



**SRI VENKATESWARA INTERNSHIP PROGRAM
FOR RESEARCH IN ACADEMICS
(SRI-VIPRA)**



SRI-VIPRA


Project Report of 2024: SVP-2430

“Title of the project”



**IQAC
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University of Delhi
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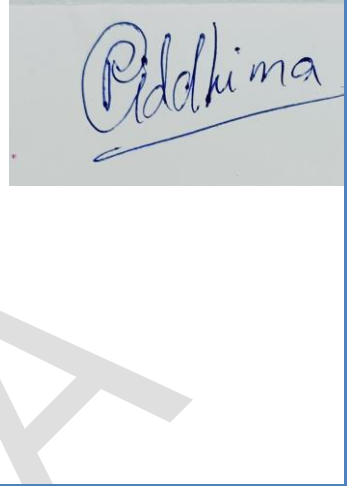

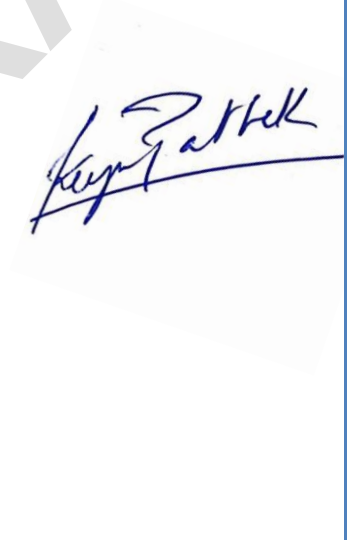

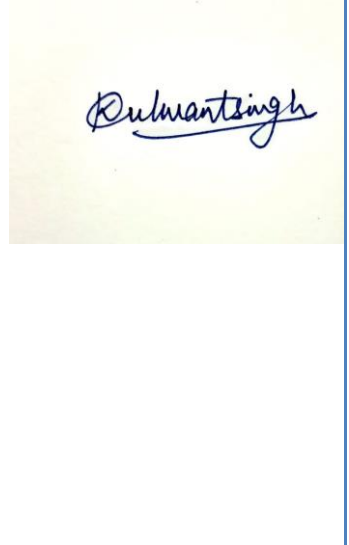
SRIVIPRA PROJECT 2024

Title : Tracing the Cultural Histories: Exploring Creativity through Real-Life Narrative

Name of Mentor:Dr. Amrita Sharma Name of Department: English Designation: Assistant Professor	Photo 
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List of students under the SRIVIPRA Project

S. No	Photo	Name of the student	Roll number	Course	Signature
1		Ritesh Ranjan Chaurasiya	0122064	BA Program (History+Political Science)	

2		Riddhima Dixit	1322050	Bsc(hons)Biological Sciences	
3		Keya Pathak	0123055	BA Program (History+Hindi)	
4		Kulwant Singh	0822014	BA (Hons) Sociology	

Signature of Mentor

Amrita

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Certificate of Originality

This is to certify that the aforementioned students from Sri Venkateswara College have participated in the summer project SVP-2430 titled “**Tracing the Cultural Histories: Exploring Creativity through Real Life Narratives**”. The participants have carried out the research project work under my guidance and supervision from 1st July, 2024 to 30th September 2024. The work carried out is original and carried out in an online/offline/hybrid mode.

Signature of Mentor

A rectangular box containing a handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Amrita".

Dr. Amrita Sharma

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Sri Venkateswara College, University of Delhi for giving us an opportunity to work on this summer project. The project enabled the participating students to explore their fiction writing skills and my sincere gratitude to all involved in this project.

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About the Project

This SRIVIPRA Project titled “Tracing the Cultural Histories: Exploring Creativity through Real Life Narratives” was aimed at enabling participating students to undertake a three-month project that explores the idea of history and creativity in the contemporary times. Each of the four participants undertook a project that had two components to it. The first component of the project involved research on the idea of cultural history. Each student was asked to select a real life setting, like a city, place or monument, and to research on its cultural history. The second component of the project involved the idea of building a fictional narrative out of the real life stories and findings of their research.

There were three group meetings during the course of the project and the students enthusiastically participated in research, writing and peer review. As the final outcome, all four students wrote a fictional narrative that intermingles the idea of cultural history and creativity.

The project concluded with the students attending a creative writing workshop on “Hiction: Where History Meets Fiction’s Diction” organized by the Department of English. The students also engaged in a close discussion with the invited speaker Dr. Amit Ranjan, a writer and Assistant Prof. Of English at NCERT and gave a final presentation of their project at its conclusion.

Dr. Amrita Sharma

The Chronicles of South Bombay (1960s-70s)

by Ritesh Ranjan Chaurasiya

It was the summer of 60's when a man in his mid-20s, a seasoned individual named Ashok dropped off at Victoria Terminus, the grand structure standing as the testament of British Rule, describing the city's colonial architecture. Gothic architecture is remarkable because of its British Architect and Engineer, Frederick William Stevens.

It was still early in the morning, with its intricate stone carvings and towering spires, loomed over him, casting long shadows. Starting in 1878, in a location south of the old Bori Bunder railway station, it took nearly a decade to transform to serve the roots of its colonial Masters. A mark to commemorate the 50 years of Queen Victoria's rule. Ashok was thrilled to read about the past it represented and its significance. With dreams as big as the Arabian Sea that bordered this bustling metropolis he desired to make the best of it.

Reinvigorated from College in Bengal, Ashok had secured an internship as a junior clerk at a prestigious law firm in South Bombay, in a city with its oath of opportunity and fable beckoned him with open arms. The narrative behind Bombay being an opportunistic state post-independence lies in its colonial past.

“The Coastal City facilitates trade and generates camaraderie in markets for businesses from various parts of the country, allowing it to grow as an economic hub for its people. The rapid industrialization created a unique cosmopolitan culture.”

As Sharada Dwivedi & Rahul Mehrotra in their book “Bombay: The Cities Within”, traces the transformation of Bombay from a colonial port city to a global metropolis. Bombay's evolution can be understood in four parts, first associated with its Portuguese takeover in the mid-16th century, followed by the growth period until the 1890s, thirdly the epidemic outbreak and renewed urban conditions, and last the evolution to modernity to date.

As he stepped off the station, the bustling streets of Bombay with honking cars, trams, the mellifluous calls of street vendors, and the lively energy of the city welcomed him. He was thrilled by the kind of freedom he felt while entering such a big city at a time when it got to be known as the financial capital of the time. The process of turning it into a financial capital was started in the early 20th century, however after the World War-II the process

was intensified with the factors like the relocation of the central bank and other economic impacts.

“An interesting fact about Bombay, the history of Trams in India, a topic that demands special attention. You’ll still find trams in India, in some parts of West Bengal, However, for Bombay on March 31, 1964, the last tram was seen journeying through Mumbai’s streets, bidding farewell between Bori Bunder and Khodadad Tram Terminus, now known as Dadar TT.

This was a historic moment in itself as a large crowd gathered to witness this farewell which was for some the end of an era.”

The first glimpses of the city were remarkable for him, however leaving his home, and coming to a new city, where he didn't know anyone, filled him with anxiety, he was curious and eager to explore, make new friends and even find love.

From there, he took a Tram to Pilot Bunder Road and had a simple stay at Colaba which is famous for its quality of colonial architecture. He stayed at a Chawl in the suburb of Colaba which was a little cramped but had a window facing the main street. Nightfall would bring the soft melodies emanating from the nearby cafés frequented by band members and the chatter of neighbours clustered outside on the front square of the staircases of the chawl.

His first few days in Bombay were a blur of paperwork, introduction at the law firm, and finding his footing in a new city. He was struggling to adapt to these changes as a fresh graduate; it was his first position. Still lost about finding himself in the midst of this new environment where he was to settle in. One evening when the sky was darkened by the clouds, after a particularly long day at work, Ashok found himself wandering through the streets of Colaba, seeking an escape from his monotonous life cycle. The beauty of the light drizzle adorned the streets. He passed Regal Cinema, where movie posters of Dev Anand’s Guide embellished the plain walls.

As he was settling in, he found a flyer for a local gathering at the Wayside Inn, a favoured cafe among the city's artists and intellectuals. Authors like RK Narayan wrote many parts of their novels sitting in the beauty of the environment that Wayside Inn was known for, Over the years authors and writers have seen Wayside Inn as more than just a cafe, it

served the purpose of a cultural institution that provided a space for creativity that has been reflected in various masterpieces by various authors of the age.

“Eventually, with the challenges the cafe faced high competition in the market from newer establishments that started to replace it, and with increasing rents, Wayside Inn closed its doors in 2002, marking the end of an era. Some locals who lived through their time still keep the cafe in their memories as a place where modern Indian history took place. As per an article written in “Mid-Day” an e-paper, the cafe’s Table No. 4 was where Babasaheb Ambedkar laid down large tracts of the Indian Constitution in 1948. Curious and eager to feel at ease in this new city, Ashok decided to attend the gathering at the cafe.”

As he stepped into the cafe, he stumbled upon a lively crowd engaged in ebullient discussions. At first, he felt like an outsider, wondering whether he would fit in with these people or not. He was surrounded by a lot of questions inside his head. And then he saw Ajay, a bold young man studying at St.Xavier’s College. Ajay was a student of History, very interested in preserving Bombay’s cultural heritage, particularly the Old Library in the Fort Area, which was under threat of demolition. The Old Library in modern-day Mumbai’s Fort Area, now known as the Asiatic Society of Mumbai Library, dates back to 1804.

I remember even when I saw it today it had the same walls that can put one into a very deep point of the intelligentsia.

“It was originally known as the Literary Society of Bombay and later became the Asiatic Society of Bombay. The building itself where the town hall is housed was constructed between 1821 and 1833 and is remarkably known for its neoclassical architecture in the city.”

As he sat down with a coffee to suit himself, with a book in his hand, his gaze met with Ajay while he was explaining to a group of people that the library was not just a brick structure, but served as a repository of the city’s intellectual history. Ashok found himself staring longer than he should have. Their eyes met briefly, and Ashok quickly pulled away in embarrassment, feeling a rush of heat in his face turning him red. It was different and something new for Ashok to feel this way while looking at a man. Ajay kept on explaining how the library was embraced by literary giants like R.K Narayan, and Mulk Raj Anand.

As he finished speaking he approached Ashok with a warm smile. “You look new here,” he said. Their eyes met, he went into a moment of dreaming about him. His voice was calm, and something about it put Ashok at ease.

Ajay clicked his fingers, "I just moved to the city," Ashok replied, still nervous and lost in his sight. "I'm Ashok."

"I'm Ajay," he said, extending his hand. "Welcome to Bombay."

He couldn't help but keep looking into his eyes while speaking with him. As they both shook their hands Ashok felt a warm craze in his heart as it started to palpitate with more excitement than usual with his one touch. It was all new and something that Ashok had never experienced in his life.

Allured by Ajay's spirited thoughts and his captivating sight, Ashok decided to join Ajay in his efforts to save the Library. He was thrilled as he started to feel he had found a friend in this new city.

Over the next few weeks, Ashok kept a stable balance between his job at the law firm and the new challenge he had embarked upon in assisting Ajay to save the library. Ashok thought it was a great way to socialise with a new set of people in a different city that would help him learn about the customs and ways of this new city. He started to spend the evenings at his place, researching the library's history and mobilising community support for its preservation.

Their shared passion for the united cause brought them closer, and Ashok found himself increasingly drawn to Ajay. They started to hang out more often. When it used to get late, he started to stay over at his place. Even when he was at work, he always used to think about what Ajay would be doing now, is he still in College, or with friends, is he thinking about him or not? He used to spend his tea breaks ruminating about him. He wasn't sure why he was feeling this way, and thinking of him so much, it used to drive him crazy at times when he couldn't see Ajay when the workload at the firm increased.

Ajay used to live alone in Bombay, his parents passed away in an accident. He had always lived in a great sense of freedom as there was nobody to question him coming home late, but at the same time, he used to miss them. He often used to wonder if he would ever find love in his life that would bring him peace and the great sense of belongingness that he had always longed for.

Each time, they would take a break while researching, with a chat over chai, they used to talk about the city, their lives, and their shared love for books and art. Ashok was

captivated by Ajay's stories, his dreams of travelling the world, and the sense of freedom he felt in Bombay with him. It started to feel like home to him.

Ajay always used to say this to Ashok, "I have never met anyone like you before, you make me feel seen, in a way that goes beyond words."

Ashok replies, "I feel the same way, it is after so long I have been close to someone in such a short time.", with a big smile turning his face all red.

And asks him, "For a change, would you like to go for a walk tomorrow? We can go for dinner as well as it's Sunday."

Ajay got confused with his decision to respond and fumbled through his words.

Ajay with a smile, "Yes we can."

They both decided to meet at the Asiatic Society of Bombay, hidden away in a narrow lane. "This place is special," Ajay said. "It's one of the few places left in the city that hasn't been touched by all the modernization. But not for long". The library was old, with dusty bookshelves and crumbling walls, but it had a certain charm. It was during these moments that Ashok began to realise the depth of his feelings for Ajay.

It wasn't just admiration—it was love. A love he had never allowed himself to feel so openly before. He just wanted to spend more time with Ajay, at all costs. Within himself, he was fighting this feeling of liking a man. He never thought he'd start to feel this for a man.

As the evening approached them, they decided to grab dinner at an old Irani cafe. The diverse city of Bombay, with its captivating mix of cultures, has always been a cultural hub and a celebration of diversity. Its unique appeal emanates from every aspect - from the bustling local trains, the bustling yet harmonious chawls, and the towering skyscrapers, to the upscale neighbourhoods, all combining to form the city's identity. An integral part of this cosmopolitan blend is the heritage of its longstanding Irani cafes.

"These delightful establishments, deeply ingrained in Bombay's cultural nest, have a fascinating history that spans more than a century. The history of Iranian cafes in Mumbai is truly intriguing. Established by Zoroastrian Irani immigrants in the 20th century, who fled religious persecution in West and Central Asia, these cafes became renowned for their famous Irani Chai and Bun Maska. Despite their declining numbers, the Irani cafes continue to be the lifeblood of the city, echoing the spirit of Bombay."

As soon as they finished eating, they hugged each other and parted their ways home. That hug lasted for more than 10 seconds. When Ashok reached home and was standing in front of a mirror, he was terrified of what was happening to him. He asked himself, “Is he falling in love with Ajay? Is it normal to be this way?”. His eyes were filled with tears, as he covered himself in the sheets and tried to fall asleep.

As the days passed, he was over those feelings calling them a phase that he would eventually outgrow with time. The next morning he started to pretend as if nothing happened and left for work.

“In the 1960s, Bombay was going through a series of cultural corners that were facing a threat from the rise of urbanisation to attract for foreign investments and businesses. The city is rapidly modernising, driven by a booming economy and an inflow of migrants seeking opportunities. This period saw the construction of new skyscrapers and the expansion of industries, such as the Air India building at Nariman Point, built in 1967 a 23-story skyscraper that became one of the first high-rises in the area, Express Towers, in 1968 which also served as one of the tallest buildings in South Asia, the famous Oberoi Trident Hotel (formerly known as Oberoi Sheraton) (1973), and many more. Even today when you visit these places you will find a great sense of magnificence about these buildings.”

The library faced strong opposition from a real estate developer who had already received approval from the Bombay Municipality Corporation to proceed with the demolition. He wanted to capitalise on this growth. The developer planned to demolish the library to make way for a commercial complex hoping that would help him gain double what he is investing for now, echoing the city’s push towards modernization and economic progress.

Everyone was thrilled. The developer’s argument was simple: progress required sacrifices, and the old library, barely frequented in recent years, was a small price to pay for Bombay’s future as the financial capital of India. Ashok and Ajay’s drive to save the Library brought out the tension between preserving Bombay’s cultural heritage and embracing the future.

For Ashok, this wasn't just about saving a library or a brick structure, it illustrated something deeper—the preservation of Bombay’s unique identity that he has recently enlightened after meeting Ajay.

The library was also the place where he began to develop his feelings for Ajay. But loving Ajay wasn’t easy. It was during these interactions that he started to accept more of what he had been fighting for a long time within himself. He realised the more he would fight these

feelings and the more he would resist, each time he used to see Ajay, they would hit him with a stronger intensity.

Even in a city as open as Bombay and the kind of freedom he was charged with, without being accountable to anyone out there. However, there were dangers as they could never hold hands in public or show their affection like other couples. Ashok was sad and the only reason was because their love was impossible and had to remain hidden as at that time, it was still a crime. Our colonial masters may have left the country, but their laws are still keeping us under their control. It was only in the 21st century that we were able to get rid of this colonial mindset and be brave enough to accept the people as they are.

It was only through closed doors and whispered conversations they were able to live and be who they actually were.

Ashok struggled with this, feeling torn between his desire for Ajay and the fear of what could happen if anyone found out. He decided to share his feelings with Ajay as soon as these things sort out.

“In 1965, the city was a cultural powerhouse, home to the Hindi film industry, iconic art deco cinemas, Irani cafés, and jazz clubs. The Gateway of India stood as a symbol of both colonial oppression and India’s triumph over it. As India prepared for its second Indo-Pakistani war, the city was becoming more conscious of its role in shaping the nation’s cultural and intellectual future.”

As they organised for a community meeting at the library, they found a hidden chamber linked with an old bookshelf. As one pulls the book, the door will slide open.

“According to the locals and some historical accounts, the Town Hall, where the Asiatic Society of Bombay Library is located, contains hidden compartments or secret chambers. These stories are part of the building’s mystique and are very popular among visitors. Over the years it has gone under various renovations and restoration projects, and these sometimes reveal previously unknown aspects of the building’s architecture, including hidden rooms or compartments used for storage purposes. There is still no clear evidence of a specific hidden compartment and it still remains a mystery.”

Inside, they found letters and photographs documenting the lives of notable figures who had often visited the library. These artefacts demonstrated a glimpse into the affluent culture that Bombay harboured and strengthened their case for preservation.

Ashok and Ajay's fight to save the library gained momentum when their campaign was covered by the prestigious newspaper of the time, "The Bombay Chronicle", leading to gathering great attention of intellectuals from all over the city beginning to support their cause. Stalwarts of Bombay- Writers, actors, and activists- at the cultural scene joined the rallies they organised making the preservation of the library a symbol of the fight against the unchecked modernization of Bombay.

One evening, as they were preparing for a major rally, Ajay took Ashok aside. "There's something I've been meaning to tell you," he said quietly, his voice tinged with hesitation.

Ashok's heart raced, he was nervous, what was it, but at the same time he was filled with joy and excitement somewhere, if Ajay was also feeling the same way for him.

"I—" Ajay began, but before he could continue, they were surrounded by a group of activists. The moment passed, leaving Ashok filled with anticipation and uncertainty. Ashok kept on thinking what it could be, he decided when the time was right, he would ask Ajay about it.

The next day, the rally was a success. Hundreds of people gathered outside the library, holding signs and chanting slogans. The more media coverage brought the issue to the forefront, and the city's municipal authorities finally agreed to meet with them.

In the days that ensued, the support of the masses in the city increased. The developer decided to push through with the demolition, but the public outcry made it difficult for him to even roam around the Fort area. Ashok and Ajay spent countless nights in quiet toiling on legal strategies and gathering more evidence to present to the court. Ashok was still stressed about what it could be that Ajay wanted to tell him the other night.

By the time the case went to court, the library had become a flashpoint for a larger debate about the future of Bombay. There was only one question that was looming all over the minds of everyone who got to hear about this case: Should a city sacrifice its past for the sake of economic growth, or was there a way to blend progress with preservation? As

many intellectuals pointed it out as the “Destruction of culture, in the name of Development”.

As soon as the hearing started in the court, the room was sealed with supporters, including prominent figures from Bombay’s cultural elite. Ashok, anxious yet determined for this great cause of preservation, submitted the letters that he and Ajay had discovered inside the secret chambers, proving the library’s importance as a historical landmark.

The judge, after much deliberation, ruled in their favour. The verdict came as the library would be preserved, but it would also be restored and modernised to become a cultural centre for the city—a place where the old and new could coexist to increase its footfall in modern times, keeping its progress in mind.

The victory was more than just a personal triumph for both of them. Their collective action brought them even closer than ever before. In the aftermath of the court ruling, the library was ordered to be restored by the Bombay Municipal Corporation. And its reading rooms once again filled with scholars, poets, and curious minds to learn and thrive in a welcoming space. It became a space for cultural gatherings, hosting literary fests and art exhibitions, bridging the void between Bombay’s colonial chronology and its contemporary fortune.

They stood outside the courthouse, surrounded by exhilarating supporters, celebrating their joy of being able to protect the beauty that Bombay harboured.

Ashok finally turned to Ajay. “What were you going to tell me the other night?” he asked.

Ajay smiled, his eyes filled with tears had a shine that Ashok had never seen before, “I was going to tell you that I love you,” he said very quietly, living the victorious moment of their collective action together.

“I’ve felt it for a long time, but I wasn't sure if——”

Ashok didn't let him finish. He pulled him in a quiet corner, putting his arms around him, covering him, and kissed him as if the world was fading away.

The restoration of the library commenced immediately after the court verdict. Ashok and Ajay were at the forefront, discussing with architects and historians to ensure that every detail will be preserved. The process was slow and thorough, requiring months of planning

and cooperation. Many newspapers interviewed them and asked them what was the reason that drove them to fight for a brick architecture that had been standing long in silence.

The old wooden stands at the library were refinished, the walls repainted, and the authentic chandeliers were carefully restored. Every inch of the library was being brought back to life, preserving its significance while modernising it for the coming generation.

Ashok spent his days at the law firm and his evenings at the library, watching the restoration. Ajay, who had returned to his studies, was equally involved. He had taken it upon himself to read the series of important journals the library harboured and also motivated his peers to visit it, which would adorn the library's reading rooms— for the students of history it depicted Bombay's rich history, from the days of British rule to the vibrant post-independence period.

In other words, they were able to transform the library into a delightful place. The library was no longer suffering from a lack of new books and has clearly overcome this problem and the reading areas are filled again with visitors who come to borrow important periodicals and books. The library also initiated such things as art exhibitions, poetry contests, and debates and became a magnet for the greatest minds in Bombay. It was no longer a stand-alone dreary edifice, instead, it evolved into an integral aspect of the soul of the metropolis – a laboratory of thought as well as an archive of living history.

For Ashok and Ajay as well, they now had a place to go to where they knew there would be less commotion and they could make use of the hidden corners of the reading rooms and have conversations freely. Inside the closed walls and out of the pearly eyes of the society, they were free to be themselves, cry and giggle without concern and make compliments of an intimate nature up to a point they are not able to do outside due to legal provisions. Love that had been concealed between them in the past now had the opportunity to flourish, even if it could only do so within the confines of the library.

As the city continued to expand, with Nariman Point rapidly changing into a bustling financial hub and skyscrapers piercing the skyline, leading to more Foreign Investments and a thriving economy that Bombay was blessed with, Ashok found solace in knowing that parts of the old Bombay would continue to live on.

“Even today one may visit the library and will not find any mention of Ashok and Ajay in the books, but the library to date stands as a testament of their collective action. And within its walls one can find their traces but not them. Eventually, the old cinema halls, all became a part of Bombay's living history, constantly evolving but never fully erasing the past. That's the beauty of a collective action of human nature that has led to the protection

of the library and awakened the people to the beauty and importance of their surrounding nature. In the aftermath, the decade was remarkable for Bombay as a whole, as the city was in a flux.”

As Ashok often used to walk through the streets of Bombay embracing the spirit it resorted to bring to him.

“But beyond the colonial heart of the city, in the northern suburbs, a darker transformation was taking place, one that only a few was talking about but felt by all. The rise of the Bombay Mafia, controlled by figures like Karim Lala and Haji Mastan, had begun to cast a long shadow over the Northern part of the city. The decade also is known for Bombay becoming a hub of smuggling, especially gold, as financial regulations being brought by the Indian government led to the output of black markets. What were once the entry points of basic commodities were now entry points of infamous smuggled gold with gangs led by men such as Mastan and Lala. These men, mythic characters in the accounts of the city’s criminal economy, had made their residences not only on gold smuggling, but also on film funding, protection rackets, and suburban real estate in the city’s growing outskirts.”

Ashok and Ajay, who lived in South Bombay, were far from the ascent of the mafia yet close at the same time. The city they love is changing and it is not only because of the process of modernization, but because of crime and corruption. House prices were soaring, and it was not uncommon for the criminal fraternity to be getting involved with inflating the prices, and there were whispers of cash generated from drug smuggling being filtered through the seemingly endless property booms.

Like many others, Ashok and Ajay strived to restore the architecture and cultural references of South Bombay and knew that the city was also being built by unknown people, artists, intellectuals, and developers, as well as criminals. The Bombay for which they were battling was a city of dual realities: The colonial grandeur was standing tall alongside the modern marvellous structures; The creative spirit the city housed was just balancing the emerging draconian structure of organised crime.

With the sunset falling over Marine Drive there was a silver lining of shine surrounding them, as they sat in quiet, their shoulders touching, a familiar comfort in the nearness that seemed only to be understood by them. This feeling, the sea, breeze and privacy is captured perfectly as they embrace in this scene which belongs to them alone.

Ajay looked away momentarily and his hand reached out and touched the back of Ashok's hand, and then just lingered there. Ashok let out an easy sigh and felt heat from Ajay not just from the body contact but from the admiration that they both shared. They had fought battles—some public, some private—and had created a world together, even if only in fleeting, stolen spaces.

Looking straight into the eyes of Ajay, Ashok instantly realised – the intensity brought a very subtle change in demeanour and the glance was gentle. For them, their love such that it is a secret, a secret between them, was enough. Here they had discovered a unique territory in a city which appeared to be in a state of a permanent transition. So being with him made Ashok free and as they sat together, knowing they'd always be together it did not feel the burden of the world and all its problems as it is told. It wasn't just about the place, but how they grew in time and grace. Together, souls began to blend, not just as lovers, but till the end.

Memories of a Begum (1950s to present)

by **Ridhima Dixit**

“So this is for your special edition column to know the city of Adab through me?”

“yes , maam that’s right.”

Well muskuraiye aap lucknow mein h.

1949 the tricolor was fluttering with pride in the independent India. My mother held her love for India dearly. She looked at me and said “ Aparna Aghnihotri ”, that is what she thought my name as .

My father worked in the BSF but his alcoholism got the best of him . He was kicked out and we shifted in a locality in Malihabad. He was a demon in a bottle and then one morning he was nowhere to be found .

As my mother patiently waited by the doorstep with hope she knew very well what she had done to herself. For a six year old it is achilles heel to contemplate as to what brought such a tragedy between a man and a woman : truth or lies. Ma had to take some decisions i could see her sadness gleam like the scent of Mogras you see on courtesan’s hair. She picked her sewing machine and settled for a garment shop in the bazaars of Ameenabad. Back then I vividly remember how the newspaper hawkers , cleaners , brokers would lighten up when awadh would have its sunrise . The recitations of namaaz made it ethereal . It felt like living inside an urdu couplet. My mother was broken having to come to terms with how much she lied to herself. Nonetheless our life came on track all the stitches and hems over chikan became our bread and butter.

When i was ten during supper , ma said that she got a contract to stitch sarees for the ram lila play during dussera . It was said that the chief minister would himself inaugurate the occasion . It was a big deal since lucknow is known for the way it treats its guests. From lucknow pact to gandhi’s speech , the city has a story of its own politics. Kindness and elegance makes the citizens of lucknow rich . The nawabi royalty seeped deep within us.

Money was kind to us now , ma and i strolled at the lucknow zoo on a fine spring afternoon as a getaway . She was looking at the sky , clouds and everything in her vicinity but what i saw was, her lips trying to break into a smile but they just couldn’t.

It made me uncomfortable. We sat by a pani puri stall . A group of women clad in chikan suits and vermilion on their heads were watching the animals with their husbands i believed that is what love looked like but the stars on their husbands’ shoulders intrigued me. Ma said that they were in police services and those stars were a part of their uniform “

they would look good on me ma right?" 1960s was not so women friendly despite the tehzeeb there were pardas that women had to still burn .

For my high spirits she took me in her arms and said "one day when you look at the sky make sure they see the perfect blue and not the tears of which you got no clue" wow i wished ma had given poetry a try , afterall melancholia is a poet's paradise.

My schooling years were not the ones you would pay the byscope wala and watch . It was not the la ven en rose for me given my father's reputation had a murphy effect on me . Had to settle for being the quiet one . The one that thought as if i were a fish with wings in Aliganj's pond .so confused as to whether fly or swim or both. When my matriculation was done , ma gifted me a pink kurti . It was as pretty as Begum Hazrat Mahal's palanquin . I was elated she said to wear it when i was the happiest. She never missed a chance to entrap me in her philosophical games.

October 1972 , when it was the most crucial phase for me as I had to decide what to do next . Our landlady would bug my mother with various matches she thought would be suitable for me. Ma would deflect her otherwise. The thought of settling down scared me a bit . I knew I was not ready and even if I were, what would happen to ma . She was pretty much the only thing ; the rock I stood by . The very notion of marriage disturbed me . Ma saw from my gestures that I was uncomfortable and gave me some rupees to get kabab paranthas . When I was at the sweet shop I saw the policemen hover around the corner . The manager gave them respect as if it was the nawab himself, with his train, had come to grace the shop with his presence. I was in awe that is what aura felt like . When i returned home ma was nowhere to be found . The landlady came and took me to the district hospital .

I saw ma on the hospital bed so pale and weak. I should have recognised that something was wrong with her when I once questioned her about the red stains in the sink a week earlier . She defended herself saying it was from beetroot or rooh afza . It was tuberculosis said the doctor. She had little time left. I stayed by her side all night . The next day she opened her eyes and stroke her fingers gently over my head . I woke up and saw her smile ; for the first time it was cordial it was something i had never seen before. In the afternoon she was no more . She was cremated and in that very moment I deeply felt what desolation was . I wondered how my father would have reacted over the news that the woman who was brave enough to love a feind like him ; got the end of suffering the last end of the straw . The landlady allowed me to stay because of my mother's goodness. I would help her with chores as to repay her generosity.

In 1974, when Kiran Bedi became the first female IPS officer she opened the floodgates for us as well.

I burned the midnight oil and saved up some money for the exam. Mr Tiwari whose wife was my mother's customer , ran a private tuition . He offered to educate me as he believed

I had something special within me. With the perseverance and hard work I did it . I got the call letter from the academy and went of for the training.

I was 25 when i returned to lucknow and had my first posting in kakori. My uniform was a celestial gauntlet for me. Youth within me was thrilled as to what life had to offer. I wished ma was there to see it. My first case came during the floods that happened in the city due to the Gomti river encroachments. I was asked to assist my superiors in the evacuation operations . Alongside, I would use some of my time to find the whereabouts of my father . Every registry , every possible local who could have been my father's acquaintance ; no stone was left unturned.

It was excruciating . So many nights I would spend baning by the moon like a kid who cries for his lost toy. This is something that was supposed to be in curtains as an amateur it was too much of risk already. Nonetheless the plight of people affected during these floods was unsettling . During one of our operations our team came across a girl who was looking for her mother . She was scared I remember her clutching my fingers for safety . She needed me : strangely I FELT I needed her too.

I took the little girl in . Many claimed as to be her parents but i could spot a lie when i saw one. The government congratulated us for our success in the evacuation operations. As a token of gratitude the whole police personnel was offered unlimited services at the lucknow mahotsav. This mahaotsav has been an intangible part of the city's history. This year we were having some of the biggest maestros in classical music . The only good i could think of was the dahi bhalle, the ferris wheel , the terracotta pottery, panipoori. And indeed it was . I decided to take the girl with me maybe she could recognise her parents there. As I was looking for something to wear I stumbled upon the tin box by my almirah . It was my pink chikan kurti that ma had given me . Hence my wardrobe was set. The little girl looked at me and giggled she said that i looked like a princess. I played along and said “ Really-?” She nodded playfully . I dressed her up as well . We started for the mahotsav . It was splendid , it was the nawabi culture at its peak . Me and the girl lost the track of time. We drew closer ;she slept on my lap and once we were back ; the ghazals were still humming in my eardrum . As i laid her on the bed; her innocent face was something I would never barter for. I got a fax from one of my source he also gave up on my personal quest . I felt dejected and burdensome . I was totally clueless as what would transpire next. All i knew at that second was , i want this girl to be by my side . So what maybe she is lost and stranded from her parents , she deserved her happiness and knew i could be there for that . What were the odds – that how could a single lady take care of a child , it would question the legitimacy of our relationship but what was I lacking : nothing !– a house, money , security , a name , a job . Anything a man would do for his kids . Yes as a woman i would be outcasted but that was so petite in front of the situation right here . I had made up my mind. I decided to raise her as my daughter .

Swara , Swara Aghnihotri is what I named her . She was happy on hearing this . In no time we blended as a mother daughter duo .

Everyday was now an adventure of its own. She became the light of our police station as well. I got promoted and everyone would fight for her attention when she would come back from city montessari . Six years went by like this . Oddly enough in her playfulness and youth i could feel ma's presence . She fixed something she had never broken . Of course people would hesitate to talk to me because an absence of wedlock over my neck haunted people more than the stars over my shoulder. The commisioner was very fond of Swara his daughter would play with her quite often . One day on the occasion of mangalwaar pooja of hanuman jayanti his wife organized a bhandara. These festivities were an impressive way to capitalize on nirvana something which i couldn't help but chuckle . We were simultaneously investigating a case where the culprit was at large as he had killed the newly appointed medical officer in the cm's hospital . Corruption , syndicates it was a labyrinth.

The commisioner recieved a lot of threats if he dared to plunge into the case. This made his wife a bit paranoid as well . He advised her to keep the celbrations minimalistic but that is what triggers the woman like her most. People like her detattach from logic instead of malice but you cannot say that because the pardas are important. Unwillingly she left her daughter in my care and asked me not to talk to her . She thought i would pollute her mind. Hari om hari! Turns out the killer was in the bhandara we grabbed him and he was shot . He was alive but capacitated . Joke was on her , because after that incident nobody wanted to go at her bhandaras ever again. Once bitten twice shy.

One thing which I realised about my life was that like justice it was poetic . It is a full circle. Swara pestered me to take her to the zoo . When I saw the sky my tears had no clue . I was the happiest . While purchasing cotton candy for her, I fell short of change. I was searching through my purse and I sensed someone behind me. A man of handsome demeanor . He said “ excuse here is 20 rupees if you don't mind” his molli through his dusky veiny hands and his smile gleaming with his calm eyes . Everything halted . I took the change and as I was about to return his favor Swara bumped into him. He took her in her arms . She agitated a bit but I said it was fine.

“ sorry I took you by surprise. Myself Manav desai advocate Lucknow high court” and “ I am.....” He added - “ Aparna Aghnihotri”-very well aware . I read about you in the newspaper articles . You are the queen of your life aren't you”

What was this , how was this . I was at loss of words . Swara was looking at me and there was a que from my driver . “ I have a meeting with the handloom owner in Ameenabad regarding a case of factory dispute and its restraining order” “ oh I see ...” he replied .

“Thank you Manus... I will remember this Namaste Shukriya.... And then I tassled in the car. Swara kept on laughing. It was silly on my part no doubt . After that meeting

the next day we had the court hearing . The owner was happy with the verdict being ruled in his favor . For his gratitude he offered a collection of sarees which were archival . Swara swooned over them more than me.

From stitching sarees to having been gifted I knew I had made it . Those streets of Ameenabad and the fleeting verses of Quoran brought tears in my eye.

Manav and I crossed paths in the court regarding a case of extortion and smuggling it was an interstate dispute and by now in this narrative we have established that this was bound to happen . Nonetheless , Manav was the prosecutor and I was in charge of his protection until he presented his testimony to the jury. He would visit Swara every now and then and she grew fond of him , well me too. Just a whiff of him would make me enchanted to see him .his acumen was at excellence . The case went to trial and it made headlines . That evening he took me to me vintage talkies in Hasratganj. The citylights , dusk's serenity infuses serendipity in itself. It is intoxicating and you cannot resist its charm and when you are with someone new its effect increases tenfold. I couldn't help but to be vigilant because the protector image never leaves .

“ You are quite the enigma aren't you”

“Not really it is just something new you know” I would fumble god knows why . “So Manav why did you choose law ?”

“i thought you would have solved my case as well – ms. Aghnihotri” . “ not that capricious of me” i smirked. We sat for movie it was enjoyable. The crowd grew in number by the time we came out . He came to my house once again . This time i was shifted in the government quarters near the aerospace centre . We sat for a glass of doodh jalebi .

Manav was quite active and observant . From the showpieces and paintings he got intrigued. “ever since my mother stitched clothes in ameenabad , art has always been inseparable. Its forms , powers everything about it goes beyond a movement.” Achaji “ quiite aristocratic for a poilcewoman”

“ hanji i am a cut from a different cloth” .

“ i see your reference madam... Waah” .. Shukriya..

Well before it could turn into a mushaeyra . Manav began to tell about his story. What was so surprising that when the floods had happened Manav lost his wife who was expecting their first child. This is was quite dramatic.

“ I found Swara in that same flood”

We both were taken aback . It was quite unsettling but it cemented our relationship . It definately grew into something more . Manav knew that nothing was so conventional in my life .

“Your story has been quite of its kind Ms. Aghnihotri. Swara is in good hands the best I would say .”

those floods were the reason why Manav decided to study law and help the public . His wife was a law student . He did it for her . So unconditional , so pure and so noble.

we decided to get married and did so at a beautiful venue at Alambagh. We had turned quite a few heads back then.

during curfews of 1992 , the political turmoil of Uttar Pradesh and the parallel urbanisation of lucknow in late 90s was ubiquitous to say the least. My position has an authority figure got serious with time. I was able to get through it because of my family . Markets got replaced by malls . Comics with phones . Internet and intolerance took over the social eco-chamber and with everything so far , my services were recognised as exemplary and received various accolades . Swara flourished with her career as a fashion designer . She got huge consignments with big fashion labels . Manav and I settled in a bungalow in Laalbagh with our labardols that Swara got me on my last day of service. And now on a fine Sunday morning you stepped on my door for an interview . I hope you enjoyed it .

“ it was by far one of the most unique experience in my career as a journalist thank you madam”

“ by the way congratulations for the opening of the coaching institute it will be inspirational for so many”

Hanji hanji It is in Ameenabad .

“the same place where.....?”

“yes you guessed it right”

Hastinapur's Legacy: A Tale of Courage, Heritage, and Sacrifice

by Keya Pathak

Hastinapur, ancestral home of Sukumar, was a place steeped in ancient lore. His father, a man of few words but a treasure trove of stories, would often regale me with tales of the Mahabharata. He'd paint vivid pictures of the epic battles fought on these very lands, of heroes like Arjuna and Krishna, and villains like Duryodhana and Karna. Growing up, he believed in the magic of these stories, in the connection between his village and the epic.

His village was a serene haven nestled amidst rolling hills. The air was crisp and clean, carrying the sweet scent of wildflowers and freshly tilled earth. The people were simple, their lives revolving around the rhythms of nature. Sukumar, a young, earnest farmer with a heart as pure as the morning dew. He worked tirelessly in his fields, his hands calloused, but his spirit unbroken.

Sukumar's father, an old man with a gentle smile, would often accompany him to the fields. His eyes, filled with wisdom and experience, seemed to hold the secrets of the universe. He'd tell Sukumar stories of the past, of the great kings who ruled these lands, of the heroes who fought for justice and righteousness. Sukumar listened with rapt attention, his young mind absorbing the tales like a sponge.

One evening, as they sat by the village pond, Sukumar asked his father about the Mahabharata. "They say that Hastinapur was the capital of the Kuru kingdom," he said. "Is it true?"

His father nodded. "It is true, my son. Hastinapur was a great city once, a center of power and learning. But greed and envy led to its downfall."

Sukumar's eyes widened. "Was it really that bad?"

His father sighed. "The Mahabharata is a story of human nature, of the good and the bad within us all. It's a warning to future generations, a reminder of the consequences of our actions."

As Sukumar listened to his father's words, he felt a deep sense of connection to his ancestors. He realized that he was not just a farmer living in a small village; he was part of a rich heritage, a legacy that stretched back thousands of years. And as he looked out at the vast expanse of fields and forests, he felt a surge of pride in his homeland.

Upon the arrival of a group of foreigners, led by a stern-faced Englishman named Dr. Harding, the village was thrown into a frenzy. Their strange attire, unfamiliar customs, and the accompanying soldiers filled the villagers with apprehension. Sukumar, along with the other young men, watched from a distance, their curiosity tinged with fear.

Dr. Harding, a renowned historian, had come to Hastinapur with the intention of uncovering the truth behind the ancient legends of the Mahabharata. He believed that the village, with its deep-rooted connection to the epic, held the key to unlocking the mysteries of its past.

The villagers convened a meeting at the village square to welcome the distinguished visitor. The village elder, a wise old man with a long white beard, addressed Dr. Harding, extending a warm greeting.

“Welcome, sir,” he said. “We have heard much about your knowledge of history. It is a pleasure to have you visit our village.”

Dr. Harding replied with a nod, his stern expression softening slightly. “Thank you,” he said. “I’m here to investigate the claims of the Mahabharata. I’ve heard many stories, but I need evidence.”

Sukumar, who had managed to slip into the crowd, listened intently. He was eager to share the stories he had heard from his father about the epic battles and legendary heroes.

“Our stories are evidence, sir,” he blurted out, his voice trembling slightly. “They have been passed down through generations,” he blurted out, his voice trembling slightly. My father used to tell me about Arjuna and Krishna, about Duryodhana and Karna.”

Dr. Harding’s eyes lit up. “That’s very interesting,” he said. “Can you tell me more about these stories?” Sukumar nodded eagerly, his fear subsiding. He began to recount the tales he had heard, his voice filled with passion and conviction. As he spoke, the villagers listened attentively, their faces reflecting a mixture of pride and nostalgia.

Dr. Harding, captivated by Sukumar’s stories, realized that Hastinapur was not just a quaint little village. Dr. Harding, captivated by Sukumar’s stories, realized that Hastinapur preserved the legends of the Mahabharata for centuries. It was a living testament to the ancient past. He knew that his journey had just begun, and that the secrets of the epic might be closer than he had ever imagined.

The sun beat down on the ancient site, casting long, dancing shadows across the dusty ground. Dr. Harding stood at the edge of the excavation site, her eyes scanning the landscape. The villagers, a curious and expectant crowd, watched from a distance.

“We’ll start with the site near the river,” she announced, her voice carrying over the sound of the gentle lapping of water. “According to the legends, it was a battlefield.”

With a nod, her team of archaeologists began to work, their shovels churning up the earth. The soil was dry and crumbly, revealing layers of history that had been buried for centuries. As they dug deeper, they found pottery shards, broken tools, and the occasional piece of metal.

“Look at this!” one of the archaeologists exclaimed, holding up a small, intricately carved stone. “It’s a pendant.”

“It’s beautiful,” Dr. Harding replied, examining the artifact. “It could be from the time of the ancient kingdom.”

As the days turned into weeks, the team made significant discoveries. They uncovered the remains of a large, fortified settlement, complete with a central courtyard and several smaller buildings. Inside the

buildings, they found evidence of a thriving civilization, including granaries, workshops, and even a rudimentary irrigation system.

One of the most exciting finds was a hidden chamber beneath the central courtyard. Inside, they discovered a treasure trove of artifacts, including gold jewelry, precious stones, and a collection of ancient scrolls. Dr. Harding was confident that they would eventually decipher the scrolls, even though they were written in a language that had long been forgotten.

As the excavation progressed, the villagers became increasingly fascinated by the discoveries. They had always known that their land had a rich history, but they had never imagined that the excavation would reveal it in such a dramatic way. Some of the older villagers even claimed to have heard stories about a hidden treasure buried beneath the site.

One afternoon, while the team was taking a break, an old woman approached Dr. Harding. "I have something to tell you," she said, her voice filled with a sense of mystery. "My grandmother used to tell me about a secret passage that led to a hidden chamber beneath the river."

Dr. Harding's eyes widened. "A secret passage?" she asked. "Can you tell me more?"

The old woman nodded. "It was said that a powerful spirit guarded the passage, and that only those who were pure of heart could enter."

Dr. Harding thanked the woman for her information and promised to investigate the claim. The following day, she led her team to the riverbank and began searching for any signs of a hidden passage. After hours of digging and exploring, they finally discovered a small, concealed opening in the rock face.

With a mixture of excitement and trepidation, Dr. Harding and her team entered the passage. The tunnel was dark and narrow, and the air was thick with the scent of damp earth. After what seemed like an eternity, they emerged into a large, underground chamber. The walls of the chamber displayed ancient carvings, and a massive stone sarcophagus stood at the center of the room.

As they approached the sarcophagus, they heard a faint rustling sound. A moment later, a small, winged creature emerged from the shadows. It was a guardian spirit, exactly as the old woman had described.

The spirit circled around the team, its eyes glowing with an ethereal light. Then, with a soft chirp, it flew towards the sarcophagus and landed on top of it. As the spirit hovered above the stone coffin, a strange energy began to pulse through the chamber.

Suddenly, the sarcophagus began to shake. The lid slowly creaked open, revealing the mummified remains of a powerful ancient ruler. A crown of gold and jewels rested upon the ruler's head, and a scepter of ivory and precious stones lay at his side.

Dr. Harding and her team stood in awe, witnessing a moment of history that had been lost for centuries. As they gazed upon the ancient ruler, they realized that their discovery was more than just a historical artifact. It was a testament to the enduring power of human civilization and the enduring spirit of the land.

The archaeological team had spent weeks sifting through the ruins, their faces etched with disappointment. Dr. Harding, the team's leader, stood amidst a pile of broken pottery shards, her expression one of disdain.

"These are just stones, nothing more," she declared, her voice carrying a hint of condescension. "There's no evidence of a great war here."

Sukumar, a young local historian, couldn't contain his frustration. "But our ancestors saw it, felt it," he argued, his voice rising. "These stories are part of our soul."

Dr. Harding merely waved him off. "Legends are just that, legends. They don't always reflect historical reality."

News of Dr. Harding's dismissal spread quickly through the village. The villagers, who had once welcomed the archaeologists with open arms, were now filled with anger and resentment.

"How can he doubt our history?" Villager named Ishwar Prasad exclaimed, his face flushed with indignation.

"He's a foreigner," Bibhuti added, nodding in agreement. "He doesn't understand."

Sukumar, sensing the growing tension, knew he had to do something. "We must find a way to protect our heritage," he declared, his voice firm.

Amrita, Sukumar's younger sister, watched the unfolding events with growing concern. "Brother, I fear this could lead to trouble," she said, her voice filled with worry. "The British are powerful."

Sukumar nodded. "I know, but we cannot let them erase our past. Our ancestors fought and died for this land, and we must honor their memory."

Determined to prove Dr. Harding wrong, Sukumar began to delve deeper into the village's historical records. He spent countless hours poring over ancient texts, searching for any clues that might support the legends of the great war.

As his research progressed, Sukumar began to uncover a web of intriguing details. He found references to a powerful ancient kingdom that had once ruled the region, as well as accounts of a devastating conflict that had brought about its downfall.

With this new evidence in hand, Sukumar approached Dr. Harding once again. "I believe I have found something that might change your mind," he said, presenting his findings.

Dr. Harding, initially skeptical, agreed to examine Sukumar's research. As she delved into the ancient texts, her expression softened. Perhaps, she thought, the legends were not merely tales, but a reflection of a forgotten truth.

A tense atmosphere filled the village square. Dr. Harding, standing on a makeshift podium, addressed the gathered crowd. "I have concluded that the Mahabharata is a myth," she declared, her voice clear and unwavering. "A tale created by a superstitious people."

Sukumar, his face filled with anger, stepped forward. "You are wrong!" he shouted, his voice echoing through the crowd. "Our stories are real."

Dr. Harding dismissed his protest with a wave of her hand. "Your emotions are clouding your judgment. There is no evidence to support your claims."

Lieutenant Thornton, the British officer overseeing the excavation, stepped forward. "You villagers are fools," he sneered, "clinging to your childish beliefs."

Sukumar's anger boiled over. "Enough!" he yelled, his voice filled with fury.

Before anyone could react, a brawl erupted between the villagers and the British soldiers. Sticks and stones flew through the air, and shouts and screams filled the square. In the midst of the chaos, Amrita found herself caught in the crossfire.

Sukumar, realizing the danger, pushed his way through the crowd to reach his sister. "Amrita!" he cried, his voice filled with terror.

But it was too late. Amrita lay motionless on the ground, blood staining her clothes. Sukumar knelt beside her, his eyes filled with tears. He cradled her body, his heart heavy with grief.

The villagers, horrified by the tragedy, turned on the British soldiers. A fierce battle ensued, with the villagers fighting for their lives and their honor. In the end, the villagers forced the British soldiers to retreat, leaving the village in ruins.

Sukumar, overcome with sorrow and anger, vowed to avenge his sister's death. He gathered the remaining villagers and formed a resistance movement. Together, they fought a guerrilla war against the British, using the forests and mountains as their sanctuary.

News of the uprising spread throughout the region, inspiring others to join the fight for freedom. The British, faced with a growing insurgency, were forced to reconsider their strategy. In the end, they agreed to negotiate a peace treaty with the villagers.

As the years passed, the memory of Amrita's sacrifice lived on. She became a symbol of the village's struggle for independence, a reminder of the courage and resilience of the human spirit. And though the Mahabharata may have been dismissed as a myth by some, it continued to be a source of inspiration and hope for generations to come.

A pall of grief covered the village. Amrita's death had left a gaping hole in the hearts of her loved ones. Sukumar, his eyes filled with sorrow, stood beside his sister's body. "Amrita... my sister... gone," he whispered, his voice barely audible.

The villagers gathered around Amrita's body, offering prayers and condolences. Their faces were etched with sadness and anger, and their eyes flashed with a determination that belied their grief.

Dr. Harding, haunted by the memory of Amrita's death, stood alone in her tent. She had been so focused on proving her theory that she had failed to see the consequences of her actions. "I never meant for this to happen," she murmured, her voice filled with remorse. "I was so focused on proving my theory."

Harding knew that she could never undo the damage she had caused. Amrita was gone, and the village was in mourning. She felt a deep sense of guilt and responsibility, and she was determined to make amends.

The British authorities were furious about the uprising. They viewed it as an act of defiance that was not tolerable. A large force of soldiers marched into the village, their weapons drawn.

The villagers, fearing for their lives, fled into the surrounding forests. Sukumar, knowing that a confrontation would only lead to more bloodshed, decided to negotiate with the British. He met with the commanding officer, a stern-faced man named Colonel Hastings.

"We are not rebels," Sukumar said, his voice calm but resolute. "We are simply trying to protect our heritage and our way of life."

Colonel Hastings was unimpressed. "You have killed one of our soldiers," he replied. "That will not be forgotten."

Sukumar knew that he had to find a way to defuse the situation. He suggested a truce, promising that the villagers would not attack the British if they were allowed to live in peace.

Colonel Hastings considered Sukumar's proposal. He knew that a prolonged conflict would be costly and dangerous. In the end, he agreed to the truce, but only on the condition that the villagers surrender their weapons.

The villagers reluctantly agreed to the terms. They handed over their weapons, their hearts heavy with sorrow. As they watched the British soldiers march away, they knew that their struggle was far from over. The memory of Amrita's death would continue to inspire them, and they would never forget the fight for their freedom.

The villagers, emboldened by their recent victory over the British, were determined to resist further oppression. Sukumar, their leader, addressed the crowd, his voice filled with passion. "We cannot let them intimidate us," he declared. "We must stand together."

The villagers, their faces lit by the flickering flames of their campfires, nodded in agreement. They had endured too much suffering at the hands of the British. They would not allow their heritage to be erased.

Dr. Harding, haunted by the memory of Amrita's death, felt a deep sense of guilt. She knew that she had played a role in the conflict, and she was determined to make amends. She approached Sukumar and the villagers, her voice trembling. "I beg of you, please stop this violence," she pleaded. "I was wrong."

The villagers, however, were too angry to listen. They had seen firsthand the devastation caused by the British, and they were not willing to forgive.

As the British forces advanced on the village, the villagers prepared to defend themselves. They had gathered whatever weapons they could find, and they were determined to fight to the bitter end.

Sukumar stood at the front, his face a mask of determination. "We will fight for our home," he declared, his voice ringing out across the battlefield. "We will fight for our heritage."

The battle was fierce and bloody. The villagers fought with a courage that belied their small numbers. They used the terrain to their advantage, ambushing the British soldiers from the shadows.

Despite their bravery, the enemy outnumbered and outgunned the villagers. The British eventually managed to break through their defenses, forcing them to retreat. Sukumar, realizing that the village was doomed, directed his people into the nearby forest.

As they fled, Sukumar looked back at the burning village. He knew that their fight was far from over. The British might have won this battle, but they could not defeat the spirit of the people. The villagers would return, stronger than ever, to reclaim their home and their heritage.

The morning sun painted the sky in hues of orange and pink as the villagers prepared for the final confrontation. As the villagers prepared for the final confrontation, their faces etched with determination and their hearts filled with a mixture of fear and hope.

The British forces, led by Colonel Hastings, advanced on the village. Mercenaries swelled their ranks from neighboring kingdoms, eager to plunder the riches of the land.

The clash was brutal and unrelenting. Soldiers clashed swords, fired guns, and filled the air with screams and the sound of metal clashing. Villagers fought with a ferocity that belied their small numbers, their courage fueled by a deep love for their home.

Sukumar, leading the villagers from the front, fought with a reckless abandon. His sword flashed like lightning, parrying the blows of his enemies. "For Amrita!" he cried, his voice carried by the wind. "For Hastinapur!"

Despite being wounded several times, Sukumar refused to give up. He fought on, his body battered and bloodied, his spirit unbroken.

As the battle raged on, Sukumar found himself facing Colonel Hastings. The two men fought with a ferocity that belied their age. Their swords clashed and sparks flew, their eyes locked in a deadly dance.

In the end, Sukumar emerged victorious by delivering a fatal blow to the British commander, although he paid the price with mortal wounds. As he fell to the ground, he looked up at the sky, a bittersweet smile on his face. He had avenged Amrita's death and protected his village.

The battle raged on for hours, with neither side giving ground. The villagers, inspired by Sukumar's sacrifice, fought with renewed vigor. They pushed the British back, forcing them to retreat.

The victory was hard won, but it was a victory, nonetheless. The villagers had defended their home and their heritage. They had shown the world that even the smallest of nations could stand up to the greatest empires.

However, the victory came at a great cost. Many villagers had lost their lives, and the village itself was in ruins. But as the villagers surveyed the devastation, they knew that their sacrifice had not been in vain. They had secured a future for their children, a future free from the tyranny of the British.

As the sun began to set, casting long shadows across the battlefield, the villagers gathered together to mourn their fallen. They remembered Sukumar, their fearless leader, and the countless others who had given their lives for their homeland.

In the distance, they could hear the sound of marching soldiers. The British were regrouping, preparing for another attack. But the villagers were not afraid. They had faced death and triumphed. They would face whatever challenges the future held, united and determined.

The village was a somber place, the echoes of the recent battle still lingering in the air. Yet, amidst the grief, there was also a sense of triumph. The villagers had defeated the British, defending their homeland and their heritage.

Sukumar, now an elder, stood before the gathered villagers. "We have lost many," he said, his voice filled with sorrow. "But we have also gained something. Our unity, our spirit."

The villagers nodded in agreement. They had faced death and triumphed, proving that even the smallest of nations could stand up to the greatest empires.

As the sun began to set, the villagers gathered around a bonfire. They shared stories of the battle, of the sacrifices made by their loved ones. They also shared stories of the Mahabharata, the ancient epic that had inspired them to fight for their freedom.

Dr. Harding, haunted by the memory of Amrita's death, felt a deep sense of guilt. She knew that she had played a role in the conflict, and she was determined to make amends.

She approached Sukumar and the villagers, her voice filled with sincerity. "I will leave Hastinapur," she said. "I will spread the truth about your village, about your stories."

Harding's words surprised the villagers. They had never expected her to apologize, let alone offer to help them. But her sincerity also touched them.

"Thank you," Sukumar replied. "Your words mean a lot."

Harding packed her bags, preparing to leave. As she looked back at the village, she felt a newfound respect for the people who had fought so bravely for their homeland.

As Harding departed, the villagers gathered around the bonfire once again. Sukumar, now an elder, continued to pass down the ancient tales of the Mahabharata. He told stories of the Pandavas and the Kauravas, of the epic battle that had shaped the destiny of their land.

The villagers listened with rapt attention, their faces filled with wonder and awe. They knew that their stories were more than just myths; they were a living connection to their ancestors, a testament to the enduring spirit of their people.

Hastinapur, once a shattered village, was slowly rebuilding. The scars of the war were still visible, but the villagers were hopeful. They had faced adversity and triumphed, and they were determined to create a better future for themselves and their children.

And so, the story of Hastinapur continued, a tale of courage, sacrifice, and the enduring power of the human spirit. The Mahabharata, once dismissed as a myth, had become a living legend, a testament to the rich and complex history of a people who had refused to be forgotten.

Years had passed since the epic battle that had shaped the destiny of Hastinapur. The village, once scarred by war, had slowly healed. The villagers had rebuilt their homes, their lives, and their hope.

Sukumar, now an old man, sat with his grandson by the village well. The boy, his eyes wide with wonder, asked his grandfather to tell him more about the great battle.

Sukumar smiled. "It was a time of darkness," he began, his voice filled with a mixture of pride and sorrow. "But also a time of hope. Our village stood strong, united against our enemies."

The boy listened intently as Sukumar recounted the events of that fateful day. He heard stories of bravery and sacrifice, of love and loss. He learned about Amrita, the young woman who had given her life for her people, and about Sukumar's own heroic deeds.

As Sukumar finished his story, the boy looked at his grandfather with admiration. "You were so brave," he said.

Sukumar chuckled. "We were all brave," he replied. "It was not just me. It was our village, our spirit."

The camera panned over the village, now peaceful and serene. The sun was setting, casting a golden glow over the land.

Sukumar's narration continued. "Hastinapur, a village forever changed. But the spirit of our ancestors lives on in us. The stories of the Mahabharata will continue to inspire generations to come."

The boy nodded, his eyes filled with a sense of purpose. He knew that he was part of something greater than himself, a legacy that would endure for centuries to come.

And so, the story of Hastinapur came to an end. It was a story of courage, sacrifice, and the enduring power of the human spirit. The story of Hastinapur would serve as a reminder for generations to come about the importance of standing up for what is right, even in the face of overwhelming odds.

The Story of Remembrance

by Kulwant Singh

Aayansh waiting for his metro to arrive at gtb nagar metro station. The day was little crowded than usual, it took at least 10 minutes to arrive metro which was halted at the previous station because of some technical issues. He reached his office in a rush in the fear of getting late. Unfortunately, in clothes that were dripping rain from head to toe.

Although he loves the rain as it makes him feel happy but only when he himself not in the rainstorm. He is more of a spectator in the rain show.

At the entrance of newspaper company he started shedding water from his clothes which might not even work for the way he was drenched.

Suddenly, from his left arrive one of his colleague Dhruv.

Hey Aayansh quite a rain huh

He replies, why?

But you love the rain?, says Dhruv Anyway, the director have asked for you.

Aayansh replies, thanks for telling. I will go in a minute.

“Sure”, Dhruv replies.

Aayansh quickly settle his clothes, hair and made himself in a presentable self.

He picks up his bag which was lying on the chair near the gate. He quickly grabbed his bag and runs towards the creator head office.

May I come in ma'am, asks Aayansh

Come in, comes the voice from behind the door

He enter the office he seems Ms. Ila sitting on his reading chair with hot cup of black coffee in front of her table. She was wearing her specs and was in her zone. Everyone in the office knew what that was meant – the breaking of the shell. That she must have not liked the writing piece and really disappointed in the writer.

I stood there for five minutes without even being noticed by her or she just likes it that way when she is in her reading zone. I slyly glanced at the write – up. It was titled :-

The title seemed a little unscholarly may be that is why she is seemed so unsatisfied. I was lost in my own world, rolling my eyes from here and there looking at the beautiful picture of nature, poets

and quotes hung at the walls of the room and featured articles pinned at the green board on my right near the window. Suddenly, a voice echoes in my ears.

Sit down.

I looked at her and in a haste saying, ah, yes!! Settles down on a chair situated diagonally from hers.

After a few seconds, she removes her specs and places it on the table.

I was sitting carrying my nerves on my sleeves and anticipating of what going to happen next.

But, she asks, how long have you been working with the content creators department.

I replied, it's been 6 months as Co-writer and co-editor mam.

She stares at me and then starting looking for something's in her stake of papers. However, her stare looks blind to me completely as if she was lost in her own world and I was blurred out from her vision

I have also done internship for 6 months with the weekly magazine before this, I added.

She looks up from searching and says, there a 2 weeks left for the month to end and we need a story to be publish in our month magazine. She seemed extremely serious while saying as if it was a matter of life and death to her.

Okay. I replied.

And I need you to write a story. A story which is wellled up with human emotions and rich in cultural evoking the deep buried sentiments.

I was thrilled at what I heard but I was keeping it polite to not mess this up.

She suddenly in her assertive tone, you have limited time left. So get back to work.

I opened my mouth to say, Thank you so much ma'am. I was waiting for this opportunity to write a story solely by myself and especially to be featured in the monthly magazine. I will surely not disappoint you..."

You directly report this to me, Now leave, a voice intervened in my interior monologue and brought me back to the ground.

And without saying anything I just came out of the room in a little sour patch on my happiness. Is because of how she talks. One might even doubt their existence. But anyhow, I am pretty excited about this but nervous at the same moment.

It is a good thing that I have gotten this opportunity but now the problem is to find a story which touched the bar, ms Ila have set or goes beyond it. The latter seems a little more difficult.

.....

I stand in the midst of some European countryside where the architect predominant your existence. The place brings me the most luxurious experience I ever had. A place where you are just

a mere passer-by to its whole beauty and grandiose. It is not the grandiose architecture but the richness in embracing the people coming to it from everywhere. The USP of this place is the inclusivity in culture. It never fails you to feel astonished i.e., *Connaught Place*.

Here, lies the Big company, Embassies, Newspaper Headquarters, Government offices, along with markets such as Janpath, Gujarati market, book stalls, jewellery stalls and a number of food Bhavans. It is a hub for the things that you can explore in a place like Delhi. You find different people roaming, friends chatting, Hanging out. People making reels and recording videos for their vlogs. C.P. is one of the wonder of Delhi and also a beating heart that is always on run.

Apart from all the lights and buzz of the moment. I do find CP as one of the symbolic place for British imperialism particularly because of the huge white structure and meticulous designs. I have always wondered about its architecture. It has always intrigued me. The designs is so foreign that it always reminds of the sufferings and pains of the past. Though the foreignness fades when people from different parts and backgrounds embrace and surrounds it.

The memories of Pain is fleeting bringing a tight lipped smile with a little glimmer in the eyes. The tears perhaps are now lost in all the glitz of the fast life.

It's been quiet some time that I am now part of this place now.

—Flashback—

Instantly, this diverted everyone's mind from laughter to more serious thinking, looking at each other in a pensive mode.

Everyone was silent. For a few seconds, it felt like we have been put on a gun point, experiencing a shiver and a numbness by the question.

It was a weekend and we all decided to give a break from all the hustle of the college curriculum and spend some real quality time. All four of us Advik, Aryan, Sanju and of course me. We have been together from the first day of our college. Since then we have grown really close with each other that we sometimes acts like parents to each other. We look out for each other in every situations. Emotionally. Financially. And many more. I guess, humans or animals develops these survival instinct over time. Perhaps also, it is because we are all alone together here away from our family.

So, yes it was our day out it was Advik's idea to watch a movie or for karaoke.

Everyone agrees with the idea of Karaoke.

When we were going to our destination while enjoying the profound view of lush green tree & plants in the center of Connaught place. A Girl bumped in making a falling of lot of books from her hands with Tad Tad tad tad!!!

"I m really sorry"

I quickly bend over to pick up the bundles of books and hand it over to her.

It' Okay, she replies.

I apologise once again as her books got a little bit of dirt from the road. She politely said, "It is really fine not a big deal".

And started to walk into her direction but with a sudden twirl comes and says, Excuse me!

I faced her with a ninety degree angle and replies, Yes.

She lifted her android and asks for a café direction. I looked over and explained her the directions. It was the same café that we were headed. I hesitated a bit to ask her to accompany us but till the time I would ask she was already on the move to the café.

And then we politely walked behind her for a moment it was like we were following her.

But then I directed my attention to our day-out and not her's.

We entered the café and finding a table for four. There was a bunch of girl-friends sitting besides us. A few moments later, I saw the same girl entering the café and was peeping up on toes, as if looking for someone. She waved her hand to a girl standing near the door to restroom. The girl came and quickly grabbed her by hand and hug her. Then they started moving towards a table and it seemed the bunch of girl – friends was her whole gang. She glances at me and then stopped.

"You are here!!!", she says.

Uh!! Yes, I replied.

Her friend asked if we know each other she telecasted the whole bumping episode again to her friend. Her friend gave a very plain reaction with, "okay".

She sat with her friends and ordered herself a cocktail. A few minutes later, she asked if we would like to join in for the dinner.

Everyone in my group seemed a little surprised. But then Advik said yes with his over melodious tone, "yeah we would love to". And all of a sudden we were sitting in a table for 8 people.

Phew!! That was quick.

The waiter was writing the orders in his small notepad.

I was sitting with my hands on the table observing with all the socialising I have done in one day. It was quite an achievement for me.

What would you like in beverage ?, a voice came and looked at my left, it was ugh...

Hmm... With a fumble I said, "A lemonade".

The waiter took all the order and went in the kitchen.

She looked and "I am sorry we didn't get the chance to introduce ourselves My name is Shreya".

"I am Aayansh, nice meeting you Shreya".

With this every one started their introduction while sipping their drinks. And it carried on to the point where we were all sharing our _experiences & incidents of life.

Shreya says, do you face any trouble in the city aayansh ? Have you encounter anything bizarre?.

Actually, I have but they are of less gravitas nothing important. But, yes living in such metropolitan is quite a task especially by all yourself.

Yeah!!! That's true but how you solve or manage the situation Shreya does not enquires further.

It depends on the way we interact to the person who are judgemental or maybe not. Forget about it and tell me which sports you love.

Shreya: I like chess, badminton, running. And you?

Aayansh: I also like running and dart, let's play dart.

Shreya with her best friend Aakansha and aayansh go to the dart playing area. Later, everyone joins to play. There was a two three games also on which we scattered ourselves.

Suddenly, Sanju's curiosity increases by looking at the chandelier which give him British or European style of the restaurant.

Out of the sudden with a loud voice Sanju strikes a question, "does this architecture is really British or it is native to some other European country"?

His voice was this loud that the whole restaurant seems to acknowledge to him with their glares.

This was the question which put everyone in a breathing statues.

He again asked the same question but now in a sophisticated manner. The question was fascinating that inputs and answers was coming in.

which he asked before, but now they all are giving answer to each other that it is an imperial architecture britisher have made, to have symbolic values in which they can rule the country from Delhi specifically.

Sanju says, why Delhi ? They could have made it Connaught Place in any part of India. For instance in madras, Bombay, Bengal they can do it easily in Bengal but why in Delhi ?

(Who said this): Might be due to the significance of Delhi through the history but they have made their home in the hill like Mussoorie and other kind of building in another area and other parts of India.

Aayansh says, "I think, if they had build Connaught place in Bengal or any other area where they had already a strong presence so people think they don't have strong army or power, but as they built it in Delhi this exerts power and authority they enjoyed. And the architecture it might be British.

Shreya - intertwine in the middle of the conversation saying that, no it's not an British architecture, it's an Georgian and British don't have their own style architecture. Because they were colony of Britton which is in north west France region. After some time, Roman & greek mostly were the major influencer along with their language including latin. They had influences further to their colony specially British who rule over whole subcontinent.

Even the exam of civil servant (Indian administrative officer) was used to held in English. Imposing a foreign language on the native land and forcing them to adopt the language and their culture, for example :- the third charter act, 1833 . and they have to learn Latin and Greek to such officer level but for sepoy and other officer it was not the case instead they have to maintain loyalty, acceptance of ideology, ways of living etc.

Aayansh and his friend stands there as if she was giving sermons and here they stand in with utmost gratitude and respect to receive it.

After she was done, Aayansh says, you spoke with so much passion about it. How did you know so much?

Shreya --- I studying literature in my college and I am also fond of history.

Obviously Sanju was in so much awe of Shreya and wanted to know further as for the nerd he is and just so he again intervened with a number of questions. He is asking question from Shreya. On the other hand, Advik captures everyone with his singing of (song name). A perfect 90s Hindi Classic.

Aryan also join Advik along with Shreya 's friend and they all are now doing karaoke while aayansh accompany Sanju and Shreya listening their songs, doing leg pulling.

Everyone seems to enjoy the karaoke part the most.

As Shreya sees her watch it was five past twenty, she tell Akanksha and everyone to go to the home. With the karaoke coming to end we all went to home.

-----Present day-----

He went to his desk and sat down and starting thinking about the story. What kind of story would evoke the memories and emotions of the people, as briefed.

I started a search on engine of different genres, places, news, articles etc, that are in trend. So to figure out what to write. For what I was doing I needed to draw some inspiration to write.

I searched whole day but nothing could capture my attention or interest.

Now, I was being a little paranoid about the whole situation.

I looked at my wrist watch.

5:30, it is.

I looked outside, it is still drizzling. It rained whole day and it's quite cold also. I picked up my bag and leave for home.

Aayansh reached his station GTB nagar. He goes to his apartment and order his favourite meal— *Biryani* for dinner. In mean time, he thought of taking a bath.

Even while bathing he thought of the children, he saw while returning, playing in the park carefree or should say tension free. These are their golden days, as it use to be our, but then one day it all

will vanish. They will also, like us, struggle to achieve something in life for which they can feel proud of, something which will give them a sense of contentment.

Right now, for him life is just completing one task and earning money to survive in this very expensive civilisation. Happiness just seems like a naughty kid who rings your door bell and runs away just to irritate you even more. He remembers, when he was young he used to play all day all that his father had to come and drag him to home for dinner. The bond between him and his Dadu—*The whole curious questioning sessions, him sneaking into his room he somehow always senses that, I was standing behind. So he just quickly closes the book and cover the book name.*

The Ring bells...

He comes out of the shower quickly wraps a towel around his waist and reaches for the main door. Leaving the floor with the imprints of wet feet behind him.

He took his order with half open door so as not to reveal himself much. He put the dinner on the table and went to dress up.

8: 30 it is now.

While eating, he thought about food and the restaurants beautifully decorated with lights and wooden designs

He comes again to his thought, but this time he tries to think about the plot for the story with mental notes to how to build a story— what to include—culture, people, relationships, emotions, human-centric. Story that evokes sentimentality, what will be my characters and what will be my target audience.

By this time he was done with his dinner and was cleaning the dishes.

While brewing his coffee. He went on with his process of weaving his story. He tries to read some articles or magazines from where he can frame the narrative as to not plagiarise himself with the story.

After spending some time, he began to frame a story and decide to begin his narration from the British colonial power and how C.P was built with a certain kind of elite classists attitude completely transforming India into British alike society.

Transition line missing

Aayansh think that this idea will be good and will evokes the sentimentality along with.....

So, he made his fictional character “Rehan”. In the period of somewhere 20th CE working as a sepoy and he belongs to working class family. He mostly enjoy with his best friend company “Anand” and he work as an agriculture labour.

One day, when zamindar come to collect tax from the people. It was a uptight situation because they did not have fixed amount to pay. so the ryot scolded and beat them as well as ask for any valuable item they have,

Anand's mother quickly goes inside the kitchen taking out her jewellery which is given by her mother-in-law, after a few seconds later "ma tum ye Kya kar rahi ho", Anand says in a whispering voice and grabs the earrings from behind as he neither wants to sell nor wants to give anybody else because of the love and the bond between them (him and his mother) then his mother gives only a few pieces of jewellery to those rioters. With a warning and threats they left to repeat the same to others in misery.

Anand was left stunned with the recent event and was thinking about the jewellery. It was his mother's prized possession not because of the material value of it rather the emotional value. Perhaps in his mind he has promised himself to bring those jewels of her mother back.

It was not only the jewellery but the family dignity that has been spoiled by these lawbreakers and wreckers. But also, because they could not pay the tax, so he decided to work as a newspaper seller.

After working so long, he saw a man sitting on a bench stranded, inside a railway station like he has lost something very precious, while staring at his uniform, made of khaki colour, big boots, small moustache and with a thin line of *surma*, so, Anand approaches him and says "Saab akhbar loge" in a hesitant and angry manner as he is struggling to keep up his emotion.

Rehan says "aaj ka akhbar milega" he quickly took it and put it aside and lost in his world where he has everything, as he does not have to worry about anything, walking in the fields while singing a song....., Anand still looking at him while he is daydreaming, after the train whistle, his daydreaming breaks, then Anand does not waste his time going to the farm as he has set a target of selling newspapers, for inspection whether crops are in good or bad condition, if they aren't then to find a solution, meanwhile, Rehan goes back to his work reading a newspaper, going through the articles, he came across with one of the articles stating the scaling of the freedom struggle movement.

"The struggle for freedom and the suppressed voices are now being heard to the colonisers and have shaken their thrones..."

Rehan sitting on a bench in a serious contemplation thinks how he has changed. There were times when he was up against the British rule and to their ways. But now he, himself is a part of this brutal regime.

He remembered what his teacher said to him.....

One of the members of his unit calls him saying that we immediately have to join the force to stop the protest against the Britishers' uprising in Amritsar. They have to leave now. He nods his head in agreement. He briskly picks up his bag and the newspaper. He moves towards the train departing for Amritsar from Ferozpur station.

Anand who was selling the newspaper at the platform glances at the faces of the two men as they rush to catch the train. He seemed to have a dilemma after looking at their uniforms and just stands there in concern. It was this moment that Anand realises his potential and his aim for life. He decides to join the newspaper company "daily newspaper". To write about the brutality faced by his family and his people. He found a medium to give justice to his people.