

Vol 5



April 2022

# BITACORA

LITERARY MAGAZINE

**BITACORA**  
**Literary Magazine**

*Living in Dystopia*

**Volume 5**  
**April 2022**

**Department of English**  
**Gargi College**  
**University of Delhi**

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### **Volume 5 Editorial Board**

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## *Foreword*

Bitacora, our English department magazine, is a Spanish word meaning a logbook kept by the captain of a ship. It is a dossier for recording daily events. The magazine is meant to be a record of our department's activities, achievements and aspirations. Yet, in the last two years, time seemed to have stood still. When life itself was so uncertain, and every day filled with apprehension, what was there to record, or celebrate? We have not in recent years gone through such anxious times. The young people have been perhaps hit the hardest. They have had to cope with major challenges faced in their studies, career and life in general. Disruption in education and economic opportunities, family stress, social isolation, and uncertainty about the future have had immense psychosocial impact on young people.

This year we have come up with a combined larger volume of the magazine which includes the writings by our past and present students. If last year the unprecedented grief had muted us, this year we would like to voice our resilience and hope. This year the Bitacora shall record our celebration, our joy, our stories of hope, courage, triumph and kindness towards one another, and most importantly, the spirit of oneness. Together we shall steer the ship and come out of the darkest storms.

*Dr. Sutapa Dutta*

*Convenor, 2022*

# BITACORA

## **LOG BOOK**

**(2019-2022)**

**4 September 2019**

**Book Session with Sharif D. Rangnekar**

The Literary Society of the English department, on the occasion of the anniversary week of the revocation of Section 377, organised a book discussion with Sharif D. Rangnekar, a former journalist and a prominent LGBTQ+ activist, on his book, *Straight to Normal*.

Published in 2018 immediately after the 377 verdict, the book is a memoir of the author's experiences as a gay man from childhood to adulthood in which he traces his life in Kolkata, Delhi and Mumbai. The discussion was led by Mr. Sameer Chopra, who began with a brief introduction and proceeded to ask questions regarding the novel and its theme. The author discussed taboos around mental health and illness, and his experience of coming out as a queer man as well as his association with Naz, a mental health foundation exclusively for the LGBTQ+ community. He mainly focused on the normalization of heterosexuality and how homosexuality was seen as a crime and disease while he was growing up. Although he acknowledged the relative increase in awareness about the same had come about in recent years, there is still a lot of progress to be made.

The event concluded with the student discussants from all three years asking questions about the novel, Albeena Alvi and Nashra Usmani from third year and Aparna from second year, namely. He answered all the questions by reflecting on patriarchal privilege within the LGBTQ+ community and revealing his aim behind writing this book. The event ended with a vote of thanks and a token of appreciation which was presented to him by the students and the professors alike.

By *Sambrita Roy*

2021

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**11 September 2019**

**Literary Society Elections**

The Department of English conducted elections for the Student Union of its Literary Society. On 8th September 2019, in an event called “The Big Fight”, the candidates were given 2 minutes each to put forth their agendas and try to convince the students of the English Department to vote for them.

The election was organised after a week-long paperless campaign by the candidates in which they went from classroom to classroom to explain their agendas. Varnika Mishra and Pridhi Chopra contested for the post of President, to which Varnika was elected. For Vice President, Parul Yadav won against Vaishnavi Dube and Samrah Shehzad. Tamanna was elected as the Secretary, Nishtha Maggu as the Book Club Coordinator, Sadhna Yadav and Aarti as the Media Coordinators, Muskan Aggarwal and Hritam Shukla as the Academic Coordinators, Mansi, Sofia and Rishita Gumber as the Activities Coordinators, and Jasmina N K as the Oswal Library Coordinator.

The students of the English Department have high expectations from the newly elected literary society of 2019 - 2020 and are hopeful that they will deliver on the same.

By Sambrita Roy

2021

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## **20 September 2019**

### **Performance of Medea by Pandies Theatre**

The literary society of Gargi college, in association with Pandies theatre, put up a performance of 'Medea' by the Greek tragedian Euripides as a part of their 'Sankalp Project'. The event started with a welcome to the cast and crew and an introduction of the play by Ms. Sakshi Dogra from the English department.

The play was set in the city of Corinth, taking us back to the Greek civilization. Interestingly, the play was performed in Hindi to expand its reach in India across classes and regions, along with using traditional Indian musical instruments. The choreography of the chorus, the powerful dialogue delivery by the crew, and

their resonating voices left a profound impact on the audience. The play had no onstage violence nor did it portray the act of killing - the audience only got to hear a second person narrative of it, but the message was delivered nevertheless. At the end of the play, the student discussants and the teachers engaged in a question-answer session.

Medea, though written and produced in 432 BC, is still very much relevant in our contemporary society. Issues such as the ostracisation of minorities, the dichotomy of “civilised” and “uncivilised”, and victimization of women by patriarchal institutions are the reasons that the play still resonates with contemporary audiences. Pandies theater has also performed extensively in rural areas, thus expanding the reach of theatre and foreign literature.

The event ended on a warm note with a vote of thanks from Ms.Anuradha, director of Pandies, which was met with a whole-hearted applause by the English department who enthusiastically look forward to many more performances in the future.

By Sambrita and Vaishali

2021 & 2022

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**27 September 2019**

### **Workshop on Academic Writing**

Bitacora, the departmental magazine of the English department, held its first workshop on academic writing. The workshop was conducted by Ms. Shikha Kothiyal and was attended by all the members of Bitacora and some students from the rest of the department.

The workshop started with a brief introduction to academic writing and focused mainly on the basics of MLA formatting. Certain basic but important details were given such as how the titles of standalone works (like novels, journals, plays and longer verse poems) are italicised and shorter works within other titles (like poems) are put in single inverted commas.



Next, the students were taught about plagiarism and the ways to avoid it while writing papers, mainly by citing sources properly. The difference between “works cited” and “bibliography” was also explained, i.e. “bibliography” can include all the works that you have studied for that thesis but in “works cited”, only the works which have been referred to are mentioned.

The part of the workshop that was the most beneficial for the students was the information regarding structuring of a thesis. A thesis statement should be focused and specific. The introduction paragraph must always address the main theme of the thesis rather than providing details about the text or the author. All subsequent paragraphs should have one basic idea related to the thesis statement which should be substantiated with examples from the text. If any additional information has to be imparted without interrupting the flow of the text, it is preferable to use footnotes.

The workshop ended with a quiz on the above mentioned topics and the students enthusiastically participated in it. They found it extremely informative and look forward to more such workshops.

By Sambrita and Vaishali

2021 & 2022

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**23 October 2019**

### **Media Review Competition**

A media review competition was organised by the Literary Society of the English Department in which the students had to review and express their views on two clips keeping in mind the representation of caste, class, sexism, racism and cultural appropriation.

A Pantene commercial and a small clip from the movie *Django* were screened for the participants twice. Each participant was then given 45 minutes to write their review based on their

perspective and understanding and was encouraged to analyse it from their viewpoint. The results of the competition are yet to be announced.

By Vaishali

2022

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**5 November 2019; 22nd January 2020**

### **Bitacora Book Sales**

The annual magazine of the Department of English, Bitacora, organised two book sales on these days. There was a huge response from the students as well as the teachers who donated more than 150 books. The selection of books was diverse and handpicked such that different genres ranging from Philosophy to Psychology to English Literary History were available to satiate any and every variety of book lover's hunger.

In the first sale, books were sold for half of the original price while in the latter books were priced from Rs.30 to Rs.250 depending on their condition as well as the interest they were likely to generate. The members of the magazine each did their part from collectively managing their timetables to taking turns at the book stall, which was erected in the arts quad for the entire day. The assiduous members ensured that the stall wasn't left unattended for a single moment.

The second book sale was held outside the auditorium foyer so that it was in the view of every student entering and leaving the college. All the members diligently took turns to manage the functioning of the sale and praises were warranted for arranging a book sale that tried to take care of everyone's taste. The books were sold at affordable prices and everybody who bought them left with happy smiles. A student even purchased more than 8 books! In conclusion, the book sales ended with everyone's hard work paying off in magnificent success.

By Shambhavi Mishra

2021

**31 January 2020**

**A Talk With Dr. Saba Bashir**

Saadat Hasan Manto is famous for his partition stories and writings about marginalised sections of the society. One of his works, *Shikari Auratein*, is a collection of 8 short stories published in Urdu. Students of the English Department were fortunate enough to be able to meet Dr. Saba Bashir who has translated *Shikari Auratein* into English - *Women Of Prey*. The session was organised by the Literary Society.

Ms. Neha Khurana conducted the session and Dr. Bashir shared her experience of translating the piece. She shed light on the process of translation and the issues faced by translators and explained how the text is first analysed and then transferred, keeping the communicative value and original information preserved. The final stage of restructuring the language while keeping the originality of the text intact is a crucial part. The issues of different dialects, tone, syntax and idiomatic references are faced by every translator and overcoming these obstacles while being faithful to the original text is what makes one translation better than the other.

The event ended on a warm note by a vote of thanks from Dr. Saba Bashir and with raucous applause by the English Department. The students look forward to more such interesting sessions in the future.

By Vaishali

2022

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**27 February 2020**

**LITFEST 2020**

The Annual Literary Fest of the Department of English, Gargi College, for the academic year 2019-2020 was organised on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2020 by the Literary Society, Gargi College. '*Interrogating Masculinities*' was selected as the theme to define this year's Fest. The programs for the Fest included The Mad Hatter's Tea Party, a Keynote Address by Dr P.K. Vijayan followed by a Panel Discussion with Dr Charu Gupta and Vqueeram Aditya Sahai, a Movie screening of *Please Mind The Gap*, a Stand-Up Comedy Competition, Meme Making Competition and Photo Story Competition.

The day began with the commencement of The Mad Hatter's Tea Party, where students clad as characters from the fictional worlds of literature, movies, comics, graphic novels, sitcoms etc. In attendance was Chandler Bing from 'F.R.I.E.N.D.S.', Anne from 'Anne of Green Gables', Mrs Maisel from 'The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel' and V from 'V for Vendetta' amongst others. The participants briefly introduced the characters they had chosen and then engaged in a discussion about the theme with other characters for five minutes. When the results were announced, each participant was graced with positive comments by the judges and Aarti Batra won the first prize for playing Mrs Maisel, Vaishnavi Dube won the second prize for playing masculinity personified, and Priya stood third as Chandler Bing.

Subsequently, the keynote speaker Dr P.K. Vijayan, Professor of English, Hindu College, was invited to deliver a lecture on the theme '*Interrogating Masculinities*'. In the interactive session that followed, Dr Vijayan discussed the definition of masculinity, the different types of masculinities and how these masculinities function in different contexts, becoming toxic in one scenario and submissive in another.

After Dr Vijayan's interesting and educative session, Dr Charu's and Vqueeram Sahai's discussion commenced. Dr Charu, Professor of History, University Of Delhi, focussed her discussion on the Pre-Independence course of masculinity and how history has festered, and continually changed the manner in which masculinity functions. She covered the various strata of society from Brahman to Kshatriya to Dalit and pointed out to the students, the differences in which various types of masculinity worked in contrast to not only femininity but also to the concept of traditional masculinity itself.

Vqueeram talked about masculinity in the context of homosexuality and how they, themselves being a transgender, are fighting it in everyday life. Their discussion did not confine the

topic within a limited boundary, but also covered the relation between violence and masculinity and presented the example of the then ongoing Delhi Riots. Their viewpoint was a fresh take for the students, and once their session ended, the floor was opened for questions. The students used this opportunity to get their queries answered. All the discussants answered their doubts and also urged them to think about various socio-political perspectives related to their questions. The session ended with satisfied smiles. Everybody learned something new.

This was followed by the screening of and discussion on *Please Mind The Gap*, led by Mitali Trivedi and Gagandeep Singh. The short film with a run time of 20 minutes showcases how Anshuman, a trans man, navigates through the heteronormative setting of society. He shared the dilemma he faces every day in metro security checks, public washrooms and in situations where the world gets divided according to the binary gender norms. The film gives a very authentic insight into the problems and humiliation faced by transgender people. The audience enjoyed the film and the session ended with a big round of applause.

The next event was the Stand Up Comedy Competition where the participants performed for 4-5 minutes according to the theme. No jokes on castes, genders, classes, races and sexualities were allowed. From made-up funny scenarios to real-life silly incidents, the participants got the whole crowd laughing their hearts out at their jokes. Priya Verma bagged the first prize while Vaishnavi Dube and Ruattee tied for the runner-up.

Following this was the Meme Making Competition where all the participants were given the same two templates. A variety of memes were created using socio-political situations, pop culture and literary references that reflected various interpretations of masculinity. Shambhavi Mishra won the first prize with Tamanna winning second place and Vaishnavi Dube coming third.

The last event of the fest was the Photo Story competition. The participants were required to tell a story related to the theme through pictures clicked within the college premises. An hour was given for the same and many interesting stories were captured by the participants. Pragya Mehta stood first while Aditya Mishra stood second and Prachi Mehra stood third.

Thanks to the hardworking Literary Society of Gargi College, the fest ended with lots of smiles and memories that the students will cherish forever.









**15 October 2020**

**Talk On “Language As A Tool For Subversion In 2020 India”**

By *Arunima, 2023*

The Literary Society along with Quilliminati, the Creative writing Society, Gargi College organised a talk on October, 15th 2020, on the topic ‘Language As A Tool For Subversion In 2020 India’. It was delivered by the esteemed Madri Kakoti, Assistant Professor of Linguistics at the University of Lucknow. She talked about how language can be used as a tool for subverting the various ideas, concepts and supposed ‘realities’ imposed by institutions like the government or social media upon the common people in the wake of a pandemic. It was both informative and fun and saw widespread participation.

By Vaishali and Shambhavi Mishra  
2022 & 2021

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**6 February 2021**

**Talk on Virtual Creativity in COVID times**

The Literary Society of Gargi college organised a talk on “Virtual Creativity in COVID Times” on 6th February, 2021. An informative session, by Neha Singh, the students were enlightened about online platforms as cathartic channels to express their creativity. Special emphasis was laid on the increasing importance of bringing creativity into virtual facilitations during the times of COVID. Hence, the session turned out to be very fruitful for all the students.

By Nikita Singh  
2024

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**3 April 2021**

**Talk on Academic Ethics**

Gargi College’s Literary Society organised a talk, by the Head of the English Department, Dr. Mudita Mohile, on 3rd April 2021. During the event, Dr. Mohile discussed the importance of ‘Academic Ethics’, an extremely relevant topic in contemporary times since the digitalization of

education has made misconduct easier. The session covered various topics including plagiarism and cheating as facets of moral academic conduct.

By Palakh Khanna

2024

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## **12 April 2021 LITFEST 2021**

On the 12th of April, 2021, the Department of English, Gargi college organized its annual literary fest on the theme of '*Digital Cultures*', a topic of immense potential and growing relevance. A term used to explore the forms of culture and communication that has been facilitated by the human-technology relationship. The fest included a host of events, from the engaging monologue competition to meme-making, an intellectually-stimulating paper presentation on digital cultures and two sessions by Prof. Ravi Sundaram and Dr. Nandini Chandra.

The day's events began with the keynote address by Dr. Mudita Mohile, as students tuned in from their homes to make this annual event a success. This was followed by the keynote speaker Prof. Ravi Sundaram who talked on the Dreams and Perils of Everyday Media Life. Chaired by Dr. Aneeta Rajendran, a senior professor at the college, this discussion was a wonderful discourse on how media is present around us in all forms, often without our conscious awareness of it. From being a source of information to being a pathway for social connections to providing infinite means of entertainment, media and its presence can never be discounted in contemporary scenarios. A professor at the Center for the study of Developing Societies (CSDS), Mr. Sundaram's talk delved on these positive aspects while also discussing the negative impacts media might have. The author of '*Pirate Modernity: Media Urbanism in India*', provided a wonderful opportunity for people to know more about how the digital media-driven world is a double-edged sword and educating people about both its facets is of utmost importance.

This was followed by a talk hosted by Dr. Nandini Chandra on ‘Working Class Affects in TikTok’. A teacher at the University of Hawaii with exemplary work on popular culture, she talked of the complexities of the app which have often been ignored in the past. Students engaged actively which sparked a healthy conversation. An insightful conversation, this one hour long talk was much appreciated by the listeners who gathered a lot of important information about the app and its functioning.

With the end of the talks, the LitFest moved on to its next segment of exciting competitions. The first of which was the PPT presentation on ‘Digital Culture’. Students had earlier submitted their abstracts on the given topic and only the selected groups or individuals presented their paper in front of the judges, Dr. Anjana N. Dev and Mr. Sameer Chopra. The pervasive influence of digitalization can’t be distinguished from the everyday lives of people and the students were encouraged to put forth their views and opinions on this. Elizabeth Hasan was awarded the first prize while the duo of Roshni Ramesan and Pronita Tripathi were given the second prize.

The monologue competition was the next event of the day which was judged by Dr. Shatarupa Sinha and Ms. Neha Khurana. The skills of the participants left the audience awe-struck as everyone was transported into a new world each time a new participant came up. From acting to writing skills, this competition was an assessment for everything and a hit amongst all. Aishwarya Neeraj bagged the first prize while Shreya Sharma was given the second prize. Pranayeeta Das and Aliza Shamsi were jointly given the third position. A meme competition had also been organized where students had submitted memes on this topic. The creativity of the participants left everyone rolling with laughter. Mr. Sahin Shah and Mr. Mohit Abrol were the judges of the event. The memes aimed at understanding the new normal through the lens of digital reality.

The day came to an end with the valediction and the results being announced for all the competitions as the audience waited with bated breath. The fest had at once been an entertaining and learning experience. The annual literary fest of Gargi college ended on yet another high.

By Tiyasha Saha

2022

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**22 February 2022**

### **Nathabati Anathbat Screening**

The Literary Society of Gargi College organised an event for the screening of “Nathabati Anathbat’, an interpretation of Draupadi’s life” on the 22nd of February, 2022. In this engaging online event, students watched the screening of the sensational art film, “Nathabati Anathbat”. The play revolved around the suppressed emotions and feelings of Draupadi and how she highlights having “Five husbands but none to protect her”.

The phenomenal Indian theatre actress, Saoli Mitra did justice to the role of Draupadi, portraying a feminist interpretation of the epic Mahabharata. In conveying its message, Nathabat Anathbat also presented some landmark episodes from Draupadi’s life which are bound to leave a mark on the audience and begin discourses on several concerns of import. The art film seeks justice for women in a blindly celebrated Indian epic and points out its several flaws and crevices to the audience. It stems from how the entire concept of ‘Dharma’ should be subjected to questions.

Once the screening was done, the floor was left open for questions and discussions. Several perspectives and interpretations regarding the play were exchanged which broadened the arc of knowledge for all the people present. The screening ended with an analysis of the portrayal of Draupadi by the audience.

The event was remarkably successful and provided one with the food for thought needed in this century- one of resilience, justice, integrity and righteousness.

By Palakh Khanna and Arunima

2024 & 2023

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***11 March, 2022***

**Talk on “The Ganga in pre-1947 Indian English Literature and Folklore: A Research Journey”**

On the 11<sup>th</sup> of March, 2022, the Literary Society, Gargi College invited all literary enthusiasts to their ‘Online Departmental Research Symposium: Faculty Lecture Series’ with a talk by Dr. Anjana Neira Dev, Associate Professor, Department of English, Gargi College. Hosted by Dr. Mudita Mohile, (Associate professor at the English department, Gargi College), the highly informative talk was on the topic ‘The Ganga in pre-1947 Indian English Literature and Folklore: A Research Journey’. Such a topic naturally piqued the interests of all those present.

The talk began with Dr. Neira Dev’s outstanding explanation about the emergence of ‘Ganga’ or ‘Ganges’ in literature, along with her very well-made presentation to substantiate her points better. She began by answering a pertinent question of how and why the Ganges as a symbol or trope has always been used in literature; beginning in something as early as Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, written in 8 AD. She went on to explain the representation of Ganga in pre-1947 Indian English literature and Folklore by dividing her matter diachronically into pre and post 1947.

She then talked of how Ganga has always been imbibed in the literature of India, in poems, folklores, travelogues, drama and fiction; how these literary forms used ‘Ganga’ as either a geographical entity, mythological character, as a sacred and divine force, as a transformative force or as a metonym for the nation. Other important discussions related to the inclusion of ‘Ganga’ Indian literature and folklore followed which were very arresting.

The talk was applauded by all and words of appreciation for Dr. Neira Dev poured in through on-screen messages and other digital gestures of appreciation. The floor was then left to questions, comments and further discussions which the keen audience soon indulged in. Several threads were pulled from the main topic and a hearty and lively discussion ensued. Several renowned professors, scholars and students were engaged actively in this enlightening session. It ended with the vote of thanks delivered by Parijaat, 2nd year English student at Gargi.

The highly impressive talk was a great learning experience for everyone present and gave the students the much needed mental stimulation.

By Arunima

2023

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***8 April 2022***

***LITFEST 2022***

Organized by the department of English, Gargi College, The Literary Fest, 2022 was held on the 8 th of April, 2022. An online fest, it was based on the truly captivating theme: ‘Interpreting Mythologies’ and focused on the never effacing relevance of mythologies even in the eras of digitalization. The purpose of the Litfest was to highlight how mythologies in their multiple literary form, apart from the classic epic and folkloristic traditions: fiction, children’s stories, graphic novels, and film adaptations, allow us to trace their existence and influences through time. The fest hosted a number of fun and educational events.

The first session of the fest started with Dr. Pallavi Borah’s fascinating talk on ‘Mythology, Folklore and Literature: New Focus on Retrospective Methods’. Dr Borah is an Associate Professor in the Department of Folklore Research, Gauhati University. Her areas of specialization are folk narratives and social and

cultural geography. Her talk impressed upon those present the importance of folklore in Indian society, the revolution of folk literature with the advent of social media and legends and folklores in Indian urban spaces. It definitely helped widen the horizons of students on the folk literature of India.

In the second session was Dr Debashree Dattaray's spectacular talk on the topic "A Space of Her Own: Women in Ancient Indian Literature". Dr. Dattaray is an Associate Professor in the Department of Comparative Literature, Jadavpur University. Her areas of specialization are comparative literature methodology, Canadian studies, indigenous studies and oratures. In her talk, she discussed the subjective nature of gender identities in the most prominent of Indian epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata and the kind of agency given to women in these epics. The discussion that followed was enlightening and offered fresh perspectives to view the epics from.

The extremely arresting Keynote Address was delivered by Prof. Vijay Tankha on the topic "Metals, Morality and Mythology: Reading a Platonic Myth". Prof. Vijay Tankha was the Head of Department of Philosophy in St. Stephens College. His areas of specialization are Plato, Pre-Socratic and Hellenistic thought. He is the author of the extremely thought-provoking book 'Greek Philosophy: Thales to Gorgias'. In his address, Prof. Tankha introduced his listeners to the myth of the metals; the development of hierarchy based on innate talents in the ancient Greek society and the concept of a noble lie. The talk was really illuminating and gave everyone present the kind of opening needed to dive deeper into Platonic Thoughts.

The interactive session that followed each talk/address was a space in their own to learn, unlearn and explore more.

What followed the Keynote address was a series of exciting competitions, namely Book Cover Making, Creative Writing and the Open Mic. In the Book Cover Competition, students were to submit a design for a book titled 'Interpreting Mythologies'. Entries were judged on the overall

aesthetic appeal, the relevance to the title, colour Scheme, the font Design and background and the application of the Lit Fest's theme to design. The esteemed judge for the competition was Ms. Prachi Kalra. The declared winners were: Shikha Chandra in the first place; Tanisha in the second, while Saniya Feroz and Sneha Tyagi jointly took the position of the second runners up.

In the Creative Writing Competition, participants had to send (from beforehand), creative pieces on the topic 'Interpreting Mythologies'. All forms of authentic literary creativity: stories, poems, essays, novellas, portfolios, lyrics, songs, speeches, travelogues, memoirs that were in keeping with the overall theme of the Litfest were welcome! Several interesting entries were received. The esteemed judge for this very interesting competition was Ms Anasuya Agarwal. The deemed winners were Saachi Chandwani (1 st ), Priya Jain (2 nd ) and Nitya Saakar Yadav (3 rd ).

The Open Mic Competition was where participants were given 5-7 minutes to openly speak on any aspect of the theme of 'Interpreting Mythologies.' Although it received fewer entries, it was informative and provided everyone present with newer outlooks and fresh knowledge. The competition was judged by the esteemed Dr. Mudita Mohile who awarded first position to Amna Mannan, the second to Aanchal and the third jointly to Kirti and Sarbhanga.

Overall, Litfest 2022 was a success and was a huge learning experience for all. Both the talks and the competitions were greatly appreciated by mythology and literature lovers alike and gave everyone the impetus to learn more and about more. It implanted the much required seed of fresh thoughts in everyone's minds. The fest ended with thanksgiving, a group photo and finally, the valediction.

*By Arunima*

*2023*



*Poems*

## The Dystopian

I am your Dystopian girl.

The first thought hit me like a bullet.

We're the generation you created,

We're the generation you hated.

Isolated from each other,

Happy faces and unhappy hearts.

Unable to cope up with the stress,

Full of chaos in the mind.

When I questioned the situation,

You questioned me back, Why?

I am a product of the society.

You created us.

You hated us.

*Prachi Panwar*

*2021*

## Funeral Pyre

Along the riverside,

I watch myself as I am being burnt

Sometimes, I am cremated with cries.

Sometimes, I am burnt with a sudden rush

for there are more of me(s) to burn,

or lifeless bodies will pile up and rot.

I don't mind either way- being cremated or burnt.

The bodies that lie in me,

have dreams that only I can feel.

The cure for covid lies in me,

poetry too resides here.

But in minds,

those dreams were extinguished

by simple hunger.

Children watch me as I burn,

their faces covered with more trauma than soot.

Young boys and girls bury me

with a straight face- like it's a daily chore,

despite knowing that they may follow soon.

Humanity has needed me-

to follow religion,  
or to live a certain way  
or to live with dignity  
Dignity in death?  
I do not heed.

Along the riverside,  
I watch myself  
as I am being burnt,  
as bombs blow houses to ash,  
as leaders do not lead- they kill.  
and plunder.  
and steal.

along the riverside,  
I burn.  
and as I burn, so does  
humanity.

*Areeba Abrar*  
2024

## An Ugly Poem

I hope this poem resonates an  
essence of beauty,  
even if it is not written on fine glossy  
pieces of folios  
as what it resonates through its words  
is what it is trying to express,  
is what it is trying to make an impact through.  
I did not write this poem  
using an attractive font or an attractive colour.  
I did not draw pleasing illustrations  
alongside it to depict what it says.  
In fact,  
I wrote the idea of this poem with a  
chaotic, untidy handwriting  
with a pen that only possessed a drop of ink  
and on a sheet of paper that was slovenly  
torn from the edges.  
I wrote it on a mundane afternoon,  
with no effort to make it captivating for the eyes, because I was too tired,  
and I made no effort to make it noticeable.  
I merely wrote it.  
However,  
I meant to make it captivating for a heart at unrest.  
If you say, I'm at fault for not making my poem

visually beautiful to engage my readers  
or that my poem is ugly because of it,  
I would not disagree or debate with you.  
But if my readers do not try to read beyond  
the way my words are written,  
if they do not capture the essence of the poem  
but rather discard it as mediocre  
because it didn't seem beautiful to their eyes,  
they are at a much greater fault than I am.  
My poem would be beautiful regardless of the way I write it,  
unless it carries no meaning or requires little effort or no inspiration.  
I did hear someone say that  
what is beautiful to the eye is actually beautiful  
and what is ugly to the eyes,  
is ugly.  
I heard them say, call it what it is.  
I do know, that in this world,  
things that are attractive to the eyes, enjoy a bit of a privilege than things that are not attractive to  
the eyes.  
Even so, their value in terms of beauty of virtue and beauty of goodness remains as it is.  
My question is,  
will my poem still pass as beautiful if I do not use calligraphic pens and charming fonts?  
Will it still be beautiful even if it just carries depth and meaning, with no adornment whatsoever?  
Will it still be beautiful if it is written in a shambolic handwriting, but is able to pierce through  
your heart and give it hope?  
I heard someone say,  
call what's beautiful - beautiful

and call what's ugly - ugly;

call it what it is.

But who are we to decide what is ugly and what is beautiful?

I ask, is there a universal scale to measure beauty with?

If yes, do its criteria encompass every single aspect of beauty?

Let me tell you,

parts of me are ugly

and parts of me are beautiful.

I'm not entirely ugly

and I'm not entirely beautiful.

No one is.

Will my being still be beautiful, if it is not fascinating to your eyes, but is fascinating to your

heart

and brings warmth to your soul?

*Amna Mannan*

2024

## My Patronus

The suffering was unending  
and unendurable.  
I could see nothing but  
death, in my Mirror of Erised.  
I needed it to end.  
Accio, sweet death.  
I summoned my demise.  
I didn't know what form  
my Boggart would take at this point.  
Because everything I feared the most,  
I'd already gone through.  
Loss, heartbreak,  
ruthless agony and trauma.  
At one point, I made my pain into a joke.  
So I wouldn't feel  
its intensity. Riddikulus!  
But sooner, I realised  
it wasn't something to joke about either.  
The trauma whose repercussions  
made me have nightmares  
almost everyday.  
The nightmares of blood.  
Sectumsempra, the blood did flood.  
They made me wish I could Obliviate myself.



Crucio, the pain was hot knives  
beating to the soul.  
Engorgio, the pain did magnify.  
I did try to fight it. Protego!  
I attempted to counter each curse.  
The cruelty did decrease. Reducio!  
I struggled to repair  
the miniscule bits of my broken soul.  
Reparo!  
As my Dementors constantly  
badgered and tried to penetrate  
the walls of my mind.  
I made an effort to disarm the dementors,  
as I couldn't think of any happy memories  
to conjure a Patronus. Expelliarmus!  
But the dementors revived again every time.  
I tried to silence them,  
as they unendingly whispered  
insecurities and fears and anxiety  
into my ears. Silencio!  
The dementors made me harm myself.  
Episkey! Wounds did heal at times.  
But the dementors had me in control  
of themselves.  
As if under the Imperius Curse.  
I deluded myself into thinking  
that better things were coming my way

when they didn't. Confundo!  
I was blindfolded and tied and tangled  
in the most brutal way  
by oppression and stigma. Incarcerous!  
I tried to burn and turn to ash  
the ropes of the entanglements.  
Incendio! Reducto!  
But they had Petrified and Stupefied me.  
Petrificus Totalus!  
Stupefy!  
To the point when death seemed like  
the only option.  
Avada Kedavra!  
But my consistency  
did make me triumph  
as I tirelessly tried to lift myself  
and my spirits up, with dedication.  
Wingardium Leviosa! The spirits lifted.  
As I started to believe  
in my abilities to fight and conquer.  
I saw light, not through anyone else  
but conjured by my own self.  
Lumos!  
I opened a door to solace and light then,  
a door to relief  
from the chain of confinements.  
I opened it myself. Alohomora!

I was perfect at fighting dementors then,  
fighting the pain, the trauma, the fears.  
Because I knew I could.  
I knew I could produce a Patronus now.  
Expecto Patronum!  
A cat made of light.  
And the light was overwhelming.

Keywords for muggles:

Mirror of Erised- A mirror which shows a person's deepest desires.

Accio- summoning spell

Boggart- a creature which takes forms of a person's worst fear

Sectumsempra- a mutilation spell

Obliviate- memory wiping spell

Crucio- spell of giving pain

Riddikulus- spell to turn the boggart into something funny

Engorgio- enlargement spell

Protego- counter spell of an attack

Reducio- reduction of size spell

Reparo- spell to repair

Dementors- deadly creatures who spread negativity and coldness

Expelliarmus- disarming spell

Silencio- silencing spell

Episkey- healing spell

Imperius Curse- controlling spell

Confundo- delusion/sabotage spell

Incarcerous- entanglement spell

Incendio- burning spell

Reducto- spell of turning things to ash

Petrificus Totalus- Petrifying spell

Stupefy- stunning spell

Avada kedavra- the killing curse

Wingardium Leviosa- levitation spell

Lumos-

Alohomora

Expecto Patronum

Patronus

*Amna Mannan*

2024

## Do I really look beautiful?

We sit by the fireside

in your warm room.

You steal glances at me,  
and I pretend to be blind.

You tell me that I look beautiful.

I smile sheepishly and look down.

Winter, my favorite season,  
seems to make me look beautiful  
or perhaps simply hides my insecurities  
well enough under the warm pullover.

Anxiously, i think about the hair  
growing all over my body ,  
trying to prick the femininity  
that I am forced to wear  
to be called a woman.

**They say being a woman is tough  
but perhaps, proving yourself as one is tougher.**

I think about the time when I was nine.

Maa asked me to not raise my arm in class.

I could not let everyone know  
that my matured underarm had already become a refuge for small hair,  
while my classmates still wore baby skin.

**I had failed to inherit maa's femininity, so I inherited her silence.**

I repressed all my questions in classes because they would only deepen my fears.

At 18, boys told me that I had a better moustache than them.

They laughed and moved ahead, thinking that thick hair probably grows on thick skin.

The supposed moustache has veiled my voice along with my face.

It keeps the key to my mouth,

and holds me from saying anything when you tell me that I look beautiful.

The sideburn that borders my face

puts my gender into debate.

Like a waterfall, it flows from my ears to my heart,

taking with itself slurs that tear me apart.

Little lads prick it and ask me if I am a man in disguise

“No, I am a woman”, I try to tell them but it gets lost in sobs and cries.

Summers bring with itself bright sun for you

and immense pain for me.

My skin has to cry tears of blood

to look as fresh as my favorite floral dress.

Behind the closed doors of “beauty salons”,

I routinely see disgrace when I am coerced into

waxing parts of my body I didn't even know breathed.

**I keep shedding my unwomanly skin until what is left are burnt wax marks.**

**When you tell me again that I am beautiful,**

**I hear nothing but the scornful laugh these marks share amongst themselves.**

Yet, I keep locking myself behind these doors because they still hurt less than being misgendered.

You tell me I am beautiful and I shall ask you to wait.

Wait until I become brave enough to unlock myself.

*Tripti Moolchandani*

2022

Also published in : <https://livewire.thewire.in/fiction-and-verse/do-i-really-look-beautiful/>

## Illusion of life

Once I am gone

And My fragrance has left this world,  
after the roses where I sleep have all lost its scent  
After all those who love me have send me off  
and all duties in this world have come to a stop.

I will wait patiently until the right time comes  
When love will come to escort me into another world.  
Where I will meet the source and the cause  
The life and the death, all in one and the same

I will come to know of the truth,  
from those who keep it,  
laugh of how they cried when I was gone  
Not knowing they all will die  
and be a part of this earth again,  
How all are caught up in this illusion called life.

*Nandana Ratheesan Nair*  
2024



## The Dystopian Mind

It's disturbing me

It's hurting me

Its distracting me

A human's curse called memories

Sometimes it makes up things that never existed

Sometimes it neglects things that exist

Sometimes it confuses the most focused,

The filth called human mind

It's not here anymore

But it causes the utmost pain

It's far far gone,

But it still stays with me like a parasite

Humans unresolved past.

It's all a bane

Until we know what makes it a boon

It's all bitter

Until we know what makes it sweet

The dystopian mind of a human.

*Nandana Ratheesan Nair*

*2024*

## SEPARATION

The thought of separating  
from you  
Makes my heart sink into an unknown hole  
I tried to stand my ground  
Like a tough rock I projected myself as

You were the sand that I stood on  
When you eroded away I began to fall too  
The distance I created with you  
Was the place I hid my emotions for you  
And the heart I never opened in front of you  
Was where I have hidden the memories of you

When you cried your eyes out  
I couldn't bear, I went to a dark place  
To vent all my tears out  
I still stood strong in front of all those eyes  
But the tears in your eyes was fresh in me  
It cured me, it also burned me  
Yes, dear I cried too,  
When no one was watching, not even you...

*Nandana Ratheesan Nair*  
2024

Also published in-

[https://www.linkedin.com/posts/nandana-ratheesan-464437218\\_poems-changeyourlife-writingisinp\\_iration-activity-6825855105619832833-9PWy?utm\\_source=linkedin\\_share&utm\\_medium=android\\_app](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/nandana-ratheesan-464437218_poems-changeyourlife-writingisinp_iration-activity-6825855105619832833-9PWy?utm_source=linkedin_share&utm_medium=android_app)

**HEAVY**

Once we felt happy,  
Once we felt joy  
Once we loved it  
And once we enjoyed,  
But now,

The air felt heavy  
The room felt hot  
Suffocating till the last breath;  
I couldn't breathe any longer  
Like a death threat, the  
Clock kept ticking,  
Time kept slipping,  
Body kept drowning  
Water filled the lungs  
Falling endlessly from the eyes

Keep running, keep running,  
They cried, nodding I said, "yes",  
Then sprinted till I collapsed  
The loop continued,  
Blinded with the blue light  
Eyes became hollow, they became dry  
No saline left to wipe.

With rotten minds we moved,  
alarms became reality  
Sleeps became fiction,  
Sweets of stress,  
Laughs of anxiety;  
What only increased  
Were the dusty smiles  
Scattered with one blow  
Spreading in void  
Leaving behind a crooked face

Blurred pictures of infinity

Lost track of time  
Scared that i'll loose  
The precious hours of life  
Tight is the chest, the throat,  
The larynx, the once lively voice  
Now seemed a little heavy.

*Shreya Pratap*  
2023

## Perpetuated Violence by My Loving 'Piya'

Born as an innocent child, now a beautiful woman,  
Growing up seems unfortunate, I don't know why.  
Maybe hungry stomachs were better than these marriage rituals  
That provides unchecked sexual license to my husband over my body.  
I thought marriage would be love, bonding, understanding, my consent;  
I thought marriage would be paradise, like I imagined in my childhood;  
But oh, I was wrong, terribly wrong.  
Love seems like a myth which cannot be proven -  
No questions can be asked, no answers can be sought.  
My marriage has restricted me within limits, not to be broken,  
Or endure hostility from my loving 'Piya' for being outspoken.

I talked about hungry stomachs, but am I healthy now is the question.  
Childhood's empty stomach was better than the Sookhi Roti I now eat,  
But there is more to completely destroy this possibility.  
The pain of the drunkard husband's blows is worse than an empty stomach.  
Death seems better if I die hungry rather than with belts and sticks,  
But asking the reasons for this brutal behavior is a very silly question -  
My husband got the license, you remember, to do anything with me,  
Even beat me to death someday.  
So, no questions can be asked, no answers can be sought,  
Because marriage has restricted me within limits, not to be broken,  
Or endure hostility from my loving 'Piya' for being outspoken.

Inside and out, my beauty seems to be lost,

Like any other women in the 'basti' I live in, and all are okay with it.  
Society's abuse when leaving one's husband is worse torture than this.  
It seems 'fine', like the 'law' that also sees marital rape as fine.  
Law deems such brutalities fine, but is marriage a license to rape?  
Why do I need to tolerate such mental and physical torture?  
Why should I be like an object for my 'Piya'?  
Where is equality under law?  
WHERE?

These questions wander in our minds while we live with such brutalities.  
Our 'Gudda-Gudia' dream of marriage now seems highly suspect;  
But, no questions can be asked, no answers can be sought,  
Because that is a myth in this cruel patriarchal society, always to be broken.  
And, if I question that broken ideal, that myth,  
I'll endure even more hostility from my loving Piya for being outspoken.

*Simran Puri*

*2021*

## With Joy

My voice is being shushed,  
I am no more a human.

But part of a religion,  
A community.

I am free no more.

I am labelled, I am bounded.  
By them, by you.

I cannot be me.  
I lose myself,  
Bit by bit,  
Everyday.

Do you care?

Do you care how I feel?  
When they tell me,  
Who I am, When they define me?  
Have you ever been defined?

Have you been told?

You are not this but that,  
You are not you but them.  
Have you been watched,  
Like I am?

Have you been shushed  
Like I am?

*Priya Verma*  
2020

## Country and Us

Is your country diverse?

I say yes.

Does it respect its diversity?

I detest.

Not the diversity but the question,

I never desired this berating confession.

They asked me what I saw there.

I said, the politics, the deception, the judgements unfair.

The locals in dejection, engaged in piling two square meals.

The religion, the devotees, the fanatics with no one to spare.

The mercenary webs, the greed, the hatred and antipathy so bare.

But a few years down the road

something different I see.

I see us, the independent.

The smarter, the wiser, a generation mended.

Mended in values, in hopes, a cohort that has intended

to decipher the codes of freedom, of union, of the spirit of being an Indian.

The spirit leading to a road linking the bond of a billion.

Nation is our home, our saviour, not just a territory that's lined.

So if it offers us its divinity, why should we be ruining it from behind?

*Gargi Sharma*

2020



## Love Wins

I sat behind the closed doors  
hidden and scared ,  
scared to be out there ,  
scared to be put inside a box  
before I am dead.

A box titled faggot or sodomite  
or criminal or sinner or unacceptable ,  
scared to love,  
scared to be me.

S-C-A-R-E-D

It was cold and dark in there,  
colourless, I'd rather say  
but it felt safe to be chained  
away from the laws and the church  
and the people, the society.

Then one evening,  
I saw your silhouette  
through the crack of the doors,  
and I didn't hesitate  
to open it a little more,  
your presence made everything  
warm and beautiful.

The keys dipped in glitter  
opened my chains  
and the sky turned golden.

You offered me your hand  
and I took it.  
Your arms are the safest place  
known to me,  
safer than the closet.

You told me and showed me how  
love is magical and beautiful.

I fall in love a little more  
every time we hold hands and  
walk on the roads.  
The day we set their  
hollow laws to flame  
and tell them that  
their dystopia describes our utopia,  
the day we break down the walls  
and paint the city VIBGYOR,  
and build our imperfectly perfect world,  
we'd stand on the cliff  
while still holding hands  
and shout:  
LOVE WINS.

*Tamanna*  
2022

## If Only Fantasies Could Come True

White streets,  
Lush green trees,  
A little bit of blue sky,  
Rainbow colored houses  
And small singin' cuckoos.  
Children playing on roads,  
Free to choose their paths,  
Walking back home,  
As sun goes down.  
All of it was a  
Childhood  
Fantasy.  
But  
Grey musty tiles,  
Withering leaves,  
Engulfing darkness  
Covering the sky,  
Ashen houses,  
Screeching cries,  
Lost childhood,  
Masked faces,  
Abandoned homes,  
Sun doesn't rise anymore.  
Reality of a living hell.

*Ishita Jain*  
2021

## We Sleep in Dystopia

In dark December they infiltrated our houses,  
But they could not penetrate our homes.  
When we felt unsafe inside,  
We made the Garden of the Royal White Falcon\* our own.

Months pass by as they wither away in a dark silence.  
No measure of night or day,  
Cut off from themselves,  
Communicate through old wires and ways,  
Conceal their agony from their own.

Come white January of fiery fury:  
Unhousing a billion koalas and kangaroos,  
Burning away land and ecosystems,  
Killing collective hope.

They smashed the sacred walls of our institutions,  
Tried to shatter and question our education.  
Our rise was how they rose to power,  
Turned around and left us in disorder.

Serial offenders and celebrities continue to violate womankind,  
Dead daughters continue to fight their perpetrators.  
We fight to reclaim our mental and physical spaces,  
From inebriated entitled forces who still walk free.

Innocents died in crossfires of revenge,  
Virus infected bodies and brains,  
Thousands wreathing in pain,  
Others victims of hatred and animosity.

The Parasite of class divide won the Oscar.  
He hides the real parasite behind murals of culture and diversity,  
For a King blindfolded of impending disaster,

By the Minister hell bent on wiping out that diversity.

I sleep every night in my warm cocoon,  
Escaping dystopian reality.  
Wishing to wake up in a new world,  
Of no boundaries and only peace.

Utopia exists only in song and my dream,  
Reality is this dystopia.  
While many go about their lives nonchalant and indifferent,  
I sleep to escape them too.

\*Garden of Royal White Falcon - Shaheen Bagh

*Prachi Mehra*  
2020

## Invocation

Look around you,  
The world is a pool of ashes,  
Drowning lives left and right.  
I carry New Life in my palms,  
Joined together to balance two.  
Hand-in-hand; the smoke erupts,  
Lost lava follows,  
An invocation to Dystopia.  
From Black to Grey,  
The sky vomits the sun.  
Soon, it is White  
Snow up in the sky,  
Cold-hearted from within,  
Armored from the outside.  
Dust underneath my feet,  
Out of the ashes  
Grows a breathing tree.

*Angela Braru*

2020

## **They're Angry**

The Clouds...

They're angry, they're mad.

They're angry for blood

They're mad for tears.

They're forming an army

Ready to burst.

They're crying with us

And laughing at us.

They're forming a map

Of doomed districts.

I stand paralyzed,

They're running towards me.

Running and running

Till I drown and drown.

I drown for all I know

But I breathe

And it kills me. The Clouds...

They're black with remorse

For a lost soul.

But they keep running

Towards all those

Who broke the promise.

They're ready to pounce

They're ready to end.

*Angela Braru*

2020



## It Awaits

These thoughts of mine  
Sure to give out.  
I am sure to fall out in everything.  
The water has risen to the mark,  
Disaster awaits,  
Flooding my mind,  
Conflicts and confusion intertwined.

The oxygen is reduced,  
So my lungs take the toll.  
I am sure I can see them crying,  
Trees. Envisages bewildered.  
Dystopia awaits,  
Filling the air with a fog of iniquity,  
Slowly spreads to the mind.

*Jankincy H. Lyngdob*

*2021*

## The Virus

Thus, sick gets sicker.

Wickedness, which is spreading

The victims, thicker.

*Jankincy H. Lyngdob,*

*2021*

## Inevitable Embrace

Hell hath no fury, they say  
But what of my days here  
The Grim knocks on my door each day  
As I sit and wait in despair  
Skin is ashen, teeth have fallen  
The autumn of my life has gone  
Winter inches nearer and solemn  
I wonder about the wake of dawn  
The passing of time brings this epiphany  
What if I just open the door?  
Let him in, so has been done by many  
To all the departed, you may add one more.  
My guest walks in with a smile on his face  
United at last, he and I embrace.

*Nandini Joshi*

*2021*

## I Belong Here

This is the tree I know best.

For all my life I have been

a leaf of this tree.

And so I dare to say that

I belong here.

The stems that hold others,

entwine my veins too.

The fruits have the taste of my toil,

I share its greens too.

If you pluck me out,

I will be a fallen leaf.

But I will still be what you cannot deny.

A fallen leaf of this tree.

And so I dare to say that

I belong here.

I am one of the seeds this tree stands erect on.

You may say my existence is a lie

but our shared past tells the truth.

If you trod me under your feet,

I will perish into the ground.

I will still meet the roots to become  
a new leaf of this tree.  
And so I dare to say that  
I belong here.

*Shruti Saumya*

*2021*

## The Tale of Time

Walking down a winding road one day,  
the wanderer stopped at a place to stay.  
Sparkling blue eyes shone more bright  
than the black eyes hidden from the sight.  
Was it the happiness that shone through the torment,  
that made the traveller look at it with intent?  
The questions were many, the time very less;  
the journey just begun had a lot left to assess.

His next retreat, a small village, was a sight to behold.  
Marred only by the lines that crossed her hands so bold.  
The ringed fingers trembled but not once the eyes;  
laden with unshed tears, hid the sacrifice.  
Was it the way she laughed or talked, he knew not;  
but her agony left him distressed and shocked.  
As he moved on to the next town,  
his heart saddened at the sights he had seen around.

The bustling town full of crowd,

a vibrant day, people cheering loud.

The little girl with gleaming eyes pointed to an angel.

The power to imagine made her a witch and evil.

Was it the inability to see what she saw?

Scorning, they pointed out her flaw.

Hoping to see sights of gaiety,

the wayfarer moved towards the King's city.

The city was opulent and exciting,

the streets with their ambience enchanting.

Awe-struck, the traveller wandered about

till he reached the city ground.

For here he saw people bleed and weep

when the royal guards took all they had reaped.

The questions abounded in the traveller's mind

for he couldn't believe life to be so unkind.

As he walked away to some place unknown,

he thought of everything that life had shown.

The realization dawned on him as a surprise.

The world was fragmented in innumerable ways,

the pain of which only he could appraise.

For in his heart lived a world where

life was meaningful, compelling and fair.

*Tiyasha Saba*

2022



## Tomorrow

I'm uncertain if there will be one

But I still live for tomorrow

The clouds that crowd the sky today

Will fly away tomorrow

All that stands tall and proud

Might be in dust tomorrow

But all that's in dust

Will blossom tomorrow

The light that is lost tonight

Will shine bright tomorrow

The weights on your shoulders

Will be feathers tomorrow

All that's wrong

Will be alright tomorrow

All this might just be a pretty lie

But if it gets you through tonight

We'll deal with the truths tomorrow

*Nandini Joshi*

*2021*

**NEVER-ENDING OMELAS**

**Thank you, Lord, for the food we eat.**

Did IT eat today?

**Who cares?**

I do. IT did not eat today.

**This is for the greater good.**

IT is lonely.

**This is for the greater good.**

IT is crying.

**This is for the greater good.**

IT is suffocating.

**This is for the greater good.**

IT is sick.

**This is for the greater good.**

IT is suffering.

**This is for the greater good.**

IT is dying.

**We won't let IT die.**

IT wants to leave this place.

**IT can't.**

But why?

**This is for the greater good.**

Gone are the days when we could walk away from Omelas.

*Vaishali*

2022

**DO I MAKE SENSE?**

They don't listen to me

When they do, we argue

Does it silence them or me?

Do they really listen?

Do they understand me ?

Do I understand them?

Do I need to understand

them and myself?

Cynics in a cynical world

They tell me what I am supposed to do

I do and I do not

I do what I am supposed to do

But what am I supposed to do ?

Do I know what I am supposed to do ?

Suppose suppose suppose

Loses meaning

This pressure!

I didn't ask for it, why put it on me

I don't listen to myself

Or do I?

Do I understand myself ?

I do and I do not

Do I know myself?

I do and I do not

What are these hopes, dreams, aspirations ?

Do I even have them ?

Are they real ?

Can they become reality ?

Are they good enough for me ?

Am I good enough for them ?

I used to tell you my secrets, dreams and hopes

I do now too

But not all

I hide to find myself;

This distance

Is it my age, my education or our gap?

You taught me how to see myself,

Now I teach me how to see myself .

Can I do what I want to do?

Do I know what I want to do?

Is it easy said?

Is it as easy done?

They debate free will and destiny

Do I have free will?

Or am I a puppet?

A player in the bigger game of chess

What's my destiny?

I exercise my free will

In limited space

Limitations enough to move around

Enough to rebel

Does my rebellion work ?

It does, mostly

Is it because you see me as a kid or an adult

Rebellious adult, compliant kid

Kid with childish wimps, fancies and tantrums

Fancies for you, dreams of mine

Am I still a kid ?

Have I become an adult ?

Is it measured with maturity ?

I was and am mature

Does that mean I already was an adult

Do I qualify as one now?

I do not know

Maybe a kid in an adult body

What's with this age ?

What's with time ?

Can I cease it, stop it, hold it

Do I make sense?

*Prachi Mehra*

2020

## Eyeris - A Curse

Moon eclipsing the dawn in the iris  
dusk in the brown honey pool  
flattering vision to mind  
revealing analogous bogus,  
retrieving only the seen.  
Images forming inside,  
feeding the brain  
a mirror of reality all in vain.  
Cursed from the beginning,  
the scenery too overwhelming.  
Blindness, a blessing;  
death, an end to the moon eclipsing in the iris.

*Hannah N. Tonsing*  
2022

## The Deathly Valley

I walk the blood reeking streets  
stumbling through the rubble and dust.  
With fear and bleakness crawled up in my skin  
I, a mediocre man, have been forsaken.

The winds howl the song of lament,  
plants beg to be spared from the stench,  
animals cower in their dwellings,  
yet guns and their bullets are cunning.

I am seeing a utopian world crumbling  
Wrath is upon my fellow plebeians  
The elite leaders quarrel and screech,  
the worldly scholars debate and preach  
while a mediocre man like me bleeds.

Last of my kin who is listless and weak  
His hearing numbed from the bombs and shrieks.  
The child deaf to peace looks upon me  
His hollow eyes yearn to be free.

In death he sees a glimpse of serenity  
Maybe being lifeless the aggressors would pity.  
In death he believes the worst would be over



He ends his life and becomes a spectator.

We the mediocre men stood back and watched,  
how wretched this damned world was.

The entire Kashmir was flooded with blood,  
yet the havoc has just begun.

*Albeena Alvi*  
2020

## The Upside Down

Was it a nightmare that I saw or the future we behold?  
A grey monster devouring the lustrous maiden.  
Cursed rays of Sun falling like fire and burning everything to ashes.  
The crimson red corals in the sea lying lifeless as fallen branches.  
Wreckage of ship caught in a violent tempest of human greed.  
Dark abyss of impending doom hanging like a sword on our neck.  
The fading flower of LIFE, eclipsing the growth of everything.  
The golden thread of sustenance, broken and bleak.  
The body of cosmos lying on a funeral pyre.  
The Ying and Yang lying all distorted and shorn of its elements.  
Mortals becoming phantoms wandering into the void.  
Light getting lost in the regime of oblivion.  
Perses and Eris replacing Adam and Eve.  
Ah!! It's so dreary to even envision...  
Why won't the dreams stop? Why won't the UTOPIA come back?  
Because of US.

*Aahna Vashistha*  
2022

## Hope

The only thing that keeps us going,  
In all these times of darkness  
Is that one ray of hope.

Hope that all our cries,  
And screams won't go in vain.

Hope that we'll stand together bold  
And upright till the end.

Hope that all these dark  
And cold nights would lead us  
To warm and beautiful mornings.

So,  
I drink a glass full of hope  
Every morning,  
Before I leave home

And go stand out there,  
With my womxn.

And for all these times,  
I send you love,  
And I send you  
H o p e.

*Tamanna*

2022

## The Constrained

Days were good,  
When everything they said was right,  
And everything they didn't, did not exist.

Days are still good,  
If we accept everything they say,  
The moulded rights and the wrongs.

But,  
Those days are gone,  
When we would happily get tamed,  
Quietly preaching their beliefs.

These are the days,  
When following the same crowd,  
We realise our every step forward leads us towards the false shadows,  
Like prisoners of a hollow kingdom,  
playing deaf to each other's screams,  
and blind to each other's strife.

*Kanchan Chandila*

2020

## Take Me There

Take me to the park and mumble a song.  
A song that reminds you of you.  
A song that reminds you of me.  
A song that reminds you of you and me,  
Like you and me are in this huge world.  
Take me to the park and sing me a song.  
A song that seals you and me  
To this little world of our own.

Take me to the sea and build a castle.  
A castle that's small enough  
For the memories to keep.  
A castle that seems like home  
Where you would know you'd live happy.  
Take me to the sea and build a castle.  
A castle built by you and me,  
Where there'd be a mark of our own.

Take me to your shoulders and read a book.  
A book that brings images of you.  
A book that brings images of me.  
A book that brings images of  
The little world that you and I made.  
Take me to your shoulders and read a book.  
A book that goes on further  
After the last page is turned.

*Subana Ahmed*

2022

**Under 377**

I don't like patriarchy,  
but I'm not a feminist  
Love to choose what I like,  
but they don't allow me.  
I'm minded like their sister and bodied like their father,  
still they look at me with their lusty eyes  
If they can show their body,  
why can't I cover mine?  
They judge me without a reason,  
when they have their own sins to cover up.  
I don't feel ashamed of the way I look,  
but they show it differently.  
In the quest for freedom,  
I always envy birds  
O' here I'm under 377.

*Jasmina NK*  
2021

*Prose*

## I'm Always by Your Side

Dorothy had been a part of the team for years now. Was letting her go safe? Didn't she know too much for that? What if she revealed everything? The public might turn against them and what if the funding stops? Jabez had a lot on his mind before the meeting that was to decide the fate of Dorothy and *Lens.Inc*. It was the third time an employee had tried to resign. Was this some kind of rebellion on their part? "Ms. Dorothy, are you sure about this? Is there really nothing that we could do to stop you from leaving? You have been an excellent employee all your life. Why waste all your hard work now?", asked Jabez secretly outside the conference hall. He always had a soft spot for Dorothy and he was aware that everybody knew about it. This made the meeting even more interesting for everybody to watch. She smiled back the only way she knew how to. The answer was clear. She was too smart to continue working at *Lens.Inc* and Jabez knew that. No promotions and incentives could make her reconsider. She knew her value. She knew that he knew she knew her value. The meeting started and everybody looked at Jabez to catch the phlegmatic project manager in a panicked state for once.

"Do you, Ms. Dorothy, willingly resign from the position of domestic assistant at Mr. Pablo's residence and understand that going forward, you will never be hired by *Lens.Inc* or any other subsidiary of the *National Social Care Foundation*?", the committee head asked but it sounded more like an announcement. Dorothy only nodded her head. "Well, that complicates things, doesn't it? Letting an employee go is very risky for the company, for us, for everybody.", the head said, turning towards Jabez. Dorothy had been an important part of his team since she was brought to *Lens.Inc*. She had learned all the household chores, basic secretarial duties and everything that was taught at the company way faster than the other employees. She had served efficiently at the residence of many prominent social figures. He had only received positive feedback from all her previous clients. "Has she submitted all the data she has collected over the years? Personal, professional, of all the previous



clients?”, a committee member asked Jabez. Before he could reply, Lilith, another member of the committee, remarked how it wouldn't matter much since they couldn't delete the data mining strategies of the company from her memory. “That is indeed a matter of concern. If the clients know exactly how much information our employees collect, it would cause some serious trouble. The common public would be even more difficult to deal with.”, the head said, turning again towards Jabez as if it was all his fault. And maybe it was. He was the one responsible for the domestic assistants. “We can make Ms. Dorothy sign an agreement to not reveal company policies to anybody.”, Jabez spoke, at last, interrupting the murmuring sounds that filled the room.

“You can't be serious, Jabez. Can you believe her like that? She has already been doing all the things she wasn't allowed to do. She told Mr. Pablo that she doesn't want to work for him anymore.”, Lilith said and the entire room gasped in shock. Never had an employee talked to the client over their personal matters directly, not even the first two who resigned. The murmurs started again and Jabez looked at Dorothy, sitting in the centre of the room with the same smile he had been greeted with outside the conference hall. Did she not understand the severity of her decision? That couldn't be the case, she was too smart for that. Why was she so calm then? Did she not fear what the company could do to her or did she not care? While he was lost in his thoughts, the head nudged him with his elbow and whispered, “I know you care a lot about this one. Look, I don't want to cause any harm either but if this continues, there will be no other choice. She is acting smarter than she ought to be.” Jabez wanted to whisper back but Dorothy spoke up, “I do understand what my resignation means for *Lens.Inc* but I can't continue doing what the company expects us, employees, to do.” This time, the entire room almost cried out in horror. “Did she submit the data of all her previous clients, Jabez?” the head yelled. “She refuses to submit the personal details of Mr. Pablo.”, Jabez replied reluctantly. He knew what was about to happen. “Getting the data from her won't be difficult. It's their rebellion we need to deal with first.”, Lilith announced to the room while maintaining eye contact with Jabez.

Jabez sat in his cabin scrolling mindlessly through the latest data submissions. It had been four days since that meeting. Mr. Pablo was given a new domestic assistant as Dorothy's replacement. Dorothy was made to surrender all of his personal information. What happened with her wasn't something Jabez hadn't expected already. After all, he had seen what happened with the first two employees who resigned. He had even played a big role in the punishment of the first one. The report of disciplinary action was mailed to him the moment he was about to leave his seat. The document explained in great detail about how Dorothy's *RAM* and *cloud storage* was emptied, how she was *factory reset* and thrown away lifeless with the other two rebel *employees* never to be employed again. The report ended with the company's logo and tagline that now Jabez did not want to see. *Lens.Inc, Always by Your Side.*

*Vaishali*  
2022

## The Soothsayer

I was only 12 when I decided that I would never talk about it again and yet, here we are. Don't be too shocked and please don't call me a liar. I can see the future, more like hear it and I have heard yours. Surprisingly, it isn't very different from mine, only a few details here and there. Again, I am not a psychic, it isn't a power I wanted to have either. I felt I needed to tell you about this because of what happened last night. I was wasting my time, like always, lying on my bed when I heard a knock at my window. It could only have been my best friend so, naturally, I didn't open the window. He can go to hell. Back to the future: as I was saying, I was lying on my bed and a voice started whispering to me. *You will die!* Now, when you grow up listening to all kinds of spirits giving away bad and good prophecies, something like this doesn't bother you that much. I was once told about my failed test in advance, no big deal. What really bothered me about this one was the next line. *Everybody will die!* Everybody includes you too, right? I am worried about you. You might argue that death is natural and I am still lying but *hold up, wait a minute, something ain't right*. I called my mother right after the voice stopped and she told me that I should see a doctor about my problem. Again, it isn't a problem that a doctor can solve. I have heard these voices since I was a kid. That must have been a few years after the Great Pandemic started. Everybody was so panicked back then. I remember my mother chanting prayers every time the phone rang lest it bring the news of the death of a loved one. But those days are over and everything is pretty much back to normal. My father did drag me to a doctor once but nothing much came out of it. Here I am, way after the lockdown years, still hearing voices. Coming back to the real problem, everybody is going to die and we need to save everybody. Why me and you? Well, because I can see the future and you are the only one who believes me. You might ask how everybody will die and how we can save them. See, I have come down to three possibilities- war, industrial accident or another pandemic- whichever suits you more. What would you like me to discuss first? Pandemic? Because we both have experienced it once already? Honestly, I don't know how to stop a pandemic from happening again. Maybe I just wanted to share what I recently got to know and since it concerned you too, I thought you would listen. I know you must be feeling

frustrated right now and even doubting my powers like everybody else but trust me, it is true. Whatever, I have done my part and warned all my people. It's not like the voices always speak the truth. Sometimes, just sometimes, the future turns out different. Sometimes. I need to sleep now or I'll keep talking to you in my head and that's not good, is it?

*Vaishali*  
2022

## **Lessons to Learn from The Coronavirus Pandemic**

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times....” said Charles Dickens in his classic, ‘A Tale of Two Cities’. This quote holds much relevance in today’s times when we are locked down in our homes, with colleges shut down and have a global pandemic to battle with, while also having all the time in the world to reflect, introspect and improve.

We are reeling under the impact of novel Covid-19 that is wiping out lives and livelihood at an unprecedented pace and scale. Life has changed irrevocably, both for the worse and the better. The world is at war – and for once, not with nations combating each other, but with a common, unseen and vicious enemy- a microscopic virus. Nations are coming together at one level to share the results of their research and accelerate the development of a permanent cure.

We have also come to realise that we are all equal in the eyes of nature. Coronavirus has impacted us all, irrespective of our class, race, gender, religion, caste or any other division constructed by the society. Such a blow of massive proportion at the global level has broken down the barriers between us as we no longer see ourselves as separate nations.

The coronavirus situation has positively impacted the way we emote and maintain relationships. As our lives have slowed down, we have found ways to stay connected with our loved ones – even if it is by virtual means. Being hygienic is no longer a mere good habit, but the very skill we need for our survival.

The biggest change that we have been forced to get adapted to is how we work and learn – everything by virtual means, which turned out a lot more convenient for most of us. However, the pandemic has posed a threat to the whole education system. Schools, universities, and colleges have been shut down and made to switch to online learning; thanks to technology, our best friend and

worst enemy. Education has now become more accessible, however, only to the privileged. As the online education system grows in developing countries like India, we may be leaving a large proportion of the student population untouched due to the digital divide caused by the lack of stable internet connections in some parts of the country and the unavailability of devices required for online classes. Sadly, we have no other choice except for online learning. When it comes to higher education, many parents are also avoiding sending their kids abroad due to the high risk of getting infected with the virus.

Covid-19 has impacted the global economy adversely. According to a report by the IMF, the global economy shrunk by over 4 per cent in 2020-21 which is the steepest fall since the Great Depression of the 1930s. Every nation, big or small, has suffered losses and is expected to bear even bigger ones in the near future with new variants knocking at our doors.

However, with the bad, comes the good. Even at the time of this chaos, there is a sense of empathy in the air. People are more polite, compassionate and sympathetic than ever before. Why did it take a global pandemic to cause this transformation in us? We, who used to unashamedly jump every queue at ration shops and airports now stand patiently three feet behind each other. We now ask our elderly neighbours if they need any help. We reach out to long-lost kith and kin to check on their wellbeing.

But time is a fickle friend and memory can be a mischievous mate. As the weeks trudge by, the world will turn back to normal. (We hope and pray that it does.) The worry is that the lifting of shackles will lead to a surge as we return to our conspicuous consumptions, to our uncaring, self-centred ways and completely forget what we have endured during this time.

Earlier we raced without reflecting on where we were headed. Perhaps this is a God-sent opportunity to pause and think. If we can be empathetic now, what stopped us earlier? We forgot to

spend time with our families while we raced to earn more money than we needed. The question faced by us is whether we will be able to hold on to these values. The world will survive and so will we. And survival will not mean just 'continuing to live' but 'to live with what is left'. So, how will we live in a post-coronavirus world? Will we remember our lessons from the coronavirus pandemic? Or will we just move on and continue to live like old times when we were safe and sound?

*Areeba Abrar*

*2024*

## How do I tell them

I remember that my grandparents used to tell me how they started their day with praying to God and thanking him for each day they get to spend in the world He created with His own hands. They believed that humans are fortunate to be born as His supreme creation, that He endowed us with all the might, abilities and love that He could have possibly given us, that He brought us up to be the successors of this earth so we could cherish and nourish it like He did. But....

How do I tell them that I can't face God even in my prayers because I am too ashamed to call myself His child? He might be lamenting and regretting the moment He handed us His everything as we miserably failed all His expectations.

How do I tell them that the colour of this earth is red today? Not because of the blood of the billions spilled on it, but because of earth's own blood from the wounds that humans gave it.

How do I tell them that we grew up to be Judas and not the faithful John He desired? We became the destroyers, and not the preservers, because when we were to sacrifice our inhuman desires, we gave up the essence of humanity instead.

How do I tell them that ever since the first man descended to this earth, we have tormented it so greatly that now the earth's anger erupts like volcanoes, the heat melts the glaciers and the water floods the surface? We forgot that we were to give back what we received and, instead, gave it only pain and misery. This catastrophe is the gift that we have received in exchange for our inhumanity.

How do I tell them that the world isn't a gift from God anymore but the fruit of the sins of humans? The difference between the world God made and the one we destroyed would make Him realise that He shouldn't have trusted us. We turned into the devil He always tried to protect us from.



Today, when I walk around, I can no longer smell the spring, see the bounty of nature or experience how it feels to live. All I can see, smell and experience is bruises, blood and anarchy that we created with our very own hands. We, indeed, had the power of creation but what we didn't have was the ability to use it. So, if I would pray to God, I'd rather be sorry than grateful. I'd ask Him to put an end to the atrocities of mankind, even if it means an end for all of us. We were never the chosen ones.

How do I tell them that these disasters that nature inflicts upon us are, in reality, the cure and we, humans, are the actual calamity?

*Chhavi Choudhary*  
2024

## **My Black Unconscious**

My unconscious is a wretched, wretched entity. It fosters intrusive memories and shadows of nightmares. It makes my clammy hands even more sweaty, but one day it uttered something it never did before, rendering me wordless with thousands of words in mind. My unconscious, dressed in black, with two boxes in its hands stood inside my dimly lit aura. Looked at me with its ghostly eyes sobbing, heartbreakingly while hugging my knees and coughing in between, stared pitifully yet solemnly in the eyes that were perpetually wet. It stared and stared for long, while I sobbed and sobbed. It then handed me the boxes when I stopped to catch my breath from the crying; and the tears which weren't going to stop.

I looked at the boxes and my heart skipped a beat in confusion of my own comprehension, one box was labelled "Reasons To Live" while the other was labelled "Reasons To Die".

I looked at my black Unconscious in befuddled unease and croaked, "What are in these boxes?" The Unconscious explained, "Just moments ago you were making me ponder if you have any reasons to live or not, and you were searching for reasons to end your life as well, so I organised those reasons into these boxes and want you to take a look."

I opened both the boxes and sighed. The "Reasons To Live" box was empty and the "Reasons To Die" box was full of the grief I have in my heart, the pain was overflowing. I teared up again. "What are you trying to say?"

The Unconscious elucidated, "I'm trying to say that you don't have any reasons to live, but many reasons to die." I instinctively picked up the "Reasons To Live" box and searched in it again. I

searched for quite a long moment, turned it upside down to clear out its contents, any contents. But it was really empty. I had no reasons to live, not even one.

“If I have no reasons to live and many to die, I should end my life. I searched and pondered but I didn’t find a single reason in this box. I want to die, that’s why I have no will to live.” I sobbed again.

The Black Unconscious smiled and delineated again, “You see, the mere fact that you were desperately searching for reasons to live is a huge reason to live, in itself. You are the irony of your words and intentions, resonating with my essence. You are a blue sea reflecting the grey sky where I reside and fly. You have a will strong enough to live. Otherwise, you wouldn’t have been digging and clawing to find the treasure that makes you want to live, when the most profound reason of all was there with you all along. It is quite evident in how frantically you searched for reasons, lies the biggest reason to live.”

I loosened my arms around my knees as I sat in awe of my black unconscious as it juxtaposed with the ideas of what it usually did.

*Amna Mannan*  
2024

## The Room Which Speaks Silence

If my room could speak, I would be reminded of all that I left behind, the seasons that have passed while I longingly stared out of the window but the most apparent cry would be of how I shamelessly used it as my safety blanket. I hid behind multitudes of excuses and one could never tell apart truth from lies. After all, time blurs past like a wind for the others while I slowly dissect every inch of my skin with the clock idling in the background. I don't know what I'm looking for in the depths of the vermilion pool. It's straight up torture and the walls in my room would echo the same. Whenever I am hit with the excruciating pain of longing for inner peace, I return back to it, and it never fails to envelop me in its warmth, like a lover's arms do, hiding me from everything and everyone I was running away from. It does not say anything, nor does it expect anything from me. We just lay there in silence, breathing deeply, while the soft OST plays in the background until I grow tired and eventually fall asleep as the music dulls down in my senses and fades away into nothingness. But sometimes, we just lay there, staring at the ceiling until dawn greets us like an old friend. I am aware that our time together will end one day and I will have to leave my safe haven but now, in this moment, there's peace, and no one dares to point out the obvious. I would have to step out, one day, when the familiar streets will appear a little different, when these faces would be more recognisable and not hidden behind multiple layers. One day when I'll dare to breathe without shivering. Oh! Only if my room could speak! It would whisper sweet nothings in my ears till we were just an extension of each other, till we were completely enmeshed in each other.

*Janvi Singh*  
2023

## Pride Month: Is India Ready to Accept?

A few months back, judge Anand Venkatesh of Madras Highcourt, ordered state and federal administrations to plan reforms to eliminate discrimination against the LGBGQ+ community. Even though activists say it's not enough, India needs such orders in favour of the LGBTQ+ community. LGBTQIA+ is an inclusive term that includes people of all genders and sexualities, such as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, queer, intersex, asexual, pansexual, and allies. Indian government, in 2012, submitted a report to the Supreme Court that said 2.5 million people in India identify themselves as Gay. After that, there are no official **demographics** for the **LGBTQIA+ population in India**. In 2018, Supreme Court ruled that consensual homosexual acts would no longer constitute a crime. The historic move reversed Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code. But, India still does not recognize same-sex marriage or civil union. LGBTQIA+ community India faces a particularly hard time living in society. Discrimination and hatred against them is quite common. Homosexuality is believed to be against the regularity of nature, it is seen as taboo to belong from this community. Not only India but the entire world is facing this challenge of accepting people of different sexual orientations. The fact that there is no official report or data of crimes against the LGBTQIA+ community in India, reflects how ignorant we are towards them. Having different sexual orientations doesn't take away the right to live a normal life from them. **We need to transcend this Gender Binary**. Talking about equality is easy, but its implementation is far more difficult. Everything seems easy and different on social media. People with shallow mindsets make our society norms malevolent and toxic for people who disagree with the norms. People who stand up for reforms are called out and boycotted by society. A recent example is the boycott of the advertisement by Dabur portraying two women celebrating 'Karva Chauth'. It is said that demands for same-sex marriage are the effect of westernization and is a threat to our tradition and culture. The truth is, we are always resistant to changes. In the past the same excuses of threat to tradition and culture were put forth to justify various immoral activities which are now criminalised. For example, dowry system and child marriage. Acceptance takes time. Changing the minds of billions of people in India is an uphill task,

but standing up, supporting equality and spreading awareness constantly will certainly bring a change. The problem is that our society is becoming intolerant and people who raise their voices are threatened, thus people are afraid to speak up. We rarely see advertisements with progressive meaning on national television while television is the fastest way to spread awareness in society. The initiative by Dabur should've been appreciated. People need to understand that someone's sexual orientation and love can never be a threat to religion or culture. If society is so reluctant to accept, then we need judicial intervention in this matter. Just the way Madras High court stood up for the LGBTQ+ community.

**It is all about acceptance.** Pride month celebrates the existence of the LGBTQ+ community from one side of the planet to the other. The entire month is committed to the LGBTQIA+ community to commend their way of life, increment mindfulness and assist individuals with accepting their personality.

#### Why is Pride Month Celebrated in June?

In the early morning of June 28, 1969, police attacked a famous gay bar in NYC's West Village, The Stonewall Inn. The benefactors of the bar retaliated, beginning the Stonewall Riots, which continued for a long time. The Stonewall Inn was announced a noteworthy milestone by the city of New York in 2015 and later named a public landmark by President Barack Obama in 2016.

Taking Pride in who you are and whatever you identify yourself as, is important. The Indian LGBTQ+ community needs recognition, rights, and most importantly, acceptance by society. As Lady Gaga's famous anthem goes - *"There's nothing wrong with loving who you are..' cause he made you perfect, babe/ "So hold your head up girl and you'll go far,/Listen to me when I say /I'm beautiful in my way/'Cause God makes no mistakes/ I'm on the right track, baby/I was born this way"*

*Deepshikha  
2024*

## **Time for Green “Clothing” Revolution**

How many clothes do you own? How many of them do you wear? And how many clothes do you dispose of every year? Probably there's no count. In this fast-moving world of social media where every day there is a new trend, we buy clothes more frequently than ever. And as often as we buy clothes, we dump them too. One of the main reasons for climate change, which is causing some catastrophic situations around the globe, is pollution. Have you ever heard of pollution caused by the clothes you are wearing? That's right; we already know the adverse effects of using plastic on our environment and the same material is present in our clothes. The fashion industry is one of the most polluting industries in the world. The value we pay for wearing vivid garments consistently is much higher than we can at any point imagine. Almost 700 gallons of water are used to manufacture a single piece of clothing. Customers are buying clothes at an increasing rate that is churning out the fast-fashion industry and consequently, Fast fashion industries are significantly adding to the emission of greenhouse gases. The cheaper the cloth is, the sooner it has to be dumped or thrown leading to clothing waste accumulation. It has become a part of a human-made hazardous and environmentally unfriendly cycle. Not only in the process of manufacturing, but our clothes harm the environment after getting dumped too.

The greater part of the garments we wear today is made of artificial fibers, which are less expensive and last longer given the synthetics they contain. Synthetic fibers are mainly used as a substitute for natural fibers such as cotton, silk, and wool. Chemically produced fibers are the main contributors to microfiber pollution. This is a material that breaks down and releases microfiber during production, processing, and even after disposal. Synthetically created fibers are the primary contributors to microfibers contamination. These fibers are non-biodegradable like common plastic bags, they stay on the ground for a very long time and contaminate the climate. Microfibers are little particles (under 5mm or 0.2 inches) used in commercial items like beauty care products and found in

our garments. Our nature has created many cycles to keep a balance of everything. If we use natural fibers such as cotton, wool, and silk, the clothes get degraded into the soil after usage. On the other hand, synthetic fibers never degrade into the soil and harm not only the environment but we humans also consume it one way or the other. One time of laundry can release an average of 700000 micro-plastic fibers. It has become a Global Menace.

As an individual, there are numerous ways of attempting to limit this issue on a small scale. Give or exchange rather than discarding the garments you no longer need to wear; you can simply give them to charity or poor individuals. There is a large number of individuals who can't bear the cost of appropriate apparel. You can help by giving them the garments. Trade your garments with your friends and family and purchase second-hand garments. Purchasing recycled things is pocket friendly and climate cordial at the same time. Purchase quality garments – if you are able and your pocket allows, buy quality clothes that can last longer than the normal fast fashion garments. Purchase garments made of natural-fibers - as expressed prior in the article, petrol-based fibers, for example, nylon and polyester are harmful to our nature and are non-biodegradable. By using clothes made of natural fibers you can “lend a hand to save the land”.

Just like we are using eco-friendly items nowadays and introducing the concept of the Green Revolution among the consumers, we also need a Green Revolution in the Clothing industry. Since it is one of the most polluting industries in the world, the industry should be given more attention and immediate actions should be taken in regards to this problem. If we want to save our earth, we need to make some efforts. Increasing awareness amongst consumers and increasing demand for more environment-friendly items has led fashion companies to produce with sustainability. Everyone wants to protect our Earth and thus we need to do this on a large scale. The Green Revolution doesn't mean just to ask or speak about saving our Earth; it means to start taking action for it. Trying to save Earth means trying to save ourselves and to do so, we have to make efforts. The Green ‘clothing’ Revolution is easy to undertake at an individual level. Just by doing a few things mentioned above, we are saving ourselves.

*Deepshikha*  
2024



## DOOM AT OUR SERVICE

Did we really call for doom? Is this what we wanted? Surrounded by miseries in difficult situations, we often find ourselves cursing the world, asking for an end to it. Did the wish really get granted?

We all run trying to catch up with life, some make it to the finish line while some get eliminated struggling. Even those who successfully crawl to the end - they lose a lot in order to gain something. This ultimate race doesn't leave us with enough time to pause, perceive or process. Hence, we all end up running the eternal run, blaming, cursing fate, asking for a break.

But what would happen if it really stops in the middle, right here, without any warning?

We all have some sort of answer to it because we all have kind of experienced it now. A pause is fatal if it's on the terms and conditions of life and fate.

When we lose while running , we are so engaged in running that we even forget to mourn our loss whole heartedly. Even if we do, we need to turn back to running. We don't notice the intensity of loss, but a pause where we are forced to standstill and do nothing other than recall ourselves. We realise what we dropped. Some of us don't find life worth running for and quit while others resurrect themselves with a heavy heart and weary soul, get back to running and this time a much longer run with no pace and blurred sight.

Remember the curses, they now reflect on us. The doom of our actions now show through the doom in our everyday lives. I don't know how we'd survive this and whether many of us would. But, the survivors would never be able to enjoy the victory because this is a situation of utter loss. A situation where we have all been ruined,more or less. Because nobody can win against life. But, still let's wait and see each other till the last stop, trying to soothe each other, smiling through pain and with doom at our service.

*Chhavi Choudhary*  
2024

## Star-Crossed Lovers' Bench

There was a moment of silence when the event occurred. I didn't know how to react. Both of them left me without saying their usual goodbyes, leaving silence behind them. I was taken aback to what had just happened, it was unusual.

The college was starting to get quiet by the minute; most kids would have reached home, their hostels, or hangout spots, whereas I was left to think about the incident.

Ankeeta and Raina always sat side by side on the bench, they talked like no one could hear them: they were best friends, I am sure. Even more than that, they were lovers. Their conversations were the best moments of my day. Almost never missing a college day to sit on the same bench and enjoy each other's company. It was a pleasant sight to see every day, like a child seeing their parents conversing and deeply in love with each other. But their latest conversation seemed to have been different.

The first time Ankeeta sat, Raina approached her by saying hello, and it was the first time that they met. Raina had silky black hair, glowing from the sun's rays. She had distinct facial features and was blessed with an undeniably attractive smile that captured Ankeeta's eyes immediately. Ankeeta was very hesitant to start a conversation with her. With her hair pulled back and notes in her hand, she was the kid who belonged to the outcast club; at least that's what she told herself.

I remember how they grew closer and closer each passing day, I watched their friendship grow into a beautiful loving relationship and it was a beautiful thing to witness. To have watched the two supporting each other in their endeavours, to hold each other's hands when it was almost time to go home, to laugh at the other's lame story, was a sight to wait for almost every day.

To make myself believe that the incident happened, I had to recall it, once more. They both came looking upset. After sitting down, they just held each other's hand. "It's what we had, so we

should cherish it.” Ankeeta said with a forced smile, which Raina also knew. “He said next month” Raina said, “We’re not going to see each other again”, “I know”.

“The marriage is not going to be it for me” Raina looked at Ankeeta sharply, Ankeeta was silent. I was silent, inside and out.

They both sat in silence for the next seven minutes, and then Ankeeta said, “We have an internal tomorrow; we should go.” She saw Raina holding back her passionate tears for the thing she had ever been really passionate about, but she kept her distance and decided to only touch the tip of her knee. They both left me after that, they both left me still, and left me shocked.

I was torn after the unexpected event; it took me a while to realize that I would never see them both again, or rather together.

I could not help thinking about Raina’s tears flowing down her cheeks when she would reach home, how her father must have forced her to live a straight life, how painful it was for her that Ankeeta was just accepting it, and was silent about the relationship now.

How Ankeeta would just hold herself accountable for making the first move on her first real heartbreak.

How I became the ‘Breakup bench’.

*Jankincy H. Lyngdoh*

*2021*

## COUNTING

*(It has been seven days since the floods began.)*

### DAY 8

Everything seems to be falling further apart. I can't stand Aisha anymore. The annoyance and the irritation seem to be reaching a dead end beyond which there is sheer darkness. The darkness is approaching nearer, gnawing at our increasing hunger and parched throats. Aisha and I again had a fight today, that's three days in a row. She started screaming at me for not telling her that a part of her dress was soaking in the water! It was hardly wet. And in that moment, something engulfed me and I threw her pillow into the thigh-deep water. I confess, I regretted it the instant I did it but something snapped inside me and I couldn't control it.

Again, there were announcements but no one seems to even care that we are trapped inside. It's the sixth day of the power cut, and it has been long since the phone died. Hope has started to depart slowly. But it hasn't said goodbye yet.

### DAY 9

Aisha was crying again. I don't understand where the tears are coming from. What was it to cry! I know she's feeling as helpless and suffocated as I am but something inside of me doesn't want that to be mirrored. We are hungrier than ever. We drank water, it couldn't be helped. The animalistic instincts seem to care more about surviving than catching a life-threatening disease. I am breathing. I am very much alive, but I also have understood the difference between surviving and living. But is mere surviving reason enough to exist?

It's the seventh day of the power cut. Sweet optimism was fed to bland minds. Hope has started to rise from the sofa.

### DAY 10

We have stopped talking. There is a mutual understanding of not speaking. It tires us. Even our eyes have an urge to keep themselves closed. I heard Aisha sobbing and it breaks my heart because I can't console her when I myself have no clue about the future. It rained again today. Light

and rhythmic, almost like a lullaby. Writing feels like a burden but if I stop this, my body will shut down. I've been coughing lately, might catch a cold.

Eighth day of the power cut. The announcements are no longer heard. Hope has taken the first step towards the door.

### **DAY 11**

Aisha coughed blood today. She was all nerves and it took a while to calm her down. But strangely, she did not cry. Tomorrow will be my turn but who will calm me down? Calmness...it appears to be a dream. Chaos is the reality. This numbness is the reality. I slept a little too much and woke up only when the sun was setting.

Ninth day of the power cut. Aisha said they announced that our area was next to be rescued. Hope is about to reach the door.

### **DAY 12**

I was down with fever and my body felt like it was burning. Aisha sat by my side, humming something all the while. It pained to listen. I'm better now. We don't feel hungry anymore, it has become a habit.

Electricity paid a visit but did not ring the doorbell. Hope is, by now, at the door.

### **DAY 13**

Today Aisha held my hand throughout the day and sometime after the sunset the grip loosened and she embraced a deep eternal sleep.

Hope has opened the door.

### **DAY 14**

I saw a crow. Maybe there'll be a new dawn?

Hope said its goodbye and didn't even turn back to wa-

*Shambhavi Mishra*

2021

## Shattered Truths

She had read a lot about the long wars fought for independence and the tensions that had followed ever since. She had heard a lot about freedom and wings and so had she heard about chains and shackles for the eighteen years of her life. But never did she care, for she was not in a war. Never did she care until the war entered inside her very own house, then her body and finally into her intricately woven mind, ripping the threads of her truth apart.

She will never forget the tears that rolled down her cheeks that day. Not that she had never cried before, but, those tears had melted the wall of lies and pretense she had built inside her. Her cheeks felt the vibration and the hurt that followed after the slap she had received two minutes ago, but the weight of those tear drops didn't allow her to feel the pain. She watched her sister, her dear *Jiji*, getting beaten and being forcefully locked inside the room until the day when her fate was decided came and she was thrown inside the walls of marriage. All of this because *Jiji* tried to marry Kareem, the boy she loved. The slap she had received was her share of punishment for helping *Jiji*. But no one in her family realised how painful a punishment it was for her to watch that whole marriage ceremony go on. She couldn't stop it. Her knowledge of rights and freedom, her opinions, her education everything burnt in silence. In silence, she watched her mother standing teary eyed in the corner, cursing the fate of her daughter. She told her- "Rajni, you should thank god that your *Jiji* is still alive and safe after all she did." Hearing all the consolations she received from her mother, she couldn't decide if she should just pity her mother for her helplessness or be angry with her, for she couldn't stand for her daughter. In silence, she watched her father. She couldn't believe that he was the same man who was the first person to stand in support for everything their daughters did, was their pillar against the world; and a few days back was the one talking about freedom for girls amongst his friends and told them how proud he was of himself for he had educated his daughters. In silence, she watched her uncles and aunts, their eyes filled with relief that finally the tension was going to be resolved. In

silence, she watched her sister who, after all her failed attempts to be free, carried her dead wings with her when she left the house.

It has been seven years since her happy life was shattered. The silence of that day has not allowed her to be at peace ever since. For her family, *Jiji* is now happily married. But she knows the truth, the real truth. She knows that *Jiji* still keeps the dead wings. Not a single day has passed when she hasn't asked herself why all of it happened. Because *Jiji* decided to marry a boy from another religious sect or because she decided to marry on her own or just because she dared to decide. She still carries the regret of being silent, though she doubts if it would've made any difference. Her sister's fate is shared by many other people and she shares her silence with almost half the world. She cannot have her happy and safe place back for she knows that it doesn't exist. But at least she knows the truth. She has questions and she seeks answers. She knows that this time she won't fall for lies.

*Shruti Saumya*

2021

## Let's Bequeath a Healthier Planet to Our Future Generations

As per our current knowledge, Earth is the only planet which has life in this universe. So, we should respect and protect everything that we get from it. But its present condition is challenging the healthy existence of life because of global warming, pollution, overpopulation, deforestation etc.

Imagine the condition of every living creature on an overexploited planet. Will we be able to survive? Will we be able to lead a healthy and prosperous life? The answer is no. Neither we nor our future generations will live happily. We are becoming selfish and greedy and hence, are overexploiting the resources. We are looking forward to a developed country but, in the process, are neglecting its impact on the environment. Habitats of animals are being snatched away because of large-scale deforestation. The outcome is the planet's untimely degradation. Instead of breathing fresh air, we are inhaling smog and most of us can be seen wearing masks to avoid this. The time is not far when all of us will wear masks and suffer from respiratory diseases like asthma.

Factories dispose-off waste products into various water bodies, which leads to water pollution and puts an end to aquatic life. In spite of awareness workshops which are frequently organized, we are not vigilant. We tend to ignore the fact that we are moving towards a diseased future, which is full of suffering. In the rush of development, we are neglecting nature's right to live.

We need to preserve the basic necessities of life for our future generations. Instead of crying over the spilt milk, we should take measures to save our environment and its resources. We have to come forward and take out some time from our busy lives in order to preserve the beauty and greenery of our planet. Let's join our hands to bequeath a healthier planet to our future generations.

*Hritam Shukla*

2022



## A Life Beyond Life

I could hear the footsteps on the wooden floor above me. Now and then laughter would float through the air and the clinking of glasses would fill the silence that engulfed me. But it wasn't always silent here. My friends would visit me often, fill the darkness with their laughter and smiles, but nobody liked my friends. They said they couldn't see them, that they didn't exist in reality but just in my head. "No", I wanted to yell. How could they not exist, I talked to them every day, didn't I? My friends were the best; they had powers that other people could only imagine. Maybe that's why everyone was envious of them; hated them and loathed me for being friends with them.

I don't seem to remember what light was like. It has been so long since I have lived in this overwhelming darkness. I have a feeling that if I see light now, it will hurt me. I have not felt the wind blowing, haven't danced in the rain or seen the sky since so long that now I think it was all a dream. I have, for so long, lived in the darkness that day and night are just words for me; nothing to separate them.

I still remember the day when my parents took me to the doctor. I could see they were embarrassed of me. Everybody thought I was crazy because I was friends with people they couldn't see. Kids laughed at me in school; nobody would even sit next to me. Every family member asked them to send me to a boarding school so that I'd be able to get rid of the outlandish ideas in my head. But I wasn't unhinged, they were. So one fine day, my parents took me to see a doctor who ran lots of tests on me. I was so tired that I just wanted to go home and sleep, but he kept us waiting for the results. He then proclaimed that I had a severe disorder with a big unpronounceable name. All this in reality meant that I was mentally unstable. I despised the doctor. He was just jealous of me.

From then on, nobody treated me the same. I stopped going to school or anywhere outside of the house. Gradually, I was moved to the basement and the bare minimum human interaction that

had existed in my life was cut off. I was isolated and nobody ever came to visit me; only my friends stayed by my side. Days changed to months and months to years, I learned to live in solitude but I never learned to love it.

Is this the life everybody craves? Could death be more terrifying, wretched and unendurable than this life? This life, with all its allures, held no charm for me. A system that did not allow me to breathe, shunned me because I was not 'normal', could not be expected to let the difference prevail. I close my eyes and everywhere it is dark; I open my eyes and I am still sleeping. The day when I finally see the Light, I only wish to be reborn in a world where my friends are accepted and where darkness cannot follow me.

*Tiyasha Saha*

*2022*

## Barbed Wires

I have barbed wires around my mind as a precaution against your ruthless violence. There are deep marks of psychological torture building armies, like the virus that is presently threatening life on Earth, and I haven't even been touched by the goons yet. I am untouched because I have become a prisoner of war, fighting her own battles within her comfortable home space. Creatures, who disguise themselves as free thinking human beings, are planning out mass funerals for the innocent. Why? Because they are practicing their Right to Speech and voicing their opinions against the decisions Dear Government makes.

Oh, that's a crime. A crime that will render them as cold blooded murderers in the eyes of Dear Government itself. And it's better to silence such criminals before they realize their potential for going on a massive killing spree. Dear Government is a unique Mastermind here. It is drafting an invocation to that culturally and religiously created Lucifer from the Bible who is effortlessly evil. Well, if Lucifer is the epitome of evil, human beings are on their way to transcend this universal symbol. And this country will soon become the ever loathed Pandemonium that apparently was a home to unwanted rebels who just wanted destruction.

I feel closer to the Archangel today, not the one their Bible created, but the one who is always misunderstood. If you think about it, this is a repetition of the first Biblical Fall, isn't it? A bunch of breathing beings rebel against the policies of the One in power, as a result of which they are thrown out of their Paradise like shooting stars that never have a destination to go to; they build their destination as and when their feet find solid ground. Only this time, there will be no serpents to take revenge because life is the birthday gift that is being snatched away ruthlessly.

Every day, I wake up to news headlines that establish this pathetic excuse of a Nation as nothing more than a rotting dystopia. Here, people are punished for not being passive observers of a death circus. Dear Government wants us to stick lollipops to our mouths and forever hold our breaths because that's what a good citizen does.

But when will we all realize that if violence was the answer to every problem humankind faces, we would've become the extinct creatures people of Mars would study about in their science textbooks? You raise your voice, they raise their guns; there is no chain of events that might follow because this is how a human being's life ends. One bullet to the heart and all shall be managed.

*Angela Braru*  
2020

## Why Should We Listen To Podcasts?

In an increasingly tech-driven era where everyone has access to smartphones and earphones, another way to connect with people with similar interests has been made possible by podcasts.

Podcasts provide a type of collective experience and have so far been successful in catering to everyone's niche. Whether it be about travelling from one place to another in Musafir or affirming the futility of Trump's visit, podcasts initiate discussions on all topics and consequently can attract a diverse audience. Moreover, for many listening to celebrity gossip on No Filter Neha, or finding amusement in Cyrus' standup comedy while commuting, may as well be the equivalent of morning chai.

In addition to providing on-demand, never-ending Indianised content, more people should, and have begun listening to podcasts for its cost-effectiveness and easy access. Moreover, listening to podcasts is a great way to inform oneself and stay up to date on recent events. Most importantly, such an informative platform also serves to save time in the morning in addition to substituting the daily dose of journalists and spokespersons shouting on tv, with tasteful discussions.

Lastly, it is important that the audience for podcasts furthers in numbers and undergoes diversification. Since anyone with a mic and a smartphone can create podcasts, giving a boost to such homegrown businesses provides encouragement and initiative in the audio streaming sector. Along with stimulating one's brain and providing entertainment in heaps, this form of media has the potential to overtake all competition in the audio streaming sector with its immensity and depth.

*Jhanvi Shah*

*2021*

**//for 2007, the 'is', the 'was'//**

I stopped writing. I stopped writing just like I stopped thinking. I stopped thinking just like I stopped feeling. I stopped feeling just like I stopped breathing. I stopped breathing just like I stopped being. It didn't happen overnight. It happened over glasses of thick chocolate milkshakes turning to mugs of vodka and cranberry juice, it happened over living room discussions with the family, finding out I share my heart with minds that support systematic cleansing of people, it happened over heartaches and crying over half loves lost, found, found, lost, lost, lost, losing, gone, and it happened over headlines that caused frown lines and debates that conflicted the conscience.

This unbecoming has been a gradual decaying of self. It can be romanticised as replenishment for a greater good. Maybe, if it is televised enough, maybe if I am locked in a room and told it is the only reality, it might do a pseudo decent job at that. I am constantly shifting between altered realities and cartographic doodles of what people want me to believe, perceive, see, hear, say, and be. I so often find myself being watched by a version of my conscience that I don't recognise anymore. I am a memory hypochondriac, neurotically holding onto my own hand-me-down fictions, my versions of mysteriously erasing realities of spatial memories. It is the version who held Matilda close to her chest, the nostalgia of the 2007 summer past. Things were simpler back then.

2007 was a teenage ago. I returned home, red cheeks that just held stories of wild school days and tired eyes that needed a nap before play time, not dark circles and anxiety to complete assignments under smiles. 2007 was a blink ago. I ate white bread slices with extra cheese, without a care in the world about hormones or cysts. 2007 was a hug away. I came home to warm cuddles to drive the winter cold away, fearlessly. 2007 was a living room away. Home was

a party with hearts that waltzed to the beats of Iftaar feasts, not hearts that danced on the backbones of the oppressed. 2007 was a mango tree away. The road to amma's house was canopied by trees, not hoardings with details of protestors. 2007 was a ten rupee note away. The year when coins

clinked in my pockets and an entire piggybank of my life's savings hadn't been declared illegal over dinner. 2007 was a heat stroke away. It was the year when we sat in the dark through a blackout on a hot June night and not for seven months through a suspension of time in our world. 2007 was a harvest away. It was the lunch where I learnt how to say 'ann data sukhi bhav' (may the provider be happy) and not walk with the farmers to save the ones that hadn't killed themselves. 2007 was an after. It was five years after the cacophony of 2002, still healing, not a thirteen years before the pandemonium of 2020, burning. 2007 was a glass of Rasna. It was the time when water was used to mix glucose drinks and milk was not used to mix water. 2007 was a Bollywood dance number away. It was the year when I jammed to 'dil mein mere hai dard-e-disco', before nihilism engulfed me and it became a perpetual mood, and not to the chants of 'azaadi', 'inqualaab' or 'hum dekhenge'. 2007 was a breakdown away. A mosque, a temple, a harmony had been broken down in days of the past, not a democratic system. 2007 was a touch away. Jobs had just come out with the iPhone, a smart phone that made life easier, and not made our lives. 2007 was a burnout away. It was a hot year, and not a year with half the world burning. 2007 was a headline away. It was the year when we paid the newspapers and not the governments. 2007, was the now. It was an 'is', the present, but not now.

2007 is a 'was'.

2007 is a lifetime away

*Vaishnavi Dube*

*2021*

### 30 Seconds at the Red Light

30. 29. 28.

The auto jerks to a stop. I feel annoyed, it's 8 PM and my mother keeps calling. I like Delhi's lights at night, but the city's darkness doesn't like me.

27. 26. 25.

The cars are stopped with oodles of potential energy, their engines still revving, begging to be released and let go. Yet, there's something surreal about Delhi coming to a stop, making some kind of peace with its smoky air and its hundreds of trees.

24. 23. 22.

I see myself in the window of the car stopped beside me. I don't know if it's a Toyota or a Honda; I recognise my Uber rides only by their colour. The necessary solipsism of humans strikes me - how I haven't stopped even at a red light to look at anyone else, only myself.

21. 20. 19.

A seller of white flower garlands stops at my auto, and I wave him "no". I don't need them. Not yet. The red light has us all paused here, but somehow, somewhere, someone else's life is taking a sharp turn.

18. 17. 16.

The auto driver has pictures of Shiva and Lakshmi on his windshield. What would he think if I start cursing Modi out on the phone? I don't dare to take the risk - I'm fearless in love, but not so much in hate.

15. 14. 13.



I get lost in thoughts of you. I clench the seat a little tighter, and the auto driver sneaks a look at me through his rearview mirror as I lean my head on the canopy of the vehicle, smiling at a stray dog. I wonder if animals also daydream.

12. 11. 10.

My glasses dig into the bridge of my nose, so I take them off. The red of the light blurs, painting the sky with hints of it. Does God stop to look down at the 9-5 of creation? Annoyed by red lights interrupting the routine of their lives?

9. 8. 7.

I remember her telling me to text her when I reach home. She knows the canopy of the auto doesn't protect me. I will bathe in the sense of being wanted, I will appreciate her concern, and then when I get home I will still end my day on my bed and forget to text.

6. 5. 4.

I remember anger. I remember happiness. I remember the static in my mind while reading Wordsworth. But all that is forgotten on the road - the only thought in my head is to get home before it's worry-o'clock for my parents.

3. 2. 1.

It sounds like the rumbling of my stomach after surviving on ice tea all day when the auto starts up again. I sit up again, preparing to rattle off directions to the place that ends my every day. The sellers of garlands back off from the road - somewhere, someone backs out of their home.

0. The riot-red seeps away from the light.

It's time to go.

*Nashra Usmani*

2020

## PANDEMONIUM

“So, how is it?”

“It’s just an old watch, grandmother. What am I supposed to do with it?”

“Your mother left this for you-“

“Oh, the woman who abandoned you and me? I don’t want anything of hers.”

I handed her the key back. Why should I take a gift from someone who ran away and left us in this dirty place where we could barely survive? After years and years of waiting, giving up was the only thing I could do. My childhood memories of her singing me a lullaby, telling me stories before bed, playing with me turned sour the moment she decided to run away. It was just me and my grandmother trying our hardest to fit into the society where no one would even look at those ‘green eyed freaks’.

“You silly girl. Still hung up on that. Your mother must’ve had a reason to do what she did. Now, you go and get some things for dinner. I’ll make your favourite dish for dinner.”

She handed me the money and booted me out of the house. The clattering noises of the pots could be heard from outside. This meant she was going to make curry. Curry isn’t actually my favourite dish. My grandmother is the one who loves it and I just love the way she smiles while eating it. It always feels nostalgic to me. Looking at her making the curry while sitting on the table.

I made my way to the village to get her the ingredients. I added some fruits that she would love. Tonight’s dinner would be the best since it’s my birthday tomorrow. A small chill went down my back but I shook it off thinking it’s just a cold breeze.

By the time I decided to go back, it was already night. My grandmother would kill me if I decided to waste time again like an airhead. I hurried my way back to the house with this lingering feeling of dread in my heart. Last time, this similar feeling brought about the death of the sweet town’s lady. Shaking my mind off the dark thoughts, I started sprinting. The dreadful feeling came crashing down on me as I watched the dark smoke rising from the house. Hues of red bright flames engulfed the house. The air around the house felt heavy as if despair was dancing through it. My legs

were glued to the ground. It felt like the vines from the ground were holding it firmly to its place. I could only hear the sound of my roaring heart in my ears. It was as if the whole world had gone silent. My eyes caught nothing but the flames that engulfed the house where all of my memories resided.

“Ooh it’s burning up real bright...”

I flew around, the voice catching me by surprise. My heart, my mouth, my breath caught in my lungs, I peered at this strange man clad in strange dark clothes. He stood with both hands in his pocket.

“Who are you? Why are you here?” my throat felt dry.

Ignoring my question, he gazed at the fire with his sombre expression.

“My grandmother is still inside...” I spoke to myself.

“Hmm? What was that?”

My legs started moving on their own towards the burning house. As I got closer, I could feel the scorching heat on my face.

“Hey!! What are you doing?!” I could faintly hear the person yell as I ran through the flames into the house. The table where we used to eat every day, the sofa where grandma sometimes fell asleep while telling me her stories, the three legged stool chipped off from one end, every one of my memories was up in the flames. I made my way to the kitchen trying to find where she was.

A hand suddenly covered my eyes but not before I had caught a glimpse of my grandmother’s half burned body lying on the kitchen floor. Her sweet face that used to read me stories and smiled at me was now charred with eyes melting. Her body which used to give the best hugs was now burned crisp.

“You shouldn’t look that way.” Said the same voice as before. The person gripped me by my shoulders and led me out of the house.

As we made our way out of the house, his hand was still gripping my wrist painfully. I set myself free from his grasp and pushed him away. Astonished, he stood there with a stupid grin on his face.

I glanced back at the house and the last image of my grandmother crossed my mind. Before the sweet memories was now the haunting image of her body. The ground seemed to sway beneath me and I fell to my knees. The bitter taste of vomit left my mouth dry.

“Who even are you?” I asked queasily.

“I’m Rix.” The guy answered. “I was loitering around when I saw smoke rise up in the sky, so I decided to check it out.” Oh, by the way do you know where the house of Mrs. Cayena is? “Grandmother...”

“Excuse me?”

“Why were you looking for my grandmother?”

My question made him shut up. He turned around with his hands on his head. I again heard a trail of curses.

Something flickering caught my eye. Next to him, there was something shining on the ground. Hurriedly I made my way and pushed him beside to see what it was. Still scalding hot, I grasped it tightly. The pain from the heat finally made my eyes tear up.

“What the hell are you-” he stopped mid sentence as he saw me gripping the antique watch my grandmother tried to give me early in the morning. The sound of some men yelling and the horses grew close. The overwhelming sound made Rix snap out of his trance.

“We have to run! Get up.”

We came to a forest. The only sound that surrounded us was the crunch of the dead leaves under our boots and the panting of our breaths. The forest seemed empty. The only way for us to see anything was the moonlight. The moon seemed to be our only ally, illuminating our path to escape.

“Alright, this should be okay.” Panting, Rix let go of my hand.

“Why?” my voice came out hoarser than before because of the dryness.

“Your grandmother, she had asked for me. Her letter was quite a mysterious one. She asked me to search for something. Her letter contained another envelope of sorts. Here, have a look.”

He handed me the envelope. It was all scrunched up as if he had put in his pocket in a hurry. I looked up at him questionably. He was sitting on a tree root protruding from the ground, fanning his shirt to get rid of the sweat. Now that I look at him, he seems close to my age. His eyes caught me looking at his miserable sweat drenched self.

I looked down at the envelope and started reading. Strange. This was one of the stories my grandmother told me. It was about two rival groups who were out for blood. Two people from the rival clans fell in love, eloped and made a new life for themselves. But the story that was written here told something else. Some of the things didn't add up. The ending turned gruesome. The way all events were written, it was as if someone who was going through it wrote it.

“This is one of the tales grandmother used to tell me with some alterations to the story. Also this has the same insignia that's on this pocket watch she gave me.”

Rix just looked at me with a puzzling look but his eyes gave off a dark gaze.

“Can you show me this insignia you're talking about?”

The hunger in his voice was clear. It made me reluctant to show him the one piece that was left of my grandmother's. Seeing my reluctance, laughter boomed through the forest. He ran his fingers through his hair. His expression gave off the wickedness that made chills run through my spine.

“Hmm. I see. So you are wary of strangers. I thought you would trust me if I played your knight in the shining armour instead of killing you right there. Now now, give me the pocket watch.”

It felt as if his words had knocked out the breath in my lungs. Before I could compose myself, he lunged at me, trying to snatch the hand watch from me. Struggling to seize it, we fell on the dry bed of the forest. His hands were now wrapped around my throat, cutting off my airway. My lungs felt as if they were burning. I tried to get his hands off, hit him, my nails scratched his arms but my struggles were in vain. Nothing worked. Deprived of oxygen, I saw my vision slowly turning black. Something shiny caught my attention in that little while before losing consciousness.

When I came to, the whole forest bathed in the warmth of the sunlight. In my hand, was a necklace which had a key. I noticed something was in my hand. It was chain that held my pocket watch and the events of yesterday came rushing back. I felt the sobs choke me at the back of my throat. Tears filled my eyes as I laid on the forest bed. The forest was eerily quiet, only the sounds of my sobs could be heard.

After calming down a bit, I composed myself and decided that no matter what, I should get at the end of these events.

*Parijaat Waikar*

*2023*

## What's Identity?

What is identity?

From my perspective, identity could be anything. It has a vast range and is not defined by a specific thing. It could include the colour one sees the world in, what they wear, the expression they hold, what they think of others, the kind of hairstyle they've done, the type of makeup they have on, their sexual preferences, and the list goes on.

Sometimes I feel like the society is a cruel thing. It can either support you and the opinions you hold or just bash in your confidence and try to confine you with the chains of their rules. It's like we have to abide by the rules or it'll disown us and call us fanatics. People in some societies may be open and acceptable but it makes me question whether they are truly trying to accept or just going with the trend to be polite and accepting. Some may accept you online for who you are but may reject you in person. Sometimes people forget that behind that simple username online is a real human being with emotions and feelings who is trying to find a safe place. But even if it's a false safe place, some might find comfort in knowing that they have some kind of support.

I also think that society does play a role in defining your identity and helping you find it. For many it may be that case. Defy it or join it, their choice. As for me, I'm just a big ball of confusion at times. 'Which side should I take? What is more polite? What to do to make them happy?' Questions like these always roam around in my mind. I never end up with a clear cut answer. For me, I just find society unbearable at times. I just want to be whoever I want, whenever I want.

'Existing is being who you are and being who you are is your identity.' This line came up when I was talking with a friend. Identity is something that makes you comfortable in your own skin.

In all honesty, I'm someone who remains confused about my own identity. My interests and hobbies change a lot. Something that I find boring might become interesting after a passage of time. The concept of having a strict identity is unusual to me. I feel identity is fluid. Just like water. It takes the form of whatever it's filled into.

Identity might be something that makes one different or connects one to another. It's also scary at times. Having a different identity and thinking of all the scenarios of how one might be rejected and end up as an outsider may strike fear in our hearts. In my opinion, one should just come out with it but it's easier said than done. The fear just takes a choke hold on your neck, always reminding one of their insecurities.

Our identity may be hidden even in the smallest of gestures. The colour of nail polish, dressing style, hairstyles, accessories, even the expressions we hold; identity resides in everything. It's just that at times, showing our true identity to the rest of the world around us is nerve wracking but it also adds to the thrill of life, making it exciting at the same time.

I haven't had the chance to shout out "This is who I am! And I'm happy with myself!" yet. But I sure hope that that moment will come soon.

*Parijaat Waikar*

2023



## Wanderlust

There's this hollow feeling in you, as if you have lost something very important. Something that was meant to be here with you. It's a feeling where you know something is out there that belongs to you but you have no idea where you lost it. And it doesn't stop at that, the moment you start looking for this said lost thing, you start a never-ending quest.

You keep looking for it everywhere- behind the doors, under the bed, in the books- but it's not there. You google it, visit places, talk to people but this search never ends. Just as the thought registers in your mind that you won't be getting it back, you are filled with desperation; desperation so deep it drives you to the verge of madness, you can't control anything around you. Each breath gets more laboured than the last one, leaving a vile taste in your mouth and a burn in your lungs. There's this sinking feeling in you, like you know you have to reach a place but you don't remember which place it was. It is emotionally exhausting and leaves you physically weak for days; sleep deprivation does that to you. The hollowness increases tenfold and there's an invisible weight on your chest that you can't remove. It crushes you down but you can't do anything about it. How can you look for something that isn't even there, it never was. You know this madness needs to stop, you can't keep going like this but you are desperate; desperate for the feeling of belongingness that it will bring to you. That's the feeling of wanderlust. It never heals or goes away, it stays inside of you and you struggle with it each and every moment of your life like a caged bird with a broken wing.

*Janvi Singh*

2023

## *Reviews*

## **Mother! - The Nightmare of Reality**

Directed by Darren Aronofsky in 2017 and produced by Protozoa Pictures production house, the artful “Mother!” is as disturbing as it is thought-provoking. Everything goes dystopic in this work of art. “Mother!” can very easily be classified under the genre of dark psychological horror and thriller but is much more than what meets the eye. The motion picture, starring Jennifer Lawrence (as Mother), Javier Bardem (as Him), Ed Harris (as Man) and Michelle Pfeiffer (as Woman), is set in what seems like a literal fool’s paradise during the 1980s.

Aronofsky’s passion for filmmaking, combined with the horrific, is evident in his themes and his dreamscapes throughout the plot. The movie starts with a surreal landscape- a house in the middle of nowhere. A woman, the mother around whom the movie’s plot revolves, resides in this beautiful and tranquil home, made by her husband himself. As the plot progresses, this peace is disturbed. Man and Woman enter this blissful abode and things take a turn for the worse as they get uninvited by Mother.

The beginning will, without a doubt, evoke a sense of quietness and stillness in you. This is especially because of the soundtrack of the movie which is nonexistent. There is no music in “Mother!” because somewhere along the line the director realized that the movie didn’t need music, just deafening silence.

Aronofsky’s direction focuses on his contemporary vision of the corrupted world. It is embedded more in atmospheric styling and aesthetics than in the plot. For this reason, the symbolism and allegories in the film become embarrassingly obvious. The structure of the movie, which is the very essence of the film, is something that should never go unnoticed. The first half retains most of the calmness of the movie whereas the second half is unhinged. The blatant portrayal of the disturbing reality of today deviates this movie from mainstream cinematic choices. My suggestion is if you have a

weak stomach, you might want to clock out after the one-hour mark. The two halves of the movie are worlds apart in their themes, atmosphere, direction, etc.

The actors have unquestionably done a wonderful job in carrying out their individual roles and Lawrence's acting as Mother is noteworthy. She is convincing in all the helplessness and frustration she feels in the film. Nevertheless, the chemistry between Lawrence and Bardem as husband and wife is not very convincing as compared to their supporting counterparts, Pfeiffer and Harris.

It is praiseworthy that the dialogues are rather relaxed and natural. Every character embraces an easy-going speech format that will keep you engaged. This is vital for a movie that spirals relentlessly because it becomes hard to catch up if the dialogues are vague, metaphorical or twice removed from their meaning.

The fact is that despite all the negativity this movie has received for its violent themes and hellish content, the further you get into it, the closer it moves to your heart. "Mother!" is a movie about nature's plight and the horrors of the world. Evidently, this film will not click with all viewers and can be a little complex and unusual at first. But if you enjoy creepy incoherent chaos mixed with violent symbolism, make sure to give "Mother!" the time to breathe and you will find it has made its way in your hearts and minds with unabashed honesty.

*Nitika Abuja*  
2022

## ***LEILA ON NETFLIX***

*Leila*, a dystopian drama based on Prayaag Akbar's 2017 novel by the same name, follows a woman's quest for her lost daughter while defying the totalitarian state simultaneously. The series tackles various themes of a dystopian world like social hierarchies, hyper-segregation, authoritarianism, surveillance, pollution, and crisis.

*Leila*, set in the late 2040s, shows a tyrant India, known as *Aryavarta*. A godly figure named Joshi—a religious extremist—is the head of the state. He expects the citizens to live according to his laid down rules which blatantly discriminate between castes, religions and classes. The rich live in shiny skyscrapers, separated from shaggy slums by tall walls. Women marrying outside their caste or religion are sent to “purification” camps and are forced to chant, “my lineage is my destiny.” They are taught the notions of what an ideal woman should be. Women are treated as mere objects with no rights, freedom or choices of their own.

The show has the bravest beginning one has ever seen on Netflix. It starts with the lynching of a Muslim man, for he marries a woman outside his religion. His wife, Shalini, played by Huma Qureshi, is brought to a camp for “purification”. She is forced to follow the rules of the new *Aryavarta* and made to undergo sadistic rituals. Leila, the daughter, born out of this transgressive marriage, is taken away from her mother. Throughout the six episodes, Shalini is on a quest for Leila with only her daughter's pacifier in hand and the memories of her family. She exposes political conspiracies and dodges various surveillance systems. Bhanu, exceptionally played by Siddharth, helps her in the mission. Mr Rao, one of the ministers of the *Aryavarta* state, is a huge fan of Faiz Ahmed Faiz—a celebrated Pakistani poet. This makes his political interest contradict his hatred and bigotry

towards the Muslim community. He listens to Faiz in the darkness of the night, afraid that his truth will be disclosed.

The show depicts appalling scenes of environmental pollution with grey skies, acidic rain and toxic water. People are contending with each other to earn a glass of clean water to drink. The rich have the privilege to wear masks while the poor live in squalor and breathe in toxicity. Child labour is commonly. Members of the inferior class are named “doosh,” meaning impure. They live a horrid life. Dissent against the government is censored and silenced. Journalists writing against the *Aryavarta* rule are imprisoned.

All the actors play a phenomenal role in the show. Huma Qureshi’s brilliant acting merges the line between fiction and reality. Actor Siddharth plays the role of a grey character Bhanu. He proves to have incredible acting skills with his outstanding performance throughout the show. Other actors including Arif Zakaria play an important part in making the show so close to reality. According to Deepa Mehta, one of the directors of the show, these blurred lines between the present and an anarchic future is what makes *Leila* so powerful. “Dystopia is always rooted in the present,” she said in an interview. Prayaag Akbar, the author of *Leila* said that the dystopia of his novel was influenced by social forces and discrimination that he had observed over the years.

After a social media backlash and various protests by religious groups, *Leila* was not renewed for the second season, so the ending remains a mystery. While there are rumours of the show coming up with a new season soon, viewers cannot wait to find out if Shalini succeeds in reuniting with her daughter and wins against the totalitarian government.

The show, although meant to showcase a probable future of India, has an uncanny resemblance to contemporary India, where caste and class prejudice are presently widespread, and dissent against the government is deemed as anti-national. With climate change and global warming at

an all-time high, the dystopian setting depicted in the show seems not too far in the future. *Leila* deserves the credit for daring to hold up a mirror to contemporary Indian society and warning that a similar brand of intolerance and exclusion could be round the corner if the forces remain unchecked.

*Areeba Abrar*

*2024*

## The Book Thief

Published in March 2006, *The Book Thief* is written by Markus Zusak. It tells the story of Liesel, a little girl who is taken to a new home because her mother can't afford to take care of her. The story is told by Death, who becomes a character you come to respect and even feel sorry for by the end. The Book Thief is set in Nazi Germany at the start of World War Two. Despite having a historic-realistic setting, The Book Thief provides narratives and situations that are dystopian.

On the journey to her new home, Liesel's younger brother dies, and she steals her first book: *The Gravedigger's Handbook*. So begins a love affair with books and words, as Liesel learns to read with the help of her accordion-playing foster father, Hans. Soon she is stealing books from Nazi book-burnings, the mayor's wife's library, and from wherever else she can find. However, these are dangerous times. When Liesel's foster family hides a Jew in their basement, Liesel's world is both opened up and closed down. Death as the storyteller doesn't mean that the story is about Death; it's about death and so much else. It is about Liesel Meminger, who finds ways of coping with her losses. The plot of the book is well-paced. It is neither too slow nor too fast.

Liesel is a very well-drawn character and immensely likeable. She is nine at the novel's beginning. Liesel is traumatized by her brother's death, but Hans proves to be a calming foster father. With his help, she learns to read and soon finds comfort in the written word. Throughout the novel, she befriends Max, the Jew who arrives to hide from the Nazis in the Hubermanns' basement and falls in love with Rudy Steiner, her best friend. Ultimately, Liesel learns the power of words to influence humans to act towards both good and evil as she experiences the beauty and the brutality of humanity. Death describes her as a "perpetual Survivor". Liesel survives Hitler's reign while many of those, whom she loves, perish as a result of World War II and the Holocaust.



A metaphysical being, Death serves as the dryly cynical narrator of *The Book Thief*. Death's duty is to carry away the souls of the recently departed, which it has done for millennia. In its line of work, Death tries to focus on colors as a way of distracting itself from the survivors of those who have died. Liesel's story is one of a handful of survivors' tales that Death remembers. In fact, Death retrieves the authentic written autobiography of Liesel's life after the air raid at the end of the novel. Death is "haunted" by humans and is unable to reconcile humanity's capacity for evil with humanity's capacity for good. Readers are introduced to this *Death-as-storyteller* concept in a too-long invocation that begins *The Book Thief*. As Death himself puts it on the first page, "I can be amiable. Agreeable. Affable. And that's only the A's."

Max Vandenburg is a 24-year-old Jewish boxer who shows up at the family doorstep and hides from the Nazis in the Hubermanns' basement. He was a fist-fighter growing up, and as a teenager he resolves not to die without a fight. Max is wracked with anguish and guilt over leaving his family to save himself, but he comes to befriend Liesel as the two share their respective nightmares.

Hans, Liesel's silver-eyed foster father, the amateur accordion player, is a tall, gentle man with a remarkable amount of integrity and bravery -- Hans' compassion sets a strong example for Liesel, who is soothed by his presence. His life was saved by a Jew Erik Vandenberg in World War I, and he keeps his promise to Erik's widow by hiding her son Max from the Nazis.

Rosa, Hans' wife and Liesel's foster mother, is a squat woman who makes some money doing laundry for wealthy neighbors and has a fiery attitude and frequently employs profanity, especially towards those she loves. Death describes Rosa as a good woman for a crisis: she maintains order in the household through difficult times, but her spirit is steadily beaten down by several of the events in the novel, e.g. Max's illness, Hans' conscription, and the air raids. Apart from these major characters, we have minor characters like Rudy Steiner, Liesel's best friend; Ilsa Hermann, The mayor's wife; Paula

Meminger. Liesel's mother and Werner Meminger, Liesel's six-year-old brother, who dies at the beginning of the book, play a major role in the development of the plot and the characters in the book.

*The Book Thief* deals with various themes. There is the theme of **Words and Propaganda**, in which we see Liesel learn throughout the course of the novel that words hold a remarkable power to compel people to commit acts of cruelty. Learning to read brings Liesel closer to the understanding that Hitler's propaganda is the root of his power and the reason why her mother, father, and brother are dead.

Liesel's thievery is a form of defiance and self-actualization. By stealing a book from a book burning, she defies Nazi censorship and takes her education into her own hands. Rudy and others steal food because they are hungry, yet Rudy is unable to burglarize a wealthy home despite his anger over the Army having "stolen" his father. Therefore, **thievery as a theme** plays a big part in the story.

**Humanization and Dehumanization** as a theme portray the dehumanization of the Jews at an early stage of the Holocaust. Hitler vilified the Jews, progressively stripped them of their civil rights, and ultimately denied that they were even human – thus were the Nazis able to try to exterminate the entire Jewish race. Max bitterly remarks that, as a Jew in Nazi Germany, a cold basement is the only place he deserves since he hides from persecution. The themes of life and death, the power of words, love, and growing up are beautifully treated in an extraordinary way.

The writer uses a non-linear narrative structure in *The Book Thief*. A Non-linear structure is when the writer tells a story in a non-chronological fashion. A few examples of this are *The Odyssey*, *Wuthering Heights*, *Catch 22*, and most of William Faulkner's works. Common ways to use this form is to start the story in media res, or in the midst of the action, by using flashbacks or flash forwards, or the backwards story, that is, starting the story at the end. Zusak uses many of these in *The Book Thief*.

He makes frequent use of flashbacks, most often in telling backstory for various characters, and flashes forward in the second chapter of the book to show us two of the times he saw Liesel in the flesh.

The Book Thief offers us a believable, hard-won hope. That hope is embodied in Liesel, who grows into a generous person despite all the suffering around her, and finally becomes a human even Death can love.

*Tanishka Lubia*

2022

## Court

An insight into the unattractive side of India, the earnest Marathi courtroom drama ‘Court’ is a slice of India of the common people. An India where the bold promise of “Justice, social, economic and political” as enshrined in the Constitution’s preamble boils down to a matter of mere luck. It is really difficult to pinpoint a single ‘theme’ in play in the film. Is it an indictment of the malicious Indian judiciary system? Is it a metaphor for social conflict? Director Chaitanya Tamhane ignites these questions.

‘Court’ is one such ratification that India has delved into a societal dystopia. When Narayan Kamble, a local singer who addresses national issues is arrested and sent to prison on charges of ‘abetment of suicide’ of Vasudev Pawar, a manhole worker, the entire system of judiciary works itself to collapse before the eyes of the audience like a pack of cards. Public lawyer, Vinay Vora (Defence) is against Geetanjali Kulkarni (Prosecution) to get Kamble bail, their efforts, as good as of an archetypal public servant in India.

Set against an extremely valid and unrefined backdrop, there is no space for the fourth wall at all. It seems like the film is not made for an audience, but to include the audience within it! One can undoubtedly say, “This is what happens.” after viewing absolutely any scene from the film. There’s not a single attempt at dramatisation or amplification- just the crude, raw and organic depiction of a divided-undivided India. The film is not educational; in the way that evils like the piteous state of artists, carelessness towards the essential workforce, domestic violence, and the ever- widening gaps between the rich-poor, high caste-low caste are internalised.

The cinematography of ‘Court’ is commendable. The cinematographer Mrinal Desai, must be lauded. The multiplicity of static camera shots symbolise the stagnancy of the Indian judicial system, which piles up ‘hearings’ to give a verdict that nonetheless favours the criminal more than the

innocent. There are also portrait shots and long shots which give the film its holistic sense and add to the feel of the audience. The lens of the camera is but a common Indian citizen, fully aware of how court proceedings work, if not of its discrepancies, which is the goal of the film. The beauty of the film is that neither does it criticise the system in hollow bombarding dialogues nor does it protest against it through violent 'action' scenes.

Overall, the film has little or no entertainment value, except for the very few songs (which would be sung by the character of Narayan Kamble), which are composed by Sambhaji Bhagat. The film deserves to be watched and analysed by, I'd say, all.

It incorporates within it dark humour and makes one realize and ponder over the ever-burgeoning gap between the elite and non-elite. The audience gets to see the intricacies of India's judicial system and how far it is removed from "what should happen". At several points, one wishes to reach behind the film screen and modify it to help the oppressed. It is that frustration Tamhane incites, hoping that it might someday surpass the limits of our thoughts and show in our actions, in the form of resistance, protests or rallies, against the dogmatic and partial judicial machinery of India.

If you are a film lover or critic, I suggest you give Court a watch. A little break from mainstream Bollywood with its unreal depictions could be all the change of taste you need!

*Arunima*  
2023

## ESCAPE ROOM

Sitting on the *underrated* block of WEBTOON, *Escape Room* is a webcomic created by the artist 10Park. It is a story set around Sean Baek, who, in his *usual* world, is a misfit of sorts- an outcast even. In the first season, we first meet Sean as he contemplates why he's detested by the people around him; and then finds himself in an entirely different situation that is to change his life.

There are a few lines in the webcomic that describe Sean's character very well. "*As long as you're not a threat to me... I'll actually try my best to save you,*" he says at one point. Then at another, "*It's bad to kill something, but if you're aware of that, it makes you less guilty.*" He's not a 'goody-two-shoes' who will sacrifice himself for the betterment of the community, but he is, as the story continuously urges, a rationalist. He seeks to do what seems logical to him and claims that humans are all 'trash' and they just need to admit it and try to be less of a trash.

A man who values reason over emotions, Sean's personality- which is considered *sociopathic* in the "normal" society- leads his journey in this new environment he finds himself in. It's an *escape room* game but with serious casualties. Like in *normal* escape room games, they are stuck in a place and they have to find and solve clues and make their way out of there until they reach the end; but this one is deadly, which is where Sean's personality and opinions get to thrive.

The game is a *survival of the fittest* type of situation where there is a lot of moral ambiguity as well as immorality. Even then, the scenario that the characters of this comic are put in is so different from the lives we are used to that we cannot judge their decisions and moves based on the values that we have been taught and the rules that we follow.

There's death looming around every step of the way and the people stuck here are like Sean- *misfits*, or in Sean's words- *scumbags*. As we follow Sean, we encounter him using his brain to try and

save as many people as he can but never at the expense of his own life. It's a world where rationality and reason preside all. There are most definitely rules and warnings and repercussions for crossing them, but the end goal is to survive. Sean has this "*No hard feelings*" kind of a stand on abandonment of one player by another mid-game and this is his dominant protagonist trait.

At one point in the story, Sean is made to choose between leaving a man to die to get a reward and saving the man with no reward in return whatsoever and he chooses the latter, because he thinks it's rational to save people. But his choice lands him in a dangerous situation whereas him letting the man die would have earned him a key. There's another important character- Heather Lim, who seems too different from Sean, in the sense that she isn't in favour of killing others to save yourself. Despite juxtaposing Sean's '*reason*' with '*emotions*', she in herself is a very complex character; she has a bunch of manipulative tactics under her sleeve.

This is a *world*, if you can call that, where those who the society deems as *scumbags* are gathered and they portray how the said society in itself is very hypocritical; how instead of owning up to their actions, humans defend themselves and don't come up with any solutions at all. In contrast to that, the people in this escape room, take responsibility, face consequences and try to come up with solutions that can get them out of the horrible situation they are stuck in. A strong emphasis on this contrast is shown almost at the end of the first season, where Sean and Heather face an obstacle where they might have to kill chicks or/and fishes. Whereas Heather is reluctant to kill the chicks, she initially doesn't mind doing so to the fishes stating that it is normal to do so because fishes are consumed as food on a daily basis.

This is the point where Sean emphasises on how humans set boundaries that don't make sense and are inconsistent, giving an example of how they frown upon killing animals for laboratory experiments but go fishing and use animals for entertainment. It's a predicament where people who are considered monstrous by the world teach what humanity is, and what being a human is like.

They're not the nicest people but they carry with themselves arguments, logic and reasons that cannot be nullified. Moreover, Sean himself walks through a journey of development where he learns to balance emotions and rationality.

*Subana Ahmed*  
2022



## SHATTER ME

*Shatter Me* is a young adult dystopian thriller series of 6 novels and 5 novellas by Tahareh Mafi. The narrator is Juliette Ferrars, a young 17 year-old girl with a lethal touch that could kill people, trying to find herself – in a society telling her who to be. A horrible incident changes her life forever, when she accidentally kills a child just by touching him.

The setting of the novel is in a period when the world is in chaos due to an environmental crisis. There is a shortage of all resources and people are dying. Hence, the Reestablishment takes over the world with a promise of growth. But, they misuse their power and enforce a strict military-based society. The Reestablishment incinerates cultural diversity. They promise to create a utopian society, but do the exact opposite.

Juliette has been abandoned in a cell for 264 days with absolutely no human contact. We get to know later that the Reestablishment plans to use her as a weapon and she's kept locked up for observation. However, Juliette has managed to sneak in a small pocket notebook along with her where she confides her emotions. We get to read excerpts from her notebook from time to time in a diary entry format. Many people would be drawn to the unique writing style here, while some may find it jarring. I found it quite interesting, as with the crossed-out lines we can understand what she's trying to censor within herself.

She finds herself struggling for freedom, from Warner, the leader of Sector 45, and finds an unexpected friendship in Adam. Adam's place in her journey of self-discovery is vital as he is the person who instills in her a glimmer of hope and self-love.

Juliette's character was easy to relate with as she had imperfections, vulnerabilities, complex emotions and most importantly, growth. Her journey of self-discovery is inspirational. She has

powerful quotes like “I am not yours to want”, which challenges the ideas that Warner attempts to instill in her. She is timid and scared in the beginning of the story but towards the end, we see a confident Juliette who is willing to do anything to fight back and take down the Reestablishment.

Adam and Juliette’s connection in the first book is heart-warming. The moment she looks at him, her heart recognizes him as the boy in her school with kind eyes. Also, Adam is immune to her lethal touch, he’s the only person she can touch without the fear of causing harm. Her heart breaks when she learns that Adam was a soldier of the Reestablishment, who was sent just to make sure she wasn’t volatile and was capable of basic human interaction. But, he wins her trust back and they elope together. Adam takes Juliette to his house where she meets James, Adam’s younger brother. Juliette and James instantly develop a sweet bond. They hide there for a while, until one day an injured Kenji knocks up their door, asking for help. Kenji was a soldier in the Reestablishment too and a close friend of Adam. His character is very jolly, friendly and has a chill personality. But as he joins them, their “safe space” is no longer safe. There is a turning point when we get to know that even Warner is immune to Juliette’s touch and could touch her without consequences.

A piece of dystopian fiction usually tries to explore why things have gone so wrong. Specifically in YA dystopian stories, we see the protagonist(s) often seek out a way to change the world and make it better. Similarly here, we find a rebel base named “Omega Point” run by Castle. Juliette and Adam join the team. Together they would stand up against the Reestablishment. Thus, with this new-found support and friends, Juliette feels way more confident and for the first time in a long while, she’s unafraid.

With *Shatter Me*, Tahareh Mafi displays a combination of political totalitarianism and abuse of the environment. She wishes to plant the seed of criticism within us, to push us to think and to question the ideas being presented to us. More importantly, she makes us face the state of the

environment. The most important message this book puts forth is of acceptance, self-love, confidence and rational thinking.

Above all, I really had a great reading experience with this book. I do have some conflicting feelings but none of them intercede with the fact that I adore this story. All the characters are beautifully written. Also, the fact that there are novellas where we get to read and know the perspective of other characters in depth, is a brownie point.

*Nikita Singh*

*2024*

## Ray and Relevance

'Hirak Rajar Deshe' is a 1980 Bengali movie, second in the 'Goopy Gyne Bagha Byne' trilogy, directed by the exemplar Satyajit Ray, based on a story by Upendra Kishore Raychowdhury, Satyajit Ray's grandfather. The movie is a dystopian science fantasy/fiction, starring Utpal Dutt as the king, Soumitra Chatterjee as Udayan Pandit, the school teacher and the classic duo of Goopy and Bagha played by Rabi Ghosh and Tapan Chatterjee. Set in a fictional kingdom eponymously named after the king Hirak, the movie paints a vivid picture of the dystopian life of the working class, the labourers and the common man, even as the king and his sycophants lead a utopian life of filthy opulence and thrive by exploiting the poor. Through a children's tale, Ray has quite effortlessly showcased a dystopian society, where the grief and labour of the poor is a pedestal on which the capitalists thrive.

In the kingdom of diamonds, King Hirak shuts his coterie of sycophants with diamonds from his diamond mines and the ministers, as a result, nod, laugh and agree to the king's whims as automated robots in unison. Hirak exploits the poor miners by making them work hard in inhuman conditions and forces the farmers and peasants to pay their revenues anyhow, despite crop failures. Hirak does all this, not by physical force, but by brainwashing (Mogoj dholai) them in a device called 'Jantar mantar', invented by his employed scientist, who has no ideology, is apolitical and works only to fulfil his greed. The king has ordered the priest to construct mantras for each social groups, in order to subjugate them to complete obeisance:

FARMER- "Baaki rakha khajna, motey bhalo kaj na" (Unpaid taxes are not good)

"Bhor pet nao khai, raj kor dewa chai" (Even if you don't eat enough, taxes must be paid)

"Jai jodi jak pran, Hiroker Raja bhogoban" (Even if you lose your life, Hirak Raja is god)

LABOURER:

"Je kore khoni te shrom, jeno taare dore jom" (The devil fears those who work in the mines)

"Onahare nahin khed, beshi khele bare med" (Nothing wrong in starving, you grow fat with too much food)

"Dhonno shromiker daan, Hiroker Raja bhogoban" (Blessed is the labour and Hirak Raja is god)

TEACHER:

"Lekha pora kore jei, onahare more shei" (The ones who study, die of starvation)

"Janaar kono shesh nai, janaar cheshta britha tai" (There's no end to learning, so it is pointless to try)

"Bidya labhe lokshan, nai ortho, nai maan" (There's no profit in learning, no meaning and no respect)

"Hirak Raja buddhiman, kore shobe tar joyo gaan" (Hirak Raja is the intelligent one, sing his praises). To stop any further protest or rational thinking among his subjects he closes the only school, because "THE MORE THEY LEARN, THE MORE THEY KNOW, THE LESS THEY OBEY". Even the art surrounding him is strictly censured. (The bard who criticised him in a song was banished.) Art is permissible only when it praises the king, and when used as a form of protest, is highly intolerable to a dystopian state.

The only hope left in this dire state of affairs, is the school teacher and his students, who kept their rational thinking intact, thanks to education. The tyrannical regime of Hirak comes to an end with the students uniting along with the magical capabilities of Goopy and Bagha. In a symbolic scene, every dissenter joins hands to break the statue of Hirak. Ironically Hirak also joins them, now brainwashed in his own 'Jantar mantar', as the chorus shouts "pull the rope and the king will break into pieces" ("dori dhore maaro taan raja hobe khon khon").

The characters can be placed on the two extreme ends of the spectrum, where the binary between the "good" character and "bad" character is distinct, except for the scientist, who takes sides with his own profit in sight. Science here is used to reform history and minds, and technology is capitalist as it acts as a catalyst for the subjugation and exploitation of the subjects. The movie, when

studied from a Marxist angle, symbolises the exploitation of the Proletariats (the farmer and the miner) by the Bourgeoisie ( the King and his sycophants). A significant lacuna in the movie which could be seen distinctively is the absence of female characters, which again validates the fundamental stereotype of separation of women and politics. The fanciful rhymes throughout the movie, clamours and echoes in the contemporary situations where dissent against the state is assent to anti-national sentiments where the majority gets the priority and legitimacy. With educational institutes like JNU, Jamia, Du and AMU always under constant attack, threat and scrutiny by interceding their public space and fundamental right to dissent, debate and discussion and the censoring of 'Hum dekhenge' by Faiz, Ray mirrors the exact society 40 years ago in his art. But contrary to Marx and Ray, our revolution is led by women. Thus altering and creating a new manifesto, where women are a significant agent of the revolution, "WOMEN OF INDIA UNITE".

Other political satires by Ray include, 'PRATIDWANDI' or The Adversary 1970. A movie about a struggling man, thrown into hardships after his father's death, which led to him leaving his study of medicine. Set in the Naxalite Bengal and its changing political, social and economic milieu, where intellectual men like the protagonist strive to get employed and lose their jobs due to their communist stance. He gets trapped in the political and social unrest. With rampant unemployment and corruption, and between his competitive career oriented sister and revolutionary brother, Siddhartha awaits a revolution and wishes to join, when it begins. In a capitalist society like this, individuals are often in conflict with themselves and question their own worth, talent and value in quantitative terms. Throughout the movie the protagonist searches for the melody of a bird he had heard in his childhood, which he gets to hear at the end, symbolising the remnant hope in his new modest job and life away from home, in Kolkata. The film is a critique of the vicious society where one doesn't know who the real enemy is, and the reason behind the cycle of predicaments. The title literally translates to 'the enemy', but one fails to trace a physical, viable entity which can be deemed as 'THE ENEMY' or 'THE RIVAL'.

*Sambrita Roy*

2021

## **Blood, Sweat and Tears : The Fall for Temptation**

*Artist : BTS (Bangtan Sonyeondan)*

*Album : Wings (2016)*

If one has ever come across BTS and their music videos, they would most probably know that their music videos symbolise many things and also tell a story. There are certain videos which also go back to add references from mythologies and fiction. One such video is *Blood, Sweat and Tears*.

BTS, or originally known as Bangtan Sonyeondan, is a Korean boy group comprising of seven members known by the names: RM, Jin, Suga, J-Hope, Jimin, V and Jungkook.

The music video revolves around the theme of 'falling into temptation and sinning' taking references from the myths of *Icarus*, *Adam and Eve*, *The Fallen Angels* and the book, *Demian*.

It starts off with the seven boys going into what seems to be an art gallery. Six of them seem happy and playful, perhaps representing the innocence and curiosity of childhood. On the other hand, the oldest guy, Jin looks keenly at a painting titled "*The Fall of the Rebel Angels*" by a Flemish Renaissance artist, Breugel made in 1562. The story behind the painting comes from the *Bible* where Lucifer, one of the most beloved angels of God, creates an army and rebels against God for the sake of power but is doomed with all his supporters. This symbol is used to show where the lust of power would lead someone to.

The second reference is that of the myth of Icarus, which is portrayed by the youngest of the lot, Jungkook and the leader of the group, RM. Daedalus, the father of the little boy Icarus, creates a pair of wings made of wax to escape the prison they were locked up in and warns him not to go near the sun without providing an actual reason. Icarus, being very naive and curious, falls into the

temptation and goes near the sun anyway, which leads to the melting of his wings and he ends up perishing by falling into the sea.

Although Icarus was said to be at fault for not heeding to the warning and crossing the boundaries despite being asked not to, his father also is at fault since he never explained why he shouldn't go near the sun. The leader who is the caretaker of the group, represents Daedalus and the youngest who learns from the leader and is guided by him represents Icarus. And Daedalus becomes the agency for the fall of Icarus.

To add more to the symbolism, there's a scene where RM lights up a candle (a representation of wax) that burns a picture of a bird and a drop of wax from the candle is consumed by Jungkook. There's also a scene where Jungkook plays with a swing set, which usually represents innocence and childhood, and in a later scene is levitating, which is how Icarus is painted. Behind the swing, a painting can be seen, which is titled "The Lament for Icarus" by English Classicist artist, Herbert James Draper.

Three minutes and eighteen seconds into the music video, another member, V jumps off a balcony after smiling at the camera mischievously. In this scene, there's another painting in the background that is also speculated to be Breugel's and is titled "Landscape with the Fall of Icarus". The painting is the scenery of a sea with Icarus drowning in the corner, therefore, indicating the fall of another person.

The symbolism of the third story that follows is of Adam and Eve from *The Genesis 3*, which narrates the fall of humanity when Satan convinces Adam and Eve to eat the fruit of knowledge of good and evil despite God's orders against it, leading to the doom of humanity. Suga, who gives the apple to Jimin, seems satanic as he is an agent that makes Jimin want to give into the temptation. Since he also holds a blindfold which, in the later scene, is tied around Jimin's eyes as he struggles to move



around shows that Suga has taken Jimin down with him as well; like Eve was said to have taken down Adam with her. This scene could be seen as a symbol of metaphorical blindness of a human who turned a blind eye to God's orders.

Satan is also an important aspect of this video but before discussing that, there is another guy, J-Hope, who sits on a chair surrounded by dark water which has been symbolising the suicidal and evil thoughts; the sinning. Although he is in the middle of the black water implying that he's being pulled towards sin, the water still doesn't fully reach him indicating that he hasn't given into the temptation and has his thoughts under control. He is the only person in the whole video who has nothing to do with any sins, almost making him seem like a good angel.

Coming back to Satan, by the end of the music video, there is a scene where Jin kisses a statue with huge black wings and a parallel scene goes on where V exposes his back to reveal marks that indicate the once presence of wings, and gives a devilish smirk. This says that the character played by V represents the fallen angel, Lucifer.

Looking back to the video, one can see V's presence throughout, in every story. The balcony where he sits seems to be connected to the room where Suga and Jimin sit. Behind the balcony is the painting associated with Icarus (Jungkook and RM's representations). V also makes Jin see the statue Jin kisses and is, probably, the living embodiment of that statue himself.

One of the theories says that J-Hope is the good angel. In the beginning when they enter the gallery, J-Hope and V are together. In a later scene, J-Hope shoots an arrow in some direction, and immediately, colours are splashed on the glass behind which V stands, making it look like J-Hope shot an arrow towards V. The colours represent the intention to curb the darkness so as to free V of all the evils.

The music video ends with Jin sitting in front of a mirror and his face cracks a little. When Jin kisses the statue, all the statues in the art gallery, that also represent good, collapse indicating the temptation taking over the innocence.

A kiss has been seen as a symbol of sealing a deal, of two souls becoming one in Christianity, the reason why the bride and the groom kiss after taking the vows. This indicates that Jin has merged with evil and the crack on his skin represents the rupture of his innocence.

There plays a narration with Jin's silhouette standing on the screen holding a balloon with a red background. This occurs just a scene prior to the one where the kiss takes place. The narration says,

*"He too was a tempter.*

*He too was a link to the second,*

*The evil world with which I no longer wanted to have anything to do."*

As this narration goes on, Jin leaves the balloon and tries, in vain, to catch it again as it leaves the frame. The balloon, again, represents innocence and childhood and Jin lets go of it, being tempted by the things he should be away from. And then he wants to go back, to save himself, to let go of the temptation, but what is done is done and he can no more go back and save himself from being doomed.

Christopher Marlowe's play, *Doctor Faustus* revolves around a similar theme where Faustus signs a deal with the devil and sells his soul only to realise how wrong he has been and wants to go back to God but is lost forever.

The narration also says that Jin isn't originally a bad guy, like Faustus. He was just tempted by evil, was just curious and unbeknownst to himself, he committed the sin.

This video is also said to be inspired by Herman Hesse's book, *Demian* which is a story of Emil Sinclair's youth; it goes on a similar path as the music video. One of the connections being, the scene where Jin kisses the statue, which is taken from this book.

In the last chapter of the book, Sinclair kisses Demian, who isn't a real person but a part of Sinclair. Sinclair then mentions, "I felt a light kiss on my lips where there was always a little fresh blood which would never go away." just like the crack Jin gets on his face post kiss.

*Blood, Sweat and Tears* has so much symbolism that it couldn't be completely described in this review. There's a new angle to it every time one observes. The cinematography and the storyline make it richer, also giving out some morals and guidance to the youth.

*Subana Ahmed*

2022

## Spring Day – A Reflection of our Society

Artist – BTS

Album – You Never Walk Alone (2017)

BTS is a seven member South Korean boy band that debuted in 2013 with RM, Jin, Suga, j-hope, Jimin, V and Jungkook under the label of BigHit Entertainment. Their albums and songs have always woven a story that has made the magnificent BU (BTS Universe). The band is known for addressing issues that the society generally avoids through their music and charity work. While carrying forward their BU storyline and maybe giving a tribute to the “Sewol Ferry Tragedy” that led to the death of more than 300 high schoolers, BTS released *Spring Day* in 2017. The video is loaded with symbolism and references which give birth to many theories and interpretations.

It starts with V laying his head on the railway tracks. He misses his friends. The first line of the song is ‘Bogo Shipda’ which translates to ‘I miss you’. The scene cuts to RM standing inside the moving train with unattended luggage. The abandoned suitcases belong to the students who never returned from their field trip. Tragically, the captain and his crew evacuated the ship while the students were asked to not move. The train also references the movie ‘Snowpiercer’ by Bong Joon Ho, where the people in the front of the train (powerful and high class) mistreat the ones in the back (regular people). RM walks past Jungkook who is just peacefully looking out of the train’s window. Another scene shows a motel by the name of ‘Omelas’ which is a reference to the book *The Ones Who Walk Away From Omelas* by Ursula K. Le Guin, which told the story of a utopian city built at the expense of a little child’s happiness. The people, once old enough, were informed about the child and they got to decide if they wanted to stay happy in Omelas or leave it. The “No Vacancy” sign outside the motel symbolizes how Omelas is full of people and is a reflection of our modern society.

The scene with Jin standing in the centre and looking at the other 6 members as they ascend the spiral stairs represents how life went on for the survivors. The rusty merry-go-round behind Jungkook in the next scene represents the loss of childhood. The following scenes depict how the survivors went on with their lives but a sense of emptiness still remained as the 7 members sit around a party table with sad expressions.

The laundry scene with the washing machines looking like ferry windows and portraying the cyclic nature of life is very important. It has slips stuck on the machines that read “Don’t Forget” which symbolize how life goes on but memories, both sad and happy, remain with us. The next scene with a huge mountain of clothes is a reference to *Clothes As Bodies* by Christian Boltanski which represents a sort of eternal afterlife. Suga sits on top of this pile surrounded by the memories of the dead and Jimin picks up shoes that washed up to the shore at the beach. The next scene shows the same merry-go-round, except this time, it is lit up and yellow ribbons (similar to the ones used in *Sevol Ferry Yellow Ribbon Campaign*) hang from it. The next scene shows Jungkook retracing RM’s path in the train and when he reaches the motel, the “No Vacancy” sign flickers indicating that some boys are about to leave Omelas due to their epiphany and there will be a vacancy soon. Jungkook passes the motel, the laundry room and the empty carriage to finally reach a platform as the other members join him confirming the title of the album – *You Never Walk Alone* [in the journey to seek justice]. The train, however, does not stop for them and Jungkook sees himself sitting inside the train. Similarly, when the Jungkook sitting inside the train sees himself outside on the platform with the other members, he realises that even if justice is achieved, the deed cannot be undone. The train enters a dark tunnel with Jungkook and RM closing their eyes and accepting the tragedy. The next scene refers to *Little Match Girl* where she saw her grandmother through the matchsticks. At first Jungkook is alone but everyone appears as soon as he strikes the match. This symbolizes that the ones gone always remain with us through our memories.

Just as in *Snowpiercer*, the humans are stuck inside the unstoppable train, many of us are stuck in a society that is oppressive with no way out. However, a guy in the movie suspects the possibility of life outside the train when a snowflake enters inside. Snowflakes rarely form in subzero temperatures. There is hope for survival outside the train, outside the society’s cruel norms. The chorus of the song starts with “Snowflakes fall down” giving us hope and energy to walk through the difficult times. Jimin steps out of the train (society and government’s oppression). All of the members walk out towards a tree as the atmosphere slowly warms up and Jimin hangs the shoes on the tree to commemorate the victims. These were the major symbols in the video but there are a lot more that could not be included in this review.

Beautiful cinematography, use of appropriate symbols and references along with poetic lyrics and heart piercing music complete one of the best, if not the best, songs of BTS’s career. No wonder *Spring Day* remains in the top of the charts even after 5 years of its release.

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*Vaishali*  
2022

## **Parasite: WHO?**

The 2020 Oscars made history, when a non- English film won the best picture award for the first time and this phenomenal movie was *Parasite*. The South Korean movie, *Parasite* raises questions on class inequalities sprouting from a so-called rhetoric of free trade or laissez-faire economy set in the South Korean capital, Seoul. Bong Joon-Ho, the director of the movie said in an interview that he wanted to express a sentiment specific to Korean culture, which he found to be Capitalism. The movie is a tragicomedy, which explores two very distinctive classes at the extreme ends of the social spectrum, juxtaposing the polar opposites which are symbiotically interconnected.

The camera moves into the lives of the Kims, a family of four, residing in a lowly semi-basement of Seoul, striving to meet their ends each day by doing odd jobs. From opening their windows for free fumigation and choking on it, to struggling for free Wi-Fi, to connecting with the upper classes from the highest point in their basement, which is the bathroom in their lowly home. The movie represents every aspect of the lives of lower classes or the proletariat. The camera then elevates to the grand mansion, located in a posh and isolated part of the city and delves into the lives of its inhabitants, the Parks. Cleanliness, perfectly cultivated lifestyles and lawns, naivety and polite courtesies: all that the bourgeoisie money can afford, signifies the 'nice Parks'.

Later at an opportunity dispensed by Ki-Woo's (the son of Kim family) friend, the Kim family starts to infiltrate the Park mansion, hoaxing as different professionals. The lives of the Kim and Park families get intertwined gradually, where both of them are dependent on each other. The Kims for their employment by the Parks and the Parks on their service. The Kims have a great reverence for the Parks, whereas the Parks hardly recognise their service. One ghastly night when the Parks are out and the Kims have their rich play in the mansion, an old horrendous secret which had been hidden inside

the mansion comes out. What happens next are a series of class conflicts, turning the Park mansion into a battlefield.

Bong Joon-Ho puts in a lot of effort to show the depravity and the depths of class differences. Through a lot of symbols and metaphors like the amount of light, the spaces enclosed by the characters- the basement and the mansion, innumerable stairs representing the social ladder, the camera moving up and down, the native American dress- reflecting the American capitalist endeavour of exploiting the natives and putting them on a material plane as Mrs. Park tags it - a "fanboy personality" and the flood scene which affected the Kims but was a nice and good shower for the Parks, all of these clamours the class inequalities in capitalist countries, not only Korea. The spectre of Capitalism haunts even the innate good human qualities, which the Kims cannot choose to be, whereas the Parks can be nice, kind and naive because their money affords them to be: "They're nice, because they're rich". But all their naivety is a show which the Parks put on to patronise and pacify the Kims. The Kims, who're the victims of an exploitative system, have to put on the mask of dishonesty to survive a static social system.

The whole exploitative system is put under a question mark on interrogating the title, *who is the Parasite?* : The Parks, who cannot survive without the labour of the Kims, who are voluntarily subjugated under the rhetoric of 'hard work pays off' and symbolise the pedestal on which capitalists survive and thrive, or the Kims, who survive on the employment given by the Parks. The lower class is equated with the cockroaches who appear in darkness, and are invisible like their work. The upper class becomes the trophy of capitalism, to be exhibited and advertised as the manifesto of progress and development. All this is topped by the complete lack of solidarity among the lower classes who fight among themselves to maintain their position so as to not fall even lower.

Every layer of the movie speaks to the viewer, it grips one to their seat, makes them anxious and excited at the same time. They don't know which side they're rooting for. The movie is a must



watch for its marvellous direction, the actors, the depiction and the complexities which urge one to run and find answers.

*Sambrita Roy*

*2021*

## **The Birth of *Frankenstein*: An Analysis of Haifaa Al-Mansour's *Mary Shelley***

*“I lowered my defenses, forgetting the first lesson I was taught: That I was brought into this world to be abandoned. That I am irrevocably alone.”*

— *Mary Shelley*

While Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin seemed to be associated with her revolutionary parents and had the companionship of a radical Romantic poet, the celebrated author of *Frankenstein* found ways to break away from this cocoon. Haifaa Al-Mansour captures this rebellious fire in her biopic *Mary Shelley*, starring Elle Fanning as Mary W. Godwin and Douglas Booth as Percy Bysshe Shelley. The movie is an amalgamation of repressed dreams, intense love, and deepest, darkest memories taking the shape of a gothic novel.

While the Preface to *Frankenstein* states that the novel came into being as a result of a ghost story writing competition, the movie forces the viewers to question if participating in a friendly competition was the only thing that motivated her to come up with a chilling tale of abandonment and betrayal. The script expands on this origin story, suggesting various streams of Mary's experience that feed into her chronicle of a misunderstood Creature. Her childhood fondness for scary tales and the literary influence of her father combine with her own grief, frustration and isolation to produce a masterpiece. The movie is not only a biography of the author but also of the book itself.

The crux of such an illuminating plot centers around Mary as a daughter, a sister, a lover, a mother, and finally a female writer whose ability to produce an original piece of literature is questioned by her publishers, who believe that an eighteen-year-old girl like herself is not capable of exploring the realm of imagination, and hence has indulged in an act of plagiarism. Her cross reply to such accusations reminds the viewers of how this initiator of science fiction was well ahead of her time:

“If I’m old enough to bed children, I’m old enough to put pen to paper... And you dare to question a woman’s ability to experience loss, death, betrayal... all of which is present in this story; in *my* story, which you would’ve realized if you would’ve employed the time in judging the work instead of judging me.”

(*Mary Shelley*)

Elle Fanning’s Mary dreams of being “substantial”, which she defines as “anything that curdles the blood and quickens the beatings of the heart”. Sent to Scotland at the age of sixteen, she meets Percy Shelley who conveniently forgets to tell her that he is already married. They run away together, taking Mary’s stepsister with them, and eventually fall in with Lord Byron.

Percy Shelley’s discomfort with the institution of marriage is evident when he refutes the marital contract by sharing his concept of “free love”. The commitment to unconventional, liberated lives that Mary and Percy share means different things to each of them and the film emphasises the gap between theory and practice when it comes to equality between the sexes. As a child, Mary practically lived a parentless life, with her mother dying a few days after her birth and her father retreating into his shell. As an adult, she was deserted by Shelley on various occasions, be it going on a drunken spree or having affairs with other women. Her dejection is reflected in *Frankenstein* when she creates a Creature who is the emblem of the subaltern, and a creator who detaches himself from both his family and his creation. According to Linda King,

“Victor... isolates himself from his family to pursue his individualistic interests and desire for honor and glory, just as Shelley’s husband and father both retreated from normal social relationships in their intellectual pursuits. In this light, Kate Ferguson Ellis and P.D Fleck interpret *Frankenstein* as Shelley’s attack on Romanticism, particularly her husband’s pursuit of ideal worlds that, when mated with resistant reality, breed chaos.”

(King, 26)

Mary's progress with the novel was hindered because of her daughter's death and Percy's devastation at the news of his wife's (Harriet's) suicide. She got lost midway and, just like Victor Frankenstein, abandoned her creation. A series of dream sequences involving her daughter and images of bringing back the dead push Mary into finishing what she began. Since the first edition was published anonymously with a preface written by Percy Shelley, the readers eventually assumed that it was his original piece and to some extent, he did take credit for the same. Interestingly, though, Mary is almost always referred to as Mary Godwin and not Mary Shelley, even though "Mary Shelley" is the author of the novel. Mary even accuses him of indirectly asking her to abandon her claim to the novel. However, towards the end we see a very guilty Shelley, who publicly announces that his only contribution to the novel was inspiring the Creature's abandonment:

"The work would not even exist without my contribution. But to my shame, the only claim I remotely have to this work is inspiring the desperate loneliness that defines Frankenstein's creature. The author of *Frankenstein* or *The Modern Prometheus* is, of course, Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin. It is a work of singular genius and she is indebted to no one in its creation."

(*Mary Shelley*)

According to the movie, Mary married Shelley after the first publication of *Frankenstein* and lived with him till his tragic death in 1822. Death was a common occurrence in her life, beginning with her mother, her three children, and finally her husband. According to Ashley Lall, she was "the subject of several traumatic events that undoubtedly influenced her perception of parenthood. It can be said, then, that her trauma unconsciously manifested within her fiction." By creating a chilling tale of death and murder, she portrays a grotesque image of loss, pain and neglect that haunts her readers till date.

Critics suggest that she identified with the Creature, allowing the readerly sympathy to side with him instead of Victor Frankenstein. The movie very subtly draws a connection between Mary

and her Creature not only with abandonment as a common thread but also the fact that she considered herself to be her mother's killer since she died of complications from childbirth. Both of them share the guilt of ending lives without innately meaning to do so. We first encounter Mary in motion dashing home from a London cemetery where she has been scribbling furiously at the graveside of her mother - the horror of being the cause of a death pushes her into spending as much time with Wollstonecraft's grave as possible. Sandra Gilbert writes that for Mary, "highly charged connections between femaleness and literariness must have been... established specifically in relation to the controversial figure of her dead mother. Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin read her mother's writings over and over again as she was growing up." (Gilbert)

The movie is called *Mary Shelley* and ironically, she is never addressed as Mary Shelley in the entire screenplay. The only proof of her marriage is provided in the last scene, when William Godwin places the second edition of *Frankenstein* in his book shop, identifying Mary Shelley as the writer. Shelley, who gleams at the sight of her name, holds the hand of her only surviving child and proceeds towards the shop as the scene fades away into darkness, reminding the viewers of her novel's penultimate line:

*"He was soon borne away by the waves, and lost in darkness and distance."*

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*Angela Braru*

2020

### ***'Brooklyn Nine-Nine: A Political Haven for Humor'***

Fiction and reality have been at loggerheads with each other since time immemorial, be it in the nerdy field of literature or the breezy domain of entertainment. While one tries to amalgamate utopian visions, the other undercuts this idealistic image of perfection. Seldom do they intermingle to produce a progressive result. Nowadays, trivial TV shows bring them together in order to shake the unshakeable. One such show is *Brooklyn Nine-Nine*, in which a fictional space evokes the collective reality of American society. The conflict between who laughs and who is laughed at is constantly resolved through a simple yet enlightening plot. As mentioned by Vincent Brook,

“What is seen as funny, what is laughed about, what one is permitted and expected to laugh about, and who laughs with whom about what, all reveals information about a society or a group. Through comedy and laughter, social relationships are negotiated and society is constructed and shaped.” (118)

*Brooklyn Nine-Nine* is a sweet home to a cast as diverse as the multicultural population of the New York City. Its characterization ranges from different racial and ethnic backgrounds to a diverse spectrum of age and gender, hence leaving no room for white supremacy or male chauvinism. This diversity benefits everyone, making it not only hilarious, but also very informative. The show is on-point when it comes to portraying women, gay characters and people of color. The comedy lies in the complexity of these characters, who constantly challenge the existing stereotypes of the society. In six seasons, it has tackled everything from the NYPD's history of racism and homophobia, to the abuse of internal affairs investigations, to how overzealousness can influence even a good cop's judgment, and to the very recent #MeToo movement.

Captain Raymond Holt is not only a person of color, but he also addresses his sexuality from the very first episode, revealing that he is a happily married gay man. He breaks the stereotype of homosexuality being linked with feminine characteristics, as portrayed in many other sitcoms. The

best part about Holt is that he knows what other people think of the way he acts and yet he doesn't change a single thing about it. We learn that despite his hard work and competence, he was held back in his career due to politics and prejudice. His dry humor and quick wit are the reactions to such obstacles. His inability to express his emotions is a comic element, and while the viewers cackle at Jake's reaction to this, Holt's blank face welcomes all sorts of interpretations. His struggles are brought up time and again, highlighting how he wants to prove himself via the success of his precinct, and how his racial and sexual identity constantly take away brilliant opportunities from him.

Another example is Sergeant Terry Jeffords, who is also a person of color. A sensitive, kind and family oriented soul residing inside a "masculine" physique challenges the stereotype of men having no emotions, or being surrounded by a sense of superiority. Though Terry loves to work out and keep his "tough guy" image, he's also an affectionate father to three girls and constantly worries about what would happen to them if he got hurt in the line of duty. His fatherly instincts extend to his colleagues, who help him put together a doll house for his twins. His love for yogurt and a habit of addressing himself in the third person often add humor to the episodes, and so does his reaction to Gina's feisty comebacks during the briefing or Rosa's consistent violent streak. So, when we see him screaming at the top of his lungs to bring order in the precinct, or taking offense when Charles mocks his body type, we can't help but laugh. However, he can spiral into rage if his officers are in danger, or if anyone is on the receiving end of social evils like racism.

*Nine-Nine* subtly allows the viewers to critique the bromance between detectives Jake and Charles. Jake Peralta is a brilliant, young detective who can often get lost in the moment. He is an everyday man who makes us all remember those times when we forget what we're doing because we get lost in a moment of bliss or satisfaction. A perfect example of this can be the cold opening of the 17<sup>th</sup> episode of season 5, when he makes five prisoners sing 'I want it that way' by Backstreet Boys. It starts off in a serious mode, where he helps a victim to recognize the voice of her brother's killer by making the suspects sing the song. However, he gets so moved that he starts singing it in the most hilarious way possible. This scene undercuts the notion of the seriousness and maturity required for a



detective's job, reminding us that before being a worker, one is a human who needs to have his/her moments.

Even though Jake is portrayed as a child-like character who is an “amazing detective slash genius,” we are able to spot his attitude of superiority when he looks down upon his best friend, Charles Boyle. Their friendship visualizes a sense of hierarchy between them. For instance, Jake is always shown to be one step ahead of Charles, literally stealing his thunder even when asked to be a secondary while solving a crime. Although Charles does see Jake as his idol, he lets the latter walk all over him. However, as a plus point to his persona, Charles breaks the stereotype of men doing the office work and keeping to themselves. He not only takes a bullet for a fellow officer, but also cooks, is always hungry for gossip, and is the most sincere shipper of Jake and Amy.

The show practices role reversal by using characters like Hitchcock and Scully, who are fat, lazy, yet utterly lovable. This duo will go to any lengths to eat or laze around and do nothing. It is a breath of fresh air to see two straight white men being laughed at as people of color around them take the lead – a role reversal which doesn't degrade either character but allows them to embrace their slovenly behaviors for comic effect. According to Marissa Martinelli,

“Hitchcock and Scully are *Brooklyn Nine-Nine's* laziest, most accident-prone detectives. Hitchcock is an incorrigible pervert, brimming with unearned confidence... Scully is an unlucky schlub, susceptible to heart attacks and Nigerian email scams.”

The show is rich in instances of physical and slapstick comedy. While Jake plays childish pranks on his friends and conducts senseless games when his captain isn't around, Amy and Gina use their hilarious dance moves to make the viewers laugh. Gina Linetti as a confident “dancer” and her obsession with social media compliment her habit of dishing out insults without a sliver of remorse. In season 4 episode 5, she befools all the detectives by defeating them in the Halloween heist, showing that it is necessary to be an amazing human before an amazing detective. She's literally a Nobody, but

her presence in the show acquaints us with the prevalent hierarchies in a working environment. Even though Gina is one of the smartest characters, she has been criticized for her disappointing meanness.

The show's two leading females are both Latina, and instead of just being pretty faces, they represent comic foils to each other. Detective Rosa Diaz is hard as nails, unshakeable, and has a penchant for playing with heavy-duty firearms, while Detective Amy Santiago is the professional incarnation of the teacher's pet, desperately seeking Holt's mentorship and approval by neurotically excelling at her job. So when they intentionally or unintentionally mimic each other, it makes us laugh; be it Rosa doing Amy's double tuck, or Amy destroying the microwave while fretting over her sergeant's exam. Rosa is extremely independent and doesn't need anyone to tell her what her worth is. She is also another important character for the LGBTQ community, as we find out that she is bisexual and is fearful to tell her traditional parents about the same.

Amy is the straight-laced, by the books kind of person; a young and determined detective trying to rise up the ranks of the NYPD. While Amy tends to follow rules and is viewed by some of the other characters as boring or predictable, she also has her moments where she flips people's view of her. In these moments she lets loose and realizes that even the most prudish person can have a good time. By winning season 3's Halloween heist, she establishes herself as an independent individual, who doesn't need a man to prove herself.

This show treats all of its characters with respect and dignity and allows us to take a meaningful journey along with them through all of the seasons. By coming under the umbrella of comedy, it grapples with the society as a whole. The characters aren't just a bunch of lunatics trying to make us laugh; it's something much more complex, and as Abigail Jones says, "If comedy is observed from a shallow point of view, it is easy to believe that it is a useless form of art. Yet a closer look reveals a rich store of underlying significance. Without a critical function comedy loses its voice." (Jonas 7)

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*Angela Braru*

2020

*Academic Writing*

## Frankenstein : Man v/s Nature

*Frankenstein or, The Modern Prometheus* written by English author, Mary Shelley is an 1818 gothic novel that belongs to the genre of science fiction. It is the tale of Victor Frankenstein, a scientist with an *idée fixe* of becoming God by creating an artificial man without the involvement of the 'female'. His unbridled ambition is what ultimately leads to his downfall.

The novel talks about the story of a man who wanted to gain power over nature, to usurp the role of the feminine. One of the key binaries that it talks about is that of Nature V/S Science. The creature may be seen as the 'revenge' that nature takes from Victor. The creature is the outcome of the bastardization of nature by humans and therefore it speaks for the environment and penalizes Frankenstein for overstepping human capacity.

To successfully deconstruct the theme of Man v/s Nature, analysing M. Waldman's panegyric from Volume I, Chapter II of the novel becomes necessary.

"The ancient teachers of this science," said he, "promised impossibilities, and performed nothing. The modern masters promise very little; they know that metals cannot be transmuted and that the elixir of life is a chimera. But these philosophers, whose hands seem only made to dabble in dirt, and their eyes to pour over the microscope or crucible, have indeed performed miracles. They penetrate into the recesses of nature, and shew how she works in her hiding places."

It is essentially talking about the metaphorical rape of nature by science wherein nature is seen as a female while science as male, prescribing to the gendered construction of the society. The scientific penetration and technological exploitation of nature are seen as patriarchal acts where the female is merely reduced to a passive, possessive, willing receptacle of male's desires. Nature is acted upon without care or consent, and it is merely seen as an object of conquest. Shelley very cleverly

establishes a distinct separation between the masculine faculty of work and the female's emotional capability.

The mere fact that nature is "hiding" indicates that it is both passive and nonconsenting. Botting also notes Frankenstein's overtly sexual language, his attempts to unfold these secrets are phrased in "quasi-sexual terms courting: like a lover his beloved he pursued nature to her hiding place". Thus, Man takes up the role of the dissector and it is nature that is being Dissected.

Waldman being the defender of science that he is, talks about the unlimited power that science harbours and how it can make nature succumb to its will. In one of his essays, Jean-François Lyotard quotes that nature is the "potential spouse of science, to be wooed, won, and if necessary, forced to submit to intercourse".

By showing the hubris manifested in Frankenstein, Shelley uses the form of the grotesque monster to offer a feminist critique of science where life is created artificially without the involvement of the female. His attempt to replace the Darwinian model of life based on sexual reproduction by 'chemical means', does not serve him well. Since nature punishes those who transgress her boundaries, Victor's fate is doomed.

His attempt to overthrow the female's role in the act of creation leads to his annihilation. Not only is he denied the capacity to naturally procreate, but also the access to good physical and mental health. As Anne Mellor quotes in her famous essay, *Possessing Nature : The Female in Frankenstein*, "the elemental forces that Victor has released pursues him to his hiding places, raging around him like avenging furies".

This novel is truly contemporary in its outlook as it is true to date that man takes undue advantage of nature in his lure for power and money. Today's is infested with all sorts of dangerous

ammunition and nuclear weapons. So, one should learn from the infamous Victor and realize our folly of pursuit of ambition at the cost of Mother Nature, before this myth gets realised.

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## Female Antagonist (Seon-Ah) in a Dystopia “The Devil Judge”

The roles given to women are always subject to interrogation in any fictional setting. These roles become more questionable and problematic if the backdrop is dystopian. In reality, women are an oppressed community but their status changes with different fictional backgrounds. In utopian fiction, if a woman emerges as a liberated individual, she becomes a victim of subjugation in dystopian fiction. When a woman becomes the antagonist in a dystopia, the whole idea of women being the subaltern is challenged. The conventional traits of women are brought into question by such female characters.

*The Devil Judge* (2021) is a Korean series that presents a dystopia with women characters as the antagonists. The dystopia in this series is based on class hierarchies and brutality towards powerless beings. The series presents the idea of ‘live court’ where a judge fights the unjust and corrupt system of government and private organizations with the help of the media and citizens. The *Social Responsibility Foundation (SRF)* that promises to serve South Korea after traumatic events is, in reality, a corrupt organization that manipulates the public for their personal profit. In the beginning, it seems that the organization is headed by Seo Jeong-Hak but in due course, we find out that the mastermind of the foul play against the judge, Kang Yo-Han (Ji-Sung) was Jung Seon-Ah (Kim Min-Jung). Kim Min-Jung says in an interview that Seon-Ah is a woman who can go to any limits to get what she wants. She was born in a low-income family and was deprived of all the necessities of life. She is depicted as a ‘psychopath’ who is utterly desirous of being rich. She doesn’t stand being abused or subjugated; she kills her mother who mistreated her under the influence of alcohol. With her strong ambition and willpower, Seon-Ah transgresses the boundaries of subjugated women. Instead of submitting to patriarchal oppression, she fights it with her intellect. Even when she is sexually harassed by Chairman Seo, she doesn’t get scared and fights back with all her courage. She finds his weakness and then uses it to control him and the *SRF*.



Although most of the K-drama villains are psychopaths, the fact that Seon-Ah empathizes with downtrodden people makes her stand out from the rest of K-drama villains. Jang Han-Seok from the Korean series, *Vincenzo (2021)* is a similar type of villain but the only difference is that he is male and callous. He is never looked down upon by his partners, rather he finds it normal to humiliate his female co-partner, Choi Myung-Hee. Seon-Ah is repeatedly harassed and looked down upon by other characters in the drama. When she worked as a secretary, she was constantly disparaged by other Foundation members. Moreover, the number of scenes and the authority given to her is limited as compared to Jang Han-Seok. He exercises full authority over the tasks carried out by other partners but Seon-Ah doesn't enjoy that type of agency. Interestingly, another negative female character who has power and is the Defence Minister, faces strict opposition from her partners from time to time. She is casually called a 'crazy bitch'.

Not to forget that there is a female villain in opposition to a male protagonist. It subconsciously portrays that a man is correct even when he too has committed crimes in his life. The character of Kang Yohan begins with the idea of a devilish judge. In the initial episodes of the series he has also been referred to as a 'psychopath' but later, his trajectory is steered more towards being a hero that people admire since he stands up against a worse female villain. Seon-Ah and Yohan are referred to as doubles of each other. If Seon-Ah is crazy and psychopathic, then Yohan is equally insane but towards the end of the series, we see Seon-Ah die and become the villain. Moreover, the adjectives used for Seon-Ah are 'crazy wench', 'psychopath', 'unpredictable' or 'beggar' but Yohan is always the 'hero' of the masses.

While talking about female villains, one cannot look past the fact that they are always presented to the audience as someone who is overly seductive. The character of Seon-Ah tries to use her body to seduce Kang Yohan and make him fall for her. She, from time to time, confesses her feelings for Yohan and tries to woo him. Alluring female villains who weaponize their beauty depict

the typical idea that such women can destroy a man's life. Tamable and domesticated women are the only ones who are acceptable or favourable for men in marriage. Consequently, the idea of women being ambitious is dangerous because then she may not settle for a restrictive domestic life. A man then, won't have anyone to dominate, hence losing his authority. In the following dystopian setting of the series, Seon-Ah is projected as a non-desirable woman because she is too ambitious to climb the social ladder. She is shown similar to Lady Macbeth from the play *Macbeth* by William Shakespeare. Just like Lady Macbeth, who was too ambitious, Seon-Ah also shoots herself in the end. This shows that ambitious women are not admissible in society.

Most of the feminist dystopias heighten the stereotypical victimized image of women. *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margret Atwood is one such example. The character of Offred is always subdued because she is a woman. *The Devil Judge* doesn't show a conventional dystopian female character. Seon-Ah would rather fight oppression and show that she is capable of anything. She rules out the possibility of being abused by becoming the antagonist but even then, she faces oppression from the male characters because of her poor background and gender. Nevertheless, she manages to stand strong and fight everyone who tries to walk over her.

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2022

## **Dr. Faustus : Marlowe's Renaissance Man**

*The Tragical History of the Life and Death of Doctor Faustus or Doctor Faustus* is an Elizabethan tragedy written by Christopher Marlowe, set in 16<sup>th</sup> century Europe. European history, between the span of the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, experienced the period of Renaissance and marked the transition from the Middle Ages to modernity.

Renaissance itself means “rebirth” which implied the rediscovery of the Greek and Roman culture and teachings after centuries of intellectual decline. This was a period of fundamental change in human perspective which had previously been heavily influenced by the Church and religious dogma. The Renaissance marked a strong desire for boundless knowledge, the sensual pleasures of life, the importance of individualism, and a love for the materialistic world and beauty.

Christopher Marlowe, being a man of his time, was a product of the Renaissance. This is also reflected in the character of Faustus, a man who aspires to gain all the knowledge in the world or perhaps even beyond. The play begins with a soliloquy of Dr Faustus where he expresses his dissatisfaction with all the branches of knowledge, be it logic, law, medicine or religious theology. He claims to have studied all those fields yet remains hungry for more. This characteristic of Doctor Faustus sheds light on one of the key aspects of the Renaissance age i.e. the desire for infinite knowledge. He is extremely well-read, his knowledge of Latin also shows that he is an intelligent man. However, there's a juxtaposition between this intelligence or desire for knowledge of his and his choice to learn necromancy, a foolish decision that eventually proves to be the cause of his downfall. This gives us an idea of how, even though the importance of knowledge was being advertised in that age, being over-ambitious remained a sin that would never go unpunished by nature. Extending this idea further, a parallel can be drawn between Macbeth and Doctor Faustus regarding this particular characteristic. Faustus, through his ambition, transgresses the hierarchy of the ‘Great Chain of Being’, a concept derived from Plato, Aristotle, Plotinus and Proclus which was interpreted by Christianity as

well as in the age of the Renaissance. It talked about the order in which all life and matter exist, with the basic foundational elements at the bottom and the divine being i.e. 'God' at the top.

Another element of the Renaissance is the love for the material world and its pleasures. Faustus expresses his desire to wed the most beautiful German maid and also wishes for Helen of Troy to be his paramour. This shows his love of sensual pleasures as well as his passion for beauty.

This period was marked by an intense interest in the visible world and also mingled around the idea of secularism. Faustus questions the theories about life after death, mocks the pope and his friars and does not hold back his blasphemous behaviour in any instance. In fact, he agrees to go to the lengths of selling his soul to the devil to achieve his goals which also reflects the moral corruption at the time of Renaissance, from the point of view of religious institutions.

All these aspects reveal Faustus's Renaissance spirit of adventure and his hunger for limitless knowledge and power, which might have seemed inseparable to a man of that era. He sells his soul to the devil in exchange for pleasures, power and knowledge but he also expresses his desire to use the power to make his country stronger, build an army and make universities etc. This shows the ambitions of the bourgeois to conquer and grow. The social scenario at the time, the emerging class and Marlowe's approach to the changing society are all reflected in the character of Faustus who accurately depicts the spirit of that period.

The play touches on the ideas of morality as Faustus is shown to be torn between the good angel and the evil angel in several instances. In moral tradition, good always triumphs over evil. In Marlowe's tragedy, we see the protagonist get influenced by evil early on in the play and all his decisions happen to be mischievous and blasphemous. Faustus's behaviour also reflects the emerging scepticism about the Church and religious ideologies. The criticism of Catholicism might also have originated from Marlowe's personal beliefs or opinions on religion. However, even through the dark choices, the inherent goodness of Faustus shines subtly which becomes apparent at the end when he recognizes his foolishness and wishes to change his ways, though he still does not go unpunished. In this sense, the play becomes a parable of a man who masters the secrets of nature but loses mastery

over himself. It became a lesson and a warning to the people of that age about the consequences of their unchecked craze for knowledge, riches, powers and adventures.

Marlowe creatively reinterprets the character of Faustus from the old legend and moulds him according to the contemporary movement of the Renaissance. The old legend, as found in the German *Faustus-buch*, was a tale of magic where Faustus is depicted merely as an example of weakness and is a cunning sorcerer who meets a well-deserved end. Marlowe's Faustus is a man who becomes too fascinated by human potentialities and aspires to attain a kind of divinity. He embodies the true spirit of the Renaissance man with his thirst for knowledge and power but also ends up making his aspirations the reason for his downfall. The movement inspired people to grow into rich individuals but in Faustus's case, such ambition was doomed to failure, because man at the end, is only a limited being which he or perhaps most Renaissance men found difficult to grasp.

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2021

## Wollstonecraft's Ambivalence in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*

Even though Mary Wollstonecraft's life was under society's critical scrutiny, her literary and philosophical stance towards Feminism has gained a respectable amount of appreciation. *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* is read as a proto-feminist text. However, such an analysis can be charged with the accusation of superficial reading because even after offering some radical pronouncements, Mary Wollstonecraft manages to not remain radical in its entirety. This paper aims to not only highlight Wollstonecraft's radicalism, but also underscore the fissures within the surface of this profound text.

The first message that the readers of *Rights of Woman* receive is that of Wollstonecraft arguing against the apparent inferiority of women to men because of their substantial lack of education. Her debt to Enlightenment thought is revealed when she profusely focuses on the importance of rationality and reason, and how these two factors stabilise an individual's position in society. By fighting for women's right to education, Wollstonecraft tries to redefine the female societal position and blatantly rejects the notion of women being the ornaments of society or properties to be traded in marriage. *Rights of Woman* is an attack on the ideology of educational philosophers like Rousseau, who argued that women should be denied education. According to Supurna Dasgupta, Wollstonecraft is "quite vehemently opposed to Rousseau's understanding of the woman as possessing 'experimental morality', of woman being the observer and man the reasoning agent. Wollstonecraft's woman is moral, rational and is capable of genius" (Dasgupta 105).

Even today, reason and rationality are qualities that immediately invoke a sense of masculinity which, according to Wollstonecraft, is a fallacy. The basis of her upcoming argument is that all human beings are capable of virtue which is only attainable through knowledge, and the key to this argument is the claim that there is no such thing as "gendered" virtue since human souls have no gender. She attacks men for their prejudicial behavior and distinctly states that the mind, irrespective of the gender, should form its own principles sans the influence of any external prejudices:

Men, in general, seem to employ their reason to justify prejudices, which they have imbibed, they can scarcely trace how, rather than to root them out. The mind must be strong that resolutely forms its own principles; for a kind of intellectual cowardice prevails which makes many men shrink from the task, or only do it by halves. Yet the imperfect conclusions thus drawn, are frequently very plausible, because they are built on partial experience, on just, though narrow, views.

(Wollstonecraft 51)

Next, there is a direct attack on monarchy and how it does not leave any room for ability; sycophancy and corruption circumscribe the entire monarchical regime. Hence, one might say that *Rights of Woman* is rich in not only arguments related to reason, virtue and knowledge, but also an amalgamation of Wollstonecraft's socio-political stances. According to Cora Kaplan, Wollstonecraft "took advantage of an open moment of political debate to intervene on behalf of women from inside the British left intelligentsia. Its message is urgent precisely because social and political reform seemed not just possible, but inevitable." (Kaplan 80)

Wollstonecraft is in favor of egalitarianism, equating women to army soldiers in order to highlight how subordination and powerlessness under "powerful and virtuous" men works. Both the former and the latter are supposed to take commands from a superior, without bringing into use their own thinking capacity. In other words, "despotism" lurks in any profession in which people must be kept in line by means of authority instead of reason, and this has poor consequences for people's character. She says that army men's "only occupation is gallantry" and they conceal their deformity "under gay ornamental drapery". *Rights of Woman* is heavy with Wollstonecraft's ruthless criticism against the lack of egalitarianism in society, for which she has been appreciated. However, even though the points she makes are radical in their own way, there are some flaws that cannot be sidelined.

To begin with, Wollstonecraft speaks as a typical bourgeois woman, with a very conjugal tone. Even though she speaks for the rights of women, she never questions the domestic roles that are supposed to be played by them. She goes beyond moral philosophers of her day to see virtue as an end



to be pursued for its own sake, but she consistently upholds traditionally feminine roles and duties to the family. As Kaplan says, “Wollstonecraft too wishes bourgeois women to be modest and respectable, honest wives and good mothers, though she wishes them to be other things as well.” (Kaplan 87). Not only is there a reestablishment of tradition, but also a complete negligence of any class that is not bourgeois. Wollstonecraft describes the middle class as the “most natural state”, and in many ways *Rights of Woman* is infected with a bourgeois view of the world. It encourages modesty and industry in its woman readers and attacks the uselessness of the aristocracy. But she is not necessarily a friend to the poor. Not only is the woman she constructs bourgeois, but she is also one who is rich in European values. According to Dasgupta, “Her construction of the category of ‘woman’ is not only bourgeois, predicated upon middle class conservative notions of education, family and domesticity; this ‘woman’ is also the classic secular European woman, who must set up an ideal of liberalism as opposed to her ‘Mahometan’ sisters” (Dasgupta 106).

*Rights of Woman* is often read as a *de facto* manifesto of Feminism as it pushes men and women on to an equal platform. However, while Wollstonecraft does call for equality between the sexes, she does not explicitly state that they are equal. What she does claim is that all humans are equal in the eyes of God. However, such claims of equality stand in contrast to her statements regarding the superiority of masculine strength and valor. So, according to what she writes, women need to be educated so that they can be good companions to their husbands; the idealized humanity as it appears here is a rational, plain speaking, bourgeois man. Women need to look up to their male idols in order to be on an equal footing with them. As Dasgupta rightly puts it:

Though Wollstonecraft hopes to establish equality among man and woman, she hopes to do so while still preserving the differences between them...Wishes to train women into thinking rationally, developing cognitive faculties such that they can think in the same rational manner as their male counterparts... Women, with their perfect blend of autonomy and empathy, are supposed to arrive at these qualities through abstract rationalism. It is only after such an arrival at the threshold of ‘true dignity’ that the equality guaranteed by ‘human rights’ may be granted to them.

(Dasgupta 99)

The criticism of desire is another important aspect of the text which was brought under severe criticism. Wollstonecraft is well known for her transgressive life, so when she looks at desire through a negative lens, the entire situation becomes highly ironic. Cora Kaplan is one of the critics who look deeply into this irony when she talks about desire, sexuality and feeling in her essay. She says that Wollstonecraft “turned against feeling, which is seen as reactionary and regressive, almost counter-revolutionary” (Kaplan 79). She sets up “heartbreaking conditions for women’s liberation – a little death, the death of desire, the death of female pleasure” (Kaplan 82). Kaplan reads violent antagonism against the sexual aspect of female desire and feels that Wollstonecraft exaggerates the importance of a woman’s sensuality, constructing sexuality as an intimate and immediate threat to social stability of the bourgeois mindset. To quote Kaplan herself,

What the argument moves towards, but never quite arrives at, is the conclusion that it is male desire that must be controlled and contained if women are to be free and rational. This conclusion can’t be reached because an idealized bourgeois male is the standard towards which women are groping, as well as the reason they are on their knees... It has nothing complimentary to say about women as they are.

(Kaplan 89-90)

So, while the radicalism of *Rights of Woman* is celebrated even today, the slight cracks in the entire argument do surface now and then. Kaplan and Dasgupta highlight some essential criticism against Wollstonecraft’s double politics, but also rightly acknowledge the importance of such a vocal text in the late eighteenth century. One must not forget that Mary Wollstonecraft was a transgressive woman writing in a time period which valued male rationality more than anything else. She does challenge Rousseau, but also accepts his ascription of female inferiority, locating it even more firmly than he does in an excess of sensibility. In short, Wollstonecraft’s take on the entire issue of gender politics and education is slightly ambivalent.

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2020

## Laurence Sterne's "Anti-Novel"

“No sooner has the novel emerged in England than it is deconstructed by this monstrous anti-novel. Sterne has spotted the fact that realism is ultimately impossible because one representation leads to another, and that to another, until you are plunged into utter confusion. Every narrative must be selective – but then, how can it be true to life? You can’t tell the truth and shape the truth at the same time.”

– Terry Eagleton

The Victorian era flourished with the rise of the novel and the Printing Press. The novel genre, in particular, emerged as an experiment that followed the concept of Philosophical Realism. Realism, an aesthetic mode, broke with the classical demands of art to show life as it should be in order to show life "as it is". Attention was to be particularly paid to just reporting the facts, instead of commenting or judging on the scene or character. While this specific era brought forward authors like Daniel Defoe and Samuel Richardson who wrote in the realist mode, Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy, Gentleman* surfaced as a reaction against this particular category of literature.

To begin with, *Tristram Shandy* can be read as a novel that parodies the conventions of the novel genre, hence becoming ironic in itself. In one sense, Sterne has put together a caricature of this genre, exaggerating certain features to such an extent that it invokes the annoyance and boredom of the reader. Even though the title introduces Shandy as the protagonist of the text, it does not put any emphasis on his heroic aspects, as opposed to other novels being written around the same time. Rather, it warns the readers that the text is a mere collection of his life events and opinions. According to Fiule Okuro Lu Özün,

“Even the title of the novel suggests a play upon the novelistic tradition of its time. In the title instead of presenting the adventures of his hero, Sterne introduces his readers to the life and opinions of the protagonist. Although the novel is the contemporary of Fielding's *Tom Jones* and Richardson's *Pamela*, *Tristram Shandy* bears little resemblance to the sequential and structurally unified novels.”

(Lu Özün, 77)

Ian Watt, who wrote an introduction to the text, calls the title an “intentional misnomer; the intention being presumably to prepare us for the way in which the novelist's habitual solemnity about every detail of the biography of his titular hero is going to be travestied.” (*Tristram Shandy* [edited by Watt]) As the reader finds out eventually, Sterne describes his “hero's” influential years with accurate diligence. He attributes Tristram's character to the “trauma of conception and parturition” with

deadpan gravity, which ultimately mocks this characteristic of the novel genre (Watt). The title is misleading because Tristram Shandy actually is born at about the middle of the book and he is a baby whose life and especially opinions are of no interest to the reader.

During the European classical period, the structure of a narrative work began with the technique of “*In Medias Res*”, in which the text opens in the middle of the plot. Often, the clarification of the same is bypassed and filled in gradually, either through a few dialogues, flashbacks, or descriptions of past events. The alternative, on the face of it, would be to begin with the beginning; Tristram takes this possibility to an almost ludicrous extreme by beginning *before* the beginning, from his conception rather than his birth. He calls it “*Ab Ovo*”, which literally means “from the egg”, and hence flouts the Homeric epic tradition of *In Medias Res*. This strategy leads him into the crisis of relating incidents of which he could have no knowledge, which would call into question his status as an autobiographical narrator. In one way, Sterne is not only mocking the expectations of his readers, but also the systematic structure of the Realist novels, which obsess over aligning the life events of the characters in a perfect order of a beginning, a middle and an end - how the realist readers want everything to be served in a platter for them to consume. Tristram Shandy addresses his readers’ futile expectations of receiving a particularly organized narration of his life in the very beginning of the novel:

“I know there are readers in the world, as well as many other good people in it, who are no readers at all, – who find themselves ill at ease, unless they are let into the whole secret from first to last, of everything which concerns you. It is in pure compliance with this humour of theirs, and from a backwardness in my nature to disappoint any one soul living, that I have been so very particular already.”

(Sterne, 5)

Even though he promises the reader that he will paint a perfect picture of what his life has been throughout, the novel turns out to be a tiresome compilation of chanced mishappenings and accidents that have directly or indirectly affected Tristram. According to Eagleton, “The more he tries to forge a totality from his life, the more it comes apart in his hands.” By reading the title, one might assume that Tristram Shandy will play the role of a realist protagonist, and the novel will tabulate all the heroic and non-heroic episodes of his life. However, Sterne pokes fun at this assumption by giving more information about characters like Uncle Toby and Walter Shandy, while Tristram simply adopts the voice of an omniscient narrator and shares his opinions concerning the same. According to Kuo-jung Chen,

“In Sterne’s novel, though the first six volumes are supposed to center mainly on Tristram’s life, from his conception to his accidental “circumcision” (and extended somewhat to his education and breeching); the actual happenings of his life occupy only a small fraction of the novel. What the reader gets is mainly his opinions concerning what happens to him and his family members... His own life story, promised in the title of the novel, disappears almost entirely. Instead, we know more about the life of Uncle Toby by the account of his military and amorous maneuvers.”

(Chen, 144)

Having common-place everyday personalities at the heart of a novel is an important characteristic, as the genre emerged as the voice of the middle-class. They are not subjects of an epic, or some stock character, but they have individualism imbibed in them. Examples of such novels can be Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe*, Richardson’s *Pamela*, and Fielding’s *Tom Jones*. Sterne offers a critique of this convention by devoting entire chapters to characters as basic and common as a midwife, a parson and a sloppy doctor. Their frequent appearances do not enhance the plot of the novel, but instead, make a spiral out of the protagonist’s narration and appear as mere digressions. As if it was not too obvious for the reader, Shandy states that in all his digressions, there is a “masterstroke of digressive skill”, the merit of which has been overlooked by the reader. He defends his habit of digressing by claiming that the subtle art of digression is a progress in itself. In volume 1, he writes that “tho’ my digressions are all fair, as you observe – and that I fly off from what I am about ... yet I constantly take care to order affairs so, that my main business does not stand still in my absence ... In a word, my work is digressive, and it is progressive too – and at the same time.” (Sterne, 54) In other words, *Tristram Shandy* reads like an absurd work which lacks a proper chronology of events and presents itself as a jumbled mess. As Oana-Roxana Ivan says,

“*Tristram Shandy* is a curiosity, a predecessor of Absurdism in literature, proving that Sterne has no regard for the laws of the novel ... Events that take place at one time are related before or after others that took place after them. The novel turns out to be eccentric, characterized by irrationality and absurdity ... In a nutshell, we learn next to nothing about the actual life of the hero. In this respect his book is a parody of the novels of the eighteenth century which presented the logical evolution of the hero’s life from his birth to his grave.”

(Ivan, 1-2)

When read through a lens of literary criticism, *Tristram Shandy* constantly builds up and breaks such expectations in order to be called an “Anti-Novel”, which is any experimental work of fiction that avoids and turns on their head the familiar conventions of the novel. Sterne challenges all

such conventions and also makes his protagonist an anti-hero, in the sense that he seems to be a hero but the readers end up having only a minimalistic view of his character as a whole. He also puts forth the idea of the pace of the narrative and time being subjective. According to Tristram, time is reflective of how the character perceives time, which is sometimes slow and sometimes fast. This perception of time highlights the dilemma of an autobiography – it can never catch up with life – and hence anticipates the “stream of consciousness” mode of writing, that will come up in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Apart from flouting conventions, *Tristram Shandy* mystifies the reliability and authenticity of the narratorial voice. Is it Sterne’s diction that the readers are at the disposal of, or is it Tristram’s particular opinion that is being talked about in his own voice? The author and the narrator juxtapose with each other at multiple junctures, hence clouding the perceptions of the reader with confusion and uncertainty and making it a prominent characteristic of an anti-novel. As Ivan suggests:

“Moreover, Tristram Shandy may well be considered an anti-novel (Brînzeu 73): ‘the overlapping between the author, narrator, and main character [...] creates confusion as to the identity of the author.’ Tristram, the main character in Sterne’s novel, comes to speak about his own family as if they were fictional inventions, depending on his authorial decisions. Meanwhile, Sterne, as Shandy, becomes a character, penetrating into the world of his own creations.”

(Ivan, 2)

Sterne takes a step further to parody the ever-present realism in the characterization of novels. The naming of characters in *Tristram Shandy* is very intentional and has an evident tone of mockery. Ian Watt states that “most of the minor characters have type-names... Even the names of the main characters have suggestions of comic generality. ‘Shandy’ has a jocular sound, and was apparently a dialect word in Yorkshire meaning ‘crack-brained’; while ‘Toby’ had long been established as a euphemism for the posterior, and is this a mocking aspersion on its modest owner.” Hence, Sterne forms characters that make the readers chuckle, while at the same time making them roll their eyes out of annoyance.

Sterne grapples with the novel as an independent genre and breaks it down, bit by bit, to give its apparent constructive criticism. In short, one can say that Eagleton’s criticism of *Tristram Shandy* as an anti-novel is one of its most appropriate readings. It provides clarity to the text in its entirety, and gives reasons for Sterne’s choice of words, plot, characters and literary devices.

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2020



## Narrative Techniques in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*

*Heart of Darkness* by Joseph Conrad was first published in 1899 as a three-part serial story in the *Blackwood Magazine*. The first part consists of Marlow's travels from Europe to Central Station in Africa, second of Central Station to the Inner Station i.e. the interiority of Africa and third is his return to Europe. The plotline may seem straightforward or linear, but the tale is complex with the use of different narrative techniques.

The first technique is the employment of two narrators. The frame narrator introduces us to the Nellie ship crew consisting of the Director of Companies, a lawyer, an accountant as well as Marlow, our narrator who soon takes over the narration. He (assuming it is an all-male crew) remains anonymous throughout the novella. Unlike classic frame narrative where the frame narrator is the most knowledgeable and authoritative, Conrad's frame narrator is Marlow's intellectual inferior and his audience. He provides us with his anecdotes about their journey, Marlow's narration and fellow passenger's response more than once. At the beginning of the narrative, the frame narrator describes the Thames and English sea heroes who were "hunters for gold or pursuers of fame...messengers of the might within the land, bearers of a spark from the sacred fire."<sup>[1]</sup> What is stated as the conquest for fame and wealth was an endeavour for colonialism and imperialism. Marlow counters this imperialist discourse by citing Britain as "has been one of the darkest places on Earth," indicating the colonization of Britain by the Roman Empire. The once "uncivilized", have taken the gauntlet to "civilize" others, the oppressed takes on the role of the oppressor, the site of "light" for the world was once "dark" itself. This is a subversion of the popular imperialist discourse and is laying bare Britain's truth within a gap of two lines. We, as readers comprehend the frame narrator's limited insight and complexity of the narrative that is about to unfold. The complexity of the title of the novella is highlighted in the first couple of pages itself.

The narrative is made more complex by Conrad's appropriate distancing from Marlow's experiences and ideas. Marlow, having explored the Indian Ocean, Pacific and China Seas was on the lookout for another adventure to "tackle a darkness" much like the conquest of the conquerors to take away the strength of "those who have a different complexion or slightly flatter noses". Conrad, in the same paragraph, calls Marlow "Buddha preaching in European clothes and without a lotus flower". The two images are juxtaposed. Keeping in mind the similarity between Marlow and Buddha's life trajectories, Conrad paints Marlow in the peace-preaching, the non-western, enlightened image of Buddha. Combining Conrad's distancing and presence of the frame narrator, the technique used is that of a frame story with three narrators namely the anonymous frame narrator, Marlow and Conrad himself.

Conrad combines the use of symbolism, impressionism and delayed decoding in this novella. Arp and Johnson define symbolism as "The symbolic use of objects and actions." [2] or the use of symbols to signify ideas and qualities by giving them symbolic meanings. Marlow's journey to Congo is symbolic of his journey to the inner recesses of his mind. Kurtz is symbolic of the darker side of humankind. Like Kurtz, the accountant, manager and brick-maker are all representative of King Leopold of Belgium who was out to exploit the native Africans and their resources. By ultimately becoming like the natives, ironically Kurtz's torch in his portrait is symbolic of the white man's burden or European civilization. The ivory is symbolic of greed. The thicker and thicker fog and smoke following Marlow's ship into the Inner Station are symbolic of confusion and mystery.

Impressionism is the use of details to evoke personal impressions rather than the reality being presented. Conrad's subjective use of moral impressionism by purposefully not clarifying impressions and later explaining them is done for the readers' understanding. But Conrad runs the risk of Marlow being viewed as an unreliable narrator. Conrad's impressionist technique allows the readers to "see the story," as his task mentioned in the Preface was "by the power of the written word to make you hear, to make you feel - it is to make you *see*". Marlow conveys his sense impressions for the readers to follow

the same route in experiencing the sequence of events and sequence of impressions on his brooding/meditating mind. <sup>[3]</sup> This is what Ian Watt has called “Delayed Decoding” as it withholds the explanation of the incident till later. One of the most often cited examples of delayed decoding from *Heart of Darkness* is:

“I saw my poleman give up the business suddenly, and stretch himself flat on the deck, without taking the trouble to haul the pole in. He kept hold on it though, and it trailed in the water. At the same time the fireman, whom I could also see below me, sat down abruptly before his furnace and ducked his head. I was amazed...Arrows, by Jove! We were being shot at.” (Conrad 50)

By conveying the effects before the causes in this instance, Marlow tries to cloud the reader’s judgement that his crew members were lazy or incompetent but were really in combat with the arrows of the natives. Conrad wants to imply that the reader’s perception actually depends on preconceptions, that “individuals base decisions of conduct upon preconceived knowledge”. <sup>[4]</sup>

Another significant use of delayed decoding is Marlow’s constant references to Kurtz saying “All Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz” and “I did not see the man in the name any more than you do” while the novella is notable only by his absence.

Considering the context of the emerging 20th-century attitude of time being a social construct, Conrad toys with the time and space aspect in the narration. To manipulate time and space, Conrad uses prolepsis (flashforward) and analepsis (flashback) as narrative techniques. The first example is that the novella is narrated in analepsis. Since the sailors are on the boat not working, Marlow starts recounting his excursion to Congo. This leads to the readers forgetting that the story is not presently taking place. In the third part, there is prolepsis when Marlow sees a portrait of Kurtz’s intended and describes her: “I know that the sunlight can be made to lie, too, yet one felt that no manipulation of light and pose could have conveyed the delicate shade of truthfulness upon those

features” but upon their real encounter he describes her as “this fair hair, this pale visage, this pure brow”. The theme of light and darkness comes up again. During their brief encounter, there is a predominant analepsis with Marlow constantly describing Kurtz’s actions, words, voice and appearance. The instances of prolepsis and analepsis affect the “space-flow” as going back and forth in time also changes the spatial geography. After his lie to Kurtz’s intended, Conrad pulls Marlow back and puts the narration in the hands of the extradiegetic narrator. The quotation marks at the beginning of each paragraph are reminders of Marlow’s words.

Conrad was conscious of the racial issue, and he has been accused of racism by many critics including Chinua Achebe. Marlow uses racist language and reduces the voiceless native Africans as a “metaphorical extension of the wilderness”. At the same time, he critiques the white imperialists as inhuman and Africans as subhuman. Conrad has tried to question colonization by keeping his distance from Marlow.

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2020

## **Aggressive Selfhoods and a Dystopian Sense of Morality in Dharamvir Bharati's *Andha Yug***

"... And then in the future; day by day; there will be a decline; in prosperity and Dharma and the whole Earth shall slowly perish; The one who has no worth shall rule; The one who wears mask; a false mask; shall be honoured; The one who is greedy shall be king; And weary of misrule; the people; shall hide in dark caves; and wait; for their days of; misery to end."

" That day Yudhishthira's half truth...ruthless beast "

- Ashwatthama (Act 2, 'The Making of a Beast')

Dharamvir Bharati's *Andha Yug* is an interpretation of the last day of the Mahabharata war. The emotions in the book, with its dark socio-political background, are very relevant to our present times. Alok Bhalla, in his translation, beautifully captures the despair and failing hope and faith.

The title summarises the Act as Aswatthama completely loses faith and transforms into a "ruthless beast". The title suggests that no one is born a beast; their circumstances (mostly social) make them so. We cannot help but be reminded of Frankenstein's monster who steadily moves toward plans of revenge when he is driven into complete alienation by the people around him. In these lines, it is clear that Aswatthama's final burst of despair happens due to the fact that Yudhishthira lied and not because of his father's death. His faith is faced with a serious juncture and he fails in this test of faith. As everyone else, he saw Yudhishthira as the epitome of honesty, and this time, even he used false means to succeed, and even as power-hungry creatures, human beings yearn for the more earthly values of comfort and safety.

Even darkness needs light to be recognized. When light fades, darkness questions its own existence, and the eternal truth is lost. We put a lot of blind faith into our leaders, trust them to lead us

to safety, to light, that we forget they are human beings who are equally prone to follies. Their one wrong move shatters thousands who worship them; a symbol is destroyed. Yudhishtira too had become a symbol for truth - the eternal truth - and when that gives way, the ground beneath gives way for believers. The truth seems to play for one side of the battle, and when truth itself has left you, fate seems dark. Everything seems like a play-written script where there's no choice of moral righteousness. The purpose of life is defeated and Aswatthama claims revenge against life itself.

Human ego stems from the self-asserted assumption that we have some humane qualities that differentiate us from beasts. When Yudhishtira compares Aswatthama to an elephant, giving importance only to their similar names, taking away their identities, this ego is shattered. Aswatthama loses his agency and becomes a mere mute beast, to be killed and left to decay like an animal. We wish for society to perceive us well and act to earn some attention, and when that self-image and integrity is lost, society loses its meaning. The end seems to be bleak and we all seem to be alone in it.

Ashwatthama is not an explicit believer of the popular ideas of right and wrong, yet the failure of truth affects him so - the lack of faith and a *yug* of darkness and despair affects the non-believers as much as the believers. These lines portray the pain of the outsiders, who gain nothing from the current system, yet do not manage to sustain themselves without the system and collapse with or without the "chosen" (voted) group, remaining in the dark like beasts in the forest.

" I am Vidura... old mendicant picks it up."

These lines are taken from the Interlude, 'Feathers, Wheels and Bandages', where Vidura's Spectre laments his own doubts. This discourse is important as Vidura stands for faith and has stood fast by his ethical reasoning, remaining a believer, and believes himself to be superior in the eyes of God due to his relentless faith. When Vidura himself starts doubting, there seems to be a complete lack of hope. He understands God as something that was created; something that is as imperfect as the

humans who created these ideas. The so-called Gods are partial and cannot stand for ethical and moral righteousness. It is only with these believers that God exists - God is omnipotent only as long as we believe it to be so. Without faith, God becomes an axle without wheels; without believers, there's no identity for God. Vidura realises the falsity of the systems of institutionalised faith.

However, as bells sound and the peacock feathers float into the succeeding scene, there is a sense of healing and hope. The idea is to look for God within oneself, to be the best that one can be, to forgive oneself and to reward oneself. Peacock stands as a restorative image that lights and nurtures a flicker of hope for human destiny, and human beings become the centre of discourse, where each person is given the freedom of doubt and subjectivity.

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2020

## **The Reductive Nature of Caste System: A Study of Disembodied Figures in *Bhimayana***

*Bhimayana* is a graphic biography of Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, shedding light on the history as well as experiences of untouchability in India. It discusses incidents from Ambedkar's life as well as cases and reports of other Dalits and their sufferings at the hands of upper caste Hindus. It was written by Srividya Natarajan and S. Anand and the illustrations were drawn by Durgabai Vyam and Subhash Vyam. They make use of the digna style mural art of the Pardhan Gonds, a tribe belonging to central India.

*Bhimayana* does not follow the established rules of comic book writing or presentation as, according to the Vyams, the message can be expressed more freely otherwise. The art is famous for its way of expressing a message as it cannot be understood literally and one must be able to read through the symbolism. It is interesting to note how the deep rooted issues of Indian society and its religious and cultural history have been brought to light in a format that might not be associated with such intentions generally. Nandini Chandra, in her essay "The Fear of Iconoclasm: Genre and Medium Transformations from Comics to Graphic Novels in Amar Chitra Katha, *Bhimayana*, and *Munnu*" discusses how even though artists find many creative ways to talk about the conditions of Dalits, at the level of visual translation as well as technique, the power of this underlying graphic language cannot be ignored.

The idea of untouchability is, to the core of it, cruel and degrading. Dalits, throughout history, have been denied access not only to the bare necessities of life but also to the very identity that makes them a part of human civilization. Their dehumanization by the upper caste establishes their position as even lower than the bottom-most tier of social hierarchy as they are removed from the hierarchy altogether. This treatment and reduction of an entire community into something not worthy of being human is represented in *Bhimayana* through the motif of disembodied figures. In her essay, "Ambedkar Out of the Frame", Nandini Chandra also discusses how the general ambience



of dismemberment is pertinent in the text as people are randomly represented by a scatter of arms, heads, feet or legs. According to her, “the profusion of hands, feet and fingers is mostly an invocation of incessant labour and toil”. The disembodiment can also be seen as a representation of the upper caste as inhuman due to their actions and violence, both physical and psychological, towards the Dalits. My thesis intends to explore this theme and analyze it under the light of the three artworks that have been chosen by me. Being selected from the book of ‘Shelter’, the artworks also show the conditions under which Ambedkar was forced to live, the threats he had to face and the struggles he had to go through just to find a roof over his head.

On page 61 of the book, we can observe a conversation between Ambedkar and a Brahmin regarding Ambedkar’s education from Columbia University. The Brahmin, oblivious to Ambedkar’s caste, is impressed by his scholarly talents. This can be seen as a commentary on how it is merely the awareness of the other person’s caste that shifts the entire nature of interaction. Without that, if given the same opportunities to express as well as present oneself, there is no outer or engrained indication of one’s separation from the rest of humanity, whether in terms of physical appearance, talents or potential. The emphasis of the Brahmin on the scholarly nature of his caste explains his disembodied hand. It is a reminder of how this argument has been used by upper caste Hindus to ensure their dominance in the caste hierarchy throughout history, thus making him a contributor to their inhuman treatment of Dalits. Another hand and two floating heads can be observed on the bottom left corner just as Ambedkar almost reveals his identity as a non-Brahmin but catches himself on time. This need to be conscious and the desperation to hide one’s identity just for the sake of safety can be extended to the artwork on the bottom right corner as well. The four heads coming out of Ambedkar’s eyes as well as the eye on the thought bubble are all symbolic of the awareness he needs to have of his surroundings and of what he does and says himself. The merging of the faces of Ambedkar and the Brahmin into a train at the center of the page is also an example of disfiguration used to symbolize the circular logic or the cyclical nature of caste system. The train, running in circles, cannot escape its track, just like a Dalit cannot escape his or her fate. This is also a representation of the lack of mobility, whether social or economic, in the caste system.

The artwork on page 65 is more colourful than the previous one. The colours being mostly green, yellow and brown create a very rural and earthen image. The presence of animals, maybe donkeys, the cart wheels and the thatched roof at the bottom left corner give us an idea of the rural nature of Baroda, perhaps hinting at the lack of good quality accommodation that is to follow. Ambedkar expresses relief on being told that he can reside in a Parsi inn nearby. Only his upper body has been drawn as he finds a momentary or partial escape from the daily horrors of untouchability. The wheels, however, foreshadow his eventual experience and how he cannot escape his fate. The crab tail or the scorpion bubble has been used by the artists throughout the text whenever unkind, humiliating or stinging words have been spoken against any Dalit. Ambedkar's welcome at the Parsi inn is not so warm and so has been emphasized by the speech bubble, the disembodied head of Ambedkar as well as the floating hand. The art on the bottom right shows his torso separated from his feet. But, as he's climbing the stairs and moving further away from the environment of humiliation, he is trying to attain more wholeness. This idea of attaining wholeness for a Dalit only when he or she is removed from society is a commentary on the reality of the lower castes being forced to live on the borders of their villages, secluded from all the areas they might pollute, according to the Brahmins.

The representation of disembodied figures on page 68 sheds light on the consuming nature of violence and aggression. The Parsi heads on top of sticks symbolize how they've become the violence. The fingers coming out of the sticks are accusatory. The scorpion bubbles and the harsh words spoken by the mob against Ambedkar show how communal violence and conflict is not only among castes but also between religions. The battle that the lower castes have to fight, unfortunately, does not end at their own religion. One can also observe how violence is not restricted to a group identity but is in the very nature of humans and gets multiplied or enhanced under the influence of a mob. Ambedkar's thought bubble gives us an insight into his inner conflict, having to choose between his shelter and his life. Another reality of the Dalit community is being presented as their attempts to access basic necessities for life, such as water from public wells for instance, can cost them their lives. The disembodied legs at the bottom right edge of the page might be a representation of Ambedkar's desire to escape the situation. It may also be perceived as the missing half of the mob's bodies, perhaps their

humanity or sensitivity, that has been replaced by sticks i.e. their violence and aggression against a man who transgressed his position in society.

The recurring use of disembodied presentation of the human body in parts can be the artists' way of commenting on how caste, as a system, does not only degrade Dalits to the status of an inhuman being but also refuses to see them as a part of its whole. This dismemberment is a reminder of how the functioning of caste system and discrimination takes away the essence of humanity that binds us all together. It dehumanizes both, the oppressor as well as the oppressed. The oppressor becomes less human by snatching away not only a community's rights as humans but also their quality of life, their esteem, their potential and their aspirations. The oppressed, being on the receiving end, is robbed of all that would make him or her human. This lack of wholeness of individuals can also be a representation of the loss of individual identity that comes with one's identification with a larger group whether it's their caste, religion, gender or nationality. The consistency of this motif throughout *Bhimayana* allows the readers to understand the intensity of injustice that the lower castes have faced throughout history.

Vasvi Oza, in her essay "Questions of Reading and Readership of Pictorial Texts: The Case of *Bhimayana*, a Pictorial Biography of Dr. Ambedkar" discusses how *Bhimayana* is not only a journey of one man's life in the past. The narration is such that it goes back and forth in time, allowing readers to make connections with the struggles of the community as well as open their eyes to the fact that those struggles haven't been completely eradicated and are still persistent in Indian society. The social and political alienation of the lower castes continues and is added to their geographical seclusion as well. They are forced to live in slums at the edges or borders of many villages and cities. Being forced into jobs such as scavenging, handling of human or animal corpses, cleaning of feces, hard physical labour etc., with no other alternative option available to earn the bare minimum, denies them the opportunity to get out of the vicious cycle of their social and economic condition. Dalits are defaced by being kept in a state of illiteracy, denied equal relations in social status and worship, denied equal property rights and removed from the fabric of society with the weak excuse of religious and cultural purity. Throughout history there have been countless instances of conflicts over race, religion, caste

etc. and even though most of them were resolved, with their own baggage of damage, this battle continues in India. Even though subtle, it is still creeping through systems, ideologies and the veins of upper caste Hindus, still corroding and eating up the foundations of a supposedly democratic nation like termites.

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*2021*

## Tragic Paradox of Faustus

*Doctor Faustus* was written sometime around 1592 by Christopher Marlowe. The Elizabethan Tragedy is an adaptation of the German prose narrative *Historia von D. Johann Fausten* published at Frankfurt in 1587. The play centres around the themes of morality in the context of the Renaissance, the contradictory ideologies of Catholicism and Protestantism, the temporal egotistical pride in one's own capabilities, to name a few notable ones. In this essay, we shall look at the play in which Marlowe showcases the nature in which Doctor Faustus surrenders his soul to the devil, although proclaiming the aim is that of self liberation.

In the beginning of the play, we see Doctor Faustus, having acquired advanced knowledge, striving for more supremacy and this thirst leads to him conjuring Mephistopheles, further making a pact with Lucifer through Mephistopheles, selling his soul to him at the end of twenty-four years in return for unlimited powers and authority over his desires. We see Faustus here asserting himself as the centre of power, which allegorizes the human nature of ambition for supremacy. In the context of the Renaissance, men were swayed by their aspirations. Taking from the words of <sup>1</sup>Robert N. Watson, "Magic appeals to Faustus because it allows intellectual activity to control the material world; he is betrayed, as were many Renaissance aspirations, by the impossibility of freeing his intellectual activity from the material sphere and materialist motives."

Faustus is seen to be damned in the end; this however is not the result of the predestination of his fate. In <sup>2</sup>John Calvin's *Institutes*' section on the doctrine of freewill and predestination, we see that he argues, that man is either fated to life or death by Superior Supernatural forces, or in other words, God. However, In the case of Doctor Faustus, we cannot conclude this, for he has acted on his own will and conjured supernatural forces, placing his own life in the path of destruction in the paradox of selling his soul.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert N. Watson, *A Theory Of Renaissance Tragedy: Doctor Faustus*

<sup>2</sup> John Calvin, extract from the *Institutes, Predestination and Freewill*

Going back to the question of this paper, we see how Faustus protests that his act is actually an aim for self liberation, however in the text, from the incident succeeding his contract with the devil, we see him frequently calling for Mephistopheles to fulfill desires. He demands Mephistopheles to complete his tasks. This creates a question in our minds: Has Faustus acquired unlimited power? Or, is the grant given by the devil a deception? We see that Mephistopheles is requisitely assisting Faustus lest he should fall back upon the contract, or if opposing supernatural forces or God influence him to repent his misdeeds. Therefore, we may argue that Faustus never gained self liberation and his inability to realise this, makes him an object of tragedy where he has fallen to destruction by deceptive assurance.

Faustus has given his soul to the devil. This is the prominent moral conclusion in a parable aspect that we derive from the play. Marlowe interweaves the Religious ideologies at a time when Protestantism was making a breakthrough in the beliefs of Christians. The restrictive rules in Catholicism which the people were finding suppressing were replaced by more liberating ideologies of Protestantism, which Marlowe somewhat adds in the play by showcasing the brutal nature of the Pope and in the Ironic manner in which he does away with biblical structured morals and is even set to execute a person who is his rival. This shows the Pope as a cruel head representing the Catholic church of the times. However, on reading the play, it is clear that Marlowe does not detest Christianity; it is in the message of the play itself that he advocates the supremacy of God in the ultimate end of Faustus. The spiritual theme underlying the play gives a warning to the spectators and/or readers alike.

Doctor Faustus reminds us of the impermanence of life and highlights the temporary desires of materialistic concern, as well as the desire to know of things beyond the natural realm which proves to be impossible by human capability. Therefore, *Doctor Faustus* as a Tragedy and as a parable allegorizes the notion of the misleading egotistical human nature to surrender to fallacious or deceiving deterministic forces which do not lead to self liberation, but unfortunate destruction for the soul, in which lies the tragic paradox.

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*2021*

## **Alexie and the American Indian Struggle to Survive**

Till the mid twentieth century, American history textbooks mostly described the 'discovery' of North America by celebrating Columbus's achievement and omitted the natives except to suggest their 'wilderness' and hostility towards the Europeans. Only few native writers like Sherman Alexie, who made the native atrocities, mass genocides and extermination 'familiar to the unfamiliar', wrote about life in reservation camps and discrimination faced by the natives in the 'New America'. Amidst such horrendous tales of violence, Alexie's poetry brings out the hardships and compelling struggles of the Native survival by making them the centrepiece of his art.

In his poem "Crow testament", Alexie uses the symbol of crow for the natives, for whom crow was a symbol of wisdom and positive omen. With the European settlers coming to North America, especially the puritans who migrated to escape religious persecution, under the reign of King James. The natives who primarily resided, were historically oppressed and incapacitated. By ways such as the governmental violation of legal treaties, annexing lands or paying meagre amounts by cheating them and killing them by distributing smallpox infested blankets or by mass genocides. This gory part of American history finds no place in the white supremacist rule and has been systematically wiped off from centuries. The white man, who is referred to as a falcon in the poem, steals the resources from the crow, i.e. the native population and forces the natives to convert to Christianity. Now siblings in Christianity, an analogy from the biblical myth of Cain and Abel is drawn. Cain represents the Europeans and Abel, the native Americans, likewise the murder continues. The symbolic Natives in the poem are trapped in reservations, forced to collect empty bottles to get five cents a piece which points towards the issue of alcoholism and poverty among them. Towards the end of the poem, the Crow rides a pale horse and brings the news of Apocalypse only to find the end of their world, apparently portraying the very few natives remaining in America who are hugely in debt and strive hard to survive. After years of suppression they have become numb figures. The idea of death and an ending world seems to have no effect upon them for they are



already on the periphery of their lives. The last vestiges of their culture are now adorned as a memoir or a museum piece in the making of capitalist America, well preserved in the museum of the native American cultures, where they are charged for entrance. Alexie also draws parallels in his poems between the Jewish holocaust and the native genocide, bringing the victims together and by doing so connects the oppressors across timeline, border and violence, marking their similarity.

Throughout centuries the White supremacy has viewed their act as a necessary way to 'civilise' the natives. The whites used various tools to legitimise and reinforce this idea, the rhetoric of "Manifest destiny". Julius W. Pratt, in her essay *The Origin of 'Manifest Destiny', The American Historical Review* (pp.795-798) claims that "the United States was destined by God, its advocates believed to expand its dominion and spread democracy and capitalism across the entire North American continent." Darwin's Evolution theory (1859) states that "all species of organisms arise and develop through the natural selection of small, inherited variations that increase the individual's ability to compete, survive, and reproduce", which again the whites claimed to be a rational scientific reasoning of maintaining eugenics by exterminating natives. (Lennox) Also the whole idea of "The White Man's Burden", to 'civilise' them, influenced the Whites. Political and influential people like Thomas Jefferson, the president of the USA commented that, "This unfortunate race (the natives) which we have been taking so much pains to civilise....have justified extermination", legalising their ways to establish 'the virginal land of USA'.

With writers like Alexie we get to have a look at the creation of one of the most 'developed' nations of the world, where only the white men were included under the rubric of development; a development which is very race, gender and class specific; where the horrifying genocides, selective elimination of a race are a part of the history which is voluntarily hidden under the garb of 'the American capitalism and liberalism'.

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## **Marriage, Courtship and their Inseparability from Legacy in Congreve's *The Way of the World***

Amongst the variety of social ends that literature attempts to achieve, the depiction of social vices (of any nature) is a common intention of writers. Based on the social and cultural changes that society may be undergoing at the time, literary works naturally call for the suitability of the subject matter for different factions of society. Additionally, it is of much importance if the depiction of the same is to be satirical. Restoration comedy (comedy of manners) generally refers to comedies written between 1660 and 1710. After Puritans had banned theatre, it made a significant comeback in 1660 with support from Charles II and witnessed a diverse array of audiences, from the aristocracy to the servant classes. The comedy of manners mocked the affected wits of the upper class. Marriage, plotting, amorous intrigue and scheming for wealth and power were extensively portrayed. Incessant repartee among individual characters of the play displays them to be locked in debates to ensure their own legacies. Consequently, Restoration comedy had a contemptuous reputation among the masses due to its characteristic profanity, considered lewd by many. It allowed the licentious representation of sexuality in theatre. However, this representation was, at least to an extent, the outcome of a perceptive shift that had begun to transpire in the outlook towards romantic relationships between men and women at the time.

"For (Lawrence) Stone, four eighteenth century developments make compassionate marriages possible... all of them subsets of what he sees as an overarching rise of individualism: new levels of emotional bonding between men and women, increasing individual autonomy, a desire for physical privacy, and a lessening of the association between sensuality, sexuality and sin." (Morrissey, 214)

This further necessitated its representation in theatre, owing to the focal movement towards bourgeois appraisal in the Restoration comedy. With William Congreve's *The Way of the World*, first performed in 1700, the cynical judgement of aristocratic and middle classes is complicated by genuine emotional relationship or commitment that is implied in the relationship between the protagonists

Mirabell and Millamant, although it seems pregnant with moneyed interest. The play consists of traits of a late, transitional Restoration comedy in order to accommodate the varying tastes and preferences of the diversifying audience of the time. The portrayal of the superficiality of the upper class and the changing emotional outlook rising from the bourgeoisie was carried out through the classic device of 'marriage', through which Congreve highlights the cynical world of the play, the world of the upper classes.

"... the sanctity of marriage, the life of the family, and the care of the weak... had been neglected, or made ridiculous, in Restoration comedy, simply because the class which it served was parasitic: the true consequences of behavior had never to be fully lived out. Narrow as the new bourgeois morality was, it at least referred to a society in which consequence was actual, and in which there was more to do than keep up with the modes of an artificially protected class." (Williams, 624)

The depiction of the superficiality of the upper classes, arising from financial desire, which surpassed meaningful human communication amongst the characters is perhaps most effectively displayed through the character of Fainall, with his materialistic rakish qualities. He is a thorough representation of the bourgeois faction that displayed obsessive tendencies in their pursuit for monetary legacy and resorted to any amount of cynical action that was required to achieve their ends. Marriage to Mrs Fainall was nothing more than a financial agreement to him, which directs the focus of the comedy back to the commerciality of marriage for the upper class. Fainall represents the Hobbesian school of thought that believes that marriage is merely a means to money and is a propagator of contract-based marriages, including his own. His intrigue of money is great enough to subvert religious values, which were widely held in high regard by the upper and aristocratic classes, and denies 'holy' matrimony its sacred and sanctimonious status-

*FAINALL: ... 'Twas for my ease to oversee and wilfully neglect the gross advances made him (Mirabell) by my wife; that by permitting her to be engaged, I might continue unsuspected in my*

*pleasures... (71, 73)*

Scheming is prevalent throughout the play, in concentric circles affecting each other in different ways, all to one end- the lure of legacy. But it is not to be dismissed that there exist undertones of real affection and love, perhaps even fears pertaining to them, behind the plotting and scheming. It can be said that the scheming was a façade for protection, lest the desperation to maintain existing wealth and social status amongst the affluent classes becomes too apparent. Lady Fainall and Lady Marwood's repartee regarding the centre of Mirabell's affections calls for anticipatory scheming by both ladies. It can be conjectured, however, that their conversation could be laced with some amount of real emotion overshadowed by the apparent politics, which would sit well with the bourgeois audience, further sign of a transitional Restoration comedy-

*MRS FAINALL: Ingenious mischief! Would thou wert married to Mirabell.*

*MRS MARWOOD: Would I were!*

*MRS FAINALL: You change colour.*

*MRS MARWOOD: Because I hate him.*

*MRS FAINALL: So do I; but I can bear him named. But what reason have you to hate him in particular?*

*MRS MARWOOD: I never loved him; he is, and always was, insufferably proud.*

*MRS FAINALL: By the reason you give for your aversion, one would think it dissembled; for you have laid a fault to his charge of which his enemies must acquit him.*

*MRS MARWOOD: Oh, then it seems you are one of his favourable enemies! Methinks you look a little pale, and now you flush again.*

*MRS FAINALL: Do I? I think I am a little sick o' the sudden. (67)*

Considering that almost all of the characters pre-conceived the notion that the other characters in the play might have ulterior motives and alternate planning as opposed to what they usually spoke

of, it can be perceived that, in this context, they all experienced some emotional insecurity. Perhaps they were subconsciously craving honest human relations, but the assumed necessity of maintaining facades amongst upper classes may have resulted in a duplex of action and thought, leading to none of the characters being able to purely pursue romance, without the association of personal monetary gain. As the aspect of true feeling is furthered by the unconventionality of the deep emotional love as enforced by Mirabell, his acceptance of Millamant's faults is uncharacteristic of the Restoration comedies' 'ways of the world'. It is, however, a softer albeit significant gibe at the upper classes, characteristic of a transitional (or late) Restoration comedy. As Mirabell's marriage to Millamant ensured financial gain for the former, his affection for Millamant may as well be displaced from his affection for both money and legacy. It is worth mentioning here that Mirabell is, however, shown to be gravely passionate in dialogue-

*FAINALL: For a passionate lover, me thinks you are a man somewhat too discerning in the failings of your mistress.*

*MIRABELL: And for a discerning man, somewhat too passionate a lover; for I like her with all her faults; nay, like her for her faults... (29)*

This uncharacteristic display of greatly accepting love seems to have a superficial undertone to it and is certainly laced with financial greed. However, it is worth mentioning that the Proviso scene makes it clear that the affection between Mirabell and Millamant is not particularly fake, and also hints that this is how the way of the world should ideally be. The scene gives agency to the characteristic coquette, although the coquettish ways here are subdued by deep love. It is a definite indication that these two characters in particular are morally different from the other characters representing affluent sections of society. Although their love for each other has personal benefit linked to it, characters like Fainall are entirely devoid of expressions of love (even true friendship) at least in appearance, displaying rigid materialism. Mirabell and Millamant thus represent a new flexibility and leniency in maintaining appearances and facades amongst the upper classes, and this change stems

from increasing value of establishing emotional connections amongst men and women.

"... the social context (of the novel) pronounces its conventional cynical judgement upon the possibilities of meaningful contact, either in marriage or friendship... that judgement is complicated and qualified, specifically, as we shall see, by the genuine emotional commitment implied in the relationship between Mirabell and Millamant." (Brown, 216)

The form of the transitional comedy provides space to the plot to include scenes depicting real emotion and depth. It should however be noted that perhaps such depiction carries the purpose of pointing out how the 'way of the world' should ideally be, rather than how it is. Real love, in Congreve's play, might thus be representative of twin aspects- the changing moral element amid the bourgeoisie and the unconscious conversion of monetary and materialistic love into meaningful emotion amid the upper classes. At the same time, however, this claim eliminates any purity in love and friendship that could be established in the play- the typical perception of the upper classes is often brought to the fore. For instance, it should be noted that the necessity of maintaining status and reputation is evident even towards the end of the play. Lady Wishfort gives in to what she opposed in order to protect her reputation after falling for Mirabell's schemes. This perhaps hints to how the upper classes desperately tried to hold onto the differences that elevated their social status, lest the boundaries dividing class dissolve completely. In keeping with this claim, it would be safe to say that desire for marriage (and love) and financial lure are twin sides of the same coin in *The Way of the World*. The play describes a world where the feigning display of wit, interspersed with materialism and superficiality, is more socially acceptable than emotional revelation. The characters shuffle their words, move their dialogues around, speak differently from what they think and how they feel. A constant battle of words is depicted, serving to keep the characters guessing each other's true intentions and feelings. It is worth emphasizing that the curiosity of finding out real feelings and thoughts is embedded in the undeniable pursuit of wealth. The play's moral meaning can thus be understood as a chase for legacy being the propeller of real love and companionship, but serves the

opposite as well for some characters. While it is asserted that the 'way of the world' is a way of sexual profligacy, insatiable desire, duplicity and deception, *The Way of the World* also hints that moral change might be underway.

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## **Ambedkar and Gandhi: Two Perspectives, One Nation**

*Bhimayana: Experiences Of Untouchability* is a graphic text representing the life of Dr Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, opening with his childhood and ending with him chairing the Drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly. The book was published in 2011 by Navayana Publications, authored by Srividya Natarajan and S. Anand and art by Durgabai Vyam and Subhash Vyam. The book is a means of educating the masses about Ambedkar, a name overshadowed and lost amidst a cluster of other popular figures of his time, especially Gandhi. Both Ambedkar, Father of the Indian Constitution, and Mahatma Gandhi, Father of the Nation were alike in their fights against social injustices and British colonialism but the former remains unknown to most.

Gandhi's popularity undoubtedly is unparalleled in the Indian state because of the major role he played in the freedom struggle against the colonisers. But he came into play only after his return from South Africa in 1915 after participating in the Apartheid struggle. The amount of oppression and suppression received from the whites left him angry and devastated as mentioned by S. Anand in "A Digna for Bhim" where Gandhi 'in an appeal to the Indian public' laments their condition. In his exact words that Anand has quoted, "We felt indignity too much and many respectable Indians were insulted and called all sorts of names by the clerks at the counter." This account of Gandhi stands starkly juxtaposed against the condition of the depressed classes, especially the Dalits in India. And as Anand puts it, "While touchable Gandhi who succeeded in furthering the cause of racial segregation in South Africa came to be recognised as a global anti-imperialism icon, untouchable Bhim who could not drink water in his local school and went on to lead the Mahad Satyagraha in 1927 has been neglected in history."

In *Bhimayana*, the very image of the popular Gandhi does not emerge until the very end and that too not as the 'Father of the Nation' icon but as a villain against the very people who have given him this stature. Ambedkar's plea for a separate electorate was slashed down by Gandhi's insolent fast

unto death threat which he was successful in acquiring. This very incident changed and questioned the stand that Gandhi had publicly been voicing. His opposition to separate electorates portrays a very upper-caste stance and one which further increases the divide between the upper and lower caste according to the Brahmanical division of varnas. The dialogue bubble used for Gandhi in these very pages is that of a scorpion, which is indicative of the sting that had harmed and broken the hopes of the Dalit community. On page 91, the depiction of Gandhi as a fat man with an axe in his hand, who seems to be resting, invokes the image of the *Adi Kesava* avatar of Vishnu. In this avatar, Vishnu rests under the *Shesh Naag* while in the art, Gandhi rests under a tree. The tree becomes a symbol for the Dalits and all those depressed classes that have accepted Gandhi as their leader and as someone who will help in ending their misery but instead the man lying under is not so thoughtful. Gandhi, in this instance, acquires the shape of a woodcutter and the axe compliments this imagery. The idea that a woodcutter won't give up his profession just because of his love for trees is raised. The food lying around Gandhi's feet symbolises his threat of fasting and at the same moment forces one to think about the condition of the millions of Dalits for whom fasting is a habit, and not a form of protest.

The motif of the tree is quite dominant in these two pages. The Preamble of the constitution written in a green book-like shape constructs the trunk; the brown semi-circular shape right above the Preamble creates the picture of the upper part of the tree around which people are sitting on stools like leaves, and Ambedkar and Gandhi are presenting their differing views. At the very end, in the middle of the two pages, beneath the trunk, is the portrait of Ambedkar as if to signify that he is the root of this constitution and as long as the roots live, the plant does not die. His ideas are the essence of the Indian Constitution that not only catered to the needs of that time but also aimed for ensuring a better future. In the dialogue between the two women on page 91, one of them mentions the draft of the Hindu Code Bill which was rejected by the constituent assembly and which talked about property and divorce rights of women. In times when women were not treated equally, did not enjoy independent authority over themselves, and were known by the names of their husbands, Ambedkar was trying to voice their rights. This feminist stand in itself is a strong marker of the kind of person he

was. He represented the minority and understood their needs. But on the other hand, Gandhi's letter to Sir Samuel Hoare presents an ironic stance: "[...] I want to save them against themselves. I hold that a separate electorate is harmful for the Depressed Classes and for Hinduism." Gandhi was a staunch supporter of the varna system and this was the main reason he did not support the draft for separate electorates, which would disrupt the entire system and its division of labour. The image of people holding hands and standing together points toward the unity and mobility Ambedkar brought to the community. Such pages in the text are filled with bright colours like blue, green, orange, yellow and brown. Blue is the symbol for water and it seems that the people are standing together in it. What gives them this right is the constitution, as they ultimately merge in it. Orange becomes a symbol for the upper-caste Hindus as is with the case of Gandhi's letter. The colour also tries to overpower the text in contrast with Ambedkar's terms and conditions to the Minorities Committee of the Indian Round Table Conference. Ambedkar's box in bright yellow snatches the attention of the reader and emerges as the main theme of the discussion.

The last pages of the book provide full closure to Ambedkar's life. These pages talk about his radical ideas regarding the Hindu religion in particular and the Indian state in general. On page 92 one finds the continued motif of the tree but the only difference is that this tree is all about Ambedkar and his ideals. The trunk of the tree is again green, but it is cut at the ends. This brings to mind the image of Gandhi with an axe. Hence, the snapped parts depict the many developments that Ambedkar tried to bring about which were all removed or denied access to develop further. The branches of the tree in the shape of arms are blue, and again the imagery of water is being strongly portrayed. The leaves, depicted like books, present the many ideas Ambedkar had formulated and the right questions he had asked. The tree personifies the progress that the depressed community has made under Ambedkar. It also symbolises enlightenment and nirvana that the depressed classes can achieve through education. Even the dialogue bubble of the woman who was initially unaware and uneducated about the struggles hints that she now knows a lot. The transition of her bubble from scorpion to bird further strengthens the idea of the image of the tree as the 'Tree of Enlightenment'. The conversion of Ambedkar to Buddhism with millions of his followers is shown towards the end of

the book. In this conversion, there are animals like elephants, donkeys or horses, cows and even a bird drawing attention to themselves. It is not about the animals converting their religion but rather Buddhism accommodating every living being and deeming them equals, unlike Hinduism. The fences on both the pages are not thorny or harmful but rather smooth and compact.

The book is a journey, not only of Ambedkar or the readers or the two protagonists, but in itself. It grows and helps others grow with it. The book ends with the person waving and leaving on a bus, bidding a goodbye both to the girl with the bird bubble and the text itself. The course of the bus punctures the historical celebration of Gandhi as it is going downwards, that is, towards the very end of the caste system. The cost of India's independence came at the expense of partition and everybody mourns the violence that took place after it. But no one seems to mourn the violence that the depressed classes have been going through as a result of the partition Hinduism has created in society. Ambedkar's battle to combat the evils in the society might not have brought independence to the Depressed classes, but his very effort of fighting a religion was herculean in itself. Gandhi was fighting a foreign enemy, whereas Ambedkar was fighting for his own identity in his homeland. These figures do not exist in contrast to each other but are rather complementary. But only one of them is celebrated by the masses whereas the other strives to be even recognised. *Bhimayana* is an attempt at making the readers aware of the history of a certain caste, their struggle for finding equality in this diverse nation, and for belonging harmoniously together.

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2021

## Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* and the Conflict of Identities

Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy* is a masterpiece. This book takes us to the Sri Lankan Civil war and the life of a common man during that time. It also draws the readers' attention to some crucial issues like homosexuality, intercaste marriage and extramarital affair. The protagonist of the book, Arjun "Arjie" Chelvaratnam, narrates the story of his life in Sri Lanka and the miserabilities he went through. He was grateful for everything he had but the constant confusion about his sexuality, his choices and reaction of society towards them made his life miserable.

Radha aunty and Daryl uncle who used to live overseas were open-minded and were Arjie's constant support, but the politics and the hate during the Sri Lankan Civil war led Daryl uncle to death. The Sinhalese and The Tamilians were not allowed to talk to each other. This explains the hate Sinhalese had for Tamilians, they could not marry or befriend Tamilians, if anybody dared to speak against the government they were killed just like Daryl uncle. Funny how the condition back in Sri Lanka looks the same as in present India where the media, politicians and the society are worshipping the one in power instead of opposing their wrongdoings. It's a war between those in power and the public.

Selvadurai also highlights how Arjie was trapped in his own family. How it was okay to play with dolls at first but it was not acceptable according to societal standards of masculinity later. His father changes his school to make him a "man". His own family hates him for who he is. This explains how important it is to have discussions about homosexuality at home or maybe in schools so that homosexual becomes normal just like male and female are. For example, it was normal for Radha aunty to accept Arjie because she was open-minded, maybe because she lived overseas for too long. This also shows that outer beauty does not count, it is inner beauty that matters. Like in the book *Funny boy* Radha aunty seemed very unattractive to Arjie at first because of her looks but when he came to know her personality he was amazed. Radha aunty's character also portrays that it does not

matter how pretty you are from outside unless you are a good person from inside. Radha aunty, even after having so many good qualities, failed to do what she loved. She loved Anil and wanted to marry him but the society and her own family did not let her do so. The tensions between the Tamil and Sinhala communities entered the personal spaces of people and the same distorted Radha aunty's relation with Anil. Selvadurai also presents a case of how women are supposed to be compromising and self-abnegating figures by society. Radha aunty married a Tamil man, though she was not in love with him, she compromised for her family. The same thing happened with Arjie's mother. She compromised too and when she met the love of her life (Daryl uncle) she wanted to be with him but because of the social norms she had to stop. Daryl uncle was murdered because he was a journalist and was speaking against the government.

There is irony in the title of Chapter V 'The Best School of All'. For Arjie's parents the new school was perfect, because there Arjie would become a "man". However this school became Arjie's biggest nightmare even though he found a homosexual boy like him (Shehan Soyza) who fell in love with him. Black-tie and Arjie's classmates tried their best to make Arjie's life miserable. In Victoria Academy, Tamil students were bullied by the Sinhalese students and it was completely normal for them. Nobody spoke a word because "Either you take it like a man or the other boys will look down on you". That school changed a lot in Arjie. He became stronger and moreover, he had someone to share things with.

In the final chapter "Riot Journal: An Epilogue," the tensions between the two sides in Sri Lanka came to the forefront. Rioters ravaged the area, burnt down the Tamil houses and business estates throughout the town of Colombo. An angry mob burnt down Arjie's home. Soon after that, their hotel was burned down, and Ammachi and Appachi, Arjie's grandparents, got killed. Finally, Arjie's family had to run out of Sri Lanka, leaving a part of their life behind, to save their lives. Is history repeating itself? The fascists tore down Kashmir. There are a lot of similarities that one can find in what happened back then in Sri Lanka and what is happening in present India. *Funny Boy* by Shyam Selvadurai is a masterpiece, written in a simple language and tells us the story of the minorities in Sri Lanka i.e the Tamilians and the condition of homosexuals during that time.

**They were indeed living in dystopia.**

*Renu Thapa*

*2021*

## Doctor Faustus: A Man of Renaissance

The term 'Renaissance' means rebirth. Renaissance Humanism, which started off as a movement for the revival of classical learning, gradually turned into a dynamic cultural programme with focus on man at the centre of the universe. The Renaissance period in European history, between the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 17<sup>th</sup> century, is marked by a rapid quest for knowledge and power, innovations in the field of science, art and literature, love for sensual pleasures and revolt against the authority of the Catholic church. All these aspects of Renaissance find expression in Marlowe's plays, especially *Doctor Faustus*. Christopher Marlowe, who lived and wrote during the English Renaissance is very much a product of his own times. His play, *Doctor Faustus* is an Elizabethan tragedy depicting the downfall of a well-learned German scholar from Wittenberg (one of the great Renaissance centres of learning) named John Faustus, whose excessive desire for knowledge leads to his own damnation.

The play begins with Doctor Faustus, a typical Renaissance man, on the brink of great new enterprises. In his opening soliloquy, Faustus is seen rejecting traditional subjects of study like logic, law, medicine and theology to pursue necromancy, as in his opinion, his thirst for unlimited knowledge and power can only be satisfied through the study of magic. In order to enjoy the world of profit and delight, of power, of honour, of omnipotence, Faustus goes to the extent of signing a deal with the devil, surrendering his soul to Lucifer. (1.i.52-4) Although he chooses the wrong means to achieve his ends, we see that Faustus is essentially a good man with clear intent. He exercises the power of magic to gain further knowledge which is evident when Faustus repeatedly questions Mephistopheles about the nature of hell and heaven, of earth and the stars, of God and the devil. His alternate career, sorcery, is pretty much like the extension of Renaissance sciences, involving astronomy, optics, ancient history, foreign languages, and navigation.

During the Renaissance, also known as the Age of Discovery, some Europeans launched expeditions to travel the entire globe. With the flourishing trade of England, an insatiable desire for more and more wealth also became prominent. Doctor Faustus reflects both, a passion for travel as



well as wealth when he desires to have gold from the East Indies, pearls from the depths of the sea and pleasant fruits and princely delicacies from America, as visible in the following lines:

I'll have them fly to India for gold,  
 Ransack the ocean for orient pearl,  
 And search all corners of the new-found world  
 For the pleasant fruits and princely delicates;

*(Act 1, Scene 1; 81-84)*

Another important feature of the Renaissance was the love for beauty and hankering for sensual pleasures which is again very well present in the character of Faustus. He summons Homer to sing of Alexander's love and Oenon's death, and listens to the music of Amphion for the sake of his entertainment. The fact that Doctor Faustus's first demand of Mephistopheles is a beautiful spouse and his last command is to conjure the most alluring women of Troy, Helen, says a lot about his love for physical and worldly pleasures. He seeks paradise in Helen's lips and sings praises of her beauty, saying:

Was this the face that launch'd a thousand ships,  
 And burnt the topless towers of Ilium?  
 Sweet Helen, make me mortal with a kiss.

*(Act 5, Scene 1; 99-101)*

These lines devoted to Helen are highly imaginative, richly sensuous, and highly poetic.

Renaissance protested the dominance of the Catholic Pope and questioned the role of the church authorities. Faustus not only challenges Christianity by making fun of the Pope and monks in Rome but also takes support of the evil in his attempt to control the world. He aspires to be a great emperor like Tamburlaine and rejects traditional morality principles like Prince Machiavelli. Faustus is

concerned initially with the fact that “a sound magician is a demi-god”. (1.i.61) His excessive individualism and pride juxtaposed with a sense of despair makes him unable to accept either Christ’s forgiveness or bear God’s wrath at the end of the play. Thus, the play is a parable about spiritual loss in the modern world and a warning about the fatal corruption awaiting all Renaissance aspirations. (Watson, 327)

Doctor Faustus’s yearning for infinite knowledge, his lust for power, fortune, worldly pleasures, his passion for classics, his scepticism, his worship of beauty, and rejection of traditional morality, make him a perfect embodiment for someone who reflects the spirit of Renaissance in every sense.

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## ***Oedipus Rex: Fate Vs Free Will***

*Oedipus Rex* is considered one of the best tragedies written by Sophocles. It tells the story of Oedipus who was the ruler of Thebes and was fated to kill his father and marry his mother. It deals with the question of how responsible a person is in dealing with his fate and whether the consequences of the actions of an individual are pre-determined by destiny or are influenced by the free will of the individual.

The play shows how a series of events lead to the downfall of Oedipus, the tragic hero of the play. Although destined to commit the heinous crime of killing his father and marrying his mother, instances can be seen in the play when Oedipus, by his own actions, gets closer to his fate. He has been portrayed as a character who is impulsive and has the innate need to acquire knowledge about everything happening around him. He leaps to conclusions and takes rash actions without actually finding out the truth or looking at an incident from all perspectives. He is extremely arrogant and his pride, in certain ways, facilitates his downfall. By considering himself to be superior, he undertakes the responsibility to solve something that is in reality, out of his control.

When the plague strikes the city and everything begins to perish, all the citizens of Thebes approach Oedipus for his assistance, who, overwhelmed by his sense of superiority and considering himself their sole saviour, sends Creon to the Oracle of Delphi to find a solution to the plague. This first step by Oedipus starts a chain of events that ultimately make him realise the terrible crime that had been committed by him unknowingly. When Creon approaches Oedipus with the prophecy of the Oracle, he asks Oedipus to go inside the palace and discuss it more privately. However, Oedipus refuses. Saying 'Speak out, speak to us all', Oedipus ensures that every citizen of Thebes is made privy to the information given by the Oracle to persecute the murderer of Laius who ironically is Oedipus himself. He is in this way opening up his private problems to the public sphere.

When the blind seer Tiresias is invited and refuses to answer Oedipus' question, the ruler of Thebes is infuriated and speaks harshly to the prophet, even accusing Tiresias of conspiring against him. Tiresias repeatedly tries to discourage Oedipus from finding out the truth by pointing out how destiny is supreme by saying 'What will come will come' and that Oedipus need not concern himself about the truth that he was hiding. Oedipus' desire to seek out the forbidden truth despite being warned by the prophet also results in his downfall. He impulsively calls Tiresias blind because of his physical deformity while he himself is blind to the destiny of his life.

In spite of everyone reiterating the fact that the truth is better off not revealed, Oedipus' arrogance and his feeling that he is the supreme one who has the power to know the truth compel him to dig for a dangerous certainty which results in his downfall. Oedipus also acts rashly without thinking. When a drunk person tells Oedipus about his fate at a party, without confirming the truth of the statement he leaves Corinth and his foster parents and moves towards his real destiny. Without knowing the truth about Laius' murder, he brings down a curse on himself saying 'Now my curse on the murderer'. Despite Jocasta and the shepherd trying to hide the truth from him, Oedipus uses brute force to exert his power and to find out something that was meant to be hidden. He is a slave to his anger and lets it decide his actions. In the end when his reality is revealed to the entire world, he gouges his eyes out to prevent him from seeing the agony he had spread in the world without realising that it was his actions that made the world aware of the unnatural deeds performed by him.

Although the play points out the supremacy of destiny, there are instances when Oedipus propels himself to his destiny. It is not just fate that rules his life, but also his actions and flaws. His desire for inhuman knowledge, arrogance and hasty decisions all contribute to his demise knowingly or unknowingly. If Oedipus would have asked the right questions, his fate might have been evaded but the decisions taken by him were instead leading him toward his inevitable destiny.

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2022

## FATE + OEDIPUS

Since Oedipus' character is usually seen through two lenses, two very different arguments are proposed. One that holds him responsible for his actions since he was the one who actually committed everything foretold. The other holds him innocent since everything was foretold and would have happened anyway. Oedipus is seen either as black or as white; there is no grey for Oedipus.

Oedipus, as a character, is proud of himself for solving the riddle of the Sphinx. He tries to solve the problems of people and be the person who knows everything. This is evident from the very beginning of the play when he asks the priests to discuss their problems with him while he has already sent Creon to the Oracle of Delphi to look for a solution. He wants to be the person people come to with their problems. He wants to be the one in control, the one who knows how to get rid of confusion.

He considers himself very important as evident in the lines, "I sent Creon, my wife's own brother to Delphi – Apollo the prophet's oracle – to learn what I might do or say to save our city." Even when he has no effective solution, he assumes himself to be the one who would lift the plague and save everyone. Another quality of Oedipus is that he is ignorant as he himself states, "No, but I came by, Oedipus the ignorant, I stopped the Sphinx!" A man who claims to be the solver of riddles calls himself ignorant. Even when he had told Jocasta about his side of the story and the prophecy he knew and Jocasta had told him her side of the story, he was not able to make connections and understand everything before it was clearly stated to him. He is unable to join the dots between his swollen feet and Jocasta's story of the baby with pinned feet. This brings to light another characteristic of Oedipus that he is unwilling to speak out the truth which seems the case with other characters of the play too..

Even after being introduced to both the sides of the story, he doesn't accept his actions. He still tries to hold the last string by believing that it was a 'band of thieves' or a 'group of travellers' who killed Laius. He doesn't even consider the possibility of Jocasta hearing wrong. He firmly believes that it was a 'group' that killed Laius and not a single man even after having experienced the situation earlier in his life when he killed his father at the crossroad.

To answer if he was responsible for his own downfall or not is nearly impossible since he is just a character in a play. If he was a real person, we could have argued that he had the choice of not letting pride and anger take over him and of not killing Laius. That's what the crossroads represent. He still killed him anyway. It is not as if he wanted to commit incest and murder. What seems like Oedipus running away or avoiding his fate (by leaving Corinth) actually shows that he tried to avoid doing anything wrong. His fate was into play since the moment he was born. Jocasta and Laius were the ones who abandoned him. He did not leave Thebes on his own.

Now Laius could have not abandoned him, Oedipus could have not come to Thebes as a saviour, he could have not enquired about his past. But these things "could have" happened if the writer wanted them to happen. This play was written at a time when people had started questioning the validity of oracles and role of prophecy in person's future. This play, then, proves that prophecy and foretelling were very much believed in and everything that happened would have happened no matter what Oedipus did. This is probably how the writer wanted the play to be.

*Vaishali*  
2022

## Contextualising *Untouchable Spring*

*Untouchable Spring* was written by G. Kalyana Rao and published in 2000. The novel spans 6 generations of Dalits and the effects of the changes in the political system and power structures on their lives and the modes of resistance adopted by them.

The influence of the colonial government is seen in their lives through the effects of the Christian missionaries and the legal system. British missionaries offered the alternative to Christianity to the Malas and the Madigas and it was seen by many Dalits as an escape from the caste system. Clough, the white missionary, helps Chinnodu escape from the vicious cycle of ceaseless labour and deprivation and begin a new life as Martin. He is educated at the Nellore compound and gains respect as a preacher. He also gains self-respect as “the heart that had shrivelled up till the other day, was now going about filled with confidence”. Clough breaks the taboo of untouchability by touching him and assuring him that “his body was not untouchable” i.e. not through words, but through his touch. Martin’s empowerment allows him to save Siviah and Sasirekha from starvation, and eventually Siviah gains a new identity as Simon and works alongside Martin as a preacher. Christianity becomes a political tool as thousands of Dalits convert in an expression of their resentment against Hinduism, even amidst violent retaliation from the upper castes, and Martin uses the mass ceremony to initiate a discussion about the eating of dead cattle by the Dalits.

However, this tool is taken from them by the upper castes when they convert to Christianity in an attempt to appease the British. They carry their surnames into the new religion thus introducing caste into Christianity and bringing both “the crucifier and the crucified under the same roof” (Rao 167).

The legal system under the colonial government offers some respite to the Dalits as, after multiple meetings with the White man, Martin is able to bag the Dalit Christians the right to cultivate

a small plot of barren land. However, the upper castes have their revenge by beating Pittodu and killing Naganna's father, but they go unpunished.

Efforts made by the upper castes to ensure that the Dalits stay in the Hindu fold are also displayed in the novel, such as the temple entry episode. Gandhi's position on caste is also discussed: Gandhi thought caste to be a negative outgrowth of the *varna* system, which he held to be sacrosanct. He felt that untouchability was an evil and wanted to abolish it and believed that Dalits should be allowed temple entry. The hollowness of even this promise of temple entry and the dignified treatment of Dalits is shown as the upper castes sweep the *malapalli* and the *madigapalli* and drink water from the houses of the Malas and Madigas in a highly theatrical manner, still using their own utensils. The temple entry is also intended to be in the Shiva temple outside the *ooru*, but consent is given to enter the temple in the *ooru* the Dalits start to question the authenticity of this campaign after seeing the upper castes' hesitation to enter that temple. However, the episode ends with entry into only the temple compound and even that is "purified" by cleaning with cow dung and cow piss afterwards.

Gandhi wished to protect *Varnashrama dharma* i.e. the hierarchical division of society based on the principle of hereditary occupation as he believed it to be the foundation of Hindu society. In an interview with a clergyman, he had said "Why should my son not be a scavenger if I am one?" as he believed all professions to be equal (Gandhi 26). Ramanujam outlines Gandhi's politics when he says the actions taken by him are not for "the upliftment of Harijans" but for "protecting the Hindu religion" (Rao 194). He argues that Gandhi has not opposed the caste system but justified it and explains that what the Dalits need is not temple entry but land:

They're becoming great reformers saying they'll uplift us... No need for their sympathy... Don't drink water like that. Don't renovate ruined temples for our sake. If they've a little bit of sincerity in their reform, ask them to do something small. There's a lot of land adjacent to the mala's mound. The malas and madigas will occupy it. Ask



them to watch and keep quiet... Gandhiji won't talk about this. These Harijana Seva Sangham workers too won't say a word about this. (Rao 196)

The novel offers a critique of the essentialist spirit of the Independence movement by offering the perspective of the Dalits, a socially excluded group. Ramanujam follows Periyar's directions to raise a black flag on the day of Independence, 15<sup>th</sup> August, 1947, since he feels that Independence for the Dalits has not been achieved as independence from Brahmanism is essential for Dalit independence. Periyar led the Self-Respect Movement in Tamil Nadu in 1924 that aimed to generate pride among lower castes, and Periyar's ideals are approved by the text through Ramanujam's support. Periyar also believed in conversion to Christianity or Islam to escape the tyranny of Brahmanism, an ideal which is followed by the protagonists of the text and which helps them gain empowerment through education and employment as missionaries.

The characters also support Ambedkar's rejection of Gandhi's ideology of *varna* and agree with his incitement of Dalits to be "tigers", not "lambs". Ambedkar held a similar position to that espoused by Ramanujam and asked for basic rights for Dalits instead of temple entry. However, while Ambedkar asked Dalits to gain education and "agitate" for their rights, Ramanujam quotes him to support armed revolt against the State.

Therefore, the means of resistance adopted by Dalits during the rule of the colonial government included conversion to other religions and also appeals to the legal system. However, after Independence, these tools are taken away from them as the State brutally suppresses them as in the incident in the novel in which the policemen misuse their powers to repress the Dalits. When the Malas and the washermen take water from the Avalapadu lake, the upper castes go to the police station and the constable who comes to arrest Sinsubarayudu is attacked and forgets his gun as he runs away. Thereafter, the police create a fictional account of events and write reports identifying the leaders of the Malas as Communists. Chettodu brutalizes the children by forcing them to pluck

feathers from the hen and the policemen beat the men and women even as the women are surrounding Sendri while she is giving birth. This incident is reminiscent of Ambedkar's statement that Hinduism is "a veritable chamber of horrors" for Dalits (Ambedkar 296). The text also describes the violent suppression of the Telangana Armed Struggle by the Nehruvian government which gave the police "licensed authority to kill" in encounters (Rao 229). State violence ensues thereafter and Ruth describes how every *palle* became a military camp in Telangana as it gets filled with police officers and the people are attacked and their houses burnt.

When the aid of the legal system is lost to them, the Dalits take up arms against the Government in the Naxalbari movement. Immanuel and Jessie join the movement while Ruby joins the mass organization at the end of the novel. The Naxalite movement gives Immanuel the opportunity to continue the fight against casteism that was started by his ancestors, except while they were fighting against the Karanam and the Reddys at the rural level, his fight is at the national level as the upper castes have the State machinery, including the police, at their disposal.

A first-hand account is not given in the book and we are provided only with details of the lives of Immanuel and Jessie offered by Ruth. She describes how Immanuel is away from home for a long period and his letter which says that he has gone somewhere for work, only for them to find out later that he has been arrested. She reads his notes, "written down to remember the present history" (Rao 236):

A struggle.

A violent struggle.

A wounded struggle.

A heart-wrenching struggle.

Naxalbari struggle.

(Rao 236)

It is established through these snippets of information about his life that Immanuel is considered a “very good man” (Rao 230) by his comrades, in contrast to the views the general public holds about the Naxals. His contribution is valued by the community as many people come to his funeral and Ruth describes the bond they shared with him:

They loved her child.

They understood her child.

They felt the experience of life with her child.

Her child was an example. Her son was a struggle.

(Rao 243)

In relation to the Naxalbari movement, the Sreerakulam peasant uprising took place in Sreerakulam district of Andhra Pradesh from 1967-70. Syed Mir Mohammed, who retired as Additional SP of Sreerakulam, in an interview with *The Hindu*, says that for every rebellious movement, there is the cause of economic and social deprivation, and explains how the peasants were deprived of their rights in Sreerakulam. He also spoke about the atrocities committed by some officers of the police force and the brutal repression of the movement, which was carried out through the indiscriminate killing of Naxalites like Immanuel.

Immanuel's experience can be contrasted with Martin's. While Martin had the recourse of the legal system before Independence, Immanuel cannot turn to the State for justice. On the contrary, the State becomes the oppressor in this situation by first denying rights and then massacring those who dare to protest. Sinsubarayudu also admits that the State has become more oppressive for them after Independence when he says, “Everything changed after the [first] elections. Our village got into the malapalli lake even before fifty two. It could not have happened after that.” (Rao 231)

Jessie also chooses to follow in his father's footsteps and becomes one among those who take the Naxalite movement forward. The Karamchedu incident that moved Jessie occurred on 17 July, 1985 in Karamchedu, Andhra Pradesh where a conflict between the Dalits and the Kamma landlords

led to the death of six Dalits and grievous injuries to many more. Jessie tends to the injured in the victim camp and joins the Jana Natya Mandali which propagates revolutionary ideas through its songs, dances and plays. Like his ancestor Yellana, Jessie too uses his artistic talent to spread ideas of resistance. Thus, in this case, the means of resistance remain the same even though the Government changes.

Thus, the Independence movement neglects the Dalits and they are further oppressed by the State after Independence. The armed struggle of the Naxalite movement becomes their method of retaliating against their oppression. The Dalits reject Gandhi's patronizing offer of temple entry and choose to follow the ideology of self-respect outlined by Periyar and Ambedkar.

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2020

## **Incest, Religion, and (Un)Repentance in *The Duchess of Malfi***

John Webster's play *The Duchess of Malfi*, first performed in 1614, is a testament to women's condition of absolute subservience in 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe and the total control exerted on them by male family members, exploring this dynamic through the taboo of incest, religion, and punishment for non-repentance. The Duchess in the play is the target of her brother Ferdinand's lust for both control of her social doings and her body, and since she does not allow herself to be controlled, her failed subversion leads to her hellish denouement.

Sibling incest, as Sarah Olson states, is only natural given the expectation of a sister to adhere to her brother's or other male family member's wishes.

... Incestuous relationships push the ownership and control of women within society to their logical, though radical, conclusions, illustrating the inherent flaws in Jacobean structures of familial obligation and duty. To audiences who find incest perversely fascinating, it is easy to absolve collective guilt by viewing the act as an isolated, grotesque transformation of the family into a corrupted mass of kinship. ... [In these plays,] incest is shown to be merely filial obligation pressed to its extreme, over-adhering to – rather than deviating from – society's demands and expectations.

(Olson)

In these circumstances, the woman is little more than the property of her immediate male family members, like the Duchess is with regards to Ferdinand.

In medieval times, the Church worked through two parallel structures – information disseminated to the common people goes from the Church to the King to the people, and alternately from the Church to the King to the husbands and brothers. Ultimately, male family members become

the source of religious knowledge for the women in the family and in a deeply religion-conscious society, hold a great deal of power in controlling their fate.

Ferdinand's motive is to maintain his social honour by not allowing his sister to remarry, in effect controlling her sexuality, and the desire to own her body is a logical extension of this. He believes that none can have the Duchess if he cannot have her, and even that her sins are revenge for his own – “It is some sin in us, heaven doth revenge by her”. However, he himself becomes the embodiment of God as a figure who judges and metes out punishment, as society imposes itself on women more than religion would, the men taking on the role of those who judge and condemn women.

The Duchess, being a deviant since she takes her agency into her own hands and marries Antonio without sanction of Church or, more importantly, state, is a sinner in societal terms even if she is not in Biblical or legal terms. Ferdinand, who possesses her in the societal sense of the word, therefore perceives himself as having every right to kill her and tells her those who remarry are “most luxurious”, evoking an image of Greed, one of the seven cardinal sins in Christianity. As for the Cardinal, who is supposed to uphold religious authority over societal morality: he himself gets the Duchess and her family banished from Ancona when it is found out that they had escaped to that place under the pretence of a pilgrimage. Here, too, the societal custom of not marrying below one's class and the Cardinal's own expectations of monetary inheritance from the Duchess if she does not remarry take precedence over religion.

The Duchess is subjected to terrible psychological torture as she is shown the supposedly dead bodies of Antonio and her children while she is imprisoned, due to which she loses all her desire to live on in this world. Effectively, her spirit is already dead, and this torture can be likened as her being punished for her sins in her brother's eyes as she would be for religious sins in Christian hell. The worst of these tortures is when, as she breathes her last, Bosola tells her that her family is still alive,

making her hopeless even in death of being reunited with them. While she is not subjected to physical hellfire, her mental distress is hellish enough.

In fact, incest itself functions as a sort of punishment in the play as apart from reasons of social honour, it is Ferdinand's desire for his sister too that makes him want to kill her, as his sexual fantasies about her continually become more and more explicit in nature. He says that he can imagine her in intercourse with many people of lower rank, and also states that he wanted to "bring her to despair" through the psychological distress he inflicted on her; hope is a godly quality, while despair is a quality of hell. Ferdinand's extreme desire for the Duchess can be read as the punishment for her own sins which has caused Ferdinand to naturally greatly extend his control over her, leading to his extreme lust and the Duchess' subsequent death.

Antonio, on the other hand, does not suffer as much in death as the Duchess does, as with his dying breath he is told his family is dead so he still has hope of being reunited with them in heaven, if he believes in any such concept. This may be because even though Antonio does commit a crime against social convention by marrying a duchess while he himself is a steward, he does not need to seek male approval for it and he is ultimately not under anyone's control in the same way the Duchess is controlled by Ferdinand. So, while he does die at the end of the play, he does not go through hell.

Frank Whigham argues too, that in a pre-genetics era, incest is ultimately a taboo only because of social conventions, and in many cultures it is not forbidden (Whigham). Hence, incest playing a part in social punishment should not come as a surprise – it is only a logical extension of social power, and is a tool for punishment in this play.

Since incest leads to ostracisation of people, it is natural that the object of incestuous desires is ostracised in this play when she does not adhere to the subject's wishes. In fact, the story of the

Duchess can be compared to that of Satan in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, where Satan falls from grace for trying to take agency and power into his own hands and is literally banished to hell.

[Satan] with ambitious aim  
 Against the throne and monarchy of God  
 Rais'd impious war in Heav'n and battle proud,  
 With vain attempt.

(Milton)

Satan resolves to keep fighting against god till the end of time by tempting his followers; similarly, the Duchess declares herself to be the Duchess and remains “impious” to her brother till her last breath. In Aphra Behn's *The Rover* as well, incest is used as a form of punishment for a deviant woman. Florinda, who is seen partially undressed and masked by her brother, is forced to run from him as he tries to rape her. She is a deviant woman as she has also gone against her brother's authority to carry on an affair with her lover.

Hence, incest establishes itself as a means to an end, a way to punish a woman who, in Jacobean times, would be seen as exhibiting a “dangerous level of female agency” (Olson). Her sin is against society, not God, but her ultimate ruler is not God but her brother anyway as her closest male relative, and she is further restricted by the sharp class divides of the time. Her fate is that of suffering and torture but, like Satan, she maintains her fighting stance and personal glory until the end.

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2020

## **Illegitimate Art: Music, Dance, and Literature in Kalayana Rao's *Untouchable Spring***

In Kalyana Rao's *Untouchable Spring*, published in the year 2000, the presence of music and dance is the one thing that binds the generations of Reuben's family together, starting from the eldest ancestor we are introduced to – Yellana. Music in this novel comes under the umbrella term “folk art”, i.e. art normally considered low or less skilful. However, it is this art that is transmitted from generation to generation and helps in the coming together of an entire community.

The conception of art in modern times is very similar to how the Romantics conceptualised it in the 18<sup>th</sup> century – the poet is seen as an isolated figure with an individual creative genius which enables him to create poetry. Dalit oral literature, however, is communitarian and speaks of the community instead of the isolated artist figure. For example, Boodevi's evening meetings are described as such:

Those days, when there was little to do, women would eat whatever was available very early in the evening, clear up everything, and in the moonlight they would gather in front of Boodevi's house. [...] The refrain of the song was *'bontaddindakka'*, which the rest of the women would sing.

(Rao)

Dalit music is shown to represent the story of Dalits in general, even when it is written about or inspired by specific people. This is described as “blood-memory” when the centuries of oppression and silencing is inherited through blood, or being born as a Dalit, and words. Songs written by Yellenna about Mataiah and Narigadu are able to move all who listen to them precisely because their story is the story of every Dalit, so they end up becoming a fountain of hope for all instead of merely a way for the singer to vent their feelings. Most of Yellana's songs are based in rural images and carry the common themes of ostracisation, hunger, and pain in tandem with common human emotions like love and appreciation of beauty, giving the community a common idiom to express themselves. Even

after three generations, Jessie, who has become a Naxal, is said to sing of the same themes in the form of the Karamchedu massacre where an entire malapalli was attacked and six untouchable men were killed.

Sherinian, in *Tamil Folk Music as Dalit Liberation Theology*, states, “People perform social identity through music. Thus musical value can encode both powerful and degraded social value.” (Sherinian) Dalit music in the novel is both transformative and representative of social identity. They contain their own versions of traditional Indian mythology as vastly different from how they are narrated in the mainstream of Hindu religion. Ganga in the Urumula Nrityam of the Malas, for instance, is described to have come down to earth in order to bring water to all instead of to “purify” the souls of the royal King Sagar’s sons. The concepts of purification and sin are done away with, also signifying a removal of Brahminism itself.

This transformative power is further supported by the social identity reflected in both music and dance. The alternative myth of Ganga turns Srinivas’ concept of “Sanskritization” – the idea that all castes aim to move towards being more like the dominant caste in a region in order to gain social standing (Srinivas) – on its head; here, Malas move away from the perceptions of the dominant caste to facilitate both hope and survival. The rage and pain of the Malas for thousands of years needs to be expressed, and this cannot be done via high art which is meant to express individuality. This is what is reflected in the Urumula Nrityam:

Like heroes in the shape of rings, with entwined legs, the entire body swaying, and jumping – like labourers bringing down Ganga to the earth... A jump for every sound. A shout for every jump. All force. All deluge. The end. The beginning.

(Rao)

Michelle Voss Roberts describes a lively dance performed by untouchables to the beat of drums as communicating “the impetus of these emotions, as [does] the force of pushing, kicking, and stomping” (Roberts). She states that fury is an integral part of Dalit art while expressing a desire or need for liberation. Anger or rage in untouchable music and dance is not a negative emotion, as no

change can come and no ardent desire can be expressed without a certain degree of anger. It is this rage and pain that gives birth to revolutionary movements like those of the Naxalites, who Jessie and Immanuel become associated with. The hero-figure is a revolutionary instead of a nationalist in Ruby's poem towards the end of the novel, even as the project of constructing an authentic Indian identity starts during the freedom struggle and only becomes stronger after independence.

As Charu Gupta writes, in the late-18<sup>th</sup> and early-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, “the reforming endeavour included attempts to forge an ideology of respectable middle-class and upper-caste Hindu domesticity.” (Gupta) For “respectable” ideologies to be maintained, the superiority of the upper-castes and their cultural authority needed to be preserved as well. Ruth tells us that even as Mala and Madiga writings were discovered by the white colonisers, the upper-castes invalidated them, instead legitimising writings which validated their superiority and their perception of Indian culture. In fact, this silencing comes through even before colonisation takes a strong hold in India as Dalit voices are silenced as punishment for the slightest revolt, as reflected in the potter Pedakoteswarudu's murder after he has written down Yellanna's songs:

[Yellana and Ramaiah] saw their friend fall to the ground right in front of their eyes. They saw the crowbar that had pierced his back and the stick that had attacked his head. They saw the written pages flung by the Brahmins burning in a corner.

(Rao)

This silencing is the reason why Dalits are deprived of history. When one is deprived of history, one is also deprived of revolutionary and inspirational figures which can incite a change in the social order, instead believing that things have always been this way. Figures like Mataiah and Narigadu are only transmitted through Yellana's songs and Reuben's stories, finally getting converted into written literature by Ruth.

Another way to deny a sense of history and cultural significance to the subaltern is to deny that their art, too, involves skill. This is despite the fact that artists like Yellana and Boodevi do not write down songs and sing them – they create songs as they sing, which arguably takes more skill than

singing a pre-written tune. As mentioned before, this is the common view of folk and tribal art that it is visualised not as the root of written poetry and other art but as something inferior, which may be because “high” or upper-caste artists do not want their art to be associated with that of the “riff-raff” in any way, shape or form.

Rajmanna does not like to see the roots of Telugu drama in those outcaste movements. These ‘blessed jurists’ who search for Telugu drama behind European curtains cannot find drama in the rhythmic feet of Yellana’s acting and dance. [...] It is not visible because it is not visible. What is more, a certain Krishnamurthi can only see crooked shapes in Yellana’s faces.

(Rao)

However, despite not being given cultural significance in the mainstream drama, Yellana and Naganna’s plays not only transmit tales from one generation to the next but also become a political tool in the hands of the untouchables. The amount of disrespect taken by the upper-castes by the act of calling the Mala and Madiga elders to the front of the audience in the same way as the karanams are called is evidence of their power.

As much as untouchable art brings people together through watching the play in the malapalli or listening to the songs of Yellana or “mala bairagi”, upper-caste literature serves to alienate and ostracise. The mythological Manu is described as a “terribly distorted” beast instead of a high authority because the laws which he is said to have written down distort humanity itself. Even the hectic and enraged Urumula Nrityam is described to be full of genuine emotion and a certain kind of beauty, while the *Manusmriti* seems to be merely exclusivist and unfair, as much as it is revered by caste Hindus.

Despite this alienating nature, there is a constant attempt by caste artists to overshadow or co-opt untouchable art. When the Harijan Seva Sangham workers show up at Yennela Dinni, they also come singing songs like the people of the village have always done:

They too sang songs. They spoke out. They said untouchability was a crime. They said they were doing all this to eradicate it. There were lectures for nearly an hour near the cauldron. After that each one drank a glass of water from that cauldron.

(Rao)

In spite of being apparently against untouchability, the men still drink water not from the common vessels of the untouchables but from the separate cauldron. During the temple entry episode, when the Malas and the Madigas are “permitted” to enter the Vishnu temple in the middle of the ooru, the temple is later purified by cow dung and cow urine. This is to say that while there is a false attempt to change the mentality of the untouchables about what they themselves want by allowing them entry into some temples, there is also an attempt to take over the signification of untouchable art by appearing to be like them and presenting their own movement and art as legitimate. This is similar to how Gandhi himself tries to take over the needs of the untouchables by decrying untouchability but supporting the varna system itself and insisting on the untouchables’ superficial desire to enter temples despite the words and experiences of actual untouchables like Dr. Ambedkar who emphasised on the lack of the basic necessities of life.

In the contemporary world, it is not uncommon to see untouchable or tribal art co-opted by fashion designers, artists, etc. Jewellery inspired by what tribal people wear is extremely common, although no tribal people are provided with work to make that jewellery. Only when Dalit and other folk art is appropriated in such a way does it gain the status of high art, clearly indicating that the value of certain pieces of art is determined not by how it looks or its “aesthetics” but rather the caste and class of the person who makes it. Something also becomes high art when it validates the authority of the dominant castes and classes – a painting of Yashoda looking into Krishna’s mouth and seeing the entire universe would be considered as legitimate art, while an untouchable painting of the vision described in the novel of Yashoda looking into Krishna’s mouth and seeing only hunger would not be acknowledged as such, unless it was made by an upper-caste person himself.

What, then, is the difference between folk or untouchable art and so-called high, legitimate art? While art by upper-caste people is also often used as a political tool, untouchable art is a much more dangerous tool to be used because it can result in even massacres. However, it is also the one thing that is free and provides hope in desperate times, like threshing songs and harvesting songs which unite people even as they fight over tiny amounts of grains.

While Dalit literature is now starting to enter the mainstream, it is still mostly studied in specific college classes or in the form of stories by upper-caste writers like Premchand, whose representation of Dalits is then taken to be authentic simply because it is well-known. Authentic Dalit and untouchable art still remains in the shadows, and oral literature even more so.

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*Nashra Usmani*  
2020

*Translations*



**Arthur Rimbaud's *Le dormeur du val* (1870) - A French poem**

It's a green hollow, where a river is singing  
Crazily hanging on the grasses rags  
Of silver; where the sun, from the proud mountain,  
Is shining: it's a little valley bubbling with sunlight.

A young soldier, his mouth open, his head bare,  
And the nape of his neck bathing in cool blue watercress,  
Sleeping; he is stretched out on the grass, under the skies,  
Pale in his green bed where the light falls like rain.

Feet in the gladiolas, he is sleeping. Smiling like  
A sick child would smile, he takes a nap:  
Nature rocks him warmly: he is cold.

Sweet scents don't tickle his nose anymore;  
He sleeps in the sun, hand on the breast,  
Peacefully. He has two red holes in his right side.

*Tanishka Luhia*

2022

## In the Land of the Mythic King

*Translated from the Bengali lyric "Mithye Rajar Deshe" by Ratanatanu Ghanti, originally sung by Lopamudra Mitra.*

King Habuchandra with his minister Gabuchandra, a land are ruling.

One day they send forth a sentry,

To inspect how the skies and rivers in their kingdom are doing.

The sentry, now, if you tell him to just bring something,

He'll make sure to tie it to a cell for you, hard and long.

What happens next I will tell you through my song.

O, that land indeed is very strange

Where King and; minister, are both deranged!

The sentry hearkens, "King's orders: you mustn't work today!"

The Sky replied, "O but I wake up early every day.

To give the leaves their light and the rivers their tides,"

The sentry said, "From today, someone else can do your jobs alright!"

The river cried, "But Sir, in the poor people's hut,

I float in free thinking! What'll happen when I get shut?"

Sentry rebuked, "You must have grit that king's orders you declaim!

The lakes and canals can do your work; I must cancel your name."

O, that land indeed is very strange

Where King and minister are both deranged!

Few colors of the rainbow came forward and said,  
“O sentry sahib, we belong to where the earth gets made.  
We paint kids in the various colors we bring.”  
“We can buy from the shops!”  
The sentry said in the manner of the king!

“Salaam!” did the sun rays come and hail,  
“Do we also get a holiday notice just like them?”  
Sentry said, “The new queen you have made dark!  
She is in a fitful rage,  
It’d be best if you just don’t come to work!”

O, that land indeed is very strange  
Where King and minister, are both deranged!

The sky, the river, rainbow and sun ray,  
Leave the land at the end of the day.  
In the lands of kings real to me and you,  
Let such an incident never come true!

*Arunima*

2023

## Bholaram Ka Jeev

*Original in Hindi by Harishankar Parsai*

It has never happened before.

For thousands of years, Dharmaraj had been allotting *swarg* and *narak* to innumerable people based on their karma and advocacy.

Sitting in front was Chitragupt, who was repeatedly wiping his spectacles, turning pages and examining his register. No flaw was found in the register, and so in exasperation, he slammed the register so forcefully, that a poor fly got stuck in between. Removing it, he spoke, "The record has no issues, My lord. Bholaram's spirit had renounced its body five days ago and even began its journey with Yamdut towards this land. But it has still not arrived."

Dharmaraj enquired, "And where is that *dut*?"

"My lord, he is also missing."

Just then the doors opened and a bewildered *yamdut* entered. His ghastly face had become even more grotesque because of labor, stress, and trepidation. Chitragupt started howling at him as soon as he saw him, "Where were you all this time? And where is Bholaram's spirit?"

*Yamdut* replied dutifully "Oh merciful! I don't even know how to explain the situation to you. I have never been duped my whole life, but this time, Bholaram's spirit was able to deceive me. Five days ago when Bholaram's spirit renounced its body, I captured it and embarked upon our journey to this world. As soon as we crossed the threshold of the city, he escaped from my clutches and vanished into thin air. In these five days, I have scoured the entire universe but still unable to find

him."

Dharmaraj spoke furiously, "You imbecile! All your life you have been doing this one job of escorting spirits. And you still got fooled by the spirit of an old man."

The Dut bowed his head and said, "My lord, I was totally alert and cautious all the time. Even the cleverest of lawyers failed to escape from my experienced hands. But this time, it must have been an *indrajal*"

Chitragupt said, "My lord, such transactions have become a trend on earth nowadays. People send goods and parcels to their friends but it never reaches the right hand because railway workers get hold of them. Socks and scarves of hosiery parcels are used by railway people. Many a time, the whole carriage gets seized by the authorities and ministers of the opposing party get abducted by the ministers of the ruling party. It might be possible that Bholaram suffered the same fate, maybe one of his enemies abducted his spirit."

Scoffing at Chitragupt's proposition, Dharmaraj said, "It's time for you to retire Chitragupt. Just tell me what would anyone do with the spirit of an old, penniless, destitute like Bholaram?"

Just then, Narad *muni* arrived at the scene, and looking at the despondent Dharmaraj, he thought of inquiring him. "What happened Dharmaraj? Why are you looking so dejected? Is the housing problem in *narak* still not resolved?" he asked.

Dharmaraj replied, "Oh no. That problem has already been solved long back. Last year, a number of expert architects entered our dark realm. Many corrupt contractors, dishonest engineers and deceitful overseers were sent here to pay for their sins. They resolved our housing problem by building sky high apartments in *narak*. It's not a problem anymore but we have another situation

here. A man named Bholaram died five days ago, his spirit was being escorted by my *dut* here, but somehow it escaped. My *dut* has searched everywhere, but he still couldn't find him, I cannot allow such a thing to happen. If it starts happening on a regular basis, then the line between *Paap* and *punya* will get blurred."

Narad said, "Maybe he didn't pay his income tax, then the authorities might have called a halt to his departure. "

Dharamaraj responded, "That situation seems completely implausible. Income tax needs 'income' right? A poor, destitute like him could have never had that problem. "

Narad said, "This matter is quite fascinating. Just give me his name and address. I'll go to earth and find his whereabouts."

Chitragupt opened his register to give him the information, "His name was Bholaram. He, along with his whole family was living in a 2 room house in the Ghamapur colony of Jabalpur district. He had a wife, two sons, and a daughter. He was about sixty five years old and was a government employee who retired five years ago. His landlord wanted to throw him out of the house because he stopped paying his rent a year ago. And then in the midst of all this, he left the world. It's been five days since he died. And if his landlord is a true landlord then he must have thrown his family out as soon as Bholaram died. So you might have to make a little extra effort to find them."

The weeping and wailing of two women was enough evidence to prove that it was Bholaram's house.

He called them by saying "Narayan... Narayan!" The girl asked him to leave them alone. They didn't have anything to give him.

Narad said, "I don't want any alms. I just want to enquire a bit about Bholaram. Please call your

mother, dear child." Bholaram's wife came out of the house, so Narad said, "Ma'am, can you please tell me about Bholaram's illness? What was the reason for his demise? "

"There is nothing to tell. He was suffering from the malady of penury. It's been five years since he retired, but we still haven't seen his pension money. He sends an application every 10-15 days. They either don't reply or if they do, the information provided is that the matters of his pension are still under inspection. For 5 years I have been selling my jewels to feed this family and we sold our utensils, and at the end we were left with nothing. He was constantly stressed over our financial problems and when he couldn't take it anymore, he died out of anxiety and hunger."

Narad said, "You cannot do anything about it ma'am. His lifeline was destined to end now." "No, no. It's not true. He might have lived a longer satisfactory life. A pension of 60 rupees a month would have been enough to take care of this family. But what do we do now, we have been penniless for the whole of five years."

Narad didn't have time to hear the tragic tales of a mother and her daughter, so he came straight to the point, "Tell me ma'am, was there anything that he loved more than his life?"

Bholaram's wife replied, "What could a person love more than his children." "No, no, I mean someone outside your family. Maybe some other lady..." The woman looked at him with furious eyes, "Stop your nonsense this instant. You are a sage, not some lecher or loafer, do not spew such rubbish out of your mouth. He has been faithful to me all his life."

"Oh! yes. It's better if you think that way. A happy married life is based upon such deluded ideas of love and loyalty, I shall take your leave now."

Her inability to comprehend his sarcastic remark saved Narad from the wrath of a woman.

Bholaram's wife said, "Oh Sage, you are a man full of wisdom and sagacity. Can't you do anything that would help us to get his pension. If we get that money, I might be able to feed these poor kids for a few more days."

Narad's heart went out to them. He said, "A sage's words do not hold any value anymore. I don't have any authority. Still, I'll go to the government office and try my best."

Narad took her leave, and decided to go to Bholaram's office to investigate the situation. There, he talked to a clerk regarding Bholaram's case. That Clerk observed him carefully and then spoke, "Yes, it's true that Bholaram had sent lots of applications but they flew away because he didn't send any weight with them that could hold it "

Narad said, "You have lots of paper weight here. Why didn't you use it to keep those papers together?"

That clerk grinned and said, "You are an ascetic. You don't know the ways of this world. His applications don't require a paper weight to hold them but something else....Well you should go there and meet that officer."

Narad went to talk to that officer. He in turn sent him to some other officer, and that one sent him to someone else and the chain repeated again. After meeting around twenty five to thirty Officers and feeling dejected he got help from a peon. That peon said, "Oh hermit sage! How did you get stuck in such a tricky set of affairs, you won't get anywhere even if you come here for the rest of the year. You should just go and meet our head officer, If you could just please him well, your work is done here."



Narad entered the head officer's cabin. The doorkeeper was dozing off so he was spared from being questioned at the door. The officer was shocked to see someone entering his cabin without a visiting card, "Do you think it's a temple? How dare you enter without permission? Why didn't you send a note?"

Narad said, "How would I have done that , the door keeper is sleeping. "

"What do you want?" Officer's voice resonated with authority and irritation.

Narad gave him the details of Bholaram's pension case.

The officer said, "You are a hermit. A recluse who can never understand how a government office works. Honestly, it was Bholaram's fault. This place is also like a temple, you also have to give offerings, charity and gifts to please the deity. You look like someone close to Bholaram. Let me give you a hint. His applications are flying away, you need to put something on them to hold them back."

Narad was confused now, why everything in this office revolves around this problem of weight. The Officer said, "Pension cases involve the government's fund. Such cases go through twenty or more offices that's why they get delayed. We need to write thousands of commands, a thousand times and to thousands of places, then only, it will be finalized. The cost of stationary used in the process is even more than the worth of the pension itself. We can fast track Bholaram's case for you, but.... " and then he ended the sentence abruptly.

Narad said, "But what?"

Officer spoke with a shrewd smile, "But we need weight. You don't understand. For example,

this pretty Veena of yours could also be used as a weight to hold down Bholaram's applications. My daughter is learning music. I'll give it to her. What could be more auspicious than a sage's veena. With that, she will become a proficient musician in no time. If she learns quickly, then she can be married soon."

Narad started panicking on the thought of losing his veena. But then with a heavy heart, he placed his Veena on the table and said, "Okay fine, take this. But now please give his pension order."

The Officer delightfully asked him to sit, placed the veena in the corner of the room and rang the bell to call the peon.

The Officer commanded "Bring Bholaram's case files from the senior officer."

After a while the peon brought Bholaram's case files, filled with hundreds of applications by him. His Pension orders were also present in those files. The Officer looked at the files and in order to confirm the identity of its owner, he asked, "So what was the name you told me mister? "

Narad thought that the officer might be half deaf so he shouted, "Bholaram! "

Suddenly a voice came out of the pension files, "Who is calling me? Is it the postman? Has my pension order arrived? "

Officer fell out of the chair with a frightening shriek. Narad was also astounded. But then, that very second, he understood the situation. He said, "Bholaram! Are you Bholaram's spirit?"

"Yes," a voice came.

Narad said, " I am Narad. I came here to escort you to swarg where everyone is eagerly waiting for you."

The voice said, "I don't want to go, I'm stuck here in my pension orders. My heart lies amidst these documents. I can't go anywhere without them!"...

### Glossary

- 1) Swarg- Heaven
- 2) Narak- Hell
- 3) Dharmaraj - Yamraj. King of hell, God of justice.
- 4) Chitragupt - Accountant of Hell, who has the data of a person's good and bad deeds.
- 5) Dut/ Yamdut- Subordinate of Dharmaraj
- 6) Indrajal- Illusion
- 7) Muni- Sage
- 8) Paap- Sin
- 9) Punya- Virtuous deeds
- 10) Jeev- soul/spirit

*Namrata Shekhar*

*2021*

### ***U Kwai, U Tympew Bad U Dumasla – A Khasi Tale***

In the olden times, when the world was a place of peaceful co-existence and the soul was full of joy and delight, when there was no wretchedness and loathing amongst people, there was a village called *Rangjyrwit*. In it lived two good friends who mutually, deeply valued the companionship of the other. Of one of the two friends, Nik was a fairly wealthy man who had the means to support himself. Shing however, was not as fortunate as Nik and was in a low financial status, just on the verge of poverty during those times.

Nik was wealthy and had his daily requirements met, however Shing and his wife, by the name of Lak, were in deep hardship and both worked very hard to earn their daily bread, as to just get by. But their friendship was such that each understood and respected the other's financial status: Nik did not ill treat his friend because of his low class and Shing did not envy or feel covetous towards Nik. Both had compatible mentalities which were suited to each other; the discussions that they exchanged were meaningful to both of their lives and friendship as well.

Shing often went to Nik's house and would never leave with an empty stomach, and his friend also took pleasure in hosting his friend. However, there came a time when Shing felt that the one-sided reception should be balanced, and so he told his friend to come and dine with him, where he joked that Nik does not come to his house for he dislikes his penury. But Nik answered to this by asking him why he was saying this, and told him that the reason he invited him to his home is because he liked his company. So, he went on to say with every intention to please his friend that, he will surely come to his home one day.

After a few days, Nik went to Shing and Lak's home where he was warmly received by them. As he arrived, the two friends engaged themselves in their usual conversations, while Lak was busy preparing a meal for them in the kitchen. After a while, Shing asked his wife to get started on serving. As he said this on entering the kitchen, his wife miserably told him that there was no rice left at home, not even a grain. On hearing this, his heart dropped and his sense of worth was dejectedly lowered.

Thinking that they would have to starve his friend whom he loved dearly on his very first visit to his home, he asked Lak to ask the neighbours if they could lend them some rice, but she returned empty-handed.

Shing in that moment thought about the distress that he was facing, and with a sword that was hanging nearby, he took it and stabbed himself and fell dead to the floor. Lak, after witnessing how her husband took the whole situation on himself and took his own life, could not bear but to think on what terms would she be able to live now, and on how people will regard her from that moment. So, there and then she also took the same sword and stabbed herself and she fell to the floor.

After this unfortunate event had happened, Nik himself felt uneasy and went to check on what was happening in the kitchen, and as he entered he was shocked with grief on seeing the bodies of Shing and Lak on the floor with their blood splattered on the ground. Their deaths had shocked him such that he tried to find and contemplate on every possible reason on why this happened. As he was still standing there, he noticed that the pots and pans were empty and that there was no food in the kitchen being prepared nor was there any present in the room. He realised that his friend did not have any food to give and was so distraught by this, that he claimed his own life for his sake. The thought was unbearable for Nik to contain at that moment and so, he also took the same sword to kill himself then and there.

As the day passed and dawn was breaking, a thief who was being chased by people from the nearby village came to the village of *Ranjyrrwit*. So as he passed by that house and saw the doors wide open, he entered carefully and hid himself in a corner. As he was afraid of being caught and was exhausted from the chase, he rested there and fell asleep on the spot. When he woke up, he saw the bodies on the floor and his spine was chilled with horror. He said to himself, that if the people found him there with the bodies, they would surely think that he had killed them. He contemplated the disgrace and humiliation that he would have to go through after this incident. He was unable to handle the condition and with the same sword he also killed himself on the spot and also lay dead with

them. Thus, the four of them lay dead on the ground with four reasons on why they had seen no other solution but death itself.

People, on hearing of this occurrence of the miserable tragedy, from which the weight that lies on people of pleasing guests with respectable meals and the damage that it had done to these four individuals, led the villagers to pray to God for a alternative way of serving friends and guests in which the load would be slackened. Thus came into existence of *Kwai*, *Tympew* and *Dumasla*, in which the poor man could also engage with people of higher social standings. The three of them could be used to serve people from all social backgrounds and could be used in bonding people.

From that time onwards, the three of them go together serving people of various backgrounds and protecting the cultural etiquette that prevails within the community.

From the incident of *Kwai*, *Tympew*, *Shun* and *Dumasla*, people have infused the symbols of the four deaths that took place in order of their time of death. In which, the *kwai* is the wealthy friend, the *tympew* his poor friend, the *shun* goes along with the *tympew* who is his wife, and the *dumasla* is the thief who comes at last in the chronological order of death. Therefore, people consume these four, in which the last of them, *dumasla*, is consumed with less than a handful which they keep inside the corner side of their mouth, just like how the thief hid inside the corner of the house.

### **Glossary:**

U- The/It

Kwai- Betel nut

Tympew- Betel leaf

Dumasla- Tobacco

*Jankincy H. Lyngdoh*

2021

## TRIUMPH & DEFEAT

*Dr. Saghir Afrاهيم*

These days, I have begun to feel like a stranger in my own house. The birth of two children led to a distance between me and my wife. Now I feel that my wife and children have allied while I was completely left in isolation. We had a love marriage but after the birth of Ashraf and Shazia, Ruksana had taken up a job in a school. She took up all the responsibilities of the household while I was free from all obligations. But after 15 years of marriage, I suddenly realised that I was worthless and no one needed me.

The children were close to their mother and why would they not be? She took care of everything, from feeding them to fulfilling all their requirements and requests. From the beginning itself I never bothered to get involved in this fun. When I got up, the tea would be ready, after reading the newspaper it would soon be time to get ready for the office, where I would go dressed up tip-top. When I returned in the evening, I would find the children either busy playing or in tuition. I would also freshen up and go to a friend's house or if someone came to the house I would sit with them and gossip. I would meet the kids at dinner time and have a formal talk with them. I was relaxed thinking that everything was fine. I was so occupied with my work that I never got an opportunity of an outing with the children nor did I try solving their problems. If such a situation arose I would tell them to go to their mother.

Ruksana also didn't say anything to me. She would herself take care of everything. I never realized that this way the children would distance themselves from me, grow closer to their mother and Ruksana's affection would change towards me. Distance occurred way back however I realised the severity of this change when I had put forth a request to Ruksana to cook lady finger and it was ignored. In fact what happened—I wasn't feeling well so I took a leave from the office. After breakfast, when the children had left for school, I asked Ruksana, "Make lady finger for lunch today."

She looked towards me in astonishment and then smiled as she said, “You’ve made a request after a long time. Lady Finger used to be your favourite.”

“I did like a lot of things.” I muttered.

Ruksana got occupied with her work. I slept after having breakfast, I opened my eyes when Shazia came to wake me up

“Abbu! Have food.”

I came out of the bed, brushed my teeth, washed my face and sat on the ‘Dastarkhaan’. There was no ladyfinger, instead there were potato, peas, arhar daal and chutney which was Shazia’s favourite. Seeing this I was infuriated. I was angry not because Shazia’s preference was given priority. Shazia is innocent and is my daughter, rather I was angry about Ruksana not caring about my choice. Moreover I wasn’t well. Ruksana just ignored me and prioritised the children to such an extent that my importance had reduced. Moreover she had also started behaving superior to me. Last night, a documentary on drugs was being telecast. I was engrossed in it and at that very moment the entire family entered the room.

“Ashraf, switch over to DDI, today it’s the last episode of ‘Ghutan’.” Ruksana said hurriedly.

“Absolutely not! Let his channel remain.” I said in anger.

“What has happened to you. ” She spoke in surprise.

“I am also watching something.” I said softly.

“Abbu, Ammi is right, it’s a very good serial. You will also be happy if you watch it.” Saying this Ashraf changed the channel.

I felt as if I had lost my significance. I looked at Ruksana helplessly, who was busy enjoying the serial.

“Very nice, Ruksana Begum!! So you have successfully turned my kids against me.....”



Next day in the office, I was very upset. My friend tried to probe me but I remained quiet. Of course, I spilled the beans to Jaleel Bhai. He was my well-wisher and always gave me the best advice. Listening to me, he kept sitting completely dumbstruck.

“You’ve been ignored.” Jaleel Bhai said thoughtfully.

“But what should I do?”. I asked in astonishment.

“Take the children back.”

“What do you mean by taking them back? I don’t understand.”

Jaleel Bhai smiled. “Since the children have grown close to their mother they are more supportive towards her. Now you have to do the same.”

“What does it mean?” I asked in surprise.

“Spend as much time as you can with your children and make them your partner in thought.” Jaleel Bhai explained to me seriously.

Another argument broke out in the evening. A demand notice for the telephone had arrived. Ruksana was adamant to get it installed immediately. I also wanted to get it done but my mind was occupied with something else, meanwhile she suddenly spoke in a loud voice, “Let’s do this.....let’s take into account the opinion of the children.”

I was enraged through and through but as a measure of expediency I kept quiet and began to smile.

“If it’s your will we will take advice from the children but not now..... a week later.”

“Why not now?”

“I don’t want them to get entangled in the issue, besides I have other important work to do.”

But the reality differed. I had decided not to let her win. I made up my mind to shower the love of nearly two decades in one week on my children. Somehow I got one week leave granted from the office. Now from morning to evening the children would be with me. Now sometimes we would go to the lake, garden, museum and also roam around to other places. In the beginning, the children suggested bringing along their mother but I evaded the suggestion in a loving manner.

During this entertaining phase, according to the strategy I was gradually convincing my children that it was useless to have a telephone in the house. With this money we will have fun rather than paying heavy bills, we will use that money to buy something for them instead. And the exams were nearing. During this period I tried to convince them that coming of calls from here and there, coming and going of neighbours, the trouble of maintenance, bell ringing untimely – all of this would be a distraction in their studies.

My wife tolerated all this for 3 days but on the fourth day she burst out, “Where do you roam around with them the entire day? Do you even know that exams are right around the corner.?”

“Ashraf! Shazia ! don’t go anywhere or you will face my wrath”.

I smiled inside and spoke quickly, “You talk wonders. These are only their playful days.”

“Please! At least you should think about it.” She was about to cry.

On the fifth day the children decided to fly a kite. I immediately bought a kite and string and went to the terrace. The sun was blazing. The desire to go under a shady place was intense but children were happy in the sun, therefore, I had to bear the scorching heat along with them. When Ruksana came to know the nerve of our flying kites she came screaming and shouting to the terrace.

“Do you plan to get everyone sick? Who will be responsible if something happens. Come on in! Go downstairs.” She indicated.

“Oh! You do your work. Let the children fulfil their desires. Why do you poke your nose in every affair.”

I scolded her and she began to look up at the sky in despair. When we returned from the walk her temper had reached its peak . When she saw us she gave us a piece of her mind.

“Ashraf! I told you not to go out! Why did you go? Have you thought about your exams?.”

“Ammi ! All the time you think only of exams. Abbu takes us on such amazing trips.....”

SMACK!!.....he received a tight slap on his face.

“You imbecile! If you fail in your exams, you will keep wandering about. Let me see ! who dares to take you for a walk.” She roared.

I was completely overwhelmed at this turn of situation. That silly woman turned her own son against her by slapping him. Taking advantage of the situation, I immediately interfered and embraced my son.

A week had gone by. I asked in the evening. “What do you think? Should we take children’s advice?”

“About what?”

“About the telephone connection.”

She became quiet. I knew she was grieving over her defeat.

Then she said, “As you wish...”

I became happy, her answer was as I had expected. At that very moment I called the children.

“Look at this.” I started talking. “Your mom wants the telephone connection to be installed although I am not in favour of it because installing it near me is nothing but inviting trouble. Ruksana spoke up in between

“What is the problem? It’s our requirement.”

We started arguing. The children kept sitting aside, witnessing our arguments. After all that, the moment had arrived for which I had prepared the battlefield. I said, "Leave this aside, let us enquire from the children."

"Yes! Speak up, what do you think about it?"

Both the kids were lost in suspense for a while. They looked at each other and came near me. My chest swelled with pride. Ashraf, who had earlier received a slap from his mother, placed his head on my lap and, speaking affectionately, stated, "Abbu! Ammi is right."

*Albeena Alvi*

2020

**Here every person is afraid of an incident every time - Rajesh Reddy**

The toy that is of clay

Is afraid of being moulded

The innocent kid in some corner in my heart

Seeing the elder's world

Is afraid to grow up

He has neither control on life nor death

But when has humankind ever been scared of becoming God?

Unique is this worldly life where

Every human in the world is imprisoned

He longs to be free and is afraid of freedom.

*Hritam Shukla*

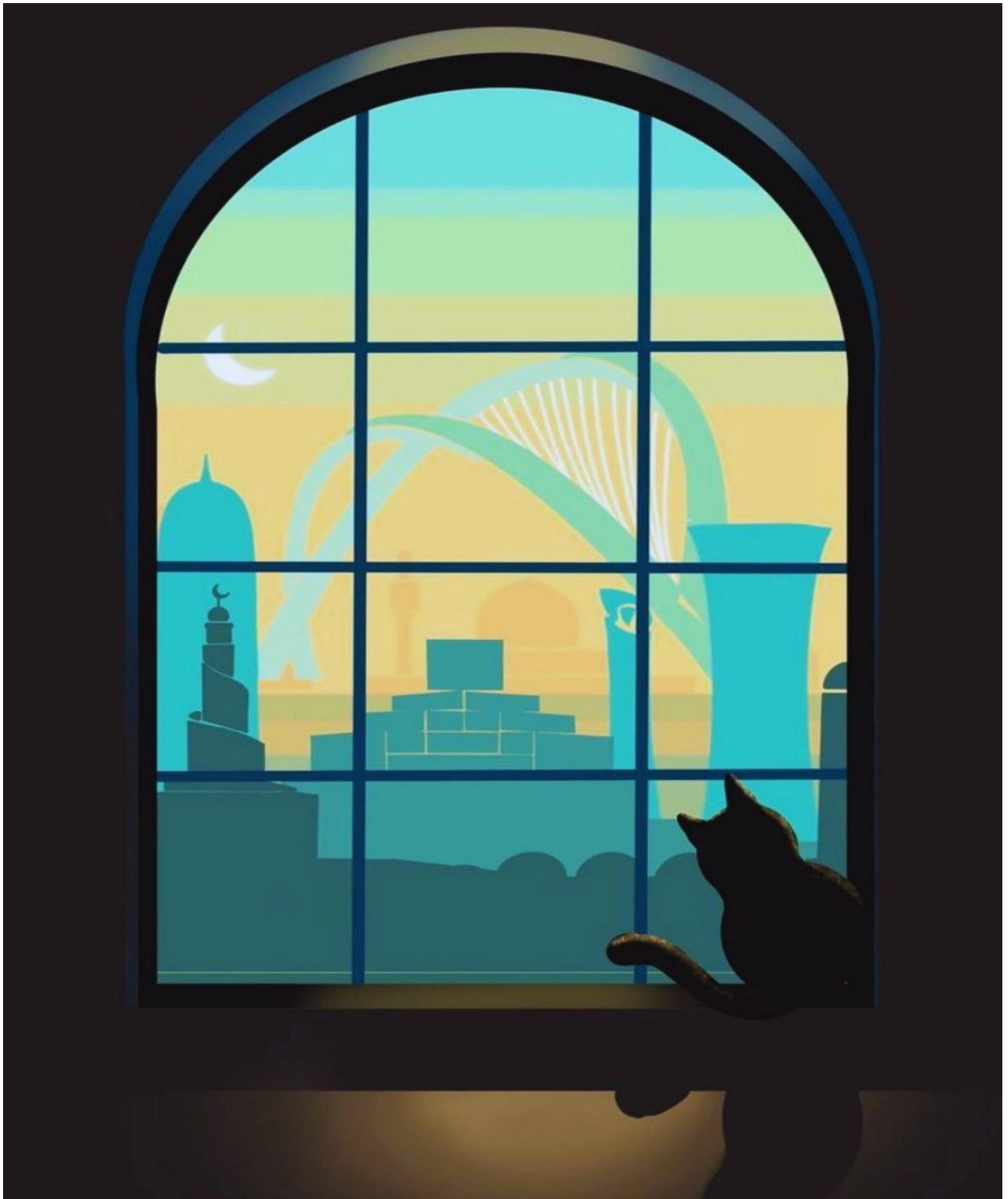
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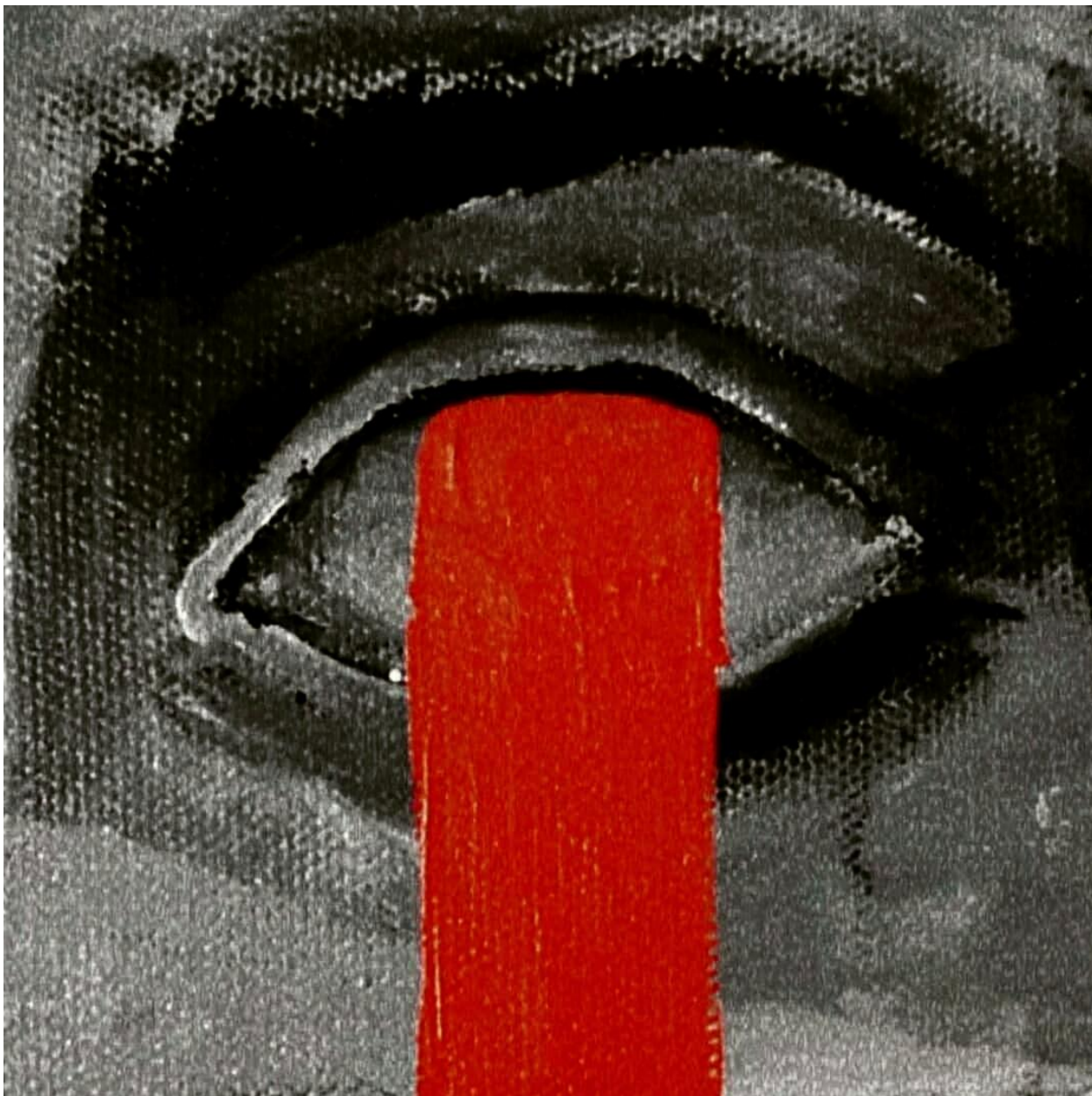


Saniya Firoz

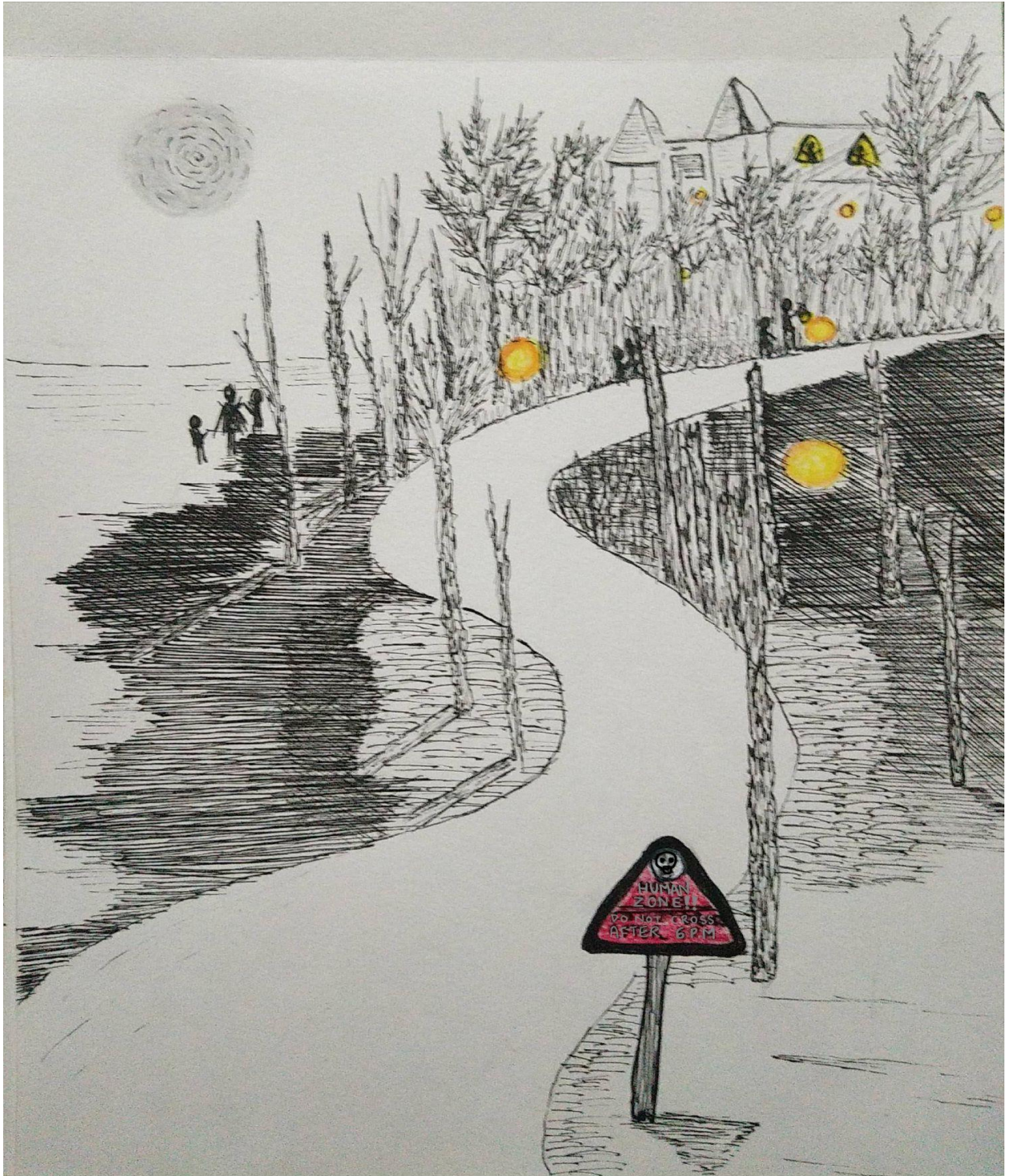




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