

MONOGRAPH

STUDENT-LED ARTS MAGAZINE



YEAR
2.
10



THE COLONIAL
CITY →
(A POEM IN
FOUR PARTS)

DIVINING
THE PAST
AMIT
SHAH





MONOGRAPH

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Editor's Note

By Anuraag Das Sarma

Editorial: On Poetry

By Anuraag Das Sarma

Divining The Past

By Amit Shah

Notes Of A Summer

By Amit Shah

The Sea

By Sarah Hall Murphy

Aapna Time (Kab) Aayega?

By Prantik Ali

The Colonial City

By Anuraag Das Sarma

Gardening Is A Lovely Hobby

By Arundhuti Das Gupta

Don't Answer Back

By Nameera Anjum

Bleach Free

By Amiya Hisham

Editor's Note



This issue of Monograph promises to be an especially wonderful one, reaffirming my faith in this little magazine that but two years ago was a pipe dream. Of note is the immensely talented Sarah Hall Murphy, a young author from the North of England. Her short story, 'The Sea' carries with it a sense of incomparable melancholic beauty, and more than solidifies her talent as a rare voice in contemporary society. It is, by all means, one of the best short stories we've published, and we hope to see more of her in future issues.

We also have two essays from the brilliant Amit Shah, a retired Publishing Executive currently living in Somerville, Massachusetts. The essays, excerpts from his wonderful book 'Instincts of Beauty', are small autobiographical glimpses into his life in India. Beautifully crafted, his writing deserves to be read and re-read. It is, again, by all means, some of the best writing Monograph has ever seen.

We also have a wonderful article by Prantik Ali a student of Presidency University, Calcutta, wherein he explores the struggles of Muslim Ghetto Dwellers in Bombay, through the lens of 'Salim Langde Pe Mat Ro' and 'Gully Boy'. It is a pertinent article, one I believe needs to be consumed by all readers of the Magazine.





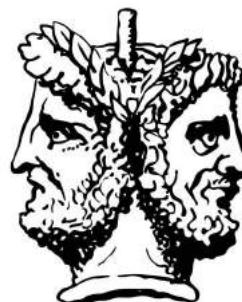
Coming to the section of Poetry, I have included a small editorial titled 'On Poetry', that examines the state of both traditional and modern poetry, and seems to search for a common ground. If one would like to read more on the art of understanding and writing poetry, I'd highly recommend Sri Aurobindo's treatise on it, titled "The Future Poetry".

We also have a wonderful collection of poetry by immensely talented poets, namely Nameera Anjum Khan, whose poem 'Don't Answer Back' explores the guilt of a child who lost their mother at birth; Amiya Hisham's 'Bleach Free' which reflects on the nature of Visual Space on social media, and Arundhuti Das Gupta's ruminations on love and loneliness through the death of an old crone and the disappearance of their garden.

I have also included a poem of mine, titled 'The Colonial City'. Divided over 4 parts, it covers the city of Calcutta in all its contradictions. A colonial city, occupied both by the Colonial 'Bhadralok', and the rural 'chotolok', I aim to trace the current state of the city, in all its trepidations.

I hope you enjoy reading this issue of Monograph as much as we have enjoyed putting it together.

***Anuraag Das Sarma
Editor-in-Chief
Monograph***



Editorial: On Poetry

Anuraag Das Sarma



The tragedy of modern poetry does not lie in its modernism, nor does it lie in its seeming lack of pattern, rhyme or scheme. When done well, modernist poetry can rise above its pretense of inward thought and give way to the endless spirituality of life. A poet should never write to portray the truth, that is the job of the philosopher. Instead, it is the duty of the poet to write of life, with all its trepidations, apprehensions, and in true poetic fashion, the beauty of these immensely human emotions. What Shakespeare or Browning had, or even Kalidasa or Chandrabati, was this inward understanding of the outward nature of life. They lived not to write but to live, and they brought forth this quality of theirs through unmatched verse.

It was, admittedly, simpler for them to do so, for they lived in an age when the language was still being developed, and was open to experimentation. While their contemporaries, lesser greats but geniuses in their own rights, wrote or spoke, they did so in exuberant dialogue, putting all their passions in the act of verse. Where others fell short, and where Shakespeare for example, shined, was in his understanding of the outward nature of dramatic poetry. Over the years, few have been able to grasp this quality of poetry, turning instead entirely to inward reckonings of the swift-paced world. This inward understanding is supremely important for poetry, and it is imperative for a poet of any standing to have this quality, but only when this inward action is mixed with the worldliness of the outward nature of life, can poetry rise above shallow ground, to reach the stratosphere like Shelley's skylark. Onward and beyond.

The reason behind this inward movement of modernist poetry can be attributed to the modernity of life. Our beliefs have changed, our actions have outgrown our own selves, and our inner connection to nature seems to be permanently broken. Our primary difficulties are no more survival, nor are they as rudimentary as they once were. Our problems now lie, not with the outer world, but with our own selves. We are preoccupied with our own being, endlessly in thought of our own humanity and constantly in worry of our own actuality. But the very quality of our existence, the very nature of our souls, lies in our outward nature. It lies in our ability to find joy in the beauty of this world we inhabit; of a sunset or of the changing of seasons. And in moments of absolute tranquility, it is still possible for us to be moved by our minuteness in the face of a glorious sunrise. And it is this absolute tranquility that we need to bring to the forefront of our poetry. In the modern, or traditional style, it is this sense of ease with nature, with the world, and with our place in it, that we need to utilize. To bring forth a seismic shift in our poetic calibers we need to develop an understanding of nature, of the world we inhabit, and of the people we meet. Such a channeling of our true selves, when there is nothing but poetic movement in our mind and body, can truly uplift poetry from its current state to one of oneness with the spiritual hum of artistic creation.

It is anything but an easy task, for even when we turn to the greats, very few of them were able to harness this power, to mix inward thought with outward nature. But it is our duty, all of us who bind ourselves to the art of poetry, to strive to do what a few have managed to do before us. We might not all succeed, but in our constant poetic endeavor, we might be able to churn out a poem that outlasts us all.

Divining The Past

Amit Shah



"Memoir is not an act of history but an act of memory, which is innately corrupt." ~ Mary Karr

I.

There is nothing like perfect recall. That's a scientific fact. It would follow that there's no perfect remembering either. We know that eyewitness accounts are suspect for infallible recounting of the original. As experts maintain, there's a difference between malleability and reliability. Childhood memories are often of emotional and coherent memories that bind the durability. What we remember and how often is of great consequence to our adult lives. It's the narrative arc of our lives.

I can't remember many cloudy and rain-soaked days of my childhood. This from a Bengali boy growing up less than 70 miles from the Bay of Bengal delta where the monsoons sent sheets upon blinding sheets of rains each year!

One such day (was it a weekend or simply a weekday evening?) was when the sky was a deep gray green and the rain was falling faster and faster, straight down and landing with splotchy phlat phlat, creating a muddy heaven on the grassy fields across from my house, the playing fields at the blind school in Behala. I remember being on one of the fields playing with a soccer ball, dribbling, kicking, chasing, and back-footing, bare feet, in the torrent, glasses barely functional and soaked to my skin. Why? I have no memory. What's the narrative here? I wanted to escape my parents' squabbling in the house?

I wanted to do something alone? I was doing something that most adults wouldn't do? Whatever, it was, it was emotional and coherent in its pleasure that I retained all these years.

II.

We would angle northwest out of Kolkata in the dead of the night to avoid the traffic, especially the long-distance trucks and head toward Hazaribagh via the Grand Trunk Road (known then as G.T. Road), which wound its way through narrow roads past jute mills alongside the Hooghly River.

The Grand Trunk Road is of Kiplingesque renown. For a few thousand years it fused Central Asia to the Indian subcontinent as the major trade route. It was rumored in my family that my ancestors traveled from the Punjab to north Bengal along this highway and eventually converted from Islam to Christianity in the early part of the 19th century. (To establish that as fact will be another day). Nowadays, the G.T. Road is a part of a series of national highways, laned and svelte where BMWs, Mercedes trucks and Indian Maruti Suzuki Balenos, Tata Safari SUVs and Nissan Kicks jockey for lane positions.

41144 E., darunter 488532 Hindu, 218158 Mosammedaner, 29904 Christen, 2100 Buddhisten, 1399 Juden, auch Neger, Chinesen und Malaien.



Kalkutta (Situationsplan).

Mit Haura (s. d.) am rechten Hugliufer, erreicht die Bevölkerung 857 750 E.



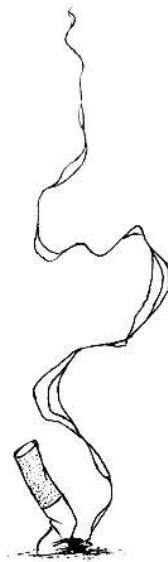
I cherished these long-distance drives, usually at the beginning of the summer and then again on the return trips about five to six weeks later. Going is always more thrilling and hopeful than returning. We were all happy as a family. No fights. No squabbles. No tensions. Just anticipation for each of our private destinations.

Without modern highways, the truckers dominated the road, and passenger cars slid off the tarmacadam to the sometimes-precipitous edge of the gravel path before the drop to the paddy fields or forested brush. There were no roadside motels or restaurants, only government PWD (public works department) bungalows from the colonial days when the tax collector or the district administrator went on tour and needed lodgings. In post-independence India, these were rented to the public, but arrangements had to be made in advance. The dhabas by the side of the road were for truckers and you could get huge portions of rotis and vegetables and dal for a few rupees. There was a charpoy or two, coir-netting on wooden frames for a quick nap any time during the day or night. Plus, the tea was spiked with country alcohol. You said “60” or “100” (meaning kilometers, the distance you needed to stay awake for) and the strength of alcohol would be measured out. The romance of the highway is always enticing when you don’t have to be a long-distance trucker in India in the ‘50s and ‘60s.

The coalfields of Dhanbad behind us, we'd speed along the Chota Nagpur plateau, at one of its highest points, in Palamau district, where Parashnath Hill was at about 4,000 feet. The plateau was the northeastern part of the Deccan Plateau, which was where Eurasia and India nicked each other. Tropical and subtropical forests girded the place names that still have a Proustian flicker--Koderma, Topchanchi, Netarhat. Today, deforestation for grazing land and mining by private corporations are changing the landscape beyond my imagination.

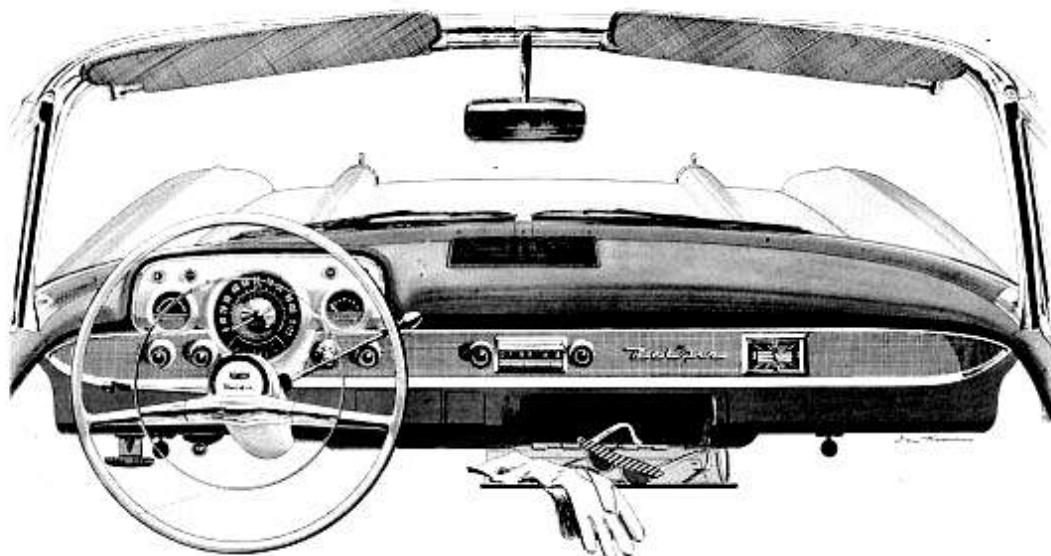
One night, we blew out two tires (can't remember which ones) in quick succession. With a spare, we still needed to repair the other one and not risk a puncture far from the villages. Plus, the tire that was on needed air badly.

We asked around at the trucker tea stalls. Yes, there was a "fixer," but it was late, and he was probably drunk for the night. So, the decision was made to take the tube out of the tire and stuff it with straw so that it would (would it?) go for a mile or two to another tire fixer's village. I imagine it worked out as I don't remember beyond that.



Another time, this time during the day, about 40 to 50 miles out of Hazaribagh, the carburetor started leaking profusely. Cork gaskets were needed, and we had none. I have to say my dad impressed me no end that day when he said we'd take all the soap we could scrounge out of our luggage and melt it slightly and cake the carburetor's casing. Then he'd drive as fast as he could till the engine would start stuttering and then we'd stop and repeat the soap-caking maneuver.

I stuck my arm out of the back seat car window, carefree, unafraid, and unworried, as my dad gunned the engine and sped toward home and safety. I trusted that. There wasn't a doubt. That's what adults did. They made do. They melted soap and caked the carburetors where the gaskets should've been.



Notes Of A Summer

Amit Shah

*“Exhaust the little moment. Soon it dies.
And be it gash or gold it will not come
Again in this identical guise.”*

- (Gwendolyn Brooks, “Annie Allen,”
1949)



Summer. India. 1950s and 1960s. Mangoes. Mangoes. Mangoes and more mangoes.

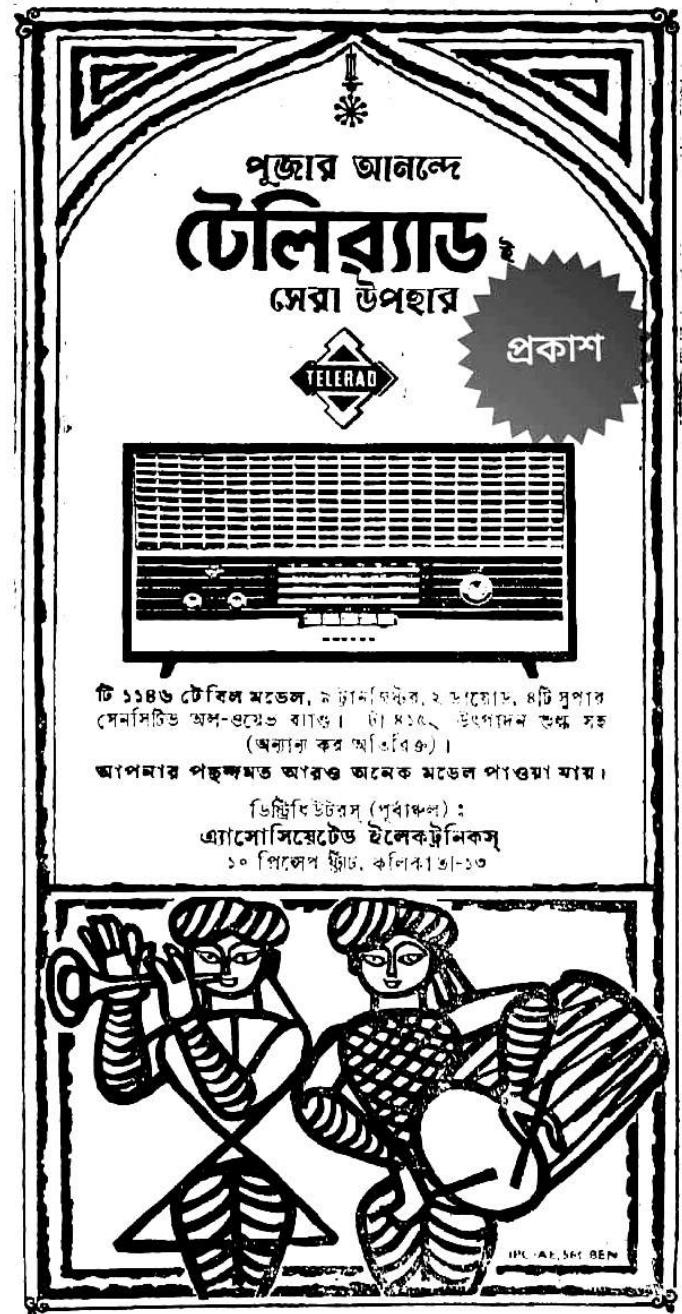
My parents had a house in Hazaribagh, in the mineral-rich low hills of modern-day Jharkhand (land of forests), about 250 miles northwest of Kolkata, where the nearest railhead at that time was 60 miles away. We went almost every year during the summer. The property had about four to five acres of land and a large portion of it had mango trees. The trees, during the summer, would have their branches stooping in supplication, pleading for the ripened fruit to be plucked.

India is a land of extremes. So much of it is staggeringly incomprehensible. How can a culture that had spawned the inclusivity of Hinduism also embrace the viciousness of casteism? How could the land of the Buddha, be drenched, routinely, in blood? How could a land have 10 percent of the people control over

75 percent of the wealth, and is the birthplace of one of the greatest philosophers of the modern world, born Narendranath Dutta and known to us as Vivekananda, who said : “So long as the millions live in hunger and ignorance, I hold every person a traitor who, having been educated at their expense, pays not the least heed to them!” In today’s India, this might draw an FIR (First Information Report) by the modern-day religious saber-rattlers.

And mangoes are no different in India. There are . . . are you ready? . . . approximately 1,500 varieties according to government sources. But we didn’t have 1,500 varieties slumping from the branches at Hazaribagh. We had, I think, a combination of six varieties that grow in Bengal and Bihar (where new Jharkhand is). That combination includes Gulab Khas, Himsagar, Kisan Bhog, Lakshman bhog, Langra, Fazli.

We ate mangoes morning, noon, and night and then we’d load two cars full---I mean FULL---with jute sacks bloated with these delicacies and transport them to Kolkata for the kids at the blind school.



JINRICKSHAWS

FOR CALCUTTA.



Japanese Jinrickshaws, very light, strong and easy running :
Diameter of wheels, 42 ins., width of track, 2 ft. 11 ins., Upholstered in brown and black leather, and complete, with cushion, hood apron, and 2 lamps.
No. 3060 No. 3062 No. 3063

Price Rs. 180 Rs. 170 Rs. 180 each.

W. LESLIE & CO.,
CALCUTTA.

Sometimes, the lead car, a 1950 Chevy station wagon, a "Woody" with wooden exterior paneling and styling, that would be so overwhelmed that the rear fender would be sparking on the asphalt road as it bounced ahead. There'd be numerous flats and repairs and picnics by the roadside before we'd roll into our courtyard probably after twelve to fourteen hours.

Summer. India. 1983. My sister, with her husband, went to India in June. I saw them off at Kennedy Airport in New York. The first AIDS cases were making national headlines. I remember as we talked about it waiting for the flight to be called. When she landed at her final destination, a short flight from Kolkata to Ranchi, about 40-50 miles from Hazaribagh, where the summer flowers were in bloom, Mahua, Karavira, white lily, pink hibiscus, she was told that our father had died that morning. He was going to drive from Hazaribagh to Ranchi to pick them up but probably had a heart attack (his third) when he tried to get out of bed. He slid to the floor, resting on his knee, his hands on the bed, head bowed at the edge of the mattress. That's where my mother found him. He was a meticulous man. He kept a blue pocket diary and he wrote down things he had to do, how much money he had in his pockets each night, something he'd read. The last entry read "Pick up Pupu and Bill at Ranchi. Take a water bottle." I have the diary and I look at the page sometimes.

Summer in India. 1989. I'm pacing the deserted Bombay airport terminal. It's 3 a.m. in mid-June in the morning. Long before it became Mumbai and long before the glittering, brash, airport-anywhere-in-the-world look. This was more like a clean bus station. I'm smoking one cigarette after another. Thank goodness, the tea and coffee stall is open. I get minuscule cups of coffee ---Nescafe for sure. I'm waiting for the first flight at dawn to Calcutta, having landed from New York about an hour earlier without a connecting flight. I'd raced out of New York with a carry-on bag and a card in my pocket from my first wife, Lisa, who'd put a photo of my first-born, Arnav, for my mother in Calcutta. Ma hadn't seen Arnav. He was seven months old.

Later that morning I land in Calcutta. My maternal uncle, Mesho, my youngest aunt's husband, wraps me in his arms as I exit out of immigration. He's almost six-feet-four, a giant by Indian standards of his generation and as handsome as a movie star. I always thought he was a Gregory Peck doppelganger. He told me my mother had passed away in the early morning, probably as I was pacing the terminal in Bombay, destroying my lungs.



Summer in Maine. 2022. Pam leads a wildflower walk in western Maine. I go along. She has taught herself so much about wildflowers (most often ignored by people like me tromping along trails). I am someone who marvels at a particular type of obsession to understand bits of our natural and physical universe. Even if I lack understanding of the urge in its entirety, I am mesmerized at the effort. She'd trained as a classicist at some of the best institutions in the world for that area of study. It had limited cache in the commercial world but is sheer poetry in its aesthetics and learning about our past. She brings that same scholarship and joy and depth of discovery to wildflowers and the forest floor.

Before she started the walk, she introduced us to a quote. Of course, it applies to so much more than the forest floor.

“Many an object is not seen though it falls within the range of our visual ray, because it does not come within the range of our intellectual ray—i.e. we are not looking for it. So in the largest sense, we find only the world we look for.” (Thoreau in “Thoreau’s Wildflowers”)



The Sea

Sarah Hall Murphy

The mermaids came to sing at night. They moved in groups, making crude shapes in the sand, sharpening their teeth against fist-sized rocks. Once they were ready, they sang.



‘Bastard mermaids again,’ Dad would grumble in the morning, bleary-eyed and spreading marmalade on his sleeve. ‘It’s not right. We’re wide awake all night thanks to that lot.’

My mother rolled her eyes. I sat in my nightie and drew crayon-bright caves and lakes; imagining their homes, their lives, buried deep underwater.

As children we were taught not to speak to the mermaids. They knew the future, most of them, and would tell you just to screw with you. This was how Debbie Howsen found out her parents were getting divorced. Weeping, she holed up in a cubicle in the girl’s toilets and couldn’t be moved, even when her mother came to collect her.

My own mother was far less impressed. ‘I could’ve told you that, prophet or not,’ she sniffed. She went unfazed, my mother. Manchester born-and-bred. Things like that didn’t move her. I was told they had different things inland, roaming the moors, buried in hills. But she never spoke about them, and, in time, I learnt not to ask.

When I was a child my father read me stories. I loved how he could weave something with his hands, his voice rising and falling as shadows danced on the walls. He taught me the stories his father had taught to him: Ian Direach and the Blue Falcon, The Story of Tuan mac Cairill. Stories nobody else in school had heard of.

Dad loved the sea, and was more comfortable on a boat than anywhere else. His hands calloused from rope, the smell of salt in his beard, his eyes fixed on the shore as he commanded them steadfast- he could've stepped out of one of those stories himself. I told everyone my dad was an adventurer, sent on a quest out to sea.

As I grew older the mermaids lost their charm. You heard things. People who befriended the mermaids, who listened to their song and drove themselves mad. Fishing was all but gone from the area by the time I was finishing school, with the mermaids eating how they did. There was this little boy from Derry, too, somebody's cousin-or-other. He went wandering down the rockpools and never came back.



People noticed. In the pub they drank pints with haste and grew flushed, muttering late into the night. The kids at school joined in on it, too. We were facing final exams and worried about our future; that stress had to go somewhere.

We would drink beer and watch the moonlight spread over the sea. Sometimes we saw them, just a flash of silver and green- there we would stand, yelling to the wind, throwing beer cans and mocking them. How do you like our singing now, how do you like our singing now?

In the morning we'd wake, hungover, mud in our sheets and lugworm in our pillows.

It began with the worst hangover I'd had yet. My mother was in the doorway. Her hair was a grey perm, her lipstick pink and thin.

She took one look at me and scoffed. 'You're having a laugh if you think I'm cleaning that up, Cassie.' Mum said, slamming the door shut. I closed my eyes and groaned.

That afternoon I drifted to the sea. The sand was grey and gritty, the sky opaque. I picked at the holes in my jeans and wondered if I should leave. I scanned the horizon for my father. He was a fisherman of sorts, I was told. I didn't see him.

It was fiercely cold, the wind whipping my hair into my face. But I didn't want to go home. My mother and I were talking less and less these days, unless it was to scream at each other. It was nice when my dad was there, but he too was becoming distant.

I sat there for a while. I was thinking about the story. About the boy with the rockpools, and the blue falcon, and how nothing happens anywhere you want it to. The men in the pub told stories of their own, of mermaids, or their wives, or death. They all seemed to end the same way.



The beach was quiet. Gulls hopped from wooden posts, pecking for scraps in the sand. Seaweed clung to the shore, washed up and brittle. An ice-cream van sat alone in the car park.

Two figures sat on the rocks. One male, one female. They wore odd jewellery- cracked shells and smooth, dark stone entwined with soft-drink tabs and colourful strips of plastic. It was risky for them to be out like this during the day. Careless, or maybe just stupid.

The male had a shock of white hair and soft amber eyes. He was trying desperately to impress the girl, with long, dark hair. Her lips were pursed, and charcoal lined both eyes. A cuttlefish-bone had been fashioned into a crude comb. She passed it from hand to hand, looking bored. Strangely, I thought she was beautiful.

The boy on the rock saw me staring. He pushed two fingers out from his chest and hissed. It was a catlike sound. The girl turned to look, her eyes meeting mine. Her eyes were black.

The boy tried to force the girl into the waves first, but she refused. She wasn't afraid, I don't think. She wanted a glimpse of this other world. Where everything ran on wheels and oil, built on steel and iron. I remembered my crayon drawings, and wondered if I had got anything right.

She turned to the boy and whispered something into his ear. The joy slid off his face. She moved from the rocks into the waves, grey and churning, and he followed.

They were gone.

I had a shift that night, in the King's Arms. It was a low, miserable place, the sort where men go to bottle up things and forget. That night it was me and Adam.

'Is there a reason you look like crap?' Adam asked.

He held an unlit cigarette, the curls of his hair washed copper under the electric light. Neither of us smoked, but Adam was practicing to get us more breaks.

I shrugged. 'Does there have to be a reason when I'm on shift?'

Adam laughed, and twirled the cigarette between his fingers.

'Figured out what you want to do after college yet?' he asked. This was all anyone wanted to talk about.

‘Dunno.’

‘I’m going to Manchester,’ Adam announced, with the air of someone who is doing something dreadfully important. ‘Because of the things I might find. Hold the light,’ he said. I did.

Adam lit the cigarette, then held his hands over the lighter in a futile attempt for warmth. I snapped it shut.

‘Aw, Cassie,’ he groaned. ‘It’s *cold*.’

‘Maybe it would be less cold in Manchester,’ I said sourly. Adam rolled his eyes.

‘What’re *you* gonna do? Stay here forever?’ He shook his head.

‘Fuck off.’

‘Whatever, Cassie,’ Adam sighed, like there was no helping me. I took the lighter and held it between numb fingers.





I had no idea what I would do. I couldn't see myself at university, somehow; and working was just something I did because I had to. I wasn't like Adam, with a future spelled out in unpaid internships and graduate bars.

I left my shift later than I wanted to. There were only a few customers left, but they didn't want to go. Old men with scraggly beards and tired eyes, stuck with nowhere else to be.

It was hard to tell them to leave. I made Adam do it, loitering in the kitchen with a floor I had no intention of mopping. Eventually we left, standing in the entrance as Adam locked the door behind me. It was raining heavily.

'Fan-bloody-tastic,' huffed Adam, jangling his car keys. I grimaced. He looked at me, tilting his head slightly.

'D'you want a lift home or are you still mad at me?'

'I'm not mad at you.'

Adam scoffed. ‘I live with three women, Cassie. I know what female silence sounds like.’

‘Female silence?’

‘Do you want a lift or not?’

The inside of his car smelt like weed and Lynx Africa. Football stickers were on the dashboard, and an air freshener shaped like the shit emoji hung from the mirror. A stick-and-poke tattoo on his wrist read LOVE.

‘That’s new,’ I pointed to it. Adam shrugged, starting to steer us out of the car park. ‘A friend did it for me.’

‘What kind of friend?’ He raised his eyebrows.

‘Since when did you care about things like that?’

‘Since when were you doing things like that?’

Adam burst into laughter. I stared at him. He was fixated on the empty road ahead.

‘Sorry Cassie,’ said Adam. ‘It’s just that sometimes you don’t act anything like seventeen, you know?’

I turned away. Adam glanced over. I thought he was going to say something but he didn’t. He dropped me off at my house. The rain had slowed to a drizzle. I stumbled on the curb as I got out of the car.



‘See you, Cassie,’ Adam said. He was smoothing out his hair in the window.
‘Yeah,’ I said softly. ‘See you.’

He drove off. I stood for a moment, alone under the streetlight. The world was quiet. I looked at my own wrist. LOVE, I thought. I remembered the girl on the beach. I wondered if she would be out singing tonight, if their songs meant anything at all, or if they just wanted to be heard. I went inside and locked the door behind me.

The following Friday Adam invited me for drinks at the King’s Arms. Pot wash Darren would be there, and a girl Adam liked called Maisie. I was surprised. We usually went to drink by the sea. I asked why he’d changed our plans.

Adam explained. Darren was fascinated with blood and horror, and had a bad habit of bringing up gory stories when Adam was trying to get Maisie ‘in the mood,’ (his words, not mine).

Darren's conversation topics were killing Adam's chances with Maisie. Adam needed a double date. Darren would be distracted, and Adam and Maisie could begin what would surely be a whirlwind romance.



'I'll make it up to you,' Adam promised, as he drove us to pick up Maisie and Darren.

'It's fine.' I said.

It really was. Though it was technically my first date with a boy, I didn't feel excited. Dating, I had gathered, was an opportunity for two people to sit in the same room and find things to dislike about each other. If I was going in disappointed, at least I had a head start.

We arrived at the pub. Adam led me to a booth. There was a half-full ashtray on the table. Two stained coasters. A large window offered a view of the sea. Maisie and Darren sat there.

Darren had choppy brown hair and a faux-snakeskin shirt. He wore too much cologne, and was slightly buck toothed. Thick gold rings were on his fingers.

Maisie was petite, with blonde hair and a spray tan. She wore a crop top and a birthstone necklace, and had perfected the art of looking unimpressed around men. A stick-and-poke tattoo was on her collarbone. It was of the word FOREVER.

Adam bought a pint for himself and a vodka-and-lemonade for Maisie. The froth stained his upper-lip as he cracked jokes. Darren drank a Lucozade. I had tap water.

Maisie was texting under the table. With every incoming message, Adam's shoulders sank a little more. I wasn't doing much better with Darren.

'They've got this restaurant, right, in London. You need to know someone, like, really know someone, but once you do, you're in for life,' Darren said. I watched the bubbles fizz in his Lucozade. Adam put his hand on Maisie's knee.

'They knock you out in the backroom, and take a bite off somewhere that can afford it- like a leg. Then they serve you it. You can eat your own leg. Tastes like chicken.'

Adam's hand inched up her thigh. I sipped my water. It was tepid. From this angle, the cigarette butts in the ashtray looked like a frowning face.

'Cool,' I said.



—————

Darren grinned. His arm snaked round the edge of the booth, not quite touching my shoulders. Maisie removed Adam's hand like it was a dead mouse.

'If I had one day left on Earth, that restaurant is where I'd go,' Darren paused. 'What about you Cassie? If you had one day left?'

'I'd swim in the sea.'

Outside the window the waves were stirring. The water churned, black and brutal, sea blending with sky.

Maisie snorted. 'That's a stupid idea.'

I hadn't realised they were listening. Adam downed the dregs of his pint and folded his arms.

'There's an indoor pool at the gym I go to. You could always go there,' Adam offered.

'It's not really about swimming,' I said. 'It's about-'

'Buy me another one of these, won't you, Adam?' Maisie held her glass up. It was empty.

Adam did.

—————

Later, Adam bought cider from the local shop. Supermarket cider results in easy, cheap feelings. We drove.

At this time of night, the car park was empty. The ice-cream van was locked-up like a funeral tomb. Above was an endless sky, the stars distant pinpricks. Adam parked crookedly in a spot. We got out.

Maisie leaned against Adam's car. She removed a pack of cigarettes from her bra and lit one with a lighter Darren supplied. It was covered in Formula 1 stickers. She offered Darren a cigarette, but he declined.

'I only smoke weed,' said Darren.

It was 11PM. We stood in the cold. Maisie leaned against the bonnet and blew smoke. Darren sat cross-legged on the ground. Adam and I watched the shore.





Figures were moving on the shore. Iridescent scales reflected the moonlight. Their hands were webbed. Their hair was either white or black. Some of them were holding things, filed bones and stone tools. Mostly, they held each other.

I imagined the hollows of their eyes, the cut of their bones, the sting of salt as they flickered over the waves. They made a strange shape, spread out on the beach. The air felt heavy. They opened their mouths, and began to sing.

Afterwards, Darren and Maisie joined us. Darren was blaring techno from his phone. Maisie still held his lighter. She toyed with the flame.

‘They’re gone now,’ Darren said, switching the music off. Maisie pointed.

‘Not all of them.’

Down by the rockpools, two figures moved. Slowly, we made our way down to the beach. Sand gathered in our shoes. We used our phones as torches. Adam’s screen exposed them.

In the sudden light, a pair of amber eyes squinted. His white hair appeared translucent. Her dark hair was spread over the rocks. I watched a crab crawl over her hand. Pale fingers were at his neck. They stared back.

‘Oh, Jesus,’ said Darren. Maisie started to laugh.

She pushed him off her, and he quickly disappeared. His cheeks were flushed. If he’d had a zipper, he’d be pulling it up.

But she wasn’t in any hurry. Her gaze swept over us, one at a time; lingering, intimate. She looked at me and I flinched. That made her smile. Her teeth were sharp, and her lips were full.

The comb was on the ground next to her. She held it out. I walked forward. Her skin was cool to the touch, and the comb was jagged. It dug into my palm. She no longer looked bored. Her eyes were alight. My heart pounded.

‘Cassie,’ Adam said, taking a step forward.

She hissed at him. He stepped back. She lowered herself to the waves, and let them claim her. I looked down at the comb. The light of Adam’s phone reflected over the rockpools.

We drove home in silence.



+++

The weekend came and went. Mum and I had been shopping. We were unloading the car. On the drive home from the supermarket, it had begun to rain. ``We'd better get in quick,' Mum had said. We were almost done when the beeping began.

I was holding a bag of oranges. Behind us, a bottle green Volvo pulled up on the curb. Someone was leaning on the horn. A man exited it and shouted. He held a duffle bag over his head to shield him from the rain. His beard was untidy, his arms thickly scarred. The oranges in my arms felt misshapen. The Volvo drove away.

He saw me, and shouted again. The rain stained the duffle bag a darker shade. It was Northern rain, falling thick and fast. His eyes seemed colourless. Mum slammed the car boot shut. She walked inside without saying anything.

Inside, I made him a cup of tea. Mum was blaring Radio Four loudly from their bedroom. He took the tea and cradled it.

I turned the television on. We watched a documentary about Antarctica. Penguins waddled across a frozen tundra. Some carried eggs between their feet. The narrator assured us, in a soothing Irish accent, that they would eventually arrive at their destination. An advert for washing-up liquid began. Dad muted the television.

‘Mum not talking?’ He asked.

‘Not really,’ I said.

‘She rings. But it’s hard to get a signal.’

‘Right.’

We didn’t say anything else for a while. The commercials stopped. The documentary had ended, and a show about kitchen renovations had begun. He didn’t unmute. The lightbulb flickered.

‘You’re not really a fisherman, are you?’

I said. Dad went quiet.

‘There’s money in it.’

‘OK.’

‘Good money.’



He set the tea down on the table. I watched the steam curl and disappear into the air. Our lightbulb needed changing. It cast strange shadows over the table. I twisted the hem of my T-shirt.

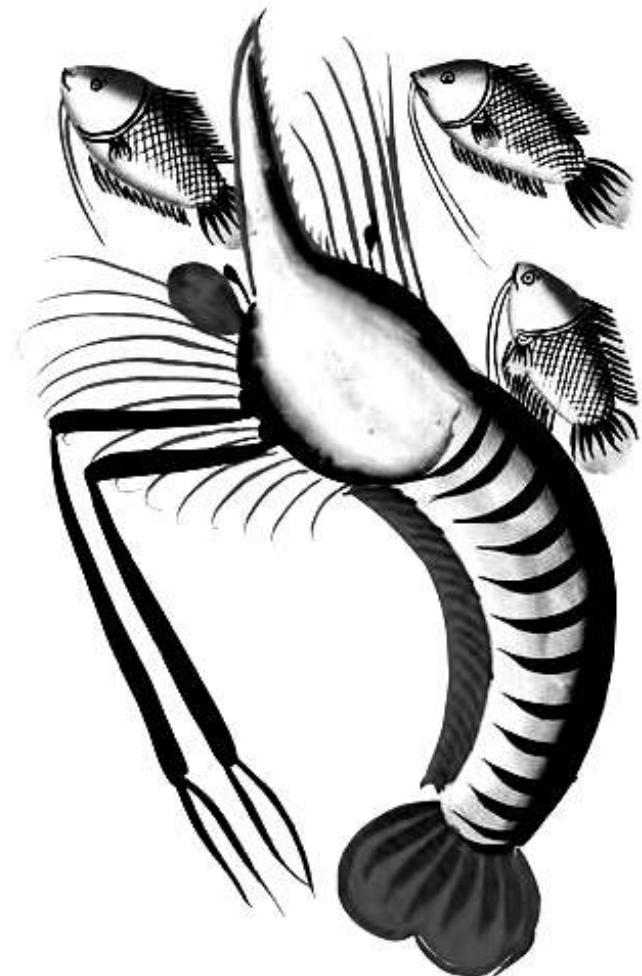
‘Don’t they fight?’

‘Sometimes. Sometimes they even win.’

His knee bobbed up-and-down. The duffle bag trembled. He untied it. One of his fingernails was missing.

Dad began to empty the bag, laying the contents on the coffee table. A large hook, a length of twine, half a sandwich, and a battered paperback- Earth is Room Enough, by Isaac Asimov.

Then he tossed something to me. It wasn’t heavy, or not as heavy as you’d expect. I poured the contents into my palm. Even under electric light, their scales still managed to shine.



+++

Mum resurfaced the following morning, over tea and tensely boiled eggs. She told Dad to book a hotel, but he said he wasn't staying on land very long.

'Typical.' she snorted.

Our goodbye was short. The Volvo pulled up against the curb. It was no longer raining. Dad told me I could keep the scales, but I slipped them in his coat as we hugged goodbye.



I was watching the car creep into the distance when Adam rang.

'Hello?'

'Cassie?' Adam panted. 'Cassie, you need to come to the beach. They've found someone.'

'Found who?'

'One of them.'

I ran.

Down at the beach a small crowd had gathered. I recognized Darren, in a leopard-print hat. Darren said something, but it was lost to the shouts from the shore. They were dragging something from the waves.

I pushed through the crowd, to find Adam at the front. His face was pale. Against the redness of his hair, it made him look sickly. He stared down at his trainers.

Her hair covered her face, and there were patches missing from her tail. Seaweed was wrapped around her neck. The comb, of course, was gone.

I couldn't see the expression on her face. So I pictured it. I pictured her, naked in the sand. I pictured her waist-deep in concrete. I pictured her rolled over and bleached, left to burn in the sunlight. I pictured her with her eyes sewn shut. I pictured her with her tongue lolling, her skin pallid, her songs stuffed deep down her throat. I pictured her and knew.

+++

After that, the choice was easy. The school year came to a final, quiet close. I did OK in my exams. Not terribly, not great. I'd never excelled in education, and on my last day I felt only a vague sense of relief.



I could fit all my things in one bag. Mum was glad of the extra room. I bought my ticket online. It was easy enough.

The night before I stayed up late. I sat with the windows open, the comb in front of me. At first glance, it seemed crude. Then you noticed the details- the designs on the edges, how precisely each point had been measured. It smelt of salt, and something I couldn't name. I left it lying on the windowsill, with a good view of the world above the water.



My ticket was for the earliest train available. I hadn't gotten much sleep. The morning air felt soothing on my skin, and birds flitted over the station roof as the train pulled up. I chose a window seat. Outside, the scenery was rich with the promise of summer. I was careful as I slid my luggage into the rack above. I sat down.

The train was slow to leave, but it picked up speed, travelling to a place where the mermaids couldn't follow. Far away from the sea.



Apna Time (Kab) Aayega?

Prantik Ali



Retracing the Struggles of Salim Langda and Gully Boy as Muslim Ghetto Dwellers in Bombay



The release of Zoya Akhtar's 2019 box office hit 'Gully Boy' saw an explosion of its tagline 'Apna time aayega' – from being a powerful statement of reassertion over one's life, it would soon reach the height of a cultural phenomenon in India, a trend that has rolled over into the years that have followed. T-shirts were manufactured in thousands with the words plastered over the front, and if one were to step out and roam the streets they would be sure to come across a significant number of people donning the new cultural ethos of a renewed, aggressive hope, and an unapologetic confidence in one's ability to turn things around. India being a country where social mobility is nothing but a myth, the ostensible political consciousness that would otherwise be encapsulated in such a tagline soon regressed into a pithy statement of hopeful optimism. A disorganized mass of working class youth seemed to be tentatively asking themselves whether their time would really come, ignorant of a reality which is grossly divorced from the rags-to-riches story of the protagonist, the eponymous 'Gully Boy'/Murad Sheikh, played by Ranveer Singh.

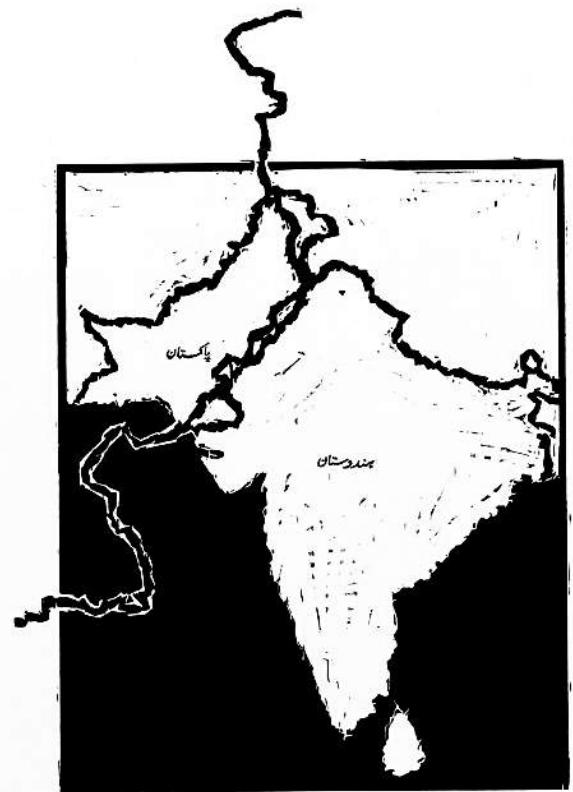
Thirty years before Murad Sheikh had stirred the hearts of a million young Indians seeking their freedom from the shackles of poverty, Saeed Akhtar Mirza had painted a similar picture of a disenfranchised working class Muslim roaming the ghettos of Bombay, who had claimed, in as much the same tone of vigorous hope as Murad, ‘apna bhi time aayenga re’. For a more detailed conspectus on how the donnée of these characters, separated in temporality but united geographically (as well as socially), match up to each other, a closer inspection of the guiding motifs of the two films is an indispensable requirement.

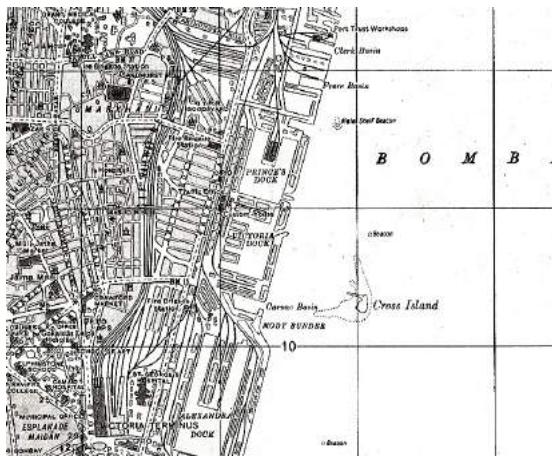
In ‘*Salim Langde Pe Mat Ro*’, Salim Langda, played by Pavan Malhotra, cuts a deracinated figure against the backdrop of a Bombay ghetto in the 1980s that can only be described as being characterized by an excess of squalor. Compelled by his circumstances, Salim is an uneducated *tapori* who spends his time engaging in petty crime with his friends, Peera (Makrand Deshpande) and Abdul (Ashutosh Gowariker).



The film sets itself against the contemporaneity of 1980s Bombay, rife with communal tension between Hindus and Muslims (the contextual background of the Bhiwandi riots of the early 1980s serve as building blocks that lend Salim more depth as an unemployed loudmouth whose only occupation is swindling the shopkeepers and other wage earners of the community), as well as focusing on the economic shambles left in the wake of the textile industry boom and the consequent strikes, which had resulted in massive unemployment across the commercial heart of Bombay. In Saeed Mirza's world, the socio-economic turmoil of the ghetto is hence an extension of selective structural prejudice, communal disharmony, disenfranchisement, and the religious chauvinism, whose flames are fanned by politicians, and orchestrated by prejudiced 'businessmen' in cahoots with the police.

Aslam, the much more refined and socio-politically conscious suitor to Salim's sister Anees, is diametrically opposed to Salim as far as a general outlook on the socio-culturally depleted Muslim populace is concerned.



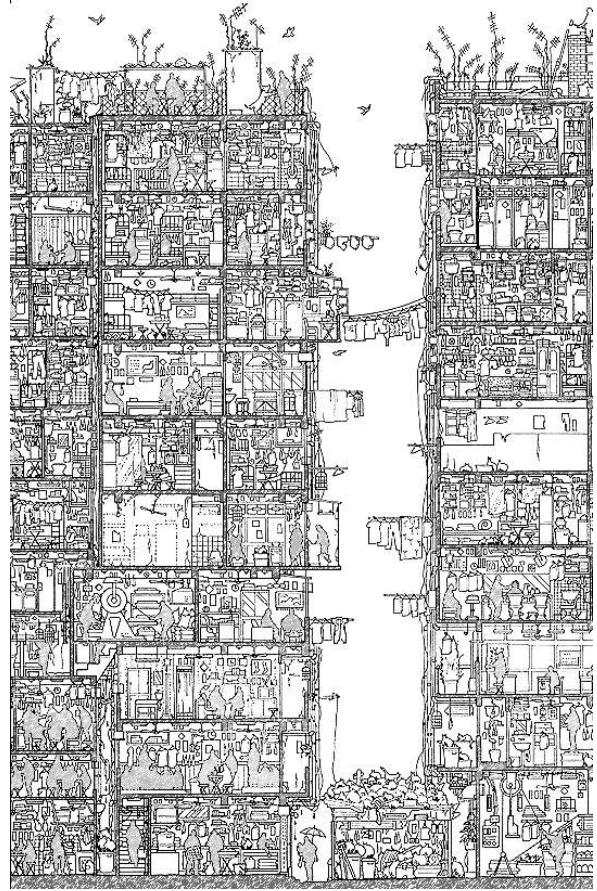


Pursuing an education in Urdu, he advocates higher education for Muslim women (something which wins him the unwanted harassment of the orthodox-conservative Muslims of the ghetto), and his room is littered with books, signifying his aspiration of success via education and toil. As noted by film critic Ira Bhaskar, even the languages employed by the two go on to reinforce their disparity in cultural refinement. While Salim's dialect is characterized by the typical Bambaiya accent, Aslam 'clings to the refined language of an older social formation as something sacred, something that can give value to a life that otherwise seems devoid of any purpose' (Bhaskar, Allen : 299). Under the patronage of Aslam, Salim starts noticing how the 'business' of promoting differences between Hindus and Muslims plays into the agenda of the ones in power in distracting people like him from the more contentious socio-economic subjugation which have kept them fettered and hence unable to bring about any significant material changes in their lives for generations. Aslam influences Salim to confront the hard truth of their social immobility, and pushes him to follow in his dead brother Javed's footsteps, who was brave enough to break out of the social stagnancy of a life in the ghettos and pursue his education in full earnest. With the application of effort, he claims, even the poorest of the Muslims can climb out of the gutter of generational poverty, and move towards emancipation and prosperity.

As the camera hauntingly captures the scene of the siblings hugging behind the bars of a kitchen window, one can only assume that for Salim, Aslam's prescribed panacea for their social immobility is but a far-fetched chimeric dream that only works its charms for individuals, and not entire communities.

We thus see Salim's religious identity seep into his class identity, with the co-existence of both these axes simultaneously dictating how he reacts to the world (petty crimes, hoodlumism, masculine arrogance masquerading as street-smartness, and so on). The narrative is interspersed with mention of riots and communal disharmony, and the ghettoized existence of the social milieu is weaved into Salim's own experiences as a Muslim vagabond who is almost compelled to participate in actions that perpetuate the poor social condition of his community. Even as Aslam's rational wisdom pushes him to take the dignified way of hardwork in order to change his fortunes, Salim's father's dismissal from his job and his inability to find work is a contradictory case in point that negates such wisdom – Saeed Akhtar Mirza is not interested in handing down a toned down version of social reality, or even providing the audience with a blueprint of success that is often a concomitant of individualized tales of struggle. The title of the film is therefore as prescient as can be. Salim Pasha, who goes by the name of Salim Langda as a signifier of his exclusivity from the other Salims of the ghetto, will die as a faceless product of his socio-political circumstances, and there is no point at all in wasting tears crying over his fate.

Following a similar analysis, in Gully Boy, Akhtar pushes a similar model of social (im)mobility through the character of Murad, whose identity is, tragically, all but limited to the enforcement of Islamophobic stereotypes. Several instances of this stereotyping can be noticed throughout the film, which is after all a common trend in the representation of Muslims in commercial Bollywood cinema. Murad's father (Vijay Raaz) is an aggressive patriarch who marries a second wife, and his mother (Amruta Subhash) is defiantly silent in the face of oppression (which she faces not only from the male members but also from her mother-in-law), with the only exception being Murad's girlfriend Safeena (Alia Bhatt), whose violent temper and aggressive self-assertion may be considered a subversion of the submissive Muslim girl trope. Murad himself is shown twice in the film offering prayers, but the interrelatedness of his identity as a Muslim who has been forced to inhabit the lowest sections of existence in the slums of Dharavi through continued social oppression and prejudice, is erased completely.



Stripped of the historicity (and contemporaneity) of his religious identity, the only thing that can be assumed to be driving Murad into aspiring for the heights of fame and glory is the humiliation he faces on a daily basis for belonging to the lower classes. As such, the idea of his struggle to claw through to the top is based around an atomized version of the larger struggles that generally engender the minority proletariat. This effacement of religious identity politics, however, does not result in a sharper focus on the class dynamics either, with the exception being the fiery soundtrack of the film, which consists of a large collaboration project between contemporary Indian hip-hop artists including Divine and Naezy (the inspirations behind the film's protagonist), Dub Sharma, Jasleen Royal, Rishi Rich, and other emerging voices of rage and discontent. Akhtar's choice of representing the bedrock of hip-hop as a means of articulation for the marginalized voices is a uniquely original idea which has seldom been put to trial in Bollywood cinema, but the result is quite an injudicious, half-baked take on marginalized protest culture – especially in the light of the fact that both the director as well as the cast has come out in subsequent interviews as being steadfastly apolitical in all intents and purposes. The revolutionary aesthetic of using Kanhaiya Kumar's famous Azaadi slogan in one of the most famous tracks of the soundtrack is, in the context of its usage in a self-proclaimed apolitical film, nothing but a pretentious pratfall, failing to fully tap into its anti-authority stance, and failing also to decipher the urgency in the call for freedom popularized in the independence struggle of Kashmiris, turning the slogan instead into a trite pop cultural merchandise bereft of any revolutionary potential.



While both Murad and Salim profess to break the shackles that keep them confined to a life of misery, the overarching dominance of their respective circumstances in the fulfillment/futility of their aspirations is also worth a closer look. In the case of Murad, the only obstacle that is concretized as a tangible source of his existential crisis is his poverty, but there is little to no commentary on why he has no weapon to fight his poverty with. Until he finds his voice in an underground rap battle, Murad has no ways of dealing with the frustration that comes with being socially impotent; on the contrary, the narrative is built in such a way that it becomes easy to insinuate on the part of the audience that he is poor because his family lives in a ghetto, and he lives in a ghetto because his family is poor. Murad's tale is, simply put, a libeal/utopian moment of glory that is more about personal endeavors and dreams than it is about the reclamation of one's identity through art as protest, although the symbols associated with his character have proven to be marketable to both the audience as well as immensely meaningful to the voices that continue telling their tales of hard-earned success through hip-hop and its various subcultures. Murad Sheikh, played by Ranveer Singh, is one of the countless other worn out faces travelling in a packed local train to earn a daily living, often to the detriment or total annihilation of their personal passions. That he is shown to rise out of the rubbles of Dharavi and achieve fame and glory is nothing but an anomaly. Without a vestige of social commentary on why it is that he finds himself in such a condition, Gully Boy fails to address the problems that shape the destiny of a thousand other Murad Sheikhs.



In an age of rampant islamophobia, to show a Muslim character submerged in poverty while simultaneously exploring their Muslim identity in the context of their social immobility would be tantamount to bridging that dangerous gap between cause and effect, and would automatically lead to a more clearly defined commentary on the disenfranchisement of working class Muslims. This is not to say, of course, that other groups besides the Muslim working class demographic are exempt from suffering the consequences of living in a world that is unbothered about the trials and tribulations of the masses, while the privileged few get wheeled around to their parties and engage in their strictly enclosed upper class shenanigans, displaying an excess of wealth, pomp and indifference. But beneath the idea of choosing a markedly Muslim protagonist, with all the resultant stereotypes which I have referred to earlier, and then proceeding to efface the intersectionality of class and religion while on the other hand making use of the Azaadi slogan in pushing its supposedly inflammatory rhetoric of complete emancipation, lies a perverted motive of apolitical marketing/commercial profit. One only has to look at the urban elite's appropriation of the raging discontent that characterizes a voice like Murad's, to come to the realization that perhaps it was never the film's intention to politically motivate the dispossessed, but instead to compress it into a neoliberal tale of dream achievement in the face of the hurdles that life is guaranteed to throw one's way irrespective of which identity they fall under.



As Murad reiterates his guiding maxim in front of a crowd that swings to his words, which he claims comes straight from his heart, one cannot but marvel at the ferocious power emanating from his voice – but it hardly takes a serious amount of research to come to the sad conclusion that in a country like India, the promised time of unmitigated freedom will remain an unachievable dream to the residents of such ghettoised communities that produce the likes of a Murad Sheikh or a Salim Pasha. For the time being, the voices that bring these struggles to a larger audience must resonate fiercely in the hearts and minds of all those who can listen, so that these untamed dreams can translate into reality, and so that one day, we might find a reason or two to shed a tear for Salim Langda, just as we clap in rousing affirmation of Murad's glory.



The Colonial City

Anuraag Das Sarma

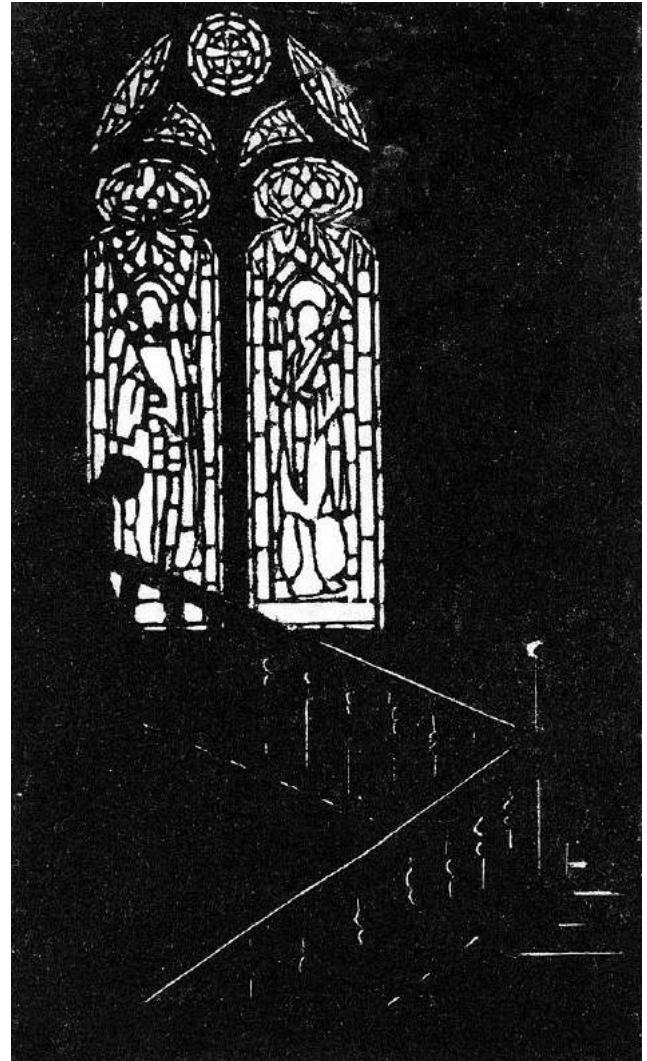
1. Song of Rain

To what means does hubris lend; to
what fortune-
Does the dying port beckon? Come in
on silt,
Iron vessels, drudge through the muddy
ghats.
"There are more dreams, can be crafted
on hopes,
In the Orient, than in the penury-
Of Brave England's forgotten white
sands."
What are the clouds that cling to
branches of
This mango tree? In the summer breeze
Moving with ease, over the river. Yet,
There is no rain, no familiar smell of-
Wet earth. The dying port beckons.



Now come,
You who must follow the dying riverbed,
To tell you the seasons. The river's fury-
Floods your home, and still you return to it.
Let it rain. Let it rain. Let it rain.
There is more to this earth, than mud and dirt.
Let it rain. Let it rain. Let it rain.
There is no God in your postcards, no God
In your calendars either. No God,
To oversee the death of the river.
There is no relief in your prayers, no-
Reverence in your voice. There is no one
As bankrupt, yet you are the doubter
And the sacred doubt.

Bring unto me-
The riverine soil. The moss beneath it,
Falling on the teakwood floors of my,
Broken home. What does the river know, of
Clouds that thunder? Can it flood Dalhousie?
Unreal city, you are real in death.
Reap what the men have sown on cemented
floors.
The palaces, with stained glass windows, bow-
To you. And you are the one to whom,
Hymns are chanted. The great answer to our
Question. Where is God when the temples are
Nothing but heaps of stony rubble? Where
Now will the church bells ring? Oh Let it rain.
Let it rain. Let it rain. Let it rain.
There is more to this earth than mud and dirt.
Let it rain. Let it rain. Let it rain.

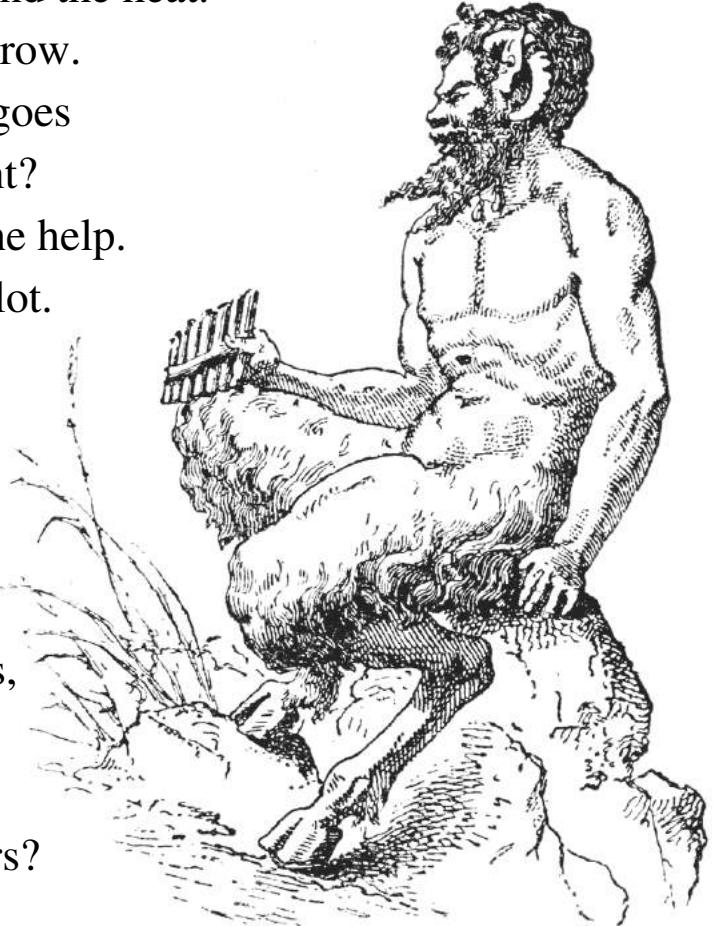


2. The Garden

"The garden is so empty dear," she said,
Her eyes like minnows, fleeting my gaze.
"Let us plant bougainvilleas, they shall
Bloom by next summer. And for the winter-
Petunias. Oh, yes! Petunias."

Nothing grows for another year but grass,
Not lush, not beautiful. Fragmented and
Scattered grass. Under the heap of rubbish,
Domestic toil concedes another victory.
Hurrah! Hurrah! Sweet ladies, Hurrah! Hurrah!

Last summer the winds were stronger, more agile.
Mrs. Dutta, our neighbor of fifty-
And one years would say, "Oh! Nevermind the heat.
The river breeze will take care of our sorrow.
And then the rains, yes. How many mangoes
Did the tree give last year? Did you count?
Always count yourself, can never trust the help.
Oh, sticky fingers you know. The entire lot.
Anyway, yes the rains will come early
This year. I can feel it in my bones."
She was cremated last saturday, No-
River breeze to take care of the sorrow.
Madame Sosostris, famous clairvoyant,
Bested by my neighbor of fifty two years,
Who felt the rains in her aged bones.
Who can keep an account of the losses
Suffered by the community of aging seers?



Today, under the canopy of trees
In front of Bhowal Lodge, where the ants hide
Under dead leaves, and under these mounds-
Like Kaiefung must a city lie. Buried
And built six times, by a line of optimists,
Unable to account for the wrath-
Of the Yellow river.
On a shard of glass I stand, and beneath,
The endless whirr of civilisation,
Lines of bricks holding up the soil, hollow
Voids of immeasurable length, so vast,
Relentless darkness in rat's alley.

"Linda, A salesman has got to dream

Don't you see?

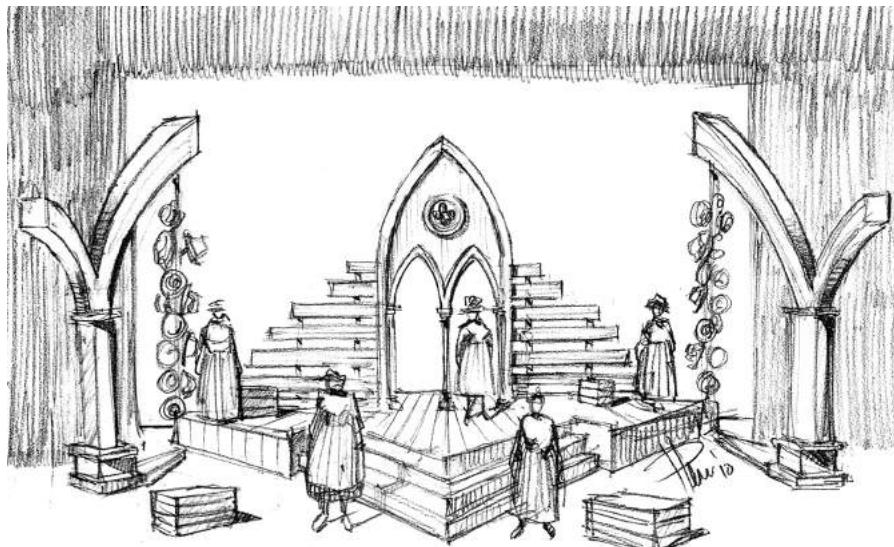
A salesman has got to dream"

"Curtain call, dear. No more.

No more dreams.

For you have shuffled off this mortal coil. Must give us

pause."



3. The River

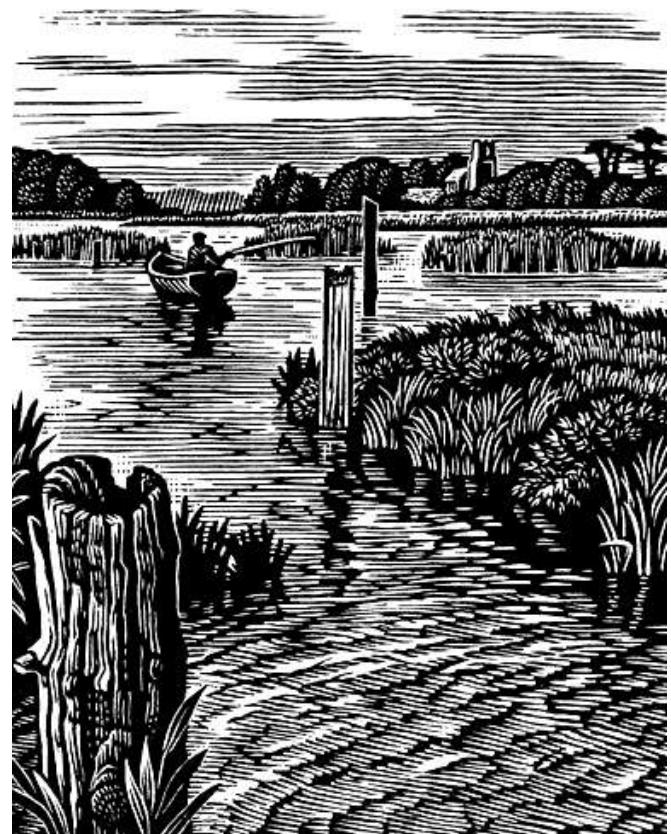
Let me carve, in burnished bronze, your
likeness.

Tout peut s'oublier, mon amour,
The house, the books. As the morning sun
forgets-

The shroud of night. And the trees fill,
Cuckoo, jug-jug, pu-we, to-witta-woo!
A trip to the river, now full
Of defunct warehouses, where squalor meets
And greets the ever seeing eye.

No cuckoos here, no sun. Only bridges-
Gargantuan, supported beams, and
Cantilevers. No Lady of the Harbour,
No houses on the Strand. Only
The warmth that softens the waves
Of the Hooghly, magnificent, withdrawn,
silting.

Rest amidst these banks, restless traveller,
And listen to the hum of July,
Drawing near. Rain on parched land broken
by
The song of waves, like a Hokusai
Painting.



*Green grow the rushes O'
One is one and all alone and evermore
Shall be so. Green Grow, the Rushes O'.*



Silent whispers, in blessed ears outgrow
The need for relentless mutterings.
I did not know of blessed men so diseased,
So full of murmur. The summer
Wind has blown away the water nymphs,
In time for the high tide, the breakers-
Roar, and the fishermen take to their boats.
Unflinching in their efforts to procure,
With their nets tied tightly, listening to the-
Call of sirens, in a dying river.

Incense fills the evening air, brightening,
The stygian soil in dotted reflections.
Luminous patches of neon signs cover,
The riverine surface. The ferry stops,
And refuels. Further down, starboard,
The river meets the sky, and no one can say,
Or tell them apart. Horizons that cannot-
Be thought of, in all your books of philosophy,
Meet the greeting, ever-seeing eye.

4. Pursuance

Anselm and Occam, preceeding
Paine by-
Seven-hundred years had not an
ounce of
Common sense between them, all
put
Together. Luminaries of Western
Philosophy, and all that is great with
the
Western way of life, could not opine
For man's freedom. In all fairness,
neither
Could Smith, nor Keynes, nor
Greenspan.

Slums, small and big, dot the cities.
Wake up
And smell the roses. I once met,
while out
For lunch, in the colonial part of this
Forgotten city, a man who had read
And translated the Telegony.
"All of the two surviving lines," he
said,
Proudly, holding up two fingers.



This was his life's work, and having completed It in full, had devoted himself To the lobby of the Great Eastern, hoping To run into the Algonquin round table, Of Calcuttan elite. In vain, he tried To cement his translation in the press. He died penniless, able to pay only for A two line obituary in the pages of the Statesman.

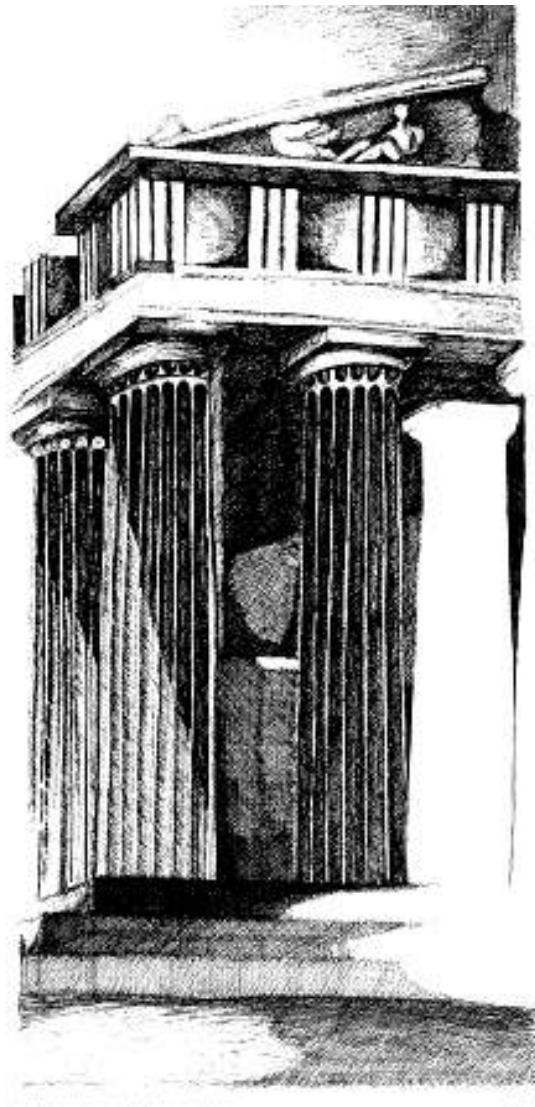
And Odysseus brought unto this world

*Teledamus, by Calypso.
By Penelope, he divined
Telemachus and Acusilaus.*

Telemachus, taken by Circe, in holy matrimony bound her,

And Telegonus, born to Circe, in redress, took to Penelope.

And I, a member of the house of Atreus, Must submit to the furies, tempestuous. Unreal city, Being most unfit to live. I have made you mad.



Gardening Is A Lovely Hobby

Arundhuti Das Gupta

Do you remember me?
I lived next door to you,
the mean old crone living in the white
house
with the rainbow-coloured garden
filled with peonies and daisies and
tulips and lilies,
flourishing from my care and nurture,
and blood red chrysanthemums.

Learn the lesson from this lonely old
crone
in her bland beige house
with the cornucopia of colours in her
lawn,
to nurture is to sacrifice
to flourish is to take until there's
nothing left to give
to suffer is to live
and the chrysanthemums,
stained with my blood
extracted from bruised, toiling fingers,
are proof.





"Dust thou art to dust thou returnest;"
the garden I built up from the dust is no more,
 but perhaps, someday
my body shall become a flourishing garden
its creepers, a tangled mass of expectations,
 disappointments and violence—
 for love is violence—
 shall be proof
 that the old crone,
the witch of the neighbourhood,
 bereft and barren,
 lived.



Don't Answer Back

Nameera Anjum

Lately

I've been thinking of all the warzones
My mother carries in her heart,
The one's that I planted with an innocent
Stroke of sand attached to the fireplace of
Her ribcage,
The very place that was the roof over my head
When hunger, poverty, illiteracy and shame
Were just words. I drank her blood, I rolled in
The riches of her nutritious young body-
I stretched and expanded inside her,
Pushing her skin further and further;
I read her mind and was educated before birth,
But at one push, my mind entered the dark ages.

My first blink was under a white sun,
One round, the other was long and funny
It was like the intestines, unfolded and
straightened;
A circle with a green cloth stared at me
Through glass that clung to the beginning of
His nose, hugging the surface of his ears.





Inside her

I was a naked beast, I would sit upside-down
Sit with my half-formed feet wide open,
But the man with hugging glasses wrapped me
In a dark green skin. It itched against my own skin,
It itched my freedom into a norm I was to worship later
on.

I was taken from her arms

'Mother' - my first home was too weak,
I had taken too much from her. She was slipping away,
My words were still lost so I cried for home
I screamed her name one last time,
She sighed and went to sleep.

I was the warzone she lost,
Everyone told me to sit like a woman.
They said I should be shameful, I should
grind and grind harder
I had to overcome my poverty of substance,
But what of the riches I will never see
again?

The next time I'm home,
I will protect your heart, mama.
I will save you from lost sleep,
We will fight beyond these daydreams.

You will tell me not to answer back,
And I will plant a warzone in your heart.

The next day,
I'll wake up and ceasefire-
I'll make you breakfast in bed, a chocolate
cake and your favorite, strong tea;
You will laugh and cry at the same time,
We both will. I'll make it up to you.
Nothing will be permanent.

You'll still be here tomorrow,
And the day after
And after
And after



Bleach Free

Amiya Hisham

I'd like to wake up to
A riot of colours.
Not just Monstera green
This beige, and brass
And this pastel peach.
It is a harsh withdrawal,
bled dry, synthetic,
too complacent, too negligent
of the stark reality.
This pallor is fear.
It cannot celebrate, it's too poised
Too out of touch, out of place
too airbrushed, made for a business
space.



Our Staff.

Editor in Chief: Anuraag Das Sarma

Senior Editors: Ayush Chakraborty & Amrish Banerjee

Art Directors: Rushali Mukherjee & Aindrila Ray

Copy Editors: Atri Deb Chowdhury

Visual Editor: Payal Sapui

Digital Editors: Aishik Roy & Mukund Daga

Media Head: Aryaman Manna

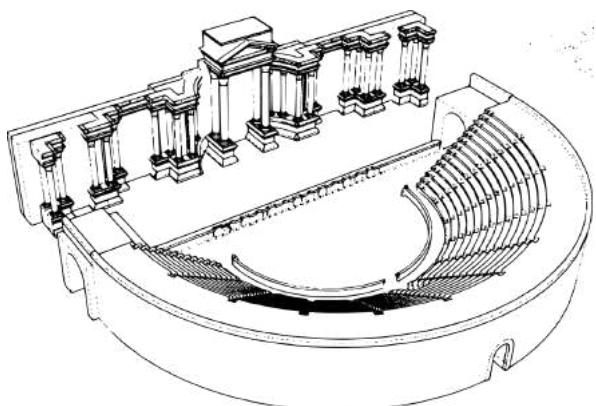
Head of Design: Arrushi Chakraborty

Social Media Head: Adrija Dutta

Curator of Newsletter: Sushen Mitra

Opinions Editor: Caiityya Pillai

Writers: Amit Shah, Sarah Hall Murphy, Prantik Ali, Arundhuti Das Gupta, Nameera Anjum, Amiya Hisham.



MONOGRAPH