

# MONO GRAPH

SINCE AUGUST 2020.

17



FEB ISSUE • VOL 5 YEAR 2

**VOL**

5 — ★

STUDENT LED MAGAZINE  
DEDICATED TO THE ARTS



UNDERSTANDING  
A PROVINCE:  
BENGAL IN  
PUBLICATION

@the monograph mag

TABLE OF CONTENTS

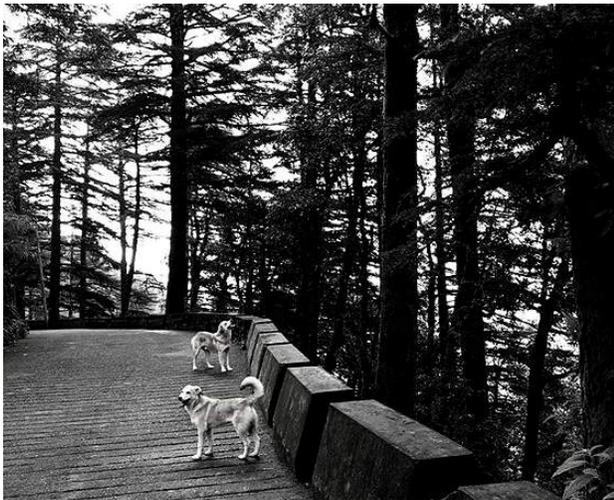
MONOGRAPH

---

Editor's Note

Understanding A Province:  
Bengal In Publication

How Not To Read Kazuo  
Ishiguro's "Never Let Me  
Go"



---

GP-01

Pilgrim's Peregrinations

"I Could Make That"

Meeting Sue

What If It's Not A Dream

Seabed

---

Anjan Dutt Goes To  
Darjeeling

The Mustards Smiled  
Wet

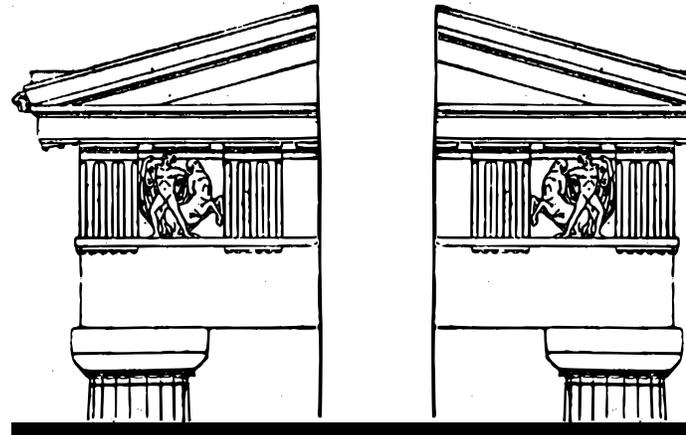
Artists In Focus

Our Staff

---



# Editor's Note



Atri Deb Chowdhury

একবার ভোরবেলা ঘুম থেকে উঠেই মেঘ ঝুঁকে থাকতে দেখেছিলাম জানলার কাছে-  
চারিদিকে অন্ধকার  
নিজের হাতের নখও স্পষ্ট দেখা যাচ্ছিল না  
সেদিন—  
সেইদিন তোমার কথা মনে পড়তেই আমি কেঁদে ফেলেছিলাম-চুলে, দেশলাই জ্বালিয়ে  
চুল পোড়ার গন্ধে ঘুমিয়ে পড়েছিলাম আবার

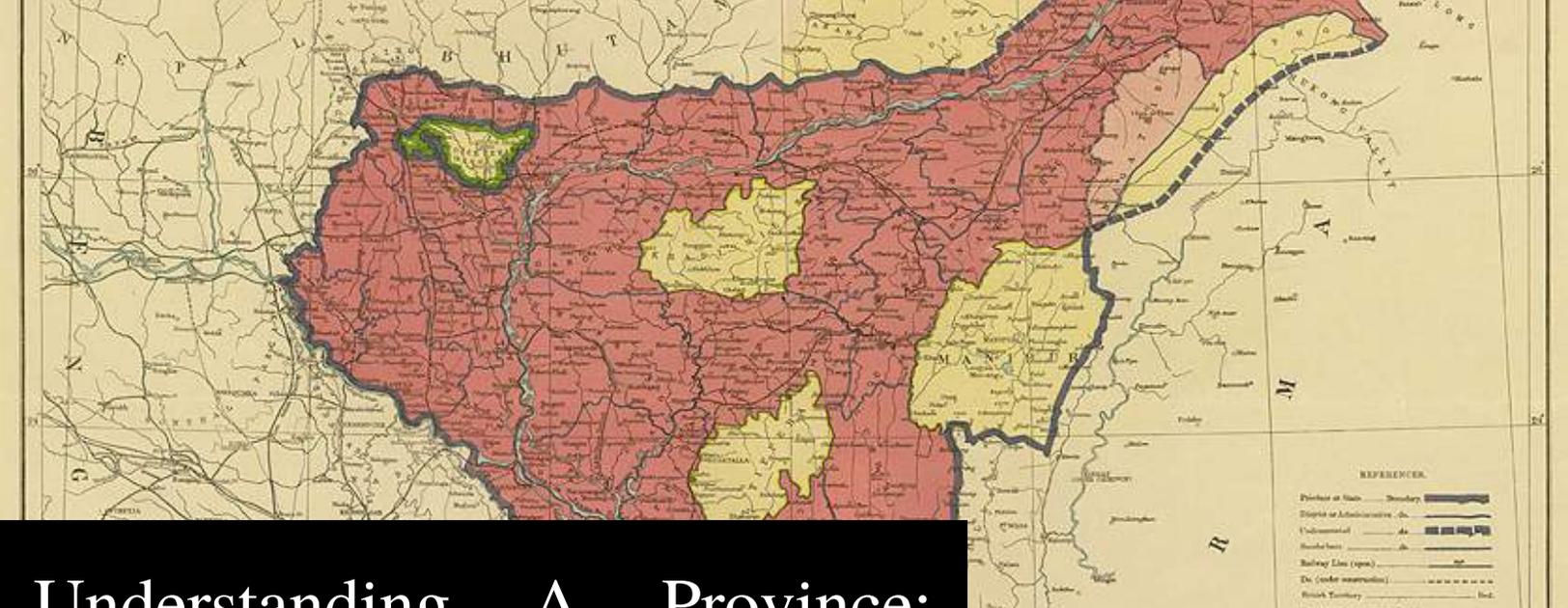
Winters are harsh, always have been. But I'm afraid this one's raged for two.  
It's been a month of chapped lips, splintered hearts and dreaded term papers, that a few of us haven't quite come to terms with.

Nonetheless, January(might not have been april, but was cruel all the same) with its own ration of rueful apprehension and freshly drawn RTPCR swabs, feels almost like the "mysterious head with eyes like ripening fruit" which in its absence begets the archaic torso that is to be this year.

Our little family here at monograph have put together yet another issue, from your own brilliant work, for you. Might not share the same claims as the "draught of vintage tasting of dance, provencal song and sunburnt mirth" that is art, but it's something- enough to hold on anyway. While the frost's still got a good bit of thawing to do, spring awaits- among the creases on this fairly large PDF and the sizeable chunk of data it inhabits, if not elsewhere.

Behold, monograph at five.





# Understanding A Province: Bengal in Publication

Anuraag Das Sarma

When the British, in their hurry to leave this plundered land, segregated and divided Bengal in half, they struck a resounding blow to their greatest province. Bengal, the land of the Sens, Palas and Nawabs, once as rich as the sky is blue, had already been put through countless famines. But to surgically amputate it, especially on religious lines was the end of an already long and drawn out road. Bengal had been split, half its resources on the other side of an international border along with half its industry, half its culture, and half its people.

To study Bengal, is to study a land surrounded by hills, plateaus, swamps and of course, rivers. And despite these natural barriers, man has continually inhabited Bengal since 300BC. Mahasthangarh (in present-day Bangladesh), Paharpur, Mangalkot and Tamralipta paint a vivid picture of our collective pre-Aryan history. Here you have a land filled with tigers, formed by floods and fast flowing rivers, chock-full of mosquitoes and all the ailments they bring, and yet there is resilience. There is civilization. Bengal has, over the years, navigated itself from capital to capital, city to city, dynasty to dynasty. It has gone through the ebb and flow of prosperity, but what it has always maintained is promise. The promise of power. The Sen's, the Pala's, the Maurya's, Husain Shah and Raja Ganesh, the Mughals, the Nawabs, the Portuguese, the French, The British, all their waterways led to the Bengal Delta.

---

Before going further, it is my duty to mention that when I speak of Bengal, I talk not of Calcutta, nor of the state of West Bengal. I talk of the land of two rivers, the land of the Sundari Trees and ultimately, the land of the Bengali language.

Through 5 books from my personal collection, I wish to cover this land- its history and culture, its past, future, and perhaps of utmost importance- the present. By doing so, I also aim to help you understand this land better, be it through my documentation or by piquing your interest in this topic. All the books I list are my personal recommendations, curated carefully and with great consideration.

---



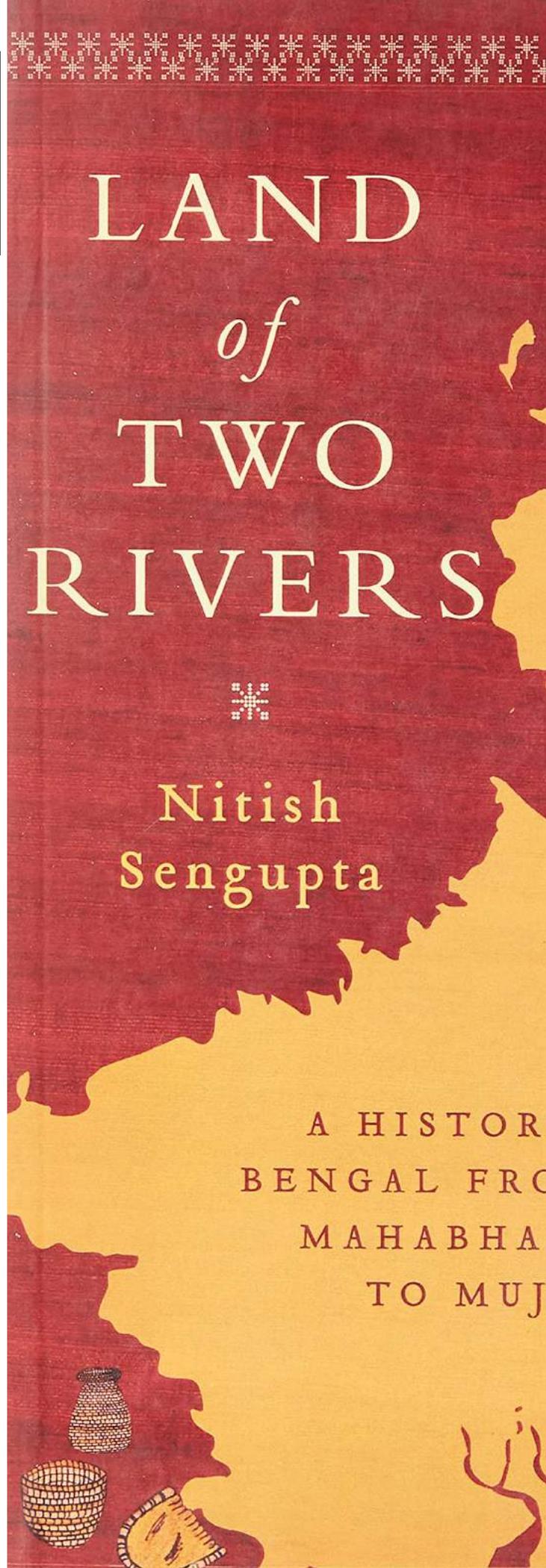
# *Land of Two Rivers: A History of Bengal from The Mahabharata to Mujib*

- Nitish Sengupta (Penguin Random House India)

Rs. 589 (Amazon India), Published: July 2011



This book is perhaps the closest anything can come to the words “compulsory reading”, at least in the Bengali speaking populace. Written by Nitish Sengupta, an erstwhile MP, IAS officer, ex-professor at Presidency and even the chairman of a UN Commission, “Land of Two Rivers” documents Bengal, from its early seeds of civilisation, through the Raj, and ending with the creation of Bangladesh. It reads like a history book, and should be treated as such. It is a piece of academic importance and begs not only your interest but your full attention. With commanding prose, Nitish Sengupta lays to rest Bankim Chandra’s fear of the Bengali populace forgetting their history. In a time when Bengal truly seems to be going through a crisis, of youth abandoning their city, calling it a hellhole, this book reminds us that this land is one of resilience and one of promise.





It reminds us, without any on-the-nose-messages, that one needs to cultivate resilience. One needs to give themselves to this land, to get through this crisis. This land has always been hell. Charnock, floating down the Hooghly, had originally considered making Canning the capital of their Bengal operations. The tigers, the mosquitoes and the waves however had made him reconsider the entire plan. But the next day, when his ship reached the three villages of Gobindapur, Sutanuti and Kolikata, he found his empire. The Mughal officers called the Province “a hell filled with good things.” The Portuguese, though dying of malaria, scurvy and dysentery, claimed to spot unicorns. Bengal always tested you, and if worthy, it rewarded you. The Sen’s came from the South to lay claim to this land. The Turks invaded Bengal for its riches. The Delhi Sultanate fought for the control of Gaur created and strengthened by Sasanka in the 7th Century. The Mauryas aryanised Bengal and Bihar and created the first great empire of the Indian Subcontinent. Bengal, ever since its inception, has been one of the most important regions in the world. A hellhole sure, but only the resilient can reap its benefits. Only the resilient can steal from Persephone’s garden.

In 600-odd pages, Nitish Kumar covers the entire history of Bengal, from The Mahabharata (where the King of Gauda fought against the Pandavas) to Sheikh Mujibur Rahaman, the Founding Father of Bangladesh. To have read this book is to have taken multiple steps towards not only understanding this land we inhabit but also understanding ourselves and our people.



*Field Notes From A Waterborne  
Land: Bengal Beyond The  
Bhadralok*

*- Parimal Bhattacharya (HarperCollins Publishers India)*

*Rs. 389 (Amazon India), Published: December 2021*

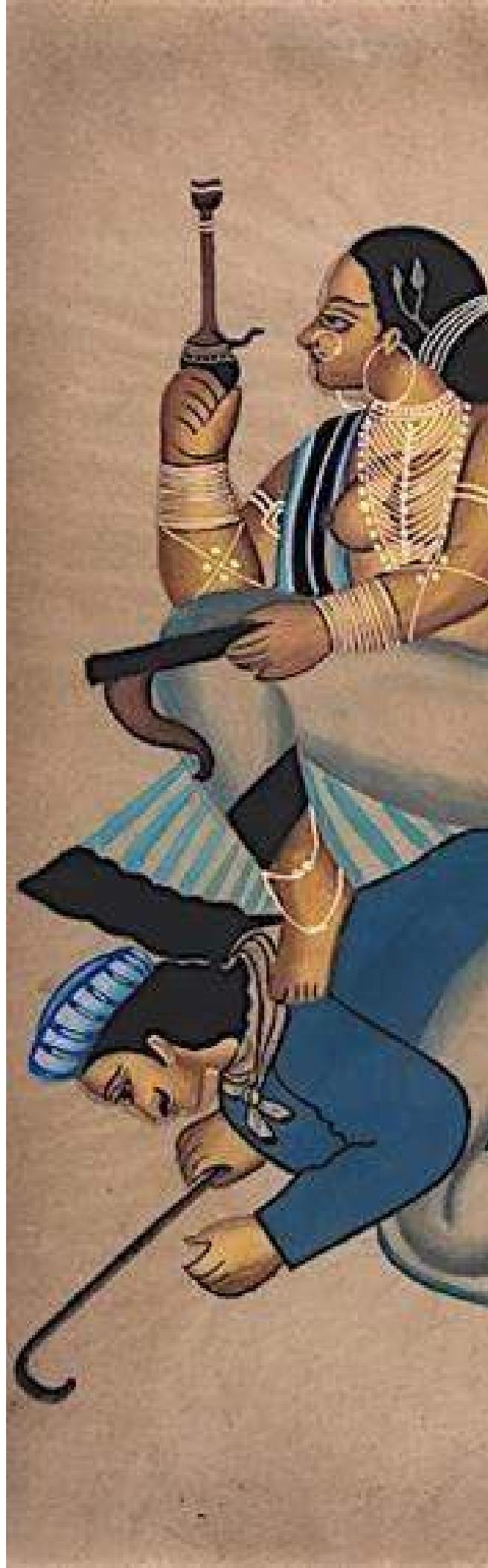


While *The Land of Two Rivers* covers the history-at-large of a Province by covering its rulers, dynasties and people of power, *Field Notes from a Waterborne Land* cements itself as a work of the masses. The book isn't largely historical and neither does it mean to be. Instead it is equal parts sociological, economical, historical and above all, autobiographical. While Nitish Sengupta explores Bengal through historical works, readings and archeological findings, Parimal Bhattacharya does it through his thirst for a story. It is, at the end of it all, people who make Bengal, and these people are the objects of his research. He goes beyond the recycled nostalgia of the Bhadraklok Society, of Calcutta's recent past, and finds and speaks to people who have lived on this land for centuries yet have been ignored both because of their economic problems and their lower caste. It is a slap on the face of the Bhadraklok Bengali, who busy themselves with the Bengali Renaissance, yet never come to terms with all that the common man has been put through.

---

Parimal Bhattacharya tackles the troubled recent history of Bengal in the book not by quoting academic prose, but by speaking to a family of two living alone in a deindustrialised town. He comes across tribes and villages claiming that they descended from the inhabitants of the Harappan Civilisation, covers the East Kolkata Wetlands and the Sunderbans like few before him, notes down the political and the natural and above all, covers a Bengal hardly found in academic books or journals. What stands through, in this book again is a story of resilience. The story of a fisherman uprooted by a river 11 times in 20 years, of tribal children braving torrential rains and floods to come to school, of men coming and settling in different areas of Bengal during and after the horrors of Partition. This book reinforces the characteristic of resilience, the ever so important characteristic of the people who inhabit this land.

---



# The Statesman

(With which the FRIEND OF INDIA is Incorporated.)

PUBLISHED SIMULTANEOUSLY FROM CALCUTTA AND DELHI.

## *The Epic City: The World On The Streets of Calcutta*

- Kushanava Choudhury (Bloomsbury)

Rs. 297 (Amazon India), Published: 2017



The Epic City posits itself comfortably in front of Calcutta's reputation as an "urban hellhole". Written by Kushanava Choudhury, a former journalist for the Statesman, this book marks his debut in the world of literature. At a time when everyone seems to leave Calcutta for greener pastures, Kushanava returns like the prodigal son to this sepulchral city. Educated in Princeton and Yale, he did the unthinkable. He gave up on the Bengali-American dream and gave in to his roots. His dusty Calcutta roots. Like I said, Kushanava put himself face to face with this metropolitan hellhole. What ensues is a story of a man coming to terms with his city.

I have constantly referred to the Bengali characteristic of resilience, and in this book it becomes most apparent especially considering the fact that the events in the book largely take place in the 90s and early 2000s.



The book constantly draws parallels, between the recent past and the near future. Of the Statesman, now a mere shell of its former self, of pre-70s Calcutta, the most developed city of the country and of 00's Calcutta. But what the book does best is explore the little eccentricities of the city. The little magazines (\*cough cough\*), the Budh Bikel meetings, the little hobbies that every Bengali cares for more than their jobs, and overall the way they claim this city as their own. One of my favorite parts of the book is where he talks about the difference between Delhi and Calcutta- of how Delhi prefers its gentrified gated communities and pushes the poor to the peripheries. But Calcutta belongs to its people. They have a sense of longing. They lay claim to the land under them. They survive in this deindustrialised metropolis. They survive in this city that Rajiv Gandhi killed in 1985. Well, the city isn't dead. How do cities die, anyway?



# *Gaslight To Neon*

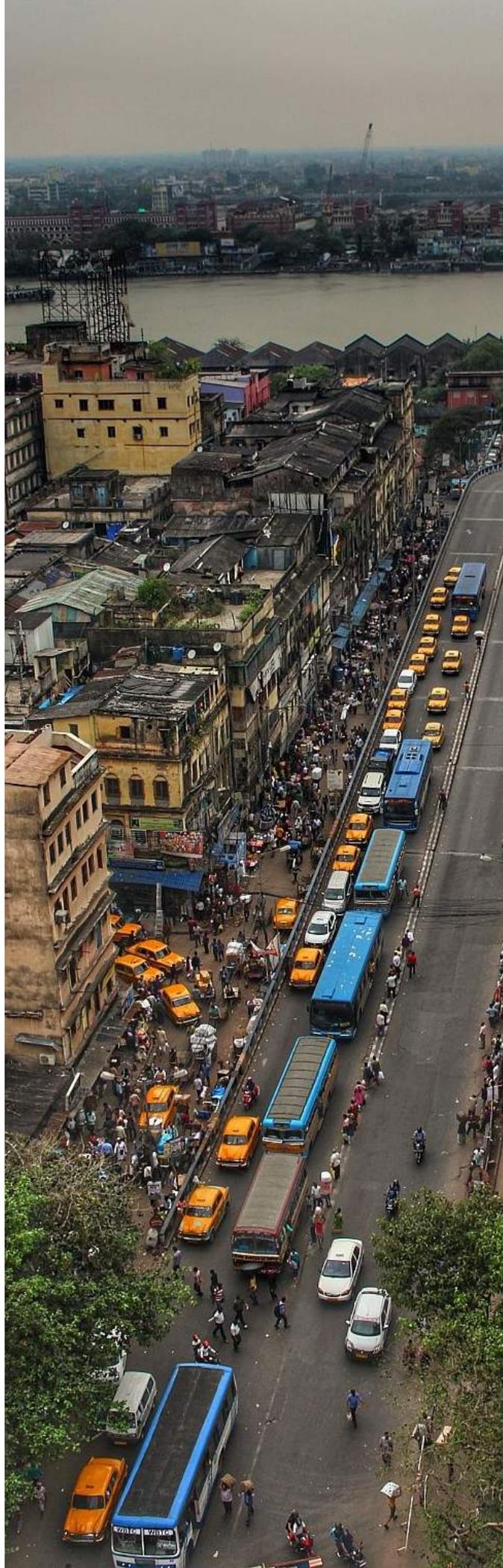
- *Ranita Gupta (Sutradhar Publishers)*



It was in the room of my friend and colleague, Sushen Mitra, at his 2, Loudon Street address, that he handed me this book- a memoir, written by his grandmother and printed by Sutradhar publishers, fittingly titled *Gaslight To Neon*. As a memoir, this book ticks all the right boxes. It is hard to put down, extremely well written with an analyzing eye, and refreshingly ordinary. When I call it ordinary, I mean it not in a demeaning way. Its prose is far superior compared to the sea of memoirs pushed into the free market every year. What I am referring to instead is the ordinariness of the content. This memoir, though intensely personal, is the story of many middle-class families of Bengal. Of life through the optimistic fifties, the depressing sixties, the violent seventies and so forth.



In the book we find her seamlessly traveling between the past and the present—from her Rashbehari house where she was born to her living room, watching her grandson play the piano. At times political and at times emotional, the story Ranita Gupta chooses to narrate is an extremely important one. In her own words: “I am only a scribe who records events from my childhood. Perhaps these will come in useful to a later researcher of oral history.” The way she covers the fragmented history of Bengal, a land divided, gives us incisive insight into the entire situation—into the violent events of Suhrawaddy’s Direct Action Day and the plight of the refugees jumping international borders. And she does all this not through academic jargon-fuelled prose but through her own memories, cleverly critiqued and analyzed. All in all, this book takes a look at the common history of the Bengali Bhadraklok— from the offices of Ananda Bazar Patrika to crumbling mansions, from the warm glow of gaslit lamps to the harsh illumination of neon. “Gaslight To Neon” documents a changing city and the mindset of those who have lived through it.



# *Life And Political Reality*

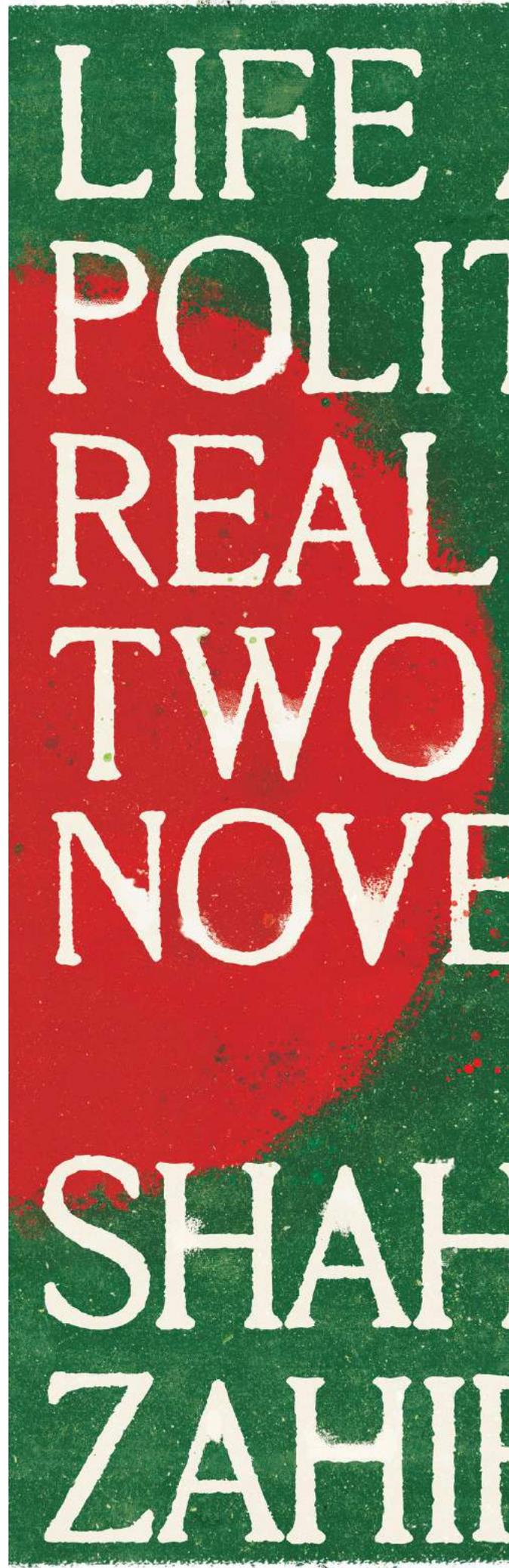
- *Shahidul Zahir, V. Ramaswamy & Shahroza Nahrin (HarperCollins)*

*Rs. 399, Translated and Published: 2022*



Shahidul Zahir passed away in 2008 at the age of 54, a criminally young age for a man of his talents. While a household name on the other side of the border, in the west he is far less known. What is it about national borders- an imaginary line cutting lands in half, that divides art like this? How did we divide the artists when the lines were drawn? Who did Dhaka claim, and who was claimed by Calcutta?

Life and Political Reality or “ Jibon O Rajnaitik Bastobata” was first published in 1988, while the soil on the graves of the Martyred Intellectuals of Bangladesh were still fresh. Chronicling the 1971 War of Liberation like no other, Shahidul chose to look at the lives and the societal functioning of a Bangali Mohalla.





In the novella we come across Moulana Bodu, a West Pakistan supporter and the organizer of the razakars, who gains political and military prominence through his party affiliations. As events slowly unfold through the eyes of Abdul Mojid, a resident of the moholla, we see the Moulana go from a Pre-Liberation power-wielding autocrat to a Post-Liberation timid individual, stripped of all his faculties and reduced to a man trying to fit into the very Mohalla he terrorized. But, as the narrator notes, if he was to be given power again, he would do all the things he did all over again. And the Mohalla, like all natives of this land, will simply say a prayer and stare into the face of death like Khwaja Ahmed Ali. Their resilience will shine through and they will move on. The Mohalla will survive, Mayarani will remain, Tulsi and Joba plants will bloom in each garden and the people of this amputated land will keep on surviving. Moulana Bodu will forever be cursed by Momena's mother, Alauddin's maa, Abu Korim and the widow of Khwaja Ahmed Ali.



## How not to read Kazuo Ishiguro's "Never Let Me Go"

Arifa Banu

Kazuo Ishiguro is a Nobel Prize winning British novelist who was born in Nagasaki, Japan. He has written across genres in his works. In novels such as *A Pale View of the Hills*, *An Artist of the Floating World*, he has dealt with Japanese identity and its explorations, whereas in novels such as *Never Let Me Go* he has detached himself from his cultural moorings. Unlike the world of his short story collection *Nocturnes*, *Never Let Me Go* stands at the extreme end in terms of subject matter, genre, and themes.

...

*Never Let Me Go* is considered to be a dystopian science fiction novel. But when we start reading it does not come across as science fiction because of its morbid closeness to the advancement of science in our own times. It is set in the England of the 1990s, and its world is enclosed with borders. *Never Let Me Go* is a dystopia with the template of a normal human life. It parodies the genre of the campus novel and creates an anti-work which has students, guardians, campus, cottages, for its characters, but the students exist for the sole purpose of cultivation of organs. The three central characters are: Ruth, Tommy, and Kathy H. Children like them are kept apart from living a life which is not predetermined.



These children are human clones who are brought into this world to donate their organs for other human beings. Being clones, they are treated as lesser human beings and therefore treated as objects with no souls and only as a site for cultivation of organs.

The novel is much more beyond the genre of science fiction; it is a dystopia different from *Handmaid's Tale*, *Childhood of Jesus*, 1984, or *The Testaments*. There is no resistance or scope of resistance in this world created by Ishiguro. Even the greatest of all saviors, that is Love, fails to save them.

The novel is more focused on emphasising the importance that the human clones also have souls, and the art that they have created during childhood in their boarding school at Hailsham, might one day save them by proving to the authorities that they are not only grounds for breeding organs but are equally human.

*Never Let Me Go* begins with an unsettling voice of Kathy H. who uses a language which is well known to her but not to the readers. She writes in a language which is specific to her world, and is unaware that the words which make sense to her, do not make sense to readers. She begins,

*“My name is Kathy H. I’m thirty-one years old, and I’ve been a carer now for over eleven years.”* After a few lines she says, *“My donors have always tended to do much better than expected. Their recovery times have been impressive, and hardly any of them have been classified as ‘agitated’, even before fourth donation.”*



Kathy H. is unaware that her readers may not know the terms that she is using, and never cares to explain them. In short, we, the readers, are drawn into her world and are puzzled initially about the world she is talking about. Usage of particular words such as “carers”, “donations”, “completed”, are only explicitly revealed in extreme situations. In fact, there are only a few times when the Truth is literally blurted out in paroxysms of anger and welled up frustration.

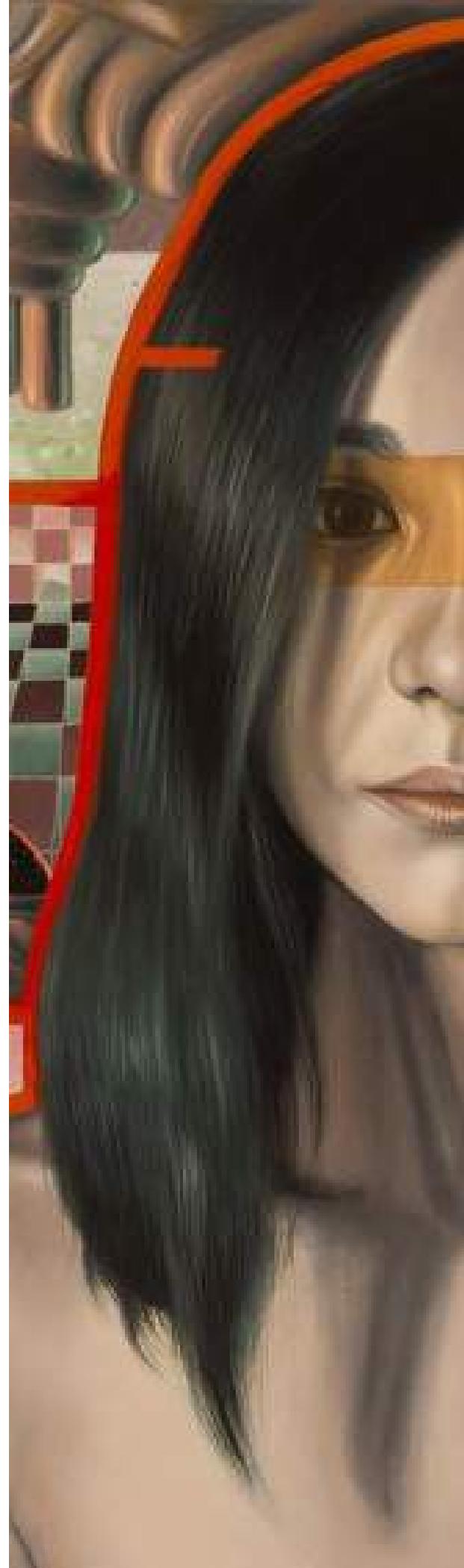
As readers, we anticipate the explanations of these sentences. What exactly is a carer? What donations? Recovery from what? While reading this text by Ishiguro, the readers must at some point stop asking these questions not because they have been explained in the language of our world, but because we merge with the world of Kathy H. and from the school where she came from – Hailsham.

Hailsham is where the central characters of the novel grew up: Ruth, Tommy, and Kathy. They were “given” a childhood, and were better off than other children who grew up in worse conditions. Hailsham as an institution was a humanitarian endeavour by the founders of the school, Miss Emily and Madame, who fought with the outside world about the equal status of these children with other fellow human beings who are born in this world.



The guardians in the boarding school of Hailsham are like any other we might find in a conventional bildungsroman such as Jane Eyre, where there is a set of strict guardians and a generous one who is ultimately expelled because she has bent the rules of the boarding school. Miss Lucy was such a guardian at Hailsham, who felt that these children should be told the truth about their predetermined lives instead of letting them dream about living a life like other people. The Truth about their lives is only told in a few instances in the novel, because in the rest of it, it is assumed that they already know it. Sure enough, none of them are surprised by it, and do not attempt any resistance. The most that they strive to attempt is to get a deferral for a few years if a couple happens to be truly in love. But that also turns out to be a rumor, and they have no other hope for salvation.

Kazuo Ishiguro has no plans to bring us back to a comfort zone. Just as for the characters Kathy H., Tommy, and Ruth, Hailsham and its memories were the most precious belonging, so it is for us. The initial ignorance of the children and the readers reminds them of what it felt to be treated as a human. Ishiguro has tried to tell us that we cannot and should not turn our world into such a place where even Love cannot give any salvation.

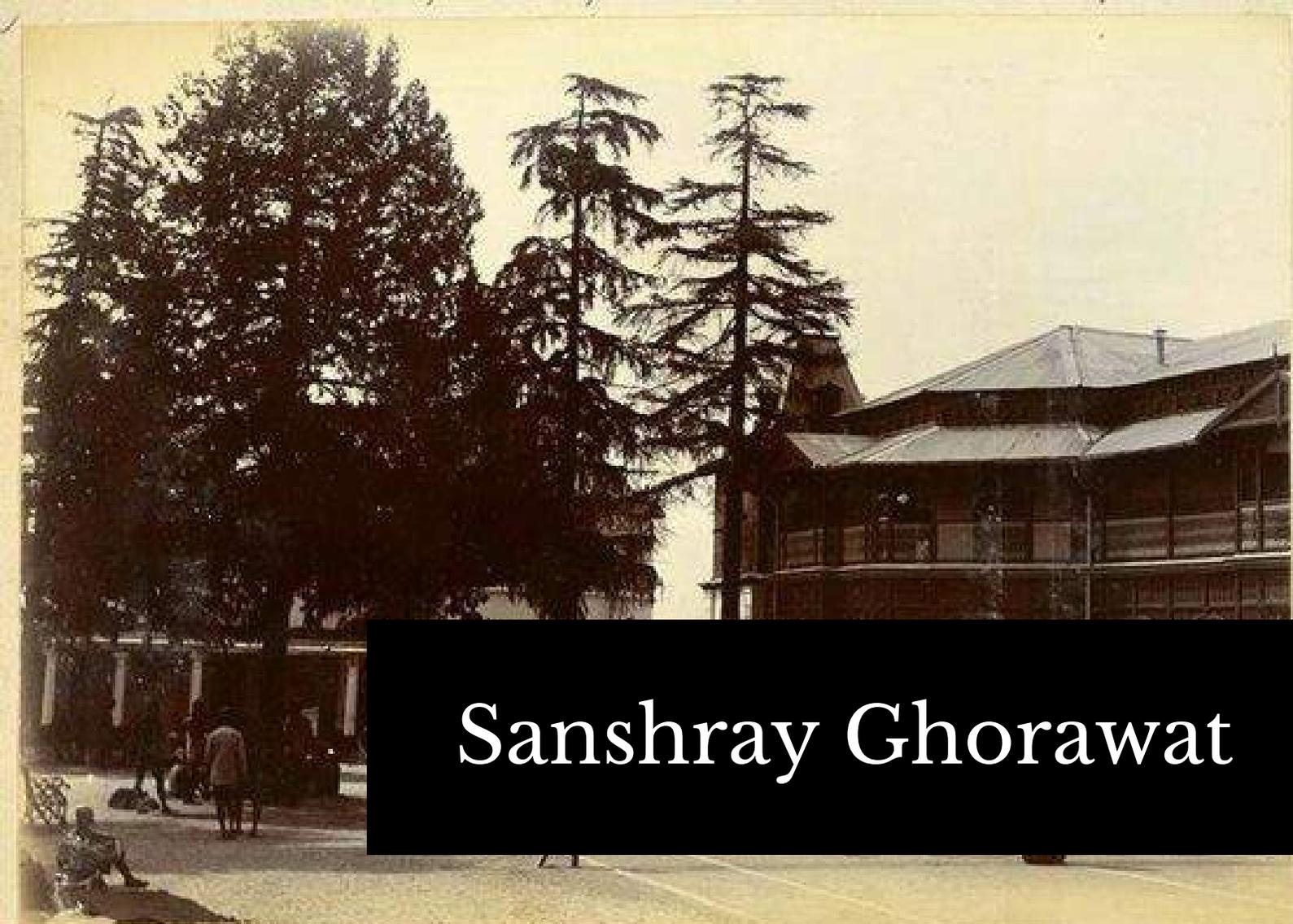


Where we have no scope for resistance, where we create an “other” and label them as “inferior” for our own benefit. We are not to read *Never Let Me Go* as a science fiction, because it is not. There exists a continuous process – the creation of an “other” whom the “Self” wholly depends on for Life, but also discards them as sub-human and inferior. *Never Let Me Go* is not a warning, it is a calling out of the practices in our existing world.

The importance of Childhood as the most precious part of one’s life and how one harks back to the shores of childhood time and again for solace, is portrayed in the novel. The guardians at Hailsham, thought that giving those children a childhood is the greatest gift that can be given to them to help them have a meaningful life. In the end of Ruth’s narrative, it is only her childhood that she remembers. She says,

*“I was thinking about the rubbish, the flapping plastic in the branches, the shore-line of odd stuff caught along the fencing, and I half- closed my eyes and imagined this was the spot where everything I’d ever lost since my childhood had washed up, and I was now standing here in front of it, and if I waited long enough, a tiny figure would appear on the horizon across the field, and gradually get larger until I’d see it was Tommy, and he’d wave, maybe even call.”*





# Sanshray Ghorawat

GP -01

*Mussorie 1899* 265

I let the wisp of smoke wash over me. It's repugnant in smell but I don't move an inch as it goes up my nostrils, into my lungs, stays there for a breath, and moves out again. I wait. Another hit. Repeat. Karan shuffles, moving from left-foot-over-right to right-over-left. He loves being comfortable while grabbing a smoke. I was scared by the vague comfort that we derived from smoking in a secluded balcony that nobody else was 'allowed' into; how easy it was for us to forget that any second someone could walk in on the pile of stubs that had gathered there over the years.



---

The branches on the tree standing fifteen feet away from my balcony sway in the chilly Dehradun wind. It makes me think of the routineness of what we are doing here. I wonder if there ever was another like me. *In the same balcony? Thinking the same things? Surely. Yes. There are seven billion people on the planet, a billion and a half in this country, and thousands who had been in this very balcony over the decades; there ought to be someone who wondered the same things I do now.* The lights in Mussoorie twinkled an eternity away. We often joked about how the closest galaxy to us was not Andromeda but Mussoorie. On paper an hour's drive away, but separated from us in actuality by twelve-lightyear high walls, school rules and academic schedules, and the melancholic laziness of teenage existence.

---



“*Kya soch raha hai?*”, Karan’s words cut through the wind and wisp. Such a difficult question to answer. What was I thinking about? What was I actually thinking about? Did he mean what I was ‘actively’ thinking about or what was in my head in that moment? Usually, I’d prepare an absurdly poetic question that I’d found on Instagram to dazzle the crowd. But today it was just Karan. He knew every inch of my brain like his own tiny backyard in Surat. Most of the backyard was compartmentalised. Mumma’s mints grew in one, Papa’s expectations in another. One corner housed the sunflowers that my friends plucked relentlessly everyday - there seemed to be a shortage of those everyday now, like the soil beneath was exhausted. In one tiny corner was a solitary bush of black roses - the love that was reserved only for people who had the courage to travel to that part of the garden, beyond the grove of the thorns labeled ‘self-deprecation’ and ‘overthinking’. Usually Karan knew his way around; but today, it felt like he was intruding, demanding to be let in.



“I was counting my sunflowers”, I blurt out. *He’s not going to get the garden analogy you dumbass.*

“Haha”, I hear him chuckle from the corner of my eye. I can see the orange spark at the end of his cigarette, burning away like a literal manifestation of time. Burning away like we had no cares in the world. Like a little boy’s childhood dream does on his first day at work.

I shift away, trying to focus on the song in my head. My face felt like the static screen on a CRT television. Black and white. Buzzing. Chaotic. I thought about the wild outgrowth of buttercups in the smallest corner of my garden. The outgrowth that I watered and trimmed and uprooted daily because I was scared it would . The only grove I watered and trimmed and uprooted. I watered and trimmed and uprooted the grove because I was scared if I left it to the soil of my brain, it would grow uncontrollably. The others, I left to the soil of my brain. Over Mumma’s mints, over my friends’ scarce sunflowers, even over my black roses.

*No.*

*Wait*

*What were you actually thinking about?*

*GO BACK*

*GO BACK*



I wanted to write. Long messages. There was something inherently romantic about writing those. And not the bastardised version of ‘romance’ that children were idealising today. No. It was romantic in the most literal, purest sense of love. There was love woven into, “*I wrote this for you when both of us should have been asleep but I wasn’t and you’re five lightyears away.*” Into, “*our physical distance is a kilometre and three hundred metres but in actuality we are distanced by metaphysical barriers, and so I sent this to you. I thought of you this way, in this moment*”. Because when days passed and memories blurred, that love would stay, still. Always love, still. I thought about who I’d make the message to.

So much to say.

So many people to say it to.

Not enough courage to say it. To manifest such heaviness.

Another hit. The smoke floats like tainted cotton in front of my eyes. Like a ball of thoughts sent my way - waiting to be consumed. I felt a welling up of words. Fuck. No diary or laptop to be found in sight. I glanced over at Karan leaning back in the chair we’d stolen from the warden. He was almost done with his first. Even the cigarette wasn’t long enough to use as charcoal to leave on the grey brick walls today. *Guess it’s me against my memory today.*

I thought about how friendship worked. How when you tell me you're having a bad day everyday I shove obsolete words down your throat because I was sympathetic, everyday. I was so sympathetic everyday that when you woke me up and told me you fought with your parents and college wasn't going the way you wanted it to and you expected it to go another way, I took it personally. Like I should have stopped it. Like I could have stopped it. And not because I was able enough - I was not - but because you gave me that stature. Because at the end of every long message I wrote to you in the middle of my Math class you made it sound like it was actually working.

I thought about how 'good' people perceived friendship. How a 'good' person was always there for their friends. Always above and beyond. How a 'good' person always said the nicest things and how people thought the 'good' person was the sweetest person on Earth. How a good person once stayed up the night and did a quiz for you because your boyfriend broke up with you and he felt bad.





Or how he once faked you as his sister just so you could come visit his school and meet your boyfriend. How everyday he woke up and replied individually to every one of your messages but you still hated him because he never called. And how nobody really loved the ‘good’ person. Nobody asked him if he wanted to have dinner together. Nobody cared if he was actually listening to you when he called you teary eyed but you started with your own bullshit because he was hiding his tears and he once told you he liked it when they weren’t discussing his problems - he thought he meant it. Nobody asked him how he was doing because they assumed since he had time for their problems he was doing fine. And maybe how that was okay because that flows from a logical chain of thought like a river flowed from a mountain. I thought about how every night that ‘good’ person slept in bed feeling like a pillow - useful but unnecessary. You expected it to bring comfort to you and if it didn’t you folded and pushed and punched it until it suited you. ‘Good’ people romanticised their friendships and that’s where they faltered.



I thought about how I was so sympathetic that it affected how selectively atheist I was. That if it pleased you that I called god the way you intended god to be called, I would do it. Just for you. That if it pleased you unconsciously that somewhere in a world's corner I sent a prayer your way, I would do it. I thought about how selectively busy I was. Like if it accorded you even the tiniest hint of a smile that I shower an hour later and get late for my class just to speak to you, I would do it and never tell you it happened. *What class?*

I thought about how people deliberately went out of their way to show everyone around them that they were strong but when at night they called me, they broke down. People broke down about wanting to hurt themselves and wanting to run away and wanting to leave the parents they so unquenchably loved yesterday. People cried about law being hard and them wanting to go back home because this place didn't smell like home and how my friend that they dated was an asshole who deserved the worst things in life.



I thought about the gullibility of human selfishness and selflessness. Everyday I offered up the space in my head to you with the belief that the universe had left it empty for you to fill it up with your sorrow, leave it behind and in return for my head you would give me a place in your heart and we would call it friendship or some sort of destined bond. But then you went out of your way to encroach on my brain. To consume the little space in my brain that I left for myself - not because you were desperate for that kind of affection but because I always told you it was not a problem. I acted as if all that sorrow didn't have an effect on me, much like a mother pretends not to be pained when her daughter has her first period. And you still did not have space for me in your heart because your heart was already too heavy with all the people you were carrying around and I didn't deserve a spot over them. *Of course I didn't. Who the fuck was I?*

About how one day when you woke me up and told me about how you fought with your parents and you called the boy you shouldn't have and how the one person on Bumble you did not expect to message you finally messaged you and how even though you didn't care about love, without it some part of you felt incomplete. And when you told me all those things and I was five thousand two hundred and eighty six miles away and I had just woken up - I broke down. I broke down because I realised then that there was too much of you and others in my head and because there was too much of you and others in my head, I was not coherent anymore. I was in too many hearts with too much to do. I could not make you believe your parents loved you because my words had lost meaning to you and I could not make you stop calling the boy because who the hell was I to talk to you about love and the momentariness of feelings when I stood in front of you with an unbroken heart. I broke down and I pinky-promised you that I didn't but you still saw that I did but we didn't say anything to each other because we knew about each others' white lies. And how I knew someday you would read this and how I was scared we wouldn't be friends when it happened.





There were people in my head that demanded that I wake up every morning and answered all their questions. Why someone's mother only taught them how to dress and not how to love. Why someone had the prettiest eyes and nose and mouth but nobody loved them the way it was intended to be. Why someone thought we used to be best friends and now I wouldn't call anymore. Why we stopped being friends. Why I should write someone's college essay because they couldn't do it themselves and as their friend I should do it. They didn't ask me, obviously. Nobody did. It was like making one of those unsaid promises a poor mother made to her stubborn child about providing a meal she couldn't afford.

And it revolted me to think that people were such savages. Such savages that they would feast on the good people; the good people who said they would give their all and actually meant it; the good people who never recounted a favour, but made the mistake of remembering one.

"Karan?", I called out like a child does before he asks his mother another stupid question

"Hmm", he said. It wasn't nonchalant and I knew he was listening. He was the only person whose reactions in a conversation rarely told the true story.

"Do you really want to know what is in my head?"



“Of course, baby”, he reassured. For one brief moment, when he said that, I allowed myself to smile. That sentence was proof of the single, most important thing that boarding school had provided me - someone who was ready to lighten the weight of every problem.

“Are you sure?” I countered. Almost as if willing him to take it back, to not accord my brain as much importance as he just had.

Karan stopped smoking. I was in trouble. He was serious. “Sanshray, I genuinely want to know. I. Genuinely. Want. To. Know”

And so I told him.

I told him about every definitively described thought in my head that was completely unrelated to the halcyon we were living in in school. How my brain was now a house, not a garden. It had enlarged itself to allow more people to walk in. It was full of people. Some were in the kitchen, diminishing the contents of my fridge. Others were sprawled across the floor of the hall, gazing mindlessly at the paintings on the wall. In one dimmed cupboard under the staircase was stashed Chris Martin who popped out singing “Proof” at uncannily poorly-chosen moments.



Upstairs, there were people who'd locked themselves into rooms. There was a boy who smoked six cigarettes a day because he broke up with the love of his life and right across the hall the love of his life put on a strong face for everyone else despite having lost thirty five pounds in three weeks. So many people who had resigned themselves to the comforts of my springy beds and had forgotten what coming out and bumping into each other into the hallway would do for them. How in the master bedroom was my soulmate who had her heart broken so many times but instead of facing it head on she threw herself head on into right swipes again like a surfer throws himself into the ocean right after being thrown out by a huge wave.

As more people walked into the house I moved pieces of furniture around, with a smile, making more space for more people and ruining the home I had built with love and kindness. But now I looked at my home and it didn't feel like mine. I didn't know what to do. Chris Martin had stopped singing. There were no chairs or couches in my head. I had to stop people at the door because nobody who was already inside wanted to leave the rooms.



What was I to do then, with all the furniture I cluttered in the attic of my brain because you wouldn't stop moving in? With every thought that I cared about? So I decided to tell Karan about every little thought that wouldn't leave me alone.

Like how I so desperately wanted to be the reason someone called me in the middle of the night and cried at the sight of how real my love was. How I kept my hair long and messy because everyday I would angle it so that the sunlight shone through it and I positioned my eyeballs almost inside my head to keep looking at it and it was beautiful. How I was so in love with someone that she made me cry but neither of us called it romance and how often I thought about how only good poets meant their poetry and the rest just imitated them. The thought that someday the dream I forced myself to dream everyday would pan out the next day exactly as it panned out in my head but it never did. How I stared happily out the window every night and imagined if we lived on Jupiter and thought about a loved one we couldn't even be sure if we were looking at the same moon.



We would have more beauty to write about but we'd be so alone in that shared space. I was glad the earth had only one moon. It made me and her happy together, I didn't have to think about whether we liked the same kind of moon - the same color, size, distance. How I thought about the person who drew the line about being ambitious and being unnecessarily hard on oneself and whether the world thought he was weak. What was I supposed to do with the unending question I asked people like beggars asking people for money on the streets - "Do you mean the poetry you write? Is all that sorrow and heartbreak real? Can you show me how to put mine down like you do yours?"

And as I talked, Karan listened on. Forgetting that the Marlboro stick that we had paid fifteen bucks extra for was slowly wasting away. Maybe, in that moment, I really mattered to him. But I couldn't tell because no matter what you were telling Karan he never really showed what he was thinking about it. He waited for you to stop talking. For you to be passionate about the most random snippets of information. For you to gasp for breath in the middle like an old man does right before letting out the loudest cough on the planet.



When I was finally done talking, we both paused in the night. Waiting for the wind to grow louder, for a distant watchman's lathi to ring against metal. He looked at me as if compelling me to say more. I looked back thinking, "I have more, but for tonight this is enough".

And that was it. We both turned back. He went back to right-over-left and tried to salvage what was left of his cigarette. I turned to stare at the AC vent that passed through the building. Looking at it from afar made it feel like a huge silver dragon that broke through the building in a billion places. The place felt like a ruin. At least the wind was good up here in our balcony-  
"Sanshray", Karan poked at me. I looked back at his hand that held a shiny black phone. Our eyes met, inexplicable urgency shot through us and I immediately snatched the phone and put it away in my pocket.



At a boarding school whose reputation had been built on orthodox practises and colonial-style upbringing, a phone was the last thing a student was supposed to have. Three months ago when Karan had sneaked this one in and shown it to me in a bathroom stall, I'd been taken aback. He didn't even have a girlfriend. *Why bring the damn phone if you're not even going to use it for something?* And then he showed me a folder on the Notes app completely dedicated to me. He told me he sneaked in the phone to let me write down whatever I wanted - every poem, couplet and letter that I didn't allow myself to write because it furthered the conflict in my head. It wasn't becoming of an engineering student to indulge in literary pursuits - at least in India.

*"Likh de yeh sab"*, he said to me on the balcony. At that moment, neither of us cared about what really mattered. Whether we would be caught with cigarettes in a secluded balcony that ironically everyone on campus could see. Or if a teacher would walk in on us using the illegal phone and we would have to scramble to save our asses. We didn't care because in that moment Karan only cared about me writing my poetry and I only cared about Karan.

And so I turned around, sneaked the phone out of my pocket and plopped myself on the floor in the corner that had "JAW" in cigarette ash spelt on it.



So, I typed. And suddenly, the air from Karan's cigarette wasn't as repugnant, the unexpressed love between me and the girl I loved wasn't so painful and it made sense why the school forced every single student to attend a graduation ceremony meant to felicitate only the senior class. It made me believe that the girl I knew with the strong front would make it through without hurting herself and the boy who wrote songs about his heartbreak would make music that enchanted millions and so it would be okay. It made sense. All of it. Made sense.





# Pilgrim's Peregrinations

Abhinandan Bhattacharya

‘How long will it take to reach the airport, dada?’ asked an impatient Madhurima for the third time in the last twenty minutes.

‘Madam, due to heavy rain, the streets of Kolkata resemble those of Venice now. There’s waist-deep water everywhere’, quipped the tawny-skinned quinquagenarian taxi-driver adjusting the rectangular mirror above the wheel.

Madhurima wondered how this apparently illiterate taxi-driver knew about Venice. She looked out of the window with a flurry of thoughts spiraling in her head. The rain-washed shops with the glittering neon lamps seemed to reflect her personal thoughts somewhere. Almost immediately, the taxi-driver added, ‘My son is an artist in Italy. He left me and his mother for higher studies and never came back.’



Only an occasional postcard or a letter consoles us that he is alright and happy in his life.’

\*\*\*\*\*

Madhu, as she was fondly called, kept her gaze fixed at a young couple holding an umbrella and trying to hop and skip over the low divider to get to the other side of the road at Ultadanga crossing. Her own mind seemed to be at some cross-roads. In the next moment, she mumbled under her breath, ‘Oh, I see’, and brought out her handkerchief to dab the silent tears which had welled up in her eyes by now. What moved her? Was it the couple wading through the vagaries of monsoon without or the immutable void in the taxi-driver’s life within after raising a son?

The engine purred gently as the taxi careened along splashing a different pattern of the logged water on both sides before roaring up the flyover towards Dum Dum Airport. The Indigo 6E 311 flight to Mumbai was on time and the display outside Terminal 2 suddenly made Madhu feel a punch of a blacksmith’s bellows inside her. With the medical file cradled securely in her arms and her American Tourister wheeling along beside her, she dialed hesitantly to the man who perhaps meant everything to her. She tapped on her husband’s contact on the touch screen pad. She phoned me in what appeared to be the last time ever.

‘Anirban, you’re a wonderful man. We have been wonderful together. But I’m sorry to leave you halfway on this journey. I am helpless. Hope you will forgive me’, Madhu’s soft voice got directed to the voicemail. That night a part of me died within as I listened to her voice message more than fifty times partly to reassure myself it was my wife’s voice and partly to figure out why she had to take this extreme step. My frantic calls went unanswered. My restlessness was at an all time high.



My tears and agony seemed to eulogize the consistent downpour pattering against the windows. Couples do fight over dirty laundry, over the toilet seat being kept down and over the dishes in the kitchen sink not being rinsed. In a second, my world crashed down upon me.

A thousand different thoughts raced through my mind, not being able to settle on any one particular strand. The monsoon of 2014 shook the very core of my being inside out. All my messages on WhatsApp went unseen. And then it happened! My phone calls were responded with, 'Kindly check the number you have dialed.' Really? Do I have to double check my wife's number before dialing? What followed next, compounded by a tumultuous wave of emotions, was a loud crash of my cell phone against the gray tiled parapet of the porch looking over the dull and deserted asphalt sidewalk of Citadel Towers in South Kolkata. As if by some equally strange force, even I flopped down on the couch only to pass out moments later.

Mornings were no longer fragrant; the transitions from noon to evenings were mechanical and prosaic;





nights were dreadful, laced with some deep fear of yet another loss into oblivion. Days, and weeks and gradually months passed by with no trace of the slightest communication from Madhu. Her email accounts were deactivated. Her bank accounts too met the same fate. On further understanding, it was brought to realization that all the savings had been withdrawn a couple of weeks ago with the accounts being closed. It was as if I was trying to clutch at a wisp of hope in the emptiness of space, only to embrace inexplicable defeat each time. I didn't wish to file a 'missing-person' report because she actually didn't go missing. She chose to walk out into that unknown world of her own will.

I dreaded looking into the mirror any longer. In fact, I stopped going near the dressing table. That half-used bottle of Chanel, the packet of colourful beauty blenders in varied geometric shapes, the palette of contour highlights recently gifted on her birthday, a couple of body lotion bottles and the ticking Fossil watch to seal our togetherness till eternity remained untouched since that dark night of July 2014. Even her clothes – all ironed, folded and neatly arranged – were left behind in the wardrobe. The major part of the wardrobe was filled with my clothes. I had always kept it like this, no matter how many times she would tell me to spare some space for her clothing. It had been a fortnight now since I had donated almost all my shirts, trousers, denims and casual wear, sparing a handful of formal outfit necessary at my workplace, to an NGO working for the flood victims and the orphans.

Come Fall. The russet leaves were carefully shifting to a light apricot. The avenues were strewn with an array of autumn's farewell to mankind for the year. I bade adieu to Kolkata too since my work required me to move to Mumbai. All that I carried with me were the wonderful memories that Madhu and I had shared at that home of ours in Kolkata.

\*\*\*\*\*





‘Happy New Year, Anirban,’ greeted my colleagues at my new workplace in this City of dreams. I could merely smile back at those enthusiastic faces to acknowledge their greetings. People all around were busy sharing their New Year resolutions, partying hard, talking about their recent visit to some exotic landscape with their loved ones, and trying to fulfill all their dreams. I was given to understand how this city which never sleeps helps accomplish the dreams of every person whether a prince or a pauper. Quite ironic!

Not a single day had passed by without Madhurima shrouding my thoughts. Not a single day had gone by without hot silent tears streaming their course down my cheeks. Still confused, still befuddled yet extremely worried about where and how she might be at that very moment. Her slim-built petite structure was always complimented by the enigmatic smile and an equally energetic but intelligent vigour in her eyes. Those were her big dreamy eyes that one could barely miss out on meeting her. There were countless dreams in them. I had always loved the way she would throw caution to the wind by letting her hair loose. I loved the drool she would wake up with in my arms every morning. How I would tease her often about that! I would even affectionately tease her about the way she ran while rushing to work or while chasing pigeons on sun-kissed courtyards.



Many an evening she would tease me too with the most delicious frankies and home-made samosas. And yet I had never known her to be demanding for any material pleasures.

My eyes had been frantically searching for her one glimpse ever since that cold, wet night. From coffee shops to shopping arcades to restaurants and eateries to vehicles held up in traffic snarl; from people queuing up for various odd jobs to those attending music concerts and dance competitions, I had been looking everywhere for my Madhu.

Life in Mumbai is quite different from anywhere else. One can barely afford to remain idle in this enchanting city. The company apartment was a decent place to stay for a single man. Or should I say a lonely man. Standing by the large windows from the twenty-second floor of my high-rise in Juhu, I would throw my eyes out each evening to the glimmering and tranquil skyline of this otherwise bustling metropolis. How miserably I hoped for Madhu to be there with me to watch the sun dip below the horizon and the charm of the night sky gently attenuating the woes of the day. Time flew by. I could merely whisper a prayer and some good wishes requesting the winds to carry them on their wings and send them across to my beloved. However, the zephyrs would bring no message back. Or so had I surmised in that gloom, each evening.

Rohit, my colleague in Mumbai and an ambitious young man with a fistful of dreams soon became a close friend of mine. He would often come over to my place during the weekends for a game of boards or go swimming. While sometime he would invite me for a pint of chilled beer at some uptown pub in Lokhandwala.





“Hey, man, drink and be merry, for in life there’s enough sorrow to make you dreary’, he would often chime in with a wink. I would force a smile suppressing hard the surge of emotions ready for an outburst. Thankfully, my week-long job was there to keep me occupied and somewhat steady.

February 14, 2015. I was clueless about the entire day. A strong pang of agony coupled with deep agitation clawed upon the very core of my being. The red heart-shaped balloons swaying everywhere, the messages of love accompanied by myriad romantic numbers blaring out of the popular radio stations in cars, taxis and shops around, the billboards and hoardings screaming irresistible offers on almost anything with hearts popping out from all corners, the exclusive offers on menu at all eateries across the city and the sight of innumerable love birds thronging all possible nook and corner suddenly sent a wave of dizziness within me. I felt like throwing up badly since my head was spinning beyond imagination.

That night, I decided to shut myself from the world.

I wanted to breathe. I needed a resurrection.

\*\*\*\*\*



‘Mr. Banerjee, your consistent efforts and brilliant contribution to the growth of this company have been recognized by the management and hence, we are extremely pleased to promote you as the Chief Advisor to the Board of Directors’, applauded the Managing Trustee in the Annual Meet on April 28, 2017.

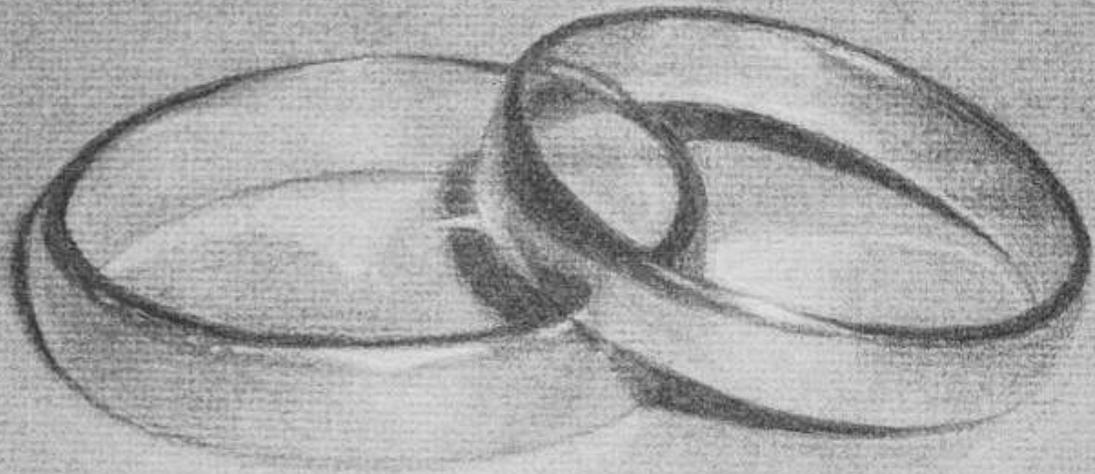
That night was different. There was excitement, exuberance, ecstasy, and euphoria all around. Rohit volunteered to host a lavish party at my pad. Beer bottles fizzed every now and then, ice cubes tinkled inside glass tumblers continuously, chicken legs and fish kebabs were endlessly wolfed down. It was some celebration I had not witnessed in the last three years.

‘Ani, come here’, signaled Rohit to me from the sea-facing balcony twirling a can of Tuborg in his left hand and continued, ‘Remember the doctor friend of mine I spoke to you about? Here he is. Meet Mr. Gujral. Dr. Aditya Gujral. He has recently been in the news for curing a cancer patient who was in the last stage. Incredible, isn’t it?’

‘Remarkable feat! Congratulations, Dr. Gujral’, I said, extending my hand to wish him the best. He gave a warm shake with a broad smile acknowledging my courtesy with, ‘Thank you, Mr. Banerjee. It was a very special case. I had to spend many sleepless nights for good two and half years.’

Suddenly, I was reminded of the last two years. I had totally surrendered myself to my work, with Rohit and I staying up late on certain nights to work on important projects. I had forgotten almost everything – right from the city I lived in, the smallest joys and pleasures of life to my very own existence, except for one thing. One look at my wedding ring, which still adorned my finger, unleashed a fresh zeal and inspiration to keep me going.





Almost shaking me out of my reverie, Dr. Gujral spoke, ‘You should meet this patient of mine as a part of your case study since yours is one of the leading pharmaceutical companies in the country today.’ His tone was kind of insisting. I relented with alacrity on my face but reluctance in my heart, giving Rohit a look which he probably failed to copy.

It was the last week of May when the audit team had come and everyone was busy with the submission of countless reports. ‘I hope you haven’t forgotten the promise made to Dr. Gujral’, reminded Rohit over a snack.

‘What now? Are you serious mate?’ I responded unassumingly and busied myself in my work.

It was not until the second week of June that Rohit and I had spoken or even met. I phoned him one weekend and asked him to get an appointment with Dr. Gujral.

\*\*\*\*\*



‘June 19, 2017. Rohit texted me to reach Tea Villa Café at Sakinaka. The rain-bearing clouds cast a gloom over the city. And this was what I detested. It was about 7 pm when I reached the café. A slight drizzle was buffeted by the seemingly harmless breeze.

There was a couple sitting in the café when I walked in. As the light was low, I didn’t know who they were until the woman turned around, and I saw it was my wife.

The world around me made no sense for as long as I could recall. My heart raced alarmingly fast; my feet seemed to be cemented beyond all conscious efforts to make the slightest stir and I felt a huge lump in my throat which was quite hard to swallow. As if a phantom had resurfaced and stood right in front to scare the living daylight out of me once again.

How is it possible?

Madhurima stood there with a somewhat similar expression too.

‘Hello, Mr. Banerjee, this is my patient who I cured of fourth stage cancer’, interrupted Dr. Gujral rising from the chair opposite Madhu’s and pointing in her direction. A burning sensation whizzed between my ears and my brain was about to explode.

Conspicuously, the scarf covering her tonsured head caught my eyes. The simplest of words failed to come out of my lips. Only helpless tears ran down copiously on both sides.



‘A powerful magnetic field seemed to be generated between us.

After what seemed ages, Madhu and I were found wrapped in each others’ arms with muffled sobs and occasional groans punctuating the terrific reunion.

‘I am sorry, Anirban. I came to know of my illness in January 2014 and couldn’t muster enough courage to face you. I was broken beyond repair when I realised I had no hopes of survival. Until I heard of my childhood friend, Aditya who is a well-known doctor and believes in taking risks and saving lives.

‘But it was a catch-22 situation for me and I wasn’t totally sure if I would live again’, she continued.

‘Why Madhu? Didn’t you, for once, feel like involving me in this journey of yours?’

‘I couldn’t think straight to connect any dot whatsoever then, except for one thing. I knew you were strong and at least the thought of losing me to an unknown cause would be any day more reasonable than the realisation of letting me slip into the jaws of death’, she replied.

‘So, where are you staying in Mumbai? What’s the status of your health now? How have you been all along?’ my curious mind didn’t know how to stop..





‘Aditya has been too kind to support me through all of this. He not just cured me but also encouraged me eventually to fall in love with myself all over again’, came a hesitant reply

‘And how about you, Anirban? What brings you to Mumbai?’ Madhu was quick to add.

‘Destiny, I suppose’, I smiled. And turned towards Dr. Gujral to thank him for the greatest gift one could have possibly given me on my birthday.

By now, the café door swung open and in walked Rohit running his fingers through his partially wet hair and unzipping his raincoat to place it on the peg in the corner.

He looked at the three of us as if a thief had been caught red handed. Dr Gujral did the needful to explain the whole affair to Rohit.

‘So what now, Mrs. Banerjee?’ inquired Dr. Gujral of Madhu.

‘Home is where the heart is, Aditya. Mumbai has given me more than I had desired. I can’t thank you enough for what you have done for me. I want to go back home and start a family with Anirban’, replied Madhurima thoughtfully.

‘How about naming our daughter Alankrita, Mrs. Banerjee?’ I asked Madhu with a wink.

‘Shut up, that name was always my brainchild, okay? Yes, I still love that name by the way’, grinned Madhu with a gentle punch in my sides.





The next few hours were spent in amorous company with Rohit bringing in the birthday cake and celebrating an unanticipated joy against the glissading streams pouring down the panes of the café in a kaleidoscopic charm.

Madhu and I looked at each other with heavily moist eyes and a million unspoken messages being exchanged between the two of us.

‘Happy birthday, Anirban’, whispered Madhu, carefully lodging her fingers behind my left ear as she leaned forward to kiss me.

That was the moment. There lay my world – forever preserved. A pilgrimage blessed at last.





Yatika Singh

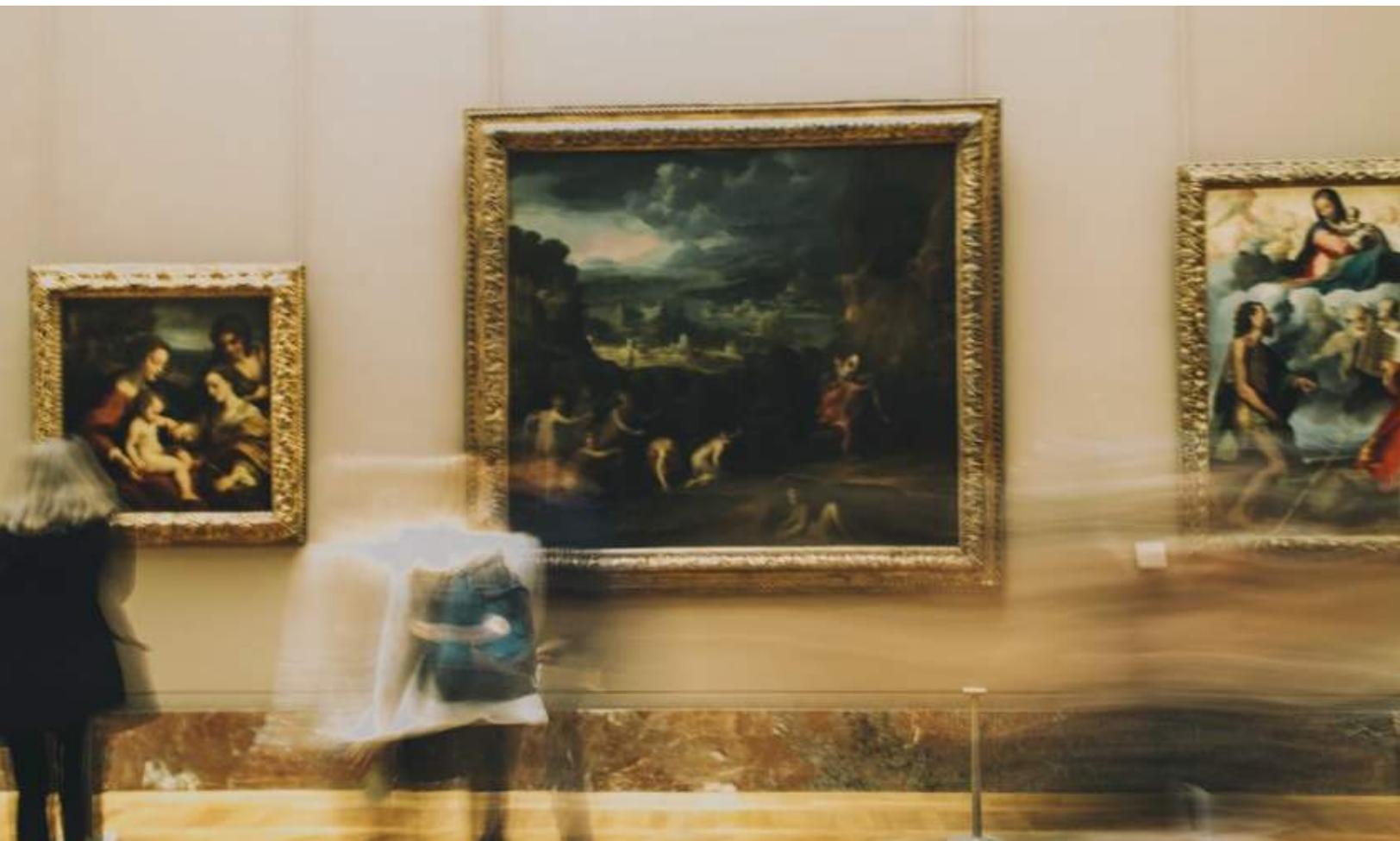
**‘I Could Make That’: Why the most common remark on modern and conceptual art is to declare it unremarkable**

Art is pretentious. Take Marcel Duchamp’s *Fountain* for example. Why is the art world ready collectively slamming their credit cards on tables for an uninteresting urinal? Or in fact, why is a readymade object not created by the artist, even considered his own art? Or take Jackson Pollock’s ‘abstract art’ of splattering paint on huge canvases for no comprehensible result whatsoever. Why, again, has the art world been fawning over this meaningless chaos for more than half a century? And most importantly (say it with me): “*I. Could. Make. That.*”

To understand this, let's create an artwork. Take two identical working clocks and synchronize their time hands. Hang them next to each other on a wall, close enough to make their edges touch. Voila. You have your masterpiece.

Except: you don't.

So it turns out that we missed a step. Without artistic thought, it is hard to have artistic expression. Our setup misses the attachment of an idea to an artwork, the very soul of all art. The idea behind the artwork we just created is called *Untitled (Perfect Lovers)* and was made by Feliz Gonzales-Torres in 1987. That same year, Feliz's partner, Ross Laycock, was diagnosed with AIDS. The two clocks he hung symbolized their relationship: the clocks were synchronized once but would, with time, fall out of sync. Ross and Feliz both later passed away due to AIDS-related complications. The artwork, now armed with an idea and its context, becomes a masterpiece: a note on the impermanence of life, on human connection and the tragedy of personal loss.



Finally, art *is* pretentious. The very definition of ‘pretentious’ is to raise the importance of something which does not hold much of it on its own. Art does exactly that using its ideas. Paint on a canvas or two clocks on a wall would hold no meaning on their own, if there was no genius assigning meaning to mundanity, implication to expression.

Fun fact: When the famous ‘*Comedian*’ (popularly known as ‘The Banana Duct-Taped To A Wall’) was purchased by an admirer, the actual banana never left the museum. The buyer only received a certificate to authenticate that if the buyer was to exhibit a different banana with different duct tape elsewhere in the same manner, the idea behind the artwork would be the same as that of the original piece. The buyer essentially purchased an idea.

This brings us back to our titular quote: “I Could Make That”. Ask again, can you though? Is it possible to have the exact same idea and exhibit? It may be possible to purchase the same clocks as the ones in the Museum of Modern Art, or the same model of urinal we see in ‘*Fountain*’, but the idea remains exclusive to the artist. Art is context. Art is thought. There is no point in declaring whether or not a recreation of an original artwork’s physical form is possible.

Instead, fabricate your own idea. Turn that into art. Make art for the sake of thought; ideas for the sake of expression. Anyone can splatter paint, but only an artist can give meaning (or a lack thereof) to chaos.



# Meeting Sue

Rituparna Mukherjee

She settled down in one of the cafes she adored in one of the tree-laden lanes of Kolkata. Things seemed to slow down deliberately here, especially in late winter afternoons. With her favourite Darjeeling to warm her hands, she waited for Sue – she ought to be here in a short while. She usually liked reaching early and waiting for people for it gave her time to think, recall, ruminate, smile, assess and frankly, reach out to lost time. Time behaved differently with her. It existed merely in moments; there were aspects of her life of which she had no recollection at all, others were gentle brushstrokes – it was as if she lived to forget.

As an English tutor in her early twenties, she had met Sue. Not that she needed one, it was just the parents who felt more assured in having their wards tutored, their brains fashioned in a particular direction.





She had never had a tutor herself, but she was glad for the opportunity. It was money, yes, but also a way to evade solitude, to get away from her parents' house, to see other homes, to feel assured that warmth was not a concept she had made up in her mind.

Sue was a bashful girl, painfully shy and she felt something indescribable on meeting her. As they explored *Macbeth* together, Sue put to words things that had worried her most of her life. All she had ever wanted in life was to get away from her parents' house and to have a daughter. Each of her decisions, realisations, epiphanies, was punctuated with the thought "when I have a daughter" or "I would never let my daughter go through this". It was always a daughter, and always this thought that motivated her to do things, to look ahead instead of looking back in inept misery.

Sue changed all that. In the two years they were together, Sue gave her the sheer joy of seeing her own innermost being articulated in tiny atoms in someone else, and while she would play the older sister to Sue, she suspected that she was doing that more to herself than the person sitting opposite her in all those elaborate lessons.

Is that what parenting was? Is that why a woman wanted to be a mother? To see a part of you outside of yourself, a living reminder to sustain vicariously on? She suddenly saw through the shallowness of her need to have a daughter. She felt love for this girl, right here, unpretentious, consuming love, something that wasn't beholden to a future premise. She knew she wouldn't be making any decisions for this girl; she was, after all, just a bystander in her life. She knew she wouldn't be there in Sue's life for a very long time either. But that somehow freed her to love Sue with all her being.





She didn't want to stay forever, she wanted to be a keepsake that Sue carried, a tiny flame inside of her. She also didn't want to be a mother any longer and this hadn't changed in all these years. While many of her colleagues deemed her selfish to deny her gender role, she felt it was the most unselfish thing to do. She wanted to be there, listen and hold little hands when needed, to see bright eyes pronounce their fear and tremulous joy, to light tiny embers of hope, where there were none.

...

Sue waved across the street. Age had not touched her, had it touched her own being, she wondered. She felt the same as she always had. She was meeting Sue for a proper conversation after more than a decade. The last time they had met briefly, her parents were in a hurry to take her away. This time for three hours, Sue would be present, time would slow down, the world reduced to friendly cups of coffee, her heart reminded to love, fearlessly, yet again.

She saw the vehicles pass by nonchalantly for some time before deciding to walk. The day was slowly changing colours and it was her favourite time to walk. The past hours had suffused her with a lightness of being and her mind was going through the words, the gestures, the smiles and the bittersweet twinkle in Sue's eyes when she told her she was leaving for longer this time.

She had bagged a postdoctoral position in Toronto and it would at least be another two years before she could think of coming back to Kolkata. She was inordinately happy for Sue, and was already imagining her in warm coats amidst heaps of snow. Smiling to herself, her eyes wandered off to one of the shops to her right.

It was a nondescript shop that sold mirrors, framed photographs and paintings. She was particularly drawn to a wall of mirrors which played with the fading light of the day and the dust particles that seemed to float like gold dust all around her.

She drew near and saw her being reflected in the mirrors, one aspect on each of them. She touched her face, saw herself doing the same and her mind began clutching at the warmth of the meeting she had just had. As she looked at her face, she recalled Sue's face when she was younger. She smiled, saw herself smiling and peered closer.

How did she look back then?





She ran through all the moments she was in that bright blue room with Sue; she recalled the curtains, the smell of freshly brewed tea and omelettes, but nothing of herself. Her mind desperate, she opened the gallery of her phone to check photographs, before remembering that it was a pristine time, without the tyranny of smart phones. She looked at herself again, this time to the utter puzzlement of the shop owner, had she looked like this always? Why hadn't she ever taken a picture with this girl? Why didn't she take one today?

She had looked at herself in the mirror, every day, several times. But she had never perceived any change in herself. She was the same person, in many ways and in many ways not. But it was always the same pair of eyes staring back at her, reassuring eyes, calm eyes, sad eyes, her beloved eyes. But right at this moment, she wanted to know how she had looked back then, when she was with Sue, if only to know what Sue meant when she said,

It's so good to finally see your face...



# What if it's not a dream

Ishita Ganguly

---

What if those who have gone  
without telling goodbyes  
Could come back  
Walking down the familiar dusty  
road.  
Their smiles, their words could  
shower again on us.  
Just imagine waking up and seeing  
things didn't vanish in the first rays  
of the sun —  
That no one left  
And those who went have all  
safely returned home.

---



# Seabed

Avery Irene Stewart

At times, people are anchors,  
and no word nor breath brings  
buoyancy  
Tearing at the throat; tracheostomy.  
Thoughts trampled.  
Salvaged, in due time, I will use these  
to respire  
Expiration, carbon dioxide  
I choke. I float.

Vacant upon the surface  
saturated skull, spine and sacrum,  
supple,  
disassembled,  
sculpted into a barbed needle  
I become a hook.  
Fired and polished.





Willing ink of black and red  
to spill over  
floor frame, forepeak, figurehead, flowing  
from the fracture.  
My share of you on prongs, flesh like flags,  
unable to stifle the current.  
Unearthing stale air from the reservoir.

Mistaken for tarnished gold;  
brass metal clay.  
Eighty years solitude, sitting in sediment.  
Sluggishly siphoned.  
A neodymium test of purity,  
the unrealized iron of my core.  
Foreknown was the deluge.



## Anjan Dutt Goes To Darjeeling

The Oleander has replaced,  
The orange of the mangoes, and-  
The yellow of the sun.  
It is now winter and woe be  
To the gentleman who sounds,  
The thick autumnal drum.

The older men with whitened hair,  
Trembling at the sight of snow, and-  
Who cannot hear the ring,  
Of their own death bell, go flocking  
For respite, because their father  
Once brought them to Darjeeling.

And the city is young again,  
The art is fresh, unfettered by-  
The Tagore's, Ray's and Sen's.  
Here you find, in the coldest month,  
The seeds of renewal hidden-  
For so long, once again.

A photograph of a man, Anuraag Das Sarma, standing in a room. He is wearing a light green shawl over a brown kurta and white dhoti. He is barefoot and looking towards the camera. In the background, another man in a white dhoti is standing near a doorway. The room has a green patterned carpet and a ceiling fan.

Anuraag Das Sarma

# The Mustards Smiled Wet

Rain- piercing flesh; through under  
the sands to buried feelings,  
Spoken in silence,  
Through to the hearts of leaves,  
And of lives- lived in silence.  
Still-Mustards telling the tale,  
heil silence.  
Bald trees of winter, silent and still;  
Silent the stones and cattles and leaves  
Silent the fickle beloved's speech  
Their loss to bear,  
Ears strain to hear,  
She doesn't speak.  
She has left,  
touched and passed by,  
She showered, the mustards smiled,  
a wishful night, and just it.  
Now the leaves cry,  
water beads drop off them.

A photograph of a vast field of bright yellow mustard flowers in full bloom. The flowers are densely packed and stretch towards a clear, light blue sky. In the background, a low, hazy mountain range is visible under the sky.

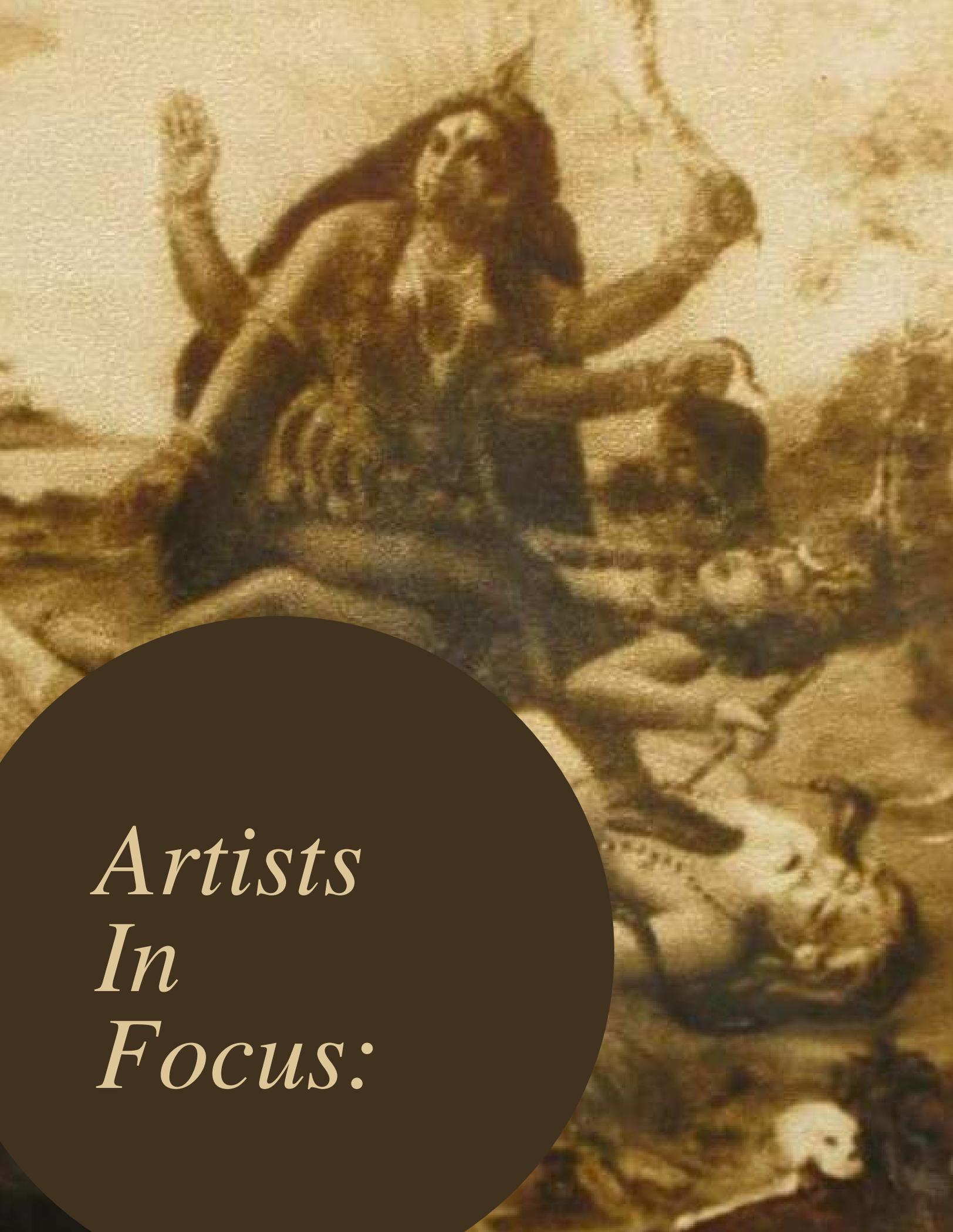
Farhan Khan

---

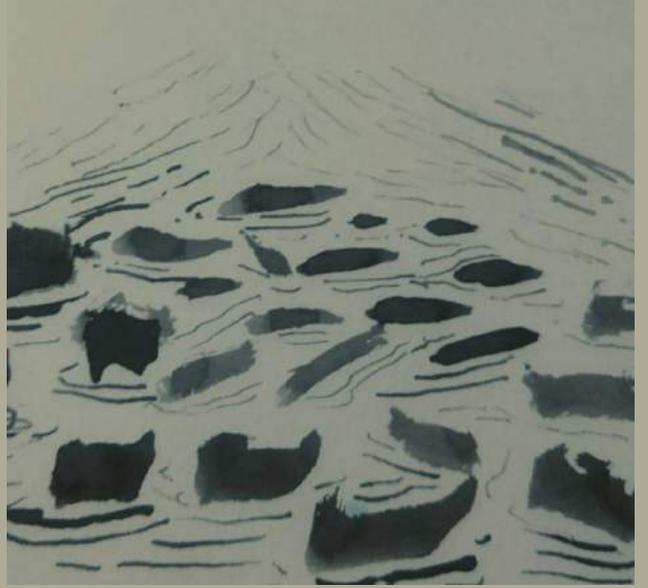
Heartbroken the light green  
sheet-  
In the field,  
Heartbroken the mirror  
On my screen.  
They have cried,  
Their bodies wet-  
with a beloved's love,  
My arm's still dry

---





*Artists  
In  
Focus:*



*Moinak Roy*



*Tractor Inspector*



O SRI HAIDAKHANDESVARI MA, MOTHER OF BLISS  
RULING THE COSMOS SINCE THE DAWN OF TIME  
MOTHER AMBA, THY MERCY IS BOUNDLESS,  
YOU FILL THE WORLD WITH SUPREME JOY  
GREAT SPIRIT FOREVER I BOW TO THEE

*Judith Lungen*



*La Hun*

# Our Staff.

**Editor in Chief:** Anuraag Das Sarma

**Senior Editors:** Ayush Chakraborty & Amrisha Banerjee

**Art Directors:** Rushali Mukherjee & Aindrila Ray

**Copy Editors:** Atri Deb Chowdhury, Indrayani Bhadra

**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

**Writers:** Arifa Banu, Sanshray Ghorawat, Abhinandan Bhattacharya, Yatika Singh, Rituparna Mukherjee, Ishita Ganguly, Avery Irene Stewart, Farhan Khan

**Artists:** Moinak Roy, Tractor Inspector, Judith Lungen, La Hun

## Special Thanks To:

*Shabnam Srivastava*  
*Harper Collins India*  
*Parimal Bhattacharya*  
*Ranita Gupta*

MONOGRAPH