

PANELIST

INTRODUCTIONS

Panel will be held on Saturday, 9/20 from 10AM-11:30AM in the Worship Room

I'm Raj Sutar. I was born in 1971 in Bomdila, a small town in Arunachal Pradesh's East Kameng district. I have 5 siblings and all of them were born in Arunachal. When I was two, we moved to Itanagar/Naharlagun — where I grew up playing with friends, swimming in local rivers, and letting nature be my playground. I often walked miles through the forest to collect firewood — because that's how we cooked. There were countless picnics on riverbanks with family and friends, cooking meat and rice inside bamboo. I attended KV School in Naharlagun and graduated from Itanagar High School in 1989. Then I went to engineering college in Bangalore and started my career there. In 2001, I married Rekha from Biswanath Chariali, Assam — my wife, my best friend, and the only person who truly knows that good Northeast food is my greatest weakness.



We've been in the USA for over 24 years, moving from Milwaukee to Columbus in 2015. Our daughter Anishka is at the University of Cincinnati, and our son Kiaan is a high school freshman. Life has taken me far from Arunachal, but the rivers, friends, and flavors of my childhood are still with me — and always will be.



Chandan K. Mahanta is a retired architect based in St. Louis, Missouri. Originally from Namti, Assam, he studied at Namti High School, Don Bosco High School in Guwahati, and Cotton College before earning his degree in architecture from IIT Kharagpur in 1968. He emigrated to the United States in 1970.

Mahanta is married to Dr. Banti (née Bharali) of Guwahati. They have two children—a son and a daughter—and four grandchildren. Following his retirement from architectural practice, he has devoted himself full-time to his many interests, including watercolor painting, photography, gardening, native plant landscaping, and beekeeping.

I, Jerina Ngangnom, am from Manipur, a jewel of India's northeast often called the "Switzerland of the East." Nestled in lush green valleys and surrounded by blue hills, Manipur is a land where nature and tradition exist in perfect harmony. It is the birthplace of Polo, home to the mesmerizing Loktak Lake with its floating islands (phumdis), and alive with the grace of the Ras Leela, dances that tell timeless stories of devotion. Growing up in this culturally rich and beautiful land shaped my values of resilience, creativity, and grace.

I completed my schooling in Manipur before moving to Thriveni Academy, Tamil Nadu, for my 11th and 12th grades. Drawn to technology, I pursued Electrical and Electronics Engineering at the Government College of Technology, Coimbatore. After working in Hyderabad for a few years, I moved to California in 2003 to pursue my Master's in Computer Science at Northwestern Polytechnic University.

I worked as a Software Engineer at Disney Studios, but retired from the tech world when motherhood became my priority. My deep love for children naturally led me to my current profession as a preschool teacher in Scotts Valley, California, where I find immense joy nurturing and inspiring young minds. Outside of work, I am passionate about fitness, health, and cooking, and dream of opening my own restaurant one day.



Josephine Sawian Syiem (née Sawian) is an educator, former IAS officer, mother and grandmother. Josephine graduated from Guwahati University, St. Mary's College, Shillong, attaining first place in B.A. English Honors. After finishing her M.A. in English from Delhi University, Josephine returned to Shillong and taught English for several years at St. Mary's College. She completed her B. Ed. from North Eastern Hill University, with Distinction and a gold medal. Josephine changed careers to become the first Khasi woman to join the IAS, general cadre. She worked in Assam, and in Jaintia Hills and East Khasi Hills, Meghalaya. Marriage and motherhood led Josephine to leave the IAS and devote herself to her children. She completed

her MBA from California Polytechnic University, and returned to teaching in private school and college. Josephine has over 30 years of teaching experience and continues to teach college parttime. She enjoys teaching, reading, gardening, traveling, and spending time with her family.

Dr. Vanlalrinchhani Varte, a native of Mizoram, India, is a neuroscientist currently serving as an Adjunct Assistant Scientist in the Department of Biology at the University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida. Her research is characterized by its interdisciplinary nature, focusing on neurodegenerative disease, particularly Alzheimer's disease (AD), using Drosophilamodels. This approach has allowed her to bridge basic research with clinical applications, advancing translational neuroscience.



**Rozumari
Samsara**

graduated from Delhi University, The Hong Kong University of Science & Technology and later from Ruhr-Universität Bochum, Germany. She worked with several international organizations before studying physical theater at The Commedia School, Copenhagen. She was the first runner-up at the Copenhagen English Poetry Slam 2016, her poems have featured in Tokyo Poetry Journal, Outlook India's Poetry as Evidence, Zubaan Books and Ohio Bards Poetry Anthology. She is a performing artist

and the debut author of a poetry book memoriographia, she lives in Kent, Ohio. Email: rzuma2020@gmail.com

I am Mamta Somani born and raised in the former kingdom of Sikkim, in the eastern Himalayas. Bordering with Bhutan, China and Nepal making it culturally diverse. I attended school in Gangtok, capital of Sikkim. I still can't forget the beautiful Kanchenjunga peeping through the clouds every morning when I opened my windows gleaming when sunrays fell on it. Life used to be so simple back then. We used to walk 3 miles to school and used to be happy and appreciate every small gifts that my parents gave. Together with my 3 siblings during cold weather we used to tug each other tight in the nights and sleep. From the world's largest lakes, breathtaking views of snowcapped Himalayas steep valleys, glooming with flowers, Sikkim has everything that one longs for to have in nature along with that monasteries and beautiful shrines for all worshippers. I moved to USA in 2001 and currently residing in Fishers, Indiana with my husband, son & pet. I love doing meditation, volunteering for social cause, reading and listening on wisdom, cooking, yoga, Ayurveda, Interior Designing, hiking being with nature. Currently working as Program Delivery Lead, Operations, Humana along with that studying in Purdue university and residing Fishers, Indiana.



My name is Dr. Saikat Chakraborty, and I am originally from Agartala, Tripura. After completing my higher secondary education, I moved to Bangalore, where I earned my undergraduate and master's degrees in Agriculture and Microbiology. I then pursued my Ph.D. in Molecular Biology in Japan before moving to the United States in 2008. Over the years, I have worked as a Postdoctoral Researcher at institutions including Indiana University, Harvard Medical School, Stony Brook Medicine, and the Feinberg School of Medicine in Chicago. Currently, I serve as a Principal Research Scientist at Elanco in Indiana



An Apatani woman in Ziro, Arunachal Pradesh. Apatani women follow the custom of tattooing their faces and have followed the tradition of facial modification by plugging their noses with wood. Today's generation no longer wear these nose plugs, but this custom has been an integral part of its cultural history. (Photo by Tom Meitei -- Discover India's Northeast).