

Dear Readers,

Happy Dussehra and Shubho Bijoya to all of you! This will possibly be the first bijoya when we won't find ourselves busy meeting family and friends but sending greetings from the safe confines of our own homes.

As we accept and adjust to the new normal, we were happy to celebrate our annual meet digitally on October 1, 2020. It was heartwarming to see the joy and enthusiasm and the talented performances. Although I am very glad that this digital edition of our annual celebration was such an enormous success, I do hope to meet all of you in person next year. Till then, let us take one day at a time, armed with masks and sanitisers.

In response to the growing demand for our services, I feel blessed to announce the opening of yet another regional office – this time in Behala. Kudos to all of us! It would not have been possible without the efforts and blessings of the entire Support Elders family.

Hope you enjoy this edition of our newsletter. Check out the last page and let us know which clubs you would like to join! Do write to us with your stories, poems, feedback and suggestions.

Happy reading!

Apratim Chattopadhyay

SEPL EVENT

Members Mesmerize with Eclectic Fare

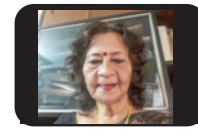
It is amazing how our members came together in strength to participate in our first digitally held annual day celebrations on October 1. So did our chairman, Ms Deepanwita Chattopadhyay, who joined us from Hyderabad with an inspirational welcome address. Our members sang, recited and even acted in a fascinatingly eclectic cultural event.

Besides this, the theatre group 'Bishargo', put up a satirical street play, *Kouto* (Box), followed by a mesmerizing programme: *Yesterday's Legends, Today's Stars*. This was a journey down the memory lane of music, presented by interdisciplinary artist, Sujoy Prosad Chatterjee, along with vocalist, Debmalya Chattopadhyay.

Our members stole our hearts, with Ms I. Sen's captivating rendition of Rajanikanta Sen's *Jekhanay Shay Doyal Amar*, followed by Ms B. Chattopadhyay's moving recitation of Rabindranath Tagore's *Tora Shunishni Taar Payer Dhwon*i in Bengali and English. Our member, Ms N. Dasgupta, brought to us poet Subrata Pal's touching imagery of the goddess Durga in her many avatars in *Tomar Durga* while our member, Ms S. Bhowmik, turned to Hindi for her soulful *Tum*



Ms I. Sen



Ms S. Bhowmick



Ms S. Dasgupta



Ms N. Dasgupta



Ms B. Chattopadhyay

Na Jaane Kis Jahan Mein Kho Gaye.

For a change of pace, we turned to member Ms R. Mitra to capture the romance of the moonlit night in *Aaj Jyotsna Raate Shawbai Gaychhay Bonay*. This enchanting programme was wrapped up with an audio play on the most beautiful and yet the most tormented woman in our mythology, Draupadi, caught in the ignominy of her polyandrous relationship. Written and presented by our member, Ms S. Dasgupta, Draupadi asks *Aami Kaar* (Whom Do I Belong To?), the eternal question about the objectification of women.

SE

SEPL Events



October 9: Rising Baul singer, Dipannita Acharya, enthralled us with her passionate rendition of *baul* songs and explained their significance and those of the instruments that Bengal's wandering minstrels use.



October 16: Our member, Dr I. Sarkar, gave us an erudite talk on a seismological study of the Garhwal-Kumaon Himalayas—'The Dance of Shiva'.

DOWN MEMORY LANE

A Tiger for Tea

Our member, Ms S. Roy, has taken us to many interesting destinations that she has lived in as a child, travelling as she did with her father, a railways officer, who got posted to charming places. This time our member takes us to Paksey by the Padma for a wild encounter! Read on.

Paksey, in 1945, was a small town in Ishwardi, in district Pabna, under the Rajshahi Division of Dhaka. Our member, Ms S. Roy, went to live there, courtesy her father, a railway officer, who got transferred to Paksey, an important railway divisional town in Bangladesh.

The town is on the bank of the Padma and their bungalow sprawled over a few *bighas* on the bank. The river was not visible from their house though because of the huge dam that had been constructed to prevent the bank from being further eroded by the mighty Padma. What it did to the river did not worry the children much. They loved the dam, which was their playground every evening.

The Paksey railway station was located just before the famous Hardinge Bridge, a 1.8-kilometre steel structure, considered a technological feat in those days. The bridge was named after Lord Hardinge, the Viceroy of India, for those were the days of the Raj. Locally, however, it was known as the Sara bridge then, as it stood near the Sara crossing, connecting Dhaka and Khulna. This famous bridge made communications easier between Calcutta and East Bengal (now Bangladesh) and Assam.

It was customary for railway officers to have *aayas* to look after their children. Though Ms Roy's mother did not like the idea of having hired hands raising her, she chose to call a lady in the evening, just to take her children

to the playground and bring them back home safely.

The evening outing was the daily routine in every family. The children would play around the dam and the help would sit in the adjoining park by the river and chit chat or knit, especially during the winters. It was a relaxing time for all and the children had fun. On one such evening, after bringing the children home, Ms Roy's help bid goodbye and left for the day. She was waiting outside for her son to escort her home, as it was getting dark, when something unimaginable happened.

Ms Roy's mother had closed the front door after the *aaya* had gone out and was about to start making her evening tea when there was a shrill scream outside and loud banging on the door. As her mother hurriedly opened the door, the *aaya* and her son almost pushed her aside and ran into the room. They shut the door behind them with a bang.

They were pale with fear and could not utter a word. Surprised, her mother kept urging them to tell her what had happened, but they could respond only after a while. Still trembling, one of them pointed a finger towards the gate. Through the window, they saw a full-grown tiger sitting just in front of their gate, outside the garden. It was quite some distance from the house but the sight of a tiger resting at one's gate, possibly after having had water from the Padma, terrified the family.

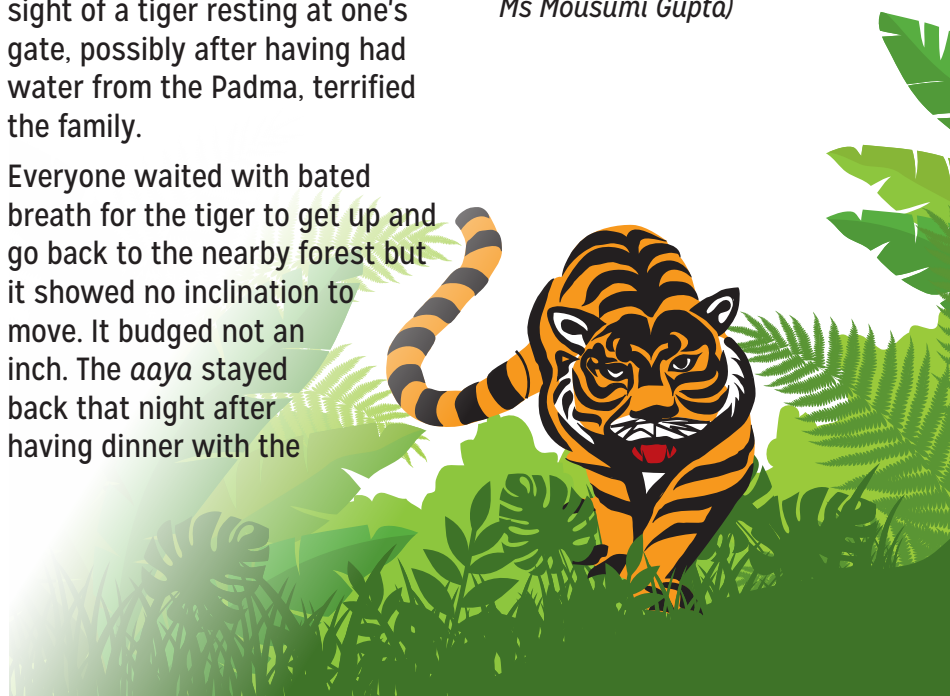
Everyone waited with bated breath for the tiger to get up and go back to the nearby forest but it showed no inclination to move. It budged not an inch. The *aaya* stayed back that night after having dinner with the

Roy family, who spent a restless night. The morning brought relief. The tiger had gone home. The *aaya* could go home too.

Though this was treated as a rare incident, the locals said that tigers were known to make house calls. There were hunters in the area too, who would hunt tigers as a hobby. Hunting wild animals was not a criminal offence then.

Ms Roy remembers her neighbour, "Bagchi uncle" to all the children, who was a hunter. He would go into the forest and wait in a *machaan* (a platform hidden in the branches of trees, where hunters waited for their prey). One night, after a long and fruitless wait, he came down to stretch his legs, with his gun resting against the tree trunk. Suddenly, there was a crackle of dry leaves and in an instant a tiger appeared right before him. He grabbed his gun and before the beast could spring on him, he shot it. Though wounded, the tiger did not give up and went for Mr Bagchi's leg, dragging him for a few metres before succumbing to its injury. It was left to the villagers to take the hunter to the nearest hospital. Mr Bagchi was unable to get back on his feet for several months. As for Ms Roy, who heard the story, the terrifying memory still gives her the shivers. SE

(As narrated by our member to Ms Mousumi Gupta)



BREAKING BARRIERS

Taki Bonhomie: Where Bengal
Immerses Partition Pain

Taki, on the banks of the Ichamati river, the international border between India and Bangladesh, is not just a historic place but a picturesque one as well. Our member, Ms A. Raychaudhuri, has her roots there. Her family and that of Mr Raychaudhuri's were zamindars of the region. Though she was raised in Delhi, she has vivid memories of Taki to which she was a frequent visitor till 2014.

As a child, Ms A Raychaudhuri lived very close to the Ichhamati. Along with her cousins, she would often run up to the riverbank to look at the other shore, the border of Bangladesh, then East Pakistan. Spotting boats with Pakistani and Indian flags was a lot of fun and jumping on to *opaar* Bangla (as East Pakistan was referred to post partition) boats to go over to the other side of the river was quite normal. Present-day restrictions had not been imposed then.

Durga Puja was celebrated on both sides of the river. The Raychaudhuris, of course, had their own Durga puja. The five days of festivity was cause for much joy but it was the *bisharjan* (immersion) that was filled with excitement. As people prepared for the immersion of the idols after *dashami*, children would watch out for the residents across the waters, at Satkhira (the border district in East Pakistan), gearing up for the immersion.

The devotees on either side would place the *pratimas* on boats and sail up to the Border Security Force boats floating in middle of the river, along the international boundary. With barely a dozen metres between them, the neighbours would

wave to each other, exchange greetings, with deafening shouts of "*aaschhe bochor abar hobe!*", a promise to meet the following year.

On that day, citizens of the two countries, divided by geopolitics, came together to celebrate a shared heritage. The practice continues and is a big tourist attraction. People from far and near, especially from adjoining cities, still throng to watch this spectacular display of international amity.

Our member recalls running to occupy seats at the tea stalls on the riverbank as early as 3.30 p.m., lest they were all taken by tourists. A well-known local club had lots of firecrackers for post-immersion fireworks. Just after the immersion, the club members would take a platform to the middle of the river to set off the fireworks that lasted for nearly a couple of hours. Those were two hours of breath-taking pyrotechnics that people watched in awe. The crackers were rather elaborate and some would go high

up in the sky and form the words 'Durga Puja', followed by the year! Plenty of sweets were made and bought. Supplies had to be procured early on *dashami* morning or else the sweet shops would run out of them. The ubiquitous Bengali *gamchha* and incense sticks too would disappear for the next three four days. This was because people from *opaar* Bangla would buy them all, as they were cheaper in India.

The Durga Puja festivities were always more social than religious affairs. Today, there are watchtowers erected along the riverfront with floating outposts in the river but Ms A. Raychaudhuri fondly remembers the free mingling of people from both sides. For them, the *bisharjan* was not only about immersing the idol in the river. It was about connecting with the other side—immersing each other in the spirit of kinship. SE

(As narrated by our member to Ms Mousumi Gupta)



Images courtesy: Mita Basu

Big Ticket

January 1, 2021

With the pandemic and the consequent lockdown tearing down our notions of life as we knew it, most of us are looking forward to bidding a hasty farewell to 2020 and ushering in 2021. It will be a new year like no other. The “new normal” of 2020 will not feel “new” anymore. And we will celebrate the positive side of this too—especially the joy and freedom that a digital world brings to us, wherein miles don't feel like miles anymore...being unwell cannot steal from us the joy of meeting others... sharing memories and smiles with old friends is a very real possibility...

Join us as we ring in 2021 with another Silver Connect offering!

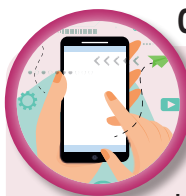
Go clubbing!

To engage with you over a broader canvas, we have set up eight new communities. Sign up to pursue your interests with like-minded members and invite guests to these vibrant hubs of experience sharing and fun. Here are the communities, selected on the basis of popular demand:

- Cookery club for members to share finger-licking recipes and learn easy and expert hacks and tricks from each other.
- Quiz club for some brain-tickling fun. Look out for the surprise quiz master! Enrol and choose topics to quiz each other on.
- Book club where bookworms can read and discuss books of their choice and occasionally meet the authors too.
- Photography club for those who love to shoot with their camera. Enjoy photography shows and expert speak on photography and cameras.
- Drama club for those who fancy the stage. Join this group to host as well as enjoy online plays, skits and generally celebrate theatre.
- Movie club, a treat for those who enjoy watching as well as discussing films.
- The antakshari club to pit your knowledge of songs against each other.
- The adda club where conversation flows, even for the normally tongue-tied. Let the *jukti-tokko-golpo* begin.

NOVEMBER

02.11.2020 - 30.11.2020



Smart Phones; Smart Folks

A Support Elders-Vodafone Idea e-learning initiative for our Smartphone user members on how best to use phones and technology to stay engaged and connected. We will bring you this five-part e-learning programme every Monday in November.

06.11.2020



Kolkata Heritage Revisited

In an interactive session, our members talk to students of Sri Sri Academy about Kolkata's heritage.

13.11.2020



Shakti

Tune in to our Members' Medley with Shyama Sangeet to celebrate Kali Puja and Dipawali along with guest artist, Dr Madhumita Saha.

20.11.2020



Magnificent Meiteis, Marvellous Movement

Suman Sarawgi takes us through the vibrant world of Manipuri Dance.

27.11.2020



Talking Tabla

Percussionist, Surojato Roy, takes us into the world of talking tablas, explaining the language of the *bols*.

Image Courtesy: Pixabay

DECEMBER

04.12.2020



Wonderous Weaves

Textile designer and curator, Mayank Mansingh Kaul, gives his insights into India's textile heritage.

Image Courtesy: Pixabay

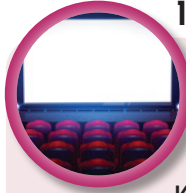
11.12.2020



The Stitch that Ran

Teacher and Mathematician, Shamlu Dudeja, shares how she makes an impact on the world of Bengal's Kantha with SHE.

18.12.2020



Cinema, Cinema

From single screeners to multiplexes, Saptarshi Roy Bardhan takes us through the chequered story of Kolkata's movie theatres.

25.12.2020



Let's Go to Firpo's

Our members and friends reminisce about the romance of Firpo's, its grandeur and its food. The taste lingers long after Firpo's shut down.

Image courtesy
Arpita Bhattacharya