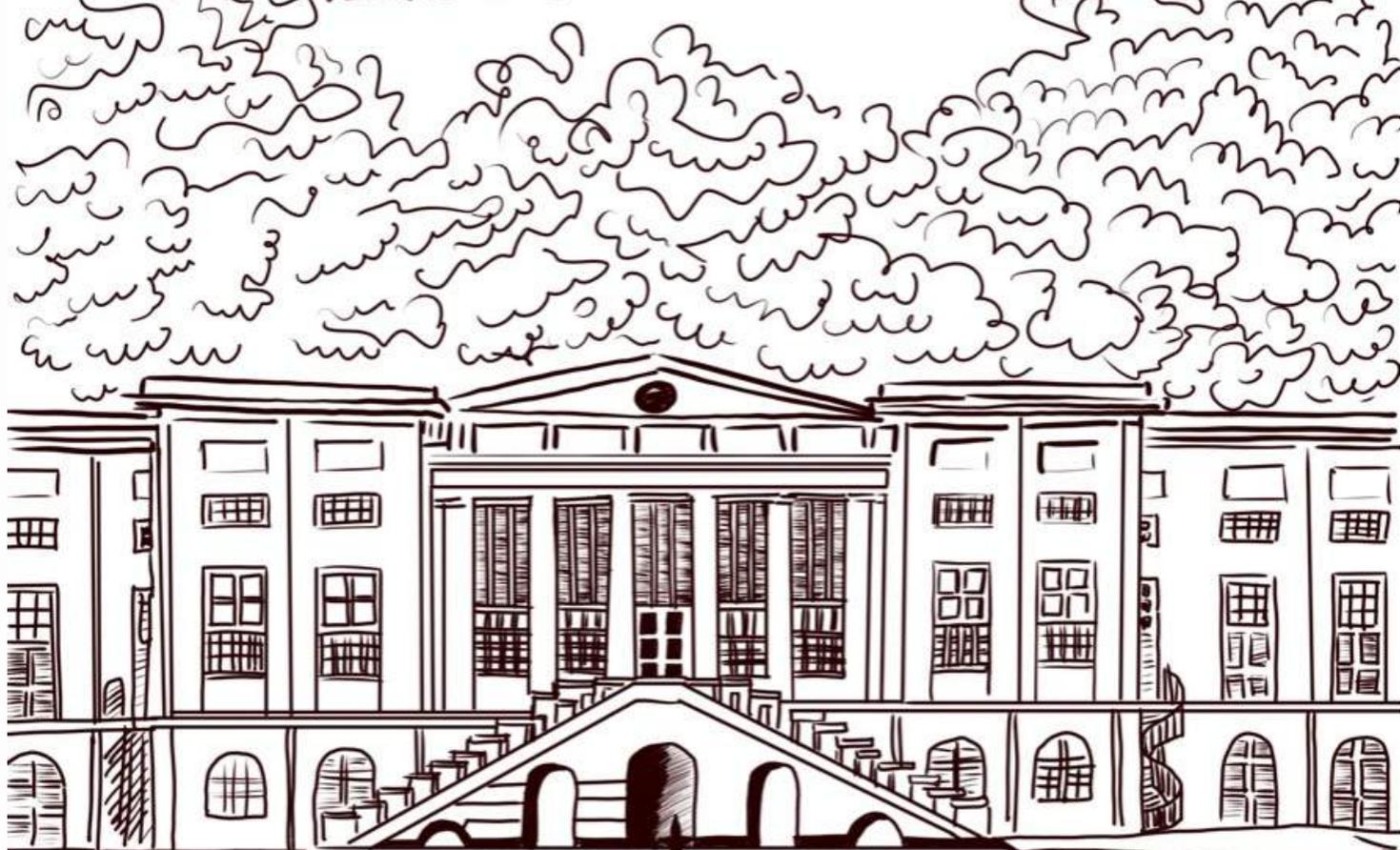
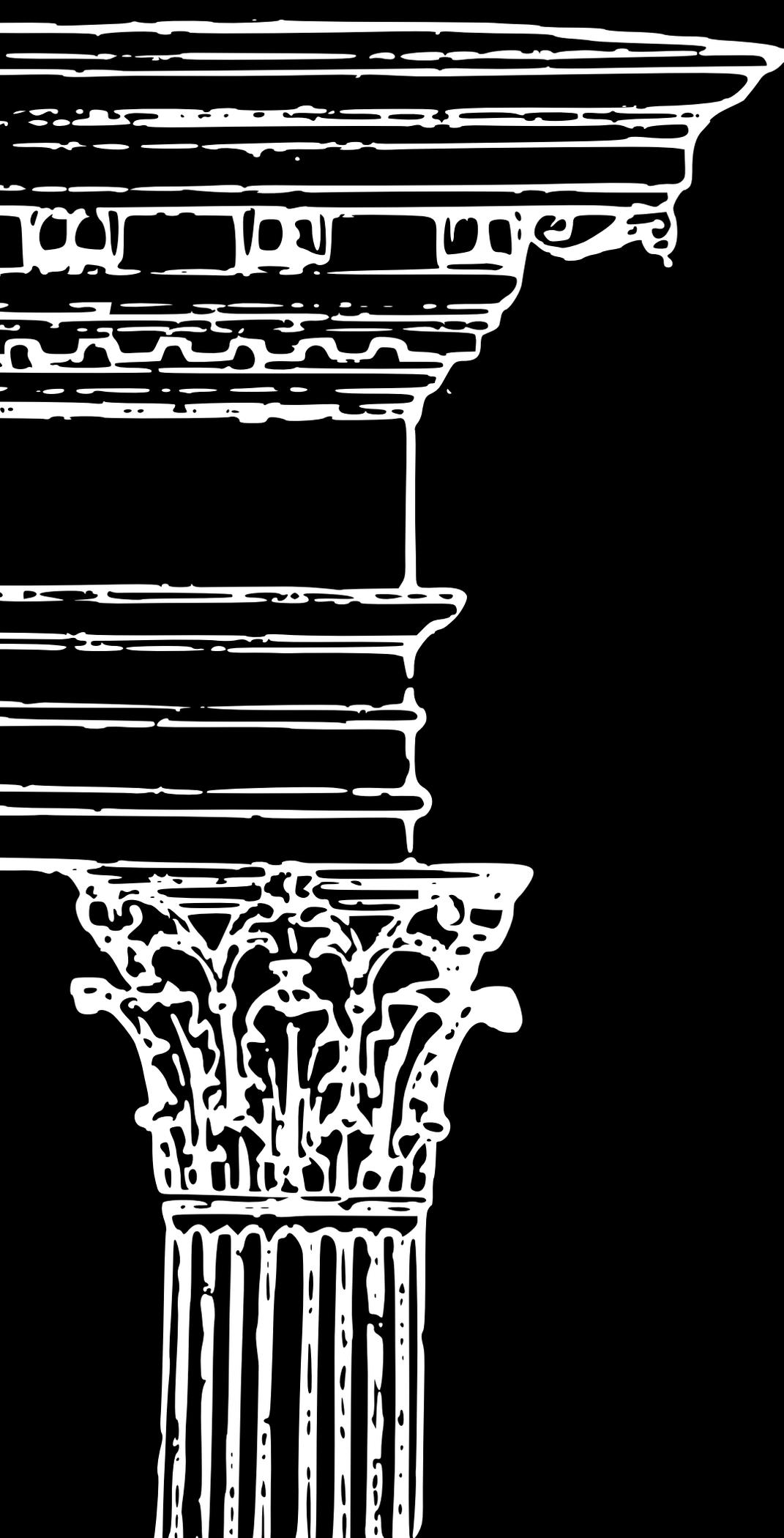


# MONOGRAPH

YEAR 2 VOL 6



AN EXCLUSIVE  
INTERVIEW WITH  
SOUMEN & MONABI  
MITRA.



# MONOGRAPH

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# Editor's Note

Anuraag Das Sarma

With a war on the European front, and many more on the Eastern front (that the media doesn't care enough about), it is quite the year to live in. And as Monograph completes 18 months amidst these roaring 20's, I can't help but feel a sense of disassociated joy. A little revolution against the norms and geopolitik of the world, housed in a tiny pdf, Monograph promises a wonderful collection of articles and poems. While these writings might not be the most accurate representation of what the world is going through right now, Monograph holds true to its ideal of art for art's sake, and nothing will ever change that. This is it, our private magazine, our own Kritibash, our personal Sandesh.





## An Ode to the Soundbox

Rituparna Mukherjee

Jhinuk stood outside the red-brick building and looked at the black letters scrawled in Bengali across the white marble facade, “Abha Rani Villa” it said, a house lovingly named by her grandfather after the indomitable woman that was his wife, the center of his rather short life. Her grandmother had passed away just three days back and today the family members had gathered to decide what to do with her things.

“Don’t go there”, her father had cautioned her, “It’s a scavenger’s hunt”, he spit out the words distastefully. Her father had never understood his mother’s decision to choose her renters over her own son, he did not understand her desire for economic freedom when he was there to cater to her wishes. So, he had bought a plot of land, laid an anchor for the first time in his life, never quite settled in the new neighbourhood, which had remained new twenty-eight years after they had built a house. He had seldom gone back to his childhood home, barring the customary days of *Saptami* and *Ashtami* on *Durga Puja* and *Poila Baisakh*, and never once stayed the night, even though her grandmother would peremptorily insist. .

On the night she died, Jhinuk watched her inordinately strong father break down, deliriously sad, addressing her as Ma, looking into her eyes and saying, “You turn more and more into her with each passing day”

“*Thik ache Baba*, it’s alright father, calm down, I’m right here”, was all she could muster, while the others looked at her, the question lingering straight on their faces- what is a woman doing at a burning ghat?

Jhinuk sighed, why did she have these thoughts all of a sudden? She trudged her way up the stairs. Her reason for coming here was to look at her Thamma’s things one last time. As if they would give you anything, her mother had scoffed. It was often useless to reason with her parents and so she would just nod silently. She was an unusually silent child right from her early days, an only girl in a family of boys, a dark girl in a family of exquisitely fair women – always a misfit, always bubbling with questions, she dare not open her mouth.





She took off her slippers and her feet touched the blessed cold of the red cement floor. It was the 10th of February, yet Kolkata was unusually warm. Her Kakima spotted her from the veranda, and waved at her, “Manu, ginger tea?”

Jhinuk smiled, her Kakima had been the only other person in the family to call her that, the primary being her Thamma, and was the only one with a ready hug and easy warmth emanating from her. She had always wanted a daughter, had been blessed with sons, and Jhinuk had been a shy substitute for a latent dream. She looked at her lovingly and nodded at the neat piles of books, *Anandabazar Patrika*, magazines, bed covers, trinkets from travel arranged in the verandah; the sarees and jewellery had been claimed previously.

Kakima laughed, “It’s a wonder how your grandmother stocked all that inside that room. Manu, look at what you want. Don’t be bashful, please. Anything you want really.”

Jhinuk leaned her chin against the soft hands of her Kakima and smiled gratefully. She never felt not at home in her presence. The rest, of course, was a different story. Her aunts, looked at her in ill-disguised suspicion, “What is the quiet one doing here?”, they exclaimed to each other, loudly enough for her to hear. Jhinuk went and gave them the cursory smile, before entering her Thamma’s room. “Never talks that one, strange child.”

She watched her aunts sifting through the pile and sharing stories about their mother and bellowing in nostalgic laughter. Jhinuk looked at the room. It looked extraordinarily large in the late morning sun. The walls were that waned pistachio green colour with faded lilac curtains, the room had always reminded her of pistachios, her Thamma’s favourite dry fruit.





They would put a handful in their mouth with a conspiratorial wink, while her Thamma would make *Sandesh*, a delicacy prepared only during festivals and her birthdays. Her Thamma would call her *Ma Saraswati*, the Goddess of Wisdom. She had asked one time, “But Thamma, why don’t you call me *Ma Lakshmi*, like the others?”

“That’s because you will study a lot when you grow up. You will educate others. We have a lot of Ma Lakshmis, we could do with a few more Saraswatis.”

Everything her grandmother said made sense to her. She would often ponder her words at night when sleep would refuse to come. She has always had a busy mind. Her grandmother was extremely fond of reading. Jhinuk thought she was perhaps the only person who used to read the newspaper bags the grocery would come in. They would be stuffed in weird shapes under her mattress to be read later. Jhinuk had begun the habit of saving every scrap of written Bengali material she could find and gave it to her Thamma.

In the lazy afternoons that she would return from school, Jhinuk would teach her Thamma English in exchange for stories. Her grandmother was a master storyteller, enthralling her childhood imagination with myths, fairy tales and detective stories. They would eat delectable murrabba, sweet mango pickle from glass jars, and share stories, their feet dangling from the high teak bed that had come with Thamma to this house, at the age of fourteen.

The beautiful teak bed was strangely empty, bereft of its mattress and the beautifully embroidered bed cover, in her Thamma’s loving hand. How she had chafed against learning how to stitch in her adolescence.



“Why do I need to learn how to stitch Thamma? It’s so girly and I hate it.”

*“Manu, je meye raadhe, shei chul ow baadhe”*, loosely translated as a truly empowered woman is self-sufficient. She plodded on with run stitch and chain stitch and hem stitch and satin stitch to please her grandmother, but these words rung true in her ears when her husband expressed surprise at her ability to fix her own buttons in her kurtas. She had smiled and thought, will have to tell Thamma. There were so many things left unsaid. She was always too busy.

She placed her hand on the flowers engraved in the bedposts, looking closely at the layers of dust that had gathered over the years, and the bright polish of the wood where it was exposed, touched and attentively polished. Her Thamma would often lie in her bed, her skin smelling of Mysore sandal soap, her luxurious, long hair falling loosely over the ornate bedpost, drying in the afternoon sun, more black than white, with streaks of burnished gold, where she had applied henna.





They would listen to the radio, to her favourite songs in the Calcutta B channel, and her Thamma would teach her to sing. She would affectionately call her *Munia*, a songbird. She had fought vehemently with her son to give Jhinuk a formal musical training, but her father had considered it a frivolous enterprise for a good student. Her grandmother had taken it upon herself to make her sing, “Can’t have you quiet all the time my dear Munia. Sing my child”. Jhinuk absent-mindedly hummed her grandmother’s favourite song:

*Ore mono pakhi,*

*Kyano daka daki,*

*Tui thaak na re, gopone...*

Oh, my heart’s songbird, why do you call? Why don’t you stay within me, hidden?

She wondered what secrets did Thamma's heart hold. Curiously enough, while she shared everything with her grandmother, apart from the frightful things of course, Jhinuk knew little of her grandmother’s childhood, apart from the few stories that she told her in those lazy afternoons. Orphaned at the age of nine, she was brought up by her maternal uncle till they found her a suitable groom, ten years older. Thamma was a diminutive young *Boro Bou*, elder bride, till she took charge of everything.



“Manu, tea.”

“Yes, Kakima. Thank you.”

“Where’s the sonodyne?”

“The what?”

“The radio?”

“Oh, that? It must be on top of the Almirah. It’s been in a state of disrepair for ages. Thamma used the transistor that your Kaka had gifted, these past few years. Why?”

“Can I have a look at it?”

“Of course. But I have a question, Manu. Would you want your Thamma’s mahogany almirah? I know how you love that. Remember the time you hid in that thing and all of us were frantically looking for you? Who would have thought that you were a naughty child?”

“Na Kakima. I don’t want anything expensive.”

“Why? You are a daughter of this house and you can have it if you want.”

Her Choto Pishi came along and said, “Where will she find the space in her tiny one-bedroom apartment to store this large almirah? Boudi, I tell you. Sell off the bed, the dining table and the almirah. They are pure teak and would fetch a good price. Rohan has planned such modern furniture for this room.”

Rohan, her cousin, Kakima’s son, was a younger sibling she was particularly close to. He was planning a marriage next year and would take up this room, since it was the largest in the house. Jhinuk nodded, “Yes Kakima, that’ll be wise.”





Her aunt, unsure of the agreement, waddled off. Jhinuk remembered the time Dadu had passed away and Thamma had declared a few days later that she would give up fish. Jhinuk could not acclimate with this decision and the unusually quiet child spoke up, “Thamma, are they forcing you to do this? Please tell me.”

“Don’t take your name literally. You are no Jhansi ki Rani. It is my mother’s decision. You stay out of it”, Choto Pishi hissed.

“Na my dear, I am doing it out of love. You will too. You will find someone you would sacrifice things you love for.”

“Accha, ok.” As usual, Jhinuk knew better than to question her grandmother’s sagacity. Jhinuk slowly got up on the bed and tried to pry at the top of the almirah.

“Bordidi, do you need help?” Rohan called out.

“Yes please”

“What are you looking for?”

“The old sonodyne. Thamma’s gaan er bashko, the soundbox.”





Both of them burst out laughing. No matter how hard they tried, Thamma would never call it radio or the proper Bangla pronunciation for a box, baksho. It was her world, her link to outer space, just as the word was hers and hers alone. Sifting through the old newspapers, a shoe box, sneezing in the dust, they found it hidden under a beige tablecloth. Slowly, gingerly, the two kept it on the thread-bare bed. Jhinuk looked at the radio, the label Sonodyne, emblazoned boldly in metallic letters, its honey-coloured wood still shone mildly in the afternoon sun, the front of the box, a network of intricate honeycomb mesh, knobs of steel poking at her feet. As soon as she looked at it, she could hear the morning music of the All India Radio, to which she would wake up. This sudden memory brought tears to her eyes. She reached into her bag and brought out a wad of tissues and began rubbing the surface vehemently, tears streaming down her face, her guilt constricting her heart. Why had she always been busy? Rohan laid a hand on her shoulder and softly walked out. She felt grateful to be left alone.

“Look at her, hard as nails, not a single tear for her grandmother.” Someone among her relatives had said. She was too busy to cry, her eyes desperately looking out for her father.

Jhinuk had always been an outsider in her family, but her sudden decision to quietly marry a man, younger than her, had cemented her strangeness in her family. Going against her parents’ wishes, she had disclosed her wish to her beloved Thamma, imploring her,

“You do understand right? I feel safe and okay with him.”





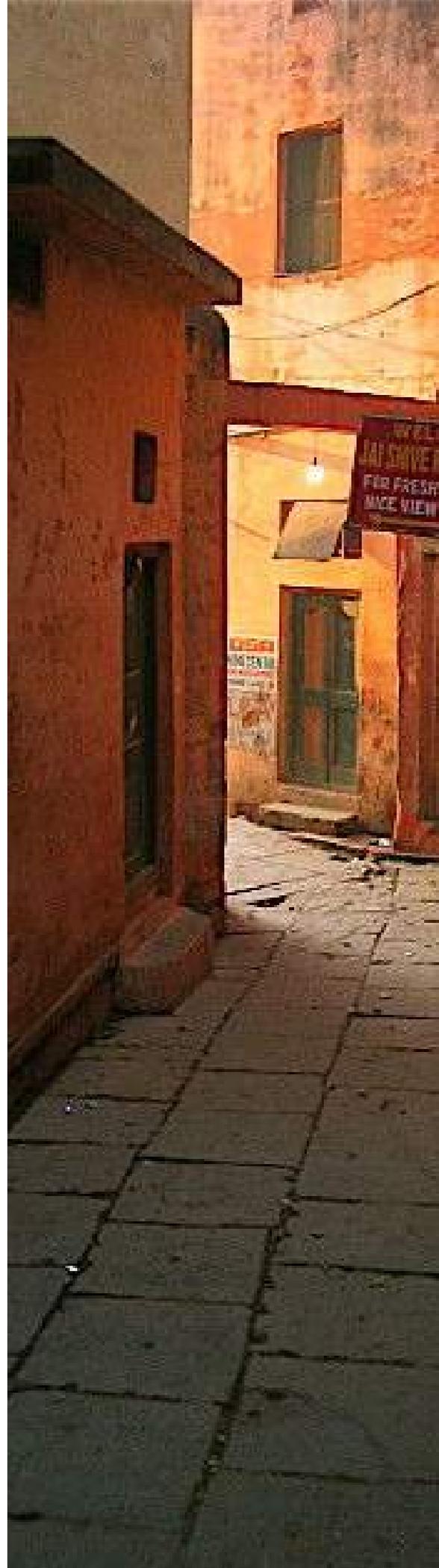
“You are a brave girl, Manu. You have nothing to worry about. Both of you earn, you will be able to take care of each other. Tell me”, she added with a wink, “Does he take you to the movies?”

“Yes Thamma, we go almost every week.”

“Then you are in good hands. You have my blessing. You will have a good marriage”, she had said with a far-away look in her eyes.

This quiet moment in her grandmother’s room was not enough to bid goodbye to all that she had meant to Jhinuk, but she was glad she had come today, to take in the sights and smells of the room before modernity touched it. The Sonodyne was the repository of her secrets, of her afternoons with her grandmother, of music, of the songs they had sung together, of pickles, of crooked embroidery lessons. She made a decision.

“Kakima. Can I take the Sonodyne?”





“Yes of course you can. But Manu, it doesn’t make music anymore. What will you do with it? It’s junk. I was thinking of giving it away to the local junk shop.”

“I know. Someday, I will be like it too.” She would explain to her husband later.

“Let her take it. Maybe she’ll write a song on it. She is the poet after all.” Her Boro Pishi chimed in humorously.

Jhinuk tenderly covered the Sonodyne with the table cloth and hummed to herself,

*Oh my heart’s songbird, why do you call? Why don’t you stay within me, hidden?*





Shrey Verma

## John Cassavates: The Need for Love in Art and Life

I have always wanted to write something about one of my favorite filmmakers, John Cassavetes. But failed to do so till now. After all, what and how do you write about someone who puts up life itself within the frames one calls cinema. But Cassavetes' art is so scintillating and provocative that the urge to pen down words comes naturally. John is considered a pioneer of American independent filmmaking. In his life he directed about 12 films which truly exhibit his idiosyncratic abilities as a director. Cassavetes used to act in big studio films in order to finance his own independent works. His films did not do great commercially but pirouetted well in film festivals. Critics too had a predilection for Cassavetes however, some films of his were definitely the subject of some heated discussions within the intelligentsia.

But his films were unique and special. They were no less than big budgeted epics with the difference that it was human behavior and raw emotions that took the center stage instead of ostentatious production designs. A front runner of the American Cinema Vérité, Cassavetes used shaky and handy cameras to capture the perspectives of his characters with raw close ups of his actors. Cassavetes' films were characterized by ruminative silences, endless conversations and sometimes unusual mockery. Often enough shots were made to extend extensively as if he was testing the patience of his viewers. Any cinephile, precisely Cassavetes fans can list a plethora of things that make his works incomparable with high artistic and aesthetic value. But for me, it will always be Cassavetes's ability to draw out empathy from his audience. All his characters seem to be stuck in some state that Cassavetes himself would be unsure of on how to save them. Lelia's brother Hugh in *'Shadows'* (1959) who is constantly struggling with the issues of race and identity, Mabel Longhetti played by the matchless Gena Rowlands in Cassavetes' most known work *'A Woman Under The Influence'* (1974) who seeks liberation from all insecurities and vulnerabilities or Cosmo Vittelli played with utmost truthfulness by another Cassavetes regular Ben Gazzara in his understated masterpiece and probably my favorite film of his *'The Killing of a Chinese Bookie'* (1976) who desires for nothing more than belongingness.





That's precisely why his films have made an indelible mark on my understanding of the medium of cinema itself. John Cassavetes' ability to commiserate with human suffering and make us do the same was nothing short of a gold mine. For me, it was as if Cassavetes himself came to me and whispered, "Hey, I know you're busy, you've got work and deadlines to meet, but come and have a look at these people, the way they live, the way they love, the way they speak and think and continue to be engulfed in misery". He made it seem that my acknowledgement to his characters' tormented state of existence was necessary for their salvation. Did that give relief to his characters? No. But that's not the point here. Instead of giving an aerial view, Cassavetes took one straight to the ground where the tornado struck. His films were not perfect, just like life which they boldly represented. Cassavetes was known to work without scripts or even filming on unfinished scripts. This is evident from the dialogues in a Cassavetes' film. The dialogues were unpolished, striking (although sometimes they were there just for amusement) and real. This was one of the ways he comfortably broke conventional ways of filmmaking. Unlike most other films where characters continue to have a complete grip on what they are speaking despite being emotionally charged, Cassavetes' characters are much more real. They are not sure of what to say, when to say it and how to say it.

One could expect anything to come out of any character. His characters speak without preparation, fumble and even change their minds mid way while confabulating. But this is how we generally speak when we are experiencing extreme emotions. We do not have a script in front of us to tell us what to say and how to behave. Everything happens impetuously. Sometimes we do know what we're speaking, sometimes we do not. Sometimes we find the right words, sometimes we do not. All of this clearly points out to the fact that Cassavetes had blurred the boundaries of art and life. He was a filmmaker who was not interested in chasing cliff hanging plots to keep his audience engaged, rather, he wanted to capture life with all its trouble and agony and put it on the screen carried by the highest artistic values. For him, relief from this agony could only come through love and the struggle for this love constituted the crux of his characters' lives. Cassavetes used his art as an extension of life but showed that life itself was just another performance. Maybe all of us have a part of Mabel Longhetti, Cosmo Vitteli or the trio from *'Husbands'* (1970) in us, but we enjoy our ignorance and let these people not disturb our routine lives. Cassavetes could create sensuous scenes entirely built on silences that one can always return to and feel the same intense emotion every time. One such scene for me is from *'The Killing of a Chinese Bookie'* where Vitelli in a pensive mood, watches a girl dance at his club to Bo Harwood's "*Rainy Fields of Frost and Magic*".



That scene alone gives away much of Vitteli than numerous lines of dialogue could have. Cassavetes was a filmmaker whose ensemble of actors included some of the greatest American actors including Peter Falk, Ben Gazzara and Seymour Cassel. And the works he produced with his wife Gena Rowlands were all masterpieces that were as honest and distinctive as the works of another unexcelled couple (probably the greatest) Ullmann-Bergman. John Cassavetes died prematurely at the age of 59 in 1989 but his works will no doubt remain relevant as long as there is love and empathy. I don't think Netflix or other streaming services will stream Cassavetes's films anytime soon but MUBI would be a great place to start this journey. At last, all of Cassavetes' ambition as a filmmaker can be attempted to be summed up in this dialogue delivered by Rowlands' Sarah Lawson in *'Love Streams'* (1984), "*Love is a stream, it's continuous, it doesn't stop.*"





# Handwritten Words: Intimate Touch

Astitva Singh

Handwritten words are a very intimate business; to dabble with the nib of the pen, splattering ink on the smooth surfaces of the freshly bound notebook, churning up dreams and ambitions from the confusion in the mind that rests firmly in the ideas on the paper. Everything that is written by hand becomes personal and has an appeal, that hitting keys on a screen or on a keyboard cannot mirror.

A student, in preferring ease and the modern-day technology, chooses to type the words that his heart had been tempting to spill, but the student doesn't understand how the mind doesn't remember a few ticks and clicks, but how his mind is always in a mood for dance; of moves of the hand, the fingers enwrapping in aura around the body of the pen, and the heart's expression that mirrors itself in the blank canvas that is, a notebook.



Even though a student aspires to learn more, it is, but advised that he should write and practice by hand. Typing, which looks deceptively simplistic, becomes easily fleeting from the confines of the mind. In the arduous process of typing information out, one tends to forget the appeal that manuscripts have managed to sustain over the millennia. To mark the sheer contrast, hitting the keyboard keys while staring into an unfriendly screen, does tend to promise the feel of a personal notebook, bound in comfort and ease; significantly it poses as quite true. Barring in, if the learning aspects of the student life come into play, the brain is rigorously put to use and imbibes the most information, when it bridges with the movements of the hand, imprints it to make the mind, a source of a knowledge hub with no bounds, no limits, only the desire to learn, learn and learn. In consequence, how pen and paper tests still dominate the education sector, as the traditional values, though brooded by technology, as redundant, are much more about the intimacy that comes with insight.

To hold a handwritten letter in one hand, is to experience the touch of a human connection, through the intangible rush that perspires from the heart, as if the personal touch that anoints to every handwriting is the personal imprint of someone's vulnerability and establishes the purest form of connection. It is to hold hands, without seemingly holding them; to wedge a fingerprint upon someone's soul, without stroking your finger over it. The undeniable romanticism that comes from applying your own ink to an empty page of a supreme notebook, is questionably nothing, but a wide stream of emotions and sensations.

Through notebooks, filled with pages that amount to art, which is not restricted to note-making, but also the doodles that turn into a fondness for painting. You find yourself between the blank lines of a notebook.



Art of journaling, art of calligraphy, births from the daily use of words that are written by anyone alike, which transforms into skill. In conceptualities, handwritten words do justice, much higher than the visible strokes on a keyboard. They are proven to enhance critical thinking, as when the pen smoothes over the surface of notebooks, the mind is awakened. This, in turn, helps the process of acclaiming the wisdom of education, while the screens result in a radical approach that tires the sensitive eyes and numbs the working brain. Writing by hand largely benefits, as the mind stores more information through this way, which helps in memory redemption. Penning down the thoughts becomes learning lessons. Handwriting is like a craft of spinning yarn wools; its cloth is the vivid consumption of the brain that never stops churring. While the conceptual understanding becomes lucid, the doubts that crack at dawn can be silenced by the dusk with the howls of the mind, that comes with the traditional art of handwriting.

Handwritten words are the embodiments of intimacy, their structure and way of form is to feel a person's presence without their ulterior presence.





Even if the words fail to convey the meanings deceitfully, the handwriting still reveals the feelings and emotions deeply hidden; without the rush of deciphering the connotations and interpretations, they effortlessly convey the core of a person. Be it a student, workaholic or the businessmen, in each and every aspect the traditional art form boasts as the superior, on the glistening pages of the notebook.

“Words would be devoid of meanings if it weren’t for the intimate touch.”



# Three Poems

1.

*i planted a kiss  
on your dead lips  
pale in colour  
and the taste of boroline  
that reminds me of winter  
in the place i grew up*

*it felt like home  
away from the shadow  
of the concrete towers  
my tongue is accustomed to*



Sutputra Radheye

2.

*the beedi and the gold flakes  
how can i leave them for you?*

*they have burnt themselves  
to glow my room  
when i was waiting  
for my mobile screen to blink  
yet no messages visited  
my lonely phone*



3.

*rabindranath fell in love  
and wrote songs*

*why should i do so?*

*what if i write songs  
to fall in love?*

*or i sell them  
to buy me some sex*

*high  
with my mind touching*

*fantasies  
i shouldn't write*

*will i be called a pervert  
or be romanticised?*

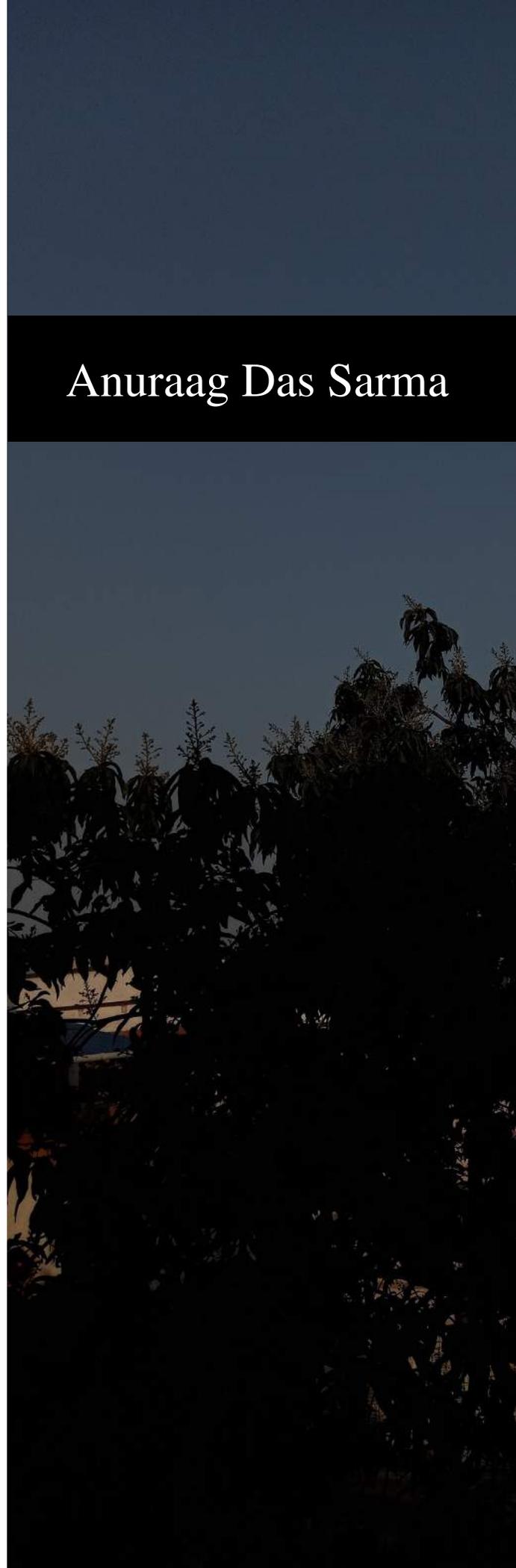


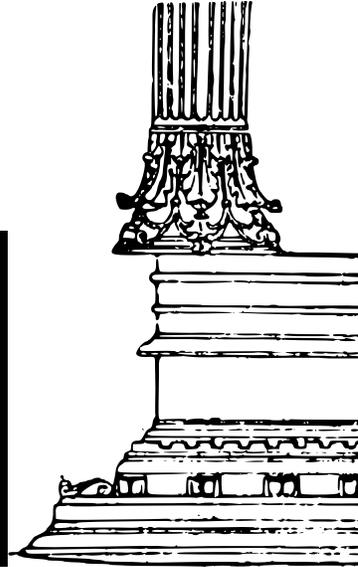
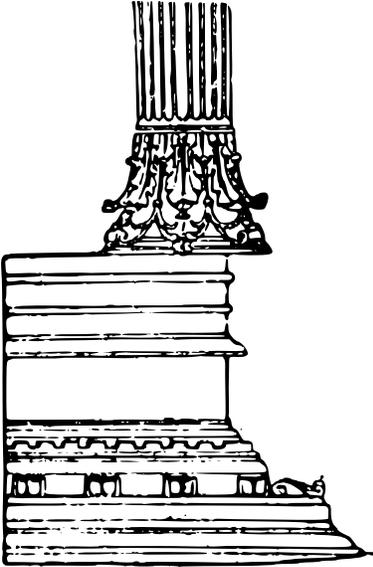
# To Summer

Anuraag Das Sarma

A hundred hands to this  
Dying metropolis lend-  
Their calloused fingers.  
The hands that write,  
And play for a city stuck  
Eternally in December.

Come, come, the rays of sun!  
Melt away the withering leaves.  
Who but I, the beckoning one,  
Will think of the dying mango  
trees?

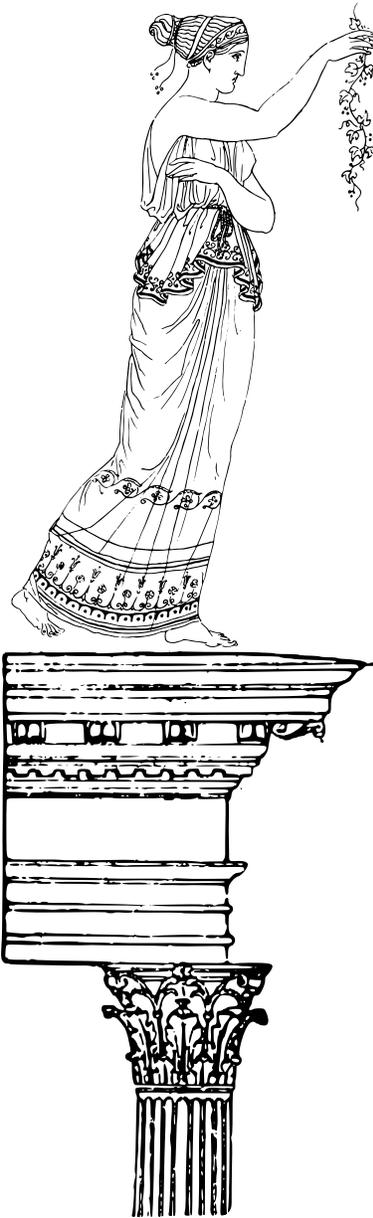




## *Monograph Interviews: Soumen & Monabi Mitra*

*Soumen Mitra is an Indian Police Officer, who served as the 43rd Police Commissioner of Kolkata. His restoration and repair of Government House, Barrackpore, the previous residence of the Governors-General of British India, was awarded the Heritage Conservation Award 2018-19 by the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH).*

*Monabi Mitra is a professor of English at Scottish Church College and a crime novelist whose F.I.R series was published by Penguin Randomhouse India. In 2019 she and Soumen Mitra penned "Under The Banyan Tree: The Forgotten Story of Barrackpore Park", narrating the two hundred year old history of Government House, Barrackpore.*





## Monograph Interviews: Soumen & Monabi Mitra

*1. Once "The City of Palaces", Kolkata has now been reduced to "The City of Crumbling Mansions". Architectural Conservation is the need of the hour, yet there is very little that is being done. Why is that so and what can be done about it?*

**Monabi Mitra:** People who inhabit these old buildings are usually caught in a bind- they don't have the money to restore, conserve or look after these buildings and yet they are unable to demolish them because they are listed as heritage buildings. Thus the buildings lie in a wasted derelict state. Those who can de- list them and sell them off. Either way the heritage value of such buildings creates great trouble for the owners. If groups of people come forward and try to pool in funds for restoration then perhaps the buildings may be saved.



2. *A major question is whether Architectural Conservation is sustainable. How can these historical buildings be re-used, and turned back into places of importance?*

**Monabi Mitra:** Imaginative thinking can certainly make such buildings sustainable. A case in point is the Kolkata Police building on Ripon Street which, on the point of demolition, was restored and renamed Limelight- with a library, a cafe, a museum gallery and a small conference room open to the public. The Calcutta Bungalow in north Calcutta, the brainchild of Iftekhar of Calcutta Walks is another example where old buildings can be restored and re-used to make it attractive and sustainable.

3. *The restoration of Barrackpore Park fills us with hope. What was the process like- the challenges faced and overcome?*

**Soumen Mitra:** The restoration of Barrackpore Park was never a challenge as I was amazed at how our force, our officers and the public actively and excitedly participated in the project- each bringing in new ideas and plans. The funding was sanctioned by the Heritage Commission and executed by the P.W.D. I personally have a great interest in working with heritage buildings and so used the expertise gathered over years of on- hand and actual experimentation with abandoned buildings within the purview of the Police to plan the restoration with P.W.D engineers.





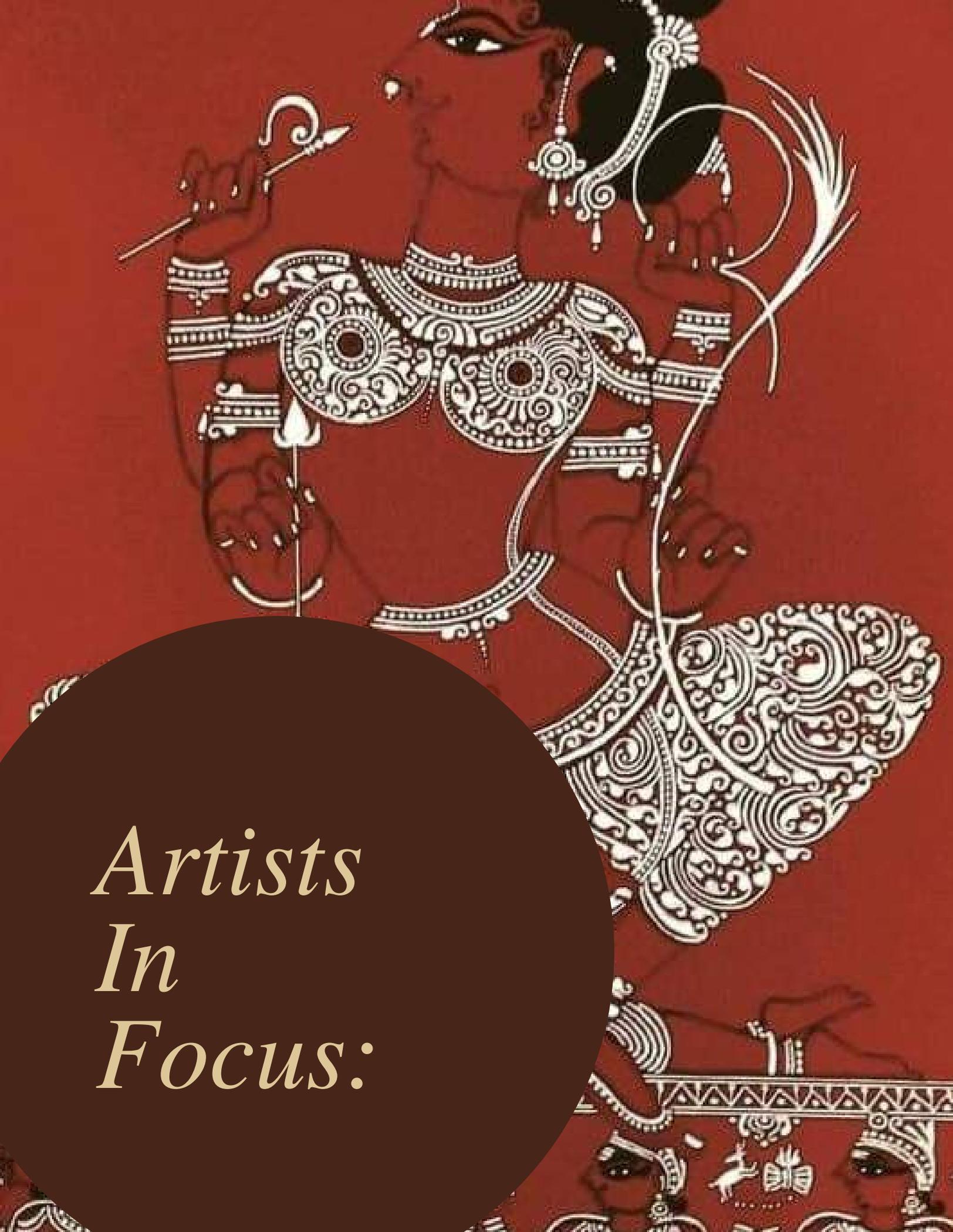
*4. Along with Barrackpore Park, you were also involved in the restoration of several heritage Police properties. What made you dedicate yourselves to Heritage Conservation?*

**Soumen Mitra:** If there are old colonial era buildings extant today in Bengal it is because many of them are within the purview of the Government. From the start of my career, perhaps because of my training as a student of History, I have been struck by the architectural splendour of these buildings, even in their decrepit state. I started to clean them up, polish the floors, paint the walls, re-build the cracks till lo and behold a beautiful 100 or 200 year old construction would come to light. My first such project was in Murshidabad, in 1992, in Lalbag, when I cleaned up and restored the Resident's bungalow outside the Hazar Duari palace, known locally as Fox's Kutir, being used by the Lalbag police. In Asansol in 1995 I restored the Addl SP's office- known as Evelyn Lodge- which had Byzantine style mosaic on the floors under a carpet of grime. In Calcutta, I had been posted in Kolkata Police from 1996-1998, 2001 to 2005, 2011 to 2016 and finally in 2021 as the Commissioner. In all these times I have restored more than a dozen buildings of great antiquity, from the Manneseh Mayer building on Lalbazar Street to the Dalanda House opposite the racetrack, from the Shyambazar Traffic Guard in north Calcutta to the Outram Jetty opposite Fort William and the Park Street Police station opposite my old school. Jetties, police stations, barracks, residences, thanas- I have had almost two dozen colonial era buildings saved through timely restoration. One of my most fulfilling projects was an old bungalow belonging to an indigo planter in Hariharpara in interior Murshidabad.



*5. How much of a role does the public have to play in such situations? Is there anything you'd like to tell our readers who are interested in such a field?*

**Soumen Mitra:** An entire book in which I have collaborated with INTACH details the buildings which are alive and well looked after solely because they were requisitioned by the police and now are saved from demolition. It's called Heritage Buildings of Kolkata Police and has a series of amazing photos by Nikhil Kapur and an introduction written by me where I have discussed the importance of restoration of old buildings. Old buildings, statues- all are parts of our history, our past, and need to be conserved because they constitute a definite moment in a nation's past. The vandalism on statues we saw two years ago in various countries of the world is a shame. Think of the craftsmanship, the labour, the toil that unknown men put in to create a piece of architecture! In the world of art and architecture a building exists outside politics- it's a piece of craftsmanship and needs to be treated as such. I hope my readers will forever take a vow never to obliterate history by defacing old buildings or tearing them down. Re-use them, use your imagination, modernise a little if need be but respect the unknown labourer who spent days of toil creating something. In a world where the planet is fast becoming unliveable because of the use of artificial and hazardous substances, these old buildings, regal and stately, built with the simplest of materials, adorned with exquisite columns, arches, lattice work that never harmed the environment are true examples of human achievement.



*Artists  
In  
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*Catherine Eaton Skinner*



*Mark Yale Harris*



*Kathleen Frank*

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*Soumen & Monabi Mitra*

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