



বাগান

Balcony









*A literary magazine with an International reach*

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**Front & Back Inside Cover**

*First snow of the season in Ottawa*

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**Rikta Rudra**, born in Madhya Pradesh – Jabalpur, living in Perth, Australia for the past 35 years. Her profession is a school teacher specialising in Early Childhood. She enjoys travelling, gardening and music – mostly Rabindra Sangeet.

**Title Page & Back Cover**

*Savannah, City of Georgia*

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## Editorial



For the last few years, most of us have been increasingly isolated as Covid-19 made gatherings and travel difficult. Even now with vaccines available, we still sometimes wear masks and socially distance. I still wear a mask in stores and at church because one of my family members has a lung condition and could become very sick from Covid. Also, during the last two years, my job has changed to working from home. While I appreciate the flexibility and lack of a commute, I also miss the daily contact with coworkers. In these times, it is important to stay connected to our families and friends and the wider world. *Balcony* offers us a chance to connect with others from around the world in the past and present.

This issue of *Balcony* shares many insights from a girl playing with her imaginary friend in “Mildred Alecuecus” to a couple driving around the American Midwest in “Date Driving”. We also receive lessons from the past that are relevant today in “To Benjamin Franklin With Admiration” and the history and modern locales of Pondicherry in “Trail from glorious past of VEDAPURI to vibrant magnificent Pondicherry.” A father collects necessary items for his daughter in “The Newborn” and enlightenment grows like a garden in “Seeds of Change.”

We hope you enjoy this issue of *Balcony* and experience insights into others' lives and other times and places as you read.

**Jill Charles**

## Editorial

“Old year you must not die  
You came to us so readily,  
You lived with us so steadily,  
Old year, you shall not die.”



The Death Of The Old Year/Tennyson

2022 is a milestone year in the journey of our literary magazine. The year indeed lived with us steadily. Eminent Bengalee poets and authors, Srijato and Tanmay Chakrabarti, shared their poetic talent with the art and literature lovers of Sydney and Perth. Batayan Incorporated was happy to invite these two literary artists from Bengal. Their performances were enjoyed by many. Besides reading and reciting excerpts from the body of their own literary work, they conducted a poetry workshop. Srijato and Tanmay's Australia trip paved the path for more opportunities to bridge the continents. This is an important step towards finding unity in diversity. These kinds of cultural exchanges strengthen global peace. This was no doubt a big endeavor for us.

Goodbyes are hard. But unless we say goodbye to the old we cannot welcome the new. It is time for us to part with 2022 and say hello to 2023. On behalf of the magazine we wish you a happy and tranquil 2023. May the year be filled with lots of poetry, stories and music.

Balcony's first issue in 2023 comes with a promise to foster the spirit of global friendship.

### Ranjita Chattopadhyay



*Workshop in Sydney*



*Programme in Perth*



## Contributors

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At the age of five **Alfred Taylor** went from his family into New Norcia Mission where he was kept in brutal conditions until fleeing when a teenager. He is now Australia's leading senior Nyoongar writer, the author of three collections of poetry and short stories, *Singer*, *Songwriter*, *Winds*, and *Long Time Now*. *Long Time Now* was translated and published in Spain as *Voz del Pasado*. His memoir, *God, the Devil, and Me* plus a selection of his poetry and prose have been published by Magabala Press. He has given readings of his work at writers festivals and other events in Australia, England, France India and Spain.



**Allen McNair** – He is a self-taught artist and poet inspired daily by the wonders of life around me, and by my present and past experiences. From individual poetic portrayals in my early years of writing, I have graduated to writing and illustrating my self-published epic saga, *I Dream of A'maresh*.



**Dhanonjoy C Saha** is a professor, scientist, writer and a poet. He is a research professor of medicine at Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York, USA. Besides, his contributions to various aspects of science and literature, recently, he has started writing theme-based rhymes for children where education is intimately impregnated with entertainment. Dr. Saha is the founder and president of International Bengali Literary Society based in New York.



**Elis Z Anis** – Elis holds a master's degree in communication and Development Studies from Ohio University, USA. Elis did PhD Candidate in Media and Communication Studies at the University of Western Australia. Elis loves photography and spending time in nature in order to maintain her positive work-life balance. She won several photography competitions for her landscape and birding photos. Professionally, Elis was the official photographer for Senator The Hon Christopher Evans, Minister for Tertiary Education (Australia) during the East Asia Summit Education Ministerial Meeting 2012, Indonesia. She also served as the liaison for Thierry Monasse, a photographer based in Brussels for the “Indonesia Unity in Diversity Photo Project.”



**Faisal Justin** – He is a poet from Minamyar. He is a prolific poet. He has a unique way of expressing his thoughts and feelings. He has composed most of his poems inside a prison.



**Indrajit Sengupta** a mechanical engineer and a Sr. Manager (EHS- Environment, Health & Safety). He already published 2 nos. of Bengali Kabya Grantha “Nepathyacharini” & “Ogo Bideshini” based on Rabindranath Tagore. He published many essays in daily newspapers like, *Dainik Statesman*, *Saptahik Bartaman*, *Ekdin*, *Uttarer Saradin*, *Jugasankha*, *Sukhabar*, *Manbhum Sangbad*, *Swadesh Times*, etc



**Kayla Vasilko** is a senior in the Honors College at Purdue University Northwest with a major in English Writing. She has been writing stories since her childhood, and enjoys experimenting with all genres. She likes using different forms of writing such as poetry, short stories, flash fiction, and novels to connect with readers' personal experiences in ways that are open to the infinite interpretation of the readers themselves. She seeks to use her writing as a platform for positive change and awareness.

## Contributors

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**Krishna Sen** is Professor, Emeritus at the University of Western Australia and a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Humanities. An Indian by birth and Australian by accident, she spent most of her adult life teaching and researching in Media and Cultural Studies at several universities, while trying to understand Australia's and India's most important neighbour, Indonesia. She is an avid hiker and occasional blogger 'Hurry Krishna' <https://readingontheroad54893552.wordpress.com/>



**Maureen Peifer** is a Chicagoan with a lifelong love of literature, writing, travel, and teaching. She is currently the school librarian at a Montessori school where she previously taught.



**Rajosik Mitra** is a poet and short fiction writer. His poems have been published in Indian Literature, Bombay review and other magazines. His debut short story has been published in The Common, an US based Literary magazine. kickin around since '93. His only book of no poems, is 'God is bipolar type 2' published in 2021.



**Sunayana Datta Yang** – Sunayana lives in Chicago. She works in the field of computer science. Reading and writing is Sunayana's hobby.



**Tarah Shaw** – I am a senior at PNW and I am majoring in English writing with a minor in creative writing. My dream is to become a librarian and best selling author. I like to read, write, garden, play piano, and paint. My favorite snack is french fries and my favorite colors are pastels. I like stuffed animals, floral dresses, and baking pies.



**Uday Mukherjee** – After a lifetime in Government service, Uday is enjoying blissful retirement in Puducherry, India. He loves to share his experiences through his writing. His other passion is cooking – experimenting with recipes from all over the world. And he enjoys “adda”, spending hours with his friends.



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## Alfred Taylor

### India, Oh India

*Published in printed Balcony (Vol 2, January, 2021)*

India, Oh India,  
How graciously you treated me;  
What... have I done  
To deserve such  
A privilege;  
Your honour and valour  
You have bestowed upon me,  
Have enthralled me,  
So enthusiastically  
With no doubt  
An overwhelming impression  
Upon my heart:  
Chennai, Delhi and Hyderabad,  
I see a wonder in you  
Which I have yet  
To encounter again.

India... Oh India,  
My partings with you  
Are not yet over,  
My sails are set to be  
Engulfed by  
Your wondrous mist  
Which will clean my soul  
On the shores  
Of your land.  
India... Oh India,  
My longing for you  
I cannot understand,  
Safe on my own shores,  
But still I see  
The Bay of Bengal  
Is calling me.



Krishna Sen

## Under The Starry Sky

*Published in printed Balcony (Vol 2, January, 2021)*

The narrow street and high buildings encouraged the cold wind to run riot. Ritwik had been planning a pitstop for a cup of coffee, but now convinced that would be unwise, he hot-footed into the museum. All the way here he had been obsessing over just one thought, that such a day had been beyond his dreams, a day when he really would get to stand in front of 'The Starry Night'. But then again, was he really doing that just today? Hadn't his mind seen that canvas so very many times? Was that seeing any less real? Ritwik got confused again. Averting himself from Sharmila, he pressed down hard on his own hand, trying to convince himself that this day was not a hallucination. It was not a figment of his imagination. It was all hard reality, all that was happening to him today. But even standing here, in the entry-hall, he could think of little else. It pleased him to think that such concrete reality could seem so unreal.

Perhaps because it was so close to Christmas, there wasn't much of a crowd. Or else as Saheli had warned, it can take half-an-hour just to get tickets. Foregoing the audio-guide, Sharmila opted just for the floor plan, without which it might take all day to find stuff here. And it took Sharmila less than a minute to realise that they should go straight to the fifth floor. Every floor has significant works, chronologically arranged in sections. But in this cold weather she didn't think she should let Ritwik stay out too late. Besides given his mental condition, it would be best to see that one painting first.

Just off the elevator on the fifth floor, the wall on the right opens into the gallery. There is a massive canvas on this wall too, but Sharmila side-stepped past it. Hooking her arm around Ritwik's elbow, she strode inside; then she let go of him. Barely ten metres from where they were standing, exactly in the middle of the room, was a square wall. On the other side of the wall, masses of people, undeterred by the dreaded icy weather, had gathered to stare in

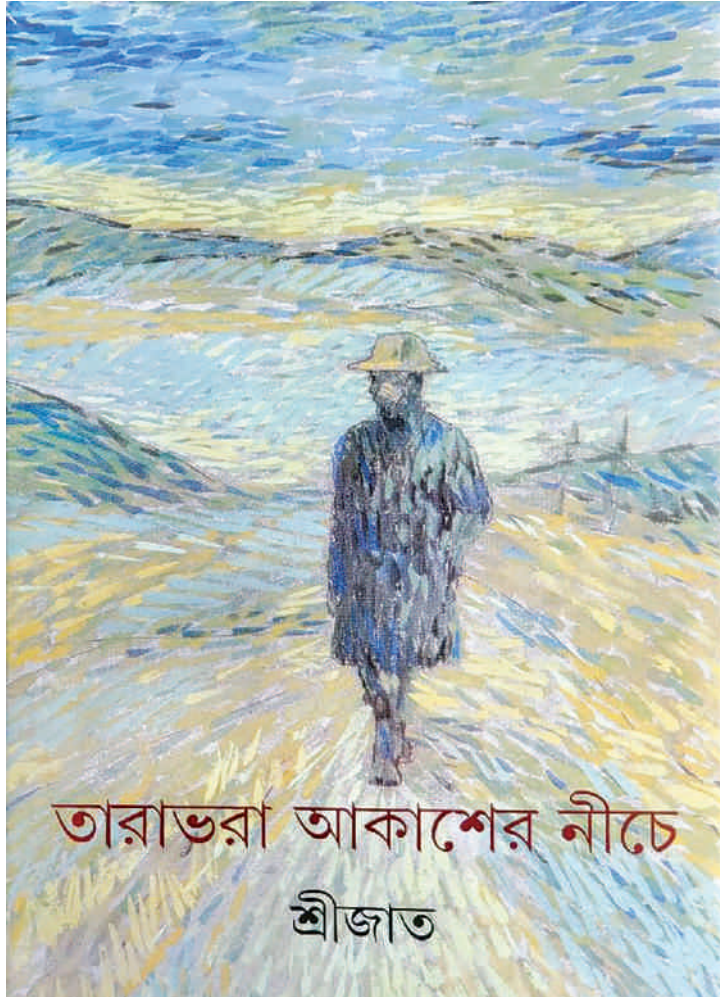
wonderment. A black-suited unsmiling man stood close to the edge of the wall, guarding Vincent Van Gogh's famous canvas. *The Starry Night*.

'You go ahead, I'll wait here', Sharmila said, gently releasing Ritwik's hand. As Ritwik shuffled forward on incredulous limbs, the crowd in front of the painting grew thicker still. He merged into the crowd facing the painting. Facing *The Starry Night*. He stood before the painting of his dreams, where as always, the nocturnal hamlet slept, guarded by the majestic cypress and the distant hills and beyond them, the whirlpool-like night-sky flowed on into infinity. As he knew by heart every brushstroke of the painting, Ritwik felt no new amazement. What surprised him was only the thought that he really had come so far away from Kolkata to this distant city to stand before this image. Once more, he felt his heart overflow with gratitude towards Sharmila.

He stood in front of the painting for five minutes. He had stood in front of the painting for his entire 37-year-old life. He has been standing in front of this painting from the beginning to the end of time. Perhaps longer still. Eternity. Crowds had melted away, the lights had dimmed, even the besuited somber-faced guard had left the room, none of which Ritwik had noticed, because staring wide-eyed at the picture, staring wide eyed, he was remembering those afternoons....

Now Ritwik noticed, the whole room was dark, only the spotlight over the frame of *The Starry Night* was still lit. He couldn't see any of the walls, hung with other famous paintings by Vincent and Paul. He noticed too, apart from himself, there was one other person in the room. A man. The man came slowly towards *The Starry Night*, to its left. Without looking Ritwik could see the male figure, dressed in military uniform, medals, epaulettes and a feather in his cap. On that uniform, in the middle of the body, grazing the rib-cage a gaping hole. Dark.

[Excerpt, translated from Srijato Bandyopadhyay's critically acclaimed novella তারা ভরা আকাশের নীচে Under The Starry Sky. The original Bengali Book has been published by Ananda Publishers]



This novel starts on a cold winter's night in France 1888 which Paul Gauguin comes to live with his friend Vincent van Gogh. From there the story enters the amazing, dramatic and fast paced life of Van Gogh, the man and the artist.

The story simultaneously follows the life of Ritwik, in 2017 Kolkata. Ritwik works in advertising although he is a failed artist. This failure leads to his existential crisis, depression and illness. His surroundings keep changing into a hallucinatory and illusionary world, and Vincent's unforgettable painting "The Starry Night" keeps him anchored there.

Ultimately, Ritwik's wife Sharmila takes him to New York to see "The Starry Night" himself, and this is where Vincent Van Gogh himself comes to meet Ritwik. They meet in an underfined space and time.

Srijato's novel not only delves into the complex psychological intricacies of people but also explores fire and madness that lives in the hearts of artists. Srijato weaves his story through unique prose and unconventional imagery. "Tara Bhora Akasher Niche" gives glimpses of an artist's universe, and shows readers an unimagined horizon.



Srijato was born on 21<sup>st</sup> December 1975, Kolkata. His father was a journalist by a profession and mother a well-known classical singer. Srijato's maternal grandfather was acclaimed classical musician, Sangeetacharya Tarapada Chakraborty. Srijato grew up in this very musical environment.

Srijato started writing quite early, publishing his first book "Shesh Chithi" in 1999, already dropping his surname. In 2004, he won both the "Ananda Puroshkar" and "Krittibash Puroshkar" prizes for "Udonto Shob Joker". In 2018 he was awarded the prestigious "Bangla Akademi" Award for his collection of poems "Korkotkrantir Desh".

In 2006 Srijato was invited to attend Iowa Universities International Writer's Workshop. In 2008 he represented Bengali poetry at the International Edinburgh Book Fair. He has been associated in editorial roles with various publications such as "Ebong Shomudro", "Joruri Obostha", "Bhashanagar" and "Krittibash". Recently, he has also started writing screenplays and songs for movies.

Srijato was married in 2004 to Durba, a professor by profession.



Elis Z. Anis

## Birding in Western Australia: A Photo Essay

*Published in printed Balcony (Vol 2, August, 2022)*

### A University full of Birds

From the first day I visited University (UWA) in 2017, the calls of the different birds were and the way the shared the campus with people fascinated me. So different from my country, Indonesia, where most birds are afraid of humans and stay far away in the trees.

I loved watching birds interact with people not just at my university, but all around Perth. The Reid Library pond and the coppice areas on campus have become home for ducks and other water-birds, providing a welcome environment for them to fly from tree to tree, enjoy the various food sources, and raising their young in safety. I got used to their sounds and their habits as well. As I learned more through observation and conversation with others, I soon developed a passion for bird-photography in addition to old passion for landscape photography.

The most common and the largest group of birds at UWA is the Rainbow Lorikeet/ *Trichoglossus haematodus* (Photo 2 & 3), which are actually not native to Western Australia. The very colourful Rainbow Lorikeet is eye-catching, and even more beautiful in spring when they are among the flowers. They usually come in flocks and they are everywhere. An Australian photographer told me that in the past, the university campus attracted many more WA native birds, such as the Australian Ringneck (*Barnardius zonarius*, also known as the Twenty-Eight Parrot) but they have been crowded out by Rainbow Lorikeet. In other places such as the Perth hill and John Forest National Park, ringneck parrots are still easily found. Their loud squawks sound like the words “twenty eight” which is the reason for their strange popular name, the Twenty-Eight Parrot.



*Photo 1. Duck Family, Reid Library pond*



*Photo 2 Rainbow Lorikeet. Spotted at UWA*



Photo 3 Rainbow Lorikeet. Spotted at UWA

Another common and quite lovely bird at UWA is the Pink and Grey Galah/ *Eolophus roseicapilla* (see **Photo 4**), frequently seen welcoming students in front of the Reid! They also hang around in flocks (of around 15 to 20) on the ground near the Octagon Theatre. Perhaps it is their favourite spot. Sometimes little corellas join them. The other galah (**Photo 5**) was spotted at Pelican Point, within walking distance from UWA. Its pink colour amongst the wildflowers making it picture-postcard pretty.

One of my favourites is Carnaby's Black-cockatoo/ *Calyptorhynchus latirostris* (**Photo 6**). The greyish black bird is among the rare endangered birds as their numbers have decreased over recent years. Sometimes they come in a flock of 20 to 50. Larger flocks can be seen in forested areas. I had the chance to see a very large flock of more than a hundred birds in Yanchep National Park, hanging about in trees, flying around and frolicking around the Yanchep Lagoon.

This photograph of a Carnaby's Black-cockatoo was taken from my balcony. It was on a lower branch of a tree, just across my University housing unit. I still remember seeing the Carnaby last year, on the same tree. The bird looked like it was enjoying the wattle

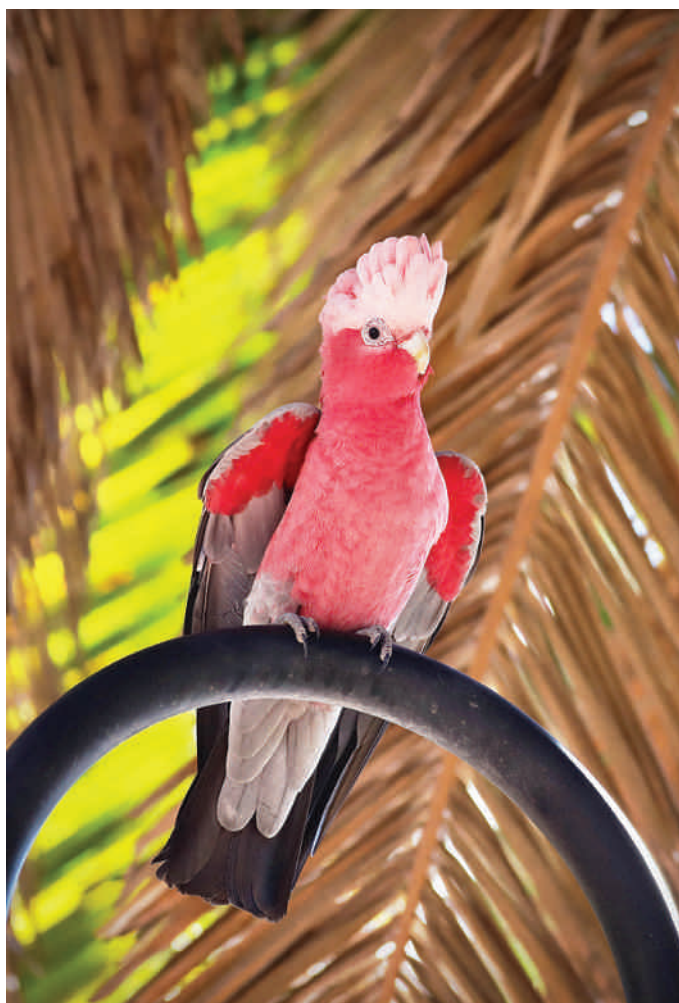


Photo 4 Pink and Grey Galah





*Photo 5 Pink and Grey Galah*



*Photo 6. Carnaby's Black-cockatoo*

nuts. I noticed there were about 6 of them; they stayed there for about 30 minutes and flew away when they heard a dog. Some birds are easily disturbed by dogs, which is why in parts of WA, especially in conservation areas, dogs are prohibited.

Sometimes the birds woke with me, sometimes even earlier. I got to know the sounds of the Red-tailed Black-cockatoo/*Calyptorhynchus banksii* (**Photo 7 & 8**) passing my flat and they usually hung around at UWA and Matilda Bay. When they were busy eating, a large flock, they seemed unaware of people around them. Sometimes they perch on lower branches of trees or even on the ground. This cockatoo is also seen in forest and conservation areas and occasionally even visit people's backyards!

### Expect the Unexpected

**I**t was on 13 May 2019, a foggy morning, when for the first time I saw a large flock of Pied Cormorants (**Photo 9**) at Pelican Point, a conservation area in Crawley, near UWA. This is a most unexpected experience. I never imagined that I would see hundreds of pied cormorants, along with seagulls. I was there with two other bird-watchers. We stayed at a distance as we did not want to disturb them. When it was time for them to get the fish, they flew in a line, a neat colour formation of black (cormorants) and white (seagulls); then they dived into the water! They returned, circling before they dived again. I was in the middle, surrounded by the hundreds of cormorants in the sky. It was an incredible, unforgettable moment! I was too mesmerised to take a photo.

Pelican Point in Crawley is well-known as a stopping place for migratory birds from other countries. There is a small lake where several such overseas visitor and 'locals' can be found (e.g Pied Stilt, Great Egret, Welcome Swallow, Seagulls, Pacific Duck, Pink and Grey Galah, Little Corella, Pelican, Red Capped Plover, Caspian and Crested Terns, Silver Gulls, White-faced Heron, Dove, Australasian Darter, Honey Eater and Eurasian Oystercatcher). Some of them are there to nest and breed. In the breeding season, some birds like Pied Stilt and Eurasian Oystercatcher

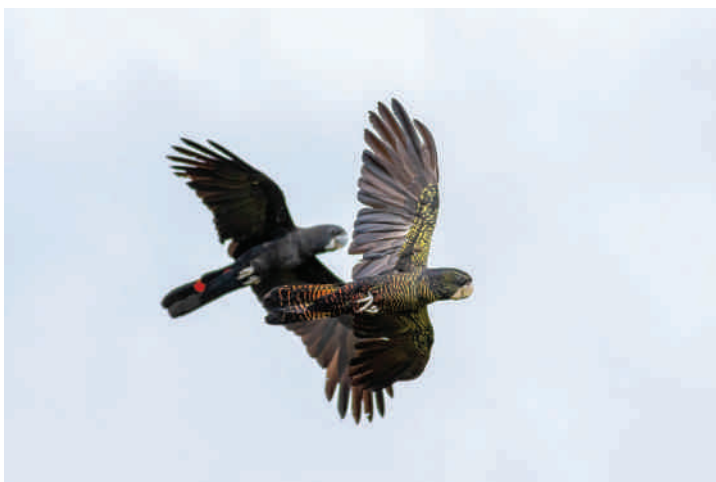


Photo 7 & 8 Red-tailed Black-cockatoo

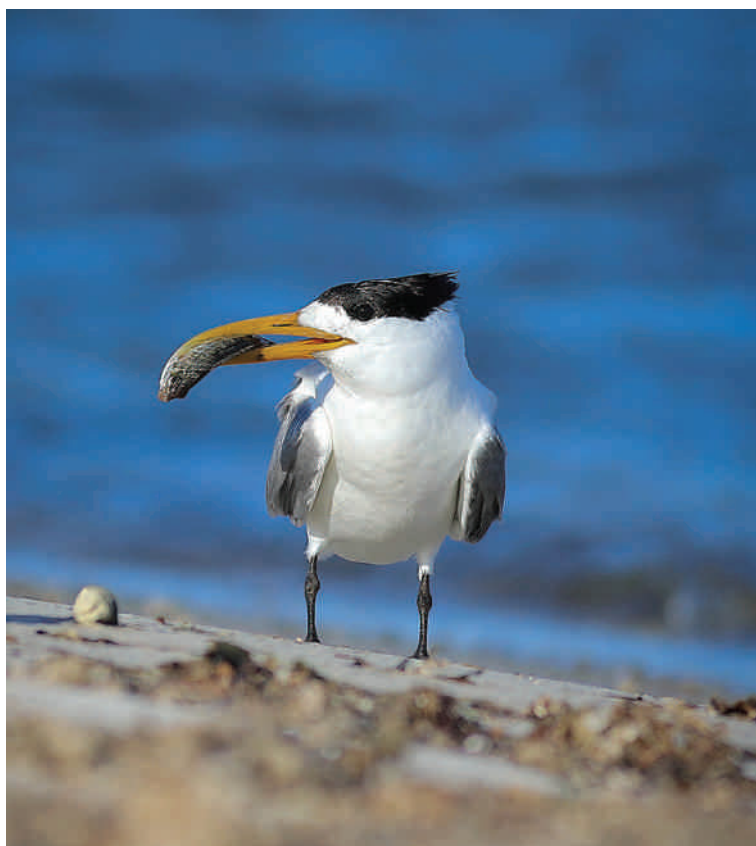


Photo 9. Pied Cormorants and Seagulls





*Photo 10*



*Photo 11*

are more sensitive as they want to protect their family. We have been warned not to disturb them and respect their privacy. Some birds from Pelican Point in **Photos 10** (Red Capped Plover), **11** (Tern), **12** (Eurasian Oystercatcher), **13** (Tern), **14** (Black-winged Kite), **15** (Australasian Darter).



*Photo 12*

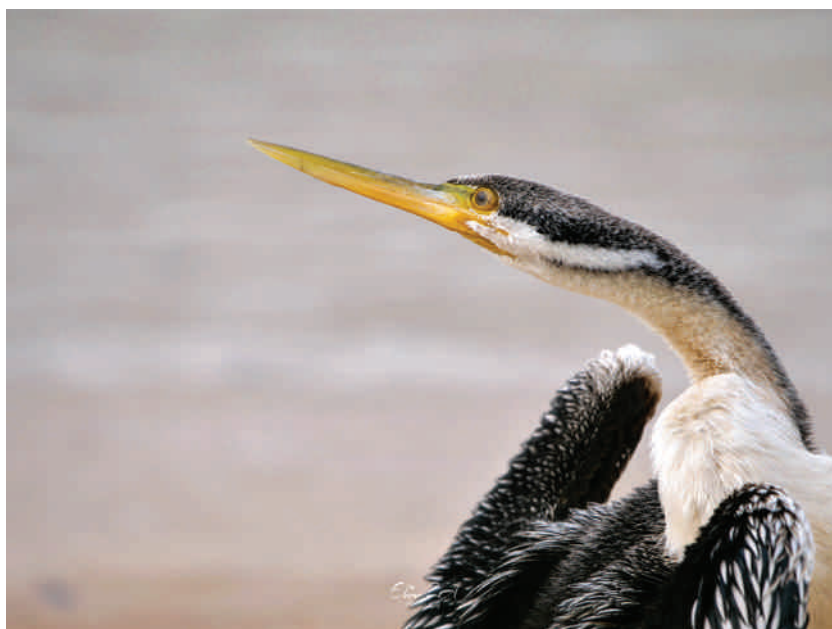


*Photo 13*





*Photo 14*



*Photo 15*

A pair of Eastern Osprey (**Photo 16**) are amongst the most famous residents of Pelican Point. They usually stay in a tree nearby. One is shy, the other is not. As photographers, we always discuss how to respect the privacy of the birds and most bird photographers have a long/tele lens (around 400mm to 600mm). But I was surprised on a particular morning, when I saw an elderly man walking with a child; they were so close to the osprey, which just remained there and did not move at all. On several visits to Pelican Point, I noticed that the Osprey often sat there for several hours. I'd watch it sitting still for ages: then, suddenly, he would swoop into the water, bathing and flapping wings and fly off to dive for fish. I never got to take a photo of the Osprey with the fish at Pelican Point as it was always too far. But I was lucky that I had the chance on a trip to Mandurah and managed to capture a magnificent photograph of an Osprey flying in the sky with two fishes (**Photo 17**). What a meal!!



*Photo 16 The Eastern Osprey*



*Photo 17 The Eastern Osprey*



### The loving family and the most wanted bird

I am always excited to see a new species of birds. This was the case especially when I spotted a little Variegated fairy-wren in a bushy area just across the UWA Business School. I was on my morning bike ride when I heard a beautiful smooth bird call which I had never heard before. My curiosity aroused, I parked my bike and went looking for the source of the sound. I was thrilled to see with my own eyes the cute Variegated fairy-wren (**Photo 18**). Previously I had only seen photos of them on social media, especially on Wednesdays which many photographers referred to the “Wrens Day”. I did not want to miss taking a shot, but I needed to be calm, as fairy-wrens are sensitive birds. They move very quickly, hopping from one branch to another, and jumping from tree to tree. I was lucky to capture the bright and colourful male Variegated fairy-wren. In a flock, usually male wrens are fewer compared to females. They are more colourful and hence more attractive to photographers than the female, but also at risk of being more easily spotted and, therefore, eaten by predators. This explains why a male wren is usually more cautious and alert than the female.



*Photo 18. Variegated fairy-wren*

Little fairy wrens are especially cute when they huddle together (**Photo 19**). I could not take my eyes off this happy family which I spotted at Yanchep National Park on an outing with six other photographers. I was reminded of the many images of wrens found on tea towels, coasters, tea cups and plates in souvenir shops indicating that they are very popular.



*Photo 19. Wrens huddled together*

Birding photography has taught me to be patient. I found out that some photographers might wait in a spot for 4 to 5 hours for a particular bird. Recently, the reported presence of

the species known as the Southern Emu Wren attracted the attention of many Perth photographers. According to Birdlife Australia, this wren is one of Australia's smallest birds. It has a long tail (around 10 cm). My friend Amy and I went to the Perth Hills and waited in vain for many hours; alas, we did not spot the Emu Wren.

The social media has been used by photographers to share photos of birds, along with information about location and sometimes technical details. Soon after a photographer posted a photo of the Rainbow Bee Eater (RBE) on a social media site, many photographers, including me, visited Gwelup Reservation Area. I had never seen a RBE before and it was 7:00 a.m when I arrived on location. Most birds are more active in the morning. The RBE is very beautiful with blue, green, yellow, orange-brown and black feathers, red and black eyes. Its colour becomes more spectacular in the morning sun light (**Photo 20 & 21**).



*Photo 20 Rainbow Bee Eater (RBE)*



*Photo 21 Rainbow Bee Eater (RBE)*



Gwelup has become a very popular birding spot for RBEs. I was delighted to join other photographers and bird watchers, as in compliance with ethical birding practice, we observed from a distance so as to not to disturb the birds. A male RBE flies around in circles above the female in a courtship 'ritual' before mating in the grass. They fly around in search of insects, mostly bees, dragonflies and butterflies. It was quite difficult to capture RBEs in flight as they move very fast. I did not get any RBE in-flight (**Photo 22**) until my second visit, after trying different techniques.

Gwelup was also my first shot of a kingfisher (**Photo 23**).



*Photo 22 Rainbow Bee Eater (RBE) in-flight*



*Photo 23 Kingfisher*

### The Egret

This Australian Great Egret (**Photo 24**), snapped in the Swan River, reminded me of a trip to Maninjau, West Sumatra, where my friend, Joni Hidayat and I spotted a flock of Asian Egrets among the palm trees. They flew to a rice field and rested on top a lofty tree (**Photo 25**, by Joni Hidayat). In Indonesia, egrets usually stay in a wet rice field looking for insects (e.g grasshoppers, earthworms, frogs etc). After taking some photographs, we tried to follow the egrets and discovered that there was a small island called “Pulau Bangau”(Egret Island) with thousands of egrets. Only fishermen went to the island and a local told us that the egrets were not afraid of the fishermen!



*Photo 24 Australian and Indonesian Great Egret*



*Photo 25 Australian and Indonesian Great Egret*



In Mandurah, WA, at Lake Erskine, we can see many cattle egrets in a green open space quite close to a housing area, unlike the ones in West Sumatra, which prefer to keep their distance from humans. I visited the lake with two Indonesian friends, in the breeding season. We spotted the cattle egrets and their babies in the trees (**Photo 26 & 27**); quite noisy. Some of them were flying around, some looked like they had just arrived. It was like a busy airport! There were also other water birds in the lake: Australian grebes, Australian darters, Pacific ducks, purple swamp-hens, white-faced herons and black cormorants.

Such a privilege for me to live in W.A for 4.5 years of my study at UWA: waking each dawn to the trills, the warbles, and the tweets of bird! I saw in many a sun-rise around Matilda Bay and Abraham Reserve (**Photo 28**) with my camera, surrounded by these willing and gracious models.

Being surrounded by birds and witnessing their behaviour, not only refreshed and entertained me, but also lifted my spirit. As a PhD student, bird-photography provided a very positive kind of balance to my academic-life. I appreciate how Australians love nature. People take good care of wildlife and various organisations, for example, Birdlife Australia, are excellent sources of information to learn about the different species, their habits and and most importantly how we must preserve their habitat.



*Photo 26 & 27 Australian Egret*



*Photo 28 Seagulls and sunrise at Matilda Bay*

## Kayla Vasilko

### “Abejas”

Life is not termed by struggle or success, but by the ability of life to exist in many forms at once/

The success of one intersecting the great trial of another when they seek to reach out and lift them, reason  
absent, void of the promise of gain/

Now, both are closer to the sun and sky, two things often seeming insensitive, bright and blue, shining over  
war, famine, and death/

Disconnected, yet never out of sync/

Separately, there are clouds, wind, and rain/

Below, there are trees, shaping their growth around the rays and the rain/

Dodging the lightning, robbing the flower that blossoms, rivaling rainbows, canyons, and waterfalls/

Feeding the bees in their glory, an army of wings buzzing in the sun and rain both/

Yellow and black creating shining gold, prospering from the beauty they create in nature, charming someone,  
somewhere who just sits/

Who watches independent of struggle or success and feels awe. Smiles. Cares/

Considers for a moment, all the connected, separate acts of life/

All necessary/Infinite acts of wonder all living at once/

Life cannot be one word any more than joy can be termed by life or success/

Joy is fragmented, broken; a sliver in failure, a piece in triumph/

It is defined best in the ability to live outside of both success and defeat and think of neither when looking at  
the sun, sky, trees, flowers, canyons, and bees/

At the pieces of joy they carry/

Separate, connected, and more whole in their fragmentation than together.



## Tarunima Guha

### Drop of Cognizance

I was travelling to Pretoria, carrying first class ticket of train  
I thrown out from the whites only wagon for a white man's blame  
21 years I contemplated racial discrimination and stayed back  
I returned to the rainbow nation with 800 free Indians pack  
Rabble attacked me physically make me exercised self restraint  
I devoted myself to protest tranquilly as it gave our crusade strength  
My green pamphlet allowed me to taste my first popular adulation  
When blacks gained the right to vote I feel my first modulation  
During Boer war I made stretcher-bearers Indians ambulance troop  
To help British soldiers to transport the wounded off the battle loop  
“To serve is my religion” I wanted to free men politically  
I want to restore men's soul spiritually and heal them physically  
Bhagvad Gita was my afflatus; it endured me through time  
Aparigraha became my dictum of Gita I bind it like bine  
I embraced the concept embodying the equality of all creeds  
My phoenix settlement promote justice and equality greet  
Satyagraha was my stride towards Indian independence drive  
Understanding the universal truth to rescind unjust law of rive  
Rabindranath and Kamdar bestowed my name as “Mahatma”  
But my four virtue of life was to get into “Paramatma”  
Nation cleped me with reverence and honor as Father of Nation  
But I still feel there are too much for my drop of cognition.

## Rajosik Mitra

### Your Share

Do not deny your share  
no matter how less how little  
if it chooses you  
even for a second.  
Do not deny what rarely fools you.  
We were duped by dances duped  
by lottery light shimmering on a snow night  
in the far kilometers;  
the silk scarf drifting  
over the sands of Sahara,  
chances of rain, dreams  
of our dead ones come back again,  
how many times did they wake you?

There is too much of it,  
too heavy to bear for some too many sobs  
through paper-thin walls  
too many walking back home on railway lines  
forever with final prophetic visions  
of an oncoming train overlooked, cast aside.  
Too many homemade nooses hanging, homeless  
tyre-tread bodies floating in your  
life-giving rivers and people jumping  
off onto the pavement abyss of belly up businesses  
from ninth storey windows.  
So many go to bed, arthritic hunger in their bones.  
I wouldn't name it, but you may call it cliché,  
maybe even necessary, may call it crazy,  
twisted.  
Though it is deeper than a black moon,  
a warping hollow in the night sky,  
endless gray shrouds on a fisherman's aft,  
the starless tar-black pool of our hopeless truth.  
Do not deny your share  
or others must have more than theirs  
and how is that good?

## Tarah Shaw

**Faking Roses**

When I was twelve years old, I got this beautiful music box.  
Inside, was a tiny ballerina.  
I loved to wind her up and watch as she danced  
To the song from Swan Lake.  
She and I were alike.  
We wore plastic fake smiles  
And we danced to songs  
That were not our own  
Anything for adoration  
Anything to avoid the sting of knowing  
That we were not good enough  
Of knowing we were the aged dandelions  
In a field of roses  
Doomed to be cut down or blown away  
Because no one wanted us.  
We were exquisite to the public eye,  
Like diamond rings reflecting light.  
But in the darkness of our boxes, we crumbled  
Like glass figurines being smashed to the ground,  
We were crushed.  
Maybe, if we could learn to love ourselves,  
Our pieces like long lost words can be put together  
In this story we call us.  
If someday, we could embrace the sharp pieces,  
And drawn blood, in our story, we can have a voice,  
To say the things unsaid; to do the things undone;  
To take our first true steps.  
We were brave.  
We were broken and stunning.  
Damaged and majestic.  
Shattered and free.



D C Saha

**My Freedom**

You told me to conform,  
asked me to obey, forced  
me to follow your rules  
and indeed, belittled, I always did.

You became powerful, stronger,  
your horizon horribly expanded,  
slowly engulfed my world-to-be  
and there was no room left for me.

You took away my freedom  
to speak, to work, eat, dress,  
my access to medical care, education  
my liberty to live.

You can exercise your evil:  
muffle my litany, silence my protest,  
but you cannot take away my  
freedom to love the freedom of my thoughts--

that will survive any measure of tyranny.

Faisal Justin

**The Beauty of Nature**

In the early morning of winter spring  
The garden slowly sway and blossom  
Birds play and dart forth the blue sky  
Melody voice of birds whisper silently

Snow starts thawing as winter is over  
Insects and animals extend exuberance  
Bounds south to north in the open field  
Bees begin making honey inside the hives

Gazing at the scenic views of nature  
Mountain and the sun get too closer  
During the sunset of beautiful day  
Telling us another day ended today

In the rains, the seeds wake up and stand.  
All creatures are symbol of imagination  
When the moon reflects its majesty  
Gives along a radiance and peace

Each thing tells us a new story  
Nature has its awesome grace  
It brings hopes and light to life  
How wonderful is God's creation!

Allen F. McNair

**The Seeds of Change**

Daily, we plant the seeds of change  
With the experience of our lives,  
.We nurture growing plants of life.  
Each plant grows into blooms of color.

We experience the reds of passion.  
Blossoms of blue demonstrate calmness.  
Our different flowers reflect various patterns  
Of our living behavior and our character.

The height of each plant's luxurious growth  
Reflects the evolution of our separate qualities.  
The garden of our wisdom is vibrant and full,  
Fertilized by both our successes and failures.

Life's varied and beautiful bouquet is fragrant with  
A wondrous perfume of continued development.  
Both the pain of failure and the joy of success  
Are broadcast within and without the floral garden.

At just the right time, we begin the harvest  
Of our growing plants to appreciate, giving  
Thanks for our lessons from the beautiful  
Garden that we have nurtured and planted.

Roses, violets, lilacs, tulips, and forget-me-nots  
Fill vases which represent floral bunches of growth,  
Precious lessons learned, and accumulated wisdom,  
They enrich our journey of life and our recovery.



## Rachel Rock

### Date Driving

Driving the backroads of a small Midwest town is something stitched on the hearts of its inhabitants from birth. Driving without destination in any other portion of the US is either carsick inducing, too expensive, or too confusing. Saying “Yeah, we went for a drive,” as a date activity in other parts of America would result in varying responses of confusion. So, thank you, Articles of Confederation, for the Land Ordinance of 1785 and the resulting gridlock of roads that makes Midwest travel simple.

A Midwest inductee, I had never been exposed to the “driving date” until I met my partner. The date in mention seems to be a warmly received option amongst all age groups of the community, but the high school couples really latch onto the concept. A gallon of gas is cheaper than the cost of a school lunch, and two could easily share a 55 oz Speedy Freeze. A high school couple could go on a date for four bucks.

The virus pandemic sweeping the country did not miss the field-filled states. Quarantine demands all non-essential businesses to temporarily shut down to help ease the spread of the virus. Nail salons, spas, tanning beds, put-put golf, movie theaters,

bars, bowling, dine-in restaurants; no exceptions are made. Public presence must dissipate until the proverbial curve is flattened.

With gas the same price as a packet of gum, date driving has never been a better idea. Coasting down backroads battered by farm equipment has never been more romantic, and that statement is meant in earnest. The Midwest may have the most brutal weather in the country, but, as retribution, we were gifted with the country's most breathtaking sunrises and sunsets. The watercolor palette of yellows, oranges, pinks, reds, and purples always seems to have spilled just as its creator was making its first stroke with a brush.

Normally, it's also common for couples to look for roadside vegetable stands during their drive, but with current conditions, just looking at the sky and inhaling soothing breaths filled with corn dust and wildflower pollen is its own fulfillment. The lack of other cars (even by small town standards) is noted, and it's understandable to reach over and grab the hand of your loved one. Grimace at their terrible puns; smile at the wind braiding knots into their overgrown hair; and laugh, just laugh, as the car drives by a freshly tilled field, and the overpowering stench of cow manure fills your nose.

## Sunayana Datta Yang

### To Ben Franklin with Admiration

United States dollar bills portray mostly the faces of the presidents. There are only couple of exceptions; one is the face of on the highest denomination bill that is in circulation, the hundred dollar bill and the face is of a statesman, an inventor, an entrepreneur, it is the face of Dr. Benjamin Franklin.

Benjamin Franklin was born more than 300 years ago, on Jan 17, 1706, in the city of Boston. He was the youngest son of seventeen children. For want of money he did not have any formal schooling except for two years, from age eight to ten. He was remarkable in learning and skipped two years ahead of his class in the first year alone. His father was in the trade making soaps and candles and wanted young Ben to take up the same trade. But this was not in young Ben's liking. After going through other trade options in the town, Ben Franklin started as an apprentice, at the age of twelve, to one of his older brother who was setting up a printing press. In those days, apprenticeship was a binding contract, a master and servant relationship, until the apprentice became an adult at the age of twenty-one.

Franklin learned the trade with great skill and efficiency and greatly enjoyed the access to books that he read most of the night. He also started writing, first poetry and ballads, and then moved more towards prose and essays. He started forming pros and cons of issues and debated with friends. His brother's print shop started a newspaper called New England Courant that was the second newspaper in the country. Some intellectual minds were then coming into the print shop to publish in the paper. On some issues Ben Franklin started to write in a nick name that got much praise from his brother's writing friends who tried to guess the identity of the author and came up with names of people in high stature. This filled young Ben Franklin with hope for his ability.

When he was sixteen years of age, he came across a book by Thomas Tyron, *The way to Health, Wealth and Happiness*, which recommended a

vegetarian diet. He wanted to experiment with it. As the employer his brother was responsible for the food and lodging for him and the other apprentices. Franklin's decision soon caused great deal of disturbance and embarrassment for his brother at meal times. To avoid this Franklin proposed to prepare his own meal if his brother paid him the amount that was being paid to the boarding house for his food. His brother gladly accepted the proposal. Franklin found that he could prepare his simple meals of boiled potatoes, rice and some casseroles for half the money and used the other half of the funds to buy more books. He found another advantage that stemmed because of this diet as his brother and other apprentices would leave the print shop for their meals, Franklin would finish his light meal in no time and then use their time away from the shop to continue with his studies and self-improvement exercises. He explained that the quietness of the shop combined with the vigor of the diet gave him a focus and retention of his learning that he did not experience before. From this experience he learned the great benefits of eating in moderation and drinking water instead of alcohol with meals. He did not remain lifelong vegetarian but would practice it from time to time.

At about the same time, Ben Franklin's brother got into trouble for publishing anti-authority opinions in his newspaper. He had to serve in jail for a few months and was ordered that he could not publish the paper any more. To get around this problem, he released Ben Franklin from his indenture so that Ben can continue to run the paper. But in private he signed another indenture to keep Ben as his apprentice until Ben is twenty one. Ben Franklin was however tired of his brother's mistreatment and decided to leave his apprenticeship. He however did not get his family's blessing on this and none of the other businesses in Boston would employ him since he was a minor and was indentured. Benjamin Franklin left Boston at the age of seventeen to New York in search for a job. However the only printer in New York did not have

room for him but the owner liked Ben and advised him to go to Philadelphia where there may be some opportunity.

With much trial and tribulations Ben Franklin got himself a job at a new print shop in Philadelphia. He showed his competence in no time and continued his reading and writing and cultivated friends to discuss and critique their writings. The patrons of the print shop and other influential people took notice of him from this early age and encouraged him to go to England to further his learning of the trade. At that time all the printing equipment and print sets used to come from England. At the age of nineteen he left for England to learn the printing business and make connections with bookstores there with the hope that he will someday own his own print shop. He easily found employment in a well-known print shop in England and continued to excel there as well. He made friends with a second hand book store owner and could read and return as many books as he wished. By means of print setting of new books, he became very familiar with the content and sometimes wrote argumentative pamphlets which brought him to notice by many learned people and he got invited to their homes. He thus made many lifelong connections in England.

While working in the print shop in England he found that the workers drank beer all day, a pint before breakfast, a pint with breakfast, a pint before lunch, a pint with lunch, a pint before dinner and more with dinner, while he only drank water through the day. The print shop was large with 50 workers and the alehouse nearby had permanent worker just to serve the print shop. This kept the workers inefficient and in debt much of the time. Every worker had to pay a certain amount to fund the beer supply. Franklin quickly negotiated and changed this long standing rule there without making any enemies and got out of this oppressive bind.

Franklin was a free thinker from early on in his life. He was born and raised in a religious Presbyterian family. On religious worship he writes "I found some of the doctrines unintelligible. The doctrines I did understand I doubted so much that I stopped attending church service on Sundays very early in my life. Sunday became my study day. I was never without some religious principles, however. I believed that our greatest service to God was doing good to other people. I also believed that

our souls were immortal and that all crime would be punished and virtues rewarded, either on earth or in the afterlife." He went to great lengths to not speak ill of someone else's religion and always donated to Presbyterian Church as well as to others whenever asked.

He created a list of 13 moral virtues that he practiced to perfection.

1. Self-control: avoid dullness from over eating and over drinking.
2. Silence: say only things that benefit others and yourself. Avoid all petty conversation.
3. Order: Keep all your possessions in their proper place. Give each part of your business the necessary time.
4. Determination: Commit to what you need to do and always carry out your commitments.
5. Economy: Do not waste your money. Let your only expenses be doing good to others or yourself.
6. Productivity: Do not waste your time. Spend your time in useful matters and refrain from unnecessary activities.
7. Truthfulness: Avoid lies that harm others. Think without prejudice and if you speak, speak accordingly.
8. Justice: Avoid injuring others with your actions.
9. Moderation: Avoid extremes. This applies specially to the holding of grudges against those who have harmed you.
10. Cleanliness: Keep body, clothes, and living spaces clean at all times.
11. Peace: Do not be overtaken by small irritants or by large trouble that are sure to come.
12. Chastity: Indulge sexual appetites for the shake of health and offspring only. Never indulge to the point of dullness or weakness. Never injure your own or another's peace or reputation.
13. Humility: Imitate Jesus and Socrates.



He followed these rules with rigor. To achieve order and productivity he organized each day, rising at 5am and retiring at 1am at night.

At the age of twenty one he started a club with most of his educated friends for mutual self-improvement, called the Junto. Each week the members discussed and debated topic on moral, politics or science that was assigned the previous week. It was to be done with the sincere spirit of inquiry. Anyone ruining the dialogue by escalating debate or being habitually contradicting or firm in his position had to pay a small fine. This club lasted for several decades and was the best place to discuss philosophy, politics or morality in Pennsylvania at that time. The rules of civility contributed to better conversation.

At about the same time Franklin ended his old employment and started a print shop of his own with a partner. Franklin had the knowledge and customer connection whereas the partnership put in the necessary capital. The print shop was located in market Street in Philadelphia. Three years later he bought up the partnership with other financing and became the sole proprietor of the print shop. Shortly after that Franklin purchased the publication of a newspaper called The Pennsylvania Gazette, that was established a year earlier by his previous employer. He improved the quality of articles and printing of this newspaper. He made it a rule to not publish any articles of personal scandals in his newspaper.

At the age of 25, he and his friends in Junto helped in founding the first public library in Philadelphia. At that time there were no book stores in Philadelphia and in most of the colonial cities. Buying books to read was difficult. Each of the 12 members of Junto had their own collection that put together for others to borrow with strict rules for return and steep fines for any losses. With success with initial concept and results, they soon expanded it to include 50 more people in the city who could pay some amount of initial fees and a yearly due. Books were imported from England. The library proved to be a huge success and was soon imitated in many other places in the colonies. Years later the library will run from endowment alone from wealthy patrons and no fees were necessary.

In 1733 at the age of 27 Ben Franklin started learning French and soon mastered it to read books

written in the language. With this success, he then tackled Italian, Spanish and Latin and mastered them as well.

At the age of 30 Franklin was chosen to be the Clerk of the General Assembly in Philadelphia. This was his first public office role and he served this post for two years. After that he was asked to serve as the Deputy Post Master of Philadelphia. He continued to operate his printing business through this time. He was always looking for ways to better the living of the community. To that end he proposed a paper in Junto on how to improve the community night watch by making the property owners pay a tax according to the value of the property rather than a flat charge that was unfair to many. He also proposed to have proper guards rather than the often drunk night watch. This was widely accepted in Junto and was then propagated for discussion elsewhere in the city. Soon the change proposed was made into a reality. He was also instrumental in forming the first Fire Company in Philadelphia. Once again, he proposed a paper in Junto on what caused fire and how to prevent them. This was very well received. He then published an article in his newspaper. The first Fire Company was soon born, known as the Union Fire Company. In the same fashion and spirit, he was instrumental in proposing and establishing a militia to protect the colony. He also established a public hospital and an institution for higher education, the University of Pennsylvania.

By the age of 40 he retired from active work in his print shop and gave the daily duties to a capable partner. He started to spend time in scientific areas alongside his public work. In 1742 he invented a stove that heated the room better than a fire place. This stove sold very well in the market but he did not take a patent despite advice from many, believing in giving back for public good. He championed for paving the city streets and lighting the city. The lamps were bought from London. However, the design was so poor that soot will accumulate within the globe and diminish the light and burn it out completely before midnight. To add to the problem, cleaning of the globe will often break the glass. Franklin worked on the improving the design drastically so that the lamps burned bright all night, cleaning was easy and the smoke did not irritate the eyes. He believed that small improvements in daily condition makes life happier.

It will be hard to believe that Franklin started delving into experimenting with electricity at the age of 40. At that time the Library Company of Philadelphia received a gift from Mr. Peter Collins - a fellow of British Royal Society, that included a glass tube along with some instruction for conducting electrical experiments. Franklin performed these experiments and continued reading on the subject and created his own devices from a local glass blower. Soon his whole house was full of various glass tubes and electrical experiments. He wrote up an account of his experiments and sent it to Mr. Peter Collins who presented them to the British Royal Society. Franklin also wrote a paper detailing his thoughts on how lighting and electricity are the same thing. This was met with much ridicule in the British Royal Society but gained acceptance in France. However, he continued his work and the body of his work was gradually accepted in Europe and was translated into Italian, German and Latin. He proposed several experiments to draw electricity from clouds and one was very successfully performed using pointed metal rods and his work suddenly gained popularity. He himself at about the same time performed his one lightening experiment in Philadelphia using a kite. The British Royal Society now accepted his work and voted him a member of the Society as well honored him with the highest honor of Society, the gold medal of Sir Godfrey Copley in the 1753. He also received honorary Master of Arts from both Harvard and Yale

for his work on electricity. Some of his other inventions are Swim Fins, a musical instrument called glass Harmonica and the bifocal glasses.

In 1759 Franklin received a Doctor of Laws degree from the Univ. of St Andrews in Scotland for his writings on Electricity. He was referred as Dr. Franklin thereafter. In 1762 he received a Doctor of Civil Laws degree from Oxford as well.

In his public service he served as the clerk of the General Assembly in Philadelphia, a member of the General Assembly in Philadelphia, Postmaster General, and as a Colonel in Pennsylvania Militia. From 1754 he actively worked on uniting the Colonies for independence. Much of the contribution to the Declaration of Independence was his. He served as the ambassador to France after the independence. His last public service office was as the president of the Executive Council of Pennsylvania. One of his last public service acts was writing an anti-slavery treatise in 1789. He died in 1790 at the age of 84.

Dr. Benjamin Franklin was a polymath. His accomplishments and contributions as an entrepreneur, a business man, a civic leader, scientist, a law maker, a diplomat, and as one of the most important founding fathers of America is simply hard to imagine. His moral character supported his every action. He has inspired many after him and continuing to do so today.

## Moulinath Goswami

### The Newborn

(Translated into English by Moulinath Goswami, from the original short story নবজাতক by Amar Mitra)

Not many days to touch fifty. Though three years have been suppressed in service records, the body does not stand still at one place. Gopen's hairs have whitened a lot. Six carious teeth had to be extracted from both the jaws. Eyes blurry without glasses. Slight deviation in diet induces acid reflux and heartburn at midnight. Lord, why did you give age? It's at this age that Gopen has become a father for the first time. He had been to many places for this - aboard the train, in a van rickshaw... prayed before the sages, pledged resolutions before the Gods, surrendered body and soul before the Pirs. Nothing worked. He was gaining in age. The tenure of his service was shrinking. The scope of beholding the face of his newborn, in the prime of his life, was fast dwindling. It was then that after many visits to various doctors and upon receipt of divine charms from Fakirs, that Gopen's wife became pregnant. That child has finally taken birth, day before yesterday, in the sweltering humidity of August, in a hospital. Gopen is beside himself with joy. He spent the whole of yesterday telling the news to everyone, bought medicines, scurried after the doctors and nurses. Both the mother and the child will be staying in the hospital for a few days more. Now Gopen has gone shopping.

The paraphernalia list is lengthy. His brother's wife had prepared the list of items to be bought. The nurse lady had added a few more. Keeping his brother posted at the hospital, Gopen has been roaming all morning, in this August heat, waiting for the shops to open. When will the shops open? Is it the day off, or a general strike? It's already late in the day, thirty minutes past seven. Done with vending newspapers for the day, the hawker lad returns home, ringing his bicycle. Why aren't they opening yet! Gopen paces frantically on the footpath. All the shutters are still down. The sidewalk is desolate. Whipping out the list from his pocket, Gopen goes through the items - towel, oilcloth, mattress and pillow (along with a cover), broad polythene sheet, a bathtub, thermos, baby powder, baby oil, soap, a bowl, feeding spoon, a small mosquito net, clothes

for the baby, baby food, two types of medicines. Postnatal essentials. Nagen, Gopen's brother, is a father of two sons. His wife is a smart woman. She had loquaciously reminded Gopen, "Get a baby cot if you can, and a pram too; these are essential, and a red stole too for the baby for placing it by the newborn's head on the sixth day along with a pen, paper and a silver coin. Providence shall be writing the child's destiny that night with these..."

The shops have begun to open now. Gopen watches, as a middle aged vendor, pushing thirty, opens his shop by the sidewalk and lights an incense stick. Gopen rushes towards him, remembering his wife telling him to buy a variety of towels, especially those with rubber sheets pasted on them. The mother would wrap the baby with these and carry the baby for a walk. "Do you sell towels?" Sensing an elaborate purchase from Gopen, the vendor cut short his in-shop morning rituals and asked - "Need them for a baby?"

"Yes." Gopen rubbed his hands tentatively.

"A boy or a girl?" asked the man, briskly unfolding the bundle of towels. Upon learning the baby to be a girl, the man appeared to halt for a moment, and then asked, "Second issue?"

"Oh no. First child."

"Great! The firstborn girl is Goddess Lakshmi. How much does she weigh?"

"That's fantastic, very nice," remarked the man heartily as Gopen revealed the weight of the baby. "Now you'll see the fun, when she'll stare at you, chuckle, roll over... oh so lovely! Does she have hair on her head?"

"Yes of course, thick dark hair. Got her mother's fair complexion. Eloquent eyes, always fiddling with her hands and feet," Gopen started recounting his daughter's twiddlings.

The shopkeeper smiled. "Ditto for me, except mine is a boy. How pampered he was when he took birth! He was the only male born in the whole



hospital that week. How many towels do you need sir? Hold on, let me choose them for you. Don't you worry a wee bit. Your wife will love them."

Gopen froze in astonishment during payment. A hundred and twenty bucks for four tiny towels! "Isn't that too expensive!?"

The shopkeeper smiled. "You should not haggle on such an occasion sir. Everyone has expectations of one's own at this blessed hour. Go back home, you'll find people asking for sweets, tips, clothes. I've quoted the correct price. Okay, give me five bucks less, though it's not a good practice to bargain over a baby's essentials," the man chided.

Gopen stared at the shopkeeper, dumbfounded. While packing the towels the man remarked, "Today's opening sale has been blessed by you, I mean, by your daughter. Let's see how good an omen she is and what sales do I make throughout the day."

"How much profit you're going to make, you mean to say?" retorted Gopen while fishing out the money from his pocket.

"Te he!" The shopkeeper grinned sheepishly, "It's all for some profit sir that I have opened shop. But listen, make sure the child gets enough sun. It'll keep the baby away from cough and cold. What is more pure these days than sunlight? The air and water has already been polluted. Don't you read in the newspapers, how rampant the pollution is!"

Stepping out of the shop, carrying the packet in a bag, Gopen could very well realize that he has been duped. Only last month did he buy a big towel for twenty two rupees. The shopkeeper has given him a tight smack across the face. Behind him, he could hear the man, reminding Gopen at the top of his voice... "Sir, make sure you massage her with mustard oil! As they say... oil and water enhances life...."

Gopen caught sight of big plastic bathtubs dangling from inside a shop by the street. He drew closer to the shop with long strides. Cautiously he asked for the price of a red one. Flinging the beedi that he was smoking, the old shopkeeper inquired - "Why do you need it? For what purpose? I mean what will you do with it?"

"For my baby," Gopen had to disclose.

The man gave a toothless smile. Measuring Gopen with his almost yellow eyes he said - "That's it then, the best of the lot, the number one stuff is all that you need. It's a baby after all. When did it happen? Boy or girl?"

A frown appeared on the man's face as he learnt from Gopen that the baby was a girl. He mumbled to himself- "They say a girl is good. Brings wealth. Is she your first?"

"Oh yes," Gopen smiled.

"My firstborn is a daughter. Her husband beat her and kicked her out of the house. She too has two daughters. All are sitting on my neck. Don't know what to do!" the old man muttered. "Here, take this and give me eighty bucks. It's true that I won five hundred in a lottery soon after my daughter's birth. Started my own business of cut-piece cloth with that money. But suffered huge losses. Good or bad, is difficult to judge. Eighty bucks please."

Gopen realized yet again that this man was taking him for a ride, plain and simple. This bathtub would not cost more than fifty. Nagen had warned him about the price. The man put away the tub no sooner than Gopen uttered fifty. "You don't bargain over anything concerning a baby."

"Not even if you are overcharged?"

"No. A baby is a baby. You'll give as I ask for, out of your benevolent pocket. Give me eighty. Seventy for its actual cost, and ten for condiments in the name of your child."

Gopen felt deceived yet again. And he was fully aware of the fact that the man cheated him overtly. To hell with it! One shouldn't feel bad on such an auspicious hour. The man was doling out suggestions to him at the top of his voice. Gopen smiled and entered a bedding store on the other side of the tram line. The shop had just opened. The incense sticks have just been lighted. The aroma was intense. These sticks are usually stuck onto bouquets that are kept by the corpses--- Gopen reprimanded himself at such a bad thought. This is not the right time to think of death. Hearing about a mattress, the middle-aged shopkeeper asked, "How many will sleep on it? Won't you be needing bolsters?"

"Yeah, bolsters have to be there on either side. The one who'll sleep in between is seventy two hours old."

The man laughed out loudly. "I get it now! Everything's clear to me. A mustard seed pillow beneath the head, two bolsters, a mattress, a rubber cloth, a bed sheet... you must get good ones, the baby has so long been in the air, earth and sky..."

"No. Why would that be? The baby was in the mother's womb," said Gopen. He was beginning to like the fellow.

The man frantically shook his head in denial. "No sir, they all dwell among earth, water, sky, trees and crops. That's where they come to their parents from. Jiten Haldar, a Primary School teacher, residing in our locality, has written a book on this. You must buy it. You can have it from Mahakali Bhandar in Tala. Listen sir, the baby has so long been swimming in the water inside its mother's womb. So it's a must that you lay the child on some soft place-mother's lap or bed. The baby must not realize that it has come, out of the womb, to some other place."

"Oh no! Why would that be! One must make her realize."

The man shook his head again in denial. "No sir, she'll realize on her own. Our job is to provide her with a first class bed. Do you know where she has arrived?"

"Where else but Earth!" Gopen appears stumped.

"Is this Earth a decent place?"

Gopen preferred his silence. He could go on and on, but then the repartee would never end. What's the use! The man was busy packing the mattresses, pillows and all the stuff, and was talking to himself as if in a soliloquy - "Too many people, too much disease, the world feels like the congregation of Gangasagar. You must take the baby to the Child-Specialist, give vaccines and injections from time to time as advised. It's dangerous to survive without vaccination. See my vaccine-scar..." The man spread his arm to show the mark- big round black spots, just like those of Gopen. "There used to be only one during our time, now there are so many of these, different types of vaccines and injections," the man whispered. Indeed it's crowded all around, like the Gangasagar Fair, surmised Gopen. The air and earth is infested with viruses, always on the prowl, yearning to dig their teeth in tender flesh.

"How much do I have to pay? Haven't checked the prices," said Gopen.

The man sprawled his legs and sat. Lit a beedi. Didn't answer to Gopen. Keeping his eyes closed the man muttered to himself - "You'll never enter a fair without taking injections. High chances of diarrhoea and cholera. Such a beautiful place by the ocean, but full of germs and viruses. Even the clean air, clear sunlight and the waves of the ocean cannot keep the microbes at bay. So many different people, thieves, crooks, patients, lecherous men - one needs to be very alert sir. Wonder, what has become of this planet! See the cloud of smoke... the lungs are going to rot."

"But aren't we surviving?" Gopen replied.

"Oh yes, we are. Just because we are humans, we are surviving," the man replied with his eyes closed.

"How much do I pay?" Gopen asked.

"Whatever you feel like," the man answered with a vacant air in his voice.

Gopen was taken aback at his unexpected reply. "What do you mean by whatever! What is the cost?"

"Give as you wish. Where is the child, in hospital or nursing home?"

"In R.G.Kar Hospital. Will be released after a few days," answered Gopen.

"Who does the baby look like? Resembles you or your wife, I mean father or mother?"

"That's not yet very clear," said Gopen.

The man suddenly sprang up on his feet and shouted to someone, "Hey Habul, keep an eye on the shop for a while. I'll return soon."

"Where are you off to? Take the money," said a startled Gopen.

"I will. I will. First let me go with you and see with my own eyes, who has arrived on this earth. Could be a prophet, who knows! I don't have any children though. Only me and my wife. Allow me to behold."

"What's your name?" inquired Gopen.

"I'm Nirapada Das. You have any reservations against me seeing the child?"

"No. Not at all. The truth is that I've been duped while buying towels and tumblers for the baby."

The man smiled in assurance. "So what! There's joy in getting duped. All in the baby's name. There's joy in everything you do. Let's go."

"The money?"

"Give whatever you like to. Habul will take care of it. Even if I lose fifty bucks, Habul will extract five hundred from someone else. Don't you worry."

Gopen started walking with Nirapada in tow. The man had volunteered to get a thermos, baby cream, baby oil, powder, etc. for Gopen. They both boarded a rickshaw. The man kept on yapping, "Sir, this is going to be fun."

"What fun?"

"You'll realise your own self, growing and getting bigger day by day."

"You know so much!"

"There's not much to know. Close your eyes - you'll find yourself crying, smiling, ears taking shape, gaining in eyesight, you're looking at the birds, gazing at the sky through the window, beginning to crawl, standing up on your own feet... never harbour ill feelings towards those who have conned you. Whatever they have done, there was no malice after all."

The rickshaw was moving laboriously through the humid heat of August. The sun was intense a few moments back. Now there was a cool breeze blowing and clouds casting a shadow atop the hood of the rickshaw. Gopen was feeling comfortable. He abruptly asked the other fellow, "You know so much about babies, hope you are not lying about not having a baby."

"No. Not a baby anymore, but a hulk. I no longer see myself in him. He's turned into a swine."

"Don't say that. He's your son, after all."

"I no longer feel that way. He's like someone who has broken into my house. Heartless trespasser, always trying to amass, always onto theft, swindling, spoiling women. A master of all these. Not a man from this planet. I stopped growing over the years, but he has outgrown himself, all alone.... Forget

these private family affairs. Let me see your child. He'll definitely be a great person. I've seen in my dreams last night."

"What dream?" a surprised Gopen asked himself. It felt strange that Nirapada Das, a person whom he didn't know till a few hours ago, would dream of a child being born... to Gopen, in a crowded dirty dingy hospital! Gopen was so tired last night that he fell fast asleep. Nirapada said that he has seen a radiant light in his dream. The sky was flooded with a soft yellow light. Someone great must be coming, he felt. It's been quite long until someone special arrived. The man had been pondering over his dream when Gopen arrived, as his first customer for the day, and delivered the news to him. "You are the father of a great person." Shivers ran down Gopen's spine. The rickshaw kept wobbling as it negotiated the potholes and craters on the road. The road smelled of filth on account of garbage dumped on either side. Children, women and dogs were foraging in the rotting heap. It's amidst all this that Gopen's child has taken birth. And a stranger is on his way to see the newborn. Gopen is his companion. It's from Nirapada that Gopen has learnt about the birth of the Special One. They are on their way, following the clouds, to see the baby born in the stable. There's the cloud, above the hospital. The cloud is their lodestar, because stars cannot be seen during the day. All the pieces are falling in place. But Gopen told the man wryly, "Things are not the same Mr. Nirapada... mine is a daughter."

Nirapada laughed out loudly from within the rickshaw. "They will never be the same. Is everything like it was before? This is the human world, so nothing is comparable. And we are no holy men either, on a journey to witness Christ. The child will be similar to him, one of its own kind, unique, completely new, having no resemblance to anyone."

The rickshaw entered the hospital premises. They could see Nagen and his wife standing outside with all the anxiety of the world written on their faces. Nagen's wife was holding the baby in her arms. A tense Nagen came running to Gopen and exclaimed, "Brother, last night two newborn babies have expired. The hospital has handed over your baby to her mother. They'll be released today. It's hepatitis everywhere, the water is infected. Alarming situation. We need to save the baby."



“The survival has begun then,” exclaimed Nirapada Das. “Let me bless the baby with the linen. This was the Light I saw in my dream... exactly like this.”

What light! Gopen appears to rummage for enlightenment in the darkness, like a blind man. Nirapada came and stood before Gopen,

“Congratulations dear! You are her father. You'll become history one day.”

The child was sleeping. With bleared watery eyes Gopen saw....a shower of flowers cascading down over Nirapada's head. All windows of the hospital have opened up. Eager eyes were staring at them from the top.

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### Literary session on poetry at centre for story, Perth



*From left Robert Wood, Srijato and Kirshna Sen*

## Maureen Peifer

### Mildred Alecuecus

It's gray and opaque outside, dull winter light struggling through the dining room windows like it's real work to make you think it's daytime. We have to play quietly cuz Dad's asleep in our bedroom, just home from his all night shift at J&J Lithography. Mom's in the living room with the radio on really low- Arthur Godfrey or something – reading the Tribune and sipping her first Pepsi of the day.

“Well,” says Marty “how about the Maureen Marty and Ginny game?”

“Yeah,” Ginny says excitedly, “yeah, we're on a pirate ship. I'll be the first mate, you're the captain, Marty, and Mo can be the prisoner we just captured from the evil pirate Blackbeard whose ship we just sank.”

Marty grabs one of dad's hats and a bandana and ties it over his eye while Ginny gets the swords and daggers from the toy box in the corner of the dining room. I start pulling the blankets and sheets off Uncle Connie's bed because the dining room is also Uncle Connie's bedroom. He's in college at Loyola and tends bar at night, so he's really not there much. We drape everything over the table. Ginny ties a sheet corner to the chandelier to make a sail and another corner to the top hinge of the built-in china cabinet.

“Careful,” I hiss quietly,” remember what happened last time when you jumped up there and broke the turkey platter.”

“Yeah, yeah,” Ginny says impatiently.

“Now,” Marty grins pulling out some string from the roll in the kitchen drawer by the stove, “We're going to have to tie you up.”

“What!” I groan,” why do I always have to be the prisoner or a princess or some dumb thing?”

“Cuz you like all that dumb girl stuff,” Ginny says. “You never want to climb and fight and stuff like we do.”

“Okay,” I cave in,”A-GAIN! FINE!!!” I crawl through the opening in between dad's old army

blanket and the white wool striped Pendleton that drape the table and sit against the the table pedestal. “Can't you just pretend I'm tied up?”

“No, that's no fun!” Ginny asserts. “We'll just tie your body to the table and leave your hands-free. Okay?” Marty adds agreeably.

“Oh, you're such a chump!” Ginny again,”What if she escapes? she's Blackbeard's co-captain so she hates us.”

Marty wraps the string around and around me and cuts it off with his new pocket knife, a Christmas gift from Uncle Connie. “Fine,” I think. “I'll just hang out here with Mildred since I don't have a book and it's too dark to read down here anyway. As Ginny and Marty screw around above deck, I drift into conversation with my friend Mildred Alecuecus. Mildred and I have known each other since I was two. She just showed up in our bedroom one day sitting on the edge of my bed while Marty slept in his crib - Ginny wasn't even around yet. She still doesn't know about Mildred. Marty knows about her, but he doesn't see her like I do.

She lives in the wardrobe side of our dresser - it's roomier there and she likes to hide between the dresses and sweaters. She's got braids like me, but hers are bright red with plaid bows. She usually wears overalls and a plaid shirt, hardly ever shoes, sometimes socks. Books are her favorite - just like me and she's got a magic doorway in the back of the wardrobe that lets her into the children's section of the big Library downtown on Randolph Street. I saw it once when Dad took us downtown to buy new winter coats and hats. We went to lunch at the Top of the Rock in the Prudential Building, the tallest place in Chicago. I begged to stop at the library cuz it was right on the way. It was so cool, all those beautiful tile designs and the Tiffany domes and the huge marble staircases. The children's room was like heaven. and Mildred could go there anytime she wanted - lucky!

“So,” Mildred says,” what you been reading lately?”

"Hans Brinker and the Silver Skates, it's really cool. Did you know they would skate on the frozen canals in Holland in winter and go all over the place?"

"Yeah, I think I heard that," Mildred says dreamily. "Imagine living someplace that has canals instead of streets like Broadway or Clark Street. It must be so fun. What about summer, do they swim around?"

"No," I say knowledgeably, I read about it in my Peter Martin geography book at school. There are lots of barges and boats and bridges and regular streets too. People walk a lot and take buses and I heard they ride bikes too. Sounds like a really cool place."

"So, back to Hans - does he do great stuff?"

"Yeah, he tries to win this prize skating so he can help his family. I'm not finished yet so I don't know how it ends."

"Bet he wins," Mildred nods smugly. "What's with your sister? Why does she always want to tie you up?"

"I don't know - she loves to have adventures in be in charge. She thinks I'm too bossy - I heard her tell Marty - and too nice. She hates dolls and girl stuff - paper dolls, dresses, tea parties.

She'd rather play with Marty - soldiers, Lincoln Logs, and climb around. She loves to climb and run and stuff."

"No dolls at all?" Mildred asks.

"Well, not really, just Charlie."

"Who's Charlie?"

"Oh, Charlie Peifer, her stuffed chimpanzee. "He's got white plastic shoes and yellow overalls with suspenders. She does stuff like hang him from the curtain rod or tie him to the bedpost.

She says he's tough and loves to escape from any knot she can tie. Last week she snuck Dad's razor and shaving cream into our closet and shaved him - his hair is really short now."

"Did she get in trouble?"

"Yeah, Dad was mad cuz she clogged up his new Gillette. She had to dry all the dishes for two weeks instead of trading days with me like we usually do. She thought his hair would grow back, she told me later."

"What a dope," said Mildred. "Wanna hear a good story?"

"Yes please," I smiled.

"Well, I heard the librarian down at the library tell this one the other day," she begins. "It's all about a girl called Madeline and she lives in Paris."

"I'd love to go there," I whisper.

"Me too - anyway - yeah, so these girls live at an orphanage with their governess Madame somebody or another and travel all over Paris in matching coats and sailor hats in perfect lines of 2, having such adventures."

"Hey you," Ginny sticks her head in, "get out here and help us hoist the sails and swab the deck!"

How can I when I'm tied up?

"Oh yeah," she grins. "Captain Marty, free the hostage!" she yells roughly. Just then Mom comes in to say it's time for lunch - would we like to eat on board or row over to the kitchen, scuse me, port to dine? "On board," Ginny and Marty say instantly.

Portside for me, I'm sick of being below deck. "See you later, Mildred. Hey," I whisper. "I want to hear more about Madeline."

She winks and vanishes.



# Indrajit Sengupta

## Another Baise Sravan in Tagore's Life

*"Those days I once spent in tears  
Have cast their shadows upon the skies filled with rain.  
The tune that died out that day, losing its voice in unending sorrow  
Today in the breezes from the east, alas once again" ...*

*"Aamar je din bhese gechhe chokhero jale  
Taari chhaaya porechhe shraabonogagonotale.  
Se din je raagini gechhe theme, atolo birohe neme gechhe theme,  
Aaji pubero haaway haaway haay haay re  
Knaapono bhese chole" ....*

On 7th August, 1941, (In Bengali Calendar, the date was 22nd Sravan) his condition had hit rock bottom and people started gathering in the premises of Jorasanko.

Slowly oxygen tubes were removed and Tagore's spirit freed itself from the shackles of a human body, at 12:13 pm. The news spread like wildfire and thousands of people rushed to Jorasanko to pay their last respects. The deafening silence of the crowd was broken by the blowing of conch shells. Flowers carpeted his path to the crematorium on the banks of the Ganges.

It was 22nd Sravan (in Bengali Calendar) when Tagore departed from the earth; we will never forget that day. But this discussion is not related to the death of Rabindranath Tagore.

Another One 22nd Sravan (it is also called Baise Sravan) had come in Tagore's Life. In his life he had to encounter the death of many loved ones, one after another — his sister-in-law Kadambari Devi, who was a dear friend and a significant influence, his wife Mrinalini Devi, his daughters Madhurilata and Renuka, and his son, Shamindranath. Tagore immersed himself into writing to forget everything.

Tagore returned back from Russia before Thirtieth Century. After two years he travelled to Paris. The big function of Seventieth Anniversary Celebration was also completed. There was no reason for him to stay depressed. But then, the Sravan came back with heavy pain of suffering, which was one of Tagore's great personal losses; the death of his only grandson Nitindranath (hereafter: Nitu) Ganguly.

Nitu was born in 1911, was the only son of Rabindranath's daughter Mira Devi (1894-1969); and Nagendranath Ganguly (1889-1954). Nitu and his sister Nandita were Rabindranath's only surviving grandchildren. Nandini his other grand daughter, had been adopted by the Poet's son Rathindranath, and his wife, Pratima Devi. Rabindranath's close emotional relationship to Nitu, and Nandita were based on the fact that they grew up close to their grandfather.

Even since his baby days Nitu had been of ill health. Possibly this was the reason that he always had been an object of special love and care. For example, William W. Pearson, a teacher of Rabindranath's school at Shantiniketan, describes the fun his pupils had with Nitu as a silent guest at their lesson:

*Pearson wrote, "Nothing gives the boys of the upper class at Shantiniketan more pleasure than to be allowed to bring to their class the grandson of the poet, a little boy of four who sits through the period quite quietly and solemnly, with only an occasional diversion, if anything interesting is happening near the tree under which the class is being held".*

In 1909 Nagendranath (together with his brother-in-law Rathindranath and Santosh Chandra Majumdar) were sent by Rabindranath to Urbana (Illinois, USA) for the study of agriculture. On his return early in 1911 Nagendranath had found employment within the Tagore family states (then administered by the Poet). But soon his irascible nature and lack of empathy for the needs of the tenants and also his handling of the institution's financial resources caused many conflicts. Although Rabindranath was constantly trying to mediate eventually Nagendranath wanted to realign his own professional future. He searched for employment at the University of Calcutta. Therefore the Poet had a word with them

on his behalf. He felt forced to do so for feeling himself responsible for the well-being of the young family, but also because the marriage originally “had been entirely his idea”. However, the strain within the marriage was constantly rising so that Mira and the children moved to Shantiniketan; periodically since 1919, and permanently at the end of the 1920s. There Nitu was enrolled at the primary school.

Nevertheless, as often as possible Nagendranath tried to take Nitu with him to Calcutta. For this reason the dispute between the parents escalated more and more. Charles F. Andrews, a friend of both the parents and also Rabindranath’s confidant, was forced to act as mediator. In a letter (February 21, 1921) he described to the Poet - then travelling in Europe - the rising emotional roller coaster for mother and son provoked by Nagendranath:

*Andrew’s wrote, “I am anxious about Khoka, If Khoka can be here, she [Mira] can have comparative relief to her own mind. But Nogen [Nagendranath] has been finding every excuse to take him away and he will try to do so after the vacation is over.”*

As Nagendranath was striving to gain a professorship of the University of Calcutta the latter demanded a higher academic qualification in the form of a doctorate. For this purpose Nagendranath accompanied by William W. Pearson and Nitu on March 19, 1923 was sailing for the United Kingdom. Just before their departure, in a letter (February 2, 1923) Rabindranath had informed Nagendranath of a hint given to him by Pearson proposing a good school for Nitu:

*Tagore wrote “Pearson informed us of a good school at Lichfield ... I think Nitu will be benefited there.”*

But obviously Nagendranath did not show any interest in Nitu’s education, his only aim was vested in getting money. So he tried to sell some manuscripts of the Poet. Unfortunately Pearson who always was wholeheartedly engaged in furthering Nitu had been fatally injured by a train accident causing his death on September 25, 1923. Then, in a letter to Nagendranath (January, 24 1923) Rabindranath made another proposal which apparently was not followed.

*Tagore wrote, “One lady of Paris came to our place at Shantiniketan. She heard about Nitu. She is willing to take the charge of his education in Paris with all necessary expenditure.”*

Having received his Ph.D. from the University of London Nagendranath together with Nitu returned to India. During his flat-hunting at Calcutta Nagendranath gave Nitu in charge of his younger brother Dhirendranath, thus preventing him from being cared by his mother Mira. Full of disappointment Rabindranath wrote (February 22, 1927) to his son-in-law:

*Tagore wrote, “I thought that you have a definite plan for educating your son Nitu and for this reason I endured silently when you have taken away Nitu from Mira only to disassociate. I don’t think Mira possesses less rights over ... Nitu, than you have per rule. But you have possess some force and no rule will be applicable there. But when you have kept Nitu without any occupation with Dhirendranath, I find this will punishing both Nitu and his mother.”*

We don’t know Nagendranath’s answer. Anyhow, sometime later Nitu returned to his mother at Shantiniketan. However, he was lacking a lot of time that otherwise could have been spent for his education, not to speak of all his emotional pressures endured during these years.

Furthermore, we have no idea of Nitu’s interest to undergo a professional training in printing. However, it may be assumed that in some way this seemed to be convenient for Rabindranath, too.

Surely it was Rabindranath’s plan for a later date to ensure the inclusion of Nitu into the whole editorial work of Visva Bharati without limiting his activity to the technical process. Therefore, on his trip to Germany in 1930 the Poet tried to find out the best places for Nitu’s education. To Mira he wrote (August 12, 1930):

*Tagore wrote, “You may not be aware for printing and publishing there is no better place than Germany. The cities of Munich and Leipzig are world famous for it [...] If he [Nitu] begins his training in Munich, he can complete it in Leipzig. He can also carry on with his general education here - so that he will become not only a printer but a well-rounded person. He will seriously learn both literature and art and the technical aspects of printing. In addition there is the great skill of publishing - he will master that”.*

As to the use of traditional Indian printing press the Poet anticipated health problems for Nitu, as he wrote to Mira in the same letter:

*Tagore wrote, “...I did not like the look of Nitu at all before I left for Europe. Everyone knows that in our climate to work in a stuffy printing press is unhealthy. Nitu does not possess a strong constitution, and at this age, when he is growing, the strain is not good for him”...*

Concerning Nitu’s expenses for cost of study and living which the Poet then estimated to come to fifty or sixty Rupees per month Rabindranath in the same letter to Mira referred to friends who had promised support:

Tagore continues, “...Such an opportunity is not available to everyone, it is possible only because of the respect that people here have for me. Moreover, there is no lack of local people willing to look after Nitu as if he were part of their own family. If you waste such a chance, you will be doing Nitu a real injustice”..

As to the best time for Nitu to depart for Germany the Poet addressed Mira further:

“...Were you to send him in September when you get this letter of mine, I could myself start him off while I am here. But if sending him so soon is simply not possible, then to wait until March would not be a bad plan. If that is what you jointly decide, then keep Nitu at Shantiniketan and let him have intensive practice in German for a few months. He does not need to learn mathematics, so he need not be anxious about that” ....

Thus, in April 1931 Nitu left for Germany. From May 9, 1931 on he was registered at the resident’s registration office of the city of Munich. But we know that Nitu in summer of 1931 had become a witness of some political riots organized by Nazi students in Munich.

In a letter to Nitu (July 31, 1931) the Poet was reasoning on the political situation in Europe seeing the rise of a danger for (personal) freedom:

“ Just as weak people struck by poverty can be gripped by epidemics, so the spread of famine in Europe is enabling Fascism and Bolshevism to get a strong hold. Both are symptoms of unhealthiness. No sane person can regard the suppression of independent thinking as something beneficial to man [...] Man’s brutality to man makes me shudder ... ”.

He instantly is begging Nitu not letting himself being involved therein:

Tagore wrote, “Whatever you do, do not become part of this cannibal party. Europe today is denying her own greatness. Our own people - Bengalis especially - if they can do nothing else, can imitate; and many of them are busy aping this European malaise. Keep yourself aloof from this contagion of mimicry. There are sure to be many of these Indians with possessed minds where you are. Don’t associate with them, carry on working on your own” ....

Probably in some earlier letter Nitu had told his grandfather of having started to learn how to play the violin because the Poet refers to this in the following part of this letter:

“...I don’t feel much enthusiasm for your learning the violin. But the cello appeals to me quite a lot. I think it is a good instrument for playing our music. But what you say is quite true - to pick up any of these instruments will take up so much time that your other studies will suffer. So better postpone it. The most important thing for your work is to improve your design skills. When you return you will be able to follow this line” ...

On March 1, 1932 Nitu registered at Academy of Graphical Arts and Book Trade at Leipzig. He enrolled for the subject of reprography. His Professor was Carl Blecher. There, his special interest had been vested “in the exact reproduction in magazines and books of images captured on the then-new color transparency film. Connected with this effort, he developed a color order system”

In the documents on the medical entrance examination Nitu is described as being of 1.80 meters in size (thin, narrow). In regard to his lung the diagnosis was “tuberculosis combined with persistent catarrh.” The medical summary states that first the future development of the catarrh had to be waited for. However, after a short time Nitu had to interrupt his studies probably caused by the progress of the tuberculosis. Practically, he could not complete his first term. In a handwritten letter in fluent German (July 13, 1932) which he sent to Blecher from his Leipzig residence, Nitu expressed this thanks for letting him have a folder of papers the content of which due to his ill health he was not able to transcribe. In this letter he further informs Blecher that on Monday next (July 18, 1932) he intended to leave Leipzig for Schömberg hoping to get a successful cure of his tuberculosis there. Referring to the prospects for his health Nitu states he was hoping to be able to report anything but good news to the professor. Now, he said, he was feeling able to travel to the Black Forest to get a “complete recovery” there. It must remain open for us to judge whether Nitu’s optimism had been congruent with his own inner estimation on his state of health.

Thus, Nitu accompanied by an Indian doctor, proceeded to Schömberg. In the meantime at home Nitu’s family had become conscious of the seriousness of his state of health. In a letter (July 2, 1932) addressed to the artist and art dealer Mukul Chandra Dey Rabindranath is reminding him to proceed with the sale of his paintings:

Tagore wrote, “The difficult time forces me to write. You know that my zamindari has stopped functioning. Even then I was not perturbed. But (now) I have received information from Germany that Nitu is affected with consumption. I have to send Mira there. Therefore, at this difficult hour, I am compelled to remind you of my due payment.”

Charles F. Andrews at this time was visiting his homeland, the United Kingdom. His biographers describe the challenge that he had to face due to the worsening of Nitu’s physical condition:



“Suddenly there came a tragic call for help. Tagore’s only grandson, Nitu, then a student in Germany, was struck down with tuberculosis. He was dying, and the parents had to be summoned. Andrews had known the boy from childhood, and the parents were his friends. During the agonising days that followed, he lifted every possible burden from the stricken father and mother.

Nitu’s death came on August 7, 1932 imminently caused by pneumonia. Via telegram Rabindranath was informed of it on August 8, 1932. At this time he was just reading in Andrews’ spiritual autobiography *What I Owe to Christ*. The latter had written to the Poet (August 7, 1932) trying to comfort him:

“...And you, my dearest Gurudev, have the very hardest lot of all - to remain behind and wait and know that suffering is going on and yet be unable to help”....

Andrews wrote on Tagore’s Language

*“...I wonder, if all my passion are in vain  
Shadowy birds as if they are.  
I wonder if anything flew across the sky”.*

*“...Eto bedon hai ki phanki.  
Ora ki sab chayaar pakhi.  
Aakash-pare kichui ki go railo na-  
Sei-je aamar nana ranger dinguli”*

It was he who read the burial service in the little Black Forest churchyard, and, indescribably weary as he was, strove to comfort those in India by long letters telling of the affection with which they had all been surrounded, and the beauty of the lad’s last resting place. Andrews’ letters to friends in England reveal the depth to which this tragedy had stirred him. The beauty of the mountains around brought no comfort then; the poignant contrast between their majestic peace and the agony he was called upon to witness and to share was well-nigh intolerable. Comfort lay elsewhere - in the Cross. Out of the suffering which had strained his faith to its foundations, came the new book, *Christ in the Silence*. The outline of it had sprung clear to his brain on a sleepless night journey through Germany as he hurried to Nitu’s side, and he knew that it had been kindled to a living power by the searching experience which had followed. When all was over he went from the Black Forest to Switzerland to call over both parents and also to give them spiritual support.

On the day he heard of Nitu’s death Rabindranath noted the following lines:

*Do not cause any shame.  
Do not hold in front  
Of everyone’s eyes  
The shock that did not strike against everyone.  
Do not hide your face in the darkness,  
Do not lock up your door with a bolt.  
Do not be stingy.” ...*

*Dukhkhher dine lekhoneke boli  
Lajja diyo na  
Sakaler noi je aghat  
Dhoro na sabar chokhe.  
Dheko na mukhe andhakare  
hçkô nâ mukh andhakârç,  
Rekho n adware agol agol diye  
Jwalo sakal ranger ujjbal bati  
Kripan hoyo na*

Two days earlier, on August 6, 1932 in premonition of Nitu’s death Rabindranath wrote a poem addressing it to Durbhagini (the woman stricken by fate). There he is imagining “his daughter

standing before him and he cannot look her in the face. Her eyes have been drained of tears and there is only a persistent question in them: Why, O Why”.

Rabindranath Tagore wrote on ‘Mata’ on 8<sup>th</sup> August, 1932,

*“...This pain is of universe,  
It is her own treasure  
Can’t keep to herself,  
Offering to the universe”.*

*“...E bedona biswadharanir  
Se je apanar dhana  
Na pare rakhite nije, nikhilere kare nibedana”.*

On August 8, 1932 the funeral service was celebrated by Andrews. Having returned to the UK after the death of Nitu he informed then British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald, an old friend of Visva- Bharati, of Nitu’s death. His letter of condolence was answered by the Poet on September 24, 1932;

*“...Nitu was young, lovable and promising. My sorrow is for him as well as for his mother who is stricken sore. However, having travelled a long path of life I have learnt the lesson of death and have received the training which enables to be reconciled to the inevitable”...*

Some weeks earlier on August 28, 1932 he had written to Mira then on her way home from Germany:

*“...I deeply loved Nitu, and when I thought of you, an intense sorrow oppressed me. But I am ashamed to trivialise my grief before the whole world. ...I must cope with my grief myself. ... I was afraid lest everyone to console me, and that is why for a few days, I forbade anyone to come near me. ... I did not want to drop any of my duties and so exhibit my feelings.*

*The night before Shami departed, I told myself with all my heart that he must have a smooth voyage into the Great Beyond - my grief must not hold him back even a little. In the same way, when I heard that Nitu had left us, for days I repeated to myself that I had no responsibility left, except to pray that he should find well-being in that Infinite to which he has gone”...*

As to his way to sublimate his grief by continuing with his work the Poet wrote:

*“...My work for everyone continues ... I must have the courage, not to grow weary, must allow no thread to be broken anywhere - I must freely accept what has happened, and I must not hesitate to welcome what is to come”...*

As always the Poet now was confronted with new challenges having tried for the first time to use the free metre scheme for his poetry. Out of this resulted his new book *Punasha (Postscript)* published in 1932 and dedicated to the memory of Nitu.

Debt: *Rabindranath Tagore: A Biography* - Kripalani, Krishna

Uday Mukherjee

## Trail from glorious past of VEDAPURI To vibrant magnificent PONDICHERY

Assisted by Urmi Chakraborty, Sydney, Australia



I was leaning leisurely at the black granite pedestal of the huge lively statue of Joseph Marquis Dupleix (Jan 1697 – Nov 1763), who became Governor General of all French establishments India in 1742.



*Statue of Joseph Marquis Dupleix*

The statue of Dupleix (2.88.m tall) was erected in July, 1870 - finally restored and relocated in 2014 at the Dupleix Park, overlooking the turquoise crystal blue sea with harmonious lines of ever dynamic white capped waves under pastel light blue sky dotted with clusters of white cottony clouds all around. I was at the corner of the sea-side promenade of the picturesque rock beach of Pondicherry at the South-eastern part of India on the Bay of Bengal.

It was about to dusk then, sun was about to set, twilight turned the eastern horizon fiery red, glaring

crimson red reflections on the sea turned the surroundings all around meditating silent.

The traffic is barred on the promenade and the visitors were very less due to deadly pandemic. Hence, long distance vision was very clear. I was drawn to the coconut tree lined promenade



*French war memorial*

straightaway to the French war memorial, elegantly made and beautifully maintained with colourful flowers and deep green meadow, dedicated to solemn reminders of the immortal valiant soldiers who during first world war laid down their lives for their beloved country – France, located just opposite



to four metre high bronze statue of Mahatma Gandhi, Father of the Nation, surrounded by eight masterly sculptured sandy granite pillars, erected such that appearing as hanging on the sea.



*Statue of Mahatma Gandhi*

Then my eyes were turned to a few reminiscent wooden logs, at the back of this statue, once erected into the sea bottom, standing still erect over the sea, struggling against the whirlwind waves – reminded the long jetty on the erstwhile sea-port as Pondicherry was then prime colonial settlement of France in India.

### Flashback

The calm atmosphere swayed me to a flashback on 4th April 1910 afternoon. A whistling steamer, erupting black smokes from its huge round chimneys, emerged out of the horizon, it was S. S. Dupleix, a passenger / cargo vessel coming from Calcutta to Colombo via Pondicherry. A tall lean gentleman with long beard was peeping through the glass window of a second-class cabin. The steamer reached the port and started anchoring beside the jetty.

### Arrival of Sri Aurobindo at Pondicherry from Chandernagore

Sri Aurobindo, a bold, strong, and confident personality with remarkably sparkling intelligent eyes, came out of the cabin along with his companion and waved hands towards a few, anxiously waiting at the jetty. He was a great freedom fighter, a fiery revolutionary writer and poet, a humanist and spiritual reformer.

Sri Aurobindo sneaked out of Chandannagar, his Inn of Tranquillity (earlier known as Chandernagore – another French colonial settlement near Calcutta) and came incognito to evade arrest by



*Sri Aurobindo*

the British, ruling India and to take exile in this erstwhile French colonial settlement. So it was a low key reception by his companions who came earlier at Pondicherry to make necessary arrangements.

On dis-embarkment, they were taken to a safe abode of a prominent citizen, Calve Chettiar. Pondicherry at Chetty Street and thereafter lived in many houses. Pondicherry became Sri Aurobindo's cave of Tapasya and a safe haven for exile for Nationalist revolutionary leaders like Subramania Bharati (Mahakavi Bharati was a Tamil writer, pioneer of modern Tamil poetry, India independence activist and social reformer), Srinivasa Chettiar, Subramania, Siva and others.

### Pondicherry – cave of Tapasya

Sri Aurobindo's first four years of stay at Pondicherry was a period of "silent yoga" in deep seclusion, entirely devoted Sadhana made a great transformation in him widening his horizon and worked for the rest of his life with a vision for human progress through spiritual evolution and the descent of a new spiritual consciousness. He attained Siddhi on 24th November 1926. His unfathomable mastery in writing gave us epics like "The Life Divine", "Savitri" and also rainbows of multilingual treatises on yoga, Divinity, evolution and human progress during his Sadhana in pilgrim of eternity in his cave of Tapasya – Pondicherry, made him immortal.

Our mind is faster than light which knows no obstacles and surprisingly most of the times not within our control.

Exactly same thing happened with me as I was taken aback when I found that I reached at Pondicherry Port again after about four years on 29th March, 1914 but it was dawn, sun was about to rise –

sky was painted with soft vermillion red colour, calm and pristine atmosphere, sweet chirping of birds all around the sparkling reddish light sapphire blue calm sea.

### Arrival of The Mother

A French ship arrived from France via Colombo – Mirra Alfassa, a lady with dreamy eyes looked to be searching her destination, a painter and artist as well as occultist, alighted from the ship. Then in the evening, happened her momentous meeting with Sri Aurobindo. At her first glance, she could recognize him as known since childhood in her meditation / vision and could immediately realize that her place and work were with him in India. She collaborated with Sri Aurobindo.



*The Mother*

Sri Aurobindo considered her to be of equal yogic stature to him and called her by the name of “The Mother”. But after a few months, First world-war broke out, she had to go back to France and finally returned to her destined work place – Pondicherry on 24th April, 1920 and was entrusted to give concrete shape to Sri Aurobindo’s vision to create a new world with enlightened society

embodying new consciousness to attain human perfection – The Supramental Manifestation was accomplished on 29 February 1956.



*Main building of Sri Aurobindo*

### Sri Aurobindo Ashram

The Aurobindo Ashram was developed as spontaneous and flowering expression to fulfil the ideals of Sri Aurobindo by The Mother in 1926 with a few members and then swelled to begin collective spiritual life. The members, called Sadhaks, aspirants of life based on spiritual realization with the ideal of the life divine here on earth and in physical existence on a change of consciousness for the next higher stage of evolution by the activities centred on this faith or truth. Each one chooses the work which includes essential services necessary for such a large community like agriculture, farms, workshops, health care facilities and international education centre, congenial to his nature, interest and skill in a spirit of selfless service and perfection keeping the aim of integral transformation and yoga.

In the main building of Ashram, under a big shady Gulmohar tree (The Mother named as Service tree), in a very peaceful atmosphere, there lies



*Samadhi of Sri Aurobindo & The Mother*



Samadhi (laid to rest) of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother around which the Ashramites, devotees offer their prayers with deep silence.

Sri Aurobindo attained Mahasamadhi on 5<sup>th</sup> December 1950, marvellous golden light with celestial perfume emanated from his physical body which was laid to rest on 9<sup>th</sup> December 1950 in a wooden casket lined with silk in the lower vault of a specially built dual chamber – 8'x4'x8' – concrete walls on all sides, as designed by The Mother in the courtyard of the Ashram main building under the "Service Tree". The Mother attained Mahasamadhi on 17<sup>th</sup> November 1973, her physical body was laid to rest on 20<sup>th</sup> November 1973 in a rosewood casket, inside lined with silver, felt and white silk satin and her symbol on the lid, was placed in the upper vault above the one in which Sri Aurobindo was laid to rest. Then after scattering of rose petals, sprinkling of sandalwood powder, the chamber was covered after meditation by the Ashramites and the devotees from all over the world.

Flower bouquets and wreaths are being placed on the Samadhi and incense sticks are lit in gratitude – homage is paid by the Ashramites, students and the devotees, spread around world through meditation in deep silence and devotion.

The rooms of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother are kept open for paying homage by the Ashramites and devotees on different Darshan days (21<sup>st</sup>. February – The Mother's birthday, 24<sup>th</sup> April – The Mother's final arrival day at Pondicherry, 15<sup>th</sup>. August – Sri Aurobindo's birthday, 17<sup>th</sup>. November – The Mother's Mahasamadhi day, 24<sup>th</sup> November – Sri Aurobindo's Siddhi day, 5<sup>th</sup> December – Sri Aurobindo's Mahasamadhi day).

Sri Aurobindo International centre of Education, an integral part of Ashram, was opened by The Mother in 1943 for remoulding the future humanity and serves as a field for new experiments and research in all aspects of education with the teacher – student ratio being about 1:8, students can select subjects of study and their teachers with provisions for studies from Nursery to higher and advanced levels of all faculties, medium being French and English with encouragement to learn mother language and other foreign languages and much stress is given to extracurricular activities and specially on sports, yoga, physical activities for

building character and physique by providing best infrastructure with negligible fees.

### Auroville

The Project Auroville was the next step of The Mother seeking to widen the base of the endeavour to establish harmony between soul and body, spirit and nature, heaven and earth in the collective life of humanity. She conceived the idea of Auroville, city of dawn, as a model town for the future experiment in international living in intended to be universal town where men and women of all countries would be able to live in peace and progressive harmony above all creeds or nationality. The purpose of Auroville is to realize human unity and is located at 7 km from Pondicherry, just inside the border of Tamilnadu - circular in shape, surrounded by green belt of nature divided in four zones – work – industrial, dwelling – residential, education and social – cultural.

The centre is having Matri Mandir which was dedicated to the civilization on 28th February, 1968 by pouring soil of the almost all the countries of the world and states of India, represented by one boy and one girl from each country / state in a lotus bud, built with white stones at the centre of the amphitheatre, beside the old Bunyan tree and Matri Mandir, an engineering marvel, surrounded by twelve petals of lotus, built by red stones.

Now the places around The Matri Mandir have been developed with more greeneries, beautiful garden dedicated to unity among the entire world community and also a viewing gallery under the shade of trees. There is also a visiting centre for showing the video of Auroville to the tourists, restaurants, boutiques, art gallery, multistage modern auditorium etc. for the tourists, peace lovers and Aurovillians (people who stay at Auroville).



*Matri Mandir, Auroville*



The exterior geodesic dome is covered by golden discs which reflects sunlight and gives radiance to the structure. Inside dome, upper area is the circular, total soundproof, white marbled meditation hall known as “inner chamber” which is having at its centre, the largest optically perfect crystal globe on which sunlight (reflected by a



*Crystal Globe inside the Inner Chamber of Matrimandir*

censored rotating prism) falls and creates a rare ambience, unique peace, and unforgettable experience in meditation. The four main pillars that supports the dome and the inner chamber are constructed at the four main directions of the compass – symbolizing four aspects of The Mother, as told by Sri Aurobindo –

*South Pillar – Maheshwari – depicting personality of calm, wisdom, tranquillity, and majesty.*

*East Pillar – Mahalakshmi - depicting beauty, harmony, rhythm and captivating Grace.*

*West Pillar – Mahasaraswati – depicting intimate knowledge and perfection of flawless work.*

*North Pillar – Mahakali – depicting the splendid strength, overwhelming will and world-shaking force.*

I was deeply engrossed in vision, teachings of Sri Aurobindo and The Mother – it's manifestation. Her fulfilled missions of starting Sri Aurobindo Ashram, Sri Aurobindo International centre of education and Auroville are now shaped towards excellence.

I am always interested to know about the history of my place of living and visit to understand about the civilization of the place.

With that intent, my mind came from Auroville to the Museum of Pondicherry, beside the Governor's house (a beautiful colonial mansion, erstwhile residence and office of the Lieutenant Governor of the then French Govt.). The stone artefacts carefully lined up on the courtyard under the shady trees, with description boards took me to ancient times of Pondicherry.

### **History of Pondicherry**

#### ***Ancient history of glorious Vedapuri***

From the time of immemorable, the city of Pondicherry, inhabited by sages, was dedicated to Vedas (knowledge). Erstwhile known as Vedapuri, this place was once a great centre of Vedic learning - at many institutions in different areas including one at Vedapuri Ishwaran temple, situated near the Catholic cathedral – to be precise in the garden area of the residence of the Archbishop, presently at the Mission Street. Swambhu lingam (Siva) of the Ishwaran Koil was worshipped by Sage Agasthya, one of the authors of Rig Veda. So the temple was also famous as Agasthyashwara (God of a temple where Sage Agasthya worshipped). These were confirmed by the inscriptions in the copper plates dating back to 8th to 10th Centuries A.D., found at Bahour of Pondicherry. Cemetery of Pondicherry goes back to the prehistoric epoch. Pondicherry is located on the seashore at the mouth of a river and surprisingly was also having Artesian wells, though the near-by areas were of water scarcity. This locational advantage made Pondicherry, a great city - a city of antiquity.

Under the backdrop of the huge sound of the gigantic waves and splashing water of the nearby sea and cool breeze, I was relaxing beside the artefacts with my deep thoughts about glorious Vedapuri.

#### ***Medieval history of Pondicherry***

I entered then inside the art and history museum – got mesmerized to see the rich collection of assorted rare and fine stone and bronze sculptures – traced their history from the time of Chola and Pallava dynasties. There were 81 Chola bronze sculptures, one of the largest collections of Chola bronze artefacts, excavated out from the historical port named Arikamedu, a trading port that existed just south of modern Pondicherry. Apart from that, the relics from the pre-Christian era – pieces from China's Tsung periods, remnants of Roman and Greek jars, glass beads and precious stones were

excavated from the site. All these excavated artefacts, sculpture, relics and remains of old coins, broken utensils etc. and the recorded history of the European settlers concluded that Romans came here to trade in 1st Century A.D. mainly for dyed textiles, pottery, and semiprecious stones. The Medieval period of Pondicherry witnessed rise and fall of several rulers. At the beginning of 4<sup>th</sup> Century A.D., it was under the control of Pallava kingdom of Kancheepuram. Eventually, it was occupied by different dynasties of South. Then came in the 10th Century A.D., The Cholas who ruled about three hundred years were then replaced by The Pandyas. Then after ruled by a few Muslim rulers, it was taken over by Sultan of Bijapur.

In 1497, Portuguese discovered the sea-route to India and extended its trade along its coast lines followed by establishment of a factory at Pondicherry at the beginning of 17th. Century A.D. but subsequently were forced to leave by The Sultan of Bijapur. The advent of colonial powers such as Romans, Portuguese, Dutch, Danes, English and finally of French, mainly for the trade, brought Pondicherry in the limelight. The frequent changes of power due to war and treaty were not conducive to the development of Pondicherry.

### ***Modern history of Pondicherry***

Finally, in 1816, the French took over Pondicherry. Then came the glorious period for the development of Pondicherry in the field of port, infrastructures, education, many masterly built churches with great architecture, buildings, statues and symmetrically aligned streets, storm drains / canals in and around French town.

Treaty of cession was reached between France and Independent India in 1956 – ratified in French parliament and thereafter on 16th August 1962, France ceded to India full sovereignty over the territories it held.

### **End of Flashback**

Suddenly I found that the white topped waves of the greenish blue sea were turning crimson red as the sun was setting at the western horizon. The dark was about to cover all around and I came to the reality from the amazing flash-back. After such unforgettable thrilling virtual tour in the flash back, I decided not to end here.

Next day, at very early morning with the completion of my yesterday's virtual Vedapuri – Pondicherry tour with histories, I took my scooter and set out to re-discover present modern Pondicherry, a great tourist destination, starting the real go-around the beaches, churches, temples, historical monuments, parks and roads starting with the joyful experience of beautiful sunrise, relaxing on a sit-out in front of the statue of Joan d' Arc at the Promenade. It was very peaceful place - behind me the beautifully crafted statue and in front of me the sea with a fresh new look - sky at the horizon was turning fiery red – nature was preparing to unfold the magnificent day with fresh hopes and high aspirations. The fishermen on the small wooden catamarans straying all around the sea for a better catch at the dawn. The birds were welcoming with their musical chirpings. It seemed as The Supreme was painting the canvas of the nature with invisible long brush and vibrant shades of picturesque colours, changing every moment into a different mystic situation. The red colour in the east turned brighter crimson and suddenly a glaring bright red semi-circular sphere jumped out from the calm sea at the eastern horizon. Slowly the whole red spherical sun came out of hide-out making the surroundings an unforgettable array of beauty which is beyond any word of explanation but to feel eternally about the splendid creations by The Almighty. The happy albatross was flying on the waves – the refreshing sea breeze made us cool and fresh happy. The beaming sunray fell on the face of Joan of Arc, which turned pink as if she blushed. This statue was installed in April 1923 opposite to the Duma's church. She was considered as a heroine of France for her role during hundred year's war and was canonized as a Roman Catholic Saint. I was facing sea, Sunrays got brighter and brighter – on my right were the statues of famous Marques Duma and in the left statue of Jawaharlal Nehru, Mahatma Gandhi and The French War Memorial flanked by old light house and at the extreme corner there is beautifully maintained Kargil war memorial.

I proceeded to the parallel street – famous Romaine Rolla library, beside the museum and beside that lies Raj Bhavan. In front of it there is a beautiful park, with greeneries and rest / play areas with flowering plants, called Bharathi Park, the statue of Poet Bharathidasan lies at its northern corner.



*Aayi Mandapam*  
(Logo of present Pondicherry)  
(Three Entry Gates to Pondicherry have been built in the style of Aayi Mandapam)

At the centre of this park, Aayi Mandapam, a white monument, built during the time of Napoleon III, Emperor of France, commemorates the provision of water to the French city, during his reign by a lady courtesan (devadasi of temples) called Ayi. This is the centre of the city around which Legislative assembly, Govt. General Hospital, General Post office, Raj Bhavan, Museum, old buildings, Ashram community kitchen and dining hall etc. are located.

### Unique Churches of Pondicherry

One of the most beautiful things about Pondicherry is its churches which have a unique charm of their own. The varied architectural finesse and grandeur give us a glimpse of the culture and tradition of the several colonists – the French, the Dutch, the Portuguese, the British. These colonial architectural marvels lure tourists from all parts of



*The Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus*

the world. Some of the very old and important Churches in Pondicherry are:

Gothic styled Basilica of the Sacred Heart of Jesus with more than century old history was marked by a special postal stamp and postal envelope released to celebrate the centenary year. This Church, located opposite to Railway Station, is one of the most visited Christian pilgrimages in Pondicherry. The rare stained-glass panels depicting some episodes from the life of Jesus Christ and Catholic saints are the main attractions of the church.



*Immaculate Conception Cathedral*

Immaculate Conception Cathedral, Pondicherry is located on the Mission street. The 300 years old memorial is the mother church of Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Pondicherry and Cuddalore, having his residence almost adjacent to the church. It was initially financed and built by the king of France in 1698 and thereafter demolished by the Dutch – rebuilt by the French and again destroyed by the British. The present cathedral has been rebuilt three times.

Besides the tombs of the Bishops of the Archdiocese, the church has tombstones of all the



*Lady of Lourdes church*



missionaries who were buried there. It is one of the oldest places swarmed by the tourists in Pondicherry.

Situated in Villianur, the church of the lady of Lourdes church, built in 1876, gives a true feeling of the original Our Lady of Lourdes Church in France. With the statue of Notre Dame this church is one of the most beautiful catholic churches in Pondicherry.



*The Church of Our Lady of Angels*

The church of Our Lady of Angels, popularly known as Duma's street, is beautifully located at the peaceful corner of Surcoof and Dumas Street. The marvellous architecture in a serene atmosphere overlooking the sea is a must watch.

### Old Temples of Pondicherry

The former French colony's temples, dates back a long a way and some of them of 10th. Century A.D. These were known for religious significance and architectural beauty. Some of the most important temples are:



*Varadaraja Perumal Temple*

Varadaraja Perumal Temple, about eight hundred years old is dedicated to the God Vishnu and is located at heritage town region of the city, constructed in the Dravidian (Chola) architecture.



*Manakula Vinayagar Temple*

Manakula Vinayagar Temple, dedicated to the Lord Ganesa (Vinayaka), dates back to French occupation of territory, situated near Sri Aurobindo Ashram is a popular pilgrimage site and tourist destination in Puducherry.



*The Vedapureeswarar temple*

Lord Shiva, a much-loved deity, is worshipped ardently in The Vedapureeswarar Temple which was demolished in 1748 by the French troops and then was reconstructed in 1788. It has magnificent structure with the Dravidian style of architecture including a 75-feet-tall gate (Gopuram).



*Sri Mahakaleswarar temple, Irumbai*

It will not be wise if I do not mention about the ancient temple – Mahakaleshwarar temple, situated at Irumbai (10 Km from Pondicherry and 3 km from Auroville) at the border of Tamilnadu, dates back to about 2000 years – the holy Shiva lingam was installed by Makaalar Rishi at this divine place. The beautiful painting on the wall depict the story of the temple and another unique feature of this temple is the presence of deities of all the “Navagrahas”.

### **Pristine Beaches of Pondicherry**

The strategic location and awesome beauty topped with interesting blend of French and Indian glorious past and cultural heritage makes Pondicherry, a major tourist destination. This has been added with the beauty of pristine beaches Promenade beach (also known as Rock Beach as



*Promenade Beach (Rock Beach)*

huge boulder had to be dumped on the shore to stop the land erosion by the very aggressive and rough sea particularly after Tsunami and the sands have been laid on these boulders to get a beach feeling at higher than sea level – now efforts are being made to reclaim the beach) is the most popular stretch of beachfront in the city of Puducherry, along the Bay of Bengal. It is a 1.2 km long stretch, from Kargil War Memorial to Dupleix Park on the Goubert Avenue. Every morning and evening, the health concerned people of all ages take their brisk walk, keep themselves busy with yoga, exercises – Tourists as well as the locals – particularly children, throng on the Saturday and Sunday evenings to enjoy the beautiful beach sceneries, cool breeze in traffic free clean environment. Promenade is having blue sea on eastern side and on the western side is lined up by Kargil war memorial, French Consulate, Chief Secretariat, many hotels, guest houses, restaurants,

heritage light house, war memorials, buildings and statues, handicraft shops – all together make the entire environment a real place of fun and enjoyment.



*Paradise Beach*

The Paradise beach, 8km from Pondicherry, is an isolated beach of golden sand, only accessible by a highly relaxing boat-ride, is a very popular tourist destination with beach – games, water sports and kiosks to chill out. The calm sea waves and the flat beach make the proper stage for relaxed bath and family picnics – with availability of speed boats and a luxurious stay and ride on houseboat (mainly aimed at corporates for relaxing, meetings and seminars).

### **Other Beaches**

Other attractive and pristine beaches near Pondicherry are Serenity, Auro and Dune beaches (about 15 – 20 minutes’ drive to the north of Pondicherry) with golden sands flanked by tall palm trees along with wide view of Bay of Bengal, dotted with fishing boats, dancing on the white topped blue waves of the sea and some of the boats anchored along the beach – The enchanting views of Sun and Sand can be explored and enjoyed with chilling green coconut water.

### **White town**

Pondicherry was once dissected into two quarters – French quarter and Indian quarter. The French quarter, now popularly known as White Town is characterised by the buildings of typical colonial architecture and restaurants of French cuisine, pubs and authentic French bakeries and coffee shops, give us a genuine feel of the French culture. The wide boulevards, roads and streets with road-signs in French and English, the heritage



buildings characterized by Franco – Tamil architecture, high walled courtyard with garden and lawn – Bougainville being an integral part of the garden mostly with white, peach and yellow colours on the walls reflect much about the French society.

### **Pondicherry cuisines**

The cuisine of Pondicherry is a mixture of French and Tamil food and include Baguettes and croissants with coffee for breakfast, Ratatuelle, Coq au vin, Bouillabaisse. This reminds us of the history of the area - these foods are French heritage like South Indian Dosa or Idly.



*Typical French Restaurant under the trees in the courtyard of the heritage building at the French town of Pondicherry*

Common French food like Salad Nicoise (healthy salad, originated from French city – Nice, includes fruits and flavouring ingredients like tomato, boiled egg, olives, potatoes, shallots, tuna and lettuce to make more colourful and delectable) Crepes (sweet and savoury), Creme Brulee, Croissants, Poisson du jouris (prepared with grilled fish, tomato and spaghetti pasta) are available at multiple French restaurants, bakeries, cafes, seafood restaurants etc., mostly situated in white town along with South Indian and multi cuisine items.

Pondicherry, South Asia, Vietnam were under French control and hence the people, the then French citizens, used to travel between these areas for service, business, administration and as required by the French Govt. / armed forces. There were also multicultural and multinational marriages among the local Tamil community and French citizens (French soldiers). These is the main reason of fusion of multicultural, heritage and cuisine, as for example:

*Dosa made like French Crepe with meat, chicken, cheese, paneer etc.*

*Prawn Malay curry influenced from South East Asia*

*French Bouillabaisse modified as Tamil Meen Puyabaise*

*Chaiyos – a Vietnamese spring roll made from rice floor as in India*

The famous local dish, Pondicherry Assad Fish curry made with coconut milk flavoured with aniseed and curry leaves, has evolved from French recipe. With the passage of time, local Creole dishes have slowly begun to fade.

### **End of the topography of our beloved Pondicherry**

Thus, we tried to take you to the interesting virtual trail of the topography – rich history, vibrant culture, transition in architecture, different religious places from ancient days of the great Vedic learning centre – Vedapuri to the unique Pondicherry (now officially renamed as Puducherry – New Village in Tamil Language, presently a union territory – conglomeration of Pondicherry, Karaikal – both are seaside towns beside Tamilnadu, Mahe and Yanam – sea-side towns beside Kerala and Andhra Pradesh respectively) – for its long and continued French connection often referred to as the French Riviera of the East – its vibrant tourism, richness added by its gateway to the nearby places for tourist attractions and religious values such as Gingee (historical place), Thiruvannamalai (old temple / maharishi ashram), Vellore (golden temple), Kancheepuram (old temples with beautiful architecture, silk), Mahabalipuram (historical place at sea-side), Chidambaram (old Nataraja temple), Pichhavaram (mangrove forest beside the back-waters), Pumpuhar (historical – old port beside the sea), Travancore (old Dutch fort at the seafront and old Dutch buildings and memories), Karaikal (part of Pondicherry – sea beach), Nagour (famous Muslim religious place), Velankanni (famous old churches) etc.

This vibrant magnificent Pondicherry is also regarded as a hub of education and health care institutions with many medical and technical colleges / hospitals – very famous being Pondicherry



University – a Central University, JIPMER under Central Govt. in the style of AIIMS, PIMS (Pondicherry Institute of Medical Sciences – both of these having Super-speciality hospitals with 750 beds with state-of-the-art facilities and infrastructures. It not only attracts the students, patients the tourists from all over the world but also the peace-loving and spiritually minded people from

all parts of India and abroad (mostly from France and other European countries) to settle permanently. This has made Pondicherry a real cosmopolitan, multicultural and multilingual (main languages being Tamil, English, Hindi and French) city.

**--: END :--**





