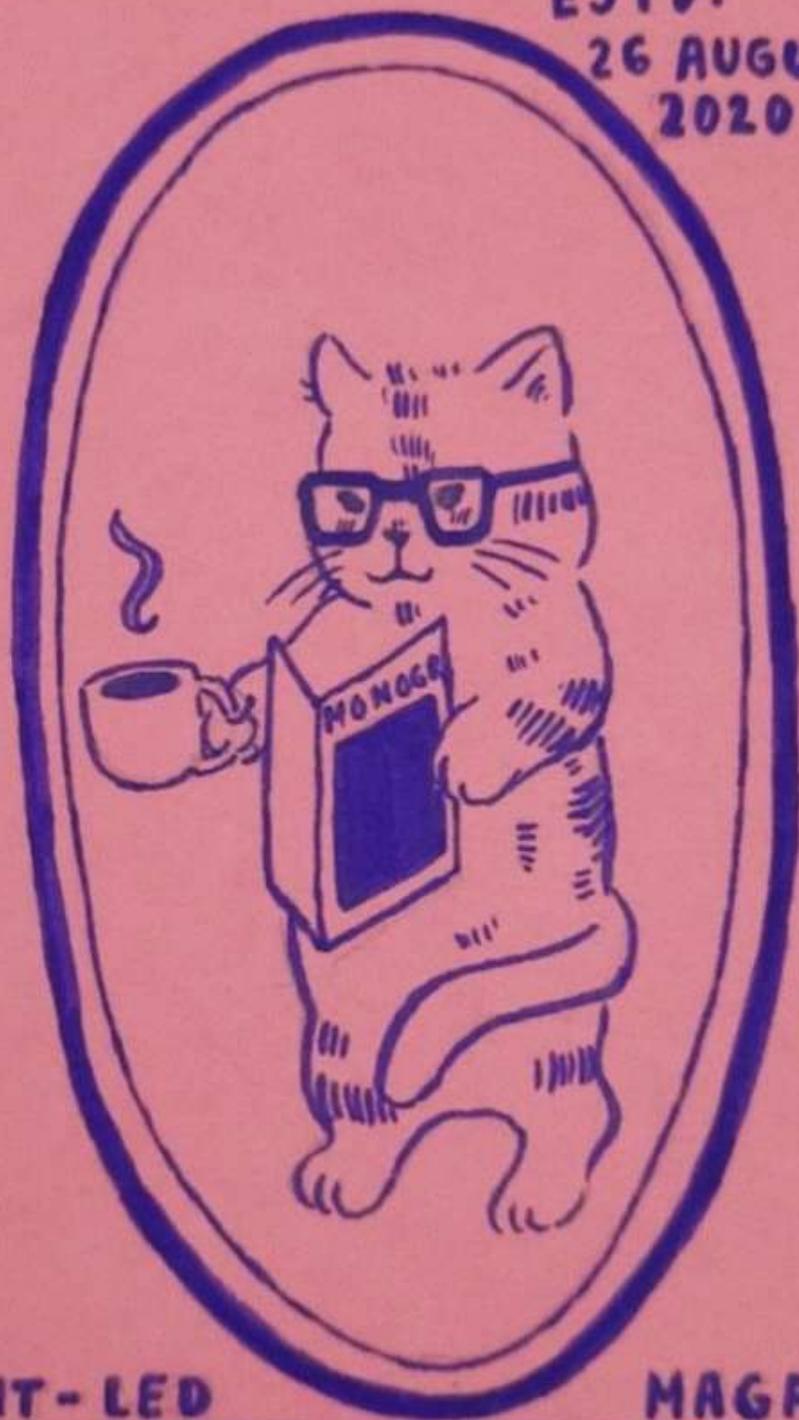


MONOGRAPH

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STUDENT-LED

MAGAZINE

★ ONE YEAR ANNIVERSARY ★

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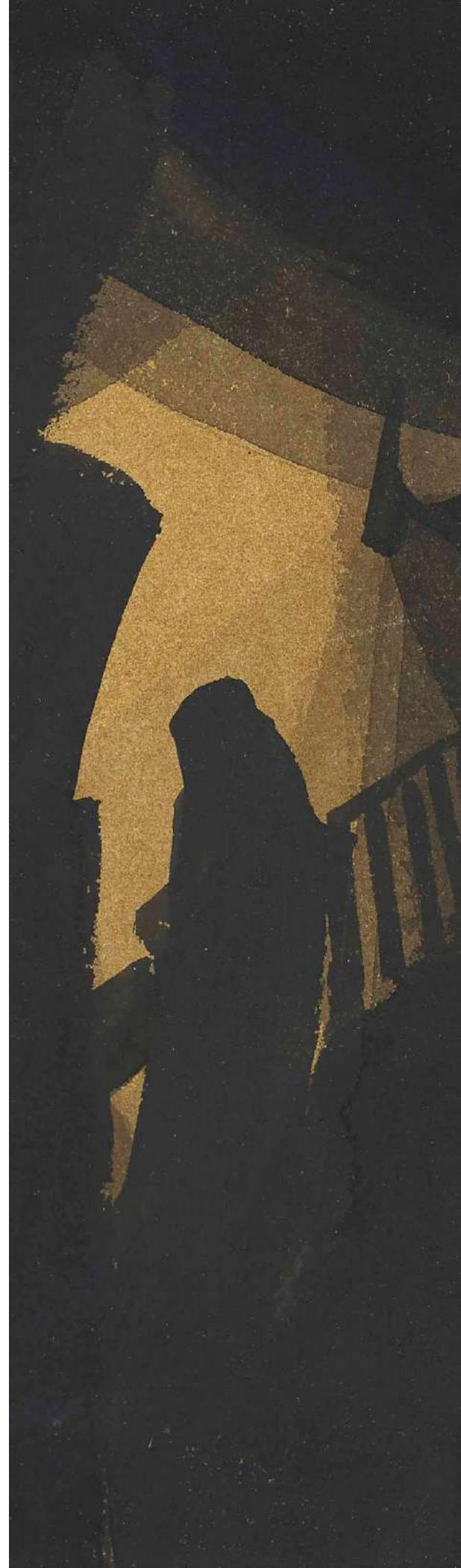
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Editor's Note

With 12 issues down, a year complete, and a 1000 followers on Instagram, the team is simply ecstatic. We are grateful for your support throughout this pandemic. As people slowly get vaccinated and we come one step closer to eradicating COVID-19, dreams of hugging our friends almost realisable, we bring to you not only the 12th issue of Monograph (along with Monograph's new mascot Snooki the Cat) but also the Monograph Store, filled with artisanal, eco-friendly notebooks (thanks to Alluvial India), handpainted totebags and bookmarks. The Monograph Store is here to stay, and we'll be constantly updating it with new things for you, our readers. This will also make Monograph self-sustainable, no longer having to depend on our parents to pay for the website fees.



As for the magazine, this mega-issue was a difficult one to curate, with a lot of last minute changes. But, we hope to have strung together amazing poems and articles for your reading pleasure. A poet to especially watch out for would be Tasneem Khan whose poetry simply floored us. We also went back to in-person interviews, kicking it off with Rohan Ganguli whose fantastic solo album "King of Summer" is out now on all major streaming platforms.

Thank you for supporting this venture of ours and a giant shoutout to Anindita Ghose, Hemali Sodhi (of A Suitable Agency), Shabnam Srivastava (Harper Collins India) and Rohan Ganguli.



The Legacy of Evangelion



Ayush Chakraborty

A mecha-anime revolving around the life of fourteen-year-old Shinji Ikari thrown into a world of colossal Eva units, strange celestial beings attacking Earth and penguins who like hot-springs, *Neon Genesis Evangelion* is essentially a story about hope and despair, depression and finding the joy of life and seeking out one's own identity as a living human while constantly questioning one's existence. The show reflects the mental health of the creator Hideaki Anno himself, shown through the lens of the main character Shinji as he tries to survive in this strange reality that he finds himself in and takes on problems bigger than himself.

Evangelion has always been relevant, regardless of the period of time between 1995, when it started airing, and 2019, when Netflix acquired the rights to stream the series. It lives on as an anime which went from keeping the audience in a state of catatonia under utter confusion, to making said audience ask the question: "are they okay?". *Evangelion* does not offer even a touch of comfort or reassurance, neither to the characters, nor to the viewers. The show resonates with us and the cracks in our own identities, leaving us in the midst of a terribly distressing psychological drama with nothing to cling on to.



One can look at *Neon Genesis Evangelion* as simply another mecha-anime. In fact, that is exactly what I called it in the beginning. It is fundamentally a mech-anime, one with such a huge pile of lore behind it that you wouldn't know which question you'd start with. Although you wouldn't know if there was anything you didn't know in the first place. "So, what is the story of *Evangelion*", you might ask me, and to that I'd say that I wouldn't know where to even begin. Regardless, I'll commence with what Hideaki Anno, the director, had to say about the show and the two of its protagonists: "*Evangelion* is imbued with an undeniable pessimism. I took the liberty of starting the story in a world completely devoid of optimism. The 14-yr old boy with whom our story begins fears all sorts of human interaction. He thinks that life holds no value, yet he is too cowardly to commit suicide. Standing alongside him is a 29-year-old woman, who, despite being willing to interact with others, guards herself from genuine connection. The pair of them lack the positivity usually found in protagonists, but they are our protagonists, nevertheless. For four years I was a broken man, who was unable to achieve anything. I poured every ounce of that broken man into *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. I wanted to carve those feelings of mine into film. The outcome was *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. Who knows if I have succeeded."

...

The story of *Evangelion* begins millions of years before the events of the first episode. On an unknown planet in the Milky Way, existed the ancient extraterrestrial progenitors of life called the First Ancestral Race (FAR). They were a hyper-advanced humanoid species with extreme technological capabilities. Having said that, they were nearing the end of their existence. As members of the FAR started to die out, they started to find ways of preserving their species. The remaining numbers of the FAR would merge amongst themselves and form seven beings.



They would send out seven Seeds of Life into the universe. Each of these Seeds contained the soul of one of the seven members and was placed on a carrier vessel called the “moon”. The Seeds were also accompanied by a Spear of Longinus which could be used to incapacitate the Seed if required.

The seven members of the FAR were reduced to their souls and were stored in the Chamber of Guf. These Seeds of Life were all that remained of these prehistoric, yet incredibly powerful beings and were waiting to be born again, each on a different planet.

From one Seed would emerge an entire new species, the successors to the FAR, and the members of these species would carry on the legacy of their progenitors. One could argue that the FAR are similar to Kubrick’s Firstborns.





The First Impact occurred millenniums preceding the birth and emergence of humanity, when a giant spherical “Black Moon” collided with what we know as the lovely planet of Earth. The massive amount of debris that was propelled off the face of the Earth coalesced in space into Earth’s only moon. The Black Moon, that had collided with Earth was the carrier vessel of Lilith, one of the seven members of the FAR.

Be that as it may, Lilith’s arrival on Earth was an accident, for the Seed of Life that was originally intended to inherit Earth – Adam – had already arrived on the White Moon, the remains of which formed the continent of Antarctica. According to the rules of the FAR, two Seeds could not populate a planet at the same time, so one had to be incapacitated by their Spear of Longinus. Normally, Lilith would’ve been the one to be incapacitated but the Spear that was supposed to be accompanying Lilith aboard the Black Moon had disappeared. So, Adam was the one to be incapacitated by its own Spear while Lilith was allowed to populate Earth. This led to the birth of humanity, the progeny of Lilith and denied the children of Adam, the rightful inheritance of Earth.

. . .

However, all of this doesn’t matter as per the title of this essay. The legacy of any given film or series is not dependent on the huge amounts of lore and backstories of every single character. It is not defined by what can be classified as external or extra information. Legacy is defined by what it means to us and how it holds up in our hearts even after years have passed since the last time we have seen it. Legacy shouldn’t depend on how well-written a plot might be, only on how we perceive it and how it connects to us. Regardless of how well constructed a series might be, it won’t mean anything if it has nothing to hand down to the coming generations. For what is the legacy of such an artform, if not the inheritance of emotions. Ergo, I shall now ditch the lore and talk about what *Neon Genesis: Evangelion* meant to me.





A lament for the ones fearing human connection or the lack thereof, *Neon Genesis Evangelion* takes a deep dive into the conversation of hope and despair. Anno doesn't provide arms of comfort to either the characters or us, the viewers. From the first episode itself, we are dropped into Tokyo-3 being invaded by the third Angel. *Evangelion*, on a superficial level, is the prototypical mecha-anime; Shinji, Rei and Asuka step into their towering Eva Units to fight the relentless Angels invading their world as the futuristic city sinks below the ground.

The conflicting personalities and character introductions are just the tip of iceberg. From an underground base below the city, the shady organisation of NERV keeps vigil. They operate strictly in the grey area and their schemes for the future coincide uneasily with their shrouded pasts. They are as integral to the plot of *Evangelion* as the action happening above.

It is terrifying to watch, not because of the eerie tension that Hideaki Anno builds up right before making it implode violently, but for something that resonates hauntingly with our personal fears and insecurities. The show strikes at those feelings and delivers us a climax harrowingly personal. After its rebirth of sorts in 2019, when Netflix acquired the rights to stream the show, *Neon Genesis Evangelion* might not be the intimidating epic that it's often made out to be.



Instead, it is now a classic that aged gracefully, one that slowly unfolds its secrets with tension-driven character horror. It is no mere feat, wrapping the wider political aspect of the plot with fantastically flawed individuals at the crux of it all, but Hideaki Anno and Studio Gainax do so admirably. A show that was written and directed episode to episode, with final cuts delivered a few days before release, its accomplishments were miraculous.

Setting the standards for pacing, *Neon Genesis Evangelion* was not the show anyone expected. For a show which defied expectations from the very start, it should have been quite obvious that the climax and ending of the show would be anything but “normal”. As the plot drives itself to a close, *Evangelion* abruptly shifts its narrative. From merely hinting to the cloud of pessimism lurking around the characters, the show gets swallowed by it entirely. The narrative shifts from observing the world of Evas to the psychology and existential dread of the characters themselves.

However, *Evangelion* had been focusing on this narrative ever since the first episode. It would often turn to look inwards at some of the heavier tones. Regardless, when the show closed with an hour-long gaze into the human psyche instead of some grand scene of fisticuffs, it was safe to say that no one was happy about it. Ironically, that was what the narrative of the show was trying to tell us from the start: that no one is ever happy. That being said, it was quite serious when the death threats started filling in.

Hideaki Anno had long maintained that the deconstructed nature of the animation and the intense change of narrative was what he had intended to execute the climax of the show from the very start and it that it was not a consequence of time constraints or budget cuts. Nevertheless, Anno and Studio Gainax did eventually succumb and start working on an alternative ending, an answer to the words of contempt and a sort of self-rooted need to deliver a final resolution known fittingly as *The End of Evangelion*.





This 80-minute-long film doesn't reconstruct the ending of the series. It takes a more straightforward look at the climax of the story presented to us in the final few episodes of *Neon Genesis Evangelion*. Transferring the surreal storyline to a more physical narrative that the audience was used to, resolved the story in its entirety with ramifications and despair. Through this beautiful, albeit heart-wrenching film, we see a totally different perspective to what we experienced in the series.

There exists a certain contrast between the two endings. The original gives us hope for the future; the alternative fills us with the despair of knowing that it may repeat itself. The endings seem to be polar opposites of one another, at the first glance. However, on further inspection they reveal themselves to be two sides of the same coin. The hope and despair are one and the same and are to be experienced at the same time.

These two endings shouldn't be considered as separate entities; they co-exist and complement one another and even if the second ending was born out of the feelings of disdain for the original, it does not fall short in the face of immense public pressure.

Once *Evangelion* starts spiralling into madness, the journey will be one that's close to heart. We see ourselves in the characters just like Anno sees himself in Shinji. In an interview with a schoolgirl, he was asked which parts of his anime he disliked, and he answered, "the parts where I see myself".

In an excerpt from an interview, he says: "I'm often asked if Shinji-kun [represents] an old version of myself, but that's not the case. Shinji-kun is my current self (laughing). I act like a fourteen-year-old boy; I'm still childish. No matter how you look at it, in psychological terms, I'm [still] in the Oral Stage. A melancholic oral-dependent type. Well, this is a truth I can't deny; I can't do anything about it. I wanted to move forward from there, but the result was that I ended up regressing back to myself. A dead end."

It is profound to even think that a piece of media, be it a music album, a film, or even a series influences you to the point it shapes you as an individual. Even if it doesn't, as you grow older you might carry a piece of it with you.



There are not many things that has ever touched me as *Evangelion* has. While watching it for the first time, I didn't bother myself with the intense lore and universe of *Evangelion*. Instead, I observed the broken and fundamentally flawed characters who were in want of affection and empathy.

On my first viewing, I never wondered why no one ever mentioned a "First Impact" or who were the Angels, or what was the Dead Sea Scrolls. I wondered how I resonated with these people I saw, how I used this piece of media as a mirror to reflect on my fundamental self.

Evangelion invokes a certain empathy for the people in it as we try to find value and worth in them. But why should we try to find value in flawed and broken strangers? Perhaps, we see pieces of ourselves in these characters. We feel as if someone managed to represent the mess that we call our consciousness.





And through this surreal representation we empathise with another voice within the series. An unmistakable cry for help coming from the very creator of the series. *Neon Genesis Evangelion* will have you question all that governs who you are. It will shake you to the very core of what makes you human. It will leave you transfixed as you stare at the post-credits while one of the several covers of *Fly Me to the Moon* plays as the outro. It might leave you with tears of hope for the characters or it might leave you in dismay.

Evangelion is a very personal experience; the emotions it leaves one with and the effect it has on one differs widely from person to person. It is a surreal journey into the depths of the characters and us ourselves. It is an epic, it is a classic, it is also a failure, if that's the way you see it. However you may perceive it, it will be a perception unique to you. The legacy of *Neon Genesis Evangelion* is what you make of it, what you personally inherit from it.



The Illuminated

Anuraag Das Sarma

What separates a regular novel from a work of art? What elevates an author's style from a simple description of events to the ranks of lyrical prose? What saves a writer from the clutches of mediocrity? The answers to all these questions, I'm afraid, are somewhat subjective-dependent heavily on the reader. You see, a good piece of prose, I've always held, is one that makes you want to pick up the pen and paper (or rather boot up the word processor). Anindita Ghose's debut novel, "The Illuminated" did that for me. Not in the strictest sense, it didn't inspire me to start writing a novel, but it did something far more important. It got me interested in Sanskrit literature- so much so that I ended up ordering a mini-library worth of Sanskrit translations and also later wrote (or at least tried to write) poetry with similar frameworks.





The *Illuminated*, you see, is made of that special something, a sort of chemical component, if you will, that has grown increasingly rare yet incredibly powerful. The prose is strong, bold and dynamic, seamlessly shifting between Shashi and Tara Mallick, the two protagonists of the novel. The plot is steeped in reality, yet has a sort of lyrical beauty to it. And the pacing is absolutely perfect- never does the book feel slow (something that often plagues literary fiction).

However, both protagonists are defined by their love for Rabi Mallick (Shashi's husband, Tara's father) whose death kicks off the novel and sets in motion the events that unfurl.

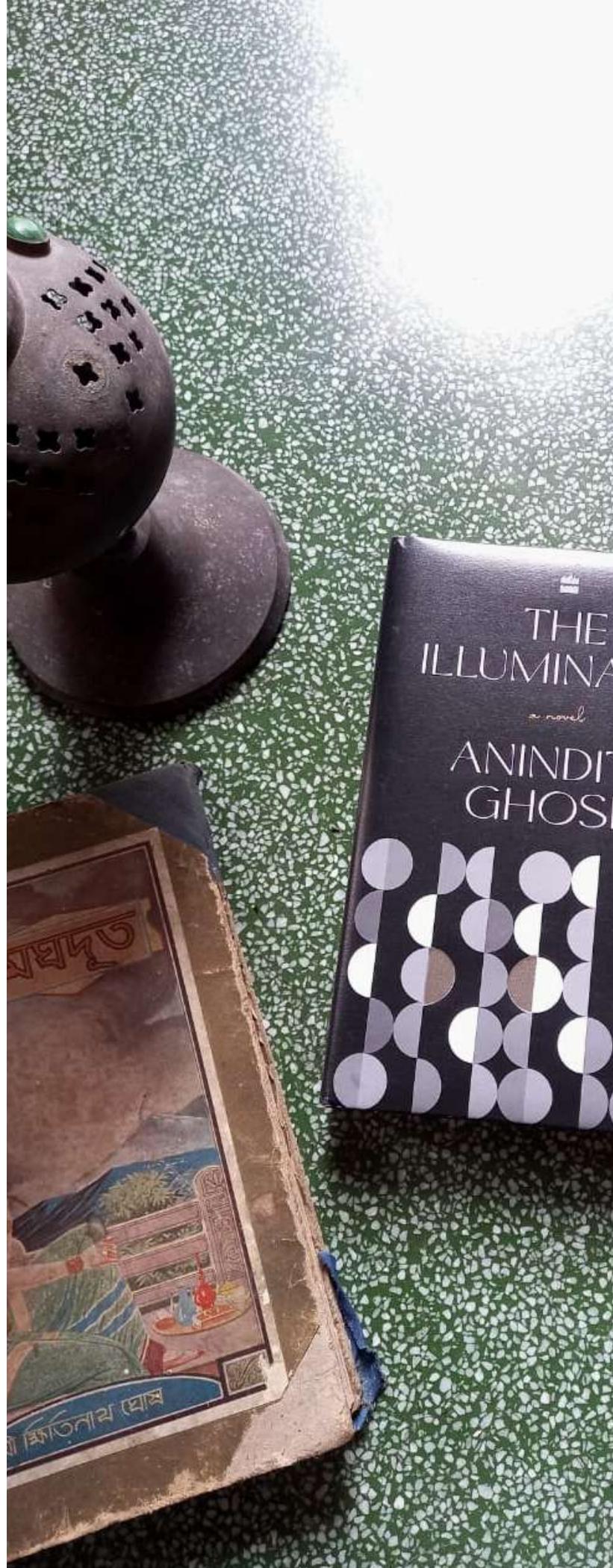
This fact, that their existence is defined by their feelings towards a certain man, raises issues initially. Do they even pass the Bechdel Test? Has this book again fallen into the vast sea of romance novels that reduce women to secondary beings, defined by their beauty and their relationships? Is this yet another one of those books? However, this is nothing but Anindita Ghose toying with us, making us believe what she wants us to believe. You see, the novel takes us on a journey, both geographically and through time, and the characters of Shashi and Tara go through many changes- the only constant being the absence of their beloved Rabi Mallick.

If the lives of the two protagonists was portrayed by the moon, then Rabi was the eclipse- not through any fault of his own, but through the darkening, all-reaching shadow of patriarchy. His departure was a tragedy, it was a part of Shashi and Tara lost forever, but it was also a new beginning for them- like the young crescent raising its head after amavasya.



Let us take into consideration Shashi. Moving from a small 3-bedroomed apartment into North Kolkata's manorish Mallickbari, her life completely changed and so did her sense of self. Despite studying Hegelian Philosophy, she was only seen as Rabi Mallick's wife and was expected to not do much other than order around the help and devote herself to her children. And with nothing else to do, she slowly fit into this circle. Shashi Mallick, wife of the famous architect Rabi Mallick, daughter-in-law of the Mallick household. That is the Shashi Mallick we are introduced to. But what happens when the person you define yourself through ceases to exist? Shashi didn't mean to define herself through Rabi, it just happened, like things do. But now what? With Rabi dead, where was she to go, who was she to be?

Enter the MSS, an organisation modeled after the real world RSS, whose netas and karyakartas drink Gaumutra (a trademarked version of it, mind you) and spout conservative, pseudo-feminist jibber jabber.





Also walks in KC Meenakshi, a staunch feminist fisherwoman who seeks to bring about a revolution in the fishing community. KC Meenakshi, is in many ways, the Hegelian dialectic to the MSS- both organisations claiming to be a feminist one, made to support and uplift women. Yet, one gives them the power, while the other takes it away. How does a woman, who has hardly been given control of her life, take charge amidst such times. As you might have guessed, Shashi obviously sides with KC Meenakshi, but before she can wholeheartedly support the woman, she first needs to take charge of her life. She needs to pass her very own Bechdel test.

Tara Mallick, the rebel girl from Bikini Kill songs, the very definition of a 21st century woman, initially manages to define herself through her own accomplishments. A sanskrit scholar, an expert at Paninian grammar, and able to quote the Chaurapanchasika from memory, she is the high-brow academic oft found at premier establishments. However, people still see her as Tara Mallick, daughter of Rabi Mallick, accepted into the Institute because her father designed the building. To prove herself she volunteers to help Amitabh Dhar, an esteemed sanskrit scholar, trying to build a sanskrit verb form generator. If she could impress Dhar, Tara was sure that she'd be selected to relay the project back to the University of Chicago (of which Dhar was faculty). But Tara and Amitabh start a romantic fling, a relationship that again ends up defining Tara. Tara Mallick, daughter of Rabi Mallick, lover of Amitabh Dhar. Amitabh however uses her, and when the time comes for him to choose the IILS representative for Chicago, he leaves Tara hanging. And Tara, feisty feminist, now relegated to the ex-lover of Amitabh Dhar, takes off to Dharamsala, cutting off everyone from her life. It is here that she comes to know of her father's death, here that she builds non-toxic relationships with people, and here that this book comes to a primary conclusion. It is here that Tara must first pass her own Bechdel test.



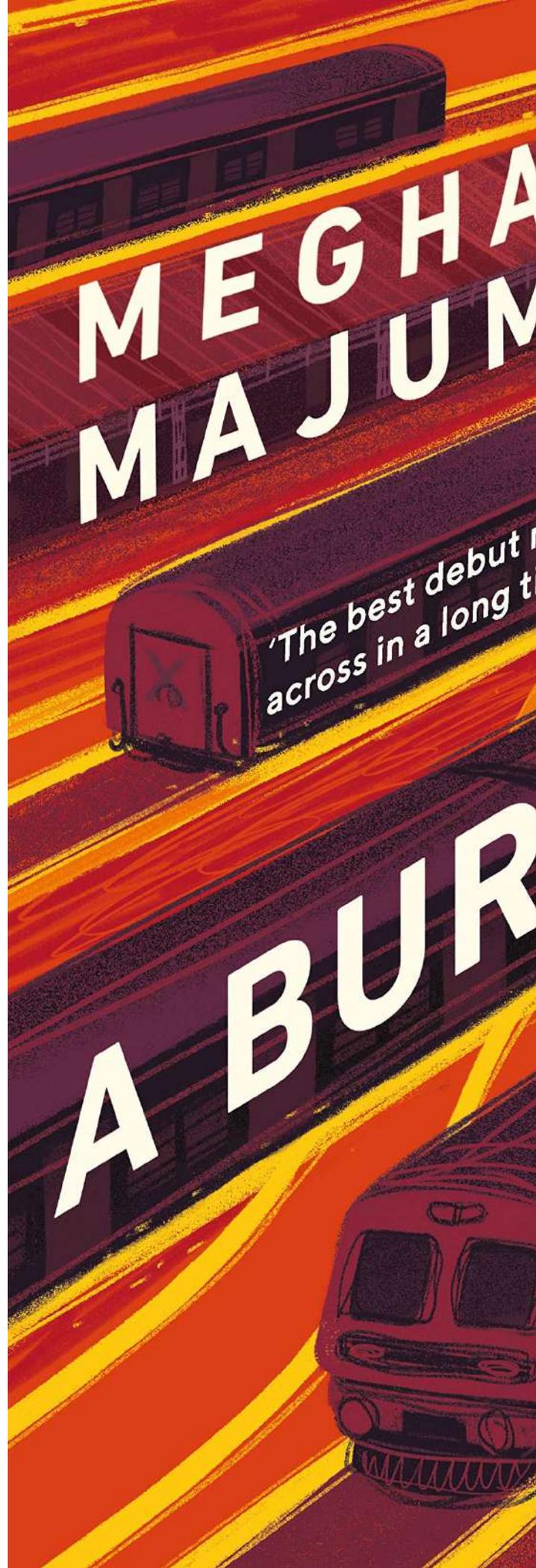
The Illuminated does not have a rigid story, but is rather a chronological telling of events, of two women finding themselves. Ghose ties everything together like a beautiful tapestry and manages to chronicle a journey that feels both personal and creative. Her novel is, by all means, a work of art- meant to be read and re-read. It is beautifully written, weaving in Sanskrit poetry if and when the prose calls for it. She is, by all means, a masterful writer, an even better storyteller, and a person to look out for- an author who is going to define this generation of writers, and Indian Contemporary Literature for years to come. The way she deconstructs the character of Rabi Mallick is simply incomparable. A character like that is usually a fixture of pulp romance novels, the rich, dark, tall and handsome man who can easily sweep women off their feet. This book simply asks the question, “How does it affect the woman being swept off?”

We'd like to thank Anindita Ghose for supporting us and sending us a copy of the book along with Harper Collins India's Shabnam Srivastava. Thank you for sending us this review copy and for supporting our magazine.

A Burning

Arifa Banu

Megha Majumdar is an Indian origin author based in New York City. She was born and raised in Kolkata, India and went to Harvard University to study social anthropology. She completed her Masters from John Hopkins University and currently works as an editor. *A Burning* is Megha Majumdar's debut novel published in 2020. Megha Majumdar's *A Burning* is a scathing attack on the stifling of freedom of the marginalized and doubly marginalized section of society. She harps on characters that are prone and exposed to systemic oppression on account of their identity, religion, caste, as well as class. However, what stands out in Majumdar's work is that she does not iron out all the differences operating from the same pedestal.





She also brings out the politics of journalism, social media activism, marginalization, pseudo- nationalism, and introduces three heterogeneous characters into this volatile context of a terror attack that results in the burning of a train.

In her work, she stitches together three narratives of Jivan, Lovely, and PT Sir. All the three characters have their own subjective aspirations and dreams. As the plot moves along the lives of these three become interdependent on each other and the radical subjectivity of the characters becomes a matter of life and death. The lives of all the three characters are affected by right wing nationalism that changes the contours of everyone's lives.

The first character is Jivan. She is a young woman working at Pantaloons, she has struggled hard to get an education and wants to get out of the shell of poverty in which she has been living. She dreams of freedom, and her one step of exercising that freedom in form of a Facebook post makes her a volatile target for the state to gorge upon. In Jivan's case, her identity as a Muslim is the most potential factor which lands her in prison and falsely accused of a crime she did not commit. The sentence on Jivan and its swift execution passed through political, social, and judicial spheres. All stages that comprise the functioning of a society created a favorable environment for her death. The narrative imposed upon her was very easy for the state because Jivan is not so privileged enough to be trusted or even to trust. The constraints of freedom have shackles around Jivan which she had forgotten were there in the first place.





In her interview with Books on Toast, Megha talks about the vulnerability of people in different terrains and how the definition of freedom is tentative. She says,

“I do think that people who are vulnerable in their real lives, those vulnerabilities don’t disappear in other terrains. For example, social media which might sometimes be seen as this place where you know, you can say anything, tweet anything, put anything on your instagram but many of us know that this is just not true.”

The second main character is Lovely. She is a transgender person, and is doubly marginalized on account of her identity in society. She is an aspiring actor who is very talented and wants to break stereotypes around trans people by rising out of poverty as well as fixed identities. In Lovely’s case, it is her identity as a transgender woman which creates new barriers for her on every step of the way. In her career as an actress, in her relationships, in trying to assert and create space for her identity, she faces exclusion and otherisation. But nevertheless, she hopes for a bright future despite all the systemic oppressions holding her down. Megha Majumdar has poignantly questioned the discourses around normative ideas of fixed identities of what makes a real woman or a real man.



She throws to the winds the essentialism around gender roles and brings to the fore the fact that gender is a construction that society has created to maintain water tight compartments of division.

Lovely is a talented actress well versed with the skills of acting. She attends a small acting class under Mr. Debnath who trains her so well that she outshines all others. She faces discrimination in the professional field of acting on account of her identity. Initially, she is labeled as B- class actor on the basis of her looks and gender, and not her talent.

Majumdar has connected the lives of Jivan and Lovely in such a way that she has all the power to help Jivan out of the prison. Jivan was accused of carrying a bag full of kerosene to burn the train but that bag contained books which she was taking to teach Lovely. Only Lovely can help testify in favor of her and save her from being hanged. The writer has connected the lives of these two characters in such a way that brings out the faulty skeletons of society and how it positions the one who are marginalized. Talking about her and Jivan, Lovely says,

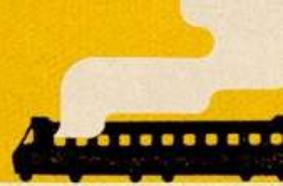
“When I am thinking about it, I am truly feeling that Jivan and I are both insects. We are no more than grasshoppers whose wings are being plucked. We are no more lizards whose tails are being pulled. Is anybody believing that I can be having some talent?”

The third central character of the novel is PT Sir. Majumdar has given PT Sir a third person narrative as she wants the readers to maintain a critical distance from him and his moral choices. PT Sir did not have any attention or power in his school and neither in his social circles.



A THRILLING TOUR DE FORCE

from a magnificent new voice in contemporary fiction...



A BURNING

is an electrifying tale of innocence, guilt, betrayal, and love.

He has instilled in him a radical pseudo- nationalism which promotes hate crimes against the minority. His ambitions and dreams are polluted with corruption. His complicity is a disappointment to the readers, but that is how the novel is realistic in terms of its issues.

All of these three characters are the main focus of the novel. They are realistic in their portrayal and spur the readers into thinking about the workings of society which suffocates the freedom to speak, live, and achieve dreams. The readers are forced to reflect upon their everyday lives and the parallel similarities between our real lives and the novel.

In her Acknowledgments, Megha Majumdar writes that,

“I know that a book comes into being because of the astute reads, creativity, and hard work of many, many people.”

I would add some more to it and say that a book that appeals to the realistic side of society and speak one on one with the readers and pricks their conscience into action, also makes for a successful work of art which Majumdar has delivered with intelligence and art



Whereabouts

Kinjal Chandra

Whereabouts draws you in a whirlpool of solitude, rumination, and gloom, and consummately so. It is precisely what its title suggests – the whereabouts of an unnamed and adrift middle-aged woman grappling with several difficulties, finding her way through life in an unnamed city, rediscovering her own self in the process.

The beauty of Whereabouts lies in its layers. The more layers you unearth, the more you find its purpose. The thoughts, perceptions, and feelings of this woman are documented in the form of journal entries, with the adequate complexity and volatility of a human mind. Her actions are incalculable but forthright, yet all of them share the common aspect of solitude and seclusion.

This unnamed narrator is universal in nature and purpose, she could fit in anywhere around the globe. The situations she comes across are prosaic and identifiable, adding to the relatability of this character. The book is brief, brooding, and boundless. It is especially experimental in terms of style and structure, something that probably will not suit every reader.





The language is imbued with lucidity; however, it is only the pauses and the silences that communicate the most. In accord with this aspect of the book, I chose to maintain silence on the other membranes you need to peel off to get to the very core of it. Whereabouts is undoubtedly, one of my favourite reads of 2021. It is telling, inventive and distinctive, in the true sense of these words.

And, it is certainly what its blurb promises – “An exquisitely nuanced portrait of urban solitude”



The Hollowed World of Dark Souls

Aryaman Manna

What I like the most about the souls franchise is the cold, melancholic and hopeless environment the player is dropped in. It's been 12 years since FromSoftware revolutionised an entire industry's notion of in-game challenges and world-building, but to this day their games simultaneously feel fresh and arduous. Players need to explore the sandbox maps, talk to all NPCs (non-playable characters, or non-hostile characters that we can interact with) and read all item descriptions available to them to get an insight into what goes on in the souls games, because the story is not presented to them in cutscenes, like in most other RPGs (Role-playing Games). It is common to see people play through these games in its entirety ignorant of what is going on. Dark Souls is a game about entropy and the fact that the universe revolves around death and destruction in the grand scheme of things.





The game feels warm and hospitable at first when players are introduced to bonfires that act as save points where they can rest and prepare for the next area. Those bonfires! I can visualise the pale yellow flame they yield and the airy, ambient hum that echoes in the wind. In its light, the character's cold, hollowed-out bodily features can be perceived, which degenerates every time they die and return to life. Bonfires are essentially places of rest, but they are also the place where humanity itself is exchanged for more power (in a way). Fire is the most important element; it is both the creator and destroyer of life. All beings originate from fire in the Dark Souls universe and to fire, entire civilizations are lost; civilizations, I might add, were created by the gods to keep a check on humanity which they consider an incurable plague threatening their very existence. Upon exploring the map adequately, one can find many factions, even among humans, that propagate the preachings of these gods, and if you don't look hard enough for more clues as to what's going on, you would buy into what they say and do as they request.

The recurring nature of dying and resurrecting endlessly perfectly captures the narrative of Dark Souls. According to the lore in this universe, humans (or any being that has been marked with the undead curse, which I will discuss later) never completely die. Every time they "die", they come back from the dead, losing some of their memories. This cycle continues many times and at one point, they lose all their sanity, memories and what is left is a "hollow"; someone, or rather something that wanders off in the land like mindless creatures attacking anyone and anything that stands in their way.





You might ask, “but what happens when the character that is controlled by the player dies one too many times? Won’t he turn into one of these hollows too?” Despite the player’s appearance as a Hollow, they can maintain their free will, which is immediately recognized by other characters. Over the years people have theorised that the Undead go Hollow more quickly when they have no further goals or purpose. Even characters like Blacksmith Lenigrast who are visibly almost fully Hollow can maintain their lucidity if they are focused on their craft. This is likely why the main character never fully hollows during the game since they will continue on their journey for as long as the player is motivated. The game begins with the player in the Undead Asylum; a place where all cursed undead beings are put away, to await the end of time, as a measure to control the spread of said curse. While escaping the asylum we come across a rather strange undead knight, Oscar of Astora, who is on the verge of turning completely hollow. It is Oscar who helps us escape, by dropping a corpse down into our cell which bears a key that helps us in our escape. Oscar is aware of his situation; he will soon turn into one of those deranged hollows who just attack anyone and everyone in their sight and so he passes on to us, the legend of the Chosen Undead :

“Thou who art Undead, art chosen... ..In thine exodus from the Undead



Asylum, maketh pilgrimage to the land of Ancient Lords... ..When thou ringeth the Bell of Awakening, the fate of the Undead thou shalt know.”

He also gives us an invaluable gift, that will help us in our journey, later on, the Estus Flask, an undead favourite. Estus Flasks are essentially flasks that store the essence of life extracted from fire and when one drinks the contents, their vitality gets replenished. Making our way through the asylum, we encounter the Asylum Demon who probably mortally wounded Oscar. After defeating the guardian demon (of course, after dying innumerable times to it), we make our way to Lordran, The Land of the Ancient Lords, to fulfil the legend of the Chosen Undead.

How did the undead curse come into existence? And why are the undead locked away, even when the lords know that the end of the age of fire is neighing and the world is coming to an end anyway? To answer these questions, we need to go back to the time when the Age of Fire began. A long time ago, centuries, maybe even millennia before the chosen undead came into being, the world was ruled by immortal dragons and there was no fire. We know that for sentient life to exist in the Dark Souls universe, fire must exist and hence even life (other than the dragons and other creatures) was absent. These dragons ruled over everything and this age was called the Age of the Ancients. One day, under the ground, a flame was sparked. This flame gave rise to life as we know it and it came to be known as the first flame and the site where it was lit was called the kiln of the first flame. This flame brought to existence the disparity between light and dark, life and death and hence a cycle of life was induced.



Such a flame had a massive impact on the world in ways more than one could have imagined. Not only did it put time as we know it in motion, but it also gave rise to very important characters that would rise to change the world as it existed then. Many humanoid beings were attracted to the First Flame. Three such individuals, curious to know more, got engulfed in the flames of the First Flame. Upon doing so, they mistakenly stumbled upon Lord Souls. The three of them consumed a Lord Soul each. Gwyn, the Lord of Sunlight took the Soul of Light, the Witch of Izalith took the Soul of Life and Gravelord Nito, the Soul of Death. These Lord Souls essentially turned these three creatures into Gods who would bring an end to the Age of the Ancients and then rule the world that would come to be as a result. But, Legends have it that there was a fourth being, the Furtive Pygmy, who found the Dark Soul, the soul that was passed down to all humans. The humans that extracted their strength from this last soul were not as powerful as the former beings and had little to no contribution to bringing an end to the reign of the dragons. Darkness is something from which humanity gains its strength, unlike the wielders of the other souls, for whom, it is nothing but a curse, an element that strips down from them their very essence of vitality and as one would say, corrupted them.





The three lords knew that in order to usher in the world, they would have to defeat the dragons and take control of the surface. To defeat an enemy who apparently had no weakness in an arena they had never set foot before seemed like an unwinnable battle for Gwyn, the Witch of Izalith and Nito. But it was a war they needed to win for a new era to emerge in a world covered in bogs, swamps and fog and make it their own. The war between the immortal dragons and lords had thus begun and as it turned out, the dragons were indeed immortal. Nothing they could do would even affect the beasts in the slightest. Heavy casualties were faced by the Lords. After numerous cycles of day and night had passed and countless individuals were lost to the war, a peculiar dragon, Seath, had revealed to the Lords the only weakness the dragons had, a blindspot if one might say. Seath the Scaleless, as the name suggests was a dragon who was born without scales unlike his brethren and was forced to betray his kind because of the way he was treated by the others. He revealed to Gwyn and his supporters that the dragons were immortal as long as they had their stone scales. However, Gwyn's lightning bolts could strip them of their defences which would pave the way for Nito to release a miasma of death and sickness upon the dragons while the Witch of Izalith would burn their homes and nests, leaving them nowhere to run. This series of events would lead to the mass extinction of all dragons all over the world leaving aside their weaker relatives like the wyverns and the drakes. Seath would be the last true dragon remaining, who would later be given a high position in Gwyn's military and his own laboratory to experiment on dragons. Thus the Lords had emerged victorious and claimed the surface for themselves, ushering in the new Age of Fire.





Several years had passed since the emergence of the three lords as the rulers of the new world. It was a golden era for civilization to flourish. Gwyn had created his own city of the gods, Anor Londo which acted as a capital of sorts, atop a mountain so as to be closer to the sun. The Witch of Izalith along with her daughters had experimented with fire and the ways of controlling it and Nito had taken over the catacombs in the Tomb of the Giants, where he slumbers to this day as keeper of a Lord Soul. Everything seemed normal, until the day Gwyn got to know about the abyss. The abyss can be explained as a source of unchecked darkness that fuels humanity and it threatens to one day extinguish the first flame. It is said that whatever the abyss touches, gets corrupt and it is an immediate threat to the citizens of the new world and must be exterminated at any cost, even if it means the loss of many brave souls. A town called Oolacile sits atop the abyss. The abyss shelters the grave of Manus, the primordial man who, if awakened, would lead the abyss to spiral out of control and start to grow at an exponential rate, consuming everything in its way, leaving only death and destruction in its path. This could bring a sudden end to Gwyn's precious Age of Fire. One fundamental law of this universe, that the lords were trying desperately to change, was that everything that is created must someday come to an end.



As the First Flame came into existence, it would fade away too with the passage of time and keeping that from happening artificially would only prolong the inevitable. So to keep this ravaging oblivion from expanding, Gwyn sends out his best knight, Artorias to traverse the abyss and put an end to Manus, which would, in turn, stop the spread of the abyss. Not much is known about what happens to Artorias but legends state that he succeeded in killing off Manus, thus stopping the abyss from expanding, but its darkness had touched him, turning him into a mindless killer who would finish off anyone who came his way, which led to Sif, his companion wolf pup to end his suffering.

Many centuries had passed after the First Flame had appeared and now it was beginning to fade. The Witches of Izalith were ambitious enough to try to copy the First Flame but their experiments went horribly wrong and as a result, they created the Flames of Chaos, which continued to spawn multiple demons to plague the land. As a result of this flame, the Witches of Izalith were transformed into the Bed of Chaos, a humanoid-shaped tree-like structure, from which, according to the lore, all demons spawn. There were many such efforts made to replicate/reinforce the flame to last a little longer but none actually worked. So Gwyn desperately did the last thing one would do at such a time. He plunged into the flame at the kiln of the last flame and fused his Lord Soul with it, thus extending the life of the flame, till the time he left the kiln or his soul was completely drained. This made Gwyn the very first Lord of Cinder, an individual whose soul has enough power to fuel the first flame. By rekindling the first flame, two things happened.



The Age of Fire extended indefinitely and humanity was cursed with the undead curse, and this curse was marked with the darksign. This darksign is shaped like an orange-red ring enclosing a black area. It signifies darkness, or humanity, being enclosed by a loop of fire, which they can never break until the first flame itself dies. So in a way, humans are now immortal, but since they have the undead curse, once they come back after death, they lose a part of their sanity and this goes on till one day they turn hollow, completely devoid of all emotions. Gwyn is now an empty husk whose only job is to protect the flame that he had guarded all his life. Gwyn's Knights now roamed the world, capturing all undead beings and putting them into the Undead Asylum, where the prisoners awaited the end of the world.

A certain period of time has passed since the rekindling of the first flame, which has now again started to dwindle. The game begins here where the Chosen Undead now awakens in the asylum and having heard what Oscar of Astora had to say about the prophecy, they go to Lordran, the land beyond Anor Londo, in their quest to rekindle the flame. Here they meet Kingseeker Frampt, a primordial serpent, who is tasked with guiding the Chosen Undead through what they must do to relink the fire.





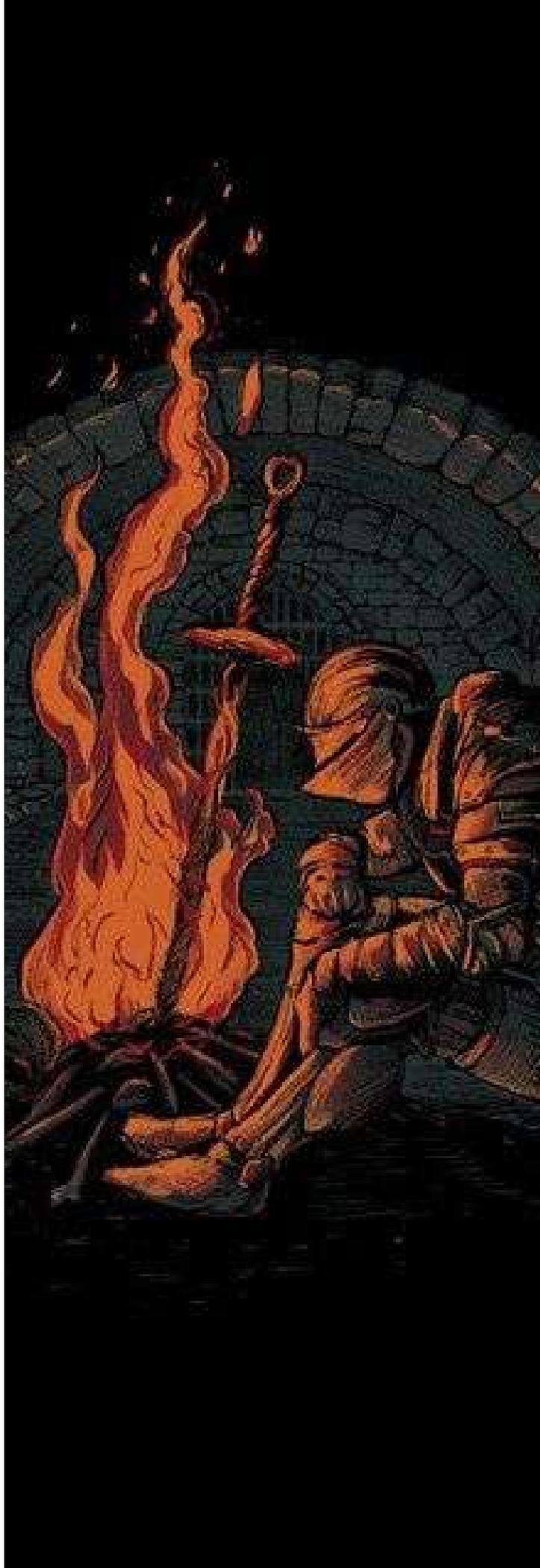
The Chosen Undead must now slay all the Lords and their subordinates, collecting their souls while doing so and finally obtain the Lordvessel in Anor Londo to teleport to the kiln of the first flame where they must defeat Gwyn and rekindle the flame a second time thus extending the Age of Fire again. But as they defeat the lords one after the other and reach Darkroot Basin, they come in contact with a rift in time and are sent back in time to Oolacile, sometime after Artorias had gone there. Turns out, Artorias had been corrupted by the abyss long before he could even reach Manus and it is evident that he was aware of this fact. This is because his left arm is seen dangling from the shoulder joint and it is assumed that he himself dislocates his joint, so as to not pose a threat to anyone who ventures this deep to try and kill Manus. The Chosen Undead defeats both Manus and Artorias and is sent back to his original timeline. Artorias had in fact not defeated Manus as the legends told and it was the Chosen Undead all along. After venturing deeper into the Darkroot Basin, the Chosen Undead meets another primordial serpent, Kaathe, who tells them that whatever Frampt had been telling them was just lies and was just preaching Gwyn's principles. According to Kaathe, rekindling the First Flame would break the natural cycle of nature and the lords would continue to rule over humans and exploit them. Kaathe tells them that it would be better to just let the First Flame die out naturally, as again, aeons later, a flame might kindle somewhere, hence giving birth to life. The Chosen Undead takes both the serpent's points of view into consideration and heads to the Kiln of the First Flame, where after several tries, he defeats Gwyn.

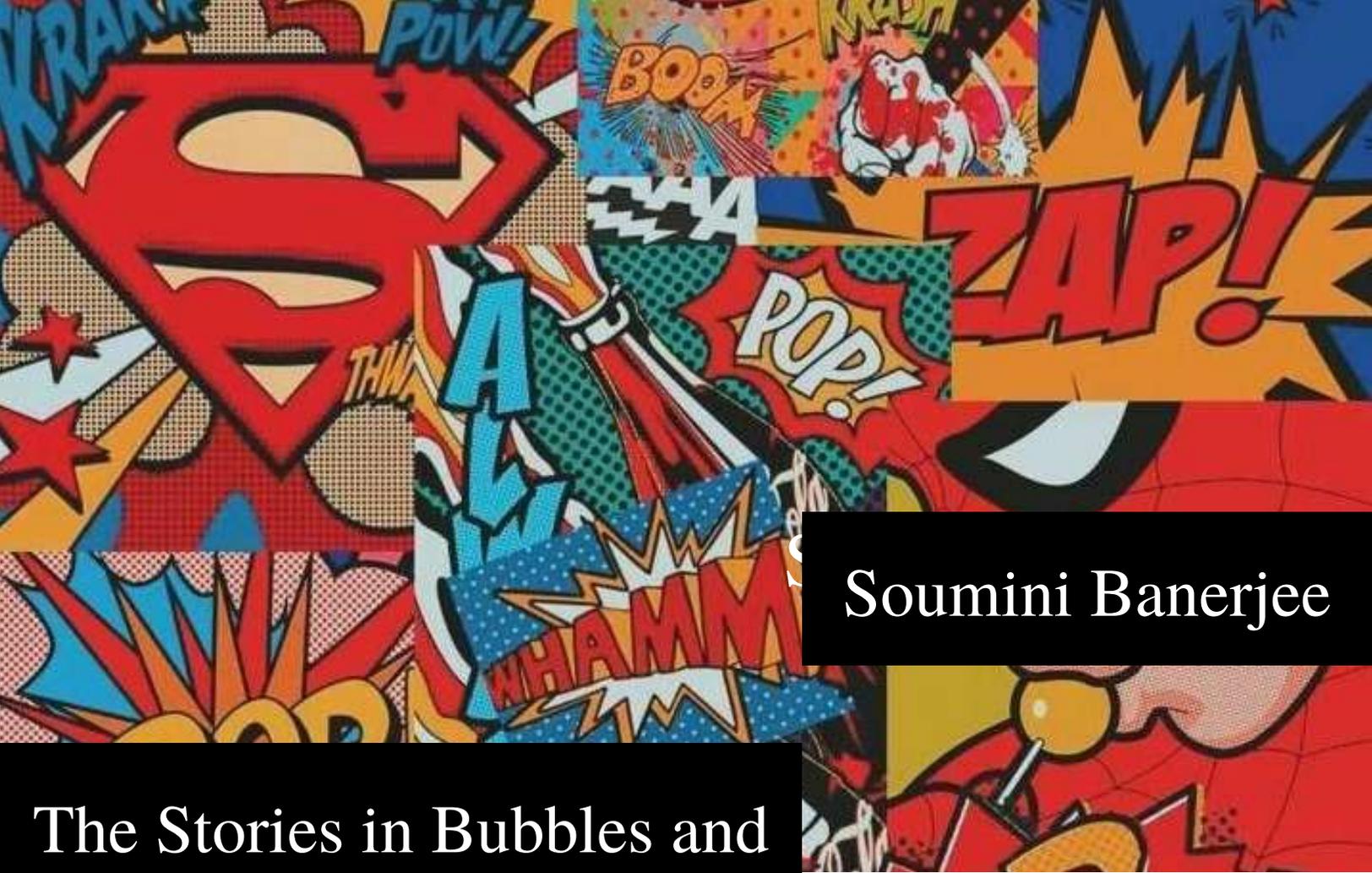




What happens next, is not important. Even if the Flame is rekindled, it would one day, not be as powerful as it once was and would die out anyway. Players have compared these Lords to humans around us and the humans in Dark Souls, with nature. With the invention of fire, we humans have developed more than any other being on earth. We have “defeated” all other competitors to the human race and are continuing to exploit natural resources for our own benefit. We have many times faced events that would lead to our extinction, like plagues, natural disasters and such, but even then, humans find cures to most diseases and ways to resist disasters, just like how Gwyn rekindled the flame. But everything that comes to existence must end sometime and no matter how much we try to prolong the inevitable, it must occur. Dark Souls subtly nods to concepts of an entropic universe with no inherent meaning, much like our own universe. In Sartre’s view, humans simply are, before they are something. Unlike tools, that are made to serve us for some definite purpose, humans have no readily accessible destiny. They must encounter their existence before searching for any purpose or meaning. But this would seem to face an immediate complication in the case of Dark Souls, as the game presents a prophecy to the player very near to its beginning.

So, to what, ultimately, do these lines about the “chosen undead” amount? At best, the prophecy is a fallible edict pointing one undead individual or another toward choosing what the next era of the world will look like. At worst, the prophecy is a willful invention spread to humans by one or more agents of Gwyn and Frampt in order to find a powerful soul to burn on the First Flame.





Soumini Banerjee

The Stories in Bubbles and Cubicles

“Literature is a narrative spinning out on a book. Literature is the expression of authors on pages. Literature is that one subject you relied on for a jump on your overall percentage. Literature made you question the "thous" and thees " of Shakespeare. But really, what is it exactly? Is it a subject? A genre? A degree your family dismisses as "cool", but not good for job opportunities!"

Ah, the memories keep fondling and I digress. Literature's beauty is, it can be anything, as long as it's written.



It could be a scribble writing on the wall, it could be a text message from your friend, narrating his day to you, and it could go as far as being a single emoji!

Literature comes in many forms, styles, premises, authors, events..... It's a never-ending contemplation. The form that guiles the interest of this article, however, is the beautiful, enigmatic, spontaneous culture of comics.

Our conceptions of comics hover over the popularity of Western comic books. One franchise reached such a height, it was well-known even among the most oblivious, out-of-touch of the people around the world. It turned into a billion-dollar franchise that finds its place in every classroom movie discussion, imprints on their t-shirts and backpacks. The elephant in the room is quite obvious. Marvel, we're all looking at you.

But how exactly did it reach that level of fortune? How exactly did particular franchises spike so high, it got adapted to a cinematic lens for everyone to witness?

McFADDEN'S ROW OF FLATS.

By the Author of "GRIMMIE FADDEN,"
And the originator of "HOGAN'S ALLEY."

HE following notes, posted on the air leg sign in front of Kelly's was enough to stir the social and sporting instincts of the McFadden Flatties to their profound depths.

"I do love a pool tournament," remarked Mrs. Murphy to the gossip gathered beneath her window. "It saves a poor soul as many steps to be near the bar, and not to be having to be sending the can all the while. I'll bustle quickly and darn Mary Ellen's stockings, as she'll be looking real elegant against the night."

"Bathie came in last. Congo, Marty, McSwalt and the others of the gang wrote their names on the list early. Only the Kid held off."

"He hasn't no more to play with me again him," sneered Marty. But the Kid for several days remained silent under taunts, until at last he entered not only his own name, but also that of "A. Monk."

"Marty was suspicious at once."

"Who's the mug, Monk?" he asked of the Kid. "He must be a Flatler or he don't go, see! There ain't no Flatler what's named Monk, and if you works a ringer on us you gets de iron down, Dat's right."

"He from Monk is a Flatler all right, and he's not so werry nooder," the Kid replied.

"Now, thereby hangs a tale. On the night of the famous turkey rally the Kid not only won the turkey, but he also came into possession of a time when the poultry dealer was not looking of a live rooster. That rooster was a cause of much misfortune and deep grief to the Kid. He fought him against every feathered creature in the neighborhood and lost in every encounter. When even the parrot had whipped his rooster the Kid determined to get rid of it. This he did in a manner peculiar to him."

One evening on honest Italian hand-organ man, on his way home, stopped at Kelly's for a show of beer, leaving the organ on the sidewalk guarded by

a monkey. The Kid thoughtfully considered the case for a few minutes and then hid his rooster in the organ and walked off with the monkey.

Nearly every Flatler in the Row saw this exchange of properties, but when the Italian came out of Kelly's and nearly fell in a fit to find his rooster on the organ and the monkey gone, he could get no information as to the perpetrator of the outrage.

The Flatlers stand together in such cases, so the lamenting organist departed, leaving the poorly cowering rooster on his shoulder.

The Kid promptly entered for the pool tournament, and the "A. Monk" also entered as his long-tailed property.

Dan's notice had given a tip that the event was to be considered social as well as sporting, and this gave the Riverdown girls (four) a great chance. It requires a small excuse for them to get on their ballet dresses.

"I wonder would they wear those fairy class V dress ones madder's favored?" asked Mary Ellen, interrogatively.

"Yes, and I'd wear 'em favored!" remarked Della, the Dominican twin.

Kittie Hogan came out in a liver hat designed for the occasion, and all was merry and milled she, as Tim hoped it would be.

Only one table was used for the game, the other being reserved as a stage for the entertainers.

It was from that stage that McSwalt began reciting his beautiful poem:

Stay de some at Kelly's bar!
Beauty, beaming like a star,
Lighted all wild rambles soft,
Hold yer mixed ale wags aloft!

Hold, I say, and drink wid me!
To de girl please look most me!

Hold! dea staid v' sweethearts' eyes,
Hold! Oh heart broke—

At that moment the monkey's chain caught around McSwalt's leg, and, as the monkey at the time was chasing the dog, which was chasing the goat, which was chasing the cat, which was chasing the parrot, McSwalt fell in a heap on the whole menagerie, his poem choked off in a howl of rage and pain, mingled with the various cries of the animals and the laughter of the Kid.

"For the love of hevin' hasten quickly, Mary Ellen, darlint, and fetch me the long sterner while I catch the skull of that monkey!" shrieked Mrs. Murphy.

Order was restored by the appearance of the Riverdown girls in a new and elegant pair, which the programme called a "dancer-doo vesters." And it was somewhat so.

But, of course, the pool tournament was the principal event of the evening, and when it was called it was soon at once why the Kid had brought the monk.

Naturally, the animal was not allowed to contest, but he took a frequent hand in the proceedings, and always at such times when any little diversion or trouble caused by him allowed the Kid to count up his score at a rate which no professional could beat. Indeed, the single method of the Kid was to take at such times all the points he needed to put himself ahead of the game.

"A lead pipe stick is a dead liver by de side of de," whispered the Kid when he helped himself to half a string of bottom, and was applauded for doing it by Della—the only one who noticed.

Unfortunately for the complete harmony of the evening Mary Ellen saw Della applauding the Kid, and, though she did not understand the organ, it aroused her jealousy, and she at once put the hooded Kelly baby on the floor and, advancing to Della, kissed in her ear:

"Do not touch me too far, lady; for, though I has 'er mind de Kelly baby der me living, de ferus heart of a Murphy

trobe in dis maidesty bosom, and I'd as lief push in your face right here as not, see!"

"Nay, Mary Ellen, I have only pity for yowse, poor child. Canst hope t' rival Della Jennings in the affections of the Kid? Foolish girl, go chase yourself around de block and cool yer jaw before I smack it for you."

This proved to be an unfortunate form of reproach, for Mary Ellen no sooner heard the cruel words issue from Della's great lips than she punched those same lips with a well-aimed left-hand swing.

The incident, I've said, was unfortunate. But that depends upon the viewpoint. From the way of looking at results, as Tim McFadden did, this incident was most timely and happy. It started a general fight, which the Fresh Cup from Oak street helped Tim and Kelly to quell. And when the party became quite disintegrated and the pool game was resumed, it was found that better spirits prevailed on all sides.

Mrs. Dunning and Mrs. Murphy, the mothers of the starters of the afternoon, had themselves battled with much vigor during the hostilities, but when peace was restored it was noticed that those two matrons had retired to a back room, where, over Mrs. Murphy's can, they were exchanging compliments with the same grace and frequency with which Kelly refilled the can.

Tim, before the evening was over, discovered the Kid's original method of counting, and, instead of giving him the purse, divided it between Della and Mary Ellen, remarking: "Had it not been for those two sweet girls and their high spirits the evening would have lacked the proper joy in its termination, and our hearts being all social favorites in McFadden's Row of Flats."

E. W. TOWNSEND.

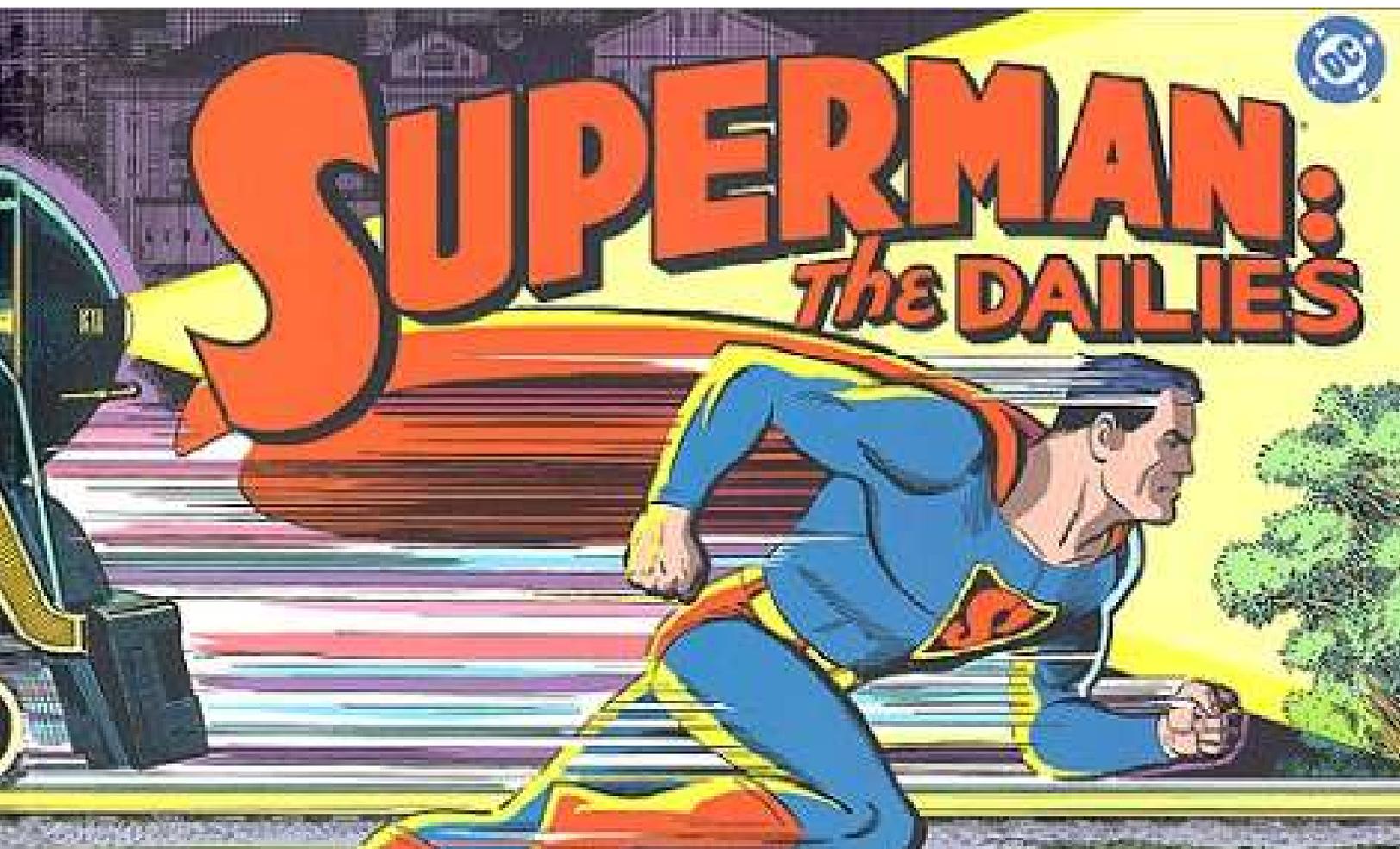


Adaptation is just one instance of the many, that arose amid the robust culture of comic books. Comics weren't really the part and parcel of our own Indian culture as much as it was an ardent religion for a community in the far West. A 1992 comic book at a Texas local store would cost 10 cents to grab. Demands from the public soared, and the printing industry cashed its balances in illustrative hymns. That 10 cent comic book now, could value to a million-dollar piece of image literature. Such prices are simply derived from the fortune a comic book franchise holds. The fortune of a notable author's name, a brand, the publisher, the famous character, riding on which the text traverses through the fame of modern pop culture.

This age-old superhero trope of science fiction that still holds the candle to this day and age, was not the only scenery for American comics to churn their stories on. Indeed, the glories of fantasy with the lowlife tech of cyberpunk lay down the perfect treble note for the superhero trope to tune out. However, looking back at the root of American comics, there was so much more. Let's start by reminiscing about the first American comic strip, titled 'The Yellow kid in McFadden's flats', 1895.

Quite the long title too, authored by Richard Outcault. He specifically illustrated these strips on newspaper outlets, as a chamber to echo out his own political commentary. Its popularity invited the surge of comic books where illustrators with a creative mind tried their hands at the newly popular sequential art. Fame fueled these side strips on newspapers to be published as full-fledged books, giving birth to the term '*Comic-Book*'. Their stories played on light-hearted slapstick comedy and ordinary life.

This platinum age of menial comics blossomed into the shining Golden Age in the 1930s. It was a time of insurgent World War 2, hopeless invasions, and bloodshed. Enhancing the feeling of patriotism was what the genre of superhero comics did. They rejuvenated spirits, mirroring the soldiers on borders in positive, *savior* lights with absurd victorious scenes. The Superman Comic heralded the image of the first superhero in blue red and white colors, symbolizing the American flag. Subverting fears of defeat by promoting the ultimate hero for their minds to be preoccupied was only a tradition of society imprinting on literature.



With time, American society witnessed a change in the atmosphere, post-war. The mother trope that birthed the rise of our beloved superheroes was reduced to a mere commoner among the splurge of other genres. The sudden range was unfathomable, from horror to humor, to romance, storming the shelves of localized US shops in the neighborhood. With a massive readership, comic prints enthralled around hard-core emotions, actions, and even philosophy in developing a scene with the motif. Superman was sidelined as the mere peddler of the communist agenda. The newly published EC Comics painted the comic image border lining on gore and violence, to intensify the theme of an action-packed plotline. The hopeful tone automatically took a dark turn, with taboo-breaking plotlines and shocking illustrations splattered on pages of what was initially meant to ease young minds.

You will sense the next unfolding of events matching your own day and age and possibly wince when I utter that familiar word that was slapped over the rise of this new genre. Yes, *censorship* it was, and a very strict one at that, in the curated “Comics Code Of Authority”. It introduced guidelines for the comic industries to overturn their policies. Criminals shown in a sympathetic light celebrated for committing *unpleasant and sordid* actions were blasphemous to the Government.





Psychologists put their own views to action, in claiming such imagery to render deviant behavior and juvenile delinquency, thereby instantly pushing the genre under a parochial microscopic lens. Restrictions piled up in a familiar rack we will all find similar to the censors riddling our own art and culture. Good over evil was the only premise to be followed, where *society's heroes*, referring to policemen, judges, government officials, must come out victorious against attractive villainous masterminds. Thus, marked the return of the moral saviors, in their quest for rescuing the young minds from the "evil hands of corruption" and spread light throughout... I agree, there was no reason for me to metaphorize their new, feared marketing strategy into a deus ex machina heroic tale, but let that be.

1958 is the year echoing the renaissance of the superhero trope, with the new DC version of The Flash, a literal light at the end of their tunnel, if you may confer. Marvel soon caught up with the trend, with the renowned Stan Lee and Jack Kirby pioneering one of the greatest characters, reaching out their hands to us, in the names of Spiderman, Fantastic Four, The Incredible Hulk.



Insurgents to this optimistic genre tried to overturn this light back to their darker aesthetics with counter-revolutions like the underground movement. However, the *adult-themed comic* publications went all in obvious vain, when the silver age of the 1980s sparked with endearing heroes fighting *the bad guys*.

The fight continued, as superheroes rivaled villains, two publishers, Marvel and DC, rivaled against each other. Heroes on these marble pages projected to 20 inch-wide television screens as cartoons for kids, and slowly in movies for the worldly set of eyes to grasp.

While two archbishops of the comic genre held and fought for the upper hand, other gripping storylines caught the attention of the cinematic industry alongside. Hence, comics with original, standalone stories contributed to the piling reign of fame, and illustrators outside the world of Marvel and DC began to gather ground. The beloved Archie comics, as we're all familiar with now in its Netflix TV adaptation, *Riverdale*, was the peak of light-hearted humor, first published as an add-on to the *Pep Comics* 1941, when Superman ruled the streets of comics (and Metropolis).

With a bunch of high school teens stumbling upon life and relationships, the familiar tales of Archie became comfort reads at a time of turmoil, to the general public what rom-coms are to us that we found our guilty pleasures in, light-hearted comics like Archie were to the contemporary readers of the '50s and beyond.

The superhero trope continued its ever-long path in variations of in-depth storylines to light-hearted actions. The public was not ready to let go of the flicker of hope, of familiarity in brinks of nostalgia they felt while reading along, and now experiencing visually, the world of good over evil with ethereal characters. At last, US History is riddled with the unending flux of immigration, black slavery, indigenous clashes, and the struggle of *breaking free from the chains* mentality. The superhero in comics and cinema was the veil to these struggles. Comics became the coping mechanism of hope.

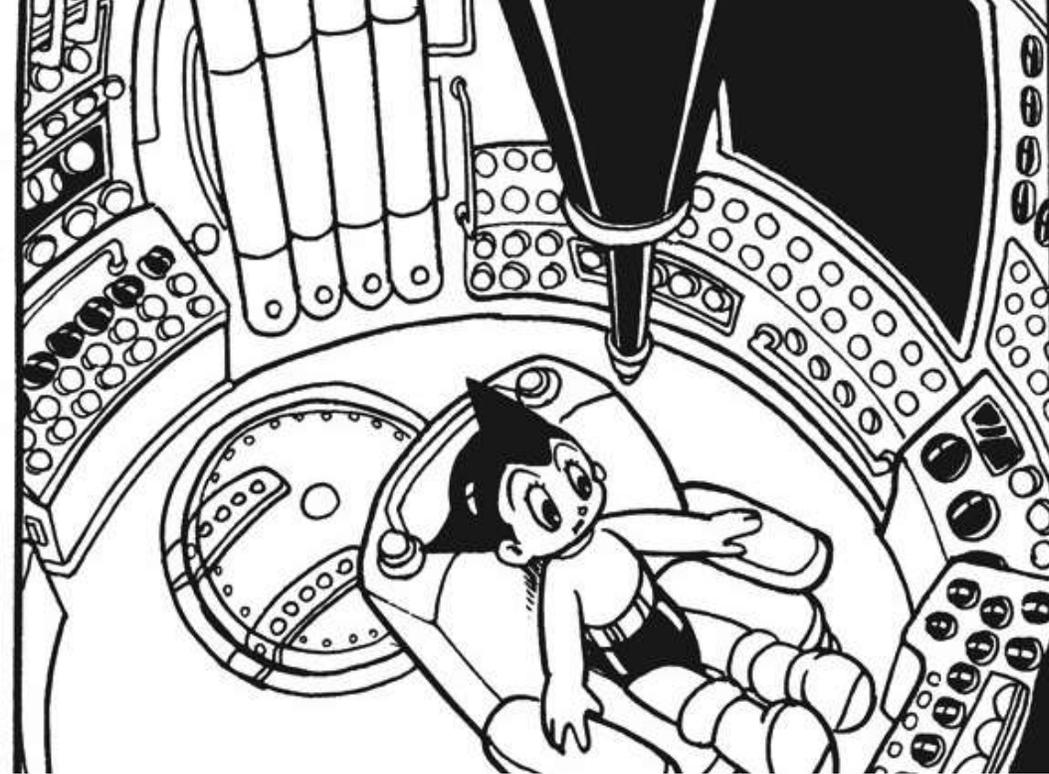
While the story of the comical genre continues in the West, let's travel back a little nearer to where we stand geographically, turning our heads to the Asian country of the far east, where a comic genre of its own orchestrates its own magnanimous empire spreading throughout the world: *The Japanese Manga*.





It's fascinating in a different light when you witness a genre capturing the essence of Japan's culture in all its hopes, dreams, and gravest fears. As we moved from the west to the east, the manga read its lines from the right to the left, a tradition in the traditional kanji writing in Japanese, that vested itself for the first time in the 12th century Chōjū Jinbutsu Giga animal scrolls, the first recorded sequential art.

While the advent of war fuelled much of the popularity in the West's trajectory of their comics, the ever-flourishing culture of Japanese art, storytelling, and literacy alone kept the flame burning hot for manga to thrive, notwithstanding the political go-arounds. Archaic scrolls were the foreground to their birth, rather than the much later arrival of newspapers. Texts pairing with these sequential illustrations were surprisingly a later addition, way into the 18th century Meiji Era, with the publication of a newly popular collection *Kusazoushi*. We can rightfully trace the root of the modern manga that grew from this woodblock-print illustrative literature that brought the eloquence of text and creativity of art together, to build a narrative. The meticulous approach to art shows itself in how the Japanese illustrators branched *Kusazoushi* into categorizations, based on their themes, readership, and possibly in the avoidance of a possible clash in targeted audience reception, that would otherwise lead them in the helm of censorship.

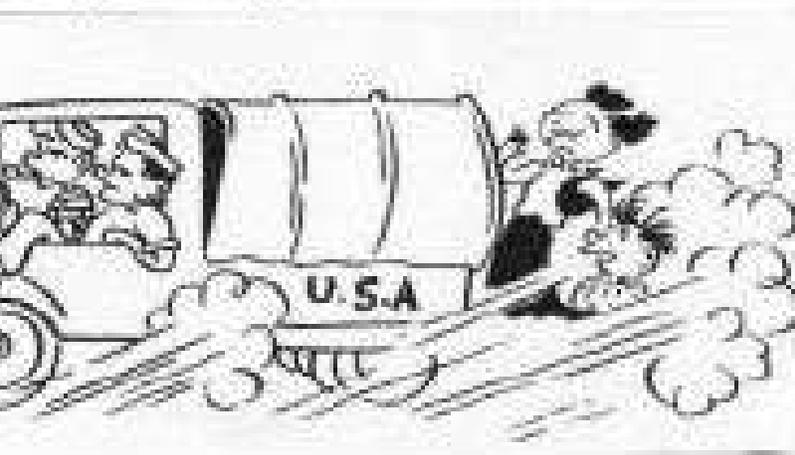
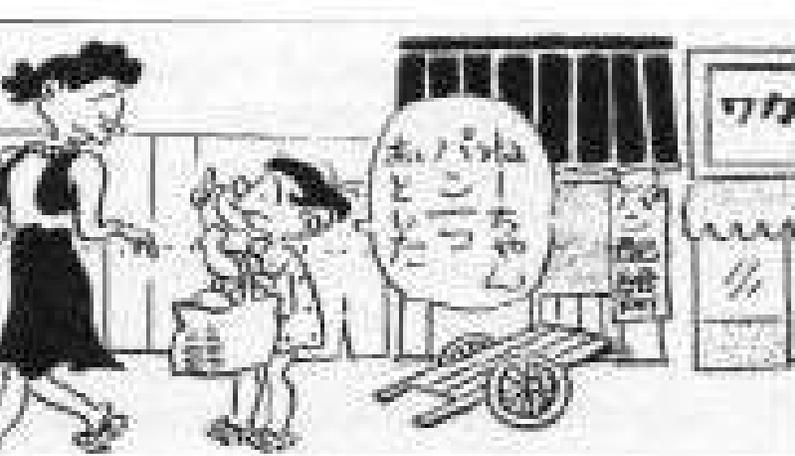


Boundaries are, indeed, everything. No matter, their tales spun around the color of history and fiction that certified them as companions of other forms of Japanese literature, with novels, prose, poetry, and even play. Amid the tri-colored categories of *Kusazoushi*, stood out the bright Yellow hardcovers. No, it wasn't the color that made it distinct, but the unique theme it followed, favoring the adult readership. Adopting from matured storylines of traditional Japanese dramas, portraying life in its unfiltered, most real form was a new kind of reality check in the literature that impressed contemporary readers and authors alike. The popular train engine wasted no time to take its usual course, and contemporary comics started spinning plots of real-life complexities, what we now term as the *slice of life* anime. Over time, Japan's political unrest and natural disasters thickened the social and satirical undertones of manga in the 1970s, with the dissatisfaction of authority, skepticism of present rule, mirroring our own sentiments today.

The groove of technology was highlighted in a post-world war atmosphere, whereby Osamu Tezuka's *Astro Boy* presented the first-ever robot protagonist. It stood as the assertive *macho* manga, brandishing male dominance, and heroism, in a cyberpunk Metropolis. Contrastingly, there was another manga, a 180 turn from Astro Boy, Machiko Hasegawa's *Sazae-san*, that heralded a woman's narrative.

The character, Sazae-san enters the patriarchal society of manga culture, presenting her own agency, trying to live through a hard life, on her way to find her identity in a homeless reality. The release of these two genre-defining styles kick-started the male and female reading distinction. Thus, the female-driven Shojo Manga and the masculine Shonen Manga came to the fore.

Women writers carved a niche for themselves in propounding intense relationships with complex, yet relatable characters. Realism through science fiction, fantasy, and medieval romances, once a stylistic trend in the female Shojo manga, became more attractive to all readers male and female, young and adult. The power of relatability, alas, triumphs over the euphemism of unrealistic fantasy. The modern Manga rests over this very premise. When you have your character take control of a scene, with just sheer emotion and mind, then the only plot becomes a story. That longing for this narrative that's personal, thought-provoking, making you question the rule of life through their actions, is a narrative that sticks to us the most.





The manga culture cast such a spell, where even the most fantastical, sci-fi heavy, hyperbolic action conveyed the deepest emotions, trapping readers in a trance. The big three, namely *Naruto*, *One Piece*, and *Bleach*, are all heavily packed with action, fantastical realms, and magic beyond imagination. Yet, their readers refer to them in terms of their character arcs, their conflicts, and relation garnering their trust. Junji Ito's *Uzumaki*, Kentaro Miura's *Berserk*, *Goodnight PunPun*, and Takehiko Inoue's *Vagabond* are examples of some of the greatest artwork in Manga, but their driving force always bordered on how each character portrayed fear, beyond their breath-taking illustrations.

You can argue that manga has its own share of overusing the superhero trope to portray action, and no one would counter that. Then again, the two cultures split away from a point where the manga adopted the Sekai-Kei or the *World-Style* trend. It blends the dystopian catastrophic “end of the world” narrative, with your everyday mishaps of relationships and school/household life. With the veil of impressive superhero power dynamics, they end up being self-reflective satires of the genre itself, as mangas like *One Punch Man* and *My Hero Academia* humorously portray.



The board basket of genres with which mangas fed the reading audience got visually alive in the world of animation, making anime a celebrated phenomenon to cherish, embrace and perform craft, rather than just an adaptation.

The tension in two cultures kickstarting their journey of comical art, and later emerging behind the screens in their own way, is so sharp, it could cut through the thinly veiled air of our own culture. I propelled over the zeniths and nadirs of two countries that are so far away from us, and yet reached through to us in their own ship of popularity and excellence. It makes us wonder where we stand in this long hall of graphic novels and comics. While War, political downfalls, and social freedom made the bricks that built their literature, for us, it was Indian mythology. The ambit of bubbles in speak, visited us Indians mostly in colors of history, Hindu gods, their adventures. *Amar Chitra Kathas* snooped underneath our pillowcases, while The 1950's *Times Of India* bore a strip of *Indrajal Comics*, accompanied by the humor of crosswords and sudokus. The builder to what we proudly reclaim as Indian comics was none other than Anand Pai, or Uncle Pai, who fathered the ACK and Indrajal corpus. His light never flickered once with his unending devotion to illustrative art, as he went on to create a beloved children's anthology, *Tinkle*. The *Deewana Magazine*, under the umbrella of the world-renowned MAD collectibles, proudly represented Indian culture, through its story bits spiraling over satire and Indian societal exegesis.



For us, MAD magazine served as the looking glass to American culture, with the character of Alfred E Neuman, a young schoolboy, marching the streets, while politics and society showed themselves in the background.

Now, there is the helm of the problem. We stand the test of time, appreciating our culture in its robust adoptions to new forms, but at the end of the day, revert back to the same old trend of foreign roots. We named Uncle Pai the *Walt Disney Of India*, named after a Western icon. Our closest childhood memories have stronger ties to our readings of *Tintin* and *Asterix*, both of French origin. Every day, the humor page to Indian newspapers still has a strip dedicated to *Garfield*, that grumpy cat we all know and love. Why is it that the reign of the foreign engulfed our own historical consciousness of comic books?

It's the same reason why we grew up with the entirety of our childhood owing to laughing at cartoons like *Doraemon*, *Tom and Jerry*, *Shin-Chan*, all of foreign, Japanese origins. The animation industry faltered in development, and children recognized storylines from the Japanese *slice of life* style more in cartoons. Small attempts at animation for kids were made in the golden age of *Doordarshan*, with *Ramayana*, and *The Jungle Book*. They got their fair share of screen time, but couldn't last for long. The life lessons and plot-driven comic characters seemed to have stayed with children.

I've been headlining comics with the country they were authored in, or the society that showered their fame. Let's strip all the territorial labels for now. I think back on them, and my jaw falls to the ground at the brilliance of the evolution comic books went through. They all started somewhere on the pages of light-hearted wit and silly jokes, climbed their way to the diversity of genres, sometimes adopting, sometimes building their own, and now heralding our lives. The greatest success of this print is how strong it nailed its feet on the cultural ground, and stood strong through the storm of the internet era. The internet obliterated a lot of trends over time, trapping them in its digital matrix. But literature still strives in the pages of comics, now curated into many different stylistic forms, like graphic novels and e-comics. Comics are still in the phase of recognition to many. What's to say, amidst that long-running journey, you see the golden era comics like the *Vagabond*, or *The Adventures of Tintin*, being taught as classic literature to students. Oh, the gracious luck of those students! And the possibility doesn't shy away when the naming of comics to graphic "novels" can reach the light of day. Nevertheless, when bubbles of *WHAM* and *WOOSH* riding its journey with creative images can elicit so much from us readers, we are not braced enough for literature, culture, and art to rise again, as a different sun, and changing lanes forever. There is the ever-long beauty of reading we thrive for, and there is the interest that made you read through this article. That's where the flame still burns.





Greta Thunberg of the
authoritarian world –
Howey Ou

Caiityya Pillai

~Call connects~

“I spent 34 hours in jail, we were forced to give our finger prints and DNA samples. The authorities were brutal and insulted us and through the process they also hurt me a little bit”, said Howey Ou, in an interview she agreed to do with me, for this profile.

Howey is currently in Lausanne, Switzerland, protesting against the International cement production giant LaFargeHolcim.

Howey Ou is an 18-year-old Chinese climate activist and has been labelled 'China's Greta Thunberg'. She was nominated to attend the 2019 UN Climate Action Summit, after the reverberations of her consistent actions to save the environment were felt all around the world. When I asked her why she did not attend the United Nations Climate Summit NY she said,

“I was afraid the event would attract news coverage and attention that would make me susceptible to the criticism of Chinese media, that perceives climate activists, like Greta Thunberg, in a negative manner.”



We often forget that voicing your opinions can present a much bigger hurdle, when in more authoritarian countries as compared to western countries. Despite these obstacles Howey did not abandon her cause.

Howey is China's first school climate striker and was the first 17-year-old to launch a solo march in China. Her determination for the cause has made her have numerous conflicts with not only her family but the government as well but she still continues to fight for what she believes in.

“One day i saw meat and eggs on the table and threw them on the floor, my family and i fought for several hours and both sides were agitated but i knew i had to stand by my point.”, her acts of disobedience at home are what translated to the global changes she is making today.

In a video profile about her, The Guardian, explains how she is the first young person in China to engage in Greta Thunberg's 'Friday's for future climate strikes.' They described her as someone who “Takes initiative”, is an “Independent thinker” and also said that she “deeply cares about the community and the world around her.”

Gu Chen from Global Times negates the claims of the article in The Guardian. The article titled, “China's young climate heroes fight apathy - and the party line”, praises Howey Ou for her initiatives in saving the environment, despite the authoritative environment she is in.

“Countless people in China are in fact contributing to protecting the environment and dealing with climate change, but they just don't want to publicise it.”, says Gu Chen. He also emphasised how she had been called a “true hero” in the article “when all she did was answer the call of Greta Thunberg to boycott classes” and “planted 6 trees”.





In another article about Howey, titled “China's first climate striker warned: give it up or you can't go back to school.”, The Guardian, further establishes how Howey's actions were so eye-catching that the authorities threatened her tenure at her school. She studied Guangxi Normal University affiliated high school in Guilin, until late 2018 after which she was asked to leave. She was told to quit her activism if she wanted to return to school. She was also made to take a psychological evaluation if she wanted to return, where all it said was that she “too stubborn”.

She went on a 7 day strike in front of the Government embassy, this was her first time protesting and it strained her relationship with the Chinese government. After the protest her family and she were personally interrogated by officers. She then questioned the authority of the state and its legitimacy. “I should not feel threatened or scared to promote ideas that are beneficial to the entire world, my voice should not be curbed.”

These acts of oppression aimed at silencing her made her parents felt apprehensive about her involvement in protests and they confiscated her phone. Howey comes from a family of professors and their superiors began to advise them to tell her adapt to the situation; get a degree, a social media platform and then make a change.



Her parents advice seemed authoritative to her. “I'm from a stereotypical family of professors”, she says, “So at the time I felt that they only worried about the pressure from the government but lacked the motivation I had for the cause.”

After the altercation Howey decided to travel around China, attending summits and hoping to make a change. She travelled alone for two and a half months, she says, “I did not know what to do next or where I was going to sleep that night.”

She made do with the cheapest alternatives, carried only two small bags with her, slept anywhere she could lay down, attended climate summits and met with people who had the same inclinations as her.

She was rejected from a large climate summit, on talking to the executive director she discovered that she was rejected because of her run-ins with the government and they did not want to entertain someone as controversial as her.

Over time Howey took her parents advice into consideration. Even though her cause was noble, her actions had to be conditioned to her surroundings. She was initially apprehensive of Chinese twitter media and did not want to be noticed too much. She has now decided to use the platform to her benefit and currently has a large social media presence that she uses to bring to light injustices of the system. She often posts about the cause she is currently pursuing, the police brutality she faces at these protests and the threats she receives. This action has removed the convenient veil used by the authority to continue with their unjust methods.



She is also now home schooled and is currently preparing to attend Harvard next year, from where she believes she can make a bigger change.

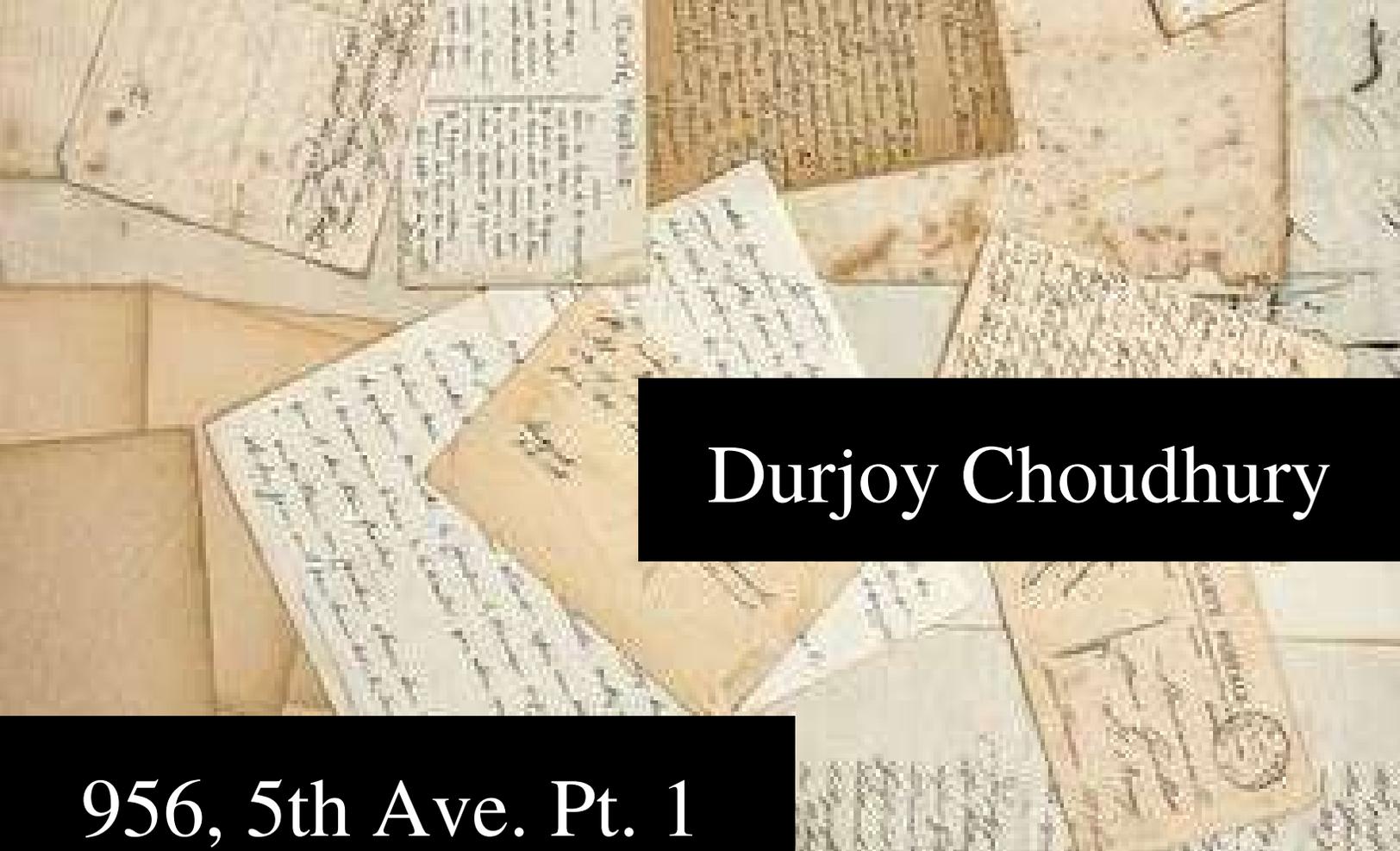
Her methods of protesting were alienating the Chinese masses from her, so she decided to plant trees everyday in china for 17 days.

“What could be wrong about planting trees, it was not a aggravated protest, why would anyone be against planting trees.”, and she was right. The movement received huge participation and support, she planted trees all the way from Global Action Week to China's 70th National Holiday

Howey is currently protesting in Switzerland against the ruling where her fellow protestors have been sentenced to 2 months in prison for peaceful protesting against LaFargeHolcim. She continues to become a global sensation but is still fighting to make grass-root changes in China.

~Call disconnects~





Durjoy Choudhury

956, 5th Ave. Pt. 1

Feb. 19, 2020. 01:45 am (EST)

Oishi,

I hope this mail finds you in good health. You might find it rather strange to receive this mail from me, after so long. I guess, it has been close to ten years or a little more, since we last spoke. Actually, I was searching for a mail address, when I stumbled upon your id. I went to Kolkata, last year. Met some of my old friends, from school. Are you still in contact with any of them?

Hope to hear from you soon.

Take Care.

Nafeez.

Feb. 22, 2020. 11:52 pm (IST)

Nafeez,

Nice to hear from you, after so long. I haven't been keeping in touch with many of our school friends, except Reya, from my class. She started studying medical with me. But she pulled out, in the second year, and went to a law school, somewhere in England.

I have been doing good. I am already a practicing doctor at my medical college.

It was nice to hear from you.

What are you up to, these days?

Keep in touch,

Bye,
Oishi

Feb 22, 2020. 03:14 pm (EST)

Oishi,

I am in New York. Teaching here at NYU and doing some music with my band. It's good to hear that you've opted to practice medicine.

I was about to say that it was expected, but then I remembered that I hardly spoke to you, in school. I guess, we belonged to different groups. It's strange how a person, you hardly knew, becomes so tangled with your memories that they appear to be long-lost friends. Our mind plays different tricks on us.

By the way, what's the COVID-19 situation there, in Calcutta?

Take care.

Nafeez.

Feb. 23, 2020. 10:01 pm (IST)

Nafeez,

That was a quick reply.

The coronavirus situation, here, is a bit unpredictable, at the moment. There is an initial warning that has been circulated, by the WHO. We have been kept on alert, but we haven't yet received a single COVID case. There have been some cases in South India. But there is a lot of rumors, floating around here. I think, politics has a lot to do, with that. The US hasn't been dealing with it, any better, it seems.

Whatever, we have to deal with it, if it comes.

Take care,

Oishi



Feb. 23, 2020. 02:04 pm (EST)

Oishi,

Yes. Both our leaders are absolute scumbags. It's a very serious situation and both are very complacent about it. It's bad in China and Iran and I guess some European countries are getting affected, and these guys are playing the fool. Disgusting.

I was checking out some of the old photographs, from school, in the morning. There was one, during the school fest. A group-photograph. I think, you were in that.

Take care.

Nafeez.

Mar. 03, 2020. 11:48pm (IST)

Nafeez,

Just saw your mail. I guess, we were in the same class, till Class 10. I opted for Biology in 11 and 12. I don't think, you were in our section. I vaguely remember that group photo. It was possibly outside the canteen. Right? I think, I remember it.

Just as a warning call, the situation might get out of hand, so you might want to fly back, home.

Stay safe,

Oishi



Mar. 03,2020. 03.21 pm (EST)

Oishi,

Yes, I took up Humanities, in senior school. We were the troubled sort.

Things are slowly getting a bit scary, out here. Yesterday, they came to our apartment and took the temperatures of each one of us. I spoke to my parents, earlier today. They have asked me to stay put, in New York, and advised me not to travel. I might have to stay here, before things get eased out.

Take care.

Nafeez.

P.S. – By the way, you were looking beautiful, in that photograph.

Mar. 07, 2020. 12:17 am (IST)

Nafeez,

Sorry for the late reply. I was a bit troubled for the last few days. Atreyo, my boyfriend, has been called back for duty, by his hospital, in Delhi. He was here on vacation.

I was going through the pictures, yesterday. After seeing you, in a couple of those, I realized that I had forgotten about you, after school. I searched for you, on Facebook. You aren't there, I guess. I thought, I'd send you a friend request.

By the way, I know, it is safe, not to travel, but take your decisions very carefully. This might last a bit longer.

Stay safe.

Oishi.

Mar. 07, 2020. 04:18 pm (EST)

Oishi,

Things are getting distressing out here. There is a lot of panic as well, especially among the Indian community. Most of my friends are planning to go back to the country. I spoke with Abbu, in the morning, and he is very insistent about me staying here, in New York. According to him, travelling now would be a death wish. I think, I'll stay here, at least for now.

No. I am not on any social media, but I'm there on WhatsApp. If you want to add...

Take care.

Nafeez.



Mar. 10, 2020. 09:59 pm (IST)

Nafeez,

I think, mail is good for me.

Stay safe.

Oishi.

Mar. 14, 2020. 04:10 pm (EST)

Oishi,

I think we're heading for a lockdown, here in the US. They came for a round of tests, in my apartment. I think there have been a couple of cases. They have been hospitalized. We have been advised to stay indoors. I think, I'll go and stock up for the week.

How is the situation there? I have been hearing about quite a few cases in Kerala. Italy has been badly affected. I have been hearing about a lot of deaths, out there. Over 50 people have died in the US.

Stay safe.

Nafeez

Mar. 15, 2020. 11:16 pm (IST)

Nafeez,

The situation in India, is also worsening.

We do not have adequate kits and equipment to stay safe, here. The virus hasn't hit Bengal, yet, but I do not know for how long, that will be the case. Our hospital has been declared as a designated one, for treating COVID-19. We were very busy, the last couple of days, transferring patients to other hospitals. The status quo, out here, is very dubious. It's like, right before the storm hits you. We are all waiting for the wave. The only problem is, we're not sure, how to tackle it.

I spoke to Atreyo, in the morning. It's the same situation, out there, in Delhi.

I must go to sleep. I have a reporting time of 7am, tomorrow. I fear, it's going to be a long day. Need to get some sleep.

Keep in touch.

Stay safe.

Oishi.

P.S. – Stock up your supplies, at least for a week and try to stay indoors.



Mar. 16, 2020. 04:32 am (EST)

Oishi,

Thank you for the concern. I have already stocked up, for the next couple of weeks. Groceries et al.

I was reading a novel by Camus and I have been having strange thoughts. Maybe, I am panicking too much.

Stay safe.

Nafeez

Mar. 16, 2020. 03:00 pm (IST)

Nafeez,

The Plague? It's a bit dystopic, but I can figure, what you're thinking. I think that's a little exaggerated in comparison to the situation that we are in. You've been staying awake late, it seems?

Today, the work pressure, in the hospital was a little eased out. I guess, we've done the hard work and now, we are just waiting for it to strike. But there has been a rise of tension and panic with the lack of adequate PPEs, in the hospital. We, put in a deputation, with the in-charge, requesting more safety gears.

I'd make a small suggestion, if you'd take it. Try and stay indoors. As far as we know, according to all speculations, this virus does not fall under the air-bourne category, which means it has a small radius of infecting people.



You know, it might sound that I'm speaking out of turn, but this quarantine period might look boring to most of the people, but you're an artist, right? Work on your art. I guess, you'll find some solace and you'd feel better.

Stay safe.

Oishi

Mar. 16, 2020. 05:36 am (EST)

Oishi,

Don't worry, I am planning not to leave the apartment, any time soon.

I know what you're trying to say. But, it's easy to think that art flows out every time. I guess, it's easier said than done. I have never been in such a situation, maybe that's why I cannot yet comprehend this phase. Believe me, I have seen stranger times, in my life, and I've spent hours on my instrument or maybe write a song. And, there have been happier stretches, as well, and I have written new songs, about those as well. But maybe, this situation is so different that I still cannot have a grasp on my emotions. You know, half of the time, I'm feeling so empty and so void that I cannot concentrate on anything. Maybe, I'll cope-up with it soon. Maybe.

But I've been thinking about it. You, doctors, are in the frontline. I am still safe; I don't have to deal with active patients with the virus. While, you are obliged to. You don't have a choice.

Take care of yourself and I don't know what else to say.

All the best.

Nafeez

Mar. 16, 2020. 03:32 pm (IST)

You're still awake? Go to sleep. Health is more important than anything else, now.

Goodnight.

Oishi.

Mar. 16, 2020. 06:04 am (EST)

Goodnight.

Nafeez.

Mar. 16, 2020. 11:35 pm (EST)

Oishi,

New York is so empty now. Believe me, this is the first time, I'm seeing New York, so empty, so silent. They say, it is the city that never sleeps. Now, when I look across the city, from my balcony, I can hear the silence.

In the last two and a half years that I have been here, I hardly remember stepping out onto the balcony, just for a view of New York.

The city looks beautiful from my apartment, on the 11th floor. The Manhattan skyline is so majestic and yet it so quiet. I live on the crossing of the 5th Avenue and the 77th street, which is right opposite to the Manhattan, with Central Park dividing the two. I can also see the Dakota, from my building. It was where John Lennon lived, before he was assassinated.

The Central Park is still white, in patches and the night looks so beautiful, from up here. Maybe, it's the silence that is adding to the beauty; or maybe it's the whiskey; or just maybe, it's something else. I am feeling much better, today. You know, it's like the first time that I am feeling so distressed, in this country. I'm feeling like I am in Calcutta. I guess I am a bit homesick.

I wrote a few lines, today:

“The night, it wanders, through desolate streets,
Noting broken signboards.
The wind, it whispers, in your ears –
The lost battles and the loneliness of each victory,
And the mishappenings of some other galaxy, of another time.

I shall send you the postcards of my memories,
I shall recite, each and every defeat
It is for you, I would forego, everything,
My muse, it is for you, I would forego everything.”

It must be early morning, there. So, good morning, and all the best for the rest of the day.

Stay safe.

Nafeez

Mar. 16, 2020. 09:12 am (IST)

Good morning Nafeez,

It's a very nice poem. I am glad that you are coping up with the changing times.

Thank you for the poem. I'll write back soon.

Goodbye.

Take care.

Oishi.





Mar. 19, 2020. 11:52 am (IST)

Nafeez,

Sorry, I couldn't write back to you. There was a positive case in Kolkata and it was quite difficult to handle, on our part.

On the 17th, this young guy, in his late teens, comes in as a COVID-19 positive patient. This asshole, landed in Kolkata on the 15th, from the UK, and using all his family connections, among the bureaucrats, evades quarantine and has happily roamed around the whole city. Day before yesterday, he was brought in as a positive patient. I don't know how insensible and insane they are, to act like this? You know, this can lead to serious damages, with all the spread. And he's not even clear about where he went and whom he met. This is just insane. We've been pushed into the frontline, to face the virus, without adequate protection; without enough testing kits; and on the other side, these rich kids go around the city, with an active viral infection. I don't know, if people will ever learn from their stupidities? Plus, there have been so many cases, all across the country, and our leaders are still reluctant to call for a lockdown.

I was going through your last e-mail, again. It is, indeed, a very nice poem. I must admit that you're pretty good with your words. But there is something that I feel I must say, before anything else. I hope you will not take it otherwise. You know, I like talking to you, over these mails, but just for the record, I am in a relationship and me and Atreyo, we're getting engaged, later this year.

Stay safe. Stay indoors.

Oishi.

Mar. 19, 2020. 09:17 am (EST)

Oishi,

I am aware of your relationship with Atreyo. You can rest assured that I would not interfere in it, in any way. It was just a poem, I wrote. But I do understand your concern and I would try my best to respect that.

Stay safe.

Nafeez





Home Sweet Home

Udita Mukherjee

I lie in bed, suspended somewhere between dream and consciousness. I think in circles – Come the morning light, my beloved will leave me. It’s a regular occurrence yet it doesn’t get any easier. At 6 am sharp, the bed starts to shake, gently at first. I feign oblivion. She knows. She draws the curtains aside, rattles the bed till I can hear the springs and blasts the radio. It’s loud even by the standards of my old, partially deaf ears.

“Alright, alright, I’m leaving. This is what I get in return for making you, giving you everything I had and have, all my love?” She slams the door and I go flying out to the yard.

I make my way to the garage which I’ve turned into a library to while away the time till she returns. Half an hour later as I’m flipping the pages of a Sunday magazine, I hear the sounds that indicate she’s ready to leave. Pipes creak, windows rattle, some furniture is knocked about. I go to the window to wave as she uproots herself and shakes off the soil clinging to her bottom. A shutter on the top floor comes down and goes back up. She’s in a winking mood today.



I smile and patiently gaze out to see what she's left behind for me to do today. It's the silver cabinet. I am supposed to polish the silver. That shouldn't take more than three hours. What am I supposed to do till she returns at lunchtime? She seems to be going easy on me in my old age. I am 77. It feels like just last year when she would leave me the laundry, dining table and chairs along with the silver to take care of before she returned. I wonder what makes her think I can't handle the same load as before anymore. My shaky limbs and digits? I go back to the day after I finished building her, some forty years ago.

I was shocked when she did exactly what she has done every morning since, starting at 6 on the dot; see through my farcical sleep tactic to stay with her longer, ignore my exaggerations, kick me out of the house as she readies to leave for work, come back for lunch. That day I considered ghosts but soon rejected that notion, telling myself a house needs history in order to be haunted. I realised on the same day I'd need a garage despite never wanting a car. A garage for my books, me.

I remember melting with relief when she returned in the afternoon. I'd like to say over the years I got used to it, but I'd be lying. The shock has dampened but the hurt is strong as ever every morning and the longing for her to engulf me when she's back increases with each passing day. Maybe it's because I know I don't have a lot of time left on the mortal plane.

For forty years I've done household chores that my home set for me before leaving and greeted her with a "Welcome Home!" when she's returned. Every five to seven years I've painted her, top to bottom, inside out, she still looks exactly like she did four decades back on the outside. The inside however, is a different story altogether.





Every day she leaves she comes back with something new, be it mismatched drapes, a junk drawer, a seashell, hats for me, dishes, antique chairs and that one time when she brought a fake lizard as a joke. I didn't laugh then, I smile now. It disappears as another thought that's been hounding me for weeks, strays into my mind. Who will take care of her after I'm gone?

I start experiencing desolation, desperation even. A dog barks somewhere outside the yard. Just like that, I'm smiling again. One time she had come back with a pet puppy. Imagine my amusement. Thank Dog for the tag, I could take it back to its people. She wasn't too happy about it but accepted it in time. I think it was a week later that the lizard incident took place and everything went back to normal, she was cheery again.

That's how it's been for as long as I can remember. To this day I don't know where she gets the stuff from and I know better than to intrude upon her privacy. All I know is, all these years I've never once had to look for a job or forage for essentials to sustain myself. She has always taken care of me.

. . .

There's a sound of whispered weeping invading the neighbourhood. It's coming from the place of the 77 year old.

The boy next door walks out only to see a mass of burnt black bricks and broken glass where once had stood the most beautiful and ageless house. Pity, the old man was so proud of it. The boy wonders how it happened. There was no fire or sound of breaking glass. It was almost like the house silently collapsed in on itself. The garage door is ajar. The old man is bent over a book. At first, the boy thinks it's grief, then he realises he's not breathing.

The old man's dead. The house too, judging by the looks of it. How weird.



A Vault Of God

Poulomi Deb

At night, grass was translucent with moonlight slivering through; it was unable to avoid the blades with dried blood. Fujiko's husband lay on his back. Stars gleamed in the corner of his eye, but he could not return their call.

‘Will I be able to eat?’

‘Fujiko, I promise you will.’ Artemis could not contain her curiosity and peered down at the pitiful futakuchi-onna, whose second mouth had stopped crying for rice, who knew that it could taste her matted hair's chilled sweat. As the goddess of the hunt, Artemis had witnessed mourning. She had learned how to conceal her bow within long tunics as she drove the moon chariot. She had assisted in the birth of brutally mothered children. Tonight, her ears, filling with ichor, perked at the mere whimper of a fox. She noticed the stomachs that were not ripped.



The penny-pincher who had married Fujiko never once resorted to violence. ‘They didn’t have turnips,’ he would say. In prayers, she had struggled to translate his happiness and suspicion in twice the words. She had never asked for a plate, or even gravy to smear into her fingernails; yet every night, before Kali killed him with a final blow, he would return to find his kitchen cabinets open, bare.

Kali rose from the branch of a juniper tree. Crickets chirped in the absence of her dancing. Her toes jabbed the fertile soil as she trudged towards her devotee and her war comrade. A few scattered daisies seemed to appreciate Kali slicing the ground, for most nights shook with the echoes of her midair lunges. When she was near enough to see the cavities on the back of the futakuchi-onna’s head, she paused to watch her tongue flick. Kali remembered sticking her own out in furious shame. Fujiko’s tongue thumped on either shoulder, tolerantly gaining rhythm, exhuming it.

‘How,’ breathed Kali, ‘how quietly a woman can dig in her bedsheets, and find a vault of undeath in her heart.’

Artemis nodded. ‘Perhaps it is one of our families left behind.’



The End

Christ Keivom

When I close my eyes there's a silver clock
Inside my chest—
I see the years dwindle in the

Grip of dust so light against the faintest
wind
Then
I dismantle the clock: hands, face, ticks and
ticks.

What is there to say?
Time grows life into a body for lodging
And life kills by growing time inside that
body.

What if our bodies shred itself asunder?
What part would you let me take from you?

I wondered, at one point,
If I had killed myself with silence
If being inarticulate meant that
Death was a mouth





The more there is so say, the more is
Left unsaid—
True not only of the words, but of birds

Even of the imagination; of words as birds,
Which couldn't fit in a mouth, as they
plumed
Surely, they were going to fly away.

I have an old man under my skin,
Sometimes, I check his appearance on my
hair which is
Already greying. But it is not the end
Only the beginning of it

And my head is my heart's dark crack
Where the light—
Forgets to shine through

If I think of the world,
Sunless, starless, pathless, is the way
But this darkness, I tell you is the
Most beautiful thing I have ever seen.



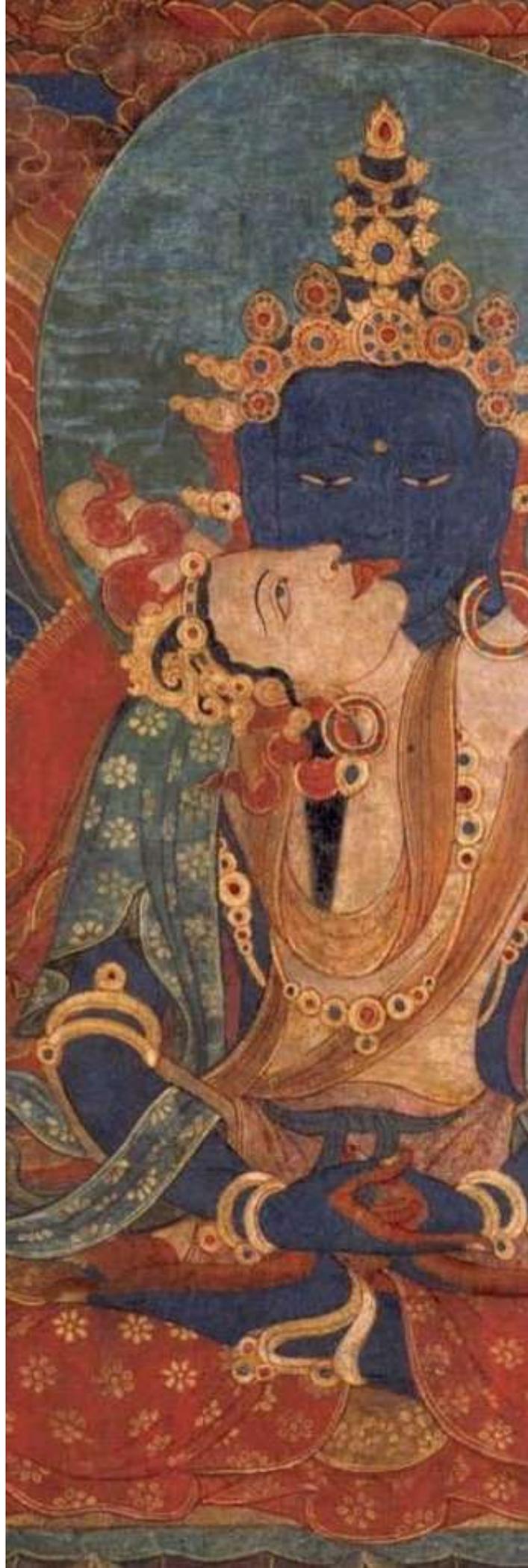
The Forest of Yamā

Anuraag Das Sarma

Praise be to *Vasantā*, God of Spring-
Kāmāborn, divine creator,
Who has made the springs of freshwater
rise,
For the forest-dwelling *yakshās*.
Madhavi weaves around sandalwood
trees,
Each flower a fragrant, white moon.
Wild elephants, impatient, devour whole-
Mudborne lotus stalks, a day old.
Kailashā, the beginning of life itself,
Lends to this forest the Ganga-
Like a serpent, it coils down the lush
green banks,
A mirror to the moon and stars.
Chandra melts in the million ripples,
Like the fleeting *Chandrakānta*.
And hinds comes to rest and mourn their
beloveds,
Lost to cursed ill-fated arrows.



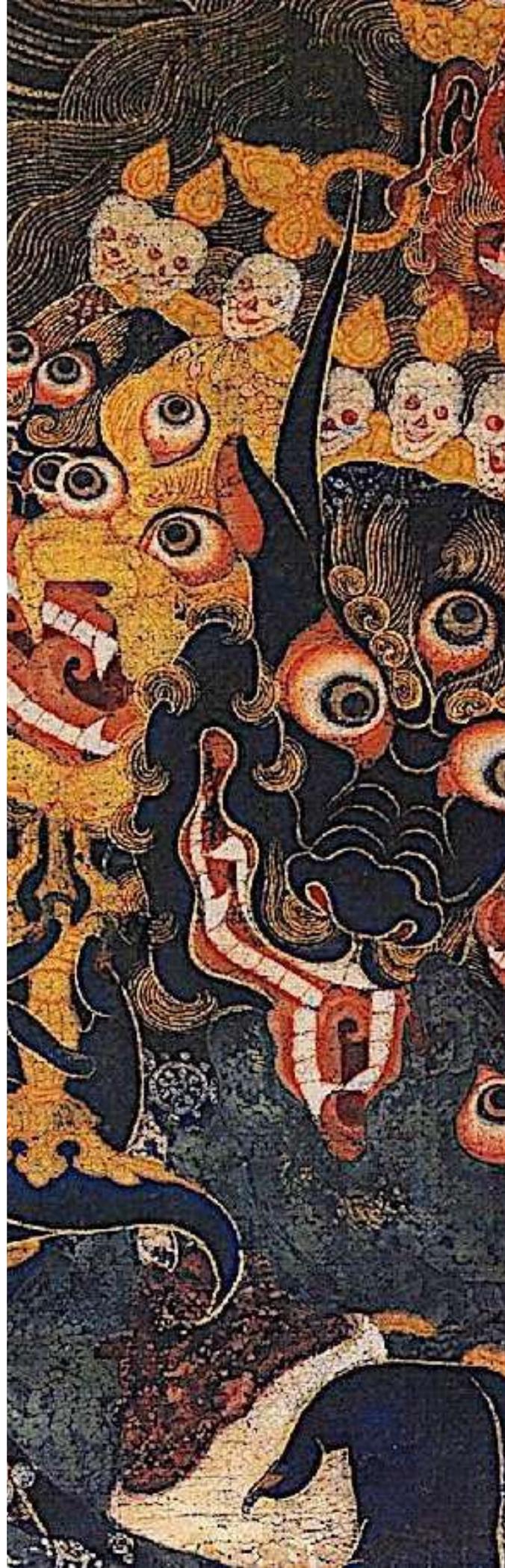
I am weary, the forest calls me to
sleep,
"Come blessed traveller, and rest.
Our arms, covered in bangles of
bright green,
Are empty without your resting head."
A snake coils round my stirrups and
says,
"Haste not, Oh bravest of warriors.
Time stands still in this forsaken
forest,
Rest ye, the dark is forever."
The moonbeams lengthen, and reflect
the leaves
Of the ketaki shrubs grown wild.
But shadows, bent of age, assure the
dawn-
Of the thousand rayed Savitr.
Yamā resides in this forest it seems,
Fear is in the thick-grown air.
Beauty and death, like lost-lovers
embrace,
And sing of collective despair.



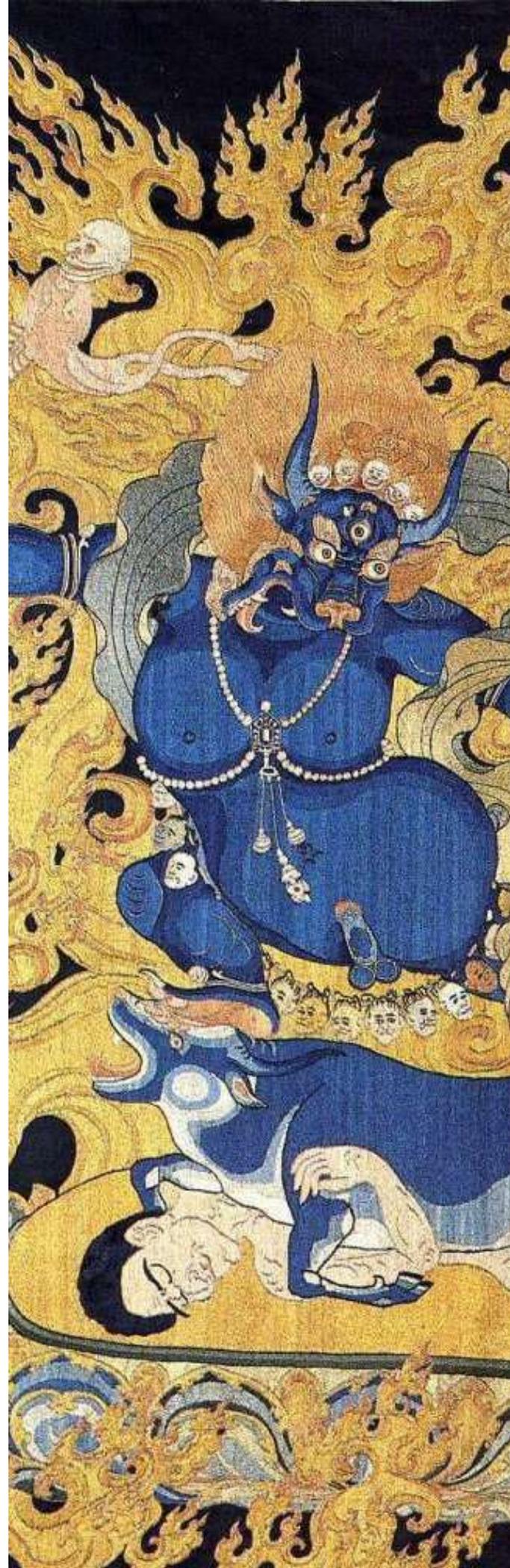
As the sun peeks through the tamala
trees,
The Chakora grieves the shroud of
night.
Chandra, her lover, bringer of
darkness,
Returns to his muse, the stars.
Light fills these darkened woods as if
Godking-
Indra himself did such ordain.
Chariots of Madāna imitate,
My horses hooves, so perfectly-
As if a skilled musician called to
court,
To play the blessed Mridangam.
Brhaspati, Gurudeva, lives here-
He must. In some old hermitage.
Why else would the sun burn so
intense and-
Bright, other than love for his teacher.
Why else would such beauty reside in
these woods,
Other than love for his student.



Then like lightning, the skies tore
asunder,
Trees separated like lovers on-
A purnima night, promises broken.
Out poured majestic creatures-
The wild elephant, dread in its eyes
and-
The doe, as if running from Rāma.
The forest nymphs cried in pitiful
anguish,
As Yamā, God of Death, supreme
Commander of the hunters, led his
charge-
The boar, first to fall to his lust.
Bathed in sacrificial blood, the Bhils
brought
To this forest death and darkness.
The tiger, fierce beast, mount of
Durga,
Fell next, and the forest shook.
Even the sun took cover behind the
clouds
Lest it fall victim to their hunt.



Maddened by the bloodlust, a Bhil
hunter,
Red in his eyes, found my refuge.
Had I not spoken then, in the
language-
Known to man, in learnt syllables,
His sword, an extension of his strong
arm,
Would have claimed the life of me.
Hearing my words, his sword lowered
and-
In voice of command he thus spoke:
"Who are you? Traveller or Hunter?
What brings you here to our sacred-
Hunting grounds, pledged to us by the
Gods?
Why should I, unaware of your-
Agency, let you leave these woods
behind?
This forest is ours, Lord Revanta,
In his infinite wisdom, satisfied-
By our penance, left these lands to
Bhils.
Why then do you, Kshatriyā by guise,
trespass?
Why then, should I let you go?



In dharmā one is taught forgiveness,
But the shastras also preach war.
I am but human, these forests my
abode.

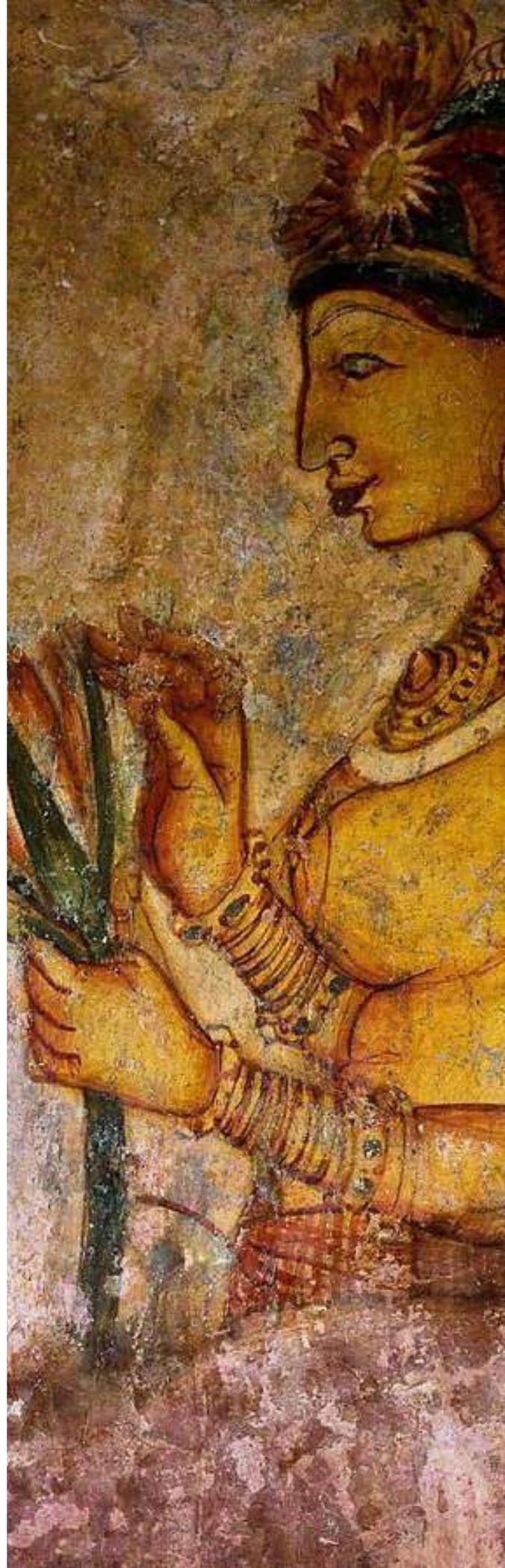
And I must protect what is mine.
So I ask you again, Kshatriyā
What brings you to these woods?"
I reply, my voice shaking like the
shala trees,

In wispy autumnal winds:

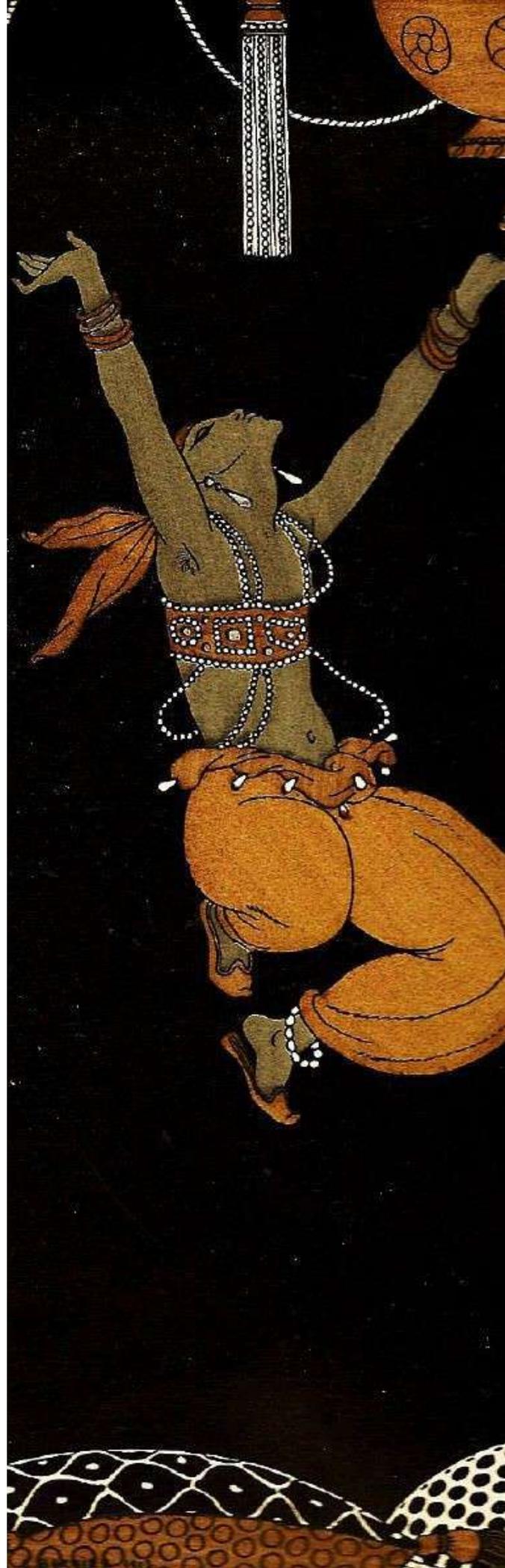
"I seek the citadel of Madanā,
Consort of Rāti, the devoted.

Across these forests are blessed lands,
filled-

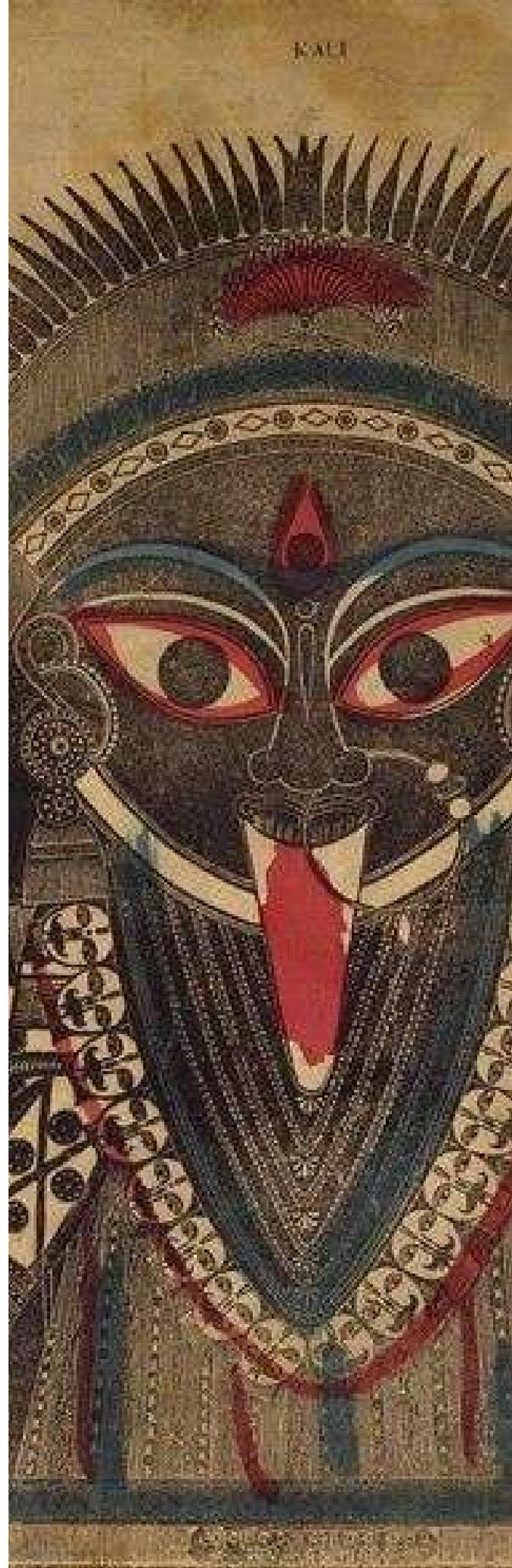
With beauty and grace unforetold.
And there resides my beloved, divine-
Singer, yet so humane in her form.
She could bring the monsoon skies to
the desert,
And flood it for a hundred years to
come.



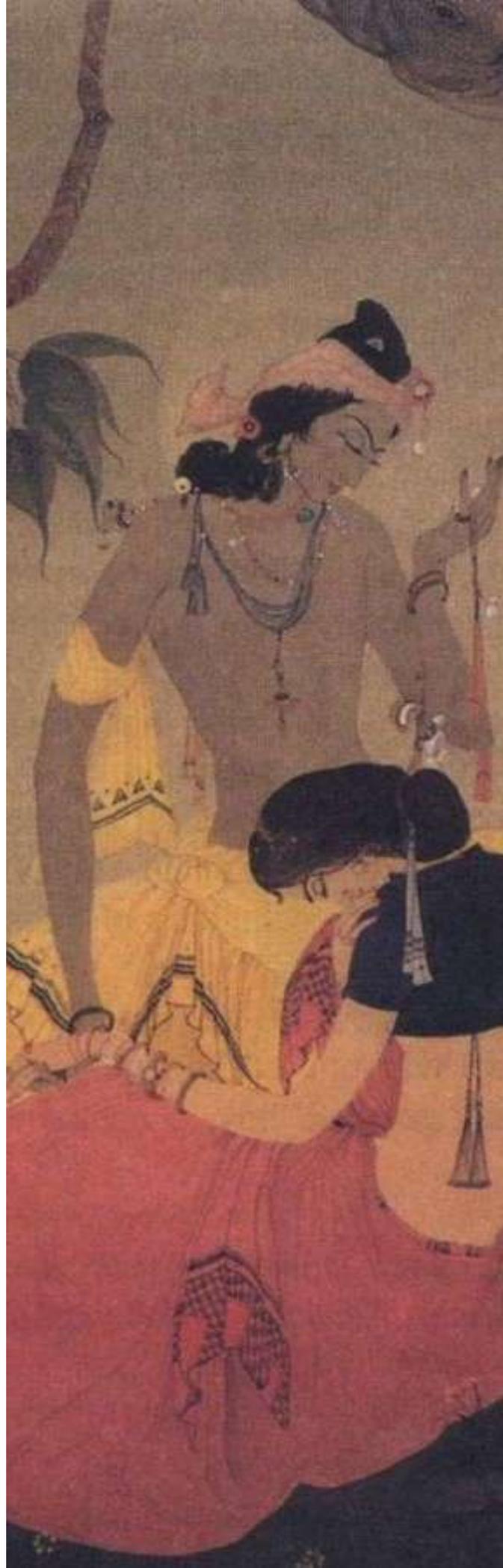
Daughter to Kshemendra, known
across the
Seven Seas as the blessed-
Player of the Veena, disciple of
Sarasvatī, the learned one.
She is not a celestial being,
Brought down from the sacred
heavens.
She does not possess divine beauty
like-
Bāṇabhaṭṭa's Kadambari.
She is quick to anger and quick to
taunt,
Her words, falling off harsh tongues.
The-
Blood of Raktabīja staining her lips.
And her gait, like that of Agni,
Fiery, like a burning ship on the
Harbors of the holy Narmadā.
And her eyes like darkened pearls
evoke,
The forgotten caves of Ajantā.



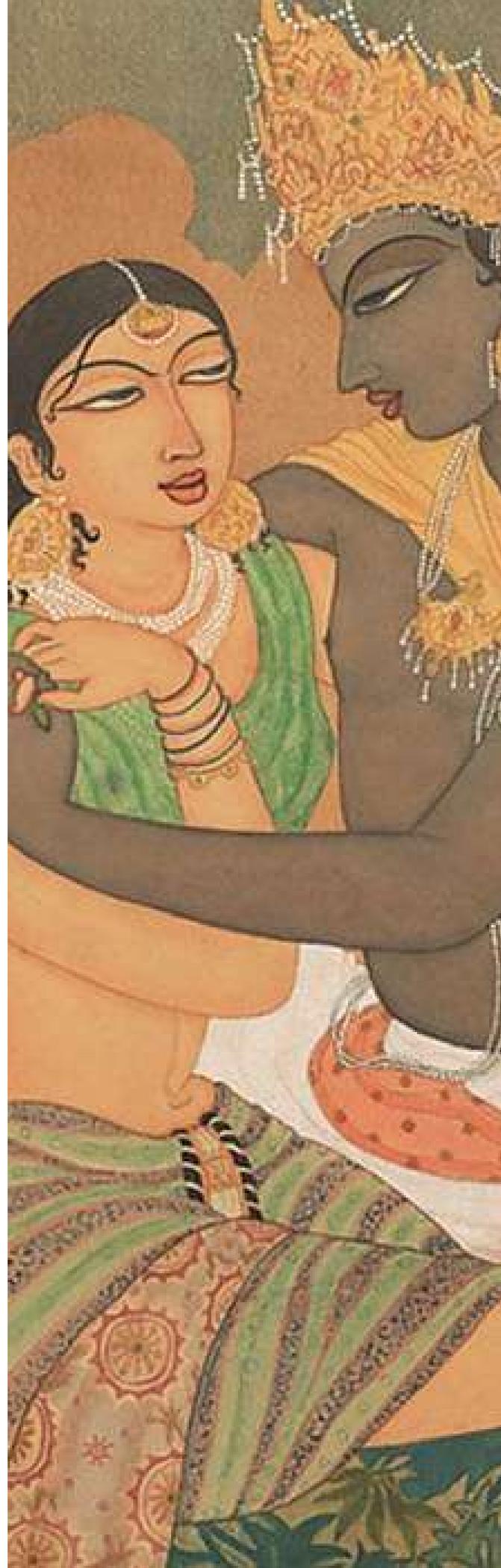
But Manmatha, the churner of hearts
resides,
Inside her and pricks the floral-
Arrow that finds its mark on this
traveller.
First I felt the pangs of love on-
The night that Chandra, afraid of
Rāhu,
Had softened the bed of Tāra.
The earth, shrouded in darkness,
offered praise-
To Bhādrakāli, the protector.
There I saw her; her alaktha stained
feet,
Blessing the grounds she stood upon.
Lost in visions, I could not feel the
prick
Of Kamā's arrow, nor hear the-
Twang of the bow. I could only see
her,
In the darkened amavasyā-
Shrouded behind incense and hidden
by
The fragrance of the stained jabāphul.



Kāma had wounded her with the same
bow,
And when I approached her, to
profess-
My love, to speak of Kāma's blessed
deeds,
She smiled. "You know not the ways
of-
The heart, Warrior. You know to
wield a sword.
My heart is fragile, like the glass-
You break in anger. Like the flower
that
Blooms once a year and never again.
Then why do I long for the touch of
your
Lips. Why do I long for your love?"
She confessed. Her cheeks, the colour
of honey-
Turned red like the blooming Ashoka.
Oh Lady, I said, allow me to touch-
Your body and take this longing-
From my lips that now burn in
solitude,
And relieve me from these pangs of
love.



Under the stars we embraced, the
filtered-
Light of Rohini reflected,
Off her, and fell on the ketaki shrubs.
And then, I knew peace and love.
Even now, her face comes to me in
dreams,
And her voice, sweeter than the
koel's,
Reminds me of her riyaz, Raag Bahar,
For Vasantā, when he made the-
Yellow Karṇikāra trees blossom and
Give unto the earth golden jewels.
Her armlets, studded with pearls,
would tinkle,
When she'd grace the Mridangam and;
The veena, mistaking her for the
Goddess-
Sarasvatī, would play melodies,
Meant for Brahmā, the lotus mounted
God,
Creator of the known universe.



I would the Lords take my sight from
me, and speech-

If it'd mean I could touch her and,
Have her beside me, singing to me of-
All she could see with her own eyes.

I long to be by her side, to rest my
head-

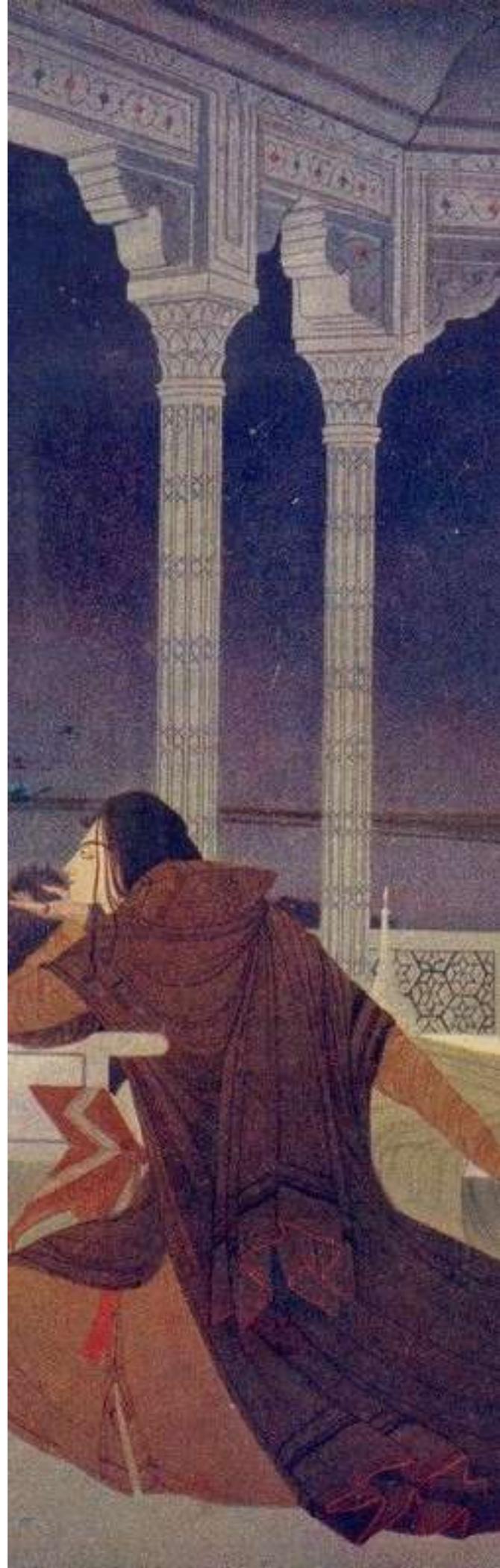
On her knees, as she'd speak in song;
Like the cooing nightingale.

The King, overzealous, sent me away,
To Kalinga. But even in Battle,
I saw her, heard her, spoke to her.
Such is the curse of Kāma's wicked
arrows,

That binds in pain, not love, nor joy.
Even now, I hear her, calling to me,
And I answer desperately.

Fair Lady, here I am, returning to
your-

Loving arms lying outstretched."



The Bhil hunter, his anger subsiding,
Said in a low voice, "Forgive me,
Warrior, for I know too well the pangs
of love;

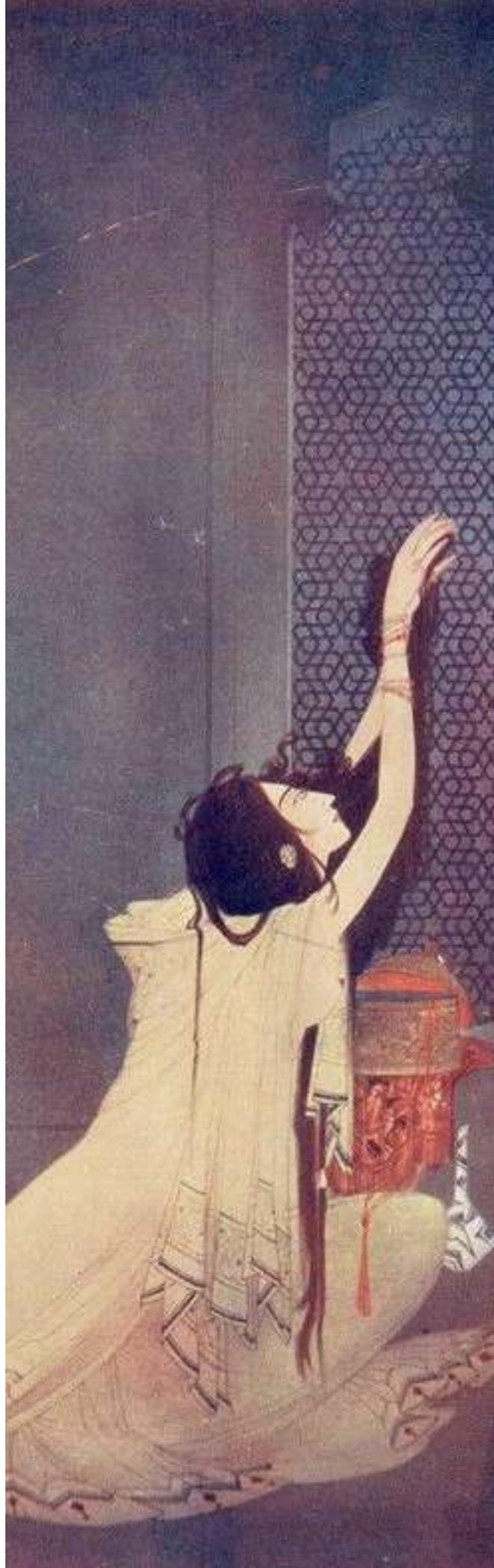
Of the prick of Kāma's arrow.
The lady you speak of is waiting for
her-
Beloved, and I must not make her
wait.

Distance brings to love rot, and time
does not heal-

But I can hear her voice too, as clear
As the waters of the pure Mandākinī,
So strong is your love for her soul;
Strong is Kāma's magic and stronger
is your-

Devotion. Godspeed Kshatriya-born-
May you reach the citadel before
dusk."

Thus spoke he and took his leave,
And I, a victim of Madanā's darts,
Curse the God of Love and Lust.



Do you scoop from the sea or do you chisel in a stone?

Tasneem Khan

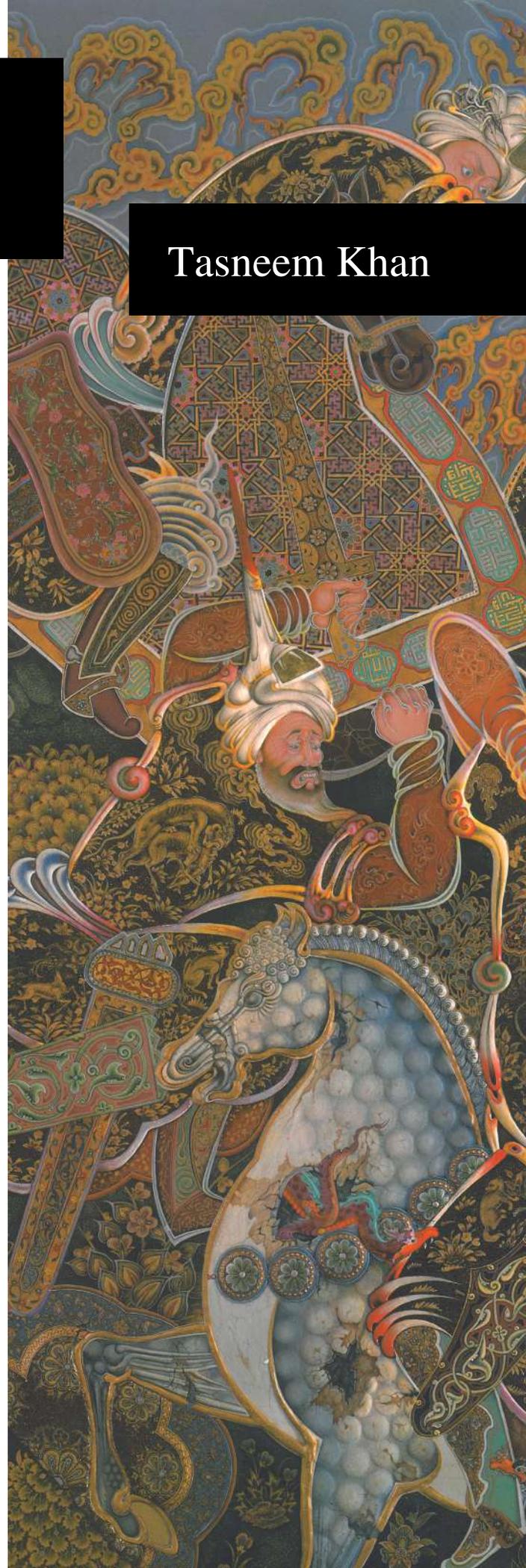
I am the tiller's daughter—
I test my luck on barren lands,
the cursed skies, the wicked season,
my foreign hands, damned,
sow seeds limply.

I am the tiller's daughter—
I am the keeper of crows,
I must hold doom in my hands,
hold it gently, until it ends,
until the doves return, until the Balsams bloom.

I am the tiller's daughter—
I curse until I remember the prayers,
I have only parched rhymes,
but before singing, I wail
until I forget the night, until the night forgets me.

I am the tiller's daughter—
I do not know any sea, and,
to chisel is an art I cannot master,
inept am I,
I plough the barren lands,
shamelessly, artlessly,
under the cursed skies,
against the wicked season—

and then,
like a Pied Cuckoo,
I wait for rain.





They Call for a Carnage In the Capital

Tasneem Khan

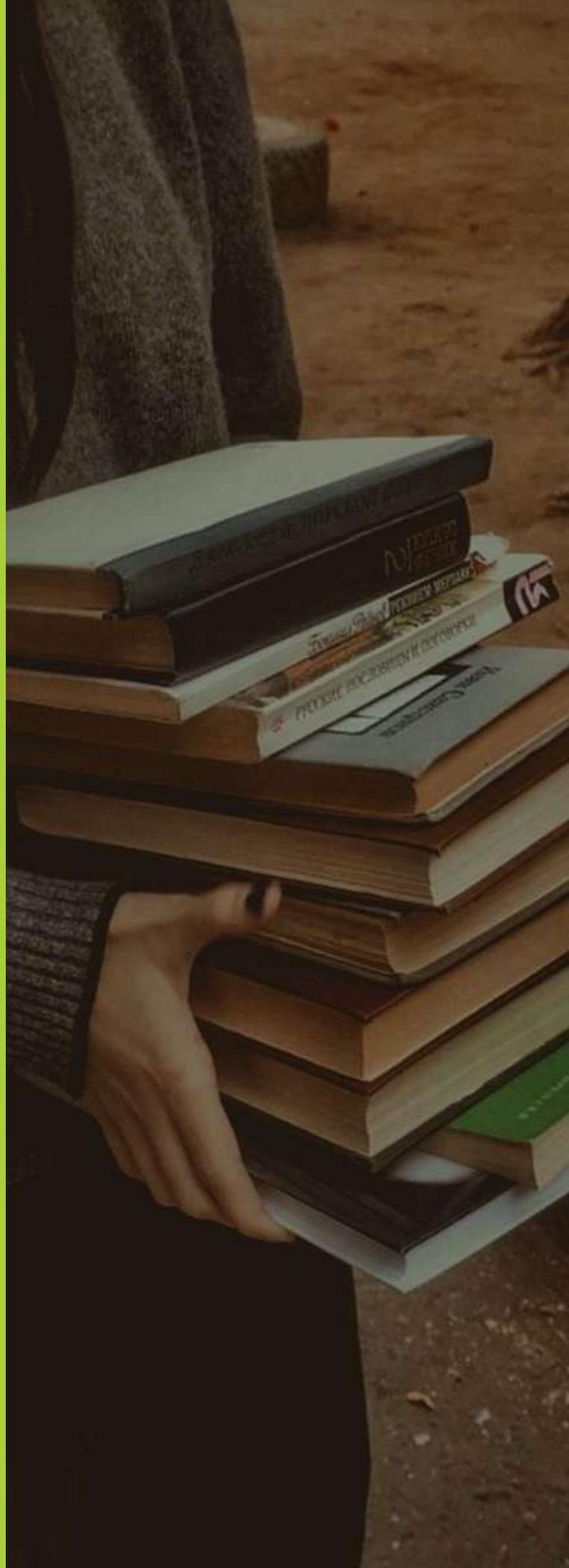
"They say murder, and then they say God's name."



a suitable agency

A Suitable Agency is designed to provide quality representation to writers, artists and brands, with the aim to enhance their public profile and bring their work to the widest audiences.

As a literary agency, they represent writers and their creative work to publishers for print editions, and to digital, audio and film platforms as well.



a suitable agency

Monograph Interviews: A Suitable Agency

Q1. What makes the role of a literary agent important?
How does it help the publishing process?

Literary agents primarily fulfill the role of an important bridge between a writer and a publisher. There are many steps in the journey of a book, right from when the author starts writing, to the point where the book is published and goes out into the world – an agent will be with the author through the journey.

Several writers are not familiar with the publishing process, or what kind of publisher would be a good fit for their work, and who to send their manuscript to. And publishers, on the other hand, are always on the lookout for new books for their list and to discover new voices. They receive hundreds of manuscripts and proposals which it's difficult for them to sort through; an agented submission assures them of a certain quality.



For an author, a literary agent is sometimes their first professional read, and would guide them towards the final manuscript, help with the pitch, take their work to publishers and help them find the best publishing home, and stay with them as partners (including on matters around sales, marketing, visibility, jacket design, royalty statements – pretty much the entire publishing process).

In addition, today a book has more than one form – it exists in different formats, or languages or markets – an agent would guide a writer through the entire process and act in the interests of the author.

Q2. A Suitable Agency is fairly new to the scene but it already represents some big names in the industry. What led to the inception of this agency and how has the journey been so far?

Books have been a constant presence in my life. I'd worked in a leading publishing house for more than two decades, and when I decided to set out on my own, I knew my work would be around books and writers. Several people had asked about agenting, and the idea of working with books and authors we'd want to represent, of discovering new voices, of being part of their publishing journey was something I felt I wanted to do.

A Suitable Agency was launched last year (we've just celebrated our first anniversary in fact), and we now represent 17 authors, and are in talks with a few others.



We're selective about the number of books we represent at any given time – we choose books we really love and can also see a vision for – but another reason we're selective is so we can pay every book and author individual attention.

We've had a great response to our first set of submissions, and it's been a very exciting journey so far.

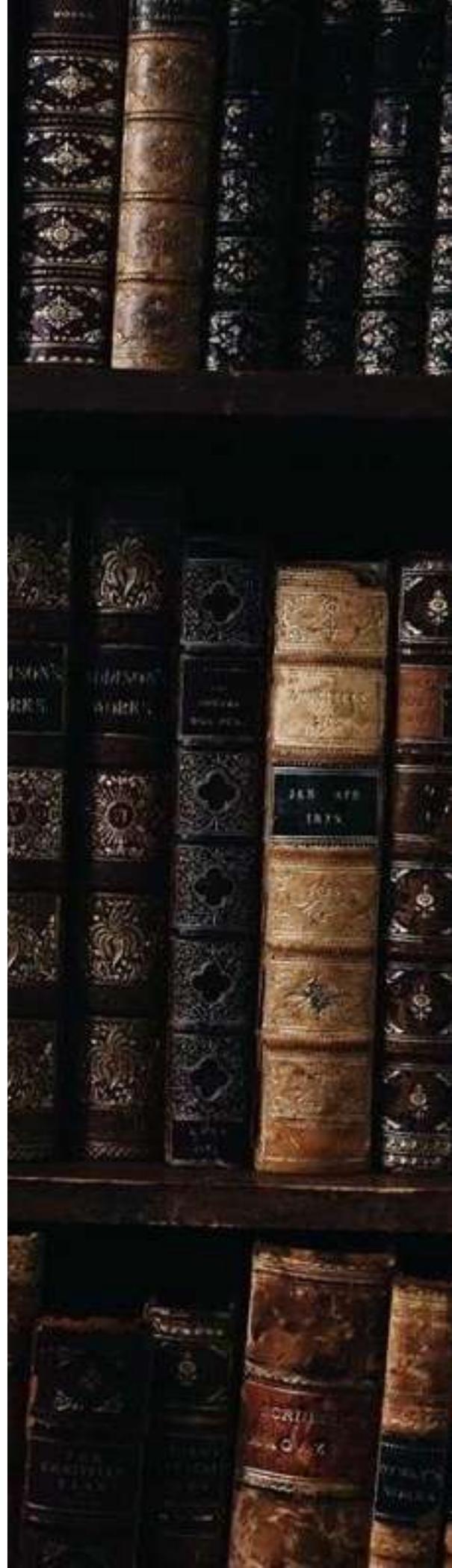
Q3. What do you look for in an author or a piece of work? What follows after someone is accepted?

We look for strong ideas, and the power of good narrative and storytelling. We're open to reviewing submissions across all genres.

Once we sign on an author, we would provide editorial feedback to start with, and work with the author on a pitch proposal for publishers. We would then submit the proposal or manuscript to suitable publishers, and aim to get the author the best publishing arrangement, not only in terms of commercials, but in terms of the publishers vision and ambition aligning with the author's.

But our work doesn't end there.

We would then help the author with inputs through the entire process, including all the different aspects mentioned above – editing, cover design, marketing, distribution and so on.





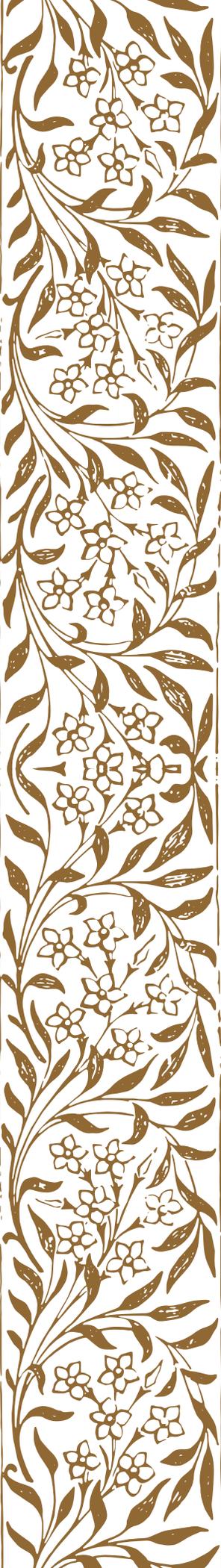
Q4. Literary Agencies in India mostly represent authors writing in English. Is there a reason behind it or is the Indian-languages market just largely untapped?

The Indian language publishing market is actually pretty huge, across several languages and regions. Though we represent works in English as of now, translations from Indian languages into English is one of the areas we're very interested in. We're representing acclaimed writer K R Meera's magnum opus Ghatakan in English (The Assassin), and will continue to look at representing writers and translators from Indian languages.

Q5. Literary Agencies in India mostly represent authors writing in English. Is there a reason behind it or is the Indian-languages market just largely untapped?

Yes, A Suitable Agency accepts submissions in poetry as well. Once we have a suitable work of poetry to represent, we'll follow the same trajectory that we do for all our other books.

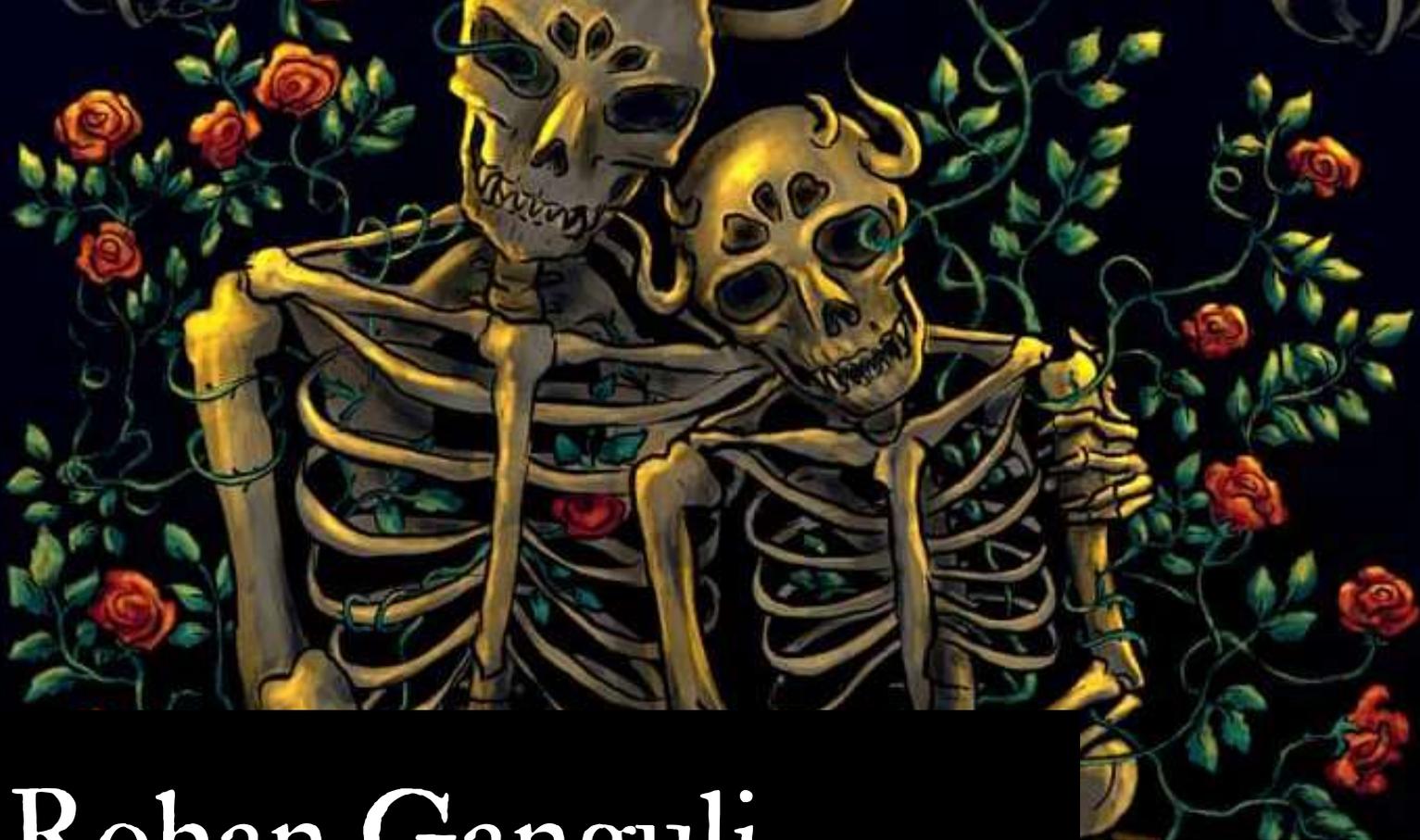




Monograph Interviews: Rohan Ganguli

We're glad to have with us the multi-instrumentalist of Cognac, Big Family, and The Supersonics, Mr Rohan Ganguli. He has just released his debut album, *The King Of Summer*, and he has been very gracious enough to have given us the opportunity of interviewing him.

The following interview was conducted on the 24th of August, 2021 and the video of the same will be up on our YouTube channel soon.



Rohan Ganguli

Q1. So, let us move on to the first question, which is: How did you start with your career?

As a musician? Actually, I transitioned into it; I don't think I consciously decided to be a musician from the beginning. I started playing guitar when I was very young, but I didn't really play guitar as such. I just fooled around with it because it was lying around in the house, and in school I'd play a few chords and all. But after school I started getting serious about it. Until then it was only lawn tennis – that was all I ever cared about. Or swimming.

Then in class 12-ish, I got a little serious, and then in college, you know, I went to Jadavpur University. You get a lot of time to do whatever you want, and they encourage you to do a lot of things. So I took up guitar over there.



One of my friends, he used to go to Amyt da, and I saw a copy he brought with all these notes and all. I was fascinated, because it looked like rocket science to me. So I was like, what is this, I want to know. So he took me to Amyt da's class, and then... even then I was not a professional. For about a year, two years I just went there and kept learning. Slowly slowly I started playing gigs but I was not a professional even then, you know. Then sooner or later, it had to happen that I stopped doing everything at once. And that was when I realised that this is what my calling is.

Q2. So, who (or what) would you say has had an everlasting influence on you as an individual, or on your art?

Amyt Da for sure. He's been my teacher, he's my mentor, and he's also like an elder brother – he's family. Outside of that, I would say some of my friends from my previous band, Cognac. They've been my closest guides and friends, we're still very good friends.

Plus my folks, for not throwing me out of the house [laughing] you know what I mean, such a lot of noise with my guitar.

Yeah, it was quite...quite unbelievable, to have no complaints. I mean, of course, the regular complaints are there – but no obstacles as such, you know. They always encourage me.



Q.3. Let's talk about your new album, *The King Of Summer*. On a first hearing, one would describe it as experimental tunes, soaked in a sort of jazz and blues environment. What is the story of this album, who is this King Of Summer?

No one. King of Summer is more of an energy or a vibe than a person. Actually what happened is, I was on a boat on the Hooghly. The boat goes very slowly, it's got its own pace, and on either side you can see the skylines of Howrah and Kolkata on either side. They're these beautiful old buildings, you know, from the British times I'm guessing. They're all falling apart, but you can tell how beautiful they must have been in their heyday. I mean, some of them are still gorgeous. They're not very well-kept – some of them are, but most of them aren't. But you can tell that it was a very regal city at one point. Being on that water, you feel like it's a king's arrival; on either side, there's this grand cityscape. And it's got that slow pace, like when a king comes and the fanfare is very slow.





It's got its own pace and it's got that energy – I think this city has that. So that's why it's called King Of Summer. It's not that I'm the king of summer or anything like that. [laughing]

But this energy is there, you know, and I really like that. And people say it's slow, and Calcutta doesn't change, but that also holds a beauty. And that beauty is what I wanted.

Q4. Since you've stated, on your Instagram as well, that you're going to be releasing a second album soon. Is it going to be similar to King Of Summer? Or is it a completely different royal we're talking about.

No, totally different. It will be more pop, it'll be straight-out pop, rock. The kind of music I've grown up listening to.

Steely Dan?

Not Steely Dan, pop, straight-up pop. See, since childhood I've been very lucky in the sense that there was music all the time. All the time, I mean, people would come to the house, from musicians, or part-time musicians, and there was that culture. A lot of Anglo-Indian people, who are naturally great musicians, you know. So they would bring instruments, keyboards or piano, they'd come to the house. My uncle's a great harmonica player. So every weekend they'd sing, and drink and eat.



So from a very early age I've been exposed to all kinds of music. Starting from The Beatles all the way to Shirley Bassey, to Louis Armstrong, Miles Davis, Beethoven, Deep Purple – everything. I've grown up on all kinds of music, so I don't like to pigeonhole what I want to play. Because I know it's coming from different places.

Q5. So, let's talk about your past ventures with Cognac and Big Family. How long was its run, and what kind of genres did you venture into?

Cognac was my first real band, and I got spoilt then and there, straight off, because I got the best musicians to play with me. My first band, on drums I had Vishal Nayak, who is phenomenal. He went to Berklee later on to study, and he's probably one of the best drummers I've ever played with. And one of the best I've heard, per se, not just with me or the band, but by himself. Then Taj was on guitar, Rajiv as a singer is phenomenal, and Ravi was on bass. So I got spoilt right from the beginning, you know – the highest level of musicianship, at that age when we're nineteen, twenty, don't have a clue about music and then you get this standard of it. So I knew this is the way it's going to be, and they're still very close friends. We speak almost everyday actually, all the time. In fact, I had to switch off my phone for this interview because they're the ones who are messaging right now.

So those guys have opened their door like that. Plus we had Amyt da guiding us at that time, and Jayashree and Gyan, they would guide us. They produced the first song of Cognac. So you have that kind of environment, you're already spoilt.

Q5. So, let's talk about your past ventures with Cognac and Big Family. How long was it run, and what kind of genres did you venture into?

Sure, you just watch and learn. I mean, I used to go for Amyt da's class. He would start at around ten, I would be there at nine 'o clock and stand outside his door. And Amyt da would be like "Why are you standing there?" and I'm like, you know... and he'd say "Come inside." So I'd go there shamelessly, and leave last also. He stops at three, but we'd be there, three or four persons just sitting quietly. We don't want to go, and he'd have to tell us why don't you get lost, and then we'd go. We were also like sponges for that information; because we didn't have the Internet at that time, we didn't have smartphones or anything. The only thing was going to a good teacher, and Amyt da's the best. And below that there was Ghochu da, he's also phenomenal. So you're getting melody and rhythm, and that's what music is.



So that happened, and then there was Supersonics after that, where we wrote our own material. Even there, the four of us decided to only write our own music, good or bad – doesn't matter, we'd stick to it. Also in that band, the driving force was to always keep getting better. Not just in music, but how to produce music, how to present yourself live, and how to keep getting better at whatever you do holistically. So even that kind of raised the bar very high. That's my background, basically.

Q6. So with the pandemic and all – not in its current state, because now everyone's going out, but when it first started. How did it affect you in terms of your performance and your mental health?

What I noticed in a few months after the pandemic began, was that there were people who were handling it well, and there were people who were not handling it well. It's not like someone's better than the other so that's why – it's not because of that. It's just that during normalcy, people had so many excuses to hide behind, to postpone or defer things they don't want to deal with. Now there's nothing left, you either do it or you don't do it. So there's no excuse to hide behind, and a lot of times the truth kind of surfaces. You hide it, but it's difficult when you have nothing to hide against. A lot of that truth surfaced, and a lot of people handled it well, and a lot of people didn't handle it too well. I've also seen people work on themselves, or crib a lot. So it's like two extremes.

Personally, I've been lucky to have people around me who encouraged me to look inwards, and get better at whatever I can do. So I got busy with that, and thankfully I didn't lose my mind in the process, because I know quite a few people who actually lost their minds, you know, and thankfully I didn't lose my mind. So yeah, but I think it's been a great time. I think it has been probably the best year of my life, where a lot of stuff that was extra has been weeded out, and whatever I could have done better all this time, I've now used that time to get better at it.



Q7. So, what do you think about the current state of music and the industry as well. Like for example, the new musicians that are coming up. What do they have to do to get in?

Hmm, that's a difficult one to answer, but I'll try. For one, what I see is now it's become more democratic – in the sense, the monopoly which once the big guys held has now gone. It's become more democratic in the sense like, everyone has got some kind of recording setup at home. So you don't depend on having studio time.

either you can do it or you don't do it. So that democracy's great, because now the power has gone back to a lot of people, which I think is a great thing. But on the flip side, there's a specialization which happens with having done one thing for years, which a lot of people don't have. So now you're dealing with recording, documenting, music or sound or movies or whatever, with no expertise. So your quality is inferior, you know, even though you might have great ideas. But for the presentation and the final product, you don't have the experience. So it's a little on the cusp – we're on the cusp of something, let's see where it goes. I'm pretty open about it though, because technology has come into our lives in a way unlike ever before. Everyone has a mic, everyone has a sound card, they have whatever you need to record. Now it's just a matter of time, I think, before people will get good at it, so I'm pretty happy about it.



Q8. Now, would you give us a few words of advice for the viewers and the readers at home who want to get into the music industry, who want to get into music and performing.

Well, having gotten into it accidentally... if you're lucky you'll fall into it, and not be able to get out from it and you stick in. But for those who won't have that luck, you have to have a lot of confidence and belief in yourself, because no one else will believe in you till you believe in yourself. And that takes a LONG time. So if you're not strong enough as a person, I would suggest you to take a step back and think if you're cut out for this, because there are a lot of privileges which you will lose out on. I'm not saying you'll lose them forever; if you make it, then toh nothing like it. But for the chance that you don't, do you have the mental fortitude to hold it together, and not be burnt out.

But having said that, the only way to do it is to just do it, actually, and to keep repeating it till you get good at it. And that repetition – people see it, and you get called for what you're good at. So yeah, I'd say be positive about it, and keep doing it.

The scent of this old city lingers on for longer than I can remember. It comes alive every morning with the chirping of birds and the hawker's song.



But how does a city die? Surely not in a blaze of glory. Does it fall into the clutches of hell one sunny morning? Or does it fade away like the remnants of a forgotten childhood?



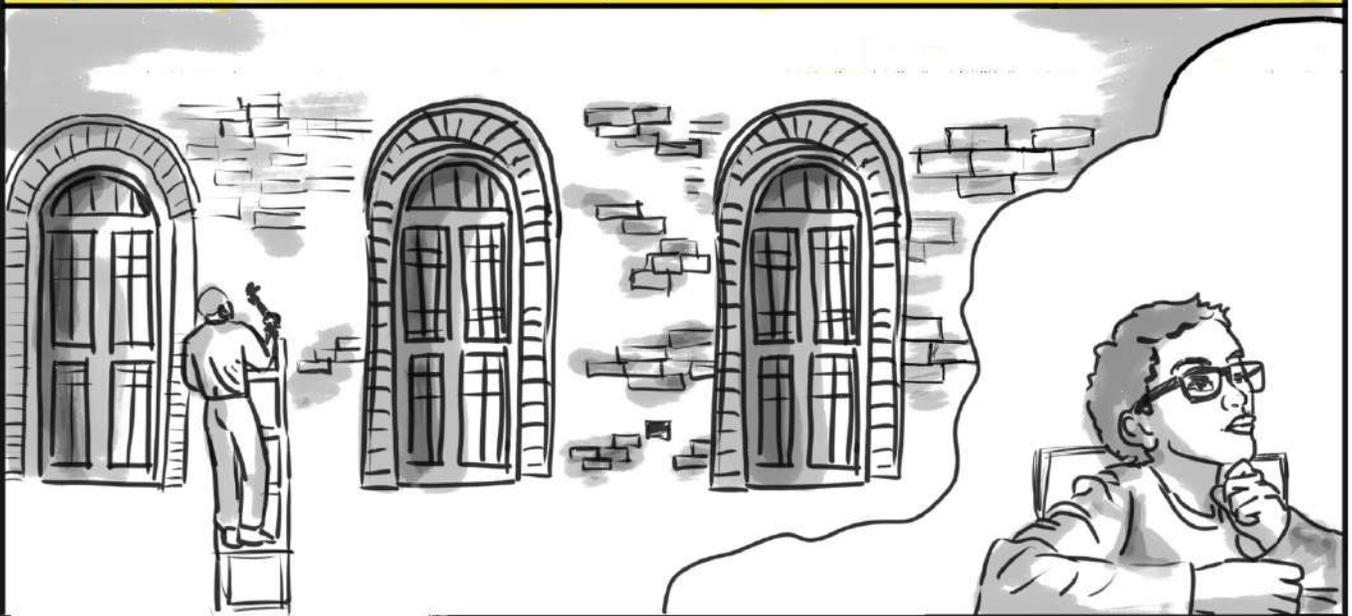
Does it die when the architects of this city die without any successors? Or does it crumble at the feet of urbanization?

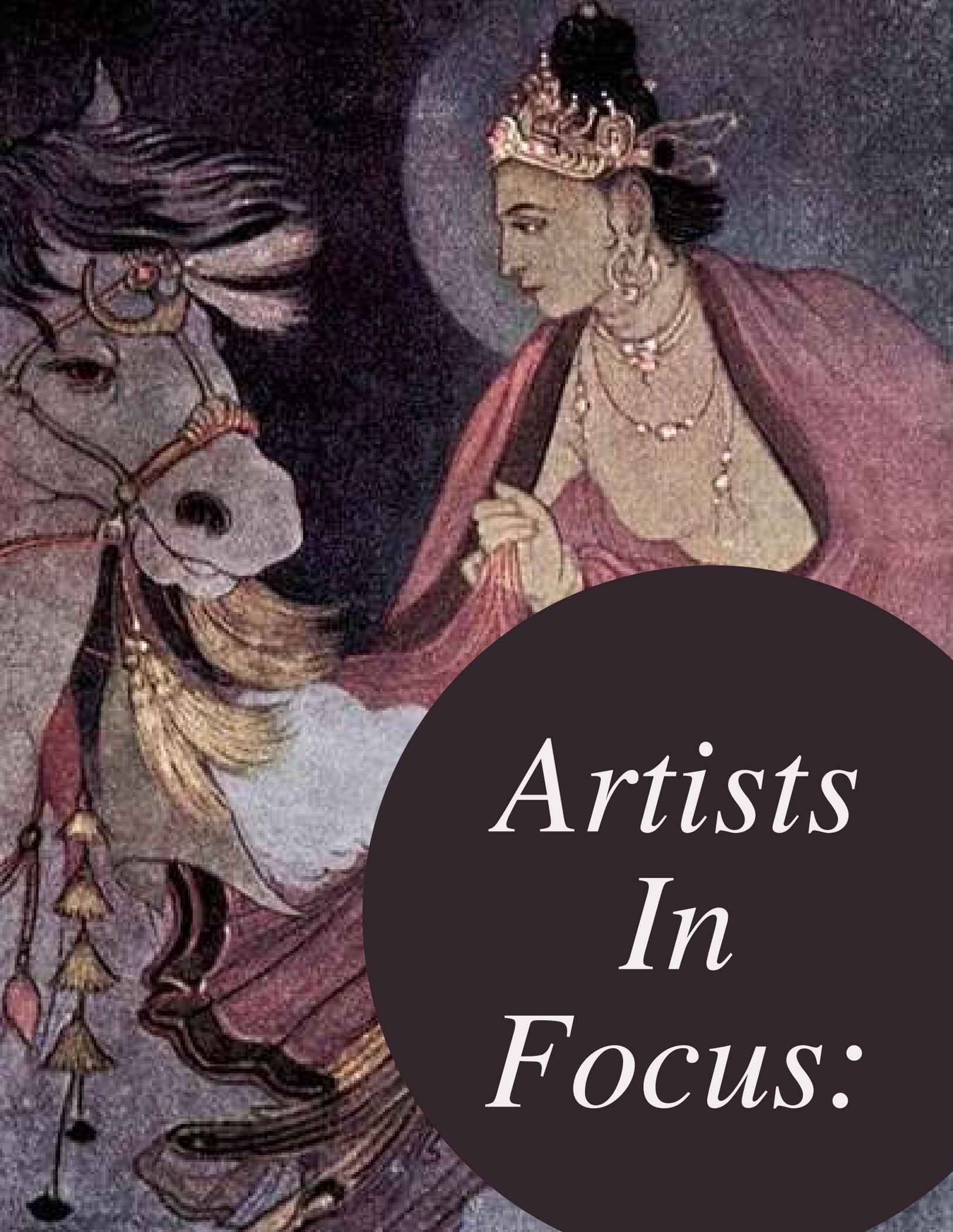


Does it become a dreamland for those who dare to dream? But a cemetery for those who cannot afford it? Maybe a city never dies, maybe it just turns into a familiar stranger.



Maybe a city never dies, maybe it just turns into an unrecognizable metropolis.





*Artists
In
Focus:*



RICK RIORDAN

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Baidurya Hariharan

Deepanjan Chakraborty





Gargi Das Sarma

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