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THE ASIATIC SOCIETY
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Isha Md.
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Cover Description



Painting done by Professor Isha Mahammad during a five-day Seminar-cum-Workshop on 'Techniques of Traditional Indian Painting' organised at The Asiatic Society (11-15 June 2018).

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From the Desk of the General Secretary

Dear Members and Well-wishers,

You will kindly note that we have very successfully observed the 241st Foundation Day of The Asiatic Society. Professor Ranjit Kumar Dev Goswami, former Professor and Head, Department of English, Gauhati University delivered a very valuable Foundation Day Oration on 'The Knower and the Known : Aspects of Asiatic Researches into Assam'. We are so very thankful to him. We are equally thankful to Professor J.B. Bhattacharjee, former Vice-Chancellor of Assam University and a distinguished historian of the Northeast Region of the country, who readily accepted our invitation at the last moment to be the Chief Guest on this occasion in spite of his many personal difficulties at the moment.

The month of February brings many directions in our life with the messages left by some of the visionaries of the world who were born in this month. Among others, we remember Charles Darwin (born on 12.02.1809) and Abraham Lincoln (born on 12.02.1809) for ushering into the new dimension of thinking; the former in the field of Biological Science, particularly on human evolution and the latter in the field of democratic culture in political governance. Similarly, we get the eternal message of human love and mutual tolerance among mankind when we remember Shree Chaitanya Dev (born on 18.02.1486) and Sri Ramakrishna Paramhansa Dev (born on 18.02.1836). In spite of all these good lessons of life being available, human being by and large has suffered from many limitations as well as direct violation of human right. That is why, many sordid memories haunt us every moment and we remember the incidence of 21st February, 1952 of the then East Bengal which ultimately prompted the UN to declare 21st February as the International Mother Language Day and which is observed throughout the globe every year. The last point to reminisce about the month of February is, specially by the members of the Society, that our beloved and respected former President of The Asiatic Society, Professor Isha Mahammad, a globally acclaimed painter was born on 11.02.1933. The cruel COVID-19 had snatched him away on 11.05.2021 in an extremely suffocative situation that prevailed in the city during those days. We had to accept this eventuality with a heavy heart. We did not have even a chance to be physically present to share our collective pain with the members of the bereaved family. I personally remember every moment of my interaction with him for the five long years as the General Secretary of the Society. Without the slightest hesitation I can share with the members of the Society that during my long stint I have hardly seen such a remarkable personality having high human quality worth mentioning was a surprise for me to discover in him a man with such illustrious career and at the same time maintaining a low profile and keeping himself free from any ill feeling



Isha Mahammad
(11.02.1933-11.05.2021)

towards the people around. He contributed immensely for the activities of the Society, graciously added for its aesthetic touch and artistic value beyond our imagination. We have decided to pay our tribute to this noble soul in this Monthly Bulletin

We had a collaborative programme on 5th January, 2024 with Paschimbanga Itihas Samsad. Professor Chinmoy Guha, former Vice-Chancellor of Rabindra Bharati University delivered the Fifth Professor Sabyasachi Bhattacharya Memorial Lecture on History and Literature in a well-attended assembly of scholars. A day long workshop on 'Decolonization of Knowledge and the Alternative of Indigenous Knowledge System (IKS) : A Critical Exploration' was conducted by the Council for Political Studies in collaboration with the Asiatic Society on 18.01.2024. The Annual Workshop 'Exploring through Folklore: Health Issues in Society and Culture' was conducted for a week from 23.01.2024 to 28.01.2024. A large number of registered participants attended this workshop. Dr. Satyendradra Nath Sen Memorial Lecture, 2022 was delivered by Professor Shruti Tambe of Savitribai Phule University, Pune on 24.01.2024. The Asiatic Society as usual has participated in the International Book Fair (18.01.2024 to 31.01.2024). Apart from the book stall our Society also organised an Exhibition 'East travels the West: Birth of The Asiatic Society'. This was in keeping with the tune of the theme country of the book fair, i.e. Britain. The officials of the Publishers and Book Sellers Guild announced the participation of The Asiatic Society in their press release in New Delhi on 13.12.2023. The birthday

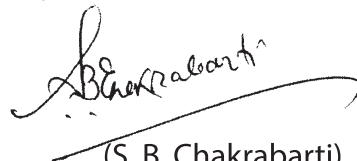
of Swami Vivekananda and Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose was observed on 12.01.2024 and 23.01.2024 respectively in the premises of the Society.

Professor Swapan Kumar Pramanick, the President, Professor Tapati Mukherjee, Vice-President, Dr. S.B. Chakrabarti, General Secretary and Dr. Sujit Kumar Das, Treasurer had met the Nobel Laureate Professor Abhijit Vinayak Banerjee at his Kolkata residence on 10.01.2024 to hand over the Rabindranath Tagore Birth Centenary Plaque for the year 2022, which was awarded to him by The Asiatic Society. He was also requested by our President to deliver a lecture at the Society depending on his convenience. He readily agreed to take this invitation which will be formalised later. On 26.01.2024 the Republic Day was observed with due solemnity at the premises of the Society.

Dear Members, you are already aware that the term of the present Council will be over by April, 2024. The Election Committee has already been constituted as per the rules. They will shortly announce the election schedule. The provisional voters' list has already been declared. You are requested to follow all announcements which are being circulated accordingly through the Society's website and other channels including a copy being pasted in the Notice Board of the Asiatic Society.

Looking forward to your active co-operation, intellectual guidance and ever extended moral support to run the Society facing the emerging challenges and the currency of the approaching time.

Please keep well and safe.



(S. B. Chakrabarti)
General Secretary



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**AN ORDINARY MONTHLY GENERAL MEETING OF
THE ASIATIC SOCIETY WILL BE HELD ON
MONDAY, 5TH FEBRUARY 2024 AT 5.00 P.M. AT THE
VIDYASAGAR HALL OF THE SOCIETY**

MEMBERS ARE REQUESTED TO KINDLY ATTEND THE MEETING

AGENDA

1. Confirmation of the Minutes of the last Ordinary Monthly General Meeting held on 1st January, 2024.
2. Exhibition of presents made to the Society in January, 2024.
3. Notice of Intended Motion, if any, under Regulation 49(d).
4. Matters of current business and routine matters for disposal under Regulation 49(f).
5. Consideration of reports and communications from the Council as per Regulation 49(g).
6. The following paper will be read by Ar Abhishek Gupta :
"Rethinking Urbanism: A Step towards Golden Era"

1 Park Street, Kolkata-700016

Dated : 22.01.2024

(S B Chakrabarti)
General Secretary

Rethinking Urbanism: A Step towards Golden Era

Abhishek Gupta

Managing Director, HDAC Associates Pvt. Ltd.

Why Rethinking Urbanism ?

In last 50 years, it is believed that investment in urban infrastructure in terms of ring roads, flyovers, elevated roads, metro, BRTS etc. are solutions to all our urban problems. Time has proven that we were following a wrong direction. These solutions have created more problems like increased congestion, pollution, crimes, commuting time, slums etc. Even though they are expensive, time tested them as failure. The TRU concept is the replacement for Rational Urban Planning (RUP) 1891 onwards, (Modified in 2015), the RUP is being used for existing and green-field city plans everywhere in the world.

The pace of urbanisation in India is going to increase in coming decades and it is essential to accommodate the migrants in the most economical way, within the stipulated time and provide them with all urban amenities, housing, employment, etc. Now with the efforts of TRU, India has a much superior alternative.

The TRU Concept of Integrated Rural and Urban Development

The TRU concept is a fusion of traditional Indian wisdom with present and evolving technologies. The concept consists of alternate methods of present day urban planning to address all problems of human habitation (both urban & rural) and worked out practical solutions resulting in multifold reduction into requirement of land, time, capital and operative expenses

for urbanisation. The achievements through the TRU concept are –

- Clustering of green field & brown field cities to create urban habitation with economy of a Mega City. An innovative TRU concept to create Mega Cities.
- Maximum 15 minutes commuting time for a city of 2 million population.
- Five times faster habitation than the fastest in the world so far, with fifty times less expenses.
- Integrated Development of Rural and Urban Areas.
- Alternate Method to prevalent urban planning practices.

Practical solutions have been worked out to address all problems of human habitation (both urban & rural), resulting in multifold reduction into—

- a) Requirement of land for urbanisation
- b) Stipulated time to build infrastructure and facilities etc
- c) Capital and operative expenses.

It will also:

- d) Provide better quality of life for the citizen with efficient delivery of services.
- e) Improve happiness index, quality of health, educational services etc.

Special focus on:

- f) Preserving soil
- g) Retaining human values
- h) Solid waste management.

Due diligence on the TRU model has been done by Ministry of Housing and

Urban Affairs (MoHUA), GoI, after which the National Urban Policy, 2018 was updated in 2020 to include TRU's suggestions. In a joint meeting with TRU; NITI Aayog, Secretaries of MoHUA and Rural Development Ministry have ensured full support to the concept. A pilot project has also been recommended by MoHUA.

During the socio-economic surveys, written consent letters from villagers (through village Pradhans and Sarpanches) for two proposed green-field cities have been received who are excited to participate in this activity with their parcels of land.

Salient features of the work:

1. Converting natural migrations into a boon for the economy.
 2. Financial independence for cities without any support of the state.
 3. Drastically reducing planned urban encroachment of arable land by 99%.
 4. Reducing average city to city road distances by 24%.
 5. Pollution free cities with a strong infrastructure.
 6. Market for all rural products within 1 ½ hour distance.
 7. Drastically bringing down cost of urban infrastructure and built units.
 8. Slum-free cities with affordable bigger houses for the poorest citizens.
 9. Very low start-up cost for young entrepreneurs for self-employment, business and industries.
 10. Quality education and health services for rural India.
 11. Organic lifestyle for all citizens.
 12. Utopian ultimate cities.
- All existing cities are struggling and their citizens are uncomfortable with increasing human vehicle ratio (likely to be stable after 10 times growth).
 - The existing cities are unable and unwilling to welcome migrants.
 - We have to build new cities of appropriate sizes.
 - The process of planned urbanisation will boost up our economy by creating new jobs, industries, and infrastructure.
 - Instead of urbanising expensive land, new urban settlements on cheaper lands should be built. Building roads and amenities in these cheaper lands will be development-oriented and less expensive. To provide every migrant an affordable respectable house, workplace, and urban amenities, which are essential for the growth of the country's economy, will be easy and inexpensive.
 - The construction time of infrastructure and building projects can be cut-short, by improving & using new technologies, which can match with the developed countries.
 - Timely construction and use of the facility will reduce overhead expenses on interest and inflation, saving us a lot of money. Fast recirculation of funds (available by cutting short construction time) will result in a many-fold increase in business profits, development, and government revenue.

The project is worked out with complete solutions, blending Indian traditional wisdom and modern technology to address the issue in totality. The solutions are economical and viable. They have never been tried before for existing cities. A new model of human habitation is proposed for cities to make them smart by birth. The cost of urban infrastructure for such cities having a 2 million population has been estimated to be lower than the cost of making an 8 km. long metro. The model takes care of the housing, employment and amenities of the migrants within the country's resources.

Our conclusions on the subject include the following:

- Existing cities are under pressure and can hardly take a load of a small fraction of these migrations.



President's Column

The Missing Indian Science Congress 2024

In a news item, published in December 2023, the headline was 'Government pulls plug on Indian Science Congress: Official'. In detailing the news, it was stated that the Indian Science Congress (ISC), an annual event for scientists, has been cut off from funding by the Government due to disagreements with the Department of Science and Technology (DST). The DST discontinued support for the 2024 event, and Lovely Professional University offered to host it after Lucknow University withdrew. This postponement is unprecedented. Except in 2021 and 2022, when the Science Congress has been postponed due to the outbreak of the COVID 19, the Indian Science Congress has been held every year since 1914, when it was first founded. This Indian Science Congress, which is the largest gathering of scientists and science students from all over the country had been a permanent feature in the calendar, with January 3 being the customary inauguration day, and with Prime Minister giving the inaugural address, has now been missing the date. This keenly awaited event among the scientists of the country has not been held this year.

The Department of Science and Technology (DST) announced in September last year that "support from all its resources for the forthcoming ISC event in 2024 will be discontinued". This development has 'flummoxed the scientific community at large'. The normal age-old practice had been that the Indian Science Congress

Association (ISCA) hosts the Congress at an Institution each year with annual financial support from the DST to the tune of Rs 5 crores which the chosen Institutions gets along with many other grants received from public funding: The Lucknow University which was supposed to host the conference backed out stating its inability to host the event. Following this, Lovely Professional University (LPU) Jalandhar, offered to host the event. The DST seemed displeased with the ISCA's choice of venue it also hosted the Congress in 2019—but the ISCA countered, saying the executive committee was not answerable to, or required permission from the DST, over the venue that it chooses.

What is interesting and intriguing to note is that the LPU also pulled out at the last moment. The ISCA then formed a five-member committee to search for any alternative venue "The executive committee of the Indian Science Congress Association decided to put the 109th congress on hold. We have also decided to post an appeal on our website for the Universities keen to host the event." Arvind Saxena, the ISCA President, said that ISCA would bide time till February to see if any other University would take the initiative to host the event. The decision to hold the alternative Congress at LPU earned the the DST's ire and the DST labelled an unspecified allegation of 'financial irregularities' on the association's part. This last minute pull-out on the part of LPU, which, though a private university,

substantiates the clout the Government has to have a final say on the venue of the ISC. On December 17, 2023, the LPU Registrar sent an e-mail to ISCA General President stating that unforeseen challenges had arisen for the University to fulfil its hosting responsibilities. This was done after a formal notice was issued by the DST, accusing the ISCA of taking unilateral decision of shifting the venue. It also stated, in the said notice "Besides these factors, a number of allegations regarding financial irregularities have also been reported to the notice of this Department." Besides, it was also stated that the ISCA annual event has already lost its relevance among the scientific community and lacks professional approach in the conduct of the meeting on many fronts. Let us now look at these allegations in the context of the historical role the Science Association has played in the development of scientific research in the country.

Genesis : The Presidential Address of Sir Asutosh in 1913

We, in The Asiatic Society, feel particularly concerned at these developments as because the genesis of the Indian Science Congress Association was in The Asiatic Society where Sir Asutosh Mookerjee was the founding President in the year 1913. We reproduce here extracts from the proceedings of the Indian Science Congress held in the rooms of The Asiatic Society of Bengal on January 15th, 16th and 17th, 1913.

"The first Indian Science Congress was held in the rooms of The Asiatic Society of Bengal on January 15th, 16th and 17th with His Excellency Lord Carmichael, Governor of Bengal, as the patron and Sir Asutosh Mookerjee as the President. One hundred and five members attended from various parts of the British Empire... At the opening meeting, the President in his address dealt fully with the history, objects and scope of the movement"

The President, Sir Asutosh Mookerjee, in his address noted that, on this day, the

January 15, The Asiatic Society was born 130 years ago, in 1784 and that the first meeting of the 'Science Congress' being held simultaneously with the observance of the centenary year of the foundation of the Indian Museum.

He further said, 'It is now more than two years ago that Professor Mcomohan of Canning College at Lucknow and Professor Simonso of Presidency College at Madras, brought forward a proposal for the foundation of an Indian Association for the Advancement of Science mainly to give a stronger impulse and a more systematic direction to scientific enquiry, to promote the intercourse of societies and individuals interested in science in different parts of the country, to obtain a more general attention to the object of Pure and Applied Science and the removal of any disadvantage of a public kind which may impede its progress. This proposal was widely circulated amongst persons of culture interested in the spread and development of science in this country, and the fundamental idea, as might easily have been anticipated, met with favourable reception."

Sir Asutosh, in his Presidential Address, further elaborated the necessity of such an organization. As he said, "To enable us to appreciate the vast extent and varied nature of the scientific work to which they are devoted, one needs recall to mind only the numerous colleges affiliated to the various Indian Universities, where the study of Mathematics, Pure and Applied, Astronomy, Physics, Chemistry and Biology is enthusiastically pursued, the excellent Institutions where branches of professional knowledge like Medicine and Engineering, whose foundations lie on a deep-rooted scientific basis, are studied: the Institutions which are maintained in a high state of efficiency by private munificence or by state grants, solely for the cultivation and advancement of Pure and Applied science, the observatories where Astronomical and Meteorological investigations are regularly

carried on; the various departments of the State entrusted with the special care of important branches of knowledge like Geology, Botany, Agriculture, Forestry, Sanitation, Bacteriology, Meteorology, Trigonometrical Survey, Marine Survey and Archaeology, finally our splendid museums which have been in the past the chief centres of Zoological and Anthropological study and research. In a domain so vast in extent and diverse in character, it is obviously essential, if the fullest measure of efficiency and success is to be achieved, that the men of science, engaged in study and instruction, whether individually or in small groups, should be brought into close association with each other. The advantages of personal intercourse between scientific workers, engaged in the same field of activity or in the pursuit of allied lines of research, are too obvious to require much elaboration. But personal association amongst scientific men may be pregnant with important consequences, not merely by a fruitful exchange of ideas; cultivators of science by periodical meetings and discussions, may bring their aims and views prominently into public notice and may also, whenever necessary, press them upon the attention of the Government, a contingency, by no means remote, for as experience has shown, even the most enlightened Governments, occasionally require to be reminded of the full extent of the paramount importance of science upon the Public Funds. This desired object could be attained if a Science Congress was held in the first instance, in Calcutta, under the leadership of The Asiatic Society, and simultaneously with the Indian Museum Centenary Celebrations, which, under the special facilities afforded by the Government of India to scientific officers, was likely to be attended by a large number of distinguished scientific men. "I now beg to accord a most cordial welcome to each and everyone of our members and guests and declare this congress open."

The Structural Arrangement

I have quoted at length from the Presidential Address of Sir Asutosh in the first Indian Science Congress held in 1914 to demonstrate that every single development of Indian Science Congress since 1914, has followed the benchmarks identified by the founder President.

The subsequent developments have shown that the Science Congress has met regularly on an annual basis, that too on a fixed date where the inaugural address is given by the Prime Minister of India, that it has become a truly representative body of Indian scientists. From a modest beginning of 105 participants as in 1914, the membership of the Science Congress has now been nearer to 50000. The structural arrangement of scientific interaction in the Congress has been aimed at coping with the enormous growth of the different areas of scientific enquiry. In the first Indian Science Congress held in 1914, at The Asiatic Society, 35 papers were presented in six categories: Botany, Chemistry, Ethnography, Geology, Physics and Zoology each led by a respective Sectional President. The ISCA 2023-24 Newsletter shows that there are now 16 scholarly sections wherein the members can participate. These sections are Anthropological and Behavioural Sciences, Chemical Sciences, Earth System Sciences, Engineering Sciences, Environmental Sciences, Information and Communication Science and Technology, Material Science, Mathematical Sciences, Medical Sciences, New Biology, Physical Sciences, Plant Sciences and the like. So, along with the growth and diversification of areas of scientific studies, the ISCA has also accommodated these areas within its ambit of scholarly research. To encourage young scientists, there are Young Scientists Programme and Young Scientist's Awards.

In 2013, on the occasion of hundred years of the ICSA, the session was held in Kolkata

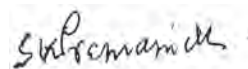
wherein The Asiatic Society and the University of Calcutta was the joint collaborators. From that year Asutosh Mookerjee Fellowship has additionally been instituted. This Centenary Session President was Dr. Manmohan Singh, the then Prime Minister of India. At this 100th session of the Indian Science Congress held in Calcutta in the year 2013, while Prime Minister Sri Manmohan Singh was the general President of the Indian Science Congress, Shri Pranab Mukherjee, the then President of India, gave the inaugural address. His inaugural address was marked by his abiding faith in the scientific community of the Country's present on the occasion in ensuring "Science for Shaping Future of India" which was the theme of that centenary session. While addressing this session he "called upon the scientific community to work for the promotion of a scientific culture for shaping our future in which prosperity along with excellence and equity and oriental values and occidental methods of science (can) converge and coexist. India is expected to emerge as a major economic power by 2035. We should also emerge as a major knowledge power with high human and societal values. Let me mention in this regard that it has been 83 long years since C.V. Raman won the Nobel Prize for Physics. Another Nobel Prize for Science is long overdue for India. I call upon the scientific fraternity gathered here to rise upto this challenge and work toward this goal in a time-bound manner." Such was his faith upon the Science Community gathered on the occasion of the Centenary Session of the Science Congress held in Calcutta.

Based on the deliberations of the Congress, the Science Technology and Innovation Policy, 2013 was released. In 1976, Dr. M. S. Swaminathan, the then general President of the ICOSA, introduced the idea of Focal Theme of national relevance. Since then this has been followed for every subsequent session of the Science Congress. From 1980, a Task Force has been introduced to look into and implement the

various recommendations based on the Focal Theme. This Task Force is headed by the Secretary, Ministry of Culture. The ISC also hosts thousands of school and college students every year as well as some talks by researchers that contribute to increase science awareness. The whole endeavour has not to be regarded as a 'circus' that is deleterious to the cause of science in India, as some reputed scientists have called the post-2014 events of the Science Congress. To ignore the contribution of Science Congress in institutionally encouraging the growth of Science in India would be a blasphemy.

The ISC has incorporated within its functioning, the iconic statement of Jawaharlal Nehru, who made this statement in the 1937 session of the ISC, "Science is the spirit of the age and the dominating factor of the modern world. The future belongs to science and to those who make friends with science and seek its help for the advancement of society."

So, the ISCA has showcased the country's achievements in various scientific fields. Any attempt to stop the functioning of this organization would be regarded as a fatal blow to the cause of Science in India. As it has been said, the Indian Science Congress no-show shelters over a century-old scientific tradition. The move to stop the functioning of this century-old Scientific body is not to be viewed in isolation. Since 2015, the Indian Government has been rooting for the India International Science Festival, an event put together by the Ministries of Science and Technology and of Earth Sciences, the Departments of Space and of Atomic Energy and Vijnana Bharati, an outfit connected to the Sangh Parivar. Be that as it may, a 'Festival' is not a scientific forum and it cannot replace the functioning of a century-old Scientific Body.


Swapan Kumar Pramanick
President

BIRTHDAY TRIBUTE



Professor Isha Mahammad, former President of The Asiatic Society (May 2016 - February 2021) was a globally acclaimed painter. During his stint at the Society he had contributed a lot in very many ways. A glimpse of his life and works is proposed to be organised at an exhibition shortly at the Society's Salt Lake Building. We remember Professor Isha Mahammad, former President of The Asiatic Society, on the occasion of his birthday (11th February) which is reflected in the Bulletin for the month of February 2024. The sketch above done by him was obtained through the courtesy of Professor Shamir Isha, his son.

স্মৃতি-সত্য নির্মোহ শিল্পী ঙ্গীশা মহম্মদ

সোমনাথ মুখার্জী

আজীবন সদস্য, দি এশিয়াটিক সোসাইটি

এক অবসৃত অপরাহু। সূর্য প্রায় পশ্চিমাকাশে ঢলে পড়েছে। এক চিলতে আলো পড়েছে চৌরঙ্গীর উড়ালপুল ভেদ করে ভারতীয় সংগ্রহশালার দক্ষিণে গাড়িবারান্দার মধ্য দিয়ে। দুই জন পথচারী ধীর পদক্ষেপে প্রবেশ করলো সরকারি চারু ও কারু মহাবিদ্যালয়ে। উদ্দেশ্য ভারপ্রাপ্ত অধ্যক্ষের সঙ্গে সাক্ষাৎ। কলকাতার অন্যতম অহংকার এই শিল্প-শিক্ষা প্রতিষ্ঠান যার বয়স সেই সময় ১১৫-র বেশি। এখানে ডিগ্রি কোর্স চালু হওয়ার সুবাদে শিল্প-শিক্ষা পাঠক্রম শুরু করার জন্য ‘লোকসেবা আয়োগ’ দ্বারা মনোনীত এবং সরকারিভাবে নিয়োজিত একজন ব্যক্তি ও অপরজন ‘বিশ্বভারতী বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়-এর শিল্প-ইতিহাস বিভাগের অধ্যাপক; ভারপ্রাপ্ত অধ্যক্ষের ঘরে ঢুকে বললেন ‘ঙ্গীশা দেখ, কাকে এনেছি’। তাদের কলেজে ইতিহাসের অধ্যাপক হিসাবে যোগদান করবে। টেবিল থেকে মুখ তুলে বললেন “বোস”, আর আমার দিকে তাকিয়ে বললেন “বসুন”। সংক্ষিপ্ত পরিচয়পর্ব সেরে আমরা বেরিয়ে পড়লাম এশিয়াটিক সোসাইটির দিকে। দিনটা ১৭ই ফেব্রুয়ারি ১৯৮২। যদিও এর আগে ১৯৭৬ সালে মার্চ মাসে, আনন্দ কেন্টিশ কুমার স্বামীর জন্মশতবর্ষ উপলক্ষে ‘বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় মঞ্জুরী কমিশন-এর আর্থিক সহায়তায়, প্রাচীন ভারতীয় ইতিহাস ও সংস্কৃতি বিভাগের অধীনে এক আন্তর্জাতিক আলোচনাচক্রে, তদানীন্তন ‘রানী বাগীশ্বরী’ অধ্যাপক কল্যাণকুমার গঙ্গোপাধ্যায়ের আমন্ত্রণে দুজন বিশিষ্ট শিল্পী যোগদান করেছিলেন, একজন প্রখ্যাত ভাস্কর চিত্তমণি কর ও অপরজন

শিল্পী ঙ্গীশা মহম্মদ। তখনকার মত দেখার সৌভাগ্য হলেও পরিচয় পর্ব অধ্যাপক জয়ন্ত চক্রবর্তীর হাত ধরে।

পরবর্তী পর্বে ১লা মার্চ ১৯৮২, শিল্পকলা মহাবিদ্যালয়ে শিল্প-শিক্ষক হিসাবে যোগদান এবং শুরু হয় আমাদের পথ চলা। যার ছেদ পড়েছিল ১১ই মে ২০২১-র প্রত্যুষে, এশিয়াটিক সোসাইটির সাধারণ সম্পাদক ড: সত্যব্রত চক্রবর্তীর করা চলভাষের মাধ্যমে।

বর্তমান প্রবন্ধের অভিমুখ দুটো। একটায় তাঁর নির্মোহ ব্যক্তিসত্তা অন্যটি শিল্পীসত্তা। ব্যক্তিসত্তার সরণীতে তাঁর জন্ম হুগলী জেলার অন্তর্গত কোল্লগরে ১৯৩৩ সালের ১১ই ফেব্রুয়ারি। শিল্প-অনুসন্ধিৎসু পিতা আবু বকরর তাঁকে শিল্পানুশীলনে ছোটবেলায় সহযোগিতা করলেও, পুত্র শিল্পীর জীবন বেছে নেবে, এতে তাঁর বা পিতৃব্য মহিউদ্দিনের পছন্দ ছিল না।

কিন্তু এদের নিঃশব্দ বিরোধিতাকে কাটিয়ে ভর্তি হন আর্ট কলেজে ১৯৫৩ সনে। সসম্মানে উত্তীর্ণ হন ১৯৫৮তে। শিক্ষাকালীন সময়ে উদ্বুদ্ধ হয়েছিলেন কিছু শিল্প শিক্ষকের শিল্পকর্মে, এঁদের মধ্যে কিশোরী রায়, মাখন দত্তগুপ্ত, বিশেষ করে অধ্যক্ষ চিত্তামণি কর অন্যতম। তাঁর অনুপ্রেরণা ঙ্গীশাদার শিল্পদৃষ্টিকে বহুলাংশে প্রসারিত করেছিল। ওই বছরেই অর্থাৎ ১৯৫৮ সালে কলকাতা বিশ্ববিদ্যালয়ের অধীনে আশুতোষ সংগ্রহশালা থেকে চারুকলা পরিচয় শিক্ষাক্রম পরীক্ষায় বিশেষ কৃতিত্বের সঙ্গে উত্তীর্ণ হন। শিক্ষা ও শিক্ষানবিশীর

পরিক্রমায় অন্যান্য আমন্ত্রণের মধ্যে ১৯৬৮ সালে জার্মান ফেডারাল রিপাব্লিকের আমন্ত্রণে ডুসেলডর্ফ আকাডেমিতে গ্রাফিক আর্ট বিশেষ শিক্ষাপ্রাপ্ত হন। দেশে ফিরে জীবিকার প্রয়োজনে পশ্চিমবঙ্গ সরকারের স্বরাষ্ট্র বিভাগের অধীনে শিল্পী হিসাবে যোগদান করেন এবং বর্ধমান জেলার অধীনে বিভিন্ন জায়গায় কর্মজীবন অতিবাহিত করেন। এরই মধ্যে জে. ওয়ালটার থম্পসন নামক বাণিজ্যিক প্রতিষ্ঠানে শিক্ষানবীশী শিল্পী হিসাবে কয়েক মাস (সেপ্টেম্বর ১৯৫৯ থেকে জানুয়ারি ১৯৬০) কাজ করেন। মানসিকভাবে মেনে না নিতে পারায়, কিছুদিন বাড়িতে শিল্পচর্চায় মগ্ন থাকতে থাকতে ১৯৬২র ১৫ই সেপ্টেম্বর থেকেই এই শিল্পশিক্ষা মহাবিদ্যালয়ের অধ্যাপক এবং দীর্ঘ ৩২ বছর কাটিয়ে ১৯৯৪ সালে অধ্যক্ষ হিসাবে অবসর গ্রহণ করেন।

অবসর-উত্তর জীবনের সর্বোত্তম উল্লেখযোগ্য পর্যায় হল ২০১৬ থেকে ২০২০ সাল পর্যন্ত এশিয়ার সর্বপ্রাচীন ভারততত্ত্ব গবেষণার প্রতিষ্ঠান, এশিয়াটিক সোসাইটির সভাপতির পদ অলংকৃত করা। এই সময়কার কর্মযজ্ঞ তাঁর সৃজনশীল শিল্পীজীবনের থেকে কোন অংশে কম নয়। একদিকে প্রশাসন এবং অন্যদিকে তাঁর শৈল্পিক দৃষ্টি ও ভাবনা সোসাইটির *মাস্ট্রলি বুলেটিন* ও *জার্নালে* দেখতে পাওয়া যাবে। বেশ কিছু নতুন পরিকল্পনা, সোসাইটিতে রক্ষিত শিল্পকর্ম, তার রক্ষণাবেক্ষণ, স্থায়ী পঞ্জীকরণ (ডকুমেন্টেশন), এবং আকর্ষণীয় বিন্যাসের (ডিসপ্লের) পরামর্শ দিয়ে গিয়েছেন তাঁর অধীনস্থ কর্মচারীদের। বর্তমান কর্তৃপক্ষ সেগুলোকে সসম্মানের সঙ্গে পালন করে চলেছেন। এখানেই তাঁর প্রতিষ্ঠা ও মহত্ত্ব। ব্যক্তিগতভাবে নির্মোহ চিন্তা-ভাবনা অন্যান্য সতীর্থদের ঈর্ষার কারণ হয়ে দাঁড়িয়েছিল। ফলে তাঁকে ভুগতে হয়েছে বিস্তর। বিশেষ করে অধ্যাপনার ক্ষেত্রে তাঁর পদোন্নতির স্তরগুলো সহজপ্রাপ্তি হয়নি। ক্ষমতা ও গোষ্ঠীদ্বন্দ্বের টানাপোড়েন পার হতে তাঁর প্রায় ১৩ বছরের বেশি লেগেছিল। জীবন সায়াহ্নে অবসর নেওয়ার

বছর দেড়েক আগে ১৯৯৩ সালে তিনি স্থায়ী অধ্যক্ষ হিসাবে যোগদান করেছিলেন নিজের অর্জিত গুণাবলীতে। আর ছিল অনুরাগী ছাত্র-ছাত্রীদের সংগঠিত প্রতিবাদ ও আন্দোলন। ফলে পশ্চিমবঙ্গ সরকারের উচ্চশিক্ষা দপ্তর অনন্যোপায় হয়ে এই পদে সিলমোহর দেন। তাঁর এন্তেকাল হওয়ার কিছু আগে বর্তমান সরকার তাঁকে শিল্পী মহাসম্মানে ভূষিত করেছেন। সাতাশি বছরের চড়াই-উৎরাই পথ পেরিয়ে স্তব্ধ হয়ে যায় তাঁর পথ চলা। স্মৃতিভারে আমরা রইলাম পড়ে, রোমন্থন করি তাঁর সংলাপ, খুঁজে পাই পথ ও দিশা।

বর্তমান প্রবন্ধের দ্বিতীয় অভিমুখ হোল শিল্পী ঈশা মহম্মদ, মানবদরদী সংবেদনশীল জাতীয় তথা আন্তর্জাতিক খ্যাতিসম্পন্ন পূর্ণ ব্যক্তিত্বসম্পন্ন এক অসাধারণ মানুষ। গত শতাব্দীর ষাটের দশকে পশ্চিমবঙ্গের যে কজন শিল্পী প্রতিষ্ঠাপ্রাপ্ত হয়েছিলেন তাঁদের মধ্যে অন্যতম চিত্রকর হলেন ঈশা মহম্মদ। যদিও তিনি নিজেই অনেক সময় চিত্র সমালোচকদের সাক্ষাৎকারে বলেছিলেন, “আমি এখনও ছবি আঁকতে শিখিনি, চেষ্টা করছি। আমাকে নিয়ে আপনারা গ্লোরিফাই করলে লজ্জিত হব।” এই অকপট উক্তি থেকে ধরা পড়ে তাঁর সৃষ্টিশীল জগতের আকৃতি, অতৃপ্তি এবং অস্থিরতা।

শৈশব থেকে ভাল ছবি আঁকতে পারতেন। চোখের সামনে যা যা দেখতেন তাকেই ছবছ ফুটিয়ে তুলতেন কাগজের বুক রেখায় আর রঙে। স্কুলের পাঠ চুকিয়ে উত্তরপাড়ার প্যারীমোহন কলেজে ভর্তি হন বিজ্ঞান শাখায়। কিন্তু মন বসে না। নিজের মত করে শিল্পচর্চায় মগ্ন থাকতেন। অবিরত শিল্পকলা সম্পৃক্ত নানা প্রশ্ন জেগে উঠত। শেষ পর্যন্ত প্রথাগত শিক্ষা তথা পাঠক্রম ত্যাগ করে ভর্তি হন আর্ট কলেজে। অনুপ্রাণিত হয়েছিলেন সেকালের কয়েকজন শিল্পীর সৃষ্টিতে। আর্ট কলেজে শিক্ষাকালীন সময়ে নিষ্ঠাভরে চেষ্টা করেছেন শিল্পকলার কলাকৌশল আত্মীকরণ করার। তাঁর নিজের কথা হল “যা দেখি তাই আঁকি, কিন্তু ছবি আঁকার ব্যাপারটা ঠিক কি,

কোনটা এ্যাসথেটিক, কোনটাই বা পপুলার এসব কিছুই জানতাম না”। কলেজে অন্যান্য শিক্ষক ছাড়া তদানীন্তন অধ্যক্ষ ভাস্কর চিত্তামণি কর তাঁকে অনেকটাই অনুপ্রেরণা দিয়েছিলেন এবং শিল্প-দৃষ্টিকে প্রসারিত করতে বিশেষ সহযোগিতা করেছিলেন। নানা জয়গায় আলাপচারিতায় তা তিনি স্বীকার করেছেন।

আর্ট কলেজের শিক্ষা সমাপ্তির পর ঈশাবাবুর অভীষ্ট ছিল শিল্প রূপায়ণে নিজস্ব প্রকাশভঙ্গী তৈরি করার। এর জন্য তিনি নানারকমের পরীক্ষা-নিরীক্ষা করেছিলেন। এই সময় অর্থাৎ ষাটের দশকে বাংলাদেশ তথা ভারতের চিত্রকল্পে সামগ্রিকভাবে কমবেশি বাস্তবায়নের দিকে ঝাঁক ছিল। প্রেক্ষিত ছিল ৪২-এর আন্দোলন, ৪৩-এর দুর্ভিক্ষ, তার উপর দ্বিতীয় বিশ্বযুদ্ধ। ফলে সামাজিক, রাজনৈতিক, অর্থনৈতিক এবং স্বাভাবিকভাবে ব্যক্তিগত মূল্যবোধ পরিবর্তিত হয়েছিল—প্রতিবিস্মিত হয়েছিল শিল্পীদের চিত্রপটে। বিশেষ করে ১৯৪৩ সালের ‘ক্যালকাটা গ্রুপ’ এবং ১৯৪৭ সালে ‘বোম্বে প্রোগ্রেসিভ আর্টিস্ট গ্রুপ’-এর সভ্যদের শিল্পায়ন উল্লেখ করার মতো। তাছাড়া ‘সোসাইটি অব কনটেম্পোরারী আর্টিস্ট’ (১৯৬০), ‘ক্যানভাস আর্টিস্ট সার্কেল’ (১৯৬২), আর ‘ক্যালকাটা পেনটার্স’ (১৯৬৪)। শেষোক্ত এই গ্রুপ-এর প্রতিষ্ঠাতা সভ্য ঈশা মহম্মদ। অধিকাংশ শিল্পীরা বিষয়কে বাছলেন বাস্তবতা ও সমাজের মূল্যবোধকে ভিত্তি করে।

দেশভাগ, উদ্বাস্তু আগমন, সাম্প্রদায়িক দাঙ্গা, কালোবাজারি, শোষণ, অত্যাচার, দারিদ্র, হৃদয়বিদারক অমানবিক ঘটনাসঞ্জাত অভিজ্ঞতা প্রতিফলিত হতে থাকল শিল্পীদের শিল্পকর্মে। ব্যতিক্রমী নন ঈশাবাবু, কিন্তু শিল্পচর্চার ক্ষেত্রে তিনি সংস্কারমুক্ত ও জীবনমুখী। চারপাশের রূঢ় বাস্তবতা তাঁর ছবির বিষয় হয়ে উঠেছিল দ্বিধাহীন তুলির টানে। যন্ত্রসভ্যতার ভয়াবহ পরিণতির করুণ ছবি দেখা গিয়েছিল ‘ম্যান অ্যান্ড মেশিন’ চিত্রে। নিরন্ন অসহায় মানুষের মর্মস্পর্শী আর্তনাদ

ভেসে উঠেছিল, ‘ফেমিন রিফিউজি’ পর্বের ছবিতে। ‘বন্দী’, ‘বার্তা’, ‘বধ্যা-স্বপ্ন’, ‘দ্বৈত সত্তা’, ‘প্রতিবিস্ম’। ‘কামনা-বাসনা’, ‘দেবদাসী’, ‘কনস্পিরেসি’ প্রভৃতি চিত্রসারিতে স্পষ্ট হয়ে দেখা দেয় সমাজ জীবনের অবক্ষয়। ‘লাইফ-চেস’ নামাঙ্কিত চিত্রে দেখা যায় চরিত্রের দেহাবয়বগুলো দাবার বোর্ডের মত চৌখপী টানটান সমতল নক্সায় আকীর্ণ। নানা-রঙের খোপে এক একটি চোখ আঁকা। দৃষ্টি আলোর দিকে প্রসারিত হতে চায় শব্দহীন নির্মল রৌদ্রে। বাংলাদেশ মুক্তিযুদ্ধের সময় বিপন্ন বিস্ময়ে শিল্পীর তুলি সোচ্চার হয়েছে বর্বরতা, অত্যাচারের বিরুদ্ধে। এই পর্যায়ের চিত্ররাজির একটি চিত্রের প্রেক্ষাপটে লেখা ছিল - ‘আমার প্রাণ নিয়ে কি যাবে শূন্য পানে’? ফুটপাতবাসী কংকালসার ক্ষুধার্ত মানুষের চেহারাও মূর্ত হয়ে উঠেছে পটে। নিজে মুসলিম সমাজের সমগোত্রীয় হয়েও পর্দানসীনতার প্রতি কটাক্ষ করতে পিছপা হননি। একটি ছবিতে পর্দানসীন রমণীর পাশে খোলাখাঁচার প্রতীকে তাদের মুক্তির আকুল আর্তিকে মুখর করেছেন। অন্যদিকে সামাজিক বিধি ব্যবস্থার বিরুদ্ধে সোচ্চার হয়েছেন। অন্য একটি ছবিতে বন্দি গৃহবধূ একটি কক্ষে শায়িত পুরুষকে দেখছে, যাকে নরখাদক বাঘ বলে দৃষ্টি বিভ্রম হবে। আসলে শিল্পী বোঝাতে চাইছেন পুরুষ শাসিত সমাজে নারীদের অবস্থান। এই পর্বে ‘ক্যাপটিভ লেডি’ শিরোনামের ছবি স্মর্তব্য।

এহেন শিল্পীর তুলিতে বিপরীত স্বাদের ছবিও আমরা প্রত্যক্ষ করি। ছবির শিরোনাম “কৃষ্ণকলি আমি তারেই বলি”। দীপ্তিময়ী এক গ্রাম্য কিশোরীর বিস্ফারিত চোখের সরল রোমান্টিক দৃষ্টি চোখ মেলে দেখার মতো। যদিও বিষয়বস্তু ভিন্নধর্মী তবুও ‘ম্যানিকিন’ পর্যায়ের চিত্রকলা আলাদা জায়গা করে আছে। শিল্পী এখানে তুলে ধরেছেন অসহায় নারী জীবনের একাকিত্ব, শূন্যতা এবং সর্বোপরি যন্ত্রণাকে।

সৃষ্টিশীল শিল্পীদের নিজস্ব প্রকাশভঙ্গীকে আমরা বলি স্টাইল—অনুভূতি প্রকাশের স্বকীয় রীতি

বা পদ্ধতি। এটি আয়ত্তের জন্য ধারাবাহিকভাবে শিল্প-চর্চা করা, সঙ্গে থাকছে নানান রকমের পরীক্ষা-নিরীক্ষা। শিল্পীর প্রারম্ভিক জীবনে দেখা যায় বাস্তবতার প্রতিফলন। ধীরে ধীরে, ধাপে ধাপে দেশ-বিদেশে শিল্পধারার সঙ্গে পরিচিত হয়ে জানতে পারেন শিল্পকলা কৌশলের বিচিত্র সব ইতিহাস। তাঁর গুরুজীর সম্পর্কে শিষ্যের উক্তি মনে রাখার মতো। বলেছেন ‘ইনফ্যান্ট তিনিই আমাকে আমার হরাইজনটা বাড়ানোর জন্য উৎসাহিত করেছেন’।

ঈশাবাবুর ছবির বাস্তবতা ইউরোপীয় এ্যাকাডেমিক রীতির অনুকরণে নয়। কল্পনা মিশ্রিত বাস্তবতার ভাবনায়, তিনি সমাজ ও জীবনের ক্ষয় ও শূন্যতাকে তুলে ধরতে চেয়েছেন। বাহ্যিক জীবনের গুরুত্ব কম করে আভ্যন্তরীণ জীবনের মর্মোদ্ঘাটনে প্রাধান্য দিয়েছেন। চিত্র গল্পধর্মী না হয়ে, হয়েছে ভাবধর্মী। রেখার সাহায্যে দেহাবয়ব ঘন রঙের আস্তরণের উপরে ব্রাস বা স্প্যাচুলার আঁচড়ে তৈরি হয় টেক্সচার। রঙের প্রাধান্য পেয়েছে কালো, সাদা, লাল, পীতাম্ব, বেগুনী। উজ্জ্বল কিছু—উষ্ণ নয়, পড়ন্ত বিকেলের রোদের মত নরম। ছবিতে আর একটি বিষয় লক্ষ্য করা যায় যে দ্বিমাত্রিকতা ছাড়িয়ে ত্রিমাত্রিকতার প্রয়াসে শিল্পী যথেষ্ট পারঙ্গম। আলো-ছায়ার যথাযথ ব্যবহার—টেম্পেরা, অ্যাক্রেলিক বা অন্যান্য রঙ ব্যবহার করলেও তেল রঙেই শিল্পী ভীষণ স্বচ্ছন্দ ও পরিণত। ব্রাসিং-এর সঠিক পদ্ধতি ব্যবহারে চিত্ররাজি নান্দনিকতায় ষোলকলায় পরিপূর্ণ। প্রতিকৃতি অঙ্কনের ক্ষেত্রে তাঁর অসামান্য দক্ষতা সর্বজনস্বীকৃত। তাঁর প্রয়াণে দেশ হারিয়েছে একজন সৃজনশীল শিল্পী ও দায়বদ্ধ সুসংগঠককে, একজন ধর্ম-নিরপেক্ষ ও হৃদয়বান ব্যক্তিত্বকে।

ঈশাবাবুর শিল্পভাবনা ও দর্শন :

বিভিন্ন সময়ে আলাপচারিতায় শিল্পভাবনা সম্পর্কে বলতে গিয়ে সহজভাবে বলেছেন যে ‘একজন শিল্পীকে একটা ছবির জন্য ঠিক যতটা

সময় দিতে হয়, সেই সময়টার মূল্য কজন বোঝেন? ছবি জন্মের আগে শিল্পীকে কুরে কুরে খায় চিন্তা-ভাবনার সূক্ষ্ম কীট। ছবির বিষয় ছাড়াও তার আঙ্গিক, চরিত, রচনা বর্ণিকাভঙ্গ, বর্ণবিন্যাস এসব কিছুই একজন চিত্রকরকে বার বার ক্ষতবিক্ষত করে তোলে। মনের মধ্যে তৈরী হয় ঝড় বা তুফান। কখনো তীব্র, আবার কখনো শান্ত। এসব শিল্পীরাই বোঝেন, ছবি এমনি যে ঘুম কেড়ে নেয়’।

বৃত্তিমূলক জীবনযাত্রায় অভ্যস্ত আমরা চারু ও কারুকলার দিকে সময় দিই না। ফলে আমাদের সার্বিক শিক্ষা হয় না। আমাদের দেশে কবি-সাহিত্যিকেরা সামান্য হলেও শিল্পের চর্চা করে থাকেন। তবে এই চর্চার গভীরতা অনেক কম। ছবির সঙ্গে তেমন যোগাযোগ খুব বেশি নেই এঁদের, এটা যতটা দুঃখের তার চেয়েও বেশী আশ্চর্যের। কবিতা ছবির আত্মীয়। এই দুই-এর আত্মিক বন্ধনকে শিল্পী ঈশা যথেষ্ট গুরুত্ব দিতেন।

ছবি দেখতে দেখতে একটা চোখ তৈরি হয়ে যায়—এটা ভীষণ দরকার, বুঝি বা না বুঝি। শব্দ বা মহিমাই তো মানুষের জীবনে সততার দিকটা জাগিয়ে দেয়। শিল্পী ঈশার অনুভূতিটা যেমন প্রবল, তেমনটাই আকর্ষণীয়। একটা সাক্ষাৎকারে ঈশাদা বলেছেন — ‘আমরা আজ এতো চিন্তা করেও যা করতে পারছি না ১৬/১৭ বছরের পিকাসো সে সবই করে ফেলেছেন। কথার পিঠে কথা আটকে দিচ্ছেন আর হার্বার্ড রিডের চমৎকার উদ্ধৃতির নানান তকমা। ওদেশে ছবি-মূর্তি এসবের ধারাবাহিকতা আছে। ওরা বোঝে, ভালবাসে।’ আমাদের প্রধান বাধা হল এই ধারাবাহিকতার বিরাট অভাব। শিল্পের শিকড় মানুষের গভীরে প্রোথিত করার কথা বারবার বলেছেন।

শিল্পের দুর্বোধ্যতা প্রসঙ্গে বলেছিলেন ‘এটি একটি চিরন্তন ও স্বাভাবিক ব্যাপার। শিল্পীর জীবনের ধ্যানধারণার কেন্দ্রীভূত সংবেদন গভীরভাবে পড়ে তার সৃষ্টকর্মে। যা দেখছি তাকে অবিকল না করে বস্তুগত ভাবনা ডিঙিয়ে সামান্য

কল্পনার আঙ্গুল ছুঁয়ে আমরা অনেক দূর চলে যাই। প্রচুর অদল-বদল ঘটে। সংযোজন হয় আবার হয় ব্যবচ্ছেদও। ফলে দর্শকরা ঠিক ঠিক রসাস্বাদন করতে পারে না। এখানেই সৃষ্টি হয় প্রতিবন্ধকতা, আগলে দাঁড়ায় দুর্বোধ্যতা। আসলে শিল্পের গতি-প্রকৃতির পেছনে ফেলে আসা ব্যাপারগুলো দেখা বা জানা না থাকলে রসগ্রহণে অসুবিধা হবেই।

জীবিতাবস্থায় শিল্পীকে একটা প্রশ্নের সম্মুখীন হতে হয়েছে যে ‘আপনারা আজকাল কি সব আঁকেন আমরা কিছু বুঝি না’। এই অভিযোগ বহুদিনের তা আজও বহমান। উত্তরে শিল্পী বলেছিলেন, ‘ভাবুন তো ছবি, মূর্তি সবটাই কি অঙ্কের মতো বোঝার? না একটু বোঝার আর অনেকটা অনুভব করার? অর্থাৎ ‘কিছু পলাশের নেশা, কিছু বা চাঁপায় মেশা’।’

এই কথা ভাবতে গিয়ে আমরা যদি মানুষের তাবৎ শিল্পসৃষ্টি — প্রাচীনকাল থেকে আজ পর্যন্ত যা নিদর্শন পেয়েছি, তার দিকে একটু তাকিয়ে দেখি, দেখতে পাব যে সমস্ত সৃষ্টির মূলে রয়েছে তার প্রয়োজনের দিক আর রসের দিক এবং ব্যক্তিগতভাবে শিল্পীর এবং সমষ্টিগতভাবে সমাজের অন্বেষণ ও জ্ঞান উন্মেষের সঙ্গে সঙ্গে স্বাভাবিক নিয়মে পরিবর্তিত হতে হতে সময়ের সঙ্গে সঙ্গে কখনো অবক্ষয়, কখনো বা উন্মেষের দিকে এগিয়ে গিয়েছে।

যদি আমরা সুপ্রাচীন মিশরের কথা ধরি, সেখানে যে সব দেওয়ার চিত্র বা পাণ্ডুলিপি, চিত্র পাওয়া গেছে — যার অনেকটাই পিস্টোগ্রাফ বা ‘ছবিলেখা’ তা কি আমরা সবটাই বুঝি? হয়তো কিছুটা অনুমান করি — যেটা বুদ্ধি বা যুক্তি প্রসূত। মনন বা অনুভূতির দিকটাই হচ্ছে শিল্পের প্রাণবন্ধু। শিল্পের আকার প্রকার রং রেখা এবং বিন্যাসের এমন একটা সুদূরপ্রসারী আবেদন আছে যা খানিকটা জ্ঞাতে এবং খানিকটা অজ্ঞাতে আমাদের সংবেদনশীল মনকে একটা পরিপূর্ণতার দিকে হাতছানি দিয়ে যায়। উদাহরণস্বরূপ ইতালীয় রেনেসাঁর ধর্মীয় উপাখ্যানের একটা ভালো ছবি

কথা বলা যায়। কিন্তু সবাই কি সমানভাবে তার রসের দিকে, শিল্প মাহাত্ম্যের দিকে আকৃষ্ট হবে? তথাপি শিল্পের সঙ্গে মানুষের যোগ থাকলে তা আশ্চর্যভাবে কাজ করে। যেমন করে অনূর্বর জমি ক্রমাগত জলসিঞ্চনে উর্বর হয়ে ওঠে — তেমনি করে শিল্পের অন্তর্নিহিত রসধারা অরসিককেও রসিক করে তুলবে। অজান্তে তাঁকে পরিশীলিত করে তুলবে।

চলমান এই প্রথায় সমষ্টিগত বা জাতিগত জীবনের পরিবর্তন ধীরে ধীরে হয়েছে। শিল্পেও এর ব্যত্যয় ঘটে নি। সুতরাং বোঝাবুঝির ক্ষেত্রে দ্রুত পালাবদল হয়নি। গোলমালটা বেধে গেল তখন, যখন যন্ত্র ও প্রযুক্তিবিজ্ঞানের চেউ সারা বিশ্বের কোণায় কোণায় পৌঁছে গেল এবং মানুষের ব্যক্তি স্বাতন্ত্র্যের অভিমান অনেকখানি স্থান অধিকার করল। উল্লেখ করা যেতে পারে যে — যান্ত্রিক উপায়ে রূপের অনুকৃতি ও অনুলিপি এত সহজে এবং বহুল পরিমাণে আমাদের সামনে এসে হাজির হল যে শিল্পসৃষ্টির সঙ্গে যান্ত্রিক পদ্ধতিতে রূপের অনুকৃতির একটা বিরোধ সৃষ্টি হল। শিল্পী এবং সমালোচকরা ব্যাখ্যা করলেন — শিল্প তো শুধুমাত্র বাহ্যিক রূপের অনুকরণ নয়। শিল্পসৃষ্টি হচ্ছে জীবনের অভিজ্ঞতালব্ধ দৃশ্যজগতের অন্তর্নিহিত রূপের ব্যাখ্যা। সেটা করতে গিয়ে ইউরোপীয় শিল্প আন্দোলনে এসে পড়ল নানা মতবাদ — যেমন কিউবিজম, ফবিজম, এক্সপ্রেশনিজম, বিমূর্তবাদ। যেগুলোর আলাদাভাবে বিস্তারিত আলোচনার দরকার।

শিল্পীরা শিল্পপ্রকরণের এক একটা দিক যেমন রং, রেখা বা পরিমিতি নিয়ে কাজ করতে লাগলেন— বাস্তব রূপকে বেশ খানিকটা বাদ দিয়ে বা কোনও কোনও ক্ষেত্রে সম্পূর্ণ উপেক্ষা করে। সুতরাং ১৯ শতকের শেষ দিকে এবং ২০ শতকের প্রথম থেকেই নানা পরীক্ষা-নিরীক্ষার মাধ্যমে শিল্পের যে চেহারাটা প্রতিভাত হতে থাকল তার চেউ সারা ইউরোপ, আমেরিকা এবং বিশ্বের উন্নতিশীল ছোট ছোট দেশেও পৌঁছে গেল।

চারুশিল্প আর কারুশিল্পের আগে প্রভেদ ছিল না। যিনি শিল্পী তিনিই আবার কারিগর। যদিও ব্যক্তিস্বাতন্ত্র্যের স্বীকৃতিকে প্রতিষ্ঠা দিতে গিয়ে ক্রমেই চারু ও কারুর সম্পর্ক ছিল হতে আরম্ভ করেছিল অনেক আগে থেকেই। এই পরিস্থিতিতে শিল্পের মোটামুটি চেহারা দাঁড়াল এই — দৃষ্টিগ্রাহ্য বাস্তব বা বাহ্যিক রূপের ক্রম অবলুপ্তির পরিবর্তে শিল্পীর কল্পনা-উদ্ভূত রং, রেখা ও আকারের বিন্যাস এবং তার মাধ্যমেই একটা আবেদন সৃষ্টি করা— শিল্পীর কল্পনার স্বাধীনতা বলে স্বীকৃতি পেল। খানিকটা গানের বদলে শব্দ ঝংকারের মত। প্রতিভাবান এবং নিষ্ঠাবান দক্ষ শিল্পীর হাতে সেটা অসম্ভব এমন অবশ্যই নয়, তার উদাহরণ শিল্পভাণ্ডারে যথেষ্ট আছে।

এসব প্রত্যক্ষ করে যে ফললাভ হল, তার দুটো দিক আছে। একদিকে বোধগম্যতার গণ্ডি বেশ খানিকটা সীমাবদ্ধ হল চেনাশোনা রূপের প্রতিফলনের অভাবে। অন্যটি আরও সাংঘাতিক – এই সুযোগে অনেক কৌশলী অ-শিল্পী রাতারাতি শিল্পী বনে গেলেন কথার আর যুক্তির জাল বুনে। কেননা কাল্পনিক আকার ও রেখা ঐকে রং লাগাতে অনেকেরই অসুবিধে নেই। দীর্ঘ সাধনার দ্বারা দক্ষতা অর্জনের বিড়ম্বনাও এতে নেই। সুতরাং ভেজালের যুগে জলে দুধে মিশে সবটাই জলো দুধে পরিণত হল।

এই পরিস্থিতিতে আমাদের দেশের অবস্থানটা দেখা যাক। আগে উল্লেখ করেছি যে — শিল্প-চেতনার এবং শিল্পরূপের বিবর্তন হয় সমাজের সঙ্গে সঙ্গে, পরিবর্তিত রাজনৈতিক ও ভৌগোলিক কারণে। কিন্তু ভারতবর্ষে যেটা ঘটেছিল সেটা বিবর্তন নয়, বরং বলা যায় অবলুপ্তি — মুঘল আমলের শেষ থেকে ব্রিটিশ অধিকারের শেষ পর্যায়ের মধ্যে। সুতরাং নতুন করে শিল্পটা আরম্ভ করতে গিয়ে আমরা এসে পড়লাম ইউরোপের আওতায়। এই ইতিহাস শিল্প-রসিকের অজানা নয়। স্বাধীনতার পর আমাদের দেশে আবার নতুন করে পটপরিবর্তন হয়েছে। ইউরোপের বিভিন্ন

‘ইজম’-এর হাওয়ায় এদেশের শিল্প-ঘাঁটিগুলো ভরপুর হয়ে উঠেছে। আমেরিকার অত্যাধুনিক ভুরো পপ আর্ট, অপ আর্টের পক্ষবিস্তারও যথেষ্ট হয়েছে। বিদেশে প্রথাগত নবীন শিল্পীরা এবং সমালোচক তাদেরই প্রশংসায় পঞ্চমুখ। প্রশ্ন হচ্ছে এদেশে এই জাতীয় শিল্পচেতনায় উদ্বুদ্ধ হওয়ার মত সামাজিক এবং মানসিক পরিস্থিতি কি আমাদের দেশে হয়েছে! ভারতীয় আধুনিক শিল্পের এই আবর্তে অনেক ক্ষমতাসালী প্রতিভাবান শিল্পীও অভিনবত্বের লোভে একটা ডিম, একটা ত্রিভুজ বা চতুর্ভুজ ঐকে বা একটা কাঠ পুড়িয়ে পয়গম্বর সেজে বসে আছেন। এই জাতীয় বস্তু আদৌ চারুশিল্পের এমনকি কারুশিল্পের পর্যায়ে পড়ে কিনা তা বিবেচনাসাপেক্ষ। তারপর সেটি বোধ্য না দুর্বোধ্য সে প্রশ্ন পরে আসবে।

আসল কথা হল — শিল্পী যদি সত্যিকার প্রেরণা, জীবনের অভিজ্ঞতা এবং সততা নিয়ে কাজ করে যান — তা যে কোন আঙ্গিকেই হোক না কেন — সেটা হৃদয়গ্রাহী হবে। দুর্বোধ্যতা হয়ত কিছুটা থাকবে। কারণ এটা বোঝার দোষ ততটা নয়, যতটা অনুভব না করার। শিল্পে শিল্পীর শ্রেষ্ঠত্ব এখানেই যা ভারতীয় মননে-দর্শনে চিরন্তন।

ঈশাবাবুর সৃজনশীল চিত্রকর্ম - শিরোনাম captive (ক্যাপটিভ)

বিষয়বস্তু হল ছবিটার একদিকে চিত্তিত গৃহবন্দী একটা ছেলে। অন্যদিকে দরজায় তালা দেওয়া। দরজার আড়াল দিয়ে দেখা যাচ্ছে দুটো পায়ের পাতা। বাইরে শেকলে বাঁধা কালচে রঙের কুকুর। শিল্পী বোঝাতে চাইছেন এই কুকুরটাও একই সঙ্গে বন্দী এবং এই বাড়ির প্রহরী। জানলা দিয়ে দেখা যাচ্ছে, দূরে নীল আকাশ এবং অন্য একটি বাড়ির ছাদে টিভির অ্যান্টেনা।

নিছক বিমূর্ত ছবি খুব কম ঐকেছেন। চারপাশের ঘটনা তাঁকে উত্তেজিত বা অনুপ্রাণিত করেছে। অথচ নিছক বাস্তবতার কাছে আত্মসমর্পণেও তিনি নারাজ। তিনি যেন বাস্তবের

অন্তরালবর্তী সত্যটাকেই ছুঁয়ে দেখতে এবং পরখ করতে চান। ফলে বাস্তবের উত্থাপ ও অনুষ্ণ তার ছবি থেকে হারায় না। একটা ভিন্ন মাত্রা তা থেকে পাওয়া যায়। যাকে বলা যেতে পারে, অন্য এক আলোর বিচ্ছুরণ, তা শিল্পীর একান্তভাবেই নিজস্ব।

আগেই বলেছি কর্মসূত্রে নানান ঝামেলার মধ্যেও তার চিত্রচর্চার সক্রিয়তা বিস্ময়কর। বেশীর ভাগ ছবি এই পর্বে তিনি এঁকেছেন মানুষের বেদনা ও সংগ্রাম নিয়ে। বন্দী জীবনের চাপা দুঃখ নিয়ে। সমসাময়িক ভাগলপুরের ঘটনাবলীতেও তিনি মানসিকভাবে আক্রান্ত হয়ে একজন দায়িত্বশীল শিল্পীর মতোই একই সঙ্গে সামাজিক দায় সম্পর্কে সচেতন থেকেছেন ও শিল্পের শর্ত পূরণ করেছেন স্বেচ্ছায়।

বিমূর্ত বা নিসর্গ চিত্রে মানুষ প্রায় আবশ্যিক ভাবে এসেছে। মানুষ সর্বসময়ে শিল্পীকে টেনেছে, ভাবিয়েছে। একটা দোদুল্যমান অস্থিরতা, বিষাদ এবং ভালোবাসা। আর্তি এবং যন্ত্রণাই শিল্পী ঈশাদাকে বাঁকিয়ে দিয়ে আঁকিয়ে নিয়েছে কিছু মহৎ ছবি। যেমন বঞ্চনা, বাঁচার সমস্যা, শোষণ শিক্ষার কূপমণ্ডুকতাকে খুব গভীরভাবে অনুভব করার ফলে এই সব অসাধারণ ছবির আত্মপ্রকাশ। এই সব ঘটনাগুলো তাঁর ছবিতে কিছুটা প্রত্যক্ষ বা পরোক্ষভাবে একগুচ্ছে চার-পাঁচটা ফোটা ফুলের মধ্যে নিষ্পাপ শিশুর মুখ, কিছুটা বিষণ্ণ যেন। পটভূমিকা অন্ধকারাচ্ছন্ন গাঢ় নীলাভ আভায় মিশে গেছে। মাঝখানে আনুভূমিক ক্রোম ইয়োলো একটু বাঁদিকে ঘেঁসে, ফলে ওটা পালঙ্ক বা বিছানার চাদর বলে ভুল হতে পারে। শিল্পী বৈপরীত্য দেখাতে ওই হলুদ রং-এর ব্যবহার করেছেন। এটা ভীষণ দরকার ছিল। যারা ছবি না বুঝে বিমূর্ততা নিয়ে শোরগোল করেন ওই হলুদ রং-এর ব্যবহার তাদের মনে প্রশ্নের পাহাড় তুলবে। কিন্তু বৈপরীত্যের চমৎকারিত্বকে অস্বীকার করতে পারবে না। আরেকটা ছবিতে একটা ফুল ঝরে গেছে। জন্ম ও মৃত্যুর প্রতীকী কল্পনা একটা হলে সাপ ওটাকে চাটছে। এখানে শিশুর মৃত্যু

দেখান হয়েছে। মৃত্যু বড় অমোঘ। শিল্পী ঈশাদার মতে 'প্রকৃতির আয়োজনটাই এরকম। এই চূড়ান্ত সত্যটা যেমন ভালো লাগে, তেমনি আবার বেদনাদায়ক'। বড় সুন্দর রূপকল্পনা।

ঈশাদার ছবিতে এক ধরনের বিষণ্ণতা লক্ষ করি, আবার জীবনমুখী রচনাও বেশ সযত্নে লালন করেছেন। সঙ্গে আছে রোমান্টিকতা মানব-মানবীর অবয়বে। দুর্বোধ্যতা এখানে বাধা হয়ে দাঁড়ায়নি। সচেতন শিল্পী যার রোমান্টিকতার পাশে নিশ্চুপ হয়ে বসে থাকতে কষ্ট হয়। স্থির সংযত একটা অনুভূতির হাত ছুঁয়ে থাকবে ঈশাদার চিত্রপট। সুখ-দুঃখের আটপৌরের জীবন-জটিলতা এবং বন্ধনহীন সব কিছুর মধ্যেই বর্ণিকাভঙ্গ, রচনা গোষ্ঠীর আঙ্গিকে এক অদ্ভুত চিত্রকল্পের ছায়া যা শিল্পীর একান্তই নিজস্ব।

জার্মান এক্সপ্রেসনিস্ট শিল্পীরা এক সময় ঈশাদাকে বেশ প্রভাবিত করেছিল। প্রভাবিত বললে হয়ত একটু ভুল হবে; শিল্পকর্মগুলো ভালো লেগেছিল। বিশেষ করে বেকম্যান। এদেশে হুসেনও প্রথমদিকে খুব টানতো। কিন্তু এখনকার শিল্পীদের কাজ ওদের থেকে কোন অংশে কম নয়, যেমন গণেশ পাইন, গণেশ হালুই, বিকাশ ভট্টাচার্য, শ্যামল দত্তরায় প্রমুখের। সব ছবিতে একটা বক্তব্য থাকতে হবে এটা শিল্পী বিশ্বাস করতেন না। বক্তব্য বা গল্পহীন ছবিও যে মানুষকে বহুদূর নিয়ে যেতে পারে, বুঝতে হবে তারও একটা নিজস্বতা আছে যার শেষ নেই।

তাঁর করা

একক প্রদর্শনীর সংখ্যা : অর্ধশতকেরও বেশি
যৌথ প্রদর্শনীর সংখ্যা : শতকের কাছাকাছি
শিল্পীর আঁকা ছবি - জল রঙ : সহস্রাধিক
শিল্পীর আঁকা ছবি - তেল রঙ : সার্ধ-শতক
খসড়া চিত্রাবলী : অসংখ্য

প্রদর্শনী পরিচিতি : ঈশাবাবুর উদ্যোগে

ঈশা মহম্মদ তেল রঙের এক অসাধারণ শিল্পী। মাধ্যম হিসাবে তেল-রঙের তুলনা হয় না। তা বহুমুখী এবং আদরনীয় এটা আমরা অনেকেই

জানি, আবার এও জানি বড় কঠিন। প্রয়োগের যাবতীয় শর্ত না মানলে, স্তরে স্তরে প্রথা মেনে, ধৈর্য ধরে এগোতে না পারলে পর্যবসিত হবে হাস্যকর প্রচেষ্টায়।

মাঝবয়সে আমরা প্রত্যক্ষ করি ঈশাদার তৃপ্তি। তিনি মাধ্যমটি প্রায় পরিপূর্ণ দখলে এনেছেন। রঙের পর রঙ চাপিয়ে বস্তুর ভার, আকার, আকৃতি, স্পর্শ ফুটিয়ে তুলতে পারেন নিজস্ব প্রত্যয়ে বা চণ্ডে। ক্যানভাস তখন আর ক্যানভাস থাকে না, জীবনের টুকরো হয়ে ওঠে। Portrait আর Still Life-এ তিনি সিদ্ধহস্ত। বিষয় ভাবনায় এই বাস্তববাদী (Realist) শিল্পী জনজীবনের বিভিন্ন সমস্যার দিকে ঝুঁকেছেন। শিল্পী যে কল্পলোকের বিচ্ছিন্ন জীবন, সেই চেতনাটি ধরে রাখতে চেয়েছেন। শিল্পীর সামাজিক দায়বদ্ধতা সম্পর্কে তিনি প্রচুর ছবিতে প্রমাণ রেখে গেছেন। বাস্তবের প্রতিফলন শিল্প ও সাহিত্যে। তবে চিত্র আর সংবাদচিত্রে ভেদজ্ঞান অক্ষুণ্ণ রাখার চেষ্টা করেছেন।

একটি ছবি সবার নজরে এসেছিল। শিরোনাম “দেখছে” (Watching)। বক্তব্য অনবদ্য। একটি কিশোর, দেহাতী এক বালক ময়দানের কাছে কোনও এক জায়গায় দাঁড়িয়ে আছে, সামনে নিচু এক পাঁচিল। পাঁচিলের কেয়ারির কয়েকটি অংশ ভাঙা, ঢালাই-এর লোহা বেরিয়ে পড়েছে। ময়দানে রাজভবনের বিপরীতে এই দৃশ্য চোখে না পড়ার নয়। বালকটির পিছনে রোদ হলুদ, ধূ ধূ এক পরিসর। পিছনের আলোয় ছেলেটি ঝলসে আছে। নিচু পাঁচিলে তার দুটো পুরো বাছ। বিস্ময় ভরা ছেলেটা দেখছে, টপকে সে আসতে সাহস পাচ্ছে না এই ব্যস্ত শহরে। পাঁচিলের অন্যপাশে পড়ে আছে একরাশ ডাবের খোলা। ডাবের খোলা এই শহরের জনসংখ্যার প্রতীক। বাবুরা নানাদিক থেকে এই শহরে দাপাতে আসেন। আখের ছিবড়ে, ডাবের খোলা ছড়িয়ে শহর ছেড়ে চলে যান সূর্য যখন দিগন্তে নামে। ছেলেটি দেখছে।

শিল্পী তার শক্তি প্রকাশের মধ্যে বিষয় নির্বাচন করেছেন, যেমন প্রতিকৃতি ও স্থিরজীবন।

নিখুঁততম কায়দায় এঁকেছেন ইট, পাঁচিল আর ডাবের খোল। মনে হবে হাত বাড়িয়ে সরিয়ে দিই একটা ইট বা তুলে নিই একটা ডাবের খোলা। আঙুনে-কমলার সঙ্গে ইটের গেরুয়ার সঙ্গে কচি ডাবের সবুজ পরস্পর পরস্পরের পরিপূরক। পিছনে রোদ সামনে ছায়া। যারা ছবি আঁকেন তাঁরা জানেন, উজ্জ্বলভূমিতে মসৃণ একটা ছায়া ফেলা খুব একটা সহজ কাজ নয়। ‘ব্রেডিং’ হাতটা পাকা হওয়া চাই। ভাঙা পাঁচিলের কেয়ারি মচকানো লোহা অতি নিখুঁত। বালকটি পটভূমি মুক্ত হয়ে এমন জীবন্ত, যে মনে হবে, এখুনি সে বলে উঠবে — হেই বাবু গো।

শিরোনাম / বিষয় : মানুষের বন্ধন-দশা

একটা সময়ে মানুষের বন্ধন-দশাকে নিয়ে ভাবিয়েছিল। তিনি ভাবলেন দেহ এক বন্ধন, সমাজ আর সমাজনীতি আর এক বন্ধন, আরও এক বন্ধন হল অর্থনীতি। পরিবারও এক বন্ধন। মানুষ স্বেচ্ছায় যে জীবন বেছে নেয় সেও এক বন্ধন। এই পৃথিবীতে মানুষই হয় মানুষের শিকার। শিল্পী অতীত থেকে বর্তমানে এলেন।

একটা ছবির বিষয় হচ্ছে সতী। বড় ছবি। ছবিটা লম্বালম্বি তিন খণ্ডে বিভক্ত করেছেন। তাতে সমন্বয়ের বিঘ্ন ঘটছে কিনা বলা শক্ত। মাঝখানে একটা গাছ। ভূমি ক্ষয়ে সমস্ত শিকড় বেরিয়ে পড়েছে। গাছটা যদি সমাজের প্রতীক হয়, ভূমিক্ষয় হল কুসংস্কার, ভ্রান্তনীতির প্রতীক। গাছের তলায় একটা সাপ কুণ্ডলী খুলছে। তার মুখটা চলে এসেছে ছবির বাম অংশে। সেখানে পড়ে আছে একটা নারীমুণ্ড ও ভাঙা কলস। এই হল শিকার। ছবির ডান অংশে সবুজ আকাশে ভাসছে হালকা ঝরা পাতা। অনেক কথা বলার চেষ্টা করেছেন শিল্পী। বক্তব্যের ভারে ছবিটা পটচিত্রের স্বাদ পেয়েছে, রঙের যাদুকরী বিদ্যায়।

সমসাময়িক আরেকটি বড় ছবিতে বন্দী কিশোর দারিদ্র আর সাম্প্রদায়িকতার শিকার। তেল-রঙে আঁকা পরিপূর্ণ একটি সংবাদচিত্র।

পশ্চাৎভূমিতে বিশাল আকাশ। দিগন্ত নেমে এসেছে অনেক নিচে। নিম্নভূমিতে আকাশের গায়ে একটা খাদ। পাশবিক যুথবদ্ধতায় সমাজের ব্রাত্য মানুষের সারি সারি ভয়াত মুখ। সামনের দৃশ্যপট জুড়ে উলঙ্গ এক কিশোর। হাত দুটো পেছনে মোড়া, মাথা ঝুলে আছে বুকের কাছে। আকাশের গায়ে চাপা আলো। সেই আলোয় সবই যেন এক ভৌতিক মাত্রা পেয়েছে। ছবিটার প্রবল বক্তব্য দৃশ্য আর বর্ণের সীমা অতিক্রম করে ভীতির জগতে ঢুকে পড়েছে। পরিবেশ আর পরিস্থিতির অদৃশ্য শিকলে বাঁধা মানুষ। প্রদর্শনীর অন্য একটা ছবি দেখলে আঁতকে উঠতে হয়। মানুষের দশদশার এক দশা। এই শহরের বিশাল বাড়ি ও জীর্ণ ফুটপাথের পটভূমিতে জীবনের ওপর দিয়ে আমাদের উদাস চোখ প্রায়শই পিছলে যায়। শিল্পী ঠিক এইরকমই এক জীবনখণ্ডকে ছবি করে তুলে ধরেছেন আমাদের চোখের সামনে। একটি সুদৃশ্য বাড়ির ঘেরা বারান্দা। সামনের ভাঙা ফুটপাথে ছেঁড়া, ময়লা, কাপড় মোড়া একটা দেহ পড়ে আছে দুমড়ে মুচড়ে, পরিত্যক্ত এক জড়বস্তুর মতো। কল্পনা নীল, মনোরম, আহা করে ওঠার মতো কোনও উপাদান নেই। বসার ঘরের আয়েসী দেওয়ালেও এ ছবি স্থান পাবে না। এটি হার্ড-পাঞ্চ সংবাদচিত্র।

জীবনকে জীবন দিয়ে এই ভাবে নাড়া দিয়ে শিল্পী একই প্রদর্শনীতে অপরিসীম করুণাঘন

একটি ছবি উপহার দিয়েছিলেন — খ্রিস্টান সন্ন্যাসিনী। প্রতিকৃতি আর স্থির জীবন পেলে ঈশাদাকে ধরে রাখা কঠিন। ছবির মধ্যমাত্রায় প্রবীণা ধর্মসেবিকা। মুখে-চোখে জীবনযাত্রার দ্বিধা। অনেকটা চলে আসার পর থমকে যাওয়া। পেছনের এক চোকো অন্ধকার কেটে বেরিয়ে আসা শ্বেতবসনা। মাথা ঘিরে শ্বেত আবরণ। সন্ন্যাসিনী মনে হয় একটি দরজা খুলে বেরিয়ে আসতে চাইছেন। সংশয়ের দরজা। মাথার ওপরে, তাকে ভাঁজ করা কয়েকটা তোয়ালে, সর্বোপরি একটা আপেল। দুটোই বিশুদ্ধ জীবনের প্রাচীন প্রতীক। ছবির বাঁদিকে শুভ্র পটভূমিতে একটি শীর্ণ ডাল, গুটিকয়েক অক্ষুরিত পাতা। আড়াআড়ি আর লম্বালম্বি বস্তু বিভাজনে ছবিটার স্তরুতায় এক নীরব চঞ্চলতা ও তৎপরতা তৈরি হয়েছে। অদৃশ্য চিন্তার বিক্ষিপ্ত আনাগোনার মতো। ভারি পরিচ্ছন্ন, স্নিগ্ধ, বিষণ্ণ এক সংগীতের মতো বেশ চিন্তা-ভাবনা করে করা। কিন্তু শত যুক্তিতেও মানা গেল না ছবির ডান দিকের গোলযোগ। বেঁকে থাকা, ভাঙা-চোরা, আয়নায় আরেকটা নোংরা মুখ। হয়ত শিল্পীর কল্পনায় কোনও “সিন্ডারেলা”। মনে হয় এ যেন দুটি বিষম ছবিকে একত্রে সেলাই করা। শিল্পী প্রখর, হাত ভরা শক্তি, কেবল বিষয় ভাবনায় কিঞ্চিৎ ছটফটে। প্রদর্শনীটি গত শতাব্দীর নব্বই-এর দশকে কলকাতায় “জেনেসিস”-এ অনুষ্ঠিত। অলমিতি বিস্তরণে...

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

6th February 2024

A Collaborative Seminar of the Asiatic Society with Ramakrishna Mission Vivekananda Educational and Research Institute (RKMVERI) on Microcosm, Macrocosm Equation.

Humayun Kabir Hall : 3.00 p.m.

12th February 2024

An Exhibition on the occasion of birthday of Professor Isha Mahammad (11.02.1933), former President of the Asiatic Society. Salt Lake Building : 4.00 p.m.

16th February 2024

Professor Suniti Kumar Chatterji Memorial Lecture, 2023

Humayun Kabir Hall : 3.00 p.m.

Speaker: Professor Ch. Yashawanta Singh.

Topic : Revisiting Kiratajanakriti

29th February 2024

K.K. Handiqui Memorial Lecture

Humayun Kabir Hall : 3.00 p.m.

Speaker: Dr. N.K. Sundareswaran

Topic : What Mimāṃsā has got to do in Mathematics? Reading into the Āryabhaṭīyabhāṣya

Little boats that sail towards those isles of yours...

Pinky Isha *

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Rabindra Bharati University

Mapping the range and extent of Isha Mahammad's works is a promethean endeavour; and one that requires a keen insight into Western and European classical and modern movements of painting; that he so illustriously studied with the precision of a miniaturist, and the eye of a connoisseur. Being born and having to live and wade through the tumultuous phase of Indian partition was not very easy for him, as Isha's father died when he was still a child. Extremely sensitive yet resilient and staunchly rational and focussed; Isha had an eye for minute details right from his very childhood. He captured through his photography, the intricate sunlight falling on the waters of the pond, at his ancestral home where he sat for hours watching the cadences and hues of nature take on their myriad forms. At a very young age of 12 he made a camera out of scrap metal parts (that existed for almost 5 decades) with only a readymade lens that could actually run on the mechanism that an actual camera worked in those days. He would stand for hours outside a potter's workshop or at a mechanic's hardware store or outside an iron smith's door to see how things would come to shape. He loved creating—anything that could perceptibly be created, intrigued him; even if it were to be a mechanical tool or an electric circuit! It was perhaps this scrutinising trait and a seemingly endless curiosity in his mental-make that eventually

blossomed into a precision, which we find in his realistic, pseudo-realist, surrealist and sometimes blended naturalistic mode of art, whether they be sketches, water colour, acrylic, oil or mixed media.

Isha's labour of love that began with his tenure as a student of the Government College of Art and Craft, Kolkata, ushered him on to see, reflect and experience the most coveted art schools, galleries and museums across the whole of Europe. And even though he loved travelling and photography, he was an avid reader and an art-historian who wrote in the form of random notes, diary entries, scholarly articles that spanned classical Western and Byzantium art & architecture, Renaissance art and even the transformative nature of art & sculpture from the old Bengal school of pattachitra, the art of Abanindranath Tagore, Nandalal, Ramkinkar and many others. The lineage and ascendance of the fine arts both in Europe and in the Indian subcontinent was something that he dextrously taught and inculcated in his students all his life; besides handling the not-so-pleasant duties of a Principal at The Government College of Art and Craft, Kolkata. There were student strikes, political pressures and unwarranted machinations that Isha skilfully tided over and yet came out unfazed. And though he was a very able, dauntlessly calm and strict administrator; there were moments when his passion and commitment for art was almost dampened due to his family

*Daughter of Isha Mahammad

responsibilities and the precarious demands on an institutional head that required sustained hours of writing letters for grants, establishing the Undergraduate and Master's Degree in place of Diploma (which Isha first introduced with much pains) in several disciplines of the Fine Arts, and streamlining the administrative and curriculum-based lacunas which were essential in making the Government College of Art & Craft, one of the most prestigious and foremost institutions of the country, back in the early 90's.

Isha's artistic oeuvre is sufficiently charged and embossed with the events

of his life. The commitment of the artist to his larger society is replete in his realistic paintings where the figures speak for themselves. The human forms, expressions and messages that they evoke are powerful and unmistakable. Isha did not believe that art was a fanciful makeover or poetic effluence or feelings beyond one's own experience. A painting or a sketch was for him, the manifestation of the soul's deepest inner essences. It could and would often wrench out the artist's subconscious fears, traumas, and his deepest insecurities. Such is the power of Isha's visual idiom that



Violence 36"x66"
Oil on Canvas, 2005



The Wall 38"x34" Oil on Canvas, 2005

they confront the audience in its most primeval, raw and untamed states of existence!

Most people would say Art should not be didactic! But for Isha perhaps, art was closer to life, emerged from life itself and that needed no subterfuges.

Isha's canvas therefore reflects the underdogs, the labourer in all their simplicity and poverty (Victim Series), the housewife or mother in her mellow subdued sexuality, pulsating lovers in an eternal embrace or eagerly waiting with an urgency that is writ large on their faces; children and orphans at their most vulnerable, lonely men and women with a double psyche like Picasso's face and the mask; or like Max Beckmann's intertwined figures that challenge the audience to think and rethink. At an early stage of his painting career besides life sketches and realistic drawings, Isha was especially attracted to the European expressionist painters like Max Beckmann, Oskar Kokoschka, Franz Marc, Francis Bacon and the abstract Expressionist painter Wassily Kandinsky. He liked how Bacon managed

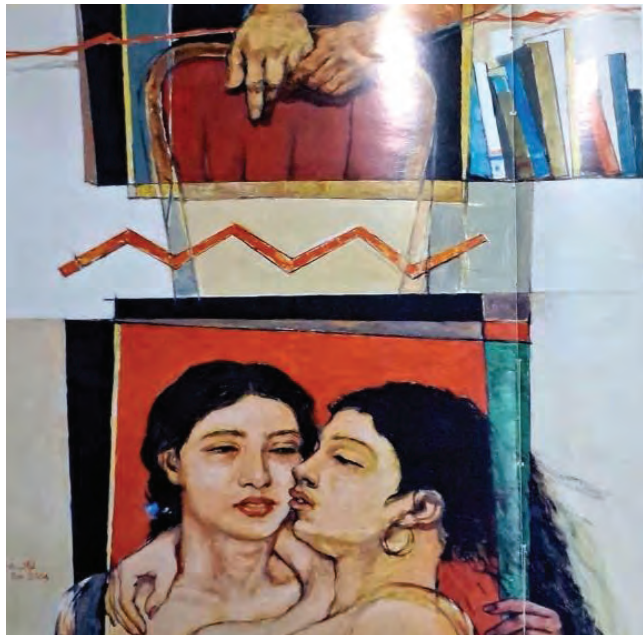


Ray of Hope. 36"x42" Mix Media, 2006.

to convey the grotesque, the horrid, and the inscrutable in one convoluted muffled face or object, where the colours coalesce and become hazy to show the essential meaninglessness or trauma of existence. Sometimes the contours and lines are blurred, or maybe they become purely abstract like Kandinsky's paintings; yet as a point of difference, Isha's abstract canvases always convey some hidden form, a structure may be, or just a likeness to something that makes one ponder. His famous Mannequin Series of nudes present the agony of prostitution and forced oppression on women.

Roughly about a hundred of Isha's commissioned portraits which were his forte

occupy prestigious places in India and abroad, mostly with government offices or museums, and even in private collections. It was indeed challenging for Isha to paint creative works of art alongside commissioned works, though all were equally appreciated and applauded. He was seminal in various art appreciation camps and educational tours for his students, and conducted workshops and plenary lectures where he was always an invited speaker; for his powers of oration like his erudition in art history was extraordinary. Famous



We Exist. 38"x34" Oil on Canvas, 2004

BIRTHDAY TRIBUTE

artists like Paresh Maity, Sanatan Dinda, Chhatrapati Dutta, and Niren Sen Gupta to mention a few, had been Isha's students once, at the Government College of Art and Craft, and they had often lovingly recalled their mentor, even years after their days at the college. Age could not deter Isha from the service of art; and he untiringly devoted himself to the restoration of old and archival art works, housed at many prestigious places; and actually framed and worked upon an elaborate strategy to preserve oil paintings as old as 300 years, during his tenure as the President at The Asiatic Society, Kolkata from 2016 to 2020. The multifarious nature of the artist and the vast collection of his works will stand the test of time, and be an inspiration for art connoisseurs and artists to come.

It is indeed difficult for even a daughter to reflect on the child like simplicity of his

soul and his outrightly outspoken nature, like an angry child who scolds his mother or aunt for not getting some delicious cake or cookies on a warm summer evening! The ripples of his laughter and his jokes, still ring in my ears and the lines of Mary Elizabeth Frye comes to my mind:

Do not stand at my grave and weep
I am not there. I do not sleep.
I am a thousand winds that blow.
I am the diamond glints on snow.
I am the sunlight on ripened grain.
I am the gentle autumn rain.
When you awaken in the morning's hush
I am the swift uplifting rush
Of quiet birds in circled flight.
I am the soft stars that shine at night.
Do not stand at my grave and cry;
I am not there. I did not die.



Dr. Satyabrata Chakrabarti, General Secretary, handing over the 'Rabindranath Tagore Birth Centenary Plaque' for the year 2022 to Professor Abhijit Vinayak Banerjee, Eminent Economist and Nobel Laureate, in presence of Professor Swapan Kumar Pramanick, President, at the recipient's residence on 10 January 2024.

Evolution of the Ancient Monument Preservation Act – A Benchmark in Heritage Preservation

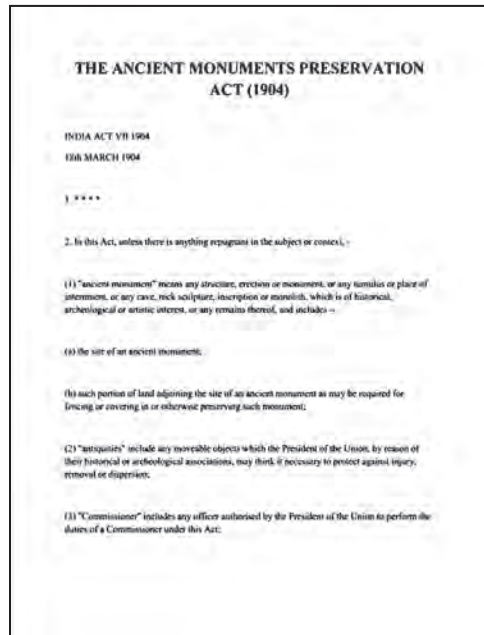
Pronoy Roy Chowdhury

Deputy Superintending Engineer, Public Health Engineering Department
Government of West Bengal



Lord Curzon

Although it is well known and accepted truth across the world that Indian Civilisation is many centuries old, it is also unfortunate that much of our heritage is lost forever due to want of proper preservation strategy & knowledge. Historically there existed an Archaeological Survey of India from colonial days which was established by Lord Canning, the then Viceroy of India in 1861 who appointed Alexander Cunningham as the Archaeological Surveyor of India. Cunningham had great interest in Archaeology and he effectively



laid the foundation of modern Indian Archaeology. The contribution of Sir Alexander Cunningham to the field of Indian Archaeology is immense. Although he was trained in Military Engineering and rose to rank of Major General before his retirement from the Royal Engineers, he was keenly interested on Archaeology, a passion which he grew with his intimacy with James Prinsep, the famous English scholar, orientalist, known for deciphering the Brahmi script of ancient India and the founding editor of the *Journal of The Asiatic Society of Bengal*. He conducted identification of many historical

locations such as Aornos, Kosambi, Nalanda, Padmavati, Shravasti, Taxila, Vaishali etc. only to name a few. He conducted explorations of Gaur and produced twenty-four reports on the excavations. He published papers in the *Proceedings of The Asiatic Society* and also published Reports of Archaeological Survey of India. However his great initiative in the field of Archaeology was only removing a fine layer of mist from the thick curtain of darkness which veiled the ancient world of India and much of the truth was still awaiting to be revealed.

Real impetus to the cause of preservation of antiquities of India was not found until Lord Curzon appeared in the scene. Viceroy Lord Curzon and also the Patron of The Asiatic Society of Bengal gave a speech on 7th February, 1900 at the Asiatic Society. In the speech he for the first time established the duty of the Government in respect of preservation of ancient buildings of India. He went on to say, "In the course of my recent tour, during which I visited some of the most famous sites and beautiful or historic buildings in India, I more than once remarked in reply to Municipal addresses, that I regarded the conservation of ancient monuments as one of the primary obligations of Government. We have a duty to our forerunners, as well as to our contemporaries and to our descendants — nay our duty to the two classes in itself demands the recognition of an obligation to the former". He reminded that, "India is covered with visible records of vanished dynasties, of forgotten monarchs, of persecuted and sometimes dishonoured creeds. The monuments are for the most part, though there are notable exceptions, in British Territory and on soil belonging to Government. Many of them are in out-of-the-way places, and are liable to the combined ravages of a tropical climate, an exuberant flora, and very often a local and ignorant population, who see only in an ancient building the means of in-expensively raising

a modern one for their own convenience. All these circumstances explain the peculiar responsibility that rests upon Govt. of India." He emphasised upon the fact that art and beauty should always be kept separate from the barriers of religious taboo. He asserted his feelings in the strongest of word, "Art and beauty, and the reverence that is owing to all that has evolved human genius, or has inspired human faith, are independent of creeds, and in so far as they touch the sphere of religion are embraced by common religion of mankind. Viewed from this standpoint, the rock temple of the Brahmins stands on precisely the same footing as the Buddhist Vihara, and the Mohammedan Masjid as the Christian Cathedral. There is no principle of artistic discrimination between the Mausoleum of the depot and the sepulchre of the saint." He went on to describe the various ages through which the Indian Antiquities have developed from the Greco-Bactrian Kingdoms to the epoch of Muslim rulers. In a more philosophical and secular tone he submitted, "To us the relics of Hindu and Mahomedan, of Buddhist, Brahmin and Jain are from the antiquarian, the historical and the artistic point of view, equally interesting and equally sacred."

He expressed that his predecessors had committed some blunders in past with respect to preservation & restoration of antiquities in India and not much significant effort was taken in the field. Although, there were some significant initiative taken previously, such as the then Viceroy Lord Canning in 1860 established the Archaeological Survey of Northern India and appointed General Alexander Cunningham as the Archaeological Surveyor of India and that for 20 years, General Cunningham has significantly laboured and published a mine of information in the *Journal of Archaeological Survey of India*. Even the local Governments also took initiative and the Bombay Survey where Dr. James Burges had conducted excellent work as the Head

of Archaeological Survey of Western and Southern India and later succeeded as the follower of Cunningham as the Director-General of Archaeological Survey of India. However, Lord Curzon submitted that much labour is still unexplored. He took upon the responsibility to explore further into this field of study and said, "I hope to assert more definitely during my time the Imperial responsibility of Government in respect of Indian antiquities to inaugurate or to persuade a more liberal attitude on the part of those with whom it rests to provide the means, and to be a faithful guardian of the priceless treasure-house of art and learning that has for a few years at any rate, been committed to my charge". Thus we find that there was a spark of passion in Viceroy Lord Curzon to protect the antiquities of this country and he had taken it up as a solemn responsibility to see that something very tangible is done to achieve this end.

It is found that the dismal state of Indian Archaeology Department did not miss the eye of Lord Curzon. On 23rd September, 1899 he recorded in a minute the following, "The Geographical arrangement of these circles are fantastic in the extreme. Sind is lumped together with Bombay and Berar; Baluchistan is tacked on to the Punjab and Ajmer is casually thrown in. The central provinces are added to North Western Provinces, Bengal has no Surveyor. The Surveyors in the remaining circles, instead of being scholars, or even Engineers, are merely, as their names implies Surveyors, who make drawings, and write reports, but can only at a considerable risk be entrusted with the task of renovation & repair". He went on to record, "Thus it has come about that owing to the absence of any central and duly qualified advising authority, not merely are beautiful and famous buildings crumbling to decay, but there is neither principle nor unity in conservation or repair, while from time to time horrors are still committed that makes the student shudder and turn

grey". It is found that on 20th December 1900, definite proposal embodying the spirit of the above stated minutes was submitted to the then Secretary of State Lord George Hamilton, who recommended the revival of the post of Director-General of Archaeological Survey, to be manned by a person who must be a trained explorer combining archaeological knowledge with Engineering skills. He must exercise a general supervisions on all Archaeological activities including excavation, preservation, repair and epigraphy. Sanction of a sum of rupees one lakh annually for archaeological work in India was requested from the Secretary of the State.

The proposal was accepted by the then Secretary of State of India and on 29th November, 1901, Sir John Marshall was selected as the Director-General of Archaeology in India. He had wide experience in the field and had already worked in Greece, Turkey and Crete. His duties were laid down as "The most important of his functions is to secure that the ancient monuments of the country are properly cared for, that they are not utilized for the purposes which are inappropriate or unseemly, that repairs are executed when required and that any restorations, which may be attempted are conducted on artistic lines". His duties also extended to exercise general supervision over all archaeological work in the country, whether it be that of excavation, or preservation or repair, or of registration and description of monuments and ancient remains or of any antiquarian research. The Director-General was also to assist the surveys conducted by the Provincial Governments. His job profile also required that he should submit an annual report to the Government on the progress affected during a financial year. Thus, the creation of the post of Director-General of Archaeology in India gave much impetus to the organised study of Archaeology in India.

Lord Curzon the Viceroy remained

faithful to his ambition of restoration of the ancient monuments of India. When he started as a Viceroy of India the expenditure on the head of preservation of ancient monuments was around £7,000 per year. By 1904, the expenditure figure amounted to £37,000 per year. Lord Curzon proudly claimed, "If you went back there, you would hardly recognize the place. What were then dirty waste are now green parks & gardens, neglected and half-tumbled down ruins are as perfect as on the day when they first left the builder's or mason's hand; we have trained our artificers to such pitch that now at last they can faithfully reproduce the original work in marble, sandstone and pietra dura".

Lord Curzon once decided to gift a hanging lamp to the beautiful marble edifice of 'Taj Mahal'. On 19th April, 1905, he writes in a letter "I want to give a beautiful silver hanging lamp of Sarasenic design to be hung above the Cenotaphs of Shah Jahan and his Queen in the upper Mausoleum of the Taj – I have been trying for years to get the people here to give me a design, but have failed. I turn, therefore to Cairo, where my recollection is that some beautiful lamps still hang in Arab Mosques." Lord Curzon himself visited Cairo. The Lamp which Lord Curzon wanted to present was like the one which hang at the Mosque of Sultan Beybars-II. With the help of two experts Herz Bey, the Director of Arab Museum of Cairo and Mr. E. Richmond of Egyptian PWD, he found a man called Todros Badir, who after two years labour produced a lamp in bronze, inlaid throughout with silver and gold. The lamp had an inscription on it in Persian made by a Calligrapher at Agra declaring "Presented to the Tomb of Mumtaz Mahal by Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India-1906."

The lamp was installed at Taj on 16th February, 1906, during the evening prayer intoned by the Imam in the Mosque of the Taj in presence of a vast congregation. The President of the Anjuman Islamia, Syed

Ali Nabi spoke to those present in and expressed deep gratitude to Lord Curzon for restoration of the historic Taj Mahal. He also spoke about the lamp gifted to the tomb of Mumtaz Mahal "As it hangs here above the graves of Mumtaz Mahal and Shah Jahan, it revives in spirit, if not in precise details, a ceremony performed in old days of lighting up the tomb once a year at the anniversary festival held in the Emperor's Honour. The gift therefore could not appeal more strongly to our sentiment and imagination, for this pious usage of honouring the imperial dead had disappeared with the passing of the Moghul power and the spoliation of the building at the hands of the invaders". A letter of Lord Curzon was read by Sir John Heweth the then Lt. Governor of United Province at the occasion of installation of the lamp, it said, "In asking you to see to its final installation, I would beg that it may be carefully guarded by the custodians of the shrine and may hang there as my last tribute of respect to the glories of Agra which float like a vision of eternal beauty in my memory". Thus we find the intense passion which was in the heart of Lord Curzon for preservation of Indian Monumental Heritage, especially the 'Taj'.

On 23rd October, 1903, Sir Denzil Ibbetson, a Member of the Council of the Governor-General of India moved for leave to introduce a bill at the Viceroy's Legislative Council for preservation of ancient monuments and objects of archaeological, historical or artistic interest. He deliberated at the floor of the house—"My Lord, during the past three quarters of a century archaeology, which has been defined as the study of the material remains of the human past, has received an enormous impetus, if indeed it may not be said to have sprung into existence in Europe. The aesthetic value of works of ancient art has always been recognized, though never studied with such intelligent care as now-a-days....". He went on to deliberate "...almost every nation with any pretensions to civilization has recently

taken measures to conserve its ancient buildings and to protect from dissipation, loss or injury to the archaeological material contained within its territories and has founded or enlarged museums in which objects of archaeological interest are collected and displayed for information of the intelligent and for study of the learned...". He went on to explain about the various developments which took place in this field of study he referred, "within last thirty years, excavation has become a science, and has added enormously to our knowledge of the history of human race. In furtherance of the objects which I have indicated, legislation has everywhere been found necessary. At present moment there is hardly a country in Europe which has not made legal provision for the objects of artistic, historical or archaeological interest, even Turkey and having followed the example of their neighbours". He further deliberated, "In Greece the law goes so far as to declare that antiquities possessed by private persons, either in their collections or situated on their property, are considered as national property, and if an ancient building is in danger owing to the neglect of the owner, the Government will step in and repair it, in which case the building becomes the property of the public. In Italy, the owner of an old picture cannot sell it without the permission of the Government, even though it may have been in the possession of his family ever since it was painted..."

Sir Denzil Ibbetson, went on to relate, "My Lord, India is surpassed by few countries in beauty, the importance, and the interest of her ancient monuments, or in the wealth of archaeological material which she possesses. There are many buildings in this country of which the whole of Indian people may be justly proud; there are some which the world could ill afford to spare... yet Indian alone, or almost alone, among civilized countries, has made no legislative provision for protection of her priceless

treasures...". Thus he justified at the floor of the Legislative Council the requirement of framing particular law which expressly recognises the right of the Government to "prevent injury to and preserve buildings remarkable for their antiquity." He expressed sadness at the fact that due to want of repair and restoration many ancient buildings of great beauty, or interest, or both are crumbling to decay. Also in past there has been many incidents of dishonest vandalism which has caused massive damage to many of the historical monuments.

He alarmed the authorities, "...the buried sites of deserted towns and buildings are common all over India; and there can be little doubt that systematic excavation under competent guidance would cast a flood of light upon the ancient history of the country, as it has done in Europe; and indeed results of value have already been obtained in this country when such operations have been undertaken with knowledge. But at present these sites lie at the mercy of the villagers, who dig in them for bricks with which to build his homes or for soil impregnated with nitre to spread upon his fields or even worse of the enthusiastic but ignorant amateur, who destroys in his well-meaning but misguided efforts, evidence which, in competent hands might have been of the utmost archaeological value." We find that later the excavation of Mohen-Jo-Daro & Harappa and the archaeological findings at the site led to the discovery of Indus Valley Civilisation, placing India in the global map amongst one of the most ancient of civilisations. Thus he requested for leave to introduce the draft bill for Preservation of Ancient Monuments of India.

He went on to describe the bill, "... The Bill is divided into four distinct parts: — The first part deals with Ancient Monuments. This term includes not all of the ancient buildings, but only those which possess a historical, archaeological or artistic interest. But as a matter of fact,

its provisions relate not to all ancient monuments, but only to such of them as Government declares to be protected monument; that is to say, monuments, the importance of which is such that their preservation is a public interest. This part of the bill is framed upon the model of English Act, which is said to be working well and to have prevented a great deal of mischief." The second part of the bill dealt with antiquities of a moveable nature, and was intended to provide for the care of sculptures, carvings, inscriptions and the like. It empowered the Government to prohibit or restrict the import or export out of any part of British India any antique object by selling or removal detriment to the interest of India. The third part of the bill dealt with the archaeological remains, whether moveable or immovable. This portion of the bill is to prevent removal from vicinity of the site or building any object of value to the student of Archaeology and to protect the antique objects from injury or decay. The fourth part of the bill dealt with excavations which empower Government to restrict or regulate within any local area.

Sir Denzil Ibbetson moved the bill together with the statement of objects and reasons relating to the bill to be published in Government of India Gazette in English and the local official Gazette.

On 18th March, 1904, the Ancient Monument Bill was passed into law. At the session of the Legislative Council at Government House Lord Curzon expressed pleasure to pass the bill into law. He said the bill was received unanimously without a discordant note by, all classes of the community and was passed '*nemine contradicente*,' i.e. without a vote of dissent. He believed that the principle of the bill is sound, irrefragable proposition that a nation is interested in its antiquities. The Preamble of the Legislation was very definite to the

object, "to provide for the preservation of ancient monuments, for the exercise of control over traffic in antiquities, and over excavating and for the protection and acquisition of eminent monument and of objects of archaeological, historical or artistic interest." He reflected that the bill is the coping stone of a policy in respect of Archaeology. He indicated that as a Viceroy of India he had observed with pain & regret the dismal state of Indian antiquities. He went on to quote the words of reproach of the Roman Poet Horace in the lyrical poem 'Odes', book-III, the passage runs in Latin as –

*Delicta maiorum immeritus lues,
Romane, donec templa refeceris,
Aedesque labentes deorum et
Foeda nigro simulacra fumo.*

In English, it may be translated as,

*Guiltless, you will pay for your ancestors' failure,
Roman until you rebuild the temples
and fallen shrines of the Gods
and Statues Filthy with black smoke.*

Horace in the above poem condemns prevailing domestic immorality and contempt of institutions, religion and urgently urges a speedy return to the simpler and purer manners of ancient times of the Romans. Lord Curzon indicated that it is not the urge of recovering the favour of Gods as it was for the Romans, but with an obligation to the posterity that the ancient monument act was passed.

The basic mistakes committed by earlier Governments in the eye of Lord Curzon was to leave the matter entirely upon local Governments, leaving the latter to spend little or nothing at all to the field of Archaeology. No standard was set before the local Governments or any system of coordination or control given. The act of conservation of ancient

monuments & objects have been totally forgotten. The most significant step was the revival of the post of the Director-General of Archaeological Survey of India by appointing a competent person by the name of Mr. John Marshall, a renowned Archaeologist to lead the Archaeological Survey of India. Mr. Marshall took up the task with scholarly energy and enthusiasm. By 1902, the Archaeological Department was in a position to define a policy covering the programme of the work and framing the legislation which was passed in March, 1904, defining the fate of the historic and archaeological monuments of this country.

A very significant step in the field of scientific conservation of archaeological monuments was the development of a 'Conservation Manual', a handbook for the use of Archaeological Officers and others who are entrusted with the care of archaeological monuments, published in 1923 by Sir John Marshall, Director-General of Archaeology. The book which was generally used before that for archaeological and public works for framing estimates was the 'Military Works Handbook'. But this handbook was designed solely to meet the requirements of Engineers & Builders engaged on new buildings. The information is not relevant for archaeological works. The Conservation Manual however addressed the requirement of the Archaeologists and historical buildings and structures.

The manual has been divided in two parts. In the first part were the Government orders & circulars regarding the maintenance of monuments and conduct of conservation works, the duties of Archaeological and Public Works Officers and their Assistants in respect of it, the principals & procedures to be followed by them with explanations. The second part of the book contained detailed instructions and specifications on all questions likely to arise in connection with

conservation of ancient monuments of India. The manual was mostly based on an earlier work entitled, 'Conservation of Ancient Monuments', published in 1907 by Sir John Marshall, Director-General of Archaeology, which included the General Principles for the guidance of those entrusted with the custody of and execution of repairs to ancient monuments. The principal objective of conservation should be to preserve and perpetuate authentic specimens of the monumental antiquities of the country rather than to rebuild or renew them; and not so much to add new work in initiation of what the original is thought to have been, as to preserve what is left of it.

Thus we find that the historic statues & monuments that stand today, proudly placing our country in the list of antique & historical civilisations, dynasties which ruled our country in the ancient times is much in gratitude to the efforts put up by the then Viceroy of India Lord Curzon, who brought in the legislation for Preservation of Ancient Monuments of this country and established the Department of Archaeological Survey of India on a strong footing, by establishing firm policy and reviving the post of Director-General of Archaeology, which went a long way to preserve the Archaeological Heritage of India.

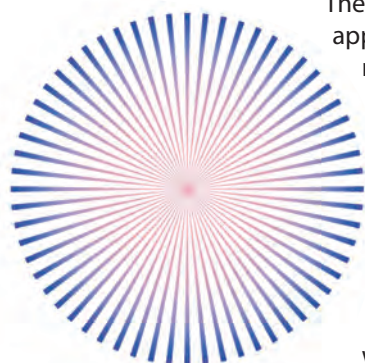
Although the legacy of Lord Curzon for which he is widely criticised in India, is the Partition of Bengal, which led to a mass 'swadeshi' uprising in Bengal and other parts. The movement was strongly put down by the iron hand of British Law Enforcement. However, it is also a fact that many of India's monuments received a new lease of life due to the significant efforts of Lord Curzon as stated above. The first Prime Minister of independent India, Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru, once referred in his speech, "Curzon will be remembered because he restored all that was beautiful in India".

A Whole New Word: Charismatic World of Neologism

Aditi Ghosh

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The word *rizz* (roughly meaning ‘the ability to attract’) has made quite a bit of news this December as the Oxford English Dictionary’s (OED) “word of the year” (Kuta, 2023; TOI World Desk, 2023; Das, 2023; India TodayLifestyleDesk, 2023; world news, 2023). For the past few years, every time the ‘word of the year’ (sometimes shortened as WOTY) is announced, a good amount of attention and curiosity is directed towards language and how it functions. Often the dominant discussion is around the uniqueness of the word, how it is a zeitgeist and the creativity of the current generation. Sometimes such discussions go to the extent of claiming that only the current generation, in the history of language use, is showing such stylistic, unique and creative use of language.



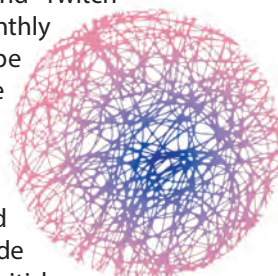
rizz

though it seems that the etymology of the word is debatable (Takagi, 2023). It was first used by a 20-year-old social media personality

named Kai Cenat and then became popular as slang among young people (often referred to as ‘Gen Z’, which is defined as those born between 1997 and 2012 (Eldrige, 2023)). Kai Cenat’s main profession is to upload and stream videos on social media platforms -- YouTube and Twitch

-- from where his monthly income is estimated to be 1.5 million dollars. The word ‘influencer’ is often used to refer to people in these professions. Apparently, the word has gained worldwide popularity after the British actor Tom Holland used it in an interview (BuzzFeed, 2023). This word is also among a stream of words, that has come out of the lexicon of African American Vernacular English (AAVE), commonly called ‘black English’, and is being adopted by younger native and second-language speakers of English all over the world. Some examples are --

bad or *baaad* meaning ‘extremely good’, *my bad* meaning ‘I apologise’, *bourgie* – a corruption of the word *bourgeoisie* -- to refer to someone pretentious. *Woke* refers to someone alert about social prejudice and discrimination. *Bae* – believed to be an acronym for *before anyone else*—a term of endearment. *Boo* (not the Standard English word for disapproval), *ma boo*, *boo-thang* –



according to some comes from the French word *beau* – is another term of endearment, usually referring to a girlfriend or boyfriend.

Bruh! – a shortened form of the word *brother*, used as a form of address and also as a form of expression. According to Urban Dictionary, it can be a response to any statement (see Urban Dictionary, 2019).

So, *rizz* represents an unusual reversal of influence of the non-standard, 'low prestige' African American Vernacular English on standard English, a rising admiration of Black American culture and language, which is thought to be less prestigious, and the growing impact of a profession based on social media platforms that were inconceivable even a decade ago (Twitch as a streaming platform was launched only a decade ago).

However, it would be wrong to assume that coining new words – called neologisms in Linguistics – is something unique to this day and age. It is a fact that the creation of new words and the adoption of words from other languages or dialects are common for all living languages. English, being one of the most vibrant, dominant languages is considered to have the maximum number of words in its vocabulary (Which language has most words -- richest languages, 2021). Even though the claim is debated, due to historical and current socio-political reasons, the English language displays great flexibility in adding new words to the language. David Crystal aptly calls the language a 'Vacuum Cleaner of languages' (BBC World Service, 2012). For example, even though it is a Germanic language, more than 70 per cent of its words come from Latin origin. History of Colonisation and Globalisation has spread this language to almost all corners of the world and it has gathered words from all corners.

Sometimes, new words are created or adopted (from another language or dialect)

to fill a 'gap' in the language, where a new item, idea or meaning is introduced and there is no word for it. However, coining new words have often other motivations than the need to fill a lexical gap. It is an indicator of the vibrancy of the languages. It is also a mark of universal human creativity. But more interestingly, it is very often a marker of group identity. Words categorised as slang are often full of neologism and are used almost exclusively by the youth and other social and economic classes that are low in the power hierarchy. Such words due to their incomprehensibility to the older, more powerful group of people, become a tool for group solidarity, projection of independent identity and exclusivity. Often even among the same age group or same social class, distinct group identities are created by the use of language and the use of so-called 'slang'.

Some of the common methods of forming new words are—

Acronyms – examples – *Radar* 'light amplification by stimulated emission of radiation', *Scuba* 'self-contained underwater breathing apparatus', *Gestapo* from *Geheime Staatspolizei* meaning 'secret state police', *zip* as in *zipcode* 'Zone Improvement Plan', *pin* (as in *pin code*) 'Postal Index Number'. *FOMO* 'fear of missing out', *BRB* 'be right back', *IKR* 'I know, right?', *GTG* 'got to go'; *LOL* 'laugh out loud', *IRL* 'in real life' and many such acronyms are in use today, which are popularised by social media.

Portmanteau words or blending – *smog* – from *smoke* and *fog*, *brunch* from *breakfast* and *lunch*, *motel* from *motor* and *hotel*. *sitcom* (situation and comedy), *chillax* (chill and relax), *staycation* (stay and vacation); *hangry* (hungry and angry); *bromance* (brother and Romance) are some of the new additions in this category.

Analogical extensions – *workaholic*, *shopaholic* in the form of the word *alcoholic*. *Cheeseburger*, *Eggburger*, *chickenburger* in the

form of *hamburger* which originally meant a type of sandwich from Hamburg, Germany. The newly added term in psychology, which was also one of the contenders for 'word of the year' in 2023 - *situationship* - is a blend of 'situation' and 'relationship' and refers to a romantic or sexual relationship without labels.

Clipping – *Bot* from *Robot*, *fridge* from the *refrigerator*, *bus* from Latin *Omnibus* 'for all', *flu* from *influenza*, etc. The word *rizz*, if it is indeed originated from *charisma*, falls in this category.

Assigning new meaning to old words – The word *virus* is extended to refer to mischievous computer programmes, in addition to its original meaning of disease-causing microorganisms. The word *viral* in addition to its original meaning is now widely used for social media content being viewed many times. A most interesting example is the use of the name *Karen* or *a Karen* to indicate a racist individual who thinks they have special privileges. This new meaning became popular after a video clip surfaced on different social media platforms, where a white woman frantically called the police on a black gentleman without any discernible reason, clearly because, she felt she was entitled to act on her prejudiced thoughts. *Gaslight* or *gaslighting* is another word now widely used in psychology as a form of domestic emotional abuse where the abused start to question their own sanity. The word originated from the 1938 British play *Gaslight* where a husband manipulates his wife by reducing the intensity of the Gaslight leading her to rethink her mental stability. *okay boomer* is a sarcastic expression directed to old people who are outdated, unaware of current issues, deny climate change etc. Ironically, the word is a variation of *baby boomer* (Eldrige, 2023)- a term used to describe the generation born between 1946 and 1964, and indicates the soaring (boom) birth rate increased between the World War and the Depression era. This

word was first used to refer to young people of this generation who were trying to take admission in colleges in large numbers. The word *influencer* has also acquired a social media induced new meaning. This word is used to refer to people who create content that influences their large social media followings, usually to buy something. Its opposite word *de-influencing* meaning 'practice of discouraging people from consumerism' is also becoming popular and was on the shortlist of Oxford Word of the Year 2023.

Many of these new coinages, after creating a lot of excitement and interest, fall into oblivion and get erased from public memory. A good example of this is the Oxford word of the year for 2022— *Goblin mode* 'rejection of social norms without any care for one's self-image'. This word has already been forgotten and most young people are unaware of its meaning. Among the words that were selected since 2004 – the year from which OED started publishing the 'Word of the Year' –many have seen the same fate as *Goblin Mode*. For example, in 2017 it was *Youthquake* meaning a 'significant change arising out the influence of young people', in 2006 it was *bovvered* meaning 'bothered', in 2011 it was *omnishambles* meaning 'a state of chaos caused by poor judgement'. None of these words enjoyed continued popularity in the following years. Some other words like *selfie* (2013), *carbon footprint* (2007), *toxic* (2018) continued to become a part of the everyday vocabulary.

In this context, it may be worth noting that being chosen as the word of the year does not ensure that these words will be included in the Oxford English Dictionary. In fact, *rizz* is not a part of the Dictionary yet. Being selected as the word of the year means that word is "reflecting the ethos, mood, or preoccupations of the past twelve months, one that has potential as a term of lasting cultural significance. Supported by evidence

of real language usage, Oxford's editors track candidates as they emerge throughout the year, analysing frequency statistics and other language data in the Oxford English Corpus" (Word of the year: FAQs, 2023). It needs to be mentioned here that, OED changed its method of selection of words since 2022, when it opened it up for online public voting. So, *Goblin Mode* was chosen by 3000,000 votes and *rizz* was chosen by a much lower number of more than 32,000 votes. The OED is one of the first Dictionaries to popularise WOTY. However, the word of the year is an annual event that is conducted by many other dictionaries. The Word of the Year 2023 for Cambridge Dictionary (which started publishing WOTY in 2015) is *hallucinate*. For Merriam-Webster, which started publishing WOTY in 2003 (one year before OED did) the Word of the Year 2023 is *authentic*. For Collins Dictionary, which started publishing WOTY in 2013, the WOTY for 2023 is *AI*.

OED also published Hindi WOTY for two years. *sambidhaan* 'constitution' in 2019 and *atmanirbhar* 'self-reliance' in 2020. None of these can be categorised as neologism or stylised or creative use of an old word. At this juncture, it may be worthwhile to see how Bangla is dealing with creative word formations. In my perception as a native speaker of the language, it seems, the word *byaapak* 'an exclamation of appreciation, literally meaning large' and *ghyaam* 'pretentious, proud, high class' gained popularity in the mid-90s. The word *aantel*, *aantlaamo* 'pretending to be an intellectual' has been popular since the early 80s. Of late, *lyaad* 'laziness' (may be comparable to *Goblin mode*) has gained more popularity. A consistent systematic undertaking perhaps can be taken up to see the trend in Bangla as well.

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Linguistic Human Rights and International Mother Language Day

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*Our language is shedding tears all over
because its own children are deserting it,
eaving it alone with its heavy burden¹*

Introduction

It is well-admitted that language is closely connected with the identity of a speech community. A community visualises the whole world with the help of his/her mother language. It is through language humans transmit their experiences, their traditions and their knowledge. So protection, preservation, documentation as well as revitalisation of all mother languages, be major or minor or endangered all over the world, are the basic responsibility of both the community members and the government. The International Mother Language Day reminds both the community members and the government of their own commitments.

Chomsky (1975:4) says, "Language is a mirror of mind in a deep and significant sense. It is a product of human intelligence. ... By studying the properties of natural languages, their structure, organisation, and use, we may hope to learn something about human nature; ...". We can say that almost the entire culture of the society – their knowledge system, history, philosophy, songs, poetry, folklore and so on is manifested in their languages. If all mother languages are not well protected the identity and the indigenous knowledge of these communities will reach a crisis.

Human Rights and Linguistic Human Rights(LHRs)

The awareness of the Linguistic Human Rights at the international level was first reflected in the declaration of the Human Rights by UNESCO. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights was approved and declared in the General Assembly of the United Nations on 10th December, 1948. The Declaration though approved the freedom of speech and expression, human rights related to the mother languages were not mentioned clearly. Finally, in 1996 the Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights was signed. The main signatories were the International PEN Club and several NGOs. This was meant especially for the endangered languages. Unfortunately, this declaration was not accepted by the UNESCO. In the 1996 Declaration it is stated that all speech communities have equal linguistic human rights at all levels like public administration, education, mass media and so on. Further, it is to be noted that the Declaration deals with both individual and collective rights of the indigenous peoples along with the rights to protect their cultural heritage as language is a part of it. It is needless to say that Linguistic rights are basic human rights like civil rights. "As we know

linguistic majorities, speakers of a dominant language usually enjoy all linguistic human rights. Most of the linguistic minorities are deprived of these rights” (Bhattacharya, 2020 : 22-23). Further, humans are closely connected with their mother languages — socially, logically and emotionally. It is used for emotional release to express all the nuances of one’s own feelings. We can quote some lines from Skutnabb-Kangas & Philipson (1994:2) “Often individuals and groups are treated unjustly and suppressed by means of language. People who are deprived of LHRs may thereby be prevented from enjoying other human rights, including fair political representation, a fair trial, access to education, access to information and freedom of speech, and maintenance of their cultural heritage.” As already stated, LHRs are concerned with both the private and the public domains. “In brief, *individual linguistic rights* are the rights of individuals to learn and use their mother tongue in their linguistic group regardless of the status of their language as a minor or major language. They have the right to get at least basic education through the medium of their mother languages and the right to use it in official contexts” (Bhattacharya, 2020:23).

And to gain these rights language movements for different causes related to various aspects of language were organised in different times in different parts of the world. That, of course, is a separate issue which is not to be dealt here. It can be said that International Mother language Day is the outcome of the Bengali Language Movement by the Bengali speaking population of the former East Pakistan, now People’s Republic of Bangladesh.

International Mother Language Day — background and its Significance:

The world observed two important declarations by UNESCO in last twenty years. These are 'The International Decade of the World’s Indigenous People' (1995-2004) and

on 17th November,1999 the 21 February was declared by the General Conference of the UNESCO as the 'International Mother Language Day' to promote linguistic and cultural diversity and multilingualism. The day aims at promoting the preservation and promotion of all mother languages. Thus International Mother Language Day can be considered a milestone in the history of all mother languages of the world. The day has been globally observed since 21st February, 2000.

Let us have a look at the history of the International Mother Language Day. The partition of India took place in 1947 when the British rule ended and two separate countries were created — India and Pakistan. As we know Pakistan had two separate parts — West Pakistan and East Pakistan. In 1948 the Pakistan Government decided to declare Urdu as the sole national language despite Bengali being the mother language of the majority of the population of East Bengal. But this decision was not accepted by the people of former East Pakistan, present-day Bangladesh. So a strong protest sparked against the imposition of Urdu as the national language of Pakistan. Moreover, there was also a linguistic and cultural conflict between these two parts of Pakistan. Ultimately students of the Dhaka University with the support of the general public started meetings, mass rallies in support of their demand to include Bengali as one of the national languages. Gradually, language movement was transformed into mass movement. In 1952 on 21st February police firing on rallies killed seven valuable young lives of Abul Barkat, Rafiquddin Ahmad, Shafiur Rahman, Abdul Jabbar, Abdus Salam, Abdul Auyal and Ahiullah and several hundreds were also injured. It is noteworthy that there were indicative differences between the two parts of Pakistan in language, culture, ethnicity and so in identity. Further, people of East Pakistan were victims of political, economic

and socio-cultural exploitation. Gradually the Bengali speaking people became conscious of their ethnicity and nationality. Now the Liberation War of the people of East Pakistan gained a momentum along with the language movement. After a fierce Liberation War in 1971 there was the birth of an independent country— People's Republic of Bangladesh in place of East Pakistan.

In connection with the International Mother Language Day names of two Bengalis called Rafiqul Islam and Abdus Salam living in Canada are to be mentioned. They put forward a proposal to Mr. Kofi Annan the-then Secretary General of United Nations in 1998 to take an initiative for saving mother languages of the world from dying out and as declared it an International Mother language day. Rafiq was in favour of the date as 21st February to memorialise the tragic killings in 1952 during the language movement in Dhaka. Finally, going through various official procedures the formal proposal was put forward to UNESCO by the Government of Bangladesh and the 30th General Assembly of UNESCO unanimously resolved that "21st February be proclaimed International Mother language day throughout the world to commemorate the martyrs who sacrificed their lives on this very day in 1952." (Wikipedia)

The significant mottos of International Mother Language Day can be stated in short as below:

1. To spread awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity as language is not only a means of communication, it also represents a diverse cultural and intellectual heritage.
2. To promote multilingualism using technology in teaching and learning languages.
3. By observance of International Mother Language Day to focus on the commitments of the mother language speakers as well as the government to safeguard the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of mankind all over the world.

Notes:

1. From a Wolof poem by Useyno Gey Cosaan (Wolof is a West African Language, spoken mainly in Senegal, Gambia and Mauritania), The lines have been quoted from the message by Ms. Audrey Azouley, Director General, UNESCO on the occasion of International Mother Language Day, 2019. In: *Memorabilia, Martyrs' Day— International Mother Language Day*. Dhaka: International Mother Language Institute

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Maliburo : A Reminiscence of His Life and Works

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Life had so far been hard but satisfying. It was not fully cloistered, We see him grappling manfully with the misery, squalor and disease around him. He lived in squalid conditions. Born as a commoner amidst abject poverty he need not have learnt to regress from adverse circumstances. On being asked once by someone he kept him informed of many ups and downs of his hard life. Coming of a destitute family he knew the pangs of real poverty that perhaps gave him the elemental energy to overcome it. His accomplishments which were prophetic of his future greatness made him afterwards one of the admired literary luminaries in undivided Midnapur, albeit in Bengal. Misery escorted him till his last breath. The study is a reminiscence of his devoted life to Bengali Literature and history. It also shows his successive achievements and cultivated concern for posterity.

The most brilliant feat of his works leading to the intense study of Sri Chaitanya with the revealing title is due to Maliburo, *nom de plume* of Judhithir Jana—a characteristic literary identity given by an eminent lyric poet and freedom fighter of his time Nalini Ranjan Hota of Kalyanchak, Nandakumar of now Purba Medinipur district in recognition of his life-long devotion to literary activities. He was born in a poor share-cropper family on 13 August, 1933 in the remote village of Bargoda on the bank of Kansai in Tamluk sub-division of Midnapur. His ancestral home was a remote place without proper

communication. Buses would not ply at that time. It was an area of canals and swamp stretched out with low-lying wetland surrounded with miles of marshy land. The dwellers usually either travelled by boats or had to walk miles and miles on foot. His father used to remain away from home most of the time, to make both ends meet and the boy felt a little awed in his presence. The only oasis in the drab desert of life was his mother whom he adored throughout his life. His father was agri-labourer and his mother had to earn an extra, though meagre, income by making cow-dung cakes and working with husking-pedal at other's house. Both of them toiled hard for a living. Still they had seldom two square meals a day. The boy insisted on prosecuting his studies. But his father wanted to put his son to the plough. His mother liked his eldest son to continue his learning smoothly. With Kari (small shells, formerly used as money) she purchased books and other reading materials for him. He went to school taking almost everyday two handfuls of boiled rice steeped in cold water or rice-gruel. He had then only one shirt. At a point of time this dirty unclean worn-out shirt got torn. His father one day beat him with a stick. He left home with an offended state of mind. His final examination of class IX was already over. He walked twenty miles on foot and reached Howrah by train from Panskura. At that crucial time he got acquainted with Alamohan Das, the founder of Dashnagar

of Howrah. He came back home from that journey. He scored well in the last examination. Elated, he decided to complete Matriculation. But he had no capacity to continue his studies further due to extreme poverty. He had a plan to purchase books and meet Ajoy Mukherjee, Satish Samanta and Sushil Dhara whom he already knew as the leaders of Swadeshi (National) Movement. At boyhood, he carried secret letters of Swadeshis from one camp to another without any knowledge of the police. He reached Tamluk with his two friends. They walked sixteen miles on foot but could not buy books. At last he came back home. All his efforts were dashed to the ground miserably.

At this time of life he was at a loss and did not know how to channelise his indefatigable creative urge. After a lot of rambling hither and thither, he finally appeared with the help of his teacher Amulya Charan Bera in Adyabharati-Madhyabharati Examination at the mass education centre of Visvabharati of Santiniketan. He also graduated from Visvabharati. Prior to that, in 1340 B.S. he published a biography of Mahatma Gandhi titled *Ye Sishu Anila Mukti* (The child who brought freedom) from Kolkata with the financial aid of Headmaster of Pedie Smarak Vidyapith (now Purnananda Vidyapith) of Moina, Sudhir Kumar Mallick. As an author his fame pervaded everywhere. He took solace and refuge in the cool shade of literature. He decided to put henceforth his remnant of life to the devotion of literature and history.

Nalini Ranjan Hota edited a weekly *Pallijiban* from his Gyanbharati press. Judhisthir babu helped him in publishing this weekly and he also edited *Golapbag*—literary organ for children. Years later, he was married to Renuka, the daughter of Binoy Ranjan Jana of Kalyanchak, Nandakumar. He left the village in no time and went to Panskura. His creativity however began to develop. He started to edit *Pratap* of the

revolutionary Harekrishna Pattanayak of Panskura. He also founded here *Kachi Sansad* (Green brigade) and arranged first literary conference of children where Kabisekhar Kalidas Roy, Ashapura Debi, Sunirmal Basu etc. were invited to grace that occasion.

The literary career of Judhisthir began to take a concrete shape. He went on collecting materials for his own publication, apart from editing work for children. In 1964 he published *Brihattara Tamralipter Itihas* (History of larger Tamralipta), an authentic book of Buddhist Tamralipta. It was the famous publication of his long and incessant labour after Jogesh Basu's *Medinipurer Itihas* (History of Midnapur). His name spreaded widely in the learned society. Since then, having rescued lost horoscope of Bengali literature he went on publishing several important works—*Banga Sahityer Ajana Kahini* (unknown stories of Bengali literature), *Chalo Jai Kashmir* (let's go to Kashmir), *Chacha Neherur Chelebela* (Boyhood days of Uncle Nehru), *Galpe Vidyasagar* (Vidyasagar in Stories), *Chotoder Lal Bahadur* (Lal Bahadur for Children), *Bangla Sahityer Parichaya* (Introduction to Bengali literature). At one point of time, he began editing a magazine *Be-du-in* from Tamluk in collaboration with Birendranarayan Roy, the King of Tamluk and the lawyer and Rabindra award winner of that town, Satyendranath Jana. This magazine was published from the residence of Satyendranath, *Taser Desh* at Malijangal of Tamluk.

Meanwhile, Maliburo got first class first, enlivened by the attainment of Manikasundari Gold Medal in Sanskrit from Shantipur Bangiya Pura Parisad. He was awarded 'Puranratna' and 'Sahityabinod' titles subsequently. He learnt Pali with his friend Suniti Kumar Pathak of Santiniketan and became well-versed in Khorosti and Brahmi Scripts. Jesore Sahitya Parisad honoured him with the title 'Kavyabharati'. But his distress and sufferings were not then relieved. Enthusiasm ebbed pretty soon. His

income dwindled. Kolkata publishers did not give him due royalty. His father was suffering glucoma and mother was attacked with paralysis. His ceaseless activity to alleviate the sufferings of his family was of little avail. All this had an unsettling effect on his mind. Forced to seek employment of teaching once for a period of time at Srirampur Umasundari Girls' School at first and then at Parmeswar or Ma Pathsala of Panskura. He had travelled far and wide of undivided Midnapur and went on collecting manuscript from villages scribbled in stained paper of middle ages and also those of the *Ramayana*, the *Mahabharata*, *Manohor Phansurer Pala* (short stage-play of Manohor highway man), manuscripts of Kabi Dayaram Das, Nityananda Chakravorty etc. Ashutosh Bhattacharya enthused Maliburo in this direction. Again he discovered Moinagarh with Binoy Ghosh (Kalpencha). He had also an interest for the ancient history of Dantan (Dantapur), and visited the mass heap of Sakhisena, Buddhist lost shrine at Mogalmari.

Alamohan Das helped him to set up Srijiban Press in his village and he started publishing *Suryadesh Patrika*. The pressman, compositor, book-binder and publisher—all in one, he had been like the venerable brahmin Sarat Chandra Pandit. He wrote novels like *Kachcha Bou* (Child-wife), *Laskardighir Mala* (Garland of Laskardighi). Also composed many school textbooks for raising his distressed family. At a time, he sheltered the Salvation Army of Bangladesh in the midst of famine, flood and poverty. He built up in his crumbled house a library and museum where the poet Basudeb Deb and Subhendu Mallick, the then District Magistrate Pranab Mukherjee, freedom fighter Sushil Dhara, manuscript expert Akshaya Kumar Kayal often visited. Maliburo organised 'Nikhil Bharat Banga Sahitya Sammelan' (All India Bengali Literary Conference) in 1974 in association with Kantiprasanna Sengupta, Basudeb Deb and King Birendra Narayan

Roy of Tamluk. Banaphool chaired the conference. He set up the individual museum and research-centre at home in the vicinity of historian Ramesh Chandra Majumder, Nihar Ranjan Roy, anthropologist Promodh Kumar Bhowmik. He put on the costume of ascetic, dhuti and scarf-clad Judhisthir babu looked like a Buddhist monk. The end came all of a sudden on 3 October, 2000. The manuscripts of *Medinipurer Bouddha Dharma* (Buddhist religion of Midnapur), *Anchalik Bhasar Abhidhan* (Dictionary of Regional language) etc. remained unfinished due to his sudden death.

Maliburo played a pioneering role in unravelling the mystery leading to the disappearance of Sri Chaitanya. He went to puri in 1966-67, took help of Hemlata, Kabiguni's niece where she set up Basanta Kumari Widow Ashram. He stayed there and visited the places like Gundichabati, Garursthambha and Tota Gopinath temple of Puri for in-depth study. He contacted personally Joydeb Mukherjee and Sadashiva Rathasarma personally. As a scholar of Odia language he reproduced many information hitherto unknown to us from the manuscripts of *Chaitanya Chakra*. Finally he published his book *Srichaitanyer Antardhan Rahasya* (Mystery of disappearance of Sri Chaitanya) in 1965 as a consequence of long twenty years' sustained labour. A hard-working research scholar par excellence, he imbibed from his mother not only sweetness but strength and that is why, he used to run to her, whenever baffled by problems or buffeted by fortune. Regarding his immense strength as a good teacher, writer, successful editor and publisher of books and juvenile literature and the able organiser of academic programmes, we conclude that he loved his work earnestly, conceived of it as a social task and was entirely greedless, honest and sincere in every inch in its pursuance. Thus contemporary reality sends us back to a thought that his posterity still may yet have to learn from him.

In Search of an Unexplored Treasure in the Museum of The Asiatic Society: The Manuscript of Vivādārṇavasetu

Tapati Mukherjee

Vice-President, The Asiatic Society

Despite sincere attempt of National Mission for Manuscripts for conservation and propagation of the value of our ancient manuscripts as national treasures and a few workshops and seminars organized by some academic institutions, the fact remains that a general indifference and apathy about the value and relevance of the apparently age-worn fragile and discoloured manuscripts in the jet-set globalized era persist among the milieu and as such they mostly remain in oblivion. It is indeed unfortunate that we have failed to highlight the basic fact that not only are these old manuscripts rich repertoire of ancient Indian knowledge system which even in the present context can signal new avenues of knowledge like Ayurveda, signaling the introduction of modern science of Etiology, but at the same time they are rich sources of history intertwined with the socio-political and religious structure of by-gone days. Even the British in their attempt to consolidate their grip and domination over the vast Indian sub-continent took special interest in collection, collation, conservation and publication of these old manuscripts. The Asiatic Society of Bengal was instrumental in publishing them through *Bibliotheca Indica* series.

Since its inception, The Asiatic Society

has taken upon itself the cudgel of preserving ancient Indian knowledge trove and in it's both tedious and glorious journey of two forty-one years had left no stone unturned in its sincere attempt to unravel ancient Indian brilliant gems of knowledge from the brittle pages of manuscripts. Mention may be made of Rajendralala Mitra, the first Indian President of The Asiatic Society who, in his early life in the capacity of librarian not only collected manuscripts from various parts of India but also published them.

Following this legacy, The Asiatic Society is working at present on a hitherto unexplored manuscript *Vivādārṇavasetu* – a treatise on juridical system. This manuscript assumes special significance not only because of its archival value but also as a representative of the socio-political situation of India during the first phase of British domination.

To assess the importance of the aforementioned manuscript, a cursory look at the pages of history will be helpful. Indisputedly, with Warren Hastings assuming charge as Governor General, started the period of consolidation of British regime in India. Hastings was wise enough to realize that for strengthening grip over the ruled as well as good governance, a sound judicial system is imperative. At the same time, the British

hierarchy was apprehensive that imposition of the British judicial system in India by force could invite danger for British ruler as it might hurt the sentiment of Indians. So British administration preferred to follow the ancient Indian legal system as enshrined in the ancient Indian Dharmashastra texts and establish a judicial system in tune with the ancient codified law to make it acceptable to the Indians. Accordingly, Hastings submitted his judicial plan stating clearly — “all suits regarding inheritance, marriage, caste and other religious usages or institutions, the laws of the *Koran* with respect to Mohamedans and those of the Shaster with respect to the Gentoos, shall be invariably adhered to. On all such occasions, the Maulavies or Brahmins shall attend to expound the Law; they shall sign the report and assist to pass the decree”.

However, despite their best attempt to abide by the ancient juridical texts, the British had hardly any access to the original Shastric texts because of their lack of acquaintance with Sanskrit language. To overcome this problem, Hastings appointed eleven Sanskritists (*Pandits*) to frame a compilation of the rules of juridical law as enumerated by the ancient texts. From the colophon of the compilation *Vivādāṅnavasetu*, formulated by them, we come across their names – Baneswara, Kriparam, Ramgopal, Krishnajiban, Bireswar, Krishnachandra, Gaurikanta, Kalishankar, Shyamsundar, Krishnakeshav and Sitaram. They made a compendium of juridical laws as promulgated in the ancient texts viz., judicial procedure, rules related to mortgage, non-payment of debts, evidence etc. Civil Laws related to boundary dispute, litigation over sale of an article by one who is not owner of it and Criminal Laws related to verbal abuse, violence, theft, molestation of women – all these legal issues as discussed in the ancient texts have been dealt with

elaborately in this compilation. It is indeed unfortunate that excepting a few, most of the Sanskritists remain unsung and scarcely any information about them is available to us. The compilation was first translated in Persian via Bengali oral version by Zaid-uddin Ali Rasoi. Finally, it was translated into English by Nathaniel Brassey Halhed titled as *A Code of Gentoo Laws or Ordination of the Pandits* for comprehension of British legislators. It was printed in London in 1776. Subsequently another legal treatise *Vivādabhaṅgārṇava* was composed by Jagannath Tarkapanchanan (1797) in accordance with the directions of the ancient texts under the supervision of Sir William Jones, the founder of The Asiatic Society.

A complete manuscript of *Vivādārṇavasetu* is preserved in the museum of The Asiatic Society. In preparing a critical edition of this unpublished manuscript which represents the zenith of juridical wisdom reached by ancient Indian lawgivers, we have consulted several manuscripts available in other repositories of India. Some of them are incomplete and a few others, though bearing the same title do not conform to our manuscript. Hence we have depended mainly on five manuscripts procured from different institutions and a printed text which appears to be a modified version of the original manuscript.

The Asiatic Society is indeed a torch-bearer of Indic knowledge with its nearly fifty thousand manuscripts in different languages, recorded in various scripts. We strongly believe that in-depth study and thorough research on these manuscripts may unravel in future new vistas of knowledge and profound wisdom which will ultimately benefit the humanity. The critical edition of the manuscript of *Vivādārṇavasetu*, when published, may be a starting point to this endeavor.

The Role of The Asiatic Society as a Pioneer Initiator of History of Science in Asia

Jagatpati Sarkar

Life Member, The Asiatic Society

Warren Hastings encouraged and patronised company officers to study language, literature and culture of India, and foundation of seminaries (Madrasha and Tol) at their own hazards. Jones' credit was to organise these individual ventures which could not produce any sustained result for want of a co-operative effort, the seedling of which was sown by Jones for the first time in India. The Society was fertilised by Western's thought and ideas, born of renaissance, "so likely to afford entertainment and convey knowledge to mankind", "and to awaken the Indian intellectuals and influence the mind and ideas, has advanced" to maturity by slow yet uncertain degrees". Its activities unleashed a new dynamism in India's stagnant elite community which gathered strength day by day and gushed out 'new awakening in all directions', which resulted in the growth of varied rational and progressive ideas. This cannot be denied that the memorable march, for regaining the lost dominion of knowledge, started from the Asiatic Society, under the leadership of Sir William Jones where people of all faiths and ideas (Young Bengals, Conservatives, Missionaries and others) converged and exchanged ideas which influenced the people who proceeded on their mission which gave birth and contributed to the growth of modern India. This fact was admitted by the founders of the 'Asiatic Academy' of Russia in 1810, in the

language—"In the last years of the eighteenth century there has been a transformation in the attitude of human civilization. The accidental reasons for this revolution are the success of the British in India, the mastery on the part of German scholars of the sacred languages of the Brahmans, the works of Zoroaster and the text of the Bible, and also the foundation of Asiatic Society at Calcutta".

Sir William Jones, founding the 'Asiatic Society' in Calcutta, in 1784 lit the lamp of research into all matters that relate to man or to nature in Asia—historical, linguistic, archaeological and scientific—a lamp that has burned undimmed ever since. Sir William Jones laid down the scope of the investigations proposed to be taken up by the Society in his address: it was to be 'Man and Nature: whatever is performed by the one or produced by the other', within the geographical limits of Asia. Up to his death, on 27th April, 1794 for ten years successively Jones took a leading part in the investigations of the Society, and naturally he contributed a number of papers—on the transliteration of the Eastern Languages (including Sanskrit) into Roman, on the Gods of Greece, Italy and India, on the chronology of the Hindus, on the Antiquity of the Hindu Zodiac, on the Literature of the Hindus from the Sanskrit, on the Indian Game of Chess, and on other topics. Most of those papers we see mentioned the mental pabulum to the people of India also. Jones

also communicated papers on Zoology, Botany and Medicine. As President of the Asiatic Society in Calcutta, his ten Annual Discourses given every year from 1785 to 1794 in the month of February, made a survey of all that was then known and all that he could reasonably speculate about The 'History and Civilisation of Asia in general' (1785), 'On these of Individual peoples—the Hindus' (1786), 'the Arabs' (1787), 'the Tartars' (1788), 'the Persians' (1789), 'the Chinese' (1790), and 'the Borderers, Mountaineers and Islanders of Asia' (1791), and the subsequent annual addresses were 'On the origin and Families of Nations' (1792), 'On Asiatic History, Civil and Natural' (1793), and 'On the philosophy of the Asiatics' (1794). In the last Jones quotes with approval the following translation made by himself from the Sanskrit of the Upanishad:

That spirit, from which these created beings proceed, through which, having proceeded from it, they live, toward which they tend, and in which they are ultimately absorbed, —that spirit study to know, that spirit is the Great one.¹

Sir William Jones was not a pioneer in this field of scholarly work, six years before he started the Asiatic Society in Bengal, some Dutch scholars, resident in Batavia in Java, already established their Association of the Arts and Sciences. But no one seems to have understood more penetratingly the implications of this new line of enquiry, into the history and civilisation of the peoples of Asia in which the mind of Europe began to be busy itself for the first time. Sir William Jones opened up for civilised Europe a new chapter in the science of Man—that of orientatism, and the participation of

Eastern scholars with those of Europe, which Sir William Jones had envisaged from the very beginning, and formed a brilliant and a significant episode in the history of intellectual co-operation, and has given a new orientation to itself, transforming it to a thing of national and not merely academics interest for the peoples of the north-east of India, Indo-China and Indonesia and of the far East. The advancement which Europe had made over, Asia in most of the sciences and in the application of science to life was manifest.

We know that Sir William Jones was the son of a notable Mathematician named Welsh, of Yeomastock, who was a friend of Newton. The Asiatic Society also investigated languages, literature, vocabularies, different types of religions, manners and customs, folklore, music, ethnology, pictographic art, natural science including mathematics, electrical phenomena, phonograph, astronomy, geology, botany, volcanoes, glacial formations, zoology, paleobotany, earthquake, chemistry, geography, water supply and drainage system of Calcutta, economic conditions and statistics. Thousands of scientific articles were published in the *Asiatic Researches* and the Journal. Only Rajendralala Mitra gave a full account of these scientific writings and the laborious task could only be performed by an outstanding scholar like him. The importance of these manifold scientific researches consists in the indubitable fact that through such publications the Asiatic Society became the principal purveyor of scientific concepts of colonial India.

The Asiatic Society is not only the oldest institution of Asia but also is a cultural icon of India. Though primarily a colonial construct, the vision of the founder Sir William Jones had a wide concept in building up the Society. The Society took an interest not only in languages, literature and culture

1 *Yato vā imani bhutāni jāyante
Yena Jātam Jivanti
Jat pra-yanti, abhi-sam-viśanti
-tad vi-jñāsva: tad brahma*

(Taittiriya Upanishad)

in the beginning, but also in the Natural Sciences as they were related to India. There was no idea of establishing a museum as a part of the Society's activities. But by 1796 this was found essential to erect a suitable building for housing antiquities of the Society. The Museum was founded and developed under the care and guidance of Dr. Nathaniel Wallich, a renowned Botanist. The first three galleries like Archaeology, Zoology and Geology were the starting point of Museum of the Society. In 1833 was published, Instructions for collecting Geological Specimens and in 1835 Hints for preservations of objects of Natural History, by J.T. Pearson and in 1844 Memorandum on the organisation of a Museum of Economic Geology for the N.W. Provinces of British India to be established at Agra by Lt. W. Baird Smith. While others were thinking in terms of Individual studies and research, Sir William Jones was the first man to think in terms of a permanent organisation for Oriental studies and researches on a ground scale in this country. In 1808 two committees were formed, the Physical Committee and the Library Committee, the former for the promotion of Natural History, Medicine, Physics etc. and the latter for that of literature, philosophy, History, Antiquities, etc. William Carrey, J. Leyden, A. Lockett and W. Hunter were included in both the committees. Both these committees went moribund in no time and the physical committee had to be revived in 1818 by resolution.

The Asiatic Society was eager to establish a notion. By this time Englishmen had become aware of the cultural heritage of ancient India and of the importance of preserving and studying it. India had made the knowledge of the progress in the physical science, especially Astronomy. This had drawn the attention of many western scientists including Samuel Davis and John

Playfair. Another English man who was interested in this study was William Hunter, who for some time served as Secretary to the Society. During his stay in India, Hunter became interested in the Indian Sciences and contributed seven papers to the *Asiatic Researches*. One of these was on the Astronomical efforts of Jaysimha, Rajah of Ambhere or Jayanagar. This provides the first detailed and scientific account of what is now known as *Jantar Mantar*, the unique astronomical structures built in the 18th century by Astronomer statesman, Raja Sawai Jaisingh at Delhi, Mathura, Ujjain and Benaras.

First of all the Europeans tried to explain the knowledge of science, particularly Astronomy and Mathematics of India because they came to be aware that these two subjects are the mirror of civilisation. The first European was Reuben Burrow who pointed out that Mathematical Science was highly developed in ancient India. His paper on 'A proof that the Hindus had the Binomial Theorem' was published in the second volume of the *Asiatic Researches* in 1804. He also tried to prove that Newton was responsible for the application of the binomial theorem to fractional indices. The Hindus understood it in whole members to the full as well as Briggs and much better than Pascal. Sir William Cecil Dampier once told that "The vast and imposing structure of modern science is perhaps the greatest triumph of the human mind. But the story of its origin, its development and its achievements is one of the least known parts of history. This has hardly yet found its way into general literature." Historians treat of War, of Politics, of Economics, but of the growth of those activities has hardly been mentioned. These have revealed the individual atom and opened to our vision, the depths of space etc. These have revolutionised philosophic thought had

given us the means of advancing our material welfare to a level beyond the dreams of former ages. Most of them tell us little or nothing." Gibbon believed that the best history could only be written by a historian philosopher, who distinguished those facts which dominate a system of relations.

An article on Hindu Astronomy by John Playfair is mentioned as being written in October, 1792. This was received and published much later, in the 4th volume of the *Asiatic Researches*. Jones had prefixed the second volume of the *Researches* with an 'Advertisement' inviting learned European societies to transmit to the Secretary of the Asiatic Society in Bengal about a collection of short and precise queries on every branch of Asiatic History. He hoped that the Society would gradually be able to provide answers to them which may prove in the highest degree beneficial to mankind.

John Playfair, Professor of Mathematics at Edinburgh, sent to the Society six questions with his own remarks on the development of the mathematical sciences in ancient India. Playfair was convinced that the Indians had in ancient times turned their attention to certain arithmetical investigations of which there was no trace in the writings of even the Greek scientist. He desired the society to find out if there were books on Geometry and Arithmetic in ancient India. He also suggested a complete translation of the *Suryasiddhanta*. He also suggested to draw up a catalogue of Sanskrit books on Indian Astronomy with a short account of each, and procuring descriptions of astronomical buildings and instruments of ancient India. He recommended that the skies and constellations for which there were Sanskrit names. The *Suryasiddhanta* and a complete catalogue of Sanskrit Mss. on Astronomy were published by the Asiatic Society, compiled by Professor A.K. Chakraborty in the year 2001.

The name of Bentley was also very popular in the history of the Society. He wrote an article 'Antiquity of the Suryasiddhanta'. J.D. Pearson attempted to study the scientific basis behind Hindu mythology and traditions. He also tried to explain the attributes of Siva and presented article in the *Asiatic Researches* in 1803. The most important paper of 1810 was the 'Essay on the early history of Algebra', read by Edward Strachey on 3rd October. He presented his observations in original, extent and importance of Mathematics among the ancient Hindus and from the Persian translations of *Lilavati* and the *Beeja Ganita*. This paper traced the origin of the description of Algebra to India as a landmark in this branch of study. Colebrooke acknowledged this contribution.

The results of the activities of the Society have been manifold and to one aspect of them in particular, namely, the collections representative of Art, Archaeology and Natural History of Asia. The natural history activities of the Society have also been accentuated by the official survey departments, botanical, geological and zoological and so on. In 1913 the Indian Science Congress association has been founded under the aegis of the Asiatic Society of Bengal leading to the foundation of the National Institute of Sciences, providing for the continuance of the study of the natural history of India. The Society also took a very useful and indeed honourable part in the developing of scientific studies in our country by publishing articles and memories in Chemistry, Botany, Zoology, Geology, Medical and other sciences specially at a time when expert associations in different science subjects were unknown. The Society acted for many years as a god-mother of the science congress during all its organisational work. The first congress was held in this Society under the Presidentship

of Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee in 1914. Sir Upendranath Brahmachari, was attached with the Asiatic Society intimately and worked his scientific observations with the materials of the Asiatic Society. Ultimately he discovered Urea Stibamine as medicine for the cure of the dreaded disease of Kala-azar. Dr. U. N. Brahmachari was the President of the Asiatic during the period 1928-29. He was also the President of Indian Science Congress in 1936 held in Lahore. Another eminent scientist of Bengal, Acharya Prafulla Chandra Ray, as a missionary and pioneer in the growth of Science and chemical industry as well as chemical studies and research in our country put himself in regular communication with the library of the Asiatic Society. He had best regards on the contributions of the Asiatic Society. He has duly quoted the Asiatic Society many times in his autobiography namely *Life and Experiences of a Bengali Chemist*. The library of the Asiatic Society helped him enormously in composing his "A History of Hindu Chemistry in 1902 by supplying Mss. on theme. In 1910 the 'Rasarnava, a magnificent book on alchemy was published by the Asiatic Society. Acharya P.C. Ray became member of the Asiatic Society in the year 1890 and in 1910 he was elected as first fellow of the Asiatic Society. He was the President of Indian Science Congress in 1920 held in Nagpur. Though never a member of the Asiatic Society of Bengal Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar appreciated the Society's efforts to print and publish the old Sanskrit, Pali and Arabic texts in the *Bibliotheca Indica*. He himself volunteered to edit some of them.

This cannot be denied that the emergence of Ram Bramha Sanyal in the late 19th century as a scientist engaged in the study of zoo animals, was mainly due to the establishment of the Asiatic Society in Calcutta.

Although an attempt was made during 1842 when an article of Dr. John M'Clelland advocating the establishment of a Zoological Garden in Calcutta was published. This did not meet with any response at that time. The subject was again taken up by an anonymous writer in the *Calcutta Review* of 1866 but again without success. In 1867, Dr. Joseph Fayrer, as the President of the Asiatic Society of Bengal, formulated a scheme for the foundation of a Zoological Garden in Calcutta and this proposal seems to have met, with a favourable response from the Calcutta public who raised a large amount of money. However, no suitable site could be found at that time, and this scheme did not materialise.

On 15th March 1873, Mr. Carl Louis Schwendler brought up again the subject before a special meeting of the Council and Natural History Committee of the Society and gave his detailed proposal for the establishment of a Zoological Garden in Calcutta. On the basis of this, a sub-committee was formed and it became a reality on 27 December, 1875. The then Lt. Governor of Bengal nominated a few gentlemen to serve on the committee which was known as Honorary Managing Committee of the Zoological Garden. Among the members were Carl Louis Schwendler of the Telegraph Department and Dr. George King, Superintendent, Botanical Gardens. Schwendler was attached to the Asiatic Society of Bengal from February 1869 and Dr. King from December 1867. Dr. John Anderson, Superintendent of the Indian Museum and attached to the Asiatic Society of Bengal, was also a member of the Committee.

In the initial days, Schwendler looked after the animals and Dr. King was mainly engaged in landscaping. In this venture Dr. King wanted a young energetic and educated person to help him in his day to day work and

selected our former students in the Medical College. R. B. Sanyal has been referred to in the Proceedings of the Committee as 'King's Baboo'.

This publication honoured him as a corresponding member of the Zoological Society in recognition of his contribution to the advancement of zoological knowledge in India. He contributed three interesting articles in the Proceedings of the Zoological Society of London based on his keen and detailed observation made in his field laboratory. The Asiatic Society has a rare and unique collection of different aspects of Science. And this collection both in Sanskrit and Arabic, Persian languages bear a valuable information about science and scientific studies in Indian context. The Society has also an archive of old correspondences, proceedings and memoirs. The letters and correspondences of many scientists supply very rare information about their work and observations. In this context we can easily mention the name of Acharya Prafulla Ch. Ray, Acharya Jagadish Ch. Bose, Meghnad

Saha, Satyen Bose, Prasanta Ch. Mahalanabis, C.V. Raman, Radhanath Sikdar and so on. Their intimate relation and contribution at the Society enriched the source of the Asiatic Society and still help us to develop our area of knowledge of Science. Those are still a milestone each in respective field of research. Few letters contain the submission of their paper to the Society, few are the queries of different administrative matters etc.

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A Journey of an Indologist: Rajendralala Mitra and His Exploration of Ancient Indic Manuscripts

Sneha Agarwala

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Since its inception, while other civilizations of this planet had only started their journey, Indian civilization had reached its pinnacle with its distinct science and knowledge system. This ancient treasure trove of Indic wisdom has been preserved and transferred to the present era through the material named Codex or *Mātrkā*. In other words, it is also known as Indian Manuscripts. However, the journey of transfer of these treasures is not so easy due to the use of perishable bio-materials. So, it becomes very important to know about the history of rescue of this Indic knowledge and those path-making rescuers and their journey. Rajendralal Mitra (15th February 1822 – 26th July 1891), the first Indian President of The Asiatic Society, one of these pioneers in India, dedicated his whole life to this exploration and collected a huge number of manuscripts and published them in the *Bibliotheca Indica* series of The Asiatic Society.

Before we delve deep into tracing Rajendralal Mitra's journey, one has to take note of the situation prior to him and how Mitra emerged in this field. At the starting phase of the nineteenth century, it seemed very important to collect Indian Manuscripts and to prepare a descriptive catalogue of these collections for the-then Indologists. In 1868, Whitely Stokes, the-then secretary to the Council of Governor General for making laws and regulations, and Radhakrishna, son of Madhusudan, the royal priest of Punjab's Maharaja Ranjit Singh requested the-then Viceroy about the need to list all the manuscripts (MSS), kept in libraries in India and Europe. However, long before that, various enthusiasts from India and Europe started collecting Indian MSS for their personal interest. The government had agreed to this proposal to

conserve Indian manuscripts though it was quite difficult to accomplish this task at that time. A scheme was sanctioned by a resolution of the Home Department, dated 3rd November 1868, for the discovery and preservation of the records of ancient Sanskrit literature. The scheme was started at an outlay of Rs. 24000/- per annum. The main objects of this scheme were —

1. To print all procurable unpublished manuscripts in Indian libraries and also those preserved in Europe. So, the scholars or expert officials, who were appointed for the task, will annually set tours to examine and collect the information about the manuscripts and then they should examine them and if possible, they should purchase or transcribe them.

2. To institute searches for manuscripts and to this end to prepare lists of desirable codices.

3. To grant The Asiatic Society of Bengal an additional allowance for the publication of Sanskrit works hitherto unpublished in *Bibliotheca Indica* series.

The instruction made it clear that all procurable unpublished lists of Sanskrit MSS in Indian libraries, situated within the territories under the respective local Governments and administrations should be printed uniformly in octavo in Nagri character, and under the superintendence of a competent editor. Here Rajendralal Mitra played a leading role in The collection of MSS from Bengal on behalf of the Asiatic Society. He was aided by two assistant pandits or Sanskrit scholars to carry out the government scheme. He recorded thousand MSS till 1880 and published twelve lists of MSS found in Bengal, under the name *Notices of Sanskrit Manuscripts*. His reports (dated February 15, 1875) on the operations carried out by him upto

the close of 1874 on the information collected regarding Sanskrit manuscripts in Bengal libraries satisfied the-then government. He or his assistants visited all places primarily where the MSS were preserved. Repositories like Mufassil libraries, Tols or Sanskrit colleges and private gentlemen collections, have very rich collections of Sanskrit MSS. Mitra and his assistants travelled several districts, viz. – Dacca, Nadiya, Bardhawan, Hooghly, 24 Parganas, and Benaras (thrice) to serve their purpose.

In Calcutta, the private collections, visited by Mitra were –

- i. Raja Yatindramohan Thakur
- ii. Sir Raja Radhakanta Dev
- iii. Babu Ramkomal Sen
- iv. Raja Pitambar Mitra
- v. Babu Subaldasa Mallik and others.

Mitra made a list of the MSS he found in several districts in Bengal. He and his assistants frequently visited the-then Zamindars and Babus to examine their private collections and gathered the texts that were important befitting his perspective. Thus, he collected a good number of age-old rare and valuable treatises of Tantra, Purana, Vedanta, Philosophy or *Darśanaśāstra*, Dharmashastra, & so on. Frequent visits to many *Tols* or the local traditional Sanskrit language-based schools and *Maṭhs* or the monasteries situated in the previously mentioned districts of Bengal, Tirhut and Orissa had been conducted by Mitra in search of a very large and valuable collection of old Sanskrit manuscripts.

After collection, he classified them and prepared a detailed description of them as per his observation. Mitra maintained a large entry book which contains the names of the collected manuscripts alphabetically that were procured by his Pandits and himself. The lists also contained the subjects of the manuscripts and information about their owners. Thereafter, he compiled *Notices of Sanskrit Manuscripts* depending on these records which contained Vedas, Grammar, and Dictionaries, etc. 19 subjects in total, consisting of 519 manuscripts in the first volume. Under his supervision, this list was prepared in 10 volumes from 1872 to 1890. Thus, the journey of Manuscript collection and cataloguing

begins with Mitra in The Asiatic Society. Later, he prepared other compositions based on various manuscripts viz., *A Descriptive Catalogue of Sanskrit Manuscripts in the Library of The Asiatic Society of Bengal* (1877), *Sanskrit Buddhist Literature of Nepal* (1882), *Lalitavistara* (1877), and *Aṣṭasahasrikā* (1888) etc. Mitra's technique and zeal for his work elicited appreciation from the-then Government and they considered Mitra as the most reliable and best researcher in this field among the Indians. So, they started to transfer unfinished cataloguing of manuscripts from other provinces to Rajendralal Mitra. As a result of this tedious work, two important collections of manuscripts drew the attention of the Indologists they are viz., — *Catalogue of Sanskrit Manuscripts in the Library of His Highness The Maharaja of Bikaner* (1880) and *List of Sanskrit Manuscripts Discovered in Oudh during the year 1876* (ed. 1878).

Rajendralal Mitra was far advanced of his time and temperament. By introducing ancient Indian wisdom through the meticulous practice and analysis of manuscriptology, he sparked the nationalist spirit that the entire country is indebted to. In this context, the admiration recorded by Rabindranath Tagore on this icon deserves mentioned —

“রাজেন্দ্রলাল মিত্র সব্যসাচী ছিলেন। ... তিনি মননশীল লেখক ছিলেন ইহাই তাঁহার প্রধান গৌরব নহে। তাঁহার মূর্তিতেই তাঁহার মনুষ্যত্ব যেন প্রত্যক্ষ হইত। ...বাংলাদেশের এই একজন অসামান্য মনস্বী পুরুষ মৃত্যুর পরে দেশের লোকের নিকট হইতে বিশেষ কোন সম্মান লাভ করেন নাই”।

Rabindranath Tagore considered Rajendralal Mitra as 'Sabyasachi', a man expert in using both hands. It was not only his redeeming glory that he was a thoughtful contemplative writer but his humane personality was reflected in his figure. ... This outstanding intellect of Bengal did not get any special respect from his countrymen after his demise.

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A World of Knowledge at Your Fingertips

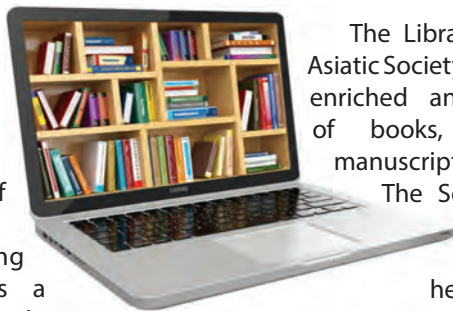
Pritam Gurey

Librarian, The Asiatic Society

Digital archives are essential for preserving cultural heritage and historical records for future generations and providing easy access to information with the ability to search and retrieve data efficiently and quickly.

Digital archives are electronic repositories which store and preserve digital information, like documents, images, audio recordings, videos and other types of digital media. Unlike traditional archives, which rely on physical storage mediums like paper, ink, and film, digital archives utilise computer hardware and software to create and manage collections of digital content.

Digital archiving can be explained as a substitute for paper archive, its main function is to store and preserve documents generated in digital format. It refers to the process of creating and maintaining digital collections of materials that are organised, preserved, and made accessible for long-term use. This process involves several stages, including a selection of materials, appraisal, acquisition, metadata creation, storage, and preservation. It also requires ongoing management and monitoring to ensure digital materials remain accessible and usable over time.



The use of digital archives represents several advantages which are:

- Faster access to data
- Safe document storage
- Saving physical space and time
- Opening up outputs of the institution to a worldwide audience
- Maximising the visibility and impact of these outputs as a result
- Enabling and encouraging interdisciplinary approaches to research

The Library and Museum of the Asiatic Society is a repository of unique, enriched and priceless collections of books, journals, microfiche, manuscripts, paintings and artifacts.

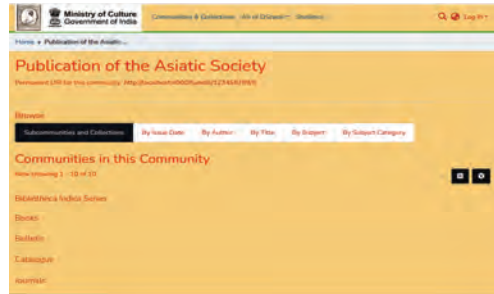
The Society has boosted the digitisation of its rich collection with the help of both in-house and outsourced digitisation programme.

The digital archive of the Society is developed by using open-source repository software—DSpace. Some of the important features of DSpace are as follows:

- Free open-source software
- Completely customisable to fit user needs
- Manage and preserve all formats of digital content (PDF, Word, JPEG, MPEG, TIFF files)
- Apache SOLR-based search for metadata and full-text contents
- UTF-8 Support
- Interface available in 22 languages



Homepage of Society's Digital Archive



Screenshot of the community – Publications of the Asiatic Society

The stable version of 7.6 is currently being installed, revamped and customised as per the need of the Society. At present 2698 manuscripts, 504 publications of the Society and 769 microfiche collections are available in the internal server.

Broader Categorisation of Different Communities/ Heads: (As per Society's Collection)

- Books (other than own publication)
- Manuscripts Collection
- Microfiche Collection
- Publications of the Asiatic Society
- Research

The broader communities are further subdivided into more sub-communities as per different collections of the Society, like for Manuscripts Collection is divided as Government Collection (G), Indian Museum Collection (IM) etc. Similarly, for Publication

of the Society it has communities like Bibliotheca Indica Series, Books, Bulletin, Journals, Presidential Address, Yearbooks, etc.

Users will be able to access the PDF version of the documents through the archive. The collections of the Library & Museum are segregated into different communities/categories and uploading of the documents will be done accordingly in different phases.

At present, the uploading of digitised documents is in full swing and the Society is planning to launch the digital archive soon in the public domain to enable its access globally.

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<https://dspace.lyrasis.org/> (Accessed on 14th January 2024)
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PDF version of a manuscript in the Digital Archive

Publications during the Last Month



Publication Department has published three books and two periodicals in January 2024.

Books

***A Descriptive Catalogue of Sanskrit Manuscripts in the Collection of The Asiatic Society: Volume III : Purāṇa Manuscripts* compiled by Bibekananda Banerjee and edited by Satya Ranjan Banerjee bearing ISBN : 978-81-965082-2-7** is a valuable addition to the 'Catalogue and Bibliographical Works' Series. This volume is a compendium of various Puranic texts with the elaborate descriptions. The Ramayana and the Mahabharata have also been included in this volume. A good number of these texts have important commentaries on the Ramayana and the Mahabharata literature. Some little known and unknown commentators with their commentaries are also described here. Various Puranas and Upapuranas with their unpublished commentaries have been included. Late Dr. Satya Ranjan Banerjee was a Professor of Linguistics at the University of Calcutta and Philological Secretary of The Asiatic Society. Dr. Bibekananda Banerjee was a Senior Cataloguer in The Asiatic Society and compiled and published two volumes of *Descriptive Catalogue of Sanskrit Manuscripts*.

***Language, Communication and Conflict in South and Southeast Asia* edited by Aditi Ghosh bearing ISBN : 978-81-965082-1-0** is proceedings of an international seminar organised by The Asiatic Society in collaboration with the University of Calcutta in 2019. Issues of communication and conflict in South and Southeast Asia are of critical importance and immense interest primarily because of the unique multiculturalism of the area. There are several cases of conflict in the history of the area triggered by differences in languages and cultures. At the same time, the overarching norm of the area is that of routine, peaceful communication across cultures. The diversity provides the inhabitants of the area with challenges as well as opportunities. Shedding light on matters related to linguistic diversity in this area, this volume brings together sixteen chapters, written by scholars from different countries of South and Southeast Asia. Dr. Aditi Ghosh is a Professor of Linguistics at the University of Calcutta. Her teaching and research interests centre on issues of multilingualism, everyday interaction and the relationship between the city and the languages.

***Tanaporen : Banglar Tantshilper Atit, Bartaman o Bhabishyat (in Bengali)* edited by Sujit Kumar Das bearing ISBN : 978-81-965082-4-1** is proceedings of a seminar organised by The Asiatic Society in 2022. This compilation focuses on different aspects of Bengal's handloom sector. This volume brings together seventeen articles depicting the journey and the challenges of the indigenous weavers. Researchers affiliated to different academic institutions as well as persons associated with this field for long time have made their contribution in this collection. Dr. Sujit Kumar Das is a Life Member of The Asiatic Society and presently serving as Honorary Treasurer of this heritage institution.

Periodicals

Journal of The Asiatic Society, Vol. LXV, No. 4 bearing ISSN : 0368-3308 is a compilation of articles, reprint of a rare article from a past issue with notes and book review.

Monthly Bulletin, Vol. LIII, No. 1 is comprised of Monthly Meeting Notice along with abstract of the paper read in the meeting, regular sections like, From the Desk of the General Secretary and President's Column and ten articles, review article on book and report on events organised by The Asiatic Society.

The Department participated in the International Kolkata Book Fair 2024 (Stall No. 234) and published a **Catalogue of Available Publications** with photographs of each book, their names, authors/editors, year of publication, ISBN and price, on this occasion.

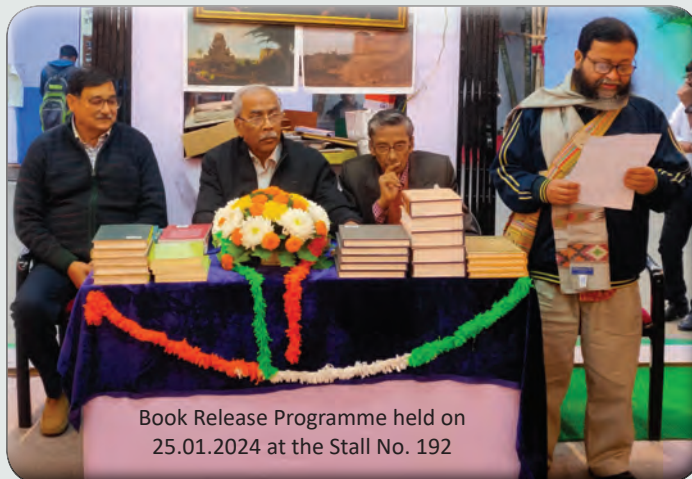
The Asiatic Society in Kolkata Book Fair 2024



Book Stall No. 234



Exhibition Stall No. 192



Book Release Programme held on
25.01.2024 at the Stall No. 192

Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar Lecture 2022

The Asiatic Society, Kolkata organised Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar Lecture 2022 on 17th November, 2023 at 04:00 p.m. at Humayun Kabir Hall of The Asiatic Society, Kolkata. Professor Pabitra Sarkar, former Vice-Chancellor, Rabindra Bharati University delivered the lecture on the topic — 'Following Vidyasagar's Footsteps: Recent Innovations in Bangla Typography'. Dr. Satyabrata Chakrabarti, General Secretary of the Society delivered the Welcome Address. Professor Basudeb Barman, Acting President of the Society presided over the programme. The programme ended with the Vote of Thanks by Dr. Sujit Kumar Das, Treasurer of the Society.



L to R: Professor Basudeb Barman, Professor Pabitra Sarkar, Dr. Satyabrata Chakrabarti and Dr. Sujit Kumar Das

Professor Dipak Kumar Bhattacharya Commemoration Lecture

The Asiatic Society, Kolkata organised Professor Dipak Kumar Bhattacharya Commemoration Lecture on 21st November, 2023 at 03:00 p.m. at Humayun Kabir Hall of The Asiatic Society, Kolkata. Professor Shrikant Bahulkar, former Director, Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, Pune delivered the lecture on the topic — 'Atharvaveda: Past, Present and Future'. Dr. Satyabrata Chakrabarti, General Secretary of the Society delivered the Welcome Address. Professor Basudeb Barman, Acting President of the Society presided over the programme. The programme ended with the Vote of Thanks by Dr. Sujit Kumar Das, Treasurer of the Society.



L to R : Professor Basudeb Barman, Professor Shrikant Bahulkar and Dr. Satyabrata Chakrabarti

Centenary Homage to Professor Arun Kumar Choudhury

Professor Arun Kumar Choudhury, who is not known to the general public much, is a well known academician, educationist and father figure in the field of Computer Science and Electronics. He was a pioneer in Computer education and research in India. First analog computer of India was built by him. Any research on digital computers was also first done by him. Under his guidance and leadership the Department of Computer Science and Engineering was initiated in Calcutta University in 1980. The Asiatic Society celebrated the centenary of this legendary computer scientist through a seminar on 22nd November, at Vidyasagar Hall of the Society. A folder containing a short biography of Professor Choudhury was published and distributed by the Society during this programme.

After welcome address of Professor Asok Kanti Sanyal, the General Secretary (Acting) of the Society, coordinator Dr. Arunabha Misra introduced the theme of the Seminar and President Professor Swapan Kumar Pramanick discussed briefly about his one time colleague. Another colleague of Professor Choudhury, Vice President of

the Society, Professor Basudeb Barman delivered the Vote of Thanks.

Invited speakers of the seminar Professor Prasanta Kumar Basu, student and departmental colleague of Professor Choudhury in Calcutta University, reminisces a lot of old memories regarding his teaching as well as his personality. Mr. Tarun Kumar Chaudhuri, Ex-Vice President, Sandvik Asia Ltd., and elder son of Professor Arun Kumar Choudhury, shared some memories of his father. Two rich presentations were done by Professor Susanta Sen, Ex-Dean of Technology, Calcutta University and Professor Bhargab B Bhattacharya, Retired Professor, Indian Statistical Institute. Professor Sen shows that at a point of his research career, Professor Choudhury contributed nearly 25-30% of the research papers published from his department. Professor Bhattacharya tried to show how Arun Babu's work paved the way for developing the arena of artificial intelligence from simple computation.

Students and teachers from Computer Science Departments of Ashutosh College and Vidyasagar College participated in this seminar.



L to R : Professor Asok Kanti Sanyal, Professor Swapan Kumar Pramanick, Professor Prasanta Kumar Basu, Mr. Tarun Kumar Chaudhuri, Professor Susanta Sen, Professor Bhargab B Bhattacharya and Professor Basudeb Barman

Seminar on 'Science, Technology, Medicine, and Environment'

The Asiatic Society in association with The Society for the History of Science Kolkata (SHSK) has organised a collaborative seminar on 'Science, Technology, Medicine, and Environment: An Appraisal of the Colonial and Postcolonial Experiences of India' on 5th December, 2023 at 10:30 a.m. at the Vidyasagar Hall of the Asiatic Society, Kolkata.

The Inaugural Session of the programme was chaired by Professor Swapan Kumar Pramanick, President of The Asiatic Society with the offering of flowers to the bust of Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar. The Welcome Addresses on behalf of The Asiatic Society, Kolkata and The Society for the History of Science Kolkata (SHSK) were delivered by Professor Asok Kanti Sanyal, Acting General Secretary of The Asiatic Society, Kolkata and Professor Sahara Ahmed (Secretary, SHSK) respectively. The Introductory Address was delivered by Professor Arun Bandopadhyay, Vice-President of SHSK and Historical & Archaeological Secretary of The Asiatic Society. The Presidential Address was delivered by Professor Swapan Kumar Pramanick, President of The Asiatic Society whereas Dr. Sujit Kumar Das, Treasurer of The Asiatic Society, Kolkata ended the said session with a Vote of Thanks.



L to R: Professor Asok Kanti Sanyal, Professor Swapan Kumar Pramanick, Professor Arun Bandopadhyay and Dr. Sujit Kumar Das

The second half of the Inaugural Session was chaired by Professor Sujata Mukherjee, Department of History, Rabindra Bharati University, Kolkata. Professor Syamal Chakrabarti, Department of Chemistry, University of Calcutta and Publication Secretary of The Asiatic Society and Professor Nupur Dasgupta, Department of History, Jadavpur University were the speakers.

The first Technical Session was chaired by Professor Asok Kanti Sanyal, Biological Science Secretary, The Asiatic Society. Dr. Jayanta Bhattacharya, an Independent Researcher and Dr. Aratrika Das, Assistant Professor, Department of Humanities & Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology Indore spoke at the session.

The second Technical Session was chaired by Professor Mahua Sarkar, Department of History, Jadavpur University. Dr. Apalak Das, Assistant Professor, Department of History, Rani Birla College, Kolkata and Dr. Amrita Bagchi, Assistant Professor, Department of History, Bethune College, Kolkata were the speakers.

The third Technical Session was chaired by Professor Ranjan Chakrabarti, Department of History, Jadavpur University, Dr. Mili Ghose, Guest Faculty, Department of History, Jadavpur University and Dr. Leena Bose, Research Assistant, Rajendra Mishra School of Engineering Entrepreneurship, Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur spoke in the session.

The fourth and final Technical Session was chaired by Professor Rajkumar Roy Choudhury, Physical Science Secretary, The Asiatic Society. Shri Indranil Sanyal, Director, North-East Zone, National Council of Science Museums and Dr. Shirish Kavadi, Visiting

Professor, Symbiosis School for Liberal Arts, SIU, Pune were the speakers.

The programme concluded with the Valedictory Session chaired by Professor Arun Bandopadhyay. The Valedictory Address was

delivered by Dr. Jagdish N. Sinha, formerly of Department of History, Rajdhani College, University of Delhi, New Delhi followed by the Vote of Thanks delivered by Dr. Suvabrata Sarkar, Treasurer, SHSK.

Two-day National Seminar on Scientific Temper

The Asiatic Society, Kolkata has organised a Two-day National Seminar on 'Scientific Temper: Revisiting its Progress in India' on 6th and 7th December, 2023. On 6th the programme started at 11:00 a.m. at the Vidyasagar Hall of the Society. Nearly 104 participants from 20 People's Science Organisations joined this national seminar enthusiastically.

The Inaugural Session of the programme began with the offering of garland to the bust of Pandit Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar. The Welcome Address was delivered by Professor Asok Kanti Sanyal, Acting General Secretary of the Society. An Introductory Briefing about the seminar was delivered by Dr. Arunabha Misra, Coordinator & Council Member of the Society. The Keynote Address was delivered by Professor Indira Ghosh, Former Dean, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU). The Presidential Address

was delivered by Professor Swapan Kumar Pramanick, President of the Society. At the end of the Inaugural Session, Professor Arun Bandopadhyay, Historical and Archeological Secretary of the Society delivered the Vote of Thanks.

The first Technical Session with the theme 'Science and Technology in Ancient and Medieval India' was chaired by Professor Rajkumar Roy Choudhury, Physical Science Secretary of the Society. Dr. Aparajito Basu, former Vice-President of the Society and Professor Sanjit Kumar Sadhukhan, Department of Sanskrit, Rabindra Bharati University were the speakers.

The second Technical Session with the theme 'Freedom Movement and Reshaping our Scientific Outlook' was chaired by Professor Subhas Ranjan Chakraborty, Vice-President of the Society. Professor Arun Kumar Bandopadhyay, Historical and Archeological Secretary of the Society and Professor Dhruv Raina, former Professor, Zakir Husain Centre for Educational Studies, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, spoke on in the session.

The third and final Technical Session of the first day of the seminar was chaired by Professor Swapan Kumar Pramanick, President of the Society.



L to R: Professor Asok Kanti Sanyal, Professor Swapan Kumar Pramanick, Professor Indira Ghosh, Dr. Arunabha Misra and Professor Arun Kumar Bandopadhyay

Professor A. Ramachandraiah, Professor of Chemistry, NIT Warangal, spoke eloquently on 'Science, Society and Scientific Temper'.

The second day of the programme i.e. 7th December, 2023 began with the fourth Technical Session, and it was chaired by Professor Asokenath Basu, former Vice-Chancellor, Jadavpur University. The theme of the said session was 'Scientific Temper: Vision and Impediments'. Dr. Gauhar Raza, Retired Chief Scientist of NISTADS (National Institute of Science, Technology and Development Studies) and Dr. Vivek Monteiro, Founder of Navnirmitti Learning Foundation, Pune were the speakers.

The fifth Technical Session with the theme 'Contemporary Challenges: Pseudo-Science in Society and Curricular Inadequacy' was chaired by Professor Basudeb Barman, Vice-President of the Society. Professor Aniket Sule, Associate Professor of HBCSE

(Homi Bhabha Centre for Science Education) and Professor Asokenath Basu, former Vice-Chancellor, Jadavpur University spoke on the occasion.

The sixth and final Technical Session of the programme with the theme 'Role of Government, Scientific Community and PSMS' was chaired by Professor Asok Kanti Sanyal, Biological Science Secretary of the Society. Dr. Subhanil Chowdhury, Associate Professor, Department of Economics, St. Xavier's University, Kolkata and Dr. Amitkrishna De, Honorary Secretary of Indian Science News Association were the speakers.

The Valedictory Session was chaired by Dr. Sankar Kumar Nath, Medical Science Secretary of the Society. Research Officer in Charge of the Society, Dr. Shakti Mukherjee thanked everyone for participating fruitfully in this seminar and making it a success.

Report on Science Fair at WBUAFS Campus

The Asiatic Society, Kolkata, participated in the 2nd Acharya Prafulla Chandra Roy Smarak Vigyan Mela O Pradarshani held in the campus of the West Bengal University of Animal & Fishery Sciences (WBUAFS) from 5th–7th January, 2024. This year the theme of the Mela was 'Save Environment'.

This year the exhibition of the Society comprises display of panels on Nathaniel Wallich, Edward Blyth, Sir William Jones and the Association of Acharya Prafulla Chandra Roy with The Asiatic Society, standee on a Rare book on Birds, photocopy of manuscripts and rare books related to the theme of the exhibition in archival paper in acrylic standees. Some of the books from the Publication Section were displayed on the table. Souvenir items from the Museum Section were also displayed for sale.



Students of Science Departments of Maharaja Manindra Chandra College visiting the exhibition on 05.01.2024

Each day the Science Fair was going on from 1 to 8 pm. Many distinguished persons, students of different schools and colleges and many local citizens visited the stall of the Society and appreciated the way the exhibition was designed. Everyday personnel from the Museum Section was present in the stall to guide and explain the visitors. The participation of the Society in this type of fair will not only spread the importance and sublimity of the Society but also make the people acquainted with the treasures of it.

Observance of 241st Foundation Day of The Asiatic Society



Professor Swapan Kumar Pramanick, President, placing wreath at the Tomb of Sir William Jones.



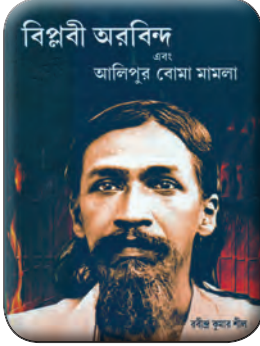
Professor Swapan Kumar Pramanick, President, hoisting flag at the premises of the Society in the presence of Council Members, Members and Staff Members.



Professor Ranjit Kumar Dev Goswami, Former Professor and Head, Department of English, Gauhati University and Sankaradeva Chair Professor of Cultural Studies, Tezpur University delivering the Foundation Day Oration on 'The Knower and the Known : Aspects of Asiatic Researches into Assam' in presence of (L to R) Dr. S.B. Chakrabarti, General Secretary; Professor Swapan Kumar Pramanick, President; Professor J.B. Bhattacharjee, Guest-in-Chief; and Professor Subhas Ranjan Chakraborty, Vice-President.



Distinguished Audience at the Foundation Day Celebration Programme.



বিপ্লবী অরবিন্দ এবং আলিপুর বোমা মামলা

রবীন্দ্রকুমার শীল
রেডিয়ান্স, কলকাতা
মূল্য ২৫০ টাকা

বিংশ শতকের একেবারে গোড়ার দিকে অবিভক্ত বাংলায় সৃষ্টি হয়েছিল বেশ কিছু গুপ্ত সংগঠন, যাদের প্রাথমিক উদ্দেশ্য ছিল শরীর চর্চা, আত্মত্যাগ ও সেবামূলক কাজে মানুষকে বিশেষতঃ যুবসম্প্রদায়কে সংগঠিত করা। এরকমই সংগঠন ছিল কলকাতার আত্মোন্নতি সমিতি, অনুশীলন সমিতি, ঢাকা অনুশীলন সমিতি বা সরলা-দেবী কৃত বাংলার প্রথম শরীর শিক্ষার আখড়া।

অথচ বছর পনেরো আগেই তৈরি হয়েছে জাতীয় কংগ্রেস, মূলতঃ ব্রিটিশ উদ্যোগে এবং এলিট ভারতীয়দের প্রতিনিধিত্বে। ভুললে চলবে না তখন জাতীয় স্তরে ভারতীয়দের একটাই প্ল্যাটফর্ম — কংগ্রেস, ফলে রাজনৈতিক ক্ষমতায়নের জন্য কংগ্রেসে যোগদানই স্বাভাবিক ছিল। ভারতীয় রাজনীতিতে তখন বাল-লাল-পাল এই ত্রয়ীর গুরুত্ব ছিল অপরিসীম। বাল গঙ্গাধর তিলক, লালা লাজপত রায় ও বিপিনচন্দ্র পাল। মূলতঃ বিপিন পালের উদ্যোগে ও আর্থিক সহায়তায় শুরু হল ইংরেজী দৈনিক পত্রিকা ‘বন্দে মাতরম’—ব্রিটিশ বিরোধী লড়াইতে যাকে মাইলস্টোন বললে ভুল হবে না। এই পত্রিকার মাধ্যমেই অরবিন্দ ঘোষ প্রথম দ্ব্যর্থহীন ভাষায় পূর্ণ, শর্তহীন, রাজনৈতিক, অর্থনৈতিক স্বাধীনতার জন্য দেশবাসীকে আহ্বান জানান। একইসাথে বরোদারাজের চাকরী ছেড়ে স্বল্পবেতনে কলকাতায় National College-এ প্রিন্সিপালের দায়িত্ব নেন। চলতে থাকে গুপ্ত সংগঠনগুলিকে একত্রিত করার কাজ। ছোট ভাই বারীন্দ্র চেয়েছিলেন বঙ্কিমচন্দ্রের আনন্দমঠের অনুসরণে ‘ভবানী মন্দির’ গড়ে তার মধ্য দিয়ে বৈপ্লবিক কাজকর্ম করতে—মূল

উদ্দেশ্য একই—ইংরেজ শাসনের অবসান। আন্তরিক প্রচেষ্টা সত্ত্বেও ‘ভবানী মন্দির’ হোলো না, মুরারীপুকুর বাগানবাড়িতে হল অন্য আরেক মন্দির—শরীর চর্চা, গীতাপাঠ আর গোপনে অস্ত্র সংগ্রহ।

এই প্রেক্ষাপটেই শুরু রবীন্দ্রকুমার শীলের ২০০ পৃষ্ঠার ‘বিপ্লবী অরবিন্দ এবং আলিপুর বোমা মামলা’ গ্রন্থটি। এই গ্রন্থে শ্রী শীল এগারোটি পর্বে যে বিস্তারিত আলোচনা করেছেন তার কেন্দ্রবিন্দুতে আছে মুরারীপুকুর বাগানবাড়ির কার্যকলাপ যার ফলশ্রুতি আলিপুর বোমা মামলা এবং অরবিন্দ ঘোষ সহ তৎকালীন বিপ্লবীদের বিস্তারিত কার্যকলাপ, ‘বাংলার বিপ্লবীদের বোমার কারখানা’, ফরাসী অধিকৃত চন্দননগরের গুপ্ত সমিতি, ‘ভবানী মন্দির’ পুস্তিকা, শাসক হত্যার প্রচেষ্টা, ষড়যন্ত্র, অসহনীয় ব্যর্থতা আর চরম শাস্তিপ্ৰাপ্ত মেধাবী তরুণ বিপ্লবীকুল।

বাংলায় বৈপ্লবিক সংগঠন করার জন্য বরোদা সেনাবাহিনীতে কর্মরত যতীন্দ্রনাথকে সরলাদেবীর নামে পত্র দিয়ে কলকাতায় পাঠান অরবিন্দ ঘোষ। সরলাদেবী (ভারতী পত্রিকার সম্পাদক) ছিলেন সেই প্রথমা যিনি বাঙালী পুরুষদের শারীরিক মানসিক ভাবে বলিষ্ঠ ও শক্তিশালী করার জন্য মূর্তজা নামে একজন অভিজ্ঞ শিক্ষককেও নিয়োগ করেন। যাই হোক যতীন্দ্রনাথ বাংলায় আসেন, ব্যারিস্টার পি মিত্রের সাথে পরিচিত হন ও অনুশীলন দলে যোগদান করেন। এরপরেই বারীন্দ্রও এই কর্মকাণ্ডে যুক্ত হন।

কিন্তু বারীন্দ্র এই নিয়মনিষ্ঠ প্রাক্তন সেনানীকে বেশীদিন সহ্য করতে পারেননি—অরবিন্দের চেষ্টা সত্ত্বেও যতীন্দ্রনাথকে এই বিপ্লবী সংগঠন ছাড়তে

হয়, অনেক পরে নিরালম্ব স্বামী নামে আধ্যাত্মিক জগতে তিনি পরিচিত হন।

মূলতঃ বারীণের নেতৃত্বে কলকাতায় একই সাথে অনেকগুলি বাড়িতে গুপ্ত সমিতির কার্যকলাপ চলতে থাকে। বারীণের উৎসাহ-আতিশয্যে শুরু হয় বাংলা পত্রিকা যুগান্তর, যেখানে খোলাখুলি বিপ্লবের প্রচার হতে থাকে এবং ক্রমে অত্যন্ত জনপ্রিয় হয়ে ওঠে, সেই সাথে পুলিশের নজরদারীও শুরু হয়।

অস্ত্র ছাড়া কি বিপ্লব হয়? শুরু হয় বোমা বানানোর প্রস্তুতি। হেমচন্দ্র কানুনগো পৈতৃক সম্পত্তি বিক্রি করে ফ্রান্সে গেলেন এ বিষয়ে দক্ষতা অর্জনের জন্য, এদিকে উল্লাসকর দত্ত প্রেসিডেন্সি কলেজ ছেড়ে বারীণের সাথে যোগ দিলেন। রসায়নের মেধাবী ছাত্র উল্লাসকর বোমা বানাতে শুরু করেন। অত্যাচারী চারজন বিদেশী শাসককে হত্যার পরিকল্পনা করা হল—চন্দননগরের মেয়র মঁসিয়ে তর্দিভেল, পূর্ববঙ্গের লাট ব্যামফিন্ড ফুলার, পশ্চিমবঙ্গের লাট অ্যাড্‌মিরাল ফ্রিজার—তিনটিই ব্যর্থ হয়। এরপর বোমার ক্ষমতা পরীক্ষার জন্য দেওঘরে বারীণ, উল্লাসকর, বিভূতি চক্রবর্তী প্রমুখ পাহাড়ে বিস্ফোরণ ঘটান, সেখানে মৃত্যু হয় বিভূতি চক্রবর্তীর—প্রথম শহীদ।

পরিকল্পনা হয় ম্যাজিস্ট্রেট কিংসফোর্ডকে হত্যার—তাকে বদলি করা হল মজঃফরপুর—প্রফুল্ল চাকী ও মেদিনীপুরের ক্ষুদিরাম বসুকে অস্ত্র ও বোমা দিয়ে পাঠানো হল এই কাজে। এতদিনের প্রচেষ্টা শেষে এই প্রথম পরিকল্পনা মাফিক বোমাটির যথাসময়ে বিস্ফোরণ হয় কিন্তু অন্ধকারে গাড়ি-বিভ্রমে কিংসফোর্ডের বদলে মৃত্যু হয় মিসেস্ কেনেডি ও তাঁর কন্যার। এর পরেরটি ইতিহাস—প্রফুল্ল আত্মহত্যা করেন, ক্ষুদিরাম ধরা পড়ে এবং বিচার প্রহসনের শেষে এই বালকের ফাঁসী হয়।

মুরারীপুকুর বাগানবাড়ি থেকে বারীন্দ্র সহ ১৪ জন বোমা-উপকরণ অস্ত্রসহ ধরা পড়ে, গ্রে স্ট্রীট থেকে গ্রেফতার হন অরবিন্দ ঘোষ, কলকাতার অন্যান্য ঘাঁটি থেকে আরও অনেকে। শুরু হয় আলিপুর বোমা মামলা।

লেখক এই গ্রন্থে বারীণ ঘোষ, ক্ষুদিরাম, নরেন গোসাঁইয়ের পুলিশকে দেওয়া স্বীকারোক্তির প্রকাশ

করেছেন। প্রয়োজন ছিল উৎস সম্পর্কে আরও সচেতনতা।

মনে রাখতে হবে অরবিন্দ ঘোষ নিজে কোনও স্বীকারোক্তি দেননি এবং তাঁর নিষেধ সত্ত্বেও বারীণ সহ কয়েকজনের স্বীকারোক্তির ফলে অনেক দূরত্বে থাকা বিপ্লবীও পুলিশের জালে ধরা পড়েন। রাজসাক্ষী নরেন গোসাঁইকে জেলের মধ্যেই গুলি করে কানাইলাল দত্ত ও সত্যেন—এবং এঁদের ফাঁসীর সাজা ঘোষণা করতে ব্রিটিশ বিচার ব্যবস্থা সময় নষ্ট করেনি।

এই গ্রন্থ একটি বিশেষ সময়ের দলিল। ১৮৯৩ থেকে বা বলা ভাল ১৯০০ সাল থেকে ১৯১০—অরবিন্দ ঘোষের পণ্ডিচেরী যাত্রা পর্যন্ত ঘটনাক্রম সাজিয়েছেন লেখক, যেখানে বিশেষ গুরুত্ব পেয়েছে বছর-ব্যাপী মামলার বিবরণ ও তার প্রাক্কথন, বোমা তৈরির দীর্ঘ প্রস্তুতি, তার পরীক্ষার ক্রম-ব্যর্থতা, সেলুলার জেলের অমানবিক, অস্বাস্থ্যকর পরিস্থিতি, সেই সাথে অসহনীয় শারীরিক-মানসিক অত্যাচার।

এই গ্রন্থে মূলকেন্দ্রে অরবিন্দ ঘোষ নয়, আছেন বারীন্দ্র ঘোষ। সেই সাথে পাঠক পরিচিত হলেন বিস্মৃতপ্রায় সেই মানুষগুলির সাথে যাঁরা শুধুমাত্র দেশমাতৃকার শৃঙ্খল মোচনের জন্য সব কিছু ত্যাগ করে জীবনের শ্রেষ্ঠ সময় ব্যয় করেছেন, কেউ ফিরতে পেরেছেন—অনেকেই পারেননি।

এই গ্রন্থ ৭৫ বছর স্বাধীনতার প্রাক্কালে একবার মনে করায়—ভারতের স্বাধীনতা আন্দোলনের ইতিহাসে গান্ধিজী এবং কংগ্রেসের ভূমিকা যেমন গুরুত্বপূর্ণ, প্রথম জাতীয়তাবাদী আন্দোলন ও চরম আত্মবলিদানের সেই ইতিহাসও কম গুরুত্বপূর্ণ নয়।

গ্রন্থটির 'প্রাক্কথন' ও 'ভূমিকা' লিখেছেন ডা. শঙ্কর নাথ ও অধ্যাপক অরুণ বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায়। লেখক উল্লাসকর দত্ত, উপেন্দ্রনাথ বন্দ্যোপাধ্যায় সহ চল্লিশ জন বিপ্লবীর সংক্ষিপ্ত জীবনপঞ্জী সন্নিবিষ্ট করেছেন। এই জাতীয় গ্রন্থে সাহায্যসূত্র অবশ্যই থাকা প্রয়োজন। মুদ্রণপ্রমাদ যথেষ্ট পীড়া দিয়েছে।

শক্তি মুখার্জী

রিসার্চ অফিসার ইনচার্জ, দি এশিয়াটিক সোসাইটি

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Delhi : Sahitya Academy,
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200.00.

Quarterly Fire Lecture-cum-Demonstration

A fire lecture-cum-demonstration of portable fire extinguishing systems for the quarter October - December 2023 was conducted on 29 December 2023 at 15.00 hrs. at the Society premises and was attended by the available staff members.



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