

Baishakhi Newsletter

পয়লা বৈশাখ ১৪১৬ সংখ্যা

Indian Community Center of Garden State, NJ

History of Bengali New Year

By The Editor

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Poila Baishakh is the Bengali New Year. This is the time of celebration in traditional Bengali homes and the time when businessmen start their financial year. On Poila Boisakh, when people meet each other, they greet one another by saying 'Shubho Noboborsho', which means happy New Year. The date of the Bengali New Year roughly coincides with either the fourteenth or the fifteenth of April each year. Apart from the Bengali community in Kolkata, Poila Baishakh is also celebrated in other parts of West Bengal, by the Bengalis of Bangladesh, the Assamese and the Bengalis who are settled in northeast India. Nowadays, e-cards are available to greet fellow Bengali friends and relatives over the Internet. The Bengali calendar is known as the tarikh-e-elahi and this was introduced from 1584 A.D by Akbar, the then emperor of India.

Happenings in the Bengali Homes in Poila Baishakh

According to traditional practice men, women and children ought to take a bath in the holy waters of Ganges in the morning and dress in new clothes. It is a common sight to spot women dressed in red-bordered white saris and white flowers in their buns. Bengalis participate in a procession called the 'Prabhat Pheri'. Homes are cleaned prior to Poila Baishakh in Calcutta and they are beautifully decorated. The corridors and rooms of the houses are adorned with 'Alpanas'. Alpanas are designs, which are painted with rice paste. In some homes, pots are placed containing holy water from the Ganges. These pots are decorated with mango leaves, coconut and vermilion swastika.

Poila Baishakh Food

Bengalis are experts in cooking different sorts of dishes including sweets. Naturally, an important festival as



Poila Baishakh would remain incomplete without these sumptuous delicacies. The most popular of all items are kosha mangsho, chingrir malailari, mochar ghonto, echorer dalna, tel koi, macher kalia, fish paturi and chatni.

The day prior to the New Year day is called 'shonkranti'. 'Pithes' are a must during the Shonkrantis. 'Pithe' is basically a type of sweet dish and comes in different forms such as 'puli pithe', 'gokul pithe', 'patishepta', 'dudh puli and 'arshe pithe'. Also hot rasgullas are very popular. When people visit their relatives and friends, they carry sweets as gifts and the guests too are offered sweets. Some of the authentic Bengali restaurants prepare special menu during the Bengali New Year.

Business Activities on Poila Baishakh

All Bengali shops start their financial year from Poila Baishakh. They sell off all their old stocks at discounted price before the arrival of the New Year. The new account book is known as 'halkhata'. They also send out invitations to their old clients to visit their shops on Poila Baishakh. Lord Ganesh is worshiped on this day. All visitors are offered sweets and sometimes small gifts too. Many businessmen inaugurate their new shops on the auspicious occasion of Poila Baishakh.

Mahasweta Devi is in the literary News

Reported by Anil Raychaudhuri

Mahasweta Devi, who is one of the brilliant stars of Bengali literary galaxy, is teetering on the edge of receiving the internationally acclaimed prestigious **Man Booker Prize** for literature which will be awarded on October 6, 2009.

The 2009 long list of Booker Prize will be announced in early August 2009. The short list will be announced in early September 2009. In recent years, a gaggle of literary figures from Indian subcontinent won this prestigious prize -- V.S. Naipal (1971) for *In A Free State*, Salman Rushdie (1983) for *Midnight children*, Arundhati Roy (1997) for *God of Small Things*, Kiran Desai (2006) for *the Inheritance of Loss*, and in 2008, the youngest of all, Aravind Adiga (2008) for his novel *The White Tiger*. These winners indeed reflect a stellar group from non-English speaking subcontinent of India.

For long, the aficionados of the Bengali novelist and activist Mahasweta Devi have been claiming that she should be a major contender for the Nobel Prize. But, since her books are not widely translated, she remains relatively unknown, said fellow novelist **Amitava Ghosh**, another contender of Booker prize.

Of late, however Mahasweta is getting some recognition abroad. The list of contenders, to be announced in New York, includes Nobel laureate V S Naipaul (2001), former Booker Prize winner himself (1971), Peter Carey and the distinguished American writer E L Doctrow. The long list also finds a place for the internationally acclaimed novelist Mario Vargas Llosa. The award competition is very rigid and tough, and the award is based on work available in English, and it recognizes a body of author's work.

In 2008, a young Indian writer, by the name of Aravind Adiga, at age 33, won the coveted "Man Booker prize" for Fiction with his novel *The White Tiger*. If Mahasweta Devi wins the prize this year, she would be the first thoroughbred Bengali writer ever to win this coveted prize at age 83. Suzanna Arundhati Roy, who won the Booker prize in 1997, is the progeny of a mixed marriage (Her mother-a Keralite Syrian Christian; her father- a Bengali Hindu. Incidentally, Man Booker Prize carries a handsome monetary value to the tune of 50,000-pounds ((\$86,000).

Mahasweta Devi was born in 1926 in Dhaka (Modern Bangladesh), into a family of letters. Her father Manish Ghatak was a distinguished poet, novelist and a social activist. He was deeply involved with IPTA (Indian People's Theater Association), and the noted filmmaker Ritwik Ghatak is her



Mahasweta Devi

uncle who is the elder brother of her father. And her mother Dharitri Devi was also a writer and a social worker. Mahasweta Devi's first schooling was in Dhaka, but after the partition of India she moved to West Bengal in India. She joined the Rabindranath Tagore-founded Bishwabharati University in Santiniketan and completed a B.A. (Hons) in English, and then finished an M.A. in English at Calcutta University as well. She later married renowned playwright and actor Bijon Bhattacharya.

After finishing a master's degree in English literature from Calcutta University, she began working as a teacher and journalist. Her first book, *Jhansir Rani* (The Queen of Jhansi), was published in 1956. This work also marked the beginning of a prolific literary career. In the last forty years, she has published twenty collections of short stories and close to a hundred novels, primarily in her native language of Bengali. Several of her work has been translated into other languages. She has also been a regular contributor to several literary magazines such as *Bortika*, a journal dedicated to the cause of oppressed communities within India. In 1984, she retired from her job as an English lecturer at Calcutta University to concentrate on her writing. In the last decade, Mahasweta has been the recipient of several literary awards. She was awarded "**The Jnanpith**", India's highest literary award in 1995. In the following year, she was one of the recipients of the **Magsaysay award** which is considered to be the Asian equivalent of the Nobel Prize. She currently resides and works in Calcutta, India.

In 1964, Mahasweta Devi began her career as a teacher at Bijoygarh College (an affiliated offshoot of Calcutta University). During those days, Bijoygarh College was an institution for working class women students. Also during that period, she worked as a journalist and as a creative writer. She became well known for her work related to the study of the **Lodhas** and **Shabars**, the tribal communities of West Bengal, women and dalits. She is also an activist who is dedicated to the struggles of tribal people in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh.

In her elaborate Bengali fiction, she often depicts the brutal oppression of tribal peoples and the untouchables by potent, authoritarian upper-caste landlords, lenders, and venal (bribery-prone) government officials. Injustices and oppressions of ordinary people of society are the main source of her inspiration for writing. In one of her interviews she expressed, "I have always believed that the real history is made by ordinary people. I constantly come across the reappearance, in various forms, of folklore, ballads, myths and legends, carried by ordinary people across generations. The reason and inspiration for my writing are those people who are exploited and used, and yet (they) do not accept defeat. For me, the endless source of ingredients for writing is in these amazingly, noble, suffering human beings. Why should I look for my raw material elsewhere, once I have started knowing them? Sometimes it seems to me that my writing is really their doing."

Fatima Chaudhuri, a well known Bengali freelance writer opines about Mahasweta Devi's writing in her "**Point of View**": "The Naxalite movement of the late 1960's and early 1970's greatly influenced Mahasweta Devi's writing".

All through her writing, Mahasweta Devi touches the burning sentimental chord of the oppressed, ordinary people. This perhaps is the major reason why her name got entry in the long list of **Man Booker Prize**. Win or lose, it is going to be an event of deserving laurels for Mahasweta Devi in 2009.

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"আলো বলে অন্ধকার তুই বড় কালো...
অন্ধকার বলে- ভাই তই তুমি আলো"

ছোটদের পাতা



Mother India I love you – My Trip to India – By Timirant Gupta

In Summer of 08, I visited India with my brothers and went to many places like Mumbai (Bombay), Ranchi, Indore, and Kolkata (Calcutta). During my Kolkata trip, I went to many tourist places like the Birla Planetarium, The Birla Temple, The Victoria Memorial, and Howrah Bridge. In the Birla Planetarium, they talked about and showed how the constellations form and move during the phases of the moon. They are constantly moving, and if in one month they are at one place, another month they will be distinctively farther away from that spot. It showed how the moon affects the tides, creating high and low tides. It was a pretty good show. When reaching the Victoria Memorial, we took a chariot ride there, however we came a little too late as it was closed before we got to actually go inside it. It looked really fascinating because it was a grand white building made of some stone, which I think is Marble. The architecture of the building was fantastic. It would have been wonderful to go inside, but maybe another time. During the day, we also went to Marble Palace, and saw all the paintings and sculptures. There are lot of rare birds just near the palace and many original works by famous painters such as Reynolds and Van Goyen. After resting for a while, we crossed Howrah Bridge by car and then took ferry ride too; it was a good ferry ride as we went across the Hooghly River. After that, we visited our relatives and just spent memorable time with them and had sweet rasgullas. On the day before we left for Mumbai, we had a feast where all our relatives live around Kolkata, came to visit us. The food was great as almost all the food in India so delicious. If I were to give the trip a rating on a scale of 1-10, I'd say 9, just because we couldn't see more places and stay there for more than 3 days. But it was definitely worthwhile



By Portia Sarkar

Spring

By Unmukt Gupta

Flowers are blooming
I smell the breezy wind
The birds look beautiful
Makes my Heart dancing

In the Sun Green Lawns Velvety
When I look outside in Night
Sky is so clear and Starry

Why it takes so-- long for you
after cold & snow, to swing
You are the best season
and my Favorite - SPRING



By Jaydeep Mukherjee, Age 9

My Mom

By Jaydeep Mukherjee, Age 9

My mom, sweet as ice cream
Loves me more than anything in the world
The best person who loves me best
My mom

Spring Calls By Prithwibir Sarkar

New green
Grass turning a fresh bright green
Soft and springy to my touch
Lush new greenery carpeting the earth
New green

Sky
Light blue with wispy clouds
Breezy and pleasant
Turns shades of dark with coming rain
Sky

Rain
Droplets of life falling from the heavens
Sounds like gentle pattering against my
window

Quenching the thirst of all flora
Rain

Flowers blooming
Delicate blossoms springing up everywhere
Making the air sweet with fragrance
Filling our sometimes gray lives with nature's
colors
Flowers blooming

Spring calls
Birdsongs beckon from every tree
The clear and crisp sun inviting you outside
Begging you to enjoy the warmth
Spring calls



Identify this Calcutta landmark



Link between two Bengals reforged on Poila Baishakh

Source: Express news service

Kolkata, April 14 The Maitree Express between Kolkata and Dhaka today chugged off from the Kolkata Terminal amid great fanfare even though Governor Gopalkrishna Gandhi struck a discordant note, saying that his heart bled for Bangladeshi languishing in various Indian jails.

Draped in flowers, the six-coach train began its journey for Dhaka at 7.10 am on "Poila Baishakh", the Bengali New Year's day. The train was briefly stopped at Aranghata in Nadia district by a group who squatted on the track demanding rehabilitation of Bangladeshi refugees. But the journey was soon resumed.

Minister for External Affairs Pranab Mukherjee, who flagged off the train from Kolkata, agreed to a proposal floated by West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee president Priya Ranjan Dasmunsi that the birthday of poet Rabindranath Tagore be celebrated inside the train.

"The train service will foster ties between the two countries and I thank railway minister Lalu Prasad for making it possible," Mukherjee said.

Rail service between Kolkata and Dhaka had snapped during the 1965 Indo-Pak war, when Bangladesh was part of Pakistan.

Community Highlights...

Over MAY 15, 16 & 17, IIPA Indian Institute of Performing Arts), New Jersey will be celebrating "Rabindranath - Universe and Beyond, 2009" at The Community Presbyterian Church of Sand Hill, South Brunswick, New Jersey. The three-day celebration is an attempt to expand the boundaries of appreciation of Tagore's literary and musical works through a variety of presentations:

Friday, May 15- Screening of Movie "Teen Kanya "

Saturday, May 16-Interactive talks with audio-visual Illustrations - Topics: Rabindranath's Poetic Vision: A Synthesis of Arts & Sciences; Rabindranath in Translation; Disconnected Genius: Rabindranath, Dwarakanath; and Rabindranath & Folk Culture
Sunday, May 17- Rabindra Sangeet Soiree.

YOUR QUESTIONS

1. Who actually wrote Mahabharata while Veda Vyasa was dictating the epic?

O Lord Ganesh, O Valmiki, O Sukha, O Narada

2. Name the vehicle of Ravana in which he could fly to any destination and which had unlimited seating capacity:

O Garuda, O Akasha Ratham, O Hanuman,

O Pushpak Rath

3. Which of the following instruments is of Indian origin?

O Tabla, O Mridangam, OSitar, O Violin

4. Where is Fort William located ?

O Chennai, O Goa, O Kolkata, O Mysore

5. Name the oldest mountain range of India?

O Himalayas, O Nilgiris, O Aravallis, O Vindhyas

The Quotes:

No Books, no scripture, no science can ever imagine the glory of the Self that appears as man, the most glorious God that ever existed, exists, or ever will exist.

- Swami Vivekananda

The starting point for all arts, poetry, painting or music, is the breath, the rhythm inherent in the human body which is the same everywhere, and is therefore universal.

- Rabindranath Tagore

There is only one God. None equals Him. He has no end. He is present in all living beings.

- Raja Ram Mohan Roy

Literature is not the direct expression of any emotion. Emotion only supplies the occasion which makes it possible to bring forth the creative act.

- Rabindranath Tagore



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<http://www.icc-gs.org>

