



YEAR 6 VOLUME 5

A STUDENT LED MAGAZINE FOR THE ARTS

MONOGRAPH

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Editor's Note

Ritobrita Mukherjee

dog and bone

Aastha Singh

Mother knows best

Ayana Bhattacharya

Outside, Revolution. Inside, Sita.

Srijoni Nandi

MONOGRAPH INTERVIEWS

'Poetry becomes my urgency'

Moumita Alam interviewed by Vedant Nagrani

Souls and Leavings

Anna Dauyl Rockswell

Colours of Quest

Monali Tiwari

The Sadness of the Poor

Ryan Di Francesco



Re-Reading Althusser
By Siti Wasiatun Nikmah

Cohesion
By Olivia Baldacci

I Ate Art for Breakfast
Arshee Jameel

Old Men in a Young Republic
Raghuram S. Godavarthi

Proprioception of the Weather in the Museum lobby
Justin Gallant

Forensics of flight
Madeleine Carrington

Horizon
Shrishti M. Jain

FROM THE GALLERY OF
Ibtsam Tahir

EDITOR'S NOTE

Ritobrita Mukherjee
Editor-in-Chief

Our algorithms are saturated with lazy recollections of the monstrosities under way in various corners of the world today, and we cower as blind faith finds itself caught in the middle of a tug-of-war game that repeats itself endlessly on soil mourning the departure of promise.



Monograph's May issue finds its way into your screens and lives along with an avalanche of exit poll memes and endless political theorising on a fickle platform that contributes to the shaping of a greater social consciousness. The editorial team delves deep into the politics of mythmaking, with our copy editor Ayana zeroing down on a single moment of grave disillusionment in the vast pandaemonium that has given itself the name of West Bengal Legislative Assembly Elections. Srijoni performs an autopsy on a literary hero, revealing the complexities that thrive beneath the singularity of certain monikers or labels. Monograph was lucky enough to converse with Moumita Alam, a leading protest poet in India today, writing on political themes using social media platforms. Our copy-editor Vedant sought to understand the role of poetry and cultural artists in engaging with political myths through the spirited exchange. The issue features Lahore based artist Ibtisam Tahir's collection of calligraphic paintings which fuse Urdu and Persian techniques with an unapologetic queer expression crafting a new visual language for the queer diaspora. An eclectic collection of prose, poem and art takes up their rightful space within the pages of these issues, and I only hope they raise more questions than they answer in these troubling times.



DOG AND BONE

AASTHA SINGH

the moth
feeds on the feed
of likes, dislikes, notifs and subscribes
feeds off of the high
of ultraviolet glints and trembling digits and stinging eyes
eyes that glaze into the gentle night
thinking thoughtless thoughts
life collecting dust piles
the flame
lights up the night with uber-fast verbiage
clicks of buttons, humming in the silent night
scroll to post to scroll to post to scroll
quick clicks, quick fix
the barrage of internal monologues are put to a stop
for the algorithmic Gods are at work
the moth
wants more
wants quick, wants climax
wants answer, wants something
something that he too is unsure of



time warps
loop, loopy, looping into minutes, hours, days gone by
hands hovering, clicking, pressing, repeat
hands hovering, clicking, pressing, repeat
dog and bone, dog and bone
i'm the dog and it is the bone
a glowing patchwork of apps and lines
meaningless text
eroding the meaningless tiles of my mind
the moth
of hedonism and whim
scrolls
until it cannot anymore
and then it scrolls again
till its thumbs have holes and its eyes water anew

MOTHER KNOWS BEST

AYANA BHATTACHARYA



Dust, filtered through large, yellow vehicles, wafts into my room. Last-ditch efforts at road construction have persisted these past few months, my street a thicket of “NO ENTRY” barriers and uneven tar. Later, at the bank, customers chat about how they’ve never seen such ridiculous vehicles. One claims to have seen an industrial-sized sweeper. He says it’s not like anyone’s going around barefoot, and earns supportive nods. I’m not eligible to vote yet, but I’ve learnt that when roads are the preferred conversation starter, an election is approaching. And, if you’ve somehow missed the loudspeaker-touting, flag-waving, door-to-door campaigning of it all, there’s always the internet. Here, one artist paints party symbols and slogans on whitewashed brick; voiceover assuring viewers he doesn’t endorse any candidates, that this is just his job. Elsewhere, a man leading a rally, coated in paint and bewigged, marches forward with aplomb.

It’s here, in this wasteland of excess, that the news breaks.

Ratna Debnath stands as a BJP candidate.

Do you remember her?



Let me help you out. A Times of India headline identifies her as “RG Kar victim’s mother”. My grandmother’s version is quicker to land. “RG Kar’er ma,” she reminds a neighbour. That’ll do.

Well. How else do you approach the brutal rape and murder of thirty-one-year-old Dr. Moumita Debnath than with euphemisms and cliches? A case that shocked the nation. A tragedy. Language evolves to oblige — pruned of all blame, pared down to the economic, slyly evasive shorthand “RG Kar”. And so she is known.

The long-story-short of it all banks on timing. There is little information to be found about Ratna Debnath online. In public, she’s bespectacled, in a plain sari, often with her hands joined together. A neighbourhood Kakima. Debnath’s campaign is simply an extension of her life, engineered around the single, least-controversial trope of a mother’s pain. Our favourite kind of women.

Motherhood is a glowing career highlight on any politician’s resume. Add to this the trauma Debnath has endured, and you have alchemical invincibility. But here’s the thing about timing: women are afforded a terribly short window to plead their case.

Debnath is palatable. She speaks with conviction, yet looks visibly distressed, her voice quivering when she brings up her daughter. There is fortitude in her words. Evident pain. And gratitude, too, when she acknowledges Prime Minister Modi. All boxes checked — it’s precisely the slice of grief we love. Right now, she’s the kind of strong woman we revere. If elected, her story becomes background. Ratna Debnath risks going from mourning mother to political actor. And that treachery, we cannot stand.



Seldom do women get to exercise ambition without suffering first; their plight, a prerequisite.

I noted earlier that there's not a lot to learn about Ratna Debnath. She emerged as a mother, and that designation is enough to sate many. Motherhood, as an institution, is beyond reproach, its participants elevated to godhood. Really, they're primed almost impeccably for political candidacy. But this godhood fails actual mothers. We worship them only when they're silently altruistic.

At a rally, Former Minister of Education Smriti Irani proclaimed, "This mother is not just a BJP candidate; she represents every woman in Bengal." I don't believe that Debnath is entirely an invention, some character written and modified to win match points. And I'm not interested in Irani's one-size-fits-all representation shortcut. The question I'm left with, really, is of agency. I hope that Debnath, if elected, is granted the right to be more than a grieving mother. That her ticket to politics isn't what happened to her, but why it did.

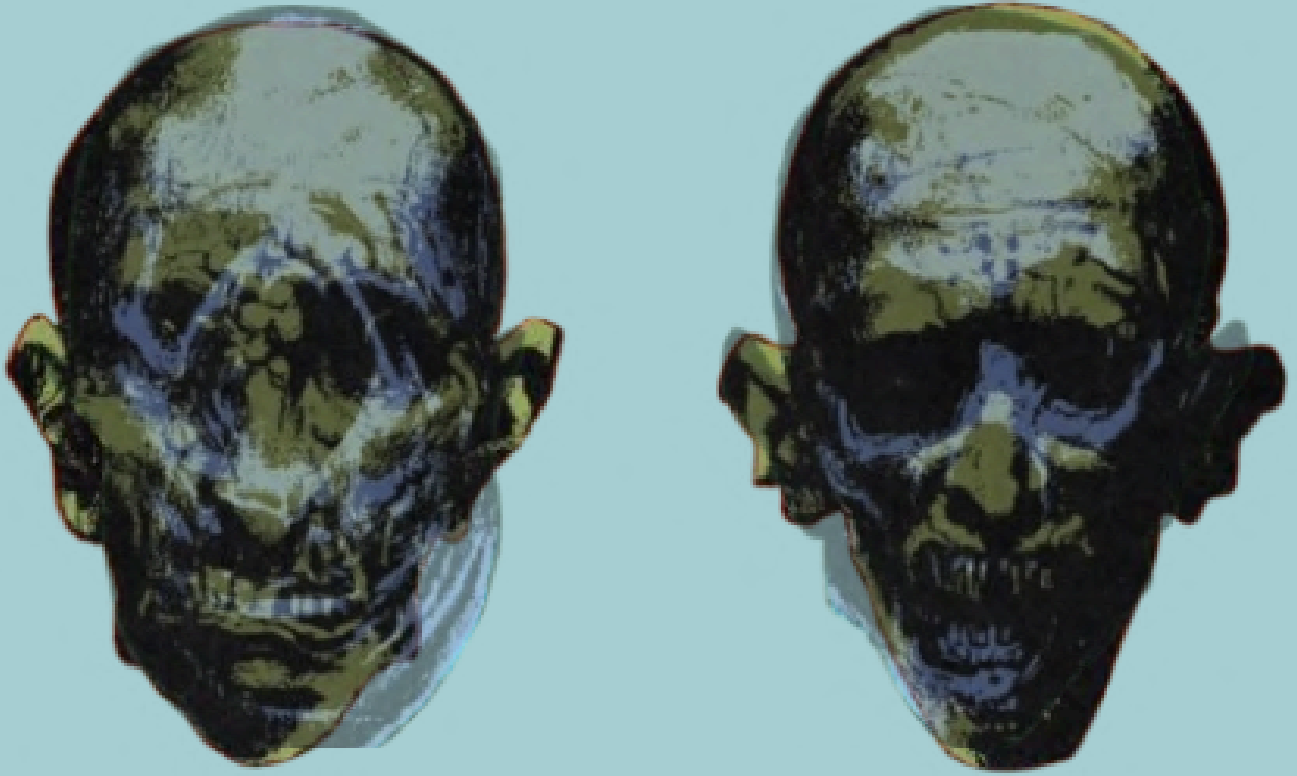


OUTSIDE, REVOLUTION. INSIDE, SITA.

SRIJONI NANDI

I came to know about Namdeo Dhasal through a university lecture, which is probably the safest way to encounter him. My professor was explaining the Dalit Panthers Movement to a class of Dalit Literature students- how in 1972, a group of young men from Maharashtra's most marginalised Dalit communities looked at the American Black Panthers Movement and thought: *yes, that*. Dhasal was one of the founders. He came from Kamathipura, Mumbai's red-light district, and he turned that geography into poetry of such concentrated rage that even the people it indicted had to admit the talent. I read *Golpitha*, his debut collection and then *Tree of Violence*. There is a particular experience of reading a poet who gives form to an anger so searingly resistant that the reader is forced to confront the flaws of a system that was never designed with them in mind. He was, I thought, the real thing, a genuine radical of sorts. Then I looked him up.





Malika Amar Shaikh is a poet too— Maharashtra Sahitya Parishad award, respected in Marathi literary circles. She is also Namdeo Dhasal's wife. Her 2016 memoir, *I Want to Destroy Myself*, translated from Marathi by Jerry Pinto, is an 'angry' account of their marriage. I want to be precise about what that marriage looked like, because euphemism here would be its own kind of dishonesty. She pens incidents of him beating her when she would ask where he'd been and him taking to drinking, extreme violence and abuse. Ironically, he also quoted Hindu scriptures- Sita being the model wife, *stridharma* being her duty- and targeted it at a woman he had married within a movement explicitly founded on the rejection of that very order. Three of her pregnancies ended in miscarriage; she writes that her body "rejected" the children because she herself had refused to carry him. The Dalit Panther, at home, was a patriarch.



Dhasal converted to Buddhism following Ambedkar, who had organised a mass conversion in 1956 as an act of political renunciation of the Hindu caste order that had classified Dalits as subhuman for centuries. Ambedkar had also spent decades dismantling the Manusmriti, the whole point of which was to drive home the fact that, theologically and politically, the system was illegitimate. Then we find out that Namdeo went home and cited it to his wife. It's a tough pill to swallow, that resistance to one hierarchy does not automatically dismantle others. She calls him a "scripture-quoting Mahar" in one chapter and I wonder just how much value a woman's silence holds within systems like these that are built upon it. The Dalit Panthers were shaped by Ambedkar's radical egalitarianism and ran on the domestic labour and suppressed accounts of women like Shaikh. Pinto, in his translator's note, says the memoir straddles "the personal and the political, the intimate and the public, the bedroom and the venereal disease clinic." I think about the jarring quality of this kind of discovery and come to a realisation. Dhasal's wife-beating tendencies sure does not rid his poetry of its artistic quality, but it once again becomes something I have to regard with the awareness that a man's rage, that helped create his art, was cushioned by the pain he inflicted on another woman.

Malika Amar Sheikh watched the movement blaze across the sky only to crash and burn. In a different period and part of the country, I sit in my classroom studying the works of a poet so revered, while the woman in me can only feel the disillusionment set in. To quote Sheikh, "I chose to write because I can. Those who cannot, what happens to them? "



“POETRY BECOMES MY URGENCY”

AN INTERVIEW WITH MOUMITA ALAM

VEDANT NAGRANI

Moumita Alam, one of the leading poets of protest poetry in India today, often writes poems which subvert political myths of our times with utmost sensitivity. This interview conducted by one of our copyeditors, Vedant, seeks to understand the role of poetry in engaging with such myths and bearing witness to significant concerns of our times.



Monograph Magazine: Although you have published three books, you primarily use social media platforms to share your poetry. We see all sorts of content on these platforms today, and they have frequently become avenues for spreading hatred. Popular and populist myths, often serving as propaganda, are circulated widely in these digital spaces. How do you believe your poems engage with those narratives? Several of your works, such as 'Working in the Smell of Azadi' from the Azadi collection, challenge specific perceptions—for instance, the way the Palestinian struggle is viewed or categorised. Since social media discourse often attempts to shape these same narratives, how do you use your poetry to engage with and dismantle these myths?

Moumita Alam: We are living in an incredibly difficult time. Never before in history have we witnessed a live-streamed war or a live-streamed genocide. As someone living in the northern part of Bengal—at the 'top' of the map—my isolation from the literary circle is not just geographical. Because Kolkata 'rules' Bengal as its literary capital, I lack access to ask for space to get my poems published. I literally saw social media in a way that has helped people, and it's still helping. Though there are some curves nowadays, you know, if I share anything about Palestinian people, my post doesn't reach many people.



But the poems still give me and my concerns some visibility because I have the option of tagging people and all. It allows me to manoeuvre through my own grief and pain. People often ask, 'Why write poetry? How will it help the Palestinian people? It doesn't provide *roti, kapda, or makaan* (food, clothing, or shelter).' While that is true, I believe art reflects the emotions that make us human. I mean, any form of art that helps us to be human.

In the last couple of days, last week, you have seen how people are playing various musical instruments when Trump said that he would destroy Iran. So this is resistance, you know? My words are resistance. There are still people left in the world who speak about Palestinians. All the capitalists, all the imperialists, all the fascist institutions, they want to erase us, they don't want to have any witnesses of their campaigns. In a way, I think that is my point. I don't know, I'm not the kind of person who makes grand claims, and I even have doubts about my own awareness. But I believe my words serve as a witness to the times we are living in. As for the hatred I face on social media, it is everywhere now. I won't say it never gets to me; in fact, it feels like it drowns me every day. But at the same time, as human beings, we can't lose hope. We can't allow ourselves to lose hope. Hope is the only thing that we have. And from the word hope, there will someday come resistance. I hope that, someday, there will be a revolution. I strongly believe that poetry and other cultural forms can motivate people far more than speeches ever can. Given the hatred and the narratives we face every day, I truly feel that cultural resistance is the only resistance we have left. We must confront every kind of hatred—whether it is the Israeli government's actions against the people of Palestine and Lebanon, or the propaganda spread by the RSS and BJP against minorities. These can only be challenged through resistance and art, because art is what truly connects people. As a millennial growing up in the early 90s, I remember the Jatras, a form of folk theatre performed after the paddy harvest. It didn't matter if you were rich or poor, Dalit, Muslim, or Christian; everyone sat on the ground together to watch. That bond stayed with us. Later, the advent of television began to compartmentalise us, though even then, people gathered around the few sets available in the village to watch football or cricket. But the mobile phone has totally broken that system. Now, even within one family, you find three isolated individuals living three isolated lives.



I have little hope for the middle or upper-middle class because they are so deeply isolated. My hope lies with the farmers. A small farmer in a village cannot work alone; you need a neighbour's tractor, their labour, and their help. It is inherently collective work. We need to cultivate these collective spaces to fight hatred, and cultural resistance is a vital way to organise people toward that goal.

MM: Since you brought up social media, I've noticed that many poets use these platforms to share work, and you recently wrote a poem about the SIR posted on your Instagram. Social media allows for the posting of very topical content that addresses immediate concerns and enables an immediate response to a situation or the chance to condemn injustice. However, aren't there also issues regarding algorithms and viewership? As you mentioned, a poem you write about Palestine might not reach many people. Does social media actually help or reach people, or do you believe there are ways beyond social media to conduct the work of cultural resistance?

MA: You are absolutely right; that is a very important question. The thing is, much like families, social media forces us into echo chambers because the algorithm ensures that the same kind of people read your work. It doesn't help much when you think of cultural resistance on a large scale. Digital inequality is still a reality in my village—the place I am speaking to you from now. Most women here don't have access to the internet because prices are rising. If a family can afford a single connection, it is the men of the house who have the luxury of using it; the women do not. At the same time, we need mass movements. If you follow the news, it's clear that institutions, the government, and the state are always afraid of mass movements. They arrest leaders because they know that only mass movements can truly challenge their 'idea of India,' their ideology of hatred, and Hindutva. My resistance doesn't end with simply posting a poem on social media. That is just a part of it. If it reaches some people, so be it—but beyond that, we need to engage people on the ground. That is an incredibly difficult task nowadays because the state is consistently aligned against people like us. It becomes very difficult. I am currently in touch with people in Bengal to form a cultural organisation that can perform street theatre and handle translations



If I write in English, I only reach a niche audience; it doesn't reach the general public. Because of this, I work in three languages: English, Bengali, and my mother tongue, Kamatapuri (or Rajbanshi). Kamatapuri is spoken by a large number of people in North Bengal, yet it is often dismissed by the Bhadrakalok as 'Chotoloker Bhasha'—the language of the downtrodden. But I never believe my work ends with writing a poem or an article; I think my journey actually begins there. 'Activism' is a much-abused word nowadays, so I don't necessarily describe myself as an activist, but I really want to connect through words—not just my own, but theirs as well. We have such a rich tradition of resistance within our folk culture, street theatre, and songs. I am looking forward to meeting people who want to pursue these things.

However, I am also a single parent to a nine-year-old daughter. I hope that in the next few years, I will have more time, provided this government leaves me alone and doesn't put me behind bars. Even then, I believe that words cannot be jailed. They can put a person in jail, but they cannot imprison the words themselves.

MM: The government is not only acting through official statements or policies but also by silencing songs that are coming up 'very red.' In your own work, as you mentioned, you use poetry to resist and to bear witness. Even though the poetry is very strong, we see that there is no real market for publishing it. Furthermore, because it is written in English, there is the problem of reach. Can political poetry written in English truly resonate with people at the grassroots level? What role do you think language plays, especially since you are fluent and write in three different languages? Finally, we see the rise of 'H-Pop,' where all these songs and poems are coming up in Hindi. Is it possible to use that same medium and language to subvert them?

MA: English is still an elite language in India. I started writing in English in 2019 because of a sense of not belonging to the Bengali language. Bengali is my first language, but I am Kamatapuri and Rajbhansi. Growing up at home, we spoke Kamatapuri-Rajbhansi, but when I stepped outside, there was always a caution not to use it. At the heart of my thoughts, there was a feeling that I didn't belong to the Bengali language because, throughout my school years, I heard from friends that I wasn't really 'Bengali.'



They would say, 'You are a Muslim, and you speak this other language.' Despite that, I have been writing extensively in Bengali lately—mostly articles. I was even awarded the 'Best Essayist' award by a prominent newspaper last year. But my third goal is to participate in movements to build our own narratives.

The Hindutva-RSS nexus is appropriating everything; they have even owned the word 'propaganda.' We are also propagandists, in a way, but our propaganda is different. Ours is not the propaganda of hatred; it is the propaganda of love, unity, and the plurality of our nation and its languages. My journey doesn't end with writing. Writing is just a manifestation of overwhelming emotion and anger. When I see news of Palestinian people being butchered in the street and a deafening silence all around, poetry becomes my urgency. I write short stories too, but poetry is a necessity; if I don't write it, I feel like I will burst with anger and die. I don't have bombs; my words must work as the bombs instead.

I feel I'm not writing enough poetry in Bengali, but I write in English so that the middle class, who are currently in hibernation, might at least glance at my words and feel the warmth, the anger, and the chaos around us. Whether I am successful or not, time will tell.

But my work never ends with the poem. I believe we need to go to the ground, mobilise, and listen to the people. We need to write in their languages, too. I live in a village as a single parent. Being a divorcee in this society is difficult; people look at you with disdain, as if you are an 'amputated organ.' I suffer from 'time poverty'—I have no time for myself. Yet, I believe people like us, who cannot sleep because of the injustice we see, must come forward. Whenever I am sad and lonely, I look at the people and see hope in their eyes. India is a vast country, and there is a positivity in that: you cannot impose a single idea on it all at once. Our inherent diversity will always resist the idea of 'one language, one religion, one food, one party.' You saw how the farmers resisted and eventually won. I am not a naturally positive person, but every night when I go to sleep, I do so with a small amount of hope. My life is a journey between opening my eyes to hopelessness in the morning and finding my way back to hope by the end of the day. I must not lose my faith in hope.



MM: One of the things you brought up was that we are also 'propagandists of love.' Some of your poems talk about love extensively—suggesting an ethic of love that exists alongside the other qualities you've discussed. This idea of love has a long tradition, one we see mirrored in the history of bards and folk fairs, using the personal to speak to the political. In your understanding, what is love? Specifically, how do you conceive of it in an environment where all we see around us is hatred?

MA: First of all, my love is non-binary. We have been taught that love is always black and white, but between black and white, there is always grey. For the last 100 years, groups like the RSS have successfully propagated their narrow ideas of food, love, and everything else. In contrast, my love is without boundaries. I want to share a very personal story. When I was in college, there were only three Muslim students in my department. Two were already engaged, which left only me. My Hindu friends—and I use that term here only to provide context—were always searching for a 'Muslim boy' for me to fall in love with. I was very young then and didn't think to question it, but now I ask: why is it assumed that a Muslim girl always needs a Muslim boy? The prejudices we are taught, whether consciously or unconsciously, determine our choices in love, food, and everything else. This is why unlearning is so important at this present juncture. Look at the idea of 'Love Jihad.' It is outrageous how they have fused those two words together. But let's take 'Love Jihad' in a positive way: let's fall in love with people from across the spectrum—different castes, different classes, different genders. They are terrified of inter-caste and inter-religious marriages. We have to understand what they fear and resist through our own lives by falling in love with people who are different from us. Love should not be a binary; it should be an open sky. In India, the rate of inter-caste marriage is still very low. I believe marriage itself is often a fascist and patriarchal institution, so I don't necessarily believe in the idea of marriage, but I believe in falling in love. We should fall in love with people from every spectrum of life. My idea of life and love is always non-binary and entirely without boundaries.



MM: You emphasise that poetry is not enough on its own; it is part of a larger movement. As someone who also writes political poems, I often find myself at a loss for metaphors. It feels as though no metaphor can truly communicate the gravity of our situation. Furthermore, when we write to mobilise people, the goal is to reach as many as possible. What do you believe is the poet's responsibility in our times? I'm speaking not just of poets who are overtly political, but of poets in general. To ask a very difficult question I often grapple with: is poetry, in the aesthetic sense we usually imagine it—even possible in a time like ours? And if it is possible, is it enough? What else must be done?

MA: On my Facebook profile, there is a quote: *'When the world is bleeding, it is a crime to write about the beauty of the moon.'* I truly believe that. In my collection, *The Smell of Azadi*, there is a poem about how to write during a genocide. A friend once told me that my political poems lack 'beauty' or the traditional 'aesthetics' of poetry. I believe this idea of 'art for art's sake' is deeply elitist and Brahmanical. Historically, the upper castes have positioned themselves as the sole arbiters of art, song, and literature. This doesn't mean poetry should be raw or bland like prose, it shouldn't be. Writing is a journey of learning, unlearning, and stumbling. I read poets who matter to me every day: Kamala Das, Maya Angelou, and Agha Shahid Ali. But I refuse to waste hours on trivialities. As a Dalit Muslim, communist, queer, single parent, I don't have the luxury of turning my eyes toward the 'beauty of the moon.' I cannot look away from what is happening in Gaza, Lebanon, Afghanistan, or Iran. I have too many battles to fight.

I have a poem titled *A Woman with a Tongue*, which argues that a woman with a tongue is more dangerous than a woman with a gun. That is the power you must learn. Writing political poetry isn't easy; people often dismiss it as mere 'sloganeering.' There is a famous line by the Naxalite poet Saroj Dutta: *'You complain that my poems are turning into slogans, but why don't your slogans turn into poems?'* People need slogans now. Those who are dying of hunger or having their forest rights snatched away don't want poems about beauty; they want the reality of their lives. In Indian English literature, very few people write resistance poetry. Many famous writers are 'English-medium kids' whose idea of India is comfortable. Their literature reflects that comfort. But my words reflect my struggle.



There is a massive chasm in India now. The middle class is collapsing; you see it in the hours people spend in line for cooking gas. In Bengal, nearly ten million names have been deleted from the voter lists. We are completing a dark cycle where we are once again begging the government for the right to vote. Who are they to decide if we are Indian or even human? They demand papers, but in a land of constant floods, displacement, and migration, preserving papers is a luxury of the upper class. I find it outrageous. To me, the government asking for papers to prove our citizenship is as outrageous as a man demanding his wife prove her virginity on their wedding night. It is that same level of systemic insult, and yet, there is so little opposition to it.

MM: As someone who belongs to several minority communities and considering that poetry is very political in nature, what is the kind of reception that you face about your poems, and have you had to face any sort of censorship because of it?

MA: It's a constant hatred I face. I don't know whether you know Taslima Nasrin or not. Taslima Nasrin is a Bangladeshi author and activist. And I might not agree with her idea of politics and all, but as I am a Muslim, my family often, you know, says what do you want to write about? Concentrate on your daughter. If my daughter has a fever, my family blames me for not taking care of her because of my writing. They will blame my writing. If my daughter is scoring less marks, she's a smart child otherwise, know, those, for every kind of thing, because they don't like me, they don't want me to have a voice. So I always, I have a point that how a father is a fascist state. The first event of fascism we face at home is the father. I believe so, I strongly believe so, because he actually puts those and do's and don'ts in his form since our birth, actually. And then comes the first hurdle I face from my family. The second hurdle comes from society because I am a Muslim woman. I don't practice religion as such, and they believe that I am doing some outrageous things, some obscene things, some foreign things. I will be cast at hell.



MA: But I often say that I think most of the writers, beautiful writers, handsome writers will be found in hell. So I would prefer to live in hell forever. And then comes the same. Oh, I don't want to name it, but just two days ago, one editor called me and told me, please write an article, don't write anything against the "BJP thing", actually. So this happens very often. One of my articles published last year talks about how the names of the Muslims can be the reason for the deletion from the voting guides. Because Muslims have naming issues. Most of the Muslims live in the villages. See, every language, every dialect has a certain kind of pronunciation, right? Sometimes the officers mishear the language and write it differently. And that article I posted again this year, okay, last week. And that article got lots of attention. Celebrating people reading much but at the same time some people are telling me are you to Pakistan job in Bangladesh? And you should be raped, you know and all and so it is also Indian content I think Indian patriarchy has the master tool like a nuclear bomb and then nuclear bomb is that they want to rape you for everything. If you are a woman with a tongue, then they will say, I will rape you. If you are a woman who doesn't abide by the rules of the patriarchy, they will threaten you with rape. So rape is a very much a political tool and I am tired of hearing "we will rape you." Sometimes it's very, very painful to deal with because some days when you are very low and you are having so many issues and some messages drop in and you find yourself amidst some people are giving you a threat. But at the same time, this is the resistance. They don't want you to continue writing, but we must.

-fin-



SOULS AND LEAVINGS

ANNA DAUYL ROCKSWELL



COLOURS OF QUEST

MONALI TIWARI

Give no side-eye to me,
when I differ.

The indoctrinated
won't even ask why.

But I will.

If assent were a road,
I'd cross anytime,
to bypass the mundane gridlock.

For left-siders
get honked at for secular banners;
Right-siders
are herded like flocks with holy flags.
Until I detour to a subway,
I proceed
where my soulful relics guide me.

On the right sidewalk,
if I were to buy a needy person's
brunch,
rather than feed a hundi,
I'd do it.

I want to
see miracles happen live—
smiles in the moment.

The left often
dismisses the primordial grounds.
Perhaps this, too,
Is not always unerring.
One can't shun the genesis;
There is no oak without an acorn.
I now see why Piscine Patel
found the crossing so arduous.



Fortune isn't always
a commodity to be bought
by the abled;
But even a layman
can claim it,
like me.
I, too, found out my route.

THE SADNESS OF THE POOR

RYAN DI FRANCESCO

That small
white thread
weaves you
a ceiling.

There is a heart
in the lamplight
on the table.

I feel sorry
for the
handkerchief
you bought
from me.

It's a small belt.



ON MESSIANIC POLITICAL EMBLEM: THE RELIGIOUS ALGORITHMS BEHIND THE POLITICAL SCENES

SITI WASIATUN NIKMAH

RE-READING ALTHUSSER

Today we find ourselves firmly rooted in the modern political landscape. Democracy has been chosen through a rational decision as a tool for implementing political agendas and decisions. Given that choice, democracy naturally has its own set of procedures and protocols. That is, in the logic of democracy, power has been divided into three branches: the Judiciary (interpreting laws), the Executive (enforcing laws), and the Legislative (enacting laws). If read literally, in this system, all decisions are made and determined by secular components. Democracy does not require the division of power through transcendental components, such as through a papal address at the Vatican or a pastor in a church, for example. At a cursory glance, democracy does not seem to explicitly proclaim the involvement of the afterlife within it. But is it true that politics in modern democracy today completely sets aside the contribution of God's kingdom? Does democracy truly demand that we become atheists? Perhaps it is not that simple; in fact, religion and belief remain present in person within the spectrum of modern politics. The divine dimension is the pinnacle of human civilization and a social fact (Geertz:1998).



It also contributes to shaping the horizon of the political atmosphere in this modern era. If so, then religion can no longer be viewed through an abstract lens as a thing in itself (Germanic term: Noumena) (J.D. Morell:1840). This means it is no longer merely a collection of divine revelations codified in sacred texts. Rather, it operates within a concrete context. That is, religious identity is used as a foundation for determining and shaping political stances. Indeed, religion can serve as a yardstick for judging who is the devil and who is the hero, who is good and who is evil, in political dealings within a community. The United States has become the global benchmark for democracy today. Its Constitution contains a clause that can be interpreted as a specific separation between Church and State (M.W. McConnel, Charles Creitz: 2019). If this is the case, moralistic campaigns such as messianic hopes and martyrdom should not be popular commodities widely touted here. However, the facts show the opposite. Charlie Kirk is an interesting case to examine. Kirk was an American right-wing political activist, entrepreneur, and media personality. He co-founded the conservative student organization Turning Point USA (TPUSA) in 2012 and served as its executive director until his assassination in 2025. In 2025, he was shot and killed while holding a speaking session at the Utah Valley University campus. The news of Charlie Kirk's death sparked a wave of anger and massive demonstrations organized by right-wing groups to voice their opposition to the left. In fact, this event cannot be viewed from a single perspective. It was not merely a clash between two political camps. Take, for example, the demonstrations held to commemorate Charlie Kirk's death, including the rally at State Farm Stadium in Glendale, Arizona, in 2025. Charlie Kirk's image during his lifetime also plays a role here. Beyond being a political figure, Charlie Kirk was known as a deeply devout Christian; in fact, the U.S. Congress dubbed him the "13th Disciple of Jesus" (NPR: 2025). Thus, religious narratives were woven into the protests beyond the political interests at stake. Indirectly, this situation became a lucrative opportunity for the right-wing to promote its advantages. As a result, the likelihood of the left becoming an equal rival to the right diminishes. During the event, Donald Trump also delivered a speech, and in his closing remarks, referred to Kirk as a "martyr." Furthermore, Kirk's supporters from church authorities also declared him a martyr (New York Times: 2025).



Essentially, martyrdom is bestowed upon a hero who sheds his blood in the fight against evil. Thus, this political battle is framed as hero versus villain. And what makes it sacred is Kirk's life.

Indirectly, the religious image of a political figure can be seen as a legacy that outlives their term of office, or even their life. In fact, it renders the figure immortal and posthumously enduring. This is particularly evident among Christian followers of Charlie Kirk who live in the modern era and believe in modern prophecies. They will view Kirk's death as a sign of the "rapture" and the coming of the Messiah as a response to Charlie Kirk's death. However, there is concern that this image may eventually become a pattern of patronage aimed at dominating the voting bloc within religious communities. Ultimately, the dialogue between the left-wing and right-wing parties—which was previously intended to serve the "checks and balances" agenda—becomes neither neutral nor clear. This is because the

gateway to that dialogue has been closed by absolute ideological fanaticism, which tends to conclude that among the two warring factions, one is the hero and the other is the devil. However, it is also very possible that the two could switch roles at the same time or at a later time.

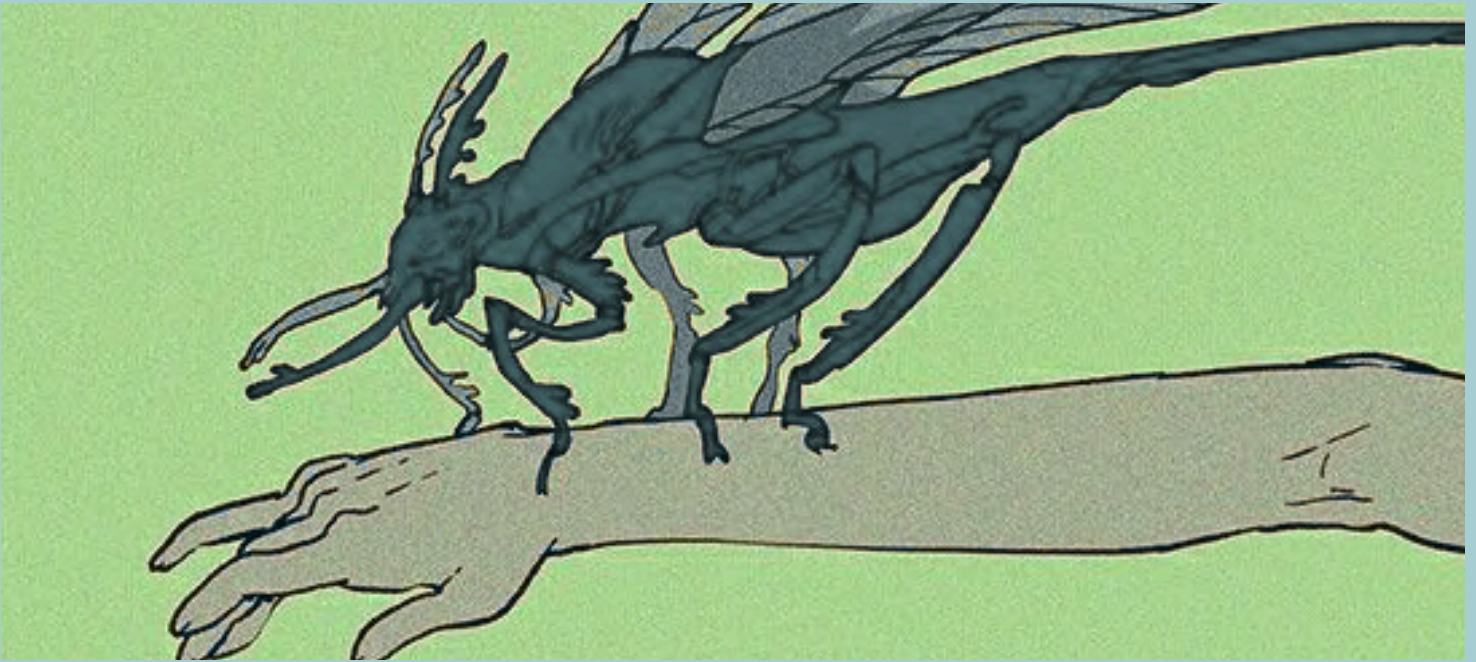
Furthermore, as the conflict in the Middle East escalates, attempts at patronage aimed at securing the support of religious communities appear to be recurring. Images of destruction and warfare are appearing more frequently and becoming commonplace in various daily media outlets. A shocking post was shared from Donald Trump's social media account in which his image was manipulated to resemble Jesus. In another instance, he even referred to the potential war between the U.S. and Iran as a "Holy War" and "Armageddon." This is not a truth mentioned in sacred texts.



Rather, it is an attempt to gain the sympathy of the American people to approve a war they never actually chose or decided upon. That a country adhering to Liberal Democracy still embraces and uses messianic narratives is shocking. But the most important question is this: why do irrational narratives like religion—even within the political systems of liberal nations—still function as a commodity? What is actually happening behind the scenes? It turns out that religion is an effective tool for steering the construction of collective belief.

Louis Althusser's analysis serves as a powerful analytical tool here. According to Althusser, religion can be positioned as part of the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA), a structure that operates not through violence, but through the production of meaning and consciousness. Unlike the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA), which is coercive, the ISA operates subtly by instilling values, norms, and beliefs that appear natural within individual consciousness. In this context, the use of religious narratives in politics demonstrates how religion is mobilized as an ideological medium to reproduce power relations. In his book *The Reproduction of Capitalism*, Althusser describes ideology as "unconsciousness." Ultimately, this method creates a form of interpellation. In this context, every individual feels called upon when the "Holy War" is invoked. This is because individuals no longer perceive themselves as rational citizens within a democratic system, but rather as faithful subjects being called by God. In this position, support for political policies which should be open to debate spontaneously transforms into a moral obligation and a divine command that requires no further reflection; they must be unconsciously accepted and obeyed.





This explains why, in a country that formally adheres to liberal democracy, which upholds rationality and secularism, religion remains a dominant force and holds a unique appeal. Religion in this context is not merely a private belief but an effective ideological instrument for building and maintaining collective trust. When political rationality is insufficient to consolidate public support, religious ideology provides a far stronger effective and symbolic foundation. As a result, the subjects being addressed will comply of their own accord without requiring repressive measures such as coercion or violence. Everything appears normal and natural. Furthermore, today's Armageddon narratives have aligned with the algorithmic logic of current news media, particularly regarding destruction and warfare. This is not an instant process, in the sense that algorithmic control is not centered on political actors. However, the selection of ideological narratives that are highly compatible with today's algorithms means that the algorithms themselves reinforce this interpellation of the public. It is as if they are trying to make the public believe that an unwanted political war has somehow become God's will as a "Holy War".



COHESION

OLIVIA BALDACCI



I ATE ART FOR BREAKFAST

ARSHEE JAMIL

But the meal was not gentle.
It was ochre first -
cavesmoke, the fat of hunted light
then the blue from a Byzantine virgin's throat,
licked off the brush before the paint could dry.
Marble dust sweetened the coffee.
A spoonful of bronze corrosion,
the green-black patina of a drowned saint,
lifted to my lips.

I swallowed the corner of a Rothko,
the one where red stops pretending to be a rectangle
and starts confessing to the floor.
The groan a cello makes
before the bow remembers its name.
The eighth draft, the one with the coffee ring
and the cross-outs,
the one that had the word hollowed out.

I ate the gasp a welder makes pulling back the mask,
showers of sparks still cooling on the concrete.
The wrong note the choir swears it didn't sing,
the one that hung in the rafters anyway,
a bat of dissonance waiting for dusk.





The crack in the canvas where the fist went through.
The fist. The apology
written on the back in pencil, never sent.

The plate is empty now.
I am full of things that were not made to be
consumed.
I am the gallery.
I am the kiln.
I am the heat.



OLD MEN IN A YOUNG REPUBLIC

RAGHURAM S GODAVARTHI

when old men tell broad tales
straddling fact and fiction often
watch out for a broad wink too
that giveaway of confabulation
yet it will take much more
to unravel the lies of the republic
that fiction sold as plain fact
patriotism concocted overnight
a witches' brew of ill-intent
the fables of old men caution us
not to buy wholesale the lie of nations
those self-serving tools of self-serving men
a badinage of untruths packaged as politics
mythologies of dubious origin as props
for the deception that underpins government
(they are branded ideology in this supermarket)
oh old man! tell me again of your youth
your nostalgia-ridden tales are a salve
for these ears bleed with today's news
the warm winter sunlight you radiate
a fine counter to this endless summer
'tis only thus that uninformed young men
come to knowledge in ignorant times



PROPRIOCEPTION OF THE WEATHER IN THE MUSEUM LOBBY?

JUSTIN GALLANT

The museum lobby was mostly empty, the bone-weight of weather scratching my temples. Rain slid down the tall glass façade in broken rivulets, refracting the city into smeared neon and gray. A pair of schoolchildren were counting the seconds between thunder and lightning, their voices echoing up into the high ceiling. I sat on a cold bench, turning over a paper ticket between my fingers. Two red stamps, slightly misaligned, bled into one another like a misprint. I didn't know why it had been stamped twice. I was waiting, though I wasn't sure if waiting was still the correct tense.

A monitor above the coat check switched from gallery maps to a live news feed. Somewhere across the world—country unnamed—a cyclone had closed a border. “A precaution,” the anchor said. “Until the rain lets up.” The audio cut out for a second, then returned with the high tone of the emergency broadcast system, tinny in the large room.

A child dropped a rubber dinosaur on the marble floor; it landed with the same rhythm as the broadcast beep. I thought about a dream from the night before: I carried a ficus up a stairwell, losing it at every landing, finding it again under strangers' questions I couldn't answer.

The glass door hissed open. A woman walked in with rainwater in her hair and a small cat in a carrier. The cat's eyes were enormous, unblinking, until it blinked slow, and I remembered another cat years ago, perched above a protest in a window sill, unmoved while the street roared below. Police in armor below, shouting and shoving, but the cat was still, watching, tail curling and uncurling.

The lobby monitor cut to an art segment. A man was describing his latest piece: a painting of a flooded street where people sat at floating café tables, drinking coffee as if nothing was unusual.



“Unreal,” the interviewer said. The sound warped for me, becoming “unrealized.” I wrote it down on the back of my ticket without thinking.

The museum lights flickered. Outside, the rain reversed direction for three seconds, crawling upward along the glass like mercury defying gravity. My phone buzzed: I can’t get across. The bridge is closed. No apology, no promise. Just the fact of it.

For a moment the lobby seemed to fold into my dream-apartment: same marble floor, same man at the desk blocking my way, same unreadable gaze. The ticket in my hand was damp now, though I hadn’t left the bench. The ink from the stamps bled into abstract shapes, one merging into the other until it was impossible to tell which came first.

The woman with the cat walked to the door. When she opened it, the rain was falling sideways, a solid sheet sliding past the doorway like a bead curtain. She stepped into it without hesitation. The cat did not blink.

The monitor now showed the same lobby I was sitting in, rendered in watercolor. My bench, the guard desk, the tall glass wall. The ticket lay on the front counter in the painting, already blurred. The art segment’s voiceover continued without acknowledging the change, as if this had always been the piece.

The emergency broadcast tone returned, but it was quieter now, like it was coming from far outside the building. I traced the wet paper in my hand, pressing the ticket flat against my thigh, trying to see if unrealized was still there.



FORENSICS OF FLIGHT

MADELEINE CARRINGTON



HORIZON

SHRISHTI M. JAIN

On a blustery, cold night one January,
The ocean rose with rage and fury,
Angry waves splashed the earth,
The land and its inhabitants all scared.

The marine world – algae and corals,
Sharks, dolphins, octopus and turtles,
Wondering, questioning the insanity,
Hid in the volcanos and unseen valleys.

But the ocean quelled soon enough,
Its wrath laid and pride shrugged,
The earth thanked the heaven and sky,
For it had thundered and rumbled to pacify.

The ocean turned, looked up despairingly,
Ogled the firmament and its beauty,
The pain forgotten and irritation forgone,
The ocean calmed, swaying to a song.

It admired the clouds, gracious like a swan,
The blazing moon and its cratered crown,
The sparkle and gleam of stars abound,
On the dark blanket of vacuum unbound.

Oh, my darling, what took you so long?
Tell me my dear, how did everything come along?
What have you seen and witnessed today?
Something new or the same as a billion days?



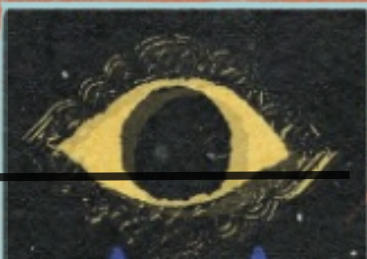
The sky gazed down into the eyes of the ocean,
Rippling in peace, reflecting its constellations,
And the blackness that was its own,
Accepted as if the ocean's throne.

Again, the sky rumbled and groaned,
It murmured, whispered and purred aloud,
Answering the questions one at a time,
With patience and love that was divine.

Far apart, yet in concert, the sky and the water,
Walked miles and miles, in a motion circular,
As the moon paved its way to the west,
They shared and conversed without rest.

Once at the horizon, they finally stopped,
As the flaming red sun rose in backdrop,
Reaching out, they firmly held hands,
At last near, they hugged, kissing goodbye.

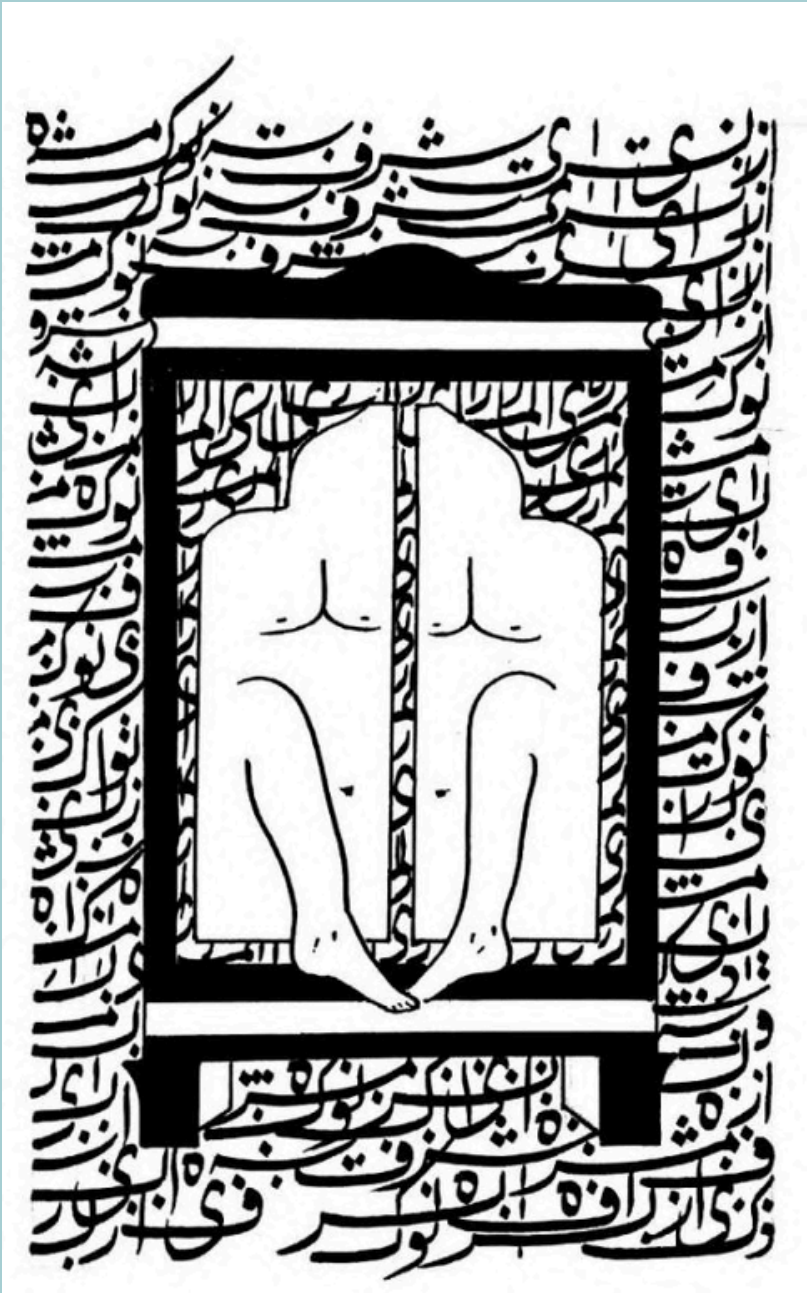
In each other's ears they softly crooned,
With a hasty promise to meet again soon,
And once more sundered, they walked apart,
Awaiting the night, to unite at their secret spot.



FROM THE GALLERY OF

IBTSAM TAHIR

Closet



The artwork *Closet* is a black-and-white calligraphic piece that fuses Urdu-Persian script with a minimalist illustration of a window-frame enclosing two bare feet. The dense script wraps the rectangular opening, turning the border into a textual veil that hides and reveals the central figure of the feet that is symbolic of a closet. Traditional calligraphic techniques craft intricate lettering that evokes cultural heritage, while the modern depiction of the feet introduces an intimate focus on the body. The composition suggests a dialogue between confinement and liberation, where the ornate script surrounds the raw, exposed self. The contrast between elaborate text and simple feet emphasizes tension between societal expectation and individual queerness.



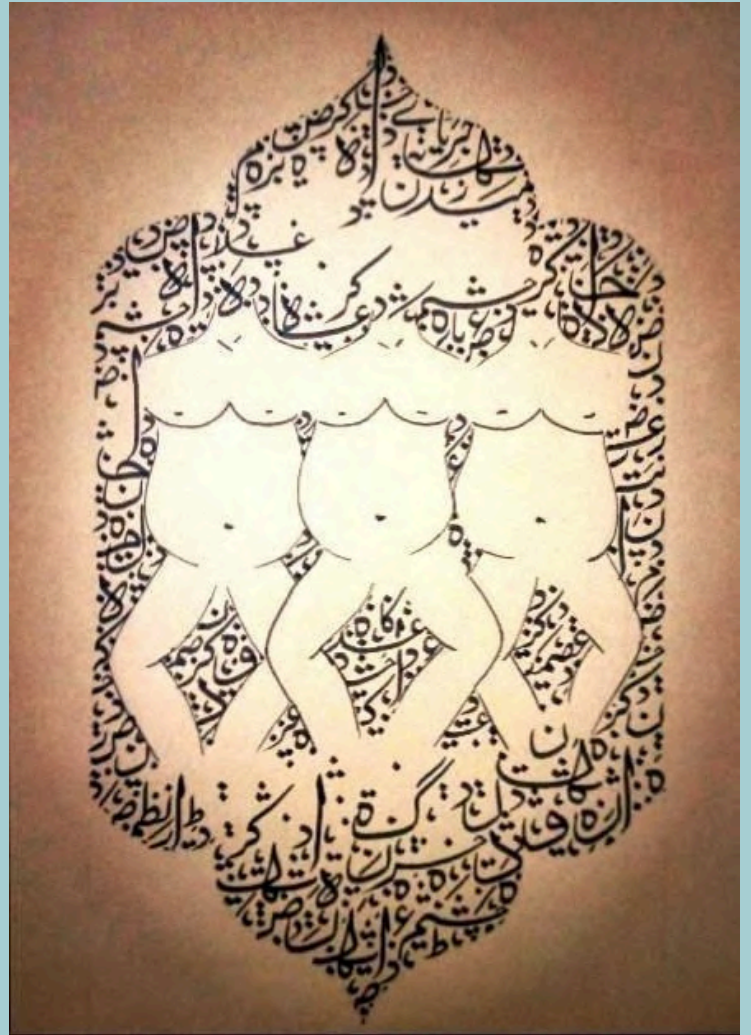
A Persian Affair



'A *Persian Affair*' inscribes verses of Hafiz Shirazi's poem into a dense textual field surrounding a stylized minimalist face with a beard and expressive eyes set in a simple frame. The calligraphy uses traditional Persian script to arrange Hafiz's verses as background texture that both obscures and highlights the central facial illustration, creating a dialogue between poetic tradition and modern representation. Embedding the Hafiz poem with a stylized face transforms the literary homage into a statement about queer visibility, urging viewers to read between the scripted lines and recognize the layered identity beneath. Overall, the piece blends Persian calligraphic heritage with queer symbolism, turning Hafiz's mysticism into a visual meditation on secrecy, authenticity, and the struggle for self-affirmation within cultural constraints.



The artwork depicts male figures shown with exaggerated abdominal forms suggesting pregnancy, framed within a Persian-style. The composition uses traditional calligraphic techniques to weave the script around the central male figures, creating a decorative, symmetrical design that blends figurative illustration with textual ornamentation. The piece explores the juxtaposition of classical Persian calligraphy with modern bodily representation, emphasizing the tension between cultural script tradition and the unconventional depiction of male pregnancy. It can be read as a commentary on identity, gender, and the transformation of symbolic artistic conventions.

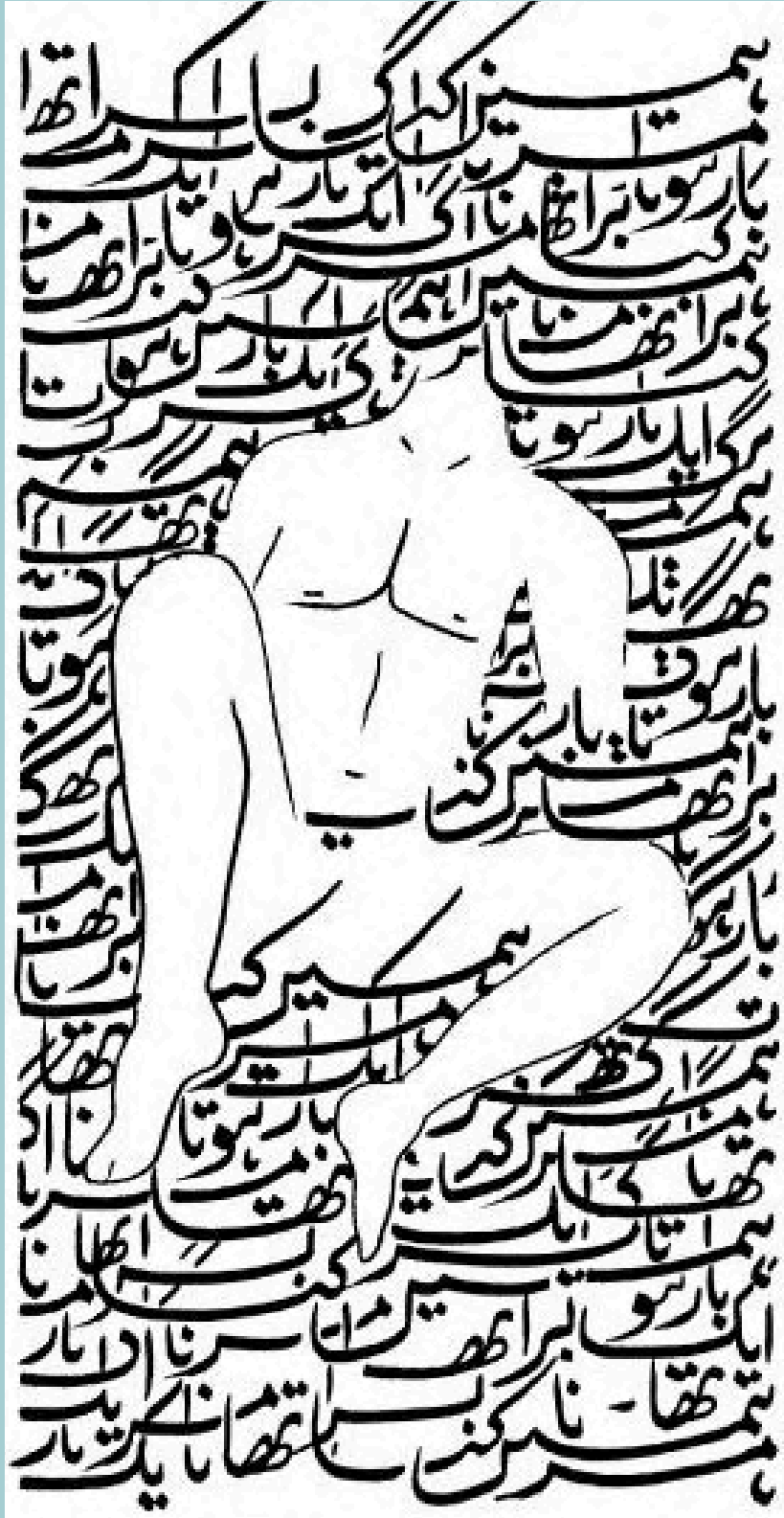


The artwork is a black-and-white piece rendered in Nastaliq script, the classic Persian-Urdu calligraphy. Negative space carves two stylized male figures standing close, bodies almost merging in an intimate embrace. The dense Nastaliq text curls around them, forming a decorative veil that both highlights and shields their closeness. Their posture hints at whispered affection, shared breath, and a quiet, tender bond between two men. The script's fluid lines echo the fluidity of their connection, blurring boundaries of gender and tradition. By intertwining cultural calligraphy with queer intimacy, the piece challenges norms while honoring heritage. It invites viewers to see the embrace as a subtle yet powerful statement of love, identity, and resistance.



Love letter to Kumail

Embodies Nastaliq text surrounds the male nude , echoing Mirza Ghalib's poetic melancholy, especially his line: "hamein kya bura tha marna agar aik



“baar hota”, (what harm would death have been if it were once), suggesting existential contemplation. The figure's exposed, vulnerable pose is juxtaposed with the intricate script, blending physical nakedness with spiritual introspection inspired by Ghalib's musings on mortality. Ghalib's verse infuses the scene with a philosophical question about the acceptance of death, reflecting the figure's introspective stance within the textual environment. The piece invites viewers to read the intertwined script and nude form as a meditation on existence, mortality, and artistic vulnerability, inspired by Ghalib's poetic philosophy.



Our Staff

Editor in Chief: Ritobrita Mukherjee

Senior Editor: Aastha Singh

Copy Editors: Ayana Bhattacharya,
Shreya Datta, Vedant Nagrani,
Srijoni Nandi

Cover By: Rushali Mukherjee

MONOGRAPH