



**POORBA
PATRIKA
2023**



POORBA
DURGA PUJA 2023
MOUNTAIN HOUSE



Wishing everyone Health, Wealth & Prosperity
on the Auspicious Occasion of
Durga Pooja

Presented By: **NEW INDIAN SUPERMARKET**



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From the President's Desk

Poorba is now in the second year of its journey. Our first year was no doubt very eventful and exciting. In the second-year members' contributions are still very palpable even though many of them have to endure daily workplace commutes, which no doubt is a drag on their availability for social commitments. But still their dedication remains undaunted and there is no letup in our steadfast commitment to community service and socio-cultural integration. This is evident with so many events organized till date. Our first social event: Festival of Colors - Holi drew a large crowd despite the most inclement weather. Our second sociocultural event of welcoming regional New Year (Poila Baishakh) got an all-around applause. The entire event was coordinated and choreographed by our youngsters. They were simply superb.

One of Poorba's primary initiatives had always been to engage in community based philanthropic activities which will directly benefit our neighborhood. Keeping that in mind, we hosted a summer internship program this year for Mountain House High Schoolers. In our every social event we always give opportunities to high schoolers to participate and earn volunteering hours which made the collaboration between Poorba and MHHS seamless this time. The internship was 6-week long unpaid program in three major departments: Information Technology and Web Design, Marketing and Business Development, Finance and Accounting. Opportunities were given to 18 interns to engage under the guidance of respective mentors from Poorba in an organized summer program and learn about the back-end activities of a nonprofit organization. We sincerely hope that this experience will come in handy to the interns for their future endeavors. Next Year we are planning to expand this program and increase the number of applications in each department.

In today's challenging environment we at Poorba believe that preservation and sustainable growth of Parks and Forests are essential and therefore our members collaborated with Park and Forest Administrators of Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Forest to eradicate the growth of nonnative invasive plant species. Such species if allowed to proliferate will reduce biodiversity, jeopardize endangered animals and plants and degrade natural habitats. Our environmental conscious members took up this challenging task and removed such invasive plants from 11 meadows in a single day. We can confidently say our efforts will continue to ensure a healthy and less impacted ecosystem in years ahead.

Our next event is the most sought-after Navratri and Durgotsab on 7th October and from 13th to 15th October respectively in Central Park, Mountain House. These socio-cultural events evoke an overwhelming response from all communities as these festive days culminate in a frenzy of love and joy, dance and music, cultural shows, showcasing skills and talents in each event. Like previous year we also planned for this year many events including well known singers from Kolkata, India. Needless to say, our primary focus remains to promote the talents of the children and Mountain House residents.

We welcome all of you to join us in this festival of happiness and love and take this opportunity to extend our heartiest thanks and appreciation to all our Sponsors, Vendors, Donors, Mountain House community officials and well-wishers for their generous contribution. Without your support Poorba could not be a performing organization. Please do continue with your helping hands to make our outreach far and wide.

Finally, we remain committed to our eternal philosophy of "One earth, one family" and together we can make "One Future" After all "Life is Divine"

Partha Mukherjee, President





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Mountain House - California

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Infant Program

Ages: 6 Weeks to 24 Months



Toddler Program

Ages: 18 to 36 Months



Transition

Ages: 2 to 3 Years



Primary

Ages: 3 to 6 Years



After School Programs

TK to Grade 3



Wishing You all a Happy Durga Puja!

Our Sponsors

Our heartfelt thanks to all our sponsors for their generous support and unwavering commitment to our community. Your contributions have played a pivotal role in making these different social events happen throughout the year and help fulfill our philanthropic goal. Thank you from the depths of our hearts.

Title Sponsors

New Indian Supermarket & Doaba Sweets & Restaurants – Sanjeev Sharda
Diwakar Taxes - Amit Kumar
New Smile Orthodontist – Nelson Hu

Platinum Sponsor

Matt Disko

Gold Sponsors

Pradeesh Thomas of RedRose Montessori Preschool in Mountain House
Raman Singh of Elite Dental

Silver Sponsors

Annie Sen & Ayon Datta of Amara Collections & AFS
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Tejdeep Rattan of Innovo Dental and Implant Studio, Tracy
Ashutosh Joshi of PNG Jewelers
Gursharan SP of Radio Mirchi
Munish Ghai of Munish Ghai Real Estate and Property Management
Safeway in Mountain House
Santanu Bhattacharya of Soundscapeio

Philanthropic Partner

Joycy Joseph of Odalu, a support system for differently abled children

With your invaluable sponsorship, you have not only helped preserve our traditions but also ensured that this organization grows, supports and benefits the Mountain House and its neighborhood Community at large.

Poorba Fundraising Team

About Our Family

Poorba Fellow Board Members



Ayon Datta
Treasurer



Prabal Saha
Secretary



Harry Dhillon
Chief Advisor

About Poorba

On a beautiful fall evening of Friday, October 29th, 2021, community members of Mountain House residents (mostly Bengalis of Indian origin) instituted "Poorba" of Mountain House to establish a cultural and social base here in the United States. With a vision to thrive as a non-profit, "Poorba" has quickly established itself as the foremost organization of all Bengalis in San Joaquin County.

As an Organization we are driven to promote the rich and vibrant culture of the Bengal and North East India here in the United States, as well as work hand in glove with the local communities to serve and give back to the people from all ethnic backgrounds.

With this in mind, Poorba will be actively organizing literary programs rich in art, music, drama and dance, support sport related activities to promote physical health and mental well-being, and will be actively involved in philanthropic and fund-raising events to serve and positively influence the life of one and all around us.

Poorba Event Calendar 2023

Holi the Festival of Color – March 2023

Bengali New Year – April 2023

Dandiya – October 7, 2023

Durga Puja – October 13 – October 15, 2023

Bijoya Sammelani – November 5, 2023

Kali Puja – November 2023

Food Distribution and Sorting with Second Harvest, Manteca – February 2023

National Park Volunteering – June 2023

Summer internship – July – August 2023

Battery Collection Drive – November 2023

Blood drive – December 2, 2023

Toy drive & Food drive with Bright Christmas – December 2023



Festival Schedule

**SAT
OCT 7**

5:00 PM DISCO DANDIYA 2023 (Ticketed)

**FRI
OCT 13**

5:15 PM AGOMONI GAAN
5:23 PM GODDESS PARVATI DANCE
5:30 PM AGOMONI DANCE
5:36 PM GHOOMAR DANCE
5:42 PM BHARATNATYAM DANCE
5:50 PM FELICITATION OF SPONSORS & VIP
6:11 PM JAATISWARAM DANCE
6:20 PM BRISTI BHEJA MEGH DANCE
7:10 PM GAANE BHUBON BHORIYE DEBO
8:05 PM BOLLY BANDISH
8:45 PM ANTAKSHARI

**SAT
OCT 14**

10:00 AM KIDS SIT & DRAW
3:30 PM BONG CONNECTION
4:30 PM VAPORS
5:30 PM GOURAB & SANCHARI

**SUN
OCT 15**

12:00 PM SINDUR KHELA
3:15 PM OKYTAAN BAND
4:00 PM AMARA'S FASHION SHOW
4:45 PM LITTLE MUSICIANS
5:10 PM A COMEDY DRAMA - BHARATE CHAI



Puja Schedule



MAHA SHASTI

FRI
OCT 13

4:00 - 5:00 PM

- Chandi Path
- Kalpa Briksha Puja
- Debi Bodhon
- Bhog
- Aarti



MAHA SHASTI, MAHA ASTHAMI & KUMARI PUJA

SAT
OCT 14

8:00 AM - 11:30 AM

- Naba Patrika(Kola Bou) Bathing and other rituals
- Devi Bathing, Ghot establishment
- Saptami Puja & Bhog
- Anjali & Aarti



MAHA SHASTI, MAHA ASTHAMI & KUMARI PUJA

SAT
OCT 14

11:30 PM - 4:00 PM

- Maha Astami Puja
- Bhog
- Pusphanjali
- Aarti
- Half hour break
- Kumari Puja
- Chandi path
- May extend up till 4:00 pm



SANDHI PUJA, MAHA NABAMI & DASHAMI PUJA

SUN
OCT 15

8:00 AM - 9:30 AM

- Sandhi Puja
- Bhog Nibedan
- Balidan(Offering to God)
- Anjali
- Aarti

9:45 AM - 11:45 AM

- Maha Nabami Puja
- Bhog
- Anjali
- Aarti
- Yagya

12:00 PM

- Bisarjan
- Dodhi karma
- Devi Baran
- Sindoor Khela

A Tribute

বাংলা সাহিত্যের অবিস্মরণীয় কালজয়ী প্রতিভা সুকুমার রায়ের
শততম মৃত্যুবার্ষিকীতে পূর্বের সশ্রদ্ধ প্রণাম।



৩০ অক্টোবর ১৮৮৭ - ১০ সেপ্টেম্বর ১৯২৩

In remembrance of Sukumar Ray (30 October 1887 – 10 September 1923) the Unforgettable
Genius of Bengali Literature on His Death Centenary.

আবোল তাবোল

আয়রে ভোলা খেয়াল খোলা
স্বপনদোলা নাচিয়ে আয়,
আয়রে পাগল আবোল তাবোল
মত্ত মাদল বাজিয়ে আয়।
আয় যেখানে ফ্যাপার গানে
নাইকো মানে নাইকো সুর,
আয়রে যেথায় উধাও হাওয়ায়
মন ভেসে যায় কোন্ সুদূর।
আয় ফ্যাপা-মন ঘুচিয়ে বাঁধন
জাগিয়ে নাচন তাধিন্ ধিন্,
আয় বেয়াড়া সৃষ্টিছাড়া
নিয়মহারা হিসাব-হীন।
আজগুবি চাল বেঠিক বেতাল
মাতবি মাতাল রঙ্গেতে,
আয়রে তবে ভুলের ভবে
অসম্ভবের ছন্দেতে।।

HOCUS POCUS

Come oh bumpkin, easy-going
On your dream-swing here you come,
Oh unfocused, hocus pocus
Raise raucous beats on your drum.
Come along, where a crazy song
Has wrong tunes and is meaningless,
Come here, fading in the air
Where mind hovers in a faraway place.
Come oh restless, tearing harness
Show your dance steps, Trot Trot Tap,
Come unruly, disorderly
Come chaotically, oh lawless chap.
With a loony trait, flawed, wacky gait
Stimulate in this drunken treat,
So come aboard, in the realm of odd
Where absurd echoes rhythmic beat.

(- a translation)

Poorba beyond a Bengali Durga Puja

2021 special and the early days

The year 2021 has been special for almost all of us. Coming out of the pandemic, this was the year when social life was starting to get back to normal again. Many were coming out of their covid bubble and small community events were being kick-started. Around the same time Mountain House, CA, a small town east of the bay area, was getting featured in multiple news articles and magazines. Thanks to the big backyard homes and work from home culture; the real estate boom had finally blessed this community. In the month of Aug, a small group of primarily Bengali people from this same neighborhood got together for a picnic, breaking the covid inertia. Many among them had moved to this new community from the bay area recently and were eager to meet their neighbors and make new connections. Slowly this group expanded and in the month of October decided to celebrate Bijoya, a post Durga puja event that celebrates the victory of good over evil. Thus began a collective effort to promote Bengali cultural events in the community.

2021 was also the same year when Durga Puja was declared an intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO. Though the celebration primarily involves worship of Hindu goddess Maa Durga, over the years, it has been celebrated across the world more like a secular event where the rich art and culture of Bengal gets proudly displayed. So, the Bengalis residing in the Mountain House Community, effortlessly connected over this idea of celebrating Durga Puja locally from the following year. It was apt to do this since there were no other organizations or groups who were celebrating the Durga Puja in that area at that time.

That was also when some of us championing this idea started thinking beyond the celebratory elements of Durga Puja. During COVID we had extensively witnessed the need for communities to stay strong and united and there was a strong sense of giving back to this society among many of us. Actually, Covid made us realize the importance of the contribution of the essential workers of the community like the nurses, doctors, scientists, the retail front workers and for that matter everyone who plays a major role in making sure that our daily life continues without hiccups. This standstill of pandemic days definitely made a deep impact in our minds, and we were serious about giving back to the community where we belong. Somewhere deep rooted in my mind was something that I learned from my school days which said, 'Service to humanity is service to God'. Thus, we started working towards the idea of forming a non-religious non-profit organization, Poorba which will provide its members a platform which can be used to give back to the society in multiple ways possible. It is not going to be just another organization celebrating only the Durga Puja and hosting cultural events. As with any community a lot of debate and discussions prelude to the official formation of Poorba and it got registered as a non-religious non-profit org on October 29th 2021. Internally it was set up like a democratic organization with an elected board and the members being its representatives.

Sweet memories of a humble beginning

The organization started with a grand celebration of Holi on March 19th, 2022. Holi is widely celebrated across India and is one of the most inclusive socio-cultural events. Also, after the Covid protocols were relaxed this was perhaps the first Holi celebration that was organized in this community. From the very beginning Poorba was very widely supported by MHCSD directors and staff. Despite the fact that the number of attendees to the event had to be limited owing to covid protocols, this event was an uber success. This event gave us an opportunity to raise funds for Children's Home of Stockton too. Since the expenses for the event were covered by Sponsorship money, we were able to donate a big chunk of what we had raised through ticket sales to Children's Home of Stockton. This was our effort in helping with whatever little we could as a promise to our humble beginning. Thanks to all of the local businesses that came forward to support us and this was a very encouraging moment for us to see how we can unite and help the community.



Poorba beyond a Bengali Durga Puja

Poorba's next event was our Bengali New Year which was celebrated in the month of April with some magnificent cultural performances. A big highlight of this event was the authentic in-house prepared food by volunteers of Poorba. Much to our surprise we even had homemade rosogollas on our menu. The success of this event told us that as an united team Poorba had the ability to move mountains and host many such exuberant events and unite the diverse community of Mountain House on one platform.

During the last weekend of September 2022, Poorba celebrated its first Durga Puja in Central Park of Mountain House. Volunteers of the organization built a grand structure that was one of its kind in the entire region to display and worship the idol of Maa Durga during the four-day long event. A famous singing sensation from India flew down here to perform at the event as well. Many young kids of the neighborhood community also took part in multiple cultural programs during those 4 days. We were able to serve free lunch to every attendee with the help of one of our local sponsors. This special lunch called Bhog Prasad is considered very sacred by the devotees. During that same weekend we also organized Disco Dandiya. Our purpose was to organize an event where everyone in the community irrespective of where they come from gets a chance to perform, participate, have fun and feel connected. We decided to make this a ticketed event and was a fusion of traditional Dandiya Raas and Disco. We knew that there are many other organizations celebrating the traditional Garba in and around Mountain House, so the idea was to be slightly different from the rest of the events by infusing the Disco element to it. The outcome was a massively attended amazing event generating very positive feedback from the attendees. We donated once again part of the proceeds of the event to the Children's Home of Stockton.

A specific department was created within Poorba who were tasked with planning a year-round calendar listing different philanthropic activities which made us more confident with our non-profit mission and vision from its early inception years. Some of the philanthropic initiatives taken since the early days of Poorba are:

- Food Sorting and distribution – Volunteering
- Fundraising for Children's Home of Stockton, a 140 year-old community service organization, guiding at-risk Youth and Young Adults forward to hope & resiliency
- Food drive collection - Donated 20 boxes of food to Second Harvest of Greater Valley
- High School internship program - Students got real-time exposure to projects in accounting, software, marketing with Poorba volunteers.
- National Park Volunteering - Volunteering effort to restore meadows in Sequoia National Park.
- Household Battery Drive - Poorba volunteers collected 341 lbs. of hazardous battery waste from doorsteps of the Mountain House residents.
- Helping small local businesses with training and skills development - Volunteers of Poorba trained a local food vendor with Bengali cuisine recipes so that they could sell those during our events and generate significant revenue.



342 lbs. of Hazardous batteries were collected from Mountain House households
- November 2022



Food Sorting and Distribution event at Second Harvest of Greater Valley
- Manteca, March 2023



Poorba Volunteers at Sequoia National Park
- June 2023



Poorba Internship Program
July – August 2023

In between these bigger events, there were also some sporting events that were organized by the members. To name a few are the chess competition, women's cricket, Table Tennis competition etc. This was a humble beginning for Poorba. When at the end of the first year we looked at our finances and activities, all the members collectively felt the need to do more for the charitable needs of the society and we hope to see more aggressive and organized collective efforts towards that in the coming years.

The Road Ahead

In this age of information overload, we tend to forget the past pretty soon. But pandemic days will be remembered forever and hence the need to serve humanity will always remain as our top priority. To someone from outside of the organization, Poorba can be perceived as yet another organization celebrating only Durga Puja but we, as the members of this new organization, know that Poorba is way more and beyond that. We hope we will be able to bring some actionable changes that will alter this perception. Perhaps Poorba will take a particular charitable cause as a multi-year project and execute towards the success of it and bring in a larger value to the society we live in. We hope to partner more with other philanthropic organizations in coming years. We want our kids to proudly connect with this organization and take it to its next level. We hope more people from the Mountain House and local communities come forward supporting this mission and vision of Poorba and take pride in its work. That will ultimately define the real beginning of the successful story of Poorba!

Manas Mandal

Poorba Initiatives

Poorba Internship

One major initiative taken by Poorba this year is organizing the High School Summer Internship Program. This was a 6 weeklong unpaid internship program where the participants in the 4 different departments were rewarded completion certificate by the Poorba Board. The 4 departments were Accounting, Business Development, Marketing, and IT. Students had to apply through the school portal filling out an online application form. There was a very high response from the students and finally 18 students were accepted in this program which ran in the month of July going into Aug. The students had the chance to learn about the operations of a Nonprofit Organization by working with Poorba Members in the 4 different departments that forms the backbone of any org. The overwhelming response we received from student participants this year has motivated us to expand this program in the upcoming years benefitting a larger pool of high schoolers in the Mountain House community.



I had a great experience as a marketing intern for Poorba. I was able to collaborate with peers who have the same passion for marketing, learn from experienced mentors, and create appealing promotional materials.

- Khushi Kolte

The Poorba Internship was one of the best summer programs I have attended. I loved the way my mentor Ms. Sharma taught us how to approach people for an interview and also helped us with anything we had trouble with, and I thank her for that. I also loved that this was not the typical boring summer internship because, in the end, we got to present it to the board leaders to show our ideas and what we were working on. I thank the members of Poorba who made this happen and for the opportunity that came with it.

- Ojas Girish



The internship I did with Poorba in the accounting branch was a great learning experience for me, especially since it was my first time doing something like this. It taught me more about how money is dealt with in organizations such as Poorba, how to analyze where it is being spent, and how to read bank statements.

-Mansi Mandal

At Poorba, I learned about new applications of computer science and industry practices that I would otherwise not have gotten experience with. With hands-on mentors, I was also able to pick up new skills in various aspects of CS, along with creating a project of some significance to Poorba, of which I'm proud of.

- Amay Galappa



The most exciting project that the marketing team was involved in was to create the Sponsorship Matrix which is being used by the 2023 Sponsorship Team of Poorba to raise funds for their upcoming events in October. I'll definitely recommend MHHS students to apply for this program in the following years.

- Veer Aich

Poorba Initiatives



- Priyanjali Aich

Poorba Initiatives

Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Park Cleanup by Poorba Volunteers

As one of our major Community Service works, Poorba Volunteers collaborated with National Park Service and organized the critical meadow habitat restoration at Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks on Saturday June 24, 2023. The day before, we drove 200 miles down south for the project work at the Round Meadow Restoration Site in the Giant Forest of Sequoia National Park and stayed overnight in the park campground.



Next morning, after completing registration at the Potwisha Overflow Parking across the road from the campground, we were escorted with our vehicles to General's Highway to the Round Meadow Restoration.



Once we reached the spot after a two-mile hike guided by couple of friendly Park rangers, we picked up our tool supplies, needed to pullout Orchid Grass, an invasive species in that area. We were also warned about the wildlife and were lucky enough to see a bear passing by. Pulling invasive grass was exhausting work, so we had to take frequent breaks to replenish ourselves with plenty of fluids. The volunteers were also exposed to irritants such as dust, plants, dead brush, and insect bites but that did not deter the motivation to complete the task.

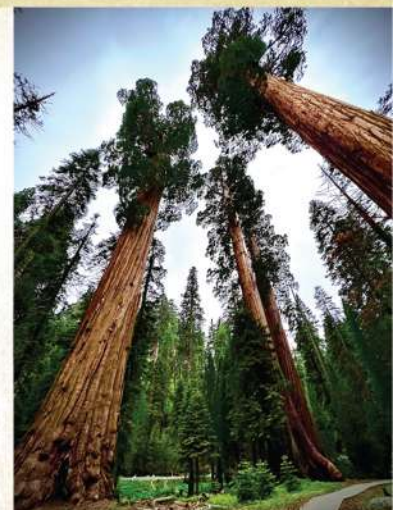
Poorba Initiatives



We brought our own lunches, snacks, and water bottles. After lunch, we wrapped up the project within an hour and went on a guided hike around the General Sherman Tree in the Giant Forest. While hiking to the lunch spot we were very lucky (because of the prolonged wet season this year) to spot a beautiful Ice Plant that grows in that area when the ice starts melting.



After hike was completed, we returned to parking lot where we were handed off the Sequoia Badge to each one of us, this not only gave us a sense of achievement but were also proud that our service could help the natural habitat to get rid of invasive grass which can deter the native vegetation.



Deepak Mandal

On the Shoulders of Giants

So as another autumn descends on the high-tech hub of the world, I often wonder about the generations that came before us that helped in the creation of the modern world, we live and experience. And since this season is almost synonymous with Durga Puja celebrations, I decided to delve a bit on the contributions of Bengal and Bengali people onto making these technological marvels a reality.

The region that is considered as present-day Bengal, has a rich and storied history, being both the center of power and an influential region of several large empires throughout ancient and medieval India. However, the latest Bengali Renaissance period coincided with the British colonial occupation of India. Also, being the most recent, this period also has the most impact on our current culture. So, for the purposes of this trip down the history lane, we shall stay in this time period.

Viewed through the lens of history of an independent India, Bengal/Bengalis are most remembered for their outsized contribution to the freedom struggle and for providing the philosophical and academic reasons for such a movement. However, what has also been extremely fascinating and probably not as talked about, is the contribution of Bengalis in science and technology during this period. The British colonial occupation was a disaster for most of the local and indigenous craftsmen, trades and industry. For decades, the British pursued a policy of de-industrialization of the entire Indian subcontinent, and thus education, research, or even traditions pertaining to physical sciences and technology was actively suppressed.



This began to change a little towards the later part of the 19th century. Calcutta, being the capital of colonial India, already had a few universities established by both the government and eminent Indians. Driven largely by the logistical challenges involved in remotely maintaining the colonial infrastructure like mints, munition depots, railways etc., rudimentary science and technological education were introduced in the universities and institutes in India and most notably in Calcutta. Soon after, the first scientific society in Asia; the Indian Association for Cultivation of Science was founded by Dr M L Sircar in Calcutta. It's original objective, which continues to this day, was to cultivate science in all its departments with a view towards advancement by original research. And because it was supported throughout its early years through philanthropic contributions, it enabled students from all walks of life and from the hinterlands to come and receive an education without the need or collecting the means to travel to England or other European Institutes for science and technological pursuits.

Thus, both the presence of institutions and a citizenry eager to learn and committed to support these institutions, helped Bengal place India on the world map of modern science. Luminaries like J.C Bose, P.C Ray became India's first internationally recognized modern scientists. Theoretical physicist like M.N Saha and Satyen Bose made pioneering discoveries and collaborated with their leading Western peers to shape the modern technological world we live in.



Not just limited to students from Bengal, in the early decades of the 20th century, Calcutta was the only place in India where higher research in physical sciences could be carried out. As a result, students from all over India began assembling in Calcutta to work in the creative atmosphere of this city. The IACS founded a few decades earlier by Dr Sircar, was the place where Sir C V Raman did his monumental work, on Physical Optics leading to the discovery of the celebrated Effect which bears his name and won for him and India the first Nobel Prize in Science. Other world-renowned Indian scientists like K S Krishnan, S Bhagavantam, N K Sethi and others also worked here and enriched the research culture of this city. And breaking several prevailing cultural and social barriers, extraordinary women of science like Kadambini Bose Ganguly, Asima Chatterjee added to the burgeoning scientific tenor.

Of course, the story does not stop there; and I have left out many, many and many more outstanding people who paved the way for a better India and a better world. And as with all things in human endeavors, every event and contribution were just but a beginning of a greater story, yet to be written. I am sure someday in the future, when this story gets revisited, there will be more names, more interesting circumstances and more accomplishments that will be mentioned. And I am sure many of you reading this will be strongly motivated to continue and contribute to this ever-lasting pursuit of enhancing the quality and art of human achievements and betterment of the society and culture we hold dear.

Radhika Arora & Jay Mukherjee

Durga Puja: A Religious Festival for the Entire Community

Religious holidays are always a source of joy in America. Now, your mind might immediately think of Christmas or Thanksgiving, but there is another cultural occasion that is celebrated with equal fervor and merriment here in the Bay Area- Durga Puja! Observed alongside Navaratri and Dussehra, Durga Puja commemorates the legendary triumph of the goddess Durga against the shape-shifting asura Mahishasura. However, it is so much more than an auspicious day.

Durga Puja is integral to the livelihood of numerous Indians. Being one of the grandest religious festivals celebrated in the states of West Bengal, Bihar, Assam, and Odisha, the locals dedicate plenty of preparation to the occasion. The centerpiece of any Durga Puja celebration is the pandal supporting and displaying the ceremonial statue of Durga worshipped throughout the holiday. The annual demand for these idols always remains high, providing the primary source of income for several Indian families. Local artisans often spend months in advance molding the statue and meticulously engraving all of the details in anticipation of selling their creation to local or overseas Puja organizations. Not only do these idols serve as a deep-rooted symbol for everyone who takes part in the worship, but they also provide the artisans of India with financial stability and a crucial role in the festive time of year they can always look forward to.

One of my favorite aspects of Durga Puja is how it brings people of all cultures and communities in California together. In India, each state is typically inclined toward a specific religious celebration and follows particular customs. But here in the Bay Area, all three festivals occur parallelly and in full swing. I could go pandal-hopping with my friends in the morning, visit a temple with my family in the afternoon, and then spend the night dancing away at a Dandiya. I get to spend time with all my friends of different Indian cultures and experience their traditions at all the various events taking place around me.

Amidst all the merriment, the true meaning of Durga Puja permeates the festivities. The religious holiday marks the divine triumph of good over evil, specifically the victory achieved by the deity Durga over Mahishasura. Durga is the divine embodiment of Shakti, a dynamic feminine energy encompassing all forms of strength ranging from the valor of warriors to the devoted care of a mother. Over the span of nine days, we worship her as nine avatars that are venerated collectively as Navadurga- Shailputri, Brahmacharini, Chandraghanta, Kushmanda, Skandamata, Katyayini, Kaalratri, Mahagauri, and lastly Siddhidhatri. We perform various ceremonies throughout these days, including lighting a hundred and eight diyas as a community to represent her light vanquishing the darkness, holding sindur khela for married women, and honoring the divine power in young girls with an adorable Kumari puja. Beyond these traditions, the artists and performers of the community come together to beautifully reimagine the legend that inspires the festival. Their renditions are enjoyed by people of all ages, continuing to inspire the community and honor our heritage every year. I know I've participated in my fair share of art competitions, dance performances, and plays based on these stories!

Did you think I would forget to mention the food? Each year, the talented cooks of the Indian community pull out all the stops to prepare a feast for their friends and fellow worshippers. If not for anything else, I'm there for that tempting array of sondesh and kheer.

Durga Puja provides so much for me to look forward to. I know I will be there to lend a hand in preparing decorations for the upcoming festival. I definitely will not be the only one, for the Indian community here at Mountain House is always enthusiastic about making the festival as joyous as ever. In the meantime, though, let me start selecting my favorite saris and getting my dandiya sticks in order.

Saanvi Banerjee



Young Minds

Climate Change

Climate change is one of the most significant challenges looming the world today, and its effects are extensive and multifold, and it refers to long term shifts in temperature and weather patterns. It is caused by emissions that made their way into the atmosphere linked to the burning of fossil fuels and emissions from industries. Extensive use of fossil fuels like natural gas and coals are posing a threat and adding to climate change continuously. As a result, it is not only affecting humans and animals but also our entire ecosystems. We are witnessing an increase in temperature in a lot of places and hence is the primary reason for increased drought, rising ocean levels, and extinction of a lot of species of flora and fauna. According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's annual climate report, "the combined land and ocean temperature has increased at an average rate of 0.14 degrees Fahrenheit (0.08 degrees Celsius) per decade since 1880; however, the average rate of increase since 1981 has been more than twice as fast as 0.32 °F (0.18 °C) per decade."

Availability of fresh water has emerged to be a big problem across the world. Droughts are even more prominent now, causing destructive sand and dust storms, which are moving many tons of sands across continents. Deserts are expanding, reducing land for growing food. Droughts have gotten so serious, that many people have become accustomed to not having access to water. On the other hand, the rapid rise of earth's surface temperature also affecting our planet by raising the oceanic levels and posing a serious threat of flooding. Low lying areas have slowly been grasped by the rising sea water. The ocean is soaking up the heat from global warming and melting its ice sheets, thereby raising the sea levels, and threatening coastal and island communities. This vast waterbody is also absorbing the carbon dioxide and preventing it from going into the atmosphere. More carbon dioxide in the ocean is making it acidic, endangering marine life. As temperatures mount, forest fires, extreme weather, and invasive pests and diseases have become more common. It was found that nearly all the observed increase in burned areas over the past half-century is due to unchecked use of fossil fuels. It is estimated that from 1971 to 2021, human-caused climate change contributed to a 172% increase in burned areas, with a 320% increase from 1996 to 2021. There has been a rise in the count of species becoming extinct as well. This is causing imbalance to the whole ecosystem.

Climate change is a very serious issue in today's world, and we should spread awareness and act before it's too late. Also, humans, being the most intelligent creatures on the planet, have the responsibility of protecting it. We are thinking of building colonies on another planet, but how can we forget our own planet. Let's all come together and do our part to solve this massive problem. The 3 R's; reduce, reuse, and recycle is what we have been taught in school and I am doing my part to follow it. Saving electricity and water and walking or biking to school every day is also something that I am doing to help the cause. I am also glad that I am associated with Poorba, where every year, we are doing our part, like national parks cleanup, battery drives to collect used batteries and recycling them, and so on. I am also doing my part in educating people on what they can do to make our future on this planet a more beautiful one.

Sirisha Basu



Diwali: Triumph of Light over Darkness

During Autumn almost three weeks after nine-day-long, Navaratri, comes Diwali, also known as the Festival of Lights, which is a vibrant festival celebrated by millions of people around the world. It is an event that brings families and communities together, spreading happiness. Here, I will try to explain why we should celebrate Diwali, highlighting its cultural influence, message of unity, and its contributions to fostering understanding among diverse cultures.

First, Diwali is a celebration of cultural heritage and traditions. It is deeply rooted in the rich history of India and is celebrated by people of various religions, including Hindus, Sikhs, Jains, and Buddhists. The festival marks the victory of good over evil. When celebrating Diwali, we preserve cultural diversity that is shown in India. It also allows for customs, stories, and happiness to be passed down from generation to generation.

Second, Diwali prompts unity and togetherness among families and communities. During this festival, families come together to clean and decorate their homes, exchange gifts, and prepare delicious meals. Lighting lamps and candles - signifying the triumph of knowledge over ignorance. The act of sharing food and gifts symbolizes sharing. By celebrating Diwali, we strengthen the bonds within our families and communities.

Furthermore, Diwali serves as a beacon of light and understanding among diverse cultures. It provides an opportunity for people of different backgrounds to come together and learn from one another. When taking part in these celebrations, we gain insight into the traditions of Indians. This exchange allows for people to understand the importance of Diwali and how it is a major event in the Hindu religion.

In addition to its cultural and social significance, Diwali also has a positive impact on the environment. Traditionally, the festival encourages the use of eco-friendly materials for decorations and the lighting of oil lamps, reducing the carbon footprint. Many communities organize clean-up drives after the celebrations, promoting environmental awareness and responsibility.

In conclusion, Diwali is a festival that should be celebrated not only for its cultural significance but also for the values it upholds—unity, togetherness, and understanding among diverse cultures. By celebrating Diwali, we can strengthen our bonds with our own families and communities, as well as extend our hands in friendship to people from different backgrounds. Moreover, the festival's eco-friendly practices remind us of our responsibility to protect our environment. So, let's come together and celebrate Diwali as a testament to the beauty of diversity and the power of light over darkness.

Ayaan Khandelwal



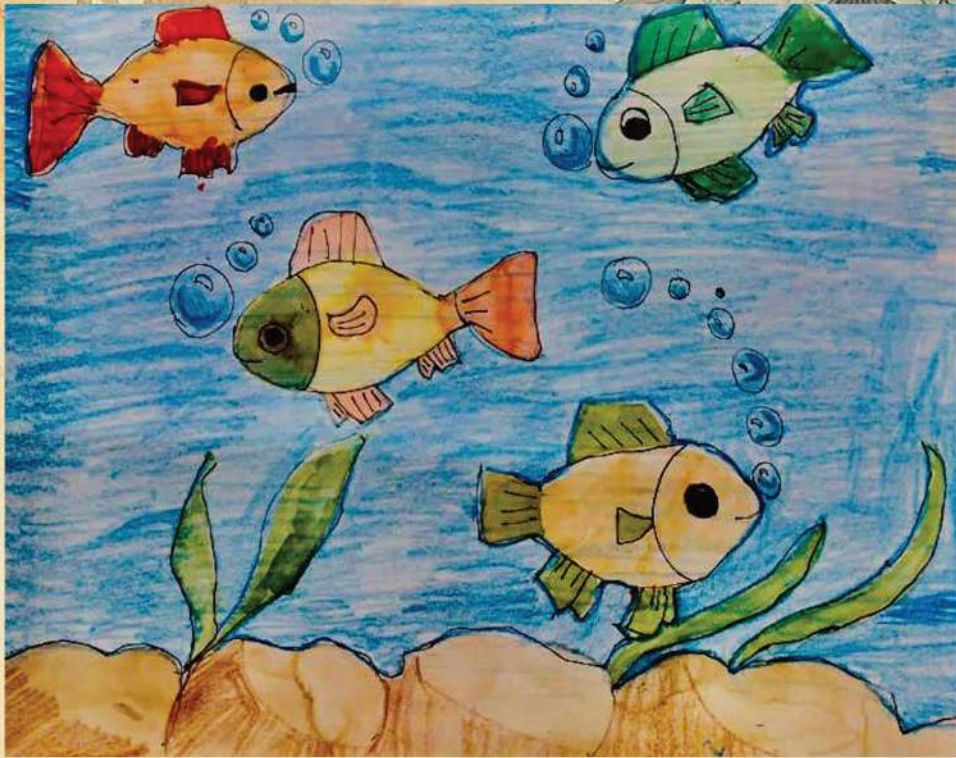
Creative Junction



Abirup Datta



Ihina Nath



Arka Bose



Trisha Gupta

Creative Junction



Trisha Gupta



Mansi Mandal

Creative Junction



Arin Bose



~Neil B
Creator/
Drawer

Neil Bose

Baithak Khana

মামাবাড়ি ভারী মজা কিল চড় নাই



চলেছি রেলগাড়ি চড়ে মামারবাড়ি তে শীতের ছুটি কাটাতে। রেল গাড়িটাও আমার মনের কথা বলতে বলতে চলছে “চল কোলকাতা....চল কোলকাতা”। কামরার জানলা দিয়ে অবাক চোখে তাকিয়ে দেখি, পাশ দিয়ে হ হ করে চলে যাচ্ছে কত মাঠ, পুকুর, ধানের ক্ষেত, ছোট ছোট কুঁড়েঘর... আরও কত কি... তার মধ্যে অনেক কিছু দেখে বুঝে ওঠার আগেই হশ করে পেছনে চলে যাচ্ছে। তারপর অনেকগুলো স্টেশন পেরিয়ে আসার পর, এসে পৌঁছলাম কলকাতায় “শিয়ালদা” স্টেশনে। ভাবতাম এ আবার কি রকম নাম!!! শিয়ালকেও দাদা বলা হয়?

যাকগে গাড়ি স্টেশনে থামতেই মা-দাদারা জানলা দিয়ে মুখ বের করে উদ্বিগ্ন চোখে দেখতো, কেউ আমাদের নিতে এসেছে কিনা। কিছুক্ষণ পরে মার মুখে একরাশ হাসি ফুটে উঠতো, দেখতে পেতাম আমার ছোটমামা, ড্রাইভার ভোলাদাদাকে সঙ্গে করে আমাদের নিতে এসেছে। তারপর যথারীতি মালপত্র নিয়ে আমরা পৌঁছে যেতাম মামাবাড়ি। এখানে আমার জন্য অপেক্ষা করে থাকতো আমার মাসতুতো আর মামাতো ভাই বোনেরা। ফুলু, জলি, মালা, রুপা, টবিন, কাবুল, কোটে - এদের ছাড়া মামাবাড়ি হয় না কি? মাসিদের আর মামীমাদের পেয়ে মা ও খুব খুশী।

দিদিমা আর দাদুকে প্রণাম করেই ছুটে যেতাম আমার বোনেরদের সঙ্গে খেলতে। কিন্তু তার আগেই আমাকে খপ করে ধরে ফেলতো, আমার সবচেয়ে প্রিয় মেজো মাইমা। তারপর কোলে তুলে, আদর করে বলতো, ট্রেনে করে এলে আগে স্নান করে নিতে হয়, তারপর বোনেরদের সঙ্গে খেলা। চলে যেতাম খোকার-মার জিম্মায়। ও আমাকে অদ্বুত ভাবে স্নান করিয়ে দিত। অদ্বুত কেন বলছি জানো? ও আগে শুকনো গায়ে সাবান মাখাতো তারপর জল ঢালতো। খুব রাগ হতো, একটুও তো ফেনা হল না আর ফর্সা হওয়াও হলো না। বললে বলতো বেশী সাবান মাখলে ঠান্ডা লেগে জ্বর হবে তখন

আর খেলতে পারবে না। যাকগে আমার এত কথায় কি দরকার, ওদিকে মালারা সবাই অপেক্ষা করছে।

মামাবাড়িতে সব সময় খেলা আর মাইমাদের আদর খাওয়াই ছিলো একমাত্র কাজ। হাজার দুঃস্থিতেও কোন বকুনি নেই। এমনকি সোফার রেক্সিন ছিঁড়ে ফেললেও মামাবাড়ির কেউ বকতো না। সারাদিন হুড়োমস্তি করার পর সন্ধ্যাবেলায় যখন দু-চোখের পাতা খুলে রাখাই মুশকিল হোত, তখন কি কারুর খেতে ইচ্ছা করে? কিন্তু বড় মাইমার হাত থেকে রেহাই কোথায়? বড় মাইমা একটা মস্ত বড়ো খালয় ভাত মাখতেন আর আমরা সকলে সেই খালার চারপাশে, এর ওর গা-ঘেঁসে, গোল হয়ে বসে, রান্না ঘরের পাশে লম্বা তালগাছটা, যেটার মাথায় “একানড়ে” থাকে, সেটার দিকে ভয়ে ভয়ে তাকিয়ে, মাইমার কাছ থেকে একানড়ের গল্প শুনতে শুনতে, বড় বড় ভাতের গ্রাস কপাকপ খেয়ে নিতাম, কোন রকম চুঁ-চাঁ না করে।

রাতেও আলাদা ঘুমোনের কোন প্রশ্নই উঠতো না। আমাদের সবার বিছানা হতো দিদিমার ফুটবল খেলার মাঠের মতো মস্তো বড় খাটে। বেচারি দিদিমা দশ বারো জন নাতি নাতনিকে নিয়ে শুতেন। কিন্তু দিদিমার ঘুমোনের উপায় ছিলো না, কারণ আমাদের মধ্যে কারুর দাঁত করকর করতো, কেউ কেউ ঘুমের মধ্যে ফুটবল নিয়ে গোল করতো, আর যে বেচারী ফুটবল হতো সে হাঁউ মাউ করে কেঁদে উঠে পাড়া মাথায় করতো। কেউ আবার বিছানা ভিজিয়ে ফেলতো। এছাড়া এর পা ওর গায়ে এসব তো হোতই। তাই আমাদের সামলাতে সামলাতেই দিদিমার রাত কেটে যেতো।

মামাবাড়িতে প্রত্যেকটা সকাল শুরু হোত নতুন নতুন আনন্দ আর উত্তেজনার খবর নিয়ে ...কোনদিন চিড়িয়াখানায় যাওয়া, কোনদিন সার্কাস দেখতে যাওয়া, কোনদিন যাদুঘর দেখতে যাওয়া। এছাড়া বইমেলা, প্ল্যানিটোরিয়াম, পিকনিক এসব তো থাকতই। আর যেসব দিনে মা-মাসীরা, মাইমারা সবাই একসঙ্গে থিয়েটার দেখতে যেত, আমাদের সকলকে দিদিমা আর খোকার-মার জিন্মায় রেখে, সেইসব দিনেও কি কম মজা হোত? একদমই না...দিদিমা সেদিন আমাদের সবাইকে বিকেল বেলায় চা খেতে দিতেন। আমরা সকলে সারি দিয়ে বসতাম, আর রান্নার ঠাকুর আমাদের সকলের সামনে চা খাওয়ার কাপ-প্লেট রেখে যেতো। তারপর তারমধ্যে গরম দুধ আর চিনি দিয়ে যাবার পর দিদিমা আসতেন কেটলি হাতে। প্রত্যেকের দুধ-ভর্তি কাপের মধ্যে ঢেলে দিতেন অল্প অল্প চায়ের লিকার। ব্যাস তৈরী হয়ে যেতো চা, আর আমরা খুব খুশী হয়ে সেই চা-খেতাম একদম বড়দের মতো করে। বড় হওয়ার কি ভীষন ইচ্ছা...হায়রে তখন যদি বুঝতাম ছোটবেলা কতটা মজার, তাহলে কে আর বড় হতে চাইতো!

সন্ধ্যাবেলায় বসতো হাসিখুশীর আসর। সেই হাসিখুশীর আসরে আমরা ছোটরা ছিলাম শ্রোতা। বড়মামা সেই আসরের সঞ্চালনা করতেন আর আমাদের থেকে কিছুটা বয়সে বড় মামাতো -মাসতুতো দাদারা সেখানে অংশ নিত...প্রতিযোগিতা হতো কে কত মজার মজার উত্তর দিতে পারে। যেমন ধর আমাদের প্রতিবেশীর বাড়ীর গেটে নেমপ্লেটে লেখা আছে এ. কে. বিশ্বাস। এই নামের পাশে কি লিখলে সেটা মজার হবে? কিছুক্ষণ পরে একজন দাদা বলে উঠলো “করা যায় না” মানে একসঙ্গে হলো - “এ কে বিশ্বাস করা যায় না”। ব্যাস, শুরু হয়ে যেতো হাসির রোল। এরপর আসতো গোপাল হোসিয়ারির পালা... বিজ্ঞাপনে লেখা থাকতো “গোপালের গেন্জি পরকন” তার উত্তরে কেউ বলে উঠতো “তাহলে গোপাল পরবে কি?” আবার হাসির ফোয়ারা। তারপর প্রশ্ন আসতো রোজ রোজ আনন্দবাজারে

Baithak Khana

অরণ্যদেব পাতলুনের ওপর দিয়ে জাগিয়া পরতেন কিন্তু রবিবার আনন্দবাজারে অরন্যদেব আসতেন না কেন? সত্যিই কেন আসতেন না? হঠাৎ কেউ একজন বলে উঠতো, রবিবার উনি ওটা কাচতেন বলে...ঠিক ঠিক ঠিক... আবার হাসি। এরকম আরও অনেক মজার মজার প্রশ্ন-উত্তর চালাচালি হোত।

কি হৈ-হল্লোড় করে যে এই পনেরোটা দিন কেটে যেতো বুঝতেই পারতাম না। তবে এরমধ্যে বড়দিনের কেক খাওয়া আর বাড়িসুদ্ধ সকলের সঙ্গে, ওইদিন সন্ধ্যাবেলায় পার্কস্ট্রিটের আলো দেখে ফিরে আসার পর, বুঝতে পারতাম, শীতের ছুটি শেষ হতে চলেছে। খেলার সাথীদের সবাইকে ছেড়ে ফিরে যেতে হবে ভেবে খুব মন খারাপ করতো।

ফিরে আসার আগের দিন বড়-মাইমা দিতো সুন্দর গোলাপী রঙের টিফিন বাক্স, মেজো-মাইমা দিতো রবার লাগানো বারোটা পেন্সিল আর ছোট-মাইমা দিতো ছোট ছোট ছ-টা নাম-লেখা রুমাল, স্কুলে গিয়ে মুখ মোছার জন্য। দিদিমা দিতেন টাকা। সেটা অবশ্য মায়ের কাছেই জমা থাকতো।

এইভাবে শীতের ছুটি কাটিয়ে আবার সেই শিয়ালদা স্টেশনে এসে, ট্রেনে চড়ে বহরমপুরে ফিরে আসতাম। কি জানি কেন ফেরার সময় ট্রেন চলতে শুরু করলেই ঘুমিয়ে পড়তাম। মায়ের ডাকাডাকিতে যখন ঘুম ভাঙতো, তখন দেখতাম স্টেশনের প্ল্যাটফর্মে হাসি মুখে বাবা আমাদের ড্রাইভার রামসহায়কে নিয়ে দাঁড়িয়ে আছে। ট্রেন থেকে নেমেই ছুটে গিয়ে, বাবাকে জড়িয়ে ধরতাম। শুনতে পেতাম গার্ড-সাহেব ঢং ঢং করে ট্রেন ছাড়ার ঘন্টা বাজাচ্ছে। ঠিক মনে হোত বাবা আমাকে মজা করে পুডিং বানান শিখিয়ে দিচ্ছে ...পি..ইউ..ডিং..ডিং..আই..এন..জিং..

■ মিতালী মুখার্জী



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Recollections of Yesteryears: My Childhood Remembrances of Durga Puja

Growing up in Nagpur, far away from Kolkata, I always carried a Prabasi spirit within me, even though at heart, I remained unmistakably Bengali.

My Durga Puja celebrations always kicked off with the excitement of shopping for new clothes and shoes to wear from Shashti to Dashami. I fondly recall that on Shashti, my parents would return from work, and with eager anticipation, we would all dress up in our new clothes to visit the pandal and catch our first glimpse of Ma Durga. We had a family tradition of dining out at a nice restaurant on Shashti evening, and since it coincided with Navratri, it almost always meant relishing the delectable Haldiram veg thali.

The subsequent four days were dedicated to hopping from one pandal to another, making offerings during Anjali, relishing Bhog, and enjoying a variety of cultural programs.

Ashtami was the pinnacle of our celebrations, with everyone dressed in their finest attire and jewelry. I still vividly remember those scorching afternoons at 100 degrees Fahrenheit, yet the women looked resplendent in their silk and Dhakai sarees. There were exhibitions and a bustling fair, and I have fond memories of exploring all the thrilling rides, purchasing exquisite handicrafts, and indulging in delicious street-side food.

On Dashami, there was a tinge of sadness in the air as we bid farewell to Ma Durga, knowing she would return to her celestial abode. But in our hearts, we made a promise to reunite with her again the following year.

We resided in a diverse community where people of various religions coexisted. On Dashami, we would come together to share sweets and savories with our neighbors, fostering a sense of unity and harmony. My parents would lovingly prepare nimki and sev, while we would also procure sweets from local shops to share with our neighbors on Dashami. Those homemade nimkis remain the best I've ever had, even to this day.

After Durga Puja, we would eagerly anticipate the celebrations of Kali Puja, Diwali, and Bhai Phota, coinciding with my birthday every other year. Since Kali Puja was a neighborhood event, and with Baba actively volunteering, those two days were filled with joyful festivities. Bhai Phota was a special occasion spent with my cousins. The most delightful aspects of Indian festivals are the gatherings of family and the delicious food.

As I reminisce about these memories from 25 years ago, I realize so much has changed since then. As I sit here, separated by 8000 miles from Ma and with Baba watching over us from above, tears well up in my eyes. Durga Puja will forever be a cherished celebration of love with Ma and Baba for me.

Mitali Bhadra



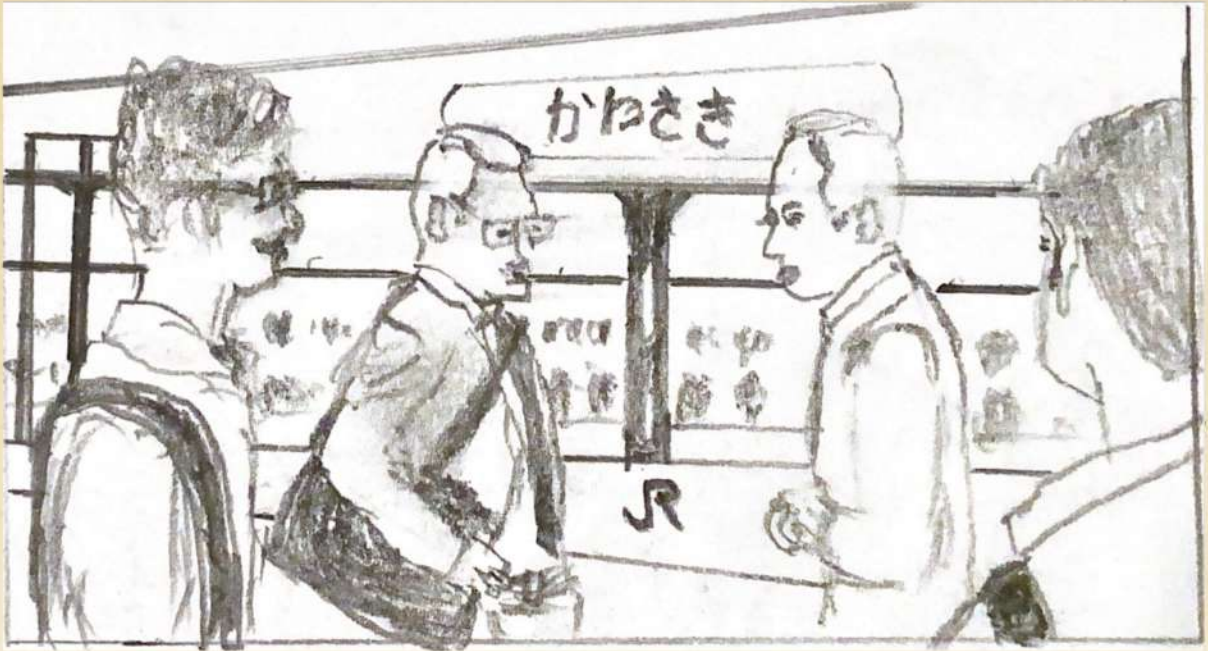
বৈধ-অবৈধ সমাচার

প্রায় আড়াই দশক আগের ঘটনা। আমি ও আমার দুই সহকর্মী তখন প্রায় মাস দশেক ধরে জাপানে রয়েছি চাকুরিসূত্রে। কাজের শেষে আবার কাওয়াসাকি শহরস্থিত এক জাপানি স্কুলে গিয়ে সন্ধ্যাবেলায় ‘আরিগাতো গোজাইমাস, সায়োনারা’ ইত্যাদি শিখতে হচ্ছে। সেদিন স্কুল শেষে ফেরার পথে আমাদের সবার মনেই বেশ একটা স্ফূর্তির ভাব – আর দেড় মাস বাদেই দেশের চেনা পরিবেশে ফিরে যাবো এই নিয়ে আলোচনা করতে করতে ফিরছি। এমন সময় পেছন থেকে কেউ একটা প্রশ্ন ছুঁড়ে দিলো, আমাদের উদ্দেশ্যে।

- আর ইউ ইন্ডিয়ান?

এই ভর সন্ধ্যাবেলায় জনবহুল কাওয়াসাকি স্টেশনে কে পিছু ডাকে – তাও নির্ভেজাল ভারতীয় উপমহাদেশীয় অ্যাঞ্জেণ্টে? প্রায় স্লো মোশানে পিছন ফিরে দেখি প্রায় চল্লিশোর্ধ্ব ছোটোখাটো চেহারার এক ভদ্রলোক, আমাদের মতোই সুট-বুটধারি – দেখে তো আমাদের স্বজাতি বলেই মনে হল, আমাদের দিকে জিজ্ঞাসু দৃষ্টিতে চেয়ে আছেন। আমার এক সহকর্মী হ্যাঁ বলতেই তিনি ততোধিক দ্রুততায় ঘোষণা করলেন – আই অ্যাম ফ্রম বাংলাদেশ। নাহ, হালটা তাহলে তো আমাকেই ধরতে

হয়, কারণ আমার দুই সহকর্মীই অবাঙালি, যদিও ওরা অনেকদিন কলকাতায় থাকার ফলে ফড়ফড়িয়ে বাংলা বলতে পারে। তাছাড়া নিজে বাঙাল ঘরের ছেলে হওয়ার দরুণ এই সুদূর জাপানে ওপার বাংলার লোকের সাথে কথোপকথনের লোভও সামলাতে পারলাম না। সোনার কেলায় ফেলুদার জটায়ুকে বলা সেই বিখ্যাত ডায়লগ দিয়ে আমি ভদ্রলোককে আশ্বস্ত করলাম – আপনি স্বচ্ছন্দে বাংলা বলতে পারেন, আমরা সবাই কলকাতা থেকে আসছি। উনি পরম উষ্ণতায় আমার হাত জড়িয়ে ধরলেন। আলাপ করিয়ে দিলাম আমার সহকর্মীদের সাথে – যোগ করলাম আমার বাকি দুজন সঙ্গীরা ভারতের অন্য প্রান্তের কিন্তু বাংলার সমঝদার। পরিচয় আদানপ্রদানের পালা সাঙ্গ হতেই উনি সোজা প্রমোত্তর পর্বে চলে গেলেন। আমার সহকর্মীদের খাতিরে উত্তরগুলো আমিই দিচ্ছিলাম খাঁটি কলকাতাইয়া ভাষায়।



- আপনাগো দেখলাম বাংলায় কথা কইতে কইতে যাইতাসেন – তা ভাবলাম একটু আলাপ করি আপনাগো লগে। কবে আইসেন এই দ্যাশে?
- গত বছর সেপ্টেম্বরে।
- কইদিন থাকবেন?
- এই তো সামনের সেপ্টেম্বরেই ভিসা শেষ হয়ে যাচ্ছে, তারপরেই চলে যাবো।
- কন কি? যাইবেন ক্যান? থাইক্যা যান।
- সে কি করে হবে বলুন – এখানকার কোম্পানীতে তো এক বছরের কনট্রাক্টে এসেছিলাম, ফিরে তো যেতেই হবে।
- না না – থাইক্যা যান। কিস্যু হইবো না।

Baithak Khana

- সে উপায় নেই দাদা। আমাদের কোম্পানি আর ভিসা এক্সটেন্ড করবে না।
- আরে কোনো ভয় নাই, এই আমি তো আসি – আমার মতো থাকবেন। আপনাগো সব শিখাইয়া পড়াইয়া দিমু।

এবার শুরু হয় আমার প্রশ্ন করার পালা।

- আপনার ভিসার মেয়াদ শেষ হয়ে গেছে?
- হ, সে তো অনেকদিনই হইয়া গেলো।
- কবে এসেছেন এইদেশে?
- তা ধরেন প্রায় বছর দশেক তো হইবই। আগে ছিলাম লেবাননে। তারপর গৃহযুদ্ধ শুরু হইলো ওইখানে। প্রাণ হাতে কইর্যা পলায়া আসলাম দ্যাশে। তারপর কিছুদিন গ্রামে বইস্যা ছিলাম। তারপর এক বন্ধু কওনে এই জাপানের ভিসা লইয়া চইল্যা আইলাম।
- বলেন কি আপনি দাদা! ? তারপর দেশে ফিরতে পেরেছিলেন?
- কইলাম কি – আর তো দ্যাশে ফিরিই নাই। এরা তো ধরতেও পারে নাই আমারে – এতোদিন তো রইয়া গেলাম।
- ভিসা ছাড়া কাজ পেতে অসুবিধা হয় না?
- না না – এদ্যাশে সব রকম ব্যবস্থাই আসে। আর কাজও আসে প্রচুর। আল্লার দোয়ায় ধীরে ধীরে জাপানি ভাষাটাও শিইখ্যা নিসি। তাই কাজ পাইতে কোনো অসুবিধা নাই।
- দেশে কেউ নেই আপনার? যেতে ইচ্ছে করে না?
- আসে তো। আমার বৌ আসে, দুইট্যা পোলা মাইয়া আসে। পোলাডা বড়। যখন আইসিলাম এই দ্যাশে, পোলাডা তখন কেজিতে পড়তো – এই পরের বসর হয় মাধ্যমিক দিবো।
- এতোদিন যে দেশ ছাড়া! ফিরে যেতে ইচ্ছে করে না?
- ইসস্যাতো খুবই হয়। প্রতি বসরই ভাবি এইডাই শ্যাম বসর – এইবারে ঠিক চইল্যা যামু। তারপর আর যাওন হয় না। ভাবি, ফিইর্যা গেলে এইরকম টাকা কি আর কামাইতে পারুম? জানেন, এই কতগুলান বসরে – তা প্রায় কম কইর্যা কুটি টাকা কামাইসি। গ্রামের বাড়িটা প্রথমে পাকা করসি – তারপর দোতাল। গরীব সিলাম কইয়া আমাগো

তো গ্রামে আগে কেউ পুছতোও না। এখন খুব খাতির করে। পালা পার্বণে ভালো চাঁন্দা দিই, পাড়া প্রতিবেশীগো দাওয়াত দিই – হের লেইগ্যা।

- বাহ – খুব ভালো খবর। তা আপনি বাড়িতে কি ভাবে যোগাযোগ করেন?
- আইজকাল তো এই টেলিফুনেই কথা হইয়া যায়। এইড্যা একখান সুবিধা হইসে এতোদিনে। বাড়িতে একখান ফোন বসাইয়া লইসি। আগে তো চিঠি ছাড়া তো কোনো উপায় সিলো না। এখন তো কথা কওনের ইস্স্যা হইলেই ফোন করি। তবে বৌরে কৈসি সবার ফোটো ম্যান চিঠি কইর্যাই পাঠায়। সেই ফোটো দেইখ্যা আবার ফোন করি। এই মাসখানেক আগেই বাড়িতে একখান বিয়া আসিলো। সব আত্মীয়স্বজন আইসিলো – ত্যাগো সবার ফোটো দ্যাখলাম – আবার তখন ফোনেও কথা কইলাম।
- তা এইখানে যে এতোদিন থাকলেন – এখানে বন্ধুবান্ধব হয়নি কিছু?
- হ হ আমি তো আমার দ্যাশের লোকের লগেই মেস কইর্যা থাকি। চার পাঁচ জনায় – তবে খুব সাবধানে থাকতে হয়।
- কেনো?
- পুলিশের ভয় আসে না! কখন কোথা দিয়ে রেড হইয়া যায় কিসু কওন যায়?
- বলেন কি? পুলিশের রেইড হয়!
- তা তো মাঝে মাঝেই লাইগ্যা থাকে। কত বন্ধু তো ধরাও পড়সে।
- ধরা পড়লে কি হয়?
- কি আবার হইবো – দ্যাশে ফিরবার প্লেনে তুইল্যা দ্যায়। একবার তো আমিও প্রায় ধরা পইড়্যা শাইতাসিলাম। রাতের বেলা রান্না করতাসিলাম বাড়িতে। সেই সময় রেড হইলো। সব কিছু ফালায়া পেসনের দরজা দিয়া বেড়া টপকাইয়া দৌড় দিলাম।
- ওরেব্বাস – এতো ঝামেলা তবুও এদেশে পড়ে আছেন! এই তো বললেন – অনেক টাকা কামিয়েছেন। তবু ফিরে যাচ্ছেন না কেনো?
- হ হ যামু যামু। টাকা অনেক কামাইসি এইড্যা একদম ঠিক। তবে কি জানেন, এই টাকাও অনেকে কামাইতে পারে না। সব ফুর্তি কইর্যা উড়াইয়া দেয়। বুঝতেই পারতাসেন চাইরদিকে তাকাইয়া – এইদ্যাশে তো পদে পদে পয়সা উড়ানের ফাঁদ। আমাগো মইধ্যে অনেকেই আসে – জোয়ান ছেলে গুলান তো কতো মাইয়্যার পেসনেই পয়সা চাইল্যা দ্যায়। সবার চরিত্র তো আর এক হয় না।

Baithak Khana

- এসব শুনে মনে হচ্ছে আপনার এদেশে আর বেশিদিন না থাকাই ভালো। এবার দেশে ফিরে ছেলে মেয়ে পরিবারের সাথে আনন্দ ফুর্তি করে দিন কাটান।
- ঠিকই কইসেন। এইবার আস্তে আস্তে ভাবতাসি চইল্যাই যামু, গত বসর তো প্লেনের টিকিটও কাইট্যা ফেলাইসিলাম, তারপর কি ভাইব্যা টিকিটটা ক্যাম্পেলও কইর্যা দিলাম। ভাবলাম সামনের দুই বসরে আরো কিসু কামাইয়া তারপরে ফিরুম। এইবার একদম ঠিক কইর্যাই ফেলাইসি - সামনের বসর ফিরুমই ফিরুম। দ্যাশে ফইর্যা ব্যাবসাপাতি কিসু করুম অনে।

আমাদের যাওয়ার সময় হয়ে আসে। ভদ্রলোককে বিদায় জানাই। আশু দেশে ফেরার কথা ভেবে কিছুক্ষণ আগে আমাদের সবার মনে যে ফুর্তি হচ্ছিলো, এই কথোপকথনের শেষে তা বেমালুম উবে গেলো। অবৈধ ভাবে বিদেশে থাকার টানাপোড়েন, প্রতিদিন আইনের চোখে ধুলো দিয়ে দেশে রেখে আসা পরিবারের উন্নতির জন্য টাকা রোজগারের নেশা - ভদ্রলোক কি চিরদিনের জন্য এই জাঁতাকলে পড়ে গেলেন? এইসবই ভাবতে ভাবতে, ভারাক্রান্ত মনে আমাদের প্ল্যাটফর্মের দিকে পা চালাই। বেশ রাত হলো - এবার হোস্টেলে ফিরে যেতে হবে।

■ রানা আইচ

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