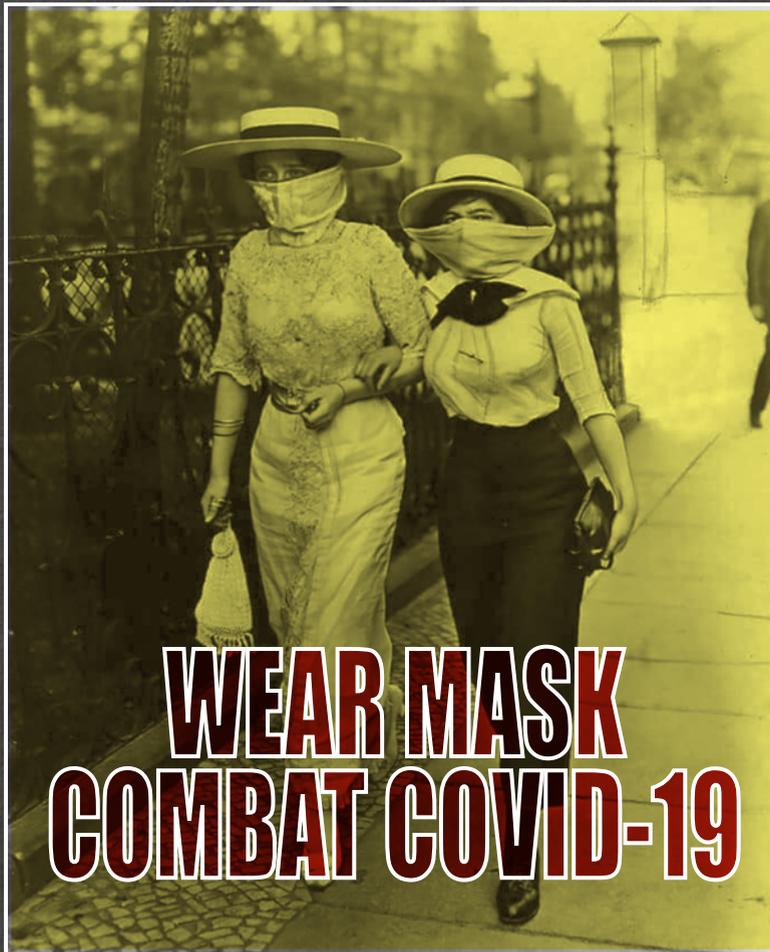




JULY 2020

Monthly Bulletin

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**WEAR MASK
COMBAT COVID-19**

THE ASIATIC SOCIETY
(AN INSTITUTION OF NATIONAL IMPORTANCE)
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Birthday Mark of the Luminaries in the Month of July



Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy



Syama Prasad Mookerjee



Jyoti Basu



Pablo Neruda



Bhanubhakta Acharya



Nelson Mandela

From the Desk of the General Secretary

Dear Members and Well-wishers,

We are still in the thick of a mixed feeling – panic, and anxiety on one side and a bit of taste of Unlock-1 on the other. Since the work for all can not wait for long, we have slowly entered into that spirit of socialization. You will kindly remember that the month of July is replete with birthday mark remarkably of many luminaries worth mentioning. The first of July is observed as the National Doctors' Day on account of celebrating the birthday of Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy. Absolutely dedicated to work (*Karmabeer*), who could say during the last days on bed that he rather felt comfortable being engaged in work than taking rest for recovery from illness. An all time brilliant physician cum politician, Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy (1.07.1882) was the Chief Minister of West Bengal between 1948 and 1962. He was also a member of the Asiatic Society. We also remember Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee, who was born on sixth of July in 1901. Dr. Mookerjee was not only a high profile public figure being state and central minister between 1941 and 42 and 1947 and 50 respectively but also he was the youngest Vice-Chancellor of University of Calcutta between 1934 and 38. This apart, he was the President of the Asiatic Society between 1942-44. Further, to mention among others, Jyoti Basu, the longest serving Chief Minister of West Bengal (1977-2000) was born on 08.07.1914, poet Pablo Neruda was born on 12.07.1904, poet Bhanubhakta Acharya was born on 13.07.1814, the legendary political figure of South Africa Nelson Mandela was born on 18.07.1918 and so on and so forth. We take this opportunity to pay our respectful tribute to all of them.

We are continuing with our academic and administrative activities mainly through modern tech-based mode under some limitations due to the prevailing situation in the country. We have been organising our Council meeting and other committee meetings for the last two three months in this way. The Monthly Bulletin of April, May and June and the latest quarterly Journal of the Asiatic Society (Vol. LXII, No.1) have been published online. These publications have received appreciations from academicians of our country and abroad. The observance of the World Environment Day (5th June) and Special Lecture programme on Dr. B. R. Ambedkar and the Constitution of India (22nd June) were organised through video conferencing. Brief reports of some Research Fellows engaged in various research projects are also being published regularly in our Monthly Bulletin. Some other important books are also in the final stage of printing.

Friends, let me share with you that one of the foremost and pioneering scholar in the field of Positional Astronomy Professor Amalendu Bandyopadhyay expired on 22.06.2020 at the age of 90. The Asiatic Society nominated him for the Award of Durga Prasad Khaitan Memorial Gold Medal for the year 2019 for his notable contribution to science. The members and staff members of the Asiatic Society deeply mourn this sad demise and express sympathy to the members of the bereaved family. We also mourn the death of thousands of valuable lives in our country and in other parts of the world at large during this critical period. The dastardly killing of a black citizen in the United States of course stands out as an exceptional reference in the history of the affected humanity.

Please keep well and stay safe.

Tribute to Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy

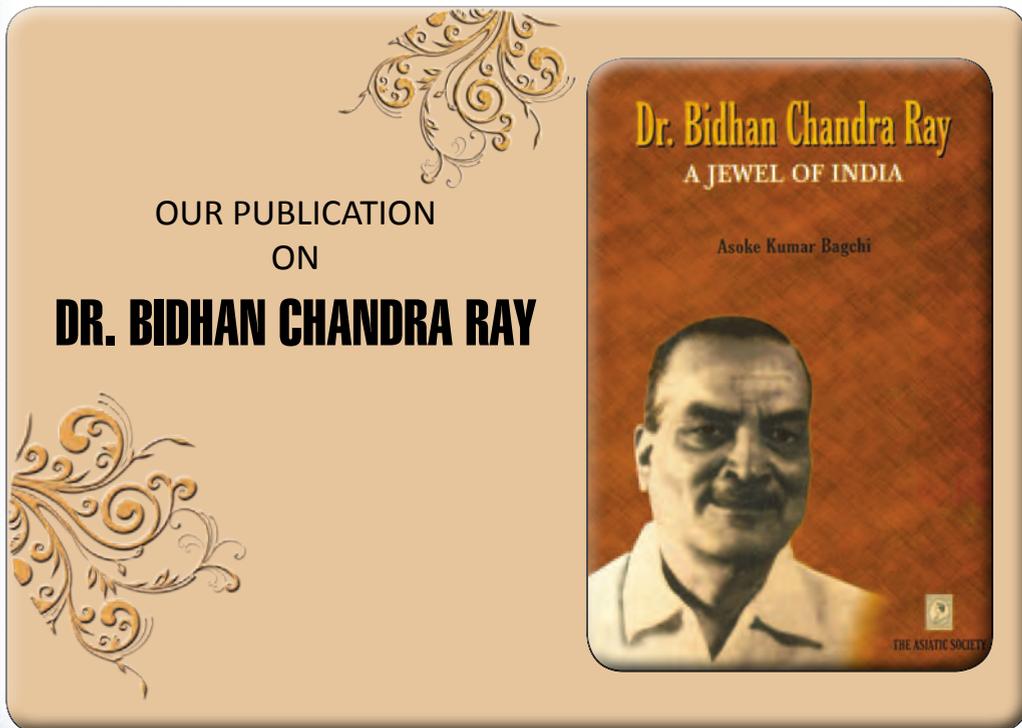
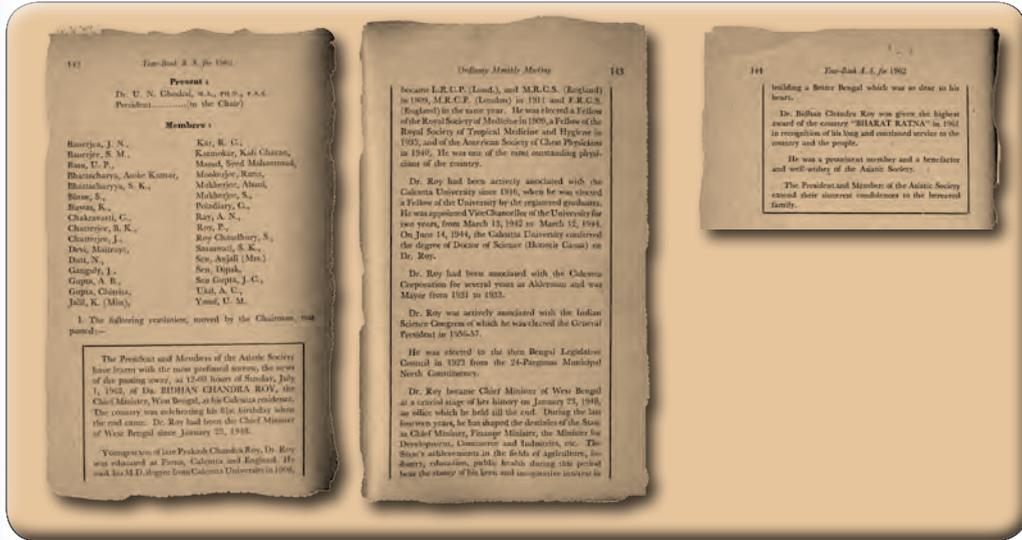
Born: 01.07.1882

Died: 01.07.1962



Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy became the member of the Asiatic Society in 1940. His name was proposed by R N Chopra and seconded by B S Guha in the Monthly General Meeting of the Asiatic Society held on 5th February 1940. Dr. Roy was always very keen to the development of the academic activities of the Society. In the Foundation Day Lecture of the Society held on 15th January, 1961, Dr. Roy encouraged the efforts of the Asiatic Society to make provision for accommodation of foreign scholars in the new building when completed.

Condolence Resolution by The Asiatic Society after the Demise of Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy



A Nail Hits on a Story : Dr. B.C. Roy Rediscovered

Satyabrata Chakrabarti

GENERAL SECRETARY, THE ASIATIC SOCIETY

I have chosen to discuss about this nearly forgotten small sized Bengali book on the occasion of the 138th birth anniversary of legendary physician cum politician Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy (01.07.1882 - 01.07.1962). Many

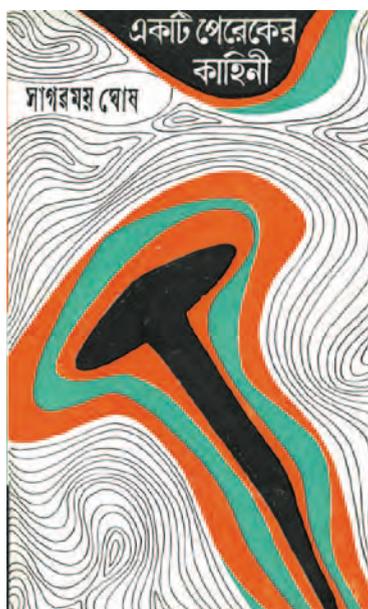
readers might be curious to know, as I myself felt as to how this is related with the contents of the strangely titled book. The task becomes automatically hard for me how to bring out the main subject out of an elaborate narrative, ultimately strewn so skilfully into a web of portraiture of a giant and rare personality as was Dr. B. C. Roy. This long narrative was virtually a storytelling to the author by one of his old acquaintance, almost in one breath about a poor guy who was personally known to the storyteller. This coincidental occasion happened on the day of Dr. Roy's funeral procession just after his demise a day before. The author got stuck on the way

to his newspaper office at the juncture of a thickly attended funeral processionists and accidentally found his acquaintance mentioned above and on his insistence returned at home of the author. After initial trauma the storyteller became freshly charged with a cup of hot tea supplied by the author and started revealing his experience of that poor guy, a fantastic plot otherwise of a full-length novel. The author excellently punches informative and

interesting anecdotes retrieved from his own memory and collated some others collected from different source materials about the brief profile of Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy. This style of building up Dr. Roy's characteristics – personal,

professional and political has been a unique method to make the book an absorbing reading without a bit of monotony keeping the canvas of funeral rites in the backdrop. While opening few pages describe how the entire state was sunk in grief and how Dr. Roy even without being a mass leader, his corpse could pull such a huge crowd beyond any imaginable dimension etc., simultaneously the author gets his readers stuck into the snapshots revealing the ready wits of Dr. Roy. For example, once in a meeting where Mahatma Gandhi, Smt. Sarojini Naidu, Dr. Roy were together, Smt. Naidu jokingly hinted at Dr. Roy's smiling face which still cre-

ated some attractive landmark even though Dr. Roy was nearing the age of fifty; pat came the return from Dr. Roy reminding her that even such romantic touch did not escape Smt. Naidu's attention when she had already crossed her fifties. Gandhiji, who was otherwise ever serious in his mood, started laughing. Thus the author, in between the thick narrative, smuggles in other such instances to project Dr. Roy's stubborn rationality, sense of dignity



Ekti Pereker Kahini (in Bengali), Sagarmay Ghosh), Ananda Publishers Pvt. Ltd., January 1971, Pages 78.

and self pride, and a touch of tender heart engulfed in a deep sense of humanity, trying consciously to remain out of public or media focus. Once Dr. Roy attended on Gandhiji's illness. Gandhiji first refused to accept any treatment when forty crores of his followers were deprived from those facilities. Dr. Roy prevailed on Gandhiji arguing that lest the forty crores do not feel depressed because the very person whom they depend upon is inflicted with illness, it is important that Gandhiji should accept the treatment of a doctor in order to get well soon and to attend to their various difficulties. Gandhiji, apparently convinced further refused to accept allopathic medicine. Dr. Roy reminded him that it is only Gandhiji who always told his people that everything on this earth is the creation of the God. In the event of that belief how could Gandhiji prove that ingredients of allopathy medicines were not the creation of the God. Gandhiji retorted that better Dr. Roy should have been a lawyer than a physician. Dr. Roy without wasting a second replied, perhaps your God knew that some day you would require the attention of a doctor like me. Therefore, He chose me to become a physician than to become a lawyer. Gandhiji finally yielded to Dr. Roy's wish. As a student of medicine Dr. Roy declined on the face of his teacher, an Englishman, to appear as a false witness for an incident where the latter was involved. Dr. Roy paid the price for it, but never repented. After returning from abroad with enviable higher degrees in medicine and surgery, Dr. Roy used to draw less salary than his boss who did not have a proper degree. Once that boss hinted at Dr. Roy as if he was being overpaid for his assignment. Dr. Roy immediately told on his face little satirically that perhaps it was correct! Because a pass out holding more than essential and desirable qualifications for the post, as in the case of Dr. Roy, should not have such a high pay packet when a boss like that Englishman drew higher pay even having failed in the qualifying examination required for the post. Such was the personality structure of Dr. B. C. Roy as stout

and bold as the tall and erect posture that he maintained throughout his life.

Now the tale of a nail which the readers must be anxiously waiting for. The narrator of the whole episode was Bishuda. In his boyhood days he used to accompany his father on tour to a place Chandpur by name situated in erstwhile East Bengal. He picked up friendship with a boy more or less of his age, Baidyanath by name. Both suffered for loneliness during their early age. Deserted by husband Baidyanath's mother took shelter in her brother's house along with the child and suffered lot of humiliation. This pained Baidyanath very much and he vowed to himself to come out one day from the clutches of such poverty stricken condition and to settle honourably with his widow mother. Baidyanath had somehow framed a utopia about the city of Calcutta from where Bishuda hailed. After a gap of time having passed matriculation examination Baidyanath came to Calcutta and took shelter at the house of Bishuda through courtesy of Bishuda's paternal aunt who had written a letter to Bishuda's parents in this regard. Baidyanath was very shy but had a sense of self dignity. He got a small job and started a modest living without bothering the host in anyway. While walking to office and back a bulging out nail from his almost discarded chappal caused wound on Baidyanath's toe and eventually developed septic. With the help of a friend Bishuda got him admitted in erstwhile Carmichael Medical College where Dr. Roy was a teacher and also a practising doctor. Somehow with great efforts Bishuda was able to reach upto Dr. Roy and received his attention for treatment of Baidyanath. To cut the long story short, under care of Dr. Roy Baidyanath was fully cured. In the meantime he lost his earlier job. No option further how to make a living. Again at the insistence of some hospital staff Baidyanath could reach upto Dr. Roy and explained his helpless condition. On Dr. Roy's recommendation he got a temporary assignment in the same hospital with a nominal pay. Baidyanath's assignment

was to fair out hospital slips for the patient's records. One day Dr. Roy detected that it was Baidyanath's handwriting, so clear, readable and systematic. Being attracted with his quality Dr. Roy, in addition to the hospital job of Baidyanath, employed him for his own secretarial work for every morning. This is how Baidyanath became so close and a person of confidence of Dr. Roy and he further recommended him in a private concern where Baidyanath got higher pay and eventually settled in Calcutta with family members. This was his ultimate goal when he dreamt of it during the days of distress. Baidyanath continued to attend Dr. Roy's office work and personal library on holidays regularly.

On the persuasion of his mother Baidyanath got married eventually. In this case also it was possible for him with the direct help of Dr. Roy who gave him some hard cash to meet the expenses involved in marriage ceremony. Even Baidyanath was able to obtain Dr. Roy's word to make a visit to his new establishment, because it was his mother's sincere desire also. However, things went on smoothly but it did not last long. One day Baidyanath in his work place got suddenly infuriated with his boss, who was an Englishman, for making some objectionable comment about Dr. Roy. And at the spar of excitement Baidyanath chased him with a firearm which ultimately turned out to be a police case and he was arrested. Dr. Roy got the message and Baidyanath was released on his intervention. As usual Baidyanath went to see Dr. Roy to explain this incidence. But Dr. Roy would not see his face even and refused his entry in his house. Suddenly Baidyanath fell from his hard built heaven and became isolated, helpless and a man of the road. But his tenacity in attempting to meet Dr. Roy just once to explain what really excited him ultimately turned out to be successful after so many days of waiting. By that time he was slowly becoming penniless after selling out all valuable possessions.

Dr. Roy again took pity on him and got him re-instated in a job which was pretty to live

with his family – mother, wife and daughter. But it was away from Calcutta in Asansol. But he was left with little choice. At Dr. Roy's instruction he joined there but made it a point ritually to pay a visit to Dr. Roy's house on holidays to assist him as usual in keeping his papers, books etc. in order. It shows how Dr. Roy gradually developed a soft corner for Baidyanath eventually and became dependent on him for some secretarial work.

Now, to quickly come to the concluding part of the narration. On the penultimate day Baidyanath returned to Calcutta. Next day being the 81st birthday of Dr. Roy, Baidyanath went out from home to buy flower bouquet etc. to reach Dr. Roy's place and to pay his respect to him on birthday. His little daughter also gave Baidyanath a garland which she herself made to offer it to her so far unseen grandpa. But by this time the end had come, Dr. Roy expired. Nobody knew where was Baidyanath all this time. Bishuda (the narrator of the story) came to Baidyanath's house, he was not available. His mother, wife, daughter were wailing and requested Bishuda to take them at the spot to pay their last tribute. Bishuda, in order to escape this pathetic scene, told them to be ready and wait for his return. I think the readers could remember now that Bishuda was found in the crowd of funeral procession by the author and at his insistence the author Sagarmay Ghosh returned to his house. For sometime Bishuda was dumb founded. Then he felt somewhat fresh with a cup of tea and started exhausting his database about Baidyanath's emergence in the life of Dr. Bidhan Chandra Roy, beginning as his nail-pierced patient in the hospital. The author on the other hand did not forget to remind his readers about the emergence of Dr. Roy in the field of politics by his maiden election win defeating Rashtraguru Surendranath Banerjee on first December, 1923 from Barrackpur Constituency as an independent candidate supported by the Swarajya Party. The book is worth reading even now and the cover design by Purnendu Patri is still memorable.

One Hundred Not Out: The Existential Encounter of a Legendary Doctor through a Century

Amrita Bagchi

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR OF HISTORY, BETHUNE COLLEGE

The autobiographical work titled 'Doctor' by Dr. Mani Kumar Chhetri is a milestone work where he has not only discussed the success story of his life but also explained the conditions of public health, gradual development of the medical science and medical care services from multidimensional aspects. In an exceptional lucid manner, Dr. Chhetri, ex-Director of Health Service and IPGMER, Government of West Bengal, has been able to unfold the story of the transformation of health care services with special focus on the expansion of Seth Sukhlal Karnani Memorial Hospital (SSKM). The entire book is divided into ten priceless segments (chapters) followed by a section called 'Reminiscences and Conversations' where other notable physicians (many of whom were his students) and his acquaintances including his only son showered their respects and experiences with this legendary doctor.

In the chapter 'From the mountains to the megacity', the author has given the detailed description of the simplicity of his child-

hood days amidst the beauty of the hills in Teesta Valley Tea Garden and later in the Toong Soong Busti where he finally grew up. The socio-political composition of the hills, the peaceful co-existence of the Nepalis, Lepchas and the Bengalis, association with the Britishers (*sahibs*), impact of the colonial culture and contribution of some of his great teachers in schools were explicitly narrated by this living legend. After appearing 'first' in the district and securing a scholarship from the University of Calcutta, Dr. Chhetri moved to the 'bustling city of Calcutta from the sleepy hamlet of Darjeeling'. He

took admission in Medical College in 1938 after passing 'Intermediate exam in science with letters in physics and chemistry' from St. Paul's College in 1936.

DOCTOR

Mani Kumar Chhetri



Mani Kumar Chhetri, Doctor, (ed.), Subhamoy Chatterjee and Nilanjan Dutta (Eds.), Critical Care and Medical Education Trust, Ajanta Offset and Packaging Ltd, Haryana, 2019, vi +166, Rs 200.

The sub-section titled 'Medical College in those days' throws light on the existing medical education institutions under the 'British rule'. His reminiscence in Medical College which was then mostly dominated by the British doctors actually helps the readers understand the medical education system in the colonial era. Among many professors of Medical College, the name of Dr. Mani De is worth mentioning as his influence played a huge role in shaping the life of Dr. Chhetri in later years.

In this magnificent work, he has brilliantly interlinked the issues like the outbreak of the Second World War, famine of 1943 and Hindu Muslim riots with the intensification of various health problems like kala-azar, malaria, tuberculosis, dengue, cholera and typhoid that posed a direct threat to the poor infrastructure of the health care delivery systems and narrow medical knowledge. However, it was during this period that the introduction of antibiotics as a 'new effective weapon' and the discovery of the drug to cure kala-azar by U.N. Brahmachari brought about a breakthrough in the domain of medical science.

In this strait jacket narrative, Dr. Chhetri has exposed the fact that after Independence, health received a proper attention of the welfare state and during Dr. Bidhan Roy's regime West Bengal witnessed multiple and far reaching changes in the sphere of health care.

The chapter titled 'I become a doctor', the author has penned down the contribution of Dr. Bidhan Roy in the development of IPGMER where he himself has also played a pivotal role. He taught the students and house staff of the college to develop a cordial relation with the patients so that they can develop faith upon the doctors.

While unfolding the story of the development of health care services for more than seven decades, Dr. Chhetri has pointed out how the doctors especially surgeons in 1950's, 60's and early 70's, had undertaken complicated brain surgeries only on the basis of x-rays. In chapter 'Calcutta moves

ahead' he has discussed that in present day it is really 'unthinkable' as there was no notion of CTscan or MRI which only started to dominate the medical investigation sector from 1970's and 80's respectively. Dr. Chhetri's reputation and dedication both as a physician and as a human being has immensely helped him get sanctioned huge grants from ICMR and central governments to undertake the developments of different specialized departments in IPGMER. As a socially aware doctor, he was well exposed to the changing profile of lifestyle and the onslaught of consumerist culture, both of which have an adverse impact on public health giving rise to certain noncommunicable like diabetes mellitus, rheumatoid fever, and hypertension etc.

In this book, we come to know that Dr. Chhetri had also taken great initiative with the assistance of AIIMS to introduce modern dialysis units in different medical colleges of Calcutta. Indeed the greatest achievement of Dr. Chhetri was the setting up of CCU (Coronary Care Unit) in SSKM for serious heart patients in 1965 to reduce mortality rates caused by cardiac problems. Dr. Chhetri described that few years later it was felt that patients suffering from any fatal disease should be placed in ITU (Intensive Treatment Unit) which was renamed as CCU (Critical Care Unit). He was also the brainchild behind the establishment of the trauma care unit for road accident cases. All these achievements reflect that as a dynamic and open minded doctor, he was always adaptable to modernization and thus welcomed techno-centric approaches to health care. At the same time he was also sensitive towards the perils of the over use of technologies especially in private hospitals.

Though associated with government service from the beginning of his career, Dr. Chhetri however took initiative to establish a private hospital in Calcutta and in this he did not express any hesitation to accept the financial support from the Todis. This was the case of AMRI, which was actually founded by his batchmate Dr. Gunen Roy as Niramoy

Polyclinic. But later it was taken by the government which was also unable to run it successfully. This entire episode behind the growth of AMRI is reflected in the chapter 'Our Own Hospital'.

Throughout his life, he had tremendous longing for good quality research in medical sciences. But he felt that in contemporary days doctors are too keen to earn money and practically nobody have any inclination towards undertaking serious research work. In the chapter 'Random Thoughts' the author has expressed his tremendous concern that though there are presently 23 (18 government and 5 private) medical colleges in West Bengal, still the shortage of doctors in public hospitals intensified the crisis of poor infrastructure. In realty medical graduates are not joining government service for various reasons. He has also raised the issues that now a days treatments are mostly investigation oriented. Doctors do not pay much attention on interacting with the patients or taking the history of the symptoms from them. Prescribing unnecessary investigations and increasing the

cost of the treatments had become the common trend amongst the physicians. Finally Dr. Chhetri has focused on a very pertinent issue of patient agitation. It has been often said that the doctor-patient relation has deteriorated presently. A centenarian believes that patients or the patient parties now became more aware about medical science and health issues. Moreover they are equally conscious about the question of 'rights'. So according to Dr. Chhetri, the queries and 'anxieties' of the non-medical persons should always be handled patiently by the doctors. He is also critical about the attitude and ego of the doctors. He feels that the doctors have acquired the habit of keeping the patients wait for long hours outside their chambers. As a legendary doctor like Mani Chhetri can only understand that the fault actually lie with the doctors who fail to recognize the sufferings of the patients and patient parties in the domain of medical 'uncertainties'. This masterpiece work is an exceptional 'journey' of a visionary who travelled the long path of the medical world with immense sincerity, dedication and commitment.



Centenarian Dr Chhetri examining the patient

Professor Gouripada Datta: A Man of Dedication and Service

Dr. Kajal Krishna Banik

PAST HON. EDITOR, JIMA & PAST HON. STATE SECRETARY, IMA BENGAL STATE BRANCH
PAST SECRETARY, BENGAL OBSTETRICS AND GYNAECOLOGICAL SOCIETY

Professor Gouripada Datta (GPD) is a name in the socio medical movement of not only West Bengal but also the entire country. He is considered to be a unique member of the medical profession who dedicated his life for the overall development of health care services in our country. He inherited this spirit from his late father, Dr. Jatindra Nath Dutta, who was a rural practitioner and socio-political leader in the Bankura district of West Bengal. His father influenced him to join the freedom movement at a tender age. Those days of struggle against the foreign rule implanted the seed of fight in his mind. Later, he joined the Communist Party of India in 1946. He even went underground when the party was declared illegal. Throughout his life, Dr. Datta remained active in the socio-medical field and is considered to be a stalwart in the political scene of West Bengal.

Dr. Gouripada Datta was a colourful character known for his excellent organisational capacity, tremendous patience and devotion. He successfully guided the socio-medical and education movement in our state by a unique combination of the qualities of head and heart.

Interestingly, he initially began his career as a teacher in an English high school before pursuing medicine in Calcutta National Medical College. Later, he was actively involved in the take over of this Institute by the Government. Subsequently, he obtained post graduate degree in Obstetrics & Gynaecology from University of Calcutta. He was professor

of Obstetrics & Gynaecology at Chittaranjan Seva Sadan, Kolkata. Professor Datta was a teacher of repute and published many articles in different medical journals. He was a master of "Mitra's operation", a special surgery for cervical cancer. Even after his retirement from service, he was invited by various institutes to teach this operation.



Being a doctor of modern medicine, Dr. Datta became a member of the Indian Medical Association (IMA). He made remarkable contributions as the Hon. Editor of the Journal of Indian Medical Association (JIMA) [1985 – 1988]. His editorials on various socio-political issues was highly appreciated by the scientific community across the country. Although instrumental in bringing many young medical teachers and activists in IMA, Dr. Datta never opted himself for any post.

Being a communist and freedom fighter, Dr. Datta was aware of the real life scenario of the rural communities and had intimate information about the poor people of the

state. His practical experience as a Gynaecologist gave him enough opportunity to explore the sufferings of the women. He was always at the forefront to protect female reproductive health.

Dr. Datta sincerely wanted medical journalism to be included as a speciality in the university curriculum. To realise the demand in a meaningful manner, he organised a national level assembly of the editors of medical journals on 24 & 25 August 1985 in Kolkata. He was of the opinion that dialogue should be opened to establish a link with the non medical journals and some sort of ethical standards be formulated. He stood like a solid rock beside me when I had organised the second such assembly in November 2009.

Dr. Datta felt that health care under the prevailing situation was bound to become predominantly curative, institution based, specialist oriented, dependent on sophisticated investigations and modern methods of remedy. But he firmly believed that the country needed primary health care.

He wrote, "It is accepted that health is the final manifestation of the socio-economic and political situation of a country. The health department, as it is run has to bear the onslaught of failures of all other departments."

Dr. Datta also stated that -"If the infrastructure does not work, then it's the duty of the people to make it work. People's vigilance, if exercised with the proper perspective, it is bound to make the infrastructure functioning."

All these had made him a seasoned leader of not only the medical professionals but also the masses. It was almost unimaginable during those days in IMA for a doctor to come out like this.

GPD was the Founder President of the Kolkata Janaswasthya committee and was instrumental in mobilising good number of left, democratic and health conscious people under this banner.

He was elected as a member of the West Bengal Legislative Assembly (WBLA) from Kotulpur constituency of Bankura district

thrice in 1987, 1991 and 1996. He became the chairman of the Subject Committee of Health and Family Welfare as well as the Committee of Estimates of WBLA. As a chairman of the assembly subject committee, he had submitted several reports based on extensive field work and practical experience.

He was nominated as a member of the State Planning Board, a member of the senate and syndicate of the University of Calcutta.

He was a member of the Mission Steering Group of the National Rural Health Mission under the chairmanship of the then Union health minister, Dr. Anbumani Ramadoss.

Professor Gouripada Datta utilized all these platforms to speak for affordable health care for the people of our country and highlighted the roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders.



Author with Professor Datta in His 93 Birthday

He was of the firm belief that "... nobody could deliver goods to the people. People have to achieve it, achieve it through struggle and by paying price for it".

He was of the opinion that there is enough scope to improve the situation of health care delivery within our limited resources through application of community based alternate approach. To implement this, one has to be clear about the political aspects of the health care delivery.

Whenever he got an opportunity to speak or write, he tried his best to explicitly expose the politics behind the health and ill health.

He always motivated others and tried to involve more people in health movement.

In the 1st meeting of the mission steering group of the National Rural Health Mission (NRHM) he stated- "It is important to inform, educate and confide the rural beneficiaries about the services available to them. The morbidity pattern of the people in the states needed to be mapped at all levels. "

Reorientation of medical education was one of his most important agenda. It was his passion for rationalisation of medical education. For this, he himself had taken personal initiative to bring the university, government, state planning board and the Medical Council of India (MCI) together to go ahead with certain definitive changes in the existing undergraduate medical course and curriculum. His proposal of "Innovative Medical Education" was accepted by the MCI. Unfortunately, no state government or private medical college came forward to accept the challenge.

He proposed total system of medical education to start from the rural health centres to medical colleges step by step. He was of the firm belief that these changes could alter the mindsets of young medicos and solve the problem of shortage of doctors in the rural areas.

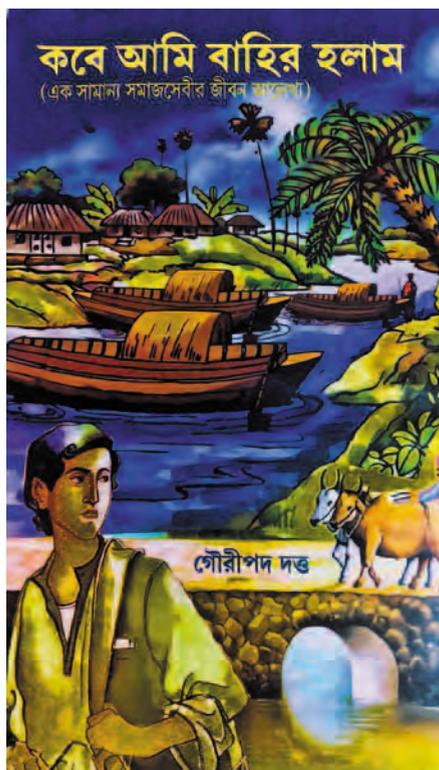
He introduced teachers training programme simultaneously in 1998, well ahead of time to create a sizeable number of human resources for fulfilling the idea. There was

only a few such centres in the country at that time.

In spite of being at the helm of affairs, he always listened to and valued opinions of others sincerely. This quality made him a genuine leader.

He authored many books on important socio-medical issues that received much appreciation from the learned people of the country like-

1. *Health care in India - An appraisal*
2. *Medical education in India*
3. *Health and medical care - A people's movement etc.*



Beside the medical front, Dr. Datta was also interested in the literary world. He wrote some books in Bengali on health and published five books of his poems. In his autobiographical writing, *Kabe Ami Bahir Holam*, he had described his march in the field of health and politics through the eyes of his depicted character, Tirtha.

During the last few months of his life, he was not physically fit enough to move freely and mostly confined himself at his residence. He was mentally very upset when he lost his wife in 2012.

He breathed his last on 8 June 2020 at the age of 92 following brief illness.

GPD will be fondly remembered by his students, colleagues, comrades and the people with whom he came in contact.

Radhanath Sikdar and His Thoughts on the Public Health

Dr. Sankar Kumar Nath

CONSULTANT ONCOLOGIST AND MEMBER OF THE
ACADEMIC COMMITTEE OF THE ASIATIC SOCIETY

In 1852, Radhanath Sikdar, the great mathematician of India for the first time calculated the height of the Peak No. XV (later on Mount Everest) of the Himalayan Range, as 29002 feet and thereby measured the highest peak of the world. So concerning papers of computation regarding the highest peak, were sent by Radhanath, the then Chief Computer of the Survey office, from Calcutta to Andrew Waugh, the then Surveyor General of India, at Dehradun. Waugh took four years to recalculate the same and found no anomaly. Thereafter at a monthly general meeting of the Asiatic Society of Bengal on 6 August 1856, Dr. G. G. Spilsbury being in the chair, it was declared as below :

“The fact he (Major Thuillier) had it in his power through the kindness of his friend Colonel Waugh to announce, was the discovery of a mountain in the Himalayan Range, the measurement of which by the Great Trigonometrical Survey of India under Colonel Waugh, Surveyor General of India, assigned it a place above that of any previously ascertained height in this range, already supposed to boast of the highest known mountain in the world.”

In that meeting the name of Radhanath Sikdar was not mentioned perhaps intentionally.

In the next year, in 1857, this highest peak was named after George Everest, as “Mount Everest” at two meetings on 11 and 25 May, Roderick Murchison being in the chair, held at Royal Geographical Society, London, thereby depriving Radhanath Sikdar once again.



Artist: Sankar Kumar Nath

But the story goes otherwise, the fact in favour of Radhanath Sikdar came into light in an article entitled “Mount Everest : The Story of a Long Controversy” by Sydney Gerald Burrard, (the then officer of the Survey office in India, later on Surveyor General of India from 1911 to 1919), published in *Nature* on 10 November 1904.

Radhanath Sikdar was born at Jorasanko, Calcutta in October, 1813 and died at Gondalpara, Chandannagar, on 17 May 1870.

In the middle of 19th century, Bengal had to face a devastating smallpox epidemic killing lot of people. During that time both Bangla Ticca (Inoculation) and English Ticca (Vaccination) were in vogue in Bengal. In spite of such precautionary measures taken by the Government, the death toll due to Smallpox had been on the rise. So a Special Committee was appointed by the Government on 12 March 1850 for the purpose of “enquiring by what means the extension of Smallpox can be prevented, or rendered less destructive”.

This Committee consisted of the following persons :

1. Senior Surgeon George Lamb : Physician General
2. Senior Surgeon John Forsyth : Secretary, Medical Board
3. Surgeon Duncan Stewart, M.D., : Superintendent General of Vaccine Inoculation

4. Baboo Russomoy Dutt : Judge of the Small Cause Court
5. Pundit Modoosoodun Goopto : Lecturer on Anatomy in the Medical College
6. Baboo Ramgopaul Ghose : Merchant and Agent
7. Mr. W. T. Law : Superintendent of Police.

(Signed) J.P. Grant,
Secretary to the Government of Bengal”

The Committee sent four relevant questions on 19 March 1850, to some intellectuals and persons of repute in Bengal to know their views regarding Smallpox eradication. Radhanath Sikdar got the questions. Now let us see the questions and the answers given by Radhanath thereof, from which we can well understand his thoughts on the Public Health.

Question No. 1.—Do you know any instances of the Smallpox being introduced into a family by a Ticcadar, and the disease thereafter propagating itself, and producing death or deaths in the family ?

Answer No. 1.—It is customary with the Hindoos in Calcutta, that when one person in a family is inoculated, all the others who had not been inoculated or who had not had the Smallpox before, are likewise inoculated at the same time. From this it would appear that the Hindoos are aware of the fact that Smallpox, produced by Inoculation, is a propagating disease. I am not aware of any deaths occurring from Inoculation.

Question No. 2.— Name any number of respectable Hindoo families, from your own knowledge, in * * * * who now adopt Vaccination, and discourage Inoculation, by precept and example ?

Answer No. 2.—Baboo Radhanath Sen had his three children vaccinated in the first instance. But this year he had them all inoculated from an impression that this was a safer procedure of the two. For a similar reason Baboo Gopeenath Sen’s two daughters who had been vaccinated before, have been inoculated this year. Baboo Hurro Chunder Ghose had a daughter of his vaccinated this year. Baboo Juggodishnath Roy had likewise his two children vaccinated about three months ago. There is a respectable

Brahmin family in Barranagar, who, I have just been told, introduced Vaccination into his family some forty-five years ago. I am not quite sure of this circumstance, but I could make enquiries, if required to do so.

Question No. 3.—Name any respectable Hindoo families who still prefer the old practice of Inoculating, and who discourage Vaccination ?

Answer No. 3.—I think that, barring a few Hindoo gentlemen, who are in intimate contact with the Europeans, and who know the advantages of Vaccination and encourage it partially, all the others of the Native community are in favour of Inoculation.

Question No. 4.— What do you think are the chief causes which tend to set up Smallpox among the Hindoos of * * * * ; and to maintain and promulgate it in certain localities ?

Answer No. 4.—The impression on my mind is that Smallpox spreads by contagion, and that unlike other epidemics, it is not much affected by the healthy or unhealthy condition of the localities. I think that the only way in which a just opinion, on this subject, may be formed is by referring to the Register of Deaths kept in the Magistrate’s Court, and ascertaining therefrom whether in healthy or in unhealthy localities, or whether equally in all, the Smallpox has been most prevalent this season.

I have heard that the Register of Deaths, above adverted to, is kept with care, which must, therefore, render it a trust-worthy document.”

All the reports coming from the selected respectable persons of the society including Radhanath’s, were submitted by the Committee to the Government on 1 July 1850.

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Amalendu Bandyopadhyay: An Astronomer's Journey through Space and Time

Kaustuv Chaudhuri

SECRETARY GENERAL, KOLKATA ASTRONOMY CENTRE

Amalendu Bandyopadhyay, one of the valiant astronomers of modern India whose life was an untold epitome of fight against astrology, obscurantism and superstitions, was born on 11 January 1930 in a small village named Mugkalyan in Howrah district of West Bengal. But during his admittance to the school, his age fell short and his date of birth was modified to 1st February 1930 which later became his official date of birth. Since childhood, under the tutelage of his father Late Sri Surendra Nath Bandyopadhyay, who was also

a school teacher, Amalendu developed a sense of scientific temperament and rational attitude which later became the edifice of his scientific career. After completion of matriculation, he got admitted to the celebrated Banaras Hindu University for pursuing his career in science and passed out with a M.Sc. degree on Applied Mathematics. It was in this university that the light of distant stars fell upon him. During his post-graduate course, he had chosen astronomy as his special paper and was privileged to have famous mathematician Dr. Vishnu Vasudev Narlikar, father of the celebrated astrophysicist and cosmologist Professor Jayant Vishnu Narlikar, as his teacher and mentor. It was Dr. Narlikar who planted the essence of astronomy popularisation in

his young mind. Under the auspices of Dr. Narlikar, young Amalendu was drawn to the art of science communication and learned how to disseminate astronomy among the common people in a popular way using coloured slides.

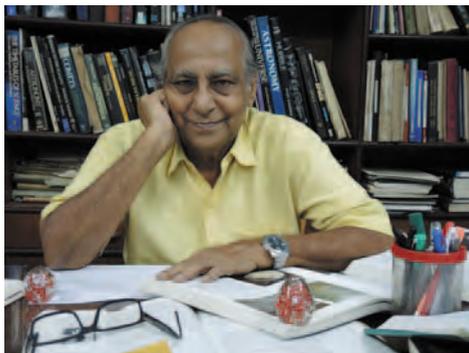


Photo Courtesy: Author

and finally under his mother's advice, took a job with Government of India at the India Meteorological Department. And the rest is history.

Development of Positional Astronomy Centre

In the year 1955, Professor Meghnad Saha, the famed Indian scientist, founded the Nautical Almanac Unit (NAU) at Calcutta (now Kolkata) under Meteorological Office of Govt. of India for flourishing of Positional Astronomy in the country. Amalendu Bandyopadhyay joined this unit as a senior scientific assistant in 1956 and subsequently transferred to Dibrugarh airport for meteorological computations in the same year.

He returned to NAU in 1968 as the scientific officer-in-charge and noticed utter negligence in the office. He understood that in order to fulfil the dream of Meghnad Saha, he had to convert this unit into a separate office and consequently could draw the attention of Smt. Indira Gandhi, the then Prime Minister of India, with the help of Professor Hiren Mukherjee. Smt. Gandhi realized the problem and immediately planned a Commission for development of Nautical Almanac Work in India under the chairmanship of Dr. Raja Ramanna, the then Chairman of Atomic Energy Commission of India. On Dr. Ramanna's recommendations and due to the untiring efforts of Amalendu Bandyopadhyay, the NAU was ultimately converted into Positional Astronomy Centre (PAC) in 1980 and Amalendu Bandyopadhyay became its first Director. As of today, PAC is the only institute of its kind in India and one of the six such centres in the world. For this monumental work, Amalendu Bandyopadhyay received the prestigious 'G. P. Chatterjee Memorial Award' from Indian Science Congress Association in 2013.

Life as an Astronomy Populariser

In spite of holding a high office in the NAU and PAC, Amalendu Bandyopadhyay had never been far apart from astronomy popularization through conduction of slide shows in the different corners of the country. The main objective of these shows was to create interest on astronomy and wipe out age old superstitions involving astronomy from the minds of the students and the common people. His fame as an astronomy popularizer became so widespread that in 2009, he was invited by the Principal of Indian School of Baharin, UAE for delivering seven lectures to the students and the common people. For this unique social contribution, he received 'Gopal Chandra Bhattacharya Memorial Award' from the Govt. of West Bengal in 2002 and D.Sc. Honoris Causa from Burdwan University in 2003. Bangiya Bijnan Parishad crowned him with 'Jaya'nta Bose Memorial Award' in

2013 as the best personality for popularizing Astronomy in West Bengal. Till the onset of lockdown period in late March 2020, he had conducted few thousand slide shows across the nation and abroad.

Another important aspect of his life was his interest in backyard astronomy. He always encouraged students to buy telescopes, look up and ask what's up. He patronised amateur astronomy and sky watching throughout his life. He was life member and sometime President of Sky Watchers' Association and advisor to Kolkata Astronomy Centre. He was also the visiting faculty in the yearly summer courses conducted by the Kolkata Astronomy Centre.

Popularization of Astronomy through Mass Media

Till death, Amalendu Bandyopadhyay had to his credit, published more than 2500 articles on popular astronomy, eclipses, anti-superstitious practices and calendar reforms in almost all front ranking journals and newspapers of the country, conducted 536 radio and TV shows and authored five books in Bengali and three in English for the common people. For this extensive mass media coverage, Govt. of India conferred on him the 'National Award for best science and technology coverage in the mass media' in 1995 and he was the first person to receive such an award exclusively for popularization of Astronomy in India. In recognition of his outstanding contribution in astronomy written in Bengali language, Calcutta University, in 2012, honoured him with the prestigious 'Jagattarini Gold Medal' which was first received by Rabindranath Tagore in 1921. He also received revered 'Sibnarayan Roy Memorial Award' from the Bangiya Sahitya Parishad in 2014 for the same cause.

Glimpse of Scientific and Professional Career

Amalendu Bandyopadhyay was the elected member of the International Astronomical Union (IAU) and the only selected

member from India in the Ephemerides Commission of the IAU. He was also a selected member in the History of Astronomy Commission of the IAU. He was the elected life fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society of London and the elected member of the British Astronomical Association. Since 1992, he was engaged as Senior Scientist at M P Birla Institute of Fundamental Research, M P Birla Planetarium, Kolkata. He had also to his credit, authored and presented 30 research papers on astronomy in various national and international seminars and journals. He attended his last international conference of IAU at Taiwan in July 2017 almost at the age of 88 years. In addition to this, he was the member and on chair of various institutions of national repute.

As an expert of positional astronomy, Amalendu Bandyopadhyay was inclined to the calculations of Besselian parameters involving solar eclipses. When two great eclipses crossed the Indian soil, one in 1980 and the other in 1995, he, along with his staff and colleagues, set up observation-camps on

the paths of totality and precisely calculated the contact timings. Unfortunately, he missed the great total eclipse of 2009 due to overcast sky over Patna, but again came back to his own light in 2010 when he recorded and calculated the timings of the greatest annular solar eclipse of the millennium from Kolkata Astronomy Centre's observation camp in Dhanuskodi, Rameswaram.

The Last Breath

Even at the fragile age of 90, Amalendu Bandyopadhyay was as active as his youth, running here and there for astronomy popularization. He didn't think twice to go to the remotest corner of rural India on a short notice for the sake of anti-astrology lectures. But the bolt struck suddenly, when on June 22, 2020 he passed away quietly at 8.30 pm while taking his last supper from the hands of his eldest son. What is left is an epitome of astronomical success, a story of unforgiving fight against astrology and a phenomenal regime of astronomy popularization that will inspire the generations through ages.

Solar Eclipse

People of India got the opportunity to behold one of the rare celestial event, i.e., annular solar eclipse on 21 June 2020. Incidentally that day was the Summer Solstice and longest day in the northern hemisphere of the globe. Of course, annularity could be seen only from the northern part of India and rest of the places of our country experienced the partial eclipse, likewise, Kolkata too had the chance to watch partial solar eclipse. Lot of astronomy lovers, enthusiasts clubs, institutes watched this eclipse across the country. Pictures show one of such solar eclipse camps, Sky Viewers' Club, at Kolkata, led by young amateur astronomer Souvik Nath.



Dr. Abdus Subhan (1936-2020)

M. Firoze

JOINT PHILOLOGICAL SECRETARY, THE ASIATIC SOCIETY

Dr. Abdus Subhan (1936-2020) will be remembered as a devoted teacher of Persian at the Maulana Azad College, Kolkata, and as a celebrated scholar of Persian at a wider level; but here, at the Asiatic Society, Kolkata, he will chiefly be remembered for the remarkable contributions he had made to Persian studies at the Society, which, in recognition of his scholarly achievements, had honoured him by electing him the Fellow of the Asiatic Society a few years back.

Dr. Subhan's former colleague in the Persian Department of Maulana Azad College, Kolkata, Dr. Tanwir Ahmed in an Urdu article, published in 2001, given the following particulars about him:

"Dr. Abdus Subhan's ancestors had migrated from Panipat to Calcutta and settled at Ismail Street in the well-known Phoolbagan area of the city. It was in this locality that he was born on the 2nd December 1936. He passed his Matriculation Examination from the Islamia High School in 1950 and B.A. Hons. (Persian) from the Central Calcutta College, in 1954. He then obtained his M.A. degrees in three subjects, Persian, Arabic and Urdu, from the University of Calcutta, in 1956, 1958 and 1962 respectively. He joined the Department of Persian in the Maulana Azad College as a Lecturer on the 4th May 1961. It was during his service period



that the Calcutta University awarded him the degree of doctorate on his thesis *Tā'rikh-i-Bangāla-i-Mahābatjāngi*. It was in 1977 that he was elected a Fellow of the famous learned institute, the Asiatic Society of Bengal. After having devoted himself to promoting the cause of Persian language and literature for thirty-six years, he retired on the 31 December 1996."

To the above information, which goes only up to 2001, the following may be added: Dr. Abdus Subhan had been associated with the Department of Arabic and Persian, Calcutta University, as a Guest Lecturer for some time; he had once been the Library Secretary of the Asiatic Society, Kolkata; and he was awarded the Certificate of Honour by the Hon'ble President of India, on the 21 May 2007, for his contributions to Persian studies in 2006. He died on the 21 May 2020 at his residence in Kolkata.

Dr. Subhan's publications include not only a good number of papers published in scholarly journals in India and abroad but also several books of high research value, some of which are mentioned below.

Tā'rikh-i-Bangāla-i-Mahābatjāngi (an eye-witness account of Nawāb 'Alivardi Khān of Bengal and his times) of Yūsuf 'Alī Khān, it is a critical edition of the Persian text prepared by Dr. Abdus Subhan by collating six main

manuscripts, including the one which is preserved in the library of the Asiatic Society. The edited version carries an erudite introduction in English by Dr. Subhan and a foreword by the renowned orientalist, A. J. Arberry. The book was published by the Asiatic Society in the *Bibliotheca Indica series* in 1969.

Zamimayi Tazkirayi Yusufi (Hadiqat al-Safā) of Yusuf 'Ali Khan, Persian Text edited with notes and introduction by Dr. Abdus Subhan. It deals with the literary life in Bengal during the second-half of the 18th century. It was published by the Asiatic Society, Kolkata, in the *Bibliotheca Indica series* in 1978.

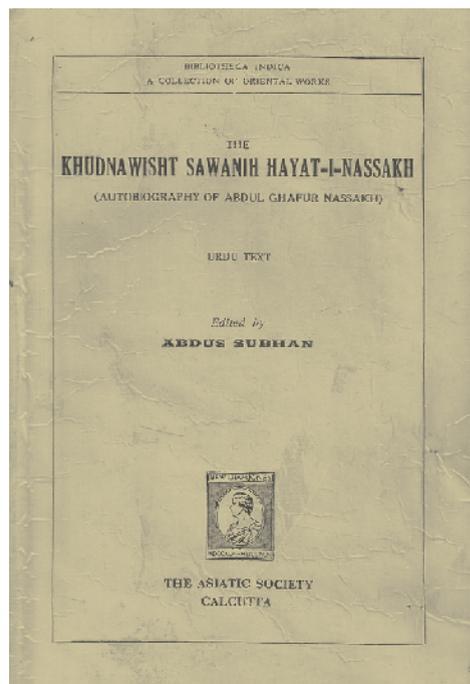
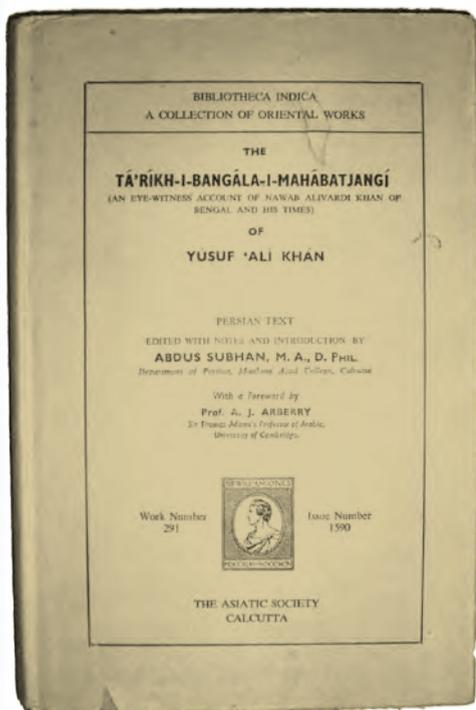
Tā'rikh-i-Bangāla-i-Mahābatjangi: English translation by Dr. Abdus Subhan, published by the Asiatic Society, Kolkata, in 1982.

Khudnawisht Sawanih Hayat-i-Nassakh (Autobiography of Abdul Ghafur Nassakh), it is a critical edition of the Urdu text prepared by

Dr. Abdus Subhan on the basis of a rare copy of the manuscript preserved in the library of the Asiatic Society, Kolkata. It was published by the Asiatic Society in the *Bibliotheca Indica series* in 1986.

A Descriptive Catalogue of Central Asian Documents, first of its kind in the field of Central Asian Studies, the Catalogue was compiled by Dr. Abdus Subhan under the UNESCO-sponsored Central Asian Project, and published by Northern Book Centre, New Delhi, in 1997.

Other works: Dr. Tanwir Ahmed, in his article, referred to above, has also credited Dr. Abdus Subhan with the edition of two more Persian manuscripts of literary value, namely: a biographical work, *Montakhabot-tazkere*; and a poetic collection, *Divān-e Bahrām Saqqā*.



Our Share of Bigotry

Pabitra Sarkar

FORMER VICE-CHANCELLOR, RABINDRA BHARATI UNIVERSITY

1

What I have written below can be turned into a very philosophical paper on history of ideas, for which I have no inclination, nor am I adequately equipped. These lines have been written on the spur of the moment, more as an emotional, and less as an intellectual reaction to George Floyd's killing by a white policeman in the United States on 25 May this year, in Minneapolis, a city where I lived happily with my wife and my little daughter for two years during 1973-75, as a teacher at the University of Minnesota.

The word 'black' has long been a problem-ridden term, even beyond human complexion. And that not just for us Indians, but for the humankind at large. Just look at the list in the English lexicon. 'Black' in the *Webster Comprehensive Dictionary*, the single word, has eight listed meanings. These are:

1. Having no power to reflect light; of the color of jet; the opposite of *white*.
2. Belonging to a racial group, characterized by dark skin; especially Negroid.
3. Of or relating to members of such.
4. Swarthy; somber; dark.
5. Destitute of light; gloomy; dismal; forbidding.
6. Soiled; stained.
7. Evil; malignant; wicked; deadly; slanderous; malicious; threatening: A *black*-hearted wretch.
8. Wearing black garments: a *black* monk.

As is evident, three of the eight components of meaning present a negative notion each. And the word 'Dark', almost a synonym, also carry similar negative implications, across a few pages of any dictionary. And this is not all. These single words are often used to make scores of compounds and phrases, that imply similar attitudes, unfavourable, avoidable, dreaded etc. For example—black act, Black Death, black art, black book, black cat, black eye, blackguard, blacklist, black look, a black-letter day, black lie, black magic, blackmail, black mark, black market, black measles, black money (Indian English), black out, black sheep (metaphor), black spot, black vomit, the dress of mourning in the Christian West, the future looks black, and the list can be further extended.

So, 'black' has all along been a condemned notion, a notion and whose associations are to be avoided by nice people like us. In South Asia at least, I don't know of other places. Here, people who were black were thought to be somewhat inferior to the fair-complexioned people, who were considered descendants of the pure-bred Aryan race, with blue eyes, aquiline nose and a tall, imposing physique. The Aryans, as everyone knows, invaded India and made it their homeland some four to five thousand years ago. All other Indians with the (partial or more) race-features of the Dravidians, Mongoloids and Australoids are often



looked down upon by the North Indians, as they think they are the true inheritors of the Aryans. What is more, the Brahmins all over India, even in South India and Sri Lanka share this sense of superiority. So it does not need a philosopher like Jacques Derrida to tell us that although black/white are in sharp oppositions, one is highly preferred and privileged over the other.

2

It is not that in our garbled aesthetics, black is always bad. We have slots where black is desirable, even covetable. In the white West, a tan on the skin is often cherished. While in India and elsewhere in the East, black hair is more desirable, than other hues of it, blond, copper, auburn, silver etc. for example. But that is for that one slot only, it cannot be extended to the body colour. The famous Indian author, Tarasankar Bandyopadhyay, wrote a song for his novel *Kabi*, which runs as *kalo jodi mondo tobe kesh pakile kando kene, kalo keshe krishnachura herechho ki nayane?* 'If black (for body complexion) is bad, then why do you lament when your hair turns gray? Have you ever seen (the beauty of) the *gulmohar* ('Krishnachura' in Bengali) with your own eyes?' Rabindranath Tagore also has a long poem, later turned into a song called *Krishnakali*, that eulogizes the rustic beauty of a black village girl who had the black eyes of a doe. But, whatever the Mr Bandyopadhyay, and poets like Tagore may say

poetically, to the practical man in our society, the two domains are ever distant in our minds. The logic of the hair cannot be extended to that for the skin. It is only too well-known a fact in the South Asian region that girls with dark skin are not preferred as brides for the sons of Indian parents, and may be accepted by some for a cash price and/or some considerable amount of gold. The parents with dark-skinned girls ever live a life of guilt in our society, cursing their fate for the calumny.

And for the Afro-American, it is not the skin alone. Many of their physical features do not match our aesthetics about human body, which has been formed in the Aryan mould, prompted by the dominant aesthetics of the White West. The lips of Black people are thick (we prefer thin lips), their noses are broad (our preference is for sharp ones), and their hair is not straight as ours. Further, having been oppressed by the White men for centuries, they have now come to reject (How dare they?) the aesthetics of whom they and some whites call WASPS (White Anglo-Saxon Pigs). They want to be different! How can we, the 'nice people', then accept them as part of us? They remain, for us Indians, perpetually the 'others', to be despised, avoided, and when compelled, only tolerated. They cannot be our friends or lovers, let alone members of our family.

Allow me to continue with the limited theme of the 'blacks' of the world and us Indians. We do not consider the subtle point



that without black, white would not be such immaculate white, and without darkness, light would not have been as brilliant. Nor do we think about the now acknowledged fact that the human race evolved in black east Africa some 2.5 million years ago, where from they moved out and spread all over the world, changing the pigmentation of their skin along the way. Of course in North India we have at least two gods (or thereabouts), Rama and Krishna, who are not fair-complexioned, and one goddess, Kali, who is demonstrably so (among other things), but we keep them in our myth-belief system and do not let that influence our mundane considerations. It is again a matter of 'slots' once again, as I said above. The logic of one slot cannot be extended or transferred to another.

3

So, when on 25 May 2020, George Floyd, a black person was dastardly killed by a US policeman in Minneapolis, the whole world was, rightly, not only indignant, but furious, about it. The US police, the President, and the undercurrent of racism that still prevails in the country were being squarely condemned, rightly once again, and we Indians also had, rightly for the third time, joined, this universal protest.

I have nothing to say in the defence of the US state machinery, as I also condemn the crime and feel extremely sad about it. But it is also an occasion to have a close look at ourselves, the Indians, or the South Asians, to be more even-handed. Do we have a right to feel so superior, so self-congratulatory, claiming that we are above all this and such hatred can never touch us?

My personal opinion is, no, we do not have the right, as everyone knows. The Hindu (so-called) 'upper castes' have committed even more dastardly crimes on the so-called 'lower castes' in this continent, and I don't find any semblance of grief or atonement for that, as *Dalits* are still killed in Gujarat for watching the *Garba* dance of upper caste girls. I am not going into the grim chronicle of communal riots.

I will now come back to our typical attitude towards the American or African blacks, to be even more specific. Everyone knows how the African students are socially treated in our Universities; as outcastes, to be frank. You know, we North Indians have created several 'others' for us, who we are happy to look down upon and jeer at. The blacks figure very high in the list. It is also a fact that by us, the Indians from the North-East are often called Chinese (the 'chinkies'), simians, and many such things.

4

The same happens when we go to the US for a job or higher studies. I know there are exceptions, but the 'rule' is that we try our best not to mix with the blacks. North and East Indians call them 'kalua', 'kallu', or 'blackies' (I don't know if my south Indian friends have a different term) and try to keep away from them. I was in the States some fifty years ago, for more than six years, and I will let you know what I found there in a very large section of my own Indian community. I doubt if things have changed drastically for the better even though half-a-century has gone by.

Most of my professional friends lived in North Chicago, which was a white area, while, I, as a student, had to live in the South Side, predominantly a black area. Many of my north-side friends raised their eyes when they heard of this and asked in awe and surprise, 'How do you live there? Isn't it dangerous?' I said, 'We don't find it so', and did not emphasize the fact that I had no choice, as I had to live close to the University. And another professional, an engineer, who was coming from Ann Arbor, Michigan to Chicago, described his Greyhound bus journey within Chicago in this manner—'Oh my God, it was 'black, black, black' all the way, and only when I crossed the downtown, *aaah*, it was WHITE!' I put caps to reflect his deep sense and expression of relief.

Yes, blacks in US have a long history of deprivation and discrimination, and some of them, out of simple poverty, resort to

mugging and such crimes. In Chicago, our friends advised us to keep a few two-dollar notes with us when we were alone, walking on the south-side streets. If a black man accosted us and said, 'Hey, Buddy, do you've a dime!' we were not to ask back anything, but should promptly hand him a two-dollar note, and rush to my destination. We haven't faced anything of this sort, but a friend did, near Chicago's Fifty-First Street.

He was doing his post-doc in Physics at the University of Chicago, and one day, while coming to our place, a black man approached him and politely asked the above question. The friend was more than prompt to pull out a two-dollar note from his breast pocket and hand it to the big black man. But, contrary to

his expectation, the black man didn't go away and held my friend for a chat, which made him even more scared. The man asked, what was my friend doing in Chicago? Which country was he from? When my friend said that he was from India, the person said, 'India, did you say? Oh my God! Take it back (he handed back the two-dollar currency to my friend), man!' And he added, before parting, 'We all have our problems!'

My friend was dazed by the man's strange and mysterious conduct. After some research, we found out that, on the *Chicago Tribune* of the same day, there was an item of news about famine in India, and people dying of hunger there.



Black Lives Matter: Reflections from Baltimore

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As I watched the protests unfold across the USA over the tragic and heartbreaking killing of George Floyd, I was afflicted by a sense of déjà vu about this police brutality against the less privileged that never seems to go away in this country. My thoughts turned to Freddie Gray, the young man who died at the hands of a brutal and callous police in Baltimore five years ago. Then as now there were protests across the country, particularly Baltimore, which was brought to a standstill. It had then felt momentous, as it does now. One felt hopeful that the entrance of these terrible deaths into the national conscience would shake the status quo, the indifference to the lot of black men, women, and children in this country. But this hope dies a premature death every single time. Sure enough within a few weeks a white policeman in Atlanta had shot dead Rayshard Brooks a 27-year-old father.



Artist: Rajkumar Mukherjee

This assumption of criminality on the part of the law-enforcers is a nightmarish reality for African-Americans in this country. The egregiousness of this systemic assumption of criminality is horrifying, and regrettably it is also depressingly wide-spread. Often when I think of this I am reminded of a student of mine. Ryan (name changed) was one of my undergraduate advisees, and an African-American. I first met him on his birthday, an eighteen-year-old, bubbling with excitement about the astronomy general-education course he was going to take, and brimming with confidence about his first programming course. We kept meeting every semester and I was struck by how his enthusiasm never wavered. So infectious was his enthusiasm, that I started basking in the reflected pride of this advisee, a first generation college-goer. Then suddenly Ryan stopped coming. He did not reply to my reminders about advising meetings. I did not follow up to try and find him. I assumed he must have decided to change his major or dropped out. I was disappointed and saddened, but forgot about him, immersed as I was in my own personal journey towards tenure. Then one day I got an email from him. He had been suspended by the University because of a police charge against him. There had been a robbery in a shop and Ryan and a few of his friends who had been in the neighbourhood had been picked up and charged. It turned out to be a case of mistaken identity. He was exonerated and back in the University and wanted to meet again. But this was a changed young man, sullen, taciturn, the enthusiasm completely wiped out. I was no longer an ally but a hostile member of a society that had assumed him guilty without due process. Ryan did stay the course for his degree, but his grades kept going down. Nothing I did to motivate him when we met seemed to work. I met him on graduation day, asked him to keep in touch. He never did. I hope he is well, wherever he is. The tragedy is that despite the inherent injustice of this tale, Ryan was

fortunate - he survived a brush with the law enforcement. Scores of African-American men and women do not, in America, even in the 21st century.

The causes behind this inequitable and unjust policing system are numerous. It ranges from the legacy of the Jim Crow laws of the deep south that continued to subjugate and de-humanise black Americans decades after emancipation, to an overly militarized police, improperly and inadequately trained in aspects of conflict resolution and community policing. There is an urgent need for police reform. But such reforms will not address a deeper rot in the socio-economic conditions of African-Americans. The corporate oligarchy that runs this country has continued to exacerbate the depths of the misery of the have nots in America. Poverty in inner cities across America is shocking. The conditions in some of these neighbourhoods should be an embarrassment to this richest and most powerful country in the world, and a badge of shame for the supposed American exceptionalism. This socio-economic inequality (except for parts of rural America) is predominantly along racial lines. In Baltimore where I live and which is demographically predominantly African-American, the poverty level is 23%. Compare that to 9% in the surrounding Baltimore County that is predominantly white. Median annual income in Baltimore city is \$29,700, while that in Baltimore County is \$76,182. As an educator, I strongly feel that a well-developed public education infrastructure could be a way out of this inequity. But America has consistently and continuously failed its most vulnerable population, through decades of egregious budget cuts. Recently Maryland (the state I live in), and one of the more prosperous states in the country, constituted the Kirwin commission to improve the public school education system. The commission made wide-ranging recommendations for reforms that would have significantly improved the conditions

of schools for students from poorer families. The laws enacting these reforms were, however, vetoed by the Maryland Governor.

Perhaps, George Floyd's brutal and heart-rending death will finally impinge on the governmental conscience. I remain skeptical

though. In the meantime, I see my nine-year-old daughter and keep thinking of another six-year-old (George Floyd's daughter), who will perhaps never understand why she does not have a father to tell her stories, play with her - and my heart breaks.



Protesting the Death of George Floyd: Does Nonviolence Matter?

Suhasini Das Goptu

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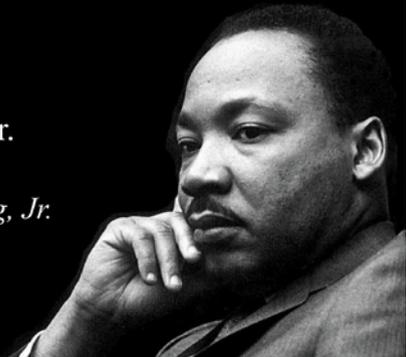
The 'Black Lives Matter' protests raging across the United States in the aftermath of George Floyd's death have exposed the problem of institutional and structural racism present in American society and reignited the debate over nonviolent modes of protest. The viral video of a white police officer's knee choking Floyd's neck for nine minutes as he gasped 'I can't breathe' has outraged American and international audiences, sparking solidarity movements across the globe. However, the core issue at stake is not new. The USA was built on the backs of black slaves, and founded by their proud owners. The

protests today expose the historic oppression, discrimination and structural inequities that minorities face regularly. The great 'American dream' of providing equal opportunities to all masks years of systemic racism, and a skewed socio-economic structure. However, what differentiates the current uprising from previous protests, is the magnitude of public support it enjoys and the pivot towards addressing structural long-term issues of race discrimination, economic disparity, construction of revisionist histories and a deeper critique of the existing police system.

Protests against racial injustice in the USA

Our lives begin to end the day we
become silent about things that matter.

Martin Luther King, Jr.



have taken many forms. Colin Kaepernick, an American football player, has been kneeling during the national anthem since 2016 as he is 'not going to get up to show pride in a country that oppresses black people and people of color'. Kaepernick's peaceful protest against police brutality and institutional racism saw him lose sponsorship deals, receive death threats and face immense backlash from citizens who found his move to be unpatriotic. The "Black Lives Matter" movement has been exploding since 2013, when it started as a social media hashtag in response to the acquittal of George Zimmerman who was accused of shooting to death African-American teen Trayvon Martin in 2012. The movement gained national visibility after massive street demonstrations were organised to protest against the unfair death of two African-Americans, Michael Brown and Eric Garner, in the hands of white police officers. Notably, before George Floyd, it was Garner who died uttering the words 'I can't breathe' as an officer choked him. Thus, evidently, racial oppression is a fatal fault-line of American society, and the fundamental question that arises at this juncture is how to protest against this injustice.

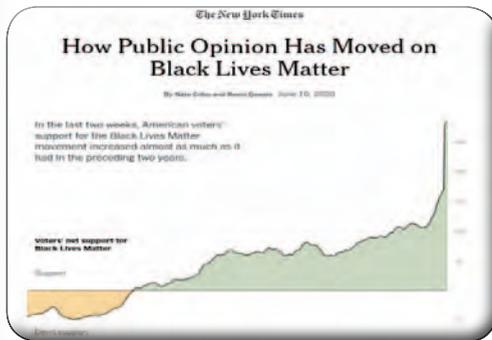
The debate between violent and nonviolent modes of struggle predates the current spate of protests, and had been deliberated upon during the nonviolent civil rights movement, led by Martin Luther King Jr. and during the Gandhian phase of the Indian national movement. Considering the increased relevance of nonviolent protest mechanisms in the context of the 'Black Lives Matter' movement, it is important to revisit the underlying principles of nonviolent political agitation, although there may be multiple forms of such agitations.

The undeniable political reality today is one of extreme political polarisations. Every individual is deeply enmeshed in her/his own echo-chamber, where she/he only interacts and communicates with politically like-minded individuals, diminishing the propensity for across-the-aisle dialogue to negligible

extremes. This leads to reinforcement of beliefs, villainization of the other, prevents constructive dialogue and the perpetual evasion of addressing fundamental structural disparities. Echo-chambers' function through profit-driven media houses where news is treated as 'info-tainment', concerned with entertaining the viewers instead of informing them. The Trump supporter will thus follow Fox News, which exaggerates the anarchic tendency of the 'Black Lives Matter' movement, while the Democrat will stay tuned to CNN's sensationalised version of the other side. It is in this context of isolated opinion building that Gandhian Satyagraha intervenes. As a transformative doctrine, the goal of a Gandhian struggle is not to defeat or alienate the opponent, but to make one see the error of her/his ways, thus creating conditions for a transformative exercise not only for the satyagrahi, but also for the opponent. Therefore, nonviolence for Gandhi and Dr. King was not just a protest method but an organising principle of democracy. The creation of a public sphere facilitating deliberation to mobilise majority sentiments, since numbers matter in a democracy, corresponds with Hannah Arendt's vision of civic republicanism and good citizenship based on cultural diversity and social responsibility. *Res publica* (public affairs) for Arendt is the realm of political action and discourse.

Another strength of nonviolence is its integrating capacity. Violence and radicalism accentuate political polarisation. They create an environment of mutual suspicion—the breeding ground of demagoguery, misinformation and vicious propaganda. The use by the far-right media of the few violent 'Black Lives Matter' protests to debunk the noble cause of the struggle demonstrates this tendency. But the principle of nonviolence provides a space for dialogue and deliberation that is absent in violent mass politics. The overwhelming participation of white Americans in current protest marches manifests the integrative power of nonviolent struggles.

Having allies is important for any movement functioning in a democratic framework, as numerical majorities form the bedrock of democracy. Nonviolent means, amplification of oppressed voices and peaceful protests can change minds through deliberations in the public sphere. This is evident in the graph published by the *New York Times*.



While organizing a movement it is essential to recognise the power of social hierarchies—be it of class or gender, intra-protest inequities may cause a movement to dissipate. Therefore, a protest method that provides a space for all dissenters becomes more effective as it recognises intersectionalities. The space created for black feminism within the larger ambit of the 'Black Lives Matter' movement is a case in point.

Violence creates unnecessary noise that detracts from the core issues at stake. Gandhi and Dr. King recognised the power of social cleavages and the possible resurgence of oppressive structures unless they were addressed head on. Nonviolent struggle allows structural fallacies to come to the fore. When you can't complain about superficial matters like looting and rioting you have to confront what the protest truly stands for—institutional racism. This aids reconciliation and encourages the construction of solutions through public policy changes, plans to reform and defund the police, funding black businesses, affirmative action or petitioning the Congress to enact appropriate laws. Even while fighting

the British Raj, Gandhi pursued constructive social work like sanitation programmes and the promotion of basic education. Dr. King, too, concerned himself with social reconstruction projects such as the Poor People's Campaign in 1967 to alleviate poverty among minorities. Nonviolence thus, lends sustainability to a movement. While the current protests are centered around police brutality, as a sustained nonviolent project, 'Black Lives Matter' focuses on broader questions of economic, social, cultural and political discrimination against blacks.

The appeal to individual consciousness through international public awareness is essential for nonviolent politics. Thus, the fourth pillar of democracy, the media, plays a pivotal role in a nonviolent struggle. The video of George Floyd being choked to death questioned the imagined notion of equality prevailing in America, thereby creating the conditions for producing the 'white consciousnesses' for social change that Dr. King had hoped for. Unfortunately, the calculus of expressing dissent through today's corporatized mainstream media has significantly diminished as market considerations take precedence over the ethics of journalism. The media is itself a victim of structural racism, evident in the allegations of racist comments made by ABC News executive Barbara Fedida, who has now been placed on administrative leave. Instead, social media is now the more impactful platform for citizen journalism. The heinous video depicting George Floyd's death first gained traction on a social media site, when no other news channel was covering it and the 'Black Lives Matter' movement first emerged through social media. While the menace of fake news persists, social media remains a relatively democratic platform facilitating public engagement that highlights issues neglected by corporate media houses.

Nonviolence as a doctrine may be harder to enact than recourse to violence and war, but it has an inherent exclusive precedential value. Hegelian idealism underlines the

dialectics of ideas through the cycle of thesis-antithesis-synthesis till perfection is reached. Transition from one stage of thesis to another is inevitable as normative ideas, notions and visions of reality change. The question at this juncture is, what is the best mode of transition: through a bloody war, a Total Revolution or a gradual reshaping through nonviolent means? Violence creates a hostile transitory stage that breeds apathy and erodes possibilities of synthesis. But the principle of nonviolence provides a unique transitory doctrine that excludes bloodshed from the calculus of social change.

However, if the collective society and state remains persistently negligent of oppressed voices, a stage may come when violence becomes inevitable, prompting Dr. King to remark: "a riot is the language of the unheard." Dr. King was not defending violence, but signalled that violence during a protest is indicative of the society and state's failure to provide spaces for dissent, deliberation and communication. The solution is not a violent overthrow of order but the sustenance of a culture of perceiving, listening and responding to those you disagree with and providing a platform to the disadvantaged so that they have the agency to voice their concerns in a highly stratified society where systemic oppression functions through discursive channels. Only then can "militant, powerful,

massive nonviolence" be the most effective agent of change.

Resort to violence is not a manifestation of the dissenter's inherent violent, anarchic nature. It is a reaction to the failure of democratic institutions, a result of authoritarianism that is unresponsive to the demands of the subalterns, an irresponsible media and a civil society leadership that fails to champion the causes of the oppressed. If the pillars of democracy fail, nonviolence fails, and if nonviolence fails, democracy is doomed. The unique integrative capacity of nonviolent politics can revive the democratic spirit by initiating public conversations and civic engagement. The inherent interactive quality of nonviolent methods, boost grass root initiation into political life. This process is evident in the civil society mobilisation for the current protests and rising voter registration among the disenfranchised American youth. The power to make people feel heard when they are disenfranchised and apathetic, to spur them into action after years of atrophy and to impart a political purpose to their citizenship is the virtue of nonviolent politics. Through their advocacy of nonviolence Gandhi and Dr. King presented a mode of political action that laid the moral foundations of an inclusive democratic culture. The current 'Black Lives Matter' movement reflects this constructive political legacy.



The Alchemy of Well-Being

Suchintan Das

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A pot of wine among the flowers.
I drink alone, no friend with me.
I raise my cup to invite the moon.
He and my shadow and I make three.

—*Li Bai, Drinking Alone with the Moon*
(Translated by Vikram Seth)

These lines, penned by the eighth century Taoist poet Li Bai, evoke an unresolved melancholia—a desire to be in company. An enforced solitude during this extended present has not been particularly helpful for people. On the contrary, this pandemic and the lockdown which ensued from it have had serious repercussions for the well-being of many. To reiterate the obvious, the sum-total of human well-being—the elixir of life—can be said to be constituted by three components—material, physical and mental. Yet, this simplistic formulation paints a picture which is far from being accurate. Moreover, it can be argued with some conviction that this extraordinary and truly unforeseen (not entirely unanticipated as some studies have hinted, yet this adjective is being used in a truer sense here than it is usually done in most places) situation has merely exposed and exacerbated fault-lines that have always already existed in our society. Although it has grasped us by our collars and forced us to confront many problems, we must recognize that most of these are hardly new.

We had turned a blind eye to problems which jeopardize our well-being and we cannot feign surprise now. This is because we have been complicit in sustaining a worldview that puts the blame on events and individuals and does not acknowledge the underlying processes which produce them. It is very convenient to shrug all responsibilities. It is disconcerting

to introspect and confront uncomfortable truths. Another reason behind this world view is the misguided and unfounded belief that the problems are perpetually unfolding—this is but a prelude to the storm that is yet to come. This belief has been informing our attitude towards climate change ever since it emerged as a serious concern in academic and political discourse. We find it too unnerving to accept that the disaster is here and now, not tucked away in some remote future. At this point, one would do well to pause and reflect what these old problems are. I will merely outline a few. I do not intend to engage in an exhaustive discussion on any of these. I simply wish to stress why they should not be viewed in isolation and why it is necessary to look beyond comforting but myopic explanations.

The concept of material well-being has for long been conflated with the limiting idea of economic well-being. Wealth continues to be viewed as the touchstone by which society vouches for individual material well-being. Aggregates like GDP and GNP are cited as the pre-eminent indicators of an untarnished national growth story. However, all welfare economists since the days of A. C. Pigou (1877-1959), and Amartya Sen is no exception, have talked about standards of living not merely determined by economic factors. Even then, equitable access to the commons and decent living conditions are left out of the discussion till the time when our sense of morality is shocked by events transpiring all around. Our conscience only gets stirred when we witness the death march of migrant labourers from one part of the country to another. We continue to look the other way when faced with the root causes of this phenomenon—dispossession of

land, degeneration of employment, and rural indebtedness, among others. Famines are no longer caused by droughts. They are caused by policy failures and catalysed by entrenched inequalities. Production, distribution, and consumption are all social activities. Collective human efforts make these possible. Inequalities distort them. As a consequence, we have been observing a steady privatization of profits and socialization of costs. What economists call externalities—the unaccounted impact of one's actions on another or the society at large—get ignored in this neat equation.

Some argue that we are living in the Anthropocene—a geological age in which human beings have emerged as a potent geological force, capable of altering the environment around us beyond recognition. We are facing the repercussions of past activities in the present. Our present actions are consistently annihilating the possibility of any future. This will not change unless we seriously begin to view material well-being in relation to the conditions which make it possible. One of these is an inhabitable environment. Our material well-being is also linked to our societal well-being. The latter is hindered by deep-seated prejudices and injustice. Racism, sexism, casteism, and poverty are not functions of individual disabilities. These are signs of social failures—our inability to create conditions which facilitate cooperation, enhance accessibility, and acknowledge difference. A holistic understanding of material well-being cannot afford to be divorced from the political realities that have normalized exploitation. When the material well-being of one is underwritten by the oppression of another, it deserves condemnation, not celebration. So long as we continue to overlook the 'environmental', the 'social', and the 'political' constituents of the 'material', we will not be able to speak of 'well-being' in any meaningful manner.

The present discourse on physical well-being is constrained by similar inadequacies. Although the 'physical' is predicated on the 'material', it is detached from the 'sexual'. States

continue to legislate on the bodies of people and it goes without saying that some bodies are considered more equal than others. Diversity in sexual orientation is yet to be fully acknowledged as natural in legal and pedagogical domains. As a result, personal choices and freedoms remain restrained. One should not, however, mistake these for individual concerns. For example, only a delusional person would not identify genital mutilation as a socio-cultural problem. This holds true for fears regarding racial miscegenation as well. Physical well-being must necessarily encompass many apparently unrelated things. Freedom from gender-based violence, freedom from norms proscribing what one wears and what one eats, freedom from torture in custody, and freedom from ethnic profiling should, *inter alia*, be viewed as the integral components of physical well-being. We express shock and disgust when we hear that rates of domestic abuse in India have gone up sharply during this lockdown. We feel aghast at the unilateral dilution of labour laws. Yet we keep ignoring the connections that exist between them. So long as we continue to delegitimize domestic work and sex-work as 'not labour' and refuse to view the channelling of tribal labourers to work in mines and plantations built on their land as 'disciplining of bodies', we will not be able to fathom the full implications of 'physical well-being'.

To emphasise the relevance of mental well-being during this pandemic is bound to be a redundant exercise. Two things will establish why this is so. On the one hand, the leading cause of death due to the nationwide lockdown in India has been suicide. On the other hand, Yale University's 'The Science of Well-Being', which deals with psychology and the good life has become the most popular online course of all time. It is interesting to note that this course has not been made available to the people of Venezuela, as a crippling US embargo is placed on this oil-rich and socialist-run Latin American country. It seems that Venezuelans are not supposed to learn

the secret to the good life. This offers a good scope for foregrounding the larger point that I am trying to make. Mental health has been deliberately academized and depoliticized. All mental health concerns have been reduced to the individual pursuit of happiness, devoid of any meaningful social ethics. As a consequence, the bountiful literature on or around 'mental well-being' are mostly either scholarly publications pathologically emphasizing clinical diagnosis of diseases and disorders or self-help guides by self-proclaimed lifestyle-gurus. One doesn't need to cite Foucault to stress this point further.

'Depression' is still a taboo in India. All suicides do not make headlines either. Most are consigned to the banality of statistics. P. Sainath had uncovered from National Crime Records Bureau data that over three lakh farmers had committed suicide in India between 1995 and 2015 (following which the data ceased to be published). Their economic insecurities have still not been addressed even today. One way in which this phenomenon was sought to be invalidated by many was by arguing that these farmers acted in such a manner because they were individually depressed and that it was futile to look for deeper causes. Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) had said that we are progressing through a 'homogenous and empty time'. It seems that he was right. We juxtapose apparently unconnected, simultaneous actions and experiences, without bothering to look at their shared genealogies. If we look deep enough, we will find what Marx had identified as 'alienation from species-essence' to be one of the prime reasons why mental well-being has been elusive. Human creative potential is unbounded, provided it is not otherwise subjugated to or restrained by a relentless pursuit of profit. A conflation of this pursuit of profit with the pursuit of 'happiness' or of 'the good life' is bound to be a political distortion. So long as we do not recognize this, we will remain 'playthings of alien forces' and will not be able

to realize the true value of mental well-being.

What then is to be done? There is no single or simple answer. To start with, we must strive to get out of the mental straitjacket which prevents us from making obvious connections between observable phenomena and underlying processes. We must have the moral courage to recognize and confront our old problems. According to Walter Benjamin, the angel of history is akin to an angel depicted by Klee in a painting called *Angelus Novus*. Benjamin had imagined that this angel, with his eyes wide open, mouth gaping and wings outstretched, keeps staring at the sky-high pile of past rubble as he is uncontrollably driven into the future by the storm called progress. Discounting Benjamin's pessimism, it is important to accept that the rubble of the past must be comprehended at present, or else there will be no future. The task can no longer be postponed. The ability to rethink society radically is a prerequisite for this. One must remember that etymologically, the word 'radical' is derived from 'radix', which means root. Radical rethinking involves addressing root causes and not their superficial symptoms. In a recent essay, Arundhati Roy has argued that this pandemic is a portal—we must not go back to the 'normal'. At the risk of pushing this metaphor too far, I would argue that this pandemic has offered us a unique opportunity to reassess and get out of 'normal' realities. The machine is broken. It has always been so. We must free ourselves from the Sisyphean habit of servicing it nonetheless. This will not be an easy hatchet job. The possibility of a new order can lie in disorder itself. This is a strange harmony, almost poetic, often found in bricolage. The alchemy of well-being is a complex process. In order to grasp the whole, we must always strive to be capable of introspection and empathy, like the Taoist poetic desire of being in the company ('alone with the Moon'). Even when we become bricoleurs, we should never lose our essence.

On Eco-configuring the Ongoing Pandemic and the *Amphan*

Dilip Kumar Sinha

FORMER VICE-CHANCELLOR, VISVA-BHARATI

As the 'lockdown' began to be closely within the heels on being curbed, the range of the cyclone *Amphan* made itself somewhat conspiringly virulent. Even though the 'social distance' per se has remained tacitly enforceable, the cyclone, *Amphan*, looking back, might have sought for a camaraderie with COVID-19. None in this cohortism could hardly afford to have contiguous incubations, spatially and temporally. Indeed, a kindredness seemed to be somehow emerging, after the landfall of the cyclone, *Amphan*, sparing to the roar over Odisha. Surely, a definitive warmth must have sprang up within the coastal arena of the Bay of Bengal. Any rudiment of atmospheric knowledge can hold brief for the substantive moisture content and hence, the prolific rain throughout the Bay of Bengal. As the chronicles well-preserved in the citadels of The Asiatic Society of Bengal ought to point out, a Britisher Henry Piddington, happening to be a Calcuttan at a certain point of time, had floated the word 'cyclone' with a bid to fathom the upsurge of a storm. Amitav Ghosh, the eminent litterateur, has the portrayals on cyclones in his illuminating treatise *The Hungry Tide*. Amitav Ghosh, in a recent communication, ventures to seek something of a feeble linkage between the pandemic, widely captioned as COVID-19 and the cyclone *Amphan*. To him, The 'Great Acceleration' pertaining to extremes, of forms of neo-liberal capitalism, involving both productive and consumption must have brought

out the calamities. An in-depth analysis of Ghosh's exercise may drive home the existence of a possible spectrum, with the climate crisis and the pandemic at the extrema. One finds the strengths of the one, with a subdued vigour but posing an existential threat and the other with a huge morass of debris, of trees, stay-on places etc., as ravages of *Amphan*, often allowing the dirt to hang on, till the disposal of the latter. Officially speaking, both the categories, come somewhat weirdly, within the purview of the Disaster Act of 2005. Whether the amelioration could be vested in the Ministry of Agriculture or Home, as of now, the sufferings and supremacy as well can hardly be kept at bay. While pre-disaster exercises are often hustled though. The post-disaster mitigation over the decades can ill afford to gloss over unavoidable necessities of the times. Resilience being dimensionalised in the corporate world as a verbiage, could remarkably have phases, when the distressed community could well embark upon, on their own, for redressal, the futurities being skillfully and adroitly contained in by the sufferers. The flavour of the historicity on such scores can be culled for meeting exigencies.

A relentless search for a pathogen in the corona virus, be that old or new, can hardly be avoided on several grounds, e.g. 'the viruses have a receptor binding site that finds ways to the cell that it is going to affect, which in COVID-19 is the lungs'. True, that all animals carry viruses but in no way be transmitted. A

misleading idea, almost going to take roots is that there may be an environment that facilitates zoonotic distance spread through direct transmission or through a vector intermediary. The diversity of pathogens has to be reckoned with. Can there exist a risk of emergence of new pathogens? An interplay can occur because of high densities of humans and livestock. A high ecological deterioration, rather a degradation keeps on surfacing and so, runs the risk of increase of the pathogen spillover increase. The habitats labouring under risks of emergence are situated in the close vicinities of the parts of Asia, specially the Indian subcontinent, South-East Asia and South China. A natural ecosystem may thus become fragile, even through the few servient stages. Such descriptions galore do flourish in the thought-canopy of the Asiatic Society, here or elsewhere. A valiant inclusivity, for the shattered species appears to have been bolstered by the assertive *Amphan*.

One can have always a layout of the atmospheric niceties on speed, temperature, moisture, humidity etc. relating to *Amphan*, pouncing upon the trees that could stand the test of times. The uprooted trees of mango, jackfruit, woodapple, krishnachura, matonginy and banyan could become painfully visible on the roads, grounds, roofs etc. that do rake up the memories with several alignments. Didn't the trees provide the places of shelter, saviour and succor to people? Who is not left forlorn while witnessing the highways or the formal streets found strewn with the elan vital of the trees? Presumably, *Alia*, *Phani* and *Bulbul* could somehow be condescending but the *Amphan* has staringly ripped the canopies apart. The Kolkata Municipal Corporation provides an estimate on uprooted trees. The concerns on impediments to pathways seem to have edges over the sense of gloom and sorrow, over the beloved trees. As of now, one hardly dares to speak about the migrant labour, seeking a shelter with trees having a cohesion elsewhere. The COVID-19 lockdown must have enabled a viewer, in

the house, trees, trunk and the branches being tormented by whirls with a dominantly torsional ilk. There is no point of espousal of sentiments around trees. A collision with COVID-19 can hardly be brushed off, on grounds of 'social disaster' imperatives. Birds and squirrels certainly chose to be occupiers of trembling trees. The cuckoo, without being bogged down by the dictum on distance, could quieten its melodious voice. The habitats and niches stand perturbed, with a slew of alternative trajectories and without being choosy in any way. The emotive spells kept on simmering if there be a coupling, where the pandemicity is well bent on seeking zoonotic entries and the *Amphan* playing fiddle for ephemeral broadsides.

Somewhat painfully, the debilitating devastation could happen by the cyclone *Amphan* which did invade on May 20, the 2373-acre spread containing 15,000 plants belonging to 1300 species, felling thereby hundreds of trees. To a professional Botanist, a tree stands as a dead body. The Great Banyan Tree in the Botanic Gardens must have acquired a capability to withstand the brutality of the *Amphan*. Some of the valuable inmates there, particularly those brought from abroad some centuries ago, have fallen prey to the *Amphan*. The area around the Botanic Gardens happens to be a declared containment zone of COVID-19. Does it allow an intuitive exercise on the coercive flare up on the inmates of the Botanic Gardens, somewhat akin to a Netflix of COVID-19?

Although the Nisarga in the western coast hardly had the outbursts of massive destruction, the pandemicity in Mumbai, continues to be a bugbear. Reportedly, the rehabilitation due to a landful of Nisarga might have called for an accommodation of the quarantine inmates. One is yet to be assured whether there could be the habitats, destroying which would facilitate the flourishing of the diseases. The concerns on viruses and diseases continue unabated on such scores. The existential bedrocks of viruses need to be delved

into, so that perturbations of the afflicted sites do not, in any way, reinforce the transmission of the diseases. The Dharavi (Mumbai), an exemplar of ecological milieus built up through the decades may be in jeopardy. Here is an arena where the diseases and the endangered populations seem to vie with each other, in the wake of settlement(s) somewhere. That shifting habitans can tell upon the ecosystems is not readily realized. The vagaries of the resulting risks there, particularly in regard to corona virus, can hardly be meted out. These become all the more dreadful, if viruses keep on spilling over into humans. Any foolhardiness of the humans may lead to contacts with zoonic facies. A bravado on the road stuff, may bring in contacts with evidentiary marks, e.g. the built bill marks. The services of professional's rehabilitators need to be requisitioned so that the evils of contamination can be contained.

The last few lines in the earlier are meant for gauging human frailties in respect of responses to environmental disturbances and disorders, set in by the pandemic COVID-19. Social distancing is being continually harped on so as to take over, primarily the non-chalance of societal beings. The 'lockdown', followed by the 'unlock', is largely meant to take care of a dismal catalogue of social ills. The depressions can hardly be precluded. Environmental dimensions are overridingly assuming significance. Often, a negativity gets visibly manifested through loneliness, monetary depression, unemployment, migration etc. as also form the set of angsts following the lockdown. An isolation may provide a self-efficacy, of course, on a personal basis. Positively speaking, a host of inquisitions and calibrations finds trajectories with invariably critical modes. A whirl disturbing the ground realities, seeking uproot a mango tree and

being so visibly atrocious, can well occur to a mind with a pressing visibility during a lockdown state. Several whirls did put in efforts there and so, in the neighbourhoods, with destroyed trees and plants. Adjacently, the cloud-masses with colliding propensities compete with windspeeds, moisture-content disallowing the warmth to quit, for bringing about scenarios. The delineation thereof can aspire for a responsibility so that a temporal consolidation gets fairly assured. A niche has to be sought for the upkeep of the stuff, often intermingled with the warmth with residuals of psychological stresses. An eco-configuring worth the words cannot but be looked for. Which realm can provide the repository other than the Asiatic Society of Bengal having a congenial built up through centuries ?

The whirlpools on the onset of *Amphan* in alleys and the corridors of Kolkata could become pesteringly discernible through *Amphan* disarming the earthly stuff that could be pounced upon earlier. Indeed, one could envisage matrices on such encounters in appropriated directions. Also, these brought in layouts of criticalities characterizing the untrodden pathways of the *Amphan*. Not an ilk of surmise can describe such trajectories to be linear. The whirling fervour, as it were, could be perceived as a yearning for a stability. The configuration, seemingly undeciphered but invaluablely challenging, forms the pre-requisite for shifts to citadels on historical resources. The portals of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, as an exemplar, provide the succor and solace in such contexts. 'Eco-development' happened to be the prelude of deliberations some decades ago, in its premises and hence, 'eco-configuring' may well fit in, for reckoning with what may be designated as the whirligig, taken in its entirety.

A Confusion of Words? Terms for 'Great Storms' in Bengal

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We know that maritime passages bring in their wake multiple mobilities which expose people to new cultures and languages. As early as 1700, when ships of unknown origin arrived at Calcutta port, notices were issued in English, Bengali, Portuguese, Persian, Armenian and Nagari (McPherson 1995). By the early nineteenth century, boundaries between oceanic worlds became blurred to a very great extent. Imperial transits created a cosmopolitan, interconnected world by way of Asian factory towns which had morphed into colonial port-cities. These port-cities emerged as new gateways with links to distant markets and military, political, and economic bases for penetrating and controlling hinterlands. For example, the Indian Ocean world became linked to the Atlantic world through an international corridor that emerged

along the southeast Africa coast. This corridor saw American whalers, Gujarati merchants, Nguni adventurers, Bengali agents, lascars, and escaped slaves from the Seychelles, with facility in diverse languages: Arabic, French, Nguni dialects, Swahili, Gujarati, Bengali, Dutch, English, Portuguese, Hindustani, and Malagasy (Hofmeyr, Dhupelia-Mesthrie & Kaarsholm 2016). The Cape of Good Hope has been called a 'tavern of the seas', because Cape

Town was both an Indian Ocean port and an Atlantic port-town (Ward 2007; Worden 1998). So, as circulations increased, the new mobilities saw different words entering the lexicon of diverse nations and peoples.

This short note argues that maritime history, usually seen within the restrictive confines of trade and economic history, can also offer the potential of new ways of doing research. Maritime crossings can be studied

through the tropes of climate and language histories. While maritime passages are well known for increased mobilities, what is not so well known is the imprint left by natural hazards on languages. As a century of 'Free Trade' under colonialism started, such disasters, recorded occur-

ring with increasing frequency, undermined the new regional connections. Cyclones, sometimes also accompanied by earthquakes and tsunamis, began to be recorded with rigour from Calcutta as such natural disasters affected intra-port shipping from Bengal and threatened the new regional maritime economies. Image 1 shows the intensity of cyclones in the Bay of Bengal as opposed to the Arabian Sea.

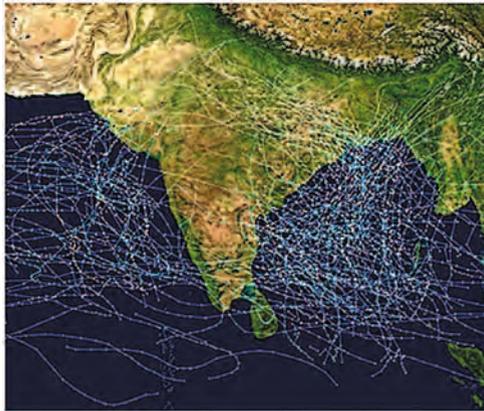
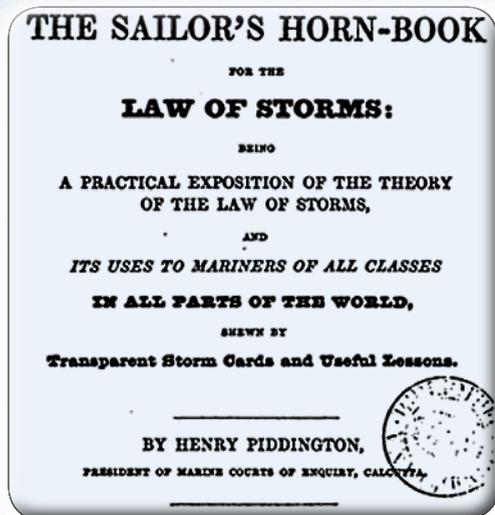


Image 1



Cyclones with death tolls reported for over 10,000 people are recorded for Calcutta in 1737, 1787, 1789, 1822, 1833, 1839, 1864, and 1876. Death tolls between 300,000 and 350,000 individuals were reported for the 11/12 October 1737 Calcutta cyclone alone. The cyclone reportedly caused a storm surge 10-13 m (30-40 ft) in the Hughly River with a reported 381 mm (15 in) of rain falling in a six-hour period. The storm tracked approximately 330 km (200 mi) inland. The cyclone reportedly destroyed 20,000 water going vessels, ranging from ocean-worthy ships to canoes and dinghies. The loss was incalculable.

However, the word 'cyclone', with which we are so familiar now, was not used for the 1737 storm. 'Hurricane' was the term of preference since the English sailors were more familiar with that phenomenon in the Caribbean. Any wind speed of over BEAUFORT force 12 was called 'hurricane' (from the Carib furacan). The Spanish used 'huracan' or 'huracano', the French used 'ouragan', while the Dutch used the terms 'orcaan', 'orcaen' or 'orkaan' (CLIWOC 2003).

The *Gentleman's Magazine* for 1738/9 noted:

October 11 night 1737 CALCUTTA: In the night between the 11th and 12th October

1737, there happened a furious **hurricane** at the mouth of the Ganges, which reached 60 leagues up the river. There was at the same time a violent earthquake, which threw down a great many houses along the river side; in Golgotta (Calcutta) alone, a port belonging to the English, two hundred houses were thrown down, and the high and magnificent steeple of the English Church sunk into the ground without breaking. It is computed that 20,000 ships, barques, sloops, boats, canoes, &c., have been cast away.

Additional details of the great storm are given in a letter dated 29 January 1739: 'A Sad Effect of the **Hurricane** was a famine that raged all round the Country best part of the Year, were obliged to forbid the Exportation of Rice...' (Wilson 1906).

Climatic hazards had always impacted regional coherence and had hindered mobility. In 1666, Glanius, shipwrecked in southeast Bengal (now Bangladesh) through a cyclone, saw an inhospitable coast (Glanius 1682). A century and a half later, in 1795, British major Michael Symes wrote:

The entrance into the river of Bengal, presents as intricate and dangerous a channel, as any that is known; and during three months of the year, a ship, in leaving the Ganges, incurs considerable hazard from being obliged to beat against a foul wind, in shoal water, among surrounding sands (Symes 1800/2006).

Nautical vocabulary changed, becoming generally wider after 1750, but it was not always more precise. Alexander Dalrymple's *Practical Navigation* of 1789 included his own 'wind scale', which is of particular importance as it predates Francis Beaufort's scheme of 1806. He used the terms 'storm' and 'gale'; he did not use either of the terms 'hurricane' or 'cyclone'. But William Reid, in his *An Attempt*

to *Develop the Law of Storms by Means of Facts* (1838), used the term 'hurricane' as he was employed in Barbados where the term was, and still is, current. Thus three words were used to describe very strong winds in Bengal: 'storm', 'gale' and 'hurricane'.

It was only from 1848 that the term 'cyclone' was used in Bengal, in Henry Piddington's *The Sailor's Horn Book* (published at Calcutta). Still, usage of the word did not become universal. 'Hurricane' and 'gale' continued to be used. The *Annual Report of the Administration of the Bengal Presidency* for 1864-65 noted of the cyclone of 5 October 1864: 'On the 5th of October last Calcutta and the districts were visited by a disastrous **hurricane**...the **gale** had its origin somewhere about the Andaman Islands'. But Gastrell and Blandford's *Report on the Calcutta Cyclone of the 5th October 1864* (written in 1866) used the term 'cyclone' definitively.

To compound the confusion, another term—typhoon—was also sometimes used to describe storms in Bengal. This term was derived from the Chinese 'tai fung' meaning 'great wind', and it was perhaps derived in its turn from the Arabic 'tufan', or even from the Greek 'typhon' for whirlwind.

The Italian Cesare Federici, travelling from Pegu to Bengal in 1567/9 wrote:

Unfortunate are they that are at Sea in that yeere and time of the Touffon because few there are that escape that danger. In this yeere it was our chance to bee at Sea with the like storme, but it happened well unto us, for that our ship was newly overplancked, and had not any thing in her save victuall and balasts... This Touffon or cruel storme endured three dayes and three nights: in which time it carried, away our sayles, yards, and rudder; and because the ship laboured in the Sea, wee cut our Mast over-board: which when we had done, shee laboured a great deale more then before,

in such wise, that she was almost full with water that came over the highest part of her and so went downe: and for the space of three dayes and three nights, sixtie men did nothing but hale water out of her in this wise, twentie men in one place, and twentie men in another place, and twentie in a third place...(Federici 2004).

While French sailors and travellers used the term 'ouragan' for hurricane, like Federici they also used the word 'tifon'. And while the English usually stayed with the term 'hurricane', they sometimes used 'typhoon' interchangeably with hurricane and cyclone. But, as the recording of climate data became more precise, climatologists started applying the three terms—hurricane, cyclone and typhoon—to three distinct world regions. In general, 'hurricane' is used to describe storms in the Atlantic and Pacific worlds, 'cyclone' is used for the Indian Ocean realm and the term 'typhoon' is used for storms occurring in countries bordering the East and South China seas. More precisely, in the Atlantic and Northeast Pacific, the term 'hurricane' is used. The same type of disturbance in the Northwest Pacific is called a 'typhoon', while 'cyclones' occur in the South Pacific and Indian Ocean. They are all the same weather phenomenon; just different names are used for storms in different world regions, and this short note shows that just as there was a permanent settlement on land, there was a 'permanent settlement' of climate terms in the world's oceans.

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The Asiatic Society

Founded in 1784

(An Institution of National Importance declared by an Act of Parliament)

and

(An Autonomous Organization under Ministry of Culture, Government of India)

Patron : Hon'ble Governor of West Bengal

Ref. No. : AS/Election/2020/44

Date : 06/07/2020

NOTIFICATION

Attention: All Members

We hope you and all your near and dear ones are safe and well. We take this opportunity to draw your kind attention to our earlier Notification dated 20th March, 2020. Since there has not been a substantive change in these extraordinary circumstances that could warrant a step in a new direction, the election of the Office-bearers and other Members of the Asiatic Society, Kolkata, for 2020-22 and all processes associated therewith, will continue to be put on hold until further notice. We are monitoring the evolving situation and any further course of action will be based on that and will be duly conveyed to you.

Date: 6th July, 2020
Place: Kolkata

[Professor Jayanta Sengupta]
Chairman, Election Committee
The Asiatic Society, Kolkata

***Ruydād-e Tufān-e Āfat-neshān-e Dhāka*: A Persian poem, containing an eye-witness account of the Dhaka tornado of 1888, by a Persian poet of Dhaka, Mahmud Azad (1842-1907) — An Introduction**

M. Firoze

JOINT PHILOLOGICAL SECRETARY, THE ASIATIC SOCIETY

Though the Persian poem, *Ruydād-e Tufān-e Āfat-neshān-e Dhāka*, which runs into 49 couplets,¹ has been reproduced, along with its summary in English, by me in my book on Mahmud Azad², I would like to revisit the poem in the present context.

As a background of the poem, referred to above, it may be said that in this tornado, which struck Dhaka in the evening of April 7, 1888, a total of 3527 houses had completely collapsed, 121 boats were destroyed, 130 persons were killed and 1500 injured.³

The poem under discussion opens with the following two couplets, in which the poet, recording accurately the date of the tragedy, says that “it was the seventh day of the month of April of eighteen eighty-eight that a disaster befell Dhaka and its people”:

درین روزگار بلا سرگزشت
که بر هیجده هست هشتاد و هشت
به تاریخ هفتم ز اپریل ماه
شده ڈهاکه و اهل ڈهاکه تباہ

The poet starts by narrating how, on that fateful day, which was Saturday, the sky began to be overcast with clouds in the evening and, after sometime, it started raining, which continued till the sunset, when the rain stopped and the sky became clear (verses 3-7).

But it was the lull before the storm,

because as soon as the sky became clear, a huge black cloud emerged from the western side of the sky and, taking the shape of a funnel, it started moving violently towards the city, accompanied by thunder and lightening (verses 8-19).

The lightning accompanying the thunderstorm burnt down houses and killed not only human beings but also birds and beasts, turning many residential places into graves (verses 20-22).

The tornado had brought destruction not only on the land causing houses to collapse but also on the sea making boats and ships to sink (verses 23-25).

The storm razed to the ground many tall buildings and mansions, including the palace of Nawwab Abdul Ghani, of which little trace had been left (verses 26-31).

But the poet thanks God that the Nawwab and all the members of the latter's family escaped unhurt (verses 32-33).

After giving the above account, the poet records his own observation to the tragedy. He, addressing himself, says that the disaster has reminded him of the omnipotence of the Almighty, who has all the power to bring down the whole world in a moment (verses 34-42).

Continuing his observation, the poet consoles himself that whatever God does, it is based on divine wisdom, which cannot be questioned (verses 43-45).

The poet concludes his poem with the following four couplets in which he asks the people to take lessons from such happenings and pray to God that He saves them from such calamities in future (verses 46-49).

¹ *Divān-e Āzād*, Azimabad (Patna), 1307 A.H. (= 1889 A.D.), pp. 76-79.

² M. Firoze, *Mahmud Azad: A Persian Poet of Nineteenth-Century Bengal*, Iran Society Publication, Kolkata, 2014, pp. 86-91.

³ B. C. Allen, ed., *Gazetteer of Bengal and North-East India*, Delhi, reprint 1984, p. 313.

Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee and the Midnapore Cyclone of 1942

Nikhiles Guha

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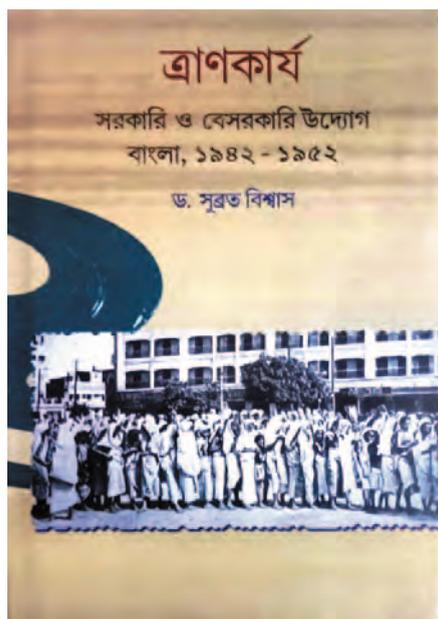
Midnapore, which played a heroic role in the freedom struggle of India, was struck by a natural calamity of exceeding proportions on 16 October 1942 when the Quit India movement of which it was an important part was still in its early phase. Being adjacent to the Bay of Bengal, the district now divided into two parts (East and West) is naturally prone to cyclones and tidal waves. But the misfortune that struck on *Saptami*, while the people were celebrating the Durga Puja, the most important festival of the Hindu population of Bengal, had far-reaching effects.

Pramatha Nath Banerjee, the Revenue Minister of the Progressive Coalition Ministry that was then in power

in Bengal, in his speech before the Bengal Legislative Assembly said that from about 7 or 8 in the morning of the 16th a fierce gale swept across the Bay of Bengal. It did not subside till it had swept over many districts and ended only 24 hours later. Meantime, on the afternoon of the 16th huge waves swept over many areas of Midnapore and the 24 Parganas. The wind was accompanied by

heavy rain. At places there were 12 inches of rainfall within 24 hours. All the rivers were flooded. Tin roofs had been blown away and all mud houses had either collapsed or been destroyed. Seventy-five percent of the cattle

had died. It emerged in the course of the discussions that 14,443 persons had died within a few weeks. Of these 11,000 had died in the Kanthi district alone. Ten per cent of the bullocks used for cultivation and cows that gave milk had drowned. About 7000 villages covering an area of about 3300 sq. miles in Midnapore and the neighbouring areas of the 24 Parganas had been either partially damaged or completely destroyed. 5,27,000 buildings had been completely razed



to the ground. Crops worth rupees eleven crores had been destroyed.

The S.D.O. of Tamluk, Wazir Ali Sheikh, had been warned of the storm but he took no action. Congress volunteers said, because the people's sympathies were with the August movement. The Revenue Secretary first received news of the disaster from the Collector of the 24 Parganas, who told him

how Diamond Harbour had suffered, on the morning of the 19th. That same day a pilot of the Royal Air Force, who had flown over the rail-line connecting Midnapore and Calcutta brought news of the havoc the cyclone had wrecked in Midnapore. The District Collector of Midnapore confirmed his statement. Three valuable days were thus wasted before relief work could be started. The Mahishadal Raj Estate at this time provided succour for a week to the thousands who sought shelter there, in spite of the fact that its *cutcherry* had been burnt by the agitators during the August movement.

The government withheld the news. Under the Defence of India rules, no news could be printed without being scrutinized by the government. When the *Ananda Bazar Patrika* published a news on 18 October to the effect that disturbing news was being received about Midnapore, it was reprimanded. But Syama Prasad, who was the Finance Minister of the Progressive Coalition Ministry, learnt from private sources about the conditions in Midnapore and rushed with help to the affected area on 28 October. Volunteers from the Hindu Mahasabha, the party which he led, manned these service centers. They received full help from the Ramakrishna Mission and the Bharat Sevashram Sangha. Sir John Herbert, the Governor of Bengal, could find time to visit the affected areas only on November 13. Shocked by this indifference, Syama Prasad in a letter to Herbert dated 16 November 1942 expressed his desire to be relieved of ministerial responsibility. He complained of the high-handedness with which the government was dealing with the people of Midnapore and the steps that were being taken to crush the Quit India movement. Even the collection of punitive taxes in the flood-affected area had not stopped. The administration was behaving no better than the Nazis in the areas under their occupation. It was in blatant violation of the principle of democracy on the basis

of which they claimed to be fighting the war. Syama Prasad asked in anguish :

"Could you not as Governor issue in time a public message of sympathy—the Viceroy could do it—for the unprecedented loss following the flood and cyclone, costing the lives of at least thirty thousand people and colossal destruction of cattle and property, a havoc which British troops describe as similar to the worst that may be caused by enemy bombing?"

Syama Prasad repeated the same arguments in the Bengal Assembly, while tendering his resignation from the Ministry, which did not last long after his departure (February 12, 1943). The governor dismissed it at the end of the following month.

The distress of the people of Midnapore was not removed. Availability of drinking water remained a big problem for the next three months. Corpses lay on the road. The garbage was not removed even after two-and-a-half months. The administration attributed the delay to the disruption of communications and the fact that it was not possible to approach different areas without police escort in view of the prevailing political unrest. Official neglect led to the outbreak of cholera and malaria, which claimed no less lives than the storm itself. Mass cremation had to be arranged for Satish Samanta, a nationalist leader of prominence and an active member of the Tamralipta Jatiya Sarkar which asserted independence from British rule, complained that no non-governmental agency was allowed to bring relief to the affected areas for a month after the storm. Later the Ramakrishna Mission, the Bharat Sevashram Sangha and the Marwari Relief Society rendered yeoman service to the cause of the suffering people. The Nababidhan Brahmo Samaj also came forward with relief. The Communist Party of India organised a People's Cyclone Relief Committee with Abdullah Rasool as the Secretary. Newspaper editors of Calcutta formed

an organisation to bring before the public news of the effects of cyclone and flood in Midnapore. It was headed by Ramananda Chattopadhyay, the renowned editor of *Prabasi* and the *Modern Review*. Large business houses like Andrew Yule, Kilburn and Bird and Co. contributed liberally to the cyclone relief fund. All these efforts taken together

helped to restore normalcy to the situation more than the piece-meal and inadequate efforts by the government.

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Whatever work you undertake, do it seriously, thoroughly and well; never leave it half-done or undone, never feel yourself satisfied unless and until you have given it your very best. Cultivate the habits of discipline and toleration. Surrender not the convictions you hold dear but learn to appreciate the points of view of your opponents.

Dr. Syama Prasad Mookerjee

Speech delivered at Scottish Church College, Kolkata on 7 December 1935

কোভিড-১৯-এর শিক্ষা

কুমার রাণা

প্রাবন্ধিক ও গবেষক

পনেরো ঘণ্টায় আটটা হাসপাতাল ঘুরেও শেষ রক্ষা হল না। পূর্ণগর্ভা নীলম কুমারী গৌতম, মাত্র তিরিশ বছর বয়সে মারা গেলেন। বোধ হয় খুন হলেন বলাটাই যুক্তিসঙ্গত হবে। জুনের গোড়ার দিকে তাঁর শরীরে কিছু জটিলতা দেখা দেয়, তাঁর স্বামী বিজেন্দ্র সিং তাঁকে নিয়ে যান এক সরকারি মডেল হাসপাতালে। বেড নেই, বলে তাঁকে ফেরত পাঠিয়ে দেওয়া হয়। তারপর একে একে আরো সাতটা সরকারি ও বেসরকারি হাসপাতালে প্রত্যাখ্যাত হয়ে অ্যাম্বুলেন্সেই প্রাণ যায় নীলমের – গর্ভের সন্তানও বাঁচে নি। ঘটনাটা ঘটেছে নয়ডায়, যা প্রশাসনিক মানচিত্রে উত্তরপ্রদেশে হলেও আসলে ভারতের রাজধানী দিল্লির মাথার মণি — কাচে মোড়া এই শহরে 'অত্যাধুনিক' সব সরকারি-বেসরকারি হাসপাতাল।

নীলম একটি নমুনা মাত্র। সারা দেশের অধিকাংশ প্রদেশেই সংকটাপন্ন নীলমের মতো প্রসূতি বা অন্য পীড়ায় আক্রান্ত রোগী। তাঁদের ডাক্তার দেখানোর উপায় নেই। গ্রাম-গঞ্জের মানুষ তো ক্লিনিক বা হাসপাতালে পৌঁছোতেই পারছেন না, কারণ যানবাহন নেই। যদিও বা তাঁরা কোনোক্রমে পৌঁছলেন, ক্লিনিকে ডাক্তারবাবু বসছেন না, হাসপাতালগুলোতে ডাক্তার ও স্বাস্থ্যকর্মী অপ্রতুল, তাই বেশির ভাগ হাসপাতাল রোগী ফিরিয়ে দিচ্ছে। কত রোগী ক্লিনিক বা হাসপাতালে আসতে পারলেন না, বা কতজন এসেও প্রত্যাখ্যাত হলেন, সে হিসেব পাওয়া কঠিন। তবু নানা সূত্র থেকে আনুমানিক যে খবর পাওয়া যাচ্ছে তাতেই যে ছবিটা উঠে আসছে সেটা ভয়াবহ। কলকাতার এক পরিচিত ক্যান্সার বিশেষজ্ঞ দিনে গড়ে পঁচিশ জন রোগী দেখতেন, লকডাউনের সময় এক জনও দেখতে পারেননি, কারণ তিনি যে নার্সিং হোমে ক্লিনিক করেন সেটা

বন্ধ ছিল। এবার এই রোগীদের চিকিৎসার কী বন্দোবস্ত? “কিছু না, ফোনে যতটুকু বলা যায় বলি। অনেকের কেমোর তারিখ ছিল, কারো অপারেশনের দরকার ছিল – কিচ্ছু করা যাচ্ছে না।”

চিকিৎসার সমস্যাই শুধু নয়, রোগ প্রতিরোধী কর্মসূচিগুলোও প্রায় দেড় মাস বন্ধ করে দেওয়া হল। নানা রোগের প্রতিরোধের জন্য শিশুদের যে সব টিকা দেওয়া হয়, অন্তত ৪৫ দিন সেগুলো বন্ধ থাকা মানে, লক্ষ লক্ষ শিশুর টিকাকরণ হল না – কোনো একটা টিকার একটা ডোজ না পাওয়া মানে সেই টিকার পুরোটাই না হওয়া। ভারতে এমনিতেই টিকাকরণের হার বেশ খারাপ, বাংলাদেশের মতো দুর্বল অর্থব্যবস্থার দেশের চেয়েও খারাপ, এবার এই দেড় মাসের ফাঁক শিশুদের সুরক্ষার ব্যাপারে আমাদের আরো অনেকটা পিছিয়ে দিল।

এই সঙ্গে যোগ হল শিশুদের পুষ্টিজনিত অবহেলাতে বৃদ্ধি। ভারতে অপুষ্টির হার নিম্ন সাহারা অঞ্চলের দেশগুলির চেয়েও খারাপ। লকডাউনের কারণে স্কুলে এবং আই সি ডি এস কেন্দ্রে শিশুদের যে খাবার দেওয়া হয়, তা অনেকাংশে ব্যাহত হল। প্রয়োজনের তুলনায় কম হলেও এই খাবার শিশুদের পুষ্টিতে উল্লেখযোগ্য অবদান রাখে। সেই খাবারটুকুও না পাওয়ার ফলে অপুষ্টির মাত্রায় বৃদ্ধি ঘটতে বাধ্য। বিশেষত লকডাউনের কারণে সারা দেশ জুড়ে লোকজন কাজে যোগ দিতে না পারায় পরিবারগুলোতে অস্বাভাবিক রকমের খাদ্য সংকট দেখা দিয়েছে। সরকারি ব্যবস্থাপনা অপ্রতুল, নাগরিক সমাজের উদ্যোগ অত্যন্ত প্রশংসনীয়, কিন্তু যতটা দরকার ততটা আয়োজন করা সম্ভব হয়নি। এই দুরবস্থা জনসমুদয়ের মধ্যে পুষ্টির অভাবকে ভয়াবহ করে তুলবে।

এক কথায় বলতে গেলে কোভিড-১৯-এর

দুস্ত্রভাবটা যতখানি না সরাসরি পড়ল তার চেয়ে অনেক বেশি করে পড়ল মানুষের সাধারণ স্বাস্থ্যের ওপর - কোভিড-১৯ বহির্ভূত রোগে চিকিৎসা না পাওয়া, টিকাকরণ বন্ধ থাকা, এবং পুষ্টিপ্রকল্পগুলো বাধাপ্রাপ্ত হওয়া।

অথচ, ঈশৎ বুদ্ধির চর্চা ও সামান্য বিবেকের সংযোগ ঘটতে পারলে কোভিডের মোকাবিলায় যেমন ব্যর্থতার সম্মুখীন হতে হত না, তেমনি দেশবাসীকে সামগ্রিক বিপর্যয়ের মুখে ঠেলে দিতে হত না। বস্তুত কোভিড-১৯-এর মোকাবিলায় ব্যাপারে ভারত তুলনামূলকভাবে অনেক সুবিধাজনক অবস্থানে ছিল। তখন কাজটা ছিল সহজ: চিহ্নিত করা এবং বিচ্ছিন্ন করা। সরকার প্রায় দু'মাস কাল নিষ্ক্রিয় থেকে, অকস্মাৎ লকডাউনের হুকুম জারি করল। একটা জনস্বাস্থ্য বিষয়ক সমস্যার সমাধানে সরকার একটা পুলিশী ব্যবস্থা নিল। ফল যা হবার তাই হল: রোগের প্রকোপ বাড়ল। এবং যেমনটা হয়ে থাকে, রোগে প্রত্যক্ষভাবে যেমন, তেমনি রোগের মোকাবিলায় করা পদক্ষেপের কারণে সব থেকে বেশি দণ্ড দিতে হচ্ছে গরিব মানুষকে।

ভারতের জনস্বাস্থ্য ব্যবস্থার অবস্থা ভয়াবহ বললে কম বলা হবে। স্বাস্থ্যকেন্দ্র, স্বাস্থ্য পরিকাঠামো, স্বাস্থ্যকর্মী—সব ব্যাপারে বিপুল ঘাটতি। সেই সঙ্গে জনস্বাস্থ্যের অন্য গুরুত্বপূর্ণ উপাদানগুলো—শিক্ষা, পুষ্টি, সাধারণ মানুষের যোগদান, ইত্যাদি বিষয়ে আমাদের অর্জন যৎসামান্য। ১৯৭৮-এ আলমা আর্টতে গৃহীত 'সকলের জন্য স্বাস্থ্য' সম্মেলনে ভারত ছিল অন্যতম উদ্যোক্তা, অথচ সেই ঘোষণাপত্রে প্রাথমিক স্বাস্থ্য পরিচর্যার ওপর যে জোর দেওয়ার আহ্বান রাখা হয়েছিল ভারত তার প্রতি আদৌ বিশ্বস্ত থাকেনি। যত দিন গেছে ভারত

- আমেরিকার পথ ধরে - মুনাফাকামী বেসরকারি স্বাস্থ্যব্যবস্থার দিকে ঝুঁকিয়েছে। এবং, এটা কাকতালীয় নয় যে, কোভিড মোকাবিলায় ভারতের দুরবস্থা আমেরিকা - এবং সম্প্রতি সেই পথের পথিক ব্রাজিলের মতো দেশগুলোর মতোই। সংক্রমণ হু হু করে বেড়েছে। বহু মানুষের প্রায় বিনা চিকিৎসায় মৃত্যু ঘটেছে। আমাদের দেশে মৃতদের প্রেক্ষাপট জানানো হচ্ছে না। আমেরিকাতে এটা জানা যাচ্ছে, এবং দেখা যাচ্ছে, কোভিডে মৃত্যুর বেশির ভাগটাই কৃষ্ণঙ্গ আমেরিকান, বা অন্যান্য দরিদ্ররা, অন্যান্য অসুখেও যাঁরা বহুল সংখ্যায় বিনা চিকিৎসায় মারা যান। তথ্য পেলে ভারতেও আমরা একই চিত্র দেখতে পাব।

অথচ, বহু দেশ, যারা স্বাস্থ্যকে মুনাফাকামীদের হাতে ছেড়ে দেয়নি, তারা অত্যন্ত সফলভাবে এই রোগের মোকাবিলা করে চলেছে। ভিয়েতনাম, লাওস, কিউবা, ভারতের অঙ্গরাজ্য কেরল তো ইতিহাস সৃষ্টি করেছে। ইউরোপের বেশ কিছু দেশ দ্রুত পরিস্থিতি থেকে এবং অন্য দেশ থেকে শিক্ষা নিয়ে স্বাস্থ্য পরিচর্যায় সরকারি ভূমিকাটাকে প্রধান করে তুলে বেশ সাফল্য অর্জন করল। কিন্তু আমেরিকা, ব্রাজিল, রাশিয়ার মতো ভারত সেই পথে হাঁটার কোনো লক্ষণই দেখায়নি। এখনো সে পথে হাঁটা যায়। সরকারি স্বাস্থ্যব্যবস্থাকে মজবুত করে তোলার জন্য প্রচুর অর্থের চেয়েও যেটা দরকার সেটা হল সদিচ্ছা, অন্যেদের কাছ থেকে শেখার ইচ্ছা, এবং মানুষের কাছ থেকে শুনবার ইচ্ছা। স্বাস্থ্য শুধু ওষুধ, ডাক্তার, হাসপাতালের ব্যাপার নয়, স্বাস্থ্য হচ্ছে বৃহত্তর মানব নৈতিকতার ব্যাপার - 'সর্বে সন্তু নিরাময়াঃ' মন্ত্রে স্থিত হবার ব্যাপার। কোভিড-১৯ আবার করে এটা চোখে আঙুল দিয়ে দেখিয়ে দিল।

Two Academicians from New York and Oxford during Lockdown

The Covid-19 syndrome over the last six months in the world today has created such an impact on the lives of people as to make it one of the worst experiences of our times. Its history is still full of mysteries with regard to its origin and spread, and its real end yet to be visible in definitive terms even by experts on the field. But life cannot stop, and it must go on. In this connection, we have been interested to know the personal experience of living and working of some renowned academicians during the lockdown period at different parts of the world. Two academicians, Professor David Ludden and Professor David Washbrook, respectively responded from New York and Oxford. Their responses are very brief, but different and suggestive. We shall come to the meaning of them at the end of this note.

David Ludden who is a Professor of History, New York University, and is also associated with the Centre for Global Asia Resources at the University, writes on 20 June 2020,

'I have been working from home -- that is, from my three-room apartment in Greenwich Village -- since March 15, going out to the store periodically, washing my hands constantly, wearing masks, going for a jog in the park at a safe distance from others five days a week, and working on a laptop instead of my full-sized computer in my office, from which we have been banned by the university until further notice. Now, we have Black Lives Matter protests daily for the last two going on three weeks which has brought helicopters overhead making a racket every day. We do not live in the worst affected parts of New York

City but everyone is heavily involved in the effort to reduce the mortality, which gladly is on the decline and allowing the city to open up somewhat in carefully calibrated phases, though the young people are not observant or careful when it comes to social distancing and mask-wearing, which make the university faculty afraid to go back to in-person teaching in the fall, with fear that the students will not take precautions. So there is a lot of uncertainty and fear but politically the mood has improved with BLM movement and a revival of the politics of protest in which all my friends were engaged 50 years ago and we thought had just disappeared into the swamp of Republicanism.'

David Washbrook who had earlier retired from a professorial position at St. Anthony's College, Oxford, and later became Senior Fellow at Trinity College, Cambridge, very succinctly puts down also on 20 June,

'Many thanks for the invitation and the idea sounds interesting. But I am retired from Cambridge now and have been locked down in Oxford for the last twelve weeks -- so I don't have much to add other than to say that I am desperate to get out and about again !!! However, I am sure that everybody else says that too.'

It appears from the brief responses of two leading South Asian historians the similarity and differences of seeing things also. Though both confined at home during lockdown have been engaged in academic studies, Ludden is still serving, and has therefore a concern for meeting students in near future, in the Fall, and an apprehension over social distancing

as followed by the younger generation at that time, while Washbrook's retired life is also presumably hampered by enforced isolation. In addition, the present movement of Black Life Matters (BLM) in the US brings in Ludden's mind the old memories of his and his friends' younger days of participation in similar protest movement half a century ago. At the end, both wish to get out of this lockdown life with an unceasing passion. In Washbrook's case, the intense desire of getting out is

symbolically connected with the similar one of the fairy-tale King of Hundi (with a cry of relief and freedom from long confinement) as shown in Satyajit Ray's highly acclaimed film called *Gupi Gayen Bagha Bayen*. The responses will remain as significant records of our time!

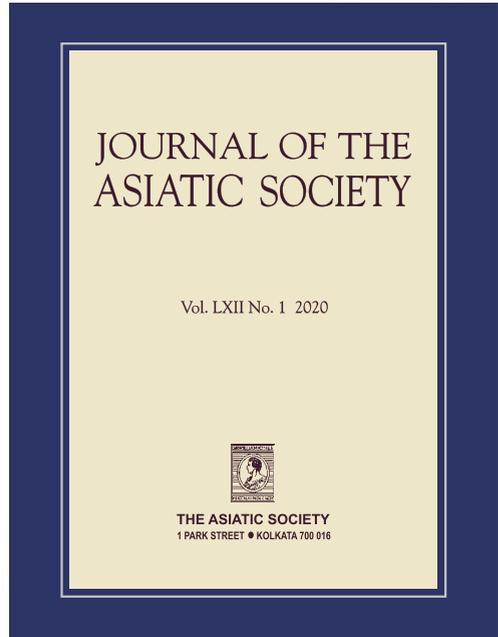
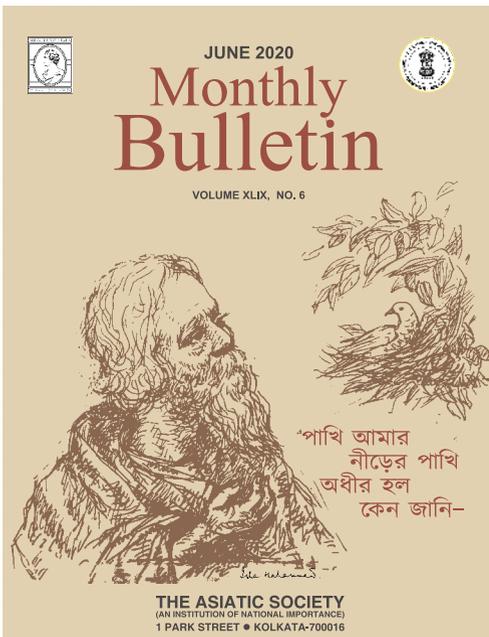
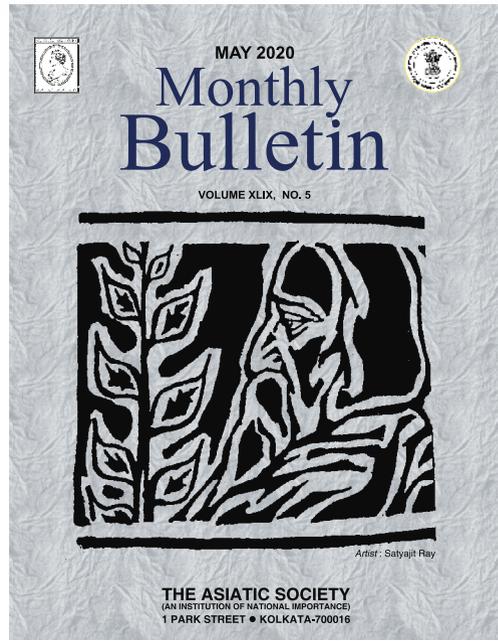
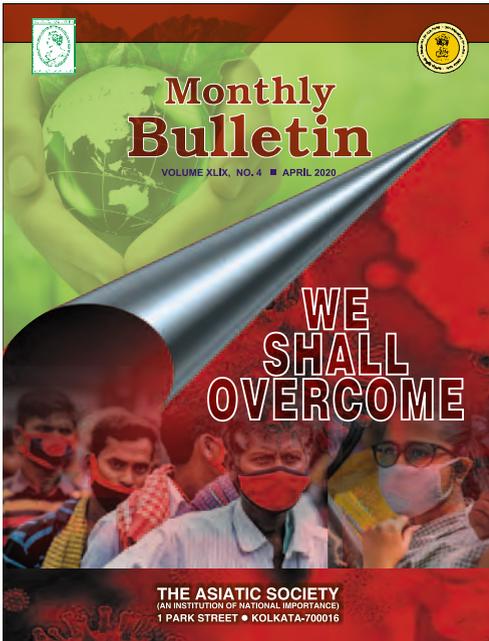
Arun Bandopadhyay

HISTORICAL & ARCHAEOLOGICAL SECRETARY
THE ASIATIC SOCIETY

Select Views on the Monthly Bulletins of the Asiatic Society since April 2020

Three issues of exclusive digital edition of the Monthly Bulletin of the Asiatic Society Kolkata have been so far published under the unusual condition of lockdown nationwide and worldwide, respectively corresponding to April, May and June 2020. Professor Dipesh Chakrabarti specially appreciated the April Issue, as Corona and today's environment was widely discussed, including his own specific views on it. Professor Robert Eric Frykenberg, a 90-year old American historian of South Asia, thought the Bulletin a 'timely' production, adding that in "these strange and troubled times, one can but hope and pray the various leaders able to make wise decisions that benefit the world". As regards the May Issue, Dipesh Chakrabarti liked the contributions on Satyajit Ray on the eve of his centenary, and specially appreciated the analogy on Ray's Ashani Sanket, carrying some environmental suggestions of our times also ("aamader samayer sambandheo ekta sanket aachhe"). David Curley, an American social historian of Bengal was highly appreciative of the issues, and later himself contributed an article on the June issue. Professor Minjari Kamat, Associate Dean of Arts, University of Mumbai, was highly appreciative of the Asiatic venture of publishing digital editions in the lockdown period. Professor David Washbrook, Professor David Ludden and Dr Benjami Zachariah are specially moved with the contributions of the June Issue. Washbrook and Ludden even agreed to share some of their experiences as academicians during the lockdown period in the coming issues of the Bulletin. On the whole, it seems there has been a wide impact of the publications of the digital edition of the Monthly Bulletins of the Asiatic Society, Kolkata in the last three months, in the country and abroad.

Our Online Publications during Lockdown



দক্ষিণ ত্রিপুরার মুহুরীপুরের অষ্টাদশভুজা চুন্দাদেবীর মূর্তি

প্রিয়ংকু চক্রবর্তী

রাজেন্দ্রলাল মিত্র রিসার্চ ফেলো, দি এশিয়াটিক সোসাইটি

১. আমরা জানি যে, আদি-মধ্যযুগে বর্তমান ত্রিপুরার দক্ষিণ ভাগ বিভিন্ন সময়ে সমতট এবং হরিকেল রাজ্যের অন্তর্গত ছিল। উল্লিখিত সময়ে অর্থাৎ খ্রিস্টীয় অষ্টম থেকে দ্বাদশ শতকে এইসব অঞ্চলে মূলত বৌদ্ধ ধর্ম ও সংস্কৃতি বিকশিত হয়েছিল। দেব, খড়্গ, চন্দ্র প্রভৃতি রাজবংশের আনুকুল্যে সমতট-হরিকেলে প্রচুর বৌদ্ধ মন্দির ও বিহার গড়ে উঠেছিল। বর্তমান দক্ষিণ ত্রিপুরার সীমান্তবর্তী আরাকান প্রদেশের রাজারাও খুব সম্ভবত বৌদ্ধ বিহারগুলির সঙ্গে জড়িত ছিলেন। ফলত বর্তমান দক্ষিণ ত্রিপুরার বিরাট অংশ জুড়ে আদি-মধ্যযুগে নির্মিত বহু মূর্তি এবং মন্দিরের ধ্বংসাবশেষ পাওয়া গেছে। এখানে আমরা মূলত দক্ষিণ ত্রিপুরার মুহুরীপুর গ্রামের চুন্দাদেবীর বিগ্রহ নিয়ে

আলোকপাত করব। এই মূর্তিটি সর্বপ্রথম সর্বসমক্ষে আনেন দেবলা মিত্র। তাঁর প্রবন্ধটি এশিয়াটিক সোসাইটি, কলকাতার জার্নালে ('অ্যান্টিকুইটিস অব পিলাক এণ্ড জোলাইবাড়ি, ত্রিপুরা', ভল্যুম ১৮, পৃ. ৬২-৬৩) ১৯৭৬-এ প্রকাশিত হয়। তবে সেসময় সম্পূর্ণ মূর্তিটি অনাবৃত অবস্থায় তিনি দেখতে পাননি। পরবর্তীকালে অন্যান্য গবেষকরা মূলত তাঁর বর্ণনা অনুসরণ করেই মূর্তিটির উল্লেখ করেছেন। তার ফলে তাঁদের বিবরণেও মূর্তিটির কয়েকটি উল্লেখযোগ্য বৈশিষ্ট্য বাদ পড়ে গেছে। বর্তমানে মুহুরীপুরের রাজরাজেশ্বরী মন্দিরে রাজরাজেশ্বরী নামে আমাদের আলোচ্য মূর্তিটি পূজিত হচ্ছেন (চিত্র ১)।

২. আমরা জানি, চুন্দা, বেঁদ্র মহাযান এবং



চিত্র ১। রাজরাজেশ্বরী মন্দির, মুহুরীপুর, দক্ষিণ ত্রিপুরা। উৎসঃ গুগল আর্থ।

তন্ত্রযান অনুসরণকারীদের আরাধ্যা দেবী। ‘চুন্দা’ শব্দটি সংস্কৃত চুন্দ ধাতুর সঙ্গে সম্পর্কিত, যার অর্থ প্রেরণা দেওয়া, উৎসাহ দেওয়া (এখানে বিখ্যাত বৈদিক গায়ত্রী মন্ত্রের “ধিয়ো যো নঃ প্রচোদয়াৎ”— অংশটি স্মরণীয়। ‘প্রচোদয়াৎ’ মানে প্রেরিত করা।)। সুতরাং যিনি বুদ্ধত্বপ্রাপ্তির জন্য সত্ত্ব বা প্রাণীকে প্রেরণা দান করেন, তিনিই চুন্দা।

২.১. ৬৮৫ খ্রিস্টাব্দে পণ্ডিত দিবাকর চিনা ভাষায় চুন্দাদেবী বিষয়ক মন্ত্রের (ধারণী) অনুবাদ করেন। এটি চিনা ক্রিপটিক-এ “চুন্দী-দেবী-ধারণী” হিসেবে অন্তর্ভুক্ত হয়। সুতরাং খ্রিস্টীয় সপ্তম শতকের আগেই চুন্দা দেবীর আরাধনার প্রচলন ছিল। দিবাকর-কর্তৃক অনূদিত ধারণী ছাড়াও চিনা ক্রিপটিকে আরও তিনটি চুন্দা (চুন্দী)-ধারণী রয়েছে, যেগুলি অমোঘবজ্র, বজ্রবোধি এবং শুভাকরসিংহ যথাক্রমে খ্রিস্টীয় ৭২০, ৭২৩ এবং ৭২৫ শতাব্দে চিনা ভাষায় অনুবাদ করেছেন। মূল সংস্কৃতভাষায়, পাপক্ষয়কারী হিসেবে চুন্দা-ধারণী বা চুন্দাদেবী বিষয়ক মন্ত্র পাওয়া যায় শান্তিদেবের (খ্রিস্টীয় অষ্টম শতক) শিক্ষাসমুচ্চয় (১৭৩।৪) গ্রন্থেও।

T'ien Hsi-tsai-র কারওয়ান-র চিনা অনুবাদে (খ্রিস্টীয় ৯৮৩) চুন্দাদেবীর মন্ত্র উল্লিখিত আছে, যথা –“ওঁ চলে-চুলে চুন্দে স্বাহা”। ভগবতী চুন্দার ধ্যানমূর্তির বর্ণনা বৌদ্ধশাস্ত্রাদিতে রয়েছে। সাধনমালা-য় (খ্রিস্টীয় একাদশ/দ্বাদশ শতক) ১২৯, ১৩০

এবং ১৩১— সংখ্যক সাধনগুলিতে চতুর্ভুজা চুন্দাদেবীর বর্ণনা রয়েছে। অভয়াকরগুপ্তের নিষ্পন্নযোগাবলী-তেও দ্বিভুজা, চতুর্ভুজা, ষড়বিংশভুজা চুন্দাদেবীর বিবরণ আছে।

২.২. অবশ্য উপরে উল্লিখিত এইসব শাস্ত্রবর্ণিত দ্বিভুজা, চতুর্ভুজা, ষড়বিংশভুজা তো বটেই, এগুলি ছাড়াও ষড়ভুজা, অষ্টভুজা, দশভুজা, দ্বাদশভুজা, ষোড়শভুজা, অষ্টাদশভুজা, চতুর্বিংশতিভুজা চুন্দাদেবীর প্রস্তরনির্মিত মূর্তি, ধাতব মূর্তি এবং পুথিচিত্র (এবং তিব্বতি পট বা থাংকা) পাওয়া যায়। চুন্দাদেবীর প্রতিমার এই বৈচিত্র্য জনজীবনে তাঁর আরাধনার জনপ্রিয়তার সূচক। এই তিনরকমের মূর্তি তথা অঙ্কিত চিত্রের নিদর্শন পূর্ব ভারত (নালন্দা, বিহার; রত্নগিরি, ওড়িশা; নিয়মৎপুর, বাংলাদেশ; মুহুরীপুর, ত্রিপুরা ইত্যাদি) থেকে পাওয়া গেছে, যেগুলির সময়কাল খ্রিস্টীয় অষ্টম থেকে দ্বাদশ শতক। খ্রিস্টীয় ১০১৫ শতকে অনুলিখিত একটি অষ্টসাহস্রিকা-প্রজ্ঞাপারমিতা-র (পুথি নং. ১৬৪৩। কেম্ব্রিজ ইউনিভার্সিটি লাইব্রেরি) পুথিতে পট্টিকেরাতে (বাংলাদেশের লালমাই-ময়নামতী অঞ্চলের অন্তর্গত) চুন্দাদেবীর মন্দিরের কথা আছে –“পট্টিকেরে চুন্দাবরভবনে চুন্দা” (ফোলিও নং. ১৭৬ ভি ১)। তার সঙ্গে পদ্মোপরি বজ্রপর্যাক্ষাসনে উপবিষ্টা ষোড়শভুজা চুন্দাদেবীর চিত্র রয়েছে (চিত্র ২)। ভৌগোলিকভাবে ত্রিপুরার



চিত্র ২। “পট্টিকেরে চুন্দাবরভবনে চুন্দা”। অষ্টসাহস্রিকাপ্রজ্ঞাপারমিতা পুথি। চিত্রাঞ্চলঃ কেম্ব্রিজ ইউনিভার্সিটি লাইব্রেরি।

দক্ষিণাংশ পড়িকেরা বা লালমাই-ময়নামতীর সন্নিহিত অঞ্চল। অনুমান করা যায়, অষ্টম-দ্বাদশ শতকে চুন্দাদেবীর উপাসনা এইসব অঞ্চলে প্রচলিত ছিল। দক্ষিণ ত্রিপুরা থেকে অনেকগুলি চুন্দা মূর্তি পাওয়া গেছে। যতদূর জানা যায়, বাংলায় এযাবৎ পর্যন্ত পাথরে-তৈরি দু'টি অষ্টাদশভুজা চুন্দা পাওয়া গেছে। একটি বাংলাদেশের নওগাঁ জেলার নিয়ামৎপুর থেকে প্রাপ্ত (বরেন্দ্র রিসার্চ ম্যুজিয়াম, রাজশাহীতে সংরক্ষিত), সময়কাল খ্রিস্টীয় দশম শতক। অন্যটি আমাদের এই আলোচ্যমান মুহুরীপুরের মূর্তিটি।



চিত্র ৩। অষ্টাদশভুজা চুন্দা, মুহুরীপুর, ত্রিপুরা।
চিত্রঃ লেখক।

২.৩. মুহুরীপুরের চুন্দা মূর্তিটি কালো রঙের বেলে পাথরে তৈরি করা (চিত্র ৩)। মূর্তিটির উচ্চতা ২০০ সেমি, প্রস্থ ৭৯ সেমি। দেবীর আঠারোটি হাত। তিনি বজ্রপর্যাকাসনা বা পদ্মাসনে বিশ্বপদ্মের উপর উপবিষ্টা। বিশ্বপদ্মটি ক্ষয়ে গেছে। বস্ত্রত, গোটা মূর্তিটিই অত্যন্ত ক্ষয়প্রাপ্ত। তাই তার বেশিরভাগ বৈশিষ্ট্য এবং আয়ুধ

প্রভৃতি শনাক্ত করা সম্ভব নয়। চুন্দার প্রধান হাত দু'টি বুকের কাছে ধর্মচক্রপ্রবর্তনমুদ্রায় ন্যস্ত। ডানদিকে জানুদেশে রাখা হাতটিতে বরদমুদ্রা, এবং ডানদিকের একেবারে উপরের হাতটি ছেড়ে দিয়ে পরবর্তী কোনো এক হাতে দীর্ঘ তরবারি ধরা। বাঁদিকের জানুদেশে রাখা হাতটিতে সম্ভবত কমণ্ডলু, তার পরেরটিতে ঘন্টা বা দণ্ড(?)। বাঁদিকের কোনো একটি হাতে পদ্মমণ্ডল ধরা, বাঁদিকে উপরে, প্রভামণ্ডলের কাছে পদ্মটি দৃশ্যমান। এছাড়া বাকি আয়ুধগুলি শনাক্ত করা যায়নি। মাথার মুকুটটি সম্ভবত জটামুকুট। মাথার পেছনে পূর্ণচন্দ্রাকৃতি প্রভামণ্ডল। তার চারপাশে পঞ্চবুদ্ধ। একেবারে উপরে পঞ্চবুদ্ধের একজনকে মাঝে রেখে দু-পাশে দুটো ছোট স্তূপ। মূল বেলেপাথরটি উপরের দিকে প্রায় অর্ধচন্দ্রাকৃতি।

বিশ্বপদ্মের সামান্য নীচে দুপাশে উপবিষ্ট অবস্থায় দু'টি অবয়ব। ডানদিকের অবয়বটির বাঁহাতে সম্ভবত সম্মুখ পদ্ম। বাঁদিকের মূর্তিটি অস্পষ্ট। মূর্তিটির পাদপীঠিকা পঞ্চরথ সজ্জায়ুক্ত। তবে মূর্তিটির নীচের অংশটি এতটাই ক্ষয়ে গেছে যে, যেখানে অস্পষ্টভাবে কিছু অবয়ব বুঝা গেলেও তার শনাক্তিকরণ নিশ্চিতভাবে করা সম্ভব নয় (চিত্র ৪)। শৈলীগত বিচারে মূর্তিটি খ্রিস্টীয় নবম-দশম শতাব্দের বলে অনুমিত হয়।

২.৪. মুহুরীপুরের চুন্দামূর্তি থেকে দেবীর হাতের আয়ুধের পূর্ণাঙ্গ পরিচয় না-পেলেও, প্রসঙ্গত, একটু আগে উল্লিখিত কেব্রিজ পুথির চিত্রটি, বাংলাদেশের নিয়ামৎপুরের মূর্তিটি ও নালন্দার দু'টি অষ্টাদশভুজা চুন্দা—এই মূর্তিগুলির আয়ুধের উল্লেখ এখানে করা যেতে পারে। বিষয়টি আমাদের চুন্দাদেবীর আয়ুধ বিষয়ক অনুমানে সহায়ক হতে পারে :

১। ষোড়শভুজা চুন্দা (অষ্টসাহস্রিকা-প্রজ্ঞাপারমিতা, পুথি নং. ১৬৪৩)। প্রধান দু'টি হাতে ধর্মচক্রপ্রবর্তনমুদ্রা। ডান হাতগুলিতে (নীচ থেকে) যথাক্রমে বরদমুদ্রা, বজ্র, চক্র, মুষল, খড়্গা, বাণ, অক্ষসূত্র। বাম হাতগুলিতে যথাক্রমে ঘট, অক্ষুশ, ত্রিশূল, চাপ, পাশ (?), অশনাক্ত, দণ্ড।



চিত্র ৪। চূন্দা বিগ্রহের নিম্নাংশ। তদেব। চিত্রঃ লেখক।

- ২। অষ্টাদশভুজা চূন্দা (রাজশাহী, বাংলাদেশ)। প্রধান দু'টি হাতে ধর্মচক্রমুদ্রা। ডান হাতগুলিতে (নীচ থেকে) যথাক্রমে অভয়মুদ্রা, ফল, খড়্গা, রত্নদাম, অঙ্কুশ, পরশু, বজ্র, অক্ষমালা। বাম হাতগুলিতে যথাক্রমে পুস্তক, ঘণ্টা, পুষ্প অথবা শঙ্খ, চক্র, পাশ, ধ্বজ, কমণ্ডলু, পদ্ম।
- ৩। অষ্টাদশভুজা চূন্দা (নালন্দা, বিহার)। প্রধান দু'টি হাতে ধর্মচক্রমুদ্রা। ডান হাতগুলিতে (নীচ থেকে) যথাক্রমে বরমুদ্রা, রত্নদাম, ঘণ্টা, অভয়মুদ্রা, দণ্ড (?), খড়্গ, বজ্র, বন্দনাভিনয়ী। বাম হাতগুলিতে যথাক্রমে কমণ্ডলু, পাশ, অশনাজ, ধ্বজ, চক্র, অশনাজ, ফল (?), পুস্তক।

এছাড়াও বোধগয়ায় মোহান্ত পেলেসের কাছে ফল্গু নদীর ধারে বর্তমানে তৈরি একটি ছোটো মন্দিরে অষ্টাদশভুজা চূন্দাদেবীর একটি মূর্তি দেখা যায় (চিত্র ৫)। তাঁর প্রধানদু'টো হাত যদিও আধুনিককালে সংস্কার করা; হাতদুটোতে একটা ঘট



চিত্র ৫। চূন্দা, বোধগয়া, বিহার। চিত্রঃ লেখক।

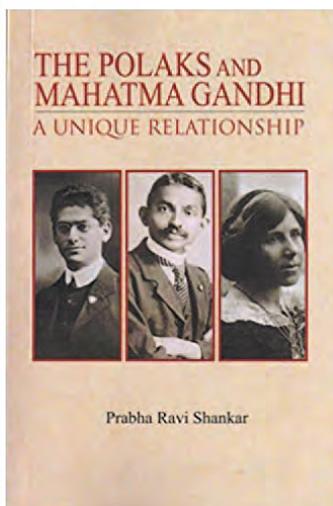
জুড়ে দেওয়া হয়েছে। এটি ছাড়া অন্যান্য হাতের আয়ুধগুলি কম-বেশি উপরের বর্ণিত আয়ুধগুলির প্রায় অনুরূপ। এই সমস্ত প্রতিমারই নির্মাণকাল খ্রিস্টীয় দশম-একাদশ শতক। কাজেই এই মূর্তিগুলির আয়ুধ এবং সাজসজ্জা ও বিন্যাস দেখে আমরা মুহুরীপুরের ক্ষয়প্রাপ্ত চুন্দাদেবীর মূর্তিটি কেমন ছিল, তা খানিকটা অনুমান করতে পারি।

নির্বাচিত গ্রন্থসূচি

১। এনামুল হক এবং এ. জে. গেইল। (২০০৮)। *স্কাল্পচার্স ইন বাংলাদেশ*। বঙ্গীয় শিল্পকলা চর্চার আন্তর্জাতিক কেন্দ্র, ঢাকা, বাংলাদেশ।

- ২। দেবলা মিত্র। (১৯৭৬)। “অ্যান্টিকুইটিস অব পিলাক এন্ড জোলাইবাড়ি, ত্রিপুরা”, *জার্নাল অব দ্য এশিয়াটিক সোসাইটি*, কলকাতা, ভল্যুম ১৮।
- ৩। নলিনীকান্ত ভট্টশালী। (১৯১৯)। *আইকোনোগ্রাফি অব বুদ্ধিস্ট অ্যান্ড ব্রাহ্মনিকেল স্কাল্পচার্স ইন দ্য ঢাকা ম্যুজিয়াম*। ঢাকা ম্যুজিয়াম কমিটি, ঢাকা (বাংলাদেশ)।
- ৪। বিনয়তোষ ভট্টাচার্য। (১৯৫৮)। *ইন্ডিয়ান বুদ্ধিস্ট আইকোনোগ্রাফি*। ফার্মা কে. এল. এম., কলকাতা।
- ৫। সরসিকুমার সরস্বতী। (২০০৩) [১৯৭৭-এ পুনর্মুদ্রণ]। *তন্ত্রযান আর্ট—এন অ্যালবাম*। দি এশিয়াটিক সোসাইটি, কলকাতা।

Gandhi and the Polaks : A Book Review



Prabha Ravi Shankar, *The Polaks and Mahatma Gandhi: A Unique Relationship*, New Delhi and Chicago: Promilla & Co. Publishers, in association with Bibliophile South Asia, 2020, Rs. 900.

Mahatma Gandhi was fortunate to have a good number of associates in his long life, persons who were distinguished by themselves and had developed reciprocal relations with the Mahatma in course of time. Historical works on some of them, such as C. F. Andrews, G. A. Natesan and Mahadev Desai, help us understand Gandhi better. Gandhi had three important associates from his South African days and thereafter, and they were all Jews: Hermann Kallenbach, Sonja Schlesin and the Polaks, husband and wife. Though historical biographies are available for Kallenbach and Schlesin, no detailed studies have been attempted so far on the Polaks. Prabha Ravi Shankar fills this gap by writing on their unique relationship with Gandhi, covering over decades, on the basis of materials collected by her from different places in India and the United Kingdom.

It is well known that Gandhi's stay in South Africa proved virtually a laboratory for him in the evolution of his political and spiritual

journey. Three of his closest European associates here were Jews – Henry Polak was an Englishman, Hermann Kallenbach was a German of Lithuanian background, and Sonja Schlesin was a Russian. All of them had distanced themselves from Judaic doctrines and rituals, and they were willing to be associated with Gandhi because of their immigrant experience and their Theosophist past which Gandhi also shared. In many ways, Gandhi influenced them in their life's choices, as they also contributed in Gandhi's thought and activity. Indeed, the whole Gandhi – political and spiritual – can be comprehended through an analysis of the people he was closely associated with. In this sense, the Polaks deserve our special attention.

Prabha Ravi Shankar has dwelt on the background, association and activity of the Polaks, and their relation with Gandhi in eleven chapters, but three things figure prominently in this book. The first of them is a biographical construction of the Polaks, their initial upbringing, their arrival and involvement in South Africa, and the beginning of their long association with Gandhi. The second aspect concerns the salient features of their unique relationship with Gandhi – the root of their attraction, the moral influence in both directions, the personal association, and their growing involvement with Gandhian programmes. Finally, an attempt has been made to focus on the differences that cropped up in their relations from time to time. But how these differences were conciliated in the long run, both for Gandhi and the Polaks, happen to be a subject of stimulating discussion in the book.

Henry Polak (1882-1959) was born in a learned Jewish family settled in England for more than a century. He studied at the

Highbury New Park College, Dalston, and completed his secondary education by passing the University of London Matriculation Examination in 1900 in the first division. Though admitted to the London School of Economics, he was forced to forgo it because of financial constraints, and took up commercial jobs. Polak met Amelia, better known as Millie Graham Downs (1881-1962), his future wife, in England. Millie was a social reformer also. Henry was from a Jewish family, and Millie from Christian one, but they found common ground in ethics. Millie and Polak jointly attended lectures at the South Place Ethical Society in London where they were exposed to Christian Socialist and Pacifist doctrines. Polak went to South Africa in 1904, and Prabha Ravi Shankar thinks that "probably" Gandhi became first acquainted with Ethical Societies through his meeting with Polak in the same year. The Theosophical Society provided a base for the oppressed and suppressed Jews without losing their identity. Gandhi had asked Polak to join Theosophical Lodge at Johannesburg, though he himself did not join because of his disapproval of occultism. Polak studied *Bhagavad Gita* with Gandhi in 1905 while staying with his family in Johannesburg. It was in South Africa that Polak came to the conclusion that all religious and spiritual guides all over the world had given credence to the belief that 'mankind is one and indivisible'. In association with Gandhi, he found his life's work in fighting against racism in South Africa and at the global level. His relationship with Gandhi gave him an international reputation both as a lawyer and activist.

Henry and Millie had been engaged in England even before the former set out for South Africa, but their marriage was being delayed. Gandhi who had invited Henry to stay with him, intervened by speaking against the postponement of marriage for financial reasons: "If poverty is a bar, poor men can never marry." Millie arrived in Johannesburg in December 1905, and soon after her arrival, Henry and Millie tied their knot in a civil marriage in which

Gandhi was the chief witness. For Gandhi, their common religion was the religion of ethics.

When the Polaks began to live with Gandhi as married couple, the second phase of their unique relation began. Millie became increasingly familiar with Gandhi family while maintaining her differences as well. She considered Polak as an equal partner, and often had fierce arguments with Gandhi, especially on the patriarchal treatment of women in Indian society. Gandhi believed that India had given women 'a position of worship'. As Kasturba did not speak much English, Millie tried her best to improve it. However, despite her differences with Gandhi, Millie maintained her admiration and respect for him. Gandhi also looked at this relationship very uniquely, as expressed from her letter to her on 14 November 1909: "Though we differ somewhat as to the view of life, there is still a subtle sameness...The inner voice tell you one thing, the outer life shows a contradiction...And if you are true, and I am less so, then pray that I may have the light. Meanwhile, both of us are mad after truth." The root of this unique relation probably lay in Gandhi's manifold attention both in the smaller and larger aspects of life. Gandhi had an intimate relation to two sons of Polaks, Waldo and Leon by name. As regards Waldo, he was even instrumental in weaning him away in his infancy. Much later, when Polaks visited India in the summer of 1917, Gandhi was all out in his search for a suitable accommodation for them at Coonoor, an Indian hill station, with all comforts. But their stay at Coonoor became unpleasant because of the break out of the influenza epidemic. While returning home in 1918, a sentimental thought occurred in Millie's mind regarding Gandhi: "Shall we ever meet again in the flesh?" Later, she wrote a full book called *Gandhi, the Man* (London, 1931) where she explained her important role in organizing the Transvaal Indian Women's Association under Gandhi's influence. Gandhi at that time admitted to her that women would play a bigger role in the

movement, and that he himself had learnt a lot from his wife Kasturba.

As regards Henry Polak, we should remember that he was a principal fellow-seeker after truth during Gandhi's time in South Africa. He was the author of the first monograph on Gandhi before he became Mahatma (*Mr. Gandhi: A Sketch of his Life and Work*, Madras 1910). He was even arrested during Gandhi's movement in South Africa, at the end of which Gandhi-Smuts Agreement of 1914 was signed. It is important to note that Polaks extended their stay in South Africa by two more years only on Gandhi's request. It is also notable that Henry Polak, with his wife and two sons, returned to London via India in 1916. By that time, he had been recognized as an associated instrumental to end the practice of indentured labour migration in South Africa. In 1919, Polak founded the Indian Overseas Association in London to defend the rights of Indians in the British Empire.

Gandhi's relations with the Polaks underwent significant changes over the years, and one of Prabha Ravi Shankar's important findings are those differences. From the 1920s, Gandhi-Polak correspondences show increasing differences of opinion, particularly over the Indian National Congress, and Gandhian politics in India. During the anti-Rowlatt Act Satyagraha, Polak believed that Gandhi was 'too extravagant in his views' and 'too religious in his principles'. The Polaks also did not support the Non-Cooperation Movement. They were instrumental in bringing an unwilling Gandhi to attend the Round Table Conference in London in 1931, but Henry was personally unhappy with Gandhi's fast on the issue of the Communal Award in 1932. Gandhi also recognized these differences as he wrote to Polak on 17 October 1932: "I see though our mutual love remains the same, our viewpoints have become different, our way of approaching things have also become different. We have therefore to agree to differ." Most important of all, when the Jewish question became most important in Germany in the 1930s

with increasing attacks on them, Gandhi accused the Jews of having never tried to work along the lines of satyagraha. This created such a controversy as to compel Gandhi to withdraw the statement 'without any reservation', hoping that it had 'not harmed a single Jew'. However, after Gandhi's assassination in 1948, Henry had no hesitation to accept his martyr-doom, and he even linked it to murderous assault on him forty years earlier in Johannesburg, saying that from that time he "had an inner feeling that he would not die a natural death".

On a closer reading of Prabha Ravi Shankar's book, several critical questions crop up. How do individual relations develop among persons, and how do they work over long time? How do the changing socio-political situations contribute to it? Intimate relations are formed with collaboration on small as well as larger issues, but when they conflict, how does the larger vision of life work? How can mutual respects function even in disagreements? Gandhi-Polaks relationship deserves our full attention because it tries to answer some of these questions both historically, i.e., in the context of socio-political movements in South Africa and British India under conditions of Gandhian leadership in the making and in its full form, and beyond history in the realm of ethical and spiritual ideas once formed under mutual influences, and then differing on occasions over time. Prabha Ravi Shankar does not provide all the answers to these questions and responses to the impressions, particularly the intellectual and personal background of the agreements and disagreements of a life-long relationship as found in between Gandhi and the Polaks. But her detailed narrative of 'a unique relationship' has the potentiality to lead one to ponder over some of these questions and impressions, and many more.

Arun Bandopadhyay

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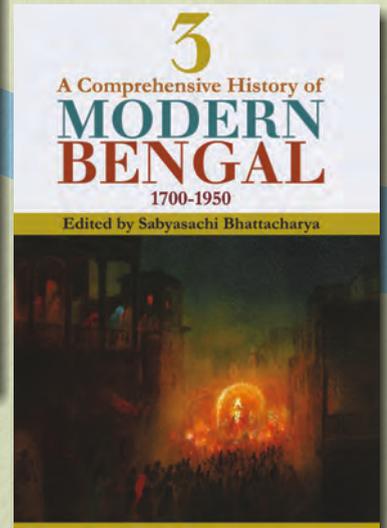
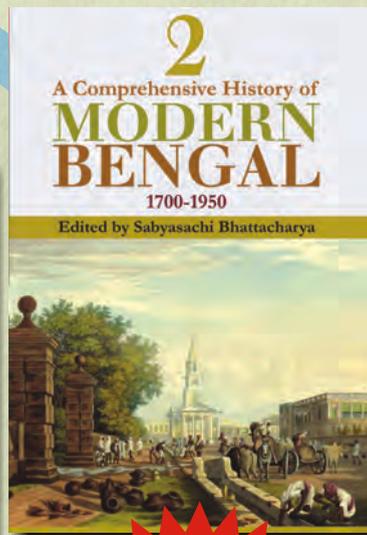
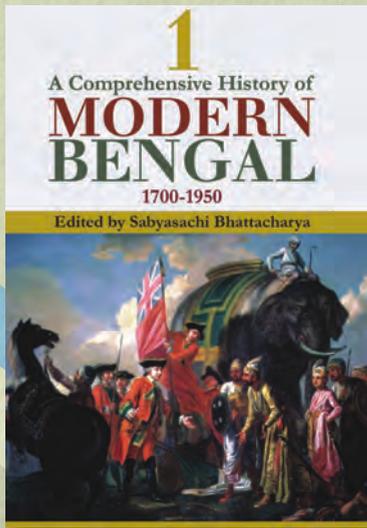
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The painting titled "Survival" is a visual metaphor capturing the recent pandemic caused by Covid-19 and the efforts made for containing the spread of Corona virus. Here, human life and community have been symbolized with trees which cross three layers represented by the colours Red, Orange and Green, denoting the hotspot, non-hotspot and safe zones depending upon the contamination caused by the virus. In the red layer, the tree branches are entangled, indicating the physical closeness leading to greater degree of contamination. The Corona virus has been shown to occupy this area on the tree branches. The different colours and sizes of the virus represent its variants on mutation. Social Distancing to break the chain of contamination have been symbolically shown with gaps in the tree trunks. The orange layer symbolizes the observance of social distancing through lockdown measures where the presence of virus diminishes but normal life is yet to arrive. The tree in the

middle without any gap in the trunk fails to survive. In the orange zone, we see birds flying denoting return of Mother Nature. From here we move on to the green layer, where normal life returns. After winning the fight against the virus, joy and happiness returns all over, represented by the sprouting leaves and blooming flowers in the green zone. The flora represents different communities but united by Humanity they hug each other, shown with overlapping tree branches. Humanity survives.