

শারদীয়া স্মরণিকা ২০১১

ত্রয়োদশ বার্ষিকী সংখ্যা



Hong Kong Bengali Association

বৈশাখ পূজা হাা



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Dear Friends,

With a sense of deep respect and utmost humility I welcome you all to this year's Maha Durgatsov, celebrated by the Hong Kong Bengali Association. With the blessings of Ma Durga, this annual religious festivity is in its thirteenth year in Hong Kong.

Looking back, I become nostalgic while recollecting the formative days of HKBA. In the beginning we only celebrated Saraswati Puja. Then we arranged informal get togethers in restaurants and celebrated the Bijoya Sammilani. Through all such informal gatherings there emerged a need for a common platform of the Hindu Bengali diaspora living in Hong Kong. An association was formed to preserve the ethnic, cultural and religious identities of the Bengalis living in Hong Kong. Thus, the Hong Kong Bengali Association (HKBA) was established in 1998. The following year we decided to celebrate the first Durga Puja (the most revered festival for the Bengalis) at the Hindu Temple in Happy Valley. We continued celebrating the Durga Puja festivities in the Temple premises till 2006.

In 2007, the Puja could not be performed at the Hindu Temple due to urgent repairs & maintenance of the Temple building. We all were worried about an alternate venue during the interim period since the Durga Puja had to go on. However, with the blessings of Ma Durga, our senior Members were able to convince the Yau Tsim Mong District office to provide HKBA with the Multipurpose Hall at the Henry G Leong Community Center in Yau Ma Tei. Since then most of our programs have been held in this community center, which is very easily accessible.

The Durga Puja celebrations in Hong Kong are like a home coming for all our members. Many members' children who grew up in Hong Kong and spent considerable time outside Bengal and India get a feel of the festivity and our culture, of which they had only heard stories from their parents and relatives. On the Pujo evenings, the members of HKBA organize colourful cultural programs based on ethnic, traditional and contemporary themes to showcase their talents in performing arts like singing,

dancing, dramatics and others. I sincerely appreciate the participants, particularly the mothers for taking their time out on most weekends to participate in the month long rehearsals for the cultural programs. The programs make the evenings a colourful extravaganza. Bijoya Dashami, the last day of the five days when Ma Durga prepares for her journey back to Kailash is marked by Sindur khela, where the Ladies take an active role in smearing the red vermilion on each other, making it colourful in an otherwise sad day of drawing a curtain on the festivities.

Our organizing committee is meticulous and attentive in maintaining all Puja details under the direction of our priest, Shri Shakti Prasad Mukherjee (Shakti da). Shakti da has been performing the Puja for the past twelve years. Unfortunately, he was admitted to the hospital in Kolkata with serious illness in August this year, and could not recover in time to undertake the travel and perform this year's Puja in Hong Kong. We pray for his well being and early recovery.

Organizing the Durga Puja has been possible only with the help and support of many who have tirelessly worked in putting small pieces of details together to make the event a grand success. I take this opportunity to thank the District Facilities Management committee of the Yau Tsim Mong District council and the officials of the Home Affairs Department of the Hong Kong SAR Government for their kind cooperation in making the facilities of Henry G. Leong Community Centre available to HKBA for the Puja. I also extend my deep appreciation and thanks to all our patrons, sponsors, friends, well-wishers and other Associations for all their continued patronage and support. I sincerely thank the HKBA Executive Committee members, for their dedication and hard work. Finally I thank the HKBA members who have volunteered to help and guide us on all occasions.

May the blessings of Ma Durga be on us at all times.

Sipanta Kumar Saha  
President  
The Hongkong Bengali Association



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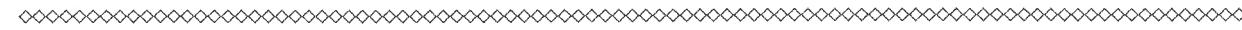


## Special Acknowledgements

The Hong Kong Bengali Association wishes to express its heart-felt thanks to all friends, supporters, sponsors and well-wishers for the help they have rendered to the cause of our Association. For this year's Durga Puja, we especially acknowledge the contributions of the following persons:

Mr. Mr R Seshadri  
Mr. Raymond Ho  
Mr. Sohan Goenka  
Mr. Vinod Dhariwal  
Ms. LIU Suk-Wa, Connie  
Mr. Kanwaljeet Singh Dhillon

|                              |                                |
|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
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| <b>Souvenir Design</b>       | <b>Lui Man Yin, Mandy</b>      |



## HKBA EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 2011 - 2012

|                               |   |
|-------------------------------|---|
| <b>President</b>              | Sipanta Kumar Saha<br>+852 9419 6031<br>sksaha@biznetvigator.com                        |
| <b>Vice President</b>         | Somdev Chatterjee   |
| <b>General Secretary</b>      | Anindita Bhattacharya   |
| <b>Treasurer</b>              | Chandranath Das   |
| <b>Committee Members</b>      | Balaram Saha<br>Kaushik Neogi<br>Debasis Roy Mahapatra<br>Gautam Bakuly<br>Anuradha Sen |
| <b>Cultural Sub-Committee</b> | Kaushik Neogy<br>Anindita Bhattacharya<br>Anuradha Sen                                  |
| <b>Contact HKBA</b>           | mailhkba@gmail.com  |
| <b>Web Site</b>               | www.hkba.weebly.com   |



## Durga Puja 2011 Program Schedule

Venue:  
Multipurpose Hall, Henry G Leong Community Center  
60 Public Square Street, Yau Ma Tei, Kowloon.

|                  |                        |   |
|------------------|------------------------|---|
| Sasthi           | Sunday, 2nd October    | - Puja starts from 6:30 PM<br>- Prasad distribution   |
| Saptami          | Monday, 3rd October    | - Morning Puja 10:00 – 12:00<br>- Pushpanjali 11:00-11:30<br>- Prasad distribution<br>- Evening Puja 18:00 – 19:00<br>- Prasad distribution 19:00-19:30<br>- Cultural program 19:30-20:30 |
| Asthami          | Tuesday, 4th October   | - Morning Puja 10:00 – 12:00<br>- Pushpanjali 11:00-11:30<br>- Prasad distribution<br>- Sandhi Puja 18:00-19:00<br>- Prasad distribution 19:00-19:30<br>- Cultural program 19:30-20:00    |
| Návami           | Wednesday, 5th October | - Morning Puja 10:00 – 12:00<br>- Pushpanjali 11:00-11:30<br>- Prasad distribution<br>- Evening Puja 18:00 – 19:00<br>- Prasad distribution 19:00-19:30<br>- Cultural program 19:30-20:30 |
| Dashami          | Thursday, 6th October  | - Morning Puja 10:00 – 12:00<br>- Pushpanjali 11:00-11:30<br>- Dadhi Karma<br>- Prasad distribution<br>- Sindur Khela 16:00-17:00<br>- Cleaning and packing 17:00-18:00                   |
| Lakshmi Puja     | Tuesday, 11th October  | - Puja 18:30-20:30  |
| Bijoya Sammelani | Sunday, 6th November   | - Gettogether over lunch 12:00PM to 4PM   |

**Priest: Shri Kastury Bhusan Chakrabarty of Kolkata**

Traveling Direction to HLCC:

Take Exit C at Yau Ma Tei MTR, turn right, walk along the Nathan Road, turn right again at the Public Square Street, the HGLCC is ahead at the intersection of Public Square Street and Shanghai Street.



THE HONG KONG BENGALI ASSOCIATION  
(Registered under the Societies Ordinance: Ref. (2) in CP/LIC/SO/19/21460 dated 31.12.1998)

STATEMENT OF RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS FOR THE PERIOD ENDED FEBRUARY 26, 2011

| Receipts   | HKD     | Amount HKD | Payments  | HKD    | Amount HKD |
|--|---------|------------|---|--------|------------|
| Opening Balance of fund:                           |         |            | Durga Puja Expenses:  |        |            |
| Cash at Bank as at March 1, 2010.                  |         | 255,383    | Purohit including travel & puja purchase  | 9,890  |            |
| Membership Fees Collection:                        |         | 9,450      | Decoration costs  | 2,618  |            |
|  |         |            | Food catering expenses  | 54,275 |            |
|  |         |            | Fruits, sweets, provisions, gifts, function and all miscellaneous expenses                | 34,821 |            |
|  |         |            | Printing of souvenir  | 12,783 |            |
|  |         |            | Bijoya Sammelani lunch  | 21,650 |            |
|  |         |            | Bijoya cultural function expenses   | 46,381 |            |
|  |         |            | Lakshmi Puja expenses   | 197    | 182,615    |
| Durga Puja Collections:                            |         |            | Saraswati Puja Expenses   |        | 3,730      |
| Members' Subscriptions                             | 136,020 |            |   |        |            |
| Pranami and donations from members and others      | 25,976  |            |   |        |            |
| Advertisements collections during the year         | 132,301 | 294,297    |   |        |            |
| Advertisement receivables for prior year collected |         | 4,000      | AGM 2010 lunch expenses   |        | 8,500      |
| Miscellaneous collections                          |         | 1,035      | Expenses for India Evening & Logo Competition and decoration for Embrace at Victoria park |        | 1,750      |
|  |         |            |   |        |            |
|  |         |            | Cash at Bank as on 26 February, 2011.   |        | 367,570    |
|  |         | 564,165    |   |        | 564,165    |

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 26 FEBRUARY 2011

| Liabilities  | HKD     | Amount HKD | Assets                                | HKD | Amount HKD |
|--|---------|------------|---------------------------------------|-----|------------|
| Members' Fund:   |         |            | Cash and Bank balances:               |     |            |
| Opening Balance as on March 1, 2010  | 79,322  |            | Bank balance as on February 26, 2011  |     | 367,570    |
| Add:   |         |            | Advertisement receivables at year end |     | 2,000      |
| Membership fees collected during 2010-11   | 9,450   | 88,772     |                                       |     |            |
| General Fund:  |         |            |                                       |     |            |
| Opening Balance as on March 1, 2010  | 165,061 |            |                                       |     |            |
| Add:   |         |            |                                       |     |            |
| Surplus from Durga Puja during year including receivables from advertisements at year end.       | 113,682 |            |                                       |     |            |
| Excess accrual of AGM 2010 expenses in previous accounts   | 6,500   |            |                                       |     |            |
| Other miscellaneous collections  | 270     |            |                                       |     |            |
| Surplus from poila boishakh collections  | 765     |            |                                       |     |            |
| Sub-total  | 286,278 |            |                                       |     |            |
| Less from General Fund for:  |         |            |                                       |     |            |
| Expenses for Saraswati Puja  | 3,730   |            |                                       |     |            |
| Accrual of estimated AGM 2011 expenses   | 15,000  |            |                                       |     |            |
| Accrual for charitable donations:  |         |            |                                       |     |            |
| Sarada Seva Sangha   | 22,000  |            |                                       |     |            |
| Po Leung Kuk   | 5,000   | 27,000     |                                       |     |            |
| Expenses for India evening, logo competition and EMBRACE multicultural function at Victoria park | 1,750   |            |                                       |     |            |
| Sub-total  | 47,480  |            |                                       |     |            |
| Closing balance as on February 25, 2011.   |         | 238,798    |                                       |     |            |
| Provision for estimated charitable donations   |         | 27,000     |                                       |     |            |
| Provision for estimated AGM 2011 expenses  |         | 15,000     |                                       |     |            |
|  |         | 369,570    |                                       |     | 369,570    |

(Debasis Roy Mahapatra)

(Bhaskar Sengupta)

(Sipanta Kumar Saha)

Dated: 26 Feb, 2011

Audit Report for 2010-11

We have checked and verified the Statement of Receipts and Payments for the period March 1, 2010 to February 26, 2011 and the related Balance Sheet as at February 26, 2011 together with the detailed supporting documents / statements attached to and forming part of these accounts. Based on our checking and on the information and explanations obtained, we certify that the said accounts are true and fair in all respects.

SD/-  
Ambar Mitra

Dated: 26th Feb 2011

SD/-  
Dipankar Chatterjee

Dated: 26th Feb 2011

The essence of being a Bengali: pujo, petpujo and adda!

Purabi Naha

Let us go back in time. *Durga pujo* in yesteryears and *Durga pujo* now have metamorphosed a lot, so are the people and the food patterns! "Aaye re chute aaye pujor gondho esheche, dhan kurkur dhan kurkur batti bejeche... pujor gondho esheche..."

My grandmother told us that during her childhood, the children knew the approach of *Durga pujo* from the "kashphool" growing in their village. *Durga pujo* had a charm of its own about a century back. *Mahalaya* was an important occasion for all. Everyone, including the children, woke up early to offer prayers in the river for the arrival of *Ma! Thakurmohais* chanted mantras while everyone prayed together. Even now, Bengalis settled abroad make it a point to sit and listen to the *mahalaya mantras* on the Internet or on television; and explain the importance of the *pujo* to their "third-generation" kids!

*Mahashashthi*. There is an atmosphere of jubilation and celebration on the first day of pujo. People wear new clothes and wait eagerly for *Ma's "drishtidaan"* ceremony. A generation or two back, ladies lined up near the *Durga* idol, with bold "sindurphota" on their foreheads and silver and gold jewellery in their thick, oiled braids and buns; welcoming *Debi Durga* in their own ways.

*Mahashaptami*. The pomp begins! Traditionally, the *tikli, tiara, noth* and the heaviest necklaces in the old-fashioned "shinduk" would have been out to be paired with the *Dhakai jamdanis, dhonekhalis, benarasis and gorods*. Men in their moustaches and big beards, extra-oiled hair with middle partition and *dhuti panjabis* would be contempt with their "babumoshai" looks! *Pujo* fashion has changed dramatically! Now is the time for Swarovski bracelets, the modern necks adorn white gold in matte finish or better still, platinum! The sari has been transformed into a *haute couture* fingerprint of Indianism.

Traditionally, the *mahashaptami pushpanjali* was a compulsory ritual. Even children fasted till they had offered their prayers. Bengalis knew the prayers by heart. The tradition continues among global Bengalis who still join their palms and bow their heads in deep respect during *pushpanjali*. Many among the new generation still understand the importance of *pronam, pujo* and devotion, and how it binds us all from every sphere and every part of the world, together!

*Mahashtami*. The "durgatinashini" is in her full form today and by *mahashtami* most of the *pandals* get some grade for their decoration and special features! The magical days of *mela* and *jatras* are substituted by other cultural programmes like *Rabindra sangeet*, dance, plays and musical recitals. Food stall buzz with crowds (the *mughlai paratha* and the *kosha mangsho* stalls surprisingly being a little deserted on *mahashtami*) while the young chit-chat and balloon-wallas make double profit with the kids. This is the essence of the new bong *pujo*!

The *pujo* which was once only hosted by the *zamindars* and the *rajababus*, became the *SARBOJANIN DURGA PUJO* of the common man.

*Mahanabami*. The last day of *pujo*, but in no way the least! We are glad to think that *shondhipujo* still continues. People rush at the dead of the night, making their best effort to arrange for the special and unique ingredients required for this event! The best as well as the surprising part is that over these years, the menu in the bhog has not changed much! Although, food stalls and their menus have seen tremendous changes in the past 100 years, *bhog* continues to be *khichuri, labra, beguni, chatni, mishti* and *payesh*.

Bengalis are deep-rooted as far their culture, especially *Durga pujo* is concerned. At the same time, they are continuously changing their mindsets, fashion, the adda topics and of course, Bengali food!

All through these *pujo* days, Bengalis gorge on a variety of mouth-watering foods: a majority of which is street food! Be it the rustic *phuchka, jhalmuri, ghugni, luchi-alurdum, mochar chop*, mutton cutlets or fish rolls, we enjoy them thoroughly with friends and family! The huge variety of Bengali sweets deserve a special mention! The variety of *sandesh, rosogolla, rajbhog, mishti doi, mowa, nadu*, etc, can sweetly melt anyone's heart. What is your favourite street food during the *pujo*?

Here is an authentic Bengali "paturi" which you will enjoy! You will get all the ingredients in Hong Kong easily.

Carp Paturi

[Variation: Try using pandan leaves in place of banana leaves for a little change!]



Ingredients:

- Readymade fresh carp paste: 2 cups
- Unsweetened hung curd: 3 tbsp
- Green chillies (add more chillies for the brave-hearted!): 2
- Mustard seeds: 2 tbsp
- Turmeric powder: ¼ tsp
- Salt: ¾ tsp
- Mustard oil: 1 tbsp
- Banana leaves (cut into half the size of your laptop screen): 6 rectangular sheets

Method:

Grind the mustard seeds, a pinch of salt and the green chillies into a fine paste. Mix the carp paste, turmeric powder, salt and the curd with this and mix well with your hand, so that all the ingredients are evenly distributed in the fish-paste mixture so obtained.

Dip each banana sheet into warm water for about 2 min. Remove from warm water and pat dry. Apply mustard oil on each leaf on its glazed side evenly and put a dollop of the fish mixture into it.

Wrap it so that it becomes like an envelope, ensuring that no paste is leaking.

Now tie each of the banana leaf parcels with a piece of thread (alternatively, use a toothpick). Heat a nonstick pan and put these parcels on a medium flame. Cover the lid and let this cook for 2 min. Now reduce the flame to minimum and cook each side till the leaves show a change in colour (this takes around 7 min). Flip and repeat the process for seven more minutes.

To eat, open each parcel carefully and discard the leaf. The steamed and spicy fish preparation is ready to tickle your tastebuds. This is best accompanied with steamed rice!

[The author, Purabi Naha, runs a food blog *Cosmopolitan Currymania* (<http://cosmopolitancurrymania.blogspot.com>). If you have interesting pujo-related food photographs, speaking something of the unique Bengali culture, please don't hesitate to mail her the same at [purabinaha55@gmail.com](mailto:purabinaha55@gmail.com)]



## AT THE TOP

Debasmita Bhattacharya

Do you know what it feels like to be on top of the world? To feel completely blown away? Well, I experienced that feeling not too long ago.

Last summer I traveled to the land of luxury, opportunity and dreams. I went to Dubai. During my stay there, I did a lot of sight-seeing which included a desert safari and a dhow cruise. I also visited many posh, grand and thematic malls. But, the most adventurous and greatest of them all was the Burj Khalifa.

The Burj Khalifa is one of the most amazing man-made structures in the world. It is the tallest building ever built, measuring 828 metres in height. The name means 'Tower Khalifa' and houses over 1000 luxury apartments, 49 floors of offices and much more. Around 12,000 people live and work in the tower, which is part of a 500-acre development.

As I waited in the queue with my family for the special elevator to climb the magnificent tower, I read the fascinating 'fun

facts' about the Burj Khalifa. Just when I was starting to get impatient, the elevator "dinged" and the doors "whooshed" open. Tourists filed, all of them looking awestruck. We rushed in excitedly and waited for the ride to start. At the end of the ride, I was surprised to find that it took under one minute to go up 124 floors!

I stood on the observation deck and admired the breathtaking view. The city lights shined against the dark night sky and the cars were just tiny moving dots. It was beautiful. I felt like I could see the whole world from where I was. I couldn't believe that I was actually there! The wind blew in my face and I felt the building sway a little. I took so many pictures that my camera eventually ran out of memory.

**I was truly at the top of the world!**

This was one of the most exciting experiences I have ever had and I will remember it all my life.

## Spring Will Come

Sohini Paul

No matter how much the night may glove  
The world in blinding darkness,  
The sun will rise and bring with it  
Rays of warmth and hope.  
No matter how much suffering we see,  
Filling our hearts with sadness,  
Spring will come again  
And with winter we'll learn to cope.

There's no escape from pain  
But we must always persevere.  
There's something worth holding on to  
Let us overcome our fear.  
Standing up to darkness and sorrow,  
We'll keep with us the faith  
That we're fighting for our loved ones,  
So spring will come one day.

No matter how long a drought may last  
And dry up even tears,  
Clouds will one day linger,  
Blessing us with the rain.  
No matter how much it seems  
That the world's end must be near,  
The time will pass and hope will win  
And spring will come again.

There's not an easy path,  
Though we must never give up.  
For every hurdle we can pass,  
If we try hard enough.  
Since regardless of countless evil,  
There is some good that stays.  
And it is worth fighting for,  
As spring will come one day.

## KILL THE ANT

Kaushik Neogy

Few months back I came across an interesting article on Dr. James Esdaille, a Scottish surgeon who worked in Bengal before ether, chloroform or other modern methods of anesthesia were discovered. Between 1843 and 1846, Dr. Esdaille performed about four hundred major operations, such as amputations, removal of tumors and cancerous growths, operations on the eye, ear and throat. All operations were conducted under mental anesthesia only. Mortality rate among Dr. Esdaille's patients was extremely low. Patients felt no pain. Dr. James Esdaille imbedded in the subconscious minds of all his patients who were in hypnotic state that no infection or septic condition would develop. Low mortality rate was due to Dr. James Esdaille's suggestion to the subconscious mind and the patients responded according to his proposition.

Lord Dalhousie, the then Governor-General of India had much respect for Dr. Esdaille and Dr. Esdaille's work, appointed him to the position of Presidency Surgeon.

It simply amazed me how a surgeon in the 18th century miraculously wonder-worked on the powers of the subconscious mind. To me it was a sort of mystic power Dr. Esdaille possessed. Nevertheless, it set me on a journey to explore more into this subject. Progressively as I read on this subject, somehow, all eventually melded and coalesced into one prime thought process, whether the books and article written by renowned neurologist Dr. Daniel Amen or neuron research scholar John Medina or Psychoanalyst Dr. Brian Weiss or the myriad self help book writers to the teachings of Swami Vivekananda. Although I had an answer to my searches, a different fruition ticked on me – the Power of Human Brain and the subconscious mind – How best to keep it on shape? The Answer is to 'KILL THE ANT – Automatic Negative Thoughts.

There are two levels in our mind – the conscious or rational level and the subconscious or irrational level. We think with our conscious mind and whatever we habitually think sinks down into our subconscious mind. The subconscious mind is the seat of our emotions and is the creative mind. Point to be noted here is that once the subconscious mind accepts the idea it begins to execute it. It is an interesting and subtle truth that the law of the subconscious mind works for good and bad ideas alike. Subconscious mind does not have a logical power as a result whatever we feed into it, it acts accordingly.

Sigmund Freud described the mind as an arena - a sort of tumbling ground, for the struggle of antagonistic impulses.

It is best not to feed the subconscious mind with the ANT – Automatic Negative Thoughts. Kill them before it attack our subconscious mind. Now we are left with the question of how to control our minds and kill the ANTs at the outset.

Identify the ANT first. Whenever it is noticed that ANT is entering the mind, recognize it and then kill the ANT feeding our emotional anteater. Here are few different types of ANT but there are many more as well.

- ❖ Focusing on the negative: Seeing only the bad in a situation.
- ❖ Fortune Telling: Predicting the worst possible outcome to a situation.
- ❖ Mind Reading: Believing that we know what others thinking or attempting to read their minds
- ❖ Thinking with your feelings: Believing negative feelings without ever questioning them.

- ❖ The most poisonous red ANT – Blaming: The worst and most damaging of negative thoughts is passing the buck or pushing the blame on others.

ANT are cynical, gloomy and compelling thoughts that just seem to keep marching all by themselves. Unfortunately there is no formal place where we are taught to think much about our thoughts or to challenge the notions that go through our head, even though our thoughts are always with us. Every thought we have, sends an electrical signal throughout the brain. Thoughts have actual physical properties, they are real.

When we fly, the airline limits the amount of luggage per passenger and asks us to pay for the extra baggage carried but we fail to apply the same strategy to our life and philosophy; instead, we carry our own mental baggage filled with immense psychological burden.

As Napoleon Hill puts it "Mind control is the result of self discipline and habit. You either control your mind or mind controls you"

We all know that at 99 degree Centigrade, water is hot and in fact very hot. At 100 deg C water begins to boil and becomes steam. Steam is powerful enough to move a train load of people or a huge ship. Just think of it "a meager 1 degree Centigrade of temperature" makes such a huge difference. Our human brain is also like that just a minor change in our thinking process can lead to enormous achievements. Make some minor adjustment in the thinking process to kill the ANT.

1. Teach yourself to **eject the negativism from your mind**. The great martial artist Bruce Lee would actually write down the negative thoughts on a piece of paper and set the paper on fire.
2. **Meditate** to achieve the boundless will power to kill the ANT. **Find strength** in the fact that you are the product of thousands of years of evolution and as survivors are already equipped with the tools you need to accomplish your goals – you just need to activate them.
3. **Build** a library of wonderful memories. Train your thoughts to be positive and hopeful.

In pursuit of killing the ANT most elemental attainment is Mono-idealism.

Mono-idealism is the state of focusing energy and attention on one thing without conflicts. We are the Master of our Fate; we are the Captain of my Soul because we have the power to control our thoughts.

ANT has an illogical logic. Left unchecked, ANTs will cause an infection in our whole body system. We need to crush them or it affects our relationships, our work and our entire life. When a negative thought goes unchallenged, our mind believes it and our body reacts to it. Let us bring them into the open and examine them on a conscious level.

Life is often like that: One right sometimes cancels out several wrongs. Let us work on dwindling down the ANT population and cancel several wrongs from our life.

I welcome you to the club of "KILL THE ANT"

P.S. – It is a topic of abysmal depth. If you would like to read more on this, for a reading list please write to kaushikneogy@gmail.com. Withal to anything the reading list on this subject will never be complete and perhaps unending as for centuries human race is searching the sea-bed of this yet unfathomable subject.



## ॐ Mythologies along the pilgrimage route to Kedarnath

Debasis Roy Mahapatra

This summer my wife and I visited Kedarnath and Badrinath. Our motivations were partly pilgrimage and partly adventure tourism. I want to assure the reader that this is not yet another travelogue about a Kedar - Badri trip. Thanks to modern technology - there are plenty of that on the internet. The purpose of this article to narrate the mythologies that surround the holy places that dot the entire region of Uttarakhand. Although we thoroughly enjoyed the trip, we felt that this would have been more enjoyable had we known these stories before setting off on our journey. After returning from the trip I started reading about these mythologies. This article is my humble effort to compile some of these stories in a single document. I hope this will enable you to better enjoy a trip to these places, if you ever decide to do so. I would like to inform our young readers that this region also offers a vast array of exciting outdoor activities such as white water rafting, trekking and skiing in the winter.

As my writing progressed I found that the article was becoming rather long - not quite suitable for a Durgapuja souvenir. Lack of adequate time on my part was also another reason that I decided to cover only the journey up to Kedarnath in this article.

For the benefit of our readers who are not very familiar with the Indian languages, I would like to explain the meaning of a few Sanskrit terms that I have used in this article. The Sanskrit word prayag means the confluence of two rivers. Prayags are considered to be holy places by the Hindus. The most famous prayag is the confluence of the Ganga and the Yamuna rivers at Allahabad. Many prayags are scattered throughout the Dev Bhoomi region (Land of Gods), which refers to Uttarakhand and part of the adjoining Himachal Pradesh province. Five of these are particularly significant. These are collectively known as the Panch Prayag - Dev Prayag, Rudra Prayag, Karna Prayag, Nand Prayag and Vishnu Prayag. I'll write more about them later in proper context.

The number five - pancha - has a special significance in Hindu culture - Pancha-gavya ( five derivatives of cow - ghee, milk, yoghurt, urine and excretion of a male calf ), Pancha-sashya (five grains - paddy grains, barley, a type of legume which we call Maash kalai in Bengali and Urad Dahl in Hindi, sesame and moong bean), Panchamrut (nectar of immortality - a mix of cow's milk, yoghurt, ghee, honey and sugar) ....the list goes on and on. It is no wonder that many things in the Dev Bhoomi are also grouped in five. Apart from the Panch Prayag that I have already mentioned earlier, the most notable "panchas" in this region are the Panch Kedar and Panch Badri.

Panch Badri consists of - Badrinath (also known as Badri Vishal), Yogdhyan Badri, Bhavisya Badri, Briddha Badri and Adi Badri. Lord Vishnu meditated at these places at different times. "Badri" is a kind of berry that is said to have grown in the upper reaches of the mountains in Badrinath. The word "nath" means "the lord". That is how the place got its name "Badrinath".

Panch Kedar refers to Kedarnath, Tungnath, Rudranath, Madmaheshwar and Kalpeshwar. According to a legend, after the end of the Kurukshetra war, the Pandavas became very remorseful for killing their cousins and other relatives. They began meditating and praying to Lord Shiva and sought His forgiveness. But Lord Shiva remained elusive. Finally Bhima caught hold of Him, who was hiding at Guptkashi in the guise of

a buffalo. Bhima embraced the buffalo with all his might so that it cannot escape. Such was the force of Bhima's embrace that Lord Shiva's body - in the form of buffalo - burst into pieces. The hind part fell at Kedarnath, the navel at Madmaheshwar (short form of Madhyamaheshwar - madhya meaning middle), the arms at Tungnath, the mouth at Rudranath and the hair at Kalpeshwar.



Hinduism has two major faiths - the Shaivaites are the worshippers of Lord Shiva and the Vaishnavites are the worshippers of Lord Vishnu. The deity of Kedar group of temples is Lord Shiva and the deity of Badri group of temples is Lord Vishnu. Thus a pilgrimage to Kedar and Badri appeals to a vast majority of the Hindus.

This region was the backdrop of the two most important epics of Hinduism - the Mahabharata and the Ramayana. The majority of the mythological stories of this region are related to Mahabharata, some are related to the Puranas and very few are related to the Ramayana.

Traditionally, this pilgrimage route is to visit Kedar first and then to Badri. I have not been able to find out the reason for it. According to Mahabharata, Pandavas started their great journey towards heaven (Mahaprasthan) from Kedar, then to Badri, from there to Satopanth lake via the ancient Mana village and finally to Swargaarohini (stairs to the heaven). I am guessing that to be the reason the pilgrims follow the same route even to this date.

Our journey began at Rishikesh (or Hrishikesh) at the foothills of the mount Himalayas. Today Rishikesh is a well known center of yoga and meditation. But even in the ancient times

Rishikesh was the centre for meditation for the rishies. The word Rishikesh comes from "rishi" (a sage) and "kesh" (hair). The place is called Rishikesh because rishi Raivya threw his hair in the holy fire of a yagna to create a demon whom he ordered to destroy Yabakrit, son of the great sage Bharadwaj, because young Yabakrit had fallen in love with Raivya's daughter-in-law who was exceptionally beautiful (yagna is a form of worship in front of a holy fire).

The road from Rishikesh starts climbing steadily along the bank of the river Ganga. The road is built high on the mountain sides and the river flows about a 1000 ft down below. This pattern usually continues all along the route. The road winds down to the river bed level when it has to cross a bridge and then winds up again to higher altitudes.

Shortly after leaving Rishikesh one road goes towards Tehri and the other one towards Kedar and Badri via Rudraprayag. We took the road to Rudraprayag. Our first stop was Devprayag, the first of the Panch Prayags described earlier. This is at the confluence of the river Alaknanda and Bhaagirathi. Downstream from here the combined river takes the name Ganga. Alaknanda originated at the Basudhara falls near Badrinath and Bhaagirathi originated at Gangotri. The river is named Bhaagirathi because king Bhagirath, by the power of his meditation, brought down Ganga to the earth to free the souls of his cursed forefathers.

Devprayag (618m) is named after Devsharma, the royal guru of Tehri, who was a great devotee of Lord Vishnu. Lord Rama as an incarnation of Lord Vishnu visited Devprayag after destroying Ravana. The Bhaagirathi part of the confluence is known as Vashistha kund because Lord Indra, the king of the Gods, performed a great Yagna here under the priesthood of the great sage Vashistha. The Alaknanda part of the confluence is known as Dasharathachal. Ramayana says that king Dasharatha mistook Sindhu, the son of a blind sage, to be a deer drinking water from a river and killed him with his sound-seeking arrow. The fountain Shanta which comes down from the top of Dasharathachal Mountain is said to be the source of that water.

The actual confluence is a deep decent from the road level. Neither did we have the time nor did any of us were enthusiastic about going down to the confluence. We watched it from a vantage point where our tourist coach stopped. Half way down the hill is a Raghunathji temple, where a half finished throne made of stone is said to be the seat of Lord Rama whenever he visited this place.

Our next stop was Rudraprayag (2000 ft), the second of the Panch Prayags. We passed Kirtinagar and Srinagar along the way. This is not the same Srinagar which is the capital of Jammu and Kashmir. Rudra Prayag is the confluence of Alaknanda river and the Mandakini river coming down from Kedarnath. We were taken to the restaurant of GMVN tourist lodge for lunch. The restaurant has an unobstructed view of the confluence below. Generally, GMVN facilities are located at vantage points. As in Devprayag, the water of the two rivers were of different colours - the colour of Mandakini water was that of a sandal wood paste while Alaknanda water was of greenish slate colour.

Rudraprayag is named after Lord Rudra, which is another name of Lord Shiva. Devarshi Narada acquired his music skills from Lord Shiva after a long meditation at this place. Shiva was very pleased with his devotion and gave his veena to Narada. A

Rudranath temple where Narada meditated is located on top of a hill. Rudra Prayag is considered to be a great pilgrimage site for the musicians all over the country.

One road from Rudraprayag goes towards Kedarnath and the other goes to Badrinath. We took the road to Kedar. Agastyamuni was a short distance away. Great sage Agastya is said to have meditated here and a temple here is dedicated in his honour. Regular helicopter service to Kedar temple is available from the police station ground here.

We then passed Chandrapuri and Syalsaur both of which are picturesque tourist locations. On our way back from Kedar, we had a night halt at the GMVN tourist lodge at Syalsaur. The lodge was situated right on the bank of Mandakini at the river bed level. The snow capped peaks of the Kedar range were visible on the horizon. The GMVN facility here was quite comfortable and cozy. Individual cottages, equipped with modern amenities were spacious and very reasonably priced.

Our next stop was Guptkashi which has an ancient Shiva temple and a temple of Ardhanareeshwar in the same compound. Ardha means half, nari means woman and ishwar means God. The right half of Ardhanareeshwar is that of Lord Shiva and the left half is that of Parvati. Legend has it that Lord Shiva proposed to Parvati (reincarnation of Sati) at this place. They were married in Triyuginarayan near Sonprayag.

From the hill top in Guptkashi the township of Ukhimoth on the other side of Mandakini river looks like a picture. Mandakini at this place flows much below the road level and two towns are perched high above on the mountains on the opposite sides facing each other. Ukhimoth becomes the winter residence of Lord Kedar after the main temple in Kedarnath is closed in October. The Rawal, the head priest of Kedar temple, also lives here.

The ancient name of Ukhimoth was Shonitpur which was the capital of Baan Raja, the great grandson of Prahlad. Baan raja had a beautiful daughter named Usha. Shonitpur was named after her and came to be known as Ushamoth, which was distorted over the ages to become Ukhimoth. Usha had married Aniruddh who was the grandson of Lord Krishna. The spot where the marriage was performed is marked on a temple courtyard.

After leaving Guptkashi we passed Phata Chatti. Regular helicopter services to Kedar temple are also available from here. Advance booking is required. Tickets are not sold on the helipad.

From Guptkashi onwards the scenery became greener and very beautiful. A few times we got the glimpses of the snow peaks of the Kedar range. The temperature began to drop rapidly. Towards the late afternoon the rain started. This is quite common in high altitudes of the Himalayas. Clouds start gathering around mid-day, followed by rain and thunderstorm in the afternoon, which continues into the evening. The rain stops at night and by next morning the sky again becomes deep blue. All journeys in this region start early morning and stop before the nightfall.

Our first night halt was at a GMVN tourist lodge in Rampur. It was actually located in a village called Sitapur where there is a Sita temple. Rampur being a bigger settlement, the address of the lodge is Rampur. The lodge was located on the bank of



Mandakini. The river bed was nearby - we could hear the roaring sound of water gushing down. The temperature had become very cold, heavy woolens were necessary. The scenery from the lodge was very charming with deep green foliage all around and the snow peaks of the Kedar range clearly visible on the background.

Next morning we resumed our journey towards Kedar. After 3-4 kilometers we reached Sonprayag (1829 m) which is the confluence of Mandakini and Baasuki rivers. Some literatures call the latter as Son Ganga. Many rivers in this region become a ganga in one way or the other and quite often there are Pauranik stories that relate to them.

A short distance away from Sonprayag is Triyuginarayan (1980m) where there is a famous Vishnu temple. Triyug means three eras of Hinduism - Treta yug, Satya yug and Kali yug. The celestial marriage of Shiva and Parvati was performed here. Lord Vishnu was the priest. An eternal flame burns in the Vishnu temple courtyard where this celestial marriage was solemnized.

The road between Sonprayag and Gaurikund is one way. We were held up at Sonprayag for quite a long time. When our turn came, the coach developed a mechanical problem and we missed our turn. We finally reached Gauri Kund around 11:00 AM - quite late for starting the 14 KM uphill trek to Kedarnath.

Legend has it that Gauri, which is another name of Parvati, performed rigorous penance here to win the heart of Lord Shiva who finally proposed to marry her at Guptkashi. Gaurikund has a small Gauri temple and a hot water spring. Water from the hot spring is collected in a small pond (kund) which is known as Gauri Kund. The devotees returning from Kedarnath take a holy dip in this kund which is said to have miraculous properties to cure all kinds of skin diseases. This may be true because the water of the hot spring contains sulfur as evident from the yellowish colour of the water. In any case, the dip in the hot water has a very soothing effect after the strenuous to and fro trek to Kedarnath. However, the water of the pond does not look very appealing and a courageous mind is needed to take the dip.

Gauri Kund is at the base of the trekking route to Kedar. This is a very steep and arduous climb. But the scenery is unparalleled. Green forests, flowering plants and thousands of feet tall fountains dropping from the mountain tops are seen along the trek. However, I must say the journey was not as enjoyable as I thought it would be. It was very crowded and I was told it will become even more crowded around mid-May. Ponies, Kandis (human beings carrying other fellow humans in a basket on their back) and dandies (sedan chairs carried by four persons) are the alternate modes of transports for the less able persons. The road is well paved but narrow and full of pony dung which made it very smelly and dirty. I found the road to be actually very dangerous to walk because of the chaotic movements of the ponies and the dandies.

The last settlement along the trek is Rambara where the pilgrims normally stop for rest and to have lunch. The road becomes even steeper after that. The greenery starts thinning and the temperature starts dropping rapidly. Rain had started before we reached Rambara and continued all the way up to Kedar.

We finally reached Kedar in early evening. It was freezing cold and drizzling. We stayed at the GMVN tourist lodge. There was

no heating. The warm water for wash had to be ordered, which was not forthcoming. They had provided us two thick quilts each. We slept with all our woolen garments and the two quilts on top of that. Even then we were freezing.

We went to visit the temple right after we checked into our rooms. The queue to the entrance was a mile long. Waiting in that queue in that freezing cold was a challenge. Thousands of devotees without adequate warm clothing patiently waited in the queue. Such is the amazing power of faith.

Kedarnath temple (3584m) was built by Adi Shankaracharya in the 8th Century. Kedarnath shrine is a stone buried in the ground. I have already narrated one mythological story about the Panch Kedar. A slightly different version of mythology says that after the end of the Kurukshetra war, Pandavas came to this region seeking forgiveness from Lord Shiva for the killing of their close relatives. But Shiva eluded them and hid himself in the form of a bull in Kedarnath. When he realized that the Pandavas have found out his guise, he buried himself in the ground. Only his hump was visible above the ground which is worshipped at the Kedarnath temple. His arms appeared at Tungnath, face at Rudranath, navel at Madhyamaheshwar and his matted hair and head appeared at Kalpeshwar

The inner walls of the temple are adorned with small sculptures of the Pandavas and Daupadi and an image of Lord Ganesha. The morning pooja in the temple starts very early, around 4 AM. Performing Pooja in the inner sanctum of the temple where the actual shrine is located can only be done with the help of the paandaas and by paying special fees (paandaas are a special class of priests found only in the places of pilgrimage). Others can only see the shrine from a distance.

By late evening the sky was cleared. This was close to full moon. The view of snow peaks of Kedar Mountains in the bright moonlight was a surrealistic scenery. We shall probably remember that for the rest of our lives.

I have collected much of the material for this essay from three Bengali books. One is "Tibboter Pothey Himalaye" by Swami Akhandananda of Ramakrishna Mission. This was originally published as a serial. But Swamiji died before he could complete the series. RK Mission has also published an English translation of this book. Another book is "Himalay Tirtha Bhraman" by Shasthipada Chattopadhyaya who is a journalist and a writer. This is an extremely informative book. The third book is "Himalayer pathay pathay" by Umadas Mukhopadhyay who is considered to be an authority on the cultural heritage of the Himalaya region. He travelled extensively in this region and has written several books on this subject. This book mostly covers the Badrinath region.

Himalayas fascinate me. I came here first as a young man. I plan to come here again. It gives me opportunities for introspection. The faith of the devotees, some of them barefooted, standing over an hour under the open sky in the freezing cold just to have a view of a stone buried in the ground is a humble reminder that the power of faith begins where the logic ends. It humbles my ego. OM TAT SAT.

## The End of the World (As We Know It)

Shagnik Das

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However, as Pandora found out some years ago, Hope remains (unless you own a bookstore or a paper company). e-books may not, as my hitherto gloomy tone suggested, be the death of books, but could instead lead us into a wonderfully modernised renaissance of reading. After all, what is an e-book but a cheaper, lighter and environmentally-friendlier version of a print book? Where before you would walk into a bookstore and be surrounded by thousands of books, you now can go online and choose from millions. Best of all, with classics such as Doyle's delightful detective and Wodehouse's wizardly wordplay available for free, there is a chance that these wonderful works of literary art shall truly remain evergreen, leaving no space for the likes of *Twilight*. Our tragically misguided youth may yet be saved!

Indeed, a revolution is upon us, with e-ink fast replacing the printing press. This new technology is progressing so rapidly that bookstores, newspapers and magazines have been left for dead in its wake. I should not be surprised if our beloved souvenir follows suit. In a few years' time, no doubt, instead of collecting your copy of the souvenir from a cardboard box, you will be downloading it onto your tablet computer, allowing you to flick through high-resolution photographs and laugh at videos from the year past. Happiest of all, no doubt, will be the HKBA president, for he (or she?) will neither have to spend a cent nor find the space to store the hundreds of copies left over!

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Crash! Bang! Wallop! To say that this year has not been history's most peaceful would be an understatement (so much so, in fact, that this sentence is itself an understatement). In these last few months, there have been revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, civil uprisings in Bahrain, Syria, and Yemen, and an ongoing civil war in Libya. Even Britain, the land of orderly queues, was plagued with a series of riots. Tyrants have been overthrown, regimes have been toppled, electronic stores have been looted, and the world's former #1 test team has been dethroned. Reclining comfortably in our sofas in Hong Kong (or, as in my case, lying on my bed in Los Angeles), it is easy to bemoan the deplorable state of the political (or, as in my case, cricketing) world. And yet I shall not do this today. Instead, I turn my attention closer to home. I devote my column to a revolution that threatens to affect every one of us. I write about an uprising that many of us have personally participated in. I speak, of course, of the demise of the printed word.

With your permission, I shall begin (the previous paragraph was not so much an introduction as an advertisement, filled with exciting action words designed to catch the eye and ensnare the otherwise unwilling reader) with a personal anecdote.

It had been a short, warm winter in Los Angeles, and my housemate's birthday was just round the corner. It struck me that I should get him a gift, and, after some deep analysis of his personality and favoured activities, I decided to get him a hiking guidebook. With a purposeful heart, I strolled down Westwood Boulevard in the direction of the nearest bookstore, whistling a merry tune while picturing my dear friend's delight upon receiving so thoughtful and useful a gift. Indeed, so happy was I that the half-hour stroll, passed by in a matter of minutes, and, before you could finish watching an episode of *The Mentalist*, I had reached my destination.

Or so I had thought. Imagine, if you will, my surprise when I saw that my local bookstore had shut down. Those spirits of mine, soaring so high moments ago, fell faster than Roger Federer's ATP ranking. No longer would my village be home to a bookworm's haven; instead, rising from the ashes, was yet another clothes store. My thoughts on clothes stores are no secret, but for those of you not in the know, suffice it to say that I am not a big fan. Where others may have greeted the newcomer to the neighbourhood with open arms (and wallets), I was rather less welcoming. I turned on my heel and, with a brief stop at an Indian buffet to restore the soul, returned home a defeated (but well-fed) man.

So ends the anecdote. At this point I had planned to pen an impassioned eulogy for the printing press, wherein I would decry the downfall of civilisation with admirable fervour, and then, with an unprejudiced eye and open mind, discuss the relative benefits of e-books. However, I appear to have devoted a few too many lines to my little story, and shall instead have to settle for some key facts and figures (from a last-minute Google search):

- 1000 US bookstores have closed between 2000 and 2007 -- about 10% of the entire market, *before* the recent global recession
- Borders, previously one of the largest international bookstore chains, has gone bankrupt



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মহাষষ্ঠী (Sasthi)

বোধন (Inauguration)

প্রসাদ (Prasad)

2<sup>nd</sup> October 2011, Sunday

1900 – 2000 HOURS

2000 – 2100 HOURS

মহাসপ্তমী (Saptami)

সন্ধ্যারতী ও পূজা (Evening Puja)

প্রসাদ (Prasad)

সাংস্কৃতিক অনুষ্ঠান (Cultural Programme)

3<sup>rd</sup> October 2011, Monday

1800 – 1900 HOURS

1900 – 1930 HOURS

1930 – 2030 HOURS

মহাঅষ্টমী (Astami)

সন্ধ্যাপূজা (Evening Puja)

প্রসাদ (Prasad)

সাংস্কৃতিক অনুষ্ঠান (Cultural Programme)

4<sup>th</sup> October 2011, Tuesday

1800 – 1900 HOURS

1900 – 1930 HOURS

1930 – 2000 HOURS

মহানবমী (Nabomi)

সন্ধ্যারতী ও পূজা (Evening Puja)

প্রসাদ (Prasad)

সাংস্কৃতিক অনুষ্ঠান (Cultural Programme)

5<sup>th</sup> October 2011, Wednesday

1800 – 1900 HOURS

1900 – 1930 HOURS

1930 – 2030 HOURS

বিজয়া দশমী (Dashami)

পূজা ও দধীকর্মা (Puja)

সিঁদুর খেলা ও বিসর্জন (Vermillion Ceremony)

6<sup>th</sup> October 2011, Thursday

1100 – 1230 HOURS

1600 – 1800 HOURS



# ➤ The Hong Kong Bengali Association ➤

— Durga Puja 2010 —







~ Lakshmi Puja ~



~ Bijoya Cultural Function ~





~ Saraswati Puja ~



~ Picnic 2011 ~





— 150th Anniversary Celebration of Kabi Guru Rabindranath Tagore —



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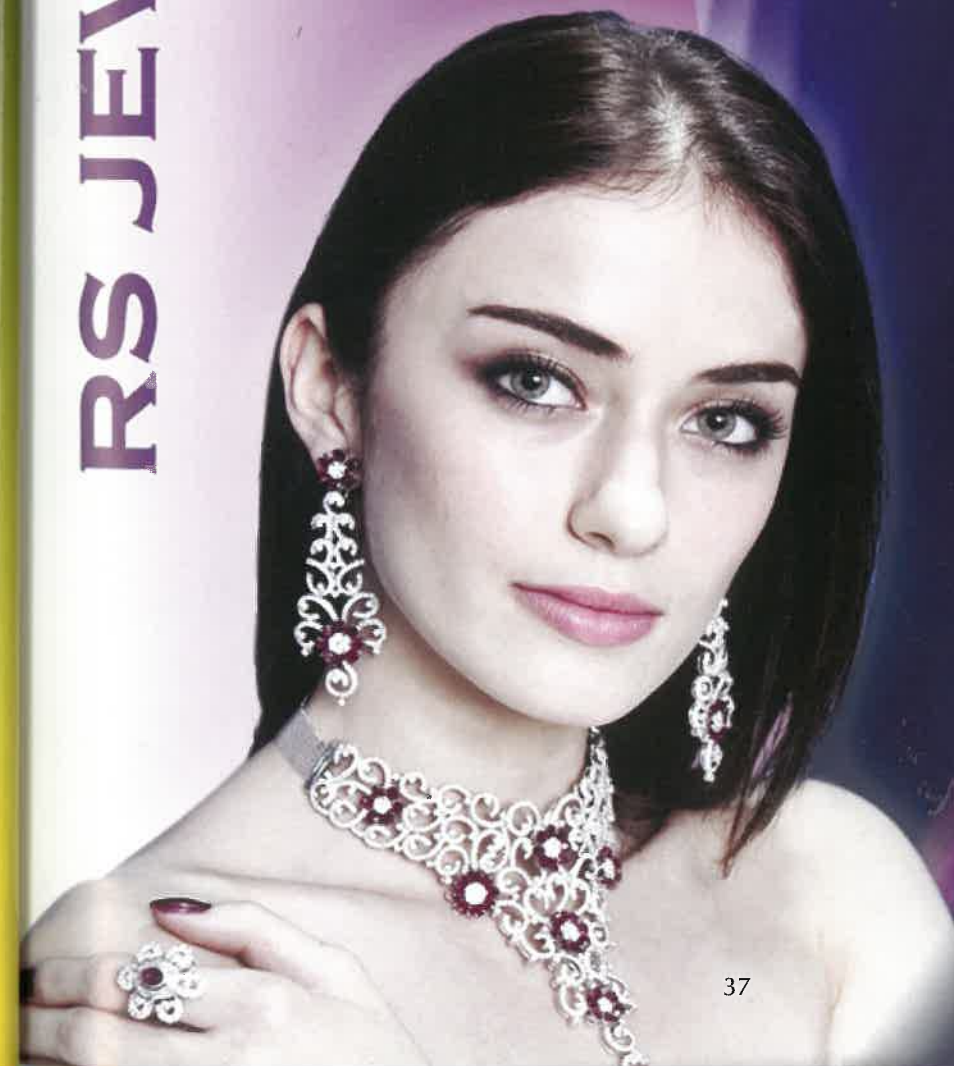


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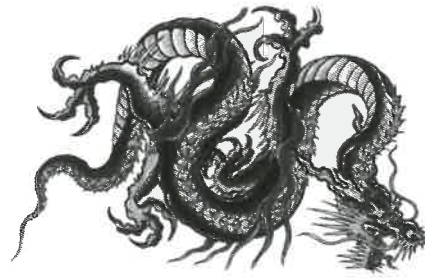
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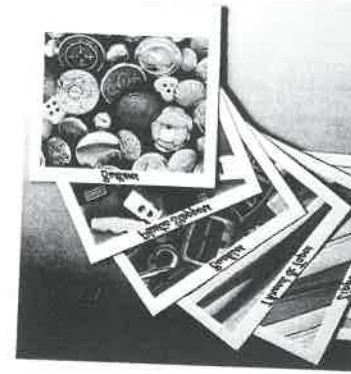
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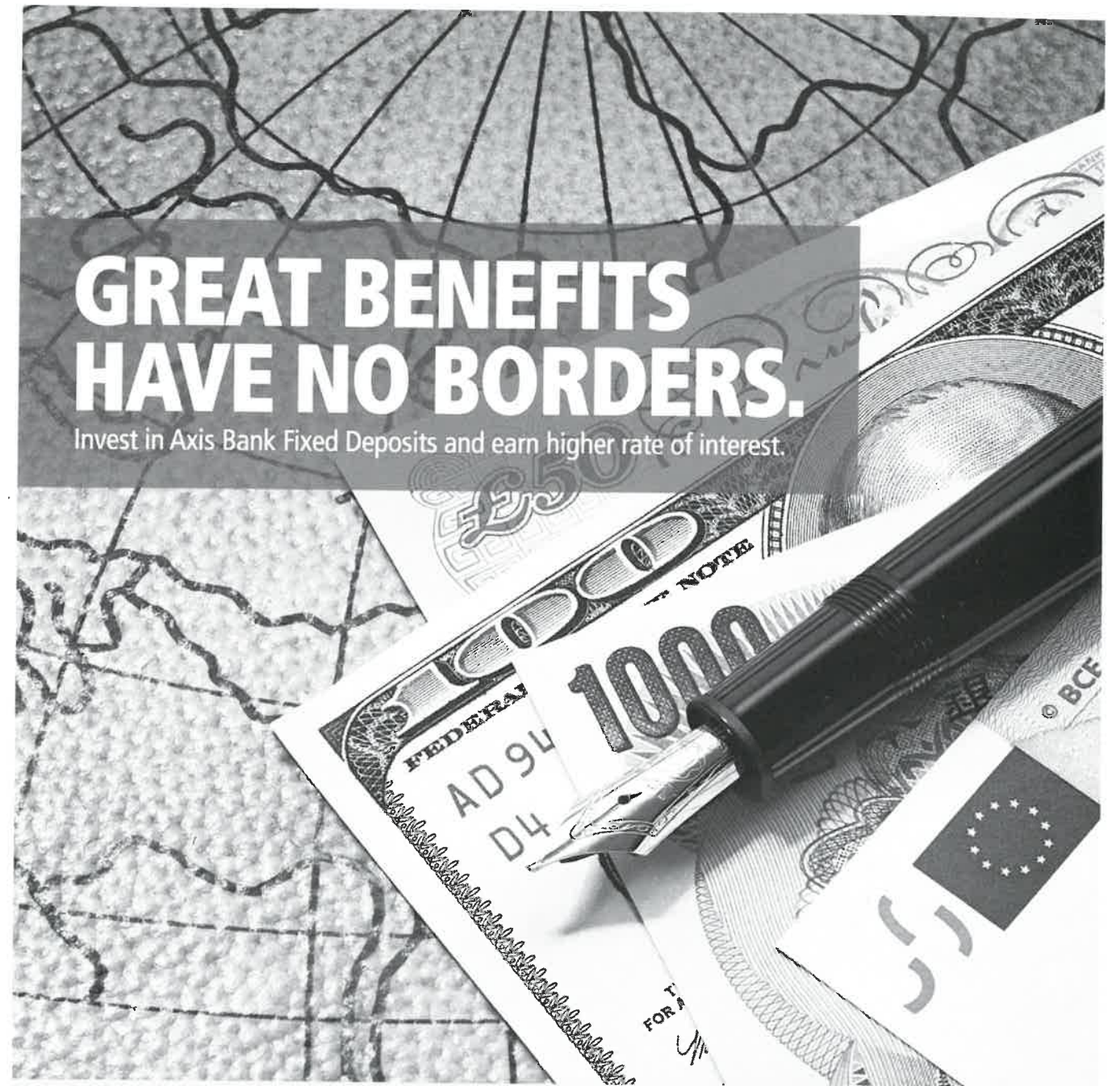
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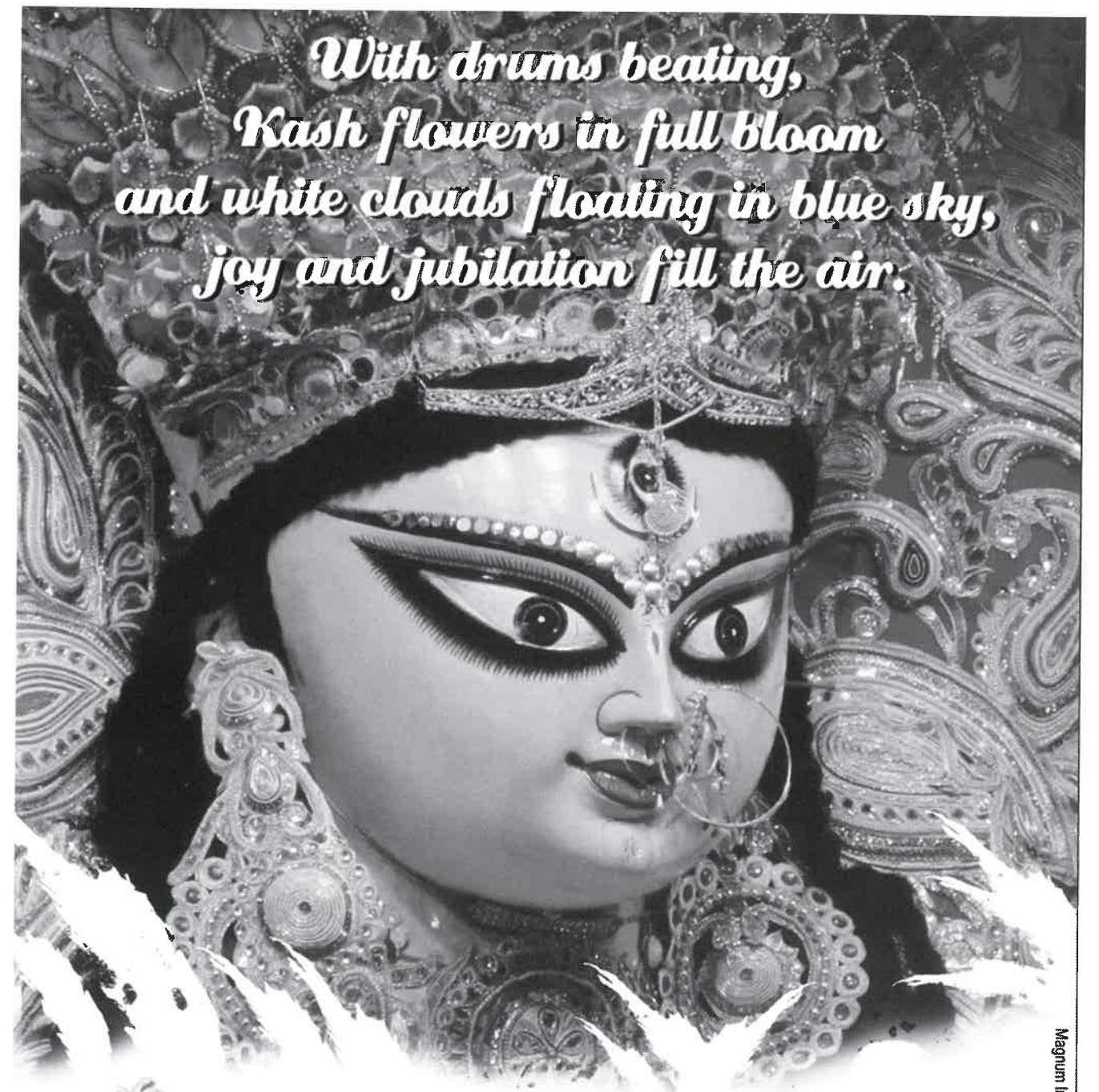
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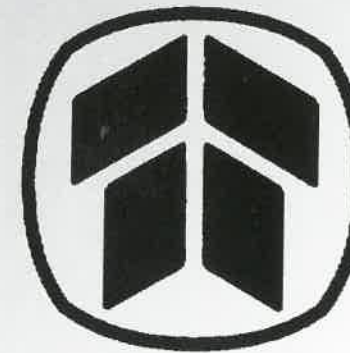
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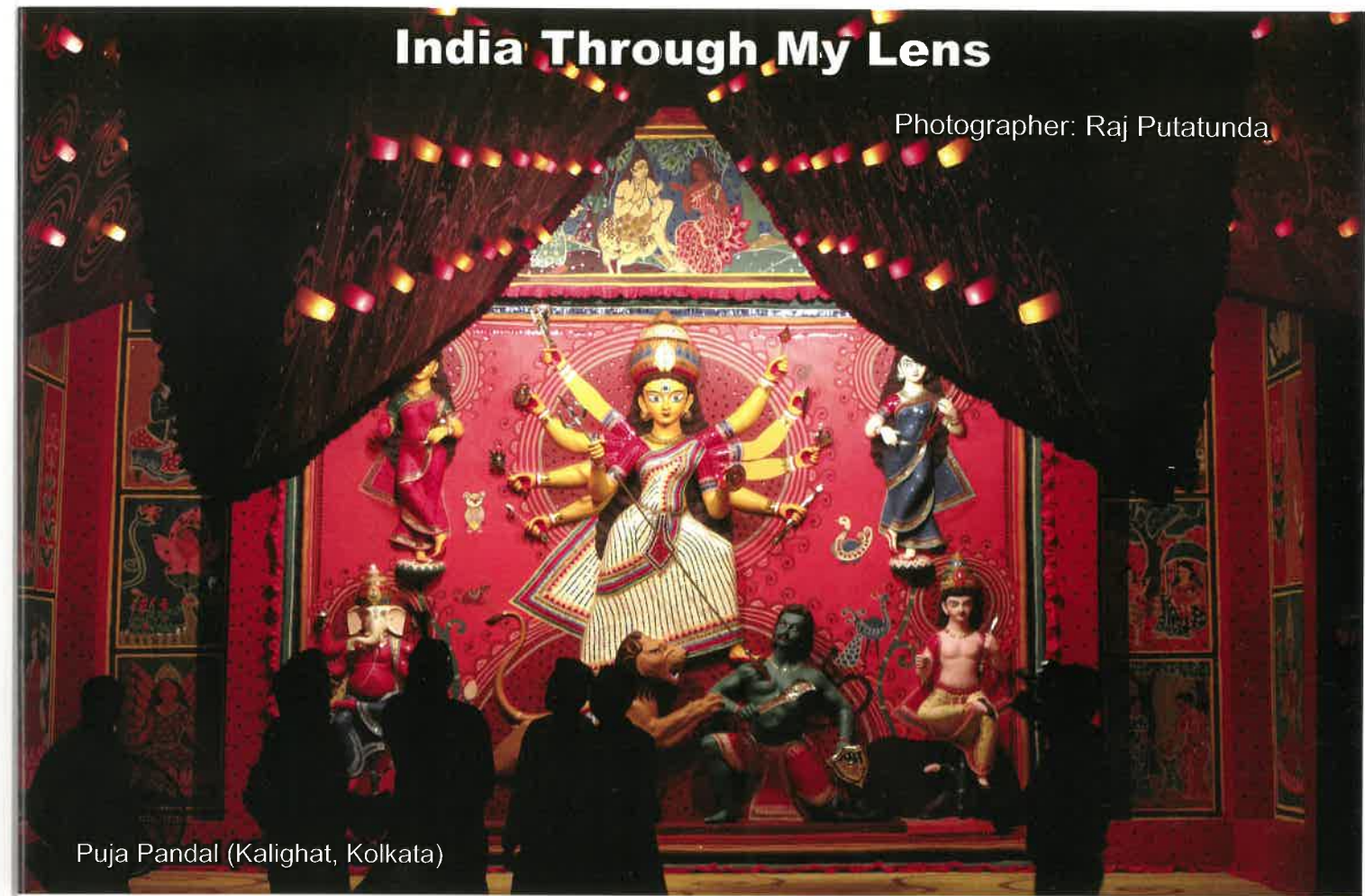


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## India Through My Lens

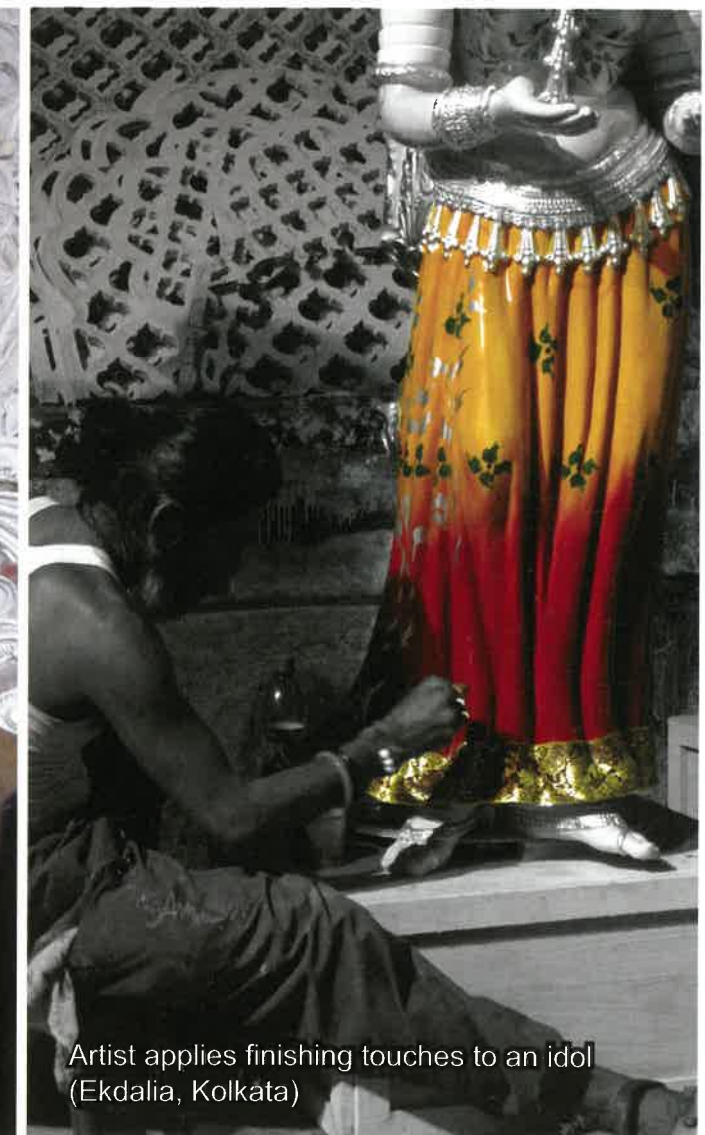
Photographer: Raj Putatunda



Puja Pandal (Kalighat, Kolkata)



Bijoya Doshomi (Behala, Kolkata)



Artist applies finishing touches to an idol (Ekdalia, Kolkata)





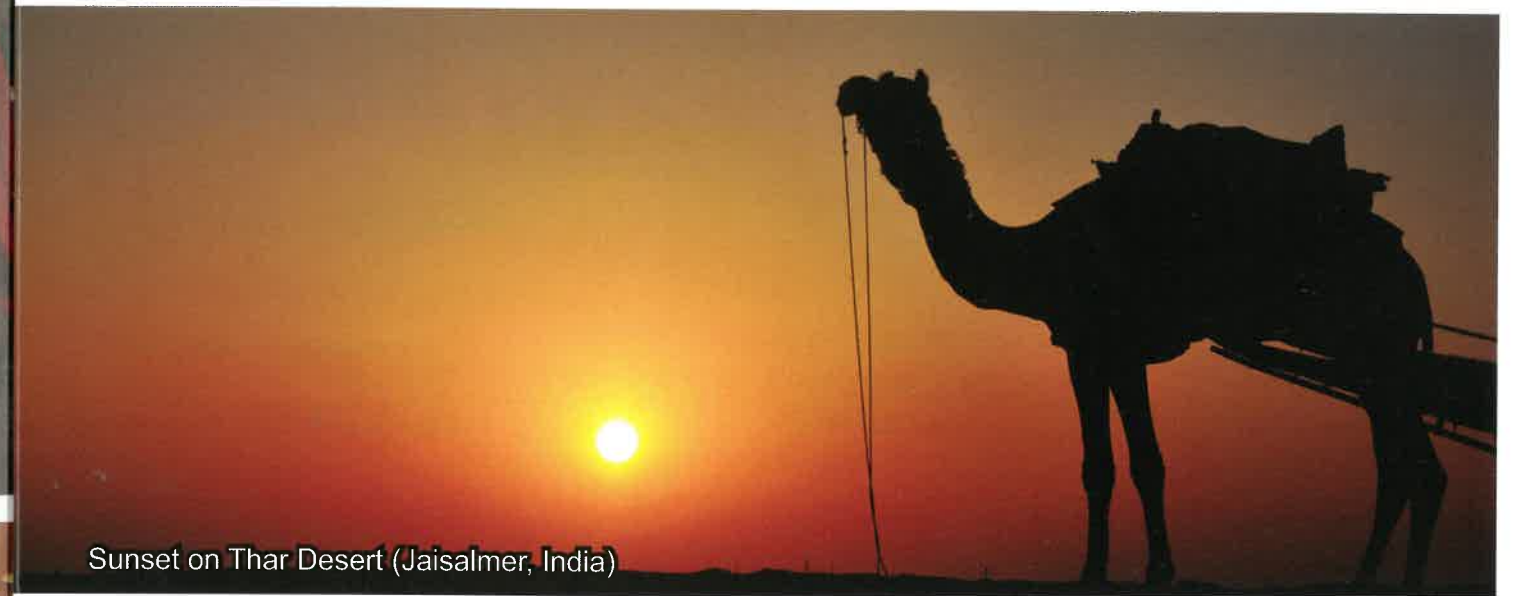
Buddhist Prayer Wheels  
(McLeodganj (Dharamshala) India)



The Smiling Monk  
(Tsuglagkhang Temple, McLeodganj  
(Dharamshala), India)



Indian Idol - Young Singer at Thar Desert (Jaisalmer, India)



Sunset on Thar Desert (Jaisalmer, India)



Afternoon Prayers  
(Tsuglagkhang Temple, McLeodganj (Dharamshala), India)



Lone Ranger (Jaisalmer, India)





Inside Amber Fort (Jaipur, India)



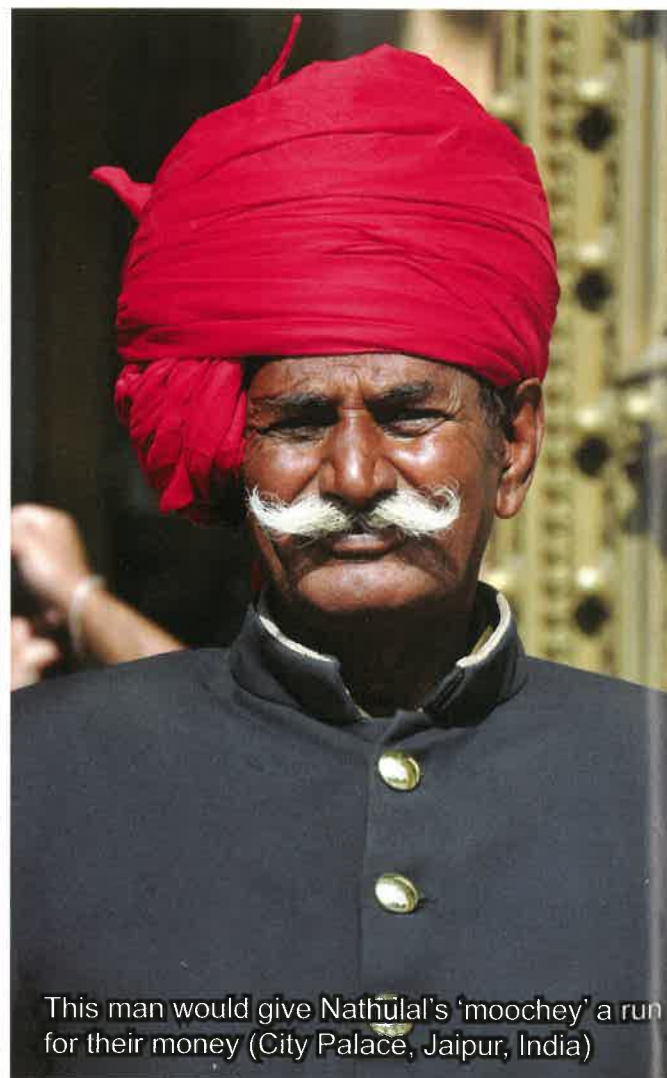
Desert Entertainer (Thar Desert, Jaisalmer, India)



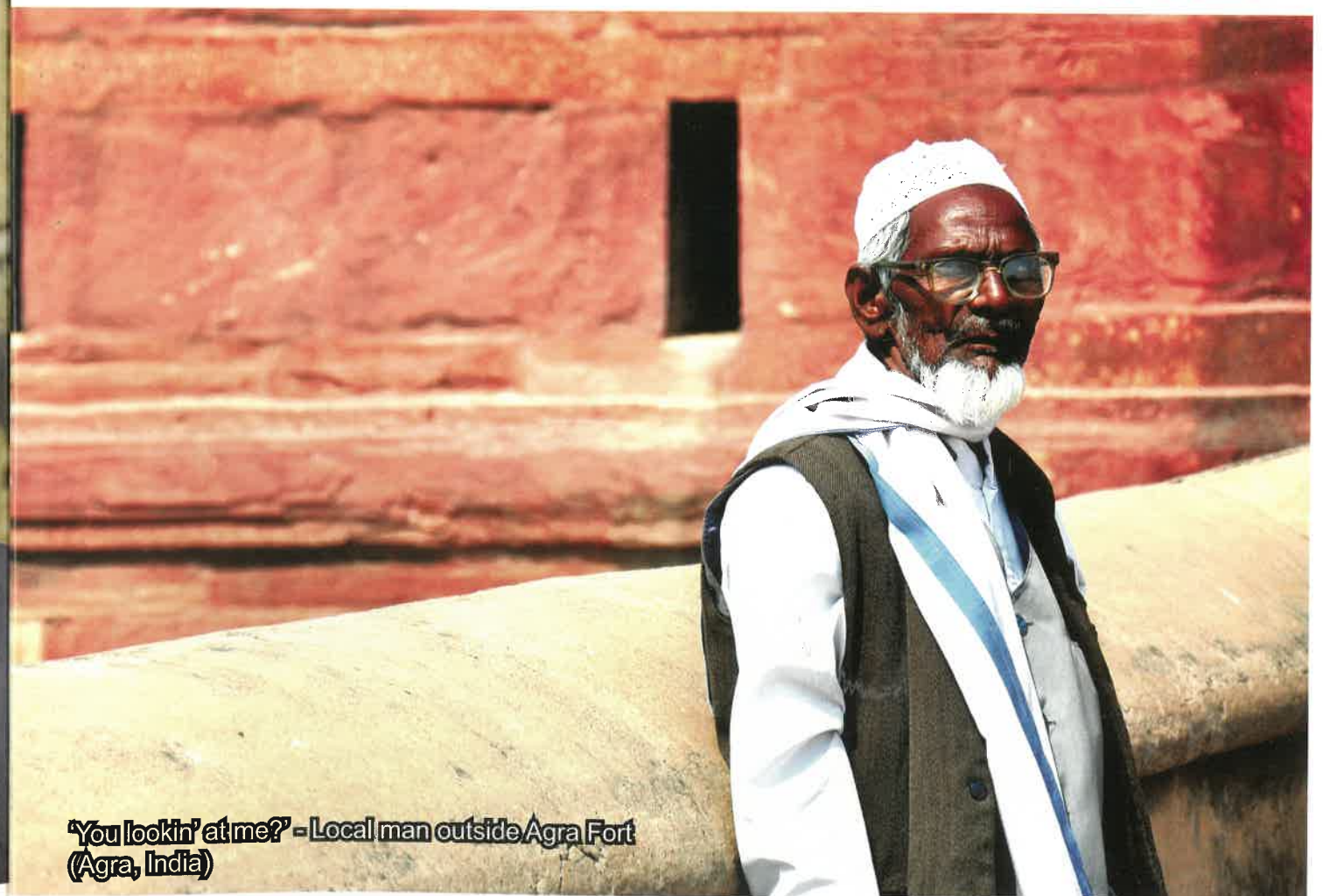
Local woman (Dharamshala, India)



Local woman outside 'Sonar Kella' (Jaisalmer, Rajasthan)



This man would give Nathulal's 'moochey' a run for their money (City Palace, Jaipur, India)



'You lookin' at me?' - Local man outside Agra Fort (Agra, India)





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