

## A brief report on Diversity Festival – Calcutta 23 in November 2019

Concept Note of the Diversity Festival:

"Mujhmein Geeta ka saar bhi hai, ek urdu ka akhbaar bhi hai Mera ek mahina Ramzan bhi hai, maine kiya toh Ganga snaan bhi hai"

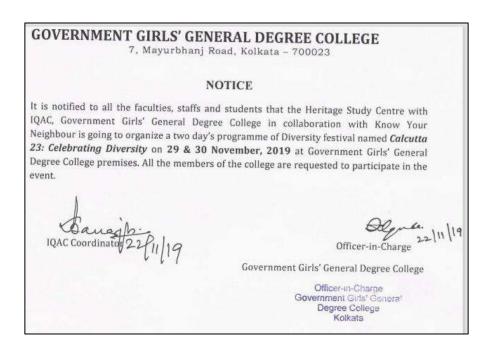
These lines from Hussain Haidry's celebrated poem 'Hindustani Musalmaan' (2017) aptly describe the cosmopolitan nature of the main port area of the city of Kolkata – Kidderpore. Kidderpore area (comprising of Kidderpore, Mominpore and Ekbalpore) is not only noted for its chequered past but is still holding on to its pluralistic present. Amusingly enough, the multiplicity of Kidderpore is often mistaken to be a 'melting pot' where 'other' cultures have faded into oblivion to give way to a hegemonic, dominant Muslim culture. This assumption is might be statistically true but its ambience is multi-ethnic. In 'Ekbalpore: A Study in Contrast' Syeda Ayesha Ali pertinently describes the cosmopolitan vibe of the area: "Residents (here) wake up to the call for the morning prayers, *Fajr Azaan*, and if they are still in bed this is followed by the sound of Church bells to rouse them (*Strangely Beloved* 133)". The coexistence of English, Urdu, Oriya, Hindi, Bengali medium schools in the Kidderpore area bear out the point. Once a home to three of Bengal's most prominent poets, this area champions in polyphonic life styles. Therefore, Kidderpore area, like a 'salad bowl', continues to nourish *Masjids* and *Imambaras*, along with Temples and Churches.

While some parts of our history and culture enjoy prominence, some risk being lost in the sands of time. Despite being the main port area of the city of Kolkata, which results in Kidderpore being one of the oldest yet busiest areas of the city, the metanarrative of Kolkata's history have hardly included the potent mini narratives of the richly layered Kidderpore area. Thus, Kidderpore area remained as one of the lesser discussed and seldom visited places by the city's educated middle classes and elites. Time has come to reinvestigate this politics of representation, to unearth the cause of this exclusionary treatment, to interrogate whether Kidderpore area is really a Muslim 'ghetto' as portrayed in modern times by popular media or a proper amalgamation of everything that the city stands for.

The nature of the Diversity Festival organized by the Heritage study centre with IQAC of the college in November 2019 was in tune with its theme – *diverse*. Without restricting to a stereotypical, uniform, and formal structure, the celebration was split up into a number of micro activities which included neighbourhood walk, lectures on relevant issues by public figures, screen issue-based films, discussion on aspects of communal harmony during the day. Evenings, on both the days, would be replete with cultural programmes. Food kiosks comprising of local delicacies. These were expected to enhance knowledge about intangible cultural heritage of the area. Art installations would preach messages of peace and harmony. Most importantly, the festival bought the artists, activists, teachers, students from different colleges, communities, school children, career counsellors, documentary film makers, etc under a rainbow umbrella.

The festival was held on 29th and 30th November, 2019 at Government Girls' General Degree College, Ekbalpore, a newly established government college in **Mominpore.** Majority of the students as well as all the casual staff members belong to Kidderpore area. Since teaching and non-teaching members of the college, inhabiting from different parts of the State, are interacting with them on a daily basis, they have come to acknowledge the immense socio-cultural potential of the area. Collaboration with 'Know Your Neighbour', (an organisation which has been established in 2016, the same year as this college) was directed to convey a message of communal harmony, peaceful co-existence through intercultural dialogues and thereby attempting to build bridges amongst people, particularly at this time of social unrest. This programme was a part of College's extension activity that gave the college an opportunity to establish a network with its neighbourhood. It provided the students with an awareness and knowledge of the rich local culture and history that mostly go unnoticed in the general humdrum of life. They enjoyed the privilege of listening to a 13<sup>th</sup> century Urdu oral story telling art form, *Dastangoi*, in Urdu and Bengali. They also got familiar with various job opportunities in the Career counselling sessions on both the days of the festival. Film shows and documentaries, on topics of contemporary relevance enhanced their sensibilities and raised awareness on pertinent topics which guided them towards a better understanding of the social situation that surrounds them. The festival offered the students an enviable platform to showcase their talents in different co-curricular and cultural activities like poster making, designing rangoli, skit and verse dance programmes. In short, through this Diversity Festival the students got an unique opportunity to experience a cultural environment (which they have never experienced before) and to map future avenues in their lives.











Key note address by the convenor, Dr. Antara Mukherjee



Wall Graffiti designed by the Mental Health Organization , Anjali



Poster drawing by children on 29th November 2019

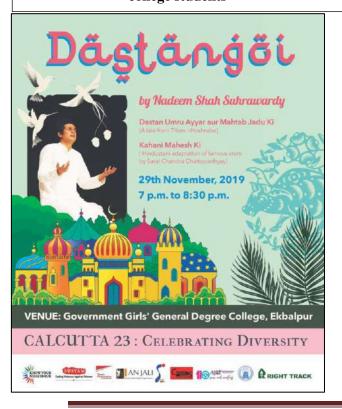


Judgement session of the poster competition held by the resource persons



Cultural performance on festival theme by our college

# Cultural Performance on festival theme by our college students



#### Cultural Performance by our college teachers

Cultural performance by our college teachers



Dastangoi presented by Nadeem Shah Suhrawardy

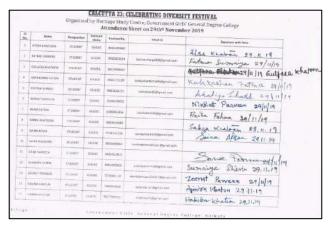


Certificate distributed to the participants by the Resource Person

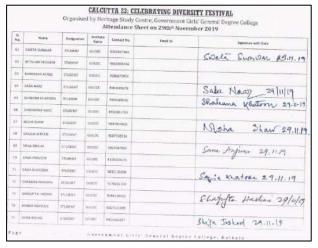


Participants, organizers and collaborators of the Grand Festival in November

#### Students Participation list in the Diversity Festival - 29th November 2019



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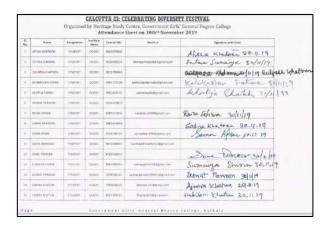


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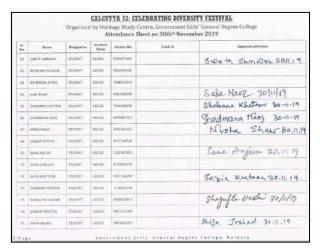
### Students Participation list in the Diversity Festival - 30<sup>th</sup> November 2019

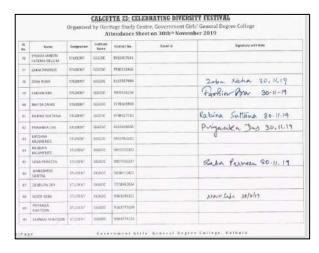


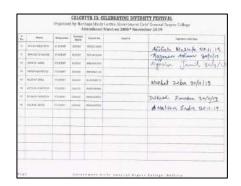
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Sample certificate issued at the event to the participants