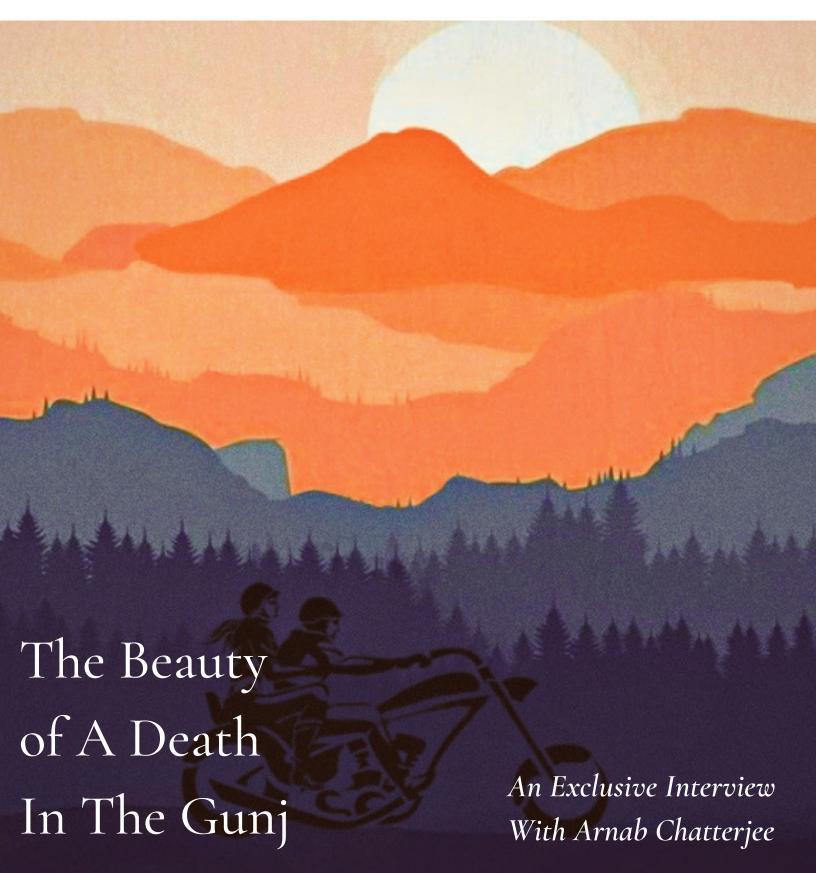
MONOGRAPH

VOL. 4 | JANUARY 2021

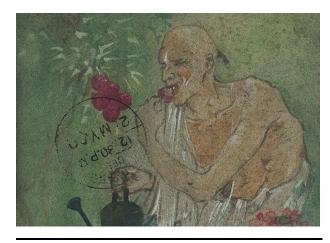


MONOGRAPH

Editor's Note
Cohen in Calcutta
Running in the Family
The Hindu Way
Insomnia
The Art Of Creative Expression



City of Broken Glass
Father
Hate
Something Borrowed
Letter To My Younger Self



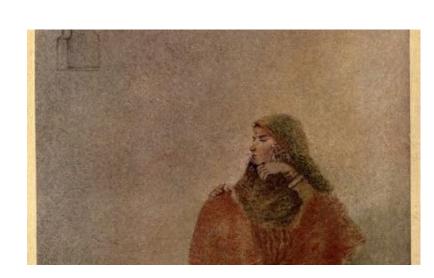
A Group Which Almost Became Historic A Death In The Gunj Bariwali Colour An Evening मेरी Shifting वाली दिवाली।। A Millenial Teenager's Dream



A Summer of Broken Promises

MONOGRAPH

Volume 4.





আমার সবটা জুড়ে

বীজ

Bookstagram Recommends

Arnab Chatterjee

The History of Jazz pt.3

Artists In Focus

January 2021



Editor's Note

Indrayani Bhadra

December is fading away before our eyes, and perhaps for the first time, it feels as if we are heading towards something better. The nostalgia of the last 12 months, the ghosts of the years past - all of it seems to matter a little less this year. So as January steps into the doorway, and waits for us to welcome her, to a world that has hoped and prayed for this moment to arrive - let us breathe in, pause for a second, and like the artists of old - acknowledge how much we have learnt from this pain. Art truly found its own place in 2020, the crown and halo it had deserved forever. It is difficult for me to think past the number of nights I spent curled up in my blanket, crying till I just could not anymore - my heart begging to meet my friends, but unable to. The sole saviour then, was Art. We clung to our music, the Anjan Dutt and the Prateek Kuhad alike - we painted ourselves in the colours of wild rainbows, and we let loose everything we had everytime we turned to paintbrushes and headphones and the poetry of a million heartbreaks. If there's one good thing that came out of this year that left no one unscathed - it is this. It is that we found ourselves in Art, we bonded over it, we cried over it and we loved it with all our hearts. I remember one particularly desolate December night that I spent watching Spike Jonze's Her with an incredibly precious person, and it is still one of my brightest moments - though we were both screens apart, and cities apart.

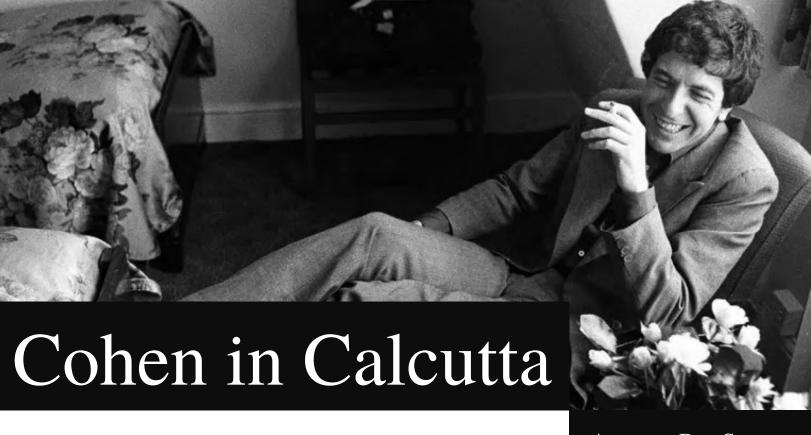
And so it goes. This letter is meant to be a reminder of this year, in all its glory, and all its heartbreak. We were together, even when we were apart. And that is something that has been worth fighting for.

And as we step into a new beginning, with a new volume of Monograph, the words from a Bengali song find their way through my mind.

December er shohor, theke jaay opekkhay-Prakton bhalobasha niye, prakton Kolkata-y.

The city in December lies in wait-Bearing old love, in the Kolkata of old.





Anuraag Das Sarma

Jikan lies in a bed crafted out of the finest cypress trees, and much like the cypresses, Jikan never graced Calcutta with his presence. He extended his hand across the Atlantic and a timid little Bengal, one hand clinging on to its decade old independence, grasped it and never quite let go.

Cohen started off as a poet – as most artists do, and as he grew, his reach extended to prose at first, and then to music. And while, no city, other than Hydra (and maybe Montreal) could claim Cohen as their own, Calcutta had quite the affair with him. A platonic love affair, the kind we find in Suzanne.

Calcutta's affair with Dylan is well known (the little anecdote of Sharmila Tagore finding Ghatak begging for money on the streets while Allen Ginsberg sang The Times, They Are-a Changing behind him, being just one of the many examples) but its sordid little fling with Cohen is never discussed or analysed. One could chalk it down to Calcutta's then anti-US rhetoric (Dylan being quite the anti-establishment bad-boy), however, at its core, Calcutta has never been a political city; it's been an inherently romantic one.

I expect fierce opposition on my previous statement, for baked into the hearts and minds of the Bengali populace, is our history, both in the struggle for freedom and in our opposition to the Union Government. Politics is the intellectual Bengali's favourite pastime, second only to Literature and even Literature is often intertwined with Politics. Take Bankim Chandra's 'Anandamath' for example or even 'Devi Choudhurani'. However, his very first novel, Raj Mohan's Wife was a romantic story and all his novels are based around romantic interests (Case in point: Krishnakanter Will). Even Anandamath has a romantic subplot and deals with the concept of love, albeit for the country, which is personalised as a female mother figure. The point I am trying to make is that politics is a romantic concept – the simple belief that one could change the system and challenge the status quo is inherently romantic – an ideal world view if you will.





Cohen was never the anti-capitalist folk hero that Dylan became – he was the man who sang songs of love and hate and while 'First We Take Manhattan' or 'Everybody Knows' could be considered political, it didn't quite suit his persona. When Dylan recorded Blood on the Tracks, that album, while hailed as a romantic album par excellence, on closer inspection, gave way to political cynicism.

"I lived with them on Montague Street
In a basement down the stairs
There was music in the cafés at night
And revolution in the air
Then he started into dealing with slaves
And something inside of him died
She had to sell everything she owned
And froze up inside"

Dylan's twang-y, and at times raspy voice is made for political ballads, the kinds that topple Governments but Cohen's gravelly and smooth tone of voice doesn't quite suit the purpose. He was made for Singing 'So Long Marianne', 'A Thousand Kisses Deep' and 'Take this Longing'; not for 'The Ballad of Hollis Brown' or 'Boots of Spanish Leather'.

Cohen was a poet first and singer later, and that shines through all of his work. Critically analysing a Cohen song, however would take months and that is not the point of this article. This article deals with Cohen's connection to my hometown of Calcutta. Like I mentioned before, Cohen never came to Calcutta, but had he come, I'm sure he'd have fallen in love with it. Calcutta, with its muddy feet and winter sun, would've enamoured the songwriter. It isn't beyond the realms of my imagination to picture Suzanne, living in a house overlooking the Howrah Bridge and the Ganges, watching the ships go by, and feeling the sun pouring down like honey on her saree-draped body. I know for a fact that I am not the only person who thinks so.

I'd like to recommend this song called Daakbaksher Gaan, a Bengali adaptation of Suzanne, which manages to ground the otherwise International song to India.



Suzanne যদি রাধা হলে যমুনা নদীর তটে আমি হাজার বছর বাঁধবো তোমায় প্রেমের গানের জটে দাও যুক্তি অদ্ভুত, যদি তাতেও ধরো খুঁত আমি রাখাল সাজবো গ্রামে তোমায় ডাকবো অন্য নামে তখন বাঁশির শব্দ শুনে, তুমি ঝাঁপিও আগুনে তাতে কলম ভরবো ছাই-এ, আমি লিখবো পুরাণ, লিখবো তাতে বেদ॥

It's absolutely beautiful to listen to and a song every Cohen fan should listen to, Bengali or not. However, this is hardly the only adaptation of Cohen in Bengali. It is not even the only adaptation of Suzanne. A lyrical translation of the song, called Sejon, from the album Hoodkhola Kobitara is just a single YouTube search away, and is equally beautiful.

সেজন তোমায় নেবে তার মাতাল নদীর ঘরে এই নৌকোমুখী ঝিনুক তার শরীর ছুঁয়ে সরে

আর সেও তো আধেকচেতন তাই সেই তো তোমায় টানে পাহাড় থেকে পাহাড় ছুঁয়ে কুয়াশা সংগ্রামে



And lastly I'll mention an immensely popular Bengali song, sung none other than by Anjan Dutta. It's called Shunte Ki Chao and is an adaptation of one of my favourite Cohen tunes – Sisters of Mercy. Honestly, if asked to choose between the two versions of the song, I won't be able to. Both are lyrical masterpieces in their own right. I'd leave it to you to decide.

এখন মাসের শেষে
মাঝে মধ্যে কান্না পায়
মিনিবাসে দাড়িয়ে
অফিস যাবার সময়
এখন বুঝেছি সেই অদ্ভুত
সুরের কি মানে
ফিরে তো যাওয়া যায়
না যে আর সেখানে

I really do not know who to credit for this weird interconnectedness that Calcutta feels with Cohen – is it because of Cohen's wonderful and vivid song writing that makes it relatable to all, or does the credit go to the certain artistic passion that Bengalis often exude?

While Cohen did travel to Bombay, Calcutta unluckily never felt his feet on its cement-filled streets. It's a pity really, that a man of incomparable writing prowess never came to Calcutta. I still hold that Cohen would've loved Calcutta, much like Ginsberg before him and Carlos Ruiz Zafón after him.

Cohen with his love for old buildings and literary discussions, would've fallen in Love with Calcutta, he really would've.

The very city Jibananda Das wrote Banalata Sen in could've been Cohen's muse. The two do have a lot in common – the parallels between Das' Banalata Sen and Cohen's Sisters of Mercy are very clear – both dealing with similar instances (A travelling artist's coup with a young lady), and that too in kind of similar ways.



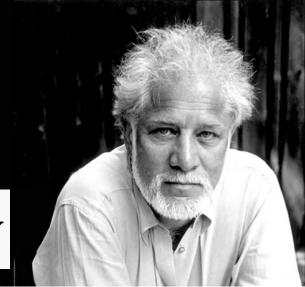
Banalata Sen:

হাজার বছর ধরে
আমি পথ হাঁটিতেছি পৃথিবীর পথে,
সিংহল সমুদ্র থেকে
নিশীথের অন্ধকারে মালয় সাগরে,
অনেক ঘুরেছি আমি
বিম্বিসার অশোকের ধূসর জগতে,
সেখানে ছিলাম আমি
আরো দূর অন্ধকারে বিদর্ভ নগরে,
আমি ক্লান্ত প্রাণ এক
চারিদিকে জীবনের সমুদ্র সফেন,
আমারে দু-দণ্ড শান্তি দিয়েছিলো
নাটোরের বনলতা সেন।

Sisters of Mercy:

Oh,
the Sisters of Mercy
They are not departed or gone
They were waiting for me
When I thought that I just can't go on
And they brought me their comfort
And later they brought me this song
Oh, I hope you run into them
You, who've been travelling so long

It would've been a symbiotic relationship, had Cohen lived in Calcutta – I can almost picture an aged Cohen, in a suit and wearing a beret, smoking a gold flake cigarette and reading a newspaper while sitting in a tea stall. It feels so Cohen and yet, it never happened and therein lies the great tragedy of mankind.



Running In The Family

Prodeepta Aich

Running in the Family is an unusual memoir. Fictionalized at parts, yet grounded in reality, it is an album of anecdotes, a travelogue, a homage to the flora and fauna of Ceylon, and more. "I must confess that the book is not a history but a portrait or 'gesture'." Michael Ondaatje writes in the acknowledgment, and true to his words, weaves a tapestry with truth, memory, rumour and lore, retracing his steps back to the extended family he had left behind as an eleven-year-old.

Ondaatje's family presents an extraordinary cast of characters, their quirks and quiddities reminiscent of García Márquez's eccentric Buendía clan in One Hundred Years of Solitude. With verbatim accounts, vignettes coloured by time and memory, interlaced with poetry, he paints a deeply personal portrait of his family, stories that define a person so well that one would suspect they are made up. But a few chapters before the end, he lifts the veil as he writes about his mother "She belonged to a type of Ceylonese family whose women would take the minutest reaction from another and blow it up into a tremendously exciting tale, then later use it as an example of someone's strain of character." Perhaps this is the foundation of this whimsical and wistful memoir.

With a rare deftness and randomness in his words, tinged by sounds, smells and colours, Ondaatje pulls us into a time and place shrouded by memory. The island itself becomes as much as a character as anyone else, as he describes with sensuous detail its intoxicating beauty, juxtaposed with its variegated populace. Conscious of the futility of going back to retrace the past, he puts together fragments of history in no particular order, yet his stories bleed into each other like watercolours on a canvas. Some stories begin and end, some begin with the end and some others drift off into musings and realizations.

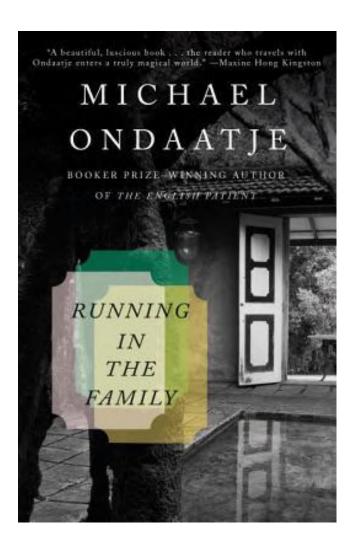
It must have been a precarious work, sifting through the details of one's family, becoming aware of the fractures and the splintered remains.

"During certain years, at certain years in our lives, we see ourselves as remnants from the earlier generations that were destroyed. So our job becomes to keep peace with enemy camps, eliminate the chaos at the end of Jacobean tragedies, and with 'the mercy of distance' write the histories." he writes in one of the later chapters. Thus, at the heart of this memoir is his attempt to reconcile with the family he had slipped past without understanding. Perhaps it is also his bid to come to terms with his own identity, in the process of dredging up the



memories of those who have walked before him. His father and his grandparents are no longer alive, but are constantly present in his stories, echoing that things get passed on from our ancestors, even if we have never known them in person.

Brimming with loss, and a sense of sadness that never really goes away, his is a voice you remember much longer than the book lasts. If there is any book that has changed the way I read, it would be this one. In a world pent up with putting everything in boxes, this book deliberately defies categorisation, validating that literature does not have to be conventional, does not have to fit in — one of the reasons this book is so close to my heart. So go ahead and read this book. Be charmed and inspired. And then read it a few more times. It's worth it, I think.

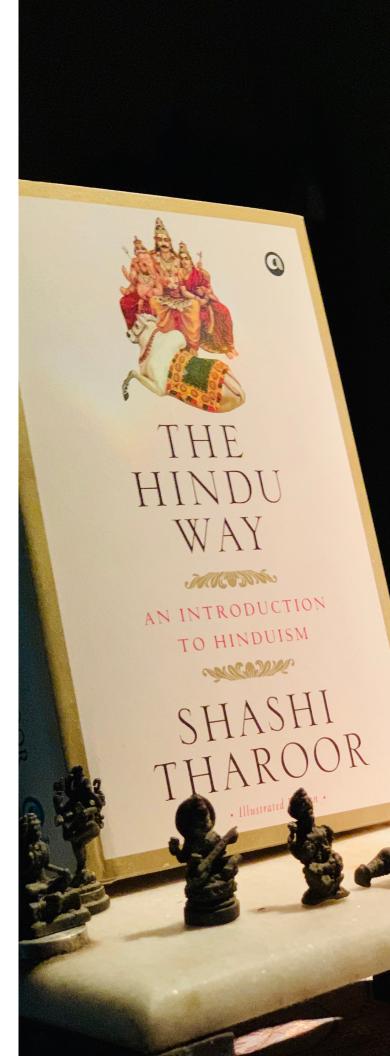


The Hindu Way

Kinjal Chandra

Tharoor's exquisite persona, political acumen and a transparent approach and grip over the Hindu "Way" engenders this comprehensive introduction to Hinduism called "The Hindu Way". Tharoor does not skim the surface of it, he dives deeper, and offers an insightful perspective to this "way of life" by reflecting upon the rich customs, the paramount teachers, the eclectic stories and the undertones of its recondite philosophy. He steers clear of the political arguments as this book stems out from his other bestseller "Why I am a Hindu" which offered a holistic view towards the religion.

This book is a personal understanding and account of Hinduism from the vantage point of Tharoor. In between explanations, he reminisces a memory from childhood, or his political endeavours and sometimes uses humour effectively to interweave it all together and make it an upstanding and wholesome read



The book is replete with illustrations and is clinically detailed; it almost feels like you are listening to Tharoor's interactive oration on what Hinduism means to him. He mellows down the esotericism and involution of the Vedanta philosophies and ancient Hindu ideas to make the book accessible to all.

However, he doesn't merely eulogize the religion, he makes an effort to point out its flaws. From dubious 'Godmen' to segmentation and fanaticism, he highlights every aspect. However, I believe these flaws belong to the faithful and not to the faith. Bringing politics into the picture, (which he promises not to, but I don't blame him), he challenges the Hindutva situation which is peppered with sectarianism, bigotry, intrusion, belligerence, intolerance and fanaticism as opposed to the eclectic, pantheistic, plural, inclusive and expansive Sanatana Dharma. This aspect is a total standout as most authors shy away from summoning the government ignited Hindutva ideology, which is maligning the notion and identity of this age-old and inclusive religion. It infuriates the author as well as me, but we are hopeful that the true meaning of Hinduism will radiate as brilliantly as did Swami Vivekananda's discourse in Chicago on September, 1893.



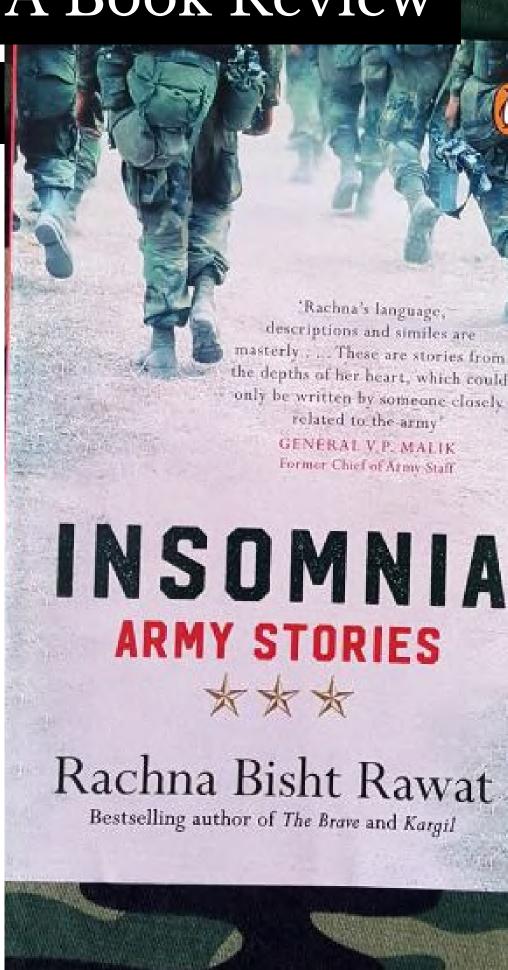
Insomnia: A Book Review

Renata Pavrey

Title – Insomnia Author – Rachna Bisht Rawat Genre – Short stories

Theme – Armed forces

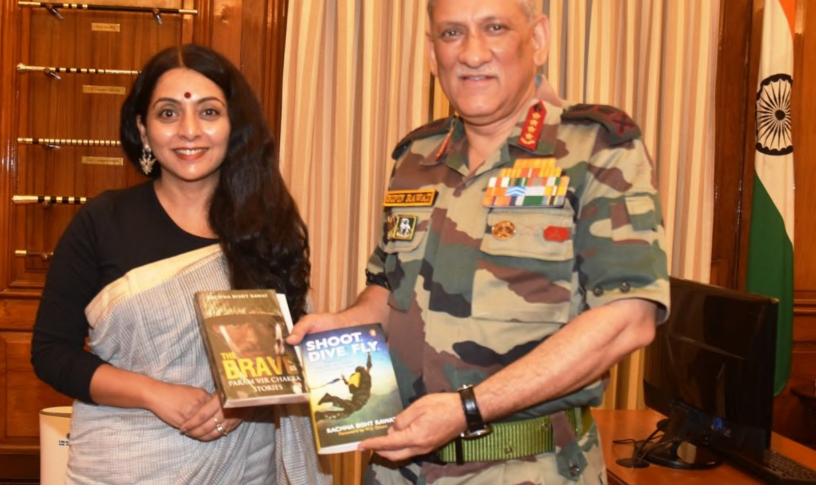
The latest release from Rachna Bisht Rawat's armed forces series of books offers a fictional take on true incidents, in the form of short stories surrounding varied army experiences. The author is an army spouse, child and sibling (with her husband, father and brother having served at different points in time). Her stories draw from the narratives shared by people close to her, providing the reader with touching tales, humorous anecdotes, and frightening forays of life in the armed forces.



A general haunted by the voices of dead men he had killed decades ago, two soldiers from warring nations forging a unique bond while manning their posts, the relationship of a child of a serving officer with his teacher, an army wife out alone on a run in the cantonment areas, and several other stories that take us from the thick of battle to random musings of our men in camo. Rawat's writing offers a unique take on her chosen themes – from the heart-wrenching tale of soldiers attempting to rescue a stray dog in the freezing Siachen – the highest battlefield in the world, to the haunting narrative of an officer trying to keep his wife's schizophrenia hidden due to social stigmas, and the hilarious colonel on holiday and his efforts to ensure the family "regiment" has the most disciplined and best time ever. A mixed bag from the world of olive green inhabited not only by heroes, but the humans, animals and things around them as well. Rawat touches issues of subtle sexism faced by women officers, the reminiscences of retired officers, the friendly bullying of new recruits that can take serious undertones, the bond between soldiers and stray animals, the lives of army doctors and nurses who are at the forefront in casualties of border skirmishes and war but away from media attention; the fear, terror, solitude faced by army wives living on their own in secluded areas; and the lives of army children moving through schools, teachers, friends as their parents' postings change.

The fact that the author compiled these stories over a decade during her own travels from her father's – and then husband's – many postings, lends a sense of authenticity and resonance to her narratives, most of which are set in desolate areas. The book is filled with beautiful lines that touch you in different ways, depending on the emotions surrounding each story.

- ~A translucent moon hung between the trees, climbing slowly into the sky like a scared kid reluctantly stepping into a dark room, not sure of where the light switch was.
- ~Both sides knew that on Siachen, the weather was your real enemy and not another country.



~He looked at his double-barrel rifle. It had been with him longer than his kids. Or even his wife. He looked at it with tenderness.

~Scars were not important, songs were.

"Stories are born in the heart – from seeds quietly sown by people who once walked in and out of it – and can only be written when they start to choke you with their weight", reads one of my favorite lines from the book, which strongly reiterates Rawat's own prowess as a writer and the stories within her that gush forth in a multitude of themes and emotions. She can make you shed a tear, laugh out uproariously, fear macabre episodes, and flood your heart with warmth for the people who keep our country safe. While the author writes predominantly about the Indian armed forces, the book is readable for anyone around the globe as her themes are universal.

The Art of Creative Expression

Mehul Menon

"Writing about music is like dancing about architecture."

-The Thelonious monk

The idea of "creating something new" to most people is just an excuse of using age old buzz wordscreativity, talent, perseverance and so on. In fact, when the brilliance of a particular artist is discussed, most pay more attention to the struggles rather than the actual features of his/her art and even less to the source of it all. The impulse to create and conceive of something that does not exist as of now in any form is driven by a number of factors and most of them have a lot to do with why we do what we do and why we create in the first place.





"The best thing you can do for yourself and your creativity is to practice the art of letting things go, accepting things for what they really are, and move on, step by step building your own "infinity shell" of experiences."

-Tom 'fountainhead' Geldschläger

The reasons for pursuing any form of art or to innovate in any way we do vary from person to person but it is a well established fact that most run away from it because it coaxes them to face an attribute that makes them either afraid or uncomfortable. Social acceptance, insecurity and even situations we want to run away from or pain that we want to numb.

Chopin would spend entire days and months after his sister's demise at the piano composing some of his best pieces and driven by a desire to numb his grief and let it manifest in something else. The need for acceptance reflects in what we do and even the emotions we wish to numb. However, does every good artist need some form of mental anguish, a particular level of technical ability or a desire for a certain level of fame or popularity to be "good"?

Creative expression is more often than not driven by a sense of intuition, something that "feels" right rather than a calculated move. In fact, the more calculated the decisions, anything that goes beyond tweaks here and there, is a recipe for disaster and possibly the source of your next creative drought. Nevertheless, this intuition is not something that a person is born with. It is developed by experience, perspective and is unique to a person's mentality. Creativity in itself is like a journey just as learning is, except the foundations of creativity change with every experience and every new experiment. Creativity goes beyond "good" and "bad", it is a representation of a voice that cannot be conveyed by human language, only subtlety and implications.

"I have had my results a long time but I do not yet know how I arrived at them."

-Carl Friedrich Gauss

"Anything disingenuous feels wrong and to create anything smoothly and quickly is to follow cliches and norms. To create is a path of solitude, hardship and most definitely one of endless rejection. Yet, to experiment, to actively listen or to see more than what the eyes and ears of the layman can conceive is something a creative person, who is capable of substantial contribution, craves. It is not a quest for answers but one for questions that need answers, beyond simple epicureanism and asceticism.

"My question...was the simplest of questions, lying in the soul of every man from the foolish child to the wisest elder; it was a question without an answer to which one cannot live, as I had found by experience."
-Leo Tolstoy



Art can either comfort or shake things up around you. I shall come back to the question I posed earlier in the essay about artists and whether extreme mental trauma is the only way to develop an artistic voice. The short answer is no, but, the only way to have your own voice is continually keep understanding yourself, to reach to the crux of every emotion you feel and to understand what you feel most and what are your motivations. In fact, there is no end to this journey of self-discovery, which is a good thing because an end implies a limited supply of music, paintings, sculpture and literature. To let creative ideas grow spontaneously and intuitively, without judgement is the only way to grow.

"I cannot conceive of music that expresses absolutely nothing." -Bartok





Aishi Saha

It was the 5th of June, 1832. Paris was in mourning. The beloved General Lamarque, defender of the people, condemner of the Legitimists, has died of cholera, and the monarchist government has simply made an occasion out of it. His cold, withered body packed inside a coffin was being traversed through the streets of Paris, surrounded by adequate military ostentation and precaution.

The streets were jam packed. A hum of a song and a heartbeat. "To arms!" a voice yelled.

To arms, indeed.

A year ago, students all across India rallied against the CAA-NRC-NPR; their peaceful protest was met with brutality from the police. Students of JNU, Jamia Millia were lathi-charged for voicing out their dissent – university campuses were turned into battlefields by the police, who were trying to strangle Democracy to death. But the students persisted, they let themselves be heard.

In this little write-up, I will be talking about Victor Hugo's Les Miserables and the group of student revolutionaries featured in it, Les Amis de l'ABC, or the Friends of the ABC, whom Hugo has appropriately termed, A Group Which Almost Became Historic.

King Louis-Phillipe was on the throne of France, and like most other kings before him, he had not a single concern about the poor and the downtrodden, the ones living on the streets in threadbare garments, suffering and dying from diseases. During this time, i.e. 1832, Paris also found itself in the throes of a cholera epidemic and hundreds were perishing each day. The ones who didn't die of cholera, died of starvation. The King was busy taking strolls in his private section of the Tuileries. The wealthy class, favoured by the king, had a similar apathetic attitude towards the miseries of the poor.

The people craved freedom. They wanted to uproot the King from where he sat on his throne, getting fatter and fatter with the money he wrung from them.





At this juncture, the Friends of the ABC enter the picture. Who were the Friends of the ABC? As Hugo himself has put it – A society having as its aim, in appearance, the education of children; in reality, the elevation of men. Interestingly, the French pronunciation of l'ABC is ah-bae-sae, which sounds like the French word, abaisse. The abaisse meant the people, specifically the ones belonging to the economically lower strata of society. They were led by Enjolras, a boy so beautiful that many regarded him as Apollo. He was headstrong – a 'soldier of democracy', 'a priest of the ideal'. He was twenty six, and full of revolutionary fervour. He was a natural leader. He didn't care much for anything other than the liberation of France from the clutches of monarchy.

He was accompanied by nine others – Combeferre, Jean Prouvaire, Feuilly, Bahorel, Courfeyrac, Laigle or Bossuet, Joly and Grantaire – Marius Pontmercy, one of the main characters of the novel, joined them later. These young men usually met at the back room of a Cafe Musain, and later at the Corinthe.

All except one were ready to burn themselves if need be, for the cause, the ideal that they believed in. Grantaire, ever the cynic, the sceptic, believed in nothing. He was a drunkard, a bottle of wine ever-present in his hands. He would say, 'There is only one certainty. My full glass.'



Hugo has described him as 'frightfully ugly', a clear contrast to Enjolras' blinding charisma. It would seem that the outward contrast is actually a figurative one – Enjolras, who lived and died for what he believed in, and Grantaire, who was faithless.

Still, Grantaire wasn't completely faithless. He believed not in his comrades' exuberant fervour of revolution, he believed not in the monarchy; neither did he have an ideology he called his own. He simply believed in Enjolras. It's a classic, really – a cynic adhering himself to the very pinnacle of idealism. Enjolras loathed him, side-eyed him. Neither could he stand Grantaire's inability to believe in anything, nor could he put up with his drunkenness. He was disdainful in his eyes. He was an unaccepted Pylades. So, 5th June, 1832 came, and ginormous barricades were built all over Paris. The boiling water had finally risen above the brim, ready to spill in trembling, unpredictable bouts. Enjolras and his friends had disrupted the funeral procession of General Lamarque, treating it as an opportunity to declare their disapproval of the monarchy. They waved their red flags of dissent and launched into movement right in the midst of the procession.



And the King's National Guardsmen reacted the only way the defenders of a despotic rule have, for centuries before, and will, for more centuries to come – with blatant brutality.

The mob started fleeing and breaking up in fear, flailing and wailing to save themselves. Enjolras, Marius, Courfeyrac and few of the others who were carrying a musket, pointed them at the king's men and rallied the mob towards Rue de la Chanvrerie where more of them were waiting inside Corinthe. They erected a barricade within hours, taking position to face their foes. It was a Thermopylae sort of situation, really – not even a hundred of them, taking up weapons for the first time with shaky hands, against thousands of systematically armed guardsmen. Gavroche Thernadier, an 11 year-old gamin, takes up a gun, too, and fights against the injustice of poverty.

Hugo delves deep into an elaborate description of almost every moment of this combat between the mob led by the student revolutionaries and the king's guardsmen which lasted till the next day, i.e. the 6th of June, 1832. At one point in the combat, a National Guard inquired, 'Who goes there?', to which the luminous Enjolras had a prompt answer.

The French Revolution.

Firing. Incessant firing. Shrieking. Rivulets of blood flowing on both ends, staining the ground below. They had hoped – no, they had believed with full conviction that the people of Paris would rise with them to fight against the monarchy. They were sure of it. But as it would seem, they were the only barricade in the city still standing. And the people had been too fearful of the oppressors to have joined them in their cause. It was hopeless.

But they would be damned before they would ever surrender to their foes. They would still fight. They would fight for liberty. They would fight for democracy. They would fight for every person's right to bread. They would fight for every person's right to a fair trial. They would fight for France. Even at the cost of their lives. Which, at that point, was an unavoidable, inevitable truth. Liberty or Death.

In a lofty, arduous, swift confrontation with the National Guardsmen, the last of the barricades was torn down while the students begged their neighbours to open the doors and let them in, only for the latter to shut them on their faces, out of fear. They fought their way inside the cafe, where once, they'd exchanged ideas and engaged in banter over a glass of wine; they had been cornered and were standing precariously on the edge of death, trying to make their final moments last longer. They were out of arms and ammunitions. Enjolras, who was almost unscratched up to that point, had only a carbine barrel in his hand when he was surrounded by several guards, all taking aim at him. He threw the little barrel away and dared them to shoot him.



Grantaire, who had been asleep for a good part of the insurgence, now emerged behind the king's men and shouted, 'Long Live the Republic!' And then, striding over to where Enjolras was standing, demanded the assailants to shoot them both down. Enjolras pressed his hand against Grantaire, and in that moment, their hearts beat as one.

Vive la France.

Eight bullets penetrated Enjolras who was pressed to the wall with the sheer force of it. Grantaire lay dead at his feet.

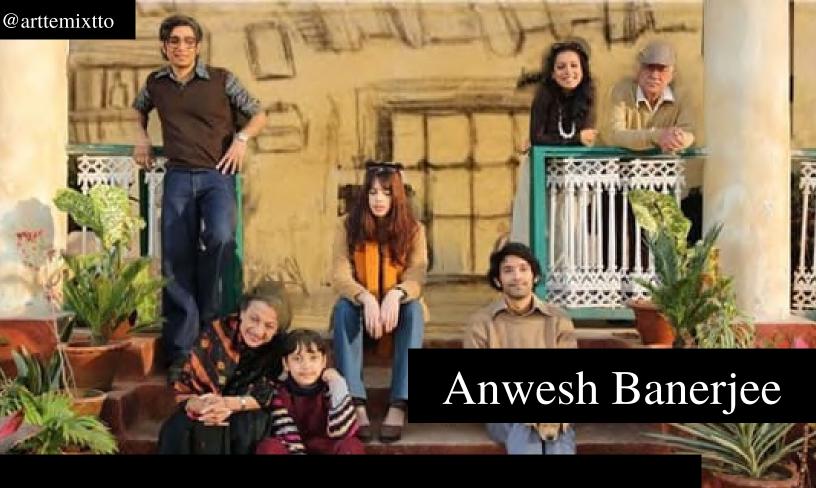
The June Rebellion of 1832 is often overlooked by history books, never taught to us in school. Why? After all, it was merely a two-day affair. That too, the heroes died in the end, never seeing the tomorrow they so dearly dreamed of. History is fast to dismiss them, consider them a minor stir, something akin to a failure. I think I echo Victor Hugo when I say with conviction that they were not. Is Enjolras, young and radiant and brave and full of dreams, a failure to you? Is Gavroche, a child who was forced to take up arms when he should've been playing in his mother's courtyard, a failure to you? Are any of these young students, peasants, artisans who stood up to the oppressors and despots, and fell at the point of the enemy's bayonet, a failure to you? I would think not.



Enjolras and Grantaire – especially Grantaire, who was vocal about his affections for the former, can very well be regarded as one of the most ambiguously explicit examples of queer representation in classic literature. They prove, once again, that we have always been there. We have always existed, even if history did a fine job in trying to erase us.

My favourite adaptation of this novel is definitely Tom Hooper's Les Miserables (2012), and my favourite song from it is the one I'll end with.

Do you hear the people sing?
Singing a song of angry men
It is the music of the people
who will not be slaves again.
When the beating of your heart
echoes the beating of the drums,
There is a life about to start
when tomorrow comes.



A Death in The Gunj

I remember watching 'A Death In The Gunj' in the theatres, two weeks upon the films' release. Although the ridiculously unnecessary divisions between mainstream and art house cinema urges the latter to be best experienced from the confines of your couch, I absolutely pity those who missed out on watching this absolutely riveting film on the big screen. And herein lies the greatest triumph of Konkona Sen Sharma as a director. The film, with its finely tuned atmospherics, spot on production design and poignant background score above everything else, manages to immerse the viewer in this slow, yet dangerously violent world of Mckluskiegunj.

This immersive feeling is central to the experience of viewing of this film which, to be fair is a slow burn. But a few good minutes into the narrative and one realizes that this slow pace is perhaps not a deterrent but rather an essential writing choice on part of the makers, that is central to the experience of these characters and their various travails.

Death is writ large across the face of the film. The title warns you of a death right away. The opening scene takes place outside a morgue. There is a formidable looking gun placed high atop the living room wall. There is a ghastly game of planchette. Insects are killed and buried. Two unlikely companions discuss a dead moth and the meaning of eulogy on a languid winter afternoon. A rendezvous takes place in a graveyard. There is a literal man hunt. And finally there is the death of innocence.

This innocence is not just symbolised but very much embodied by the character of Shutu. A twenty something, young man, whose full name is mentioned in passing once. Whose presence is more of an omniscient absence looming large over the narrative of the film. Shutu is sensitive. He is the butt of all jokes. He maintains a journal with a list of words that begin with the letter e. He weeps into the sweater of his own deceased father. We often see male characters but to mourn this explicitly for the passing of a male parent by a son is not so common a sight in our cinema. Shutu does not stop at being sensitive. He is constantly made to carry out chores and look after the kid of the house.



Yet he is the one who knows the capital of Australia in a group of nine people. And he is the one who falls for the seduction of the femme fatale played to perfection by Kalki Koechlin. One of the most underrated balls of fire in Bombay right now, Ranvir Shorey essays Vikram, the literal antithesis of the character of Shutu. He presents to us a side of masculinity that is more acceptable. Vikram is boisterous and loud. He is married but doesnt give two thoughts about sleeping with an old flame. He is a bully and takes sadistic pleasure in dominating over those weaker to him. In one of the best scenes of the film we see Shutu and Vikram literally fight it out in a game of kabaddi while a letter from Shutus' mother plays in the background. It is stunning.

@arttemixtto

On a symbolic level this motif of conflicting masculinity is one of the central driving elements of the film. Vikrant Massey inhabits Shutu. His stares are empty initially. There is a certain dream in them when he tries, in vain, to please his lady love Mimi. There is hurt in his eyes when the film rolls to a climax and in the end there is only rage. This performance grounds the film. And the perfection and pathos with which Massey executes this role goes a huge way towards contributing to the success of this story which is essentially a study of character.

How far can a person be pushed before he breaks once and for all? This question asks us repeatedly.



Sirsha Ray the DOP, bathes each frame in shades of sepia embuing the film with deep seated nostalgia. There is a sense of loss, of something lost and gone forever. This idea is present from the very first scene when the entourage stops to buy cake from an Anglo Indian lady. The house is barely standing and the woman visibly old. It is a definite homage to 36 Chowringhee Lane, which upon reflection was yet another meditation on loneliness. Only this time the Jennifer Kendall character is replaced by Shutu. Sen Sharma, also pays two other very important homages. The image of a tyre swinging from a tree, a sleepy old town in christmas are all elements that draw inspiration from To Kill A Mockingbird. The swinging tyre is a recurring symbol even in this film and one sees the link that Sharma tries to establish.

A death in the Gunj is essentially a story about the kiss of innocence. A depiction of a world where innocence and sensitivity is not allowed to thrive but suffocated and made to embrace an early and violent death. We get a reference to Lolita as well in the carefully framed shot where Mimi is painting her nails as Shutu looks on with lusty eyes.

And by god does this film nail lust! Another brilliant achievement of Konkona is her ability to choreograph her sex scenes through such a lens of sensitivity that the scenes depicting two acts of quite graphic sex, do not become narratives about the acts. Rather they become about the immediacy of the emotions that propel the act. In one we see an act of fatal seduction involving an anxious novice. Konkona ends the scene with a paper chip sliding from underneath the chair on which the couple make love. It is poetic and brilliant above all. The second scene comes out of nowhere. It is a lazy winter afternoon. And people are going about their work when suddenly we cut to a maid knocking on a closed door inside which a wife is performing oral sex on her husband. We never see the act. The camera is focused on the face of the husband and for a brief few seconds we see the face of the wife as she raises her head to send away the maid.

It is intimate and the fluid editing makes it look like an organic part of their daily routine. It is such a rare sight to see such well thought and empathetically shot scenes of sex in our country that the few which come our way must be noted and appreciated for their immense worth.

Above all A Death in the Gunj in spite of a morbid narrative and a grim message is a must watch because it is after all a triumph of directorial vision and writing. Konkona makes us look at the tiniest of things for beauty. But she also makes us aware that sometimes beauty can come at the cost of great cruelty.





Bariwali:

A Tale of Self-Inflicted Isolation, "Womanly Virtue", and Choice

Banalata has been living in quiet solitude all these years when an unwelcome intruder knocks on her door; it is perhaps the worst of visitors a lonely woman can imagine entertaining: a film crew, complete with an insistent, charming director. Initially reluctant (and obvious about it) to give away a part of her only prized possession, Banalata is mollified by the director's reassurances of not besmirching her lovely home while he makes his film under her roof.

Banalata, a recluse by choice, has no connection with the world around her. Moreover, she has no inclination of venturing out to explore it.

Nearly agoraphobic, to Banalata, greeting strangers is a disdainful task, frequently resulting in severe anxiety. The inner workings of her house are as foreign to her as the world she never steps into - an invisible line on the threshold that she never crosses.

- It is easy to dismiss her as a woman devoid of worldly pleasure and desires, confer on her the title of a homebody, or a modern-day Miss Havisham without the revenge fantasy.
- Perchance, a female Heathcliff in her own version of Wuthering Heights, without the incessant mourning for Catherine.
- Facilely, one may deem her privileged: she has full-time help, a maid, enough room for herself, and thus, has no need to step out of her solitary existence. Even when important matters pertaining to her palatial house require attention, she sends her trusted servant to do her bidding.
- She requires a helper to switch on the fan and even provide her with a glass of water.
- She is unbothered about her attire, is frequently petulant, and likes things the way they are the thought of changing an old fan sending her into a tizzy despite its unfeasibility is a testament to this.
- To top it all off, she distrusts nearly everyone except for her long-time help, Prasanna (Surya Chatterjee).





She seems complacent in her isolated existence and treats it like an oasis of comfort, even though it might be lacklustre to a callous spectator.

She and the once magnificent house she inhabits have become synonymous now – they share a sibling like relationship: resentment and love residing together. Its crumbling walls, its dilapidated appearance, the lonely hallways, mirror the turbulent aloneness of Banalata's life and her heart, the lost exuberance of youth; middle age beckoning her in a forced embrace.

- What remains is only a pale copy of their once resplendent glory.
- There is a dejected acceptance of her fate; it is a way of life for her, and she has grown (brusquely) content in it, punctuated by bouts of depression which she masks by inflicting wrath on her domestic help.
- But after a few days (read months) of isolating ourselves from the world, most of us can find a connection to her; we finally realise how lonely a person can be; what isolation, in any form from people, from friends, from family, and even strangers can do to the human mind.

Quarantine should have been an introvert's delight – finally free of the incessant and mandatory socialisation and play-acting – but even though one may be of an introverted nature (a predilection I attest to myself), it just doesn't feel right; there seems to be something amiss.

All this indulgence in a supposedly serene environment where others seem to be attaining peace or getting back to that abandoned novel, or whipping up recipes while the world spars with a pandemic makes one's solitary heart yearn for the quiet seclusion offered by a world where being alone is a choice, not an enforced necessity.

Bariwali augments this feeling of inherent loneliness of a soul and proposes a question: is it better to revel in it or shun oneself and the world because of it? With the weather turning tempestuous by the minute, I proceeded to watch Bariwali yet again, attempting to find solidarity in the aloneness of a fictional character.

Bariwali (The Landlady, 2000), starring Kirron Kher as Banalata, is one of Rituparno Ghosh's earlier films (which earned him the NETPAC Award); what it lacks in production value, it makes for in its quiet gracefulness.

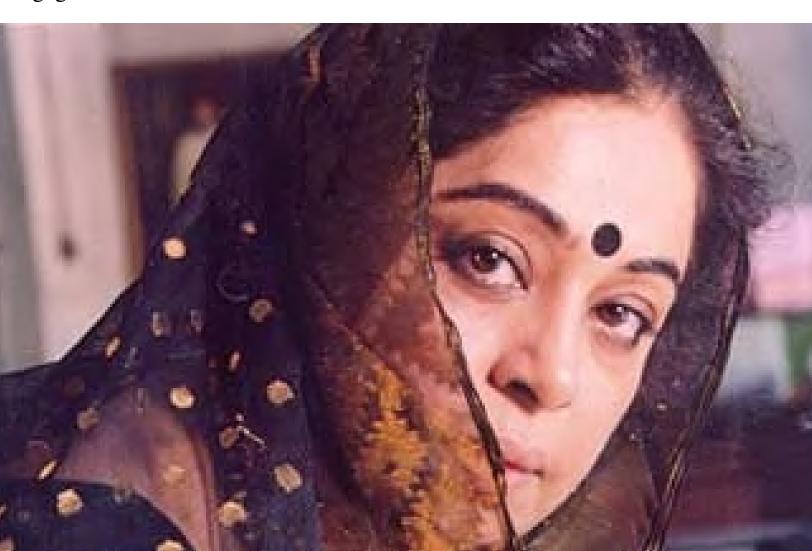




Eloquently written and superbly acted, it tells the age-old story of societal mores and tradition shackling a person's need for company.

- Reminiscent of Satyajit Ray's films, Mr Ghosh constructs a paradigm for his protagonist: she is neither seen nor heard in the initial moments of the movie you are free to create a version of Banalata based on the facts you hear about her.
- This is where Mr. Ghosh's ingenuity shines providing this freedom to the audience to concoct a version of the lead effectively getting the viewer involved in the story. He walks the thin line between drama and melodrama; never giving in, a master in comprehending the importance of the little things in life.
- He casts a spell on the viewer, with the help of details that one may consider inconsequential: the flick of a wayward hair, an upturned lamp, a look of perfectly masked disdain by the protagonist or the turn of a head.
- But in a move quite similar to the queen-storyteller Scheherazade from the Arabian Nights, Mr Ghosh uses these trivial details to season the life of the protagonist, subsequently flavouring the story.
- He manages to deconstruct the lead's image from our mind's eye, without disparaging one's intelligence, thus making an engaging character.

- In Bariwali, from the titbits the servants let fall, an image of a lonely, cantankerous woman takes shape.
- Eventually, when we get to see her on screen, we find that the servants (and we) were right: she is irritable and strict.
- But before we can congratulate ourselves on having our notions realized, Mr Ghosh strategically takes us to the reason for Banalata's present state: a tragedy that struck on the eve of her wedding.
- In the events succeeding the catastrophe that befalls her, Banalata isolates herself; some of it voluntary, a dash self-inflicted, but mostly circumstantial.
- The death of her fiancé, two nights before she was to become a bride, changes her; she spurns society, stops interacting with people.
- She secludes herself, going into a shell of her own creation in order to deal with the aftermath of being rejected by fate.
- She stands at a bizarre precipice: an unmarried woman with no future; single yet engaged.





As Banalata goes through her belongings, trying to locate the deed of her house, she chances upon the invitation for the wedding she never had; a Bengali folk song plays in the background as she remembers the hullabaloo around her impending nuptials. The song talks about the legend of Behula, a woman whose husband is bitten by a snake on their wedding night as a response to her father-in-law's refusal to worship the snake goddess, Manasa. As Behula cries over the lifeless body of her new husband, she grieves for her lost marital ambitions and vows to avenge her husband and bring him back to life.

Banalata has no such talent, nor the strength or conviction to undertake an endeavour akin to Behula's. That notwithstanding, both women face a similar conundrum but Behula ends up emerging as the loyal, pious wife and a symbol of marital excellence while Banalata is left to her own devices.

Tragedy has a way of niggling into one's conscience: softly yet rigidly enveloping one in its grasp. Banalata is only a manifestation of the sorrow's viscerality.

She is not a likeable character – her plainness and her lack of intelligence peppered with her despondent disposition and tepid inanity do not make for a lovable person – but it is her sorrow, a sorrow we all share, is what makes one relate to her.

Ignorance, Thy Name is Isolation

After her acquiescence to the movie's shoot, she tries to find the novel, on which the film is based, in the local library, but they are unable to procure it because she has forgotten to mention the author's name.

Banalata has been so deprived of the world outside that she is unaware of one of the best classics written by Rabindranath Tagore (Chokher Bali aka A Grain of Sand).



It is only when the film director, Deepankar (Chiranjeet Chakraborty), leaves behind a copy of the novel that Banalata is intrigued with the matter of the film that is being shot.

- On closer inspection we find that there's a part of her wants to go out, explore the world people keep talking about, have adventures like other people do.
- To her credit, she does not verbally express her bitterness towards being alone, until she feels drawn to the director: the worldly person she could never become, or romance.
- Constraints ground her; she finds herself as a protector of her family's heritage and even though it makes her unhappy to be limited to a boundary, it serves her with a purpose.
- A sense of melancholia colours her wardrobe as well; sarees with a muted colour palette, worn-out cardigans, heavy petticoats, and to top it off: soda lime glass spectacles, all point to the subdued life she leads an extension of her intrinsic lonesomeness and confinement and the heaviness of lugging around the weight of tradition.
- Her long hair, in much need of care, is awkwardly put up in a bun or a messy braid, because she simply does not care about her appearance; she has no need to look presentable as there is no question of entertaining company.

Dressing up, grooming, beautifying oneself are all part of a routine dedicated for society's cognizance – as an armour against its judgement – insinuating an obligation rather than a personal choice.

It has also ingrained in us the notion that looking beautiful is a major concern when one has a lover: one has a person one would need (again proclaimed as a necessity, not a proclivity) to look good for, to feel desirable for.

Adorning yourself in ornaments, trying to tempt and seduce a lover are all part of a quest to keep a certain person engaged – it is an exercise to reverberate the attractiveness of one's extraneous appearance – and we have been moulded to comply with these demands, choice notwithstanding.

Beautification is a social diktat: you look presentable for society because one has the need to create an impression.

I vividly remember my mother combing out her hair, re-applying the vermillion in her part and changing into a fresh saree (a practice she religiously follows till date) just before twilight (the hour of prayer for Bengalis), in anticipation of my father's arrival from his office and or if there was a need to entertain guests.

Women have been conditioned to look and act in a certain way; they have been taught that their beauty is a device to catch a male's attention or more so to keep his wavering attention fixated; an entity that is not hers to claim.





- Men, on the other hand, aren't bound to these restrictions they have a "choice", a choice not extended to women.
- Men can appear as haggard as they want to and not one person bats an eyelash.
- A bare-chested man is an allegory of virility; a bare-chested woman is branded either a whore, a temptress, or a title even worse.
- An instance of this conditioning can be seen in "The Marvelous Mrs Maisel" where our heroine, Midge, the perfect 1950s wife, is seen performing a series of ablutions
- cleaning her face thoroughly, applying a face pack, putting her hair in rollers only after she has made sure that her husband, Joel, is fast asleep. Even though both go to sleep at the same time, Midge lies awake, waiting for the perfect moment to start her nightly regimen.
- It doesn't stop there; she wakes up early, much earlier than her husband, in order to apply make-up, splash some perfume on herself, detangle her hair from the curlers, and then goes back to bed and feigns sleep.
- She lets Joel wake up first, shut off the alarm, and then proceed to "wake" Midge and marvel at her beautiful face.
- The reason for all this? She has been taught that if she doesn't follow this nocturnal ritual, her husband is bound to look for a new face to satiate his desires; that her prettiness is the only expedient to keep her husband in check.



Early in the series, she is also seen measuring her body, methodically noting the figures down her in a notebook, which she proudly proclaims she has been maintaining for years.

To dig in the fact of how blatantly society has dictated these rules for generations, we see Midge's mother, Rose, later in the series, follow the same pattern once her husband is in repose. It is apparent that she is the person who has extolled the virtue of this night-time ritual to her daughter, along with another set of rules of how a wife should behave.

A similar predicament can be witnessed in period dramas, typically based in the Victorian era, where the ladies of the house are in uproar, upending their normal routine, because a certain person (mostly a man) has called upon them.

Gone is the regularity of affairs, the idleness of life, presentation takes precedence; a temporary, forged picture of utopia must be maintained in front of guests.

All the women in the house are in various stages of dress-up: one is still in her nightclothes, the other one hasn't had her hair curled, one is sewing; presiding over them is their (habitually shrill) hapless matriarch (looking at you, Mrs. Bennet) who is trying to get them organized for the showing.

What is irksome is that the entire montage is played for comic effect

I would have been content, had the comedy been self-aware of the ridiculousness of the situation rather than playing up the confusion to get a few measly smiles from the audience.

Banalata has no such fancies: she has no husband, nor any other person whom she needs to impress. She has her two helpers for whom she doesn't need to put on a show.

Even in front of outsiders, if they are lucky to chance upon her, she doesn't bother excessively with her clothing; all the while wishing them to be gone.

In a scene, she even unties her saree and loosens her blouse in front of Prasanna, which would be a scandalous event according to the society we inhabit; it is also a departure from her provincial temperament (though Prasanna's alluded queerness might be a reason for the comfortability).

Only when she develops a crush on Deepankar, that is when she starts making an effort to dress up. Lotions appear next to her bed; she dresses with more care; her outward appearance is of major concern to her now – she is aware of Deepankar's gaze.

In fact, she is so enamoured by Deepankar, that her subconscious starts concocting versions of reality according to her imaginations.





The one dream that stands out is a weird fantasy fixated on an unfinished sewing endeavour which she had provided the film crew to use earlier in the day. A similar batik spread is draped over her body as she slumbers.

- Deepankar enters the room and asks her to part with it, she tells him it isn't the one she sewed but a family heirloom; he pulls at it, revealing Banalata adorned in a lacy bra and a flimsy petticoat garments she wouldn't ever wear.
- As he tugs at it, a visible pleasurable tremor runs through Banalata.
- The dream sequence is a device to point to the fact that the only space safe for a woman to make a socially unencumbered choice sartorial and otherwise is when she dreams; where she lets her inner enchantress decide.
- It reminded me of my first date the anticipation, the eagerness, the wanting, the desire to look my best and how the validation of another person, an appreciative glance from the person of my affection, would mean the world to me; would perhaps even rival Narcissus's ego.

A Casual Flirtation, Or Is It?

When Deepankar flirts with Banalata, she flirts back, realizing her latent desire and the power she supposedly had all these years.



The director, on the other hand, uses Banalata: both as a flirtation and as a means to an end.

- His exploitation of Banalata is a result of his artistic aspirations he does not necessarily exploit her in the conventional way but rather in a creative space. He wants to complete his movie's shoot and if a verbal liaison can achieve that, why not use it?
- As the story unfolds, we find out that Banalata is no demure damsel; when acquainted with her new-found power, she unleashes it in its entirety.
- Inadvertently, what Deepankar does is bring to the fore Banalata's altruistic streak: the woman who insultingly banished the first person who came to ask her for her permission to shoot at her house, transforms into a benevolent soul who doesn't mind lending her ancestral baubles to the crew.
- He makes Banalata emerge from her shell, experience her own intelligence, and the wisdom she has gained over the years. Banalata, whilst opening her home to strangers, ironically, opens up her heart in the process.
- She strikes up a friendship with the art director, Debashish (Shiboprasad Mukherjee): a connection which she whole-heartedly maintains.

- But she does have ulterior motives in befriending young Debashish who unintentionally provides her with fodder from Deepankar's life: his affair with the lead actress, his crumbling marriage, his proclivities.
- But Banalata isn't exactly devious: she might try to win over her crush using artifice, but she knows her limitations.
- But Banalata's actions on Deepankar's birthday make one question her simplicity: is she really that inane
- In the scene, Banalata coyly serves up a meal to Deepankar that she has been cooking since morning while making it look like it was an unplanned event; as if she does that daily for herself.
- She sits down next to him, fanning him with a hand-held fan, casually asking about his life, discussing his movie, and at the end of the conversation giving up her agreed upon rent for filming at her home in a gesture of goodwill.
- She asks him to consider it his birthday gift, though secretly it crushes her that she cannot offer him her love; she settles with dismissing monetary compensation.
- The love she starts feeling for Deepankar fuels the revelation of her long-forgotten self: a woman who feels, an emotional human being.
- And who among us can fault her aren't we all guilty of this sin?





Mirror, Mirror on The Wall, Am I In Love or Is That A Claim Too Tall?

Rupa Ganguly as Sudeshna, the lead actress in Deepankar's movie, is the perfect foil to Kirron Kher's Banalata: She is well-read, extremely gorgeous, fashionable, is aware of her effect on people, and is confident; traits that our heroine lacks. Additionally, she has been an ex-flame of Deepankar's.

It also mirrors the plot of the movie being shot: "Chokher Bali" (a movie which Rituparno Ghosh eventually adapted and directed in 2003), two women with conflicting personalities, bound by an alleged friendship but more sturdily by their love for one man.

Both have that quiet resolve of not showing their true feelings. Their conversations and even their silences speak of the tacit resentment they feel towards each other; the acting capabilities of both actors at their paramount.

It reminds one of the understated restraint of Shabana Azmi's Pooja while dealing with Smita Patil's paranoid Kavita in "Arth", a movie where the main leads suffer a similar predicament.



Returning to the night of Deepankar's birthday, as Sudeshna sits alone, singing love songs by Tagore, she is joined by a victorious Banalata, who has successfully managed to trump the competition.

In a smug manner, adeptly disguised by a friendly smile, she recounts the details of her afternoon with Deepankar to Sudeshna who had forgotten about her exlover's birthday.

It turns out that Sudeshna's love is as flimsy as the petticoat she wears; her love for Deepankar is an attention-seeking, ego-satisfying gimmick for her.

Banalata on the other hand, gives up her rigidly followed inhibitions pertaining to outsiders in order to enthral Deepankar; going through painful lengths of making him a birthday lunch, a task that she would normally frown upon.

- She uses her status as the landlady to dissuade Sudeshna from wishing or visiting Deepankar; she claims that she has locked the main gate, adding that it is quite late in the evening, which is an apparently pathetic excuse but that binds Sudeshna from trying her luck.
- Banalata tries to live vicariously through the experiences of other people: she is intrigued by the lives of these creatures who have gravitated towards her in an unlikely game of fate.
- She wants to explore her amorous desires, cut short due to the untimely death of her affianced.
- She wants to hear about the carnal escapades of her maid, Malati (a splendid Sudipta Chakroborty), some of which she has unceremoniously witnessed; but deems it improper, not just because of her age or stature but because she does not want to feel those prohibited feelings again; emotions she has tucked away carefully perhaps too carefully, like the property papers inside her trunk –

or with the same rigidity with which she prohibits her maid, and by extension, herself, from watching Amitabh Bachchan movies. Interestingly, like the documents, her sexual desires are bubbling on the surface, flooding over when the director shows up.

Sister, Sister of my Heart

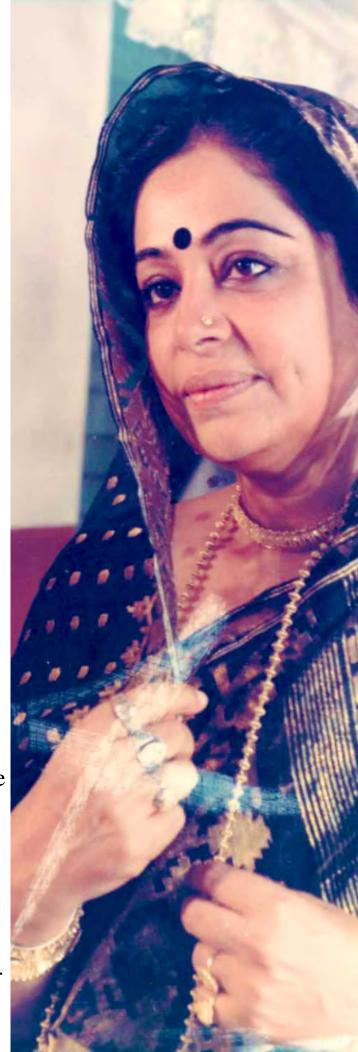
Banalata conjures up the image of another resident single girl we all know (and love to hate): Carrie Bradshaw.

The cigarette-toting, high-heeled heroine of "Sex and the City" is a single woman in her 30s, muddling through life in bustling New York City, while Banalata is the village belle much past her prime (perhaps a decade older than Carrie), guarding her family heirloom, with her once-beautiful face now perennially contorted into a grimace.

Banalata lacks the vivacity of Carrie, Carrie lacks the wisdom that Banalata embodies. Carrie is adept at exploring her sexuality and navigating men while Banalata has no such agency over herself or the chance to date. One finds strength in being alone, the other has no alternative.

Carrie is an egalitarian feminist; Banalata's feminism is nearly non-existent.

Banalata doesn't enjoy the freedom her male counterparts do – she lets them exploit her for their own good and doesn't retaliate; never utilizing her independence.



Perhaps, the only thing that comes close to Banalata exuding feminism is the statistic that she is the owner of her house, overshadowed by the fact that she can be construed to be a feudal overlord at best, enjoying the benefits of capitalism. Rituparno Ghosh, who was known for his feminist heroines, uses Banalata as the everywoman: the neighbourhood auntie you see, the house-help who works in your house, the woman who's running to catch the bus before it leaves without her children, even your own mother.

Though Banalata might not be a feminist like Elizabeth Bennet, she stands as an allegory for the woman who doesn't wish to exercise her right even when she can – like the women we see in real life.

It remains Mr Ghosh's only work where the heroine isn't keen on being a feminist; even choice – which is a hotly debated faction of feminism – plays a subdued role in the life of the protagonist.

She might not be waiting for a man to save her, but she also isn't saving herself. She might be independent on the surface, but she depends on Deepankar's attention to feel complete once she develops a crush on him.

Banalata's privilege cannot be undermined; she has choices because of it. Even when life gives her chances, she makes no voluntary effort to change it.





That being said, Carrie is empowered; Banalata isn't empowered in the same way and seems like a person who would not want to be.

- While they are dramatically different as individuals, they are ultimately comfortable being single. Yet, both are alone, like most of us. And if nothing, it is the decisive truth: we are all alone, even when we are with someone.
- And if this quarantine has taught us anything, it is that it isn't that dismal being alone.
- Moreover, it has given us the time to reflect on the person most important to us, and to carousal in the best company we can imagine, i.e., ourselves.
- The climax of the film only echoes the aforementioned fact.
- Mr Ghosh leaves Banalata as Mr Saratchandra Chattopadhyay did to Paro in the novel "Devdas" contemplating over the apparent isolated existence and the loss of the love of her life, but no longer seeking cognizance of the lead.
- Just like the famed author's protagonist, we leave Banalata, crying behind closed doors, once again a recluse.
- As the movie progresses, Banalata's dependence on certain members of the crew for company increases, like a rapidly filling vessel.
- Her emotions start overflowing, and when she finally indulges herself to have a tryst with the idea of romance, and become sociable, the cruelty of human nature triumphs over her.

Even her beauty, once again emphasized and revamped by Deepankar for a bit part (as compensation), doesn't provide any solace ultimately. It is perhaps equivalent to snatching one's birthday gift from their hands at the end of the party. In a contrary vein to "Ghar Ki Murgi" (an Indian short film), where the protagonist Seema (Sakshi Tanwar) makes a choice to go back to the home and family she abandoned for a long overdue vacation, giving herself agency over a decision she takes, Banalata's return to reclusive life isn't her choice: it is thrust upon her.

- But that is how her transgression of dreaming of a future is retributed, and she regresses back to the eponymous title: Bariwali, The Landlady, no more a human but a title, bestowed upon her with no gravitas.
- Bariwali's story unfurls like a blossoming bud noiseless, evocative.
- Yet it is also a tale of ageing in reverse: from a conservative middle-aged recluse to a vulnerable, starry-eyed schoolgirl in the throes of a newfound passion for love.
- The tale of Banalata's reclamation of her lost youth in her way, with an unpalatable aftertaste.
- Banalata, a relic living in a relic, cursed with the same fate as her forefathers, more gruesome still.
- Mr Ghosh's movies bring us stories of overlooked individuals, of people one wouldn't glance at for a second time.
- Bariwali reconnoitres the life of a common woman; at its heart, it is the story of each one of us: traversing through the loneliness of our lives, wishing to find another lonely soul along the path who'll bear with us this precious, yet unsought gift called life.

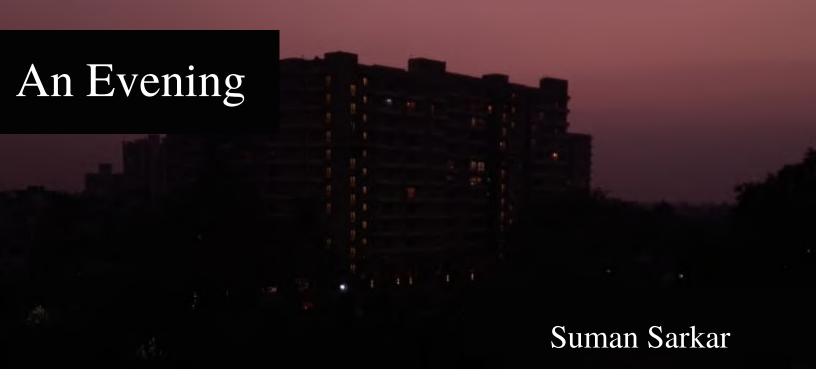
Colour

I woke up, realising the flowers beside my bed had dried up. I had bought them for someone two days ago, from the florist who had emigrated from my hometown and sold poppy seeds and exotic jewellery during the night. In the hushed silence, she would lace the trinkets with poppy and hold them up to the streetlight.

I never could distinguish between many colours, and never understood the need for them, before she showed me how she imagines every colour to be. I would name them and she would describe a world devoid of monochrome. Red for the stars, cyan for war, and black for the world beyond our dreams; Ochre for the days when the sun used to perforate the leaves sleeping on the cobbled street.

When I asked her how she liked to dress, she said she didn't, and that she wore her body as a garment to be admired. She went about her morning routine like everyone else, before leaving for work. She said wearing her skin for the two hours of the morning was the most pleasant time of the day, more beautiful than the times she took off her clothes to make love.



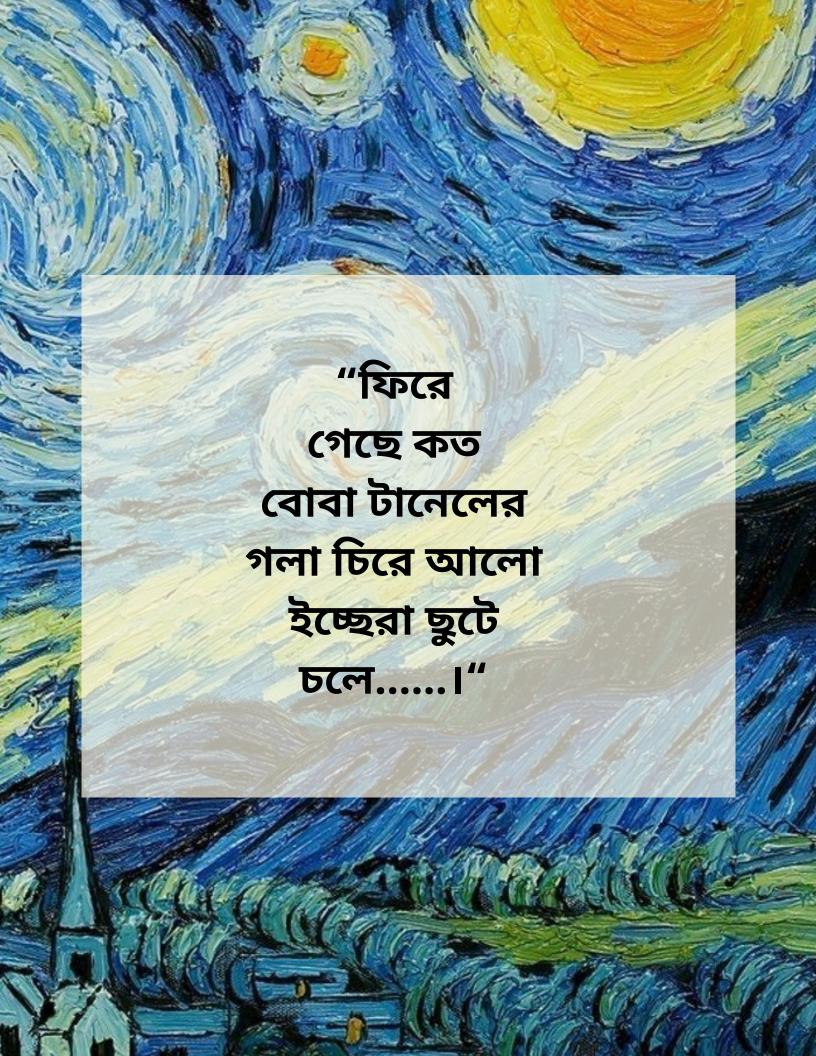


মৌসুমি ব্যানার্জি, বয়স ৪৬, সরকারি চাকুরিজীবি, মানিকতলায় নিজের ফ্ল্যাটেই থাকেন। নিজের কাজকে একটু বেশীই ভালোবাসেন। কামাই করেন না বললেই চলে। আসলে কামাই করার মতো কোনো কারনই ওনার নেই। বাড়িতে একাই থাকেন, কামাই করবেনই বা কার জন্যে। শুক্রবার এলেই ওনার মনটা একটু খারাপ হয়ে যায়। আত্মীয়দের সাথে যে খারাপ সম্পর্ক, তা কিন্তু একেবারেই নয়। তবে ছুটির দিনে সখের ভায়োলিন, গাছপালা, সিনেমা নিয়ে বেশ আনন্দেই থাকেন। uber চড়তে তার ভীষণ ভালো লাগে। সকালে ঘুম থেকে বেশ তাড়াতাড়ি ওঠেন। তারপর ঘরের সমস্ত কাজ সেরে অফিস যান। মাঝে মধ্যে তিনি uber share করে বাড়ি ফেরেন। ফেরার সময় কিছু অচেনা মানুষ আর ড্রাইভারের সাথে একটা ছোটোখাটো গল্পের আসরও জমিয়ে ফেলেন। একদিন uber এর জন্য দাঁড়িয়ে আছেন অফিসের বাইরে। এদিকে আকাশের অবস্থাও ভালো নয়। ঝোড়ো হাওয়া দিতে শুরু করে দিয়েছে। এরই মধ্যে ড্রাইভারকে দু'বার ফোনও করে ফেলেছেন তিনি।

অবশেষে uber এসে হাজির। তাড়াহুড়ো করে তিনি উঠে গেলেন। জানলার কাঁচটা পুরোটা নামিয়ে ফেললেন। হাওয়ার বেগও বেশ বাড়তে শুরু করে দিয়েছে। সামনের সিটের দিকে তাকিয়ে দেখলেন কাঁচা পাকা চুলের একটা মধ্য বয়স্ক লোক , কানে হেডফোন দিয়ে আপন মনে গান শুনছেন। লোকটিকে হঠাৎ কেমন যেন চেনা লাগল তার। এমন কি ঘাড়ের কাছের তিলতাও। সবই যেন তার খুব চেনা। Heart-beat ধীরে ধীরে বাড়তে শুরু করে দিয়েছে। এক অদ্ভুত অনুভূতি তাকে যেন ঘিরে ফেলল। নানান ভাবনা একের পর এক তার মাথায় আসতে শুরু করলো। লোকটি ছিলেন শুভাশিষ বাবু, বয়স ঐ পঞ্চাশ ছুঁই ছুঁই হবে। সব যদি আজ ঠিক থাকত, তাহলে হয়তো এই ব্যাক্তিটি মৌসুমি দেবীর অফিস কামাইয়ের কারণ হতেন। হঠাৎ যেন চারিদিক নিঃস্কন্ধ হয়ে উঠল মৌসুমি দেবীর কাছে। রবীন্দ্রনাথের 'হঠাৎ দেখা' র মতো- থমকে গেল ওনার সমস্ত মনটা। চেনা মানুষটার সাথে যে এভাবে দেখা হবে মৌসুমি দেবী কখনো তা আশাও করেননি। এরই মধ্যে বাইরে হালকা বৃষ্টিও শুরু হয়ে গেছে। শান্ত চোখে তাকিয়ে রইলেন লোকটার দিকে। হাতের মধ্যে এক অদ্ভুত অস্থিরতা। জানলার বাইয়ে বের করে দিলেন নিজের মুখখানি। শুভাশিষ বাবু ঘাড় ঘুরিয়ে দেখতে চেষ্টা করলেন পিছনের সহযাত্রীটিকে। মৌসুমি দেবী তখন বাইরের আকাশের দিকে তাকিয়ে। ওনাকে দেখে অবাক হয়ে গেলেন শুভাশিষ বাবু। সঙ্গে সঙ্গে নিজের ঘাড় নিলেন ঘুরিয়ে। মৌসুমি দেবী এসব কিছুই টের পেলেন না। দুজনই তখন একই অনুভূতির মধ্যে দিয়ে বয়ে চলছিলেন। সেই একই অস্থিরতা শুভাশিষ বাবুর মধ্যেও দেখা গেল। পুরোনো স্মৃতিগুলো যেন এক মুহূর্তে ওদের চোখের সামনে এসে হাজির হল। এক এক করে সেগুলি যেন ওনাদের মনের কড়া নাড়িয়ে চলে গেল। এদিকে বৃষ্টিও বাড়তে শুরু করলো। কাঁচটাকে এবার সম্পূর্ণ তুলে দিলেন মৌসুমি দেবী।

গাড়ির সামনের দিকের আয়নাটাও ভাঙা। চেষ্টা করেও একে অন্যকে দেখতে পেলেন না। নখ খুঁটতে খুঁটতে কখন যে রক্ত বেরিয়ে গেছে মৌসুমি দেবী তা বুঝতেও পারলেন না। শত চেষ্টা করেও কেউ একে অন্যকে ডেকে উঠতে পারল না। জিজ্ঞেস করতে পারল না, "কেমন আছ?"

হঠাৎ করে গাড়ি থামল। শুভাশিষ বাবু নামার জন্যে তৈরি হচ্ছিলেন। মৌসুমি দেবী ওনার দিকে তাকিয়ে রইলেন। হয়তো কিছু বলতে চাইছিলেন। ছাতাটা খুলে বেরিয়ে পড়লেন শুভাশিষ বাবু। ঘুরে তাকালেন না আর। কোনো পিছুটান হয়তো তাকে ঘুরে তাকাতে বারণ করছিল। ভেজা কাঁচের মধ্যে দিয়ে শুভাশিষ বাবুকে চলে যেতে দেখলন। একবারও ফিরে তাকালেন তিনি। পুরোনো ভালোবাসার এক দীর্ঘশ্বাস ফেললেন মৌসুমি দেবী। জানলার কাঁচটা একটু নামিয়ে নিলেন। চোখ বন্ধ করে শরীরটাকে হেলিয়ে দিলেন সিটের ওপর। কিছুক্ষন চুপ করে থাকলেন। তারপর বললেন, "একটা গান চালাবে ভাই"। ড্রাইভার চালিয়ে দিল গান।





आज यूँ ही छत पर बैठी थी, नज़र पड़ी दो कबूतरों की ओर। प्यार से सहला रहे थे एक दूसरे को , लड़ भी रहे थे, मना भी रहे थे, मेरी छत के छज्जे को अपना लिविंग रूम बनाकर बैठे थे। काफ़ी busy चल रही हूँ ना शिफ़्टिंग में इन दिनो, cigarette पीती नहीं हूँ वैसे, आजकल achhi लगती है। ख़ैर मैंने cigarette बुझाई, इन कबूतरों को देख कर ना, फिरसे फुदकने का दिल किया, mask लगाकर चल दी मैं।

Rikshaw पकड़ी, भाई साहब जो pollution है, जो शोर है बाहर, मानो इस शहर को कुछ हुआ ही नहीं था। मैंने तो ना आँखें बंद की, और एक तस्वीर को याद किया...

ठंडी का मौसम है उस तसवीर में, एक जनाब चले जा रहे हैं, झाड़ियों में, अकेले।नहीं, पेड़ हैं शायद लम्बे-लम्बे , evergreen forest जैसा कुछ। हाए! काश यह rikshaw नहीं, वही forest होता, तो भी क्या बात होती ना।

आँखें खुल ही गई, शोर इतना होता है। अब बात ये है, signal पर खड़ी है rickshaw, अच्छा rikshaw वाले को मैंने कोई ठिकाना नहीं बताया है हाँ, बस वो चले जा रहा है। मतलब अभी तो signal पे ही हैं हम, बाजू में ना एक कौवा दाना चुग रहा है, गाँठिए से लग रहे हैं, होते हैं ना yellow-yellow, Gujarat में मिलते हैं। ओहो! ये तो बड़े पसंद हैं मुझे। ख़ैर, अभी के लिए तो कौवा बड़े आराम से खा रहा है।

अरे!!! यह तो steeglitz है, मेरे दोस्त का doggul Rikshaw वाले भैया से बोला रुको, मिलने गई steeglitz से, बड़ा ही खुश हुआ। Dog walker के साथ आया है, अरे हाँ-हाँ, सात बंगले में बढ़िया फ़्लैट है मेरे मित्र का। भाई साहब, लोगों के पास कितना पैसा होता है ना, dog walker तो afford कर ही सकते हैं ये सात बंगला वाले।

आगे चलदी मैं, अच्छा रिक्शावाले भैया का नाम इमरान है, गोरखपुर से हैं।

देखो भला, चलते चलते मीटर की counting ही भूल गई मैं, कहीं किसी backroad पर आगए हैं अब। कोई तो बैठा है cement वाली बेंच पे, कौन, पता नहीं। लेकिन उसके पीछे हरियाली है। Backroad है ना ये, ऐसी ही होती है backroad, यहीं हरियाली होती है Bombay में।

मैं ज़्यादा रुकी नहीं, इमरान भाई को कहा, "इमरान भाई, दिवाली आ रही है, कहीं चहल पहल होती है तो वहाँ मोड़ लो rikshaw"। आ जाते हैं हम एक चमचमाती हुई सड़क पे।

इतनी सारी lights हैं, पर लोग बहुत कम हैं।



A Millenial Teenager's Dream

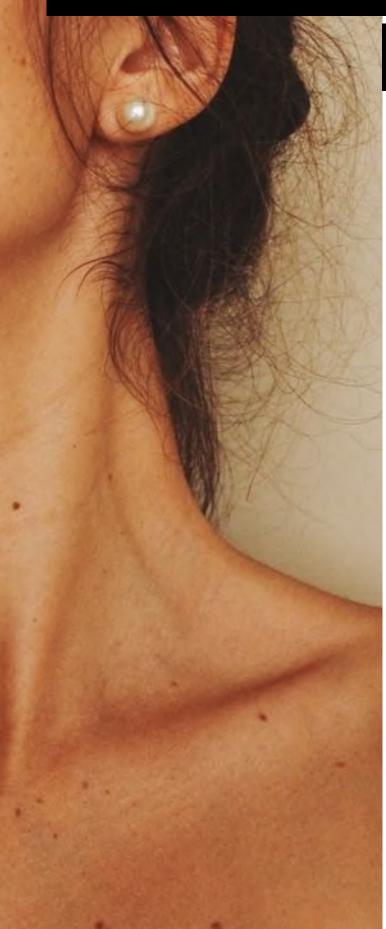
For nearly two years I've tried to run from my reality and fit 'in' into something I myself am unsure of. I tried to experiment with an already perfect life in pursuit of gathering more experiences. Little did I know, I was gouging into my soul to make it look expansive. Like every other teenager of my age, I started spending most of my time on social media. This experience turned out to be a nightmare for me. The more content I started consuming on social media, the more detached I felt. I believed that this was my way out to find out what my true calling actually is. This entire concept of 'Netflix and Chill' has to a great extent crippled my grey cells. As a typical teenager, I felt that movies, television series etc taught us about the varied experiences in life.



I wouldn't completely disagree with the aforementioned verbatim but to my dismay these weren't the finer things in life that I was looking for. Before I could realise, I was captivated by this vicious cycle of consuming so much off the internet that I deep down lost myself. Such situations not only academically bring one down but also nurture a lot of insecurities which we initially fail to realise.

An Instagram story popping up on an issue as sensitive as the NRC would now be sufficient for one to form a perception about it. Icing on the cake is the fact that we all feel obligated to share the same across notwithstanding it's credibility. This is a slow and long drawn process of how excessive consumption of content cripples us of our ability to analyse, brainstorm and comprehend. It took me two years to pen down my thoughts because I was being made to feel believe that my opinions are not worth sharing. We are made to believe that our calling has no impact for we are mere insignificant fractions of a whole. As a teenager of this century, I wish to get away with labels and insecurities; stand up for my calling and believe in what I do.

A Summer of Broken Promises



Ritobrita Mukherjee

the last time i painted you
the sky was bleeding
in every language
i didn't want to love you in
but my tongue has this habit
of running loose on the edge
and setting my mouth on fire
which is fine as long you burn in it

i like you raw on wet canvases
in faulty lights where i can't figure out
where your jawline ends
and your witty prose begins
but i wish for once
you'd let me paint your collarbones
before you pour heathen worship into my
eyes

as if blindness would cure me of you

you laugh when i read your lover's poems out loud

but all the same it's nice to feel the way a parasite feels for once i could never drain the life out of you if you didn't splash it over my palette every night darling your lies are so well written i'd almost cry at every fake burial you've held in your frostbitten palms

you look like a woman
who never forgets a face
and you will carve my lips
out of driftwood if they ask you to
even when you are drowning
and there's no escape
just to hold on a little while longer and
debate
what exact shade of coral they were

you spill my hopes on the marble threshold of your shrine before pulling me down to cold earth there's just something about this pain i worship that makes me feel wrong in all the right ways but tell me once honey won't you spell out my name like this and taste it on the tip of your tongue? i've hidden everything you want to know in four vowels and consonants up to the count of five it couldn't possibly hurt you much if you say it just right and i promise i won't taste like a summer of broken promises not anymore



City of Broken Glass

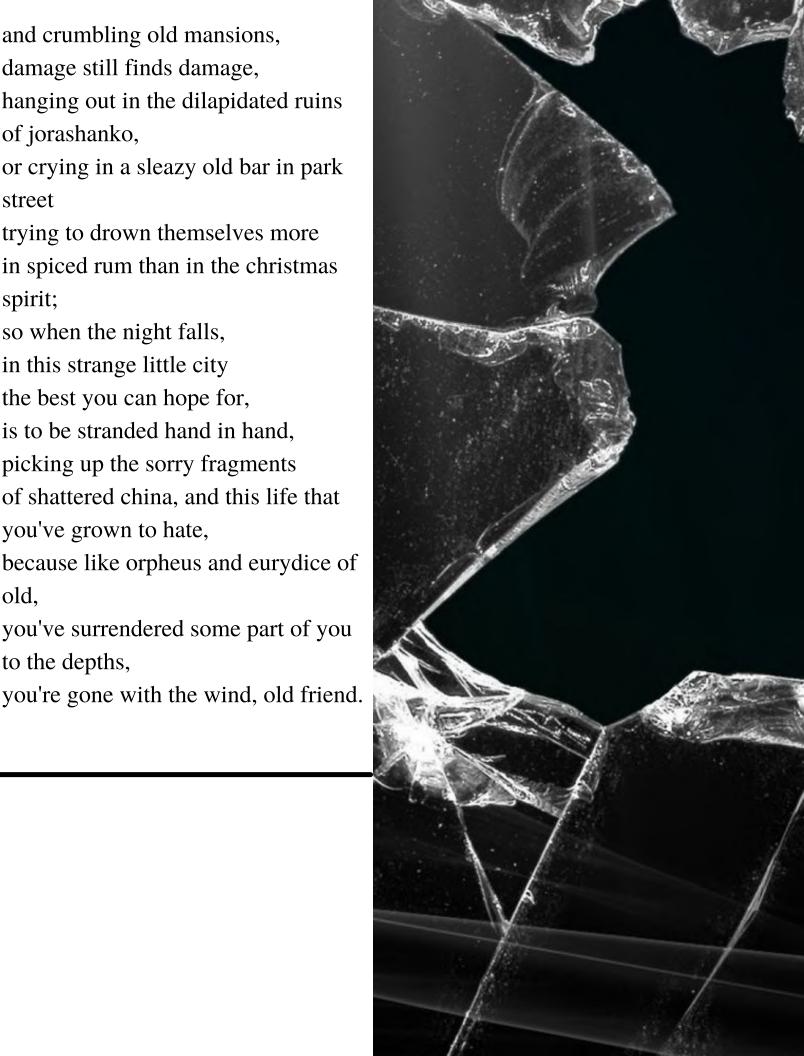
Indrayani Bhadra

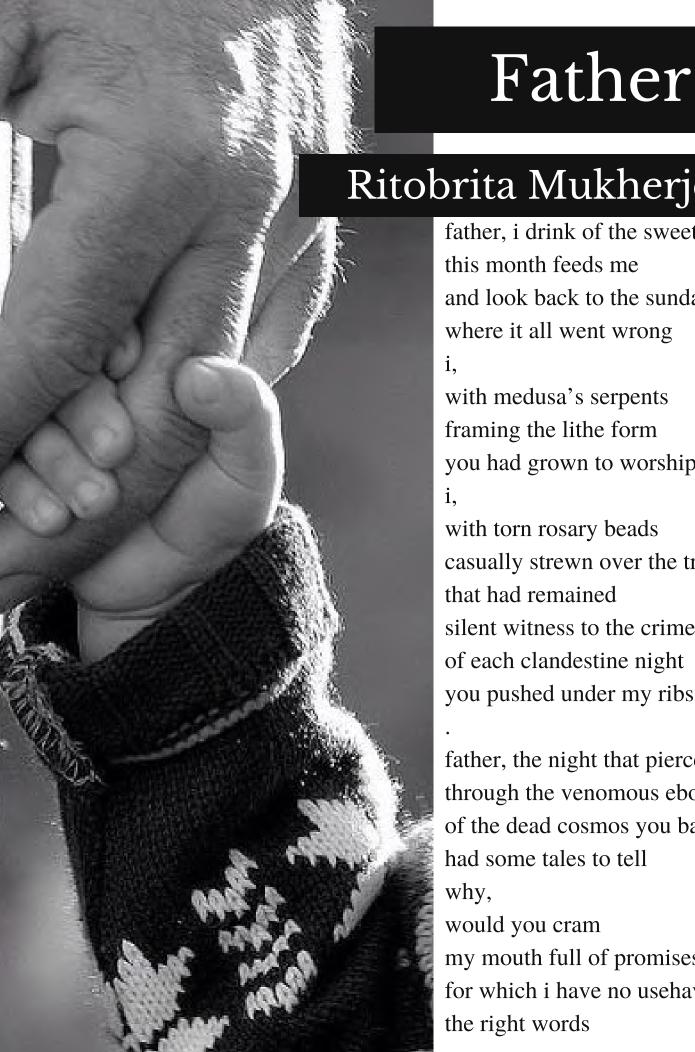
and in this city of broken glass, and broken dreams, we all grew up searching for something or someone, peering through cracks in the walls at the silhouettes of the hearts we had grown to love and cherish but never really knew; and in this city of broken hearts and broken parts somewhere on college street, and somewhere in a broken down yellow taxi two people become strangers again drunk out of their minds and trying not to lose themselves they go back home and rip pages out of their diaries as if the eccentric little act could take away from love born and love lost; and in this city of broken people



and crumbling old mansions, damage still finds damage, hanging out in the dilapidated ruins of jorashanko, or crying in a sleazy old bar in park street trying to drown themselves more in spiced rum than in the christmas spirit; so when the night falls, in this strange little city the best you can hope for, is to be stranded hand in hand, picking up the sorry fragments of shattered china, and this life that you've grown to hate, because like orpheus and eurydice of old, you've surrendered some part of you

to the depths,





Father

Ritobrita Mukherjee

father, i drink of the sweet poison this month feeds me and look back to the sunday where it all went wrong i, with medusa's serpents framing the lithe form you had grown to worship with torn rosary beads casually strewn over the trinkets that had remained silent witness to the crimes of each clandestine night

father, the night that pierced my lungs through the venomous ebony of the dead cosmos you bathe me in had some tales to tell why,

would you cram my mouth full of promises for which i have no usehaving found the right words

to scathe you with at last why,
would you have me eat
the meal god's lover
had pushed aside
before being carried
to the pyre
where she would blaze
for eternities to come

father, you told me there was a price to pay for every breath you took but the last time you wrapped your fingers round the fragile porcelain of the flower vase i pushed over in my haste to run away it felt like i was the only one with unpaid debts fighting to make space inside each hollow bone rotting, crumbling and clawing their way out of my skin, no the skin that you painted in the gory red of your lost battles and taught me to call mine for you felt it would be dangerous if i had

nothing, no one to call mine

an orphan of your making

but a slave to her own self





Hate

Lesley Simeon

me.

How nice it would be to be wrong for a change. Or to forget things ever needed to be set right.

Ignorance, such an evasive bliss.

Everywhere I look today, hate. But not once will you find hate in history. Not in history that was made for you and

But history as it was meant to be re-lived - in parallels, in nooks and corners, in kitchens, by the

streets, under the trees, in playgrounds, in bedrooms and under the skies.

Far from where history was being carefully manufactured. And plotted.

Right where, history simply unfolded itself. No pretense. Just lived through.

It's love. Right from the prophet's first words, to the accidental prisoners' last words on the guillotine, to the visiting angel's greetings, to the Messiah's departing sermons, even the whispers of the street-side commoner.

It's all love. And peace. And forgiveness. This hurts.

It would be nicer to find hate in the past. Something that fits the forceful jigsaw of our times.

Something I can justify your modern spite with.

And your modern thirst for blood. So I can finally make sense of the war and join in, perhaps.

But nothing. Where did you get your hate from?

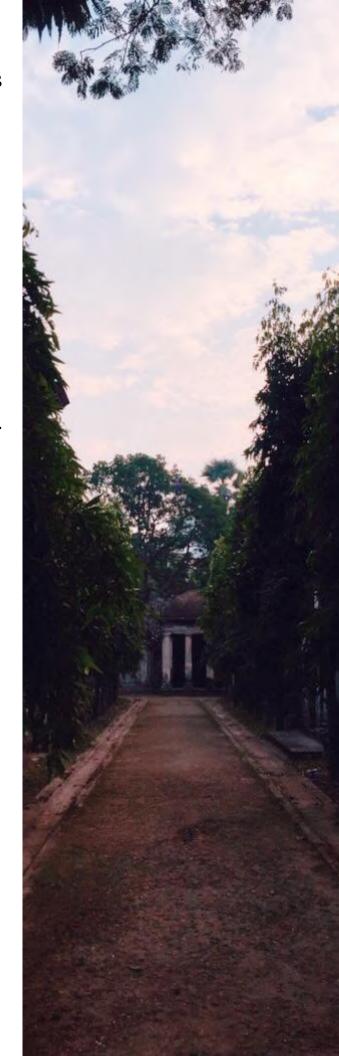
Don't tell me from the temple priests, who loved their reflections more than God's.

They were

banished from the cities.

Don't tell me from the crooks of empires and courtrooms of our past.

They were assassinated in their sleep.





Don't tell me from the guards who took pleasure in the murders of spotless children of evil men.

They had their throats slit until they swam in their own blood.

You chose to borrow hatred from the past. Foolishly thinking you could leave behind the gory end, hate has always met.

And that you will today meet with.

It doesn't end well, this saga.

We remember the good with fondness.

In this remembrance, thrive the screams of love, the pleas of brotherhood and the longing to unite. Those that were long thought to have succumbed.

But echoed for us to write about.

Something Borrowed

Komal Srivastava

My hand-me-downs smell like a home once lived in, currently vacated and up for sale, Housing remnants of furniture and baggage deemed too bulky to be taken with, left behind and passed on to the next occupant; Borrowed, but mine for the time being.

Their touch feels like my mother's warm embrace-Seeked out only occasionally, yet always nestled in a safe corner of my cupboard,

Eager to wrap itself around me;



Their appearances are shyThey don't tag along with me to
parties
Where the clothes are brand-new,
showy, and itchy,
Where the outside speaks of pomp
But the inside yearns
to slip into the comfort
of what lies hidden away;

Slip into the skin of the person before meinto, under, beneath, outside,
Yet never lie within,
For her story is
for her to safeguard,
And for me to unlock;

I wonder if the hand-made floral motifs
were carved into the fabric meticulously
by her grandmother,
If she'd been ensuring their safe-keep
in honour of her ancestry,



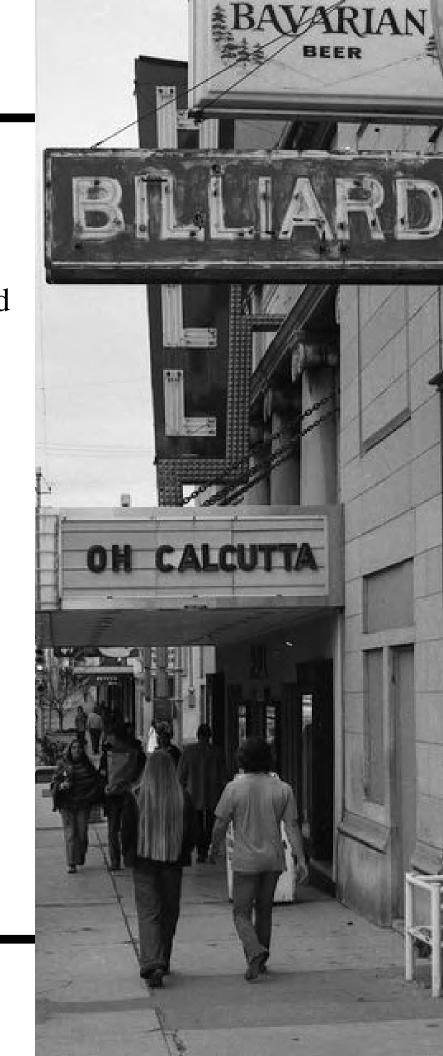
Or whether it had been thrifted from a local store
In an attempt to barter responsibility of ownership with second-hand sentiments,
If she too had been the first one on someone's waiting list;

I wonder if
the wine stains were from
A trivial dinner-table fight,
A night of
blissful intoxication with friends
and lovers,
Or whether
it was from a lonesome night
When she
drank alone,
Never to see the bottom of the
glass;

She alone
gets under the sheets with me,
Caresses her hair till she falls into
asleep,
Only to stealthily
wake up in the dead of the night,
And walk away with it,



In the morning when I find myself resting at your doorstep, hoping you'll be drained from your house hunt, willing to settle for it, It shall be waiting to be passed on to its next tenant; Still borrowed, but yours for the time being.



Letter To My Younger Self

Abhilasha Bij

Dear self in 2009: I wish I could tell you to slow down and live-As long as life had problems smaller than the smallest problem that exists. I wish I could tell you to quit the rat-race and hone instead-The skill to be vulnerable and learn from unabashed mistakes. I wish I could tell you to not fear the uncertain-For it is that which inspires you to put forth your best version.



I wish I could tell you to not doubt your raw creativeness-Remember, it is the road less taken that makes all the difference. I wish I could tell you to hang on and not lose faith-Adversities may befall but you persevere for even Rome wasn't built in a day. I wish I could tell you to not be blinded by worldly shine-Because you are the sun of your life and none can stop that dazzle of your light. I wish I could also remind you to not be unkind to yourself-You may fail, and you may falter but life can go on as good as new, unaltered.



আমার সবটা জুড়ে

Sohini Mukherjee

আমি তোমায় দেখেছি অনেকরকমভাবে মধ্যরাতের গভীর অন্ধকারে সকালের আলতো রোদের ছোঁয়ায় মধ্যগগন সূর্যের তেজে ক্লান্ত মন তোমার আমি দেখেছি অপরাহ্নের শিরশিরে হাওয়ায় আরামে ব্যস্ত শরীরে হাত বুলিয়েছি হঠাৎ রেগে গিয়ে চূড়ান্ত কোলাহলের মাঝে হাসির ভীড়ে হারিয়ে যাওয়া মন খারাপে ডুবে থাকা তুমি আমার চেনা তুমি, যে তুমি শুধু আমাকে ভালো দেখতে চেয়েছো যে তুমি শুধু আমাকে আগলে রেখেছো অম্লান বদনে আমার সমস্ত অত্যাচার নীরবে সহ্য করেছো আমি দেখেছি আমি দেখেছি তোমাকে ভালোবাসতে আমি দেখেছি তোমাকে বারবার ফিরে আসতে আমি দেখেছি তোমাকে বাঁচতে হাল না ছাড়া একটা জেদি একগুঁয়ে মানুষকে আমি চিনেছি, আমিও ভালোবেসেছি



আমি ভালোবেসেছি তোমার গন্ধ নাকে মেখে ঘুমন্ত চোখের পাতায় লেগে থাকা জল আমি মুছেছি মনের অগোচরে ভীড় করে আসা পুরোনো স্মৃতির ধাক্কায় ঠোঁটের কোনের অবুঝ হাসি অনুভব করেছি রবি ঠাকুরের পাতার ভাঁজে যত্ন করে তোমাকে সাজিয়েছি বছর কুড়ি পরে যখন হঠাৎ দেখা হবে জেনো তুমি তখনও আছো আমার আলমারির ঠিক বাঁ দিকের ডুয়ারে একটা সুগন্ধি কাঠের বাক্সে মখমলের কাপড়ে জড়ানো ঠিক যেমনটা তুমি ছিলে আমার সবটা জুড়ে |



বীজ

Srijoni Mitra

আমরা বীজ। আমরা মাথা করি নিচ , ক্ষেত এ খেটে মরি , খেতে খেটে মরি ।

আমরা ধান ফলাই , আমরা ফুল ফলাই । আমাদের রক্ত গরম তো কি? আমাদের কাজ তুমি করতে পারো কি?

কেটে দাও ধান , মোদের, নিয়ে নাও প্রাণ । আমাদের ই রোজগার, আমাদের ই আয় নিয়ে নাও, আমাদের ই পেট খালি করে গলায় দড়ি দিয়ে দাও

আমাদের ই জমিতে , আমাদের ই গাছে , আমাদের ই হাতে করা দড়িতে , আমাদের কে ঝুলিয়ে -



আমরা পর্ব নিচ , আমরা হবো বীজ । ফুল ফলবে, ফল ফলবে ।

আমাদের ই শরীর তলিয়ে হবে সেই ক্ষেতের সার । তাই বলি যে -এই জীবন করার শুধু নয় যে ধারণ, এটি মর্ম মুলে উপস্থাপিত; কারণ

আমরা বীজ। আমরা মাথা করি নিচ, ক্ষেত এ খেটে মরি, খেতে খেটে মরি।

মায়ের বুক থেকে শিশুর মুখ ফিরিয়ে নিয়ে কি পাও? তোমরা কি পাও গো?

মায়ের হাত থেকে বাবার মাইনে কেড়ে নিয়ে কি পাও? তোমরা কি পাও গো?



এই যে চোখের সামনে সর্বস্ব ধ্বংস হয়ে যাচ্ছে , এর মধ্যে আমারও কিছু আগুন আছে । দুখ্ আছে , হতাশা আছে ।

জীবন? কাউকে ডুবায় শত হতাশায় সকল মায়া ছেড়ে , কাউকে মারে গলায় দড়ি দিয়ে , কাউকে বা সুখে রেখে ।

গাছের বয়স হলে সে পাতা হারায়, সাজে নতুন সাজে, কয়েক মানুষ তেমনি ভাবে বদলায় শুধু নতুনত্ব খুঁজে।

তবু ডাল থাকে ডালের জায়গায় পাতা শুকিয়ে মরে , মানুষের থাকে শূন্য দেহ হৃদয়ে খসে পরে |





@love_among_the_bookshelves recommends

1) Sapiens: Yuval Noah Harari

Sapiens is a whirlwind of information about the history of mankind, a topic which is extremely difficult to tackle. However, Harari's genius shines through in his concise yet communicative account of "being human".

2) Lowland: Jhumpa Lahiri

A hard-hitting yet endearing tale of two brothers set during the Naxalite movement in Calcutta forms the meaty premise of The Lowland. Lahiri delivers a heartfelt narrative which I guarantee will make you ponder for days after you put the book down.

3) Tuesdays with Morrie: Mitch Albom:

Albom returns to his ailing sociology professor Morrie Schwartz years after the completion of his degree. The old man imparts invaluable life lessons to the young man, and the result is this gem of a book - Tuesdays with Morrie.





@paperbacks_nd_hardcovers recommends

1) Eat Pray Love by Elizabeth Gilbert:

Caught up admist marriage incompatibility and a disturbed mind , Liz sets forth on a journey to seek her lost appetite , inner peace and balance of her life through Italy , India and Indonesia . Her journey is filled with life lessons and is very inspiring .

2) Chokher Bali by Rabindranath Tagore:

A story of a love quadrangle between Mahendra - Ashalata - Bihari - Binodini ,the novel is full of raw human emotions . One can truly understand Tagore's sheer brilliance while reading this beautiful book.

3) The Da Vinci Code by Dan Brown:

Mona Lisa by Leonardo Da Vinci is a world renowned painting. What if I tell you, some of Da Vinci's paintings contain hidden messages? Dive into the thrilling experience with Robert Langdon in the artistic city of Paris.



1) Pride And Prejudice by Jane Austen

Most of Austen's novels portray a glittering fairy tale of two people falling in love and having a 'happily ever after', but they also do not cease to be critiques of the patriarchal structure of the day. With witty dialogue, amazing character development and strong female leads, Pride And Prejudice, I think, is one of my favourites now.

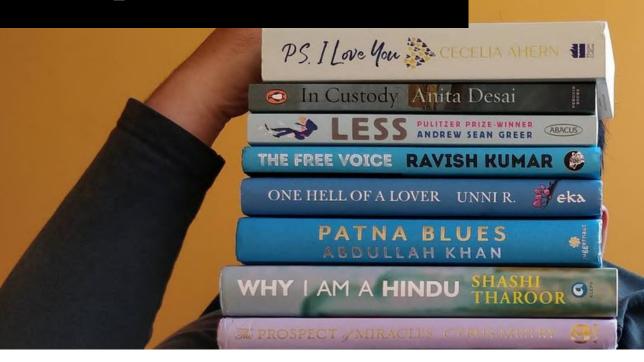
2) A Room Of One's Own by Virginia Woolf

Imagine if Shakespeare had a sister. Now ask yourself if in that era, would she have managed to achieve the same level of literary merit that her brother did. Woolf, in this extended essay, ruminates upon various such instances of women having been denied intellectual and economic freedom throughout history. And all I can say about this essay is that it makes absolute sense to say that a woman needs money and a room of her own if she is to be able to write.

3) Brave New World by Aldous Huxley

I've always loved reading dystopias and this book has it all- Mass produced babies. Hypnopedia. Sex. Drugs. A state where World controllers maintain stability based on pleasure. Reading Brave New World was a gut wrenching experience. The fact that we are so close to such a reality made it worse.

@sahilpr1109 recommends



1) Sugarbread by Balli Kaur Jaiswal:

I practically picked up her books this Lockdown because of a marketing thing from a publisher. I had seen a lot of buzz around her last two books and was thus excited to a hell lot. To read this book was quite a journey through a lot of conflicting and clamoring voicy ideas: racism, sexism, sexual abuse, pedophilia, sorority of survivors, and even how food expresses emotions of the cook.

2) Girl in White Cotton by Avni Doshi:

Finally after a long stretch we had a debut Indian novel feature again on the Booker list and I was dying to pick this up and I eventually did. The book's tempo background score is dark and messy: born out of a concoction of a dysfunctional mother-daugther realtionship and an alarming illness that's a barrier. It was every bit of bone chilling and awakening as it could have been.

3) Hellfire by Leesa Gazi:

Translated from Bengali, this novel is one hell of a rollercoaster ride into a world where females Are both the victims and the heroines. The author does not offer any slack to the emotions and conflict inside her heroine's- two sisters and their over possessive mother- mindset. It takes you on a ride through Bangladesh and through human psyche and it's most brutal and darkest of abyss.



Arnab Chatterjee is an Indian filmmaker, born on 13th November, 1999, to Bengali parents in Kolkata, India. Arnab started filming at the age of eight, and evolved as a filmmaker ever since. During He runs his production banner, ACjee Productions, established in 2013, when he was thirteen. He is regarded as one of the youngest filmmakers in India, by the Times of India.

1) Starting off with a generic question, how has the pandemic situation affected you both personally and professionally? Has the impact been a positive or a negative one, or both?

The pandemic has surely taken a toll on all our lives, both personally and professionally. The release of my film Jonmodin got delayed due to the lockdown. We're now pushing for an early 2021 release, and I'm in talks with my distributors. After a two-year break, I've just started off with my new script, which I'm very excited about. Personally, I've been in an overall good space throughout this year. 2020 has allowed us to spend quality time with our families and friends because of the halt in our work lives. It is so disheartening to see what the world is going through, so spending time with family and friends at some point or the other, was essential, and 2020 has given us that.

2) Now, the name 'Arnab Chatterjee' was suddenly in every newspaper in 2018, with the release of 'Unsaid'. We know you had started writing it way back in 2016, did you have any idea back then that this would receive worldwide recognition?

Not at all. When I wrote Unsaid, I didn't even think it would be a feature film so to speak. I didn't have the resources to pull it off. It was only after a good 40-50% of shooting, did I decide to lift the production value of the film, looking at how it was shaping up in the first few edits. I always had an urge to do something bigger and bigger, and I thought Unsaid at the age of 16 would be it. After deciding to do so, I took the edits door to door to studios etc. and pitched this whole film to them, asking them to trust me with such a project. It took me two years to complete the film.

3) Unsaid' went on to win 31 national and international awards, and was even nominated for one at the Dadasaheb Phalke Film Festival. With all these massive achievements and international fame, was it a little overwhelming, given you and your team were just teenagers at that time? How did you handle being the youngest filmmaker of Bengal?

Initially, it was overwhelming, definitely. Making such a film out of nowhere with zero theoretical knowledge of filmmaking, zero sources in the film industries, complete amateur bunch of teenagers, and then getting exposed to the global film market within a couple of months of its completion, was nothing less than a dream at that moment. I still feel that those five months from December 2017 to April 2018, when it hit the festivals and then premiered in Kolkata – that was one of the most special phases in my filmmaking journey.

4) Being a filmmaker yourself, are you influenced by the works of other filmmakers, both of the present and the past? If you had to name a film that inspired you to become a filmmaker, what will it be and why?

Yes, most definitely. so many filmmakers have influenced me in so many ways. I personally don't have any specific type of movies which I like. My range of preferences is very wide. For example, I love European cinema, as well as complete commercial Bollywood. There are quite a bunch of filmmakers I like. But from them, I got to pick two - Satyajit Ray and Roman Polanski.





5) What really surprises us is how a sixteen-year old could pen down such a sensitive, heart-touching story. Is 'Unsaid' based on or inspired from someone you knew or something that had a deep impact on you?

The whole idea of Unsaid actually got conceived by me when I was finishing the previous one, Vertex Duo. I was somehow not satisfied with that film, as I felt I could've done better if I had not rushed with it. That film was made in great hurry and I felt it didn't do justice to the hardwork. I felt I could bring in more human emotions through the very same teenagers, yet keep them very simple and real, from the heart. I had watched a short clip on YouTube which dealt with physical disabilities, and decided to incorporate that element in a film, but not make it preachy at the same time. The disability which the character of Raghav has in Unsaid, is more metaphorical than physical, if you look back into it. The whole idea of failing to communicate when it comes to expressing feelings, is something I have personally gone through on several occasions in the past, and I wanted to incorporate that in the film, through a physical disability.

6) Now we know that there are numerous challenges that an independent filmmaker has to face. How was your experience while filming 'Unsaid'? Is there anything memorable that happened during the shoot that you would like to share with us? Were there any particular reasons behind the locations you chose to shoot in?

Unsaid has been the most challenging film of mine till date. Thinking of how we made it in 2016 still gives me nightmares, but I just laugh when I look back to it. The whole span of shoot is uniformly memorable to me. Out of the entire schedule, I think the outdoor we shot on Saturday 3rd and Sunday 4th December, 2016, still remains the craziest shoot. We covered around seven locations over two days, including the 'Hai Junoon' sequence which itself has so many locations, including the Ganges riverfront and the Howrah bridge. It was a different level of madness, something which I cannot express in words. The locations which I chose were basically to show the city of Kolkata. I've seen it in so many films, I felt I could show it too with my cameras and vision.

7) As someone who has been born and brought up in Kolkata, do you think that the city has had a impact on your work? Has Kolkata played a role economically, politically and socially in your filmmaking?

Most definitely. I've been fortunate enough to be exposed to Bengali cinema and culture at a very young age. The household I've been brought up in, is very Bengali, so I've naturally imbibed the culture, which in some ways or the other I think do reflect in my work, maybe not so much until Unsaid, but my next release Jonmodin, which is a Bengali film. It stars Bengal's legend Soumitra Chatterjee, who passed away recently. I feel most fortunate and accomplished to be the youngest director to have directed him. It was an experience of a lifetime.



8) Now another thing that really touched us is that 'Unsaid', even after its huge popularity and critical acclaim, had a non-commercial release, because you did not want to measure its brilliance by its box-office success. Do you happen to believe that the race for commercial success has somehow led to the downfall of the quality of films that are presently being made?

I didn't want a commercial release, yes, but to put it more practically and being honest, I was also convinced that it would make no sense to go commercial with it because it would be a disaster. And that would perhaps lead to talks which would belittle all my hardwork, which is a regular trend when a film bombs at the box-office, no matter how great the film is. It is sad that a film's success depends on its box-office. But, the race for commercial success has always been there in all the film industries across the globe, not just Bengal or India. And no, I feel it is quite healthy. There is viewership for all kinds of cinema. Again, going practical, if films aren't made for commercial success, there would be no money to fund the films which are heavy on art. Makers need to strike a balance and focus on both commerce and art equally. Cinema is the most expensive art form. It cannot be made without shedding tons of money, and creativity doesn't blossom with an empty stomach.

9) Are you currently working on any new projects? Our readers would love to know if we can expect any upcoming Arnab Chatterjee film, in fact we did hear you had paired up with rather big names of the Bengali film industry, can we get any updates on that?

Yes. Jonmodin, starring late Soumitra Chatterjee is my next release, sometime early 2021. I made it in 2018, within a few months of the release of Unsaid, but didn't release it because I was looking for a deal with digital platforms, then moved to London for graduation, and then finally the Covid-19 lockdown which delayed the whole release process. Now I feel I could release it as a tribute to our beloved Mr. Soumitra Chatterjee. I've also started writing a few scripts and I will end my two year-long break next year, as I start shooting my next. It should go on floors by end of 2021, subject to the pandemic situation as well.

10) Now our last question to you, how did you realize that you had a passion for filmmaking, what was the driving force? Also, it would be great if you could give any word of advice to aspiring young filmmakers who might be reading this right now.

The whole idea of telling stories through such a complex form of art fascinated me at a very young age of six or seven. I used to watch behind the scenes footages of some movies, and get baffled by the whole atmosphere. I would imagine myself in those sets. Those were the starting points of this whole journey. It was 2008, I was eight when I started experimenting with filmmaking at the most amateur level. For a good five to six years, I kept experimenting with the technical and creative aspects, before launching the banner of ACjee Productions, in 2013, that too on a very independent amateur scale. The banner grew over the years, as I gradually learnt more and more with every new film I made, completely hands-on with no professional influence or help. It was only in 2016, during Unsaid, that I went that big with production, after eight years of experimenting and self-learning. I would like to tell every aspiring filmmaker to start filming right away, without much pondering.





No one would judge you for what you make right now, because it's all a learning process. Until and unless you're out there, you won't know what it takes to make a film. You needn't even go so big with production value. At the end of the day, all you're doing is telling a story. The simplest of cameras can capture the fine stories. Focus on storytelling, and the basic camerawork and editing. Don't get stressed with the finances – you do not become Disney or Yashraj overnight. Every story needs a beginning. Begin now. Begin right away.



Ayush Chakraborty

What is freedom?

It is so often asked, rather pleaded for, that it begins to make me wonder if it has ever been gotten. Is anyone ever truly free? Free from the shackles of the dark pits of this world or the atrocities it has to offer? It serves them to you as if they were Cabernet. The word has been tossed around so much; people fail to understand what it really entails. People fail to comprehend the gravity of "freedom". People twist the meaning in such an Orwellian fashion, it starts to sound like its polar opposite. Some spend their whole lives yearning for a breath of freedom, and then again, there are some who never get to entertain even the thought of the word.

Now, you might wonder about the reason of such philosophising over a simple word. You might ask what am I even doing – talking about freedom in an article which clearly states that it is about jazz. Well, let me ask you: Is freedom not a part of jazz? It most certainly is and always has been. Jazz stemmed from the percussive music and the spirituals that Africans would play and sing when they were brought to the New World as slaves and made to work at plantations and as part of chain gangs. The greatest gift to music was born from one of the biggest atrocities ever committed in history. An act so scarring, it still takes its toll on people as of today.

Jazz is "triumphant music" as Dr. Martin
Luther King Jr. said in his opening address
for the 1964 Berlin Jazz Festival. "When life
itself offers no order and meaning, the musician
creates an order and meaning from the sounds of
the earth which flow through his instrument. It
is no wonder that so much of the search for
identity among American Negroes was
championed by Jazz musicians." Dr. King
loved and respected jazz and its musicians.
He said jazz was an important part of the
Civil Rights Movement. Born out of
oppression, it spoke for life he said, even in
the midst of death and darkness all around.

Jazz has forever been linked to The Civil
Rights Movement. The music, which
appealed to both black and white audiences,
provided a stage where musicians were
judged by skill alone. It was music for the
sake of music and its artists. But that did not
mean that black jazz musicians weren't
subject to discrimination. Musicians such as
John Coltrane, Louis Armstrong and Billie
Holliday have faced discrimination
throughout their lives. They weren't allowed
to play on live radio broadcasts, they weren't
allowed to play unless the audience was
segregated under Jim Crow laws.





Musicians were constantly under attack because of the colour of their skin. But they would risk their career and their lives to play jazz and to promote the cause of racial equality through jazz.

Jazz became the driving force of the movement of racial equality. Musicians promoted the cause through their performances and their acts of courage, singing about and against the oppression of African Americans

Louis Armstrong was one of them. Often criticised for being the "Uncle Tom", playing for mainly white audiences, he had a subtle way of dealing with racism. In 1929, he recorded "(What did I do to be so) Black and Blue", a song about how his only sin was the colour of his skin. Given the era, being a black performer and singing that onstage out of context was quite dangerous:

My only sin
Is my skin
What did I do
To be so black
and blue?

During the Cold War, Armstrong became one of the cultural ambassadors for the USA, playing jazz around the world along with others such as Dizzy Gillispie. It was called the "Jazz Ambassadors" program, launched by President Eisenhower to present the nation on a world stage through jazz albeit as a form of propaganda. But Armstrong was openly critical of his country. After the Little Rock Crisis of 57', he publicly stated that "the way they're treating my people in the south, the government can go to hell".

Billie Holiday was among the jazz stalwarts of the era, singing openly about the oppression meted out towards her race. She was never scared, even as she sang "Strange Fruit", a song which juxtaposed the scenery of the south with the image of black bodies hanging from trees, a song which led to Harry Anslinger, the Head of the FBI, threatening her to stop singing, a song which ultimately led to the end of Holiday's career, for she never did stop singing it:

Southern trees bear strange fruit,
Blood on the leaves and blood at the root,
Black bodies swinging in the southern
breeze,
Strange fruit hanging from the poplar
trees



Benny Goodman, a white bandleader and clarinettist, was an important figure in jazz for he was the first to hire a black musician as a part of his jazz ensemble. He used his fame and his outreach to bring black music to the forefront. In 1935, he hired Teddy Wilson, a black pianist, as a part of his trio. The following year, he hired Lionel Hampton to the band. These acts pushed for racial integration which was looked upon as a taboo during his era

Every Civil Rights generation has had music as a tool of protest. Gospel fuelled the marches in the 50s, while new jazz drove the people in the 60s through musicians deeply expressing their individual personalities and their socio-political selves. And now we have the genre of rap as the music of revolution against the supremacists. But jazz has forever been the music of the movement.

It was the perfect art for the struggle as black musicians demanding to be seen as artists was a "rebellious political act".

Martin Luther King Jr. declared that jazz was the ability to take the "hardest realities of life and put them into music, only to come out with some new hope or sense of triumph." It was the music of life.

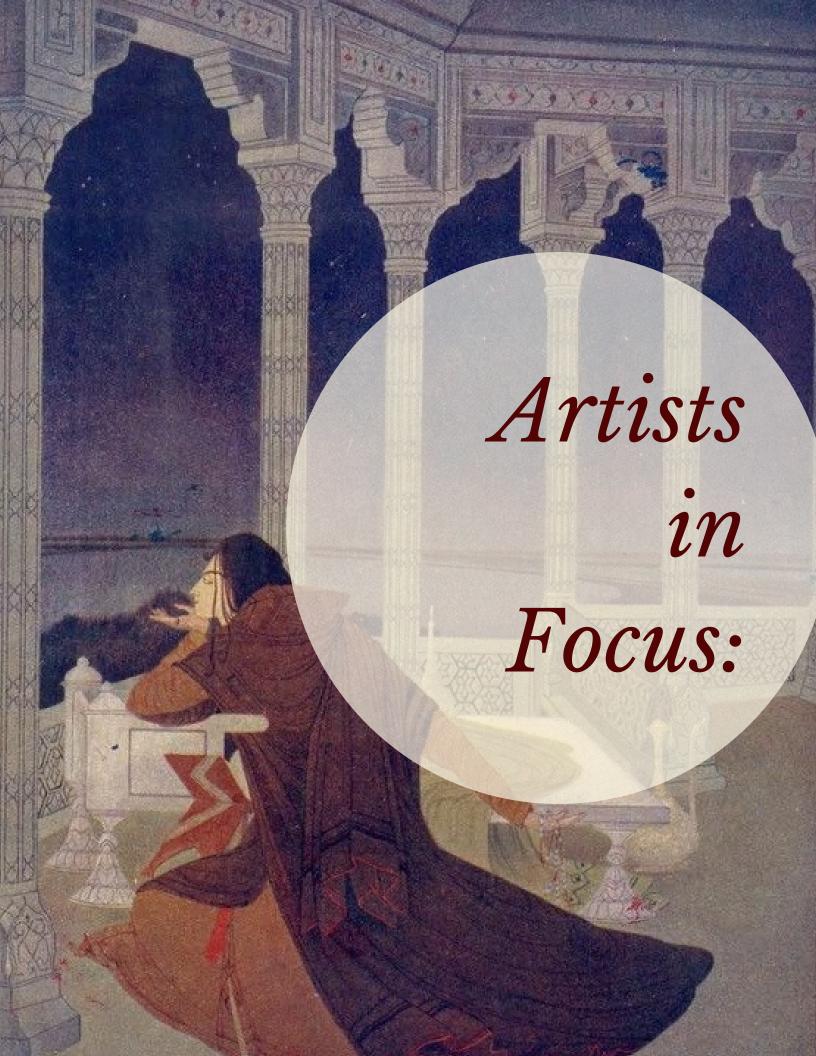


Jazz continues to be a tool for the movement for equality in the 21st century. Since the 70s, it has moved out of the spotlight, into relative obscurity, endeavouring into more experimental and avant-garde depths; jazz still remains as an instrument for equality. Jazz musicians around the world, of all ethnic and racial backgrounds have taken their stand against racial oppression in the present day as it still continues to eat away at the face of humanity.

As jazz music got popular and started to get recognised by the white liberal audiences, jazz musicians were held up as the country's greatest artistic leaders. But they would never recognise them as the scholars and innovators they were. Those positions were solely kept for the white musicians. Even today, at esteemed institutions of jazz, the faculty and the student body barely consist of African-American. How are they supposed to tell the story of jazz without any proper influence for the students to be affected by? Now, you might say that it is ancient history, that it does not matter anymore. Jazz was a thing of the past and that everyone should just let go of its idea. But is it really a thing of the past?

Jazz was the music of protest. Of liberation and of freedom. It was the music that fuelled the Civil Rights Movement. Jazz was widely produced, back in its hey-day. But it is more than relevant today. As the cases of police brutality rack up against Africans and African-Americans all over the world, jazz continues to grow in relevance. Jazz has been expecting situations just like this. To come up from the streets and join the protests that it is all too familiar with. And there is no better time to learn or teach about the importance of jazz in the constant process of taking down racial inequality. For jazz is freedom.









and the young mistress of Chowdhury house defied all convention

THE HOME AND THE WORLD

Robinson with Jague

Sohini Mukherjee



Chandler Everdeen



kolkata, west bengal, india

Sohini Mukherjee



Snayini Das

Our Staff.

Editor in Chief Anuraag Das Sarma

Senior Editors Indrayani Bhadra & Ayush Chakraborty

Art Directors Rushali Mukherjee & Aindrila Ray

Copy Editors Atri Deb Chowdhury & Ahir Ghosh

Visual Editor: Vidushi Das

Digital Editors: Aishik Roy & Mukund Daga

Writers: Aishi Saha, Anwesh Banerjee, Shayan Chatterjee, Rayan Chakraborty, Suman Sarkar, Geetanshi Lamba, Lishika Sahni, Ritobrita Mukherjee, Lesley Simeon, Komal Srivastava, Abhilasha Bij, Prodeepta Aich, Mehul Menon, Kinjal Chandra, Renata Pavrey, Sohini Mukherjee, Srijoni Mitra.

Artists: Reetika Mukherjee, Sohini Mukherjee, Chandler Everdeen, Snayini Das, Emili Dutta, Anjali Gautam

Special Thanks To:

Arnab Chatterjee
@love_among_the_bookshelves
@paperbacks_nd_harcovers
@bookigai
@sahilpr1109

MONOGRAPH