

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH,
SRI VENKATESWARA COLLEGE, DU
presents

MOSAIC

Edition: 2020-21



NOTE FROM THE PRINCIPAL: PROF. C. SHEELA REDDY



Even as pandemic clouds darken the atmosphere, the unstinting efforts of dedicated students shine through. One such effort is the Mosaic, the English Department Magazine. Having seen several copies of past editions of the magazine lining the Principal's office, it is with pleasure that I recognize the 2021 Mosaic as a worthy publication. It is creative, innovative, insightful and enthralls the reader. I wholeheartedly appreciate the dynamic spirit and efforts of all the students and teachers involved in bringing out the magazine. I congratulate the Editorial Team on the achievement and my best wishes in all your future endeavors.

**-Prof. C. Sheela Reddy,
Principal, Sri Venkateswara College,
University of Delhi**

NOTE FROM THE CONVENOR



Many congratulations to Team Mosaic for managing to put together a creative, variegated fare in Covid-constrained circumstances. Over the years, the Mosaic has evolved and changed shape and thrust. The demands of this year has given birth to an entirely new entity. Making a digitally responsive e-Magazine is a demanding task—a task admirably accomplished by the Team.

I look forward to reading the entire issue closely and to many more such achievements. Vive le Mosaic!

–Prof. Dr. Meenakshi Bharat , Associate Professor, Dept. of English, Sri Venkateswara College, University of Delhi

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR



In its first digital avatar, **Mosaic** seeks to testify how literature and art transcends disciplines, dismantles hierarchies, removes barriers and connects us all. The magazine brings about and showcases the creative capabilities of the students of Sri Venkateswara College from across disciplines like the Sciences, Humanities, Social Sciences and Commerce.

It is very difficult to disagree with Keats when he says “A thing of beauty is a joy forever” as we always seek refuge in ‘things of beauty’ at the end of a long, tiring day. As the pandemic raged, the world was stealthily engulfed by clouds of darkness and we became islands; lonely, distant and disconnected, the words of Keats offered a potent remedy.

We realised that extraordinary times call for novel actions and we chose this endeavour powered by the magic of words, charged with the collaborative efforts that would surely lead us to the road of joy. This cure, seasoned with the love, will surely give the readers a dose of beauty that they seek to distract themselves with.

My heartfelt thanks to our Convenor and Staff Advisor, **Prof. Dr. Meenakshi Bharat** who unlocked the bridge of words and imagination for us in these troubled times. Her steady guidance, advice and creative insights released us from our holed up existence, brought us together, gave us a sense of purpose and much needed direction in Corona times. Without her support Mosaic's transition to the digital platform would have been extremely tiring and difficult.

This edition of **Mosaic** seeks to capture various shades of human emotions and understand what makes us humane through the creative word. Varied possibilities, a polyphony of voices and experiences are presented as a mosaic on the common plane of humaneness.

I sincerely thank each and every person who sent in their entries **Mosaic** is truly enriched by your contributions. I sincerely request you all to never stop writing. Eagerly looking forward to read your work in future.

Cheers to the Editorial Board that worked as a team via online platforms to ensure **Mosaic's** timely release. You all were truly amazing, learnt a lot from you all.

I heartily welcome our readers to the 2020-21 digital edition of **Mosaic** on behalf of the Editorial Team. I hope you will find joy that you are looking for in the pages of our magazine. Your pleasure marks the success of our efforts.

Do share our magazine with your loved ones if it offers the remedies it promises.

Stay Happy, Stay Safe

Best Wishes

Samik Chakraborty, Editor-in-Chief, Mosaic.

B. A. (Hons.) English, Semester VI

(Batch: 2018-21)

LINK TO THE OFFICIAL WEBSITE

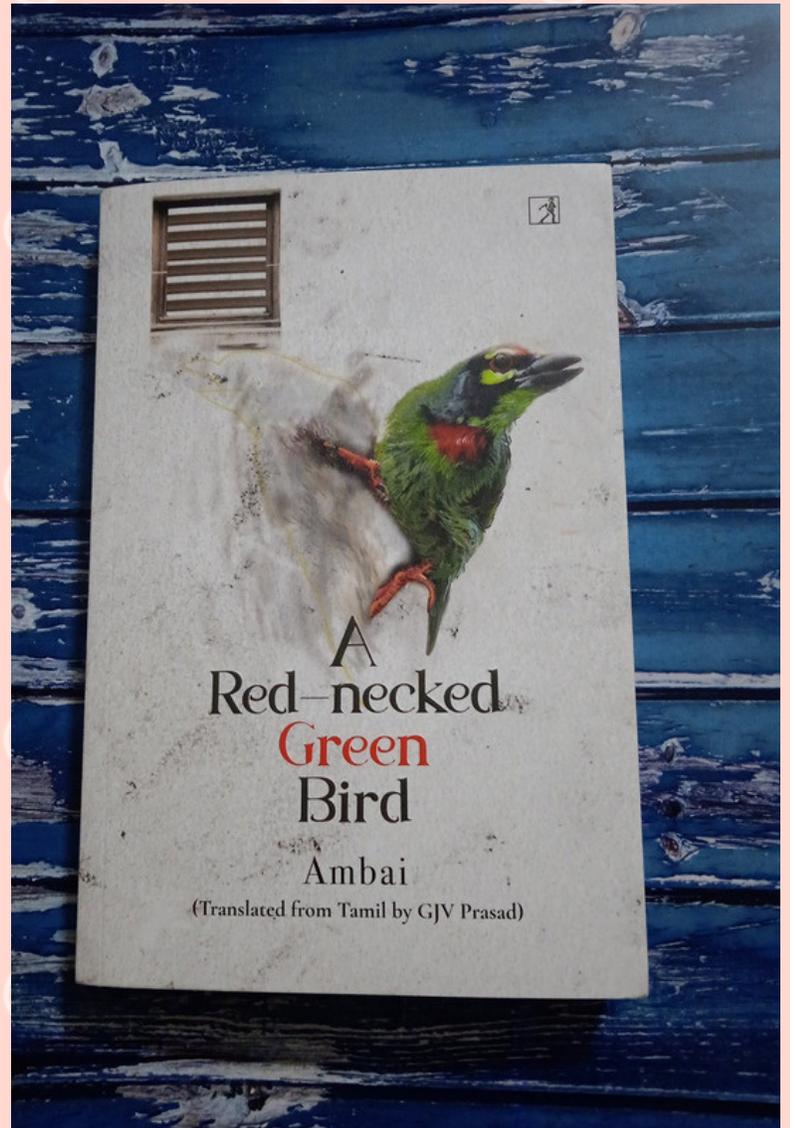
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INTERVIEWS:

“THE COW
WILL GO
‘MAA’ IN
MY
ENGLISH!”
AN
INTERVIEW
WITH
G. J. V.
PRASAD



- **Samik Chakraborty,**
B.A.(H) English,
Semester VI
(Batch 2018-2021)

Dr. G. J. V. Prasad is a renowned academic and a retired Professor at the Centre for English Studies, School of Language Literature & Culture Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University. Being a stalwart in his field, he needs no introduction.

Whatever praises I had previously heard about him seemed to fall short to describe his mastery over critical acumen and creative vision that he embodied during our interaction, leaving me completely enthralled.

Dr. Prasad spoke to Samik Chakraborty, the Editor-in-Chief of Mosaic regarding his latest translation *A Red-necked Green Bird* (Simon & Schuster India, 2021). Dr. Prasad translated the short stories written by the renowned author Ambai originally in Tamil into English.

Excerpts from the interview:

With respect to the idea of onlooking and the looking at oneself as a gender other than our own, is love too experienced differently by people from different genders?

I would think love is experienced differently by different people, talked about differently by different people, groups, and communities. It is time specific (generational) even within these differences/variations. Do I know what you feel or what you mean by love? Perhaps not. Can I understand you when you describe it, can I empathise? Most probably, yes.

How do you view the viewing of oneself as someone from another gender, would you read it vis-a-vis the idea of the Lacanian mirror image or is it about the existential human condition as if we are going back to the formative stages of the development of gender and sexuality, would you look at it from that neutral space or is it differential and oppositional? Are the waters of the pond akin to the "waters" that break before a child is born?

I really have no idea. I think it comes with the territory - all writers put themselves in other people's shoes. They are the original method actors.

Honestly, I didn't think of the pond in that sense. I don't know if Lakshmi (Ambai) thought of it like that either. Interesting that you read it in this manner.

"The ones which never lost hope were the honeybirds. Screeching keech keech."-

Does translation play a role in highlighting the beauty of phonetic quality of languages, especially at a time when many languages are losing their speakers in India? Also could you tell us about the creative process of transmuting that quality of a language from one language to another through the usage of literary devices?

I don't know how translation can save languages. A translation can only hope and try to do justice to the quality of work created in a different language. To try and highlight certain aspects of that language and culture could be a possible motivation for a

translator. My aim as a translator is simply to make my English do a jugalbandi with Ambai's Thamizh. In any case I use my English to speak of a life led in many languages, Thamizh being one of them, even if a major one. This experience of writing my India in English is what I bring to translation as well.

What goes behind in deciding how much to retain the sentence structures of the source language during the act of translation? Also whether this also gives us a glimpse of the way of thinking in that particular source language?

To continue from where I left off in the previous answer, I put my Indian English to the service of translating another person's work, the added pressure on my language is to reflect the way the writer or narrator speaks, their thought process, their style.... While some of this may have to do with the grammar of the language, mostly it has to do with the style of the writer, the style adopted by the writer in the particular text.

Can it be said that the title "The Red-necked Green Bird" is also indicative of the way in which identifiers are used in the Indian subcontinent, simultaneously highlighting the vibrancy and prominence of the red and the green?

Of course, you can say so if that is what you think. Once a book is out, it is up to readers to make what they want of it. I speak as both a translator and a writer, and perhaps even as a teacher and critic, when I say that so long as you read the entire text, you can read it the way you want. Your reading will depend on your experiences including that of reading other works.

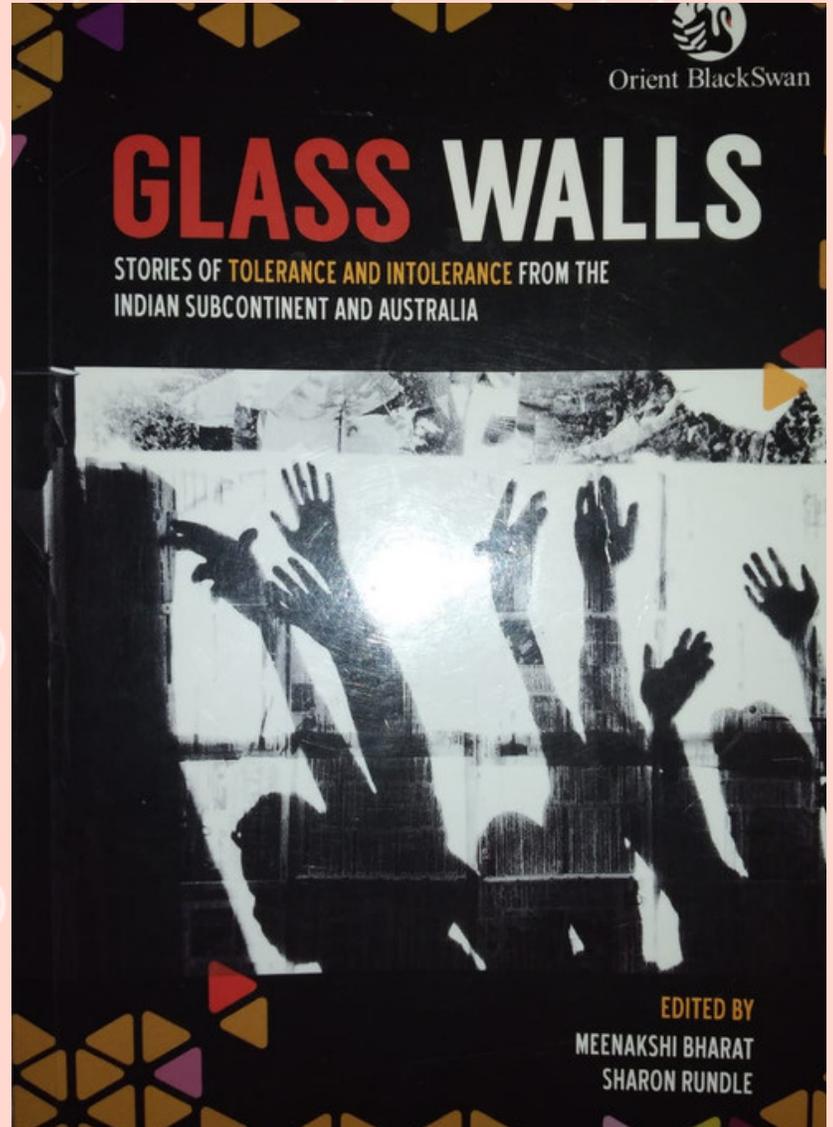
A space in my mind is fascinated with the peculiarities of sounds in different languages and how a sound is apt for a particular situation within a particular context. Also what fascinates me whenever I think about translation is its power to influence readers and readership. What has always fascinated me since childhood is the fact that people outside India try and learn Bangla or any other language to read and appreciate Tagore or someone like him, but before that they come across Tagore via a translation....

I can only add that sometimes what motivates a translator is to transmit the beauty of a language including its cadence, its sound system. Usually it happens that when you are listening to poetry in translation you would like the original to be read out aloud to get a sense of the rhythm of the original, to experience what it sounds like. The translator may or may not have attempted to carry that across.

However, whether you translate poetry or prose you take across what you hear and say - the cow will not go moo in your Indian ears!

So, the cow will go 'maa' in my English!

"EVEN IF
YOUR ARE
THE LAST
PERSON
STANDING,
'EKLA
CHOLO RE'.
THINK FOR
YOURSELF."
-AN
INTERVIEW
WITH
DR.
NANDINI C.
SEN



-Samik Chakraborty,
B.A.(H) English,
Semester VI
(Batch 2018-2021)

Braving technical glitches, the conversation that I had with Dr Nandini C. Sen was, in a nutshell- enthralling. From Tagore's philosophy to Jasraj's concert, from Mahasweta Debi's social work in rural Bengal to the sexual division of labour and misogyny in urban locales- the extent of the interview was delightful to say the least. With humorous anecdotes and fascinating insights vis-a-vis the process of the writing of her literary piece, she discusses her short story with the hope that it encompasses in order to instill the hope for a better future.

Dr. Nandini C. Sen is an Associate Professor at Bharati College, University of Delhi. In this conversation we talk about her short story "The Religion of Love" published in the anthology of short stories by Indian and Australian writers "Glass Walls: Stories of Tolerance and Intolerance from the Indian Subcontinent and Australia", edited by Dr. Meenakshi Bharat and Dr. Sharon Rundle(Orient BlackSwan, 2019).

Excerpts from the interview:

There is a vivid realism in your story not only vis-a-vis the name of the locales but also vis-a-vis the characters in the story and vis-a-vis the context in which the story is written. What was the thought behind choosing realism?

When you are writing something, it's the story which takes you, you don't sit down and craft it in your mind that this is how i will go about it, it's something that is around you, it's something that you are feeling, it's something that you wish to express and it comes out in a certain manner,

You are absolutely right about the fact that when you read it, you can contextualise it, you know what events I am talking about, you can almost see the visuals because they are constantly being displayed on the TV. I can see that happening and in that case I will say that the story is successful, not that I intended it to be that way, but it just happened that way.

It grew out of a lot of dissonance , it is something that I was feeling very strongly about and I continue to feel very strongly, that hurt, that anger, and probably being a creative artist.. It is the way the story chose for itself to happen.

And we are very glad that it did, striking a chord in our hearts. How do you view that rise of populism at a global level, the culture of growing entrance not only at the local level, but also we see how intolerance, populism and xenophobia is very strongly growing in the West as well, how do you view this occurrence?

I don't want to give you a very political answer because that already exists, to give a larger picture, things have a cyclical way of happening, so there was a time when the Left thought was prevalent, at a time a certain kind of liberalism that was there. So, I think we take turns so now we've reached that point where there is an understanding that if you are a leader, you need to be a leader with not only a mass appeal but also a certain kind of populism that you're talking about, and very often in order to become popular the kind of measures that are used aren't exactly ethical. There is shock and awe value that exists. The more you are able to shock people, the more they are in awe of you, the more pain you cause people, the more mayhem that you cause, the more supporters you get. The only way we can counter it is by doing just the opposite. Spread more love, make love not war. We need to hold on till it passes. And this needs to be countered and it is being countered.

In continuation with this idea of faith that is also present in the story, the story is also titled " the Religion of love", how all religions teach love and how the same love conquers everyone's heart...

Yea being a young person, when you love somebody, are you really going to sit down with their Janampatri before you fall in love? You fall in love because you fall in love..young or old, we all fall in love with the person and not see what religion, caste, class that person belongs to. It's something that your heart feels and the other heart responds. So I think as long as we can keep it simple, like this, that it is about humanitarian values, it is about love. And love really doesn't see religion when it asserts itself and that's something I truly believe in. I am glad that it resonated with you.

Yes Ma'am, and I love the idea of naming in the short story. The names Syed and Gayatri, both have religious connotations attached to them. Moreover, both discuss philosophy and literature, and also we have two stalwarts Syed Mujtaba Ali and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak in the literary world. So I wanted to know what was the inspiration behind choosing these two names?

No Samik, there I will have to disappoint you. Believe you me, I wasn't thinking of either of these two stalwarts when I was naming the characters. And again, the names were organic, they just came to me. They were nice names and they struck a chord. The only thing that I was mindful of was that the names had to be very specific to the religions, so the minute you hear Syed, you know who he is in terms of his religious identity, when you hear Gayatri you know who she is in terms of her religious identity because in the storyline, it is not only the religions that are different but also the class disparity which is just as strong. They come from very different localities. There are so many binaries. To bridge any of these binaries there is bound to be conflicts. These binaries I wanted to talk about and say that when you are in love the conflicts can be subsumed very easily.

Also, Gayatri is not exactly an academic although she is drawn into the academic world. I wanted to talk about people from different spheres of life.

I could only draw the realism in the story from the people I knew, the people I would meet. I would know a Gayatri. I would know the company she would be working for, I would know the kind of parents she would have.

With Syed, it took a little bit of imagination but as far as where he is located within the campus, I can see the house. I know it so well! As far as where he belongs to, well, that bit I allowed my imagination to go there. But overall, these are people that I have around me. I see, I encounter it all the time. So I was telling their stories my way.

Through the meeting at the Jasraj Concert, the motif of art and culture is used to bring both the protagonists together. Indian Classical Music is also a symbol which represents India and acts as a cultural ambassador of India in the international space. It is one of the symbols through which our cultural identity is expressed. I would really like to ask what was the inspiration behind the inclusion of the Jasraj Concert in the plot?

Samik, again I have to say that the incident came from me because I grew into loving Classical music when I was your age. When I was in college, we had Spic Macay and I am sure you know that Spic Macay brings artists to institutions. So, I have had the honour of listening to some of the greatest stalwarts.

It's a baithak-kind of a setting where we had lecture demonstrations. So, one has had the pleasure of listening to Pandit Jasraj on several occasions and this one particular occasion that I can never forget was that being a Spic Macay volunteer I was asked to fill milk in Pandit Jasraj's flask and serve it to him as he sang because he never drank water. He used to drink milk. Just the task of being able to do that- to sit on the stage and ensure that his flask is ready for him to sip from and of course his incredible music. And as luck would have it, I was in the Dover Lane Festival last January and I heard Panditji perform, sitting almost in the first row and Panditji passed away after that. So, I don't know what that connect was but I kind of recreated that.

Pandit Jasraj came from there.

Panditji used to perform quite a bit during my college days and we've had the opportunity of listening to him quite a few times but in this case, there is also the corporate bit added to it, so I kind of changed the setting a bit but I thought that could probably be a space where two people from two completely different worlds could come together and could talk. And if you are a lover of music, you realise that very often, when you are sitting like that, when there is such good music, you have been elevated to a different plane together. You can talk to another music lover like you've known him for the rest of your life, that happens very naturally.

There is an anecdotal story about that also, this was related to my Maasi (maternal aunt), she had gone to listen to one of these greats and my uncle was sitting next to her and she was so mesmerized by the music that she forgot which side of her he was sitting on, so she went and grasped the hand of another person who was to the other side and said "Isn't it remarkable!" and the person said "yes" and my uncle thought " what exactly is going on here?!!"

So the couple used to narrate this story much to our delight. I think when I was trying to get Gayatri and Syed to have a conversation all of this somewhere played a part. That's a space where you can start talking immediately because you are so full of the music- it transports you. So, like I said, vignettes from my life are reflected there.

And I must say that we too, as readers, through our imaginative eyes got transported into all those locales- the locale of the concert, and also the locale of Syed's house, his university-residence. Through your words we could see these pictures also because we live in this current space of the happenings that are taking place.

In the second paragraph of the story, you say "Gayatri was from a conservative ..family". I find it really interesting how behind the mask/garb of the "conservative" and conservatism, there is a lot of patriarchal controlling of women's bodies that takes place and this is left unchallenged as it passes off as "conservatism" and being a "cultural" practice. But the question evokes what if the practices are patriarchal and oppressive which I found very interesting. How do you look at this term?

What we say very often as the bhadralok culture, the upper class, caste people, what goes on within the households which passes for "Oh! This is what has been happening" is very often extremely conservative, patriarchal and detrimental to women but it gets passed off as cultural traditions. There will be numerous households where it is almost a given that men discuss politics and women discuss what to cook and recipes. I am not generalising it in a manner but it happens so often. Time and again my female students tell me that there is a different set of rules for their brothers and a different set of rules for them. It might be a very simple thing like the other being allowed to be out till 11 o'clock whereas the sister needs to be back by 7. I am not even getting into areas that are way more dark - where there is female infanticide or dowry deaths. I'm talking about the upper middle class, educated families but you see how much of this goes on. And this understanding of the parents that they know the best about their daughter and they are the ones who are going to decide. This is a strange space we sometimes find ourselves into. I am not talking about a poor hapless girl in some village getting tortured and traumatised, I am talking about a woman in the urban space- she earns well, she might be working with the UN, she might be working with multinationals but within the domestic space, it is the father deciding for her or the husband deciding for her and you do have these conflict situations.

We know that these conflicts exist within the society where we are constantly negotiating in order to find our own space to move forward, so like I said I know Gayatri. She would be someone I would recognise completely as a friend, as someone I can almost see picking her bag up and driving to her office, the exact house where she would be staying, the meals she would eat, I have seen it all. So, she came out of that space which I recognise very well. I have seen the struggles of exemplary women, extremely well-educated, people who earn well, they are women who are decision-makers in their work-spaces, but they are suddenly told that they are not good enough to make decisions in their home spaces because there are other decision-makers at home. That happens-sometimes brutally, sometimes softly, but it exists. So Gayatri comes from there.

Towards the end of the short story, there is a description of the protests in Delhi. In the concluding paragraph you say she finally breaks her shackles. So how does this personal breaking of shackles mixes with the political or the community space and then inter-community spaces and then challenges the larger political space? What are these shackles of Gayatri and how can we hope for better and break our shackles? How founded is this hope in materiality keeping in mind the fact that we see the rising intolerance in not only the local, but also at the global level? How can we actually break our shackles?

I do believe that "the personal is political". Everything you write is political. Everything you do is political. In this case, Gayatri is breaking out of her personal shackles. It would have also been a statement where just by answering her father back, Gayatri could have appropriated a certain political space for herself. It could have been anything- but in this space it gets dramatised a bit more. This is something that I truly believe in, that the personal is very definitely political and that you cannot have one without the other.

That space is very much there. But this story is also about her awakening. She is not "political" when she starts off. She is doing a job, she is earning good money. That's about it. Then, it is also a process where she grows into the person that she eventually becomes, and to me that growth pattern is very very important. I always believe that it is not always in doing some very dramatic and great things, but if you are able to counter whatever your fetters are, then you have arrived. You have taken the next step. The women that I recognise are taking one step at a time and that one step at a time is what I am talking about. And about the second part of your question, that's a tough one.

How can each one of us break our shackles- now, primarily by identifying what our shackles are. So, what my shackles are might not be what your shackles are. So primarily by identifying those and then working towards getting rid of those. And with the bigger picture, whatever that we might be doing will benefit the people. So keeping the larger community, the larger society in mind if we are able to essay our roads as good citizens.

And when I say good citizens I don't mean somebody who is pro a certain party or pro a certain government, but pro-humanity. Somebody who is pro-humanity, somebody who thinks deeply about the malaise that lies in our society and does something. While on one hand you are dismayed by the violence, the rapes, the terrible political

discourse that you currently are experiencing, people abusing each other in the choicest of terms. While you are disgusted by seeing all of that, you are also so heartened by seeing young people coming out, writing songs, artists coming out and expressing themselves. That's what makes the world go round. And to each her own way.

I was blessed to see Mahasweta Debi, to be able to interact with her. I had gone to her house, had interviewed her, and she sat in her dressing gown, making umpteen phone calls. At that point of time, the Nandigram agitation was on. She was trying to organise doctors for them, trying to do things, and this was an eighty-year-old woman! There are millions of things that we can do, it's just that choice that we need to make, the vision that we need to have and the courage to be able to do it. So if we can get it all together, then I think it is possible. I think all of us in our small ways, if we make that contribution, if we are socially and politically aware, if we are conscientious people, I think we can make a world of difference. And that's what we have to continually do, even if we are the last person standing. And both of us come from the land of Tagore. He says "ekla cholo re". So, even if you are the last person standing, "ekla cholo re". Think for yourself. And of course again Tagore- "Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high...". So we don't have to look too far. We have our philosophers; we have our poets. They are telling us- so that's what we need to be- a land which is not bound by fetters, "Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake." We have Tagore. He told us what to

And I think all of us, anyone who will read the interview will be inspired to be inspired. And I wish we can actually think for ourselves, fearlessly....

That is what is most important- we need to think fearlessly. Yes!

“ I HAD KNOWN-
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-AN INTERVIEW
WITH SUMANA
ROY



- **Samik Chakraborty,**
B.A.(H) English,
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I was in high school when my sister told me that Sumana Roy writes about Siliguri. Something leaped within me after realising that my hometown is being written about (in English). While growing up, I had read a lot about Calcutta-its lanes and by-lanes and how immortal characters have immortalised those prominent locales. Then, I did not have the privilege to have visited those locales and so I could only view them with my imaginative eyes which had led to a belief that those locales had a mysterious magic. But when my high-school-self realised that Siliguri could also be a topic of such musings and discourse, everything became more lively with the realisation that the creative capabilities of people emerging from places like Siliguri are at least equal and at par to those emerging from more centrally located, prominent and ever-celebrated locales.

And as Roy says in the interview, Siliguri becomes a metaphor for all such “places like Siliguri which exist outside the attention and imagination of people.”

Sumana Roy’s “How I became a Tree”, chronicles and meditates upon a living history of people who wanted to and who want to become trees. While doing this, she dismantles all hierarchies/ binaries/ compartments of greater/ lesser traditions, research materials, testimonies , disciplines and so on. In doing so, “How I became a Tree” becomes a text that opens up the mind to alternative ideas of time and being and shows us how beautiful it can be to re-look at what has been taken for granted, what is apparently mundane and still.

Roy shows us the art of experiencing a pulsating heart in the apparent stillness of plant-life, experiencing the profound rasa of the world in plant-time.

Sumana Roy is a renowned author and Associate Professor at Ashoka University, Sonipat. The interview took place on a monsoon evening at the backdrop of Siliguri rains, via an online platform due to the COVID-19 pandemic. “How I became a Tree” was first published in India in 2017 by Aleph Book Company. It is going to be published by Yale University Press in 2021, easing its access internationally.

Excerpts from the interview:

In the epilogue of “ How I became a Tree ”, you say “ Amar kawthati furolo/ notay gachti murolo”, which is also how Thakurmar Jhuli ends. You also refer to Thakurmar Jhuli in the second chapter of your book. Also, there are various folklores, local traditions, local histories that are not the History with the capital ‘H’ but these local histories find place in your book. What was your thought behind including these motifs in your book? Was it a conscious decision? What was the process about?

None of this was conscious at all and I am being completely honest. I did not set out to write a book. I used to teach in Jalpaiguri Government College at that point of time. I would often travel by our car, sometimes by the public bus. A lot of times, the roads were bad, the National Highways were destroyed because of various reasons- the indifference of the government, of the people responsible for looking after the highways, and also the monsoons which dent the roads and make it difficult for people to travel and navigate. So what would have been a journey of an hour and a half, would often take me two and a half hours to just reach Jalpaiguri from Siliguri. That would mean that I would get five hours to myself whether I was in a car, or if I was fortunate, I would be able to get a window seat on the bus. I was going through a time in my life when I felt very disenchanted by the social world, by the human-social. I wanted to think of relationships, if at all they were possible, outside the transactional character of an emotional economy that defines social relationships. And at that point of time, I began to ask myself because I had known- I didn't want to die, I did want to stay alive- I began to ask myself whether it was possible to live as any other being or creature, besides the human. I remember it was summer, and like right now, the ceiling fan was moving above my head and I thought to myself- how would it feel to live like a ceiling fan? And immediately I had to cross out that thought, because a ceiling fan is dependent on someone to switch it on or turn it off.

So I would have no agency. I would be dependent on someone. I would not be able to live outside the emotion economy. Then I thought-is it possible to live like a dog? And again, those of us who have interacted with a dog or have lived with a dog know that even that relationship is not outside the emotion economy. And a significant period of time passed and I remember that I was unwell, and I was lying in my bedroom. There's a Papaya plant right outside one of the bedroom windows. It was summer. It was a very sunny day, and the curtains of the windows were drawn apart. The shadow of the Papaya plant with its beautiful leaves was falling on our bedroom and suddenly it struck me. Something in me moved. Despite not being well, I cannot now remember what it was I was suffering from at that moment, but something in me moved and I thought- the beauty of those shadows- I had not asked for it. I had not asked for that kind of beauty, I had not asked for that kind of grace, and yet the Papaya plant, coming together with a host of factors like light, and its absence, and so on and of course the ceiling had managed to give that to me as a gift. And I thought how wonderful it would be if one could love like that, if one could live like that too. We have not only been conditioned in the transactional nature of relationships, but also it has almost become a second intuition. We give only to expect in return and so the reason behind the thinking that I want to live like a tree was not botanical at all. Many people have wondered about my affection for trees. So it comes from a very very private space in relation to emotions. And then many years passed. As I said , I began by talking about my journey to Jalpaiguri. The reason I mentioned that is, because you are in Siliguri, you know that there used to be lovely, aged trees, hundred year old trees, even the forest department because of their afforestation enterprise, had managed to plant lots of beautiful trees there. I would see two things happening- one was the beauty of these trees, the interplay of shadow and light and how the shadows of these trees fell on the road and I remember being struck by what now seems like an epiphanous thought but then it seemed very "natural" that even when the bus or the

wheels of my car moved on the road, the shadows of trees managed to remain unheard. I also saw how so much of the forested lands around me either was being given to real-estate agents or was being turned into agricultural lands. I began to note down many of these thoughts on a very old phone that I had where I was writing emails to myself. When I saw it was becoming difficult to do, I began carrying a notebook with myself. I also began waking up in the middle of the night, going to the bathroom or switching my phone on and writing thoughts about plant life until it reached a place when I thought- am i the only person who is as abnormal as to desire to become a tree? And so I began to look for people like myself. Is it possible that there have been others who wanted to live like a tree? So I turned to the people I have read- Rabindranath whom you mentioned, Thakurmar Jhuli, Jagadish Chandra Bose, Buddha's teachings, and so on. But I also began to look for people- not just turning to old writers or texts that I knew, but also looking for people, and discovering many- not just artists, filmmakers, scientists but ordinary people like myself. So it is from that space that it came. Your question, and I think it's a very important one- what I said is a preface to come to your question. So just as my thoughts were wayward, my "research" was wayward too. That's because it wasn't meant to be a book. It was meant to be a very private exploration of almost confirming to myself that- no, you are not "abnormal"- there have been people like you, there are people like you. So to discover an emotional and intellectual family of relatives who have exhibited the same desire. There is no hierarchy in my mind about research sources. So, whether it is Thakurmar Jhuli, whether it is folklore, or the research papers of Jagadish Chandra Bose that I read with great delight and interest, there are no differences of hierarchy regarding these sources in my head.

It is not because it is an extension of the person I am, by which i don't mean to praise myself but to say that that is my natural temperament, my inability to see compartments or hierarchies between anything- between people, between methodologies, between disciplines, between institutions and so on. So it was just the way the gradient of my mind flowed and I recorded them.

So, I was my mind, even now and i think will always be like a Brownian particle, banging against one wall-it could be Thakurmar Jhuli, encountering it, and then being forced to bang against another- it could be Acharya Jagadish Chandra Bose, and so on. So that is how the book evolved.

How do you see Tagore and how do you view Tagore's influence in your writings?

It almost seems blasphemous that I would talk about Tagore because I have read so little about Rabindranath. Just a while ago I was reading Gitabitan again. My parents like all Bengali parents forced me to learn how to sing from around the time I was in class five. After five years even they gave up because I had absolutely no talent for sure.but I have always loved listening to music.

Just a while ago I was thinking about the song - "*tumi kemon kore gaan koro hey guni/ami obaak hoye shuni kemon shuni*", a song familiar to most of us who grew up in a milieu similar to yours and mine. It is the same Rabindrasangeet that continues to be in circulation.

When I was in class one and my brother was in nursery school and my father who is a great moralist and loves performing the role of a moralist told us that we should never lie, that we should be honest.And I asked him- "*Baba, thakurerao mithye kotha bole na?*" -" Don't gods lie either?", and my father, with a very stern face said "No". And my brother, who was just four years old or so then and had just discovered the name of Rabindranath Thakur said "*Rabindranath Thakur o naa?*"(tr. Not even Rabindranath Tagore?) because as children and even now, we know so little about gods that just like Lokkhi thakur or Shoroshoti thakur, Rabindranath Thakur was also another thakur.

The sad thing is that perhaps abetted by the surname, we worship Rabindranath more than we read him. I have been reading the *Bhakti* poets for the last three days, and every time I have told myself and also my husband “I wish this was taught in schools “. It’s because if *Bhakti* poets were taught in schools, not only would it be an extremely important emotional education, but it would also educate about a kind of Hinduism which is accessible and which is intimate. A space where God can lay with a menstruating woman, we don’t have to be instagrammable versions of ourselves to meet God like we do in certain *tithis* and so on. I read very little of Rabindranath as a child. My father, because he was working in a nationalised bank, where the Rabindra Rachanabali was made accessible, so he would get instalments of Rabindra Rachanabali and Sharat Rachanabali as well.

On Sundays, he would read out the Sharat Rachanabali to us where we had the stories of Lalu. We read very little Bangla outside our syllabus because of the way in which Bangla is taught in ICSE schools. So he would read these stories to us on Sunday afternoons after a lunch of *mangsho-bhaat*, but very little of Rabindranath. When I went to school in Calcutta in Pratt Memorial, I had an extraordinarily good Bengali teacher who acquainted many like us who had suffered through ICSE Bangla with texts from the Bengali writers and Rabindranath was one of them.

She had studied in Rabindra Bharati University I think and that might have been one of the reasons. It was from that time, I think my interest in Tagore grew. But again, because of the nature of our educational system, because I happened to begin studying English Literature and that too in a place like Siliguri which had a very antiquated syllabus at that point of time, Tagore was not really on the syllabus.

I don't remember reading Tagore even at that time. Then I got married almost immediately after my masters, clearing the NET examination at that point of time. I got married to a family where they would gently mock me for not knowing enough Bangla. After a point of time it got to a place where I began to feel sad. Now I feel grateful for being mocked and even bullied at times for not reading enough Bangla literature but for the twenty years I have read more Bangla Literature than I have read in

English, and I feel very grateful for that. Tagore seemed like an uncle who was helping me see the world slightly differently. Now, at my age, when I return to him, I find someone who for some reasons to with the hierarchy of the word "critical " in an understanding of Critical Theory that comes to us from the West, from the apparatus of the Anglo-American Critical Theory has not been able to actually understand him. There is so much in him that I am discovering, that is helping me to look at the world in a way that I haven't been able to. There are things in him that I found very early in my life though. I remember I was in class six when my father bought a cassette where I heard "jagate anandajagge tomar nimantrana" - something in me changed even though I was just in class six at that point of time. The concept of *ananda*, now for instance I know I am interested in the philosophy of *ananda*, but there are other things that I am interested in. In the book, *How I became a Tree*, which you brought up, I haven't only been able to touch upon *Bolai* which is quite familiar to the readers in Bangla, I could only mention the nature study manual that he created for the students, or the primer he created for the students of Patha Bhavan in Shantiniketan, and it's an extraordinary primer because it teaches both the students and their instructors to look at nature not in this "scientific way",

not through nomenclature, but through observation of the seasons- how to trees change, how the fruits ripen, how the flowers bloom, so Basanta(tr. Spring) is not just a metaphor in Tagore but it can also be seen as a scientific category if we allow ourselves to. Also because I am working on a book on five plant-thinkers in Bengal and I see Tagore as a plant-thinker, I am reading many of the novellas, but also other texts I have read before, and discovering things in him that I wish the world discovered again or returned to again, things that might help us to see the world in a slightly more calming way that what we are at this moment.

In “ How I became a Tree”, you talk about the apparent stillness of trees in chapter two. A link is established between the *gaach* and the story especially vis-a-vis Thakurmar Jhuli and alongside the idea of a psychosomatic response to the tree, a motif I found throughout the book. Would you like to comment on the way in which trees respond to you and you respond back to the trees?

My book is an intellectual and emotional memoir of people who wanted to live like trees or who wanted to become trees. It is not about me but it is about people like myself. One of things this book helped me understand was something I had experienced as a child which is an intuitive belief in the living quality of almost everything around me. You would know that I photograph walls a lot, these are things I wasn't conscious of, I was doing them without any kind of consciousness that I just did what I wanted to do. I see this phone(holds her phone) as living in it's own way. Last Thursday we had the terrible storm in Siliguri, and we have an open air terrace, and there was a very tall Bankura-clay-horse there, about seven feet or so, by the time the storm ended it was completely broken. I couldn't get myself to go and "clean" the terrace because for me, this horse had been with us for about thirteen or fourteen years, ever since we moved back from Germany to Siliguri - so it had been there for so long. I felt like a family member had gone because of the storm, so to answer your question about stillness, I mentioned the horse because it too, because it was a sculpture of was also still.

The plants behind me (there are lots of plants in the room) are still. The reason why they were ascribed to be “non-living”, a very silly category if there was one, was because they were still.

I think Jagadish Chandra Bose wanted to challenge the idea of life. What he was actually doing through his experiments, through designing instruments and so on, was that he was actually trying to challenge the limited nature of the Western idea of what constitutes life or the idea of living. So it's not stillness. The mind, we know is supposed to be still somewhere and we know yet the mind moves more than our bodies do. So what is this whole idea of stillness!

On your second question, those of us who have a background in literature, we know that Deleuze and Guattari were challenging exactly that when they wanted to substitute the tree model with a rhizomatic model because the tree model is hierarchical. But Manuel Lima extends this and shows the whole idea of the family tree of the nation-state, of the federal-state, of how people sat at a dining table. Even our computers, mobile phones and even social media is structured like that- exactly the tree and branch-like model. If you know again from Deleuze and Guattari, or if you are a gardener, that if a certain part of the tree is chopped off, the tree will die, so it shows the hierarchy. There is a hierarchy that has told us to place the head above the toe.

The relationship between the gaach and the story is a very interesting question. You will notice that narrative works like that. Narrative works to the tree model. If we take Aristotle's proper beginning, proper middle and proper end- the root, the trunk and the branches- is similar to that. That is how the conventional idea of storytelling is.

The lyric poem has no proper beginning, middle and end. My interest has always been in the poetic. So in moss, in grass, what can we learn from these structures in terms of storytelling. You can take out a paragraph from the story and the story will not be affected. It's exactly like, for instance, if your grandmother or mine, if she was alive, would go to the courtyard, pluck out some dubbo , and come back to the thakur ghor and worship her Gods and Goddesses with that, but the grass would remain unaffected. She could not have broken off the head of a tree in that way and brought them to her Gods and Goddesses. So these models also supply different models of narrative and storytelling.

What also interests me is the idea of the landmark, in the earthquake episode you also talk about the trees and how visit that through memory, so how of a particular place, the tree becomes a signifier or a landmark. What I thought about it was also that in Siliguri Girls' High School, we have the Kaju Gaach which has become a landmark there. Tagore says "Nishi dishing dariye acho mathay loye jot, /chhoto cheleti mone ki pore ogo prachin bot", so how do you respond to this? I am also asking this also because you talk about Siliguri and the idea of putting Siliguri into the geographical space, so how do you see all of this?

Samik, you said your *mama bari* is in Jalpaiguri and *Jolpai* as you know is a tree. It is named such as Jalpaiguri and *guri* is the tree-trunk. So the region where you and I are from often has the suffix of either *bari* or *guri* in the names of towns, villages and places. A name such as Jalpaiguri helps us imagine a prehistory of how this settlement could have developed- a very large *Jolpai* tree, or a grove of *Jolpai* trees, and people settling around that place.

So we have Jalpaiguri, we have Maynaguri- again some form of association with the bird, and so on. Siliguri is slightly different, it's from *shila* or stones. It's a very stony place. So the river that passes by is Balashon, *bali* and *shon*. Such beautiful names!

Even the names of our neighbourhoods, because you are from Siliguri again, two well known neighbourhoods are Amtala and Pakurtala, but also Battala, the market closely is in Champasari. Sari as you know is the row. There are no Champa trees here anymore. But this also gives us a history of the environment in these names - that there must have been a row of *Champa* trees here. But now those trees are gone. Similarly with Amtala, there is an Amtala Club as well. But even in Amtala Club, there is no Am tree. So again a history over there. Pakurtala, fortunately the Pakur tree is still there. So this gives us a sense of a history lived there- a settlers' history of people in this region but also elsewhere, where such names survive. In the names that we have in this neighbourhood now, one is called the Orchid, there used to be lovely trees there and a sawmill, that has now given way to a five-storey apartment complex. There is no semblance of the Orchid anywhere of course, it's difficult to grow Orchids here and you need to be an extremely efficient gardener to be able to grow the Orchid in Siliguri but there is no sign of the Orchid here. Just opposite to that is a building called the West Wind. So you see, in these names there is no history. There is only a history of aspiration, use of the English language in a way that you want to show some kind of power, some kind of culture, some kind of education, but no real history.

What do the people of the West Wind feel? Do they feel things that the people of Jalpaiguri would have felt when they formed that hamlet? Not at all.

The people of Jalpaiguri would have formed their settlement in a way that made them related to each other because it was the *Jalpai* trees. That is not the case with the West Wind. The people who live in the West Wind would not perhaps know of Shelley. What is a name like that doing here?

There is a house over here (showing towards the right) that used to be called *Orun Aalo*. And it's east-facing, so naturally it would get the first rays of the Sun. And in that there was a history.

My husband, when he was teaching at Viswa Bharati, used to live in a house called *Diner Sheshe*. That was west-facing and so the sun would come there (at the end of the day). So there is a history over there that has been taken away from us. It's absolutely possible to like you without knowing your name.

I was born in a place called Balurghat. So the word itself gives you a history. My father was born in a place called Hilly. There are two Hillies- one in Bangladesh and one in India. He was born in India. But the fact of this name being available to two nations.

Gonj- Raiganj, Kaliaganj, Thakurganj- *gonjo*- it gives the sense of these histories of these places that we no longer have.

I think it is possible to go to these places and experience these histories.

I studied at North Bengal University. There is a place called Salbon. I heard this from my mother in law that when the university was established, during every congregation and even otherwise, people would congregate and have open-air concerts where they would sing Tagore, Atulprasad and Nazrul, and so on.

The whole idea of the *salbon* would indulge that kind of an atmosphere. But now the stream running by it is almost dry. The last time I went there, I saw that it was gone. But as a student, I remember, I would go to the library pick up a book and try to walk through the *salbon* instead of taking the route through the street that led to the campus. There is something about walking through the *salbon* that affects you. After Pujo, when the boys of our class had to stop playing cricket because the *kashphool* had grown in the cricket field. So all of that affects us. It affects me as it does you I'm sure.

Yes Di, absolutely!

You write about Siliguri and also the idea of putting Siliguri on the world's map can be seen in your work. You also talked about a Doordarshan episode as well- when you were young and you were very happy to hear Siliguri being mentioned on Doordarshan. In your writing, the cultural, the natural and the political all come together to form an exquisite garland of speech. So, how do you respond to the constant deforestation that is happening in North Bengal? For example, there has been massive deforestation in Baikunthapur forest in recent years.

In my head the natural, political and cultural do not exist as different compartments. They are one and the same. It is because, as you said, the loss of Baikunthapur forest is a natural loss, a political loss and a cultural loss as well. What about people who were forest dwellers, who were dependent on the forest, for instance. We saw the flyover being built between Siliguri and Shiv Mandir, where the university is. I remember my mother in law telling me that when she used to go to work in North Bengal University, the road used to be lined with what is called *bandorer lathi* (literally translated as 'monkey's stick') with yellow flowers.

She would say it was a sight! And my father in law and mother in law have noth told me that there have been times when they had been so mesmerized by these trees that they would walk all the way from Shiv Mandir to Pradhan Nagar which is not a short distance, as you know. There is something about the place where you go everyday and yet it succeeds in mesmerizing you. The availability of enchantment in our daily lives is something that we are constantly being deprived of. The idea of my mother in law walking that distance just so that she could be in the company of those trees- that had been taken away from us.

Just the other day, I went to Salugara. There used to be a tiny woods-like place where my friend Anamika used to live and I visited her once when I was in class ten. And now, when I went there, all those trees were gone. It was very very sandy and dusty. So much is being taken away from us.

I want to clarify that everything that you said is true. But it's not really about putting Siliguri on the map. I think I also use Siliguri as a metaphor by which I mean places like Siliguri which exist outside the attention and imagination of people.

Some say, 'Oh you're so lucky that you live in Siliguri! '

-No we made a choice to live in Siliguri. And we are as lucky or as unfortunate as you are. Just because we live in the foothills of the Himalayas does not mean we have access to a kind of beauty that you only imagine in brochures. It's not true. It's like imagining that all of Calcutta is the Victoria Memorial or the Howrah Bridge, and so on. That kind of a blurb-like understanding of places.

Yes, you are absolutely right to remember that moment when I said about Gitanjali Iyer on Doordarshan mentioning Siliguri. That was a big moment for my brother and myself because we never heard the word 'Siliguri' being mentioned on national television. And now during the time of the bad news economy, when only bad news gets attention, I hope that there is no bad news about Siliguri. Now I am scared for Siliguri to get attention honestly!

I think this comes not from a desire to get power at all. I can say this now, after my nephew was born. You love without awareness. When I am aware and conscious about my love for him, I sometimes look at him and feel- 'I wish the world loves him and cares for him as much as I do'. So I think my love for Siliguri is like that. I wish the world cares for it and gives as much care and attention as I do. So it comes not from an ambition for power. Just to be given some form of attention and affection which I think I want not only for Siliguri but of all places and all spaces, of all disciplines and all ways of thought that are ignored by the mainstream imagination.

You have also collaborated with German artists for a recent project of yours. How do you view interdisciplinarity in general and also vis-a-vis Art and Literature?

I think we are naturally interdisciplinary. You don't get up in the morning thinking- I am a Bengali, I am an Indian, I am a boy, and so on. So similarly the mind does not have these compartments- I am going to think about Literature now, I am going to think about Science now, and so on. I think we are always interdisciplinary. What was Aristotle- he was writing about botany, tragedy, ethics, philosophy, physics, so many things. A figure like Jagadish Chandra Bose, who wrote what is arguably the first science-fiction story and was not just a scientist. So it is not only writers who are interdisciplinary.

Jagadish Chandra Bose who was trained as a physicist would not be taken seriously by scientists in England who would say- But you are a physicist! Why are you performing experiments in botany? So you see there is a caste system happening there too. What has happened is basically a professionalisation of these spaces that helps us to get jobs. So you will only be able to do this much, and not that. I don't believe in the separation of disciplines at all.

I would say the more we are able to access parts of ourselves which might not be completely efficient. By this I mean that I might not be able to draw very well. But that should not prevent me from trying to draw something that might help me think. It is possible that I might not always be able to think in words. It is possible that I might be able to think by drawing something. So I should be allowed to do that without career-professionals in any field telling me- No, you are not right!

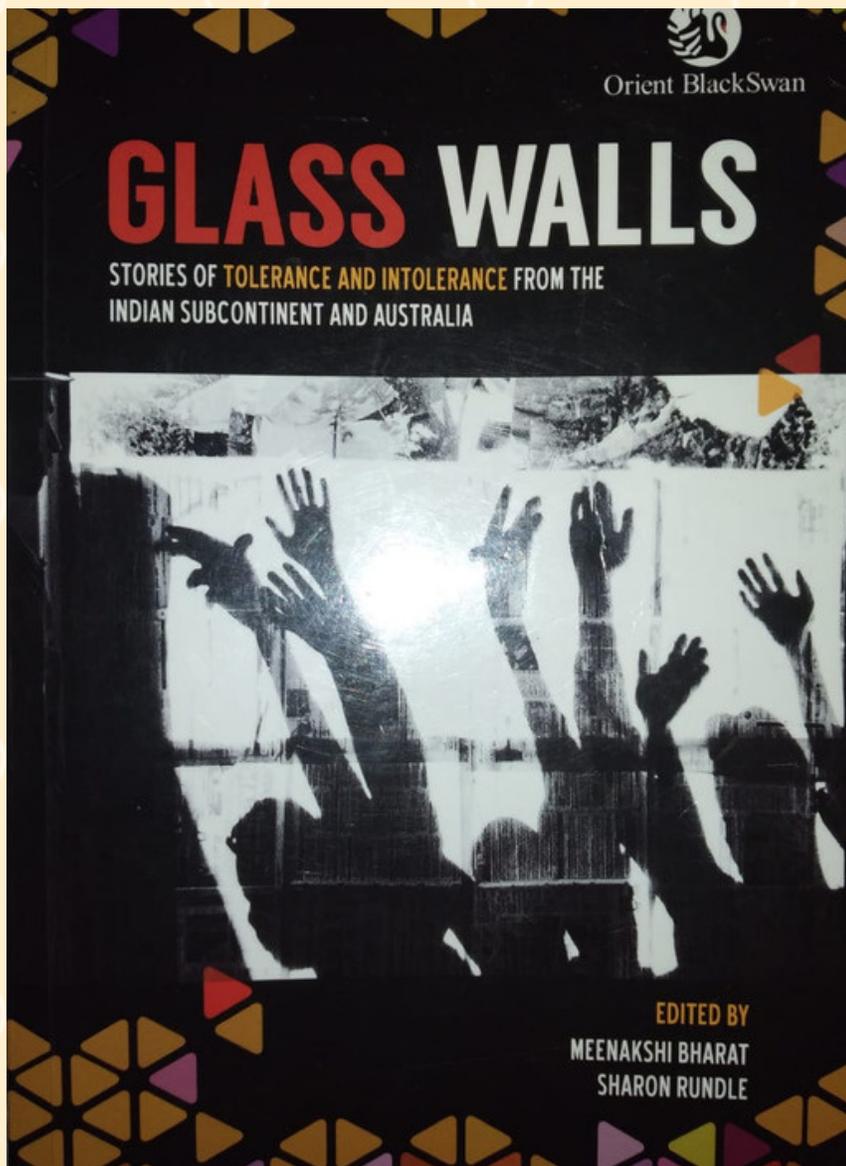
So, disciplines have become so divided into these tiny divisions just like agricultural lands in a joint family. You just have one *katha* of land in what used to be one acre. So a sense of territoriality and a sense of proprietary nature that attends disciplines. I don't believe in those disciplinary divisions at all.

Also, now we have trans-disciplinary which is going beyond disciplines, to do away with the compartmentalisation between disciplines so that there is greater fluidity between these things. I think most of us want to live in many of these rooms, so why just give us this tiny room, basically a hotel room that we are renting- give us a home where we can move freely.

That is my understanding of disciplines.

BOOK REVIEW:

Glass Walls: Stories of Tolerance and Intolerance from the Indian Subcontinent and Australia



Glass Walls: Stories of Tolerance and Intolerance from the Indian Subcontinent and Australia, Edited by Meenakshi Bharat and Sharon Rundle, Orient Blackswan(2019)

**- Samik Chakraborty,
B.A.(H) English, Semester VI,
(Batch 2018-2021)**

Glass Walls is a book that is very pertinent with regards to the times that we are living in. With the rise of populism across the world, the alarming rate of documented hate crimes on the rise, with an open disregard to liberal and tolerant values as a backdrop, *Glass Walls* seeks to navigate the meaning of the common thread of humanity. The anthology of short stories has been edited by Dr. Meenakshi Bharat and Dr. Sharon Rundle and published by Orient Blackswan in 2019.

What is consistent in all the stories is the truth that we are all human beings in the end on the face of this earth. Through the stories of tolerance and intolerance from the Indian Subcontinent and Australia, the book tells us that we might have different identities with regards to race, religion, sexuality, gender and sexual identity, et al, but one common identity makes us one and that is the common human identity. In the forward, Amit Dasgupta quotes Wilde, "Most people are other people" – this book seeks to look at this other and bring out that alternative voice of seeking tolerance through and after having an understanding of different types and forms of intolerance. This is especially important with the growing intolerance that seeks to overshadow and diminish the space of mutual coexistence and acceptance through employing sheer brute force. This anthology resists that enterprise by documenting the varied voices and the varied stories that they tell, which are the lesser known stories of you and me.

Some of the stories document microaggressions, some document macro-aggressions, and some do both simultaneously. Through looking at the stories 'Closer', 'The Wedding Gift' and 'Henry' I will attempt to review the anthology.

The short story 'Closer' by David Malouf imagines the possibilities of queer desire and explores the conditions of queer existence while it being loaded with Biblical references. An important leitmotif in the short story is the idea of the queer individual having the potential to corrupt morality and people and thereby pollute the lives of the normative.

The idea of acting against one's heart because of societal dictates and punishing the homosexual through isolation, seclusion into a space of non-belonging can be seen here. However, this is reversed by the end of the story when the dream of the child exposes how seamlessly Uncle Charles fitted their family.

Grandpa Morpeth is the patriarch in the family who at heart misses his son terribly but his disposition as a patriarch of a heteropatriarchal household will not allow him to welcome his son. The negation of the son's existence by his parents as if he was never there is contrasted with the unmissable beauty that he embodies. The story reaches its climactic ending with the articulation of the little boy's desire of having Uncle Charles come closer to him, thereby unfolding multiple possibilities of homo-erotic and homosocial undercurrents in this desire being present in him or the possibility of a future germination of the same in the least.

Meenakshi Bharat in her short story 'The Wedding Gift' highlights the issues vis-a-vis the politics of hate and the cultural symbols that are used as tools to justify hate. The Swastika symbol is a symbol that has been found in parts of Europe and Mediterranean by archaeologists and is also a much celebrated symbol in the Hindu theological space in the Indian subcontinent. The motive behind gifting the silver swastika was never to terrorise the Jewish grandmother who suffered persecution in the hands of the Nazis.

The usage and symbolism of the symbol varies greatly in these two locales in two different ends of the world.

Bharat portrays the trauma that has occupied deep roots in the grandmother's heart and shows how potent the trauma-accompanied negative associations can be .

The two grandmothers in the story(Nona and Dadi) have experienced their lives in different countries in two different parts of the world but the fact that violence had caused their trauma connects them. It reflects the common human predicament and that violence and terror have no particular race or culture, that they can erupt anywhere and from any populace. Dadi saw her family being decapitated in the midst of partition violence in the hands of the other group, "the Musalmans" and Nonna saw her family being massacred in the hands of the Nazis.

Asma is not a Muslim who wants to kill 'Nani's family' and the Swastika that Rishi had gifted Luigi is different being straight from the Nazi symbol that is titled at a forty-five-degree angle. But still, both the grandmothers are reminded of their painful memories when they encounter something that reminds them of their perpetrators. This testifies the fact that memory never leaves one, that memory comes back to us, that we live and re-live memory again and again.

Bharat also delves into the question of time healing the pain of atrocities. We see that even though the grandmothers have come to nearing senility, what happened to them when they were infants have not only never left them, but also have had a deep and entrenched role in the decisions made by them in their lives.

The story therefore, implicitly calls for world peace and the shunning of violence altogether which can probably be a means to lessen such hounding traumatic experiences that accompany individuals till the dusk of their lives.

In the short story 'Henry', Libby Sommer brings out vignettes of complexities of desire. The short story has a distinct form with a confessional voice narrating the conversation she has with her friend, Maxine. This conversational format comes out more vividly throughout the short story when abrupt comments from Maxine are interspersed in the midst of a flowing narrative, giving the story a

realist effect. It uncovers the intolerance in the minds of people who view transgressive gender-expressions as a disease that is transmittable from one person to another and therefore, exposing the prejudiced mindset of thinking that the only way to avoid this false 'pollution' / 'corruption' / 'transmission' is to abandon the one who has such non-normative tendencies of expressing gender. The trope of a candid conversational format between two close friends equips the author to reveal and unveil these inner prejudices and concerns that the normative individual might harbour towards the non-normative queer.

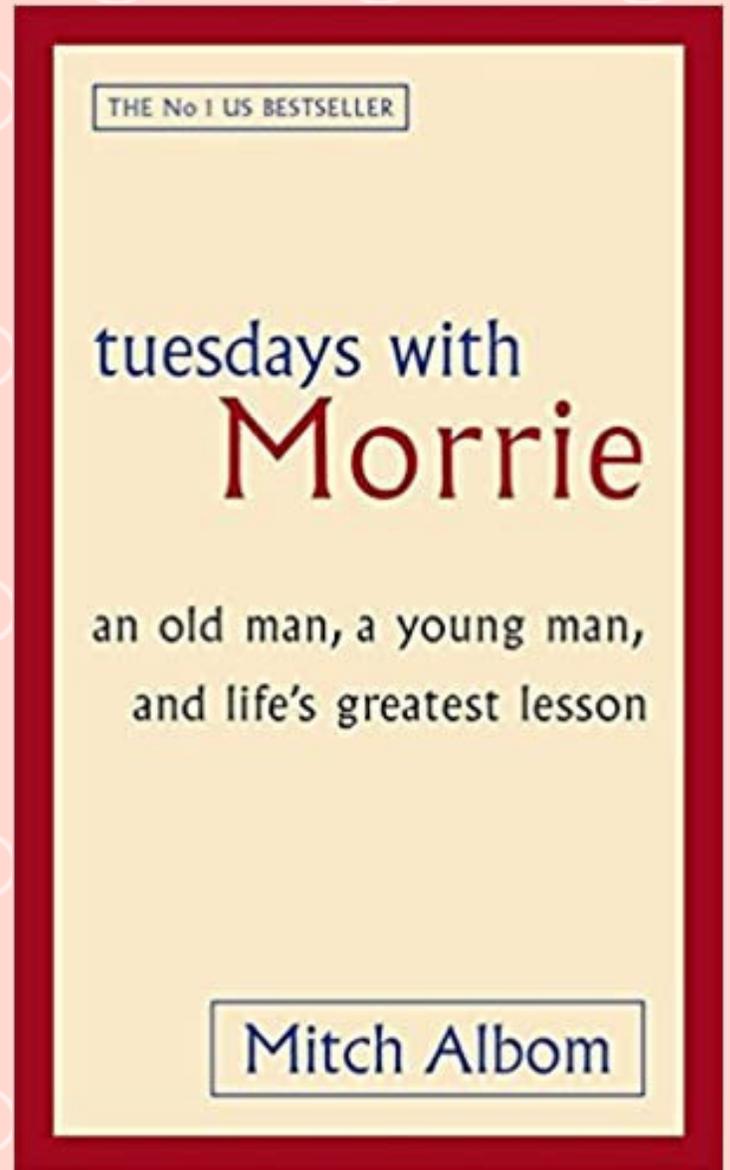
The stories are vivid and varied in their form and politics. Glass Walls is therefore, a much needed attempt to break the glass walls, thereby creating a possibility of the splintering of oppressive structures, and ultimately trying to imagine a better society.

Glass Walls attempts to respond to the need of the hour, asking us all to meditate and contemplate, and be thinking, conscientious human beings.

BOOK

REVIEW:

**Tuesdays with
Morrie, Mitch
Albom,
Doubleday
(1997)**



-Viveka Goswami, B.A.(H) English,
Semester IV, (Batch-2019-22)

A New York Times bestseller penned down by Mitch Albom, Tuesdays with Morrie is a series of interviews conducted by an ambitious young man who during the course of this correspondence is taught to stop and savor life by his dying professor. Morrie Schwartz is a Sociology professor with an undying passion for dance and a zeal to learn and to teach everything life has to offer. His former student Mitch on the other hand, has been lost in the human rat race of money and fame since his graduation. The two worlds, thought juxtaposed in the beginning of the narrative, seem to collide when Morrie contracts ALS and Mitch learns about the same.

Over the course of the book we constantly see how being faced by death puts things into perspective for Morrie, who is keen on sharing his learnings with Mitch and through him, the world. The non-fiction piece touches on love, marriage, career and children and how humans often get caught up in the web of their worldly follies.

Tuesdays with Morrie doesn't shy away from highlighting and discussing the importance of human touch and how we all, as beings of the flesh, crave it. Every chapter in the story reinforces the theme of brotherhood and unity and offers ways of practicing co-operation with those surrounding us. Love begets love and thinking of oneself as an isolated island is both impractical and egotistical. The professor is gradually seen to concede to his lack of self-sufficiency due to physical impediments, thereby gracefully accepting his want and need for physical and emotional support without inhibitions. A teacher in heart and spirit, Morrie's legacy incessantly urges the reader to think about what truly matters. It answers the questions we didn't know we had and gives us more to find answers to ourselves. With nothing to gain or lose, his diseased body slowly melting away, his ideology of 'carpe diem' or 'seize the day' proves to be powerful enough to leave one overwhelmed with a sense of gratitude for life, the greatest teacher among all. The professor and his insightful maxims laced with wit are sure to keep reminding one of the phrase, 'If we treated everyone as if they were dying, the world would be a much better place.'

Poetry



INCOMPLETENESS

The Sun and the Moon don't complete each other
by imprisoning them into lightness dungeons-
Eclipses serve that purpose;
by choking them till the writhe helplessly-
Black clouds serve that purpose
When desolate, solitary in the firmament,
bullies though not conventional complete their existence.
And they say- "instigations of Satan"

Samik Chakraborty,
B.A.(H) English,
Semester VI, (Batch 2018-2021)

CONQUERED

Wars no more happen on battlefields or massacre grounds,
but await like a predator on narrow creases of country borders.

When lines blur,
the lands of 'slumber' turn to 'slaughter',
temporary homes turn to resting grounds,
barren lands are fought over like precious cargo;
a father, a son, a spouse,
die for nothing
while toasts are made in the honour of winning

we don't have 'lines of control'
but 'lines of latent wars',
waiting to be blurred
in the name of another barren land,
another father lost,
another wrong done
being corrected by more valiant wrongs

Two wrongs can't make a right,
souls lost won't reincarnate
on slaying their twice,

CONQUERED

wars wooed can't be shooed
when demise arrives,
so think again before coveting hate
for it brings nothing
but a mounting debt of lives!!

Parinita Malhotra,
B.A.(H) English,
Semester II, (Batch- 2020-23)

A S A P L I N G I N R E D .

This poem was written in the painful memory of the victims of the terror attacks around the world.

Here, the sapling refers to a young life plucked away and killed before it is even given a chance to bloom.

An unusual deluge it was
When a sapling was borne
Not with green tendrils
But roots of red
It occupied the garden
With a dire, doomed presence
Half bent from struggling hands and colored with the
Roots of demented growth
Soiled by a dozen bullets
Encased in the bloodied nursery

It had no two eyes to witness it's plunder
No visage to be etched upon
Mute targets of horror and Terror it was,
Its birth metaphor impaired.
All that remained was a crippled conscience
The sentience of a sapling in red

A S A P L I N G I N R E D .

It's umbilical cord separated
Even before it could feel the world, all leafless yet.

What carnage ensued in this garden
And what doom could be forseen by its gardener
His beloved sapling now nothing more
But a spitting image of human trembles and sighs
Struggling hands touched those tendrils, so benign
What fate had his sapling borne?
Stroked by its ultimate punisher
A shadowless sinner
As he uprooted its final cord

Now a stillborn symbol
The sapling renouncing it's incarnation
Buried in its muddy womb
Mourned by its Gardener
Embodied by the bloody nursery
Now dry and defunct

Anagha Nair
, B.A.(H) Political Science,
Semester II, (Batch:2020-2023)

PLAYING AMONGST PEBBLES

If you look at my hands
You'll see criss crossed lines
Mapping out my destiny
In the dust I live,
In the dust I die.
No pen or no sword
I've got twenty balloons,
Red roses and jasmine
Scented dreams which I
Must sell before the sunlight
Fades away to oblivion.
I eye the darkened horizon
It's a sky out of my reach
Where clouds do float but
Dreams lay suspended and then die.
I play with broken strings that tug
The sorrow of my mother's heart.
I eat the remnants of a broken life
And save some for the near future.
Playing amongst pebbles and dust
I dream of a life, a life, a life.

Pragnya Paramita,
B.A.(H) English,
Semester VI, (Batch 2018-2020)

A C O L D W O M A N

When hell does freeze over,
will it bring paradise to a cold woman like you?
Will your frosty lips still kiss death into my ribcage
and turn my breath to scorching ice,
freezing my warm blood with your frostbitten fingertips?

A cold woman like you must surely be an angel
risen from the most glacial depths of heavenly hell
Born from all things floral, feral and frigid
making me wonder if magnolias bloom in snow

You try to appear tepid but your cold gaze gives you away
Those silvery eyes are nothing short of calculative
as you patiently bide your time
Waiting for an infernal paradise

If fire is catastrophe, surely ice must be genesis
With all my heart, for my own sake I must hope so
For when I fell for a cold woman like you, I fell from heaven
And now
hell will freeze over.

Priyasha Bhattacharya,
B.A. (H) English,
Semester IV, (Batch 2019-22)

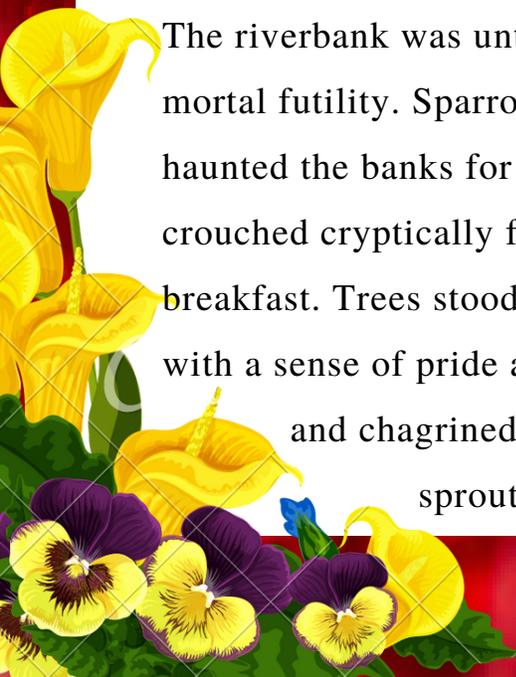
PURGATORY

On the eighth day, the world ended. It had rained fire, it had rained ice and Mother Nature had blown off steam aplenty. Mountains had melted and vales had swallowed them whole, leaving nothing behind but a miserable mound of morose mortals. The days of doom and gloom had loomed for years, simmering ceaselessly against the blissful ignorance at hand. The winds had whispered at dawn and wailed at dusk, whimpering all along to deaf ears in the dying twilight. Wars were waged and blood was shed to a degree that the waters of the Holy River had turned crimson.

The riverbank was untouched by the mortal futility. Sparrows and Shrikes haunted the banks for grains as gators crouched cryptically for a light breakfast. Trees stood erect, radiating with a sense of pride and jubilation and chagrined mushrooms sprouted in dingy

corners as always. Flowers smelled of oblivious optimism and the soil that bore them could only sulk in response, and reasonably so, for it had endured the wrath of the fickle firmament for far too long. It was heaven and it was hell. The earth had been cleansed but not all mortals had perished. Three of them had lived to tell the tale- a tale that had eluded their kin.

A Soldier, a Droid and a Chimp were the last surviving primates on the planet. An honourable distinction it may have seemed, but none of them was too darn crazy about it. Especially not the chimp. The trio sulked in unison, not speaking a word for hours at a stretch, but their reclusiveness wasn't a consequence of the war. It had been the cause. The soldier stirred his feet in the cold, reddish water of the river. Dipping his toes in the repository of sin wouldn't have furnished atonement but it satiated the



PURGATORY

inflammation like a divine ointment.

Relieved, it dawned upon him that he might have been the smartest of the three beings in proximity and it was his moral responsibility to break the ice.

“So this is it, huh?” drawled the soldier. “Is this how everything ends?”

He eyed the droid and the chimp tenaciously, seeking an answer. The droid was a fine robotic specimen and reeked of an overbearing suavity. He had a face that was kissed by god himself, and despite the horrors of the war, it bore not a single scratch. He was tall, muscular although a good chunk of his physique had been roughed up by the looks of it. His body armour was in tatters and devious green eyes flickered incoherently, as if out of order.

The chimp was a chimp.

“Which side did you fight on?” the droid asked. His voice carried a cold metallic sting the didn’t sit well with the ape.

“Does it matter?” the soldier replied. The droid scanned him from top to bottom and noted the Western Emblem. Disgust flashed across his face, much to the soldier’s amusement.

“Oo-hoo aah-aah aaah,” the chimp shrieked at the droid. He was a clutching a rotten banana to his chest and seemed to be mighty possessive about it.

“What’s this fella doing here?” The droid asked, intrigued by his antics. He mimicked the chimp’s sounds but it only further aggravated the chimp’s disdain for him.

“I don’t think he likes you,” the soldier observed.

PURGATORY

“I don’t think he has a choice.”

The droid toyed with the chimp a little more and imitated his peculiar movements and ginormous gesticulations. The soldier couldn’t be bothered.

“Eastern front,” the droid said. “That’s where I come from. I lead the frontline, you know?”

“And?” the soldier inquired.

“And what?” the droid chuckled and marveled at the soldier’s naïveté. “Tore into all of them. Six thousand confirmed kills, and I’m not even counting the Androids because ‘oh well, poor humans’.”

“Impressive,” the soldier said. “Did that win you the war?”

“Well, we annihilated

everyone on your side.”

“So did we.”

“But at least one of us has survived,” the droid thumped his chest proudly. “I have survived.”

“And so have I,” the soldier replied.

“So... is it a tie, a stalemate? One-all each side?”

The droid fumed. His ego had been bruised and like all droids, he wasn’t a good sport about it.

“Just so you know, the very outcome of this war is at my discretion. I can knock your head off right now and singlehandedly win the war for my side.”

The soldier looked the droid in the eye for a brief moment and burst out laughing. The chimp joined him

PURGATORY

enthusiastically and flung his arms and legs in the air.

“Well, son, good luck waking up all the dead people on your side to give them the sweet news of victory. I’m sure they’ll all be proud of you for, uh, ‘winning the war’.”

The droid frowned. “Is this sarcasm or are you telling me there is a genuine possibility that I can bring them ba-”

“Sarcasm,” the soldier stated. “Unless you are the second coming of Christ.”

“Who’s Christ?” the droid demanded.

“Does it matter?” the soldier said. “So much for religion, gods and all that horse-shit. Look what it has yielded. Look around you, look at this bloody river.”

“Hmm,” the droid mused. He

studied the soldier’s bony face and inspected his micro-expressions. A plethora of parallel lines ran across his rumpled forehead and the droid couldn’t decide if they were phenotypic traits or if the soldier was undergoing a great deal of stress. The chimp, too bore a multitude of lines on his forehead. But he didn’t look a bit stressed. He waved his rotten banana in the air without a care in the world and stuck out his slimy tongue, tasting the air.

“Are you two related?”

The soldier looked around his shoulder. “You talking to me?”

“Are you and this creature related?” the droid asked again.

“We sure as hell had a common ancestor,” the soldier said, “so yeah, you can put it that way.”

P U R G A T O R Y

The droid couldn't stomach the idea. His steely gaze danced back and forth between the chimp and the soldier in an attempt to narrow down the common characteristics. But there weren't too many that struck him right away, except for the wrinkled temples. He couldn't fathom the idea of them having shared a lineage at some point.

"Who created you?" he asked, overcome by bewilderment. The soldier was annoyed by the deeply philosophical bomb dropped on him.

"Who do you think I am, Plato?" he scoffed.

"So you don't have a maker?"

The soldier shrugged. "I'm going to take a leak. Maybe this fella could help you with your spiritual reawakening, meat-bag."

The soldier relieved himself in the river. His weary, rose-tinted reflection stared back, sparkling ominously under the sordid sun. He tried to smile for once but his riverine visage did not share the same sentiment. He broke into a fit of sardonic laughter and crossed back to where he had been. He saw what he had expected but it wasn't as comical in his head. The droid was grilling the chimp for answers like a battle-hardened drill sergeant.

"Who is your creator? Who designed you? Tell me, tell me everything!" he quizzed the chimp.

"Ooh-oo aah-aah."

"What even is that supposed to mean?"

The chimp scratched his angular chin and farted profusely. The droid was taken aback and assumed a battle-ready stance- his default defense

PURGATORY

mechanism to explosive noises.

“Are you trying to assert dominance?”

The chimp grunted and grabbed a handful of the loamy sand. He circled the bamboozled

droid on all-fours and hurled it right into his face. The droid was agitated and let out an angry howl. The chimp enjoyed every bit of it and winded him up even more. The droid was ready to have a go at him before the soldier intervened.

“He’s going to tear out the silicon off your face, you imbecile!” the soldier warned. “He’s an animal. A primal beast. You don’t mess with them.”

“And I’m an Android!” bellowed the droid. “The pinnacle of evolution, the successor of homo-sapiens, the harbinger of peace and

tranquility...”

“You killed six thousand people, mate,” the soldier pointed out. “How’s that for ‘peace and tranquility’?”

“Oh yeah? I did it so that others could survive. I walked so the others could run.”

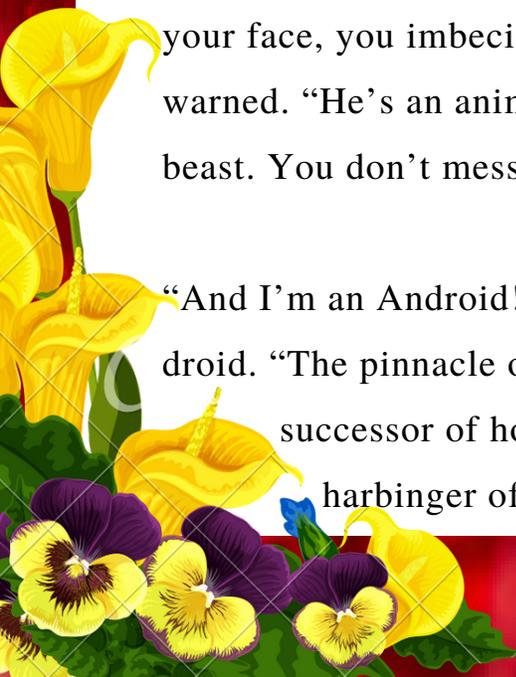
“That worked like a charm, right?”

The droid detected the sarcasm successfully this time. The chimp was ready for another round of mudslinging and was clearly in the zone. The droid shot him an angry glance and retreated three steps.

“What about, how many did you kill?” he asked the soldier.

“None, I was a medic.”

“So you saved lives?”



PURGATORY

“Yes.”

“That worked like a charm, right?” the droid sneered.

“Of course, I gotta live with two apes now.” The soldier sighed and landed on his haunches. He held his head in his hands and cursed his fate. It was the stuff of nightmares.

“So you won’t accept it, huh?” the droid went on, “you won’t accept the fact that we are the superior species and not you measly humans?”

“I don’t have time for this,” the soldier said with his eyes closed.

“We have all the time in the world, soldier. Why don’t we settle the score for once and for all? Let eternity be the witness to the bravado of the droids.

Let my future generations
relish the glory of their

great grandfather.”

“Future generations?” the soldier laughed. “You cannot even reproduce, man. Who are you gonna mate with? This chimp over here?”

“I don’t need to reproduce,” the droid answered, “because unlike you, I am immortal. I’ll never perish.”

The soldier rose, determined to put the droid in his place. “You talk a lot for someone whose entire machinery is dictated by a bunch of zeroes and ones. Bring it on, whatever punches you’re hiding.”

The droid didn’t need any further invitation. He charged at the soldier with feverish intensity and unleashed a powerful right hook. The soldier ducked swiftly and recovered in time to retaliate with a low kick to the droid’s knee. The droid stumbled but

PURGATORY

maintained his balance.

The soldier went for a chokehold but the droid overpowered him and slammed him onto the ground. The soldier sprung back to his feet and braced for an incoming attack. The droid moved quickly and attempted to grab him. The soldier struggled to keep his balance but he used it to his advantage and tripped the droid, who leapt again and launched a flurry of punches. The soldier dodged most of them but the final punch connected, leaving him dizzy. The droid grabbed him by his neck and strangled him without an iota of mercy. The soldier was off his feet and was suspended in the air at the mercy of the droid, life oozing out with every passing moment.

“That’s it, huh?” the droid said. “Is this how everything ends?”

He tightened his grip and the soldier gasped for air.

The droid enjoyed his ordeal and lifted him higher in the air. His fiery resolve to unite the soldier with his maker could have put even the most sinister executioners to shame. He roared with laughter as the soldier approached the end of his life, his feet trembling in the air, presumably performing the dance of death.

And then the droid froze. His hand went limp and the soldier dropped on the ground like a bag of sand. He’d been knocked out unconscious. When his eyes opened, the droid was standing on top of him, lifeless like a mannequin. But a filament of life flickered in his eyes and begged his arch-nemesis to spare him. The soldier inspected the droid’s body and figured that an exposed port had been damaged by the acidic sand, rendering him immobile. The soldier couldn’t believe his luck. He glanced at the chimp who seemed to have enjoyed the

P U R G A T O R Y

the inter-special face-off.

But the soldier was not done. He knocked the droid off his feet and like a man possessed, he gave him the battering of his life. He ripped off the arms, smashed his skull and pulled out all the wiring. It was carnage and the soldier went on mutilating every bit of the fallen droid. When he was done, nothing remained but coils of damaged circuitry and shattered silicon. As a decent man, the soldier buried everything under the sand. His race had triumphed and he had singlehandedly won the war for his side. The man lay down next to the makeshift droid grave and pondered the nature of his actions. Was it a murder, or was it the course of evolution?

It weighed down upon him. He went back to the river and splashed the water on his dirty hands,

It cleansed him of the sand but now they were bloodied. Mortified, the soldier rubbed his hands vigorously and the shades of crimson grew darker. It was the blood of billions he did not kill and yet, he was the doomed to have that blood on his hands for eternity. He cried for help but even the echo of his voice had deserted him.

The sun lingered on the horizon and the river glowed like an inviting lava pit. The soldier was hypnotized by what he saw and he walked on remorselessly for repentance had eluded him. He waded through the murky waters and gave into the cold, bitter embrace. A second later, the water tickled his nostrils.

The sun had set.

Back on the bank, the chimp basked in his newfound glory and hopped from one tree to the other in search of a

P U R G A T O R Y

suitable residence and ultimately
settled for the tallest one. Satisfied, he
peeled the banana he'd been saving and
wolfed it down in one go.

- Yashvardhan Shukla

B.Sc (H) Physics ,Semester VI,
Batch(2018-21)



A L I F E F O R A L I F E



Steps after steps paced along the corridor, an unknown urgency floating in the air. Maybe in this isolated moment these people knew exactly where to go and chose to seize this momentary control. I, a misfit, felt quite the opposite. The lights in the long hospital corridor were white, blinding, almost beaming with the sole objective of sucking any life that might be left lurking in the corners by accident. I had reached a quarter of an hour earlier than my scheduled appointment and now had no choice but to wait. The rows of metallic chairs sticking firmly in place were as if sprouting from the marble floor, birthed in that cold discomfort next to the main reception.

Restlessly I traversed the empty space to reach their rigid, skeletal frames and tried to sink into one of them but respite remained elusive in the faded silver gloom the chairs emitted. Old men with daughters, pregnant women with husbands- no one willing to test

their courage to navigate these tides alone. The winter fog shadowed all the windows in the waiting area but the place seemed unbothered by external signs of change; the seasons of life were lost within. Feet dragged on and machines whirred on and silence fell away and I caved in.

Empty stomached, I pulled together all of myself that had spilled out and made way to the hospital cafeteria. Relatives with drooping eyes and extinguishing spirits rested their faces in the cups of their palms; these dried up mouths had to feign happiness soon. They spoke in hushed up gibberish, not quite understanding their own words themselves. There was no long queue and no smell of sickness so characteristic to hospitals, but the space still carried a chaos on its breath. The stench of sweat killed my already diminished appetite and I departed with a chest full of breath, waiting to be let out.

A L I F E F O R A L I F E



Though I couldn't see myself, I knew my face must be pale. Looking at my feet they appeared too small, my body too frail to house the whirlwind within. I hadn't wanted anything to do with where I was but the elders of the family had insisted on making this visit.

Unalert to the surroundings, I suddenly bumped into an old janitor. She wore her blue cotton uniform, barely enough to keep the biting cold at bay. "Sorry madam," she blurted out embarrassed at having assumed the authority to catch hold of my wrist lest the soapy water made her slip. In the wrinkles of her coarse skin, she carried a familiarity- years of polishing the same floors she still could not tread with freedom as her own.

The sickly thin receptionist would occasionally call out a name or request the waiting patients to maintain a safe distance but never seemed earnest enough in these exchanges. Her immaculate indifference suffocated me and I pulled my greasy hair out from

the tight bun it had been in. This made my head hurt instantly, the roots had been tugged at for too long with too much strength, and I closed my eyes trying to massage her shrill voice out of my temples.

But the din became more deafening and unable to calm the disquietude within, I decided on getting some fresh air and returning when it was time for my turn. A growing dizziness bore heavy on me as I stepped down what seemed like an unending flight of grey stairs and slipped out into the open. The December morning was dark and chilly but beads of sweat had begun lining my forehead. The layers I carried on my person felt claustrophobic, resolved to set my insides on fire. I had taken the earliest appointment possible to avoid prying eyes but now I felt sick. The stars were slowly fading away and I watched the day break along with me.

My phone vibrated in my pocket and

A LIFE FOR A LIFE



trembling, with fingers that had already fallen numb in the icy air, I struggled to get a hold of it from my back-jean pocket. “Any news on the results yet?” it was my husband. “Still waiting,” I decided against relaying to him the delay. “Please give Tina breakfast before she leaves. In microwave.” I texted again, blinking at the screen, waiting for a response.

When I finally looked up it was because I was being violently honked at. Lost in some other consciousness, I had walked out to the edge of the road, nowhere close to the ramp leading to the hospital building. A long line of cars sat under the light mist, sleeping like their owners, parked in unauthorized spots. I turned around and faced the towering edifice I had just escaped.

‘PHARMACY’ the bold, red letters announced. Just what I needed. I rushed my way into the shop attached to the building, almost as if to look for

all the missing life that might have collapsed onto it from the bigger structure. The walls of the tiny room were lined with shelves full of medicines and held a mild reek of disinfectant. Spotting no one inside, I mindlessly stepped further in, almost repulsed by the unpleasantness with a sort of static filling the atmosphere. I must have stood and stared blankly at the huge clock on the opposite wall ticking away for it took me a few moments to realize I wasn’t alone. Behind the cash counter separating us, someone knelt with their head bowed in the direction of one of the side walls, praying crouched on the unwelcoming winter tiles. His head was covered with a handkerchief and though I could only see part of his face, I stumbled out with an eerie feeling of having intruded on some sacred, intimate space not meant for my eyes.

The air bellowed on the outside, reprimanding this act of vulgarity. It

A L I F E F O R A L I F E



blew through my neck, raising its hair, and made way to my untied locks leaving it more disheveled than before, but the inside that met my eyes seemed unmoved. Standing on that threshold, trying with all my might not to look, I almost forgot where I had to be. In the moment, I belonged nowhere. He must have heard the unintentional shuffling from when I had walked in seconds ago because the man hurriedly opened his eyes, got up and motioned me to come in. “Sorry madam, Namaaz nahi chhod sakte,” but he wore no look of a man who had just been praying. “I’m-I am sorry. Mujhe dikha nahi.” He just smiled sheepishly with empty eyes not quite looking at me. “Ekk Crocin. Aur bhaiya mask pehen lo please.” He pulled off the handkerchief that had been covering his head and tied it around his mouth, then opened a drawer on the counter and started looking for what I had asked for. Such a common medicine must be kept handier than others. He pulled out a strip of the blue tablets, cut out one for

me and put on the disposable plastic gloves stuffed in his pocket before handing it to me. “Madam, please uh- Woh Namaaz ke time saans lene mein dikkat hoti hai.”

I nodded comprehendingly at his explanation for not having been appropriately covered as per protocol and was just pulling out my purse as he spoke again. “Aur ab waise bhi lagne laga hai jaan bachaane laayak kuch bacha nahi.” The statement took me a little by surprise. “Ekk beti honi, woh bhi duniya mein aane se pehle hi chal basi. 9 hafte ho gaye aaj.”

I felt the life inside me ebb away. Who was this man and why did he think it fit to share all of this with me? The clock said it was almost time for me to go back into the building but something paralyzed me, some fear of never knowing what had happened with this stranger. As if for my freedom his truth was more important to me than my own and I had to make that known to him. But at a loss of

A L I F E F O R A L I F E



words, I could only nod in solidarity. Trying to get a hold of my money and my words, I was interrupted midway. A hefty man with an intimidating air about him had walked in and was now demanding a refund of some kind in an aggressive tone.

“Yeh doctor toh bewakoof banaate hi hain, ab tum bhi bana lo.” But the man I’d just been talking to looked at this customer helplessly. If he had forgotten his story or just decided work was more important than empty talk with an unknown lady, I could not tell but I had grown invisible to him. His pain had evaporated and could be dealt with later, if ever, and the voice within my throat had failed me, and him, the one who probably needed to hear it the most.

After paying, forced into silence for an entire lifetime lived in that absence of stories, I slowly left the shop. The chemist had been too preoccupied dealing with the other man to notice

the change I had placed on the counter before him, let alone reading the desperation in my demeanor right before I walked out. The sky was translucent now, a light blue with specks of sunshine glowing through the nebulous clouds. It was finally dawn.

I breathed the day in. The wind was still blowing a bunch of dead leaves around but I felt secure, protected under the thick layers. My stomach no longer felt empty; a gaping void had been sated. After taking in all I could, I got into my car and just before hitting the ignition, pulled my phone out again and began typing. “Didn’t get checked. I’m keeping it even if it’s a girl,” but this time, I drove off without waiting for a response.

- Viveka Goswami
B.A.(H) English
Semester IV,
(Batch-2019-22)

DISSONANCE

For the umpteenth night in a row, was she pulled out of the clutches of a dreamless slumber.

As she fluttered her eyelids open, soft sounds of a sweet refrain filled her ears, driving away any last remnants of drowsiness from her eyes. She cursed the heavens; her heart beating fast as a myriad of feelings overwhelmed her form, two out of which were plain for her to discern. The first was vexation, vexation that rose from being jerked out of sweet sleep many nights in a row, by the eerie sound of the piano being played. The second and perhaps the most palpable of every emotion she felt at the moment, was plain and unsettling fear. Her mama would surely smack her on the head if she were to even so much as mention the word spirits or ghosts, but deep down it did not matter. She was not child, yet she

certainly feared all things dark and dead.

As the melody from the pianoforte continued to sound from what felt like another realm, finally she mustered up enough a resolve to go and investigate. Her mama wouldn't want her to be weak. She peeled herself off the bed and reached for the brass candlestick by her side, watching the gold flame come to life on the wick. Making her way out of the dark room, she walked in long strides, one of her arms crossed around her torso in response to the unusually cold air that nipped at her skin, the other that brandished the flickering candle. She only followed the music, almost as if the night had enchanted her into a trance, walking where it lead her like a sailor being beckoned by a siren's song.

DISSONANCE

As she came to stand in front of a pinewood door, odd undercurrents of remembrance washed over her. It felt as if she were bursting at the seams with something, but with what, she knew not. With her mouth set in a firm line, she twisted the handle open, letting the door flow ajar.

Her jaw went slack as her eyes landed on a strange man who sat at the bench; his slender fingers flitting across the keys, neck craned at an angle as his eyes remained closed, engrossed in nothing but his art. Not even the dim moonlight could take away from the scene that unraveled in front of her.

A chill rolled down her spine as the divine sound reverberated across the room. Her limbs started to quiver as she felt herself breathe in, not air, but the very song itself. Her mind was

piecing it together, as she recognized the piece the man played as a Tchaikovsky, the keys to the composition emblazoning themselves vivid in her brain. It scared her, she realized with a grimace etched on her face, for she had no musicality; let alone any memory of ever knowing how to play the instrument.

But there as she stood, she felt it; longing, sorrow, agony and most importantly, rage.

The flame of the burning candle could not match the blue fire that the sudden spell of rage had plummeted down her veins. Wrath was never her sin, yet in that moment all she felt was hot frenzy taking over her body as she charged at the figure of the man with gritted teeth.

D I S S O N A N C E

This was her house.

That was all she could see, hear and know when she struck the man down with the candlestick. The vigorous blow to the back of his head knocked him right off the bench, as his body slumped to the side. The second bludgeon to his temple knocked the wind right out him and before she knew, the second hit turned third, then fourth and eventually she lost count as the carpets all turned red. Only when the man's limbs ceased moving, did she finally stop, looking down at the body with wide eyes full of contempt and storm. Some of the blood had landed on her nightgown and soaked into the blush pink material, but she remained indifferent. The intruder was gone.

She took a seat at the mahogany piano, fingertips grazing the keys

lightly, hesitant yet sure like a first lover's kiss. Pressing down on one, then another that followed; her fingers began playing a song on their own accord. A wistful song that told the tale of a lone soul, condemned to spend the rest of eternity in purgatory, existing without living, memories from life forsaking it with time. As the haunting tune reached its crescendo, her eyes welled up with moisture, a single tear rolling down the virtuoso's cheek as the song reached its end.

The door burst open and in came rushing two women, shrieking at the sight of the brutally bludgeoned cadaver. She remained seated, merely gazing at them to realize they looked right past her, never acknowledging her presence once. Another tear made its way down her sallow face,

DISSONANCE

a harrowing smile tugging at her lips
as she thought of her mama telling her
spirits were merely things of
imagination.

The music may have woken her up
many nights, but here she was; at last,
truly awake.

- Priyasha Bhattacharya, B.A. (H)
English, Sem IV(Batch 2019-21)

LUNA DEI

I started awake at the sound of my phone ringing. I groaned at the faint recollection of switching it off silent last night. What time what was it? Two in the morning? I answered the phone.

“Hello,” I grumbled.

“Raman! Thank god you’re up.

Listen –”

imagined rolling my eyes behind the eyelids. It was typical of my little brother to call me at absurd times of the day with his highly inappropriate requests, asking for favors that always asked too much me. I called him little brother, but he was just five years younger, thirty now. He needed to start acting like it.

“I really need my sleep, you know that, Pratham.”

“I know, I know. But you know I wouldn’t call you if it weren’t important.”

tone of impatience.

Silence.

“Pratham, I’m going back to sleep.” I started to cut the call.

“Don’t look up, Raman!”

I stopped. What?

“What?”

“Don’t look up.”

I look up. The fan rotates in a silent, hypnotizing motion. When did I last clean the blades? They were starting to get dusty. “What’s up?”

“The moon.”

“Is this a joke?”

“No! I mean it! Don’t look at the moon, Raman.”

I sigh. “Hold on.”

I shook off my sleep and sat up, rubbing my eyes. Tossing the sheets off my legs, I switched on the bedside lamp. I reached for my glasses and put them on. I was talking on the phone, what did I need my glasses for? It was a power move. It helped me focus. It

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ntimidated my clients. It impressed my clients.

Tucking the phone between my ear and shoulder, I poured myself a glass of water and said, “Pratham.”

“Yes! Did you listen to what I said?

Don’t look-”

“Have you been drinking again?”

He stopped abruptly. “No?”

I took a sip of water. “How much did you drink last night?”

“You’re not listening to me.”

“I am listening to you. Just not to what you’re saying. Two very different things Pratham.”

“I just called to help you. I don’t need your help.”

“Fine. Help me.”

“Don’t look at the moon, please. Just for tonight. Don’t believe anyone else. I have seen people-”

This was new. Did our parents know about this? Did the doctor know?”

I downed the water. “Look, Pratham.”

The line went silent. I called back a couple of times.

The number you are calling is switched off. Please try...

Typical of him, shutting me off. He’d had a tough time in his twenties, getting into the wrong company multiple times. In March 2034, after the massive militant religious cult was exposed by the journalists, the religion had crumbled as millions of people started converting or switching to atheism in a historical cascading effect. Immediately after, multiple other religions started cropping up, trying to establish dominance. Pratham got involved with one religious group after the other, and they all dissolved in a couple of months. It left him and so many other people stranded in a faithless existence for years, many losing their wits. I thought the country had finally starting to get used to a world without religion after six years.

L U N A D E I

I wondered what his therapist would say about this new moon thing. Did he even go to therapist anymore? I didn't know. I took off my glasses and switched off the bedside lamp. I would deal with this tomorrow.

What now? I certainly couldn't go back to sleep right away. I scrambled for the bottle of pills under my pillow and popped two into my mouth. Three? I couldn't tell. I turned my phone on and waited for the auto brightness to adjust. A little social media before the pills kicked in couldn't hurt. Not more than the pills anyway.

Suddenly, a news alert with the word 'moon' caught my eyes. I wasn't much for current affairs except in my business, but I tapped on it anyway.

'Prettiest moon in a century, scientists say.'

I frown. Strange headline. I scrolled through other headlines.

'NASA confirms supernatural beauty of the moon'

'Breathtaking moon starts poetry revolution overnight.'

'Van Gogh sent moon, say conspiracy theorists.'

I frowned. Had I slept through all this? It seemed surreal, such ado about the moon. And what was Pratham saying about the moon? It was probably one of his mad ravings, to put it crudely, but could it have been triggered by this?

A notification alert on my phone. I shook my head. This way I'd never get any sleep. I would check my phone again next morning, I decided.

But suddenly, my phone chirped again. And again. And again. And again, and again, and again.

The phone dropped out of my hand and continued to chirp, dancing on the floor. I stared at it, not wanting to

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admit to myself how much it unnerved me, but not being able to mute the thumping in my chest. Sitting on my bed in the dark room, the light from the phone looked spectral. I steeled my nerves and reached for my still vibrating phone and looked at the screen.

It was filled with messages from all kinds of social media – Instagram, Facebook, Whatsapp. Even SMS and Email notifications. From my friends, from my parents, from my colleagues. From acquaintances I had not spoken to in years. From that guy I fancied at my gym.

I started reading.

My eyes widened as I went through the messages. Because they all seemed to say the same thing.

‘Look at the moon.’

‘The moon looks so pretty tonight, Raman.’

‘Raman, look up!’

‘This is the prettiest moon I have ever seen.’

‘The night sky looks gorgeous tonight.’

‘Look at the moon ‘

‘Look at the moon.’

‘Look at the moon.’

I shut my eyes. When I opened my eyes again, I was standing on my terrace, fifteen stories above ground level, leaning against the parapet. I didn’t remember how I got there, but I was still in my night clothes, barefoot. I knew it wasn’t possible, but I could have sworn that I still heard my phone buzzing downstairs. As I wriggled my toes against the mossy concrete I hadn’t set foot on in years, I realized that I was standing underneath the bare sky.

The moon.

L U N A D E I

What was it all about? I mean, sure, the moon was beautiful and all, but how pretty could it be? How different could it be? But everyone was saying it was, so it must be. I was just about to look up when a frantic voice rang in my ears.

Don't look at the moon!

Why had Pratham seemed so scared?

Sure, he was depressed, probably drinking again, but he had never in the last six years called me of his own accord. He had too much of an ego. His desperate, pleading voice was different. It was something I had never heard before. Why shouldn't I look up at the moon? What was the big deal? Heck, NASA would agree!

I pushed Pratham to the back of my mind and resolved to deal with him the next day. For now, I would enjoy this apparent lunar masterpiece everyone was talking about. The moon seemed

to nudge me playfully.

Look at me, Raman. I'm beautiful.

Slowly, I looked up. The moon was perfectly overhead. I stared at it for a while. A perfect circle, it glistened against the prussian blue sky. I could feel the moonlight making everything around me beautiful, peaceful. I couldn't tell why, but it was true; this moon felt different. It felt prettier than any other moon I had ever seen. I sighed as the moon filled up my lungs, filled up my veins with its moonlight. It took control of me; the moon was my soul, my mind. My brain was clear of any reservations I had had. I didn't remember... anything. There was something that had been bothering me, but I didn't remember it anymore. The moon was too beautiful.

I gazed at the moon, mesmerized, for a good thirty minutes. I stood there, my neck craned up, just staring. My eyes

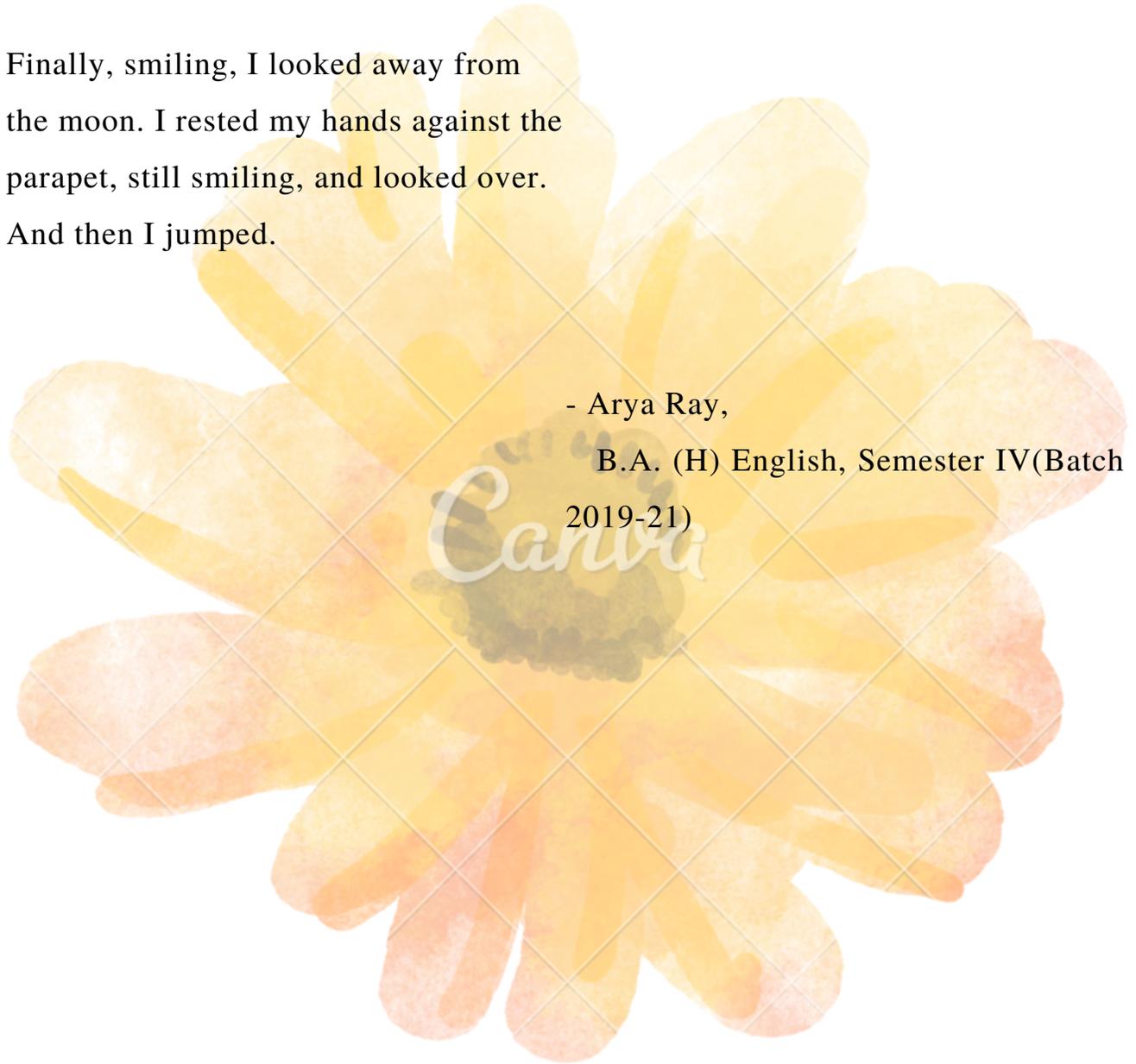
L U N A D E I

glazed, but I don't think I blinked.

Finally, smiling, I looked away from
the moon. I rested my hands against the
parapet, still smiling, and looked over.
And then I jumped.

- Arya Ray,

B.A. (H) English, Semester IV (Batch
2019-21)



MISCELLANEOUS:

C U S T O M E R S E R V I C E

(A lady sits at a help desk and a woman approaches, looking eager)

Lady:

Good evening, ma'am. How may I assist you today?

Rita:

Hey, I'd like to return these. (she keeps a purple bag on the counter)

They didn't really fit.

Lady:

(opens the bag to reveal a pair of black stilettos)

When exactly did you buy these, ma'am?

Rita

I think it was about two weeks ago?

Lady

Do you have a receipt, ma'am?

Rita

I don't have a receipt but you literally helped me put these on. So. I'm sure you remember.

Lady

I'm sorry, ma'am. We cannot take these back without a receipt.

Rita

Um. I understand. Work. Duty. It's great. And I respect it. Really, I do. But I spent a lot on these.

And um. They don't fit and I almost broke my neck trying to walk in them. So, if I could get

refunded, it would be great, you know?

Lady

Sorry, ma'am. No receipt, no refund. Store policy.

R(pause)

Rita

Okay. I'll be right back...

(she leaves and enters after a few seconds – hair tousled and a victorious grin on her face)

Rita

AHA! Here. I knew I'm not that careless. (She keeps a piece of paper on the counter)

Lady

Welcome back, ma'am.

Rita

Well, this is the receipt. As you can see, I bought the shoes from here. (the lady peers at the receipt)

Rita

It was literally under the car seat and I spent about ten minutes looking for it. I think I'm gonna take better care of my receipts from now on.

Lady

Ma'am, you purchased these twenty-five days ago.

Rita

Uh huh...

Lady

We are not allowed to refund any purchases beyond the twenty-day mark. I'm sorry.

Rita

Two weeks, three weeks – it's all really the same if you think about it, right? (she chuckles)

Lady

(chuckles for a while and then stops)

No can do, ma'am. I'm sorry. Store policy.

Rita

Why is that? Why do you have a twenty-day mark?

Lady

That information is classified, ma'am. Store –

Rita

-Policy. We get it (she's flustered now). Okay, look – (she looks at the lady's name tag) Linda. I

don't know what this little act is but your exact words when I tried these on were “They look

absolutely marvelous on you, ma'am. These shoes are perfect for any occasion. You could wear

them for a workplace event or a night out.” And I believe I said “Oh, I don't know.

They're a

little high and quite uncomfortable.” And then you went “They're every 20-something's

wardrobe quintessential, ma'am. They're the last pair of the season and I assure you, they're all

the rage.”

Lady

I understand that you might be a little upset ma'am –

Rita

Might?! Linda, Linda, Linda. I'm trying really hard not to be disrespectful here. It's just a

receipt.

Lady

Ma'am...

Rita

What?

Lady

There's also the issue of the box. We cannot refund unless the product is returned in its original packaging.

Rita

No. Absolutely not. I can't believe I'm doing this. I would like...um...to speak your manager.

(she does her best to look intimidating)

Lady

Very well, ma'am.

(she dials a number on the telephone kept on the counter and a few seconds later, a tall man appears from behind a door)

Manager

What seems to be the issue, ma'am? (he addresses Rita directly)

Rita

Well, I wanted to return these shoes that I bought from here. But unfortunately, I bought them twenty-five days ago...

Manager

Ah. I'm afraid we cannot attend to your request. You see, as part of our store pol –

Rita

YOUR STORE POLICY! OF COURSE! God forbid a poor customer try and curve your way around your precious store policy.

(she's on the brink of tears now)

NOW LOOK HERE, MISTER. I work at an internet media company that only serves drinks in mason jars, has neon signs in conference rooms and not to mention, about eight different versions of a keto menu in its cafeteria. So, trust me when I say I know how annoying and pretentious twenty something adults can be. But if I have to bear the pain of these crazy stilettos at a work party while listening to Jessica from Finance spew another word about how her mood being off depends on her chakras, then I WILL ABSOLUTELY LOSE MY MIND.

(silence)

Manager

Ma'am, if you'd like, we can have you exchange your shoes for a pair of Moccasins.

Rita

Uh...

Manager

Of course, they're a part of our "Oldie Goldies Collection" but...

Rita

(slowly, almost introspecting)

Wow. Am I becoming a Karen?

Manager

What's that, ma'am?

Rita

Nothing. I'll take them. Thanks.

By: Ayrah Faisal Husain, B.A.(H) English, Semester VI, (Batch 2018-2021)



A F F I N I T Y

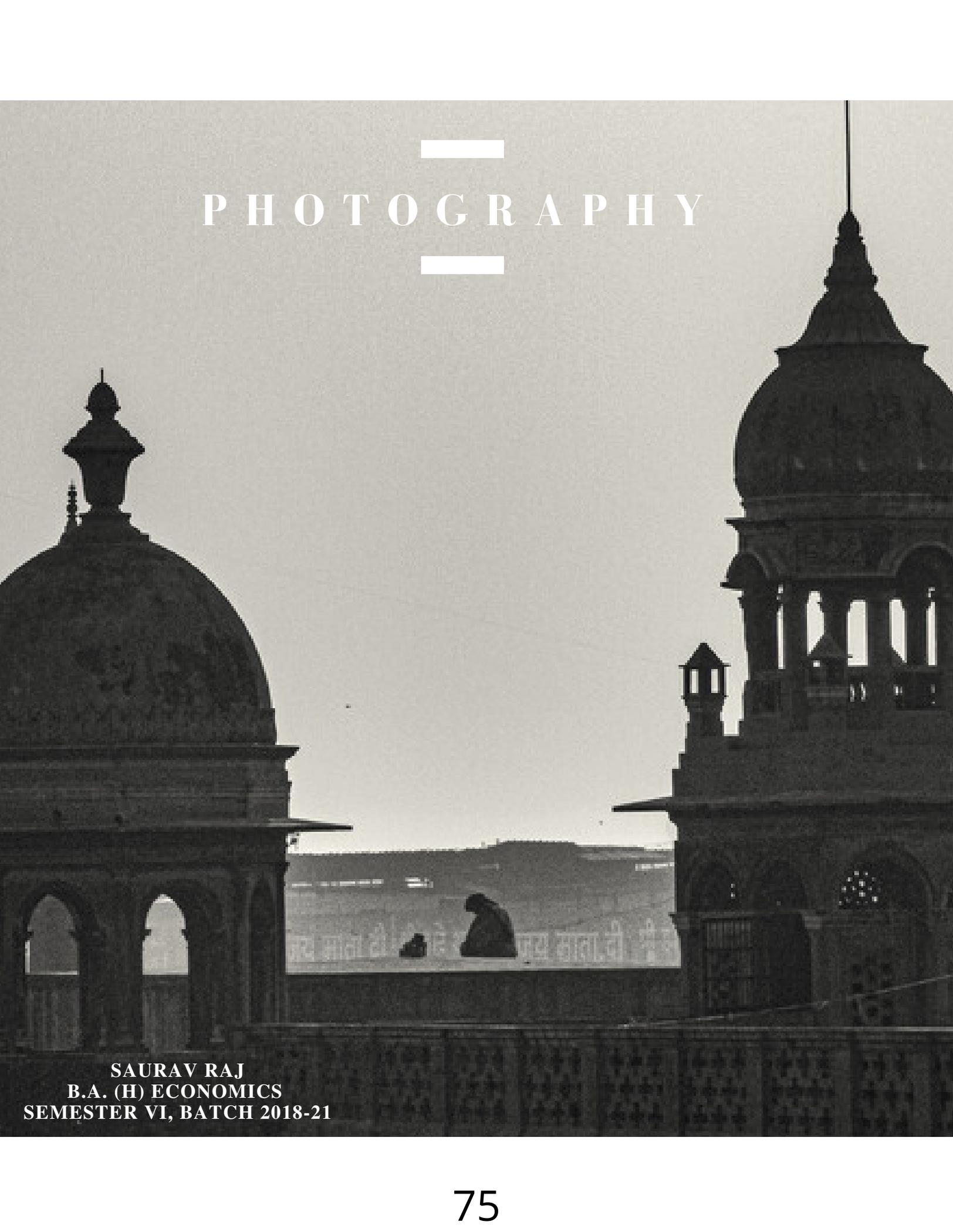
He had never met him, but felt something brewing between them. It was an office party with blue coats, black coats roving around like cabs and police vans on a busy day. He agreed to take some strides with his friends in slow steps. They would circle the room and he would slow down his pace a little the moment this man became more visible in the traffic. Many laps passed, and finally this man turned to face him. The man looked as if he knew all the while this gaze which had been calling him, so the man came forward. He started walking towards him as well, clenching the fists too tight, sensing the sweat, putting hands inside the pockets to hide the nervousness of addressing the man. Both of them were coming closer with similar steady steps, “playing it cool” with burning fists hidden in the cloth. Facing each other now, they stood still and a light red light fell on them. He wanted to say something to the man, he was thinking about asking the man’s kinship, because he sensed a strange affinity with this man. His blood was rushing as if aiding the brain to form

bonds and remember where he had seen this figure... He stood staring for long, neither saying a word. He felt the bending curves of the man’s brows, his square forehead, sliding down the nose and reaching the lips, he wanted to trace and imprint everything of this man with the eyes. He was confused what kind of face this was, no he would never be able to paint it or describe it. The jaw line he remembered, but forgot it when he walked on the neck line. His fingers wanted to touch this man, but he couldn’t reach his face, his expression perplexed, as if in deep anguish, no not frowning, but meditating on the face which could not be understood.

Among all the hullabaloo, his friends were toasting and they shouted to call him, “Hey Narcimuss, what are you looking in that mirror for? Come, and get yours on the rocks, buddy!”

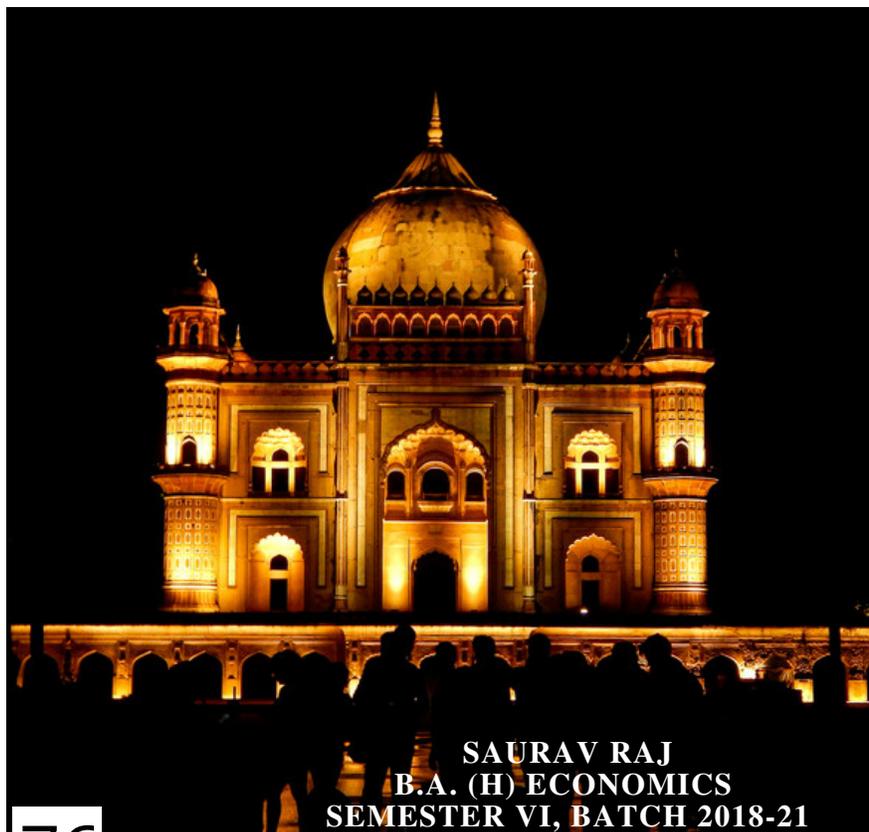
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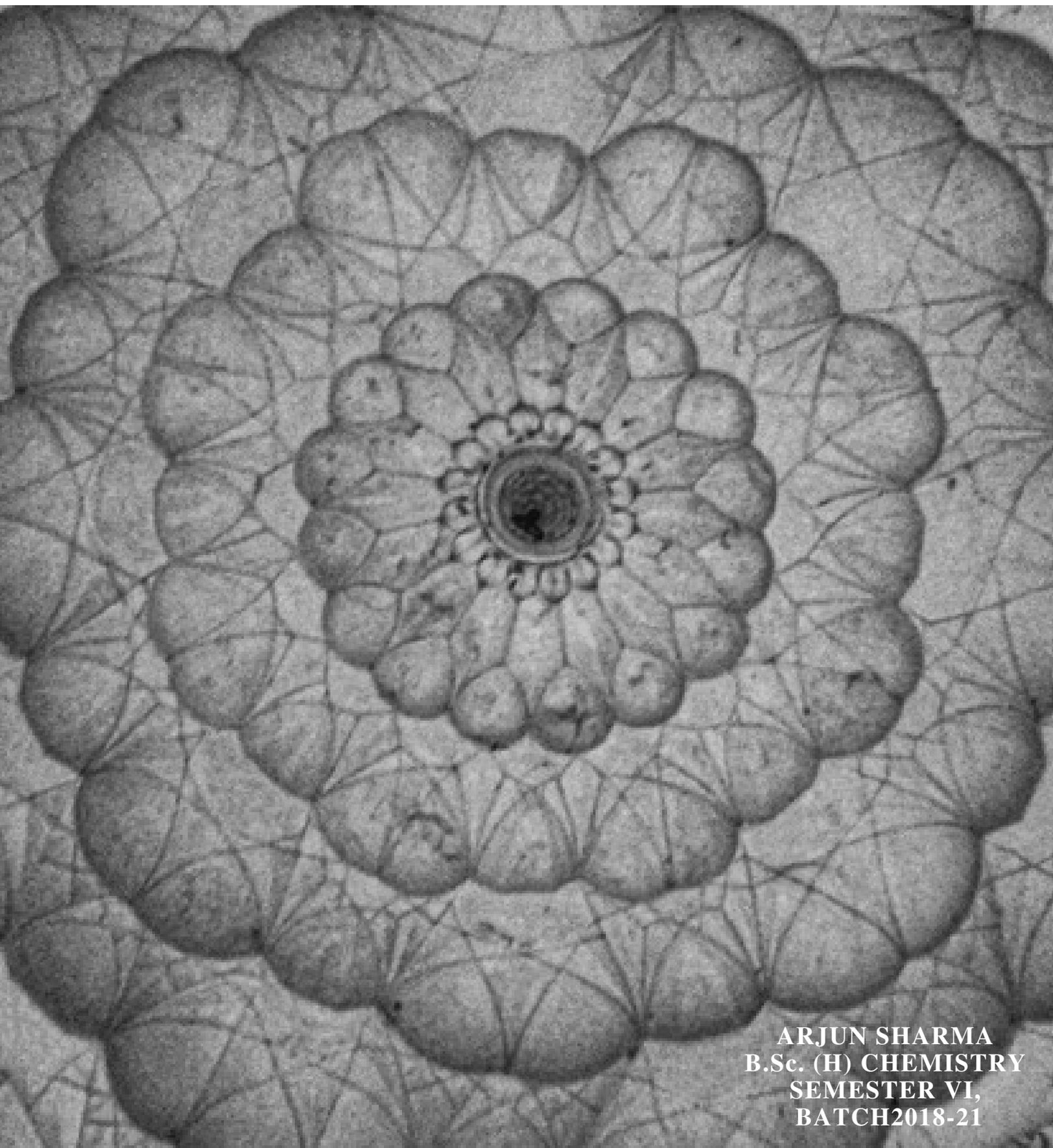


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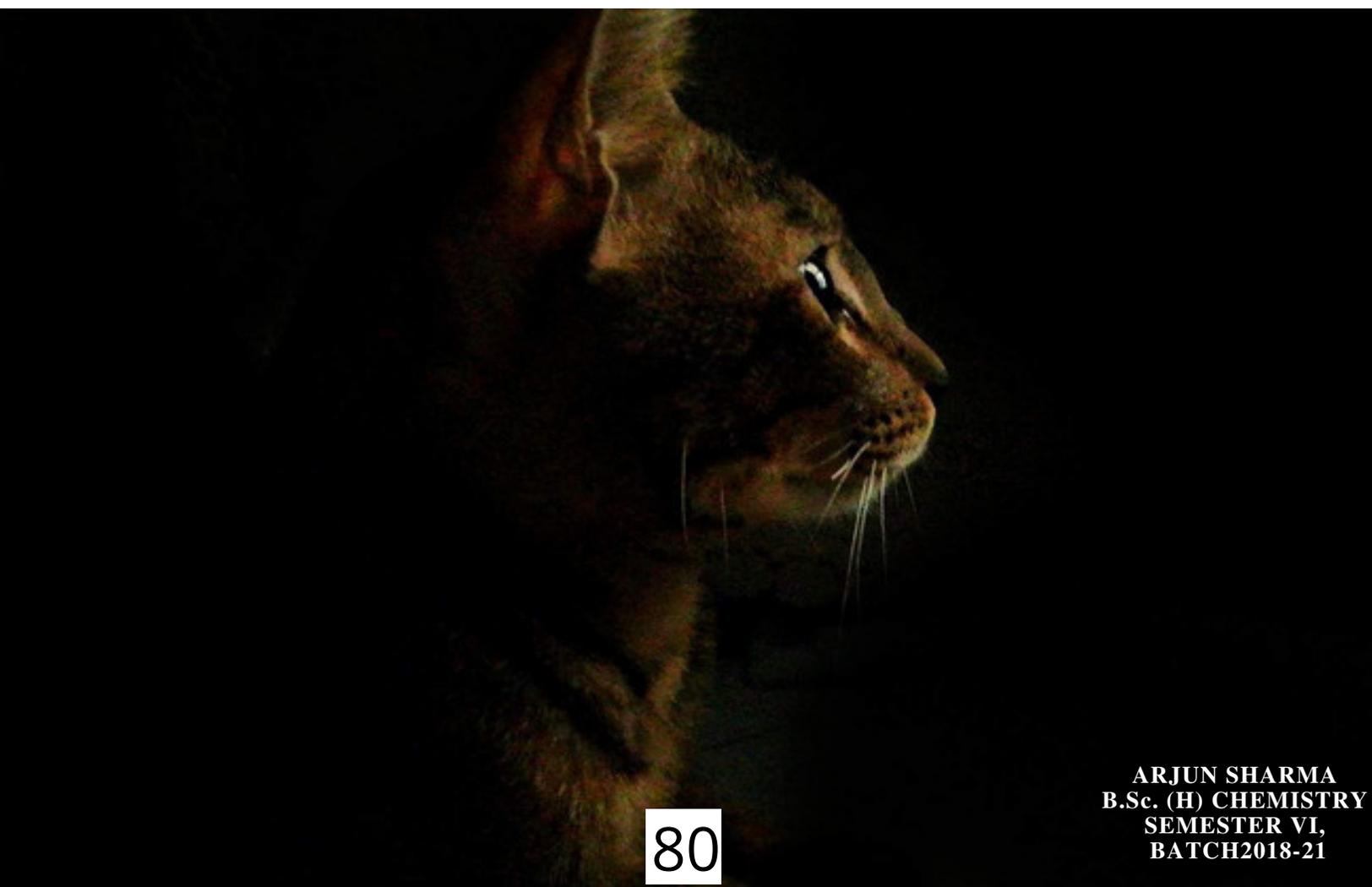


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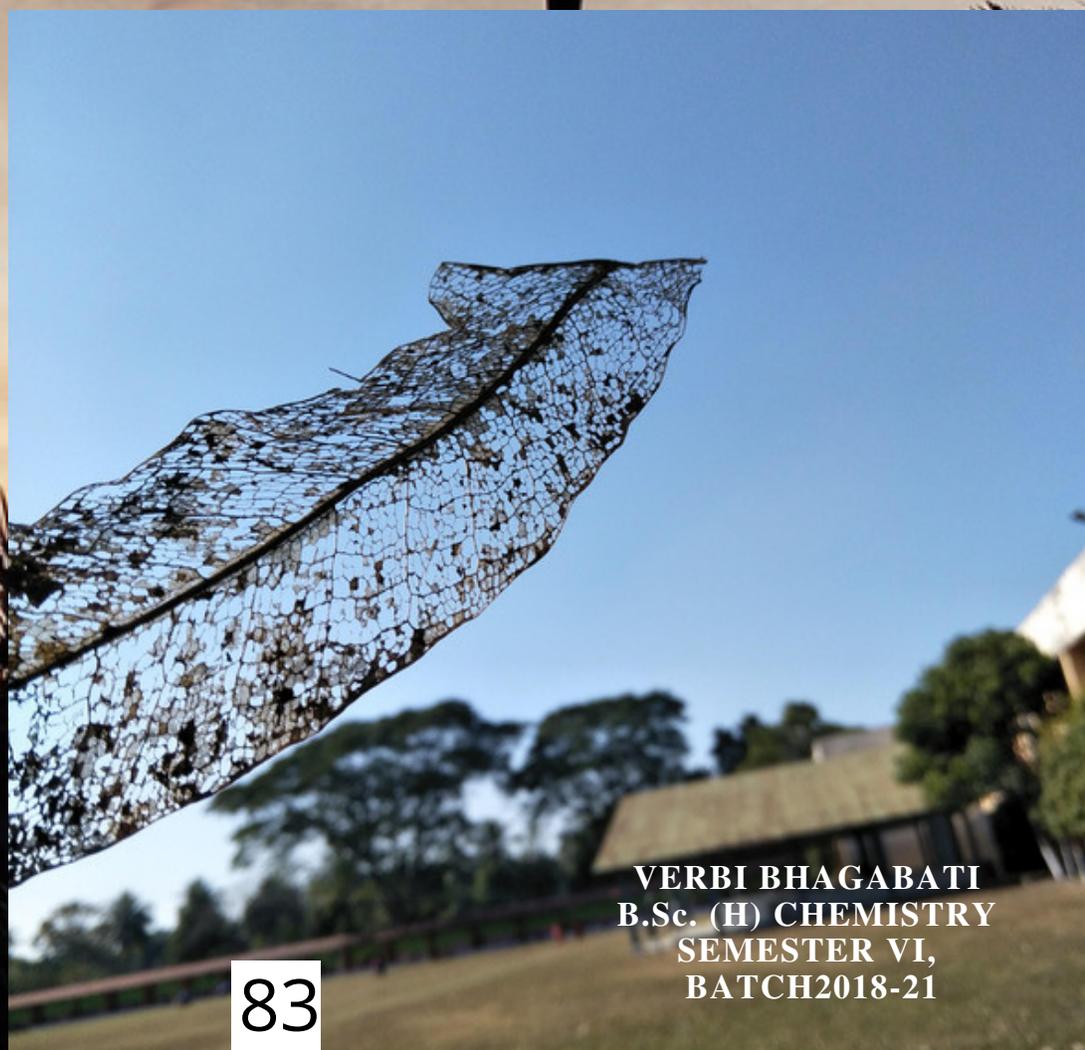
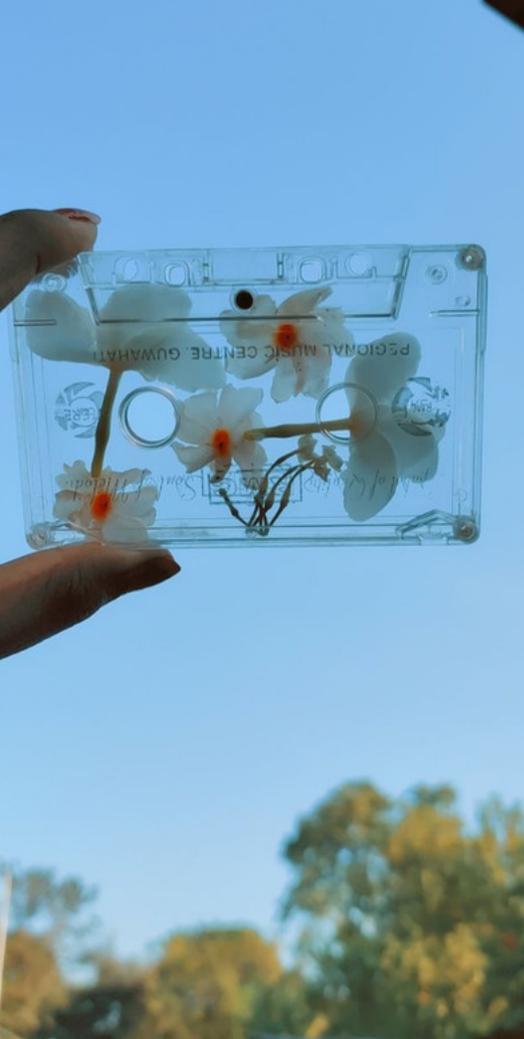
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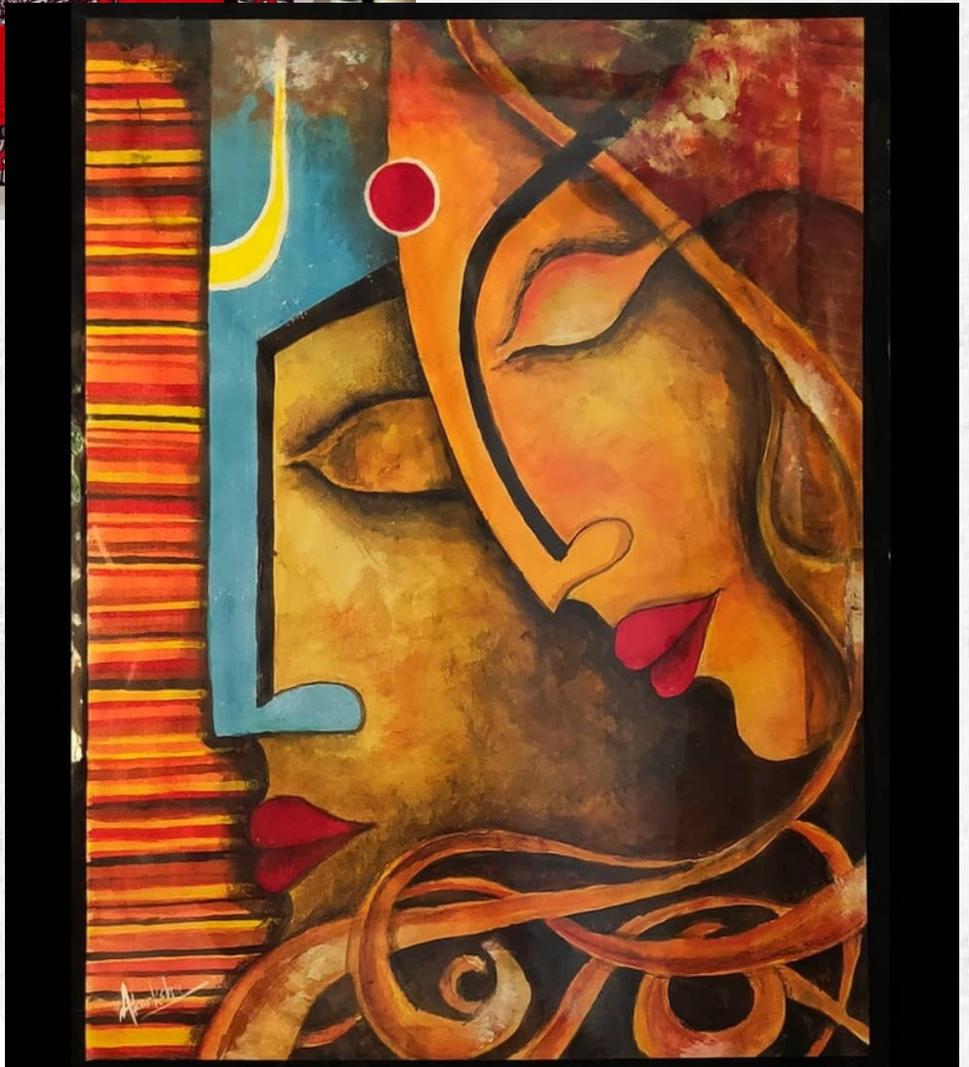
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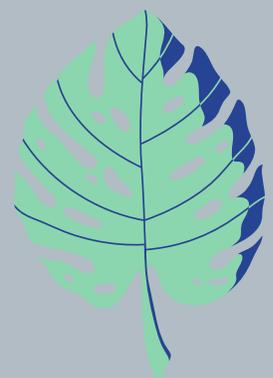


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