

সুকুমার রায়ের 'আবোল তাবোল'  
থেকে 'গোঁফচুরি'র ইংরাজী অনুবাদ

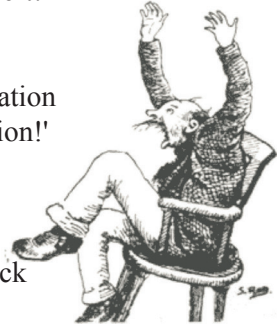
The Translation of  
'Gonf Churi' in English from  
Sukumar Roy's 'Abol Tabol'

Translated by **Gargi Samadar**

এফই- ২৪৮

**THEFT OF MOUSTACHE**

The chief of the babus at the Head Office was a man quite calm and restrained  
Who knew that he would turn out to be so scatter brained?  
He was seated in his chair in ease and comfort  
Dozing for a while he suddenly bellowed, his outburst absurd!  
Shouting out in panic, arms flinging about  
He cried out, "Help me! I am in rout!"  
Hearing that some ask for a doctor, while others call the police  
And someone warns, pick him up carefully lest he bites, he is man of caprice!  
When people are running helter skelter and going right and left,  
The babu shrieks out, "Of my moustache, there has been a theft!"  
Moustache stolen? How very strange! Can it be ascertained?  
The moustache remains as it is neither waxing nor waned!  
Thrusting a mirror before his face, everyone gives an explanation  
"Your moustache remains intact, please see your own reflection!"  
At this absolutely enraged he bellowed infuriated  
"I don't believe anyone, I know that you have vitiated  
A dirty moustache, that resembles a broomstick  
Is similar to that of the milkman of Shyambabu; this is no trick  
If you say that this is mine, I would have you jeopardized"  
And saying this, he had all of the workers with fines penalized.  
Out of extreme anger, he almost choked in exasperation  
"Nobody should be given indulgence", he concluded in vexation.  
"With cowdung in their heads these monkeys have no notification  
Where the moustache could have disappeared they haven't the least information!  
I feel like dancing while pulling hard at their stash  
And using a spade to shave the heads of this utter trash.  
Who says the moustache is yours or mine—can it be bought?  
Either me or you belong to the stash and recognition is accordingly sought."



# Finally!! Time to rejuvenate amidst nature : A Travel Diary

Dr Ahindra Mohan Saha

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Last two years of the pandemic forced us to stay within the confinement of our homes, cut-off from the rest of the world. Especially for senior citizens like us, there always existed that constant fear and uncertainty. For the first time in life, travelling, meeting, and greeting our near and dear ones became a cause of concern. We were all hoping and praying for that magic day to arrive when life would spring back to normal, which seemed to be a distant future. With invention of vaccines and its immunization drive, the world seemed to have broken the shackles of the virus.



That's when we decided to plan a trip to rejuvenate our mind amidst the beauty of nature. What could have been a better option than spending few days in Meghalaya – which the Britishers rightly described as “Scotland of the East”. Meghalaya derives its name from the Sanskrit word “megha” meaning "cloud" and “ā-laya” meaning "abode" – in short, the “abode of the cloud”. With an average annual rainfall of 10,000+ mm in different pockets, the name could not have been more appropriate. It is worth mentioning

that it is the wettest place on the earth and two of the world's soggiest places Mawsynram and Cherrapunji reside here in this state.

We took a direct flight from Kolkata to Shillong in the morning. It was so thrilling to board an aircraft after ages. The captain of the ATR flight made our flight journey



even more interesting. He kept providing us with little snippets on our flight route. Interestingly he mentioned, we flew over our neighbouring country of Bangladesh for major part of our journey. Since we were travelling in the early part of June, there was always an apprehension of the flight not landing in Shillong and we may be diverted to Guwahati. But we were lucky on that day and the flight reached 10 minutes prior to schedule. Shillong is a small airport, with no aerobridges and buses to transfer you to the main airport terminal. So we had to walk our way from the flight to the main building. That's when we experienced first-hand the taste of Meghalaya – mountains all around in a cloud covered sky with gentle breeze all around. Precisely what we were dying to

feel for the last two years.

Meghalaya has imposed strict Covid protocols, so double dose vaccination certificate is a must before entering the state. In addition, you need to register



on the Meghalaya Tourism app and generate an e-invite letter before arrival. The journey from the airport to the hotel was a sneak peek of what was expected in the next few days. We stayed at a property outside the heart of the Shillong city, overlooking the Umiam Lake. Umiam Lake is essentially a reservoir built in the hills by building dams on the Umiam river. This lake primarily supports hydroelectricity generation. In addition, it's a perfect spot for kayaking, water cycling, scooting, and boating. Post lunch we visited the Umiam Lake. The views were spectacular against a mesmerizing backdrop.



Late evening, we visited Police Bazar, the downtown of Shillong. It's the main market area of the city with plentiful hotels, restaurants and shops. Besides traditional shops, there is an overflow of roadside

vendors, who sell a variety of items from winter garments, to electronic gadgets, to bakeries, local gift items and plethora of fruits and flowers. It is massively crowded and seems the whole of Shillong has congregated. One interesting point, the well-maintained black and yellow Maruti 800 and Willy's Jeep are still the beauty of the roads and lifelines for many within Shillong.



Next morning we went on a day long trip for the Dawki River . It's the journey rather than the destination which leaves you spellbound. The distance from Shillong to Dawki is around 80 km, however it will take you close to 4 hours to reach there. With the highway extension work in progress to widen the roads, for a major part of the drive it is hard to zoom through. The initial part of the journey was a bit chaotic as we struggled our way through the congested city roads. But once we crossed the cantonment area, the rows of tall pine trees welcomed us to the picturesque side of the mountains. The journey was nothing short of a dream. Making our way through the mountainous terrain, lush green valleys, dotted with numerous waterfalls in full glory, every turn on the way divulged a new canvas revealing surreal unblemished beauty of the Khasi Hills. The narrow highway meandered through the mountains under the canopy of trees. On numerous occasions the dense layer of fog seemed

to engulf us completely and the visibility was reduced to zero owing to white drape of cloud and mist. It was scary at the same time thrilling as our car inched forward at the slowest possible pace with flashing parking lights. Surely this were the exciting moments of our life.

To lighten our moods, our chauffer narrated us with the rich history of Meghalaya. The state is not just an abode of natural scenic beauty but also a cradle of the rich cultural and traditional heritage of the Khasi, Garo and Jaintia tribes. Unlike traditional Indian norms, Meghalaya has historically followed a



matrilineal structure where inheritance is linked through women; it's the daughter who enjoys the inheritance to wealth and takes care of her parents. The cock plays an important role in the Khasi religion and considered mediator between God and Man. Way back in time, sins had become so rampant in people that the sun refused to wake up. It was the persuasion of the cock with its constant crowing that finally made the sun come out of its hiding, which preaches the message of "Kamai ia ka hok" meaning "Earn with Honesty". A message so simple yet so powerful for us to practice even in the modern era.

After the long and eventful journey we reached Dawki River and simply couldn't believe our eyes. Even the cloud took a momentary leave to allow us to bask in the beauty. The breathtaking



pristine views had another interesting tale to it – it's a border point between India and Bangladesh, where one side of the river points to India and other to our neighbouring country – all living in perfect harmony. We took a ride in human-rowed boats, which allowed a closest view of the river. The crystal clear water seemed like a mirror, reflecting the water bed in the background of mountain and the blue sky. No words can ever do justice to the beauty of the place. It was indeed heartening to see the effort of the local authorities to create awareness within the tourist community in an attempt to preserve the purity of this nature's gift to mankind.

If you ever had wondered where our humble "phool jhadu" comes from – which we use at home on a daily basis. We got the answer, courtesy the knowledge king – our chaffuer. On our way from Dawki to Mawlynnong, we saw flowery inflorescence of *Thysanolaena maxima* plant, known simply as Broom grass. Primarily cultivated on slopes by the Khasi communities as a mixed crop, the plant serves in keeping our houses clean and tidy in the most sustainable fashion.

Finally around 2:30pm we managed to reach Mawlynnong - Asia's cleanest village. No better place to have a traditional local cuisine lunch before we had a quick sightseeing inside the village. We had to walk inside the village as vehicles are not allowed to reduce pollution. You will be



spellbound once you step in - this seems to be more like a sophisticated town than a village, with metalled roads, pipelined water, solar powered street lights, sanitation and no sign of littering plastic or paper. A perfect model village for the rest of India to learn and emulate.

Our last destination for the day was the “Single level living roots bridge” located about 3km before Mawlynnong. In short a mind-boggling technical marvel given



the local Khasi community hand-made the bridge from the aerial roots of the rubber fig tree with their indigenous skills and expertise. If you love trekking, then there is another reason for you to be there, as the path to the bridge is an expedition. With the monsoon around, the steps were a little slippery but if you take a relaxed approach then you could be right at the bottom of the bridge, right down to the stream and waterfall.

The next day, we made our long trip to Cherrapunji, another day in the lap of nature. In spite of the rain and cloudy weather, we did manage to see some of the prominent waterfalls in the region. On our way we stopped at the majestic Elephant falls – gushing herself in a three-tier architecture. Originally the Khasi community named this falls “Ka Kshaid



Lai Pateng Khohsiew” – because the water falling in 3 steps. Later due to the resemblance of a rock (located just at the foot of the falls) to the elephant, Britishers named the falls as Elephant falls. The rock was later destroyed in an earthquake in 1897. For senior citizens like me the last tier is beyond reach, as the steep climb up through the slippery rocks is a bit too adventurous at my age and physique.

Our final morning was a quick tour of the city, wherein we spend paddle boating at the Ward’s Lake. Located in the heart of the city, this horse-shoe shaped lake is a tourist delight. The lake was named after Sir William Ward, the Chief Commissioner of Assam, who initiated the plan for the construction of this lake, which was later constructed by Colonel Hopkins in the year 1894. From there we had the last taste of some local cuisine - Cherrapunji chicken cooked with freshly grounded pepper served with local khasi turmeric rice before heading for the airport.

This was a short 4-day trip, and its crazy how rapidly time flew by, but the memories got ingrained forever. As we all return with a heavy heart and a recharged heart and mind, it’s time to soak in the reminiscence till we plan for our next travel.

Wish you all a very Happy and Prosperous Durga Puja!!!

# Pujo Lights

## Mainak Bhattacharya

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It was time now. The traffic light went red again. She was ready with her bowl. It was Saptami, and all around, there was revelry. The notes of a distant song could be faintly heard, and there was the occasional, but refreshing, 'dhaak' beat.

She was seven, dressed in a rag, hair all over the place, and arms so thin that one would think there was nothing except bone. She had been like this for quite a while now, thrown into the abyss of poverty, uncertainty and oppression from an early age. She had seen so much of the dark side, but still, this life seemed simple to her, the basic necessities of subsistence divine boons for her. She did not have, and certainly couldn't be expected to have, the ability to comprehend the complexity of this world, its nuances alien to her; she did not have time for that. Survival was her only objective, everything else seemed obsolete.

She knocked on the window. The glass did not go down. Four friends were

discussing about their next destination for pandal-hopping, and an argument started about where to eat. They didn't even notice her, their deliberation much more important than a malnourished child, who just wanted to have some rice at the pice hotel. She tried her best, but in vain ; there was only a glance. The light turned green.

She returned to the sidewalk. She could comprehend failure, though not articulate it. But all this was normal to her, her indomitable spirit unfazed by perhaps a small hurdle. She could have become so much more, but that did not matter now ; society had given her an identity.

The atmosphere was gleeful, the music persistent and the 'dhaak' laying claim now and then. All around she could see bright dresses and smiling faces. It made her merry , too. All this seemed otherworldly to her, something which she could gaze at but not penetrate. But no, she had to get out of her trance ; the light had turned red. She was ready again.

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*"I am an Indian, every Indian is my brother. The ignorant Indian, the poor and destitute Indian, the Brahmin Indian, the Pariah Indian, is my brother. The Soil of India is my highest heaven, the good of India is my good."*

Swami Vivekananda



# The Zamindar of Khajraitha and a House by the River Lt Col Dr Jyotirmoy Chaudhuri

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*(From Stories Untold: An Army Doctor's Memoir for his Grandchildren)*



As the world changed in ways we could not imagine, Dr Jyotirmoy Chaudhuri felt the need to give his grandchildren a glimpse of times gone by. So, during the long months of lockdown, he put together his diary entries, memories and photographs to piece together his memoir, *Stories Untold*. Here is an excerpt from his first work experience after graduation from Medical school.

Bhagalpur, Bihar 1956

After passing my MBBS exams, I was faced with two choices – the first was to do a house-job in any speciality, and the second was to start earning, as my family had sacrificed so much to put me through medical college. I chose the latter and

started actively looking for jobs.

At this time, I came across an advertisement for the post of Flood Relief Medical Officer in Bihar. I applied for the job and an appointment letter from the Office of the Assistant Director of Public Health, Bhagalpur, arrived in the mail asking me to join as temporary epidemic doctor under the Flood Relief Scheme on a monthly salary of Rs 375 (pay of Rs 200 plus a 'cost of living' allowance of Rs 175).

I was happy and made up my mind to take up the job though my friends were surprised at my decision to travel to an unknown destination with the risks involved.

I reached Munger from Howrah on



the 1st of September and headed for the office of the District Health Officer where I was briefed about my work. For further instructions, I was asked to report to the office of the Assistant Health Officer, Plague Centre, by getting off at Khagaria Railway Junction. I was a bit nervous initially on hearing the word 'plague'. Actually this centre was active during a previous plague epidemic in Bihar and it was also the AHO's office. On reaching there, I learnt that I would have to travel onwards to Khajraitha village for actual flood relief work. As there was no arrangement for staying at the office of the AHO, I was asked to enquire at a nearby dharmshala.

On my way, it suddenly started raining very heavily and there was so much lightning accompanying it, that for a moment I thought that I would surely be struck down by it! However, I managed to reach the dharmshala, and on entering was amused to see the peaceful co-existence of men and animals packed in there. I found an elderly person with a huge wooden box, and on enquiring, came to know that he was the temporary compounder of the health department and that he was allotted flood relief duty each year, alongside a doctor and that the wooden box contained medicines and other necessary items. He was waiting for a certain Dr Chaudhuri, he said, and on hearing that the aforementioned doctor was none other than me, was both surprised and relieved. He was an asthmatic and was having difficulty in breathing so I asked him to change from his wet clothes and rest. The in-charge of the dharmshala was kind enough to spare me a room to spend the night in.

The next day, the compounder and

I, with the big box of course, reached Khagaria station from where we took the metre gauge train to Narayanpur and then proceeded to walk to Khajraitha. I will never forget the train journey from Khagaria to Narayanpur. The train was passing through what looked like a turbulent ocean. All that one could see everywhere was water and more water – the mighty Ganga in all her grandeur and fury.

Floods have ravaged Bihar from time immemorial. In fact the Kosi is called the 'Sorrow of Bihar' having changed its course by more than 130km in the past 200 years! While Kosi is the most notoriously meandering of them all, all the rivers of north Bihar are known to have changed their courses and the process continues.

We encountered heavy rain again on alighting at Narayanpur. In the station waiting room, two men came forward and started up a conversation. One of the young men turned out to be the son of the zamindar of Bhatkhand and he suggested that we spend the night at their place. He chided me for not having an umbrella with me and lent me his. I do not like carrying umbrellas, but realised how silly I must have looked, to have come on flood relief work without any form of protection from the elements.

It took about half an hour by boat to reach Bhatkhand village where we were welcomed by the zamindar and his family. A big reception hall had its walls covered with pictures of national leaders. A photograph of Shyama Prasad Mukherjee was very conspicuous. The zamindar's family had strong patriotic feelings and after a stimulating conversation, we were treated to dinner. Their hospitality overwhelmed me. In the morning, we

got ready to leave for Khajraitha. The zamindar's son had very kindly arranged for a tall, strong person to carry the medicine box on his head.

After bidding farewell, the three of us set out on our journey. We would have to reach an embankment, where the marooned villagers had shifted with their belongings, and it would take about an hour to do so. There was no road as such. The journey was through agricultural land, submerged partially by flood water. Little did we know that the journey would turn out to be such an ordeal! The muddy route was extremely slippery, and the compounder and I fell flat on the ground many times. We ultimately took off our shoes and folded up our trousers. The person carrying the medicine box remained steady though and not once did he fall. Ultimately we reached the embankment, completely soaked and muddy, and rested for a while. The compounder was panting for breath.

After resting for some time, we started walking again, along the embankment, till we reached the spot where the Ganges had engulfed part of the embankment and the river water was gushing along in full tide. What a sight it was! The man carrying the medicine box, put it down, and left for Bhatkhand. Flood waters were all around us. What was once a mango grove, now looked like a large lake. Beyond, we could see the Khajraitha zamindar's house, our final destination, but how were we to reach there?

There was no boat in sight, and finding no other alternative, I decided to swim across to the house. The compounder did not know how to swim, and was already under severe strain. We decided that for the time being, he would stay back with

the box and we would find a solution later. I removed my trousers, tied them on my head and started swimming. Only the heads of mango trees could be seen, and they were now the resting places of insects, lizards and snakes. I continued swimming. Snakes swam past me. Ultimately, I reached the other end of this watery expanse and close to the residence of zamindar Cheddi Roy. I put on my trousers and approached the white building. The zamindar and his entire family greeted me and assured me that the compounder and the medicine box would soon be brought safely.

I was told that once upon a time, the zamindar's ancestors owned elephants and horses and later jeeps, tractors and boats, but all that was a thing of the past and now, whatever valuables they had were stored away at a safe distance. There was a temple annexe adjacent to the house with a resident priest. I was allotted a room in this annexe and the compounder was next door.

After settling down, I concentrated on the work for which I had come here. The medicine box was found to contain adequate amounts of medicines and equipment. A schedule was drawn up – in the mornings, I would attend to patients on the embankment; the second site would be the area around Cheddi Bhavan where people from adjoining villages could come to seek medical help.

Things ran smoothly initially, but slowly villagers from the embankment started coming to the house at odd hours all through the day and night. The pressure became so intense, that I hardly had the time to take my meals. I did not mind, considering their helplessness. In fact I was happy to get the opportunity to treat

such a range of conditions singlehandedly, gaining a lot of experience.

The common conditions were diarrhoea, febrile conditions including influenza, skin conditions, conjunctivitis, scorpion bites, snake bites, drowning, tuberculosis etc. Most of the conditions could be managed by the medicines we had; at times however, I would procure specific life-saving drugs by special indent.

I used to attend to calls at night sometimes remaining with a patient the entire night if required. Patients developed faith in my treatment in that short time period and many villagers asked me to stay on permanently. The zamindar arranged food for me, which was a blessing as most shops were closed and food supplies were running out. The zamindar refused to take money from me. I got along well with the priest too – a knowledgeable man. The compounder settled down too.

Slowly the flood waters receded. I was there for four months from September till December 1956, following which I returned to Calcutta. I received a total of Rs 1500. Even to this day, when I recall those months, I am pleased I took such an off-beat career decision – Epidemic Medical Officer. I am filled with gratitude for the hospitality shown by the zamindars of Bhatkhand and Khajraitha, and for the opportunity to be able to treat such a large number of patients. The smiles on the

patients faces after getting cured and the little bit of monetary support that I could give my family are precious memories.

However, there was a bitter aftertaste. A few days later I received a letter from Mr Cheddi Roy. Apparently, at the dead of night, their whole house had been swallowed up by the Ganga! I couldn't believe what I was reading. A beautiful, sturdy, large, brick and mortar house. I realised how helpless we humans are against the power of nature.

During my stay people kept talking about how it was written in the stars that the Ganga would one day immerse the whole building. It baffled me for a long time – was it just a co-incidence or some inexplicable force? Later, reading about floods in Bihar I surmised that there was logic to the predictions – even ancient Sanskrit texts talk about Bihar's devastating floods and its rivers that are notorious for shifting their course. Chanakya Neeti pities a person who has his house located on a river bank. The Naradiya Purana advises people against residing on the river bank.

In the letter, the zamindar had requested me to send him a copy of any photograph of the house that I might have taken. I quickly developed my film rolls and there was indeed one. But there was no forwarding address. Where do I send him a memory of his home when there was no home to send it to?