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Bengali Cultural Association of Arizona, Fall 2006



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Bengali Cultural Association of Arizona

Fall, 2006

Ma Durga



Durga Puja, 2006
Sharodarghyo

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Durga Puja 2006 – Program

Saturday, September 30, 2006

9:00 AM Pujo starts
12:00 PM Pushpanjali
12:30 PM Prasad and Lunch
1:00 PM Quiz Competition
5:00 PM Jhalmuri & Tea
6:00 PM Cultural Program
9:00 PM Dinner

Sunday, October 1, 2006

9:00 AM Pujo starts
10:30 AM Children's Art Competition
12:00 PM Pushpanjali
12:30 PM Prasad and Lunch
2:00 PM Children's Variety Program
5:00 PM Arati and Dhunuchi Naach

Saturday, September 30, 2006 – Cultural Events & Activities

Children's Quiz Competition – Starts at 1 PM

All children between the ages of 8 and 17 interested in participating must sign-up by 11 AM at the Main Stage Area. Team sizes and assignment to teams will be determined based on actual sign-ups.

Quiz Masters: **Sandeep Bagchi** and **Benoy Saha**, assisted by **Sampriti Bagchi**

Evening Cultural Program – Starts at 6 PM

Bengali Songs by Kishore Kumar presented by **Sudhakar Gopal**.

A Medley of Bhajans and Classic Film Songs presented by **Pranav and Bina Mehta**, accompanied by **Shri Ramesh Kumar** on the tabla.

Bina and Pranav Mehta have been schoolmates and soulmates since childhood, at the famous shrine of Indian culture, Sheth C.N. Vidyalaya, Ahmedabad, where they developed a deep appreciation for Gujarati and Indian fine arts. Pranav, a computer engineer by profession, has been trained in music by distinguished masters. Bina, a Bachelor of Psychology, has also earned her "Visharad" in Indian Classical Music. Both have settled in the U.S. for the last ten years and have performed all over the country. Ramesh Kumar is one of the most sought-after tabla players in southern California. His father and teacher, Pandit Bansi Lal, was a prominent tabla player from Jaipur and comes from the tradition of Ala Rakha and Zakir Hussain.

Bengali Play – Octopus Limited by Mohit Chattopadhyay

Octopus Limited is a satire on the proliferation of commercial sponsorships everywhere...so sit back, relax, and enjoy a play about how two unemployed and dreamy lovers find themselves trapped within the tentacles of sponsored marital bliss!

Actors: Chele – **Soumya Biswas**, Meye – **Sampriti Bagchi**, Agent #1 – **Priyobrata Sinha**, Jyotishi – **Aniket Majumdar**, Marriage Registrar – **Sandeep Bagchi**, Mohila – **Sarbari Chowdhury**, Agent #2 – **Hoimonti Sinha**

Direction: **Prabir Chaudhury**, Soundtrack: **Debashis Chowdhury**, Production: **Debarpita Sen**

Sunday, October 1, 2006

Children's Art Competition – Starts at 10:30 AM

All children under 18 interested in participating must sign-up by 10 AM at the Main Stage Area.

Coordinator: **Sampri Bagchi**

Children's Variety Program – Starts at 2 PM

Master of Ceremonies – **Shristi Nayak**

Basabdatta

Dance and recitation based on Rabindranath Tagore's "Avisar."

Participants: **Royina Roy (6 yrs), Ruhika Roy (10 yrs)**

Recitation: **Ruma Roy and Shankar Roy**

Program Director: **Shankar Roy**

Dance Director: **Ruma Roy**

Phule Phule Dhole Dhole

The children describe the beautiful flowers and sweet chirping of birds in this popular Rabindrasangeet. The children range in age between 3 and 6 yrs old.

Participants: **Jigisha Bagchi (6 yrs), Somashree Biswas (5 yrs), Isha Chakraborty (4 yrs), Neelam Runton (4 yrs), Rubica Runton (4 yrs), Prokriti Saha (3 yrs), Sanjana Sarkar (5 yrs)**

Arrangement: **Rajashi Runton and Rupali Kar**

Bengali Program Medley

Recitation

Participant: **Rounak Bhuniya (8 yrs)**

Megher Kole Rod Heseche

Participants: **Sanhita Garkipaty (5 yrs), Varna Bhat (5 yrs)**

Sohag Chand Badani

Participants: **Kavya Kumar (10 yrs), Varsha Bhat (10 yrs)**

Overall Program Coordinator: **Kasturi Bhuniya**

Instrumental Music

Participant: **Sonia Sen (13 yrs)**

Meera Bhajan

Participants: **Arpita Kundu (9 yrs)**

Sunday, October 1, 2006 – Children's Variety Program Continued

Program by the Bengali School of Arizona

Chorar Gaan O Naach

Participants: **Jigisha Bagchi (6 yrs), Gourab Banerjee (7 yrs), Anamika Basu (6 yrs), Somashree Biswas (5 yrs), Isha Chakraborty (4 yrs), Devashi Ghoshal (4 yrs), Divya Ghoshal (6 yrs), Royina Roy (6 yrs), Akash Samanta (7 yrs), Ipsha Banerjee (8 yrs), Dipro Chakraborty (10 yrs), Sruti Guhathakurta (9 yrs)**

Tabla: **Deepen Chakraborti**; Keyboard: **Barnali Banerjee**; Choreography and Direction: **Anita Banerjee**

Mawmo Chitte

Participants: **Ipsa Banerjee (8 yrs), Urvi Banerjee (8 yrs), Shilpika Chowdhury (12 yrs), Trisha Dasgupta (10 yrs), Sruti Guhathakurta (9 yrs), Ruhika Roy (10 yrs)**

Choreography: **Sutapa Barua**

Narration for the whole program: **Dipro Chakraborty (10 yrs)**

Program Coordinators: **Sanju Barua** and **Barnali Banerjee** on behalf of the **Bengali School of Arizona**

Thaye Yashoda

Dance is music made visible. This song, from the Bollywood movie "Morning Raga," is a prayer to the Hindu deity lord Krishna. This dance is a fusion of popular dance styles such as Bharatnatyam, Kathak and Hip Hop. Singers are : Kalyani Menon and Sudha Raghunathan

Participants: **Suravi Sengupta (11 yrs), Trisha Chaudhury (11 yrs)**

Choreography: **Trisha Chaudhury and Suravi Sengupta**

Bollywood Dance

Participants: **Trisha Ray (9 yrs), Sneha Ray (10 yrs), Samjhana Devkota (10 yrs)**

Arrangement: **Kanika Ray**

Chotoder Sholay

The famous Bollywood blockbuster comes to life again! Will Jay and Veeru be able to save little Ramgarh from the terrorizing grip of Gabbar Singh and restore Thakur's pride?

Participants: **Rohon Ray (6 yrs), Gourab Banerjee (7 yrs), Akash Samanta (7 yrs), Sanjana Sarkar (5 yrs), Sayok Datta (5 yrs), Barin Banerjee (6 yrs), Arnab Banerjee (4 yrs)**

Director: **Sharmistha Ray**

Assistant Directors and Costume Design: **Rekha Sarkar, Shampa Banerjee, Alodeepa Datta, Monideepa Banerjee, Soma Samantha**

Stage Decoration: **Abhijit Ray, Gautam Banerjee, Soma Samantha**

Tae Kwan Do Demonstration

Participants: **Abhik Chowdhury (10 yrs), Shilpika Chowdhury (12 yrs)**

Narration: **Sarbari Chowdhury**

Hindi Karaoke

Participants: **Eashan Das (6 yrs)**

Hindi Songs

Participant: **Meghna Kollengode (12 yrs)**

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Message from the Board...

Dear Community Members:

And in the wink of an eye, Durga Puja is here again! Sometimes you just can't help but shake your head in suspended disbelief at how fast time marches along! It seems like it was just the other day that we were working on getting everything organized for the 2006 Saraswati Puja, and now, already its time to get all those new clothes out, sift through all those happy memories of what the Pujas are like in Kolkata, remind ourselves of what a great time we make of it here in Phoenix every year, get the kids loaded into the vans, cars, and SUVs, and head to the Indo-American Religious and Cultural Center!

It's been a relatively "normal" year for the BCAA this year. We started the year out with celebrating Saraswati Puja, reading the latest issue of Bashontika, and watching an enjoyable cultural program put up primarily by the children of our community. The Saraswati Puja celebrations were followed by the Annual BCAA Picnic at the White Tank Mountains...again, we had a great turn-out, and people enjoyed some good food, and generally had a good time under decent weather conditions. After the picnic came the Rabindro-Nazrul Jayanti Celebrations. We had a packed house with standing room only this year at the Pima Hall...and community members enjoyed some wonderful programs on Nazrul and Rabindranath put together by our kids, and walked away with a smile on their faces after watching Tarapodo and Company!

In the middle of summer, none other than Usha Uthup graced our desert state, and added a wonderful touch of personal warmth to an otherwise merciless Phoenix sun. Unfortunately, because of her tour schedule, we ended up having her performance right in the middle of summer when a lot of our community members were on vacation. Those of us who were here in town and were able to attend, we believe enjoyed a wonderful evening of foot-stomping nostalgia, and were bowled over by Usha's unstoppable charm.

So, once again, its time for the Executive Committee for this year to begin to wrap up our act, and pass the baton on to the fresh new office-bearers for 2007. For our part, we tried

very hard to focus on efficiency and professionalism this year. We started out the year with a membership survey and tried to adhere to what the majority of our members said they would like to see. While we are sure we haven't been able to meet the expectations of each and every community member, we do hope we have been able to bring our events to the majority of you in a form and format that has been relatively hassle-free and enjoyable.

We sincerely hope you will have an absolutely wonderful Durga Puja celebration this year, and will come back for Lakshmi Puja in a couple of weeks. We owe a special thanks to Mr. and Mrs. Pranav Mehta for donating their incredible talent and time, and performing for us during the 2006 Durga Puja. Also, from the bottom of our hearts, we want to say thank you to all our community members who have participated in the various events this year, either in volunteering their time, or in being present to enjoy the event. Without your spirit and involvement our successes this year would not have been possible. Finally, we would also like to take this opportunity to wish the future Executive Committee members the very best and offer them our support as they shoulder the responsibility of guiding us through 2007.

Sincerely,

The 2006 Committee
Bengal Cultural Association of Arizona

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Cover design by Debarpita Sen.

Inside Front Page design by Somashree Biswas (5 years).

"Digibong" cartoons provided by Nivedita Guha.

Full color pdf version of this magazine can be downloaded from www.azbengal.org

Durga's Story

Compiled By Urna Mukhopadhyay and S. Urmila Majumdar for

www.anandautsav.com

Once upon a time, there lived a Prince in Ayodhya, Rama, who was banished to the forest by his father. He roamed the forest with his wife Sita and his brother. Once upon a time, there lived in Lanka a king called Ravana. Ravana abducts Sita and Rama is furious, but helpless. A war begins, but to no avail. Ravana is a devout follower of Shiva and nothing can vanquish him. So Rama does what any astute army general of olden days has done since time immemorial. He approaches Shiva's wife, the Goddess Durga, requesting her blessing and a good word to Shiva on Rama's behalf. The request takes the shape of a puja - Durga Puja, out of season. The fact is Durga Puja, also known as Basanti Puja, is held in spring. But Rama cannot wait, so he makes preparation for Durga's puja in the middle of autumn. This is the puja that has come down through the ages and is referred to as Akal Bodhan.



Ram performs Akal Bodhan

Anyway, to get back to the story, Goddess Durga, herself a power to reckon with, can hardly be appeased without much ado. Rama gets 108 blue lotuses to conduct the ceremony. Just as he is about to begin, he discovers one blue lotus is missing. He sets out to get the last flower, but strange are the ways of the gods. He searches heaven and earth, but there is not another blue lotus to be found. Frustrated, he returns, and starts to offer one of his eyes which have often been compared to a blue lotus. Needless to say, the missing flower was hardly missing. Goddess Durga had removed it to test Rama. Now that she has had proof of his devotion she returns the flower. Rama completes the ceremony and eventually succeeds in defeating Ravana.

Then there is, of course, the story behind the actual Durga Puja. The demon Mahishasur, another devotee of Shiva, is creating havoc, but he is blessed by the Supreme Lord and cannot be defeated by any man. So the gods, strategic geniuses as they were, form a conglomerate. Goddess Durga emerges armed with all the arsenal the gods can provide. Naturally, this is a bit too much for Mahishasur. He succumbs. Durga is triumphant.

This story merges with the story of Durga Puja popular among Bengalis, namely, the daughter Durga's return to her father's house. Mother Menoka eagerly awaits her daughter's visit. All this finds expression in the Agamani songs of Bengal sung during this festive season.

Durga in Bengal

Durga, the emblem of female power or Shakti, appears to us since Vedic times. We find a female goddess astride a lion on seals from Mohenjodaro and Harappa. Today, Durga Puja has reached a zenith of popularity in Bengal, although it is celebrated with a great deal of fanfare in states like Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Jharkhand and Bihar. Yet, the history of the Durga Puja is shrouded in obscurity. There is controversy about the advent of this puja in Bengal.

According to one school of thought, Raja Kangshanarayan Roy of Tahirpur started the worship of this deity towards the end of the sixteenth century. According to another, the first Durga Puja took place in 1606 and the gentleman responsible was Bhabananda Majumdar of Nadia.

Calcutta's oldest



The Sovabazar Rajbari puja started in 1757 to celebrate Robert Clive's victory in the Battle of Plassey. This puja is held even today

It is held that the oldest puja in Calcutta took place in Baghbazar. It was started by Prankrishna Haldar almost 400 years ago. The image was carved in black stone known as *kastipathar* in Bengali. In this puja Durga is accompanied not by her children but by her two companions Jaya and Bijoya. Historical records show the first Durga Puja took place near Barisha in 1610 conducted by Lakhsmikanta Roy Majumdar of the family of Sabarna Roy Choudhuri. The Sabarna Roy Choudhuri family was the owner of three villages Sutanuti, Govindapur and Kolikata. Subsequently, these three villages merged to form the city of Calcutta. So, the 1610 Puja of Sabarna Roy Choudhuri is considered to be among the oldest Pujas of Calcutta.

As years went by prominent families of Calcutta began their own Durga Puja celebrations. For instance, the Bhattacharyas of Baisnavghata, the Ghosh family of Pathuriaghata and yet another family of Ghoshes of Thanthaniya have been celebrating Durga Puja for over 300 years. In 1757 Raja Nabakrishna Deb started the

Pujas as a victory celebration. He had helped Robert Clive in the battle of Plassey. This puja is held even today and is the famous Sovabazar Rajbari Pujo. Soon the Mitras of Darjeepara and the Duttas of Hatkhola and others nicknamed, ChatuBabu-LatuBabu, joined the bandwagon. In short, Durga Puja flourished among the aristocratic families of north and south Calcutta.

This trend continued till the end of the 19th century. Durga Puja was essentially a family affair. Each family organising, conducting and financing the puja in which everybody from the locality and outside participated. The only exception was the puja of Gourimata Udyan. It was started by Gourimata, a disciple of Ramakrishna and a devoted companion of Sarada Devi. Gourimata established the Saradeswari Ashram in Baghbazar in 1895 and started the Durga Puja. This puja is performed even today. It does not have an idol; instead a Pata painting serves as the deity.

Barawari Pujo

The turn of the century saw a break from the tradition of family puja or Barir Pujo.

Bengal was now in the grip of a movement known as the Bengal Renaissance. The rigidity of orthodox religious and familial norms was weakening.

Aristocracy was gradually ceasing to be a holy word. Soon the most popular Bengali festival succeeded in breaking the fetters of the elite and became a festival organised, conducted and financed by all and sundry. In short Barir Pujo gave way to Barawari Pujo. Although a Barawari puja was held for the first time 120 years ago, this was not a Durga puja, but Jagaddhatri Puja. (As the story goes, a barir pujo in Guptipara, Hooghly, could not continue due to a shortage of funds; that was when 12 friends got together, pooled their resources and thus began the first *Baro Yaari* pujo, or the pujo of twelve *yaars* or friends.) The earliest Barawari Durga Pujas to be held in Calcutta were in Bhowanipore in the south, Simla Byam Samiti and Baghbazar in the north. All these pujas are held till date.

Today not all the pujas of Calcutta are Barawari nor are they all Barir Pujo. Today, we still have a few Barir Pujo and a large number of Barawari Pujo. The Barir Pujo are a close second to the Barawari in pomp and popularity.



The 1610 puja of Sabarna Roy Choudhuri is considered to be among the oldest in Calcutta

The Barawari Pujos are irresistible with their gorgeous idols, huge pandals glittering with a million chandeliers and scintillating display of lights.

The Barir Pujo may seem like a poor cousin next to the Barawari, but its riches are immense even though they may not be as glaringly obvious. On one hand, there is the richness of history and on the other the charm of the old world. Both these combine to make the Barir Pujo equally if not more attractive than the Barawari.



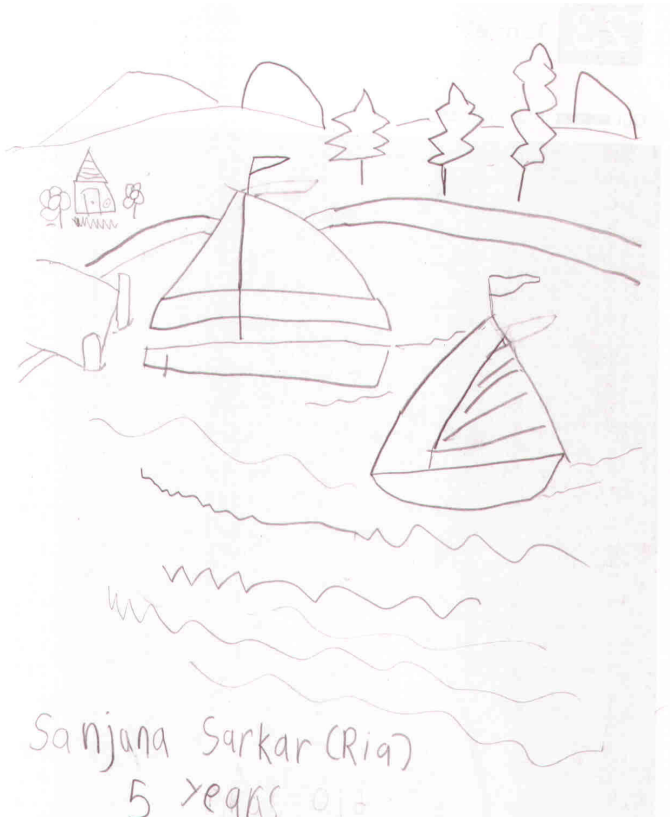
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Black

Aritro Majumdar (9 years)

Black is like an evil witch's hat
Black is like a scary spiky mat
I shiver a lot when black is near
When I look at black I fear
Black smells like something burned
Black is for chalkboard to learn
I taste terrific dark chocolate
I see a small black pocket
Black reminds me of Harry Potter
Black reminds me of dirty water



Sanjana Sarkar (5 years)



Anjali Sanyal (6 years)





Subhayon Bhattacharjee (4 years)

I Can't Write Poetry

Natasha Balasubramanian (8 years)

I can't write poetry
I have stinky feet
My hair is too ugly

My pencil has no lead
My paper is brown (which I hate)
I am very picky

I slept in
I am too dumb
My brain's at Mars

I'm eating candy bars!



DORA AND BOOTS



Urvi - Sat 1/7/8

Urvi Banerjee (7 years)

Scooby - Dooby - Doo!



Urvi 9/2/06

Urvi Banerjee (7 years)

My Sister

Arpita Kundu (6 years)

(1)

Sister sister food eater
Has a crazy face,
She laughs too much
Plays ball a lot and makes a big mess.

(2)

My Sister is good
My sister is cute,
My sister is crazy,
My sister is brave,
But she cries a lot when she bumps her head.

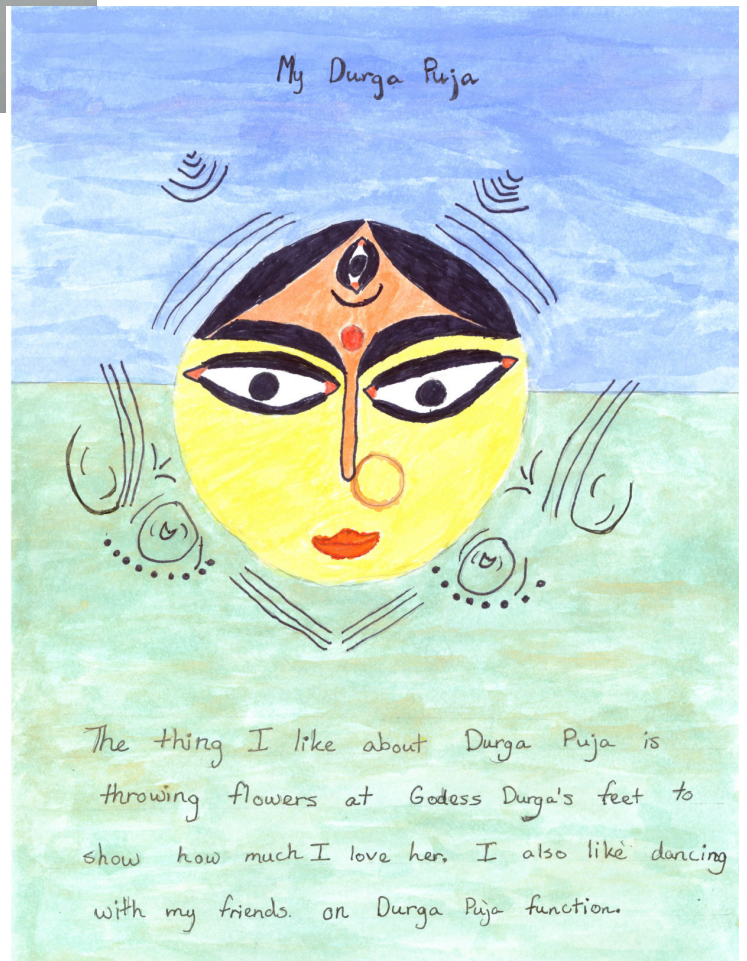


Royina Roy (4 years)



Tulip in Oil Pastel

Trisha Chaudhury (11 years)



Ipsha Banerjee (8 years)

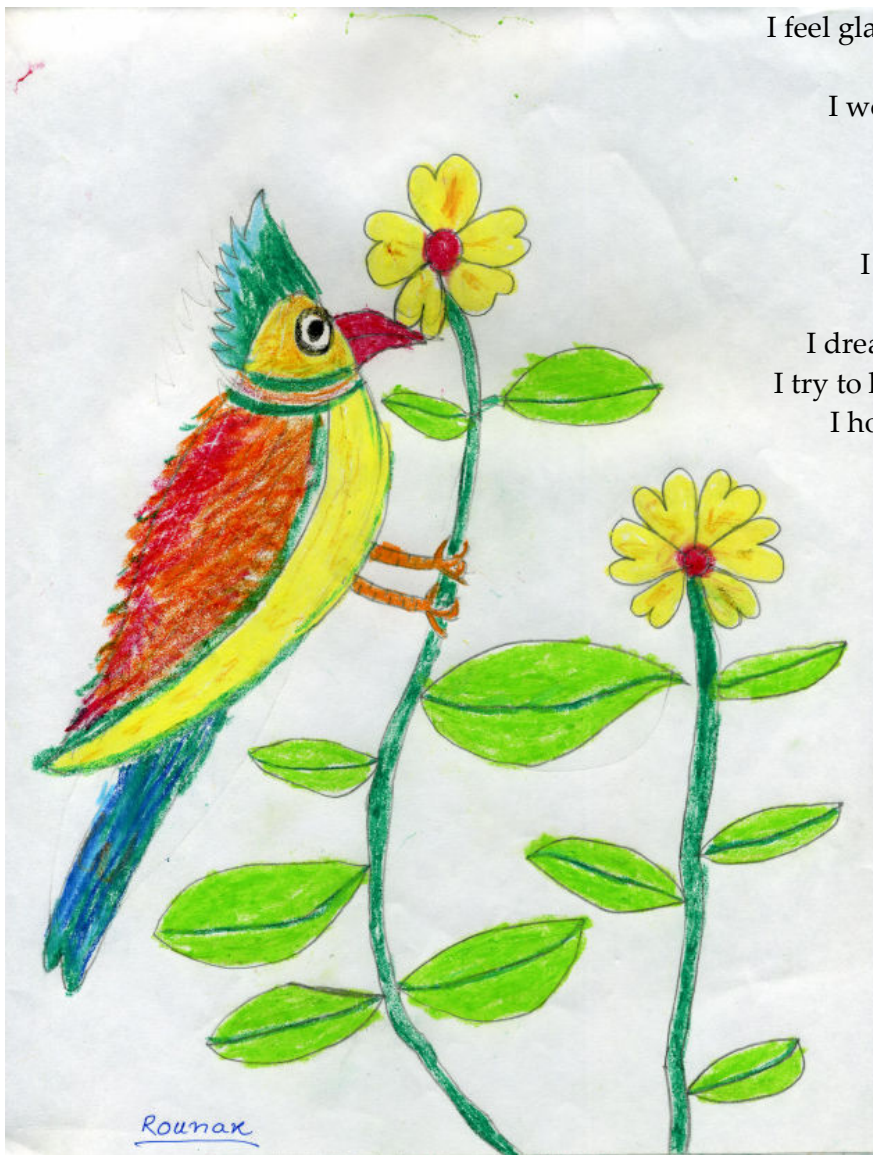
I AM...

Ruhika Roy (10 years)

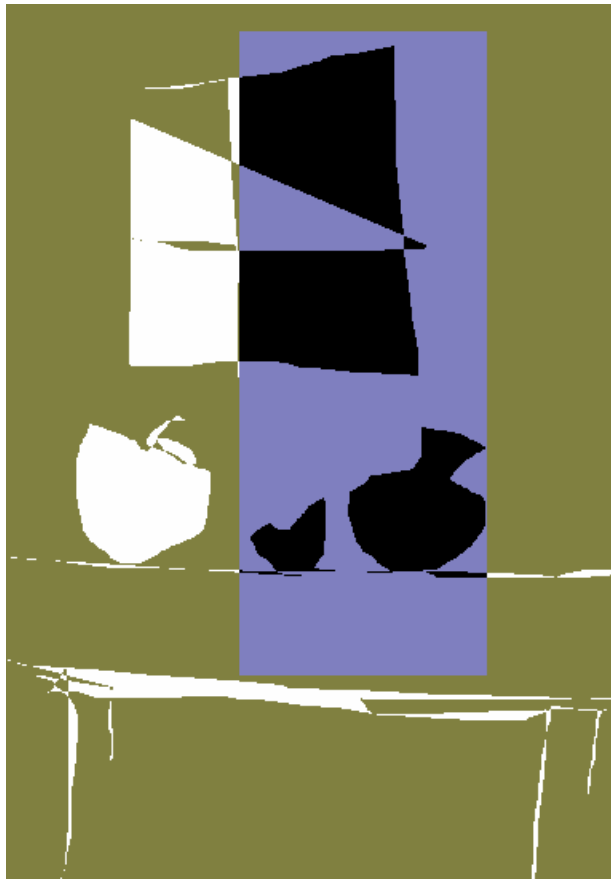
I am Ruhika Roy
I wonder if there is an end to a rainbow
I hear birds chirping
I see flowers growing
I want to see people happy
I am a sister

I pretend I am a mermaid
I feel glad when I do something good
I touch a sweet smelling rose
I worry when someone gets hurt
I cry when I'm sad or hurt
I am a friend

I understand people's feelings
I say funny jokes
I dream that I swim with dolphins
I try to help people when they're sad
I hope I do well in Tae Kwan Do
I am Ruhika Roy

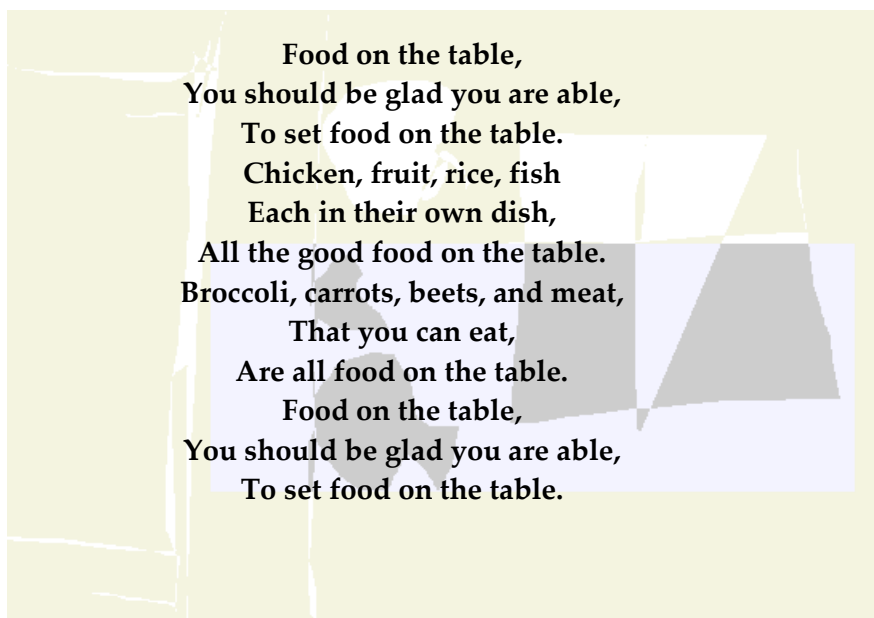


Rounak Bhuniya (8 years)



Food on the Table

Shruti Guhathakurta (9 years)



The Secret Behind the Door

Ruhika Roy (10 years)

On an ordinary street, in an ordinary town, in an ordinary house lived a girl. The girl had a normal mother and a normal father. She went to school, had nice friends, and nice teachers. As you can see, nothing bad ever happened to this girl...nothing yet.

On Monday morning as the girl walked to school with her friends, she noticed some type of thick, green liquid slowly making its way down the tree's bark and dripping off the tree's crooked leaves. From the green slime you could actually see a disgusting fume that smelled so bad that it had killed some flowers nearby. Even though it was strange, she moved on.

At school, as always, she took out her pink and blue notebook and wrote down the math homework for the day. Ugh, math. In a way, it was both her best and worst subject. First of all she hated it; second of all, she was great at it. Then with a quick movement she pushed all the things on her desk into her over-sized backpack, just as the bell for the 5th period rang. She hurried to her locker...356...357...there it was, 358. She quickly opened the door. If she did not hurry, she would be late for her next class.

As she grabbed her English books and slammed her locker door, she slid down the recently waxed hallway of Crater Middle School. As she slid she noticed a strange green light glowing in the old janitor's closet. Since she was a very curious girl, she went in. The room was about the size of a big classroom, in fact, it was as big as the 3rd biggest classroom in the entire school. She had no idea why nobody used it anymore.

As she walked into the room she noticed that everything was covered in a sheet of dust. All of a sudden her gaze turned to the table. Something that was glowing was on top of the table. As she moved closer, she could just make out the object. It was round...well, almost. There was a hole in it, but other than that it was round. It sort of looked like a rock. She thought it looked pretty, so she looked around the dust covered room and found a dusty old piece of string that was just the right size to make a necklace out of. Just as she finished tying it around her neck, she realized that she was late for class. The minute she opened the door was the same minute that she vanished into thin air, never to return again.

The girl's name was Katie Clovis. She had blonde hair and blue eyes. She could have been one of the most popular girls in school, but she gave up the chance and decided to stick with me. Who am I you ask? My name is Suzanne D. Walker. I was the girl that Katie decided to hang with and I was also there when all of this happened. You see, I was hiding behind a shelf. I know I was not supposed to be there, but I saw Katie and snuck in through the back entrance to the room. After Katie left, I noticed the same thing she did, except it was smaller...much smaller. As I crept closer, I realized that it was the piece from that rock that belonged in the hole. Since it was only a small portion of the rock, and not most of it (like Katie's piece), I did not vanish into thin air.

That night, I put the rock into the box that my grandma had given me and slowly drifted off to sleep. When I woke up, I saw that my room was a mess!!! Someone or something had come into my room last night. That person (or thing) had taken the rock!!! Actually I was glad the rock was out of my hands. Who knows how dangerous it could be? The question was, what about Katie?

No one believed me. I called everyone. I guess no one believes a kid, but that is the story, whether you like it or not.

A Pachyderm Encounter

Antora Majumdar (13 years)

The night was alive with celebrations of Ganesh Chaturthi, but I paid no attention to the happenings as I drifted in and out of a drowsy sleep in the confines of a Maruti Esteem. My family and I had just spent a long tiring day of apartment hunting. We had after all just arrived in India from Chicago early that morning and needed to find a place to stay. Ma and my little brother, Aritro, were sound asleep next to me while Baba was in the front, softly conversing with Suresh, the driver of the car.

'Ugghhh! Why is Mumbai so crowded?!' I thought to myself as the car slowed to a crawl. Opening one eye, I peered at the traffic light through the windshield to see some blurry splotches and bright lights. .

'Still red' I rolled my eyes sighing.

'It couldn't take us any longer to get to the hotel could it?' With that last thought I fell asleep but oh how wrong I was...

BANG! I woke up in a state of confusion. Glass shattered around me and I heard my mother screaming something about a bomb. Scrambling for the door handle, I hurled myself onto the sidewalk. A few people helped me up and I looked around dazed and confused. Baba came over to me and took me to Ma and bhaia (Aritiro). He looked me over to make sure I wasn't seriously injured, which I wasn't. I did however have shards of glass in my hair and clothes that pricked my skin every time I moved. Ma immediately started to fuss about me and bhaia, brushing shards off here and there, pulling them out of our hair.

I had absolutely no idea what had happened and started to question my father but he explained before I could ask.

"An elephant hit our car." I stared at him like he had grown another head.

'An elephant? Was this one of Baba's jokes-to-lighten-the-mood?' I wondered.

"I saw most of it happen. People were setting off firecrackers in the street. There was an elephant entertaining people on the side of the road. When the elephant heard the firecrackers he got scared and started to run. And unfortunately our car was the first thing in his path. He ended up crashing his body into our car but he must have thought twice before stepping again because he turned around and ran the other way, he didn't step on anyone that time." he described.

"An elephant...hit...the ...what?! Wait, what happened to it?!" I managed to sputter out.

"The car is right there" he pointed behind me and I turned to look. It seemed that I was staring at a vehicle that hadn't been fully crushed at the garbage dump. The front was intact but the back looked like a mangled piece of dented metal. The windshield on the back was completely shattered and the remains were scattered all over the street. What was left of the frame looked like a piece of modern art gone horribly wrong, and there was no trunk left to speak of because everything was mashed together.

'Had an elephant really done all that?!' I wondered in amazement.

"Mahut bhaag gaya" a man next to us stated matter-of-factly.

"The elephant handler ran away? Why?" I asked my father managing to translate the man's Hindi into English.

"He most probably thought he would get arrested, fined, or beaten up," he said off-handedly. I reared my head in shock.

"Beaten up? By whom?"

"The public. They might think it was his fault and get mad at him"

I shuddered at the thought. Looking around I saw an enormous group of people had gathered gaping and pointing at the Maruti. Others crowded around my family and asked if we wanted anything. It was very kind and thoughtful of them but I couldn't bring myself to focus on them or their efforts at the time. I wasn't feeling well at all. I was numb, yet shaken, and despite all of my mother's glass brushing efforts I still felt as though I was being pricked by a thousand needles.

My dad noticed my discomfort and took me into a store near the site of the accident. The manager was a middle-aged friendly man who allowed me to sit down and presented me with a water bottle. At last, composing myself as best I could, I headed back into the chaos on S.V. Road. I stepped out and was greeted by flashing light bulbs. My father was pulled aside by reporters from Aaj Tak and they asked him to describe what happened. I just looked on. It was all very strange to me... reporters, cameras, a bunch of people. Nothing seemed to be real, like it was all a bizarre dream.

"Baba, what happened to the elephant?"

"See that tall palm tree over there, he's under it. And the mahut had to come back with another elephant to calm this elephant down."

"Is something wrong with the elephant" I asked curiously

"He hurt his knee when he banged into our car." I was immediately saddened at the thought of the poor animal in pain. But what could I do? Nothing. Subsequently the rental car that was sent to pick us up arrived, and we left the area as the crowds started to diminish and the reporters left. I left the scene thinking about what had transpired. I couldn't come to believe that it was actually I in the Maruti Esteem, I who got glass all over her, and it was I that could have gotten seriously injured.

I've never forgotten the events on that September night. The shock, surprise, and confusion I felt. An elephant doesn't step on your car everyday whether you're in India or not. It really made me think. What would have happened if the elephant ran over our whole car? If its body fell on top of it? Would I be here today, writing this? I don't know. What I do know now is that each and every day of our lives matters and we should make the most of it. For we don't know what tomorrow holds for us.

The Hope Diamond

Navya Dasari (9 years)

It was a warm and muggy evening. I was walking along the pavement in front of my house when I felt a strange sensation. I looked around and saw nothing. I was about to go into my house when I felt that same strange sensation. I looked around. Still nothing. "Oh, well," I thought and opened the door. All of a sudden there was a flash of light and a Boom! I squeezed my eyes shut. Whoosh! I felt myself being sucked in. "No need for that," I thought. "I was planning to go in anyway." I opened my eyes. "Wait a minute, this isn't my house." I said, starting to panic. "Of course it isn't," said a kind voice, "It's my house!" I looked around nervously. This time I did see someone.

It was a short, old man with a long beard wearing a tunic and shoes with turned up toes. Next to him was a lady with black hair wearing a long dress with puffed up sleeves. They seemed like Snow White and one of the dwarves. "Who are you?" I asked. The old man said, "The Great Truffle Duffle Lolli Burst, to be exact." "What the what?" I said. "Well, you can call me The Great Lolli instead. And this is my daughter, Liliias." "Where in the world am I?" I enquired. "You are in the house of The Great Lolli." "What am I doing here? I thought I was going into my house." I said. "We brought you here to help us by defeating the wicked Witch of Blackbird Forest and get the Hope diamond back to us. The diamond is magical and the witch is misusing it." "How can I find the Hope diamond?" I asked. "Here is a magic stone which can help you fly and take you to Blackbird forest." I took it and asked, "How do I fly?" Zoom! I was out and on my way when I heard The Great Lolli reply, "When you hold the magical stone and say 'fly', you will fly".

As I approached the forest, it seemed very spooky. I shuddered as I landed and entered the forest. "Stop!" said a voice, scaring me "Look around the forest for directions." I didn't see anyone, but kept finding directions until I came to a pyramid. I was so tired by then and kept slipping when I tried to go over the pyramid. Then I remembered my magic stone and said "Fly!" I then flew swift as the wind, over the pyramid! I saw a Ferris Wheel on the other side. Since I was so tired and it was very late in the night, I landed on one of the seats and dozed off to sleep. I woke up the next day, when I felt a jerk. The Ferris Wheel was starting to move. It went faster and faster and before I knew it, I was thrown off. I landed on something hard and looked around. "Aaaaaah!" I screamed. I landed on an alligator's head. I was in a lake full of alligators! I jumped from one alligator to another trying not to become their food. Suddenly, I spotted something shiny. It seemed like the Hope diamond and it was in an alligator's mouth. Summoning all my courage and strength, I landed hard on its head. The diamond flew out just as the Witch of Blackbird Forest flew in on her broom. She tried to catch it, but I threw myself up at it before her. I caught the diamond, but fell in the water. The witch too fell in the water and drowned. I clutched the diamond tightly with fear and squeezed my eyes shut. I wished I was back with the Lollis.

"Back so early?" enquired a sweet voice. I opened my eyes, surprised. It was Liliias. The magical Hope diamond had transported me back to them. I felt very tired and hungry suddenly and

took leave of the grateful Lollis. With the help of the Hope diamond, I was able to get back to my house. Mom was cooking dinner. "I'm sorry I was gone for two days. You must have been worried" I said. "Two days?" said my mom, laughing, "You were at the store for only an hour!" I was confused. Well, maybe I had been daydreaming...or maybe, just maybe.... I HADN'T BEEN DAYDREAMING!



Navya Dasari (9 years)

The Book

Sneha Ray (10 years)

I trudged after my brother into the children's library and sulked into the empty chair closest to the door. Yes, I had been forced to walk him here by my always busy mother. I silently cursed my brother as he pointed at me and laughed, along with some of his, already present, friends. I knew he was talking about me, and I buried my face in my hands. As I did this, I felt something crawl up my arm.

"Stop it," I ordered my brother, "This is no time for your silly pranks," for he was obviously trying to frighten me.

He didn't stop, so I grabbed his hand. But it wasn't his hand. It was his pet tarantula!

"Ahh!" I screamed, glancing up to see everyone either staring or laughing at me.

I caught a glimpse of my brother just in time to see him whisper something to his friend. That was the last straw! I furiously thrust the tarantula at him, and almost sprinted to the back of the room where nobody happened to be.

"It was just a joke! Why are you so sensitive?!" I heard my brother call after me. I didn't mind the tarantula. Being laughed at by an entire room of people was not a joke!

At the back of the library were a line of small rooms in which you may study if you wanted to. I carefully selected the very last room, recalling the time my brother mentioned it was haunted and that no one ever went in there. I silently flicked on the light and crept to one of the chairs.

As I sat and stared at the room, I noticed that there was a book sitting at the front of the room. I slowly stood up and approached the book, with a slight bit of caution. I picked it up and read the title. "Beware!" it read. I slowly grinned. Maybe I could scare my brother in front of a crowd as well, for if there one thing he's afraid of, it's anything to do with ghosts.

Without giving that another thought, I sped out of the room and to the check-out counter.

"Hi, how may I help you?" the friendly looking employee happily greeted me. She was killing two birds with one stone as she checked in books and talked to me at the same time.

"I would like to check this book out," I spoke hurriedly, with a transfixed grin on my face. I gave her the book, and watched her drop the book she was checking in as friendly smile altered into a look of pure horror.

"Where did you get this?" she asked with a little gasp.

"In that last study room, you know the one that everyone says is haunted," I added a short laugh after that to show that I didn't believe them.

"I am warning you," she said with that same look of horror, "This is an odd book. It was banished from the library, because ...," she paused here and gulped, "everyone who read this book disappeared forever by some plant in the book."

“Oh, don’t be ridiculous,” I said, my grin fading because of the seriousness in her voice, “There is no plant in the book! Now if you aren’t going to check it out for me, then I’ll check it out myself!”

I grabbed the book out of her shaky hands, and made myself to the self checkout counter. I quickly scanned the library card and then the book. I then grabbed both items and then raced out the door, not bothering to get the receipt.

I bolted the whole block to my house, and burst through the door.

“Mom, I’m home,” I yelled, while charging up the white carpeted stairs to my room.

“Where’s your brother?” inquired my mother as the sound of a vacuum turned on.

“He’s coming,” I assured her, although I wasn’t as sure as I sounded. This was the first time I had thought of that kid since finding the book.

I leaped onto my bed as soon as I entered my room, glad that I had dinner before going to the library. I quickly turned to the front page and noted that it was empty. I flipped to the next page and then the next but there was nothing on those pages either. I flipped and flipped, frantically trying to find a word, any word on the pages.

I stopped flipping only when I came to the last page. There were a few words typed in little print at the bottom of the page. I read what it said, and then read it again, not believing it the first time.

“The librarian warned you, now it’s too late!” I read it once more, this time out loud. It’s true, I realized, the librarian had warned me.

Upset and terrified at the same time, I closed the book and saw that there was a picture in the back of the book. The picture showed a girl asleep beside an open book. The thing that caught my eye, though, was the plant that grew from it.

I silently placed the book beside my bed and prayed in bed that nothing would happen to me, until I fell asleep.

I woke up by that same tickling annoyance I had felt in the library.

“Stop it,” I muttered in my sleep, probably out of habit, “Stop”

The tickling just got worse and I was forced to open my eyes.

“Ahhhh!” I shrieked loudly, but I couldn’t hear myself. No, it wasn’t another tarantula; it was plants growing out of an open book on my bed. My eyes grew in horror, and a million questions bustled through my head. Why couldn’t I be heard? Who placed the book on my bed? Was I going to disappear forever?

My stomach suddenly felt jumpy and I felt sick when I asked myself that last question. The librarian was correct on the part about plants in the book, why won’t she be right about me disappearing.

As I thought about this, the plant grew larger and larger. When it was as large as a car, it clasped my neck and started to choke me. I tried to break free, but knew that a 10 year old like me, would never stand a chance against an enormous blood-thirsty plant.

I gasped for breath, as the plant held on tighter. I started to choke, thrashing wildly, as my lungs gave way and everything went black.

“Ally, wake up,” someone said with a sharp kick on my side. I slowly opened my eyes, surprised to find myself breathing again.

“Jake!” I exclaimed, jumping up to hug him, “You saved me!”

“Sisters!” Jake murmured under his breath.

“Where am I?” I questioned, looking around at my surroundings in wonder.

“In the front yard where you wasted your time sleeping,” he said as he held a book up, “I, on the other hand, went to the library to get a book.” He then marched off into the house, muttering how strange I acted.

I had woken up startled, and was still thinking about the dream about the deadly book. I am so relieved to know that there isn’t such book and, that I haven’t disappeared in the midst of the human killing plant.

Congratulations to Shristi Nayak!

Shristi Nayak was crowned the **“2006 Teen India Arizona”** at an event organized by the Indian Association Pageant, on August 26, 2006 in Arizona!

In addition to winning the overall award, Shristi wowed the crowd with her beautiful dancing and *won first place in the Best Talent category* as well!



মজার

আসের

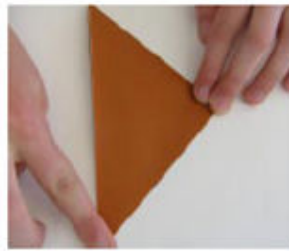
Origami Cat



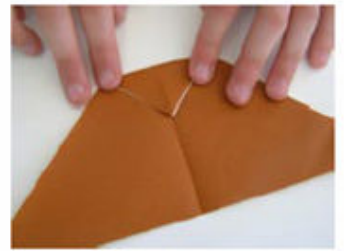
It looks great on a greeting card with a bow under its chin. You can also tape it to a wooden spoon to make a puppet. If you use a very large piece of paper you could even make a mask out of it! Use stick on googly eyes or a black marker to draw your cat's features.



1. Start by folding your square in half diagonally, and creasing carefully.



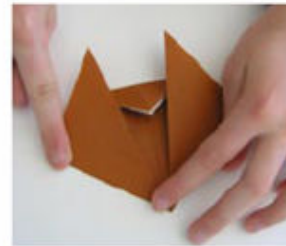
2. Fold your triangle in half again to form a crease. Open it back out again.



3. Take the top point of the triangle and fold it down along the crease, about 1/4 of the way.



4. Take one of the bottom corners and fold it up, taking it at an angle as shown in the photo above. The point will form the cat's ear.



5. Fold the other corner up too.



6. Turn the model over, and add your cat's features!



Color Me!



Durga Puja, 2006
Sharodarghyo



Halloween Finger Spiders!

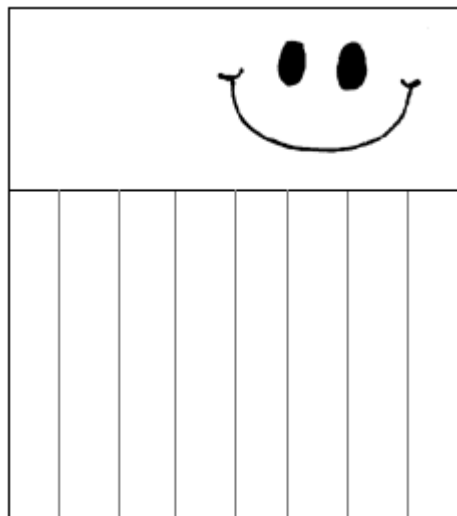
You will need:

Black paper
Scissors
Glue or sticky-tape
Googly eyes (optional) or scraps of paper and pens

Instructions:

Cut a rectangle of paper approximately 3 inches by 3 1/2 inches. Fold the short side down about an inch to make a crease then open it up again.

With the crease horizontal, cut the paper up to the crease to create the spider's 8 legs (see diagram).



Parents: You can show your children how to make the first cut in the middle, dividing the bottom half of the paper into 2 halves. Then show them how to divide each half again to make quarters, then the quarters to make eighths. You may want to draw lines for younger children to practice cutting on.

Now wrap the spider around the child's finger and fasten with sticky-tape or glue. Remove and decorate - either with scraps of paper or with googly eyes. Put back on the finger and bend the legs into shape or curl them around a pencil.

Variations:

Hang the spiders up! Simply cut a length of black yarn (wool) and attach inside the head of the spider with a small piece of sticky-tape.

Make smaller versions of these spiders to decorate the ends of Halloween pencils.

Wrap small spiders around straws to decorate your Halloween table! Make some bigger spiders and scatter them around the table too.

Cut a small slit on either side of the spider's head and insert a name card to turn these spiders into spooky place markers!

Puzzle Corner

How many of these puzzlers can you answer correctly? (Answers on the next page)

1. Put a coin in a bottle and then stop the opening with a cork. How can you get the coin out of the bottle without pulling out the cork or breaking the bottle?
2. A girl who was just learning to drive went down a one-way street in the wrong direction, but didn't break the law. How come?
3. How can you throw a ball as hard as you can and have it come back to you, even if it doesn't hit anything, there is nothing attached to it, and no one else catches or throws it?
4. Two students are sitting on opposite sides of the same desk. There is nothing in between them but the desk. Why can't they see each other?
5. There are only two T's in Timothy Tuttle. True or false?
6. Each letter below stands for the name of something. What should the last three letters be?

M V E M J S ? ? ?

7. Cindy, Andy, and Mia, were all over at Keith's house when a package was delivered. Each child guessed what was in the box, but only one of them was right. Using their guesses as clues, can you figure out what was in the box?

Cindy said, "It's a laptop computer." Andy said, "I'll bet it's a pizza." Mia said, "I think a picture or a laptop computer is in the box." "It's a picture, for sure," said Keith.

8. In the following code, each symbol stands for two possible letters:

+ stands for I or A
* stands for B or W
= stands for C or T
& stands for E or K
? stands for L or H

The five-letter code word * ? + = & can be translated into two English words, and each one means the opposite of the other. What are the two words?

Some Facts About Water...

The human brain is composed of 95% water; blood is 82% water; muscles 70%, the lungs are nearly 90% water. As one can imagine water is also the single most critical nutrient for health, growth, and development. It is not only the most important nutrient in the body, but also the most abundant. Water is critical to the balance of all the body's systems, including the brain, heart, lungs, kidneys and muscles. Proper hydration is required for maintaining healthy blood flow, proper kidney function, digestive functions, and proper sodium, potassium, and electrolyte balance.

Tips for drinking enough water:

- **Drink at least eight 8-ounce servings of water each day.** The more active you are, the more water you need to replenish lost fluids.
- **Don't wait until you're thirsty to drink water.** By the time you feel thirsty, you have probably already lost two or more cups of your total body water composition.
- **Drink plenty of water throughout the day.** Convenience is a must, so carry a bottle of water with you as you commute to work, run errands or enjoy a day at the beach. While at work, keep a bottle of water on your desk, or visit the office water cooler and take a water break rather than a coffee break.
- **Once you start exercising, drink water throughout your workout.** Keep a bottle of water with you and take frequent water breaks.
- **Don't underestimate the amount of fluids lost from perspiration.** Following a workout, you need to drink two cups of water for each pound lost.
- **Start and end your day with water.** Your body loses water while you sleep, so drink a serving before bed and again when you wake up.
- **Common colds and the flu frequently lead to dehydration.** Keep a large bottle of water next to your bed so you can sip it throughout the day without having to get up.
- **Cool water – not carbonated beverages or sports drinks – is the best fluid for keeping hydrated when it's warm outside.** Cool water taste/feels better, therefore you are more likely to drink more, resulting in better absorption than warm fluids and may help to cool off your overheated body. If you're going to be away from home or outdoors, make sure you keep a bottle of water close by.
- **Children need to drink enough water.** Children need water to balance their intake of other beverages – especially during activities. Packing bottled water in a child's lunch instead of juice or regular soda can also help prevent childhood obesity.



Answers to Puzzles from Previous Page.

1. Push the cork into the bottle, and shake the coin out.
2. She was walking.
3. Throw the ball straight up in the air.
4. The two students have their backs to each other.
5. True. There are only two T's (upper case). There are also three t's (lower case).
6. U for Uranus, N for Neptune, and P for Pluto
7. A pizza was in the box. Right away, you can tell that Mia can't be right, because if she is, then Keith would also be right (they both said picture), and no more than one child can be right. And since Mia is wrong, then Cindy is wrong, too, because they both said laptop computer. That means that Andy is correct — it's a pizza.
8. The two words are "black" and "white."

বরোদের

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মুক্তি

শংকর রায়

শূন্য কারাগারে বসে আছি দুজনে
কত কথা মনে পরে কুজনে
ভাবি বসে মনে মনে
ওই বুঝি আমাদের
ছোট্ট খুকু এল
শোন, শোন মনে হচ্ছে
ও কিছু বললো।

মেঘ বরণ চুল
কানে চাঁপার দুল
স্নেহসুন্দর রথ
যেন ইন্দ্রজিতের পথ
জ্যোতির্মইয়ীর রূপ
ওর কেন এরূপ।

মনে হচ্ছে মুক্তি আসন্ন
আমরাও জমুনা সম প্রসন্ন।

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The following picture and caption was published in MSNBC's "The week in Pictures" for the



week of May 4-11: Being a widow remains one of the worst stigmas a woman in India can endure. When her husband dies, the widow often becomes a pariah; excluded from family gatherings for fear the mere fall of her shadow will bring bad luck and tragedy. In the north, many move to the holy cities of Vrindavan and Varanasi, where they beg and are paid a pittance to recite prayers in the temple.

After reading this, I was so touched that few lines came out of my pen in my own language...

আমরা একবিংশ শতাব্দির সভ্য মানুষ
তবু বিধবা হলে আমাদের আখন বেনারসে স্থান
দুবেলা মন্দিরে মন্দিরে ভগবান কীর্তন করলে
তবেই জুটতে পারে অন্ন, বাঁচতে পারে প্রান।

সভ্য আমরা, আধুনিক সংস্কৃতিতে সমৃদ্ধ আমরা
তবু বিধবার কুদৃষ্টিতে অমঙ্গলের ভয় জায় না
এখনো তারা অশুচ অশুভ
আচারে অনুষ্ঠানে থাকতে তাদের মান্য।

প্রশ্ন করার দিন কি এসেছে?
তপনদার কাছে শুনলাম এখনও রয়েছে
সেই প্রথা - ত্রিসঙ্গমে বিধবাদের ডুবিয়ে মারার
কিছুই আমাদের নেই কি করার?

ভাবো বন্ধু, একটু ভাবো,
কোথাও উপায় পেলে একটু কোরো
করজোরে নিবেদন নিয়ে এই বারতা
রাখলাম পৃথিবীর কাছে আমি অনীতা।

Milieus

Rajarshi Saha

He opened the door. It was dark inside. There was a stench, from unwashed dishes lying in the kitchen. He stooped to take off his shoes before stepping onto the carpet, a habit she had forced him in to, the very first year they had started living together. He switched on the lights. A pang of loneliness hit him momentarily. Twenty five days had gone by since she had packed her bags! At the beginning he used to have an urge to leave this apartment for good. It used to be suffocating since he felt her presence everywhere. He still did! He poured himself a glass of cold water, loosened his tie-knot went over to the couch and switched on the television. She would have never allowed him to watch television before changing his clothes. It had something to do with her family's customs. Men were supposed to change and freshen up after returning from work, she had repeatedly told him. He flipped through the channels. He was beginning to feel restless. He was acquainted with the sequence of feelings that gripped him each night after he entered the apartment. He still missed her. He went over to the cabinet to pour himself a drink and spotted the photo on the mantelpiece. It was from the skiing trip they took during Christmas a couple of years ago. He was giving her a piggy-back ride after she had tripped herself and sprained her ankle. She had been excited about the trip all along till the accident. It was also one of those rare moments where she was genuinely sulking! It was his idea to take the photo since he found her grumpy-look kind of cute! A Chinese student had taken their photo, he recalled. He had to go over the camera functions again and again with the guy; all the while she was sitting on the ground, cursing him. He wished she was happy now! He still couldn't understand how they had drifted apart over such a brief period of time. Small arguments had led to bigger ones and finally the big confrontation where they had both realized it was over. He went to the patio. He found this place safer than inside the apartment, altered by time and immune to memories.

He could see the other apartments at a distance against the sky. The place seemed desolate. Darkness seemed to have engulfed the entire world with pockets of dim-lit precincts. Mere mortals trying hard to defy its colossal influence! There was a pleasant breeze and he could smell the rain from the mountains. A crescent moon was hidden amongst the clouds. He decided to sit here for sometime. But he needed another drink. He went inside, switched off the television and turned on the music. He needed some food too.

When he came back to the balcony, it was late. He sat on his favorite rocking chair. The wind was blowing stronger now and it was getting darker. He watched as the moon played tricks with the clouds. Soft Kishore melodies flowed in from his CD giving rise to an esoteric ambience. He simply loved Kishore's oldies!

shei raate raat chilo purnima,

rong chhilo phalguni hawate...

There was a tap on the door. He stood up and staggered to the entrance. Who could it be at this hour? He was surprised and irritated. He opened the door and stood paralyzed. There she stood, looking as gorgeous as ever.

"I have been knocking on the door forever, were you asleep?" she was indignant.

"Yea...I mean..." he fumbled. He couldn't believe his eyes. "Please ...do come in!" he was totally lost. "Have you had dinner yet, I know it is kind of late but I got you some chicken tandoori". She quipped as if nothing had happened between them, as if they were still a normal affectionate couple. "That's great," the words came out automatically. "I was stuck up in traffic on the one-oh-five for almost an hour," she complained. He felt as if he was in a trance. She went straight to the kitchen to find a bowl. "Where did you put the big bowl we bought on labor-day sale," she yelled. He had no clue. She was back in a minute, with it. She was always so efficient. She never failed to amaze him. "You know, the kitchen stinks! Was that paneer you cooked?" He nodded his head. It was his first time with paneer and a complete fiasco. She started putting the chicken into the bowl. "I thought you'd call... just to see how I was doing." He couldn't find a reason why he should, though he desperately wanted to. He could smell Chanel, her favorite perfume. One of the very few they both liked. "So how are you doing," she asked. "Good" he lied. "And you?" "Am ok." he sensed a tinge of melancholy in her voice. She put a piece of chicken on a plate and handed it to him. "You never get tired of hearing to Kishore's oldies, do you?" He smiled. He reached out for the plate. It felt cold.

dhup kathi mon jole aka-aka tai

shei tumi, nei tumi, nei shathe...

It had started to rain and the first few drops felt cold on his fingers. He wished it could have started a bit later. He had desperately wanted to ask her if she was unhappy. Outside, the wind was gusty. It was pitch-black. There could be a storm coming in, any minute now. He stood up to go inside. He shut the balcony door, washed the dishes, got undressed and went to bed. The pensive look on her face bothered him all along though he constantly reminded himself that it was a dream. He felt anxious. Did she miss him? He made up his mind to call her anyways; just to see how she was doing. He tried to get some sleep.



A Ride Down Memory Lane

Sudipta Biswas

It was one day in the midst of the yearly autumn celebration of Durgotsav that my father decided to go on an adventure. The idea came to him right after the commencement of the morning rituals with Pushpanjali and distribution of Prasad. It was the eighth day of Durga Puja or Ashtami and the only day he got off apart from Dashami or Dusshera which was a government holiday. He gathered us all together and put forward the proposal that we go and see the new Shiva temple or Shibmandir that had been built atop a hill in Chittaranjan Park.

We were living in Delhi at that time. The Delhi I am talking about was the Delhi right after the 1982 Asian Games. A lot of roads and buildings had been constructed for that event. Everything was clean and tidy. The roads were broad and well lighted and at night, it was a mesmerizing sight. A lot of new areas were coming up in the southern fringes of the city. Saket in South Delhi, where we lived at that time was still considered the suburbs. A few miles north east of Saket is Chittaranjan Park, considered an expatriate version of Bengal. For every Bengali settled in Delhi in the last two decades, Chittaranjan Park is a must visit for fish, muri (puffed rice), patali gur, Bengali sweets and of course pajama-panjabi for men and ready made blouses to go with the Puja's new saris for women! The southern end of Chittaranjan Park was still barren at that time and dotted with Babul and Keekar trees (Indian versions of Mesquites and Palo Verdes of Arizona) interspersed with many small hillocks. On one such hillock a new Shiva temple had been built the previous year and the temple was celebrating its first Durga Puja. It was this temple my father planned to visit.

My readers must be wondering why I am referring to a temple visit as an adventure. The topography of the area at that time was no less than the rugged cliffs and canyons of Sedona. The northern end of the Aravali hills that border Rajasthan passes through Delhi and is called "the Ridge." The area has many small hills and valleys covered with thorny bushes and desert trees. No proper roads existed in that area and it was sparsely inhabited. A four-wheel drive would have been preferable but all we had was our family car, a 1968 Standard Herald! The car needs some introduction. It was shiny red with a long chasis, low in height. There were only two doors in the front and one had to get to the back by sliding the two front seats! In today's terms it would probably be called a five-seater, but it easily accommodated eight! Having persuaded one of his friends and his family to come along, my father loaded all eight of us in this mini caravan and set off.

We started right after lunch which consisted of Bhog at the Puja Pandal. The onward journey was uneventful except that father missed one or two turns and ended up traveling a few miles more than intended. The trouble started once we got near the place. Not many people were aware of the exact location of the new temple. We first tried asking the shopkeepers at the main market but their knowledge was sketchy. A few pedestrians here and there gave us vague directions and we ended up right where we had started. Getting to a new area in those days was a lot tougher without the convenience of downloading directions from Mapquest! Anyway after driving around aimlessly for a few miles, father's friend came up with the idea that we

drive along the road that formed the southern boundary of the settlement. We kids were asked to keep a sharp lookout for any building that we could see on a hill. After about thirty minutes, we were rewarded with the sight of a temple on top of a hillock.

The drive uphill was quite arduous. The road was mostly unpaved and we had to park our car a few hundred meters from the top. After walking, hopping and tripping over rocks and boulders we finally reached the newly built temple. It was still mostly under construction; only the sanctum sanctorum of the Kali Mandir had been built. They were celebrating a smaller version of Durga Puja there. We kids were quite disappointed. We always associated Puja with lots of activities; eating phuchka, chowmein and egg rolls at stalls, buying Bengali books, periodicals and greeting cards at the book stalls and great cultural program. And here we were stuck in the midst of rubble and concrete on a hill while our favorite activities were underway at our local neighborhood pandal. My father tried to engage us by pointing at the magnificent views of the surrounding city from the hill. His friend, who happened to be an artist by profession was quite inspired by the view and planned to come up once again to paint the landscape. After a lot of protests and whining we finally got our way and started descending to reach our car. Father started the car and we started slowly down the hill. About halfway down, the car suddenly sputtered and stopped. Father was quite surprised as he had filled the tank with gas right before we started. After a few unsuccessful attempts with the ignition, we were all asked to get off and push the car from behind. We were very enthusiastic about the prospect of pushing the car; however our enthusiasm was not shared by our mothers! Finally father's friend and we four kids ranging in age from nine to four years (my brother was the youngest) managed to get the car rolling downhill. We reached the paved road but after that the car came to a final halt.

It was already twilight and light was fading fast. That stretch of road was completely deserted. Lights and smoke rose from a few nearby huts. As per my father's estimation they probably came from Govindpuri village. Everyone was occupied with his own set of worries. Father worried about his car, his friend about his scooter parked in a vacant lot next to our house. My mother and aunt whispered among themselves recounting previously heard rumors about being robbed on a deserted road. I was worried about missing the children's dance drama "Alibaba" that was due that night, and my friend about the movie that was to follow it. My brother was of course hungry and no amount of cookies could mollify him. After probably an hour we saw a man emerge from one of the huts. He came towards us and asked what the problem was. My father pointed at the car and explained that it was not starting. The man said that he was a motor mechanic and would return with his tools to check out the problem. After he left, a new wave of fear hit everyone. What would happen if the man went to return with his friends with the plan of robbing us? My mother and aunt didn't trust his appearance and were quite suspicious. We kids were pushed inside the car and told to lie still. Any way there was no other option other than waiting so everyone waited in anticipation.

The man returned with his tools and opened the hood of the car. After tinkering with it for a few minutes he told my father to turn on the ignition. It started at one go. Everyone was quite

relieved. We profusely thanked the Good Samaritan but he refused any money that my father tried to offer him. He kept saying that he was only doing his duty. The rest of the party got into the car and we sped back to our locality. Father was even nervous when we had to stop at the traffic signals fearing another motor breakdown. We reached our respective homes after about half an hour and heaved a sigh of relief. Father was strongly urged to get his car serviced and he promptly took it for an overhaul the very next day.

Of course that wasn't the end of our adventures. Over the next couple of years we had numerous outings in our car and had to get off and push it multiple number of times. We visited the Shibmandir many times after it was completely built. It is a grand temple now and a must see for its Durga Puja decorations. Even its approach road has been fully paved. And our old car? It is still standing in front of my parent's apartment complex so that my father can see it from the balcony while sipping his morning tea. The shiny red color is a little faded, the top has got a bit rusted and it doesn't run anymore. Long grass and wildflowers have grown around its wheels. But it is still standing as a testimony to the great time we had riding our red Standard Herald!!!



The Heritage

Devajyothi

Life seems to be complete when a spark of divinity is expressed through it. I feel excited and elevated whenever I meet and listen to the teachings of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda through the monks of the Ramakrishna Order. It gives me strength and inspiration to go through the life with a song in my heart. At last our valley has a permanent spiritual center. Here is a common roof where individuals with similar interests and goals gather and share their spiritual thoughts and vibrations.

Knowledge is power. In any field, such as science, mathematics and fine arts, guidance makes us think, understand and explore the wonders of the nature. This inquiry into external nature is called science. Similar inquiry and understanding into the internal nature is called spiritual science. The monks are the spiritual teachers for the students exploring the knowledge of the self. Material progress and pursuit of pleasures is not the goal of all the human beings. Some become passionate to know the eternal values in a changing society and would love to explore the substratum of the universe (called Supreme power or God).

Vedanta provides the material and inspiration to live a life of moderation and fulfillment. People who cross the shores of rituals need direction to enter the waters of Bhakti and Jnana. God is everywhere but he is more intense and visible where god-loving people gather and remember their relation to Him (Tatvamasi – Thou are That).

There are several Vedanta societies in the United States but proximity matters. It is not easy to visit the Ashramas in the other cities very often in our hectic lives. In the month of April of 2006, Swami Swahananda (Head Minister, Vedanta Society of Hollywood, CA) inaugurated Ramakrishna Ashrama in the city of Tempe (1138, E Henry St.). Every month, Hollywood center sends a monk for a couple of days to give discourses and provide guidance to the seekers of God.

We are fortunate to have Satsang on a regular basis which inspires us to become a better individual. I have been associated with the Ramakrishna Order since 1980 and wish my children imbibe the values of our Sanatana Dharma which equips them to face the challenges of life with spiritual strength and become better citizens of this country.

In this world of superficiality and materialism the teachings emanating from these spiritual centers make us reflect on the true perspective of our inner self. The only weapon to counter-act the negative forces of the world is the knowledge about the common thread that links all beings which is the eternal pure consciousness. Spiritual wisdom makes us better human beings to share the planet with diversified individuals.

Let people get the message of Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda and reap the benefits of the universal message (Ekam sat bahudha vidanti – “Truth is one but men call it by different names”).

God is a Comedian

Dr. Tushar K. Ray

God is the Master Comedian before a tense global audience
Where people are too shallow to grasp His wits, noted Voltaire
And this is a correct scenario even today for our world at large
Since this appears as the state of mind where most people still are

Imagined fears out of ignorance have besieged our humanity
Without realizing the fact that God Himself dwells in us
Spanning over His vast creation all through His endless Cosmos
It is His copious love and complete power that keeps us conscious

Only if we could feel His power both within and without
Then nothing in this universe could truly intimidate us
As His kindness will be felt ceaselessly within our own heart
Regardless of our karmic state or no matter where we are

Life is Lord's fun game with us to help His humanity grow
Through a process of neat karmic plan to make us really learn
And we do learn in time that we must forgo own ego
As ego is the only barrier between God's Will and the will of man

Once we grasp the plan of God we begin laughing with Him
Realizing how meticulously cunning He has been for our sake
Being forever so diligent for us in guiding to the right course
But we make own choice in life ignoring what He wants from us

God really is playing in person with each of our human soul
Like a father playing with the child to arouse her learning skill
But so long as the child knows her father is up and around
She enjoys fun with her own father no matter how serious it is

So, if we know how to play in life lead by the Almighty Lord
He never fails to guide us along so we could play it smart
Never worrying again what would happen if we lose in the end
As win or loss remain the same when honoring the will of God

Vedanta Speaks

Dr. Tushar K. Ray

Know yourself first, and then seek to know others
This is the crux of the eternal Vedanta text
Instead, attempt to know others by going in reverse
Is like a blind man's venture to know an elephant

All knowledge reside in our blissful spirit self
Absolutely nothing is apart from that
So, knowing own self through proper meditation
Does bring all facts under a person's hat

Our material body is surely nobody in the universe:
Only an interim carriage for the eternal soul
Where the spirit in us is the person in-charge
Just playing for the fun of it for our egotistic goal

Our pure self as own Spirit is the seat of all bliss
That too pervades this entire universe
So, forever we're free from time-space constraint
Since nothing really stays beyond us

Our body as gross matter and mind as fine matter
Are at one with the vast pool of stuff
Being forever in a flux with matters of the universe
They just move on in a cyclic task

The spirit is only steady in our ever shifting universe
Being a nonlocal entity it's the only real kind
So, perception from this solid base gives a global view
All others are basically the figments of our mind.

So, attempt to know others not knowing oneself first
Is bound to be futile at best
When a person sees the partial truth all around him
Being unable to discern only own pure self.

An Ode To Swami Vivekananda*

Dr. Tushar K. Ray

You have been at the heart of world conscience
Over the decades of religious disharmony
Oh Vivekananda Swami –
Guiding light of mankind over a century in the making
Pursuant to your lead for a global harmony
In the first Parliament of Religion in Chicago
Just over a century ago
Oh, Swami
You pioneered Vedanta in the West in its embodied form
Setting up a new paradigm for the world to learn
On the oneness of all religions for a global harmony
Oh, beloved Swami
Your grand vision is now visible in a tangible form
In spite of all the conservative commotion
Toward fulfilling your pet mission,
On “The unity of all religions” for a global harmony
Oh Vivekananda Swami!

**Dedicated to Swami Swahananda, the Head of the Vedanta Society of Southern California, and one of the senior-most monks of the great Ramakrishna-Vivekananda Order, who recently established and inaugurated Ramakrishna Ashrama in the Phoenix Valley for the welfare of the followers of Vedanta. This is part of his tireless ongoing efforts in spreading the eternal message of Vedanta to the West.*

Congratulations to Dr. Tushar K. Ray!



On August 19, 2006,
Dr. Tushar K. Ray
received the **"2006
Special Recognition
Award"** granted by
the India Association
of Phoenix,
in *Appreciation of his
Professional and
Community Service
Accomplishments.*

A Himalayan Journey: Trekking in the Great Himalayan National Park

Subhrajit Guhathakurta

The river Tirthan was our constant companion, first to our left, then, after we crossed a beautiful log bridge, to our right. The river was becoming visibly stronger and bolder, with the sound of the cascading water getting louder as we progressed. As we ventured further into the

park, the path became more forested and covered with weeds and bushes.

Thankfully, we did not have to worry about locating the trail since we were following some of the most seasoned hikers in that region. Around, 1:00PM that afternoon we reached our designated camp for the first night.



The Tirthan River near the entrance to the Great Himalayan National Park

This was the first day of our long anticipated trek in the Great Himalayan National Park. At 7:00AM the rest house at Sai Ropa, our staging point, was a hive of excitement and activity in preparation for the 9-day hike into the Park. Jayesh, the organizer of the trip, went around giving tips to novices (like us) about the proper

use of hiking sticks, the best hiking shoes, checking our water canisters, and providing information about what to expect during the trek. We had a hearty breakfast of stuffed parathas with achar and started out towards Gushiani, which was a small town along the motored road from where the trail to the park started. We took a short stopover at Gushaini to organize the porters who were carrying our provisions and our luggage. Jayesh did an initial count of all the members of our team – 7 trekkers including Jayesh and 11 porters. Soon we started down the wide footpath towards the park, a comfortable walk with a gradual climb in ideal weather and beautiful surroundings. The mood was cheerful – almost joyous. We stopped occasionally to admire wildflowers, small waterfalls, or even the herd of sheep that shared our way. About two hours into our trek we noticed the sign proclaiming the entrance to the Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP), which was followed by a wide concrete gateway about 500 feet away. While the path to the gateway was beautiful, the trek after the entrance was absolutely breathtaking.

Our first camp was at a point called Rolla. The camp looked surprisingly non-rustic. There were two permanent structures and some dilapidated smaller shacks around them. One served as the kitchen and shelter for the porters while the other, a very dusty and unfinished log cabin with a verandah, provided us a roof for the night. These facilities were right next to the river.

Immediately after we dropped our day packs in the cabin we ventured close to the river to wash and relax. The water was so cold that we could barely dip our fingers and splash some water on our faces. However, we were shocked to see two of the porters strip to their underwear and



The river Tirthan at Rolla

dive into the frigid waters. We were even more taken aback to watch as they soaped themselves and rinsed off in the river – the same river that was providing for our drinking water. Regardless, soon we would be purged completely of these “urban” hang-ups.

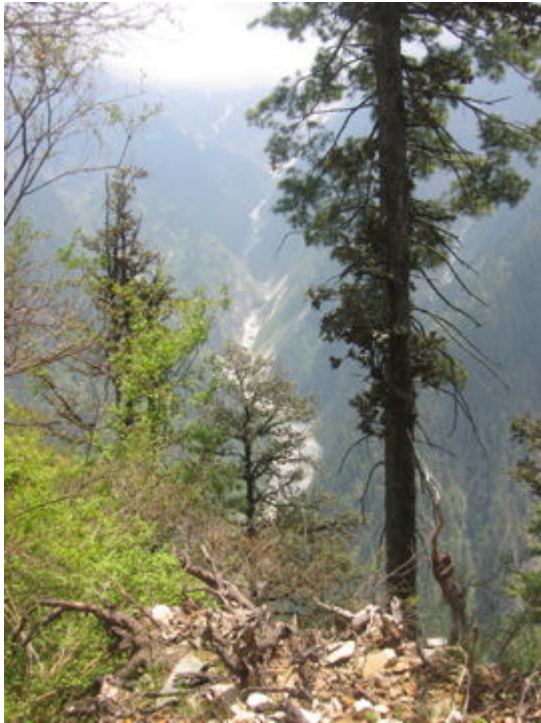
The next morning we started out in a relaxed manner after devouring several stuffed parathas

for breakfast. Jayesh, in his tongue-and-cheek manner mentioned something about this day being the most arduous – we were not sure how seriously to take this cautionary note. However, as the day wore on, we faced some of the most diverse terrains in our entire trip. It started out with a gradual climb through a verdant forest and several footbridges that were in surprisingly good condition. We soon realized that the apparent good maintenance of the trail should not lull us into carelessness. Ashish was walking ahead of the pack and Leena and I were slightly behind him at this stage. Suddenly we heard a firm but not panicky voice up ahead beseeching us for help.



Crossing The Tirthan River en route to Chaloncha

When we scanned the landscape we could barely see Ashish’s head and arms as his body dangled below a gaping hole in the trail. We rushed to drag him out of his misery. A major crisis was avoided without much fan-fare and Ashish was back to his usual jovial self.



Climbing 3000 ft above Chalocha

The trail then led us down to the river and we realized, while we were jumping and climbing over the large rounded rocks by the river, that we would soon have to deal with the river directly as well. Expectedly, we were instructed to take off our shoes at one point and wade through submerged rocks and branches for about 100 feet. The chill of the water was burning into our flesh and each of us had hilarious exclamations to manage the pain. At about 11:30 AM that morning we reached another dilapidated log cabin next to the river, which turned out to be our first rest point for that morning. This place was called *Chalocha* – according to our itinerary.

We climbed 3000 feet from Chalocha to our camp at Nara Thatch that day along winding and steep trails. Although the climb was difficult, it offered some of the most divine sights on the Siwalik range. The vegetation changed to taller pines and conifers. Below us the Tirthan Valley was

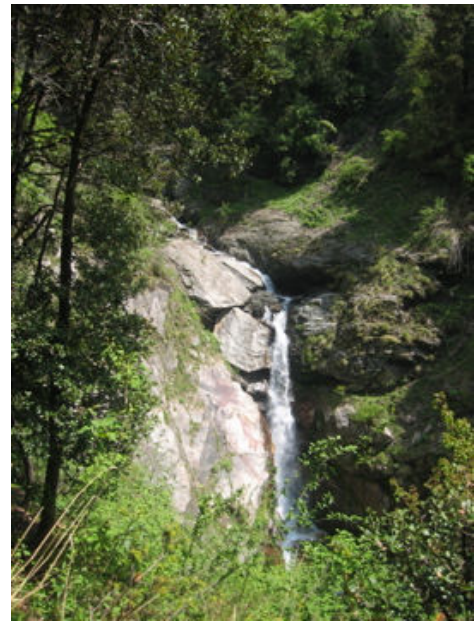
gradually getting further away as we climbed. The roar of the river got fainter till I suddenly discovered an uncanny silence; a silence that was occasionally disturbed by footsteps or the wind rustling through the trees. In the distance were a series of mountains encircling the one we were climbing interspersed by deep cleavages of glaciers that flowed down and became rivers. Clouds were gently rolling below the snow-capped peaks giving the entire scene an almost surreal effect.

It took us another one and half hours of climbing before we realized that the trail was now veering down. Few steps below our highest point we saw an amazing sight. This was a vast green meadow on top of the hill, gently sloping to the northwest. It looked like a hidden playground surrounded by snow-capped peaks. This was Nara Thatch, our camp for the second night. Nara Thatch also had an old, dusty log cabin with crumbling walls and unsecured floorboards.



The view from Nara Thatch

We usually deferred to Jayesh to organize our sleeping arrangements. These arrangements started early compared to what I am used to. Since there was very little to do once darkness set in, every evening we would have several rounds of a card game called “Challenge” before retiring. I am not known to be a card enthusiast but I think Anirban discovered that side of me during this trek. I began to realize the essential bonding experience that these innocuous games allowed. The games had all the elements of deception; sarcasm, irony and exultation that bare open most souls to strangers. Once we slid into our sleeping bags, the usual round of jokes and reminiscences from other treks ensued. This lasted till the noise from the snoring became too loud to disregard – followed by a range of humorous episodes about snorers. Before long the voices would die out and snoring would take over the silence.



One of the many waterfalls on Tirthan

The next morning we were greeted by another unbelievably awesome sight. The snow-capped peaks were just in front of us. The air was crystal clear which revealed such vivid details of these mountains that they seemed very close. Each of us grabbed our cameras and ventured off in various directions. The high mountain on the left had an inviting green valley running through its entire height. Just to the right of this mountain was a long valley protected by mountains going away from us. In front and to the

right were the white snowcapped peaks crisply defined against the deep blue sky.



The Tirthan Valley at Baloo Thatch

The morning breakfasts were wholesome and filling as always and tea was served several times. We started out on the day’s trek filled with enthusiasm and vigor, knowing that we had already tackled the most difficult part of our journey the previous day. We would soon discover that that thought was a delusion. It is well known that coming downhill is often more treacherous than climbing. We realized that as we scrambled down the gentle slope of Nara Thatch and reached close to the river Tirthan on the other side of the mountain.



Wildflowers in the park

Soon we were scrambling down waterfalls, sheer rock faces, and large tree trunks. We also developed a healthy respect for the wonderful guides who were carrying our burden both in terms of our meager possessions and our not so meager lives. They guided our feet, held our hands and gave us the extra bit of encouragement that went a long way in alleviating our trepidations of navigating a treacherous terrain. I also discovered that they were building some strong relationships with those individuals they were assisting that remained throughout the trip. Each of us had at least one porter who was a constant companion.

The path led us to back to the banks of river Tirthan, but the terrain was decidedly more rugged than what we had witnessed the first day. There were waterfalls all around us, sometimes as many as three on three sides. We could barely hear ourselves over the roar of gushing water. This was the majestic wilderness that we had aspired to see on this trip. The vegetation was lush green and very diverse – I have no idea what the generic names of the plants were but I could tell there were thousands of varieties. The wildflowers were in full bloom in amazing colors. We were now in a deep gorge, which felt like being inside the Grand Canyon. Multiple streams were flowing into the river Tirthan raging through the bottom of this Canyon. We were crossing these mountain streams several times, sometimes by constructed footbridges and more often just wading through submerged rocks. The path meandered through dense forests and rocky river beds. In about three hours we reached a clearing on a flat stone ledge where the porters unloaded the stove and prepared tea. This was Baloo Thatch, a name alluding perhaps to the small sandy area next to the river. We scrambled down to the river took off our shirts and splashed cold water on our bodies. This was going to be as close as we would get to taking a bath during this entire trip.



Crossing the Glacier

It was another two hours of grueling trek, mostly darting over and through large boulders and bare unsettled rock before we reached the third campsite known as Sanka Thatch. Most of us were so exhausted that we could barely move from our stone ledges that served as seats while we watched with amazement the porters who were getting the campsites ready and the fires going for our afternoon meal. The site was right next to the river in the deep gorge that was the Tirthan Valley. We spent the day alternating between eating and playing the card game. That evening, the sky opened up and poured with such gusto that I thought our tent would be



Near Tirath, the final destination

washed into the river. Inside the tent, we kept our spirits up with large doses of humor; some pointed at the expanding blob of wetness seeping through the inner layer of our tent.

I can't remember how we got through that night at Sanka Thatch but when I woke up I felt totally refreshed. The morning was amazingly clear and bright – the colors especially vivid after the natural scrubbing overnight. We took extra time that morning to take in the surroundings and relax by the river with our plates of chapattis and vegetables. By the time we had finished breakfast and put on our hiking paraphernalia, the tents were

packed and the porters were ready to leave. Jayesh explained that we were only one additional day away from our final destination, Tirath, which was marked by a "Kund" (a small pond fed by an underground spring). This was our fourth day trekking in the Great Himalayan National Park and we had not come across any other person after Chalocha. Neither did we see much wildlife; one Langoor (a small monkey) and a couple of snakes were the only sightings. The trail was as spectacular as ever. The narrow gorge was slowly opening up, revealing large meadows carpeted with bright wildflowers. On this day, we also came across the first glacier on our path. The glacier was barely distinguishable from the ground given the amount of mud and dirt that covered it. However, we quickly realized its true icy nature when we were slipping and sliding across it to get to the other side.

The day's hike ended at a large ledge on top of several natural caves formed on the hillside. We were about 1000 feet higher than the river at this point; the only water source being a stream that flowed next to the caves. While our living arrangements were being discussed, a special lunch was being prepared comprised of spicy rice and vegetables. After lunch the porters very efficiently began to prepare the ground for two tents, one of which would be shared by Anirban and me. We watched with great fascination as the ground was pounded and cleaned by primitive tools (rocks, branches, and sticks) and a gully was constructed around the base of the

tent to channel water in the event of rain. We appreciated the perceptive design of the tent grounds even more that evening when it started pouring with greater impact than the previous night. However, this time it did not faze us as much; perhaps the sheer exhaustion put us out in a flash once we were in the sleeping bags.

Morning of May 28, 2006 started out slow as we had limited hiking planned for that day. The morning, as usual, was bright, clear, and cheerful. After a late breakfast we slowly set off for the final destination of this trek. This segment of the trail was perhaps the most benign given the gently sloping terrain through vast meadows of wildflowers. We stopped often to take photographs and just admire the grandeur of this place, which few had visited. It took us about two hours to reach Tirath where the river seemed everywhere; small tributaries coming from all directions to join together to form the mighty river that flows 200 miles into the river Beas. Our guide Lal Singh directed us to a rock outcrop and asked us to take off all our leather accessories. Leena, our only female fellow hiker was instructed to remain here given some religious beliefs that we did not seek any explanation for. Here we were in the majesty of three spectacular snow-capped peaks to the left and in front of us. We spent some moments of silence in awe of the breathtaking sights in front of us. We are now on the 5th day of this trek and we were effectively cut off from the world outside – no phones, messages or news penetrate our moments of intimate experiences with the magical beauty of nature. It is a state of being I have never previously experienced.



The mountains around Tirath

Barefooted we navigated through rocks and several rivulets of excruciatingly chilled water towards the “Kund”, a small body of still water fed by an underground spring. We noticed from a distance a rudimentary shrine that was erected close to this body of still water. The shrine was made up of few sticks about 3 feet high decorated with red ribbons. Several porters cleaned themselves with the chilled water and came to pay their respects at the shrine. An unusual violet flower was in full bloom all around this shrine. We spent a few moments in quite contemplation and began our journey back to civilization.

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Messages of Sri Ramakrishna

- Women whether naturally good or not, whether chaste or unchaste, should always be regarded as images of the Blissful Divine Mother.
- God cannot be realized by a mind that is hypocritical, calculating or argumentative. One must have faith and sincerity. To the sincere, God is very near, but he is far, far away from the hypocrite.



Messages of Sri Ma Sarada

- I am the Mother of the wicked, as I am the Mother of the virtuous. Whenever you are in distress, just say to yourself, "I have a mother".
- If you want peace of mind then give up fault-finding. If you would search for fault at all find out your own faults and shortcomings. Learn to accept anyone as your own. No one is alien to you, the whole world is yours.



Messages of Swami Vivekananda

- We must have life-building, man-making, character-making, assimilation of ideas. If you have assimilated five ideas and made them your life and character, you have more education than any man who has got in his head a whole library.
- The old religion said that he was an atheist who did not believe in God. The new religion says that he is the atheist who does not believe in himself.

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