



Bengali Association of Greater Chicago - Community Newsletter

সমাজ সংবাদ

Volume 34 Issue 1

January 2009





President's Address

Dear BAGIC Members:

As 2009 BAGIC President, I am pleased to introduce myself to all our esteemed members and I wish you all a very happy and prosperous New Year! BAGIC this year, like any other organization, especially with an unsettling market and world situation, faces numerous challenges. But with your help, we will put up a united front to face to those challenges and make sure that the upcoming year is beyond successful. It is really a disquieting time; especially with last November's horrific Mumbai incident that had shattered our mental peace. With each struggle and hardship I hear on the news, the more I am convinced that there has never been a better time to call for complete harmony and peace amongst our community members.

Through our disciplined and judicial actions, we need to distinguish ourselves and project an impeccable image that is soothing and comforting to our business partners and members.

Perhaps you have all heard of the unfortunate incidents that occurred during Durga and Kali Puja involving damaged school property. These acts outraged the U-46 school district administration and for that they initially denied our request for renting their schools in 2009. However after much persuasion by some notable members of our community and a written apology sent to the school district by our then President, some reconciliation has been achieved and we have hopes that they will consider our requests for future dates. Unfortunately, we still couldn't get any U-46 schools for the January 31, Saraswati Puja date. For this reason, our committee decided to work with the Plainfield School district and celebrate the occasion at Plainfield South High School. This is a brand new and excellent facility that I am sure all of you will love! However, I will appeal to all of you to be aware of the following:

- All property of the host school must be thoroughly monitored and protected.
- Illinois schools, as part of government property, are smoke free and we must make sure to honor the law.

I have complete faith in our community, and with everyone's cooperation we will make this year a memorable one. There is one integral positive that we have on our side: we start every year with Saraswati Puja, invocation of the Goddess of Learning, and pray to her for knowledge. This knowledge kills all darkness and enlightens our souls with the purity and divineness to carry us to the highest plateau of humanity.

Let Maa grant our wishes and bless us with a very successful year!

Sincerely,

Angshuman Chatterjee

-DISCLAIMER-

Articles in Samaj Sambad are obtained from individual members. The editors are not responsible for the content of these articles. The opinions expressed in these articles are solely those of the contributors and are not necessarily representative of BAGIC.

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Event Photography by:

Nirmalya (Shanku) Ghosh/847-677-9884

BANGA BHAVAN UPDATE & SARASWATI PUJA GBM AGENDA

Registration Information

BAGC registration information for the membership is available on the web-site (www.bagc.net). In addition to the traditional methods of registration, **the option of Online Registration has been introduced this year** for those members who would like to pay online (through the secure "Paypal" site) using credit cards. We encourage you to take advantage of the "early membership rates" by

- paying online by January 24, or,
- mailing your check by January 24.

The membership rates are also provided on the bottom of the inside back cover of this newsletter. If you are paying by check, please print out the registration form from the BAGC web-site and mail the filled-out form along with your check.

Let's Go Green !!

All recent BAGC Newsletters are available in PDF format on the BAGC web-site for you to read (and to have a print-out, if desired). If you do not mind reading the newsletters on the web and can do without the paper copy, please indicate your choice on the registration form.

The Banga Bhavan project is now in its second year. The BBC members in keeping with their mandate have looked at a number of properties and sought community input on their viability as a Banga Bhavan. In order to ensure the opinions of all the members are heard and processed before purchasing a property a number of steps will be taken early in 2009.

A Web Survey will be conducted during the second week of January, 2009. This will entail gathering some key information regarding the Banga Bhavan project. Responding to the survey will not result in a binding commitment on the part of the members. Before sending the survey, we'll provide a detailed description of the different property options, with the pros and cons, and the financial model for each option, via email along with a web posting.

Each member will then be sent a web survey asking their preference of property, their comfort level with a mortgage, if yes the maximum mortgage amount preferable to them. What would be the voluntary donation the member is willing to make on an annual basis or pledge onetime.

Then we will have a GBM at the Saraswati Puja . We will not have any vote in this GBM. The agenda of this GBM will be:

1. Walkthrough of the property options, the pros and cons of each option and the financial model for each option.
2. Review of the Web Survey results.
3. Q&A session to address and clarify any concerns on property options, mortgage, and voluntary donations.
4. Explain the voting on mortgage and property options that will take place during the Banga Sanskriti GBM.

The Banga Bhavan will be used as a Bengali Heritage Center that will help preserve the rich Bengali Heritage for the current and future generations. It is hoped that young children and adults will utilize the Bengali classes which will be held there. There will be a library which will house books, movies and music. One member has generously donated to devote a section to Netaji Subhas Bose. We hope there will be seminars and discussions which will be held at the center, and dance recitals, plays, Bengali movies as well. It will also be a meeting place for our younger generation, to learn about their culture and heritage. There will be a section of the property which can be used for Puja and devotional purposes, and can be rented out for any personal Pujas; we will also have another section for rental to the membership for their personal gatherings. This is the future of Banga Bhavan, it will not be done in one day, but we hope that within the next few years we will be able to make this into a vibrant and dynamic Heritage Center.

Please review the options on the Web and let us know what you think in the survey, since this is the community's property, BBC would like to get input from the whole community before moving forward.



From Kunming airport, we fly to the northwest direction to the city of Lijiang, about 600 km away. Located on the ancient tea route, the city of Lijiang and the surrounding mountainous region is steeped in the magical

Dongba culture and religion. It is still practiced, may be in somewhat casual manner, by the Naxi (Na means black and Xi means people) who are the original inhabitants of the region. Some researchers believe that Lijiang was the inspiration for the place called Shangri-la conceived by the novelist Joseph Hilton in his 1933 novel called Lost Horizon.

As we exit the small, but neat airport of Lijiang, a very pleasant young man greets our tour group. He is first person I met in China with a truly infectious smile. Rocky, our Lijiang tour guide, is definitely a real Naxi.

To attract tourism, Chinese government is trying hard to revive and preserve the legacy of its unique cultures which are no longer integrated into the lives of people. Throughout my China travel so far, I have this uncomfortable feeling that the Chinese government is simply trying to put up a show of the ancient religions and associated culture. It is sad to observe that individuals are not naturally interested in delving into the essence of regional spiritual believes that were crushed only in the recent past. Unlike in other parts of the world, I sense demonstrable rough edges to Chinese characters. However, Rocky exudes happiness.

Following Billion Footsteps Continued – Lijiang, Yunnan Province, China

Dr. Bakul Banerjee

From the airport, the tour bus driver takes a roundabout route to reach the town. The roads are lined with terraced Canola fields blooming with variegated mustard colored flowers bordering the gentle mountain range at a distance. We arrive at the Grand Lijiang Hotel directly across the Old Town. After resting briefly, we head out to the picturesque Black Dragon Pool, a beautiful expansive lake. Every tourist to this part of the world must have a picture taken in front of the

lake. With the Deyue Pavilion seemingly floating in the lake and the majestic Yulong Xue Shan mountain range in the background, it is a picture postcard spot.

Our next destination is the Dongba Cultural Research Institute around the corner. Dongba religion was established in the region about thousand years ago. The epistemological principle of this religion is, "Man and nature are brothers with same father, but different mothers." Naxis, practicing Dongba religion, believe that the nature is alive. This religion has no formal organization or temples. However, there is a very large collection of scripture written in Dongba pictographs as well as formal religious ceremonies. Dongba language is one of the very few ancient pictographic languages still in use today. This language is complemented by a phonetic language. One of the major activities of the research institute is to translate about 20,000 pictographic manuscripts to modern Chinese. Apart from the general tourist activities, elder Dongba shamans educate younger Naxis in ancient scriptures, music, and rituals. At the institute, a young apprentice in yellow silk robe explains the pictographs and colorfully painted ritual objects. Our last stop here is at the museum and sales outlet for beautiful Chinese needlework.

(Continued to next page)



Bakul at the entrance to the Old Town of Lijiang, a UNESCO Cultural World Heritage Site

In the afternoon, we explore the vibrant Old Town of Lijiang across our hotel on our own. This site is designated as a UNESCO Cultural Heritage site. Ancient "Tea and Horse Caravan Road", often called Southern Silk Road, passes through Lijiang. This road has been in existence in some primitive form or other since 1600 BC. The rambling old town is anchored by a plaza with private homes, a Visitor Center, and many handicraft shops and restaurants radiating out of it. Three rapidly moving water canals surround it. Walking along the alleys lined with shops, I imagine millions of human being, horses, and other animals who pounded on these uneven cobblestone pavements before me. I almost get lost, but find my way back by following the upstream of the canal, as was instructed by Rocky. Some of my tour group members invite me to join them to drink the green wine at a little tavern, but I resist the temptation. There are several old-fashioned private homes in the middle of the market place. One of the massive red doors is plastered with squares of colored papers. Somebody explains that the colored papers signify the mourning status of the household. I buy silk scarves and tee-shirts with Naxi pictograms from two adorable young women. In their broken English, they educate me about everything from the local economy to their love lives. There is still time to visit the Visitor Center which is also sponsored by Nature Conservancy.

The story of Lijiang cannot be complete without talking about the magical mountains surrounding it along with the long dancing rivers flowing out of them carrying pure glacier water. Qinghai Tibet Plateau is the birthplace of major rivers of the region. Yarlung Zampo or River Brhmaputra flows from it, first toward southeast, then turns away westward entering India. However, three other parallel rivers, Mekong, Salween, and Yangtze, meander through South Eastern China, particularly Yunnan province. Situated in the middle of the watershed of these mighty rivers, Lijiang remained a center of commerce since ancient times.

The Old Town plaza becomes alive in the evening. Locals gather here with families and children to watch and participate in the live street entertainments. The authentic Naxi music continues until late. Our dining venue tonight is an old fashioned restaurant in the Old Town, of course with ubiquitous Chinese turn tables.

Bright and early next day, we head for the Yulong Xue Shan or Jade Dragon Snow Mountain. The majestic snow capped mountain, a massif with thirteen peaks, rises to a height of 5, 596 meters. It is the cradle of one of the southernmost glaciers in the northern hemisphere. The tour bus takes a very narrow winding road toward a small tourist center where we will catch cable cars. To distract us from the steep drop off the cliffs on our right, Rocky spins out the tales of matrilineal living arrangements of Musuo people in the nearby Lugu Hu village. For Musuo, a sect of Naxi, there is no marriage contract. Children are adopted by their mothers.

The bus journey ends at the Yulong village. The air is already quite thin. Allison, our tour director, tells me that even healthy young people may be affected by altitude sickness in this stretch of the road. We prepare to take two sets of cable cars to reach the alpine meadow at the foot of Yulong Xue Shan. The first cable car ride is three km. long and takes us to a height of 4500m. The second leg is about one km. long that takes us to a closer glacier viewing point. As we ride the cable cars, pine forests change to Spruce, Camelia and Rhododendron forests. Riders before us hung good luck charms and prayer objects made out of red silk from the trees. As we step outside, a fierce wind whirls around us. Among the clouds, the sunshine is playing hide and seek over the peaks. At this level, there is an alpine meadow. The view of the snow capped mountains and partially hidden glacier field is extraordinary from this vantage point. I buy a piping hot baked potato from one of the covered stalls to warm my cold hands as well as my stomach. Local women in elaborate costumes are entertaining tourists with slow group dances, obviously affected by the altitude. Some of their outer aprons have large fancy frogs embroidered on the back. The frog is the fertility symbol for Naxi. I give in and buy pictures of our disheveled shelves taken in the cable car. Among usual souvenir shops, a handful of decorated yaks are giving rides to the tourists.

On our way back, we stop at a small park by the river. Nora, my fellow traveler, was quite troubled by the altitude sickness during our previous stay at Lhasa, but she seems perked up now. She is the only one who attempted to ride a stubborn yak who did not want to move. It is great to see her again in her usual feisty self. Later that afternoon, it is time to go to Chongqing where we continue our journey on the Yangtze River.





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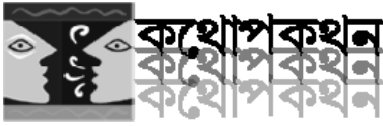
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An Important Interview with One of Us – Unmesh

Interviewer: Alak Bhattacharyya

Date: December 29, 2008

Unmesh celebrated its 15th birthday on November 7th at the residence of Anjali and Alak Bhattacharyya. I was asked to write a few words about Unmesh. Therefore, I started thinking about what to write. Everybody knows that this group of two dozen or so people gets together once a month, reads from their own works, and enjoys the satisfaction of co-writers' appreciation. Although, at this 15th birthday session, a new game was played. The session chairs (Ma and Mashi) were reading excerpts from fellow Unmesh members' old writing, and they quizzed people on the author. The person with the correct answer was given one point. The winner, whoever he/she was, had five correct answers. Anyways, I was not too sure about what to write!

So, I thought why not interview Unmesh? The problem is Unmesh is not one person; how do I interview a group of diverse people? Hence, I created an imaginary person – a fifteen-year-old teenager – a talkative, know-it-all, opinionated, smart, suburbanite teenager with an attitude. Here is how the interview went:

Question: Please tell me something about yourself.

Unmesh: What about me do you want to know?

Question: About what you do, your goals...?

Unmesh: Well, I write stuff; I read; I discuss sometimes; I publish a magazine. I have a goal I am sure, but I have not thought about it much.

Question: Could it be that your goal is to transfer the Bengali language and culture to our next generation?

Unmesh: Maybe. Maybe not. Maybe it is for me. It is for me to express and reminisce.

Question: Since you are writing for so long, do you think your quality of writing has improved?

Unmesh: I object to your question. Who is measuring the quality? Quality, compared to what? Plus, as I said, my goal is "to express and reminisce." How do you measure the quality of reminiscence?

Question: Let us move on to your annual magazine, Unmesh. Why do you publish only once a year?

Unmesh: I am very proud of my magazine. You talked about quality, not I, right? Don't you think, if I published four times a year, it would have been more difficult to keep the quality high, as you defined it?

Question: How many people buy your magazine? (Unmesh's cell phone rang)

Unmesh: Excuse me. I need to answer this text message. Thanks. What was the question?

Question: How many people buy your magazine? Can you cover the cost?

Unmesh: This is a kind of personal question. Anyways, I break even, and as I said before, my goal is "to express and reminisce," not necessarily to make money.

Question: I heard that sometimes you copy from other sources. Is this true?

Unmesh: That is a hagu question. It is almost a lie. If it happened, it is unintentional, accidental. You may call it an instantaneous, infrequent, intellectual insanity.

Question: Why didn't you form an organization with a structure and a constitution?

Unmesh: Because I want to be free. Free. Tell me – can you ever be free with a c-o-n-s-t-i-t-u-t-i-o-n? Who needs a constitution, if you have constancy? You can amend a constitution; can you amend a constant?

Question: Are you telling me that you have not changed all these years?

Unmesh: Probably not. Maybe only very slightly. I was born with a Ma, two Mashis, and a lot of brothers and sisters. Then one Mashi left. However, we added a Pishi a couple of months ago. Sorry for bringing my family into this conversation.

Question: Can you tell me what else do you do other than writing and reading?

Answer: I have participated in several literary events throughout Illinois and elsewhere. I had intimate sessions with many of the famous Bengali writers and intellectuals like Late Subhas Mukhopadhyay, Sunil Gangopadhyay, Sirshendu Mukhopadhyay, Shrijato, and others.

Question: Intimate sessions? Can you elaborate?

Unmesh: What is there to elaborate? They came and sat down with me, and we read and talked. For instance, we had about a three-and-a-half hour program with Sunil Gangopadhyay and his wife. He read from his poems, explained, and answered questions. Can you imagine Sunil Gangopadhyay (I am paraphrasing) telling me that a poem of his had no real meaning – it was written to satirize other established poets?

Question: I have no other questions, thank you very much.

Well, interviewing Unmesh was an interesting experience. It truly has all signs of a smart, suburbanite teenager with an attitude. It is a unique organization. It is defined but free. It is active in thoughts but passive in action. It has a pure, clear mission not perturbed by the swing of pendulums. It has no agenda (probably), no urgency (presumably), only spontaneity (possibly). It is open, not exclusive, but elusive.





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Upcoming Saraswati Puja Cultural Programs: Local Performers

♪♪ Surer Jhorna ♪♪

Directed by: Jaya Banerjee

With Saraswati Puja around the corner, the Bangla School Choir children are practicing a new batch of songs to share with all. This is the fourth show for them. This time the children will be focusing on learning songs by the ever versatile Salil Chowdhury.

Under the direction of Jaya Banerjee, they will be presenting a collection of five songs along with their original interpretation of the songs via posters.

Which songs? For that you will have to attend the program.



Rahul-er Abhijaan

Directed by: Sarmistha Banerjee

At the upcoming Saraswati Pujo, BAGC children ages 4-10 will be presenting a dance drama called "Rahul-er Abhijaan" (Rahul's Journey). This is a modern piece not previously staged by BAGC. The music is excellent and very contemporary. The songs have been performed by the new singers of Kolkata, including Rupankar, who performed on the BAGC stage in 2007.

"Rahul-er Abhijaan" tells the story of a mischievous village boy, Rahul, who is sent off to a boarding school in Kolkata by his parents. There, he meets the Royal Bengal Tiger at the Zoo, who teaches him the story of the Sundarbans – its waters, animals, plants and humans. He learns about the fragility of that ecosystem, the threat of extinction facing many of the animals, and the hardships experienced by the villagers of the area.

The theme is one of living in harmony with nature and of being ecologically responsible. Now that we are all going green, it is particularly fitting that our children present a show on these themes in a fun, kid-friendly and entertaining musical.

Our young members have been rehearsing with tremendous dedication and enthusiasm in frosty weather for two months. And it's certainly been worth it. Come and watch Rahul's exciting and melodious journey – you won't be disappointed.

See you at the show!

YUVA

Directed by: Anindita Sen

Presenting YUVA....we are young, we are new, we are strong, we are individuals...we want to simply express ourselves and be heard. We don't want to fight, we don't want to create rifts...we just want to be understood. We are YUVA...yesterday, today and tomorrow.

Yuva expresses a universal underlying theme across generations, across cultures, across time. It is an exploration of the new, the unknown and the next. The youth of today, yesteryear or tomorrow simply want to voice their opinions, express their thoughts, be heard and in this pursuit of finding individuality and discovering their uniqueness they are at times viewed as being non-conformists, or rebels, or mischievous and improper, perhaps disrespectful or just plain disobedient.

However, these apparent differences between youth versus parents or earlier generations is only skin deep and simply on the surface...it is merely separate forms of expressions. YUVA sings to a different tune, dances to a different beat, expresses in a new hence what seems to be an incomprehensible language, they follow different paths at times but at the end (or even right from the beginning), they want the same things. Their goals, dreams and ultimate desires are always aligned with the their elders or prior generation...its only that the expression or delivery is different. Although many a time, it seems that a mother and daughter/son is head to head and are repelling forces wanting opposite things, its only that their expression, language, words are different but their end goals or inner wishes are always in sync. Ultimately they are tied by heart strings....hearts are together and always ONE. Hear us now.... presenting YUVA.

Cultural Program: Darshana Menon (Guest Artist)



BAGC is proud to present **Darshana Menon** during Saraswati Puja 2009.

Darshana Menon is an accomplished singer from Michigan, USA. She is the Winner of the Sa Re Ga Ma Pa Challenge USA 2008 and qualified to participate in the Sa Re Ga Ma Pa Challenge 2009 in Mumbai, India. She represented the Rock Gharana under music director / singer Himesh Reshamiya.

Darshana's entry into music started when she was six and her stage debut happened at the age of seven. She received her training in classical vocal music in Hyderabad, India from Smt. Usha Raghunathan followed by lessons from Sri Chandrasekhar. After coming to the US in 2002, she continued her music training under the tutelage of Smt. Kasturi Shiva Kumar. Darshana has performed at numerous musical programs in the US as well as in India.

Please visit Darshana's website:
www.darshanamenon.com to know more about her and her music.



Saraswati Puja

Events

Registration	Starts at 10:00 am
Puja	11:00 am - 1:00 pm
Anjali	1:00 pm - 2:00 pm
Lunch	1:00 - 3:00 pm (Kitchen closes at 3:30 pm)
GBM	3:00 - 4:00 pm
Cultural Program (Part 1)	4:00 - 6:00 pm (Local Performers)
Dinner	6:00 - 8:00 pm
Cultural Program (Part 2)	8:00 - 10:00 pm (Guest Performer)

Rates for	Family	Adult	Child (5-12 yrs)	Student / Sr Citizen
Annual Membership (Family)	\$ 35.00			
GFP		\$ 100.00	\$ 50.00	\$ 50.00
GFP (on or after 1-31-09)		\$ 110.00	\$ 50.00	\$ 50.00
Emeritus	-	\$ 50.00	\$ 50.00	\$ 50.00
Saraswati Puja				
Member - Non GFP	\$ 35.00	\$ 30.00	\$ 20.00	\$ 25.00
Non Member	-	\$ 40.00	\$ 25.00	\$ 30.00



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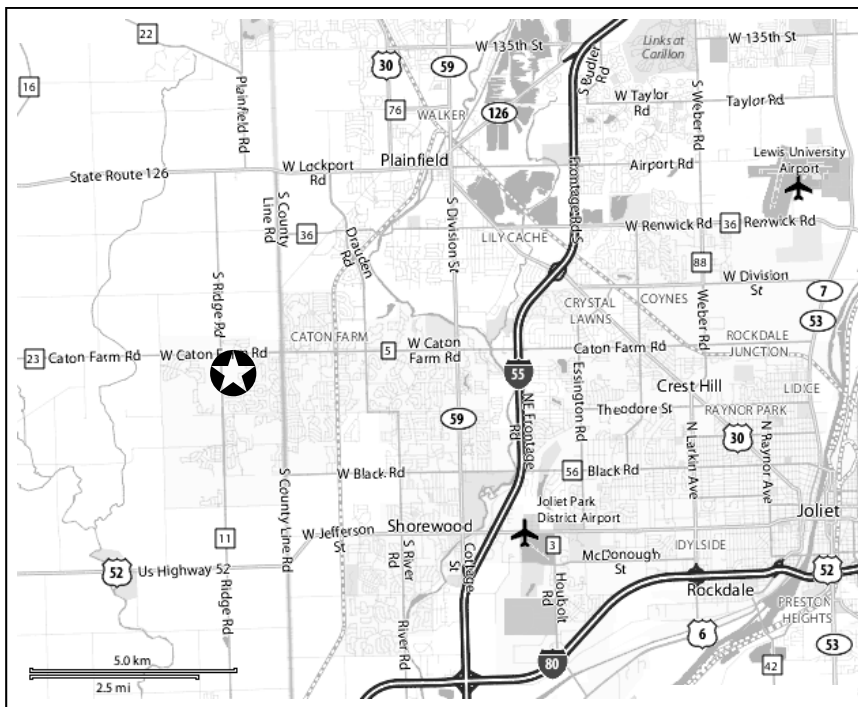
To:



Mark your calendar for upcoming event:

"SARASWATI PUJA"

January 31st, 2009



Venue:

**Plainfield South High School
7800 Canton Farm Road
Plainfield, IL 60586**

Directions:

Via Route 55 or Route 355:

- Exit at Route 126(Plainfield exit). Travel west approximately 3 miles to Route 59.
- Turn Left (South) on Route 59 approximately 6 miles to Caton Farm Road.
- Turn Right (West) approx 6 miles to PSHS (School is at Caton Farm & Ridge)

Via Route 80:

- Exit at Minnoka exit (Ridge Road). Travel North 8 miles on Ridge to Caton Farm Road
- School is at the intersection of Ridge and Caton Farm Roads

◆◆◆◆ Google maps ◆◆◆◆

Use **Caton Farm Rd & S Ridge Rd, Plainfield, IL 60586** to find the correct location