back to my room alone to message Atreyee.

### **Saptami Night**

I am not able to sleep. I look at the clock on the bed stand. It is past two in the night. For God's sake, it is Durga Puja! I should be having fun, all decked up, gorging on delicacies, hopping from one pandal to another. Tomorrow is Ashtami. I need to get up early, take a shower, wear my best new saree, and turn up at the pandal for the morning 'anjali'. And here I am, still awake, in the grip of a variety of emotions I do not understand myself.

Shubho, what are you doing in my head, in my dreams? The worst part is, you probably do not even know that I am thinking about you right now. And even if you know, you probably do not care.

I know I am losing control. It has been more than twenty-four hours since I saw you with those girls – including your 'special friend', I don't remember her name and I couldn't care less, but the bitterness is still there. I have been ignoring your calls and your messages. I do not know what to tell you. I do not want to come across as weak and jealous. At the same time, I cannot pretend to be indifferent. So, it is better that I do not talk to you. I need to get over you, Shubho. I know I can. I just need some time away from you.

### **Ashtami Evening**

The club conducts a dhunuchi dance competition every year. The dancers are queuing up, ready to let their hair down and their spirits soar. That is when I finally get to see Atreyee. Her hair is tied back, the shindoor glowing on her forehead, her aanchol tucked neatly into the edge of her saree at the waist, the smoking dhunuchi firmly held in her hand.

As her curvaceous form starts swaying in rhythm with the fierce beating of the dhaaks, all eyes are on her. She is lost in her dance, the ecstasy sweeping across her body in waves, manifesting itself in her moves. The sweat



glistens on her body. Her hair has come undone, strands of it caressing her face. She looks devastatingly sensuous. She is beyond care, letting herself go with every step. I look around. Everyone's eyes are fixed on her, and cameras too. I feel insanely jealous, possessive, protective.

The beating of the dhaak—s reaches a climax, and I see her trembling all over as she dances in frenzy like a woman possessed. When the drums stop and the crowd cheers, Atreyee looks straight at me, and then she walks past me. My eyes are fixed on her receding frame, but she does not bother looking back.

### **Nabami Afternoon**

It is around three in the afternoon when my phone beeps. There is a message from Atreyee. Finally! "Shubho, please don't contact me again. You have a lovely girlfriend. Be happy with her. Bye." What! I sit up in my bed. Why is she doing this? First, she comes into my life, makes my world go upside down, then she gives me the cold shoulder, tortures me with her silence for no apparent reason, and now this! I throw the phone away. My blood begins to boil.

\*\*\*

I am in the balcony, when I see Abhishek-da stepping out alone. I do not know what comes over me. I run down the stairs and across the road. I ring the doorbell. Once. Twice. Thrice.

"Coming!" I hear Atreyee walking up to the door.

She opens the door and her eyes widen.

"Shubho?" she gasps. "I thought I told you not to -"

I do not let her finish. I almost shove her aside and walk inside. I sit down on the sofa in the living room - the same place where I sat when I came to her house for the very first time.

"What do you think you're doing, Shubho?" she asks.

"I want you to explain to me what you think you are doing!"

"Shubho, will you believe me if I tell you that I missed you? Will you believe me if I tell you that I didn't reply to your messages, as I didn't want you to know how weak I am right now?"

"No... I really don't believe any of this!"

"Shubho, look, I'm not saying that I don't like you, but I'm very confused. I thought this would just be a festival fling. It's probably just that for you." There are tears in her eyes now. "But, it has stopped being just a fling for me, Shubho. I don't know when this happened, but I realized it, when I saw you with your girlfriend and I felt jealous. I couldn't stop thinking about the two of you for days!"

"And I couldn't bear to see you walking away with Abhishek-da without sparing a glance at me! By the way, Parul is not my 'girlfriend'. It's no longer just a fling for me, either! I want to be with you every moment of the day!" I almost scream.

"Oh Shubho! Please try to understand! We've met at the wrong turn of our lives," Atreyee closes her eyes and bites her lip, trying to stop her tears. "Please leave! Abhishek would be back any time," she says weakly.

I sit rooted to the sofa, unable to decide what I should do next. And that is when my eyes go to the red suitcase in a corner of the room - the lid open, stuffed with clothes.

"We're leaving tomorrow," her voice is barely audible.

"Tomorrow? I didn't know that you..."

"You don't know a lot of things about me, Shubho", she walks up to me. She ruffles my hair and kisses my forehead.

\*\*\*

Shubho does not know anything. My heart is still afire with my love for him. But I want the flame to weaken with each passing day. I know that, it will eventually die out.

A goodbye is always painful. It pains me to think that this is the last time I am seeing him alone with me.

I watch as Shubho walks out of my house – angry, broken, hurt.

### **Dashami**

It will all be over in a few hours. The pandal will wear the look of a house deserted. Ma Durga and her children will be taken away in trucks, in a procession, to be immersed in the Ganga. The food stalls are already being dismantled. The electricians are taking off the lighting. The decorators have started taking the pandal apart. It will begin again - the yearly wait for the five days of Durga Puja.

I am in front of the pandal watching the neighbourhood women bid farewell to the goddess with shindoor, paan, and sweets and then smearing each other with shindoor. The husbands circle them with cameras, trying to capture their wives in the perfect pose for Facebook.

I can see Atreyee being escorted out of the pandal by her husband. She is in a white saree, a red sleeveless blouse, a red bindi adorning her forehead. Her hair is left open, her bare arms and face streaked red with

shindoor. She looks divine. As she walks away, she turns around and our eyes meet. Atreyee holds the gaze and all I can read in those eyes is sadness.

\*\*\*

I look out of the window. The sun is about to go down. There are streaks of orange and purple on the sky, interrupted by dark clouds. There is a flurry of activities on the ground, as our plane gets ready to fly out of Kolkata, the city still shrouded by a pall of gloom.

I am leaving a piece of my heart in this city. With Shubho. He perhaps will never remember me fondly after what happened yesterday. But I will remember him for the rest of my life. I will remember him when loneliness leaves deep scars on my soul. When it snows on a winter night. When it rains and the garden smells sweet.

“Already missing Kolkata? Missing Pujo? Or...” Abhishek stops briefly and then continues, “missing Shubho?”

I look at Abhishek, startled. Like a child caught stealing cookies from the jar.

“Abhi, I...”

Abhi takes my hand into his.

“Please don’t say anything. You don’t have to.”

He smiles, looking into my eyes.

“I realized it long back. I saw it in your eyes. Every time you asked about him after we had moved into that neighbourhood. When you blushed while telling me that he had visited us for the subscriptions. When you asked me if I could get his number for Saheli. When we went to their house for lunch. Every time we met him at the pandal. I have been seeing it in your eyes since yesterday,” Abhishek says in whispers, stroking my hand.

The last passenger has boarded the plane and the door has been closed. I rest my head on Abhi’s shoulder, and my tears finally break free.



## 8. Aleš Jelenko (Slovenia)

Aleš Jelenko, born in 1986 is from Slovenske Konjice (Slovenia). Among many achievements, he is a two-time finalist of the Festival of youth literature in Slovenia (JSKD, 2015 and 2016); Winner of the Mentorjev feferon for the best protest poem of the year (JSKD, 2017). He authored books titled 'Container', 'Primal speech' and '(Non)existence'.

### PUZZLE

With every day there's more of me  
My body are small pieces  
Hard  
But flexible  
Every time i find a new one  
I put it in the appropriate  
Hole  
I grow slowly  
I grow six days  
Then i rise  
Like eddie  
From the grave

I turn on my belly  
And glue my spine  
So that I'm stable enough  
That the pieces don't fall apart

I'm a wolf  
A predator

I hunt on four  
And boast on two  
Alpha male  
An eye on a pyramide  
Without a pedastal  
Just an eye

Douglas adams is assembled  
Umberto eco is assembled  
Julian barnes is assembled  
Hans magnus enzensberger is assembled  
John ashbery is assembled  
Aleš jelenko is assembled  
He truly is assembled

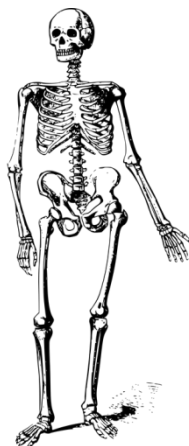
The name on the back of a frame  
Doesn't help much  
When a picture fades  
It just disassembles  
Into a box.

### BON APPETIT

A winged bird has boomed into me  
Squeezed and  
Changed me  
Sucked out red blood cells  
And poured absinthe into the vein

So I took off my skin  
Burned from words  
Torn apart from views

Now I stand on display  
On ridicule  
Everyone can tick off  
A piece of my vital organs  
Available are



Livers  
Lungs  
Duodenum  
Stomach  
And brains  
The choice is huge  
For many costumers  
Whatever they want

And at the end  
There's just the skeleton  
Cold  
Hard  
Unflexible  
S-k-e-l-e-t-o-n!



### 9. Shreya Suraj (Qatar)

Shreya Suraj is the Founder of an art group called Any Body Can Draw on Facebook, which has more than 5000+ members from more than 75 countries. She is a mathematician by profession but an artist by passion. She takes regular classes and workshops for all age groups in Doha.

#### ANGELS ON EARTH: DOCTOR

Dressed in white with a caring face  
Is that an angel with an angelic face?  
Who is the person walking with majestic steps?  
Is he the head of this place called paradise?

Does he have magic in his hand?  
How does he cure aches and pains in every land?  
What is the bitter-sweet portion given in a pill or a bottle?  
Will that portion make us immortal?

Where is the magic wand which is found in every angel's hand?  
This angel has a strange thing called stethoscope in his hand  
The stethoscope claims to hear the beats of our heart  
Will it now give us only happiness in our cart?

The angels have descended on earth  
And it's our duty to realise their worth  
The angel on Earth is called a DOCTOR  
We should only love, support, respect our protector and benefactor.



## 10. Rupama Basu (Singapore)

Rupama Basu, an NRI residing in Singapore, is a beauty pageant title winner, of IAB-Mrs India 2019 beautiful hair and Mrs India Universe 2020 Quarantine Queen Official. She takes pride in penning down her thoughts from her school days.

### PROBASHI DURGA PUJO IN SINGAPORE

Singapore - the red dot is a cosmopolitan city rich in diverse culture, heritage and ethnic fervor. I recall with sheer nostalgia when we first stepped into this island nation and made it our home away from home. Ten years later and countless memories with family and friends, I proudly recall the first brush with the “Probasi Durga-puja” in Singapore. We celebrate the Durga -puja with the same festive charm and tradition.

In Singapore, when our Indian-Hindu festivals become the topic of discussion, Deepavali (The Festival of Lights) – and more recently, Pongal (Festival of Harvest) – come to mind. The observation of Navaratri takes on many different forms amongst the various Indian/Hindu communities. In Bengal, the worship of the Great Goddess Durga – also known as Durga Puja begins with a nine-night autumn festival organised in Ma Durga’s honour.

The Goddess Durga (Epitome of female strength) – one of Devi’s many forms – is a deity worshipped for protection, power and the elimination of harmful forces. Ma Durga epitomizes maternal love, courage and her readiness to express her martial capabilities in order to restrain or destroy evil in all its forms. Common depictions of Goddess Durga show her with ten hands(Dosho-Bhuj) – each equipped with a protective emblem/weapon – seated on a mighty lion as she slays the buffalo demon “Mahishasura”. The buffalo demon, is a manifestation of the spiritual ailments plaguing Durga’s devotees. The eventual triumph of the Goddess over her enemy reflects the boons (divine blessings) that the Goddess confers upon her worshippers whenever the latter are confronted with negative forces and concerns. Thus, among some communities that observe the Durga Puja, Ashtami – the eighth day and ninth night of the festivities – marks the day when Durga successfully destroyed the evil force Mahishasura. status and her return to her birth home.

We the Bengalis in Singapore celebrate it every year with pomp and show. Upholding the traditional values with a modern twist we try to inculcate the right blend of festivities while keeping the festive charm intact. The inception of the Durga puja every year is with the “Anandmela”- an annual Bengali Association Singapore tradition before Durga Puja, culminating the beginning of festivities where our members show off their culinary skills by preparing authentic, home-cooked Bengali dishes, by setting up stalls selling mouth-watering dishes like ‘Phuchkas’, ‘Chops’, ‘Ghugni’, Biriyani, Sandesh ,Patisapta and even ‘Nolen Gurer’ ice creams.

‘Saptami’ IS generally filled with the musical extravaganza and medley of song and dance by us(members) and children. Confluence brought guest artists to exhibit beautiful Odissi dance performances that enthralled us to the core, followed by informative quizzes and fashion show to portray the cultural diversity.

‘Ashtami’ starts with the quintessential Anjali and Bhog distribution, followed by an informative quiz on Singapore. The students of the Chitrakala Arts invited to offer a presentation of Odissi and Bharatnatyam performances in front of the deity.

‘Nabami’, an uniquely and beautiful evening which commence with a musical evening performed by the Bangladeshi migrant workers. This followed by other melodious performances by the members of ‘HOME’(charitable organization) dedicated to empowering and supporting women migrant workers who find themselves victims of human rights violations and suffer abuse and exploitation.

‘Dashami’ we bid adieu to Ma Durga , with the famous “Sindoor khela” among us where I eagerly await this time of the year to smear our foreheads with the holy sindoor and bid farewell to the deity with pan-paata,(betel leaf),misti(sweets) and sindoor, praying for the long lives and good will of our better halves. The year 2020 has challenged the existence of mankind. No longer will I adorn my beautiful saree and wait with bated breath to visit the puja pandal. Singapore has decided not to host any mass festive gatherings including Durga Puja this year. Instead, we will gather virtually to celebrate the festivities in our own way, culminating our cultural ethos, in a more traditional setting by virtual dance, songs and programmes. Let this year be different and special as I look forward to spending time with my family and close friends, amidst the comfort of our homes. Hoping that next year will see a different world where we can embrace the festivities with renewed zeal and enthusiasm.

## 11. Alipi Das (USA)

Alipi Das is from Kolkata and has completed her post-graduation from Calcutta University. She has been in Bangalore for quite some time due to her professional requirements. She quit her corporate job as a senior manager and is currently settled in the USA. She is a voracious reader and a passionate writer and is inclined more towards classics from the Victorian era of Dickens and the Bronte sisters, though she reads books of all genres.

### IN HER LOVING MEMORY

The alarm buzzed; she quickly stopped it in her slumber and checked the time on her mobile. In the stealth of the nebulous night, she slowly disembarked on her activities.

The children were fast asleep; her heart craved to allow them to sleep in peace, but there was a far greater purpose in life.

“Get up; we need to go!”

“Mom, it’s so chill!”

With a big, packed bag on her shoulder, covered from head to toe, Mita, and her kids started their journey to their destination. They huddled in the car, and in the quietness of the chilly dark early-morning, Mita’s mind raced to those childhood events associated with this day, and her mother’s absence now in this world. The same city which she had left a decade ago has not woken up yet, an eerie but a peaceful silence enshrouded the ever-bustling character of the metropolis. They passed through the familiar lanes and by-lanes of old Kolkata; a lot has changed, yet the essence of the “City of Joy” still remained.

Initially, Mita was skeptical about the children accompanying her, but her instincts nudged her. She convinced her husband, “Allow them to connect to their native roots, at least to get the flavour of the diversity of our rich culture and festivals once in their lifetime.”

Neel who was seven years old; was partially awake. Ria, three years older to her brother, fidgeted with the bag and asked, “Mom, where are we going? Tell us what is unique about this day?”

Mita addressed, “This day is known as Makar Sankranti. During our childhood on this day every year, we accompanied our mother to celebrate this festival. Early in the winter morning, your uncle and I would take a holy dip along with your grandma in the Ganga.”

They both gawked at her. Ria visibly alarmed said, “You want us to follow the same?”

Her mother displayed her unruffled attitude and spoke, “When we were young like you, we also had similar views. We would stand far away at a distance and shudder at the thought of setting foot in the chilly water that flowed. It is always biting cold during this time, but there is something unexplainable and enchanting about it.”

Neel always had practical questions and would probe further, “What is the relevance of this tradition, and why do people follow it?”

“Makara Sankranti is a festival dedicated to the Sun deity. It is observed either on 14th or 15th January each year. It marks the first day of the transit of Sun into Capricorn, also indicating the end of the month and the start of longer days. On this date, the people of India celebrate their harvest. Many observers go to sacred rivers or lakes and bathe in a ceremony of gratitude towards the Sun God.” Their mother explained.

“Why do you want us to observe these rituals for the festival?” Her daughter scoffed.

Mita firmly responded, “We didn’t pressurize you to participate in the Durga Puja or Diwali festivals back in the USA. Why did you willingly take part in not only the social and cultural events but also the ritualistic activities?”

“That’s different.”

“Exactly, every festival has its significance and uniqueness. That is why we celebrate them with immense dedication. It is a diverse experience; you will comprehend my statements once we reach the Ghats of the Ganga.”

Both were neither convinced nor excited at the prospect of going into the freezing water of the Ganges.

The Ghat was teeming with people of different genres and generations. They were awed at the sight of the crowd at this hour. It was a complete contrast from the deserted roads they traversed. Reluctantly, they trotted with their mother as she held their hands and hurried towards the banks of the river.

“How can we take a bath in the open, in full view of a crowd? It is ridiculous.” Her daughter was irritated.

“No one will be noticing as everyone is busy with their spiritual beliefs and divine ceremonies. Follow me.” Mita persisted.

“Mom, we’ll catch a cold.” Neel reasoned.

“Your uncle and I took a dip in the early mornings during our initial ages, but never caught a cough or cold.” She guided them through the wet steps, “Be careful.”

The river Ganga formed ripples and lapped up the shores. It busily displayed the different dance forms around the boats which sailed on its breast and the folks that took a dip in its holy waters. The carefree boatmen sang the Bhatiyali song, which burst forth from their inner pain and sufferings and rendered the air with their echoes and cries. The lyrics and rhythm soothed Mita’s soul, and serenity filled her mind.

The fishermen on the other side; hurled their nets for their catch. Different hues of one river sparkled and shone in crimson where the sun was about to rise and created patterns as if engrossed in its painting.

At the nearby embankment; the half-naked young boys partly covered with mud, merrily plunged into the water with their innocent laughs and a cheerful attitude. Looking at them, and by the guidance of their mother, Ria and Neel took their holy dips at ease. She reminisced over those long-lost moments with her mother. It was pure bliss for her to get submerged in the ice-cold water again, now with her children.

Along with other women, they jostled for space in the tiny shelter at one end of the steps. “Dry yourselves and change under the shed, I’m in the front to keep a watch, don’t worry.” Their mother directed and assisted them. She handed them the fresh clothes from her carry bag.

On their way back, they entered the nearby temple premises and offered their prayers. Mita handed packets of dry food items to both and instructed, “distribute these provisions amongst the destitute and homeless sitting at the roadside.”

A while later, she asked them, “How was your new experience? Wasn’t it something unique which you can appreciate in the future?”

“Not bad, Mom. I think I can mention it in my school project.” Neel replied optimistically. Ria was still in a sulking mood.

The fresh aroma of the various sweet-flavoured savouries and sweetmeats filled the air, as they entered their ancestral house. Mita’s mind drove down the memory lane. She was overwhelmed with emotions as she recollected her mother’s love, and warmth showered on the delicacies prepared for the entire family. From time immemorial, the loss of a mother had always been irreparable and incomprehensible. The comfort during these times of sadness was the bittersweet, past moments spent together and cherished currently in the absence.

The old aunt of Mita sat inside the kitchen and checked on the sweet, cooked dumplings.

“Finished your Ganga Snan? Come, sit and taste some of these Puli Pithas.” Toothless, the aunt grinned from one cheek to another, patted her forehead with the loose end of her white sari. She wiped off the small droplets of sweat accumulated from the heat of the earthen furnace which lit up bright with a fiery rage; the charcoals tossed to the brim.

“This reminds me of Ma and her variety of preparations she organized.” Mita reciprocated.

The aunt handed her the plates and comfortably perched herself on the mat placed on the ground. She arranged a concoction of areca nuts, lime, and cloves and wrapped them in a betel leaf. Then she tucked it

inside her mouth and chewed it with all the might of her black gums. Her face reflected the satisfaction of her creation.

The red saliva gurgled in her mouth from chewing this stuff known as the Paan. “Eat the Pithas and let me know if it is soft and juicy.”

Mita handed the plates full of dumplings to her daughter and son. They relished as their faces lit up with the delectable taste of the homemade sweets.

“This is a new type of confections. We haven’t tasted anything like this before.” Neel commented as he picked up one after another.

Their mother responded, “This is also a part of the celebrations. Most of the households prepare these sweet syrupy dishes during the festival, to commemorate the new harvest.”

“It is very delicious.” He continued, “Mom, can we make this back in the US?”

“Yes; sure, why not?”

“It’s different. What are these made of?” Ria enquired.

“The sweets are a concoction of various products. Some are with rice powder, coconut, condensed milk and semolina. Others with palm, sweet potato, flour and cottage cheese. A special liquid date jaggery when added; makes the taste and fragrance of the Pithas and Pulis so alluring.”

Wide-eyed, she questioned, “Will it be possible to get all the ingredients over there?”

“We’ll try, else we can still manage with what we get there.” Mita turned around, smiled at Ria and assured her.

Gradually, the native youngsters from the foreign lands mingled with the rest of the family and gladly took part in all the norms of the household. They decorated the doorsteps and courtyards with Rangolis along with others.

She noticed the eagerness of her kids to experiment with new activities and willingly participated in all the affairs.

At night, as Mita bade goodnight to her children, they hugged her. Ria whispered, “Mom, we enjoyed today’s festival and the celebrations. Thank you.”

Mita couldn’t resist the brackish tears that welled up in her eyes. The involvement and acceptance of their traditions by the kids brought a new faith in her heart.

“All fine with them?” Her husband queried in bed.

Calmly, she replied, “Yes; I have been able to impart some values and teachings of our rich customs and culture to our children. I hope they imbibe these precious possessions which we have grown up with and still hold on. Let us continue the tradition of our festivals and convey some of our footsteps to the next generation.”

Mita’s thoughts wandered towards her mother whose love was always unfathomable. The loss and vacuum never fulfilled. The observance of Sankranti with her daughter and son was a silent tribute of her love, affection, gratitude and respect for her mother, a gesture in her loving memory. The exhausted, melancholic self, got calmed by the cold, winter breeze. She finally slept peacefully.

[Glossary:-

Makara Sankranti – It is a festival day in the Hindu calendar, dedicated to the deity Surya (sun). It is observed each year which corresponds with the month of January as per the Gregorian calendar and on this day the people of India celebrate their harvest. It marks the first day of the sun’s transit into Makara (Capricorn), marking the end of the month with the winter solstice and the start of longer days. Many observers go to sacred rivers or lakes and bathe in a ceremony of thanks to the sun. Makara Sankranti is observed with social festivities in some areas, such as colorful decorations, songs, dances, fairs, kite flying, bonfires and feasts.



**Pujas** – It is an act of worship. Hindus perform a ritual to offer devotional homage and prayer to one or more deities, to host and honour a guest, or to spiritually celebrate an event.

**Ganga or Ganges** - The river originates from the Gangotri Glacier of western Himalayas and flows south and east through the Gangetic Plain of India eventually emptying into the Bay of Bengal. It is considered sacred and pure, and believed that bathing in the river causes the remission of sins. Pilgrims immerse the ashes of their kin in the river.

**Bhatiali or Bhatiyali** – This is a form of folk music in West Bengal in India. Bhatiali is a river song mostly sung by boatmen while going down streams of the river. The word bhatiyali comes from bhata meaning “ebb” or downstream. It is mostly sung in several parts of greater riparian Bengal delta. The Bhati (lower region of a river) area is its place of origin. Bhatiali lyrics traditionally consist of metaphorical and emotional verses about the waters and the situation of boatmen and fishermen.

**Pitha Puli** – This is a type of palm-sized fritter, pancake, pastry or dumpling from the eastern regions of the Indian subcontinent. Pitha can be sweet or savoury, and usually made from a dough or batter, which is then steamed, fried or griddled.

**Paan** – This is a preparation combining betel leaves with areca nut and lime, with or without tobacco, and widely consumed in India. It causes profuse red coloured salivation when chewed.

**Rangoli** – It is an art form, originating in the Indian subcontinent in which patterns are created on the floor or the ground using materials such as coloured rice, coloured sand, quartz powder or flower petals. It is usually made during the Hindu festivals.

**Snan** – Taking a bath.

**Durga Puja** – It is one of the major festivals of Hinduism, traditionally held for 10 days in the month of September–October. It celebrates the victory of the goddess Durga over the demon king Mahishasura.

**Diwali** – It is a Hindu festival of lights, held in the period October to November. It is particularly associated with Lakshmi, the goddess of prosperity.

**Ghats** - A broad flight of steps that is situated on an Indian riverbank and that provides access to the water especially for bathing.]



## 12. Debashree Basak (USA)

An erstwhile banker, settled in the USA, who currently loves to scribble her heart out. Being a passionate writer, she totally believes that words can herald a change and therefore contributes in her own trivial way.

### DURGA PUJA - THE GRANDEST FESTIVAL OF BENGALIS ALL OVER THE WORLD

Being born and raised in Kolkata, the importance of Durga Puja cannot be over-emphasized. We Bengalis, yearn for this festival and wait for it with baited breath. Durga Puja is not restricted to just a festival for Bengalis, it's an emotion for Bengalis all over the world, that pervades for an ebullient span of five days. The first Barowari Durga Puja was organized in Kolkata by Bhowanipore Sanatan Dharmotsahini Sabha in 1909 at Balam Bose Ghat Road, Bhowanipore. On this occasion, Sri Aurobindo published the famous Durga Stotra in his Bengali journal, Dharma, issue one "Kartika" dated 1316 AD.

The Durga Puja festival marks the victory of Goddess Durga over the mythological demon Mahishasura, and is observed in the autumn months of September/October according to the Hindu solar calendar. The celebration of Durga Puja, during the "sharat kaal" which is autumn is called "Akal Bodhon" implying untimely worship.

Mythology has it that, Shri Ramchandra started worshipping Goddess Durga to empower him with her blessings to overcome the demon king Ravan who had held his wife Sita as a hostage in Lanka, during autumn. Shri Ramchandra worshipped Devi Durga first during this time of the year by offering 108 blue lotuses and lighting 108 lamps. Pleased and satisfied with his prayers, the Goddess blessed him, led him victorious in his war against Ravan. Coincidentally, Dussehra or the slaying of Ravana (the evil) by Shri Ramchandra falls on the same date as Dashami of Durga Pujo which marks the departure of the Goddess and end of Durga Pujo festivities.

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The flamboyant celebrations among the Bengalis begin right from Mahalaya, the first day of Durga Puja which heralds the advent of the Goddess. With a gazillion of elaborate rituals, Maa Durga's arrival to her natal place is celebrated. On the auspicious day of Mahalaya, the ritual of "Chokkhudaan" is of paramount importance, wherein Maa Durga is given her eyes by the famous artisans of North Kolkata. Thousands of people throng to the Ganges or any holy river to pay homage to their late ancestors in the form of "Tarpan" right from the break of dawn. Mahalaya is also synonymous to Birendra Kishore Bhadra for every Bengali. His deep baritone renders a distinctive charm to the age-old divine "stotras".

Maa Durga is seen in her triumphant pose over the demon, wielding weapons in each of her 10 arms. She is flanked by her four children: Ganesh, Lakshmi, Saraswati and Kartikeya. Many of these magnificent works of art have a year of impeccable and meticulous planning behind them. In Kolkata, all of the idols are made of clay, which is typically taken from the banks of the Ganges river. They are sculpted and then punctiliously painted. At the end of the festival, the idols are returned to the Ganges in a grand ceremonial immersion that represents Durga's return to her husband, Shiva. There has been an environmental concern about this practice in recent years, as the paint and adornments pollute the river. Efforts are being made to use non-toxic paint, although it is not yet wide-spread. Originally, Durga Puja was celebrated by the affluent or the "Boned" families wherein the ritual was passed down from one generation to the next. But gradually, the burgeoning middle class, initiated their own cultural organizations which heralded the Durga Puja culture amongst umpteen interested communities. The requisite funds were raised mostly through local fund raising.

This one festival, unites the Bengalis across the globe over their love for celebrations, fun-fiesta and good food. Maa Durga is not just a mere embodiment of Shakti or power to them. She is perceived as a harbinger of peace, celebrations, exuberance, bliss and even gatherings for Nonresident Bengalis who throughout the year await this carnival. The best part of Durga Puja that bestows pure and unadulterated fun and satisfaction has to be the most "coveted and peerless" 'BHOG' (An offering to Maa Durga- a scrumptious platter of vegetation rice and dal khichdi, a "labda" vegetable medley and a few desserts) form the basic but quintessential attraction of Durga Puja.

The next inherent aspects during the Durga Pujas are "Dhakis- the traditional drummers from Bengal and "dhunuchi naach" dancers who perform with coconut fiber and incense mixed with camphor in earthen pots which has a handle, for the ease of holding it during dancing. Regardless of the country, presence of Bengalis calls for celebration of Durga Puja. However, the Durga Puja celebrations are adapted commensurate with the country they're celebrated in. Countries other than India do not allow the immersion of Goddesses, since it breaches every criterion for environmental well-being. Hence, the idols are usually made from non-traditional fiberglass since it is light, easily transportable and has more endurance to travel overseas without breaking. It

can also be safely tucked and put away till the next year. The four days of merry-making and festivities make it a carnival, where-in the entire Bengali clan comes together with a high level of camaraderie. It's all about donning the best ethnic wear, which otherwise languishes in the closet throughout the rest of the year. It is also about overtly indulging into the scrumptious Bengali delicacies that too with the company of friends and the like. Though the feel and carnivalesque atmosphere of Durga Puja that prevails in Kolkata, West Bengal is utterly onerous to find elsewhere in the world, still the global Bengalis make it a point to make hay while the sun shines. For logistical reasons, most overseas Pujas take place over weekends – starting Friday evenings. The Sasthi, Saptami, Asthami, Nabami and Dashami sequence is squeezed into a simplified two-and-a-half-day or even a three-day schedule.

Outside the Puja venue, makeshift shops sell wares as wide-ranging as sarees, jewelry and also the recreated versions of Bengali roadside food, viz, egg rolls, chicken rolls, kababs and biryanis. Since Bengalis and food are complimentary, one is incomplete without the other. The Durga puja celebrations overseas also witnesses hosting of cultural shows with artists traveling from India particularly Kolkata, to render the quintessential Bengali emotions through songs that make the Bengalis bask in the nostalgia of their childhood days. The local Bengali community also gets an incredible opportunity, to showcase their talent. Some may choose to sing, be it Rabindra Sangeet or any other Bengali song inherent of Bengali legacy, while others may choose to dance or even play any musical instrument.

Despite being miles away from homeland, Durga Puja is hands down the grandest festival of Bengalis all over the world. Poignant and nostalgic ties with their homeland nurtures their ardent desire to be attached to this regal and deep-rooted tradition that any Bengali irrespective of geographical location can ever boast of. The 5 days of extravaganza, garnished with unadulterated fun commonly referred to as “adda” in Bengali and good food makes this festival truly grand. The heartbeat of every Bengali dances to the rhythmic percussion of “dhaak” during those 5 days.



Another crucial aspect during the Durga Puja, that ever Bengali in a foreign land looks forward to is “Sindoor Khela” on the 10th day. Women first perform Devi Baran, where the married women bid adieu to the goddess. The married women perform “arati” and apply “sindoor” (vermillion) on the forehead and feet of the Goddess. Once Devi Baran is done, they apply sindoor on each other's forehead followed by shankha, pola and noa (three bangles, made of conch shells, coral and iron, respectively, that signify Bengali women's marital status). After that, women playfully smear sindoor on each other's faces. Finally offer sweets to each other as prasad. Though these days, “Sindoor Khela” has witnessed much leniency thereby allowing anyone to participate and savor the bliss. The magical mantra “Aasche bochor abaar hobe” which simply implies that the celebrations will resume again next year, is literally the fodder for every Bengali for next one year.

Being a resident of The USA, I can vouch for the fact that Durga Puja bestows peerless joy during those 5 days of merry making. It smears us with incredible nostalgia of our good old days, while concurrently celebrating the victory of good over evil. After all, our existence is intricately entwined to our deeply embedded roots and rich heritage. Hence regardless of the latitude and longitude we all Bengalis unanimously agree to the fact that Durga Puja is indeed “The Grandest” festival that will continue to enthrall us, through its inexplicable charm and utopian feeling.



### 13. Lalitha Ramanathan (Singapore)

Lalitha is from India and currently living in Singapore with family. She works in Finance and an avid blogger and writer. She has an 8 year old daughter who is the centre of her universe. She loves celebrating festivals as it reminds of her family back in India!

#### CELEBRATING VISHU

Festivals and religious occasions were an integral part of my childhood. I have been lucky to be raised by a family that followed the tradition of celebrating every festival. My grandparents taught me the significance of each celebration. Perhaps it is because of this upbringing, that I look forward to every festival with great gusto. With my Tamil-Malayali roots, I have ample opportunities for the same.

Why are celebrations important? For one, celebrations bring back memories. Of home and family. of a carefree, joyful time when life was so much simpler. Of a walk down memory lane, invoking familiar scents, sounds, and sights. The smell of ghee and cardamom from the kitchen, the fragrance of rose petals, and Agarbatti from the prayer room. The Gods seated in the prayer room, adorned with freshly ground sandalwood paste and vermilion. The jingle of the pooja bell, the rustling of silk. My grandmother singing aarti in her melodious voice. Nostalgia is an emotion on its own!

Today, I have a home away from home, here in Singapore. I make a conscious effort that my child is aware of our traditions and heritage. I want her to watch and learn. I hope she imbibes the richness of our culture and carries it forward. Which is my favourite festival? It is hard to say. Is it the festival of flowers, Onam? Is it the festival of lights, Diwali? Or is it the festival of my favourite God, Ganesha? I love all of them, and it is hard to go with just one.

There is one festival, which holds a special place in my heart. It is none other than Vishu, a festival celebrated in God's own Kerala. This festival coincides with Tamil Puthandu, Bihu, Baisakhi, and Songkran, the Thai New Year. Isn't it amazing that different people in India and the world are celebrating at the same time? Just another example of how we relate to the same set of beliefs and value systems. We may be different, yet we are the same.

Vishu marks the first day of Medamasam (the month of Medam) and the spring equinox. It falls generally on April 13th or 14th every year. It is the festival of abundance. A reassurance that the upcoming year would be full of prosperity. Its onset marks an abundance of not only wealth but also health and happiness.

Vishu is a festival dedicated to Lord Vishnu. Vishnu, the preserver, is also the God of time. It is no surprise that the auspicious beginning of the year would be dedicated to the God of time himself!

The most important tradition is the Vishukani or the special 'sight' for Vishu. The beginning of a day is always auspicious. My grandmother used to tell me, when you awaken every day in the morning, glance at your palms for a minute. "Karagre Vasathi Lakshmi, Karamadhye Sarawasti, Kara Moolathe Govindaha, Prabhate Kara Darshanam". In our palms reside, Lakshmi, Saraswati, and Govinda. Begin your day by invoking this auspicious trio, and the day will be blessed.

The concept of Vishukani is the same. Any new beginning starts with an auspicious sight. On the first day of the year, one should wake up viewing a cornucopia or a festive display that is kept in front of God. This display is the 'Kani' or the divine sight. Placed at the centre of this display is an idol of Lord Krishna, adorned with yellow silk and flowers. Along with the idol, are kept plates full of coins, cash, and jewellery. Next to it is placed an urn filled with vegetables, fruits, rice bowls, and grains. There is a mirror placed adjacent to this arrangement to reflect the Kani. The mirror symbolizes Bhagawathi, the feminine force, and the reflection of the life we want to see.

This arrangement is kept the night before Vishu. The next day, early in the morning, the eldest lady of the house awakens the family members, one by one. She keeps her palms over their eyes and guides them to the Kani. When they open their eyes, they see the divine sight and pray.

It is said that the first thing that you see through the mirror will represent how the year unfolds. As kids, the first thing we would try to see is the money. More pocket money meant more toys and sweets! The flower of this festival is the yellow Konna flower or the Cassia Fistula that resembles delicate golden anklets. The sight of a Cassia tree in full bloom fills my heart with joy. If I ever get a chance to build a dream house, I will want a backyard full of Konna trees. Imagine waking up every day to see a golden Kani! The Konna tree has several

stories associated with it. One such story is very poignant and touches my heart every time I hear it. Once upon a time, there was a poor woman, who had a young son. They lived next to the temple. The little boy made a new friend at the temple. His friend was a boy of his age, dark-skinned, dressed in silk and jewellery with peacock feathers adorning his hair. They played together every day.

One day, the young boy was upset. His friend asked him why he looked glum. The boy replied, "My mom works so hard. Yet, we barely have enough to eat." His friend smiled. "Is that all? Take my anklets! You can sell them and earn a fortune." The little boy thanked his friend. His mother would be pleased! He went home to his mother with the golden anklets. "Amma, look, what I got!" The woman was horrified. "Where did you get these from? Do you want to be accused of theft? Don't we have enough problems already? Return them from where you found them!" she ordered him and slapped him when he protested. The little boy burst into tears. He went back to the temple and tried searching for his friend. His mother accompanied him. His friend was nowhere to be seen. There was a crowd gathered at the temple. There were whispers that the anklets from the idol were missing.

The mother was exasperated. What had her son done? She burst into tears. Seeing his mother's anguish, the boy grew upset. His eyes fell on the anklets that had caused so much trouble. He picked up the anklets and threw them away in disgust. The anklets landed on the nearest tree, a Konna tree, in the temple compound. The minute each anklet touched the tree, the tree burst into a hundred blooms, all resembling yellow, golden anklets. The mother was astounded and convinced of her son's innocence. "What did you say your friend's name was?" she asked. "Krishna!" the boy replied. And from that onwards, the Konna's status has been elevated as the lord's favourite flower.

The day before Vishu, we would gather yellow Konna flowers and made lovely arrangements in front of the prayer room. We would select the juiciest, most luscious-looking fruits and vegetables- purple brinjals, white pumpkins, and ruby-red tomatoes to adorn the prayer room. Our parents would spread coins on the plate, set the mirror, and send us to bed early. We would go to bed, a little nervous and bubbling with excitement. My biggest fear was, what if I woke up and saw something else, other than the Kani? The year would be doomed!

The alarms would go off at 5:00 AM. We would lie awake in bed, daring not to open our eyes. Amma would come to us, guard our eyes with her hands, and guide us to the Kani one by one. We would gingerly step into the pooja room, open our eyes, and glance into the mirror. We would then take our bath and wear new clothes purchased for Vishu. We would touch the feet of our elders to seek their blessing. They would shower us with good wishes and give us what we were looked forward to the most- the 'Vishu Kaineetam.' Kaineetam translates to outstretching the palm for coins. Our grandparents would give Kaineetam or coins to the younger ones in the family, our domestic help, and everyone who came to our doorstep with the cry of "Vishu Kaineetam!"

We would then go to the temple to pray. There would be a crowd gathered to celebrate the new year. When we came back home, mother and grandmother would busy themselves in preparing the feasts. The Vishu feast would have all yummy classics like payasam, aviyal, sambar, rasam, and papadam, served on a banana leaf. The special item of the day was the Mambazha pulisseri, or mango gravy, sour and sweet, reminding you that life is both bitter and sweet and one cannot coexist without the other. Enough of nostalgia! Back to the present day! How do I celebrate now? As a working woman, it is hard for me to keep up with all the rituals and practices. But I try. You will be surprised by the resourcefulness of retailers. Some of them even stock ready-made kits that help me balance my work and home needs!

In Singapore, we have a busy marketplace called Little India. If I ever miss the crowds and the hustle and bustle of India, this is the place I head off to, to soak in the ambiance. I shop here for almost every festival. During Vishu time, I get my mini jackfruits, my green mangoes, and flowers for Lord Krishna. If not Konna, I'm happy with the nearest approximation- bright yellow flowers. I have tried to locate Konna flowers in Singapore. I have used Google maps and other online forums to locate a tree from which I can pluck flowers for Vishu. It has become a habit for me to glance out of taxi windows trying to spot this elusive tree here. One also must be careful here. In Singapore, plucking flowers off private properties can lead to a fine! One does not want to start the new year on a penalty. I once did locate a Konna tree. It was bang in the middle of a busy road. Since I am a law-abiding person, I could only glance at it longingly from a distance. Once my shopping is done, as a family, we work on putting the Kani together. We don't have an idol at home, so we put up Krishna's picture and adorn him with flowers and necklaces. Then begins the fun activity, raiding the kitchen for things to put into the Kani.

I'm a modern millennial. Half of the thrill of celebrating a festival comes from validation on social media. I choose the plump, juiciest-looking, brightest vegetables and fruits for my Kani, which will later feature on Instagram. Truth be told, I miss being a child. Being the eldest woman of the house, I must wake up early and guide my family to the Kani. I rush with happiness to the prayer room for the first sighting. Once complete, I awaken the sleeping child and husband and lead them one by one to the prayer room, just like how my mother used to do.

The first time I gave my little one her Kaineetam, coins, she was surprised. We give her pocket money only when she does something nice. "Mom, I didn't do anything! Why are you giving me money?" I told her, "This is a special day, where we give everyone money." She is immediately intrigued. Suddenly Vishu has become her favourite festival! "If only every day were Vishu!" she sighs. Some things never change! The day progresses with prayers and feasting. I do not attempt to make as many items as my mother, since I'm a novice to the kitchen. But the one thing I insist on, is eating off a banana leaf. Sitting cross-legged on the ground and eating food off a banana leaf is a different experience altogether. I'm drooling at the very thought of the feast served on a brilliant green leaf! It takes skill to manoeuvre the Payasam around to make sure there is no spillage, but the taste is so divine. There is something about banana-leaf chlorophyll for sure!

Writing about this makes me crave for Vishu. But there are still four months ahead to April. This year has been anything but normal. COVID took away livelihoods and jobs. There has been disease, death, and despair. Come April, for many, there will be nothing to keep for their Kani, except their hopes for better times. I have decided that for this Vishu, my Kaineetam will be a donation to different charities. We must make this celebration more meaningful.

One of my favourite Malayalam songs, that I keep humming during this season is:

*"Kani Kanum Neram Kamala Nethrante  
Niramerum Manja Thukil Charthi  
Kanaka Kingini Valakal Mothiram  
Aninju Kaanenam Bhagavaane"*

These beautiful lines translate to, "The first sight I see on waking up, should be you, Krishna! Krishna, you are the Lotus-eyed lord. I want to see you with yellow garments and golden loin chains, bangles, and rings! " Hoping that the lotus-eyed one takes pity on us mortals and blesses us with prosperity and abundance and grants us a disease-free year. Lastly, I would like to conclude, by stating that while celebrating each festival, I want to create memories for my child. These precious memories will give her the strength to wade through the challenging times in her life. After all, each memory is but a silver thread we cling onto for a moment of hope and joy, a moment where we are reminded that the best feeling in the world is when we find our way home.



#### 14. Alakananda Pramanik (USA)

Alakananda is a best-selling author, co-author for many anthologies, a woman who dons many caps. She even proved herself as an actor! Born in a simple and well-educated family in Nagpur, Alakananda is exposed to creative world since childhood. Married to Mr. Robin Andrew, they are proud parents of two children. Coming from a close knit family and now a working professional in Credit Control of one of India's leading IT companies and Honorary Vice President at one of the top e-Learning platforms, Alakananda Pramanik is an inspiration to many women. In 2020, Alakananda was honoured with the 'Literoma Woman Achiever' Award.

#### CELEBRATING WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH FESTIVALS VS REALITY

Every year since ages, people had been celebrating the power of a woman, the good over evil, and some of the big celebrations of “Nari-Shakti” (Women power) are the festivals of Durga Puja & Kali Puja in West Bengal. They are the biggest celebrations of woman empowerment and woman power through festivals in India. Apart from them there are celebrations on the special days of Goddess Kamakhya at Guwahati when she menstruates, Goddess Gangamma in Tirupati, Goddesses Lakshmi, Saraswati and several other goddesses.

What is the mythological tale of Durga Devi, the epitome of woman empowerment and woman power?

A tyrant demon named Mahishasura wanted to become immortal, and be the supreme power across earth and heaven. He prayed relentlessly to the Gods. Seeing his dedication, Lord Bramha appeared and granted him one boon. The demon Mahishasura wanted to be the most powerful creature on the planet and invincible by any man or God! Bramha granted him his boon and with this boon Mahishasura considered himself immortal as no God or man could kill him. In pride, he started misusing his immense strength and powers by causing havoc across the earth. The land was covered in darkness and not only that, he even displaced Gods from their heavenly abodes. The tormented Gods went to Bramha, Vishnu and Shiva for help, who conferred with each other and created ten-armed Goddess Durga, the embodiment of ‘Adi-shakti’ in order to take on and vanquish Mahishasura. Many Gods approached her and gifted her powers and array of weapons. Lord Vishnu gave the Sudarshan Chakra, Vayu gave her Bow & arrow, Shiva gave her a Trishul, the God of the Himalayas gave her a Lion to ride on, and so forth. Armed with ten weapons gifted to her by the Gods and all the powers, she descended from the heavens. She battled with demon Mahishasura for ten long days. On the tenth day, she beheaded Mahishasura with the Trishul, restoring peace and order on earth and heaven.

The mythological tale of Goddess Durga reflects the power of a woman’s triumph over evil. It is significant because it reminds us as a society, of the immense strength and determination of a woman, provided she is able to believe in herself, and start working on her potentials. A woman whose skills and powers are developed and nurtured, is an unstoppable force. This is what we need to absorb and learn from Goddess Durga’s story, and apply it to society. Goddess Durga is an icon for empowering women. We can learn many lessons from her life especially regarding women in society today.

Worship of Goddess Kali is another important celebration of woman power. Kali is the divine manifestation of “Nari-Shakti” (women-power). She is the Goddess who annihilates evil and fights demons. She is not gentle and calm, but aggressive and destructive. She proves that women, who have the power to create and nurture, are equally capable of destructing and annihilating the sources of evil. She is the ultimate protector against evil.

These festivals are not only celebrated by women, but men too. However, it doesn’t make sense to worship many goddesses and express love and devotion to the female deities without mirroring it in reality to the women back home. It doesn’t make sense to pray to a female deity and treat women poorly. Violence against women & girls is a very big and serious social issue which comes forth from time to time. It is a grave violation of human rights.

What is the reality? Time and again I go through waves of emotions, emotions of happiness and grief at the same time. The recent happiness was during the festive season of Durga Puja of 2020, the celebration of good over evil, the celebration of “Nari-Shakti” i.e. woman power, coupled with the news of our short film ‘Shakti – The Strength Within’ winning the 1st position in the Best Story category in Literoma’s Short Film Carnival & Contest 2020. The film was the story of a girl who is continuously harassed by a local boy and her decision to confront the situation when things reach a dead end. The story was very impactful and in the end, it conveyed a powerful message to all. It’s a film on women empowerment released on Women’s Day 2020.

In spite of the happy news, my heart was cracking with grief at the current news unfolding daily on the atrocities and brutality to the extent of painful death of young girls in the hands of beasts in human form. I failed to fathom the pain the young girls went through that led to their untimely painful deaths. I failed to fathom the pain and grief the families of these young girls went through.

During our shoot days in November 2019, we were blown by the horrific news of the brutal rape and killing of a young lady Doctor in Hyderabad. After the Nirbhaya case and Asifa Bano case, this was another incident that sent a shockwave through our country. The entire cast of the film went numb with shock as here we were shooting a film to drive a positive and powerful message to all with regards to the atrocities and harassment met by the girls & women in our society.

The television channels were flooded with news of the brutal gang rapes, torture and deaths of the helpless young girls. Once again, the entire country had woken up to the most brutal news that boiled our blood with anger and disgust. The incidents were inhuman and heart wrenching. On one hand Goddesses like Durga, Saraswati, Kali, Parvati are worshipped and on the other hand is this how women are treated? In spite of glorifying women as mother, who creates and nourishes life, the violence against women like dowry related harassment, death, marital rape, wife-battering, sexual abuse, mental harassment, gang rape, acid attacks, etc. continues.

While Goddesses are worshipped as a ritual with great pomp and grandeur, in reality, women are generally never seen as their earthly representations.

We teach our children how to be safe, about the dangers of drugs and alcohols, about looking both ways when crossing the road, and several other things. As our children grow older, especially the daughters, we talk to them on several issues to keep themselves safe and stand up for what they want and what is right. I as a Mother also had a one to one talk with both my daughter and my son too. Even a boy needs to know of how to keep himself safe and taught to respect girls.

All girls are taught to be careful in this world and ways to keep themselves safe. They are taught all the good lessons like not to accept a drink from someone as it could be drugged with something. They are taught to wear clothes that do not attract unwanted attention, or avoid traveling alone especially in late evenings. While you teach your daughters how to be safe in this world, don't forget your sons. They need to learn this too. As parents, we must discuss with our children about the dangers and on how to take personal responsibilities and safety, but how do you guarantee that they will not be a victim of such brutality? Not always such sexual assaults happen behind closed doors or bars. They may happen on the way from school or work, or at any unexpected time or place. They happen regardless of what someone is wearing, whether they were sober or not, if they were with strangers or close friends or family members.

Is teaching your kids about only safety and self-protection enough?

It's not. It's the duty of every single parent to talk to them about the meaning of consent and that sexual assault of any kind is wrong. It is very important that we explain to them that sexual assault, sexual harassment, sexual bullying and unwanted sexual advances are all completely unacceptable. We must and need to teach our children that it is not right to trick, coerce, force or threaten someone into unwanted sexual activities, and that it is never the victim's fault. Most of the kids know that it is unacceptable to drive drunk. Most of them also understand that there are serious repercussions to engaging in behavior that is dangerous and illegal. When most of them understand all this, then why not make them understand the same thing about the difference between consent and force. Even men and boys can become victims of sexual assault.

We, as a parent, need to teach our children that no matter what someone is wearing, you cannot make unwanted advances on them. Teach them that no matter who is walking alone at night, you cannot sexually assault them. Teach them no matter how drunk someone is, you cannot take unnecessary and unwanted advantage of them.

You need to teach them that when a person is sexually assaulted it is never, ever the victim's fault. The only individual to be blamed is the perpetrator of the sexual assault.

It is usually the daughter's safety that we are worried about and teach them how to keep themselves safe and stand up for what they want. And if you are a parent of sons and you are not teaching them to respect women and you are not teaching them the meaning of consent as well as not explaining to them the trauma that the



victim of sexual assault faces, then you are doing absolutely nothing to prevent the widespread and frequent incidents of rape in this country. While you teach your daughter to be careful, teach your sons to respect girls. Teach your sons to respect the gender who gave birth to them.

Celebrating women empowerment through festivals will continue in the future too, but until the mindset of men towards how they look at women doesn't change, the reality will always be disturbing.

For women, these celebrations are a great source of pride and empowerment providing them with a sense of control over the happenings of their life. Similar to Goddess Durga, who was given power and weapons to battle Mahishusara, if a woman is surrounded by people who are positive and encouraging, there is absolutely no limit to the heights a woman can reach. This festive celebration of woman empowerment appraises women to not let fear determine their actions, but to push past these fears to confront and triumph.



### 15. Capt. (Dr.) Rajesh Kumar Sinha

Dr. Sinha is currently working as an Associate Professor and HOD of English department in a college in Bihar. He is a regular speaker at many seminars and conferences across India and abroad. Many of his abstracts and research papers have been published in journals worldwide. He is also a trained NCC officer of his college's army wing.

#### ENTRANCING MAGIC OF DURGA PUJA

Festivals in India number innumerable,  
 But some of them are revered a lot.  
 Durga puja is one of such festivals,  
 The magic of which resides like a clot.  
 Though the Hindus worship the goddess,  
 Yet all other clans too enjoy a lot.  
 What to talk of the Muslims, Sikhs & Christians,  
 Every one of them treats this festival hot.  
 Puja of Goddess Durga unites us all,  
 And gives each Indian reasons to cheer sans doubt.  
 In West Bengal it has a special charm,  
 But the rest of India too celebrate its dot.  
 The rich and the poor forget the gaps all,  
 And together participate in its slot.  
 Literature and puja are tagged together,  
 As Durga Shaptshati is full of literary thought.  
 For nine days the devotees do it's paath ,  
 To make the Goddess bless the earthy lot.  
 Apart from puja people act, sing and dance,  
 To add to the glamour of the festival's plot.  
 Life sans festival is just waste and all,  
 So we must enjoy all fests & their knot.



## 16. Dr. T. Sree Latha

Dr. Tangirala SreeLatha, Associate Professor of English is an educator for 26 years, bilingual poet, short story writer and translator. Her poems are anthologized in various National and International collections and other e-journals like Inner Child Press, Muse India, The Criterion, Cape Comorin Trust, GIPF-Guntur and Amaravati Poetic Prism conducted by CCVA, Vijayawada. She has to her credit, an anthology “Voiced Thoughts” and approximately 57 published research papers.

### THE MURDER

It was 7pm when Krishna walked into the house silently with an acute nervous face. His eyes were searching all the sides and checking if someone was observing him. He crossed the wide drawing room and when he was about to enter his bedroom, Kanishka, his sister came running to him and asked, “Why are you hiding your hands at the back? Are you hiding anything from all of us? Did you bring something for me? Ah, show me!” She asked with great curiosity but he was shocked. His face went utterly pale. He was sweating buckets. At last he uttered with finger on his lips, “Shh! don’t shout, please. Get out of here.” But she insisted, “Tell me what are you hiding, I want to see, I want to know, tell, tell, tell...,” she started yelling thumping her feet to the floor.

“Hey devil! Stop that nonsense. I will tell you later. If Mom sees me...,” he stopped seeing Vakula, coming to him. “Where have you been? It’s been so long since morning, you haven’t even come for lunch! What’s the matter, you seem so panicky! What’s wrong with you?” There is a downpour of questions from her. Krishna understood that the situation had got worsened; beyond his control. He frowned at his sister with menacing looks. “Why do you make wry face at her?” He turned to his mother staring astounded and speechless. Looking at his pallid face she asked in raised voice “Krishna, what happened? Speak out.” He said, “hm... nothing Ma, nothing,” very meekly, suddenly went into the room and closed the door.

“Krishna! Krishna! Tell me what happened,” shouted his mother. Kanishka gaped at both of them in big confusion. Vakula left him thinking that he would come out after that fit of vexation was cleared. Krishna was totally driven mad and threw tantrums in the room. He did not understand what to do. He feared what would happen if his father knew about the incident. He thought seriously the possible ways to get away from that situation. “What will Dad say? Will he pardon me? My God! I can’t keep up with this stress.”

Then, at around 8pm the doorbell rang. He knew his father, Nandu came home. He heard his father asking about him and Vakula explaining him everything. Nandu’s distinguished voice was always a horror to him. As expected there was a knock at the bedroom door. Krishna paused a while, but a moment later, opened the door. Stepping in, Nandu looked at the chaotic room with knitted brows, smelled the annoyance and turbulence going on in Krishna’s mind. He came near him, patted him gently and said, “Hm.. what’s the matter my boy? Why are you bothering everyone at home? What did you do that disturbed you to the core? Why there are blood stains to your palm and your shirt? Come on, tell me!” His voice gradually grew very serious. Kanishka and Vakula were standing at the door. Krishna was staring at Nandu with wide open eyes and with offended look. He could not bear with the struggle tormenting him from within. He slowly raised his head and murmured, “Murder!”

That response hit everyone like a bolt from the blue. Nandu stood up with a jerk. Vakula was struck dumb and sank into a chair there. Kanishka’s jaw dropped. “What... Krishna, what did you say?” Nandu’s voice trembled. Krishna now lifted his head and whispered the same. “What are you talking Krishna?” his father went mad. He could hardly believe his ears. “What is he saying?” he looked at his wife and muttered. After a while, he suddenly sank into the chair and looked at his son intently. He beckoned Krishna, made him sit near him and said, “Tell me clearly what exactly happened. Let me understand it properly.” Then Krishna burst out, could not control for a few moments; but felt comfortable with his father’s pat on his back and started. With hiccups interrupting now and then, he narrated what exactly happened at his friend’s house.

“Morning I went to Ram’s house as we had a cricket match with the “City Champions” at 11am. When we were busy with the game, suddenly his mother yelled from the kitchen. We ran there and saw her standing shocked. The gas cylinder was moved from the cabinet and it was in front of her. We were shocked beyond expression. Ram, who was the oldest of all us and the undisputed captain of our cricket team, ran to her asking, “Ma, what happened?” Then she was even more horrified, looked at all of us with terror and said, “No, no, don’t come near me, stay away, stay away.” Confused more, we all stared at one another. But Ram slowly went near her asked the reason. She then pointed to the cylinder cabinet, where there was a rat hiding in the dark corner eating a piece of apple. He then felt relieved and clarified us about his mother’s eternal fear of rodents and could not even sleep till the rat is either driven out or killed. Immediately our “Dare Devils”

team took great interest in chasing and hunting it. We besieged it from all sides and finally it was hurt seriously by one of the team's best bowlers. He threw the cark ball so perfectly that it hit the rat which could not move from there. It was struggling hard to escape from there and to survive; when I hit it hard with my bat. That's the end of the whole hunt. It died. Then we all cremated it with sincere apologies at the back yard. Ram thanked us for helping him get rid of it.

After that great victory, during the team's retrospection of the whole adventurous climax, and gallantry attack on the rat, everyone made me responsible for the death of the poor creature. They told me that I was the murderer and hence the soul of the rat would not leave me. I am horrified as the rat's soul would avenge me. The sense of fear and sin crammed my mind as mine was the final blow with which it died. I am a murderer Papa, I am a murderer. I am a sinner." He embraced his father and started crying loudly. "I am very sorry for it Papa, I am sorry. I will leave you shortly and God will punish me severely. Hu..hu...hu.., the police uncle may also come to arrest me," the ten year old Krishna continued crying his eyes out.

Listening to the whole narration, everybody felt relieved. They were horrified at first when he uttered the word 'murder.' But when things were clarified, both Nandu and Vakula sighed with relief. Kanishka came to him, gripped him by his hand tightly close to her heart and said, "Don't cry brother, I will catch you firmly and protect you from the ghost. It can't take you away from me; I will ask Lord Hanuman to come to your rescue. He will throw away the ghost into its dark world with his long, strong and powerful tail." Krishna looked at her with admiring eyes though filled with tears. Nandu smiled at both of them and looked at his wife. Vakula came to Krishna, hugged him and said, "Nothing like that will happen my dear Kittu, don't worry. Your father will take care of everything. First you should stop crying. Listen to me.... Hey listen, Kittu." Then Nandu said, "Neither police nor the ghost will come to you. Go, take a bath and refresh yourself and come. After dinner I will talk to you clarifying all your doubts. OK!?" Krishna nodded his head and left. Kanishka went to the puja room to invoke Lord Hanuman. Vakula started setting the dining table; Nandu assisting her in the process.

## CYCLE OF FESTIVALS

The festivals we celebrate throughout the year  
Educate and enlighten about our culture in clear  
Habitually bring all our kith and kin very near  
Performed to show human's gratitude and fear  
To Nature's timely support as year after year

Pongal, the festivity of conscientious farmer  
Celebrates yield of his toil with soil as armor  
The Sun, Earth, cattle, monsoon and man further  
Join the master curriculum of God, the Charmer  
Showing gratitude to world's Creator and Father

Ugadi, a fiesta of pristine flora in six superb tastes  
Celebrates the sprouting life afresh in warm chaste  
A blend of bitter, sweet, sour, salt and spicy based  
Tangy flavors in the most strangely garnished paste  
Teach life's grace lucidly and vividly with no haste

Months of multihued Sravana and the succession  
Get festivals of worship with Nature's purification  
Women apply mehendi for decoration and tradition

Worship the Earthen Deity in selective vegetation  
Immerse Him in rivers to diminish contamination

Dussehra, the fest of combat to establish harmony  
Reveals feminine power of affection and gallantry  
Trains men to fight evil, ignorance, pride and apathy  
Besides egoism, lust, spite, violence and brutality  
To set up peace, concord and mutual value in plenty

Diwali, a carnival of dispelling darkness by light  
Victory of good celebrated by lights vividly bright  
Invites goddess of riches in formal ritual and rite  
Luscious sweets and moments shared in delight  
Rockets and crackers alighted on the radiant night

Festivals edify men to worship elements of Nature  
Realize and respect the benefits they manufacture  
They urge the value and respect to many a creature

Bring the Almighty and Nature to identical stature  
Bestow to man's safest survival into infinite future.



## 17. Richi Simon

Richi Simon, M.A. Social Work takes writing as her passion. She has contributed her poems and short stories to several anthologies at national and international platforms. She has authored a self-help book entitled *Doors to Life: From the Basics* and a Fiction book named *From My Eyes Only* available on Kindle. She is UGC-NET JRF (Social Work) and has also cleared UGC-NET (Labour Welfare and Industrial Relations). She is also having several research papers and chapters to her credit. She holds BEC Higher CEFR Level C1. Currently, she is pursuing PhD (Social Work) from ISSW, DAVV, Indore, India. She is also associated as an Assistant Professor at BSSS, Bhopal, India since 2012.

## TRUE FESTIVITY

In the world of known faces,  
 In the world of unknown traces,  
     We live, we grow,  
     We wait, we walk,  
     Through high and low.  
 We keep adding to our stock  
 Stories those said and heard,  
     With lots as manipulated  
 By the intelligent, innocent, fool and nerds.  
     We do contemplate,  
     Experience and learn,  
 Sometimes we even do unlearn,  
     And that's how we evolve,  
 With how much we remain involved.  
 Our thoughts shape our reality,  
     Oh! But I wonder!  
     Do we even ponder?  
 Do we even make efforts to reach the originality?  
 Or simply accept that what is shown?  
     Do we clap when others do?  
 And smile because we are forced to?  
     Or have we truly grown?  
 To question and reason upright?  
     To exercise our true existence?  
     To celebrate life's festivities,  
 And address those ignored sensitivities.  
 To work out our call to fight for the rights,  
 Are we ready to rise for that long awaited difference?



## 18. Subhasree Ray

She is working as an Assistant Professor in the department of Hospital management at Gurunanak Institute of Technology, Kolkata.

### CELEBRATING WOMEN EMPOWERMENT THROUGH FESTIVALS VS REALITY

Festivals are the riveting avenue to associate, commemorate and acclaim every culture and religion in one strand. The positivity enhances and negativity rids off. We live in a multicultural country India where people from several religions, cultures reside and celebrate each festivals which shows a sign of cooperation, togetherness & equity.

In India people worship “SHAKTI” which means “power” which emphasizes the feminine generative power. Maa Durga has several angelic stands. Some of them are Shilapurti, Bramacharini, Chandraghanta, Kushmanda, Skandamata etc. Indian festivals are renowned for their magnificence. The way Maa Durga is doing vadh to asur Mahisasur also encourages women empowerment end of all evil powers that’s why Maa Durga also known as “Mahisasurmardini”. Kanya Puja or Kumari Puja is also done during Navaratri and Durga puja where nine girls are recognized as Devi and they are being worshipped and also people pray to them for good fortune, wealth etc.

Like Maa Durga has ten hands that’s why she is known as “Dasavuja” like that way a women balances her professional and personal life where she plays the role as a daughter, mother, wife ,sister where she is compared to “Dasavuja”.

Diwali is another festival which is known as the festival of lights which also indicates conquest over evil. In Ramayana Sita Mata was kidnapped by Ravan and when Ramchandra rescued her by overcoming all obstacles and defeated Ravan . When he returned Ayodhya by defeating Ravan Diwali the festival of “lights” is celebrated as because evil powers were destroyed over good powers. Sita mata continuously fought for herself during her stay at Lanka and she never agreed with Ravana’s wishes, she was an ideal wife who respected her husband, in-laws even she raised her two sons Luv & Kush single handedly. It signifies women empowerment when Shree Ram left her at vanvas. In Bengal Kali puja is also celebrated during Diwali where Maa Kali destroys evil and gives rise to happiness, peace, wealth. Kali is bellicose. She fights for justice destroys ego and always stands up for justice.

Raja festival which is celebrated in Orissa which celebrates the onset of monsoons and earth’s womanhood begins. So to respect the earth during her menstruation days all agricultural works are suspended so as to make sure that she doesn’t get hurt for those three days. It’s a celebration of womanhood where the main concern is for the young girls who wear new clothes, apply alata in their feet, enjoy folk songs and also women’s are flourished from their house hold work.

Several festivals are celebrated all along the world for empowering women like Chicago Women Funny Festival, Tekla festival, Sappho Women: International Eressos Women’s Festival.

Indian cultures are mainly women centric and they play a pivotal role in any of the festivals and rituals. The women are also considered as Laxmi as because they single handedly manages their families and household activities because these duties are assigned to them as soon as they get married. Even priestess are performing in different pujas like durga puja , kali puja , marriage thus they have break the myth and thus equality is maintained where there is no discrimination.

Now, in reality women are fighting for their rights and freedom everyday may be now women are educated, independent but still there are different barriers which are faced by women like domestic violence, sexual harassment at workplace, molestation, rape is increasing day by day. In India still women are fighting for their rights because equal rights are not provided to them even after they have the ability and suitability.

Dowry system in India which now also prevails where the bridegroom along with the family members are gifted with cash, ornaments, cars, furniture’s. It puts burden on the bride father and other family members. Law has been imposed in it but still it prevails in India. Every time a woman is being dominated as soon as she gets married if her in-laws are not supportive they will force them either to leave their job or they will not allow her to do a job. The women always have to agree as per their husband’s choice. It is a priority as because still in Indian society is regulated by male dominance. Female fetus is being destroyed because a male

child is preferred over a female child. If in-laws prefer male child then she is forced to abort the female fetus. If a girl child is born now also father and other family members get dishearten because they need to invest huge money in their marriage. So revealing child gender prior childbirth is a crime in India.

Domestic violence is also prevailing where a woman is surviving with an abusive relationship mentally, physically by her in-laws, partners etc. Women also getting molested and the victim are suffering from trauma and it is affecting their education personal, professional life.

India is one of the countries where the occurrence of rape is increasing day by day starting from Nirbhaya's to Priyanka Reddy's case and so on there are enormous number of cases which are also not highlighted as per NCRB report 2019 88 number of cases has been reported per day which are alarming drastically. Even some women cannot even do "police complain" along with her family because of the fear of losing dignity in the society.

May be India is developing in the present era but still women have to struggle hard for their dignity and existence as per the very uncertain scenario. They still are fighting for their rights, freedom. Women must be economically strong and educate themselves so that they can be independent but still many women in India are not getting proper education, food, proper rights because there is always a discrimination. In rural areas most of the people are belonging to below poverty line level. They are allowing their daughters to get married just below 18 years. But government has launched some of the schemes for safeguarding women's interest both from central and state governments. Even women are learning how to protect themselves through various techniques of "Self Defense". The condition of women has improved but still lots of betterment must be done in the near future for protecting women against violence and for providing them a better future because women are the universal resource to nurture a child for 9 months. Moreover they bear the intolerance of pain and give birth so they need to be empowered and they need to be protected to bring out the everlasting parity in between the paradigm of our nation and the historic "National Victory".



**19. Tushar Sen**

He is a writer, poet, author and screenwriter. He has authored a book titled Pandora's Box, available on amazon which is a collection of short stories. He started a channel on Instagram where he narrates poems written by him in Hindi/Urdu and it's going quite strong.

**THE QUILL**

The quill that gathered dust  
And dirt, once was used to  
Craft sonnets for his sweetheart,  
Has again been lifted  
Today to compose a  
Lyric or two, a song,  
A paeon, or a prose.  
Held between his shivering  
Fingers the quill shakes, the  
Nib quivers over paper,  
And the ink on it bakes,  
It dives back into the  
Pot, and the poet tries,  
The paper craves for a  
Drop of ink, amazed at  
The gifted poet failing  
To compose, who puts down  
The quill to rest finally,  
After scribbling a line –  
I shall love you eternally.





## 20. Anupama Dalmia

Anupama Dalmia is a multiple award winning blogger, author, serial entrepreneur with three ventures, social influencer, creative writing mentor, choreographer and mother to a 5-year-old. She is a Karamveer Chakra (Silver) awardee which is a Global Civilian Honour presented by International Confederation of NGOs in association with the United Nations. She is a Sheroes Champion where she motivates a community of 15 million women and is also an Amazon approved Influencer. She has been featured among the top bloggers and influencers of India on multiple platforms and her entrepreneurial journey has been covered by coveted media like Official Humans of Hyderabad, The New Indian Express, The Better India and YourStory. She is the only Indian who has been nominated in the category of "Digital Transformation" by Global Digital Women which is a Berlin based International network of female digital pioneers at the Digital Women Leader Awards 2020. Recently, she was conferred with the Sarojini Naidu International Award for Women 2020 for her contribution in the field of writing, social work and entrepreneurship. Her literary works have been published on leading magazines, platforms and newspapers of India. She has also contributed to International Literary Journals and her poems, blogs and fictional stories have been widely appreciated.

### LIGHT IN DARK

The aureate sunbeams percolate through my pores,  
Unlocking my shut eyes as the wonted dawn beckons;  
The quivering and weary lashes grapple and stutter,  
As they endeavour to make way for vision in the dungeon.

It is dim with speckles of light lurking in the shadows,  
My body manoeuvres its way through each curve and lane;  
Comfortable in the darkness, so familiar and intimate,  
The unilluminated surrounding is in kinship with my pain.

Suddenly there is a flash of light, unforeseen and jarring.  
Alluring me into a deceptive, effulgent illusion;  
I scream, I panic, I turn around to escape,  
Taking to my heels, till I fade into oblivion.

I am back to that caliginous space,  
The one that I have embraced and known;  
Dodging the perfidious, dazzling luminosity,  
I am blissful in my desolate, gloomy zone.

The night descends on the horizon, still and mute;  
I slip into slumber and awaken in the realms of fantasy.  
A surge of exuberance proliferates within me,  
Vivifying my soul as I live my glittering reality.

Don't tell me that my truth is a dream,  
Don't tell me that my bright is a fallacy;  
Don't push me into obscure apertures,  
Let me decide my light, my reality.



## 21. Soumyadyuti Goswami

Soumyadyuti Goswami, a student of Industrial Fish and Fisheries from Asutosh College (Kolkata), currently studying in the 5th semester aims for the upliftment of the struggling women and for the recognition of the 3rd gender of the society. Soumyadyuti finds peace in penning down her thoughts in the form of poems and short stories/articles and hence started writing since her secondary classes and her works soon found place in the school and college magazines.

### MY PARVATI IS NOT YOUR DURGA

White clouds floating above the Kash flowers on ground,  
Heralding the arrival of Devi Durga, Birendra Krishna's voice all around.  
An old sculptor pointing to a Durga idol he made,  
To his grandson he said,  
"Durga Puja is where Devi destroys all demons  
So in making of her idol, we take clay from the house of nine women-  
One, who begs with a skull, called 'Kapalika',  
Two, who is a stage dancer and performs 'Nritya',  
Three, who works in laundry; Four, is a dairy maid,  
Fifth should be a gardener and Sixth should cut hair from head,  
Seventh one is a prostitute- quenching the thirst of society's lust,  
Lastly a Brahmin as well as a Shudra are must.

One such Shudra eloped with her lover- the son of a Rajbari.  
She is Parvati, possessing a divine look of elegance in a red saree.  
"She isn't Lord Durga, she is Parvati- filled with flaws.  
How can a girl of lower caste be my daughter-in-law?"  
There spread a melancholic situation and she was crying in fear.  
How can Durga be happy when Parvati was in tear?

The festival has started with roars of happiness down the lane,  
But Parvati was suffering from her menstrual pain.  
"This girl is a burden, bringing tribulations and social calamity.  
A menstruating women is a misfortune in any festivity."  
Crumbled Parvati's mother-in-law in full gear,  
However the anger vanished when her younger son came near.  
"Maa, I returned from Kamakshya Temple and look what I had,  
A cloth drenched in Goddess's menstrual blood to eliminate all bad."

Such a hypocrite society where Goddess are worshipped with devotion  
And women are ill-treated without any emotion.

Finally Dashami, the Rajbari celebrating the festival of the mightiest woman.  
Alas! No one knew there was a living demon.  
The younger son who was planning for an evil intention  
Entered Parvati's room when she was not in attention.  
His cold hands touched her and she fought hard and cried,  
He crushed her soul and thrashed deeper inside.  
While Durga was being covered with vermilion stain,  
Parvati was blood shedded and sobbing in pain.

This is a story of my Parvati-s living in a city  
Where your Durga is worshipped as a deity.  
Where your Durga Puja is celebrated in a grand way,  
My Parvati-s are insecure throughout the day.  
Where my Parvati-s are still suppressed under superstitions  
Where my Parvati-s are still restricted to follow their ambitions  
There, your Durga can't help but cry,  
When she finds how everyday my Parvati-s die.  
Why should I say the festival of Durga Puja resembles Women Empowerment

When, “Let’s ensure a better life for Parvati-s”, is not a commitment.  
My Parvati cannot be your Durga- I know this clear.  
Durga might be safe but you have to fight Parvati dear.

If Durga has to acquire the Trishool, Chakra, Sword to fight  
An educated and self-dependent Parvati can end the plight.



## 22. Srijita Debnath

Srijita Debnath is a college student, pursuing bachelors in Hospital Management. She has a huge interest towards write up and specifically when it comes to festivals, it increases gradually.

### THE FESTIVAL ALONGSIDE OUR SCIENTIFIC IMPLICATION OF COLOURS

#### INTRODUCTION:

According to our collective perception any festival brings out the overjoyed metamorphosis of delight and best cultural amalgamation. On the other hand, if I talk about colours then then colour 'purple' signifies the power of intellect and peace. These are the most commendable medium for worship goddess in connection with most fascinating "Durga Puja Festival" while we do erase our sorrows but invite the pleasure amongst all of us to cherish the global credence of festivity.

The perceptual significance of colour to rejoice our festive glamour.

#### GODDESS DURGA:

According to Puranas the saree which is worn by goddess Durga is fiery in colour. The saree is the symbol of energy to conquer the real cultural reflection. The name Durga is associated with many forms of Shakti Devi. Each of them has a different colour. The number of arms of each of them is also different, even there is also a difference in weapons. So, it is difficult to find the answer to the question of how difficult is the correct complexion of goddess Durga. These specific information are found from some of the very renowned "Books" and resources in all over the globe. Most notably our forthcoming researchers will be absolutely benefitted through the same for searching the best research solution in this elite regard.

The appearance of Devi Durga can be found as 'Yoganidra' to finish the two demons 'Madhu' and 'Kaitava'. Goddess 'Yogamaya' or 'Yoganidra' or 'Vishnumaya's complexion is dark blue. On the other hand, Dwapar era, she appeared as Goddess 'Kaushiki' with dark complexion to help lord Vishnu in the Kangsa prison.

After the slay of 'Mahisasura', when "Gods" were praising Goddess Durga, they said that the beauty of the moon on the face of the goddess. From this it can be inferred that Goddess Durga is glorious. For the oppression of 'Shumbha' and 'Nishumbha', when gods were praising 'Goddess Parvati', in that time Goddess 'Kaushiki' with dark complexion came out of her womb.

According to 'Devibhagabata'. 'Mosibarna Mahaghora Daityanang Bhayavardhini'- which means Goddess Chamunda appeared with black complexion at the time of slay of 'Chandya' and 'Mundya'. According to 'Kalika Purana' and 'Baman Purana', the complexion of Devi Parvati is black. But why is the idol of Durga as bright as gold in the worship of Bengal? This mystery is hidden in traditional provision of making Durga idols. It has been said there that – 'ATASIPUSPAVARNAVANG' which means it is golden like a Atasi flower. Because in Bengal most of the Atasi flowers are golden in colour. But we can also find some blue Atasi flowers in Bengal and according to this we can observe some Durga idols with blue complexion also.

#### GANESHA:

Ganesha was born due to Mata Parvati. According to 'Shiv Maha Purana', the complexion of lord Ganesha is green and red.

According to famous iconology which is 'Nityoshab' and 'Mantramahamanab', we can find the complexion of Ganesha is yellow. But the red complexion of Ganesha is more common. Many pandits have speculated that the colour "Red" may have influenced the primitive society.

#### MAHALAKSHMI:

According to 'Dhyan mantra' Devi Lakshmi owns fair complexion – 'Gaurvarnang Surupanchya'. The symbol of grace and prosperity, Devi Lakshmi has yellow body colour. Goddess Lakshmi is depicted in four body tones. There is deep symbolism attached to the various colours associated with Goddess Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth and prosperity in Hindu religion.

As per scriptures associated with Hinduism, she is described as dark(blue), pink, yellow and white in colours. When a painting or image of Goddess Lakshmi is dark or blue, she is the consort of Vishnu. This is because Vishnu is dark in colour.

When Goddess Lakshmi is described as having yellow colour, she is associated with wealth.

In white colour she represents nature- it is from the universe and all living and non-living appearance and disappearance.

Pink colour represents a compassionate form of Goddess Lakshmi – she is the mother to all living beings.

#### DEVI SARASWATI:

Devi Saraswati is the possessor of white colour. As a result she is the symbol of white or good. According to the fourth chapter of 'Srimad-Bhagavatam', 'Tatra Satbang Nirmalayat'- that is 'Satwa Guna' is very sacred, which is also a symbol of clarity and purity and according to verse 16 of this chapter, 'Satyat Sangjayate Gyanang'- that means the knowledge is gained through 'Satwa Guna'. That is why Goddess Saraswati has been said knowledgeable. Her skin colour is white which symbolizes innocence and holiness.

It is described in 'Saraswati Stotram' which is mentioned in the 'Padma Purana' that -"Shweta Padmasana Devi Shwetpushpashovita" which means Devi Saraswati is adorned with white flowers on the seat of white lotus. According to the 9th volume of 'Devi Bhagavata Purana', Devi Saraswati is originated from the front part of the tongue of Vishnu and she is fair in colour.

#### DEVSENPATI KARTIKEYA:

The child who was born from the ejaculated semen of Lord Shiva in the forest and sucked the breast milk of Kritika and hence he was named as Kartikeya. According to the 'MathshyaPurana' and 'Agni purana', the colour of Kartikeya's skin is same as the colour of heated gold and also according to these Puranas we can find Kartikeya with yellow complexion which has six heads. That's why Kartikeya is also known as 'Saranana'.

#### LORD SHIVA:

The most charismatic white aura owns by Lord Shiva. So that it can be said that the complexion of Lord Shiva is not blue. It is known to all that for protecting the entire world, Mahadeva drank the cosmic poison and for that reason the colour of Lord Shiva's throat had been changed into blue. But the whole body of Mahadeva is not blue. His body has white camphor colour. Shiva is also known as 'Bhoothnath' because he loves to smear the cremation ground ashes into his body. That's why he has this white camphor colour of his body.

#### CONCLUSION:

The life is absolutely incomplete without the gradation of colour. It signifies our communal speed of movements and the most dashing attainments of life where this specific festival creates an immortal impact in our society. As a result, common people not only do search for a number of bright colours to represent but to ensure their modest cultural profanity in style. Therefore, all the specified colours are the undeniable alerts for our glowing society and to increase the charm of pre-scheduled festival in the heart of this victorious globe respectively.



### 23. Tamosiya Das

Tamosiya Das is a college student, pursuing from Bachelor's in Hospital Management and now in third year. Her hobby is singing which always makes her happy.

#### FESTIVAL AND ITS CELEBRATED LUMINOSITY FOR GRAND SOCIAL GLORY

Introduction: The word "Festival" is an appeal to ensure our comprehensive joviality not only to enrich our society but to culminate our both religion and culture. It has a great significance of jointness which fulfills a specific purpose and to for even proceeding of life to the God and Goddess. The most notably festival sparks our belonging and the social appraisal which are the most exquisite alarm of cooperative cohesiveness at all. It is undoubtedly an independent entertainment which influences our community for constructing the pleasure but destructing the sorrow. Therefore this most glittering "Durga Puja" festival is creating our national charm with demand which is absolutely priceless in nature that is why this particular festival is really enjoyable to participate and immeasurable to be fascinated forever.

The wide-ranging consequence of "NAVRATRI" which ignites the collective zeal of festivity:

First perspective: It is indeed really very purpose to participate in the elite festival of "Durga Puja" where we are in a position to culminate best woman empowerments as per strength and unbitten cultural synthesis as a result each woman can participate in this festivity not only to hold their existing position but to enhance their fascinating communal harmony.

Second perspective: This prospective signifies the unending power of each one of us to proceed for our prescheduled destinies which are absolutely priceless to realize and to measure the present social standing constituency.

Third perspective: We are confident enough to empower each one of us in connection with exclusive reception of people who are from different class and various provinces of this global. Now the consideration is to get involved as per our respective responsibility convert this exemplary "Durga Puja" festival to the high-end pathway of social upbringing along with our multifarious involvement with each and other. It causes our unstoppable bonding and outstanding relational canvas which denote the florid significance of this special festival in a very comprehensive dimension of tomorrow.

Fourth perspective: Festival means the great celebration with our iconic splendors including lord Durga and her most versatile children. Most importantly this revered festival brings the attention amongst all the Hindus and about worship of Goddess Durga who gives us a ageless spirit and the exclusive energy to cherish the globe. It is indeed an outstanding pathway for all of us to hold the existing self-confidence along with the hope to survive in this most elevating society with prosperity. It is very true that goddess Durga has fought with most strenuous Mahishasura and defeated him according to our best histrionic statistic through her indomitable spirit and outstanding state of mind which has been recognize as one of the best victories in all over the globe in style. Moreover this worship of lord Durga entirely stimulate all of us not only to hold our combative existence of lives but it helps to create our personalities for upbringing ourselves and to drive according to our all the situational hazards which we do face at every now and then.

Fifth perspective: It is a major festival for common people of every individual class on the other hand it is a religious festival in connection with celebration of various traditional culture and norms that is why we are bound to do our worship just to enjoy "Saptami", "Ashtami", "Nabami" and "Dashami" at the same point of time in an equal importance of great devotion and festive mind without any second thought.

Sixth perspective: This festivity bring out unconditional satisfaction along with the appeal of assurance the victory of lead our present day scenario along with different cast, religion and people of different culture respectively. It reflex out versatile quality and talents to explore along with the grand ceremony at difference pandal along with the uncontrollable emotion and unconditional satisfaction forever. As a reflection in some parts of the country idols of the Goddess are immersed in water where as some parts of these nations do carry the traditional rituals for public celebrations indeed.

Seventh perspective: "Durga Puja" in Kolkata is not only a grand celebration but it is a pathway for best societal fusion at all. It is basically celebrated for ten days right from the day with execution to exhibition in successful proceeding moreover according to our Hindu Mythology Goddess Durga immerged all the all the

energy and she has proved global feminine power to destroy all the evil situation of both culture and society most importantly lord is our radiant icon of sufficiency and the betterment of uncertainty. That is why Durga and her most ambitious children are highly celebrated in Kolkata during the festival with the number of ceremony where we can have graceful basement of togetherness and fascinating movements of both mental and physical presence through our overwhelming inventive attitudes and unconditional expectations to alive in this regimented universe.

Eighth perspective: Light and decoration are really purposeful for this industrious festival in Kolkata. Most importantly people are overjoyed not only to their memorable visit of different pandal but they are completely cherished through the versatility of lighting as well. It signifies their fresh mind, broad heart, unlimited charm and the desire to relish this festival with the most imperative existence of light. This is why “The city of joy” Kolkata reflects an awesome image of hospitality along with the unforgettable reception of people who are undoubtedly ambitious in a successful manner.

Ninth perspective: According to the present day social cannon we do explore our multi versatile themes of pandals and it signifies different social movements through a number of happenings which occurs in our daily lives at every now and then. On the other hand it is a very special attraction because of unending cultural delight. So that most of the pandals do win panty of recognitions and accolades for the attractive articulations and it is drawing their mute attention at the end of the day. It is very true that visitors do take a conducted tour as well by West Bengal tourism to visit some of the most famous pandals during “Durga Puja” from the end of their ardent interest.

Conclusion: “Durga Puja” has already been celebrated as harvest festival which signifies lord Devi Durga’s unconditional love and care for the entire world on the other hand nine different plans are included for communal peace and exemplary traditional benchmark which is mainly within “Navpatrika” where Durga is honored as an exclusive form of nature where she undoubtedly devotes for agriculture therefore the concept of festivity along with the superiority of different rituals shall have to be admitted by the common people not only to enlighten the climax of war but they shall have to bring out the unforgettable global with bottomless pleasure and ageless cultural observance to be entirely successful.



## 24. Rituparna Sen

Rituparna Sen is a college student, pursuing bachelor's in Hospital Management. Literature brings life into her words scattered in a lifeless sheet and turns them into a living being. This brings huge interest towards write ups.

### THE INHABITABLE ANALYSIS BETWEEN MY PROGINATOR (Mother) AND LEGEND LORD DURGA

#### INTRODUCTION:

Global heritage and cultural traditions are expressed through festivals, thus it plays a vital part to add structure in our routine life and deliver us inspiration to remember moments of enjoyment with our close ones , loved ones and families. Festivals pass knowledge and traditions onto the next generations. From an early age of this world of ..... billion people a large population belief upon God at some point of their life journey, there are numerous religions across the globe and it's followers, whereas Atheists are a group of individuals who denies to follow any religious boundary. Atheism is specifically the position that there are no deities. Then the questions arise if deities are manmade perception, then WHO IS GOD? , how does he/she looks like? , what is the gender of GOD? God, is the power which can hold us together. A ray of hope, a alarm against bad. God is a power which can't be measured or divided. It's a unite hope, belief, moral, wisdom and peace.

There are mainly three types of cultural festivals which are National, religious and seasonal.

**NATIONAL FESTIVALS:** These are the festivals to celebrate nations history, birthday of national heroes who sacrificed their life for nation's freedom fighting, founding day of a nation etc. These festivals helps to us come to together as citizens of the country, with many nations celebrated through public holiday which concrete our patriotic spirit.

**RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS:** Religious festivals help us to teach principles and ethics to our next generations and connect with our family members. All of these festivals share a similar message for love, tolerance and understanding. On these occasions we express our gratitude to God.

**SEASONAL FESTIVALS:** Seasonal festivals shows a man's responsibility towards nature. Directly or indirectly relation to food supply makes these festivals more important. Human beings care about the nature and embrace beneficence before obtaining any of its gifts.

#### Exclusive Importance Of Festivals

Festivals keeps attached each other in society. A sense of unity forms when we are together as a family, friends, and society. This unity helps us to fight against obstacles in life. The family is connected through festivals on its most precious and joyful time. That's why I think festivals are important in our life.

We all are together, celebrating festivals with each other no matter the cast, color, poor or rich so it's helps to increase the social connectivity. We all work and live separately, we are maybe strangers to each other, but on festivals, we pray and wish everyone. A believer believes in unity, festivals, and the importance of relationships in life.

#### 1. Festivals harmonizes our life with nature

All festivals are related with nature and culture. In India Navratri, Dushera, Diwali, Holi, Lohri, Pongal, Karwa Chauth, Raksha Bandhan, and Shivratri, etc. all these festivals have religious importance. All are special occasions based on SATYUG (The ERA of truth on Earth), DWAPARYUG, TERTA YUG, etc. mythical tales and real incidents. Vastly explained in PURANAS AND VEDAS. Currently, we are living in KALYUG but we strongly believes our culture of festivals.

The day when God killed the devils had a significance of auspiciousness. Such as RAVAN, HIRNAKASHYAP, KANS, KHARDUSHAN, etc. are killed by God in form of special avatar on earth to protect people from victimization and tyranny. Now in Kalyug or previous era, it does not matter how different we are in color, salary, occupation, job, position, and money we are still taking oxygen from trees and plants. We all need food and water to live and everything around us is a part of God.



Technically, we need to identify good and bad in every kind of possible instances in life. We humans can't live without plants, trees, water, animals, etc. on the earth. Even this world is impossible without humans and other natural parts. When all part of nature connects with each other for good cause then it creates harmony in the society. And that's why we all connect on festivals with each other to remember that God is here and we need to follow good natural practices. So for the development of Nature (humans, animals, water, air, etc.) and harmony between people in society, it's important to celebrate festivals. But the problem is humans are selfish and lost their common sense as an example of cutting trees, polluting water and air, breaking down mountains for industries and doing thousands of devil practices online and offline.

We need to remember that there are devils in each ERA. Today's devils use Facebook, Whatsapp and they wear Jeans and Tops, they become politicians later then rule people, they create social tension in the society, today's devil's teeth size is small and laughing style is changed. Today's devils look great in person and have fake popularity around the world. But that's why each day in morning and evening numerous number of people do the prayer, worship in Temples, Masjeed, Gurdwara in our own style and comfort to GOD that kill the devils and protect and save our lives. And we do this more on special days and these days are festivals. To celebrate to pray together to kill the devils and protect nature from unnatural practices.

It's important to celebrate and even make Dushera, Holi, Navratri etc. holy festivals more viral on the Internet and offline so it holds the cultural traditions, heritage and spread more love than hate. That's why it's important to celebrate festivals so that the devils, monsters, and bad people in the society or inside us gets an education, fear, and a sense of God. It's important to remember that God is near and festivals are the days in which we connect with God and nature more deeply than any other day.

## 2. Festivals Spread Brotherhood and faith

Festivals spread brotherhood and faith in between humans. People at festivals are connected with God and lessons. Connection with God creates a positive attitude in their behavior towards other people. And positive behaviors towards everyone no matter about cast, religion, colors and occupation and sense of respect for everyone it spreads brotherhood, love, and faith in the society. That's why festivals are important to celebrate. It's because festivals are the oxygen of society and the life of society, brotherhood and faith are dependent on how much we care about each other. When everyone follows everyone's respective duties and cares about the other people and the whole part of this nature then the social development begins. Festivals are a chance to whole people of the country and world to work and connect for a cause. So that it spread brotherhood, faith, love, sense of respect, and duty in between people. That's why festivals are important occasions that have to be celebrated peacefully and without destroying others' emotions and beliefs.

## 3. Festivals speed up the economic development

People buy more goods and services during festivals. It's because they get a discount on luxury items and various attractive schemes on products and services from sellers. Government and private employees get special bonuses, gifts, and holidays to celebrate festivals with family. Everyone arranges and spend money on festivals. That increase banking and cash transactions. More items sold mean more tax collection for the government. More people get money and it increases more investment later. We can explain festival importance in many points because of its wider reach around the world. All religion has their own method and festivals. And all are respectable. That's how festivals work in a society like glue and why it's important to celebrate festivals. If we care and have the love for humanity and people more than their religion and cast in-differences then we're a great human and society, every country needs people like us. Our work and practices describe us more than our profile and status in the society.

Other than above points these are also some corollary of the importance of festivals, which are:

- Keeps us closer to our religion and tradition.
- Carrying the message of the past generations to the present and future.
- We get to know about different religions
- Helps to preserve our culture and heritage
- Gives a unique opportunity to gather and spend time with family, friends and community
- Stress relieving from a hectic work season
- Provides us a time to break out from normal routine and have a colorful time
- Gathering of family members and friends
- Breaks the monotony of life

- Since a lot of our festivals involve special offerings being prepared and offered to poor, it also brings happiness for them
- The cultural exchange of views and celebrations
- Build social relations and social communication which leads to unity among the people

### Bengal Heritage and Glorification of Goddess Durga

In Indian culture there are 330 millions of gods and goddess mentioned in ancient mythological tales and epics. The trio deities or Trimurti Bramha, Vishnu and Shiva are the ancient one responsible for creation, maintenance and destruction respectively among believers. Then comes Devi Maa Durga, a form of Parvati devi, wife of Lord Shiva. The woman deity represents woman empowerment, as of the mythical tales she was created by the Trimurti to stop an evil demon (Mahisasura) who was cursed to be dead from hand of an woman. Afterward there were some mentioning in the period of Ramayana that Lord Rama glorified Goddess Durga in the time of early winter before going in to the battle with King Ravana .In Believers heart she is an universal mother.

Festivals are a vibrant part of Bengali culture we wait the whole year for the Durga Puja festival. In early winter it starts with “MAHALAYA” , a day for glorification of Devi Maa Durga happens almost in every house in bengal at the time of 6o'clock in the morning, in earlier days when any kind of modern media devices were not available people used to listen on Radio ,“mahishasurmardini”, a programme streamed at Akashvani radio channel hosted by famous Radio broadcaster Birendra Kishor Bhadra. Now a days, it's hosted by almost every bengali television network and other broadcast media but most of the vintage people stick towards the retro style radio version. The centre of bengali cultural hub Kolkata, prettify it's streets and Mandaps in colourful lightings and decorations. Streets get full of people of the city as well as outside of the city. Kolkata Police plays a vital role in this time to keep the traffic run smooth.

### The Noteable Comparison In Between “Maa” & “Maa Durga”

Throughout the year we imagine our own mother as a living representation of Lord Durga. The respect for our mother not only inspire us in the long run of our life but also her words helps us to establish and flourish in one's personal life . Maa Durga has embraced my mother with unbeaten compromise, blind sacrifice, indispensable love, unconditional care, immortal devotion, undying emotion, prompt initiative, endless feeling and affection, noteworthy blessings and immense strength. As goddess Durga has ten hands, each hand holds one weapon which has a particular significance on it's own and those qualities are perfectly comparable with one's mother.

1. Trishula/Trident for Inner wisdom : This weapon was gifted by Lord Shiva. This weapon signifies three qualities of human life Tamas (Inactivity), Rajas (Desire), Sattva (purity). As the trident can pierce anything to death, it represents a mother's inner wisdom which she teaches to her children which is necessary to conquer these three qualities and emerge victorious in life.
2. Sudarshan Chakra for Centre of creation : It was a gift from Lord Vishnu. Revolving around Goddess Durga's hands, it shows that a mother is the centre of creation of her family and all other individuals revolves around her.
3. Vajra/thunderbolt for Firm Spirit : It was gifted by Lord Indra. This weapon symbolizes firmness of spirit. A Mother helps to shatter the problems encountered in life without losing confidence. She empowers her child with unshaken confidence and will.
4. Sword/Kharga for Intelligence : It was gifted By Lord Ganesha. Sword marks the qualities of sharp personality and intellectual being which a mother injects in her child to overcome their negativity and to be adaptive in any negative situation.
5. Spear/Javelin for Auspicious power & Purity: While a spear symbolizes auspiciousness, this gift of Lord Agni (Fire) also represents pure, fiery power. A mother's exclusive purpose to teach her child, the quality of knowing what is wrong and what is right and act accordingly. Only a mother's purity and her boldness can give birth this kind of wisdom to anyone's life.
6. Axe/parashu for Bold and Fearless practicability : Maa Durga received it from Lord Vishwakarma. It signifies a mother's fearlessness of consequences when fighting for her child.

7. Bow and Arrow for incomparable energy: It was a gift from Lord Vayu and Surya. It signifies the incomparable energy a mother puts to maintain her family. Her numerous sacrifices and compromises can't be explain through words. She manages ten works with ten hands and still never gets tired up.

8. Lotus for Knowledge & spiritual consciousness : It was gifted by Lord Bramha. It stands for awakening of spiritual consciousness in a soul. A Divine Mother will help her child to understand the transience of life and seek the ultimate truth.

9. Conch for positivity: This weapon was gifted by Lord Varuna. It represents a primordial Sound "Om" From which entire creation was emerged. It sweeps away all the negativity, just like our mother her existence is an eternal sound which fills us with positivity.

10. Snake for Uprising/Uplifting: It was a gift from Lord Shiva which Indicates the need of a mother's blessings in life for upward movement from the lower state of consciousness to the higher state of existence.

#### Conclusion:

Mother's are the living replica of god and this indicates god's sovereignty in our lives, through her. Like god a mother creates a new life a soul. Believing motherhood is believing God . Rejoicing her endless contributions in our life is spiritual. Embracing her presence is like celebration. I see Maa Durga in my own mother. And this makes Durga puja is so special. Devi Durga protects the whole universe from bad and evils, and my mother protects my own little universe like a deity with ten hands. Festival is the ultimate destination to refresh our minds and the spark of our immortal souls and on the other hand, it increases our human satisfaction along with the unending pleasure to ensure the far-reaching magnificence to proceed with warm illustrations of success. Our heritage, culture and traditions are expressed through festivals. They serve a medium to rejoice, and spread happiness socially and strengthen our sense of community. The wisdom of literature for this specific writing will help to expand the horizons of its readers.



## 25. Sukanya Roy

By profession, she is a researcher in the area of ‘Consumer Behaviour’ where she learned and applied different qualitative techniques. Along with her research work she devoted time to academic pursuits where she taught courses like Business Administration. In her academic journey, she has received many awards. Currently, she is working at the Indian School of Business, Mohali in the Marketing realm. Apart from this, she is a creative writer and an avid reader. Her love for animals drove to found a home for stray animals named “Home for Stray Animals” which is a Non-Profit Organisation.

### AUNT’S DIARY

Aunt Aarya lived in a far-flung small village called Amartola. She was a wise woman, full of energy. As ill-luck would have it, she became a widow in the early years of her marriage. She endured her suffering and sailed through her life. Forgetting her own sorrow, her great resolve was to bring up her two sons, Arup and Daivik, and somehow to give them the best of education she could afford.

Her two sons completed their schooling with good scores. There was no college in the village for their higher education. So, Aarya decided to enroll both of her children in Residency College at Shirampur City from where they completed their college education. Like a good mother, she made tremendous sacrifices for them. Aarya’s niece Malavika when a child spent many days with her in the village and enjoyed the time with her children. To Malavika, the village was a paradise. Aarya loved her life in the village and the villagers. She believed that God exists among the simple folk who love and nurture the nature. In those days technology had not yet made any advance. People then were blessed that they spent their childhood days in the lap of nature. Life was simple and childhood was full of moments of joy and fun. Aarya was so happy seeing Malavika and her two sons playing together. She forgot all her sorrows and her troubles. When she was felt lonely, she used to look at the photographs in the album. But times change and with this the people. That is the way of the world. And so it happened with Arup and Daivik with the passage of time. They got married and settled in far away towns and became busy in their professional life. As the years rolled away, they forget their roots in her mother’s village and made excuses to visit their mother in the village. Time and circumstances mould the nature of a person, she thought. “Time is a winged bird. It flies away so quickly. It has written wrinkles on my brow. I’m so old now,” Aarya said to herself, seeing herself in the mirror. Then came that one freezing night in winter which Malavika could never forget. Aarya was lying on her deathbed. Malavika was helpless and standing in one corner of the room, seeing Aarya’s pale and haggard face and sunken eyes. For Malavika it was a sullen winter night which became more sullen by the sweet-nothings talk of relations which gave rise to questions in her mind. Why one sudden day a dying person becomes important? was the question which rocked her mind. In her life and in her old age when Aarya was alone in her village home, no one relative or even her sons Arup and Daivik came. Now they were standing in the room where their mother, Aarya, was lying on her deathbed. Seeing the put-on feelings, Malavika was dismayed. Such is the nature of the world. She thought.

Malavika saw the shaky hands of Aarya pointing towards her. Malavika guessed Aarya wished to tell her something. When Malavika put her ears close to her face, Aarya’s shaky hand pointed towards something. She asked Aarya what she needed. Aarya whispered something in Malavika’s ears and asked for water which she gave her. Though the room was full of many people, all of them were busy talking of their own worldly affairs. Aarya took a sip of water. Then she breathed her last. Malavika saw Arup and Daivik touching their mother’s feet, crying: “Maa ! tumi kano chele chole gele” (Maa ! why have you left us so early ?) Hearing their words, a relative consoled them and said to them, “Do not cry. The dead body has to be carried to the Ganga Ghat and is to be cremated.” Arup and Daivik bade their farewell to their departed mother and shouldered their mother’s body with others to the Ganga Ghat, weeping. Malavika was thinking that they never displayed such expressions of love when Aarya was living alone in the village, longing for her sons, daughter-in-laws and their children to come to her when she was alive. But they never came. Aarya endured the hidden pain in her heart. But outwardly she was ever smiling among the villagers who thought of her as a pious presence among them. When all the funeral ceremonies were over, all relations left the village. Malavika sat alone in the room in which Aarya had died. There was an intense kinship between the two. After some time, Malavika’s eyes hovered towards an old wooden box. Its lid was open. Malavika looked into the box. It contained Aarya’s belongings. It contained her well-saved bridal saree, album of her marriage with her dear departed, one small plate, and a small spoon that Aarya had kept with love with which she used to feed her little sons. Seeing the mother’s love, Malavika’s eyes were filled with tears. Aarya treasured her feelings and memories in the diary. On the first page of the diary, Aarya recalled her marriage and the joys she had shared with her husband and wrote: "After you left, I am so much engrossed in the care of children. How the time flies. Without realizing the passage of days, I am now old age and my hair had turned grey. Now my body is weak and my health has

gone down. I am surrounded by loneliness. I had thought that when my sons grow up, they would share the responsibilities with me, but I was wrong. After completing their studies, Arup and Daivik forgot their mother as well as their motherland. I have to bear it all alone in your absence.”

On another page of the diary, Aarya recorded: “One evening Arup came to me and that told me that he wanted to get married and he had chosen a girl. They both were working together in the same office. Hearing his decision, my heart was happy. But after marriage, my son was not mine. He lives in his own world with his wife and his son. Before marriage, he used to visit me during Durga Puja or on the occasion of some other festival but after marriage, he stopped coming during Durga Puja. Who can look into the heart of a mother? Even today I am waiting for my son during the Durga Puja.” On another page of the diary, she lamented: “Even Daivik has behaved the same way. Relationship change. He forgot his mother. My yearnings are not answered by them. I always think of you, who left me long ago.” Still on another page of her diary, she wrote what had happened when she was still full of life: “Malavika remembers her Aunt. Till today Malavika celebrates Nabami and Dashmi Puja with me. In this year’s Puja, Malavika made a surprise visit. She knew that I love the sea beaches, but I have never been at a sea beach. So Malavika planned a Jagannath trip. In the web of family and responsibility, I somehow forgot my likes and dislikes. After a long time, I realized that I love sea beaches. I had read many things about sea in my schoolbooks, but today I saw the sea and the sea beach for the first time. Incredible view. On the sea beach, I spent hours with Malavika. There was music in the sound of sea waves lapping the shore. When the waves touched lapped my feet, it seemed that the waves were playing with me. The sand under my feet slipped, but I felt that you were embracing me and so I did not fall into the water. The view of the sea in the evening was amazing. The big glowing sun slowly sinking into the sea is a scene to behold. I had always been thinking of my family only, but I think there is a beautiful world beyond that. Am I wrong?

On another page of the diary, she had penned: “The visit to Jagannath changed my life and gave it a new direction. Once I came to home, I decided to fulfil my childhood dream. To learn tailoring. I went to the Stitching Training Institute in the village which was opened by the Government to empower the rural women. I do not know how the day passed in the Training Centre. Everyday was a new day for me, to learn and to explore many things during my training periods. I made new friends, listened to their tales of tribulations. Then I realized that my problem was nothing as compared to their problems but they led their life happily with positive attitude. Five months passed and I finished my training and earned the certificate. During my training days, I observed that there was a lack of space in the Training Institute. There were more women keen to learn tailoring, but the space was less. I was astonished to see their zeal to acquire the new skill. There was shortage of sewing machines as well. So I decided to donate my farmland which was adjacent to the Training Institute. I went to the Gram Panchayat Office and requested the Pradhan to accept my offer but not to tell anyone, even to my sons regarding the donation. Donation is a virtuous work and I do not want any sort of announcement of it. Hearing this, the Pradhan became happy and accepted my proposal.”

The last entry in the diary ran: “After a few months, I visited my old school, the Training Institute. After seeing the good work that was going on in the Institute, I felt peace in my heart. A new large hall was built on that donated land and women were learning the craft. My small farmland has been put to good use for the welfare of the villagers who have been part of my life. Even if I die today, I felt that my existence has made a difference in the lives of the people.” That was the last page of the diary.

Late in the evening Malavika saw that Arup carried a big framed photo of his mother. He placed it on the mantle-piece and put a sandalwood garland on it and bowed before it. Malavika could not appreciate this pose.



## 26. Ashwini Unnikrishnan Nambiar

Ashwini's work is mainly focused on children and women. Her stories are not just for entertainment but it is an attempt to inculcate good values and morals in the young minds. She also wants to bring focus on the issues concerned with women empowerment through her writings. She has been the recipient of following prestigious awards -Indian Women Achievers Awards 2020 by Asian Literary Society, Literoma Nari Samman 2020, Literoma Author Achiever Award 2020.

### ATONEMENT

Once upon a time in the era of Mahabharata, the great maharishi Vyasa sat meditating on the banks of river Ganga. And there stood the queen of Hastinapur, Maharani Satyawati, with folded hands coaxing him to have niyoga with the widows of her late son so as to get the heir for the throne of Hastinapur. And today yet again, on the very banks of this holy river, a woman is compelling a man to help her bear a child. With the holy Ganga being sole witness to it the man although reluctant initially, gives in for her surreal request. But niyoga, a pious act of dharma, is beyond the reach of common man. The young man on realizing this is overwhelmed with guilt for he knows he has committed a sin. Vyasa being a great sage was above all the worldly desires while he is an ordinary man helpless in the clutches of lust and desires. With his conscious castigating him, he wonders how he could even think of comparing himself with the great maharishi! Unable to bear the guilt, he surrenders himself to Maa Ganga who readily embraces him into her strong waves.

Years later, a moribund patient is lying in an ashram in Haridwar. The patient is here to seek solace in Maa Ganga. Sure enough, in the twilight of life, remorse and atonement are the only things in one's mind. She too is here regretting all the sins done out of greed and jealousy, the unjust and barbaric act done on others. A powerful and dominant personality all her life, she lay helpless today awaiting her end. But time seems to have frozen making her sufferings and wait eternal. Reduced to a lifeless skeleton and draped in a piece of cotton cloth, her horrifying sunken eyes are desperately waiting for someone. She seems to be forcibly holding back her soul into her almost dead frame. It has been a month since she ate anything or spoke to anyone. The only word she utters at times is 'Mahi'.

Meanwhile in Mumbai, after returning home from a weeklong industrial tour with the students, Mahi picks up the mail. Amongst the bunch she finds a letter. She is both surprised and shocked to see the sender's name. She opens the letter. "I wish to see you for the last time. It's my dying wish to confess my sins and to beg you to forgive me for all those sufferings that I gave you." Mahi is unable to read any further. Tears, blurring her vision, drop down her cheeks messing up the writing in the letter. This was the first and probably the last letter from her mom or to be more precise, her step mom, ammaji. Mahi has not been to her maternal home even once in the last 16 years. She had long forgotten her life before marriage. But this letter brought back all the horrific memories of the past. She was always 'the ill-fated child' for her father. She has no memories of her mother as she had died while giving her birth and father held Mahi responsible for it. He brought himself a new wife who failed to be her mother. They were the zamindars, the landlord, and that too the most affluent ones in the whole of Dehradun. But Mahi's status in that ancestral Haveli (mansion) always remained much below that of Shanti didi, the house maid. She tries hard but cannot remember a single instance when any of her parents had spoken kind words to her. Thanks to her maternal uncle's occasional visits, she could go to school and get formal education. He was the only one who doted on her but well aware of his wife Jaya's nature could not take her to his home. Jaya's own sister's now orphaned son Veer was staying with them and he had seen him enduring humility every now and then. But alas! He was under great misconception because Mahi's condition couldn't have been worse anywhere. She remembers struggling to make chapattis in her kindergarten days itself. That was when her step mother was pregnant for the first time. Due to some medical complications she was on bed rest and would yell at her from the bed every now and then. She would throw at her whatever she could get her hands on. Once it was the metallic alarm clock which hit Mahi on the head and left her bleeding profusely. None of the maids or servants ever dared to intervene. The 6-year-old somehow on her own managed to tie a towel on her head, not because she knew that a wound needs to be bandaged but because ammaji was yelling on top of her voice to stop that blood from dropping down on the floor. Worst part was that she was made to clean the floor too. The mark, still visible just above her left eyebrow, is a grim reminder to that horrific incident. But you reap as you sow is indeed true. Ammaji delivered a still baby. And then it repeated many more times. Every time it was either a miscarriage or a stillborn. Her frustration every time unleashed more severe violence on Mahi. At that tender age she was not yet familiar with the words like own or step. It was Veer who sometimes used to come along with uncle had told her that ammaji was not her real mom. Veer was fortunate to have his parents around till he was 8, until that fateful trip to Mussoorie. They were on their way back from their weekend stay at the farmhouse when his

father lost control of the car and the car after hitting a tree fell into a deep ditch. Veer who was leaning out of the window was thrown out due to the impact of the collision. He was left unscathed but both his parents were charred to death along with the car. Mahi felt some connection with Veer and every time he came, he made her laugh and giggle telling her about his pranks on his vicious aunt. Mahi liked his company very much but sadly this friendship could not last long, for soon he stopped accompanying uncle to their house. She overheard someone saying that Veer had run away from home due to his aunt's atrocities.

It was only after she began going to school that she came to know how mothers actually are. She saw other kids hugging, playing and annoying their moms and to her absolute surprise the mothers would never ever hurt them. How she wished her mom to be alive and in fact had created an image of her in her mind. Her mom was a loving angel like figure with whom she shared everything. She began living an imaginary happy life with her dead mother while her condition at home was going from bad to worse. For anything wrong that happened at the house, Mahi was blamed outright. When their Jersey cow 'Bindiya' died delivering her calf, the onus was put on Mahi. She was kept locked in her room the entire day to ward off any further omen. By then, she had actually begun to believe herself to be a bad omen and that she really was the cause of her mother's death. Thinking back the memory lane, Mahi now feels as if it was her past birth or simply a bad dream because it all seems too horrific to be true. She still couldn't understand ammaji's hatred towards her but what hurts her the most is her own father's support to ammaji in the atrocities. He would often remain out on his job and would come home only once in six months or so. But his homecoming was no happy occasion for her as it usually is for kids who wait eagerly for their father's arrival. Kids generally would jump all over their father when he would return after a long trip with gifts in his hands and love in his eyes. As for Mahi, she would run and hide in a corner on the terrace. Ammaji always had a list of complaints ready before his arrival. It could be anything like "she has become characterless, she is looking at men from the window or she is jealous of me and tried to kill me, or she tried to poison me" absolutely anything that could come to her wicked mind. Surprisingly he believed it all. Or maybe even though knowing that these were the false allegations he actually looked for an excuse to punish her. Her father's homecoming day was always a nightmare for her but the incident which left her completely shattered was the one on her 11th birthday. It coincided with father's homecoming after a very long gap and for the first time she dared to hope that he might bring her a surprise gift this time. But as soon as she heard the car approaching she ran upstairs on the terrace and sat in a corner, hiding. "Maaheee....." a strong shout and next moment Mahi was standing near him literally trembling. Her frail body was struggling hard to stand straight on her feet. Running away was of no use because that meant more slaps and blows. With her heart beat getting louder every second, her skinny chest seemed unable to hold her trembling heart as the 6 feet huge figure stood towering over her. That day it was child abuse and domestic violence at its worst. But still no one even raised an eyebrow. The servants saw it all but as usual gave a blind eye. The neighbours too knew it well but it was a general thinking back in those days that 'It's their family matter and we must not interfere' or even worse that 'It's their child and they have every right to do whatever they want to do with her.'

He was staring at her with anger while her step mom kept adding fuel to fire. He gave her slaps, blows and kicks with full force. The frail physique kept falling on the floor with a heart breaking bawling. Lastly, he mercilessly pulled her high with hair and after rotating her in the air, he literally threw her like a ball. The unconscious Mahi was later on moved to her room by Shanti didi. She can still feel the helplessness, the loneliness and the unwantedness she felt in that dark room of hers which had only a dim light and no fan or window. She remembers waking up after very long, maybe a day or so. She was terribly hungry and feeling weak. Her entire body was bruised and aching. Crawling slowly on all the four limbs, she somehow managed to reach the kitchen. Ammaji was in there, serving food to father. Pouring a big spoonful of ghee in his plate, she gave Mahi a scornful look and said "oh, maharani! Welcome! Had a very good rest no? Two slaps and you need two days to come out of your room?" Then turning to her father, who all this while was too busy enjoying his meal, she said "she is becoming too lazy and dramatic nowadays. I'm telling you, we need to pull her strings tight." To which her father nodded in agreement. He was quiet and without bothering to even look at Mahi, he said "give her something, she must be hungry." His words felt like a drop of nectar going down her throat. Her plate had always been the same since she remembers. A white paint coated metal plate normally used for pets at homes. And a similar mug to accompany it. Mahi patiently watched as ammaji poured dal over rice and then pushed the plate towards her. This was the way she was served always but this time ammaji pushed it so hard that the plate overturned upon hitting the wall spilling the food on the floor. Poor Mahi, without wasting a second started gulping the morsels hurriedly from the floor, for dignity was a luxury much beyond her reach. But now Mahi knows very well that dignity is not a luxury but a necessity, a basic human right. Today, she is a professor in a reputed college with a dotting husband and a teenage daughter to dote on. Post marriage, she never visited her maternal home. Not even for her delivery as her step mom was expecting a baby herself. And not even for her father's funeral. Of course it was because she was not informed on time

deliberately, may be to avoid any property related issues. And later on, there were no efforts from either side to reach out to each other. The occasional phone calls too seized gradually. Meanwhile Mahi completed her studies and groomed into a confident woman. She has in fact never mentioned her maternal home to Isha, her only daughter. But now, after 16 years she decides to visit her ailing step mom. Isha is very excited to visit granny's house for the first time. Maheshji is glad to take a break from his hectic work schedule. Mahi has never uttered a word about her past ordeal to them. It's not that she wants to hide it from them but she simply doesn't want them to be upset over something which is history now.

It's Isha's longest train journey so far, from Panvel to Haridwar. Mahi watches affectionately as the father and daughter duo have fun throughout the journey. 'Maheshji is such a noble soul, a thorough gentleman! It would be a sin to keep him in dark regarding any matter whatsoever' Mahi thought. But every time she gathered courage to tell him the truth she shivered by the thought of upsetting and hurting him. Pretending to be reading the book she is lost in her thoughts. Maheshji whispers something into Isha's ears and she bursts into laughter. Pointing at her book, 'Woman With A Secret', she giggles and asks "dad says a woman can hold not one but an ocean of secrets. Is that true mom?" Mahi, as if caught red handed, keeps staring at them bluntly. Maheshji smiles and pressing Mahi's hand replies "All but not your mom. She is an innocent fairy princess you see!" And he gets down to shuffling the cards with Isha. Mahi knows it very well that she never was a princess but yes she did dream of a prince who would one day free her from the clutches of her step mom. She never thought herself to be beautiful but people did say that she was a copy of her mom. She had seen her mom's photo in the store room and she indeed was a beauty. Mahi never had the luxury of face powder, cream or new clothes like her friends. All she used to get was the torn and worn out hand-me-downs of her step mom. A broken piece of mirror and an old broken toothed comb was all that comprised of her makeup tools inside a shoe box. And yes, it also had an imported soap that one of her friends had given her supposedly brought by her father from Dubai. She never found an occasion grand enough to use it. When she was in high school, her father's health began to deteriorate. With both his legs paralyzed, he was on wheel chair and had finally stopped being cruel to her. But the terror of step mom was still on the rise. Mahi was not bothered about the physical pain anymore but the abusive and offending words that she used for her used to hurt her badly and still bring tears in her eyes. Her short stint of six months in the DAV College is etched in her memory as the most memorable period of her life as it was in the campus that she met him again. Veer, he was her senior in the college. He had indeed run away from home fearing his aunt's beatings after accidentally breaking her pickle jar. He spent some years with the sadhus in Haridwar. Now that he was a handsome hunk, who would dare to harm him? He was back in his own house. He was the prince of her dreams who was back in her life and she knew that all will be well soon. Their love blossomed secretly. Mahi for the first time in her life was feeling happy and fortunate. Everything around her was auspicious and pious. It was the night of Holi, the festival of colours. Preparations were on for Holi bonfire and Mahi was sitting outside her house. Ammaji was at it again. Mahi, while cleaning, had accidentally dropped her newly bought jewellery set. The dangling heavy earrings fell straight into the dust pan. This was enough for her to get mad at Mahi. "You bloody whore! So you are jealous of me? You want to steal my things now? Hey, you ill-fated! You are bound to suffer. You cannot change your fate by stealing my things. DARE NOT touch my things again or else I will make your face as ugly as your cursed life..." and it continued until she was forced outside the door. This was not the first time. She had spent numerous nights in the chilling cold outside. She as usual went to the outhouse with a depressed feeling unaware of the things destiny had in store for her. It was going to be a blessing in disguise for both of them. Veer was already in there to surprise her. When Veer suddenly from behind smeared abeer (red colour) on her cheeks with one hand and gently stopping her scream by his other hand she couldn't believe her eyes and wished the moment to freeze forever. She had spent many scary nights in the hayloft but it was the thing of the past. The night today was the most beautiful one. Heap of hay reaching the open rooftop kept them well hidden. The near at hand full moon was the only one to keep vigil on them. They could hear the sounds from the Holi bonfire around. These festivities in the background and cool breeze in this time of year bringing in the fragrance from the night blooming Jasmine in their yard were all too mesmerizing. With love in the air, it was cupid playing that night. The shy and timid Mahi blossomed that night in his masculine embrace. With his hands feeling every tip and curve of her femininity, his gentle touch made her realise the reason of her existence. The lovers wanted to make the most of this blissful moment. But none of them would have imagined this moment to be so short lived and to end in the tragedy of a lifetime. The Holi bonfire was in full swing and was lighting up the area around when somehow the sparks reached the hayloft and within seconds it was up in flames. People came rushing with water in buckets, cans and whatever they could get. Veer quickly pushed her out from a window but had to remain hidden for obvious reasons. Hours later, fire was doused but Veer was nowhere. Mahi believed that he must have escaped. But alas! He was never seen again. His sudden disappearance had no explanation. There were rumours in the campus that he had joined the Khalistani militants like some others in the college. But only Mahi knew that he had sacrificed his life for her dignity that night. In a mad rage, she searched the charred outhouse only to find a half burnt piece of dangling earring. It



was the same earring ammaji wore that night. Had she seen them together and deliberately set the hay on fire? Mahi knew it very well that ammaji could go to any extent to torture her. She sat there in disbelief wondering what could have happened 'She would have hoped to shame me in public but Veer did not let it happen'. She sat there, wailing helplessly while ammaji watched her with a contemptuous smile. Heartbroken Mahi was given no time to even mourn his death and within days she was married off to Maheshji.

The memory of the incident made her eyes wet, she quickly wiped her eyes. Mahi could have forgiven all the cruelties done to her by ammaji but Veer! Oh how could she be so cruel to char him to death! Mahi dragged herself out of her haunting thoughts for it was time to face the reality. They had reached Haridwar and the chilling cold of the Garhwal hills greeted them. They take an auto from station to the 'Mukti Dham' ashram. Isha is all smiles seeing the colourful town of Haridwar. As Maheshji wraps a shawl around Mahi, Mahi gives him an affectionate look. Maheshji, such a gem of person, was highly underestimated by ammaji. Ammaji had actually tried her best to ruin Mahi's life by marrying her off to a widower, much older than her and with no family or financial support. Maheshji was a writer with such meagre income that even making both ends meet was difficult for him. But within months of marriage Maheshji got a huge break in a good production house in Mumbai and after that it was progress all the way. On top of that what a fabulous person he is. Mahi could not have imagined a better life partner than him. They finally reach the 'Mukti Dham'. Mahi forgets all the atrocities she had gone through and her heart is filled with compassion on seeing her frail moribund step mom. A boy about Isha's age is sitting near her. He jumps up in hysterical excitement "didi, didi, my didi has come" clapping his hands abnormally. He is Vansh. Mahi is stunned to see her step brother's behaviour and more to see the stark resemblance of him with Veer. She now understands that Vansh is ammaji's botheration and sits down near her bed holding Vansh's hand. "Ammaji, I will be with him always." she whispers into her ears. Tears rolls down the pair of sunken eyes before getting motionless forever. Mahi, makes Vansh do all the funeral rites. Innocent Vash, a 6 feet tall young boy is baffled by all this. With strangers all around him, he moves around clinging to Mahi all the time as he feels safe and comfortable only with her. After the final offerings into the Ganga, Isha returns to ashram with dad while Mahi stays back with Vansh to watch Ganga aarti at 'Har ki pauri' ghat. Amidst chanting and praying, she notices a familiar face. He seems to be one of the chief priests offering the prayers. Unable to believe her own eyes, she moves towards him. With Vansh holding a corner of her saree, she forces her way through the crowd to get a closer look of him. In spite of his long hair, over grown beard and the monk's attire, she could recognize him. She can bet! He is Veer. His eyes meet hers and yes it is him. Astonished Mahi looks at him in disbelief. But he is calm and composed. After the aarti, crowd begins to leave and he comes to Mahi. Mahi patiently listens him speak. He says "your step mom had seen us together that night and she did secretly save me. I was worried she might take this opportunity to defame you but she had some other plans altogether. I couldn't believe that one could stoop so low. Your father being paralyzed, she made an insane offer to me. To keep our affair as a secret and in return for saving my life, I had to impregnate her. She knew I could go to any limits to save your dignity. I had to succumb to her demand." Mahi listened in disbelief. She now understands Vansh's resemblance to him. Veer continues "How could I face you after that and how could we get together after that. Unable to cope up with the guilt I tried to end my life but as they say that remorse and penance are must, maybe I too was saved to go through the penance." He looks at Vansh lovingly and says "but, it seems that her selfish motives remained unfulfilled. She wanted her own heir in order to keep the property away from you but see she ended up giving the heir to you. I'm glad you are settled happily. She did repent and suffered a lot in her last days. I did see her once in the Mukti Dham. I have long forgiven her and you too must forgive her so that her soul can rest in peace. She had gone through enough of atonement." He then quickly leaves and gets vanished into the group of sadhus. Mahi knows it's no use calling him back. He has indeed offered his lifetime in the penance for the sin he did not intend but was forced to commit. He has really moved on and is now on the path of salvation. Ammaji too had suffered for all her misdeeds and Mahi had seen the regret and remorse in her eyes. Mahi, with her eyes closed and breathing in the positivity of the divine surrounding, begins to introspect. What about her own remorse and penance? Would she ever be able to confess to Maheshji that she had lost her virginity that Holi night and that she was already carrying Isha while performing the sacred marriage rituals? She can't. She can never. She will have to take this secret to the grave. Vansh is her responsibility. She will have to be the mother of her step brother, her lover's child and it is not going to be easy because his presence will keep her wounds afresh always. Maybe this is her penance and atonement. She sits there looking at the twinkling diyas floating over water. As it gets dark, Maheshji and Isha come looking for them. A relaxed Mahi leaves 'Har ki pauri' holding both Isha and Vansh, while Maheshji looks at them affectionately. Immersing all her worries and guilt in the holy river, Mahi moves ahead on the path of atonement.



## 27. Anweshan Hajra

Anweshan Hajra, a college student who studies the subject Industrial Fish and Fisheries. When emotions within him start to overflow, he tries to catch them through words.

### CHRISTMAS MYTH AND MEMORIES

Growing in my childhood, as an Indian boy  
 The things I most crave for, were always some toy.  
 In those days, the first festival I knew which was exotic to my country  
 It was Merry Christmas! When dad brought in house some X-mas tree.  
 "What's the decoration for dad?" I asked in a curious voice,  
 "Tonight Santa will come with the gift of your choice."  
 Dad's answer uplifted my curiosity more high,  
 My excitement was increasing with the time passing by.  
 "What do you want from Santa?" in the dinner table mom said,  
 "Write it on a paper, and keep inside the shock" dad also instructed.  
 Following their words, I went to bed that night  
 I was eagerly waiting for Santa, putting out the light.  
 I was praying to Santa for giving me an indoor game kit,  
 But soon I fell asleep, under my warm quilt.  
 Next morning, I woke up with my eyes full of surprise,  
 The game kit was kept in my room before my rise.  
 Many years later, when I was in my teenage,  
 The secret gift keeper's identity came into my knowledge.  
 Magicians who read in my shocks those hidden content  
 They were none other than my secret Santa parents.  
 After this when I and my friends were settled in life and making good earning,  
 We were discussing what to do on Christmas in a winter evening.  
 One suggested, "This Christmas let's do some charity"  
 Then I proposed, "So bring on smile to the street children's face, suffering from poverty."  
 "Serving child is serving GOD" we decided our moto  
 In imagination I could see their happiness clear as photo  
 Then we assembled our mates for the purpose, and formed a party  
 And give it the name "Secret Santa Society"  
 Since then we donate food, cloth to the poor children every year,  
 In the disguise of Santa at night, to serve God's dear,  
 I enjoy the carol of church in their smile and happiness  
 Like God is showing us light, clearing all the dark and mess.  
 Thus now I celebrate Christmas and the myth of Santa  
 Recalling my childhood memories, mainting the agenda.  
 If the intention is pure, then Almighty won't let us fall,  
 This thing I have realized and Merry Christmas to all.



## 28. Papia Ghosh

A postgraduate in Economics, Papia Ghosh (Pal) has always been an avid reader with a penchant for penning down her thoughts and experiences through her poems, short stories and memoir. At present, she is a Senior Instructor at Word Munchers where she is actively involved in nurturing children and adults to pen down their thoughts for future readers.

### DURGA MAA

The colours of joy and festivity,  
Filled the hazel autumn sky.

The strong vibes of the drums  
Lent music to the colours.

The bustling city relented her grip  
To welcome Maa.

A mother with a bleeding heart  
Fighting against the vices of time.

Vices which only change its hues  
With the on march of time.

Even with all the shades of festivity,  
We could not reward Her with  
A moment of bliss.

Dowry, Child Marriage,  
Female Foeticide and Gender Bias,  
Only to name a few.

How can a society rejoice,  
When the embodiment of Maa  
Is subjected to untold humiliation?

An unanswered question  
In the vortex of a storm,  
Echoing through the ravages of time.

Let the colours of this Puja  
Concoct the right values and ethics  
Prompting us to practice  
The pristine rules of humanity.

### A TRYST WITH MA DURGA

The vast azure expanse of the unbounded sky with snowballs gently gliding over its surface reflected on the murky waters of the lake crowded with floating circular leaves where white and pink lotus flowers and deep pink lilies grew in perfect harmony. The gentle morning breeze lifted the skirts of the leaves in accordance with the direction in which they blew while, the tall catkins with their prominent white spears giggled in the breeze, heady with the fragrance of the night jasmines reminding us that it was spring, a time to welcome Goddess Durga to our homes.

My selfie with the caption "Ma and me" was taken at a Puja pandal on the 5th of October 2019, with a painting of Goddess Durga, the mother of strength and wisdom in the background. The painter's brush had woven together threads of magic on a temporary brick wall. I stood before the masterpiece in a radiant yellow saree gazing in wonder. The golden glow of her face blended with the spun yarns of my attire. Her beautiful eyes were pools of love and understanding, while the third eye could introspect your soul. Her captivating gentleness mirrored an unconditional love for all her children. The solitude of the early morning was pulverized by hundreds of eager feet, gazing in wonder. You could find the waves of exhilaration amidst a maelstrom of heady perfumes peeping surreptitiously from the folds of new silk sarees, regal gowns, smart casuals and kurta pajamas, mingling with the aroma of freshly brewed masala tea, fried 'kachori' and 'jelebies' welcoming the frothing waves to a mouthwatering breakfast along the roadside. Yet the smile in my selfie couldn't reach my eyes lighting up my soul. There resides an impenetrable mist of loneliness where the radiant festive sun cannot penetrate. There I was with my husband giving me an indulgent smile, surrounded by an enthusiastic crowd waiting to take a selfie and yet, I missed my son. His presence would have made a world of difference to me. We were thousands of miles apart and yet, I missed him with every heartbeat.



## 29. Gita Bharath

Gita Bharath has enjoyed five years of teaching middle school before starting on a banking career that lasted thirty four years. Now, happily retired, she focuses on writing and trying out Kolam art. She has lived in Jamshedpur and Bombay before settling in Chennai. Her first book Svava contains three hundred poems, comprising narrative, humour and philosophical verses.

### PERSPECTIVE

My third grade friends called me Asian girl and wondered why  
 My eyes didn't slant or my nose turn up:  
 I said to them -I'm Indian.  
 Later I landed at Delhi airport and people spoke  
 Hindi at me very rapidly until  
 I said -I'm Madrasi.  
 On the train to Madras I finally heard  
 The cadence of my native tongue;  
 And I told my fellow-passenger  
 "I'm from Tanjore town."  
 At my cousin's wedding, the house was filled  
 With people, noise and flowers and I had to explain  
 To an old great aunt which branch of the family tree was ours.  
 This inward focus, narrowing vision, comes natural to my introvert mind  
 So I tried to visualize Outward Bound to see what I could find.  
 The astronaut's view is the heart-wrenching blue  
 Of the planet of his birth and when asked who he is,  
 He'll probably reply "A Human from planet Earth."  
 Further on, he'll claim he's carbon-based life,  
 Yet further that he's a form of Matter--  
 But very far must he go along the Space-Time flow  
 Before his Self can shatter.  
 He'll finally realize with a vast surprise -  
 The Universe and He are the same:  
 He the Mover and the Moved-- He the Player and the Game!



### 30. Neeti Parti

Neeti Parti, is a writer, a poetess, a trainer and an educationist. She is Deputy Director, Academic Practices, of a renowned chain of schools and has more than thirty five schools in India under her charge . As Founder Principal of a well reputed Senior Secondary School, she received the 'Award for Best Upcoming School in Uttar Pradesh'. She lives in Delhi, India and believes that when the Universe smiles a child is born, nature's greatest tribute to itself!

#### GANGA MAHOTSAVA

King Bhagirath prayed for Ganga to help sixty thousand ancestors of King Sagara to be purified by her waters so that they may ascend to Heaven. His prayers were granted by Vishnu but there was a concern that Ganga's swirling waters and force would cause immense damage to the earth. Lord Shiva agreed to hold Ganga in his tresses and gently lower her. From times immemorial Ganga has flown across the country as a life-giving river worshipped and revered by each generation. To commemorate its birth and its contribution as a selfless nurturer, Ganga Mahotsava is celebrated for five days each year at Varanasi, the most continually inhabited city of India. Celebrated craftsmen, dancers and musicians congregate to the town during the festivities. The day of the festival begins at the 'ghats' with 'Surya Namaskar' by ascetics and believers and ends with the most spectacular sight of 'diyas' floating in the Ganga, their lights glowing, twinkling and dancing in the frothing waters. I offer my respect to this glorious river in the form of an ode.

ODE TO GANGA, Mother of all!

Avimukta, Anandvana, Mahashamshana, Kashi, Varanasi  
Names of my first born  
My favourite among all children  
Whose side I have flown by and will till eternity

Swirling clouds make the night air thick with incensed fragrance  
The fires in brass diyas dance,  
Throwing arms of burning light and glowing embers  
Their frolic caught in the glowing kohl lined eyes of young maidens

Cymbals clash in rhythm  
With the rising crescendo of chants  
Enchanted pilgrims stare awestruck in disbelief  
'Ganga, our mother we offer our humble tribute!'

The darkness in the east gracefully gives way to light.....  
Fires of another nature begin to kindle, taking on a ferocious mode in no time  
Reflections of saffron fall upon my waters through the day  
Till the west turns a deep pink

All consuming, yet all liberating Fires  
Forming a heavenly path of souls  
On their final journey  
Completing the ever- rotating ritualistic cycle of life.....

In the din I cry to those I nurture at my bosom,  
"Wash your sins, not your filth  
Cleanse your heart not your bodies  
Desecrate not my dignity, my purity, my life, my purpose

Allow me to remain clean, pure and divine  
Hold me dear as I do you. Our lives are eternally conjoined  
A mother does not wish ill her own  
My own, me you must not disown, for I am mother of all!"

## FESTIVE CELEBRATIONS OF LOVE

Indians consider love a divine gift granted by the Gods. Kamadev is our God of love – our Cupid! He is depicted as a handsome man travelling through the three worlds atop a parrot, holds a bow made of sugarcane stalk with a line of bees forming the bowstring and carries five arrows tipped with fragrant flowers. All the five arrows are significant and complete the full cycle of love. The first arrow is aimed at the heart and causes initial excitement, the second is aimed at the lips which let out a cry of excitement, the third targets the head which goes crazy with love, the fourth finds the eyes and creates vivid visions, the final arrow lands on the body which becomes completely consumed by desire and love. Kamadeva is accompanied by his wife Rati, a youthful woman of great beauty. Rati was once an ordinary woman unable to attract suitors. She prayed to Goddess Lakshmi who imparted the art of 'solah-shringara' to Rati, which made her the most beautiful woman in the three worlds. Kamadeva was bewitched by her and made her his eternal consort. The following four celebrations are an exotic bouquet of love that exhibits this tender emotion in amazingly divergent ways.

**MADAN TRAYODASHI** – a festival dedicated to Kamadev

Kashmir, the land of everlasting love is the land of this 'now almost forgotten' festival dedicated to Kamadev. The roots of this festival of love are nurtured by Shaivist tantric traditions that recognise the all-pervading Shiva consciousness, which are life-affirmative, which see all things, including love and sexual union as a door to divinity. 'Madan Trayodashi' comes from two words: 'Madan' meaning he who intoxicates with love and 'Trayodashi' which means the thirteenth. We find the description of this festival in the ancient seventh century text of Kashmiri Nilmata Purana, that has often been referred to by Kalhana in his famous book 'Rajtarangini'. Nilmata Purana says that on the thirteenth day of 'Chaitra', the first month of the Hindu calendar, a cloth painting of Kamadev is to be worshipped with garlands made from beautiful flowers exuding enchanting fragrances. To quote Nilmata Purana, "One should decorate one's own self and worship the ladies of the house. O twice born the thirteenth day should be necessarily celebrated, the rest may be or may not be celebrated."

About the celebration itself, Nilmata Purana says, "O descendant of Kasyapa, best among the brahmanas, on the twelfth day, a pitcher full of cold water and decorated with flowers and leaves should be placed before Kamadeva, and before sunrise a husband himself should bathe his wife with the water from this pitcher." In doing so, the man becomes possessed of beauty and finds fulfilment of his desires. Kamadev was venerated by the Kashmiris and according to Historian Virendra Bangroo, "There are two beautiful masterpieces of Kamadeva sculptures at Avantiswamin temple in Avantipur. Also, many independent sculptures of Kama seated with Riti have been reported from Kashmir."

It is worth noting that Kamadeva's ornaments are the conch and the lotus, both related to water, the symbol of creativity and fertility and that Kamadeva's ornament, the lotus is found in abundance in the pristine emerald waters of the famous lakes of Kashmir.

**KAAMOTSAVA** – the Holi love!

The revival of Kamadev, the God of love took place on the full moon day of the first day of the month of Spring or Basanta Ritu, the day of the colourful festival of Holi. Kaamotsava, literally means the celebration of love, the celebration of desire! Kama is one of the four pursuits of human life or Purushartha. The other three being – Dharma, Artha and Moksha. Sati or Dakshyani (the daughter of Daksha), an incarnation of Parvati is the goddess of fertility and marital bliss. She is the first consort of Lord Shiva. Sati loved Shiva from childhood and enjoyed listening to tales of Shiva from Muni Narada. She grew into a beautiful young woman and received marriage proposals from the richest princes of that time but she was in love with Shiva or Mahadeva and decided that she would only marry him.

To win over Shiva, Sati went deep into the forest to meditate. There she gave up all food and water. In fact, so severe was her meditation that she even gave up her clothing and stood immersed in her prayer despite the harshest conditions of cold, rain and high velocity winds. It is because of this that Sati is also called Aparna.

Acknowledging her penance, Shiva appeared before Sati and accepted her wish to become his bride. Sati was happy beyond belief but her father Daksha, a devotee of Vishnu could not bear the fact that his daughter was going to marry Shiva but Sati was adamant and had her wish. Sometime after the wedding, Daksha organised a Yagna at his place. He invited all the well-known royals, nobles and princes but decided not to invite Sati or Shiva as an insult to both. When she heard about the Yagna, a determined Sati began begging Shiva to accompany her to defy her father. Shiva warned her but she did not pay heed to him. Daksha was furious at the arrival of Sati and Shiva and insulted them in front of all the guests. Humiliated and angry, Sati jumped into the sacred fire and immolated herself. She was later reborn as Parvati. Parvati tried to regain the love of Shiva, who adopted celibacy in the grief of Sati. Kamadev came to her rescue and shot an arrow of love at Shiva. An enraged Shiva burnt him to ashes. Rati, the wife of Kamadev threw herself at the feet of Shiva. Shiva realised

that Kamadev had only good intentions in trying to create his love for Parvati and revived him in a bodiless form. The heavens were pleased with the rebirth of Love. The revival of Kamadev, the God of love took place on the full moon day of the first day of the month of Spring or Basanta Ritu, the day of the colourful festival of Holi, which is also celebrated as Kaamotsav or the festival of the God of Love.

#### LOHRI: THE JOYFUL BLAZE OF ETERNAL LOVE

As per legend, Dulla was Rajput hero of Punjab – a Robinhood like character, who belonged to the warrior clan of Bhattis. Dulla Bhatti is also likened to St. Valentine as he is famous for bringing love in the lives of the young by arranging the marriage of rescued abducted girls. His compassion and commitment to love is celebrated on the festival of Lohri, that falls on 13th January each year at the time of the Winter Solstice. Here is my poem a tribute to the blazing festival of Lohri :

The sun begins it's Uttarayana  
Its golden rays cast a magic spell  
Over the vast expanses of wheat fields  
And each grain captures the radiance  
Emitting it back manifold  
Creating a brilliant, shimmering carpet of gold

The spontaneous gladness of the lover  
Finds its manifestation at such splendour  
In imitating fires which throw up their arms  
Spreading star like embers of red into the skies  
The fires of warmth and light  
The fires of Lohri, the festival of eternal love!

The atmosphere resounds with lyrical renditions of  
Sunder munderiye ho!  
Tera kaun vichara ho!  
Dullah Bhatti walla ho!  
Dulle di dheee vyahe ho!  
Ser shakkar payi ho!  
Kudi da laal pachake ho!  
A song sung in sweet Punjabi

In praise of Dulla Bhatti  
Who brought love into the lives of young couples  
By marrying them  
The dhols beat feverishly  
And the young, old, men, women, newly wedded, lately born  
Dance around the fires to the frenzied rhythm  
Offering gifts of til, nuts and popcorn  
The wafting music stirs sheer joy and laughter  
As Flames cavort, frolic and prance.

#### KHAJURAHO DANCE FESTIVAL – a festival of celebration of love!

Around the middle of 1st century BCE, the idea of Moksha began to emerge. Moksha is Mukti or liberation from the cycle of birth and rebirth. It is derived from the Sanskrit word 'muc' (to free) and Moksha means freedom from the samsara or this world. The Buddhists refer to this state as Nirvana, which means a transcendent stage where there is no suffering, desire or sense of self. It is achieved when we are released from karma and not reborn again. As per a philosophical belief, Moksha is achieved after the fulfilment of Dharma, Artha and Kama. Simply put it means that one can attain Nirvana or be one with God after one has experienced the worldly pleasures and overcome them.

Perhaps it is with the belief that even the normal human being can achieve salvation that the Khajuraho Temples were built by the Chandela Kings. The Khajuraho temples are said to have been built between 900 AD and 1130 AD. Apparently each Chandela ruler built at least one temple in his lifetime. The carvings of mating and love making depict the 'Dampatya Jeevan' or the marriage period of each person's life and therefore fulfils the purpose of the experience of 'Kama', one of the steps towards Moksha. The Chandelas or the celestial descendants of the Moon God built these monuments of love. There is an interesting mythical story behind this name.



According to the famous court poet of Prithviraj Raso, Chandra Bardai's 'Mahoba khand', Hemvati, the priest had a beautiful daughter called Hemvati. Hemvati was unfortunately a child widow. She was bathing in a pool on a dark night when the moon fell in love with her, transformed itself into the human form and seduced her. A distressed Hemvati threatened to curse the moon, who promised her that she would be blessed with a valiant son who would be crowned the king and become the builder of temples of Kajaraho. The child was born in isolation in the remote village of Khajjarpura and named Chandravarman. He built temples and performed the 'Bhandya Yagya' to wash away the sins of his mother. The Khajuraho temples are now a part of the UNESCO World Heritage Sites. The erotic carvings adorn the exteriors of these temples, while the insides are bare conveying the belief that one needs to experience and leave behind worldly pleasures in order to attain divine bliss.

A week-long celebration of dance called the Khajuraho Dance Festival is held annually in the month of February. Bedecked dancers celebrate the wonderful dance forms of Shiva, the God of dance, Krishna's raas-leela with the Gopis, the dance of 'apsaras' like Urvashi and Menaka demonstrated through traditional renditions like Kathak, Kathakali, Kuchipudi, Manipuri, Bharatnatyam, Mohiniyattam which are performed to the accompaniment of classical music, in front of Chitragupta and Vishwanath temples dedicated to Shiva.

#### BHAGORIA FESTIVAL – eloping in love!

Singing, dancing, revelry and elopement define this festival that is celebrated by the tribes Bhil, Bhilala and Barela in Alirajpur, Jhabua and other districts of Madhya Pradesh in the week leading up to Holi. The name 'Bhagoriya' is derived from the word 'Bhag' which refers to 'running away'. Apparently, the first couple to elope were Shiv and Parvati or Bhav and Gauri. A combination of both names indicates towards the chosen nomenclature 'Bhagoria'. Another story related to the name is linked to King Bhagore who had conquered the region where this festival is celebrated. King Bhagore celebrated love by allowing young couples to elope. During the festivities the boys apply red 'gulaal' on the face of the girl of their choice. If the girl is in agreement, she also reciprocates by applying 'gulaal' on the face of the boy. In case, a girl wishes to propose marriage, she spits red coloured betel juice in the direction of the boy. She thereafter expects the boy to elope with her. If the boy does not do so, he is considered a coward!

#### LET US SPEAK THE LANGUAGE OF LOVE

Love is the universal language that can be understood by all.

I wind up my submission through these beautiful words from Lord Krishna:

"The only way you can conquer me is through Love and there I am gladly conquered!"





### 31. Shubhayan Chakrabarti

He is an English graduate from Ramakrishna Mission Residential College, a people person and has good management skills. He is also proficient in speaking. His hobbies include photography and gardening. The latter brings a sense of satisfaction and inner peace, something which we all deeply desire in our lives. The former on the other hand, is a conduit for his creative streaks and it allows the opportunity to preserve memories.

#### INDIAN FESTIVALS VIEWED FROM A FEMINIST PERSPECTIVE

*“Women are supposed to be very calm generally: but women feel just as men feel; they need exercise for their faculties, and a field for their efforts, as much as their brothers do; they suffer from too rigid a restraint, to absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged fellow-creatures to say that they ought to confine themselves to making puddings and knitting stockings, to playing on the piano and embroidering bags. It is thoughtless to condemn them, or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for their sex.”* — Charlotte Brontë, Jane Eyre. For those unfamiliar with the aforementioned citation, it is from one of my most-read and favoured novels of the Victorian era, Jane Eyre by Charlotte Bronte.

The roots of Indian festivals have always been entrenched in traditions as ancient as time itself. Festivities abound in our country. Hindus especially cannot survive without festivals, the reason being simply that there are too many of them and are nearly ubiquitously present throughout the year. They may range from simple fasting rituals accompanied by at-home ceremonies dominated by women to the more elaborate ones such as Karwa Chauth, Raksha Bandhan and Bhai Dooj. Before I begin my assertion, it is pertinent to discuss the fact that gender bias has always been a predominant issue, in all aspects of life, be it cultural, social or otherwise. In India, discriminatory attitudes towards either sex have existed for generations and affect the lives of both sexes. Although the constitution of India grants men and women equal rights, gender disparities remain. Indian festivals are no exception to the norm.

What is prevalent in our society, as mentioned earlier, is the spirit of festivity which pervades throughout the year. But it is indeed disheartening to know that a majority of these festivals are sexist in nature and actually promote gender bias. To define it simply, and without any jargon, gender bias is behaviours that shows favouritism towards a particular gender, thus ensuring gender inequality. While women do participate in these rituals and occupy a role, more often than not, they are often assigned a secondary or sedentary role. The entire gamut of rites, rituals and religious ceremonies are presided over by male priests. Why is it so? There appears to be only two logical conclusions: women either lack enough grey matter and neurons to remember these mantras or they are perhaps too ‘frail’ to handle the elaborate and time-consuming rituals. For the sake of this paper, I have decided to restrict the scope of my focus to predominantly three festivals.

The first, and perhaps most prominent of the three is the ancient festival of Karwa Chauth. A festival embedded in Indian culture, Karwa Chauth is an annual one-day ritual of fasting observed by married Hindu women seeking the longevity, well-being and prosperity of their husbands. This festival has always raised several red flags in my mind. Why are only women expected to fast for the well-being of the male members of their family, first on the eve of Karwa Chauth and four days hence, on Ahoi Ashtami for the well-being of her sons? Why is there no fast prescribed in our religion for the well-being of their counterparts? Is it because of a preconceived and misplaced notion that women need their husbands more than the husbands need their wives? Or perhaps her importance is linked to his existence? Truth be told, there is nothing inherently wrong in a woman fasting for her husband’s well-being. What I am attempting to express is that I am not against the notion of a wife wishing the best for her husband; rather against the gender bias which is being propagated by festivals such as these. These festivals have begun to instil, subtly or unsubtly, gender bias in the future generations to follow. Whatever is the idea behind its celebration, Karwa Chauth cannot be severed from its patriarchal traditions. Besides, the decorations, rituals, ideas of love and eternity, become the garbs regressive patriarchal norms that tend to define women in terms of a wife. Many women fail to see beyond the myths of Karwa Chauth, perpetuated to uphold the purity of marriage, and understand how they normalise patriarchy.

Moving on, Raksha Bandhan or Rakhi as it is referred to in the Bengali culture, is a festival which once again propagates preconceived notions of gender. A festival celebrating the love between two siblings, on this auspicious occasion, the sister ties a colourful knot or rakhi around her brother’s wrist as a symbol of protection which will keep evil forces away from him. Superstitions aside, in my personal opinion, while superficially it may appear to be skewed in favour of women, Raksha Bandhan as a festival is somewhat demeaning to both genders equally. The woman is perceived as the damsel in distress and in need of protection, something which is highly demeaning to the sex as a whole. In the contemporary age of Angela Merkel, Judy Smith and our very

own Arundhati Bhattacharya, isn't such a notion entirely off-putting? In contrast to the women, the men are also expected to uphold their responsibility and duty as the 'protector', a notion which essentially constitutes a field day for gender bias. Why should women need protection? Are they so frail and delicate that they should be protected like the unspoiled flower that they are? Besides, why should men alone be charged with the burden of protection? The sexist implications of this festival abound and are in plenty.

The last, but most certainly not the least in my list of tirades, is Bhai Dooj. A festival which shares a striking similarity to Raksha Bandhan, on this day the sister is charged with worshipping her brother, following which she applies a tilak on their forehead and offers prayers to God for their well-being. The very name itself suggests its patriarchal origins. It is based on the notion that a woman, be it a wife, daughter or sister, is mandatorily deigned to perform rituals for their respective brothers. This festival, especially in the Indian context, is a symbol of the cultural construct of the preference of a male child over their female counterparts. The essence of the festival itself is ruined when only one sibling is prioritized. Why is it so? Isn't Raksha Bandhan meant to be a celebration of the mutual love and respect between siblings?

To conclude, perhaps you are wondering what is the significance behind quoting Jane Eyre in the beginning of my paper? The reasoning is quite simple: Jane Eyre, as a feminist woman herself, represents the insurgent woman eager for esteem. A majority of the novel comprises of the romance between the smouldering Mr. Rochester and the innocent protagonist, Jane. But what is perhaps truly and remarkably alluding regarding her character is her seemingly irrepressible spirit and candour. Bearing striking resemblances to Austen's Elizabeth Bennet, Jane's preoccupations are not simply limited to frocks, suitors and an elegant wedding. On the contrary, she carves her own space amongst men and refuses to be compartmentalised into the traditional roles ascribed to women in the era. She faces several injustices throughout the course of the novel, but refuses to turn the other cheek when provoked. She does not relent to becoming Rochester's dotting and ideal wife, despite her passion for him and consequently refuses to become her mistress upon finding out that she is married. She values herself too highly to be subordinated in such a gross fashion. Perhaps Jane would serve as an ideal role model to women who are willingly subjugating themselves to traditional roles prescribed to them by society. It is only when society stops treating women as the 'second sex' that women will attain true emancipation from the shackles of patriarchy.



### 32. Shatabdi Mukhopadhyay

Shatabdi Mukhopadhyay is a history Honours student. Her relationship with writing started at five. A dream inspired her to pen my thoughts. She found writing a medium to fulfill unfulfilled desires. She felt the thrill and suspense of the characters. She has written many short stories, poems, and a novel.

#### FEMINISM: A MOVEMENT ACROSS THE GLOBE

Although we are living in the twenty-first century, what we expect, how a marriage will end up to the girl child of the family. We expect it will be happily ever after like fairy tales. But the reality is different. There is dowry system, pressure for giving birth to a son, and many more obstacles. There are a thousand cases reported every day in the countries of the third world where women are harassed from home violence. The number will be triple if we take the unreported one. Yeah, I know you will say what's new in it? Or you can say I will start a weepy story about harassment of being a woman. But this is the prologue of a story. I will tell you how the world changes through generations. A tribal woman is sitting in her hut, with a gloomy face. She heard footsteps are coming towards her. A shadow of fear passed through her face. An angry man stormed into the hut. It looks that the man is her husband, who is about to bit her. The woman screamed in terror. Every woman of the neighbourhood came out from their huts with bamboo sticks in their hands. They marched ahead towards the hut of the terrified woman. The terrified woman sits in the middle and the other women circle her with bamboo sticks. This is the picture of the African tribe. They gift daughters with bamboo sticks during the time of marriage by the father. The women use them as a weapon for their protection. The headmen of the village then start tribunal against the accused husband. They warn him if he will do this act again then it will cause severe punishment. So, we can see the tribal women have the knowledge about the woman's rights and they can fight to save it.

This is the picture of Africa, now let's move to another country, Iceland. Everybody knows there is a huge wage gap between male and female. A woman does the same work as men in a low wage. In the 1960s, the women of Iceland stood against it. One day they stopped to do any work include the work of housewives. You cannot believe but stroked the daily life. On that day they sold all the sausages from the market as it was the best food to take without cooking. The restaurants could not serve food without the waitress. The voice of radio jockey deemed by the playing noise of the children. After that, the women received the right of the same wage as men.

Now let's move to another beautiful country, Denmark. In Copenhagen, you can see a statue of a black woman. Where the statues are white, it attracts extra attention. It is the statue of Mary Thomas, a fierce rebel who stood against the brutal rules in Atlantic Danish colonies. The rebels under her burnt all the corps in the field. Here we can see the picture of Europe and Africa.

Now let's move to Asia. When India was dominated by British, the women suffered the most. Often the British army attacked the villages without male and raped the women. But it did not take long to change the picture. In Tamluk, the women protested by using daily commodities as brooms, knives, etc. The British army like white girls, so the women covered them with ash. Every Indian is familiar with the names Matangini Hajra, Sarojini Naidu, who played major roles to free India. We are also familiar with Chipko movement where the tribal women tried to save the forest by covering the trees with their bodies.

Prior to the 20th century, women in China were considered essentially different from men. In the patriarchal society, the struggle for women's emancipation means to enact laws that guarantee women's full equality of race, sex, property and freedom of marriage. In order to further eliminate the legacy of the class society of patriarchal women, discrimination, play, mutilate women's traditional prejudice and habitual forces based on the development of productive forces, it is gradually needful on achieving gender in politics, economy, social and family aspects of equality. Before the westernization movement and the reform movement, women had set off a wave of their own strength in the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom (1851–1864). However, there are too many women from the bottom identities in the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom. It is difficult to get rid of the fate of being used. Until the end of the Qing Dynasty, women with more knowledges took the initiative in the fight for women's rights and that is where feminism started. Key male feminists in China in the 19th to 20th century included Liang Qichao, Ma Junwu and Jin Tianhe. In 1897, Liang Qichao proposed banning of foot-binding and encouraged women to engage in the workforce, political environment and education. The foot-binding costume had long been established in China which was an act to display the beauty and social status of women by binding their feet into a small shoe with good decorations and ornaments. Liang Qichao proposed the abolishment of this act for concern the health of a female being a supportive wife and caring mothers. He also

proposed to reduce the number of female dependents in family and encouraged women to receive the rights of education and enter the workforce to be economically independent from men and finally help the nation reach higher wealth and prosperity. For feminist Ma Junwu and Jin Tianhe, they both supported the equality between husbands and wives. Women enjoy legitimate and equal rights and also rights to enter the political sphere. A key assertion from Jin Tianhe was women as the mother of the nation. These views from male feminists in early feminism in China represented the image of ideal women in the imagination of men. Key female feminists in China in the 19th to 20th century included Lin Zongsu, He Zhen, Chen Xiefen, and Qiu Jin. The female feminists in early China focused more on the methods or ways that women should behave and liberate themselves to achieve equal and deserved rights and independence. He Zhen expressed her opinion that women's liberation was not correlated to the interest of the nation and she analysed three reasons behind the male feminists included: following the Western trend, to ease their financial burdens and high quality of reproduction. Besides, Li Zongsu proposed that women should strive for their legitimate rights, which includes broader aspects than the male feminists call for their own right over men, the Qing Court and in an international extent. In the Qing Dynasty, the discussion on feminism had two dimensions including the sex differences between men and women such as maternal role and duties of women and social difference between genders; the other dimension was the aim of liberation of women. The view of the feminists was diverse: some believed feminism was benefiting the nation, and some believed they associated feminism with the individual development of the female in improving their rights and welfare.

From ancient times to modern era, women are fighting to earn their rights. We can respectfully mention the movement #metoo against sexual harassment in the workplace. And the movement of women in Iran against wearing the hijab. It will remember the movement of South Korean women against porn videos for ages. In the ancient times they do not consider women as the citizen of a country. They could not give a vote or join any work. In a video of the 1930s it is revealed that the breast and butt size of a woman were taken in the interview of an air hostess by a male.

We all know they change the situation. Some are familiar with the facts and some are not. But I want not only to make everybody about the amazing facts of women empowerment. The bottom line is we should not be sympathetic towards a woman for the harassment in inequality in the society. We must stand by her and change the world. Do not break but stand against the society. We must fight for protecting our right. Women are the mother of the nation. Together we can change the society and make the world a better place to live.



### 33. Masidd Khalate

Masidd Khalate is a B.Sc. Biotechnology student aged 21 staying in the city of Sangli, Maharashtra.

#### THE SCIENTIFIC GUIDE ON HOW TO GET AND STAY MOTIVATED?

Motivation is a powerful, yet tricky beast. Sometimes it is really easy to get motivated, and you find yourself wrapped up in a whirlwind on excitement. Other times, it is nearly impossible to figure out how to motivate yourself and you're trapped in a death spiral of procrastination. This page contains the best idea and most useful research on how to get and stay motivated. This isn't going to be some ran-rah, pumped-up motivational speech (That's not my style). Instead, we're going to break down the science behind how to get motivated in the first place and how to stay motivated for the long-run. Whether you're trying to figure out how to motivate team, I am going to cover everything you need to know.

I. Motivation: What it is and how it works?

Scientific define motivation as your general willingness to do something. It is the set of psychological forces that compel you to take action. That's nice and all, but I think we can come up with a more useful definition of motivation.

1. What is motivation?

So what is motivation, exactly? The author Steven Pressfield has a great line in his book, "The War of Art", which is I think gets at the core of motivation. To paraphrase Press-field, "At some point, the pain of not doing it becomes greater than the pain of doing it."

In other words, at some point, it is easier to change than to stay the same. It is easier to take action and feel insecure at the gym than to sit still and experience self-loathing on the couch. It is easier to feel awkward while making the sales call than to feel disappointed about your dwindling bank account.

This, I think, is the essence of motivation. Every choice has a price, but when we are motivated, it is easier to bear the inconvenience of action than the pain of remaining the same. Somehow we cross a mental threshold usually after weeks of procrastination and in the face of an impending deadline and it becomes more painful to not do the work than to actually do it.

Now for the important question:

What can we do to make it more likely that we cross this mental threshold and feel motivated on a consistent basis? Common misconceptions about motivation:

One of the most surprising things about motivation is that it often comes after starting a new behavior, not before. We have this common misconception that motivation arrives as a result of passively consuming a motivational video or reading an inspirational book. However, active inspiration can be a far more powerful motivator. Motivation is often the result of action, not the cause of it. Getting started, even in very small ways, is a form of active inspiration that naturally produces momentum. I like to refer to this effect as the physics of productivity because this is basically Newton's First Law applied to habit formation:

Objects in motion tend to stay in motion. Once a task has begun, it is easier to continue moving it forward. You don't need much motivation once you've started a behavior. Nearly all of the friction in a task is at the beginning. After you start, progress occurs more naturally. In other words, it is often easier to finish a task than it was to start it in the first place.

Thus, one of the keys to getting motivated is to make it easy to start.

Before we talk about how to get started, let's pause for just a second. If you're enjoying this article on motivation, then you'll probably find my other writing on performance and human behavior useful.

II. How to Get Motivated and Take Action:

Many people struggle to find the motivation they need to achieve the goals they want because they are wasting too much time and energy on other parts of the process. If you want to make it easy to find motivation and get started then it helps to automate the early stages of your behavior.

Schedule Your Motivation:

During a conversation about writing, my friend Rutuja looked at me and said, "A lot of people never get around to writing because they are always wondering when they are going to write next." You could say the same thing about working out, starting a business, creating art, and building most habits.

- If your workout doesn't have a time when it usually occurs, then each day you'll wake up thinking, "I hope I feel motivated to exercise today."
- If your business doesn't have a system for marketing, then you'll show up at work crossing your fingers that crossing your fingers that you'll find a way to get the word out (in addition to everything else you have to).

- If you don't have a scheduled time when you write every week, then you'll find yourself saying things like, "I just need to find the willpower to do it."

An article in the guardian summarized the situation by saying, "If you waste resources trying to decide when or where to work, you'll impede your capacity to do the work." Setting a schedule for yourself seems simple, but it puts your decision making on autopilot by giving your goals a time and a place to live. It makes it more likely that you will follow through regardless of your motivation levels. And there are plenty of research studies on willpower and motivation to back up that statement. Stop waiting for motivation or inspiration to strike you and set a schedule for your habits. This is the difference between professional and amateurs. Professional set a schedule and stick to it. Amateurs wait until they feel inspired or motivated.

How to Get Motivated (Even when you don't feel like it):

How do some of the most prolific artists in the world motivate themselves? They don't merely set schedules, they build rituals. Twyla Tharp is widely regarded as one of the greatest dancers and choreographer of the modern era. In her best-selling book, *The Creative Habit* (audiobook), Tharp discusses the role rituals, or pregame routines, have played in her success:

I begin each day of my life with a ritual; I wake up at 5:30 AM put on my workout clothes, my leg warmers, my sweatshirts, and my hat. I walk outside my Manhattan home, hail a taxi, and tell the driver to take me to the pumping iron gym at 91st street and First Avenue, where I work out for two hours. The ritual is not the stretching and weight training I put my body through each morning at the gym; the ritual is the cab. The moment I tell the driver where to go I have completed the ritual. It's a simple act, but doing it the same way each morning habitualizes it makes it repeatable, easy to do. It reduces the chance that I would skip it or do it differently. It is one more item in my arsenal of routines, and one less thing to think about.

Many others famous creative have rituals too. In his popular book *Daily Rituals: How Artists Work*, author Mason Currey notes that many of the world's great artists follow a consistent schedule.

- Maya Angelou rented a local hotel room and went there to write. She arrived at 6:30 AM, wrote until 2PM, and then went home to do some editing. She never slept at the hotel.
- Pulitzer Prize winner Michael Chabon writes five nights per week from 10 PM to 3 AM.
- Haruki Murakami wakes up at 4 AM, writes for five hours and then goes for run.

The work of top creative isn't dependent upon motivation or inspiration, but rather it follows a consistent pattern and routine. Here are some examples of how you can apply ritual and routine to get motivated:

- Exercise more consistently:
- Use the same warm up routine in the gym.
- Become more creative:
- Follow a creative ritual before you start writing or painting or singing.
- Start each day stress-free:
- Create a five minute morning meditation ritual.
- Sleep better:

Follow a "power down: routine before the bed. The power of a ritual, or what I like to call a pre-game routine, is that it provides a mindless way to initiate your behavior. It makes starting your habits easier and that means following through on a consistent basis is easier. The key to any good ritual is that it removes the need to make a decision: what should I do first? When should I do this? How should I do this? Most people never get moving because they can't decide how to get started. You want starting behavior to be easy and automatic so you have the strength to finish it when it becomes difficult and challenging. How to Make Motivation a Habit? There are three simple steps you can take to build better rituals and make motivation a habit.

Step 1:

A good pre-game routine starts by being so easy that you can't say no to it. You shouldn't need motivation to start your pre-game routine. For example, my writing routine starts by getting a glass of water. My weightlifting routine starts by putting on my lifting shoes. These tasks are so easy, I can't say no to them. The most important part of any task is starting. If you can't get motivated in the beginning, then you'll find that motivation often comes after starting. That's your pre-game routine needs to be incredibly easy to start.

Step 2:

Your routine should get you moving toward the end goal. A lack of mental motivation is often linked to a lack of physical movement. Just imagine your physical state when you're feeling depressed, bored, or unmotivated. You're not moving very much. Maybe you're slumped over like a blob, slowly melting into the couch. The most opposite is also true. If you're physically moving and engaged, then it's far more likely that you'll feel mentally engaged and energized. For example, it's almost impossible to not feel vibrant, awake, and energized when you're dancing. While your routine should be as easy as possible to start, it should gradually transition into more and more physical movement. Your mind and your motivation will follow your physical movement.

It is worth nothing that physical movement doesn't have to mean exercise. For example, if your goal is to write, then your routine should bring you closer to the physical act of writing.

### Step 3:

You need to follow the same pattern every single time. The primary purpose of your pre-game routine is to create a series of events that you always perform before doing a specific task. Your pre-game routine tells your mind, "This is what happens before I do." Eventually, this routine becomes so tied to your performance that by simply doing the routine, you are pulled into a mental state that is primed to perform. You don't need to know how to find motivation, you just need to start your routine. If you remember the article on the 3R's of Habit Change, then you may realize that your pre-game routine is basically creating a "reminder" for yourself. Your pre-game routine is the trigger that kick starts your habit, even if you're not motivated to do it. This is important because when you don't feel motivated, it's often too much work to figure out what you should do next. When faced with another decision, you will often decide to just quit. However, the pre-game routine solves that problem because you know exactly what to do next. There's no debating or decision making. Lack of motivation doesn't matter. You just follow the pattern.

### III. How to stay motivated for the long run:

We have covered some strategies for making it easier to get motivated and start a task. What about maintaining motivation over the long run? How can you stay motivated for good? How to stay motivated by using the Goldilocks Rule:

Imagine you are playing tennis. If you try to play serious match against a four year old, you will quickly become bored. The match is too easy. On the opposite end of the spectrum, if you try to play a serious match against a professional tennis player like Roger Federer or Serena Williams, you will find yourself demotivated for a different reason. The match is too difficult. Compare the experiences to playing tennis against someone who is your equal. As the game progresses, you win a few points. You have a chance of winning the match, but only if you really try. Your focus narrows, distractions fade away, and find yourself fully invested in the task at hand. The challenge you are facing is "just manageable." Victory is not guaranteed, but it is possible. Tasks like these, science has found, are the most likely to keep us motivated in the long term. Human beings love challenge but only if they are within the optimal zone of difficulty. Tasks that are significantly beyond your current abilities are discouraging. But tasks that are right on the border of success and failure are incredibly motivating to our human brains. We want nothing more than to master a skill just beyond our current horizon. We can call this phenomenon The Goldilocks Rule. The Goldilocks Rule states that humans experience peak motivation when working on tasks that are right on the edge of their current abilities. Not too hard. Not too easy. Just right. Working on tasks that adhere to the Goldilocks Rule is one of the keys to maintaining long term motivation. If you find yourself feeling unmotivated to work on a task, it is often because it has drifted into an area of boredom or been shoved into an area of great difficulty. You need to find a way to pull your tasks back to the border of your abilities where you feel challenged, but capable.

### How to Reach Motivation Peak:

This is wonderful blend of happiness and peak performance is sometimes referred to as flow. Flow is what athletes and performers experience when they are "in the zone." Flow is the mental state you experience when you are so focused on the task at hand that the rest of the world fades away. In many ways, we could describe flow as your state of peak motivation. You would be hard pressed to find a state where you are more driven to continue the task you are working on. One factor that researchers have found is linked to flow states is whether or not you are following the Goldilocks Rule we mentioned earlier. If you are working on challenges of optimal difficulty, then you will not only be motivated but also experience a boost in happiness. As psychologist Gilbert Brim put it, "One of the important sources of human happiness is working on tasks at a suitable level of difficulty, neither too hard nor too easy." In order to reach this state of peak performance, however, you not only need to work on challenges as the right degree of difficulty. But also measure your immediate progress. As psychologist Jonathan Haidt explains, one of the key to reaching a flow state is that "you get immediate feedback about how you are doing at each step." Thus, we can say that measurement is a key factor in motivation. To put it more precisely, facing an optimal challenge and receiving immediate feedback about the progress you are making toward that challenge are two of the most critical components of peak motivation.

### What to Do When Motivation Fades:

Inevitably, your motivation to perform a task will dip at some point. What happens when motivation fades? I don't claim to have all the answers, but here's what I try to remind myself of when I feel like giving up. Your mind is suggestion engine: Consider every thought you have as a suggestion, not an order. Right now, as I'm writing this, my mind is suggesting that I feel tired. It is suggesting that I give up. It is suggesting that I take an

easier path. If pause for a moment, however, I can discover new suggestions. My mind is also suggesting that I will feel very good about accomplishing this work once it is done. It is suggesting that I will respect the identity I am building when I stick to the schedule. It is suggesting that I have the ability to finish this task, even when I don't feel like. Remember, none of these suggestions are orders. They are merely options. I have the power to choose.

#### Discomfort is Temporary:

Relative to the time in your normal day or week, nearly any habit you perform is over quickly. Your workout will be finished in an hour or two. Your report will be typed to completion by tomorrow morning. Life is easier now than it has ever been. 300 years ago, if you didn't kill your own food and build your own house, you would die. Today, we whine about forgetting our iPhone charger.

Maintain perspective your life is good and your discomfort is temporary. Step into this moment of discomfort and let it strengthen you. You will never regret good work once it is done:

Theodore Roosevelt famously said, "Far and away the best prize that life has to offer is the chance to work hard at work worth doing." So often it seems that we want to work easily at work worth doing. We want our work to be helpful and respected, but we do not want to struggle through our work. We want our stomachs to be flat and our arms to be strong, but we do not want to grind through another workout. We want the final result, but not the failed attempts that precede it. We want the gold, but not the grind. Anyone can want a gold medal. Few people want to train like an Olympian. And yet, despite our resistance to it, I have never found myself feeling worse after the hard work was done. There have been days when it was damn hard to start, but it was always worth finishing. Sometimes, the simple act of showing up and having the courage to do the work, even in an average manner, is a victory worth celebrating.

#### This is life:

Life is constant balance between giving into the ease of distraction and overcoming the pain of discipline. It is not an exaggeration to say that our lives and our identities are defined in these delicate balance. What is life, if not the sum of a hundred thousand daily battles and tiny decisions to either gut it out or give it up? This moment when you don't feel like doing the work? This is not a moment to be thrown away. This is not a dress rehearsal. This moment is your life as much as any other moment. Spend it in a way that will make you proud.





### 34. Pushpal Acharjee

Pushpal Acharjee, a student of Industrial Fish and Fisheries, is currently studying in 5th semester. He tries to reflect the daily tribulations and social dilemma of our daily lives through writeups. He sternly believes that creativity and determination can change the world.

#### MY DURGA

Amidst the cacophony of the Mudiali Street, the shimmering lights crossing my way and the loud music of R.D.Burman playing across the lane, I was tightly holding my mother's hand for the sight of the grand Durga idol. An immense crowd was rushing towards me and within seconds I was pushed in front by the crowd of beautifully dressed people. I looked in front, there was a massive idol elegantly draped in Red sari with 'Astras'. That was not just an idol, it was Devi Durga. 'Maa'- our 'Maa' who demolishes all the evil of our society. Durga Maa was there in front of me, with her tranquil look, but where was my Maa? "Maa....Maa....where are you? Maa...." I shouted as I looked around but couldn't identify amongst the people in the crowd. "Maa...Maa...Maa..." and I woke up to find that I was lying in my cot. The broken mirror in front reflected my tattered and filthy shirt and my skinny hands, still searching to touch my mother's face. I looked around in my room. I couldn't see anyone else, except of the lizard on the dilapidated wall. My quest for my mother disappeared by the cry of a baby. That was my sister beside me probably she was hungry or might have seen a dream like me where Maa went missing. But she couldn't say. She was just a baby who would turn one year in this coming Puja. And Maa! I knew I have lost her, not only in my dreams but also in reality. She gifted me my sister and breathed for last time. You all might be wondering who am I? Rajesh is my name as common as my attire. My father is a renowned Phuchka wala in the streets of Sealdah. But if someone ask me about him, I won't be able to say much because whenever I open my eyes , I found him getting ready for selling Phuchkas . He usually came back home late at night and within minutes after his return he started preparing for next day's sell.

I missed my mother, but my father had no time to recollect her memories with me. But I felt things have changed drastically. Previously we used to have two meals a day, but now-a-days the meals had reduced and whenever I asked about the reason my father kept on recurring the same words – "I am having no sell due to Corona." His words made me curious to know – "Who is Corona?" Probably he was a nasty villain with big moustaches and sword in his hand. He might be intimidating my father and other people like Mahisasur used to do in 9th century. But I was sure Durga Maa would demolish this Corona and my father would have lots and lots of sell during Durga Puja. I remembered last year a massive crowd in front of our phuchka stall. I was sure in this year too; the streets would be crowded with people waiting for my father's phuchka with Shalpatha in their hands. A stroke of wind passed by and the pages of the calendar started flipping. After my mother's death, nursing and taking proper care of my sister were my prime tasks of the day. Time passed by so quickly that I didn't even realise, it was the month of October. Only two days left for Puja. I couldn't handle my excitement. Puja! Ahh! The time to forget all our sorrows as Durga Maa was arriving with her children. My happiness was beyond words. I looked outside the window. A cluster of white clouds was floating on the blue sky. The lane in front was filled with the smell of Chhatim flower. The sound of Dhak was slowly approaching me. The soothing rays of the sun hypnotised me, kissing my hands and asking me to overwhelm myself with the earth to welcome Maa Durga. Soon my thoughts were interrupted as my little sister started crying and I looked at the clock to recall it was her feeding time. However the pitch of her cry could not exceed the peak of my excitement for Puja. I was also wondering about the different ways of helping out my father for the special Durga Puja stall. Since last two years I helped my father during Durga Puja and after selling all his Phuchkas he used to buy me a balloon from the stall next to his.

My father returned and I rushed to him. With my heavy exhilaration I began narrating my plans to him – setting up the stall together, eating good foods, buying colourful balloons, wearing new dress. Yes! New dress! "Baba where is my new dress? Baba will you gift me a shirt or a Punjabi? What about new pants? Baba ... Baba my new dress, Baba." Soon my rows of questions stopped as I heard a noise of crumbling of a packet on my father's hand. My excitements reached its peak. Was that my new dress in that packet? I snatched the packet to open it in a hurry. To my surprise it was a little frock! "That's for your sister. Wear that red shirt you have. You will look good," said my father in a heavy tone. I was totally disheartened. Sky fell on my head. I knew not what to do. Father bought a new dress for my sister, but not for me. Why? Why would I ware that old red shirt? How could father do this to me? My mother would surely have scolded him, if she knew it – hundreds of thoughts flashed across my mind. Tears started rolling down. All my excitements vanished and I sprint out of my house. I could not stop weeping. I darted so fast so that no one can see my tears. I ran and ran and ran till I reached a pandal in a lane, in its mid-construction. I stopped there and sat under a heavy tree. I was exhausted.

My eyes closed on its own. I could hear barely anything due to the sounds of Dhaks. Suddenly there were smokes all around. Fog during Durga Puja was something very unusual! To my surprise there arose an idol of a lady calling out my name. "Rajesh...Rajesh..." I knew this voice. That's my mother's. But this lady in front was not my Maa. Oh! Wait! I recognised her, she is Maa, Durga Maa. "Durga Maa...is that you?" I asked curiously.

"Yes, Rajesh," she replied.

- "Maa, I miss my Maa. I miss those merry days. My sister, she has snatched away all my happiness. My Maa left this world soon after she was born. My father brings new dress for her. What about my happiness? I hate my sister."

- "But Rajesh, she is just a little girl. Remember Rajesh, Durga is not only there in the pandals for these four days, I am there in every house for the entire year. I am within the mothers, I am within the wives, I am within the grandmothers and I am within the sisters. I am within your sister as well. Rajesh, life is full of ups and downs but that doesn't mean it's because of someone's fault. It can never be your sister's fault. Love yourself and love your sister, Rajesh. She is your mother's last gift. She is where I reside. Love your sister Rajesh. She will be always beside you."

The idol soon started fading into the smoke. I wanted to touch her but I could not. Just her words were reverberating into my ears. Soon my eyes opened and I realised that I was dreaming. All of a sudden I could hear a familiar cry. Wait! Was that my sister voice? I looked around to spot her and as I turned my head I saw a little girl. She was in tears and then I noticed her brother was approaching towards her with a bun in his hand. That scene made me remember about my sister. I realised that I became late and must rush home to feed my sister. And Durga Maa's words! I knew now what to do. I had to love my sister. She was Maa's last gift. She was the miniature version of Devi Durga.

A year passed by so quickly and the pandemic was over. Amidst the cacophony of Mudiali Street, the shimmering lights crossing my way and loud music of R.D.Burman playing across the lane, I was tightly holding my sister in my lap, for the sight of grand Durga idol. An immense crowd was rushing towards me and within seconds I was pushed in front by the crowd of beautiful dressed people. I looked in front, there was a massive idol elegantly draped in Red sari with 'Astras'. That was not just an idol; it was Devi Durga and my little Durga was gazing at her own reflection in that idol with her utmost astonishment.



### 35. Chandra Sundeep

Chandra Sundeep discovered the passion for writing on one of those days when everything seemed to go wrong! In the complex puzzle that life is, words came as a breath of fresh air and rescued her. In a short span of time her thoughts have found a place in a few anthologies. Having worked as a social worker across cultures and classes, her stories reflect her understanding of society and issues faced by people. Through her words she tries to bring in awareness and writes with the hope that even if her words impact one person's life, her tiny drop may not be so tiny after all.

#### RARE REGIONAL FESTIVALS OF INDIA

The patterns on a zebra's body are unique. No two humans have the same set of fingerprints. Well, when we accept these facts with ease and no disbelief, my next sentence should not come as a surprise. India is not just a country of 1.3 billion people, it is a land of diverse cultures, customs, traditions and practices. It is a melting pot of diversity. It is a land where multi-religions thrive and flourish. 121 languages flow through the veins of this glorious land, with 19,569 raw linguistic affiliations peeking from its various nooks and corners. When there is so much diversity in language, religion and cultures; how can festivals fall behind?

From Siachen in the north to Indira point in south and from Kutch in the west to Changlang in the east- there are as many festivals as the number of stars in the sky. It may seem as an exaggeration, but it's true. The more popular festivals like Deepawali, Holi, Baisakhi, Eid, Christmas, Dussehra are celebrated by many, but even then, their celebrations differ across the country. While Deepawali in North India celebrates the return of Lord Ram, in South India it marks the death of Narakasura while Bengal celebrates it with grandiose Kali puja. While north India celebrates the victory of good over evil by burning effigies of Ravana on Dussehra, in Mysore it signifies the slaying of a demon Mahishasuran by Goddess Chamundeeswari. But it isn't only these well-known festivals which brighten our festive calendars. Indians celebrate a plethora of regional festivities with great zest and vigour. Let's embark on the journey to explore the rare festivals of India by trekking to the spectacular rugged mountains of Ladakh. These mountains and valleys blossom not only with nature's bountiful gifts, but also with colourful traditions and customs.

The Dosmoche Festival or the festival of scapegoats is a Buddhist prayer festival to protect the locals of Ladakh, its origin tracing all the way back to the late 13th century. In the last month of the Tibetan lunar calendar (February as per Gregorian calendar), monks from many monasteries get together at the Likir, Shachukul, Diskit monasteries and Leh palace. Tantric rituals performed by Buddhist monks aim to drive away negative and evil forces, and keep the people of Ladakh safe from natural disasters. During the rituals, the monks dress up in colourful robes and masks depicting various deities, including Buddha. Locals perform sacred enchanting and thumping Cham dances with musicians playing the cymbals and flutes (gyaling). The vibrant stalls that come up even before the celebrations begin add to the festivities. The festivities end with the burning of ritual offerings.

From Ladakh, let's go to the picturesque state of Himachal Pradesh to celebrate the festival of 'Sair or Saayar', a festive celebration to mark the end of harvest season and welcome the 'Shravan' month. Pongal, Baisakhi, Sankranti, Ugadi are few of the more well-known harvest festivals, Sair is one which is unique to its land and vibrant people. It is a centuries old festival which brings the quaint towns of Kullu, Solan, Mandi and Shimla to life. Carnivals, bright colours, drum beating and blowing of trumpets add fervour to the festivities. Two events set this harvest festival apart from the other harvest festivals celebrated across the country. One is the Oracle sessions which are conducted to ward off evil spirits, and the other is traditional bullfighting.

The Sair festival was initially symbolic of the preparations needed for the harsh upcoming winters, and the villagers would get ready by storing crops and firewood. Also, it signified the return of Gods from heavens. Celebratory music and beating of instruments would welcome them. The devotees offer crops to Gods to invoke their blessings. Large-scale fairs displaying various stalls selling jewellery, utensils, and clothes are popular among the locals. While in Kullu and Kangra valleys, Sair is more of a family celebration; in the valleys of Shimla, entire villages come together in celebration.

From the North, let us move towards the East, to West Bengal, the sacred abode of Maa Durga. 130 kms from the capital city of Kolkata is the beautiful temple town Bishnupur. Apart from being famous for its intricate terracotta temples and elegant silk sarees, it is the home of a unique festival 'Jhapan' or snake festival. An annual festival which traces its origin to the 14th century, it is unlike other snake festivals (naag pujas) of India. People throng Bishnupur village in the months of July - August and offer their obeisance to Goddess Mansha (Goddess of snakes). Locals believe the Goddess Mansha controls all the serpents of this planet and worshipping

her would keep them safe from snake bites and hazardous diseases. On the day of festivities, menfolk bathe the snakes in the river while chanting mantras and singing traditional songs. Women refrain from eating food on that day and offer milk to snakes in the temples. The entire village soaks in the festivities amidst the monsoon rains, praying for fertility, a good monsoon and a booming harvest season.

A trip to the East would be incomplete without visiting the 7 sisters - the North Eastern states which is a pot-pourri of cultures and customs. Bihu in Assam, hornbill festival of Nagaland, kut of Manipur; North-East regions are home to not only these well-known and celebrated festivals, but they also witness countless more joyous celebrations. You would have heard of the famous boat races of Kerala, but have you heard of a boat race supervised by the deities themselves?

Manipur's boat race festival, Heikru Hitongba, is as unique as it gets! A religious function held annually on the 11th day of Langban (a month in the Meetei lunar calendar) in the Thangapat canal, brings out the devotion and festive spirit of the locals. With the rising sun, the sacred idol of Lord Bejoy Govinda is brought out from the Mani temple and taken to the sacred boat (Khunet-Hi). Priests offer garlands, gold and silver coins to the deities. They perform rituals seeking blessings, after which, the deities preside over the exciting Hiyang Tanaba or boat race. Skilled rowers row narrow long boats along the narrow canal with full vigour. Men dress up in traditional Khamen Chatpa (Manipuri dhotis). Each boat has a minimum of 20 rowers and a leader (Tengmai Leppa) who is at the helm of the boat. The locals cheer and revel in the festivities and bid farewell to Lord Vishnu as he enters his abode after witnessing the energetic and enthralling race.

I know all this information has amazed you, but the next festival will leave you awestruck as you wonder at the diversity India offers. Let's take a plunge and wade to the western coast of India, which is an eclectic mix of cultures and traditions. The states of Rajasthan, Gujarat, Goa and Maharashtra offer an outstanding example of diversity and oneness. We begin our travels with the union territory of Goa which has so much to offer. Goa isn't just a land of feni, carnivals and beaches, but also the proud grounds for many traditional festivities; Shigmotsav or the spring harvest festival being one among them. Konkans start the celebrations on the 9th day of Phalgun month and it lasts for 14 days. Initially celebrated to commemorate the homecoming warriors, it also marks farewell to winter. Dhakto Shigmo (folk songs and dances) and Vhadlo Shigmo (religious ceremonies) form a part of this colourful festival. Colourful outfits, joyous music, and dance are part of the festivities. The festival begins with a collective singing of 'namans' - traditional songs. On the 5th day, people enjoy sprinkling gulal (dry red colour powder) and neel (dry blue powder) on each other. Parades with colourful floats are an important part of celebration. People dress up in traditional costume and even carry artificial swords. Musical instruments like dhol, taso etc are played in the street parades. Shigmo is incomplete without the traditional breathtaking dances like 'Ghode-Morni', 'Fugdi Dance' and 'Rommatamel'. The celebrations end with Mand Davarap (collective bath in the river).

From the western boundaries, let's go to the heartland of India - Madhya Pradesh and join the locals as they celebrate Bhangoria - the festival of love - the Indian version of Valentine's day- if we may call it so. Bhangoria, a tribal festival which began in the early 11th century, is one of the rarest festivals of India as it celebrates elopement! Yes, you read it right! Youngsters of marriageable age elope and get married as per customs on returning. A week-long festival, celebrated around Holi, gives youngsters an opportunity to choose their life partners. Boys apply gulal (dry coloured powder) on the face of the girl they want to marry. If the girl accepts the proposal, she would reciprocate by applying gulal on the boy's face; and if she is not in agreement, the boy has to convince her for her approval. In a unique custom, girls propose by spitting betel juice toward boys who would then elope with the girl, else it is a sign of cowardice. Folk songs, dances and colours add to the mystique as villagers revel in the village fairs or haats which sell locally made items like clay pots, silver jewellery etc. Tribal women dress up in their festive best, adorning fine jewellery and mirrored accessories. Holika dehan marks the end of the vibrant festival. What better place than South India to continue on this enriching exploration. Let's visit Andhra Pradesh - where Lord Balaji lives in his abode of seven hills. Sirimanothsavam is a unique and intriguing festival celebrated with utmost devotion and traditions.

A one-day festival celebrated to worship Goddess Pydimamba is held on the first Tuesday after Vijayadashami in the Vizianagaram district. It is unlike other festivals, as in this festival the temple priest hangs from the tip of a 60 ft long flag staff. Though risky, locals believe that the Goddess Pydimamba's grace protects the priest from all harm. According to popular belief, the goddess visits the temple priest in his dreams and shows the place from which the sirimanu (log) is available. The priest performs Vedic chanting to pay obeisance to the goddess before starting the festival. A chariot procession carries the goddess 3 times around the fort and temple. A statue of a white elephant precedes the goddess. It is symbolic of olden days when the Maharaja used to lead the procession. Another chariot, known as Anjali chariot carries 5 married women, accompanied by paladhara

(a decorated umbrella made with fishing net). The streets come alive with stalls, traditional music and vibrant dances performed by the villagers.

Our journey would be incomplete without stepping into God's own country - Kerala. The land of coconuts and bathhouses is famous for the grand celebration of Onam, but have you heard of a festival in a temple which doesn't have a roof or the sanctum sanctorum? Yes, Kottankulangara temple in Kerala is a unique Swayambhu temple which does not have a roof and also hosts the rare festival of Chamayavilakku or Carnival of lights.

Kottankulangara festival - an annual celebration which takes place at Kottankulangara Devi temple at Chavara is a highly spiritual and religious festival. Held on the 10th and 11th day of Meenam (8th month in the traditional Malayalam Calendar), devotees worship Goddess Bhagawathy to seek her blessings. Men dress up as women and wear traditional female clothes - sarees, half sarees etc. Carrying traditional lamps, they walk at night in a procession accompanied by traditional music and instruments to the Devi temple.

India is a land like no other; From north to south, east to west there are countless traditions. Though divided by religion, caste, colour and creed; the people of India are bound by an invisible thread of love, respect and tolerance. In this land of festivals and customs, all celebrations point towards spreading joy and cheer. This great land which was once the home to many civilizations, and great inventions; has continued to thrive and flourish because of her strong cultural roots. The festivals of India are not only vibrant, they are unique and intriguing as well.



**36. Pritika Bhatt**

Pritika Bhatt is 12 years old. She is a student of class VIIth of the The Millennium School, Noida.

**CHRISTMAS EVE**

Oh here comes the Christmas eve!  
So early this year you wont believe!

All the presents are bundling up and falling down  
Hundred people looking for gifts in the town

Santa claus is busy feeding his reindeers  
They fainting on the special Christmas night is his biggest fear

From the north pole comes the joyful and good old santa clause  
When he will deliver the gifts, everyone will shower him with applause

The breathtaking Christmas dinner always makes my eyes glued to it  
Take a bit of everything that is a work of a person full of wit

Until midnight you enjoy to the fullest  
Then till late next morning you rest

But the party is not ever yet  
Thousand more gifts you still have to get

Because new year comes next  
Oh the end of the year is the best

It is so good for this year to end  
There is so much we need to mend

All the cold and snowy breeze  
In which we would usually freeze

Will be gone soon  
And will remove all the cold gloom

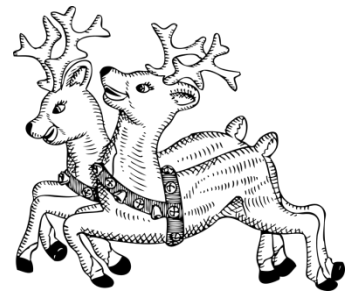
And then the school's Christmas break will have be to put on a stop  
All the excuses of being sick, tired and cold will be flop

And then we go to the school  
Which would still be full of air cool?

But we don't ever forget that special Christmas day  
Even though there are more such on the way

Each will be as special as the previous one  
Munching on food and leaving carols none

Oh here comes Christmas eve!  
So early this year you wont even believe!



**37. Amrita Mallik**

Born and brought up in Kolkata, Amrita has been a school teacher. She is now a housewife. Reading and writing are therapeutic for me. When she is not re-learning alphabets and numbers with her son, she is busy scribbling her thoughts on paper.

**FESTIVALS IN TIMES OF PANDEMIC**

Fun, frolic, family and food define a festival  
 A welcome break from the daily gruel  
 Happening all the year round, with great pomp and vigour,  
 However, this year, the pandemic brings a twist  
 Unbelievable, unexpected but a crucial one too!

2020 is the year of Rahu, asserts the soothsayers  
 He won't budge unless awakening dawns upon all,  
 It's time for confession, rectification and repentance.  
 The woebegone world's heartfelt plea, karma couldn't refuse  
 Is this its clever ploy to pinpoint the basic and the essential?

In the rush hours of kitschy parade of status quo and power play  
 Festival has lost its inherent essence of empathy and humanity,  
 Love has been distorted to meet the fad trend  
 Gaudy gloss and glitter stifling the innocent mirth and bliss  
 As everyone cannot be a participant, neither all wish to!

It's time to unmask and embrace your real selves  
 Be congenial, be grateful and be content  
 For the simple things hold the key to happiness  
 Remember, only when you sail through this year  
 Can you celebrate festivals the next year!

Festival is about sharing the blessings, to be a Good Samaritan  
 And, so, it's best enjoyed when families have a hearty laugh together,  
 When, people are selflessly generous to the less-privileged  
 That is what even the Gods yearn from their mirror-images  
 It's time to think better, talk less and act noble!



### 38. Amrita Lahiri Bhattacharya

Amrita is an IT professional and a doting mother. She has had a penchant for writing since her teenage days. She squeezes in time between work and her kid to pen down her thoughts in the form of stories, poems and microtales. Her work has been regularly featured in multiple online literary platforms. Her poems and stories have been published in several anthologies.

#### MY PERFECT SHANGRI-LA

When the harsh sun dims its fury,  
The sky is enveloped by a charismatic glory,  
As zillion stars tucked in its vista,  
The twinkling stars have a majestic aura,  
I marvel at their embellished finery,  
While I lay here with a broken heart  
With a tattered diary.

That day it was the festival of lights,  
The streets were shining bright,  
The iridescent gems of the sky matched,  
With the glowing bulbs in my dark alley,  
While my head was pounding hard,  
With loud clamoring noise in the distressful valley.

In my dark room where only shadows,  
Of dark past makes the resonance,  
The flickering flame of positivity and hope,  
Riding on the firefly made its prominence,  
The dazzling lights within myself  
Rekindled my inner fire,  
Dimming all the extraneous gaudy lights  
And the burning ire.

For the first time I lit the inner lamp,  
To ward off the disrupting thoughts,  
The reticular rays of lights dispersed,  
Unfurling the upsetting knots,  
Oh! The shimmering lights,  
Of inner peace and power of self-love.

Radiating atoms of soul-stirring songs,  
Forming a treasure trove,  
Playing with the shadows and silhouette,  
Of painful experiences,  
The shining beads of light emanating from within,  
Buried all the differences.

I understood that nothing can dim  
The light that shines from within,  
Nowadays, I try to be the moon  
In those wearied souls,  
Emitting lucent rays in the azure welkin,  
The world will go in a blur  
After the brief spell of the festival,  
But lights perched on the heart,  
Will keep us always jovial and convivial.

Ah! Such a great place nestled in the mountains,  
Of lights and serenity - my perfect Shangri-La,  
Shadows of past never roam as hope,  
Faith and lights are my paraphernalia,  
In the darkest hours,  
I found the hidden lights  
Peeping into my broken heart.

As I excavated my hidden talent,  
The dancing shadows of evil intent fell apart,  
The lights never left my life from thereon,  
As I walked towards the lights,  
Leaving my shadows behind,  
I let go and moved on!





### 39. Jagdeep Kaur

Jagdeep is a teacher by profession having an inclination towards writing about day to day experiences and relationships. She is a passionate reader to broaden and explore different perspectives.

#### CHANGE IN FESTIVAL CELEBRATIONS IN THE LAST 25 YEARS

Festivals play an integral part in binding and strengthening the relationships. Relationships need time and space to flourish. Individuals are hustling to earn their bread. In such a condition, survival becomes monotonous and stressed. Festivals add colors to every human being's existence. There are certain traditions of celebrating a festival associated with every community. Earlier one person from the family was the sole earner. Keeping that in mind, families made home-cooked food during occasions. Women of the house have to decide about the decoration, list of gifts to be given and other important material that will be required.

Let's consider the Festival of Lights – Diwali. I could recall that ahead of time, my mother starts with the deep cleaning of the house that includes replacing the old stuff with new, dusting, and polishing every corner of the house. The list of groceries was prepared and bought exclusively for the upcoming festival. After making the house spic and span, mum used to start with the preparation of delicacies like besan laddoo, shakarpare, namkeen to name a few. How can I miss Diwali house! I remember bothering my parents to assist in making a Diwali house of mud and decorate it with color powder, lights, and flowers. Till here the plan was executed halfway.

A day before Diwali is called Dhanteras when my mother used to buy important utensils according to the usage missing from the kitchen or the replaceable ones. On the day of Diwali, mornings seemed to be energizing and full of life. All the members of the family were allotted work with a time deadline. My brothers were busy with lighting to be properly fixed, I and mom used to be in the kitchen and my father went to and fro completing outdoor work. Diyas made of mud had to be dipped in water for a few hours, dried and made ready for use before evening. All rooms were cleaned by spilling water and wiping the floors. Rangoli with different colors were the attraction of the house. In the evening, after worshipping Ganesha and Laxmi, people distributed the home-cooked snacks gathered in a thali to each other. The activity of distribution lasts for an hour.

As there was the advancement of technology, there was a major transformation in the way festivals were celebrated. The list of delicacies to be made is reduced to one or two or bought from the market due to the crunch of time as women have started working. Women's brain is diverted in multiple things including home and office. Initially, women solely thought about the upcoming events and well-being of the house whereas, nowadays, they have to maintain a balance between personal and professional life. Earthen diyas got substituted with tealight candles. Readymade Rangoli patterns are available in the market that is ready to use. A variety of decorating materials including fancy lights are available. People's buying capacity has increased to a great extent in comparison with the initial days. The gifting ideas have taken a tremendous shift like hampers, antique pieces, dry fruits collection, etc. People click pictures of every instance of contribution towards the festivals to post it on social media like shopping, cleaning while preparing in the kitchen. Individuals want to be digitally active so that society is aware of the celebration of the festival at their place. Various applications providing home cleaning services like Urban Clap have come up to provide comfort during office breaks at reasonable rates to the individuals. Despite facing a drastic change, the enthusiasm and zeal among millennials are observed even today. Everybody welcome festivals with open hands every year and manage to celebrate it with their families irrespective of their busy schedules. They hold cultural and spiritual importance in the minds of people and teach us to live with festivities, no matter whatever situation comes our way.



#### 40. Soumita Mitra

Soumita Mitra is born and brought up in Maithan, Jharkhand. Formerly she was an educationist and has taught at several government institutions. She had completed Bachelors and Masters in English. Presently, she is doing her PhD in Philosophy. She is passionate about creative writing which has lead her to become part of International Poetry compilations and International Journal and other International Anthologies.

#### AMOUR DE NOËL

When the chariot of Santa speeds through the time  
 Breaking the ice of sorrow and pain  
 The jingling of the bells in his caps  
 Are the heralds that wintertide has arrived.  
 The smell of those logs burning at the fire place,  
 Makes me remember those childhood carol gatherings  
 Those innocent and unadulterated exchange of love glances ,  
 And how my red frilled dress shone through the sunlight  
 That peeped through the decorative window panes.  
 The aroma of the freshly baked cake filled the room,  
 It added flavors to our new found affection.  
 Our eyes sparkled with unimpeachable yet unexplainable feelings,  
 As if, Almighty's abundant blessings.  
 Thus, the touch of the cold wintry breeze is like recalling those good old days,  
 And feeling the warmth on the face.



#### 41. Deepshikha Mukherjee

Deepshikha Mukherjee completed M.Sc in Biochemistry and worked in research projects, currently preparing for Ph.D. entrances. Since childhood, she has been involved in different social works (helping underprivileged students for their board exams, collection, and distribution of reliefs for flood-affected and other distressed people) being associated with few organizations. She began writing from adolescence in school magazines. She loves to depict her emotions and protests through creativity.

#### NEITHER DIVINE NOR INSIGNIFICANT

26th January 2018, Delhi Highway, 'Seema Bhabani, Border Security Force', for the first time performed Bike Stunts and impresses with unprecedented skills of balance on bikes. The whole country was amused and applauded them. The team has won a permanent seat in the history of India. Not only they, from sports to cultural events, from education to politics, from family to office, from space to the ocean, but no field in human history is deprived of women's success. On international women's day, print media, social media are flooded with great speeches, statements, and comments to depict the greatness of women. Do women really have enough respect as human beings?

To find the answer we have to return to that time when the society was just trying to drag itself forward without releasing its captive limb, the women; but that hand has provided the power to remove the filth of the society for years. They helped a dormant social structure to acquire and utilize its full potential by empowering themselves. Whenever nature lost its balance, femininity has taken the helm. The women, it was supposed to be respectful for, has been hit by patriarchal debauchery. Femininity is the womb, where the seed is nurtured and finally flourishes as a society. Patriarchy loves to lose in the alley of her beauty but is afraid to dive into the depth of her heart. Feminism has been seen much in the literature, epics that have been created over the ages. However, the worship of womanhood is being increased in the pages of the literature only. That is why women have become majestic within themselves without waiting for other's acceptance. After making huge achievements, even today, women are fragmented between the extremities. Either she is mother- goddess, or just a commodity – many hold such an idea. Whether she is a daughter or wife or mother, she must be the idol of endurance – otherwise, loss of her divinity is inevitable. Either she is superhuman or mere insignificant. People endorsing economic freedom, gender equality, also look for beautiful, domestic brides who are skilled in household jobs through matrimonial advertisements. Although some people beliefs in the idea that the beauty of a woman lies in her soul, not in her skin-color, vital statistics, or facial features, most women are victims of the opposite thought.

In religious beliefs, we have worshipped Durga, Kali, and many goddesses from ancient times but do not show women the respect which they deserve as human beings. Here lies the hypocrisy of society. They worship goddesses to kill evil but themselves become the devil when a woman is found in a vulnerable state. Sexual harassment, verbal abuse, domestic violence, gender-dependent unequal pay, body shaming do happen. The #MeToo movement started in one of the so-called 'developed' countries. Not only in third world countries, but the first world countries also have not approached nicely towards women. But now, women's excellence in every field and form of life are remarkable, hence the hurt patriarchal ego comes into play and the defeated 'superiors' try to harm and demean the women as an act of vengeance. The success of her life does not lie in blessing like a goddess, but to enrich herself with all the resources, and in living like a free human being with huge potential. They are the rare combination of Motherhood of Mother Teresa, the boldness of Malala Yousafzai, the analytical ability of Madam Curie, the determination of Mary Kom, the creativity of Frieda Kahlo, the compassion of Sister Nivedita, and many other great qualities. Each of them is unique. She can create and nurture if been loved and respected; else can destroy civilization. They have immense power and potential. They can raise their voice for their needs, rights. Hence, they need neither the seat of divinity nor the contempt of the slightest. They are neither goddesses nor insignificant person. They are very much human, human with totality. Despite all the hypocrisy, quite a part of society also respects and believes in woman's capabilities. They share the journey of the thorny path of life with them and help to prosper them to the fullest. Although, there are contrasts between devotion to goddesses, the festivities of Durgapuja, Kalipuja, and in regressive approach towards the flesh and blood women, the scenario has changed to some extent. It is never wrong to say that, nature has its own way to maintain balance and if the stability is lost, it will fix it on its own.



## 42. Sajal Kanti Basu

Sajal Kanti Basu, raised in North Kolkata, has an illustrious career as an engineering & management professional with renowned multi nationals. He thinks Literature is the backbone of most the business communications especially Marketing segment.

### LITERATURE'S INFLUENCE IN MARKETING & MODERN BUSINESS COMMUNICATIONS

Introduction:

“Literature”, a word still to find its own definition, many literarians many minds, but Literature is not only a body of written works, it is not only used to poetry & prose or novels, it is not only classified as per different situations, systems, language, culture, society , history & many more subject matters but it helps human being to communicate & control one human to another human’s brain, heart,emotion,anger,decision etc. Literature is a qualitative & quantitative communications to understand the global culture in writing or orally. Literarian is the artist of this art. Literature influenced human to watch dream, to create emotion & converts into real life. Literature plays an important role in marketing also. Literature & Marketing both are synonymous. Marketing is a communication about product & services to consumer mind but this communication starts with literature. Literature gives birth of marketing either in writing or in Oral Communications.

1. Literature influences on Marketing:

1.1 Case Study on OYO group: Now I am telling a small story which will depict how the literature is being influenced commercially in marketing. Here is the story:

Until the early 19th century, Asiatic lions could be found all across South and Southwest Asia. But the rise in the human population took over large parts of the lion’s habitat. The destruction of their natural habitat was only the beginning of the end. The manufacturing of guns and subsequent hunting for sport meant that nearly all the lions remaining outside Gujarat were hunted and killed from 1800-1860. Within Gujarat, indiscriminate hunting by the people of Junagarh led to a drastic decrease in population, even as they were completely wiped out from the other parts of Asia. The last Asiatic lions in India outside of Gir forest were killed in 1886 at Rewah, and the last wild lion sighted outside India was in Iran in 1941. In 1901, Lord Curzon was on a visit to Junagadh and was offered to be taken lion hunting. He reportedly declined the offer and suggested that the Nawab of Junagadh protect the only lions left in Asia instead of hunting them. In what was probably the first institutional wildlife conservation effort in India, the Nawab began the long and arduous journey towards protecting the species. He started by preserving the lions within his private hunting grounds. The Department of Forest Officials stepped in later to protect one of the world’s most threatened species. From a population of approximately 20 lions in 1913, the numbers have risen to 523, according to the 2015 census – A mammoth effort made possible by the Nawab’s conservation efforts and the Indian Government’s post-Independence ban on lion killing in 1955. (Excerpt from OYO travel guide, for their Hotel Chain advertisement website: [www.oyorooms.com](http://www.oyorooms.com)). The excerpts is a literature which describes depict the history of “The Gir National Park”, Gujarat OYO the famous hotel chain group in India attracting customers to use their Chain of Hotels to explore the famous national park. Now the above Literature indicates such a strong communication for the tourist to attract or use OYO Hotel Chains for their vacations. So here the Literature communicating a service to the consumer for their wants or needs, this is marketing. The Literature is mother of marketing. If there is no literature, no communication will happen. Literature influence human to watch dream, to imagine & converts into real life. Literature plays an important role in marketing also. Literature & Marketing both are synonymous.

2. Covid 19 and Marketing Strategies:

If we consider the pandemic situation like Covid 19 where the entire Globe is passing through a torrid time, the modern marketing practices completely changed & it is shifted to digital marketing. Literature has an important role in modern marketing practices & digital marketing basically in current pandemic situation. Here few modern practices are Literature based:

- i) Social Networks and Viral Marketing : Social media marketing focuses on providing users with content they find valuable and want to share across their social networks, resulting in increased visibility and traffic. Social media shares of content, videos, and images also influence SEO efforts in that they often increase relevancy in search results within social media networks like Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, and Instagram as well as search engines like Google and Yahoo.
- ii) Paid Media Advertising: Paid media is a tool that companies use to grow their website traffic through paid advertising. One of the most popular methods is pay-per-click (PPC) links. Essentially, a company buys or “sponsors” a link that appears as an ad in search engine results when keywords related to their product or service are searched (this process is commonly known as search engine marketing, or SEM). Every time the ad is clicked, the company pays the search engine (or other third party host site) a small fee for the visitor — a literal “pay per click.”

iii) **Internet Marketing:** Internet marketing, or online marketing, combines web and email to advertise and drive e-commerce sales. Social media platforms may also be included to leverage brand presence and promote products and services. In total, these efforts are typically used in conjunction with traditional advertising formats like radio, television, and print. There's also a lot to be said about online reviews and opinions. Word-of-mouth advertising is unpaid, organic, and oh-so-powerful because those having nice things to say about your product or service generally have nothing to gain from it other than sharing good news. A recommendation from a friend, colleague, or family member has built-in credibility and can spur dozens of leads who anticipate positive experiences with your brand.

iv) **Email Marketing:** Email marketing is a highly effective way in Covid 19 period to nurture and convert leads. It is an automated process that targets specific prospects and customers with the goal of influencing their purchasing decisions. Email marketing success is measured by open rates and click-through rates, so strategy comes into play, particularly when it's used as a component of a larger internet marketing initiative.

v) **Direct Selling:** Direct selling accomplishes exactly what the name suggests — marketing and selling products directly to consumers. In this model, sales agents build face-to-face relationships with individuals by demonstrating and selling products away from retail settings, usually in an individual's home (e.g., Amway, Avon, Herbalife, and Mary Kay).

vi) **Point-of-Purchase (POP) Marketing :** Point-of-Purchase marketing (or POP marketing) sells to a captive audience — those shoppers already in-store and ready to purchase. Product displays, on-package coupons, shelf talkers that tout product benefits, and other attention-getting “sizzle” often sway buying decisions at the shelf by making an offer simply too good — and too visible — to pass up.

vii) **Co-Branding, Affinity, and Cause Marketing:** Co-branding is a marketing methodology in which at least two brands join together to promote and sell a single product or service. The brands lend their collective credibility to increase the perception of the product or service's value, so consumers are willing to pay more at retail. Secondly, co-branding may dissuade private label manufacturers from copying the product or service. Similarly, affinity marketing is a partnership between a company (supplier) and an organization that gathers persons sharing the same interests — for instance a coffee shop that sells goods from a local bakery. There is no shortage of co-branding partnerships, but several more recent examples demonstrate particularly good natural brand alignment including the adventurous GoPro and Red Bull, luxurious BMW and Louis Vuitton, and fashion-forward Alexander Wang and H&M. Likewise, cause marketing leverages and enhances brand reputation. Cause marketing is a cooperative effort between a for-profit business and a non-profit organization to mutually promote and benefit from social and other charitable causes. Cause marketing is not to be confused with corporate giving, which is tied to specific tax-deductible donations made by an organization. Cause marketing relationships are “feel goods” and assure your customers you share their desire to make the world a better place.

viii) **Conversational Marketing:** Conversational marketing is just that — a conversation. Real-time interaction via a chatbot or live chat gets the right information in front of prospects and customers at the right time, allows them to self-serve, and gets questions answered immediately. Personalized, relevant engagement vastly improves the user experience. For B2C businesses, conversational marketing is especially effective because it and scales your customer service typically cuts the time buyers stay in the sales funnel. Conversions happen quicker because relationships are established quicker.

ix) **Earned Media/PR:** Earned media (or “free media”) is publicity that is created through efforts other than paid advertising. It can take a variety of forms — a social media testimonial, word-of-mouth, a television or radio mention, a newspaper article or editorial — but one thing is constant: earned media is unsolicited and can only be gained organically. It cannot be bought or owned like traditional advertising.

x) **Storytelling:** Brand storytelling uses a familiar communication format to engage consumers at an emotional level. Rather than just spew facts and figures, storytelling allows you to weave a memorable tale of who your company is, what you do, how you solve problems, what you value, and how you engage and contribute to your community and the public in general.

The above all marketing strategy story telling plays the most important role with human brain. Story shares happiness, sadness, emotions, pain, feelings, dream, fears, passion. The story will be more communicative if it's literature works carries moral & makes to feel the perspective of human life. All feelings responded from human brain & marketing carries the communication between the product & services with brain.

## 2.1 Case Study: America's most haunted Hotel & its literature based marketing

Here is another story of another most haunted hotel in America. The name of the hotel is “Crescent Hotel 1886” 75, Prospect Avenue in the city of Arkansas. This hotel was a cancer hospital & ghosts of the patients are still there. In the Graved yard shift powered by Ranker, the digital media company in Los Angeles described in the ghost story of the hotel. The writer Laura Allen wrote :

As welcoming as hotels may appear, some are prime spots for unwanted spirits. As rumor has it, few lodgings are as haunted as the Crescent Hotel, where almost every room has at least one ghost. But how did this place

become haunted? The haunting of the Crescent Hotel stems from a tragic, horrifying history that goes back more than a century. The hotel was once a hospital for cancer patients. At the Crescent, a "doctor" reportedly advertised miracle cures and led a fraudulent scheme to scam cancer patients out of thousands of dollars. It's no wonder the basement once served as a morgue. Not only is the Crescent Hotel considered one of the most haunted places in Arkansas, but it's also one of the most well-known haunted hotels in the United States. Do you have the nerve to stay at the Crescent? As welcoming as hotels may appear, some are prime spots for unwanted spirits. As rumor has it, few lodgings are as haunted as the Crescent Hotel, where almost every room has at least one ghost. But how did this place become haunted? The haunting of the Crescent Hotel stems from a tragic, horrifying history that goes back more than a century. The hotel was once a hospital for cancer patients. At the Crescent, a "doctor" reportedly advertised miracle cures and led a fraudulent scheme to scam cancer patients out of thousands of dollars. It's no wonder the basement once served as a morgue. Not only is the Crescent Hotel considered one of the most haunted places in Arkansas, but it's also one of the most well-known haunted hotels in the United States. Do you have the nerve to stay at the Crescent?

The Crescent Hotel has a notorious association with "Doctor" Norman Baker. He was far from a real doctor, but that didn't stop him from pretending to be one. He targeted vulnerable people - many of whom had a terminal illness. In the 1930s, inventor and stage performer Baker saw an opportunity to generate money. He started with the purchase of the Crescent Hotel, then set up a fake hospital spa inside the lodge, bragging that he could cure cancer. Baker reportedly made advertisements claiming other hospitals and doctors were not treating cancer correctly, and surgery and radiation were harmful and ineffective. He recommended patients go to his hotel instead, so they could receive injections he invented and return home cured. The injections were little more than tea, cloves, and carbolic acid, which didn't cure anyone's cancer. While the injections were not lethal, the patients still died because their condition went untreated. Baker earned more than \$500,000 per year before investigators discovered his scheme. Crimes such as stealing money from people, impersonating a doctor, and facilitating slow, painful deaths should lead to a long prison sentence. But this didn't happen to Baker. Instead, authorities arrested and convicted the fraudulent doctor for mail fraud. In 1940, Baker received a four-year prison sentence for swindling cancer patients out of millions of dollars. But since his injections did not kill anyone directly, he did not face charges for any of his patients' deaths. Once out of prison, Baker lived out his days comfortably in Florida until his death in 1958. Crimes such as stealing money from people, impersonating a doctor, and facilitating slow, painful deaths should lead to a long prison sentence. But this didn't happen to Baker. Instead, authorities arrested and convicted the fraudulent doctor for mail fraud. In 1940, Baker received a four-year prison sentence for swindling cancer patients out of millions of dollars. But since his injections did not kill anyone directly, he did not face charges for any of his patients' deaths. Once out of prison, Baker lived out his days comfortably in Florida until his death in 1958.

#### Hotel's First Ghost

The first tragedy to happen within the Crescent Hotel's walls dates back to the building's construction, and the man involved reportedly still haunts the hotel. "Michael" was supposedly a mason who worked on the hotel's construction in 1885. As the story goes, he slipped and fell from the second floor down to the first, and died on impact. After his death, one of the hotel rooms built on that site, Room 218, has become the building's most frequently haunted location.

Michael apparently messes with lights, doors, and electronics. People can sometimes hear a falling man's scream, and one guest alleges they saw blood on the walls and hands coming out of the room's mirror. The above excerpts collected from Grave Yard Shift of [www. Ranker.com](http://www.Ranker.com). The literature of the story creates fear among the readers & it also develops curiosity among the adventurous people. The story explains the horror of the hotel. This is the successfulness of how the literature influences marketing. The review rating of the hotel is 4.5; the boarders prefer this hotel for its location & horror history. Now the readers are able to clarify the relation between Literature's strong presences in marketing strategies.

#### Conclusion:

The Literature has an immense power to drive Society, Culture, Business, Science & Technology. It is not confined among Literarians or Poets but it is backbone of all communications in this universe irrespective any language, cast, creed, nations. Literature is an element of human communication chemistry.



### 43. Paromita Mitra

Paromita Mitra is born on 12th October, 1997 in Maithon (Jharkhand). She presently resides in Asansol with her parents. She has done her B.Tech in Electronics and Communication from JIS College of Engineering. Presently she is working as an associate technical engineer for IBM, Bangalore. She has a keen interest in writing and has contributed in few poetry compilations.

#### AGOMANI - FROM DIVINITY TO FESTIVITY

The clear sky after months of drizzle, summons the Sharad Navratri.  
 The blooming bunches of Kans Grass covering the bare barren lands everywhere,  
 The melody of Chandi Path mixed in breeze marks the howdy of Goddess Durga.  
 Here comes Maa... with her blessings and positivity.  
 The power of Goddess Durga can be felt in the entire community.  
 The preparations jingle the hearts of everyone,  
 Clothes, food, decorations tell that the "Matri pokkho" has begun.  
 Rich or Poor, no matter the status, the festivities of Durga Puja always meant for all of us.  
 The flames of hundreds of diyas glowing in the eve of Ashtami.... Inspires us to wipe out our enemies.  
 The Burning fire spur our courage... emboldens us to be just and take the path of non-violence.  
 Navami means having delicious bhog, the food which knows no boundaries or difference.  
 Which considers us as only Humans with no any other reference.  
 The Dashami is the day of depart... however it's not the end, it marks the start.  
 The emersion leaves the message that everything that comes around goes with time  
 Whatever the hurdles, they will sync and rhyme.  
 Every year this occasion fills us with a deep feeling of joy forever  
 Which inspires us to keep our hopes high and loose it never.  
 Even when the whole world believes we are surviving a pandemic,  
 The Navratri make us hold to the euphoric world of ours,  
 Where the hearts are full of joy and festivities,  
 Where the lives are adorned with creativities,  
 Where food is the expression of every emotion,  
 Where flavors unite the nations.  
 Thus The Durga Puja bears an emotion for the entire community,  
 Keeps us bonded despite of Differences and close to humanity.



#### 44. Ariana Ganguly

Ariana Ganguly is a high school student of Jusco School Kadma. She finds poetry and yoga as her passion. She is a linguist. Her intelligence level is appreciable. She is a great devotee of Lord Krishna.

#### DIWALI COLLECTION

Geared up with my psych  
Tuned to the encircling  
And Dhanteras transpire  
To mizzle content  
My indigenous mores.

Sauntering out of the hall  
I stepped ahead  
An approach to attain  
Then a reverse turn  
To divert the bulbs.

All of the foregoing years  
Markets were packed up  
I was seen in the stores  
My aunt, mum n granny  
Busy, picking the preferable.



My mom informed  
It's an occasion of prosperity and gold.  
As if, I felt, things would revert  
Hope manifests, I'll get rewards.

My dad prayed for all  
May God hear his call.  
Yes, surely, God always listens  
Whosoever holds morality and diligence.

An espy,  
The clouds are fluffed up  
Golden glares pass by  
Seems to be a divine call  
Nevertheless, lockdown retains.

Gems n gold combined out a crown  
For a girl, colourful n brown  
Dressed up in a yellow gown  
Next to her, a variety of clown

Rallies n protest carried out  
That season was awake, like an owl  
Cloud fenced, it looks, people on streets  
Any life, any being is here to greet?

Racial prejudice introduced  
In the South American breed  
Dutch Era imposed, birth of Apartheid

#### NAVARATRI

Social barriers  
Cultural differences  
Arised between us  
Me and my mates.

They wish for the world  
I prefer the Hereafter  
They had time for gossips  
Did they really mean the friendship?

Navaratri was spent  
Worshipping with my aunts  
None of them came  
Having their own programme.

On the Eve of Halloween  
My friends had a gathering  
Panning for the event  
Assembled away  
From the Puja celebration.

One of them came to invite  
Yet I returned to the site  
That day I came home  
With my mind in sundry concerns.

In the next generation  
Who'll take part in the function?  
Plenty of time for outlandish customs!  
And no time for our heritage?

#### BROWN

Isn't it good to offer them a blissful treat?  
Human begotten a nature to fulfil their greed.

Media biased towards male scientist's work  
Who would give the righteous honour,  
To the Brown American girl?  
High profile casualties of the Black American sort  
They best know your model, do they not?

Joe Biden's role as former Vice President  
Pushed by the coloured, to select a Brown mate  
First woman of colour  
On a major party Presidential ticket  
Enable them to their virtue, let it!



## 45. Dr.B.Visalakshi

Dr. B.Visalakshi is an ardent scholar with an avid passion for research. She is currently employed as an Assistant Professor of English. She has made significant contributions to research by way of participating and presenting research papers in various International and National forums She has been awarded “Best Professor” by ESN Publications and “Nari Samman 2020” by Literoma Apart from this she is a budding poetess. Her poems have been published in various anthologies.

## KAL-LZHAGAR (HANDSOME THIEF)

Lacerates his palanquin  
The enthusiastic crowd  
That heterogeneously overflow  
Tumultuous hustle bustle  
Amble and ramble  
Shop to shop  
On masi street

Year after year  
For centuries, opting  
The brightest night  
Of chitrai month  
After augmentation, he  
Starts the journey.

A long way  
From his abode  
Carries with caution  
The inherent possession  
Gold, silver, diamond  
all wealth, encompassing  
joy and good-health.

Disguised thief handsome  
On bypassing ostentation  
Towards dutiful extradite  
Bless and wish  
The new married  
Divine royal couple.

Choose he attire  
From the five  
Colour oven silk

Representing prosperity related  
With upcoming year.  
Blue, green and yellow  
Show success wealth  
White is neutral  
Red for wrath

Drums roll  
Rock and roll  
Harahara hara-ha-ro  
Menakshi- sundaresar on the floor  
Ethir sevai on other shore  
Waves on Vaigai  
As she roars.  
Vendors on road  
Sell various stuff  
Colourful yummy candies  
Beautifully designed mehandies  
Masks and ribbons,  
Many play win  
Task for children.

Excitement reaches pinnacle!  
Alazhagar features Vaigai,  
Her glory strikes.  
Embracing, offering, exchanging  
Love and gift  
Amidst spume tide  
The divine sibling  
To their abode departure  
Devotees spray water  
Joyfully on others.



#### 46. Vittal Arigela

Vittal Arigela is a teacher by profession since 2009 in a government school of Telangana. He has been writing from college days and few of his poems are published in international anthology and some poems are given appreciation both in print form and even on social media poet groups.

#### KEYPAD ON MY PHONE

I wonder how you were invented  
 With just a stroke of my hand  
 There appears a full word  
 Before it comes to my mind

Even a young lad can use  
 To write his favorite muse  
 For elderly it becomes an ease  
 However for all you are wonderful crease

It really a surprise  
 When I want to erase  
 Something I don't want to place  
 Just a step backwards the word disappears

All the while, everyword I just please  
 Just becomes your naughty guess  
 With this there will be an apt choice  
 Writing becomes a joyful bliss

What ever, there seems a future without pens  
 There we may not see paper notes  
 Because everyone likes  
 Just to type the words on keyboards

Kudos to the one who programmed  
 The idea made this tech savy world  
 A mesmerizing writing easy pad  
 For all the users it simply becomes a tech magic wand



## 47. Sayak Mukherjee

Sayak Mukherjee is currently studying Applied Psychology and Behavioural Sciences. He has won several awards in Creative Writing contests in school and in external events.

### FAREWELL TO THE CITY OF FESTIVALS

The hair stood on the boy's back as he opened the door and the winter breeze rubbed against his face. He silently closed the door, ensuring that he did not make any noise as he set out. After all, not everyone in his family liked early mornings as much as he did.

"The winters have begun," the boy muttered to himself as he checked the watch. It was sharp six a.m. The time for his daily walk. The streets with their broken, grey tiles veered in and out of his vision as he picked up pace. The sparrows chirped incessantly, only to be interrupted once in a while by a rather unruly crow's caw. The winter mornings of Kolkata are truly something of beauty, not many the boy knew could brag about experiencing one in its glory. A cold smog seemed to embrace the city, almost like a grey cloud bound to the land.

"Faster! Faster!" a woman's shrill cry tore through the serene environment. The boy halted as a little girl crossed his path, running towards the faded yellow school bus. The boy looked around and deduced the woman to be the girl's mother. The conductor picked the little girl up, and placed her on the front seat, the remaining ones already full. She was probably the last one to climb aboard. The girl waved from the window; her smile revealed a set of missing teeth. Soon, amidst exhausts and loud engine noises, the bus departed and silence was restored.

The boy continued the jog.

The lampposts, coloured white and blue stood in sharp contrast with the green trees overhead. The park beside him had been occupied with the aged members of the laughing club who continued to bellow as they dutifully carried out their morning stretches.

"Contagious, indeed," the boy commented under his breath as he realized the presence of a smile that he had been unconsciously wearing for a while now. The main road was at a distance, mostly deserted. The rat race had not begun yet in the wee hours of the morning. The hawkers and men carrying giant sacks screamed, some offering to buy goods, some to sell them. Most of their pleas went unheard. Beside the boy stood a small tea shack, placed snugly under a tree. The customers sat on benches, discussing everything from politics to sports over a cup of morning chai. The boy had a sudden thirst for tea, but he had no money on him. Shaking his head, the boy ran. He then noticed the men who were carrying the bamboos away from the recently dismantled pandal. Durga Puja - the festival that marks the arrival of Goddess Durga with her sons and daughters in the mortal realm as well as every pandal located in the nook and cranny of the many streets of Kolkata. A reverie of reminiscences passed by the boy's eyes as he was reminded of the many memories he had made during the festivals. He could feel the gloom that had descended over the city after the season of festivals. It was also time for him to leave the city to join his college in Mumbai. The boy stopped. It was a spontaneous reaction. He surveyed the surroundings, filling his mind with information until his eyes felt heavy. After all, this was probably the last time he walked down these familiar streets, which till the other day, spilled over with children, men and women decked up, soaking in the festivities.

The boy turned the other way and began walking towards his house. His pace had slackened. He pushed the hood that he wore, closer towards his face. It was a fruitless attempt to hide the tears that ran down his cheeks.



**48. Aditi Lahiry**

Aditi Lahiry is a Bengali poet, enthusiastic about writing poems and stories. Many of her writings are published in many anthologies.

**THE BRIDE**

Mother nature blessed her daughter with abundance beauty for a week,  
 The raindrops dulcet adorned her like a bride with a veil  
 The emerald green fields , were laden with flora and fauna of myriad hues  
 The squirrel watched the butterfly dance merrily  
 Forgetting her hurried chase to collect acorns for the winter's day  
 The vermilion red bugs played carelessly on the emerald , grass meadows  
 White mushrooms sprang up to life on the earth's surface  
 The brooks, the ponds , the lakes and rivers sang a mellifluous melody  
 The cascade in the dense forest splashed its water reflecting the rainbow hues  
 The azure necked peacock spread its feathers too  
 A flock of geese flew beside the lake  
 Everyone paused their hurried rat race to enjoy the beauty of nature during the monsoon sunset  
 Each bird sang its welcome song to cheer Natures daughter  
 It was indeed a moment to rejoice and rejuvenate with the  
 Bountiful hidden treasures of life on the earth's surface  
 The brooks, the ponds, the lakes and rivers sang a mellifluous melody  
 The cascade in the dense forest splashed its water reflecting the rainbow hues  
 The azure necked peacock spread its feathers too  
 A flock of geese flew beside the lake  
 Everyone paused their hurried rat race to enjoy the beauty of nature during the monsoon sunset  
 Each bird sang its welcome song to cheer Nature's daughter  
 It was indeed a moment to rejoice and rejuvenate with the bountiful hidden treasures of  
 Nature's amazing creatures Each and every creature  
 Who visually tasted this energising elixir of earth's mesmerizing beauty  
 Agreed completely that the potion which earth used to enhance her charming beauty  
 Was the drops of rain sprayed from the realms of God endlessly.

**CANDLE IN THE WIND**

Amidst all the oddities we will move ahead with faith  
 We have to be together in our prayers always  
 We have to bring the best feelings and qualities together  
 We have to fight to create one world together  
 A world where there is continuous harmony  
 A world where resides, no hatred  
 A world where there flows the river of kindness  
 A world where no soul cries in helpless bitterness  
 Lets make the Utopia true  
 Lets not fight over petty issues  
 If we stay together harmoniously,  
 The music of hope will play on like a song touching every soul endlessly  
 We have to conquer our fears and move ahead with feelings of optimism effortlessly  
 Like the "Candle in the wind", we have to flicker  
 We have to guide each other during the hours of calamity fearlessly  
 Bridging the gap of old and new We have to keep moving amidst the oddities our prayers always  
 We have to bring the best feelings and qualities together  
 We have to fight to create one world together  
 A world where there is continuous harmony A world where resides, no hatred  
 A world where there flows the river of kindness A world where no soul cries in helpless bitterness  
 Lets make the Utopia true  
 Lets not fight over petty issues  
 If we stay together harmoniously, the music of hope will play on  
 like a song touching every soul endlessly

We have to conquer our fears and move ahead with feelings of optimism effortlessly  
 Like the "Candle in the wind", we have to flicker  
 We have to guide each other during the hours of calamity fearlessly  
 Bridging the gap of old and new  
 We have to keep moving amidst the oddities  
 We have to stay strong like a pillar amidst severe adversities.

### A DIAMOND IS FOREVER

While cleaning the cupboard, a diary slipped from Neela's hands. She opened the diary and read the name . Seema's name was written on the top. As she continued, to open the diary further , she found a huge collection of Poetry written by her mother. As , she rushed to show it to her mother. Her mother felt awkward and said " please keep it away dear". Seema , had always hidden her inner talent , as she was married in an orthodox family. She always loved to pen down her thoughts into beautiful poems and short stories. Unfortunately, she was never able to express her desire to get her works published for the fear of "what her family members would say!". She even wrote them down with her pen name "Anu". Yet she preserved the diary secretly, so that no one get to know about it until that day. Neela, too was unaware of her mother's hidden talent, although she had observed her mother scribbling something in her diary regularly. So that day, she got a chance to read through the yellowed pages and discovered her mother's talent secretly. On her mother's insistence, she left the diary, reluctantly that day. Next month , on Seema's fiftieth Birthday, Neela gifted her mother an anthology of poetry with the title " A Diamond is Forever", the title of one of her mother's poem. Seema was greatly impressed by this gesture of her daughter. Tears of happiness rolled down her cheeks as she declared " This is the best gift that I ever received."

### THE LAST CALL

Rukmini , was thinking why was the voice on the last call sounding so familiar . Although it came from a wrong number, the heavy voice on the other end sounded like that of Amit, her batchmate from her M. tech course. It had been almost ten years since she had lost contact of all her batchmates, but somehow, she could never forget, the heavy voice of Amit. This was the reason, why inspite of it being a call for some one about whom Rukmini had no idea, she somehow managed to keep the call alive, trying every second to profile the voice, give it a face. If it was Amit Kelkar indeed, then it was a happy coincidence for Rukmini. Meeting her college crush after 15 long years!!

She had fell in love with him during the excursion in the Nilgiris. Actually, during their visit to Ooty, they had stayed in an old British cottage. On the second night, she, saw the shadow of a man, presuming it to be a ghost Rukmini , screamed loudly. Amit, came to the rescue and hearing his heavy voice calling her name not only scared the ghost away but it also comforted Rukmini. Once she has calmed down, it was Amit's baritone, which with a mischievous undertone informed Rukmini that the ghost was in fact their batchmate Sachin, who had problem of sleep walking . That was when Rukmini began to love him, but due to the fear of being rejected she never Could convey him. With that, all the memories of yesteryears flashed in front of her eyes. This time when her phone rang , she said promptly Are you Amit Kumar from 2008 M.tech batch , IIT?" Amit replied" Yes Rukku , you sound incredulous!! Sorry yaar, playing a wrong number was my way to see whether you can identify me. Sachin gave me your number, I ran across him at Kennedy airport last week. Sachin Sharma, remember the shadow of the ghost?" Rukmini felt her heart missing a beat instantly.



## 49. Dr. Rakhi Sameer

Rakhi Sameer, Ph. D in English Literature, is an author, lecturer, life coach and Fengshui consultant. She has worked as a corporate trainer too and presented research papers at various international levels, including Harvard, Osaka, Lake District UK, and several other places. These days she is into a full time Consultant role, working from Mumbai and Noida.

### MY LIFE SUCKS

“I hate my life!”

Have you been telling yourself this lately? Life is undoubtedly tough. And when a dark cloud has settled over us, it can feel very isolating. But the truth is this: You’re not alone. We all have moments of struggle and despair. Even Buddha said that “pain is inevitable”. Yes, some people have a much harder life than others. But everyone experiences tribulations. But however hopeless and worthless you feel now, things can change. We can learn the tools and techniques to help us emerge from some of the worst moments in life. It’s been done before, and this will continue to be the case in the future. How well we do in life has nothing to do with money or how many tough circumstances we face. Instead, it has to do with our emotionally resilient we are. The best bit? We can all learn to become more resilient. With our mindset, we can change how we see the world. We can change how we view our pain and we can create a life focused on meaning and purpose. So to stop yourself from saying “I hate my life”, and instead, create a life you love, check out the below 7 tips.

#### 1) Whose life are you living?

Many people who say “I hate my life” aren’t following their desired path. Instead, they’re carrying out a life that they think they “should” live based on society or family expectations. But in order to create a life we love, we need to think about what we really want to do, outside of influences from society or family. Because the truth is this:

Life can become pretty limiting when you’re expected to conform to a small box of expectations. So, the question is: How can we distinguish our true wants and desires from outside influences? Some people seem to be born with a defined sense of life purpose. But for most of us, we’re not so lucky. Many people go on this never-ending search for purpose, but they never get anywhere. Why? Because it’s assumed that purpose is something that exists in the future that we need to strive towards. But life is never that simple. Instead, our purpose should come from our values and how we want to live life. It’s not somewhere to get to. When you think of your purpose in this way, it becomes more achievable. You’ll enjoy life a lot more as well.

To figure out what you really do with life, ask yourself these 8 weird questions:

- i. What were you passionate about as a child?
- ii. If you didn’t have a job, how would you choose to fill your hours?
- iii. What makes you forget about the world around you?
- iv. What issues do you hold close to your heart?
- v. Who do you spend time with and what do you talk about?
- vi. What is on your bucket list?
- vii. If you had a dream, could you make it happen?
- viii. What are the feelings you desire right now?

Once you figure out your purpose and how you want to live life, write down what actions you need to take each day. Remember, it’s through our habits and actions every day that will create change in the long-term.

#### 2) Face Your Inner Critic

No matter who you are, there’s one thing that remains true: You are your worst critic. It’s not your strict college professor or your overbearing boss — and not even that popular, snobbish group in your class or office. Because whatever others have to say, it’s up to you whether you believe them or not.

And do you know what’s worse? You can feel bad without others making mean comments.

The inner critic is more than capable of doing this. Because once you’re all alone in your room, there is silence. It’s the perfect time for negative thoughts to enter and crowd your mind.

### 1) Create Your Safe Space

One of the reasons why we freak out and cower within ourselves is because we feel that too many things around us have gotten out of control. We are afraid of the reality that we can't control even the smallest parts of our life, and we have no idea what or where we will be tomorrow, next week, or in the next year. So the solution is simple: create a safe space that you can control. Carve out a portion of your mind and dedicate it to yourself—your thoughts, your needs, your emotions. The first step to stopping the storm raging around you is to grab a piece of it and make it stand still. From there you can start to move forward.

### 2) Ask Yourself: “Where Do I Go Now?”

While it's always great to shoot for the stars and aim high, the problem with that advice is that it makes us look so far that we forget what we have to do right now. Here's the hard truth you need to swallow: you are nowhere near the place you want to be, and that's one of the reasons as to why you are so hard on yourself. No one is going to go from Level 1 to Level 100 with a single step. There are 99 other steps you have to take before you get to where you want to be. So get your head out of the clouds, look at your situation, calm down, and ask yourself: where do I go from here? Then take that step, and ask yourself again.

### 3) Ask Yourself Another Question: “What Am I Learning Now?”

Sometimes we feel that our life has stalled. That we've spent way too much time doing the same thing, and that our personal growth has not only halted, but has begun to regress. There are times when we need to be patient and see it out to the end, and times when we need to pack our things and move on. But how do you know which is which? Simple: ask yourself, “What am I learning now?” If you are learning anything significant at all, then it's time to calm down and be patient. If you can't find yourself learning anything of value, then it's time to take your next step.

### 4) Your Limits Are Your Own Creations

You can do whatever you want to do, but in many cases, you don't let yourself “want” the things you really want to achieve. And that's because you do everything to believe that you can't do it. Maybe your parents or teachers or peers have told you that your dreams aren't realistic; maybe you've been told to take it slow, keep it easy. But it's your choice to listen to them. No one has control over your actions except you.

### 5) Stop Shifting the Blame

When things don't work out, the easiest option is to find something or someone to blame it on. It's your partner's fault you didn't go to college; your parents' fault you didn't branch out more; your friend's fault for not believing in you and pushing you to keep going. No matter what other people do, your actions are yours and yours alone. And blame will get you nowhere; it's just a waste of time and energy. If you know the problem, great: start working on the solution instead of blaming someone for it.

### 6) Cut Your Losses When the Time Comes

There are times when no matter how hard you try or how much you work, some things just won't work out. These are the hardest lessons of them all—life sometimes just doesn't play in your favor, no matter how much you will it to. It is in these moments when you need to show the greatest strength, in accepting your own defeat. Cut your losses, let the defeat happen, surrender, and move on. The sooner you let the past be the past, the sooner you can move towards tomorrow.

### 7) Take a Part of the Day and Just Enjoy It

Life shouldn't always be about staying on schedule, getting to your next meeting, and checking off your next task. That's what burns you out and makes you fall off the productivity wagon. It's important that you give yourself the allowance to spend a few minutes or hours every day just enjoying life. Look for those little moments—the sunsets, the laughs, the smiles, the random calls—and really soak them in. That's what you're living for: the opportunities to remember why it's great to be alive.

## 8) Let Go of the Anger

You have anger. We all do. To someone, somewhere—maybe an old friend, an annoying relative, or maybe even to your partner. Listen: it's not worth it. Resentment and anger take up so much mental energy that they hinder your growth and development. Let go of it—forgive and move on.

## 9) Stay on the Lookout for Negativity

Negativity can seep into your head like the wind. One moment you can be happy with your day, and the next you can start to feel jealousy, self-pity, and resentment. As soon as you feel those negative thoughts sliding in, learn to step back and ask yourself if you really need them in your life. The answer is almost always no.

## 10) You Don't Need That Attitude

You know what kind of “attitude” we're talking about. The toxic kind that pushes people away, with its needless negativity and carefree insults. Drop the attitude and learn to be a bit less cynical. Not only will people like you more, but you'll be happier just doing it.

## 11) Make Today Start Last Night

When you're waking up, groggy and tired and shaking off the sleep, the last thing you want to do is make a mental list of all the things you need to do today. So you end up wasting your entire morning because you don't have the right mindset straight out of bed (and who does?). But if you prepare your to-do list the night before, all your morning brain has to do is follow that list.

## 12) Love Who You Are

There are many times when we need to be something or someone else to get ahead in life. But pretending to be something you're not weighs heavily on your soul, and keeping that mask on long-term can even make you forget who you are. And if you don't know who you are, then how can you love yourself? Discover the real you, and hold onto it. It might not always be the best look, but compromising on your true values is never the right choice.

## 13) Make a Routine

We need our routines. The most productive people out there have routines that guide them from the moment they wake up to the moment they go back to bed. The more you control your time, the more you can get done; the more you get done, the happier you will be. Control over your life is always great for stability and mental health. If you're going to take responsibility for your actions and your life, it's all about controlling your habits.

## 14) Don't Bury Your Emotions, But Don't Prioritize Them Either

You need to respect your emotions—if you're sad, let yourself cry; if you're upset, let yourself shout. But remember that your emotions can oftentimes cloud your judgment and confuse what you believe to be fact and fiction. Just because you feel something doesn't necessarily mean that feeling is correct.

## 15) Grow Up

As a kid, we have our parents to step in and say “No more ice cream” or “No more TV”. But as an adult, we have to learn to say those things to ourselves. If we don't grow up and give ourselves rules that we need to follow, our life will fall to pieces.

## 16) Appreciate Everything

And finally, it's important to stop the clock every now and then, take a step back and look at your life and just say, “Thank you.” Appreciate everything and everyone you have in your life, and then you can get back to working on achieving more.



## In Conclusion

Life is furthest thing from being easy. We all suffer. Some suffer more than others, but we need to take responsibility for our life no matter how hard it is. By accepting what is and facing up to our demons, we'll give ourselves the best shot at making the most of life, no matter how dire it seems. And when you only get life once, that's the only option. Do you want to improve your mental resilience? By accepting what is and facing up to our demons, we'll give ourselves the best shot at making the most of life, no matter how dire it seems. And when you only get life once, that's the only option.

Do you want to improve your mental resilience? Resilience and mental toughness are key attributes to living your best life. They determine how high we rise above what threatens to wear us down, from battling an illness, to dealing with challenging emotions, to carrying on after a relationship has ended. In *The Art of Resilience: A Practical Guide to Developing Mental Toughness*, we outline exactly what it means to be mentally tough and equip you with 10 resilience-building tools that you can start using today.



## 50. Ruma Chakraborty

Ruma Chakraborty is a senior English faculty in a premium institution in Kolkata. Teaching is both a profession and a vocation for Ms. Chakraborty. It is but one of the hats donned by her. An amateur painter, a budding poet and compulsive story-teller, currently she is in the process of writing a compendium of short stories. An alumna of Loreto School, St. Xavier's College and Calcutta University, an intrepid traveller; a typical 'Bangali' in matters of food; an example of the argumentative Indian; an inquisitive learner to boot—she is a quintessential Renaissance woman.

### THE OUTSIDER

Purnendu Bose, I.A.S (Retd.) read the name plate of the bungalow. Ashish Saha opened the gate diffidently and entered. Then he corrected his gait to a jauntier swagger as he aimed to strike a mean bargain. In his heart he still was the small-town hick who had struck gold by being an opportunist in spotting and buying antiques from just such houses, slowing fading, decaying, clinging to their past glories behind stained glass windows and chintz curtains. He still felt uneasy by the stagnant trapped time in such houses. It seemed like he was being watched. "What the hell am I thinking?" He brushed aside his feelings, snapped on his ingratiating grin and plunged into battle. He need not have bothered.

Retired Mr. Bose did not need much convincing to part with nostalgia-tinged articles, antiques and bric-a-bracs. His mind was made up. "My son is not coming back from his cushy life at Silicon Valley. My wife is gone. So, I see no point in holding on to all this," he said with the sweep of a sad hand. "I am going off to live in a commune of likeminded people, spending the rest of my days close to nature and in trying to give back to society something worthwhile. I just wish Sunetra, my wife were here. You must be in a hurry. Old age, one tends to ramble on and on."

"Yes Sir, I understand. Your son would not want any of these things? No. He has a good life. What is the point of this pointless sentimentalism, Sir? Your wife is dead, may her soul rest in peace." He tried to look suitably sad as he gazed at the picture of a beautiful lady in a gilded silver frame on the coffee table. "Huh? My wife is not dead. She went missing. We searched. The police are useless in this country. Cannot find anything. I used my influence but it did not work."

"Anyway, I wish to dispose off everything. Give me a good deal and it is all yours."

"Sir, I am giving you the best deal. You are a gentleman. I will not haggle with you. I am ready to pay the price you had quoted. I am also an honourable man, Sir, I will keep my word to you."

"Please get the packers to move the furniture quickly but with minimal fuss. You may leave now. Nowadays, just talking to anybody is tiresome." The steel in Purnendu Bose's voice dismissed Ashish Saha, who felt a twinge of resentment at being waived away like a pesky fly. But, secretly he was pleased. He had struck a good deal. Everything he had purchased would fetch a great deal of money at the auction house he had already struck a deal with. His cut was not bad. This was the third house this month, he was on a roll. Business was good. Liquid cash was flowing in and he felt rich, not bad for a poor school master's son. He had long put his squalid past behind him. He was keen, very keen, to climb the social ladder. Wonder what people from Naskarpara, Second Lane, would think of Gopal Master's son? His elder brother had been the model child, the apple of his impecunious father's eye and the favoured son of his mother. He remembered, with a hollow feeling in his chest the gnarled hands of his mother ladling the extra spoon of rice on his brother's plate, a spoon of her share of rice. Even today, it rankled. Where was that son now? Leading a pitiful existence, not much different than his father's. "Why do my parents not see how happy I am? I am unscrupulous, unethical they say. Maybe I am. Where did their ethics get them, I say?" He shrugged. "Why am I thinking of all this today? What's the matter with me?" He wondered.

"I have the lot, Agarwal ji. Yes, within the limit. A little less in fact. Yes, yes, he's willing to get the packers move it today itself. Yes, thanks. I will come around to the Auction house the moment I'm done here. My pleasure, ji. I will get you whatever you want. I'm not being immodest but surely you can see for yourself from the past three deals, I am the best in this field. Can't rush them. After all, they are selling off their memories." He ended the call with a sigh of contentment.

He was doing up the interiors of his 750sq. ft flat in Behala. Siuli, his wife, loved bright, new, flashy things. He loved her. The equation was simple. He wanted the flat to be exactly how she would like it. Siuli had been mystified, petulant even, when he did not allow her to come and see the flat. "I am getting it ready. I just want you to see the finished product. I am sure you will be thrilled." Siuli had glared at him in mock anger only to dissolve into coy giggles later at the thought of her pampering, loving husband. She had earlier had reservations about her choice when he had been struggling and her parents kept insinuating that she had made a poor

choice but these days her parents and relatives were fawning before her. She could afford to gloat. “I want to live in a beautiful flat, travel in a car, go shopping in the big malls. I want to live the dream.” And it all seemed to be coming true. Her husband had struck the mother lode and life was good. They were ascending the social ladder. Siuli was adamant in getting there.

Manoj Agarwal walked around the packaged crates and closely inspected the opened ones. Saha had done good. Burma teak cabinets, four poster bed, chest of drawers of the finest quality. Would fetch a handsome price from connoisseurs. Brass bells from Tamil Nadu, walnut wood trays from Kashmir, inlay work Bidri coffee tables at least fifty years old but in top shape. Up and down the rows of goods swept the clinically business eyes of Manoj Agarwal. A fine haul. Saha had delivered the third time this month. He wondered if he should raise his commission. “No need, will get unnecessarily greedy. The trick is to keep them motivated enough but the string taut.” Outwardly, he smiled widely at Ashish Saha, favouring him with a set of pan masala stained teeth, “Good cache. It should fetch us the desired price. Just yesterday, I have received enquiry about Burma teak beds. You have done well. I will transfer the money into your account or do you want it in cash?” “I would prefer cash, Agarwal ji. I wanted to buy a few geegaws for my house. I am doing it up, you know.” “Why don’t you pick up something from this lot? For you, I will charge the bare minimum,” said Agarwal, never willing to let go of an opportunity to strike a favourable deal. “My wife likes bright, new things, Agarwal ji. She is not very fond of antiques. She says that it feels like hand-me-downs. I will buy her new chrome and glass furniture.” Agarwal shuddered. His tastes had become quite refined being in his line of business. The idea of decorating one’s house in gaudy bling and showy furniture was repulsive but he persisted, “Why don’t you pick up that brass-lined mirror? It is Belgium glass. Almost as good as new. I am sure your wife will like the ornate brass work on the border.”

Ashish Saha had secretly quite liked the mirror. It was a large oval mirror with exquisite brass metal borders. It had caught his fancy when the packers were packing it at Mr. Bose’s house. He had been too busy to check it out properly but had managed to get a glimpse of the regal object. He was sure Siuli would like it. He pictured her combing her lustrous mane in front of it, smiling at him while she toyed with her hair. A very pleasing scene. Impulsively, he told Agarwal that he would take it. Just then his mobile rang. Irritatedly, he looked at the screen. It was Poltu, his friend and informant. “Do you remember the house on Hastings Road? The son has agreed to sell the old grand piano. With just a little tuning, it could sell for anything between 2 to 3 lakhs. Do you want to come over to talk?”

He could not believe his luck. He hoped this lucky streak continued. Why, at this rate, he could sell his two-wheeler and buy that car Siuli had so set her heart on.

“Poltu, I am going over to talk to the son. Could you do me a favour? Could you pick up a package for my flat from the Auction House? Drop it off and go get my wife from her mother’s house. Tell her it is a surprise for her and that I will get back as soon as I can.”

This one time he would make an exception. He wanted to see her surprised look when he unveiled the mirror to her. With this anticipation in his mind, he made haste towards Hastings Road. Never keep a prospective seller waiting, might change their minds, not good for business. Siuli quickly dressed up and got ready to go with Poltu to the flat. She wondered why her husband had changed his mind. She pushed the thought aside and hurriedly picked up her clutch. Checking her phone to see if her husband had given her a call. She hailed the cab and climbed into it with Poltu. “When will Ashish come? She asked. “He asked me to take you to the flat. He has a surprise for you,” Poltu said with a smile. As Siuli entered the lift, she was in a state of excitement. She wondered what work had been done to the flat by her husband. The liftman was suitably deferential. She felt good. Ashish was such a darling. She was lucky. In an hour’s time, Ashish Saha walked out of the Hastings Road house whistling tunelessly to himself. Another killing. He was going to take this deal to Pestonji. He was a wizard with musical instruments and knew a lot of people who would be really interested in buying a restored Steinway & Sons grand piano. He could not believe his luck! A good quality specimen bought for a mere pittance as the man knew nothing about the piano he had just sold. He had regarded it as just a cumbersome, defunct musical instrument. Let God keep such gullible people coming his way!

“Siuli would have reached the flat by now,” he thought. “I hope she likes what I have got.” He nodded curtly at the liftman, marvelling at his acquired seriousness as a flat owner. When asked, the liftman answered that yes, Madam had arrived a while ago. ‘Madam’, he liked the sound of the word. He liked being upwardly mobile. Walking out of the lift with squared shoulders he walked towards his flat. He had a spare set of keys with which he quietly opened the door. He wanted to surprise his wife. The flat was quiet. He could not hear anything. That was strange. Where was she? Maybe she was in the balcony. She had liked it the moment they had seen it. He tip-toed towards the balcony but no one was there. “She is trying to play a prank on me,” he smiled to himself. “Okay, two can play that game.” He had removed his shoes at the door and padded around in his socks, moving noiselessly. Moving from the balcony through the corridor that connected the bedroom to

the living, he moved to the kitchen but could not find Siuli. "Strange, did she go out? But she knew I was coming."

An uneasy feeling was overtaking Ashish. He paused and then entered the guest room. The light entering the room was dim as the windows opened towards the wall of the next apartment block. On the wall was mounted the beautiful gilded mirror. "Must be Poltu's handiwork," Ashish thought. He walked towards the mirror. As he looked at it the hair at the back of his nape stood up. Siuli smiled mysteriously at him through the mirror. How did she get in there? How could he see her in there? Almost sensing his question, Siuli looked to her side and speaking to a lady, who looked vaguely familiar, asked her, "Can we bring him inside?" Mr. Purnendu Bose's wife smiled benignly at Siuli and said, "No dear, men cannot come in here. There is only space here for women."

## SHE

She wandered, seeking direction  
 In the mossy knoll, the velvety ferny carpet of  
 the woods.  
 Heard sounds unheard, saw sights unseen before.  
 Wide eyed and awed  
 Mingled with something near fear  
 For the first time, entering so deep from the clear  
 She could hear her squelching footsteps  
 Never before had she heard her hesitation  
 so clearly ever.  
 Then she sensed it, prior to seeing  
 This majestic being  
 Fiery liquid amber eyes  
 Transfixed and mesmerised  
 Powerless to move  
 Rooted to the spot  
 Shocked to see in its eye  
 the sham she lived, a lie  
 Unfettered, thus, she soared  
 Matching roar for roar  
 The exhilarating thrill, being alive  
 for the very first time in the face of death  
 The beast taken aback by its intrepid prey  
 Measuring it with new respect and awe.  
 Before Nature took over  
 Teeth sunk with primal need  
 Her loudest roar equaled her dying scream  
 Life snuffed, long live She!



## 51. Dr. Ratan Bhattacharjee

Dr. Ratan Bhattacharjee winner of INSC Research Excellence Award 2020 is Associate Professor and Head of Post Graduate Dept of English Dum Dum Motijhel College. He is a trilingual poet and translator with seven volumes of poetry including *Oleander Blooms* for which he is known as Oleander Poet. He is Editor in Chief of *Literary Confluence* and one of the distinguished members of the International Advisory Board of the International Theodore Dresier Society USA.

### WHITE HASHNAHANA AND YELLOW OLEANDERS

A telephone call is sometimes the most precious thing of life. A strange feeling suddenly overtook me .I cannot exactly explain why that I started feeling God will call me .Not that I had a streak of Lord Ramkrishna in me who used to talk to Goddess Kalimata. Not that I was falling prey to hallucination. It was a kind of helplessness that made me pray to God to call me at least once. I knew this was impossible. But many impossible things happen in our life. So this might have happened that night too. I waited for God to call me. Usually in our daily life, we expect the telephone to ring and sometimes it does that. Someone among our relative friends calls us even beyond our expectations. I am now detached from many and I do not get calls on phone. Daughter calls me from the USA to tell about son in law and granddaughter. But recently my mobile screen is broken and it is given to repair. So for a few days I am disconnected to them in mobile which is gone for repair. While I went to the repairing centre , I might have been infected by corona.I took proper protection, wore the mask and gloves and even I wore the head covering helmet type cap. Still since my return from the Mobile repairing shop I had been violently sneezing , I had fever temperature. I measured my oxygen rate with Oxymeter. But it was shockingly low. It goes below 90 and I needed to go to hospital. I called the Covid Emergency centre. I was alone at my home and I felt helpless. Usually when I am in tension of any kind I start counting. The Covid Emergency centre sounded busy and it did not respond to my call. I waited. In this helpless condition I thought some call would come unexpectedly either from my daughter or from any relative or any friend. I was not in a position to stand properly and could not call the neighbor at that midnight hours. So I in a strange mental set of mind waited for God to call me which I knew was impossible. Whole life I did not practice any religious rituals . I was never a religious person nor I was an atheist . I might have been an agnostic . I was not sure if really God is there or not. So it was a kind of test if God was really there . He will respond to my heart's call. I waited long hours. No call came. I started counting one to hundred. Then I restarted again more slowly to reach hundred. I knew the telephone might ring. I prayed to God silently and measured my pulse and oxygen level in my blood with oxymeter. Oxygen level came down 56 and I was vehemently waiting for the return call. I called the emergency number of Covid hospital again but it was found busy.

I prayed to God,' Please listen to me. Either you call me or kindly make the telephone ring . I am counting third time from one to hundred more slowly. It was hard for me to breathe. I knew I was infected by Corona. No one now at my home. I am alone here in this dark room lying on my bed waiting for the telephone call. I was terrified , I was fervently trying to connect someone. I was counting without stopping five ten fifteen, twenty, twenty-five, forty , forty-five , fifty.... This is the last time I looked at the clock. It was 2am in the post midnight. Outside the window there was darkness and I saw white Hashnahana and yellow Olenanders blooming profusely and the distant stars were gazing at them with loving look. I recalled how many poems I wrote on Oleander alone . More than five hundred. My dearest Olea promised to translate them for me . But she did not keep her promise. I wanted conquer death and make our love immortal. She wanted to be my Oleander . But suddenly one day she betrayed me and kicked me out from our life for loving some other person. All promises were belied. I will wait for you all my life , I told her . She smiled and said , one whom a poet loves never dies. So I am immortal . You need not wait my dear Neel. I am in your inside. Search for me over there . You will find me .

Today she is not with me , nor she is inside me . She is gone for ever. One day I told her , I will die much earlier than you. She said , ' No one can tell it for certain. I have now heart pains and my pulses are slow. I have developed pressure problems and hypertensions. So I too may die. But I will live in your poems'. Today I am sure she too is far away from me. No call will come from her. She might be busy with her own work own writing . Since long time I maintained no relation with my relatives . I loved solitude and wanted to be alone for my writing .It makes me happy . I create my own world, I think , I dream, I live happily in this wonderland of creativity. So people whom I disconnected don't like me as much as I do dislike them. Many of them are selfish calculative and purposive.Most of our relatives are like that. I sometimes feel I am getting very much negative in my attitude. May be it is the result of my depression. All creative people are by nature victims of depression. Hemingway,Sylvia Plath, Virginia Woolf , Mayakovsky and many others were poor victims of

depression in spite of all success. I am not going to commit suicide like them. But I feel I am a damn failure in all my life. My career is not successful. My books are not sold. My writings are not all published in reputed magazines. My articles are rejected daily in many of the newspapers. I feel at times I am a big cipher. This feeling recurs in recent times in a greater frequency. I cook I sing I write poems but finally I do not get peace of my mind. Many in my locality avoid me .They consider me worthless and a little crazy. So I am disconnected to many of them. I am lonely physically and psychologically. I wanted to die natural death not to die by committing suicide by cutting vein or hanging from ceiling fan. Those things seem unpoetic to me. I wanted to die poetically like Keats in the land flowers where Hashnahana and yellow Oleander blooms. Wilson in Somerset Maugham's story died looking at the two hills of Faraglioni in Italy when all his resources were exhausted and he became a beggar having no money to buy food even. I am not poor but still I feel exhausted and I feel that my life is meaningless. May be because of that , God makes me a Corona patient unexpectedly all on a sudden. I am not very sad. Rather I am happy that my oxygen level has come down. I thanked the oxymeter to show my pulses going down to 49 and oxygen rate to still more lower . And no telephone ring either to beacon me to life .Death is nearing me . I know it is almost certain, that this darkness will gradually envelop me and I have severe breathing problem now. I cannot even count . I am getting unconscious. I rang the helpline numbers stored in my telephone diary. But no one responded. May be all are sleeping . Doctors RMOs nurses .. they too are human beings. All day all night they are Covid fighters, working and working to give service to thousands of corona patients coming to them. They cannot go home . They cannot meet their dearest and nearest ones at home. So I did not blame them. I was unable to call any one in my neighbourhood. All are sleeping. No one is to be disturbed. People say if it is not predestined , it will not occur. If I am lotted death tonight , it cannot be blotted. And suddenly the telephone rang. But I was unable to move now from my bed. I tried to crawl even to reach the telephone. But I was not able to reach out. I know the telephone will not ring again as I did not lift it . I was shivering , sweating. My vision was getting darker. I could not even see the clock . It might be 4 am. One crow was loudly crying outside my window. I was gradually losing my audibility and finally I lost my sense and lay on my bed like an inert stone. Now nothing can touch me , fear or hope. I am safe in the hand of death. I will not have any dream or nightmare. I am happy I cannot think now as I lost my sense. I need not disturb anyone any more. I will not impatiently look at the clock, I will not madly call the Covid helpline number to awaken one from deep slumber. A dead man is the happiest because he is freed from all liabilities, all duties, all responsibilities all fears and hopes. No body realizes the bliss that death can give. It is a wonderful gift to human beings. When life is heavily burdened with sorrow , then Corona is also a blessing. I prayed to God to lower my oxygen rate and pulse rate. I want to die soon and sooner. I realized that I was still to lose my consciousness or I would not be able to think. Man is a wonderful creature of this universe. He can think till the last moment of his life till death. But when shall I die- it was a million dollar question to me now . Suddenly I started praying to God for good to all. Those who still survive the corona onslaught, let them be happy. Indian scientists have done a miracle by finding out the antibody to Corona virus. I am happy and proud as an Indian. Many are trying to invent vaccine for Covid but few succeeded . Many are giving gimmicks. Many are groping in the dark. The world is scared. One little virus one tiny insect is pushing all to extinction. All our efforts , knowledge , our pride of learning , our advancement are meaningless now in our failure to control a tiny virus. It is more dreadful than plague, small pox , cholera or swine flu. It is sealing the human fate . Millions of people are infected and they are dying. I read in newspapers and watched on tv about Corona . Tonight I am facing the giant myself in this dark room. I am losing my consciousness.

Can I count now and can I still survive the onslaught? Can I breathe really ? Can I sit on my bed ? Can I go near the telephone to call the Covid emergency cell ? I knew nothing after this.....

When my consciousness was recovered I saw myself in the Covid hospital bed. I was surrounded by the doctors and nurses and a host of journalists and correspondents. I saw the TV screen serving breaking news on me. I was the first such Covid patients in the city who was mysteriously rescued from the closed door room of a house. They got my telephone call but as I did not respond they tried to reach me by searching the location of the telephone number. Even Fire Brigade was involved to break open the door and rescue me in a senseless condition with pulse rate too low and oxygen rate dropping to ten. If still lower I could not be restore to life from my nearly dead condition. The journalists were asking me questions how all these happened. I could not contact my daughter in the USA. My mobile was given to repair and could not contact them. Might be they too called in the landline. I was totally detached from all that night. Seeing me on TV many tried to contact me when I went back home. Many relatives whom I thought selfish came to cheer me up and my daughter planned to come to India but I told her not to come as my grand daughter was too much a baby. It will be a great risk if they come to India. America is reeling under the corona devastation. Doctors described all as a miracle . Yes, miracles too happen sometimes in our life. When I came back home I got my mobile back . The first message that came was from my daughter and the second one from Olea who came to know my condition from TV news. She told she completed the translation of my poem book Oleander Blooms and some

of my stories on Corona days from the book that is going to be published from the USA. So much happiness in just one minute. I again thanked God . I am really blessed by the gracious Lord. The nightmare was over , but the hashnahena of that night still bloomed and whitened the lawn of my house. The white hashnahana mingled with some yellow Oleanders . I did not die probably to feast my eyes on this wonderful divine sight where flowers sang the songs of life and hope. I know God will call me over the telephone on one such Hashnahana night when yellow oleanders will bloom more and more in my lawn and in my heart. Dear kind God please call me once please call me over the telephone.

### I KNOW WHY THE HIGHWAY CALLS

My feet on the sun -kissed dust pursue the ceaseless Highway  
 Shadows hide the road  
 Our feet on the sunlit dust stay .....

A reeling mind and rolling eyes search for someone all the day  
 But I know why the Highway calls  
 My beloved came riding her red BMW on this highway  
 To let me know that she has got a new lover so to say  
 I love this highway 'coz my beloved bade me  
 good bye to our love

I saw she dropped a tear or two which were pearls for me  
 and I treasured them in my hazy memory- trove  
 Oh high way you gave me some moments  
 to treasure my golden moments of love

I know why the high way calls me again and again  
 We once got drenched on this highway in torrential rain  
 We once walked slowly hand hand in hand on this highway  
 Now she drove so fast with such a splendid look  
 in her car and must have gone far far away

I understood the pains of love and immense value of tears  
 I have nothing to say  
 Thank God I still can love this highway

### STARE AT THE CARPET

Sometimes life becomes a beautiful Carpet  
 Carved with rosy posies and patterns  
 Some other times it is just a vacuum cleaner  
 The bruised heart that time inside me burns.  
 I see the carpet being cleaned by the cleaner  
 It is a great task  
 In the hours of dawn my maid comes to clean  
 Again she comes in the hour of dusk.  
 We cannot clean life's agonies in this way  
 Dirt and scars are posited on life's surface  
 Sometimes they percolate inside  
 When we walk and move with gloomy space

A carpet clean and beautiful is wonderful  
 It gives me strength of mind  
 I want nobody to inspire me then  
 I at that time never look behind.  
 A beautiful carpet is a priceless gift  
 Every house can boast of it  
 I pray to God to make my mind a carpet  
 When it becomes a blank empty sheet.  
 Life requires some colourful patterns  
 Some beautiful friends to love  
 Life is a gift like the colourful carpet  
 A gift from God above.



## 52. Tanushree Nag

She is an ex-corporate professional who is enjoying her life as a full-time mother and a home-maker by choice. Writing is her passion and she writes short stories and poetry on an array of topics, mostly of human interest.

### THE ESSENCE OF CELEBRATIONS

"Shravan! Shravan! Are you coming to play today?" Naseer hollered at his best friend, standing outside Shravan's two-storied, house.

"Nahi yaar, Maa asked me to stay at home today to help her out with Diwali cleaning," a begrudged Shravan answered from the first-floor balcony.

"Naseer beta, ain't you helping your Ammi this time? Eid is also just around the corner," asked Sumita, Shravan's mother.

Too proud to share his disappointment, hiding his uneasiness and pain, Naseer responded with a feeble smile, "I will, Aunty!"

Shravan's father, Mr Gupta, who was sitting in the balcony with his newspaper, had observed Naseer's glum eyes, that was quite unusual for the otherwise cheerful lad.

With a heavy heart, Nasser strolled back to his house, located at the other end of the street.

This year was special, as both Diwali and Eid fell on the same week, just three days apart. The entire neighbourhood was already enlightened with strings of decorative lights. Every house flaunted its best collection of fancy string lights and stood majestically, made up and groomed like a newly wedded wife. The entire street was covered with awnings of rice string lights. The sight at night gave away a major festive vibe. Amongst all the extravagant splendour, there stood one lone house, deprived of all the lights, all the festive fervour- It was Naseer's house. The sprawling mansion stood bare, at the corner of the lane, almost in ruins. But the house still boasted the vestiges of grandeur that the place once exhibited.

Naseer's was one of the well-known, affluent families of the city once. His grandfather and father were loved and revered by one and all for their kindness and benevolence. But over the past decade, things changed quite drastically. Due to his father's over-ingenuous and saintly nature, their manager gradually swindled them out of their money and eventually, their family business sustained heavy losses. The damage, both financial and emotional, was way too severe for his father to recuperate from. Theirs became fascinating, but a melancholic tale of riches to rags. They somehow managed to live a modest, yet respectable life, sans any grandeur. But, the family still lived in the same old mansion and still commanded a great deal of admiration amongst the neighbours. In spite of practising a different religion, Naseer's family never shied away from celebrating every other festival with their neighbours. Every Diwali, their old mansion regained its lost glory, as it stood magnificently, all draped in thousands of string lights, just the way they decorated it during Eid. His mother and sister would zealously light diyas at every corner of their house. And every Eid, his parents would distribute Eidi to all the children in the neighbourhood and organise a hearty feast for the neighbours. All that, despite their debilitating financial stature year after year. But, this year, it was different. Due to his father's failing health, their business was almost in shambles. The family of four hardly managed to sustain on the meagre salary that Naseer's elder sister, Najma, fetched as a primary school teacher. "This year, we won't be celebrating Eid or Diwali," Naseer's mother, Shazia, had dolefully declared. To avoid the prying neighbours and their concerned queries, the family decided to stay indoors during the festive week, as much as possible.

It was Diwali evening. The family heard a sudden commotion outside their house. Sensing some unwarranted trouble, the family quickly went outside. Their eyes widened at the sight in front of them. The entire neighbourhood was gathered in their courtyard. The high boundary walls of their mansion, abundantly decorated with strings of light in their nescience, lit up as soon as they stepped outside. And with those beautiful lights, glowed their desolate faces, with amazement and glee. But, there also was an element of hesitation and curiosity in their puzzled eyes about that sudden, extraordinary gesture of the neighbours. Even before Naseer's father, Shamim, could ask anything, Shravan's father, Mr Gupta, came forward and hugged him, "Happy Diwali, Shamim bhai!" Adorning a frail, yet warm smile, Shamim responded, "Ah, आपको भी Diwali مبارक, Amol bhai! But, what is all this?"

"Every year, you treat us to a lavish spread on Eid. Your love and warmth for everyone in the neighbourhood are not unknown. And we, the ungrateful lot, we never did anything to reciprocate your love and kindness all these years," said Mr Gupta, warmly. But his answer didn't seem to convince Shamim. Shaking his head in disapproval, he said, "But, Amol bhai, everything I do is only because it gives me immense pleasure in



celebrating every festival with you all, whom I consider as my own family. There shouldn't be any 'give and take' practice amongst us."

Mr Trivedi, Shamim's next-door neighbour, interrupted him, "Shamim bhai, year after year, we have accepted your warm hospitality with all our heart. This year, however, all of us have decided to take charge of your Diwali and Eid celebrations, as a gesture of our love and gratitude. This year, you just sit back and relax, while we will take care of all the decorations and preparations of both Diwali and Eid."

"Please don't say no, Shamim bhai. Let us do it this once, please! Next time onwards, once you regain your health, you can take charge, as usual," pleaded another neighbour.

Shamim realised there was no way he could decline their love. His eyes brimmed with an overwhelming sense of love and gratitude. In his heart, he acknowledged that his neighbours' gesture of kindness and love couldn't be misinterpreted as a mere charity. Not intending to mar their spirit of festivities, Shamim and his family dived into the celebrations wholeheartedly.

And thus, the last house in the neighbourhood too glowed in all its glory, as the residents celebrated the festival of lights and love together, spreading the message of harmony and brotherhood.



### 53. Sukhvinder Kaur

Sukhvinder Kaur Bakshi is a qualified professional on a long sabbatical. Currently a full-time mom to an 11-year-old daughter. She rediscovered her passion for writing, thanks to the lockdown. An amateur writer who's exploring the world thanks to her passion for giving voice to her thoughts through words.

#### FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS - THE SIKH DIMENSION

Festival time is the most sought after time of the whole year. Unfortunately due to Covid, this time when festivals knocked at our door, the pomp and show was a bit curtailed, but the spirit was intact. Nevertheless, the way we have adapted to the new normal exhibits human resilience and spirit to fight back. With our indomitable grit and determination and unconditional support for each other, we will surely emerge victorious. Decorations, sweets, new ethnic attire, gifts, fireworks concocted very well with lots of family time and blessings from elders beautifully capture the essence of festivities. Undeniably, Diwali is the biggest festival in India. The splendour of this festival pan-India remains unmatched. We are extremely proud of the fact that India is a secular nation. Regardless of our different religions or regions, we celebrate all the festivals with equal fervour and enthusiasm. This is an incredible feat and is in itself unparalleled.

Whether it's Diwali or Eid, Gurupurab or Holi, Christmas or Sankranti, our exhilaration knows no bounds. We look forward to having loads of fun and frolic. Whether it's by lighting diyas (earthen lamps) on Diwali, eating sevaiyaan (sweet vermicelli) on Id, relishing the kadha prashad (sweet wheat pudding) and langar (community kitchen) on Gurupurab or drooling over the rich plum cake on Christmas. I doubt if a day goes by, without a festival, big or small being celebrated in some nook' or cranny of our diverse country.

Let's talk about the current Festival of Lights - Diwali. Almost all of us are familiar with the significance of Diwali based on the ancient events and scriptures of Hinduism. You may be surprised to know that this day holds a special significance for Sikhs around the world too. I take this opportunity to share with you a brief insight into the same.

The day of Diwali coincides with what is referred to as 'BANDI CHHOD DIWAS' literally translated as PRISONER LIBERATION DAY. It refers to a Sikh Historic event that transpired in the autumn of 1619. In Sikhism, we revere 11 Sikh Gurus. First 10, starting from Guru Nanak Dev Ji had graced human form. If you have visited a Gurudwara, you must have seen the Holy Scripture in front of which we kneel, bow down and pray. This is our eleventh and current Guru, Guru Granth Sahib Ji. The teachings of the same illuminate our path and show us the virtuous way ahead. This particular event was related to the sixth Guru, Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji.

According to tradition, Guru Hargobind Sahib Ji had been held captive in Gwalior Fort. He agreed to leave prison if 52 Hindu princes who were also locked up with him will also be freed. The Mughal Emperor Jahangir said that those who clung to the Guru's coat would be able to go free. This was meant to limit the number of prisoners who could be released. However, Guru Hargobind Singh Ji got a coat made with 52 tassels attached to it so that all the 52 princes could leave prison with him.

The day of Guru Ji's return to Amritsar coincided with the Diwali celebrations. The whole city welcomed their Guru by lighting diyas and candles. Sikhs historically celebrated Diwali along with Hindus that year and the ritual has followed since then. This concurrence has resulted in a similarity of celebrations amongst Sikhs and Hindus. Hence the tradition continues even after 400 Years

The Bandi Chhod Divas commemorates freedom and human rights. It also celebrates the victory of justice over injustice. The lives of 52 local kings had been saved without a single drop of blood being shed, thanks to Guru Ji's positive mindset and presence of mind.

On this day, the world famous shrine of Sikh's The Harimandir Sahib or The Golden Temple in Amritsar is illuminated with thousands of diyas and candles. The golden domes are festooned with millions of electric lights. Fireworks display forms a grand part of the celebrations too. Sacred hymns are sung, Kadha prashad is prepared and Guru ka langar is served to the thousands of devotees who flock the Gurudwara to seek blessings from Almighty and celebrate the victory of good over evil. The visiting devotees also light the candles in the Gurudwara, around the periphery of the sarovar (holy pond) and usher in the festivities. The reflections of the incandescent lights in the sarovar waters look surreal. In every Gurudwara, Bandi Chhod Diwas is celebrated in a similar fashion.

To summarise, festivals are an expressive way to celebrate our glorious heritage, culture and traditions. Diwali signifies the victory of good over bad, just over unjust whether we see it from the Hindu angle or just highlighted above, the Sikh dimension.

The basic essence of all festivals is the same. They all teach us the lesson that humanity holds the highest pedestal. They provide a break from our monotonous lives, giving us a reason to celebrate and at the same time imbibe the virtues by revisiting the events.

Let's come together and continue to celebrate our festivals in such a way that boundless sanguinity is dissipated into the universe such that no negativity can ever dampen the human spirit.



## 54. Aarti Roy

She is a keen observer of people and nature. In humdrum life, her pen is the happiness quotient and solace.

## MERAKI

As the Kash flowers blossom and bring news of thy arrival,  
 My euphoric heart coerces my feet to dance to the tunes of Agomoni.  
 On Mahalaya the house echoes with Mahisasur Mardini,  
 In the rotund soulful voice of Sri Birendra Krishna Bhadra.  
 The smell of Durga Puja fills the hearts of rich or poor with glee,  
 Their longing eyes await a glimpse of thee.  
 The verandah meetings mark preparations of thy arrival,  
 The old Mohagany tree had witnessed it all,  
 He is a hundred years now.  
 Maa Durga is visiting her natal home.  
 Are we mothers or her child?  
 A thought that lingers in my mind.  
 Amidst the triumphant sound of Dhak and Conch shells,  
 Clad in a red Saree, adorned with jewels and garlands of flowers,  
 Maa wakes up on Sashti marked with rotund chanting of holy scriptures.  
 The gala celebration of the homecoming begins,  
 Early morning of Autumn is filled with mild fragrance of orange and white beauties,  
 The Shiuli flowers I offer for Pushpanjali.  
 Piping hot Bhog with minimal serving tastes delicious,  
 I bask in heavenly aroma of your love in each morsel.  
 Shakti Roopa, the prowess, the gaiety oozes out during the Sandhya Aarti,  
 My eyes well up each time I search the mother in your eyes,  
 Your love gives a sweet ache in my heart,  
 I immerse in thee, I cherish to be thy part.  
 A reunion of a huge family,  
 Elderly see a trip down memory lane revisiting their boyhood,  
 Juveniles enjoy the unfulfilled romantic glances,  
 Broods chirp around the carnival.  
 Devouring on delicacies without caring about those calories,  
 Garland of lights all over the city, dancing in gaiety,  
 The days and nights become spurt of mirth,  
 It embarks the unison of the sky and the earth.  
 On Vijaya Dashami, the day of your departure,  
 With a vermilion smeared face dancing in Sindoor Khela,  
 A silent drop dribbles down, Maa why you need to go?  
 For Bengalis, it's not a festival,  
 It's an emotion that beguiles the mind, body and soul.  
 Bidding adieu with moist eyes, my heart clamors,  
 "Bolo Dugga Mai ki Jai" as the wait for next year embarks!

## [Glossary]

Kash Flower: Kans Grass

Agomoni: The arrival song

Mahalaya: Oratorical invocation to the goddess urging her to arrive on earth.

Mahisasur Mardini: Slayer of the bull demon

Dhak: Drum like instrument

Sashti: Sixth Day

Shiuli: Night-flowering jasmine

Pushpanjali: Flower offering to God

Bhog: Food offering to God

Sandhya Aarti: Evening Prayer

Sindoor Khela: Bengali Hindu tradition where women smear each other with Vermillion.

Dugga: Goddess Durga



## 55. Nikhil Guru

Nikhil Guru is an author, scripter, director, motivational speaker and an occasional YouTuber. He is the young author of the sci-fi novel which he published at the tender age of 13. On many occasions he has won accolades on both the national and global scale including the Telangana Rashtra Sarwabhouma, Swami Vivekananda Excellency Award, Literary Excellence, Best All Rounder and the Spoorthy Award as well as the titles Erudite Prodigy, Pride of Hyderabad and Debonair just to name a few.

### WHAT IS LEFT BEHIND

My earliest memories reach back to when I was a mere child of five years old. Before that, all my mind can hope to recall, is an infallible wall of black, through which nothing ceases to exist. I find it strange, before that fateful encounter that night, my mind doesn't register my life as one lived at all. One would expect me to at least have recalled some vestiges of my time as a toddler. Yet no exercise of mine seems to penetrate that darkness. However, strange as it is, after that day all my memories burst forth with the same vivid detail I see the world every day. That twilight I discovered light with my Grandfather. As I grow older and practice my art of words even more; the remembrance grows even clearer; as if it were almost physical. The sultry winds tousling my oily hair, the strong scent of salt wafting from the crashing coast waves, the narrow winding streets lined with clusters of wet shops and tiny huts, and most importantly the gentle roughness of the hands that wrapped around mine. I still dream about that grip to this day, for never again in my life has someone held me with the same tender kindness as the hand that had held me that day. I don't remember if I'd walked far or if someone had carried me the way but my bare feet were sore and the soft sand jammed between my toes gave me a rather unsettling feeling.

"Stay close to me Nani" I looked up at my grandfather as he instructed me with his trademark three-tooth grin "The streets are busy today."

His grip tightened and he pulled me closer as we traveled deeper into town. Expectedly there more people moving about than usual. Strange as it was, most of them were wearing fancy clothes: long flowing sarees, flowery skirts, sharp kurtas, and even silken tunics. I wondered what the occasion was and I voiced my curiosity like so. "Dada, why is everyone dressed up this way?"

"Their dresses? It's because today is a special day" he began to explain, just before pulling me up with a loud grunt and placing me on his shoulders, "Today just so happens to be Diwali-the festival of lights."

"But why Dada?"

"You're asking me why? Truly what a strange child you are." he chuckled "Well, let's see. Thousands of years ago, when Lord Vishnu had incarnated onto this planet as Lord Rama, he had to live in the forest for 14 years."

"Was it because he was a bad person Dada?"

"Oh, no beta. Rama was the kindest person in the world. But one day he made his mother angry, so he was sent away to the forest."

"Does that mean he stole sweets when his mother was praying?" I asked with all my childish innocence, throwing my grandfather into a fit of cheery laughter, drawing brief attention to our duo. Laughter was rather rare in the hungrier parts of town, and I could see a few others smiling at us even though they didn't know what we were talking about.

"No, no he did nothing like that. Once you grow up I'll tell you the full story. But on this day, Rama returned to his home Ayodhya with his wife Sita. To show Rama the right path, the villagers lit the road with lamps. That is why Diwali is the festival of lights."

"But my mother Sita is not Rama's wife, she's my father Shahsi's wife! Does that mean mother is thousands of thousands of years old?" I pouted, clearly confused by the occurrence of my mother's name in a millennia-old fable. My grandfather wheezed heavily, clearly not having enough energy to laugh loudly once again.

"Of course not beta, they are different people" he playfully slapped my cheek making me giggle on his shoulder "But I wouldn't be surprised. Your mother is as strong and powerful as the Goddess herself."

For some odd reason, I found that surprising. As a child of five, I did not know the world apart from the dynamic my family had put up. It was rather odd for me to picture my mother, the pious woman who prayed three times a day, loved cooking fish and coconut chutney; and seldom spoke, to be equally powerful as a Goddess. Of course, over the course of growing up with my abusive father, I would learn that what my grandfather said to me was absolutely false. My mother was much stronger and braver than the Goddess; at least that is what I choose to believe.

The rest of the journey home was spent discussing what we did on Diwali. I won't bore you with the specifics but I will say my grandfather was quite elaborate. We covered everything from the sweets we would be making at home to the rituals we would be performing. However the topic we covered that intrigued me the most was "Firecrackers?!"

“Yes beta. I told you right that Diwali is the festival of lights. Every year we light up our houses with diya’s and burn firecrackers, to celebrate this very special day. When we light them up they flash with the most beautiful colors you will ever see.”

I parted ways with my grandfather as soon as we reached the coast, where I lived with my parents and sister. My dwellings weren’t exactly royalty. Many of you would even say I grew up in a garbage dump if you were to ever visit my childhood home. At the far end of the beach, where the rocks begin to pile up and the ground is higher, resides a tiny shack that is my humble abode. It was an incredibly small place, about the size of a carrier truck maybe, barely enough for a family of four but we scraped by the skin of our teeth. I would learn years later that my father used to be a fisherman. After he saw my uncle drown at sea years ago, he decided to repair boats instead. What little he manages to put on the table is usually spent on rice and bottles of alcohol, father’s only sources of sustenance. Although I couldn’t blame him, intoxication is a rather powerful tool to keep living. Just like how, on that day, I was drunk in the hopes that I would celebrate Diwali and get to see the beauty of firecrackers with my own eyes. As always I found my mother praying. Our house has no rooms, cabinets, or drawers with the lone exception of a shrine devoted to Lord Shiva, housed securely in the corner of the room. Oddly enough I don’t find anything different from usual. Of course, there is the silent lump of torn blankets in another corner, under which my sister sleeps soundly. There were no exquisite celebrations, sweets nor new clothes. It made me wonder if my Grandfather’s story was just some elaborate prank. Perhaps it wasn’t a prank, maybe they were planning a surprise for me? For a five-year-old both rationality and innocence spell the same, even with poverty staring at me right in the face I hoped that Diwali would give me something better to see.

I decided to spend the rest of the evening collecting shells along the shore. In a way, I was doing it to give my family time to prepare, but I had other reasons too. My sister enjoyed making long necklaces out of them, and ever since her sickness left her bedridden that’s all she’s been able to do. The waves had been high that day, promising me a haul of beautiful shells. I remember finding quite a few white ones that day which I took a liking to. After an hour or so of the activity, I rushed back home, in eager anticipation that I would see my house decorated fancily with a hearty meal of rice pudding and fish curry waiting for me. Alas, when I reached the hut neither did I find any lights or new clothes. It was the same old four walls and straw roof. If anything my mother had lit a lantern outside, which was the only light we had. I walked inside and saw my mother still praying. Her body was so still and frail in her worn-out saree that she might as well have been a corpse. The only signs of life were the string beads in her hands, which she twisted between her fingers. There was another addition to the house. In the darkness of the evening, I almost missed the large man sleeping smack dab at the center of the floor. He was wearing a torn shirt, almost invisible shorts, and his face was covered in sweat and grime. A strong smell wafted from him that was neither sweat nor fish, and the pink blush on his face didn’t bode well. It was as if he was dressed up for anything but Diwali. I quickly fetched the lantern from outside, the dim light casting long shadows on the walls. Without it maybe I wouldn’t recognize the rowdy looking man on the floor as my father, perhaps I would have even shooed him away as some strange vagabond.

“Mama, what is this? What about the sweets, the new clothes and... and the fireworks?” I asked her. She looked at me weakly, “What are you talking about beta?”

“Today is Diwali isn’t it?” She looked at me and smiled at my naivety “I’m sorry beta, but there is no Diwali for us.”

I gulped and shook my head in disbelief. She would never lie to me, I was confident of that. Or maybe it was just my childish self denying reality. “But...but Dada said that we would eat sweets and-”

“That doesn’t happen here beta” she faltered, before retreating to her prayers. At that moment I wanted to scream at her, I wanted to wail and bark that everything she said was a lie. But no words came to me. Instead, I decided to find my answers someplace else.

I don’t know what my mom was thinking when she saw me run away, maybe she was angry at me, or perhaps I had made her feel guilty for the state we were living in. At that time I wished I asked her though, because maybe then she would’ve told me that she was praying for my safety and happiness.

My immature self found his legs carrying him through the meandering lanes of town. I found my destination after an exhausting sprint. It was a worn-out building surrounded by old, rusted gates that oddly resembled a haunted house. A sign hung on the door but I didn’t know what it read. Of course, I didn’t care what was on the sign; I had business with the watchmen sitting in front of it.

“Nani what are you doing here?” my grandfather asked me, surprised that I had come to visit him during work. He was the watchmen for the local library, since my father didn’t earn much he had to pitch in to make money for us and my grandmother.

“You lied didn’t you Dada?” I asked, wheezing for breath. He promptly stood up and took me closer in his arms, “What do you mean beta? I never lied to you.”

“But you did Dada...you did,” I asked teary-eyed, “You said today was Diwali.” I slowly began explaining what had happened at home and he listened considerately, wiping my tears as I spoke. At the very end he smiled at me and said “So because your mother, my daughter, said there is no Diwali, you think I lied to you?”

“Yes, Dada. Besides how can I trust you? You said you know something that happened thousands of thousands of years ago. How can you say that?”

He looked at me quizzically with furrowed brows and then leaned near my ear “Do you want to know how I know?” he whispered and I nodded frantically, “Follow me.”

Through the back gate, he led me into the library compound, or rather he carried me. I was simply too scared to go in. We got in through the back door and climbed up the stairs to the fourth floor. The sheer volume of books astonished me. I couldn't read what was written on their covers, which instantly made me jealous of the people who managed to write them.

“Dada was all of these books written by people?”

“Yes, yes they were Nani beta. They were written by people a very, very long time ago.” He carried me to the other end of the large room, where numerous desks were lined to the walls. All the windows were shut closed and dim lights lit the room. He placed me on one of the desks and ran to the nearest shelf where he pulled out an orange book.

Bright letters were written across the cover with a picture of Lord Rama and his holy entourage. “You asked me how I knew about Diwali, right Nani?” he pointed to the book and smiled “The Ramayana has all your answers.”

“You know how to read Dada?” I beamed and he nodded curtly. “But how does this book know what happened thousands of years ago?”

“That's because it was written thousands of years ago.”

“You're lying again, Dada! Something can't live for so long. It's impossible!”

“That's the thing Nani beta. Unlike us, that live for some time and pass away, words have a very magical power to live on forever. That is why; even today we know something that happened thousands of years ago.”

Something inside me clicked when he said that. A strange feeling began brewing inside my stomach, a sense of alacrity I had never felt before. The prospect of something being able to live forever excited me unlike anything had ever before.

“But still, don't believe me if you don't want to Nani beta” he continued while picking me from the desk “Because you see Diwali isn't about celebrating the story. It is about enjoying happiness.” We stood next to the window and he opened it with his free arm, showing me a sight I would never forget. Underneath us, the entire village was drowning in the warmth of hundreds of lamps. It was as if the night sky had decided to dance on Earth for a day.

“Words have this much power Dada?”

“Yes, they do beta. They have the power to make us see things we could never imagine, people we've never met before, and happiness we've never known we had. It's thanks to these words that we can celebrate Diwali today.”

It was on that faithful twilight that I discovered light. On that faithful twilight, I discovered the dreams that those unreadable words had spun for me, a dream that would survive for thousands and thousands of years.



## 56. Rupali Gupta Mukherjee

Rupali Gupta Mukherjee, resident of Kolkata is an educator by profession. Rupali is a nature enthusiast, she loves to travel and has a passion for photography. Poetry reading, writing and reciting gives her immense pleasure. Few of her poetry recitals have been uploaded on YouTube. She has a collection of her self composed verses. One of her poems entitled, 'Salute # Frontline Warriors' has been published in the Anthology - Fortitude : 'Heroes of the Pandemic' ( Spectrum of Thoughts ). Occasionally enacting on stage during festive season and audio drama keeps her active and jovial.

### CREEPY MORGAN HOUSE

Morgan House has a string of spine-tingling spooky tales,  
Exude an aura of mystery and regality.  
George Morgan's manor, a sinister chalet,  
Decked out double storey villa,  
Adorned with Vine, Ivy, lavender creepers,  
Has a saga implanted on its pebbled walls,  
Roman paved diverge slant.  
History and heritage etched all over  
This, Colonial Mansion tinted on the quaint highland, Ringking.  
Spreads over 16 acres of pine clad,  
Pictorial Himalayan landscape was built way back in 1930.  
Morgan House ensconced in the range of Durpindara  
Has a legacy of its own.

Lord Morgan left his abode,  
After the ill-timed demise of his beloved, Lady Morgan.  
Legends prowl,  
The spirit of Lady Morgan still haunts the foggy hill top,  
Victorian country house.  
Local folks heard her shriek,  
A glimpse of her apparition was seen in the washroom mirror.  
A vacationer narrated his tale of awe;  
He has seen a milky white Caucasian lady sitting in dimness,  
He stood stock-still staring at her eyes,  
The specter dissipated like smoke in obscurity.

Room no. 101, Lady Morgan's bedchamber  
Looks straight in the face of Kanchenjunga,  
Overlooking, deep quaint valley downwards.  
There was an eerie silence prevailing,  
Followed by weird footsteps on the wooden floor.  
I opened my eyes wide, the clock struck three, and it was 3am.  
I sat and gazed out of the French window pane,  
The setting outside was divine.  
Those uncanny footsteps faded in the moonlit night  
Amidst orchids and foliage and those strange sounds,  
The call of the wild cat, in the manicured olive lawn,  
The gust of wind and fragrance of Camellia, Champa, Cape primroses  
Lulled me to my cozy couch and I dozed off to slumber.

The baffling creepy footsteps,  
At the unusual misty hours,  
Still haunts me, beckons me!!





## 57. Bidipta Mandal

Bidipta Mandal is a student from Asutosh College studying the subject Industrial Fish and Fisheries. His way of expressing thoughts is majorly through writing. He achieved some prestigious awards for writing in school level. He is also an independent filmmaker, having acted in those films and some telefilms too.

### IN THE SEARCH OF LIGHT

It was the month of November, the festival of light knocking at the door of Bengal. A vast area of field was changing their colour with golden grains, a school of foreign birds were visiting the field. Satish felt little worried about his small rice field, the grains have ripened. Satish was a poor brahmin, lived in a village "Amtali" with his little daughter Chini. She was only five years. That was the time of twilight, sun was drowning in the middle of grain fields, Chini was staring towards the setting sun and the colourful clouds.

-- 'What are you doing here maa?'

--'Look baba! Look! The clouds are gradually changing their colour, not only them! Look at the grains they are also changing their colour as well.'

Satish didn't know the scientific explanation of dispersion, reflection, refraction, and spectrum of that drowning sun light, that was creating such a magical moment.

--'It is all about the magical drama of drowning sun light maa. By the way! Fog is spreading all over, and it is near about evening now. It could be harmful for your health, lets go.'

After returning home

Satish saw that their kerosene stock was over, and he went out for some kerosene.

-- 'I feel afraid in dark baba, please come back soon.'

-- 'Stay in the room maa, I'll be back soon.'

The festival of light was knocking at the door but still the village was submerge in the shadow of darkness. there was no trace of electricity.

When Satish came back home, he saw Chini was crying loudly holding her belly, and was also vomiting frequently. He ran towards Chini and hold her tightly.

--'Dn't worry maa, I'm here, here I am!'

Satish brought her to the local government health centre. She became stable in few hours, doctor consulted to take Chini to a develop and equipped hospital in kolkata. She was born with cardiac puncture.

Satish loves his daughter more than anything else, so he decided to sell his grain field to commenced a good treatment for his little heart Chini.

Next morning Satish got a letter by post, from Kolkata - Bose babu incited Satish as the priest of their oldest Kalipuja in Aharitola.

--'are we going kolkata this year baba?'

-- 'yes maa, I got a call from Bose Babu.'

-- 'so we can celebrate kalipuja in kolkata?!'

---'yes maa.'

-- 'Im so excited, I never saw kolkata. I want to see those thousand of lightings in puja, that you promise me every year but fail to keep your word.'

-- 'ha ha! But before that you have to be fine very soon and I'll consult the best doctor in kolkata.'

They were getting dinner in low light of kerosene lamp but Chini was staring at the flame of lamp. she needs more light, it was not enough for her. Chini always thought that a good amount of light could treat an ill plant, she could also be free from this disease if she got a proper quantity of light.

Next day, they began their journey towards kolkata. It was 8 o'clock in the evening, the train was near about to reach Howrah station, Satish was sitting on a seat beside the window, Chini was sleeping on the lap of Satish. a streak of light of the luminous moon was boosting the sweetness of Chini. Satish was staring at Chini's face, he saw a reflection of his beautiful wife Sabitri in his daughter. Suddenly his heart cried out of fear to loose Chini as he lost his wife last year in typhoid. His wife named her daughter Chini because she was sweet as sugar ("Chini" in begali). The train reached the station in few hours. They got shelter in the guest room of "Bose villa". Bose's wife accepted Chini with great hospitality in few hours.

--'If you ever feel hungry, please call me okay?'

--'I'll call you, Maathakuron.'

-- 'You can call me only "maa"!'

-- 'But I dnt have maa, she left me last year!'

-- 'i don't have daughter also, but you are like my daughter maa.'

Bose's wife didn't have any child and she went through a miscarriage last year, doctor said, that was a baby girl in her womb.

That's why she got an emotional attachment with Chini in a few moments. Two more days left for kalipuja and Satish consulted a good cardiologist before he became busy with the preparation of kalipuja. Doctor recommended a minor operation which would surely rebibe her forever.

Finally kalipuja arrived, every one was busy with the decorations of Kali mandap. Satish and Bose Babu was also busy with arrangement of puja. Chini was observing everything from the corridor of "thakur dalan". Puja would start at mid night. Bose's wife arranged a breakfast of "luchi misti" for Chini. Suddenly she saw a widow entering the yard. The widow was wearing a dirty white sari, with lean body, nose was very projected with smoky dark brown complexion, her skin is wrinkled, her mouth was dry, some of her teeth had fallen out, her long dishevelled hair was gray. She had also a bag on her shoulder.

There were always an arrangement of food in Bose Villa for all strangers in the day of kali puja. Usually the widow was served with breakfast. But a strange thing was happening there, the widow was not eating the food, she was throwing the pieces of food in front her and a crow was feeding on that. No one had time to observe those things but Chini was observing and enjoying that very much. Suddenly the widow signalled Chini

-- 'what are you doing burima ?'

--'Im feeding this hungry crow !'

--'Are you not hungry ?! You are giving all your food to this crow .'

--'yes, im hungry. '

-- 'okay, then take a luchi from my plate .'

Chini gave a luchi to that old widow, that was observed by Bose's wife, and she felt little scary because that widow was looking very ugly and seemed like roadside mad woman. She could be harmful for chini, so she asked the widow to leave after breakfast and brought Chini to her room and forbid her to make contact with such kind of people, specially strangers.

That was the night of 'kali puja', the Bose villa was illuminated with 'tuni' bulbs and clay lampers. Chini was observing everything with great wonder. Her father was busy with three other priests attending the rituals. she heard from her father that a great ascetic is present among the priests.

It was 3am of that night, the city of joy was becoming more lively, crackers were blasting all over the sky. Chini was sleeping in her room. When all of them were busy in rituals Maathakuron was gone to visit the room of Chini to see her, Because she was alone in room.

The bed was empty, sound of worship bells was coming from thakur dalan that was signifying "sesh prahar" (ultimate ending of the ritual).

A hidden fear was stopping the breath of maathakuron. It was 4 o'clock, every one was searching for chini, servants were searching in every corner of house but they couldn't find a single trace of chini. Maathakuron was crying from the beginning, she had a strong doubt on the old widow that she could kidnap Chini.

-- "Satish lets find her in out side area of house", said Bose Babu

Satish was broken from inside, he felt that the world became darker in spite of huge arrangement of lights, he was searching for light of his life, his daughter. Two more days was left for operation. Everything was gonna fine but he lost his everything in few moments.

They went out for chini, the road of kolkata was very empty and silent, some dogs are sleeping on footpath, some sudden sound of crackers were breaking the silence of the night. the school of silent lights on the road were staring at a helpless father. They searched every where but there were no trace of chini...stair was southing with the name of chini in crying voice.

"Chini where are you maa, please answer me !!Chini !! Where are you!!"

BoseBabu felt sorry for Satish, suddenly he noticed a old man sitting on a the footpath, smoking stuff near his house. Bose Babu ran toward the man, he thought this man could notice chini outside. At first he denied, but he saw the fervidity of Satish and said 'I saw a little girl with a old widow crossing the road, near about 4 hours ago.'

--' My wife was right Satish,! Lets go to the police station '. They filed a missing complain in Sobhabazar police station. Next day morning, everyone one was sitting tired and sleepless on the yard in front of "kali mandap", fog was not even disappeared, suddenly chini appeared in front of the main gate, Satish ran towards and hugged her tightly.

-- 'are you okay maa ?where are you being last night ?'

--' I'm okay baba, I was with burima '

-- 'you mean that old widow?! Was she kidnapped you ?please Maa say everything, what happened actually.' Chini was little afraid to see the faded faces around her, everyone seems worried except that great ascetic who was sitting with closed eyes in front of the goddess, he might be preying for something. Chini started with little hesitation.

'I don't know the actual time, suddenly I woke up, after hearing a loud basting sound of a cracker, I found myself alone in room. I was feeling little scary. I went towards the window, chilled wind was touching my face, a sweet sound of worship bell was spreading all over the air. I saw a bunch of crackers blast together on

sky , they were colouring the sky with different light which making sky more magical . I saw a lamper was floating on the sky , followed by that light ,i went out from my room and reached the corridor .I gave a look towards thakur dalan ,I saw everyone were busy with the ritual and the gatekeeper was sleeping but The flame was attracting me more to itself , I crossed the gate . the road was near about empty ,huge trucks were passing with crazy sound but my attention was still on that flame, it was falling on the opposite of the road . I tried to cross the road .when I reached the middle road a loud sound and two bright lights hit all my senses. I thought the truck smashed me already but when I opened my eyes I saw that old widow, burima ,! .Blood was dropping from her elbow , i understood that she saved me from the accident somehow .

--'Burima! blood is dropping, you need to bandage the wound now .'

-- 'No ,need to..... my dear '

We were sitting on a footpath. I was looking at the decoration of light on the buildings with sharp attention because I never saw such decoration before.

'You wanna visit the Festival of light tonight ? '

That was a alluring proposal for me . We visited various pandels of kolkata by walk . there were various sculptures of Maa Kali , they were individually beautiful, how much lighting was there in Different shapes and colours! That was amazing ! Specially the star shaped bulbs were hanging all over the roads . After that burima brought me to the side of Ganga , that was the best moment I had. Two side of Ganga was illuminated , those lights were changing their colour frequently , the reflection of light in the river made me hypnotize. Suddenly burima asked 'Are you hungry Chini?'

-'How do you know my name burima ?' She gave a smile and she brings out windowing basket with a packet of fried flattened rice from her bag. And separate some croon from fried flattened rice by the help of it .When we were eating ,a crow suddenly appeared there . Was not it really strange! and as usually burima feeded it. I was feeling every sleepy and i rested my head down on her lap . When I woke up ,she gave me a little smile and brought me here. After crossing the road when I turned around, I saw she was disappearing gradually in fog on the opposite side of the road. Satish took a breath of peace , and looked at maa kali with thankful eye . Maathakuran was not present there . when she saw chini was there she ran toward chini ,hugged her tightly and said "maa kali saved you my dear."

-- 'yes !maa Dhumavati saved your child.' Said ascetic.

-'Dhumavati? 'Said bose babu.

--'Do you know about "Ten - mahavidya".

--'Yes they are the ten form of devi "adi sakti .said satish

--'Exactly satish! she is the seventh mahavidya , rescuer from all troubles. '

- 'how do you saying that baba ?'

If you were listening the incident properly , you must understood who she was actually!

Chini was looking out side from the train's window , she was completely fine . She was returning home with a great experience of her life , but missing Maathakuran very much . Ultimately She got the light she was searching for and and Satish got back the light of his life.



## 58. Deepa Jandial

Deepa is a hands-on mom to two boys, aged 15 and 11, respectively. Though she had a knack to write since childhood but could never pursue it amid the humdrum of life. The lockdown gave her an opportunity to introspect and discover her latent talent. An amateur writer, an avid reader and an enthusiastic traveller, Deepa enjoys writing the most.

### DIWALI- THEN AND NOW

“Spiritually, life is a festival, a celebration. Joy is the essence of life.”

Festivals are the most important part of the society. It's during this time that people forget all grudges, all differences, let go off all negativity, forget almost everything and come together to celebrate life. Each country has its own different festivals, and we, in India, celebrate a variety of festivals- Holi, Diwali, Christmas, Eid, Gurupurab, Baisakhi, with equal pomp and show. Incontestably, Diwali - the Festival of Lights, is the biggest festival in India. Its name is derived from the Sanskrit term “Deepavali”, meaning “row of lights”. The festival usually lasts five days and is celebrated during the Hindu lunisolar month of Kartika. It symbolises the victory of good over evil- Lord Rama killed Ravana and rescued his wife, Sita from captivity in Lanka. The celebration marks the homecoming of Lord Rama to Ayodhya after 14 years of exile. Diwali gives us hopes for new beginnings. It imbues within us love, light and happiness. People bask in the glory of the festival irrespective of religions or regions. This festival's been my favourite ever since I was a child. I've fond memories of celebrating the festival with my family and friends. I would exhilaratingly decorate the home with my mother and siblings. Flaunting my new ethnic attire, I would run around gorging on succulent sweets and exchanging gifts in the neighbourhood. It is the day when the Goddess of wealth, Laxmi, is worshipped to usher in good luck and prosperity. And I would eagerly wait for the pooja to end, as crackers would be the next on my to-do-list.

Now, I'm a mother of two grown up kids, yet the enthusiasm and charm of the festival remains intact. However, with this pandemic, life's no more the way it used to be. Times have drastically changed and so has our lifestyle as well as the way we celebrated our festivals. Our freedom to live, laugh, roam around, meet people, all has been curtailed. Infact, we ponder over everything umpteen times before we actually do it. Diwali is that time of the year when the entire world sparkles with dazzling lights, gleaming diyas, delectable sweets, and infinite happiness. It infuses within us exuberance, spreads mirth and brightness all around. Diwali symbolises the victory of light over darkness, good over evil but we must not forget we've not yet been able to achieve victory over the lethal pandemic. With social distancing, post lockdown rules and the corona virus, Diwali this year was a tad different for each one of us.

Usually it involves huge firework displays, parties and social get-togethers. But 2020 sure has been a historic year. It has left no stone unturned to dampen the human spirits. Nevertheless, we humans are blessed with an impregnable grit and resilience which helps us triumph over, even the worst. We take everything in stride and are grateful to be alive and kicking. Everyday is a celebration if one's hale and hearty. Every moment is worth celebrating if one has his/her loved ones around.

This year, I celebrated the festival from a different perspective. I tried to reach out to the underprivileged, made an effort to illuminate the lives of the ones less fortunate, made an effort to support the local shops and street vendors who've been affected the worst due to the lockdown. I celebrated the festival without any pageantry and grandeur but certainly with the same zest and fervour as I've been doing in the years gone by. The same age-old traditions, my ever-loving family, blessings from my elders, the enthusiasm and the zest were high, only the celebrations were low-key.



## 59. Sonal Sharma

She is a passionate writer, blogger and a story teller. She is also a speaker for All India Radio (AIR). She draws inspiration for her write-ups from what she observes around in the society and also from her personal experiences. Recently she has mastered the art of writing quotes and prides of a collection of 70 winning quotes in her kitty. She wishes to be the little change that she desires to see in the world through her writings.

### THE IRONY OF INDIAN FESTIVALS

A holy land that worships goddesses on festivals too many,  
How it treats its girls and women speaks of its hard irony.

The land that celebrates women empowerment and hails them so astoundingly,  
The reality is far from what is being portrayed, as Indian women are treated so poorly.

Indian appreciation of the feminine divine goes far beyond on festivals,  
While the treatment it offers to its women folk is nothing less than a tortuous mine.

Indian festivals can never be imagined without goddesses where young girls are worshipped as Devis' on Navratri,  
The shrieks of the same innocent little girls are silenced, no one knows their plight when they are tortured and raped amidst these festivities.

Parvati-the wife of Lord Shiva is worshipped as goddess of fertility along with the deity on Shivratri in all its pomp and glory,  
But when being unable to produce a child a woman in our country, is being cursed by her entire tribe even if its by her choice she is not spared from this category.

A daughter as dedicated as Sita is immensely celebrated on Sita Navmi and Diwali,  
And yet female infanticide is practiced openly in so many parts of the country.

For centuries Indians have been invoking goddess Laxmi-the goddess of power, wealth, fortune, luxury, beauty and auspiciousness on Diwali,  
But the conditions of actual grihlaxmies(housewives) in typical Indian households still remains pathetic due to physical abuse, moreover dowry and marital rape is not even recognized legally.

Radharani-the love interest of Lord Krishna has been accorded the status of goddess and is worshipped wholeheartedly on Janmashtami,  
Yet when an adult woman loves, marries and chooses to be in a relationship, she pays a huge penalty in the name of honour killing and its directly linked with her virginity and chastity.

Goddess Shakti- the destroyer of demonic forces and her various other fierce forms like Durga and Kali are worshipped on Navratri so enthusiastically,  
But when a woman raises her voice and fights for her rights, in the land where patriarchy reigns, she is made a ruthless victim of blaming and shaming so unbelievably.

Saraswati-the goddess of knowledge and the patron of science, music and art is worshipped so devotedly on Vasant Panchami,  
Yet a girl's right to basic education, her choice of profession is entirely dictated by her family.

Rakshabandhan perpetuates the belief that sisters must seek protection from their brothers perceiving them as weak and shows them their dependency,  
Resultantly, she drives away all her notions of learning self-defense and accepts her male counterpart's dominancy.

Being a widow, being rapid, being a victim of acid attack, being a divorcee, being homosexual or being independent are all considered as disgrace,  
Then why do we have to pretend that we glorify and worship women when there is a clear visible difference in how we actually behave,

Patriarchy says you can be anything under the sky, as long as you stay demure with your mouth shut and stay in glass cases and stone sculptures with no right to protest and rebel.

Please don't put women into standard size suffocating moulds and put them on the pedestal so that they never come down or else they would be trolled.

For god sake don't associate women empowerment with divinity because this restricts the scope and reach of Indian women,

And defines a very rigid and strict framework under which an Indian female should operate inside or in open.

Either practice what you propagate through your festivals,

Or stop fooling the world that worshipping goddesses on festivals empower girls at all levels.



**60. Soumista Dey Nandan**

She is a homemaker and a mother carrying on her dreams of writing poems and short stories. She is from Kharagpur and currently residing in Kolkata.

**FESTIVAL OF LIGHTS**

A year passes by with the hope to see the festive lights again  
Cascades of lights hanging from the terrace like a chain  
The roads and houses full of colourful lights  
Sounds of the crackers fulfil the empty heart and makes bright.  
The flavourful sweet aroma all over the town  
Makes me feel like a queen without a crown  
That melodious song which mixes in the air  
Makes me feel like a twinkle toe with open hair.  
Wonderful homemade lamps and glaring fluorescent candles  
Embracing the whole world with love and ending all battles  
Enjoying this festival of lights wholehearted  
We again remain with a year full of hope and wishes awaited.



## 61. Mahua Sen

Mahua Sen is a poet based out of Hyderabad. She has authored a poetry book and has edited and compiled an anthology, both being well accepted and crowned as an Amazon Bestseller. Mahua is the winner of Asian Literary Society's Wordsmith Award 2020 and Half Baked Bean's Annual Poetry Award 2020. Her poems and stories find place in many anthologies, journals and newspapers. She works for BEO (Bull's Eye Outsourcing) as the Regional Director (South).

## MIRROR

In the silence of a punctured night,  
Or a morning.  
I tiptoe into the cascade within.  
When the boughs of imagination soar  
Into the dark, I look at you,  
And I part company with this masquerade,  
Wiping away the 'invented' condensation.  
Razed by a saudade memory,  
That never happened,  
I bare my soul.

You reflect my flaws, my sins  
And my splintered silhouette...  
Sometimes debilitated by the world of squall,  
I come to you,  
And you show me, the me;  
Unfiltered, unmasked, unadulterated!  
You reflect my mosaic regrets  
Of what is not!  
You know the crevices  
And the potholes of my inside out,  
Concealed from the rest of the world.

You embrace me for what, and who I am!  
You break the walls of doubt,  
As much as you build them.  
You've seen my best and my worst;  
For, I undress myself in front of you,  
Day after day;

For, I undress myself in front of you,  
Day after day;  
One layer after another!  
You've seen my heart bleed,  
And how I smear the blood gleefully  
Into the tapestry of my favourite old skirt.

And how I tread on, swirling with the tornado  
Of the everyday rut,  
Masquerading with a smile;  
Surviving the onslaught of my heart,  
Each day!

You have seen me rise and fall.  
You have given a patient hearing to my  
Mumble and my rumble,  
And my fear and insecurities,  
And you've seen me heal!  
You've heard my bluebell shriek  
And my snowdrop yells!  
You've hugged me like a mother,  
Held my index finger like a granny!

Oh Mirror! You are a part of me.  
My soul mate, my kindred Spirit.  
Always reflecting the "true" me,  
When others persuade me, to believe otherwise!!  
I look into your eyes, and I find myself.  
In you, I find my bosom friend!





## 62. Shikha Gupta

She is an interior designer. Although not a certified Graphologist, by practice she loves to read signatures. She also loves to observe and study human nature, and this inspires her writings. Currently she is a budding blogger. Writing has become passion and it keeps her occupied. She begins the day with walk and yoga. Her mantra for happiness is loads of positivity and a good health.

### EVOLUTION OF HOMO-SAPIENS

Time and centuries have elapsed,  
 walking on fours; to learning to walk on our legs.  
 Homo-sapiens have come the long way,  
 Progression haven't been an overnight,  
 but slowly and steadily conquering other races,  
 stood and tested against time.  
 Many species in between gave- up and  
 lost in the race to the point of getting abolished.  
 We humans evolved, rising above all,  
 with us evolved our brain, the superpower.  
 We made the world our comfortable heaven,  
 comfortable and cosy equipped well.  
 Connected from one part to another World.  
 Our approach taking us to Moon and Mars as well.  
 It's all in the brains to either use it in the development of the mankind.  
 Or, use it to harm the Homo-sapiens.  
 As we are fighting one virus,  
 inside our homes, behind masks.  
 It's a signal from the ALMIGHTY!  
 Use your brains in the right direction,  
 or this planet would become our graveyard leading world wide destruction.



### 63. Tamal Mukherjee

Tamal Mukherjee is a Management Consultant with twelve years corporate experience in the fields of Information Technology, Artificial Intelligence, Ecommerce, Hospitality and Manufacturing. He has led multiple unicorns and start-ups in strategic roles. A native of Kolkata, Tamal is a sports aficionado and sports writer with two published books from his desk. During leisure hours, he enjoys out-of-the-box thinking and dreams to play a tiny part in helping the nation think laterally through his own venture.

#### ‘THE HERO CUP’ – THE FESTIVAL THAT ‘SPOILED’ MY LITERATURE EXAM

It was school days for me. I was a pathetic student and a consistent last bencher. I had Asif and David with me for company. At that stage, we did not understand the meaning of ‘Festival’ but the general mood we used to be in was festive. During Eid, Asif used to celebrate while David and I used to join in; During Christmas, David used to celebrate while Asif and I used to pitch in; And by this time, you have already guessed it rightly - during Durga Puja, both Asif and David used to join me for the celebration. So, fundamentally, each celebration used to get triggered by a particular person belonging to a particular religion. Yes, there used to be collaboration but, in essence, a harmonious collaboration used to get triggered by a religious initiation.

At that point of time, we got the first taste of a festival which drove coherent collective celebration across the nation. The year was 1993. The month was November. Cricket Association of Bengal was celebrating diamond jubilee. As a part of that, the association hosted a five-nation cricket tournament. Among the SENA countries (South Africa, England, New Zealand and Australia), only South Africa took part. Pakistan pulled out at the last moment. Yet, the presence of a strong West Indian side along with Sri Lanka and a Zimbabwe team full of Flowers (Well...at least they had two) made a grandeur out of the tournament. India won the '83 ICC World Cup before we were born and lost the '87 semifinal before we could understand cricket and being nothing but kids, we could not match the Australian time zone to catch up with all the actions from the '92 ICC World Cup. Hence, in more ways than one, the Hero cup of '93 was our first major cricketing tournament. What made it more special was the buildup. Floodlights got introduced in the Eden Gardens giving One Day International cricket a whole new dimension.

India dragged to reach the Semi Final and met South Africa. This match turned out to be one of the tipping points of Indian cricket. India struggled with the bat. South Africa looked all set to pull it off and then a certain prodigy named Sachin Tendulkar defended 6 off the last over. West Indies, on the other hand, beat Sri Lanka comprehensively to enter the final. The final turned out to be an Anil Kumble show as he picked up six wickets conceding just a dozen runs. India marched to victory.

Now, let's keep all the stats aside. Perhaps, my generation will always remember this tournament for the relevance of the 'now-not-so-common' 'All Bat-No-Banter' approach, as a testimony to 'Old School Slogging' and as our first taste of knowing 'What's the score?' as the most socializing question.

Overall, it was a festival which generated unprecedented emotions. Well! The overflow of emotion also ensured me along with my two buddies flunking the literature class test but somewhere in the long run the overall festive feel became part of a personal romantic literature which will never be written.



## 64. Sonali Ray

Sonali Ray is an aspiring writer, a nature lover, a dreamer, a selenophile at heart and a mother to a 5 years old. She dreams for a better world, a world free poverty, pain and sufferings. A world where gleeful faces are spread everywhere. All mouths are fed and all hearts are content. Words can create miracles and so through words, Sonali tries to heal the world around her. She hopes that someday her dream will come true.

### CHRISTMAS ALL THROUGH THE YEAR

Autumn has left its imprint on the crunchy pages  
On the pearly carpet, countless scarlet stories lay scattered  
Hot chocolate aromas engulf the breeze erasing  
The traces of pumpkin-cinnamon pies  
Bright cloudless sky smiles  
The crescent peeks from behind the misty veil

The lilt in the winter breeze whispers the Orangy song  
Echelons of natural lanterns dazzle in the night sky  
The snowy earth gleams like a bride,  
Graceful and shy, anticipation in her breath  
Bells jingle, choirs play in the distant church

The embellished wreath adorns the doors of every house  
Stars, confetti, decorated pine trees, beautify the icy look  
Glittering lights illumine the dark mystical nights,  
The milky planet ready to welcome the guest from Lapland  
The plummy old Redman who trots the globe on his red sleigh

Showering bounty of happiness and prosperity to the deprived  
The man whose unfathomable love for mankind is observed in his deeds  
Santa or Samaritan, the Dreamcatcher or the Well-wisher, one face, several names,  
Accompanied by his loved reindeers, the Berryman sprinkles his fondness in the depth of the night  
And evaporates into thin winter air with the first rays of daylight,

No footprint, no trace of his existence yet he fulfils every heart's deepest desires  
Stockings on windows blessed  
Presents dropped at every door  
Pains, sufferings erase on every step of the Jingle Man  
His melodious baritone rejuvenates hearts with glee and bliss

Santa teaches us to love every soul,  
Body ages, beauty fades but the soul remains unchanged  
Let our souls speak the language of passion  
Let the music of the soul reach every ear, dissipating affection and compassion  
Let us be the secret Santa to another needy soul

Why wait for Christmas to spread the warmth  
Let every day be Christmas and brighten the dull eyes of a deprived  
Let's feed every mouth and wish that every heart sleeps peacefully  
Let us drape every skin in fabric, let their shivers be pacified  
Let the homeless be gifted a canopy of faith and togetherness,

Santa did exist and still exists in each of us  
In our acts of kindness, embracing the world ignoring barriers of  
Cast, creed, colour, religion, loving every being  
Yes! We can all be a Santa, the Giver,  
Let's unlock the dams in our hearts and fill all the parched wells dwelling inside every soul,  
A caring touch, few empathetic words heal every barren wound  
Awaken the Santa that lay buried in each of us  
In days of gloom let the spark in us be the guiding light to others

Let not wait for the moon to show us the path  
Be that effervescent luminous orb that illumines numerous dark alleys

Be that dandelion that withers fulfilling the wavy dreams of others  
Be that star that fades into nothingness as it satisfies the wishes of countless eyes  
So let's deck the invisible red cape and jingle our way  
Into the hearts of the world, known and unknown faces  
So let's usher in the season of merrymaking with a platter of tenderness and passion.



## 65. Prajna Dutta

Prajna Dutta is an interdisciplinary artist and educator with academic degrees in literature, music, cinema and martial arts. He has been a part of several award winning national and international audio visual projects, albums, documentaries and cinema.

### RANDOM RAINS

As I behold the rain and touch  
 the drops that fall silently  
 like a symphony of a forgotten dream,  
 beyond the curtain of the clouds  
 I can hear a voice resonating  
 like an archaic aria dedicated  
 to the revolution that brews  
 within the deepest helms  
 of art on earth.  
 The rains rhythm have taken  
 on a swing of offbeat syncopation  
 and yet all I feel is inner peace  
 and your touch on my ear lobes,  
 not the rain but you.  
 These days afternoon rain  
 reminds me of all those blank pages  
 on which I write  
 with an invisible instrument  
 every time I clasp your hand.  
 I write, I think and I share the rains  
 with you and only you.

### BLOOD AND INK

Bullets are so powerful in  
 Making martyrs monsters  
 And monsters martyrs  
 Yet the holy book says  
 The ink of the scholar  
 Is more holy than the  
 Blood of the martyr  
 That day where were  
 These scholars near  
 The wells at the Bagh  
 Jallianwala Bagh  
 A garden of massacred  
 Martyrs for no cause

Yet causes which makes  
 Scholars bleed with poetry  
 Memories of screams  
 Glimpses of dreams  
 All bound in golden  
 Chains of unfettered  
 Bullets from the guns  
 Of officers who take  
 Orders, be it the valley  
 Or the plains, be it a  
 Dire Dyer or a sadist Shah  
 They will bleed blood  
 While we bleed poems.



## 66. Dimpy Tolani

Dimpy Tolani has over 6+ years of extensive experience in multiple domains like Marketing, Business Development, Content writing, SMM, SEO, and digital marketing. Dimpy has earned a degree in BBA and MBA in the fields of Entrepreneurship, Marketing, and Human Resources. She's a Digital marketing professional and has worked with multiple domestic and international clients. Her goal for the long term is to start her own organization and recruit more and more females worldwide to keep up the motto of spreading and promoting why women empowerment is so essential.

### WE INDIANS CELEBRATE EVERY OTHER DAY EVERYTHING YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT INDIAN FESTS

**The Festival Country:** Know how India is always in celebration:

India is a place that is known for its vast celebrations and fairs. Basically commending every day of the year, there are a bigger number of celebrations celebrated in India than elsewhere on the planet. Every celebration relates to various events, some invite the periods of the year, the reap, the downpours, or the full moon. Others commend strict events, the birthday celebrations of celestial creatures and holy people, or the coming of the New Year. Some of these celebrations are normal to most pieces of India. Notwithstanding, they might be called by various names in different pieces of the nation or might be commended in an alternate style.

**Festival impacts on Literature:**

Indian Festivals have a deep influence over literature. Most Indian festivals are related on myths, legends and literature. These stories and histories are the base icon for festivals in India. There are Festivals which celebrate literatures and embrace the people towards literature which influences people to look more about literatures. Most festivals all over the world celebrate the jubilees of certain literature community and improves the art of literature. These festivals show the importance of the historical literature and their impact on the people. Greek Myths, Egyptian myths are some of the literature myth based lands where these legends are praised, spread through celebrating their festival.

**India vs. the World:**

Indian festivals are distinguished from World festivals due to the deep traditional look wearing Sarees, Dhotis, Kurtis and other traditional apparel. In India, most festivals are based on gods and myths. This is also a reason why India is called as God's own country. World festivals are mostly based on true events and enjoyable histories, and the livable factors of people. The western hemisphere festivals are based on harvest, historic people and events. Asian festivals are based on mythical creatures, legends and literature historic. Their apparel on festival days remain modern but Indian festivals have that tradition look

**Lights and Wine:**

Indians have brightening natural lights on festivals while the world raises a toast with a glass of wine. There are broad wine festivals which happen in countryside of western countries. Wine assumes a significant function in uniting individuals, a job that developed from its inceptions in strict ceremonies and custom, where wine was an emblematic component, to the solidification of wine culture across every single social layer. ... The way of life of wine developed close by the different social orders that make up our advanced world. The diyas lighten the homes brightly and people believe it will give a bright fortune for them and also it is a décor for their homes.

**All religious festival of India:**

The festival of lights, Diwali is celebrated by all Indians worldwide. India will be bright in the night sky when Diwali. Diwali is celebrated as the Lord Krishna defeated the Evil Narakasura, where good defeats the evil. Even though 2020 is in lockdown, there is no loss in the hearts of Indian people in the spirit of celebrations. Everybody in India loves to fire crackers and it brings joy to their faces, people share sweets with neighbors and relatives bringing unity in them.

**Rare Festivals:**

There are festivals which are celebrated once in a period of years. Khumbh Mela, an Indian festival is celebrated once in 12 years. The battle for the Kumbh or the holy pitcher between the Gods and evil spirits proceeded for 12 celestial days, which is viewed as up to 12 years for humans to celebrate Kumbh Mela. Olympics Festival, which is celebrated once in 4 years, is celebrated as inaugural festival of The Olympics Games. FIFA inaugural festival is also celebrated once every 4 years.

### Christmas and the world:

Christmas is a yearly celebration remembering the birth of Jesus Christ, the god of Christianity noticed fundamentally on December 25 as a strict and social festival among billions of individuals around the globe. People believe that Santa Claus delivers gifts without disturbing children in their sleep and eats the cookies people keep for Santa. Christians attend church meetings in order to praise the Lord. Christmas is one of the most remarkable just as accepted celebrations celebrated consistently. Christmas is the sort of celebration that is mainstream to the point that it is endorsed in excess of 160 countries throughout the world, by grown-ups and youngsters the same. Christmas is praised by those after the religion of Christianity; however the celebration has all inclusive allure, across all religions. There are innumerable viewpoints to observe Christmas and the way with which it is commended is peculiarly in numerous nations, inspite of the fact that the Christmas soul is all inclusive in nature. Basically, when one says Christmas, there are three unique days in which one can commend the occasion.

### Why fiction festivals?

A long thought over people's mind about festivals are why are all of them are related to fictional stories. Festivals are representing the historical events that or mythical events which are accepted and planted deep in people's minds, and they are a followed traditions over centuries which are enjoyed, practiced throughout the world. India is a place that is known for its festivities, legend, religion and convention. Here a gathering is a fundamental part of the socio-social existence of the individuals. In actuality the celebrations mirror the way of life of the individuals. Dynamic tones, music and celebrations breathe life into the nation consistently. There is a festival for each strict event, for each difference in season and for each gather

### Festivals amidst COVID-19:

Festivals amidst COVID-19 had a lot of setbacks in the practices of traditional festivals. Generally people celebrate with their family, their relatives and of course their loved ones, but this pandemic season has kind off isolated and took far away their unity and contentment. But thanks to technology, they could at least video call over their loved ones and celebrate over phone and see their glorious faces. Due to this lockdown, huge number of businesses and employees has been in economic crisis and many have lost their Jobs. This has resulted in decreasing the purchases of festival products where many families aren't able to celebrate many festivals. The beginning of the colder time of year season denotes the start of merriments. What's more, the most anticipated celebration of the year, Diwali is practically here. Yet, because of the COVID 19 pandemic, we won't have the option to commend the celebration with a similar energy and excitement like previously.

While the quantity of legitimate cases being accounted for may have dropped, with no antibody for the infection yet, we must be as careful as before to keep ourselves and our family protected. However, this doesn't imply that you can't celebrate. You simply must be more mindful so as to bring down the danger for you and your family.

### Changes in festivals over time:

The manner in which metropolitan India is celebrating has changed. For example, celebration spending is not, at this point pretty much conventions and home-cooked desserts (think besan laddoos and mathri). Nor is it the one event in the year—other than the birthday—when individuals spend too much on purchasing new garments or buyer durables. Celebration spending is likewise an event to flaunt and mingle. Eateries offer real territorial food like Onam sadhya; bundled nourishments and beverages organizations adjust to festivities and beauty parlors are a piece of the new custom. For a few, it is tied in with moving endlessly from the network frenzy and holidaying away with family.

### Globalization of Festivals:

Flexible celebrations can be seen in various religions or in Hindu itself there are various celebrations for various reasons. Anyway individuals used to praise all celebrations for upbeat and prosperous. In antiquated India individuals used to commend celebrations regular yet monetary crunches has cut brought down festival from 365 days to 10 to 20 celebrations. After globalization celebrations economy moved to worldwide organizations and extended their market and made blast of buying during celebration time, additionally they made new celebrations for showcasing. In this article specialist has utilized subjective and quantitative information to evaluate socio-prudent condition, use on celebrations and attempted to zero in additional on, how globalization has made new vistas for celebrations and how they receive money related advantage in return, how families languish monetarily over doing high buy through on the web or disconnected.

**Mythology in Celebration:**

Myths play an important role in festivals. The origin of festivals rose keeping mythology as the base idea of the festivals. People celebrate the celestial creatures, gods, nature relating to their myths. For example, Christmas, is celebrated as the birth of Jesus Christ and said to be having magical powers. Panathanea, an ancient Greek festival was celebrated to praise and respect of the god.

**Pollutive Festivals:**

Since celebrations are praised on a mass scale and for the most part outside the homes, openly spaces, individuals should be more liable for their current circumstance while commending these celebrations.

Diwali, an image of triumph of light over haziness, information over obliviousness and great over malevolence, is probably the greatest celebration around the globe celebrated by all individuals and not simply Hindus. Lighting diyas, get along with families, trading endowments, having our number one desserts and rich suppers are probably the best ascribes of Diwali. Yet, there is one trait that numerous individuals censure and that is blasting of wafers. While it is amusing to blast wafers, it has a bigger number of weaknesses than focal points.

**Festivity over India:**

India's festivity varies from region to region. Pongal, Onam, Vijaya Dasami are Southern Indian festivals, and these are based on farm harvest and Gods. Ganesh Chaturthi, Kite festival and more are Western Indian festivals. Kumbh Mela, pushkar Mela are some of the North Indian festivals. Saraswathi Pooja, Vasant panchami are East Indian Festivals. Northeast states like Tripura, Mizoram, and Himachal Pradesh have Bihu, Bhogali Bihu, Ras Lila Festivals.

**Durga Pooja in Bengal:**

Durga Puja, additionally called Durgotsava, is a yearly Hindu celebration starting in the Indian subcontinent which loves and gives recognition to the Hindu goddess, Durga. It is a numerous day festivity changing from 6 days in certain pieces of the nation to 10 days in others. In the majority of Northern India the celebration is praised as Navratri (nine evenings). Despite these varieties, the most recent four days of Maha Saptami, Maha Ashtami, Maha Navami and Vijay Dashami, are especially significant and as needs be commended with much quality around the nation.

**Women Empowering Festivals:**

Navratri or the nine evenings commends the force or Shakti of the three goddesses, Durga, Saraswati and Lakshmi. The celebration mostly implies the triumph of Goddess Durga over the fallen angel. Every one of the nine evenings have its own unmistakable quality and shading. The Indian ladies clothing themselves as indicated by the shade of the day to praise the intensity of the divinity. Individuals perform Garba dance in the night for all the nine days.

As 'Mahishasurmardini', goddess Durga got triumph over the devil Mahishasur to balance out the great over wickedness. She stands apart the generalization of Hindu society and sets an extraordinary illustration of ladies strengthening. A few exquisite pandals are made to revere the excellent and intense structures of Goddess Durga. The towns and the urban areas are brightened perfectly with lights and blossoms. Individuals are totally lost in fun and attempting conventional and delightful rarities.

Seen in the period of Jyestha (June), the Raja celebration represents monthly cycle and fruitfulness. It commends the wetting of mother earth by the main raindrops of the monsoon. In this 3 days in length Odia celebration unmarried young ladies get dressed wonderfully in new dresses and sarees and decorate their hair with tropical blossoms. Young ladies play swings and appreciate the three days of Raja without accomplishing any work aside from getting a charge out of. The land isn't developed during this time. The uncommon delicacy of Raja is Poda Pitha and Raja Pana adding greater excitement to the celebration.

**Festival of Colors:**

Holi is a Hindu celebration that happens each spring. It's about fresh starts — Holi invites the spring season and praises the finish of winter. The Holi celebration consistently falls on Purnima, or the day of the full moon. It's a two-day occasion; the day of the March full moon is Holika Dahan. Notwithstanding denoting the appearance of spring, Holi additionally commends ripeness, shading, love, and the victory of good over fiendishness. The beginnings of the celebration can be found in different legends in Hindu folklore, one of which recounts the narrative of a devil, Holika, and her sibling, King Hiranyakashipu.

**Travel for enjoyment:**

Traveling for a festival is great way to know about more cultures, have fun, interacting and socializing with other people, seeing everyone together. You can literally make people your family. You will experience a lot



of music, dance, traditions, people, communities, foods, and more. Individuals hoping to make some incredible memories can move, tune in to extraordinary music, praise, party, have some good times, and unwind. They happen everywhere on the world for various reasons. Some commend religion, some the new year, some craftsmanship, some the collect or the full moon — whatever the explanation, consistently, some place on the planet, you'll discover individuals slipping on an area to celebrate and share a typical encounter.

#### Online Pandal hopping:

The feature of Durga Puja is no uncertainty visiting the various showcases (pandals) of Goddess Durga, each with an extraordinary topic or enhancing style. This movement is regularly eluded to a pandal hopping. Online Pandal Hopping take place in video live streams and TVs, but this can't beat the feeling of originality.

#### Food and Festivals:

A food celebration is a celebration, that utilizes food, frequently produces, as its focal topic. These celebrations have consistently been methods for joining networks through festivals of harvests and expressing gratefulness for a copious developing season. A considerable lot of the occasions are huge scope, stroll around tastings with gourmet expert designated tables covering the edge of the scene. You'll for the most part be strolling and representing the term of the occasion, and holding up in a long queue at each table to taste the gourmet experts' contributions.

#### Eid:

Eid is a holy festival when the Muslims meet up and embrace each other with guarantees of noble cause, generosity, agreement and fraternity. This celebration isn't tied in with being cheerful however to make others upbeat and support their cravings. The Islam people group from all over the globe shows their appreciation to Allah for all that they own. There are two sorts of Eids that are praised all through the globe with incredible intensity and fun. The first is Eid-ul-fitr and other being Eid-ul-Azha. Eid-ul-Fitr. Eid al-Fitr highlights a few days of festivities that incorporate uncommon morning supplications. Individuals welcome each other with open heart and wish "Eid Mubarak," denoting "Favored Eid" and with formal hold. Sweet dishes are prepared at home and endowments are given to teens and youngsters and also to those out of luck.



## 67. Srijoy Mitra (USA)

Srijoy is a US born Indian boy, studying his Masters in English now. He loves to reside in his father's Mini Cooper car and lives with music, writing and a carefree life that we all dream in our days of youth. This document is not just about Durga Puja, but about his whole concept of how Hindu religion or Lord Krishna has had an impact on his whole life. He has spoken in regards to how God has guided his path at such a early age, kind of his account of spiritual transformation. Srijoy also mentioned ideas from the Bhagvad Gita itself and his experiences of Durga Puja, telling all how he transferred the lessons learnt into actions and thoughts.

### DURGA IN AMERICA

This document will outline the overview of a perspective of a child born of West Bengali parents within the borders of the United States. What is the idea of India from the mind of an American with Indian heritage? Never judge another person by plane sight. Every person has a backstory on why they may be a certain way - never judge people. This has been my main mindset since as long as I can remember. I was born and raised in the South East of the United States of America. I do not know how most other kids with Indian parents think in the United States, I grew up around mostly all caucasian children. I went to a private school for ten years with the same kids who all have European heritage. I was very quiet, I was never close with too many, but I did not have any enemies.

I remember having religious ceremonies - Durga pujas. I remember sitting for up to two hours in the same position repeating lines the priest would say from some old book. I have always kept in mind the ideas behind the festival for Ma Durga. This has kept my mind focused on the Supreme power at all times since I was a small child. These events would happen in my home in Winston - Salem, North Carolina. One of the prominent memories of my life I hold dear are the once a year visits to Kolkata. My allergies would go away as soon as I would land in the Kolkata air. I could breathe much more easily. The heaviness of my eyes would disappear. The abundance of life and cars filled my mind with enough entertainment, I was content. Seeing relatives was always the best time, it felt more normal than any other situation. There was a growing Indian community in Winston Salem starting at age 12. I could not fully connect with the mentality of the other Indian kids. I could not understand what it was, but the other families were not relatable, yet they were always at my home in Winston Salem on the weekends and I just wanted to be alone. I thoroughly enjoy the land of my origin, this was the main differentiation between me and the other Indians in America. This caused me distress since I knew and know one must always show the highest form of respect to the ancestry. I was unable to showcase and feel my ultimate gratitude towards my religion/God and background when around the Indian community in Winston Salem. I could not understand the Indian community's mentality. During this dissonant period, I was developing a keenness to a form of music which was very abstract. I was introduced to Nine Inch Nails, Skinny Puppy, The Cure, Depeche Mode, Ministry, Metallica and several other bands. Not only was it that Indians in America were not into this form of music, no one my age I knew was even familiar with most of the above artists. I enjoyed it enough to where I listened to it alone. But this never changed my perspective and feelings towards Kolkata. Kolkata holds the foundation of my origin. Without Kolkata, I am nothing. My entire family is there and I felt the best with them. The ambassador was always my favorite vehicle and always will be. The hoards of people will never bore me.

When 9th grade or class 9 came around, I became recruited into a hardcore band where I was the front screaming vocalist. One member was of half European half Hispanic origin, another was full European, another was a kid adopted from South Korea by parents of European origin, another member had an origin of Judaism, and I am a West Bengali person. That is correct, each band member was from a completely different land from the other - it was a very symbiotic group. We functioned very well. However, my parents would drag me away from these practice sessions to attend gatherings within the Indian community in Winston Salem.

I was stripped from my growth to be within a fantasy world my parents were submerging themselves in. I was the black cat, the crow, the black snake, the black bat among a herd of sheep. I did not belong, I belonged less than when I was in a private school full of only Caucasian children. The parents of the Indian community were submerged in Bollywood and alcohol. I hated both - quit drinking alcohol when I was 16, did not even like it much - and I haven't felt the effects of any alcoholic beverage other than a sip at a few church functions. I do not smoke anything ever and I take no medical drugs or any illegal drugs of any kind and I never will. I tried as much as possible to escape any kind of Indian influence in America, I sought for beauty and art in everything around me including the ocean and human's magnificent creations of skyscrapers, airplanes, trains and paintings.

In high school, I tried to meet as many people as possible. I did not care where they came from. I did not care if they lost their virginity when they were twelve or desired to never lose their virginity at all. I knew people who had quit drugs and who may have sold drugs. I knew people who had to work to support their own selves because their parents could not. I knew Black people, Africans, Blasians, Muslims, Christians, Jews, Asians, Europeans, Mexicans, Hondurans, Costa-Ricans, Turkish, Irish, British, German French, I never judged. Hippy or man-child pro-wrestler agrees to the fact that rapists and child-molesters should be annihilated from the Earth and we will get along. I wore all black for the first year of high school and made my black hair long enough to cover my eyes in order to block most people's strange gazes. I was very quiet and kept to myself as much as possible for the most part, but no one gave me real trouble. I was in Concert band, Jazz band, I played classical piano and was always in a hardcore band of some sort either playing guitar, screaming or both. I remember doing shows when age 16, giving piano lessons when 14 and age 15 - all below the legal working age. I had great music teachers who taught me the importance of sounding outstanding on a musical instrument.

Since I was 14, I dreamed of being a homeless musician artist in some big city. I never wanted to go to college; I hated class other than being the class clown. College is the place where young kids with semi-wealthy parents try alcohol for the first time. I had already quit, therefore I did not see the point. I went to Drexel University. I learned nothing in the classroom. No matter what, I never lost sight for what I wanted to do as my duty to the almighty. When I finally read the Gita, I realized the most important rule of life - to make every effort towards the ultimate vision for obtaining fulfillment through acting and thinking within a vocation of my own choice.

Since I was 14, I dreamed of living in a big city without a home to pursue success within my vocation. Instead of sitting in a classroom of a University for five years, I decided to make my final stance at confronting the frontlines of my sacred duty. There have been plenty of successes and failures within this process, but I never lost sight of the light at the end of the tunnel. Sure, I can discuss all the reasons why I may succeed or why I may fail, but the point is - strategy, diligence, consistency, commitment, patience and several other words and rules I learned from reading, mentors and of course - the Gita and the Upanishads teach all these virtues. I realized I was a coward for not pursuing my dream all these years until very recently. I realized the objective is to live great during every second. There is no point waiting for the sense-gratifying pleasures of money and power, one must always stay determined to make life better. It takes effort to make a vision become real. "You should go to college, drink alcohol, get a degree. What if it doesn't work out?" - This is what I have been hearing my whole life, and all I do is ignore it. The mere act of worrying is blasphemous. No matter what, misery will always happen. This is what Krishna was trying to tell his friend who did not want to go to battle.

No matter what, those people will die whether Arjuna fights or not. I apply this logic to my own fight in my life for acquiring the ultimate truth. No matter how successful I will be, I will still miss my friends who have died, I will still miss Kolkata, I will still be a weak boy yearning for the comfort of mother's warmth. No matter how many times people tell me to do something I don't want to do, no matter how many people come and go in my life with some message, I will still remember my grandparents who died. I will remember that there is someone I know very well who I cannot hang out with because they are dead. No matter how many people tell me to drink alcohol, I will still be sad, happy, angry and every other emotion because there is no escape. I will remain DRUG FREE . I keep most of my affairs private, but these are some lessons I have learned as an American with West Bengali heritage. I have not met more than ten Bengali people in America in my entire life. I will say that I have decided to go for an arranged marriage with someone from West Bengali heritage. I made this decision when I was 12 years old and I never let go of it. I knew my parents had given up on this method, but I brought it back to life for the sake of my still living Grandmother. Out of all the relationships I have seen, out of all the debris I have witnessed in the world, the marriage between my still living grandmother and her husband has been by far the most beautiful thing I have ever seen. I desire for the same experience as what they went through. I will fight till the death to get my dream. I will find the firmest and most powerful source of protection for it which I am doing. No one will stop me ever again. This is my battle to my highest form of existence.

I have become a part of a duo act in Los Angeles California where I play accordion with a stand-up comedian artist. Our objective is to make people feel better about the idea of death. We dress in a grim reaper costume, my personal costume mimics the idea of a plague doctor from the middle ages. Our act's name is called Grim Duplicity. I love my work as an accordionist with the stand-up comedian who talks about death. Death has been an important aspect to creating my music and I play what feels right for the act. This is my final word.



## 68. Dr. Seema Sarkar

Dr. Seema is a Lucknow based Associate Professor in English. She has 20 years experience in teaching, having played multiple roles as an academican. Many of her writings have been published in journals and seminars.

### SWEET DEEPAWALI

India is a land of multifarious festivals. Deepavali is the one , which in hindi means ‘ a line of earthen lamps’(Deep+Avali). Tamsa ma Jyotirgamay- lead us to light from darkness: the message hidden behind this festival. This Pandemic time really needs us to light up the lives from the darkness of problems. The whole year 2020 has gone in crisis and now flickering the light of hope for a brighter, healthier 2021.

There is a story behind this festival of lights. It is said that Sri Ramchandra with Sita and Laxmana, returned to Ayodhya on this day from 14 years of long exile. So the whole Ayodhya was lit with earthen lamps, making the whole city brighter like day. This festival is not a one day affair, it's a chain of five days festivities. It starts from 1.Dhanteras, 2. Chhoti Diwali/ Narak chaudas, 3. Diwali, 4. Annakut, 5. Bhai Dooj. The first day is celebrated generally by worshipping the god of money- Kuber, buying new utensils, utility items or silver/gold coins and even jewellery. But actually, it's not the day to purchase gold jewellery but to buy Ayurvedic medicines for the golden health. There was a king named Dhanvantari in Kashi. He had propagated, popularised Ayurveda not only in his kingdom but in whole India and that's why Ayurveda and Dhanvantari are synonyms. He was born on trayodashi day or the last lagna of trayodashi, beginning of chaturdashi. In Bengal, people eat 14 kind of green leafy vegetables on Chaturdashi -'Choddo Shak' and the connection is to pay regards to the King Dhanvantari and Ayurveda, 14 kinds of green leafy healthy vegetables are taken in at the beginning of winter to prepare the body to fight the cold weather. Generally 14 earthen lamps are lit on the second day of the festivals- Narak chaturdashi or chhoti diwali. Normally the shopping starts from Dhanteras itself and new laxmi-Ganesha idols, Diyas, Lai, Lava-Kheel, Batashe, gatte, revari, chini khilone, boondi Laddus, decorative items, electric lights, candles, etc. are purchased to celebrate the festivals. Being a Bengali, we celebrate Kali Puja in Diwali, where the goddess Kali is worshipped at midnight and after the puja, Pushpanjali, Prasad and Bhog is being organised in the customary manner. The Bhog consists of Khichdi, mix veg called labra or chocchori, some fries of potato and brinjal, tomato chutney and finally the Payesh or Kheer. In a nutshell, any festival of India is incomplete without sweets. Non Bengalis worship ganesh Laxmi as shubh- labh or good fortune on the day of Diwali. The fourth day is Annakoot or 56 bhog , offering of 56 dishes to Lord Krishna, as the story says Lord Krishna saved people from heavy rains or wrath of Lord Indra and hence the festivities . Finally the fifth day is Bhai dooj, when sisters put tilak to the forehead of brothers, praying for a long and healthy life. Again a story of Yam and Yamuna, the immortal example of brother-sister love is popular. Food and sweets are an essential part to serve the brother as per his favourite dishes specially and getting lucrative gifts in return by the sisters. Firecrackers are also being burnt on the occasion of Deepavali and a tradition of playing cards with money is also being customary. I am brought up in a liberal atmosphere without any discrimination. Festivals meant a lot of food and guests being entertained in our family. My father, whom we call Bapi, was a medical practitioner and a dedicated person to humanity. He was a great cook as well and with passion, he used to prepare a wok full of Gulabjamuns, a big plate full of Balushahis, even Jalebi, Imaratis also so often and we used to enjoy it fully. He loved to throw parties for friends and fraternity so often and we cherish sweet memories of it still.

Balushahi was a must for Diwali and I remember a famous sweet shop in Mirzapur, which serves Makkhan Bara, a soft Balushahi that melts in mouth immediately. Even Fetuva, prepared with the batter of yellow moong dal and desi ghee, sugar that is whipped to a soft fluffy texture. Bapi was against the firecrackers, as per him, it was lighting fire to bundle money. He always believed in eating good, serving humanity and spreading happiness everywhere. He had miraculous powers and was worshipped by the patients as god, because he never looked towards money, only the person's welfare mattered to him. Like a child, he got passionate in the time of festivities for preparing sweets. Even helped in preparing batis by for the diyas. While offering Puja, he used to play Conch nicely, resounding the atmosphere with serenity. This year, we missed him a lot, as he has left for heavenly abode now in January for 2 years. But in his memory, what I could do was cook with passion and serving friends and fraternity with love and joy. I have seen a trend now of exchange of gifts among friends on this occasion of Deepawali and it's turning to a materialistic approach of show off only. This Year brought many difficulties to many families all over the world. Hence the prayer to Almighty is to remove this darkness of pandemic and spread the sweet light of health and happiness everywhere in the world. *Sarve bhavantu sukhinah, sarve santu niramaya, sarve bhadrani pashyantu.*

*Ma kashchid dukh bhag bhavet.*

Pray all should be happy, contented, healthy, do good to others and nobody should be miserable.

## 69. Panyam Dutta Sarma

He is a retired Principal of a reputed Intermediate Education institute in Andhra Pradesh. Currently, he is working as a professor of Business Communication at a private B-school. Panyam is recipient of numerous awards for his literary contributions. He writes poems and stories in English, Sanskrit and Telugu. He believes in healing and reformations of poetry.

### AN ELEGY ON MODERNITY

O modernity, thou are a failure!  
 Thy instrumental rationality yields no more.  
 Western-Centric are thou, irrelevant to the core.  
 Gandhi and Marx decried thee, not to be fair.  
 The world is not merely a place to live in  
 But one to master and control by all and one.  
 The concept of 'Nature' holds no water.  
 'Natural Resources' replaced it forever.  
 'Human Beings' are not to be found.  
 'Citizens' only, fighting for their rights  
 Ignoring, nay, suppressing those of others.  
 The wide, the all-pervasive term 'People' has vanished.  
 'Population' has set it aside, sans universal brotherhood.  
 Where do we find 'knowledge' in its real sense?  
 There is only 'expertise' that rules the universe.  
 What a cognitive and cultural fall!  
 Leading to man's degeneration and toll!



## 70. Subrata Bandyopadhyay (Chief Patron, Literoma)

Subrata Bandyopadhyay was born in an elite Zamindar family of Lalbagh, Murshidabad. Today, she is a resident of City of Culture, Kolkata. An alumna in M.Sc. from Visva Bharati University, she keeps keen interest in writing, mostly in Bengali. She draws inspiration from her rich childhood, surroundings, relationships and human emotions, routing them through her words. Subrata's works have been published by leading Bengali houses including Patra Bharati and Sristisukh. Her ninth book is packed under cards for January release. In this article, she has shared her memories of a very unique festival called 'Bera' which is also a testimony of the heritage of Murshidabad, the old capital of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa during Mughal Rule.

### BERA FESTIVAL OF MURSHIDABAD (Translated by Reetwika Banerjee)

Murshidabad, the land of Nawabs, is known for its exclusive festivities, 'Bera' being one of such carnivals. Way back in 1704, it was started by erstwhile Nawab Murshid Quli Khan and since then it has been ceremoniously celebrated every year by the people of Murshidabad. Bengali calendarwise, Bera is observed on the last Thursday of Bhadra month (mid-September) by the Nawab family even today. Primarily it is an Islamic festival, but equally participated and enjoyed by the resident Hindu families too.



'Bera' originates from an Urdu word which means 'raft' or 'float'. As per local traditions, a gigantic water float (read as 'Bera') is constructed and released at 11pm on the Bhagirathi River from Hazar Duari Palace Ghat. The float is decorated with colourful clothes, silver sheets, flags, flowers and candles to resemble a brightly lit floating mosque on water. The platform is made up of tender bamboo, banana leaves and stems cut into equal halves so that the Bera gets the required buoyancy to take a long sail. The Bera is dedicated to the water saint namely Khwaja Khizr\* and is often believed that it will reach him the next morning. Once Khwaja Khizr is pleased, any cruise taken after that will be safe.

History says, Bengal's Nawab had to deposit tax collections (gold, jewels and coins) from his territories to Delhi Durbar (Mughal treasury) once in a year. And it was mostly done after Muharram. The Nawab had to travel all the way carrying the riches in his ships. In those days, waterway was the major mode of transport. So, keeping the water saint pleased was a common custom, especially before the Nawab sets his sail. Though there are no such long water rides that take place today, but the tradition is still followed with same zeal and pomp.

[\*Khwaja Khizr is worshipped by Muslims and Hindus alike and is often referred as Zinda Pir, Darya Laal etc. Mythology describes him as a water saint with white beard, who wears a green turban and rides on a Hilsa fish in the river. He had once rescued a damsel in distress by riding on his fish against the water current and since then it is believed that he can save anyone from water accidents. Another school of thought believes that Khwaja Khizr is the saint who counseled Prophet Moses about righteousness, wisdom and patience. Irrespective of the iconography, Khwaja Khizr's greatness remains the same.]





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