



AARATRIKA

MOSCOW DURGA PUJA

2016



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From the Editor's Desk...



Debasmita Moulick Nair

Last year on Ashtami, I saw a lady dressed in denim and a sweater seated in a corner, eyes closed praying. She sat through the entire ritual which lasted for over four hours. She barely moved. Whenever we eye contacted, she warmly smiled. Later, in the queue for *prasad*, I came to know that Tatiyana had travelled from the Siberian city of Tomsk by train to Moscow just to attend the Puja. She had some urgent chores and would leave on Navami, the following day, travelling back the 3,600 kms. Tatiyana, who worked in a milk processing factory had come to know about Puja from a friend, who like her is also fascinated by Indian culture. Tatiyana wondered how Goddess Durga effortlessly maintained the cosmic order and said she could sit for hours looking at Her third eye which she felt leads to inner realms of higher consciousness. She had travelled all the way to be able to *хотя бы чуть чуть присоединиться к всемогущим*. (feel at least a little connected with the Divinity).

Last year Aaratrika had carried a story about eminent sculptor Aleksandr Ryabichev. Our gorgeous cover illustration this year has been prepared by Alexandra Zagryazhskaya, his wife. The intricate details on the Goddess, the exquisite shades of blue and the mystic glow makes the cover one of the most remarkable aspect of our magazine this year. The image has been hand painted and then enhanced by digital processing. We have heart-warmingly watched Alexandra painstakingly research Indian mythology and meticulously studying relevant details while working on the cover. Aaratrika is proud to be associated with the amazing Ryabichevs, the three generations of artists who dedicated significant part of their life and work to India.

The decreasing warmth of the autumn sun and the golden brown trees (our Russian version of the kaashphool) serves as a useful reminder that it's time to prepare for Puja. They say you can smell the Puja in the air at this time of the year. Preparations for cultural programme begin, children even on weekdays rush to rehearsals after school, check lists of Puja *samagri* are discussed and the countdown begins. Few visitors like Tatiyana begin to book their tickets, others who reside in the city suburbs or in the periphery, shift to friends living close to the Puja venue. This means uniting over Puja preparations, shopping for knick knacks and late night *addas* planning the details of Puja days. *Addas* can range over a wide theme of topics, often getting extended into thought-provoking argument sessions which are sheer fun. Aaratrika through its pages has strived to capture those stimulating snapshots.

The first major pre-Puja event to take place is Anadamela, our annual food festival. Anadamela has been growing in leaps and bounds in terms of scale and participation. The comprehensive collage by our photo editor is a true reflection of the spectacular event.

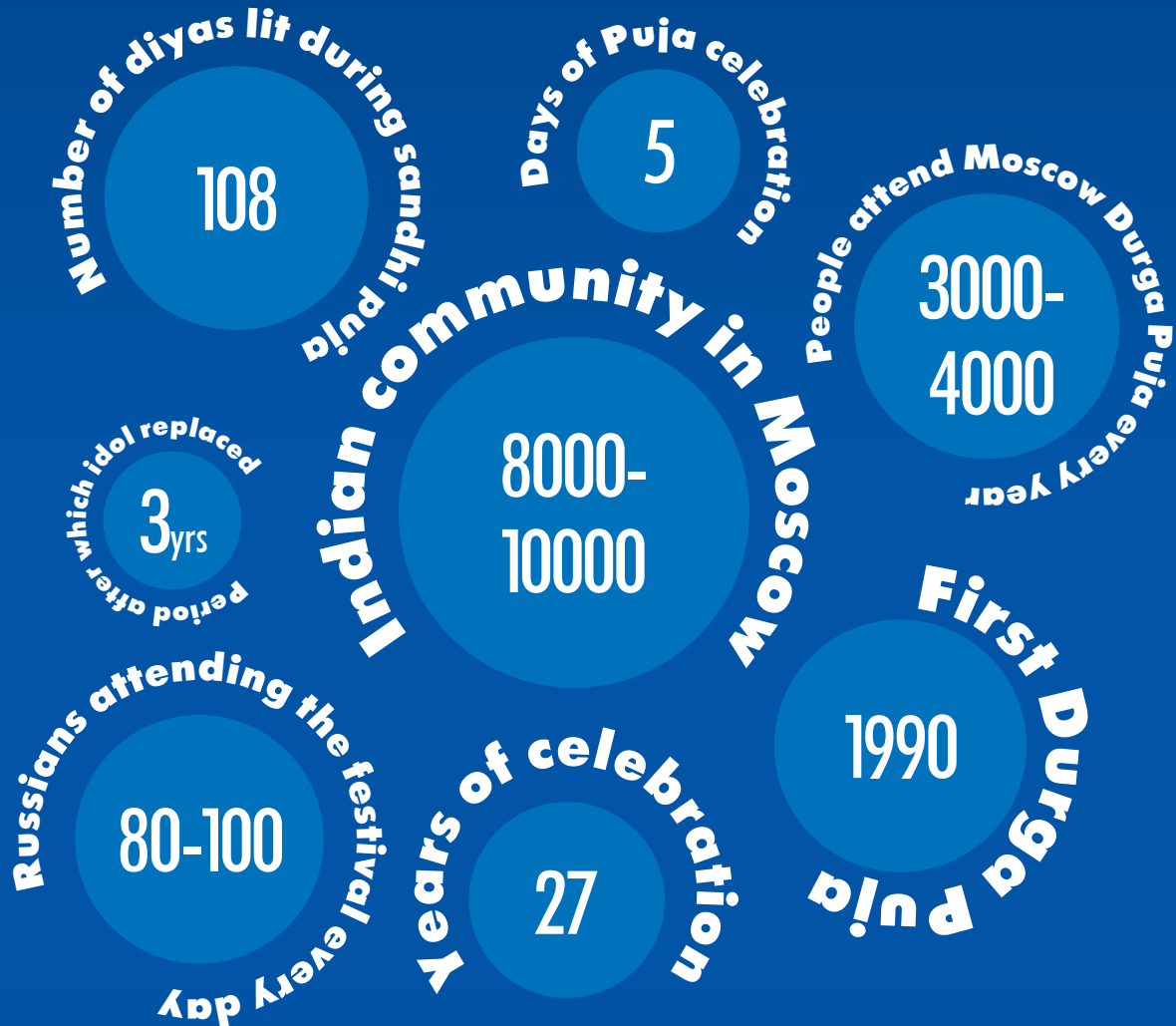
In the section Friends of Aaratrika, we are delighted to be able to connect with two eminent personalities of our sub-continent - Asaduzzaman Noor, Honorable Minister for Culture of Bangladesh who is also an avid actor and Shama Rahman, a leading Rabindrasangeet exponent. Their recollections and insights are a delightful read.

Digest 2016 summarizes the activities of bilateral significance between India and Russia. Gearing for the upcoming 8th BRICS Summit to be held in Goa, India on 15-16 October, Aaratrika has been interacting with academicians and strategists, the participants of the high profile event both from India and Russia and shares their thoughts with our readers.

Our travel section carries a breathtaking travelogue of the dancing Aurora Borealis, the Northern Lights and is full of stunning images. We hope our travel story will inspire some of you to discover Murmansk, the kingdom of ice and adventure.

Our Puja continues to keep alive our traditions among Indians in Russia as well as keeps acquainting the Russians with our culture. One of the most exuberant and heartwarming aspects of the Puja remains exploring cultural traditions and connecting through the underlying bond that brings us together. The Puja reminds us that holidays, time with the family and friends, change of season, new clothes, festivities are what make the passage of time memorable. As we go to Press, we pray that Puja is peaceful and harmonious in South Asia. Please join us to celebrate the joys of the season!

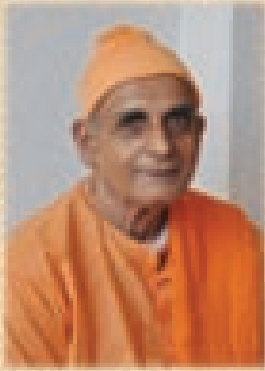
Puja in Numbers



Some more fun trivia:

- Moscow Durga Puja has invited artists from India **twice**
 - Invited Mitrayan Group to perform Chandalika in 2013, and Aneek Dhar during the 25 year anniversary celebrations in 2014
- The damage to the environment from Durga bisarjan is **zero**
 - the idol is not immersed; only 'Ghoto Visarjan' takes place at any small pond or flowing water
- Organising committee members take leave from their jobs for **4-5 days** for the duration of the Puja

MOTHER DURGA- A MANIFESTATION OF UNIVERSAL ENERGY



देवात्मशक्तिं स्वगुणैर्निगूढाम्

*(The Power of God Himself hidden
by its own effects - sattva, rajas and
tamas...)*

Svetasvatara 1/3

In the Upanishads we find that Vedic sages came to know the source of the universe, the Supreme Reality, and called it **Brahmaan** – infinite, eternal and without a cause. **Svetasvatara Upanishad** starts off with a question to settle which the sages had called a meeting: what could be the source of the universe? Was it time, inherent nature, fate, chance, the elements, the individual soul or their combination? Finally by meditation they realized that the Power of God Himself, hidden by its own effects, ruled all the sources, including time and individual soul.

This **Shakti** (power) of **Brahmaan** was responsible for creation, preservation and destruction of the universe. Later, she, this **Shakti**, was designated as Ma Durga. She is, in fact, one with that non-dual **Brahmaan**. Sri Ramakrishna said – a snake whether coiled or moving is the same snake. Whom you call Brahman, I call my mother **Kali (Shakti)**.

We worship Ma Durga as the Supreme Reality, **Brahmamayee**, who bestows us with what is best for us. She resides in the heart of everyone as our consciousness. For every being, there is the external **Gross body**, and within it, a **Fine body**, consisting seventeen parts including mind and vital force. Like the gross body, the fine body also needs regular workouts by the consciousness in us. This consciousness is inseparable from Ma Durga who is the Supreme Consciousness. By worship, devotion, and meditation we can approach her and be blessed.

Those who opine that the Gross body is the only prominent part in a being, and all other finer aspects are subordinate to it, could not be further from the truth. If they think that with the death of the body nothing remains, they commit great blunder causing enormous harm to the world. If my life is ended and everything for me also ended with it, I shall naturally seek as much enjoyment as possible within this short period of life without thinking for others. All the problems of modern time are based on this misleading attitude. On the other hand if I know I have also next lives to continue to reap the results of my present **Karma** (thought and action), I will try to accumulate **Sukarma** (good deeds) for attaining good result, i.e., peace and happiness, and avoid sufferings, i.e., the result of **Kukarma** (bad deeds) waiting in the next life. This life, we may presume, is somehow going on mixed with joys and sorrows, while keeping hope that the next life should be better by doing righteous action. Keeping this in mind, Hindus worship different deities and continue benevolent activities. Such spirit we find in the followers of other religions also. So long as this spirit was dominant in the world, people were more peaceful and happy. People of modern time lack this and are not sure why they should carve selfishness and restrict their enjoyment based merely on physical urge. Beyond physical and mental level, man has his divine state in consciousness in which if he pays attention, he can get rid of baser propensities. Worship of Ma Durga helps uplift us to that state.

या देवी सर्वभूतेषु चेतना इति अभिधीयते

(The goddess who is called Chetana (consciousness) in every being...)

Sri Sri Chandi 5/17

Swami Jyotirupananda

Founder of Ramakrishna Vedanta Centre in Moscow in 1993

SRI SRI DURGA MAHAPUJA SCHEDULE 2016

7th October 2016	Mahashashti, Friday
18:00	PUJA STARTS (Sthapana day)
8th October 2016	Mahashaptami, Saturday
09:00	PUJA STARTS
11:30	PUSHPANJALI
11:50	BHOG & ARATI
18:00	EVENING ARATI
19:15	CULTURAL PROGRAMME STARTS
9th October 2016	Mahaastami, Sunday
09:00	PUJA STARTS
11:30	PUSHPANJALI
11:50	BHOG & ARATI
18:00	EVENING ARATI
19:15	CULTURAL PROGRAMME STARTS
22:07-22:55	SANDHI PUJA
10th October 2016	Mahanavami, Monday
09:00	PUJA STARTS
11:30	PUSHPANJALI
11:50	BHOG & ARATI
18:00	EVENING ARATI
19:15	CULTURAL PROGRAMME STARTS
11th October 2016	Mahadashami, Tuesday
09:30	PUJA SINDUR KHELA IMMERSION SHANTI JAL

SRI SRI LAKSHMI MAHAPUJA 2016

15th October 2016	Saturday
18:00-21:00	LAKSHMI PUJA



In conversation with H.E. Pankaj Saran, Ambassador of the Republic of India to the Russian Federation



Image Credit: Sputniknews

Pankaj Saran joined the Indian Foreign Service in August 1982. He is an M.A. in Economics from the Delhi School of Economics under Delhi University. He was first posted in Moscow as a language trainee from 1984 to 1986 (Russian language). During his long tenure at the Foreign Service, he has been posted in Delhi, Dhaka (Bangladesh), the US (Indian Embassy in Washington DC). He served as Counsellor (Political and Commercial) at Embassy of India in Cairo (Egypt) in 1999-2002. Subsequently, he served at the Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations in Geneva (Switzerland) during 2002-2005. From 2006 onwards he stayed in New Delhi at various important posts for six years after which got appointed as High Commissioner of India in Dhaka (Bangladesh).

Since January 2016 he is our Ambassador here in Moscow.

An avid reader, his hobbies include Tennis, Golf, and Bridge.

Aa: Please share your early memories about Russia. Some of the revelations the country and its culture presented to you.

Ambassador: I visited Russia for the first time 32 years ago. I landed in winter in the month of January when everything was snow covered, absolutely white. I had never seen so much snow in my life. Also I was impressed by the vast expanse of this country, its sheer size. The hospitality and warmth with which we were received by the common Russian citizens wherever we went is truly memorable. India was associated with films, Raj Kapoor and there was a great interest towards the Indian culture. That was the time when friendship between India and the Soviet Union was very strong. India was Soviet Union's one of the most important strategic partners.

I was learning Russian language at that time. I was exposed not to the language but also the other aspects like the literature, music and the cuisine which was a unique experience. I was keen to understand the Russian country along with its culture. Every single day was a voyage of discovery and understanding. I felt deeply that Soviet Union needs to be understood much better than most people understood it.

I travelled extensively throughout Russia, driving through the length and breadth of the country and across its vast highways. Fondly remember my visit to Krasnaya Polyana. I also visited the other republics - Baku, Dushanbe, Frunze and Tallin. It was indeed a huge enriching experience.

Aa: Prior to Moscow you were posted in Dhaka, Bangladesh. What are your fondest memories from your stay? What were your key observations?

Ambassador: I was fortunate to spend eight years in two spells in Bangladesh. My association has been a deep one. I was posted from 1989 to 1992. I witnessed the emergence of democracy, the first election after the fall of General Ershad.

Bangladesh is a very critical neighbour and our relationship is multidimensional. I will always carry with me a memory of warmth, generosity and large-heartedness of the people of Bangladesh. I made it a point to meet people across the section of the society, trying to understand their psychology, making friends and striving to promote the bilateral relationship.

I think during the three years of my stay, we managed to achieve a lot of breakthrough.

I remember almost every single moment of my stay in Bangladesh - the bustling streets of Dhaka, the language, the poetry and the music. In Bangladesh too I drove across all four corners of the country, visiting all the major cities and towns of Bangladesh and in this process discovered a lot about India, specially the North-East. I also traveled to Kolkata. The experience was very enriching. Not a dull moment!

Aa. Aaratrika this year has reached out to two stalwarts of Bangladeshi music and culture - Asaduzzaman Noor, Minister for Culture of Bangladesh and Shama Rahman, the eminent Rabindrasangeet exponent. Do you happen to know them personally and what are your fond recollections?

Ambassador: Noor Bhai is a very special friend, a great theatre personality, an excellent orator, an avid poet and a great cultural figure. He genuinely believes in the greatness of Bengali art and culture. He symbolizes the creative aspects everything that is good about Bangladesh. And above all a fine individual, genuine, very open, transparent. I enjoyed knowing and working with him. I believe we have made a life time association with each other and have been able to do many things together. I knew him even before he became the Minister of Culture, even before he was an MP. I would say that by any yardstick, he is an eminent cultural personality. I wish him every success in his work.

As far as Shama Rahman is concerned, she is undoubtedly one of the greatest singers of Bangladesh. Being an extremely charismatic personality, she has won the hearts of millions of followers on both the sides. She is very well known in India. She has so much melody in her voice. A proud Bangladeshi who is at the forefront of promoting music and poetry.

Aa. Were you exposed to Durga Puja celebrations and festivities growing up? In what way did you participate?

Ambassador: I attended many of the Durga Puja celebrations in Dhaka. Even before that, I had attended a few growing up in Delhi. What struck me was that these celebrations attracted people of all communities and age groups. Moreover, they were conducted peacefully and were very well organized with the support of the government and local municipal authorities. The government and eminent citizens of Bangladesh, by patronizing and celebrating Durga Puja together with everyone, send out a very positive message that the festival brings everyone together and is not denominational. It is a celebration of everything that Bengali culture stands for. Of course, I love the music, the songs and the food (bhog) – basically the whole buildup to the Puja, the days of the celebration, through its aftermath. I have also attended the celebrations at the Ramakrishna Mission. Overall, it left a really good feeling to see the festival being celebrated with such enthusiasm

Aa. Were you always this immaculate and well-behaved even as a child?! Please tell us a bit more about your childhood and growing up years.

Ambassador: (smiling) I think I'll pass the first part of the question, and leave that for others to answer – can't really introspect and analyse much over childhood memories! But I was one of two siblings – the elder one to a younger sister. We grew up largely in Mumbai (or Bombay, as it was called then) and Delhi, in very cosmopolitan cultures; and I think I did everything a young boy ought to do growing up to live life to the fullest – with all kinds of adventures inside and outside of school, then in college. I was given quite a free hand, as my parents trusted me enough to let me live my life. Those were the days when there were no mobile phones or Television sets (even Black & White TV came much later), so the means of entertainment would playing with and talking to friends, more of physical interaction, reading books, travelling to various parts of the country, etc. And there used to be quite a premium on physical sport, unlike today where we see technology binding us down to our laptop and computer screens. We used to find joy in simple things – the monsoons of Bombay, the intellectual discussions and activities at Delhi University; we grew up with the belief that there were no limits to our growth, and that we would certainly enter a world much better than that of our parents.

Aa. For someone intent on maintaining and bolstering relations between countries, how do you connect with your inner self?

Ambassador: I don't really see a contradiction – there are many moments I spend introspecting on the work I do; you need to step back regularly from your day to day activity, to see and to reflect on what you are doing, why you are doing it and how you can do it better. And I really value those moments when I spend time all by myself looking through my life and planning my mission objective.

Aa. For our younger generation, could you recommend one book to read, one movie to watch and one life skill to learn? Maybe even more than one, but which have given you the most joy and insights...

Ambassador: It's difficult and depends largely upon interests, but I would definitely mention Pt Jawaharlal Nehru's 'Discovery of India'; it would really help every young Indian understand their country so much better, because he brings together so many aspects of his life. I have also loved reading classic Indian works such as those of Premchand. Increasingly, I find myself becoming attracted to the Gita, because it says a lot about life – teaches you to manage contradictions, navigate the grey areas, and manage different pulls and pressures in a complex world. I am unfortunately not much of a movie person, so can't mention any. As for life skills, I think it is of utmost importance to be able to handle tough situations – when things do not go as you have planned, whether at work or at home. I also believe everyone should have something to do apart from work – be it physical sport, or a hobby, or an activity; it's what makes you feel complete. Growing up you realise it's not the most important thing to score the highest marks, get into the best college, or secure the best job – life is more than that. It's about allowing yourself to discover what works best for you. So the ability to handle pressure is therefore a skill that will see you through all stages of life – including when you take up higher responsibilities such as starting your own family. I feel it's also important to listen to and learn from others – often you learn more from others than would otherwise be possible, and that's what helps you grow and evolve as you go along.

DIGEST 2016



Ambassador presenting his Letters of Credence to President Vladimir Putin at a formal ceremony in the Kremlin, 20th April 2016.



A statue of Swami Vivekananda, made by distinguished Sculptor, Mr. Gregory Pototsky, was jointly inaugurated by H.E. Pankaj Saran, Mr. Alexey Grigorievitch Zabelin, Rector of the University and Mr. Gregory Pototsky, Sculptor and President of Academy of Kindness, at the Moscow University of Finance and Law on May 20, 2016.

This 190 cm tall bronze statue is the first of Swami Vivekananda to be installed in Moscow.

The annual Indian charity Summer Bazaar organized by the Indian Women's Association on May 21 showcased Indian culture, cuisine, jewellery, handicrafts and apparel. The event included an ensemble of cultural programme in music, dance and yoga performed by JNCC.



The 2nd International Day of Yoga was celebrated across Russia in about 70 Russian regions spanning 11 time zones. In terms of geographical spread and scale, this was the largest Yoga celebration in the world. The week-long celebration began on June 18 in Vladivostok and continued throughout the week in various regions before culminating in St. Petersburg on June 26.

The main celebration was held in Moscow on June 19 in Gorky Park. Over 4000 Russian Yoga enthusiasts participated. The event began with a video message by Prime Minister Narendra Modi dubbed in Russian language and another message by popular Russian singer Sati Kazanova. The Ambassador led the two-hour long Yoga session with performance of the Common Yoga Protocol. Speaking on the occasion



he highlighted the benefits of Yoga for our body's flexibility, strength, and balance.

Visit of Indian Warships to Vladivostok, Russia 27 June - 01 July 2016.

Indian Naval Ships Sahyadri, Shakti and Kirch under the



Command of the Flag Officer Commanding Eastern Fleet, Rear Admiral S V Bhokare, arrived at Vladivostok on a four day visit, as part of deployment of the Eastern Fleet to the South China Sea.

Ambassador seen with Acting Mayor Konstantin Loboda in Vladivostok where he also committed to India's increased participation in this year's Eastern Economic Forum.

INNOPROM, Russia's largest annual international industrial trade fair was held from July 11-14, 2016 in Yekaterinburg.

Indian delegation led by Nirmala Sitharaman, Minister of State (Independent Charge), Commerce and Industry and consisting of the Chief Ministers of three states of India – Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra and Rajasthan, held detailed



discussions to identify new areas of cooperation between India and Russia. The thrust of the discussion was to explore possibilities of investment in India, particularly in these Indian States and in Russia including in the Ural Region as a whole.

A Roadshow presenting Vibrant Gujarat 2017

was organized on 7th September 2016 at Hotel Hilton Leninskaya, Moscow to explore mutual business and trade opportunities between Russia and Gujarat. The business delegation was led by Ms. S Aparna, Principal Secretary to Chief Minister of Gujarat.



The first ever India-Russia Think-Tank summit was hosted by Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO) in association with Indian Council for World Affairs (ICWA) and the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) of India on September 22-23, 2016 in Moscow. Thematic sessions were held to discuss all facets of India-Russia bilateral ties and challenges for future.

With Anatoly Torkunov, Rector of MGIMO (Moscow State Institute of International Relations - Russia's oldest and most renowned school for International Relations and Diplomacy).



H.E. Dr. S.M. Saiful Hoque, Ambassador of the People's Republic of Bangladesh to the Russian Federation

Like every year, I am happy to greet you all on the joyous occasion of Durga Puja. It feels wonderful to be associated with this grand celebration. I am happy to know that Aaratrika this year has connected with one of the most eminent personalities of our country – Minister Asaduzzaman Noor, an outstanding thespian and cultural messiah. Aaratrika has also reached out to Shama Rahman, leading Ranbindrasangeet exponent, and pride and joy of Bangladesh. Love for art and culture truly is beyond all boundaries. I must therefore commend Aaratrika's efforts in bringing everyone associated with the festival and its culture much closer. Moreover, in these times when we often see socio-political turbulence, Aaratrika is playing a major role in bringing communal harmony among people. The more we reiterate and remember the importance of promoting understanding, tolerance and friendship among human beings, notwithstanding their diversity in religion, beliefs, culture and language, the more we encourage universal respect. I wish Aaratrika the very best in all its endeavours, and hope they can reach out to more people in the times to come.

Sharodiya Suveccha!



Image Credit: Bijan Saha

Asaduzzaman Noor, Honorable Minister for Culture, Government of Bangladesh and veteran actor - in a reflective mood with Aaratrika



Asaduzzaman Noor,
Honorable Minister for Culture, Bangladesh

As hackneyed as it may sound, I honestly never thought I would be an actor. Growing up, my father had always been active in the local cultural scene. I was therefore always keen, but never gave serious thought to it as a career. I came to Dhaka for my Undergraduate Studies, where I tried studying Law and Political Science. Meanwhile the war for the Liberation of Bangladesh had started. Culture and theatre was emerging as a very strong form of protest, and I got involved with it while being part of the Students' Union. However, the war intensified and cut short my education as I had to return to my hometown. I decided it was time to earn my upkeep; so started working two part time jobs – one at an ad agency, and another with a cine magazine. It was in 1973 on an interview assignment for the magazine that I first met Ali Zaker, who had just started a theatre group – one of the first formal theatre groups in the art and culture resurrection movement post Liberation in Bangladesh. He invited me to join them; but I was not sure about my acting abilities, so took up a backstage role. I was responsible for being the understudy and doing all kinds of odd jobs around the stage. A few months later during rehearsal for the play '*Toilo Shonkot*', the lead actor got seriously injured just a day before the performance. The director turned to me to step in as I knew all the lines. So I did, and that was it; I had officially crossed over to a new chapter in my life – that of Noor, the actor.

The time I truly realized the power that theatre has over people was when I stepped into the now cult character of *Baker bhai* in the series '*Kothau Keu Nei*'. The love and support that the character received from people exceeded all my expectations. I think because those were troubled times, what with the Martial Law in place, and resentment against Pakistani rule, the character became a beacon and really struck a chord with people. I was excited with the possibilities this threw up, and over the next many years I was to continue working as an actor, I have tried not to let myself be typecast and have taken on a variety of roles. I wanted to be remembered as an actor who did good quality work, not merely as an on-screen Romeo who was linked to several heroines!

In my latest role as Minister for Cultural Affairs, I am in my own humble way working towards strengthening culture of the subcontinent. We want to speak our own language and sing our own songs. But above all, we want peace and harmony among people of all religions residing in our country and for them to respect the multitude of cultures as the basis of a successful democracy is secularism. An occasion like Durga Puja is therefore very heartening to see in Bangladesh, where sometimes over 50% of the attendees at the Puja Pandals are Muslims. As a case in point, my constituency is only one of 300 constituencies in all of Bangladesh; and last year, in my constituency alone, 272 puja mandaps were erected.

Russia is a country and a culture that I deeply admire. Not only have I visited Russia on a number of occasions, I have also been associated since the times of the Soviet Union, when I worked with the Press & Information Department of the Russian Embassy in Bangladesh. I worked on quite a few Russia-centric publications in Bangla. I was also nominated as Secretary General of the Soviet-Bangladesh Friendship Society (now the Russia–Bangladesh Friendship Society), a position I continue to hold till this date. The people of Russia are deeply emotional, expressive, sincere and honest. Their contribution towards theatre, music, literature has been immense; I see it as a treasure – not just their own, but for the entire world.

I am happy to know Moscow Durga Puja is also working towards the noble endeavor of preserving their culture in Russia, and that it celebrates its 27th year this year! I wish everyone *Sharodiya Shubhechha* and only the very best for the years ahead...



Mr Noor donning various hats - (from L to R)
as Minister of Cultural Affairs, Government of Bangladesh; as actor in '*Kanagoli*;
as host of the TV show '*Bela Abela Sarabela*'

Leading Rabindrasangeet artist Shama Rahman — on her Devotion for Rabindranath, Views on Contemporary Music, Love for Russia and more...



I was trained in classical music as a child under Ustad Fazlul Haq, and grew up in a musically inclined family. I have therefore always had a fine ear for music, listening to all kinds – jazz and western forms included. But Rabindra Sangeet is special because every time I listen to his words, it feels as though they were written for me. There is a song for every occasion. *Geetabitan*, I feel, is him telling the story of his life – every feeling or emotion he has ever experienced is in it. I derive solace, comfort, the motivation to follow my journey inwards, and the strength to face any ordeal in life.

A lot is often said about how the present generation and the new culture are eroding our traditions and our classical forms; but in Bangladesh, I see a very heartwarming and encouraging trend of youngsters seeking to learn Rabindra Sangeet in its pure form once again. Our legendary music schools such as *Chhayana*, *Shantiniketan* and various other *Sammilan Parishads* are doing a commendable job of keeping the form alive. Having said that, we should not be very rigid – times have changed, our attention spans have reduced greatly; hence, those who wish to experiment with the instrumentation or musical layout should not be discouraged from bringing their innovations forth, as long as it does not diminish the essence and sanctity of the songs. Moreover, I feel we of the current generation have a big responsibility upon us of handing down our understanding and appreciation of

Rabindra Sangeet so they can love it equally and are inspired to discover it too. I grew up listening to many greats and would never miss an opportunity to attend workshops – such as of Nilima Sen or Mohor di whenever they would come visiting Dhaka from Shantiniketan. I myself would love to teach whatever little I have learnt over the years to those who wish to learn. Though I am not teaching at the present moment as I feel I would not be able to do justice to it being busy with performances, it is my heartfelt wish to be able to take in students under my wing in the future, and to try inspire them to love Rabindra Sangeet the way I and all of us do.

For my performances, I travel often to countries such as Canada, USA, UK, among others. Every time I perform on foreign shores, it is always a fulfilling and heartwarming experience. A particular memory that stands out is the occasion of Rabindranath Tagore's 150th Birth Anniversary Celebrations at the UNESCO headquarters, when nine of my albums were released together. It was a milestone for me personally, of course, but also for all Tagore lovers – to have our *Kobi guru* being celebrated on such an important global platform. More recently, I was in Kolkata in July for the launch of *Radio Maitree* – an initiative by the All India Radio and formally launched by President Pranab Mukherjee, where artists from both sides of the border unite to perform. It is deeply fulfilling and a great honour when I am invited to be part of events of this magnitude internationally.

Russia has always held a special place in my heart. As a child, I would devour all Russia related stories in *Roop katha*, and I still remember a fairy tale I read called *Vasilisa the Beautiful* ("Василиса Прекрасная"). My mother visited Russia first in 1974 as part of an official delegation while an MP with the Bangladesh government; and after she came back, I remember listening to her stories completely spellbound. I am delighted and indeed thrilled to hear that Rabindranath Tagore is so well respected and loved in Moscow, indeed with his statue in place and students and Indologists studying him, his life and his works with such passion and love. I would encourage them to keep the spirit of Rabindranath alive, and to continue on this journey of finding his soul and, in the process, their own. I find this an opportune moment to quote the following lines:

*Sokatore oi kadiche shokole shono shono pita,
Koho kane kane shunao praane praane mongolo barota...
(Dejected, all are crying bitterly, listen O dear father;
Soothe souls, and whisper into ears, all your good words...)*

I look forward to an opportunity to visit Russia and see all these wonders for myself. To everyone in Moscow celebrating their 27th Durga Puja, my warmest season's greetings and love to all...



Dmitry Kiselyov

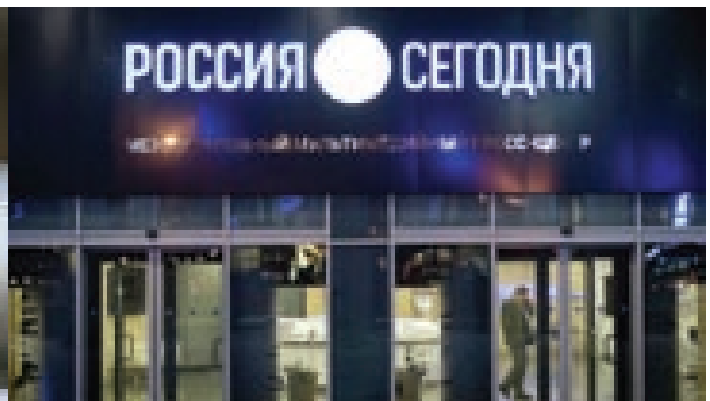


Dmitry Konstantinovich Kiselyov, Head Rossiya Segodnya and H.E. Mr. Pankaj Saran

Rossiya Segodnya News Agency incorporates the former RIA Novosti news service and the international radio service Voice of Russia (formerly Radio Moscow). Rossiya Segodnya provides information on Russian state policy and Russian life and society for audiences abroad. Around 2,300 people are employed with the organization.

The press centre at Rossiya Segodnya regularly holds various press conferences and panel discussions on issues of Indo-Russia bilateral importance. Recently, the press center organized a press conference with Abhishek Kumar Sharma, the bicyclist and environmentalist.

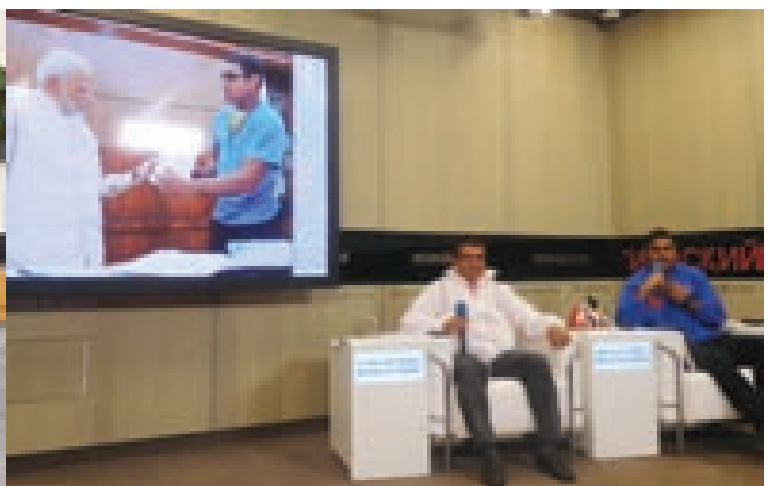
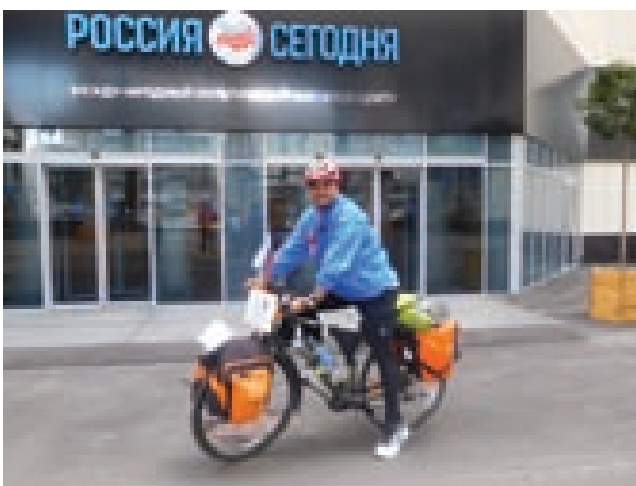
Mr. Kiselyov sends his warmest greetings on the occasion of Durga Puja.



Around the World on Bicycle for Climate Change & World Peace

I was inspired by our Prime Minister's call for Swachh Bharat, to undertake such a journey to motivate people towards this cause. I devoted an entire year to the cause of Swachh Bharat traveling 4500 km across eight states in India, covering nearly 5000 villages and 350 towns, talking to people on the subject of cleanliness. I had to modify my bicycle. It is now equipped with an LED light, a poster with my name, phone number, a bottle and a luggage carrier. I also carry a flag of my country.

And now I have began my world tour to raise awareness about climate change and world peace, both of which are extremely essential in today's world. I am trying to change the mindsets of people, because unless the mindsets are changed, we will not be able to make our world a healthy place. I am delighted to be in Russia, a land of very kind and beautiful people. Where ever I stopped to rest, I was well fed and taken good care of. Also I was given lot of gifts.



A press conference with Abhishek "World-wide cycle tour by Indian Traveller: visiting Russia" was held at Rossiya Segodnya held on September 01, 2016

Param Vir Chakra; A tribute to 21 Brave Soldiers

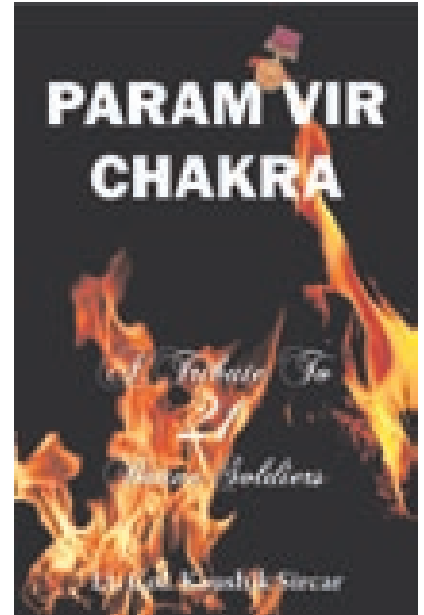
By Lt Colonel Kaushik Sircar, Retd



Lt Colonel Kaushik Sircar, Retd.

His Excellency The Governor of WB, Shri Keshari Nath Tripathi released a very special book (**Param Vir Chakra; A tribute to 21 Brave Soldiers written by Lt Colonel Kaushik Sircar, Retd.**) on 4th July 2016. The book, his Excellency felt should be part of the educational curriculum in schools and colleges in appropriate standards it as very inspiring and motivating. According to him, the youth today should know about our real heroes and the causes for which they made the supreme sacrifice.

Lt Colonel Kaushik Sircar is a retired officer of the Army who has had a stint with IPKF in Sri Lanka for two years, had taken part in Operation RAKSHAK (PUNJAB & J&K), Operation VIJAY (Tangdhar) and had been a counter Hijack expert with the elite National Security Guards, The Black Cat Commando.



The book cover

This book is a revised version of a previous one, namely **OF GUTS & GLORY** from the same author (2004). It took 2 years to complete the book after visiting most of the awardees, their families and the places where the wars were fought for which the recipients received this Supreme Award.

Param Vir Chakra is the highest military decoration awarded for the highest degree of valor or self sacrifice in the presence of the enemy. It is similar to British Victoria Cross, US Medal of Honour, French Legion of Honor or Russian Cross of St George. There were 21 Soldiers who were awarded the Param Vir Chakra, 14 of them posthumously.

As described in the book, the medal was designed by Mrs. Savitri Khanolkar (Born Eva Yvonne Linda Maday-de-Maros) born to a Russian mother and Hungarian father and married Major General V Khanolkar of the Sikh Regiment.

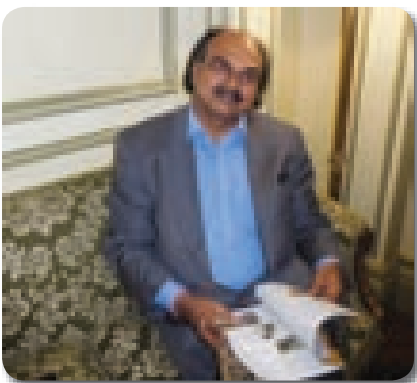
It is a well-researched book. The research is laudable for being outstanding both in terms of scope and depth.

We hope that the book will find its way to the collections of many and will inspire some of our youngsters to take up the job of defending our Motherland in a fashion where the coin of exchange is Human Life, the greatest thing one can sacrifice.



«Freedom» by Sudeshna Aurangabadkar

Dr. Ram Upendra Das in a Freewheeling Chat



*Professor, Research and Information System for Developing Countries (RIS)
Delegate, first India-Russia Think-Tank summit held on September 22-23, 2016
in Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO).*

Russia is truly fascinating, a developed country with a disciplined population. I could feel a certain warmth, willingness to reach out and an appreciation about India in the people with whom I interacted during my stay. Russia is at a juncture when its relationship with India is getting rediscovered. Both Russia and India are changing. Connections at different levels need to be established - people-to-people ties, government to government collaboration and contacts in business endeavours. The stereotypes in the Indian minds about Russia and vice versa, are merely reflections of sheer information gap. The geo-strategic and geo-economical relationship between our two countries must begin at the level of academic and cultural exchange.

Do you know the meaning of the word yoga? To enjoin, to connect. And that is what I wish our two countries would develop upon to work towards a strong and comprehensive relationship.

Aaratrika Remembers...

Padma Vibhushan Sayed Haider S. H. Raza (22 February 1922 – 23 July 2016)



The legendary painter who globally popularised Indian concepts and developed a soaring legacy of modern art passed away. He lived and worked in France since 1950, while keeping strong ties with India. His works are mainly abstracts in oil or acrylic, with a very rich use of color, replete with icons from Indian cosmology as well as its philosophy. His works, based on the idea that the 'Bindu' (dot) is the centre of all creations, are considered a turning point in his career. He had said "Bindu is a source of energy, a still centre, a point of radiation. It has immense visual possibilities." A huge loss for Indian contemporary art, he will always be remembered.

Mahasweta Devi (14 January 1926 – 28 July 2016)

We lost Mahasweta Devi this year. She was 90.

A renowned writer and social activist, her notable literary works include Hajar Churashir Maa, Rudali, and Aranyer Adhikar. She worked for the rights and empowerment of the tribal people (Lodha and Shabar) of West Bengal, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. Among the numerous awards she received during her long and eventful literary life one can mention the Sahitya Akademi Award (in Bengali), Jnanpith Award and Ramon Magsaysay Award along with India's civilian awards Padma Shri and Padma Vibhushan.

Mahasweta Devi was born to literary parents. Her family was full of distinguished art workers of varied fields. Her father, Manish Ghatak, was a well-known poet and novelist of the Kallol movement, who used the pseudonym Jubanashwa. Her uncle was noted filmmaker Ritwik Ghatak. Devi's mother, Dharitri Devi, was also a writer and a social worker whose brothers were very distinguished in various fields, such as the noted sculptor Sankha Chaudhury and the founder-editor of the Economic and Political Weekly of India, Sachin Chaudhury.

Mahasweta Devi wrote over 100 novels and over 20 collections of short stories, most of which are in Bengali. She was translated in many languages. She studied the Lodhas and Shabars, the tribal communities of West Bengal, women and dalits. In her elaborate Bengali fiction, she often depicted the brutal oppression of tribal peoples and the untouchables by potent, authoritarian upper-caste landlords, lenders, and venal government officials.

She always believed that the real history is made by ordinary people. The reason and inspiration of her writing were those exploited and people who do not accept defeat. For her, the endless source of ingredients for writing was in these amazingly noble, suffering human beings.

With her a long epoch of waging war against the powerful and strong ones through the sheer strength of unity of people and power of the pen terminates. Life without her will never be like how it was before. Brutal force was stopped time and again by her writings. In her, the other India which does not shine, where sub-human existence is the way of life, lost one of its most vocal spokespersons. The newly baked bunch of writers will hardly say anything about them- their audience is the other, shining India.

We deeply mourn the death of this Great Soul!



Salaam Namaste

The Durga Puja celebration in Moscow was a significant part of my childhood. This united the Indian committee in Moscow. We admired our religion and practiced it despite living in a foreign country.

The festival was amazing and the performances were outstanding. My favourite part was the mouth-watering delicious food. The astonishing fact was that a few Russians also supported and admired our religious and cultural practices.



The lion here symbolizes the power and wisdom of the Ma Durga to win over all evils of this universe.

Wishing all in Moscow a great celebration.

Abhilasha Arun
First Year BA, Political Science
Delhi University

Picture by Abhilasha Arun



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SHIVE SARVARTHA SADHIKE
SHARANYE THRIYAMBHIKE DEVI
NARAYANI NAMOSTHUDE

Wishing all a Happy
DIURGA PUJA



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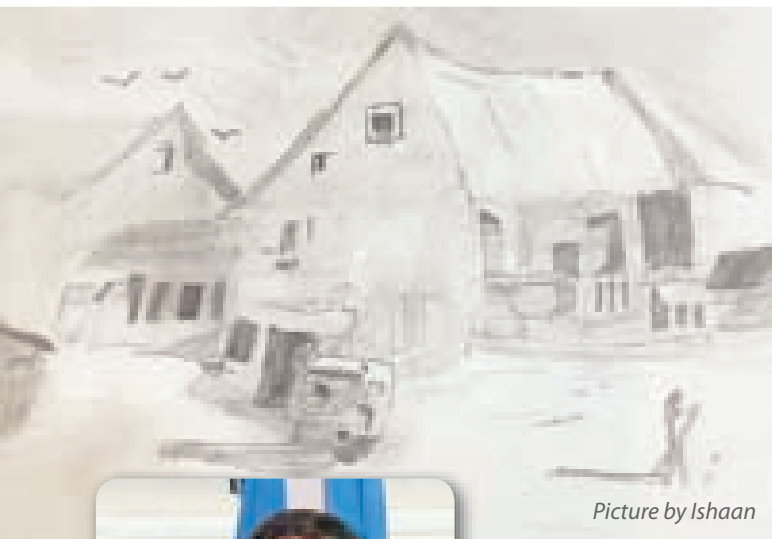
My First Durga pujo in Moscow

I love Durga pujo! My Dimma (Grandma) told me the first time I saw Durga pujo, I was 30 days old. It was in Hong Kong. So I thought Durga pujo happens only in Hong Kong. Then when I was 5 years old, I saw Durga pujo in Kolkata. I was going to Dimma's house from the airport and saw so many temples (Mummy said they are called "pandals") with the same Durga thakur everywhere, but all looking so different. In Kolkata the stages are all open, but in Hongkong, Durga pujo happens inside a hall.

Now I am waiting for Durga pujo in Moscow. Mummy had lived here a long time ago before I was born. She told me many stories about Moscow Durga pujo. When I heard that we were shifting to Moscow, I was really excited to see Durga pujo because I had missed it for the last four years. My grandmother is here to visit us and she is very happy too. I am also waiting to see all the shows and programs during the Durga pujo in Moscow.



Aarushi Chatterjee, Class 4



Picture by Ishaan



Picture by Ishaan

Hello from Mumbai...

Ishaan used to be one of the most enthusiastic participants at Moscow Durga Puja before he moved back home to Mumbai with his parents. However, Ishaan misses us all here at Moscow (we do too!), and shares with us some of his latest sketches.



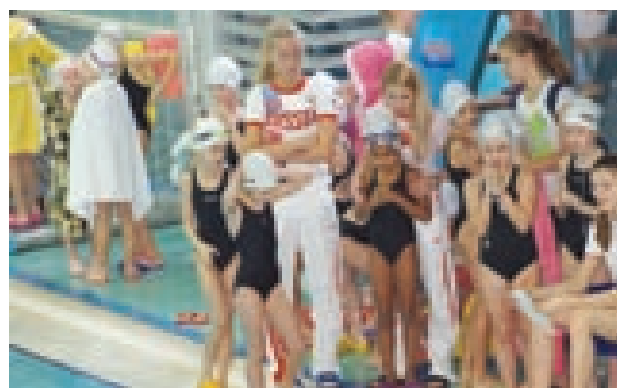
Ishaan Ghosh, Class 5

be no less than perfect at all times. This summer, I went to Greece to attend a special 10-day summer training camp. This was the first time we did synchronized swimming outside of the protected environs of a swimming pool and were all out in the sea. It was an intense programme – we would be practising from morning till evening, and were severely exhausted at the end of the day with our arms and legs in pain. However, the experience of meeting kids my age from other parts of the world, who are some of the best in the sport, was amazing to say the least. I also feel lucky to have been able to visit and experience a wonderful new country in the process. I now feel motivated to do even

better so as to be able to participate and compete in many more such events in the future.

My Greek Summer

I have been a water baby for as long as I can remember. About four years back, I started training in competitive synchronized swimming. It is a very physically demanding sport –



Aanisha Garzon, Class 4



Yash Dasgupta, Class 9

"School of the Future" 2016 –

Competition of Scientific and Technical Creativity

In today's world, the most important personality traits are creativity, analytical mind and finding innovative solutions. With the support of the Russian Ministry of Education, this annual contest promotes the involvement of Russian school students in project activities, contributing to the development of engineering and design capabilities, modeling skills and technical creativity. The competition is conducted in three age groups: 6-10 years, 11-13 years, 14-18 years.

Yash Dasgupta won the 1st prize for his project amongst all Moscow's schools in the category (14-18 years), he being the youngest participant in that age group. Aaratrika had a few words with him.

Aa: Tell us about the competition.

YD: This inter-school competition is held annually in 3 stages: Local-Zonal-State levels. We first competed amongst local schools in our area; the winners were then selected for the zonal level (4-Moscow zones). The winners of each zone then competed in the state-level finals. The competition has two categories: "Design & Construction projects" and "Multimedia Projects".

Aa: How were the projects evaluated?

YD: The projects were evaluated using the following criteria:

- Innovation & creativity;
- Aesthetic design;
- Reasoning, logic, presentation;
- Complexity;
- Level of use of software;
- Practical use in life.

Aa: What was your project about?

YD: The main objective of my project was to create a modern Recreation Center (Disney Land) for the leisure activities of children - the organization of children's outdoor activities, improvement of social atmosphere in the city, generating revenues for city budget through taxes, opportunities for development of small businesses. It consisted of Designing/construction of a model, Preparing a detailed business plan and Evaluation of social & environmental impacts.

Aa: How was your experience being the youngest participant?

YD: When we registered for participation, I was three days short of 14 years. However, I was already a few days past 14 years, when I presented my project. The experience was very helpful as I met many students from different schools of Moscow and we shared various interesting ideas. Though the jury was very strict, they were cooperative and gave us useful recommendations.

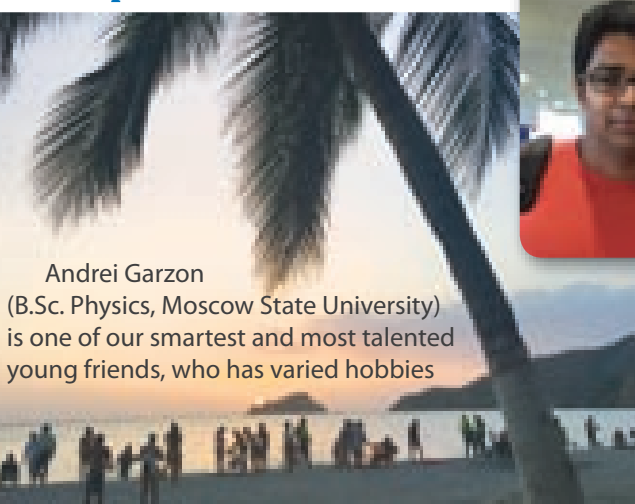


Nimble footed Nymphets

Meet Prarthana (Class 9) and Sanchari (Class 6) Mukhopadhyay – the shining stars of Moscow Durga Puja! This sibling duo has been training in classical Odissi dance since a very young age, and together they have performed at various events of the Durga Puja Committee and outside of it. They have represented their school, the Embassy of India Kendriya Vidyalaya, in various solo and group dance competitions and won numerous accolades. Aaratrika is very proud of Prarthana and Sanchari and encourages more of our next generation to take up and keep alive our traditional dance and art forms...

Prarthana Mukhopadhyay (Class 9), Sanchari Mukhopadhyay, Class 6

Snapshots of Colombia



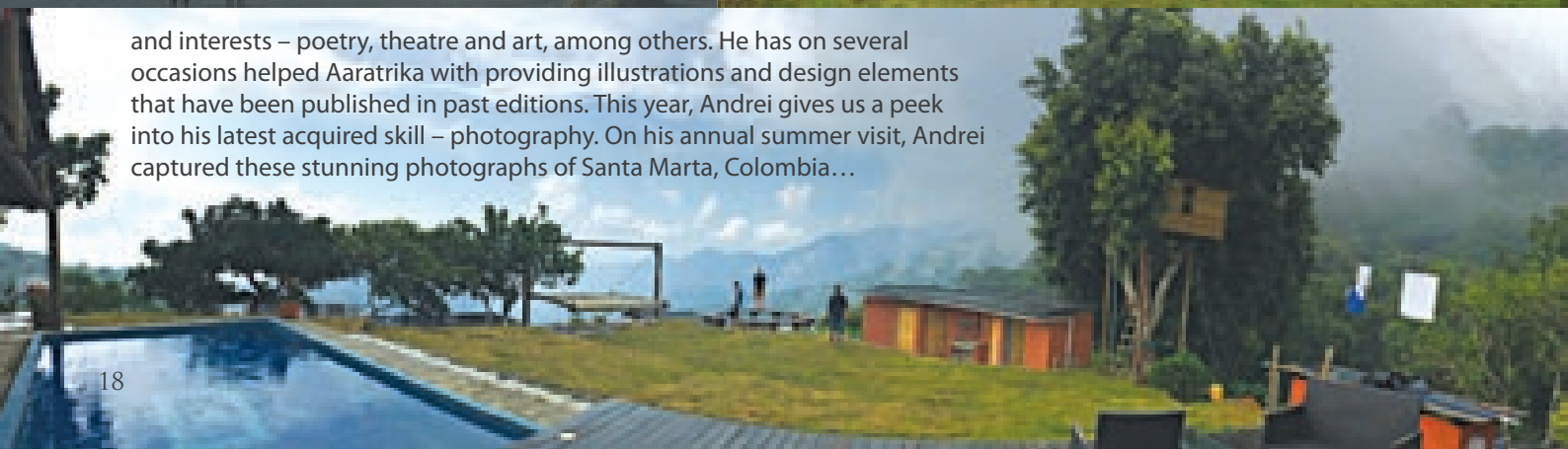
Andrei Garzon
(B.Sc. Physics, Moscow State University)
is one of our smartest and most talented
young friends, who has varied hobbies



Andrei Garzon
(B.Sc. Physics, Moscow State University)



and interests – poetry, theatre and art, among others. He has on several occasions helped Aaratrika with providing illustrations and design elements that have been published in past editions. This year, Andrei gives us a peek into his latest acquired skill – photography. On his annual summer visit, Andrei captured these stunning photographs of Santa Marta, Colombia...



Tesla and Swami Vivekananda-A Divine Connection



Uditangshu Aurangbadakar

When we say the word 'India' in front of Americans or citizens of other foreign communities, the first word that comes to their mind is 'Swami Vivekananda' and then in descending order Bollywood, curry etc.

Swamiji was a visionary and a revolutionary. Even though he ascended his mortal self in 1902, his thoughts and quotes still influence many people, not just Indians. My article is about another such visionary. His name was Nikola Tesla. Unlike Swamiji, Tesla was far from being a monk. He was an inventor who invented our century-The XX1st century. Both shared some common traits, their families were religious, both at first denied the existence of God, both had an eidetic memory and both wanted to influence the world in some or the other way, but would anyone believe that these two met and had a chat.

Yes, they did meet. We've all been taught about the 1893 Chicago World Fair by our history teacher in the eighth or ninth grade and we can recollect the pride with which our teachers would talk about the Parliament of World's Religion and about Swamiji's most iconic word-"Brothers and Sisters of America" and his speech which has been repeated in every declamation competition in Indian schools, but there was a second part to it. Swamiji not only influenced American visitors but also inventors like Nikola Tesla! Nikola Tesla along with George Westinghouse, were in charge of the entire lighting of the World Fair and Tesla happened to be at Swamiji's speech.

Tesla, was deeply influenced by Swamiji's speech, met him and said that he could give a relation between Mass and Energy. Swamiji in one of his letters wrote, I quote, "Mr. Tesla thinks he can give a mathematical relation between Mass and Energy. If he succeeds, Vedantic philosophy will be placed on the surest of foundations"

You all might be thinking whether Tesla could prove this or not. I am sorry to inform that he couldn't, but he did not stop his research and extensively read the Vedas. He would then assert

his influence on famous literary figures like Mark Twain, scientists like Paul Dirac, pioneers of nuclear physics like Niels Bohr and Albert Einstein and the genius behind the periodic table, Dimi-tri Mendeleev. Mendeleev, however, met with Tesla after Tesla found a way to illuminate the newly found element Neon. After that meeting, Mendeleev started using names like "Eka"-Alumi-num and "Eka"-Silicon (Eka is a Sanskrit word used extensively in the Vedas) for the elements that were yet to be discovered and Tesla started using words like "Akasha" and "Prana" in many of his patents, which many time, left the patent office baffled!

Now I believe, you all might be thinking, why am I writing about a man who could not give the relation between energy and mass. The truth is, he did, but was too late to realize it. As patents involving scientific theories cannot be patented unless it is a thesis paper and considering the fact that Tesla never graduated from university, his work could be available to anyone who wanted. Albert Einstein, who is credited to be one of the most in-telligent people on this planet, saw the potential in Tesla's ideas. Borrowing Max Planck's idea of light being energy and Tesla's 'hypothetical' theory of Mass and Energy being interrelated, he framed his equation, $E=mc^2$! This was a perfect relation between mass and energy.

However both Swamiji and Tesla, till the end of their lives be-lieved that each organism in the Universe gains energy from an energy source and that source according to both was "God".





টুকরো ভাবনা, ছেঁড়া অনুভূতি

- বিশ্বরূপ সান্যাল

১।

নিচু জলাভূমিকে বৃষ্টি তিব্বতি ভাষায় বলে ‘বং’। বঙ্গ দেশের ভৌগোলিক একক হিসেবে উদ্ভব সম্ভবত সেই উপলব্ধি থেকে। শোনা যায়, বিপদসঙ্কুল সাপ- খোপের রাজত্ব এই ভূখণ্ডে পাণ্ডবেরাও আসতে পারেন নি তাদের দীর্ঘ বনবাস কালে। সেখানে এখন অরুণ আলোর অঞ্জলি দিতে সাদা মেঘের ভেলা ভেসেছে আকাশে, অথচ রাশিয়া- তে ঠিক একই সময় মেঘের ছায়া বনের প্রান্তে লুটিয়ে পড়ছে। আকাশের নীল চোখের কোণায় যেন জলে ভারাক্রান্ত কালো মেঘ জমির ওপরে ঘোমটা টেনে দিল।

এখন এখানে বৃষ্টি হবে।

জানালা দিয়ে উঁকি ঝুঁকি দেয় কমলা হয়ে আসা পাতাদের ভিড়। তাদের মাঝে দলছুট সবুজ রয়ে যাওয়া একলা একটা পাতার আভাস। ছ’ মাস বাদে আবার পৃথিবী জীবন ফিরে পাবে, নতুন তারুণ্যে সবুজ হবে- এ কি তার-ই অঙ্গীকার?

শরত পূর্ণিমা গাছের ভেজা পাতায় চাঁদকে বন্দী করে আলোর ঢলে ডুবিয়ে দিয়েছে সবকিছু। জলের স্রোতেও যেন ঝিকমিকে রূপালী তরঙ্গ বাষ্প হয়ে আকাশ ধরতে ছুটল।

আগ্নিনের ওই জ্যোৎস্নার মাঠে কি মনসুর মিয়াঁর ঘোড়াটা বেরোবে ঘাস খেতে?

২।

হাজার বছর আগে দেশ কেমন ছিল, পৃথিবীটাই বা ঠিক কেমন, কেউই আমরা তা দেখিনি। তবে, গত প্রায় অর্ধশতক ধরে দেখছি জাতি হিসেবে আমাদের এক নিশ্চিত হীনমন্যতা। আসলে, কানে শোনা মহত্বের গল্পের সাথে বাস্তবকে মেলাতে না পারলে হয় দুটোর একটাকে খারিজ করতে হয়, অথবা ভাবের ঘরে চুরি করে দুটোর মধ্যে একটা বোঝাপড়ার সেতু বাঁধতে হয়। আমরা দ্বিতীয়টা করি। তার ফলে, নিজেদের জাতিস্বত্ত্বার বস্তুনিষ্ঠ কোন মূল্যায়নের জায়গা নিয়েছে কিছু ধার করা উক্তি, নতুবা যুক্তিহীন গোঁয়ারত্বমি।

গোথলে মহাশয় একশ বছর আগে একটি মারাত্মক বুলি ঝেড়ে বাঙ্গালিকে পথে বসিয়ে দিয়ে গেছেন। এখনো আমরা বিশ্বাস করি, যে আজ আমরা যা ভাবি, বাকি ভারতবর্ষ বৃষ্টি... মজাটা হল, যে আমরা যখন যা ভেবেছি, বাকি ভারতবর্ষ কখনই তা ভাবেনি। আগেও না, পরেও না। শুধুমাত্র, এই বিষয়টি আমাদের ছেলেবেলা থেকে মাথায় ঢুকে গিয়ে হয়েছে বিপদ। কেবল ভাবি, সবার আগে আসলে তো আমরাই। শুধুমাত্র কিছু কুচুটে পরশ্রীকাতর চক্রান্ত করে আমাদের পিছনে ফেলছে।

দুর্ভাগ্য।

আসলে, আমাদের মূল ধারার ভারতবর্ষ থেকে দূরে সরানো হয়েছে আজ অনেক দশক হল। অথচ এখনো আমরা ভাবছি, ওরাও আমাদের মত ভাববে, করবে।

করেওনি, করবেওনা। যতদিন না আমরা সত্যি সত্যি কোন অসাধারণত্বের জন্ম দেব।

পিছু হটে হটে রয়ে গেছে এক দুর্গা পূজো। কলকাতার লোকে রাশিয়ায় থাকি শুনেই জিজ্ঞেস করে- ‘খুব ঠাণ্ডা, না? সব তো বরফ হয়ে যায়!?’... আর তার পরেই- ‘ওখানে পূজো হয়?’

৩।

ভেজা পথে নিজের জুতোর সপ সপ ছাড়া আর কোন শব্দ নেই। নিস্তব্ধতা এতটাই গভীর, যে নিজের হৃদপিণ্ডের ধুক পুক শব্দ যেন কানে আসছে। আশে পাশে পাইন বন। বেশ জোরে একটা হাওয়া দিয়ে ভাবনাগুলো এলোমেলো করে দিয়ে গেল।

জঙ্গলটা পেরিয়ে ওপারের গ্রামে পৌঁছাতে রাত হবে। অমাবস্যার রাত। টিমটিমে তারার আলোয় মনে হচ্ছে গাছগুলো জীবন্ত হয়ে উঠল বৃষ্টি। ওদের খস খস পাতার শব্দে যেন কোন অশরীরী আত্মার ভাষা। ঘু- ঘু-উ উ উ উ... ঘু- ঘু- উ উ উ উ... রাত্রি দুপুর রাত্রি দুপুর... বেহালার ছড়ে টান দিয়ে মেঘের সূর ভাসে হাওয়ায়।

সাড়ে তিন দশক আগে এমনি করেই শাল মহয়ার বনে পায়ে পায়ে অনেক দূর চলে গেছিলাম। মুক্তির সেই রাজ্যে শেষ অবধি পৌঁছান হয়নি। মানুষগুলো রয়ে গেছে, মুখে- কপালে বলিরেখাগুলো গভীর থেকে গভীরতর করে। নামহীন, পরিচয়হীন। নাকি, এরা প্রজন্মপারে প্রোথিত সেই মানুষগুলোর-ই আত্মা?

এতদিনে একটা শতাব্দী শেষ করে নতুনটার দ্বিতীয় দশকের মাঝে এসে গেছি। গাছেরাই প্রশ্ন করে- বলেছিলে নব যুগ আনবে, কই- আনলেনা তো? তোমরা বৃষ্টি আর স্বপ্ন দেখনা?

প্রচণ্ড শব্দে বাজ পড়ে, মুশলধারে বৃষ্টি নামে।

গাল চুঁইয়ে নামা বৃষ্টির জলে হারিয়ে যায় ফেলে আসা যত অঙ্গীকার, জলের মতন দেখতে কয়েকটা স্বচ্ছ বিন্দু।



नीलाभ अशक : एक क्रांतिकारी कवि, अनुवादक और पत्रकार - ददन उपाध्याय -



इस वर्ष जुलाई में हिंदी साहित्य जगत को एक अपूरणीय क्षति से अचानक सामना हुआ, जब मशहूर वरिष्ठ कवि, अनुवादक, पत्रकार और समालोचक नीलाभ अशक का नयी दिल्ली में संक्षिप्त बीमारी के बाद निधन हो गया। वह 70 वर्ष के थे। नीलाभ के इस बेवक्त निधन के साथ ही उनके उस अनवरत संघर्ष का, उतार-चढ़ाव और भटकाव से भरे एक सकारात्मक क्रांतिकारी सृजनशील जीवन का भी अंत हो गया, जो उन्होंने इलाहाबाद विश्वविद्यालय में शिक्षा हासिल करने के बाद साहित्य और पत्रकारिता में एक लंबे रास्ते से तय किया था। अपने निधन के पूर्व वह खुद एक नयी रचनात्मक दिशा पाने की कोशिश में लगे हुए थे और जैसा कि मीडिया रिपोर्टों से मालूम हुआ, कई रचना-योजनाओं पर काम कर रहे थे।

उनका जन्म 16 अगस्त 1945 को मुंबई में हुआ था, लेकिन उनकी शिक्षा और कर्मस्थली इलाहाबाद रही। नीलाभ दिवंगत प्रख्यात हिंदी साहित्यकार उपेन्द्र नाथ अशक और कौशल्या अशक के इकलौते बेटे थे। विश्वविद्यालय से अंग्रेजी में एम.ए. करने के बाद वे इलाहाबाद में खुसरोबाग रोड स्थित निवास से नीलाभ प्रकाशन के काम में उपेन्द्र नाथ अशक का हाथ बंटाते थे।

जीवनभर सत्ता के शोषण के खिलाफ लिखने वाले इस योद्धा साहित्यकार और पत्रकार के स्तब्धकारी निधन से हिंदी जगत में शोक की लहर छा गयी। प्रगतिशील लेखक संघ (प्रलेस) जनवादी लेखक संघ (जलेस) और जन संस्कृति मंच (जसम) सहित अनेक जाने-माने लेखकों, साहित्यकारों, सांस्कृतिक रंगकर्मियों और पत्रकारों ने नीलाभ के निधन को हिंदी की एक बड़ी क्षति बताया तथा इस पर गहरा दुःख व्यक्त किया।

साहित्य अकादमी के अध्यक्ष विश्वनाथ प्रसाद तिवारी ने उनके निधन पर शोक प्रकट करते हुए कहा, नीलाभ हिंदी के क्रांतिकारी कवि थे। उनसे साहित्य को बहुत उम्मीदें थीं। उनके निधन का मुझे बहुत दुःख है।

हिंदी के मशहूर कवि और पत्रकार मंगलेश डबराल ने उन्हें बहुत प्रतिभाशाली साहित्यकर्मि बताते हुए कहा कि आज के समय में विरले ही चार भाषाओं - हिन्दी, उर्दू, अंग्रेजी और पंजाबी - के जानकार मिलते हैं और नीलाभ उनमें से एक थे।

नीलाभ अपने स्वभाव से मूलतः एक क्रांतिकारी और बेहद प्रयोगशील शख्सियत के साहित्यकार और सृजनकर्मी थे। घर की निजी समस्याओं और प्रकाशन काम के ठीक से न चल पाने के कारण अंततः उबकर और परेशान होकर उन्होंने 1980 में बीबीसी (हिंदी) में बतौर प्रोड्यूसर नौकरी तलाश ली और लंदन में चार वर्ष तक काम किया। लंदन जाकर उन्होंने एक योग्य पत्रकार-प्रसारक के तौर पर अपनी छाप भी छोड़ी। 1984 में स्वदेश वापसी के बाद वह इलाहाबाद में पुनः अपने लेखन और प्रकाशन कार्य से जुड़ गये।

लेकिन छह साल पहले वह दिल्ली चले आये और राजधानी में ही रहने लगे थे। निधन के समय वे राष्ट्रीय नाट्य विद्यालय की पत्रिका रंग प्रसंग के संपादक के तौर पर कार्यरत थे और अपने संस्मरणों पर आधारित ब्लॉग नीलाभ का मोर्चा लिख रहे थे।

नीलाभ ने नौ कविता संग्रह प्रकाशित करवाये। अकविता और भूखी पीढ़ी के वैयक्तिक विद्रोह की प्रवृत्तियों से हटकर नीलाभ नेकविता में अपनी जो राह बनायी और हिंदी में जिन कवियों की पहली ही कृतियाँ महत्वपूर्ण मानी गयीं, उनमें उनका कविता संग्रहसंस्मरणारंभ भी था। बाद के वर्षों में अपने आप से एक लम्बी, बहुत लम्बी बातचीत, जंगल खामोश है, उत्तराधिकार और चीजें उपस्थित हैं आदि संग्रहों से वे अपने दौर की एक प्रतिनिधि आवाज के रूप में जाने गये।

एक अनुवादक के रूप में भी नीलाभ ने कई सुप्रसिद्ध लेखकों की बहुचर्चित कृतियों के उम्दा अनुवाद किये। उन्होंने मिखाइललेर्मोन्तोव के उपन्यास हमारे युग का एक नायक, विलियम शेक्सपीयर के चर्चित नाटक किंग लियर का अनुवाद पगला राजाशीर्षक से किया। इसके अलावा, उन्होंने बर्तोल्त ब्रेख्त और लोर्का के कई नाटकों के काव्यात्मक अनुवाद किये। सलमान रुश्दी के उपन्यास फ्लोरेन्स की जादूगरनी के उनके अनुवाद भी उत्कृष्ट हैं। उन्होंने अरुंधति राय की बुकर पुरस्कार से सम्मानित पुस्तक द गॉड ऑफ स्मॉल थिंग्स का अनुवाद मामूली चीजों का देवता शीर्षक से किया। इसके अलावा, उन्होंने हिन्दी साहित्य का मौखिक इतिहास नामक एक चर्चित पुस्तक लिखी। रंगमंच के क्षेत्र में भी उनका यादगार योगदान है।

ददन उपाध्याय (संक्षिप्त परिचय) : वरिष्ठ पत्रकार, साहित्यकार और अनुवादक। नयी दिल्ली में लगभग दस वर्ष पत्रकारिता से जुड़े रहे। फरवरी, 1978 से मास्को प्रवास के दौरान “प्रगति प्रकाशन” में वरिष्ठ हिंदी अनुवादक और संपादक के रूप में अपने पंद्रह वर्ष के कार्य-काल में विभिन्न विषयों पर लगभग 150 पुस्तकों को अनूदित किया। उन्हें पंद्रहवीं सदी के मध्य में भारत की सर्वप्रथम यात्रा करने वाले अफानासी निकितिन की मौलिक कृति “तीन समुद्रपार यात्रा” का हिंदी में पहले-पहल अनुवाद करने का भी श्रेय है।

“प्रगति प्रकाशन” में कार्य के दौरान और 1991 में सोवियत संघ के पतन के बाद, वह मास्को में अंग्रेजी और हिंदी के कई सुप्रसिद्ध दैनिक समाचारपत्रों और समाचार एजेंसियों के संवाददाता रहे हैं, जिनमें “इंडियन एक्सप्रेस”, “मेल टुडे”, “यूएनआई”, “आईपीए”, और “आज”, “देशबन्धु” हिंदी दैनिक सम्मिलित हैं। वह दिल्ली से प्रकाशित कुछ अन्य मुख्य हिंदी दैनिकों के लिए भी लिखते रहे हैं।

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माँ

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नमो नमो दुर्गे सुख करनी। नमो नमो दुर्गे दुःख हरनी॥ निरंकार है ज्योति तुम्हारी। तिहूँ लोक फैली उजियारी॥
शशि ललाट मुख महाविशाला। नेत्र लाल भृकुटि विकराला॥ रूप मातु को अधिक सुहावे। दरश करत जन अति सुख पावे॥1॥
तुम संसार शक्ति लै कीना। पालन हेतु अन्न धन दीना॥ अन्नपूर्णा हुई जग पाला। तुम ही आदि सुन्दरी बाला॥
प्रलयकाल सब नाशन हारी। तुम गौरी शिवशंकर प्यारी॥ शिव योगी तुम्हरे गुण गावें। ब्रह्मा विष्णु तुम्हें नित ध्यावें॥2॥
रूप सरस्वती को तुम धारा। दे सुबुद्धि ऋषि मुनिन उबारा॥ धरयो रूप नरसिंह को अम्बा। परगट भई फाड़कर खम्बा॥
रक्षा करि प्रह्लाद बचायो। हिरण्याक्ष को स्वर्ग पठायो॥ लक्ष्मी रूप धरो जग माहीं। श्री नारायण अंग समाहीं॥3॥
क्षीरसिन्धु में करत विलासा। दयासिन्धु दीजै मन आसा॥ हिंगलाज में तुम्हीं भवानी। महिमा अमित न जात बखानी॥
मातंगी अरु धूमावति माता। भुवनेश्वरी बगला सुख दाता॥ श्री भैरव तारा जग तारिणी। छिन्न भाल भव दुःख निवारिणी॥4॥
केहरि वाहन सोह भवानी। लांगुर वीर चलत अगवानी॥ कर में खप्पर खड्ग विराजै। जाको देख काल डर भाजै॥
सोहै अस्त्र और त्रिशूला। जाते उठत शत्रु हिय शूला॥ नगरकोट में तुम्हीं विराजत। तिहुँलोक में डंका बाजत॥5॥
शुम्भ निशुम्भ दानव तुम मारे। रक्तबीज शंखन संहारे॥ महिषासुर नृप अति अभिमानी। जेहि अघ भार मही अकुलानी॥
रूप कराल कालिका धारा। सेन सहित तुम तिहि संहारा॥ परी गाढ़ सन्तन र जब जब। भई सहाय मातु तुम तब तब॥6॥
अमरपुरी अरु बासव लोका। तब महिमा सब रहें अशोका॥ ज्वाला में है ज्योति तुम्हारी। तुम्हें सदा पूजें नरनारी॥
प्रेम भक्ति से जो यश गावें। दुःख दारिद्र निकट नहिं आवें॥ ध्यावे तुम्हें जो नर मन लाई। जन्ममरण ताको छुटि जाई॥7॥
जोगी सुर मुनि कहत पुकारी। योग न हो बिन शक्ति तुम्हारी॥ शंकर आचारज तप कीनो। काम अरु क्रोध जीति सब लीनो॥
निशिदिन ध्यान धरो शंकर को। काहु काल नहिं सुमिरो तुमको॥ शक्ति रूप का मरम न पायो। शक्ति गई तब मन पछितायो॥8॥
शरणागत हुई कीर्ति बखानी। जय जय जय जगदम्ब भवानी॥ भई प्रसन्न आदि जगदम्बा। दई शक्ति नहिं कीन विलम्बा॥
मोको मातु कष्ट अति घरो। तुम बिन कौन हरै दुःख मेरो॥ आशा तृष्णा निपट सतावें। मोह मदादिक सब बिनशावें॥9॥
शत्रु नाश कीजै महारानी। सुमिरौं इकचित तुम्हें भवानी॥ करो कृपा हे मातु दयाला। ऋद्धिसिद्धि दै करहु निहाला॥
जब लगि जिऊँ दया फल पाऊँ। तुम्हरो यश मैं सदा सुनाऊँ॥ श्री दुर्गा चालीसा जो कोई गावें। सब सुख भोग परमपद पावें॥10॥
देवीदास शरण निज जानी। कहु कृपा जगदम्ब भवानी॥



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Introducing Our Stagehand Crew...

Most of us know of the popular Bengali refrain that resounds at the end of the Durga Puja every year – "Ashchhe bochhor abaar hobe" (Let's get ready for this again in the coming year!). This of course speaks for our immense enthusiasm and excitement for the festival, but more than that, for the hard work – a full year's worth of sheer hard work – that goes into making this spectacle happen. The artisans working all year in the bylanes of Kumortuli, the members of the Organizing Committee who work hard all year saving up their Work Leaves so they can be all available for the duration of the festival, the ladies who keep a strict fast until the Goddess and everyone else has been fed, the participants of the Cultural Programme who, despite having had to practise their parts beyond all pleasurable limits, still put up mesmerizing performances on D-day – sacrifices come from every possible quarter.

'Introducing Our Stagehand Crew' is our attempt to recognize some of those unsung heroes who work selflessly to make this magic happen year after year; those who derive joy purely out of service and not by recognition. Since they have no desire of taking the limelight, we thought we would for once cast it on them!



*Fancy the sacred chandan tika on your forehead?!
Know the man who makes it happen...*

I look forward to Durga Puja every year. For the five days of the festival, I immerse myself completely in the powerful, spiritually charged atmosphere, and get to meet new and highly spiritually motivated people who I have learnt from immensely over the years.



I remember my first time attending this festival – it was around the year 1998-99. I was overwhelmed by the abundance and variety of colours, outfits, decorations, noise and smells of incense – yet everyone seemed to know perfectly their parts to play in this chaos. I wished to participate too, but had no idea how to go about it. So many utensils and items for the service – all those little cups, plates, trinkets, strings – none of which I had ever seen before and had no inkling what to do with them. I was entrusted to wash the dishes after the offering. I tried everything I could...

To recount a humorous but embarrassing incident, one of the kind Indian women who would always stay by the Mother Goddess once held out a bundle of firewood to me, and tried to tell me something with a wave of her hands. I did not understand, because neither of us spoke each other's language. I gestured – do you need me to wash? She nodded. The wood?? She nodded again, and went on to doing her own work. I had never heard before of firewood being washed. I had my doubts, but because I had seen so much else at the festival that was just as new and baffling, I thought perhaps they do indeed wash the wood! I then proceeded to the washing area, and was shortly joined by another Indian gentleman, who, seeing me at it, also sat beside me and helped carefully cleanse the wood; this dispelled all my doubts about whether or not I had misunderstood the lady, because, obviously, an Indian would know better! Anyhow, having cleaned the wood we both happily came to the altar and handed the wet firewood to the woman. I was met with her look of silent horror as she saw the wet wood, which still

dripped water. What have you done?? How do we now kindle?? Turns out that they just needed to clear the Puja area, and my gesture was misunderstood. To clear the area and to wash – the Indian gesture for both is the same! I was deeply embarrassed, and over the years since, with a little bit of common sense, I have tried to be more useful.

Just as a child perceives a new event – completely detaching themselves from their current reality and plunging headfirst into it to explore – losing the adult in the process, I feel Durga Puja too is a celebration of childhood for adults. And fitting too, for are we not all children of the Mother?! The watchful eyes of the Mother enjoy seeing her children playing among themselves with innocence and spontaneity... It is the fact that we lose our hardened, adult selves that creates the amazing atmosphere that prevails at the Festival. Moreover, each of us has our own special, sacred relationship with the Mother, which stays only between Mother and child ☺

Oleg Pestov



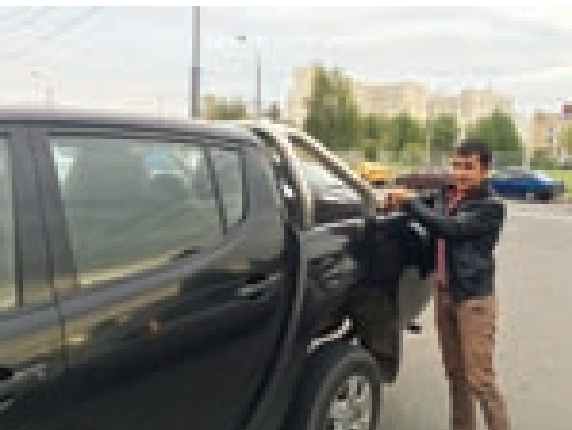


She whose sartorial skills help string together those beautiful garlands that adorn the goddess herself...

I think it was around 7 years ago that Maharaj first asked me to attend Durga Puja. He had explained to me the significance of the festival and encouraged me to participate. Since then I have come every year; I eagerly wait for it and feel sad when it gets over. I usually reach the Puja venue at around 8am and start making the garlands. Each day, there is a different number of garlands that are required, with the most being on Ashta-

mi. Chitralkha di arranges for the flowers and Sudeshna di informs me beforehand of the flowers to be used. I absolutely love doing it as it evokes in me a feeling of contentment from service...

Olga Tretyakova, Couturier



Our logistics in-charge and crisis troubleshooter...

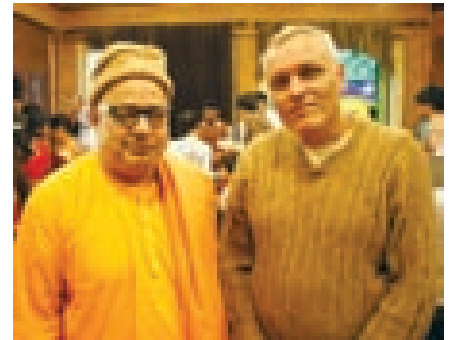
I make it a point to wash the car thoroughly on the eve of Shashthi, dry it, and have it ready to carry all the puja items to the venue. I know that everything needs to be absolutely clean and take utmost care to place the things only on a clean area and keep them pure. I eagerly wait for this time of the year and adjust all my other assignments so that I am in Moscow for the entire duration of the Puja. It's been over five years now that I have been associated with the Puja, and I hope to continue to be part of it for many more...

Mamasherif Pulatov, driver

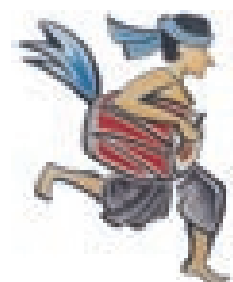
Mr. Dependable and yet another of our shining stars...

When did I first attend the Puja? Well, at least over 20 years ago, as my elder daughter is 20 years old, and I have been coming here since even before she was born...! Swamiji himself brought me to the Puja for the first time. It gives me immense joy when I am entrusted with buying fruits and other items needed for the Puja.

My daughters too love attending the Puja. I remember my younger daughter played the cello once in the evening cultural programme – she is 15 now; my elder daughter plays the French horn. Moreover, after the five fun-filled days of puja, they look forward to Laxmi Puja in 3 days' time, and Saraswati Puja at the beginning of the following year; in fact, both my daughters keep a photograph and figure each of Ma Saraswati on their study tables. They have photographs of Ma Durga and Laxmi too. Over the years, *мы сроднились с дургануджой* (we have grown so close to Durga Puja, it is like our own festival). I relate to Durga as my *мать* (Mother)...



*Aleksey Alkhasov,
Personal aide to venerable Swami Maharaj*



#Throwback 2015



#Throwback 2015



Anandamela 2016

Image Credit: Joy Dasgupta



Anandamela 2016

Image Credit: Joy Dasgupta



First Prize: Thai Cuisine (Nina Upadhyay, Neetu Singh, Anjali Singh);
Second Prize: Indian Cuisine (Monal Kasturi Mohan, Shalini Tripathi, Vandana Sharma)



Third Prize (Joint): Russian Cuisine (Anmol Omar, Abnaz Dadiburjor) and Japanese Cuisine (Suyogya Sharma, Balwinder Sharma, Mona Singh, Harsha Thakur)



Other Participants: Mexican, Chinese and Arabic Cuisine



Judges: Tejiro Sudo (Executive Chef, Aozzora Restaurant) – Japanese;
Mohan Khatri (China Garden Restaurant) – Chinese and Thai;
Bhagwati Prasad (Talk of the Town Restaurant) – Arabic and Indian;
Cristian Galindo & Daniel Ángel Moncada (Colombian food enthusiasts) – Mexican;
Tamara Ivanovna Kapeleva & Olga Sengupta – Russian, Mexican, Chinese and Arabic Cuisine



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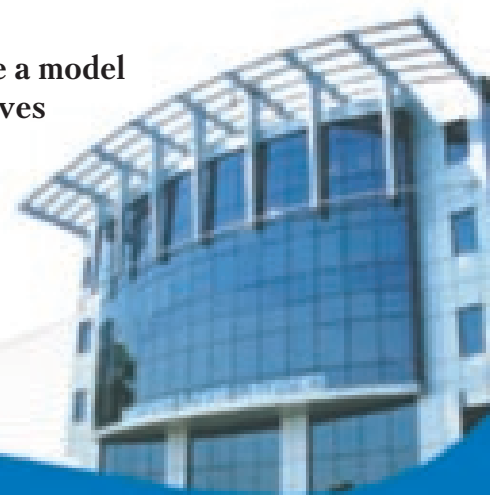


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... Because health is in small details

In Conversation with Dr. Tatiana Shaumian, head of the Centre for Indian Studies, in Moscow's Institute of Oriental Studies



Aa: Prof. Having studied closely and having had a ringside view of Indo-Russia relations over the years, what would you say is the state of relations at the present moment? Have you seen it change significantly, and does it look like the change is in a positive direction?

TS: I can see the changes in Indo-Russian relations after 1991. Because, unfortunately, after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, when the Russian government started the new policy, new approaches to the policy. Because of the complicated situation in Russia, the new Russian political elites started looking more to the West. I can understand them. We needed economic help, economic cooperation with the developed countries. It was very important for us. But unfortunately during that period, in the beginning of the 1990s, the period of stagnation in Russian-Indian relations started because all of them concentrated on the West. And unfortunately it was not so interesting to the continuation and developing relations with the eastern countries.

In my opinion it was a mistake. Because I am absolutely sure that development of relations between (Soviet Union) Russia and India, it was in our mutual interest. It was very important for both of us in economic sphere, and in political cooperation, in the coordination of our policies in world arena. Because we have so many common things, we are poly-confessional, poly-national, linguistic and so on countries. We were countries, which needed economic reforms. We could have exchange of views, exchange of experiences in all these spheres.

Unfortunately 1991 was the period, when this relationship, I do not want to say that was absolutely finished. No. I do not want to say that. But I would like to tell you that we specialists on India here in the Institute of Oriental Studies, we tried to do our best. We published articles in Russian newspapers. We tried to focus attention of our politicians regarding the necessity to continue and develop our relations with India.

Prof. Shaumian wishes us a very Happy Durga Puja!

The full interview is available
at www.moscowdurgapuja.org



Chasing the Northern Lights - A Dream Come True in the Russian Arctic...!



Abhinav studied and grew up in New Delhi. He came to Russia in 2015 as a Masters student at the Higher School of Economics. A passionate traveller and budding photographer, he has lived in Moscow and St Petersburg and, within a year, has travelled to many parts of the country including Murmansk, Crimea, Siberia, Tuva. He is also a culture, food and music enthusiast.

Even before I first came to Russia in September last year, I had already drawn up my bucket list of the places I wanted to see, sights I wanted to behold, and experiences I wanted to savour during the course of the two years I have here. Right on top of that list was seeing the magical Northern Lights, aka the *Aurora Borealis*, visible only at higher latitudes – primarily above the Arctic Circle (66.5 degrees North).

Some quick research brought up the places to see them from in Russia, and the most accessible seemed to be the Arctic Port City of Murmansk – also one of the historically significant 'Hero Cities' from WW II. Next was figuring out the right time to go. For someone coming from Delhi, used to searing temperatures, and having now suddenly been dropped into cold cold Russia, I decided December – February would not be a good choice; for Aurora watching requires standing out in the open in the dead of the night and waiting hours with uncertainty, and I could not afford the risk of pneumonia (though that meant letting go the chance to be able to see a full polar night – bummer!). So March it was. I pitched my idea to a few friends at my dorm, and eventually the only one to sign up was fellow Indian and Bangali Samrat Sil from Kolkata (bless us!), currently studying History at HSE St Petersburg. So now I had company too – awesome! The trip was moving closer to realization!

For the Northern Lights to show, there needs to be in place a combination of a few factors simultaneously – i) It has to be pitch dark – the farther you are from even the city lights, the better; ii) An absolutely clear sky – clouds should not play spoilsport; and iii) The right amount of solar activity, or geomagnetic 'storm' levels, measured by the Kp index. As you can imagine, this makes it largely a matter of sheer luck, so that beyond monitoring the 3-day or 7-day local weather and space weather forecasts, and just hoping they are not far removed from reality, you cannot really do much. Some more online research revealed however that solar activity has historically been known to increase around equinox – suddenly March did not seem a bad time to go after all! I started planning early February, and once my class schedule seemed to permit, I took the plunge and, with a silent prayer to Ma Durga, booked train tickets for Samrat and myself from St Petersburg to Murmansk for the 9th of March (26 hours long, which would make it my first long distance train journey in Russia), and return air tickets for the 15th – a total of a week.

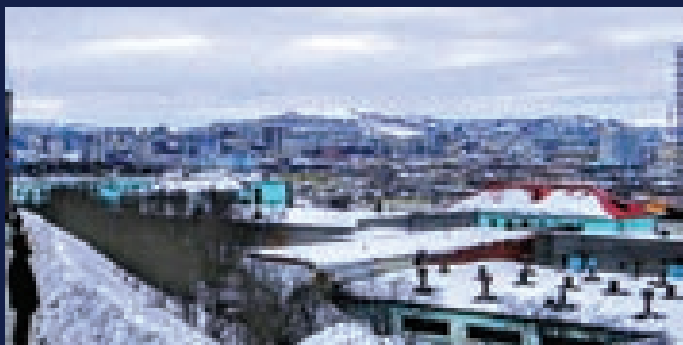
Others, however, did not seem to share my excitement – mostly Russians, who gave dire warnings: "Why Murmansk?... *Ochen Opasno*... Drunk people... Criminals...". My heart sank, and suddenly I started feeling a little out of depth – was I be-

ing a smidge too adventurous? Had I not researched properly? I must also mention that because I study in an all-English programme at Russia's National Research University, I do not speak much Russian beyond the most basic phrases. This would make it even harder in Murmansk, where one would be hard-pressed to find another English speaker. I sent out Couchsurfing requests to a few hosts, and one by one they were all turned down due to one reason or another. All but one – Vadim, who replied with a "Maybe", saying he would try and let us know if he could host us. As the date of departure drew closer, I got cold feet, and part of me even contemplated cancelling it all and staying put; but the other half, the adventurous half I guess, said somewhere with a shrug – what can possibly go wrong? No couchsurfing host?? We'll find a hostel. No idea where to go looking for the Lights?? We'll ask, maybe join a tour. What about safety, and getting transport and essential information from people?? Two determined *Bangali chheles*, Translator, GPS Navigator, etc – there's nothing that can possibly go wrong! The apprehensions would therefore be gunned down, but only to be revived and return a little while later. Oh, the struggle...

Finally the morning of departure came; and I being the habitual procrastinator, and being scared on top of it too this time, found myself packing till the last minute. Samrat and I made it just in time for our train which left *Ladozhsky Vokzal* at 10am. I didn't realize how much I had been stressing over the trip till I woke up from sleeping on that tiny *Platzkart* berth almost the entire day, and after a quick dinner, slept through the night too. The following morning, I woke up to see the train snaking through the beautiful region of Karelia.

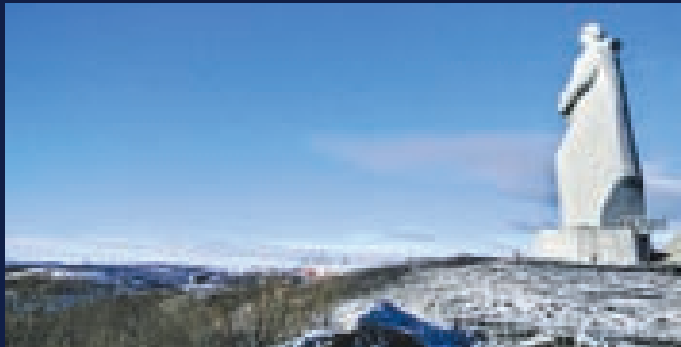


It was white as far as eyes could see. The entire morning I only stayed glued to the window. The elderly lady next to me also muttered under her breath, "*Krasivaya strana... Vsyo Khorosho...*". We finally reached Murmansk at 12pm. Right off the bat, it came across to be a pretty busy city. It was all under a blanket of white, which made it look even more stunning.



The buses had WiFi, which was awesome! I latched on to it to check my email, and there was good news – Vadim had agreed to host us and sent detailed directions to his place! We reached without much trouble, and were welcomed in by his very cheerful self. Vadim turned out to be an extensively well-travelled man, having been to over 80 countries, and with

fridge magnets, souvenirs, little showpieces all over his comfy little pad. He even had authentic Hyderabadi biryani masala from India, and promised to make us biryani for dinner!

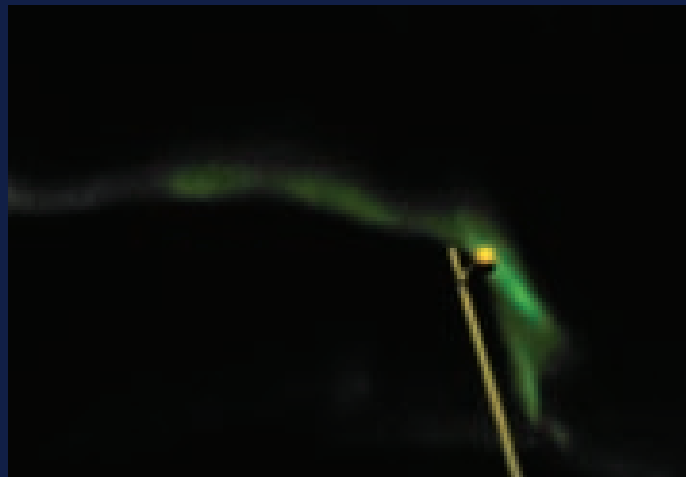


Vadim's house was superbly located, overlooking a giant lake in the city centre which in the winter months served as a lively skating rink. At the other end of the lake was the Alyosha Statue monument – one of Murmansk's best known landmarks.

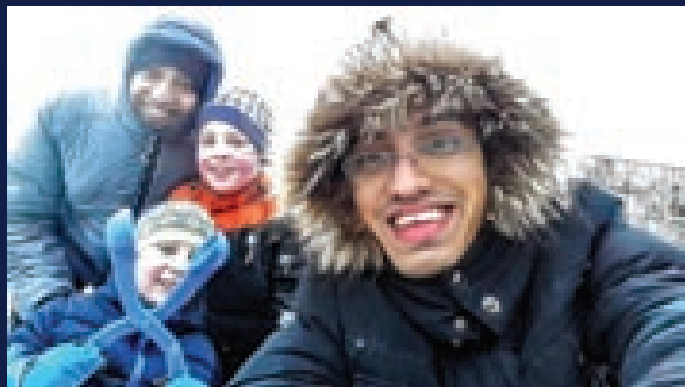
We walked up to it and were greeted by superb views of the city and a narrow inlet of the Barents Sea which lent it a lovely fjord-like setting. We identified a potential spot on top of that hill to possibly come Aurora watching later that night. We then proceeded towards the *Pechenga Monastery* – a wooden church (one of the most beautiful I had ever seen) which we learnt had been made in the 15th century with the intent to convert residents of the endemic Sami tribe to Christianity. The sun was going down just about then, and we heaved a collective sigh as the sunset cast beautiful hues of orange and red on the snow and the hills around the monastery. We went back to Vadim's house with some beer and vodka in tow. He'd had friends over, who were an equally jovial lot. Samrat kept them entertained with some gyaan on India; while I helped Vadim in the kitchen to make the promised biryani (technically *chicken pulao*, but oh well!), following the recipe instructions on my phone. An hour and a half later, we dished out the biryani, which had turned out lip-smackingly good!

It was about 10.30pm when we proceeded downstairs to say goodbye to his friends. It was then, when I just briefly looked up towards the sky, that I first saw it – a shape-shifting, swirling cloud, only fluorescent green in colour. The Northern Lights!! I let out a shriek which made everyone jump - I couldn't believe my eyes!! Samrat and I excused ourselves, and we rushed towards the viewing spot by the Alyosha Monument Hill we had identified earlier during the day – it was a dream coming true, and we wanted to take in every single moment of it! The Lights continued to swirl, dim and then brighten, and form various shapes across the sky. Samrat and I found ourselves turning philosophical – *2 Bangali chheles...* Thousands of miles from home... Nature... Destiny... Miracles... Experiences... Life... We discussed all, even as the Aurora played its magic. It continued for about two hours, before it finally dimmed and we could see no more. But we had been blessed, and we could not complain anymore. "*Asha sarthok holo*" (coming here was worth it), we declared.

The next day we woke up, still reeling, but completely relaxed – our main purpose had been achieved; we could take it easy now. Vadim suggested we go to Kirovsk, a ski resort town about 5 hours by bus, the next day. So we had the day free. We went first for a tour of the Lenin, the first Russian nuclear-powered icebreaker ship to sail on the Arctic waters. It has been docked permanently and serves as a museum today. Quite impressive, and we emerged after the 2-hour long tour very much



in awe. We then strolled around the city center. Murmansk, being a port city, has a decent supply of fish; and that's exactly what we had for food during our stay – plenty of fish! We then found a park where kids were having fun sliding down a snowy slope, and making and throwing snowballs. We joined in the fun too, living our childhood white winter fantasies, and spent a few enjoyable hours with them.



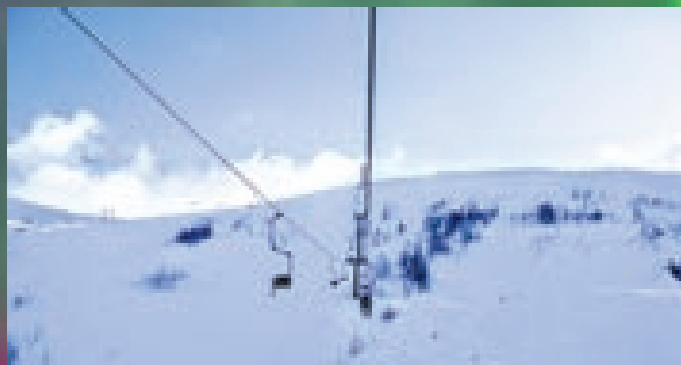
Vadim took us out and showed us around in the evening, and gave us a few more interesting trivia about the city. For one, the northernmost McDonald's outlet in the world happens to be here! We had a quick dinner before calling it another day in Murmansk.

The next morning, we got packing again to get ready to leave for the bus station to go to Kirovsk. We bid goodbye to Vadim and thanked him profusely for everything. The bus journey to Kirovsk took winding pathways and offered some stunning vistas of the valley. However before long, it turned misty and we could not see much. It was 7.30pm when we reached Kirovsk City Center, and it was like no City Center I had imagined – completely deserted, and the mist had only got thicker.



There was snow piled up, as high as 7-8ft above the ground, on the sides of the road. We could see nothing. The streetlamps were casting a diffused light down below such that the whole place seemed lit up by a faint and eerie pinkish-orange, almost as though we were inside a giant cloudy crystal ball.

I whipped my phone out and the GPS thankfully showed precise directions to our hostel ~500m away. We followed blindly, for we could not see beyond 10m ahead of us. Presently, some buildings loomed into view, but they were decrepit, dark buildings, making the place only seem eerier. My heart



was beating fast, and I only wanted to get to the comfort and warmth of the hostel, for I was now getting cold. The entrance to the hostel took some figuring out, but we got in and we couldn't be more thankful. We were now puzzled as to what could possibly be here worth coming all the way for. Let's wait until morning, we decided.

We woke up the next morning, opened the window curtains and felt our jaws drop – the mist had cleared, and the snow-clad *Khibiny* mountains (which we could see nothing of the previous night!) surrounded us. It was beautiful – absolutely nothing like last night!! We went out and saw people from all over with their ski equipment. It turns out there are ski resort operators at the base of the mountains, and who operate ski lifts to the top to ski down the slopes from. Samrat and I took a one-way ticket up. It was freezing as the ski lift ascended and the wind was howling in our ears.

that had seen us through all our moments of doubt or any that may have seemed less than perfect, that made this moment the grand culmination of our trip.

We just stood there a while to soak it all in; and then started our descent – by foot! By the time we came down, we had snow inside our boots, and were cold, but utterly content. The rest of the day was spent going around seeing other places around town, including *Sneg Derevn'ya* (Snow Village), which had some beautiful ice sculptures on display. We went to sleep happily exhausted that night.

The next morning we took the bus back to Murmansk. We had some more fish for lunch, before heading for the airport. Running through everything about the trip on my mind while on the flight, I realized how misinformed people can be about places they have not seen for themselves. What was made out to be a dangerous place before my visit, turned out to be a town so peaceful, home to a significantly elderly population with pets they dote over (and it is my personal belief that animal lovers can never be bad human beings). Samrat and I were more than once invited to have friendly chats and to share food, and the people have without exception been immensely expressive, caring and wonderful. My tuppence worth to all would therefore be to not just go by what you hear from others, but to go out there and experience all the wonders this country and indeed this world has to offer. I am certainly glad I did, and I can't wait to go out explore more and debunk some more myths by sharing more such happy and fulfilling travel stories in the times to come!

But once we reached the top, the views of the valley and indeed all of Kirovsk were to die for. We felt on top of the world. This may be no Mt Everest, but it was the epic feeling and the sheer joy of having made it here, the epiphany that we had achieved what we set out for and discovered so much more while at it, and that it was our conviction



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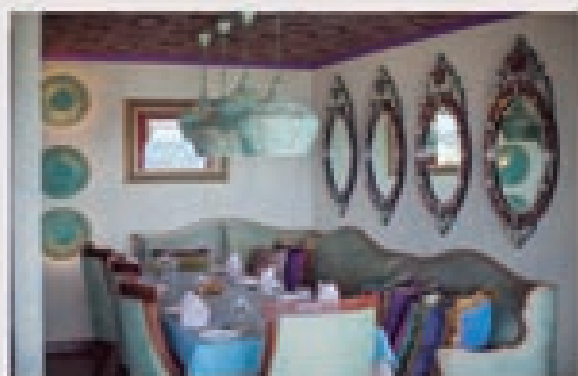
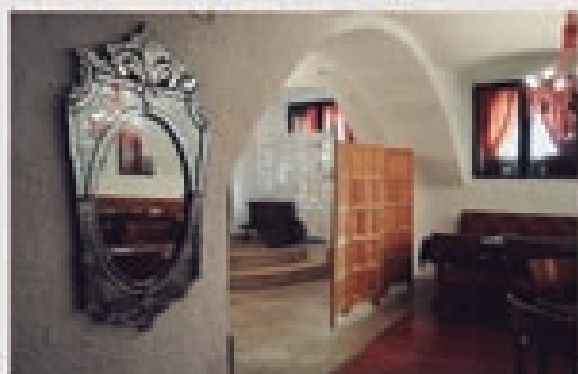
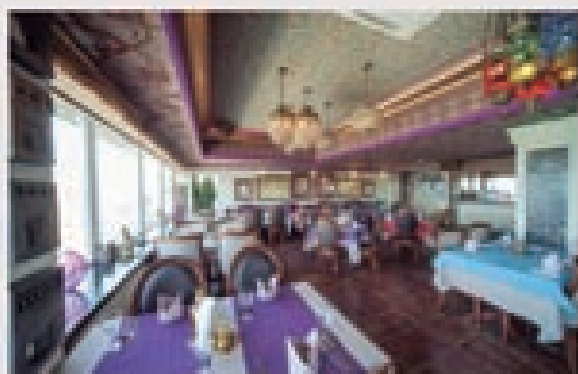


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Towards Becoming Medical Nuclear Powers...

The GAPIO (Global Association of Physicians of Indian Origin) Mid-Year Forum 2016 was held in Moscow on 6 July 2016. Organised jointly with the EAFO (Eurasian Federation of Oncology), this event brought together doctors of Indian origin, and those associated with and interested in India from different continents, to share their experiences on modern healthcare and to explore ways to provide access to high quality healthcare in all parts of the world. This is the first time a GAPIO event was held in Russia and marks a new chapter in the history of India-Russia collaboration in the healthcare sector. Besides improving professional networking and interactions between healthcare professionals of the two countries, promotion of medical tourism, exchange in educational initiatives and exchange in research programmes are the other possibilities which were discussed.



Ridya Sheikh has been a part of the Moscow Durga Puja for a long time, performing since her childhood. This year Ridya a pass out of the prestigious Plekhanov Economic Institute, became the winner of the reality contest "Shera Nachiye" in Mangoli channel in Bangladesh. Since then she has also appeared in a Tele-film. Aaratrika wishes her success in the years to come!

Medical Assistance in Russia

For most of our community members residing in Russia, any medical treatment is always an emergency rush to India. Aaratrika has been partnering leading doctors of Russia like Dr. Somasundaram, world renowned oncologist and founder of EAFO, Dr. Saravanan Orthopedic Surgeon and the head of Russian School of Orthopedics, and together with members like Dr. Pradyumna Chatterjee would like to reach out to help the Indian community in need of an urgent as well as the required specialist treatment in Russia and abroad.

We wish you all good health and a very happy Durga Puja and Dusshera!

70th Indian Independence Day Celebrations...

The 70th Indian Independence Day celebrations were held with great fanfare at the Kulturniy Tsent Vdokhnoveniye. Organised by the Hindustani Samaj, one of the highlights of the event was an energetic and moving performance put up by members of Moscow Durga Puja, called 'Unity in Diversity', designed and conceptualized by Debashish Sengupta. Members representing various states, and dressed in traditional attires of the regions, brought out various cultural nuances while reiterating the central idea that despite all the differences, everyone in the country stands united.

The Durga Puja Committee members also participated. Their part of the programme, which beautifully narrated the rich tradition of West Bengal, was designed and conceptualized by Debashish Sengupta, our Cultural Event Coordinator.



The main idea and the intended audience for 'Unity in Diversity' is our children. It is important that they be made familiar with the richness and strength of our culture, which they might lose touch with growing up on foreign shores. It is our responsibility as adults to hand down that knowledge to the next generation...

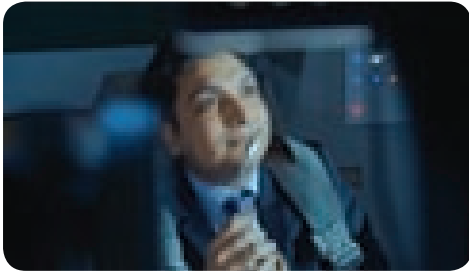
Nitin Aurangabadkar
General Secretary, Moscow Durga Puja Committee



Acting CHOPs!

'CHOP' is a popular Russian comedy series aired on TNT and produced by Good Story Media. In Season 2, first aired June 2016, it had a prominent Indian flavour. The story unfolds in the setting of the *Sevastapol Rynok*, known for trading in Indian goods such as incense, Ayurveda and Yoga items, among others. It shows the humorous tactics used by employees and the security personnel of a major business center housing Indian stores to make a quick buck in the face of the economic crisis.

Along with popular Russian actor Sergei Styopin, it features our very own Pradyumna Chatterjee as one of the lead actors of the project.



"This was my biggest TV project till now and I am really happy with the way it has been received and the popularity it has achieved... To be honest, I was initially skeptical because I had never been part of a comedy project before, but they had a compelling script and a wonderful character crafted almost exclusively for me, which made this an offer too good to pass.... Our young and energetic director, Mihael Solovyov, took great care in getting the details right, and so did the art directors who put in commendable efforts in recreating an Indian Bazaar on sets... What I also liked is that the subject of India has been dealt with in a way that it provides for the required comic element, whilst not giving in to an over-the-top stereotypical portrayal..."



JNCC

JNCC is the cultural arm of Indian Embassy in Moscow. Aaratrika welcomes Shri D. Jeysundhar, the New Director of JNCC. We look forward to a lot of new beginnings in promoting our ancient culture and heritage under his tutelage and wish him a lot of success.

Aaratrika welcomes Shri Dharmendra Gautam, our new dance teacher at JNCC. We are sure that Shri Gautam will carry on with the good work of the previous Gurujis we had at JNCC, and his choreography and own dancing skills will become part of Russia's Cultural mosaic.



Introducing Aaratrika 2016's Cover Artist



Alexandra Zagryazhskaya (Second from L. with family)

Alexandra Zagryazhskaya

Lives and works in Moscow, wife of famous sculptor Alexandr Ryabichev whose Gandhi sculptor is installed in Indian embassy Moscow. She is Member of the Creative Union of Russian Artists, Corresponding Member of Russian Literature Academy, Recipient of Pushkin Medal of Russian Literature Academy "To The Adherent of Enlightenment", Active Member of People's Art Academy, Recipient of Silver Medal of Creative Union of Artists of Russia for her contribution to national art. Also, she is a Television journalist, editor of information resources about art and creativity ART- RELIZ.RF and "Alexandr Gallery" (www.alex-gallery.ru), creator of television program The Art Shop (about famous artists and extraordinary art works), and "Circle of Interests" (VKT Channel), participant of artistic and educational project "The Mystery of the birth of a Painting) of the art gallery "House of Kulinich", Surikov Institute and Tretyakov Art Gallery and many more.

The Art Studio of the Ryabichevs

DMITRY (DANIEL) BORISOVICH Ryabichev, the extraordinary sculptor of our time, was the source behind this sculpture studio in 1967. He is a People's Artist of Russia, Recipient of the USSR State Award, UNESCO International Award.

Many sculptures (Monument to the 14 Turkestan Commissars at Tashkent, sculpture- architectural ensemble "Courage" (also in Tashkent), monumental fountain complex "Peoples' Friendship" (Tashkent), both monumental and easel made, were created at this studio for many cities of Russia and other countries.

A large part of the creative works of the Ryabichevs consist of group activities in India, where they created sculptures of Mahatma Gandhi (New Delhi), Mrs. Indira Gandhi (Bhubaneswar), Jawaharlal Nehru (Moscow, J. Nehru Square). Now Dmitrii Borisovich Ryabichev's son, Alexandr Ryabichev, works at the Studio along with his daughter Daniela.



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IN LOVING MEMORY OF MALA DAS



12.03.1957 - 20.08.2016

For those who knew Mrs. Mala Das find it difficult to believe that she is no more among us. She was in Moscow for a couple of years only. But even during that short stay she left the kindest impression about herself which is difficult to erase.

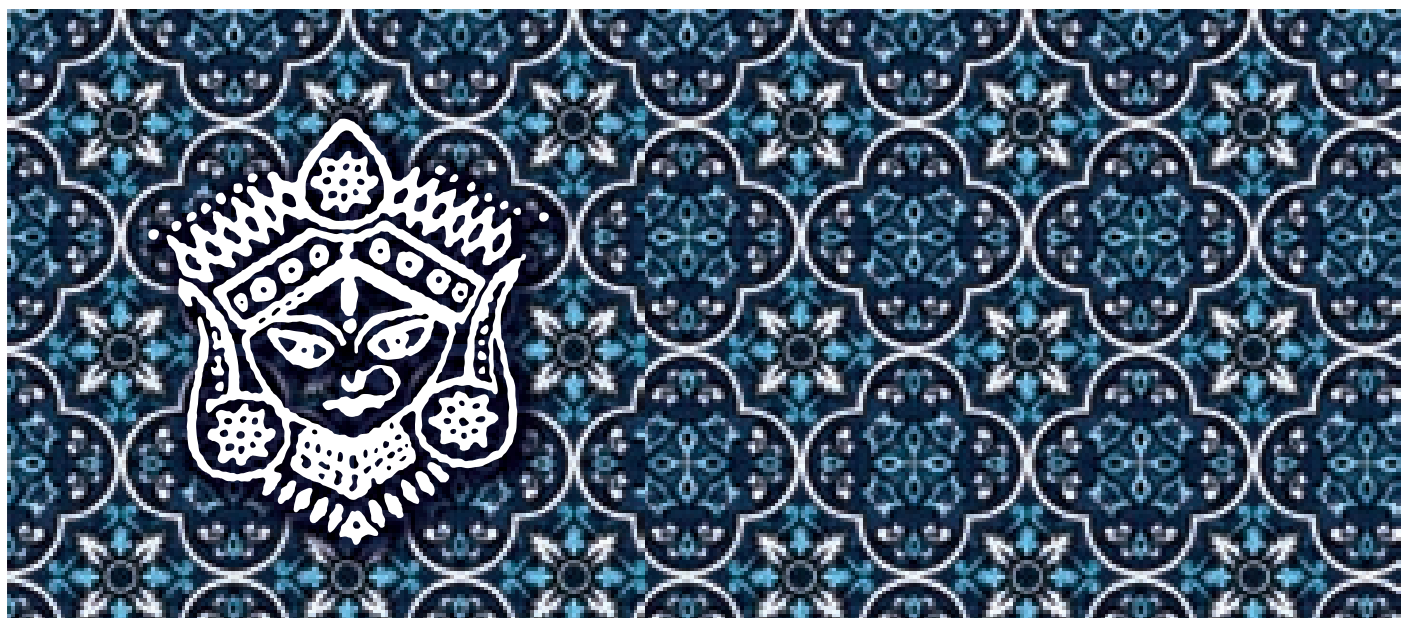
Mitali Sarkar, perhaps the one who interacted most with her from among us, expressed her immense grief and described her as a very energetic person. She perceived Mrs. Das as her own BOUDI.

Mrs. Das was humour personified. She was capable of drawing a laugh from people surrounding her out of the most mundane things. A trail of laughter always seemed to follow her wherever she went.

Mrs. Lochna Mahadevan had opportunity to interact with her and work with her closely. According to her, Mrs. Das was dear to everybody at kids' club. She often had to advice the personnel, but all these were always done with a lot of humour.

She had the rare capability to find the right chord to interact with a child. The two years she worked with Kids' Club is the time all of them recall fondly.

Her memories continue to live on.



Moscow Durga Puja Celebrations 2016

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General Secretary	: Nitin Aurangabadkar
Treasurer	: Chitrlekha Dasgupta Garzon
Editors of Aaratrika	: Debasmita Moulick Nair Joy Dasgupta

Cultural Event

Coordinators	: Debashish Sengupta Sudeshna Aurangabadkar Vishal Jethalia
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Administration	: Durga Nand Mishra
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Puja rituals	: Swami Shubhavratananda Maharaj Sri Rathin Chatterjee
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Aanisha Garzon Dasgupta
Aakansha Kumari
Ayanna Chatterjee
Hritendu Baruri
Hrittika Baruri
Ninisha Sengupta
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Our Special Acknowledgement & Thanks to:

Swami Jyotirupananda Maharaj
Swami Shubhavratananda Maharaj
H.E. Ambassador of India
to the Russian Federation
Deputy Chief of Mission,
Embassy of India
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Sammy Kotwani
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Our gratitude to:

India Student Association, PFU
Calcutta Yellow Pages.com (P) Ltd.
Ramkrishna Mission Moscow
Jay Sureshchandra Gupta
Manoj K. Agarwal
Aleksy Alkhazov, Oleg Pestov, Olga Tetryakova

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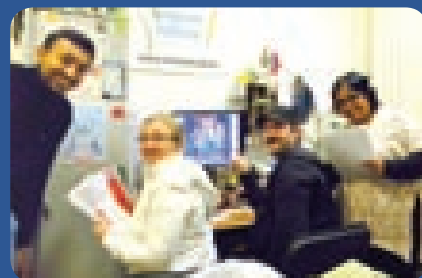
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Uditanghsu Aurangabadkar
Abhinav Banerjee

Research & Information:

Jawaharlal Nehru Cultural Centre (JNCC),
Moscow
Moscow Institute of Oriental Studies
Russia Segodnya News Agency
Nitin Aurangabadkar
Mitali Sarkar
Lochana Mahadevan



"AARATRIKA"

Moscow Durga Puja Celebrations
1990-2016

Communication Director:

Nadezda Singh
(General director "IDEA")

Design & layout:

Denis Feldman

Design center and printing house

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+7 926 222 0888

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