

MONOGRAPH

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AN EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW WITH ANIRBAN DASGUPTA

STUDENT LED MAGAZINE

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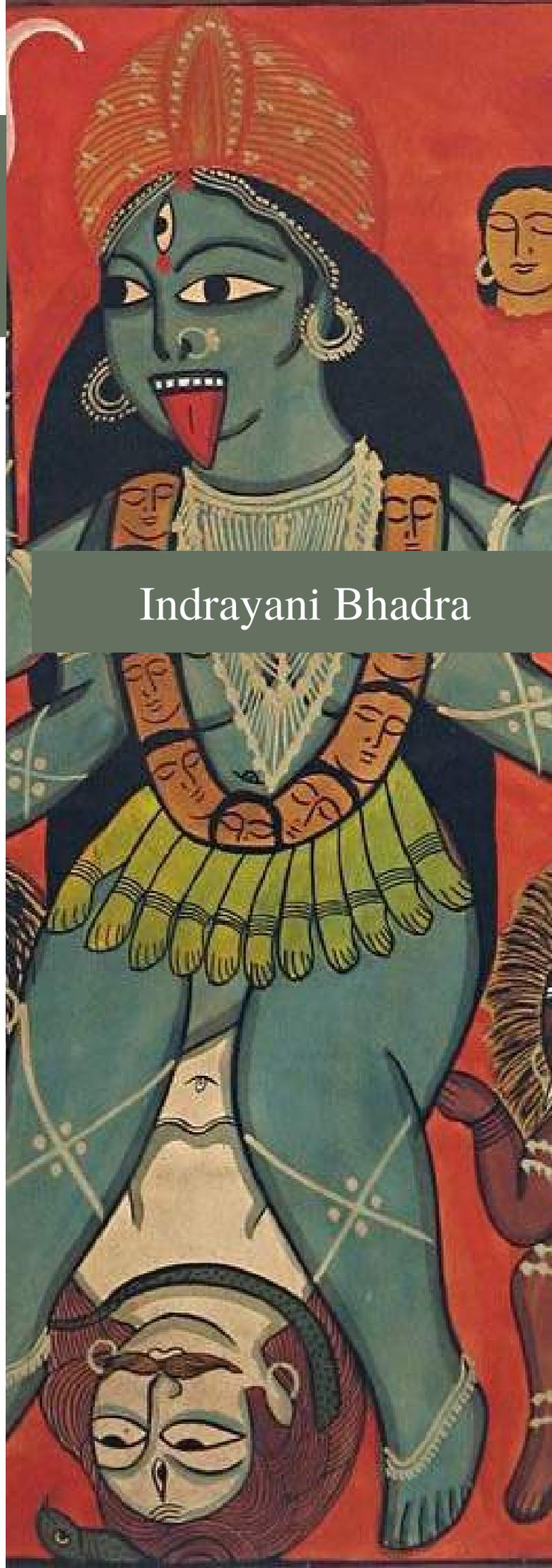
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Editor's Note

Perhaps the one thing I have learnt about Art is that it resurrects. Whether good or bad, that we will perhaps never know - but it resurrects. It brings back people and things of the past, it takes you back to cozy safe spaces where good things happened and where there was love, and warmth. Monograph differs a little in its representation of Art. We believe in taking strides forward - one small step for us, one giant leap for all that we believe in. And that is what we have done throughout the month of October, and what we hope to do moving forward. We collaborated with the Kolkata Police on one of our favourite romanticised fairytales - Old Calcutta, and we were able to get our handpainted totes across to their shop. The Monograph store passed the audience test with flying colours too. (Psst psst, we are restocking soon!) And we hope to take bigger leaps and strides forward, as we grow more and more by the day. But now, as the reels all say, can we skip to the good part? Diwali is fast approaching, and the November issue promises to be a true to Calcutta Kali Pujo Special. While the Calcutta HC might have banned firecrackers this year round (sorry, law student), we promise that this issue will be compensation enough. The lights are twinkling on the horizon, in promises of faith, new beginnings, love, and family.

So, are you ready?



Indrayani Bhadra

A Year Apart

Anuja Mukherjee

It's a very quiet night in New York City. The heat has been unforgiving lately, just like the circumstances that life has presented everyone with. How could I forget? It is the last day of June 2020. My gut says we are currently mid-pandemic but who knows how long this will be our present. I have exactly two more weeks left in this city. Will it be clichéd if I said this is the city of my dreams but I would never want to live my whole life here? New York is where I broke out of my shell and I am certain I have so much more shell breaking to do. What pleasure do I get by thinking that without the virus I would be living such a different life? I'd say the pleasure is completely invested in the fantasy of a perfect time in the city. Could have been's are vicious.





I haven't taken the subway in four months. I should risk it. Maybe not. Will I be back again? Will I be able to live here again? What age will I be? What will my anxiety look like then?

Uncertainty is such an interesting word. Interestingly I re-learned the word 'interesting' from my graduate school colleagues last fall. They use the word to describe anything that isn't in their reach. So, to say uncertainty is interesting is quite fitting. The word alone has the ability to pack a lot.

I hope you are doing well in these uncertain times.

I hope you are coping to the best of your abilities.

A few email endings that I keep in clutch these days.

So many boxes to mail but not one holds my hopes and dreams tightly. Not one has the capacity to even project what the future might look like. Human beings have a few words that are packed with fantasy and the word future definitely is in the top few. Possibilities are not endless. Or are they?

I am sitting on my fire escape. I don't see my neighbors. When I say neighbors, I mean the people who made a Facebook group during strict self-isolation. New York City is currently the most affected city in the world. We have shared a few beers recently from this fire escape with theirs. They don't know this but I have on many occasions relied on them for my sanity. The routine of a typical American life is very tempting, something I could never maintain. One of them would work all night but just enough to get his eight hours, the other did most of the cleaning and cooking. They had a little quiet dinner sharp at 8:30 PM every evening placemats and crockery Et Al.

It's a very quiet night in the city of Kolkata, the rain has been unforgiving lately. It's the last day of July 2021. I feel numb thinking that once upon a time, I used to live in New York City. It has been a year, a little more than a year that I left all my hopes and dreams tucked into cardboard boxes. They did fit in those boxes after all. I will probably never see them again. I wish I said that with a little bit of hope in my heart, you know when you say the opposite of what might happen just in case. Jinxing/ed.



In the year that was, I have faced endless treacherous thunders to know that some things are just really out of reach, and life is perhaps about making our peace with the after-effects of the storm.

New York feels far away measured both in distance and in my memories. I live with my parents now and I have lost my job. There is a little bit of peace in knowing that I am not expected by anyone or anything, maybe just by a few word documents and emails that need my occasional attention.

*Looking forward to hearing back soon,
I hope this summer was better than the last
Dear*

I am sitting on a small stool on the verandah of my parents' house. It's one of those verandahs that overlook nothing except the neighbors' laundry. So, every evening with the ritual of tea drinking that holds me together, I sit on the stool and watch everyone's laundry, their plants, and secret storage stashes move just a little bit due to the broken city winds. A few biscuits coupled with some uncomfortable eye contact with the neighbor who did not want to interrupt their rushed air-drying effort.





Suspended between two cities, two households, the pre, and the post. There is stability in the liminal.

*The fire-escape,
The Verandah,
A Year Apart.*



They don't want de Beauvoirs!

You wish you wouldn't run into her today, as you run to the fourth compartment door to get in. You purposely stood twenty meters away from where you stood yesterday because you wanted to get into a different compartment. But you see her, waving at you from inside the compartment, having already claimed her space near a pole. And now, you can't not go near her.

"Hi!" you say drawing an excited smile and she gives you even a bigger smile.

"I saw you running to the door, in your saree" she laughs.

"I didn't see you standing on the platform" you say.

"I got in from the other compartment and walked here from the inside" she says triumphantly. You know she likes small small achievements like that.

"Right" you say, making a mental note to stand forty meters ahead, tomorrow. Or maybe you should just take the bus.



Ciara Mandulee Mendis



She looks at your saree and says it's pretty. She does not say it looks good on you. She says it would have been prettier if you had pleated it, and worn it the way a saree is supposed to be worn. You tell her you like it this way. She says it looks like a bedsheet being carried on the shoulder, back to the house from the cloth line, and you both laugh, your laugh fake, but hers, very real. Her laugh is very loud and you're embarrassed. In a morning office train compartment with people packed like rice in a dry piece of milk-rice, you can hear even what people think. You want her to stop laughing but she does not. So you take out your mobile phone and pretend to type something. She looks away. You feel sad for her.

You used to be good friends, a couple of months ago. You discussed weather and politics from Gampaha to Colombo Fort. But somewhere, in between your books and dramatic stories, she turned into somebody different. Day by day, she became intolerable. Somewhere deep inside, you know it was you who did that. The first day you spoke of the MA programme you got selected to, she was happy for you. But when you told her how they got you promised you would quit your job if it comes to that, she thought that was insane. She asked how she could have fed her kids if it was her. She said, with the government property loan that she had taken and the housing loan her husband had taken, she could not consider that even in a dream. You wanted to tell her you had no government property loan to pay back, or a housing loan to make a husband pay it back, or, even a husband at that. You wanted to remind her you had no kids to feed, that you were a kid yourself. When you told her about the amount of articles you had to read every week, she asked how they expected a mother to do that, with all her children's work and household chores.



You didn't tell her there were no mothers in your batch. When you went on study leave, she did not approve of it, she said your job was too good to risk for something as stupid as your MA. She thought studying too much would make you go mad, like the lecturers you spoke so highly of. She asked you not to end up like them. But when you kept on defending them, she wanted to see them and you showed pictures – the ones taken lying in the Independence Square, at literary festivals and cafes. She wanted you to clearly point at the lecturers with your fingers because she sure could not distinguish them from the students. She was surprised to see them in clothes that for her looked like pyjamas and earrings made out of feathers and coconut shells, instead of rich kandyan sarees and neat hair buns with konda kooru ending with agasti stones. She saw how too much education had ruined them. And she was even more certain you should not end up like them.

You kept on telling her about Laura Mulvy and Judith Butler because something came over her every time you did that – her voice raised and her tone became assertive. You found joy in doing that. She thought Mulvy may not have had a proper childhood and Butler may not have been able to find a good man for herself. You laughed from Ragama to Horape that day, and counted fingers till you shared that with your Gender Studies class the following week.





She asked if there were more like that and you willingly told her about de Beauvoir, Bechdel and Angelou. She thought Angelou was one confused woman. But, when you read Mulvy and Butler during exams, in an air-tight compartment, lifting your weight from one foot to the other, she always fought and got you a seat. She looked over your notes and read them with you, but laughing every time you looked up. But, when your office issued a circular banning sleeveless saree jackets, she said “they don’t want de Beauvoirs!” and laughed. Although she added, “aiyo, crazy people”, you sensed contentment in her tone. Her eyes gleamed the first day you came to the platform in a sleeved saree jacket. “Your posh look is gone now” is the only thing she said with a wink, followed by a laugh.

It is Ragama and more people get in. After all the small air gaps around you are completely filled and the compartment is sealed like an ice-cube tray, she starts speaking.

She tells you about a friend who had called her last night.

“She and I used to fight for the first place in the class back in school” she says, a little bit loud with a laugh. “She’s a clerk in a private law firm and her voice changed when I told her I work at the Customs” she says, still laughing, still loud. You smile. You can’t tolerate her accent. You want to throw up when she accentuates the ‘t’ but you give her a graceful smile. And you’re glad you have something to add to the Phonology class next week. You think about how you would tell them about her. A friend? No. The travel companion would be better, you think.



She shows you the flat she stayed at while she was studying for her Advanced Level exam. She calls it an apartment. She takes pride in her school. Though not quite famous, she's proud it is within the Colombo city limits, unlike your school. She says your school is the place which has given you your first strokes of madness, and that it is not very different from your MA group, and, probably the reason you keep on being attracted to mad groups. You know she is right. You make a face and she laughs.

As the train reaches Dematagoda, you tell her about your assignment marks. You tell her your scores were good this time. "Congratulations!", she shouts, all excited and quite loud. And she tells you how unsatisfied she is with her kids. How her eldest daughter who is in Grade Four has got only eighty-three marks for English out of hundred this term, and being a mother who always speaks to her children in English and pays a fortune for their Elocution Exams and classes, she is very disappointed.

"Unless you score more than ninety for all the subjects next term, your father will not get you a dart board" she has told her.





“I’m a tough mother, I am, and I’m proud of that. Education is very important to me” she says aloud, looking around and you are embarrassed. ‘If she gets into a State University, that is enough for me’ she adds. “Well, I will never make her do an MA” she says giggling, “she will end up crazy, like you”. She laughs aloud. You give her a fake laugh, again. And as the train gets the first glimpse of the twisted railway lines in Maradana, you know you are close to the end and you are relieved.

The train stops at the Maradana Station for a long time and you take out a note on Language and Identity. You read about Social Identity Theory while she makes calls around to confirm her three kids and her husband have reached schools and work safely. She tells the school van driver that her eldest daughter has a tuition class and son has an after-school swimming class so it is only the other daughter he has to pick up from school. As you listen to her speaking in Sinhala, you don’t sense the confidence she has when she speaks in English. You juxtapose the relaxed way she speaks in Sinhala, with the high pitched accentuated way she speaks in English. You notice something about the way she speaks in Sinhala – something similar to a trace of the old friend in this new travel companion. Sociolinguistics, you think. You’re glad you now have enough knowledge to analyse people like her.

When the train shudders to leave the Maradana Station, she urges you to put the note in your handbag which she calls the malla, to go near the door. You know it is too early but she can not tolerate your cursive-lettered note anymore. She takes the first step. You hold on to the note as long as you can and you go stand near her. You take out your mobile phone. When you can go on Instagram or Facebook, you choose to check your emails.





You click on the already read mail announcing a Conference on Humanities which is expected to be held in August because you know she is looking at your mobile phone. You show it to her and you tell her about the paper on ‘Phenomenal Woman’, ‘Woman Work’ and ‘Still I Rise’ that you wish to submit and she smiles and says ok. But when you tell her that those poems are by Maya Angelou, she laughs because she knows her.

“The confused woman” she says with excited eyes. You laugh with her, this time real. “I want to read Woman Work” she adds. You smile. When at that instant, the compartment makes a rattling noise and people are thrown from left to right, you feel sorry you told her all of that – the conference, Angelou, Woman Work, the MA.

The train suddenly stops. And everyone sighs and starts scolding the government.

In a second, the train howls and starts hobbling towards the Colombo Fort station. While putting the mobile phone back into the handbag, you say, “it might rain today”.

“Yes. Rain these days is like Sri Lankan politics, very predictable” she replies, laughing, “I will reserve seats for both of us in the evening” she adds.

A photograph of a greenhouse in a garden. The greenhouse has a gabled roof and is surrounded by lush greenery, including a large tree on the left and purple flowers on the right. The scene is bright and natural.

Savindri Ferdinando

The Greenhouse

The greenhouse that stood by the end of our property, and that had stood for long since before my family moved into the house, was flanked by nature on three sides. To its right stood overgrown tufts of grass; to the left, a smattering of dead pine leaves whose stench perfumed the air with their decay. Behind the greenhouse, obscured by the back wall, an abundance of pearly mushrooms poured like pus from the gaping carcass of a forgotten log.

There's nothing comforting about the greenhouse; but neither is there any undercurrent of danger. It's one of those places that exist in blissful neutrality, and even I must admit that they have done a marvellous job of preserving this space.

The shelves and floor have been swept clear of any of the grit that would have plagued the greenhouse's nooks and crannies. Hollow, clay pots in rows of three draw the eye away from the patterned flakes of peeling paint; intercepting each group is a coir sack neatly packed to the brim with fertilizer (the chemical kind).

I revel in the exquisite symmetry of the set-up, complemented by the sunlight flowing in, unbarred by the usual fog of dust and cobwebs upon the glass windows. Any danger of stray leaves or wilted buds has been alleviated by the complete and utter absence of life. All is still. Nothing breathes. Nothing suffocates. The overgrown, brambling wilderness of wild jasmine, gardenias and twigs remains outside and away.

My sister may as well be a non-living entity. She has chosen the greenhouse as her refuge as well; beneath a table devoid of even the termites that had once burrowed tunnels into its softened flesh, she lies stock still, her back against the wall, legs stretched out before her, and arms slack upon her lap. She's a marionette alone and abandoned upon a stage, strings cut.



There is a spike, an urge, perhaps, to brush the sweat-damp curls away from her brow and force the vacant void out of her eyes by wrenching her gaze onto mine. I want to tell her that she will be getting her white skirt and blouse dirty. A stray moth flits across my vision and the thought disappears.

If you look carefully enough, the amalgamation of light and dark concentrated in the deepest corners of the greenhouse, birth vaguely humanoid figures that sprout up like mushrooms. They are familiar, of course, for memory is the primary culprit and creator here. I think that my sister could be drunk; Lord knows she has been plenty of times. There, in one corner, between a clay pot and a rake, her younger doppelganger sprouts up, along with someone with my complexion and hair. I think I've always loved the way the alcohol burned all those times we tried it together; as if setting my very veins on fire, cleansing me from inside out and spinning me all the way into a place where the fog is heady with incense and spice and a need to just climb higher, and higher, the inevitable fall be damned. She must have submitted to the temptations of our parents' liquor cabinet. She certainly looks it.





“It’s astounding, really, that woman’s powers of organisation,” I say, “Five hours after we left the hospital, and she had the florist, hearse and extended relatives ready to go. You even dressed me up in bridal attire. Oh, the irony.”

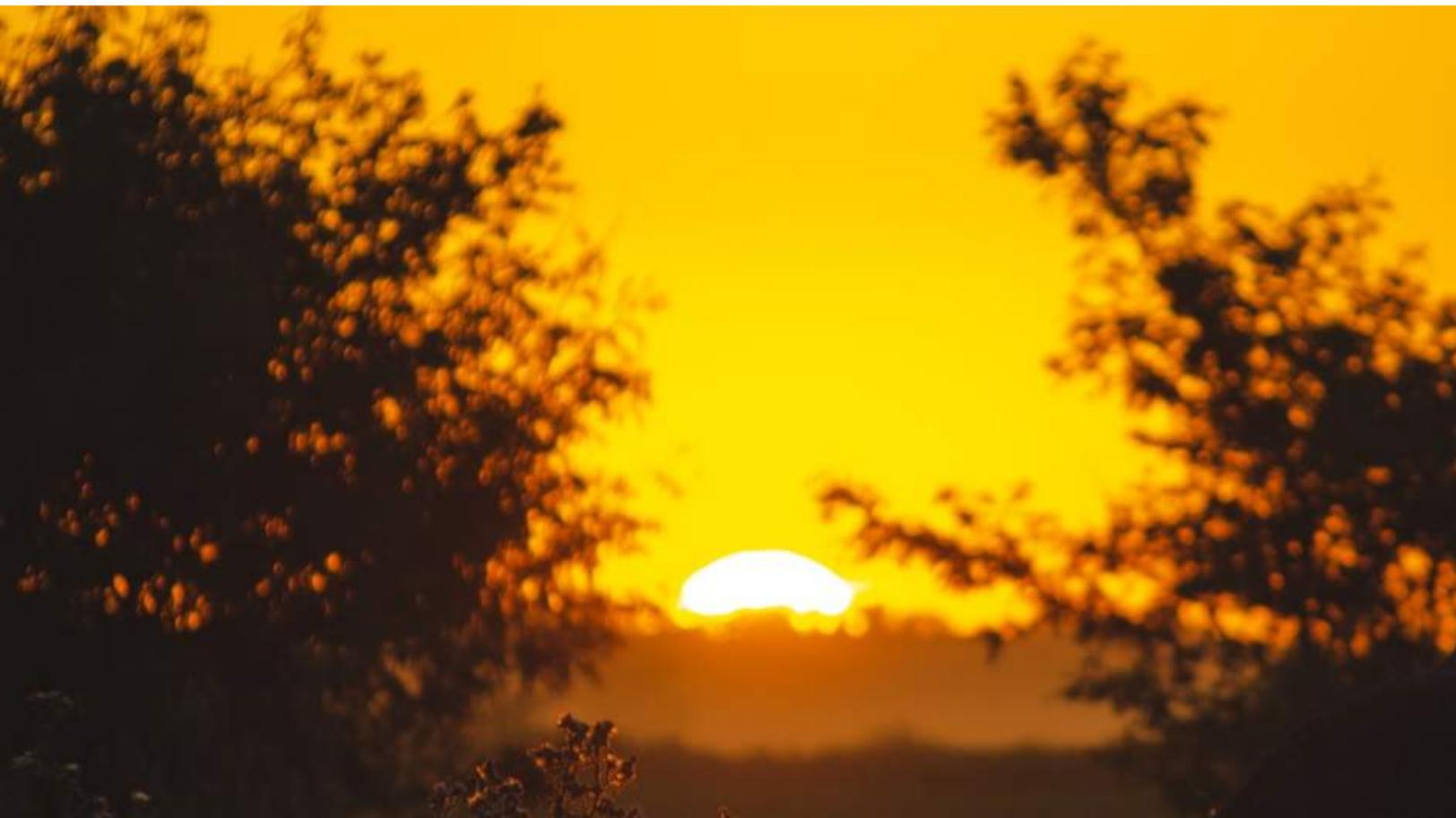
Once, when I was eight, my mother had tossed one of our brand-new books into a fire, just because we dared disobey her word, which, in hindsight, was quite a foolish and insignificant word really. Had my sister acted as I had then, after they left the hospital? Grit her teeth and direct her fury at some hapless, inanimate object? What sort of anger is required to power a scream? More accurately, what is the required amount?

“I saw the living room. Our mother has transformed it well. All those people, spouting out superficialities. I already know what my gravestone will read: daughter, sister, cousin, student, friend. Same old, same old.”

“And here’s the kicker. I saw everything. I know you think I didn’t, but I did. I tracked the path of every tear that took their merry way down to our mother’s chin. I even watched as the coroner fixed my bruised and battered face; and the cuts as well; wielded needles and threads and surgical gloves and literally extracted my useless heart, lung and liver. Did you know our mother oversaw the blush and contours to recreate my face. She’s...stubborn. I think. Did you know our father seeks comfort in nicotine?”

The sun is turning amber. I stretch my palm to a patch of light. Just sunlight. Photons, eight minutes away from the sun, travelling through an entire void; and that’s it. There’s a dead beetle I didn’t notice before, balanced on its round, polished shell. I’m surprised the ants haven’t got to it and left its spindly exoskeleton behind. Some kind of memento mori. Even that would have been crushed by a passing foot; eventually.

“And you? You look...we could be twins, right now, as we are. You are all monochrome, wreathed and sunken and tinged with red light.



I suppose you are as cold as you are pale, and I think I would like to see what you are seeing and feel what god-awful thing is crawling under your skin to make you grip your elbows so tightly. I think I would like to know what words are boiling away up at your throat.”

“Do you remember when I broke my arm. The bone cracked and I know it tore through my skin, right open, and we were both crying, and the doctors had to sedate me while wheeling me to the operating room. I think I’m sedated now. Everything’s hazy, but it’s the kind of hazy that you want to get high on, you know? Everything’s right there, unreachable, just on the surface, literally curving its fingers at me; but I don’t care. This is all arbitrary. This whole thing, this is a whole charade. Nothing grows in this greenhouse, nothing *can* grow. All those snapshots of us smiling and what were we even smiling about? All those people in there, what are they even crying about?”

“It’s like staring into a painting without comprehending the colours or the skill of the painter. We are mirror images, you and I, but you, you dance warm despite your stillness and I am behind this solid sheet of mercury, and it’s cold under my fingertips. This is a force beyond the sun, matter and emotion.”





And perhaps she is hearing me, by some defiance of physics or metaphysics, for her lips twitch down and she curls her fingers in. Perhaps for one moment there is a burst of flame at the idea that she can understand me and breach this barrier; but I realize, and I know, that it won't matter not really. And I don't want to."

"It's limbo here, and God, I love it."

Grotesque: repulsively ugly or distorted. A definition that encompasses unhinged jaws stretching flesh to its limit, carving new tranches into unmarred skin, fingernails dragging, stretching the bags of one's eyes until the entire eyeball swivels in a crater of sickening pink.

My sister is grotesque as she begins to wail, and I think she has heard me, but, of course, she has not. She has transformed into some Cthonian thing, skittering out from under the table with curved claws and hackles raised. I think I have found the answer to what fuels rage. Perhaps I should apologize, but what would I be apologizing for? I do not regret. I should regret.

She grasps at one of the empty pots, limbs jerking once more controlled by strings, and flings it. It crashes through the glass of the right wall. The shards raining down should be beautiful, I should be afraid, but it's fascinating in its own right. It's a chaotic symphony of ceramic and clay against soft thumps of grass, and it's this girl gasping out heaving breaths through gritted teeth, accompanied by the sharp edge of a keening crescendo; a note no one would want to play lest it destroy everything completely. Interesting. I should wrap my arms around her. Perhaps soothe. That's the prescription for grief, isn't it? I should, I should, I should...

She's basking in the aftermath, still once more. Then, with a jerk of her spine, she is stepping through the glass, leaving the greenhouse. She heads to the tufts of grass on the right where she picks up a shard of pottery and pockets it. I frown. The path she takes back to the house is alive with buzzing mosquitoes and blinking glow-worms; white jasmine and leaves with downy hairs, fresh and sprightly. Her step is firm, leaving imprints on the grass. The light of her home welcomes her into its gaping maw.

Her wails echo long after she has gone, and I think that only mushrooms and the exoskeletons of dead insects can exist in this space again.



The Retrograde

Ankita Gupta

At seven in the evening, when the doorbell rang, Eeshan was busy prepping things for the party. Wondering who had turned up, he hastily went to the door. It was Niloy. "I'm here to help out" he said with a grin. "How much can you possibly manage by yourself?" Holding forward a single rose that had a thin long stalk, he bowed theatrically. "Congratulations, Mr. Play Writer." Eeshan knew that the emphatic 'by yourself' was hardly intentional, but it bothered him.

A lot of things bothered him. They always had. But it got worse after his wife Suhina left. Everyone blamed Eeshan for their failed marriage, and he did nothing to redeem himself in their eyes.





There was a cold draft inside the living room. Taking off his overcoat, Niloy headed straight for the kitchen. “That’s a lot of food and drink” he remarked, surveying the counter, “for such a small party.”

“Jackie, Rohan and Tushar are joining us. They’ll make short work of all the food.”

“They are old guzzlers” Niloy said while sampling a chilli fritter. “Who else is coming?”

“Dhruv and Chitra,” said Eeshan coyly.

Niloy let out a low whistle. “Ahhh Chitra. Chitra is the guest of honour. Let us make her feel at home.”

Eeshan made no reply.

“We can party late into the night and sleepover here. There is enough room for all of us.” winked Niloy.

“I have a doctor’s appointment tomorrow morning. Let’s wrap it up by midnight.”



Eeshan did not want anyone to mess around in his business. He silently continued chopping chillies for the coriander chutney. Humming an old tune, Niloy started to load the beer bottles into the refrigerator.

Turning his back to him, Eeshan switched on the mixer grinder. The jarring sound that erupted, reminded him of Suhina's constant grating. "Curse the woeful day I married you! It was the biggest mistake of my life. I regret it sorely," she would yell in her shrill voice. Eeshan would hear her out meekly.

He changed the grinder mode to 'pulse'. They had fought hard and often. She would hurl words like immature, incompetent and even impotent at him, without the slightest regards for his feelings. But the last straw was when she said, "You should try being more like your friend Niloy." Everything spiralled downwards from there. Eeshan shot a reproachful glance at his friend as he turned off the noisy grinder.

"I saw your play at the local theatre. I enjoyed it, even though the seats were musty and the ceiling fans creaked," said Niloy. "Why was your story so open ended?"

"So that the audience could interpret the plot and its characters in their own way."



“But most people prefer a single conclusion. Usually a happy one,” shrugged Niloy.

After sorting out the arrangements for nearly an hour, Eeshan said, “It’s getting cold in here. I’ll fetch the heater. Meanwhile, you can help by moving everything to the centre table. The guests are due to arrive any minute now.”

Eeshan headed up the creaking staircase. The house was getting old now. He would have to sell it to one of those persuasive realtors soon.

He had many memories here. Mostly miserable ones.

Eeshan had always been a sensitive child. Overtly so, as the years progressed. He had vague memories of visiting many doctors and specialists. He had sharper memories of being scolded, and even caned by his military father. He used to be left handed once- but that was remedied soon. Faint traces of a scar were still visible on the outside of his palm, as it glided up the balustrade. No one had ever taken any notice of it. Not even Suhina.

His mother should have understood though. She had tried very hard with Eeshan, but the boy was incorrigible.



Medically, there was nothing wrong with him. But the complaints from his school kept on piling. They were innocuous at first, like ‘Eeshan is a quiet child. He should speak up more,’ or ‘He just sits vacantly and refuses to participate. This is reflecting on his academics.’ Then, the judgement got worse. ‘His notebook is entirely blank. He misses a lot of his classes’ or ‘Eeshan has bitten a classmate today. This kind of disorderly behaviour will not be tolerated here.’

His mother would patiently (and tearfully) hear the teachers complain about her son. Not once though, did she ever listen to Eeshan. Not when he tried to tell her that he hated home and that he hated his school even more. Nor when he told her that the school kids were bullying him. She always thought it was his fault.

Eeshan suspected from a very young age that his parents were ashamed of him. Everything was bubble wrapped in an air of constraint. No one ever laughed freely in the house. It seemed to young Eeshan, that he was somehow responsible for the situation. Maybe that was why his parents would never take him out on trips. Or when there were guests in the house, they would ask him to stay upstairs in his room and cause no disturbance.



Niloy was the first friend that he ever had. He would protect him from the bullies and keep him company through his troubled times. Eeshan would follow him around everywhere. He would share his tiffin and tazzo cards with him, and asked for little in return.

Everyone loved Niloy. He had talent. And charm. At school, he progressed from class monitor to prefect to head boy. He excelled at sports and never got a nosebleed while playing kabaddi. While Niloy got ‘Excellent’ or at least a ‘Very Good’ in his report card, Eeshan’s mother had to hide her son’s marks from the relatives and plead with the school principal to allow him to continue to the next class.

When they were ten, Eeshan once confessed to Niloy that he was extremely jealous of him. Niloy had laughed it off, and then given him a rose as a peace offering. He did not know then, that each night, Eeshan would go to bed praying to trade lives with Niloy. ‘I wish to be Niloy. I wish to be Niloy’, he would chant fervently. But his situation remained the same.

Inside the guest room, Eeshan tried to force the heater plug from the switch socket. This resulted in a short blackout, lasting for a couple of minutes. He heard a groan, followed by the sound Niloy’s footsteps downstairs, amplified in the darkness.



The lights came back as the doorbell rang. He watched from the corridor as Niloy went to the door to greet his guests. Switching off the lights, Eeshan hurried down thinking that Chitra had come.

It was only Jaikishan. He punched Eeshan on the ribs and muttered, “Congratulations on the play. You are finally turning into a bigshot screenwriter.”

Eeshan smiled curtly through his stinging ribcage. Jackie had been one of the kids who had bullied him in the past. But he seemed to have no recollection of it.

Rohan arrived next, followed by Tushar, then Chitra. Dhruv texted Eeshan that he would not be able to make it. ‘Family emergency’ read the message. An image of a younger Dhruv flashed across Eeshan’s mind, brandishing his school bag and blaring out loud, ‘LOST PROPERTY, THIRD CLASS QUALITY.’ Eeshan did not really mind Dhruv’s absence.

Instead, he focused his attention on Chitra. She was looking stunning in that green dress. He wanted to discuss the storyline of the play with her, but she told him that she had not seen it yet.

Eeshan did not like parties. He stood at a corner of the room in silence with a drink in his hand. He observed Niloy. A small lizard was crawled on the beam above him.

They all sat down to dinner. They were enjoying the food when a slight tragedy occurred. When Eeshan leaned across the table to serve chutney to Chitra, he ended up spilling it on her dress. She squealed in protest.

“The toilet is in the first floor towards the left,” Niloy offered kindly.

“Wait!” blurted Eeshan. “You can wash up in the sink here.” Chitra glared at him and strode off. Once she was out of earshot, the others roared with laughter. Eeshan tried to smile but fumed inwardly at the situation.

The rest of the evening was uninteresting. They all played cards for a while. Eeshan, Niloy and Chitra versus Tushar and Rohan. It was fun at first but they gave up when Tushar won most of the rounds. The guy cheated shamelessly. At around ten, Chitra said “I must be heading back now. Thanks for having us over Eeshan. See you. Later.” Later seemed a long way off.





Tushar suggested a game of poker, but Rohan quickly announced that he had to go too. The remaining guests, except Niloy left within the next hour. “It was a chill party. Let’s do it again. I will host next. We will also invite Chitra” said Niloy. “There are enough leftovers to last a week though. Let me help you clear it up,” he proffered.

“I will do it tomorrow morning,” said Eeshan yawning widely. Brushing aside a lizard that had fallen on his overcoat, Niloy bid goodbye and headed out. After he heard the door close, Eeshan picked up the rose. There were no thorns in the long stalk. He twirled it in his hand for a while, then threw it into the heater. He watched till the petals burned to ash. The heater hissed and flickered and then went back to normal.

Taking some uneaten food in a tray, Eeshan trudged up the stairs. He went inside the guest room and switched on the lights. “E-Eeshan, is that y-you? T-there seems to have been a p-power outage.”

“It was only a short blackout, Ma. I’ve brought dinner.”

“It is r-really cold in here. W-would you adjust the b-blankets, please” she said through the right side of the mouth. The left side of her body was paralysed. Eeshan propped her shrivelled figure against the pillow, rearranged the blankets and started to feed her with a spoon.



“Did you throw a p-party? I heard s-someone singing an old f-favourite of mine. ”

“There was no party, Ma.”

“I t-thought I heard N-Niloy’s voice?” she said, the left side of her lips twitching into a smile.

“I am Niloy, Ma.”

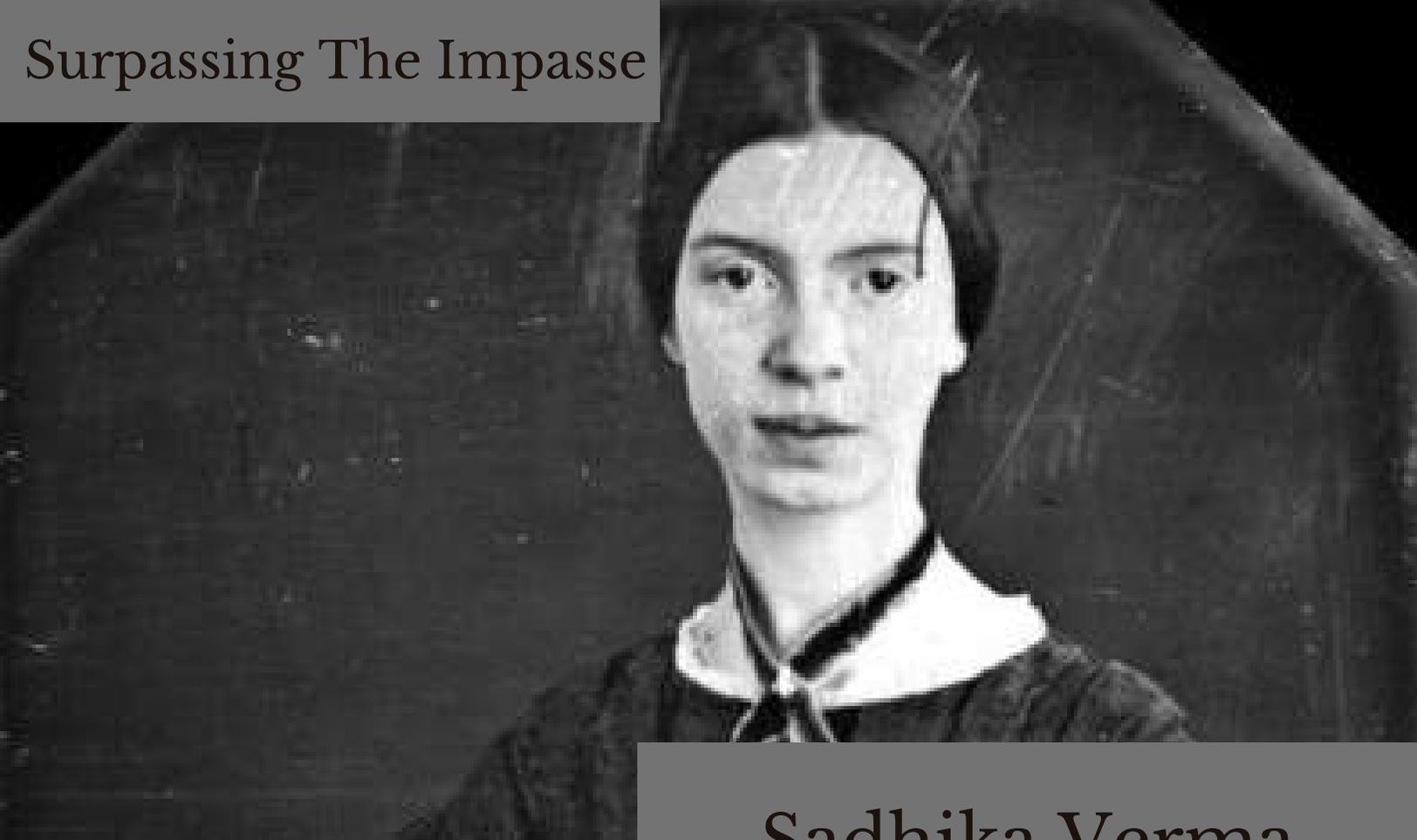
“A-are you sure?”

“Yes. I am Niloy. There was no party. Perhaps, we should get you checked for Alzheimer’s,” he said coldly. The old woman ate the rest of the meal in silence, in fear of another trip to the doctor.

From the lawn, Niloy could see the shadow of a figure in the faint light emanating from the upstairs window of Eeshan’s house. He had always had his doubts about Eeshan. Years ago, when Niloy had dared him to, Eeshan had actually bitten a boy in their class!

The party had been extremely boring. He decided to stop visiting Eeshan for a while- especially since Suhina was no longer there. Niloy smiled at the thought of Suhina. He would visit her again soon, he thought as he walked down the road.

Surpassing The Impasse



Sadhika Verma

The Impassioned Genius of Emily Dickinson in I Cannot Live With You :

“The Brain—is wider than the Sky—
For—put them side by side—
The one the other will contain
With ease—and you—beside—
“—Emily Dickinson, Part One: Life, c. 1862

Regarded as one of the most striking figures in the American literary tradition with fresh currents in writing, Emily Elizabeth Dickinson has earned herself a significant position in the pantheon of world literature. Born on December 10, 1830 in Amherst, Massachusetts as the middle-child into a prominent family with strong ties to the community,



Dickinson shared her family household built by her grandfather, The Homestead, with her father, Edward Dickinson, a successful lawyer elected to the US House of Representatives, her mother, Emily Norcross Dickinson, her younger sister Lavinia and her older brother, William Austin Dickinson, who later became the Treasurer of Amherst College, married her childhood friend Susan Gilbert and moved into a house next door. What Amherst lacked in size, it more than made up for with ambition – a fact that was not lost on Emily. A town that refused to think small, it was a local epicenter of religious reform and political debate. Overflowing with achievements as the Dickinsons were, The Homestead became a hub of intellectual tête-à-têtes, where Dickinson engaged with eminent preachers, missionaries, men of affairs, university students, as well as writers who were friends with her father and brother – taking part freely in the social life until her mid-twenties. Learning much of the Bible, Shakespeare, and Emerson by heart, Dickinson also took particular interest in reading women writers, including Elizabeth Barrett Browning, George Eliot, the Brontës, Harriet Beecher Stowe, and her own friend – Helen Hunt Jackson. Little did she know that one day she would come to be associated with these great names of the nineteenth century after her sudden, unparalleled rise to a posthumous fame in American literary history.

Before delving into Emily Dickinson's writings, it is important to establish the recluse character of her life that accentuates her fame by setting her poetry apart from all others. Born into a Puritan family in the Victorian Age when women were relegated to the domestic and religious spheres without any expectations to be intellectuals, leaders, or creators, Dickinson was a woman who created her own avenues of thought without giving into the orthodox Calvinistic sensibilities of her times.





She repudiated the pervasive institutional religious rhetoric and insisted on self-reliance and self-realization, basing her sense of piety on a deeper, spiritual and a more direct connect with her God. A woman with a mind of her own, her austere retreat from society – what she would call her ‘polar privacy’ in *There is a Solitude of Space* – became an urgent bid for imaginative survival (rather than the capriciousness of an eerie eccentric spinster with a penchant for white dresses, as her reputation precedes her). Her private world turned into itself, limited to the garden and its flowers, mushrooms, birds, insects, spiders and trees. Her window that overlooked the main road became the channel for all free flowing thoughts, and books became magic carpets that allowed her fancy to take flight and travel far and wide, crossing even the perimeters of worldly existence and venturing out to imagine death, immortality, and life beyond its banalities and set trajectories.

This unconventional literary ethos that leaves her readers with an aftertaste almost unsettling manifests in her radical poetic style, comprising of dashes, elusive punctuations, and sudden collapses of sentences – freeing expression by bedecking language solely with her own creative energy – to write for her own, for her art’s sake.



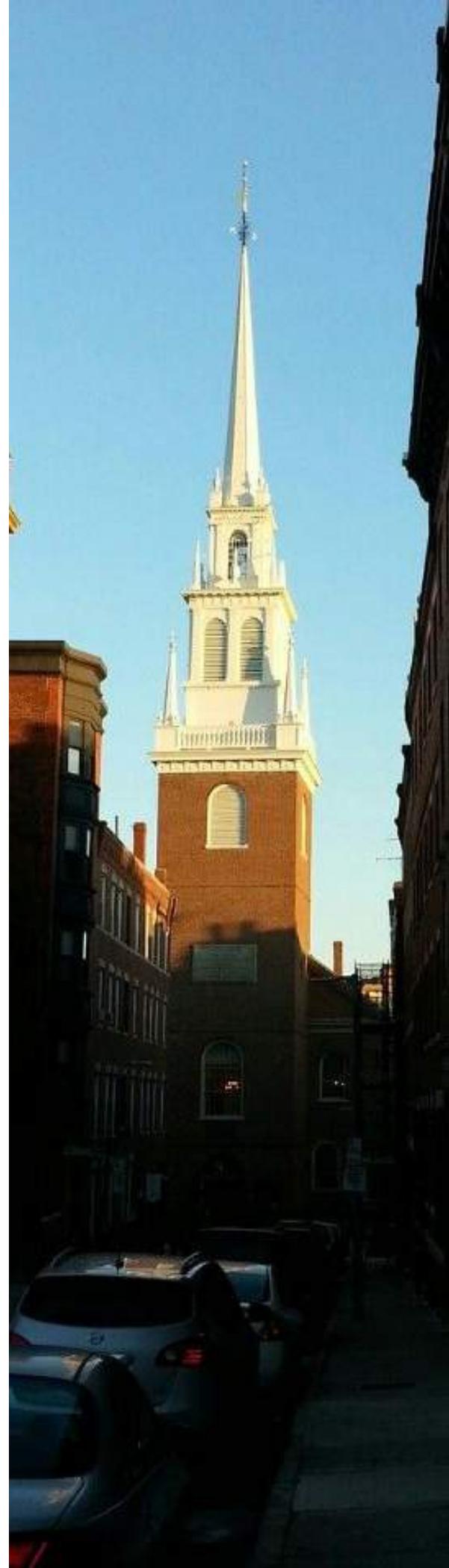
This distinct aroma of Dickinson that perfumes all her pages was strong enough to escape notice, and all attempts to make her conform to the mechanics of poetry by her literary counselor and confidant, Thomas Wentworth Higginson, were largely ignored by the poetess – ‘While my thought is undressed – I can make the distinction, but when I put them in the Gown – they look alike, and numb’ (Letter 261), she replied.

A closer reading of her poem, *I Cannot Live With You* (640), attests to this rawness of Dickinson’s extreme states of being that is at once a magnificently thoughtful production demanding real-time probing. While heightened expression of longing betrays language and invites readers to fill the dashes alongside the poetess, the poem articulates itself as a dramatic enactment of an organized thought process through the structure of a persuasive, deductive argument with a series of postulations in an attempt to establish symmetry. The overarching structure of feeling that binds all formulations together can broadly be seen to be divided into five stages of thought – why she cannot live with the object of her love, die with him, rise with him, not even fall with him, and, finally, the miraculous and curious romantic conclusion of the poem.

Unlike a traditional confessional romantic poetry that contemplates the coming together of lovers, this poem works itself out as an enactment of a process of elimination of all the possibilities of staying together. The very title, *I Cannot Live With You*, seems utterly anti-romantic, often requiring a careful second glance as it throws off the reader at first. The first part of the poem foregrounds the trappings of worldly institutions that root the lovers in their codes of conduct in an attempt to provide stability, robbing them of any agency and purity in their relationship. The domestic metaphor of china, described as ‘discarded’,



‘quaint’ and cracked relates to how in a marriage, the lovers assume the role of a husband and a wife – becoming external social symbols that stiffen them and rupture the sanctity of their love, much like the porcelain put up for display that gradually develops cracks. Moreover, the ‘Sexton’, a representative of Church, becomes the one holding the key to their artificial lives, bounded as they are by his supreme authority that overrules individuality. These very opening stanzas do a remarkable job at setting the poem and its creator apart from the rest of her society, choosing to remain distant from her lover over succumbing to the authoritative forces that stifle ingenuity and liberty to lead a life on one’s own terms. Unapologetically passionate and imaginative, Dickinson strays away from the conventional path of morality to preserve her own entity as a thinker. She also dismisses any extraneous ascendancy of doctrinal conduct to (re-)establish the sovereignty of her love for her beloved. The third stage of her argument follows suit – she refuses to ‘rise’ or be resurrected with her beloved because his face ‘Would put out Jesus’ by overshadowing the latter with his memory. She imagines her sight as ‘saturated’ by her lover's presence, rendering any other excellence – even that of the Christian Paradise – ‘sordid’ and degraded in comparison.

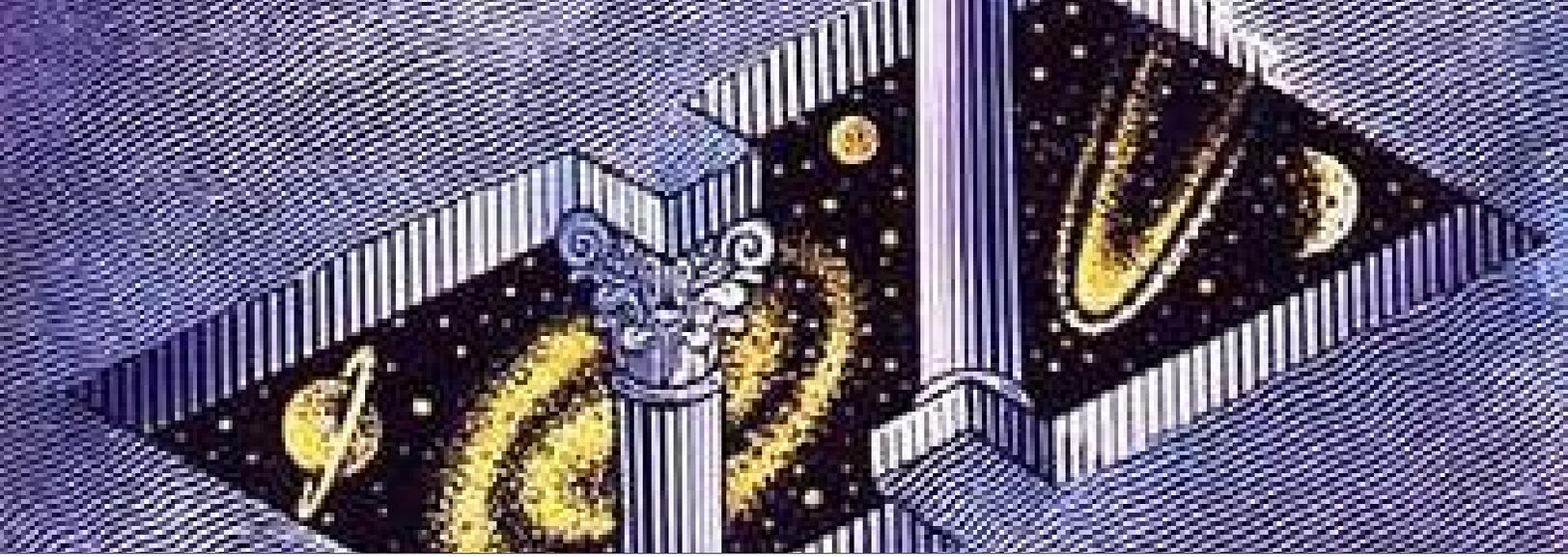




These beautiful lines are wholly original in their approach towards romance, with a quality that can overthrow the spiritual ease of the reader. Rather than making any outright assertions in the beginning, Dickinson is more pragmatic in her approach towards love as she tries to imagine a life in different, possible realms of existence with her lover to actualize her ideal. The argumentative arc in her poem communicates a new language of (seemingly anti-)romantic love – based not on the inseparable force that binds the earthly lovers together but on all the factors that create an unbridgeable gap between them. This cathartic exercise of thinking aloud the possibilities is experienced by the readers as well, as they follow the trail of the poetess' thought-adventure and share the same uneasiness. The personal, intimate, soliloquy-like nature of the speech only makes it all the more powerful, as Dickinson observes no ironic distance through a commentary on reality. The poem, rather, sets up a certain project and deconstructs itself – letting the readers in on it in the process.

'The mind', writes Dickinson in an 1862 letter to Higginson, 'is so near itself it cannot see distinctly.' *I Cannot Live With You* presents us with a mind that becomes so self-obtruding it begins to cast a shadow upon its own light. In developing her argument from within, the poetess recognizes that she is skating on thin ice and that her love cannot be realized in conventional terms. In *Trying to Think with Emily Dickinson*, Jedd Deppman writes, 'Thought, in her poems, is often represented as rapid, uncontrollable, and self-contesting; it is associated with power, extreme inner experience, fantasy, madness, pleasure, logic, suffering, and risk.' This intense emotional experience coupled with her mental lucidity makes the poem extremely rich and fresh, endeavoring to define meaning without confining it.





The intensity of her projects is only enhanced by paradox and irony, superimposed on her emotional yet organized structures of thought that attempt to capture the depths and vicissitudes in her thinking. The trend of these linguistic conundrums is established early on – ‘Life’ causes an incapacity to live, Paradise’s excellence becomes ‘sordid’, and the only remaining way for the lovers to unite is to ‘meet apart’ where grief will become their ‘Sustenance’, as the conclusion would suggest. Like her own mind, even her lover who ‘Shone closer by–’ than all else seems out of Dickinson’s reach – almost as if she is not able to perceive a life with him because his presence eclipses the possibility for anything else. This failure of perception in a poem that itself is so well-realized poses as the elemental paradox in the writing of Dickinson, bringing forth the nuances in her thinking and her keen sensitivity towards human nature that cannot be boxed. The fact that Emily Dickinson understood this peculiar, powerful nature of the human mind is proven by her evocation of a Miltonic Hell even in Heaven in the absence of her lover. Her love is not bound by binaries and articulates a new form of ethics.

Jedd Deppman, then, refers to Dickinson’s poetry as ‘try-to-think’ poems that ‘force the mind to do something extremely difficult. The project often entails satisfying reason’s unsatisfiable demand for a complete image, narrative, or understanding of a certain idea or experience.’



The willful movements of thought traced through dashes, ambiguous wordings, and usage of oxymoron also have a ‘try-to-believe’ quality – the thought becomes ‘self-transforming’ and the argument ‘self-persuasive’ with the readers monitoring the results along with the poetess and becoming completely engrossed in the process. This incredible ability to keep her audience captivated despite her impassioned diction being hard to comprehend is suggestive of the Modernist elements in Dickinson, focused as she is on a self-reflection that is fragmentary and radical in nature, with its experimentation in language. However, critics such as Deppman go a step further in their study of Dickinson to establish her ‘self-imposed labors’ and ‘disinheritance’ from the conventional rhetoric as essentially postmodern ‘In the ways she refused either to accept or reject the powerful explanatory discourses of her time’. Her self-governing mind is entirely unfettered – choosing not choosing at all. Instead of anchoring her consciousness and reflections in the world she inhabited – like Walt Whitman – Dickinson’s poetry is entirely a personal, intellectual processing of her emotional states that cannot be pinned down to one monolithic analysis.

The final epiphanic stanza exponentiates this allure of the poem. After a series of assertions that seemed to negate the possibility of any romantic love, the concluding lines perform a wonderful miracle of neutralizing all anti-romantic, matter-of-fact expressions by taking an unexpected turn and making the poem one of Dickinson’s most romantic pieces of writing. The poetess, in these lines, envisions a wholly original form of meeting of the lovers that pushes the barriers of our sensibilities – there is a sudden transcendence, an articulation of poetics of separation where the two lovers ‘meet apart’ with just a ‘Door ajar/That ‘Oceans are –’. This oxymoronic enjambment, a product of the elasticity of Dickinson mental processes, allows for the realization of an imaginative ideal that finds

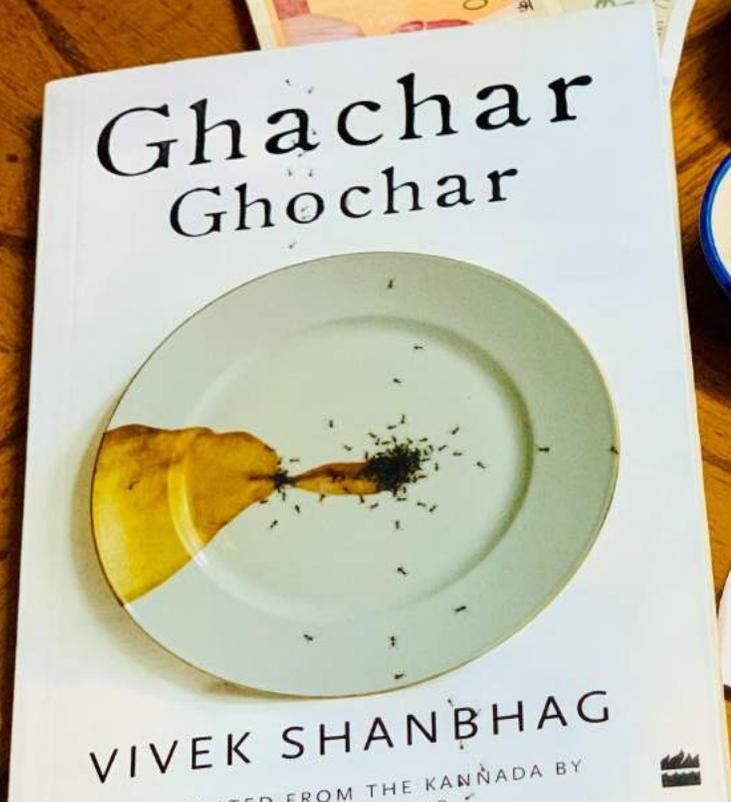




hope in the hopelessness and the anticipation of love, giving the poem its utterly romantic force. Separation and despair become the basis of their love and meaning comes to reside in the half-openness of the poem – abandoning the inferior genre of a happy-ending model.

Entirely uncompromising in her Kantian-thought experiment, Dickinson's faith lies not in the extraneous but in her own visionary capacity and ability to reason, providing solace and hope. By breaking out of the limits of human knowledge in a complex desire to envision fully something unrepresentable into conscious life, Dickinson takes a tenacious epistemic leap: she cannot think death or Eternity, cannot present them adequately to herself, but she cannot not think them either.

Emily Dickinson, looking directly at the spectacle of life, creates a brand new world of rich uncertainties, well beyond where thinking usually wants to go. Poetry was something she did rather than write – her psychotherapeutic response to troubling emotion, her respite from a world that tried to demarcate women's intellectual and emotional bounds. While many may refuse to follow her along on a radical journey of thought, those who have come to trust the poetess are rewarded mightily as they dig deeper and discover a gold mine of meaning.



Kinjal Chandra

Ghachar Ghochar

Ghachar Ghochar is essentially a nonsense phrase, implying nothing more than a sense of entanglement or perplexity, which is beyond repair or restoration. This very nonsense phrase finds purpose in this book, which through its multiple layers and nuances arrests the perils of the fleet-footed affluence and social ascent of a middle class Bangalorean household.

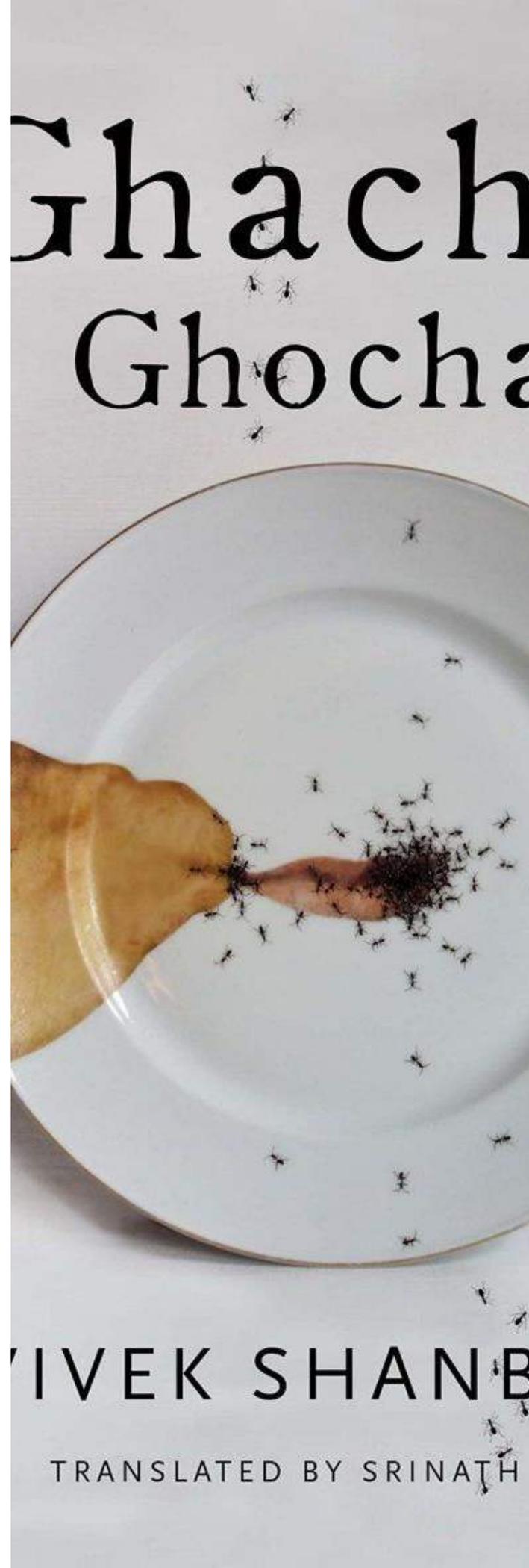
An unnamed narrator recounts the rags to riches story of his family in Ghachar Ghochar. From an incommensurable ant-infested ramshackle of a house, a successful spice business venture sets their fortune rolling. Their family which was once on their beam ends, shifts to a bigger house in uptown Bangalore. However, poverty of abundance strikes when their deep pockets start to impoverish their relationships. Conflicts gain ground, fissures arise in marriages, and riches impede their interpersonal relationships.

Ghachar Ghochar is subtle yet impactful in its messaging. Shanbhag peels the layers to these deteriorating associations yet rising fortunes with impeccable flourish.

He successfully builds the atmosphere with familiar and vivid settings, especially a bustling coffee house, which has much part to play in the narrative. The language is unadorned and brisk, which explains the reason behind a 120-page book delivering a message this potent.

Srinath Perur, the translator of this book written originally in Kannada, keeps the essence alive and the message relevant. The best part about the book is that it is a delicious mishmash of genres. The book starts like an ordinary literary fiction novel, traverses the feminist fiction path, and ends on a breathtaking note – making way for a psychological thriller-esque climax. I have not read something so unique and compelling in a while. You should add this to your carts already!

“It’s true what they say – it’s not we who control money, it’s the money who controls us. When there’s only a little, it behaves meekly; when it grows, it becomes brash and has its way with us.”



Ghach
Ghochar

VIVEK SHANBG

TRANSLATED BY SRINATH

A Stranger In The City

Shramana Ganguly

I live on the outskirts of *Calcutta* in a town called *Barrackpore* and I have been living there since I took up the first morsel of rice which was meant to be the important sustenance of life, a ritual quite familiar amongst the *Bengalis*. Wherein I have spent 21 years of my life and was looking forward to attempting a masters in English Literature from *Presidency* or *Jadavpur* and was quite engrossed these days trying to water the parched knowledge about literary history from Renaissance to Post Colonial literature. When, on a hot, humid day as I took the bus to *Park Street, Oxford book store*, a place which recently has earned my affection owing to its vast chivalrous contents displayed in rows and columns which almost stood like gentlemen and knights waiting for approval from folks. I would assert later that these books are the bachelors in town, so spoken of, so praised and managed to secure a place inside the drawers or the lucky bookshelves in the rooms of women soon to fall in love with them.





I conjure up emotions every now and then, framing them with the essence of life and enunciating them according to my own demands and likeness. Such was me framed within the reference of books, a blot in this huge world, no one finds me out and I, practically satisfied with my acquaintances showed no longing to seek new.

Thus, on a tired Saturday I found myself buying biscuits from a bakery and heading towards the tram line. The distinct clatter of a hundred street vagabonds like me, some with aspirations and some with sheer uncertainty managing to look like Tagores in eternal quest, searching for the vast unknown in the midst of a crowded place like Calcutta. I didn't mind the usual chit chats of the girlfriends, nor did I mind the arguments between the owner and the buyer from some flower shop which little disturbed my empty thoughts running in random lines. I pulled my scarf to cover the majority of my face as an excuse to avoid the heat when all I wanted was to avoid the attention of the passers-by. As fate would have it, I tripped against a stone and managed to embarrass myself by falling down in front of a pack of college students who turning sideways, ignoring me and resumed their discussion. My perception about Calcutta soon changed from the City of Joy to the City of Ignorance and I stood up to discover my right knee bleeding a bit. By the time I reached Oxford bookstore I was sweating in this heat, looked exhausted and was irritated. I was trying to decide if my day could go any worse when I discovered a bottle shoved up to my face and looking up I caught sight of Amit who looked far more disgusted than ever by the sight of me. Well Amit, as the name goes, I never decided to keep him in the list of my close associations but neither did I spurn him to the list of my antagonists but rather never bothered to give importance to Amit, the infinite.





He would be that customary guy, standing behind the bookshelves, with a pointed nose tilted to a side as he ravaged books, always looking for something, an infinite knowledge, a boundless story or perhaps a book on how to frown a bit less. Sometimes it would appear that he, having passed the age of innocence too quickly, ponders upon the fact whether to walk past his early adulthood with the equal pace! This Amit has however hated even the reflection of me and whenever the door of the store creaked upon, he would storm out and I would remain tempted to interrogate him: What is it about me that disrupts his monotonicity of life? Now, Amit having offered to quench my thirst was being a gentleman today. I, however, caught in a trance, declined the formality and seated myself to the tool and breathed in the cool air. To my utter dismay, the sulky boy having followed me from the door was now humbly perched in another tool by my side, which quite reminded me of my little self tugging to the loose end of my mother's saree asking her to tip me a bit more with the orange candies. Amit however didn't initiate a talk and I responded against the disaster that could have taken place if he decides to part his lips to a smile. The hours passed; meanwhile, I noticed him scribbling something, perhaps engaged in a research paper about Partition literature and to make matters worse I inadvertently picked up a Khushwant Singh, "Train to Pakistan".



The inevitable takes place and he looks up enquiring about my personal reviews regarding the tempestuous subject and after a moment of time it didn't feel so awkward and I was thrilled to aid him in his research. Let me remind you I lived in the 21st century, the age contained within Instagram and Facebook, where the world enters into the proximity of disagreements and disputes in Twitter and where the section of society has graduated in bride and grooms hunting from newspapers to matrimony sites. A part of all these bemused me and I being a person shifted towards art and literature thereby chose to be that saggy, outdated woman, whining and refusing to enter this world of heaped depression and pretence. Maybe, this is why I wasn't inclined towards keeping the details short or maybe I used this as an excuse to furnish my readers with every minute details of unworthy things like the bougainvillea whose pinkish flowers heaped near the entrance of my house and which I would appreciate more than someone's garden edited and cropped and displayed over facebook making it look more artificial than it was.

When the beholder decides or plans something for you, he makes sure that it falls in your way without you having the slightest hint of it.

I don't know what he planned in my case but when something out of the blue starts to develop in your heart, you roll up your sleeves because you are certainly the person of the contrary nature and thereby you would act accordingly if that even meant outraging against the beholder's wishes.

“Here is a latte for you” Amit arrived shrugging my thoughts away.

Over the last few days, we had been talking more than a bit. Our discussion ranging from literature to paintings and ended with music. We even dallied around the streets of Calcutta, visited the Indian Museum, argued about politics in a coffee shop and walked past a rally of protesting students, our arms brushed against each other, as I tried to restrict my imaginations where I took Amit as a friend.

“So, what is your impression regarding the subaltern resistance in a Post Partition literary work?”

I squeaked as the hot liquid passed down my throat and almost burned my tongue.

Amit's research was in full progress and he was almost at the brink of ending his research and submitting his thesis for approval. His dark hair fell on his face and covered his temple.





The brownish complexion with sunburnt skin gave off an exotic aura. The eyes carved ever so smoothly - they were huge almond shaped and the lips once pink now turned blackish perhaps because of his habit of smoking. He looked up and found me staring at him and sheepishly remarked,

“You remind me much of the characters of Austen's novels.”

I replied, “Care to take me as Elizabeth? She is too much of a woman!”

He remained tired these days. Maybe because of his work stress and his guide's pressure. I squat to tie my shoelace when accidentally I lost control and was about to fall down when she scooped me in his arms to prevent a scene and commented. Something was wrong with me. I wasn't my conventional self these days and the very thought of Amit never caring too much about the little things I notice was heart-breaking. I never knew how to make a man fall in love with me and now I was quite worried about my physical attributes not being perceptible enough to catch his eyes. Or maybe we never spoke about our personal lives or discussed love because we were far too busy prioritizing novels over love. Also, I never asked for his contact number, we would catch up randomly in the bookstore and proceed to make sudden excursions.

The next day I was back to book hunting and finding the ideal one, I seated myself calmly and waited for Amit. Hours passed, still there was no sign of Amit. I kept on staring, waiting for the door to open and Amit to enter. However, it was 2 pm and I decided that perhaps he was sick and secretly wished that I had his contact number.



Amit didn't show up the following day and for the next 3 days I kept on waiting for him to turn up but a month passed and I learnt that he had stopped showing up in the shop. My latte tasted horrible these days, and the air of the bookstore made me feel nauseous and each and every book seemed to reprimand me and chide me for being too desperate to fall in love. I couldn't dare to buy a look at the section which was his preference. A part of me wanted to forget him and a part of me still yearned for him. I had too many unanswered questions and I was waiting rather childishly for the teacher to answer them.

It was October, the season well cherished amongst the Bengalis. People and relatives around me were engaged in shopping and Calcutta never looked happier than this. Streets flooded with people heaped around shops, the affluent ones visiting malls and the sub-standard ones crowding in the road side stalls of Hatibagan. The lights hung up, and pandals decorated, Kumartuli at its busiest hours, and photographers buzzed round the lanes of North Calcutta shooting, capturing the beauty of Durga Puja.





I bought new clothes and wished my delicate heart would recover from its grievances, however it still waited for Amit to come back

It was ashtami, the eighth day of Durga puja and after offering anjali, I made my way to the usual place as it offered me an escape from the chaos. I was also working upon a novel and the bookstore was a perfect place for me to scribble my thoughts. I stepped in, clad in my mother's red and white kanjivaram and found a perfect corner. To my disbelief I found Amit, clad in a white punjabi, with an unkempt beard and a saggy expression. I walked to him and the usual aroma of cigarette smoke hung about him. He seemed to age a bit and parted his lips to a smile. I decided to be formal with him and inquired about his whereabouts these days. Funny, how a woman can keep a storm inside her mind and still behave differently outside. When he commented, "You look beautiful in a saree!"

"I decided that you are no longer one amongst the characters of Austen but rather you are fit to be like the creations of Tagore. An ideal Bengali woman." he laughed incoherently as he said this.

I flushed and my cheeks turned red. He reached my face and tugged back the locks behind my ears and I, caught in a trance, stood helpless. He muttered, "I have something for you." And opened his side bag and handed me something wrapped in newspaper.

"Open it after I am gone." He directed.



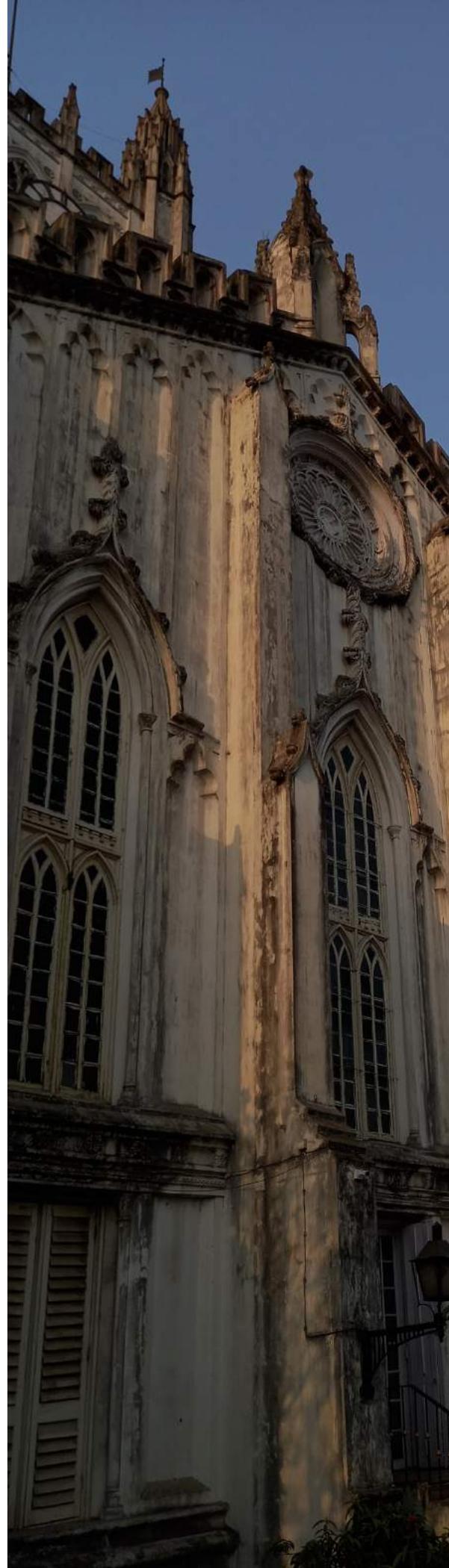
He sat down while I remained standing. He shrugged off his sluggish mood and took a sip of coffee and continued...

“I needed a belonging, a place to call my own.”

“When I first moved to Calcutta 2 years ago, I was repulsed by the stale smell that spread from the congested lanes of Bowbazar. The beggars who lay on open streets and the dirty roads that took to old dusty shops. I couldn't fall in love with the city.”

I listened to him quietly. The only interruption was the sound of bells and laughter from the crowd of people hanging near about. Meanwhile he continued...

“The sight of you entering the store added up to the list of the people overpopulating the city (which he resented much) whom I should be ready to disapprove of. It was after you left, when I stood near the shelf of a book and smelled your lavender aura and felt the touch of your fingers brushing against these books, your choice of books, especially Indian literature enhanced my interest in you and soon I decided to research on post-Partition literature to cajole you. I thought I would bring myself to your attention.”





The words sent a jolt in my stomach and I stood lost in his speech.

“You made me fall in love with Calcutta. You corrected my definition about the city and brought to my notice every minute detail. I was thrilled and like an infant, I looked at the city from a different angle and started falling in love with it. Then came you, your little squeals of joy, your endless diversions led me to admire you and I developed an affection for you.”

As the poet laments over the loss of the beloved, as songs wail for eternal love and as the hopeless romantic roams around looking for the perfect piece of heart that will complete his other half - I took to Amit's love . Though I still couldn't decide whether to keep him in the list of antagonists or my acquaintances, I was sure that I wouldn't keep him as an un bothered soul whose presence had no particular effect on me. I couldn't bring myself to hate him even though he left for abroad to get a post doctorate degree from the University of California and him confessing his love just made my situation worse. Neither could I gather up enough strength to bring myself to love him. He was a traveller, a soul in quest of the unknown. He would discover contemporary places and just when he would decide upon hating the country, another girl like me would bring into his notice the prospect of loving it. I laughed when I thought about the cycle and, in this way, someday somewhere he was bound to stop and learn to stay. I heaved a sigh of relief and opened the newspaper cladded gift. It was a novel by Tagore, Chokher Bali. I made space in the bookshelf, and adjusted the book in it. It seemed to look perfect there. A disruption in my life, a gentle wave of emotions, a constant reminder of the luxury that I could have afforded but still disregarded with a simple handshake and a promise to never cross paths with it again in this life or seven lives from now.

I take my pen and start writing to ensure the continuity of life...



Creation

Isn't it comforting to know
That your first house will always be a
woman,
That as your clots became bone and
filled
The human mould, another life
expanded
And with its lineal generosity,
Bent its sturdy pillars and pushed
against its own walls
To make room for you
When you could do nothing but take?
The womb is the sorcerer's biggest kept
secret, bearing a tenderness
As old as the moon.
Beautiful
Because it begins something
And if you know that, do you not
wonder
If Eve ever grew wistful while looking
at her swelling belly,
Tried to feel the heartbeat of her baby
With the gentle caress of her hands
And found herself yearning
That she too could have come from a
benevolent womb
And not Adam's rib?



Zainab Wahab

The Sleeping River

The sleeping river emerges
from the depth of my heart,
passing the crevices and safely reaching out to the
world.

People long lost resurface
in my dreams
and flow with the river
that dried up ages ago
in a forgotten summer.

Faces reappear,
so do the memories.

I drown in the river
in my dream.

I ask for help
seeing the known faces
standing absently on the shore
looking at me
like I am a stranger to them.

I beg for forgiveness,
they don't look at me –
their stony faces don't reflect any mercy.

'But I have forgiven you all, won't you forgive
me?' I ask.

They don't blink or look at me
while I keep drowning in the river.

Some nights I die in the dream,
some nights I float on the surface of the sleeping
river.



Ishita Ganguly



Assalatu Khairum Minan Naum

Farhan Khan

Open eyes, wide arms at dawn,
The Dua after Fajr namaz at dawn.
Soothe touch of Ja'Nawaz on my cheeks
As I lie face down on it, at dawn.

Tranquility and concentration at dawn,
Silent dreamy non-thoughts at dawn.
Walks to the mosque with Abba,
As he explains "Assalatu khairum
minan naum" means "the prayer is
better than the sleep" at dawn.

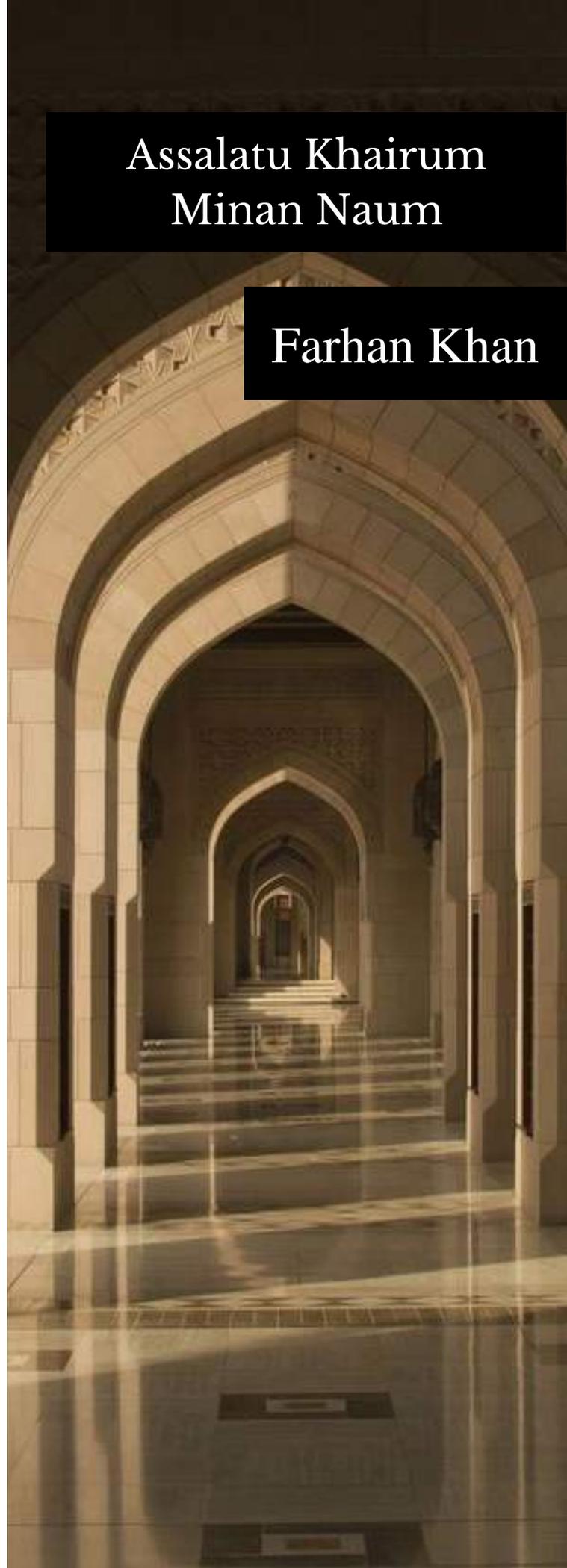
All soothing, glee and serene feats at
dawn, all perky clouds in winter at
dawn.

One rainbow-esque sky, one autumn
zephyr,
Freshening, splendid human faces at
dawn.

Alas! All that in falsity, at dawn,
For Abba died in winter under the
rainbow-esque sky at dawn.

All that in falsity, nobody raises me up
For Fajr, for autumn zephyrs at dawn.

Alas! My belief is dusk
and unbelief dawns in dark nights
Before dawn.



Before we close our eyes talking endlessly

Amal Mathew

It is simply the punishment of homes. Exoduses of windows, carpets on a bareback.
Where is yourself—among the early halves of dawn.

You

inhibiting the many forms of distances. Underneath our acts of war is this distance
between the idea of birth and birth itself.

Where Gods are searching for smaller Gods: Where any homeless is a home.

Ask

The bird-watching “what it means to hear birds, when one doesn’t exist”. Over night-
fall a year of stars have passed us over. As we learn to touch. I wonder. What is to the
meek: to imagine birds
or how to be them. That so I loved—counting their deaths.

Nobody knows their beginnings because: they do not sow, reap or harvest. They
simply do not.

As if the last night on earth—these heavens: sweep away the unloved. It is their hour
now, these passing visages. *Do birds of prey, bond with the prey?*

II

Outside the lights are awakening. Why is it always like this?

The wing-ward movement of grief’s orbit, hovering above the night’s remainder. I
watch, the oddities of our names—parting.

You tell me the early lights do not fall over my body.

It simply watches, forcing

an overture—into the affair of creations, their questions. As, at the vaunt of a leading
mouth, I question. What does it mean to see in the darkness anyway?

Listen

Come closer, listen, listen
It's just a heartbeat, the heart is not
Yelling your name yet

Come closer, listen, listen
I'm not sure if this is love, or fate,
Me, texting at 2.10 AM
And you, replying at 2.12

Come closer, listen, listen
This December night is going to be long,
Long enough for dawn to remain chained
Behind the dusky clouds

Come closer, listen, listen
The rain will fall slowly
Each drop, a musical note
Each sound, a phrase only we can comprehend

Come closer, listen, listen
We're young and possibly healthy
We can run barefoot without having to
Worry about the cracks in our heels

Come closer, listen, listen
We can pet and purr as you wish
Or read A Supermarket in California



Karthik Keramalu



Come closer, listen, listen
There's only so much our fists can gather,
Only so much our lips can bear

Come closer, listen, listen
We can talk about this; please, it's not what
You think, it is... it is...

Come closer, listen, listen
This is love, this is indeed love, not fate.

Listen, listen, are you there?
Come closer



Of Weak Knees and Weightless Pleas

They speak of the tales of great heroes
Apollo and Hercules and Perseus and the like
But I wonder if they ever looked beyond their
shadows?

Roses that couldn't bloom in the midst of lordly
sacrifice?

Such a rose once hath bloomed,
Fresher than the humble summer rain
And in his vibrancy the entire world revelled,
A colourful fantasy among the mundane.

He held their entire universe together,
And left my green monster forever curled
Oh, but darling, you know good things don't last
too long,
I was there the day his petals unfurled.

They peeled and pulled and slit and soiled,
Obliterated for all that he had tilled and toiled,
Hushed him up, rendered his faith blind,
Made my sedulous rose give up in the defeat of
the acutest kind.



Molina Singh

Doubtful. Fearful. Numb.

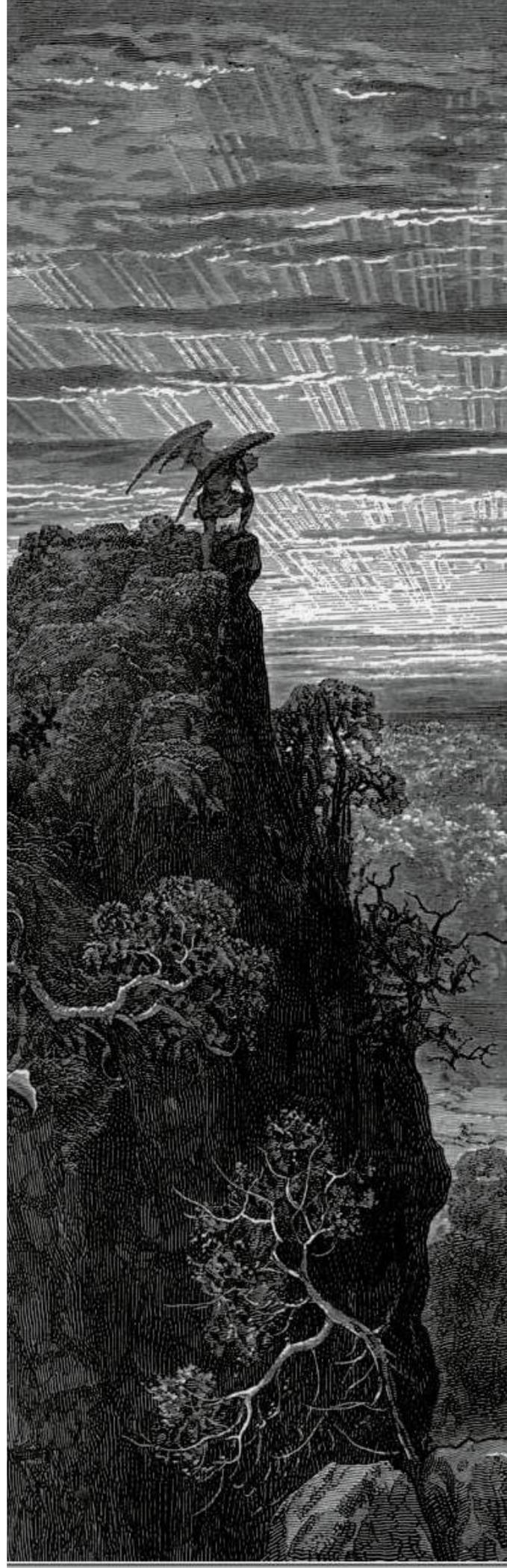
So he tried to get through.....

With his witty quips and fabricated life,
And humour of the sappiest kind.
A smile on his lips, that so blissfully hid,
The demons that tormented his mind.

I now know how Atlas must have felt,
Holding the sky up relentlessly
My love,
bones and blisters can all be fixed,
But where do we go when they crush our spirit
indefinitely?

A bittersweet lump does form in my throat,
And I can't help but smile at the games the
world plays.
And Ol' William was right not to fear hell,
When all the devils up here, around us, stay.
And even though bare and bereft he may lie
Let my rose lick its wounds away
For it'd be a second too small, a lifetime too
large,
The moment his thorns entire battalions slay.

Until then,
I live to see my rose sprout again,
Rise his petals against all petty sorrows,
Glisten like I know no other being ever could,
I live for the promise of a better tomorrow.



A Lonely Man

I am a lonely man
who, in the spring, walks
in gardens filled with pretty flowers,
wishing someone would see me,
think of me as beautiful
and gift me one of those flowers.

I am a lonely man
who walks in the summer sun,
sweating like hell,
wishing someone would stop to
walk with me to an ice cream parlor.

I am a lonely man
who walks in the rain
carrying an umbrella,
wishing someone would take it from my
hands,
throw it away
and ask me to dance with them
in the rain.

I am a lonely man
who walks on the autumn-filled roads,
wishing someone would see me picking
fallen leaves
think of me as intriguing.

Doyel Chawla





I am a lonely man
who jogs in the winters,
wishing someone would jog with me
and listen to my playlist.

Oh. I am a lonely man.
They say people change just like seasons
but look-
I don't change.
I remain lonely and only get lonelier.





Monograph Interviews: Anirban Dasgupta

1. From the arduous job of a field salesman at Godrej, how did your career transition into stand up comedy?

It's a complete change in my life. My sales job and stand up comedy are on two different planets entirely. All of us who started at that time like me, Vaibhav (Sethia) and Sourav (Ghosh), and we are all accidental comics. Because even 2-3 years before that, there was no scene and thankfully we were at the right place, at the right time. In Bombay, I used to watch comedy at Canvas Laugh Club which was called Comedy Store back then. Most of them were foreign comics and some Indian names like Tanmay Bhat, Ashish Shakya used to do 10-minute spots. My first ever experience of watching standup was actually an improv show where the lineup had Vir Das, Ashwin Mushran, Kavi Shastri and Rohan Joshi. Even AIB didn't exist, this was back in 2010. The whole concept where you just sit, chill, order some drinks and snacks while watching live comedy blew my mind. I never thought I'd get to do this someday. When I shifted from Bombay to Calcutta for my job after 2 years, in 2012,

I saw an open mic and just went for it. Just wanted to do it for fun, to unwind and write jokes. After meeting Vaibhav and Sourav, I realised that there is a market for this and this could be something serious. It was only in 2014 that I quit my job and decided to do this full time since I started earning as much as I used to at my job. It's really important to have some good friends in the circuit as well because had I not met Vaibhav and Sourav, I would not be doing stand up full time. All of us looked out for each other by getting gigs and corporate shows.

2. How do you think things would have been back in the day of your initial stand up years in Calcutta if say a Canvas or Habitat existed here?

If we had something like that here in Calcutta, I probably would never have left. The thing with Calcutta is that we are a bit slow digitally as compared to other metros. Back in the day, we used to get calls from people saying we will not book a ticket on Bookmyshow since we are not comfortable sharing our card details. I mean these were problems which no other city faced. All you need is some stand-up awareness for the art form to survive which is not very difficult. Just go watch YouTube! Even if we look at things from the corporate perspective, East Zone would have the lowest targets which were also true for my company. So if the West had a yearly target of 200 crores, for the East Zone it would be just 20 crores. It's the same with comedy also. We were that much behind.





3. Sir thanks to you, Sourav Ghosh, Meghdut and everyone else involved in the making of Topcat, Calcutta finally has its first official stand up club. So how did the whole idea stem up and how was the experience of setting it up?

It's all Sourav Ghosh man. He's the architect of that club. Even back in the day, he used to run maximum open mics out of all comics in Calcutta. At that time if you were a comic in Calcutta, you could get up on stage 6 times a week which is a luxury even Bombay or Delhi comics didn't have. Sometimes Kunal Kamra would come from Bombay just to do some open mics here in Calcutta for a week. Sourav Ghosh has always been the one who goes that extra mile and all Calcutta comics really look up to him because running those open mics was not making him any money or something. There is nobody like him in the entire Calcutta scene. Like when Munawar performed at Topcat, Sourav Ghosh arranged for a witness box on stage as a joke and when Samay was here, he helped organize a chess tournament with him. No other club in the country normally does so much for the comic who's performing. He met Meghdut who was a willing partner and very few people have the patience to do something like this despite having their own work like Sourav had writing gigs, zoom shows, etc.



4. As much as we love your special, Take It Easy on Prime Video, we still haven't been able to figure out why you decided to shoot it in Black & White?

Haha, so honestly my director and I just wanted to do something different. My material was really tight and unlike most specials which are shot at auditoriums, I decided to tape it on my home turf- Canvas Laugh Club, Bombay. So either way, I was not stressed at all but wanted to do something visually different amid all the specials that were coming out. We played around with a bunch of ideas but finally decided to go with black and white because it was such a good fit considering the content of my show based on freedom of speech, Netaji, etc.

I actually had a lot of trouble pitching this to Amazon Prime because they had never heard of such a thing. I used to write them emails every day with different reasons such as black and white is the colour of protest, I'm talking about Netaji who is from the black and white era, and some 20 other reasons which I used to convince Amazon.

5. Talking about the content of your show, especially the part revolving around Netaji, for which you mentioned you got some hate, how do you go about such things like social media trolls, and threats?

It bothers me, there's no denying it. You can go off social media for a week but in the end, you have to come back because your career is largely dependent on such apps. It's the whole Catch 22 situation where the internet is the worst place for comics but also the best place for comics. The negative comments and hate really spoil your day and you don't feel like doing anything else but taking care of your mental health should be your foremost priority. After all this hate, I actually stopped writing political stuff since it was quite demotivating and I just wanted to cleanse myself out of all this. Everyone has their own ways of dealing with it and it totally depends on your frame of mind. It's kind of a defeat somewhere if you're a comedian who's putting out a video on YouTube only to have it taken down because of threats and FIRs. But I really hope this changes in the coming years.

6. Sir what about the dark comedy genre appealed to you the most which inspired your show Afsos on Prime Video, besides the book Golper Goru Chaande?

Fargo was our biggest inspiration. It's a film and series which we really love. We also wanted to do something which nobody else was doing. Even with the present scripts we are working on right now, the very first filter is whether it's unique or not. If it's something other people have done before, we don't want to do it. Chances like these don't come too often so we wanted to make the best of it and create something different and unique. Plus, nobody had really fully tapped into the genre of black comedy before. Since we are comedians and wanted to do something new with comedy, black comedy was something which we ourselves really love and appealed to us most. Also, our storyline and the black comedy genre was such a perfect fit. Since the show deals with the sensitive topic of suicide; for us the challenge was how to make that funny and palatable to the masses.



7. Will we see a season 2?

Most likely, no. I don't think we are going to make a season 2. There are many reasons for it like it's not an Amazon original show, budget issues and we also kind of knew we only had one shot at this so if you look at the ending of season 1, the show is concluded there only.

8. In this pandemic, we've seen you on Kvizzing With The Comedians as a winner of the sports edition, the winner of the first edition of the chess tournament COB and also the hilarious show you have with your buddies Vaibhav and Sourav called "How Weird Is This Guy." Can you tell us your experience with all of these online events that arose owing to the pandemic?

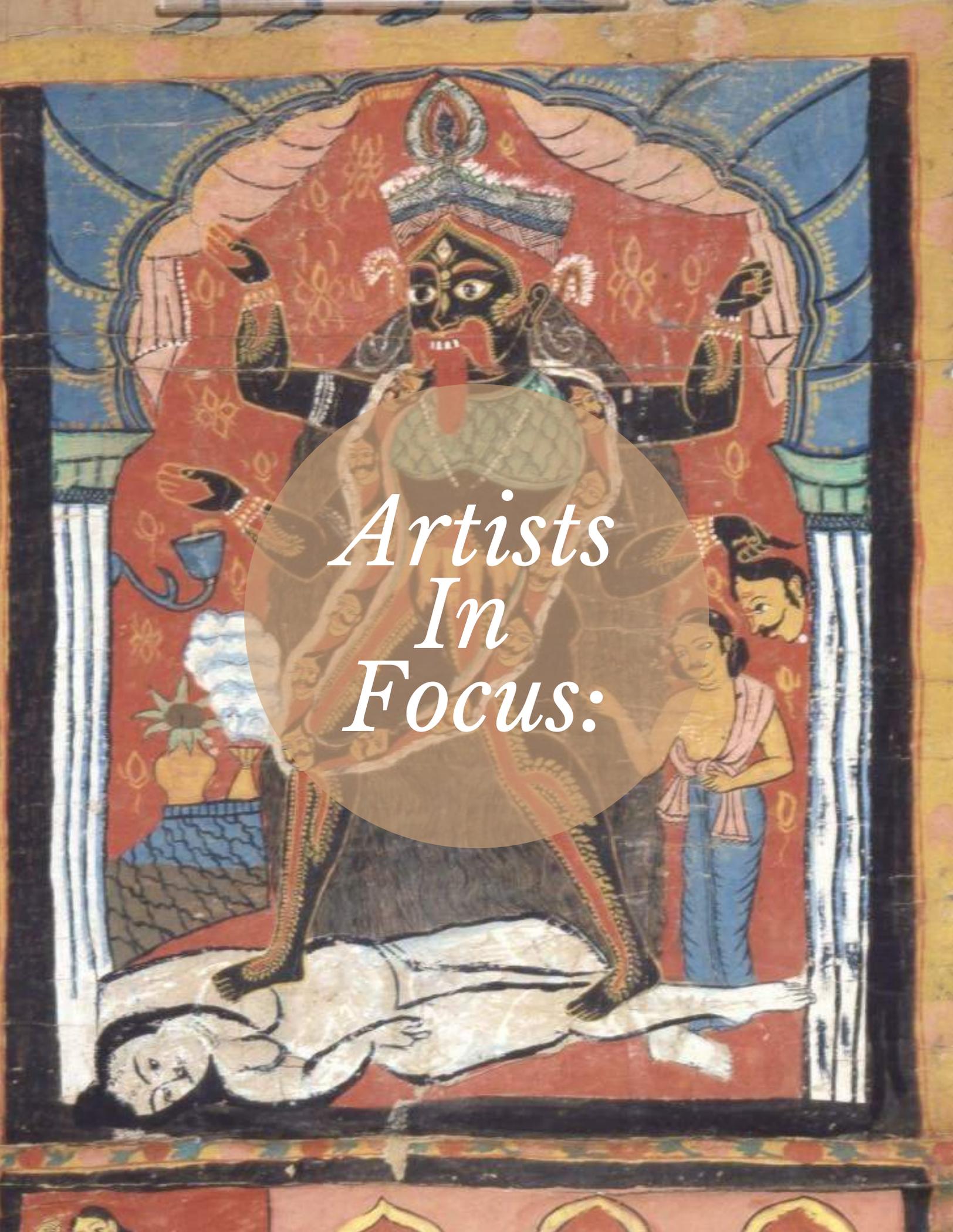
So right before the pandemic I was feeling quite burnt out and needed a break in general. When the pandemic hit, all events were getting cancelled like I was supposed to perform at Melbourne Comedy Festival but it got cancelled. Never knew the break would come in the form of a pandemic but I had a lot of fun. The two people who made the lockdown bearable were Samay Raina and Kumar Varun.



Talking about chess, I have absolutely fallen in love with it in the pandemic. Addictions such as binge-watching and smoking are harmful but I don't see any harm in being addicted to chess. It's such a beautiful game! I am a huge sports buff and have played many sports all my life but never got into chess. But now I just love it so much. Chess is just fond memories for me throughout the lockdown so many streams which I'll never forget such as Abish Mathew vs Viswanathan Anand.

Coming to quizzing, the tournament Kvizzing With The Comedians hosted by Kumar Varun is simply a jewel in the crown of quizzing in India. Apart from that on WhatsApp, we are quizzing all day in the group. It's a proper culture that KV has built and the tournament is the result of it. In fact, during the lockdown, KV used to do daily quizzes like a bunch of us used to get on a Zoom call in the evening and just quiz, learn and have fun.

Chess and quizzing was easily 80% of my lockdown and I couldn't be happier. The scripts and all I was working on were also in their initial stages and stand up was not happening. I didn't even do any zoom shows. The only time I opened Zoom was to play chess or quiz. The show "How Weird Is This Guy" was there too but it didn't require any prep since it was just friendly banter. All we had to do was show up.



*Artists
In
Focus:*



Ritwika Ganguly



Ritwika Ganguly

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