

মিলন

Milon



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President's Message

Dear Esteemed Members,

I am writing with profound sense of gratitude and pride, as the President of our organization. It is an honour to lead a community dedicated to making a positive impact and continuing our Bengali cultural traditions here in Singapore.

Our mission is to become more inclusive and increase engagement of our members. We want to serve as a catalyst for positive change, to foster unity and understanding, and to champion causes that resonate with our member's collective values. Together, we strive to create a more inclusive, compassionate, and harmonious society.

As members of this organization, we are bound by a shared commitment to serve, to uplift, and to inspire our members. Through our collective efforts, we aim to address the pressing challenges of our time post Covid and leave a legacy of meaningful impact.

I am confident that with your unwavering support, dedication, and enthusiasm, we will continue to reach new heights in our endeavours. Together, we have the power to make a lasting difference.

Thank you for entrusting me with this responsibility, and I look forward to working hand in hand with each and every one of you as we embark on this journey of service and transformation.

It is that time of the year when we all are excited to get together and celebrate our Durga Puja with the same fervour as the Pre-Covid days. Let me share with you some highlights and activities in the last few months building up to the Durga Puja. This year we have extended our MC to twelve members with several new members who have joined the MC for the first time.

We had sent a survey out to our members to get an idea on what our members would like us to do and also asked for suggestions to increase our membership base. We had two workshops where we brainstormed on how we could bring in new members and have a homecoming of older members. This year, it has been our privilege to welcome back many of our older members. We were able to organize a cultural evening where members showcased their talents. We have partnered up with organizations who are screening of Bengali movies so that our members can buy discounted tickets.

We have been thinking about ways to engage our youth and have finally been able to launch our BAS youth wing. Our youth wing has enthusiastically started various activities and is actively trying to engage all our youth in our community. Several youth wing members have participated in cultural programs as kids and have fond memories of interacting at BAS events. So, we are extremely delighted that our youth are actively participating at BAS events.

I wanted to take a moment to express my heartfelt gratitude to each and every volunteer who has taken time off from their busy schedules and helped the MC in organizing events. They have put in countless hours to help the MC

in developing materials for communicating with members like editing videos and have painstakingly worked with the decoration team. We are looking forward to volunteers who will help us in organizing the Durga Puja and without their unwavering support, dedication and engagement we will not be able to pull off a successful Durga Puja.

Thank you for being a beacon of hope and a force for good. Together, we can make a meaningful difference and provide an inclusive platform for all our members to come and enjoy the festivities.

Kind regards



Dr. Sowmya (Shoumo) Mitra
President BAS

Management Committee

Meet the 2023 Bengali Association Singapore Management Committee



Shoumo Mitra
President



Raja Choudhury
Vice President



Pratik Mukherjee
Secretary



Prasun Saha
Treasurer



Saurav Chatterjee
Cultural Secretary



Saswati Bhattacharya
Member



Sumana Mallick
Member



Kanab Banerjee
Member



Devleena Sanyal
Member



Siddhartha Chatterjee
Member



Basab Bhattacharya
Member



Amartya Chakraborty
Member

Editorials

Every year we look forward to celebrating Durga Puja as one big family. Milon has been an integral part and a tradition to mark the festivities. Continuing with the Go- Green initiative, we are glad to be a part of the editorial team and have thoroughly enjoyed reading all your contributions. Thank you so much for being a part of Milon and the Bengali Association of Singapore.

Sharodiyar Shubhecchha to one and all.



Dr. Himani Swami



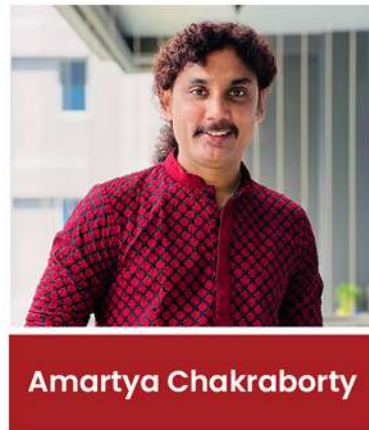
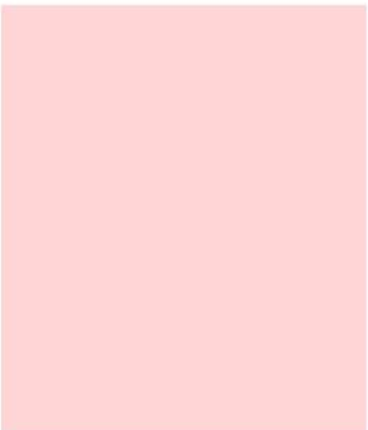
Deb Mukherji



Srabonti Chowdhury



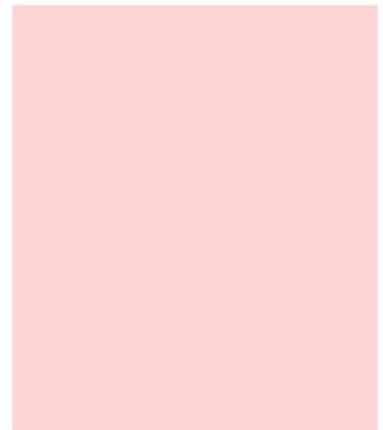
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Amartya Chakraborty



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Nilotpal Saha

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Looking Back at 2022

BAS Events

Anandomela

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Dear Friends

I am so happy that like every year Bengali Association of Singapore is organizing this year also Durga Puja in its own glamour.

The pujo of Singapore has a celebrated and unique past recognized all over the world including Kolkata

I congratulate President Shoumo Mitra and his team for organizing this pujo for all of us.

~Prasoon Mukherjee and family~

দুর্গা পূজা

Durga Pujo





দশমী ধামাকা

Dashami Dhamaka





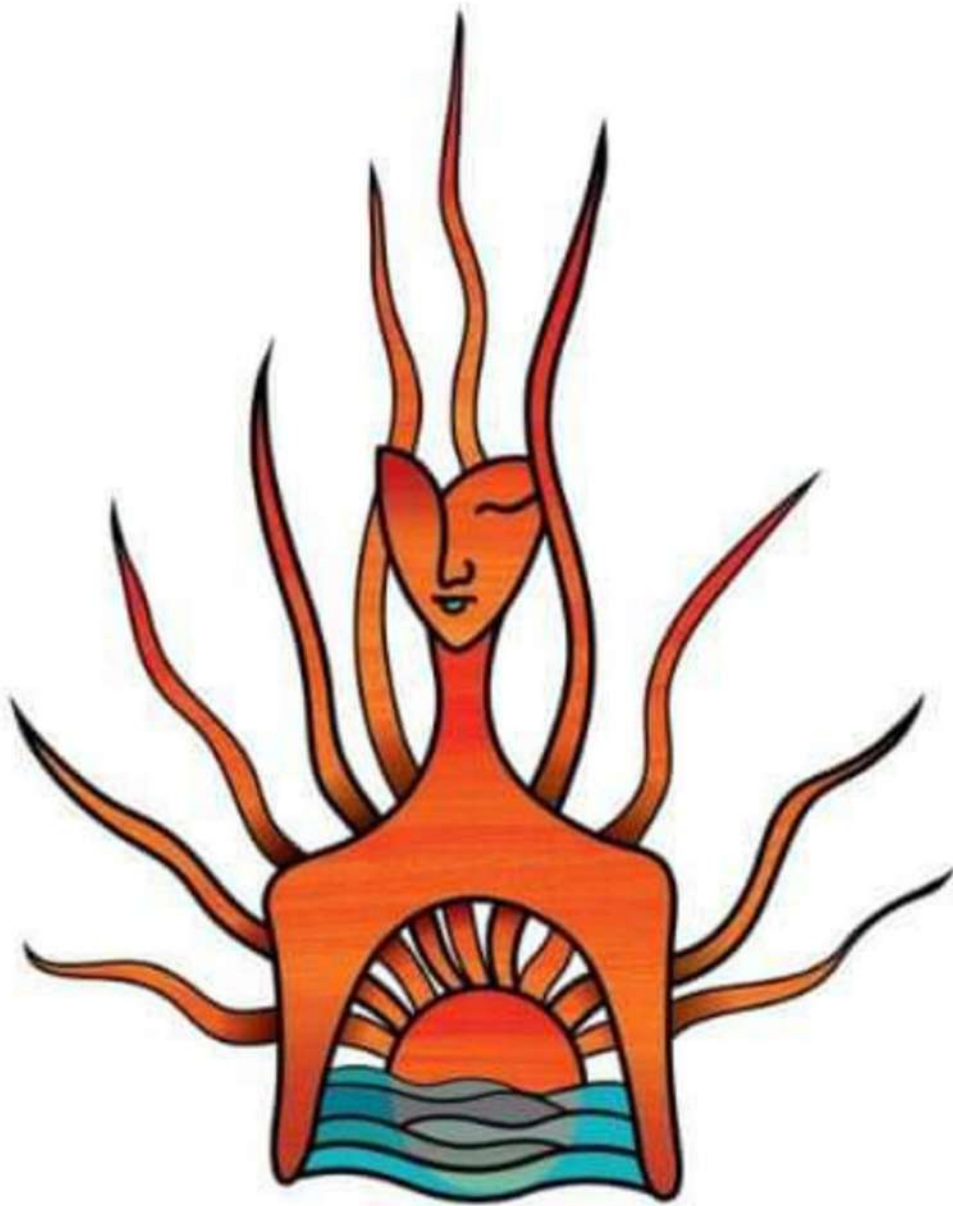


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Best wishes for a
Joyous and Festive
Durga Puja

~Mona & Jayesh Parekh~



সরস্বতী পূজা

Saraswati Pujo



Holi





Dayboddho

দায়বদ্ধ

Photographer
Gargi Mukherjee
Shuvam Sarkar



সুর-তাণ ও চন্ডে

Sur, Taal o Chondey



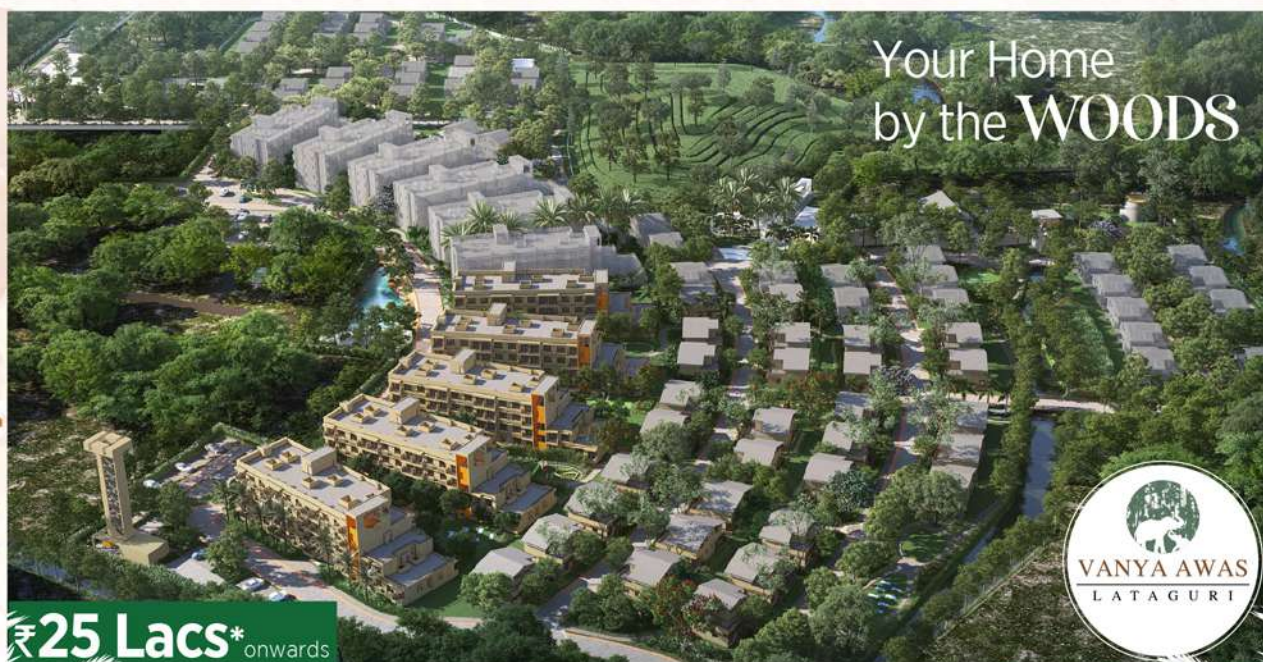
Community Engagement





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AmbujaNeotia



Budding Artists



About Aarna

Name: Aarna Saha

Age: 11+

Grade: 5

School: Wellington primary school



About the Drawing

Anusmit is a great fan of Soccer and Lionel Messi. He plays soccer and always works hard to improve his skills. He admires Messi not only for his sportsmanship but also for being a nice and humble human being like him. Through his drawing he wants to pay tribute to his idol.



About Anusmit

Anusmit is a creative learner who always works hard to depict his emotions and imaginations through his drawings and compositions. He is a student of Beacon Primary School, studying in Primary 4 and is interested in Soccer, Movies and reading books.

Pujo in the air



About Dheemahi

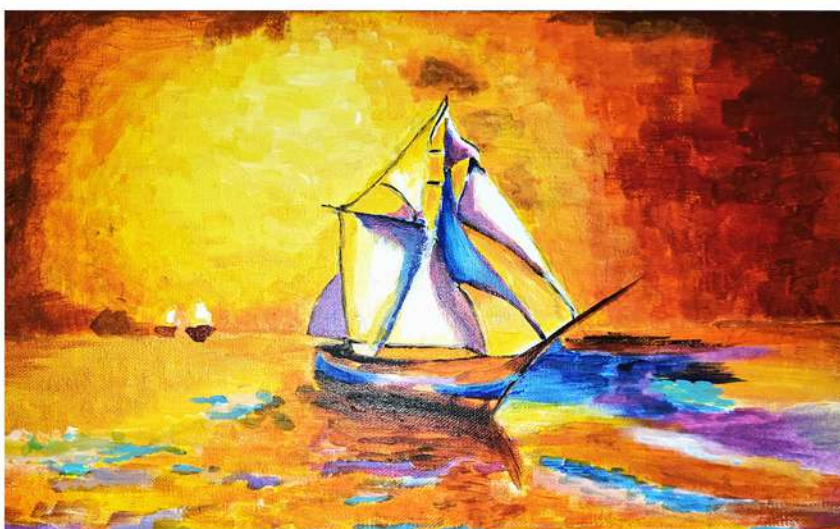
Dheemahi is a student of Grade 2 at the Canadian International School (Chinese Bilingual Program). She loves sketching, ballet, singing and plays piano and violin.

About Ayansh

Hi, I am Ayansh a studying in Primary 6. My painting "Sailboat on the Horizon" depicts the nature's glorious shades. The painting is done on Canvas with acrylic paints. My hobbies are painting, spending time with my friends, photography and Xbox.



My painting, "Eiffel Tower", is the most majestic and iconic Parisian landmark and a technological masterpiece in building-construction history. The painting is done on Canvas with acrylic paints representing the Eiffel Tower in the colourful spring season.

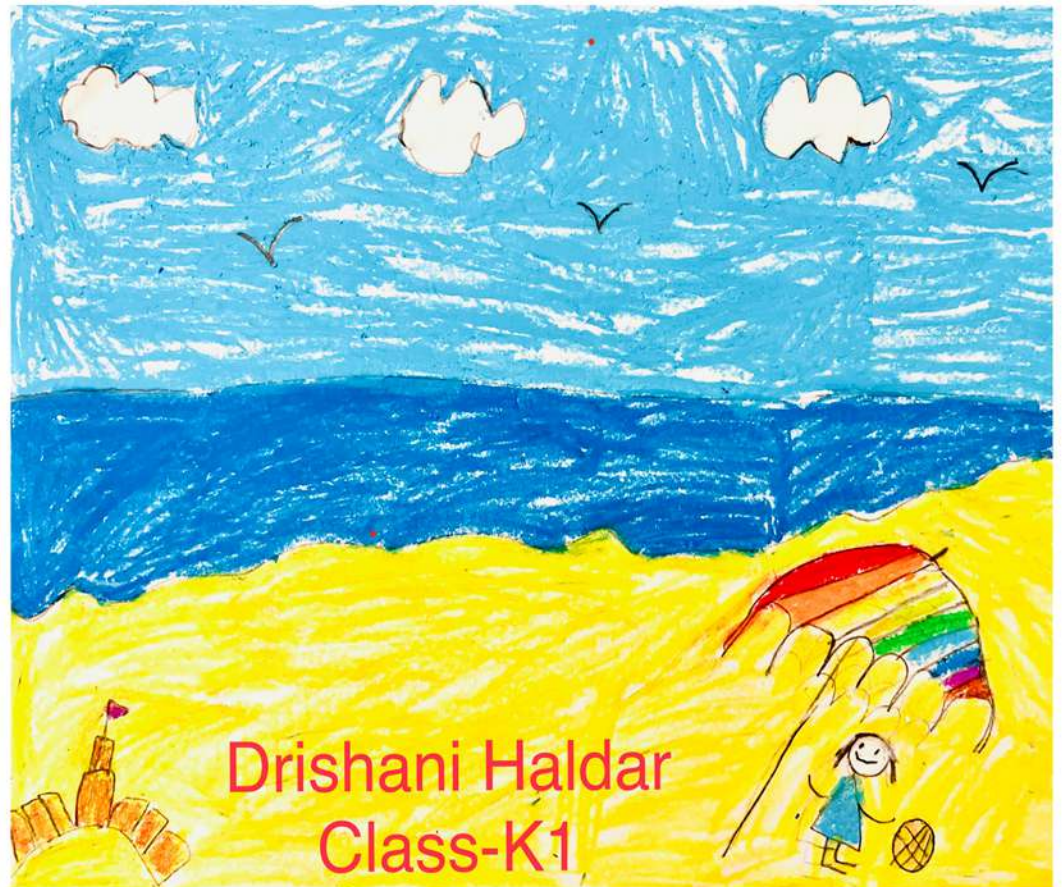


Sailboat on Horizon – Acrylic paint on Canvas



About **Drishani**

Drishani Haldar, a 5-year-old student at Changi Bethany Church, has a passion for numbers and enjoys activities like painting, dancing, and playing with her friends. She has a fondness for playing piano, reading storybooks, and swimming. She loves to go to the beach and make sand castles.



Drishani Haldar
Class-K1



Ashoka chakra



Puri sunset



Petunia axillaris



Sunflower

About **Shreyansh**

Shreyansh is a Primary 6 student, who is keenly interested in programming and photography. He is also a food enthusiast who enjoys eating different types of food.



Rabbit



About **Kairav**

P1, St. Stephen's School



About **Nivaan**

Nivaan Chakraborty is a 9-year-old boy with a gift for singing. From a young age, Nivaan possesses talent and passion for singing. Currently he is undergoing taalim in Indian Classical Music.

Outside of music, Nivaan is a well-rounded young boy. He is an avid reader, a chess and coding enthusiast. He has also developed a passion for painting, and loves to spend his time doing the same.



About **Riyaanshi**

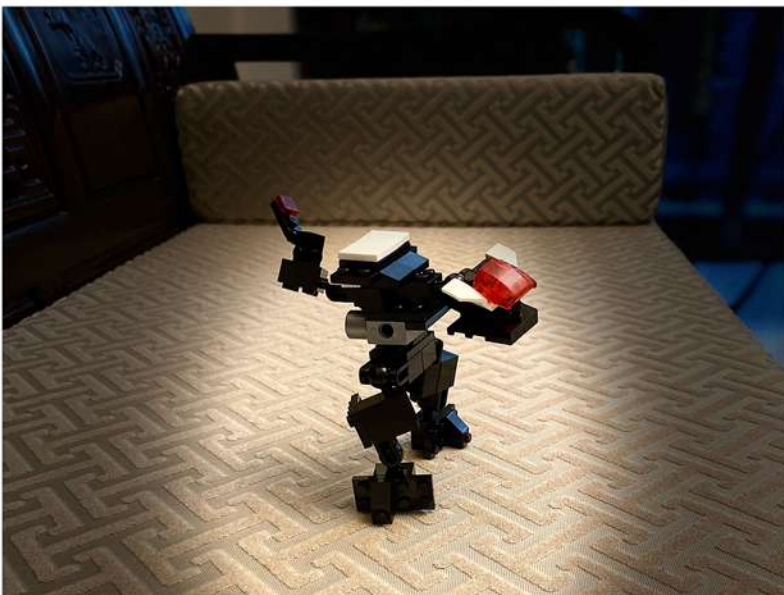
Riyaanshi is 8 years old and studying in Primary 2. She enjoys different types of arts, such as playing the piano, listening to music, and dancing. Apart from this, she is also fond of drawing, writing poems, and making new friends.



My animal friends



Mother Goddess



Transformer – **Dheyaan Shankar De**



About **Dheyaan**

Dheyaan is a student of Grade 5 at the Canadian International School (Chinese Bilingual Program). He loves playing violin and piano, singing, and has a penchant for Apple Technologies and photography!

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~ Debotosh Lodh ~

Nowveau Poets



About Srijani

Srijani Mukherjee, is a 13-year-old Secondary 2 student of Singapore Chinese Girls School. She wrote this piece as a part of her project. Here she tries to question the conflict arising in the minds of so many like her, as a result of the barrage of articles and social media attacks that happen on a routine basis. She tries to explore her "Origins". It is her first ever dabble into the world of poetry. Srijani has a penchant for artistic hobbies like dancing, singing, drawing and playing the piano. She is also part of the school Choir team and participates in different events.

Origins

By Srijani Mukherjee

I am an Indian, brown, and proud
But racism has left me feeling cowed.
My culture, my religion belittled and shamed,
My kind unfairly accused and blamed

The British colonized, sowed seeds of hate.
Our dignity and pride, they tried to berate
They used our differences to divide and rule,
Our rights ignored, our dreams trampled, they took us for a fool.

But we rose, we fought, and we took a stand
Our leaders, our heroes, their legacy grand
Against the tyranny, the oppression, our freedom, they sought
A beacon of hope, our freedom they got

But racism still rears its ugly head
In subtle ways, it's always been said:
From names to accents, it's hard to ignore,
The hurtful words, that cut to the core.

Once again, we'll stand tall, we'll hold our ground
Against the hate that tries to bring us down
We'll celebrate our culture, our diversity
What makes us unique, our unity.

For we are Indians, strong, and proud.
Of the struggles we've faced and the triumphs we've found
We'll keep fighting to make things right
For a world where equality, acceptance, and love unite.



About **Shreyan**

Shreyan Banerjee is a 13-year-old who studies at NPS International School. His hobbies include playing video games, chess, etc. This poem is inspired by the first time he watched a full tennis match in one sitting, that match being the Wimbledon final.

The Epic Finale

By Shreyan Banerjee

On the day of the Wimbledon final,
Two rivals came for the title.
Both exuding passion,
There was no end to their ambition.

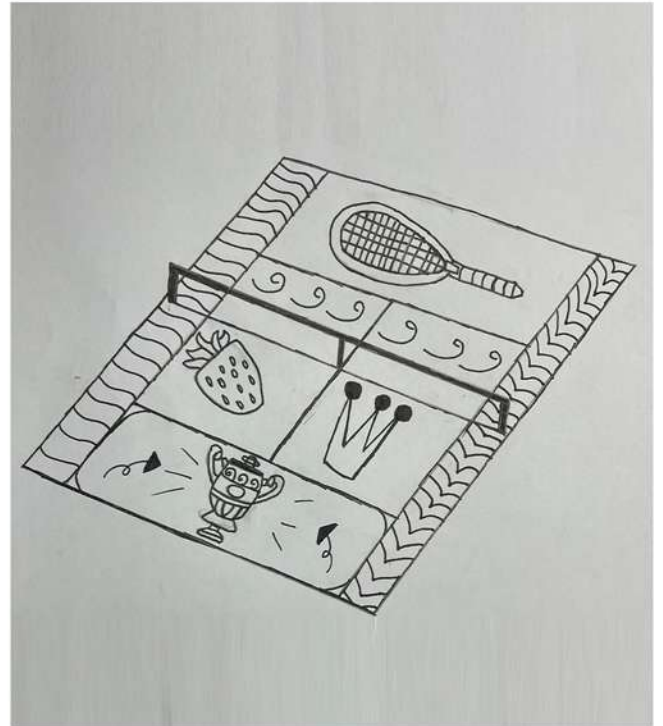
As the game commenced,
Both players knew who they were up against.
Novak Djokovic, a player with a star-spangled reputation,
And Carlos Alcaraz, a young icon of inspiration.

As Alcaraz brought on the aggression,
Djokovic had to play with caution.
His defence played to perfection,
Against an onslaught fuelled by determination.

As Djokovic won the first set,
It didn't faze his opponent's mindset.
He then had his breakthrough,
As Alcaraz won the next two.

But Djokovic was no stranger to a comeback,
He clenched the 4th set and overturned his setback.
But in the end, one man prevailed,
It was the Spaniard who had triumphed.

Emotions came over the 20-year-old,
Winning a championship around an age-old.
As he lifted the trophy with his hands,
His esteemed opponent said 'Congrats'.





About **Riyaanshi**

Riyaanshi is 8 years old and studying in Primary 2. She enjoys different types of arts, such as playing piano, music, and dancing. Apart from this, she is also fond of drawing, writing poems and making new friends.

The Moon

By Riyaanshi Chowdhury

Smiling high up in the sky,
Dispelling darkness, radiant and bright,
Despite your changing shape, your magnificence shines.
Mesmerising us with your serene sight

You illuminate the night sky and cover the earth in a silver hue.
Your softness adorns, making everything appear anew.
Your gentle touch enlivens tired souls,
Making them forget their worries and things that take a toll.

You make us wonder and marvel at your irresistible charm.
Filling out hearts with gratitude, joy, and warmth.
You brighten up the lonely mountains, fields, and farms.
Just like a true friend, caring and calm.

You embrace, rejoice, and glow in the light of the sun,
yet grow out of its shadow to make a mark of your own.
Your unparalleled grace and brilliance
Teach us to look beyond our failures and achievements.
You make us reflect on the value of life
And appreciate our existence, despite its limitations and imperfections.



Harmony

A Roadmap to Happiness and Balance

Abhinav Chatterjee

In our city lives, we have never-ending work schedules. City residents have gradually become lifeless, emotionless. As a result, we don't treasure life so much. Young adults nowadays seem to focus more on the future than the present. For teens like me, all I can think about is the never-ending worklist made stressful with tight deadlines. I always plan what I will do the next day so that I do not miss out on my submissions. I always see primary students worry about the PSLE examination and have nothing else to consider.

I once saw a video of an injured cat on a road. The cars drove by the cat, not a single one stopping to help. I can relate to this. The road is our lives and we are all the cars that zoom past the cat. We ignore the cat, the small details in our lives as we are focused on reaching our personal destination. A famous author, Wayne Dyer, once said that 'if we change the way we look at things, the things we look at change'. If we just take a moment to appreciate the smallest pleasures in life, life will be much more wholesome.

Everyone has moments when they feel like life is terrible. A tragic setback could make someone lose their purpose in life and become depressed. We shut ourselves from the beauty of life. A positive mindset can help one see the light at the end of the tunnel. For example, when I feel down, I always tell myself that when one door closes, another one will open. The stressful city life in concrete jungles does not help people when they are down. A bit of nature is always required to make the person happier. This is why Singapore's concept of a green city helps people by making them feel more hopeful when they are surrounded by lush greenery in parks and neat rows of trees on the road.

Even then, people need a break from the hustle and bustle of the city. Because Singapore is very industrialised and a small island, the best we can go within the borders are nature reserves and beaches. But once in a while we need a vast open space with a never-ending sky. That's why some Singaporeans go to Malaysia once in a while. A big country with beautiful landscapes is the ideal stop to wind down. Trekking on a mountain and gazing away at the faraway hills enclosing a crystal clear lake is a million times better than looking out a skyscraper window.

But I have noticed that we value things most when we are about to lose or have already lost it. The same applies to life. When people feel depressed, they isolate themselves from the community and tend to regard their life as a waste. But only after realising the beauty of life by embracing nature in an outdoor environment do they find out the true value of life. We only have one life and time flies by before we even know it. That's why my parents always advise me to not waste my time and achieve something worthwhile in life.



About Abhinav

Hi! My name is Abhinav Chatterjee and I am a 12 year old Secondary 1 student. I study at St. Joseph's Institution and I enjoy Secondary school life. I am passionate about writing and Football. I love Bengali food too.

Take my primary school life as an example. It has been six years since my first day at primary school and a year since I graduated from it yet it feels like just yesterday. I didn't even notice how much I have grown up both physically and mentally. I used to be a tiny talkative child who used to be very gullible. Now, I make my own decisions and have a somewhat average physique. When I think of my years spent in primary school, I reminisce about it very fondly. Everything seems to flash like a movie in my head as I visualise my primary school journey. I have learnt to cherish memories and value each moment as it comes. I have learnt to focus on living life the way it should be lived – working but with relaxing times so I can enjoy every moment and not have regrets about not living a wholesome life.

At the same time, I believe that we humans are social animals and must share good memories together. I strongly believe in family and friendship bonding time as that is the time when we exchange our sorrows and laugh about the good times. We can live happily by sharing our happiness with our near and dear ones. By sharing our experiences, we free ourselves of burdens and laugh out the joyous occasions together. We must live life happily in our community. The best way is by organising potlucks or group meetups where we have a session of being happier together and temporarily forgetting the bad things in life. It has been proven by our seniors who used to live in towns and small cities together, show up at a friend's house any day and have fun together. They did not have that much stress we have as we live in this pressure cooker.

Lastly, because this is part of the Milon magazine, I want to emphasise the importance of community festivals like Durga Puja. Every year, stressful or not, we long for this festive time. It's like our lives are incomplete without Durga Puja and sweets. This is where the whole Bengali community comes together to have “adda” while immersing in the loud bangs of the “Dhak”. This is an opportunity for everyone, young and old, to mingle and also pass down our rich culture to the next generation. Durga Puja always happens during the PSLE times, yet all Primary 6 students attend the celebrations like I did last year. Community gatherings like this build stronger bonds within the community and make us feel happier and energised. The sight of energetic children running around, aunties in red and white sarees praying in front of the majestic Maa Durga statue, and reading marvellous stories in the Milon Magazine gives a special vibe about Durga Puja. Life is incomplete without fun and enjoyment, and thanks to our specially designed rituals, our life is bound to be complete with experiences like this served on a silver platter to all the young Bengali children in Singapore.





শারদ শুভেচ্ছা ও অভিনন্দন

~Nandini and Kaushik Ghatak~



About **Samraat**

Meet Samraat Saha, a curious and enthusiastic Primary 5 student from Teck Ghee Primary School with a passion for uncovering the secrets of space. Samraat's fascination with space began at an early age when he first gazed up at the night sky and wondered about the stars and moon. His love for mathematics fuels his curiosity about space exploration and the intricate calculations involved in understanding the cosmos. Samraat is currently pursuing Taekwondo Poom belt. He is also an avid chess player and his passion for sports extends to swimming as well.

Discovering the Secrets of Chandra & Aditya!

By **Samraat Saha**

Hello there! I'm Samraat from Primary 5 and until recently, Chandra & Aditya were just names in my grandmother's fairy tale stories.

But now I'm super excited about something out of this world that recently stormed my mind: Chandrayaan-3! It's about the great, amazing adventure to the moon, and I want to tell you all about it from my perspective.

It's no-brainer that the big, shiny thing that comes out at night, is the moon! It's not just a pretty light; it's like a big space rock that's close to our Earth. Now, Chandrayaan-3 is a super cool spaceship made by really smart scientists from India. They wanted to go to the moon, just like astronauts in a storybook! Chandrayaan-3 was launched on 14 August 2023 from Satish Dhawan Space Centre located in Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh to learn more about our moon.

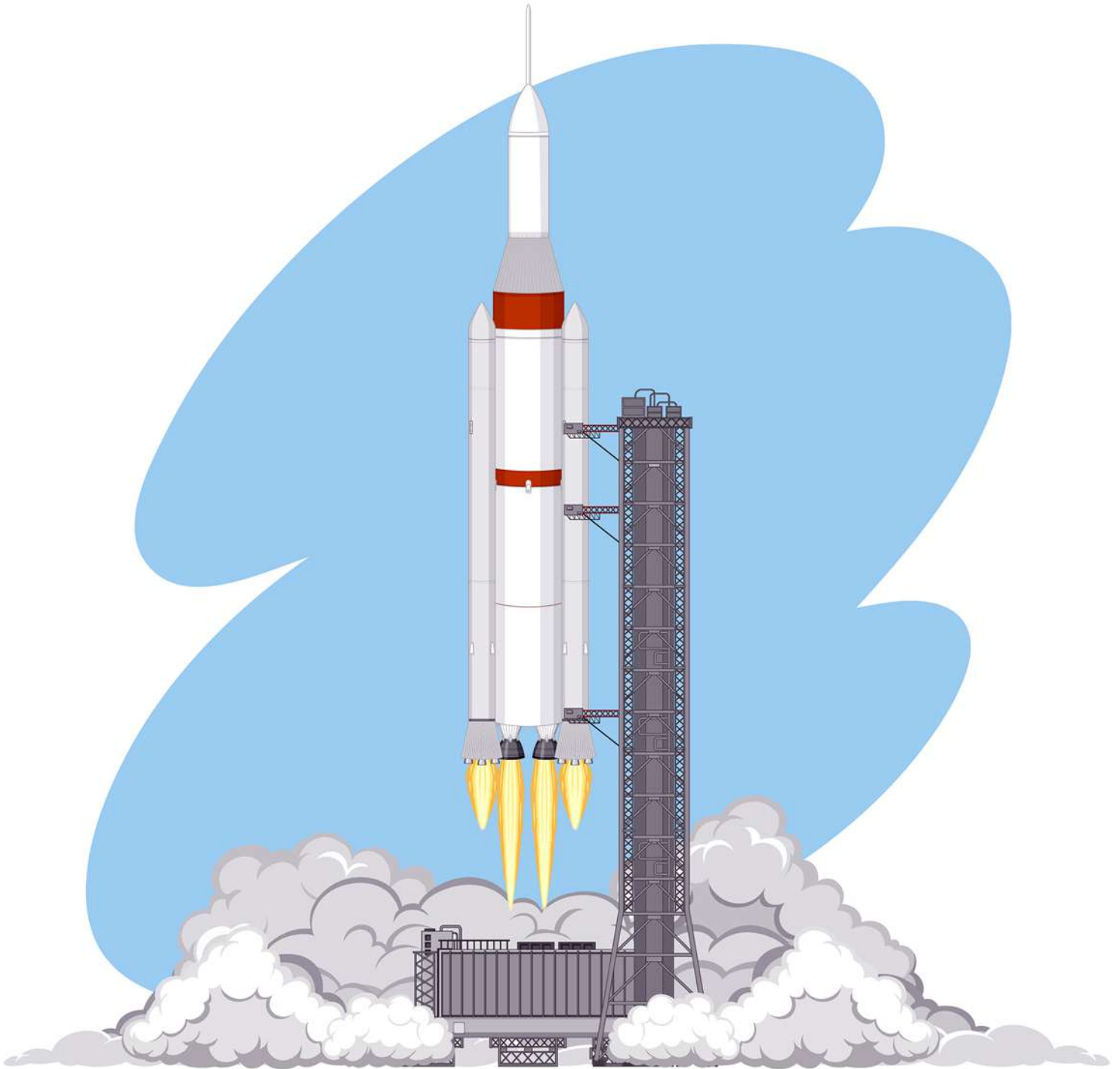
Chandrayaan-3 represents a significant milestone in India's moon exploration program. This was the third time they were trying, and it reminded me that we should not stop trying. Following the success of Chandrayaan-1 and Chandrayaan-2, which both aimed to explore the moon, Chandrayaan-3 was poised to continue the quest for lunar knowledge. Chandrayaan-3's primary objective was to build upon the knowledge gained from its predecessors. It aims to further our understanding of the moon's geological and mineralogical composition, its topography, and the presence of water molecules on the lunar surface. Armed with state-of-the-art instruments and cutting-edge technology, the spacecraft promises to provide valuable data that can enhance our comprehension of lunar science. Maybe it will find cool rocks and unfold several secrets! Aliens?

The people who built Chandrayaan-3 are like real-life superheroes! They worked really hard in the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and used super-duper science to make this spaceship. It makes me proud to know that kids like me can grow up to do amazing things like this.

Chandrayaan-3 also fills me with a sense of national pride. I watched the live telecast of the Chandrayaan-3's Safe and Soft Landing on the Lunar Surface near the south pole of the moon on 23 August 2023 where no human could reach before. I was so excited that I started jumping on my bed! This was like a real-life space adventure, and "it's happening right now!".

Since then, I have found myself eagerly waiting for each update from the ISRO every day, each image sent back from the spacecraft, and each new discovery to be made during the entire mission. The anticipation of new knowledge and the prospect of unlocking the moon's secrets evoke a sense of adventure that transcends boundaries and unites humanity in its shared quest for understanding the universe.

In conclusion, the journey of Chandrayaan-3 was a remarkable voyage of discovery and inspiration. Chandrayaan-3 landing was like a dream come true for a curious kid like me. It's like a mix of science, adventure, and magic all rolled into one. Did you also hear about ISRO's 1st Solar Mission embarked on Aditya-L1 launched on 2 September 2023? I can't wait to hear more about what they also find about our Sun. Who knows, maybe one day I'll be up there exploring with Chandrayaan-10 or with Aditya-L3, and then I can tell you all about not only our moon but also our Sun!



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About Veer

Veer Chatterjee is an 8 year old student who loves fantasy, swimming and art. When he is not dabbling in these activities, he can be found on the soccer field kicking a ball around with his teammates.



The Tsunami

By Veer Chatterjee

There was an 8-year-old boy named Henry. He loved the ocean so much that he went there every day. He swam and snorkelled and floated in the water for hours. After a few days, he convinced his parents to build a house that was above the ocean and also had some rooms in the basement that were underwater.

Henry's parents, who also loved the water, agreed. His mother was an architect, and she helped design a house just like Henry wanted. Henry took the largest bedroom, which was in the basement and had a wall made of glass. The three of them loved living in this new house on the ocean. They went swimming and diving whenever they felt like it.

It was a lot of work keeping the house clean and dry because waves would come into the house, but they never complained. Their beds had a view of the deep ocean. They saw lots of fish of different colours and many types of sharks. They sometimes could even spot whales. Henry soon learnt to swim with the fish. He even swam by a whale once.

One day, they woke up, cleaned the house, and then Henry spotted an outstandingly big wave approaching them from far away. The wave appeared to grow larger and larger as it advanced towards them. He quickly ran to his mom and dad and asked them what it was. They told him it was a tsunami and it was dangerous. They changed into their swimming costumes and went to warn the people on land because Henry's house was indestructible while the others' homes were not.

So everyone left the land and got to safety at Henry's house. They swam to Henry's home and waited until the tsunami arrived. It did not take long because it struck in almost an hour. When it came, it was beautiful, but it crashed against everything and broke things down. Everyone waited anxiously until the tsunami receded. They were sad because everything they had was gone. Henry and his parents helped them slowly rebuild everything they had lost. The new seaside town was even better than it had been before. Henry and his parents made a lot of new friends, and they loved living next to the seaside town.





About Eesha

Eesha Chatterjee loved her first sighting of snow on top of Mt Titlis and Junfrauoch. She realized she loves cold mountains as much as the sunny beaches and would like to travel to new and fun places with her family.

The Hike to Jungfrau

By Eesha Chatterjee

It all started one day when a family of two children, a boy and a girl, and their parents went to the magnificent mountain of Jungfrau. Being one of the most famous mountains in Switzerland, it attracts hundreds of tourists daily. But to get to the mountain, they had to get on a three-hour bus ride. The bus ride was boring and hot, but as the bus climbed higher along the mountains of Switzerland it got cooler and cooler. On the bus ride, the family wondered whether they were going to meet any animals on the hike. The children slept for an hour, played on their parents' phones, and searched all about the animals found in the region.

Finally, they could see the base of Jungfrau. The children cheered that they had finally reached. To get to the top, there was an option to either hike or take the cable car. Everyone else on the bus who was part of the tour chose the cable car except this family of four. They went by themselves to hike to the top of Jungfrau. On the way up, they met another family and decided to join them and move forward as a group since this family too had 2 children.

The tour guides had warned them that it would be a dangerous journey. They took the risk and went ahead. They hiked and hiked for five hours until suddenly, one of them stopped, turned around, and screamed "Bear!". Everyone started running and made a beeline for a nearby cave. They hid there for a long while and stayed still and quiet. The bear, after what seemed like ages, finally passed the cave. The two families stepped out and continued hiking until they saw the top of the mountain.

The long and tiring hike had been worth it! There was a soft blanket of white snow, and they could see people sledding down the mountain. When the kids saw it, they wanted to try it too. There was also a zipline and an ice palace. The ice palace was magical inside. They saw an ice throne and ice sculptures of all sizes, and concluded that Jungfrau was truly magnificent. The families were happy and knew they would never forget this adventure.



**Best Wishes for a joyous and
festive Durga Puja**

~Sridev Mookerjee~

About Devika

Devika Dasgupta is a 12-year-old student in Grade 7 at UWCSEA. She has a creative mind and is passionate about art and videography. She enjoys sports, primarily swimming and cycling. She also likes listening to music and hanging out with her friends.



The Cave

By Devika Dasgupta

One small boat on one big ocean
Swish goes the water, whoosh goes the wind
Just like caves after erosion

The sun beams of light, and the sight of Benagil approaches
All eyes focus on the cave
While in the distance, rocking the boat are small waves

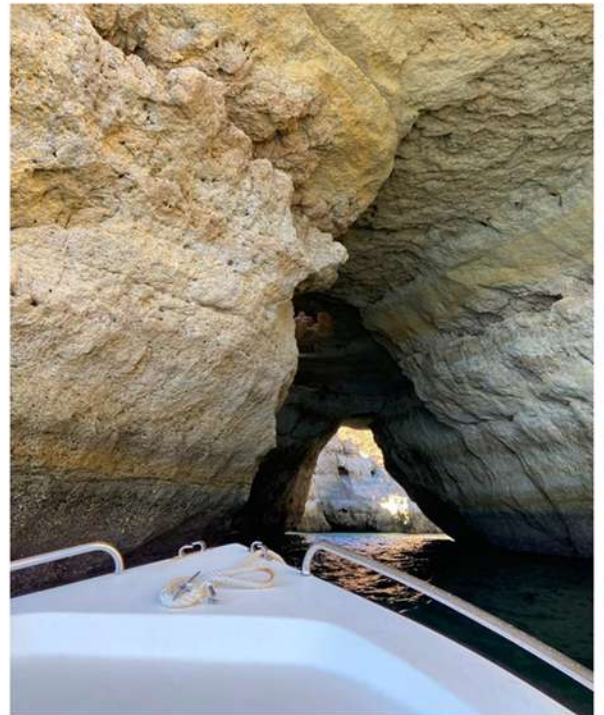
Entering a big archway filled with cold air
Waves and winds collide
My hair swishing from side to side

Admiring the beauty as seconds go by
In the middle of the Atlantic, the famous cave sits
Many people inside, yet the cave remains in bliss.

Far far away inside the famous cave, the tiny beach lay
As the beach sits for decades
Giant tears of happiness wash up day by day.

Golden hour is now here
The waves become the enemies banging the boat left, right, and centre
Time is up and the angry waves disappear.

The boat has left, and so have we
Now it is just one big ocean with no emotion
Swish goes the water, whoosh goes the wind





About Asmi

Age 16

Secondary 4

Raffles Girls' School

Adorned in Gold

Asmi Chatterjee

A mother sits with her daughter atop a bed, gently laying out delicate necklaces, earrings and bangles on the mattress. No matter how large or small the collection, the pieces glitter a lustrous, gorgeous yellow. As the mother lays out her jewellery, be it to choose a piece to wear, or simply sort her collection, she begins to tell a story. She weaves together the memories of these pieces which have passed through the hands of generations of women, and creates a rich, beautiful tapestry of their shared history. It is an experience so intimate, so powerful and so undeniably, unabashedly feminine. As the little girl listens, she feels the phantom caresses of all the women who came before her, and she feels as though she is part of something greater than just herself.


Gold has played a unique role in Indian culture throughout the years. In marking milestones in women's lives, it is gifted to them at weddings, graduations or birthdays. It serves as a symbol of prosperity, purity and happiness, and has long been a marker of wealth in families. According to recent estimates, Indian women hold around 11% of the world's gold, gathered from generations of jewellery passed down from woman to woman, through the years.

And yet, this gold serves a more innocuous purpose. The possession of gold has always been intimately intertwined with the reclamation of financial autonomy for Indian women. When they are gifted gold at their weddings, it is customary for jewellery to come in full sets; sets of dainty earrings, durable bangles and opulent necklaces. However, this is not a choice made for aesthetic value. The division of wealth into smaller pieces of jewellery originally ensured that women are able to sell off individual pieces in times of need, while still being able to retain the rest of their assets.

Gold is an asset which is highly gendered in the context of an Indian society. It has, for generations, been seen as a highly stable source of investment in Indian communities. Even in times of financial upheaval, the Indian gold value remains relatively steady due to the community's confidence in it as a whole. Gold serves not just a symbolic, but a financial role in our communities, linking itself intricately to Indian culture and norms. However, the significance it holds to women is even more greatly nuanced.

In the past, against a backdrop of a typically patriarchal and misogynistic society, her gold was considered a woman's only true possession. Be it gold obtained from her parents, dowry or via other means, it was passed down from mother to daughter in marriage, acting as financial security in times of distress. The selling of gold was seen as a woman's ultimate sacrifice, a sacrifice that oftentimes mothers were forced to make in order to protect the futures of their daughters in the only way in which they were able.

In recent years, Indian legal courts conceptualised the idea of Streedhan, a word which roughly translates to 'women's wealth'. As per the Hindu law of the Indian Penal Code, a woman is given complete control over gifts,



typically of gold, given before/during her wedding or gifts given by her in-laws, parents or siblings. Streedhan consists of gifts given free of undue influence, and acts as a financial fall- free of undue influence, and acts as a financial fall-back for women who fall upon difficult times.

In modern times, although many women still struggle with similar issues, a large number of women have also already attained financial autonomy and independence within their families. Although the context of gold as a financial fail-safe for women has become slightly less relevant, its cultural and emotional significance remains.

As we don the delicate gold jewellery so characteristic of this festive Durga Pujo period, let us take a moment in remembrance of the women who came before us. Let us appreciate that each uniquely-commissioned piece carries the memories of women who struggled to make the world a better one for their daughters. It carries their desire to protect, nurture and sacrifice for the women of tomorrow, and comes imbued with their ardent desire to achieve more. To pave the way for women who follow in their footsteps, to show them the beauty, metamorphosis and devotion so integral to our unique culture and heritage.

For every young Indian girl who looks at herself in the mirror, putting on her mother's gold jewellery for the first time, there exists an endless lineage of women standing right behind her, showering her with love, devotion and loyalty, holding her hand all the way.



It's that special time of the year when all of us in the Bengali community eagerly look forward to celebrating Durga Puja with family and friends. A big thank you to the BAS Committee and the many dedicated volunteers who have worked tirelessly to ensure that we all have another memorable Durga Puja. May Ma Durga's blessings usher in peace and joy for us all

~Basabi and Gautam Banerjee~



About **Anusmit**

Anusmit is a creative learner who always works hard to depict his emotions and imaginations through his drawings and compositions. He is a student of Beacon Primary School studying in Primary- 4 and interested in Soccer, Movies and reading books.

Chronicle of a Witty Traveller

Anusmit Mukherjee

Hola Amigos!

Hope all of you are doing well. I am going to share with you about my recent journey to a place known as, "The Pearl of the Caribbean". An island country bursting with culture and stunning sights, where warm, tropical waters meet wild beaches, the sun shines bright, and every place has a story to tell.

The trip commenced when our ship found its way south of North America, just beneath Florida. With every nautical mile, the choppy waters slowly became clearer and bluer. The air was hot, and the breeze carried that all too familiar smell of the sea... salty, fishy and wonderful.

The GPS showed that I was nearing the country of Cuba, and sure enough, I woke up next morning to see vast land stretched across the horizon. Our ship docked, and I found myself in the very small town of Baracoa. The town was surrounded with tall coconut palm trees framed by the water's edge, and rainbow-huge buildings and shacks that made up a somewhat sleepy-looking fishing village. I was soon to find out, however, there was much more to this place than that met my eye.

This little town has quite the history. Long ago, Christopher Colombus landed here and famously journaled that he had stumbled into paradise. He was not wrong, though. This place is a medley of pristine beaches, jungle covered mountains, and one or two intriguing local legends, but more of that later.

After a seafarer's diet of canned beans and stale bread, my first course of action was to explore various kinds of food. As I was walking through the streets filled with locals going about their day-to-day lives, gobsmackingly delicious smell hit my nose. A man in a small wooden hut near the water was standing over a pot whilst stirring a hot, goey, brown liquid. Chocolate! I would recognize it anywhere. In broken English, the man told me all about Baracoa's rich chocolate history. Locals harvesting Cacao seeds for centuries and turning the bitter morsels into the delicious concoction before me. I handed him a few coins, and he quickly whipped up a peculiar looking snack, then handed it to me with a grin. It was a palm leaf folded like a cone filled to the brim with shredded coconut, almonds and drizzled in melted chocolate. Delectable! I ate everything and went on my way.

I decided to venture into the jungle for the hopes of climbing El Yunque, a flat top mountain that looms over the town. As I huffed and puffed up the steep hill, I couldn't help but feel like I was, indeed in a real paradise. Everywhere I looked, there were strange-looking plants, pretty flowers and odd little creatures. Ferns and palms of every variety, vines, Island pines and fruit! The trail was covered in fallen avocados, mandarin oranges and the occasional pineapples.

I scooped up a Mandarin and saved it for later. Birds, every colour of the rainbow, chirped loudly in the trees while snakes and giant millipedes slinked up and down the branches. An unusual swirl of colour caught my eye and I moved closer to discover a snail with a vibrant, multicoloured shell. A Cuban snail! I would read about these. No snail is the same as the other. Their shells are like fingerprints. I finally reached the top and sat to snack on my Mandarin as I drank in the astounding view below me.

I stayed there all evening, just listening to the birds and sketching my findings in my field notes as the warm sun sank in the sky. Before long, it was dark, and I had to light my lantern to find my way back to town. Along the coast, I noticed a bunch of busy fishermen preparing to depart. Fishing at night? How odd! One of the men stopped his work and told me they were going Teti fishing. It is a tradition that's taken place for centuries on every waning Moon as the fish cluster near states that only those with pure hearts can catch them. I wished him luck and followed the cheerful sound of music coming from a nearby building. I entered to find what was deemed to be the entire town dancing away to the beat of some traditional Cuban music. It was infectious! I was soon swept up in the festivities and tried my hand at Salsa dancing. I dare say, I believe I caught on quickly.

The next morning, just before my departure I took a dip in the nearby river of honey As per the local legend that would fulfill my wishes. On my way home I was having mixed feelings which consisted of sadness to depart from such a lovely place and being equally happy to meet with my family soon.

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Bengali Section



Rituparna Sengupta is an Indian actress, dancer and producer who is acclaimed for her work in Bengali and Hindi cinema. One of the most successful actress of our times with impressive box-office success, she has won a National Award for Best Actress from the President of India, two Filmfare Awards, four BFJA Awards, four Anandalok Awards and her films have been showcased across International film festivals at the highest level including the Cannes Film Festival. She has also received the Banga Bhushan award from the West Bengal Government in 2022.

Rituparna has been the major star actress in Bengali cinema for well over two decades making her presence felt in both mainstream and arthouse cinema. As filmmaker Suman Ghosh says "you look at her oeuvre, there is no one else who has straddled the two different cinemas with such ease. She has been the top heroine of Bengali Cinema for

decades. She understands the tone of the character, what we call the "matra", the measure. She is a professional par excellence. She is an actress any Director would love to work with."

Hailing from a middle-class professional family in Kolkata (formerly Calcutta), West Bengal, India – she had no family connections to cinema or any formal training in acting. She was trained in Indian classical dance, and enjoyed arts from an young age. She studied at Carmel High School, and graduated with a BA (Hons) degree from Lady Brabourne College, one of the oldest and most reputed women's colleges in India. She started her MA program in Modern History from University of Calcutta, but had to interrupt her studies to concentrate on her acting career.

She continues to be a leading star in Indian cinema, actively engaged in a number of movies across Hindi and Bengali cinema, while engaging in her passion as a dancer and splitting her time between Singapore and India.

সমতা

ঋতুপর্ণা সেনগুপ্ত

বাজনা ছিলনা, অনুভূতি ছিল, কিন্তু সেরকম জোরালো নয়। পূজোর দিনে পিঙ্কি খুব হাসে, হাসতও খুব। ওর মনে কোন ক্ষোভ জাগেনা, আজও না। বিস্মিত চোখে তাকায় পিঙ্কি জ্বলন্ত সলতের দিকে। চোখে একরাশ জিজ্ঞাসা। মায়ের আরতি শুরু হবে একটু পরেই। সন্ধিপূজো, সন্ধিক্ষণের আড়ে, পিঙ্কি যেন কেমন আনমনা, ভীষণ আনমনা। মনে পড়ে ওর মায়ের কথা, বাবার কথা, বেড়ে ওঠার কথা, ঠাকুর দালানের কথা; লোক জন, কত কথা; মামা বাড়িতে মানুষ হবার কথা, মামীর ভালোবাসা, মামার আদর, ছোট বয়সে সবাইকে হারাবার কথা, অসম্ভব সব মুহূর্তের ব্যথা। ভেতরে আগুন আর কষ্টের ফোয়ারা।

পিঙ্কির পেটে ব্যথা করে। আশেপাশে সব যেন কেমন শান্ত; আরতি শুরু হবে। নিস্তব্ধ কেন এত? হঠাৎ শোনা যায় কোন একটা সোরগোল, বাইরে; শোনে কেউ একজন প্রাণ ত্যাগ করেছেন, এই পাড়াতেইঃ- জানতে পারে সমীরন হঠাৎ হৃদরোগে..... দুঃখ পায় না পিঙ্কি। এই পূজোর আগেই তো, মানে এই পূজোর না, আগের বছর পূজোর আগে ভেঙে গেছিল, মানে বিয়ে ভেঙে দিয়েছিল সমীরন। বলেছিল, ঠিক সমীকরণ হচ্ছে না ওদের; সমীরনের সমীকরণ হচ্ছে না। সমীরনের সমীকরণ বোঝেনা পিঙ্কি; বোঝেও নি বোধহয় কখনোই। ছোটবেলায় সবাইকে হারিয়েছিল তো, পিঙ্কি মামা বাড়িতে আশ্রিত। সমীরনকে মন দিয়েছিল, কিন্তু সমীরন ঠিক সমীকরণ করতে পারেনি। বিয়ের একমাস আগে ভেঙে দিয়েছিল বিয়ে, ঠিক এরকমই অষ্টমীর সন্ধ্যায়।

পূজো সবথেকে প্রিয় একটা সময় পিঙ্কির। গরম সলতে গায়ে লেগে গেছিল; পুড়ে গেছিল পিঙ্কি, আর হাতের ভেতরটা, মানে হাতের চেটোটা পুড়ে গেছিল। সমীরন সমতাকে বিয়ে করে এনেছিল একই দিনে, যেদিন, ওদের বিয়ের দিন ছিল; ফুল সাজানো গাড়িতে। পিঙ্কির হাতে তখন সলতের জ্বালা; মামিমা হাতটা ধরেছিলেন, বলেছিলেন, মা সব দেখছেন। পিঙ্কির বুকটা খালি হয়ে গেছিল। সমীরণ চলে গেছে মায়ের দেশে। পিঙ্কি হয়তো এটা চায়নি; হয়তো না, পিঙ্কি চায়নি তা। তবে মা হয়তো নিজে কোথাও সমতা করে দিলেন পিঙ্কির সঙ্গে। আর অসমতা করে রাখলেন সমতার জীবনে।

পুজো সবথেকে প্রিয় একটা সময় পিঙ্কির। গরম সলতে গায়ে লেগে গেছিল; পুড়ে গেছিল পিঙ্কি, আর হাতের ভেতরটা, মানে হাতের চোটোটা পুড়ে গেছিল। সমীরন সমতাকে বিয়ে করে এনেছিল একই দিনে, যেদিন, ওদের বিয়ের দিন ছিল; ফুল সাজানো গাড়িতে। পিঙ্কির হাতে তখন সলতের জ্বালা; মামিমা হাতটা ধরেছিলেন, বলেছিলেন, মা সব দেখছেন। পিঙ্কির বুকটা খালি হয়ে গেছিল। সমীরণ চলে গেছে মায়ের দেশে। পিঙ্কি হয়তো এটা চায়নি; হয়তো না, পিঙ্কি চায়নি তা। তবে মা হয়তো নিজে কোথাও সমতা করে দিলেন পিঙ্কির সঙ্গে। আর অসমতা করে রাখলেন সমতার জীবনে।



অভিনয় আমার স্বপ্নে, জাগরণে, চেতনায়। ডুবে থাকি সেই নিয়েই। রোজকার কর্মব্যস্ততার মধ্যেও বাংলার শিল্প ও সংস্কৃতিকে বিশ্বের দরবারে নিয়ে আসার একটা দায়বদ্ধতা অনুভব করি নিজের মধ্যে। তাই চলচ্চিত্র জগতের ব্যস্ততার মধ্যে থেকে সময় বার করে সমাজসেবার কাজ আর নৃত্য, লেখা আর সজ্জার মধ্যে আমাদের ঐতিহ্য ও সংস্কৃতিকে এগিয়ে নিয়ে যাওয়ার মধ্যে খুঁজে পাই আমার প্রেরণা।





About Suhrid

Suhrid resided in Singapore between 2007 and 2017 and was an enthusiastic member and volunteer of BAS. He currently lives in India and splits his time between professional engagements and writing. His interests include theatre, cinema, music, quizzing and sports.

খাই-বার পাশ

সুহৃদ দেবশর্ম

নুন খাওয়া ছেড়ে দিয়ে,
আলুনির স্বাদে,
মজে আছি রাত-দিন,
স্যুলাডের ফাঁদে।

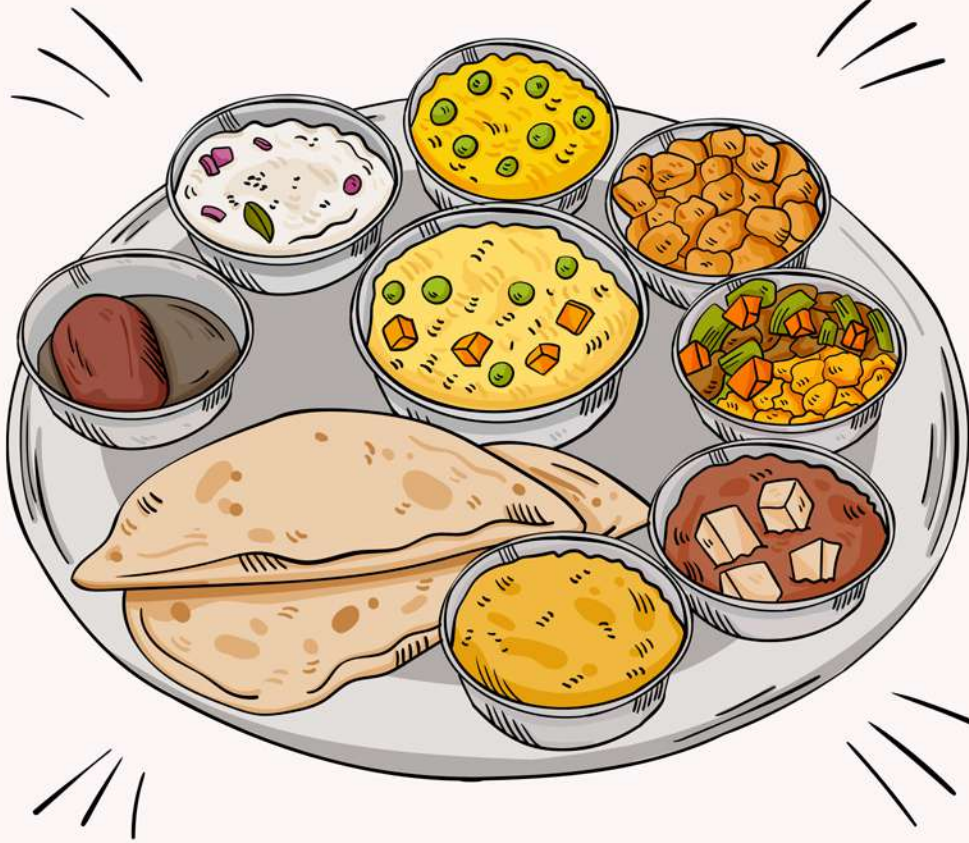
পাউরুটি খেতে পারো,
দুই পিস দিনে,
লাগিয়ে প্রলেপ তাতে,
সে মার্জারিনের।

আলু খাওয়া? ওরে বাবা,
বড় দোষ সেটি,
মাছ খাও ছোট, তবে
খেয়ো নাকো পেটি।

রাত্তিরে খেয়ো নাকো,
ভাত আর রুটি,
খাও যদি, ডায়েটের
থেকে যাবে ক্রটি।

মটনকে শুঁকো শুধু,
কভু নাহি চেখো,
রসগোল্লাও তুমি
দূর থেকে দেখো।

খেতে পারো তবে তুমি,
তেতো আর শশা,
বাঁচলেও মনে হবে
মরণের দশা।



২০০৭ – ২০১৭ অবধি সিঙ্গাপুরে থাকাকালীন বেঙ্গলী এসোসিয়েশনের এক অত্যুতসাহী সভ্য ও কমিটি মেম্বর ছিলাম। আপাতত ভারতে বসবাস করছি আর পেশাগত কর্মব্যস্ততার ও লেখার মধ্যে দিয়ে সময় কাটাই। নাটক, চলচ্চিত্র, সংগীত, কুইজ আর খেলা – এ সব নিয়েই আছি।

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~Amrita and Arjun Dasgupta~

English Articles



Transforming Bengali Association Singapore(BAS): A Journey of Feedback, Innovation, and Inclusion.

Abstract:

This report documents the transformation journey undertaken by the Bengali Association Singapore (BAS), which began with a comprehensive survey of its members, followed by a Design Challenge workshop. The survey results revealed valuable insights into member preferences, while the Design Challenge workshop harnessed these insights to craft a strategic plan for BAS's future initiatives. This report delves into the survey findings, workshop process, key strategies, and the prioritised action items that will shape the evolution of BAS in the coming years.

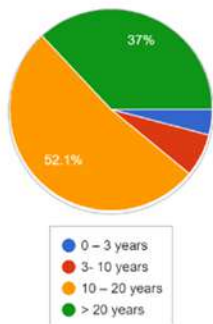
Introduction:

The Bengali Association Singapore (BAS) embarked on a transformative journey to enhance its offerings and foster inclusivity within its community. The journey began with a member-wide survey conducted in July, followed by a Design Challenge workshop held in July and August. This report presents a narrative of this journey, highlighting key findings, workshop outcomes, and the resulting strategies that will shape BAS's path forward.

Survey Insights: Understanding the BAS Community:

The survey garnered 73 responses from BAS members, providing valuable demographic insights. It was observed that 89% of respondents had been living in Singapore for over a decade, with 63% having been BAS members for a similar duration. Most respondents (87%) were aged above 40 and were predominantly married. Impressively, 80% of respondents had attended at least three BAS events annually.

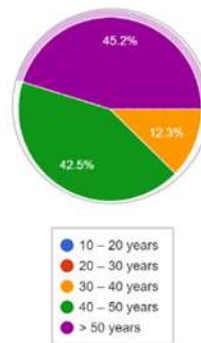
How long have you been living in Singapore?



How long have you been member of BAS?



Age Profile



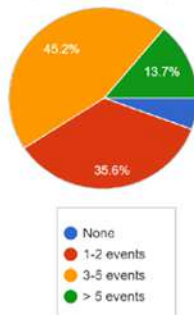
Member Preferences and Gaps:

The survey unveiled BAS members' preferences, indicating a strong desire for performing arts, such as Music, Dance, Arts, and Theatre, which was supported by over 90% of respondents. Additionally, 78% expressed the need for more Fine Arts activities, including Drawing, Painting, and Sculpture. Despite the enthusiasm, a perceived gap existed in BAS's offerings in this realm. Similar sentiments were echoed for Movie and Literature activities, where 88% deemed them important but felt they were lacking.

Unique Cultural Elements:

BAS's unique cultural activities like Adda, Quiz, and Food, seen as quintessential to Bengali identity, were also emphasised by

How many BAS events do you attend a year?



respondents. However, the survey highlighted a gap in the availability of such activities. Similar sentiments were voiced for Community Development, Outreach, and Professional Networking opportunities.

Inclusivity and Transparency: Fostering Equal Participation and Unity:

The survey conducted by the Bengali Association Singapore (BAS) not only shed light on members' preferences for cultural activities but also brought to the forefront a strong desire for inclusivity and transparency within the association. Respondents emphasized the importance of creating an environment that provides a platform not only to a select few but to a diverse range of members, irrespective of their background and tenure in the association.

Members articulated a collective aspiration for equal representation and involvement across all segments of the BAS community. This encompasses veterans who have been an integral part of the association, as well as young and new members who bring fresh perspectives and energy. The survey revealed that members yearn for participation to be facilitated in a fair and open manner, where everyone's voice holds equal weight, ensuring that all cultural and pujo activities reflect a broad spectrum of ideas and inputs.

The call for inclusivity isn't just about equitable participation; it's also about celebrating the diversity that enriches the BAS community. Respondents stressed the significance of embracing the varied backgrounds, interests, and talents that each member brings to the table. By creating an inclusive environment, BAS can harness this diversity to craft culturally vibrant and holistic offerings that resonate with all members, forging a stronger sense of unity and cohesion.

Empowering the Next Generation:

One of the resounding themes that emerged was the importance of providing ample avenues for the younger generation to actively participate and contribute to the association's growth. Respondents expressed the need for

platforms that allow young and new members to engage on equal terms with their more experienced counterparts. This entails enabling their involvement in decision-making processes and cultural initiatives, which, in turn, fosters a sense of ownership and belonging among these emerging members.

Transparency as a Pillar:

Transparency emerged as a crucial component in fostering inclusivity. Members expressed the desire for clear communication about the association’s plans, decisions, and activities. An open dialogue not only builds trust but also ensures that all members are well-informed and have the opportunity to engage meaningfully in discussions that impact the association’s direction.

Workshop: Crafting Strategies for Transformation:

To address these findings, the Design Challenge workshop engaged four teams, each focusing on different aspects of BAS’s offerings. The teams considered member demographics and needs, resulting in the identification of top ideas/suggestions. These were then prioritised based on value and feasibility.

Key Strategies and Actionable Items:

From the workshop’s outcomes, 11 key strategies emerged. These included involving new members in Bhog Ranna (community meals), organising a Sports Day, creating interest-based groups, fostering collaboration, and more. Given the need for phased implementation, the Management Committee of 2023 prioritised five of these strategies for immediate action.

Immediate Action Items for 2023:

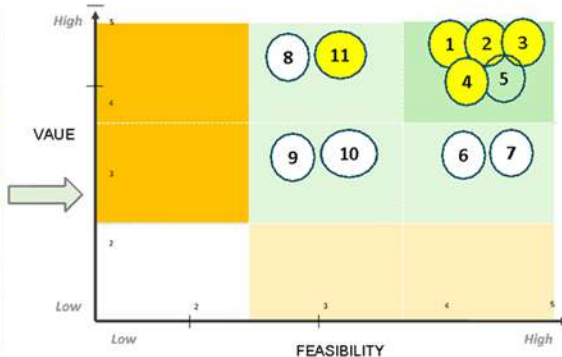
The following strategies were selected for implementation in the current year:

- President’s message about “New BAS”
- Inclusion of new members in Bhog Ranna
- Introducing new members and involving them as volunteers.
- Hosting a Sports Day event
- Creating a comprehensive member database based on interests and skills.

Voted top 5 actionable items by BAS MC 2023 (Highlighted in Yellow)

#	Brief Description
1	President to share a message about “New BAS”
2	Bhog ranna to include new members
3	Introduce new members and involve them as volunteers
4	Sports Day
5	Create Interest groups (Quiz/ Wellness/ Movie/ Culinary)
6	Carnival during Durga Pujo days
7	Targeted programmes for different target audience (by demographics)
8	Inter Association/ Community collaboration
9	Talks and Seminars (Health/ Finance/ Study Overseas)
10	Establish proper Onboarding process of New Members
11	Create a database of Members based on interest, skills and experience

Prioritise and map Initiative no. on the matrix



Conclusion:

The transformation journey of the Bengali Association Singapore (BAS) exemplifies the organisation's commitment to its members' needs and aspirations. Through a meticulous survey and a Design Challenge workshop, BAS obtained vital insights, generated innovative ideas, and charted a path forward that ensures inclusivity, cultural enrichment, and community engagement. The prioritisation of actionable items for immediate implementation signifies BAS's dedication to its members' evolving expectations and its own evolution as a vibrant cultural institution. As these strategies unfold, BAS is poised to evolve into a more dynamic, inclusive, and engaging platform for its members.

Prepared by: Management Committee 2023

Facilitated by: Kaushik Ghatak





About **Barnali**

I'm Barnali, a computer engineer in Banking IT Industry by the day and a staunch lover of art/ writing / music / travel / photography always!

My Childhood Pujo Memoirs

Barnali Sircar

This morning I did not wake up to the tunes of Mahalaya but played it on YouTube, after I woke up. However, that was not a deterrent in bringing back the myriad of childhood memories. Waking up at the wee hours of the dawn, tuning in the big radio set in thakuma's boro ghor and waiting for Birendra Krishna Bhadra to start working his magic at 4 am was the beginning of the unadulterated fun for five days! We would be glued to the radio to hear the story again and again every year and in between the recitations, when the songs kept playing we would go running to the Thakur Dalan to validate the story, to check if Ma Durga is really disembarking on earth. By then the major painting was done, the ekchala structure and the idols were ready for the last layer of gloss, called gham-tel in the kumor-para terminology and chokkhu daan – giving life to the idol.

Mahalaya morning was also a perfect time for me and my sister to sit down with a notebook and pen and designate new outfits to 9 Pujo mornings and evenings we had in hand! Oh yes, planning the accessories for each attire was not an easy job either. I remember how generous ma used to be during our mom-daughters accessories shopping trip to New Market. No amount of brand shopping these days perhaps can match the happiness quotient of that! Essentially we both sisters wanted to be as organized as possible to

avoid messing up on looking good, as we knew during the five days of Pujo, every morning and evening baba would call out to us, surpassing the dhaker awaz in a hurried voice – "come to thakur dalan, pujo shesh hoye gelo". This call used to come at least an hour before the pujo even started for the day but we excitedly ran to the dalan in our new outfits and never stopped feeling on top of the world!

The meal planning for pujo days used to start from this point on, ma busied herself with producing all the nadas, murkis and other delicacies with perfection and baba, procuring all the ingredients in abundance. We used to plan endlessly for our indulgences in the street food, with all restrictions waived off and the expert accomplice in this crime used to be none other than my brother. He does this very lovingly till date! The debate on chicken or lamb, prawn or Ilish was so engaging that we wouldn't even notice how the few days in between had passed and it was already time for bodhon!

I vividly remember how much we begged to our elder cousins to take us with them for 'phool churi' adventures. At that time the flowers for pujo used to come from neighborhood gardens and not from the flower shops like in recent time. The younger generation used to set out at 4 am to sneak out flowers from the gardens in the locality. We used to make a lot of noise while shaking the Shiuli trees with all our might, that inevitably woke the old dadus up from their slumber and they made it a point to shoo us away with a loud "ke re Bagane". Can understand now, that was the whole point of it and the biggest fun element. I am sure Ma Durga didn't mind the pushpanjali with the stolen flowers, the kids had poured their souls in it after all.

The maha Ashtami pujo was always the biggest event in our family – running errands for ma and the aunts who

tirelessly worked at the pujo ghor felt like a huge responsibility. Wearing saree for the pushpanjali was the highlight of the day and we never cheated on fasting until then. The vegetarian luchi torkari fair on Ashtami always tasted like heaven. The carom competition was no less than a world championship; the fights, the screams, the cheers and the anguish were overwhelming! We were passionate supporters of baba and our first cousins. The pujo was truly colourful and slowly made its way to Dashami. On this last day when it was time to say goodbye to Ma Durga after sindoor khela, we felt an excruciating pain, as if we lost a loved one. For immersion, our family tradition was to carry the whole ekchala on shoulder to river Ganga – which was a couple of kilometers away. Seeing baba and later my brother along with other uncles and cousins carrying the structure always generated a sense of pride. During the rest stops, the street dance to the beats of dhak and the art of spurting out kerosene from mouth to make fire on a stick never failed to entertain us. After the visarjan we used to look forward to the shantijol and then visiting each household in the neighbourhood for shubho bijoyar pronam. The sweets and innumerable delicacies in return were the brownie points for sure.

This is what pujo meant to me, this is how I would love to remember it, through the eyes of a child. On this day, every year, our family pujo gets the fresh lease of life and continues to pull us towards our roots. Counting days to be part of this frenzied fun, happiness, family bonding and camaraderie once again. Ma Durga and baba ma are waiting for us to land in the city of joy, and we, to be pampered like the kids we were once upon a time.

#BarirPujo #MahalayaAnecdote

~ Barnali Sircar





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Dr. Swarup Mukherjee

MBBS, PGDSM, PhD, FECSS

Associate Professor in Sports
Medicine and Exercise Science

Nanyang Technological
University Singapore

Dr. Swarup Mukherjee is a renowned expert in sports medicine, exercise science, health and wellness. He is an International Sports Medicine Federation-certified Team Physician and a World Health Organisation-certified trainer in disability prevention and rehabilitation. Dr. Mukherjee is a Fellow of the European College of Sports Science and is the first scholar from Singapore and the third in Asia to have been bestowed this fellowship. Prof. Mukherjee has practised for over twelve years as a specialist sports medicine physician and over fifteen years as a university faculty in the areas of his expertise. He has delivered several international talks as an invited speaker, authored books and book chapters, 21 technical reports, and over 40 research papers in top-level international peer-reviewed journals. In his leisure time, Dr. Mukherjee loves to exercise, play golf, write poetry, and travel to the mountains.

DEBUNKING THE DIETS

Dr Swarup Mukherjee

Diet culture today is more popular and pervasive than ever before. Gone are the days when most would grab a sandwich, or a kebab roll with a bottle of orange juice and get on with their lives. With the emergence of several forms of diets, there's a seemingly endless number of ways one can eat to lose weight, gain muscle, boost focus, and feel energetic and healthier. To achieve these outcomes, millions of people go on a diet each year by choosing different types of diets. Data shows that the current weight management market is valued at \$300 billion. Searching for diet advice online can be exhausting, and it may lead one to unreliable and commercially oriented sources with low credibility. By having a better understanding of the more common types of diets, you can decide which one works best for your lifestyle and overall goals (to slim down, bulk up, or be healthier). This article debunks the ten common diets that are currently quite popular across the world:

- Intermittent Fasting
- Mediterranean Diet
- The Ketogenic Diet
- If It Fits Your Macros (IIFYM)
- Noom Diet
- Veganism
- Carnivore Diet
- Paleo Diet
- Dessert with Breakfast Diet
- Sirtfood Diet

Before we dive deep into the popular diets, it's important to note that none of these options are the be-all, end-all for your health needs. You can lose weight on just about any diet, so long as you burn more calories than you consume, exercise regularly and maintain an overall healthy lifestyle. The same is true if you're looking to lose fat and put on some muscle mass. No diet may be necessarily better than the other in accomplishing this. Therefore, prioritize calories first, and then choose a diet based on your lifestyle, goals, and preference.

DIET 1: INTERMITTENT FASTING

You're probably already familiar with intermittent fasting (IF). This isn't so much a diet but a 'timing your meals' strategy where you consume all of your calories in a set time period and then fast for the rest of the day. There are different approaches to intermittent fasting, with the most popular being an 8:16 split. This means you consume all your calories in an eight-hour eating window and fast for the other 16 hours of the day. You can

also do a 10:16, 16:10, or even 6:20 eating: fasting split. Some extremists go as far as squeezing a whole day's worth of calories into a single hour. The concept is that you'll be eating fewer calories since you're squeezing them into a narrower timeframe, as opposed to consuming them throughout the day. During the fasting period, you're allowed zero-calorie beverages such as black coffee, herbal teas, and sparkling and flat water.

Below is an example of an IF cycle:

- Fasting periods: Water, herbal tea, black coffee.
- Eating windows: Balanced meals containing whole foods such as lean proteins, whole grains, vegetables, and fruits.

Pros and cons of intermittent fasting:

Pros:

- May promote weight loss and fat loss.
- Can simplify meal planning and reduce overall calorie intake.
- May have potential health benefits, including improving insulin sensitivity, cellular repair, reducing oxidative stress on your cells, stabilizing blood sugar levels, and reducing the risk of stroke.

Cons:

- Can lead to overeating during eating windows.
- May not be suitable for everyone, especially those with certain medical conditions such as diabetes.
- Can lead to an unhealthy focus on food during fasting periods.
- May lead to feelings of hunger, irritability, and difficulty concentrating during fasting periods.

Who is intermittent fasting best suited for?

IF is best suited for individuals who want to simplify their meal planning, manage calorie intake, and potentially improve insulin sensitivity (blood sugar control). It can also be suitable for those looking to lose weight. However, IF may not be recommended for pregnant or breastfeeding women, individuals with a history of eating disorders, and those with certain medical conditions that require consistent food intake.

Which age group is it best suited for?

IF is best suited for adults who are looking to manage weight, improve metabolic health, and have a good understanding of their nutritional needs. Intermittent fasting may not be recommended for children, adolescents, or pregnant/breastfeeding individuals due to their unique nutrient requirements and growth needs.

Is it backed by scientific evidence?

There is growing evidence that intermittent fasting can help with weight loss and improve metabolic health. Research suggests that intermittent fasting may lead to calorie reduction and improve insulin sensitivity. Some studies have shown potential benefits of IF for cardiovascular health, brain function, and longevity, although more research is needed in these areas.



DIET 2: MEDITERRANEAN DIET

As the name suggests, the Mediterranean Diet (MD) is inspired by the eating habits of people who live near the Mediterranean Sea. Those countries include Greece, Italy, Spain, Lebanon, Turkey, and more. These countries have some of the longest life expectancies in the world. According to a study published in the Lancet Medical Journal, Spain's citizens are expected to live to an average age of 85.8 years. The United States' life expectancy, for comparison, is about 78.5 years.

The Mediterranean Diet is rich in heart-healthy foods such as vegetables, fish, fruit, grains, olive oil, and nuts. Consumption of red meat is kept to a minimum, and dairy intake is moderate and consists of high-quality sources such as yoghurt and cheese. Experts, however, also point out that people in the Mediterranean have better lifestyle habits than Americans. Typically, these people are less sedentary, drink and smoke less, and have better sleeping habits. A study published in the American Journal of Clinical Nutrition reported that not only did the MD lead to weight loss, but it was also the easiest for people to adhere to when compared to intermittent fasting and the Paleo diet. When adhered to, the MD has also been reported to reverse symptoms of diabetes and cardiovascular diseases.

Example of a Mediterranean diet platter:

- Olive oil
- Fruits: Apples, oranges, grapes
- Vegetables: Tomatoes, cucumbers, bell peppers
- Whole grains: Whole wheat, barley, oats
- Legumes: Chickpeas, lentils
- Lean proteins: Fish (e.g., salmon, mackerel), poultry
- Nuts and seeds: Almonds, walnuts, flaxseeds



Pros and cons of Mediterranean diet:

Pros:

- Emphasizes whole foods, including fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and healthy fats.
- Linked to reduced risk of heart disease, diabetes, and certain cancers.
- Flexible and sustainable.

Cons:

- May require more time for meal preparation and planning.
- Could be higher in calories for some individuals if portion control is not managed.
- May require careful portion control to avoid overeating, especially with calorie-dense foods.
- People with certain medical conditions, such as allergies to specific foods, may need to adapt the diet to their needs.
- May be challenging to follow in regions where Mediterranean foods are not readily available.

Who is the Mediterranean diet best suited for?

MD may be best suited for individuals seeking a balanced and sustainable approach to eating, with an emphasis on whole foods, healthy fats, and a reduced risk of chronic diseases like heart disease and diabetes. However, MD may not be recommended for people who are looking for rapid weight loss or have specific dietary restrictions that

may conflict with the diet's recommendations.

Which age group is it best suited for?

MD is suitable for all age groups, from children to older adults. The Mediterranean Diet's focus on whole, nutrient-rich foods can provide health benefits across the lifespan.

Is it backed by scientific evidence?

The Mediterranean Diet is well-supported by research for its potential to reduce the risk of heart disease, stroke, and type 2 diabetes. Studies have indicated that the Mediterranean Diet may contribute to weight loss and improved weight management, especially when combined with calorie restriction. The diet's emphasis on whole foods, healthy fats (such as olive oil), fruits, vegetables, and lean proteins has been linked to numerous health benefits.

DIET 3: THE KETOGENIC DIET

In recent years, the Ketogenic diet has arguably been one of the most discussed and debated diets. Even if you're not a follower, you may have seen specially designed keto snacks on store shelves for its loyalists.

But what is it? Keto, as it's called for short, is a diet that prioritizes fat (65–75 percent of your daily calories), with moderate protein consumption (20–30 percent) and very few carbs (only about five percent), though some versions prohibit carbs altogether. This means you'll be eating a lot of avocados, eggs, and bunless cheeseburgers.

The Keto diet was designed to keep the body in a near-constant state of ketosis, a metabolic state where the body creates ketones from fat to use as energy instead of sugar from carbs (the body's primary and preferred energy source). There have also been claims it may help treat cancer and even respiratory illnesses. As mentioned above, weight loss comes down to calories in vs. calories out. Several studies point out keto is no more effective for weight loss when calories are matched with other diets.

Example of the ketogenic diet composition



- Healthy fats: Avocado, coconut oil, olive oil
- Protein sources: Meat (e.g., beef, chicken, pork), fish, eggs
- Non-starchy vegetables: Leafy greens (e.g., spinach, kale), broccoli, cauliflower
- Low-carb fruits: Berries (e.g., strawberries, blueberries)
- Nuts and seeds: Macadamia nuts, chia seeds.

Pros and cons of the ketogenic diet

Pros:

- Can lead to rapid weight loss by inducing a state of ketosis.
- May improve insulin sensitivity and blood sugar control in some individuals.
- Potential benefits for certain neurological conditions (e.g., epilepsy).

Cons:

- Restrictive and may be difficult to sustain long-term.
- May lead to nutrient deficiencies if not carefully planned.
- Some individuals may experience "keto flu" during the initial phase.
- "Keto flu": Some people experience flu-like symptoms during the initial phase of carb restriction.
- Potential for nutrient deficiencies due to the exclusion of certain food groups.
- Increased risk of constipation due to low fibre intake from limited carb sources.
- High intake of saturated fats may negatively affect heart health in the long term.

Who is the Ketogenic diet best suited for?

Keto diet is best suited for individuals who want to lose weight quickly, manage epilepsy or certain neurological conditions, and may find it easier to restrict carbohydrate intake. However, it is not recommended for people with kidney issues, those who have difficulty sustaining a very low-carb diet, and individuals seeking a balanced and varied approach to eating.

Which age group is it best suited for?

Limited research exists on the safety and effectiveness of the ketogenic diet for children and adolescents. The diet is often used under medical supervision for children with epilepsy. Adults who have specific health goals, such as weight loss or epilepsy management, may consider this diet after consulting a healthcare professional.

Is it backed by scientific evidence?

The ketogenic diet is effective for short-term weight loss and reducing seizure frequency in individuals with epilepsy, particularly drug-resistant epilepsy. Some research suggests that the ketogenic diet may have potential benefits for metabolic syndrome, neurodegenerative disorders, and certain types of cancer. However, the long-term effects of the diet on overall health, including cardiovascular health and nutrient deficiencies, are still being studied.

DIET 4: IF IT FITS YOUR MACROS (IIFYM)

Most people fall off their diets because it's too regimented or ritualistic. You end up eating the same thing day after day. Eating chicken, rice, and broccoli on repeat until your next cheat meal is miserable for most folks. "If It Fits Your Macros," seemingly is a more flexible dieting approach that lets you eat whatever you want as long as you hit your pre-determined protein, carb, and fat targets.

First, you must determine how much of each macronutrient (carb, fat and protein) you need to eat per day to accomplish your goals, whether to lose weight or gain weight. How much of each macro a person needs will change based on that specific person and their goals. Here's a good starting point: the acceptable macronutrient range says you should get 45-65 percent of your daily calories from carbs, 20-35 percent from fat, and 10-35 percent from protein. There are open-source macro calculators that you can use as a starting point. Though, your best bet is to speak with a registered dietitian or a sports scientist. Thereafter, make sure that everything you eat fits into those macros by tracking what you eat on any of the diet management apps. You can eat a slice of pizza or your favourite brownie so long as you don't go over your carb or fat limit. And therein lies the dilemma many people face. If you indulge in one of those treats at lunch, you'll need to pay close attention to what you eat for the rest of the day and, theoretically, could be forced to eat a pure protein meal for dinner, which wouldn't be the worst thing.

IIFYM is often touted as an anti-diet, but it is absolutely a diet. Your macros will only allow for so many treats. Most of the time, you'll be eating the 'typical' healthy foods, so your macros remain balanced, and you stay full.

Example of the diet composition of IIFYM

- Protein sources: Chicken breast, lean beef, tofu
- Carbohydrates: Brown rice, sweet potatoes, oats
- Fats: Avocado, nuts, olive oil
- Foods that fit within specific macronutrient targets, allow for flexibility in choices.



Pros and cons of IIFYM

Pros:

- Provides flexibility in food choices.
- Can help with body composition goals by focusing on macronutrient intake.
- May be more sustainable for some people.

Cons:

- May lead to poor food quality choices if not properly balanced.
- Can promote a disordered approach to eating if individuals become overly focused on hitting specific macronutrient targets.
- May not emphasize nutrient density and overall health.

- Overemphasis on macronutrients may lead to neglect of micronutrient needs and overall food quality.

Who is IIFYM best suited for?

IIFYM is best suited for those who are focused on specific body composition goals and want to have flexibility in their food choices while still meeting their macronutrient targets. However, it is not recommended for individuals who prioritize overall health and nutrient density, as the diet may allow for less nutritious food choices.

Which age group is it best suited for?

IIFYM is best suited for active adults who are focused on body composition and have a good understanding of their macronutrient needs. Children and adolescents should prioritize a balanced diet that supports growth and development.

Is it backed by scientific evidence?

The concept of tracking macronutrient intake for specific body composition goals is supported by research, especially for athletes and individuals engaged in resistance training. Studies indicate that achieving specific protein and calorie targets can be important for muscle building and weight management. However, the overall healthfulness of food choices within the IIFYM approach can vary widely, and the diet may not necessarily promote optimal nutrient intake.

DIET 5: NOOM DIET

The Noom diet is a psychology-based program that operates with the core belief of balance. In terms of food, the diet breaks down the items into three categories: green, yellow, and red. The diet is similar to a traffic light, so green foods are the best, yellow foods are slightly less nutritious, and red foods are the most calorie-dense. Ideally, your diet is comprised of mostly green foods, some yellow foods, and a limited amount of red foods. Therefore, Noom is a weight loss program and application (app) that aims to help individuals achieve their health and weight loss goals through a combination of behavioural psychology, cognitive restructuring, and personalized coaching.

Example of Noom diet ingredients

While Noom does not prescribe strict meal plans or specific food ingredients, it emphasizes the concept of green, yellow, and red foods to help individuals make healthier choices. Here are examples of food ingredients that might fall into each category based on Noom's colour-coded system:

- Green Foods (Low-Calorie Density, Nutrient-Rich):
 - o Non-starchy vegetables: Spinach, broccoli, kale, bell peppers, carrots, cucumbers.
 - o Fruits: Berries (strawberries, blueberries, raspberries), apples, oranges, grapefruit, and melons.
 - o Lean proteins: Skinless poultry, lean cuts of beef or pork, tofu, tempeh.
 - o Whole grains: Quinoa, brown rice, whole wheat pasta, oats.
- Yellow Foods (Moderate Calorie Density, Moderation Encouraged):
 - o Starchy vegetables: Sweet potatoes, corn, peas.
 - o Whole grains: Whole wheat bread, couscous, bulgur.
 - o Legumes: Lentils, black beans, chickpeas.
 - o Dairy: Greek yoghurt, low-fat cheese.
- Red Foods (Higher Calorie Density, Portion Control Advised):
 - o Fatty proteins: Fatty cuts of beef or pork, processed meats.
 - o High-calorie snacks: Chips, cookies, pastries, sugary cereals.
 - o Oils and fats: Olive oil, butter, nuts, nut butter.

What can you eat on Noom?

Green	Yellow	Red
Blueberries	Avocado	Olive Oil and Other Oils
Apples	Salmon	Nuts and Seeds
Carrots	Chicken	Nut Butters
Peppers	Turkey	Dried Fruit
Spinach	Beans	Beef
Brussels Sprouts	Tofu	Pork
Broccoli	Whole Eggs	Full-Fat Dairy
Sweet Potatoes	Tempeh	Bacon
Beets	Lean Ground Beef	French Fries
Berries	Black Beans	Burgers
Bananas	Chickpeas	Potato Chips
Oats	Low-Fat Dairy	Pizza
Whole-Grain Bread		Cake
Quinoa		
Non-Fat Dairy Products		
Egg Whites		

NOOM

The App For Weight loss?



Keep in mind that the Noom diet is a personalized program, and the specific foods you include will depend on your preferences, dietary needs, and health goals. If you're considering the Noom diet, it's a good idea to consult with a registered dietitian or healthcare professional to ensure that it aligns with your individual needs and provides a balanced approach to nutrition.

Pros and cons of the Noom diet

Pros:

- Behavioural Change Focus: Noom emphasizes behaviour change and psychological strategies to help users develop healthier eating habits and a positive relationship with food.
- Personalized Approach: The app uses a personalized approach, taking into account individual preferences, goals, and lifestyles to create a tailored plan.
- Education and Awareness: Noom provides educational content about nutrition, portion sizes, and the psychological aspects of eating, helping users become more informed about their food choices.

Cons:

- Subscription Cost: Noom requires a subscription fee, which can be a financial barrier for some individuals.
- App Reliance: The program heavily relies on the app, which may not suit everyone's preferences or technology access.
- Limited Personalization: While Noom offers personalization, it may not fully address individualized dietary or medical needs.
- Focus on Weight Loss: The program's emphasis on weight loss may not align with everyone's health goals, and it may overlook other important aspects of health and well-being.
- Behavioural Change Challenges: Some users may find it challenging to consistently implement and sustain behavioural changes, especially if the psychological strategies provided do not resonate with them.

Who is it best suited for?

The Noom diet and program may be best suited for individuals who:

Are interested in addressing the behavioural and psychological aspects of their eating habits and making lasting lifestyle changes. It may also be suitable for those who want to learn more about nutrition, portion control, and the psychological factors that influence eating behaviours can benefit from Noom's educational content. Noom diet is also preferred by individuals who are comfortable using smartphone apps and prefer a digital platform for tracking meals, setting goals, and receiving coaching may find Noom appealing. Lastly, Noom requires a subscription fee, so individuals who are willing to invest in a paid program and commit to its principles may benefit.

Which age group is it best suited for?

The Noom diet is primarily targeted towards adults who have the cognitive ability to engage with the program's behavioural strategies and make informed decisions about their eating habits and behaviours. However, there are certain considerations regarding age groups and the Noom diet.

Adolescents and teenagers have unique nutritional needs for growth and development. While some of the principles of the Noom diet, such as balanced eating and mindfulness may apply to this age group, it's important to ensure that any dietary approach supports their growth, provides adequate nutrients, and is guided by a healthcare professional.

The Noom diet is not suitable for children, as their nutritional needs are significantly different from those of adults, and they require a balanced and nutrient-rich diet to support growth and development.

Pregnancy and breastfeeding have unique nutritional requirements, and it's important for women in these life stages to prioritize a well-balanced and nutrient-dense diet that supports both their health and the health of their baby. The Noom diet's emphasis on weight loss may not align with the needs of pregnant and breastfeeding women.

Is it backed by scientific evidence?

There is limited scientific research specifically evaluating the Noom diet program. Noom is a relatively new approach to weight loss and behaviour change, and while there is some preliminary evidence to support its principles, more rigorous studies are needed to establish its long-term effectiveness and impact. It's important to note that Noom incorporates behavioural psychology and cognitive restructuring techniques, which are established methods for promoting behaviour change. However, the specific application of these techniques within the Noom program has not been extensively studied in a scientific context.

DIET 6: VEGANISM

Veganism is one of the fastest-growing dietary preferences globally. And the alternative meat industry is expected to be valued at \$140 billion over the next decade. While mainstream media considers it a diet wherein followers avoid animal-based products, some consider it a lifestyle (many vegans avoid wearing any leather or animal hide). A few years ago, vegans would only eat beans, legumes, grains, egg-free pasta, fruits, and vegetables. However, advances in technology have allowed the alternative meat industry to provide vegans access to a wider variety of products.

Example of a vegan diet includes:

- Plant-based proteins: Tofu, tempeh, lentils
- Legumes: Chickpeas, black beans, kidney beans
- Whole grains: Quinoa, brown rice, whole wheat bread
- Vegetables: Broccoli, spinach, carrots
- Fruits: Berries, bananas, apples
- Nuts and seeds: Almonds, chia seeds, flaxseeds

Pros and cons of a vegan diet

Pros:

- May lower the risk of heart disease, diabetes, and certain cancers.
- Can lead to weight loss and improved weight management.
- Supports ethical and environmental concerns.

Cons:

- Requires careful planning to ensure adequate intake of essential nutrients (e.g., vitamin B12, iron, omega-3 fatty acids, zinc, Vit D, calcium) which are vital to everyday health.
- Social and cultural challenges may arise in some situations.
- Potential for higher carbohydrate intake if not balanced properly.
- Potential for limited food choices, especially in social or cultural settings
- Some individuals may experience digestive issues if they abruptly increase their fibre intake.



Who is it best suited for?

Veganism is best suited for individuals who have ethical or environmental concerns about animal products, and those who carefully plan their diet to ensure adequate intake of essential nutrients through plant-based sources. However, it is not recommended for those with difficulty meeting their nutritional needs from plant-based sources alone, especially without proper planning.

Which age group is it best suited for?

The vegan diet is suitable for all age groups, including children and adolescents, with proper planning to ensure nutrient needs are met. Parents should work closely with a healthcare professional or registered dietitian to ensure proper nutrition during growth and development.

Is it backed by scientific evidence?

Research has shown that a well-planned vegan diet can provide health benefits, including reduced risk of heart disease, certain cancers, and type 2 diabetes. Studies also suggest that vegan diets are associated with lower body weight and improved weight management. However, careful planning is required to ensure adequate intake of nutrients such as vitamin B12, iron, calcium, and omega-3 fatty acids.

DIET 7: CARNIVORE DIET

What if your mother's advice to eat your vegetables was not entirely true? That's the essence of the carnivore diet, the antithesis of veganism. Carnivore devotees only eat animal-based products like meat, cheese, milk, animal-based fats, and eggs (though some variations only allow meat, no eggs, and dairy). There are no grains, no vegetables, and no fruits.

Also known as the Zero Carb Diet, it's a variation of the keto diet since fat and protein are prioritized over carbs. This diet approach contrasts with scientific research suggesting that limiting your meat intake can extend your life and improve cardiovascular health. Still, its followers have claimed it can fight inflammation and prevent nutrient deficiencies. There is some proof that it can lead to weight loss, especially since protein increases the body's thermic effect of feeding, which is the energy it takes to digest food.



Example of a carnivore diet platter

- Animal proteins: Beef, pork, poultry
- Animal fats: Butter, lard
- Organ meats: Liver, heart
- Limited plant-based foods, if any, are consumed in this diet.

Pros and cons of carnivore diet

Pros:

- May lead to weight loss due to restricted food choices.
- Some individuals report improvements in digestive issues.
- Can be simple and easy to follow.

Cons:

- Extremely restrictive and lacks a variety of nutrients.
- Long-term health effects are not well-studied.
- Potential for increased intake of saturated fats and cholesterol.
- High intake of saturated fats and cholesterol may increase the risk of heart disease.
- Lack of dietary fibre may lead to constipation and other gastrointestinal issues.
- Potential for nutrient deficiencies, especially vitamins, minerals, and phytonutrients found in plant-based foods.

Who is it best suited for?

There is limited evidence to support the suitability of this diet for any specific group. It's highly restrictive and may be considered extreme. Individuals who try this diet should monitor their health carefully and consult with a healthcare professional.

Which age group is it best suited for?

The lack of variety and exclusion of plant-based foods make this diet unsuitable for all age groups. It's not recommended for children or adolescents, as they have unique nutrient needs for growth and development.

Is it backed by scientific evidence?

There is limited scientific evidence supporting the health benefits of the carnivore diet. Most research on this diet is anecdotal, and there are concerns about nutrient deficiencies, particularly in vitamins, minerals, and fibre. The high intake of saturated fats and cholesterol in the carnivore diet raises concerns about its impact on heart health, increased risk of cancer and overall, a higher mortality risk.

DIET 8: PALEO DIET

The Paleo diet, sometimes called "The Caveman Diet," could be considered a cousin of the carnivore diet. In addition to meat, you're also eating fish, vegetables, fruit, nuts, and seeds. You need to avoid any grains, dairy, processed foods, beans, legumes, and sugars while adhering to this diet.

Studies have shown that it's effective in helping people lose weight, drop their blood pressure, and improve other blood markers. Many researchers, though, point out there's not enough evidence of the diet's effects on health and that more research needs to be done. Others also warn against the diet's exclusion of whole grains, which have been shown to ward off heart disease and diabetes.

Example of Paleo diet

- Lean proteins: Chicken, turkey, lean beef
- Fish: Salmon, mackerel, sardines
- Vegetables: Leafy greens, broccoli, bell peppers
- Fruits: Berries, apples, citrus fruits
- Nuts and seeds: Almonds, walnuts, sunflower seeds

Pros and cons of the Paleo diet

Pros:

- Emphasizes whole, unprocessed foods.
- May lead to weight loss and improved insulin sensitivity.
- Encourages reduced consumption of added sugars and refined grains.

Cons:

- Eliminates entire food groups grains and dairy, which could lead to nutrient deficiencies.
- Some versions of the diet may be too high in saturated fats.
- The historical accuracy of the diet's premise is debated.
- Potential for overconsumption of red meats, which may increase the risk of heart disease.
- May be challenging to sustain long-term, especially for individuals with limited food options.

Who is it best suited for?

The paleo diet is best suited for individuals who want to focus on whole, unprocessed foods and reduce their intake of added sugars and refined grains. It may also be suitable for those who are looking for a diet that aligns with a more ancestral or natural approach. However, it is not recommended for people who require a more balanced and varied diet or those who have specific dietary needs that the Paleo diet may not address.

Which age group is it best suited for?

Adults who are looking for a whole-foods-based approach to eating. Children and adolescents should not be restricted from entire food groups without careful consideration of nutrient needs for growth and development.

Is it backed by scientific evidence?

Some studies suggest that the Paleo diet can lead to short-term weight loss and improvements in metabolic markers such as blood sugar and lipid levels. The diet's emphasis on whole foods and the elimination of processed foods and added sugars align with generally accepted principles of healthy eating. However, the exclusion of entire food groups (such as grains and dairy) has been debated, and long-term effects on health require further investigation.

DIET 9: DESSERT WITH BREAKFAST DIET

You probably start each morning with some fruits, a slice of wholemeal bread, a scrambled egg and some oatmeal. But how would you feel about finishing that with a cookie or a slice of cake? Well, apparently you can. The Dessert with



Breakfast Diet is exactly what it sounds like. A sugary treat first thing in the morning. Doesn't it sound too good to be true? A study in the journal *Steroids* found that people who ate a high-carb, high-protein meal that included a dessert lost more weight and kept it off for the duration of the eight-month-long study than those who had a low-carb, high-protein breakfast. Of course, you need to know yourself before trying this diet. Some studies have shown that sugar may be addictive, and some people can be triggered to eat more tasty food after having a little.



Example of Dessert with breakfast diet

This diet is not based on established nutritional principles. However, examples of breakfast desserts could include pastries, cakes, and sweetened cereals.

Pros and cons of dessert with breakfast diet

Pros:

- This diet is not based on any established nutritional principles and may not offer health benefits.

Cons:

- Could lead to poor blood sugar control and weight gain.
- Lacks nutrient density and balance.
- Nutrient-poor breakfasts can negatively impact energy levels and overall health.

Who is it best suited for?

This diet is not based on established nutritional principles and is not recommended for anyone seeking a balanced and healthy approach to eating.

Which age group is it best suited for?

This diet is not based on established nutritional principles and is not suitable for any age group, as it has the likelihood of promoting unhealthy eating habits.

Is it backed by scientific evidence?

There is no scientific evidence to support the concept of a "Dessert with Breakfast Diet." This diet is not based on established nutritional principles and is not recommended.

DIET 10: SIRTFOOD DIET

Thanks to endorsements from Adele and British royal Pippa Middleton, the Sirtfood Diet has grown in popularity in recent years. Created by nutritionists Aidan Goggins and Glen Matten, the diet focuses on foods high in sirtuins, a group of proteins found in the body that regulate metabolism. Foods high in sirts include red wine, dark chocolate, walnuts, Medjool dates, walnuts, arugula, coffee, capers, and extra-virgin olive oil.

Following the Sirtfood Diet isn't as simple as just eating those foods. Goggins and Matten prescribe a two-phase approach. In the first, you can only drink three sirtfood green juices and eat one full meal rich in sirtfoods, which amounts to 1,000 calories for three days. On days four to seven, your caloric intake goes up to 1,500. Then, in Phase Two, you eat three sirtfood-rich meals per day and green juice for two weeks. After that, you can either repeat that process or stick to a diet rich in sirts while continuing to drink at least one juice per day.

Example of Sirtfood diet

Pros and cons of the Sirtfood diet

Cons:



Who is it best suited for?

Which age group is it best suited for?

Is it backed by scientific evidence?

CONCLUSION

The word diet refers to anything we eat daily. Remember that the best diet for you is the one that will help you reach your goals and that you can also stick to. The quality of food is just as important as the number of macronutrients (protein, carbohydrates, and fats) you consume. In other words, if you're following a low-carb diet, you need to make sure you're eating quality fats and protein. On the flip side, opt for whole grains over refined starches if eating a diet lower in fat. Lastly, it is important to keep in mind that some diets may lack vital micronutrients (vitamins and minerals) necessary for everyday life.

One should note that individual experiences with these diets can vary, and it's important to consult an expert before making significant changes to your diet. A balanced and varied diet that suits your individual needs and preferences is generally recommended for long-term health and well-being. Therefore, it is important to approach any diet with critical thinking and consider the scientific basis of the diet. Lastly, consulting with healthcare professionals and registered dietitians is advised especially if you have any underlying health conditions or specific goals.

Disclaimer

This article provides a practical summary of different forms of diets. The facts provided are based on existing scientific evidence. Some of the views and opinions are personal and based on anecdotal evidence gathered by the author. This article by no means endorses any of the diets stated above, and the information on details of the suitability of different diets does not substitute for a piece of expert advice from healthcare professionals or registered dietitians.





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~Shalini & Kunal Chatterjee~



A Short Biography of My Dadu – Mr Salil Kumar Chakravarti

Ehsan Nandan Roy

My Dadu, Salil Kumar Chakravarti (SK Chakravarti), was also fondly called Joguda within the Bengali community, or Paki (or T), a nickname given by my Didima, Manoramam.

Dadu was the eldest son of a Brahmin couple – Kogendranath and Jibon Tara Chakravarti. He was born in the Jarang Padang settlement in Negri Sembilan on the 24th of July, 1928. At that time, my Boro Dadu (my great grandfather) was the mandor/supervisor in the Guthrie estate. When Dadu was about 7 or 8 years old, his parents decided to settle in Sridharpur, Jessore district, Bengal. Although my Dadu was from the Zamindar (Jomindar) class, and a Brahmin, he was not a keen believer in the various norms that stemmed from the caste system. Being a very practical, and open-minded person, he broke many caste rules and mingled freely with people of all castes.

Bangabasi College, Kolkata, (founded in 1887) was where Dadu studied at the college level. Sometime around 1946, my Dadu, as a college student, participated in the Civil Disobedience Movement. This was a significant initiative by his college to rid India of its colonial masters (the British). Early August 1947 witnessed the partition and creation of India and Pakistan. The

borders of Bangladesh were established due to this separation. Terrifying outbreaks of sectarian violence, upheaval and rapes occurred in the district Dadu and his family were residing in. Fearing for their lives and sisters' protection, my Dadu and his family fled at midnight one day by train. Leaving his ancestral land forever, they headed for a safer place – Ichapur, West Bengal. During that same period, my Boro Dadu was stuck in Malaya. The complications that arose after the Japanese Occupation (1946) and the unstable political scenario made it difficult for him to be with his family during those crucial times.

In 1951, Dadu and his brother Sushil Chakraborty, were requested to return to Jarang Padang, Malaya to assist his father in running their family-owned grocery shop. The mundane chores of working on the estate and looking after Boro Dadu's cows and goats bored my Dadu. With his sights towards Singapore, and due to better job opportunities there, Dadu left Negeri Sembilan. In 1954, Dadu started working for Singapore Immigration. He was 26 years old then.

In Singapore, Dadu became acquainted with an elderly Bengali lawyer, Mr Mitra. With Mr. Mitra's encouragement, he began studying law, on a part-time basis, at the then-University of Malaya in Singapore. Unfortunately, he could not pursue his third year due to work, financial constraints and his father wanting him to get married.

On January 17th, 1959, Dadu tied the knot with my Didima, Manoramam DC Bhattachajee. The wedding took place in my Boroma's (Didima's mother) residence. The wedding was done on a grand scale with home-cooked food and much gaiety. Dadu was good at letter-writing and thus wrote many love letters to my Didima. Some of these letters have still been kept as a family treasure. Botanical Gardens or the Polar Cafe was their favourite jaunt during courtship.

In early 1964, Dadu joined the Malaysian Indian Congress (MIC, Singapore branch). He was part of the organising committee for various sporting events that encouraged participation from Indian youths. In November 1970, during the catastrophic Bhola cyclone that hit Bangladesh, killing almost 500,000 people, my Dadu volunteered his services. He acted as a Bengali translator for The Singapore Armed Forces Medical Mission. On 1 December, he travelled with the Singapore Mission to assist in the cyclone relief effort.

The first Durga Pujo was the brainchild of my Dadu. He was then the Honorary Secretary of the Bengali Association Singapore (BAS). Together with Mihir Chakraborty, they collaborated to celebrate Durga Pujo in Singapore in 1978. A Durga Pujo Committee was also appointed. In 1979, the Durga Protima and the other deities were flown in free of charge by Air India from Kolkata.

Dadu was the main priest for Durga Pujo, which was then held in Perumal Temple for 3 years followed by 2 years in Kamala Club. Besides Durga Pujo, Dadu also did Saraswati pujos. During those busy pujo times, my Dadu and Didima would buy the pujo items from Little India and pack them carefully into a blue rattan basket. They worked with full commitment, ensuring the pujo went on smoothly. The credit also goes to the dedicated Durga Pujo Committee and Bengali Association members who worked tirelessly.



Dadu always kept himself busy. He was a frequent contributor to the Straits Times, 'Letter to the Editor' page. His views were always highly appreciated and received good responses from the various Government Ministries. He joined the Ang Mo Kio Resident Committee (RC) in 1981. He started as an RC secretary and then moved up to become the chairman by popular vote. Mr. Lau Ping Sum, Member of Parliament for Yio Chu Kang suggested that my Dadu become NCMP (Non-Constituency Member of Parliament). My Dadu had declined as he wanted to spend more family time with his grandchildren. When Dadu retired in 1989 from the government service, he became a

free-lance Bangladeshi Interpreter. He worked up to the age of 79. Dadu also took a breather after he retired and went to travel with my Didima to Europe, the USA and India.

Dadu, as a well-read man, always had a lot of great stories to share with his grandchildren. He never missed reading his Straits Times newspapers and always waited eagerly, every morning for the delivery man. With his garam sweet-scented chai, Dadu read almost every page fervently. The other favourite periodical Dadu subscribed to was India Today and the weekly Tabla newspaper. Playing football during the weekends was his favourite pastime. When we, the grandchildren, visited Dadu during the school holidays, we would head off to the Ceylon Sports Club to play football. It was a game full of laughter and fun.

Black Label was a 'thirst quencher' every evening for Dadu. At 7:30 p.m., Dadu would pour himself a glass or two. It was at that time that we got to enjoy his melodious voice. While enjoying his drink, he would talk about his childhood and politics and even crack jokes to amuse my Didima. Another of his favourite times was to listen to the evergreen Bengali and Hindi songs—SD Burman, Hemanta Mukherjee, Mohamed Rafi, and Lata Mangeshkar to name a few of his favourites.



As Dadu started becoming weaker, he was not able to read much due to his failing eyesight. He would instead just touch the covers of the books or the newspapers. He became more silent. Even though unsteady when walking, he would take short walks in the afternoon by himself. Combing his hair, wearing his soft cotton shirt, and putting on his wristwatch was what he did before going for his walk.

Dadu passed on at the age of 94 on 21st February 2023. I miss my Dadu. With his intelligence, humorous self and 'ready-to-help' attitude, he treated everyone with equal respect. There was so much I learnt from him – his quiet self, the advice and care he gave to his eight grandchildren, so thoughtfully and selflessly. Dadu has motivated me to achieve my goals, no matter how difficult it may be. His family and friends still have fond memories of him as he touched so many of us with his kindness. I am so blessed to have such a wonderful Dadu.

(Contributions from my Mashis and Mama: Basanti, Aroti, Malati and Ashok).



শারদ শুভেচ্ছা ও অভিনন্দন

~Deepshikha & Arnab Dasgupta~



শারদ শুভেচ্ছা ও অভিনন্দন

SEASON'S GREETINGS

~Ankita & Debashish Chatterjee~



A 'quizfreak' & 'true-blue Calcuttan' by heart & soul, 'meaningful content' of any form provides the data source (read 'oxygen') for my existentialism.

AI on the cusp of an 'Oppenheimer moment'?

Arnab Banerjee

As an ardent admirer of Christopher Nolan's deft directorial craftsmanship, watching 'Oppenheimer', his magnum opus wasn't just a mere feast for the eyes to revisit a watershed event in history, or get enthralled with the spellbinding performances therein. The scale of devastation is a stark reminder of us potentially landing into a similar situation albeit not exactly 'like-for-like'. However, the magnitude & impact could be at par, or even more posing an existential threat to humanity.

Sounds like a doomsday prophecy. It's my naïve attempt to draw parallels between a monumental event with whatever little I understand of the potential ramifications, stemming out of the huge technological leapfrogs made in the Artificial Intelligence (AI) space.



Oppenheimer grappled with what he had wrought for the rest of his life. In 1945, after the bomb's first test, he lamented that his invention wasn't ready soon enough to wield against Nazi Germany, which he reviled as a Jew and an anti-fascist. After he saw the atomic annihilation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, where he had a skin in the game too, he allegedly confided to President Harry S. Truman during their meeting, that the incident made him feel he had "blood on his hands". He urged the president to reconsider amassing a stockpile of nuclear weapons. Such advice didn't go down well with Truman, who was not only unconvinced with the suggestion, given the erstwhile Soviet Union was fast building up its nuclear arsenal in their bid to establish geopolitical hegemony as part of the Cold War era, but also derided him as a "crybaby scientist".

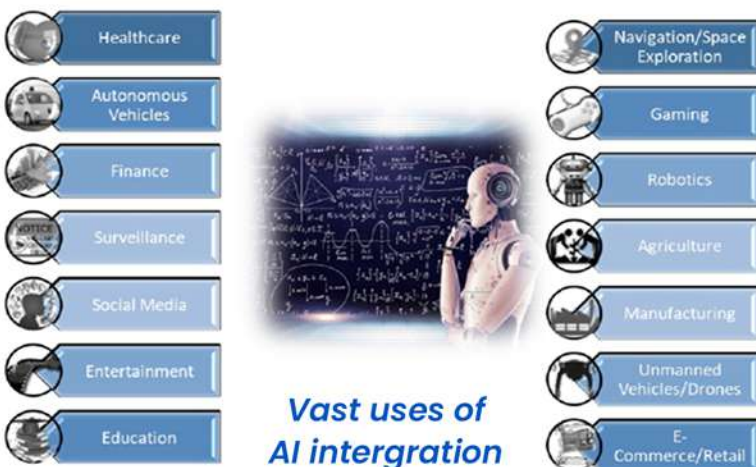
We have now arrived at a similar crossroads in the realm of computing, where the recent breakthroughs in Generative AI using large language models (LLM's) have reignited debates about the existential dangers, AI could present for humanity's future. One concern is that AI systems could reach a level of superintelligence, that is beyond our control, where AI's cognitive abilities and decision-making vastly outpace humans. Researchers & pundits are referring to this as the **"Openheimer moment"**, acknowledging the genuine risks of an AI model going rogue, hijacking weapons systems, releasing pathogens or following some other terrifying algorithmic goal that would have apocalyptic consequences for humanity. They also express amazement and a degree of alarm at how swiftly AI systems are developing, already eclipsing human abilities in some significant ways. One such example of us vs. them is the triumph of machine over Man on 11th May 1997.



Gary Kasparov, the-then reigning world champion succumbed to 'Deep Blue' IBM computer.

This was a huge milestone in the development of AI, enabling researchers to explore the limits of massively parallel processing, and providing developers insight into ways they could design a computer to tackle complex problems in other fields. The architecture used in Deep Blue has been applied to financial modelling, including marketplace trends and risk analysis, data mining, uncovering hidden relationships and patterns in large databases, a valuable tool for helping to discover and develop new drugs etc.

AI is ubiquitous e.g., we use AI every time we do a Google search or look at our Facebook and Instagram feeds, as we ask Alexa to play John Lennon or a Kishore Kumar, or browse Netflix movie selections across a wide repertoire of offerings across genres, et all with its multifaceted integration as illustrated below:

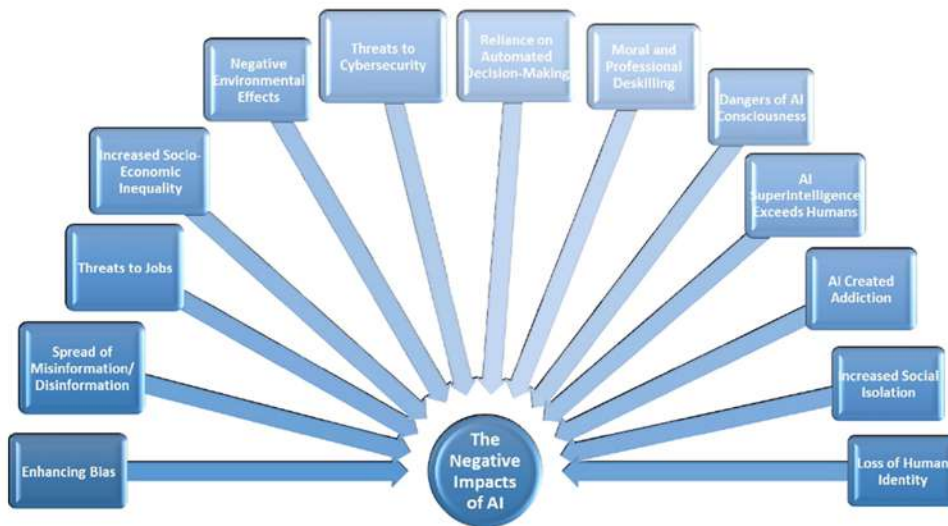


AI has become increasingly more pervasive because of the accessibility of hardware and software to process dense neural network training algorithms, that mimic the neural architecture of the brain. These complex algorithms can be trained using unstructured data, such as images, audio, or text, and have radically altered the degree to which AI can learn to reason, classify, and understand.

AI provides a plethora of benefits in nearly every area of human endeavour, for example, biomedical research, communication, data analytics, education,

energy efficiency, environmental protection, farming, finance, legal services, medical diagnostics, resource management, space exploration, transportation, waste management, and much more. AI played a pivotal role during COVID. Since the pandemic's onset, innovative applications of AI have included detecting outbreaks, facilitating diagnosis, identifying people with fevers, and accelerating gene sequencing and vaccine development, demonstrating that this non-medical intervention holds much promise in empowering the response to the global health crisis and future healthcare.

Although there are many areas where AI has enormous potential for good, there is also the possibility for alternative outcomes, with many of these potentially negative as illustrated below:



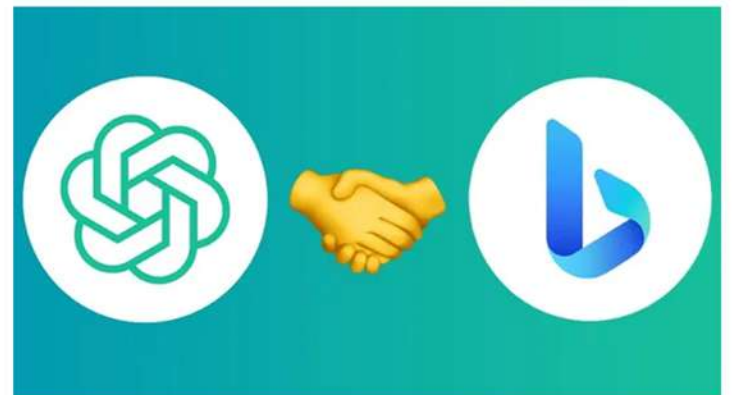
Areas where AI can go wrong

The blame for bias in AI is often laid on the biased data used in training the AI. But the causes of biases go far deeper than that. Implicit bias can sneak into AI algorithms because of real human tendencies such as (a) looking for patterns and associations, (b) taking shortcuts and trying to simplify etc.

AI can be both a blessing and a curse for cybersecurity, with AI being used both as a sword (i.e., to help facilitate malicious attacks), and as a shield (to counter cybersecurity risks)."

We shouldn't get overly panicky about ChatGPT's capabilities to write an essay, poems, pass key career-shaping exams with flying colours get into an Ivy League, all in a jiffy of split seconds, or take our jobs, replacing humans, it still has a long way to go in its theory of evolution, even I've to go back to 'Darwinian theory of 'Survival of the fittest'.

At the same time as these systems and AI offerings get enriched, there needs to be tighter controls with enforcement of a regulatory framework to manage the launches, 'develop-test-deploy' paradigm, and the right set of safeguards. Tech giants instead of getting into the rat race of AI supremacy to get a share of the bigger pie should refrain from irresponsible launches and availability to the public and take a vow to focus on ethics, responsibility and accountability, demonstration of collaboration and synergies, and above all conformance to the legislation that needs government intervention to put the checks and balances in place.



When the Tech Giants are at loggerheads (Cola War) to outpace each other

Net-net, AI presents three major areas of ethical concern for society: privacy and surveillance, bias, and discrimination, and perhaps the deepest, most difficult philosophical question, the role of human judgment.

Technology in the wrong hands is dangerous, but in the right hands is beneficial to all. Technology advancement has often been met initially with alarm and anxiety, but it can lead to tremendous gains for humankind, as we learn to embrace the best of the changes and adapt and adjust to the worst. The core of the AI dilemma is not the ability

of machines to learn. It is the ability of humans to learn to manage the growing abilities of these new systems. What matters most is what they do and how they grow, and how we grow along with them.

Like responsible parents, we need to keep vigilance over the systems we are nurturing. We need to guide them as we would a child toward full adulthood. We need to instil respect for our shared benefit and interdependence. Then, when we let them go, it won't be into a completely different, isolated world with them, or us in control.

We don't want us to be reminded of and remembered for that famous quote of Oppenheimer? **"We knew the world would not be the same", "A few people laughed; a few people cried, most people were silent", "Now I am become Death, the destroyer of worlds?"** in our management, shaping of, empowerment & control of AI.

We want to work towards a better tomorrow, and live in a world where we are all working together to create greater real control for all of us to usher in a future where 'we both live & breathe free in an ecosystem of peaceful coexistence for the greater common good'.



Live in Harmony at Arm's Length (Humans & AI)

English Poems



About Anurag

"An engineer and design thinker by training, Anurag Chatterjee currently works in a US-based multinational company. He graduated with a B.Eng (Hons) in Electrical Engineering from the National University Of Singapore (NUS). In his free time, he loves watching cricket across all formats and going on long-distance walks in nature parks and hills."

MOM

Anurag Chatterjee

Upon a warm, cozy nest,
Yonder,
I once laid,
Enjoying a splendid time,
Till,
The eggshell shattered,
And I emerged,
Breathing in the icy air,
Hello planet Earth!!

All this became possible,
Thanks to,
MY MOM.

In my youth,
When I struggled to flap my wings,
And cried out in despair,
Yearning to soar high,
And traverse the skies,
Another set of wings,
Would instantly flutter,
Upon hearing my cries,
What an unusual sound it was!

Those wings always acted in response,
As if perpetually prepared,
To defend,
Upon hearing my distress,
To stand by my side,

To become the guardian of my life,
This person is none other than,
MY MOM.

The one who taught me,
No pain, No gain,
The one who battled the harsh world,
Never tarnishing my reputation,
But instead shouldering the blame,
The one who stood by me,
Through ups and downs,
Through rollercoaster rides,
And even,
Through moments of euphoria,
Was none other than,
MY MOM.

The one who always casts light,
Upon my eyes,
So that,
I could see the world as bright,
The one who played melodies in my ears,
As I fell asleep, in my fears,
The one who wouldn't take her meal,
Unless she saw me eat and feel,
My wings would grow stronger,
And be prepared to fly,
Was none other than,
MY MOM.

But now,
My wings are mighty,
Flapping vigorously,
Even harder than my MOM's wings,
So what should I do?

Leave the nest swiftly,
To build another one?
Or remain in my current abode,
And care for those wings,
That is gradually transitioning,
From reflex,
To voluntary actions now.

My mind is clouded,
Leaving me bewildered,
Nonetheless,
Time will tell,
And a bell will toll,
In my mind,
To make a momentous decision,
To create,
Or,
Seek God's help for the rest.





About **Dipankar**

Dipankar Dasgupta has worked as a professional in the Telecommunications industry for 35 years. He is now an Education Entrepreneur.

Besides writing poetry, his other hobbies include playing Bridge, blogging, reading books, and travelling. He and his wife Chitra, spend time between Singapore, New York City, USA and New Delhi, India.

Dipankar is a graduate of IIT Kharagpur, India, and University of Miami, Florida, USA.

Those of us who have had the pleasure of reading the “four series” books by Spanish Author Carlos Ruiz Zafon called “Cemetery of the Forgotten Books” (Shadow of the Wind, The Angel’s Game, The Prisoner of Heaven, and The Labyrinth of the Spirits), will appreciate the beautiful prose full of metaphors, euphemism, and aphorisms that bring books to life. This piece of poetry draws inspiration from his writing.

They have a Soul

Dipankar Dasgupta

A gothic structure - greeted me
Over the threshold - a large hall
Many staircases - rose in front
Like mystic labyrinths - on a wall

Dark silhouettes - met my gaze
Vaulted ceiling - reaching the sky
Streaks of light - cascaded through
It took a while - to adjust my eye

When I got - my bearings right
Intrigue swept- over my face
It felt -like a sacred cathedral
Stately presence - full of grace

They stood still - gazing at me
Old, lost, discarded and more
Their demeanor - humbled me
I was left - glued to the floor

Distant footsteps - I heard
Face hidden - behind the light
His steely eyes - looked me up
The shadow - a strange sight

A quivering voice- spoke to me
Soft, slow, and lost in thoughts
This place is a mystery - in itself
Has a character - its own sorts

See the books - on the shelves
Each unique - in a special way
They all are alive - with a soul
Soul of the author - and his say

Some read it - to give them life
Others dream - expanding its soul
Every time - a book changes hand
Their spirit grows - filling a hole

This the place - they come to rest
A new journey - they wish so much
Some forgotten - and lie here still
Others alive - at a reader’s touch

As I soaked in - this wonderful find
a serene thought - crossed my mind
A book is bought, sold and loaned
But - in reality can never be owned

Art & Paintings



About **Amrita Pal De**

Amrita currently teaches Data Literacy at the National University of Singapore (NUS). She has a PhD in Chemical and Biomolecular Engineering from NUS and loves to sing and sketch portraits, as a passing hobby

About **Anamika Dutta**

Anamika Datta (Anny) is a Singapore based artist. She has made a reputation in the arena of Visual Arts, for almost a decade and a half. Her works have been exhibited on various prestigious platforms. She imparts lessons at educational institutions and also has a huge number of students of her own, via her online as well as face to face classes. Her beautiful works have earned immense clientele around the globe. She has also won some reputed online art competitions.



About **Diparati Mukherjee**

Art is always an integral part of my life since childhood. It always gives me immense pleasure to give life to my imagination. I like to work in all mediums, but through the years, I can find oil colours has become one of my favourite choices. I have attended many workshops of renowned artists and have undergone my oil painting certification from NAFA, Singapore. I have taken part in many exhibitions, specially in Singapore.

About **Mohua Banerjee**

"What started out as a mere hobby has quickly become a meditative, creative outlet. I draw inspiration from my travels and observation and hope you find as much meaning in them as I do."



About **Dr. Rupak Dutta**

Have always been fascinated with the creations of nature in all its forms. The sizes, shapes, colours and shades identify each one from the other to their own.

Through my oils try depicting those to give meaning to life. Every bright has a dark shade demonstrating the ups and downs, giving each one a form.



About **Tina Datta**

Tina Datta is an Indian folk artist who is proficient in styles such as Kerala Mural, Madhubani and several others. The current submission is a Kerala Mural titled "Gajanan".

Paromita Rakshit





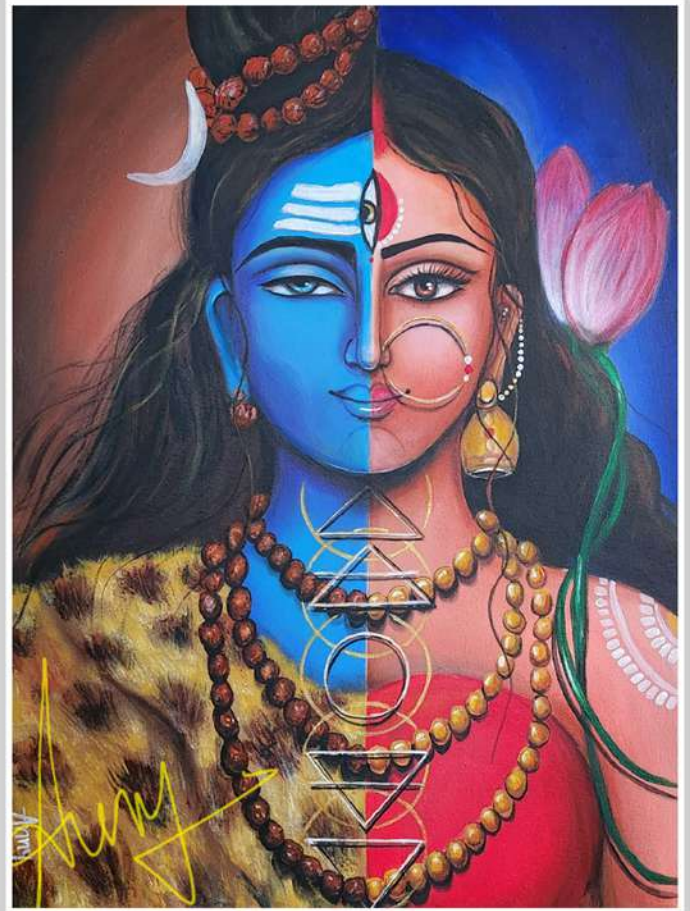
A cauldron of emotions captured in pencil
- Amrita Pal De



Murlidhar - Diparati Mukherjee



Shiv Durga - Mohua Banerjee



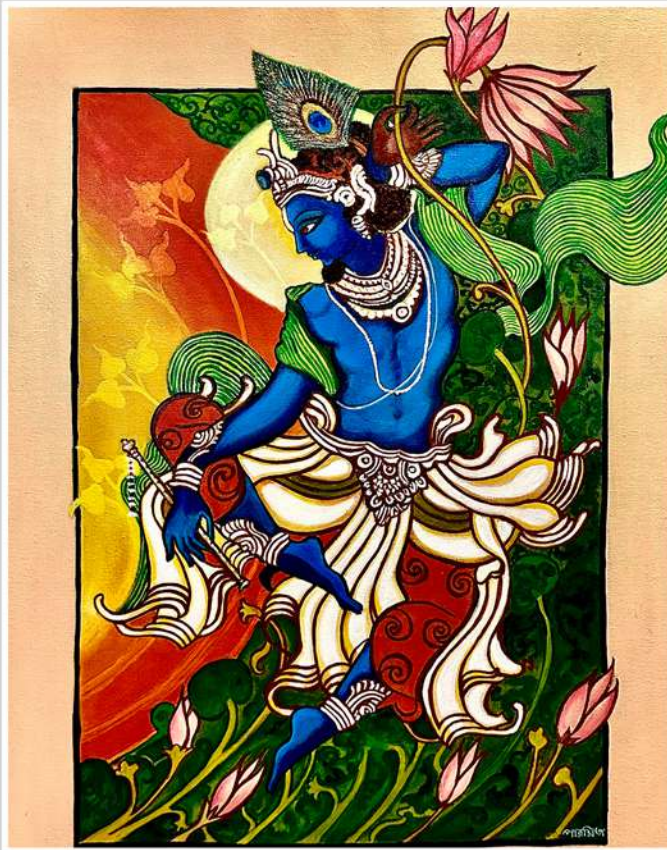
Ardhyanarishwara - Anamika Dutta



Gajanan – Tina Datta



Prayers for all – Banaras – Dr. Rupak Dutta



Paromita Rakshit



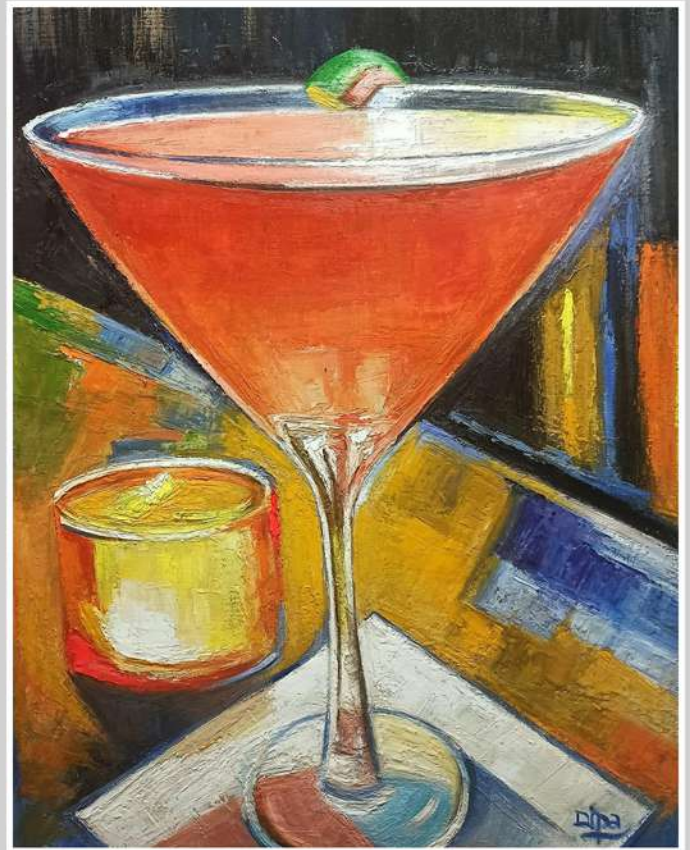
Dhunuchi nach – Paromita Rakshit



Muralidhar – Anamika Dutta



Agony and Hope – Dr. Rupak Dutta



Cheers – Diparati Mukherjee

Kitchen Talk

Khai Khai with Deb Mukherji

The term “Amra Bangali” immediately brings to our mind a number of special features of our Bengali culture – literary discussions, dance, drama, singing, paintings, ‘plain nirbhejal adda’ etc etc and of course the great repertoire of Bengali cuisine. Bengalis are known for their gastronomic expeditions – so called “Bhuri Bhojon” – any time is foodie time for us.

Bengali kitchen is a very important part of our household composite. It goes to the credit of our grandmothers, mothers, aunties, and wives of continuing the tradition of practising authentic Bengali cuisine and passing it down through generations. Bengali kitchen has been the forte of



Deb Mukherji



Siddhartha Chatterjee

the female and it is quite rare to come across males perfecting the art of cooking at home scale food preparation.

Contrary to commercial kitchens where majority of chefs are male, domestic kitchens are dominated by females, barring a few exceptional males. The same holds true for our Bengali Community in Singapore.

Today, we share with you all such an exceptional male cooking talent – **Deb Mukherji**, who besides being a busy IT professional has nurtured his passion for cooking all throughout and makes mouth-watering dishes serving full-course dinner from fusion to traditional cuisine. Deb is also a prominent figure in Punjabi seated next to the Purohit during our Durga Pujo ensuring the exact tradition of performing a Pujo is practised.

Siddhartha (Siddhu): Hi Deb, thanks for being so kind to spare your time for our discussion on your passion for cooking. Can you share with us how did it all start ?

Deb: It all started way back in 2001-2002 during our early days in Singapore. We started making friends in Singapore – as we were getting invited to places, we started inviting friends to our place as well. As we all know, food is the quintessential element of a Bong gathering, one fine day, I just thought of trying my luck in the kitchen. Fortunately, the dishes came out palatable and that somehow induced a keen interest in me for cooking.

Siddhu: Cooking is your passion and you have experimented with various ingredients in your cooking adventure. What do you perceive as the most important skill to master in order to make a great-tasting food?

Deb: Cooking, like any other skills need to be developed and honed over time. In my initial days, I used to cook using readymade spices but over the years I have learned to make every ingredient from scratch. Making a Massaman Curry or a Kolkata Chicken Chapp with all ingredients made from scratch gives one a different level of satisfaction.

I believe a critical part of cooking is the sense of proportion of the ingredients to be used, which comes with experience. Even for a simple chicken curry, the ratio of onion and ginger-garlic to the quantity of chicken to be cooked can make a lot of difference to the taste of the dish.

Siddhu: What have been your special dishes which you love to serve to your guests at home again and again?

Deb: There are a few. For example – Fried Chicken Kofta/Ball (starter dish) made from roughly chopped chicken boneless leg, marinated in spices; Kong Bak Bao (Pork Belly in Lotus Bun); Fish seared in slow cooked coconut milk with chilli and coriander leaves (this is a variation of the Bengali Malai Curry without any spices or whole garam masala that I came up with while experimenting).

Siddhu: In the age of changing lifestyle where both men and women are busy with their careers and other obligations, how do you see the landscape of home-cooking change over time?

Deb: In the last decade or so, life in Singapore and for that matter everywhere has changed drastically. Life has become fast paced and stressful for every profession that I know of. While we are struggling to maintain work life balance in our daily lives, traditional cooking is taking a back seat. Daily cooking is more of a chore, mostly performed either by domestic helpers or by us after work.

However, it's heartening to see that people are still taking out time over weekends or during special occasions to recreate some of our most traditional and authentic Bengali recipes to keep the tradition alive.

Siddhu: What is the future of traditional Bengali dishes like Shukto, Posto Bata, Ghonto etc?

Deb: I don't think traditional Bengali dishes are at risk really – at least not in Kolkata or West Bengal. While we are finding it increasingly difficult to spend time in kitchen to cook traditional dishes like Shukto or Chapor Ghonto, in Kolkata, restaurants are bridging that gap. The story changes when we look at overseas Bangali lifestyle. Most people from our generation had come to Singapore at a matured age and we had carried the legacy of Bengali cooking with us. However, the next generation has grown up or is growing up in Singapore or somewhere else. How much we would wish to, it will almost be impossible for them to carry the legacy of authentic Bengali cuisines any further. So, if my daughter, living and working in London, has a craving for "Shorshe-Narkel Bhapa Chingri", either she has to come to Singapore or venture out to a Bangladeshi restaurant in London.

Siddhu: Can you share one or two extremely traditional Bengali recipes and its way of preparation for our BAS members so that they would be inspired to try their hands on?

Rasogollar Korma (Very old Recipe)

Ingredients:

Ingredients – Rasogolla 10-12, ginger paste, Khoya Kheer 4 tablespoon, turmeric and chilli powder, garam masala powder, Potatoes 2 medium size, cut in cubes, raisins 10-12, yogurt 3 table spoon, saffron mixed in warm milk (optional), lemon juice 1 tablespoon, white oil and ghee.

Process:

- Soak the rasgollas in warm water for 10 min, squeeze the juice inside the water; throw and replace the water. Repeat this process for 3-4 times and keep the rasogollas soaked in water.
- Heat oil and ghee in a pan and fry the khoya kheer till golden brown; take it out in a bowl to be used later; fry the potatoes in the same oil till golden and take out.
- In the same oil (add some ghee if required) add ginger paste and fry till the raw smell is gone (If you wish to make a non-veg version, you can use onion paste and ginger garlic paste as well); add turmeric and chilli powder and fry for a few minutes; add the khoya kheer after crushing with hand to avoid big lumps; fry for a few minutes.
- Add bitten yogurt and fry for 5 minutes on medium low heat till oil separates. Add the potatoes and water, add seasoning (we should be careful about sugar as rasogollas will infuse some sweetness to the gravy) and let it boil on medium low heat till potatoes are almost done.
- Add the rasogollas and raisins, garam masala powder, 1 teaspoon of ghee, saffron mixed milk and cook covered for another 5 minutes or till the gravy reached desired thickness, adjust seasoning, add lemon juice, mix well and remove from heat.
- Serve hot with steam rice or Parota.



Siddhu: It was lovely talking to you and also tasting some of the dishes mentioned during our discussion. It was really finger-licking good. Myself, also being a frequent visitor to the kitchen, really appreciated the time with you. Hope it will inspire many of us to perfect our cooking skills and encourage those who haven't dared to visit their kitchens to give it a try.



শীলা ঘোষ



Channar Cake

ছানার কেক বা পোড়কেক

এই মিষ্টিট। উড়িষ্যার বিখ্যাত মিষ্টি এই মিষ্টি বানাবার প্রণালী লিখছি। উপকরণ – ফ্রেশ ছানা, চিনি, সুজি, ঘি, কাজু, কিসমিস, বেকিং শোডা বা বেকিং পাউডার।

প্রণালী- ১ কিলো দূধের ছানা কেটে জল ঝরিয়ে নিতে হবে। এবার একটি পাত্রে ছানা, স্বাদ মতো চিনি, ও দুই চামচ সুজি, বেকিং পাউডার বা বেকিং সোডা মিশিয়ে ভালোভাবে মেশাতে হবে। সুজি দেওয়াতে ঘন হয়ে যাবে। যার জন্যে ছানার জল ওর মধ্যে একটু মিশিয়ে নিয়ে, ১০/১৫ মিনিট রেখে, কেক বানাবার পাত্রে বেকিং পেপার লাগিয়ে ব্যাটার ঢেলে প্রেশার কুকারে বা যে কোন পাত্রে ১০ মিঃ প্রি-হিট করে পাত্রটি বসিয়ে দিতে হবে। ৩০ মিনিট থেকে ৪০ মিনিট বেক করে কাঁটা চামচ দিয়ে দেখে, গ্যাস বন্ধ করে দিতে হবে। প্রথমে অল্প আঁচে ১০ মিনিট বা ১৫ মিনিট রেখে, তারপর আঁচ বারিয়ে দিতে হবে। বেক হয়ে যাবার পর কাজু, কিসমিস দিয়ে পরিবেশন করুন।

In Fond Memory



S.K.Chakravarti

24.07.1928 - 21.02.2023

Our dearest Joguda (S.K. Chakravarti), also nicknamed 'Gujral' due to his kept beard, fondly called by most Bengalis, sadly left us on February 21st, 2023, at the age of 94.

For all those who knew him, will have witnessed his unwavering support towards the Bengali Association during his term serving as a Honorary Secretary.

Baba's dream of having Durga Pujo here in Singapore materialised in 1979. His determination and hard work to bring Ma Durga to Singapore was a tremendous achievement that most elderly Bengalis still speak about today. Baba was a purohit for Durga Pujo for about five years.

Baba's contribution towards BAS, being a part of the Milon Committee and overseeing activities, made us feel so proud of him. He was truly a sincere, hardworking and unpretentious person, loving what he did to the best of his abilities.

Our community has sadly lost a prominent member and, yes, our dearest Joguda will surely be missed.

Beloved husband, father and grandfather, a wonderful friend who was always ready to lend a helping hand, a brilliant engineer, a single malt lover and the most extraordinary cook who will always be revered for his adraaki champ, biryani and kebabs. It may be hard to say only a few things about him in memory, but it may suffice to say that he was the kindest person who loved deeply and lived every single moment of his life to the fullest. He was revered for his resilience and determination and his passion for his work and for being dedicated to his family and his community. He will be missed every single day and always remembered so very fondly.



Ajit Kumar Bagchi

10.12.1946 - 20.08.2023



Ajoy Kumar Dasgupta

07.08.1956 – 15.09.2023

Ajoy Kumar Dasgupta (Rana) was born in Digboi, Assam (India) on the 7th of August 1956. He studied in Oil India HS School in Duliajan (Assam) and then graduated from Birla Institute of Technology (BIT, Mesra) as a Civil Engineer. He was a brilliant student and was very much interested in sports and music. He was involved in many activities in his college days. He represented his college as the tennis captain and was also good at badminton, Cricket, hockey, driving and talking. He was a big shot in his college band unit and music club playing bongos, congas, and drums. This “all-rounder” was popular at every stake, every place and with every community with infinite friends.

He came to Singapore with his family on the 2nd of May 1994 as an expatriate and eventually became a Singapore citizen. In his earlier days in Singapore, he was an integral part of the Bengali Association of Singapore. He was a committee member for quite a number of years and was involved in every activity (be it cultural programme or sports related event) organized and conducted by the association. However, in the later part of his life he was comparatively less involved in the activities of the BAS because of the nature of his job which compelled him to travel all over the world allowing him lesser time for any other commitment.

Ajoy loved food – eggs and biriyani being his most favourite items – and loved to travel with his family. He was very much a family man and was the best son, best brother, best husband, and the best father anyone could ever have. He was jovial and friendly, who had good and kind words for everybody he met. He was noble-hearted and generous, always ready to go out of his way to help and assist others.

Professionally, he had a successful career working for several renowned companies and had to take voluntary retirement from “RJM International” because of his illness. He was detected with cancer in 2021 and after bravely fighting a long battle of two and a half years he passed away on the 15th of September 2023. He will be remembered as an active, energetic, strong, caring, and an extremely positive person by everybody who knew him. He is survived by his wife, daughter and son who are missing him dearly.



Bibha Rani Gupta

03.08.1941 - 12.04.2023

Bibha Rani Gupta, a long- time member of the Bengali Association of Singapore passed away on 12 April 2023.

Bibha was born in Agartala in the northeastern Indian state of Tripura on 3 August 1941. When she was very young, her parents moved to Singapore where she grew up and did her schooling. She was the eldest of five children of the late Mono Ranjan Gupta and his wife Hashi Rani Gupta. They were among the early Bengalis who settled in Singapore and attended Bengali Association functions at the Kamala Club.

As the eldest in the family, she was the dutiful daughter and Didi who tended to the needs of the entire family. This included caring for her parents and helping them to look after her younger siblings and later on, their families. Her nephews have many fond recollections of the times when their Boro Pishi helped their Thakurma to cook their meals, play with them and even accompany them to school when the need arose. Years

later, she also doted on her grand-nephews, spoiling the little ones with food and gifts when they visited.

Although resident in Singapore from a young age, Bibha was a true Bengali at heart. She was always neatly dressed in a saree and spent a lot of time with daily puja rituals at home. On special festivals like Lakshmi, Saraswati or Durga Puja, the kitchen would be abuzz with activity. She would be there preparing luchi, begun bhaja , halwa or payesh as bhog for the gods. Every year, a visit to the Bengali Association of Singapore's puja pandal on Ashtami day with a tray of offerings to Goddess Durga was a must. On one occasion, she had a stall at the Anandamela with Bengali favourites like macher chop.

Bibha's love for Bengali culture encompassed music, songs, books, movies, dramas and attire, just to name a few. Of course, food played a big part in this equation. Fish preparations of all kinds, including different ilish mach recipes, dhall, labra and Bengali sweets were staples at home. One particular item that she made very well was patishapta pitha. She enjoyed preparing this traditional Bengali pancake stuffed with kheer. Those who tasted her pithas simply loved them.

Having lived in Singapore for so long, she also inculcated a love for local cuisine. Among her favourites was mee siam, a dish made of thin rice vermicelli with hot, sweet and sour flavours. She also loved South Indian fish or fish head curry and mysore mutton from Little India. And then there was her penchant for the Durian. Although some find the aroma and taste of durian overpowering and unpleasant, to her it was the King of Fruits. Her eyes would light up when someone walked into the house with a box of durians, the buttery goodness of which she would savour with gleeful relish.

In her final years, she had various health problems and was mostly homebound in a wheelchair. She spent her time recording the day's events in her diary (which no one was allowed to read), watching Bengali serials on Zee Bangla, finding out what her grand- nephews were up to, doing her pujas, listening to bhajans and tuning in to the live streaming of the evening arati at the Ramakrishna Mission, Singapore at 7pm daily.

Bibha Rani Gupta left a big void in our lives with her passing. We will always have fond memories of a generous and caring person whose life revolved around us. She was the beloved Didi, Boro Pishi or Bibha Thamma who was always there for her family. We were very fortunate indeed to have had her at our side all these years. **The Gupta Family**



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