

Mrityunjay Chatterjee

Faces of Divinity

For over three centuries, in the northern part of Kolkata, once known as Sutanuti, where narrow and slushy lanes divide rows of aging, decrepit houses, beauty is being modelled out of clay by thousands of Kumartuli artisans, who have the skill traditionally handed down to them.

The gentle benign smile on the face of the goddess—visible even before the final strokes have caressed the face—offers no hint to the pressure on the artisans of having to fuse tradition with modernity. What is being shaped is the unmistakable expression of subtle blend of reassurance and anger—the former aimed at her worshippers and the latter at her foes. Over 450 artisans, aided by thousands of labourers, work their nimble fingers on straw and clay for months to produce idols of goddess Durga and her four children—Saraswati, Laxmi, Kartik and Ganesh—who descend from Mount Kailash to visit the plains for five days every year.

Kumartuli images are not only a craze in the country but the world over; Europe, America,

Many priceless traditional art forms are an integral part of Durga Puja—perhaps the world’s largest community festival. However, changing times, pressure of modernization, economic crunch and dwindling patronage have put them on the brink of extinction. Mrityunjay Chatterjee brings you glimpses of an art form struggling for survival.

Australia and Africa, the clientele being the Indian communities living there.

But all does not seem well for the “celestial

colony”, on the bank of river Hoogly. The priceless art of clay modelling is fast moving towards oblivion for a variety of reasons coupled with government apathy. The new generation is opting out of the trade that their ancestors were involved in and choosing newer avenues of making a living, terming the trade as highly “labour-oriented, unremunerative and unenterprising”. Besides, the galloping prices of ingredients, lack of patronage, paucity of funds as loans from banks and financial organizations, the debt trap of crafty money lenders and the advent of the much cheaper dice-made images have all added to the fast decay of the profession.

“It takes months of painstaking labour and finely tuned artistic acumen before beauty takes shape and assume the final form, be it goddess Durga or Kali, says famed artisan Nepal Pal. “No one is willing to take such pain. Our children are getting educated and opting out for more profitable, less labour-oriented professions”.

A member of the new generation, Arup Pal is a graduate from an art college. He has specialised in carpentry. He, like many of his age, has

taken up a job with a private company. “Why opt for the ancestral profession when there is no money, no future. Clinging to soft sentiments does not help or yield two square meals a day. I have a job and security in life”. “We are an endangered class”, says Narayan Pal regretfully. “We carry on as we are artists and when the idols travel to different pandals—there is deep satisfaction within. The appreciation of the people eases the relentless



Illustration: Agnijit Tarafdar

pain. We again look forward to the next year.”

Most of the workshops do not have a proper roof over their head.” The government had in 2009 promised a permanent colony—with workshops and housing besides an art gallery. Only two blocks out of four were built. The Rs 40 crore project was supposed to be funded partially by the central government and partly by the state government. But since then, there has been no fresh construction,” said Babu

Pal, the spokesman of Kumartuli Mritshilpo Karigar Samiti.

“We have approached almost everyone for help. Most of us live from hand to mouth since we have to deal with the vagaries of the weather with tarpaulin sheets covering our workshops. But nothing has so far been done”, says Pal.

The trade is seasonal, says Babu Pal and “even after engaging every available hand in the family, including women and children, we can barely survive. The income generated out of the image-making takes us through six months of the year. For the rest of the period, we work in different trades, even as labourers to survive.”

The prices of most of the ingredients like Ganga clay, bamboo, wooden frame, straw, rope, paint, “zari” ornaments, beads and fancy clothes have jumped at least thirty per cent compared to last year. The dice-made images, owing to their affordable price, have also made a major dent in the income of the artisans. Conventional images are definitely more artistic but costlier.

When banks and other financial organizations deny them loan for lack of collaterals, these artisans are forced to borrow from the crafty money lenders who charge high interest rates. “We know we are being cheated. But what is the alternative?” he rues.

The artisans are trying out alternative ways to tide over the lean period. They are taking up work in terracotta and ceramic industries.

As Kolkata prepares to celebrate this year’s Durga Puja and the artisans work round the clock to give shape to the goddess and her children, one big question looms large over Kumartuli— will its art survive?

The artisans helplessly look for an answer, for a light at the end of the tunnel.

Of mother, myths and metaphysics: The tale of Goddess Durga

Debanjan Banerjee

The mythical element of Durga Puja of Bengal is related to its metaphysical dimension just like the way the apparent size of Sun and its actual size are related. Without that, sympathy and broadness of knowledge-spirit, this Mother-Goddess, this icon of fractal and morphed icons will remain only a simple deity. One way, unmistakably she is. But human culture suffers from inertia of choices and in most of the cases; choice is guided by the absence of the same rather than the need for experimentation. This cultural baggage lies at the evolutionary level and goes further, further into history as ferocious obedience to its Totem-Deity, to its own view of Supreme Controller, to its specific brand of Religion and reciprocal intolerance to the “other.” If we look at this icon only as an ordinary Deity, an idol with strange attributes, we are going to miss a point.

In this Mother-Deity is a continuum of lost memories and mythical connectivity that is as mobile as it is immobile. Around her have been woven myths more about us than about gods. With her form as a young and weapon-dressed woman with lion and asuras, surrounded by her family and a husband of questionable virtue, she hides the entire mythical world. She is

pleasant and scintillating, she is manicured to the extent of the age, she is given contemporary veneer but the moment the Sanskrit texts open, we enter into another world:

Sristhi-Stithi-Vinasanang-Shakthi-bhute-San- atani



Picture courtesy: Shayan Chaudhuri, PG 3rd

[Oh Goddess, who is present in all living entities as eternal fundamental Energy or Life Force]

As we continue, we hear stranger and stranger sounds, the high feminine adjectives (which Sanskrit’s rich phonetics supply liberally and laws of conjoining approve with ease) — Kaushiki, Varahi, Hari-netra-vilasini, Roudra, Shanta, Narayani, Bhairobi, Chandi, Bhuvaneswari, Shuladharini, Gouri, Katyayani passed, suddenly we hear, in our so known voice of Birendrakrishna Vadra —

Ardha-matra sthitha nitya junucharya visehata

[Thou art the inarticulate half-metre of consonant sound]

From the great and gorgeous description of imageries of beauty and power, adorning the Mother with all weapons, magic, opulence from the three worlds, (tree'-vhuban) invincible and shining in eternal radiance of Fundamental Energy that drives all beings, all of a sudden, like a bell tolling, the poet of Sri Sri Chandi entered into an abstract realm, a world of uncertainty, an intangible being, a very delicate world — the inarticulate metre of consonant sound. The myth is transforming. It has started from the known and with the great adjectives ringing still in our ear, we are visualising her Bhuvan-Mohini form, and the poet has passed onto something else. He has connected —our consciousness with the collective unconscious — to Nitya from Lila.

The confirmation comes, just after all battles are over, all enemies are destroyed, Flowers are being thrown in benediction, the whole cosmos bows to her feet time and again —

Namo-tashmi! Namotashmoi Namotashmoi Namotashmoi!



Through history and poetry: Revisiting the tribal perception of Durga puja

Srija Naskar

The cultural annihilation of the tribals of this country continues to this day through what is considered the Rio Carnival-like celebration in West Bengal and many other parts of India, the Durga puja or Durgotsav. The word "tribal" was introduced as a socio-economic category by the British in



Picture source: The Telegraph

colonial India. It was a way of distinguishing a community from the rest based on their physical characteristics, living conditions and culture. Several Indian anthropologists who have worked on the origins of the tribals have pointed out that their existence is as old as the Indus Valley civilisation, based on excavations discovered in the eastern part of India, in the Chhota Nagpur region of Jharkhand. It was told that these original inhabitants spoke a language that had no grammar, they worshipped no God nor performed any ritual. The Vedas call them "Asuras", "Dasyu", "Rakshas", etc. When Hindus across the nation celebrate Durga puja as victory of "good" over "evil" in elaborate puja pandals, it is these Asurs or the tribals who go in mourning for nine days of Navratri and observe "Mahishasur Martyrdom Day" on Dashami or Dussehra.

Tribals consider themselves to be descendents of "Hudur-Durga", a name in local dialect for Mahishasur. They associate themselves as descendents of who Hindus call, "the demon". The Durga Saptashati or the story of Durga puja describing the tale of Durga slaying Mahishasur as rendered in Markandey Purana is biased, they claim. They consider it to be a selective, deliberate erasure of their folklore, of their culture. For the Santhali tribals living in Bengal and parts of Bihar and Jharkhand, a Santhali festival called Dansaya is celebrated at around the same time as Durga puja. For obvious reasons, such festivals are lesser known tales. In this Santhali tribal tradition, Durga is a tribal chief who is hunted down by a group of outsiders. Failing to track him down, the outsiders decide to use deception and take the help of a woman. When the woman asks them what she will get in return for the act committed, she is told that she will be known and worshipped for years to come for this deed. When the tribal chieftain is killed, the woman is given the title of "Durga". It takes her nine days and nine nights to kill the tribal chief.

The Mahishasur of the Hindus is the Durga of the tribals. And what is to Hindus a celebration of mythology is a piece of lived history for the tribals. Annihilation of Mahishasur is annihilating tribals, as descendents of the Asur/Rakshas/Dasyu community are still alive.

Two moons ago I was fortunate to meet one such descendent, Sushma Asur, from Jharkhand who is also the first from her community to document Asuri history. She is an activist and poet and her social media page ASUR Adivasi Women Documentation Initiative and Youtube videos have become the subject of recent interest for researchers working extensively on the sociology and countercultural history of the tribal community in India. As a young journalist from Tehelka, I was helping my co-worker write a feature article on marginalisation and Durga puja. She ended up writing two pieces, one on the Asurs and their association with the festival and the other one on Sonagachi transgenders. Tehelka carried only the latter one.

But Sushma Asur's poem which she had narrated to us while talking about Asur Kahani and the alternate history and folklore surrounding the Durga puja has stayed with me till this day. As Mahalaya approaches, I would like to provide a translation of how the Asurs feel about Debipokkho.

हम जरूर जिएंगे ही, पठार की तरह निडर

पठारी क्षेत्र में तुमने
हमें (असुरों को) जन्म दिया
पर जिंदा रहने के लिए रास्ता नहीं बतलाया
पठारी क्षेत्र में तुमने
हमें (असुरों को) मजदूर बनाया
पर स्कूल जाने के लिए पैसा नहीं दिया
हमें आगे बढ़ने के लिए रास्ता नहीं बतलाया

*In this plateau region you
Gave birth to us (the Asurs)
But never showed us the way to live
In this plateau region, you
Turned us into working class
But never gave us money to go to school
Never showed us the way to move on
अब तो हमारे पास भाषा नहीं है
अब तो हमारे पास संस्कृति नहीं है
हम तुम्हें कैसे पुकारें
हम तुम्हें किस विधि से याद करें
We have no language of our own
No culture of our own
How do we address you?
How do we remember you?*

हे धरती के पुरखों, हे आसमान के पुरखों
ओ हमारे माता-पिता, ओ सभी असुर बूढ़े-बूढ़ियों
तुम्हारे भोजन की जिम्मेवारी जंगल की थी
तुम्हारी मजूरी खेत की जिम्मेवारी थी
यहां से वहां तक फैला पठार ही तुम्हारी पाठशाला थी

पहाड़-झरने तुम्हें रास्ता बताते थे
*O ancestors of the earth and sky
O parents and ancestors
Forests gave you food to eat
You worked in your fields
The entire plateau region was your school
Hills and waterfalls showed you the path
हे धरती के पुरखों, हे आसमान के पुरखों
ओ हमारे माता-पिता, ओ सभी असुर बूढ़े-बूढ़ियों
तुम सब नहीं जानते थे कचिया-टिबा (रुपया-पैसा)
तुम सब नहीं जानते थे परजीविता
हम तुम्हें दोष नहीं देते
हम तुम्हें अपनी असहायता के लिए
कोर्ट-कचहरी नहीं करते
पर जब कंपनी धम-धम आती है
पर जब सरकार दम-दम बेदम करती है*

हम किसको गोहराएं
हम किस छाती में आसरा ढूँढें
*O ancestors of the earth and sky
O parents and all our ancestors
You never knew about money
You never knew about dependence
We do not blame you
We would never seek your help
We would not take refuge of judiciary
But when commercial companies come barging in
And the Government lashes atrocities
We feel lost
We seek your solace and company*

हे धरती के पुरखों, हे आसमान के पुरखों
ओ हमारे माता-पिता, ओ सभी असुर बूढ़े-बूढ़ियों
हम सीखेंगे तुम्हारी तरह बोलना
हम सीखेंगे तुम्हारी तरह नाचना
हम करेंगे शिकार तुम्हारी तरह
उन सभी जानवरों का
जो असुरों के घर खोद रहे हैं
जो हमारे झरनों को फुसला-बहला रहे हैं
जिन्हें धरती और इंसान खाने की लत है

हम जरूर जिएंगे तुम्हारी तरह ही
पठार की तरह निश्चित-निश्चल
तुम्हारे रचे इस असुर दिसुम में
*O ancestors of earth and sky
O parents of our ancestors
We will learn to speak like you
We will learn to dance like you
We will learn to hunt like you
All those animals*

*Those who shake the foundation of Asur homes
Those who are messing with our waterfalls
Those who have the tendency to gobble up the last vestiges of humankind
We will learn to live like you
Content and innocent like the plateau
In this Asur region created by you.*

-- Sushma Asur

Sindoor khela and the burden of being a Goddess

Anuradha Deb

Durga puja, besides being the most awaited festival of the year for the Bengali community, is also a moment of celebration and glorification for Indian womanhood. The ceremonial worshipping of the mother goddess – Durga— who is understood to be empowered through the weapons and tools bestowed upon her in all her ten hands, is revered in the embodiment of her possessing a holy strength of some immeasurable kind.

She is opulently decorated into a feminist icon during the pujo days. She is described as the protector, mother, slayer of demons in all its pop feminist symbols. When the festival season arrives, the saree and ornaments' brands simply cannot afford to miss out on the opportunity to monetize Durga. This is our practiced culture. Travel and tourism business flourishes. Social media, tv commercials, newspapers and print platforms go berserk in their voluminous intoxication towards reverence of Maa Durga, who according to the practiced Hindu mythology, descends with her four children from her husband, Shiva's home, to her father's home. For the number of days she is there on earth, she is pampered with numerous varieties of bhog, prasad and aarti, etc. The build up to the festive days echo with the impatient fervour of the advent of Durga Maa, the savior of mankind who is about to arrive, for whom elaborate and expensive pandals are created.



“As they say, 'Motherhood is a biological fact. Fatherhood is a sociological fiction'”

- Nivedita Menon (Seeing like a Feminist)

Shasthi, the sixth day of the festival is reserved exclusively for mothers who observe fast for the well being of their children. The patriarchal design of this festival does not allow the barren women to observe this particular fast, excluding fathers as well. Since this is a sacred observance of a ritual, it is binding for the mothers only. It therefore also makes a statement of good mothers and bad mothers. It also acts as a burden for fathers who don't have to observe the fast on this day and are not supposed to have that bond with the children as much as the mother does.

Thus, on the 10th day when Dashami comes and the Goddess has to leave her pedestal, women give her a grand farewell. Married women while applying sindoor (red vermillion) on the idol's feet and forehead, pray for their happy and long married lives to one another greeting "Shubho Bijoya"- a ritual which is supposed to invite prosperity to their household. This is called the Sindoor khela. However, this glorified practice essentially magnifies the importance of marriages in women's lives. It clearly makes a distinction between the married and the unmarried— turning it exclusively into women's domain where too there is a subtle discrimination created between the married and those who are not. So we see a kind of burden on this Goddess to be 'auspicious', to be 'prosperous' and an entity which excludes the barren, the celibate, the widowed, the Other. This mainstream celebration of the Goddess can also be understood to be well strategized mass exercise in order to marginalize, push out, erase out, a line not drawn by these women themselves but by others. The celebration is certainly not an inclusive one. It has never been 'sarbojonin'. Because no inclusion can be conditional.

When a festival is about women being relegated to the position of a goddess, who is assigned all the divinities to feel powerful whether she wants it or not, it can certainly be a burden for some women in general to celebrate such a discriminatory festival.

Rantings of a Feminist

Wear pink, never blue. You are a princess, not a hero. You are a hero's shining and docile wife. Little girls will read stories about your appearance, not your achievements. Princesses and wives keep their hair clean and their man fed. Why be the breadwinner when you can bake it instead? Keep the house and the children tidy. Do not play with the toy cars or the small green army men. The small plastic tires will tangle in your hair and the pointy guns will poke at your delicate fingers.

Learn to wash the windows. You'll be yearning through them for your entire life. Keep them clean to remind yourself of what could have been. Learn to dust the shelves. You will stock them with reminders of what life means to you. Scrub the doorknobs raw, for when you go outside, you must keep clean. Your name will become a household one if you are.

Express and feel emotions, fleeting and open as a blustering curtain. You're expected to be emotional, so never hold back. When you are shaking with anger, do not be afraid to scream. Holding back is for men. Whatever you do, do passionately. Men are for making ends meet and stoic thinking. Feel the need for these things and only find these needs met in men. Your dreams are to marry ideal qualities, not to have them.

You will fit nicely into a box. You are only a respected female if you meet these standards and requirements. Your hair must be shoulder length or longer. If it is not, you are a lesbian and are handed a bad connotation. Cover all unacceptable skin. If you do not, you are a slut and are most definitely asking for any sexual

advances to come your way. Your ribs need to be as visible as your smile. If they are not, you are fat and clearly lazy and unproductive. You will only listen to approved music and think approved thoughts. If you do not, you are a thug and an anarchist and a God hating liberal. Each of these is a nail in your fragile plywood box. You must be oppressed and not let a hateful word escape your rouged lips.



An iconic feminist World War II poster

You must listen to your father and respect your elders. Your mother is not a direct authority figure. She will discipline you by saying that your shirt has always clung to your stomach and your hair is quite oily these days. Your elders know more than you do. When you state a fact or news event, it will be met with either an "I know" or a "that's not true".

You will learn to covet appearance above all. Your acceptance speech when graduating college would be null and void if you had forgotten your eyeliner. You have been raised with books about long brown hair and being rescued. You are not allowed to save yourself. You will wait until a man can sweep you off your feet and that will be the end of it. You must be skinny and made up for that day so that he can pick you up physically and mentally.

Do not play with the toy cars or the small green army men. The tires will tangle in your long brown hair and the army men will make you think of power.

You are not what you become. You are what you are born.

Manisha Shaw, UG Media, 1st year

How empowering is any celebration with a religious sanction?

Sayak Pal

Any ritual that we celebrate becomes a part of our lives and some of them are being spontaneous for ages. It is like a stream of emotions letting us get washed away with either hope, enthusiasm, happiness or fear and failure; left with either dazzling pairs of new clothes or a decent one-square meal. But as most of us who populate the urban landscapes immerse ourselves in these festivities, the Durga puja being the biggest one in Bengal, do we really look back and think about the in-your-face inequalities that lurks behind the pomp and show? Are we not selfish? Do we care two hoots? Where lies the sense of empowerment in the celebrations of religious festivals like the Durga puja? Can the elaborate puja pandals hide the squalor of shelter homes that are spread in ghettos across the length and breadth of this city? Can autumnal bloom hide these all-seasons' cultural markers?

We talk about changes and social reforms but we lack the basics to understand it. Social reform does not come from selective effort but requires all of us to participate and contribute with the same enthusiasm. Helping the poor is a generalised concept and remains restricted to only school books teaching us moral values. We do not bat an eyelid before putting Durga on a pedestal, imagined as our mother but happily ignore

plights of prostitutes, Dalit women, Adivasi women, the LGBTQIA community who are fighting daily atrocities. We believe in rituals, splurge on sweets and milk and all other kinds of bhog for the goddess but feel irked when roadside beggars plead for a penny.

It is believed that we all have our own universe and we all have our own Brahma, the creator of our perceived universe where we look at everything in a different and unique way. We act according to our own judgment and belief system but whenever we are being judgemental about someone else and their needs, we always think from our perspective, putting their preferences as secondary without considering the fact as to how our judgments are affecting that person and creating ripples in his/her uni-

verse. We often forget that the way we are considering something can entirely be different from the reality as reality exists differently for different people.

The need of empowerment is not gender-specific and its not about a specific people and community but our mind, our thought process, our heart that needs to be empowered, as we alone are the harbingers of poribartan. Poribartan being the only constant in life.



Picture source: Google

Women empowerment is not a woman's responsibility alone

Women empowerment is indeed the most widely spoken and discussed issue of recent times across the globe. Gone are the dark medieval ages when women were forced to hide behind the veil of dominant patriarchal customs. The modern day Indian women have come a long way aided by the actions concerning women empow-

of rural self-help organisations.

However, it is very evident from the daily incidents of abuse, harassment, trafficking etc that women are not truly empowered. A much neglected aspect of this scene -

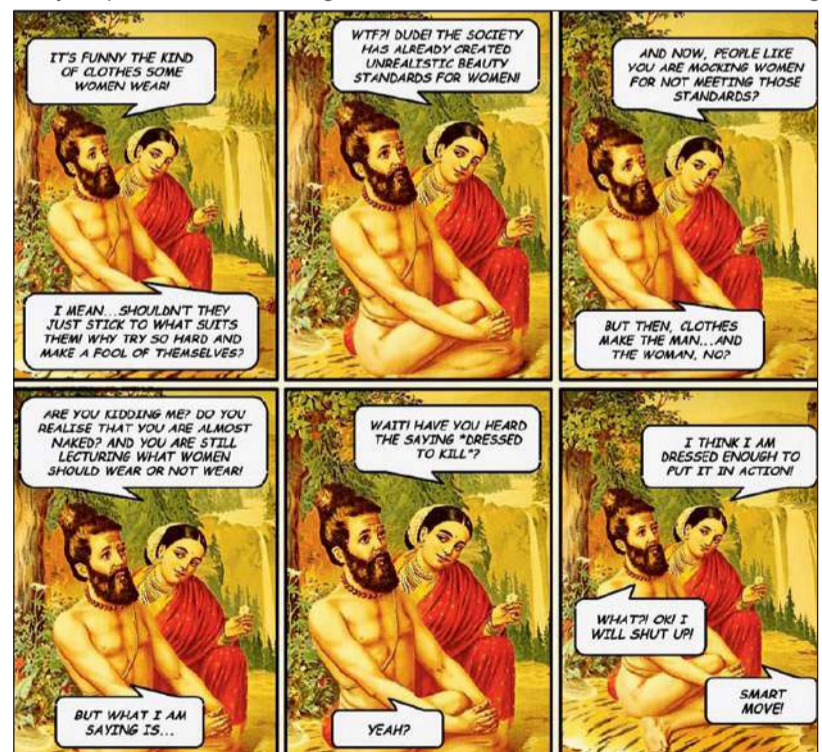
en themselves. There is a compelling need to abandon the stereotypical ideas of masculinity and educate men on the shortcomings of dominant, patriarchal cultures from an early age. Efforts should be undertaken to urge men to

speak up against violence towards women. Male egos need to be deflated and one must ensure greater participation from men in workshops on gender issues.



Picture source: Adarsh Balak

empowerment campaigns. When we think of women empowerment today, we visualise the urban working women or successful entrepreneurs



Picture source: Inedible India

nario is the issue of alerting and educating men for the sake of empowering women. It should be realised by all that the harmony of the society at large equally depends on both the sexes. It is by the culmination of both the powers, the world will grow to be a humane and generous living space. Therefore a major shift in perspective is the need of the hour.

The switch in concept needs to start with wom-

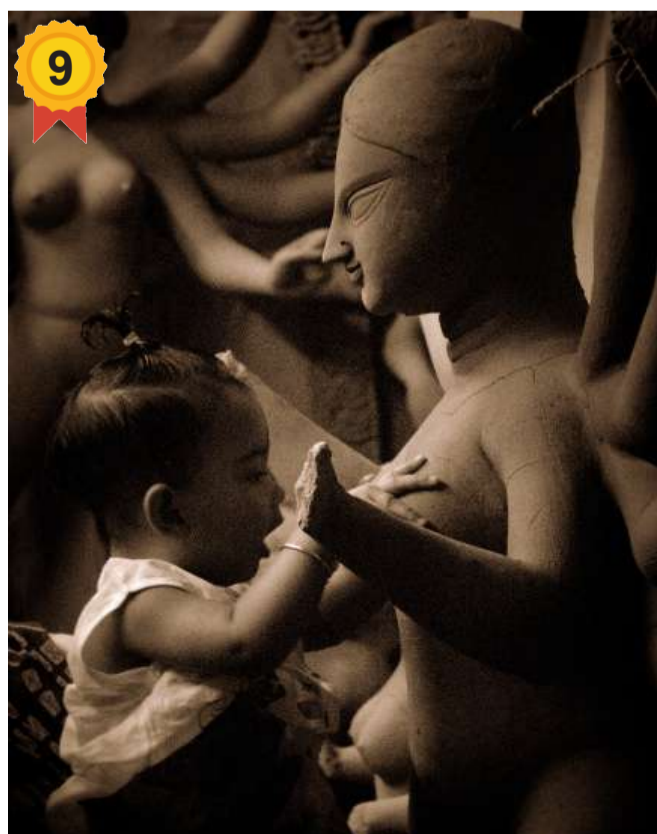
As mentioned earlier, it is only through united understanding of both men and women that society will prosper fruitfully. The greatest ever example of this is perhaps the story of Goddess Durga and her triumph over the demon Mahishasur. The Gods, forgoing their masculine ego, wholeheartedly aided the Goddess with their gifted weapons. It was this combinative endeavor that established righteousness in this Universe.

Rapti Mukherjee, PG Media 1st year

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“ Taking an image, freezing a moment, reveals how rich reality truly is ”

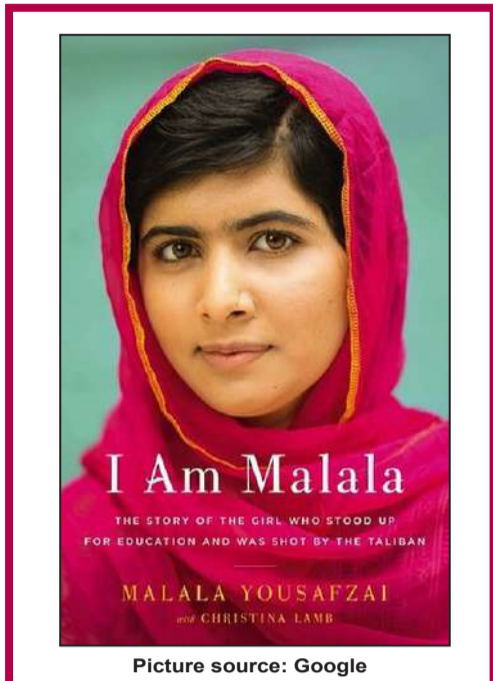


“Time flies but memories last forever”



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- 2. Suman Bandyopadhyay
- 3. Rookotha Dam, UG Media, 1st year
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- 17. Pravakar Ghosh, PG Media, 1st year

I am Malala: Powerful tale of grit and determination in the face of religious extremism



Picture source: Google

In the novel, *I Am Malala*, by Malala Yousafzai, the main character Malala is a Pakistani human rights activist working for the welfare of children and women. From a young age, her father, also a strong proponent of education encouraged her to stand up for what they believed in. In the traditional community of Swat in northwestern Pakistan, Malala's father over the years built and expanded his school. It had 1100 pupils and over seventy teachers. Unfortunately, the Taliban follows a very strict interpretation of the Quran and is

completely against women's education. On a morning in October 9, 2012, a Taliban member stopped a school bus, asked for Malala's name, and shot her thrice. She spent the following months recuperating and moved to London with her family, while the international community discovered her story. She would go on to become the youngest Nobel Peace Prize laureate for advocating and fighting for education for women. This is a breathtaking novel about a girl's fight for women's education in the face of Talibanism and a repressive regime of extremist forces. Yousafzai follows a logical sequence as she writes the book. This allows the reader to understand the sequence of events better. She does an incredible job by providing the reader with the social and historical milieu in which the book fits to show the significance of her actions.

I Am Malala is a beautiful piece of chronological state of events; from Malala's birth to her being shot by the Talibans. A girl child's birth is not a matter of celebration in Pakistan, given the feudal mindset of the people in northwestern of the country. But Malala's father took an initiative; he insisted on a small gathering with relatives because he was sure that she would be special. How we know Malala today was because of her father. Her father went against societal norms to celebrate her daughter's birth, set up a school to propagate women education and empowerment amidst adversities. For instance, after finally starting the school and gaining traction with the local villages, there occurs a flood in the region and

his school gets wiped out. Furthermore, the author magnificently goes on to describe further sequence of events, like the list of awards Malala was receiving when she was ten and eleven years old by speaking out on the importance of education for all. After giving a talk titled, "How dare the Taliban take away my basic right to education?" Yousafzai shares with the reader that the Taliban then proceeded to issue a death threat against her. So when the story gets to the climax of the Taliban soldier shooting Malala in the face, the author has already successfully conveyed her life story to us and in that moment we feel her trepidation and can empathise with her unfortunate predicament.

Similarly Yousafzai conveys to the reader the crucial historical context in which her actions transpire. Yousafzai devotes a hefty portion of the first part of the book to talk about the culture in the Swat Valley of Pakistan, the differential treatment meted out to men and women, the Taliban's role in everyday affairs, and how girls are brought up to be prepared as wives for future husbands. Yousafzai explores the history of Pakistan and gives out the nuances that led to this fragmented country. Therefore, when she ends up becoming a blogger for BBC, blogging about the Taliban's new edict banning girls from attending school, we, the reader, know what major risk she's taking because we are aware of the social context of her actions. As Malala's prominence rises and her actions get more coverage in newspapers and television channels, her life too is at a

higher risk. The Taliban is always out to kill her.

Yousafzai talks about all the other death threats that she had received and her family's decision to keep her enrolled in school despite the Taliban making an attempt to bomb many other schools in the previous weeks. Yousafzai's discourse on the history of the culture of the Swat village in northwestern Pakistan and the social context in which her story takes place allows the reader to have a more informed perspective on the issues at hand.

In short, *I Am Malala* is a well-written story about a girl's determination to fight for education for women in a region deep steeped in patriarchal notions of women behaviour and roles. Her dissection of the chronological events in her life and the historical and social context of her actions allow the reader to better understand the profound significance of her actions and the courage it took to do what she did. Her actions have been rewarded with the International Children's Peace Prize in 2011, the Pakistan's National Youth Peace Prize, a speech to the United Nations, and a Nobel Peace Prize. As reading Malala Yousafzai's story has profoundly deepened my knowledge of Middle Eastern cultural affairs and the struggle of children, particularly women, in those countries to receive proper education, I believe it can do the same for others and better humanity.

Ayush Maskara, PG Media, 2nd year

Tete-a-tete with the man who introduced female Dhakis in Bengal

It's often said that behind every successful man there is a woman, but the women of this quiet village of Maslandapur from Habra district have a different story to tell. Their lives have been transformed because of the dhak, an instrument that brings an aura to the festive mood and spirit of Durga puja; and they have only but Gokul Chandra Das to thank. Gokul Das is a now a household name in Bengal, thanks to the numerous appearances on television shows alongside stalwarts such as Pt. Tanmoy Bose, Pt. Bickram Ghosh, Ustaaad Zakir Hussain, Pt. Ravi Shankar and many more. After having brought glory through the use of dhak in his numerous performances at several music concerts in India and worldwide, he is out on a mission currently.

In a telephonic conversation, Anurag Ghosh talks to Gokul Das about the revival of dhak in mainstream musical culture and his mission to train women to take up drumming as a profession.

Is playing dhak your family profession? Tell us how has the journey been so far?

Yes, we come from a family of dhakis. My father and grandfather both were renowned dhakis. I started training under my father Ishwar Motilal Das at the age of four, who gave me lessons on classical dhak playing. Initially I used to play the kancher and then slowly I took up the dhak and used to go along with my father to perform at shows. I have participated and performed in innumerable competitions and shows all over India; in places like Delhi, Mumbai, Allahabad, Lucknow. In one such Durga puja competition in 2004, I was conferred with the title of the 'Dhaki Samrat' after having competed against 32 teams. In fact it is during this competition that I got to meet Pt. Tanmoy Bose and had the privilege to perform with his world renowned fusion troupe Taal Tantra and have been touring around the world with him till date. I got the opportunity to perform in North America, England, Jakarta, Indonesia, Norway and Bangladesh. Such encounters also gave me a platform to perform with legends and maestros like Pt. Ravi Shankar and Ustad Zakir

Hussain. In Norway, I got to be a part of a 250 piece symphony orchestra comprising musicians from throughout the world.

Who inspired you to take up this profession?

Dhak playing came as an inheritance to me. My forefathers have been involved with this art form since ages. I learnt the basics from my father. However I consider Pt. Tanmoy Bose as my guru. It is all because of him that I was able to reach where I am today. I was able to



Picture courtesy: The Indian Express

learn various instruments like the saxophone, clarinet, harmonium, dholak, etc. as a kid. But under guruji's guidance, I was able to focus more deeply on dhak and explore new horizons with it.

Why is Dhak still not part of mainstream music despite being a rich traditional percussion instrument?

Our forefathers were very renowned and played well. But they lacked a far sighted approach. They never thought about the next generation and how they might want to take the art forward. You will not find any study material or lessons based on dhak like we get for instruments such as the tabla, dhol, pakhawaj or harmonium. Dhak being very region specific to Bengal, you will not find a single institution where dhak is taught formally. The art of dhak

playing has been recognised as a mainstream art form. But I am trying to change the mindset. I have started writing a book which will help the future generations to come forward and learn this instrument as a mainstream art. Dhak is also based on basics similar to that of tabla or pakhawaj and my book will have details about the technicalities of dhak.

How did the idea of training women come to your mind? How well was it accepted?

In one such international tours in North America, I visited a music store to buy a saxophone for my son where I found the lady at the counter playing multiple kinds of instruments effortlessly. It is then that the idea struck me. I wondered how women back in my village are far more laborious and hardworking. Then why can't they play something wonderful as a dhak?! I got back home after the tour and soon started training women of my locality in dhak. Initially I got mixed response from my neighborhood and started with a group of six women. The idea was very new and unique as no one had ever thought about it before. With time and overcoming criticism, my efforts were recognized and at

present we have 50 women who have trained under me and are performing in several shows.

Dhak is still a very Durga puja related instrument. Why don't we see it at par with instruments like table or mridanga? What are the efforts being taken for the revival of dhak and for its survival as an art form in the long run?

Dhak was previously found only during the Durga puja. However, nowadays, times are changing and with efforts like that of mine, people are accepting it more widely. I brought about the concept of fusion dhak where dhak is being played along with saxophone, keyboards, etc to make it more appealing to the audience of today. In 2010, I organized a workshop where dhakis from many districts came together to promote the art form. On the last

day of the workshop, we put up a performance in front an audience comprising renowned musicians and celebrities from the music fraternity. They were amazed to see how dhak could be played with a variety of mainstream instruments. The workshop was also an effort to make the dhakis trained and learned musicians. We also discussed about nuances and techniques which could be adopted to make dhak more interesting for modern day listeners. The response we have received overtime has encouraged us even more. Corporates are calling us to inaugurations and product launches, also, movies and daily soaps are showcasing us. This is promoting the art form as well as artists. The present government has promoted folk art and artists to a great extent and we receive monthly financial grants.

What is the future of dhak? Do you see young musicians taking up dhak as an art?

Before my time is done, I'd like to restore the lost respect for the dhak and the dhaki. You will never find a table player being summoned to play at odd hours or for indefinite time. Whereas we dhakis are called for at any time of the day, often with not-so-good gestures. Dhak has always been neglected and seen with demeanor. After a long struggle, we have finally registered our group and you can find us on www.gokuldhaki.in. I want people to accept dhak as an instrument, understand its importance and presence and respect the art form as well as the artist. I will not be there forever, even after I am gone, people and the masses should have information or material from which they can learn dhak.

Training women in dhak is a very unique initiative. Do you think women have the potential to become better than men in drumming?

Earlier pilots used to be men only, but now women have encroached that space too. Nothing is impossible if the person concerned wants to work hard for whatever he or she is aiming at. With this thought, I had started training the women and I wish that someday in future I see these female students of mine shining in the field of mainstream music, playing the dhak to glory.

Anurag Ghosh, PG Media, 1st year

POETS CORNER



মা

প্রত্যয় দত্ত

যেমন আগলে রাখো তুমি
আমায় বুকের ভিতর
শান্ত হতে চাই আমি
পেলে প্রশয়ের এই আদর;

নিশ্চিন্দ-নিরাপদ ঘেরাটোপে
সেই মুক্তির কান্না,
কেন পাল্টে দিতে এই সময়
আমি আজও পারি না?

আমি হৃদয় দিয়ে ছবি
এঁকেছিলাম ভালোবাসার-
বুঝি নি শুধু এই পৃথিবী
এক স্বপ্ন ধোঁয়াশার,

স্বপ্নের মায়ারী সেই চাদরে
রেখেছিলাম কত কথা
ভেঙে যাওয়া কোন সে হাত ধরে
অতীত বাড়ায় ব্যাকুলতা;

এ কোন স্বাধীনতা আজ রক্তে আমার
ঢেকে দিতে ব্যর্থতা
গড়ে অস্তিত্বের কারণার...

এ কোন ভালোবাসা খোঁজে মিথ্যে অহংকার
রয়ে যাওয়া ব্যবসার
সয়ে যাওয়া ক্যান্সার

বন্ধ দরজা তবু ভাঙবো সজোরে
এই প্রত্যয় যেন না ভাঙে অন্তরে-

আমি নিভে গিয়েও স্বলে উঠতে পারি
যদি কথা রাখ,
আমি মরে গিয়েও বেঁচে ফিরতে পারি
যদি ফিরে দেখ.



Illustration: Sukriti Saha

You Did Not Let Her Go

Manisha Shaw, UG Media, 1st year

You Heard Her
In that back ally way down the street
But You Ignored Her
As she Screamed,
You Knew what was happening,
Yet,
You let them be,
She was the victim,
And you didnt seem to care,
As those men dug down in her,
She screamed stop and help,
But you just left and didn't stop,

In the morning there she was, on the news spotlight,
RAPED,
Was in red big, and bold,
Why didnt you stop?
You Heard Her,
In the back alley way down the street,
You saw them commit the crime,
You heard her scream for help,
But you just ignored and walked right by,
As no one had gone to help,
So now this young girl of 8,
Her skin as pale as snow,
Molested again and again in every trial,
Because no one stopped to help.

श्रद्धांजलि

A Tribute To Nirbhaya (Daamini)
Setu Maheshwari

कहाँ खो गयी इंसानियत कहाँ गया इंसान
हमारे दिलो दिमाग से आखिर कहाँ गया नारी का सम्मान
क्यों भूल गए हम हमें जीवन देती है नारी माँ बनकर
हमारा जीवन सवारती है नारी कभी बहन तो कभी पत्नी बनकर
नारी के हर रूप में हमें भगवान् ने प्यार की सौगात दी है
ज़िन्दगी की लौ को जलाने के लिए एक भीनी सी आंच दी है
कहा है हमारी आँखों की शर्म आखिर कहा गया हमारे दिलों से प्यार
क्यों इस समाज में बार बार नारी की पवित्रता होती है तार-तार
क्यों हम उन्हें प्यार के बदले सिर्फ नफरत दिया करते हैं
क्यों हम उन्हें वफ़ा के बदले सिर्फ धोखा ही दिया करते हैं
आखिर कब तक हम उन्हें प्यार के बदले सिर्फ हवस देते रहेंगे
आखिर कब तक हम उनसे मिली ज़िन्दगी के बदले उन्हें मौत देते रहेंगे
ज़रा एक बार अपने अन्दर झाँककर अपनी आत्मा से पूछो
कि क्या होगी ज़िन्दगी बिना उनके प्यार और लगाव के
क्या जी सकेंगे हम इस बेरंग दुनिया में बिना उनके साथ के
क्यों नहीं उठते हमारे हाथ उन सजदों के लिए जिसकी वो हकदार हैं
क्यों हमें उनकी आत्मा छोड़ सिर्फ जिस्म से ही प्यार है
किसी की दुनिया बेरंग बनाकर अपने लिए कैसे रंग भर पाओगे
जब भी आयने के सामने जाओगे तो एक वहशी भेड़िया ही पाओगे
और उस से तो क्या सोचो कभी खुद से भी नज़रें मिला पाओगे
आखिर कब तक समाज पे उँगली उठाओगे कब तक पुलिस को दोषी ठहराओगे
मत भूलो कि दूसरों पर उठी एक उँगली के बदले तीन उँगली अपनी ओर पाओगे
अपना शैतान पालने के लिए आखिर और कितनी दामिनी भेंट चढ़ाओगे
हर बेवजह बली पर अपनी माँ का दूध और उसकी कोख लजाओगे
मत भूलो ! जैसे को तैसा ही प्रकृति का नियम है
कल अगर किसी अपनी को दामिनी कि जगह पाओगे तो दुनिया को तुम क्या मुँह दिखाओगे
खत्म करनी होगी ये हवस ये दरिदगी, फसला करो कि प्यार के बदले सिर्फ प्यार ही लौटाओगे
वादा करो खुद से कि समाज में फिर "राम राज" लाओगे
और राजा राम भले ही न बन सको, इंसान तो बनकर ही दिखाओगे
बनकर ही दिखाओगे ॥

The Unheard Cry for Help

Disha Gomes, BCA, 3rd year

The day when she finally made it through the sack etched in the maternal belly,
She charged her way through the womb to conquer the world with love, already!
She met with rejection, Creators with a conflicted heart,
Reluctance and remorse cropped up, her gender had them to their gut.
Had she not been born with genitals that bled,
The disappointment and denial would be replaced with pride of possession instead.
Her immaculate presence in attempt to light up the dwelling darkness,
Managed to sieve through specks of emotion, beneath the layer of toughness.
She traversed a path impeded with mighty prejudices of the society,
She waged battles relentlessly against the evil that comes in such variety.
Shamed and dominated, concealed within the safety of her house,
Her character and worth was determined by the length of her skirt and blouse.
Her charred lungs pumped out exhaustion,
Her scarred liver cried out for mere affection.
She's expected to entwine into a social bond, procreation being the goal,
Nurturing a fruitful life, with no heed paid to the desires of her soul.
Patriarchy suppressed all her innocent whims,
The journals bear witness to her vivid dreams.
She desires being above none, just equality and equity would do.
A little bit of humanity and a conscience that is true.
Her struggles are real, and so is she!
Just a being made of flesh and bone,
Who are we to deny her rights?
Why can't we just make her our own?

Not Your Supergirl

Satabdi Gantait

I've always loved superman
Ever since I was small
But, now a days, i wonder
Does the man sleep at all?
He does look sleek and shiny
His gorgeousness intact
But I'm beginning to wonder
If the story is based on facts.
Because you see, dear people
I'm superwoman for some
I manage, dazzle, juggle
Every thing and every one.
The curtains and the curries
The stupid laundry bill
The paytm(s) , the deadlines
And everything in between.
And I live this title so much
Super's a lovely name
The only problem is inside
I don't quite feel the same.
I don't have time for breakfast
I'm always running late
I forgo food, because there's already
Too much on my plate.
Today I woke at dawn
And saw things clearly
It has been a long time
Since it was ok to be just me.
Today I'll breathe in the autumn
And not fall in that trap
Of Supergirl, woman..
Will be just enough.

