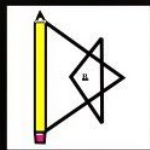


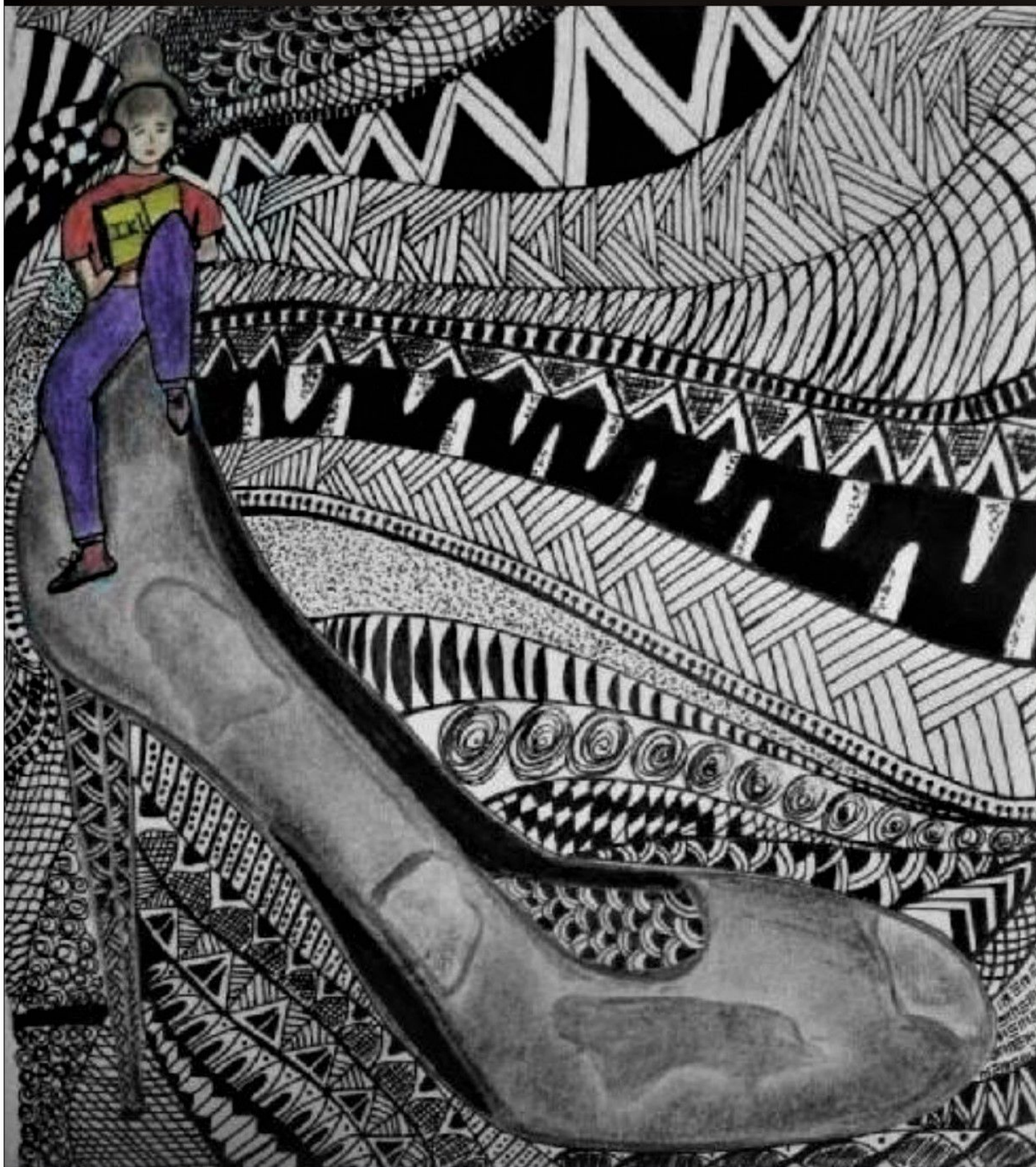
VOLUME 4

APRIL 2019



BITACORA

LITERARY MAGAZINE



VOLUME 4

BITACORA

APRIL 2019

Student Editorial Team (2019)



Row 1 : Sakshi, Bhupinder, Nandini, Shruti, Albeena

Row 2 : Sonalee, Nashra, Janckincy, Pavini

Row 3 : Gopika, Mansi, Angela, Tisha, Prithiva

BITACORA

Literary Magazine

If the Shoe doesn't Fit

Volume 4

April 2019

Department of English

Gargi College

University of Delhi

From the Principal's Desk

It gives me great pleasure that the Department of English is releasing the fourth issue of its Magazine - **Bitacora**.

It is indeed a matter of pride to be a part of an institute where students and faculty are always enthusiastic to upgrade themselves. Publishing periodicals and magazines are amongst few endeavours which contribute a lot to their holistic growth. Choosing a theme, writing articles, selecting suitable ones and then editing them, I'm sure requires a thorough brainstorming of both the editorial and graphics team as well as the contributors.

The perpetual energy, movement and enthusiasm in these young ladies permeate the atmosphere at Gargi. The vision is to produce conscientious, smart and confident citizens of India who will go out into the world and make us proud!

I congratulate the entire editorial team & contributors and enthusiastically look forward to reading our students' perspective on the theme undertaken.

Dr. Promila Kumar

From the Editorial Board

If the Shoe Doesn't Fit, is Bitacora's attempt to appreciate the current winds of change and encourage and usher in a new wave of acceptance. The phrase, although a reference to the Cinderella fairy tale, is also the famous phrase from *Outrageous Acts and Everyday Rebellions* - Gloria Steinam's feminist classic (Steinam, famous political and social activist-journalist was also media spokesperson for the women's liberation movement in the late 1960s - 1980s in America). Her book also emphasised how the world will change for the better if we understood "everyone mattered". In the light of the recent decision of the Indian Supreme Court to decriminalize Section 377 of the Indian Constitution and the effects of the #MeToo Movement, this theme for the fourth edition of the English Department's Literary Magazine becomes immediately relevant.

This year has also been important for Delhi University in its fight against the policies of privatisation of higher educational institutions, along with decent standards of living for its faculty. The many protests and demonstrations that the faculty and students of our university have taken part in to demand everyone's right to quality education expands our theme to desires in every walk of life. Bitacora's Logbook of Department Activities for the academic session therefore includes *The Right to Quality Education* which covers some of these demands and reports on the students perspectives of the DUTA Protests this academic session; the section lists the numerous events the department has conducted through the year.

It is fitting that this edition has chosen to use 'If the Shoe Doesn't Fit' as an umbrella term for the "deviant", the "abnormal", the "unexpected" and the "absurd". It encourages one to question what constitutes the "normal"; if indeed such a determinant exists. *Standards; What Is A Man?* challenge the constructed nature of "normalcy"; how individuals are expected to conform to unrealistic standards, to 'fit in', when the proverbial shoe has indeed started to pinch. In the wake of recent attempts to break out of the "ordinary", the "restricted", and create an inclusive niche for every individual, the magazine welcomes all who do not restrict themselves to normative expectations. *Dreams Transcend Gender, LGBTQ+* highlight this very aspect of diversity and how different identities come together to form any movement. *Sex: A Negotiation* highlights the need for a conversation around sex and how it is depicted visibly in architecture. *Unheavenly Bodies* and *The Other Side of Paradise* explore desires, not only sexual but also romantic, and how these desires transcend gender, religion and caste.

This year's translations include Manipuri, Tibetan, Ladakhi and Hindi tales, and narratives that try to reflect the diverse composition of the student body in the department. Faezeh Jalali's *Shikhandi—the Story of In-Betweens*, a play review examines how mythologies are relevant to the current and present now. *Call Me by Your Name* and *Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga*, attempt to examine the responses of the popular media to these paradigm shifts. The section explores the adequacy of these representations and the responses to the changes now taking place. The academic section (this year's decision to include the work that students in the department turn in during the course of the year) carries contributions like Premchand's *Kafan* and *Finding the Appropriate Compartment for Inspector Ghote* which prove how literature can be a subversive space to express, to question, to challenge, and most importantly, to change.

The Interviews section carries forward Bitacora's tradition of students engaging with the department's faculty and to learn about the work they do besides teaching within classrooms. The section also includes an interview on Shabnam Be-Wa-Fa, India's youngest drag artist.

This year's edition also carries snippets from the graduating batch of students highlighting their experiences through their years in college. The edition also includes art submissions from the department's students and some of the posters they have created over the years. The cover pages as in previous editions are also entries submitted in keeping with our theme and set the tone for our edition : "If the Shoe Doesn't Fit... must we change the foot?"

Table of Contents

Bitacora Log Book [08 - 16]

1. *Right to Quality Education*
2. *The General Body Meeting*
3. *Workshop on Academic Ethics*
4. *Book Reading Trisha Das : Kama's Last Sutra*
5. *Editing Workshop*
6. *Indian Classical Literature : Contexts and Concerns*
7. *Creative Writing Workshop*
8. *Bitacora Old Book Sale*
9. *Poetry Workshop*

Poetry [17 - 42]

1. *Two Feet- Nashra Usmani [18]*
2. *Dancing Out - Gopika S. Pai [19]*
3. *Dreams Transcend Gender - Tisha Sharma [20]*
4. *Unheavenly Bodies - Anonymous [21]*
5. *The Last Time - Simran Arora [22]*
6. *Me to Myself - Simran Arora [23]*
7. *Fit In - Priya Verma [23]*
8. *Galvanize - Pridhi Chopra [24]*
9. *LGBTQ+ - Simran Arora [24]*
10. *Scars - Shruti Saumya [25]*
11. *Fit Love - Bhupinder Kaur [25]*
12. *Who is a Man - Sakshi Arora [26]*
13. *Bare and Bold - Gargi Sharma [27]*
14. *The Other Side of Paradise - Priyanshi Bhardwaj [28]*
15. *Letter to my Younger Self - Sidra Islam [30]*
16. *My Mind - Jankincy H. Lyngdob [32]*
17. *The Tale of a Journey - Sonalee Das [33]*
18. *Standards - Jankincy H. Lyngdob [34]*
19. *Escape the Stereotypes - Arunima Sethi [34]*
20. *Two Trunks - Angela Braru [35]*
21. *That Shoe Didn't Fit - Angela Braru [36]*
22. *Beautified - Manpreet Kaur [37]*
23. *Likes - Kunsang Doma [38]*
24. *Why am I Considered Weird - Simran Puri [39]*
25. *Not Acceptable - Prachi Panwar [40]*
26. *Dead Leaves - Nandini Gautam [41]*
27. *Misfits - Tisha Sharma [42]*

Translations [43 - 53]

1. *Sandrembi and Chaishra - A Manipuri Tale - Priyadarshini Devi Yumnam [44]*
2. *The Tale of 'Oma Tso - A Tibetan Tale - Kunsang Doma [47]*
3. *Strange Relations - Albeena Alvi [49]*
4. *Va-Tse Nangi, Shangkuui Rungs . A Ladakhi Tale - Kunzes Dolma [53]*

Academic Papers [54 - 84]

1. *Critical Analysis of Helen's Character in the Iliad - Nandini Joshi [55]*
2. *Symbolism of Weaving in the Iliad - Albeena Alvi [56]*
3. *Ambedkar and Premchand's Kafan - Albeena Alvi [59]*

4. *Misogyny in Webster's "The Duchess of Malfi" - Angela Braru* [61]
5. *Anne Bradstreet's "Anxiety of Authorship" in "The Prologue" - Angela Braru* [66]
6. *Representation of Rape in "The Rover" - Angela Braru* [68]
7. *Christie's Narrator in "The Murder of Roger Ackroyd" - Angela Braru* [73]
8. *Sex: A Negotiation - Prithiva Sharma* [76]
9. *"Inspector Ghote goes by train": Conventions of Detective Fiction - Annya Tandon* [78]
10. *Finding the Appropriate Compartment for Inspector Ghote - Pavini Suri* [82]

Reviews [85 - 92]

1. *Allegedly - Shruti Saumya* [86]
2. *Call Me By Your Name - Sarah Jalil* [87]
3. *Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga - Nandini Joshi* [88]
4. *Love, Simon - Shambhavi Mishra* [89]
5. *Faezah Jalali's Shikhandi - The Story of In-betweens - Vaishnavi Dube* [90]
6. *A Woman Alone - Prachi Mehra* [92]

Prose [93 - 96]

1. *Mithi - Priya Verma* [94]
2. *Holy Hell - Prithiva Sharma* [94]
3. *The Yellow House - Bhupinder Kaur* [95]

Interviews [96 - 106]

1. *Dr. Sutapa Dutta* [97]
2. *Ms. Nzanmongi Jasmine Patton* [101]
3. *Interviewing Nitish Anand aka Shabnam Be Wa Fa* [105]

Rememberings [107 - 111]

BITACORA

LOG BOOK

(2018 – 2019)

The Right to Quality Education

by *Nashra Usmani*

The words “strike”, “protest march”, and “resistance” have now become common in Delhi University and many other universities as well. Since 2017, Delhi University has seen many teachers and students come out onto the roads to protest against the government's regressive policies of commercialisation of higher education, (amongst other things) which would drastically reduce the number of students and teachers in the university.

Commercialisation, or “autonomisation”, of colleges in state or central universities would be a fatal blow to a lot of the representation of women and lower caste and lower class sections of the society. The proposal to scrap grants for the university and instead introduce loans which will have to be paid back over the years, is money that will have to come from the students. There is also the promise of autonomy which would give colleges the right to create their own syllabi at the cost of 30% of government assistance. Currently, the fees for three year B.A. courses in Delhi University is on average less than a lakh for all three years combined. If the university is privatised, it is projected to increased manifold. This would mean less accessibility for lower classes and even the lower middle class. This would also lead to parents sending only their boys to higher education due to classic Indian societal bias, not to forget real financial burden.

Over 4,500 teachers in Delhi University are currently teaching on adhoc basis. While student seats were increased by 54% during 2008-10 to accommodate 27% OBC reservations and recently by 25% for the 10% EWS quota, the promise of more permanent teaching posts has not been fulfilled. These teachers receive pay cuts for taking leave even for medical reasons, along with having no health insurance. Especially those teaching on an ad-hoc basis, go without pay for multiple months at times, enjoy no job benefits like health insurance or maternity leave. On top of all this, they are forced to give interviews every few months in order to hold their jobs. Many teachers who have been teaching for more than even a decade have not been appointed as permanent faculty while those who have been working have received no promotions. Moreover, the change from the 200-point roster system, taking the whole university as a unit for reserved jobs, to the 13-point roster system, which takes a single department as a unit, will leave many teachers jobless, most of whom will fall under the marginalised sections of society. (Another ST post is expected to open in over a century if the new roster comes into effect)

Multiple protest demonstrations have taken place in 2019, in North Campus protests, marches to Jantar Mantar, and even Parliament Street. Students have endured water sprays, tear gases and lathi charge to march for their right to the tune of “*Hum apna adhikaar maangte, hum na kisi se bheek maangte*” (We demand our rights, we don't beg for them). From the Young Adhikar March, where students and teachers from all over India came together in the lakhs in Delhi to protest against the record low percentage given to education in this year's budget, unemployment with regard to government jobs, etc. to marches and dharnas specific to Delhi University, teachers, students, and even non-teaching staff have made huge efforts to protect higher education.

In the month of February, students of Gargi College made posters along with their teachers to carry to a march on 19 February. During this event, when teachers and students came together in an unconventional way, Varnika Mishra, a second year student, expressed, "Privatisation is a violation of our Right to Freedom as most of us won't be able to attain this safe space where questioning becomes our right. Freedom of expression will go away because the masses to whom the institution is accessible would be cut in half and hence only a homogenous point of view of a particular class will prevail in such institutional spaces."

Sidra Islam from third year also said, "Privatization of public colleges will make the rich, richer and the idea of capitalization will establish its roots even deeper in our society. Privatisation kills diversity as privatisation will make education accessible to only a few rich people. The teacher-student relationship will then become commodified and hence the teachers will be subconsciously made part of a market space."

On February 19, students and teachers marched from Mandi House metro station to Parliament Street along with organisations like Delhi University Teachers' Association, Krantikari Yuva Sangathan, and Delhi University College Karamchari Union to protest against privatisation and autonomization of colleges; exploitation of teachers; and the 13-point roster. The sounds of tablas and marching footsteps rent the sky as posters floated over an excited crowd. While the protest itself was completely non-violent, the purpose was to shake the government into acknowledging the masses' demands instead of letting education be consumed by capitalism. While an ordinance has been passed in favour of the 200-Point Roster after the protests and continuing demands, it is important to remember it is a temporary victory.

Right now, there is a dire need to create more awareness amongst people, especially students, about this situation. While the spirit of rebellion is naturally strong in the young students, the knowledge of what is going on is sadly not commonplace. For most, a strike day is just a holiday, not a day to take action. More awareness can be raised by holding public meetings in individual colleges, like the ones which were held in Gargi College in February which educated many on the current tumultuous situation in less than an hour. This is important especially in the wake of efforts to silence student-teacher protests, specifically the advisory issued by Delhi University and undersigned by Proctor Neeta Sehgal banning protests on campus grounds.

In the face of educational and job rights being trampled upon, what must be remembered is that throughout history, university protests have been successful in bringing about change. In 1976, it was a university protest against mandated Afrikaans-language education by South African students in Soweto which spread into a global movement against the apartheid. The fear of not being a good citizen needs to be discarded - when asking for our rights does not work, we are forced to either bow to a lower standard of living or fight for them. We must of course fight for them while we educate ourselves to be conscious citizens.

29 August 2018 **The General Body Meeting**

By *Angela Braru*

On 29 August 2018, the very first general body meeting for the session 2018-2019 was organized by the Literary Society of Gargi College, Delhi University. The meeting was graced with enthusiastic participation from all three years of the department, along with the teachers. It began with an introduction to the department association by the post-bearers of the session 2017-2018. A brief account of all departmental activities, that were organized previously, was presented. These included the Lit Soc flea market, movie screenings by the Film Club, academic workshops by our professors and guest speakers, the Literary Fest and so on. It was an interactive session, with students and teachers indulging in a very friendly and informative discussion. There was excitement throughout the meeting, and all kinds of questions and doubts asked by the audience were entertained encouragingly.

Students were familiarized with the posts for the current student panel of the Literary Society, the volunteering positions for those who are not the post bearers of the team but would like to help in the arrangements of all the events for this session, and the annual fees to be submitted for the same. This was followed by a brief discussion on the election procedure that the department follows – the nominations, campaigning, the 'big fight' and finally, the voting. The dates for the same were revealed and the students were notified about the campaigning rules. Once all the details were shared and received, the stage was left open for suggestions and feedback from the attendees. As a conclusion to this eventful hour, the hosts of the meeting encouraged everyone to share the expectations they have from Lit Soc. Students from first year participated fervently during this bit, while the rest of the attendees mentioned the departmental trip multiple times. The meeting ended on a positive note, with a strong anticipation for what comes next. The department, as a close-knit family, was looking forward to an exciting and promising session of 2018-2019.

24 September 2018 **Workshop on Academic Ethics with Dr. Mudita Mohile**

By *Mansi Ramrakhyani*

On September 24, 2018, Dr. Mudita Mohile conducted a workshop on 'Academic Ethics'. It began with a discussion on what plagiarism is. Different types of plagiarism were discussed, many of which were not known to the students. The ethical concerns about the theft of ideas and intellectual property were discussed. The economic concerns in buying all the books that one needs

to refer to, and restriction on flow of knowledge due to disparity in purchasing power of people of different classes and countries were also talked about.

An interesting High Court case was discussed in which three publishing houses (including Oxford University Press and Cambridge University Press) jointly sued a college photocopier over selling spiral-bound volumes of their books. The court gave the verdict in favour of the photocopier as it was for educational purposes. The provisions of the Copyright Act were also discussed in detail including the exceptions.

The two types of citations i.e. In-text and Bibliography were discussed. The APA and MLA formats for Bibliography were also reviewed. The students shared the problems they faced in quoting critics while writing assignments and received useful tips. Their queries ranged from how to avoid “re-tweeting” the opinions of critics to how to form their own opinions. They were advised to always give credit to the critics and analyse their ideas rather than just quoting them. They went home satisfied, relieved and ready to tackle the pile of assignments that lay before them.

29 September 2018

Book Reading with Trisha Das: *Kama's Last Sutra*

By *Albeena Alvi*

On 29 September, the English Literary Society of Gargi College organised a book-reading session with the filmmaker and author Trisha Das to discuss her latest book “*Kama's Last Sutra*”, a historical romance intertwined with a feminist perspective. This book is the new addition to her other works such as “*Draupadi Kuru: After the Pandavas*” and “*The Mahabharata - re-imagined*”. She is also an internationally acclaimed filmmaker who has directed and written over 40 documentaries. Mr. Maisnam Arnopal from the English department chaired the event which also included three student discussants, namely Jhanvi Shah from 1st year, Albeena Alvi from 2nd year, and Prithiva Sharma from 3rd year.

The event began with Shalvi Rastogi, the President of the Literary Society welcoming both the author and the mediator. Mr. Maisnam had a short discussion with Ms. Das about the novel which included the feminist perspective of the protagonist Tara, an archaeologist who time travels to the 11th century *Jejabbukti* kingdom. Trisha Das put forth her understanding of feminism and focussed on how much pressure comes along with living up to the ideals of being a feminist. She also talked about her experiences as a filmmaker going to the deeply caste entrenched society of Bundelkhand, the location which is the crux of her novel. She focussed on how she made sure to draw parallels of the issues within the Chandela dynasty along with the 21st century India. She read an excerpt from the novel which led to peals of laughter due to the humorous content and also a huge round of applause. The discussants raised various questions about the novel such as the sexual connotation, the historical context and even the cover page. Trisha Das was very interactive with the audience and answered all the questions without any filter.

The session ended with a token of appreciation given to the author for coming to Gargi College to discuss her book. The discussants were rewarded for their efforts as well. The author took pictures with the department and individual audience members and offered ten copies of 'Kama's Last Sutra' and 'Draupadi Kuru: After the Pandavas' to the students. The event was interesting and engrossing as it served as a good opportunity for exposure to a feminist outlook which draws attention to the struggles of all feminists of the 21st century India.

6 October 2018

Editing Workshop with Ms Jeyakirthana J.

By *Tisha Sharma*

Aiming to provide training and guidance for the Bitacora team, a workshop on 'Editing and Design' was held on October 6, 2018. The workshop was conducted by Ms. Jeyakirthana J. from the Department of English

There could have been no better start to the year's magazine than a workshop that not only guided one about its structure and composition but also focused on the significance of literature in our lives. "Everything is a text, and ultimately everything becomes consequential to the larger society we are a part of." This compelled us to see the crucial role of literature in reinvigorating our lives. Ms. Jeyakirthana completely denies the myth of associating literature with something that is boring to the readers. When we look at the bigger picture, literature is something that serves as a medium of expression of everything that is relevant by placing the mundane, the mainstream, and the prevalent into context.

Over the course of the workshop, students were given not just theoretical knowledge but their practical skills were also enhanced via on the spot document editing. During the session, minute details such as setting a certain standard for the font to more important details like the various sections of the magazine were discussed thoroughly. Other key guidelines to be kept in mind are the 3Cs - to keep the material concise, clear, and consistent. The removal of redundancies and use of track changes etc were discussed.

The workshop was designed to bring all the three years to a single platform and share the strategies needed for effective and efficient working of the team as a whole. *Bitacora*, the Department magazine, provides an independent forum for both creative expression and training skills such as content editing and graphic designing. The workshop also produced an in-house Editors Manual for reference and concluded with a spirit of teamwork after division of tasks to set off the magazine work for the 2018-19 edition.

13 October 2018

Indian Classical Literature: Contexts and Concerns: A Lecture by Dr. B. Mangalam

By *Sania Mirza*

The Literary society of Gargi College organized a talk by Dr. B. Mangalam on Indian Classical Literature : Contexts and Concerns on 13 October 2018 in the college . The programme was jointly organized by the Literary society and Academic Committee of the College. All the

students along with the teachers of the English department participated in the two hour long programme.

The event was chaired by Ms. Poonam Sharma. The talk began with a brief discussion about the perception, context and concerns reflecting ancient India and how there has been an increased affinity towards Sanskrit in the 20th century. She also informed the audience about the various modern interpretation of the classical texts.

The discussion was very interactive as the students asked questions and shared their views on subject.

A student asked Dr. B Mangalam's views on translation. She gave a beautiful response, saying you need to lose a bit in order to gain something, that translation may sometimes lead to loss of essence, but it's a significant way to spread knowledge everywhere. A very important point discussed was the status of women in both ancient and contemporary time. A student gave her views on the topic, saying that every single story that has been studied till now depicts women in same light. No matter how strong a woman is, be it Kannagi or Draupadi, in the end she has to submit to the demands of the patriarchal society. Dr. B Mangalam also supported this theory with a very interesting example. She said that if we pay attention to any of the female characters in our movies, we will notice a very popular trend. A woman may have conquered the world with her knowledge but the story always ends with her getting married to her Prince Charming. Another important point of discussion was the number of religions in ancient India. Hinduism was not the only prevalent religion at that time. Jainism and Buddhism were also the part of religious diversity present at that time. Her insightful answers put a rest to the curious minds sitting among the audience. The talk came to an end with a very interesting discussion about the reason we continue to read these texts and the importance they hold in today's day and age. The event also opened the students' minds to new opinions and ideologies by widening their horizons.

11 January 2019

Creative Writing Workshop with Janice Pariat

By *Gopika S. Pai*

On 11 January, 2018 Janice Pariat, winner of the 2013 Sahitya Akademi Young Writer Award for her debut collection of short stories *Boats On Land* conducted a two hour creative writing workshop. It was an inclusive and active engagement with the processes and nuances of writing aided by extracts from *The Reader* by Bernhard Schlink and *A Bad Character* by Deepti Kapoor.

The workshop was more of a discussion with participants seated around the author. Ms. Pariat started with the important queries of whether creative writing can be taught and if a creative writing course could ensure bringing out the Bernhard Schlink in you. She answered the doubts in

most of our minds and reassured us that creative writing courses do help in improving one's language skills and gives one more confidence in their writing style. More than that, a creative writing course does give you an opportunity to interact with other like-minded people and an opportunity to discuss books and authors. This, she stated is important to one growing into a future author. Such courses and workshops also help to learn about editing and publishing skills which otherwise writers only learn from slow experience while writing.

Ms. Pariat who brought a few copies of extracts from the two books then began with examining details such as the age of the protagonist in the first text and why the specific age mattered so much. Would another other age have made a difference? Was it a deliberate choice of the author? Does it have a special impact on the reader? We next moved on to the voice of the narration. Would the book have been better if it had been written from the perspective of a different character? Would that have changed the actual purpose of the text itself? The narrative technique used was later examined. Was it first person, second or third person? What impact did these different kinds have on different stories. Ms Pariat guided as through the questions for the first book and by the second book we were asking the questions ourselves. The different ideas s each of the participants had about each question made the variety of opinions in the workshop very evident and the importance of such platforms to help grow into writers who are confident in their own style.

It is also true that workshops like these definitely create better readers who would demand greater works of art, and are an additional experience of an advanced language class in your hands. The workshop helped book lovers have a healthy invigorating book discussion too.

24 January 2019

Old Book Sale

By *Sakshi Arora*

Bitacora, the literary magazine, Department of English, Gargi College sold old books and handmade bookmarks to raise funds on January 24, 2018 from 10 AM to 4 PM at the Arts Quadrangle of Gargi College. The old and unused books were collected from the students and teachers, were priced according to their condition and were sold along with beautiful handmade bookmarks by the Bitacora Team.

The Book Sale showcased a plethora of books ranging from Romance to Fiction, Biographies to Young Adult and from popular authors like Durjoy Dutta to classics like Jane Austen. Popular fiction series like- 'The Heroes of Olympus' and 'The Lord of the Rings' were also present. This wide array of masterpieces was picked up by students from different departments. Critical essays and books on history of English were popular among students from English Hons, while Mysteries and Romances were desired by all. The teachers from different departments also visited and brought the books from the book sale.

The purpose of the book sale was fulfilled with raising of sufficient funds for the magazine. The team along with the teachers worked hard to make this event a success. It proved to be a

fruitful experience for all and lead to reuse of old books that were kept in the cupboards gathering dust.

1 March 2019

Poetry Workshop with Aditi Rao

By *Nashra Usmani*

On March 1, the Bitacora team was granted the opportunity to have a workshop with celebrated activist and poet Aditi Rao. She has received multiple awards for her writings, such as the Srinivas Rayaprol Poetry Prize in 2011 and the Muse India - Satish Verma Young Writer Award in 2015.

The workshop was intended to teach the team about the basics of poetry - what poetry is and how to write better poetry. Rao started the workshop by asking what we thought poetry was, leading into an interesting discussion on the subjective aspects of poetry which make a poem a poem. Students were given a poem called *We Real Cool* by Gwendolyn Brooks to see how different elements like alliteration, rhyme scheme, rhythm, visual patterns, etc. come together in a poem.

The team observed how even line breaks could alter the meaning of a poem and could change the way it is read. In a way, students learnt more about the musicality of a poem. Students also learnt to be creative with their metaphors in order to keep a sense of freshness alive in their writing. After observing how seemingly small things like stanza breaks affect the impact of a poem, students were given time to edit their own pre-written poems in order to improve the structure and to convey with clarity of meaning and intention to the reader. Many students attempted to play with the visual pattern of a poem but editing poems such that they would form a shape, while others varied phrasing and sentences to make their poetry read better.

The workshop turned out to be both informative and a good practical exercise for everyone on the team, especially those who are fond of writing poetry. Aditi Rao's charming and funny demeanour kept students engaged throughout the workshop.

Poetry

Two Feet

I Prize Creative Writing Competition

Now and then, I remember
The quivering lips on my lead singer's face
Her eyes imperfect and perfect at once
And her voice like a steel angel, I her magnet,
She pulled me, drew me in

But so did he
With his ready smile and his piercing gaze,
The calming warmth of him seated beside me
Trying to solve a maths problem, a physics equation.
Thoughts of him devoured rationality.

How can one burn fire under water, they ask,
How can you like both sour and sweet?
You have to choose one!
But bisecting my self is not for me
And my eyes can in all directions look
Love being a path I have to tread myself
My two feet can never fit a single shoe.

Nashra Usmani

II Year

Dancing Out

II Prize Creative Writing Competition

She stood there, in a corner
 Awkward silence in her head
 The loud music looming over all else.
 Hips swayed hard
 Hands clapping wild
 Bewildered, she felt her hand melting in
 sweat.
 Someone pulled her into their midst
 Lights hurting her eyes.
 She was pushed around the circle.
 The rhythm made no sense.
 'Dance.' Someone hissed.
 Clearly it was a disappointment
 Her friends steered away
 Their feet moving them,
 Away from this lone tree
 Unnatural, non-rhythmic.
 Her space too precious for dancing feet,
 Stepping into her, over her.
 Her heart beat wildly,
 And the rhythm downed in.
 She closed her eyes,

Forgot herself
 Imagining her numerous performances
 The prayer before each
 Each step focused on years of tradition and
 practice.
 Was not she a dancer?
 The dance floor seemed empty,
 Her soul reached out to thousand souls
 Attention only on her Bharatanatyam
 A silent reverence to her muse.
 Her body grew stiff, but gracefully.
 They made way for her
 As she masked in the glow of another
 performance.
 They watched as she moved rhythmically,
 As she owned up the stage,
 Touched the ground in a namaskar.
 Straightening up gracefully,
 Her body swayed.
 In that crowded party,
 A lone dancing tree.

Gopika S. Pai

II Year

Dreams Transcend Gender

My world turned upside down,
All fears came true;
Didn't know revealing my inner self
Could bring shame to you.

Had to break free,
When you tried to cage me,
For I longed to walk the runway
Owning who I was born to be.

Dressed myself the way I liked,
Red lipstick with smoky eyes.
That day I was truly free:
Nothing could have stopped me.

Not those mournful murmurs,
Not those winking wicked eyes;
I had just one thing to acknowledge:
My real self, and an unrecognized pride.

It wasn't easy ever,
Nor is it ever going to be.
The woman in me would live forever,
That much I could foresee.

Today, when those confused stares, furrowed brows
Try to inquire my gender;
Comfortable in my skin, filled with confidence within;
I claim to be a Transcender.

Tisha Sharma
I Year

Unheavenly Bodies

It's easy to interlace your fingers with mine
Like they were made to rest there,
In the hollows of your hand draining the tiredness
And engulfing my heart with comfort.

Hell isn't a place, they say. I say it is.
It's any place where I'm not connected to you.
And what is heaven then but hell and hell, heaven
If you are destined by my God to go there?

But you don't believe in him, do you?
You say, bright eyed, "we came from aliens, don't you see?"
But perhaps your aliens were from a different galaxy than mine
And they never learnt to make peace.

And I know we don't fit the idea of the ideal.
Oh boy, Plato would scoff so at us.
And I know our blood may make the ideal example
For those who dare lie with "infidels".

Well, we'll never fit in a *kundli*, you know -
You'll burn and I'll be buried -
But at least my fingers fit in the hollows of yours,
And we'll hold hands to hell.

Anonymous

The Last Time

The last time I felt anxiety,
 It began with a hurricane sweeping through
 The inner confines of my mind silently
 Thumping my chest to the rhythm
 Of the mountain
 Before it breaks out-
 A volcano;

It's quiet now,
 Anxiety sits like the personification of poise
 So I rush to my room
 Lock all the doors
 And close my eye
 Wait for slumber
 For hours;

After which the sun yawns,
 And the first thing I see
 On removing the curtains of nightmares
 Is anxiety, all dressed up reading the paper
 Armed to keep me hostage in my own body;

It's boiling inside but
 tears don't slide down anymore
 For it's still wet from the last outburst;
 Is time taking longer to wipe the surface or
 Have my eyes adjusted to gulp down their
 own anxiety?

Extinguishers don't reach me, anyway,
 For 'then'
 Words don't pounce off my lips
 Into the venomous air
 That chokes me,
 Whenever I try to ask for help or
 Inhale some minimal optimism;

They tell me I speak a lot,
 I wonder when they'll understand that
 Words have become like maths digits for me

That even after reckoning
 I still can't get the right set together
 To convince them enough about myself;

Yes, I do cloak my anxiety before them
 And try to accommodate myself
 Into each box that society gives me
 Shed some weight, eat less cupcakes
 And make myself a smiling joker
 But the box remains small;

And how much can one blabber
 Till one realises that there is no-one on the
 other end;

All the spaces I enter become narrower
 And louder with the clamour of the crowd,
 Louder, louder and louder;
 I ask them all to shut up
 But they don't
 Because there is no one;

And when there is -
 Someone who puts his hand on mine
 And promises to lead the way;
 The recurrent thoughts of their death
 Or them penning a full stop on our journey
 Drill holes into my palms,
 Making it impossible for them
 To hold them;

The transparency of the frequency
 Of my anxiety builds bridges
 Between I and my friends,
 I and my family,
 I and me;
 I, am not I anymore.

Simran Arora
III Year

Me to Myself

Of what remains
 After tough heart-quakes
 And sole nights
 of breezy loneliness;
 On uneasy hustle days
 and aware slumbers;

When the burden of expectations mount,
 And rules of the normative society,
 I want to flout;

I ask myself,

“What remains?”

The bark of my confidence
 might wrinkle,
 The security of my will power
 might dwindle,
 What then saves me
 from these disasters
 Is my ink -

When words fail,
 clothes inherit
 my voice;

Expression is
 liberation to me;
 Of what remains
 after it all fades?

What I gift myself
 in dreams -
 The fierce passion
 of my ambition;
 The quest of unshackling myself
 Through self-exploration
 and introspection;
 So what remains
 is my resilience
 That I give myself
 to reinforce self-love.

Simran Arora
III Year

Fit In

A size too big,
 She always tried to fit into the ones too small.
 Suffocated herself with the tight tank top,
 For loose t-shirts weren't the trend.
 Everyday she scrubbed her skin,
 In hope of lightening her 'too dark' face.
 “Perfect” she wanted to be,
 But it came with a checklist of requirements
 That she failed to fit in.

Priya Verma
II Year

Galvanize

In the name of wonder, idleness and imposes
 She chooses to be a marigold,
 in the field of roses.

In the valley of red, white, pink and purple
 She chooses to be the golden duchess
 despite infinite hurdles.

Forced to remain calm and composed,
 submissive, diligent and unexposed
 She metamorphosed into a hurricane.

Starry sky, pleasant breeze,
 shining sun and local trees,
 were dethroned by daddy's little princess

As she was the queen,
 with sneakers crystal green.

Pridhi Chopra
II Year

LGBTQ+

Rainbow representation:
 Parallel, equal recognition;
 Of each, a reverential view
 Dyed their individualist hues.
 Layers of togetherness
 Glued by resistance;
 Threatening orthodoxy,
 Rainbows are antonyms
 To state hypocrisy.

Simran Arora
III Year

Scars

It's a long-term relation: my face and these scars
Which came as a curse and caged my beauty behind bars

Agonizing and painful, got them accidentally
No doubt they didn't come alone but with the title of "ugly"

Put a question mark on my future, especially on my love life
How will she live with that face? Who will accept her as a wife?

With these concerns or say, fears, came condolences for what I lost
I couldn't connect, because it wasn't beauty what these scars cost

It was my confidence, self-esteem, hope that was marred
Visible scars were the least hurting, I was mentally scarred

But where Time is the healer, change becomes the best and worst truth
I ventured my scars to play forward, to step into growth

Eventually I accepted my scars as on my face I wore them
And when I got in touch with indefinable beauty, I began to adore them

The present scene is that I stand before the mirror praising my monstrous beauty
My face to me is the moon with its sun residing within me

Redefining beauty, my beautiful soul now does embrace
With love and regards, my beautiful scarred face.

Shruti Saumya

I Year

Fit Love

In the chosen ring
The finger dreams to fit in
To be for'er yours

Bhupinder Kaur

II Year

Who is a Man?

They say I am a man, who does no wrong.
My willpower should reach the sky.
Subjected to be harsh and strong,
My neck bound by a corporate tie.

Either that, or I should be on the field,
Charming beauties left and right.
Weapons and pride a man does wield,
Holding his women close-knit and tight.

But what if, I want to be someone else?
Not a Man, just be myself.
What if I just want to dance and sing?
Or lose myself in the world of words?
What if I want to stay at home?
And not get bound by the world of lies.

Be strong, protect your mother, sisters, daughters and wives,
They say, I need to be their knights.

But, no one teaches me the act of respect,
No one asks me to listen to my heart,
No one tells me that 'No' means 'No'.

They say I am a man, who does no wrong.
But maybe, just maybe,
They are the ones who are wrong?

Sakshi Arora

I Year

Bare and Bold

But I don't belong here anymore,
I screamed as the ocean threw me at a shore.

I can't live my life with bruises and marks,
Not with this fear of every man and roads dark.

These colourful posters are fanciful lies,
My destiny remains brutally black and white.

Tell them not to fight or march with candles,
But accept me with my short skirt and sandals.

"It's your fault", they say, "Why do you desire?
It's not the man; it's your late nights and attire."

"You have to run as fast as you can,
Either till he stops chasing or you escape this barren land."

So I tightened my shoes, ready to resign,
This fearfulness sending chills down my spine.

Then I sat and prayed to be free on the other side-,
Where my dreams and femininity don't collide.

But if I leave now, my story will not unfold,
I'll be just another girl, with a tale never told.

If I jump in, consumed by these waves,
I'll dishearten every girl who couldn't be saved.

So now, I'll run and run, even if I slip,
To whoever I am and whatever I want to be.

And I promise, if my shoe doesn't fit,
I will walk boldly, bare-foot, on the beach.

Gargi Sharma
II Year

The Other Side of Paradise

You're on that side of paradise,
I am on the other.
Waiting for you to come to me,
To deliver me from this fire.
The white snow covers your lane,
While darkness runs crazy on my porch.
An invisible force stops me
From reaching out to you,
I keep trying to cross over to your side,
To no avail.

Appalling, isn't it?
We can't even be under the same sky,
You lie on the green grass watching the azure sky,
I run under the thunderstorm saving myself from disgrace,
You are as you are,
I am as I am,
Romantic you are,
Sentimental I am;
I struggle to find the anchor,
Amidst the storm in the night.
You look at me like an angel,
Holding on to the bright white light.

I touch you across glass walls,
The rose-coloured glass as I picture,
I watch, as you walk
Never stopping to look behind.
I dream of you chasing clouds,
I hear your breath going wild.

Oh what misery!
You and I are not the same,
I know of you as the “one” for me,
While I know you can't say the same.

The leaves, the daisies and the lake... are all in Paradise.
While the chimney emitting smoke is the brightest thing on my side.
I stand at the gates of Paradise,
Waiting for someone to grant me entry,
Will you ever come and rescue me?
Will you hold my hand and change my chaos?
Will you dig deep enough into me to know my darkest secrets?
Will you care enough for me to not use them against me?

Hoping, I wait
For you to look into my eyes,
And take my hand into yours,
To lead me to the other side of Paradise.

Priyanshi Bhardwaj
III Year

Letter to My Younger Self

All the self-help books and TED talks ask us to be our authentic self,
But they give no warning, no disclaimer of what is to come next.

I think of my younger self,
And as I look at her, I know how much she's craving for
Acceptance and validation,
From a society that would never grant her wishes.

Oh, I can now read her eyes,
Understand how it emptied me.
It's the kind of heartache that has no vocabulary,
Shakespeare didn't write sonnets about it.
About what it feels like to be othered,
When you don't fit in with the rest.

I want to talk to my younger self
And tell her that-
Don't see yourself through their eyes,
As they do not have the eyes to see the beauty-
That resides in your identity,
In your individuality.
As you stand before the mirror
Adorning yourself with your Hijab.
There are doubts in your eyes
And questions in your mind.

Yes...
Because you fear being questioned
"Why?"
You fear being told- "Don't!"
Not because you have no answer to that,
But because you are tired and need to rest.

So I want to reach out to you and hold you close,
Offer my shoulder to you.

Do you remember that day
When a friend coerced you to take It off
So you looked as pretty as she did to men?

I want to travel back into that moment,

And teach you to wear the Hijab,
Your Hijab,
With - Pride!

I want to tell you that,
You must not subject yourself to their ideologies
Of what beauty looks like, what liberation dresses like.
For they have been indoctrinated
Into believing that showing more skin is liberating,
When liberation lies only in - Choice.

So the next time they ask you to dress like them,
You tell them,
You are not this society's mannequin!
Your body is not obliged to fit in-
With their fashion trends.

That their notion of beauty and empowerment,
Centred only around exclusion.

From where I look at you now,
I know you have had quite a journey
Into becoming the woman that I am today,
Unapologetically my most authentic self.
- *I am proud of you for not fitting in with the rest.*
Love you deeply,
Sidra.

*Sidra Islam
III Year*

My Mind

We are just tiny specks of dust on this place
 Called earth.
 Which is a speck of dust in this space
 Called the universe.
 Yet we deal with numerous problems,
 Numerous perceptions.

We create problems, we let our feelings get
 the
 Better of us.
 We tend to surrender to temporary
 temptations
 To our temperament.
 No one is at fault,
 Humans are flawed.

We try to make up, for our shortcomings
 With solutions.
 We realize our solutions contain
 Other problems.
 It adds up to this,
 Complex net of human psychology.

I dream of a place, I can fly to, a
 Made-up fantasy in my mind.
 Which does not belong to this man-made
 Complicated world.

Serenity in my mind,
 Serenity within my life.
 In reality, me and you only hope to
 Achieve this fantasy.
 Impossible is the name for such things,
 Such as my fantasy.
 But why do I believe
 In impossibilities?

Me and you, are capable of creating problems
 Which are complex.

So tell me, can we not, or should we not
 create
 Peace within our minds?
 Our mentality is nothing but,
 What springs from ourselves.

People's thoughts and actions are bound
 To be similar,
 Of how this world functions
 And rotates.
 Once in a while we should talk more,
 With our thoughts.

I give myself more time alone to hear
 My own voice,
 With it telling me that, the sky is unrestricted
 and
 So am I.
 Never-ending possibilities with yourself,
 That comes from your mind.

Jankincy H. Lyngdoh

I Year

Pather Panchali
(The Tale of a Journey)

07:00 AM.
My eyelids flutter along with the grandfather
clock...
Open. Close. Tick. Tock. I. Must. Get. Up.

Somebody shut the blinds early in the
morning
The room stands dark with shades of violet
past the curtain
Making cracks and crevices on the mirror...

I must get up.

I must get up, says my pacemaker
To walk in on the world
Through a general class Metro compartment

A stale cup of coffee in my hand
Only to leave a ring on my office table .

I must get up, I realise
As the whiff of *dhunuchi* comes in
Through the tall broom leaning on my
maroon door
I must get ready to walk in on the world

Past a tired tractor's wheel
Past a tired man dropping his child off,
Oh, love, how weakening can you be.
Past an enthusiastic student with a Polaroid
camera,
Past the road and the street and the paved
pathway,
I must get up.

I must get up now,
To walk in on the world
Through a general class Metro compartment

Under the teal, faded sky
Carrying broken and in-making dreams

Carrying torn and fragmented limbs
Carrying exhausted pools of blood spilled
And minds clogged with street rubble.

I must get up, and go
Attend yesterday's meeting, once over again
We shall assume today turns over a new leaf
Yet somehow striving on the same tree.

I must get up,
And walk in on the world,
With no sense or nonsense or more sense
Than has ever been made
Of me, myself, and my entire charade.
My eyelids flutter along the grandfather
clock...
07:01 AM.

Sonalee Das
III Year

Standards

Normal is the way to go? The way to be?
 I hear people say and tell that
 Normal is key.
 Standards for everything we do and
 Expectations just cruel.
 Definitions-what we rely on, what we trust,
 To tell us what to do and what we must
 Do should be Normal.
 Standards for everything we do and
 Expectations just cruel.
 Action-what we do, how we act,
 Should always conform, in
 Accordance with the *rules*.
 Standards for everything we do and
 Expectations just cruel.
 Life: is what we *live*, what we *have*,
 Why should our actions, be defined, by *Normal*?
 Standards for everything we do and
 Expectations just cruel.

Jankincy H. Lyngdoh

I Year

Escape the Stereotypes

For once in my life,
 I too want to fly freely;
 Like birds in the sky.

Arunima Sethi

II Year

Two Trunks

Two trunks that hold me
Are the only home to my leaves;
The fruits I bear, the ticklish flowers
Stay on board with us.

The other trees laugh at me;
I'm not as pretty as them.
They say they play with four kids,
While I play with ten.

The number keeps increasing,
Their laughter rings through me.
To get an upper hand right now
Is all I want for me.

I let the full fruits fall,
I let my flowers wilt.
As the doomed days go by,
The kids refuse to stay.

From ten to one, the number falls;
The trees give their approval.
But, oh my god, what haste it was...
I couldn't grow too tall.

The chicken roots snap apart,
I wobble on my own.
The two sticks that hold me
Give up, I killed my own heart.

*Angela Braru
II Year*

That Shoe Didn't Fit

Her gown as blue as the Pacific,
Her hair tossed over her head;
With her eyes, she does the trick
“Just enjoy,” the godmother said

No tick-tock to worry about,
No step sisters in tow;
Waltzing through an empty crowd,
The shoe was her only foe.

Hours later, the hand strikes twelve;
A yawn escapes from her lips.
Into her blue eyes, He delves;
The fairy tale you knew, now flips.

In front of him, she drops her shoe
And glides over the stairs;
She becomes a shade of royal blue
And sprints off without a care.

Days pass by, soon He arrives
Demanding for the ladies;
To see that glassy face, he thrives
For her, He'd even fight Hades.

The audience waits for the show,
She presents her marble feet.
The souvenir's like a magic blow
He stares from across her seat.

As legends go, she tries the shoe
And slides her foot through the slit;
A prince wasn't someone new,
Hear now: that shoe didn't fit.

*Angela Braru
II Year*

Beautified

The colour of my skin is beautiful like the sky you see at night.
The pores you see on my face are not to be concealed,
they are the stars twinkling when the moon shines.
The frizzy forest on my head is as perfect as the straight rivers
flowing down from my crown.
They say the grass is always greener on the other side
But the melanin is browner on this side.
A slim waisted doll you gave me, when I was nine
became a parasite on my mind.
I adored its curves not knowing, beauty doesn't fit
in just one mould.
Colours never defined beauty for me but
at nineteen you all said fair is beautiful and
dark is ugly.
Short skirts, high heels, tight clothes, size zero
gave me a fashionable death.
The two friends, Anorexia and Bulimia Nervosa,
Validated my beauty with blood and vomit and
lifeless eyes.
But, this procrustean bed isn't my life, I realized.
The high or low level of melanin in me doesn't matter.
The blue or brown pigments of my eyes do not render it hopeless.
The crown can be wore – be the hair straight or curly.
Perfection doesn't come in an hourglass shape only.
Double XL or dark skin speaks of beauty that shines.
To you, beautiful is a sleek body, fair and bright.
But, beauty isn't constant, it comes in different shapes and size

Manpreet Kaur

III Year

Likes

Today is passing so slow.
 Tomorrow is coming so soon.
 Like a bear wanting to hibernate,
 I rest in my bed with the blankets.
 I can't let go of my phone,
 So I open Instagram again.
 People are out with friends, yet I am home alone
 Posts like this make me feel depressed
 So I don't press like.
 Knowing more about people fazes me,
 Sometimes it makes me feel so antisocial.
 Am I the only one or is it the same for everyone?
 Looking at these posts that seem so otherworldly.
 Editing photos is the norm and when I am done,
 I wonder how people look at me.
 The posts I upload, I ponder about twice.
 Will the likes I get suffice?
 This disease-like obsession has got me hooked,
 Line and sinker.
 Do others feel the same?
 Displaying perfect pictures of an imperfect life,
 Humans are weird that way.
 But I am also to blame
 Because I participate in this game.
 The Instagram me is beautiful
 But it's not me for I'm flawed

What everyone shows is just the pretty parts
 Of their lives,
 And wants people to press hearts.
 So why are people so hooked on watching
 A person living a near-perfect life?
 It just makes others feel inferior
 And instigates strife,
 For no one is perfect, and we all have flaws.
 I wonder if by breaking the cocoon-like blanket I wrap myself in,
 tomorrow I might turn into a butterfly?
 For now, I just stay in my cozy bed,
 So I open Instagram again.

Kunsang Doma

II Year

Why am I Considered Weird?

I came to this earth as innocent as you were
born
Heartfelt emotions in life were what I wanted
But situations moulded my personality into a
new version of me
When people criticized my feelings as life
moved on
Norms will define one's feelings
With same emotions as others have,
'Why am I considered weird?'

No one will assure the purity of restrained
emotions
Then how can society point out whom to
love and who should be discriminated
For feelings to be expressed, boundaries need
to be violated
I will exercise my right to choose the person
I want to love
My love will be unconditional, and thus, no
conditions will be heard
With the same choice of love as others have,
'Why am I considered weird?'

Love which is blind towards gender is
strange, that's how society perceives
Gender of my beloved overpowers my good
deeds is something my heart refuses to believe
Harsh criticism and hard to bear pain is what
I have gone through
How can my decision be wrong: to be with
someone who helps my sufferings to relieve?
I have done no harm to you and have chosen
good over bad
With good deeds I do, no matter what I get
back, 'Why am I considered weird?'

Love is a pure emotion that knows no gender
the law has finally considered
But society with its narrow confines still
regards us the ones who don't fit!
I exercised my right by choosing my loved
one and that's no wrong I did to me.
It's the thinkers bound by societal norms
who should possess the guilt
The criticism on my love doesn't depict my
character but your low thinking standards
I love being with the one I love and problem
lies with those who find me weird

Simran Puri
I Year

Not Acceptable

They say the law is inappropriate,
 They criticize the law,
 They criticize us!
 Law is not according to the quo,
 But Indeed, it is!

Why do they question the law?
 Why do they question our relationship?
 Are we not part of the country?
 Are we not part of the society?
 Don't we have the right to be loved by
 someone like us?

They consider us not to be a part of the
 crowd,
 Why? Just because we are unique?

I want to ask, why? Why?
 Why all these stereotypes prevail?
 Why such discrimination?
 Why such isolated behaviour?
 What is our fault? We are unique - Is this our
 fault?

I want to ask questions,
 Who are they to blame us?
 Who are they to decide whether we are
 acceptable or not?
 Who are they to behave like this?
 Who are they to question our identity?
 Who are they to consider law as
 inappropriate?

When god loves us as he loved them,
 why?

Don't they understand that God made us?
 He is in our support,
 He gave us joy, love, hope.
 The Supreme Law is in our support.
 Our Constitution says, everybody is equal
 before the law, then why are we being quoted
 as "Inappropriate"?

They say the Law is inappropriate
 They criticize the Law, they criticize us!
 Law is not according to the quo,
 But Indeed, it is!

It makes me laugh, the time is changing,
 But they are not accepting the change.
 Accepting Modernisation, but not us, the
 humans!

Why? Because we don't work according to
 them?

I want to say this is not modernisation,
 This is something called Humanity, equality.

They say the Law is inappropriate,
 They criticize the Law, they criticize us!
 Law is not according to the quo,
 But Indeed, it is!

Prachi Panwar
I Year

Dead Leaves

1. Last autumn, my sadness wore a sweater woven out of memories just to make itself feel more like home beneath my joyous skin. I've seen people sing to Hozier and cry to Bon Iver. I've seen people become a fireplace for someone while they were burning in the fires of hurt themselves.

I now know, it takes courage to fall down as a dead leaf. It takes courage to know that it's time to leave.

2. This winter I decided to find life amongst the crowded streets and abandoned galleries. I decided to walk slowly over the dead leaves as I do not want to kill what's already dead. I do not want to add anything to my broken regrets. I bought some new shoes but they didn't fit me well, so now I walk with shoe bites and slippers and collect dried leaves as souvenirs. I smile at the moon and think about the old lady who told me that we're all made of stardust. But if we are all made of passed away stars,
Aren't we all already,
Dead?

Nandini Gautam

I Year

Misfits

The shoe was pink
 As bright as the sunshine
 But he was a boy,
 So that couldn't be possibly fine.

Fitness was her breath,
 Exercising her passion.
 However, gym was a place,
 Where strong men would gather.

Women as a deity,
 Worshipped by entire mankind;
 When menstruating, her very existence
 Impossible to find.

Born when she was,
 He saw an angel at first sight.
 Dragged her down,
 When she desired to touch heights.

Seeking protection in return,
 Tied a rakhi to his wrist.

He took away her innocence
 Why was she on his list?

Love is what we preach,
 Lessons on equality we teach;
 Still laws on homosexuality
 We are not supposed to breach.

Can't say whether,
 She is blessed or doomed;
 Saved from the chaos of the world
 Killed in her mother's womb.

Bigotry is a sin,
 Humanity : the only religion
 Transgenders are humans too,
 Time to broaden our vision.

Believe in change
 And ultimately become the change.
 For why try to fit in?
 When you can perfectly be a misfit.

Tisha Sharma
I Year

Translations

Sandrembi and Chaishra – A Manipuri Tale

Once upon a time, in a far away village in the Kingdom of Manipur, lived a Meitei man who had two wives. Both had children. The first wife had Sandrembi and a younger son. Chaishra was the second wife's lone child. They lived together but the relationship between them was far from congenial. While Sandrembi was pretty and kind hearted, Chaishra was ugly and wicked. Chaishra and her mother always planned evil things behind their back. All this started after their father passed away.

One fine morning, the mothers went out fishing. As luck would have it, Sandrembi's mother caught so many fishes in no time. On the other hand, Chaishra's mother's tungol got filled with snakes only. When evening came, they decided to go back home. On their way, they passed a large fig tree laden with ripe fruits and Chaishra's mother started climbing it. When she reached the top she shouted, "Sister, there are so many ripe fruits here. I'll drop one for you. See if it tastes good." She liked it. Again, Chaishra's mother shouted, "Sister, I'll give you more. Just close your eyes and wait for a more delicious one". Sandrembi's mother didn't know that Chaishra was planning something else for her. Without without any hesitation, she closed her eyes and what came next weren't the ripe fruits but the snakes from Chaishra's tungol. Sandrembi's mother died there. She was pushed into the river and left.

Chaishra's mother came back alone and Sandrembi asked why her mother isn't there. To this her step mother replied bluntly that her mother said that she wants to do some more fishing and doesn't want to come back. Night fell and still Sandrembi's mother didn't come back. Her younger brother was crying, "Sister, sister, why is mother not back yet?" Sandrembi had no answer to this. The siblings hugged each other and slept. In her dreams, her mother came and told her, "My dear daughter, I was killed by your wicked step - mother. Now I have turned into a turtle. Tomorrow morning go to the river, take me out and put me in a mud pot for five days. On the fifth day, I will transform into a human".

Sandrembi woke up early and did what her mother told her in her dreams. She brought the turtle home and kept it secretly in a mud pot. Chaishra saw this and told her mother about it. Hearing this her step mother ordered her to cook the turtle for dinner. Sandrembi requested them that she will cook something else and not this. Conniving as always, they paid no heed to her requests. Eventually she had no choice but to cook the turtle which was actually her mother. Shedding tears, she put the turtle inside the cooking pot and started boiling it. Her mother called, "Sandrembi, the heat has reached my feet". She couldn't bear this and pulled out the firewood. Chaishra slapped her sister and started burning the firewood again. Her mother spoke again, writhing in pain, "Sandrembi, it has reached my waist. Now my chest, now my neck". The turtle died. Chaishra and her mother ate the dish greedily and threw the bones near their house.

Sandrembi again saw her mother in her dreams, "My dear daughter, collect the bones, wrap them in a cloth and preserve them for seven days. I'll be back to my human form". Next morning, Sandrembi did the same. She kept it safely for five days. On the sixth day, out of curiosity she opened the cloth. As the days felt short, the bones turned into nothing but ashes. Sandrembi cried, because of her greed, she and her younger brother won't be able to see her mother again.

As the time went by, they grew up. One day the step-sisters went out to fetch water. On their way back, they encountered the king of the land. He requested, "O my fair beautiful lady, can I get some water". He climbed down from his horse and came near Sandrembi. To this Chaishra replied, "Yes your majesty. Please take some water from me". The king paid no attention to Chaishra and faced Sandrembi. She gave him water and they returned home. Seeing Chaishra fuming with anger, her mother enquired about what happened and Chaishra narrated the entire incident to her mother. She asked her mother to tell Sandrembi to give all her old clothes and pot in exchange for her nice ones. Chaishra thought the King was attracted to Sandrembi because of her torn clothes. The next day, they went after switching their clothes. As they reached the river, the king was waiting for them. Sandrembi looked beautiful and the King couldn't take his eyes off her. From the side, Chaishra said, "My dear king, see I have worn torn clothes today. Don't you like me?" Hearing this the king mocked her and said she looked like some mad woman. The king immediately proposed Sandrembi to be his queen and live at his palace. He pulled her up in his horse and took her away. They got married and got a son the following year.

After this, Chaishra and her mother spent their days either imagining what their life would be if they were in Sandrembi's palace or else they would be plotting to kill her. So one day they decided to call Sandrembi for a feast. They went to the palace, requested the king and they were given permission only for Sandrembi but not for their son.

Sandrembi came alone. After the meal, she found Chaishra wearing her attire. She asked her sister to give back her clothes as she was getting late. Chaishra took off the clothes and instead of giving it to her, threw them under the bed. Sandrembi crept under the bed and as she came out, Chaishra and her mother threw boiling water on her. Sandrembi had a dreadful death. Her soul turned into a dove and flew away. Chaishra put on the clothes and went to the palace. The king was surprised when he saw the undesirable change in his queen's face. He asked, "What happened? Why are there dark circles around your eyes and your heels all cracked?" To this Chaishra replied, "My dear king, in remembrance of my late parents I cried my heart out and therefore my eyes sank. I was so worried about our son that I ran quickly to the palace and my heels cracked." The king remained silent.

After a few days, the Dove flew into the royal garden. The gardener was cutting grasses when he heard a bird singing-

"O gardener of the king,

Go, tell your king,

Go, tell your queen,

Sandrembi on the tree,

Chaishra on the throne,

Don't harm my young child,

O king forgetful of wife."

The gardener was surprised to hear a bird singing. Immediately he ran and informed the king of this. The king came outside, took some grains and cried, "O dear Dove, if u are my beloved Sandrembi, please come down and eat this." The Dove flew down and ate it. The king kept it in a golden cage . That night in his dreams, Sandrembi came and said, "My lord,keep me for seven days.I will change into the human form." The king woke up and hid the cage. Chaisra saw this and started thinking that there must be something behind the king's behaviour.

One day, the king went hunting and seeing this as an opportunity, Chaishra killed the Dove and cooked it. That was the sixth day when the king returned. To his horror, he found the Dove dead. Chaishra offered the king the cooked Dove. Burning with anger, he shouted,"You evil woman! What have you done? Throw it away immediately before I throw you out of the palace." She threw it away immediately. The king locked himself up and cried , "O my dear Sandrembi.Now I have lost you forever. Please come back. Please come back."

After a few days, a beautiful mango tree started growing at the spot where Chaishra threw the cooked dove. But it bore just one fruit. The king kept a close watch at the tree. One day the gardener plucked the mango and took it home.

The next evening, the gardener looked for a knife to cut the mango. He couldn't find it. The next day when he had the knife he couldn't find the mango. This went on for seven consecutive days. On the eighth day, it turned into a beautiful woman. She cooked food for the gardener and when he returned home he was surprised to find some delicious food. The woman hid herself in a dark corner and came out only when the gardener wasn't home. This went on for few days. Growing suspicious,the gardener decided to hide himself near his house and act like he has gone . Thinking he left, the woman came out and started cooking. From the back, he caught her and to his surprise she was none other than the Queen. She told him about her story. The gardener went and narrated the story to the king. The king felt tears in his eyes , surprised and happy at the same time. He sent his royal guards to escort his queen.

Sandrembi came back. The king felt happy to get his wife again. The news reached Chaishra and the king asked both of them to have a duel in front of the subjects. They were given a sword each. The sword of justice. Chaishra struck Sandrembi but it didn't even touch her body. But when Sandrembi struck Chaishra's body she died instantly. The people rejoiced at the return of their queen. After this, Sandrembi became the queen once again. They lived happily ever after.

Glossary:

Tungol-a traditional container use to collect fishes caught during fishing.

Translated By:

*Priyadarshini Devi Yumnam
II Year*

The Tale Of 'Oma Tso - A Tibetan Tale

This is a tale of olden times where the villagers were struck with a problem when all the cows suddenly stopped giving milk. The villagers thinking it to be the fault of the cow herder got angry at him. The cow herder in order to free himself of any suspicion showed the villagers how the cows were grazing as usual but the milk was not being produced. their anger knew know bounds and therefore they planned to kill him. The cow herder had no idea of the evil deed that the villagers had hatched and went to the lake to feed his cows as usual ,when seven angels suddenly appeared before his eyes.

He was informed by the seven angels about the villagers' plan to kill him and that the reason why the cows had stopped producing milk was because it was the angels who had been drinking all the milk, therefore he blamed them for the predicament he is in. One of the seven angels felt remorseful for the cow herder and wanted to help him, she told him that in order to save his life he would have to carry her on his back ,down to the village. But there was one condition that he had to fulfill , no matter what the circumstance might be he should not turn back. He agreed to the condition and started his journey from the lake back to the village. He had reached halfway in his journey during which Mara trying to make him turn back when suddenly , he heard someone calling his name and the sound of footsteps echoing along with leaves crunching beneath someone's feet. Unable to resist the urge to look ,due to curiosity and fear of who might be following him, he turned back and suddenly the weight on his back became heavier. He was startled to see that the angel had turned stiff like a stone. He washed the angel who had turned rigid with the water in the stream while regretting his decision of looking back. He proceeded to carry the stoned angel to the King's palace. When the cow herder went to the King's court, the King believed his story , when he saw the stone like angel who spoke saying that she could bring peace and prosperity to his kingdom and would place it in his court. The kingdom was fraught with evil people who had malicious intentions. The people were jealous of each other, cases of poisoning, killing were normal and heinous crimes were rampant throughout the kingdom. In just a few weeks, the miraculous effects of the idol could be seen; the people's malice subsided, infertile women were blessed with children and people with diseases that were fatal were cured. The people began visiting the idol and tales of the miraculous idol started to spread around. The King from the nearby kingdom of Kulu also heard the tale of the angel and planned to take the idol for himself. The King of Kulu attacked the kingdom and when he attempted to lift the stone angel she became very heavy and he was unable to move her even with the help of hundred men.

After numerous unsuccessful attempts to take the angel, the King of Kulu in his rage tried to kill her with his sword due to which the angel lost her arm , tears began to flow from her eyes and eventually she completely turned into stone. Many years later, a Lama of high status in Tibet heard of her and expressed to his minister that he wished to donate an umbrella to the goddess. As soon as the Lama's lips uttered the words a gold umbrella flew from Tibet to the temple and stood atop the goddess's idol.

Today her idol lies in the Triloknath temple at the Lahaul District of Himachal Pradesh which shows a missing arm and teardrops from the time she was hurt. The idol brings peace, happiness and prosperity to the people of Triloknath and the nearby villages. The angel is considered a goddess. The place that the seven angels were found by the cow herder, there now exists seven streams that flow from the lake. The stream flowing from the lake is as white as milk and is called the 'oma tso'. The water remains white as milk since the ancient times. Buddhists and Hindus have both been worshipping at this shrine for many centuries.

Glossary:

Lama – The title for a teacher of the Dharma in Tibetan Buddhism

Mara -Buddhist devil who represents temptation, sin and death

'oma Tso – Milk lake

Translated By:

Kunsang Doma

II Year

Strange Relations

Abbu, being a government official, was always on a tour. There were a lot of servants in the house, and with them I never felt a sense of loneliness. As has been seen those who are empty handed are usually happy at heart and soul because they have a treasure of love and affection.

Fourteen years after the demise of my mother, when I was hardly 19 years old, a strange incident occurred. One day, Abbu returned from his trip accompanied by a pretty woman who might have been two or four years older than me. A fair complexioned lady with sharp features and a tall figure, her beauty in the form of a bride was obscuring the full moon.

“This is Salma Mateen.” Abbu said.

“I am Aamir Sohail.”

“So... this is your new mother.”

Hearing this I was shocked and began to look here and there with astonishment... that lady also felt embarrassed... as if she was repenting over what she did.

“Nafeesa aunty... this is your new mistress... she will explain everything to you.” Saying this Abbu went to his room and Salma Mateen followed him. Lost in my thoughts, I was left alone in the verandah, pondering over what just happened. What occurred to Abbu, that made him marry at this age? Even if he did want to get married, why did I spend fourteen years of my life without a mother, without whom our entire world revolved around the domestic help. I was carefree and happy among them; I was so used to their presence that they had become part and parcel of my life. Then why had Abbu suddenly felt the need for a better half? Furthermore how did he spend fourteen years without Amma? Suddenly lightning struck. The spark of that lightning enlightened my conscience: maybe a life partner is needed more in old age rather than in youth.

Last night I had dinner with Abbu. Salma Mateen didn't join us. Abbu as usual started shuffling the files and papers while I went to my own room. In the morning, Salma appeared and turned my books upside down and began to interrogate me regarding college.

“If you want the books to read, you can take them” I said in an aloof way.

She nodded and spoke nervously, “I gave up studying after high school.” Then she answered in a soft and disappointed voice, “Now there is no inclination towards books.”

“Okay, alright!” Saying this I went out swiftly. Neither did I care to know nor did I consider it important to know what she did all day in the house. Whenever I saw her, I found her staring into space. I started getting agitated seeing her worried. The household activities were the same as usual and the inhabitants were behaving without interfering in each other's affairs. That was not only the golden period of my education but also of my life. B.Com. first year exams were around the corner but my interest towards studies had somehow declined. Roaming around with friends for the entire day and watching films became my daily routine. Abbu wanted me not to stay

out after dark. There were no other restrictions apart from that. The thought of violating his orders never came to my mind. Suddenly, one day he warned me.

“You will go to college with a driver and you will come home directly from college. Rest of the time you will spend with your tutors.”

“But Abbu...”

Ignoring my reaction, Abbu said in a stern tone, “I am not used to listening to excuses; don't argue with me.”

I also got angry and retorted, “Am I an infant? Without giving me a chance to clarify, you started making ridiculous decisions as if I have committed a theft or something.”

“If drifting away from your education is not a theft then what is it?” He said in a harsh voice.

“When and what do you do? And why do you do it?”

I got a tight slap on my cheek before I could even complete my sentence. I would have received another slap but someone pulled me from behind: it was Salma. I was locked in my room. Outside, Abbu was mad with rage.

“Salma, don't interfere between us. He has become arrogant. I will have to teach him a lesson.”

“Is it appropriate to hit your young son in front of the servants?” Salma said in an alarmed voice.

“He's making a mistake.”

“But you should make sensible decisions!”

Listening to Salma speak in my favor, my anger began to cool down.

Abbu was sitting at the dining table as if nothing had happened last night. He warned me again while I sat with my head bent down. Now, I would return home early. I would have a talk with Salma but only for the sake of it, not more than two to four sentences. Although she was older than me, I still addressed her by her name. She would take care of my friends and converse with them actively. I would introduce her as my new mom while she smilingly would add “Step-mom” and everyone would burst into laughter. Even during these moments, she didn't reveal anything about herself.

Two years passed. Result of B.Com. was declared and Abbu sent me to America to pursue M.B.A. I was eager to finally breathe in a liberal atmosphere. Since Salma came into the house, I was experiencing a distance from Abbu equal to the love I earlier used to have for him. Sometimes I would be sympathetic and sometimes I would be frustrated with Salma. I could not hate her but at the same time I hesitated to call her “mother”. Abbu's stubbornness was also one of the reasons behind this. Now I understood that Abbu had married this young girl under some psychological

pressure but a girl in her early twenties marrying a 38 years old man was something difficult to understand.

During my education in America, neither did I return home nor did I write a letter. I used to have some formal conversation over the phone, but that too with Salma. Immediately after I completed my education, I was offered a job there itself. Meanwhile, phone calls and fax to return home started pouring in. I had to return home unwillingly. The driver was present at the airport. As soon as I reached home, Salma was standing right in front of me. I was meeting her after two years and three months. There was an eerie silence in the house. Salma looked fatigued. Dressed in white, she was neither wearing bangles nor a nose pin. My heart started pounding fast and I looked at her questioningly.

“Yes, your Abbu left us fifteen days ago. He had a heart attack which he could not survive.” I sat down as darkness engulfed me.

“Why didn't you inform me? You could have at least called or sent a telegram.”

“He had forbidden me.”

“You had to have realised.”

“I never expected this, everything happened so suddenly.” There was pin drop silence for a while.

“You could have informed me of his demise even formally,” I said in a harsh tone.

My thoughts wandered seeing Salma's furtive smile.

“In his will, he has left the entire property for you,” she said.

“The property can not substitute Abbu,” I said dejectedly.

“There is one condition also.”

“What?”

“I should be treated as a real mother till the end,” she said mildly.

I started staring at her. She too had fixed her eyes on me as if searching for something: maybe acceptance of her as a real mother, or maybe for her dignity?

“There are some shares in my name. I'll transfer those to you,” she said in a somewhat dignified manner.

I became restless. Before I could burst into anger she fell on the sofa with exhaustion and then she had no idea where she was. Her face was dripping with sweat. Her breathing became rapid. There were dark circles around her eyes. Seeing her condition, I asked the servants to call the doctor immediately.

“*Begum Sabiba* had just returned from the hospital,” said Nafeesa aunty.

Looking at her condition I took her to the hospital again forcibly but before we could enter the doctor's room, she said in a feeble voice, "You stay here."

I sat outside for half an hour, turning the pages of a magazine.

"Doctor has called you inside," said the nurse.

"Sit down."

I sat down in the front chair. Doctor gestured the nurse to take Salma towards the bed.

Doctor said, "Salma has cancer in the last stage. Prayers are needed." I don't know what the doctor *Sahib* kept saying afterwards, I was so shocked. When the doctor went towards Salma, I followed him like a lifeless body. Blood was dripping into her body through a bottle. Seeing me, she gestured to me to sit down. Soon, I was searching for answers to my questions in her eyes. All of a sudden, I got up and asked sternly:

"Were you aware of this before?"

"Yes..."

"Did Abbu know?"

"Yes your Abbu knew...he knew this before marriage," she replied

My emotional breakdown began to decline by itself and was turned into sympathy and care towards her.

"Mother equals love, affection and sacrifice." This came from the bottom of my heart but I couldn't utter these words. Salma Mateen looked at me with affection but couldn't say anything.

"Your father was a close friend of my father. My mother, just like your mother, bid me farewell when I was a child, my father expired in a sudden accident. I was left alone to fight cancer. I would have lost the battle long ago but your father gave me courage and support. It was necessary for a young and pretty woman to enter into a marriage with your Abbu because it was a taboo for a young unmarried woman to live with a man. It was crucial for me to escape this nuisance because eventually I was also going to depart from this world."

Two drops of tears, like pearls, were about to trickle down her cheeks but I gathered them in my hand. I looked towards the sky and saw a pair of eyes smiling upon me.

Translated by:

Albeena Alvi

II Year

Va-Tse Nang Shangkui Rungs - A Ladakhi Tale

There was once a *Langto* and a *Va-tse*. Both were good friends. The *Va-tse* planned to go and arrange some food for both of them. He asked the *Langto* to stay back and to call him only if he is in danger from the *Shangku* and he leaves.

The *Langto* calls him and the *Va-tse* appears to rescue him. When he comes he finds out that he is actually not in any danger and goes away angry at the *Langto* telling him to only call out for help when he is in real danger. The *Langto* shouts again and the *Va-tse* appears for the second time to save him but finds that the *Langto* has tricked him yet again. The *Va-tse* now does not believe when the *Langto* shouts for help the third time. When the *Va-tse* gets back with the food, he finds the *Langto* has been killed. He finds out that the *Shangku* has killed his friend and seeks revenge upon the *Shangku*. He hatches a plan to kill the *Shangku*.

The *Va-tse* first collects some glue from the saps of the *chuli* trees which he pretends to put on his eyelids. When the *Shangku* sees this, he gets curious to know what the *Va-tse* is doing.. However *Va-tse* replies that since the *Shangku* killed his friend he shall not reveal the secret about what he is doing. The *Shangku* pleads with the *Va-tse* to tell him his secret, and the *Va-tse* agrees after after a while. The *Va-tse* whispers in his ear that applying this mixture and basking in the sun rays will allow the person to have the ability to see heaven in all its glory. After hearing this, the *Shangku* pesters the *Va-tse* to do the same for him. The *Va-tse* pretends to reluctantly agree to his wish. The *Shangku* applies the glue on his eyelids and sits in the sun. After a while, the *Shangku* tries to open his eyes but realises that he is unable to. He hopes that the villagers might be of some help. The *Shangku* is scared to trust the *Va-tse* again as he had been successful in making a fool out of him. The *Va-tse* asks him to carry a bag full of sand and him on his back to the village. In this way they will be embraced by the villagers for their great friendship and provide them with everything. The *Shangku* refuses to believe him as he was tricked earlier. But somehow he falls in his trap. As soon as they enter the village, the people grow fierce and come forward to attack. The *Shangku* can not witness their hostility as he is now blind. The *Va-tse* tells him that the people are overjoyed to see them. As the mob comes nearer, the *Va-tse* jumps from the *Shangku*'s back and the *Shangku* is beaten to death.

Glossary:

1. *Nang* - And
2. *Rungs* - Tale
3. *Langto* - Buffalo
4. *Va-tse* - Tibetan sand fox found mainly in Tibet and Ladakh
5. *Shangku* - Wolf
6. *Chuli* - Apricot

Translated By

Kunzes Dolma

II Yea

Academic Papers

Critical Analysis of Helen's Character in the Iliad

Homer's *Iliad* is one of the earliest works of western literature. The 15,000 line epic was composed around 8th century BC. The authorship of *Iliad* as well as the identity of Homer, however, has been a topic of debate to this day. The Homeric question raises doubts on who Homer really was. There are mainly two schools of thoughts, one being that of the Analysts who find the incongruities in the work and suggest that it cannot be just one poet who can be credited but a line of oral poets whose contribution over the years resulted in the final work. There are on the other hand, The Unitarians who believe Homer was a blind bard who orated the epic and is the one who must be accounted for the work. Homer's other famous works include 'The Odyssey'.

In the words of American literary critic, Harold Bloom "Beauty is one of the greatest archetypes in Homer's pantheon. The one who possesses beauty possesses the world in Homeric society". The beauty in Homer's *Iliad* is Helen, 'goddess among women', the wife of Achaean Menelaus who is abducted by Trojan Paris which results in a ten year war between the Trojans and the Greeks. Helen is introduced as she is sitting in a hall, weaving. This practice of hers might be symbolic to the way she is embroidering history as the Trojans and the Greeks wage war over her. This has been suggested by several literary critics. She is, in a sense, weaving and altering the fates of all those involved in the bloodshed. She is also using weaving, a typically domestic activity, to express herself and write her side of the story. This shows the side of Helen that has a strong desire to express herself and be independent. Her relationship with the elderly Trojans, who compliment her beauty and pleasantly welcome her, especially Priam, shows that she is not a burden on them and they do not blame her for the circumstances. However, their attitude towards her doesn't seem to influence how she views herself in this situation. Another layer of Helen's personality is revealed when she calls herself a 'slut' in one instance and holds herself responsible for the war. She feels guilt and nostalgia as she longs for home and her old life.

As Harold Bloom suggested, "Helen, even though abducted, has not and will not be treated like any other woman. She will never be a slave even in a place that is not her home and will remain a "goddess among women." But, despite having this status superior than other women, she is repeatedly treated as an object, fought over by men as if she was a prize, asked to make love to Paris on command of Aphrodite and forced to do things against her will. Helen's character cannot be judged as black or white like most characters in Greek history and mythology, whether man or mortal. There is a lot of grey area as the flaws and the good qualities often overlap. The contradictory circumstances make her character complex and layered. She is intelligent and ambitious but her potential is overlooked because she is a woman. She is referred to as the 'daughter of Zeus' but finds herself helpless among mortal men from time to time. She has her moments of strength but that strength is also crushed under certain circumstances. The status of Helen, therefore, is that she is the way she is because of how her surroundings have forced and molded her to be otherwise she has the potential to be much more.

Bibliography

Bloom, Harold. *Homer's Iliad*. Langhorne: Chelsea House, 1987.

Homer. *Iliad*. Delhi: Penguin Publishers, 2016.

Nandini Joshi

I Year

Symbolism of Weaving in *The Iliad*

The Iliad is one of the earliest works in Western literature, epic of approximately 15,000 lines, dated to have been composed around the end of the 8th century or early 7th century B.C. There are two schools of thought regarding authorship of the text— there are analysts or separatists who claim that *The Iliad* is not the work of a single author while on the other hand there are Unitarians who believe that Homer, also known as the 'blind poet' has written the entire text. It is speculated that Homer lived around 450 BC and probably couldn't write therefore he dictated the text to the scribes.

According to Milman Parry's 'Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral Verse-Making: I. Homer and Homeric Style', Homer had followed techniques of centuries old traditions such as use of repetition designed to help the performer. The entire epic revolves around the war between the Trojans and the Greeks, due to the abduction of Helen by a Trojan named Paris. Helen is the daughter of Zeus and originally married to Menelaus, a Greek warrior. According to the famous 'Golden Apple' myth, Paris chose Aphrodite as the fairest of all and is rewarded with Helen, the world's most beautiful woman. Paris seduces Helen in the absence of Menelaus and takes her to Troy, resulting in the Trojan war. The text begins with the tenth year of the siege of Troy. The given lines are taken from Book III of *The Iliad*, titled 'A Duel and a Trojan View of Greeks', in which Helen appears for the first time.

The book begins with both the armies advancing to the battle, but Paris intervenes and proposes a single combat with Menelaus claiming that, whoever is the winner gets to take back Helen along with the property. At this point Iris, the messenger goddess approaches Helen, disguised as Laodice, Helen's sister-in-law. Helen is introduced to us as sitting in the hall and symbolically weaving the trials faced by the Trojans and the Greeks for her sake. The significance of these lines are that through weaving, history is being embroidered by Helen, her own point of view is being put forth and in fact, metaphorically speaking, she is weaving her own story in the thread of text. She is presenting her own version of the Trojan War and grieving over being the main cause behind it. Weaving may be seen as a domestic activity to be handled by woman, but at the same time, Helen's creation of art indicates that she isn't simply a stereotypical 'docile' woman who was abducted. Helen is shown as a woman who speaks her mind and respects others; she also feels tremendously guilty and lives a life of tearful woe as a result. In fact, the cloth on which she weaves, the color purple itself can be seen as an association with Dionysius, who represents the defying of social norms and also a means for women to enjoy their rights. The colour purple is reminiscent of Dionysius's constant rebellion against the restrictive and structured Apollonian ideology. Helen by weaving on a purple cloth can be associated with Dionysius's spirit and sense of freedom.

To get a deeper understanding of the symbolism of weaving, we need to look at it from a broader aspect. Weaving in ancient Greece was most probably seen as a domestic activity ensuring that women remained indoors and under a veil. However according to Kathryn Sullivan Krueger, in her book *Weaving the word: The Metamorphosis of Weaving and Female Textual Production*,

literature from this culture shows how a woven object embodies the psychology of its weaver and how weaving itself becomes a metaphor for a woman's thought process. In fact the Greek term '*metis*' (craftiness or plotting) is often associated with weaving or sewing. Penelope's time spent on the loom to deceive the suitors, allows her to wait for Odysseus, Philomela's ordeal which she depicted on a tapestry allows her to escape from the clutches of Tereus. Similarly, Helen's weaving on the purple cloth allows her to bring out her opinions, independence and her guilt. The use of such textiles brings out the forbidden desires of the weaver. It can also be said that women who were denied education, considered their works of art as substitutes for written texts. Homer has shown many female characters as weaving in both *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*, implying their capability to weave plots and speech. In Helen's case, weaving becomes a metaphor for empowered speech and a medium of storytelling. According to Kathryn Sullivan, Homer shows Helen of Troy weaving a pictorial representation of his poem but at the same time, this is from her point of view. Therefore, I certainly agree that weaving is symbolic in understanding Helen's role in the text and her internal conflict. The fact that Helen is a strong and independent woman can be justified through completely unanticipated view of Trojans of Helen. In the text, when Helen approaches the elderly Trojans, who were observing the war, they whisper to each other: "No one could blame the Trojans and Greek men-at-arms for suffering so long for such a woman's sake. She is fearfully like the immortal goddesses. All the same, and lovely..."(3.157-161)

Helen is therefore not seen as a burden by the Trojans, which comes as a surprise. Another instance that contradicts that Helen was captured is seen in her relationship with Priam when he says "Dear child, come here and sit in front of me, so that you can see your former husband and your relatives and friends. I don't hold you responsible for any of this, but the Gods..."(3.163-166)

The conversation between Priam and Helen puts forth the argument that perhaps Helen had willingly eloped with Paris and that it was her own independent decision. Priam doesn't blame her and in fact out of politeness he asks Helen to tell him about each of the warriors, despite knowing all of them. Helen then describes each of the warriors according to her own opinion. Another instance is that of Aphrodite approaching Helen disguised as an old woman she knew but Helen is clever enough to see through the façade and she immediately protests and blames the Goddess: "Mysterious Goddess, why are you trying to lead me on like this? You are plotting, I suppose, to carry me off to some still more distant town, in Phrygia or lovely Maeonia..."(3.399-405) Helen mocks the Goddess for her slyness and even when she is taken to Paris, she immediately provokes him, questioning his skills as a warrior and comparing him to her former husband, Menelaus, whom she considered more powerful. All of these instances can be connected with the symbolism of weaving which represents Helen's freedom of speech and expression. Helen's internal conflict with war, through the idea of weaving, can be represented through this instance: ' I respect and admire you, my father-in-law. I wish I had chosen to die in misery before I came here with your son...."(3.173-177)

Helen feels the shamelessness and guilt of being the major reason of the war. Thus, she is conflicted claiming herself to be responsible, yet unable to do anything to clear the chaos she has caused and simultaneously blames Aphrodite for her slyness and Paris for his folly. Although weaving shows how Helen is empowered, at the same time we see another facet of Helen, in which

she feels ashamed of committing in infidelity, a social condemnation. According to Synnove des Bouvrie's essay, 'Helen of Troy: A Symbol of Greek Culture', she claims that the myth of Helen meant more than an entertaining romance for the ancient Greeks, the tale conveyed the crucial values of their social institutions. Another aspect seen through the weaving symbolism is that of suppression. Although, Helen protests against Aphrodite, while driven by guilt and accepting her destiny, she agrees to go and comfort Paris.

According to Kathryn Sullivan, anthropologist Elizabeth Barber has noted that Greek women occasionally did weave large storytelling cloths. Barber's research indicates that such clothes were meant for religious and political festivals and rituals. The earliest surviving examples of a storytelling cloth is the Bayeux Tapestry, a cloth created many centuries after the *The Iliad*. This tapestry according to Elizabeth Barber, provides clues to the importance of the story-telling cloth. Their significance lies in the fact that they were not meant for decoration alone and were an extremely important medium of storytelling for the illiterate audience. Art is thus seen as a medium of breaking out of silence. Homer shows Helen weaving a story-telling cloth of the almost ten-year old Trojan war incited by her. In this sense, she has been given some sort of agency by Homer, as she is telling the story the way she would like to present it.

Bibliography

Bloom, Harold. *Homer's The Iliad*. Langhorne: Chelsea House, 2005.

Bouvrie, Synnove. *Helen of Troy: A Symbol of Greek Culture*. The Norwegian Institute at Athens, 1991.

Krueger, Kathryn. *Weaving the Word: The Metamorphosis of Weaving and Female Textual Production*. Susquehanna University Press, 2001.

Parry, Milman. "Studies in the Epic Technique of Oral Verse-Making: I. Homer and Homeric Style." *Harvard Studies Classical Philology* 41 (1930): 73-148.

Albeena Alvi

II Year

Ambedkar and Premchand's *Kafan*

Premchand (1880-1936), a well-known Indian writer of Hindi-Urdu literature and a Gandhian, was writing in the first half of the twentieth century where most of his works revolved around the downtrodden sections of the society. *Kafan* (The Shroud) written in 1936 was his last work which sparked a lot of appreciation and criticism. *Kafan* reflects a certain kind of social realism which goes parallel with Ambedkar's observation of the Dalit community, as it doesn't paint a romanticized image of victims rising up for rebellion, instead it shows characters lacking Ambedkarite consciousness and their inhumanity as a consequence of caste system on their psyche. Ghisu and his son Madho who are 'Chamars' by caste, are work-shirkers suffering from immense poverty and caste discrimination. In their house is Budhia, Madho's wife who brought about order in their lives and is going through terrible labor pains. Both of them, insensitive to the woman's plight, worry about their own survival, reminisce over Thakur's feast and keep waiting for her to die. Her death allows them to collect some money from the villagers to buy a shroud for her cremation. However, they spend the money on eating and drinking. They blame the brutal caste system for their conditions but at the same time do nothing to escape the vicious cycle.

Kafan, a story based in Uttar Pradesh, brings out realism in many ways such as the fact that Ambedkar's anti-caste movement was limited to Maharashtra and didn't reach other parts of the country; that is, events like Mahad Satyagraha were not as widespread as one may assume. Premchand plunges us into a reality of U.P away from Ambedkar's ideologies and indicates how Dalits devoid of education internalized the caste system. In the case of Madho and Ghisu, there is no conscious conceptualizing of anti-caste assertion which is why Ambedkar focused on education. Anna Fernandes in her thesis 'An in depth educational study of the life and work of Dr Babasaheb Ambedkar with special reference to philosophy and sociology of education', mentions Ambedkar's idea of education. "It rather connotes a de-schooling of the minds which get mechanically schooled in tune with tradition. Ambedkar wanted Dalits to develop consciousness about the caste system and thus become educated and act accordingly to "emancipate themselves". For the Dalit movement, education was a tool of empowerment as it made them aware and led to the capacity of 'questioning', considering how Ambedkar's education abroad was his introduction to equality and the impetus behind his protests. Madho and Ghisu are both aware of the injustice but their criticism never becomes a rebellion due to lack of education. Moreover, according to Ambedkar the participation of Dalits in their own misery was the greatest threat to the community as it rendered them helpless. Madho and Ghisu not only internalize the caste system but also advocate Brahminical concepts like attaining 'Maya' and also gratefulness towards 'Thakur', a Brahmin, for feeding Ghisu. They live in a society where shirkers like them are better off than other Dalits who work hard to earn a living indicating that the system is equally exploitative towards all Dalits and also that they don't see united collectivism as a possibility. Alok Rai in his essay 'Poetic and Social Justice: Some reflections on the Premchand-Dalit controversy', mentions how "Ghisu and Madho, they take form not of idealists burning with a passion for social justice but rather snatching desperate solace from a life and a social order that gives them nothing". Moreover, their inhumanity, hypocrisy, cunningness and opportunism, a consequence of the caste system is also their means of survival. They are victims who become victimizers as they were indirectly responsible for Budhia's death, thus somehow participating in a murder. They lacked social, economic and emotional resources to welcome a new person in the house. Premchand usually

attracted sympathy towards Dalits from readers but this shifts in *Kafan* as the brutality of characters brings out the brutality of the caste system. Pradeep Kumar in his thesis 'Literary expression of political consciousness among dalits: a critical study based on selected works of Hindi Literature', mentions that "Mourning is a luxury a starving man can't afford but it is difficult to condone the actions of Madho and Ghisu. The story shows precariousness of cherished human values, with bestiality on one side and hypocrisy on other". Towards the end of the story Madho feels a twinge of guilt over Budhia's death. Both of them also give away some food to the beggar indicating that they weren't inhumane, it is their situation that made them heartless. Their buried humanity comes out, but it comes out only when they have the means to be humane.

Many critics see Premchand's work as anti-Dalit as it shows the community as inhumane and victimized. However, the harsh reality in the story is a necessity because it shows that Ambedkar's efforts were not recognised everywhere and logically speaking, since Premchand was a writer based in U.P it was impossible for him to include revolutionary ideals in his stories. *Kafan* doesn't aim at garnering sympathy, as 'sympathy' according to Ambedkar was not enough to upsurge the Dalits out of the vicious caste system. Madho and Ghisu's helplessness is like the 'claustrophobic' situation described by Ambedkar when he dealt with untouchability throughout his life. Moreover *Kafan* leads to the debate whether a non- Dalit, especially Premchand who belonged to a 'Kayastha' family, has the right to contribute to Dalit literature as many argue that only a Dalit writer can do justice to the community. Thus, social revolution never occurred in India, as mentioned by Ambedkar, due to aspects such as limited awareness and deeply rooted caste system which refused to give the Dalit community basic human rights. Lack of education and acceptance of their fate as shown in *Kafan* indicates a landscape suffused with casteism which continues to be relevant in the twentieth century.

Bibliography

Leeta, Anna Fernandes. *An In-Depth Educational Study of the Life and Work of Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar with Special Reference to Philosophy and Sociology of Education*. Pune: Savitribai Phule Pune University, 2003.

Rai, Alok. "Poetic and Social Justice: Some Reflections on the Premchand-Dalit Control." Kapse, Dhananjay. *Modern Indian Writing in English Translation*. Delhi: Worldview Publishers, 2016.

Sharma, Pradeep Kumar. *Literary Expression of Political Consciousness Among Dalits: A Critical Study Based on Selected Works of Hindi Literature*. Delhi: Jawaharlal University, 2014.

Albeena Alvi
II Year

Misogyny in Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*

“I am the Duchess of Malfi still... Peace; it affrights not me.”

--- Act 4, Scene 2

With a title that ostensibly gives agency to a female character, *The Duchess of Malfi* weaves a tapestry of multiple illusions regarding the worth and presence of John Webster's literary characters. Even though the first impression that the readers make might be inclined towards a positive angle, the kaleidoscope does change patterns by the time the last page of the text is read. The irony lies in the title itself: the play is an amalgamation of tragic and problematic episodes, which put the Duchess on the receiving end of blatant misogyny from not only the male characters, but (indirectly) from the playwright as well. For that matter, none of the women in the text have been able to shirk away this absurd disparity. What does this tell us about the nature of the Jacobean tragedy or John Webster as a playwright? Was the latter a misogynist who used literature to look down upon women? Or was he a feminist who tried to offer a critique on the society of the early 17th century and the treatment of women in that period?

Like every other literary tragedy, Webster sets his play in motion by introducing his characters via the *Dramatis Personae*, which is defined as a list of the characters or actors in a drama. Keeping in mind the title of the play, one expects to see the Duchess' name appear first in the list, and that too with an intricate description of her disposition. All these expectations go down the drain the moment we read Bosola's name at the top of the catalog. Yes, Bosola emerges as an essential character in this dramatic piece and undergoes an absolute transformation, but that doesn't change the fact that the text is called '*The Duchess of Malfi*' and not 'Bosola of Malfi.' This becomes the first instance where Webster gives a hint of how he has portrayed the women characters in his play: men's trivial 'possessions' devoid of any sort of agency. The fact that she is simply referred to as the Duchess throughout the play highlights the trivialization of her identity; her name is never revealed. Gender dynamics never fail to eclipse the individuality and distinctiveness of women.

One of the most interesting things to note is that the Duchess' very first words in the play are addressed to her brother, Ferdinand. She refers to him as 'sir' and speaks for only a few seconds. For someone who won herself the title of a Jacobean tragedy, an introduction as feeble as above-mentioned defeats the purpose of establishing the text in favor of the Duchess. She presents herself as a sister, a wife, and a mother, but not as a political ruler of Malfi. However, many feminist readers try to uplift her stature by pointing out that even at the brink of her death, she refuses to repent; she establishes the truth of her being the Duchess of Malfi and boldly states that the thought of an untimely death doesn't affright her. As we observe towards the end of the first act, she is even granted the stage space to choose her partner on her own: a rebellious action that threatens both patriarchy and patrilineality. As Aspasia Velissariou puts it:

“The Duchess' marital choice of her steward, Antonio, re-inscribes the masculine terror of a female sexuality turned loose, which dictates the structure of feeling in Jacobean tragedy... The Duchess's sexual choice of her steward and her marriage to him fully articulates the frightening

vision of women on top, intensified by yet another grave inversion whereby in the state's mirror structure, that is, the family, the husband must be the head to woman/body." (Velissariou, 275)

Even though this gives the text a feminist edge, one cannot deny the fact that Webster did manage to end the Duchess' character in an unfair manner and that too, with the consent of her brother, who wanted her dead because she went ahead with her second marriage and bore Antonio's children as well. Suffice to say, a woman's body becomes a commodity for the men to possess, and the same body becomes an object of her own brother's incestuous desires. The question of chastity of women gets highlighted in the text when extremely inappropriate and misogynistic comments are passed about the Duchess' sexuality, including the instance when Ferdinand addresses her as a "lusty widow." Theodora Jankowski has commented on this issue of maltreatment of the Duchess and her body:

She became an object of commerce who—passed from father to husband—sealed a bargain of greater or lesser economic significance... The very nature of woman's objectification within dynastic marriage leads to Ferdinand's obsessive sexual questioning. That a wife's body became, in essence, a vessel for reproducing her husband's or her father's bloodlines made it necessary for that vessel to remain unpolluted by sexual contact with unapproved males. This situation necessitated confining a woman and preserving her chastity at all costs.

(Jankowski, 228)

Ferdinand emerges as an incredibly problematic character, who appears to be exercising his power over the Duchess with the gaze of a voyeur's. Even though he tries to paint his discomfort over the surface by projecting his rampant fury on his siblings, the hidden fragment of his jealousy doesn't really fall back. Many critics suggest that Ferdinand's character isn't as simple as the shades of black or white. Frank Whigham writes in one of his essays:

I conceive Ferdinand as a threatened aristocrat, frightened by the contamination of his ascriptive social rank and obsessively preoccupied with its defense. This view, when coupled with Leech's evidence, suggests that Ferdinand's incestuous inclination toward his sister is a social posture, of hysterical compensation—a desperate expression of the desire to evade degrading association with infer... His leering assurances to her that all her most private thoughts and actions will come to light mark the invasive urge to control of the authoritarian Voyeur.

(Whigham, 169)

In short, the objectification of women becomes a noteworthy chapter of *The Duchess of Malfi*. Even though the Duchess seemingly floats over the textual surface, it is essential for the readers to divert their attention to the female characters who display themselves in the background of the text. Apart from her, we find women like Cariola, Julia and the Old Lady, who fall victim to misogyny and stereotypical word-battles.

Cariola's presence in the text is similar to that of a mediator's; she appears as the Duchess' shadow, and becomes her confidante, even though she is quite often dismissed by her masters. To see Cariola only as the maidservant of the royal quarters would be a very shallow reading of the text. For instance, when the Duchess decides to propose to Antonio for marriage, she confides in Cariola about the same, claiming that she has given up her 'life' and her 'fame' to Cariola's known secrecy. The latter's reply highlights her trustworthy and loyal nature:

Both shall be safe: For I'll conceal this secret from the world
As warily as those that trade in poison, Keep poison from their
children.

-- Act 1, Scene 2

As seen in texts like *The Rover* (Aphra Behn), the concepts of love and marriage can be extremely questionable in certain situations. For instance, the male protagonist of said restoration comedy – Willmore – is notorious for feeding lies to women like Angellica Bianca in order to sleep with them. He offers her a fantasy of her capturing his heart and them being in love forever. It seems like the Duchess tries to draw away from such a situation by making Cariola the witness of her marriage with Antonio, who'd vouch for her if he disapproves of their marital ceremony in future. The fact that the women of the 17th century were at the disposal of men and hence had to take precautions in order to surpass such sketchy scenarios shows their little worth and importance in society. Whilst Cariola promises to maintain the knowledge of the marriage as a secret, she emerges as a prophetic voice in the text, foreshadowing that the Duchess will have to pay for this so called felony. However, Antonio reprimands her for refusing to ever get married, and provides the readers with allusions to the myths of Daphne, Sirex and Anaxarete. In a way, Webster suggests that the women who forgo marriage and embrace a single life are denied happiness and a sense of domesticity; that women are designed to succumb to men by marrying them. Cariola does stick by the Duchess throughout the text, but her story inevitably comes to an end. Her death comes moments after the Duchess', and there's a sharp contrast between the two: while the Duchess dies in a dramatically crucial scene, full of dignity and acquiescence, Cariola grovels and begs until the bitter end, doing everything she can to convince Bosola to spare her life.

Apart from Cariola, we meet another female character who has been designed in a way that satisfies certain societal stereotypes, which successfully target married women. Julia is introduced to the readers with two labels: Castruchio's wife, and the Cardinal's mistress. Her character has been painted in a way that defines her as the play's stereotypical fickle female, with constantly changing affections. Webster establishes her sexual availability when she is incessantly wooed by multiple male characters, including Delio. Near the end of the play, she becomes enamoured with Bosola, who then uses her to get the Cardinal to admit his involvement in the Duchess' murder. Like every

other woman in the play, Julia is punished for the “flaw” in her character. The Cardinal kills her – because of her betrayal – by making her kiss a poison covered book. Julia’s presence has been intelligently used by Webster to glorify the false existence of gendered stereotypes; a clear message of women losing track when driven by their desires and sexuality. Literary critics find this problematic on multiple levels, because it creates a dichotomy between women – a domestic, loyal and submissive wife versus a sexually independent, outspoken and uncontrollable wife. Interestingly, certain parallels have also been drawn between Julia and the Duchess. As Christina Luckyj writes in one of her essays:

“...Julia as a parody of the Duchess, designed to undercut and qualify her values. Boklund suggests that “since the main action of the play is based on the consequences of a deliberate flouting of the laws guarding social decorum, the by-plot may serve to provide a commentary in word and action on the heroine’s behavior.” Such attempts to find a “tragic flaw” in the Duchess, reflected and confirmed in Julia, are difficult to support with the text.”

(Luckyj, 269)

Hence, even though the Duchess and Julia never share the stage space throughout the play, it is possible to link the two characters in a sense that they both exercise their agency when it comes to choosing partners, and in turn, Webster perhaps exercises his authorial power by penalizing the both of them before the play ends.

As if the downfall of three women was not enough for the audience, the playwright introduces yet another female character whose existence is all about being on the receiving end of a copious amount of misogyny and humiliation. Webster plots the character of the Old Lady as a visual evidence of how women use makeup in order to look young and pretty. So, one can say that she might be a part of the royal family because she has the money to purchase all such beauty products. The Lady shares the space with Bosola, who goes all-out against a woman’s closet and links her with witchcraft. According to him, women like the Old Lady offer sexual pleasure in ‘drooping autumn’ and for a ‘precious reward.’ Here, Bosola is extending a problematic description on women’s sexuality; how some women offer sexual pleasure when young and out of pure love, while aged women declining in vigour would receive anything in return for the same:

... The orange tree bears ripe and green fruit
And blossoms together. And some of you give entertainment for pure love: but
more, for more precious reward. The lusty spring smells well: but
drooping autumn tastes well.

-- Act 2, Scene 2

Even though some readers might want to defend Webster's dramatic strategies by claiming that he is trying to criticise the societal background of the 17th century Britain, other critics refuse to let go of such a blatant misogyny that is visible throughout the text. The little freedom that he graciously grants the Duchess is rudely snatched from her as she is literally choked to death. So, the fact that everyone ultimately dies in the end doesn't make the feminist readers of the 21st century any happier or satisfied. They still feel the wrong that's done to all these female characters is not justified and many of them are quite vocal about the same. In short, Webster may have practiced their unsolicited character assassination and took away from them what little agency and independence they had, thus violating and misusing his

Bibliography

Jankowski, Theodora. "Defining/Confining the Duchess: Negotiating the Female Body in John Webster's "The Duchess of Malfi"." *Studies in Philology* 87 (1990): 221-245.

Luckyj, Christina. "Great Women of Pleasure: Main Plot and Subplot in "The Duchess of Malfi." *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 27 (1987): 177-379.

Behn, Aphra. *The Rover*. Delhi. Worldview Publications. 2016

Velissariou, Aspasia. "The Body Politic, Female Transgression and Punishment in Jacobean Tragedy." Sidia Fiorato, John Drakakis. *Performing the Renaissance Body: Essays on Drama, Law, and Representation*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG,, 2016. 227-289.

Webster, John. *The Duchess of Malfi*. Delhi: Worldview Publications, 2016.

Whigham, Frank. "Sexual and Social Mobility in "The Duchess of Malfi." *PMLA* 100 (1985): 167-186.

Angela Braru
II Year

Anne Bradstreet's "Anxiety of Authorship" in 'The Prologue'

*"Preeminence in all and each is yours;
Yet grant some small acknowledgement of ours."*

-- 'The Prologue'

Even though Anne Bradstreet's *'The Prologue'* begins with a tone of modesty, this submissive approach soon shifts into an air of assertiveness; a feeble, feminine voice initiates the poem and slowly, it demands an acceptance and acknowledgement of female writers. Anne Bradstreet, a puritan woman, survived the difficulties of her life by constantly writing. Most of her works are poetic verses, and it was her brother-in-law who took her manuscript to England in 1650 and published it. Her poetry includes a tone of humility verging on self-denigration, which comes from her sensitive perception of being a woman poet in the world of men. Interestingly, she uses this as a poetic strategy in *'The Prologue'* by pedestalizing her lighthearted conversations with Du Bartas and Philip Sidney, which become audible in the last lines. As Marian Schlotterbeck states:

Bradstreet's refined verse conforms to and perfects many of the standard poetic conventions used by men and is a subtle assertion of women's capabilities in the literary sphere... She found a place for uniquely personal expression working both within an acceptable literary format of highly stylized verse and imagery, and through the Puritan values of her society.

(Schlotterbeck, 03)

With an evident jerk of self-doubt, Bradstreet undergoes what Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar call "The Anxiety of Authorship." According to them, "the 'anxiety of influence' that a male poet experiences is felt by a female poet as an even more primary 'anxiety of authorship' – a radical fear that she cannot create, that because she can never become a 'precursor' the act of writing will isolate or destroy her." In the text, Bradstreet appears to be looking down upon her art of writing and compares her works with those of the male poets; the readers might interpret it as an act of upliftment of her opponents. She blames her "foolish, broken, blemished Muse" for singing to her; such denigration could indicate a transference of the criticism that she faced. A constant parallel is drawn between her and Greek poets as well, which somehow emphasizes the patriarchal literary tradition. However, the tone of sarcasm is present in subtle amounts; she takes a fairly sardonic stance when she talks about the literary injustice that women face. The fact that finding an audience becomes a herculean task for women writers appears in her words. As Maria Garcia-Rouphail suggests:

Seventeenth century women poets found themselves in the awkward position of having to discover their purpose and place in a poetic tradition, as well as to identify their audience... As a rule, the women's interest in poetry was kindled as a result of the education and encouragement they received from their fathers, brothers, or husbands.

(Rouphail, 60)

In stanza five, Bradstreet asserts her right to write poetry. She excoriates those who tell her that her hand is better suited for a needle than a “poet’s pen” and bemoans the fact that even if her poems do attain prominence, people will claim that she either stole them or chanced upon them accidentally. However, she doesn’t plead for an acknowledgment of her works, but tells men to look outside the facade of their own eminence. She avers that women aren’t naturally inferior to men; instead, they are denied opportunities because of their gender. She emerges as a “foremother” to the coming generations of women writers and upends the anxiety of authorship in her favor, which is essential because Bradstreet didn’t really have any female role models to look up to. Gilbert and Gubar state that “The woman writer... searches for a female model not because she wants dutifully to comply with male definitions of her ‘femininity’ but because she must legitimize her own rebellious endeavors.”

‘The Prologue’ suggests that the comparison of men and women writers is a doomed project because of the deeply embedded gender inequalities. When they aren’t on an equal footing, the existence of a fair comparison is out of question. Even in the diverse notions of literature, gender comes into play. Robert Hilliker draws similarities between Bradstreet and Marie de l’Incarnation and highlights the significance of their regendering: “... It (regendering) shifts attention away from the hierarchical, even divisive, class identities that remain central to earlier male authors by taking politics out of the sphere of male competition... It organizes the discursive connections between national politics, religion, and collective identity around the figure of a mother instructing her children in proper moral behavior.” (Hilliker, 04-05)

Bradstreet leaves the reader to decide whether her work is of blazing gold, though she may not be regarded as capable of generating anything better than “unrefined ore.” She gives space to a rather repressed gender in the world of literature and uses this repression to give a sarcastic reply to all those who look down upon her poems, which aren’t mere tokens of something more significant than her words on paper; for starters, something as precious as gold comes out of its ore only.

Bibliography

Bradstreet, Anne. “Prologue.” Bradstreet, Anne. *The Tenth Muse, Lately Sprung up in America*. London, 1650.

Hilliker, Robert. “Engendering Identity: The Discourse of Familial Education in Anne Bradstreet and Marie de l’Incarnation.” *Early American Literature* 42 (2007): 435-470.

Rouphail, Maria Garcia. “Anne Bradstreet, Her Poetry, and the Policies of Exclusion: A Study of the Developing Sense of Poetic Purpose.” *Electronic Thesis or Dissertation*. Ohio: Ohio State University, 1982.

Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar. “Infection in the Sentence: The Woman Writer and the Anxiety of Authorship.” Sandra Gilbert, Susan Gubar. *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth Century Literary Imagination*. London: Yale University Press, 2000. 45-93.

Schlotterbeck, Marian. *Modestly Approaching Conventions: Anne Bradstreet, Phillis Wheatley and the Literary Sphere of Early America*. New York: New Garland Publishing, 2002.

Angela Braru
II Year

Representation of Rape in *The Rover*

Outside the realm of Aphra Behn's *The Rover*, there is a world which divides its women into two problematic categories (a whore versus a lady of quality) and consciously places a thick line between them. The fact that Behn ceaselessly blurs this prominent distinction in the above-mentioned Restoration Comedy alerts her vigilant readers to a series of misogynistic backlashes that women face at the hands of the society. The constant tussle between the co-existence of a prostitute and a virgin forms the outline of the text, with an unremitting interference of men taking advantage of the same.

The concept of female sexuality is either shunned by the society or deliberated as an act that leads to sexual violence. Even today, women are on the receiving end of male supremacy, and their resistance to the same doesn't really matter. Aphra Behn constructs a similar scenario, where a lady of quality receives 'phallic punishment' for not adhering to the patriarchal norms. It's interesting how the plot invokes three attempted rapes on Florinda, who is a chaste woman in every sense, whilst letting her sister be. Hellena breaks all the barriers of patriarchy by renouncing her designation as a nun, thus presenting herself as the female Rover of the text, and even then, it's not her who gets punished. The fact that the first attempted rape is seen as a form of seduction by Willmore is highly problematic. So, even though Florinda is a maid of quality, the male characters in the text constantly reduce her to nothing more than a commodity. Act 3 scene 5 opens into a world where men like Willmore use their strength to portray the role of sexual predators, hence drawing attention to what it means to be a female sexual subject in this dramatic world. Florinda enters with a blanket of sexual signifiers surrounding her from all sides: she is out alone at night, "in an undress", carrying a box of jewels symbolic of the dowry she brings, and a key which signifies her virginity. Willmore sees her in this 'seductive' appearance and interprets it as her apparent sexual availability. His assumption of her being a wench lies in a series of evidences that frame his drunk consciousness; her resistance to his dominant approach only provokes his manly ego, hence giving him the hint of her 'No' being a 'Yes.' Anita Pacheco calls this "a provocative model of double seduction: it is at once an attempt to seduce and a claim to have been seduced." In the first, the man is the subject, seeking to woo the woman into ceding. In the second, the woman is a seductress: aggressive and guilty. Yet despite its foregrounding of the figure of a potent female sexual subject, this second seduction paradigm establishes a vicious assertion of masculine power. Here, Florinda becomes an article of trade, who is supposed to be a man's possession. She is constantly enduring the male violence projected throughout the text. Caitlyn Piccirillo comments:

To the cavaliers, violence against women is an act of revenge for the loss of their property and titles back home... Florinda is the consistent victim of the assaults presented. She exists in stark contrast to other virgins in the play, as her meek demeanor compounds her ability to be commodified.

(Piccirillo, 37)

On the other hand, Hellena will not allow herself to be a man's property; she'll defy all the patriarchal norms and use her wit to eventually obtain Willmore. She comprehends the threat of male lust, and instead uses that desire as well as her own to get what she wants, hence emerging as a perfect counterpart to Willmore. All through this scene, Willmore's constant infantilization of Florinda and his promotion of guilt-free sex give rise to an alteration in the meaning of rape. For Willmore, sexual signs coupled with apparent disinclination make this encounter a seduction; while this wench may require a little coaxing, she is open to persuasion. He takes a misogynistic turn when he states that a prostitute like her would never indulge in free sex, and hence, her resistance gets equated with her demand for money:

That you would do it for nothing? Oh, oh, I find what you would
be at. Look here, here's a pistole for you. Here's a work indeed!
Here, take it, I say!

-- Willmore

The pistole, a phallic object, symbolizes the male sexual organ and the male sexual power over women. To save his beloved from this toxic masculinity, Belvile enters the scene, reinforcing the patriarchal notion of women needing men as their saviors. The play's second attempted rape scene involves Blunt – literally a blunt character who is used by the cavaliers as a source of finance. Physical violence takes an extreme turn and the level of misogyny gets even more elevated than before. To feed the audience's patriarchal expectations, Behn drags Florinda into another menacing situation. When she is next threatened with rape, it is not predominantly because she is sending out inappropriate signals, but because she has the misfortune of stumbling upon a man who has decided that all women are whores. Blunt presents himself as the victim of Lucetta's wit and seduction, and takes it upon himself to avenge the humiliation that she caused him. Pacheco writes:

Blunt is the seduced man of Willmore's provocation model, the victim of the prostitute Lucetta's seductive fiction that she is a "person of quality" who has fallen head over heels in love with him. When he has been robbed blind and abandoned in a Neapolitan sewer in his underwear, Blunt immediately berates himself for having been foolish enough to believe in woman.

(Pacheco, 334)

Lucetta's dangerous and predatory sexuality frustrates Blunt's desire, ultimately humiliating this English country gentleman. Because of the 'most infamous' of her sex, Florinda faces another good dose of phallic punishment, that isn't called rape but a valid reprisal. She hastily re-establishes the patriarchal distinctions and struggles to distinguish herself from the 'devils,' who – according to Florinda – deserve everything they get. Finally, she produces Belvile's diamond ring which is a signifier that identifies her as under the shield of a man. The second she re-enters a world

where rape has meaning, she presents herself as the property of Belvile, enacting the sexual transaction that has been her sole driving purpose. She thus becomes a product of the patriarchal society.

The closing act of the play opens with a scene of attempted gang-rape on Florinda: the quintessential maid of honor running around the stage in her masking habit, chased by men. By this time, the feminist readers get extra critical about the concept of phallic punishment. Blunt, who holds Florinda captive, is laughed at by Belvile, Willmore, Frederick, and Pedro. However, when he produces Florinda's ring and declares that he has a wench in captivity, Belvile unravels the whole situation. We expect him to save his damsel yet again, but he simply sows the seeds of disappointment. He does nothing to hold the men back and instead, just prays that Florinda's identity remains unexposed, hence emphasizing her chastity. It seems as though rape has meaning only for the women belonging to a specific rank. As Pacheco writes:

For what Belvile faced danger to preserve was the virginity of an upper-class woman threatened by the lust of "common soldiers." He appears on the scene not as an opponent of rape as such, but as the champion of chastity and class distinction... The chivalric attitude to rape is that it exists only in relation to women whose class and sexuality make them valuable patriarchal commodities.

(Pacheco, 326)

Piccirillo says that "since Florinda is masked and therefore anonymous, the men are free to show their most base and violent desires." In other words, each rape scene is more disturbing than the last: the first was for drunken lust, the second for vengeance, and the third for male competition. This scene is particularly disturbing because a) it is a proposed rape on a virginal heroine made into a game among the men and b) it is a proposed gang rape, with the men agreeing to take turns violating a woman they have not seen. However, what's really problematic is that the audience encounters a brother pursuing his sister.

Throughout the text, the men find it impossible to recognize Florinda; first, Belvile fails to identify his beloved when they meet during the carnival, and later, her own brother takes her for a harlot and tries to subject her to his incestuous desire. Toxic masculinity erodes the text as a whole and the only reason why Pedro stops chasing her is because he has to put 'his sister' in check. Piccirillo says that "Her rape at the hands of her brother is not stopped out of compassion for this unnamed woman, but rather a desire to maintain control over his own property." Sarah Olivier suggests:

Behn uses Don Pedro's attempt to rape his own sister to problemize the male gaze. His act is so disgusting that it is difficult to imagine even the cavalier/libertine audience members finding it amusing. On a basic level, this shows that all victims of rape are sisters, or family members to someone.

(Olivier, 69)

And all this while, Belvile does nothing whilst Willmore exhibits his London wit by stating that the wench should get a chance to choose her man, which will render her sexually alienated and make rape 'consensual.' Although it is possible for a victim of sexual assault to forgive her attacker, the swiftness of Florinda's forgiveness seems problematic. According to Rereading Aphra Behn: "...Behn's juxtaposition of the attempted gang-rape of Florinda immediately prior to the wedding ceremonies at the end of the play undermines the moral code that marriage supposedly embodies; thus, Florinda's fairy-tale union with the Prince Charming Belvile is depicted as disturbing and fictional."

However, as literature students, we realize that rape in this text is not limited to these three scenes. Behn projects rape metaphorically when she introduces the prostitute of the play – Angellica Bianca – who constantly tries to become a Petrarchan mistress and seeks subjectivity through the provocation of male desire. Since she has no chastity intact, she uses her beauty as a compensation for the lack of virginity in order to fit into the role of the Petrarchan mistress.

Even though Angellica is never overtly raped by anyone, the theft of her portrait by Willmore can be read as one metaphorically. Similar to the myth of Philomela and Shakespeare's Rape of Lucrece, Angellica becomes secondarily an "object of desire" and primarily "the terrain on which inequalities of male power are fought out." Willmore steals her portrait without her permission and seconds later, we see a fight erupting amongst the men for the same. Not the body, but her image is the site of conflict. The psychology of rape arguably informs an act of sexual theft perpetrated by a libertine hero whose sexual impulses are shown to be rooted in competitive masculinity. If the portrait symbolizes Angellica's body, then Willmore does exploit it by putting his hands on it without her consent. It's not only Angellica whose body gets commercialized; we find that marriage and dowry go hand-in-hand, where the value of the bride comes from the dowry she brings for her husband. The body-politics remains prominent, regardless of the class to which the woman belongs. Elie Rottiers states in her essay:

"Angellica hangs out her picture to attract customers... fully aware of the commercialization of women's bodies as she advertises herself... Even though Angellica expects payment in exchange of her body, virgins like Hellena and Florinda also enter this economic realm as objects of which the value is determined by the dowry they can bring to their future husband."

(Rottiers, 42)

To conclude, we can say that if whores and virgins are physically mystified, they are equally so regarding their feelings and desires. As Rottiers says, "the prostitute can be seen as a wife's doppelganger who articulates female desires and indulges in them... In Behn's view, erotic feelings are natural to all human beings, and not necessarily to prostitutes or men alone. Consequently, she pleads for an acknowledgement of women's sexuality, so that the prostitute no longer only serves as a wife's alter ego, but can become a part of her identity."

Bibliography

Behn, Aphra. *The Rover*. Delhi: Worldview Publications, 2016.

Olivier, Sarah. "Cavalier Politics, Banishment and Rape in Aphra Behn's "The Rover"." *Restoration & 18th Century Theatre Research* (2012): 55-74.

Pacheco, Anita. "Rape and the Female Subject in Aphra Behn's "The Rover"." *ELH* (1998): 323-345.

Piccirillo, Caitlyn. *The Force of Seduction: The Use of Rape Narratives in the Plays of Aphra Behn*. New York: CUNY Academic Works, 2017.

Rottiers, Elien. *Marriage and Gender in Aphra Behn's "The Rover" and Eliza Haywood's "Love in Excess"*. Belgium: Ghent University, 2011.

Angela Braru
II Year

Christie's Narrator in *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*

One can never deny that every individual – regardless of his or her profession – has the potential to commit an act of crime, be it theft, adultery or murder. Picking up such real-life possibilities and using them as mysterious plot-lines for fictional writing has been at work since ancient times. It was only in the nineteenth century, however, that a literary genre emerged out of this phenomenon. Detective Fiction involves thorough investigations of criminal offenses, usually murder, and has introduced famous heroes like C. Auguste Dupin, Sherlock Holmes and Hercule Poirot to the world of literature. Various conventions of the detective genre were standardized during the Golden Age, roughly a period between the two world wars (the 1920s and 1930s). Many of the most popular books of this time were written by Agatha Christie. Her use of complex puzzles, combined with stereotypical characters and picturesque middle-class settings, is credited for her success.

The Murder of Roger Ackroyd is considered a masterpiece for its startling ending and its explicit identification of the narrator as an altogether unreliable one. The plot, indeed, manages to throw the reader into a whirlwind of astonishment, disappointment and uncertainty. The novel makes use of the first person narrative, tricking the readers into believing that they are privy to the intricate details of the events prior to and after the murder of Roger Ackroyd. However, the tables turn drastically as we approach the inevitable end of the murder mystery; the character who is supposed to be the most trustworthy of them all turns out to be the murderer: Doctor James Sheppard – the narrator himself.

The very fact that Sheppard is a doctor, a social position that affords him easy access to people's homes in an age when the local doctor was treated as an intimate family friend, and who is tasked with the responsibility of preserving life, makes his murderous actions all the more heinous and shocking. Therefore, Sheppard does not only break the trust of the people residing in Kings Abbot, but also becomes an unreliable narrator for Christie's readers. What is truly intriguing is the fact that even after having an 'I' to tell the tale, a majority of the chapters are just a description of the events that take place throughout the novel; rarely do we find Sheppard's interpretations of the same. As Göran Häljestaam notes:

Dr. Sheppard's voice dominates the whole narrative, but sometimes in a very discreet way. The domination of the narrative is of course an active choice from the author, which in turn enables the self-conscious narrator to deceive the reader. Some parts of the narration take place through Dr. Sheppard's description of his thoughts and ideas. In other parts, he merely documents conversations that take place, without commenting on them . . . He is in fact so subtle that it, at some points, is easy to forget that the story is really told in first-person
(Häljestaam, 11).

One picks up a murder mystery with a blind faith in its narrative voice. Since most of the plots of this genre play tricks with the psychology of the reader, s/he imbibes the personality of the narrator in a way that their thoughts run parallel throughout the investigation. By making the narrator the murderer, Christie not only dupes the readers, but also the detective. Even though Poirot manages to unravel the whole mystery, his shock and disappointment at the end is quite evident. For instance, he abruptly stops referring to Sheppard as a companion similar to his friend, Hastings; the Watson to his Sherlock disappears all of a sudden, and this emerges as one of the clues that Christie plants for the readers, which when paid attention to, might help in the identification of the murderer. In Sheppard's own words:

As I say, up till Monday evening, my narrative might have been that of Poirot himself. I played Watson to his Sherlock. But after Monday our ways diverged. Poirot was busy on his own account... he did not take me into his confidence beforehand

(Christie, 163-64).

Psychology plays an important role when it comes to identifying the criminal from a set of multiple suspects. Through a detective like Hercule Poirot, Agatha Christie uses the theories of psychology in her characterization and how a character acts or reacts to a particular situation. For instance, Sheppard's nervousness and wavering confidence give him away on multiple occasions; the readers are credulous enough to just not notice it; The entire text reverberates the narrative voice of a murderer. Robert Chute states that "*The Murder of Roger Ackroyd* enacts detective fiction's worst fears, for Christie shapes her entire text around the narration of the murderer . . . The novel actively dramatizes how easily readers can be led – by the appropriately named Sheppard – to side with criminal forces."

Just like Poirot, Sheppard does not emerge as a stereotypical male. Both the detective and the criminal have been, in some way, feminized by the author: apart from being a scrupulous and experienced gentleman, Poirot also plays the role of a matchmaker for Flora Ackroyd and Hector Blunt. Sheppard's weakness, on the other hand, of not being able to conceal a lie for a very long time is similar to women inability to keep secrets, which was a problematic stereotype back then. Time and again, Christie's motive behind making Sheppard the murderer has been questioned. She first portrays him as the detective's companion and then leaves her readers in a state of shock. Nevertheless, we can't accuse her of breaking our trust because she constantly drops multiple hints, which get highlighted very strongly when we re-read the novel. As Marc Gabriel Alexander suggests:

Those who assist the detective, then, have an air of innocence by association – they are presumably trusted by the detective, and they have a long list of fictional forebears, from Captain Hastings to Dr Watson . . . He is probably too ubiquitous a character to be suspected by a reader . . . although the fact he

is a suspect is technically present, the way that he exists at all points in the narrative makes him not explicitly part of that external parade of suspects
(Alexander, 60).

In as much as the novel forces the readers to question the reliability of not only the narrator, but a doctor as well, Christie gives a new turn to detective fiction. She provides us the possibility of being guided through the mystery by a fallacious narrator, and also subtly criticizes a doctor's profession. We can see the murderer as the personification of evil: the serpent from Milton's *Paradise Lost*. His expulsion from the narrative helps the readers and the characters to regain their Paradise. Using the narrator as the murderer was an uncommon trope in Christie's time, but has since become more widely accepted, especially in the postmodern novel. This has led to today's reader being better equipped with the analytical tools to handle an unreliable narrator. Sheppard's true colors are revealed only in the 'Apologia.' All along, he had been hiding behind the persona of the narrator and is only identified as the murderer when Poirot throws the final bait. Having met his match, Sheppard pens down his full confession in the form of a manuscript, and justice comes full circle when he overdoses on Veronal.

Bibliography

Alexander, Marc Gabriel. *Cognitive-Linguistic Manipulation and Persuasion in Agatha Christie*. Glasgow: University of Glasgow, 2006.

Christie, Agatha. *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*. United Kingdom: William Collins, Sons, 1926.

Chute, Robert. "Is punished in the Detective Story is not simply Criminality but Transgression more generally?" *Innervate* (2008): 42-48.

Häljstam, Göran. *The Unreliability of Dr. Sheppard and Humbert Humbert*. Engelska, 2015.

Angela Braru
II Year

Sex: A Negotiation

6 December, 2018: A monumental moment in the history of India, for it is the date when Section 377 of the Indian Penal Code was declared unconstitutional. The result: non-procreative sex between consenting adults, of any gendered identification, was decisively decriminalized.

The uproar continues, and the idea of freedom to love anyone irrespective of their gender and sexual identity is still being debated but what remains unacknowledged is the potential impact of the judgement on how we think, individually and culturally, about anal and oral sex. Verbatim, Section 377 of the IPC states, “Unnatural offences: Whoever voluntarily has carnal intercourse against the order of nature with any man, woman or animal shall be punished with imprisonment for life, or with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extend to ten years, and shall also be liable to fine.” The implication? Any form of sex apart from peno-vaginal sex, usually for reproduction, was deemed illegal.

The question that arises in this context is: what exactly is this “order of nature?” Who defines it? Going by the basic assumption that all religions are premised on, we are all, to put it simply, products of nature. A natural force created us, and nurtured us, and one day this natural force will lead to our destruction. If we are all created by nature, then how can any act of ours be against the order of nature? It is imperative to remember that Section 377 was not drafted by nature. It is a human creation with the sole purpose of repressing and subjugating that which is considered ‘wrong’ in the eyes of law and society.

Moreover, cunnilingus and anal sex are not explicitly proscribed in Hindu thought and ethics. The basis of this argument lies in a study of Indian architecture and ancient culture. The Khajuraho Temple, for instance, openly showcases non-normative sexual acts, including even bestiality, on its walls. The emphasis on heterosexuality and reproduction likely comes from the Judeo-Christian tradition, which has had a significant presence in India through various stages of its colonisation. The internalisation of such a thinking on sex/uality has led to the normalisation of the view that anal and oral sex are ‘immoral.’ The Indian Penal Code, which contains many echoes of its British counterpart, solidified the taboo around non-reproductive sex by rendering it criminal as per law.

This aspect of Section 377 has much to do with diverse sexual acts that fall outside the ambit of what is informally referred to as ‘vanilla sex’: peno-vaginal sex only for reproductive purposes. The legalization of oral and anal sex may pave the way for more open and free discussions on, and mainstreaming of, different aspects of sex. Peno-vaginal sex more often than not upholds dominant power structures insofar as the man dominates the woman in bed. A woman assuming a more assertive role during sex is seen as unnatural even today, and the man is considered weak for it. Through oral or anal sex, these equations can be radically altered. “Going down on somebody,” as it is popularly termed, is a mutual process of give and take. It ensures both partners derive equal pleasure from the sexual act. Similarly, the power dynamics can very easily flip with anal sex. Since anus is an “organ” that both the genders have, the phallocentrism of

conventional sex is dismantled. Any partner can provide sexual pleasure to the other through the anus. There is no *one* giver or one taker.

These sexual practices can bring to light other issues like kink-shaming, problems in the gay porn industry, and the differences between sexual equations across not only genders, but also relationships. The discovery of a person's lesser prevalent kinks usually has an adverse impact on the relationship; perhaps the much-belated scrapping of 377 would also create space for "kink negotiation," one that would establish a healthy understanding of taboo practices between two people, including BDSM, daddy kink, fetishes and so on. It is ironical that these are usually seen as products of 'Westernisation,' since the moral panic surrounding them also comes from the West.

It is important that such negotiations pertaining to sexual preferences take place not only individually but also socially, to ensure that everyone gets to experience the true essence of liberty and privacy and autonomy over their own sexuality without any judgment. While 377 most directly relates to the decriminalisation of homosexuality, the Supreme Court judgement also has significant ramifications for the way we process non-normative sex that centers itself on pleasure alone and not a religiously-ordained 'higher aim.' It may ultimately lead to challenging the belief that sex is merely meant for reproduction, and to subvert the phallocentrism widely prevalent around us.

Prithiva Sharma
III Year

Inspector Ghote Goes By Train Conventions of Detective Fiction

The main purpose of this paper is to conduct an analysis of H. R. F. Keating's *Inspector Ghote Goes By Train* and to establish arguments proving that the novel breaks many conventions of detective fiction. Detective fiction, widely known and appreciated for the suspense and tension it creates, is a subgenre of crime fiction and mystery fiction. Detective fiction, unlike many other genres, seems to follow certain basic rules. Several acclaimed authors have set forth a list of these rules to be followed by future writers. Keating, by revealing the criminal in the very beginning of the novel, breaks the most important convention of detective fiction and disrupts the reader's chance to guess the circumstances of the transgression and to identify the culprit. It is because of this reason that the novel does not engage with the reader and loses purpose. This paper discusses in length the conventions violated by the novel thus characterizing it as a police procedural rather than a detective fiction.

Detective fiction, as described by Russell H. Fitzgibbon, involving the presentation of a puzzle (the "crime") and the subsequent solution (the detection of the criminal and the relevant circumstances associated with the crime), is a subgenre of crime fiction and mystery fiction relying on some specific theories of criminality that originated in the 19th century. These theories and their associated scientific logic are central to the discoveries made by detectives in this genre. Several authors like Van Dine, Ronald Knox, W. H. Auden, Raymond Chandler, etc., have set forth a list of "Detective Commandments" which are essential for a novel to be considered part of the detective fiction genre, for future authors attempting the genre.

First published in 1971, *Inspector Ghote Goes By Train* by H.R.F. Keating is the seventh novel in his series of novels featuring Inspector Ghote of the Bombay police force and is one of the most controversial detective novels of all time. An English crime fiction writer, Keating is widely known for his Inspector Ghote series and has completed twenty-six novels under it. This novel follows Inspector Ghote's latest assignment to escort a Bengali fraudster A.K. Bhattacharya from Calcutta to Bombay by railway.

One of the most popular American mystery writers of the twenties and thirties, S.S. Van Dine, gave a list of twenty rules for writing detective stories. He says, "The detective novel must have a detective in it; and a detective is not a detective unless he detects", and "There simply must be a corpse in a detective novel, and the deader the corpse the better. No lesser crime than murder will suffice." In the novel however, there is no actual murder and murderer; A.K. Bhattacharya is a trickster who passes off wax copies of stone statues as genuine antiquities. Also, Inspector Ghote is no detective and does not use logic or reasoning for deduction; there is no deductions to be made in fact. This violation of the two most important rules of writing a detective story challenges the conventions of the genre and thus provokes the readers to challenge the norm.

Van Dine also gave two rules of the 'disguise principle':

- 1) The truth must be hidden throughout the book.
- 2) While being hidden, this truth must be accessible to the reader, even in plain view.

In this novel, the “truth” is not hidden. From the very beginning, the readers are informed about the criminal (A.K. Bhattacharya) and thus the element of suspense and mystery is missing. The only point of excitement in the novel is in the way Ghote will catch Bhattacharya.

Roland Barthes distinguishes between the readerly text, “characterized by the pitiless divorce which the literary institution maintains between the producer and the user”, and the writerly text, in which “the goal is to make the reader no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text.” Where detective fiction is at its most successful when it is a writerly text, Keating does not provide with clues to the solution of the crime, the build-up of tension and the awaited discovery of the criminal- all of which keeps the readers on the edge, eager to turn the page- thus making the text a readerly text. The readers sit back and play a passive role, not having the enjoyment to solve the crime along with the writer. Also, the author employs third person narrative deeming the reader as an outsider looking in as compared to a first person narrative where the reader has an inside view and is welcomed from the start.

Dorothy L. Sayers, taking from Aristotle, says since form is as important as content, all detective fiction must contain a beginning, middle and end. This way there is an order of how things unfold; the crime followed by detection and the resolution of the crime. However, in this novel, with the immediate revelation of the transgressor’s identity in the beginning and no actual crime to solve, the readers are not mentally stimulated enough and are left dissatisfied in a way. No crime to solve simply means that there is no form of investigation in the novel. This breaks one of the ten commandments given by Raymond Chandler, an acclaimed novelist, which stated that a detective novel “must have a sound story value apart from the mystery element: i.e., the investigation itself must be an adventure worth reading.”

Mystery writer and a member of the Detection Club, Ronald Knox, is also known for his proposed commandments of detective fiction. He says, “No accident must ever help the detective, nor must he ever have an unaccountable intuition which proves to be right.” However, the first time Inspector Ghote suspects A.K. Banerjee to indeed be A.K. Bhattacharya, the culprit, is when Ghote sees the initials “A.K.B.” on Banerjee’s suitcase. No doubt that Ghote is able to identify A.K. Bhattacharya because of his intellectual reasoning that allows him to connect the dots, however it is also true that this is where the seed of doubt against Banerjee is planted in Ghote’s mind: “Ghote felt as if a great split had opened in the middle of his head. Was this Bengali A. K. Bhattacharya?” (Keating, 25) To add onto this doubt, Banerjee constantly defending the criminal i.e. himself, indirectly by saying that the criminal is not actually a bad person or is not doing anything wrong, makes Ghote increasingly certain about the real identity of A.K. Banerjee.

Another popular name in the detective genre is that of Arthur Conan Doyle, who is best known for his detective fiction featuring the character, Sherlock Holmes. Doyle says that the most important aspect of a detective fiction is the detective character himself and his characteristics, “the eccentric behaviour of the detective character.” Although the novel does not have a detective figure, Inspector Ghote possesses the general characteristics of the detective but with a slight twist.

Ghote is rational, well-educated and witty, just like any ordinary detective; however, where usually the detective is from a rich background, Ghote is a middle-class man barely making ends meet. One possible reason why Keating chose to do this could be his attempt to make the protagonist relatable. Another feature of the detective genre-- the detective knows exactly what to do-- is seen in Ghote's character making the novel a mix of detective fiction and police procedural at one level.

Having a variety of suspects with different motives and evidences pointing towards them being the culprit is another general rule of a detective fiction. In *Inspector Ghote Goes By Train* however, there is only one suspect i.e. A.K. Bhattacharya. Ghote does doubt the Hippies, Red and Mary Jane, and Mrs. Chiplankar to be allies of Bhattacharya at some point in the narrative. After Ghote arrests Bhattacharya and is on the return journey, Red and Mary Jane at the very last minute, board the carriage claiming to be concerned for Bhattacharya. It is when Bhattacharya states his intention of escaping and having help, that Ghote suspects Red and Mary Jane of being the help Bhattacharya talks about: "The Bengali had openly boasted that he might have confederates. The hippies' quarrel could well be a disguise for their real intentions. A. K. Bhattacharya was perfectly capable of trying to charm him into forgetting all this." (Keating, 145) Another time when Ghote suspects Bhattacharya of having help is when he deprives Bhattacharya of sleep as a way of getting a confession from him and Mrs. Chiplankar objects saying that it is torture. The fact that Mrs. Chiplankar forced herself into their carriage, wears spectacles with ordinary glass and shows concern for Bhattacharya makes Ghote angry and suspect her of being an accomplice to Bhattacharya: "No, he is no poor man. And you know it well. He is A. K. Bhattacharya, wanted on charges of Rs. 72.85 lakhs, and you, you are his accomplice. You are no more Mrs. Sulbha Chiplankar than I am." (Keating, 205) Even though Ghote suspects the other characters' involvement in the crime, he does not suspect them to be the criminal, only mere accomplices. Doubts about Bhattacharya having accomplices do crop up in Ghote's mind, however, there comes a point later in the novel where these doubts are abandoned.

All of the above arguments prove that *Inspector Ghote Goes by Train* subverts the conventions of detective fiction and in turn creates new ones. The novel's story, its narrative, absence of a detective and revelation of the criminal in the very beginning, makes the novel a police procedural rather than a detective fiction. The police procedural is a subgenre of detective fiction that is concerned with the investigative procedure of the police department. The fact that Inspector Ghote, at the end of the novel arrests the real criminal while adhering to legal restrictions and procedures, proves it to be a success under the police procedural genre.

Bibliography

Crow, Jonathan. *Raymond Chandler's Ten Commandments for Writing a Detective Novel*. Open Culture, 25 February 2014.

Fitzgibbon, Russell H. *The Agatha Christie Companion*. Ohio: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1980.

Jones, Josh. *20 Rules for Writing Detective Stories by S.S. Van Dine*. Open Culture, 5 February 2016.

Keating, H.R.F. *Inspector Ghote Goes by Train*. New York: Doubleday & Company Inc., 1972.

O'Neill, Sean. *Ronald Knox's Ten Commandments of Detective Fiction*. Sean O'Neill Writer, 6 January 2016.

Sayers, Dorothy L. "Aristotle on Detective Fiction." *English: Journal of the English Association* 1 (1936): 23-35.

Winks, Robin W. *Detective Fiction: A Collection of Critical Essays*. 1988: Countryman Press, California.

Annya Tandon
III Year

Finding the Appropriate Compartment for Inspector Ghote

M. H. Abrams' *A Glossary of Literary Terms* defines detective fiction as “narrative that centres on criminal acts and especially on the investigation” (Abrams). But in H. R. F. Keating's *Inspector Ghote Goes by Train*, questions of crime and enquiry do not take centre stage at all.

Even a preliminary reading of the novel reveals that it subverts the conventions of the detective genre specifically with its reliance on “coincidences and unexplained events” to propel the narrative forward (Keating). The introduction of Mrs. Chiplunkar and Mr. Ramaswami into the plot, the revelation of the initials embossed on the leather suitcase, and even A.K. Bhattacharya's initial capture “with a cigar lighter” all seem highly coincidental (Keating). S. S. Van Dine in his *Twenty Rules For Writing Detective Stories*, and Roland Knox in *Ten Commandments Of Detective Fiction* agree that this reliance on happenstance is not in keeping with the “spirit” of detective fiction. “No accident must ever help the detective, nor must he ever have an unaccountable intuition which proves to be right” (Knox).

This deviance from generic convention, however, might be a misplaced concern altogether. On closer inspection, Inspector Ghote reveals that it isn't a cerebral puzzle at all. We already know “who [has] done it”, even A.K. Bhattacharya's disguise isn't left for the reader to dismantle. One realises that the reason for Ghote's success is not a superior intellectual prowess or the ability to outwit his criminal counterpart. A. K. Bhattacharya, “the notorious confidence trickster” has after all “been very much part of the high society scene” and has evaded the law multiple times whereas it seems to be the first time that an important task has been assigned to Inspector Ghote.

It therefore becomes evident that Ghote's biggest strengths are his work ethic and determination. When viewed in light of said characteristics, one might try and look at the novel from the perspective of classifying it as a Police Procedural. “Instead of bypassing the police and flouting the law, the detective in a Police Procedural depends on the mechanisms of the police world... his world of the detective as characterised by an inherent belief in the system” (Collins). This - although it might explain Ghote's obsessive need to recite the Indian Penal Code - does not satisfactorily quench our thirst for generic conformity. The essential trope of the collaborative effort of multiple individuals, each with their own unique skill sets appears to be missing from the novel.

The cast that Keating does put together seems to comprise of people so ordinary that it seems to mock the conventions of the genre. Mary Jane, although not sympathetic to Ghote's cause, “could be depended upon” to dress wounds because of her stereotyped femininity. Mr. Ramaswami's only claim to fame seems to be his honesty in carrying out the duties as an “inspector of sorts”.

In his supporting role to Inspector Ghote as stenographer, Ramaswami can be viewed as a parody of the Watson figure in most detective novels. By repeatedly calling him the “inspector of sorts”, the novel seems to both justify his position as second in command and bring to the forefront the commonplace characteristics of both our detective and his sidekick. This

tongue-in-cheek treatment of genre conventions is present throughout the novel. It becomes increasingly evident that the novel is a parody. Yet the sudden outburst of action towards the end of the novel is not in keeping with the slow progression of a Police Procedural. The question that arises then is: what generic conventions does the novel fit into and consequently flout? It seems that Keating's novel with its elaborate description of disguise, eminent threat of exposure, equivocation, sympathetic portrayal of the "villain", and the action sequence towards the end combine to make it a parody of a typical thriller novel.

Sarah Lynn in *Ten Basic Ingredients of Successful Thriller* advises writers to "make clear early on what your protagonist wants and what he fears" (Lynn). We are told very early on that Ghote is afraid of flying. Rather than discussing the big questions of morality or faith, the author uses this opportunity to puncture the image of the hero even before it even has a chance to be built up. The brooding and "miserable" personality of the thriller protagonist has also been played with here. Ghote is indeed unhappy but his unhappiness does not stem from elite notions of loneliness or a psychological compulsion to put himself in difficult situations. Instead, the causes of his unhappiness are relatable instances of an unsympathetic boss and a need for respect from his peers. Keating uses this technique of building up genre conventions only to undercut them throughout the novel. A. K. Bhattacharya's careful disguise comes undone by a hint of white showing from his dyed hair. The detective's careful accumulation of clues does not seem to reach its fruition as most of the characters suspect A. K. Bhattacharya at one point or another.

"It has become critical commonplace to describe the basic fantasy-structure of the thriller as that of a hero 'overcoming obstacles and dangers and accomplishing some important and moral mission'; it is less often recognised that the thriller is equally, and in some instances, more concerned with creating obstacles, proliferating setbacks, traps, inconveniences, dead-ends and discomposure" (Glover). However, in *Inspector Ghote* the artificiality of setbacks as plot devices is made apparent; whether it's the cook that seems to be so easily taken in with Bhattacharya or the guru that seems to perform no narrative function except to undermine the hippies. Even Mrs. Chiplunkar seems to vanish into the background as soon as her function of arousing false suspicion is over. "The thriller differs from the detective story is not in any disinclination to resort to deductive methods in solving crimes – though, to be sure, when present they necessarily occupy only a secondary role. Rather, the thriller was and still is to a large extent marked by the way in which it persistently seeks to raise the stakes of the narrative, heightening or exaggerating the experience of events by transforming them into a rising curve of danger, violence or shock" (Glover).

The primary threat in the novel seems to be to Ghote's job as opposed to a universal human calamity. The thriller "trades in international conspiracies, invasions, wholesale corruption, serial killers who threaten entire cities or even nations and this remains the case even where the tone is relatively light hearted or facetious" (Lynn). Keating retains the tone while building to the crescendo that culminates in a chase on top of a moving train. Even while Ghote is hanging on for dear life and performing quintessentially heroic manoeuvres, he is still described as "caked [in] dust from the carriage side... [on] his already sweating face" (Keating). The effort and struggle is constantly made evident. The classic game of hide and seek between adversaries is interposed with

descriptions of “the concentrated sweat of hundreds of hot bodies... the urine of children and their vomit” (Keating).

The emphasis on strong narrative thrust and surprising revelations is also mocked here. Keating gives away the big reveals: A. K. B's identity and modus operandi to create an aura around the details. The biggest exposition in the novel is the revelation of the name of the book A. K. Bhattacharya had been reading. Thrillers usually place themselves in a morally ambivalent universe and tend to portray their villains sympathetically. Here the criminal mounts his own defences and it is not the reader but the characters within the novel that seem to be taken in with his propaganda. *Inspector Ghote* therefore parodies a typical thriller both in terms of the content as well as the conceits of the genre.

Bibliography

Abrams, M.H. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. Delhi: Cengage Learning, 2015.

Collins, R.D. *The American Police Procedural*. Delhi: Classic Crime Fiction, 2014.

Dine, S.S. Van. *Twenty Rules for Writing Detective Stories: Writing Advice from The Masters*. New York: Penguin Publishing, 2005.

Glover, David. "The Thriller." Priestman, Martin. *The Cambridge Companion to Crime Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.

Keating, H.R.F. *Inspector Ghote Goes By Train*. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1972.

Knox, Ronald. *Ten Commandments of Detective Fiction*. New York: Gotham Writers, 2015.

Lynn, Sara. *Ten Basic Ingredients of a Successful Thriller*. Delhi: LDB Publishing, 2008.

Pavini Suri
III Year

Reviews

Allegedly: The Conversation on Consent Needs to Continue Unabated

On 18 February, 2019, Unmukti, The Women's Development Centre of Gargi College, in collaboration with Zubaan, organized the staging of the play *Allegedly*. The play began around 12:30 p.m. in the presence of a fairly large and enthusiastic audience, which included students as well as teachers. It focused on the idea of consent, its importance, and the consequences of it being misunderstood.

The play also touched upon issues of sexual harassment, justice for women and feminism. Shena Gamat and Mallika Taneja, the two performers, were extremely interactive and kept the audience transfixed throughout. The plot revolved around a girl emphasizing the significance of her consent in a physical and emotional relationship. As it progressed, however, the complexities involved in arriving at the right definition of consent and the difficulties in seeking justice for women were revealed. The performers fully engaged with the audience and sought their opinions. Each spectator present at the venue was given a 'yes' and 'no' card to express whether or not they agreed with the ideas presented, which in itself was a very unique approach.

The play concluded on an interrogative note as to what consent and justice really mean; the underlying implication being that consent cannot be presumed to exist unless it is affirmative and emphatic. A question and answer round followed, where members of the audience addressed their queries and concerns to the actors as well as Ms. Mini Saxena, a professional lawyer. The actors also shared their thoughts and experiences on the matter.

The event came to a close around 2:30 pm; the performance and the discussion forced us to wrestle with complex questions relating to feminist praxis in our everyday lives, the power of a 'no' and the role every individual must play in strengthening the movement for women's empowerment. One left the venue with a critically-sound understanding of the power and relevance of consent and the way it helps us rethink our positions in a patriarchal culture.

Shruti Saumya
I Year

Call Me by Your Name

Andre Aciman's *Call Me by Your Name* (2007) revolves around the story of a 17-year-old Elio Perlman, who falls in love with a Jewish American student named Oliver, who helps his father in research. Set up in the Italian Riviera, this book offers a deep insight of what lies in and around the first-hand experience of falling in love for the first time; the murky sexual awakening of a teenager, who is awkward about his affections, yet longs for an honest communication with his subject of desire.

The restricted six-weeks that these two men get to spend together, marks the beginning of an intimate journey that transcends the boundaries of time, because they accept the eventual parting sans bitterness. The Mediterranean backdrop is a constant reminder of an unexpected summer of passion, with a tinge of heat and dust adding to the metaphorical depth of Elio's psyche in the text. Although, the story takes a twenty-year turn, both the characters are unwittingly conscious of each other's impact, which amidst the emotional dynamics is a rare thing to find. Stacey D'Erasmus of the New York Times quotes, "It is as much a story of paradise found as it is of paradise lost." [1] These passionate nuances are found to be poetic, which ultimately makes the reader root for a reunion and somewhere in the realm of your imagination, it hits you that curating affection like love for someone comes naturally and is not something that you enforce upon yourself.

The book is heavily invested in the psychological aftermath of acknowledging our deepest desires and pertaining to the recent acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community, one cannot escape the character of Elio's father who treats the "friendship or much more than that" with compassion. The following line: "Nature has cunning ways of finding our weakest spots. Just remember, I am here," shows us the need for the delicate handling issues of gender and sexual identity, that most importantly starts with one's family. Therefore, an open approach eventually assists us in assimilating what is there within us and helps channelize it constructively. This appeal goes beyond this review and hopes to remind you of your summer of '83.

Call Me by Your Name thus serves as a story of search for identity, the discovery of a belongingness and the memory of a time that is frozen. As Elio discovers himself through Oliver and says, "I loved the egalitarianism of the moment. I loved feeling younger and older, human to human, man to man, Jew to Jew." Aciman, makes us root for Elio, who grows from a shy, reserved teenager to a man who is willing to explore his capabilities.

Sarah Jalil

III Year

[1] <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/02/25/books/review/DErasmo.t.html>

Ek Ladki Ko Dekha Toh Aisa Laga – A Bollywood Cliché with a Twist

Love stories have always held a soft spot in the hearts of cinema lovers, especially Hindi cinema.

Shelley Dhar Chopra, in her new Sonam Kapoor, Rajkumar Rao, Anil Kapoor starrer 'Ek Ladki ko dekha toh aisa laga' approaches this much-loved genre a little differently. The movie starts off with a cliché *girl meets boy* scenario as their paths intertwine while Sweetie (Sonam Kapoor) is running from her hot-headed brother, Varun (Abdul Quadir Amir). As the chase goes on, Sahil (Rajkumar Rao) falls in love with her. Sweetie's Punjabi family adds to the comedy and drama in the story as the plot progresses rather gradually in the first half which ends with the revelation of Sweetie's sexuality and her struggles with it.

The second half, even though predictable, picks up the pace and has some creatively depicted emotional scenes. The decision of choosing a kind of love story that has not been done before in mainstream cinema saves the movie from its average direction and screenplay.

The concept of homosexuality, a topic that continues to be tabooed in our country, being absolutely normal is still a foreign concept to the crowd that makes up majority of the audience of such movies. A movie such as this is a crucial step towards normalizing topics like homosexuality, the freedom to choose one's partner irrespective of the gender, caste or religion and thus is burdened with the responsibility to make an impact and that too a positive one.

Considering that responsibility of making an impression in the minds of the viewers, the plot could've been better constructed and the direction improved. Since the actual revelation of her sexuality happens only in the second half, the first half feels like a waste of potential as it is spent elaborating irrelevant details while it could've been used to shed light on the main issue with more detail and sincerity. The two halves feel disconnected as there is an attempt to cramp several crucial aspects of the plot into the latter half as if to pick up the pace and compensate for the laid back story telling in the first half. The exciting and moving parts in the story could've been more evenly distributed.

The movie also touches on the issue of gender roles as Anil Kapoor's character, who has always had a passion for cooking and dreamt of being a renowned chef, is constantly chased out of the kitchen by his mother who firmly believes that the kitchen is a woman's domain and has no place for a man.

On his the acting front, Rajkumar Rao has seldom failed to impress the audience with his thespian skills. Anil Kapoor brings his experienced charm to the movie and Juhi Chawla makes her onscreen comeback. A star cast like this and shedding light on the issues and taboos that society continues to tackle with and needs to get rid of is a bold step and deserves appreciation.

Nandini Joshi
I Year

Love, Simon: A Simple, Unconditioned Love Story

Love, Simon is a 2018 American high teenage romantic comedy film directed by Greg Berlanti. Simon Spier is your "normal" high schooler, with cool parents and a sister who's a chef (read: aspires to be). His life is an ordinary one however, he carries around a big secret. He's Gay. But that's about to change because there's someone who's just like him and Simon has already fallen for this stranger. But love doesn't come easy for these two and the movie is about that very journey about finding love and accepting who you are.

It is never easy for a homosexual person to come out in the society, especially to his/her parents about who they are. Moreover it's much more difficult for them to come to terms with their own identity. The gradual realization that one is different from the designated "normal", the denial of not being the "normal one" and then the acceptance of oneself just the way they are, normal or otherwise, is not a path of roses. There are thorns at every step. Some that are feeble but some that prick. Because what are roses without thorns i.e. Love without trials.

Nick Robinson as Simon Spier is very believable and relatable. You can feel the frustration and helplessness he is experiencing. You cry with him and you laugh with him. You feel him even if you have never been through what he's going through. Jennifer Garner as a really supportive, caring and loving mother connects to you instantly. Josh Duhamel as the father also does a fine job. The moment he accepts Simon, his identity, tears start rolling down your cheek and emotions come flooding at once. Simon is incomplete without his friends and Katherine Langford, popular for playing Hannah Baker in the television series "Thirteen Reasons Why"; Alexandra Shipp and Keiynan Lonsdale are delightful to watch as friends who are helping, supportive, hurt, betrayed and deceived. Based on Becky Albertalli's "Simon vs. the Homo Sapiens Agenda", the screenplay written by Isaac Aptaker and Elizabeth Berger is beautiful and applaudable. A dialogue that immediately strikes you is when Simon says that, what if gay was the "normal" and people would come out to their parents as straight people. As stirring and thought provoking it is, it has been shown wonderfully on the screen. The scene is hilarious yet at the same time the idea behind it, how the society has decided the standards to be accepted in the societal structure, stays with you and at the end you find yourself asking, what if it was like that. It is one of those moments in the movie which makes you or rather compels you to think. And that is the best part. Director, Greg Berlanti, should be credited for such a beautiful piece of art, that ruled various nominations.

Credit also goes to the Casting Directors Denise Chamian, Tara Feldstein and Chase Paris who assembled a cast that is very much diverse and sadly a rarity in today's cinema. Also, something that eventually grabs your attention is the background score. The songs are impressive and diverse in genres. Artists from the likes of Khalid, Normani, Troye Sivan, The 1975, to Amy Shark, Bleachers and Brenton Woods among others contribute towards increasing the magnitude of the film. The direction is excellent, the writing is fresh, gripping and impactful, cinematography is really good, background score is captivating and also the acting is spellbinding. A movie like this: inspiring, touching, heart-warming, and emotional yet realistic comes once in a while, so till the next one's in the making and out and about, enjoy and relish this one. Its aroma will entice you.

Shambhavi Mishra
I Year

Faezeh Jalali's *Shikhandi—The Story of In-Betweens*

A Play Review

“I'm the sublime/ I'm the timeless/ I'm all universe encompassed”

Today, though the Indian society is slowly beginning to acknowledge and accept the presence of the LGBTQ+ community, we cannot overlook how it has frowned and looked down upon, negated and been orthodox and regressive about the same. Ironically, if we look at our myths and legends, we can find numerous examples of alternate sexualities that we somehow seem to accept and, in most cases, even celebrate and worship.

However, our uneasiness with everything associated to the third gender is so barefaced and palpable not only because it is unaddressed but also because we're still very hesitant to do address them. Our bards though, weren't half as timid to accept and include them in their tales. For example, various interpretations, adaptations, re-imaginings and perceptions have been borrowed from *The Mahabharata* which has presented its characters in their absolute uniqueness, magnificence, vibrancy and individuality. *The Mahabharata* presents a juxtaposition of all the basic and complex problems that we face in our lives. These issues and dilemmas which are presented in the with their complexities and left open-ended, unresolved questions that help us ponder over them and find solutions to them by ourselves. We are given several examples of people who are neither male nor female, from Krishna who becomes Mohini to Arjuna who becomes Brihannala where we may use our own perspectives add to the context, and mould/ interpret them according to our times. One of the most remarkable stories in the grand narratives is perhaps that of Shikhandi.

“I'm the androgynous/ The mister, the miss/ I'm the good and the evil too/ I'm me but I'm also you”, goes the narration of Faezeh Jalali's *Shikhandi—The Story of In-Betweens*, a comic retelling of the story of Shikhandi, one of the earliest known trans-character who plays a pivotal role in winning the battle of Kurukshetra for the Pandavas.

The play is an innovative re-telling of the story of Shikhandi. The tone of the play oscillates between simple rhyme and an urban, casual Indian-English brogue, full of Americanisms as it shows the journey of Shikhandi from the time she was Amba to her being reborn female; raised male; getting a sex change on her wedding night thanks to a Yaksha and finally taking revenge by killing Bhisma, fulfilling her destiny and causing the downfall of the Kauravas.

The story places the taboos related to the LGBTQ+ community in the forefront and in the process—while retaining the rapt attention of the audience—exposes conservative gender stereotypes. It portrays both the genders in a completely different light. Apart from focusing on Shikhandi who is the protagonist of the play, it also showcases Draupadi: not as the meek submissive wife of the Pandavas. Shikhandi's wife is an unapologetic and unabashedly bold woman who knows what she wants and how she wants it on her wedding night. Shikhandi's interaction with the Yaksha who expresses his desire to become completely feminine—physically and otherwise is another narrative. With provocative lines like “Is that all/ That makes a man, a man/ A bulge in

his pants?” the audience gets to witness how the brave, bold, heroic “men” of the great Epic are not spared. The Pandavas are often taken to task for their sexist behaviour by Draupadi whenever they bully Shikhandi. Here, the Pandavas represent society and its normative expectations of rigid gender values.

Jalali first wrote this play as a twenty-minute-one-woman performance in Berlin in 2010. Over the years she worked on it and wrote a full-length version of it in 2014. The play was runner up for the Sultan Padamsee Award for Playwriting, 2016 and was also awarded the Laadi Media Award for Best Play in 2017. Jalali admits that the play is dark but she also stresses on how it is a comic re-telling, “I didn't want to scare the audience or have an air of gloom. I needed to bring the theatre alive and wake the audience up not just literally but also metaphorically and that is why I have focused so much on gender fluidity and have used stereotypes and clichés to highlight the biases of our society.”

The play uses minimalist black and white costumes and all ornaments are used in an androgynous way to symbolize gender fluidity. The actors often switch roles as required. While their movements have borrowed styles from *Kudiyattam* and *Yakshagana* and even acrobatics. Although the audience can get caught up with the choreography, the verse dialogues are sharp, clever and hilariously true rather than just grim and deep. The production, which strikes a delicate balance between script, costume details, live music and aerial acrobatics urges the audience to question gender stereotypes and sexuality. It also makes the audience realize that we're all in-between; it does not merely place the viewers in a grey space but is makes one acknowledge and welcome it.

Vaishnavi Dube
I Year

A Woman Alone

A Performance by Shilpi Marwaha

A Woman Alone, a one-woman show, organized by the Women's Development Centre on 19 September 2018 was performed by veteran theatre artist Shilpi Marwaha. She held the audience captivated during the entire span of the performance. The play, an adaptation of Franca Rame and Dario Fo's original script highlighted the vicissitudes of a woman's struggle.

The play began with loud music playing (in every corner of the house) to keep the woman entertained while performing her daily chores. Why does she want to be entertained that way? Because she is in an abusive relationship with her husband who keeps her locked in the house. Music the audience found out gives her respite from the wailing of her new-born child and the tantrums of her perverted brother-in-law who abuses her and had abused other maids too. The audience learnt of the woman's every-day struggles of being watched through her window and strange men calling her up multiple times to harass her on the telephone; she didn't have the freedom to wear what she wished to, even inside her own house.

She finds solace in the company of her dance teacher and the audience realized that when her husband found out about it, he confined her forever to the house and beat her 'out of love for her' and then had sex with her at night. The play dealt with various topics like loneliness, depression, abusive relationships, a woman's sexual desires, marital rape and the many restrictions she faces in everyday life. The play was also a metaphor for how a woman is alone in this patriarchal world.

At the end of the performance, the auditorium erupted into thunderous applause and Shilpi Marwah was given a standing ovation for her power-packed performance. During the interactive Q&A round, a breathless Shilpi answered many questions and comments from the students. I am sure each girl or woman in this institution has faced harassment in some form or the other- but we have finally also learnt how to revolt and stand up which adds to the greater cause of women's safety both inside and outside the house.

*Prachi Mehra
I Year*

(With apologies from the Editor. This article was submitted to the previous issue of Bitacora)

Prose

Mithi

Her Baba had been planning for her wedding since she was five, Mithi was excited too then. Mumma had told her all about marriages and grooms and the thought of a prince charming back then gave her tingles. The lehenga will be from Delhi. Food definitely from the famous halwai. Each day her Baba kept aside a penny. When Mithi was 25 his dream finally came true and his daughter married, everything he did was only after asking her except one, Mithi wasn't asked if the groom was what she wanted still. Deep in her heart Mithi had realized she wanted a bride but baba had assumed a groom would suit her well and Mithi wasn't courageous enough to object to that.

*Priya Verma
Year II*

Holy Hell

Last night I called you to hear the sound of death, because where can you find destruction except in the comfort of known souls? How can you share death with someone you don't know? Death is sacred, I say. You're a Satanist cult, you say.

I'm not a Satanist cult; I'm the spawn of Satan, walking the earth as if I am descending the stairs of hell. Hell isn't hell, it is heaven, or so Milton's Satan said and I believe Milton. He did refer to the bible, didn't he?

The thing is, God and Satan are two sides of the same coin: every time I've flipped it, it's always Satan who has appeared. I'm agnostic by definition; I believe there is something which no one can find, which no one should try to find. But isn't religion an attempt to find that something? To take it, make a noose out of it and wrap it around your throat? And then, you hang yourself to death.

I don't really know how to smoke; no one took me through different stages of inhaling and exhaling. But I do know how to breathe and if religion isn't the poison I'm breathing...

I'll be damned.

*Prithiva Sharma
Year III*

The Yellow House

They told me not to take a risk but I refused to listen, because in my opinion, risk is something that gives you the power to not only forget your failures but also to keep going in order to achieve your goals. So this time again, I chose forward, but this time it could have put a full stop to all my ambitions because it was almost a question of life or death. I live to regret this decision to this date.

It's been a year since I started hearing rumors about the yellow house at the corner of our A1 Block. No one has lived there after the Jason family. People say it was designed by Mr. Jason, an architect, for his daughter Mary. She had left because she wanted to marry a man outside their race, and she thought her father wouldn't have allowed it. Mr. Jason was extremely disappointed with his daughter's action because he had thought it was not really a big deal to marry someone outside one's own race. Mrs. Jason was also a black woman who had married a white man. She was never happy in her married life. She died after a few years of Mary's birth. It was a very difficult journey for Mr. Jason to nurture his daughter under such circumstances.

I took the risk of entering that house after seven in the evening, looking for adventure. The yellow walls seemed very normal to me when I entered the house. People say one should not dare to enter the house without a companion, but I did. The furniture in the house was antique and everything seemed valuable. Mr. Jason surely must have been a very rich person. There was a huge lobby at the entrance, two staircases leading to the same corridor but in opposite directions, so I took one of the stairs which lead me to the bedrooms. There was a loud creak when I stepped on the first stair on the left, which I thought was normal because the wood was very old, so I moved further. When I reached the corridor of the first floor there were huge paintings of some black women who died. I had heard they died because of the trauma of their husbands' suffering from multiple personality disorder; it wasn't just trauma, it was physical violence as well.

When I moved further I saw a very unsettling thing, a red door. It grabbed my attention at once. It appeared disparate to me because the radiance it had was exceptional. That door stood out from the rest of the furniture used in the house. When I went towards it, to get a closer look, I froze. The door seemed like it was still being used. The door was very clean unlike the other objects which had layers of dirt on them. I opened the door looking for the reason behind that exception.

Once I entered the room behind that red door, I was no longer in that lonely yellow house. I entered into the midst of the Jason family. The family did not even seem bothered with my entrance. There were many people in that room, Mr. Jason, Mrs. Jason, Mary and some servants. All of them seemed very happy, except Mrs. Jason. Mrs. Jason had a face very different from that of her portrait hanging beside the other black women. Her face was spattered with blood as if she had faced stomach-churning violence. Those blood spots seemed very unnatural to me until I saw a gunshot on the other side of her face. I tried to talk to her but she was unperturbed by my voice. She got up and walked out of the room while I was talking. I was frozen by the sight of her face.

When I left the room with the red door, which showed me the painful and horrible past that Mrs. Jason suffered, the door suddenly shut with a head-splitting noise. I started running when I realized that I had met all the dead members of The Yellow House. It was already ten, I hurried to leave the house and tried to reach the main gate as soon as possible. My blood ran cold when I saw it shutting in front of my eyes. I hurried to reach the small gate leading to the garden before it closed, there was no other way out of that house. I started searching for alternatives but couldn't find any. My cell phone and torch ran out of battery. I tried to light a lantern that I found on the floor when I heard a loud creak like what I heard initially while climbing up the stairs. I saw that gory face again, but this time looking a lot more violent. Yes, I saw Mrs. Jason again, but this time with a gun coming towards me. I looked to the back and saw a dark door leading out. I ducked just as Mrs. Jason shot her gun, and ran to my house. I collapsed in the garden and was awoken the next morning by my brother scolding me for going to that house after seven.

Bhupinder Kaur
Year II

Interviews

Dr. Sutapa Dutta

Dr. Sutapa Dutta is been an Assistant Professor of English. She joined Gargi College in 2007. She specialises in 18th and 19th century European and English poetry, drama, and novels. Her research interests cover a vast span of topics, including a comparative study of 18th century novels with respect to identity, Indian educational system, literature in colonial Bengal, and missionary writing. In this interview, she expands on the way our curriculum and educational dynamic has changed over the years and her experience of teaching this discipline as it grew.

Q1. *Ma'am, you've been teaching at Gargi since 2007. How, in your experience, has the nature of the teaching-learning process transformed over the years?*

A lot changes in a decade, and the academia is no exception. The last five years especially have seen a major rehauling of the academic system in Delhi University with substantive revisions in the syllabus, and some very drastic changes in the academic format. We have yet to see how this will affect the standards of academic performance, but it has also meant that we have lost that personal interaction with our students. Teaching has become more time bound and mechanical. On a more positive note, a rigid traditional pedagogy has given way to a curriculum which is more inclusive and has a broad based global approach.

Q2. *The theme of the current edition of Bitacora is "If the Shoe Doesn't Fit". What are your first thoughts on it?*

It is scary how classroom teaching, and mass education in particular, has unfortunately tended to treat students like herds of sheep and cattle who end up looking and behaving like prototypical clones. Students are not perceived as individuals, and the education system is not fit to cater to the heterogeneity of the student body. The 'one size fits all' curriculum, often dictated by the current tendencies in the job market, completely disregards the diversity in aspirations and aptitudes of individuals.

Q3. *A literature classroom creates and nurtures a space for discussion, dialogue and even dissent. How do you process students' readings of a particular text that may be unusual or unconventional insofar as they are not line with your own?*

The challenging and exciting part of teaching literature in the classroom is that it provides a space and opportunity to see different perspectives. As students of literature we are trained to analyse and interpret multiple facets of reality, the legitimacy of which helps to widen our minds to accept contending issues and ideologies.

Q4. *In what ways do you think can literary studies contribute to making society more accepting of, and empathetic towards, diversities, differences and marginalities?*

I think literary studies, of all disciplines, is the most suited in contributing to making a more balanced society. It enables us to understand and empathise with others' emotions. We are better

skilled in social relationships too. In a way, we are good psychoanalysts, better able to 'read' others' feelings and sentiments. Literary encounters with various issues like gender, race, caste, ethnicity, religion and sexual orientation, help us to understand and accept diversities and differences. The classroom with students from varied backgrounds is in itself a microcosm of the society we live in, thus making us more sensitive to individual and institutionalized constructed differences and marginalities.

Q5. The politics of identity construction and representation is one of the primary lenses through which literary texts are analysed within the classroom space and beyond. How do you negotiate it in your own pedagogical practice?

One has to keep in mind that the literary text is like a box which once opened can reveal multiple meanings. However foreign and exotic the box may look from outside, it is the meanings which fly out that connect with the readers. Meaningful literary texts are often integrally bound up with the ways in which the reader constructs meanings for himself or herself, and reacts to the characters and the situations in the texts. It cannot be overlooked that the social process of constructing meanings and exploring interpretations is closely connected to one's own culture and identity, based on complex variables like childhood memories, adolescent challenges, family and community concerns, religious and sexual orientation, and a whole lot of other limitations that are in the subconscious realm of the individual. While teaching such texts I merely facilitate students to connect with the ideas, thereby making the text more meaningful to their own lived reality.

Q6. Your research work, focused on the colonial encounter in eighteenth-century India, cuts across literature, history, culture and politics. What are your views on the interdisciplinary turn that our subject has taken?

Yes, the interdisciplinary turn may be more pronounced today, but it is nothing new. Literature cannot be studied in isolation, it has always been inextricably entwined with philosophy, history, culture, and all aspects of society. Literature as 'Art for Art's sake' can be a very limiting and an undesirable way to understand any creative composition.

Q7. In what new ways do you envision the development of the curriculum of our discipline, considering that it is still heavily invested in perpetuating the centrality of the Anglo-American Canon? Do you perceive any differences in the ways your students have over a period of time responded to canonical literature vis-à-vis newer forms of postcolonial and world literatures?

Over the years there have been significant changes in the syllabus. No longer is it purely 'Eng. Lit.' now, with Indian, African, South American, and other European literatures forming a major part of the curriculum. Again, as a student in JNU about thirty years ago, we had courses on comparative literature, literature in translation, popular fiction, children's literature, critical theories, Indian critical thoughts, and women's writings, all of which are considered very 'in' things today. A wide exposure to an array of genres and writings eventually provide a richer comprehensive understanding of literature and hence must be encouraged.

Q8. As a recipient of multiple grants from prestigious bodies such as the British Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (BSECS), and the India International Society for Eighteenth-Century Studies (IISECS), you've conducted truly groundbreaking research in your area. Please enlighten us

about the topic and scope of your latest book, ***British Women Missionaries in Bengal, 1793-1861***?

My advantage as a researcher has been my additional knowledge of Bangla language and literature. My research work focuses primarily on writings of British missionaries and travellers in colonial Bengal. The book *British Women Missionaries in Bengal* tries to address the lacuna in the historical study of Protestant Missions in India, by focusing on the foundational contributions of the first generation of British women missionaries towards education and evangelization in Bengal.

Q9. *What is your message for your students who always look up to you as a role model and would like to become dedicated and renowned academicians like yourself in the future?*

I too have been inspired by exemplary teachers, colleagues and friends, and have looked up to them as role models. It is not necessary to be like your role model, or to become a 'renowned academician'. Just follow your dream; whatever you do, do it with honesty, passion and dedication. Self-confidence, motivation, discipline, and diligence will take you to places where only talent may not be enough.

Interviewed by:

Nandini Gautam

I Year

Ms. Nzanmongi Jasmine Patton

Ms. Nzanmongi Jasmine Patton is an Assistant Professor at Gargi College. Her chief interest lies in oral traditions and folklore and she has published English translations of North-East Indian folklore in her books such as A Girl Swallowed by a Tree: Lotha Naga Tales Retold. She is also the first convenor of Bitacora and for this edition she took up the charge of the newly introduced Translation section of the magazine, making it more culturally diverse. In this interview, she talks about her approach towards teaching, especially Classical Literature, and her considerable experience with Bitacora.

Q1. *Please share with us some of the challenges when you were transcribing and translating the **Lotha Folk Tales** in your book?*

Ans: There were quite a few challenges while working on the book of which two were the most difficult. One was the fact that these stories being passed down orally through word of mouth for hundreds of generations, there was no one single version of a tale. There are at least 115 Lotha-Naga villages or more, and all the villages have some variation from the other in the narratives. My job as translator was to study the commonalities and work on giving a translation that was as 'accurate' as possible but to reach that one accurate point, I had to listen to multiple recordings and cross check with many storytellers to come to the final version. The other problem I faced was on cultural untranslatability. How do I translate words that have no equivalent in the English dictionary? Then how do I translate experiences? Like the word *Pyozhu* which loosely translates to group fishing but how do I convey the warm feeling of camaraderie and love, of the jocular and playful banter shared by the people, that of the joy of sharing a meal on banana leaves. *Pyozhu* is an activity but more than that it is home, it is community, it is love, it is culture. I found the English vocabulary too poor to relay some of the words that I wanted to translate but then of course that is, I suppose, an unavoidable deal with the devil that every translator makes.

Q2. *What does retelling mean to you?*

Ans: Retelling is to me celebrating people, cultures, traditions, beliefs and above all retelling to me is an opportunity to renegotiate given notions of history. Because there is power in retelling the stories. By retelling we remember, when we remember we empower memories and people, and when we empower memories we give dignity to stories, and when we give dignity to stories we reclaim/recreate/restore a new kind of harmony, one that can charter unmapped territories of alternative histories.

Q3. *What are your suggestions regarding reviving oral traditions in this era of digital technology?*

Ans: This question reminds me of an article that I had read on December 31st 2018 on Matters India on 'Reviving Oral Traditions in Digital Boom Era' that talks about oral tradition as thriving. Oral tradition is not dead one would think. In fact, it is very much a part of our everyday existence.

In the words of storyteller and actor Pankaj Tripathi, "What we are today is because of what we have heard". How can we forget the past because it is what gives us an understanding of who we are in the present. Oral tradition is what makes us. Even in today's generation of digital and virtual, the spoken word is still very powerful and I am pretty old school in my belief that the latter can never replace the former. Oral tradition like the classical literature that we read today is so relevant in the way it keeps and preserves legacies and connects us to roots- it may be our own or our friends' or our neighbours' or others that we may have never known of. As for me, I live my oral tradition in my drawing room in the material culture I have displayed on my walls, in my kitchen in the age-old recipes of my tribe that I cook up on my induction gas, in the jewellery and ethnic outfits I don. For me oral tradition is alive and pulsating.

Q4. You have been part of Bitacora, since its inception as the teacher convener in the first two editions. How has been your journey so far? What vision did you have in the beginning and are you happy with Bitacora's evolution over years?

Ans: Yes, I have had the good fortune of being the teacher convener for two editions of Bitacora and amassed a wonderful treasure house of experiences that really have added to who I am as a teacher, and as a person. We just started out with a simple vision of creating a sustainable platform for students to express their thoughts on a free space and also to encourage the culture of writing and now looking back, I am amazed at the quality corpus of work which our bright young ones have produced. We have had wonderful write-ups from different genres and forms, artwork, translations and divergent modes of expressions which have enabled in building bridges and understanding one another as individuals from different thinking/living spaces. We also always have had good student editors who have worked hard to edit the submissions to crisp perfection so yes, I feel roaring proud of what we have created together as a department and I hope that this legacy of thinking, expressing, and creating a common connecting space through quality penmanship continues.

Q5. What makes Bitacora stand out from our college magazine and other departmental magazines?

Ans: All the other student magazines are well written but what I feel stands out in Bitacora is the richness of writing that comes from diversified spaces. Like many departments, we have students from various parts of India, North, South, West and East and we can see that represented even in our magazine. Take for instance this issue's rich translations; three folktales translated from Tibetan, Manipur Meitei and Ladakhi and a short story translated from Urdu. How cool is that! In one issue itself, look at the expanse of cultures we have interacted with.

Q6. Regarding your teaching experience so far, can you share some interesting ideas and tools particularly your approach to Classical Literature vis a vis Folklore studies in a contemporary world?

Ans: For me I approach both Classical literature and Folklore Studies the way I approach history, with a little dose of skepticism and a good dose of open mindedness. Also classical and folklore have more in common than what meets the eye. The homeric epithets of values, ideals, virtues are celebrated in the folktales too. Likewise the social structure, the woman question and the intermingling of the seen and unseen and the supernatural machinery are just some among the

many intersections between the two distinct genres. If Schliemann boasts of discovering a Troy in Hissarlik, the *yantung*¹, *otssup*² and *yonkuk*³ used by the brave Ranphan from the Lotha-Naga folktales have been found and preserved in Akuk village in Nagaland. I remember one particular year when I was discussing the weaving of Helen in Homer's *Iliad* and on a whim, I carried a Naga bag and showed the students the motifs which I found out was actually created by a woman (a comfortably forgotten name) who was inspired by the pattern with which the morning rays of the sun entered her hut. Imagine the Helen of ancient Greece weaving the tapestry of war and then imagine the unknown Naga woman weaving the free golden rays, who not unlike Helen would have been in similar throes of living within the circumscribed space defined for her by men. There was also this other time when we were discussing the sceptre of Agamemnon from the *Iliad*, I remember wearing to class a Naga necklace estimated to be a few hundred years old with rare cornelian beads which are invaluable. It was gifted to me by my grandfather who had found it when they were clearing the forests to make roads. He had told me that these beads were the stuff that he had heard from his grandfathers and great-grandfathers. These material comparisons have brought the classes alive in a manner like no other and it helps in thinking beyond the given narrative geographies.

Q7. *How does the idea of "antiquity" fit into any contemporary texts you deal with?*

Ans: The idea of antiquity is everywhere in the texts and the spaces around us. In the traditions and beliefs we hold close to us, in the family ties we celebrate, in the festivals we commemorate, in the way we hold the idea of home to us. This semester among others, I teach a favorite -Narayan's text *Swami and Friends* and in the conventional albeit selfish friendship between Swaminathan and his grandmother, and the fight for a free Nation in the India of the early 20th century, we feel and sense the urgency to hold on to what is ours organically. In the need to have family as an indispensable unit, the importance of having the grandparents close, to have an organised family structure and the ideals we stand for as a people we can trace antiquity in contemporary texts too. Similar stirrings we find even in contemporary texts like *The Namesake* by Jhumpa Lahiri, *Half of a Yellow Sun* by Chimamanda Adichie's or *Mari* by Easterine Kire and many more. The longing to have a constant in people or places is quite universal so in fact antiquity makes a lot of sense in the contemporary world too.

Q8. *How have your gender and ethnic identities amongst others affected your academic life within and without the classroom?*

Ans: As teachers, in our classrooms we are always consciously trying to facilitate new conversations. We are constantly working to create a liberal, conducive intellectual and intelligible environment for interrogation, dialogue and initiate/discover new discourses. We talk about citizen rights, human rights, rights for women and inclusive ways of acceptance and empowerment. To add to that for me as a woman and that as a Lotha-Naga woman from the North-East region of India has certainly fueled the impetus of speaking also as an insider who has experienced the language of discrimination. Knowing the dismal reality of how many a time only a 'single story' of minority identity goes out in popular media, as a teacher I feel the need to narrate and voice out

¹ Naga machete

² Wooden spatula used for serving rice

³ Wooden carved ladle used for broths

multiple alternative narratives that are off the beaten track. It is not only about changing perception but about enabling more ways of understanding people. The classroom must be an inclusive space and that will continue to be a passion I work towards each day as a teacher.

Interviewed by:

Prithiva Sharma

III Year

Interview with Nitish Anand, aka, Shabnam Be-Wa-Fa

Nitish Anand, aka Shabnam Be-Wa-Fa, is India's youngest drag artist. A student of Psychology and Literature, Nitish assumes his adopted persona to metamorphose into a feisty and uninhibited performer. His career began with an unexpected call from the National Geographic Channel, seeking to feature him in a documentary on LGBTQ rights. Nitish has never looked back since and is currently focusing on his studies as well as modelling. He is always found propagating self-love and acceptance and is known for his warm and affable demeanour.

Q1. What reasons, both personal and political, compelled you to take up the persona of 'Shabnam Be-Wa-Fa'?

Opting drag as a form of art is the most courageous decision I've ever taken. I always needed an outlet to celebrate my hidden feminine side but never felt ready for it. Eventually, drag found me and brought me back to life. For me, drag is primarily about entertaining people.

Q2. How did you come up with the name 'Shabnam Be-Wa-Fa' and how do you think being the youngest drag artist puts you in a position of empowerment as well as vulnerability?

So the origin of the name of my drag persona makes for the most interesting story! 'Shabnam' comes from my favourite high-school teacher who constantly motivated me in some way or the other. She always knew I'll stand out from the rest and make her proud. Throughout my childhood, she brought out the best in me for which I will forever be grateful.

The surname, 'Be-Wa-Fa,' was chosen not only to sass things up but also in a way to give it back to my controversial Bollywood lover who used to call me by that name.

Being India's youngest drag artist is, of course, a title that empowers me and makes me stand out. Not everyone has the guts to actually come out on the stage and unapologetically affirm and celebrate who they are. Every bit of this experience makes me feel young and alive.

Q3. How has the reception of 'Shabnam Be-Wa-Fa' been?

Shabnam is India's most loved drag artist. Even I don't know how this happened. I was nervous before my first show but somehow it went well and since then people have loved me. People always expect something new and different from me and I never fail to deliver it to them with a little more sass and hotness.

Q4. Your social-media presence reflects the importance of self-love and acceptance in your life. How did you come to that?

I had a very dark childhood: I was always put on the back burner. I will keep trying to motivate more and more people no matter what, because I know what it feels not being able to showcase one's true self. I believe self-love is the first step towards chasing our dreams.

Q5. How do you feel about not fitting into the shoe of traditional 'masculinity'?

It's my choice to stand out. Initially it was hard, with the taunts and the sniggers that came my way, but with time they made me strong. They made me the fabulous person that I am today. I truly believe in the motto, *live and let live*.

Q6. *Do you think your use of the pronoun 'he' while simultaneously embracing what is socially seen as 'feminine' behaviour on stage is a way of challenging normative constructs of gender?*

Not really. People need to understand that pronouns and gendered presentation are entirely one's personal choice. Call me HE, call me SHE, as long as you call me, ME!

Q7. *What is your response to those who are critical of male-to-female drag ironically reinforcing traditional feminine stereotypes? It has been argued that the loud makeup and exaggerated costumes, often used by drag queens, undermine the efforts of feminist movements that have struggled against the stranglehold of conventional femininity.*

Such people need to be sent to one of my shows. I'll make them understand that drag is more than just entertainment. However, it needn't be necessarily related to the question of gender just because many drag performers happen to belong to the LGBTQ community. No one questions Sunil Grover about drag because he's straight!

Q8. *How is drag identity different from transgender identity? Do you aspire to be a woman even outside your drag persona?*

I don't want to be a woman; I just want to dress up as one and entertain. People of the transgender community often experience what in medical terminology is termed 'gender dysphoria' but I am okay with my body and identity. As Tish (my nickname), I love my beard and other masculine features.

Q9. *What do you feel is the difference between how drag artists are viewed in the Indian and Western contexts? Do you think the drag scene is evolving in India?*

The struggle is just the same in both the contexts, but obviously the Western world is more accepting. The real fight is actually about educating people and making society a better place for everyone.

Q10. *What parting message would you like to give to young people who look up to you as a trailblazer?*

"If you are lost then you can always be found, because it's never too late to turn your life around."

- Tish No matter what you identify as, if you want to do drag, just do it.

If I can do drag, anyone can do it. Believe in the voices in your head and stand out.

*Prithiva Sharma
Year III
Nandini Gautam
Year I*

Rememberings

My entry to the world of literature started in 2016. I feel like this is the best decision of my life so far. I love what I have studied in a span of almost 3 years. This course should be compulsory for all disciplines (if only it was possible). I perceive the world now with a difference .

Anahat Kaur Guron

Worth remembering <3
Ngawong

If you're reading this, you already know the deal.
"I haven't started either", "Maggi or samosa?", "let's miss this class guys", "I think I like him/her", "I need a therapist", "I broke up", "I'm late, will she/he let me enter?", "Pay for me, I'll pay you tomorrow", "*****", "I'LL BE THERE FOR YOU"
In other words, College is like losing your mom in the grocery store for 3 years. Going to miss this little adventure.

Sanya Malik

Initially, things fall apart. I had hard times too, but with each passing day, I grew up.

Tenzin Yangzom

I was told that "real" college experience lies outside the classroom. I am not denying it, because it does to a certain extent. However, that one thing I am really going to miss after graduating is my classroom, the time I shared with my department from 8:30 am in the morning till 5:00 pm. The constant exchange of ideas, thoughts and opinions; the creative freedom to take a standpoint and defend it, I believe has allowed us (students as well as teachers) grow together. I owe so much to this institution for all the opportunities it has given to me, be it academically or outside that / otherwise
VIVA DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH!
VIVA GARGI COLLEGE!

Sarah Jalil

These 3 years in Gargi have been a rollercoaster ride for me. The college groomed me into a more independent and empowered person. From the English department to the quiz society, I've had many memorable moments.

Raashi Ghai

I think it's safe to say that I am definitely not the same fresh-faced young adult that I was in 2016. Now, DOBBY IS FREE!

Divija Kumari

College is a funny place. We started as strangers but will end as a family. The focus was always on making memories instead of attendance.

Shilpa

My experience at Gargi College, English department is that of young bittersweet teenage love. I want to let it go and hold on at the same time.

shalvi Rastogi

College is like looking both ways before crossing a road but then getting hit by an airplane.

Madiha Ansari

Gargi gave me the most beautiful time. It made me a better person. The friends and the teachers I had were like a family. It has been a "home away from home".

Manpreet Kaur

Here's to the place that has made me the woman that I am today; I will be out of my sigh tomorrow but will forever stay in my memory for it has given me as much as it has taken away from me.

Sidra Islam

As a society student, I was frequently aloof from class all three years, till the last month struck in and we woke up to an emergency of coping up with the syllabus. My teachers in the department have been very relatable, and easy to communicate with; we have known their quirks, and they have known ours. Between attendance issues, making lines for getting pink slips signed, torturing them and feeling tortured - our faces showing the utmost sincerity in the last couple of months before the papers, we've made countless memories that seemed stressful then, but come off as laughable now. I would say, I hope they each keep their wonderful unique teaching techniques for generations of students to come, but we surely won't find any teacher even close to matching their style anywhere else. They changed our outlook towards the entire world out there, and I think somewhere all of us have emerged more thoughtful, more compassionate, and more knowledgeable in our observations and actions. We will always be thankful to them, however strict, however stiff, however humorous, and however gentle every one of them is.

Sonalee Das

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair." - Charles Dickens, A Tale of Two Cities

Pavini Suri

Gargi taught me to be myself; it made me stronger. The world outside Gargi is different and you will be alone but now I know how to fight alone.
I WILL MISS MY GARGI FAMILY.

Deepti Naik

winter suns soaked in smiles
Summer semesters took a while
when timetables and work schedules did not align
we never thought we'll get through fine;
But gradually a balance got maintained-
survived the adventures of pink slips,
Identified the magic of lecture debates,
worked mornings, noons and evenings out
And learnt to assert a footing
without a hint of self-doubt.

Simran Arora

Where learning actually became unlearning
a lot of conventions. I no longer have a
fear of fitting inside the shoe.

Kajal Sisodia

Landed in this unknown
battleground in 2016
without even knowing
how to hold myself;
now English honours
has made me a warrior
who is fully prepared
to face the
"society". I am going
to miss my college
teachers more than the
school teachers. They
are the coolest I've
met. I am not at all
ready to leave this
place so soon.

Kirti Sharma

It was a great experience being a part of Gargi. I had a lot of fun during these three years, and I am going to miss my college life and my professors so much.

shikha

"Now that I see my college life has come to an end, I feel really sad and emotional."

To be honest, I was not able to open up to my teachers and some of my classmates. It was only in third year where I am able to open up (only a bit), and I regret not doing that in the first place. Anyway, now that we have to part, I will miss my professors, classmates and my special friends, "Gargi VIPs". Without them my college days would have been a dull one!

Saranghae to all of you! :3

Toyang

I don't really have much to write about my 3 years in Gargi College as I wasn't a regular student till I got in IIInd year. Nevertheless, the college, the people and the faculty always seemed welcoming and introducing me to new opportunities and areas of growth that I couldn't have attained elsewhere. While college as a collective experience was not good for my mental health, it's the subjects I studied which had a real impact on me and as such my perspective on life has changed.

My classmates I feel are the warmest bunch of people I have had the pleasure of coming across, I wish the college staff (excluding our professors of course) were as warm and cooperative but then one can't have it all and I got much more than I deserve at Gargi College. This past year has been the most amazing one as I started being regular and really invested myself in my course and classes. One thing which I will definitely take away is the infinite knowledge our professors have provided us with, exceeding beyond academics. I don't know where I will end up but wherever I do Gargi and especially the English Department will have a huge role to play.

Ankita Thakur

These 3 years in college has given me a lot of memories to cherish. My initial two years were all about my dance society. But my departmental and especially my friends helped me a lot to go through my class assignments and tests. It's my third year and I planned to spend the entire last year with my class and friends and indeed, it was the best time.

DONE AND DUSTED!

Aastha Pahadia

The one thing these three years in a literature classroom have taught me is that once you learn certain things, you can never unlearn them and I believe that it has both its positive and negative aspects. This journey has taught me to never compromise but negotiate my way in daily life. My observations of the mundane life activities have become so different now that I have the critical lens that literature has provided me. My perspective has widened to such an extent, I can never go back to being the person I was before I joined college. And to be honest, I don't want to be that person anymore. Life is so much better this way.

Priyanshi Bhardwaj

These three years have been one hell of a rollercoaster ride for me. Truly, will miss college.

sanskriti Chopra

I consider these 3 years as the best days of my life. Definitely going to miss those 8:40-5:00 lectures. Whenever I will be reminded of college, I will be reminded of all the good memories I made here.

Deepti Sharma

College for me was an experience which taught me many things. I never thought that college would teach me so much. I met some really amazing people. In short these three years made me a better me.

Priyanka Bhatia

These three years have been one hell of a rollercoaster ride for me. Truly, will miss college.

simran katoch

—

The journey at Gargi College was not less than a rollercoaster ride. In the starting I felt a bit like a fish out of the water but gradually I became an amphibian. I lived every bit of it, and it taught me to live rather than just exist. It made me something I had never thought in my wildest dreams and transformed me into different person who I am proud of. The things which I learnt in Gargi will help me till the end of my life and each and every step will surely be impacted with lessons learnt. Gargi provides a very healthy, safe and open environment for girls to grow as an individual inside out. The teachers have been really supportive here especially of English department. Talking to them lessened the burdens of days. They were like stress busters to be honest. In short, my experience at Gargi was something that I'll cherish all my life and would really miss these amazing three years I spent here.

I love you, Gargi!

Radhika Tandon

Gargi gave me an insight into how the real world works, how things are sometimes worse than you expect them to be but at the same time, can be made more beautiful than you ever thought. But most importantly, Gargi gave me people who I will love for the rest of my life and for me, Gargi was and will always be these people.

Home is not a place. Home is a people. - Thor (Ragnarok), 2017

I think it's safe to say that I am definitely not the same fresh-faced young adult that I was in 2016. NOW, DOBBY IS FREE!

Divija Kumari

College has been a place where I learnt to interact with a diversity of people.

Charika

There are places that threaten you with a good time. Gargi has been one such place. As we march towards our farewell with Maudlin eyes, I am reminded of when Pooh parts with Piglet before departing into the woods. Thanks Gargi for a Pandora Box of memories.

Nancy

Prithiva Sharma

This college and the time I spent here has been an integral part of my growth. The teachers and my friends make me wish that I had another year.

Annya Tandon

These 3 years have been super fun and amazing. I couldn't have asked for more. And we have the best professors in the world.

Simran Singh

From the irritating early morning lectures, to all those mandatory red wall pictures; those canteen chit-chats and warm lectures under the sun. To the place where I learned to find myself, accept myself and to be carefree and to love everything around me.

wish I could never leave this bond, this place, this college and this life!

Tanu Bhatia

The journey from the first year to the final year of college has seen of loathing patriarchy for segregating men and women and creating all girls' college to relishing and realizing it to be a female space that empowers you. We didn't just graduate but grew up into women together.

Geetika Sharma

Three years of experience, fun, learning and most importantly, unlearning. Met some wonderful people here. Today, I can say that Gargi for me is a different new world. Classrooms are fun rooms where we have great discussions with the coolest professors. I will miss this place.

Sakshi

When I first joined Gargi College, I wasn't really excited or looking forward to spending my next 3 years here. I was super upset at the prospect of studying in a girls' college as it was a totally different environment for me. But now when I look back it was the most beautiful 3 years for me. I am also glad that I got to be part of such a great department.

sangjirso

Poster Prepping for People's March (19 Feb 2019)

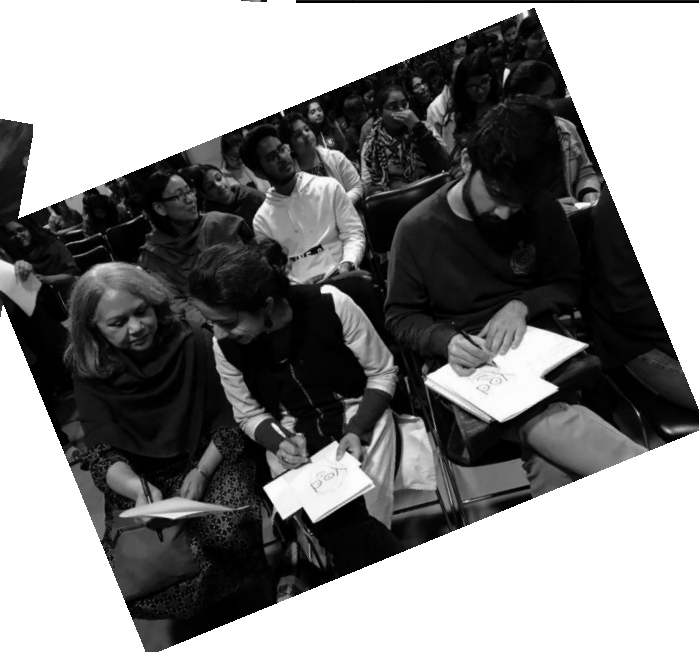
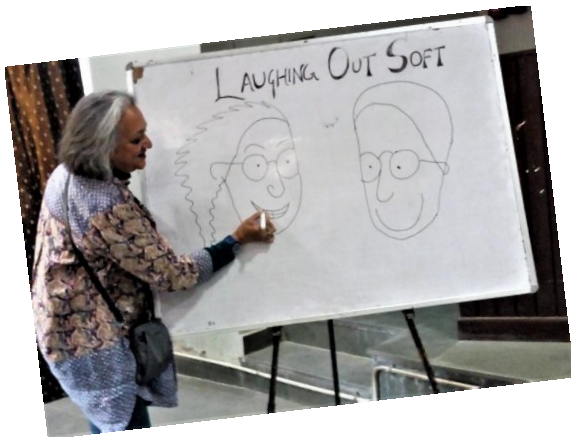




Teacher-Student Interactions



Sketching with Manjula Padmanabhan



Aditi Rao's Workshop



Reading & Writing with Janice Pariat



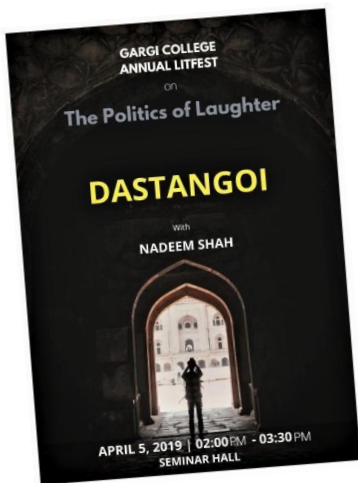
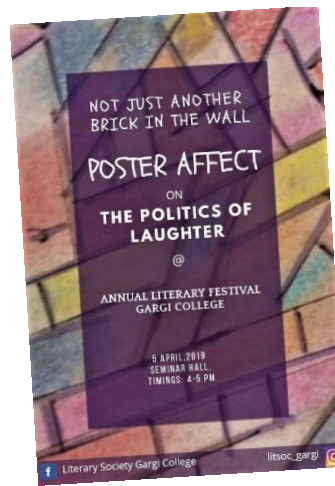
Dr. B. Mangalam on Indian Classical Literature



Annual Book Sale for Bitacora Fund Raising. We did it Twice this year!



Some Poster Art from this Year



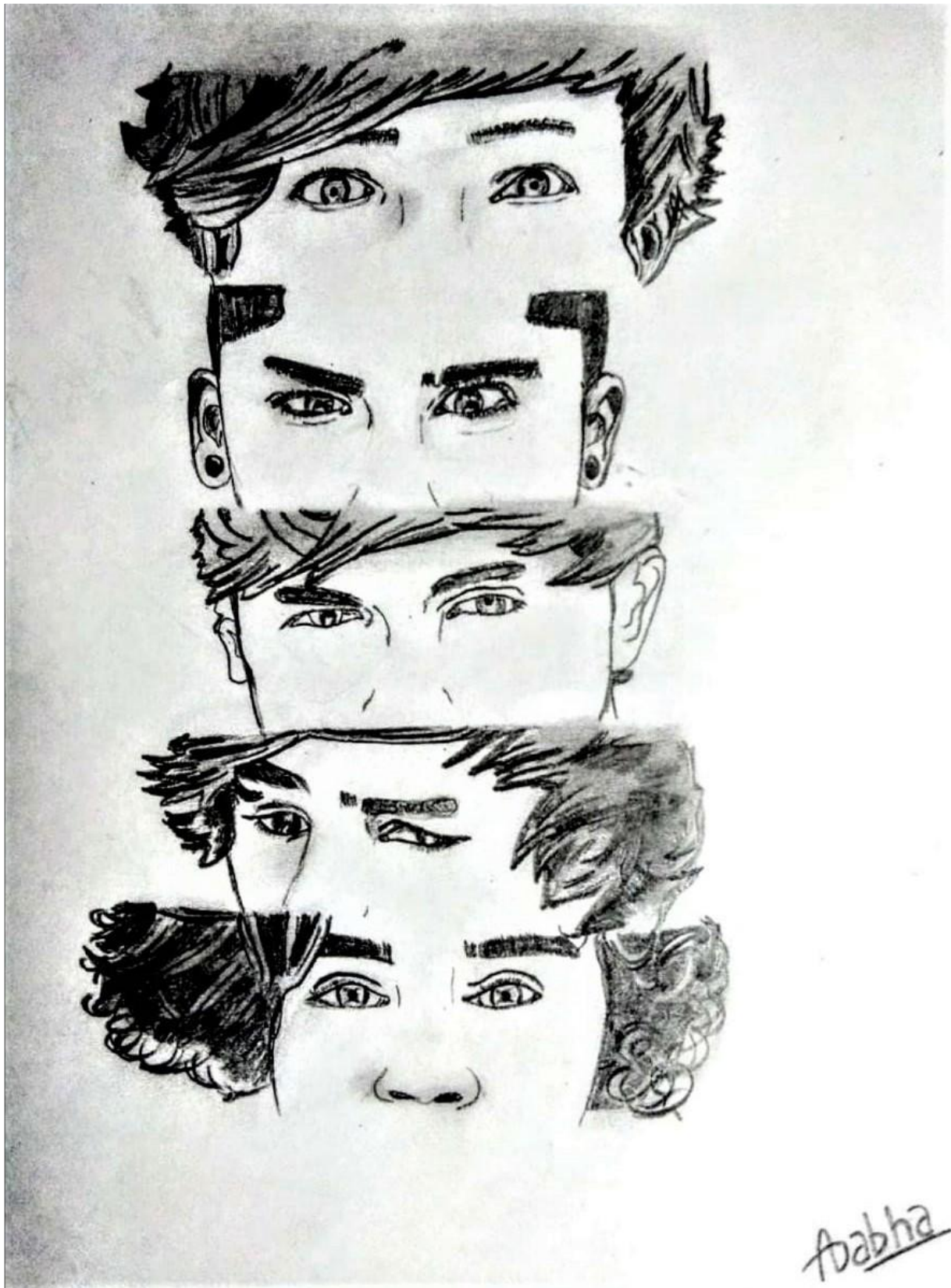
From the Field Trip (2018-19)



Simran Puri
I Year



Aabha Kapoor
II Year



Pridhi Chopra
II Year



Sakshi Arora
I Year



Prachi Panwar
I English



Bhupinder Kaur
II Year



Priyanshi Bhardwaj
III Year



Batch of 2019



Teachers Editorial Board (2019)



Mr. Sameer Chopra



Ms. Pragya Gupta



Ms. Arunima Chetia



Ms. Jeyakirthana J.



Mr. Maisnam
Arnopal



Ms. Nzanmongi
Jasmine Patton



Ms. Rajkumari Smejita Devi



Ms. Poonam
Sharma



Department of English
Gargi College
University of Delhi

Front : Pridhi Chopra

Cover Design : Tisha Sharma

Back : Jasmina NK