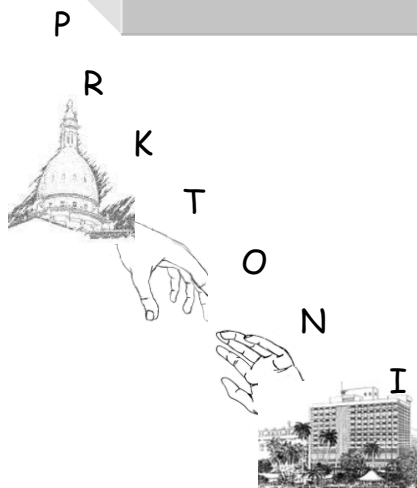
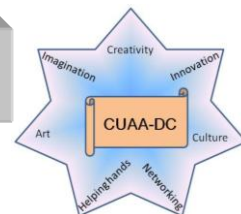




**Agnostic to Ascetic:
Narendranath to Vivekananda**

by Sankar P. Basu

"Have you seen God?"—a challenging question posed by a young college student to a priest of a temple in the out skirt of Calcutta. "Yes I have, just like the way I see you now, perhaps somewhat more distinct than this..." "Can you show me, sir?", the student asked. "Yes indeed" came the candid reply boldly.

Calcutta at that time was deeply engulfed with Brahmo movement led by stalwarts from Rammohan to Devendranath to Kesab Chandra. It was the British era---the Hindu religion was crippled with many gods, goddesses, and priests practicing different rituals.

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Newsletter 2012

From CUAA-DC Board of Directors (BOD):

I'm delighted to have this opportunity to speak to you on behalf of the BOD Committee. It has been a long time since CUAA has had a newsletter. With contributions from you, we put our efforts to bring this to you, to share your thoughts with others and also to present the activities of CUAA. Our voluntary group effort is committed to bring you the best ever CUAA Annual Reunion this year. The success of the summer picnic, which by some account was the best attended ever, is a testimony to the effectiveness of our endeavors.

..... Continued to page 2

Long Live Sunil Da by Anjali Bhattacharyya

A huge canvas-----a play of images, feelings, memories---sometimes abstract--sometimes so many shapes and an array of colors-----a rainbow of feelings---an ongoing process with no beginning and no end.

That is how I feel about Sunil da.

He earned unbelievable and unprecedented name and fame ---not engulfed in them but riding over them---riding above waves---waves of life as life is (Jiban Je Rakam). That was Sunil da to me.

He was bigger than life itself and yet closer to my heart and to so many other hearts---a huge network of his extended families all over the world. How can I describe such a great man in such a sort space and such short time?

Where do I start?

So many moments so many simple talks, so many memorable and auspicious moments are jumbled up in my mind--- rushing, jostling competing with each other to be expressed, to come out in light, to be shared with my family, my Gadya Padyar Asar family and my CU friends ---how do I do it!

Let me start with his appreciation and generosity. Appreciation came naturally to him without any calculations of profit and loss---in so many situations---be it a big arena like a literary session in Banga Sammelon or be it at Bengali Poets Meet, Hyderabad or be it at my writing room (Amar Lekha lekhir Ghar). While we were hosting Sunil da and Swati he used my writing room. First day went well. Next morning he was so concerned: he was using my room and where was I writing! Our hospitality to him was taking such a heavy toll on my writing! He had no idea that I was in seventh heaven and my writing career was the least of my concern at the time. He was working on a novel and finished it there. "Your writing room is simply heavenly and blessed! I completed my novel today." I was simply dumfounded! My response was, "Now my entire house is." Continued to page 3

Calcutta (Kolkata) – a Cradle for Medical Education and Infectious Disease Research By Ranjan Gupta

In the late 70s, I vividly remember an undergraduate lecture in plant pathology in which our professor introduced us to the Koch's postulates – the principles that conclusively establish the causative link between an infectious agent and a communicable disease. Little did I realize then that this critical research of Dr. Robert Koch, one of the founders of modern microbiology (along with Pasteur and Cohn), was conducted literally next door at Calcutta Medical College (CMC), only a century ago. Fast forward to 2008 – I was on a study tour to Kolkata with a group of American professors from several medical schools and universities. At CMC, as we huddled into the Principal's office (a room that almost leaps out of a Dickens novel), walked through the hospital wards and finally made our way to the adjacent Calcutta School of Tropical Medicine, we realized that we were surrounded by history. Amidst the ongoing renovations we saw a red brick building where Dr. Koch made his discoveries on comma bacillus, *Vibrio cholerae*, the causative agent of cholera. Also credited with pioneering work on anthrax and tuberculosis, Koch received the Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine in 1905. The walls of CMC are lined with photographs of many medical luminaries, and history has been made many times on these premises. Established in 1835, this is considered the first college of Western medicine in Asia and was registered in England in 1845. What caught my attention was that in 1876 Kadambini Ganguly was admitted as the first female medical student and by 1889 Bidhumukhi Bose and Virginia Mary Mitter became the first women graduates from this college. This is no trivial achievement even by western standards considering the fact that around this time Florence Nightingale was just training her first batches of student nurses and Elizabeth Blackwell, the first woman to graduate from medical school in the U.S., only received her degree in 1849. Female doctors were rare anywhere then and this is true even today in some places.

Continuing our study tour at SSKM Hospital we visited the research site of Dr. Ronald Ross, whose seminal research in Kolkata established the link between the malarial parasite and its vector the mosquito, in the path to human transmission. Ross received the Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine in 1902 and was knighted in 1911.

Introduction of western science education in the mid-1800s obviously impacted Bengal, nurturing the next generation of Indian scientists. Most Bengalis know the names of Sir. Jagadish. Bose, Satyen Bose or Meghnath Saha, I introduce the reader to two pioneering medical researchers from Kolkata, who may be less known, though no less in achievements. Readers may think of others that I have not touched upon. In the 1950s, Dr. Sambhu Nath De changed the understanding of cholera by demonstrating

..... **Continued to page 3**

Financial Report:-

January, 2011 through
December, 2011

Bank Balance as of January 01,
2011 \$3829.62

INCOME

Picnic \$265.00

Annual \$1065.00

Donation for Scholarship funds
\$1901.00

Total Income \$3231.00

EXPENSES

Picnic \$323.00

Annual \$783.00

Sound System \$360.38

CUAA-DC Name Change

\$120.00

NABC Reunion \$100.00

Total Expense \$1686.38

Bank Balance as of December
31, 2011 \$5374.24

*Supplied by Pampa Mondal,
Treasurer*

Newsletter Editor: Ranjan
Gupta.

Design and Composed by
Bidhan Bandyopadhyay

From CUAA-DC Board of Directors (BOD):

Continued from page 1

Following on the vision of previous CUAA BOD, we will continue our efforts to provide financial help to the CU graduate students who are meritorious but economically challenged. As the first step, we visited CU and had a meeting with CU administration to discuss about the mechanism to reach a memorandum of understanding. Second, we have raised about \$3,000 fund towards our target of \$10,000. Third, we now have our very own sound system that we have purchased from the fund; we saved money by cooking food ourselves, at CUAA events. Forth, we have been able to largely engage our next generation i.e., the children of CUAA families, in various activities of CUAA. We will continue to explore such ideas to shape the association into a dynamic and functional group. Now we have an interim election committee that will search and recruit next BODs. We are also planning to make an advisory council to take advantage of the experience from our senior alumni. Even though there is a working committee (BOD), it is extremely important that you, as CUAA members, enrich us with your ideas and play an active role in the activities of CUAA-DC. Working together, we can ensure the brightest future for this organization.

Thank you,

Bidhan C. Bandyopadhyay, President

Photos from CUAA Annual 2011:-



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Another scene: it was Banga Sammelon literary seminar at San Jose: I read my poem on Radha. He was next. Before reading his poem he declared: "Anjali has read her poem on Radha and I will now read my poem on Krishna so they will be complementary to each other." I was thunderstruck! How can my poem be complementary to his poem! I knew it was purely an act of his kindness and generosity.

In another occasion: it was a literary meeting at Hyderabad. Three of us from Kolkata and four poets from Bangladesh were invited. Sunil da was not feeling well yet he attended the session. During my presentation his eyes were closed and he appeared to be resting. I completed my presentation and came back to my seat wondering: did he listen to my presentation? As I sat there he opened his eyes and said, "You chose good poems and presented them so well! Good job!" Was I elated!

He touched my heart like so many other hearts he touched with his generosity, his kindness and concern---now are bleeding ----bleeding so slowly and will go on bleeding forever !

Sunil da's lifework will keep him alive! As long as a single Bengali Literary mind will be alive Sunil da will be too.

Long live Sunil da

by Anjali Bhattacharyya

Photos from CUAA Annual picnic 2012:-



ID Research

Continued from page 2

that the symptoms of cholera were due to a specific bacterial exotoxin that affects intestinal membrane permeability. His research, including his invented animal model, opened up investigation into the world of hitherto unknown class of enterotoxins that characterize specific pathogenic bacteria in the human gut. De was nominated for a Nobel Prize by Dr. Joshua Lederberg. During our 2008 tour we learned about the pivotal work of Dr. De at the National Institute of Cholera and Enteric Diseases, adjacent to the Infectious Disease (ID) Hospital in Beliaghata, and elsewhere we saw his original laboratory equipment. Another person that comes to mind is Dr. Upendranath Brahmachari. Within less than a few decades after William Leishman and Charles Donovan independently identified the parasite for *kala azar* (a.k.a. Leishmaniasis) from Kolkata and Madras in 1903, Dr. Brahmachari discovered a wonder drug for Leishmaniasis - Urea Stibamine. According to contemporary reports, this saved thousands of lives, with a 90% cure rate. Dr. Brahmachari was nominated for a Nobel Prize in 1929 and received knighthood in 1934. At the Indian Institute of Chemical Biology, a hub for Leishmania research in Kolkata, our delegation got a glimpse of the ongoing studies in Leishmaniasis under modern laboratory settings.

Stories such as these certainly make us proud but why is such history relevant? Consider this - with the advent of multidrug resistance and global warming, infectious diseases have returned with a vengeance. TB, malaria and HIV/AIDS have been declared as three of the largest killers in infectious diseases. With the outbreak of cholera in Haiti and the rise in other insect-borne diseases, research in tropical medicine, is back in the name of "Neglected Tropical Diseases." Today's researchers might find inspiration in the daunting tasks that some of the pioneers undertook in Kolkata and elsewhere in the tropics.

Agnostic to Ascetic: Narendranath to Vivekananda

Continued from page 1

The French Revolution had just been over in Europe and fresh air was blowing from the west—one of French style—knocking at the door of the elites announcing the birth of Renaissance of Bengal in 1828. That new age was captured by no one other than the great person like Rammohan, who considered himself a pure Hindu but was very much opposed to the superstitions of orthodox Hindus. He believed in the Vedas but did not believe in the existence of numerous gods—to him God was one and unique. Thereafter came Maharshi Devendranath (the great saint), father of Rabindranath, who twisted this concept a bit further. He alluded this to a different form of divinity discarding even the Vedas and admitted that the Brahmins are the torch-bearers of the Hindu religion. Keshab Chandra in his famous address of 1880 influenced the young and the elites alike....”How animating is the Brahmo’s knowledge of God! He does not worship an abstract, metaphysical idea of the Divinity, destitute of charms and lifelessness. His God is neither a logical nor a historical divinity. His God is ever-present and ever-living Reality....”

Narendranath came closer to Keshab Chandra, having been attracted by his philosophy. He instantly accepted the membership of the Brahmo Society and became a frequent visitor. He sang Tagore songs, listened to the lectures but one day was struck by a realization—”Keshab Chandra delivers lectures on God but has he really seen Him?” With this thought in mind he rushed to Maharshi and told him, “I want to see the Almighty.” Instead of directly answering his question Maharshi advised him ---“immerse yourself in deep meditation.” Narendranath realized that the Maharshi, although a saint-like person, is also attempting to sidetrack the issue and this drove him crazy searching for the answer. He ran from place to place and asked this very question to all the religious leaders, “Have you seen God?”

Finally he came to Ramakrishna, who was but a simple priest - not a scholarly person by any measure, nor too famous, nor known to outside world. He said to Narendranath with a strong conviction, “I have seen God, if you want to see I can show you too.” Narendranath thought it was impossible; and said until I see Him, in my opinion His existence has no basis whatsoever. Ramakrishna asked him, “Can you cry at least once for God? If you can cry for Him, He will surely appear before you. Not only might you be able to see Him you can talk to Him also.”

As Narendra watched him closely in Dakshineswar, in the eyes of a modern young college student Ramakrishna appeared to be a “mono-maniac” or half-eccentric person. He found him to be absorbed in a “trance state” or “samadhi” at frequent intervals. Narendra was not the only one influenced by his magic spell. Keshab Chandra too was converted to a different person being captured by his genuine love and affections. He declared in his later life that Ramakrishna was a true representative of God and he would like to dedicate himself to the feet of this great leader.

One day Narendra insisted Ramakrishna in showing his magical powers to inculcate some queer feelings in him—he wanted to know and also see where this world begins and where it ends, and whether this world is held by a supreme power that is formless or shapeless. Ramakrishna then gazed upon him casting a strange look which was not to be found commonly in any human being. With no one in the room but himself and Narendra, he made Narendra sit by his side. Suddenly he lifted his right foot and placed it over Narendra’s lap and instantly Narendra, due to a tactile sensation, lost his consciousness by an electric impulse---his existence, his self- being started whirling around with a tremendous speed running towards infinity. He was dizzy and felt that death is surely close to him and he was being thrown by a force. Being scared he started screaming, “what did you do to me? I have my parents living....”. The half-insane man laughed loudly, then placed his hand on Narendra’s chest, consoled him in a whispering voice, “let’s stop now, nothing doing further, will wait for another time...”

After that Narendra had a different form of realization in life and experienced a somersault in his world of thought. Ramakrishna told him, “Samadhi, God, etc. are now all within your grip. I have stored them with a lock in a box for you. The key should be left with me. I will open this for you when time comes.”.... This helped Narendra turn to Swami Vivekananda, a title conferred on him later by Ajit Singh, the Maharajah of Kshetri. We will be remembering him on his sesquicentennial now and throughout the year to follow.

New CUAA Bylaws furnished by Tarak Bhar and accepted at the general body meeting: These by-laws of CUAA Inc. shall be read in conjunction with and as subsidiary to the Article of Incorporation of CUAA, INC., registered within the State of Maryland on April 22, 2011. The activities and the business of CUAA shall be managed or conducted in accordance with the provisions of these By-Laws as provided in Article 6 of the Articles of Incorporation of the CUAA. In the event of any conflict between the provisions of the Articles of Incorporation and the By-Laws, those of the Articles of Incorporation shall prevail indicating that it will be a fully autonomous body in all aspects. To view details of the Bylaws please visit our website <http://www.cuaa-dc.org/>