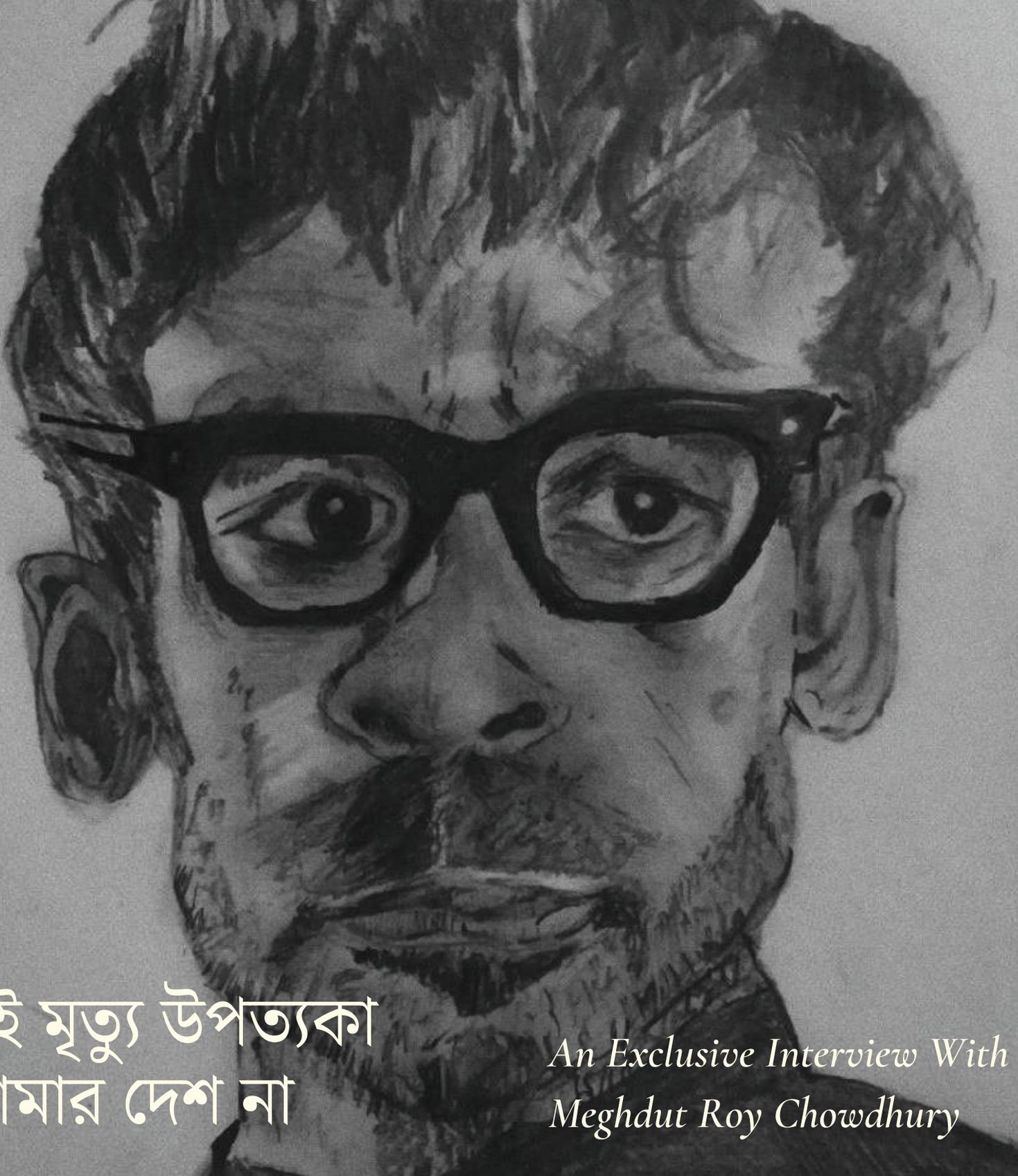


# MONOGRAPH

VOL. 7 | APRIL 2021



এই মৃত্যু উপত্যকা  
আমার দেশ না

*An Exclusive Interview With  
Meghdut Roy Chowdhury*

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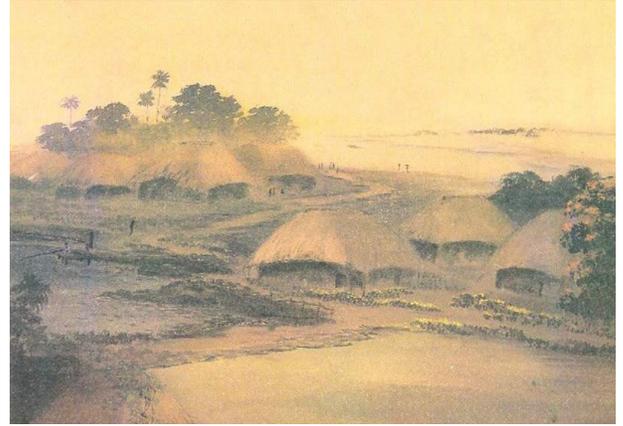
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# Editor's Note

Anuraag Das Sarma

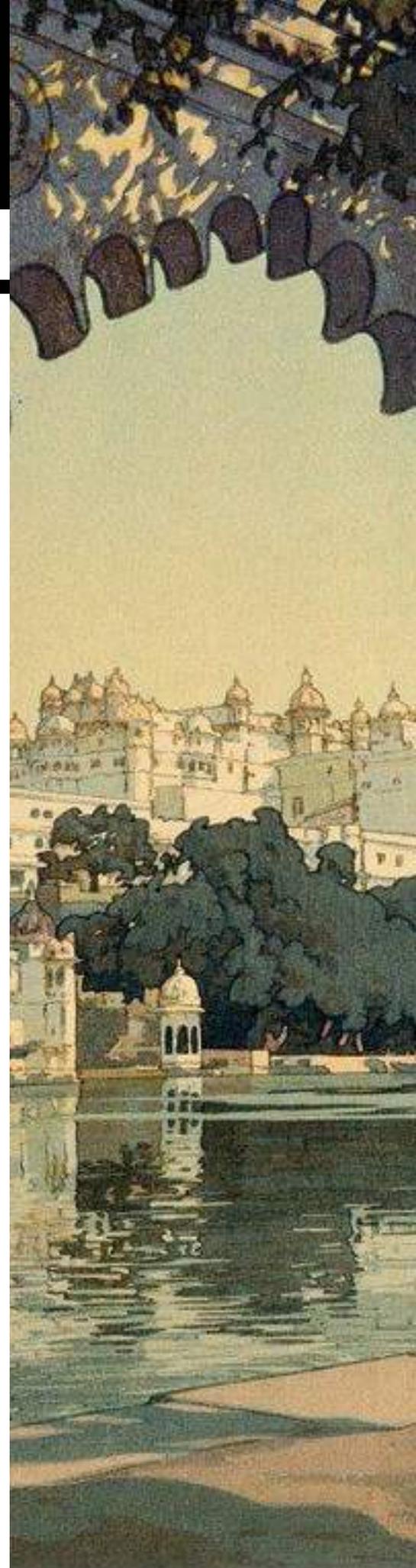
I'm often faced with one very pertinent question, often asked by people, and one that I've seldom had the privilege of answering in full - What does Monograph stand for?

It is an art magazine, that is correct - one that is run by students and read, mostly, by students. I could end the answer there, call it a day and walk back home, but if you would bear with me, only for a second, I could perhaps help you understand Monograph better.

Monograph started out in August, 2020. In the middle of the pandemic, with nothing to do, a head-splitting writer's block, and a lot of anxiety about college, I came up with an idea for a digital magazine. A bunch of anxious (and equally excited) phone calls later, Monograph was born.

With 8 people in the team, slowly we started working on our October Issue, and a month (and a lot of canva bugs and glitches) later, we finally had it - An issue to call ours. Now, the current issue, if I say so myself, looks a whole lot better than our first issue, as we've finally settled on a design and figured out our aesthetic. But that first issue, remains etched in our minds - us experimenting with coloured pages and different layouts, having four interviews just to fill up pages, and me submitting more than my usual one article just to beef up the contents page.

Now, six issues later, Monograph is, by no means, a successful magazine. But it has become a creative outlet, not only for the core members, but also for the astounding number of writers, artists and poets who've written for us. And that is what Monograph is about. It is about creating a sustainable outlet for all sorts of creatives - be it literature, art or even videography. And it shall forever remain that way.





# এই মৃত্যু উপত্যকা আমার দেশ না

Atri Deb Chowdhury

‘আমি তাকে চিনি।

তাকে আমি দেখেছিলাম।

দাঁড়িয়ে আছে মহানগর। নদী কঠিন লোহার বাঁধনের তরে নীরবে যেখানে বয়ে  
চলেছে। আর পাশে চলেছে মানুষের জীবনের কান্না-হাসির নাগরদোলা।

যেখানে আরো একটি দিনের কাজ হলো শেষ। লক্ষ লক্ষ কর্মক্লান্ত জীবনের  
আরো একবার সূর্যিডোবা। আকাশ যেখানে তারে-তারে আষ্টেপৃষ্ঠে মোড়া।

সেই আকাশের তলায় তাকে দেখেছিলাম।

হাজার-হাজার নাগরিকের মাঝে একটিমাত্র নাগরিক।’

২৫-২৬ বয়সের সুদৃশ্য এক যুবক। পরনে সাদা ধুতি-পাঞ্জাবি। চোখে পুরু  
কালো ফ্রেমের চশমা।

ঋত্বিক কুমার ঘটক।

Ritwik Kumar Ghatak.



In the face of all naysay, I submit to you, that this man isn't a filmmaker. He did happen to make films, though. Now, here you might want to interject, adding that I need to get myself checked. To that, I would say, 'দাঁড়াও পথিকবর।'

Here's why.

Ritwik was an artist. An artisan, even, in the truest sense of the word. A scribe who was there to 'chronicle the great changes'. A people's artist, the man spoke for the people, and to the people. For this, especially in his early years, he worked with many art forms until, finally, settling on the celluloid as his weapon of choice. He believed that in terms of immediate and spontaneous communication, theatre is much more effective than literature. And cinema with its mass appeal, he felt, could do wonders. Ghatak passionately participated in theatre but cinema as a singularly powerful means of expressing the agony of the people haunted him.

Beginning as a short story writer, he published several of his short stories in 'Agrani', 'Galpobharati', 'Desh', 'Porichoy', 'Shonibarar Chithi' and other leading magazines of Bengal.

Ritwik then took to theatre and joined the IPTA as a playwright, actor and director. Between 1950 and 1952, Ghatak wrote 'Jwala', an analysis of the suicide wave in Calcutta. After 'Jwala', Ghatak wrote 'Officer', based on Pramathanath Bishi's adaptation of Gogol's 'Inspector General'. Ghatak himself played the role of the Inspector in the play. He also acted in the production of 'Nabanna' under the direction of Bijon Bhattacharya. 'Nabanna' revolutionised his way of thinking and served as a turning point in his life. Later he paid a tribute to 'Nabanna', acknowledging its deep influence in one of his articles, "Bijon Bhattacharya; Giver of New Life". Simultaneously he set up the 'Natyachakra' Theatre Group and then broke away to work with Shambhu Mitra's 'Bohurupee'.



He further worked as assistant director and actor in Nemai Ghosh's 'Chinnamul', besides taking over the direction of Arup Katha (1951-52) from Nirmal De. The film however was abandoned.

'ঢেউ উঠছে  
কারা টুটছে  
আলো ফুটছে  
প্রাণ জাগছে।'

Ritwik, born in 1925, grew up amidst political awakening and the Marxist uprising. In the aftermath of Japanese onslaught, British retreat, Bengal famine, Naval mutiny and communal riots in 1946, Ghatak became a part of active Marxist politics. He witnessed the Independence of India that came at the cost of an incision, made across the land, the populace - the nation.

'ও সে স্বপ্ন দিয়ে তৈরি সে দেশ  
স্মৃতি দিয়ে ঘেরা।'  
কোন দেশ ? বাংলাদেশ না ভারতবর্ষ ? নাকি  
পাকিস্তান ? East না West ?

The Partition brought with it an exodus, of lives, stripped of a home, a homeland, a family, possessions and a childhood -- an identity.





This loss of identity, the trauma associated with it and the angst that the exile bore seeped deep into Ritwik's consciousness, who himself was one of them.

Saadat Hasan Manto'r একটি ছোট গল্প আছে, নাম Toba Tek Singh। এই Toba Tek Singh নামক দেশের খোঁজ, নির্বাসন, অস্তিত্ব, পরিচয় ও স্থানচ্যুতির এই কান্নার দাগ ঋত্বিকের প্রত্যেককটি কাজের মর্মে স্পষ্ট দেখা যায়।

Ritwik's body of work is thus marked with themes of separation, homelessness, economic and cultural displacement and a deep-seated desire to belong, along with those of unemployment, class deterioration, myopia and amnesia.

'দূরে কাছে কেবলি নগর, ঘর ভাঙ্গে  
গ্রাম পতনের শব্দ হয়;  
মানুষেরা ঢের যুগ কাটিয়ে দিয়েছে পৃথিবীতে,  
দেয়ালে তাদের ছায়া তবু  
ক্ষতি, মৃত্যু, ভয়  
বিহবলতা ব'লে মনে হয়।'

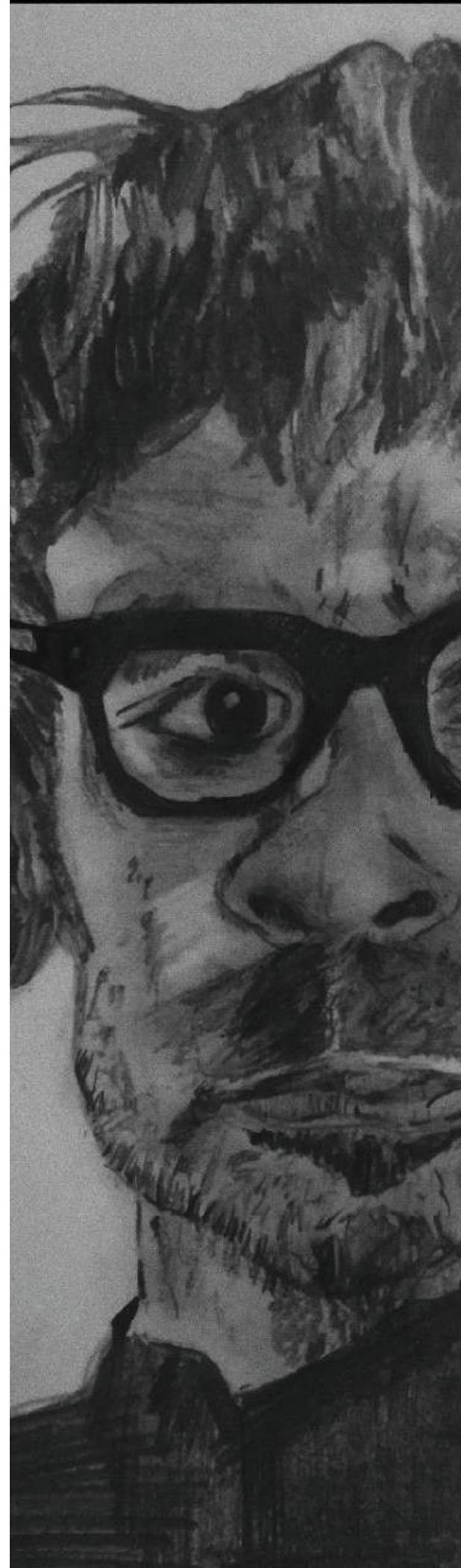
চারিদিকে হানাহানি ও নাশকতার আগুন জ্বলতে দেখে ঋত্বিক বৃদ্ধ Tiresias এর মতো আর্তনাদ করছেন। তিনি সত্যদ্রষ্টা। তিনি celluloid ব্যবহার করছেন testament লেখার জন্য। তাই তাঁর ছবিকে Palestine, Guatemala এবং অন্য যেকোনো জায়গায় ব্যবহার করা যেতে পারে।

সেইজন্যেই বোধহয় ঋত্বিকের চলচ্চিত্রকে নানা জায়গায় কেবল একটা "Diaspora Cinema"র তকমা লাগিয়ে আবদ্ধ করে দেওয়া হয়। আদতে, একেবারেই তা ঠিক নয়। আসলে "বাস্তুহারা", "স্মরণার্থী", "refugee" - এই শব্দগুলো কেই ঋত্বিক অপছন্দ করতেন। 'সুবর্ণরেখা'তেও তাই ঋত্বিক প্রশ্ন তোলেন - "কে refugee নয় ?" তিনি এই সীমানা হারানোর গল্পেই বিশ্বাস করতেন না। ঐক্যের দাবি রেখে ঋত্বিক লড়তেন কেবল এই দশ ফুট বাই দশ ফুট আঁকড়ে বেঁচে থাকা মানুষদের জন্যে।

'দিগন্তে কারা আমাদের সাড়া পেয়ে  
সাতটি রঙের ঘোড়ায় চাপায় জিনা  
তুমি আলো আমি আঁধারের আল বেয়ে  
আনতে চলেছি লাল টুকটুকে দিন।'

Cinema, I dare say, is not a medium easily understood - especially Ritwik's. Irrespective of the number of Bergman features one can name(looking at you over-entitled cigarette-dhārī teenager), Ritwik's form, with its subversive language and coding, remains cryptic to many(case in point: 'চ্যালেঞ্জ নিবি না শালা' শুনে লিখতে বসা আমি). This article dares not analyse or explain Ritwik's filmography. The first half of it simply made a meagre attempt at giving one a glimpse of the time Ritwik made his films, and the sensibility that shaped his work and philosophy.

To put it simply, this half serves as context for the next.

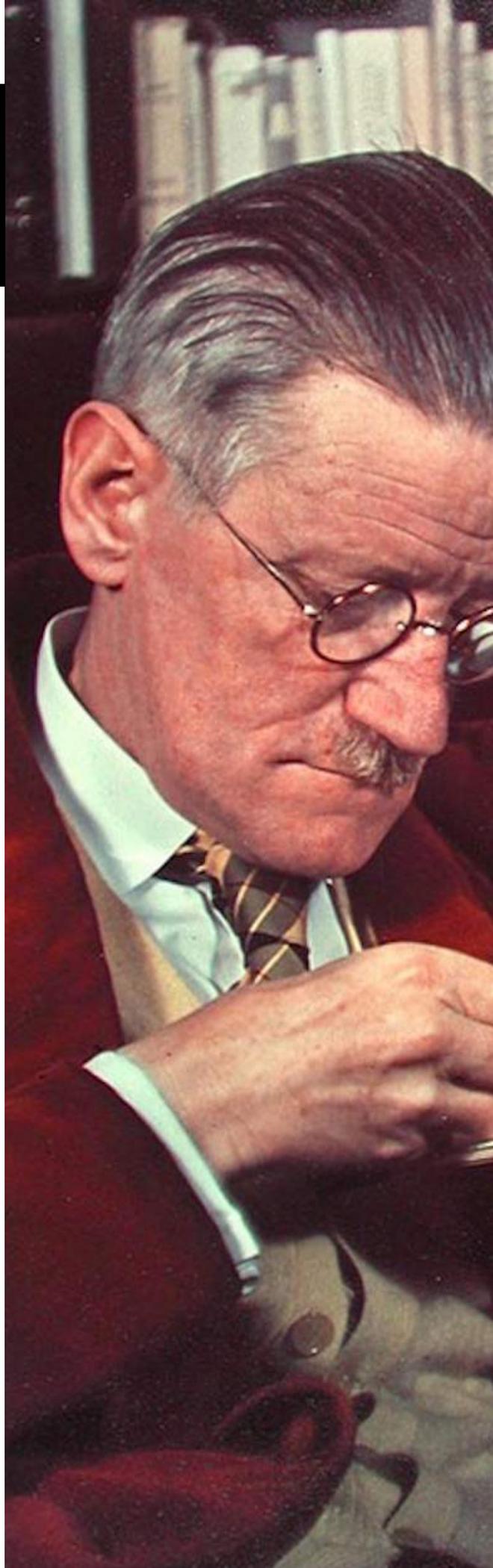


# Epiphanies in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man

Ankita Gupta

*"The artist, like the God of the creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence, indifferent, paring his fingernails."*

James Joyce's 1916 novel, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, is one of the best examples of a "Joycean" text, such that it is inaccessible, obscure, and full of realism, at the same time. Pushing the limits of the English language, Joyce introduced Modern techniques such as epiphanies, leitmotifs, use of portmanteau, and the stream of consciousness genre, in his written works. It is important to note that the representation of Stephen Dedalus is semi-autobiographical. In a way similar to Joseph Conrad's characterization of Leggatt in his novella, *The Secret Sharer*, Joyce constructs his alter-ego with sympathetic irony and the voice to question and reason.





Joyce's frequent use of epiphany and leitmotif in his prose is interesting to note because the two are opposites of one another. An epiphany is a sudden understanding or realisation of, whereas, a leitmotif is a recurrent repetitive theme or idea in a given situation. The purpose of an epiphany is to break the flow of reality and at the same time, facilitate "the continuity of sensation", as observed by Tobias Boes.

*"The leitmotif, on the other hand, is entirely conjunctive: ...The endearingly frustrating nature of Joyce's texts stems from the fact that epiphany and leitmotif can hardly be separated from one another."*

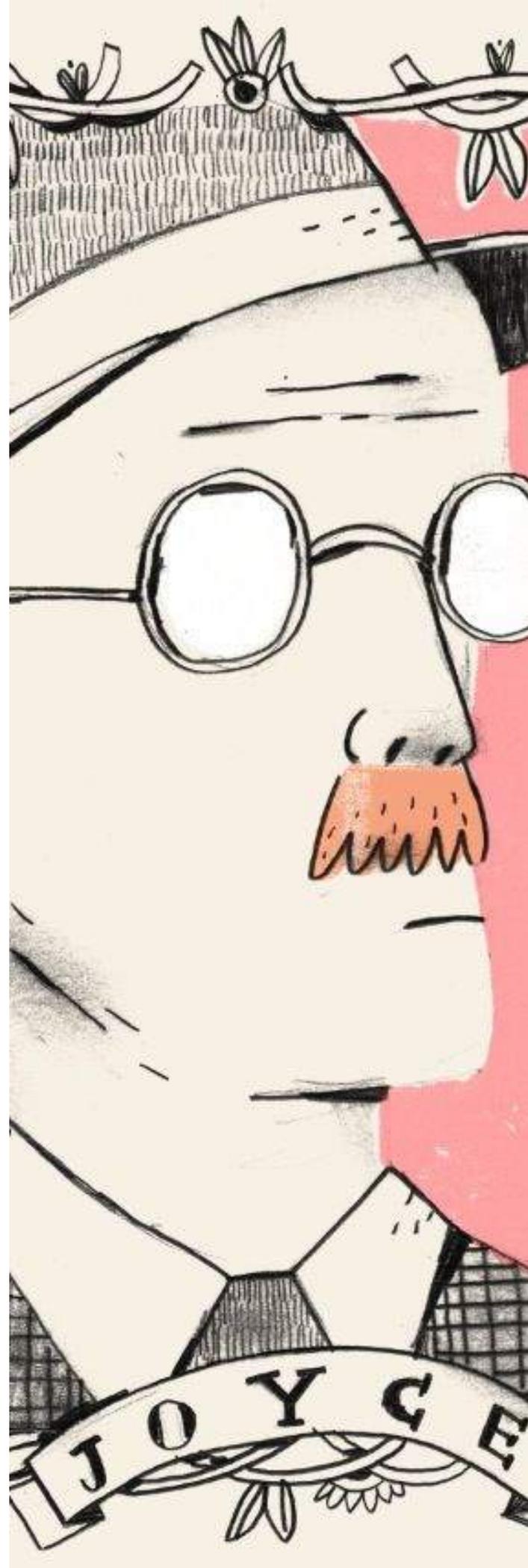
Joycean leitmotifs appear to act as refrains within the plot – emotions and "underpinnings" are stitched with both the protagonist and the plot, either as a recapitulation of a thought, or a remembering, post-epiphany. This repetitive style is exclusive to Joyce in the sense that he uses both epiphany and leitmotifs at the same time, and both coagulate to give meaning to the prose and guide the reader, and at the same time are able to retain their individual identities.

It is understandable that even the smallest or momentary change in the life and experiences of Stephen Dedalus, drives the plot forward, and the reader grows with the literal and literary growth of Dedalus. The observation of Joyce's brother Stanislaus is rather interesting because he was of the opinion that epiphanies are subtle forms of Freudian slips. While Joyce himself never defined what he meant by epiphanies, Stephen's character however "[says that] epiphanies are a sudden and momentary showing forth or disclosure of one's authentic inner self." Such a "disclosure" could present itself in various forms such as gestures towards self and others, reform or "vulgar speech", or response to memories.



The term “epiphany” is not explicitly mentioned anywhere in the novel, the use of the term “claritas” fulfils its purpose. A moment of “claritas” is an instance outside the margin of space and time. It brings a “stasis”, or a halt, for the individual experiencing it. Dedalus explains this by stating the example of the “supreme quality” that is experienced by an artist when they, for the first time, find an idea or inspiration of and for art (which is an “aesthetic image”), come to them.

The notion of epiphany however is confusing and the significance of epiphanies in the novel is unclear. For instance, one tells another that the clock on the Ballast Office is capable of “inducing an epiphany”. All of the epiphanies in the Portrait are sourced from James Joyce’s experiences at Belvedere or in Paris. The epiphanic moment of watching prostitutes walking the streets while they ate pastries (women of the oldest profession indulging in an experience of luxury – eating desserts while looking for business) is one such example. However, what makes an epiphany possible is not addressed – it continues to be a private and personal realization that is recorded by the author and his character, without revealing the “aesthetic image” found, as previously mentioned.





Critics opine that all external and “extrinsic factors” in the Portrait are only significant insofar as they are related to Dedalus. Since Dedalus is portrayed as his conscious self, and the novel deals with his interiority in far more detail than it does the other characters, or even Dublin, his epiphanies are significant in that they help the reader understand who Stephen is, what he stands for, and why “the self” matters.

The readers’ extensive experiences with Dedalus are those of his thoughts and emotions, and the significance of epiphanies lie in the distancing of Stephen and the people he is surrounded by. One of the earliest examples of emotions and thoughts and realizations in the novel is that of a cold sheet under which Dedalus covers himself, and eventually, it is the same cold sheet that warms him. Although this does not qualify as an epiphany, it is important because it helps us peek into the mind of a young boy, in a Jesuit school, in an unfamiliar environment.

Another significance of epiphanies is that it helps Stephen learn that his own wisdom does and will help him “learn”. Wisdom is exclusive of feelings and what has been taught, and helps Dedalus, not just a young man, but the artist, free himself and his spirit to find his true calling. The sense of freedom that epiphanies and wisdom provides Stephen Dedalus is similar to the “ecstasy of flight”, and it helps the artist “recreate”. Whether this recreation is the true “aesthetic imagery”, or merely an exhibition of craftsmanship, is immaterial. The reality of his experiences and the significance of epiphanies in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man can be in Stephen’s words towards the end –

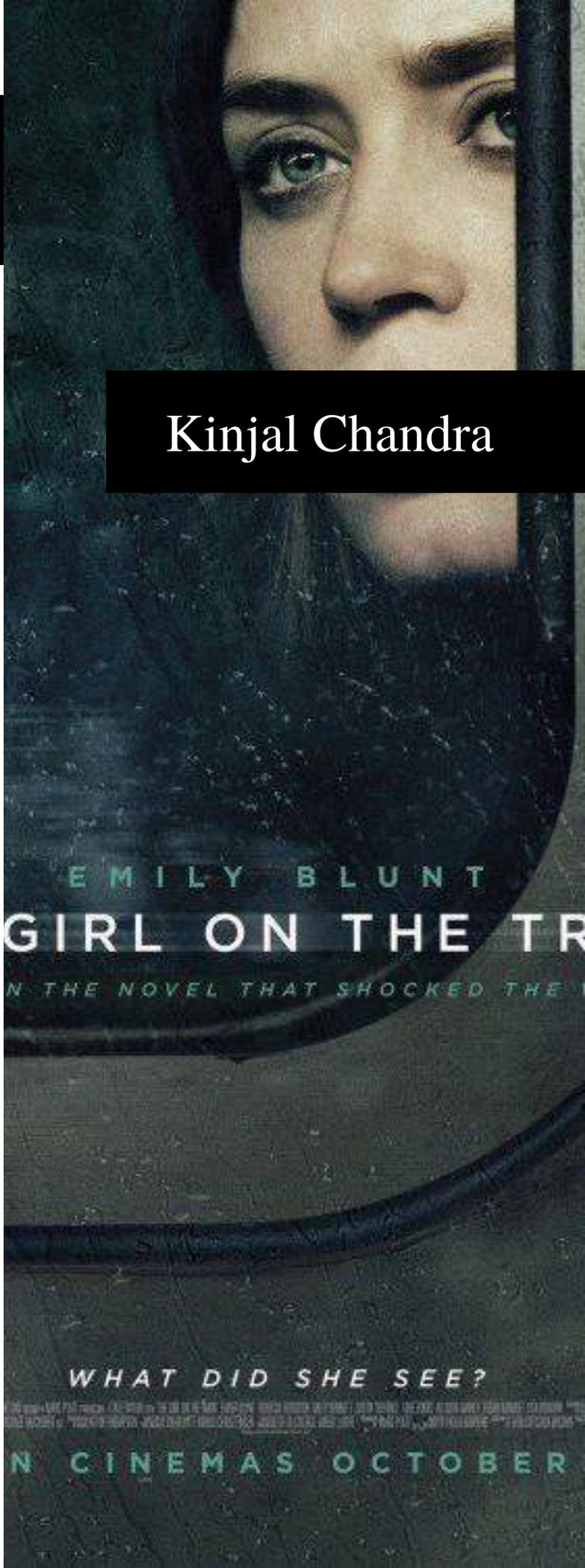
*“I go to encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race.”*



# The Girl On The Train

Rachel, Megan and Anna – three women with seemingly unimpaired lives, find themselves uncannily related to each other. All the three women yield some strings in common with each other. Be it straying partners, delusions about the flawlessness of each other's lives, impassioned hate or maternal instincts – their lives are networked, discombobulated and repugnant. Rachel, cheated in love, IS the Girl on the train, she looks with frantic envy at Megan's ideal life from the window of a train compartment, overlooking a sprawling house which once was her own territory.

She is perennially confounded and scatterbrained, a repercussion of the copious amounts of alcohol in her bloodstream – a vice picked up as a natural consequence to the stupor of infidelity. Her inebriation is intractable, it makes her remorseful, vindictive and intrusive, all at the same time. Her actions are beyond her own control – which plays a consequential role in building the intriguing narrative.



Kinjal Chandra

EMILY BLUNT  
GIRL ON THE TRAIN  
FROM THE NOVEL THAT SHOCKED THE WORLD

WHAT DID SHE SEE?

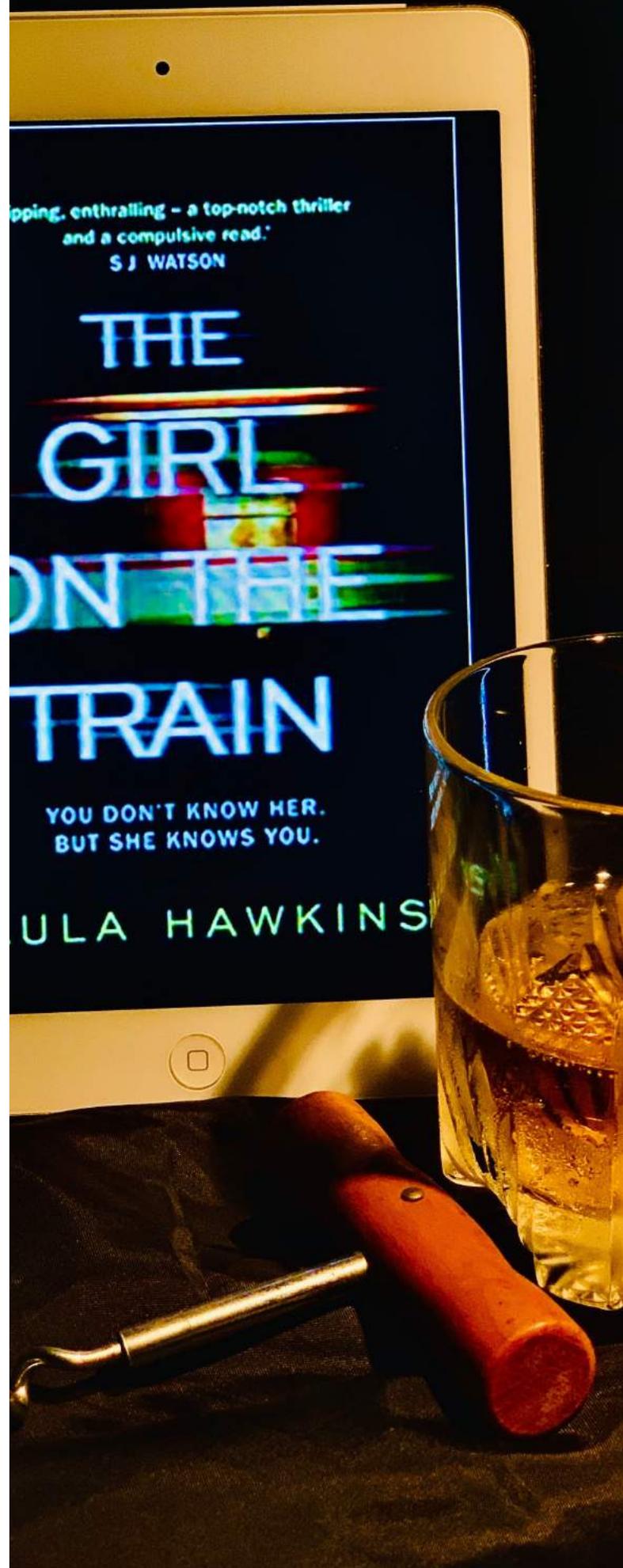
IN CINEMAS OCTOBER

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A murder sets the action rolling, ulterior motives, misinformation and unreliability start gaining momentum there onwards. The book is inventive in structure, the details are fuzzy (Hawkins doing justice to the state of intoxication of the narrator) and the narrative is crisp and quick. The only problem with the story is the poor climax. The cadence of it all comes crashing down with the obvious and incongruous culmination. I was almost expecting an additional surprise after the final revelation, only to realize that I had reached the last page of the book.

Back to my final verdict- this book is a 'satisfactory' thriller. Not awful, not mind-bending – it's just ordinary.

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Pragya Roy Barman

## Evolutions of the Rainbow

Power lies with the compulsion to believe in being special. Human beings have extracted themselves from the broad scientific category of animals and built a safe cocoon of the Self. It comes with identifying as the majority and still distancing from the commonality. The identity of accepted uniqueness. Power lies in majority acceptance, that what we have is the sole boundaries of humanity. Because difference breeds speciality, and if everyone is special than is it even special anymore?

Thus was born a trend of blind compliance to the heteronormative lifestyle, something which ironically means a 'different normal' by enforcing a pre-defined blueprint of identity. Yet, in the tribal society, LGBTQ+ presence was quite common. In fact, it was such an integral part of the daily routine that they had assigned jobs in the community. Homosexuals were seen as pioneers of culture and worked as healers, shamans and advisors. This communal acceptance was not only limited to only sexual diversity but other forms of identities as well. In his book, *Berdache: A Brief Review*

of the Literature, historian Sue-Ellen Jacobs observed eighty eight tribes with recorded references to queer behaviour which includes mentions of same-sex marriages, cross dressing oracles and trans medics.

They were even considered to be widely acclaimed warriors. In the 4th century BC, an elite Theban army of 150 gay couples called the Sacred Band of Thebes dominated the battlefield. Over time, their numbers dwindled and they were known with different names through history, the last of which was the Order of Chaeronea who had their last stand in the Battle of Chaeronea.

But this natural acceptance died down with the prevalence of witch hunting trends. While people began to hunt and burn people of difference that they framed to be dangerous in the name of religious, the queer society muted its existence for survival. They kept their identities silent for so long, hoping the rest of the world would forget about them and leave them to just be. In that silence, secret societies like Order of Chaeronea were refounded.

The Order, an almost mythologic fraternity of lovers, was rebuilt by a poet and gay activist George Cecil to serve as an underground point of communication for the forms of love that society then deemed illegal. Initially used as a platform to find familiarity, it soon involved political and ideological discussions as well, especially with masterminds as Osgar Wilde and Lord Alfred Douglas as members.





For their safety, the Order had an ornate systems of initiation, rituals and ceremonies, maintaining its secrecy by the metaphor of “The Chain” where no one could reveal information about the Order and its members. Beyond physical meetings, they communicated through secret codes and symbols, all of whom had historic background and reasonings, dating since the tribal societies.

Since the only way to enter the gay community was to meet another gay person, and that was not possible due to prevailing social bigotry, many resorted to wearing subtle gay symbols on them. Some of the most common symbols were inverted pink triangles, lamdas and the Amazon labyrinth worn as jewels, emblems, accessories and logos. Each held in itself entire histories of survival and hope.

Pink triangles were actually used in Nazi concentration camps to marks homosexuals, among whom approximately 250 thousand were put to death. But it was inverted and used to symbolise the fight against systemic oppression. The Amazon labyrinth was mainly used by lesbians, hailing from the community of the famous Amazon warriors symbolising matriachal strength and feminism, where the lamda was more sexual in nature. These were as much as to meet new people as it was to retain their individual anonymity.



This was the basis of foundation for The Mattachine Society. It started when a Communist and labour activist, Harry Hay was inspired by the concept of Alcoholics Anonymous and imagined a queer version of it for, as he called it “Society’s Androgynous Minority”. By the time its first meeting was held, the name had become Society of Fools as a introspective paradox. Hay, later changed it to the Mattachine Society taken from Medieval French secret societies of masked men gathered to criticise the people in power.

Such societies recruited members with the use of the symbols and slangs like “a friend of Dorothy’s”, “safe sex” and “one of the family”. There were even pre-established coded dialects like calling it “forward” instead of “straight” for car directions. Each community and phases had different symbolisms like goddess imagery, gay art and literature, high fashion and music taste. People usually did not rely on one symbol, but a blend of carefully composed appearance and mannerisms.

Apart from physical and behaviorial symbols, colours were also used as identification. Lavender, or purple held a special implication in the gay lifestyle. It held significance of royalty from the tribal history and shamanic traditions. Even more philosophically, it represented aura and spiritual power. An entire group, called The Lavender Menace was founded based on the importance of this colour. It was a radical feminist group of lesbians, a sub-sect of the Women’s Movement.



They extended the topic of women's suffrage towards their identities and met to rationalise their existence, finding solidarity in their shared difference, something very rare in those times.

As products of the 21st century, it is easy for us to overlook the extensive efforts people before us made to belong. It is even easier to forget that we are not a contemporary genetic mutation courtesy of Satan, as most conservatives like to claim, but our roots trace back to early civilisation where modernity had not yet snatched the freedom of simply being. And this is where our true power lies. This history of holding on to each other, scared to lose their own identity in isolation, where being forgotten was a form of salvation. Power lies in this preservation through perseverance. Power lies in us.



Spandan Rana

# Se7en

**Directed by:** David Fincher

**Produced by:** Arnold Kopelson and Phyllis Carlyle

**Screenplay by:** Andrew Kevin Walker

**Runtime:** 128 minutes

**Cast:** Brad Pitt, Morgan Freeman, Kevin Spacey, Gwyneth Paltrow



The plot follows seasoned detective William Somerset pairing up with new-to-town, hotheaded detective David Mills to investigate a series of murders based on the seven deadly sins before his retirement. The unlikely pair work together to apprehend the fugitive but this case would prove to be life changing for the both of them as they close the file with completely new perspectives on life itself.

**Somerset** - Morgan Freeman stars as seasoned detective William Somerset. From the beginning, Somerset is established to be a pessimistic character due to number of murders he had to investigate throughout his career. The story follows Somerset coming to terms with the fact that nothing could have prepared him for the wrath of 'John Doe' as he questions his capability. The end of the movie sees Somerset quoting the well-known line from novelist Ernest Hemmingway, "The world is a beautiful place and worth fighting for." Somerset agrees with the second part of the quote which makes sell the idea of his pessimism being replaced by a solemn promise of never letting the world witness a repeat of the wrath of 'John Doe'.



**David Mills** - Brad Pitt portrays a hot headed and instinctive detective whose rookie behaviour is excused due to his emotional development throughout the story. Mills is a man of emotion unlike his partner who is much more calm and calculated. Mills jumps into fights and is hell-bent on catching “John Doe” which makes him look like a reflection of Somerset. Somerset’s fear that Mills may push everyone away just like he once did is carried on throughout the story and told through Mills’ actions and his dedication. His absence in his wife’s life further complicates the story as Mills’ dedication to his work is what leads to his ultimate downfall. Mills is the emotional center of the film as the film revolves around Mills and the slow and painful deterioration of his mental state.

**John Doe** - John Doe isn’t introduced before the final act of the film but his impact, his presence and what he is capable of makes his reveal even more fascinating. On first glance, John looks like an average man but his fascination with Catholicism and the reasoning behind his murders are explained so well that it convinces the audience that he isn’t the villain in his eyes, he is simply doing God’s work.



Kevin Spacey has minimal screen-time as the character, but the sheer intensity of the scenes he is involved in, his calculated nature, much like Somerset, and his dedication towards his work, much like Mills, makes him the perfect antagonist as he replicates the protagonists' personalities which leads to the completion of his plan in one of the finest and gut-wrenching endings in modern cinema.

**Cinematography-** The unnerving atmosphere that is created in every shot is note-worthy as the shots give us the feeling of solving the crime scenes ourselves. The immersive cinematography is what makes this movie David Fincher's finest work. Darius Khondji makes us feel what the detectives feel throughout the movie. We can feel the unsettling nature of each crime scene from Mill's perspective but over the course of time we start to treat them as everyday occurring just like Somerset does. We can feel Mills' frustration as he is constantly being pushed to his limits and we can feel every sweat that streams down Somerset's usually calm and collected face.



The cinematography in this movie is the finest example of the idiom, 'A picture speaks a thousand words.' ever put to screen as every shot tells a story itself and dialogue is not even required at some points due to the effect of famous techniques that stir up suspense such as 'The Dutch Angle'.

**Sets-** The sets and the world-building are what sells the idea of John Doe and the necessity of John Doe in a city like this. The constant rain and the gloomy setting stir up a negative impression towards the city from the get go. Throughout the film we see how lost the city is. Pedestrians are murdered but no one bats an eye, children are scarred by the death of their parents as shown in the opening scene, a man covered in blood can get anything he wants regardless of how skeptical he looks, citizens try to hurt officers upholding the law when they are faced with an inconvenience because of it, brokers who cheat their clients without any guilt, and police sergeants who do not bat an eye unless the murders are of high ranking officials. The city is shown to have lost its way which makes John Doe's murders understandable as he sees them as delivering justice from humane standards and not by the standards of society. The seven deadly sins themselves are embodied in the movie with God's own executioner, John Doe, being the embodiment of 'envy'.



The movie does a brilliant job at building the world that this movie takes place in and helps us understand Doe's motives throughout the movie while not allowing us to sympathize with him at the same time.

*Se7en* is a masterpiece because of the brilliant acting, outstanding storytelling, immersive world and so many minute details that make it relatable to the real world. *Se7en* may be a landmark in film history but its success has proven to be detrimental on the genre of mystery thrillers itself, killing off the genre more or less as future installments felt like copies of *Se7en* or nothing as special as *Se7en*. David Fincher has created one of the most gripping films of all time and this movie proves that real cinema isn't always an escape from realism, and often it is born out of embracing realism.

*Se7en* is the perfect movie for people who are learning to write mystery thrillers as it explores all the necessary aspects of the genre.



Even though *Se7en* is a cultural masterpiece, it would be wrong to say that it is flawless. From vague backstories to decisions that progress the plot but harm the realistic aspects, *Se7en* has plenty of flaws. The most glaring flaw of them all comes from the number of assumptions and inconsistencies in John Doe's seemingly flawless plan. The number of unbelievable incidents that have been later revealed to be calculated and 'all part of the plan', ends up hurting the strictly realistic approach of the movie.

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# A Pandemic of Sorts

Ayush Chakraborty

18th March 2020 – I got up from my table at precisely 6 in the morning after pulling an all-nighter for my sociology exam. At around 7:30 am we received an email declaring that all pending ISC exams including the one on that day were to be postponed. I looked at the email with eyes filled with dread and simply went for a shower after letting out a deep disappointed sigh. Now, as everyone knows the “postponed” exams never took place and we received marks depending on our past performances which did not seem to be satisfactory to say the least. However, we got into colleges and begun the new phase of our lives in a pandemic. Honestly, I believe that people have talked about COVID-19 quite a bit and I simply do not care for it anymore so I shall proceed to gloss over the word entirely.

My experience during the pandemic had not exactly been the sort of scintillating journey into tranquility as I would have hoped it to be. I spent the first few months scouring the face of the earth (in this case the earth was anywhere within a 900m radius from my home) for cigarettes. In the end buying them somewhat illegally during quarantine curfew.

In a couple of months, a new virus had plagued the earth, this time as the silly quarantine trends as that of the Dalgona Coffee. I had decided that I would not participate in any of that for I did not wish to engage in an activity that gave a false sense of collective harmony. Apart from that, my experience was far from normal. No, I never did experience an existential crisis; I had dealt with that when I was born. But strangely enough, I did face the “mid-life crisis” that finds its way into the hearts of most middle-aged persons. While walking up the stairs to my apartment during a load shedding, two girls behind me addressed me as an “Uncle” and asked me to shine some light on the stairs using my phone. I was devastated, for I was not a year above 18.



In the early days of the pandemic, I would observe people wearing masks everywhere as I would step out without one. Being the skeptic that I am, I thought that a mask alone is not going to keep me safe, so I was better without one. Later, I would be the one wearing the mask every time I went out and other people, even in my own residential complex, would never wear one.



Time passed and 2021 came into being. I was spending the New Years at a sleepover with three of my closest friends when we reached the collective decision of going on a trip together. Just the four of us without any parental supervision.

We were old enough to handle the responsibilities of our own selves and we did not see a reason not to go other than the ongoing pandemic. After each one of us conned our parents by saying that the other parents had consented to them going on a trip, the plan was in motion.

We would go to Darjeeling by the end of February and return on the first of March. The journey itself was ethereal for not once in the entire train ride could we grasp the fact that we were going to Darjeeling by ourselves. Mind you, the strange experiences weren't characteristic of Calcutta only. Strangeness was in plentiful. It was definitely strange when we decided that the tissue paper was worth more than the ice-cream they served at Keventer's.

On our last night in Darjeeling, we were sitting in Glenary's amidst the ruckus of all the other tourists who were also leaving the next day. A table behind us had just cleared and at that very instant-

a full-grown husband and father of two, sprinted through the crowd, crashing into a couple of chairs to secure his seat. But what was even more strange was when one of my friends had gone to get a lemon tart, the wife of the afore-mentioned athlete had tried to snatch his chair away, saying it was hers when she clearly did see someone sitting on it 3 minutes ago. Later that night when the power in our hotel went out, the generator decided that it would only light up half of our room, not including the heater which was on my side. Well, I can't really complain, I didn't have to go to the bathroom in absolute darkness.

However, I will complain about the dining hall lighting up out of nowhere in the middle of the night. The dining hall was two floors above our room, and you could see a bit of it if you twisted your neck out the window by the sofa. Darjeeling goes completely dark past 9 in the night; It was 12 when I was smoking by the window. So, you can imagine how frightening it may have been when a bright light from above illuminated everything outside the hotel. But there was one experience which was not only strange but also quite unnerving, so much so that afterwards I was left temporarily catatonic.

Down the street from our hotel, there are a couple of benches overlooking the rest of Darjeeling. Behind that on the other side of the street lies the remains of Hotel Mount Everest. Built by Arathoon Stephen in 1914, it was called the 100 room hotel. It was leased out to the Oberoi Group in 1950 for a hundred years and they had successfully run the hotel for more than twenty years till a fire had destroyed the building in 1978. There were talks of a certain businessman who wanted to demolish the building and build something on the property but that was 5 years ago. No work has been done ever since the hotel closed its doors for the final time in the '80s.

There was tittle-tattle about the paranormal coming into play, for several people had died in the fire that had ravaged through the hotel. Rumours here and there about people meeting with bad luck if they enter the premises.



Nevertheless, they're all just rumours. When I first came upon the ominous structure, I had noticed the lack of arches in its design. It had something to do with making it withstand the natural calamities that were characteristic of Darjeeling, but it definitely made it look imposingly grand. For no reason in particular, every window I shifted my eyes away from seemed, at the corner of my eye, to hide a certain figure. Shrugging it off as the delusions in the face of a diabolical façade I walked towards the Mall Road.

That night, at around 10pm, which is very late in Darjeeling, we were returning to our hotel. We stopped momentarily near the locked gate which led to the Mount Everest Hotel for one of us decided that it would be a great spot for a photograph. He was setting up his tripod when a man behind us said: "Nice pic". We all turned around to see who it was. A man in his 20s, reeking of bengali liquor, approached us and asked if we were tourists and if we were staying at the hotel uphill. After a few words we learned that he was Manish and that his father was from the Ultadanga region in Kolkata and that three generations of his family had stayed in Darjeeling, just a short walk from where we stood. He then proceeded to talk about his family history and about his grandmother, whose funeral he would attend following day.

He would then let us know for a second time that his father was from Ultadanga. While this conversation was taking place, I started to look around for anyone approaching our direction suspiciously, for these were uncertain times, and we were just a bunch of 18-year-olds. Out of nowhere, an inexplicably dense fog came flowing down onto the street, reducing our vision range down to 6ft. At this precise moment, a group of dogs came running down from the barren grounds of the Mount Everest Hotel and started barking. I realized that the dogs were not exactly barking at us, rather at Manish specifically. That was it for me. After learning for the third time that his father was from Ultadanga, I started signaling the others that we needed to leave, and they nodded. Manish started leading the way, declaring that we needed to come meet his family, that they lived not far from the main street. He turned right and walked down the road which branched away from the street our hotel was on and after a few seconds, he had, for the lack of a better word, disappeared. Visibly disturbed, the four of us decided to wile the night away in the warm comfort of tea.



Strangeness aside, we had been through a surreal weekend. We had fallen in love with Darjeeling the moment we arrived. The cold crisp air, the streets sloping down unforgivingly, the thick fog clouding our vision just like bias clouding our judgement – we were free. The city was ours for the weekend. Four boys, almost men with everything in the palm of our hands, well maybe not enough layers to stop ourselves from shivering in 5 degrees Celsius, but you get the point. We stood in the middle of the Darjeeling mall, looking down the streets glistening in the glow of the evening lights, wondering where life would take us next. Perhaps the time we were most free was when we had our breakfast in the chilly hotel room with the malfunctioning room heater, smoking against the bone-chilling wind, listening to Olivia Newton-John’s “Hopelessly Devoted to You” and gulping the tea away in collective harmony.





# That Day

Rithu Krishna

She typed, 'What does dreaming of a sea mean?', on her laptop. When the browser fetched thousands of results, she moved a bit forward, her puffy eyes widened marginally, skimming through the content that is in front of her. She was hoping for a good omen, not that she believed that a dream could mean something apart from being broken fragments of yesterday's memory. She read a few articles, thought to herself how assuring it was to believe in something and wished she could believe in what she was reading right now. Sighing she got up from the bed, opened the tap, fetched some water and poured it into the rose plant pot that she bought in an exhibition last winter. She couldn't help but notice that lately, the plant produced no flowers, unlike the earlier days, when there used to be many fuchsia roses. The plant now just stayed alive. It had lost its motivation to live, she thought and felt bad for the plant.

It was a humid evening. Perspiration rolled down her forehead, as she watched the crowd move outside her window. She felt too detached from the outside world at that moment, like she had never existed in that space. The golden and red rays emanating from the sky peeped through the small windows of her old apartment and fell over her face.

She emptied her coffee cup and put it back on the small wooden table. Moving to the bed placed towards one side of her room, she lied down on it. Her room lay in disarray, dirty clothes lying in a heap on the floor, books strewn around the room, magazines and newspapers scattered on the table. A small pot, occupied by a money plant, lay carefully placed on the table. The yellow walls, in the sunlight however, looked different - more upbeat, as they gleamed more with each strand of the ascending sun rays.

For a while, she remained that way, watching the revolving fan, as it made a recurrent squeaky sound. Then slowly she got up, dressed herself and left the apartment. She walked along the empty streets, checking her phone often as if waiting for something. Her aimless walk, however was soon interrupted when she chanced upon a Gulmohar tree. The end of summer had made the tree shed flowers and leaves, making it look like a ghost carrying memories of the fruitful past. There used to be a huge Gulmohar tree near her house. When the tree would blossom red or murmur as the wind blew, her mother used to tell her that nature was staging its emotions. Though she reckoned now that that may not be the case, she liked to hold on to that memory of the tree dearly.





She used to lay on her mother's lap, listening to her talk about the tree which held an important place in her mother's heart. Even though repetitive at most parts she used to carefully listen to her mother as she toned down her voice and spoke gently about the tree. Such memories left her reminiscing about a single particular day during her childhood. She was listening to her mother talk, about something which she didn't quite remember anymore. As she listened she hardly realised that she was drowning in the shallowness created by her thoughts and her mother's voice was, slowly but surely, becoming more and more distant. She was confused with herself and she slowly uttered, ' Ma, I don't know what I would like to do...when I grow up...what will I become..'. She initially doubted if her mother even heard her speak those important lines, but after a little while her mother stopped and looked at her with a smile and said 'All that you can be'.

She identified herself as someone who didn't share a great part of her thoughts with others. But that day her mother's presence played second fiddle to her solitude.

She wished she could go back to that place and curl in the bed beside her mother, thus feeling her long-lost warmth.



She was interrupted from her thoughts by a phone call. She picked it up immediately and with a pounding heart said, ' Hey please, don't do this. I won't talk about the past this time. I understand'. After havjng said this she was silent for some time as she listened to the familiar voice on the other side of the phone. She said, 'Please ...it was not even my mistake...and I am sure that time is what we need to...'. She stopped when she heard a beep from the other side. She panicked and started to walk faster. Her eyes welled up and her hands trembled as she held her phone.

With time she slowed the pace of her walk. She hadn't realise that night had descended on the city.

When she reached her apartment she felt the silence of her mind sync with the apartment, creating a louder vacuum. She felt the apartment emulate the state of mind she was in. Maybe it was empathizing with her.

Realising that she hadn't eaten anything since the morning, she ordered food. From the balcony, she could see the city crowned by lights. Silently, she wondered how life was for those who live in the apartments. She quietly sang out the lyrics to her favorite Norah Jones song while dragging the chair out to the balcony. She sat and waited for her food to arrive. The night sky, combined with the sadness characteristic to the song, made her cry a little. The fuschia rose plant, placed carefull on the dirty table, gave way to a small bud after a long time.





Ayon Basu

# The Poetry of Loss- The Beautiful Sorrow of In the Aeroplane over the Sea

Neutral Milk Hotel's beautifully interconnected orgy of lush sounds, surreal lyrics, and impactful imagery offers a moving blend of hushed and comforting folk with strong sensations of induced nostalgia, loss, and hope. Released under MERGE RECORDS on February 10 1998, the album didn't garner much mainstream attention, but remains a cult classic among fans of indie music, while being despised by others for the simple reason – it doesn't live up to their definition of alternative music of the time, best exemplified by Radiohead's OK Computer.

Jeff Mangum's touching sensitivity for the pain felt by others expresses itself in full bloom in the overarching motif of this album: his regret for the short life of Anne Frank. Like a true poet though, he doesn't make this superficially apparent, instead choosing to hide it in deftly hidden references and metaphors. In fact, the sheer mystery of Mangum's lyricism adds to the myth of this album. It makes poetic sense but not necessarily logical, and is enveloped in a glum melancholy, in a way akin to a cold cloudy day in the Irish countryside. This spirit is perhaps best expressed by the song Holland, 1945, especially in the following lines:

*“And here's where your mother sleeps  
And here is the room where your brothers were born  
Indentions in the sheets,  
Where their bodies once moved but don't move anymore.*

*And it's so sad to see the world agree  
That they'd rather see their faces fill with flies  
All when I'd want to keep white roses in their eyes.”*

Mangum's singing ability accentuates this feeling, with its coarse and innocent quality complimenting his ability to juxtapose the most visceral imagery with the most beautiful. A feeling of explorative teenage sensuality and flesh-to-flesh connection pervades a lot of the lyricism in the album, which Mangum deftly carries with his voice, such as in the song King of Carrot Flowers Pt. 1, when he sings:





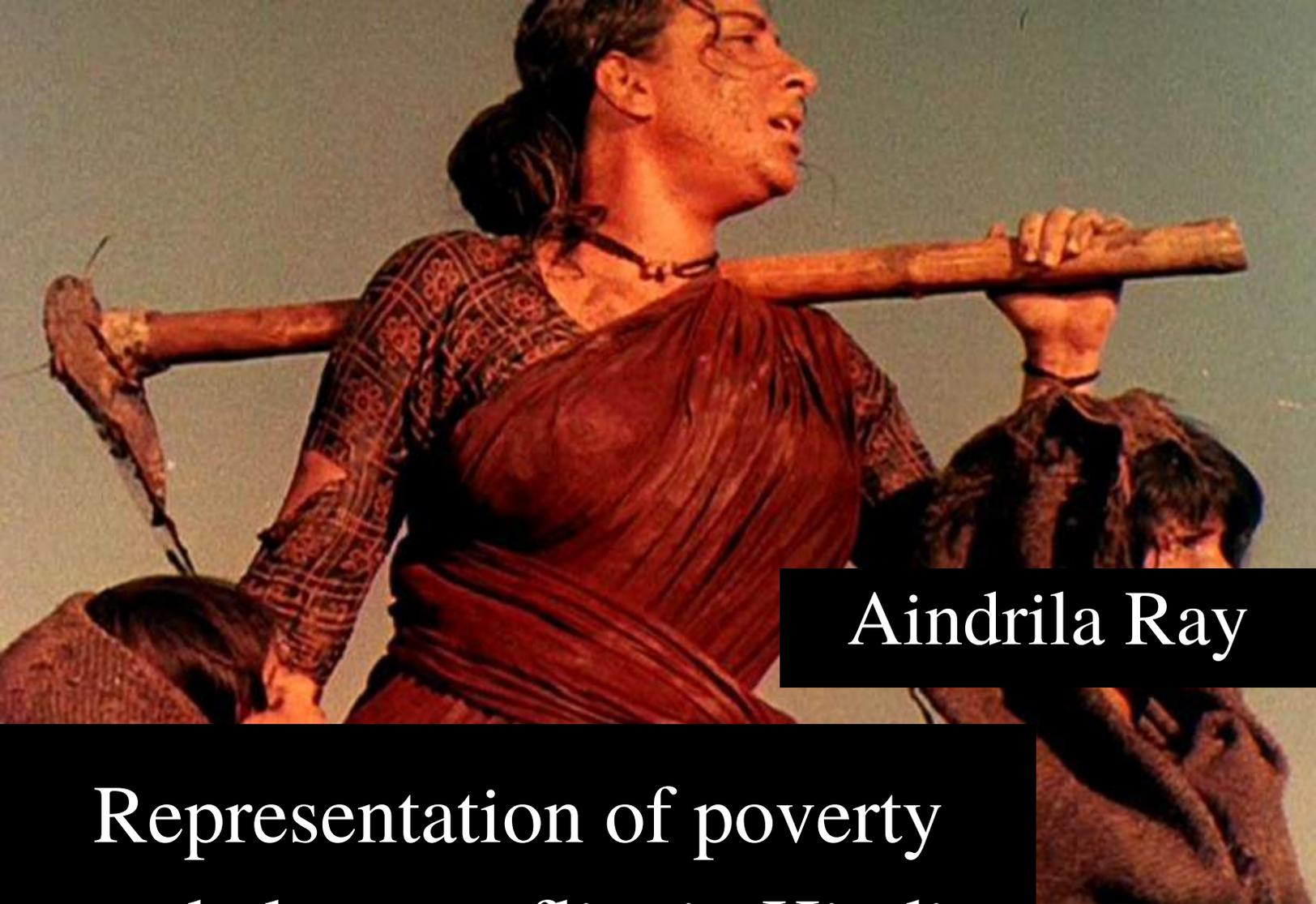
*“And your mom would stick a fork  
right into daddy’s shoulder  
And dad would throw the garbage  
all across the floor  
As we would lay and learn what  
each other’s bodies were for.*

*And this is the room one  
afternoon I knew I could love you  
And from above you how I sank  
into your soul,  
Into that secret place where no  
one dares to go.”*

There is a rusticity to the surrealism presented in the album, akin perhaps to Andrew Wyeth’s classic painting “Christina’s World”. However, this rusticity doesn’t encroach upon the sheer grandiosity of some of the wind arrangements in the album, especially in the 2-minute-long instrumental interlude, The Fool, and the aforementioned Holland, 1945.

Overall, I would probably not be mistaken in calling this a piece of musical history. It makes us think, analyse, and attempt to understand its complicated references, musical choices, and poetry, and its ability to mean different things to different people might just be what sets it apart for me, personally.

FINAL RATING: 9.5/10



Aindrila Ray

## Representation of poverty and class conflict in Hindi and Bengali cinema

For a country that has struggled with population and poverty since the beginning of time, it is very surprising that our homegrown art and cinema has, for most parts of it, failed to represent the real picture accurately, and has given us a very diluted version of the situation, that is definitely aesthetic, but in no way threatening. It is no secret that our country has a long history of corruption, impoverished masses, starvation, unemployment, gender discrimination and class conflict to name a few, then why do we hardly get glimpses of it in our cinema? An answer to this question could be, because a large part of the audience does not want their lives represented on the silver screen, they want larger-than-life tales, glamour and thrill.

. As mainstream Indian cinema has flawlessly catered to that need of the masses, parallelly there has been cinema, though very few in numbers, which have talked about our slums, the widespread unemployment of the country's educated youth, the government's inadequacy in providing its people with basic amenities and living conditions and the absolute lack of financial security among common people in this nation. Not surprisingly, more than often, these initiatives have come from foreign language filmmakers and they have been harshly criticized by the Indian public for endorsing a wrong image of the Indian society.

The 1950s and 1960s saw the birth of alternate cinema in both the Hindi and the Bengali movie industries, with directors like Bimal Roy, Mehboob Khan, Guru Dutt and Satyajit Ray going for more realistic plots and life-like storylines that were in tune with the masses. The very first movie that comes to my mind is *Mother India (1957)*, directed by Mehboob Khan. Often heralded as the 'birth of the Bollywood blockbuster', the movie revolves around Radha (Nargis), portrayed as a righteous woman in a poverty-stricken Indian village, who struggles to pay off a debt incurred to Sukhilala (Kanhaiya Lal), a moneylender and the perfect Bollywood villain and simultaneously takes care of her family, after her husband, Shamu (Rajendra Kumar) is rendered incapable of working the fields after an accident. *Mother India* with its virtuous protagonist and vile antagonist, is very highly dramatized and often too predictable, but it does bring in some realism into Indian cinema and showcases the struggle of hundreds of Indian citizens post-Independence, at a time when most mainstream cinema was based only on myth and mythology and had little connection to reality.

Bimal Roy's *Do Bigha Zameen (1953)*, based on Rabindranath Tagore's poem 'Du Bigha Jomi', starring Balraj Sahni and Meena Kumari, portrayed a poor farmer and his family in distress, for being unable to pay off their debts to a zamindar (a landowner, especially one who leases his land to tenant farmers) who was then threatening to seize the land they own.



The family is forced to move to Calcutta where the protagonist, Shambhu Maheto (Balraj Sahni) works as a rickshaw puller to pay off his debt. Bimal Roy etched his name in the history of Indian cinema with this very realistic portrayal of one of the oldest forms of impoverishment and exploitation of our common people in the hands of the rich and the powerful.

In Guru Dutt's *Pyasa* (1957), we have an urban setting as opposed to *Mother India* and *Do Bigha Zameen*, and one of its major themes is the unemployment of the educated youth of India in the '50s. It also challenges several social stigmas relevant to the Indian society of the '50s, where the protagonist, Vijay (Guru Dutt) is constantly humiliated and eventually, driven out of his home by his brothers for not earning and contributing to his family financially.

*Pather Panchali* (1955), by Satyajit Ray based on Bibhutibhushan Bandopadhyay's book of the same name, showed poverty and destituteness in a different light.

The Oscar-winning film shows siblings- Apu (Subir Banerjee) and Durga (Uma Dasgupta) make the most of their mundane and poverty-stricken childhood in a remote Indian village, where their mother, Sarbojaya (Karuna Banerjee) struggles to make ends meet when their father leaves for Calcutta for a better job. Satyajit Ray redefined Bengali cinema with *Pather Panchali*, which continues to be considered a revolutionary film globally.

As we move into the '60s and '70s, politics in Bengal is as turbulent as ever, and Bengali cinema has reached its golden era, with directors Mrinal Sen, Ritwik Ghatak and Satyajit Ray taking centre stage. Ritwik Ghatak's trilogy *Meghe Dhaka Tara* (1960), *Komal Gandhar* (1961) and *Subarnarekha* (1962) deals with the aftermath of the Partition of Bengal. *Meghe Dhaka Tara's* protagonist Nita (Supriya Chowdhury) is a refugee from East Pakistan (now: Bangladesh) and lives in the suburbs of Calcutta. Nita's life is riddled with personal tragedy, where her self-sacrificing attitude is taken advantage of at every step.



Nita gives up her formal education and becomes the sole source of income in the family, and struggles to rise above their state of extreme poverty. Betrayed in love, betrayed by her family and betrayed by her country, Nita dies of tuberculosis with her last words being “Brother, I want to survive (দাদা, আমি বাঁচতে চাই).” *Subarnarekha*, besides highlighting the obvious impoverishment of those displaced during the Partition, also talks about the direct link of the Indian caste system with individual economic stability, and their contribution in alleviating poverty and class conflict.

With the split of the Communist Party of India (1964) and the Naxalbari uprising (1967), the communist wave in Bengal was strong, and Mrinal Sen’s films blended in well with that political setting. His two films that gave powerful statements and insights on the struggles of the working class are *Calcutta '71* (1971) which showcases four short stories spanning over four decades, with 'exploitation of the common man' as the central theme, and *Chaalchitro* (1981), which shows the problems of the middle class in Calcutta with its existing class conflicts and how surviving in the metropolis was a struggle for the economically weaker sections of the society, through the eyes of Dipu (Anjan Dutt), an aspiring writer.





With Prakash Mehra's *Zanjeer* (1973) establishing Amitabh Bachchan as the 'angry young man' of Bollywood, and *Sholay* (1975) popularizing the 'gangster-damsel in distress-hero of the common man' narrative, the stage was set for Yash Chopra's *Deewar* (1975) to be a big commercial hit. *Deewar* takes a very interesting take on poverty, portraying the state of poverty as a cause for shame and humiliation and a precursor to revenge and violence.

The 'rags-to-riches' storyline was also gaining momentum around this time, with films like Shyam Benegal's *Bhumika* (1977), starring Smita Patil and Amol Palekar and one of Bollywood's biggest hits, Babbar Subhash's *Disco Dancer* (1982) starring Mithun Chakrobarty, coming forward. An example of the 'rags-to-riches' storyline in Bengali cinema is the Soumitro Chatterjee starrer, *Koni* (1984), which is an adaptation of Moti Nandi's book of the same name.

Probably the only Bollywood movie to have shown the Bombay slums in their true form is Mira Nair's most popular film, *Salaam Bombay!* (1988).

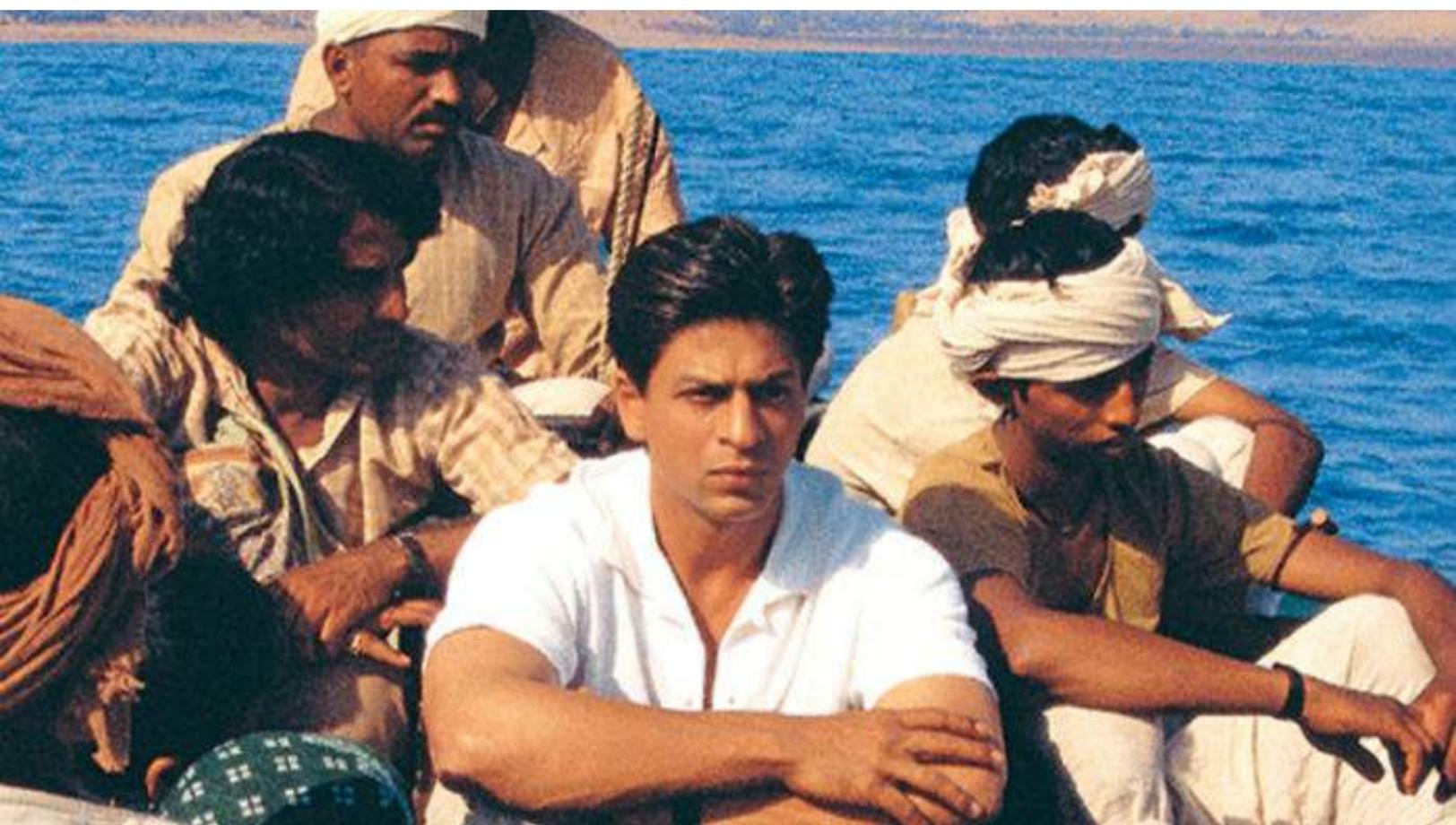


*Salaam Bombay!* revolves around a ten-year old boy, Krishna who runs away from home and finds himself in the city of Bombay, and can only go back once he has earned five hundred rupees. It focuses on a group of young children in a Bombay slum riddled with child labour, child trafficking, prostitution and drug addiction. This is one of the very few cinemas that shows the Bombay underbelly for what it is, and hence though critically acclaimed, the film has often been criticized for being too crude.

As we move into the 90s, both Hindi and Bengali movies see a radical shift in terms of content and script, with family dramas ruling the silver screens. If we look at Bollywood, the 90s saw the rise of the three Khans, with most of the commercial hits being filmed in exotic foreign locations and revolving around characters from the upper-class Indian society. Most of these stories were set outside the country, with the protagonists being NRIs with palatial homes and disposable incomes, a life that only a select few had access to, in reality. Thus, the 90s saw a complete erasure of poverty and class conflict, or in fact, any real social issue from mainstream cinema.

The 2000s however, saw the rise of alternate and coming-of-age cinemas to some extent. Before moving on to films like *Lagaan* (2001), one of Karan Johar's biggest hits, the multi-starrer *Kabhi Khushi Kabhie Gham..* (2001) did have the rich-poor divide as one of its main themes. However, the portrayal of the middle-class Indian society was so overdone and unrealistic, it only highlighted the complete lack of connection of the filmmaker with the common Indian population.

Two Ashutosh Gowariker films that need to be mentioned in this article are *Lagaan* (2001) and *Swades* (2004). *Lagaan* takes us back to the pre-Independence era, and highlights the struggles of the residents of a remote central Indian village under exploitative British officers who continue to charge high taxes despite being aware of the low yield of crops in the area due to recurring droughts, and their fight to break free through a very unique cricket match challenge. Although heavily dramatized and romanticized, the film does successfully represent the plight of the agrarian class during the British rule. *Swades* has a more contemporary setting, with our protagonist Mohan Bhargav (Shah Rukh Khan) being an expatriate employed with NASA returning to India to find his childhood nanny, Kaveri 'Amma'.



This journey turns out to be an eye-opening experience for him, who is shocked by the widespread poverty, the gender politics, the class conflicts, caste-based discrimination, lack of education and technological advancement and the complete negligence of the Indian government in tackling these issues. He finds himself advocating for social reforms in his village and eventually decides to let go of his luxurious life and come back to serve his own nation. The film, surprisingly did poorly at the box office, but continues to be a milestone in modern Indian cinema.

*Water* (2005), which is the concluding part of Deepa Mehta's controversial 'Elements' trilogy: *Fire* (1996), *Earth* (1999) and *Water* (2005), is a film set in the 1930s, that showcased how Hindu widows were forced into poverty and ignored by society after their husbands' deaths by Hindu fundamentalists. In 2008, director Danny Boyle gave us the several Academy Award winner *Slumdog Millionaire* which revolved around Jamal Malik (Dev Patel), an orphan teenager from the Juhu slums of Mumbai, who goes on to be a contestant on the reality show '*Kaun Banega Crorepati?*'. When accused of cheating in the game, Jamal revisits his past and gives us a glimpse of life in Mumbai slums and urban poverty, while revealing how he had all the answers.



The 2010s were the years of underrated gems, with several young filmmakers looking at poverty from very unique angles. Anusha Rizvi's directorial debut, *Peepli Live* (2010) was a satirical comedy-drama film that deals with farmer suicides in the country, and the media and political response to it. The movie throws light on the ignorance of political leaders in rural India towards the economic welfare of their people. Several children-centric films that had poverty as their underlining theme came up in the 2010s, the most notable one being *Stanley ka Dabba* (2011), directed by Amole Gupte. In the film, Stanley (Partho Gupte) is a spirited fourth-grade student, who is full of wit and humour. Unlike the other students in his school, Stanley does not bring a lunchbox or a 'dabba' from home and his Hindi teacher, a phagomaniac who steals food from the kids' lunchboxes, threatens to suspend him if he fails to bring his own lunch. As the movie progresses, we find out Stanley is a poor orphan boy and works at a local restaurant where he is physically abused by the owner and the whole while, Stanley has been lying to his schoolmates and teachers and hiding his reality. Amole Gupte's *Hawa Hawaii* (2014) is also a very endearing tale about a little boy, Arjun (Partho Gupte) who works at a tea stall and dreams of being a skating champion and how his dreams eventually come true with the help of a skating coach, Aniket (Saqib Saleem).



Ashwiny Iyer Tiwari's directorial debut *Nil Battey Sannata* (2016) showcases the struggles of a mother, Chanda (Swara Vaskar) to keep her daughter, Apeksha (Riya Shukla) motivated to do well in school. Apeksha does not want to study for she feels her education will in no way change her life because of their threatening financial status. *Nil Battey Sannata* captures the sentiments of an ambitious parent struggling to provide the best for their child and gives us a very realistic portrayal of a mother-daughter relationship.

With the popularization of the 'middle-of-the-road' cinema, Bengali filmmakers preferred a niche urban setting, with characters based out of middle to upper-middle class backgrounds with elite degrees and professions which subsequently led to decrease in depiction of poverty in our cinemas. While urban problems found platform and representation, the poor and the marginalized lost their place in mainstream Bengali cinema. However, a film that I must mention is *Sahaj Paather Gappo* (2016) by Manas Mukul Pal, where brothers Gopal (Samiul Alam) and Chotu (Nur Islam), two young children, are forced to earn and support their family after their father meets with an accident. Along with poverty, the film touches upon the Indian caste system, and how children are psychologically affected for not being able to comprehend it.



Some very recent movies have also portrayed poverty in different lights. *Sir (2018)*, directed by Rohan Gera and starring Tilottama Shome and Vivek Gomber, shows an attraction that surfaces between a domestic help, Ratna and her employer and an architect, Ashwin, but fails to blossom due to the rich-poor social divide, and on a broader, more general perspective goes on to show that how love is always not enough to sustain a relationship. Zoya Akhtar's *Gully Boy (2019)* shows the journey of Murad (Ranveer Singh) from a youngster in a Dharavi slum to a professional rap artist and a prominent face in India's rap industry and his take on social issues. Rahim Bahrani's recent release, *The White Tiger (2021)* which is an adaptation of Aravind Adiga's novel of the same name, revolves around a driver, Balram (Adarsh Gourav) of an ambitious, rich family and how he deploys his wit to rise above his state of poverty and transform himself into a leading entrepreneur.

Cinema is the very reflection of an era; the portrayal of the socio-economic and cultural wave of a particular time, and it is very important that our cinema plays an active role in eliminating poverty and class conflict from our society. Movie enthusiasts and cinephiles are mostly of the opinion that in recent times, the marginalized communities are severely underrepresented or misrepresented in our films, and we urge upcoming filmmakers to make a note of that and work towards eliminating it.



# Oscars '21

Anwesh Banerjee

When Priyanka Chopra was declared to announce the nominations this year, alongside her husband Nick Jonas, we all knew that *The White Tiger* was going to bag a nomination. While many complained against Adarsh Gaurav's omission from the Best Actor category following his whirlwind performance in the film, everyone seemed pretty content with the glorious, albeit unexpected, screenplay nomination for the film – which is the most Indian presence in the Oscars in years. With awards season in full swing, and the Academy Awards just around the corner, here is my list of who should, and who will win from one of the most diverse and inclusive bunch of nominees in Academy history.





## 1. Best Picture

I will not lie about the sigh of relief I released when I found that Ma Rainey had not bagged a Best Picture nomination. I was pleasantly surprised although, to see Sound of Metal in this category, something I was hoping to land a Best Actor nomination alone from among the big categories. All these surprises notwithstanding, this is a category that deserves to be won by one of the biggest phenomena in American cinema in recent years, Chloe Zhao's labor of love – Nomadland. A stunning character study, riding high on the shoulders of the ever-reliable Frances McDormand, this film truly examines the condition of the eroding American Dream in light of today's world fraught with globalization and socio-economic instability. At once an indictment on the true nature of belonging and a meditation on identity and self-hood this film is for Zhao, what Parasite was for Bong Joon-ho. Long ignored by the mainstream, it is time the world awakens to the talent of the auteur that Zhao has established herself as in the festival circuit. But that said, one must also remember to look out for the Netflix backed Aaron Sorkin crowd favorite Trial of the Chicago 7, in spite of it lacking a nomination in the directorial category (one must not forget Argo). With winning performances from a fine ensemble, a rock-solid screenplay and a goosebump inducing climactic stretch, this film might just nudge out Nomadland to claim the Best Picture title in light of its relevance in the face of rising global right-wing extremism. But with the most recent diversification of Academy voters and its very recent propensity to award indie talent one should also take note of the slow, but steady, traction being gained by the quietly moving and deeply human immigrant drama Minari.





## 2. Best Director

Barbara Streisand took a moment after opening the envelope before saying, It is time, and crowning Kathryn Bigelow as the first woman to the take home the Best Director award for her war-classic *The Hurt Locker*. This year the Academy created history by nominating two female directors. Although the beginning of this year had seen this as a probable year for either Spike Lee or David Fincher, the loss of award season traction for *Da 5 Bloods* and the polarizing and difficult *Mank*, makes this a clear game to win for Chole Zhao. Her poetic depiction of the American Mid-West and its heartbreaking loneliness is definitely worthy of recognition. One could have argued that Aaron Sorkin, with his steady direction of the years' grittiest courtroom drama is a probable contender for this award, but the same doesn't hold ground considering his omission from the category. A screenplay win seems a safer bet for Sorkin while the Directorial crown should, and hopefully will land on the deserving head of Zhao.





### 3. Best Actress

Every year this is one category where people find themselves spoiled for choice. On one hand you have McDormand, already a two-time winner of the award, with her restrained portrayal of a lonely woman who has nothing left to lose – a performance that exhibits a lifetime of craft and on the other end of the spectrum stands Viola Davis with her maddeningly physical, career-best performance in *Ma Rainey*. But in my eyes, this is the year of Vanessa Kirby. In the first two seasons of *The Crown*, she gave us a stunning, scene-stealing interpretation of the seductively reckless Princess Margaret, more than often outshining her equally brilliant co-star Claire Foy in the handful of scenes they had together. In *Pieces of a Woman*, she gives an intensely physical performance as a mother mourning the death of her child as she navigates a rapidly failing marriage with her grieving husband. Her eyes take us through the stages of mourning and grief and despite a hammy screenplay laden with on-your-face symbols, one remains invested in the movie solely for the brilliance of Kirby. If not for anything else, the Academy should hand her the award solely for the twenty minute one-take birthing scene in prologue of the film. But one must not overlook, Carey Mulligan's sinister performance as an avenging angel in Fennell's heart-felt feminist take on vigilantism in a post-MeToo world. Mulligan effectively uses her set face and alluring eyes to wreak havoc on the men she takes back home and by the end of the film makes us root for the seemingly steely yet vulnerable personality of a character I never imagined her to play in my entire life.



## 4. Best Actor

Although it indeed is a criminal offence to select anyone over the brilliance and panache of Sir Hopkins, this truly is the year of Riz Ahmed. His portrayal of a troubled artiste spiraling into deafness, is probably one of the most heartbreaking performances of this year. The Academy has in the past awarded actors like Jamie Foxx (Ray), Jean Dujardin (The Artist) and Colin Firth (The Kings Speech) for their portrayals of men battling physical obstacles in the face of art. All of them were intense, edge of the seat performances which have gone down as some of the best in Academy history in light of which Ahmed seems the most obvious choice for this year as well. But sadly, for him, if the awards have been any indication so far, the award will go to the late Chadwick Boseman, for his swan song of a performance in Ma Rainey opposite the fierce Viola Davis. His premature death is truly a loss for the industry and although many will argue that this is the way to honor the legacy of a bona fide artiste lost too soon, I hope secretly that just by some miracle this moment is restored to Riz Ahmed, to whose glorious performance we all stand witness.





## 5. Best Supporting Actor

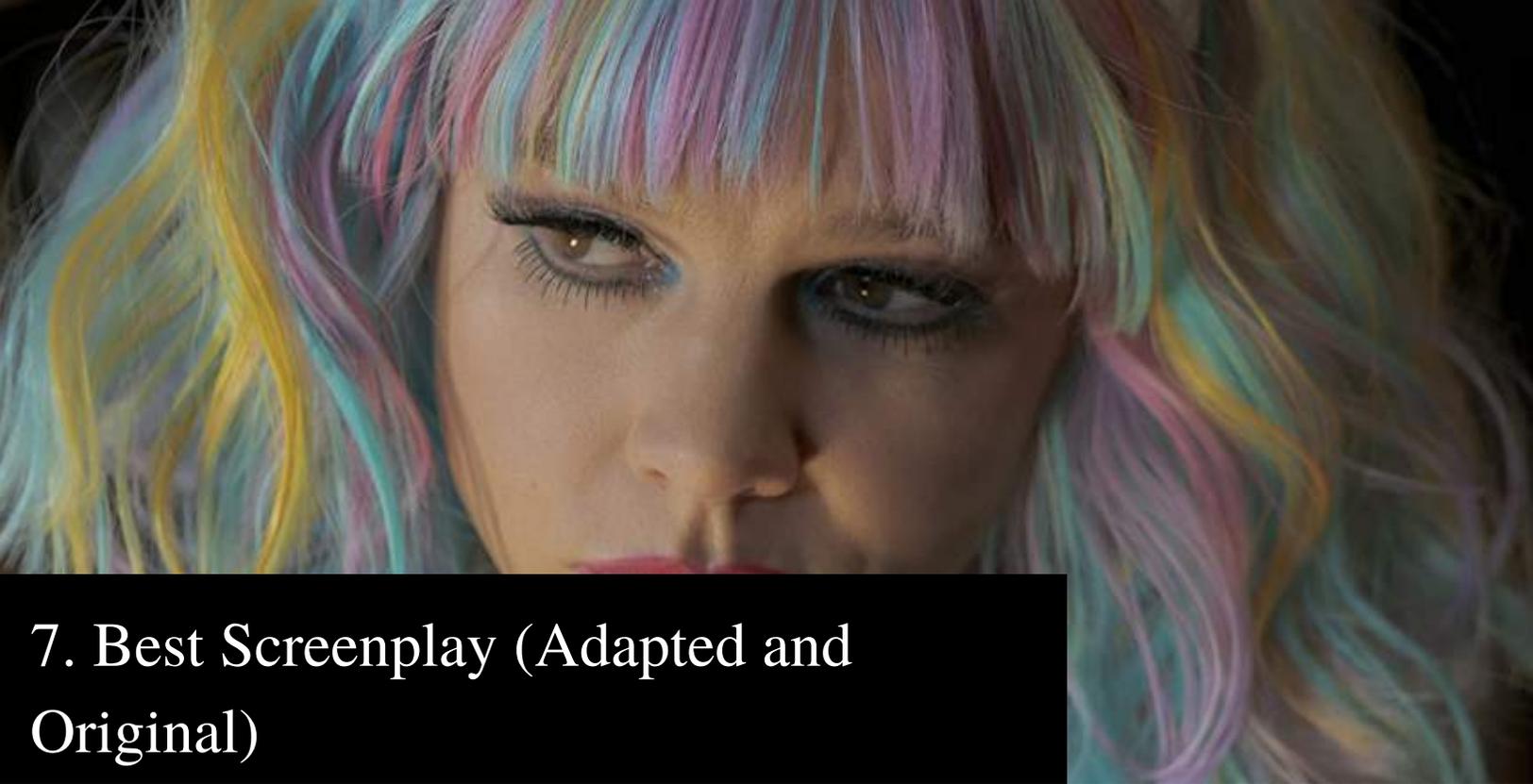
I have only three words to offer for this one. Sacha Baron Cohen. In a single year this man won us with both his hilarious performance in the largely successful mockumentary sequel to Borat and his portrayal of a hippie rebel with a cause in the Chicago 7. Although he has received a nomination for the latter alone, one must appreciate the sheer range this man has portrayed in this one year. Overshadowing a performer as looming as Redmayne, Cohen's heart-rending speeches and monologues were rousing and his palpable anger and rage one of the driving factors behind the overall impact of the film. While it indeed is strange to not see Eli Goree's spellbinding Cassius Clay interpretation from One Night In Miami here, it's clearly a two-horse race between Cohen and Daniel Kaluuya. The awards so far seem to indicate that Get Out star Daniel Kaluuya will land his first trophy for the restrained primality of his role as betrayed Black Panther Party chairman Fred Hampton. And honestly considering the Academy's record of awarded talented black men awards in the supporting actor category – this seems to be an easy win for Kaluuya unless Netflix does some real last-minute campaigning to secure a very deserving win for Cohen.



## 6. Best Supporting Actress

Glenn Close being nominated for the Hillbilly Elegy is all you need know about the compensatory nature of the Academy awards. And maybe, just maybe, this will finally be her year after her dangerously controversial loss to Olivia Colman in 2019. Amanda Seyfried was an early favorite for Mank, and rightfully so. One of the most redemptive features of the movie, her face seemed lit from within and she brought with herself a pure innocence that freshened the film in some of its most sluggish moments. But at the same time, it is satisfying to see Maria Bakalova lead the race for a genre role that is traditionally frowned upon. So far it seems a clear race for Maria Bakalova, but the gorgeous and sunny, Youn Yuh-jung might take home the award for her crowd-pleasing role as the immigrant family's good-humored and chatty grandma in Minari. Her win in this category seems to be one of the safest bets for the film too, considering the stiff competition it will face in other categories including Best Film, Director and Screenplay from Nomadland and The Trial of the Chicago 7.





## 7. Best Screenplay (Adapted and Original)

I have always had a personal issue with the bifurcation of this category and hence in penning this piece I will be clubbing the two categories. The race for adapted screenplay should be an easy win for Best Picture frontrunner *Nomadland* unless the Academy pulls a surprise with *Borat* Subsequent Moviefilm (remember the pleasant win of *Get Out* against *Three Billboards*?) which seems quite unlikely yet. Given my personal bias for family dramas I would have loved to see *Minari* win Best Original Screenplay and heal my hurt heart at Noah Baumbach's loss of the same for *Marriage Story* last year. But clearly it is going to be a close call between the electrifying feminist tragedy of *Promising Young Woman* and the Sorkin masterclass in writing that is *Trial of the Chicago 7*. Considering that much of the rousing brilliance of the latter is derived from powerful writing as opposed to the former which takes wings much to the winning turn of its leading lady and the directorial overtures of Fennel, it would be safe to bet on Sorkin – for now.





## Love, Longing and Lockdown Pt3

Shubhankar  
Sengupta

On the sixteenth day of the lockdown, Taposee woke up early and did a round of the house. While roaming in the kitchen, she found some unwashed utensils. She moved close to the sink, rubbed some vim on the Scotch-Brite and slowly started scrubbing them. The last time she had cleaned a utensil was during a Bangla bandh three years back. Biplob was invited by JNU to give a lecture on Marxism, Its Failures and Its Legacy and Saraswati had suddenly fallen ill. Alone in the house and restricted to go outside, she had to do all the household chores by herself for a day.

A *Koel* was calling at its highest pitch when she was about to sit having done the cleaning of the apartment. The sound led Taposee to the veranda. She tried to locate the bird on the trees adjacent to the apartment but couldn't. The algae had caused the pond water to turn green. No human being could be seen in the pathway close to the pond that led to the main road. Two dogs – one standing and the other one was circling it. Her heart was out in the free air talking to nature. She imagined herself flying like a bird with no boundaries, no lockdown to hold her a prisoner.

Back during their idle evenings, Taposee and Biplob would spread legs on the boundary wall of the Veranda, her leg on top of his, watching the sunset behind the buildings following the pond.

"Don't you think the view behaves like a pet?" Biplob had said, "it always brings a smile at the end of a hectic day."

"I never thought of it that way."

"Look at the pond forming the body. Its shallow edge looks like a face, fur-like weed growing around it. The coconut tree is resembling a tail."

"Are you sleep talking?"

When Biplob woke up that day, he saw the door of the guest room open. He rolled his eyes from left to right but found his eyes responding to the sound of a Rabindra Songeet-

Pran chay chakshu na chay,

The heart desires but denies the sight..

Slowly he paced near the Veranda with the intention of not making Taposee conscious.

She continued-

Milanosumudrobelay chiro,

At the time of rendezvous

But stopped seeing Biplob standing on the Veranda door, she didn't complete the line-

Bichchedojarjaro majja

The heart still dwells on the ache of separation...

"Why did you stop?"

She shrugged as she didn't know the answer to the question. For the first time since she had arrived, she was looking happy as if a bird had just been welcomed to the nest it built.

Later that day, Taposee was in her room, attending a virtual meet with her colleagues when she heard a loud sound. By the time she reached near the source, Biplob was sitting on the floor holding his head as blood trickled between the gaps of his fingers.

"What happened? Let me see."

As Taposee was about to touch the head, he said, "it's okay."

For a moment she forgot they were not together. For a moment, it didn't occur to her that she had no right to touch Biplob without his permission. And she came back to the reality when Biplob turned his face to the other side without making eye contact. There was a time they stole glances even when they were at the company of friends, but now, they somehow find it awkward to look at each other and talk at lengths when they are in the same room.



"Can you at least tell me where the first aid box is?"

"Same place."

Time and again, Taposee had told him not to wear slippers in the house, especially when the floor is wet. But as always, he had turned deaf ears to all her badgerings. And now that a thin stream of blood trickled down his forehead, all those badgerings were running in front of his eyes as he closed his eyes more out of shame than pain.

A flood of memories hit her as she entered what used to be their bedroom even a year back. The wall colour - butter yellow was chosen by her from the heavy shade card, the small book rack half-filled with books she had gifted him on birthdays, anniversaries or during their visit to the Kolkata boi mela, the hydraulic bed they had bought after they moved to this apartment, the long flower vase which was a gift from a former colleague when she was leaving her former employer, the table cloth beneath it – Biplob's mother had brought for her from a trip to Meghalaya and the wooden Almirah they got after a discount along with the bed.

She paced towards the Almirah and moved the nob. In the second rack from the top along with his clothes, was kept the first aid box.

Back in the kitchen, she took a cotton pad and applied Betadine on it.

"May I?"

He slowly removed his hand, making a deliberate effort not to look at her. They hadn't been this close for some time now. As she slowly wiped the blood from the forehead, his heavy breath touched her left arm, making him feel like a young man unable to fathom his next move in the proximity of the opposite sex.

. . .

Biplob never really took to smoking. At the end of the week, alone in his apartment, he enjoyed a peg or two of his single malt, now that Taposee was in the apartment he didn't feel the need to drink, he didn't feel lonely.

"I have stopped looking over the numbers," Biplob said over the phone one evening to a colleague as both were working on the material for the virtual meeting of the college faculty the next day. He changed the slides of the PowerPoint presentation rectifying a typo. "They are depressing. No government, be it central or state is going to do anything extraordinary to save the people. Whenever the people of the earth have crossed a line, so far that they can't even remember having crossed it, nature always draws a new line, over millions of dead bodies."

As the people started turning into mere numbers and statistics, Taposee and Biplob involuntarily started living like a married couple. During the initial days of the lockdown when they were in the same room, Biplob made a point to scream the numbers – the number of cases and the number of deaths in the country. Taposee would reply with a "hmm", audible enough to knock Biplob's ears. But then one day he stopped which surprisingly didn't result in any sort of complaint from Taposee.



"But I don't agree with you. How can you call this a genocide?" the person on the other side of the phone asked.

"Genocide is a form of a massacre. This is no different. The country from where it is said to have originated is documented to have fewer deaths than other countries."

"The oppositions are also saying that it's a conspiracy."

"The politicians have a habit of incorporating propaganda everywhere. They eat money and shit propaganda and feed their propaganda to people."

Biplob always had a strong political outlook, a staunch communist, something which he inherited from his father. The change of power in the state after thirty-three years had filled him with pessimism and scepticism. He never actively became a party member of the CPI(M) but was a part of a few pro-party groups on Social Media. Now and then he also shared a post or two on his social media feed. On the other hand, Taposee always held a neutral view. She criticized each political party on a case to case basis. Biplob always detested and often regarded her as a spineless woman.

Taposee came out of the room and went towards the fridge. She scanned the contents, and then as she was heading towards the room, Biplob asked, "You want something?" "Something to eat?" Taposee replied.

"Please hold a second," he said on the phone. Then he looked towards Taposee and said, "I have made some Halwa. It's in the pan in the kitchen."

"Okay."

"Yes, so as I was saying," he continued over the phone but focusing on Taposee. "Everything is planned. Let's say, on an island if I have three hundred people of three ethnicities and a virus outbreak. And I give the vaccine to the people of only one ethnicity and let the other two die, won't you call it Genocide? Something similar happened in the 1930s when Nazi used Typhus to disgrace Jews." At this moment, the laptop screen in front of him went blue, "What the?"

"What happened?"

"The laptop. It malfunctioned."

"The meeting? You know I am technologically handicapped and so are the other professors at the college."

"I know, I know. I will try to get it fixed. Let me try something and give you a call later."

Taposee came near the table and stood facing the laptop, holding a small bowl in her hand. She wanted to ask if she could help in some way, but something was stopping her as if the willingness to help had been subsided by the prospect of an insult.



On the other hand, Biplob was thinking about the meeting the next day. He long pressed the power button, but the light rejected any sign of glow, then he flipped the laptop and took out the battery- Inspecting the outer surface like a laptop mechanic with no knowledge in the subject.

"Can I do something?" she asked.

"Have you been learning how to fix a laptop lately?"

She feared this, but she instead chose to ignore the harsh comment. Taposee looked at Biplob's head. The baldness was more prominent. It had more grey hair than the last time she had noticed. At thirty-seven he looked in the late forties. They were growing apart, which meant that they were both growing old, Taposee thought and then shrugged it off her head.

"No," she said with authority. "But you can work on my laptop."

He found himself staring at the small black mole in her temple and looked away as soon as he realized what he was looking at. Whenever they made love, he made it a point to kiss the mole first. He believed it was a switch that aroused her.

"It's okay. I will manage."

At one moment, she thought of leaving things here and move towards the guest room, and then she knew Biplob had been stubborn all his life. Biplob also alleged her of being in the same category.

A trait that once brought them together was the reason for ripping them apart.

"It's of no use to me tomorrow." He looked hard at her, trying to penetrate her mind and read her thoughts. Then in a flash Biplob checked the date on his mobile – 2nd of May. Tomorrow is Sunday, he thought, she indeed won't be working tomorrow. "You have a meeting, right? I know hosting a web conference is tough, especially when people on the other side are techno-peasants..

You will have to make calls, tell them how to join. It will be a burden if you have only a mobile phone. Working with a laptop and phone will make things easier." She gave no choice to him this time

. . .

The next day when Taposee woke up, it was already ten. The dishes were clean, the clothes were washed and spread out in the veranda, and the floors smelled of phenyl. Without going to Biplob's room, she tried to listen to the sound of his existence inside, but there was none. She looked at the shoe rack and noticed Biplob's leather sandal was missing. There were books spread – right side up, notes, and a diary was scattered on the centre table of the drawing-room.

For years now, Biplob was working on a book about communism. With this lockdown, he thought of finishing the first draft he had been delaying for about two years.

When Biplob had proposed to Taposee for marriage, she got a bit surprised and had asked, "Are you serious?"

"I can swear on the Communist Manifesto," he had said.



Taposee stacked all the books now— one above the other and arranged all the papers in order. She read a few pages of the open diary bearing his handwritten notes and closed it, making a thaw sound. She had been brought in a family that believed an open book to be a curse. "All the gained knowledge disappears when a book is kept open for long," Jhumpa Pishi would say when she was small.

The apartment felt her for a moment. It was precisely four years, Biplob had bought this apartment. When Taposee had insisted on putting in money, Biplob made a pact with her. "I want to buy this apartment. I know you can pay, and we can repay the bank loan early. But please let me do this," he had said.

"Since when have you started acting patriarchal?"

"Since when did following a dream become a sign of patriarchy?"

They both peered at each other and then Biplob said, "Okay, let me buy this, and you'll sponsor every trip we make henceforth. Deal?"

"Deal."

And their lips had curved a smile.

No, this was never her house, she thought, coming back to the present. Biplob had always found out reasons when she wanted to make a big investment in renovating the house.

The car – his.

The Insurances and medi-claims – all his.

Nothing was mutual. Not even love.

She looked at the clock hanging above the fridge – Eleven. No sign of Biplob yet. Walking to her room, she grabbed her mobile. She knew, there won't be a message, or a call from him still couldn't help but look at it. She was right. No sign of a virtual presence too. She moved to the Veranda and stared at the path connecting the housing complex gate to their building in the hope of seeing him.

No luck either. The clothes were dry by now. Unclipping the clothes, she couldn't help but look at the gate. There were days when she worked from home, she would see his maroon Wagon-R emerge from the parking and slowly vanish into the traffic of the main road from the Veranda when he left for college where he taught. She was happy when he was away. She didn't have to think of Biplob and handle his recklessness.

It was twelve-thirty when Biplob came back with two bags in hand – One full of vegetables and another one having groceries. Taposee had thought several times to give him a call, but every time she was about to dial the number, someone from inside stopped her. When she saw him enter the door, she gave a hard look at him – sweat trickling down his forehead, and a facemask was hanging from the left ear. Biplob was surprised to see her sitting on the dining table with eyes stuck on the door. He wanted to say the reason for him being late, that he went to Saraswati's house to give her some money that he thought would help her survive during this period and while returning his old Scooty broke and he had to push it all the way. But he didn't say a word. His eyes kept staring at her as she kept the laptop for him to use for the meeting and walked to the guest room.

Biplob always wanted a child, Taposee was never ready. For the first few years, Biplob tried to persuade her, but when the years of marriage grew, the love plummeted between them. And soon he made himself believe that a childless marriage is as pointless as a cigarette-butt. That was the beginning of the end.

His constant bickering at the end of each day made Taposee furious after a point, and one day she decided to lie to him, "Let's give it a try."

Alone in the house one afternoon, Biplob sat in the dining table about to have his lunch. As he was about to open the rice cooker, he noticed the Ghee was missing. In the next fifteen minutes, he searched every corner of the house- the fridge, every rack in the kitchen, even the almirah as he thought Taposee might turn naughty and hide it away. Then as he was moving out of their bedroom, he wanted to give another try, so he searched Taposee's dressing table. It was there, behind the lipstick box in one of the lower racks along with it a strip of contraceptive pills- six of the pills missing.

That night they had a massive fight. Biplob, whose emotions never betrayed him, screamed at her for the first time. Taposee also revolted in the same way. First, she fought, and then as an act of revolt, she moved out of the apartment. She took a promotion which she had been delaying for some days because she didn't want to leave Kolkata and Biplob in a sign of rage.



She was left with questions- is this the same man she had once loved? Is this the same person for whom she was going to sacrifice her promotion because she had to change cities? Is having a child more important than living happily?

On the other hand, Biplob was inundated with thoughts too – Is asking for a child too much? What’s wrong in having the eagerness to begin a family?

. . .

The call was late at night, Biplob had already drifted off to sleep. With a heavy head, he answered, "hello."

The sound of soft sobbing preceded the words from the other end, "Jhumpa Pishi passed away this evening." This bad news alerted all his senses, and he sat on the bed. "The hospital called an hour back."

After the call had ended, he tiptoed out of the room without his slippers. As he was about to tap the door to the guest room, he heard a weak voice – Taposee was weeping. He barged inside without a knock. She was sitting on the floor with a pillow on her lap, her head against the willow of the bed. Biplob lowered his body, went on his knees, and kept a hand on her left shoulder. Her breathing was uneven. She said nothing, neither did he. And when the tension in the room and between the two of them was on the verge of melting, Biplob in sudden movement removed his hand as if he had a sudden realization and rushed out of the room.

. . .

On the Eighteenth of May, Taposee received a WhatsApp forward about a super cyclone in the Arabian Sea. As always, she thought, it won't affect most places of Kolkata and will move its course to Bangladesh. It never crossed her mind that she could be wrong.

Two days later, news of the cyclone and predictions of its destruction inundated every local news channel as Biplob changed one channel to another. Some said wind would blow up to 150 kilometres per hour, and some predicted more.

"Charge all your electronic gadgets," Biplob said, "we might have a power cut."

"Yes," Taposee was looking at the dark clouds from the glass window pane, "and my power bank is charging too. But I presume it won't be as serious as it looks like. The media also informed about the cyclone just a day back."

"Nature has a habit of showing its darker side whenever people try to scoff it off."



"A storm is a sign of change. It's not a sign of doom."

"This part of the land has not witnessed a category five cyclone in this century. A super cyclone is not to be taken lightly. The media is all caught up with the Covid crisis. They think this will just pass."

"Ma and Baba are worried; they strictly directed us to stay indoors."

Ignoring Taposee's decree, Biplob said with a tone of mockery, "Who names the cyclones?"

"Why?"

"*Amphan* or *Umphun* is a Thai word for sky. Sky is a name for a cyclone? Are you kidding me?"

. . .





# The Loudness of Rebellion

Soumini Banerjee

Your quintessential Bengali bhadro lok goes to the local club every Sunday. He reads the morning papers with a brewing golden tea smothering the air. He feels content in his own element. His ears pick up a conversation from the other table. They're talking about politics again. It's a never ending debate, they say, and the word "oppression" seems to buzz around a lot. "Oppression!", What does he think of when he hears that word ? Which page of his history book does he tear from his confused mind? He may draw a picture of a child, in his brown sepia uniform, standing somewhere in the desolate lane, staring at the scarred wall, the black trickled down ink of the symbol of swastika, haunting him, confusing him. "Hail fuhrer, hail fuhrer!", the streets chant, deafening his tired ears. He can't hear his own sobs.

Is there something else he hears? It's faint, faltering, the sound waves from a decade back, thousands of miles from farther west, the bludgeoned, even more subdued screeches of people in pain, as the lashes hit their sunburnt black spines, tears staining their face, mouths calling out "Master" to the suit wearing Southern whites in another land they named "The United States of America."



An indigo ink suddenly blotches his history book, the indigo that alludes to disaster, to his own people, to his own farmers, starved, deprived, death ridden, as the British Raj points at their misery, smirks in a way even 75 years of escape doesn't wipe the daring image of.

Does he really have to tear a history page when the newspaper is right in front of him? Yes, it's an ongoing revolution that makes the headlines, that creeps into the debates of his fellow elite club members, that forces you to "choose a side".

The man, clinking his spoon caressingly in his ice cold tea, is confused, and frustrated. Sounds familiar, doesn't it? Don't we reflect his emotions too? Every morning, a new feud. That brings us to this frequently asked, non unique, quite familiar and frankly a little repetitive question : Do we, in all our considerations of the real world, of our own land, of the people we see lying in their blood sweat and tears, get to call ourselves independent?

It's the rife of a century, the rupture of a decade, the chaos of years in developing. Humans are social creatures. Hence, to be social, naturally you'll have discord. Well, that's the most boiled down stripped off naked sphynx cat like justification you can ever provide. From the primeval clans to the monarchs of authority, from democracy to a very undemocratic glory, from brinks to bruises in corruption and malafides, we've come this far in our race.



He, the confused boomer, has had an epiphany in his gold lined dhyuti and khaki shoes on the linen couch. They, with backpacks and placards, with joined hands and in synced voices yell in desperation. He listens, he becomes aware, he gets inspired. He goes about his day thinking about it, “Good on them”. Next day he wakes up, and alas! The illuminating halo background musical of being inspired and motivated to rise to the occasion went away in a poof, and he goes on about his pensioned job like nothing's happened.

Riots, bloodshed, breakdowns, brutality, ah how the sparring technologically advancing age of the 21st century still crowds such words in our daily newspapers and twitter feeds. I mention the word technical, because there is no way you can look across to the other side without enduring the heavy punches of the next flagship quantum computer , digital currency taking over those cash notes you keep in your purse, or a literal brain chip landing inside you brain. (As if the movie Inception has not scared us within the screens already) . These talks of advancement , major looms and journeying through time in innovations of your next best digital dwelling home, feeding the paychecks of billionaires, inciting investment scores through the roofs, really shadow over the true meaning of democracy. Economics has come up with a word for that don't we ? Capitalism, or it which shall not be named, disbarring in promoting corporate cash flow in the name of progression. The throne holders up there do bloom with their progressive stance on economy , in raising the global gdp , in opening up their adorned gates to innovation. But, when are we getting the stats on the innovation of democracy ? Are we looking at research that actually points to the interests of the people screaming in agony outside their homes ?





Aaron Sorkin in his wits and nimbleness embarks upon four eccentric men , who are rebels from real life manifested on the laps of a brilliant courtroom drama. The ethical conundrum of violence in the name of inoculating freedom in the bloods civility is a dilemma encountered through it .The four rebels faced allegations against “conspiracy” through breach of state lines with an intent to incite a riot, a riot essentially condemning the brutality of the horrendous concurrences of the Vietnam war, the unjust blatancy of American bodies falling down. The complementary “violence to end violence” trope sets out a long standing trial ,showcased in an impeccable gut wrenching courtroom setting, with brilliant dialogues riddled in classic Sorkin humor and grit ,with a large overarching billboard of words screaming issues that will always trouble America's corrupt bureaucracy.

The concept of relevance , purpose , and how screens entail reality is especially highlighted through the so called “Conspiracy 7”, by the ensemble cast , where the different idiosyncratic individuals,

Tom Hayden, the leader ,the Yippies, played by Eddie Redmayne , Abbie Hoffman & Jerry Rubin , portrayed by Sasha Baron Cohen and Jeremy Strong ,Bobby Seale, David Dellinger among others. While the performances were immaculate in their portrayals each, the stand out remains Abbie Hoffman, and how Cohen was the sole repertoire of reflecting the icon of the anti-war movement and the counterculture community.



Of the droll, comedic stills and frills of scenes that he has been part of, Abbie's most memorable scene definitely roots from his line of questioning by brittle lawyer Richard Schultz played by Joseph Gordon Levit, when asked on peace and its relation to rioting :

Lawyer: So how do you overthrow or dismember the government peacefully?

Abbie: In this country we do it every four years.

That protesting caused more of a change in leadership than the voting system is hilarity in darkness.

These Chicago 7's, through their conducts on their country's denomination to bloodshed, only shows how long we have come from the 1968 magnanimous havoc of rebellions, or if we ever evolved in that sense. The Vietnam War was a brazen smoke of American soldiers pouring their blood out in merciless exile, which only but poses as a sample for what our world looks like right now. The release of this film also came out in a time as apt and relevant as it can be, when the brinks of the infamous American elections reached its traction. Only the hazards of Donald Trump allude to the then-President Richard Nixon's disaffection in regaining the notoriety that is the American Democracy. The 1968 democratic convention was a massive blunder in the government's hands, and the public discourse that went behind stopping the vote counts is eerily, frighteningly and yes almost too coincidentally familiar with the pandemic induced electoral counts of the 2020 general elections.

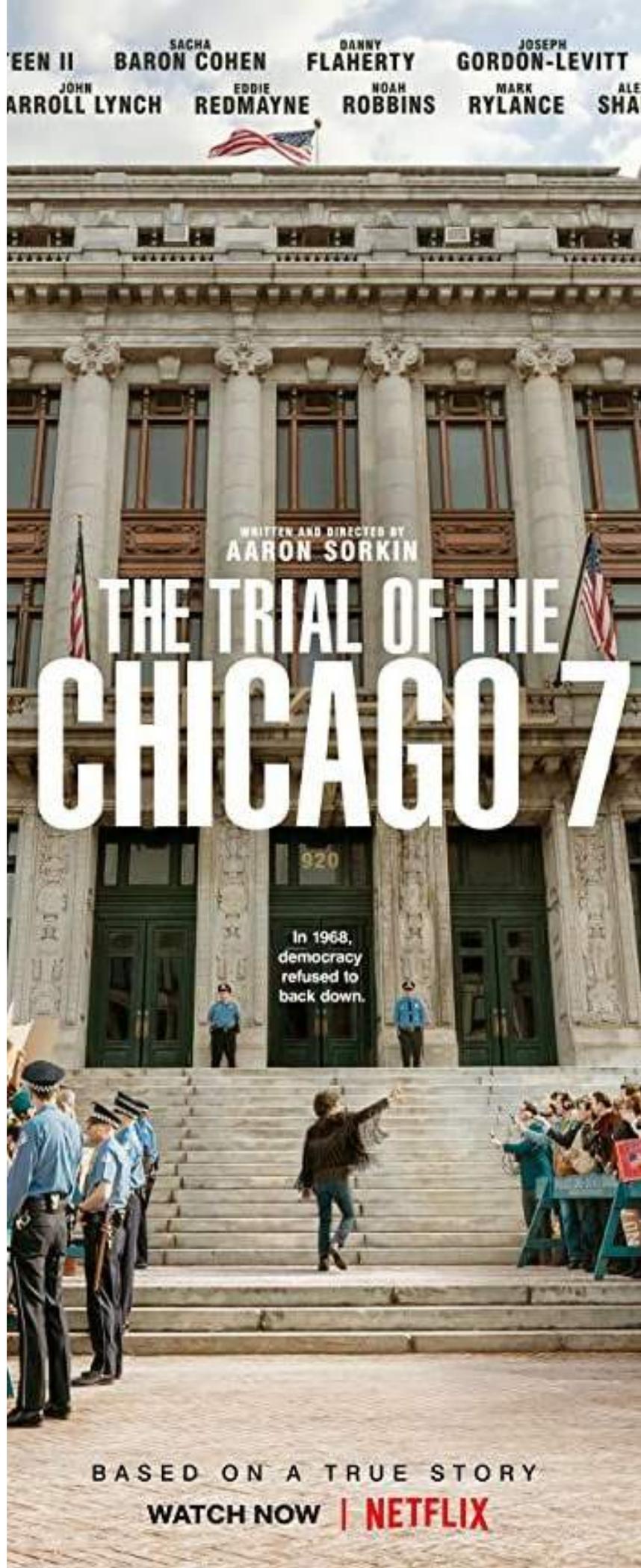
Furthermore, the lack of of hope , of trust in our books we keep on men of authority, is a scarring reflection shone in all over the world, from the hardened military coup to the onerous spate of sexual assault allegations, from the stagnancy of dictatorship to blatant ignorance of protests widened, people screamed, the world watched in dissonance.





*"Papers say," Congress is deadlocked and can't act. " I think that is the greatest blessing that could befall this country."*

It is a delirium of a choice, to either lend the power to the hands of the people , and live in unorganised chaos , or keep the global monarch alive , and stray from democracy , forever. Well. forever unless the world out of the blue comes under an alien invasion. Supposedly, hope of regaining freedom under their purview lies there too and that's how far we have come from the events of Chicago 7, and that's how far we have arrived from the history we dread from.





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*Monograph believes in supporting artists and collectives that support such artists. Thahor, an art collective, is one such establishment that sells art made by young and budding artists.*

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*Contact them on instagram, support them and collaborate with them.*

*Let's support this homegrown collective that aims to popularize young budding artists.*

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# Thahor.

Thahor came to existence in 2020 before the pandemic struck us. It is very new and at this point of time it is willing to do things that are not thought of. Thahor means determination. We are aware of the art scene in Calcutta, and given how the small businesses of local artists suffer, we, the team of Thahor decided to help these local artists with their business. Thahor is an art collective that aims to help the local artists uplift their business and grow and for that we are reaching out to different artists, asking them to become a part of the team so that we can grow together and help each other in this process where we will be trying our best to reach out to the consumers and bring the business right to our artists' door.

Regards

Team Thahor



# Winter Nights

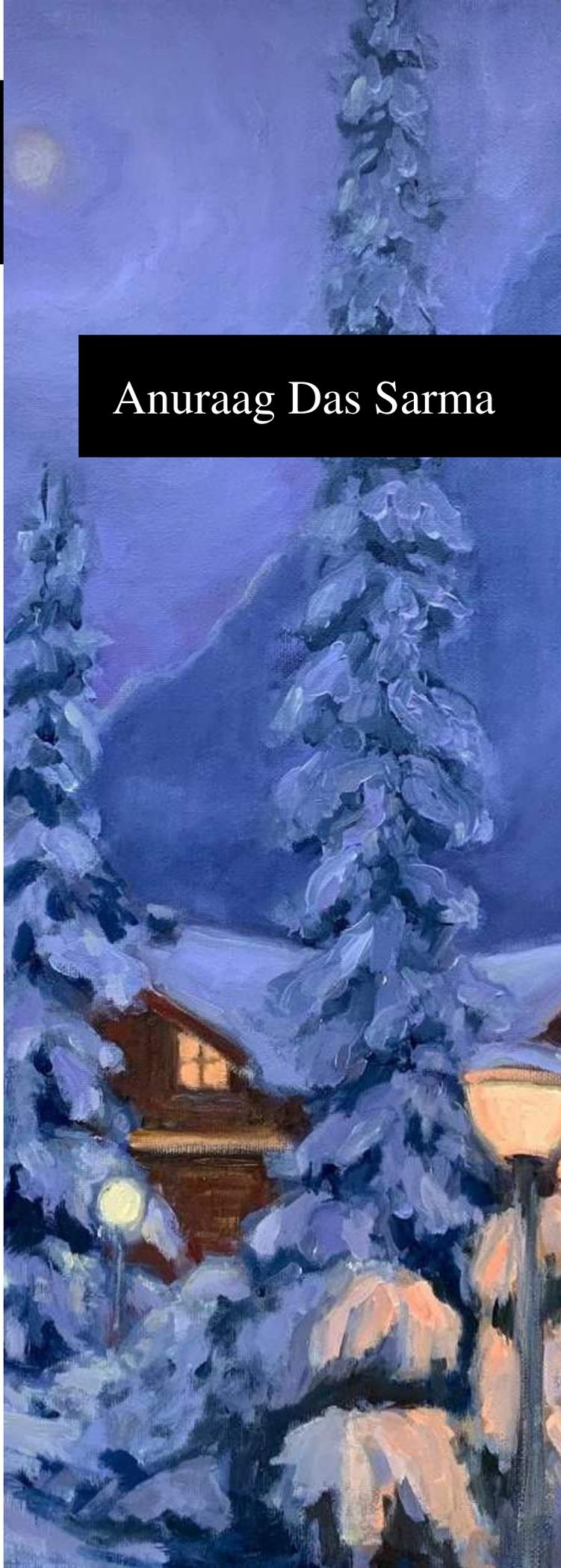
Winter comes, clouds part;  
Dahlias all 'round.  
Autumn winds, blowing cold,  
On barren grounds.

Maiden love, Lover's spat-  
Buttons undone.  
Picnic tables empty now,  
And down goes the sun.

Fireflies on frozen lakes,  
The moon descends.  
Ice capades on empty lanes,  
Lovers consent.

To the tune of Mulligan,  
Street lights dance.  
Passing over starry nights,  
Lovers advance.

Tachycardia takes hold,  
But they dance so slow.  
Winter nights, lonely nights;  
They come and they go.



Anuraag Das Sarma

# Gypsy Killed The Moon

Anuraag Das Sarma

*Minor Swing on a full moon night,  
The Gypsy entertains;  
His lover old, her dress so white,  
Her hands bound in chains.*

*“I’ll be back, o’ my darling bride,  
Do not be afraid.  
The night is calling me aside  
For a gentle serenade.”*

*Lost behind a thin cloth veil,  
The Gypsy calls out,  
To the moon to ready her sails,  
“Your guards,” he says, “without.”*

*The conch is heard across the sky,  
As the moon descends;  
Her breasts of tin, her heart resigns,  
Dusk comes to an end.*



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*The gypsy shoots his handmade gun,  
The bullet takes a life.  
The night moves on, its work undone,  
It lives in careless strife.*

*“O’ Why did you bind me in chains?”  
Asks his gypsy bride,  
“My love, I couldn’t let you see,  
What just happened outside.”*

*“I’ll see you tonight in my dreams  
We’ll be under the stars,  
The moon dressed all in velveteen  
Bereft of any scars.”*

*“I’ll see you tonight, in my dreams,”  
Repeats his loving wife,  
“We’ll be beside a moonlit stream  
Living new lives.”*

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# बेशकल दशत

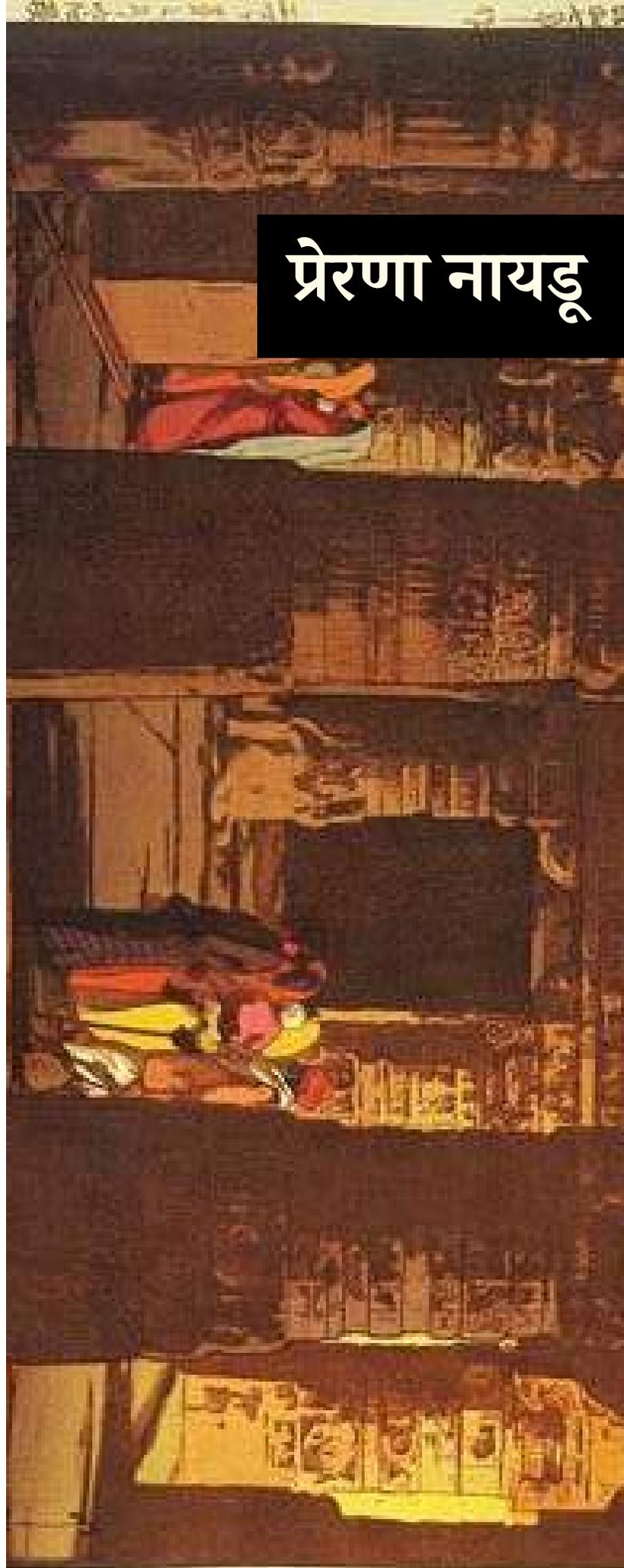
प्रेरणा नायडू

बेशकल दशत  
मन का शहर वीराना

आज दिल यहाँ दौड़ आया  
न जाने कौनसी बातें बो आया

रूह से खून का सबब  
अब मालूम हुआ  
दीवारों पे यहाँ

ज़ख़म जो कुरेदे है



# Kritya's Sari

I walk the path; I started a long time ago.  
There used to be others with me  
But, no longer do I see, anyone else.

I was destined,  
Determined,  
To change the world.  
Here I am today – lost, abandoned.

They judge me,  
Their hungry eyes roaming around my body.  
I no longer care.

There were tears, I think,  
I can taste the saltiness on my lips.  
I gulp them down; to remind myself of the taste,  
of humiliation,  
of shame,  
of inner strength.

I hear voices.  
The sounds clanging on my skull like tolling  
bells.  
I no longer understand what they speak.



Shayan Chatterjee





Something rustles at my feet.  
A torn piece of my sari.  
I stare, unaware of the stares.

There's movement inside my head,  
throbbing.  
I see a flash of light.  
Realization dawns,  
but I no longer care.

A scream swells in my throat,  
A perilous call  
to the assembled men,  
cowardly in their stance.

Someone yells my name,  
I pretend not to hear.  
It's part of an insipid game,  
I mutter to myself mere.

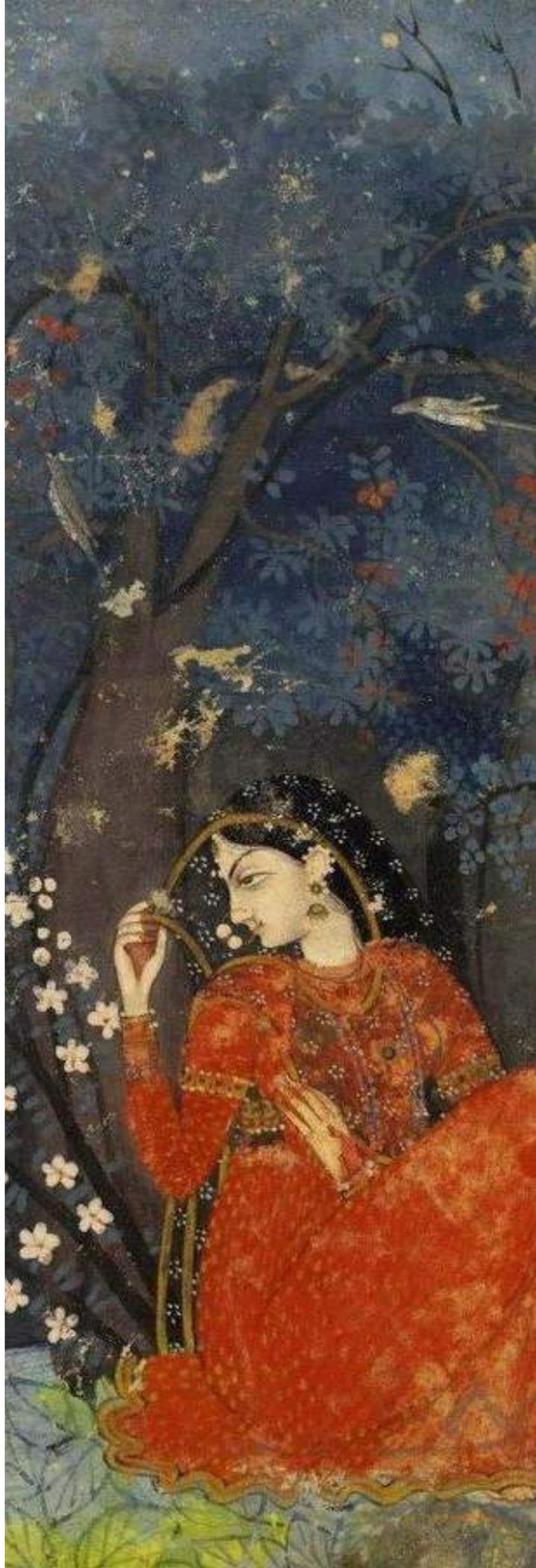
They judge me,  
for sleeping with five men.  
Call me a whore.  
Will not, furthermore.  
For I no longer care.  
For the time has come,  
for me, to become  
Kritya.

For all I know now, is that,  
I am me; no one matters.  
And as destined, I will bring about  
change.

It is time for me,  
to humiliate,  
to make the perpetrators aware,  
of what a Kritya can do.



Somewhere, I feel vindicated.  
For I know that all I said will come  
to pass.  
And as I walk the length of the site  
of ruin,  
not mine, but of these dastardly  
men,  
my body bare, bereft of vanity,  
I know,  
They will not judge me anymore.  
For all that is left, is a strip of a  
Kritya's sari.



# Lucid Dreams

Let me fly like an eagle above the  
mockingbird.

Don't cut of my wings, cause it will cause  
me pain.

Don't lock me up either,  
Embrace me for a change.

Let me sleep at night with peace,  
With dreams of eclectic fairy tales.

Let me wake up to the euphonious birds,  
Let me live life with no ail.

Wouldn't that be a dream ?

Though it will never come true.

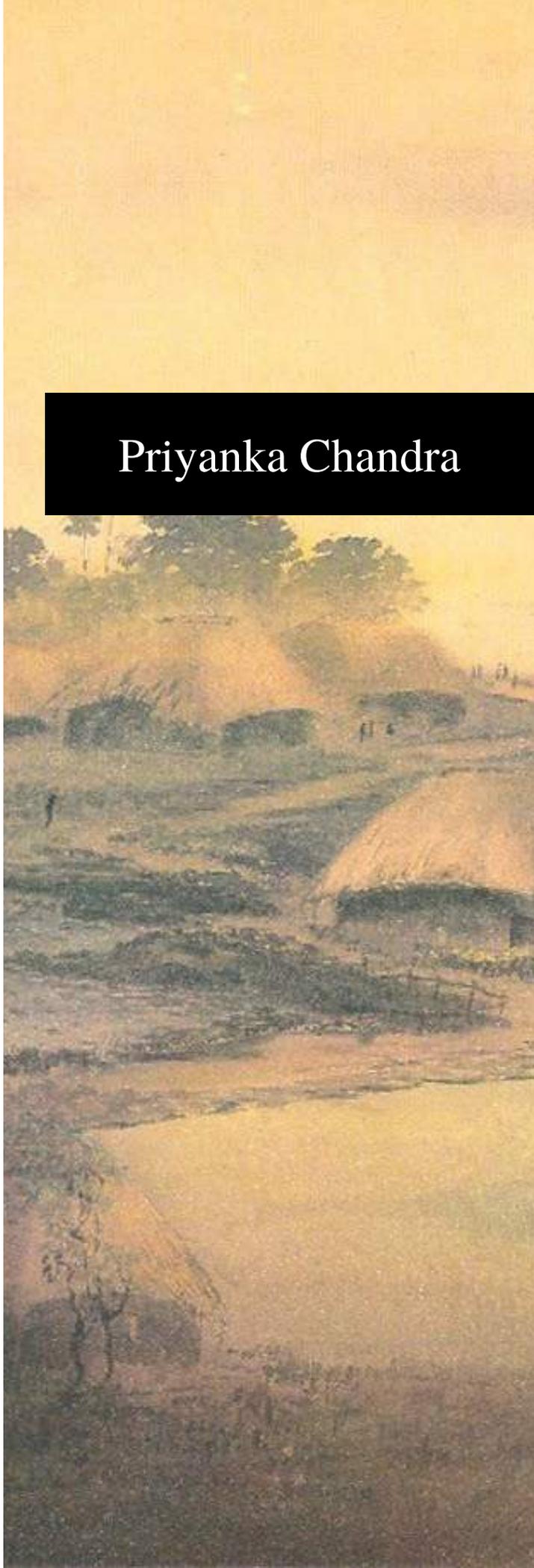
Maybe it will in heaven,

But right now, life is filled with a myriad  
of issues.

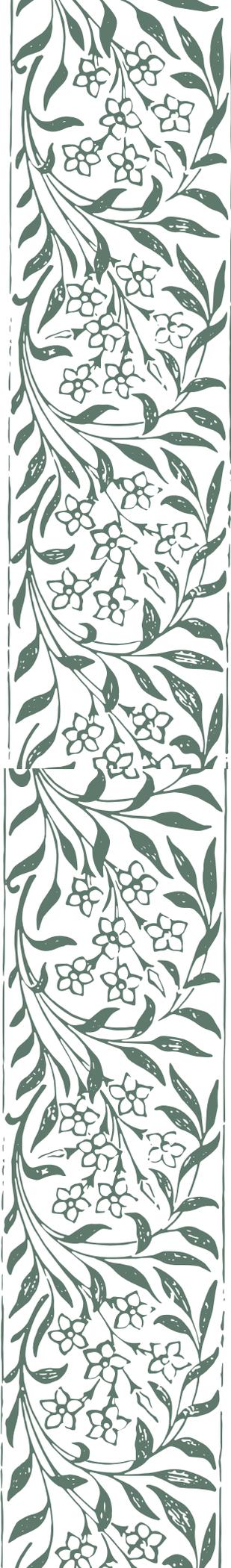
But let me at least hallucinate this life,

Even though it would be a false  
perception.

I can't be honest with myself now,  
So let me live life with deception.



Priyanka Chandra



*Monograph  
Interviews:  
Meghdut  
Roy  
Chowdhury*

On the 23rd of March, our Senior Editor sat down with the wonderful Meghdut Roy Chowdhury. The interview was video recorded and will be up on our YouTube page on the 7th of April. Stay tuned for the full interview!

The following transcript is an excerpt from the aforementioned interview.



# Meghdut Roy Chowdhury

Meghdut Roy Chowdhury is the founder of Offbeat CCU, Topcat CCU, and Blooperhouse Studios. He is also the Chairperson to head the Entrepreneurship committee and Skill Development Initiatives of the Bengal Chamber of Commerce and Industries and the Director of Global Operations for Techno India

*1) We have been researching about you for a while and something that keeps coming up here and there is you defining yourself as a “lifelong un-learner”. However, considering the state of the current education system, does a conventional education system like this support such un-learners?*

It should. Things have changed very rapidly in these recent times and I would consider myself as an outlier. I didn't go to the top schools or any elite schools here in Calcutta. But, I went to schools that were not bad such as Birla High School and St. Lawrence High School. However, even there I was considered an outlier because of the personality I have. Ever since I was a child, I always conducted shows, hosted award ceremonies, always stood first in class. The reason why I consider myself as an “un-learner” is because if I don't feel challenged by the kids of today and feel that there is no scope to learn, I will never grow as an individual. If I start thinking that there is nothing left to be accomplished and nothing left to learn, then a place like Offbeat would never have existed. I would have never tried to push the boundaries for what's possible.



I come from a lot of privilege. So much so that even if I wouldn't have worked a day in my life, it would not have mattered. Then why did I put in so much time and effort? It's because, for me, it's an attempt to give back to my city. I know that Calcutta has a lot of potential. The people in Calcutta have that hunger but it gets unleashed when they move to another city. That's because in here, there is no scope to un-learn. And if you are not un-learning, you aren't really learning. The development of the world in the paradigm we live in has been so rapid that unless you're unlearning, you aren't learning. This is the reason why I consider myself a lifelong un-learner, alongside things like Kolkata lover. These are things that come from within.

***2) Our next question is about something which you are really close to and that is music. You have founded Topcat CCU and Offbeat where shows are hosted very frequently and Calcutta is a city that has seen music in phases. We had Rabindranath Tagore, followed by Hemanta Mukherjee, followed by Mohiner Ghoraguli, then the Jibonmukhi Gaan phase heralded by Anjan Dutta and Kabir Suman. As youngsters, we don't think we have enough people in our generation who looks up to them. Is this true? If yes, then why do you think it is so and what is the possible reason behind it?***

I think, the lack of modern day idols is not just restricted to the world of music. Calcutta is a city nostalgia and a city where people constantly make references about people who have died a hundred years go. Now, is there something wrong with that? Yes and no. On one hand, you see Rabindranath Tagore as an icon who upholds Bengal. The entire history and personality of this city is derived from its hero – Rabindranath Tagore and will continue to do so in the near future no matter how many people succeed him. It is because of the range of things he did and also because of the fact that he was considered a visionary in his time.





Sadly, Calcutta these days has been sold to so much mediocrity. What I feel ended up happening is modern day culture has lost its meaning. The rich and the nouveau riche have money but aren't really acquainted with the culture and its importance in Calcutta as such and then they end up giving in to Bollywood music. It is not the lack of venues in cities. If you think about the number of venues in Calcutta that has sprung up over the course of a year and if even one tenth of those venues contributed one day a week to good music, music which is not a derivative or just simply covers; it would make a huge difference. Take Punjabi music for instance. Artists like Diljit Dosanjh are killing it and I find that as a source of inspiration. He is being able to commercialize his music and is a pop icon. Why are we not as proud of our Bengali music? Why do we still have to praise other musicians from Kolkata who are doing English or any other form of music? I believe that one should do any type of music but not derived from anybody else's music. You can be derivative in order to gain your name but once you are famous, you should push your own narrative.





***3) BlooperHouse Studios was founded by you when you were 19. What are the pros and cons of starting at such a young age?***

It's all pros, there's no cons. No cons because you have no responsibilities. What I realized over the years is the fact that I have tried to push the entrepreneurship envelope too hard. You cannot make an entrepreneur of somebody who does not want to be one. Some people have it in them, some people need a little brushing up and some people do not have it in them and have no interest in it either. When I say I am an un-learner, I also un-learn things about myself. So, I pushed the envelope for people a bit too hard who were not interested in being entrepreneurs. And I learn a lot from people. On an average, I meet about 50 new people every day and I get to learn something from each of them. I cannot have an air during the un-learning process. I stand for accessibility of knowledge and accessibility of information. So, there aren't really any cons. If you are in between the age of 18 to 21, get your hands on some cash and start something of your own that really pulls you. What sets apart successful entrepreneurs from not so successful entrepreneurs is your resilience. You have to have the resilience to wake up each morning and work on what you want to do.





#### ***4) Is your perspective on education and your love for music interconnected? If so, how?***

Tomorrow's advanced version of the Homo sapiens will be the assimilation of various kinds of intelligence such as music, art, dance, education, everything. It is all about recognizing patterns in human behavior. Behavioural and Cognitive sciences are things that are the most important aspects of the future and has been so for the past as well. The most successful individuals have been those who understand what is happening around them and are able to mould themselves according to that. The industries that I am in include hospitality, education, entertainment, entrepreneurship awareness and also consider myself as the gatekeeper of comedy, culture, music and so on. Now, through the same event, I can drive three of those verticals minimum. It's not only important for me but also for people who are attending that event to take away something from the event that they weren't aware of before. From studying these patterns, I have realized that learning happens best when you encounter personalities or ideologies that completely baffles you. That's when you truly learn. Social media on the other hand, does not allow you to do that. It tries to keep you in a bubble and not get out of it and stick to people who are exactly like you. So, I would want to work on more disciplines and industries tomorrow because none of them are linear and everything borrows from everything else. We exist in a world where 7 billion people are all different from each other. If I am not being able to learn about what all these people think about in my everyday journey, then am I doing my job as a curator?





***5) How do we make Calcutta relevant again? How do we, as a city, ensure that we are self-sustainable?***

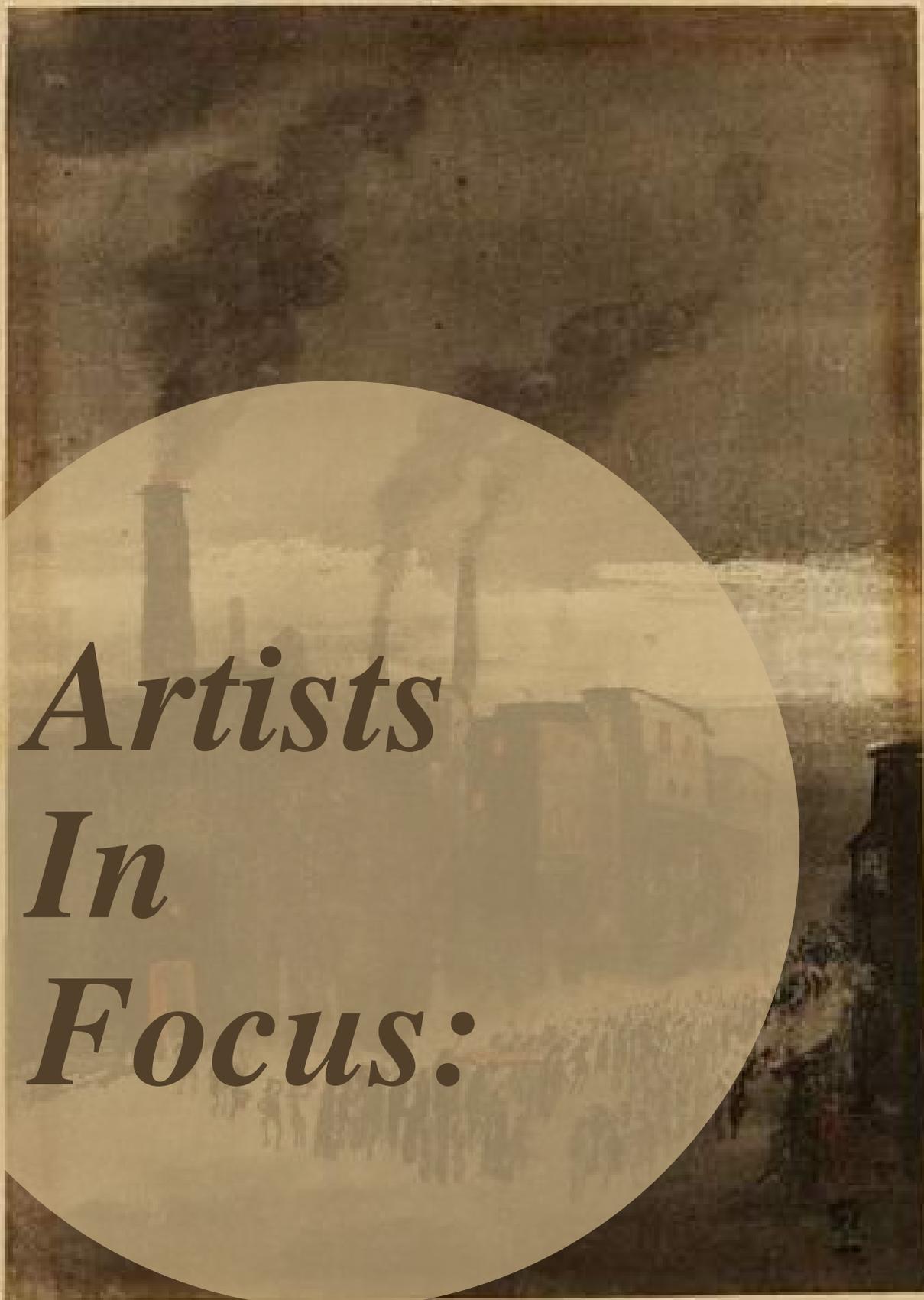
First of all, there is a lot of bias in the statement that you made and let me point it out. One, yes, the youth of Calcutta are leaving the city but they are not just leaving the city for the lack of economic opportunities, they are leaving for fun things to do as well. What I believe is that if we want to make Calcutta relevant again, we just have to make Calcutta fun again. It is about giving people enough reason to come back. Make people jealous about the amount of fun you are having in this city and automatically the perception of the city will change. It is also important to note that Calcutta has largely contributed to our GDP for medium and small-sized industries and the people that run these businesses are having a lot of fun. It's mostly Bengalis who have taken to their head that there is nothing left to do here. So, young people need to be financially a bit more sufficient so that you can go out and have fun. If we can keep pushing that narrative that Calcutta is not just a city for old and retired people that you come back to when you are retired, then maybe things will change.



**6) *Finally, do you have anything to say to the viewers at home?***

The only thing that I would want to say is that don't be complacent. Don't get complacent with what you achieved and what you have done because there is somebody out there who is already hustling hard enough to do what you are doing. Let's also not forget that that what we all do at the end of the day is not truly original, it is in some way derived from something that somebody else has done. Philosophically and objectively speaking, there is some form of what we are doing existing somewhere else no matter how novel we say it is that we're doing. Keep building on it, especially if you are a builder by nature. Just keep re-inventing yourself because at the end of the day, if you stop working, if you stop feeling the need to keep evolving, then you are going to go out of business very soon and also redundant very soon. No leader lasts forever, no president lasts forever, no ideology lasts forever. It's all about how long you can re-inventing. So, never stop learning. That's the last message I want to give.

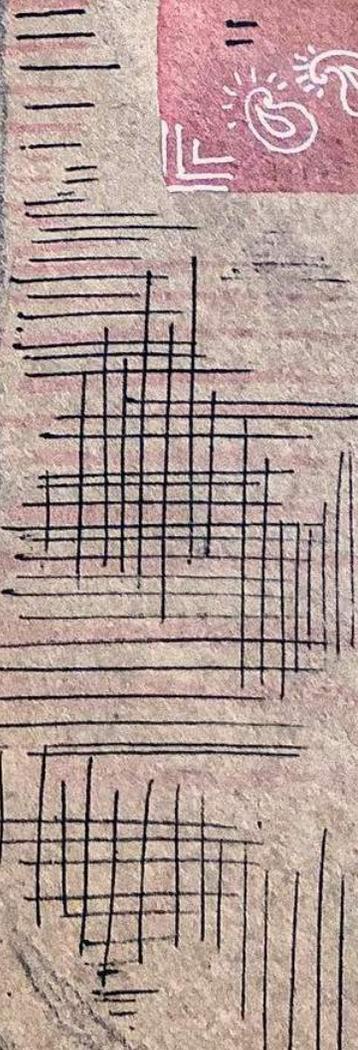




*Artists  
In  
Focus:*

चक्रव्यूह में धसने से पहले मैं  
कौन था और मैं कैसा था,  
यह मुझे याद  
नहीं रहेगा।  
चक्रव्यूह और मेरे बीच  
सिर्फ जानलेवा  
निष्ठा है।

= अक्ष  
- सत्



Prerna Naidu

naidongg



*Snayini Das*



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## Special Thanks To:

*Meghdut Roy Chowdhury*

*&*

*Team Thahor*

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