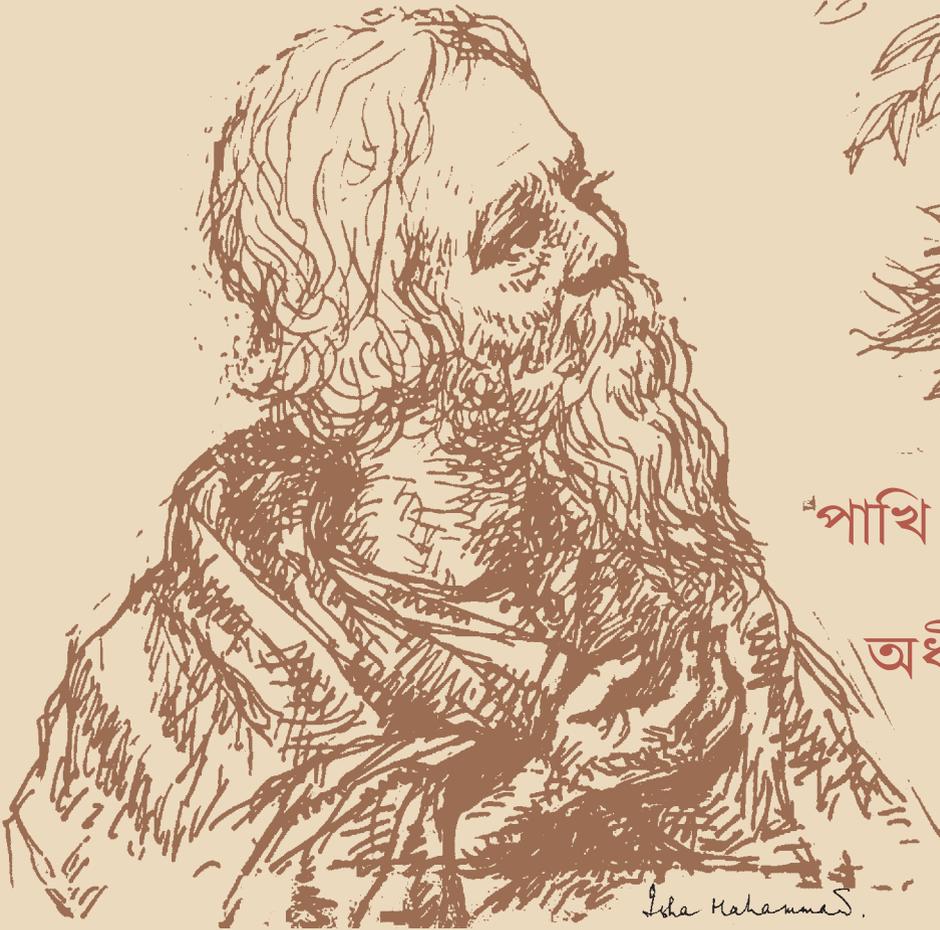




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# Monthly Bulletin

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*Isha Mohammed*



পাখি আমার  
নীড়ের পাখি  
অধীর হল  
কেন জানি—

**THE ASIATIC SOCIETY**  
(AN INSTITUTION OF NATIONAL IMPORTANCE)  
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## From the Desk of the General Secretary

### CONDOLENCE MESSAGE



#### **Dibyendu Dutta Chowdhury**

(b.14.08.1964)

With profound grief we condole the sad and sudden demise of Dibyendu Dutta Chowdhury of Conservation Section of the Society on 22.05.2020. His service to the Asiatic Society since 14.10.1985 was undoubtedly remarkable. His association with the Asiatic Society was of immense help to his colleagues and to the Society. Members of the Staff, Research Fellows and Members of the Society share heartfelt sorrow with the bereaved family and pay homage to the departed soul.

#### **Dear Members and Well-wishers,**

We are still passing through a regulated lockdown phase. We are also witnessing a quick-changing twilight scene between life and death of the glorious species in the animal kingdom i.e. the Homo sapiens, in a complete inexperienced, inhospitable environment. The fifth of June being the World Environment Day, following the announcement at Stockholm in 1972, it automatically relates us with a number of subjective and objective issues centering around the interface of Man and Nature. These issues naturally include various dimensions of human cultures vis-à-vis the visibly changing environmental contexts. A comprehensive understanding of this composite subject has, therefore, been a continuous engagement of the scholars across many formal academic disciplines belonging broadly to natural, biological and social sciences. Man and environment in a sense has overwhelmed the entire world since long. McGraw-Hill Encyclopedia of Environmental Science (1975) sums up environment as the “sum total of all conditions and influences that affect the development and life of organisms.” T.N. Khushoo in his book Environmental Priorities in India and Sustainable Development (1986) observed, “Today anyone looking for a cause, be he a politician, a civil servant, a common man or a scientist finds environmentalism a fertile field.” Friedrich Engels reminded us long back in his book Dialectics of Nature (reprinted in 1974, Progressive Publishers, Moscow) as to the need of having a judicious balance in the midst of the contradictions in both nature and human nature. An world acclaimed philosopher in India, Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (former President of India; he inaugurated the new building of the Asiatic Society in 1965) in his Address delivered at the Silver Jubilee Celebration of Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Bombay in 1961, expressed a similar feeling when he observed, “Civilization is not merely a scientific adventure and technological advance. It is the establishment of proper, sound, human relationships.” The lessons left for us by our illustrious predecessors about the mutual and reciprocal relationships of man and environment need to be viewed in the context of a humanitarian framework. This urgency is being increasingly felt specially in the backdrop of a devastated humanscape in the very recent time.

Friends, you are definitely aware by now that we are gradually entering into a new world of communication altogether. Now, most of our academic transactions and interactions are being organised through a new technology-based medium. The present lockdown condition has made us more compulsive along this track. Henceforth, this is perhaps going to be the major way of building up academic network for our immediate programmes at hand. Kindly follow them through our Monthly Bulletin published online and other occasional communications made via email etc. We seek your valuable opinions about how to improve them.

Before closing the Desk Note let me share with you about a pioneering lady, Florence Nightingale (born 12.05. 1820, Florence, Italy). Her bicentenary reminds us of her historically eminent services in the World of Nursing in the war front during Crimean War (1853-1856). In her memory the whole world observe International Nurses Day on 12th May since 1974. She also directed her dedication on the question of health in India. In today's context we are specially reminded of nursing as a great noble service for the cause of humanity, and is not simply an ordinary occupation.

We mourn the sad demise of Professor Hari Vasudevan and Professor Anisuzzaman (Bangladesh) who were associated with The Asiatic Society in many ways. We also mourn the death of hundreds and thousands of people spread over the globe due to COVID-19. We sympathise for the cause of suffering other hundreds and thousands of struggling masses who have been badly impacted due to the said factor.

Please keep well and stay safe.



## Council Meeting of The Asiatic Society held Online

The Council Meeting of the Asiatic Society took place on 29th May, 2020 at 03:00 p.m. almost about two months apart. The meeting was organised through video conferencing in the context of COVID-19, when physical gathering is strictly prohibited. 18 members of the Council including President, General Secretary, Treasurer, President of the Asiatic Society Employees' Union, four Vice Presidents, five Sectional Secretaries, two Members of the Council and three representatives of Ministry of Culture, Government of India participated in the meeting. Despite the technological adversities caused by *Amphan* the meeting was held smoothly and successfully.



Professor Isha Mahammad, President



Dr. Satyabrata Chakrabarti , General Secretary



Shri Padma Lochan Sahu, Joint Secretary,  
Ministry of Culture, Government of India



Dr. Sujit Kumar Das , Treasurer

# Cleanliness is Next to Godliness

Dr. Subir Kumar Dutta

Medical Science Secretary, The Asiatic Society



## PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT (PPE)

1. Face shield and goggles
2. Masks -
  - i. Triple layer medical mask
  - ii. N-95 Respirator mask
3. Gloves -  
Nitrile gloves are preferred over latex gloves.
4. Coverall/Gowns
5. Shoe covers
6. Head covers



## HAND WASHING

### Why is Hand Washing Important ?

Hands are responsible for the spread of 80% of common infectious diseases and hand washing remains one of the easiest and cheapest ways to prevent the spread of bacteria.

However, 1 in 5 people don't wash their hands and of those that do only 30% use soap.

So if keeping our hands clean is key in preventing illness, why don't more people do it, and do it right?

The answer may be as simple as that most people don't know how.

### Hand washing technique



A number of infectious disease can be spread from one person to another by contaminated hands. These disease include gastrointestinal infections, and respiratory infections, such as influenza. Washing your hands properly can help prevent the spread of the germs (like bacteria and viruses) that cause these disease.

#### **Hand washing health benefits -**

Hand washing with soap is the single most effective and inexpensive way to prevent diarrhoea and acute respiratory infections (ARI), as automatic behaviour performed in homes, schools, and communities worldwide. According to UNICEF, turning hand washing with soap before eating and after using the toilet into an ingrained habit can save more lives than any single vaccine or medical intervention, cutting deaths from diarrhoea by almost half and deaths from acute respiratory infections by one-quarter.

#### **Use running water**

Use running water instead of a basin of standing water that could become contaminated through use.

Contrary to popular belief however, scientific studies have shown that using warm water has no effect on reducing the microbial load on hands.

#### **Hand sanitizer (rub-in-hand disinfectant)**

A quick method of cleaning hands, contain about 60% to 70% alcohol, other disinfectants and emollients.

To rub 1.5 ml/2 pushes in both hands, front and back for 30 seconds. Not suitable for dirty and soiled hands.

A hand sanitizer or hand antiseptic is a non-water-based hand hygiene agent, began to gain popularity. Most are based on isopropyl alcohol or ethanol formulated together.

Hand sanitizers containing a minimum of 60 to 95% alcohol are efficient germ killers. Alcohol rub sanitizers kill bacteria, multi-drug resistant bacteria (MRSA) tuberculosis, and some viruses. Alcohol rub sanitizers

containing 70% alcohol kill 99.97% of the bacteria on hands 30 seconds after application.

US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend hand washing over hand sanitizer rubs, particularly when hands are visibly dirty.

#### **Liquid soap is the best**

Liquid soap is easy to use and will not spread germs from one person to another.

#### **No advantage to using antibacterial soap**

When following the hand washing steps outlined above, all soaps are equally effective at removing disease causing germs. Antibacterial soap is unnecessary and dose not offer an advantage over regular soap.

#### **Ash or mud**

Many people in low-income communities cannot afford soap and use ash or soil instead. Ash or soil may be more effective than water alone, but may be less effective than soap. Evidence quality is poor. One concern is that if the soil or ash is contaminated with microorganisms it may increase the spread of disease rather than decrease it. Like soap, as is also a disinfecting agent because in contact with water, it forms an alkaline solution. WHO recommended ash or sand as alternative to soap when soap is not available.

#### **Low-cost options when water is scare**

Various low-cost options can be made to facilitate hand washing where tap-water and/or soap is not available e.g. pouring water from a hanging jerrycan or gourd with suitable holes and/or using ash if needed in developing countries.

In situations with limited water supply (such as schools or rural areas in developing countries), there are water-conserving solutions, such as "tippy-taps" and other low-cost options. A tippy-tap is a simple technology using a jug suspended by a rope, and a foot-operated lever to pour a small amount of water over the hands and a bar of soap.

### Drying with towels or hand driers

Effective drying of the hands is an essential part of the hand hygiene process, but there is some debate over the most effective form of drying in public washrooms. A growing volume of research suggests paper towels are much more hygienic than the electric hand driers found in many washrooms.

Drying method	Effect on bacterial count
Paper towels and roll	Decrease of 24%
Hot-air dryer	Increase of 12%

### The world health organization has “five moments” for washing hand :

- Before patient care
- After environmental contact
- After exposure to blood/body fluids
- Before an aseptic task, and
- After patient care.

The addition of antiseptic chemicals to soap (“medicated” or “antimicrobial” soaps) confers killing action to a hand-washing agent. Such killing action may be desired prior to performing surgery or in settings in which antibiotic-resistant organisms are highly prevalent.

To reduce the spread of germs, it is better to wash the hands or use a hand antiseptic before and after attending a sick person.

### Developing countries

In developing countries, hand washing with soap is recognized as a cost-effective, essential tool for achieving good health, and even good nutrition. However, a lack of reliable water supply, soap or hand washing facilities in people’s homes, at schools and at the workplace make it a challenge to achieve universal hand washing behaviours.

### Take care of your hands

Hand washing is only one part of hand hygiene. Looking after your skin generally is

important, as your skin is your most effective barrier against infection. After your hands have been dried thoroughly, you can help to look after your hands if you :

- Apply a water-based absorbent hand cream three to four times a day, or more frequently if your hands are constantly in water.
- Use gloves to wash dishes to protect your hands.
- Use gloves when gardening to prevent a built-up of ingrained soil or scratches.
- Consult a doctor if a skin irritation develops or continues.

### USE OF MASKS

Govt. Of India, CDC - recommend everyone to wear cloth mask while in public places where it is difficult to maintain 6 feet distance from others this recommendation is in continuation of social distance and proper hand hygiene.

### Masks are of 3 types —

1. Home make cloth face mask
2. Surgical mask
3. N95

### Recommendations -

1. Wear cloth face mask in public places.
2. Don’t put cloth face mask on children <2 years, people with troubled breathing, people who are unconscious or unable to remove the mask on their own.
3. Use cloth face mask rather than surgical or N95 respirator.
4. Face masks should preferable be used with face shield that covers the entire front and sides of face and extends to chin below.
5. Wash Home made Cloth mask after every use. While removing be careful not to touch your eyes, nose, mouth, chin and wash hand immediately.
6. Home made face masks easily available, lower the risk of people without symptoms and stops transmission of virus through

speaking, coughing and sneezing. Before use look for tears or holes.

7. Risks of homemade face masks -
  - Provide a false sense of security 30%.
  - Don't replace or reduce the need for other types of masks.
8. Surgical masks - Protect wearer from spray, splashes and large particle droplets.

#### HAND HYGIENE AND MEDICAL GLOVE USE

- The use of gloves does not replace the need for cleaning your hands.
- Hand hygiene must be performed when appropriate regardless of the indications for glove use.
- Remove gloves to perform hand hygiene, when an indication occurs while wearing gloves.
- Discard gloves after each task and clean your hands- gloves may carry germs.
- Wear gloves only when indicated according to Standard and Contact - otherwise they become a major risk for germ transmission.

#### CORONA VIRUS, SOCIAL AND PHYSICAL DISTANCING AND SELF-QUARANTINE

Now that the new corona virus and COVID-19, the illness it causes, are spreading among communities in the United States and other countries, phrases such as "Social Distancing", "Self-Quarantine" and "flattening the curve" are showing up in the media.

#### What is social and physical distancing?

While it may be disappointing to hear that so many sports events, cruises, festivals and other gatherings are being cancelled, there is a public health reason for these measures. These cancellations help stop or slow down the spread of disease allowing the health care system to more readily care for patients over time.

Cancelling events that are likely to draw crowds is an example of social and physical distancing. Social distancing is deliberately increasing the physical space between people to avoid spreading illness. Staying at least six feet away from other people lessens your

**HOW NOT TO WEAR A MASK** TOI

**DON'T**  
Leave your chin exposed

**DON'T**  
Wear the mask below your nose

**DON'T**  
Wear your mask loosely with gaps on the sides

**DON'T**  
Push your mask under your chin to rest on your neck

**DON'T**  
Wear your mask so it covers just the tip of your nose

**DO**  
Wear your mask so it comes all the way up, close to the bridge of your nose, and all the way down under your chin. Tighten the loops or ties so it's snug around your face, without gaps

● Always wash your hands before and after wearing a mask

● Only use the ties or loops to put your mask on and pull it off

● Don't touch the front of the mask when you take it off

● For apartment dwellers, put the mask on and remove it while inside your home. Elevators and stairwells can be high-contamination areas

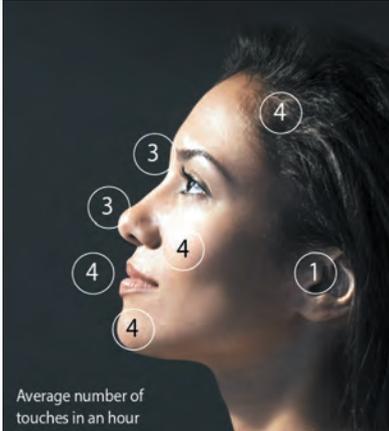
● Wash and dry your cloth mask daily and keep it in a clean, dry place

**#MASKINDIA**  
THE TIMES OF INDIA

● Masks can protect you from an infection but don't let it lull you into a false sense of security

● Continue to maintain social distancing measures and follow lockdown guidelines

Source: NYT  
Illustrations: Sajeew Kumarapuram



## YOU TOUCH YOUR FACE 23 TIMES AN HOUR

The entire point behind the exhortation to wash your hands every 20 minutes is to prevent the corona virus pathogen from getting inside your body via your face when you touch your nose, eyes or mouth. But how many times do we really touch our faces? You'll be surprised what some studies have found

### GUARD YOUR FACE AND YOU CAN PROTECT AGAINST COVID-19

No matter how frequently you wash your hands, it's often not enough to prevent passing an infection into your system. The best preventive measure is to avoid touching your face as much as possible. But not touching our face is easier said than done, because it is something we do without even being aware of it, studies show

### MEDICAL STUDENTS TOUCHED THEIR FACES 23 TIMES IN AN HOUR

A trusted source observed 26 medical students at a university in Australia only to discover they touched their faces 23 times in an hour. The 2015 study found that almost half of the face touches involved the mouth, nose, or eyes, which are the easiest pathways for viruses and bacteria to enter our bodies

### IN OFFICE ENVIRONMENT, PEOPLE TOUCH THEIR FACE 16 TIMES/HOUR

A 2008 study quantifying the hand-to-face contact rate and its potential application in predicting respiratory tract infection found that office-goers, too, are high on touching their face. It was found in a group of 10 subjects who were each observed alone in an office environment for 3 hours, that they touched their face an average of 16 times per hour

### MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS EQUALLY SUSCEPTIBLE TO TOUCHING THE FACE

In 2014, group of medical professionals, who should know better, were found to touch their face an average of 19 times in a two-hour period while also being inconsistent about observing proper hand hygiene

Source: [www.ajicjournal.org](http://www.ajicjournal.org), media reports

## THE GLOVE PYRAMID - TO AID DECISION MAKING ON WHEN TO WEAR (AND NOT WEAR) GLOVES

Gloves must be worn according to STANDARD and CONTACT PRECAUTIONS. Hand hygiene should be performed when appropriate regardless of indications for glove use.

### 1. STERILE GLOVES INDICATED

Any surgical procedure.

### 2. EXAMINATION GLOVES INDICATED IN CLINICAL SITUATIONS

Potential for touching blood, body fluids, secretions.

**3. DIRECT PATIENT EXPOSURE:** Contact with blood; contact with Mucous membrane and with non-intact skin; potential presence of Highly infectious and dangerous organism; epidemic or emergency situations.

**DIRECT PATIENT EXPOSURE:** Taking blood pressure, temperature and pulse; performing SC and IM injections; bathing and dressing the patient; transporting patient; caring for eyes and ears (without secretions).

**4. INDIRECT PATIENT EXPOSURE:** Emptying emesis basins; handling/cleaning Instrument; handling waste; cleaning up spills of body fluids.

**INDIRECT PATIENT EXPOSURE :** Using the telephone; writing in the patient chart; giving oral medications; distributing or collecting patient dietary trays; removing and replacing linen for patient bed; placing non-invasive ventilation equipment and oxygen cannula; moving patient furniture.

**GLOVES NOT INDICATED (except for CONTACT precautions)** No potential for exposure to blood or body fluids, or contaminated environment

chances your chances of catching COVID-19.

Other examples of social and physical distancing that allow you to avoid larger crowds or crowded spaces are :

- Working from home instead of at the office.
- Closing schools or switching to online classes.
- Visiting loved ones by electronic devices instead of in person.
- Cancelling or postponing conferences and large meetings.

### What is self-quarantine ?

People who have been exposed to the new corona virus and who are at risk for coming down with COVID-19 might practice self-quarantine. Health experts recommend that self-quarantine lasts 14 days. Two weeks provides enough time for them to know whether or not they will become ill and be contagious to other people.

### Self-quarantine involves :

- Using standard hygiene and washing hands frequently.
- Not sharing things like towels and utensils.
- Staying at home.
- Not having visitors.
- Staying at least 6 feet away from other people in your household.

Once your quarantine period has ended, if you do not have symptoms, follow your doctor's instructions on how to return to your normal routine.

### What is isolation ?

For people who are confirmed to have COVID-19, isolation is appropriate. Isolation is

a health care term that means keeping people who are infected with a contagious illness away from those who are not infected. Isolation can take place at home or at a hospital or care facility. Special personal protective equipment will be used to care for these patients in health care settings..

### TIPS FOR PREVENTION

- Wash your hands frequently and carefully
- Avoid touching your face
- Stop shaking hands and hugging people - for now
- Don't share personal items
- Cover your mouth and nose when you cough and sneeze
- Clean and disinfect surfaces
- Take social distancing seriously
- Do not gather in groups
- Avoid eating or drinking in public places
- Wash fresh groceries
- Wear a (homemade) mask
- Self-quarantine if sick
- Until you get through this, count on our support
- Why are these measures so important?
- You may not have symptoms
- You can still spread the virus
- It has a longer incubation time
- You may get sicker, faster
- It can stay alive in the air
- You may be very contagious
- Your nose and mouth are more susceptible
- It may travel through the body faster

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Times of India  
Dr. Samudra Basu

## Florence Nightingale and Her Theory of Sanitation

**Dr. Sankar Kumar Nath**

Consultant Oncologist and Member of the Academic Committee of the Asiatic Society

Florence Nightingale is the pioneering figure in nursing, healthcare, hygiene and sanitation of the human society at large internationally acclaimed.

Nightingale was born on 12 May, 1820 in Italy. Since childhood she showed great interest in nursing and caring the sick people and later on took the decision to go for the profession of nursing, which was at that time considered as the lowest form of profession.

Ultimately she became a nurse and dedicated her life in the healthcare of the British Military System. She always obeyed and honoured the scientific approaches in keeping the good health of the society and its constituents and therefore stressed always in maintaining the individual hygiene and prevention of diseases in general. In this way her philosophical aptitude helped improve the sanitary environment of the hospitals then.

Nightingale will be remembered forever for her environmental theory of hygiene and sanitation which constituted ten essential points :

1. Ventilation and Warming
2. Light
3. Noises to minimize
4. Health of the houses, hospitals
5. Bed and bedding
6. Variety
7. Personal cleanliness
8. Food and water
9. Offering hopes
10. Observation and recording

These were the fundamental elements as she believed, which, if maintained in a balanced way, would cure all the diseases.



*Artist: Sankar Kumar Nath*

In fact, to Nightingale, the Crimean War became the starting inspiration of her Hygiene Movement in 1853. She together with at least forty trained nurses were then working in the front of the war to nurse the wounded soldiers. She found that nearly 4000 death occurred among the army people, but to her utter surprise she noticed, only 10% had died due to severe injury and the rest due to various infections and other diseases like typhoid, typhus, cholera, scurvy and dysentery.

After applying her hygiene theory and

improvements of sanitation, Nightingale could be able to reduce the death rate from 42% to 2%. For example, she introduced much needed hand-washing which gave a marvellous result. In the perspective of her unique works during Crimean War, poet Wadsworth Longfellow of England called her as "Lady with a Lamp" In his poem in 1857. Her biographer Edward Cook (1913) mentioned it as below :

"And Longfellow in the following year (1857), made a poem of it all, one of the most widely known poems, I suppose, that have ever been written :-

Lo ! in that hour of misery  
A lady with a lamp I see  
    Pass through the glimmering gloom,  
    And flit from room to room.  
And slow, as in a dream of bliss,  
The speechless sufferer turns to kiss  
    Her shadow, as it falls  
    Upon the darkening walls."

She set up a prestigious and much useful "Nightingale Training School" at St. Thomas' Hospital on 9 July, 1860.

Nightingale even thought much about Indian Sanitary System and was worried regarding the ill-health of Indian Army. For that matter, her book on "The Sanitary State of the Army in India" was published in 1863 and in 1864, she wrote another booklet "How People may Live and not Die in India". Again in 1874, she wrote one more pamphlet about India on Sanitary System, entitled "Life and Death in India".

Florence Nightingale died on 13 August, 1910 in London.

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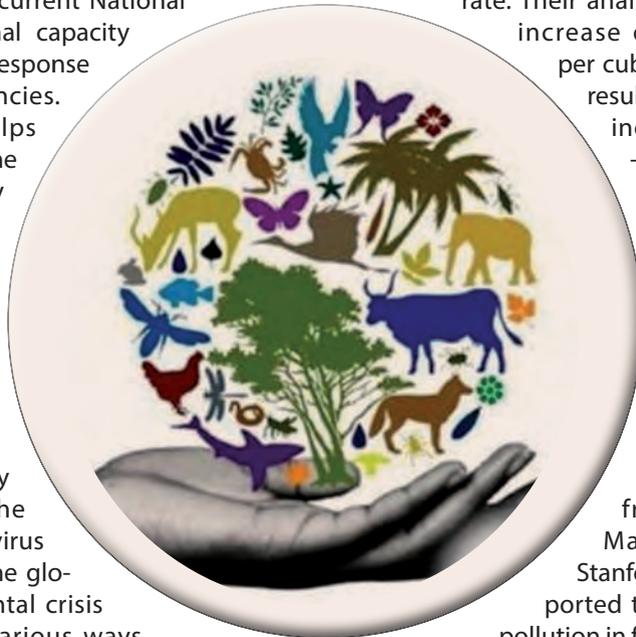
Artist: Sneha Agarwal, The Asiatic Society

## COVID -19 and Environmental Health

Asok Kanti Sanyal

Biological Science Secretary, The Asiatic Society

The tragic coronavirus pandemic has now greatly shaken the whole world despite its unprecedented and devastating dynamic, the crisis generated clearly shows crucial insights to the current National and International capacity and system of response to the emergencies. This clearly helps us to measure the system's ability to tackle more long-term issues, particularly the global environmental crisis. At the first sight these two things may seem very separate but the current coronavirus outbreak and the global environmental crisis are linked in various ways. Somebodies claim that the relation between the two is antagonistic, but their intricate dependency was pointed by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) in March, 2020. It was mentioned in their report that environmental degradation has a relation with the origin of COVID -19. It claimed that such an outbreak is related to degradation of ecosystem and wildlife threats. These cause the Zoonotic diseases i.e. transmission of viruses and diseases from wild species to human.



A research team at the Harvard TH Chan School of Public Health in Boston stated that there was a direct relation between polluted environment and the COVID -19 death rate. Their analysis indicated an increase of 1 microgram per cubic meter of  $PM_{2.5}$  resulted to 15 percent increase of COVID -19 death rate. Another study in Italy showed that days of exposure exceeding the limits of  $PM_{10}$  in some cities was related to the number of admission from COVID -19. Marshall Bruke of Stanford University reported that reduction of pollution in few cities of China may have saved the lives of 4000 children under 5 and 73,000 adults over 70. In another study in China it was found that the man breathed in an environment having higher concentration of  $PM_{10}$  over many years, developed chances of dying from the virus 15 percent higher.

It is agreed that the environmental crisis specially the air pollution is responsible to a greater extent in coronavirus pandemic. The World Health Organisation (WHO) estimated that about 4.2 million die every year

worldwide from ailments caused by air pollution. An International Agency mentioned in one of their reports of 2018 that out of ten most air polluted cities in the world eight are in India. Kolkata is in the rank of 23rd among about 4000 cities in the world. Another fact of concern that Kolkata is in fourth position in respect of increase of pollution out of 25 major polluted countries. It was also mentioned in the report that vehicles in Kolkata are the major source of air pollution. The first and second Biennial Update Reports carrying details of emissions show that the energy sector continued to be the largest contributor to the Green House Gas (GHG) emissions (71 percent of total emission in 2010 and 73 percent of total emission in 2014). India is fighting with the alarming air pollution that claims about 1.2 million deaths every year. India's climate target indicates use of 40 percent non-fossil fuels in the power sector by 2030. To satisfy the target, the India government aims to install 175 GW of renewable capacity by 2020. But the country has to double the present capacity to attend the commitment.

It is amazing to note that when India and most of the countries have been failing to combat the air pollution - an important factor for coronavirus outbreak, the 'Corona' related lockdown has made a significant drop in concentration of air pollutants resulting relatively pure air having minimum level of carbon and pollutants like PM<sub>2.5</sub>, PM<sub>10</sub>, Nitrogen dioxide (NO<sub>2</sub>) and Sulphur dioxide (SO<sub>2</sub>). More than three billion people in almost 70 countries and territories have implemented lockdown and quarantine to slow down the spread of the virus. As a result, some unexpected and unprecedented effects on the environment have been seen throughout the world.

With shuttered factories and business, eliminated traffic congestion on the road and in the sky and paused construction projects and non - essential industry and sharp drop in demand for electricity, our natural environment is recovering shortly.

Clean blue skies with flying birds over the world's megacities have become a visible mark of the pandemic. In India, a country having high concentration of pollution and emissions, people are happy to see the Himalayas for the first time from where they live. With lockdown the nature has been changed with change of water parameters in parts of rivers which were otherwise polluted are cleaner than they have been earlier. Scientists are expecting the diversity of plankton, the pillar of food chain in the ecosystem, may alter with the effect of this outbreak. Many animals have returned to their lost territory. Different birds are seen in groups hopping around the bush and trees. Dr. Kalyan Rudra, Chairman, West Bengal Pollution Control Board recorded the sightings of varieties of bird species at Dum Dum Park area, Kolkata, which were hardly noticed before this lockdown. Olive Ridley sea turtle's annual arrival at the sea coast of Odisha became vulnerable for the last few years but so far over 70,000 endangered turtles have arrived to Odisha's Rushikulya hatchery this year. In another nesting site at Gahirmatha rookery, Odisha nearly 2 crore Olive Ridley hatchlings have emerged this year, a rare incident. Another interesting observation, as soon as human emptied the streets animals took over. Not only in India in other countries animals have truly come out of the wild. In Uttarakhand three sambar deer were found walking on the streets, a nilgai was found strolling in Noida, an elephant was captured in Dehradun, a small Indian civet was seen in Kerala's Kozhikode, a bison passed through a market place in Karnataka, peacocks danced on the streets in Mumbai and a leopard reached near an Air Force Base at Patna in Bihar.

A report published by the Specialist Outlet Carbon Brief mentioned drop of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in China and 5 - 10 percent decrease of air pollutants in New York. In India fall of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions for the first time in four decades may be due to coronavirus. The private and public transportation and aviation, the major

contributors of CO<sub>2</sub>, emit 72% and 11% of GHG emission respectively. According to the IQAir Air Visual's 2020 World Air Quality Report drastic fall of average concentration of PM 2.5 during the period from march 23 - April 13, 2020 with that of the same period in 2019 (Table 1).

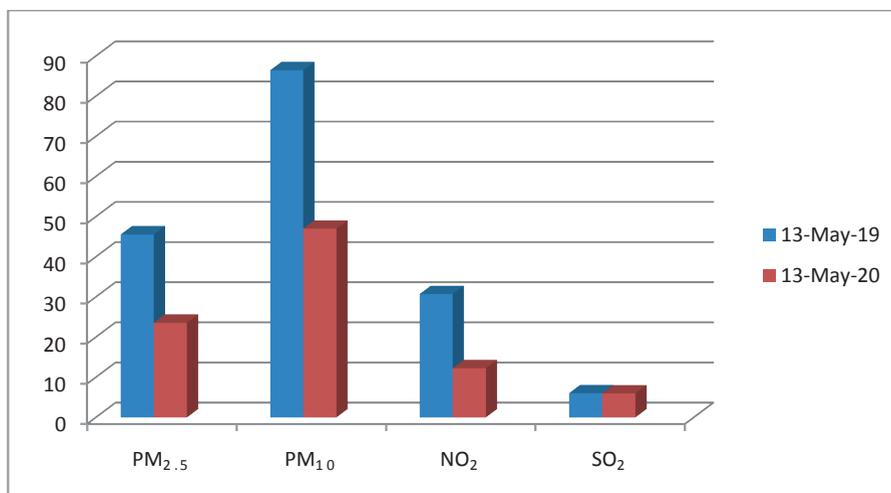
Table 1. Average concentration of PM<sub>2.5</sub> in 2020 compared to 2019

Megacities	Average PM <sub>2.5</sub> reduction in 2020 compared to 2019
Delhi	-60%
London	-9%
Los Angeles	-31%
Madrid	-11%
Mumbai	-34%
New York	-25%
Rome, Italy	+30%
Sao Paulo	-32%
Seoul	-54%
Wuhan	-44%

Source: IQAir Air Visual 2020

The Geophysical Research Letters reported in May, 2020 that PM<sub>2.5</sub> dropped by 35 percent in northern China. Jenny Stavrakou, an atmospheric scientist in Brussels commented in one of his papers that after lockdown was imposed, such a significant decrease in emissions is unprecedented and not recorded since 1990s when monitoring of air quality from satellites started. American Geophysical Union on May 11, 2020 reported drastic reduction of two major air pollutants since lockdown began in response to COVID-19 pandemic. Their research also showed that in spite of decrease of pollution level ground level ozone was increased as secondary pollutant in China. Several other researchers also noted that drop in NO<sub>2</sub> pollution caused an increase in surface ozone levels in China. Ozone is harmful to man at ground level causing pulmonary and heart diseases. An atmospheric scientist Guy Brasseur at the Max Planck Institute, Germany mentioned that although air quality has largely improved, surface ozone can still be a problem. A report based on satellite measurements of air quality indicated the changes in NO<sub>2</sub> pollution at 40%

Figure 1. Ambient air quality of Kolkata for 2019 and 2020



Source : WBPCB ambient air quality report, Kolkata 2019 & 2020

over Chinese cities and by 20-38 percent over Western Europe and the United States during 2020 lockdown compared to the same period in 2019. A study conducted in China during lockdown period observed 60% decrease of NO<sub>2</sub> and also commented that surface ozone increase may be due to weather conditions and other factors. China emits over 50 percent of all NO<sub>2</sub> in Asia. It was estimated that decrease of each tonne of NO<sub>2</sub> emission equivalent of withdrawing of 62 cars per year from the road. So 10% reduction of NO<sub>2</sub> emission is equivalent to 48,000 cars off the road. The picture was also very encouraging in UK where after March 23 when lockdown was imposed NO<sub>2</sub> pollution in some cities dropped by as much as 60 percent. NASA revealed that NO<sub>2</sub> pollution over New York and other major areas in northeast USA was 30 percent lower in March, 2020 compared to the monthly average for 2015 - 2019. Interestingly in Iran where there was no complete lockdown until late March, NO<sub>2</sub> pollution did not decrease. This may be a clear indication of impact of lockdown on change of air quality.

India is currently under the biggest lockdown with around 130 crore people to stay home in view of the virus outbreak. This has destroyed lives, livelihoods and the normal functioning of society but in turn has gifted a clear blue sky and more clean breathable air. The national capital Delhi has shown around 49 percent reduction in pollution.

The NO<sub>2</sub> has decreased by 87.9 percent. A recent study conducted by the researchers in IIT, Delhi reported 43, 31, 10 and 18 percent decrease in PM<sub>2.5</sub>, PM<sub>10</sub>, CO and NO<sub>2</sub> level during the lockdown period. The summary report of air quality of Kolkata for May, 13, 2019 and 2020 prepared by the West Bengal Pollution Control Board showed a drastic fall of concentration of four major air pollutants (Figure 1).

The improvements in air quality may not be sustained after the emission started but it would be an eye opener to all and an excellent message to the government and the policy makers what would be the air quality in the future and rational measures to be adopted. One of the measures for immediate improvement of air quality would be in phasing down of car use and replaced with electrically powered mass transit. The recent improvements in air quality can be made permanent if fossil fuel is replaced with renewable energy and other low carbon sources.

The pandemic has also given us the lesson that development at the cost of environment ultimately becomes futile and make the life miserable. Lastly I may quote from Buddha's sermon "just as a snake shed its skin we must shed our past over and over again". This enlightens us to expiate our past disgraceful act towards environment and pay respect to her for sustainable life and livelihood for the present and future generations.

## Locating Epidemics at Environmental Changes: Revisiting Malarial Fever in British India

**Arabinda Samanta**

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Malarial fever had been a chronic killer in British India throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth century. It was, however, not an unknown ailment in pre-modern India. Indians were, in fact, acquainted with malaria ever since the Vedic days. People did suffer from fever, and village kavirajas used to administer palliative drugs. Unable to beat it with medicines they had at their disposal, they eventually learnt to live with it, for it rarely posed a threat to the community. But India under the British rule offers a different picture altogether. It experienced a spate of epidemic malaria, afflicting a greater number of people on a larger geographical scale. Originating sometime in the 1820s, it travelled far and wide, from Amritsar to Andaman, from Assam to Bombay. Worse still, it lingered longer over more than a century. But the moot question is why did it break out at a time when it did? Was it a mere coincidence, or was there a causal link between the incidence of epidemic malaria and the phenomenon of colonial penetration in India?

Quite predictively, its etiological

intelligence is sharply divided. Contemporary commentators culled information from almost similar accounts but arrived at different concluding locations. Received wisdom

on the subject in recent times however tells us that there is huge scope for alternative imaginations about its causation. Apart from the well-known causal attributes, it seems that the function of environment has not been given adequate attention. Nineteenth-century British commercial and political penetration in India and the subsequent creation of colonial infrastructures broke through the geographical barriers and spatial distance. Roads, railways, system of labour migration, military

recruitment and civilian administration enhanced internal mobility of people. It stirred up a hitherto endemic property of a disease and disseminated it in such a scale that the endemic property turned out to be an epidemic reality. Colonial labour recruitment policies played havoc with the health of the workers and the communities from which they were drawn. Overcrowded and insanitary conditions around homestead, in



Sir Ronald Ross

mine compounds and on plantation, created microenvironment favourable for mosquito breeding and spreading malaria among the inhabitants. The expansion of irrigation canals and the construction of railway embankment created favourable habitats for malaria-carrying mosquitoes. This short note argues that the causes of malaria epidemic in India were much enmeshed in the very nature of colonial economy and in the environmental changes brought about under the colonial conditions.

#### Embankment and Obstructed Drainage:

We have huge records to show that pools and swamps were closely associated with railway constructions and embankments along the river lines all over India. It is difficult to deny that the proliferation of malarial fever was largely owing to deficient sanitary arrangements during the aggregation of labour for embankment work. As early as 1917, W. W. Clemesha, Sanitary Commissioner with the Government of India, admitted two important things. First, not infrequently, he argued, railway authorities incurred unnecessary expenditure by not taking expert advice and making adequate sanitary arrangements for the protection of their working staff in unhealthy regions. An unnecessarily large number of employees died as a result and desertion of the labour force followed. Second, alterations in the natural conditions of a locality caused by the construction of borrow pits, and the blocking of drainage with embankments, sometimes occasioned the ill health of the rural population.<sup>1</sup> There could be no doubt that in certain cases in India, the advent of a railway had resulted in a marked deterioration in the health of the community it served. It was fairly certain, he argued, that the extraordinary epidemic of malaria, which occurred in the Lower Bengal, was

1 W.W. Clemesha, 'Notes on the Influence of Railway Construction on Malaria', in *Records of Malaria Survey of India*, vol.1, no. 2, p. 163, 1917

'due to the construction and opening of the railway between Calcutta and Burdwan'.<sup>2</sup>

It appears that as early as the 1840s, the British medical officers and engineers had an impression that malaria diffused with works of economic development. The first systematic enquiry appears to have been conducted by a canal committee appointed in the mid-1840s to explore the causes of the spread of unhealthy conditions around the Delhi and Jumna canal works.<sup>3</sup> T. E. Dempster, a member of the Canal Committee, cited the 'astonishing difference' between the numbers of fever cases belonging to the 'irrigated and un-irrigated parts' of the region of the West Jumna canal.<sup>4</sup> The Canal Committee found that the spread of malaria was intimately, connected with 'this canal construction in a remarkable degree'. They discovered two remarkable local conditions common to all tracts irrigated from the existing canals where spleen disease prevailed to a great extent, viz., obstructed drainage, and a stiff retentive soil. They observed that where soil condition and drainage were favourable, malaria had not taken hold. In fact, the East Jumna canal illustrated the best and the worst results of canal irrigation. In the northern and southern sectors of the East Jumna Canal where the soil was light and the drainage perfect, the committee found, 'all the blessing of a canal'.<sup>5</sup> But in the central division where drainage had been greatly obstructed and the soil was stiff and clayey, the effect on health was exactly the opposite.

2 Ibid. p.164

3 Ira Klein, 'Malaria and Mortality in Bengal, 1840 - 1921', *Indian Economic and Social History Review*. Vol. IX, no. 2, June 1972. p.139.

4 *Records of the Malaria Survey of India*, vol.1, no.2, March 1930. p.70.

5 *Records of the Malaria Survey of India*, vol.1, no 2, March 1930. p.45.

### River decay and siltation:

Closely connected with the problem of embankment and obstructed drainage, were the facts of siltation and river decay. This stemmed partly from long-term evolution of the environment, and largely from the impact of the development policy of the government. Evidence comes in abundance to confirm the progressively decaying environmental conditions especially in Bengal. Reporting in January 1863, Dr. Elliot complained that the greatest suffering had been the villagers on the banks of stagnant rivers filled with vegetation and weeds.<sup>6</sup> While seeking to analyze the predisposing causes of the fever in Nadia and Burdwan division, he spoke of cultivation of bamboos and plantains in close proximity to houses. The houses, he argued, were over-crowded owing to increase of population. Huts were huddled together in villages obstructing streets and drains. The best and the largest tanks, he complained, were gradually silting up, while trees often covered the smaller ones. Decades later, Radhakamal Mukherjee explained the larger process of this 'changing face of Bengal' in 1937 with reference to on the one hand such long-term environmental factors as the changing courses of river Ganga traced since the sixteenth century, later supplemented by earthquake and other natural factors in the eighteenth century, and, on the other hand, the changes associated with man-made innovation initiated in the colonial era, particularly since the nineteenth century.<sup>7</sup>

### Canal Irrigation:

Incidence of malaria in British India was highest in areas waterlogged naturally or

- 6 Proceedings of the Government of Bengal, March 1863, Gen. Dept., no. 108. pp. 63-64. West Bengal State Archive.
- 7 Radhakamal Mukherjee, *The Changing Face of Bengal: A Study in Riverine Economy*, Calcutta: University of Calcutta, revised edition with an Introduction of Arun Bandopadhyay, 2009; the original edition was dated 1938.

as a result of irrigation. In her study of the environmental costs of irrigations in India, Elizabeth Whitcombe argued that malaria was the concomitant result of colonial irrigation projects to increase commercial agriculture. Irrigation canals led to waterlogging and created conditions conducive to mosquito breeding.<sup>8</sup> From 1890-09, Whitcombe argues, vital statistics were collected annually for villages of the four southern divisions of the Western Jumna Canal, where fever mortality was registered as highest in Punjab, the province with the highest fever mortality in British India. The story of poor drainage, waterlogging, salinity and malaria so familiar from the Jumna system was replicated in the Ganges Canal during the 1860s and 1870s, in Bari Doab Canal in the 1860s and again in the 1920s, and in Sukkur Barrage in the 1920s and the 1930s. Covell predicted an increase in the rate of endemic malaria in the wake of the Sukkur scheme, and his prediction was confirmed.<sup>9</sup>

### Deforestation and Reclamation of Swamps:

A similar connection can be noticed between malaria and deforestation in Berar, a phenomenon well explicated by Laxman D. Satya.<sup>10</sup> All the forests in the prime teak forest region of the Melghat taluka, Satya argues, were taken over by the colonial state and declared as government reserve.

- 8 Elizabeth Whitcombe, 'The Environmental Costs of Irrigation in British India: Waterlogging, Salinity, Malaria', in David Arnold and Ramchandra Guha eds., *Nature, Culture, Imperialism: Essays on the Environmental History of South Asia*, Delhi, Oxford University Press, 1998, Chapter VIII.
- 9 G. Covell, 'Malaria and Irrigation in India', *Journal of the Malaria Institute of India*, vol. VI, 1946, p.404
- 10 Laxman D. Satya, *Medicine, Disease and Ecology in Colonial India: The Deccan Plateau in the Nineteenth Century*, Delhi, Manohar, 2009, pp. 107-08

An entire colonial infrastructure was built on deforestation, leaving the Melghat country with barren hills, scrub jungle and stony ground. Water stagnated in ditches where innumerable species of trees once stood, creating a breeding ground for mosquitoes. From their breeding ground in the forest, the mosquitoes caused havoc among forest dwellers and the agricultural populations in the Purna valley below the hills. This region was the worst affected by malarial fever during the nineteenth century.

It is well known that swampy low-lying locality ceases to be unhealthy when temporarily submerged. In the olden days, flooding was often deliberately applied both in Italy and Holland for ameliorating malaria with the most excellent results.<sup>11</sup> But while the flooding of swamps had been resorted to for checking malaria, the partial removal of water from a marshy area had always been regarded as a dangerous exercise, calculated to produce a serious intensification of the disease. This belief is strengthened by the numerous instances in India in which the reclamation of swamps had led to severe outbreak of malaria.<sup>12</sup> Bentley recorded the incidence of such outbreaks in connection with the construction of the Colaba Causeway (1824-41), various reclamation schemes carried out in 1861-66, and in the later times the construction of the water works at Malabar Hills and Bhandarware Hill and of the Alexander Docks and Hughes Dry Dock.<sup>13</sup>

#### Conclusion:

Nineteenth-century medical wisdom correctly identified climatic determinants of malaria: high temperature in

association with the rains. It was traditionally believed that the cause of malaria must be noxious exhalations from the scorched earth saturated by rain. This mistaken notion was dispelled by the discovery of the biological agents, first, the parasite by Laveran in 1888, and then, the vector, the female anopheline mosquito as assumed by Patrick Manson in 1896. Ronald Ross, who demonstrated the agent and the mode of transmission, confirmed all these assumptions experimentally in 1899. By the beginning of the twentieth century, S.R. Christophers and C.A. Gill in Punjab provided the correlation with specific environmental factors.<sup>14</sup> They argued that the critical climatic factor was not rainfall as such in association with maximal annual temperatures, nor pooling, nor soil-saturation, but atmospheric humidity.<sup>15</sup> In fact, not only malaria, all other epidemic diseases in British India can well be located mostly in the dysfunctional environment caused by colonial intervention.

- 11 Angelo Celli, *Malaria in Italy during 1910*, Rome, 1911
- 12 Gordon Covell, *Malaria in Bombay*, Bombay, 1928. p.13
- 13 C.A. Bentley, 'Some Economic Aspects of Bengal Malaria', *Indian Medical Gazette*, vol. LVII, September 1922, p. 323

- 14 S.R. Christophers, 'Malaria in Punjab', *Scientific Memoirs by the Officers of the Medical and Sanitary Departments of the Government of India*, NS, 46, 1911; C.A. Gill, *The Seasonal Periodicity of malaria and the Mechanism of the Epidemic Wave*, London, 1938.
- 15 Elizabeth Whitcombe, *op.cit.* p. 249

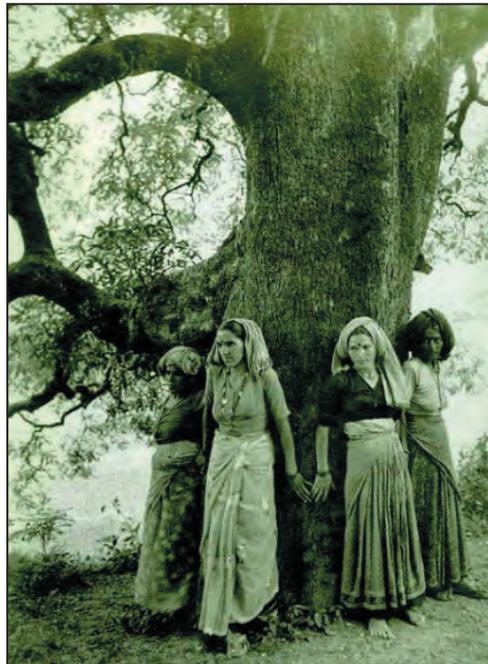
## Varied Zones, Various Histories, One Globe

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The theme of the world environment day in this year 2020 is biodiversity. Can we present an outline of the diversified environmental histories that developed around

the globe in this context? Environment is undoubtedly a global phenomenon. It has no national frontier. However, when historians have tried to explore environment they certainly have been driven by some national dimensions. Thus we have seen the development of environmental history in different parts of the world with some unique characteristics which have some area-specific features. But it does not mean that this feature overshadows the global



perspective of environment. Thus we notice the development of a combine exploration of both global and local which may be coined as 'glocal'. There are similarities and dissimilarities in the process of development of environmental history in different parts of the globe, subject to this 'glocal' phenomenon. This journey shows the 'glocal' phenomenon because the history of the environmental studies indicates that the investigation on

the local environmental themes cannot be made without having the global perspective.

We may mention the development of environmental history as a new trend in

historical research in different countries. As Richard White has pointed out in his paper, titled *American Environmental History: the Development of a New Field*<sup>1</sup> that in the United States, environmental history emerged as a distinct field only in nineteen seventies, in the wake of modern environmental movement. David Arnold and Ramachandra Guha remarked 'While varying widely in their spatial focus, time-frame and mode of analysis, the vast majority of books and articles on Ameri-

can environmental history cluster around two overarching themes: (i) a documentation and analysis of the eco-cultural consequences of the two master processes of American history, namely European colonization and the development of capitalism; and (ii) a celebration of those individuals and organizations that have, however unsuccessfully, challenged the environmental destruction unleashed by colonialism and capitalism.'<sup>2</sup>

In France, the ecological approach to history had been fostered by an intimate relationship between history and geography in French intellectual life and an application of the fundamental importance of environmental factors to understand the agrarian society<sup>3</sup> as pointed out by the *Annal* historians Ferdinand Braudel and Emmanuel Bernard Le Roy Ladurie.

In India, the environmental history had been developed mainly in the nineteen eighties with the protest movements for people's rights on common property, i.e. land, forest and water. It has been preceded by environmental communication. A serious attempt towards historicising environment in India had been made by Madhav Gadgil and Ramachandra Guha with their book *This Fissured Land: An Ecological History of India*<sup>4</sup>. That book was critically appreciated by Arun Bandyopadhyay in his essay *Towards an understanding of Environmental History of India*<sup>5</sup>. That was followed by the publication of another important book, David Arnold & Ramachandra Guha edited, *Nature, Culture, Imperialism: Essays on the Environmental History of South Asia*,<sup>6</sup>. That book tried to focus on various aspects of environment that include forests, pastoralists, cultivations, water system- dam-irrigation etc. It tried to investigate the problem of water-logging as a cause of diseases like malaria. Even that book touched the horizon of air as it studied air pollution caused by smoke. It was succeeded by another significant addition to the domain of environmental history of India, i.e. Richard Grove, Vinita Damodaran and Satpal Sangwan edited *Nature and the Orient: The Environmental History of South and Southeast Asia*<sup>7</sup>. The book, *Nature and the Orient*, tried to discuss diverse aspects of the environmental history of South and Southeast Asia, from a variety of perspectives. The arena of environmental history was addressed by experts from the fields of history, history of science, archaeology, geography and environmental studies in that book. Whether the time span under review was concerned it covered a big time

span starting from 50,000 BC to the nineteen nineties. Spanning a geographical region from Peshawar on the North-West Frontier to the Maluku Islands in eastern Indonesia, that book told the story of the highly complex relationship between people and their environment. The book threw light on diversified subjects like the latest findings in settlement archaeology, the history of deforestation, climate change, the history of fishing, hunting, colonial science and forest management, indigenous plant knowledge, the history of famine, the impact of coalmining and the tragic story of India's tribal communities.

As the environmental history of India was expanding, a need for reading the themes of the environmental history of India was naturally developed. Thus the first two decades of the twenty-first century witnessed the publication of two important readers in this context. In 2007, under the editorship of Mahesh Rangarajan, *Environmental Issues in India: A Reader*<sup>8</sup> was published. It tried to read the issue in five sub-sections namely, *Pre-colonial India, Colonial India, Independent India's Environment, Movements & Alternatives and Global Issues*.

Mahesh continued his search to read the environmental history of the country in a different way with a later publication namely *India's Environmental History – Colonialism, Modernity and the Nation: A Reader*<sup>9</sup>. It was a two-volume reader edited by Mahesh Rangarajan and K. Sivaramakrishnan.

Thus we notice the development of multi-faceted themes within the domain of environmental history. The themes covered by the historians written in *Bangla* language are same as of the environmental historians' writings in English. Following the sub-themes, suggested by Rangarajan we may briefly mention the themes which had been covered by the practicing historians on environment in *Bangla*. The environmental communication in *Bangla* was the forerunner of the study of environmental history in *Bangla*. The study of environmental communication shows

international and environmental news of other regions of India gained importance in *Bangla* environmental magazines of Kolkata<sup>10</sup>. The international and national concern for environment was developed in or after the *United Nations Conference on the Human Environment*, held at Stockholm in 1972 as evident in the publications of a number of environmental magazines in *Bangla* in nineteen seventies<sup>11</sup>. However the history-writing on environmental issues was not started.

On the other hand, some environmental movements had begun in some places of India under the initiative of the common people basically on the issue of their own livelihood. Basically, the Indian state, though theoretically emphasized on the importance of environmental issues, in practice it had not done so. According to Madhav Gadgil and Ramchandra Guha Indian state for a long time was not interested to protect the environment which resulted several protests in India. While the forest water and the natural resources in India was diverted to produce energy and commodities for the rich, the poor was made to bear the social, environmental costs of the economic development. This initiated the communication for environment in India. They have also mentioned that it was not the political parties but the activists outside party system in India were interested in communicating environment in India and activists like Sunderlal Bahuguna, Baba Amte started writing on environment. To them this process was developed from the mid-seventies.<sup>12</sup>

The study of environmental history was developed following the environmental movements that took place in India during nineteen seventies and eighties namely, *Chipko movement*, *Silent Valley movement*, *Save Narmada movement* etc. Ramchandra Guha and Madhav Gadgil have mentioned that the environmental communication is the result of the environmental activism. To them unlike the radio and television, press is not a state controlled media in India. Print media

played an important role in communicating issue based environmental activism and publicising the nature based conflicts in India (this was the opinion of the authors before the coming of private radio channels in India).<sup>13</sup>

The researches related to environment first came out in *Bangla* in the context of the history of public health. From the periphery related to public health, the environmental history in *Bangla* entered into a central place with exploring the environmental thought of the Britishers in colonial perspective. That was followed by probing the formative forest researches in colonial India. It was questioned whether that research was aimed at getting knowledge or was it a need for the empire?<sup>14</sup>

In the perspective of colonial India, Arun Bandopadhyay tried to evaluate the potential of environmental history as a separate field of study. He explored the multi-dimensional interactive relationship between environmental history and cultural history. There his line of discussion was developed in three ways. First, he discussed on different perspectives of environmental history, where he used the term environment both as physical and human concept. Secondly, Arun Bandopadhyay elaborated the relationship between the development of capitalism and colonialism for the emergence of environmental thought. And thirdly, he discussed the significance of parallel presence of modern and traditional environmental thought. Bandopadhyay concluded that to him both economic and environmental histories are related to each other in many ways. He believed that the environmental history of colonial India can answer many questions related to nature, livelihood and ethnicity.<sup>15</sup>

The study of environmental history can be situated in a greater perspective of green movement. The journey of practicing environmental history in other words, is a journey towards a green world. Thus the exploration of environmental history points out the expansion of *historian's craft* to a new dimension.

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- <sup>11</sup> Ibid.
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## “Epidemic and Literature: ‘Atharva Veda’ to Shakespeare”

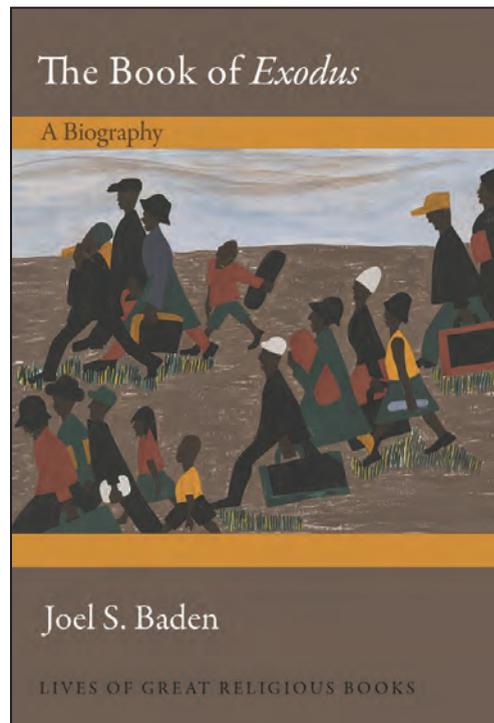
Pallab Sengupta, Former President, The Asiatic Society

### 1

The earliest reference of epidemic in world literature can probably be found in the “*Takman Sukta*” of the ‘*Atharva Veda*’ (A.V.5/22/7) where it was stated that some people were urging ‘Takman’ (an unidentified epidemic) to move to the other side of Mujbat Hills, where the ‘Bahliks’ (Bactrian Greeks, who came with the soldiers of Alexander in 327 B.C) lived, so that the dwellers there may enmasse suffer painful deaths. Whatever be the reason behind such vengeful wish, one information comes out clearly that even in a very distant past of (+/-) 300 B.C, large scale epidemics occurred and played disastrous roles in the human society.

‘*Old Testament*’ chronologically comes next after the ‘*Atharva Veda*’. Its ‘*Book of Exodus*’ (circa 165 B.C) shows that Jehovah, the supreme god of Jewish people, came to know that the Pharaoh was not permitting the Israelites to leave Egypt under the leadership of Moses to return to their Promised Land i.e Palestine, after the period of Diaspora. The Israelites were treated like slaves in Egypt, hence the Pharaoh was not willing to let them go as the people of Egypt will miss their service. This enraged the Zehovah who vented his anger in the form of a curse that the whole of Egypt would suffer from ten types of plagues, the identity of which were though not ascertained either by the Bible-scholars, or by the Egyptologists.

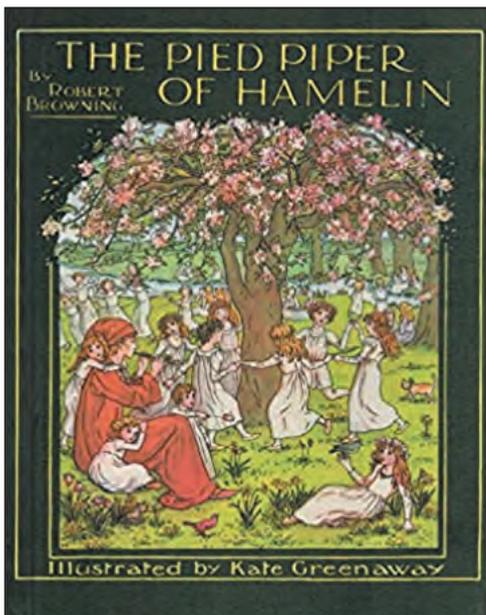
Though there were differences of opinions about the types of plagues mentioned in the ‘*Book of Exodus*’, but the epidemiologists of



later years were unanimous about the fact that in the middle of the 14th century, precisely between 1341 A.D -1351 A.D, several epidemics of plagues ravaged a vast area of Asia Minor, North Africa and a number of countries in Europe. It was estimated that about 7.5 millions to 20 millions of men, women and children were obliterated by such Bubonic Plagues during the said time. It was also established that the virus of such deadly disease primarily attacked the rats and from the heaps of dead rats, people of

an entire region gradually got contaminated. In the Middle ages, this virulent killer which attacked again and again was also known as "Black Death" in Europe.

2



In the forthcoming centuries some stray references of this rat-borne disease could be found in the folklore of the region, but two distinctly discernible instances of the Bubonic Plague could be found in the form of one folktale based upon a local legend and a very popular nursery rhyme.

The first one, the story of the '*Pied Piper of Hamelin*' was prevalent as oral tradition for a long time. In 1812 A.D, Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm included it in their '*Kinder und Hausmarchen*,' commonly known as '*Grimms Fairy Tales*.' The place of occurrence in this tale was Hamelin, a small town in Lower Saxony. The people of the town were in deep trouble due to presence of thousands of both dead and alive rats. The corpses of the dead rats were strayed all over the town and the stink from their rotten bodies created a big environmental hazard for the town. The

cause of the death of the rats was not known to anyone. But everyone was apprehending that unless these bodies are removed, a severe health hazard would follow in no time. The Mayor of the town issued a notice to all concerned, that anyone who would be able to give the town respite from this rat-menace, would be rewarded abundantly.

The notice was circulated outside the town also. In response to that, a flute player from outside the town came and claimed that he would be able to do the needful. He claimed that a particular tune, if played in his flute would drive away all the rats from the town and the heaps of dead rats in the town could be set to fire to stop further contamination.

When the authorities agreed to his proposal, the Piper started playing a tune and within minutes thousands of rats came out of their hidings and followed him up a mountain cliff from where they all jumped into the river below and perished. Triumphant Piper came back to claim his reward from the Mayor who now refused to pay him the promised amount.

Feeling cheated Piper left, only to come back on a Sunday when all adults of the town were in the church. He then started playing a new tune which lured every child in the town to come out of their homes and then followed Piper to a mountain cave where they disappeared forever. Thus the Piper fulfilled his revenge against the treachery of the town which he rescued from epidemic.

This story was prevalent in the locality for generations and in course of time the magic element in the story turned it into a folktale which then spread to several other European countries as well. Later historical researches did reveal that during the mid 14th Century, Lower Saxony area was indeed infected with the menace of plague. This story was interpreted differently later but one common factor remained constant in each version --- that is the reference of the epidemic borne by rats. Thus the story of the '*Pied Piper of Hamelin*'

may be considered as the first folktale where an epidemic played a vital role.

The second reference in folklore can be found in a very popular nursery rhyme which till date is being taught to school going children all over the world mostly in English speaking nations. The current version of the rhyme is as follows : “*Ring a ring of roses/ Pocketful of poses/ hush a hush a / We all fall down*”. But the original version was slightly different. It says: “*Ring a ring of rosies/ Pocketful of poisies/ A-tishoo A-tishoo / We all fall down*.”

This poem is believed to have originated during or after the Great Plague of London in 1665, a time when Isaac Newton also discovered his Law of Gravitation while being quarantined in his house on account of the virulent epidemic.

Modern researches revealed the ingrained meanings of the three words “Rosie”, “Poisies” and “A-tishoo” which clearly show their connection to Bubonic Plague that invaded England many times since 1347 A.D, the most severe being in the year 1665. According to these findings, “Rosie” meant pink rashes all over the body of the plague-affected person, “Poisies” referred to a particular medicinal herb which was believed to be plague resistant. And “A-tishoo” is mimicry of the sound of sneezing, which also was a common symptom of this disease. Finally “We all fall down” indicates the ultimate fall in the clutches of death.

It is now an accepted theory that many local historical events leave their references covertly in folklore genres like tales, rhymes, proverbs etc. Hence this nursery rhyme also is a reminder of the menace of plagues in England in the middle ages.

### 3

These waves of plague over England was the background of yet another literary creation by none other than William Shakespeare, the play being ‘*Romeo and Juliet*’ written in 1594 A.D, just a year after the plague of 1593

which had created disaster in England. It is worthy to mention here that Shakespeare also wrote ‘*King Lear*’, ‘*Macbeth*’ and ‘*Anthony and Cleopetra*’ during the quarantine period on account of the plague of 1606.



Juliet’s letter about her plan to pretend to have died does not reach Romeo because the messenger is forced into quarantine.

Though the background of the play ‘*Romeo and Juliet*’ was set in two Italian cities of Verona and Mantua, but the playwright applied the memory of previous year’s (1593) plague from his own nation, as the passive yet immediate cause of the tragic end of these two lovers.

Let us refer to the penultimate sequence of the play: after their secret marriage, Romeo was expelled from Verona for committing a murder. Juliet was left alone to face her impending marriage with Count Paris as decided by her family. In order to avoid that, at the behest of Friar Lawrence (who had

arranged her secret marriage with Romeo), she drank a potion to feign death, when in reality she would only remain unconscious for a maximum of two days. It was decided that next morning Friar would send a messenger to Romeo to ask him to come back from Mantua secretly and rescue his wife. But the messenger could not leave Verona next day as the entire city had come under lockdown due to an ongoing plague. As a result the rescue-plan could not be conveyed to Romeo. But Romeo's accomplice on hearing the death of Juliet had already secretly left the city the previous night before lockdown and had conveyed the death news to his master.

Devastated Romeo rushed back to Verona secretly and after seeing his beloved's 'lifeless' body in the graveyard, immediately committed suicide, as he was in total dark about the Friar's plan. After the stipulated time Juliet regained consciousness only to find Romeo's lifeless body lying beside her. What followed was Juliet killing herself with a knife, thus

ending a love story in blood, death and utter sadness.

Undoubtedly the two families of these hapless lovers were to be blamed for this tragic outcome, but the immediate responsibility of their death lies definitely with the lockdown for the plague epidemic in Verona. Had Romeo received the information of the plan, surely this tragic end could have been averted.

4

Many other literary references may be drawn in the context of epidemic in the world, which show that such disastrous deathly menaces could take away lives in lakhs, but could not dampen the creative psyche of authors, who created such literary pieces which were just not literature but also documentations of the epidemics and their impacts in human life during those dark times. The present Covid-stricken world will surely heal one day and may leave for future generations ample artistic creations to be read and analysed later.

## Moses Leaving for Egypt



This is a fresco by the Italian Renaissance painter Pietro Perugino and his workshop, executed around 1482 and located in the Sistine Chapel, Rome. It depicts a journey by the prophet Moses.

*Courtesy: en.wikipedia.org*

## The Calcutta Journal of Medicine and the Plague Epidemic of 1898

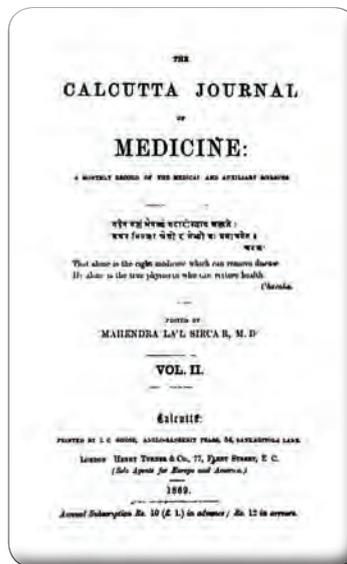
Sayantan Bose

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The third pandemic of the Bubonic Plague, after ravaging parts of the Bombay Presidency for a period of two years, finally announced its arrival at the colonial capital of Calcutta during the summer of 1898. The general sense of panic among the populace, the serious disruptions in public life and the draconian counter-measures of desperate imperial machinery have all been well documented and discussed. A common theme in these accounts, especially those written by Indian historians, has been the socio-political resistance to Plague measures adopted by the authorities in Bombay and Calcutta which were deemed oppressive and intrusive. The violent repercussions against anti-Plague measures in Bombay added a chapter to the freedom movement of India, while the *Bhadralok* in Calcutta minced no words when they declared that they would rather die of Plague than abide by the regulations of quarantine which gravely injured their traditional values.

Hostile resistance and indignant remonstrations do not, however, form the entire history of Plague epidemics in India. By the end of the nineteenth century, the *Bhadralok* intelligentsia had come to challenge the autonomy of the state over scientific knowledge. An extensive cultivation of western

medicine was undertaken to shed the tag of passive receptors and claim an active agency in the production of medical knowledge, a process which Projit Bihari Mukharji defines as 'vernacularization'. While the 'scientificity' of western medicine was acknowledged beyond doubt, other alternate forms of therapeutic knowledge were increasingly legitimized and accommodated within the western epistemology. With the onset of Plague in Calcutta, the members of this community reshaped existing discourses on the propagation, diagnosis and treatment of the pestilence. For Mukharji, a crucial element of vernacularization was the use of Bengali as the preferred mode of language, but there were journals and periodicals that used English



as a medium for legitimizing their agency in producing, contesting and reshaping medical knowledge. *The Calcutta Journal of Medicine* was certainly a pioneer in that aspect, and it played a crucial role during the Plague epidemic of 1898.

Launched in 1868 to promote the efficacy of Homeopathy as an alternative form of therapeutic, this monthly journal was the one of the earliest Indian publications on medical science.

Dr. Mahendralal Sircar, its founder editor, had a considerable reputation as a practitioner, not least because he embraced homeopathy (synonymous with quackery in those days) despite being one of the most decorated students of conventional allopathic medicine. In October 1896, Dr. Sircar was accorded a place on the Medical Board formed to deal with the threat of Plague; he was appointed a member of the Plague Commission as well, which superseded the Medical Board in November 1897. Dr. Sircar, along with fellow member Dr. Kailash Chunder Bose, served the commission in a non-official capacity and often found himself marginalized within the commission. Not surprisingly, he chose *The Calcutta Journal of Medicine* as his own mouthpiece; from the September of 1896 to the August of 1898, each monthly edition of the journal (referred to as *CJM* henceforth) contained at least one article on the subject. The discussions covered a range of issues including identification of patients and effectiveness of segregation as a measure of prevention.

Even before the first case of Plague was reported in Calcutta, the proposed policies of physical segregation had turned out to be a bone of contention between the colonial authorities and the *Bhadralok*. Revised Plague Regulations of November 1897 had empowered the Health Officer to forcefully 'remove' a suspected patient and other family members to any public camp set up for the purpose; this was already a tried and tested method, with the authorities in Bombay setting a precedent of ruthless efficiency and merciless disregard for ordinary people. For a brief period at its meetings held between October 1896 and November 1897, the Medical Board had mulled the idea of 'home segregation', or allowing people to remain isolated in their own residences. They concluded that home segregation as 'undesirable' and opined that there was 'nothing serious to apprehend' from forced hospitalization, Dr. Sircar being the only voice of dissent during these discussions. In the January 1898 edition of the *CJM*, he advocated in favour of home segregation rather

than forcible hospitalization. He offered two primary arguments in support of his conviction: a) proper isolation or segregation of any patient was impossible to observe, given the nature of the germ that was both 'contagious' and 'infectious', and that sanitization was the only viable alternative to segregation, b) the patients deserved to be in their homes and amidst their families which would be beneficial to recovery. Here we see a meticulous balancing act by a true *Bhadralok* practitioner. Sircar could not repudiate his leanings towards western science which was, for him, almost universal truth, nor could he forsake his own traditional values as a physician. Therefore, he sought to legitimize the latter under the auspices of the former! Home segregation was necessary because it was more 'scientific', but it was also an expedient measure to honour the medical custom that has been observed by his community. These observations proved almost prophetic when riots broke out in Bombay later that year, with agitations mounting in Calcutta over the forcible examinations and removal to hospitals conducted by the Health Officer. Subsequently, the Lt. Governor took note of the issue and by an order issued in February of 1899, allowed home segregation to be tolerated.

As Plague finally broke out in Calcutta between May and August of 1898, such contestations over knowledge came to revolve around a thornier issue: the confirmation of suspected cases of Plague. As expected, the colonial state wanted to have the final word on this matter. During the earlier days, confusion regarding 'true Plague' was rife even within the official circle; W.J.H. Simpson, the then Health Officer of Calcutta, had been seriously reprimanded by authorities for raising a false alarm in November 1896. Waldemar Haffkine, the celebrated Russian bacteriologist who was held in high regard by the Raj for his Cholera vaccine, had laid down the symptoms of 'true Plague' during the course of 1897. When suspected cases of Plague occurred in the city during the April of 1898, it was Haffkine who confirmed the cases

as that of Plague via a letter to the Government of Bengal. Subsequently, his prophylactic serum was officially accepted for large scale inoculation. The *CJM*, which denounced the verdict as 'hasty' and 'fallacious', founded their arguments on a robust scientism once more; their objection to Haffkine's conclusion was primarily on terms of a wrong bacteriological diagnosis, an episteme that was considered to be the white man's forte. But as it was with the issue of segregation, *CJM's* ire was drawn at a rather political concern behind it; H.H. Risley's declaration in favour of adopting Haffkine's prophylactic for immediate inoculation was not received well by the editor of the *CJM* who represented the *Bhadralok* at large. How could the government, he asked, force people to choose between segregation and Haffkine's prophylactic, if the latter's interpretation of the Plague bacillus is questionable? The decision, felt the editor, would be testing the moral limits of the people. In his reply to a letter from the Indian Plague Commission, Dr. Sircar stated that as of January 1899, none of the cases he had personally examined was of true Plague. The general objection of a high caste Hindu towards any form of inoculation was well documented by scholars working on the public health of colonial India; it is not wrong to assume that the *CJM* was soliciting in favour of the same.

As has been stated before, the colonial state had initially claimed complete monopoly over the therapeutic measures on Plague. This they sought to achieve through a process of vaccination and inoculations by serums, especially the one produced by Haffkine. The *Bhadralok* took exception to it; in Mahendralal Sircar, alternate medicine had a figure who could posit claims of scientificity, and he did it with aplomb. It is almost impossible to delve into this complex discourse within such a limited scope, but a small reference should suffice. With the epidemic of 1898 subsiding and Plague making repeated visits to the city

till 1925, the *CJM* kept publishing therapeutic articles on Plague every year. The virtual preface to this endeavour was provided in an article published in the February 1898 edition of the *CJM*, where Dr. Sircar advocated in favour of a concerted attack on Plague by all the different schools of medical science. Indeed, he was not dismissive of traditional Indian therapeutics either; his case in favour of allowing the *Vaids* and *Hakims* to enter the segregated homes betrayed a sense of professionalism that preceded his training in western medicine.

It seems that the possibility and scope of recreating knowledge through Indian agency were virtually endless and therefore, the colonial state could never assert its hegemony over medical science in India. Further investigation may add newer dimension to this area of study in future.

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## Menstrual Health Situation amidst COVID-19 Pandemic: A Brief Overview

**Parama Chatterjee**

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Managing menstruation with dignity, safety and good health is the basic right and need of a woman. (Weiss-Wolf, 2020). Menstruating women and girls face inadequate access to toilets and water and may lack the most basic materials needed for managing blood flow, such as menstrual products, underwear and soap. Women face lack of privacy and many toilets lack door locks, functioning doors, lighting and separation by gender. Strong menstrual taboos and superstitions may restrict the movements and behaviours of adolescent girls and women, hindering their ability to attend school, work, or participation in daily life. (Garcon, 2020).

The COVID-19 or the coronavirus outbreak has resulted in nation-wide lockdown which is compromising the menstrual health and hygiene of economically disadvantaged and rural women. The factories which make sanitary pads are forced to keep their shutters down or are facing disruption to the supply of raw materials to keep the units running. This has led to an increase in the shortages of affordable sanitary napkins across the country. As a result many women are adopting unhygienic methods of managing their menstrual health. The Union Government had declared sanitary pads as essential commodities along with groceries. But the units cannot be run

because the pads are largely made by the informal sector with few workers, mostly women. Arunachalam Muruganantham popularly known as "Padman" has said that the units which process raw materials are idling due to lockdown. So his factory cannot manufacture affordable pads during this pandemic situation (Edwin, 2020).

But we have to understand one simple fact that menstruation don't stop for pandem-

ic. Just as we eat, sleep and defecate similarly women generally between 10 to 45 years (on an average) menstruate every month. Many girls are getting sanitary pads either from health centre or school or from state or Central Government. But due to the lockdown the schools are closed and the health centres are now busy distributing sanitizers and masks and

also taking care of COVID-19 patients. The students generally come from low income groups who avail these facilities. They know that it is important to save their lives from the deadly virus. But sanitary pads are a basic necessity for them. (PTI, 2020) Many of them do not have the money to buy the products and others who have the money cannot move out of their places due to lockdown. In village areas the medicine shops are not located in every nook and corner . They have to travel long distances and stand in long queues to



Arunachalam Muruganantham

buy medicines. During the lockdown period it is risky to go to crowded places. So what will they do ?

Till now I have discussed about common people who are not getting enough supply of menstrual pads. Now I come to a very important point which is the condition of the health care workers who are not getting proper menstrual products. We are hearing that around the world there is severe shortage of supplies and equipment that medical personnel need in order to protect themselves and take care of patients with COVID-19 symptoms. Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) including masks are at the top of the list. But 70% of healthcare workers worldwide need menstrual products while working on the frontlines . The menstrual product is another kind of personal equipment which is facing huge shortage worldwide due to lockdown. The frontline health care workers are having severe challenges worldwide while accessing menstrual products or being able to change them while caring for their patients. Many of these challenges are for safety reasons because they have to follow a protocol while changing their PPE . Sometimes it is difficult for them to even take breaks for changing menstrual products. In addition to all of these the age old tradition of stigma and discrimination is always there . (WSSCC, 2020).

In the Chinese province of Hubei, where 50 % of doctors and 90 % of nurses are women, donations of menstrual products were turned away mostly by male members because it was not considered as a necessity. Women were reportedly taking contraceptive pills in order to suppress their periodic cycles. Others did not have any choice and were forced to bleed in their PPE itself by sacrificing their dignity. When the Chinese Government knew about this they immediately took steps and menstrual products became part of their critical medical supplies. It was supplied by the Government to hospitals for both patients, care givers and health workers. (WSSCC, 2020).

The need of the hour is to provide menstrual products to the women who are in need of them. It includes both poor , disadvantaged women and all the women health care workers. The health care workers are working in the frontlines to save our lives. The Government and civil society should see that they are getting their menstrual necessities in the hospital and they can work with dignity. Every woman has the right to maintain dignity , hygiene and privacy during menstruation. The health care workers who have to maintain certain protocols for wearing and taking off the PPEs should be given enough menstrual products which is a basic necessity for every woman.

Another problem which is faced worldwide is stocking of essential commodities. People who can afford are stocking essential goods and food items including sanitary pads and tampons. As a result both the supply and price of essential commodities have increased in the lockdown. I can take the example of the field area of my research work. Though I cannot go the place (Magrahat in South 24 Parganas) in the midst of lockdown I am in touch with the local people through telephone. They give me information about the lockdown situation and have also informed me how the lockdown has affected their daily lives including their menstrual health. I came to know from them that there is a shortage of supply of the sanitary pads because the main markets were either closed or fell under the containment zones. In the month of March and beginning of April there is no such shortage. But from the mid of April there was a shortage in the supply of sanitary products especially in the small local shops. The women did not get the specific brand of sanitary napkin that they wanted. Moreover the price was higher than the actual price of the product . Suppose the original product cost Rs 28 now the shopkeeper is charging Rs 30. So the women have decided that if the lockdown persists and their family members who are mostly daily wage earners cannot get back to work then they will start using clothes

to save money instead of the sanitary pads. I also want to mention one thing that I have made them aware about sustainable menstruation and have distributed cloth pads to some of them during my fieldwork. But it was not possible for me to cover the entire village due to financial constraints. The women who received those special cloth pads are highly benefitted during lockdown because they are reusable. The problem lies with other women who are buying sanitary pads from the shops at higher price and may have to use clothes which are not reusable. This can cause huge amount of environmental degradation as some of them do not dispose the materials effectively. This can also have an impact on their health and hygiene if they do not wash the clothes properly.

Considering the above problems the policy makers have already initiated steps to combat the issue. In India The Department of Women and Child Development will explore ways to provide sanitary napkins amidst lockdown. The different state Governments and civil society organisations are also coming forward to look into this matter. The Right to Education (RTE) Forum, a civil society coalition has sought the help of the Ministry of Women and Child Development for ensuring menstrual health of adolescents by giving them sanitary pads , iron folic acid (IFA) and supplementary nutrition under Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent girls or Sabla or under Integrated Child Development Scheme (ICDS) or School Health Programme. (Deccan Herald , 2020).

Pandemic don't stop periods. We should plan and respond to this global crisis by looking it from a holistic viewpoint. Masks, sanitizers and PPEs (for health care workers) are crucial for protection against coronavirus but we should also take into account the basic menstrual hygiene needs of all women including those of the menstruators who

are on the frontline of the pandemic. More importance should be given to hygiene during menstruation especially to the women of rural community. The prices of the menstrual products should not rise. People should not charge extra money since it is an essential commodity. People who can afford should not unnecessarily stock the products at home. If they continue doing so through online purchase or from shops directly then it will pose a great challenge to the poor community. Many poor people do not have smart phones or online access and they even do not have nearby shops. They have to travel long distances during lockdown and stand in queues where it is difficult for them to maintain social distancing. Women who are not getting reliable products needs to be innovative and maintain hygiene while using home made products.(Weiss-Wolf,2020). It is a big challenge for sure but we have to come together, maintain social distancing, practise hand hygiene, cough etiquettes, wear masks and follow the Government regulations and WHO (World Health Organisation) regulations to overcome this crisis.

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## Over-consumption underlies cyclone Amphan and Covid-19

**Amitav Ghosh**, renowned author, anthropologist and an authority on climate change, spoke to Srijana Mitra Das at Times Evoke, on the impact and implications of Amphan—and what Cyclone Amphan and Covid-19 have in common:



THE EYE OF THE STORM: Cyclone Amphan has torn through the eastern coast

### Are climate change and extreme weather events like Cyclone Amphan linked?

Yes, scientists say there is a clear link. Hurricanes, cyclones and other tropical storms draw their energy from warm water, and many stretches of ocean are now exceptionally warm. One reason for the rapid intensification of Cyclone Amphan was the warmth of the Bay of Bengal. Also warmer air holds more moisture, so storms carry more rain.

### How will Cyclone Amphan impact the mangroves and life of the Sundarbans?

Mangroves are resilient; they are well adapted to cyclones — indeed they play a very important role in protecting the interior. The impact on the wildlife of the Sundarbans is a different matter. If the storm surge is 30 feet in height, then all the land and most of the trees will be submerged. Tigers may be able to save themselves by climbing up the tallest trees — but that will not be an option for the deer.

However, it's the people who live in the Sundarbans who will suffer the most. Their villages will be inundated, their dwellings swept away. There will be extensive damage to the embankments that protect the interiors of the islands. Arable land will be swamped with salt water and won't be cultivable for years. Freshwater ponds will

also be flooded with sea water. Many fishermen will lose their boats and nets. This time, with the cyclone arriving during a pandemic, evacuations themselves may have adverse consequences — it's almost impossible to carry out large scale evacuations while observing social distancing. Nor will it be possible to maintain social distancing in crowded cyclone shelters. On top of that, an untold number of people — many already suffering from the effects of the lockdown — will lose their livelihoods. A good number of the migrant workers walking back to Bengal are from the Sundarbans. They will arrive to find further devastation. It will be a humanitarian disaster of epic proportions.

### Why is India's eastern coast so vulnerable to such cyclonic activity?

The Bay of Bengal has long been known as a 'storm breeder' — indeed, Henry Piddington, who coined the word 'cyclone', lived in what was then Calcutta. He was one of the first scientists to investigate the phenomenon of the storm surge. We can only hope that Cyclone Amphan's impacts are not like those of the cyclone that struck Kolkata in October 1737. In my novel 'The Hungry Tide', Nirmal, a schoolmaster, describes this cyclone: "In Kolkata tens of thousands of dwellings fell instantly to the ground... They say that there was not a building in the city that was left with four walls intact. Bridges were

blown away, wharves were carried off by the surging waters, godowns were emptied of their rice and even the gunpowder in the armouries was scattered by the wind. On the river there were many ships at anchor, large and small... Among them there were two English ships, of five hundred tons each. The wind picked them up and carried them over the tops of trees and houses, it threw them down a quarter of a mile from the river. People saw huge barges fluttering in the air like paper kites..."

The disparity in cyclonic activity between the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea is partly the result of a historical anomaly. Starting in the late 19th century, there was a decline in cyclonic activity in the Arabian Sea — but before that, India's west coast had been hit by many cyclones. Mumbai was hit by very destructive storms in 1618 (when a fifth of the population was killed), 1740, 1783, 1837 and 1854. Then, there was a lull, ending in 1998 — between then and 2001, three cyclones have hit to the north of Mumbai, claiming over 17,000 lives. There's been a big uptick in cyclonic activity in the Arabian Sea — this is one of the predicted effects of climate change. It is increasingly likely that Mumbai will be hit by a major storm in the years to come. I have written about this in 'The Great Derangement'.

### You mentioned the pandemic. Do you see a link between the Covid-19 situation and Cyclone Amphan?

There is no direct causal link — but these phenomena are cognate in the sense that they are all products of the tremendous acceleration that occurred over the last 30 years, a period in which extreme forms of neo-liberal capitalism have been imposed upon the world by global elites. This period has been called the 'Great Acceleration', which is appropriate because it is the acceleration of consumption and production, and the resulting rise in greenhouse gas emissions, that lies behind all these crises, from the climate breakdown to the pandemic.

*TOI, Times Evoke, May 22, 2020*

# সুন্দরবনে সুপার সাইক্লোন ও হেনরি পিডিংটন

গোকুল চন্দ্র দাস, প্রাক্তন অধ্যক্ষ, সোনারপুর মহাবিদ্যালয়

আমপানের বিধ্বংসী তাণ্ডবের প্রেক্ষিতে সংবাদমাধ্যমে মধ্য উনিশ শতকে কলকাতায় কর্মরত এক ইংরেজ আবহবিদ হেনরি পিডিংটন নিয়ে চর্চা শুরু হয়েছে। পিডিংটন তাঁর কর্মজীবন শুরু করেছিলেন একজন নাবিক হিসেবে। ইংরেজ ইস্ট ইন্ডিয়া কোম্পানির বাণিজ্যিক জাহাজগুলি আটলান্টিক, ভারত মহাসাগর ও বঙ্গোপসাগর হয়ে কলকাতায় যাতায়াত করত। সেই সূত্রে বঙ্গোপসাগরের আবহাওয়ার ঋতুভিত্তিক পরিবর্তন ও গ্রীষ্মমণ্ডলীয় সামুদ্রিক ঝড়-ঝঞ্ঝা সম্পর্কে তাঁর সম্যক পরিচয় ছিল। ১৮৩০-এর দশকের শুরুতে পিডিংটন কলকাতায় স্থায়ীভাবে বসবাস শুরু করেন এবং তাঁর জাহাজী অভিজ্ঞতাকে



থ্যাণ্টের স্কেচে পিডিংটন

কাজে লাগিয়ে এশিয়াটিক সোসাইটিতে সামুদ্রিক ঝড়-ঝঞ্ঝা নিয়ে গবেষণা শুরু করেন। তাঁর উদ্যোগেই জলবায়ু ও আবহাওয়া নিয়ে ভারতের প্রথম গবেষণা কেন্দ্রটি গড়ে উঠেছিল এশিয়াটিক সোসাইটিতে। এই সময় বঙ্গোপসাগর থেকে উত্থিত ঝড়ের উদ্ভব, গতিপ্রকৃতি, শক্তি ও অভিমুখ সম্পর্কে তাঁর অনেকগুলি সন্দর্ভ এশিয়াটিক সোসাইটির জার্নালে প্রকাশিত হয়েছিল। এই প্রসঙ্গে জানাই ইংরেজি শব্দভাণ্ডারে 'সাইক্লোন' শব্দটির সংযোজন পিডিংটনেরই কীর্তি। সমুদ্রের উপর ভয়াবহ ঘূর্ণিঝড়ের আকৃতি অনেকটা কুণ্ডলী পাকানো সাপের মত দেখতে হয়। এর কেন্দ্রটিকে তিনি ঝড়ের চোখ বলে অভিহিত করেন। গ্রীক ভাষায় সর্পকুণ্ডলীকে 'কুকলস' বলে। আবার প্রাচীন গ্রীসের পুরাণ কথার ভয়ংকর একচক্ষু বিশিষ্ট দৈত্যের নাম 'সাইক্লপস'। সাইক্লোন শব্দটির মূলে রয়েছে এই দুটি গ্রীক শব্দ।

আমপান ছিল একটি অতিশক্তিশালী ঘূর্ণিঝড়, ইংরেজিতে super cyclone। সাগরদ্বীপে আছড়ে পড়ার সময় এর গতিবেগ ছিল ১৮৫ কিমি/ঘণ্টা। নিরক্ষীয় অঞ্চলে এবং বঙ্গোপসাগরের শীর্ষে অবস্থান হেতু নিম্ন দক্ষিণবঙ্গ চিরকালই, বিশেষত মে-জুন ও অক্টোবর মাসে বহুবার এরকম ভয়ংকর বা অতি ভয়ংকর ঝড়ের মুখে বিপর্যস্ত হয়েছে। সারা বিশ্বে প্রাচীন কালের এরকম যে পাঁচটি সামুদ্রিক ঘূর্ণিঝড়ের লিখিত বিবরণ পাওয়া যায়, তার একটি হল ১৭৩৭ সালের অক্টোবর মাসে ঘটে যাওয়া একটি অতিশক্তিশালী ঘূর্ণিঝড় যার অভিঘাতে কলকাতা থেকে সাগরদ্বীপ পর্যন্ত প্রায় সমগ্র ভূখণ্ড বিধ্বস্ত হয়েছিল। কলকাতার

*Gentleman's Magazine* পরের বছর (June, 1738) এই ঝড়ের বিবরণ ছাপে। পিডিংটনের উদ্ধারকৃত সেই বিবরণের কিছু অংশ এইরূপ -In the night between the 11th and 12<sup>th</sup> October (1737) there happened a furious hurricane at the mouth of the Ganges, which reached sixty leagues up the river. There was at the same time, a violent earthquake, which threw down a great many houses along with river side. In Galgotta ( Calcutta) alone a port belonging to the English, two houses were thrown down and high and magnificent steeple of the English church sunk into the ground without breaking. It is computed that 20000 ships, barks, sloops, boats, canoes etc.,

have been cast away. Of nine English ships then in the Ganges, eight were lost and most of the crews drowned. Barks of 60 tonnes were blown to two leagues up into land over tops of high trees, two English ships of 500 tons were thrown into a village above two hundred fathoms from the bed of river Ganges. Four more Company's ships were lost; of four Dutch ships in the river three were lost with their men and cargoes; 300000 souls are said to have perished. The water rose forty feet higher than usual in the Ganges and 15 inches of rain fall in 6 hours.

পিডিংটন দেখালেন, ঘূর্ণিঝড়ের কেন্দ্রে অতিশক্তিশালী ও উচ্চগতির যে ঘূর্ণায়মান বায়ু স্তম্ভ তৈরি হয় তা সমুদ্রের জলস্তরকে অনেক উপরে টেনে তোলে এবং তা ঝড়ের অভিমুখের দিকে অগ্রসর হয়। আর, এই কেন্দ্রে বাতাসের চাপ কমে যে শূন্যতা তৈরি করে, তা পূরণ করতে চারদিক থেকে দ্রুত ধেয়ে আসা বাতাস বিস্তৃত ঘূর্ণায়মান বায়ুবলয় তৈরি করে। কিন্তু এই বায়ুবলয় ঘোরে বিপরীত দিকে, ঘড়ির কাঁটার উল্টো দিকে। এই আমপান যেমন সাগরদ্বীপে স্থলভাগ ছুঁয়ে যখন উত্তরে কলকাতার দিকে ধাবিত হয়, সাধারণ বুদ্ধিতে ঝোড়ো বাতাসের ঝাপটা লাগার কথা বাড়ির দক্ষিণের জানালায়। কিন্তু বাস্তবে বাতাসের তীব্র অভিঘাত সহিতে হয়েছে উত্তরের দরজা-জানালাগুলিকে। পিডিংটন আরও বললেন, বঙ্গোপসাগরে প্রবল শক্তিসম্পন্ন ঘূর্ণিঝড় তৈরি হলে তার কেন্দ্রের উখিত জলস্তম্ভ ও চতুর্পাশের ঘূর্ণায়মান বায়ুবলয়ে তীব্র শক্তির বিদ্যুৎ উৎপন্ন হয়। এই বিদ্যুৎ প্রবাহ সমুদ্রজলকে অনেকটা উপরে টেনে তোলে এবং অস্বাভাবিক উচ্চ ঢেউ সৃষ্টি করে। এরকম ঢেউগুলি ঝড়ের অভিমুখে স্থলের দিকে প্রবল গতিতে এগুনোর সময় এদের সম্মুখের অংশ খাড়া দেওয়ালের মত উঠে যায়, আর সমুদ্রের বা পিছনের দিকটা ঢাল হয়ে নেমে যায়। ঢেউগুলির সম্মুখভাগের উচ্চতা অস্বাভাবিক ভাবে অনেকটাই

বেশি হয়, *Gentleman's Magazine* যেমন ১৭৩৭ সালের ঝোড়ো ঢেউ-এর ৪০ ফুট উচ্চতার কথা উল্লেখ করেছিল। কিন্তু পিডিংটনের পর্যবেক্ষণ অনুযায়ী এরকম বিপুল উচ্চতার ঢেউ-এর সংখ্যা তিন/ চারটির বেশি হয় না। ১৮২৩ সালের ঘূর্ণিঝড়ে বরিশাল ও বাখরগঞ্জ প্রায় ৫০০০০ মানুষ মারা গিয়েছিল। ইংরেজি পত্রিকা *ইন্ডিয়া গেজেট*-এর সংবাদদাতার প্রতিবেদন অনুযায়ী, মাত্র ১ মিনিট সময়ের মধ্যে ২৫-৩০ ফুট উচ্চতার প্রবল তিনটি ঢেউ দুই জেলার বিস্তীর্ণ ভূভাগকে প্লাবিত করেছিল।

১৮৩৩ সালের ঝড়ের সময় পিডিংটন কলকাতাতেই ছিলেন। এই ঝড়ে সাগরদ্বীপ নতুন করে বিধ্বস্ত হয়েছিল। তার আগে ১৮১৯ সালে ২৪ পরগণার কালেক্টর ট্রাওয়ারের নেতৃত্বে কলকাতার ইউরোপীয় ও এদেশীয় ব্যবসায়ীদের নিয়ে গঠিত একটি সমিতি (The Sagour Island Society) সরকার সাগরদ্বীপের জঙ্গল হাসিল ও আবাদীকরণের দায়িত্ব দিয়েছিল। এপ্রিল থেকে অক্টোবর, এই কয়মাসে একাধিক সামুদ্রিক ঝড়-ঝঞ্ঝার কবলে পড়ে হুগলির মোহনায় কলকাতা বন্দরগামী ইউরোপীয় জাহাজগুলি প্রায়ই বিপদে পড়ত। এই সমস্যা সমাধানের উপায় হিসাবে বাংলার সরকার সাগরদ্বীপে জাহাজ ও জাহাজীদের নিরাপদ আশ্রয় নির্মাণ ছিল সরকারের প্রাথমিক লক্ষ্য। কিন্তু জনমানবহীন লোনা জল প্লাবিত স্থাপদসংকুল বাদাবনে কাজ করার উপযুক্ত শ্রমিক পাওয়া তখন বড় রকমের একটা চ্যালেঞ্জ হয়ে দাঁড়িয়ে ছিল। তা সত্ত্বেও ১৮৩০-এর মধ্যে দ্বীপের উত্তরে বেশ কয়েক হাজার বিঘা জঙ্গল হাসিল করে সোসাইটি জমি বন্দোবস্ত দিতে সক্ষম হয়েছিল। গ্রহীতার অধিকাংশই ছিলেন ইউরোপীয়। বন্দোবস্ত দেওয়া জমিতে চাষাবাদ শুরু হয়েছিল। কয়েক হাজার কৃষক-কুলিও জড়ো হয়েছিল এই নয়া আবাদে। কিন্তু সাগরদ্বীপের উপনিবেশীকরণের এই উদ্যোগ ১৮৩৩ এর ভয়ংকর এক সামুদ্রিক ঝড়ে প্রায় সম্পূর্ণ নিশ্চিহ্ন হয়ে গিয়েছিল। এই ঘূর্ণিঝড়ের বিস্তার অবশ্য খুব বেশী দূর ছিল না। ঝড়ের কেন্দ্রে বা চোখের মুখে পড়ে সাগরদ্বীপ সাংঘাতিক বিপর্যয়ের মুখে পড়েছিল। পিডিংটন সংবাদপত্রগুলির প্রতিবেদনের

উপর ভিত্তি করে জানিয়েছেন, ঘূর্ণিঝড় সাগরদ্বীপ ও ডায়মন্ড হারবারে হুগলি নদীতে নোঙর করা H.C.S. Duke of York ও অন্য কয়েকটি জাহাজ জল থেকে তুলে বালির উপর দিয়ে উড়িয়ে দূরের ধানীজমিতে, কোনো কোনোটি নদীর পশ্চিম পাড়ে বাদাবনের জলাভূমিতে ফেলেছিল। দ্বীপের মধ্যে সমূহ জনবসতি ধ্বংস হয়ে গিয়েছিল। কয়েকজন ইউরোপীয় তত্ত্বাবধানকারী আধিকারিক-সহ সমূহ কুলিমজুর ও অভিবাসী কৃষকের, সংখ্যায় তিন থেকে চার হাজার, সরাসরি সলিলসমাধি ঘটেছিল। এরপর সাগরদ্বীপ আবাদীকরণের জন্য গঠিত সাগরদ্বীপ সোসাইটি ভেঙ্গে গিয়েছিল। এটি ছিল সুন্দরবনে কৃষির বিস্তারে প্রথম একটি বেসরকারি উদ্যোগ। এরপর ঔপনিবেশিক সরকার দীর্ঘ কাল, ৫০ বছরের অধিক, এখানে জঙ্গল হাসিল করে কৃষির বিস্তার ও বাণিজ্য পরিকাঠামো গড়ার কোনো পরিকল্পিত উদ্যোগ নেয়নি।

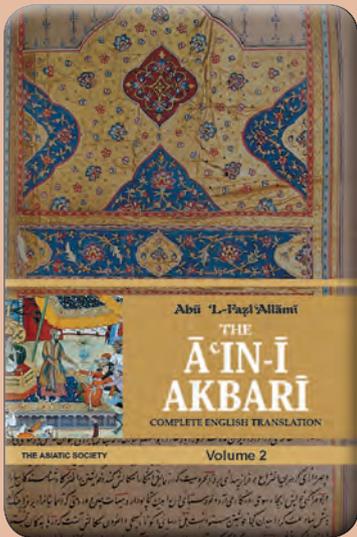
তীব্রতা, ধ্বংস ক্ষমতা ও ব্যাপ্তির দিক থেকে উনিশ শতকের সবচেয়ে বিধ্বংসী সাইক্লোন অবশ্য দেখা গিয়েছিল ১৮৬৪ সালে। এসময় অবশ্য পিডিংটন অবশ্য জীবিত ছিলেন না। ১৮৫৮ সালে কলকাতাতেই তাঁর মৃত্যু হয়। সুতরাং শেষোক্ত ঝড়ের বিবরণ পিডিংটনের লেখায় পাওয়া যায়না। এই বিবরণ পাওয়া যায় সুন্দরবন কমিশনার আর বি চ্যাপম্যান-এর প্রতিবেদন থেকে। '৬৪-এর সামুদ্রিক ঝড়ের বিধ্বংসী ক্ষমতা ছিল ১৮৩৩এর থেকে অনেক বেশী। বঙ্গোপসাগর থেকে এই ঝড়ও মাটি ছুঁয়েছিল সাগরদ্বীপে, ৫ অক্টোবর ১৯৬৪ সকালে। ঝড় বাহিত ঢেউয়ের উচ্চতা ছিল ১৬ ফুট। সাগর দ্বীপের মোট ৪৭৯৫ জন আবাসিক আবাসিক কৃষকের মধ্যে মাত্র ৭৮২ জন বেঁচেছিলেন। ডায়মন্ড হারবার মহকুমায় ঝোড়ো ঢেউয়ের উচ্চতা ছিল ১১ফুট। ৩০-৪০ শতাংশ মানুষ মারা গিয়েছিল। হুগলি নদী বেয়ে ঝড় উঠে এসেছিল কলকাতা পর্যন্ত এবং সাতক্ষীরা বাদে তখনকার ২৪ পরগণার সবগুলি থানা এলাকায় ব্যাপক জীবনহানি ও সম্পত্তির ক্ষতি হয়েছিল। কলকাতা ও নির্মীয়মাণ ক্যানিং বন্দরের বহু ঘরবাড়ি ও নদীতে অপেক্ষমাণ অনেকগুলি জাহাজ ও দেশীয় জলযান ধ্বংস হয়ে গিয়েছিল। ক্যানিং টাউন ও বন্দরের এতটাই ক্ষতি

হয়েছিল যে এর অনতিকাল পরে বন্দরটি স্থায়ীভাবে বন্ধ করে দেওয়া হয়েছিল।

১৮৫০-এর দশকের শুরুতে যখন মাতলা নদীর মাথায় কলকাতার সহায়ক একটি বন্দর নির্মাণের চিন্তাভাবনা শুরু হয়, সে সময় এর যৌক্তিকতা বিবেচনার জন্য গভর্নর জেনারেল ডালহৌসি একটি কমিটি গঠন করেছিলেন। সামুদ্রিক ঝড়-ঝঞ্ঝা সম্পর্কে অভিজ্ঞ পিডিংটন ছিলেন এই কমিটির অন্যতম সদস্য। কমিটি তদন্ত শেষ করে রিপোর্ট দেওয়ার আগেই পিডিংটন এ সম্পর্কে তাঁর চিন্তা ভাবনা ব্যক্ত করে ১৮৫৩ সালে বড়লাটের বিবেচনার জন্য একটি স্মারকলিপি পেশ করেন। সেই সন্দর্ভ থেকে দেখা যায়, পিডিংটন ছিলেন একজন পরিবেশবাদী, প্রকৃতির স্বতঃস্ফূর্ততায় মানুষের হস্তক্ষেপের বিরোধী। সেজন্যই তিনি সুন্দরবনে জঙ্গল কেটে আবাদ ও বসতি বিস্তারের বিপক্ষে ছিলেন। প্রস্তাবিত ক্যানিং বন্দরের ভবিষ্যৎ সম্পর্কেও তিনি সরকারকে সতর্ক করেছিলেন। উপসংহারে তিনি লিখেছিলেনঃ Reviewing all these facts, I confess that I have been unable to bring my mind to any other conclusion than this that supposing the head of the Matlah river to be fixed upon as a mercantile and nautical depot, everything and everyone must be prepared to see a day when, in the midst of the horrors of a hurricane, they will find a terrific mass of a salt water rolling in, or rising up upon them with such rapidity that in a few minutes the whole settlement will be inundated to a depth of from a five to fifteen feet unless its boundary be secured against such a calamity by efficient bunds, say of 20 feet high which is not easily contrived on the river space.

পাঠক নিশ্চয়ই বুঝবেন, ১৬৭ বছর আগে হেনরি পিডিংটন সুন্দরবনের উপর সামুদ্রিক ঝড়ের প্রভাব সম্পর্কে যে সতর্কবার্তা দিয়েছিলেন আজও তা কতটা প্রাসঙ্গিক।

## Devastating Storm in Sunderbans Recorded in *Ā'in-ī-Akbarī*



Allami, Abul Fazl, *The Ā'in-ī-Akbarī*, Tr. H. S. Jarret, Annotated by Jadunath Sarkar, The Asiatic Society, Kolkata, 2010, Vol. II, pp. 135-136.

### Note

In the Persian text, the date of the flood is the 28th year of Divine Era, but in the translation it is the 29th year of that Era (1584 CE).

### PERSIAN TEXT

ایرد مہدراچ ات هام یلالہ رہ زاغاً رس.راز تخرد هخلق درگ  
دہاکب ہیاب ہیاب رخا ات مہدزناپ زا و دیارد زیخ چوم ہب  
فرگش زور رہپ موس یلہا ہتہشہ و تسیب لاس رد و  
اجنآ نابزرم ہتفرگ ورف ار راکرس یگمہ و یبالیس  
دنہامرپ و دیناسریتشک زارف رب ار دوخ ہتشاردینشج  
رب یناگرزاب و دمآ رب ہناختب رب یخرب اب وا روپ یار  
شروش و ایرد شوچ رہپ مین و کی ات ہتفاتش یرالات  
ہناختب و دش ورف اہیتشک و ہناخ دوب داب و رب  
نارد راناج کل ود کیڈزن دیسرن یدنژگ ار رالات و  
دش ورف ششوج ینافوط

Allami, Abul Fazl, *Ā'in-ī-Akbarī*, Text, Nawal Kishor  
Publication, Lucknow, 1881, Vol. II, pp. 50-51

Courtesy: M. Firoze and Shabbir Ahmed , The Asiatic Society

### ENGLISH TRANSLATION

*The Sarkār of Baklā extends along the sea shore. The fort is surrounded by woods. On the first day of the new moon the sea steadily rises until the fourteenth, and from the fifteenth till the end of the month as gradually falls. In the 29th year of the Divine Era, a terrible inundation occurred at three o'clock in the afternoon, which swept over the whole Sarkār. The Rājah held an entertainment at the time. He at once embarked on board a boat, while his son Parmānand Rāe with some others climbed to the top of a temple and a merchant took refuge in a high loft. For four hours and a half the sea raged amid thunder and a hurricane of wind. Houses and boats were engulfed but no damage occurred to the temple or the loft. Nearly two hundred thousand living creatures perished in this flood.*

## 1916: A Cyclone Visits Kolkata

**Suchetana Chattopadhyay**

Associate Professor, Department of History, Jadavpur University

When does a natural disaster take a catastrophic turn? The impact of cyclones on Kolkata during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries are recorded in history. The cyclones on 11 October 1737 and 5 October 1864 were accompanied with tidal surge, destruction of ships, buildings, property and heavy loss of lives. The colonial initiatives during the nineteenth century to receive prior warning led to the origin and circulation of meteorological knowledge as a significant branch of scientific research; they were primarily aimed at conserving colonial commercial interests. In Bengal, this meant fortifying the super-profitable ports and lucrative urban commercial citadels while neglecting the villages. Government apathy meant people living in the rural areas were more vulnerable and at greater risk than those living in the towns and cities.<sup>1</sup>

In 1875, the colonial government established a meteorological department, with its headquarters in Kolkata. Calcutta, the Anglicised name of Kolkata, was the capital city of the British Empire in India till 1911. With the transfer of the imperial administrative headquarters to New Delhi in 1912, the headquarters of the Indian Meteorological Department was shifted to Simla, the

summer capital of the British Raj and later to New Delhi.<sup>2</sup> The city remained one of the most powerful centres of colonial capitalist investment in mercantile and industrial terms. The observatory at Alipore continued to be maintained and regarded as one of the 'first class centres' for watching the climate and making weather forecasts under the charge of the Meteorologist, Calcutta. A report from 1917 proudly announced that Alipore possessed some of the finest and most advanced imported equipments at its disposal including a barograph, a micro-barograph, thermometers, thermograph and two seismographs. The observatory provided crucial information to the Calcutta Port and shipping; it disseminated readings of daily temperatures and made weather forecasts. In addition to special messages sent during stormy weather, the Meteorologist, Calcutta provided the European-owned shipping industry with daily information regarding weather conditions in the Bay of Bengal.<sup>3</sup> Its existence and functions were intertwined with the Empire of Capital.

How was the cyclone which swept over Kolkata and its vicinity in 1916 perceived? Life was particularly harsh during this period. From 1914, the city experienced sharp rise in prices due to the outbreak of the First World

1 For a summary and analysis of the historiography of cyclones in the South Bengal delta and their impact on Kolkata, see Tirthankar Ghosh, 'Cyclone, Vulnerability and Society: Disaster, Knowledge and Colonialism in Nineteenth Century Bengal (1864-74)', *Journal of History*, Vol. 31 (2016-17), pp.52-73.

2 [http://www.indiaweather.gov.in/?page\\_id=250](http://www.indiaweather.gov.in/?page_id=250)

3 *Report on the Administration of the Meteorological Department of the Government of India in 1917-18*, Simla: Government Press, 1918, pp.2, 7.

War. The deteriorating economic conditions of the middle-class and slum populations were deepened by house demolition drives. More than a million people inhabited the metropolis and thousands commuted daily from the suburbs. In 1911, the Calcutta Improvement Trust (or the CIT) had been formed by the colonial government to widen roads and construct thoroughfares which could accommodate modern vehicular traffic, take over old houses and slums and build handsome residences for the upper-classes in their place. The CIT was primarily driven by European commercial interests. Big Capital benefited from the dismantling and reconstruction of neighbourhoods. From 1914, this pre-existing and ongoing process of disposing the indigent middle-classes and the poor combined with spiralling food prices; a mood of deep social anxiety and dejection was generated. An overwhelming sense of helplessness found its way into Bengali, Urdu and Indian-owned English newspaper pages. There were many forecasts of doom and gloom descending on the city. To this was added the reality of political repression as the British government came down heavily on Bengali Hindu, Pan-Islamist and Punjabi Sikh revolutionaries in July 1916. They had been planning to overthrow colonial rule, taking advantage of the beleaguered condition of the British state which was fighting a desperate inter-imperialist competitive war with Germany.<sup>4</sup>

April and May 1916 had been extremely hot and dry. There was hardly much rain till August 1916. On 21 September 1916, a cyclone passed over the city and its suburbs.<sup>5</sup> Surendranath Kar, an artist and eye-witness,

recalled the cyclone as 'Asviner jhar' (autumn storm) in his memoirs.<sup>6</sup> Pat Lovett, a British journalist, also noted the coming of the storm and its effects in his popular column, 'A Ditcher's Diary'. He wrote this column for Capital, an English periodical which described itself as a journal devoted to the interests of capitalists and employers of labour.<sup>7</sup> Kar and Lovett, from divergent stand-points, were struck by the ferocity of the storm. Lovett praised official meteorologists for sending a prior storm warning; it was approaching a city of 'jerrybuilt tenements, bungalows with exposed verandahs, leaky terraces and cranky windows'. He was happy to see that from their offices, the Sahebs were able to give the Memsahabs at home, a prior notice of this advancing menace; some humane employers even allowed their office staff to go home 'to save their huts and busties from desolation'. According to Lovett, the cyclone did less damage to human dwelling than the heavy hailstorm of 30 April which could not be predicted by the weather office. What upset him was the cyclone's destructive effect on trees in the wooded streets and the maidan, the open space at the centre of the city. Old trees, inherited from the colonial city-builders, were uprooted and lay in the streets. He was saddened by the poor effort of the Public Works Department or the Calcutta Corporation to save them. He held electricity wires for street lights responsible for adversely affecting the trees. Sometimes their roots had been ruthlessly cut by the municipality, leaving old trees with little purchase and vulnerable in stormy weather.<sup>8</sup> The loss of trees had a devastating impact on

4 Suchetana Chattopadhyay, 'Fear, Scarcity and Repression in Kolkata during the First World War', Syed Jaffar Ahmad (ed.), *Challenges of History Writing in South Asia: Special Volume in Honour of Dr. Mubarak Ali*, Karachi: Pakistan Study Centre, University of Karachi & Pakistan Labour Trust, 2013, pp.321-355.

5 *Calcutta Gazette*, May 1917, pp.627-629.

6 Surendranath Kar, 'Smriticharan' (Recollections), Sobhan Som (ed.), *Rabindra Parikar Surendranath Kar (1892-1970): janmasatabarse nibedita sradharghya* (Birth Centenary Tribute to the painter-architect Surendranath Kar, 1892-1970), Calcutta: Anustup, 1993, pp.2-4.

7 'A Ditcher's Diary', *Capital*, 28 September 1916, p.693.

8 Ibid.



Old Howrah Bridge was tied with iron chains and ropes to prevent being swept away

the gardens of Calcutta; this was described as a 'catastrophe' by Calcutta Gazette, a government publication.<sup>9</sup> The coming of the cyclone revealed the uncaring attitude adopted by municipal authorities in relation to the natural environment of the city. Driven to ill-executed electrification plans which were promoted by rich European residents and companies, they endangered numerous trees that had been planted by the colonisers themselves to provide the city with a green cover.

The cyclone was not kind to the colonised subjects. Ships and boats were securely fastened to the jetty but some of the Indian boats bumped against one another and developed leaks; the goods stored in them suffered water damage.<sup>10</sup> The British sources brushed aside the experience of the common people. Suren Kar, a struggling artist, could not ignore the daily hardships and scarcity. He offered a different perspective from the streets. He was among the panic-stricken people hurrying home, their offices having closed down. He overheard a lament from someone in the crowd: 'I knew in the morning

an apocalypse (*pralay*) will come.' Another voice declared: 'a storm like this one has not seen in the last 50/60 years or even before then.' Most of the large mahogany trees on both sides of Harrison Road lay uprooted. The electric wires of the Calcutta Tramway were severed. No vehicle was to be found in the street. The Howrah Bridge was closed and tied with iron chains and ropes to prevent being swept away. Many passengers were stranded at Howrah station. Most trains were not running. The passengers, including Kar, organised a 'gherao'; they forced the railway authorities to run a train so that they could reach their homes in the suburbs. The officials, with the aid of hand mikes, informed the passengers not to close the windows as the storm could overturn the train.<sup>11</sup>

These accounts indicate that despite prior warning and 'meteorological knowledge', the vulnerability of ordinary people was uncovered by the storm. A chaotic social situation could not be avoided. Though the losses were neither severe nor major, in a social climate of material hardship, rising alienation and political repression, the coming of the cyclone uncorked a public mood of panic, helplessness and psychological despondency.

9 *Calcutta Gazette*, May 1917, pp.627-629.

10 Lakshmi Narain Baijnath vs Secretary Of State For India on 13 February, 1923, Calcutta High Court. Source: <https://indiankanoon.org/doc/459041/>

11 Kar, 'Smriticharan', pp.2-4.



## Professor H. S. Vasudevan (1952-2020): In Search of What He Really Was

This obituary should be taken as a personalized note of a long-time friend and colleague on the highly enlightened, thoroughly erudite, vibrant academician that Professor Hari Shankar Vasudevan was. It is written with a heavy heart within a week of his sudden departure as a Covid Pneumonia victim on the early hours of 10 May 2020, pronouncing a closure of my 42 year old relations with him. Rather than making any impersonal evaluation of Hari, as we fondly used to call him, I have searched here for what he really was for many of us, as a man and a historian.

Hari's arrival at the academic circles in Calcutta in 1978 may be regarded as an extraordinary event. Professor Amales Tripathi was one of the main architects of having a Russian History expert at the Department of History, University of Calcutta, and young Dr. Vasudevan was their choice. Calcutta had no longer the cosmopolitan intellectuals of the early twentieth century, but Hari's induction as a Lecturer in its last quarter signalled a difference. The eldest son of Methil Vasudevan, an Aeronautical Engineer, and Sreekumari Menon, Hari was brought up in British Kenya from his middle school days, thanks to his father's foreign posting, and later completed his History Tripos, and Ph.D from University of Cambridge under the supervision of Norman Stone. The subject of his thesis was the Provincial Politics and Modernization in Pre-Revolutionary Russia. He came back to India at the end of 1977, and was teaching in Ramjas College for a few months, after which

he was selected for Calcutta University.

Though considered as a 'pucca sahib' by many, Hari was most amiable in the circles of his friends and students, and proved to be a generous person by nature. One of my senior brothers in Calcutta University's history circles called him an 'angel' (*debdut*) in 1978, and many of us later found him without any enemy (*ajatashatru*). It suggests that he was greeted in Calcutta very well, and he also made the city, if then not by culture at least by intellect, his home. I was familiar with him from the beginning, and more so when I joined the Department as a faculty two years later.

I believe that Hari was very serious in his engagement with the history and culture of the city, state and the country throughout the 1980s. It was not an easy task for him because of his non-Indian upbringing during major part of his school and college days. Very soon, he realized that his strength and difficulty was his expertise in European History, with a sound knowledge of Russian, French and German languages together. How to develop and impart this specialization among students in the limited circles of Calcutta, and elsewhere in India? Hari made several innovative visits to Santiniketan and Pondicherry during this time, to some of which I was a witness. I was then teaching respectively at Benaras Hindu University, Varanasi, and Visva-Bharati University, Santinkitan, and every summer vacation we used to meet in Madras. He even used to

come at Tamilnadu Archives in the traditional south Indian dress to see what kind of materials we are dealing with. Much later, while writing about his early teaching days at Calcutta University, Hari admitted that he “was poorly acquainted with the context of modern Indian history research”, and I now think his interest in our research was part of his effort to recover from that.

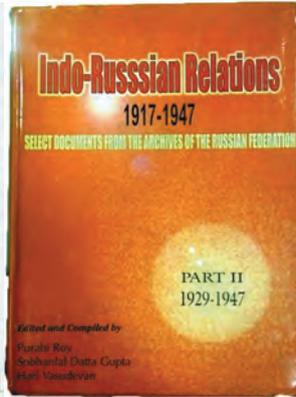
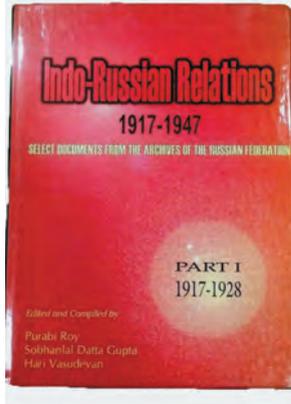
In the early 1980s, after I joined at Calcutta University as a teacher, I found Hari very busy with his passion for teaching and studies in European history, including Russian history. He was of course searching for models for both in the Indian context. Around the mid 1980s, a group of scholars variously attached with the Department of History thought of alternative models of social protest in pre-industrial societies, and Hari along with Professor Rajat Kanta Ray gave a lead in this project. The result was a publication entitled *Dissent and Consensus* (eds. Chattopadhyay, Vasudevan and Ray, Calcutta, 1989), in which Hari had a full article on the landowners and professionals in local government in Russia during the 1890s, virtually linking them with the Russian Revolution of 1905. He was also teaching Industrial Revolution in Europe, and its Russian path for some time became a subject matter of his research. He was translating some seminal articles on commercialization of agriculture from Russian to English, and they were later published with his long introduction (*Commercialization of Agriculture in Late Imperial Russia: Essays in Russian Economic History*, ed. Hari Vasudevan, Calcutta 1998). It took from him about three years of research and editing before its final publication. It was around this

time that Vasudevan along with Purabi Roy and Sobhanlal Datta Gupta compiled and edited a checklist of documents collected by the Asiatic Society, and the volume entitled *Indo-Russian Relations, 1917-1947: Select Documents from the Archives of the Russian Federation* was published as Part I: 1917-28 and

Part II: 1929-47 (Calcutta, 1999 and 2000).

But the moot question remains. It is about the prospects and problems of studying European History in India, particularly in Kolkata. Hari touched on

the subject in an interesting article entitled “B.B. Chaudhuri’s Encounter with European History: A Colleague’s Memoir” (*In Quest of the Historian’s Craft: Essays in Honour of Professor B.B. Chaudhuri, Part I: The Economy*, ed. Bandopadhyay and Das Gupta, Delhi, 2018). He covers the last twenty years of the twentieth century in view of the larger trajectory of teaching European history at the post-graduate programme of Calcutta University, and found a few spectacular achievements as far as the history of European industrial economy and society, along with its regional variations, were concerned. In this search, he even found a bright name from among the faculty of the history department of the University in the early 1960s: Dr Pradyot Mukherjee who had an untimely death. But some of its main problems remained, and even loomed large over the years. There was a methodological question of broader perspectives and detailed studies in European history. The shift from economic to social to cultural issues was another factor. The gender question and the linguistic turn of historiography were drawing more attention in the



1990s. The Russian History special paper had already been abolished at the University. Over and above all, there was lack of interest and capacity among the student community at large in continuing serious interest in research and studies for European history.

Globalization had begun in full swing from the late 1990s, and Hari's academic interests began to change in multiple directions from this time: Central Asia, International Relations, East Asia and even Look East. From 1999, Hari was a full Professor at Calcutta University, but he soon took other positions and administrative responsibilities from 2001 onwards. He went to Jamia Millia Islamia, on lien, to take up the position of a Professor in charge of Central Asia Programme. He then became the Director of Moulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute of Asian Studies (MAKAIAS) during 2007-11. One of his major publications is *Shadows of Substance: Indo-Russian Trade and Military Technical Cooperation* (Delhi 2010). The other one, a product of longer years of research, is *Footsteps of Afanasii Nikitin: Travels through Eurasia and India in the early twenty-first century* (Delhi 2015).

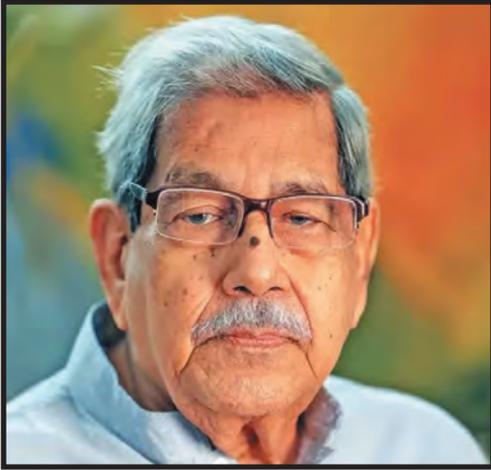
While Hari was developing interest in new areas of research beyond his old love of European history in the last twenty years, he had also an interest renewed in the teaching and research in contemporary Indian history. This seems both interesting and important to me in understanding Hari's intellectual trajectory. He began to teach some of these courses in Calcutta University, and became engaged in research in Constituent Assembly debates during 1947-1950. Earlier, I have also found him collecting printed documents on the social and economic conditions of Malabar from Tamilnadu Archives for the Calcutta University UGC Special Assistance Library. He was also interested in the history of science and technology in modern India, an interest probably generated from the kind of work that his father did in connection with his profession at large, and also in extension of

Hari's first monograph published in 2010. He even completed the compilation, translation and editing of his mother's autobiography entitled *Memoirs of a Malabar Lady*, before she passed away in January 2020.

At the end, I come to my friend Hari, the man that he was. In a sense, this brief note is written to search for the destination of his real journey. He was a vibrant, friendly, always illuminating personality. A large hearted person by nature, stains of bad feeling rarely touched him. It is true that he was a *bhadralok*, encircled, here and elsewhere, by the cultured groups of people associated with him, his family, select friends, his wife Tapati Guha Thakurata, a historian of art and culture, and their daughter Mrinalini Vasudevan. But those people who have seen Vasudevan closely will testify how often he could break the barrier of *bhadraloks*, meeting all and sundry, and coming to cordial terms with any of them. This was partly possible as his Bengali improved remarkably over the years, but his basic cooperative attitude remained the same. Unlike many *bhadraloks*, he was a god believer, his personal faith in Guruvayur and Sabarimala Ayyappa was deep and profound. Generations of students, colleagues, friends and well-wishers in their respective memories will cherish his loving presence, helping hands, compassionate mind. It is often stated that Hari lived in Kolkata as a big window through which others could look the world beyond, but it is often forgotten that Hari also tried to look inside of his lived life, the real home, in the reverse light of this window only. The unfortunate thing is that the journey remained unfinished with the light and shade of the window.

**Arun Bandopadhyay**

Historical and Archaeological Secretary  
The Asiatic Society



## **Professor Anisuzzaman (1937 - 2020)**

Professor Anisuzzaman was one of the most prominent and highly respected 'public intellectuals' of the South Asian subcontinent. His presence was felt everywhere in Bangladesh, wherever a literary or 'cultural' event took place for the last six or seven decades. An in India he was not an unknown figure either, where, particularly in West Bengal, his presence in any seminar or colloquium was eagerly sought and most of the time was rewarded with it. He received the prestigious Padma Bhushan award from the Government of India in 2014, an honour rarely offered to a foreigner, and the Asiatic Society of Kolkata has had the privilege to offer him the Vidyasagar Gold Plaque in 2011. The awards and honours that came his way are many, and we will look at a list that will follow later.

It was not usual for a scholar of Bengali literature to rise to this high, as scholarship alone does not make a leader or a cultural icon. He was a scholar of high distinction, no doubt, but his continuous and intrepid participation in the East Bengal (later East Pakistan) popular movements, i.e., those for Bengali as an official language, against the

banning of Tagore songs and literature there in the sixties of the last century, his active participation in the 1969 street rebellion and the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation war, and later his leadership, with Begum Jahanara Imam in the 'Ghatak Dalal Nirmul Committee' ('The Committee for the Annihilation of the Killers and Collaborators' [in the Liberation War]), and also his prominent role in the restoration of Democracy Movement in Bangladesh in the late eighties, were among numerous instances of his participation in the larger national life. He was once the Chairman of the Nazrul Institute Trust Body. He was one of the advisors for the rendering of the Constitution of the new Democratic Republic of Bangladesh into Bangla. It is widely known that he was requested to become the President of the country by his student, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, which he refused every time. And all this made him a public figure whose stature no other scholar of his time could match.

And, which was only natural to follow, were the honours and awards. For achievement in literature and for academic excellence, he received Bangla Academy Award, Ananda Purashkar, Sarojini Basu Prize (University of Calcutta), Iswarchandra Vidyasagar Gold Plaque (The Asiatic Society), D. Litt. by Rabindra Bharati University, Nilkanta Sarkar Gold Medal by the University of Dhaka, Jagat-tarini Medal (University of Calcutta); and for patriotic and other humanistic efforts, as for lifetime achievement, he was awarded Ekushe Padak, and Swadhinata Puraskar by the Government of Bangladesh, Star Lifetime Award, Khanbahadur Ahsanur Rahman Gold Medal, including, as already noted above, the prestigious Padma Bhushan from the Government of India. He was a well-decorated man, but decorations seemed to hang lightly on him.

He was born in Calcutta on 18 February, 1937, but the rural base of his family was near Basirhat, now in North 24 Parganas. His father, ATM Moazzem was a homeopathic practitioner. Anis had his early schooling in Calcutta, but his family moved to Khulna

after Partition and then to Dhaka where he completed his Bengali Honours and M A at Dhaka University. After 1957, his long tenure of scholarship and teaching began, which complemented each other and which often opened up for him opportunities of research overseas. While he taught at Dhaka (1959-1969, 1985-2003) and the University of Chittagong for three long tenures, he was invited by the University of Chicago for doing post-doctoral research (1964-69) and next by the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London (1974-75). One can say that his stint in London was more productive than others elsewhere. A scholar of his height can never be ignored by the international academic community, so he has later been associated with many other universities of the world, including the United Nations University (1978-1983), University of Paris (1995), North Carolina State University (1995), Visva-Bharati (2008-2009, 2011).

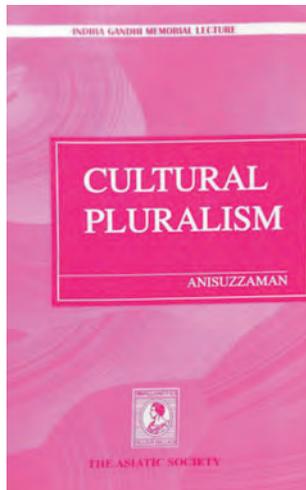
One could, not without unavoidable overlap in such neat categorization, detect four distinct strands in his works. The reader is forewarned that there is no preferential bias in this numbering and order. The first, and also the earliest, is a fuller search and discovery of the Muslim contribution and sensibility in Bengali literature as well as in journalism. This was necessary, as, one could see that, the earlier literary and cultural historiography, mostly conducted by Hindu authors, had treated the topics only partially, for various reasons. It was therefore the duty of the Muslim scholars of East Pakistan to bring out fuller exposure of the topics heretofore marginalized. And this Anisuzzaman did with a detachment and critical acumen that mark all his writings. In this area, his notable books are; *Muslim Manas O Bangla Sahitya* ('The Muslim Mind and Bangla Literature', 1964), *Muslim Banglar*

*Samayikpatra* ('The Periodicals of the Muslim Bengal', 1969), *Banglar Nari, Sahitye O Samaje* ('Women of Bengal, in Literature and Society', 2000). His short biography of his teacher and colleague, Munier Chowdhury (1975), may also fall into this category.

In the second group comes his unearthing and analysis of old eighteenth century documents, for which his London University fellowship offered an opportunity. His publications—*Factory Correspondence and Other Bengali Documents in the India Office Library Records* (1981), *Atharo Shataker Bangla Chithi* ('Bangla correspondence in the eighteenth century', 1983) and *Purano Bangla Gadya* ('Old Bangla Prose', 1984) clearly succeed to extend the history of Bangla prose back beyond the nineteenth century. These are of immense help for the historians of Bangla literature.

For me, the third and a very significant section of his works that deal with the question of the cultural identity of the Bengali Muslims and later, also of the cultural identity of the Republic of Bangladesh, is also quite important. One knows that, during the Pakistan period, many Muslim intellectuals in East Pakistan faced this question, and most of them, including Anisuzzaman, clearly committed that not religion, but culture and language as its basis, should be the grounds

on which a new 'Bangali' identity should be built up. Most of his English publications fall into this category. His Bengali book, *Swaruper Sandhane* ('In Search of Identity', 1976) begins this search, and it is repeated and expanded in his English books *Creativity, Identity and Reality* (1993), *Cultural Pluralism* (1993) and *Identity, Religion and Recent History* (1995). That he was a thoroughly secular person, and attached himself to no particular religion, and had a broad humanistic vision, comes out clearly in these books.



The last, but by no means the least, is his autobiographical writings. He wrote a full biography later, but his personal experiences begin to come out earlier with his *Amar Ekattor* ('My 1971', 1997), *Muktijuddha ebong Tarpur* ('The Liberation War and After', 1998), *Amar Chokhe* ('In My View', 1999), *Kal Nirabadhi* ('Time without End', 2003), which probably was reissued in West Bengal later as *Bipula Prithwi* ('The Huge World'). Some of these books contain contemplations and observations more than autobiography, but all are fascinating to read, as these books adequately demonstrate Anisuzzaman as a prose stylist. He writes attractively without mannerism, and often, in a short comment, exudes a humour that is delightful. It looks as though understatement is his personal signature in prose. In comments about the contemporary events, he minces no words, and he states clearly his points of disagreement

with the administration and leaders in power whom he otherwise supports.

The statement that, as in his autobiography, he was a somewhat self-effacing person, may sound strange, as he was almost omnipresent in the cultural scene of his time, across the borders. Yet, in spite of his being the central figure everywhere, he had a particular faculty of not being loud or overbearing, and spoke in short, precise sentences, thus quickly getting into the heart of the matter at hand, and concluding, unlike others, much sooner than his satisfied audience would expect. He was a great teacher, and a fine person, always ready to help anyone.

Such a scholar and man will be dearly missed by his adoring society and the international community of intellectuals who knew him and his work, and also loved him as a man.

**Pabitra Sarkar**

Former Vice Chancellor  
Rabindra Bharati University



## দেবেশ রায় (১৯৩৬-২০২০)

তিস্তাপারের কথাশিল্পী চলে গেলেন। বাজার সর্বস্ব অর্থনীতির প্রবল চাপেও যে কয়েকজন মুষ্টিমেয় লেখকের লেখনীতে বাংলা সাহিত্যের ব্যতিক্রমী ধারাটি আজ কোনক্রমে টিকে আছে সেখানে একটা বড় শূন্যতার সৃষ্টি হল। আর আমরা যারা আমাদের প্রাণের শহর জলপাইগুড়ির জন্য একটা আত্মশ্লাঘা সবসময় অনুভব করি, তারা অনেকখানি রিক্ত হলাম।

দেবেশ রায় আমার প্রতিবেশী ছিলেন। দেবেশ রায় আমার স্কুল জলপাইগুড়ি জিলা স্কুলের ছাত্র ছিলেন। দেবেশ রায় আমারই মতন জলপাইগুড়িতে উড়ে এসেছিলেন, তারপর সবকিছু উজাড় করে জুড়ে বসেছিলেন। এই আপাত অযৌক্তিক অথচ আবেগ নির্ভর কারণগুলিই কি এই লেখার মাধ্যমে তাকে আমার শ্রদ্ধার্থ জানানোর জন্য যথেষ্ট নয় ?

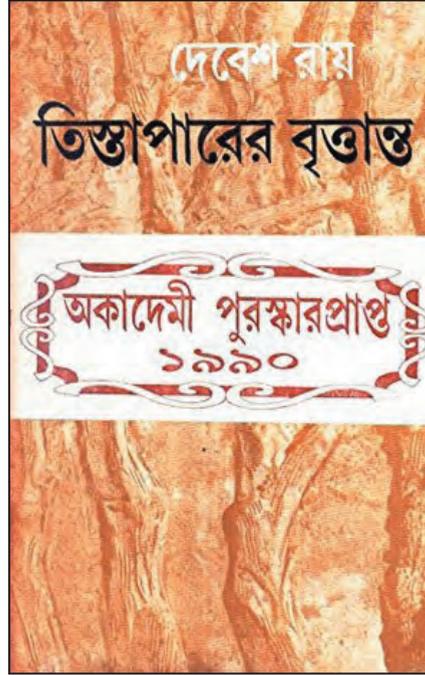
আমি তখন নবম শ্রেণী। শীতের এক অলস

দুপুরে তাঁর সাথে আমার প্রথম এবং একমাত্র আলাপ। কয়েকদিন থেকেই লক্ষ্য করছিলাম পাড়ার যে বাড়িটা বছরের প্রায় অধিকাংশ সময়ই বন্ধ থাকে সেখানে কারা যেন এসেছে। শীতের এক দুপুরে স্কুল থেকে ফেরার পথে তিনি আমাকে ডেকে নিলেন। দীর্ঘদেহী, বাড়ির সামনের ছোট্ট উঠোনে আরামকেদারায় বসে বই পড়ছিলেন। মামুলি কথাবার্তা হল। কী নাম, বাবার নাম কী,

কোন ক্লাসে পড়ি, গল্পের বই পড়ি কিনা ইত্যাদি। রাতে খাওয়ার টেবিলে প্রসঙ্গটা উঠতেই বাবা বললেন, ‘আরে উনিতো দেবেশদা’। বাবাই বললেন, একটু বড় হ, ওর তিস্তাপারের বৃত্তান্ত পড়বি, দেখবি তোর চোখ খুলে যাবে।

তা সেই চোখ খুলতেই সময় লেগে গেলো আরও তিন বছর। মাধ্যমিক পরীক্ষার পর চলন্তিকা পাঠাগারের বিস্তৃত বইয়ের সম্ভারে নিজেকে ডুবিয়ে দিয়ে যখন আস্তে আস্তে বড় হয়ে উঠছি, তখনই একদিন হাতে চলে এলো দেবেশ রায়ের তিস্তাপারের বৃত্তান্ত। যদিও পাঠাগারের সর্বময় কর্তা পরিমলজেরু বইটা পড়তে দিলেন না, বললেন, ‘এখন নয়, আর একটু অপেক্ষা কর।’ সেই অপেক্ষার অবসান হল আরও দু বছর পর। উচ্চমাধ্যমিক পরীক্ষার পরবর্তী নিঝুম দুপুরগুলিতে আমার সঙ্গী হল দেবেশ রায়ের তিস্তাপারের বৃত্তান্ত।

সত্যি কথা বলতে কি প্রথমে একটু একঘেয়ে লাগছিলো - এতও বিস্তৃত বর্ণনা, কিন্তু ধীরে ধীরে তাঁর স্টাইলটা আমার মন জয় করে নিলো। তিস্তাপারের এই ‘বাঘারু’ কে তো আমি ছোটবেলা থেকেই চিনি। আমাদের বাড়ির ‘কামলা’ জিতেন দা, যে মাঝে মাঝে বাড়ির বাগান পরিষ্কার করতে আসে, একটা একফালি কাপড়ে তার লজ্জা নিবারণ করে সারাদিন খেটে যায়, মাঝে মাঝে গুনগুনিয়ে গান গায়, আর দুপুরে গাছ থেকে কলাপাতা কেটে কুয়োর পাড়ে বসে মায়ের দেওয়া ডাল ভাত সাবড়ে খায়, সেইতো বাঘারু। তিস্তাপারের বৃত্তান্ত আমাকে নতুন করে জলপাইগুড়িকে ভালোবাসতে শেখালো। আমার চোখের সামনে খুলে গেলো এ আরেক



নতুন জলপাইগুড়ি। আরও পরে, ২০০৬ থেকে ২০১১ পর্যন্ত যখন স্বাস্থ্য দপ্তরে কাজ করছি, কাজের সূত্রে জলপাইগুড়ির প্রত্যন্ত অঞ্চলে ঘুরে বেড়াচ্ছি, কাজ করছি প্রান্তিক মানুষদের সাথে, তখন আমার একটুও অসুবিধা হয়নি, কারণ এই জলপাইগুড়িকে যে আমায় দেবেশ রায় ইতিমধ্যেই চিনিয়ে দিয়েছেন।

দেবেশ রায়ের জন্ম ১৯৩৬ সালের ১৭ই ডিসেম্বর, বাংলাদেশের পাবনা জেলার বাগমারা গ্রামে। দেশভাগের আগেই পরিবার সহ থিতু হন জলপাইগুড়িতে। ঠাকুরদা উমেশচন্দ্র ছিলেন জলপাইগুড়ি জিলা স্কুলের প্রধান শিক্ষক।

দেবেশ রায়ের পড়াশোনা প্রথমে আনন্দ মডেল প্রাইমারি স্কুলে, তারপর জলপাইগুড়ি জিলা স্কুলে। জলপাইগুড়ির আনন্দচন্দ্র কলেজ থেকে স্নাতক হন। কলকাতা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় থেকে স্নাতকোত্তর ডিগ্রি অর্জনের পর আবার ফিরে যাওয়া জলপাইগুড়িতেই। দীর্ঘ ১৭ বছর জলপাইগুড়ির আনন্দচন্দ্র কলেজে বাংলা বিভাগে শিক্ষকতা করেন। পরবর্তী কর্মজীবন কলকাতার সেন্টার ফর স্টাডিজ ইন সোশ্যাল সায়েন্সেস। ছাত্রাবস্থাতেই জড়িয়ে পড়া বামপন্থী আন্দোলনে। দীর্ঘদিন ছিলেন সি পি আই-এর জলপাইগুড়ি জেলা সম্পাদক।

ছিলেন সি পি আই এর রাজ্য পরিষদের সদস্যও। বামপন্থী আন্দোলনই তাকে তিস্তাপারের মানুষের কাছাকাছি এনে দিয়েছিলো। ঝরঝরিয়ে বলতেন রাজবংশী ভাষা। ওদের কৃষ্টি, সংস্কৃতি ছিল তাঁর নখদর্পণে। জলপাইগুড়িকে তিনি চিনতেন হাতের তালুর মত। জলপাইগুড়ি নয়, জলেশগুড়ি নামটাই ছিল তাঁর বড় পছন্দের।

বড়দা দীনেশ রায়ের হাত ধরেই তাঁর

লেখালেখির শুরু। *জলার্ক* পত্রিকায় সম্ভবত তাঁর প্রথম লেখাটি প্রকাশিত হয়। সেটা ১৯৫৩ সাল। এর পরপরই তিস্তাকে নিয়ে লেখেন ‘মৃতদংশন ও বিপজ্জনক ঘট’। তাঁর প্রথম উপন্যাস *যযাতি*। ‘আহ্নিক গতি ও মাঝখানের দরজা’, ‘দুপুর’, ‘পা’, ‘কলকাতা ও গোপাল’, ‘পশ্চাৎভূমি’, ‘ইচ্ছামতী’, ‘নিরস্ত্রীকরণ কেন’, ও ‘উদ্বাস্ত’— এই আটটি গল্প নিয়ে বেরিয়েছিল তাঁর প্রথম গল্পের সংকলন। তারপর একে একে এলো : *মানুষ খুন করে কেন*, *মফস্বলী বৃত্তান্ত*, *তিস্তাপারের বৃত্তান্ত*, *সময় অসময়ের বৃত্তান্ত*, *লগন গাছার*, *আত্মীয় বৃত্তান্ত*, *বরিশালের যোগেন মণ্ডল*, *সাংবিধানিক এজলাস*। ব্যতিক্রমী ধারার গল্প উপন্যাসের সংখ্যা শতাধিক। পাশাপাশি ১৯৭৯ সাল থেকে দীর্ঘ এক দশক সম্পাদনা করেছেন *পরিচয়* পত্রিকার। ১৯৯০ সালে *তিস্তাপারের বৃত্তান্ত* উপন্যাসটির জন্য তিনি সাহিত্য অকাদেমি পুরস্কারে সম্মানিত হন। এই উপন্যাসে উত্তরবঙ্গের সামাজিক আর রাজনৈতিক জীবন মিলেমিশে একাকার হয়ে গিয়েছিলো।

বাংলা সাহিত্যে দেবেশ রায় প্রকৃত অর্থেই একজন সাহসী লেখক, একজন ‘বিকল্পসন্ধানী’ লেখক। বাজার অর্থনীতির ‘জনপ্রিয়’ হাতছানিতে তিনি প্রলুদ্ধ হন না, বরঞ্চ তা অনায়াসে প্রত্যাখ্যান করতে পারেন, ঠিক যেভাবে তাঁর সৃষ্টি অধিকাংশ চরিত্রই ‘আধুনিকতা’কে প্রত্যাখ্যান করে। উপন্যাসের বাঁধাধরা ছক বা আঙ্গিক সম্পর্কে তিনি উদাসীন। তিনি তাঁর একের পর এক উপন্যাসে এই বাঁধাধরা ছক ভেঙে যান, সৃষ্টি করেন এক নিজস্ব ঘরানার। তাঁর কথায়, ‘প্রথম পরিচ্ছেদে লেখক হিসেবে লিখেছি, দ্বিতীয় পরিচ্ছেদে পাঠক হিসেবে react করেছি, বাইরে থেকে দেখলে প্রথম পরিচ্ছেদ উপন্যাস, দ্বিতীয়তে আত্মসংলাপ। এই ভাবে। কিন্তু উপন্যাস তো ওইভাবে তৈরি হয়না। ফর্মটাকে আমি বাইরের জিনিস মনে করি না। একটা ফর্ম যখন তৈরি হয় তখন লেখক বিষয়টাকে কিভাবে ধারণ করছেন, তাই ফর্ম হয়ে যায়।’ তাঁর লেখায় ঘটনাবলীর বিস্তৃত বর্ণন। একটু একটু করে তারা একটা আকার নিতে শুরু করে। তারপর একসময় তা একটা মহাকাব্যের অবয়ব নেয়। যে মহাকাব্যের পরতে পরতে ছড়িয়ে থাকে

রক্ষ বাস্তবতা, কখনও কখনও যা ইতিহাস, পুরাণ, লোকগাথাকে ছুঁয়ে যায়, কখনও বা আলতো করে স্পর্শ করে রাজনীতির অলিন্দ, রাষ্ট্রশক্তির আফালন, ক্ষমতার হাফাকার, আর সবশেষে যার কোথায় যেন বেজে ওঠে একটা প্রত্যাখ্যানের সুর। তাই রাষ্ট্র, মন্ত্রী নেতা সব বুঝে নিয়ে বাঘারু বলে ওঠে, ‘মোর কোনো মিছিল নাই।’ বড় সত্য কখন তাঁর লেখনীতে। এই সত্য সহ্য করবার জন্য পাঠকের হিম্মত থাকা চাই, আর তাই দেবেশ কখনই সবার ‘লেখক’ হয়ে উঠতে পারেন না।

জলপাইগুড়ি দিয়ে শুরু করেছিলাম, শেষটাও করি জলপাইগুড়িকে দিয়েই। দেবেশ রায়ের হৃদয়ের অনেকখানিই জুড়ে ছিল উত্তরের এই জলশহর। তাঁর মনের প্রতিটি কোঠায় ছিল এই শহরের নিত্য আনাগোনা। তাঁর কথায়, ‘আর সব জায়গায় আমি আগন্তুক, কিন্তু জলপাইগুড়িতে আমি গেরস্ত।’ প্রয়াত এক কংগ্রেস নেতার মুখে ঘটনাটা শোনা। ষাটের দশক। জলপাইগুড়ির বামপন্থী রাজনীতিতে দেবেশ রায় তখন পরিচিত নাম। সদ্য সদ্য রাজ্য সরকার ঘোষণা করেছে উত্তরবঙ্গে মেডিক্যাল কলেজ হবে। এবং এই ঘোষণার সাথে সাথেই মেডিক্যাল কলেজের স্থান নির্বাচন নিয়ে জলপাইগুড়ি আর শিলিগুড়ি এই দুই শহরের মধ্যে শুরু হয়েছে চিরায়ত দ্বন্দ্ব, যা নানা ইস্যুতে আজও বহমান। জলপাইগুড়ির বাসিন্দা হলেও দেবেশ রায় মনে করতেন মেডিক্যাল কলেজ শিলিগুড়িতে হওয়াই বাঞ্ছনীয়, যাতায়াতের সুবিধার কারণে উত্তরবঙ্গের সবকটি জেলার বাসিন্দারাই উপকৃত হবে। এই বিষয়ে তাঁর মতামত তিনি নিদিষ্ট করে ব্যক্ত অবধি করেছিলেন। কিন্তু গোল বাধলো অন্য জায়গায়। মেডিক্যাল কলেজের স্থান নির্বাচন নিয়ে এই রেযারেষি থামাতেই শিলিগুড়িতে একটি সর্বদলীয় বৈঠকের আয়োজন করা হল। ডাকা হল জলপাইগুড়ি আর শিলিগুড়ির সমস্ত রাজনৈতিক নেতাদের। বৈঠকের দিন কয়েক আগে দেবেশ রায়ের বাড়িতে এসে হাজির জলপাইগুড়ির নামজাদা সব কংগ্রেস নেতারা। দেবেশের কাছে তাদের সবিনয় অনুরোধ ওই বৈঠকে হাজির থেকে তাঁকে বলতে হবে। দেবেশ অপ্রস্তুত, ‘কিন্তু আমি বললে তা তো জলপাইগুড়ির বিপক্ষে যাবে।

আমি তো চাই মেডিক্যাল কলেজ শিলিগুড়িতে হোক, তাতে গোটা উত্তরবঙ্গের মানুষের সুবিধা।' নেতারাও নাছোড়বান্দা, 'তুমি বলবে, তোমার মত করেই বলবে, আর জলপাইগুড়ির পক্ষে বলবে।' দেবেশ ওই বৈঠকে শেষমেশ হাজির হয়েছিলেন। যদিও জলপাইগুড়িতে মেডিক্যাল কলেজ হয়নি, কিন্তু ওই বৈঠকে তিনি জলপাইগুড়ির হয়েই বলেছিলেন। তার (অ)যুক্তিগত বক্তব্য সকলকে মুগ্ধ করেছিল। দেবেশ এমনই। জলশহর কে ভালোবেসে তিনি তাঁর চিন্তা, মতবাদ ইত্যাদিকে অনায়াসে জলাঞ্জলি দিতে পারতেন।

তিস্তাপারের বৃত্তান্তের পর তিস্তা দিয়ে অনেক জল বয়ে গেছে। নন্দনপুর বোয়ালমারী, ঘুঘুডাঙ্গা,

বানারহাট, গয়েরকাটায় আজ নতুন বসতি। চওড়া পিচ রাস্তা দিয়ে সেখানে প্রবেশ করেছে আধুনিকতা। তিস্তাবুড়ির গান আজ আর শোনা যায়না, বরং ডিশ এন্টেনা ছুঁয়ে আজ সেখানে নেমে আসে হিন্দি গানের চটুল সুর। নিতাই সরকার, আকুলউদ্দিন, রাবণ চন্দ্র রায়রা আজ আর কোথায়? তবুও তিস্তা বয়ে চলে। বহমান তিস্তার কোন এক বাঁকে কোন একদিন তার সাথে ঠিক দেখা হয়ে যাবে দেবেশ রায়ের। দেবেশ তো ঘরে ফিরতেই চেয়েছিলেন। ভালো থাকবেন দেবেশ রায়।

অরুণপরতন বাগচী

প্রশাসনিক আধিকারিক, দি এশিয়াটিক সোসাইটি



Caught between COVID-19 and Amphan Miseries

**We mourn the death of victims caused by Amphan, COVID-19 and the poor migrant labourers who died on their way to return during the days of Lockdown. We also pay our respect to Doctors, Nurses and Citizen Volunteers whose selfless efforts to aid the marooned and sick resulted in their own sacrifice, sufferings and even their untimely deaths.**

## **Brief Report on Historical Links and Contemporary Convergences of India-Japan Relations**

**Lipi Ghosh**

Former Dean, Post-Graduate Faculty Council of Arts, University of Calcutta

The Asiatic Society, Kolkata organized a day-long seminar on 'Historical Links and Contemporary on India-Japan Relations', 13 March 2020.

The programme started with welcome address by Dr. Satyabrata Chakrabarti, General Secretary of The Asiatic Society. The inaugural session was attended by Mr. Masayuki Taga, Honourable Consul General of Japan, Japan Consulate, Kolkata and Professor Pabitra Sarkar, former Vice-Chancellor of Rabindra Bharati University, Professor Swapan Kumar Pramanick presided over the inaugural session. The welcome address of Dr. Chakrabarti was followed by a speech of Professor Lipi Ghosh, former Dean Post-Graduate Faculty Council of Arts, University of Calcutta and convener of the seminar. Professor Ghosh introduced the Seminar to the audience. She at the outset narrated how Buddhism followed by Rabindranath Tagore and Subhas Chandra Bose developed and strengthened India-Japan relations over historical period of time. She also pointed out the contemporary economic trade culture as well as security aspects of India-Japan relations in contemporary times. Mr. Masayuki Taga emphasized the credentials of The Asiatic society in different times to foster India-Japan relations; he also expressed his sincere thanks to the Society for promoting such an important subject of international relations between the two countries. Professor Pabitra Sarkar during his key-note address pointed out his personal visit to Japan for the last four decades and he specifically wanted to express his high regards impression about the notion of discipline and perfection among the Japanese as

a nation. He also stressed the importance of this type of seminar which in a way reveals the connectivity between past and present relations of India and Japan. Professor Swapan Kumar Pramanick, the Vice-President of The Asiatic Society talked about his experience in Japan and the extent of politeness and helping attitude among the Japanese as he observed during his short visit. Professor Sujit Kumar Das, Treasurer of The Asiatic Society extended the vote of thanks.

The first academic session had three papers to be presented, like Professor Unita Sachidan, Head of the Department of East Asian Studies, Delhi University, Dr. Ryohei Kasai, Visiting Researcher, Center for South Asian Studies, Gifu Women's University and Professor R Siva Kumar, Kala Bhawan, Visva Bharati. Professor Sachidanand and Professor Kasai could not attend in person because of COVID-19 virus scare and visa restrictions respectively. The summary of their paper was read out by Professor Lipi Ghosh. Sachidanand's paper focused on migration of Buddhism to Japan via China and Korea. Kasai's paper pointed out three aspects of limitations between India-Japan relations during the crucial era of 1940s. Professor R Siva Kumar's paper was on Japanese influence on painting of Santiniketan as transmitted by Rabindranath Tagore and his followers.

The second academic session had four papers on contemporary aspects of India-Japan relations. Dr. Kakoli Sengupta, Assistant Professor Department of International Relations, Jadavpur University, Ms Sanjana Joshi, Phd Scholar, Department of South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of Calcutta, Dr. Angana Guha Roy, Delhi Policy Group, New Delhi

and Dr. Madhuchanda Ghosh, Department of Political Science, Presidency University were the paper presenters. Dr. Sengupta's paper was on India-Japan strategic co-operation in context of Indo-Pacific region where China's threat looms large. Ms Joshi's paper talked about FDI, trade and economic interdependence have played major role in India-Japan's economic relations post 1952 era. Dr. Guha Roy's paper has taken into account as dealt with FOIP (Free Open Inclusive Policy) in Indo-Pacific and its strategic benefit in India-Japan Defence Rela-

tions. Dr. Ghosh's paper laid emphasis on 2+2 dialogue between India-Japan and its implication in forging new security partnership in Asia.

The valedictory address was given by Professor Arun Bandopadhyay of The Asiatic Society. His speech reiterated that history has a role to play and defining contemporary relations on this two countries. He emphasized on 'culture' as a key word to link up past with the present and his final submission was that this 'culture' has many connotations as understood by scholars of history and international relations.

## Professor Pabitra Sarkar honoured by the Government of Japan



Professor Pabitra Sarkar, a life member of the Society, and former Vice chancellor, Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata, has been awarded the 'Order of the Rising Sun, with Gold and Silver Rays' for 2019, by His Royal Highness, the Emperor of Japan. This is the third highest civilian honour that Japan bestows on

people who contribute substantially towards the enhancement of Indo-Japanese friendship. Professor Sarkar is the fourth recipient of the Honour from India, the earlier recipients of which include Dr. Manmohan Singh, Dr. C. N. R. Rao etc.

Professor Sarkar, in his long career, has taught Bangla to

several Japanese students, who have later established themselves in Japanese society, as scholars, diplomats and cultural activists. He has travelled seven times to Japan and has written about it, apart from translating Japanese folktales and plays from English. His friendship with Professor Kajuo Azuma, the foremost Tagore scholar from Japan, has resulted in important publications about Japan from Rabindra Bharati University, as also in establishing, with the help of Paschimbanga Bangla Akademi, the Rabindra-Okakura Bhavan at Bidhan Nagar, Kolkata in 2007. Professor Sarkar has also been the President of Indo-Japanese Social and Cultural and Welfare Association of Kolkata, an institution that teaches Japanese to Indian students and does other socially beneficial work, for about three decades.

The Society congratulates Professor Sarkar on his achievement.

## Observation of the International Women's Day

**Bandana Mukherjee**

Research Officer, The Asiatic Society

International Women's Day was observed by the Asiatic Society, Kolkata on 6 March 2020 at Humayun Kabir Hall of the Asiatic Society at 3.30 p. m. It was attended by a good number of participants including the Council Members, members of the Asiatic Society, officers and staff members of the Society.

The programme was started with a welcome address and brief deliberation of the historical background of the observance of the International Women's Day by Dr. Bandana Mukherjee. She presented a brief account of the object of the observance of Women's Day for the protection of Women's Right and Mutual respect of all working women in their working place since 1906, its influence upto the modern Society and also the contribution of Raja Rammohan Ray, Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar, Lady Abala Basu and other Bengali Socialist of the 18th and 19th century India, with special reference to Bengal for the advancement of women. It was followed by a Rabindra Sangeet delivered by Sri Amit Ghosh. Then Dr. Satyabrata Chakrabarti, General Secretary of

the Asiatic Society delivered a brief lecture. In his speech he said that The Asiatic Society observed this occasion at per direction of the Ministry of Culture. He thanked all the staff members for organizing this programme in a befitting manner within a short period of time.

The function was followed by a series of programme like oration from an extract by Anuradha Bysack, the recitation by Sagarika Sur, Smt. Rupa Mukherjee, song by Smt. Sumana Pramanik, Smt. Suranjana Chaudhury, Smt. Tisa Basu Roy (R.A.) and reading from a selected portion from *Streer Patra* of Rabindra Nath Tagore by Mala Chatterjee. *Manu Smriti* was discussed by Sri Bibekananda Banerjee. Smt. Sujata Misra, Dr. Keka Banerjee (Adhikari), Dr. Shakti Mukherjee recited from the Tagore's poem *Horikhela*. Dr. Jagatpati Sarkar, Smt. Amita Ghoshal, Sri Nirmalendu Ghoshal discussed on different aspects of Women's Day, Sri Arupratan Bagchi, Administrative Officer, also delivered a brief speech regarding the importance and impact of International Women's Day.



General Secretary, The Asiatic Society, addressing the distinguished audience at the programme

## A Report of International Seminar on 'Iswarchandra Vidyasagar Towards Modernity: Science, Society and Public Health' on 4 March 2020

Dallia Roy Chowdhury, Research Scholar, Rabindra Bharati University

The Asiatic Society organized a day long international seminar on 'Iswarchandra Vidyasagar towards Modernity: Science, Society and Public Health' on the 4 of March, 2020 in association with the 'Iswarchandra Vidyasagar Bicentennial Birth Celebration Committee, West Bengal'. The seminar witnessed an enthusiastic participation of near about 200 persons including the participation of various scholars, researchers and interested persons.

Professor Swapan Kumar Pramanick, one of the Vice-Presidents of the society, presided over the inaugural session. Dr. Satyabrata

Chakrabarti, General Secretary of The Asiatic Society in his written message wished the success of the seminar. Professor Susnata Das, the coordinator of the seminar and Director, Vidyasagar Centre for Indological Studies, Rabindra Bharati University, introduced the theme of the seminar.

Professor Makhsuda Khatun, Principal, Calcutta P. G. B. T. College, on behalf of the Celebration Committee delivered the inaugural address.

This was followed by the key-note address, delivered by Professor Mesbah Kamal, Chairperson, Research and Development



In the Inaugural Session(L-R): Professor Susnata Das, Professor Swapan Kumar Pramanick, Professor Mesbah Kamal and Professor Makhsuda Khatun

Collective, Dhaka and Faculty member of Dhaka University. Professor Kamal emphasized on Vidyasagar's role as a 'traditional modernizer' and lamented on the fact that notwithstanding being a Renaissance figure, Vidyasagar has not been a much-discussed figure in Bangladesh, unlike Rabindranath. The inaugural session was concluded by the Vote of Thanks by Dr. Sujit Kumar Das, Treasurer of the Asiatic Society.

The first academic session commenced after a tea-break. This session was chaired by Professor Ashok Nath Basu, former Vice-Chancellor of Jadavpur University. Professor Shyamal Chakrabarti of Calcutta University spoke on the topic 'Vidyasagar's Scientific Mind'. He argued that a scientific spirit was ever-present in reformist Vidyasagar. He substantiated this by referring to Vidyasagar's critical selection of school textbooks. Professor Chakrabarti mentioned that Vidyasagar wrote biographies of Copernicus, Galileo, Newton and others who fought to establish the scientific truth in western world. During his student life, Leelabati and Algebra were taught as a part of mathematics. Vidyasagar proposed to introduce modern mathematics with the help of western science. An outstanding Sanskrit scholar like Vidyasagar immensely upheld the utility of English learning. When Dr. Mahendralal Sircar announced the establishment of 'Indian Association for the Cultivation of Science', Vidyasagar came forward and donated rupees one thousand to the association fund which was equal to the donation of Babu Joykrishna Mukhopadhyay, a Bengali zamindar of Hooghly. Vidyasagar was a member of the founding trustee board of the organization. We can not forget his close friendship with Akshay Kumar Datta, the first Bengali who propagated science culture throughout his life.

Professor Malini Bhattacharya spoke about 'Vidyasagar on Mass-Education and Religion'. She emphasized Vidyasagar's attempts at reforming women's education and his ideas

on the making of an ideal teacher. The last speaker in this session was Professor Abhra Ghosh who spoke on the topic 'Vidyasagar and 19 Century Renaissance' and accentuated Vidyasagar's conception of 'Iswar', from the secular point of view, in the great Bengali anthology *Bodhoday* (since the fifth edition of the book). Mentioning Reverend John Murdoch's (a Christian priest) attitude towards Vidyasagar, Professor Ghosh said that some Bengali authors had opined that Vidyasagar was religious-minded, however Murdoch in his evaluation, on the contrary, had identified him as anti-religion ('secularist'). This was based on his reading of Vidyasagar's two famous primers *Barnaparichay* and *Bodhoday*.

The second academic session was chaired by Professor Himabanta Bandyopadhyay, Vidyasagar Chair Professor at Rabindra Bharati University. The first speaker, Professor Swapan Basu spoke on the topic 'Vidyasagar and Bangali Samaj' with particular reference to the ethical and moral dimensions of his reform programme. Professor Sankar Kumar Nath spoke about 'Vidyasagar and Public Health' based on his diary written during his stay in Karmatar of Santhal Pargana. For last 18 years of his life, Vidyasagar used to stay at Karmatar with the santhals and used to treat them free of cost. A 144-page diary with Vidyasagar's handwritten prescriptions, has been kept at Rabindra Bharati University archive; Dr. Nath argued that after getting initiated into homeopathy under Dr. Mahendralal Sircar, he invested his time and effort in the treatment of poor people and in the field of public sanitation. In her presentation, Dr. Zannat E Ferdousi focussed on Vidyasagar's thoughts regarding the subaltern populace and highlighted the connection between the social values which he espoused and those which were enshrined in Bangladesh's struggle for freedom. The seminar concluded with the Vote of Thanks delivered by Dr. Bandana Mukherjee on behalf of the Asiatic Society, Kolkata.

## Contemporary Research and Emerging Issues of North-East India: Anthropology and Beyond

**Sarit Kumar Chaudhuri**

Professor, Department of Anthropology, Rajiv Gandhi University

A two days national seminar was organised by the Department of Anthropology, Rajiv Gandhi University (RGU), Arunachal Pradesh in collaboration with The Asiatic Society, Kolkata on 2 and 3 March 2020 under the coordination of Professor Sarit Kumar Chaudhuri. The theme of the seminar was "Contemporary Research and Emerging Issues of North-East India: Anthropology and Beyond". The inaugural session was chaired by Professor Saket Khushwaha, Vice Chancellor, RGU and the Key-Note address was delivered by Professor T. B. Subba, (former Vice Chancellor, Sikkim University) Department of Anthropology North-Eastern Hill University (NEHU), Shillong. Dr. S. B. Chakrabarti, General Secretary, The Asiatic Society, Kolkata, was present as the Chief Guest. Delegates from various parts of the country presented their papers on various issues, viz, Emerging concerns of Borderland Societies in North-East India, Dynamics of borderland in India's North-East; Folklore, language and identity Issues of North-East India and other contemporary research on North-East India. The technical sessions was chaired by Professor Tana Showren, (Dean FSS, RGU); Dr. Kulwinder Kaur (Dept. of Sociology, Jamia Millia Islamia, Delhi), Professor Simon John (Director AITS, RGU), Professor P K Panigrahi (Head, Dept. of Political Science, RGU) respectively. The valedictory session was chaired by Professor Amitabh Mitra, Pro-Vice Chancellor, RGU. The valedictory address was delivered by Shri Shyam Sundar Bhattacharya, Philological Secretary of The Asiatic Society, Kolkata.

Inaugural session started on a positive note with the welcome speech by the coordinator of the seminar Professor Sarit Kumar Chaudhuri. He introduced the theme and sub-themes of the national seminar by stressing on the need of multidisciplinary research for understanding multilayered realities and the diverse communities of the North-East region irrespective of the political and cultural boundaries of the region. The seminar was graced by the Vice Chancellor, Professor Saket Khushwaha who highlighted the need of such collaborative initiatives and acknowledged the roles played by The Asiatic Society in the context of the North-East region. He also identified certain researchable issues in the context of Arunachal as well as northeastern region. In key-note address, Professor T. B. Subba shared his view on the need for relooking into the ongoing research in the context of tribes of North-East India and also stressed for the need of comparative studies by focusing on the limits of the auto-ethnography. Citing multiple examples Professor Subba categorically harped on the reexamining methodological strategies for more meaningful tribal studies in the context of North-East India. The chief guest for the seminar Dr. S. B. Chakrabarti, General Secretary, The Asiatic society, briefly narrated the historical journey and explained how it became the mother institution of all the other major institutions in Kolkata that sprang up after; he also emphasised on the need of participation of the younger scholars in such seminar which would add value for more comprehensive understanding of the contemporary issues



Dr. S.B. Chakrabarti, General Secretary, The Asiatic Society, addressing the distinguished audience

reflected in the seminar theme. The inaugural session ended with the vote of thanks by the Head of the Department of Anthropology, Professor H. Vokendro Singh.

In four technical sessions, altogether 17 valuable papers were presented on different themes of the seminar by the scholars who represented different states of North-East India and beyond.

The second day ended after the technical session along with the valedictory session where the welcome address was delivered by Professor Sarit Kumar Chaudhuri. Also, Professor Amitabh Mitra (Pro Vice Chancellor, RGU) chaired the session. The valedictory address was delivered by Shri S. S. Bhattacharya (Philological Secretary, The Asiatic Society, Kolkata) where he briefly summed up the major issues presented by the contributors and discussed by the audience/participants of the seminar. Then he presented his understanding about the language questions in the context of the tribes of the region and explained various concepts and illusions while researching on "Tribal Language" issues

and specially language endangerment issue which is a major concern in the whole North-East region. The Seminar ended with Vote of Thanks by Dr. M Asghar (Department of Anthropology, RGU).

Overall, the two-day national seminar was a huge success and this has generated lot of issues and concerns in the context of the India's North-East. Large numbers of faculty members, research scholars and students of RGU along with other institutions took part in this two-day national seminar.



Dr. S.B. Chakrabarti presenting the Publications of the Asiatic Society to Professor Saket Khushwaha and Professor T. B. Subba

## National Seminar on 'Excursions in History: Power and Contestation in the Historical Writings of North-East India' held on 6-7 March 2020

**Chiranjib Sahoo**

Department of History, Cotton University



Padmashri Professor J.N. Phukan inaugurating the Seminar

The Asiatic Society, Kolkata organised a two-day national seminar on 'Excursions in History: Power and Contestation in the Historical Writings of North-east India' jointly with the Department of History, Cotton University, Guwahati on 6 and 7 of March 2020. More than 30 participants including distinguished historians and social scientists, academics, teaching faculty and young scholars from different parts of the country participated in the seminar.

In her address, Convener and Head, Department of History, Cotton University, Dr. Ritu Thaisen welcomed the distinguished guests and the speakers at the seminar. The key-note address was delivered by Professor (Rtd) J. N. Phukan, Department of History, Gauhati University and Padmasri awardee 2020. In his eloquent address, Professor Phukan stressed on the close cultural ties between the geographical land-scape and different tribes inhabiting the South Asian region, their livelihoods, and the route taken

by the Tai-Ahoms into Assam. Dr. Ramakrishna Chatterjee outlined the various academic initiatives undertaken by The Asiatic Society and the focus on the North-East region of India.

The inaugural address was followed by seven academic sessions.

### **Academic Session 1: Theme:** History of Power and Contestation

Chair: Dr. Rajen Saikia, former Head, Department of History, Nagaon Girls College  
Speaker 1: Chiranjib Sahoo, Cotton University: Understanding Power. Speaker 2: Sunaina Gogoi, Royal Global University: Relationship between State and Mayamara Satra: Politics, Power and Contestation in Medieval Brahmaputra Valley. Speaker 3: Vineet Kumar Das, Research Scholar, Cotton University: New Social Reforms and Caste Dynamics in Colonial Assam; Speaker 4: Jahnabi Gogoi, Research Scholar, Cotton University: Understanding the Working of the Penal System in Colonial Brahmaputra Valley. Dr. Chandan Sharma, Dept. of History, Dibrugarh University: Making of Regional Historical Consciousness: Popular Historiography in Colonial Assam.

### **Academic Session 2: Theme:** Micro History: History of the Margins, Locating the Peripheries and the Fringe Areas.

Chair: Professor (Rtd) Priyam Goswami, former Head, Department of History, Gauhati University. Speaker 1: Dr. Sikhmoni Konwar and Dr. Anup Deka, Karmashree Hiteswar

Saikia College, Guwahati: Linkage of Border People: Myanmar and Nagaland. Speaker 2: Anusuya Baruah, Research Assistant, IIT Guwahati: Outlanders among Consorts: The perspectives of the Assamese Inhabited in Meghalaya. Speaker 3: Dr. Sangeeta Gogoi, Mangaldoi College: A Comparative Ethno-Cultural Study between the Ahoms and the Tais. Speaker 4: Dr. Bornali Sharma, Department of History, Cotton University: Revisiting the Context of Conversion to Christianity: A case study of the Bodos of Udalgiri district of Assam. Speaker 5: Dr. Rishi Karna Das, Department of History: Understanding the Dynamics of Migration in Colonial Brahmaputra Valley.

**Academic Session 3: Theme:** History of Aesthetics and exploring the material Culture of North-East

Chair: Dr. Tilok Thakuria, NEHU, Tura Campus. Speaker 1: Mrigakhi Saikia, Department of History, Gauhati University: Material Culture of the Kapili-Jamuna valley of Assam: A Study based on archaeological survey. Speaker 2: Dr. Ritika Sahu, Department of Archaeology, Cotton University: Statues, Structures and Sites: A case study of the Ahoms of Assam. Speaker 3: Dr. Preetee Sharma, Department of History, Cotton University: An Analytical study of Early-Medieval Pottery traditions from the Brahmaputra Valley (7-13 century CE).

**Academic Session 4: Theme:** Historical Processes of State and Social Formation in North-East India

Chair: Dr. Chandan Sarma, Associate Professor, Department of History, Dibrugarh University. Speaker 1: Zahidul Islam, Assam University: Historical Process of State Formation in Meghalaya. Speaker 2: Amiya Kumar Das, Dergaon Kamal Dowerah College, Golaghat: The Contribution of Sankardeva and Jyoti Prasad Agarwalla in the formation of Assamese cultural nationalism through the eyes of Bishnu Prasad Rabha. Speaker 3: Kadambini Terangpi, Department of history, Diphu Government College: Negotiating cultures of North-East: A Comparative study of the Dimasa and Karbi tribes of Assam. 4. Kuldeep Patowary, Department of History, Gauhati University: Early Modernity and Assam: Contesting and Re-negotiating temporal division in Assam History. 5. Priyanka Talukdar, Department of History, Cotton University: The Role of Vernacular Publication in the Rise of Assamese Nationalism.

#### Valedictory Session:

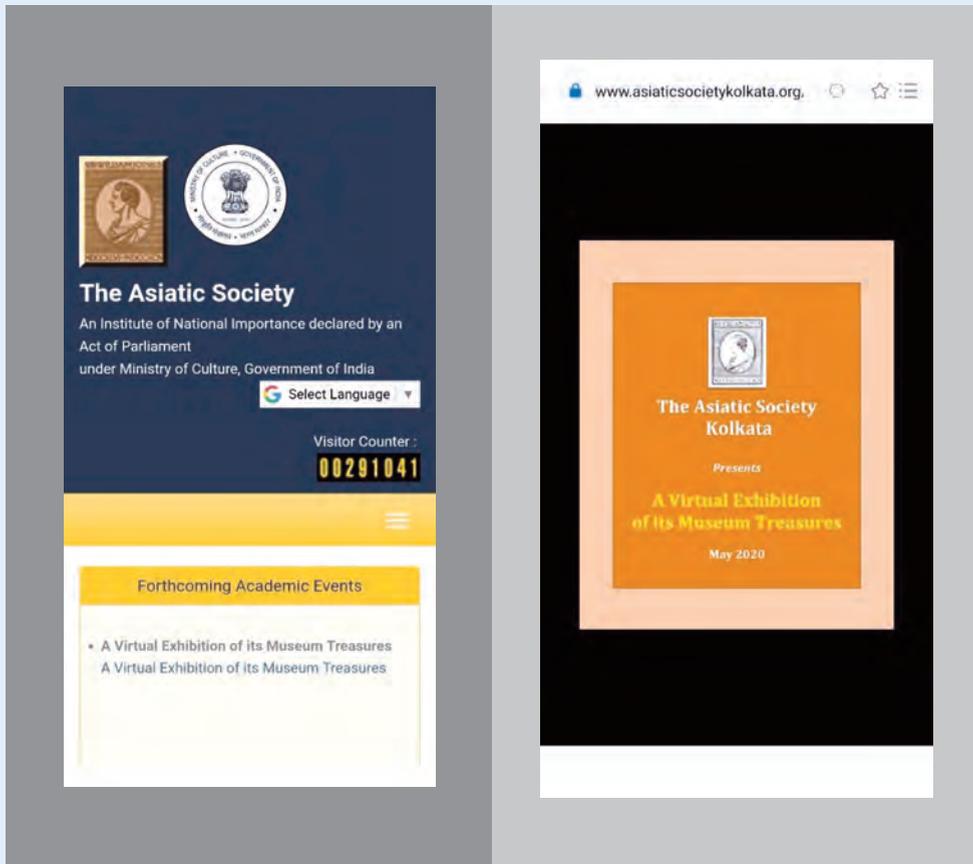
The two-day seminar was concluded with a vote of thanks extended by Dr. Bornali Sharma. Dr. Sarma thanked the distinguished guests, Dr. Ramkrishna Chatterjee, the resource persons and the speakers, and The Asiatic Society for their whole-hearted support in making the seminar a great success. Dr. Ramkrishna Chatterjee assured a publication from the Asiatic Society after receiving the full papers from the resource persons and speakers in the near future.



Distinguished audience

## Virtual Exhibition of Museum

### The Asiatic Society hosts its first Virtual Exhibition



The Asiatic Society, Kolkata has hosted its first Virtual Exhibition titled “*A Virtual Exhibition of its Museum Treasures*” on 11<sup>th</sup> May 2020 on its website ([www.asiaticsocietykolkata.org](http://www.asiaticsocietykolkata.org)). The exhibition can be viewed by clicking the link provided in the homepage of the website. The Society has also planned to host more such exhibitions on different themes in the coming months.

*Text & Images:  
Dhiman Chakraborty  
Controller of Finance, The Asiatic Society*

## The Asiatic Society observes International Museum Day

The Asiatic Society, Kolkata organised a Tele Talk on 18th May 2020 in observance of the International Museum Day where academicians and museum professionals were invited to talk about the role of museums in the present day scenario and how museums will emerge in future significantly in the virtual platform. With the recorded telephonic talks an Audio Visual Clip was made adding visuals of the Asiatic Society's Museum Treasures. The event was then published in the Society's website and also uploaded in its YouTube channel.

In his introductory talk, Dr. Satyabrata Chakrabarti, General Secretary of the Society touching upon this year's theme "Museums for Equality: Diversity and Inclusion" spoke about how Asiatic Society strives to align with it. He also briefed upon the history of establishment of the Museum of the Asiatic Society, Kolkata. Professor Tapati Mukherjee, Library Secretary of the Society talked about the valuable collections of the Asiatic Society's Museum and also narrated the pioneering role of the Society in museum development in the Indian Subcontinent. Dr. Sanghamitra Basu, Head of Manuscript Publication, National Mission for Manuscripts, Ministry of Culture talked about the urgent need for digitization of Manuscripts for digital archiving and online access.

In an impressive and informative talk, Shri Anurag Kumar, Director, Central Research & Training Laboratory, National Council of Science Museums, Ministry spoke about the processes and techniques involved in creation of Virtual Museums and how it will gain importance in the days to come. In a telephonic interview with Dr. Keka Adhikari Banerjee, Curator of the Society, Shri Sudhanva Ranade, Director, Raja Dinkar Kelkar Museum, Pune emphasized on the measures to be undertaken for social and economic sustainability of museums in the present day perspective. Dr. Mahasingh Poonia, Director of Youth & Cultural Affairs, Kurukshetra

University and former Director, Dharohar Haryana Museum, Kurukshetra University delivered a talk on "Museums' approach to people during the ongoing lockdown"



Dr. Pratik Ghosh, Director-Secretary, Gandhi Memorial Museum, Barrackpore gave a talk on "The role of Museums in inclusion of Cultural Diversity". Dr. Pradip Kumar Mandal, Curator, Rabindra Bhavan, Visva Bharati, Santiniketan delivered a talk on "Museum - a challenge of communication". The Thanks Giving talk was delivered by Dr. Sujit Kumar Das, Treasurer of the Society.

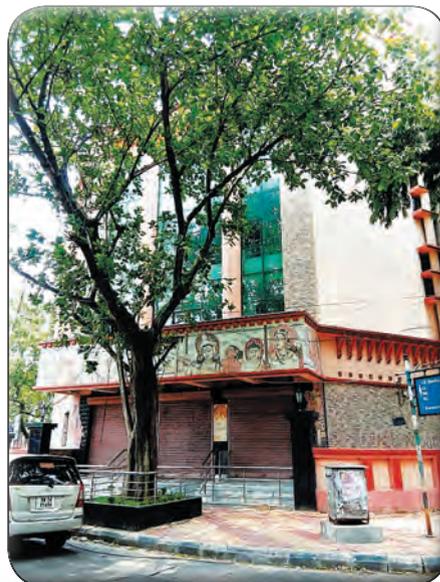
**Keka Adhikari Banerjee**  
Curator, The Asiatic Society

## Forthcoming Online Academic Programmes\*

Tentative Date	Seminars/Conferences/Lectures	Speakers / Participants
05.06.2020	A colloquium in observance of "World Environment Day 2020."	<b>Prof. Asok Kanti Sanyal, Prof. (Dr.) Sankar Kumar Ghosh, Prof. Arun Bandopadhyay and Prof. Swati Nandi Chakraborty</b>
22.06.2020	A Lecture on "Interpreting Indian Constitution as perceived by Dr. B.R. Ambedkar."	<b>Prof. Swapan Kumar Pramanick</b> , Former Vice-Chancellor, Vidyasagar University and Vice-President of the Asiatic Society
15.07.2020	A seminar on "Epidemic and Ancient Indian Wisdom."	<b>Dr. Anjalika Mukherjee and Dr. Nayna Sharma</b>
28.07.2020 and 29.07.2020	An International seminar on "The World of Visvakarma : Artists in ancient India."	<b>Yashaswini Chandra, S.V. Padigar, Suraj Pandit, Rohitha Eswer Shastri, Osmund Bopearachchi, Vincent Lefevre, Umakanta Mishra, R.N. Mishra, Shrikant Ganvir</b>
05.08.2020 and 06.08.2020	A workshop on "Aspect of Manuscriptology - Method of conservation and preservation"	<b>Staff of the Museum, Library and Conservation Sections of the Asiatic Society</b>
03.09.2020 and 04.09.2020	Bi-annual presentation of <b>Research Fellows and Research Assistants</b> of the Asiatic Society	
25.09.2020 and 26.09.2020	Seminar on "Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar and Santal : the legacy of the Bengal Renaissance and Development of the Adivasis."	<b>Dr. G.N. Devy, Prof. Maroona Murmu, Dr. Martin Kampchen, Prof. Pabitra Sarkar, Dr. Ranjit Kumar Bhattacharya, Dr. Boro Baske and Dr. Kumar Rana</b>

\* Tentative

Tree in front of Rajendralala Mitra Bhavan (Salt Lake Campus of the Asiatic Society) fortunately remains intact after Amphan



## Endowment Lectures

1.	<b>Ms. Ela Gandhi</b> , Eminent Academician, Peace Activist and Former Member of Parliament in South Africa will deliver <b>Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar Memorial Lecture on humanities</b> .
2.	<b>Professor Malavika Karlekar</b> , Co-editor, Indian Journal of Gender Studies will deliver <b>Raja Rajendralala Mitra Memorial Lecture</b> on Indological Studies.
3.	<b>Professor Rajmohan Gandhi</b> , Eminent Scholar and Former Member of Parliament [Rajya Sabha] will deliver <b>Indira Gandhi Memorial Lecture</b> on National Integration.
4.	<b>Professor Ramkrishna Bhattacharya</b> , Eminent Scholar on the ancient school of Indian materialism will deliver <b>Professor Suniti Kumar Chatterji Memorial Lecture</b> on Comparative Philosophy of Language.
5.	<b>Professor Nirmala Banerjee</b> , Former Professor of Economics at the Centre for Studies in Social Sciences, Calcutta will deliver <b>Abha Maiti Annual Memorial Lecture</b> on Economic Development vis -a -vis the Question of Women.
6.	<b>Shri Amitav Ghosh</b> , Eminent Indian Writer and the Winner of the 54th Jnanpith award will deliver <b>Dr. Biman Behari Mazumdar Memorial Lecture</b> on Literature and History.
7.	<b>Dr Anungla Aier</b> , Principal, Kohima Science College will deliver <b>Dr. Panchanan Mitra Memorial Lecture</b> on Anthropology.
8.	<b>Dr Asim Dasgupta</b> , Eminent Economist and Former Minister of Finance, Government of West Bengal will deliver <b>Dr. Satyendranath Sen Memorial Lecture</b> on Social Science.
9.	<b>Professor Somnath Dasgupta</b> , Former Vice-Chancellor of Assam University will deliver <b>G.S.I. Sesquicentennial Commemorative Lecture</b> on Earth Science.
10.	<b>Professor Achintya Kumar Biswas</b> , Former Vice-Chancellor, University of Gour Banga will deliver <b>Swami Pranavananda Memorial Lecture</b> .

## Moulvi Mujibur Rahman (1869-1940): Life and Politics

**Md Alamgir Hossain**

Research Fellow, The Asiatic Society

Moulvi Mujibur Rahman was one of the great influential persons in the history of politics of India and Bengal since 1905 up to his death. A man of high integrity and noble character Mujibur Rahman devoted his whole life for the freedom of India, for Hindu-Muslim unity, for the development of Muslim community in Bengal and for upholding the dignity of the press. He was in politics in the Indian National Congress, the Khilafat Committee, and the Muslim League, but wherever he was, he did all that he could do for the unity of the Indian people. He never compromised his position as a journalist even at the cost of refraining his weekly from publication. He suffered imprisonment but never lost his dignity. He was a man among men ever in prison.

Mujibur Rahman was born in Nehalpur, 24 Pargana district of Bengal Presidency, British India (in present-day West Bengal) in 1869. After passing the Entrance Examination, at which he obtained a stipend of Rs. 10, he came to Calcutta and got himself admitted in the F. A. class in the Presidency College, but his financial circumstances put an end to his formal studies. In pursuit of fate, he had to spend days through several works like shop keeper etc. But in his heart was patriotism, idealistic attitude and a strong desire for freedom struggle. He temporarily joined revolutionary groups. During this time he regularly contributed his writings in the newspaper *The Bengalee* edited by Sir Surendranath Banarjee.

In the very beginning of twentieth century Mujibur Rahman felt the necessity of publishing an English journal for the formation of Muslim public opinion. At this time a group of nationalist Muslims also hold the same idea to bring out an



English paper. Thus, *The Mussalman* appeared on 6 Dec 1906 with the cooperation of Abul Kasem (1872-1936) of Burdwan and Abdul Halim Ghaznavi (1879-1956) of Tangail; and with Abul Kasem as its founding editor. After a month and a half Mujibur Rahman was asked to take over the editorship and under him the *Mussalman* run with importance for over 30 years.

The policy of this newspaper was established in its first editorial issue entitled 'Ourselves' –

"We shall be no party to the festering of differences between race and creed, but shall always lend willing help to the establishment of peace, harmony and goodwill between the different sections of our great Indian community".

When the partition of Bengal was declared in 1905, Mujibur Rahman vehemently opposed it. His political life actually started at the time of this measure. He worked with top-ranking leaders of India during this movement. He was very active in anti Partition movement and he delivered his speeches everywhere in anti Partition agitation and various articles and remarks about Partition were published in his newspaper. He not only supported Swadeshi and Boycott movement but also inspired the Bengali Muslims to follow the ideology of boycott in their personal and social life by writing three editorials in the same title 'Boycott, free trade and protection'. According

to him, "Boycott alone can save India from a hopeless economic ruin". He also raised his voice against cruel exploitative operation of England in his newspaper.

Mujibur Rahman was the symbol of communal Harmony. He supported the freedom movement with Hindu-Muslim jointly. Within a short time of the declaration of partition of Bengal, when communal riots and bloody atmosphere were created in different places of Bengal, Mujibur Rahman firmly came forward and published articles back to back about Hindu-Muslim unity in his newspaper. The desire for communal harmony was successfully sounded in his editorial entitled 'Unity between Hindus and Mohamedans' - "Mistrust will make the situation worse while mutual sympathy and cooperation will lead us to desired goal".

Mujibur Rahman's views brought him in conflict with the government at different times. In 1914 he attacked the British imperialism by publishing an editorial entitled 'England, Turkey and Indian Mussalman'. It was the war time and the Chief Secretary of the Government of Bengal who found the editorial objectionable, warned him through a letter. In 1918 the Chief Secretary was led to believe that Mujibur Rahman (the editor) 'has acted or is about to act in a manner prejudicial to the public safety' and directed him to 'abstain from publishing any part of the said paper without first submitting the manuscript of the same to the Special Mohammedan Press Censor, Bengal.' But he refused to consent with the government and the periodical was stopped to publish in the next five weeks.

Mujibur Rahman also participated in the Khilafat and Non-cooperation movement like other reputed political leaders of different parts of India; and his newspaper *The Mussalman* made a strong agitation of political movement in Bengal. Mujibur Rahman preferred the movement of Hindu-Muslim jointly against the British and so, he emphasized on Hindu-Muslim unity and wrote during this movement in his newspaper,-

"If the English retire from India at all,

revolutionary or otherwise, it can only be after the Indian people have learned and have become fit for self government and we fail to see how the Indian people can ever become fit for freedom and self government unless Hindus and Moslems combine and cooperate in all matters which are for their common will".

His participation in the Khilafat and Non-cooperation movements led to his arrest on 9 December 1921 for one year imprisonment and was released on 31 December 1922. He wholeheartedly supported Bengal Pact (1923) of C. R Das and published several writings and news in the development of Pact. He criticized the Calcutta riot in 1926 and played active role to maintain peace in the country. The 19th session of All India Muslim League was held in Calcutta town hall in 1927 and Mujibur Rahman was elected as welcoming president. In his presidential address he criticized Simon Commission as the scandal of India because of imposing it forcefully on Indians.

Mujibur Rahman was told to have been the Secretary of the Provincial Congress Committee and the Khilafat Committee, the Secretary of the Provincial Muslim League and the Chairman of the Reception Committee of All India Muslim League Conference in Calcutta in 1927. He was elected in 1927 as the President of the All India Journalists Association. He was elected as an Alderman in 1931, but refused to seek election to Provincial Council or Assembly, because members elected were obliged to take an oath of allegiance to the British government.

After 1930 the Political scenario of the country was changed. The Muslims lost their faith on the honesty of Congress but Mujibur Rahman still continued to spread the message of nationality through his newspaper in India. In this time differences of opinion developed among the directors or between the editor and other directors later on. Mujibur Rahman resigned in 1935 and *The Mussalman* ceased to publish probably in 1936. In 1937 Mujibur Rahman suffered from a paralytic attack which disabled him and he died in Calcutta on 26 April 1940.

Sugata Ray. *Climate Change and the Art of Devotion: Geoaesthetics in the Land of Krishna, 1550-1850*. Seattle University of Washington Press, 2019. 264 pp. \$70.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-295-74537-4.

Sugata Ray's brilliant book proposes new questions for the discipline of art history. Using concepts and methods taken from material culture studies as well as from art history, Ray proposes reciprocal relations among the earth's changing environment, ecological transformations brought about by the ways humans have lived upon the land and sea, and "theology, art practice, and an aesthetics of the natural world" (p. 20). As a case study, Ray has chosen the region of Braj in north India, first, because of repeated, disastrous droughts and famines in north India that seem to have been particularly severe from the mid-sixteenth century to the early eighteenth century, and second, because in the same period Gaudiya Vaishnavas made the whole region of Braj a sacred landscape.

In the 1540s, about a decade earlier than the first severe recorded famine of the Little Ice Age, Gaudiya Vaishnava scholars residing in Braj began producing theologies of what Barbara Holdrege has called Krishna's "mesocosmic embodiment" in the locality as a whole. The whole region of Braj, the Yamuna River, Govardhan Hill, sacred pools and groves, and indeed every living being in Braj were considered parts of the "manifest body" of Krishna.<sup>1</sup> Ray's thesis is that a theology of Krishna's embodiment in the land of Braj, together with climatic, political, and economic changes to the environment, led to changes

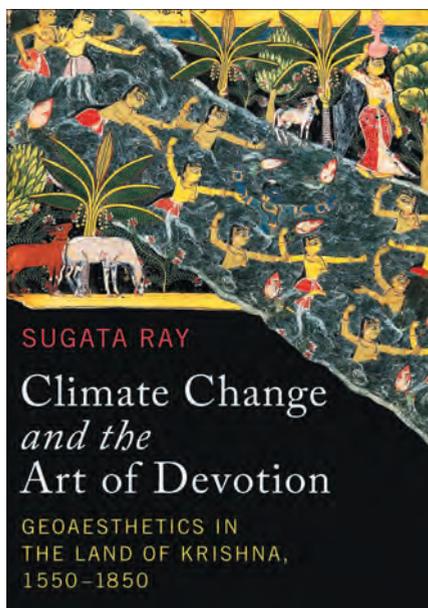
in devotional disciplines of Vaishnava pilgrims in Braj, and to changes in visual practices of art and architecture.

One should note at the outset, however, that his project is not limited to artistic and architectural changes in Braj that were related to climate changes of the Little Ice Age. Rather, Ray has undertaken a case study in a more comprehensive discipline of "geoaesthetics"

as an "approach within art history." Ray describes the subject matter of geoaesthetics expansively: "artistic and architectural practices that were shaped through human interactions with geographical, geological, botanical, zoological, mineralogical, astronomical and climatic formations" (p. 22).

Ray also describes his subject matter as an "interweaving," "interplay," or "interconnectedness" between "nature and culture," or "the natural world and human life,"

or "matter and life," or "the human and the environmental" (pp. 20, 23, 57-9), suggesting practical goals and a dimension of environmental ethics in his geoaesthetics. In a coda we are encouraged to compare a miniature titled "Krishna's Water Sport" from the Isarda *Bhāgavata Purāṇa*, ca. 1560-70 (p. 26, plate 1.1) with an installation called "The Water Diviner," 2008, by Sheba Chhachhi (pp. 185, 186, plates C.11 and C.12). The former shows the whole, beautiful living environment of the sacred Yamuna River. In the second, we see a dimly lit room filled with bundles and shelves of old books, and a small light box that displays Radha and her companions playing in the Yamuna River, but they are surrounded and obscured by the river's floating burden of garbage, and Krishna cannot be seen.



Disconsolate birds and a deer look on from an otherwise lifeless shore.

One of Ray's strategies of mediation between "nature" and "culture" (p. 58) is to develop a dialectical relation between more direct, sensual experiences of environmental "matter" made sacred as Krishna's living body, and more abstract cultural representations of bodies of water and features of the landscape. Early works of Gaudiya Vaishnava theology, archival records of property claims, temple inscriptions, and accounts of travelers and pilgrims are just some of his sources, as are records of droughts and famines; together they help provide contexts for an "eco art history" (p. 20). Ray's most important primary sources, however, are visual artifacts that remain in Braj. He analyzes them with careful attention to detail, and by wide-ranging and insightful comparisons to other works. One hundred and fifteen figures, almost all of which are full-color photographs, provide invaluable visual evidence to support his text.

Ray's arguments are dense, and complex, and always worth pondering. I can only suggest the range of connections Ray makes in each of his four chapters.

With obvious relevance to climate change, chapter 1 takes up the theme of a liturgical practice of "seeing the flowing [Yamuna] river" (p. 29). Ray links this theme to works of art, and to acts of redistributive piety and charity during two prolonged droughts and famines in north India, the first beginning in 1554, and the second in 1614. He explores a new way of painting the Yamuna River in Vaishnava art to show its living environment of plants, animals, and humans. He links this artistic practice to a new liturgical practice of "seeing" the flowing water of the Yamuna River, rather than bathing in or imbibing its water (pp. 13, 29). He links architectural symbols of water to conspicuous acts of piety and charity by emperors Akbar and Jahangir. Finally, he notes imperial Mughal influence on the aesthetics of the soaring Sati Burj temple,

constructed on the Yamuna River at Vishram Ghat in Mathura in 1570 (p. 32, plate 1.3), and on the Torana built by Bir Singh Dev of Orcha at the same site (p. 50, plate 1.17). Both afforded architectural perspectives on the flowing Yamuna River, and the Torana has a motif of the "undulation of waves" (p. 52), and was designed as a balance for the weighing ceremony of Bir Singh Dev against immense charitable gifts of gold.

Chapter 2 turns to the topic of land, and continues a contrast between more direct, sensual experiences of Govardhan Hill, considered a part of Krishna's manifest body, and more abstract relations to the mountain, for example, as it was represented in icons or landscapes, and when it was disputed as legal property. Ray first describes a series of disputes in the 1570s that resulted in Akbar's acknowledging the claim of Pushtimarg Vaishnavas to Govardhan Hill, and the forced removal of Gauriya Vaishnavas. Their expulsion was followed by the construction of a compensatory temple, the largest and most important work of architecture ever constructed by Gaudiya Vaishnavas in Braj.

This temple is the Govind Dev temple in Vrindavan, begun in 1565 by Bhagwandas of Amber, and completed in 1590 by his son, Raja Man Singh I (p. 73, plate 2.7). It is located on a small hill in the town of Vrindavan, a hill that Gaudiya theologians claimed is the *\_yogapitha\_* where Krishna and Radha were united in love. For Gaudiya Vaishnavas, the site was the center of the "lotus mandala" of Braj and the most sacred site in all of Braj (p. 89). Ray argues that within the temple an icon of Govardhan Hill personified as Krishna, together with a fully envisioned landscape of the mountain he is holding, move Govardhan Hill to a liminal presence outside the temple's cave-like sanctum, and transform the mountain's sanctity to a liminal and subordinate status, compared to the temple's sanctum and its images of Krishna and Radha (p. 79, plate 2.13). Finally, he notes that the material from which the icon was

carved, the same red quartzite stone that forms Govardhan Hill, still is thought to be material having “vital energy” and capable of communicating with devotees (pp. 91, 95), quite apart from any artistic use.

Chapter 3 turns to the more prosperous eighteenth century, and takes up the theme of forests. This chapter explores an imagined space for the meetings of Radha and Krishna that became important in Braj along with the contemporary clearing of actual “forests”—semi-arid grasslands, scrub forest, and savannahs. The imagined space was called a *\_kunj\_*, a “dense bower overgrown with creepers and vines” (p. 102). The term *\_kunj\_* in turn inspired a new kind of garden, a new kind of Vaishnava temple, and new ways for pilgrims to experience Radha’s search for Krishna in hidden groves. The first example of this new kind of temple in Braj is the Gangamohan Kunj, a temple in Vrindavan built in the 1750s by Ganga Rani, the wife of Suraj Mal, ruler of the kingdom of Bharatpur (pp. 104, 106, plates 3.5, 3.6). For this temple, and later temples of this type, as pilgrims crossed courtyards before entering the sanctum, they would have brushed against carefully pruned arches in dense clusters of jasmine vines and other flowering bushes associated with Krishna. Thus, Ray concludes, a “corporeal aesthetics” of intimacy between humans and plants was given “tactile and sensorial immediacy” (p. 117). Enclosed by walls, *\_kunj\_* were a place where “the devotee could viscerally feel Radha’s encounter with the sentient plants of a poetic Braj” (pp. 130-1).

Finally, chapter 4 takes up the theme of ether, the element that connects all other elements over vast distances, and the medium of sound and music. In this chapter Ray turns to art and architecture of the nineteenth century, when the hegemony of British rule was at its peak, and when globally modern technologies and novel forms of colonial subjectivity and masculine identity threatened the “theophanic praxis of immanence”

or “geoaesthetics of immanence” of Gaudiya Vaishnavas (p. 174). Chapter 4 explores the first nineteenth-century Vaishnava temple in Braj that borrowed from neoclassical motifs of British colonial architecture. The temple is the Shahji temple (p. 134, plate 4.1), built in Vrindavan in 1868 by the patronage of Shah Kundanlal. Kundanlal was a Vaishnava merchant from Lucknow and a close associate of the last monarch of Awadh, Wajid Ali Shah, who was deposed by the British in 1856.

Ray first explores motifs of neoclassical architecture that might have reminded viewers of imperial British “domination” (p. 136), but he notes their juxtaposition with other motifs that suggest “entanglements and encounters on a global scale,” and a strategy of colonial “cosmopolitanism” (pp. 139, 151) modelled on the architecture of precolonial Lucknow. Music and other arts and pleasures are another theme. Inside on the walls of the central pavilion one sees *pietra dura* images of female figures: musicians, a woman painting a scene, and a woman feeding pigeons, all in Lucknow dress. Kundanlal has included in this group an image of himself playing a drum; he is dressed as a man, but wears the ornaments of a woman. Thus, playing the role of a *sakhi*, one of Radha’s friends, who experience the sweetest form of love for Krishna, is still a third theme. High above the ground floor of the temple, and in the past clearly visible from the central pavilion, an image of Wajid Ali Shah enacts the character of a dancing woman, as he customarily had done in celebrations of the *rasa-lila* before his forced exile from Lucknow. Ray argues that as Kundanlal’s temple resisted imperial domination, it also resisted a new “hyper-masculine” ideal for colonial male subjects. Instead the Shahji temple represents “the male body as a de-masculinized site of spiritual aesthetics” (p. 166).

Important themes in Ray’s book call to mind contemporary issues of climate change, and conceptual and ethical problems that have been caused by conceiving

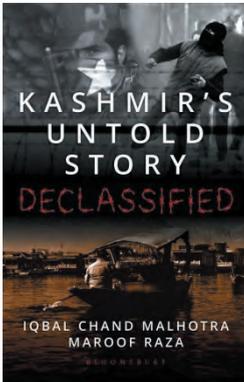
human “culture” as separate from and in control of “nature” (p. 58). By opening art history to questions about how humans have thought about the earth, and how art and religion have been shaped by human changes and natural disruptions to the earth, Ray’s brilliant book guides us to new problems, and to new ways of thinking about art in relation to the “three ecologies” of “land, human subjectivity, and social relations.”<sup>2</sup>

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Barbara A. Holdrege, *‘Bhakti and Embodiment: Fashioning Divine Bodies and Devotional Bodies in Krsna Bhakti’* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 29, 76-79, cited by Ray, 8n26.
- <sup>2</sup> Félix Guattari, *‘The Three Ecologies’*, trans. Ian Pindar and Paul Sutton (London: Bloomsbury, 2000 [1989]), 19-20, 23-25, cited by Ray, 22n82.

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*Kashmir's Untold Story: Declassified*, Iqbal Chand Malhotra and Maroof Raza, Bloomsbury, 2019, Pages: 220, Price: Rs. 499, ISBN: 978-9-3889-1283-9

This is a must read book for anyone seeking convincing answers to two basic questions: First, why do the Chinese always stand by Pakistan and are so determined to consolidate their position in the occupied Aksai Chin and build China Pakistan Economic Corridor at enormous cost? And second: why is the US support to Pakistan has been always so steady? The authors’ answers to these are straight forward: a heady mix of geopolitics and geo-economics created these compulsions and that these are unlikely to change in the future—a bad news for us, the Indians.

However these are based on the analysis of hard evidence, facts and original thought. It begins with the great geostrategic significance of the rise of Sikh empire in the 19th century under Maharaja Ranjit Singh in destroying first, the Afghan power structure to invade the Punjab Plains at will by securing Peshawar, the gateway to Kabul valley and

subduing the Afghan warlords therein. And second, by extending for the first time in history the power of a state based in Indan heartland to a part of the Tibetan plateau in 1834 when the Sikhs under General Zarwar Singh captured Ladakh; and third, in 1839 when occupation of Baltistan and Gilgit-Hunza brought the borders of the Sikh empire to Tsarist Russian empire in Central Asia. The signing of the Treaty of Chushul on September 17, 1842 following the Sikh defeat in the conflict with the combined forces of Tibet and China between Raja Gulab Singh representing the Sikh empire and the Qing empire of China and the then Dalai Lama settled the boundaries of the two powers leaving the control of Ladakh, Aksai Chin, Baltistan and Gilgit-Hunza with the Sikh empire. Never in history, a state based in Northern Indan Plains achieved such a strategic outreach as the Sikh empire did by 1839 - 1842. Even after positioning its successor state- Kashmir following the Treaty of Amritsar big power contests over these strategic areas shaped and continue to shape the unending “great game” in the 21st century. The fact that the Sikh conquests extended India’s frontiers to the Tsarist central Asia and Tibet for the first time in history is not highlighted in conventional history books and even in Kashmir studies. The authors thus did justice to those defining periods of Indian history.

The first Kashmir war triggered by the invasion of the valley by the Frontier tribesmen- Kabalis in October 1947 preceded by uprising of the Muslims of Poonch was really a British move designed to deny India control over the strategic Gilgit-Hunza- Baltistan land border with the USSR Afghanistan and access to Sinkiang in China ; because given the anti colonial and socialist tradition of India's freedom movement, her size and power potential India could not be expected to toe the western line in the Cold war that started already. Hence the strategic importance of Pakistani control over the northern Kashmir territory for the British.

The authors' analysis of the events, the roles of Sir George Cunningham, the British Governor of the North West Frontier Province, Generals- Frank Messervy and Gracey commanding the Pak Army in mentoring , planning and mobilising the tribal raids to Kashmir; and in particular the treacherous act of Major Brown of the Gilgit Scouts in organising a revolt against the authority of the Maharaja at Gilgit, hoisting Pakistani flag and declaring Gilgit Hunza a part of Pakistan establish in no uncertain terms that "tribal (Kabali) invasion was a move of the British "deep State" to further the western strategic interest. These were not just uprisings of Muslims against the Hindu Maharaja. This is further corroborated by the hard evidence that the British officers serving with the Pakistani Army took part in the Kashmir war when the Kabalis were being driven out by the Indian Army and the Pak Army moved in to save the situation. The authors referred to the death of Major R.E. Sloan, a British officer of the Pakistan Army in action in Kashmir war. There might have been more British Kashmir battle casualties. This was in total violation of the solemn assurance of the UK and the then Joint C in C General Claude Auchinleck that the British officers serving under both the Dominions would not take part in any future conflict between the two Dominions. On examination of facts on record

the authors viewed the roles of the British Generals - Roy Bucher and Gracey who led the Indian and Pakistani Armies respectively "treacherous" that led them to conclude that the First Kashmir war was a kind of "shadow boxing" as the British Generals ensured that the Indian intervention didn't succeed to the point of removal of Pakistani forces from Muzaffarabad- Poonch and Gilgit Hunza Region as the British "deep state" was determined to deny India a land border with USSR in close proximity of emerging "Red China". This also explains why Indian Army didn't complete the task of clearing Kashmir of the Invaders and India settled for a UN sponsored cease fire in January 1949 dividing Kashmir in the process.

The consequences of Gilgit Hunza falling under Pakistani control was far reaching as in the same period- 1949-50 consolidation of the Chinese state took place under the Communist Party led by Mao Tse Tung. After taking over Tibet and Sinkiang in 1949-50, China started making inroads to Aksai Chin, a part of Kashmir. Though India's borders with China were not demarcated, as early as 1899 a border that would run through Karakoram and Kashmir was drawn up by the British which came to be known as McCartney- MacDonald line which the authors mentioned still forms the boundary between Pakistan and China. China however made it clear that it didn't recognize the Line as it went ahead to construct the Karakoram high way through a part of Aksai Chin. Further it viewed the Treaty of Chushul "unequal" and thereby questioned its legitimacy. This paved the way for March 2, 1963 Sino Pak Border Agreement resulting in the surrender of 13000 sq miles of territory by Pakistan to China which included Shaksgam River valley, "the home to over 242 glaciers and considered to be the most glaciated Region in the world outside the two poles".

This was a huge strategic gain for China as Aksai Chin already provided her with an alternative access to Shaksgam River valley. This would not have taken place but for the British perfidy which enabled Pakistan to take over

Gilgit Hunza Region. And this was one more strong reason for the authors to hold that the Chinese occupation of Aksai Chin made the Panchsheel Agreement signed much later by India an unequal one.

The acquisition of the Shaksgam River valley proved to be a boon and a veritable gold mine for China in the 21st century global politics when "economic strength became the currency of power" which in turn is founded on domestic capacity to produce micro chips essential for manufacturing most high value added products. Micro chips require two basic raw materials- sand and fresh water. A 30 cm silicon wafer requires almost 10000 litre of fresh water which China's major rivers being choked with effluents can't provide.

In this situation, a convenient location in Xinjiang close to both Taklamakan desert and Shaksgam valley would be ideal for manufacturing micro chips. Thus before long the Chinese polysilicon and silicon wafer producers were found busy setting up giant plants outside Kashgar. The authors' conclusion that strategic control over the vast water resources stored in the lakes, rivers and glaciers in the Himalayan and Karakoram mountain ranges is the real driving force behind China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is valid. This must be the Chinese real agenda to start China Pakistan Economic Corridor and the basis of "all weather friendship" between China and Pakistan.

The answer to the other question about continuing US support is more complex. It is partly a hangover of the British Foreign office view since Second world war that a strong, United India was not in the western strategic interest in the Middle East and the oil rich Gulf Region and especially so once the cold war began. There was also a perception that Pakistan could never be a functioning democracy like India and the British helped Pak Army to develop systems to undermine democracy right from the creation of Pakistani State. The ISI - the inter service intelligence was

therefore founded by a British officer of the Pakistani Army, Maj. General W.J. Cawthorn in 1947 who was its head during the first Kashmir war and thereby laid the foundation of the "deep state" facilitating Army takeover of Pakistan in 1958—a development the West and US in particular endorsed. Hence Pakistan as a permanent client state has always been a strategic asset to protect US interest in the Middle East, Afghanistan and central Asia and will continue to serve as such in the foreseeable future. One must recall that Dr. Kissinger's (then US secretary of state) secret July 21 1971 flight from Pakistan's Peshawar to China was a game changer in global politics; and today Pakistan's role is critical for success of February 29, 2020 Doha Agreement that the US signed with the Taliban to end 18 year old war in Afghanistan - the longest involvement of USA in any conflict.

This being the big picture defining convergence of interests of China and Pakistan and US and Pakistan the authors' point that Pak sponsored terror in Kashmir will continue seems realistic. Equally telling is their argument that "funding the militancy in Kashmir costs Sino-Pak syndicate a fraction of what it costs India to fight the same". In this scenario the success of bold Indian initiative of reorganization of Jammu and Kashmir into two Union Territories would depend on how soon the Kashmiri Muslims of the valley realize that while the idea of "Azadi" (meaning Independence) might be desirable it is not achievable given (a) the military infrastructure that India has built in the valley over seven decades, (b) Kashmir's mind boggling complex ethnic, religious and regional diversities, (c) increasing stakes of the US, China, Japan and European Union in India's economy; and finally the reality that beyond logistics support to militants, Pakistan would not venture out to a war with India again. This is the core message of insightful study of Kashmir today.

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মুদ্রণের সংস্কৃতি ও বাংলা  
বই, সম্পাদক : স্বপন  
চক্রবর্তী, অবভাস (গড়িয়া  
স্টেশন রোড, কলকাতা-৮৪),  
ডিসেম্বর, ২০০৭, ISBN  
: 978-81-904755-4-9,  
২৯১ পৃষ্ঠা, মূল্য : ২২৫ টাকা।

‘মুদ্রণ’ কথাটা যত ছোট, তার পরিধি তত ছোট নয়, বরঞ্চ উল্টো—বিশাল, ব্যাপক। আমূল বদলে গেছে প্রকাশনার প্রযুক্তি। গুটেনবার্গ, ক্যাম্ব্রটন, ফ্রাঙ্কলিন-এর আমলের কথা বাদ দিলাম। নিজের চোখে দেখা গত ৫০ বছরে যা বদলে গেছে প্রকাশনার জগত তা এককথায় অকল্পনীয়। আগামী ৫০ বছরে কোথায় গিয়ে পৌঁছবে কে জানে!

‘মুদ্রণের সংস্কৃতি ও বাংলা বই’ — বিশাল আকারের বই হবে এমন অনুমান করাটাই সমীচীন, কিন্তু এ বইটি যেহেতু ১৯৭৮-এ হ্যালহেড (হালেদ) সাহেবের ‘A Grammar of the Bengali Language’-এর দুশো বছর পূর্তি উপলক্ষে ‘অবভাস’ পত্রিকার পরিচালক ও বন্ধুরা পত্রিকার একটি বিশেষ সংখ্যা বের করার উদ্দেশ্যে পরিকল্পনা করেন তাই বইটির আকার ততটা বড় নয় কিন্তু বিষয়-বৈচিত্র্যে গভীরতা অনেক বেশি। বইটি বের হতে পার হয়ে গেছে আরো ২৯ বছর। কি আছে বইতে? ষোলজন মুদ্রণ বিশারদের ষোলোটি লেখায় সমৃদ্ধ গ্রন্থটি যে কোনো পাঠকেরই ভালো লাগবে—বিশেষ করে যারা মুদ্রণের সঙ্গে কোনো না কোনো ভাবে যুক্ত তাদের আরো বেশি ভালো লাগবে। কাজে লাগবে এঁদের মতামত। সব মতের সঙ্গে সবাই সহমত পোষণ নাও করতে পারেন কিনা কিছু কিছু মত যোগ করতেও পারেন। বইটা পড়লে জানা যায় অনেক ঘটনা, অনেক মজার মজার তথ্য। জানা যায় ভবানীচরণ বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায় ‘চন্দ্রিকা যন্ত্র’ থেকে শ্রীমদ্ভাগবত ছেপেছিলেন—ছাপার আগে কালি গঙ্গাজলে শুদ্ধ করে নিয়েছিলেন এবং ব্রাহ্মণ কম্পোজিটর নিয়োগ করেছিলেন।

বই প্রকাশনার ব্যাপারে বটতলার ছাপার কথা ভোলার নয়। বটতলার প্রকাশকদের লক্ষ্য ছিল হিন্দু পুরাণ, মুসলিম কিসসা, রহস্যকাহিনী, আদিরসাত্মক কাহিনী, মহাকাব্য ইত্যাদি প্রকাশ। অন্যদিকে, কলেজ স্ট্রীট অঞ্চলের বিদ্যাসাগর ও তার পরবর্তী প্রকাশকরা মন দিলেন পাঠ্যপুস্তক প্রকাশের দিকে। ‘বটতলার প্রকাশকরা দেশজ শিক্ষা ও সংস্কৃতির বাহন ছিলেন। তাঁদের হাতেই মূলত প্রাচীন ও মধ্যযুগের সাহিত্য সংরক্ষিত হচ্ছিল। জনসাহিত্যের নির্যাস খুঁজতেও আমাদের বটতলায় ফিরে যেতে হয়। কিন্তু বটতলার সমৃদ্ধির যুগেই (১৮৪০-৭০) বিদ্যাসাগর যখন বই প্রকাশনে এলেন, তিনি বেছে নিলেন কলেজ স্ট্রীট অঞ্চলকে। শুধু তাই নয়, তাঁর পাঠ্যপুস্তক প্রকাশের ধারাকে মাথায় রেখে এবং কলেজ স্ট্রীটের দ্রুত পরিবর্তনের সঙ্গে তাল মিলিয়ে পরবর্তীকালে যেসব প্রকাশক এলেন তাঁরা বটতলার প্রকাশন ধারার বাইরে এক স্বতন্ত্র প্রকাশন ধারা সৃষ্টি করলেন। নবজাগরণের ফলে বাঙালী আভিজাত্যের চিন্তা-চেতনায় যে আকস্মিক ও গভীর পরিবর্তন দেখা দিল, কলেজ স্ট্রীটের বই ব্যাপারীরা তাকে স্বাগত জানালেন।’ এই অভিজাতদের চাহিদা অনুযায়ী তাঁরা পুস্তক-সম্ভার সাজাতে শুরু করলেন। জনসাহিত্য ক্রমশ প্রাস্তিক হতে থাকলো। বটতলার গায়ে পড়ল কেবল আদিরসের ছাপ। বই বিক্রির সম্ভাবনা ও আভিজাত্য বজায় রাখতে বটতলার সংস্রব ছাড়লেন বহু প্রকাশক। কলেজ স্ট্রীটে শুরু হলো বাংলা মুদ্রণের আর এক অধ্যায়। কলেজ স্ট্রীট ধীরে ধীরে পৌঁছে গেছে কোথায় তা আজ কলেজ স্ট্রীটের চেহারা দেখলে বিশ্বাস করা কঠিন। অথচ আজকের কলেজ স্ট্রীট ১৮২৬-এ কেমন ছিল তা জানা যায় School Book Society-র নিম্নলিখিত Report-এ :

With a view to promote the purchase of books by the pupils of various institutions for native education in Calcutta, the Committee have established a retail shop near the Hindoo College.

কিন্তু কথা হচ্ছে যে-বইয়ের এত রমরমা তা

আর কতদিন? “ছাপা বইয়ের দিন ঘনিয়ে এসেছে। আমাদের পড়বার অভ্যাস আর সেই সঙ্গে চিন্তার ধরণ একেবারে বদলে যেতে চলেছে—এরকম আশঙ্কা ইদানীং ব্যক্ত করেছেন পশ্চিমের বেশ কয়েকজন পণ্ডিত।” আমার মনে হয় বৈদ্যুতিন প্রযুক্তির নাগাল এমন চমকপ্রদ ভাবে বেড়ে গেছে যে জনসংযোগের অনেক ক্ষেত্রেই আজ বই অপ্রাসঙ্গিক হয়ে পড়েছে।

“বই হাতে নিয়ে খুশি হওয়া, না পড়তে পারায় চোখে জল আসা ও অঝোরে কাঁদা, আবার লজ্জা পাওয়া—এই সব অভিব্যক্তি বই পড়াকে ঘিরেই প্রকাশ পেয়েছে।” এমন কথা তখনকার দিনে মহিলাদের সম্বন্ধে বলা হয়েছে। আর এখন? লজ্জা পাওয়াটা উঠে গেছে, বাকিটা ঠিক আছে। মেয়েরা আজ শুধু পড়াশুনায় কেন, সব ক্ষেত্রেই এগিয়ে যাচ্ছে, যাবেও। এই বইতে যদি কমপক্ষে একটা লেখাও কোনো মহিলার থাকতো তাহলে বেশ হতো।

‘বাংলা বানানের মা-বাপ নেই।’—কথাটা খুবই শোনা যায়। হয়তো খানিকটা ঠিকও। আমরা ‘কত’ লিখি, আবার ‘কতো’ও লিখি। তেমনি, মত/মতো, বল/বলো, কর/করো, কি/কী ইত্যাদি যে যেমন পারছি, তেমনই লিখছি। সত্যি বলতে কি—বাংলা ভাষার একটা পূর্ণাঙ্গ অভিধান নেই—যাতে এসব প্রশ্নের উত্তর পাওয়া যাবে—পাওয়া যাবে আরো অনেক রকম উত্তর নিত্য-জিজ্ঞাসার। ‘ধান ভাঙ তে শিবের গীত’ গাইছি। আবেদন রাখছি যে কোনো সরকারী/বেসরকারী প্রতিষ্ঠান এগিয়ে আসুক এ-কাজে এবং একদল গবেষক-লেখক নিয়ে তৈরী করুক গোষ্ঠী—যে গোষ্ঠী তাদের কঠোর পরিশ্রমে তৈরী করুক এক সর্বজনগ্রাহ্য বহু-সমস্যার-সমাধান-হওয়ার এক সুন্দর অভিধান—যাতে মানুষের বুঝতে অসুবিধা না হয় যে ওই অভিধানে প্রায় সব প্রশ্নের মোটামুটি উত্তর পাওয়া যাবে। তার বিক্রির কথা চিন্তা করার দরকার হবে না।

‘ধনবান কেনে, ভাগ্যবান পড়ে।’—এটাই রীতি ছিল, আছে এবং হয়তো থাকবেও। কিন্তু সেই ধনবান

যখন মারা যাবে তখন বইগুলোর কি হবে? বইগুলো যদি কোনো প্রতিষ্ঠানে দান করা হয় তার অবস্থা যে কী হয় কহতব্য নয়। ব্যক্তিগত দানও অনেক সময় সে-অবস্থায় পৌঁছায়। ব্যতিক্রম তো থাকবেই। তাই রক্ষণাবেক্ষণের অসুবিধার জন্য যে সম্পদ (পুস্তকরাজি) দান করার কথা ভাবা হচ্ছে তা দান না করে স্বল্পমূল্যে বিক্রি করাটা বাঞ্ছনীয় যেমন কিছু কিছু ডাক্তার এবং শিক্ষক আছেন যাঁরা একটাকা ভিজিট বা দক্ষিণা নেন যাতে ওই রোগী বা পড়ুয়া না ভাবে—বিনে পয়সার ওষুধ, খেলেও হবে, না-খেলেও হবে কিন্মা বিনে পয়সার টিউশানি, গেলেও চলবে, না-গেলেও চলবে।

মুদ্রণ-বিশেষজ্ঞদের বইতে মুদ্রণপ্রমাদ প্রমাদ গোনার পর্যায়ে পড়ে। তা সত্ত্বেও কয়েকটি প্রমাদ যেমন ‘প্রচ্ছদ প্রসঙ্গে একটি পত্র ও কয়েকটি প্রবণতা’ প্রবন্ধটি লিখেছেন শুভেন্দু দাশমুগী। ‘দাশমুগী’ বানানটা বইতে (পৃ.২০৪) একরকম, আর সূচিতে অন্যরকম (দাসমুগী); আবার ‘বাংলা হরফের পাঁচ পর্ব’ প্রবন্ধে প্রবন্ধকারের নাম বইতে (পৃ.২১৭) পলাশ বরন পাল অথচ সূচিতে পরাশ বরন পাল। পৃষ্ঠা সংখ্যা ৬৮ ফোলিওতে এলো না। ১৯৬ পাতার পর চার পাতা ছবি আছে—তাতে না আছে পৃষ্ঠা নম্বর, না আছে কোন্ লেখার অংশ তা বলা—মনে হচ্ছে অনাথ। ২৯১ পৃষ্ঠায় কোনো পেজ-ফোলিও নেই; Cover-এ সম্পাদকের নাম নেই। Printer’s Page-এর matter সাজানো নিয়ে প্রশ্ন উঠতেই পারে—এই ধরনের কিছু প্রমাদ না থাকলে বোধ হয় ভালো হতো।

তেরো বছর পার হয়ে গেছে বইটি প্রকাশিত হয়েছে। এতদিনেও বইটি পুরনো হয়ে যায়নি। কিছু হয়তো যোগ-বিয়োগ করা যাবে। তা সত্ত্বেও সব লেখাই যেন বারবার পড়তে ইচ্ছে করবে। বইটির বহুল প্রচার ও পুনর্মুদ্রণ কামনা করি।

সুখেন্দুবিকাশ পাল (সুখচাঁদ)  
প্রকাশনা বিভাগ, দি এশিয়াটিক সোসাইটি

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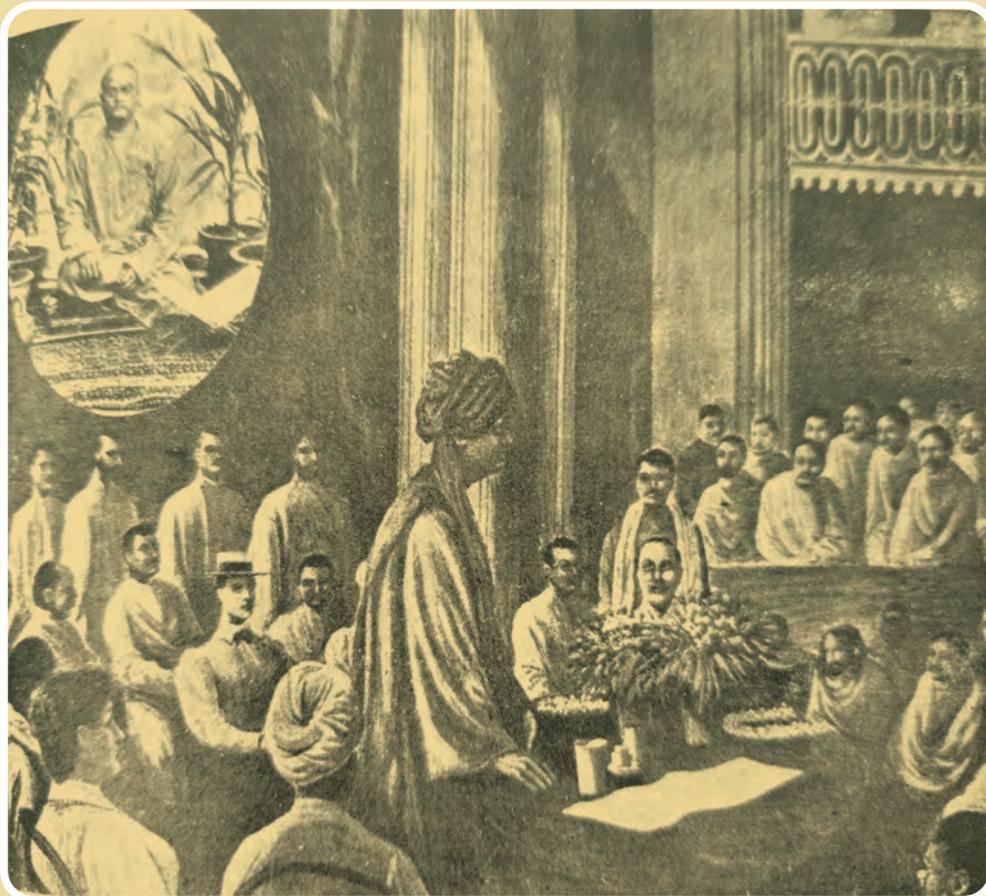
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## Swami Vivekananda and Sister Nivedita in a Meeting to Combat The Plague in Calcutta



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—Swami Vivekananda

Swami Vivekananda addressing the university students with an appeal to seek all out help from them to fight back the Plague in Calcutta on 22nd April, 1899 at the Classic Theatre, Calcutta. Sitting behind him is Sister Nivedita who was in fact instrumental in organising the meeting. At the close of the meeting a large number of students came up and enrolled themselves as volunteers to work in the slums as scavengers.

For full text of the speeches of both Swami Vivekananda and Sister Nivedita, see S Basu and S B Ghosh (eds.) *Vivekananda in Indian Newspapers 1893-1902* (1969).

*Source:* Sankariprasad Basu, *Vivekananda O Tatkalin Bharatiya Samaj, Vol IV.*

*Courtesy:* Amit Ghosh, The Asiatic Society