

Bashantika



The Bengali Cultural Association of America
Spring, 2006

Magazine and Membership Directory

Bengali Cultural Association of America

Spring, 2006



বিশ্ব
ভাষা
সংস্কৃতি

Saraswati Puja,
Bashontika



Message from the Board...

Dear Community Members:

Nomoshkar!

The BCAA 2006 Committee welcomes you all. To those who are new to the Valley of the Sun, welcome to the family! To those who have been around over the years – we salute you for being there when we needed you. You dear member is the reason we are here and this Committee serves at your pleasure.

Before proceeding, we would like to place on record our community's deep appreciation for those who were at the helm throughout 2005. They had voluntarily stepped up to the plate when there were hardly any takers for the job. Despite their family and professional commitments, each of them has done a marvelous job in furthering the interests of this community. Their generous contribution to the Tsunami efforts and the starting of investments in Time Deposits are examples of their compassion and foresight. To each of you – we are all grateful for your services and a big thank you from all of us!

We feel that we have come a long way from our initial moorings as two tiny families. Due to our growth in membership, it is imperative that we change the way we do business. In particular, we feel that for the continued survival of this association, we must develop and maintain duplicate competencies. So long, we had the same set of people being in charge of the same activities, year after year, in a monotonous cycle. No doubt those people have complained of boredom. To be fair to everybody and to encourage the induction of fresh ideas, we want to rotate the charge amongst different people. We feel that this change will allow people to try out new activities and will strengthen our overall core competencies. We urge you to try out your hand.

You must be aware of the short survey we had conducted a few weeks ago. We are glad that a large percentage of the people responded. We want to assure you that your feedback has provided us great insight and we intend to cater to your wishes to the best of our abilities. The central focus of your response was a cry for quality. But to achieve quality the participation of each and every one of you is of absolute necessity. Be it our magazine or

Saraswati Puja, 2006
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the cultural activities or the food preparation or the decoration, or even mentoring, you have to take part. Rest assured that if you do not step in, it would not happen. We are banking on you to come up with ideas and it is for us facilitate them. You have to drive the process.

Our mission statement - we will:

- Help BCAA grow as a responsible member of the Arizona society.
- Encourage member participation and trying out of new ideas.
- Adhere to democratic principles in our decision-making.
- Run BCAA activities with business like efficiency.
- Be evenhanded and transparent in all our dealings.
- Initiate appropriate two-way communication between the Members and Committee.

Finally, please join us to create an exciting year for the community. We look forward to a long and enjoyable association with you and your family.

The 2006 Committee

Bengal Cultural Association of Arizona

2006 BCAA Committee Members			
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Cover Design by Samar Majumdar.

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*Best Wishes to the Bengali
Cultural Association of
Arizona*

Fresh Vegetables, Fish, Atta, Daal,
Rice, Pickles and other Indian groceries

**Lee Lee
Oriental
Supermarket**

**2025 N. Dobson Road
Chandler, AZ 85224
(N-E Corner of Warner and Dobson)
Phone: 480-899-2887**

Celebration of Saraswati Puja

As most of you know, Saraswati Puja is a big occasion in West Bengal. The pujas are held in every locality and in many homes as well. Since Saraswati is the goddess of learning, children and students are very enthusiastic about the Puja. They give 'Anjali' to the goddess, they bring in their text books (usually from the subjects they have the toughest time with!), and pray that they do well in their exams. The fun part is that on the day of Saraswati Puja no one has to study, and all the schools and colleges are closed.



The puja itself is quite elaborate, with sandalwood, ghee, joss sticks, and incense sticks and is done to the sound of shlokas, conch shells, and drums. On this day, people eat vegetarian food and initiate children into the world of the written word. Traditionally, the youngest girl of the family has to wear a yellow ('Basanti') colored saree. An essential requirement for the Saraswati puja are the 'Palash' flowers (Flame of the Forest) without which the puja is considered to be incomplete.

All the young people in the neighborhood gather in the pandal to celebrate the occasion. Music blares in the pandals and the children enjoy themselves. The puja is performed by the 'Pujari' or pundit. After the puja is over, the 'prasad' is distributed among all the people present. In some places, they make it a point to feed all the poor living in the locality.



It is believed that Saraswati endows human beings with the powers of speech, wisdom and learning. She has four hands representing four aspects of human personality in learning: mind, intellect, alertness and ego. She has sacred scriptures in one hand and a lotus - the symbol of true knowledge - in the second. With her other two hands she plays the music of love and life on a string instrument called the *veena*. She is dressed in white - the symbol of purity - and rides on a white swan - symbolizing purity and discrimination.

Saraswati and Mythology

The Birth of Saraswati

In the beginning there was chaos. Everything existed in a formless, fluid state. “How do I bring order to this disorder?” wondered Brahma, the creator.

“With Knowledge”, said Devi. Heralded by a peacock, sacred books in one hand and a veena in the other, dressed in white, Devi emerged from Brahma’s mouth riding a swan as the goddess Saraswati.

“Knowledge helps man find possibilities where once he saw problems,” said the goddess. Under her tutelage Brahma acquired the ability to sense, think, comprehend, and communicate. He began looking upon chaos with eyes of wisdom and saw the beautiful potential that lay therein.

Brahma discovered the melody of mantras in the cacophony of chaos. In his joy he named Saraswati, **Vagdevi**, goddess of speech and sound. The sound of mantras filled the universe with vital energy, or prana. Things began to take shape and the cosmos acquired a structure: the sky dotted with stars rose to form the heavens; the sea sank into the abyss below, the earth stood in between. Gods became lords of the celestial spheres; demons ruled the nether regions, humans walked on earth. The sun rose and set, the moon waxed and waned, and the tide flowed and ebbed. Seasons changed, seeds germinated, plants bloomed and withered, and animals migrated and reproduced as randomness gave way to the rhythm of life.

Saraswati – independent and whimsical

Funnily enough, Brahma thought that Saraswati was too aloof and absent-minded for his liking. Apparently, once he had arranged for a major fire-sacrifice, at which his wife’s appearance by his side was a must. He repeatedly warned Saraswati not to take too long over getting dressed and miss the sacred time. He commanded that she take her traditional seat beside him, well in time. But Saraswati was whimsical and didn’t like to take orders, and took her time getting ready, and was actually late for the fire-sacrifice making Brahma livid!

According to most myths Saraswati had no children, possessed a fiery temper, was easily provoked and was somewhat quarrelsome. She, of all the goddesses, is described as possessing a very independent will and was not very obliging to the male gods. She is the one who believes in the ultimate futility of all warfare and the trappings of wealth.



BCAA Membership Survey Results

For many of you, this is probably “old” news! But, for those that didn’t receive the email or didn’t have a chance to read the email, here is a short summary of the 2006 BCAA Membership Survey Results.

We got some excellent feedback, and although there were no “earth-shattering” findings, the results help give us some direction on how the BCAA committee should arrange various community events in 2006. While the BCAA committee may not be able to arrange everything to suit everyone’s taste and preference, the committee will make every effort to bring to fruition some of the feedback we have received through this survey, within the constraints of time, budget, and practical feasibility.

- The vast majority of community members would like to see a cultural program for both Saraswati Puja and Durga Puja, but not for Lakshmi Puja. They would like the programs to be between one and a half to two and a half hours long, with both children and adults participating.
- With respect to food preferences, for Saraswati Puja and Durga Puja community members indicate they prefer a home-cooked lunch, followed by a catered dinner. For Lakshmi Puja there is a slightly higher preference for a boxed lunch.
- A solid majority of community members indicate that the quality of cultural programs presented by both children and adults over the last two to three years has met or exceeded their expectations. However, most community members would still like to see a focus on program quality, even if it means some community members and children are not able to participate.
- The vast majority of community members say they would like to see the BCAA Community arrange at least one professional program in 2006. The top three program preferences are: Bengali Pop Music (Chandrabindu, Bhumi, etc.), Hindi/Bengali Pop Music (Usha Uthup, etc.), and Classical Instrumental (Sarod, Tabla, etc.). There is a strong preference for professionals to perform during Durga Puja, if possible.
- Ninety percent of community members feel the current membership fees charged by the BCAA are about right or lower than expected.
- About half of the survey respondents are women. A majority of respondents are between 35 and 44 years of age, and 87% are married. Fewer than three in five respondents did not have any children living in their household.

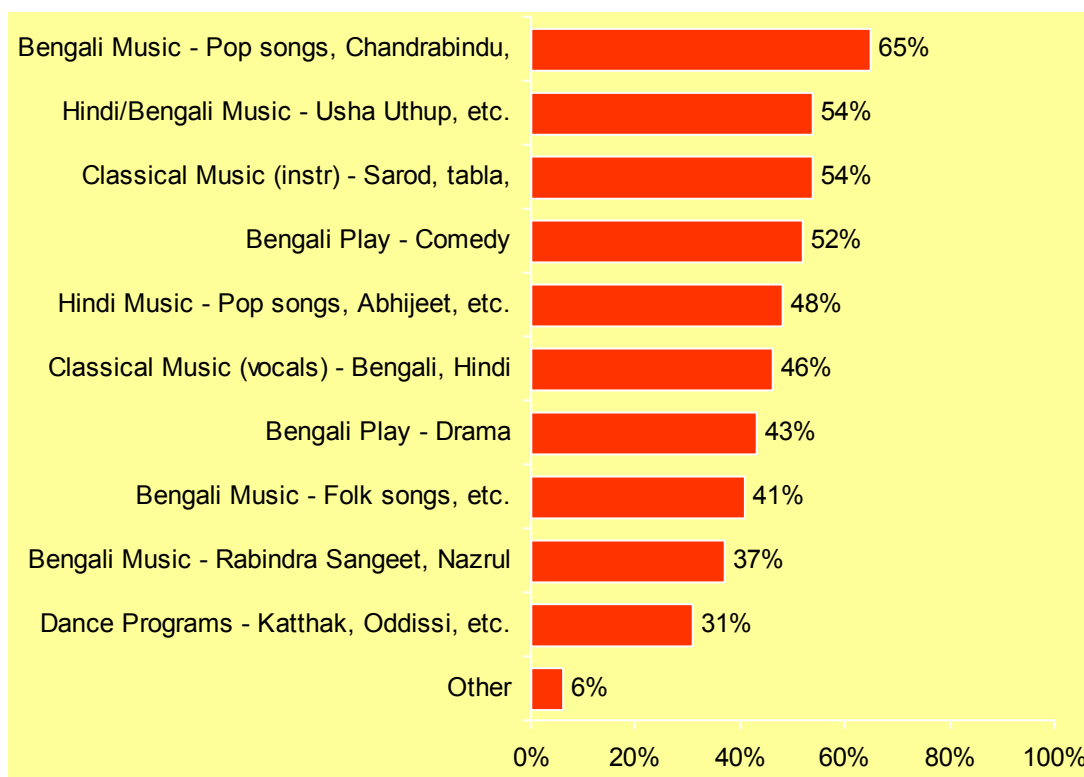
Once again, our heartfelt thanks to all community members who took the time to provide their feedback and opinions. The overall response rate was over 40%!

Sincerely,

The BCAA Committee ~ 2006.

P.S. The complete survey results have been posted on the AZBengal.org website. There is a link to the survey on the home page at www.azbengal.org, as well as in the "Publications" section of the website.

Community Members' Preferences on Professional Programs



Usha Uthup ...Live in Phoenix this July!

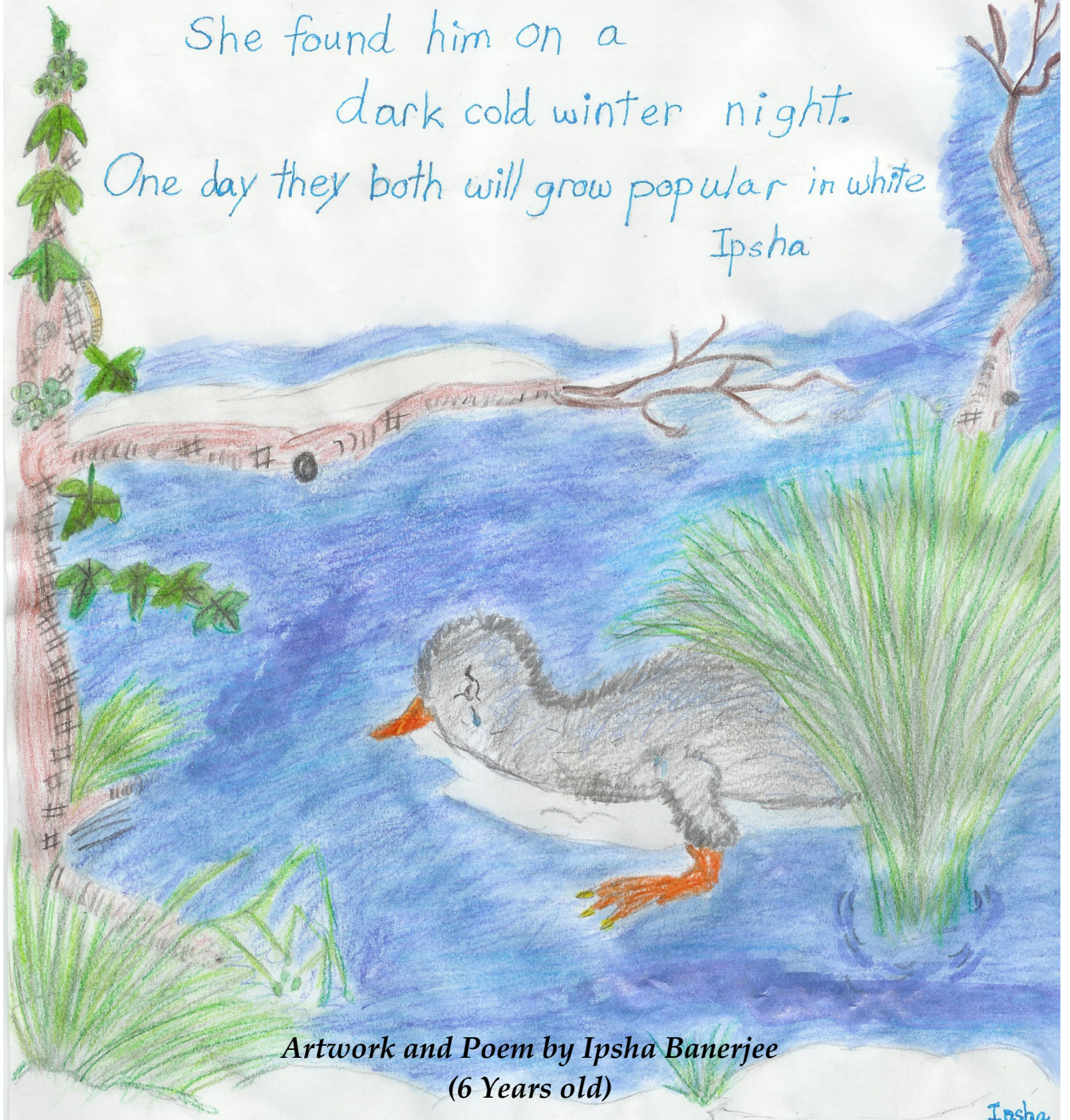
Stay tuned for Usha Uthup...yes, you heard it right! She is coming to Phoenix in July! For the first time in Phoenix, you will be able to see Usha Uthup live in concert! Tickets are going to go fast, so keep your eyes and ears open...we will begin ticket sales very, very soon!

Chotoder

Chondo

The Duckling

The duckling is
Baby Saraswati's favorite,
She found him on a
dark cold winter night.
One day they both will grow popular in white
Ipsha



Artwork and Poem by Ipsha Banerjee
(6 Years old)

All About Blue

by Arpita Kundu (8 years old)

I love blue,
It's my favorite color, too!
I love the bright, blue sky,
It's like a shower from, the sky!
I love the blue breeze,
It feels like the wind, freeze,
I drew the ocean blue,
It looked like a shoe!
I made a blue shirt,
It had a lot of dirt!
I went to the candy shop,
It has a lot of blue lollipops!
I never saw blue trees,
Or any blue leaves!
I said good-bye to Mr. Blue,
I looked up at the sky and said,
Hey that's Blue, too!

That Green Tree

by Rounok Joardar (12 years old)

Palo Verde
Green and gnarled
Rattling like a maraca
An evil hand
Reaching for the casual nighttime hiker.

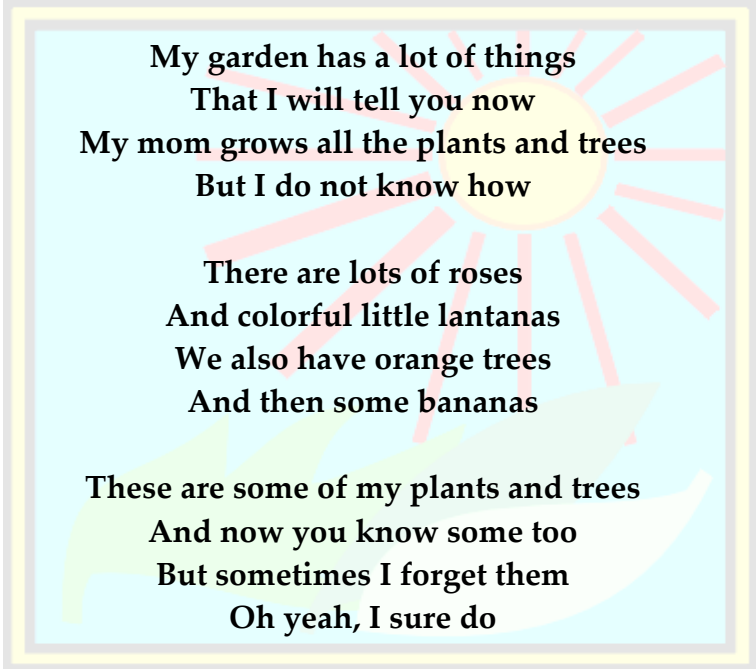




Artwork by Urvi Banerjee
(7 Years old)

My Garden

by Trisha Dasgupta (10 years old)



My garden has a lot of things
That I will tell you now
My mom grows all the plants and trees
But I do not know how

There are lots of roses
And colorful little lantanas
We also have orange trees
And then some bananas

These are some of my plants and trees
And now you know some too
But sometimes I forget them
Oh yeah, I sure do

Birthday

by Sruti Guhathakurta

(Sruti wrote this poem the day she turned 8)



Skies are blue,
A new you-
Yesterday you were seven and today you are eight.
Trains carrying freight - that are your presents that you take.
I am writing this poem because it is my birthday, isn't that great?



Cooti Baluti

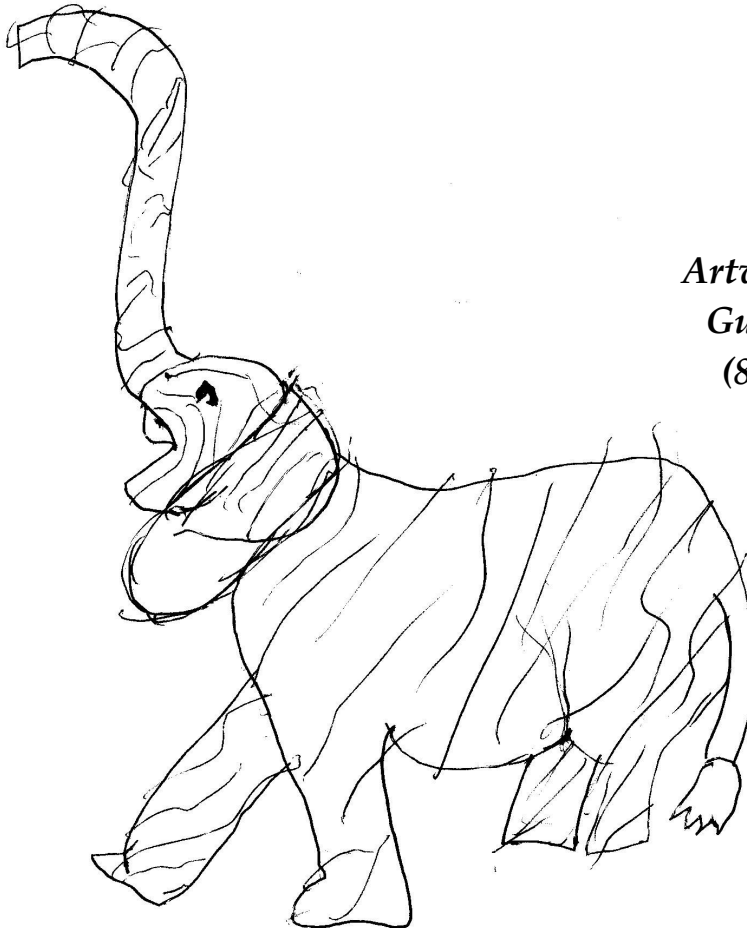
by Sruti Guhathakurta (Another poem Sruti wrote on her 8th birthday)

Cooti Baluti is a little boy
Yesterday he broke my toy.

He pushed me down at school,
He thought it was very cool.

He's just five years old,
But he wouldn't do what he is told.
He even thinks he can find real gold!

But I don't think he's right,
He always gets in a fight,
I'll teach him a lesson, I just might!



*Artwork by Sruti
Guhathakurta
(8 Years old)*

Yo! Ho! Ho!

Route to the Pacific Ocean

by Suravi Sengupta 2005(10 years)

(I wrote this poem for my Lewis and Clark project, it is based on the actual sequence of their journey west to discover the Pacific Ocean)

“We set out at 4 o’clock.....
And proceeded under a gentle breeze up the Missouri”
We follow Lewis and Clark’s call
we the Corps of Discovery
We load the keelboat
Followed by red pirogues,
And the rowing boats
We carry loads of goods
Gifts for Indians, mirrors, beads, and ribbons
We carry food, instruments, and books
Including the rifles and the fishing hooks
We are a force of more than 30 men on a mission
To discover a route to the Pacific Ocean

As we sailed up the Missouri
The river itself became our enemy
There was a danger of our boats being hit by the dead trees and hidden rock
Stirred the boats out of danger were our strong men and York
The forests disappeared giving rise to the ocean of grass called the Great Plains
Where the huge herds of buffalo roam their claims
We are a force of more than 30 men on a mission
To discover a route to the Pacific Ocean

When pushed up river we did ten miles a day
When winds were down we rowed and polled ‘twas a hard day.
But still we did not encounter the terrifying “cut throat” Sioux Indians
Meeting came with Mr. Black Buffalo Bull chief of the Sioux Indians
It was not a pleasant greeting since the tribe captured Clark
But the corps thirty riffles were hard to match
Not forgetting Seaman’s (dog) bark
Sioux yielded and the Corps won
The expedition was going for a home run
We are a force of more than 30 men on a mission
To discover a route to the Pacific Ocean

Saved from the cruel winter by the friendly North Dakota's Mandan tribe
Mandan Indians were very impressed with our own York's drive
During the stay with the tribe we met the versatile girl, Sacajawea
She was a Shoshone Indian native in the Rocky Mountain area
We are a force of more than 30 men on a mission
To discover a route to the Pacific Ocean

When in Montana one morning, Lewis and a hunter went to look for food
However their luck wasn't very good
They spotted an 8' foot grizzly bear feeding on berries

It looked confident in his territory
Alas it was vicious and not a docile bear
As Lewis shot number second bullet at the bear
Lewis soon found out the bear didn't care
All it did was to enrage the ferocious bear
Scared Lewis scurried into the river

Thank Lord the bear was wounded
Otherwise Lewis would have been hounded and pounded
We are a force of more than 30 men on a mission
To discover a route to the Pacific Ocean

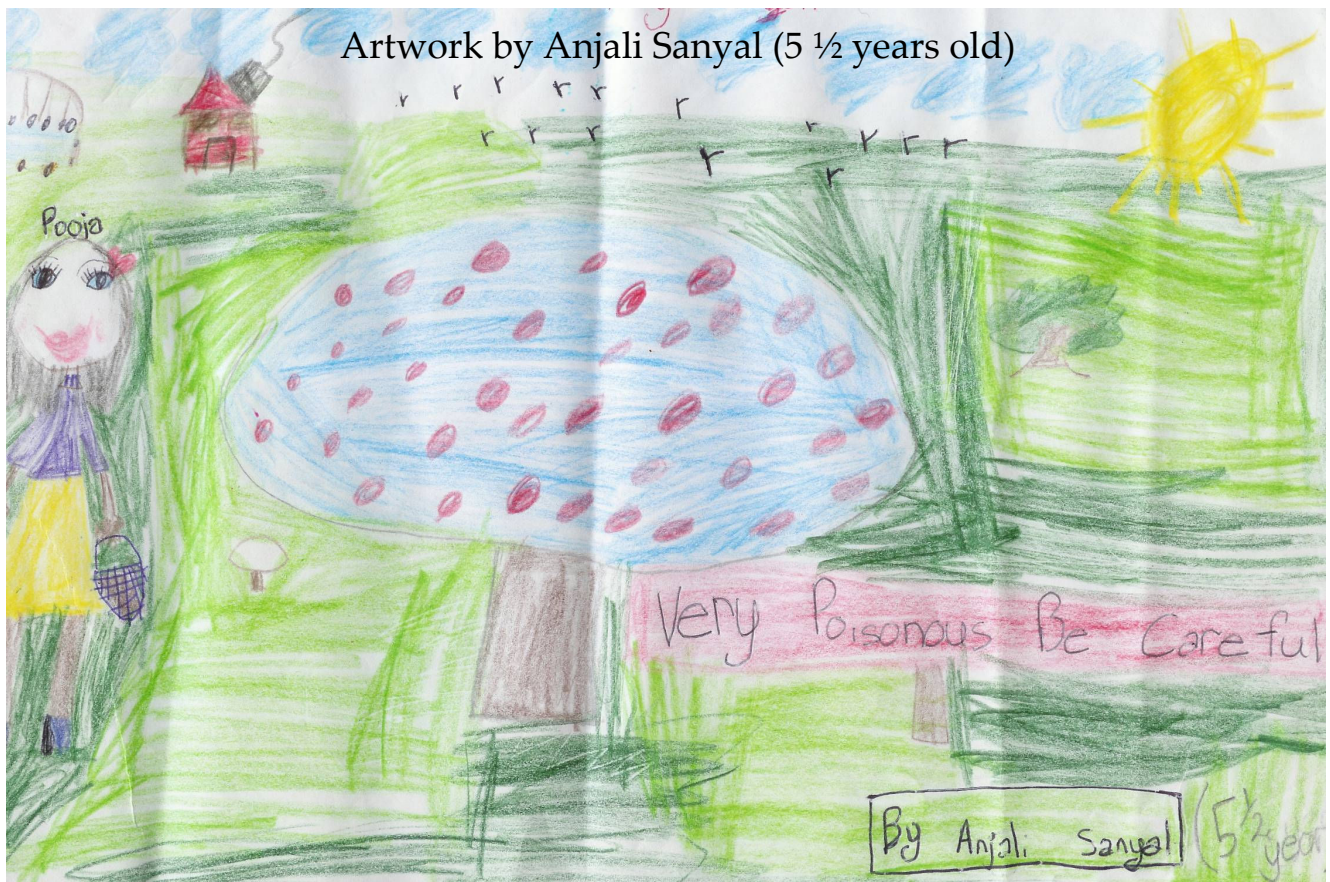
Next the Corps encountered Montana's Great Fall
Sublimely magnificent it stood tall
Its natural beauty took Lewis's breath away
The Corps of Discover was going the right way
We are a force of more than 30 men on a mission
To discover a route to the Pacific Ocean

Soon the Missouri formed into three streams, one was called Jefferson
The second was called Galeton and the last was Madison
The gigantic Rocky Mountains was an obstacle
The high snow capped mountains looked like icicles
The Corps was worried about how they would get through these mountains
Since they had no horses to cross the rocky terrains
We are a force of more than 30 men on a mission
To discover a route to the Pacific Ocean

As the corps was going up the Jefferson they encountered a thin stream
Almost as thin as a balance beam
Surprisingly this stream was flowing west
Not like the others that were flowing east
The Corps had crossed the continental divide
They were close to their goal by Gods abide
We are a force of more than 30 men on a mission
To discover a route to the Pacific Ocean

Finally Lewis thought he would see a river leading to the Pacific Ocean
 Unfortunately he just saw only the mountainous terrain
 This terrain is called the Rocky Mountains
 Now they had a need for horses
 The Corps would not sacrifice their knees
 Sacajawea say's her tribe, the Shoshones
 Might provide them horses since they had a mountain to cross
 Luckily they offered them horses, as Sacajawea's brother was the Shoshone boss
 We are a force of more than 30 men on a mission
 To discover a route to the Pacific Ocean

The Corps hiked and crossed the Rockies
 With the help of arduous Sacajawea girl of the Shoshones
 Finally we come to a stream which Lewis say's leads to our goal
 As we sail Lewis shouts out "ahead Ocean"
 That's when we saw the Pacific Ocean
 This is the end of our mission
 Joy comes to all
 We the Corps of Discovery
 We are a force of more than 30 men on a mission
 We have discovered the route to the Pacific Ocean



Scared

by Sneha Ray (10 years old)

My mother is scared of scaly fishes
My sister is scared of dirty dishes
My father is scared of a bumble bee
But nothing ever scares me

My brother is scared of hairy bears
Jellyfishes sure give my aunt a scare
Lions, my uncle is scared to see
But nothing ever scares me

My cousin is scared of big-toothed sharks
Grandma is scared when the old hound dog
barks
My grandfather is scared to climb a tree
But nothing ever scares me

My teacher is scared of slimy snakes
My doctor is scared of deep, dark, lakes
My friends are scared when nothing's free
BUT NOTHING EVER SCARES ME!!!!



I Am From...

by Rounok Joardar (12 years old)

I am from Gamecubes
And Gameboys;
Nintendo controls my life,
Well, 50% anyway.

I am from books and music,
Fantasy and guitars;
I enjoy them very much
Dragons and fairies, little dots on lines.

I am from long plane flights
Visiting Ammi's and Dimma's,
Booba's and cousins,
Journeying to a far away part of me.

I am from well made Indian food
Chickens, rootis, rice and fish,
All eaten without much care
For there are things I like better.

I am from a strict world
Of "pay attention" and "what happened at school,"
"Learning is necessary to have a successful life"
Grades control my life... well 50% anyway.



*Artwork by Ronit
Banerjee
(4 Years old)*



*Artwork by Urvi Banerjee
(7 Years old)*

Ten Minutes Left

by Shilpika Chowdhury (13 years old)

Ten minutes left,
I haven't got a fear.
What could go wrong
The times not even near

Nine minutes left
I've gone back to sleep
It's still not close
I don't sleep that deep

Eight minutes left
I'm half-awake
Just to get up
Strength it will take

Seven more minutes
Seen the time on the clock
My head is still blurry
While I put on my sock

Six minutes near
I'd better hurry
I'll get breakfast fast
Try not to worry

Five minutes left
I'm gonna be late
I'm out the door
Boy, Mondays I hate

Four more minutes
It takes two to get there
So, I'll skip to one
Just more life to spare

One minute and counting
I'm all out of time
Here comes the bus
And the end of this rhyme





Artwork by Urvi Banerjee
(7 Years old)

Mojar

Ashor

Word Search

See how many of these words you can find in the word search puzzle below!

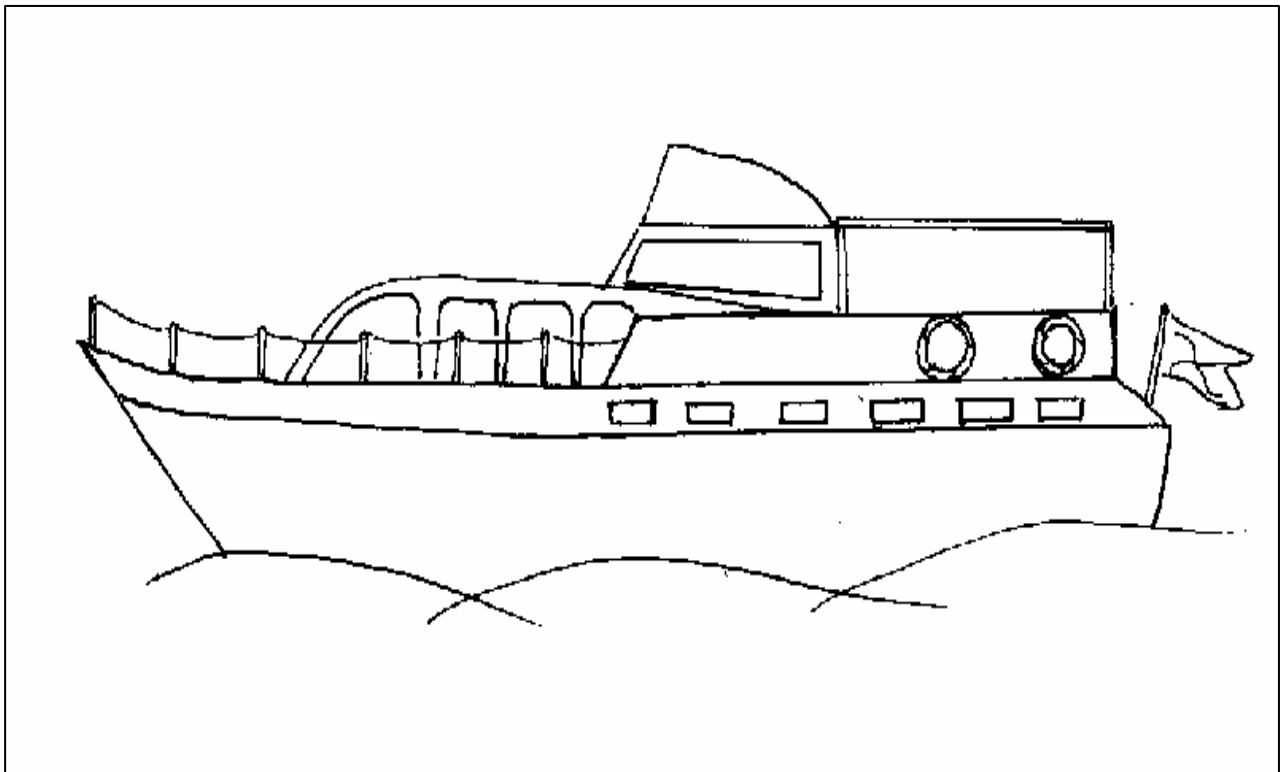
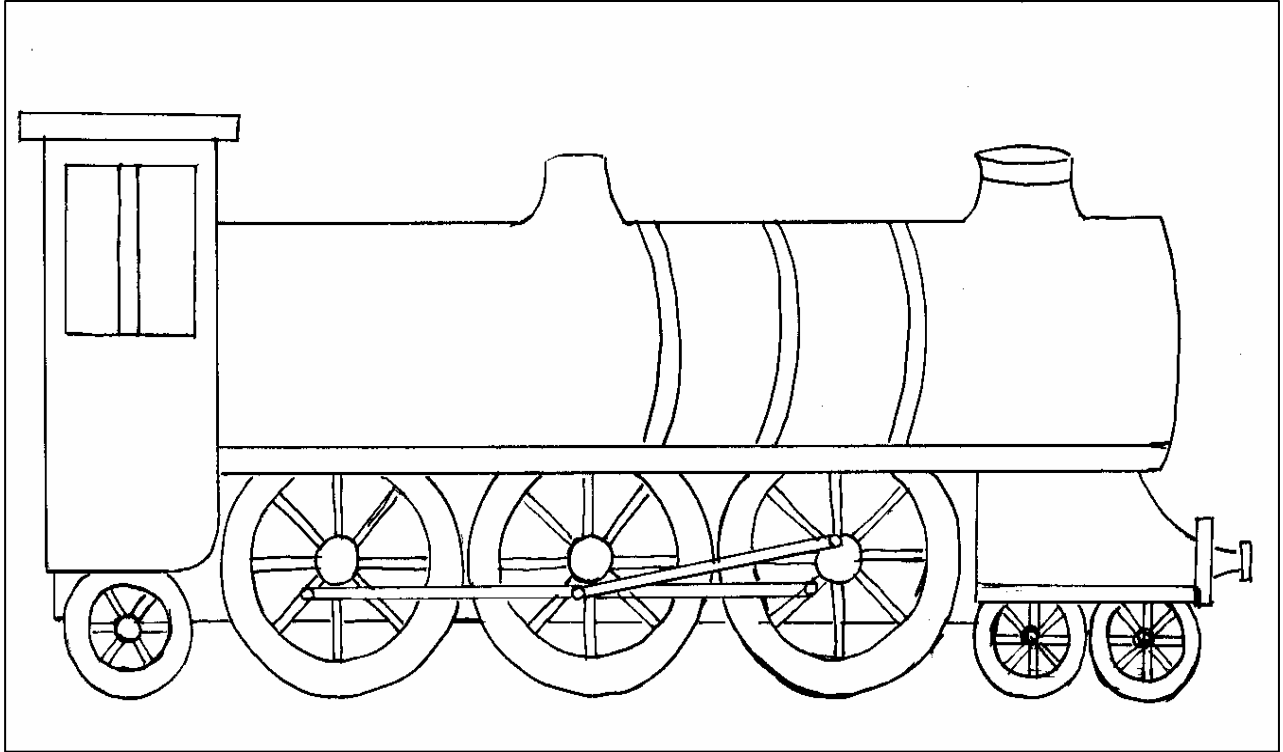
ARTS	MATH	STUDY
BOOKS	PUJA	SWAN
CHILDREN	SARASWATI	TEACHER
FEBRUARY	SCHOOL	VEENA
FESTIVAL	SCIENCE	WISDOM
LEARNING	STUDENT	

T	N	E	D	U	T	S	L	T	G	L	S	M	O	B
Q	F	E	B	R	U	A	R	Y	I	O	C	A	Z	J
M	D	V	V	H	V	L	T	A	P	O	I	J	S	I
E	O	P	P	I	T	E	E	B	Y	H	E	K	A	L
I	A	D	T	V	A	A	V	A	Z	C	N	L	X	S
T	T	S	S	C	E	T	M	E	R	S	C	T	P	S
R	E	A	H	I	J	E	L	Z	N	N	E	M	K	J
F	O	E	W	Q	W	V	N	R	E	U	I	O	N	O
H	R	Q	G	S	T	R	A	A	R	V	O	N	L	N
O	E	P	B	G	A	S	E	D	D	B	X	O	G	Y
C	P	U	B	B	W	R	D	I	L	J	U	L	G	L
D	R	J	U	A	K	B	A	X	I	I	E	R	N	J
U	Y	A	N	N	L	U	K	S	H	S	T	U	D	Y
Y	V	T	J	V	C	G	D	C	C	D	A	O	U	G
H	B	R	U	L	M	X	S	Y	O	F	N	L	J	Z

Solution is at the end of this section.

Color Cafe

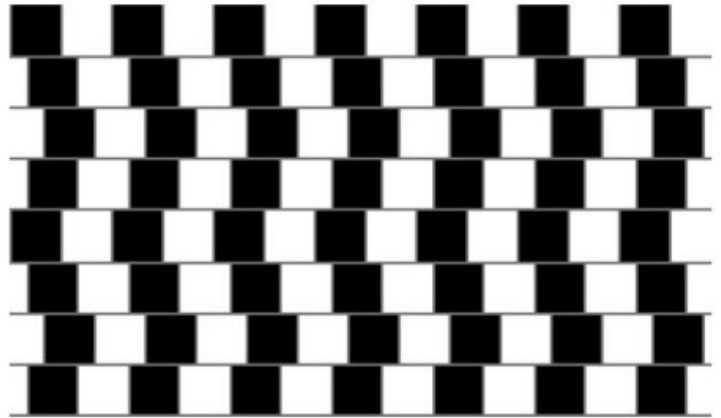
Make these pictures spring to life with some colors!



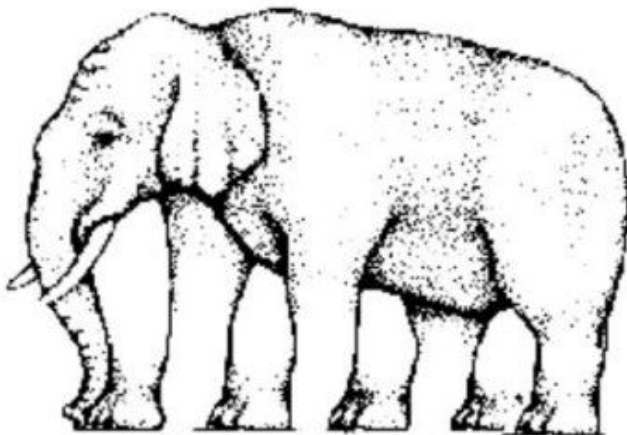
Optical Illusions



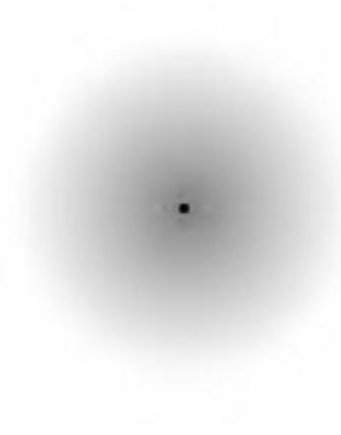
Can you trust the man in this picture???
Look closely and see if you think he is a
liar!



Are these horizontal lines really straight
and parallel? You betcha!



Elephant Mutation! No, really, how
many legs does this elephant have?



Is that really a gray splotch around a
black dot? If you stare at the black dot
long enough, what happens to the gray?

A Coupla' Funnies...

Flying Bombs

A famous statistician would never travel by airplane, because he had studied air travel and estimated the probability of there being a bomb on any given flight was 1 in a million, and he was not prepared to accept these odds. One day a colleague met him at a conference far from home.

"How did you get here, by train?"

"No, I flew."

"What about 'the possibility of a bomb'?"

Well, I began thinking that if the odds of one bomb are 1 in a million, then the odds of TWO bombs are $(1/1,000,000) \times (1/1,000,000)$. This is a very, very small probability, which I can accept. So, now I bring my own bomb along!"

A Rose is a Rose is a Rose...

Two elderly couples were enjoying friendly conversation when one of the men asked the other, "Fred, how was the memory clinic you went to last month?"

"Outstanding," Fred replied. "They taught us all the latest psychological techniques-visualization, association-it made a huge difference for me."

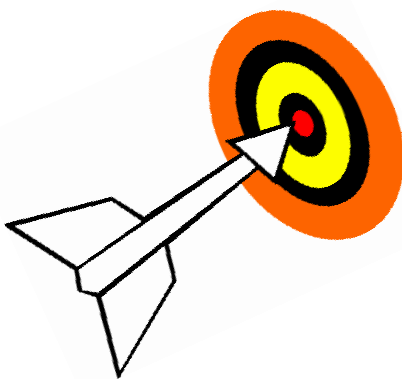
"That's great! What was the name of the clinic?"

Fred went blank. He thought and thought, but couldn't remember. Then a smile broke across his face and he asked, "What do you call that flower with the long stem and thorns?"

"You mean a rose?"

What does that red dot that Indian women wear on their forehead mean?

Well, in ancient times, Indian men used to practice archery skills by target practicing by aiming at their wife's red dot. In fact, that is one of the reasons why they had many wives. You see, once they mastered the art of archery and hit the target...



Jokes provided by Binoy Saha

Word Search Solution

T	N	E	D	U	T	S	L	T	G	L	S	M	O	B
Q	F	E	B	R	U	A	R	Y	I	O	C	A	Z	J
M	D	V	V	H	V	L	T	A	P	O	I	J	S	I
E	O	P	P	I	T	E	E	B	Y	H	E	K	A	L
I	A	D	T	V	A	A	V	A	Z	C	N	L	X	S
T	T	S	S	C	E	T	M	E	R	S	C	T	P	S
R	E	A	H	I	J	E	L	Z	N	N	E	M	K	J
F	O	E	W	Q	W	V	N	R	E	U	I	O	N	O
H	R	Q	G	S	T	R	A	A	R	V	O	N	L	N
O	E	P	B	G	A	S	E	D	D	B	X	O	G	Y
C	P	U	B	B	W	R	D	I	L	J	U	L	G	L
D	R	J	U	A	K	B	A	X	I	I	E	R	N	J
U	Y	A	N	N	L	U	K	S	H	S	T	U	D	Y
Y	V	T	J	V	C	G	D	C	C	D	A	O	U	G
H	B	R	U	L	M	X	S	Y	O	F	N	L	J	Z

Boroder

Boktobyō

ভালোবেসেছি

অনীতা ব্যানার্জী

একটু সুর দিও আকাশে ও বাতাসে
একটু রঙ দিও বাদলে ও রোদে
হিংসা প্রতিহিংসা, দ্বেষ বিদ্বেষ ভুলে,
মানুষ হয়োছো তুমি, একটু ভালোবেসো।

লাল নীল সবুজ হলুদ সাদা বা কালো
বারুদের খুসরতার চেয়ে সব রঙ ভালো,
তুমিই তো করেছো রচনা টপ্পা, ঠুংরি, গজল
মানুষ তুমি, তুমিই তো শিখেছো বাসতে ভালো।

তবু কেন এত দ্বন্দ্ব, এত ঘৃণা ভয় ?
শ্রেষ্ঠজীব, ভালোবেসেই তো তুমি কর সব জয়।
তবু কেন ভুলে যাও, তোমার এ শ্রেষ্ঠ অনুভূতি ?
ভালোবেসেছি, মানুষ আমি ।

September 2003

Deriving Under Influence

by Rajarshi Das

"What do you think?"

"Uh...huh?"

The cat had jumped down from the sofa and was making his way to the kitchen, eyeing me constantly. I was briefly distracted.

"...about her mom?" Deep finished off his glass with a gulp.

"She's a nice lady." That was the best I could come up with since I couldn't remember her face.

"What about her features?" Deep poured himself another drink.

"What about them?" I was curious to know where all this was leading to. I sipped on my drink!

"I always felt they resembled a primate... And when we were ruffling through her family album at her place on Christmas Eve, I asked her whether she had an African ancestor. That got her all fired up!"

He could've gotten himself sued, I thought to myself. The cat was back from the kitchen, trotting lazily, eyes fixed on me, assessing my movements. It was creepy!

I had come down to Maryland on a long weekend to Deep's place. As usual, we were having intellectual "adda" sessions every night. Last night we had an intense discussion about the diminishing size of rossogollas back home. In five years, rossogollas would be the same size as 'nokuldanas' Deep had concluded! Tonight was different. A couple pegs of Jack Daniels' had forced Deep into deep introspections about his recent break-up. Now, I am not good at handling people lamenting on break-ups. Worse, I knew the girl! Something told me that could result in a longer session. Probably my sixth sense, since the other five had called it a day after two drinks.

"She started shouting and throwing tantrums, and that's when I made the second mistake."

"What mistake?" I was thinking hard.

"I told her she was behaving like a primate herself.... literally she was jumping around then!"

Deep's voice was serious. I tried to look away, to suppress a laugh. And then, I spotted the cats! All three had crept very close and were staring at me. I felt uneasy. Deep's landlady had gone to visit her daughter on the west coast leaving her three cats to guard the house. Knowing my "affection" for cats, Deep had tactfully avoided mentioning this fact till I had stepped inside the house. The three creatures had greeted me with disdain. From that moment on, wherever I went, three pairs of eyes had followed my every move. The relationship had gone bitter after I had accidentally stumbled on one of the cats at night. I had earnestly hoped that they would forgive and forget! But tonight, from their body language, it was apparent that nothing was forgotten lest pardoned. I could sense a conspiracy in the air. I felt distressed!

"And she wouldn't talk to me after that...especially when she found out that I had a drink before I had gone up to her place," Deep kept on rambling.

"How?" My attention momentarily shifted from the cats.

"I told her! I thought she would soften up knowing it wasn't me...I was simply not myself then, I was under influence!" Deep was remorseful. I couldn't quite agree. I have noticed most Indian women to take up this issue the same way they perceived teenage pregnancy.

"That was a big mistake! You know how she hates alcohol after her dad's incident!" Deep continued.

"Which incident?" I knew her dad had quite a few up his sleeve. In fact, her mom had threatened to leave her dad and had only stayed back after he cancelled his monthly "khata" (subscription) at the local bar.

"Couple of his friends challenged him to stand on one foot at the office party... to prove he wasn't drunk."

"And?" I wondered.

"Poor guy...he eventually succeeded... three hours after the party was over. All through the party, they were making fun of him."

"He tried really hard". I felt pity for her dad.

"Such friends...you wish they were your enemies."

"Hmmm..." I couldn't agree more.

"Her mom packed her bags and left soon after."

"Ohh!" I didn't know what to say. It was probably not good but on the brighter side her dad could now start his monthly "khata" again.

"So she broke off with you??" It was time to return to the original story.

"Yeah!" Deep let out a sigh!

I rose to get some water but stopped midway! I froze!!! The cats were right there at my feet...ready to pounce...I couldn't move!

"SHOOO..." Deep came to my rescue. The cats scampered off to a safe distance. I scurried to the kitchen. While returning, I noticed to my dismay that the cats were back. Somehow they had sworn to get me tonight. An attack was imminent!

"Should we go get some sleep now?" I suggested. I would rather surrender to bed than to these four-legged creatures.

"You can't stay with women and you can't stay without them either!" Deep languished.

I was perplexed. But I could sense the melancholy in his voice. I also presumed "you" meant himself.

"Hmm...best would be to get used to the fact", I added on. I wasn't sure whether that made sense.

"And this alcohol! It makes you feel so confident of your thoughts and actions! I was convinced she had to have an African ancestor. I was literally *deriving* under the influence at that time" Deep was going through mixed emotions. Poor guy, he was truly in love... this time!

"And for a DUI offense, you aren't supposed to get capital punishment" Deep went on. He was clearly miserable.

"True. But I guess she had seen some extreme DUI at home and hence wasn't ready to deal with it anymore," I reasoned. I stood up. It was definitely time to get to bed... with the cats hovering around and now Deep getting the blues. Deep looked at me. He was visibly hurt since he needed me to listen and I wasn't helping him on that. But he didn't complain. We went to bed.

It was only the next morning when I was packing my stuff that I discovered a moth hiding in my t-shirt; the same shirt I was wearing the previous night. Then it struck me! Last night, the cats had spotted the insect and had got curious! Guess they tried to sneak in, to catch it!

On the way to the airport, I mentioned this small discovery to Deep and how I had misjudged the cats and had literally panicked last night.

"Well, my friend, you were 'deriving under influence'. In your case you were silent... in control! On Christmas Eve, I wasn't!"

There was nothing more to say.

Desire of an Aged Father

by P.N. Ghosh

Why?

by Dr. Tushar K. Ray

What are those five pigeons up to?
Sitting on the high tension wire?
Just contemplating under the sunny sky?
Or taking a quick nap?
Don't know what or why
But wait, the sixth one just joined in
Making the rest fully alert all on a sudden
And all became airborne in a moment
Under the cheerful sky
Amid the silent music of morning glory!
And I suddenly realized, why

January 7, 2006

If I were a mighty young bird
And had mighty wings one pair,
I would fly high up in the blue sky
With none to stop me going there.
I shall speed away towards the west
Across the Atlantic Ocean to the USA,
To see my only son at Irvine,
Who is there for a three-month stay.

Going near the window of his room,
I shall perch on the branch of a tree,
He will look at me in wonder,
And say, "Hi, dad! You came here to see me?"

My absence will frighten my dear wife,
Both her eyes will be full of tears,
I shall sweep down by her side
And throw away my pair of wings.

November 20, 2000

Fun in Snow

by Dr. Tushar K. Ray

How could Lucy Mala have so much fun?
Holding cold snow ball in her tiny bare hand
Defeating the bitterness of the biting cold
When parents and gramma anxiously
behold!

She is fully carefree with her fun ball of
snow

Giving it the last bit of mind she has got
Her eyes are gleaming with immense fun
And her tongue is about to feel it on
kneeling

Each cell of her body has joined this game
Without the slightest clue what is about to
come

In moment like this she is her own
comparison

Being in spontaneous fun she is beyond
reason!

January 11, 2006



Lucy Mala Ray (22 Mo) with Mom
and Gramma, Rochester, NY, 1/9/06



Pure Fun in Snow

by Dr. Tushar K. Ray

Lo and behold!

In Lucy's fun-seeking infant body
No more fun she can uphold!
Fun is bubbling out spontaneously
Like a spewing spring, so obviously
That she is oblivious of the obvious
That the snow is stinging cold!

But who cares when fun is there
To be enjoyed in full
Then nothing else does really matter
As there is no more mental chatter
The brain becomes then fully busy
In cherishing the heart-feel!
This art of enjoying pure fun
The children know it well

Here, what you see is what you get
Without the intellectual veil
Their head, heart and spirit is one
So their fun is nothing but fun
Their show of fun is a genuine tale
Not just any show and tell

January 13, 2006

Winner

by Amitava Bhattacharya

It was a gorgeous sunny morning in an early winter day. Standing on the first tee, with the driver in his hand, Sourav Roy scanned the view ahead of him. The light green fairway lined by tall trees at places, and with a couple of sand traps strategically located at the edges, lay ahead for a few hundred yards and then disappeared to the left. Straight-ahead about a mile away, a series of copper-toned, rounded, rocky buttes were gleaming in the slanting rays of the morning sun. "This is a perfect place and a day for a round of golf, and I am going to play my best today," Sourav said to himself.

The three teammates were known to him. Ramesh Chopra, who had a similar job in another department of the same company, was a friend of his with whom he played golf quite often. Vikram Lal was a sly looking man, who had some social connections with Ramesh. Vikram was five years younger than Sourav, but had been more successful in his career, and had climbed one rung higher than him on the corporate ladder in another company. John Hunter was Vikram's friend, about the same age as him, and worked in a similar position as him in the same company. All four had met each other before through business or social occasions.

Ramesh had booked the tee time for 8:07 AM. Sourav arrived at the golf course thirty minutes in advance for some putting practice. Vikram arrived a few minutes after him. As Vikram got down from his Lexus, Sourav waved at him, "Good morning!"

"Hello, Sourav. How are you doing?" Vikram responded with an air of dignity as he walked over. "Others are in?"

"Not yet." Sourav eyed at a hole ten yards away, and looked for a line for the right putt.

"Good Morning. How you gentlemen are doing today?" Both were startled as a beaming John Hunter approached from his car.

"Good Morning, John." Vikram modulated his voice to sound truly pleasant.

"Are we all here?"

"We are still waiting for Ramesh."

"Ah, the key man is missing!"

"I am here." Ramesh could be seen emerging from the shade of a small tree in the parking lot.

"Let us go inside and pay," Ramesh proposed.

"Sure, let us do that," John concurred. All four went into the clubhouse for making the payment.

The keys for the two carts were picked up by Vikram and John from the counter – appropriating the unwritten privilege for undisputed leaders, to drive the cart.

Vikram and John looked at the key tags – numbers 19 and 20. They came outside and loaded their bags on carts 19 and 20 and took the driver seats. Ramesh picked up his bag, pondered for a few seconds and then loaded his bag on John's cart. Sourav followed, and placed his bag in the vacant

spot at the rear of Vikram's cart. All four were now seated in the two carts. Soon the loud speaker blared out, "On deck, Chopra foursome." The two carts started rolling and stopped behind a white line marked on the path. They would have to wait for a few minutes.

"You play here often?" Vikram asked.

"Not that much. But, yes I've played here a few times," Sourav informed.

"I normally play at Mountain Ranch Country Club. But, I am too busy at work to play much."

Sourav did not find a suitable comment, and remained silent.

"It's a nice place – isn't it?" John asked cheerfully.

"Yeah, and a perfect day for golf," Ramesh enthusiastically replied.

"The place looks good! I would like to play here more in the future."

"Sure, we can arrange for it any time."

The loud speaker boomed, "On the tee, Chopra foursome." The carts started rolling and came to the first tee. All four got down and marched forward with driver in hand. Vikram took the first shot. The ball went a good distance, but went off the fairway and settled on the right between some large trees. Sourav's shot was better. The ball went a little shorter distance but settled on left inside the fairway. John took his shot, which was not as good as he does normally. The ball went a good distance but landed between some trees on left of the fairway. Ramesh hit straight and the ball went a little further than John's and stopped at the right edge of the fairway.

The carts started rolling again. Ramesh expected John to go to his own ball first, which went a shorter distance than his. But, John was too courteous and drove to Ramesh's ball first and let him take his second shot. Both of them then drove towards John's ball. Vikram was driving the cart full speed. Soon Sourav's ball was visible on the left. He expected Vikram to drive to his ball first as it went a shorter distance. But, the cart headed full steam towards Vikram's ball. Sourav became edgy. "I am there," he pointed to his ball. The cart stopped. "Alright, take your club and go to the ball," Vikram instructed. A sullen Sourav picked up a club and started a long walk to the ball.

Sourav took his second shot. The ball rose in a nice curve and landed on the middle of the fairway a good distance ahead. Vikram took his second shot, which was quite a lousy one. The ball hit a tree, failed to get on the fairway, and landed some distance ahead among the trees. Sourav looked at Vikram. He was racing the cart towards his own ball, instead of coming back to him. Sourav gnashed his teeth and started walking towards his ball. When he reached there, he saw Vikram taking shot after shot in his desperate attempt to get out of the maze of the trees. Sourav stood near his ball and kept on counting Vikram's shots. He was waiting for Vikram to come back to him, to let him pick up a right club for his third shot. Vikram finally got out of the maze, as his ball landed in the fairway, further ahead of Sourav's. But, to Sourav's horror, the cart was racing towards Vikram's ball. "I need my clubs," Sourav yelled. The cart changed its direction and came near Sourav.

Vikram was glaring at Sourav. "You don't have your clubs?"

"How can I have them? The bag is in the cart." Sourav tried to maintain his calm.

"Alright take whatever you need."

Sourav picked up a pitching wedge and a putter for his next shots, as he discounted the possibility

of Vikram's following the rules of the game and being courteous.

Vikram drove the cart towards his ball. Sourav took his third shot, which landed at the edge of the green about twenty five yards from the hole. He started walking towards his ball. Vikram's next shot landed in a sand trap forcing him to take two shots to get out of there. Finally all four were on the green. Vikram made a long putt, and to the cheers of others, the ball went straight into the hole. Others were not that lucky, and ended up taking two or three putts to the hole. All four came back to the carts. Ramesh pulled out the score card and said, "Scores please."

"Five," was a prompt reply from Vikram.

"Nice, Vikram, you made a par." John congratulated. "Mine is seven."

"Did he make a par? I counted, it was eight," Sourav said under his breath to Ramesh.

"Yeah, I too think so. Let it go." Ramesh said resignedly. "Mine is six."

"Mine is six too," Sourav reported.

All took their seats in the carts and headed towards the next tee. "Who is your boss?" Vikram asked?

"Bill Clark," Sourav replied.

"Oh, I know that guy. I met him once in a conference. He likes to talk quite a bit with others."

"Yes, he does."

"He asked me to see if I could hire a guy who was just out from MIT. But, I don't hire anyone from such schools. They think they are too great and know everything. I keep a tight rein on my guys. They have to obey me and respect me."

"That is good," Sourav's voice was feeble.

"Are you gentlemen pretty busy at work now a days?" John asked.

"Yes, we are," Ramesh replied.

"I met Robert Jones the other day. He is your Manager, I guess. He told me that his group is doing some important work and that he has a talented bunch of people. I know very well the value of good people. It all depends on the talent and effort of the people in the group. The Manager can only coordinate their efforts. You individuals are really doing a great job."

"Thank you," Ramesh politely accepted the compliments.

It took about four and half hours to complete the eighteen holes. While driving back to the clubhouse, Ramesh started totaling the scores. When the carts stopped, all four got down. "Would you gentlemen like to know your scores?" Ramesh asked.

"Yes," replied Vikram standing near his cart few yards away.

"Vikram – 86, I have 89, John – 89, Sourav – 91."

"Alright Vikram, you are the winner!" John's cheerful voice resonated.

"You too play very well, John!" Vikram's humility towards John was touching. But, his tight lips could not conceal the satisfaction and self-confidence that radiated from them.

"Add twenty points to his score," Sourav murmured to Ramesh.

"I know!" Ramesh snickered.

"Give me a call, when you want to play again," Vikram directed his words towards Ramesh.

"No way! Not in a hundred years." Sourav muttered.

"Thank you all for the game," he said aloud.

He looked ahead. The copper-tone buttes were now streaked with sun and shade.

"It is still a nice day!" Sourav said to himself, as he picked up his bag and headed for his car.

Silicon "Valley"

by Rana Dasgupta

Friday darkens and tests fail,
The foggy day decays and falls...
The dog sits waiting in the northwest rain.
The chasm of silicon widens,
And software cannot breach.
Yong Li and I wait,
For Inspiration,
Starbucks,
And a fix...

Google

by Rana Dasgupta

Google, Google
Happening thing...
Search, an answer
To everything
Fairy tale
Fashion mail...
Happy, zippy
Computing



Cartoons provided by Soumya Biswas

Those little,
little things
that make
“back home” so
special...

Songs of Tagore

Translated by Anandamayee Majumdar

Madhobi hothat kotha hotey elo

Amar shonar Bangla ami tomay bhalobashi

Madhobi, the young spring flower
is in a rush to leave
as soon as it arrives
in a sudden wave of splendour.

I love you dearly,
My golden Bengal -
It is your skies and your air that
Forever fill my heart
With the resonance of a flute.

No,no! - cry the leaves
as they dance to the fresh blossom.
The stars in the heavens
beckon to the flower,
Won't you hurry along?
We need you so!

The wondrous smells of the mango orchards
Thrill me in Spring
And in the harvest,
I see lush paddy fields
Sway like gentle smiles..

But the the leaves encircle her and insist,
No,no,don't leave us!

I have witnessed such beauty,depth
And such tenderness

The southern breeze blows past
and murmurs,Come with me little one!
..Far away the infinite blue sinks into the lap of
the dusk.

In you,
In the shades that you gently spread
Across the river banks
And beneath the mighty trees..

The night of the full moon recedes;
No time left for us my dear!

And when you speak,
Your words enchant

No ! Please no!
say the dancing leaves
as they throng around the disappearing flower.

My being,
And when you cry inwardly,
I can not withhold my tears...

Kana Hashir Dol Dolano

In the cycle of tears and laughter
winter and spring-
I shall bear my offering of songs
through my life.

Is it in your pleasure
that I wear this garland
-- so fragrant with melodies?

Is it why I am sleepless ?
And why oceanic tides break open all
gates?
Is it why crazy winds blow in waves
through the forest of my ceaseless pains?

And all my lights and shadows tremble
in that current?

I have prepared no nest for the night-fall
I falter in my tasks of the day;
But there is no repose in my taskless service
Where could I find Peace in this Universe?
It is the Peacelessness that strikes the chords
And rings them in tune.
And thus my soul and spirit
Burn to enkindle songs.

Is it in your pleasure
that I wear this garland
--so fragrant with melodies?

Lost in Utopia

by Rupanjana Sengupta

Watching the movie *“Lost in translation,”* I saw the heroine listlessly roaming the city of Tokyo, halfhearted interest in all, filling her mind with every thing foreign, making her own void grow deeper. Her alienation with her new surroundings lessened her sense of belonging, engulfing her emptiness with boredom and nostalgia. That was something I experienced twelve years ago when I came to this country in search of a home. Time rolls on and you get used to the surroundings. One upgrades from an apartment to a house, from being married to being married with children. Our new roots get nurtured with our present day memories filling in our abyss. One starts to yield to one’s own story, among new people, a new country and the new system pursuing our American dream. Your hopes and dreams grow stronger. You think you live a perfect life. You feel invincible in this system.

I remember a play I had once acted in, named *“The Killer”* by Eugene Ionesco. It was about a man's quest to find a home and a community for himself in a metropolis. You follow the journey of an anonymous lay person in his search for the serial killer who is emptying the city's streets and houses with astonishing speed and efficiency, killing and instilling fear. In India I had asked “Why this play? There are no elements in it that the audience can identify with! We don’t live in utopian surroundings; we don’t get to hear of murder knocking at the door so close to home.” Today, though, I have come to feel fear in this utopia called America. Why do I feel this way? Well, let me tell you why! No! These narratives are not fiction! Unfortunately they are based on facts, and are true-life stories.

Bailey and Shanayaa are my daughters’ friends. One is seven and the other five. Mostly they play with my younger daughter. They regularly visit with their grandparents who are my neighbors. I see them gallivanting through the neighborhood often and at various odd hours. I used to wonder sometimes, just like a typical Bengali mother would, where is their mother? They are always outside... do they eat at proper times? They are so unkempt...somebody should tie their hair, make them wear proper winter clothes or they might catch a cold. So one day I asked Bailey “where is your mother? I don’t see her.” The seven year old answered nonchalantly, “my mother was murdered two years ago.” I was so aghast at the answer and the coldness of acceptance I couldn’t say a word. Somebody took a precious life away from these kids...took away their mother. These little kids have learnt to live without her...they had to. The killer out there in utopian America did not give them an option.

Then there was Al. He was the pesticide guy and I got to see him every month. Through the years I had gotten acquainted with him. He was an older guy, about sixty, probably my dad’s age, and walked with a limp. He used to pull these heavy pipes to spray my backyard. At first guilt made me offer him tea and then it became a ritual. His daughter was my age and he was my dad’s age -- a commonplace bond for friendship. One day Al said his wife ran away with a younger man to New York. He seemed quite heart broken, on the rebound he had gotten himself a girlfriend. When he came over the next month, I noticed his limp was more pronounced and he had dyed his hair hot pink. I asked, “What’s up Al? You are way past your mid life crisis! Grow up, man!” He said he had to go to a bar with his girlfriend and of course the dancing had taken its toll on his leg. My Indian

intuition was to give him a sweet-coated pill called “advise.” I suggested he should call up his old wife since this new relationship was quite taxing if not on the emotions but definitely on his legs and hair. Perhaps if they got back together, we could all say, “halleluia! Alls well that ends well!” I told him that every thing in life has its own right moment. If felt if he stretched it too far he might have a heart attack keeping up with this girl. Al did not show up the next month. Instead, his partner, Bill, showed up. Bill said, “Al couldn’t make it because he’s dead. He was shot at point blank range in a parking lot. His girlfriend and her current boyfriend were being questioned.” God! And Al thought he had found his true love. The killer did not give Al any option...just took away his life. I don’t ask Bill to join me for tea. At least if the attachment isn’t there you don’t feel the pinch and, after all, we humans are selfish.

Then there was the recent murder of Murad Bhai. He was tall, with a smiling face and a mild personality. Simply put, he was “a nice guy.” Whether it was a political or social conversation, his wife and children always cropped up in the discussion. I imagined they were very important to him and vice versa. He was idealistic; he wanted to bring the Asian community together. As the publisher of the bi-monthly “Asian Magazine,” he wanted his magazine to encompass all the Asian community, be it Korean, be it Pakistani, be it Chinese, be it Tibetan, be it Sri Lankan, be it Bangladeshi, or be it Indian. His idealism got to me and I promised to write for his magazine. On the 7th of January, 2006 I had an extensive chat regarding the magazine. That was the last time I would ever talk to him. He was murdered on the 9th of January, 2006. Murad bhai owned quite a few condos and apartments in the university area that he would rent out. Two young guys, one 19 and another 20, had checked him out and had wrongly concluded that Murad Bhai was a rich man. The killers answered his advertisement for renting an apartment and set up an appointment with him then they went out and bought a metal pipe and a knife. This was completely premeditated. These guys had a plan. On the morning of the 9th., Murad Bhai, being the nice guy that he was, picked the so-called potential renters up in his Mitsubishi Montero and took them to the empty apartment he had for rent. The inevitable happened -- they beat him up brutally and slashed him mercilessly. Murad Bhai died a cruel and torturous death. The killers did this in a lived-in neighborhood, in the congested Tempe University area in the middle of the morning and nobody had an inkling. The killers took away a husband from his wife and a father from a 6-year-old and a 13-year-old. Murad Bhai was only 45. He lost his life for a Mitsubishi Montero and his paltry credit cards. Life is so cheap in this utopian country.

Fear is a strong emotion. It messes up your thoughts and the strength to take on challenges. Negative worry makes you weaker. When the doorbell rings I peep from the “charulata styled” window to see if the person at the door could be a killer. I don’t give strangers a chance. I look over my shoulders to see if there are any killers lurking in the parking lot. I am over-protective about my children since the mug shots of small pretty little girls lost in this utopia are numerous. Shouldn’t American thinking propagate this truth? That the most important freedom is freedom from harm from others? I miss the naivety of my statement back at home “We don’t get to hear murder knocking at the door so close to home.” I lived in India longer than I have lived in the USA, yet I am aware of three such incidents so close to home. In India, I never experienced this! I don’t recall being fearful of strangers in India. I don’t like the feeling of despair. That’s what I miss back at home, the naive innocence and the trust.

“Only when we are no longer afraid we begin to live.” -- Dorothy Thompson.

Memories of Another Day

(A blend of fiction and fact through the eyes of Sujit Sanyal)

His fingers desperately raked the ground. There was that undeniable sense of urgency hanging thick in the air on that early spring morning - you could almost touch it. The job had to be done. And there wasn't much time to finish it. It would be a photo finish if at all. The soft muddy bottom of that huge hole in the ground bore multiple scratch marks – of pickaxe and fingers – all laboring in vain to find that elusive water connection. It was early morning and we kids had sneaked out of our houses to witness the *taamasha* first hand, as it unfolded. There were others too, at least one representative from each household stood rooted to the spot, faces gaunt.

In keeping with the mood, everybody would only whisper his or her apprehensions. Nobody dared to talk aloud lest that perpetrate failure. It was guilt by association; as for no reason, the kids felt guilty for what had happened. In the fog of combined anxiety, our hearts went out for Apu-da. He was working hunched in that cramped hole for hours, muddled and sweating despite the morning cool. It was a race against time. The threat of becoming a laughing stock was very real.

What would Jhuma-di say when she sees the mess? That was a concern some had mouthed. The mere mention of her name had an electrifying effect on the man down under. His pickaxe started attacking the side of the hole at a feverish pitch. Wasn't he supposed to have contacted the guy at Calcutta Corporation's Water Department to get the job done? He didn't, or rather couldn't. How could he ignore her urgent summons? She had decided to skip school the day before and had demanded that he chaperon her to a matinee show.

Half way through the movie, he realized his folly. There was no way he could drop her off at home and then reach the Corporation office in time to catch the G-man. He had exercised bad judgment. What else could he do? It would be insane to turn her down. On his way back, he did the most logical thing he could ill afford – hire a taxi to drop her off and then race to the local Corporation office. Inquiring about his point man, the durwan lazily looked up at the wall clock and all Apu-da got was a caustic sneer. That was how he literally sank into the hole of his current predicament!

It would have been a piece of cake had the Corporation guy connected the roadside outlet to the pipe that had been laid out. But Apu-da had goofed up big time. Damn that water connection! He cursed and swore at the idiots who had laid out the pipes. Only the government would hire such imbeciles he muttered, as the situation below the ground began worsening. The water started leaking at multiple points. Not gushing, but enough to form a small puddle. The British *Raj* pipes couldn't take the beating.

It was Pinaki-da's grand plan to erect a waterfall as a centerpiece of attraction – a circular water fountain of a dozen feet in diameter, flanked by two rectangular holding tanks of approximately the same size. The holding tanks were to have colored fish swimming in each. The fountain, because of the motor, would have to do with rubber ducks. He had studiously planned the whole thing and supervised the erection of a two-foot high wall around the circle and its accompanying rectangles. Colored accent lights were laid out at strategic points around the wall, to dazzle the viewer in the evening darkness. Pinaki-da was our *para's* version of Ramases II.

The newly white washed walls shimmered, and to our unseen eyes, it simply looked grand. The work was held up because Pinaki-da couldn't get hold of the water pump and the spray mechanism. The decorator had let him down; he was promised delivery forty-eight hours ago but that didn't happen. It wasn't available in the market, not even at Chadni Chowk. The water connection had to wait for the contraption to be put in place. It was finally delivered last evening and was quickly bolted to the center of the circle. Success now hinged on coaxing water to flow through to the contraption!

At the pace things were going, Pinaki-da's masterpiece would soon be a non-functioning eyesore, right in front of the *pandal* for all to see. Not only that, with the passage of time, the underground leak was casting dampness in the soil in ever-widening circles. It now threatened the creation of a sinkhole close to the fountain wall, which in time would threaten to suck it in. Titanic sinking!

The practice beat of the *dhaak* came to our ears. It sounded like the harbinger of impending doom! As if to complete the cacophony, the *kashor ghonta* started adding the steady stream of metallic tang-tang-a-tang. From my vantage point at the top of the freshly dug earth accumulated around at the rim of the hole, I could see a column of pale blue-white smoke rising from a *dhunuchi*, past the face of the Goddess of learning, and onward towards the ceiling. She did not blink. Instead, her stare seemed transfixed at that hole in the ground. Right in front of me laid the Supreme and the wretched. Would she intervene I wondered? After all, this was all in her honor.

By the time the *Purohit* ended the *Puja* Apu-da had given up hope. He sat on the rim, his legs dangling inside and a vacant look on his face. He was eating *prasad* out of a paper bag, oblivious of his dirty hands. The man was sitting alone, that is, till a boy with an urchin look approached for help – he wanted a bag for himself. Earlier, I had noticed the same lad being practically shooed away by those distributing the packets inside the *pandal*. Urchins have little chance when in company of ladies and gentlemen dressed in finery. For all his hard work, Apu-da had a consolation prize of an extra bag of *prasad*, the unopened one lying on a packing box by the side of the hole. Without thinking, he gave it away.

Either out of gratitude or sympathy, the boy decided to sit beside Apu-da. Taking in the futility of Apu-da's efforts, he suddenly blurted out that his father could fix the problem in a jiffy. Oh yeah? And just how would he do it? It's like this ... he works for the Corporation. Corporation? The Water Depart – an aberration of department. His name? Bablu Deb. B-a-b-l-u D-e-b! Apu-da jumped up as if kicked in the shin. Here was his point man's son. Instructing the boy not to move, he ran inside the *pandal*. Under a minute, he was back with a couple of packets in hand and the committee members in tow.

With a wide grin the boy sat perched on the cycle carrier. He was being ridden home to fetch his dad. A chap shooed away only minutes back was now treated like royalty – escorted by half dozen cycles. Later I had heard that Deb-babu was literally bundled and raced back. Barefoot and dressed in ill-fitting khaki shirt and shorts, his first protest was that it would be illegal to make the connection without office permission. The committee President sarcastically agreed, as illegal as that electric connection he said, pointing to the long cord that snaked its way to the nearest lamppost. Per him, utility services "diverted" for divinity was not illegal. Before Deb-babu could protest, the President promised him a generous sum and almost pushed him inside the pit, making clear that saying no was not an option.

Maybe the promise of money kicked Deb-babu into gear. He first attended to the small leaks with melted tar. The leaks stopped which sent our hopes rising. He then ordered bricks and stones to be laid inside the hole nearest the fountain wall, the rest with the earth that was already dug up. An army went into action and the ground was level in record time. The mood became vibrant. Deb-babu then started digging by the side of the pavement, some ten yards away from earlier sinkhole. He barely dug a foot in the earth to reveal the coveted joint and the metal stop-cork. Jaws fell. Without thinking, everybody was on a wild goose chase based on hearsay. Nobody had bothered to check it out first.

With the army still at his beck and call, Deb-babu finished connecting the fountain pipe to the city water supply, in under an hour. The end was in sight. Confidence had returned in our hearts. You could tell by the gingerly steps of the committee members as they moved about barking orders. *Barowari Puja* in action. With the gloom lifted, cheer spread through the crowd like a contagious flu. After a final check of electrical and water connection, Deb-babu was ready to turn on the water. Hysteria was reaching a feverish pitch. The *dhaakis* refused to be left out and made their presence felt striking wood against leather in a frenzied action. Who other than Jhuma-di would have thought of the idea of blowing a conch? The pieces were in place, finally.

A double-handed flick was all that was required to send water shooting up the veins of the system. After a gurgle and initial hesitation, it shot straight up in the air and fell back like the first rain. A water mushroom sprung up from the ground to everybody's delight! A wild cheer went up. People were grinning silly just to relish the moment. The community dream had come true. Prayers have been answered. Incidentally, Deb-babu politely refused his remuneration. I don't know why. Was it the pat-in-the-back? The jubilation? Or was it the Goddess' unblinking stare? In service of *Bhagawan* was all he would say.



Cartoons provided by Soumya Biswas

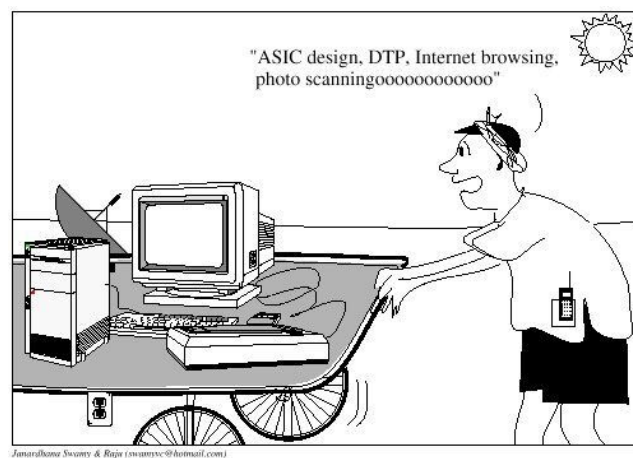
Home, Sweet Home!

by Tapan Ganguly

- When train reaches my home station and I see my sixty nine year old father walking briskly to see his first born son with tremendous joy in his face.
- When I see my aging mother and she kisses the forehead of my wife and her eldest grand child.
- When I pass the carton of “imported” cigarettes to my father and mothers pretend she didn’t see the whole transaction.
- When I lazily sit and watch my wife and sister-in-law cooking and my kid playing with his cousins in the hot MP morning/afternoon.
- When I go to the vegetable market with my father and watch him intensely negotiate the price of vegetables, fish or meat.
- When I plan my walk in the market so that I don’t step into cow dung or mud and also reach my destination safely without bothering a 600-b bull.
- When I catch up with my mother’s local gossip about the “para” and relatives.
- When my baby sister and I watch junky Hindi movies all night.
- When my brother and I roam around the city on his scooter and see our old school and meet old school friends.
- When I try to fix my father’s 20-year-old car and my father keeps interrupting with his expert advice (he has no knowledge of how an automobile functions).
- When my sisters/mother show us the hand made sweater they made for us spending huge amounts of time.
- When my brother and I sit in the railway station and try to guess the home station of each engine (Kharagpur, Jhansi, Itarsi etc). It is a very old game.
- When my mother-in-law tries to pamper me with fish curry and rice and my brother-in-laws are available to follow my every wish and command.
- When my wife serves the dinner in the AC 3 tier compartment of the train – luchi, alu dum, boiled eggs, misti and my mom’s special Nibbu bhat.
- When I have intense discussions with a total stranger on some very important topics, such as – future of Indo-US relations, or how India is superior to any world power.
- When I take the early morning ride from Howrah station to South Calcutta watching boats floating on Ganga, the brisk activities in Boro Bazar, the exercise freaks of the Maidan and finally, the religious activities of Kali Ghat, all in one trip.
- I hate to see my parents/relatives face when I board the train/plane to come back knowing what they are thinking.

The Milkman

Photograph by Jayanta Das



Cartoon provided by Soumya Biswas



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