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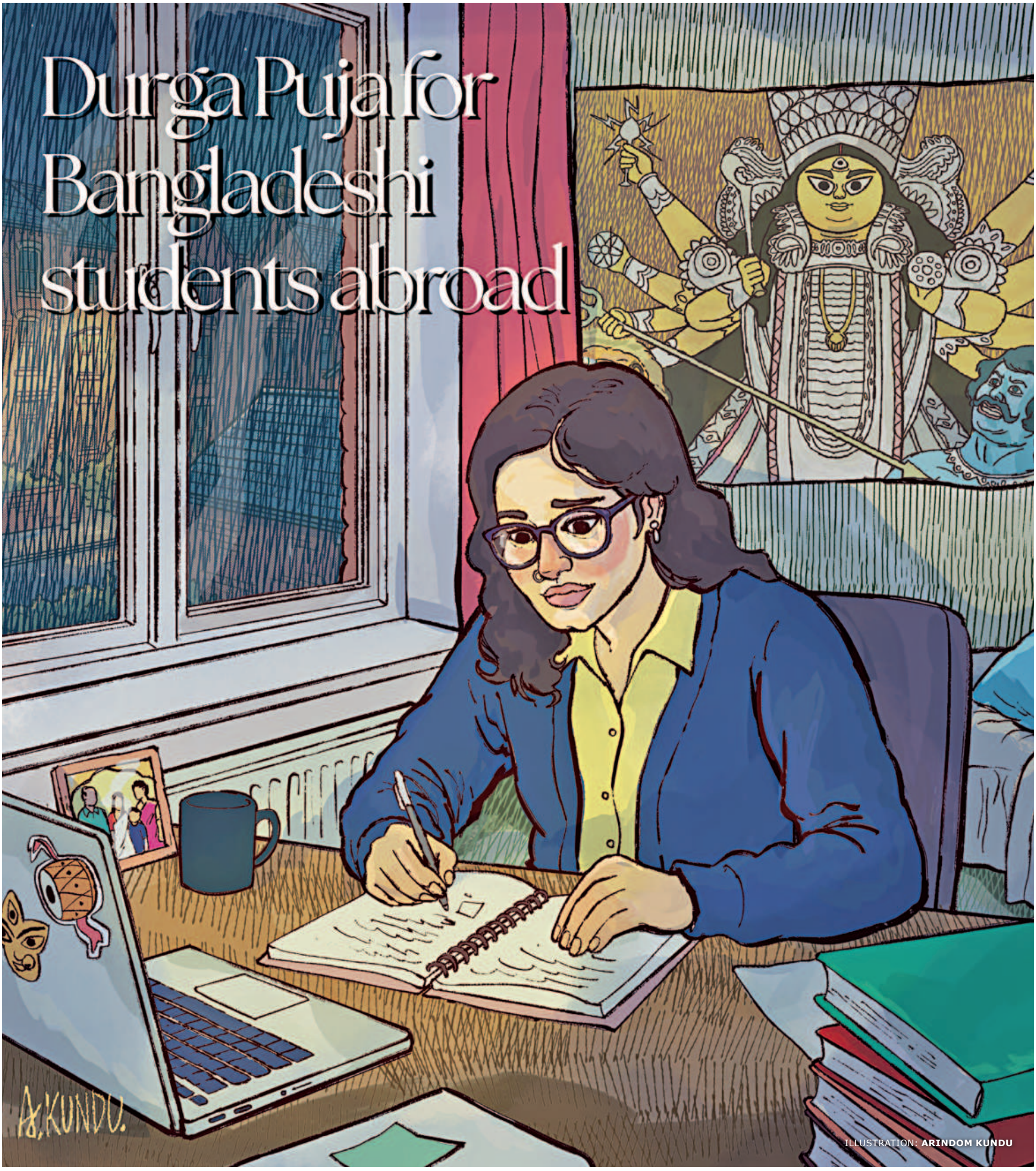
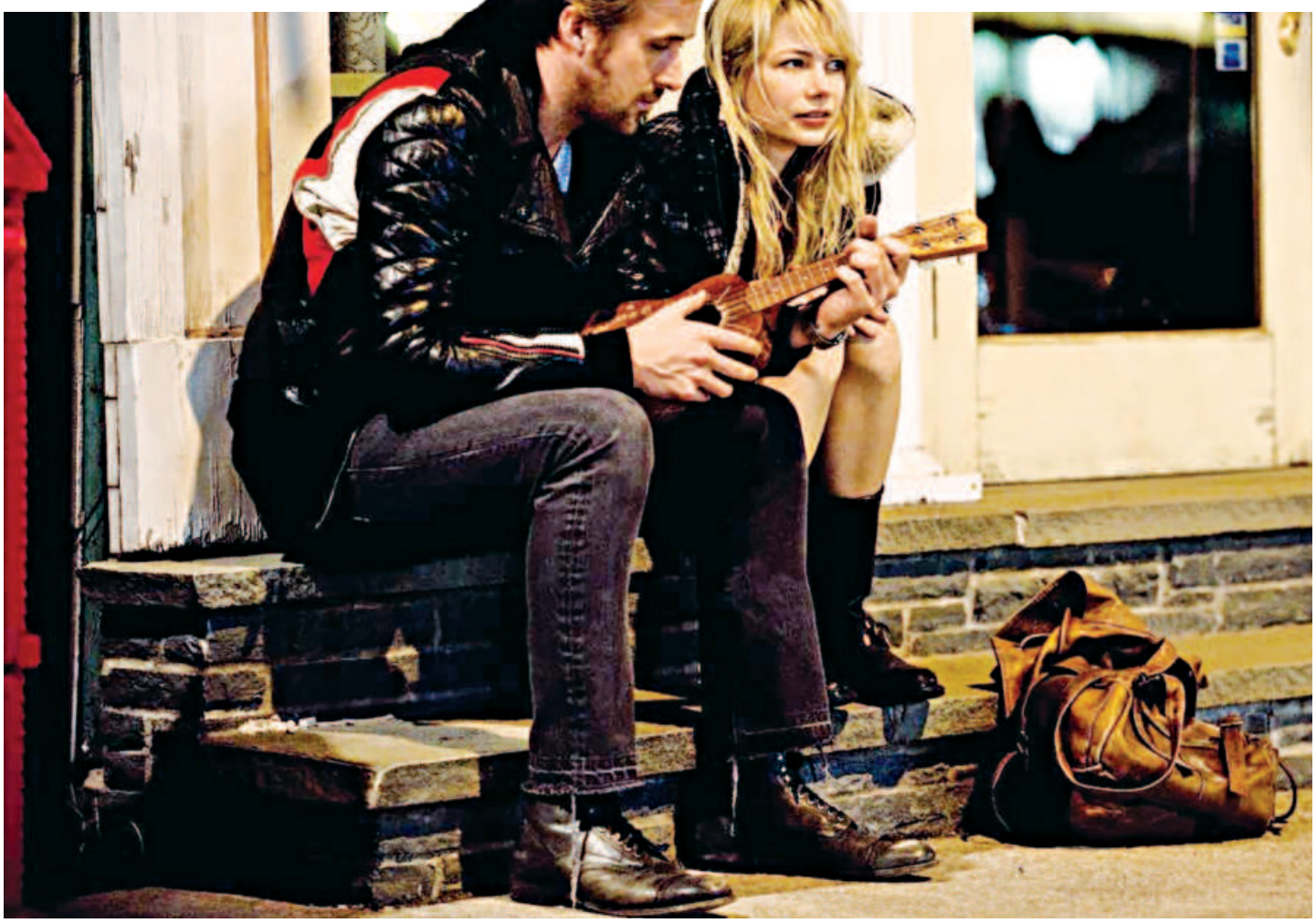


ILLUSTRATION: **ARINDOM KUNDU**



MOVIES

Blue Valentine still stings in your 20s

SHARAR CHOWDHURY

**This review contains spoilers for the movie*

I keep coming back to one thing about *Blue Valentine*, which is how it shows you the right person at the right time, then shows you those same two people turn into the wrong ones. It never lets you decipher where the switch happened.

The film cuts between the two timelines on purpose. One minute, Dean and Cindy are walking the streets at night, half-strangers convinced they have found the one. The next, they have been married for six years and cannot stand to share a room. Putting the falling-in-love next to the falling-apart is why the film hurts the way it does.

The romance is real. The nighttime wandering, Dean playing ukulele on the pavement while Cindy taps her feet in a shop doorway: none of it is ironic. You believe them – which is the trap – because underneath all that tenderness, the film is showing you two people in their 20s rushing into a marriage without ever asking the boring questions. What do you actually want? Where do you see yourself in 10 years? Cindy is pregnant, scared, and on her own. Dean shows up and chooses her completely. He marries her, raises the baby as his own, and asks for nothing back. It is the most generous thing in the film. It is also the decision that quietly dooms them.

Being chosen at your lowest is not the same as being right for each other once you have climbed back up. Cindy was training to be a doctor. Dean is content painting houses and indulging in his vices. He says, more or less, that being a husband and a father is dream enough for him. Maybe he means it. But Cindy ends up married to a man whose ambitions she never actually knew, because when they met, all she could see was someone who wanted her and the baby. She did not fall for his future, as there was not one to fall for.

There's a Jeff Buckley song, "Lover, You Should've Come Over", that names her exact bind: the feeling of being too young to stay put and far too old to break free and start again. That is Cindy by the end. She is suffocating, but there is a child now, and she grew up watching her own parents stay locked in a cold, loveless marriage. She knows what that does to the kid caught in the middle. So, she takes the harder stance and lets go, not out of cruelty, but because she refuses to hand her daughter the same childhood.

Here is what I really cannot resolve: who is the bad guy? Cindy, for leaving a man who was good to her when she had nobody? Or Dean, who refuses to grow past his resentment, takes offence at every word, and treats her ambition like an attack until she cannot breathe? I have gone back and forth, and I do not think the film wants me to land anywhere. There is no villain, but rather, there are two people who made an enormous decision on the back of one tender, desperate night and woke up years later as strangers.

That is why it still feels honest at 20-something. We are sold the idea that loving someone hard enough is supposed to be enough. *Blue Valentine* says outgrowing someone is real, even someone kind, even someone you once meant it with. The decent thing to do in that situation is to say so out loud, to talk about who you are becoming, instead of clinging to who you used to be for each other.

It is complicated, the way real relationships are complicated. No bad guy. Just bad timing, a few bad decisions, and the plain fact that people grow in different directions. The film does not try to comfort you about that; it refuses to pretend otherwise. At this age, that honesty is worth more than reassurance.

Sharar Chowdhury is learning how to be a manager and believes "I'm confused" is not a complete sentence. Send him emails at: sharar672@gmail.com

OPPORTUNITIES

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GLENRICH: INVESTING IN THE TEACHERS WHO SHAPE TOMORROW'S LEADERS

HOW CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT STRENGTHENS THE LEARNING EXPERIENCE FOR EVERY STUDENT

A school can invest in a strong curriculum, technology and learning resources, but much of a child's experience ultimately comes down to the teacher. Beyond textbooks, teachers shape how students think, respond to challenges and engage with the world. A school that wants to nurture independent thinkers and future leaders needs teachers who are prepared to keep learning.

At Glenrich International Schools, professional development is a sustained investment in the people who shape students' everyday experiences. The school conducts a minimum of 20 professional development sessions each year, with 100% teacher participation. Glenrich says its investment in teacher training is the highest among schools in Bangladesh.

Building Cambridge expertise at every level
Cambridge training is a central pillar of this commitment. All Glenrich teachers are Cambridge Level 1 (Introductory) trained. Experienced educators joining from other reputed schools must complete the training within their first year, with the cost funded by Glenrich. The school also funds Level 2 (Extension) training for selected qualified teachers and Level 3 (Enrichment) training for selected teacher leaders. Glenrich says it has the highest number of Cambridge-trained teachers and continues to invest in developing this expertise.

Preparing teachers for the modern classroom
Professional learning extends beyond Cambridge. Through STS Academy, a subsidiary of STS Group like Glenrich, teachers receive training in 21st-century skills, communication, time and conflict management, and public speaking inspired by approaches such as Toastmasters. These skills help teachers communicate clearly and deliver lessons with confidence.

AI training explores how advanced tools can support teaching-related logistics, question-paper preparation and answer-script checking. Used thoughtfully, these tools can reduce administrative workload and allow teachers to focus more on teaching and supporting students. Interactive Flat Panels in every classroom further equip teachers to deliver engaging lessons.

A culture of continuous learning
Sessions led by school leaders and experienced Section Heads encourage knowledge-sharing and reflection on classroom practices. Other programmes cover work-life balance, stress management, academic-year preparation, Montessori methods, Jolly Phonics, Classroom Essentials and Bloom's Taxonomy. Training in inclusive education, child protection and safeguarding helps teachers respond to students' different abilities and needs.

Glenrich educators also participate in Cambridge-facilitated and Cambridge International subject-specific training, Cambridge Learning Lounge sessions, and the Cambridge Principals' Meet, broadening their perspectives through professional exchange.

When teachers grow, students benefit
Professional development matters most when it translates into better learning experiences. Teachers who continue to build their knowledge and refine their practice are better equipped to recognise individual strengths, nurture curiosity and help students move beyond memorisation towards analysis, evaluation and creativity.

At Glenrich, investing in teachers is ultimately an investment in learners who are better prepared to question, explore, adapt and lead.





COVER STORY

DURGA PUJA for Bangladeshi students abroad

HRISHIK ROY

As the riverbanks around the country are increasingly adorned with the blinding white hue of the *kash-phool*, the Hindu community prepares for the annual Durga Puja – the largest celebration of ethnically Bangalee Hindus on both sides of the border. It is a time which for many symbolises the community aspect of the social group — from families coming together to listen to the recital of Chandipath on the auspicious morning of the Mahalaya to shopping for one's friends and family. However, for students who have moved away from Bangladesh, it can be a difficult time as they not only struggle to adjust to their new lifestyles but also navigate feelings of homesickness while missing out on the celebrations back home.

Durga Puja, for them, does not feel the same without the shared anticipation with their loved ones. "The Bangladeshi Hindu community has a separate spark in the days leading up to the festivities," said Atoshi Golder, a second-year undergraduate student at Rhodes College. Recalling experiences from her childhood, she said that the entire calendar in a Bangladeshi Hindu household is orientated around Durga Puja – an aspect of celebration she misses being in the air every October. Despite her homesickness during the period, Atoshi feels lucky to be able to go to a Durga Puja hosted by the Bangladeshi Hindu community nearby. However, many do not share a fate similar to hers.

Nabonita Paul, a third-year undergraduate student at The University of Sheffield, shared how Durga Puja is not something that is often at the back of her mind these days. "Sometimes I will just forget that it is Durga Puja, and I will only realise it when I talk to my parents back home," she shared. The lack of a Bangalee Hindu temple in Sheffield means that she misses out on any and all festivities surrounding Durga Puja.

"While there is a lot that happens on campus during Diwali, I cannot really say the same thing about Durga Puja." When asked if she thinks that Diwali might be able to make up for some of the missed aspects of Durga Puja, she said, "Nothing really replaces Durga Puja for me because I miss dressing up for it, the food that my mother would make, and just being able to invite my friends to our house." For her, celebrating Durga Puja now boils down to just going out and getting a meal with her friends, and that too, if she actually remembers that it is the day of the puja.

Even for those who have a Durga Puja celebration near them, the idea of going to a puja pandal can be daunting because of their unfamiliarity with the community. Aritra Saha, an undergraduate student at the University of British Columbia, shared that he was hesitant to go out for the festivities last year because he didn't know anyone involved with the Bangalee community in Vancouver. "I am researching my options this year," he said. Speaking about his experience last year, he said that he attended his school's Diwali festivities to compensate for the fact that he was unable to celebrate Durga Puja.

Unlike Nabonita, however, Aritra feels that it is plausible that Diwali can make up for some of the missed festivities during Durga Puja. Shedding light on his brother's experience – who lives in a part of Canada where there aren't many Bangalee Hindus – Aritra said that his brother celebrates Diwali and Navratri with his friends. The former is a festival that is also dedicated to the Goddess Durga, which coincides with the festivities of Durga Puja.

"My brother now engages in Gujarati festivities such as going to a 'Garba Night' with his friends during Navratri because all his friends are from that part of South Asia," he shared.

Reflecting on this, he stated that people seek out that festive essence from other celebrations such as Diwali or Navratri when their own festivities are not available. On the other hand, Shawhardo Shopan Singha, a first-year student at the University of New South Wales, is attempting to convince the Hindu student groups on campus to celebrate Durga Puja in a more active fashion. "I believe that if many people can show up for Garba – a predominantly Gujarati tradition, as a part of Navratri celebrations – there has to be interest in celebrating Durga Puja amongst non-Bangalee Hindus too," he commented.

While some do have a community of people to celebrate Durga Puja with while abroad, several core aspects of the celebration might feel imperfect to them. According to Shawhardo, the pujas which happen in Sydney often happen over a span of two days or a weekend. "It just feels wrong to be celebrating Durga Puja on the wrong day, especially when it is constrained within two days," he shared. He further added that this is the only feasible option for many members of the community given that Durga Puja is not a public holiday in Australia. Similarly, students studying abroad often do not take holidays for religious observation, even if they are allowed to take a break.

The difficulty of having to catch up with academics and other extracurricular commitments means that religious or cultural commitments often have to take a backseat. "My engineering degree is extremely intensive, and I am often attending lectures for very long periods of time, so taking a day off means that I have to miss out on material which is difficult for me to later catch up on," said Nabonita. "I literally had a midterm exam during the puja last year, so taking a day off was not an option for me at all," noted Aritra.



Durga Puja Mandap in East London in 2025 PHOTO: **DIPITA SAHA SHWETA**

The students pursuing their education and other career opportunities abroad often have to give up on important aspects of their culture as a trade-off. As such, the feeling of alienation can feel more pronounced when you are so removed from the festivities.

Sharing her melancholy surrounding the issue, Atoshi remarked, "I honestly do not have a strong desire for any holidays during any other time of the year, but I really wish that I could get time off during that period and visit Bangladesh." She further shared how she sometimes thinks about the implications of permanently settling in a country that is not her own and how she pensively wonders if she'll ever even be able to go back to celebrate it in a proper manner.

It is rather ironic that, while Durga Puja is celebrated as homecoming for the Mother Goddess as she returns from her husband's abode to unite with her family, it is that one time of the year that Bangladeshi students cannot afford to return home, given that it often overlaps with the midterm examination season of the academic term. As one learns to adapt to these social changes around them when studying abroad, there is still a part of them that clings to aspects of their culture and traditions. While one might tweak or shed some aspects of the culture, they still try to retain the core essence, whether through participation in Diwali festivities for a sense of belonging or just celebrating through a meal with their friends.

Hrishik Roy is a former intern at The Daily Star. Reach out to him at hrishik.roy.27@dartmouth.edu.



PHOTOS: **COURTESY**

INTERVIEWS

DU STUDENT AMIO PAUL ON CARRYING FORWARD A 150-YEAR-OLD LEGACY OF IDOL-MAKING

AZRA HUMAYRA

On the occasion of Durga Puja, we must acknowledge the artisans behind the idols we see in mandaps. Campus spoke with Amio Paul, a student of the 33rd batch of the Department of Oriental Art at the Faculty of Fine Art, Dhaka University (DU), who, along with his family, has been involved in this craft for approximately 150 years. Generation after generation, his family has continued to make idols with pride.

Campus (C): You grew up in a family that has made idols for generations. What is your earliest memory of watching your father or grandfather make an idol, and when did you first feel you wanted to learn this craft too?

Amio Paul (A): There is always some work going on at my home or workshop, so the whole working period becomes a collection of small memories. We do the work with great joy.

As a child, I especially enjoyed the time of painting Durga idols with my father, Achinto Paul. I have felt a special fondness for art since childhood, and because work is always going on at home, I have been watching and learning since I was little.

C: What have you learnt from your father and grandfather about making idols that cannot be learnt from books or at art school?

A: The biggest lesson I received from my father is that making an idol is not just art; it is work that involves feeling, faith, and patience. I learnt how to understand clay, how to work by judging its quality and moisture, and how to bring life to an idol's facial expression.

Above all, I learnt from my father how to work in the traditional method. At art school or the Faculty of Fine Arts, the entire process of making a sculpture follows academic rules, and every measurement is taken precisely. The traditional method, however, I learnt from my father.

C: How has formal art education as a student of Oriental Art at DU influenced your idol-making? And how has your experience as an idol-maker helped you see what you learn in the classroom?

A: Formal art education has made my idol-making far more conscious and refined. The ideas I gained there about drawing, form, proportion, colour, composition, aesthetics, and art history are useful when I make idols.

Earlier, I perhaps relied more on experience and family teaching, but formal education has given me a new way of analysing my own work.

At the same time, my long practical experience as an idol-maker has helped me understand classroom lessons differently. The theories of proportion, form, and balance taught in books and classes, I see applied in practice right before my eyes as I make idols.

So, theoretical knowledge and practical experience have complemented each other. For me, the union of formal art education and the idol-making education I received from my family has enriched my art practice the most.

C: What does making an idol mean to you: simply creating a work of art, or something more?

A: For me, making an idol is not just creating a work of art. It carries a deep connection with tradition, emotion, and people. When I make an idol, I do not merely shape a form out of clay. I try to express the form of a goddess and people's feelings of faith and devotion.

This work has been done in our family for generations, so for me, idol-making is at once an art, a family heritage, and a responsibility. When an idol is installed in a puja pandal, and people pray before it with devotion and reverence, my work as an artist takes on a different meaning. Being part of that faith and joy is the greatest reward for me.

So, I believe idol-making is not just creating a beautiful form from clay, straw, colour, and ornaments; it holds a culture, a tradition, and people's feelings.

C: You are part of a young generation joining a craft that has been passed down through families for generations. What changes have you seen in idol-making compared to your father's and grandfather's time?

A: Quite a few changes have come to idol-making compared with my father's and grandfather's time. Earlier, the work depended largely on conventional methods and family experience. From collecting materials like clay, straw, and bamboo to the idol's structure, ornaments, and colours, everything was done mostly by hand, drawing on long experience.

Today, new kinds of designs, colours, and decoration are being used more. The demands of buyers and puja organisers have changed too, so alongside traditional styles, modern design and creativity are gaining importance. Because of social media and technology, it is easy to learn about idol work from different parts of the country, which has created opportunities to work with new ideas and designs.

Even amid so much change, we try to hold on to our core tradition and our family's technical knowledge. What matters most to me is that, while keeping pace with modernity, this traditional art form should not be lost. Rather, I hope it becomes richer through the new generation and moves forward.

C: Do you feel interest in learning traditional crafts like idol-making is declining among young people today? If so, what do you think could be lost if this knowledge and skill are not passed on to the next generation?

A: I feel that interest in learning this traditional art is declining somewhat among young people. If this chain breaks, it is not only the techniques of idol-making that could be lost, but also our family heritage, technical knowledge, and generational experience. That is why it is important to get the new generation involved in this art.



Amio Paul

C: Do you want to continue idol-making professionally in the future and carry your family's heritage forward? What do you want to preserve in your work, what do you want to change, and what do you want to add anew?

A: Yes, I want to continue idol-making professionally in the future and pass our family's heritage on to the next generation. I want to preserve the traditional methods of construction and the technical skills we have received from our forebears. At the same time, I want to bring some changes in design, materials, and technology to keep pace with the times. By adding modern artistic thinking and creativity, I will try to make idols more aesthetic and diverse.

I dream that one day our art will spread beyond the country. I dream of exhibiting my work internationally.

Azra Humayra is a sub-editor at Campus, Rising Stars, and Star Youth.

Advertisement

Building Bridges, Shaping Futures:

Scott McDonald on UK–Bangladesh Relations



Scott McDonald, Chief Executive
British Council

Q1. This is your first visit to Bangladesh. To begin with, if you could share your reflection from this trip- who have you met and what has struck you the most?

Answer: It has been invaluable to witness a seven-decade long relationship. I've met government and education leaders, school teachers, children and leaders, young entrepreneurs, cultural partners and our own British Council team.

One of the highlights of my trip was an evening in Dhaka where we met alumni of British Council programmes and grant recipients. The results of their work were incredible, including a new genetic counselling organization focused on cancer treatment, sustainable architectural designs, several entrepreneurial businesses focused on the craft sector and new apps designed to help with employment.

Q2. How do you see the UK-Bangladesh relationship evolving, and where does the British Council fit in?

Answer: Our focus is building a modern, mutually beneficial partnership. Bangladesh is increasingly looking outward academically, and the UK has strong institutions, expertise, and networks to offer. We aim to bridge that connection, moving towards sustained partnerships across education, English, and the arts.

Designing programmes that work at scale for Bangladesh's population might be our greatest challenge. I want the British Council to leverage all our experience to tackle it.

Q3. As you have already seen, Bangladesh is pursuing a significant reform in education. How, in your opinion, can the UK and the British Council support this?

Answer: Rather than prescribing solutions, our role is to listen and identify where UK expertise and partnerships can add value, like quality assurance, teacher and institutional development.

Our work already ranges from the 'Teacher Needs Analysis' to higher education leadership programmes with Advance Higher Education, supporting faculty and university leadership.

Visiting a school in Rajshahi gave me a firsthand look at this impact. The students spoke impressive English, and even playfully teased me about my broken Bangla!

Q4. How can access to English be widened, and what role will digital learning and AI play?

Answer: We need to think beyond reaching individuals and empower teachers, institutions and partners that can reach many more, including outside major cities. Digital learning can help extend that reach, and AI creates further possibilities for personalised practice, feedback and support. But we should be thoughtful about it. AI should support good teaching, not replace teachers, and questions around quality, bias, privacy and unequal access need to be taken seriously.

Q5. Higher education partnerships are often equated with student mobility. What does a deeper relationship look like in this context?

Answer: While student mobility remains vital, international education extends far beyond studying abroad. A deeper UK-Bangladesh relationship involves universities collaborating on teaching, research, faculty development, and knowledge exchange, including transnational education models that deliver global benefits without requiring travel. Crucially, this is a two-way relationship: UK institutions gain equally from Bangladeshi talent and perspectives. Our leadership and faculty work with Advance Higher Education illustrates how such collaboration strengthens institutions far beyond the individuals directly involved.

Q6. How is the British Council working with young people on digital citizenship and resilience to misinformation?

Answer: Digital citizenship is an essential life skill, especially as AI reshapes how information is created and shared. Our role is to build critical thinking, verification skills, and safe online habits. Through our Youth Connect: Digital Citizenship and Misinformation Resilience project at Rajshahi University, students are not only gaining these skills but passing them on to their families and communities. However, parents, teachers, schools, and institutions must work together to guide the young learners.



Q7. What role do arts, culture and heritage play in strengthening UK-Bangladesh connections?

Answer: Culture creates integral connections, giving people space to tell their stories, understand each other and build trust. Bangladesh has an extraordinarily rich cultural heritage and a dynamic creative community.

In Rajshahi, I witnessed this dynamic culture at the historic Varendra Research Museum and during a performance at the Rajshahi Shilpakala Academy, supported by the 'Women of the World' grants programme.

Varendra Research Museum's partnership with Durham University through the British Council's Cultural Protection Fund shows how cultural exchange can also strengthen professional expertise and institutions. During my visit, we also signed an MoU with the Bangladesh National Museum to boost cultural cooperation.

Q8. What does the future of the British Council's relationship with Bangladesh look like, and what one message would you leave the readers with?

Answer: I would like to see a Bangladesh-UK relationship that becomes deeper, broader and mutually beneficial. That means stronger connections between institutions; English and higher education collaborations; opportunities for young people; and continued exchange via arts and culture.

My message after this first visit is one of thanks and optimism. I was welcomed with open arms and am grateful to everyone who has shared their work, ideas and time with me.

REFLECTIONS

TO THE TEACHERS WHO BUILD US

AZRA HUMAYRA

In class 10, I was elected as the class president in my school. I remember this one instance when I was carrying a stack of homework copies to the teachers' lounge, and a teacher, whom I liked dearly, shot me a rather steely look and asked whether I really was the class president. I was 15, but that day I felt smaller than a speck of dust.

That was 10 years ago, but I remember the incident vividly.

This story definitely is a sore spot, but it would be criminal if I didn't write about the teachers who carry us, push us, and build us.

Like many of my peers, I developed an affinity for English when I was in primary school. But it wouldn't be fair if I didn't mention my English teacher, who instilled in me a love for the language and an appreciation for the effort that goes into every paragraph.

Then, in high school, I had my fair share of teachers who made me feel as though the world was my oyster and others who made me feel rather less so. But looking back, apart from that first incident, I remember only the good parts. The teachers I truly cherish were the ones who made learning fun, rather than berating us for not knowing how to spell a word we had never even heard of before.

University, however, was a real game changer. Through my own, rather humble experiences, I began to understand that there was so much more to teaching than pedagogy.

I remember being at university, losing my mind over Judith Butler's wonderfully complicated *Gender Trouble*. Late one night, I wrote a rather strange email to my professor about an equally bizarre question involving lipstick and gender performativity. To my surprise, my professor wrote back with a detailed response, explaining that, yes, conditioning is a significant part of what Butler describes as performance.

There are some teachers you come across only rarely. But when you do, they turn your world upside down. They listen to your academic ramblings and somehow make something coherent out of them. They are patient when you are impatient and can turn your half-formed thoughts into a research plan. These are the teachers who love teaching. Their love for the profession translates into the effort they put into their course outlines and, more importantly, into actually following them because they want to give their students as much as they possibly can.

Of course, I know that students and teachers are not always on the same page. But for those who are following the lecture, the effort is unmistakable. You can tell when a teacher has put their heart into the lesson.

My *nanabhai* and *dadabhai* were both teachers, so whenever I hear someone introduce themselves as their student, a rush of emotions washes over me. Because even when these teachers are no longer with us, the impact they leave on their students' lives makes their presence linger.

This is for the teachers who make teaching feel like something more than a profession. The teachers who are patient with their students and let them meander over lessons that have little to do with tests and assignments. The teachers who push their students towards their fullest potential, while understanding that not every student is walking towards the same destination. The teachers who make time, even when they have very little of it, because a student needs them.

It is incredibly difficult to be a teacher, especially in Bangladesh, given the conditions in which we expect our teachers to work. So, when someone manages to make it through that labyrinth of hurdles and still leave a positive mark on even one student's life, it warrants both love and respect.



ILLUSTRATION: **SABAA ALI HAFIZ**

STUDY ABROAD

CHOOSING AN ERASMUS MUNDUS PROGRAMME THAT FITS YOUR JOURNEY

WHAT I LEARNT WHILE APPLYING TO THE ERASMUS MUNDUS JOINT MASTER DEGREE IN PUBLIC HEALTH IN DISASTERS

ZARIN TASNIM MALIHA

For many students, the Erasmus Mundus programme first appears as a scholarship. It is, certainly, a prestigious scholarship, offering generous financial support, international mobility, and the opportunity to study across multiple universities and countries in Europe. For students from Bangladesh, that combination makes Erasmus Mundus one of the most attractive postgraduate opportunities in Europe.

However, when I began exploring Erasmus Mundus seriously, I realised that the scholarship and its benefits were only one part of the decision. The more difficult question was much more personal: which programme would actually make sense for the work I had already done and the direction I wanted my career to take? That question eventually led me to the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master Degree (EMJMD) in Public Health in Disasters (PHID).

My professional journey had already moved through several different settings by then. I started my career in 2020 after completing my MBBS internship, first working in clinical research with icddr,b in Dinajpur. From there, I moved to Save the Children in Rangpur and later to Cox's Bazar with RTM International, where I became involved in humanitarian public health programmes with Rohingya refugees and host communities.

Each role added something different. Clinical research introduced me to the importance of evidence in my work. Field-level responsibilities showed me how difficult it can be to translate plans into services that actually reach people. Humanitarian work pushed me to think beyond individual treatment and towards health systems, preparedness, coordination, and vulnerability.

The shift in perspective was gradual. Medicine had trained me to focus on the patient in front of me. Public health taught me to look at populations. Humanitarian work made me pay attention to everything that connects the two.

In a crisis setting, health is never only about diagnosis and treatment. A single programme may have to think about referral systems, maternal and reproductive health, mental health, disease surveillance, community engagement, protection, logistics, coordination, and emergency response at the same time. Working in that environment left me with questions that became increasingly difficult to ignore.

What makes a health system resilient? How prepared should it be before a crisis occurs? Why do some populations become more vulnerable than others? How can evidence improve decisions when circumstances are changing quickly?

Those were the questions that eventually made this programme feel less like "another master's degree" and more like the next academic step I genuinely needed.

The EMJMD PHID is a two-year programme delivered across the University of Oviedo in Spain, Karolinska Institute in Sweden, and the University of Nicosia in Cyprus. It brings together public health, disaster preparedness and response, epidemiology, research, and health systems. The programme's mobility structure is one of the things that drew me to it, but the appeal of that structure is not simply the chance to live in different countries.

Public health is deeply contextual; a solution that works well in one country may fail in another because the health system, resources, policy environment, or population needs are different. Studying across different institutions allows students to see those contrasts directly rather than only reading about them. That was especially relevant to me because my professional experience had already taught me how much context matters.



PHOTO: **COURTESY**

The application, however, required a different kind of approach.

By the time I was applying, I had a medical degree, research experience, and several years of professional work in different roles. At first, that seemed like an advantage. Then, I realised that having a broad range of experiences can create another problem: an application can easily become a collection of unrelated achievements.

The challenge, therefore, was deciding what not to include.

I had worked in research, programme implementation, humanitarian response, management, and leadership roles. If I simply listed everything, the application might have looked impressive on paper but not necessarily coherent. So, I went back and looked for the connection between those experiences.

Clinical research had introduced me to evidence. Programme work had shown me the realities of implementation. Humanitarian work had exposed me to health systems under pressure. Leadership had given me a broader understanding of how programmes, teams, and systems are managed.

Once I could see that progression myself, writing the application became much easier. This was also important for the motivation statement.

A CV can tell a selection committee where you studied, where you worked, and what responsibilities you had. The motivation statement has to do something different: it has to explain what those experiences meant.

For example, my work in Cox's Bazar demonstrated my experience in humanitarian public health. But that fact alone did not explain why PHID was the right programme for me. The stronger argument was explaining what the experience had taught me and what questions it had created around preparedness, health-system resilience, coordination, vulnerable populations, and crisis response.

While preparing my application, I kept returning to three questions: What brought me here? Why do I need this programme now? Where do I want it to take me next? Answering these helped me decide what to include in both my CV and motivation statement.

This approach, I think, is particularly important for applicants with several years of professional experience. There is often a temptation to include every certificate, workshop, conference, and training. But a longer CV is not automatically a stronger one. Relevance matters more than volume. After all, the purpose is not to prove that you have done many things. It is to make the direction of your journey understandable.

This also means there is no single ideal profile for the PHID programme. A doctor may arrive through emergency medicine, community health, epidemiology, humanitarian work, or research work. Someone from another background may come through disaster management, policy, health systems, or social sciences. The important question is not whether your background looks like someone else's. It is whether you can explain what perspective you bring to public health in disasters and why the programme is relevant to where you want to go next.

Applicants should also start early. Gathering academic documents and references, and fulfilling language requirements, can take time. The motivation statement, especially, requires more reflection than you would expect at first.

Erasmus Mundus is highly competitive, and the scholarship is undoubtedly a major part of its appeal. The financial support and international exposure can open doors that would otherwise be difficult to access. But I still think the scholarship should come after the programme. For anyone considering applying to the Erasmus Mundus this year, perhaps that is the most useful place to start: understand the programme you want to apply to, but also take the time to understand your own trajectory. Know what has shaped you, what you still need to learn, and where you want to eventually go. Then, find the programme that makes those pieces come together. That is where the strongest application begins. And if you are invited to an interview, know your own application well enough to discuss it naturally rather than relying on memorised answers.

In the end, it was not the individual milestones that defined my application, but the thread that quietly connected them into a direction I was finally able to see clearly.

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