



Food for Life Global – JAPAN



Uniting Japan through Pure Food

- Sanjay Karanji

The distribution of sanctified plant-based meals has been and will continue to be an essential part of Indian Vedic culture of hospitality from which Food for Life Global (FFLG) was born. FFLG has endeavored to liberally distribute pure sanctified meals (prasadam) throughout the world with the aim of creating peace and prosperity. The project started in 1974 after yoga students of Swami Prabhupada became inspired by his plea that no one within a ten mile radius of a temple should go hungry. Today, Food for Life is active in over 60 countries. Food for Life Global – Japan (FFLG-J), is Japan arm of this global volunteer institution.



Mr. Shrikant Shah, Director of FFLG-J, says that every strata of the society should be served by this project without any discrimination and reservation. After

devastating 11-March-2011 incident in Japan, FFLG-J took lead in providing support to victims with strong collaboration from it's affiliates ISKCON New Gaya Japan and Govinda's Restaurant at Funabori. For 9 continuous weekends a truck load of food accompanied by a dozen, selfless and brave volunteers, would go for food distribution. To make the food sanctified and blessed, it was first offered to deities of the Supreme Lord Shri Krishna at Funabori temple. The Vedic scriptures mention that if one eats such pure food, he is immediately nullified of past sinful reactions (bad karma) and can make quick progress on devotional path.



FFLG-J served about 6,200 opulent lunch/dinner and more than 6,000 kilograms of fresh fruits & vegetables to affected people for 9 weekends. Total spent on this charity till date is about 5 million JPY. Govinda's restaurant traveled extra miles to provide food for relief victims at Miyagi. FFLG-J is also sponsoring 1,000 fresh hot meals everyday to financially challenged school children in Mumbai,

India and around.

Not just food, yoga seminar were regularly arranged to provide mental relief to victims.

This support has been recognized by Japanese government who reciprocated by felicitating FFLG director through Miyagi Mayor. A full list of services provides by FFLG-J during Miyagi relief program is in below table.



One of the volunteer writes:

"I could see the ground situation with my own eyes. Although TV channels and news are/were full of real life scenes from affected areas, seeing it, was feeling it. People lost everything in the wake of tsunami, houses gone, cultivable land destroyed (with meek possibility of any harvest in next 3-4 years), insufficient clothes & beddings and no assurance of job or income in near future. Most of the families there were not complete (one or other lost during the disaster).

One old lady asked me for couple of more chapatis which we served. She asked "can I eat chapatis just like that?". I said "its better to eat it with

a curry" or "atleast dip it in something like miso soup you may get tomorrow morning (normally served during breakfast or with any meal)". She laughed cynically and said "what kind of luxury you are talking about. Who is going to serve me miso soup?"

I suppose that describes the agony. I doubt if people in the evacuation centers are served full meal

Anjali



Not just food, yoga seminar were regularly arranged to provide mental relief to victims.

more than once a day!! People were so happy with the hot full course opulent meal served by FFLG. I would request all interested to support FFLG to help the cause.

All said and done, most important thing to learn was the way everybody maintained discipline and cleanliness while living in not so comfortable evacuation centers. People were positive and looking ahead towards days to come. When we left for Tokyo, my heart was full with only one thought in mind. That is to support as much as I can.”

Immediately after the catastrophe, a group of Nepali students from Sendai university approached the temple for shelter. They were provided with food, shelter & warm beddings for couple of days in the temple premises. Ambassador of Nepal to Japan personally called to express his gratitude and appreciation.

The unique feature of this drive was that people from all walks of life regardless of their affiliation and apparent differences, united to offer the best possible selfless and dedicated service, which was the need of time. Everything got managed so very well without much effort, as if a superior power working in the background. Each group from different vicinity or organization took lead to plan

and execute. Due to the extent of damage and lack of system in affected areas it was difficult to start. Who to contact, whom to help, how to help, etc. But once it picked up there was no looking back. There were instances when volunteers were in waiting-list to offer service but there was not enough room to accommodate all. Sometimes reservations were done. It was a sight to behold and the energy-level to experience when the volunteers gathered to start their mission. Some starting their day as early as 3:30 AM and ending only at 1:00 AM. Driving hundreds of kilometers, loading & unloading heavy stuff, distributing hundreds of meals, cleaning-up & winding-up. Approx. 18+ hour day. Then next day to work.

Initial help is always not that difficult but sustained support, not only food/finance but emotional, spiritual & psychological would be a challenge. With time, past events are forgotten or atleast de-prioritized. So will be this tragedy. Hence we need to put a system in place for sustained support for this cause for a long time to come.

For more details, please refer to www.ISKCONJapan.com and www.ffl.org



DATES	PEOPLE SERVED	LOCATIONS	LOCALITY	MENU	UNCOOKED OFFERING	OTHER OFFERINGS	VOLUNTEERS	CARS
Week 9 (12-June)	300	4	Wataricho, Myagi	Mix Vegetarian Rice (Chahaan), Vegetarian Manchurian Gravy, Vegetarian cream soup, Sweet Nan	Fruits & Vegetables	60 liter fresh Juices, Cook	23	4
Week 8 (5-June)	800	6	Wataricho, Myagi	Roti, 2 curries, salad	Fruits & Vegetables (1,000 kgs.)	Juices, Cookies	31	
Week 7 (27,29-May)	400	3	Wataricho, Myagi	Sandwich, vegetable soup, tomato pasta, veg. chahaan	Fruits & Vegetables (1,200 kgs.)	18 gallons of Fresh juice	34	7
Week 6 (22-May)	1050	3	Wataricho, Myagi	Roti, 3 curries, samosa, mango lassi & desert shahi tukda	Fruits & Vegetables (1,000 kgs.)	New Suzuki-Every Van, 359 hand bags.	47	9
Week 5 (15-May)	980	3	Wataricho, Myagi	2 curries (chhole masala curry & paneer butter masala), salad, home-made Thepla (masala-paratha).	Fruits & Vegetables (1,000 kgs.)	Brand new LCD TV, Hand-made cookie, Organic Tulsi Ginger tea	41	8
Week 4 (8-May)	580	3	Wataricho, Myagi	2 curries (birjal masala curry and paneer butter masala), masala paratha, salad & sweet cake	Fruits & Vegetables.			
Week 3 (1-May)	725	3	Wataricho, Myagi	2 curries, salad, parathia, sweet cake.			50	6
Week 2 (23-Apr)	800		Wataricho, Myagi		Fruits & Vegetables (1,000 kgs.)			
Week 1 (16-Apr)	600	5	Wataricho, Myagi	Curry	Fruits & Vegetables (820 kgs.)	Ready made soup packets, rice, cracker,		
TOTAL	6236							
Funds Collected: 7,000,000								
Funds Spent: 4,800,000								
New Suzuki-Every Van								
359 hand bags								
ORGANIZED BY: FOOD FOR LIFE								
Director: Shrikant Shah								
Cooking: GOVINDAS' Temple Restaurant								
Base: ISKCON New Gaya Japan Funabori Temple								

BHAGAVAD GITA 9.26

patraṁ puṣpaṁ phalaṁ toyāṁ
yo me bhaktyā prayacchati
tad ahaṁ bhakty-upahṛtam
aśnāmi prayatātmanaḥ

TRANSLATION

If one offers Me with love and devotion a leaf, a flower, fruit or water, I will accept it.

<http://vedabase.net/bg/9/26/en>

Please chant “Hare Krishna Hare Krishna Krishna Krishna Hare Hare Hare Rama Hare Rama Rama Rama Hare Hare” and make your life sublime.

Memories

- Anirvan Mukherjee

The tragedy that befell Japan this year, lead me to write a very personal essay. This essay is not about the ongoing crisis, about which – much has been written. Instead, I thought of writing about a few of my childhood incidents. It is not that I had a very special childhood – it was perhaps very similar to yours, with its own share of “joy and woe, woven fine”. But I hope that, as you read about my incidents, you are reminded of your own and reflect on your past ...

I spent my entire childhood at Rama Krishna Mission Narendrapur, a boarding institution about 15 kms south of Kolkata – from Grade 5 to College. In this respect, my childhood might have been a little different from yours. Most of you might have spent all those years with your family. I used to go home only during vacations. Even more, since my father changed jobs and moved to different cities, I had limited opportunities to make friends in each new neighborhood (the Bengali word is ‘Para’). So in a sense, the only constant in my life was Narendrapur, which was in essence my home. As a result, most my childhood incidents have a “Narendrapur bias”. I hope you will excuse me for that!

Santosh da

It was a cold misty evening in Dec 1979, when I – a young 10 year old kid was strolling in front of the “Headmaster’s office” in Narendrapur. My parents were inside completing my admission formalities. As I was standing there, an elderly man came near me.

He: “Son, will you be studying here?”

Me: “Yes”.

He: “Good, then we can be great friends”

Me: “I am not sure how can we be friends, I am 10 years old and you are so much older!”

He (becoming very serious): “I am actually your classmate”.

Me: “But how is it possible?”

He: “I have a sad story. I got admitted in Grade 5 many years ago – but I don’t get promoted”.

Me: “I don’t quite understand - why is it so?”

He: “Because I am very weak in studies. I need a friend, who can help me in my studies so that I can pass exams. Will you be my friend?”

Me: “Of course, I will be your friend. We will study together so that you get promoted!”

He: “Excellent, looking forward to it!”

In a few weeks’ time when I joined Grade5, I realized that he was Santosh da, our Maths teacher! I was extremely embarrassed and after the first class, I told him “Sir, I was so stupid! I really believed that you were in Grade 5”. Then he smiled at me and told me “Believe me, I will always be in Grade 5”. Thus began a long and very loving association between me and Santosh da, during my entire academic life. I was never the best or smartest kid in my class, but Santosh da always used to single me out for love and affection. Whenever there were other teachers around us, he used to entertain them with this story. Every passing year he used to tell me “Anirvan, how wonderful you are getting ahead – but poor me, I am still in Grade 5”. And I used to get even more embarrassed! I remember the final day when I completed my Bachelor’s degree in Statistics and went to meet Santosh da to convey the news that I will be finally leaving Narendrapur in order to pursue my Masters in Computer Science. Santosh da told me “Good for you, but poor me! Who will now help me in getting promoted?” I replied “Santosh da, you are impossible ... you will never change!” and asked him to bless me.

Words fail to describe the ambivalence of feelings that I experienced that final night in Narendrapur. On one hand, there was the excitement of entering an outer world – of which I knew very little and was rather naïve. On the other hand, there was a tinge of sadness for I was leaving this “cocoon” forever. I vividly recall that hot and humid night in May, 1991 when I packed my suitcases, called a cab and finally left my beloved Narendrapur as a student forever! I am sure that you the reader must have also had these moments!

I really wish that life was perfect and my relationship with Santosh da remained just the same. But alas, life is anything but perfect! About two years later I visited Narendrapur and met Santosh da again. Just as we were chatting, the discussion steered around a recent incident called “Babri Masjid demolition”. (For young readers, this incident involved the demolition of a mosque on Dec 6, 1992. It was such a major incident that, for our generation, that day has become a reference point in our lives).

As we were discussing I realized that Santosh da and I had divergent political views on the subject and the friendly banter ended up in a heated

argument. After a while I excused myself and left - with a very bitter feeling, as if I had been deeply wounded. What is even worse, I never got to meet him since! I have often wondered, why did I have to argue so much with a man who had showered so much love on me for all these years? Now that I am much older and maybe a bit wiser, I realize that my actions had to do with my young age, my new found "independence" and a sense of arrogance that "I knew better". For that indulgence of youthful arrogance, I had bartered away something infinitely more precious - unrequited love from a good old teacher! As I write these lines, I am filled with a bit of sadness and nostalgia for not having attempted to reach out to Santosh da. The next time I go to Kolkata, I'll try harder!

The Library Class

Did you ever get in trouble while at school? I did once and would like to share the story with you.

Our school consisted of 8 classes a day, divided into 2 halves. The 1st half was between 9:30 to 12:30, followed by lunch break and then 2nd half was from 1:30 to 4:30.

In Grade 6, we had a "Library Class", during which we were supposed to go to the library and study. Exactly what to study was not very clear to me. Since there were no teachers around, we often used to chat amongst ourselves. We had this class once a week, between 11:45 to 12:30 - followed by lunch break. One day, a friend and I decided to skip this "Library Class" and instead go to hostel, relax and come back for the 2nd half. We felt that it was a safe "crime" for the chances of getting caught was remote. Alas, it was an imperfect crime - for little did we expect what was in store for us. Our regular teacher was absent, and instead our Head Master ("Hari Maharaj") came as a substitute teacher! While taking the attendance roll call, he noticed that we were absent in the previous class.

Hari Maharaj: "Anirvan and Abhijit, why were you absent in the previous class?"

Us: "Maharaj, there was no particular reason...."

Hari Maharaj: "What class was that?"

Us: "The Library class"

Hari Maharaj: "And what exactly did you do, during that time?"

Us: "We went to the Hostel?"

Hari Maharaj: "Which Hostel?"

Us: "Abhedananda Bhawan"

Hari Maharaj: "And what did u do in the hostel, during that time?"

Us: "Err...not much, we chatted..."

Hari Maharaj: "How interesting ... grade 6 students

bunking classes! What has the world come to? I think that there is no need for you to attend grade 6. You have already graduated - with honors! Your parents must be extremely proud of you! Where do u live?"

Me: "In Gol Park, Kolkata"

Abhijit: "Salt Lake"

Hari Maharaj: "Wonderful, pack your bags and tell your parents to take you home!"

We: "But, Maharaj"

Hari Maharaj: "Not one more word, dismissed!"

My friend and I were truly scared! Every Sunday our parents used to come to visit us, but this Sunday might be different - thanks to a weekly practice called "Guardian Call". If your name appeared in that weekly list, your parents were supposed to meet the hostel warden. What made this process very suspense ridden was that until Sunday afternoon you had no clue as to whether you qualified for this weeks' list. That too, the list was announced during lunch time right after the weekly delicacy - the "Mishti Doi" (Bengali Sweet Yoghurt) was served on your plate! Why a serving of "Mishti Doi" had to be followed by "Guardian Call announcement" was something that always baffled me! For this process ensured that, regardless of whether you were in the list or not - it was not easy to enjoy your "Mishti Doi"!

That Sunday afternoon, right after the "Mishti Doi" was served, I was on full alert. I hoped for a miracle, that somehow my name would not appear in the list - and looked intensely at the announcer. The announcer started reading the list and the very first name was mine! I bowed my head down and all I could see was the "Mishti Doi" lying untouched on my plate. I wasn't sure as to what to do with that "Mishti Doi" - to eat or not to eat, that was the question! But finally in an act of supreme self-sacrifice, I decided not to eat and left the dining room and lay down on my bed.

God only knows, how I spent the next few hours. I pondered practical questions such as "Will I get expelled? What will my parents think of me? What will my grandparents and uncles and aunties and cousins think of me? If I am expelled will any other school admit me?" I also pondered ethical questions such as "Is the punishment proportionate to the crime?" Suddenly there was a knock at my door - a friend told me "Hey, your parents are waiting for you in the lobby". And so I went to the lobby.

As usual my mother came and hugged me. My little sister shouted "Dada, how are you?" And my father enquired "Son, how are things?" I replied "Everything is fine ... come let's sit down somewhere". And we sat in the meeting room where my mother

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– just as usual - opened a tiffin box containing home cooked delicacies and told me *“Son you first eat!”* Well after having avoided the *“Mishti Doi”*, I was pragmatic enough to realize that another round of self-sacrifice might seem a bit too conspicuous ... so I ate it all. And my mother was regaling me with stories of the past week, how my sister has become too naughty ... how my father had to go to Delhi for two nights ... and on and on. After a while I could take no more. I looked at my Father and said *“Dad, the hostel warden – Amitava Maharaj – has asked for you”*. My Father then asked *“Do you know why? Is everything okay?”* I replied *“I am not sure, I have no idea...”* Anyway he gave me a look and told my mother *“You all stay here, I will be back soon”* and he left to meet the warden.

For the next 15 minutes, I was extremely quiet. My mother was a little worried and she asked me *“Tell me what happened ... and don't tell me that you know nothing”*. But I still kept quiet. And then my father came back ... I was preparing for the worst, when he asked *“Son, did you skip the library class?”* I kept very quiet. Then he told my mother the story and then told me *“Son, don't do it again – all right?”* I replied *“I promise, I won't do it again”*. Then my father changed the topic to something else. For the next 1-2 hours, I was on full alert expecting to hear words like *“expelled”* or *“suspended”* but there was no such mention of any. By then my parents were smiling and joking and telling me to take care of my health and study well. Around 6:00 when it was time to leave, my mother hugged me again and told me to be a *“good boy”* and she will see me back in one week's time. By now I was pretty sure that I wasn't getting suspended and for sure the storm was over! I also met Abhijit, my *“partner-in-crime”* and he too was looking very relaxed. I was so relieved that for

the first time in that day I was feeling hungry. That night, I devoured the *“not so great dinner”* like a feast, and went to sleep like a king!

The Letter

A few days after the Japan Earthquake, I was in Kolkata with my family. Almost every family member, advised me not to return back to Japan. It was not an easy moment for us. One Sunday afternoon, I decided to visit Narendrapur, and pay a visit to the current Secretary Swami Suparnananda (*“Satya da”*). During my College days Satya Da was the Principal, a position that he still retains.

I saw Satya da, at his room watching a cricket match on TV. He immediately recognized me and asked me to sit next to him. As we watched the game together, Satya da made general enquiries about the situation in Japan. In an understated manner, I told him about my dilemma: on one hand- the incessant family pressure, and on the other hand my obligation to return back to Japan. Satya da was rather quiet and spoke very little. After an hour, Satya da told me that he needed to attend some pressing engagements. I understood, for he was always a very busy person. As I proceeded to leave, Satya da asked me to write down my address in Kolkata, which I did.

Two days later a letter arrived at my doorstep. I was really surprised to find that it was handwritten by Satya da. The letter contained the following words, *“Like a brave person, return back to Japan and do your duty. May God bless you”*. Somehow those words gave me strength, for I knew that Satya da took his own time to decide on what to advice. Something within, gave me the feeling that it was the right call to make. And I have never looked back since!



Memories of the Towers

- Suparna Bose

When I moved to Wayne, NJ, from my hometown Kolkata, India, a big city like countless other big cities in the world, I felt cramped in the small-town feel of the place. Like any other American small town, Wayne didn't have many sidewalks. If you walked for ten minutes from my Tudor Gardens apartment, you would reach a highway, Route 23, I think. No more walking, thank you. The horizon was there, un-peppered by any skyscrapers and still I felt cramped.

My only feelings of release happened when I went to New York City, a half-hour drive from our place. Every time, as soon as we crossed the Lincoln Tunnel, my heart would start thumping – at the sights and sounds of NYC – the roads crowded with people, beautifully clad, strangely clad, with immaculately groomed pets; the roadside cafes brimming with people eating and chatting, musicians singing on the street corners, the Manhattan horizon cluttered and peppered with skyscrapers like the Empire state Building, the Chrysler Building and the World Trade Center.

On my first trip to the WTC as a tourist, I posed from all possible corners at the rooftop, looking at the different boroughs of NYC, the Central Park, the Liberty Island. I posed with the bronze statue of the gentleman in the park downstairs. On all my subsequent trips, I always sat by the gentleman and I would usually have a brown bag full of glazed donuts

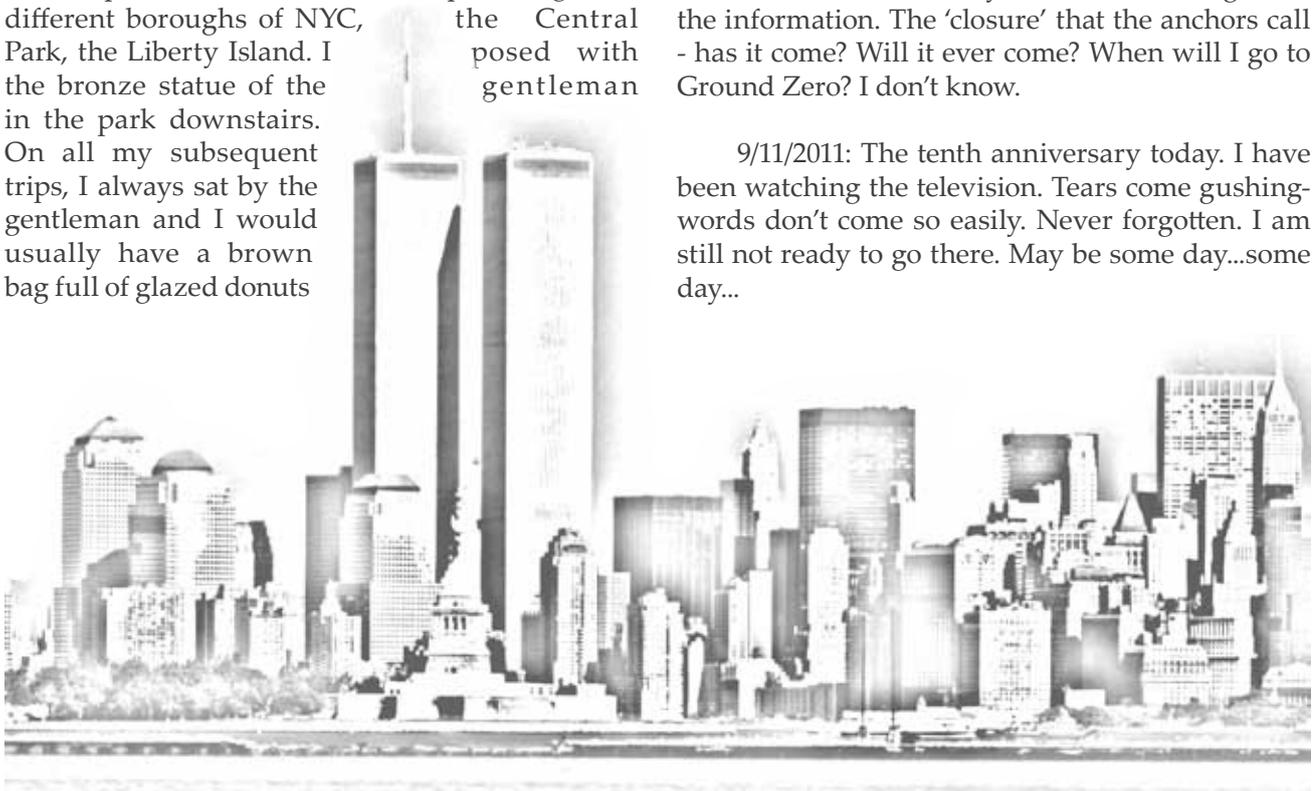
bought from the Dunkin' Donuts down the road.

I left the US, thinking I would be coming back again for a visit to the park, the gentleman and the WTC. Osama bin Laden changed it all. With a few brutal strokes, they were all gone. All gone with thousands of lives with them - and millions of lives that stayed behind, only to mourn. Our photos of the tower and the park and the gentleman were archival in nature. And so were the memories.

I came back to the US and looked at Ground Zero on television – as it is called now. I am far away from NYC. There is emptiness in my heart – a lump in my throat – every time I look at it. Last year, I was boarding a flight to Mumbai from Newark. Passing by the window where I could see the NYC skyline, I just looked at the skyline of one of my favorite places on earth. It was not there. They were not there. Tears just welled in my eyes and kept on coming. I was glad I was not going into the city. I was not ready.

May 2, 2011: Ten years have passed. Today, from the morning, I have been watching the television and the Internet. I've been sitting on the sofa, mindlessly sometimes and mindfully sometimes, taking in all the information. The 'closure' that the anchors call - has it come? Will it ever come? When will I go to Ground Zero? I don't know.

9/11/2011: The tenth anniversary today. I have been watching the television. Tears come gushing- words don't come so easily. Never forgotten. I am still not ready to go there. May be some day...some day...



Flashbacks and Spotlights

- Sougata Mallik

[This summer of 2011, we decided to take a road trip of those trails travelled and those untravelled. Our small family of 3, I cannot say we were back-packing, but were more car-packing. Amidst this interesting journey, met various people – strangers, acquaintances, experienced diverse topography, encountered sundry weather conditions. The excitement of seeing the new, the happiness of remembering the old, the exhilaration of foreseeing the future punctuated our journey throughout. Penning few reflections, experiences as 'Flashbacks and Spotlights']

Monsoon Days

[Driving through I-81 Interstate Highway in USA, were faced with raging thunder squalls from the Appalachian Mountain range. Scared as I was with the fury of this weather, how I wished for a softer, milder rainfall.]

Memories are funny. Of the billions of experiences, only a handful remain embedded in our grey matter. If they are pleasant, they are a source of comfort on difficult days. If the memories are not really wanted, they continue to haunt us, casting a shadow on happier days.

A remote small town somewhere in West Bengal. The skies darken, the clouds rumble and women scurry to remove clothes hung out to dry.

Children, asked to help their mother, are excited at the urgency of the task. Those too small to reach the clotheslines are asked to shut the windows. In older houses that have seen better times, women and children put pails in areas where the roof leaks.

Even the breeze seems to anticipate what is coming and its quality changes, carrying smells that become sharper and travel quickly. The smell of 'rajnigandha' with a boring English name, Tube Rose, the night blooming jasmine fill the air with their strong scents. And then, without waiting for the mass of humanity to be fully prepared, thunder crashes somewhere and large drops of water fall on the dry earth. As the ground starts to grow moist, it gives off a smell that is elemental and primordial. Wet patches quickly grow and the ground becomes wet and sticky.

The rain now comes down in all its fury. In the open field, little boys take off their shirts, and a ball appears from nowhere, they kick it back and forth casually; and then someone shouts, two teams form and the game starts in right earnest. Players run across the field, with bare muddy feet, exhilarated to be fighting the elements and playing the good game. It is a moment perhaps they will remember and cherish later on in their lives.

In most houses, the focus is also elemental, but it is on food and not sport. "Monsoon snacks" are prepared. Young girls sit in the veranda and chat;

then one sings a line of a song, the other runs in and gets a harmonium, and suddenly there is repertoire. Hot snacks arrive and for the moment all senses are satisfied!

Oxford Book Store

[Pennsylvania is one of the most beautiful states for anyone who has delved into its interiors – I don't mean the sprawling, prime cities.]

Driving alongside Susquehanna river - the ancient river which is the longest in United States and historically still preserves Iroquoian tribe culture. The tepees are still there, the animal skin clothed men sat in one corner etching Totem Poles. A small tepee caught my attention. It was marked 'Oxford Book Store'. The books now on sale represent those that one might not find in any modern bookstore; its little walkway was replete with popular history and travel, contemporary literature, coffee-table books; alongside was a tea room and gift store. And I venture I would never know that to find books on Nagaland lamps, I could come here! Something has not been lost in this headlong drive for modernity.

If we are here, what are they doing there

[In the course of our travel, we visited an old friend one evening. A news surprised, startled, overjoyed me?!]

Among our Indian-American friends, a 23 year old son of one family suddenly declared that he is going to India to earn his living. Born, bred, nurtured, assimilated in the American soil, his decision came as a bolt from the blue for his parents and acquaintances. He was exploring motherland opportunities. As economies convulse in the West and jobs dry up, the idea is spreading virally in émigré homes. Which raises a heart-stirring question: if the parents left India and trudged westward for their children, if they manufactured from scratch a new life here for them, if they slogged, saved, sacrificed to make children's lives lighter than theirs, then what does it mean to choose to migrate to the place their parents forsook? If we are here, what are they doing there?

The parents married in India and then embarked to North America on a lonely, thrilling adventure. They learned together to drive, shop in malls, paint a house. They decided who and how to be. They kept reinventing themselves, discarding the invention, starting anew. It was extraordinary, and ordinary.

The parents took the children to India every few years. They relished time with grandparents, cousins, relatives; but India always felt alien, impenetrable, frozen. Perhaps it was the survivalism born of scarcity: the fierce pushing to get off the plane, the miserliness even of the rich, the obsession with becoming doctors and engineers by profession. Perhaps it was the bureaucracy, the need to know someone to do anything, or the culture shock of servitude in seeing servants, maid servants slogging around the house. Their firsthand impression of India seemed to confirm the rear view immigrant myth of it: a land of impossibilities.

But history bends and swerves, and sometimes swivels fully around. India pursued, commanded economics, liberalized, privatized, globalized. The economy boomed, and hope began to course through towns and villages shackled by fatalism and low expectations. America, meanwhile, floundered. In a blink of history came 9/11, outsourcing, Afghanistan, Iraq, Katrina, rising economies, rogue nuclear nations, climate change, dwindling oil, a financial crisis. Pessimism crept into the sunniest nation.

This young man in discussion is a 23 year old, smart, well groomed, accomplished individual. I dare not ask him why, how, where of his decision. As I left their house, I courteously wished him good luck and enjoyment in his new future. A long ride home from Virginia to Toronto, I concluded my opinion – perhaps this stepchild of India felt its change of spirit, rising power, or perhaps the gravitational force of condensed hope.



Birds in Kobe

- Jyotirmoy Ray

It was an unforgettable experience of bird watching for me, the very first morning of Kobe. That was early June of 1982, when late spring weather is still lingering on and rain about to set in. Nearby mountains Maya and Rokko San are in their best seasonal attire. White fleecy clouds are playing hide and seek with grey Nimbus bringing occasional showers. Both sun and rain made the forest cover of the mountains lush emerald green.

As I got up from the comforts of early sleep, the wide window with open curtain brought me the wonderful view of the twin-mountains. From my window on the opposite side I could get also a glimpse of Osaka Bay (Seto Nai Kai) displaying its mirror surface reflecting the rising sun. Silhouetted structures of innumerable overhead cranes of Kobe Harbor were getting out of slumber pointing their fingers towards the blue sky.

I came out of the room to the fresh air of open verandah to get a closer view of the scenic panorama as it was unfolding. Suddenly I could hear some high-pitch twittering of birds from the corner of the verandah. To my pleasant surprise I spotted a pair of Yellow Wagtail (Seki Rei) on the railing in a courtship mood merrily wagging their tails. As I was getting a little closer to them they flew away to the sloping banks of the rivulet rippling by the side of my apartment and merrily flowing from Maya San towards the nearby inland sea. As I focused over the flowing streams, I saw a movement of brown wings and found another bird called Dipper taking a quick bath. In fact it was getting ready to catch tiny snails or fish for the breakfast. Momentarily I had a flash back in my mind of similar sights on the rocky bank of the Himalayan streams during our holiday trips. Finale of this early morning event was a sweet call of a Brown Eared Bulbul (Hyodori) from the nearby Ginko tree. Left over water drops from the overnight rain glistening like pearls in its branches. Bulbul in Kobe and its sweet call is the least I could expect. It flew rapidly towards greeneries of Maya Mountain perhaps in search of its nest.

That was a Sunday and there was eerie silence all around broken by occasional rustling of the fresh leaves of the Ginko from the gust of wind blowing from the sea. Luckily there was no rain. Bright sunshine flooding the sprawling

city. While having breakfast I could not take my eyes off the open window and enjoy the wonderful view of the distant mountains covered with floating mists and quiet neighborhood full of traditional



Japanese style houses each surrounded by well kept gardens and shrubberies.

I could not check the temptation of a bird watching trek near the sloping bank of the rivulet near my apartment.

After coming down from my apartment I discovered a long winding concrete path by the side of the Rivulet leading towards Maya Mountain.

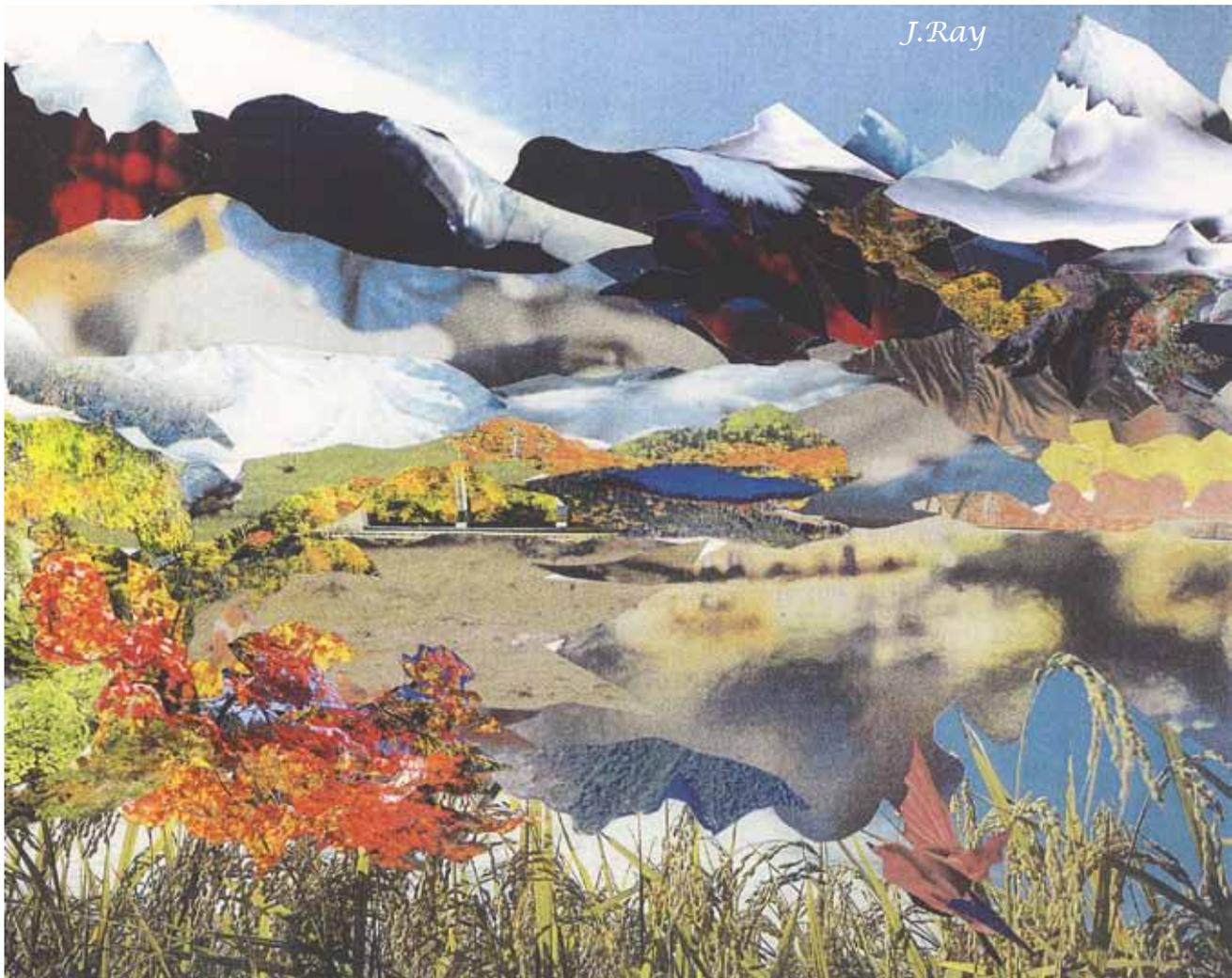
I walked upstream easily over its slope and used my Binocular scanning the trees on its both sides and typical Japanese style cottages with mossed red tiled roofs. Evergreen Pine Trees (Matsu) with artificially twisted branches could provide nesting sites to wild birds. In fact the first bird I could sight was perching on one of these Pines at a distance. From the image on my Binocular it looked like Roller. As I looked closely I saw the tell tale mark of blue wings showing up brilliant bands as it took flight perhaps for a better nesting site. Soon a flock of Grey Tits flew over the rivulet and landed on Television Antenna on the nearby house top. As I looked down towards the rivulet I was rewarded with a pied wagtail of white and black color feeding on the crevices of the rocks. These birds are sure sign of the purity of the flowing stream generally fed by pristine underground springs.

Soon I was very near the foot of Maya Mountain covered with dense foliage of variety of evergreens and Maples. The streams of the rivulet, I was walking by, got lost on its slope occasionally glittering and reflecting against the late morning Sun. This peaceful scenario was being cheered by

faint calls of birds from the upper region. I could not check the temptation of climbing through the thickets of Pink Hydrangea towards Maya Temple. I was told by my Japanese colleague that it set up under the guidance of a Buddhist Indian Monk in seventh century AD. When I looked through the thickets to get a closer view of the surrounding trees I heard the sweet endless low pitched call of birds with distinct notes as if coming out of a Piano being played in the temple. Soon I could also hear those musical calls very near to me and saw a pair

of brown bird of sparrow size on a branch swinging in the wind. There was no doubt it was a pair of Uguisu. Ornithologists call this species Japanese Nightingale.

That was the most thrilling experience I ever had in my Bird Watching trek. It made me forget the time. When I looked at my watch it was past noon. It was time to bid farewell to this beautiful habitat of Birds and get back to my mundane duty of shopping for daily needs.



It's a Beautiful World

- Hemalatha Anand

It was a hot and humid summer day in India, on one of my recent trips back home. I had just been to visit an old relative and had spent a good couple of hours with him, listening to him ramble and lament about “the good old days” –about how principled people were back then and how things have changed now, with declining values in today's youth, the materialism and corruption in our society etc. etc.

I did try to argue otherwise, but my debating skills were sadly defeated by his seemingly valid and truthful points! I left his home feeling morose and dejected (as I usually feel after losing an argument or even a game, for that matter:-) and I walked towards the Bus stop, left with little or no hope for this “future-less world ” as uncle had called it !

At the terminus, I hurriedly boarded the bus which was due to leave in the next few seconds. Fifteen minutes passed and our driver was still mysteriously absconding! Uncle *IS* right, I said to myself. “Nothing can change this system”!!

I entertained my depressed self by taking in the ‘scenery’ outside - a barren ground, with loads of dumped rubbish, a few pathetic looking cows feeding on the garbage, a couple of street dogs barking at the passing cyclists and a little tea stall where workers from a nearby construction site unburdened the heavy loads they carried on their heads to refresh themselves with a cup of chai and some dry loaves of bread! I sank further deep into my depression – it was a very bleak picture indeed!!

To add to it, a little girl who looked about 4 or 5 years old came from window to window in

our bus asking the passengers for 2 Rupees. She repeated her request incessantly at every window and was ‘shooed away’ every time, sometimes with a scold. Undaunted, she kept trying anyway! What persuasion skills-she’ll make a great Salesman, I thought sarcastically! Soon, she came up to me and her unusually bright eyes looked up from her dirty little face and with her small muddy hands stretched out she repeated again and again, ‘Aunty Do Rupaya de do’

I am usually averse to encouraging beggars, but on that day I gave in –probably just to get rid of her nagging tone!! Thrilled with her success, the girl ran with glee to the nearby tea stall.

For want of something better to do, my glance followed her, curious to know what she would do with the money.

I saw her buy a loaf of dry bread and run towards a dilapidated wall nearby. There lay there, a sickly dog, literally gasping for breath and this little girl sat down beside him and fed him the whole loaf, lovingly talking to him all the time!!

I was speechless.

I cried shamelessly the rest of the way back home, overwhelmed with the magnitude of that simple, selfless deed of love and generosity! This little ‘street urchin’ filled me with hope, and re-assured me that the world isn't as black as we often paint it!

If only all of us could emulate a bit of this wonderful girl, what a beautiful place our world would be!!



A Story about Fingerprint

- Tsuyoshi Nara

Today most people around the world know what a fingerprint is, but most do not know who first discovered fingerprints and how they came to be utilized for personal identification.

Dr. Henry Faulds (1843-1930), a missionary doctor belonging to the Presbyterian Church of Scotland, came to Japan in 1874. He settled in an area of Tokyo called Tsukiji, where he opened a community clinic and established a school for the blind.

During his 12 years in Japan he made the acquaintance of Mr. Edward Sylvester Morse (1838-1925), an American biologist, who happened to discover an ancient shell mound on the Oomori Seashore (now in Oota-ku, Tokyo). This mound contained a large number of ancient earthen vessels along with a huge array of seashells and animal bones.

Dr. Faulds became interested in these earthen vessels and started assisting Mr. Morse as he classified these archeological items. One day Dr. Faulds noticed fine lines looking like a human fingerprint on the surface of an earthen vessel. While examining the line patterns minutely, an idea suddenly came to his mind. These lines might be the fingerprint of the artisan who made the vessel.

He had previously observed with special interest a peculiar Japanese custom according to which people would seal important documents – such as wills, bonds, agreements, oaths, pacts etc. – by pressing their thumbs below their written names. He guessed that the fingerprint-like lines on the surface of the ancient vessel were not just scratches made carelessly but rather a personal mark intentionally made by a professional craftsman.

To substantiate this guess work, he studied various patterns marked on the surfaces of all discovered vessels. He also collected fingerprints from a few thousand Japanese people to see if he could find any patterns similar to those he

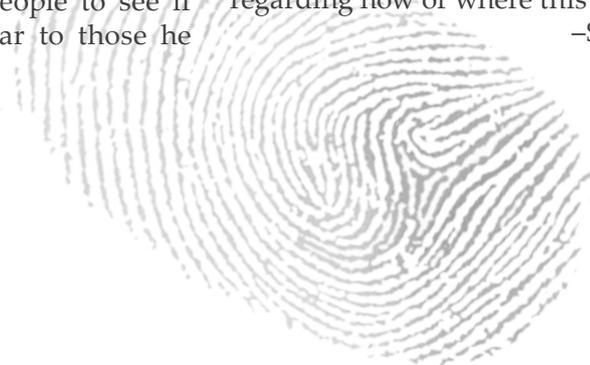
had collected from the vessels. In the process, he became convinced that no two people have identical fingerprints. Furthermore, he discovered that a child's fingerprint grows with the child in size, but the pattern never changes. Therefore, Dr. Faulds concluded that a person's fingerprint remains the same throughout his/her whole life, and every person's fingerprint differs from every other person's fingerprint.

When he publicized this discovery of human fingerprint in the science magazine 'Nature' on October 28th in 1880, he suggested to utilize this specific feature of human fingerprint for identifying any criminal by examining his/her fingerprint. However, the then Scotland Yard did not accept his idea or suggestion but rather started searching for their own original method of criminal's identification and eventually adopted it in 1901. On the contrary the Japanese police authorities appreciated Dr. Faulds' method of criminal identification and formally adopted it for criminal investigation in 1911.

Therefore, this year 2011 happens to be the Japanese Police authorities' centenary of adopting Dr. Faulds' method for criminal's investigation. It is also needless to say that this method is not only effective for criminal's investigation but also useful for personal identification of any living or dead person. Although nowadays the personal identification method based upon fingerprint is being gradually replaced by the personal DNA examination method, yet Dr. Faulds' method may continue to remain as the most economical, effective and easiest means for personal identification for long years to come.

Let me add here one final intriguing piece of information and make a request. I have heard that under British rule, the police used to identify Indian laborers by their fingerprints. I will be grateful to anyone who can provide substantial information regarding how or where this was done.

–September 15th, 2011-



The Moonlit Night's Dream

- Sakuntala Panda

Shweta and Abhilash took an impulsive decision on that particular day. Shweta's forty-fifth birthday was just a day away and she and her almost-fifty husband decided to have an exclusive celebration for some of their close friends.

The list had to be made immediately. As Shweta sat at her small study table – her favourite place in fact- her eyes strayed around. There was a cheerful picture of their son and daughter on the wall. On the other side of the wall was the glass bookshelf, which had a framed photograph of Shweta and Abhilash set amidst a stack of books. On the table, Shweta's brown diary with a golden border was open and the sparkling silver pen was placed next to it. The lamp with its cream shade completed the picture. It was switched on and the soft light was enough to brighten a portion of her face and the work surface.

Shweta picked up her pen and contemplated. Who all were special in their long list of friends? Whose name should come first?

'This sounds quite formal; what is special about such a party?' She suddenly commented

'Well, that is what everybody wants – some time to just let their hair loose.' Abhilash replied.

'That is so boring.' Shweta made a face. 'Can't you think of something that would be different and exclusive?'

A mysterious smile hovered on Abhilash's lips. 'Sure I can. ... Let us invite them with their wives.'

'What do you mean? Who are - 'them'?'

'That's sad! Don't tell me that you have forgotten them all.' Abhilash's words were laced with sarcasm. 'I was talking about your many boy friends. Men who loved you.'

What is love? Does anyone ever understand the meaning of this word? It is so difficult to find true love. Shweta was pensive.

'Let us find the addresses.'

'Sure.'

Soon both of them were searching the old diaries for addresses and phone numbers of those people who had a soft corner for her. Shweta also made a great show of preparing to make a list, but somewhere there was a disconnect. Abhilash's comment, though it was said in jest, or was it, disturbed her. She paused for a moment and stared at the ceiling of the bedroom. The fan was still and motionless although the winter had come to an end.

Did she actually love someone else? After twenty-five years of long and happy married life – a life of contentment and plenty, two lovely children and enviable careers, this was an unfound accusation. Shweta suddenly realized that even after the long life together, her husband neither understood her nor the life they shared.

Poor Abhilash!

He would probably leave the bed sometime in the night as he usually did on her birthdays and make a great show of rushing to the bedroom in the morning to wish her. 'Happy birthday, darling! You look as pretty as you did when we were newly married. How do you manage that? Oh, are you upset about what I said yesterday? I am sorry. Don't be unhappy today.'

But what if Abhilash did not get the chance to say all that or apologize? What if he discovered the half-clad body of his wife hanging from the ceiling fan, the sari around her neck, face distorted?

Shweta looked at Abhilash, who was fast asleep. She sighed and walked up to the window. The world was swathed with moonlight; everything looked so quiet and serene, but there was an anxiety in her that she could not fathom. Her body was drenched in sweat.

She walked away determinedly, changed her clothes and walked up to her bed. She was about to switch off the light, when the first name on the list caught her eye.

Animesh. After all these years, where was Animesh? Was he still in the same house? All Shweta knew was that he did not marry for a long time. There was a telephone number boldly mentioned at the top of his letterhead, but as there was no

telephone in Shweta's house, he could not talk to her. Instead, he wrote a number of long letters to her, which went unanswered.

Later, Shweta showed the pile to Abhilash.

'How come you never replied to any of his letters? Were you scared?' remarked Abhilash.

'Of course, I was. Those days the mail would get delivered thrice every day and I would watch out for the postman always. Sometimes three of his letters would come in one single day. Can you imagine what would have happened if my parents or extended family would have discovered this? I would have been penalized for no fault of mine. ... I was young then and was not sure if it was a crime to love or not.' Shweta explained.

'But didn't you want him? Abhilash was curious.

'No. Anyway, soon Animesh stopped writing letters and told me that this one-sided affair was no good. ...Well, here are the letters. You want to read them?'

Those days, Animesh was studying in Delhi University and when he came home on vacations, he would rush to Shweta's house, even though he was tired after a long train journey. He was distantly related to the family and he could visit whenever he wanted - there were no restrictions on him. But for some strange reason Shweta tried to avoid him, often hiding in the garden or escaping to a secluded corner on the terrace.

'Didn't you see him on that day in the sari shop? He was standing so close to you and was smiling at me.'

'Really? No, I don't remember. You should have introduced him to me.'

'It was only eight days after our marriage.'

'So what?'

Apparently, Animesh was a brilliant student and was also a poet and an artist. So what kept Shweta away? What was she afraid of? It was a mystery to Abhilash.

Shweta found it difficult to explain to him her time-honoured upbringing. To her love was forbidden - a frivolous emotion that was usually found in movies and fiction. Shweta did not want to venture in to that world, preferring to accept her

parents' decision. She was glad that she did not cause any harm to Animesh although he could have put her in an embarrassing situation with his letters.

Then there was Vivek.

Vivek was Abhilash's friend and colleague and a very informal person. He was always at ease and did not hesitate to speak his mind.

'Don't you recognize me? I was a student of your father.' He said when he was first introduced to Shweta.

There were many students. How on earth would Shweta remember every one?

Vivek must have realized that. He changed the subject immediately. 'You are a great cook. Today's lunch was fabulous. I wish you could teach my peon to cook the excellent mutton curry.'

Shweta had just smiled at the compliment.

The compliments came in plenty - at least from two other colleagues of Abhilash - Sanatan and Jalal who, like Vivek, were his close friends. This foursome was not satisfied with the time spent at work; they would meet after work in their office club house for a game of bridge or rummy and sometimes just for drinks and dinner.

Shweta often disapproved of the arrangement and complained.

'You never stay at home, Abhilash.'

'Just this evening, my dear, I have promised every one and they would be waiting for me. By the way, I will be back soon.' The excuse would be repeated regularly in different forms.

Everything, however, changed soon.

Sanatan's wife arrived. She strongly protested their evening sojourn at the club; hated card games and occasional drinks and dinner. Jalal's devout parents came visiting and it was difficult for Jalal to go to the club. As if these were not enough, the clubhouse needed to be repaired and was closed down for a few months.

The four friends finally found a way out; they decided to meet at Abhilash's house in the evening. Shweta had no choice, but accept the situation. At least Abhilash could stay at home all along - she reassured herself. Soon enough, she started participating in their discussions, which ranged

from high philosophy and literature to hunting and politics. Unlike the clubhouse days, these evenings ended early.

Once when he was on tour, Vivek invited his other three friends with their families for an outing. The place was breathtakingly beautiful; the weather was perfect, but other than Shweta, no body was moved. It was just an outing for them – the time to relax and unwind. Abhilash preferred to play cards with Jalal and Sanatan. Sanatan's wife was happy to just relax in bed with music and a light book. 'You are mad, Shweta. Why would you want to climb the steep hill and get tired? And why are you so keen on going to see the river? A river is a river. It is the same everywhere. What is so fascinating about it?'

Shweta had smiled and stepped out. She tried to soak in the beauty of the cloudless blue sky, the distant hills, the murmuring river, and the surrounding forest. And Vivek was always by her side, pointing out things of interest and helping her to take care of the two young children.

The outing, however, had made the bonding even tighter. The small sitting room in Abhilash's house was regularly filled with loud laughter.

Shweta remembered the day when Vivek showed up one day with twenty-five copies of a reputed magazine.

'Are you going to start a magazine stall yourself? Abhilash had pulled his leg.

'This is special, my friend, and calls for a big celebration. Shweta's poem is published in this magazine with her photograph and these copies are going to be distributed among friends,' Vivek declared with an air of pride.

Although Shweta was very anxious to see her published work, she pretended to be nonchalant and had walked into the kitchen to arrange the dinner.

Those days were sweet, as was their friendship. But in course of time, they were separated. Although Vivek had gone to another town, he often used to visit Abhilash's house and insist on taking Shweta out even when Abhilash was tied down with work and was busy elsewhere.

One evening when Abhilash and Shweta were returning from a party in a five-star hotel, they met Vivek in the lounge. He was in town to meet some people and had just stepped out of the bar. He was unable to walk properly, yet his eyes beamed with joy when he saw the couple. It was getting late and

Abhilash was about to start his car when Vivek came forward with a strange proposal.

'Why don't you go ahead, Abhilash? I shall drop Shweta home in my car.'

Abhilash could not turn down Vivek's persistent request. When Vivek went away to call his driver, Shweta was quite annoyed. 'What is the meaning of this? Are you out of your mind, Abhilash?'

'Why? Will he eat you up?' Abhilash drove away leaving a stunned Shweta standing all by herself.

While in Vivek's car, Shweta falteringly remarked, 'it is only a three minute drive. Why did you bother?'

Vivek became emotional and said; 'You have no idea how precious these three minutes are to me.'

Shweta quietly slipped her palm from Vivek's. On reaching home, she was furious with Abhilash, 'How could you just drive away leaving me alone with a drunk man?'

She often wondered why there was no reaction from her husband.

Like Vivek, Sanatan had shifted to another city, but soon he joined Abhilash's company and was back in their city. Abhilash was overjoyed, but surprisingly, Shweta did not share his happiness. Not that it bothered him, as their days of revelry were back. The evenings stretched on and Sanatan would rarely step out of their house before midnight.

Most of these days, Sanatan would force Shweta to join them. 'Why do you always run away? When I am here, there would be no writing, no cooking and no indifference. You have to join us.'

Shweta, though hesitant in the beginning, was gradually swayed away by the exuberance of such affection and intimacy. But later, she was greatly disturbed, as she sometimes discovered herself on the verge of crossing the limit.

Sanatan very often rang her up and said, 'I need to talk to you. Can we meet?'

Shweta was perturbed, but helpless. Once when Abhilash was away from home, Sanatan came and candidly confessed, 'There is something I need to tell you. Do you know why I resigned from my earlier job and joined this company? It was not for money. I wanted to be near you; to be able to see

you.'

Shweta was stunned. Thankfully, she came to her senses soon and turned away.

Since that day, Sanatan had never visited their house even once. There was no telephone call either and when they met on social occasions, the conversation was formal.

Abhilash was aware of the flow of incidents and surprisingly, he sympathized with his friend.

'Forgive the poor fellow, my dear. Sanatan has a very difficult marriage; his stubborn and aggressive wife is very quarrelsome and her days are spent mostly with her parents. Their only son too is away in a hostel. He lives a miserably lonely life. If you don't believe me, ask Jalal. He knows everything. They are after all neighbors.'

Ah, Jalal- Jalal Akbar. Shweta recollected and hurriedly turned the pages of an old diary. He was quite a lovable person. Shweta looked at the dusty photograph of Jalal with his wife Nazia. Before their marriage, Jalal could talk interminably about the film stars and other beauties he so deeply admired. Like the other two, he was very close to Abhilash and always spent their evening at their place. No wonder, Shweta was quite free with him.

She suddenly remembered the rainy evening. Abhilash was away for two days and Jalal was aware of it. Even then he came over to their house late, thoroughly drenched, past the children's bedtime. He knocked on the door, but that went unnoticed in the torrential rain, which was punctuated by thunder and lightning. Suddenly a car stopped near the gate and it was Abhilash. He had come back home one day early as his work was completed before time. He exchanged a few words with Jalal, who took leave of him abruptly. Abhilash took the rose bud from Jalal and gave it to Shweta. 'Jalal had come.'

'How could you turn him away without letting him come inside?' Shweta asked in utter astonishment.

'I know his nature'- was his short answer.

Shweta was shocked. Her abiding trust in mankind was shattered.

The loud ringing of the phone startled Abhilash and he picked up the phone quickly so as not to disturb Shweta.

'Hello.'

'...'

'What!'

'...'

'How is Nazia Bhabhi?'

'...'

'I am so sorry. Yes, I will come.'

Shweta stirred.

'Happy Birthday, darling.' Abhilash tried his best to sound normal.

'Thanks.' She groggily smiled. 'You know, Abhilash, I had this strange dream. In my dream Jalal had come. He presented me a lovely red rose imploring me to forgive him. I would have, but your phone conversation woke me up. Why don't we do something? Let us call him and surprise him.'

'Jalal is no more, Shweta. He met with an accident while returning from Bombay in his new car last night and died on the spot.'

Shweta was speechless.

(Mrs. Sakuntala Panda is a prolific writer from Orissa and she has been the Editor of a literary magazine for more than 30 years.)

The Island of the Gods

- Tapan Das

“Show me the proof! As simple as that!” said Saachi with a faint smirk and slightly impatient and challenging look as if humoring a child, patiently getting the child around to admit the fact that he’s wrong. She had stretched out on his grandfather’s armchair and fiddled with a key ring as he lay there. It was one of those very rare times when Saachi was neither on phone nor on the face book, Mr. Das noted with pleasure and relief, as he took in his fifteen year old grand daughter who has come to spend a week with him. Saachi has started drumming on the armrest of the chair now, an impatient but rhythmic tapping of his finger tips and mild jerks of her head as if responding to some inaudible rap. Her poor fingers must always be itching to be tapping, Mr. Das mused, what with the continual habit of hitting keys on the computer or the blackberry. He smiled at Saachi indulgently.

“Yes, yes, I know. That’s the instantaneous and almost unanimous response to the question of anything supernatural, malign or benign that interacts with the living.”

“Very obvious response, isn’t it, dadu? Did any spirit come back yet to testify to our theories on life after death? Without that, you’ll have to admit that all theories are just theories, speculations, NOT facts.”

“I do agree. But life’s not just that black and white, kiddo! There’s more to it than we can figure out. And at times, incidents occur that makes us wonder about that realm of impossibility. Just because we do not know about them doesn’t make them false or non existent, Right?”

Saachi let out a sigh. “Okay, what’s the story? Get to that, dadu! I bet that’s more worth our time. I wished my friends Misha, Tanima, Torsha, Sukriti, Ashmita and Amrita were there with me now.”

Mr. Das let out a hearty laugh at the restless young girl. “Sure, dadubhai. We’ll come back to the debate when I’m done with the story. Now remember, what I’m going to tell you is not fiction. Local people consider this to be a real incident.”

“Well well, until the proofs are made known to public, it will only remain real for the person who claims to have experienced it.”

“Fine, Saachi. I’m not asking you to believe. I’m just stating the fact that this is the story of my friend Robin San Kakoty, who has told me about his experiences himself.” Robinson Crusoe Dadu?” she quipped naughtily and settled down to listen.

Popularly tagged as haunted, the island

‘Bhayananda’ across the Brahmaputra River at Pragjyotishpur fed the fear mixed imagination of many a curious mind. It’s largely abandoned at nights for fear of the unknown. Elders of the village said that there were supposed to be two identical temples, about a century old, on the island, devoted to the two forms of Shakti, Durga and Kaali. At the time when kings ruled the place, prayers were offered at both the temples and offerings were made, including human sacrifices. It was believed that only the king himself and his priests visited and prayed at the temples, none else. As you can guess, mystery only deepens and gathers imagined or real details with stray comments and speculations and stories passing among the curious mainland neighbors. So within six or seven decades, it so happened that a few people who have ventured on the island did not return. They were thought to be dead. Some fearful mind supposed this to be an indication of divine wrath on those poor fellows who desecrated the temple island by setting foot on it. Soon, people wouldn’t dare touch the periphery of the island at night, let alone get into it, for fear of angering the Gods. Beings any lesser than kings could not possibly offer prayers there and now that there were no kings, there were no visitors to the temples. Yet, to appease the gods, every Monday, Wednesday and on Friday people of that locality would offer food, fruits, live chicken, goat along with a lighted earthen lamp and ask the boatman to leave those offerings on the Island.

My friend Robin was quite a vagabond. He was from the boatmen community but had not taken up the family profession. He was witty and imaginative and loved jesting around. He found the profession of dressing as mythical or epical beings and performing rather fun and took it up as fish takes to water. He would put on his make up with skilful dexterity and perform with all his heart. He also made some money showing tourists, scholars and researchers around the island, many of whom came there to study the unique flora and fauna of the place. Like all curious minds, he fell to imaginative speculations about the forbidden island now and then but never dared to explore.

One day he was busy in one of the village shows where he had to play a role of ‘Hanuman’ the monkey God. He was just done with the final bit of his performance and had lit a bidi and squatted

down to watch the others perform when a friend came running. "Robin! That tall sahib's here. The one you worked with last November, remember? He's waiting near the market. Hurry up!" It must be Derek Sahib, thought Robin, the one who had spent quite sometime in this village the previous year. Without changing his monkey attire, he rushed to meet Derek. Derek was waiting near the market. He smiled warmly and welcomed him with a cordial slap on the shoulders and took a few pictures of Robin in his attire. Robin noticed that Derek had a somewhat preoccupied look on his face though. He had a hunch that Derek was here on some uncanny business. Soon, Derek fished inside his backpack and brought out a couple of pictures and showed them to Robin. Robin identified this as a picture taken of that Island during his last visit. He could see a white form in the trees in these pictures but could not make out what it was.

"What's that white thing sahib?"

"I'm here to find out. And you'll help me. Won't you, Robin?"

A quick shadow of fear crossed Robin's face. He managed a weak smile.

"Don't tell me to take you there, sahib. You know I can't. You know it's impossible."

"Come on Robin. Don't be such a weakling. You don't need to step into the island man! You just sail to a spot near enough for me to take more pictures. I have a camera with a telescope now. Look!"

Robin's knees were already shaking and his palms were moist with cold sweat. He kept nodding his head vehemently and then gave in to Derek's coaxing, and also the currency notes that he thrust into Robin's hands. Derek gave him no time even to step out of the hanuman attire. They rushed on to the boat and headed off.

It was a Friday and people had already offered their prayers and all the boatmen were back after ferrying the offerings to the island. Some of the earthen lamps were still afloat, burning. Derek had his video camera, laser lights and his licensed revolver. He had a back pack which had a torch light, some currency notes, a Swiss knife and a book, possibly 'The lonely Planet'. Robin at first crossed the rough river and made a U-turn to approach the Island from the other side. After reaching a point, Robin stopped sailing.

"I'll go no further. You can take pictures from here sahib."

"But I can hardly see anything from here. Why don't you just go till that rock there? I'll get a better view from there."

Once again, Robin gave in. But this time, he's scared out of his life when Derek, without any warning took the camera, torch and leaped on to the Island from the rock. Robin cried out with a loud whisper. 'You cannot do this sir, they will kill you.

If you don't return within 5 minutes I will leave you and go' cried Robin. 'Done my friend' was the reply. Robin could do nothing but watch in disbelief as the fearless young Britisher slowly inched his way inwards. Robin turned his boat to a safe distance and decided to watch for sometime. He was shivering with fear. He prayed, he tried to reason that if there were creatures, Derek can defend himself with his pistol. Yet, neither prayer nor reason comforted him.

Tired of waiting and praying, Robin decided to call out several times to Derek, but his efforts were in vain. Now he was trembling with tension and apprehension. He was inclined to sail back to the safety of the village, his home and family. Yet a part of him couldn't agree to just abandon Robin.

He knew he wouldn't be at peace even if he went back. Gathering some courage, he took a stick, tied a cloth at the end, dipped it on the oil can which he had in his boat and lit a fire. He had to find Derek. He tied his boat to a rock and slowly tiptoed towards the jungle wall in search of Derek. After he went a few yards he located the camera and his backpack.

He picked them up. He took out the book from the back pack and tried to flare up the fire. As soon the fire began to grow, what he saw was horrendous. Derek was lying in a pool of blood, his face and torso nibbled and clawed and disfigured. His knees gave away and he dropped to the ground numb with shock. Suddenly, he was seized from the back by a hairy sharp clawed arm and he fainted.

Mr. Das observed with some satisfaction that his granddaughter was listening with rapt attention. Her fingers, for once, were unmoving, placed under her chin. However, her verbal pokes resume soon after. "So? What killed Derek? The angry spirits of Gods?"

Mr. Das smiled at the impatient girl. "Listen to the rest of it."

When Robin came to his senses he found himself lying uncomfortably face down on some soft slimy surface, his throat parched dry and with a terrible pain in his head. There was an eerie silence around him and for a moment he couldn't recollect where he was. He dragged himself to a sitting position and squinted his eyes and tried to make sense of where he was. As soon as he saw two old stone walled temples, things came back to him at once and he felt a sudden punch of fear numbing his senses. He realized that he was actually on the forbidden island! Images of Derek's bloodied corpse came to his mind and he felt sick. Instinctively, he drew back and started stepping backwards, away from the intimidating temples. Within a few steps, his back touched a tree trunk and he looked back. What he saw almost made him faint but he managed to hold on to the trunk.

He first sensed and then saw a multitude of hairy monkey like creatures surrounding him, staring at him steadily. Robin had goose bumps when he took in the scene around him and totally lost his nerve. He felt himself sinking down. He sensed one of the creatures approaching him and immediately Derek's nibbled, disfigured face came to his mind. He closed his eyes and waited for his fate. He could smell a strong wild stench as the creatures came near. But strangely, nothing happened. After a while he could bear the tension no more and opened his eyes. He saw fruits around him. A few bananas and some pears. The strange hairy monkey-like creatures with red wild eyes were now sitting around watching him, waiting for him to take in the food. Robin dared not do otherwise. He sat and ate what his trembling hands could put into his mouth.

He finished eating quite mechanically. In the mean time, a little curious one of the ferocious group has approached and was sitting very near him. He even rubbed his head against Robin's legs at one point and Robin's drumming heart steadied a bit. He suddenly realized why he wasn't killed yet. He was still in his monkey attire, the one he had donned for his show the previous evening. Heartened by this realization, he steadied for a while and looked around him for the first time. He took in the group of hairy monkey like creatures around him, the temples, scattered specimens of fruits and meat, which we understood to be from the offerings that were made regularly by the villagers. Still he couldn't quite understand why or how people got killed on this island. He didn't of course speculate much on this since he was himself very much in a state of shock and fear, though the initial panic had receded a bit. Soon, he spotted a particularly menacing looking creature squatting on a high branch. Unlike others in the group who were now foraging around, this one looked on steadily with his ice cold formidable look.

Immediately, Robin's heart froze with fear.

In a couple of days his nerves steadied a bit and he took the opportunity of exploring his surroundings. He soon figured out that there weren't any other creatures on the island besides these huge hairy monkey-like apes and some insects. He didn't see birds at all, which was very strange and pondered what could be the reason. Being a look-alike, Robin was soon spared the constant vigilance that these creatures had initially started for him.

All but two. The little one who had rubbed himself against his legs the first day had become a natural companion and Robin had named him 'Fido.' And the old stoic malicious one who always seemed to be staring coldly at him.

His mere presence unsettled Robin each time he sensed it.

It wasn't long before Robin gathered from his

explorations and observations that these creatures were carnivores. Not only did he find them feasting on the chicken or other sacrificial creatures offered to the twin deities of the island, but saw several half eaten birds and skeletons of small animals.

That explained the mysterious absence of birds. Yet, Robin couldn't bring himself to believe that the creatures were man-eaters. But images of Derek's half eaten corpse kept popping up in his mind and he knew that strange though it was, this had to be the truth. With realization, came relief that he was miraculously spared because of his costume as well as fear of being exposed and therefore killed.

Escape, however, seemed difficult. Whenever Robin strayed out of the forest near the beach, he always found the old malicious creature had somehow turned up on a nearby branch and was watching him. Though the creature had done nothing but freeze him with his petrifying stare till now, yet Robin dared not execute any escape plan with him looking. It was a sinister omnipresence.

It was years before Robin's chance came at last. By that time he had become even stranger looking than the creatures, with his costume still on, as well as grown hair and beard. He devoured on the offerings made at the temple and was quite a part of the group. He devised a way to make fire and that brought him a position of detached respect in the group. The chance came out of the blue one day when during continuous rainfall and flood, the island moved with a strong earthquake. In the devastation that followed, with debris all over, uprooted trees, Robin and Fido saw a raft like structure in the water. More strangely, he saw the old sinister creature being washed away by the currents of the flood water with many other monkeys. A portion of the island within no time submerged into the river. This time, Robin, shocked though he was, did not wait but jumped on the raft with Fido. He soon lost consciousness out of exhaustion. Robin and Fido were later discovered on the shores of another village at the mouth of the river. It took Robin about half a year to get back to normal life.

"So it's a tale of the supernatural rumors being busted, right? Spirits didn't eat men, monkeys did, right? That endorses my claim," said Saachi with a smirk of satisfaction.

"Yes, Saachi, in a way, you can say that. But people still prefer the aura of the supernatural and attribute human deaths on the island to the wrath of island spirits. Who has ever heard of man eating monkeys? Also, who was that omnipresent sinister looking creature that always turned up near Robin and readied the raft for Robin? Hallucination? Or the guardian spirit of the island?"

U.S. College Admission – Do’s and Don’ts

- Sanjeev Gupta

By the time both my children entered into U.S. colleges, I came to learn a lot about the realities of the application process. I am often asked by parents for advice on how to “train” their children to successfully gain admission in the college of their choice. I noticed many parents had the same questions, and this seemed an apt opportunity to summarize my experiences with American colleges.

It is no doubt that college admissions in the U.S. are getting increasingly difficult, and may seem like an overwhelming feat at times. However, there is one way any student can gain admission in the college of their choice – high SAT scores, good grades and as many extracurricular activities as they can fit in their free time. Guaranteed formula right?

Wrong... or at least partially. Of course, it is true that academic success improves one’s chances, but it is important to realize that with the increasing competition and immensity of qualified candidates, this just isn’t enough anymore. It is simply the first step. In fact, every year admissions offices reject more and more high school valedictorians.

Furthermore, while extracurricular activities may be important, it is not required nor recommended to undertake every single extracurricular activity offered. It is important for students to partake in activities that truly interest them and convincingly demonstrate this to colleges. Admissions officers would rather see you excel in one club, rather than just show up at ten.

One of the greatest things I learned was that colleges don’t necessarily want well-rounded students; they want a well-rounded class. Specialized students that can bring something new to campus are of particular interest to many schools. Colleges tend to value students that prove themselves to be out-of-the-box thinkers.

I also believe building an attractive application requires commitment. Many students start thinking about ways to embellish their resumes from freshman year. Colleges like to see a student active throughout his high schools years, even during

vacation time. In fact, many applications specifically ask about a student’s summer activities.

Another reason it is imperative to get an early start is that developing meaningful relationships with faculty goes a long way. In my opinion, the single most-overlooked aspect of the college application is the recommendation letters. These letters say a lot more about a student than one may think. Not only is it the sole insight a college has on your integrity and character from a relatively unbiased source, it also demonstrates your people’s skills.

On the other hand, the essays are an aspect of the application that I feel is given too much attention. Often times, students proofread, and over proofread their essays until they sound formulaic and dull. Admissions officers can usually tell which of the students’ essays have received immense help. So unless your writing is especially interesting or creative, you can expect the reader to skim through your work in a matter of seconds. After all, they must get through 1000’s of applications per day.

Having said all of this, the college “madness” my children went through seems silly in hindsight. I sincerely believe that when all is said and done, every student finds his niche and settles happily into whichever university he or she chooses (as cliché as it may sound). All the recognized schools in the U.S. provide an almost identical level of education. Plenty of students have gone to top-notch schools, and plenty haven’t, but in my experience, that doesn’t seem to have any bearing on their eventual success – however you may define it.



A Book for All Ages

- Rita Kar



Every few years, my books outnumber my shelf space, and it becomes time to pack a box or two to be donated at the annual school fair. Sorting through the pile is a bit like encountering old friends, and the more creased the spine, the more dog-eared and yellower the pages, the better the friend. Suddenly a job that should take only an hour has taken up a day, lost in the beloved chapters, and revisiting the pages that bring a smile to the lips or a tear to the eye. Even the books I say goodbye to require a diligent flick through and reconsideration: will I really never read this again? Will there never be a rainy Sunday when I want to revisit Provence in Spring or Showa-era Japan? Fewer books make it to the box than I intended, but there is space on the shelf now for newer additions. I anticipate their filling: a new book complete with the “new book smell” and crisp unread pages, or a used book with a sentence underlined that would have escaped my notice but is now what makes the book amazing. Of course, there is an easier solution to my dilemma: the e-book reader.

From Kindle to the iPad, the choices keep growing and the temptation is indeed great. After

all, I wouldn't have to say goodbye to any of my books, and storage would be wonderfully small (and everyone knows that small is beautiful). But there is a hint of regret as I consider the digital move: there would be no new-book smell, no underlined words, and no well-thumbed pages that I return to by force of habit. Yet change is inevitable, and I may eventually adapt to—perhaps even appreciate—the new way of reading.

After all, in light of a struggling publishing industry and falling sales in books, perhaps technological innovation will bring new readers to the fold. Though I can't help but wonder what happened when people stopped writing on papyrus. Did anyone rue losing the “new papyrus smell” or wax nostalgic over the unfurling of a scroll? When Gutenberg's press enabled the mass production of books, were there some who mourned the loss of hand-copied books?

Even though its form has changed, perhaps it is too early to mark the end of reading. Rather than agonize about *how* we are reading—books, e-books or even audiobooks—perhaps we should appreciate that people still enjoy the stories that are told. After all, writing can be considered a technological development that allowed our ancestors to write down and pass on the stories that were earlier transmitted orally. It is really storytelling, that uniquely human entertainment, that is then at the heart of reading—of books, physical or virtual. As I return to my box of books, I start to realize that even though I part with the books that I have read, what stays with me are the stories—even the ones I disliked. They are stories of love and despair, joy and grief; whether stories of French aristocrats or Indian peasants, the words convey the infinite, intimate human condition.



Virgin Galactic: A Revolution or a Risk?

- Shoubhik Pal

We, as a generation, have grown up witnessing vast changes in aerospace. Many movies have depicted space travel; some of them have grown to be cult classics, Stanley Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey and Ron Howard's Apollo 13 prime examples of this. While my generation has grown up having mainly one omnipresent event/date (9/11) spark off intense opinion and a subsequent chain of events, our parents had several important worldwide events govern their lives. Examples of this are the building and subsequent destruction of the Berlin Wall, the Vietnam War and last but not least, Neil Armstrong being the first man to set foot on the moon, uttering the forever ethereal words: "This is one small leap for man, one giant leap for mankind." It was these words that united all mankind for a split second, leaving their differences and achieving universal pride. Ever since then, it has been a small desire in possibly each one of our hearts to travel to space.

Sir Richard Branson has always been a debonair, a man who seeks to achieve the impossible. Therefore, it is fitting that he is the person who is the closest to making these dreams of ours come true. Unbelievably enough, this project has already been 5 years in the making, and is still a long way from being completed. In fact, currently, there is only one pilot capable of achieving the feat Branson hopes to achieve with this Virgin Galactic experience. This shows that Virgin Galactic is not only visionary, but



also quite risky. Pilots who opt to join this program are said to undergo 3 years of intensive training, because not only do they have to be equipped with flying at sub-orbital pressures, they also have to have medical training because there will be no doctors or medical staff on board. Despite all the pressures associated with this job, pilots consider it the zenith of their field and there is incredible demand for these positions.

Test launches are currently taking place in

the Mojave Desert in Nevada, and Virgin Galactic expects initial passenger flights to embark from there. Since February 2007, Virgin Galactic has had full compliance with NASA to help them with their goals. Like every new technology, Virgin Galactic has several competitors in the race to gather more demand. However, Virgin has two facets that these other companies don't: brand value and exclusivity. Whenever we think of Virgin, there's an outlandish feel to it, which may attract suitors towards them rather than the others. Also, the exclusivity that Sir Richard Branson offers is indelible. During development, it was suggested that there would be 12 seats in the spacecraft, however Branson rejected that immediately and made it into 6 seats, ensuring that every passenger on the plane would get a window seat to have the optimum experience of travelling in space. Call it the Virgin experience, if you will.

Surprisingly, without a single pilot ready to fly the spacecraft, bookings have already started, with a mammoth \$200,000 dollars to get a seat, with \$20,000 deposit at the current moment. What will all of this provide? After a weekend of space training, passengers will embark onto their spectacular journey, ranging from 15 minutes to get into orbit, following by 6 minutes of stoppage with no gravity. Here, passengers can remove their seatbelts and float around. After 6 minutes, they will take a steep descent which will last for about 19 minutes. The overall journey will be approximately 40 minutes. This poses another risk to Virgin Galactic. While the glitterati and the well endowed will find \$200,000 to be paltry for them, would be upper middle or middle class actually trade \$200,000 of their hard earned money for 40 minutes of ecstasy? Virgin plans to have 10 flights a day. While it will be no doubt initially successful, whether it will or will not suffer from burnout is an interesting concept.

Whether or not it will be a constant success, Virgin Galactic promises to provide an experience that words cannot describe. I already know 2 friends with aerospace majors who want to become Virgin Galactic pilots. Interest is simmering in this project ever since its inception. Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey highlighted a realistic dream back when he made the movie in 1968. While it has been delayed by some time, Kubrick's vision seems to be coming to fruition. In around 5 years, a normal person with minimal experience in space training can go to

space, albeit for 6 minutes, and enjoy the vividness of our galaxy. But whether Virgin Galactic will be successful by the end of it all is a case of extreme agony and ecstasy. Because while Virgin Galactic promises to be spectacular and indescribable, the question remains on whether it is profitable and fully safe. □



A Window to the Spiritual World

Inauguration of ISKCON New Gaya Japan Center at Funabori, Tokyo.

It was in the year 1970 when His Divine Grace A.C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Srila Prabhupada, Founder Acharya of International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON) first visited Japan. He translated and published over 70 Vedic books which are available at many universities and libraries throughout the world. They have been translated in to different languages including Japanese and are accepted as authoritative literatures. His Divine Grace and his disciples till date have established over 550 centers worldwide and the number is ever increasing. Through Srila Prabhupada's inspiration, this "Hare Krishna" or "ISKCON" movement continued in Japan and witnessed a historic milestone on the weekend of July 2nd & 3rd, 2011. A grand new temple inauguration ceremony took place to establish ISKCON New Gaya Japan temple, Pure Vegetarian Govinda's restaurant and Vedic Culture Center at Funabori, Edogawa-ku, Tokyo. This opening ceremony gathered an audience of 1,500 people from different cities like Osaka, Kofu, Nagoya, Kyushu, Yamanashi, Niigata, Chiba, Yokohama, etc. Various dignitaries and important people attended this event including the Ambassador of India to Japan.

ISKCON has made big strides and has become more visible throughout the world and now in Japan through the social services it provides through its scripturally aligned meditation and yoga techniques, counseling on self management, spiritual book distribution, sanctified food charity, pure vegetarian restaurant, promoting ancient Vedic culture through music, art, drama, discourses, etc. This is to foster the 'happiness' formula of "Simple Living and High Thinking".

Mr. Junsaku Nakamura and Mr. Sanjay Krishnachandra (080-5412-2528), co-presidents of ISKCON New Gaya Japan mentioned that this is an ambitious undertaking, costing more than 200 million JPY, and will serve society in a unique way that will be most satisfying to the heart, creating universal harmony and peace in this stressed and chaotic world. It will educate people to understand the real goal of human life and live by it.

This institution is established to attract a wide variety of people depending on their interests and be truly international with a specific flavor to serve Japanese people. For those who are spiritually inclined, there is marvelous beautiful temple. Vedic philosophy and its application in today's world are shared through demonstrations and encouragement for the ancient spiritual process of Mantra-Yoga (Japa & Sankirtan) to promote spiritual advancement. Vedic Culture Center would serve as an embassy of tradition and culture.

On the charity front, Food for Life Global – Japan (FFLG-J), a voluntary food distribution organization served about 6,200 opulent lunch/dinner and more than 6,000 kilograms of fresh fruits & vegetables to affected people every Sunday for three months. Total spent on this charity till date is about 5 million JPY. Govinda's restaurant went extra miles while providing food for relief victims at Miyagi. FFLG-J is also sponsoring 1,000 fresh hot meals everyday to financially challenged school children in Mumbai and around. Mr. Shrikant Shah (090-1469-6129), Director of FFLG-J, says that every strata of the society should be served by this project without any discrimination and reservation.

"You are what you eat". To promote social well-being, rich, healthy, vegetarian, karma-free and sanctified cuisine to satisfy body, mind & soul is provided at Govinda's restaurant (<http://govindas-tokyo.com>). Japanese have offered a lot of praise for this service and offerings at Govinda's restaurant, which is an integral part of this temple.

After the new temple opening, next big event at this temple was Shri Krishna Janmashtmi (Appearance day of Lord Shri Krishna), which was celebrated on August 20/21/22. Around 1,500 guests attended this celebration. Looking forward for an opportunity to have your association at the new temple in the service of the Supreme Lord.

Please visit www.ISKCONJapan.com for more details.



Home is where the hearth is.... Is it?

- Anagha Ramanujam

I am a very proud Indian.

No, I am not saying this when Indians all over the world are returning home for the big bucks that are now in their homeland, I am not saying this now, when conveniences have come within arm's length of most educated, working Indians, I am not even saying this because Indians run businesses all over the world or author books that make Oscar winning movies...

I am stating this now because out there in the world, there are those who question India and what she offered them.

I am a proud Indian. Proud - of my parents, my friends, my family, my upbringing, my education - my schooling, my university, my land, her history, art, culture and her people. People - yes, they are fundamental to my identity and sense of pride. They are the ones who make my land what she is, they embrace one and all, they welcome a foreigner with the same warmth that they welcome family and today, they are even willing to abandon their land and identity to adopt a foreign land and culture, one, that doesn't necessarily welcome or want them...

They say home is where the hearth is, for many in my family the hearth burns abroad... I spoke to a cousin after several years and once we exchanged pleasantries, she said - "Just got back home from a month of vacation in India." "Home?" I ask. "Yes, the US is my home now. I am well settled here. Life is so convenient. You get everything, you can go anywhere... I send my son to school here, it's such a different world out here, teachers are so loving and caring, and I just love it!" If I had been patient enough to let her carry on, I am certain she would have concluded with "I am so fortunate to be married to a green card holder, I never wish to return"! In hind sight, I wish I had allowed her continue, I could have responded with you aren't married to a green-card holder Madame; you're married to the green-card. Yes, a green-card!! The be-all-end-all of your identity - A mere card... You complain of being an unknown face in India's crowd, I really wonder if you haven't reduced yourself and your family to an unknown number in an ever growing, deeply scrutinized, unwelcome list!

I am not in any NRI bashing mode. No, don't mistake me. I have a lot of respect for people who have the courage to stand up and take charge of their existence instead of accepting everything just

as it is, those who have the strength of personality to endure the hardships of being away from family for years on end trying to improve the lives of those they love - for these people respect their land and her people and understand what it takes to change things for the better. These people also know that if they had collectively worked just as hard, they would have brought about a big change in India, people who are today returning with a sense of nostalgia and to imbibe the spirit of India in their family's identity... But I am unabashed in challenging people who still have a condescending attitude to India and her people to a brawl of words and wits - people who have it easy, who are nestled in the comforts of a foreign land and didn't see what it took to get there, people who look at India and their origin as a bane rather than a boon. For them, school was stressful; college was a drab and day-to-day existence - an unforgettable endurance test.

Bihar is a lawless land, not the capital of Chandragupta Maurya or the land where the Buddha attained enlightenment; Tamil Nadu is the land of drought, not one which preserves the oldest classical language till date and UP - the land of corruption, not the richest Mughal kingdom of Awadh or the land where Sufi saints and Urdu poetry flourished and prospered.... Perhaps they barely remember these details for they never listened in school or read beyond ill-forgotten text books... They hated history and geography because it was "cool" to like science and math, and hated language classes for they were never told that language was an expression of human identity, not a subject to score points in. Therefore, when they were given a choice to pursue a selection of subjects, they either voluntarily chose science and math or the ones with an element of doubt (like me) were shunted into the science wagon in an attempt to permanently shut their soul's window to the world of history, art and culture...

You probably think it is ironical that I say this - someone who has trodden the beaten path, studied science and math, gone on to become an engineer and for all practical purposes, has moved abroad without a clear intention of returning to the land she is now raving about. I say "Think again!"

I've been traveling quite a bit of late and I can tell you this for sure - every time my flight lands in India - no matter where it is - my heart always leaps into my eyes that shine with a glint and say "Aah..

this is home"... Indeed, home is where the hearth is, just that my hearth still burns in the heart of India. Anywhere else that I live, no matter how convenient or empowering it is, it isn't my "home". I am and will always be a foreigner in every other land and this is a fact that cannot be changed. Indians are known to be very accepting - of culture, of people, of lands yet I must know that I will never be accepted in any country the way I am accepted in my own. No green card, red card or yellow card will change my identity or my memories... memories of home....

Home is waiting at the bus stop at 7 am with 5kgs of books in a back-pack that's ready to tear apart for a bus that would turn up half hour late, home is walking back from school in the rain, jumping in puddles on the way, home is going to play in the park with the kids - kids borne by the maid who bonded with us just as much as we bonded with each other, home is hot summer evenings spent in the aangan drinking aam ka panna, home is making clay toys with the black earth from the garden with the maali on a winter afternoon and learning to swim in the river while the washer women bathed and did their laundry, home is mum's cooking, pouring over books, fearing the math teacher's reprimand for not knowing 19×7 , home is the friendly neighbourhood

and the art, music and dance class, home is where every festival was celebrated with much fan-fare by the whole community, home is mum chatting with the newspaper boy who won't deliver paper for a week as he going to bring his wife from the village and home is shedding a tear with the fruit-seller who lost her husband to tuberculosis last night ... home is the dusty lanes, bicycles and rickshaws, priests and monks, home is what gives me my identity ... clearly I am getting very nostalgic, but home is none other than where I grew up.

And that is why I say I am proud - for I am proud of where I am today and know that it is my land that has brought me here, a country that has taught me to brave hardships and establish an identity for myself.

I often wondered why so many of my professors in university came back to India after a few years abroad. They said they wanted to come back home... and going by the narratives of the developed world... I couldn't imagine why they would want to... Today, I know, for if I were to wish for a collection of childhood and growing-up experiences for my children someday, they would be identical, in every single way to the one I had - in every single way!



India - The Emerging Global Manufacturing Hub

- Arun Goyal

India is the world's largest democracy and the 4th largest economy in terms of purchasing power parity. The Indian economy exhibited remarkable resilience in the face of the global financial crisis and registered a growth of 7.2% during 2009-10 & 8.5% in 2010-11. It was one of the highest growth rates compared to most other economies in the rest of the world. India's robust, well-capitalized and well-regulated financial sector; gradual and cautious opening up of the capital account; and the large stock of foreign reserves worked to its advantage and helped India in coping with the meltdown. There are now visible signs of recovery. The Economy Survey of India has predicted growth of over 9% for 2011-12.

Today, India is one of the most exciting emerging markets in the world. India's skilled managerial and technical manpower matches with the best available in the world. Further, emerging middle class provides India with a distinct cutting edge in global competition. India's time tested institutions offer foreign investors a transparent environment that guarantees the security of their long-term investments. These include a free and vibrant press, a well-established judiciary, a sophisticated legal and accounting system and a user-friendly intellectual infrastructure. India's dynamic and highly competitive private sector has long been the backbone of its economic activity and offers considerable scope for foreign direct investment, joint ventures and collaborations.

Foreign Investment Policy and Investment Outlook

India's foreign investment policy has been formulated with a view to attract and encourage Foreign direct Investment (FDI) into India. The process of regulation and approval has been substantially liberalized. FDI under automatic route is permitted in most activities/sectors, except a few where prior approval of the Government is required. Government of India welcomes FDI in all sectors where it is permitted, especially for development of infrastructure, technological up gradation of Indian industry through 'Greenfield' investments and in projects having the potential of creating employment opportunities on a large scale. Investment for setting up Special Economic Zones (SEZs) is also welcomed.

As a result, India is fast emerging as one of the most favored investment destinations in the world. A number of studies and surveys in the recent

past have highlighted the growing attractiveness of India as an investment destination. According to A T Kearney, India ranked first in Global Services Location Index 2009 and Global Retail Development Index 2009. Goldman Sachs has predicted that, India will become the world's third largest economy by 2032. In 2009-10 FDI worth US\$25.83 billion flowed into India and the corresponding figure for 2010-11 was US\$19.42 billion.

India as a global manufacturing hub

India is on the verge of announcing National Manufacturing Policy to make India an International Manufacturing hub. The policy aims to increase manufacturing sector's share in GDP from 15% to 25% by 2022 and double the current employment in the sector. The policy also envisages increasing domestic value addition and enhanced global competitiveness of the sector. India offers many advantages that attract foreign companies to establish their manufacturing base in India:

Large Domestic Market: As compared to many other countries, India has huge domestic market. Private domestic consumption accounts for more than 50% of India's GDP. Young population, fast growing disposable incomes, increased availability and use of consumer finance and credit cards, increased awareness - all these are leading to the creation of a rapidly growing consumer base and one of the world's largest markets for manufactured goods and services. It is expected that more than 40% of India's population will fall under middle class (Annual Income of INR 0.2 million to INR 1 million) by 2025 and by then India will be the 5th largest consumer market.

English Speaking Professionals: India has more than 100 million English speaking people. There are large number of schools, colleges and universities with English as medium of instruction. It requires much lesser time for the foreign companies to establish base in India.

Human Resources: India is among the world's youngest countries. Its median age would be 25 years even in the year 2025. India has third largest pool of scientific and technical manpower in the world. India provides skilled and unskilled manpower at very competitive rates. For example, a qualified engineer who passes from a premier institution like

Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) gets placed with \$12K to \$20K per annum package in a good company as compared to \$50K to \$80K in USA.

Strength in Software & Allied Services: India has emerged very strong in the field of software and IT enabled services. This has helped in optimizing the supply chain and in reducing the overheads. The cost of establishing an Enterprise Resource Planning System in a company located is much cheaper in India as compared to a foreign location.

Cost consciousness in product design: The Indians are generally cost conscious. Affordability of the people in India to purchase a product is a major factor in success of a product. The products may not be flamboyant in aesthetics but serve the desired purpose. So each manufacturer tries to bring in better features within the budget limit to penetrate the market. Such products have found acceptance in global markets.

Influence of Japanese manufacturing principles: Japanese manufacturing principles are considered to be the best in the world for reducing cost of manufactured products. The concept of Kanban (Just-in-time concept), Kaizen (Continuous improvement), Total Productive Maintenance (TPM) have proved successful on shop floors in India. Indian companies have proved to be quick and better in following the Japanese manufacturing concepts as compared to many other countries in the world. Adoption of Japanese manufacturing principles have helped Indian companies to reduce cost of production, improve quality and enhance customer satisfaction.

Special Economic Zones

India has announced Special Economic Zone (SEZ) policy with the intention of making the SEZ an engine for economic growth. These zones can act as a catalyst in making India as a global manufacturing hub as they provide tax holidays and many other incentives. SEZs also have more control over infrastructure like water and power and less regulation. They can create an appetite

for worldwide giants to come to India. Some of the benefits to the units located in SEZ are:

- Duty free import of goods for development, operation and maintenance of SEZ units.
- 100% income tax exemption on export income for SEZ units for the first 5 years, 50% for the next 5 years thereafter and 50% of the ploughed back export profit for next 5 years.
- External commercial borrowing by SEZ units up to US\$500 million in a year without any maturity restriction through recognized banking channels.
- Exemption from central sales tax.
- Exemption from service tax.
- Single window clearance for central and state level approvals.
- Exemption from state sales tax and other levies as extended by the respective State Governments.
- Exemption from customs/excise duties for development of SEZs for authorized operations approved by the board of approval (BOA).
- Income tax exemption on income derived from the business of development of the SEZ in a block of 10 years in 15 years.
- FDI up to 100% is permitted under automatic route.

Conclusion

India is all set to emerge as the leading manufacturing hub as global manufacturers are looking for newer places to carry out their operations. India offers many advantages including that of large domestic market and availability of technical, skilled & unskilled human resources at very competitive rates. Global players have already benefited from their operations in India and are making expansion plans for the country. The companies are planning to expand by way of setting up manufacturing base in India, increasing the existing production capacity, product diversification, establishing research centers etc. Many Japanese companies like Suzuki Motor Corporation, Sony Corporation etc are in India for quite some time and leveraging the India advantage.

Acknowledgement: Some of the Information contained in this article is from the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India publication 'INDIA Dynamic Business Partner: Investor Friendly Destination'.

Japan's most popular CEO

- Ravi Mathur



To most foreigners, one of the hardest things to understand about the Japanese is their voracious appetite for *manga* or comics. Although English translations of Japanese comics, albeit few, have been successful, the fact that middle aged men can sit with their heads buried in comic books on rush hour trains without any sense of embarrassment never fails to amaze me.

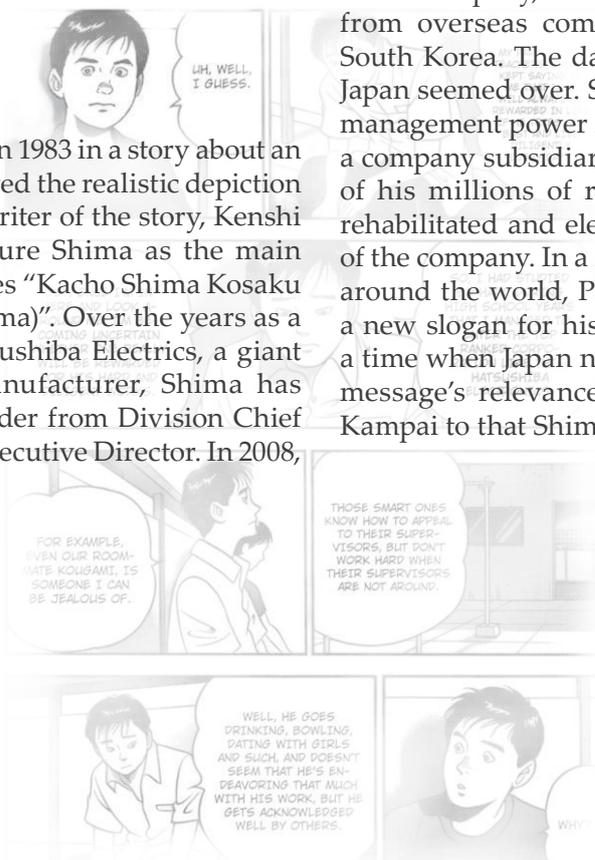
While in the West, mainstream comics are almost entirely for children, in Japan there are many types of *manga* and some of them are very definitely NOT suitable for children. Arguably, the most interesting and contemporary *manga* character is Kosaku Shima.

Shima first appeared in 1983 in a story about an office romance. Readers loved the realistic depiction of corporate life and the writer of the story, Kenshi Hirokane decided to feature Shima as the main character of the *manga* series "Kacho Shima Kosaku (Section Chief Kosaku Shima)". Over the years as a salaried employee of Hatsushiba Electric, a giant consumer electronics manufacturer, Shima has risen up the corporate ladder from Division Chief to Managing Director to Executive Director. In 2008,

when the charismatic and flamboyant Shima was named as Shacho (President), newspapers reported his promotion as it were national news.

The Shima series has sold more than 30 million copies in book form and spawned two serials. While the comic series includes its share of fantasy and sexual encounters featuring the dashing and James Bondish Shima-san, its relevance lies in how the broad contours of the narrative mirror the ups and downs of the Japanese economy. During the boom years, Shima's personal and professional experiences reflected the assumptions of so many Japanese corporate executives that Japan would keep rising and the West would decline. After the financial bubble burst, the *Shima Manga* series focused on Japan's own shortcomings – factional rivalries and groups within the Hatsushiba company, and above all the neglect of obligations to ordinary workers.

A common theme was the consequences that corporate decline exacted on individual Japanese. When Shima took over as Managing Director (2005) of his company, it was facing a tough competition from overseas competitors, namely, China and South Korea. The days of lifetime employment in Japan seemed over. Shima soon found himself in a management power struggle and was packed off to a company subsidiary. However, much to the relief of his millions of readers, he was subsequently rehabilitated and elevated to the post of President of the company. In a speech broadcast to employees around the world, President Shima came out with a new slogan for his company "Think Global". At a time when Japan needs to reinvent itself, Shima's message's relevance cannot be overemphasized. Kampai to that Shima-san!



Author's remarks

It is indeed a pity that English translations of only a few selected episodes of the Shima series are available in the Kodensha International's bilingual edition.

Life I Live I See

- Shalini Mallik

[Two weeks from now, I will be entering a new phase of life. Leaving behind school, known friends, comforts of home, I will be heading towards an unknown period, University and responsibilities of life.]

What is the meaning of life?
Well there is no specific meaning now is there?
It's about making mistakes and doing rights.
Taking a leap of faith to grab that last chance of hope.
Looking at your surroundings wondering if it will devour you?
Screaming at the top of your lungs-
I HAVE THE MIGHT TO PREVAIL.
But having the confidence knowing someone is always there for you,
When you plummet and cannot pick up the broken pieces.
Living up to your potential.
Knowing that each and every day you will embark on a task.
Some you will find easy, others miserably hard.
Looking at everything from different perspectives,
Because there is always two sides to one story.
Stop and think about your actions,
Should I have done that? No? Yes?
Finding the silver lining to a thread.
Only you can dig deep and find yourself.

[Few months ago, we lost a classmate in High School whose time ended abruptly due to wrong choices of life. I wrote this eulogy on her behalf, for her funeral. Her mother asked me to publish it, to keep her memory alive.]

Dear Mom,

Sorry for the times -
I looked right into your eyes and lied to your face.
When I hurt you on purpose just to get my way.
Screaming I HATE YOU, YOU'RE THE WORST MOTHER EVER!
Sneaking out of the house at 2 am to do unanticipated stuff.
Not coming home for 3 days, while you were worrying with agony.
Stealing alcohol from liquor cabinet.
Coming home absolutely wasted, staying in bed for 3 days.
Skipping school to meet up with my stoner boyfriend,
Yelling that I love him and to you to stay out of my life!
Flunking History, Math and English.
Getting suspended for smoking on school property.
Forgetting it was your 50th birthday.
Hanging out with my friends on mother's day.
Not saying once I Love You.

Dear Mom,

Thank you for the times -
Looking straight back at me and saying no.
You stepped out of my way to let me be.
Calming me down and hugging me so tight.
Staying up until 4 am to make sure I came home safe.
Driving around town to look for me.

Holding my hair back while I puked my guts out.
Sitting by my bed and stroking my hair for comfort.
Flushing my bag of marijuana down the toilet.
Staying in my life.
Finishing half my assignments to make sure I pass.
Stopping me from losing my life by 7 minutes, 20 times a day.
Baking my favourite raspberry chocolate cake for each birthday.
Buying me presents out of the blue to make me happy.
Saying you love me every night.

Dear Friends,

Empty bed, empty room
Cherish the memories worth remembering
Look past the sorrow and serenity
Wipe away tear drops drenching your face with grief
Standing in the rain upon my soul,
Upon my grave –
Six feet under.
Every deed taken, do no wrongs nor have regrets
Hang your head down, say goodbye.
Yet say hello to a beautiful life lived -
Six feet above.

Charm Of Life

- Sunil Sharma



When the waters of the sea are serene and blue
When the sun is rising on the grass with dew
When you can feel that warmth of sand
With the sun rising on the morning land
When somebody is there who cares for you
When somebody is there who dares for you
When all around is considerate and warm
This is when the life brings forth its charm

Autobiography of a One Rupee Coin

- Tanushree Dutta

I am a coin of one rupee
Born in the year 1970
But very sad to say
I can't celebrate my birthday
Because I don't have any birth certificate
So nobody knows the exact date
The year is only known to me
As it's engraved on my body.

After I was born I was kept in a locker
Along with my other brothers and sisters.
Then, one day a shopkeeper
Took me along with my 99 family members
In exchange of a hundred rupees note.
The shopkeeper involved me in a transaction
As a balance amount,
To a mother I was given.

The mother's boy wasn't fascinated by
My cute body
Without hesitation, he parted me
For purchase of a Cadbury
Don't be amazed
In the year 1985
My value was similar to present day Rs.25

Now, let me tell you an interesting story of how

I performed the job of ten rupees
One day two friends were going to sell 20 berries
Only one of them had money
Which was of course I
During the journey my possessor
Was mad with hunger
He ate two berries
By paying his friend one rupee
The other friend also became hungry
He repaid his friend, one rupee
For eating two berries.
Like this two friends who were very hungry
Ate all berries and I performed
The job of ten rupees.

Nowadays hardly a toffee worth is my valuation
And due to fast depreciation
I am becoming of no use
To accept me even beggars often refuse
Soon approaching the time of my elimination

I shall be driven out of circulation
And become history for future generation
When hundred rupees will be
The lowest denomination.



Spectator

- Udita Ghosh

My eyes are here to behold,
My mind is keen to feel,
I am an observer in this vast world
Of wounds I cannot heal.
Your love, your pain I'm here
To see, to feel, to understand,
You struggle to rise - I listen
To your tale, in a distant far away land.
The histories are many, I seek to know them all
Since one Truth shall not be had
Justice bears no meaning in stone,
Her eyes covered, she stands unclad.
So spin me no tales of fairies or elves
When they starve before my eyes --
Grotesque little mutants unable to grow
Love-children of your greeds and vice.
If I am quick to judge your ways
Then know that I am stricken by pain
The burnt flesh, the scarred womanhood,
The dreams they wove in vain,
And judge I must what I see before me,
That is why my eyes are moist.
Your symbols are scratched in to my skin
In the colours of the flags you hoist
I cry for your arms that raise the bricks
That you stamp into a wall,
For you know not what you do

And will not hear them call.
In tears I see you on the other side
In the ruins of your house,
As you resolve in your mind to fight
I see the anger it shall arouse.
Why do you choose to worship greed?
Why do you lighten your skin?
Why do you insult a man you don't know?
Why do you kill her kin?
Your beliefs are vibrating loudly in my ear
Must you really give it a name?
I have seen the sacred altars besmirched
One by one without shame.
I am sick to my heart seeing you put him down
For not wanting to be as you,
And I am choked by the mockery they make of
human blood
That was spilt in trying to undo.
And I feel everything, but I cannot purge your sins
I wonder if it at all can be done
When you have thus- slashed and raped,
Mocked and killed in fun.
I am an audience though I stand on the stage,
I weep your tears and mine,
I know and feel but I cannot break the chains
That all our acts combine.



A Poem for my Daughter

- Ahona Gupta

Giggles and smiles
Naughtiness and wiles
That's what Kuhu's made of...

Sunshine to clear every cloud
Sometimes quiet but mostly loud
That's what Kuhu's made of...

A terror, a brat
Tears at the drop of a hat
That's what Kuhu's made of...

A bundle of sweetness, brightness & fun
The beauty of springtime, the warmth of the sun
That's what Kuhu's made of...

Laughter that melts your heart
A sloppy kiss for every hurt
That's what Kuhu's made of...

Twinkling eyes, a toothy grin
Mischievous filled upto the brim
That's what Kuhu's made of...

Temper tantrums at the mall
The deadly calm before a squall
That's what Kuhu's made of...

A bear hug at the end of the day
Bubbling with words she can't wait to say
That's what Kuhu's made of...

A bundle of contradictions and often a tease
A creature of moods not easy to please...
That's what Kuhu's made of...

Mamma's joy and her father's pride
Taking life right in her stride
Growing up in the blink of an eye
Indeed how time does seem to fly.
And yet I know
Our journey's just begun,
Our lives forever entwined as one.



जापान से सीख

- लोचनी अस्थाना

स्वामी विवेकानन्द ने ११७ वर्ष पूर्व जापान से लौटने पर कहा था कि हम जापान से बहुत कुछ सीख सकते हैं। हमने एक सदी बीत जाने के बाद भी जापान से क्या सीखा, हम सब भली भाँति जानते हैं लेकिन एक बात अवश्य है कि ११७ साल बाद भी स्वामी विवेकानन्द का कथन दोहराया जा सकता है। सुनी सुनाई नहीं, आँखों देखी बात कह रही हूँ कि आज भी जापान से बहुत कुछ सीखने की ज़रूरत है और इसे सीख कर हम न केवल अपनी ज़िन्दगी ही आसान कर सकते हैं, बेहतर कर सकते हैं, बिना कौड़ी खर्च किए।

दूसरे विश्व युद्ध के बाद से जापान आज सबसे अधिक कठिन दौर से गुज़र रहा है। ११मार्च को जापान के पूर्वोत्तरी क्षेत्र तोहोकु में ९ की तीव्रता का महाभूकंप और उसके बाद उठी त्सुनामि ने मियागि, इवाते, और फुकुशीमा प्रिफैक्चरों में जो तबाही मचाई वो कल्पना से परे है। नगर के नगर बह गए जहाँ सिवाए किचड़ गारे के कुछ नहीं बचा। लापता और मृतकों की संख्या २५ हज़ार से ऊपर है। कहीं समूचा परिवार बह गया है तो कहीं परिजन। लेकिन इस महात्रासदी के बाद भी न तो टैलीविज़न पर छाती पीट पीट कर सरकार को कोसते लोग दिखे, न कहीं उनके नाम पर धरना प्रदर्शन देखने को मिले।

दिल चीर देने वाली इस त्रासदी के बाद भी लोगों का अनुशासन हमारे लिए अनुकरणीय है। स्कूलों या व्यायामशालाओं में शरण लिए लोग जिनके पास सिवाय जान के अगर कुछ और बचा है तो वो है संस्कार, संयम और विनम्रता।

जापानियों का संस्कार है कि वे अपने से पहले दूसरों के बारे में सोचते हैं कि कहीं उनके कर्म या वचन से दूसरे की भावना आहत न हो जाए, उसके दिल को कोई ठेस न पहुँच जाए। ये जज़्बा त्रासदी की इस घड़ी में भी बरकरार है। प्रभावित इलाकों में हर चीज़ की कमी है। खाने-पीने के सामान की सुपरमार्केट खुलने में कम से कम दस दिन तो लग गए और जो सामान वहाँ तक पहुँचा वो सीमित ही था। लेकिन वाह री जापानियत, विपदा और अभाव की इस घड़ी में भी राशन लेने के लिए लोग पंक्तिबद्ध थे और उतना ही सामान खरीद रहे थे जितने की ज़रूरत थी ताकि हर किसी को मिल सके।

देश का हर नागरिक इसी तरह सोचता है इसलिए विपदा में पड़े लोगों की मदद के लिए हर किसी ने हाथ

बढाया है। शरण स्थलों पर रह रहे लोगों को हिम्मत और हौसला देने के लिए पूरा देश एक जुट है। कोई ये चर्चा करता नहीं दिखता कि सरकार क्या कर रही है, हर कोई ये सोचता है कि वो क्या कर सकता है इन लोगों के लिए। इस भावना का बीज बचपन से उनके दिल में बो दिया जाता है। प्राईमरी स्कूल के बच्चे भी आज शरण स्थलों में जा कर लोगों को मुस्कान बाँट रहे हैं। कोई अपने नन्हें हाथों से बूढ़ों के हाथ मसल कर गर्म करने की चेष्टा करता है तो कोई उनके कंधे दबाता है।

स्वयंसेवा की भावना से ओतप्रोत युवा देश भर से त्सुनामि प्रभावित इलाकों में पहुँच रहे हैं। जिन घरों को त्सुनामि साथ नहीं ले गई वहाँ कीचड़ छोड़ गई थी। देहाती इलाकों में ज़्यादातर बुजुर्ग ही रह रहे थे।

इन बुजुर्गों के मकानों की सफाई करने ये युवा आगे आए और टोलियों में काम करते हुए खेल-खेल में मकानों की सफाई ही नहीं की, घर के आसपास का हिस्सा साफ करके चलने-फिरने की जगह भी बना दी। कई इलाकों में पानी, बिजली, गैस अभी पूरी तरह बहाल नहीं हो सकी है तो आसपास के मिट्टी के तेल डिपो वालों ने, मिट्टी के तेल के दाम नहीं बढ़ाए, बल्कि लोगों को मुफ्त बाँटना शुरू किया, इतना की हर किसी को मिल सके। कमसे कम जिस्म जमा देने वाली सर्दी में लोग, कुछ गर्माहट तो पा सकें।

महाभूकम्प और त्सुनामि ने फुकुशिमा परमाणु बिजलीघर को ऐसा नुकसान पहुँचाया है की दुनिया भर में चिंता की लहर दौड़ गई ये बिजलीघर तोक्यो इलैक्ट्रिक पावर कंपनी का है जो राजधानी तोक्यो सहित एक बड़े इलाके में बिजली सप्लाई करती है। जब बिजलीघर ने काम करना बंद कर दिया तो ज़ाहिर है बिजली की कमी हो गई। कंपनी ने लोगों से माफी माँगी और बिजली की कटौती करने को कहा। लोगों ने स्थिति की नाजुकता को समझा और हर कोई अपने स्तर पर बिजली की कटौती करने में जुट गया। जो सुपरमार्केट दिन रात खुली रहती थीं, वो रात ८ बजे बंद होने लगीं। दिनभर बाज़ार में विशाल टीवी स्क्रीनों पर विज्ञापन चलते रहते थे वो सब बंद हैं, जो इलैक्ट्रॉनिक खेल की दुकानें दिन रात रोशनी और शोर से गुंजायमान रहती थीं वो सब शांत हैं। घरों में लोगों ने ए.सी का इस्तेमाल बंद कर दिया दफ्तरों के गलियारों, डाइनिंग हाल, प्रसाधन कक्षों में प्रकाश न्यूनतम कर दिया गया। नतीजा ये हुआ कि कंपनी को प्रस्तावित

Anjali

आवर्ती बिजली कटौती नहीं करनी पड़ी। लेकिन मज़े की बात ये कि कोई भी इसके लिए हाय हाय नहीं कर रहा।

पीने के पानी में विकिरण का समाचार आया तो एकदम से बाज़ार में बोतलबंद पानी की माँग तीस गुणा तक बढ़ गई। तुरन्त दुकानदारों ने प्रति व्यक्ति दो बोतल पानी की बिक्री शुरू कर दी। किसी से कहने की कोई ज़रूरत नहीं पड़ी। बस कागज़ पर लिख कर बोतलबंद पानी के शैल्फ पर लटका दिया। जो भी पानी की बोतल लेने जाता वो पढ़ता और बस दो बोतल ले कर चला आता। किसी को दुकानदार से उलझते, तकरार

करते, लड़ाई झगड़ा करते नहीं देखा गया। हर कोई अपनी व्यक्तिगत जिम्मेदारी समझ रहा है। हर कोई समझ रहा है कि देश इस समय मुश्किल के दौर में है और उसे देश के लिए कुछ अवश्य करना है।

ये जज़्बा अनमोल है, और इसके लिए कोई कौड़ी खर्च नहीं करनी, केवल सही समझ पैदा करने की ज़रूरत है। ये देश उन्नत है आर्थिक समृद्धि की वजह से नहीं, उन्नत सोच के कारण, और शायद सभ्य समाज की यही पहचान है।

(ये लेख भारत के राष्ट्रीय दैनिक “नई दुनिया” में २ अप्रैल २०११ को प्रकाशित)

स्वामी विवेकानन्द के अनमोल विचार:

- अगर धन दूसरों के मदद में मदद करे, तो इसका कुछ मूल्य है, अन्यथा, ये सिर्फ बुराई का एक ढेर है, और इससे जितना जल्दी छुटकारा मिल जाये उतना बेहतर है।
- ब्रह्माण्ड कि सारी शक्तियाँ पहले से हमारी हैं। वो हमीं हैं जो अपनी आँखों पर हाथ रख लेते हैं और फिर रोते हैं कि कितना अन्धकार है!
- हम जितना ज्यादा बाहर जायें और दूसरों की सेवा करें, हमारा हृदय उतना ही शुद्ध होगा, और परमात्मा उसमें बसेंगे।
- जब तक आप खुद पे विश्वास नहीं करते तब तक आप भगवान पे विश्वास नहीं कर सकते।
- उस व्यक्ति ने अमरत्व प्राप्त कर लिया है, जो किसी सांसारिक वस्तु से व्याकुल नहीं होता।

श्री हनुमान चालीसा

॥ राम ॥
॥ श्री हनुमते नमः ॥

अनुवाद - रोहन अगरवाल



दोहा

श्रीगुरु चरन सरोज रज, निज मनु मुकुरु सुधारि ।
बरनउँ रघुबर बिमल जसु, जो दायकु फल चारि ॥

गुरु—चरण के पुष्प—रेणु से मन का आइना साफ करते हुए श्री रघुवर की बेदाग महिमा का ध्यान करता हूँ जो जीवन के चार मुख्य फल “धर्म, अर्थ, काम और मोक्ष” प्रदान करती है।

बुद्धिहीन तनु जानिके, सुमिरौ पवन-कुमार ।
बल बुद्धि विद्या देहु मोहि, हरहु कलेस बिकार ॥

यह जानते हुए कि मैं बहुत ही अज्ञानी हूँ, मैं पवन कुमार पर अपना ध्यान केंद्रित करते हुए विनम्रतापूर्वक शक्ति, बुद्धि और सच्चे ज्ञान की प्रार्थना करता हूँ जिससे मेरे दोष और दर्द दूर हो सके।

चौपाई

जय हनुमान ज्ञान गुन सागर । जय कपीस तिहुँ लोक उजागर ॥

ज्ञान और गुण के सागर श्री हनुमान जी कि जय हो, जो तीनों लोको को अपने शुभ चरित्र के द्वारा जाग्रत करते हैं, ऐसे कपिस की जय हो।

राम दूत अतुलित बल धामा । अंजनि-पुत्र पवनसुत नामा ॥

हे महान राम—दूत, आप कि शक्ति और वीरता अतुलनीय है।
अन्जनी पुत्र, पवन पुत्र आप की जय हो।

महावीर विक्रम बजरंगी । कुमति निवार सुमति के संगी ॥

हे महावीर विक्रम बजरंगी, अन्धकार और बुराइयों को हरने वाले,
सन्मति सदा आपके संग है।

कंचन बरन बिराज सुबेसा । कानन कुंडल कुंचित केसा ॥

सुनहरी पोषाक और विशाल काया के धरोहर, कानों में कुण्डल और घुंघराले केश वाले प्रभु आप को निहारने से ही



असीम सुख कि अनुभूति होती है।

हाथ बज्र और ध्वजा बिराजे । काँधे मूँज जनेऊ साजे ॥

आपके वज्र से बलवान हाथों में विजयी ध्वज और कंधों में सुन्दर जनेऊ सुशोभित है।

संकर सुवन केसरीनंदन । तेज प्रताप महा जग बंदन ॥

भगवान शंकर के अवतार, श्री केसरी के पुत्र, आपके तेज और प्रताप का समस्त जग वंदन करता है।

विद्यावान गुनी अति चातुर । राम काज करिबे को आतुर ॥

श्रेष्ठ विद्या और गुण के धनी, राम कार्य के लिये तत्पर रहने वाले आप श्री राम के चतुर सेवक हैं।

प्रभु चरित्र सुनिबे को रसिया । राम लखन सीता मन बसिया ॥

संपूर्ण भक्ति से राम—कथा सुनने वाले, आपके हृदय में श्री राम, माँ सीता, लक्ष्मण जी सदा रहते हैं (और आप उनके हृदय में)।

सूक्ष्म रूप धरि सियहि दिखावा । विकट रूप धरि लंक जरावा ॥

जहाँ आपने माँ सीता के समक्ष निरहंकार और विनम्र अवतार ग्रहण किया, वहीं आपने अपने विशाल अवतार से रावण की लंका को दहन किया।

भीम रूप धरि असुर सँहारे । रामचन्द्र के काज सँवारे ॥

आपने भीम रूप धर के असुरों का संहार किया और श्री राम के कार्य को पूर्ण किया।

लाय संजीवन लखन जियाये । श्रीरघुवीर हरषि उर लाय ॥

आपने संजीवनी बूटी लाके लक्ष्मण के प्राण बचाए। श्री राम प्रफूलित हो आपको गले लगाया।

रघुपति कीन्ही बहुत बड़ाई । तुम मम प्रिय भरतहि सम भाई ॥

श्री राम ने आपकी अति प्रशंसा की और कहा “तुम भरत जैसे ही, प्रिय भाई हो मेरे”।

सहस बदन तुम्हरो जस गावैं । अस कहि श्रीपति कंठ लगावैं ॥

“हज़ारो जीव जंतु, शेषनाग आदि तुम्हारा यश गान करे”। कहते हुए श्री राम ने आपका सम्मान किया।

सनकादिक ब्रह्मादि मुनीसा । नारद सारद सहित अहीसा ॥

सानक, ब्रह्मा, सरस्वती, नारद एवं संसार के समस्त संत आपका हमेशा गुणगान करते हैं।

जम कुबेर दिगपाल जहाँ ते । कबि कोबिद कहि सके कहाँ ते ॥

जहाँ यमराज, कुबेर और ब्रह्मांड के रक्षक आपका जोर—शोर से गुणगान करते हैं, वहाँ मेरे जैसा तुच्छ कवि आपका गुणगान ठीक तरह से कैसे कर सकता है।

तुम उपकार सुग्रीवहिं किन्हा । राम मिलाय राज पद दीन्हा ॥

आपके उपकार से सुग्रीव श्री राम से मिल सके और श्री राम के आशीर्वाद से सुग्रीव को अपना राज और सम्मान वापस मिला।

तुम्हरो मंत्र बिभीषण माना । लंकेश्वर भए सब जग जाना ॥

यह सारे जग में प्रसिद्ध है कि आपके ही उपदेश मानते हुए विभीषण ने लंका का राज ग्रहण किया।



जुग सहस्त्र जो जन पर भानू। लील्यो ताहि मधुर फल जानू।।

हे हनुमान आपने बाल लीला के समय, मीलों दूर चमकते सूरज को मीठा फल समझकर निगल लिया।

प्रभु मुद्रिका मेलि मुख माही। जलधि लाँघि गये अचरज नाहीं।।

प्रभु श्री राम की अंगूठी मूँह में लिए बड़ी ही आसानी से आपने विशाल समुद्र पार किया।

दुर्गम काज जगत के जेते। सुगम अनुग्रह तुम्हरे तेते।।

हे हनुमान आपके अशीर्वाद से संसार के सारे कठिन कार्य आसानी से हो जाते हैं।

राम दुआरे तुम रखवारे। होत ना आज्ञा बिनु पैसारे।।

आप श्री राम के पहरेदार हैं, आपके अनुमति के बिना कोई भी श्री राम के महल में नहीं जा सकता (हनुमान जी की आरती के द्वारा ही श्री राम के दिल में जगह पाई जा सकती है)।

सब सुख लहै तुम्हारी सरना। तुम रच्छक काहु को डरना।।

आपकी दया से सारे सुख संभव हैं और जिसके लिये आप जैसा रक्षक हो उससे कोई भय सता नहीं सकता।

आपन तेज सम्हारो आपै। तीनो लोक हाँक ते काँपै।।

आपके गर्जन से तीनों लोक कांपते हैं, और आपके पराक्रम को भी सिर्फ आप ही नियंत्रित कर सकते हैं।

भूत पिशाच निकट नहि आवै। महावीर जब नाम सुनावै।।

आपके भक्तों को कोई भूत-प्रेत नहीं सता सकता, वरण आपके नाम लेने भर से ही भूत प्रेत दूर रहते हैं।

नसै रोग हरै सब पीरा। जपत निरंतर हनुमत बीरा।।

आपके नाम का नियमित जाप करने से किसी भी प्रकार की पीड़ा को दूर किया जा सकता है।

संकट तें हनुमान चुड़ावैं। मन क्रम बचन ध्यान जो लावै।।

जो अपने विचारों में, कर्म में, सदा आपका ध्यान करता है, उसके सारे संकट आप हर लेते हैं।

सब पर राम तपस्वी राजा। तिन के काज सकल तुम साजा।।

हे हनुमान आप तो उनके कर्षवाहक हैं, जो स्वयं श्रेष्ठतम महान सम्राट श्री राम हैं।

और मनोरथ जो कोई लावै। सोइ अमित जीवन फल पावै।।

जो भी आपके पास अपनी मनोकामना लेकर आता है, उसे जीवन का अमृत फल प्राप्त होता है।

चारो जुग परताप तुम्हारा। है परसिद्ध जगत उजियारा।।

हे हनुमान आपका प्रताप चारों युग में फैला हुआ है, और आपकी प्रसिद्धि से सारा ब्रह्माण्ड चमत्कृत है।

साधु संत के तुम रखवारे। असुर निकंदम राम दुलारे।।

हे हनुमान आप साधु और संतों के रखवाले हो, असुरों का नाश करते हो और भगवान श्री राम के दूलारे हो।

अष्ट सिद्धि नौ निधि के दाता। अस बर दीन जानकी माता।।

माँ जानकी के वरदान स्वरूप आपके पास अपने भक्तों को अष्ट सिद्धि और नौ निधि (सुख, चैन, वैभव, शक्ति, प्रसिद्धि, आदि) के दान की क्षमता है।

राम रसायन तुम्हरे पासा। सदा रहो रघुपति के दासा।।

आपके पास राम-भक्ति का अमृत है, आप सदा के लिए राम के परम भक्त हैं।



तुम्हरे भजन राम को पावै । जनम जनम के दुःख बिसरावै ॥

आपका भजन करने से श्री राम को प्रसन्न कर, सारे जन्मों के दुःखों को दूर किया जा सकता है।

अंत काल रघुबर पुर जाई । जहाँ जन्म हरि- भक्त कहाई ॥

ऐसे भक्त को अपने अन्तकाल के बाद श्री राम कि शरण मिलती है और वो जहाँ भी जन्म लेता है सदा राम—भक्ति उसके साथ रहती है।

और देवता चित्त न धरई । हनुमत सेइ सर्ब सुख करई ॥

सिर्फ हनुमान जी का नाम लेने भर से सारे सुखों की प्राप्ति हो सकती है। (कोई और देव अपने भक्तों का ध्यान रखे या न रखे, हनुमान जी सदा अपने भक्तों का ध्यान रखते हैं।)

संकट कटै मिटै सब पीरा । जो सुमिरै हनुमत बलबीरा ॥

जो भी श्रद्धापूर्वक आपका ध्यान करता है आप उसके सारे संकट मिटा देते हैं।

जे जे जे हनुमान गोसाई । कृपा करहु गुरुदेव कइ नाई ॥

जय हो शक्ति और बुद्धि के प्रतीक हनुमान, आपसे प्रार्थना करता हूँ कि आप मुझे अपना “गुरु” बनाने का सम्मान प्रदान करें।

जो सत बार पाठ कर कोई । छूटहि बंदि महासुख होई ॥

जो भी हनुमान जी की आरती सौ बार (निरंतर करेगा), उसे जन्म—मरण से मुक्ति और परमानन्द प्राप्त होगा।

जो यह पढे हनुमान चालीसा । होय सिद्धि साखी गौरीसा ॥

भगवान शंकर स्वयं इस बात के साक्षी हैं कि जो भी पूरे ध्यान से हनुमान चालीसा का पाठ करता है उसे सारे सुख और सिद्धि प्राप्त हो।

तुलसीदास सदा हरि चेरा । कीजै नाथ हृदय मँह डेरा ॥

तुलसीदास (जो भी यह हनुमान चालीसा पढे) हमेशा हरि भक्त रहे और आपसे प्रार्थना करता है कि आप सदा मेरे हृदय में रहो।

दोहा

पवनतनय संकट हरन, मंगल मूरति रूप ।

राम लखन सीता सहित, हृदय बसहु सुर भूप ॥

हे पवन पुत्र, संकटों का नाश करने वाले, शुभ—काज के अवतार, आप सदा सदा के लिए मेरे हृदय में श्री राम, माँ सीता और लक्ष्मण जी के साथ रहो मेरी बस यही कामना है।

॥ इति ॥

भाग्य का खेल

- शुक्ला चौधुरी

हमारे देश में रेल का सफर कितना सुखद और मनोरंजक होता है वह शब्दों में ब्यान नहीं किया जा सकता। यात्रा करते हुए कितने लोग करीब आते हैं, कितने रिश्ते बनते हैं और कितने मन के मीत मिल जाते हैं। यह कुछ साल पहले कि घटना है, जब मैं रेल में सफर कर रही थी, मुझे भी ऐसा एक मन का मीत मिला। मैं अपने स्टेशन से रात के समय चढ़ी थी इसलिए सामने के सीट पर कौन था नहीं देख पाई, अंधेरे में अपने सीट पर जाकर सो गई। सुबह हुआ तो उठकर बैठी, और खिड़की से बाहर का नज़ारा देखने लगी, और सोचने लगी कि यह सामने वाले सीट पर कौन सो रहा है, सर से पाँव तक चादर से ढककर। वह कोई पुरुष है या महिला है समझ में नहीं आ रहा था। यह सोच ही रही थी कि एक चाय वाले ने ज़ोर से अवाज़ लगाई चा...ए...चा।

उसके आवाज़ से मैं भी चौंकी और सामने के सीट पर चादर से लिपटी वह एक सुंदर सी महिला भी चौंककर उठ बैठी। फिर दोनों ने चाय लिया और बातें करने लगे। बातों ही बातों में पता चला कि हम दोनों का गन्तव्य स्थल एक ही था, दोनों अपने बेटों का ग्रैडूएशन देखने और उनसे मिलने विश्वविद्यालय जा रहे थे।

महिला का नाम सीमा था, करीब मेरे ही उम्र की होगी। उससे बातें करते हुए कुछ दुःखी मालुम हुई, कुछ देर बातें करने के बाद कहीं और गुम हो जा रही थी। बहुत पूछने पर सीमा अपने बीते दिनों में कहीं खो गई और बताने लगी —

मेरा बेटा कोलकाता के नरेन्द्रपुर रामकृष्ण मिशन में पढ़ता था, और पति एक स्कूल के अध्यापक थे। हमलोग नरेन्द्रपुर से करीब दो ढाई घंटे की दूरी पर रहते थे। हमेशा बेटे से जब भी मिलने जाते, वह बहुत खुश होता और अपने दोस्तों के बारे में बताता, और उनसे मिलता। उसका एक बहुत ही अच्छा दोस्त था अभिनव, जिसका परिवार कोलकाता में रहता था, उसका छोटा भाई भी यहीं पढ़ता था। बहुत छोटे उम्र से ही दोनों (मेरा बेटा और अभिनव) बहुत गहरे मित्र थे। अभिनव हरएक चीज़ में अक्ल आता था। पढ़ाई में, खेलकूद में, और सब इधर-उधर के काम में, सबमें वह सबसे आगे था। मेरे बेटे को अपने दोस्त पर बहुत गर्व था। हमेशा छुट्टीयों में घर आने पर भी वह अपने दोस्त की प्रशंसा करते हुए नहीं थकता था।

वह साल उनके स्कूल का अंतिम साल था, परीक्षा खत्म हो गए थे अब सबको अपने अपने घर जाना था।

सबको अलग-अलग कॉलेजों में दाखिल होना था, फिर सभी कब दुबारा मिलेंगे या नहीं यह सोचकर सबका मन खराब था। मेरे बेटे का मन भी अभिनव के लिए बहुत खराब हो रहा था, तो मैंने बोला अगर उसके माता-पिता अनुमती दें तो कोलकाता वापस जाने से पहले अपने दोस्त को एक दिन के लिए घर लेकर आ जाए। फिर दोनों बहुत खुश हो गए, उसने अपने माता-पिता से अनुमती ले ली। दो दिन के बाद अभिनव और उसके भाई को कोलकाता वापस लौटना था, उनका टिकट तैयार था। उसने भाई को बोला मेरी प्रतीक्षा करना, मैं एक दिन के लिए अपने दोस्त के घर से घूमकर आ रहा हूँ। फिर दोनों घर में आए, मैंने दोनों के लिए खाना बनाया, रातभर दोनों ने फिर खूब बातें की।

दूसरे दिन अभिनव को वापस जाना था, सुबह उठकर बाहर देखा तो बारिश हो रही थी। मेरे पति ने उसे पहुँचाने के लिए एक जीप ठीक करके रखा था, और अपने भाई को साथ में जाने को बोला था। दोपहर को खाना खाने के बाद, निकलने का समय करीब आ रहा था और बारिश और ज़ोरों से होने लगी थी। मेरा मन बहुत भारी हो रहा था, कैसे इतने बारिश में उसे बाहर भेजूँ। अभिनव के पास और कोई उपाय नहीं था, उसे नरेन्द्रपुर वापस पहुँचना था, क्योंकि उसका दूसरे दिन का टिकट था, इसलिए वह जीप में जाकर बैठ गया। फिर मेरे देवर ने आकर सामान उठाया और जीप में रख दिया जैसे ही खुद चढ़ने गए चप्पल टूट गई। अंदर चप्पल बदलने आया तो मेरे पति ने कहा, “तू बैठ मैं उसे छोड़ कर आता हूँ” कहकर निकल गए और जीप में जा बैठे ड्राइवर और अभिनव के साथ। वे लोग घर से निकले तो बारिश और ज़ोरों से होने लगी। हमारे घर से नरेन्द्रपुर के रास्ते के बीच में कुछ पतली नदियाँ थी जिनपर छोटे छोटे पुल थे, साध्द गारणतः इन नदियों में ज़्यादा पानी नहीं होता था। परन्तु जब बाँध का पानी छोड़ते थे तो नदी में बहुत पानी आ जाता था। उस दिन भी बहुत बारिश होने के कारण बाँध का पानी छोड़ा गया था, पानी का बहाव बहुत तेज़ था, थोड़ा थोड़ा पानी पुल के ऊपर भी आ रहा था। कुछ कुछ गाड़ियाँ धीरे धीरे पुल पार कर रहे थे। तब जीप के ड्राइवर को लगा वो भी पार कर जाएंगे,पर भाग्य के लेखनी को कौन टाल सकता है, जैसे ही उनकी जीप पुल के अंतिम छोड़ तक पहुँची पता नहीं कैसे पूरा का पूरा पुल पानी में ढह गया। उनलोगों के जीप के आगे का हिस्सा पुल के कोने में अँटका हुआ था और बाकी का पूरा पीछे का भाग नीचे लटक गया।और वहीं सब

खत्म हो गया, पानी के उस तेज़ धार में वे तीनों बह कर निकल गए। ड्राइवर के हाथ में एक पेड़ की टहनी आई, और उसने उसे कसकर पकड़े रखा, और अपने प्राण बचा पाया। परन्तु अभिनव और मेरे पति का कुछ पता ही नहीं चला, करीब एक सप्ताह बहुत ढूँढने के बाद अभिनव का कीचड़ में लिपटा शरीर घटना स्थल के ५ कीलोमीटर दूर मिला। परन्तु मेरे पति का आज तक कुछ भी अता पता नहीं मिला.....

किसी को भाग्य का चक्र कैसे पता होता, अगर पता होता तो उनलोगों को घर से ही न निकलने देती। मुझे क्या पता था की मैं उनलोगों को अंतिम बार देख रही हूँ। यह कहते कहते सीमा फूट-फूट कर रोने लगी और अपने को कोसने लगी की ना उस दिन मैं उन लोगों को बारिश में निकलने देती और न यह सब होता। इतने सालों में कितने ही बार अभिनव के माता-पिता से मिली हूँ, आज भी मैं अपने आप को उनलोगों की गुनाहगार मानकर उनसे आँखे नहीं मिला सकती। उनलोगों का मुझपर कोई शोभ नहीं है लेकिन मेरे ही मन में एक बोझ है की मैं उनके बेटे को उनके पास लौटा नहीं पाई। आज अगर अभिनव होता तो उसका भविष्य कितना उज्ज्वल होता हमारे बेटों की तरह वह भी विश्वविद्यालय से निकलता।

अगर मेरे पति का दुःसंवाद आता, मैं उनको अंतिम बार देख लेती तो और बात थी। मगर अभी मेरी हालत ऐसी है कि इतने सालों के बाद भी घर के दरवाज़े पर कोई दस्तक देता है तो मैं मन में आस लिए भाग कर जाती हूँ कि कहीं वे वापस तो नहीं आए। आज भी मैं

उनके इन्तज़ार में बैठी हूँ, हमेशा सोचती हूँ कि वे कहीं पर कुशल-मंगल से हैं, हो सकता है उनकी यादें गुम हो गई हो, कभी उनकी यादाश्त वापस आए और वे वापस आ जाएँ।

सीमा की यह सब बातें सुनकर उसका रोना देखकर मैं अपने आप को रोक नहीं सकी और मेरे भी आँखों से झर-झर पानी झरने लगे। मैं उठकर उसके पास जा बैठी और बहुत समझाया कि कोई किसी के भाग्य चक्र को नहीं बदल सकता। वह क्यों उनलोगों के भाग्य के लिये खुद को दोषी मान रही है। जीवन के सफर में जिसका जितना समय लिखा है वह उतनी ही दूर जाएगा। इसलिए व्यर्थ में आँसू बहा कर क्या फायदा। हम दोनों ही बातों में इतना लीन हो गए थे की पता ही नहीं चला कब हमारा स्टेशन आ गया। उतरने से पहले सीमा कहने लगी कि मैंने आजतक इतना खुल कर किसी से बात नहीं की, किसी को मन की बात नहीं बताई। अपना दुःख मन में छुपाकर रखा था मगर इस सफर में आज तुमसे बात करके बहुत अच्छा लगा, ऐसा लगा जैसे मुझे मन का साथी मिला है। सच, सीमा की बात सुनकर मुझे भी ऐसा ही लग रहा था जैसे मुझे भी कोई मन का साथी मिल गया था। फिर हम रेल से उतरकर दुबारा मिलते रहने का वादा करके बेटों के विश्वविद्यालय की ओर रवाना हुए। वहाँ जाते हुए यही सोच रही थी की भाग्य भी कैसे खेल दिखाता है, कभी किसी को कहीं मिलता है तो कभी कहीं सब मिटा देता है। हम भाग्य के हाथ के कठपुतली हैं।



जापानी गीत - अपने गाँव की याद

- सुरेश ऋतुपर्ण

(तत्सुकी तकानो के सिद्ध गीत "फुरुसातो" (गृह-नगर) का भावानुवाद)

बहुत मुश्किल है भूल जाना
अपने गाँव की याद!
वे पहाड़ी ढलान
खेला था जहाँ
खरगोशों के साथ
वे नदियाँ
जिनमें पकड़ता था सोन मछलियाँ
गाँव के वे दिन
अब भी मेरे सपनों में आते हैं

मस्त हो गए होंगे,
पर मुझे याद आते हैं
बारिशों के वे दिन
मुझे याद आते हैं
झूमती हवाओं के दिन

हर दिन मेरी आँखों में
घूम जाता है मेरा गाँव



सच! बहुत मुश्किल है भुलाना
अपने गाँव की याद!

जब पूरे हो जाएँगे मेरे अरमान
और मेरे सपने
तब लौटूँगा अपने गाँव की ओर
पर नहीं जानता
कब पूरे होंगे मेरे अरमां
मेरे सपने
और लौटूँगा कब
मैं अपने गाँव की ओर
नहीं जानता।

मैं लौटूँ या ना लौटूँ
पर मुझे मालूम है

सच! बहुत मुश्किल है भुलाना
अपने गाँव की याद!

सोचता हूँ
कुशल से होंगे
मेरे माँ-बाप
और
मेरे सारे दोस्त

धीरे-धीरे मुझे भूल
अपने आप में

अब मेरे गाँव के पर्वतों पर
छा गई होगी हरियाली
और नदियों में
बह रहा होगा
अमृत जैसा पवित्र पानी!

सच! बहुत मुश्किल है
भुला पाना
अपने गाँव की याद!

मेरा भारत

- सुव्रता भटनागर

ना मैंने भारत छोड़ा है ना भारत ने मुझको छोड़ा है,
बन्धी हूँ इक रिश्ते से जो मैंने भारत से जोड़ा है।

देखूँ पीछे मुड़ कर तो जैसे जी सा भर भर आता है,
चाहे पिज्जा हो थाली में पर सरसों का साग ही मन भाता है।

खुश हूँ फिर भी जाने क्यों इस दिल में अंकुश सा लग जाता है,
इक कमरे की इस दिवाली पे वो दीपोत्सव याद सा आ जाता है।

मन की इस खामोशी में जब नितांत अकेली होती हूँ,
तब मैं तू बनकर खोती हूँ मंदिर के ढोल नगाड़ों में,
उन गलियों में उन कूचों में मिट्टी की कच्ची दीवारों में।

मेरे ओंकार के नांद में तू ही तो सुनाई देता है,
मेरे कंगन के धानी चूनर में तू ही तो दिखाई देता है।

मैं सुव्रता अभिमानित सी इतराती हूँ,
जब लाखों की भीड़ में
“भारतीय” मुझे कोई कहता है।



छोटी सी बात

- ऋतम बतरा



इच्छा थी करने की चाँद तारों से बात,
तो करने लगा मानव अंतरिक्ष की जाँच।
उड़न खटोले बनाए उसने लाखों हजार
और जा पहुँचा वह फिर चाँद के पार॥

अंतरिक्ष में लगाई महादूरबीन “हब्लल”,
देखें तो पृथ्वी के सिवा है जीवन कहीं और भी संभव।
सौर मंडल में हैं नक्षत्र अनन्य अनंत
पर मिला नहीं उसे अभी तक पृथ्वी का सम्वत॥

पहाड़, समुद्र और हरियाली से सजी पृथ्वी है सबसे सुंदर
फिर क्यूँ कर रहा है मानव उसे बंजर॥

नींद की लुका-छिपी

- सुमिता भट्टाचार्य

रात के वे चंद लम्हे,
जब नींद आँखों पर दस्तक दे
कहीं छिप जाती है
और आँखें उसकी राह देखती रह जाती हैं
तब आकर हमें घेर लेती हैं
दिन भर की बीती बातें
कुछ जाने-पहचाने पल
कुछ खट्टी-मीठी यादें।



कुछ बातें कही-अनकही
फिर खुद को दोहराती हैं
कुछ बातें सुनी-अनसुनी
फिर अपना हाल सुनाती हैं,
फिर लगता है आज अगर
ऐसा होता तो क्या होता
हर बात अलग होती कल की
कल का अंदाज़ नया होता।

छिपी नींद को शायद लगा
मेहमान मिल गए हमें नए
उनसे दो बातें क्या कर लीं
उसको हम बस भूल गए।
झट आँखों पर डेरा डाला
मूँद लीं हमने भी पलकें
ख्वाबों ने हम पर बिखराए
रंग कई गहरे हल्के।

लौट गई दिन भर की यादें
अभी इन्हें जाना होगा
अब कल ही ये द्वार खुलेंगे
अब कल ही मिलना होगा
आज गए, फिर लौट आएँगे
यही पल कल रात मगर
हर बात अलग होगी कल की
कल का अंदाज़ नया होगा!

ओ शिक्षित मानव

- स्वर्गीय नेमीशरण मित्तल

ओ शिक्षित मानव नगरों की सभ्यता वाले,
आओ, उतरो इस भू पर,
धूलि से ढकी धरा पर
और अपने कोमल हाथों से
इस पावन धरती के आँचल को छू लो।
हाय लौट पढ़े तुम तो
डर गए धूलि से धूप से,
फिर बोलो! बोलोगे कैसे
जय राष्ट्रवाद की समाजवाद की?
और करोगे उन्नत कैसे
घोष तुम स्वतंत्रता का, समता का?
वह जो नन्हा सा बालक, देखो
वस्त्रहीन, वंचित जीवन के हर साधन से
दौड़ रहा उषा के संग
उन पशुओं के पीछे
जिनके दूधों का मक्खन हमतुम खाते,
जो जोता करते उस धरती को
जिसका अन्न सभी हम खाकर जीते,
क्या वह कुछ भिन्न मुझ से तुम से?
क्या नहीं वह भारत माँ का पूत सपूत?
क्या नहीं कोई योगदान उसका कोई समाज के जीवन में?
या, वह नियति की खोटी सन्तान
जो न कर सके हम उसके जीवन का सम्मान?

सुनो ओ कंचन काया वाले
तरुणों बालाओं! तोमको आना अनिवार्य
उसी धूलि में, जिसमें लिपपुत कर
कर रहा स्वच्छ, पाकशाला, रंगशाला तुम्हारी
वह दरिद्र जो अभिशप्त सा
चिथड़ों, दानों के बदले में।
मिटा दो भेद मानव के बीच से
और हर धन्धे को दो
प्रतिष्ठान समान, पारिश्रमिक समान।
कोरा काया का श्रम लो पशु से,
या यंत्र से, विद्युत से, विस्फुटित अणु से,
मानव के श्रम में हाथों से जुड़े बुद्धि ।
अहंकार की तमिस्रा का करके अन्त
समाज तो बना लो पहले,
पीछे समाजवाद या योगयाग
करना जो चाहे कर लेना।
मनुष्य के जीने का हो इन्तज़ाम
दाम का चिन्तन ही छोड़ो,
सबको हो काम, हर काम बराबर।
प्रतिष्ठित होकर जी सके हर कोई,
अवतारित होता जो जन्म लेकर
इस धरा पर
हमारे जीवन का समसाझी बनकर।

(स्वर्गीय नेमीशरण मित्तल स्वाधीनता सेनानी, शिक्षक, जाने-माने पत्रकार, साहित्यकार और चिंतक थे। उन्होंने यह कविता आधी शताब्दी पहले नई पीढ़ी को सम्बोधित करते हुए लिखी थी। नेमीशरण जी का गत २६ जुलाई को ८६ वर्ष की अवस्था में निधन हो गया। उनकी यह कविता उनके पुत्र और अंजली के पुराने सहयोगी श्री अखिल मित्तल ने भेजी है। हम उनकी स्मृति में इसे प्रकाशित कर रहे हैं। ५० वर्ष पहले लिखी गई यह कविता आज की स्थिति में भी एकदम सही बैठती है। जब तक हम पढ़े लिखे लोग नहीं जुड़ेंगे अपनी मिट्टी से तब तक नहीं मिटेगा भारत से दरिद्रता का अभिशाप)



मेरे सपनों में वो बात नहीं होती

- अनुराग पाँडेय

अभाव के दिन ही सही थे,
मैं मेरे दोस्त सब वहीं थे,
पड़ोसी के अमरूद तोड़ कर खाते थे,
कुछ मीठे सबमें बट जाते थे,
उन दाँतों के निशानों की कोई जात नहीं होती,

आज मेरे सपनों में वो बात नहीं होती।

दो जोड़ी में पूरा साल कटता था,
भाइयों में तब भी सामान बँटता था,
बड़े को कभी ज़्यादा मिल जाता था,
यह देख छोटा रो जाता था,
उस बँटवारे में वैर की कोई बाँट नहीं होती,

आज मेरे सपनों में वो बात नहीं होती।

कुटिलता तब भी मन में पलती थी,
पर पंचतंत्र की कहानियाँ जहन में चलती थी,
गलत पर यूँ पछतावा होता था,
दुःख पर गैरों के मन खुद रोता था,
इन आँखों से अब आँसुओं की बरसात नहीं होती,

आज मेरे सपनों में वो बात नहीं होती।

हम अब भी वहीं हैं,
पर अब मेरे दोस्त नहीं हैं,
हमने खुद यह बंधन काटे हैं,
दाँतों के निशान चार भागों में बाँटें हैं,
अब सिर्फ रात के अंधेरों से मुलाकात है होती,

आज मेरे सपनों में वो बात नहीं होती।

डर लगता है हर अहट पर,
शक होता है अपनों की चाहत पर,
कोसों दूर सी सुबह लगती है,
आँखें हैं यूँ अपलक जगती हैं,
चाहता हूँ हो पलकें भारी, ऐसी कोई रात नहीं होती,

आज मेरे सपनों में वो बात नहीं होती।





東日本大震災 本格復旧はこれから

The Great East Japan Earthquake Full Recovery is yet to start

— 月野亜佐子
(Asako Tsukino)

1. 地震発生

3月11日午後2時46分、私は仙台駅近くのオフィスビル6階におり、机の下で這い付くばっても振り落とされそうな激しい揺れが気の遠くなる程長い時間続きました。やっとの思いで帰宅後、自宅より徒歩

2分の避難所へ行ってみました。晩期乳癌の宣告を受け抗がん剤治療の副作用で非常に体調悪い私にとっては停電による暗闇や人の多さよりもまず寒さに耐えられない！と即断。避難所で過ごすことを諦め自宅へ。と言っても激しい余震の中マンション6階の部屋へ戻る気になれず、車の中で暖をとりながらほとんど眠れずに数日間夜明かし。病人や高齢者にこの寒さは大打撃だなあと実感。表面には出難い数字ですが、避難したものの寒さで亡くなられた方が大勢いらしたとのこと。私も背中合わせの状態におりました。

18日、まだ混乱の真只中、友人が駆けつけてくれました。自宅の中は冷蔵庫や食器棚がありえない方向を向いて移動しており、とても1人では片づけられません。そんな助っ人として、来てくれたのです。片づけ名人の彼女のお陰で見ても無残だった部屋はあっという間に整理整頓されました。友人とはありがたいなあと心底思ったものです。

2. その後



㊤震災直後 ㊦片づけ2時間後



その後、沿岸地域は言うに及ばず、内陸も毎日余震と非常事態が続いておりました。物資不足・ガソリン不足でまるきり動けず、昼は会社で炊き出し。やっとなりJRが少しずつ運行開始し始めた矢先の4月7日に大きな余震が発生し、内陸の人間はギリギリ持ち堪えていた希望の糸が切れてしまい、精神的にトドメを刺されました。普段は絶対言わないような暴言を吐くようになってしまう程、人を変えてしまう異常事態。街全体の人々が病んでいる状況を想像出来ませんでした。

それでも、地震後の混乱がこの程度ですんでいるのは東北だからこそだと感じます。地震直後の停電により、全ての信号が消えているのに結構な数の車が流れていました。複数車線ある交差点では誰もが譲り合い、歩行者も普通に横断。譲り合いの精神が根付いているからこそですね。「東北人は我慢強い」と言われますがちょっと違う。普通に振舞っているだけなのだと思います。

GWにJRの主な在来線・新幹線・地下鉄も運行開始となり、仙台市内の都市ガスも大方復旧。やっとなり新年度が始まったような気がしました。そして5月下旬から7月にかけて体調不良を訴える人間が続出。無理をしてきた反動がここへ来て体の不調として出始めたようです。ある人は気管支炎で長期休暇、ある人はうつ病で休職、私自身も乳癌が悪化し休職する等、人によって症状は様々でした。

3. 沿岸地域とボランティアの友人

4月以降東京や大阪の友人が多数、ボランティア活動をしに来てくれています。ある人は「単身」とにかく来てみた。水含んだ畳は重いね。家主のおばあちゃんにご馳走になったおにぎりと漬物が忘れられない」。ある人は「ネットで調べて知り合った人に物資届けに行った。その様子をつぶやいてたら東京にいる娘さんがネット上で偶然見つけて連絡くれた。ネットすごい」。私の家は仙台宮城ICから数分というアクセスの良い場所ということもあり、ありがたい友人達の拠点になっています。朝起きたら知らない人がいて「初めまして」なんて挨拶したことも(笑)。彼らは入れ替わり、色々な形で何度も東北へ来てくれます。どれほど励まされたことか。

私自身は気持ちの整理が少しずつつき、やっとなり沿岸地域へ行ってみようという勇気が出てきたのは4月中旬頃でした。ボランティアに来てくれた友人の車に同乗して石巻市へ。テレビの映像以上の光景が目の前に広がっていました。さらに臭いがひどい地域も。物資支援をしたり炊き出しをしたりしましたが、茫然とする漁師さん達の目。そんな中でも必死で前を向こうとしている皆さんを前に、継続的な支援を決意したのでした。



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4. 今後の復興支援

まだまだ復興には程遠く、地域状況も千差万別です。継続的な支援が必須です。支援をしたいけれどまだ何もしていない方、これからでも十分間に合います。それには

- まずは東北へ行き、自分の目で状況を確認の上で自分が何を出来るのか考えてみる(直接的なボランティア活動、援護射撃的な支援活動等)

1. The earthquake strikes

At 2:46 PM on March 11, when the tremor struck, I was in my office in a six-storey building near Sendai station. The first jolt immediately threw me off balance and I somehow managed to crawl under my desk, but the tremor was so strong and sudden that I felt it continued for an unbelievably long time.

It was a great struggle to return home after that. The disaster shelter nearby was a two minute walk from where I live, so I decided to check the place. For a late-stage breast cancer patient like

- 活動参加が難しい場合は、お金の援助(義援金)
- 日常生活の中で、東北産のものを購入
なんていう方法が挙げられますね。各自治体でもまだまだボランティアの募集をしていますし、首都圏からのボランティアツアーバスもありますのでご利用下さい。
ちなみに私は復興応援するカレンダーを販売しております。壁掛版1部につき200円、卓上版1部につき100円を義援金として寄付致しますので、こちらもご利用下さい。

5. 気持ちに寄りそう為に

最後に注意事項です(笑)

被災者の方を励まそうという気持ちがかえって傷つけてしまう言葉がありますのでいくつか挙げます。

1)「がんばって」

被災地の皆さんはとても頑張っています。家を流され、失業し、住み慣れた我が家から遠く離れたり、全壊と認定された自宅の2階で暮らさざるをえない等、とても厳しい状況で先が全く見えない中、それでも前を向いて生きています。そんな方々がこれ以上頑張らなければいけないのでしょうか。「一緒にがんばろう」でさえ、聞きたくない人がたくさんいます。「応援しています」と言っても口先だけではやはり相手を傷つけてしまいます。言葉などではなかなか励ましなど出来ないのです。何も出来ないのであれば「何も出来ずごめんなさい」と謝るか、黙っていきましょう。

2)「気をつけて」

非常事態を経験し、激しい余震が続いている中を毎日生活してきた方々は細心の注意をもって生活しています。そんな方々へ「気をつけて」と言うのは失礼ですよ。これも言わないことをオススメします。

3)「私に出来ることは何でも言って」

そう言われて期待して、「じゃあ、あれをやって欲しいのでお願い」と頼むと、簡単に「それは無理」という断りの返事がかえってくる人が多いものです。そんなやりとりをするだけで被災者の皆さんは疲れてしまいます。「だったら何が出来るのか教えて！」ということになります。従って、「私は〇〇と〇〇が出来るのだけど、これで力になりますか」という聞き方にしましょう。

勝手な事を並べ立てましたが、少しでも現状理解の助けとなりましたら幸いです。

復興へ向けて、皆さまのご支援をいただきたくどうぞよろしくお願ひ申し上げます。

me, significantly weakened by the side-effects of prolonged chemotherapy, I immediately realized that more than anything else, in such a dark place without electricity and with so many people around, I shall not be able to withstand the cold. It was a quick decision and I soon returned to my apartment. But due to the aftershocks it was not safe to return to my 6th floor apartment, so instead I spent the next few nights in the warmth of my car, almost without any sleep.

I soon realized how difficult it would be for the sick and the old to fight this cold weather in such

a situation. Although there are no official statistics, a good number of old and sick people have died in the shelters due to lack of heating. Like them I was also very close to a dire situation.

On the 18th, amid the continuing chaos, one acquaintance managed to come to see me. In the apartment my belongings were scattered all over and the refrigerator and the bookshelf were in unimaginable positions and it called for many more hands than my own to restore things to original order. My friend came in to help me with that, and with her assistance I was able to arrange things and clean up the room in a short time. Friends in need are friends indeed.

2. Afterwards



Top: Before cleanup Bottom: After cleanup



Needless to say, not only in the coastal areas but also the areas inland the aftershocks kept coming relentlessly and the end of the emergency situation was nowhere in sight. Lack of materials and gasoline made moving around virtually impossible, and forced us to cook rice during the day in our office premises.

A strong aftershock struck again on 7th April when JR was about to restore train services. Till then

the people inland had somehow managed to keep hope alive, but this one almost wiped off the last inner mental strength and threw everyone into total despair. For a while the people around lost their composure and became unbelievably rude in their verbal outbursts, it was as if the whole town was sick with an incurable disease, the continued emergency situation dangerously sapping the last bit of energy from every soul around.

In spite of all these, I think by virtue of the indomitable spirit of the people in Tohoku region, we have been able to weather the storm with minimal chaos. After the earthquake there was widespread power outage which made all the traffic signals inoperable. Even in such a situation many cars were being driven without any dramatic disruption. In multi-lane thoroughfares everyone driving was courteous and paying due attention to pedestrians as usual. This was possible because people here have ingrained spirit of compromise. It is well known that the people of Tohoku are patient, but this is different. They were just behaving normally.

During the golden week holidays most of JR, Shinkansen, and underground railway services were resumed, including the city gas supply in Sendai. It felt as if a new year has just started. And then beginning from May through July people started falling sick. Many started taking sick leave due to various illnesses like asthma and depression, and I also had to take leave because of aggravated breast cancer.

3. Coastal areas and my volunteer friends

Since April many of my friends from Tokyo and Osaka came to Tohoku to help as volunteers. One friend who is single mentioned, "I just wanted to come and help, the wet tatamis felt really heavy, but the most memorable of all was the delicious rice ball and vegetable pickled prepared by the elderly woman in the house I cleaned". Another person noted, "I went to deliver goods to a person I came to know through internet. When this was twitted, my daughter in Tokyo by chance came across the message and contacted me immediately. Internet is just incredible". My apartment is very close to the Sendai IC, and it has now become a base for my helpful friends. Waking up in the morning one day I was greeted "Good morning" by a person I have never met before (laugh). These people are coming regularly to Tohoku to help us and this is highly encouraging.

Around middle of April somehow I was able to gather enough mental strength and decided to visit the coastal areas. My first destination was Ishinomaki and I drove there with my friends who came to work here as volunteers. What I saw there

was far more devastating than what I managed to watch on TV. The rotting odor all around was unbearable in some places. We went there to deliver goods and prepare food for the people living there and cheer them up, but met many fishermen with vacant looks. Even under such inhospitable condition I met a lot of people who were looking forward to weather the difficulties in graceful stride, and that was when I decided that I would continue my volunteer activities here as long as needed.



Selling calendars to contribute to relief fund

<http://www.amazon.co.jp/shops/A37E6312PRHOE0>

4. Support for recovery hereafter

The real recovery is still far away. Continued support is essential. People who are interested in helping the distressed but have not yet done so, there is plenty of opportunity to do so now. To do that here are some suggestions:

- First go to Tohoku, please have a look around to find out what you can really do to help the people there (direct volunteer activities, one time help for people in distress etc.)
- When you find it difficult to get involved in volunteer activities, you can help financially through donations
- For your daily necessities buy things produced in Tohoku

Many affected areas are still recruiting volunteers,

and there are plenty of bus services from Tokyo for the volunteers to travel to these areas.

I am personally involved in selling calendars I prepared to contribute to the disaster relief fund. For each wall hanging calendar sold I shall contribute 200 yen, and for each desk top calendar sold I shall contribute 100 yen to this fund.

5. To align your feelings with the distressed

Lastly, some things to remember when you decide to help (laugh) are described below. This is because it may well be the case that when you are trying to encourage the people you might inadvertently end up hurting their feelings. Given below are some typical words that you should avoid.

1) Hang on

People in the affected areas are already hanging on for a long time. Some have lost their home, lost jobs, forced to live in a cramped place far away from their original dwelling, some even have chosen to live in the second floor of buildings officially designated as unfit for living. They are already doing all their best. There are people who no more want to hear "Let's hang on together". Words like "we are supporting you" without any tangible help will only hurt their feelings. Words only cannot encourage people. If you cannot help tangibly, the best way will be to apologize or simply keep quiet.

2) Take care

These people have already experienced the worst emergency, taking utmost care in living their daily lives made insecure from the incessant aftershocks that keep coming without any warnings. Is it not impolite to tell such people to take care? My advice is not utter such words in front of these people.

3) Do not hesitate to ask me do things you need

When one hears such request and says "please can you do this for me", often the reply one gets is "sorry I shall not be able to help with that". Just hearing such remarks undermines their spirit, and the conversation naturally leads to "what actually can you do then?" So make it clear at the outset by saying, "I shall be able to do this and this. Will that help?"

I hope that you will understand the situation here, and will not be offended by my candid remarks and advice.

Please help the people in distress in whatever capacity you can, so that they can recover their original livelihood as soon as possible. Thank you.

(Translation by Sudeb Chattopadhyay.)

初めてのインド

- 羽成 千亜希

2009年12月。私は初めてインドへ行きました。20歳頃に、「インドに行ってみよう！」と心に湧いてから、念願が叶ったのは、10年以上かかりました。「なぜそんなに行ってみようと思ったのか？」これは、自分でもありきたりな理由ですが、①どんな国かみてみたい ②TVや、人の話を聞くとおもしろい ③インドの空気を吸ってみたい ④宗教と共に生きる人達はどのような人達か？ ⑤何か特別なものがあるのではないかと？そしてなにより ⑥なぜか魅かれるということが1番でした。

現在私は、インドと切っても切れない縁があると思っています。家族。義母がインド人であること。夫が半分インド人であること。そして、ヨガ。義父は、私のヨガの先生です。こういった自分を取り巻く環境は、今はなんともインドの一部が、私の生きることに深く関わっていると思っています。

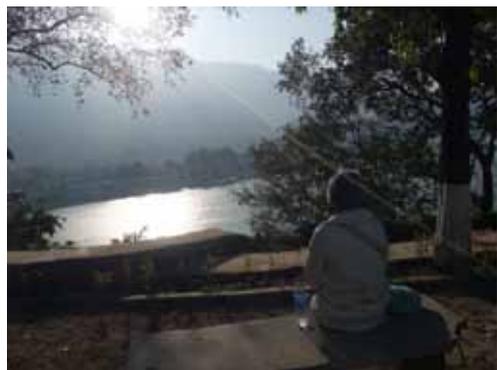
まず行くと決まったときの、高揚感とはさすがに！10年かけて、望みが叶うだけに、とても幸せに思えました。出発し、飛行機が無事にデリー、インディラ・ガンジー空港に着陸した瞬間、心の中で万歳している自分がいました。この旅は、夫と2人。夫は、数回経験があるため、私は、少々安心でした。

空港。空港には、その国特有の「におい」がある話は、皆さんどう思われるか？ここで第一印象がくるわけだろうと！・・・なんとも私は「ここは、落ち着くな〜！」と、喜ぶ自分を感じました。大丈夫だと確信しました。これを境に、この旅は楽しいものになるだろうと感じました。デリー、リシケシ、アグラ、ベナレス を20日間で周りました。

1番の目的はリシケシ。ヨガをするためです。アシュラム滞在は、とても快適で、充実した日々でした。『環境』これは、何にも勝る素晴らしいものと思えました。

滞在所。窓を開ければ、目の前はガンガー。12月で少し寒いですが、ガンガーの水面と流れは、美しく、穏やかで、太陽はまどろむように輝いて、ただ座り、ガンガーを眺め、陽を浴びているだけで、インドに来てとても充実された気持ちになりました。

このガンガーは『聖なる河』。TVで見る、「いわゆる



ガンガー」の様子は、きっとベナレス辺りのものが多いと思います。が、ここ上流のリシケシのガンガーは、私の情報で知っていた

ガンガーとは、違うものでした。混沌ではなく、きれいで、不思議な安らぎを放っていました。なんとも静かな、穏やかな、優しい、この河は見ているだけで、心洗われる気持ちでした。小さな波が流れて、流れて、、、何もかも流れて今在るものだけでいいのだな、と思わされました。

日本とは違う時間が流れている。アシュラム滞在中、生活様式も少々日本とは異なるが、正に陽と共に起きて、陽が暮れると人は休むのだな、という生活でした。日本での毎日は、なかなかそういう訳にもいかず、この太陽のサイクルで生活する日々を満喫しました。このサイクルが、自然と共に生きる、そしてヨガ的生活だと実感し、心地良かったです。

アシュラムは高台に立地し、静かで、広々とした、とても素晴らしい環境でした。アシュラムの方々も皆親切で、気持ちのいい毎日でした。そこにある調和によって、環境は生み出されるものだと思えました。細かな1つ1つよりも、全体から感じられるもの。これが、私のインドの印象の大きなものとなりました。

そして「GAYATRI Mantra」を初めて知りました。朝は隣の寺院や、河の向こうから爆音で聞こえてきました。あとでこのマントラは何か、どういうこと言っているかを知りましたが、意味は分からずとも、音階と音調が気になり、CDも買いました。「買うなら絶対これよ！」こうしたコミュニケーションも楽しかったです。(有名なシンガーのCDを勧められた)S

その後、リシケシ〜アグラ〜ベナレス〜デリー と周りました。ハプニングもありましたが、困った時は、いつもインドの方々から助けて頂いて、無事20日間の旅を終えました。景色、食べ物、体験が、この旅を作り、人との触れあいが暖かさをもたらしてくれました。

インド人の優しい部分に触れられたことは、とてもとても私に良い印象と経験となりました。

こういった経験が出来るのは行けたからこそ、インドへ来られたことに毎日感謝の気持ちでいっぱいでした。そして、楽しく元気に過ごしました。(少々お腹は壊しましたが、、、)

自分で見て、触れて、感じて、もっとインドが好きになり、興味を持つようになりました。

この「空気」を吸えたことが、自分の内側からの喜びとわかり、これからはまたぜひ行きたいです。

ヨガと、家族がある限り、この国に触れて、学んで、繋がっていきたく思います。



わっこひろば「宙」開園

- 山田 さくら

1980年代後半、私自身子育て真っ只中だった頃、友人達に送ったメッセージを引出しの奥から見つけた。その一部を抜粋・・・

「大量エネルギー消費社会、情報過多社会、原子力発電所の乱立、食べ物汚染、果てしなく続く自然破壊・・・人間の飽くことなき欲望は、生あるもの全ての糧である地球を蝕み続ける。数えあげたらきりが無い危機感の中で生かされている私達。人間の愚かさの極限に立たされている。

ここに生を享けた者にとって、次の世代の子ども達、幼いいのちを思わずにはいられない。

大地に、みずに、森に風に、この宇宙に息づいている全てのいのちを思わずにはいられない。

おそらく幾世もの生を繰り返して、旅を続けてきた私達。

もちろん記憶はまるでないけれど、魂を甦らせ、真に大切なことは何かということを見つめて、この世で与えられた役割を見出し、全うしていくことが「今」というこの時代を生きている私達の務めではないだろうか・・・」

あれから20年以上が過ぎ、人の意識に変化は見られず、環境も悪化していくばかりのこの国で3.11東日本大震災が起こった。大規模地震と津波が、言葉に尽くせないほどの被害を東日本に与えたことに心が痛まらずにはいられない。そしてまた人間の想定をはるかに超える自然猛威の前で、人間は何と微力なのかということを変更して思い知った。

ここまで大規模な震災が起こるなんて想像もつかなかったけれど、チェルノブイリ原発事故の現実を目の当たりにしながら、地震の多いこの国に原発建設が急ピッチで進められていることに違和感と危機感を覚え「No Nukes」運動を進めていたあの当時の親達の不安は、今回の福島原発事故で不幸なことに証明されてしまった。

人間は、この広大な宇宙の中では、ほんの小さな小さな点のような存在でしかなく、また一部でもあるのだ。他の生命体との共存バランスを壊し続けてきた人間の傲慢さを捨てない限り、自然は容赦ない。

生きとし生けるものの命を育てていくことの大切さ、自然と共存しながら生きていくことを、子ども達に学んでいってもらいたいと切に願っている。

そんな、東日本大震災の約3ヶ月後の6月に、わっこひろば「宙」がついに開園！

この2～3年なかなか適った場所に出会えず、足踏み状態が続いていたが、やっと手ごろな民家を借りることができ、4月には間に合わなかったが、何とか開園にこぎつけた。

「宙」は神社に近く、毎日神社へお参りに行くのが保育の一環でもある。

息子達が、シャンティニケタンでパッタババンに通っていた頃、毎朝授業が始まる前に、お祈りの時間が日程に組み込まれていた。それは、インドの子ども達にとって当たり前のことだったのかもしれない。日本では、そういう大切なことが、日常から遠のき忘れ去られている。



神前や仏前で心静かに手を合わせる、という行為が一体どこに結びついていくのか・・・という説明も解説もできないけれど、人間は人間の思いや意思だけで生きてはいけない、という謙虚な気持ちを育てていく上で、とても大切な行為に違いない。こういう行為が日常になっていくということこそ、これから生きていく子ども達にとって、必要なことに思われてならない。震災は、人間の生きていく上での原点を振り返らせてくれたような気もする。

わっこひろば「宙」では、雨が降っても雪が降っても余ほどのことがない限り、神社へのお参りは欠かさないつもりだ。子ども達は、習慣になってしまえば何の問題もなく神社へ行き、お参りが済めば境内で遊んだり神社の杜を散歩したり、結構楽しんでいる。

ここ長野県大町市の市街から車で20分ほどアルプスの方へ向かって走った所に、「森のくらしの郷 千年の森」という自然豊かな場所があり、そこで小学生までの子ども達に自然体験してもらおうと「宙」の開園イベントを行った。

まずは、薪を使った料理を経験してもらおうとキーマカレーとサブジを作り、かまでナンを焼いた。大量に作ったはずなのに、「おいしい、おいしい」と大好評でほとんど残らず平らげ心豊かな食事になった。

火を見る機会も最近では、めっきり減ってしまい、ま



Anjali

してや自分達で木を燃やすなんてことは日常では全くなくなってしまっているの、子供だけでなく大人も火を見ながら「火って心が癒されるなあ・・・」などと言いながら食事作りを満喫していた。

この日は、初顔合わせの子ども達もいて初めはよそよそしくつまらなそうな顔をしていたけれど、食事の後はリラックスしたのか、誘い合って森へ行ったりツリーハウスで遊んだりしているうちにすっかり打ち解け、良いお友達同士になっていた。

5才以上の大きい子ども達は、ネイチャーガイドの案



内で、沢へ行き沢のぼりを体験。初めはみんな濡れるのを気にして思い切りが良くなかったが、そのうち全身ずぶ濡れになるのも気にならなくなり、靴のまま川へずぶずぶ入りみんなで大笑い。「きゃー！助けてー」と誰かが悲鳴を上げれば、「大丈夫？」と駆け寄って助けてあげ、仲間意識も十分だった。



沢をのぼりきった所に親達が待っていて、みんな良い顔で迎えてもらっていた。自然は、楽しいけれど危険ということも少しは学んでくれたのではないだろうか。

ここ地方都市のいなかでも、子ども達は室内活動が主流で、自然と触れ合うことがほとんどなくなってきている。いなかということもあって、車での移動が多く歩くことも少なく転び方も下手だ。

今回、このイベントを通して子ども達は昔から変わりにくく、体ごと自然の中で遊ぶことに抵抗はないということを学んだ。幸せなことに、大町は少し山の方へ行けば自然とふれ合える場所がまだまだある。せつかくここで子ども達のための場を立ち上げたのだから、自然と思いきりふれ合い、学ぶ機会をどんどん作っていきたいと思っている。

震災に会った子ども達、都会の子ども達そして国境を越えている人達に来てもらえるような開放的な場所作りを目指している。

わっこひろば「宙」は

子ども達の「ここら育ち」を大切に育ち育てることを最優先としています。人間の脳機能は生後10歳までほぼ完成するとされています。脳は外からの刺激を多く受け取り発達しているのです。

① 身体的発達 ② 精神的発達 ③ 社会的発達
④ 感情的発達 ⑤ 身体的発達 ⑥ 言語的発達
⑦ 感情的発達 ⑧ 社会的発達 ⑨ 知能的発達

「ここら育ち」とは、人の持つ持つ知能に楽しいと思える刺激を与えることにより、健康的で心豊かな子ども達を育てていくことです。子ども達の心や知能の発達をきちんと把握し、生きていく上で必要な基礎をしっかりと築き、いろいろな遊びを経験させたいと思っています。

保育理念

自然と山自然の中で遊び、自然との触れ合いを通して想像力を育む

地域の様々な年齢層の人達・文化との交流によって、社会性を身につけ豊かな心を育てる

自然・自然心を育み、豊かな心を育む

そら

わっこひろば「宙」開園!!

∞ ひろばっこ募集 ∞

第一王子神社社の民家を「宙」の字で改装し、地域での活動の場を設けています。開放的で、楽しい空間作りを目指しています。どうぞお気軽に親子で遊びに来て下さい。

プロフィール

わっこひろば「宙」代表 山崎博幸

- ★大分市で児童施設・保育園に勤務
- ★東京で保育士と共同保育所を運営する
- ★1991年より約11年間インド在住
- ★シンハラナード・タゴールの教育論に触れ、星が創設した学校で息子2人を学ばせる
- ★2001年帰国 地民市・大町市で保育士として働く
- ★2008年 子育てアドバイザーの資格取得

開園情報

対象年齢：3歳以上小学生まで
定 員：15名
保育時間：9:30～16:00 (月～金曜日)
休 日：土曜・祝日 休園 年休等別途
保 費 料：30,000円 (1ヶ月)
★申し込みは、必ずお電話下さい

アジアラスベガス—マカオ

— クリスティン バナルジ

マカオ、今まであまり知られてない町、突然、世界から注目を浴びてきました。それは、たったの一つの理由があります — カジノです！

さかのぼりこの10年間で、地元のカジノ、リスボアホテル以外にも、世界一流の有名なカジノホテル、例えば、Venetian, Wynn, MGM, Galaxy等々はマカオで作られました。そして、たくさんの観光客を呼ぶようになりました。2010年に観光客は2000万人に達成しました。マカオは本当に小さい町で、29平方キロメートルしかありません、人口は50万人ぐらいで、こんなお客さんを迎えることがとても不思議だと思いました。



しかしながら、観光客の中の半分以上の人々はカジノのために来ているのではないかと思います。たくさんの観光客が町を回らないままに帰ってしまうことも



あります。いつからかもわからないですけど、マカオはカジノの町だと思われて、観光をあまりしようと思わないかもしれないですね。実は、マカオは本当にきれいな町だと思います。

400年間ポルトガル人が管理していたマカオは、深い影響を受けました。人口の9割以上が中国人にもかか



わらず、どこでも欧風のキリスト教会や建物がよく見えます。町の風景は本当にポルトガルと似てると言われています。なかなか他のアジアの国では感じられない雰囲気です。同時に、もちろん、マカオは中国の町なので、いろいろとお寺もあります。その中で、一番知られてるのは - Ama Templeです。昔、マカオは漁師が多くて、よく海に行って、魚を捕っていました、アマ神様は漁師達を守る神でした。



マカオでは、中華料理だけではなく、ポルトガルの影響で、本場のポルトガル料理も美味しいと言われています。日本と違って、一般的に食パンとコーヒーなどですが、マカオでは、朝からヤムチャとか、麺類、お粥など食べるのが普通でしょう。カジノの影響で、24時間営業しているお店は少なくないです、なので、いつでも食べたい時に、食べるのがマカオの習慣です。

今度、連休のとき、旅先はマカオにはいかがでしょうか。

「私はアジア人？」

- シャモント 恵里菜

「9年間、インド(バンガロール)に留学していました。」と言うと、「インドと日本、どっちが好き？」とよく聞かれる。本当の事を言うと日本の方が好きだが、そうダイレクトに言えない様な人達(会社の取引先のインド人の方など)にはこう答える。「う〜ん・・・難しい質問ですね〜・・・まあ私は日本で生まれて、小学校卒業まで日本で過ごして来たから日本の方が好きですが、インドも好きですよ！だってインドの良い所は日本の悪い所で、日本の良い所はインドの悪い所ですから・・・」

本音に嘘を混ぜたような答えだ。では、私の「本音」とは何なのか？

あらかじめ言わせていただきますが、私はインド人と日本人のハーフです。だが、インドと日本という180度違う環境を見てきて、その他のアジア諸国を短期間ながらも旅してきて思ったのは「私はアジア人だ」ということです。

ここから先、インドと日本の事を書いていきますが、「一般的には」という感覚で読んでください。決して「皆が皆そうである」と言う訳ではないので、どうかくれぐれも「その国の人はほぼ皆そうなんだ」と頭にたたき込まないでください(笑)

さて、先ほどの「私はアジア人」の話に戻しますが・・・なぜ私がこう思うようになったのかと言うと、血筋的にはインド+日本なのに、性格的にはインド+日本+その他のアジア人みたいな感じだし、見た目的にも「地図上でのハーフ」みたいになっているんです。性格に関して言うと、日本人ほど時間にきっちりしていないけど、インド人ほどルーズでもない。「人の事を思いやる」という点でも、日本人ほど気を使うのは好きではないけれど、インド人ほど他人なんてどうでも良いと思うのもどうかと思う。(注:ここで言う他人とは、知らない人 - つまりStranger。ちなみにインドでは家族や友達にはとてもやさしい。)かと思えば食生活やダイエットについては日本人と同じで考えるし、金銭感覚に関してはインド人の考え方に賛成だ。

これだけまあ良いのだが・・・

実は私、日本にいてもインドにいても「外人扱い」なのだ。どちらかと言えば日本寄りの顔だが、それでもたまに日本の警察の人に「(外国人)登録書見せて」と言われる事がある。ところがタイに行くと現地語で話しかけられるのだ。香港でも、マルチカルチャーな国だからか、中国語(広東語)で話しかけられることがある。更に言うと、私が思う「住みやすい国」はアジア限定で言うとシンガポールか香港だと思っている。細かいことは気にしないが、相手に不快な思いをさせるような事はしない。(香港には中国本土から来ている人も多いのだが、香港人であればマナーを守る。)そもそも、この2つの国はマルチカルチャーだから、いろいろな国の良い所をうまく具合に取り入れられているのだろう。プラス、どちらの国もほとんどの人に英語が通じるから(少なくとも私は)不便な思いをする事もない。英語について言えば、日本は外国人にとっては不便な国だと思っている。私は日本語の読み書きが出来るので以前はあまり気がつかなかったが、客観的に考えてみたらすごく不便だな〜と思うようになった。

こういう総合的に考えてたどり着いたのが、私はインド人でも日本人でもなく「アジア人」なのだという事。ちなみに「地球人」も思いついたのだが、アメリカ人の友達等を見ていると振舞い方が根本的に違ふし、考え方は似ている所もあるが、やはり違ふ所が多い様に思えるからだ。

さっきから「アジア人」などと言って都合の良い風にな名前をつけているが、要は「中途半端」なのだ。私みたいな人間は時に困ることがある。先ほど書いた通り、私はどちらかと言えば「日本寄りのハーフ」だ。だから、インドに行けば日本人や中国人だと思われる。となると、インドのタクシーの運転手や売り子は必ず「ぼったくろう」と考える。なめられている気がして頭にくるので頭にくるので自然と

「私がこの国で生きていくには強くなるしかない！」

となる。もし、タクシーの運転手や売り子だけならまだ良いのだが、同じ寮に住んでいたインド人から

「日本に帰ったら〇〇買ってきてね。お金は払うから！」といわれ、最初何もわからなかった私は頼まれたものをなるべく買ってこようとした。ところが実際にお金を払ってくれる人はごく一部の人だけだし、それ以前に持って行くのは大変だ！一人や二人なら重さもそんなでもないし、払ってくれなくてもそれほど困らないが、人数が多いと金額も重さも結構な負担になる。

9年間の留学で日本に帰国したのは12~13回ほどだったが、「日本に帰ったら〇〇買ってきてね。お金は払うから！」と言われなかったことは一度もない。

別の外国人と話して判った事だが、外国人に「〇〇買ってきて！」というのはどうやらもう「お決まり」らしい。「お金を払うから」の部分に関しては払う人もちゃんとしているが、数ヵ月後に払ってくれたという話も聞く。こういうことがあるから外国人は強くならなければナメられるばかりだ。(ちなみに外国に住むインド人が里帰りする時も同じような事があるみたいです。)

この「強さ」はインドに「外国人」としているときは良かった。

ところが、留学を終えて日本に戻ってくると、この「強さ」はあまり必要ないのだ。日本で暮らしていく上で最も必要な「言っている事の本当の意味を読む力」だ。例えば、日本人が言う

「近くに來たら、是非家に遊びに来てくださいね！」

これはほぼ社交辞令だ、中には本当に心から招待している人もいるが、特に都会ではごく一部の人達だ。外国ではこの様な事はあまり無い様だ。海外では急に遊びに行っても歓迎されるし、そもそも遊びに来て欲しくないと思っている人には「是非遊びに来て下さい」なんて言わない。「社交辞令」と言う日本のカルチャーは非常に面倒くさい。昔と比べればまだマンにはなっているのかもしれないが、世界的に見ればやっぱり「心にも無いことを言う」という行為は理解しがたいと思う。

もちろん、インドにも日本にも良い部分はある。

インドは何と言っても家族の絆が強いし、言語をマスターする能力には驚かされる。

日本はマナーを守るとか、勉強よりも「生活力」があ

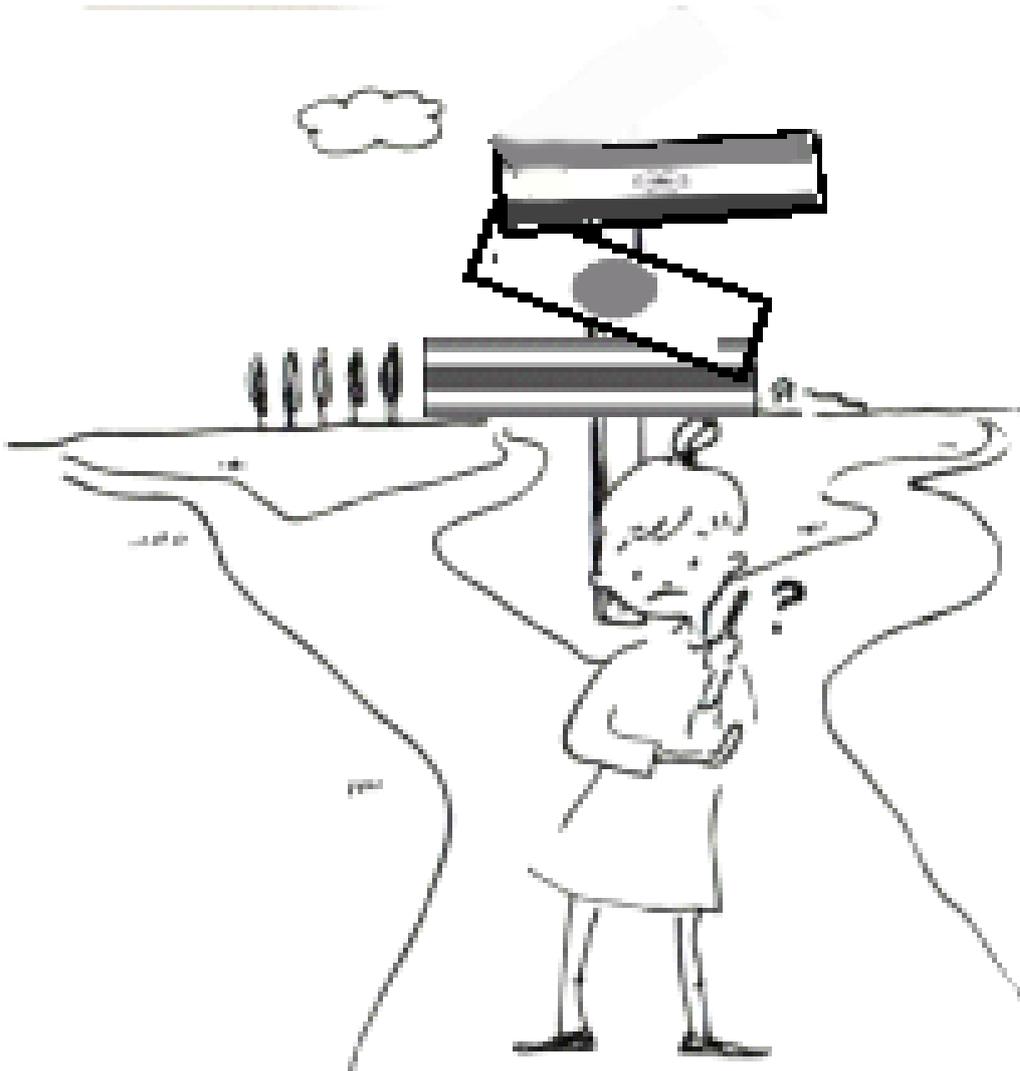
る人が多い気がする。(日本で家政婦さんを雇える人はごく一部の人ですからね！)

皆さんはこういう事をじっくり考えたことはあるでしょうか？

私はこういう事を考えすぎるので悩める子羊みたいになっていますが、それを乗り越えてそれぞれの国の良

い所を取り入れられれば最高ですよ！あと、色々な国に訪問したり人々と交流する事で物事を客観的に考えられる様にもなります。

みなさんも是非一度じっくり考えて見て下さい。面白い発見があるかも知れませんよ！



夏の日への便り

—元氣は当たり前でない。そして、
医療があることも、当たり前でないこと、また思いました— - 吉田美紀

花子様

Anjaliの件、原稿依頼を頂いておりましたのに、ご連絡もできず、すみませんでした。実は、帯状疱疹になってしまい、痛くて痛くて、ここ3週間ほど唸っております。先日メールさせて頂いた頃から左肩甲骨あたりがひどく痛くて、かつ虫刺されの地腫れがとれないなあ(と、思った)、という状態で、体をひねってしまったのかと指圧に行ったりストレッチをしたり、整形外科に行ったりしたのですが、痛みが腕から胸に広がるので、さすがに？と思い、友人にも「ひよつとしたら、帯状疱疹かも」と言われ、中旬に皮膚科に行きましたら、先生が一目見て、「これ、帯状疱疹。体が痛いのは筋肉痛じゃなくて、帯状疱疹の神経痛。指圧じゃ治らないわねえ。一週間以上も？痛み止めも飲まないで？随分痛み強いわねえ」と、褒められたのか、呆れられたのか。とにかく薬を飲んで休養しなさい、と。痛みがとれるのに6~8週間とのこと。でも、痛みの原因がわかってホッとしました。

世界中で、医学が届かない方々がどれだけいて、大変な思いをしておられるかと思うと、私はそこに医療があり、手を伸ばせば医療を受けられることが当たり前でなく、本当にありがたいことと思う日々です。8年前にインドから帰国した翌日にお腹の激痛に見舞われ、緊急入院した時もそう思いました。原因はインドの寄生虫。激痛です。ラッキーにも専門医がおられる病院でしたので、検査結果を待たずとも、多分原因はこれ、と治療が始まりました。身をよじって病院のベッドに身を横たえている時、同じ原因で苦しんでいる人がインドにもたくさんおられるのだろうか、痛くても医療が届かなくて受けられない方が、様々な痛みの中におられるのだろうか、と頭に浮かびました。私は手を伸ばせばそこに医療がある。なんて有難いんだろうと。ホントに感謝だなあ。そう思うと、有難くて、痛みの涙ではなく感謝の涙が出てきました。そんなことを見舞いに来てくれた友人に言うと、「あなた、自分が痛いっていうのに、何言ってるの？」とキョトンとされましたが、この帯状疱疹を通して、その事をまた実感した次第です。

でも、痛い。ドクターの言う通り、超スローダウンした生活をしております。体力低下と腕を動かすと痛いのでキーボードが使えず、メールもできず、原稿も書けず、花子さんにもご連絡をしなければ・・・と気にはなっていたのですが、ご連絡できず、すみませんでした。今朝は夜明けに痛くて目が覚めて鎮痛剤を飲んだので、今は腕を動かしても大丈夫なので、メールさせて頂いている次第です。早く治さねば。

帯状疱疹は、体力が弱った時、免疫になっていた体内の水疱瘡菌がウハウハと元気になり、発症すると教えてもらいました。花子さん、くれぐれも体に気をつけてくださいね。水疱瘡菌が原因ですが、帯状疱疹は人にうつらないとのことなので良かったです。日頃痛みを抱えておられる方は、さぞかしつらいだろうなあ、我が身を通して思います。この経験で、痛みを抱える方にも前より少しは優しくなれる、そんな機会を頂いたのかもしれない。

そんな訳で、Anjaliお役に立てなくて、すみませんでした。ご連絡もできず、ホントにごめんなさい。Apology.

少し涼しくなりましたが、台風もやってきますし、花子さんご家族の皆様も、どうぞ元氣でお過ごしくださいますように。

美紀

追伸:

ちなみに、ドクターから「これ読んでおいてね」と言って渡された小冊子によると、水疱瘡ワクチンの接種が帯状疱疹の予防に効果があるとのこと。アメリカでは60歳を過ぎたらワクチンを接種することが勧められているそうです。両親に話してみようと思う。

