

# *Editor's Note*

Plans, especially long term ones, have a funny habit of gradually transforming into something different as the execution takes place. The change is incremental at each iteration, almost unnoticeable, but those incremental changes add up to result in something rather different from one's expectations. Not that that's a bad thing. On the contrary, the incremental changes over time lend a sense of temporal relevance that the plan, if carried out as per the original plan, would have lacked.

I've noticed something along these lines as we've worked on Quarks over the past eight months. The magazine as planned, and the magazine you are holding now have significant differences. Several developments took place, both in IISc, and the outside world, which demanded appropriate representation in the magazine.

One of the key differences to notice is that there is no more a full blown coverage of Pravega, as was the norm until the previous issue. Over the past year or two, there has been a growing minority who thought Pravega wasn't quite adhering to its founding ideals, and was straying into mediocrity. But as often is the case with minority opinion, the sound of it was drowned in the din of the majority's dialogue. We felt it would be appropriate for Quarks to have a critical look at Pravega in hopes of sparking meaningful dialogue about the subsequent editions of Pravega.

Another issue we've dealt with is that of student politics. Although not a priority for most students here, recent events in universities across the country have created an aura of mistrust and suspicion around student movements in general. In an essay on the topic, we've discussed the why's of student politics, and how it is absolutely essential for a healthy democracy.

On a lighter note, it's been five years since the UG programme was started, and in particular, five years since the Humanities course started. Many components of the course started out as experiments in teaching, and it's interesting to note what pattern they've settled in after five years. We have opinions of the instructors as well as the students about the course, and how they felt about it. There is also a rather tongue-in-cheek review of the films the students of the 2018 batch made as a part of their Humanities projects.

Then there's the article on the graduating batch, with details on where people are going after four, or in some cases, five years at IISc. With a Rhodes scholar in tow, as well as people going to other great institutions of learning, they've set the bar rather high for the subsequent years.

The majority of the articles in this issue have a common theme tying them together. And that is the idea of introspection, i.e. looking inwards. This introspection can be at the individual or at the level of groups and institutions. Hence the cover page.

And finally, the magazine owes its existence to a group much larger than the Quarks team. This includes, amongst other people, the entire UG community, the instructors for the UG programme, the helpful people at the Archives and Publications Cell, our outgoing Dean Professor Umesh Varshney, our new Dean, Professor Anjali Karande, and the Director, Professor Anurag Kumar.

In hopes that we never get too busy to introspect,

Yours sincerely,

Sayantan Khan,

Editorial Team Coordinator

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# LIFE AS AN UNDERGRAD

Fulfilling the promise

Pravega :Stating the obvious

Humanities at IISc

A space of one's own



Photography  
Credits:  
Deepak Vinod,  
Abhinav Jain





## FULFILLING THE PROMISE

As they depart from the nest that has nurtured them for the last four years, CONNECT takes a closer look at where students from the second batch of the BSc (Research) course are headed.

SUBHAYAN SAHU\* and KARTHIK RAMASWAMY+  
This article first appeared in the May 2016 issue of Connect.

\*Subhayan Sahu is an undergraduate student in his third year  
+Karthik Ramaswamy is the Editor of Connect, at the Archives

Come September, Suhas Mahesh, currently a senior undergraduate (UG) student in IISc, will be joining Oxford University for his PhD in condensed matter physics, with the prestigious Rhodes Scholarship under his belt. Only the third Rhodes Scholar<sup>1</sup> in the Institute's 107-year-old history, Suhas, who will graduate later this summer, is part of the second batch of IISc's four-year BSc (Research) programme which started in 2011. Until then, IISc, India's premier research institution, had focused exclusively on post-graduate education.

### Focus on Research

Not surprisingly, a majority of the students graduating this year intend

**"...the biggest benefit of being a UG student at IISc is the postgraduate nature of the Institute"**

to pursue a career in research. "Like most of my batchmates, I joined IISc with an interest in research [and] the biggest benefit of being a UG student at IISc is the postgraduate nature of the Institute," says Suhas. Balaji Jagirdar, Professor,

Inorganic and Physical Chemistry, and one of the two Associate Deans of the UG Programme, concurs with this view. "Students joining this Institute experience all the research activities that go on here and the path for the students to go into a career in research is well laid out," he adds.

The course work emphasizes hands-on research in world-class laboratories, ensuring that these young minds appreciate the rigors and joys of doing science. Experiments in laboratories compliment lectures taught by faculty members who are among the best researchers in their respective fields. At the end of their first one and a half years, students choose their major in any one of the following subjects: Biology, Chemistry, Environmental Science, Materials, Mathematics or Physics. In their final semester, students also do a research project with one of the several faculty members of the Institute. This emphasis on research cannot be overstated, feels Kishalay De, a fourth year Physics major, who is going to Caltech for a PhD in astrophysics.

As part of their curriculum, students are also expected to take

courses in engineering and the humanities. The engineering courses allow them to explore the real-life applications of the basic sciences, while the humanities courses give them an opportunity to understand the social context in which science is done. The interdisciplinary nature of the curriculum has been recognized and appreciated by the students.



**"My chosen area of research is neuroscience, a field which is interdisciplinary by itself [and] having both biological and mathematical training is useful for doing this science"**

1Source: Wikipedia

Harsha Gurnani, a graduating Biology major, who has received the sought-after Wellcome Trust Fellowship for her graduate studies, says, "My chosen area of research is neuroscience, a field which is interdisciplinary by itself [and] having both biological and mathematical training is useful for doing this science."

## Climbing the Research Ladder

De and Gurnani along with many other fourth-year students have already bagged offers from some of the best universities in the world, including Caltech, MIT, Harvard, Cornell, Yale, Berkeley, Princeton, University College London, Max Planck Institutes and Oxford to name a few. Though going abroad to pursue graduate studies is a popular option, a few students are considering doing their PhDs in India. In the past, most Indian universities required a Master's degree for admission into a PhD programme. "However that situation is changing," clarifies PS Anil Kumar, also an Associate Dean and Associate Professor, Department of Physics. He adds that opportunities for research for UG students, both within and outside India, will increase in the near future. He says, "More universities are taking note of the UG programme in IISc, and hence the placement scenario is only going to improve with time."

## Staying Home for Another Year

But not all students who wish to pursue research are leaving the In-

stitute. At least not yet. After four years of study, IISc's UG students have the option of staying back for a fifth year to earn a Master's degree at the Institute itself, an option that a number of graduating students are planning to exercise. According to Anil Kumar, this gives the students an opportunity to investigate their final year research project more deeply and also to explore other avenues that may lie ahead of them. The precedent to continue at IISc for another year was set by the batch of 2011, when 47 out of the 83 enrolled students opted to get a Master's degree at IISc. One of them, Pranav Mundada, decided, in his final semester, that he wanted to work in new field, and therefore stayed back. This year, he will be going to Princeton University for a PhD to "try to make a fault tolerant quantum computer."

## Changing Tracks

At least three of them from this cohort of graduating students are planning to study a subject in graduate school that they did not major in: economics. Sabareesh Ramachandran, a Mathematics major, is one of these three. He is headed to the London School of Economics for a Master's in Economics, armed with a Commonwealth Fellowship. "I intend to work in public policy or developmental economics. I think the [Humanities] course on governance made me look at this career option more seriously. I find in economics a nice avenue to work on pertinent social issues while also using the analytical abilities that we developed in our maths courses", he says.

*Top to bottom:*  
Pranav Mundada, Princeton (PhD)  
Kishalay De, Caltech (PhD in Astrophysics)



**"More universities are taking note of the UG programme in IISc, and hence the placement scenario is only going to improve with time"**



**"I find in economics a nice avenue to work on pertinent social issues while also using the analytical abilities that we developed in our maths courses"**

## Acing Entrance Exams

Another indicator of the quality of the UG programme is how well IISc's students have been doing in the national-level entrance exams for graduate programmes. This year, Tapan Goel, a Physics major, has stood first in CSIR NET Physics; Ullas Chembazhi, majoring in Biology, has got the first rank in GATE Biotechnology and Nidhin Kurian, a Materials major, has topped the GATE Materials exam. Many of the top rankers in these entrance exams have also received offers for PhD and Master's programmes in schools.



**Ullas Chembazhi, majoring in Biology, has got the first rank in GATE Biotechnology**

students. This year saw Fortune 500 companies like Goldman Sachs, Capital One and Walmart coming to IISc, specifically looking to recruit UG students. One such recruit is Sameer Shah, a fifth year student majoring in Mathematics, who was hired by Walmart as a data analyst.

## Environment of Excellence

As the programme gets older by a year, UG students at IISc, enriched by its environment of excellence in research and pedagogy, have more than just lived up to the faith imposed on them by the Institute. Their stories of success are testament to the quality of education they have received. Suhas, who also moonlights as a connoisseur of classical languages, ends with an old Sanskrit adage:

santah sadābhigantavyā yadi  
nopalidiśantyapi |  
yāstu svairakathāsteshāṁ  
upadeśā bhavanti tāḥ||

“Keep the company of the wise, even if they aren't teaching lessons.  
For whatever they tell in passing, they turn out to be lessons.” ■



*Abhinav Jain ,Financial Analyst In Ernst and Young*

*Suhas Mahesh  
Rhodes Scholar pursuing PhD in Oxford*

## Exploring Other Options

Though the UG programme is designed to help young students become researchers, it also provides students with the skills required to go into the private sector. For instance, Abhinav Jain, who graduated last year, is a financial analyst in Ernst and Young. He believes that though taking up a job immediately after graduation is not yet a popular choice, there are ample opportunities in the corporate world for IISc's UG





# Pravega

## Stating the obvious

Pravega, the IISc undergrad festival, has been a presence in the undergrads' calendar since its inception in 2014. And not unlike other colleges, a lot of IISc undergrads have amalgamated the idea of Pravega as part of their identity. When people internalize a foreign notion as part of their identity, they often fail to see the notion objectively and make unbiased judgements and decisions regarding that notion. Furthermore, they take valid criticisms about the notion to be criticisms of their identity, which is exactly the wrong way to go about it. This is precisely what has happened with the idea of Pravega, and as a result, a lot of open dialogue regarding Pravega has either been avoided, or swept under the carpet. There has been some exposition in the past, in particular an article re-examining the reasons validating Pravega's existence did appear in the previous edition of Quarks. However, it appeared as a two page article, immediately following massive coverage of Pravega spanning multiple pages. The trend was quite evident; a growing minority of people at IISc recognized the malady ailing Pravega, but when they spoke out, their voice was drowned in majority's indifference or ignorance of the issue.

Another point the article in question made was the contribution a fest is supposed to make to its immediate environment, which in this case is the urban community surrounding IISc. The success of Pravega at achieving this ideal is a questionable notion at best. True, it does organize certain events that contribute back to the society, e.g. quizzes and the like. But most of the events were rather insulated in nature, for example the fashion show and the DJ nights. The fact that the latter events comprise a major chunk of Pravega's budget is somewhat disconcerting.

The event that comes closest to the idea of contributing back to the community and inculcating the scientific spirit would in fact be Open Day. If anything, Open Day is the closest thing IISc has to a science and tech fest.

The article in question objected to Pravega, in its current form, on a purely philosophical basis. It argued that Pravega strove to establish its identity as the "science, technology and cultural festival" of IISc. However, Pravega fails to truly be a science fest, one of its failures being an incapability to inculcate the scientific spirit in the attendees, among other things. A lot of people also work for Pravega just to make it popular, and to paraphrase the article in question, popularity is not an end in itself, but a byproduct of a novel idea. A fest, however, is not just a means to popularize a college/programme, nor is it merely an opportunity for a break from academics. There must be some intrinsic worth involved in any such endeavor and the contribution of Pravega to life as an undergraduate at IISc must not be neglected. Certainly, in a college that is fundamentally research and hence academics centric, a fest does provide an opportunity for the students to hone other skills that may well prove equally important to them in the future. The ability to organize an event of any significant scale can only be developed when such an organizational task is actually thrust upon one's shoulders. Furthermore Pravega provides an opportunity for the students to try their hands at things like publicity, finding sponsors, managing large groups of people so that they can coordinate their efforts, and in general dealing with all the challenges inherent in any large scale organizational task.

Furthermore, the argument that Pravega promotes teamwork and allows all of the students to work together better, is not entirely without merit. Seniors and juniors get to know each other better by working together for Pravega. While sometimes being ‘forced’ to work with others can lead to acrimony, it is also important to learn how to resolve differences of opinion and work with a diverse set of people towards a common goal. It is also true that as an undergraduate at IISc there are hardly any other chances to either gain such organizational skills, or even have a chance to work with such a large group of people. While there are numerous projects as part of courses and these often involve groups, the harsh reality is that we always end up working with our friends when it comes to such group endeavors. While this is not necessarily a bad thing, people rarely get out of their comfort zone, when it comes to working in teams with other people.

While it might well be a praiseworthy exercise to provide the students a platform to hone a wide variety of organizational skills, one thing that the organizers have failed to realize, year after year, is that quality is not to be equated with quantity. There is an unhealthy obsession with making Pravega bigger instead of better. At one of the initial GBMs of last year’s Pravega, the volunteers were all being exhorted to help be part of a fest that was going to be ‘big’. This is not merely nitpicking over words. The whole motto of Pravega sometimes seemed to be just: ‘be bigger than last year’. This ridiculous fundamental aim shows itself in a blind rush to have the same or similar events as the previous year but only with more prize money and participants. The result of this mad rush to make Pravega, which as fests go, is still very young, bigger and bigger is that the organizers bite off more than they can chew. The ambitions of the organizers, however, outweigh their capabilities (and by this the authors don’t mean that the organizers are incompetent, just that there aren’t sufficiently many people to organize the event. The fact that the event eventually goes through is hence a testament to the capabilities of the organizers and volunteers who often end up abysmally overworked). The fest needs to be developed keeping in mind that the number of volunteers is limited and that UG community has a group of genuinely talented people who should be used to make new innovative events and not just to increase, indiscriminately, the number of participants.

While there is nothing wrong with the organizers proud-

ly proclaiming the number of people coming to attend the fest, it does sound unseemly when one is forced to admit that this number is the only thing that people seem to be running after. There is no in depth analysis of why events have been successful or why they were unpopular. In fact the very definition of success has become anything that attracts a lot of people or any thing that involves a lot of money. It’s up to the UG community to decide what comes first: making Pravega a genuinely good fest, or making it big and flashy.

It is also a much regretted, yet essential, duty of the writers of this critique to point that while a lot of the difficulties in organizing the fest are simply because we insist on making it too big for our own good, a lot of problems also arise due to the fact that some of the organizers and volunteers do not put the goal of making the fest as good as possible, before their own personal interests. There is plenty of time and energy spent by certain people merely on undermining the position of others. One could also argue that many decisions are made by organizers to further their own personal popularity or benefit themselves and their friends. It is not unheard of for merchandise to even go missing outright. The writers have seen such incidents first-hand and this is corroborated by sources who shall remain anonymous. The lack of people speaking out about such discrepancies and the lack of people in positions of authority who are willing to take firm steps have aggravated the problem severely. Fundamentally this points to a much deeper problem: that, out of the people working for the fest, a large number do not have any strong desire to help make the fest better. For a large section of students it seems that the primary reason to become a part of Pravega is to further their own interests, whether those be to gain popularity, get freebies, benefit those close to them or even if it is as innocuous as finding something to put on their CV’s. The result of this is that the motivation of others is severely dampened and many capable people hesitate to contribute in significant positions because they know the work culture that has become associated with Pravega: that of work being secondary and getting a free pass and taking advantage of the position primary. It is a sad state where you find a large crowd of people all over the campus self-declared to be ‘working for Pravega’ and one is forced to wonder how many of them actually are, and how many are just looking out for their own selfish interests.

While it is undeniable that there are many committed volunteers, the presence of just a few people is sufficient to tar the perception of all those working for the fest with the same negative brush.

There are also quite a few problems with the way the organization is structured. For example, not enough freedom was given to the subject teams. In many cases they were given instructions as to the difficulty and number of questions for some event and asked to work to these specifications. Perhaps, the core committee should not interfere so much with details of events. In fact why not give teams an idea of the space and budget constraints and let them design events. The core committee would certainly have some discretion as to what events would be feasible, keeping in mind that they would have a picture of the fest as a whole. However it seems that the events to be held were just decided by a select number of people and that the volunteers in the teams for these events were often left feeling that they had no say in the events they were working for. Also there have been cases of event coordinators suddenly being made to work on finding and dealing with sponsors for other events, which was explicitly not one of their responsibilities. Events should be chosen keeping many factors in mind. Popularity is certainly one of them but the tastes and interests of the volunteers as well as feasibility should not be neglected. A lot of money was spent last year on bands like Agnee and on organizing the fashion show. However, many felt that the money could have much better been spent elsewhere. For example, an event coordinator was told a certain event would not occur unless the prize money could be found from some other source, because the funds were diverted away during the last few days for paying the band. Events such as the fashion show were a subject of widespread criticism. While there is no reason not to have an event just because it is unrelated to science, IISc is ultimately an institute devoted to science and there is nothing wrong with playing to our strengths. If the fest is to carve out a niche for itself it can do so by having good well thought out events, both technical and cultural, not by blindly copying what every other fest in the country is doing.

Of course the root cause of this is the abysmally low number of volunteers in comparison with the scale of the events. Even when the volunteers are working their utmost, there is too much to be done. One case in point is

the food zones: even with people working double shifts, the place was critically understaffed. Due to several dedicated people the work did get done somehow but running a fest without things going wrong is impossible with the volunteers stretched so thin. This is probably why so many things did go wrong. Payments were often made in the very nick of time and often people had to rush at the last hour to find supplies essential to holding some event. The Microsoft Data Science Challenge faced problems like lack of internet at the location. Such things can and should be checked weeks, if not months, in advance.

Another question that we should ask ourselves regarding the sponsors is whether the ends justify the means. This time there was a lot of resentment among volunteers for Pravega's main science quiz because Narayana (a cram school which prepares students for JEE) was a sponsor. Much of this was due to outrageous demands: such as giving them the prelims papers days in advance, and due to pressures for setting a substandard question paper. Conducting prelims at only the Narayana centers led to a large bias in the participants and the quality of the quiz in terms of content was far from acceptable. If Pravega is, at least to some degree, supposed to build the brand of the Undergraduate Programme, should the organizers not come up with more innovative events and find more suitable sponsors for them. It might be difficult to find sponsors more in line with the image one would want the brand to have but is it not a worthwhile investment of time and effort?

Ultimately the reasons for the problems with Pravega boil down to some simple facts. We are trying to make the fest as big as possible forgetting all else. We do not have a large enough workforce of committed people. This in turn is largely because of the restrictive style of managing the volunteers and the lack of focus on innovation and efficiency, as well as a poor work culture which deters capable people from working for the fest. To add to the trouble a significant number of people try to use Pravega as a means to their own ends. Lastly there is a lack of thought about what we want the fest to be like and how to design and hold events that would further these aims. Only if we work towards mitigating these problems can Pravega start to become more successful.

-Ishan Agarwal and Sayantan Khan



# HUMANITIES AT IISC

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The undergraduate humanities course at IISc has always been an enigma, in terms of the students' reception of it. For the other courses, the average response has always been dictated by the way the course was taught; furthermore the response was nearly homogeneous across the entire class. The response to the humanities course though, has been somewhat mixed. Most students came in without really knowing what expect from the course, and had a reasonable amount of skepticism about the course. A couple of months into the course, a sizeable number of students were convinced about the utility of the course, and maintained a high degree of interest in the course over the subsequent three semesters. The remaining fraction however, had been polarized, so to speak, against the course. They argued that the course was potentially inessential for them for their future careers, and they'd rather spend the time they obligatorily spent in the humanities class doing something more "useful". This observation does posit the need to look back at the course, and see what has been covered in the last five years, as well as a get the opinions of the instructors, and where they see the course going forward in the next few years.



# TEACHING HUMANITIES AT IISc

**"Education is what remains after one has forgotten what one has learned in school."**  
-Albert Einstein

**Dr. Bitasta Das is the permanent Humanities instructor here at IISc. She has been an active part of every humanities course, even the ones she wasn't personally teaching.**

2011 is momentous for the Indian Institute of Science Bangalore, as it inaugurated its first ever Undergraduate Programme that endows Bachelor of Science (Research) degree. That year is also significant in the history of the institute for another reason— Humanities began to be taught for the first time as part of its UG curriculum.

Humanities or the study of the human world is a discrete academic field today. Moral Philosophy of the 18th century, whose primarily concern was to investigate the question, “what is the best way for people to live?” is considered to be the precursor of this area of knowledge. Humanities in the

course of time evolved as a distinct field of inquiring human civilization and culture. The Humanities curriculum at IISc is unprecedented in many ways. First, unlike in other Science institutes of the country, Humanities here is a compulsorily subject in six out of the eight semesters of the BS Programme. Also, the nature of the curriculum is unique. In the sense that, the focus here is to introduce the budding scientists to the socio-cultural milieu in which they are learning Science and not on teaching Humanities as a set of unrelated discipline.

The curriculum is designed in such a way that Humanities is not taught as add-on or optional courses but demonstrates convergence and synergy with natural science questions and therefore is relevant and useful to science students. The courses of the first three semesters are foundational, titled: Ways of Knowing, Ways of Seeing and Ways of Doing. The last three are relatively advanced, titled: Mapping India through the Folk Arts, Journalism for Scientists and Introduction to Governance.

The Centre for Contemporary Studies (CCS) of the institute, headed by Prof. Raghavendra Gadagkar, Chairman CCS conducts the Humanities course for the UG Programme. The Visiting Faculty of CCS and invited instructors, consisting of experts and practitioners from various fields, teach the different courses. Though I was associated with the UG Programme in various capacities since I joined CCS in 2011, I was appointed Instructor Humanities- UG Programme in July 2014. Till date, I am the sole appointed Humanities instructor. I teach one module in the first semester, Cultural Analysis and the course Mapping India through the Folk Arts in the fourth semester. However, I attend all the classes of all the batches and assist in the conduct of the classes, exams and results. Therefore I get to interact with the students throughout their six semesters. This is by far the best part of my association with the UG Programme—the interaction with the bright, inquisitive minds.

IISc being India's premier Science research institute, the ambience,

facility and teaching Science here is undoubtedly among world's best. In this setting, introducing Humanities to the young Science enthusiasts calls for building a firm context. It has been a common trend every year to have two sets of students: one who understands and appreciates the importance of learning Humanities along with the Sciences and the other who are sceptic. Both these sets contribute in the advancement of knowledge, the first set by enhancing what they already value and the second set by questioning and countering in their process of rebuttal. The challenge for me, as a teacher, is to relentlessly strive to let the contrasting thought processes coexist.

I would like to delve a little into the courses I teach. The shorter one, Cultural Analysis, that I have started teaching since last year is the first module of the first semester Humanities course. I use this module to open up the question, "Is culture important for scientists?" As the classes progress we look into the various lenses through which we understand culture. The other semester long, Mapping India through the Folk Arts is the Humanities course for the fourth semester. The third edition of this course concluded in January-April 2016 semester. Each year we explore one form of art- visual, narrative or performative; for the 2012 batch it was folk visual arts, for 2013 batch it was folk music and for the 2014 batch it was folk theatre. This course is an attempt to introduce the students to Indian multiculturalism and also to understand the nation a little better through its rich folk art repertoire.





In both the courses, my attempt is to sensitize the students to the fact that as human beings they cannot remain insulated from the social context in which they practice Science. The problems of the rapidly globalizing world are multilayered and are often interconnected. They demand knowledges and methodologies which straddle several disciplines for arriving at solutions that are holistic and inclusive. In order to recognize the big picture, understanding the nation and its people are absolute necessity, so that being members of science and technology community, they can provide effective leadership. In a country like India where majority of the population resides in rural, technologically untouched societies, it is the folk lexicon that gives expression to their worldview. Looking at the folk artefacts appears a worthy exercise for the blooming scientists of this country for meaningfully engaging with the milieu they reside in. So far the attempts can be said to have been successful. This is reflected in the splendid works of art that the students have produced as part of their assignments for the course.

The assignments for the courses are given to encourage exploration of disciplinary boundaries. 2012 batch was asked to represent a scientific concept through any visual folk art form of India, 2013 batch was asked to produce folk songs about Science or life at IISc and 2014 batch was asked to stage folk plays that either had Science as their theme or articulated a contemporary problem. The mantra we apply for creating the art works

is “borrow and share” instead of “buy and rent”. The effort that the students made and the result they produced in the limited time and resources will make any teacher proud! The art works of the 2012 batch has been published as a pictorial book by IIScPress. We are exploring ways in which the assignments of the other batches can also be documented appropriately.

To sum up my experience of teaching Humanities to more than a hundred Science students per batch, has been both a pleasure and a challenge. It is a privilege to teach the cream of the country, who join this institute after qualifying tough competitive exams. These students come with genuine zeal and passion for scientific research. Science today has emerged as the most powerful phenomenon. It is a mark of certainty and authority. Humanities on the other hand advocate creativity and critical thinking, subversion being the core of its nature. It is yet more important to buttress the Science students with Humanities to restrain the peril of dogmatism, such as religions once exploited. What informs paintings and poetry? Why respect someone else's culture? How history is made? Pondering over such questions could only be a worthwhile exercise for scientists!

An anecdote I would like to give which tell a tale of the students' approach towards Humanities instructors is, I was once made to take care of a puppy for a week because apparently that is what Humanities command!

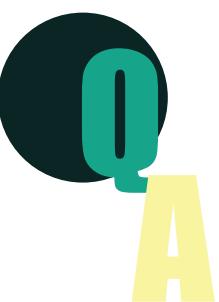
# Q&A with Dr. Rajan Gurukkal

Dr. Rajan Gurukkal taught the module “Nature and People” in the third semester Humanities course, “Ways of Doing”.



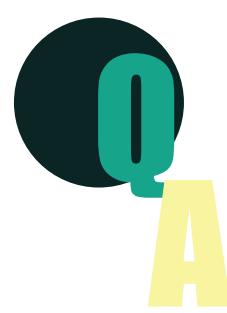
**How and when did you join CCS (Centre for Contemporary Studies), and where did you work before? What courses did you teach there?**

I was Professor & Director, School of Social Sciences, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, Kerala State before joining CCS. A historian by training eventually moved on to social theory, historical human ecology, human geography, philosophy of science, and finally history of knowledge production, the Courses I taught were mainly in social theory and human ecology. I became an invited Professor at Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociale, Paris 2006 where I taught methodological aspects of early Indian knowledge production. I was invited to CCS as Soundararajan Chair Visiting Professor in 2008. On nomination as Vice Chancellor in my former university for a term (2008 – 2012) I left CCS. Invited to the CCS Chair again in 2012, I have been here teaching philosophy of science and the UG Course in ‘Nature and People’.



**Why do you think CCS is smaller than the humanities departments in other colleges, do you think there is scope for expansion? What are your views on the no permanent faculty policy of CCS?**

Yes, structurally CCS is smaller than the Department of Humanities/Social Sciences in other universities or IITs. But functionally it is quite bigger. Having not entrenched as a regular Department of teaching and research with permanent faculty it has the advantage of serving as a platform for the convergence of umpteen fields. It deals with the contemporary issues relating to human affairs – intellectual, socio-economic and politico-cultural. Of course, it has enormous scope for expansion but never to be falling in line with the conventional and becoming sterile with a few permanent faculty members in certain disciplines. Themes of CCS do not belong to any of the established disciplines. They are interdisciplinary. CCS is a convergence centre of interdisciplinary knowledge dissemination. It hardly treads along the entrenched path, but it treads and that becomes the path.



**You have been associated with CCS for the past 4 years, have you noticed any changes in CCS and UG?**

I have been with CCS only for the past four years. A theme that it has been probing was ‘knowledge production.’ I had delivered several lectures in the subject as part of a Course in the theme, first in 2008 and subsequently during 2014, 2015 and 2016. In 2014 the Course focused on early Indian knowledge production. In 2015 CCS organised a National Seminar on methodological aspects of knowledge production in early India. I have noticed two remarkable changes about the working of CCS: 1) the lead role that it started playing in the designing and implementation of the humanities/social sciences courses for UG students, and 2) the publication of the articles presented in the CCS decennial National



Seminar on 'Knowledge Production in Pre-colonial India: Methodological Aspects,' as a special issue of the Journal of History of Science (Vol.51, No.1, 2016) of INSA. It is an attempt at responding to the entrenched belief that knowledge production in traditional India lacked any methodology in the Western sense, for the scholars were considered as sages of deep introspection and extra-sensory perception. The articles address the question of methodology from the knowledge base of various domains like ancient metallurgy, healthcare, mathematics, logic, philosophy, grammar, architecture, intellectual history, histrionics and musicology lay bare the fact that knowledge production in traditional India had followed universally valid epistemological properties that Europe ordained only since Scientific Revolution.

#### **In your opinion what is the relevance of humanities in today's world?**

Quality transmission of knowledge with criticality is the purpose of humanities courses. Learning sciences, social sciences and humanities has become an alienating and deskilling exercise in the country, for the learner gets lost in the descriptive literature on one aspect or the other of the discipline of choice. Sources of knowledge and modes of knowing remain compartmentalized, stereotypical and rigid allowing the learner little or no flexibility in acquiring knowledge about anything without its being segregated into independent facets. This is all the more true of science and technology education, for its being almost entirely subsumed by technicality divesting the learner of the faculty to relate the knowledge/skill to human affairs and social processes. 'Quality' in transmission implies the student's utilization of the transmitted knowledge in the development of higher cognitive ability, sharper analytical faculty and better language power with a thorough knowledge about the fundamentals of the discipline concerned. 'Quality' knowledge in any discipline is deep, theoretical, scientific and invariably subversive because it exposes the surface information that is shallow and shoddy as distinguished from the profoundly buried deeper truth. It is this embedded transformational potential of learning that is called the politics of knowledge. Quality higher education is one that renders possible the effective transmission of socially useful knowledge that can act as critical consciousness enabling the youth to emerge as responsible citizens and creatively engage in public policy debates. IISc's positioning itself as a seat of highly specialized scientific knowledge of discipline based divergence, distanced from the common people as in the case of any University, is by and large based on the conventional, tacit and linear perspective of science education. It is important to facilitate convergence teaching/learning at the instance of social issues/problems, which provides critical insights enabling the learner to be conscious of the need for combining economic growth with equity and surplus productivity with resource sustainability. Convergence of sciences with this critical social agenda leads to the holistic integration of specialized knowledge diffused in multiple disciplines, a process to be identified as real interdisciplinary pedagogic movement. Over the past few decades several non-conventional areas of knowledge cutting across physical, natural and social sciences have emerged as a result of researches beyond disciplinary boundaries, thus letting disciplines move closer to one another. Humanities and social sciences are knowledge areas that engender interdisciplinarity and criticality, a perspective of extreme importance to the world today.

#### **What are the challenges of teaching humanities to a scientific audience?**

The main challenge is putting across the political economy of the techno-capitalist world for the students acquiring science/technology as neutral knowledge, who are least initiated in critical thoughts.



## Getting to know SV Srinivas

Professor S.V. Srinivas taught the “Ways of Seeing” and the “Ways of Knowing” course for the batches until the class of 2018.

**When and how were you approached for recruitment into the programme?**

I came to know about the teaching opportunity in December 2012, from a visiting professor at CCS. I wrote to Prof. Gadagkar expressing my interest. He was aware of my qualifications and my areas of research because I was part of some earlier CCS initiatives. The conversation with Prof. Gadagkar was carried out in the early part of 2013 over email (since I was then in the USA). Details of the offer were finalized in June and I formally joined the programme on 1st August 2013.

**What were the most important things that you think a student would have gained from your courses?**

Levels of engagement of students were very different so it is difficult to generalize. A few students were indifferent throughout the year, some showed interest in particular units while some others were engaged during both semesters. On the whole, in UH 101, it would not be an exaggeration to say that a majority of students were being introduced to Humanities as areas of knowledge production. By the end of the course, they seemed to have understood that knowledge production is not limited to the sciences and got some sense of what is there to study in humanities subjects in general and Literature, History and Anthropology in particular. In UH 102, the challenge was to relate concepts to practice. Students did quite well as far as practice was concerned. They produced original literary (science fiction) and video works and in the process made connections between concepts they studied and creative work. An important takeaway from UH 102 is that literary and artistic works are products of labour and are carefully (painstakingly) assembled. Stories can be told in multiple ways and, consequently, the world seen differently.

What did you like about the students and their response to your courses? In what respects do you think the students could have used improvement?

Students participated actively in classroom discussions and were enthusiastic about doing projects, which were group activities. The classes generated wonderful stories and films although most students had not done either creative writing or made video films earlier. On the downside, students often came to class without reading the course materials. Most groups did not seek or value feedback from their peers, much as I encouraged them to share their works in progress in class. Instead they came to me for my feedback and suggestions.

Were you satisfied with the time allotted to your modules? (For example, are there some things that you couldn't complete because of lack of time?)

1.I wish we had an activity or lab slot for at least a couple of hours every week. Although I used the TA sessions for writing practice in the first semester and discussion of projects in the second, a longer activity slot would have allowed us to do more and the courses would have been more enjoyable too.

2.The class had several students who needed some additional support in English language comprehension and writing but also with course materials, which they were having difficulties following. Weekly tutorials would have helped such students.

You taught the 2014-18 batch for two semesters. What are some things that changed from the starting to the end?

On the whole students turned in excellent end-semester projects in the second term. This was partly due to high level of interest the entire class showed in the module on film, which came at the end of the

course. At the same time, it is likely that students were drawing on what they had learnt in the first two semesters to bring to the project a better understanding of the problem (namely, cities and their representation).

How do your modules fit in with the rest of the UG humanities course?

The first two UG humanities courses are closely related to each other by design. There are multiple cross references within each course and also across these two courses. I was fortunate to have taught all the modules of both courses. As a result, I was able to integrate the modules better, anticipate and also flag connections between the modules and courses.

Since I was not a part of the Humanities teaching team after 2015 July, I don't know what other courses were offered. I will therefore not comment on the fit with the rest of the courses.

Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience teaching these modules?

It was a valuable learning experience for me. I enjoyed teaching both the courses immensely.

# CONVERSATION with **Prof. Uday Balakrishnan**

Prof. Uday Balakrishnan teaches the third year course, "Intro to Governance"

**When and how were you approached for recruitment into the programme?**

**1**

This programme evolved through discussions with Professor Raghavendra Gadagkar and the Dean of the UG programme. It was designed to round off the humanities programmes for UG at IISc. Looking through the areas covered in the humanities programme it was seen that there wasn't one which talked of how India ran as a country. What were its governance mechanisms, the dynamics of its political, legislative, administrative, electoral and judicial processes? This semester long programme spread over 12-15 classroom sessions was aimed to introduce the students to these, not in a theoretical way, but with inputs from persons with hands on experience in all these areas. Thus we had a former Union Minister telling us how an idea becomes a bill which in turn becomes a law. A former head of RA&W introduced the class to the security challenges India faced and a serving judge of the Supreme Court introduced us to the administration of justice in India.

**What were the most important things that you think a student would have gained from your course?**

**2**

The students through their immersive classroom sessions, individual and group assignment would have gained a better appreciation of how such a vast country like India runs.

**What did you like about the students and their response to your course? In what respects do you think the students could have used improvement?**

**3**

The response of the students through the three such programmes conducted so far has been amazing. They enthusiastically participated in the classroom sessions, produced incredibly informed group presentations and insightful individual assignment. I think they enjoyed the participative and immersive aspects of the course as well as the opportunity to interact with opinion and policy makers from the highest levels in government. The students willingly stayed on for sessions sometimes lasting more than two hours.

**Were you satisfied with the time allotted to the module? (For example, are there some things that you couldn't complete because of lack of time?)**

**4**

This is an original programme and the only one of its kind in the country. Yes it could have benefitted by having a few more sessions and better scheduling. Ideally I would have liked to cover the dynamics of grassroots democracy with the help of those who actually run Panchayats and more comprehensively cover important aspects the Indian economy and foreign policy. Hopefully this will happen in the next session.

**What is the process behind the choosing of guest lecturers who are called in as part of your course?**

**5**

Guest faculty was chosen for its experience, credibility and hands domain knowledge.

**How does your course fit in with the rest of the UG humanities course?**

**6**

Very well indeed in enabling the students to get a more informed understanding of the world we all live in.

**Is there anything else you would like to add about your experience teaching this module?**

**7**

I would certainly have liked to link a few field trips to build on the classroom sessions – perhaps an opportunity to interact with e.g. the Governor of RBI and his team in RBI , MPs in Parliament and see large social sector schemes on the ground such as MGNREGS.



Milind Hegde was in the year graduating in 2016, and he is currently doing his PhD in Mathematics at the University of California, Berkeley.

Subhayan Sahu is a fourth year Physics major at IISc.



## Interviewing the Students

Q: Can you describe your overall experience as a participant in the UG humanities programme?

**M**ilind: I loved the humanities programme. The exposure we got to so many different ways of thinking was amazing. (I am still surprised that Ways of Thinking isn't the name of a semester, though perhaps that's because it really is the point of the whole programme). My only wish is that I could have learned more, more systematically and with more time, but that would unfortunately require a full-fledged department dedicated to the subject, which is not yet possible at IISc. I think a particularly important role the course played was reminding us that there is more to the world than just science and research, and which simply cannot be ignored in favour of those things.

**S**ubhayan: I am glad that we had a Humanities module. At times it was difficult to adjust yet another intensive curriculum alongside the science subjects, but at the end of the day, I feel that we learned something constructive and different, which could be useful in the future.



A still from play Photograph 51

**Q:** Which module do you think stands out from the rest? Any particular reason?

**M**ilind: For me, the theatre module, but perhaps only because it led to being able to be part of the play Photograph 51 under the direction of Mr. Prakash Belawadi. Apart from that, the one that comes to mind is the course on Governance organized by Prof. Uday Balakrishnan, because of the so many real perspectives and experiences which were brought to us in the form of actual people whom we could interact with.

**S**ubhayan: The 6th Semester Module on Governance was especially illuminating; it introduced governance and policy making to a crowd that is largely ignorant about these issues. Also, the structure of the course, where experts in different subjects are invited to deliver talks, was unique. I feel that the other modules should be restructured and made to follow this aspect of the Governance module.

**Q:** The IISc UG humanities programme is somewhat novel, owing to its overarching structure (the division into ways of knowing, seeing etc.). How well, and to what extent, in your opinion, did these divisions percolate into the way the individual courses were taught?

**M**ilind: From what I remember, at the time of the courses being taught, the distinctions of the different parts of the division weren't very clear.

**S**ubhayan: The first three modules were a bit vague in terms of their objective. I don't think that there was enough effort taken to unify the various submodules under the overarching theme. Also, it might be better to focus on a topic like Economics more extensively instead of having just four weeks of it.

**Q:** Could you share an interesting story/anecdote that you remember from the three years of humanities courses?

Milind: In the 2nd semester module on Visual Arts, we were taught by a curator of an art museum, Mr. Suresh Jayaram. We had a very large assignment of submitting three pieces of art and two minimum 500 word essays with just a week's time. We submitted the assignments at 12 pm, at the end of the last class, and we received an email at 4:30 pm the same day that all the assignments had been graded. Considering the instructor had to have read some 240 essays in about 5 hours, we were pretty sure he hadn't read them at all – and were even more confident when we saw the seemingly arbitrary marks (all either 10, 12, or 15 out of 20) that people received. A popular joke was that all the assignments had been thrown up in the air in CCS – the ones that landed on the table got 15, on the chair got 12, and all that fell on the floor got 10.

Subhayan: In our second semester, we had a module where we had to produce a story that involved both science fiction and IISc. That, I think, was our first group assignment, so seven of us got together and formed a group, which we called Gobi Manchurian! Those weeks were undoubtedly the most fun in my stay in IISc till now. I remember us sitting in Choksi Hall courtyard at night, using our mobile torches to create an effect, and discuss for hours about our story. The final product was a labour of love. On hindsight it would have made more sense not to spend so much time over that assignment given our packed schedule, but I am glad that we chose to do it.

**Q:** What, in your opinion, was the most thing you learned from the humanities programme?

Milind: One important thing I learned from the humanities course was about feminism. This wasn't something directly taught in the course, but an essay topic ("The Gaze") in an assignment for the Visual Arts module led me to read about the beliefs, history, and goals of the feminist movement, which was something I barely knew anything about before. This really changed my perspective on such a huge aspect of life that I think this is the single most important thing I gained from the programme.

Subhayan: The group assignments. These assignments allowed us to get to know our classmates better, make lasting memories of college life and express our creative sides while also learning to work with a group.

**Q:** What changes to the course, would in your opinion, help improve it (different modules, less or more time spent on something etc.)?

Milind: I would want to learn about so many other aspects of the humanities that it wouldn't be feasible to cover it all. One thing which I do think would fit in (and was part of the course for my seniors, I think) is on the philosophy of science, which seems very interesting and a good background to have.

Subhayan: There shouldn't be any written exams for any of the modules - I think that defeats the purpose of the course. Restricting the number of submodules to 2 (or at most 3) per semester, and following a structure akin to the 6th Semester module, where experts on various subjects are invited to give talks. Also, considering the fact that the course counts for our grades, grading should be made more objective, consistent and fair.



*A still during the practise session for Kathir, folk music project.*

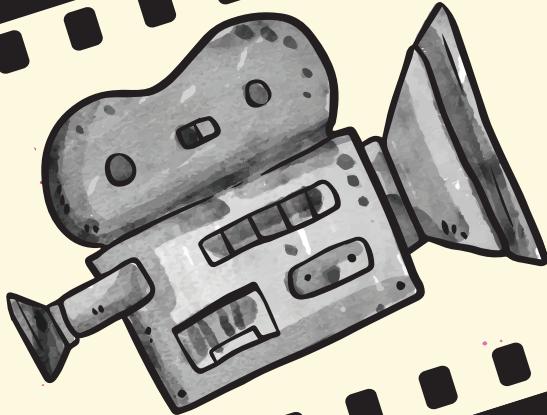
Q. Anything else that you would like to communicate to your juniors?

**M**ilind: Please take the humanities course seriously. Too often we people who think we are on the path of science look down on or like to belittle the humanities for not being precise or quantitative or some such thing. To do so prevents us from gaining a new perspective and a new way of knowing, seeing, doing which actually does make a big difference. Particularly in the first humanities course in IISc people are likely to have this intellectual arrogance, and to show it off by asking seemingly deep and pointed questions in class. While I am not against the asking of questions, there's a lot of value in first striving to listen and understand this discipline; it is truly tackling issues very different from what comes under the purview of science, issues which are much too complicated for the current practice of science, and so the methods and ways of thinking they adopt are very different. I gained a lot by this exposure.

**S**ubhayan: Even though the modules are taxing alongside the demanding science curriculum, do learn to enjoy the course to get the best out of it!

# ARE THEY ANY GOOD ?

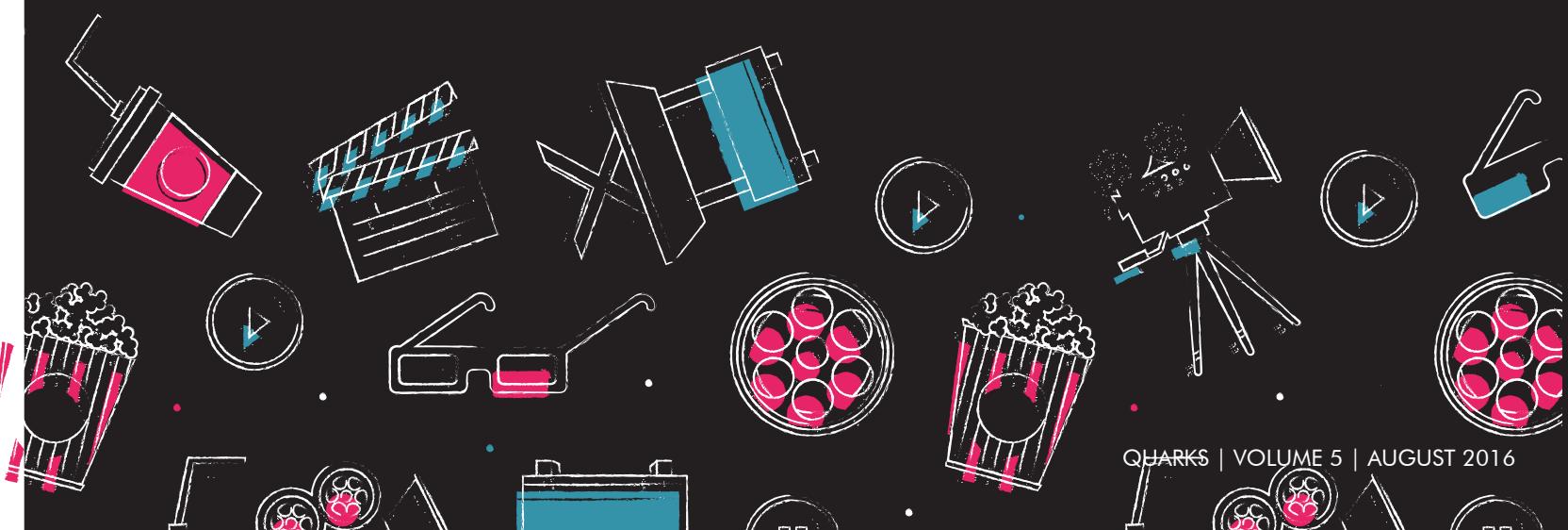
-An anonymous weasel



There are a host of situations in which one shies away from excessively poking fun at something, out of respect for the hours of hard work that the authors of that work have undoubtedly poured in. This, God be thanked, is not one among those unfortunate occasions. In this article then, as an an accomplished, neutral outside observer who has had nothing to do with the UG batch of 2018, or their decidedly feeble attempts at making short films, I set out to take stock of the 20-odd video clips that were created and then forgotten about, even though this constitutes a pretty major waste of the aforesaid observer's time.

First, some background. In the second semester of their first year at IISc, the UG batch of 2018 were tasked with the creation (in twenty odd teams of four), of up to fifteen minute long short films that

reflected on the representation of the urban theme in cinema, as part of their course in the humanities (most of the groups, of course, in typical cavalier fashion, paid absolutely no regard to this imposition, but more on that later). The instructor of the course, Prof. S.V. Srinivas, then succeeded in bravely wading through almost seven-and-a-half hours of footage, and grading the films. Despite this, we will not, in this article, be referring to, or taking into account the awarded marks. The reasons for this are twofold. Firstly, the marks were rationed based on a set of criteria (including relevance to the topic provided) that won't necessarily agree with those that make a good movie in general. Secondly, the original spreadsheet that contains these marks is nowhere to be found.



Let us begin. Provided below is the link to the Youtube play list that contains all the films. I will write about the seven best films.

<https://goo.gl/lx82hu>

# Spoiler alert!

## The Untitled Picture

Three guys go around Bangalore; problem is, they have an outdated travel guide that constitutes a bunch of black and white pictures and one word descriptions. Our heroes face the perils of garbage dumps, chopped trees, overly long and ill placed narration sequences, and a very cheesy ending. Highlights include a 2 minute long panoramic shot of Lalbagh and it modest 25 minute runtime.

*Still from "The Untitled Picture".*



A place which is untitled.

## La Belle Dame Sans Merci

A kid makes a journey all the way from Kolkata to Bangalore without telling his parents and takes up board in a seedy lodge so that he can get mugged more easily. As a consequence of the head injuries incurred during the relevant mugging though, he forgets his parents' phone numbers, and is left to fend for himself in a strange city. Inevitably, he is attracted by the lure of easy money and turns to begging and other shady avenues. Highlights include the special appearances of 2 biology lab instructors, the gratuitous french title, and the world record for the closest anyone has ever gone to making a noir film while simultaneously missing the whole point.



*Still from "La Belle Dame San Merci"*

## One by Two in Bangalore

A couple start everyday at a favorite tea shop before going on their separate ways. But underneath the Lovey-dovey looks that they give one another, each one suspects that the other is cheating. They hire private detectives to follow the other person around for the whole day for a week, unknown to each other. At the end of that period, mutually exonerated of all blame, they can finally share a coffee together. Critical moment: 1:03, when the woman almost discovers that someone is following her around. Highlights include a Duck waddle (2:34) and that classy, classy font, the Jokerman.

## Soggy Biscuits

Ah! How nice. No audio. This is what you get for trying to use Justin Bieber songs in your short film. Believe me, you'll never be able to love yourself after that. Not to worry though, I managed to glean quite a bit about the plot from nonverbal cues.

The film is basically an oppressively long tale (with a title that makes you question the sanity and of the creators) about a two filmmakers—one of who likes to wear fake mustaches while drinking tea—and their creative disagreements with yet another director (this one likes to wear Ray-Bans while following people around). A snore fest that I am sure the addition of dialog would only make worse. Highlight: the credit sequence.



*Still from "Soggy biscuits"*

## Greener Pastures, or how the Clerk didn't die

A techie arrives fresh at Bangalore, and even before reporting to his first day at the office, he—with much foresight and wisdom—decides that he should buy land and build a house in the city. A broker—with even more foresight and wisdom—decides to guide him through this task. And then he dies. There is also much drama in between. Highlights include the scene at 9:40 and the award for the second longest title.



## A Glistening Drop of Dew

“Sourav Ganguly, a writer for different travel magazines comes to Bangalore to cover the city.” He then parks himself on a sofa and spends the whole morning gloating over articles that he has already written. To the accompaniment of deafening background noise, he then proceeds to locate, respectively, a beggar, a temple, a movie poster and a construction site. He then snaps pictures of these and titles them with eye-opening captions. After some more walking around, he plays cricket (finally!), sits on a wall, ogles a girl, and re-titles his pictures with even more eye-opening captions. The movie then ends. Highlight: 2:32.

*Still from "A Glistening Drop of Dew"*

## Breaking Bad in Bengaluru

Rumor has it that this movie was all planned, acted, and edited during the night prior to the submission date. I urge you, though, to not put much stock into this. Provided with a video camera, a computer and a full 12 hours, a semi-grown llama would have been able to make a better movie.

A genius chemistry lab student creates a wonder drug. He then goes up to a drug lord to help him sell it. Even though the drug lord agrees to a deal, the student (presumably having incurred major brain damage because of ODing on his own stuff) decides to take the risk of personally distributing the drug around the city. In an epic ending involving 3 people dying of heart attacks because of having guns fired in their proximity, DEA agents fly in specially from the USA, polish off the few people still alive, and then simply walk away into the shadows. Highlights include an instant transmission at 2:38-2:44, and the first death by heart attack at 10:27.



# THAT'S ALL FOLKS!

"Folk theatre is a course for you?!" was the first reaction I got from an old friend when I told him about fourth semester humanities. It comes as a shock to many that as (boring) science students, we find time for anything other than coursework. This predisposition is not wholly inaccurate, rather a very astute observation if anything. For many of us, who had continually precluded ourselves from performing any extra-curricular activities, the folk theatre course was a godsend; liberation from the "All work and no play" lives we had learned to acquiesce. What's more, since it was all part of the curriculum, there was full participation from the class.

In the beginning, it was all quite intimidating: write, direct and enact your own play- for most, it was the first time doing any of these. In class the instructor, Dr. Bitasta Das would give glimpses of the vast and diverse forms of folk theatre, from the four corners of the Indian Sub-continent. Coming up with an idea was the first thing any team had to do, and it was not easy. After the endless discussions and arguments, that most groups must have gone through to decide on a story, an appropriate folk form had to be chosen to enact it. Teams had to be very instrumental while choosing, so as to avoid an incongruity in the story and theatre form. The next big challenge was to adapt the story into the folk form and write scripts in its native language and style.



Top to bottom:Stills from 1.Naqqal 2.Ramleela 3.Jatra  
Photography Credits :Sabyasachi Basu

Finding time for practice would have been hard enough without the incessant assignments and lab reports we had to submit, and to top it off the end-semester exams were around the corner. It was a miracle that everyone could put their hearts into practising. Apart from the occasional (light hearted) rivalry between groups, everything was a smooth sail. Deciding what costumes to rent was an exercise that many of us had not experienced before and since resources were limited and we had to show extreme parsimony in this regard. Cooperating and sharing costumes with other groups was the only viable option.

The folk theatre festival, contrary to the artistic squalor that most would have expected from amateur undergraduates, was probably a very colourful and euphoric experience for the participants and the audience. Each play had a unique and momentous message to convey, some related to social issues, others about science and technology and there were some that stayed true to mystical indigenous themes. Performances like Svang, and Chauu depicted pressing matters like subservient faith, exploitation and environmental degradation. Through the art of shadow puppetry, a group elucidated the story of Charles Darwin and the theory of evolution. Ras Leela and Ram Leela both captured attention through mythological tales; while the former conveyed a more solemn message about love and attachment, the latter was well directed comedy adaptation of the epic Ramayana with a modern twist. The Bengali play in the form of Jatra talked about peoples' futile attachments to frivolous objects, whereas Naqqal was a satire on the unscientific methods that are commonly used to make tall claims.

Although the course taught a lot of things, the most important lesson learned was teamwork and resourcefulness, to be able to set aside individual differences and come to a collective decision. One cannot deny that it was painful having to practise many hours a day, and go around town looking for costumes and props, but the pang felt when the course got over was on a much different level. In entirety, one is certain to consider this an unforgettable and indispensable experience in life, after all, in Shakespeare's own words, "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players". ■

-Gokul G Nair  
Third Year



Top to bottom:Stills from 1.Svang 2.Raasleela 3.Chauu

# A Space of one's own

SHAYANI PARIDA  
THIRD YEAR

Hostel room decoration is seen by many as being frivolous and inane. The very thought of cleaning your own room is sure to send chills down the spine. Afterall, hostel rooms seem to serve no better purpose than provide a soft bed to rest on during the night and turn into a locker to keep our belongings safe during the day.

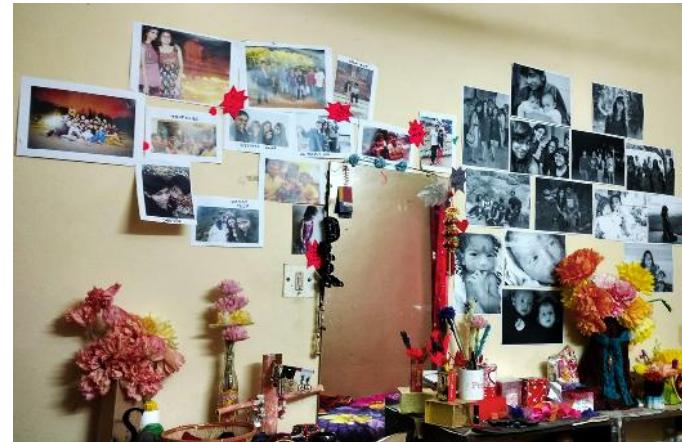
But then think it this way, your room is your motivator when you don't want to go for another day of toil and hardship. Zig Ziglar, a motivational speaker, remarked, "[M]otivation doesn't last. Well, neither does bathing—that's why we recommend it daily". So, waking up on a frightful day, when the phantom of your trepidations won't let you open the door and step outside, a glance on a simple poster, reading a treasured quote, hung on the wall can rejuvenate your spirits and actuate you to step in the right direction.

In the same vein, a your hostel room can not only be a place to rest your tired limbs but can also serve to nurse your broken heart and shelter your unsaid dreams. In the words of Beth Revis,

"Well, sometimes home is not a place, home is a person."

Your room is a very personal space. So, your room can be your diary. It can, in more than one way, mirror your persona.

So, people's room décor can be quite original and interesting. Let's go around the rooms of four 2nd and 3rd year UGs who beautifully knit few loose strands of their imagination and created some awesome room décor.



## SONAM –LET'S JUST TAP(E) INTO THOSE MEMORIES

**A** popular saying goes- We didn't know we were making memories, We were just having fun...

College days present the most memorable days of a person's life and Sonam has made it a point to cherish all those fun filled days. The total length of one of the walls in her room is covered with photographs-carefully labelled with the event they remind of. The wall possibly holds a bit of every single person who is dear to her. Right below them, many-hued flowers that she made out of tissue paper line the shelf in front of the wall. Other small articles made of ribbons and laces dot the table. Staring at the wall, one gets reminded -Photographs are memories, they are not taken,they are made.

Photography Credits:  
Aditi Rai,Shayani Parida,Samriddhi Thakur,Sabyasachi Basu

## RAKESH'S 'IMPRESSIVE' MOTIF



For Rakesh, the hostel walls are but a canvas to his imagination. On pieces of papers stuck to the wall, he has created "handful" of keepsakes. Along with that, the cupboard door is adorned with a collection of vibrant paintings, but well, what those paintings mean seems a little shady. Afterall, only the artist knows what the artist means.



## GAYATHRI'S TRYST WITH FINESSE



Gayathri's room with elaborate decorations all around is nothing short of an exposition. Walking in through the doors, right before you turn on the lights, you catch a fleeting glimpse of the small cluster of fluorescent stars and moon on the wall in front. Then switch on the light to be surprised by the plethora of handmade decorative pieces lying all around. Some beautiful landscapes are pasted on the wall to the right. Below those hangs a white board with few quotes and doodles scribbled here and there. Then turning to the wall on the left, one sights a spectacle of swaying ivory colour paper flowers just under the tubelight. Some more hand made paper flowers and butterflies line the wall in neat array. But the finest part of this grandeur are the intricately carved lanterns. Some made of tangled woollen strings, hanging from the bulb holder, others made of colour papers cover the candles-each seeming to echo- Take us down, we keep trying; Thousands of feet above, we keep flying....

## SHAMITHA HAS BEJEWELLED THE BEIGE AND BLANCH

In a small corner of the room, on the table top, in front of a mirror, lies a bewitching sundry of bijou. The chestful of jewellery and other trinkets lying around and dazzling under the glow of the side lamp is absolutely enchanting. Beside them sits a cuddly collection of teddy and origami cats. Similar treasures of gems and jewels lie all around the room on satin and velvet covered racks and tables. Overall, this is the perfect remedy for all those Monday morning blues.





Photograph by-  
**Anuva Aishwarya**  
Fourth Year

Art by -  
**Ankita Paraste**  
Fourth Year





Art by -  
Rakesh Arya  
Second year

Art by -  
Sabyasachi Basu  
Second year

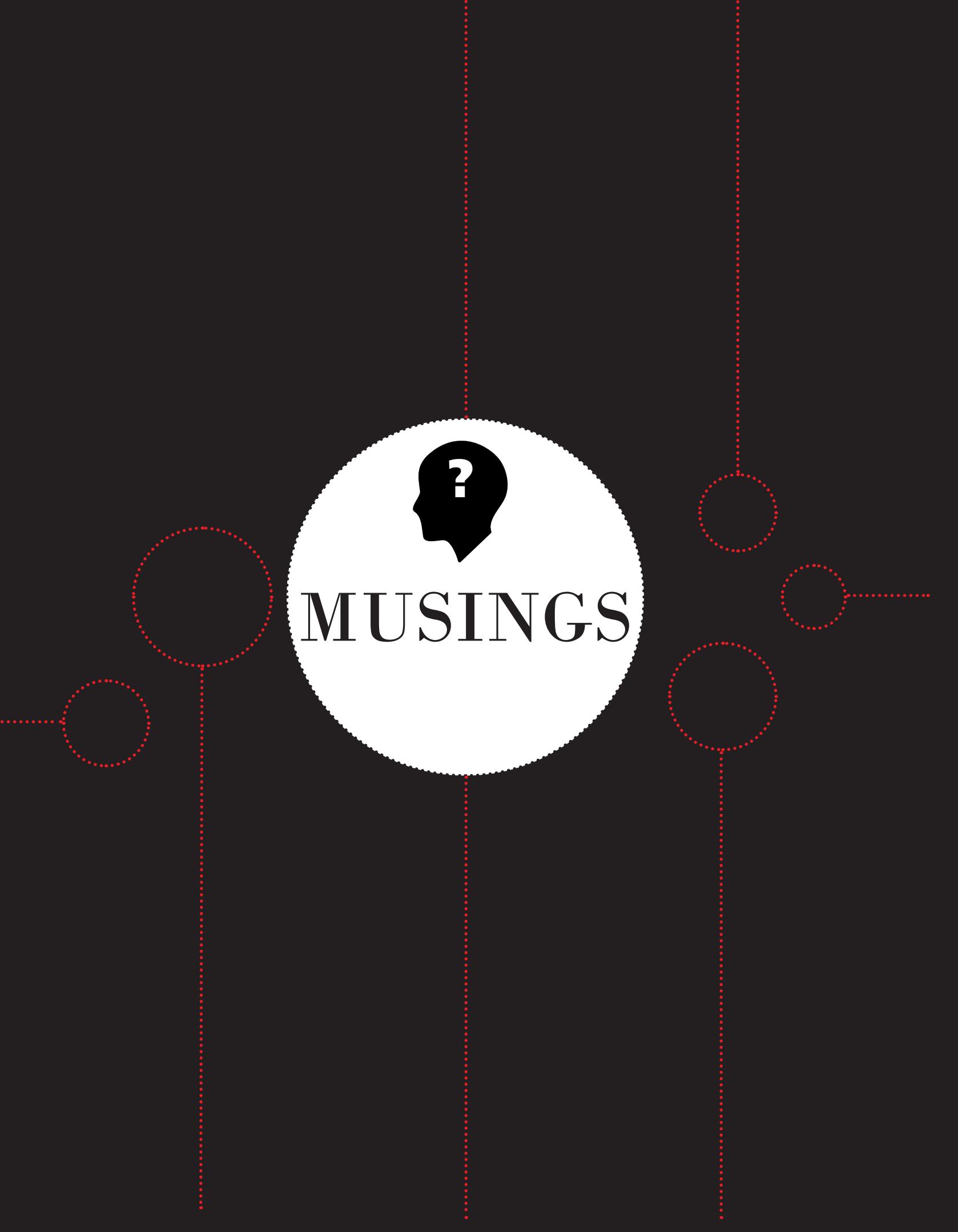




Art by -  
**Sabyasachi Basu**  
Second year



# MUSINGS

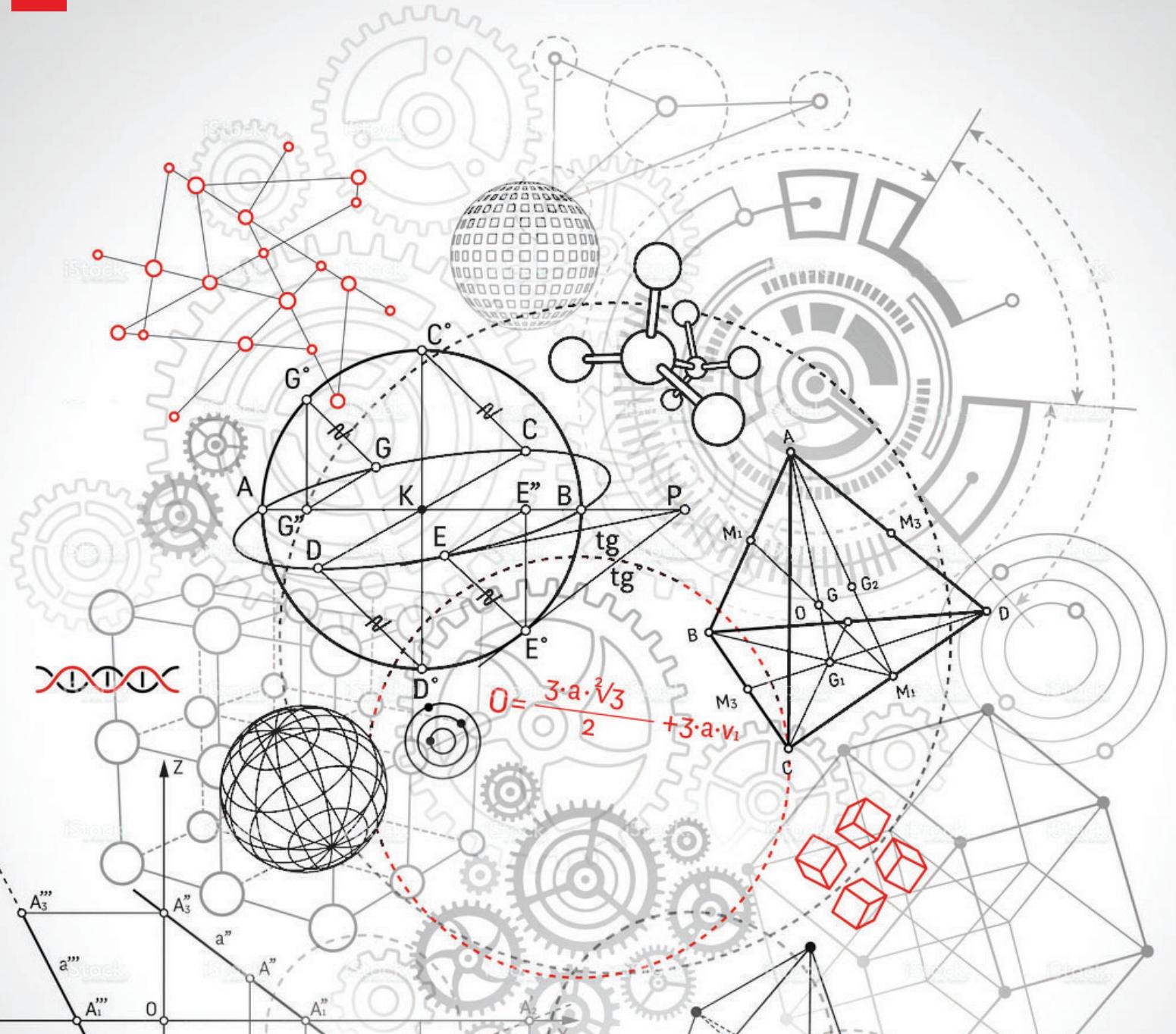


How to justify Doing Science for  
its own sake

Participation of students and a  
paradigm shift in the political  
scenario of India

Manga: Not just cute and big  
eyes and strange hairstyles

Viva la Vida



How to justify  
**Doing Science**  
 for its own sake

by Sayantan Khan

As British number theorist G. H. Hardy was often fond of saying, “No one has yet discovered any warlike purpose to be served by the theory of numbers or relativity, and it seems unlikely that anyone will do so for many years.”, and was especially proud of the fact the number theory was the purest of sciences, and as such, would remain unsullied, safely out of reach of the corrupting influence that was human practicality. Pure mathematicians, and number theorists in particular, have taken this aphorism to heart, taking pride in the fact that their work has absolutely no real world applications.

We, of course, have the luxury of hindsight, when we call out the error in Hardy’s statement. For not only has number theory not stayed detached from warlike purposes, it will probably occupy the central position in any war that happens in the future as number theory is the basis of all modern cryptography, and the second World War showed us the crucial role cryptography plays in any war.

As any undergraduate who’s spent a summer working at a lab, trying to do whatever minuscule task or problem they’ve been assigned, which they hope counts as research, the following conversation with anyone not involved with their work, anyone who’s not familiar of how things work in research, is painfully familiar:

Questioner: What were you up to all summer? Anything useful?

Young naïve undergrad: (always eager to talk about his/her work) Oh yes. I did....blah blah blah (mostly background information on the problem, toned down to the level of the questioner). I showed that (different responses for different fields) [E. coli grows 2% slower than expected on a fructose medium / The set of invertible matrices does look like a flat surface given that you look at it close enough / Similar response for other fields].

Q: So you spent the entire summer [growing E. coli / looking at matrices]?

YNU: Essentially, yes.

Q: Are you any closer to [curing cancer / whatever laymen think the ultimate goal of mathematical research is]?

YNU: Not really. That really wasn’t what I was working for.

Q: Then you didn’t really do anything worthwhile.

It is at this point that the questioner, if the questioner is a tax paying citizen of the country, realizes that he/she funded, in part, a person who used that funding to do “nothing” for three months.

But the response of the questioner illustrated above is not an irrational response. Normal people don’t fund research out of altruistic tendencies. They fund research because they expect to get something out of it within the near future. That expectation is usually fulfilled in the more applicative disciplines, e.g. Engineering and medicine in particular, and people expect something similar in the pure sciences. In the sciences, a direct forced approach does not always work. Sometimes the necessary tools to solve a problem are yet to be invented, and inventing tools takes time, and is often seen as pointless excursion, and at the very worst, it’s seen as doing science for its own sake.

When confronted with such existential questions about the relevance of their research to the real world, most scientists respond with a series of connections, tenuous at best, starting with their work, and terminating at something that even a layperson would recognize as utilitarian, e.g. making better batteries, curing cancer, etc. The links though, are largely speculative, and there is no real guarantee that things will actually work out as predicted, i.e. the research in





question make significant progress towards solving the problem. A lot of scientific work, both today, and in the past has led to (Seemingly? For even now might be too early to judge.) dead ends. Most researchers, after being prodded for a while, admit the possibility of their work being entirely detached from the real world, its *raison d'être* solely being pure academic curiosity. But does that mean the work is useless? A slightly different question would be is the work useless to the average taxpayer, who is indifferent to scientific nonsense, and only cares about scientific work in terms of the utility it brings to his/her life. The answer in the first case is no, and in the second case, is not really decidable.

Let's deal with the second question first, i.e. what is research with absolutely no practical applications worth to the average person, one who pays their taxes to fund the research in question. Let's call such research Useless Research™. Note that the adjective useless is not pejorative in any sense; it merely is shorthand description for the kind of research that does not seemingly hold any value for the taxpayer. Now let's impose a reasonable, though arbitrary metric on the excellence of a piece of research as the sum of its perceived utility to the taxpayer and the amount of original insight that went into the work. With this metric, it is possible to have excellent Useless Research. Such a piece of work would have to have absolutely no perceived utility, and to compensate for a lack of utility, would need to have astonishingly brilliant insight. Case in point being Cantor's work on infinite sets (Georg Cantor was a German mathematician, who invented set theory as we know it. He was the first mathematician to deal formally with infinite sets, earlier mathematicians usually leaving the infinities to the philosophers. In his work, he came across several unexpected results, and the unorthodoxy of his methods, led to general scepticism among the broader mathematical community.). Although it contained several brilliant insights, far ahead of the time, the works dealt with infinite sets, which had been dealt in the past only by philosophers, and as such was seen to be useless by not only the laypeople, but also the

mathematical community at large. Luckily though, Cantor's work was redeemed in his lifetime, where the techniques he used in his work (one of them being the famed Diagonal argument), were used more generally, in other areas of mathematics. In the words of David Hilbert, "From his paradise that Cantor with us unfolded, we hold our breath in awe; knowing, we shall not be expelled".

If there's a lesson in this, it is that there's something worthwhile in excellent Useless Research. The brilliant insights, or tricks that form the backbone of excellent Useless Research can be recycled in other contexts, often contexts in which the trick in question might not have been the obvious choice. A lot of progress in mathematics, as well as in other sciences has been made by using an existing trick or technique in a new context. But one needs to keep inventing new tricks, lest one runs out of tricks. And that is what excellent Useless Research does. Since it's useless, the only way it can be excellent is that it has really astoundingly original trick(s).

But that still doesn't answer the original question: how is excellent Useless Research actually useful to the taxpayer? The argument goes something like this: any new trick invented in a particular piece of work can be recycled in a variety of other contexts. One of those contexts might be result in something practical at some point of time. And at that point, our Useless Research has contributed to the real world, becoming Useful Research™ in the process. This argument is made more convincing with an example. Recall the beginning of the essay, where Hardy was quoted as saying number theory has no warlike uses. Now consider a very well known, and seemingly useless to the layperson, 'trick' that lets you find integers  $x$  and  $y$  when given two coprime integers  $a$  and  $b$  such that  $ax+by=1$ . Looks almost cute, but quite useless, most people would be inclined to say. However, there is a very well-known attack on the RSA cryptosystem, known as the common modulus attack, which uses this very trick to decrypt messages if the same message

is sent to two different people. Not such a useless trick after all.

On the other hand, there's plenty of mathematical research that is still to find some utility in everyday life, even indirectly. It also depends on the amount of time one is willing to wait. Plenty of mathematical research was ahead of its time, and lay dormant until related fields, usually physics caught up to utilise the research in question. Plenty of research thus had to wait several generations before being utilised.

The obvious response of the taxpayer to this answer would be: why should I pay for work I'm not going to benefit from. The answer to that is, since we're benefitting from research paid for 200 years ago, we owe it to the future generations to pay for the mathematics they'll need in their time. And that is it: it's our social responsibility to fund the mathematics our descendants will use.

Coming back to the first question now, is any work of research really useless: in absolute terms, not relative to anyone's perception? The question is rather philosophical in nature, and the answer, by necessity, must also be philosophical. Most people (barring nihilists maybe), are motivated to do what they do by a (often subconscious) desire to achieve some degree of permanence: some record of their existence that lives on after them. There are many different ways people think they achieve permanence. Some people focus on building monuments, some people focus on creating art, and some people focus on raising a family. These different foci have varying degrees of

permanence: in the first two cases, the permanence lasts as long as the creation lasts. In the third case, one achieves permanence through one's descendants. Knowledge creation, on the other hand, does not quite offer permanence in this form. Here, the individual is irrelevant: the knowledge they generate is what matters. People who create knowledge, i.e. researchers, choose to forego the formerly described permanence for something a little different. They choose to add their own small piece of work to the vast edifice that is collective human knowledge. And for each individual, the amount they contribute is different; but that does not matter in the end, because the edifice stays on even after the contributors are gone, irrespective of the size of the contributions. To quote Terence Tao, "[S]pectacular, deep and remarkable results and insights in this subject... are the hard-won and cumulative achievement of years, decades, or even centuries of steady work and progress of many good and great

mathematicians; the advance from one stage of understanding to the next can be highly non-trivial, and sometimes rather unexpected, but still builds upon the foundation of earlier work rather than starting totally anew".

The point of the previous paragraph being that even the most Useless Research is a part of collective human knowledge, and that reason alone, makes it worthwhile to do research for the sake of it.



Funtime Activity:  
Forcibly converting pure mathematicians  
into applied mathematicians.

# Participation of students and a paradigm shift in the political scenario of India

BY PROKASH KUMAR KUNDU

Frustration over the political scenario in India was pretty much universal, that is to say, across the nation – at least till two to three years ago. Students as a community were a major face of this frustration.

Today, if I am to reconsider this statement – I would definitely add this. Students as a community are now prospectively a major political force as well.

As I begin this essay – I am bothered by a few questions in this very regard.

- What does it take for a student to become politically motivated?
- How significant is the fact that this is 'student force'?
- Why am I considering the students to be a prospective and growing political force? The events and happenings besides, what do people (academics, politicians, students themselves, the middle class, the working class, etc.) think?
- How potent has this force been? How well-spread? What are the issues that it has been addressing?
- How do I hope this to effect and/or change the political scenario? The social structure? What are the issues this is addressing?
- What are the contending political ideologies in the students' sphere? How are their activities different? What role has the political parties played in this whole process?
- What is the role of social media in this process? Alternate media?

I shall try to discuss some of them in this essay.

There was a question of what it takes. When you face the brunt of wrongs being done to you, you don't have much of a choice. And there is more to that as well.

I started this essay speaking of frustration. One could also speak of frustration being vented out.

My personal belief is that there is a bondage that is being forged. One is the bondage among students of different institutions. When I speak of a 'student community' – I speak of this bondage. This bondage causes one student of IISc to identify oneself with a student of University of Hyderabad and be agitated by the injustice there. This bondage causes one to be disturbed by the happenings in JNU. This bondage causes a student in Bangalore to feel guilty sitting in the mess because students in Kolkata are on a hunger strike.

Once this bondage is forged, it is sure to go beyond the 'student community'. Then, you start feeling sorry for the rape victims of the cities, for the factory workers who don't have any job security, for the tribal people whose hills are being appropriated for mining companies. And you start identifying yourself with them, you start feeling the same insecurity. It was a bondage of this sort that brought the citizens of Delhi together at Jantar Mantar when Nirbhaya had been brutally gang-raped.

This sort of bondage makes you want to do something about it. It is an inspiration of this sort that causes a student of IISc to work for the Notebook Drive, because he feels that everybody is not as privileged in educational opportunities as he is, and he strongly wants to remedy that.

There is also a question of awareness. When you start feeling that a lot of things are going wrong, you'd want to ask whether the underlying system is a sane one or it is that the system is not being properly executed. If you're convinced that the system is a fine one, in spite of your feelings and your conviction, the best you should do is be an ideal citizen and inspire and help others to be the same. Sometimes, you might want to be a more integral part of the system and its working, in joining mainstream politics or the administrative system. That is something I guess Mr. Kejriwal is doing.

In the light of such a situation, it is a very vital thing that this is a 'student force'. Students being the future citizens, if such a conviction so as to set things right sets right into the students, it is very likely that they shall in future grow up very good citizens and ensure a proper working of the system.

Addressing the problem of a difficult popular mind-set, the answer possibly is social education. In that case, the movements should be, I guess, guided in that direction. Also, this drives home the significance of that the 'future citizens' are gearing up with a mind-set better suited to the system.

On the other hand, you might be understanding that the system needs working on, then you are in for a much greater challenge. You first must persevere to understand how a better system should be (and this understanding is not to be a personal undertaking, as well) and then, you are faced with the challenge of transition from the current system to the better, idealized system. In the past, many a time such a transition has been through a process of rebellions and has been quite drastic – and the effects of such transitions themselves have often been reasons of botheration.

I shall try to explain this one problem by examples.

- Take education, say. A lot of us feel that things are going wrong with it. You might feel that the problem in particular is that hon'ble minister Ms. Smriti Irani is herself not very well-educated by academic standards and that is the reason she is taking horrible decisions that are harmfully affecting the education scenario. Some of you may go even further to say that the 'saffron ideologies' are more particularly the deciding factors in this process, and possibly we ought to rise above that.

But that still does not explain why most of us (if not all) in IISc are so very much well-to-do. It is supposed to admit students merely by merit, and it also allows for scholarships which would be more needful for someone who is not so well-to-do. And I don't feel we have an education system which, even if run perfectly, could take care of that.

- I have slightly touched upon the issue of hills being requisitioned by companies for mining. Let's take the example of Niyamgiri, Dongria Kondh, and Vedanta. On ethical grounds that the land belongs to the Dongria, and on grounds of environmental concern – many of us may agree to that mining the heart of Niyamgiri is not the best thing to do.

But that brings us to the question of whether we can do without those minerals, and if we are to mine those minerals – whom the profit of the enterprise would belong to. We must also address the question of whether we should try to actually be more economical with the minerals, and whether to truly achieve that would require us to ask for alternative economic systems.

For the question of what it takes, this is one important point to note. Transcending the bondages and convictions, we are faced with these questions and dilemmas. And, as one can observe, the student movements are truly trying to address these questions.

A rough theoretical setting at hand, now I shall proceed to attempt at going through a recent history of some of the movements, briefly. Also, I shall brush past some other stions that I have initially mentioned.

## Timeline of various student movements in the recent past

### #HokKolorob

2014

September

#### Jadavpur University Protests

Popularly known as the Hok Kolorob Movement, this was sparked off when the university authorities authorized a brutal display of force by the police against a group of peacefully protesting students. This sparked off a series of student protests around the country condemning the use of state-authorized violence against a group of non-violent protesters.

### #Scholarship

2015

July

#### Pondicherry University Protests -

These protests were precipitated by the lack of accommodation and the sudden termination of scholarships of many needy students. The matter escalated however, when the authorities condoned the use of violence against the student protesters.

### #OccupyUGC

#### OccupyUGC Movement

This movement was triggered by the move by UGC that would cut off PhD funding for several thousand students. UGC cited a lack of transparency in the process of funding; on the other hand, the students on the other hand claim that cutting off funding is not the fix to the opacity in the procedure.

### #JNU

#### JNU sedition controversy

The incident was sparked off when a student group condemned the hanging of Afzal Guru, calling it state mandated murder. Whereas a normal response to the statement should have been counterarguments, and other forms of debate, the situation escalated when the police got involved, leading the arrest of the Student Union president on charges of sedition.

A first look at some of these movements readily present this to us that the students were at stake when they decided to rally together. Either their academic careers, or their living conditions, or sometimes their democratic freedom. However, soon enough, these movements came to stand for 'student unity and independent democratic voice' and became socially way more significant. I would like especially to draw attention to the movements of Pondicherry University and of Jadavpur University.

The movement in Pondicherry was initially triggered by low stipend, a closed library, poor hostel facilities and the like. However, it soon flamed up more fiercely when a police crackdown caused 30 students to be admitted to the hospital, and 50 were arrested. Goons were deployed by the vice-chancellor himself to attack the students heavily.

In Jadavpur, too, the legendary rally of lakhs that defied the monsoon rains and filled the roads of Kolkata, had been in immediate effect 'called forth' due to a midnight police crackdown on protesting students on the campus. The movement had started with the demands of justice for a molestation victim.

Both these movements demanded the respective vice-chancellors step down.

Such crackdown by police and political goons has been a common scene in many, or possibly all of the movements listed here. I believe, in the immediate cause of the movements – such incidents have seriously helped to forge unity among the students, and also raise tremendous upheaval in the civic society. However, it hurts me to say that neither has the civic society been always very sensitive.

But, such monumental unity once forged –

the students evidently turned into a serious political force. Speaking of Bengal – following Hokkolorob, students have taken a very active part in many civic and workers' movements. Also, student movements followed in a number of universities – and unity among students was forged 'transcending the barriers of different universities'.

On the other hand, JNU, let's say, has been politically very aware and active for a greater part of its existence, and its students and alumni have played a significant role in the shaping of Indian politics in quite some spheres. Also, it has raised a lot of very important social and political questions – generally overlooked otherwise. For one, it has been addressing the issue of dalits and moolvasis since 1990's at the very least; and it has been an important centre of alternate cultural practice in this respect in the academic spheres.

So while the OccupyUGC movement was triggered by an issue – the recent media debacle that brought JNU much more into discussion was caused by nothing more than a routine event, perhaps.

This is not to say that other universities have been politically dormant. (JU, say, led a serious movement in protest of the Nandigram massacre. Also, questions of gender have always been given serious consideration in many universities. ASA has championed the cause of the dalits in many a campus, UoH being one of them.) But I am merely pointing out that a lot of these movements actually started out with issues, and faced unnaturally severe police/political crackdowns that but enhanced the movements.

As I have tried to propound – it has been observed that a greater student unity is

developing out of these movements. As for Bengal – students from the universities of Jadavpur, Presidency, Calcutta, Viswa-Bharati, Burdwan have come together on many an occasion and regularly maintain contact. Such unity has also been significantly observed on a broader national level – especially since Rohith's name has been there to forge such bonds.

Rohith deserves particular mention in this aspect. He has brought the dalit issue into a serious discussion – and it is no longer vote-bank-statistics that you may evade. His dreams have also added to the conviction of the student movement and unity. To discuss Rohith would require a lot more of space than I can afford, I shall just stop here, not before I quote Gopalkrishna Gandhi –

*'Time will tell, but this we can be certain of – Rohith Vemula's note, written just before he withdrew from life, and Kanhaiya Kumar's speech, delivered just before he was withdrawn from freedom, are thus far the two greatest testaments of 21st century India. They have been made out of the razor's edge of truth. They will last for all time.'*<sup>1</sup>

Images:1.*In Defence of Mother India, Students' Movement Takes Charge* - Gopalkrishna Gandhi, thewire.in

There is another point which I shall but only mention. Many of these movements have been born out of spontaneity; and in spite of their decidedly political nature – they have remained quite free, sometimes very fiercely free of the stronghold or even influences of the political parties or their student wings. This is a very serious debate to address, whether the party influences and structuralism is to be adopted by this movement, and whether the movement should vehemently shun it; and what then would be the structure and form that these movements are to take. (Also political movements (I repeat, political, not civic) free of the stronghold of parties is not original to students' movements. In West Bengal itself – we have observed such movements in Kamduni and Barasat much prior to #hokkolorob.) However, I shall again avoid addressing this debate here – space is running short.

However – the point I want to make now – which again is factually well-supported, is that this united student force has started to poke their nose into a huge number of social and political problems, and very often has lent a hand and raised a voice. Kolkata has seen students join



the unemployed youth in their demands that the School Service Commission employ the selected candidates, has seen them raise money for Nepal, for flood-stricken districts of Bengal, has seen them protest against the electricity tariff rise. Many an academic, student or teacher, from JNU has ever been a compassionate presence in the war-fields of Bastar – and they have led the ideological war in that aspect in the academic, civic and mainstream political spheres. JNU has constantly lent support to the workers of Maruti and other automobile manufacturers in Gurgaon. Students in Kolkata have lent their support to the struggle of jute-mill workers.

University of Lahore lent its voice of support to JNU. Kolkata has also seen her students support a movement to save the Sundarbans in Bangladesh.

One may have noted that I have been talking mostly of what politically they call 'left'. I shall not deny that political drift, neither shall I deny that the 'right' – led by RSS, VHP, 'Art of living' and the like have been stirring up serious political activities among students, nor shall I deny that there is a serious ideological war going on in the student plane. If you ask

me why I have almost omitted them, I have no option but to appeal to my personal bias.

But I assure you – I do not consider them stupid 'bhakt's. They are anything but stupid, and they are every bit as dedicated and concerned about the problems our nation is facing. The ideological war is in what these parties believe can salvage us of this condition.

However, this carries for me all the significance in this essay that the students are being seriously concerned about broader socio-political problems and are actively trying to mitigate them. Also that they (both the 'right' and the 'left' – so as to say) believe that the system is not perfect, in some aspects – wrongful, and they have taken up the challenge to try to change it. They have waged a war against the system – and they are gearing up. This possibly can be milestone.

In such restricted limits, it is difficult to argue for the novelty of the movements, and to address all the questions (rather, any of the questions) raised – I have merely tried to understand here 'what is going on' and attempted lamely at guessing significances. ■





WHAT IS IT?  
WHERE DID IT  
COME FROM?

MANGA

NOT JUST CUTE AND BIG EYES, AND STRANGE HAIR-STYLES

## Introduction

When I was in second grade, my daily afternoon ritual was -- coming back from school, taking a short nap, and then as the clock struck 6, fight with my grandfather over the television remote. The remote was very important to both of us for that half an hour--6 to 6:30--because, he wanted to see the news headlines for the day, and I wanted to see Dragon Ball Z, which used to come on the Cartoon Network Channel. Dragon Ball Z was the first addiction I had, and it engrossed me so much, that if you looked through any of my books or notebooks, you could almost surely find doodled versions of the main characters, and doodled amalgams of protagonists, who were routinely born in my imagination, only to die as my interest in imagining them fizzled out. Almost two years after, when I started watching another entertainment channel, Animax, I got hooked on to another anime--as Japanese cartoon is called--named Inuyasha. And after that, with the purchase of the desktop computer which still sits on my desk back home, (although, now it's a ship of Theseus), I dived into the world of Manga, the origin of anime. And this jump wasn't just into a particular genre of literature, it was a lunge into a whole culture of a country--it would lead me to read books like *Sanshiro* by Natsume Sōseki, *Kafka on the Shore*

by Haruki Murakami, to mention just a few, to take the JLPT Level N1 exam, to take a strong interest in Japanese movies from *Jiruba no Tetsu*, *Ran* and *Rashomon* by Akira Kurosawa and *Gohatto* by Nagisha Oshima to the much more modern *Departures* by Yōjirō Takita and *The Little House* by Yoji Yamada. My taste in Japanese music had started off with the opening and ending scores in various animes, and now has progressed to listening to not only to genres like pop and alternative rock, but also the gagaku music, which is the court music that is played in the Japanese imperial court.

I am not the only one who had started out with an anime or a manga, and had progressively become immersed in the Japanese culture. Neither am I the only person who is almost regularly asked what pleasure I find in reading comics and watching cartoon. I also ask myself, what is it about manga that is so immersive?

## Manga: Origin

Manga is a word primarily used to refer to comics created in Japan or comics created using the Japanese language as a medium and conforms to a particular art of style. In nativity, the term is used to refer to both comics and cartoons, however, internationally, manga is used to describe the comics, while the term "anime" is used for describing the cartoons. Breaking the word "Manga", (kanji: 漫画), it comes to the

two kanji *man* meaning ‘without a reason’ or ‘in vain’ and can also be understood as “whimsical” or “impromptu” or “playful” or lax” and *ga* meaning “pictures”. The exact origins of manga remain unclear, in spite of the arduous searches. One view is that manga originates from the basic human desire to record and express the surroundings of oneself, beginning from basic scribbles and doodles. It has been speculated that the influential 19th century artist Katsuhika Hokusai (1760-1849), the maker of the famous 19th century *ukiyo-e* (“floating world pictures”) and the iconic woodblock print images of 36 Views of Mount Fuji, was the first person to use the term and his sketchbooks are one of the earliest examples of Japanese humorous art. He sketched funny images of faces, blind men examining an elephant and many more on the same note. Finally he went on to produce, the 15 volume series of books *Hokusai manga*, which are widely regarded as the true ancestors of manga literature.

Even before Katsuhika Hokusai, we can find picture scrolls, the contents of which can be roughly termed as manga. These picture scrolls are from the 6th and 7th centuries, illustrated by buddhist monks. The most famous of these works is *Choujuugiga*, meaning “Animal scrolls” or “Illustration of Frolicking Animals”, a work by the monk Kakuyu

### ***Choju Giga(Kozan Temple) 12th C - 13th C***

(Image: [www.japanesegallery.co.uk/](http://www.japanesegallery.co.uk/))



(1053-1140) that depicted animals behaving like humans and satirized the life of Buddhist priests. Manga, had initially started out as an art form that depicted comic situations, using humour and satire.

In the early 18th century, with the development and widespread use of woodblock printing, this picturised literature started to gain more popularity. Despite its sometime satirical take, due to its innate comical aspect, it was easily accepted as light literature--nothing threatening, rather a form of light entertainment--by the feudal authorities, who had strictly banned any sort of instigatory or political themes in literature, and therefore not penalised. Also, through the history of east-asian literature, we can find a relatively close picture-to-language relationship. In cultures with Kanji (Chinese characters carrying different meanings and therefore always leaving possibilities for different combinations), it is easier to communicate where letters and words are combined with drawing, and used interlockingly to convey an expression.

The first book form of such work was *Toba-e* books that were distributed in *Osaka*. The early 18th century saw the commercial availability of *giga* (caricature) images to the public, and by the 19th, boosted by the commercial success, major woodblock print artists began producing prints with the influence of *giga* images. Examples include the numerous *giga* prints produced by *Kuniyoshi* (1797-1861). And with this, the forerunners of manga gained a firm foothold onto the Japanese psyche, though not yet in the form that we see it today.

The next major revolution in manga art, or better put “gharana”, would come with the Second World War, like many other things in the world. Perhaps wars aren’t just conflicts, they are also catalysts of sudden bursts of creative zeal. However, the changes in the artscape of manga had begun at the turn of the century.

At the dawn of the 20th century, Japanese artwork in comics started to become more and more open to the influences from the Western world. Rakuten Kitazawa was one such artist who embraced this East meets West gharana. He was inspired by popular comic strips *The Yellow Kid* by Richard Felton Outcault and *The Katzenjammer Kids* by Rudolph Dirks, and it led him to draw popular comics, such as *Tagosaku to Mokube no Tokyo Kenbutsu* (*Tagosaku and Mokube’s Sightseeing in Tokyo*). In 1905, he founded *Tokyo Puck*, a magazine to promote

the publications of Japanese cartoonists. Another notable artist who would explore this trend more and more was Ippei Okamoto, who would also be the person who would found the first cartoonist society of Japan, *Nippon Manga-kai*.

This century would be one of the most exciting and cataclysmic for the country. And yet as the Japanese left their feudal days behind to embrace a new world, the country boiled with an infectious energy, which many artists would tap into to fuel the changing landscapes of art and literature. But this was the just the beginning, for the Land of the Rising Sun would soon go into war.

Manga as we see it today, first came into existence by the hands of Osamu Tezuka, a medical student and Machiko Hasegawa.

One of the after-effects of the Second World War was that many of the pre-war large publishing houses went out of business, for a variety of reasons. With this development, a new sort of publishing business came to life--the little red books. And one of the authors of these little red books was Osamu Tezuka.

Tezuka’s first comic was *Shintakarajima*, or New Treasure Island. But he found comic as a medium insufficient. To make it more visually appealing and arresting, Tezuka started using cinematic techniques. And eventually

he gave birth to the immensely popular manga, *Mighty Atom*, known as *Astro Boy* internationally. (Sound familiar? Used to come on Cartoon Network).

## Manga: Post war to today

As Tezuka started doing panel after panel of work, he decided to use cinematic view techniques. And for *Sazae-san*, Hasegawa also made panel art using these techniques.

Both *Astro Boy* and *Sazae-san* were post-war mangas. And if we look at the style of these two mangas as compared to their predecessors, we would be able to see a post-war trend. By this I mean that, both of the main characters have selfless heroism, unflinching loyalty towards friends, or the country and unsubtle anti-war messages. These were the manga of the next generation, carrying the memory of the terrible war that would end with two atomic bomb explosions in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

*Astro Boy* was created in the US' occupation years of Japan, and Tezuka was influenced by the ideas of the Western world—in particular French and Germanic forms of art and literature that he came across. The US soldiers brought with them the earlier animations of Disney—Mickey Mouse, Bambi. This didn't just influence Tezuka, this was a major source of influence

and inspiration to many other contemporaries of Tezuka. *Momotaro's Divine Sea Warriors*, the first feature-length anime film, was released in 1945. Tezuka would go on to establish his own animation company—Mushi Productions, and in 1963, *Astro Boy* was first broadcast in Japanese TV and went on to become the first Japanese television series to really create and form the aesthetic that became known internationally as anime. Tezuka was also responsible for the unique “large eyes” style that has become a distinctive feature of manga and anime today, both



for cuteness and derision.

In particular, *Sazae-san* was a manga with a quite a modern spin. *Sazae-san* was a housewife who would often end up in comic, but trying situations. She was more interested in being herself than to look presentable or finding a husband—which were considered important duties for women in the Japanese society. But the war, like many other places, had drawn women to the front line—in particular, in industries and other governmental services. After the bombing occurred, Japan was attempting to rebuild itself—infrastructures, rehabilitation, military—and it could not do so with a large percentage of its population sitting at home. Hasegawa was forward-thinking, and like God had so debatably done with the human race, she created *Sazae-san* in the image of herself.

The cultural exchange between US and Japan in the occupation and Post-occupation years went both ways. During the 1960s, *Astro Boy* became the first anime series to be broadcast outside Japan. In the 1970s and 80s, other adaptations of anime made significant impact in overseas markets. Two of those series, *Robotech* and *Star Blazers* introduced mature themes. *Star Blazers*, broadcast in the U.S. in 1979, dealt with many issues before they became global concerns as they are today, such as radiation poisoning, acid rain, and global warming. In the show's first season, humans were forced to move underground



### *The Sazae-san Manga*

to avoid radiation poisoning. *Star Blazers* was also the first popular English-dubbed anime series with a storyline that required the episodes be shown in order.

The trend set by these two mangas would continue to persevere, especially in the 1980's, with mangas like *Dragon Ball*, (Created by Akira Toriyama and first published in 1984 it follows Goku and his friend Bulma as they explore a mythical earth, learning martial arts and searching for "dragonballs" that summon a magical

dragon who assists them in times of danger)--ideas of courage in the face of insurmountable threats, loyalty to the point of death, and in general, the ideas of good prevailing over evil, and a heroism that was military oriented. Even today, modern mangas such as *Bleach* (created by Noriaki Kubo and first published in 2001 and still continuing), continue to stick to this general trend.

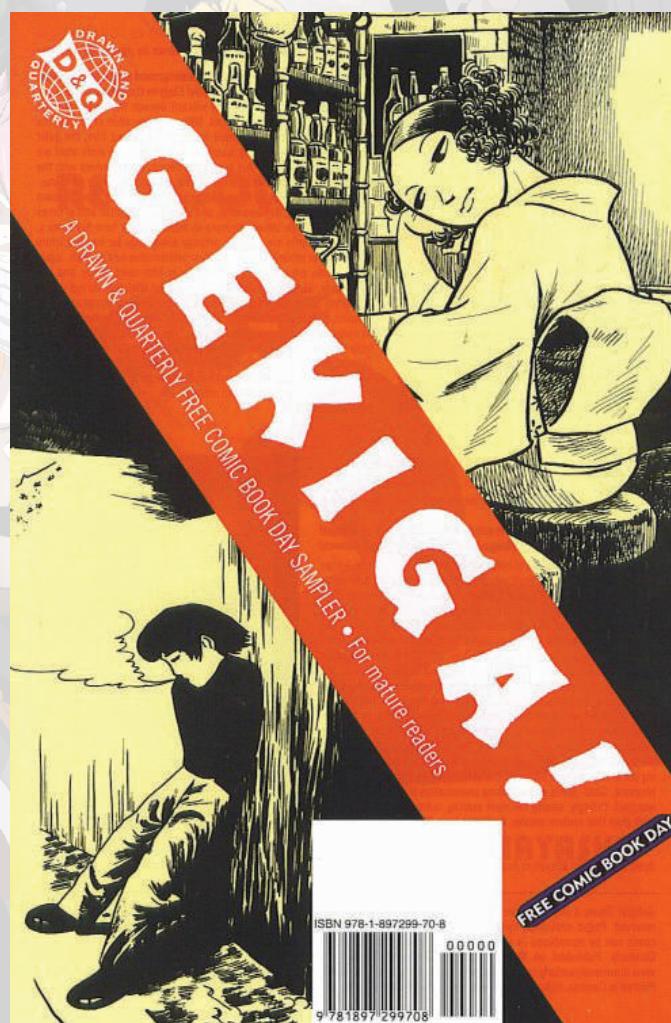
As the manga market continued to grow in Japan and overseas, the genres started to diversify to a great extent. With this emerged the different classes (if that is the correct term to use) of manga, and very often than not, these classes were gender-based. Manga for male readers have been classified into--boys up to 18 years old (*shōnen* manga) and young men 18 to 30 years old (*seinen* manga). Another approach to classification is done by content, rather than age. Here we have the third class for male readers—sexually overt manga aimed at grown men and also called *seijin* (“adult,” 成人) manga. For female readers, the manga written is called *Shōjo* manga.

Another content based genre which is remarkable in its own right is Gekiga. The word Gekiga means “drama pictures” and refers to a form of aesthetic realism in manga. This style drawing is emotionally dark, often starkly realistic, sometimes very violent, and focuses on the day-in, day-out grim realities of life, often

drawn in gritty and unpretty fashions. Some famous manga of the Gekiga genre are—Koike and Kojima’s *Lone Wolf and Cub* and *Akira*, an apocalyptic tale of motorcycle gangs, street war, and inexplicable transformations of the children of a future Tokyo.

One interesting thing to note would be see that unlike the comic superheroes—Batman, Superman, Wonder Woman, Spectre, Captain America, in the world of manga, costumed

#### **Gekiga- a genre based manga**



superheroes never have been very popular. Superman-esque heroes like Goku never attempted to hide their identity and though they seemed to have a standard dress for fighting, it was never a stylized costume. Modern mangas such as Bleach and Naruto have stylized dresses, but they serve to reflect ethnicity or class or a level of power, rather hiding the identity of the wearer.

Manga has made the Japanese publishing markets one of the most vigorous in the world. The gross sales from publishing in 2002 was 2.3 trillion yen. The total number of published materials including magazines was over 750 million. 22.6% of total sales, or 38.1% of published material sold in 2002 are of manga (Figure 1). Since they peaked in 1995, both the percentage of manga in published material and the publishing industry as a whole have been on a decline, due to piracy and scanlation. Still, manga remains one of the pillars of Japanese economy. Overseas, the largest market of manga is currently North America.

Manga now includes topics like heroism to gritty avant-garde realism and political thrillers like Sanctuary. It has varied complicated topics which explore the meaning of morality and humanity--Mirai Nikki, Ghost in the Shell, Neon Genesis Evangelion (Though this is not a manga) are classics.

Apart from just the manga volumes, Manga culture has spawned a great number of tertiary industries. Some of the greatest annual events if the world are held in Tokyo. In Japan and many other countries, you have Manga cafes, places where customers can read from a library of manga for a specified time at a corresponding fee. Guests are free to borrow and return books as many times as they wish within the time limit. There are Maid cafes were originally created to fulfil the fantasies of fans of maid-themed manga and anime.

Anime conventions such as Anime Expo, Otakon, and JACON, started in the early 1990s and are currently held annually in cities across Europe, Asia, and the Americas. Many convention attendees take part in cosplay where they dress up as anime characters. Japanese artists, voice actors, film directors and musicians are invited to the conventions. Colleges, high schools, and community centers outside Japan, even in India have started hosting anime clubs, as a way to share and exhibit anime and manga. As the popularity of manga and anime continues to grow, so does the world's knowledge and understanding of Japanese culture. ■





# VIVA LA VIDA

**G**oing by my likes and dislikes in general, a city would be an embodiment of everything I am ardently against. They're chaotic and unruly, and there's far too much happening for my tiny human brain to keep track of, let alone comprehend. Keeping that in mind, I've always wondered why I'm particularly drawn to large cities. Despite the fact that my room is usually a mess, I'm actually

fond of order, cleanliness and discipline. Yet cities, especially Indian ones, are polar opposites. It always struck me as odd that I'd fall for places characterised by dirt, grime, disorder, and commotion. Does my subconscious find order in this mess? As much as I'd like to believe it, that is very, very unlikely.

*Photo credits: Sabyasachi Basu*



It took me a while to arrive at this conclusion, but for once, something tells me that my deduction might not be too inaccurate.

Despite the sorrow, the despair, the misery and everything negative about human life that cities happen to be full off, they are also full of the complement. You find joy in every corner, they teach you appreciate the happiness and pleasure that accompany even the smallest, most insignificant of things. For every spot, every stain, every act of crime, you find people doing their best to make up for it. In spite of the decadence, the disease, the pain and suffering, there is always a little hope. Isn't that some-

thing worth admiring? It's rather fortunate that this one still lives inside Pandora's pithos.

And of course, there are the people. What are cities without people? Empty buildings, vacant rooms, abandoned roads. Where is the hustle and bustle of a city, where are its sights and sounds without the people?

On another note, it's interesting that I find large metros a lot more appealing than smaller towns. The difference is rather stark in our country; not just in terms of amenities and facilities, but in terms of cleanliness, quality of life, and a number of other things that fall under the list of my general 'likes'; I guess this is where it kicks in; it has to, somewhere. I'd be rather surprised if it didn't.

Enough of digressing. I've rambled on for long enough; it's time I finished this.

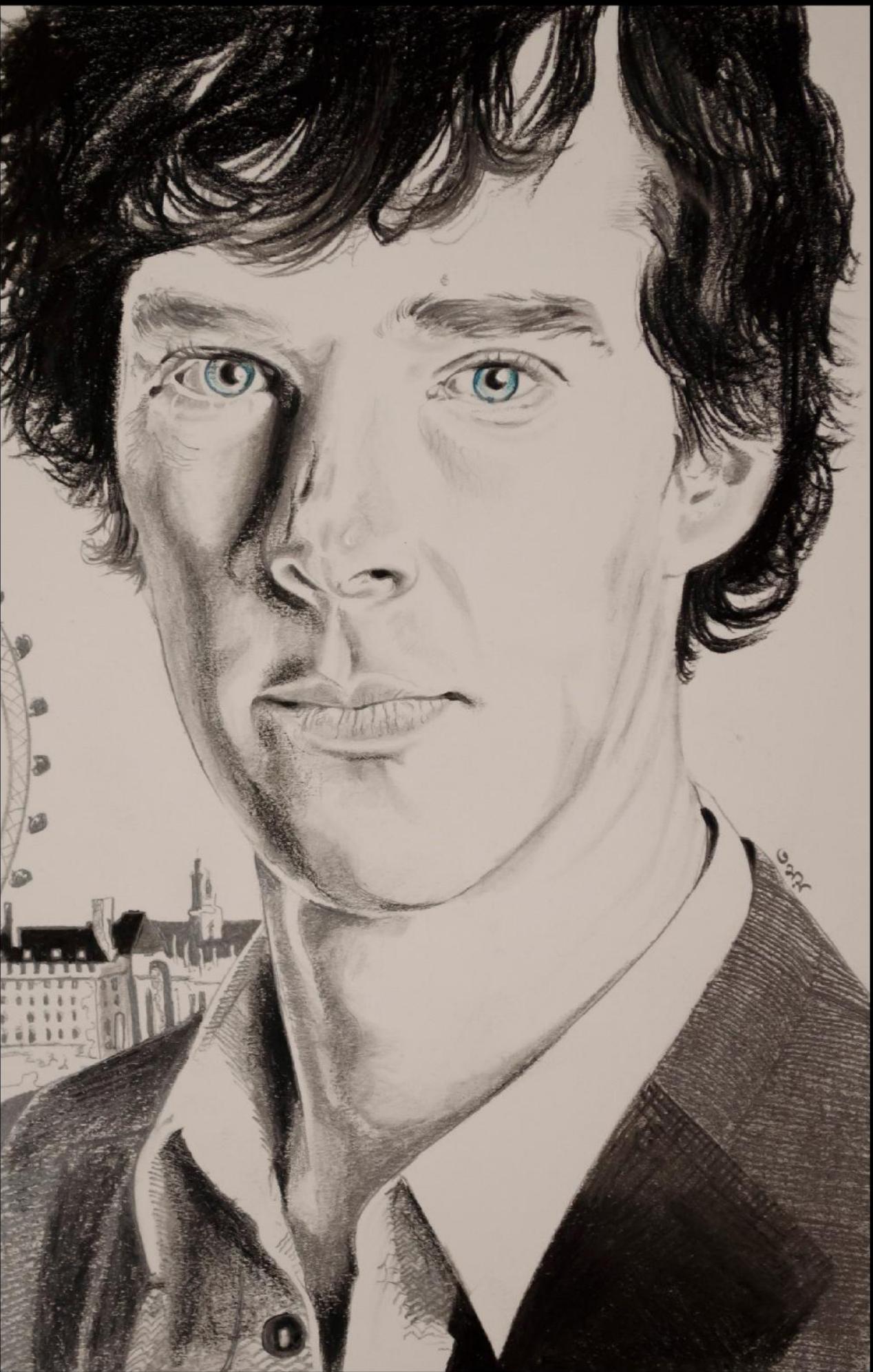
I've come to realise that irrespective of our personal views about the urban life and everything it means, these cities are a lot more than what we usually perceive them to be; a city is more than a melting pot of cultures and beliefs, it is an embodiment of energy, a city is life personified - with the hordes of people struggling to overcome challenges, the city itself ever-changing in its dynamics, and the people moulded by it to keep adapting to these changes; what is this, if not the very spirit of life on this world? It is this indomitable spirit of life that has let it survive, and even thrive in the most desolate of conditions for billions of years. Is it strange that this very thing is what gives a city its beauty, what makes these centres of our civilisation, the manifestation of our hopes and dreams? I guess not.

And no matter how much we humans may try to distance ourselves from nature, we are part of this world. Is it not natural for us to be drawn to life? ■

-Anonymous

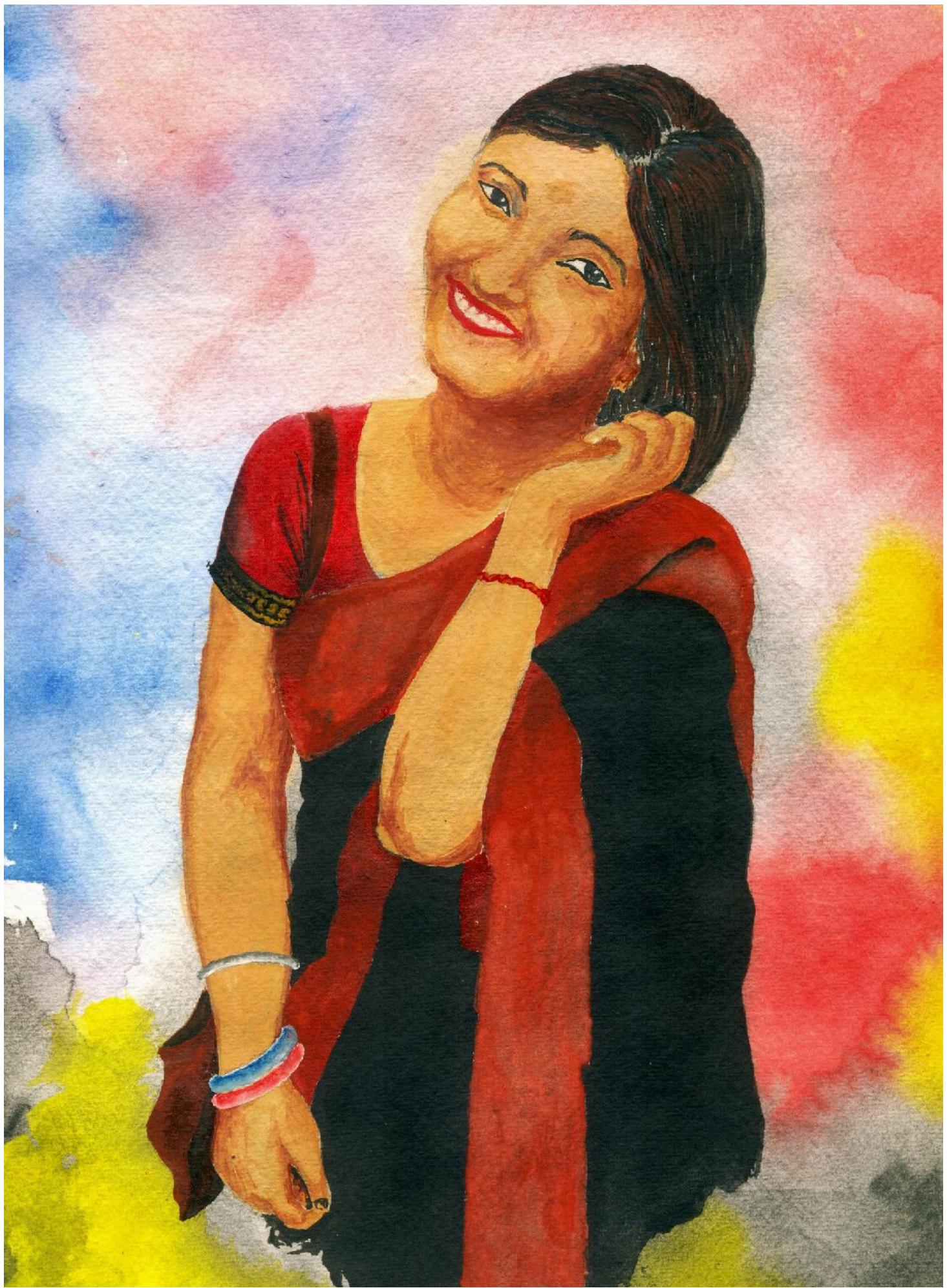


Art by -  
**Sabyasachi Basu**  
Second year



Art by -  
Tanmoy Pal  
Batch 2012-16

Tanmoy



Art by -  
Prokash Kumar Kundu  
Third year



Punarbasu Roy

Art by -  
Punarbasu Roy  
Third year



# INTERVIEWS



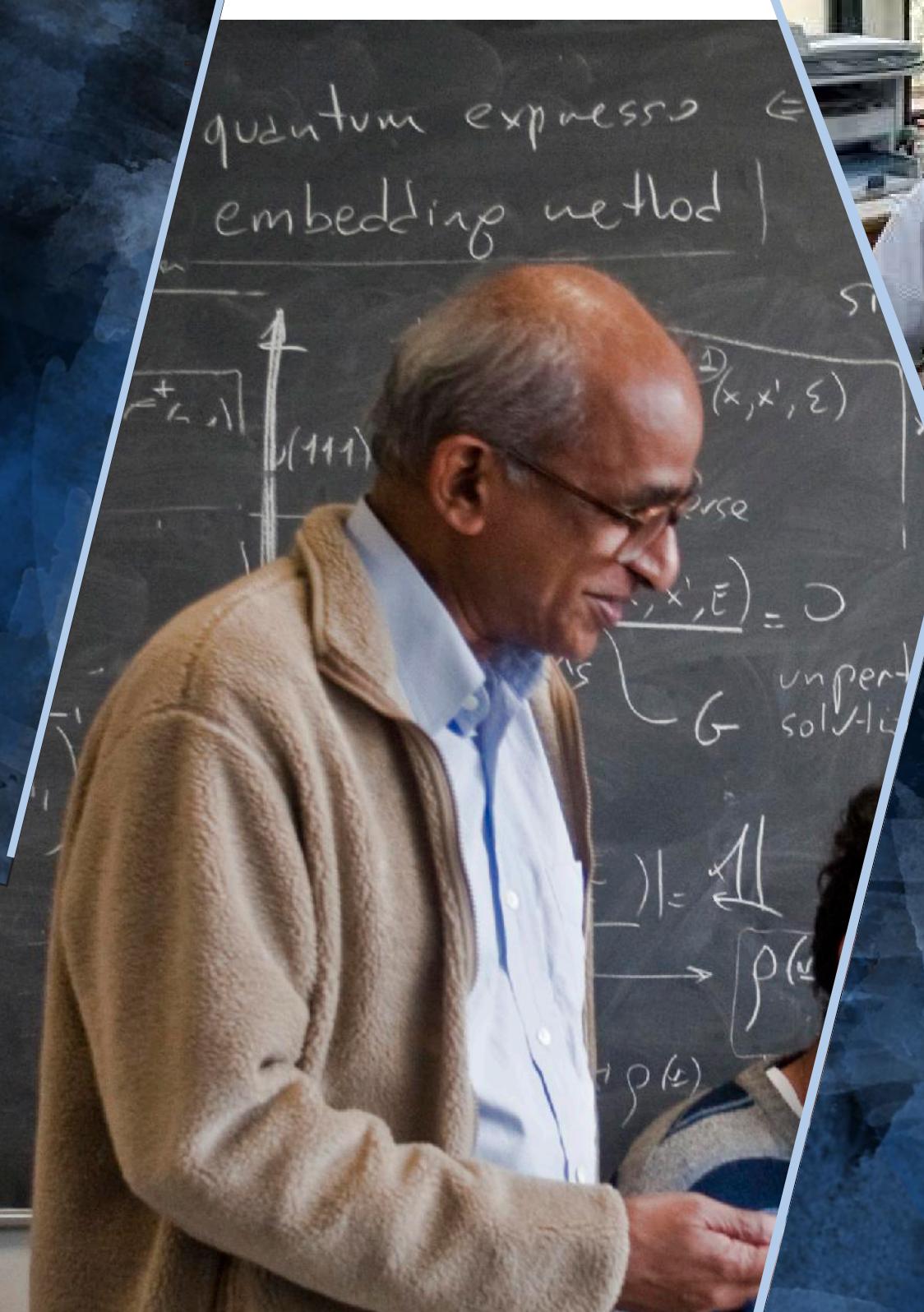
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An Interview with  
Prof. K L Sebastian

Veteran's View : Interview with  
Prof. Dipankar Chatterji

Bikers of Bangalore : Talking to  
a semi-procyclist at IISc



Photograph by-  
Anuva Aishwarya  
Fourth Year



# THE QUANTUM CHEMIST

B.Sc (SPECIAL, CHEMISTRY)  
Calicut University

M.Sc (PHYSICAL CHEMISTRY)  
Calicut University

FELLOW OF INDIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES  
Elected in 2001

DOCTORATE IN PHILOSOPHY (PH.D)  
Indian Institute of Science

PROFESSOR, IISC  
September 1996 onward

AN INTERVIEW WITH

# PROF. K.L. SEBASTIAN

By Pranav Minasandra  
Second Year

$$\frac{1}{\sqrt{2}}|\text{cat}\rangle + \frac{1}{\sqrt{2}}|\text{mouse}\rangle$$

**I** enter the Inorganic and Physical Chemistry department at 2:10 PM. The snug and warm place seems to harbour a creeping premonition of doom. ‘Relax’, I tell myself. ‘Breathe in, breathe out’. It’s the first time I’m interviewing someone.

Dr Kizhakeyil Lukose Sebastian, KLS as everyone calls him, had asked me to arrive at 2:30pm. KLS taught Quantum Chemistry to the first five batches of IISc’s UG programme. The fact that he will not be teaching the future batches, as he announced in his very last class, will be a loss to all UG batches to follow. With hilarious quips and mountainous enthusiasm, he brought quantum mechanics to life. Every student thoroughly enjoyed his course.

At 2:30, I peeped into KLS’ lab. A student told me that KLS was waiting in his office. Trembling, I entered. KLS, with a smile, offered me green tea. The trembling ceased. The interview began. I decided to begin with what is probably the oldest question in the book of interviews.

### **Why chemistry in particular, and why science?**

“After I passed my tenth standard”, said KLS, “my father wanted me to become a *medical* doctor. Back then, you had to choose between maths and biology during your plus two. After my twelfth, I’d done pretty well in everything, but I didn’t want to do medicine. As it turned out, I was underage by around forty days, so I couldn’t join the medical programme. My father told me to apply for a BSc in chemistry, because chemistry is useful in medicine. I was to apply in the following year.

The next year, when the time for admissions came,” KLS laughs, “I didn’t tell my father about it! After I completed my BSc, I did apply for medicine. I was selected. In fact, I was first in the list.” KLS laughs again, “But you see, by that time, I had grown up!”

### **How would you define science?**

“Anything that is interesting. Also, it must be logical. It’s difficult to define science. For me, it’s anything that’s interesting. I don’t think I can define it any better.”

### **Do you think the people of the world will start liking science more than they like it now?**

“No, why should they? People go for science because they find it interesting, logical and doable. But it isn’t necessary that everyone should find it so. Agreed that people’s outlook towards science has changed,

but that is mainly because of the benefits that they get. In fact, there is a dearth of good science students in the western world. Shouldn’t that number be increasing if, in fact, people start liking science more?”

### **For the people who have chosen science over other options, what do you think are the qualities and skills required to be a good scientist?**

“Standard answer: inquisitiveness! Also, one must be able to think logically. Ultimately, it’s the curiosity and ability to understand science that matters. Not necessarily something as complex as quantum field theory. Trying to understand something simpler is sufficient too.”

### **How would an IISc budget cut affect science in India and UGs at IISc in particular?**

“Things like these are common. Regarding UGs, the fact is that many other good institutes, such as IISERs, are available. So, the quality of the students who join here might go down. One of the deans also mentioned that there might be serious repercussions for the UGs.

When I was studying, funding for science was very low. There was no prospect of a job, partly because I chose to do theoretical chemistry. The financial situation in general, has been improving ever since I came to IISc twenty years ago. I came to IISc as a professor in 1996, and couldn’t buy a car till 2000. Now, assistant professors can easily buy a car in an or two years after joining. There has been a corresponding increase in funding for research. Regarding research, if suddenly the funding becomes less for research, they would get disgruntled. That would cause problems.”





*Your exams were the most balanced ones anyone had set for us. What is the definition of an examination according to you, and what would you change in the UG examination system?*

An examination should, of course be a test of the extent to which the student has understood the subject, and whether he is able to apply the knowledge to solve a new problem, that he has never encountered before. “One of my main disappointments regarding teaching the UGs was that I could not interact a lot with the students. The number of students is very large, and there isn’t enough time. Perhaps UGs don’t have a lot of time after the classes either! I don’t know how much spare time you have to do anything else.”

***What did you like the most in the UG Course?***

“The teaching, obviously! Until five years ago, I had only taught masters’ students, so I didn’t know whether I’d be able to teach you guys. So, initially when I agreed to teach, I agreed to teach for just one year. After teaching the first batch, I decided to continue. Students are always asking questions. Sometimes I couldn’t answer all of them in the class, for lack of time. Nevertheless, I enjoyed it immensely.”

***What do you think about the UG attendance policy? Do you think it’s true that attendance is correlated with good performance?***

“I am against recording attendance. I think I have mentioned this in the class! Many other faculty are, as well. There are two reasons. Firstly, lack of attendance implies a fault in my teaching abilities. Many times, I have noticed students sneaking out of the class when I’m turned the other way. I have been deeply upset by this, but I believe that the fault lies in me, that I have not been able to make the topic interesting enough to that student so that he will not want to go out.

Secondly, and more importantly, in an Institute like this, there must be some students, perhaps 10% of the total strength, who don’t need to be taught. Otherwise, this whole programme seems pointless. That’s my opinion. Why should I hold somebody in my class, if he/she can study on his/her own?”

However, yes. I do believe that attendance is correlated with good performance. The Students’ Dean of IISER Pune said that they had no strict policy regarding the attendance in their first year. When they did implement the scheme, it was observed that overall performance seemed to improve.”

***Your lecture slides were really helpful, and funny at the same time. Why did you choose Tintin characters while making your slides?***

“I am a fan of Tintin, but actually, I like Asterix more! I chose Tintin over Asterix because it has more relatable characters. There is Calculus, who is an ab-



sent minded know-it-all. There is Haddock, the buffoon. And there are Thomson and Thompson, of course. You might have noticed that Tintin does not appear in the slides. The reason for that is that, well, he is kind of a normal guy!", KLS laughs.

### ***What is your message to future students and instructors of your course?***

"That's a difficult one! This is the Indian Institute of Science. There are many smart people here, and they will definitely do well. The instructors must keep the course engaging, because it forms the basis for all the chemistry that students learn later. The students, well, they simply need to enjoy the course, and learn it well, as clear understanding of the concepts will help them in their future studies in their chosen area, irrespective of whether it is chemistry, physics or biology"

### ***There were a few students who did not have a formal exposure to mathematics. How did you help them manage?***

"For two years, when there were problems, we have conducted small remedial courses in mathematics for those who asked. During the first year, Pallavi, a PhD student, handled it. The second time, Rohit, another PhD student, handled the course. We have helped anybody who came forward and asked for it."

### ***If you were to conduct any more classes for the UGs, which batch would you choose, and which concept would you teach them?***

"I liked the first batch, probably because it was the first time I was teaching UGs. I also liked the third batch. The reason is that, usually, I handle courses for three years; I like change. I was under the impression that it would be my last year teaching UGs. Further, the third batch gave me very good feedback!"

As for concept, I would teach path integrals. It was a concept I could not teach in great depth, due to lack of time. It is not taught at an undergraduate level anywhere in India, or anywhere in Chemistry. But it is an interesting topic, I use it in my research, I like it a lot."

### ***Lots of people will miss you.***

"I will also miss them. I will be happy to offer the course again. In fact, Anshu Pandey asked me to teach this year, but it is not possible. I'd be happy to handle the course further in the future if I'm still in the institute"

### ***Would you like to say anything else to the UGs through this magazine?***

"All the best! Pursue your chosen area with passion! You should not be worried about job opportunities! You will have plenty of them. I am looking forward to reading your papers –in the journals *Nature* and *Science*!"

And on that note ended my interview with Dr K L Sebastian, one of the friendliest and humble scientists of his generation.

**"IT'S DIFFICULT TO DEFINE SCIENCE. FOR ME, IT'S ANYTHING THAT'S INTERESTING. I DON'T THINK I CAN DEFINE IT ANY BETTER."**

# VETERAN'S VIEW

-by Pooja Nathan  
Second Year



PADMA SHREE  
**PROF. DIPANKAR CHATTERJI**  
JC BOSE FELLOW | BHATANGAR AWARDEE



Padma Shri Prof Dipankar Chatterji, among several other things is a J C Bose Fellow and Bhatnagar awardee. Until this year, he handled the first semester module on Biomolecules in the latter half of UB101, a compulsory course for all undergraduates. His laboratory works on Regulation of Gene Expression, pertaining to the Structure-function relationship in RNA polymerase in organisms like *E. coli* and *Mycobacterium*. Prof Chatterji's course was short yet succinct, and his retirement will be a loss for the batches to come.

#### Why was Biology your discipline of choice?

On the contrary, it was not! I started with chemistry ...  
...I never studied biology formally, ever. I only took it up during my PhD. In fact, I majored in Chemistry.

There are two perspectives on research; one is that research must be carried out with the welfare of society as the primary goal, and the other is that research must be performed solely for the pursuit of knowledge. What is your opinion on this?

This is a very difficult question...

My answer may seem a little selfish, but I have a reason for thinking this way. Research must be carried out only for the pursuit of knowledge.

Very few people can do science, and these select few must do it in pursuit of knowledge. Serving humanity is a lofty goal, and there are many people committed to that. Right? If you pursue knowledge, your knowledge will serve humanity. Take Muhammad Ali; he was a genius. He achieved excellence in boxing. But he changed the face of the world! If you are in pursuit of such excellence, people will eventually be benefitted.

#### Do science and art go hand in hand? Have you ever dabbled in the arts?

They go hand in hand indeed, as their basis is creativity. Both of them spur from the urge to create or discover

something new.

I personally have never dabbled in the arts, but I enjoy looking at paintings and watching movies. When I was your age, I was a movie-buff. I enjoy good music too. When one looks at these expressions of creativity one feels so good! This happens even in science...a good paper makes you wonder how the author did such an elegant piece of research!

#### How important is it for science to be accessible to the masses?

Science must be accessible to the masses; there is no question about that. But to do good research, you need trained minds. The general public must be sensitised to science and scientific progress no doubt, but the scientific community will always be a different class of people.

If you are to appreciate a painting or a raga, it takes a trained eye and a trained ear to do that. Only those who have inspected the painting, or have listened to the raga several times will know how to enjoy it. It is the same for science. Any creative endeavour is esoteric.



### What qualities in your opinion should a scientist possess?

Firstly, he or she should ask questions. What the teacher says should not be accepted immediately. This is one reason why I like UGs. When I teach, I see all those sleepy boys and girls take out their laptops to check if what I'm saying is right! The guru-shishya hierarchy doesn't work in science. The 'guru' may not always be right. Age is not a proxy for knowledge. Learning is a lifelong process.

Science also requires focus, and a fair amount of indifference. Indifference will help a scientist pursue his/her research unaffected by the external world.

### What are your general comments on the UG programme?

As one of the faculty members seriously involved in the establishment of the UG Programme here at IISc, I take pleasure in mentioning that it is a very successful programme.

I felt that two things were essential; one, that the programme must be of four years' duration, and two, that the students must be from a Physics-Chemistry-Mathematics (PCM) background. This was much to the displeasure of many of my colleagues, but I stand by it. Although a major discipline, Biology can be learned even with no prior exposure; mathematics cannot.

### What is your take on the interdisciplinary nature of IISc's UG programme?

I strongly feel that a student must be familiarized with all subjects. It is important to know at least the basics of all subjects, as this will enable a student to take a more unbiased decision regarding their major. I want to add that having more than one teacher per semester should be avoided. Students should be able to interact with their teacher casually to discuss their questions, should be able to frequent their labs...this will not be possible if the course is very short. The courses themselves must be such that the content can be applied to other disciplines easily.

The UG Programme mandates an attendance requirement of minimum 80%. What do you think of this?

(laughs) Do you remember that I used to say that I won't take attendance? There are people who do exceedingly well even without attending classes. However, I suppose there must be some discipline. I don't believe in enforcing attendance. However, if there is data showing that there is a direct correlation between attendance and performance in class, then maybe I will change my mind.

### Do you have any general advice for us?

IISc is one of a kind...it offers more opportunities to learn than any other institute. Make the most of your stay here, attend as many seminars as possible. Play more; it will help you to concentrate. ■



# BIKERS OF BANGALORE

Road cycling scene in Bangalore, as described by an insider

by Ashok Suresh Das  
Third Year

*Rishav Mallick describes himself as a seismologist by day, and a cyclist by earlier in the day. An obsessive cyclist, Rishav has competed in numerous races held in and around Bangalore. The Quarks team managed to catch up with the speedster to hear his views about the road cycling scene in Bangalore, and how he made it to the pro-cycling arena.*

## QT: FIRST LET'S GET TO KNOW A BIT ABOUT YOU. WHAT BROUGHT YOU TO IISc?

Rishav Mallick: I finished my undergrad from NIT Surathkal, but I wasn't really happy with engineering, and I'd done a lot of projects which had pushed me towards geoscience.

## QT: SO WHAT DID YOU STUDY IN NIT?

RM: I did chemical engineering. I came here with the intention of doing geochemistry, especially particle modelling and geochemistry. But after coming here, you get disillusioned, and then you realize that what you were looking for is not what you really want to do. Stuff like that always happens: you're always misguided as an undergrad, if you haven't really tried your hand at what you think you like. I knew I wanted to do geoscience, but I was not very fixed on what. So that's why I came to IISc, and the M.Tech program was just starting off, and I initially thought I'd join CAOS, but then, it just so happened that the M.Tech program opened here (Earth Science Dept.) as well. It was a good fit. That's how IISc.

*"You have to trust who you ride with. In races, you will see me generally always near the front because in India we still haven't gotten to that level where we communicate very well in a race. We don't point out that, oh look, there's pothole, move away"*

## QT: SO YOU'VE MOVED ON FROM GEOCHEMISTRY TO?

RM: Currently what I'm doing is studying the physics of faulting. How cracks propagate and so on. We don't really work on cracks initiate, but how cracks propagate in a tectonic framework. The scale of stresses is much larger than what you see in rock mechanics labs, which have these Cartesian coordinates in these blocks, which are stressed. But what I study happens on a much larger scale; it's in spherical coordinates, and it's on the earth, it's not in a lab. The idea is to work on earthquakes using seismic data and geodesy, that is INSAR (Interferometric Synthetic Aperture Radar) and GPS. And if you're lucky, which is in a way, unlucky, but if you have tsunamis, that helps a lot in gauging what's going to happen. That's what I'm going to work on now.

## QT: SO LET'S GET TO BUSINESS. AT WHAT POINT CAN YOU SAY YOU STARTED GETTING INTO CYCLING?

RM: When I lived in the campus, I lived in the PD block. It's on the other side of the campus; it was pretty far. I realized, okay, got to get myself a bicycle. So, I bought a rockrider, like everyone else because it's cooler than the btwin mybike, but it's not expensive enough to get you



worried. So I got myself a rockrider and it was my commute bike. There was this one pretty adventurous chap in my department. He organizes these adventure series talks in Centre for Earth Science. He's into bouldering, and hiking and a lot of trekking. He also did cycling for a while and took up running. He was like, "You know what, let's try going and checking out Hessarghatta. Twenty-five kilometres dude!". And I was like, "Yeah man, let's do it and make a day of it." There was also this added incentive to do so. I'd taken up running and cycling at the same time. That was because my girlfriend at the time said that I was getting fat, I'd put on weight. That was a bit of a poke I didn't recover very well from...

## QT: WE'D RATHER SAY YOU RECOVERED VERY WELL FROM THAT POKE.

RM: Point to be noted, I was never fat. There was that, and the

fact that in IISc you see a lot of people cycling. When I joined the cycling community in IISc, it was on its decline, which meant it still had some activity, it wasn't completely dead, but it was slowly dying. We still had people who were doing brevets and randonneuring, things like that. You'd meet people and they'd tell you that, "You know what, I just rode like a thousand kilometres in the last 90 hours.", and you'd be like, "Why the hell, man! Why did you do that?". But slowly, that became commonplace. They'd be like, "I just did 200 km last night, and then I'll do 150 this afternoon." And your reply would be, "Cool. Okay thanks bye." But the thing is, you hear this more and more, and then it becomes commonplace, you think it's not a big deal.

You start with a 50k ride, and then you tell yourself, "If I do two of them, that's 100k. Let's just do it." I'd say the scene at that time was pretty encouraging as cyclist who's just starting out. Even if you didn't have big goals and aspirations, there were people at different levels. The whole spectrum from absolute novice to just novice. There were no serious cyclists: there have not been serious cyclists from IISc, but the initial stages, where you need company, there you did have company at IISc. That was really nice.



## QT: SO HOW'D YOU GET FROM THERE TO WHERE YOU ARE NOW? NOW YOU DO MAINLY RACES, NOT LONG DISTANCE, RIGHT?

RM: That's a tricky question really. Maybe it was buying a road bike? No that was not it. Doing long distance cycling has one real annoying drawback. Everyone at home is constantly worried. It's because you're riding with no support, wearing this silly reflective vest and you have a stupid light and anyone can come and hit you. When you get tired, you just stop on the side of the road and you go off to sleep. Someone could steal your bike and go away. It's not a very good deal. And it feels like you're kind of short-changing yourself because it's so easy and not very competitive. It's the kind of scene where everyone is very nice, and just finishing it is a big deal, not finishing it fast. At our age, just finishing is not enough. Just like clearing IIT-JEE was not a big deal. You want something out of it. You don't want to do it just for the heck of doing it. I think that works when you're forty or fifty years old, when you're calm enough to maintain a steady pace for the next 10 hours and I'll just look at the countryside which is really beautiful. I have all my baggage on me. I'll take a bath whenever I want to, when I see a stream. I'm self-sufficient, and I'm doing it because I like touring.

In my case that didn't really fly with me; brevets and touring weren't really my thing. It was then when I bought a road bike. And then I turned up for a couple of these lo-



cal races. They're organized by this group called BBCh, Bangalore Bicycling Championships. There was a huge turnout, lots of states, and lots of people from Karnataka. There were various categories; there was an elite category, an amateur category, U-18 category, Masters, for older riders and women's category. You can participate in whichever category you think is appropriate for you, you find people at similar levels. The races here were shorter, e.g. 50k, 100k, 200k. But despite being short races, at the end of the day, you get your ass handed to you, and you've raced your heart out, you've nothing left. You just die after the race. I liked that. I liked that a lot more. It felt like I was doing something where you could win. It felt like a competitive sport. In college, when we played football, or even went swimming, it was always a race. There was always a point of beating someone's ass, or crying after you'd lost, or plotting revenge. It was still a sport; it wasn't just a team building activity.

Competitive cycling was that thing, which I rediscovered. I really liked it. But making that jump from just cycling to actively cycling at that competitive level, that takes a lot of time, a lot of coaching. You have to give up a lot of things. You need a very solid routine. You can't go partying whenever you want to. You don't need to watch what you eat all the time, but you need to start being picky. Mess food just doesn't cut it. That much rice, and just one piece of fried chicken.

## QT: DO YOU TRAIN IN THE MORNING? DO YOU TRAIN EVERY DAY?

RM: Yeah, I do train in the morning. I train about 5 or 6 days a week. Mondays are my off days. I don't get on the bike at all on Mondays. The other six days are a mix of hard rides and recovery rides.

## QT: YOU SAID YOU NEED A GOOD COACH AND DECENT PEER GROUP TO GET INTO RACING. HOW DID YOU GET YOUR PEER GROUP AND COACH?

RM: At some level, it has to do with your initial talent itself. You can't go from being completely average to suddenly finding a spot. You need to have either a spark, or you need to believe in yourself. So in my case, I was lucky, I had a bit of that spark. When I first started racing, I used to do a lot of time trials. Time trials are where you don't race in a bunch, you race solo. So it's you, against yourself, against the wind, against the clock. So you're not racing against anyone else. You're basically trying to be as fast as you can be. The thing about cycling is, unlike running, wind resistance is the biggest factor that impedes speed. The strongest rider is not the guy who is going to win the race. It's the guy who's been sneaky, who stayed out the wind for the longest and has accelerated fastest when it mattered.

Cycling is slightly different from all other sports. It's all about being as aerodynamic as possible. Conserving, conserving, conserving as much. During time trials, all that doesn't matter. All you need to be is the strongest rider. If you just get into the zone, just hammer the shit out, you can really do well, you can be fast. The first few time trials I did, I ended up being pretty competitive and pretty fast. There are a couple of amateur teams in Bangalore that noticed that, and asked me whether I'd like to train with them. That's where I got picked up.



## QT: WHEN DID YOU GET YOUR FIRST ROAD BIKE?

RM: Sometime in 2014; March of 2014. And I ended up joining this team, this team was called Spectrum Racing, in the January of 2015. I was always riding with other people. During coursework, it's a little tough to manage cycling and coursework. The toughest part of cycling is you do it in the morning. It's very tough to do it in the afternoon or in the evenings because traffic picks up. And you're tired, you're really tired. The moment you come back after a hard ride, you're really tired, and you feel like you can't get into the zone for class. But the good thing is, you're actually much more alert. I don't know if it's just me, but I've spoken to a lot of other people who agreed. After hard workouts in the mornings, even people who go to the gym say the same thing, they come back and feel really energized and level headed. So it worked out awesome for me. So I'd cycle in the morning, come back, go to class, do my work. It became like a very structured routine.

That's the thing with cycling. It forces you to get into a routine. You can't be too much of a loose cannon and take any endurance sport very seriously. You need to have crazy genes and really good inherent talent to manage that, but as Indians, we aren't encouraged to do a huge amount of sports as kids. Europeans in general, have an advantage there. Since they're twelve, they would've picked up a bike and gone to the local races. They'd be running all the time. A lot of my friends whom I race with come from the US. They were like alpine skiers when they were 14 or 15. They were into rowing. From rowing and alpine skiing, making the transition to cycling is easy, because you're already well trained. In India we play cricket. You spend most of the time standing.

## QT: WHAT IS THE LONGEST RIDE YOU HAVE BEEN ON? WHAT ARE SOME POINTERS YOU WOULD GIVE TO ASPIRING TOURING CYCLISTS?

RM: My longest ride was this 600k brevet that I once did. It was a brevet, which required the participants to finish the 600 kilometres in the stipulated amount of time. That was about the time I started hating it because you get really tired. I did the first 300 km really fast and then I got so sleepy. Unimaginably sleepy. The race was supposed to finished in 40 hours, but I managed to finish it in 30 hours. Out of those 30 hours, I cycled for about 20 hours, and take intermittent naps and breaks in between lasting anywhere from 15 minutes to 1 hour. I'd keep thinking, I'm almost there, just 100k to go, but 5k later, I couldn't go on any more. I'd be craving food; my legs were empty. And bum sore as hell. There's this common problem of being on the saddle for too long, and if the saddle is not fit perfectly for you, then one can suffer chafing. Don't be surprised if you hear cyclists talking about their crotch all the time. It sounds weird to outsiders, but fellow cyclists will empathize.

A lot depends on clothing, really. When you start cycling you don't really think of it. When I started cycling I just wore cotton shorts and cotton tees. But the body hugging lycra actually pays dividends. Because (a), It wicks moisture away really well. Then, if you notice cycling bib shorts probably, you'll see that it looks like adult diapers. There's a padded foam material in the nethers, and mainly that acts as your cushioning blanket of sorts. That is what makes your ride comfortable. All that really matters as you ride longer and harder, you feel that you may have to move away from just putting something on to wearing the right stuff.

## QT: SO WHEN YOU GOT YOUR ROAD BIKE DID YOU KNOW YOU'D EVENTUALLY GET INTO COMPETITIVE CYCLING?

RM: That was the plan. I started watching a lot of bike racing on the internet; you don't get to see much on TV. So, it looked really interesting to me. I knew I'd always want to get into competitive cycling. That was the end goal. Or that was always the goal, not the end goal. There are different levels of it. I knew I wanted to race, not just ride for the fun of it.

## QT: SO IT MUST HAVE BEEN AN INVESTMENT, RIGHT? WE'RE GIVEN TO UNDERSTAND THAT ROAD BIKES ARE KIND OF EXPENSIVE?

RM: It's not as expensive as you think. It can be, it can be really expensive if you let it be. But as a miserly, or I would say as a frugal student, I tried to not be spendthrift, I tried to be, you know, be watchful of how much money I spent on cycling. Because, you need replacements.

The investment is around, between 25,000 to 30,000 rupees is what you start with. And then



you feel like, you know, I don't like these wheels. I want better wheels, I want lighter wheels, I want more aerodynamic wheels. I want everything more aero. I want a more aero kit, I want a more aero helmet, I don't want to ride with glasses, I want like cooler looking glasses. People become vain. Even if I'm not fast, I want to look good for the photos.

You can let it go out of hand, you can let it go really out of control and spend like a lot of money. But if you're ok with looking douche, let your legs do the talking. But after I got on a pro cycling team, that was this team called Giant India Racing. So they sponsored the bikes and kit and stuff like that. With that I got a really good bike, and that changed a lot of things.



You don't have to spend that money on a frame and on the bike anymore. You can spend it on other things, nutrition, or better wheels. But I did not. I still tried to not spend as much money as possible. But there are people who would. In cycling, you can buy speed. You can buy fitness. The more money you spend, the more aerodynamic your frame and wheels, the more supple your tyres are. That makes you much faster for the same effort. If you're willing to spend more money, more and more money, you can get faster without actually doing anything more. That's always an option.

### QT: THE TEAM YOU ARE IN NOW IS THE FIRST TIER OF RACING, IS IT?

RM: So, there's a bit of an oddity there. I used to be in this amateur cycling team called Spectrum Racing. I moved to this pro team called Giant India Racing. But that team disbanded in March. So, our goals were the states and nationals, and the moment the nationals were over, which was in late February, the team disbanded and I went back to my amateur racing team.

### QT: HOW COMMON ARE ACCIDENTS AND INJURIES IN THIS SPORT?

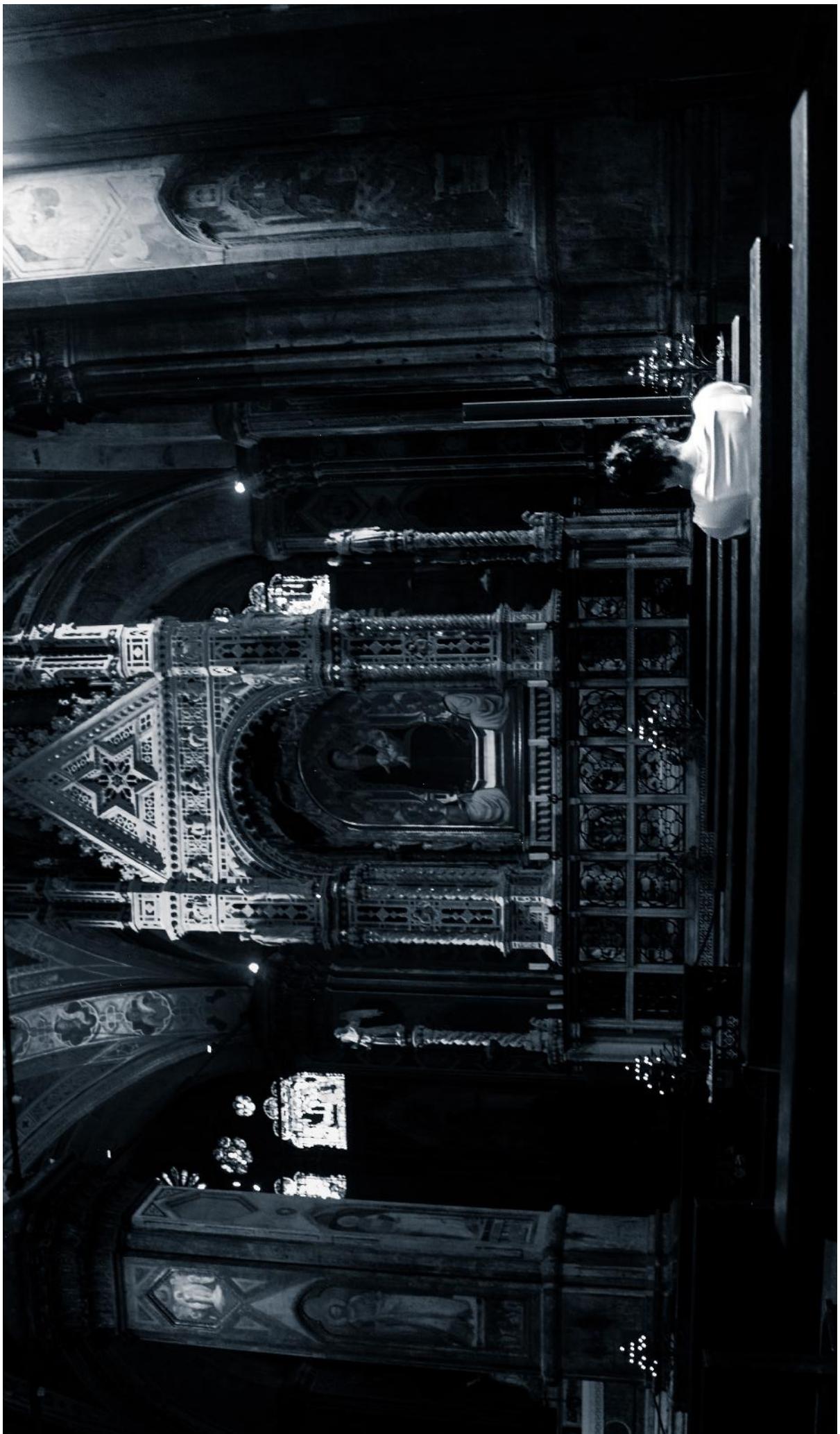
RM: (Shows us the multiple injuries on his arms.) These are just the ones on display, there are more. You crash. You crash quite a lot. The thing is, it may or may not entirely be your fault. Even if you're really careful, if someone goes down in front of you, it's very likely he's going to pull you down with him. So it's preferable to stay in the front of a pack in a race. A lot of times, there are guys who aren't very good with handling themselves in a bunch. So if you have a very technical circuit, they might be the ones who get nervous and move around. So what happens when you're racing in a bunch, a lot of times there's a lot of contact. Or you push someone away. If you're not comfortable with that, you get kind of jittery and you squirrel around a lot. And so you might get nervous and overlap wheels, because you're in such close contact. If you just don't focus for a fraction of a second, you might get your front wheel clipped by someone's rear wheel. The moment that happens, you have no control over your front wheel. You will crash. Or if you're racing really hard and there's a pothole in the middle of the road as has happened to me before. The guys in front, there are 20 people in front of you. So you have no sight of what's in front. You are relying only on the people in front of you to point stuff out. But if they don't, and they just branch out suddenly, and there's a pothole right there, you will go and crash into it.

You have to trust who you ride with. In races, you will see me generally always near the front because in India we still haven't gotten to that level where we communicate very well in a race. We don't point out that, oh look, there's pothole, move away. And it's open roads, remember. There could be a guy coming on the wrong side of the road. There's always some random two wheeler who is on the wrong side of the road. If you don't notice it at the front and suddenly swerve, the guy behind you can get knocked down. So, it's preferable to constantly be alert. Crashes happen a lot. It's very common for a cyclist. About breaking a collar bone: Another cyclists joke is, you haven't turned pro until you've broken at least one collar bone. Breaking one is semi pro and breaking both is pro. So, I'm still semi pro.

## QT: OUR LAST QUESTION, WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE SOMEONE WHO IS TRYING TO GET INTO THE CYCLING SCENE HERE IN INDIA?

RM: Go race a bit. Go for these races, they're a lot of fun. They're very cheap, to register for, and they're very well organized. And you meet a LOT of people who cycle. Cycling is a community sport almost, at least at the basic level it is a very community driven sport. Just go meet people, go cycle. It's fun, you get to eat a lot of good food. When you first start cycling, you can justify eating any food, 'I'm burning off the calories anyway!' And you go to like these quaint places outside the city, and you meet really nice people. The moment you leave the city, people just become a fraction nicer. The further you are, the nicer they get. They'll see you cycling all the way, tired, and they'll say, 'Ok, let me take care of this guy, it looks like he's going to die. Take water, cold water, some fresh milk if you want.' It's a nice experience. Just exploring, and that feeling of freedom when you're out, away from smoke being puffed in your face in the city. That's actually a very relaxing feeling, at least it was for me. It still is, I love passion rides. You find a road which you feel like there's no one on it, just mindlessly just go. It's a bicycle, it can take any road, just go. You'll always discover these gems of places. ■





Photograph by-  
**Anuva Aishwarya**  
**Fourth Year**

Photograph by-  
Anuva Aishwarya  
Fourth Year





# PHOTO ESSAYS

A trip to Corbett

Floral Symphonies : Flowering  
Trees of IISc



# A trip to CORBETT

*Written by Sayantan Khan  
Reported and Photography by Samriddhi Thakur*

You see a big grey mass hurtling down towards you. You watch as the animal gets close enough for you to distinguish the wrinkles on its trunks. In the background, you hear the conversations as it transitions from banal chit-chat, to awe at the sight of the approaching elephant, to a low panic as the elephant gives no sign of slowing down as it approaches you. Then with a click and a growl, the jeep's engine comes to life, and amidst exclamations of relief and admiration, you look back wistfully at the elephant herd, the matriarch having finally given up her chase and gone back.



Top Right :  
Getting chased.

Bottom left:  
Motherly Love.

Forests, in popular culture, have primarily been associated to two feelings, and enigmatically, those two feelings are in some sense, opposites of each other. They've been associated with claustrophobia, and fear of the unknown, case in point being the Forbidden Forest in Harry Potter, and Mirkwood in The Hobbit. On the other hand, forests have worked as places where one has the most personal liberty, far away from the human civilization. For that very reason, Mowgli was loath to go back to the village whence he came from. The forests comprising Corbett definitely evoke the latter feeling. As far as forests go, Corbett is rather open, so to speak. Nowhere is the canopy dense enough to induce a feeling of being closed in, unlike some other tropical forests.



Anticlockwise from right

- 1.A Forest Trail.
- 2.A grassland in middle of the forest.





I visited Corbett National Park with my family sometime in late May, just before the monsoons arrived. Pre-monsoon is the best time to visit a forest anyways, with the paths all being dry and navigable, as well as the ease of spotting animals near watering holes. Reaching the place sometime in the late afternoon, around 4 p.m., we decided to go for an evening safari before retiring for the night. So we set off in our gypsy, with our voluble guide, who seemed to know everything there was to know about the birds of the forest. The first few animals we saw were all deer. We saw barking deer, Sambar and Chital. Sambar are usually a good sign, if you want to spot a tiger, since they seem to know if there's a tiger around, and they make their characteristic call on spotting one.



Clockwise from top  
1,2 :Sambar alerted by outsiders.  
3.Oriental Magpie Robin.



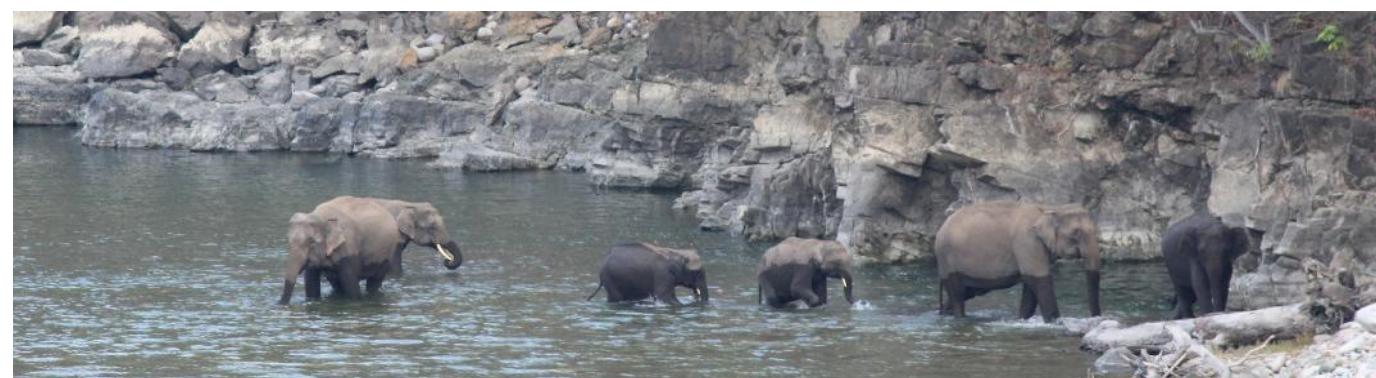
Anticlockwise from left  
 1.Chestnut headed bee-eater  
 2.Emerald Dove  
 3.Khaleej Pheasant  
 4.White throated Kingfisher,waiting for its prey



We saw plenty of birds too, perhaps it was because of our guide, or just plain luck. We spotted Khaleej pheasants, Magpie robins and bee-eaters. We ended our first safari pretty soon, since we needed to get out of the forest by 7 p.m., otherwise there's a chance you encounter a group of travelling elephants, and from what I've heard, it's not a very good idea to do that.



The next morning, we were told that a sambar warning sign had been heard, which meant there was a tiger in the vicinity, which meant there was a good chance of spotting one. That however, did not work out as expected, because a lot of people turned up to spot the tiger, and that probably scared it away. We continued on with our safari, and that was when we chanced upon a herd of elephants near the river. It would have been perfectly fine if not for one member of our group, who was wearing a red sweater. As we were later told by our guide, red clothing is particularly aggravating for elephants, leading to the chase described in the first paragraph.



Caption clockwise from right-top photo:  
Rufous bellied niltava, a pug mark, a herd  
of elephants.



Photograph by-  
Samriddhi Thakur  
Third Year



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# Floral Symphonies: Flowering Trees of IISc

By Pooja Nathan and Pranav Minasandra

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Nature walks at IISc are a fruitful pastime, and no two walks are ever alike. The campus changes in appearance drastically throughout the year. In summer it appears fiery red, as the Gulmohar bursts into flower. Come winter, the Tabebuia blooms in its many pastel shades. Spring brings with it the lively blossoms of the Cassias.

A walk through the campus at almost any time of the year will reveal that it is home to many spectacular flowering trees, both native and introduced. This article describes some of the most abundant and striking specimens along with their (approximate) flowering seasons. Read on and feast your eyes!

*Photos by Pooja Nathan unless otherwise mentioned*



## Javan cassia:*Cassia javanica* (Native to Southeast Asia)

**Description:** A large tree that bears beautiful pink flowers annually in various shades of pink. Fruits are cylindrical pods, often foul-smelling, which have a stack of compartments each containing a seed.

**Time of flowering:** April-June

**Location:** Around Main Building, Ashwini Hostel

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## *Lonchocarpus minimiflorus* (Native to Trinidad and Tobago)



**Description:** A medium-sized to tall tree which produces small, fragrant pink flowers in great profusion, which when shed carpet the ground.

**Time of flowering:**  
May-June

**Location:** Near the Library, near Xerox Centre

**Description:**

There are many different and colourful species of Frangipani in IISc. With elongated leathery leaves and a thin tall stem, these trees are hard to miss. Varieties bearing white, yellow, light and dark pink can be seen on campus. Trees can often be located by their heady fragrance.

**Time of flowering:** Varies, some flowering year-round.

**Trivia:** The serene fragrance of Frangipani flowers reaches a maximum at night to attract sphinx moths that pollinate them.

**Location:** Jubilee Garden

## Frangipani: *Plumeria sp.* (Native to Central America)



## *Tabebuia sp.* (Native to American Tropics and subtropics)

**Description:** There are many different and colourful species of Tabebuia in IISc. They are tall woody trees with rough dark brown barks, bearing flowers are in different shades of white, yellow, pink, etc.

**Time of flowering:** Between January and July  
**Trivia:** Tabebuia are ecologically very relevant, as they provide a large amount of nectar to pollinators such as bees.

**Location:** Almost all over the campus. Tala marg, Near Health Centre, Prakruthi Underpass, etc.





## Gulmohar: *Delonix regia*

(Native to  
Madagascar)

**Description:** A tree of moderate height, but with a vast canopy. The whole tree appears red

during flowering-season. Flowers are bright red and five-petalled, the central petal bearing yellow-white patterns. Fruits are large and sturdy pods, often used as 'swords' by children and child-like adults.

**Time of flowering:** April-June

**Trivia:** The bright yellow sepals can be attached to one's fingernails using the adhesive qualities they possess, and used as ready-to-wear claws.

**Location:**  
Throughout  
Gulmohar Marg



## Copper Pod: *Peltophorum sp.*

**Description:**

*Peltophorum africanum* and *Peltophorum pterocarpum* are found on campus, *P. pterocarpum* being more common. They are tall trees with dense feathery foliage, and bear bright yellow flowers.

**Time of flowering:**

*P. pterocarpum* - February onwards, reaching its grandeur in April

**Location:** In Tala Marg and near UG Building



## Popcorn Bush : *Senna spectabilis*

(Native to South America)



**Description:** It is a small to medium-sized tree which bears bright-yellow flowers in erect clusters. The flowers and buds have a pleasing rounded appearance.

**Time of flowering:** September -December

**Trivia:** This tree was earlier put in the genus *Cassia*.

**Location:** Near NGH

## Quickstick: *Gliricidia sepium* (Native to Mexico and Central America)

**Description:** A small to medium-sized tree which bears clusters of small, light-pink flowers with yellow insides. Bees, notably bumblebees are commonly seen collecting nectar from these flowers.

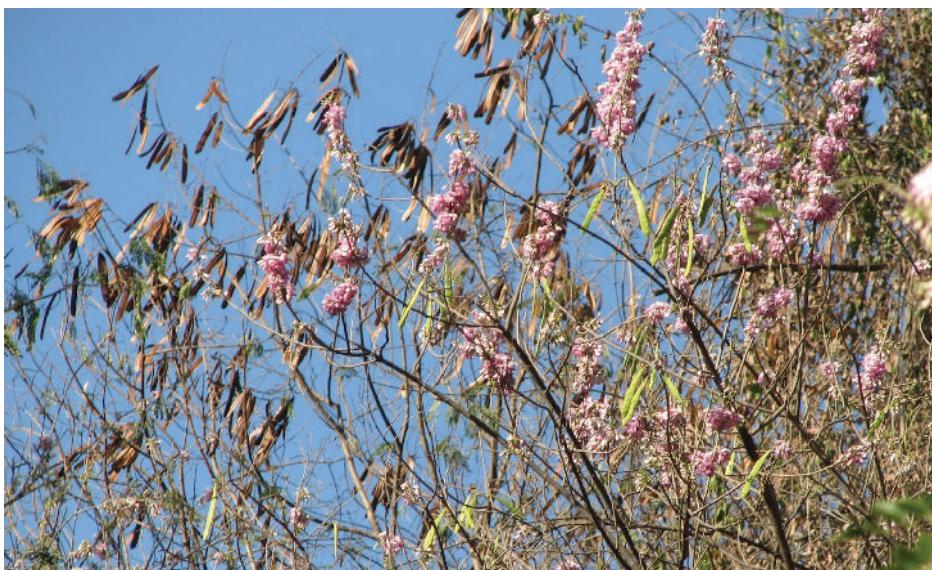
**Time of flowering:** February-April

**Trivia:** The tree gets its common name from its ability to be propagated from cuttings, due to rapid root initiation

**Location:** Hostel Office, Swimming Pool



## Blue Jacaranda: *Jacaranda mimosifolia* var. *acutifolia* (Native to South America)



**Description:** It is a medium-tall tree with a brown stem, and Mimosa-like leaves. The flowering is profuse, and the ground beneath the tree is littered with shed flowers during flowering.

**Time of flowering:** April onwards

**Trivia:** In Queensland, Australia, the stress associated with summer examinations is termed “purple panic”, after the flowers of the Jacaranda, which bloom at the same time.

**Location:** Tala Marg, C-D-Messes, IPC

*Photo credits: Top- Shimoga Rakesh (CST 2006-10)*

## Crepe Myrtle: *Lagerstroemia speciosa* (Native to India)

**Description:** A medium-sized tree with flaky bark and broad dark-green leaves. Produces conspicuous bunches of crinkly pink to purple flowers once a year.

**Time of flowering:** April-June

**Trivia:** Wood from this tree is used for boat-building owing to its resistance to waterlogging.

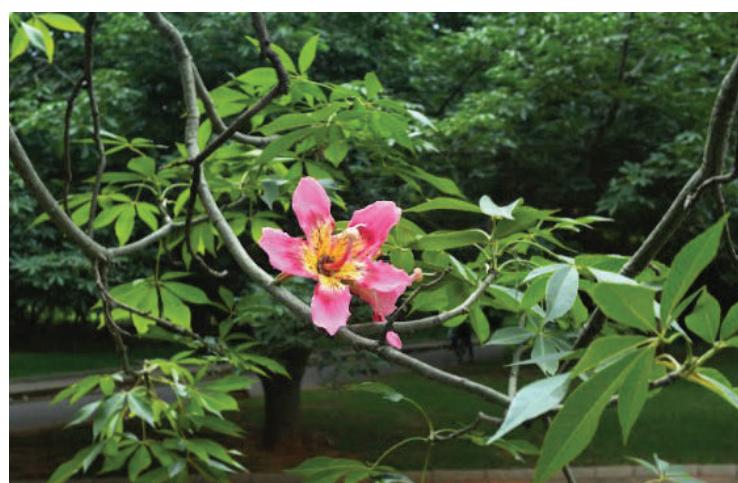
**Location:** Near Krithika Hostel



## Silk floss: *Ceiba speciosa* (Native to South America)

**Description:** A short tree with a grey trunk covered in inch-long spines, it is impossible to climb/lean on it. Flowers are bright-pink and yellow, and are borne individually.

**Time of flowering:** June to September

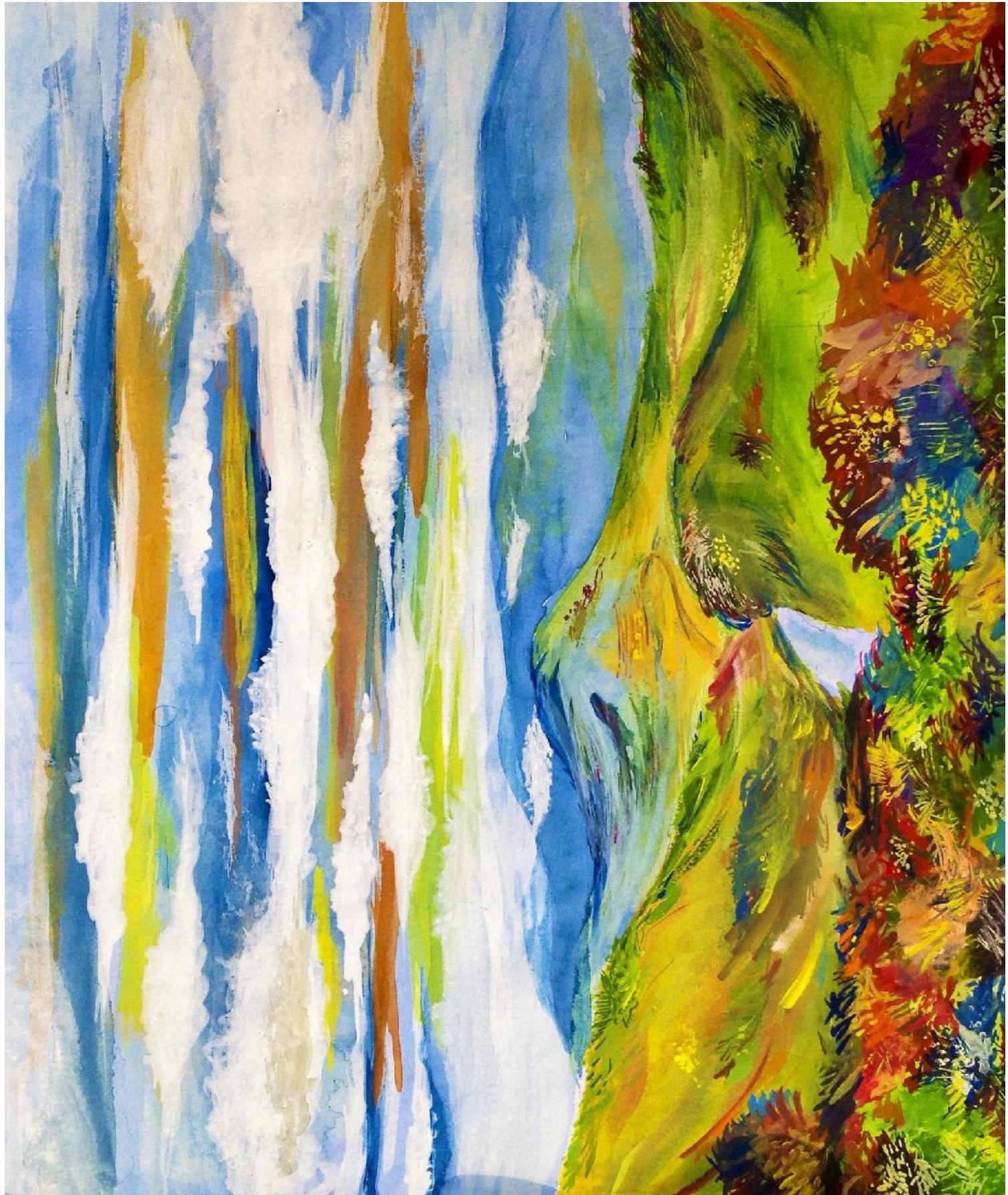


**Trivia:** Like many plants from South America, Ceiba's adaptations (the spines) may have evolved to defend itself against large mammals that are now long extinct.

**Location:** Opposite to Main Building,  
Behind J N Tata's Statue.

*Photo credits: Top- Middle- Aditya Iyer, Bottom- Pranav Minasandra*

Art by -  
Tanmoy Pal  
(Batch 2012-16)





Art by -  
Pranandita Biswas  
Third year



Art by -  
Pranandita Biswas  
Third year



Surbhi

Art by -  
Surbhi Munda  
Third year



**POETRY**

Bleedings of a Tame Beast  
Perennial Perplex  
Open Access  
Night Lily  
Graveyard of Dead Poets  
The Demise  
The Stillness  
খড়ের দাবী  
The Battle  
Story of a victim

...



# BLEEDINGS OF A TAME BEAST

I am tame now –  
Tame and sane.

I will not paint any more  
In the nauseous shades of red.  
No more shall I paint the blood  
That I bleed every day;  
Every moment a lathi charge is unleashed,  
An encounter is ensued,  
A curse is hurled.  
No more shall I paint the blood  
Trickling from the vagina of the girl  
Stuffed with pebbles.  
They say she was a naxal.

No more shall I paint the rubble that lay  
In Syria, speckled with the blood of a son,  
Caressed by the roughened fingers of a widowed  
husband,

No more shall I paint the entrails of  
Lahore, split apart by a bomb-blast.

No more.

I am tame now.  
Tame and sane.  
I shall but spit,  
And spit blood  
And speckle the walls in red.

- Prokash Kumar Kundu  
Third Year

# Perennial Perplex

In Moments of serendipity, one sees tacit contemplations  
 in the diction of a stranger as exclusive to the man,  
 as the deliberation should be to that ponderer;  
 "We are three kinds on the globe-  
 The Good, The Bad and The Ugly,  
 but there has to be the fourth – the ever perplexed..  
 Am I in the last? Seems likely";  
 So the dumpy feature in the fun corner of the Daily read,  
 gibberish to many, daft to scores other but hardly any stares,  
 impassive, as I had;  
 thoughts avalanched further;  
 For same has been my muse in solitude how confused a lot we are  
 Relentlessly considering and weighing with tracks and directions leading nowhere;  
 For, each happening in life is a choice made;  
 Hence-

A choice every instance,  
 Every instance – A choice;  
 Options ask a settlement, further build a room for confusion,  
 I, for one, enhance the room to an immense fort of prohibition;  
 Enter the gates – to the eternal labyrinth of murky rooms,  
 One leading to next and annexing new terrain  
 Then slowly tired and wired out, comatose,  
 Unaware , a tick, at the gates then again;  
 The gates stay open but not inviting  
 Rooms frequented, but not familiar,  
 A disturbing maze  
 A haunting lair;  
 Sometime, somewhere, doors lead to exotic meadows  
 With gust of respite and blinding rays of delight,  
 Such is the nature of this contemplation,  
 A peculiar one man kingdom, Clandestine – in timeless twilight

Shayani Parida  
 Third Year

# OPEN ACCESS

-Prabha Gangopadhyay  
Third Year



A raven with a key,  
Atop the knowledge tree  
Each leaf one plucks,  
Will cost him bucks  
But the raven gives it free!

As the tree grows in its size,  
To none of our surprise,  
It's branches and strands,  
With it, expands,  
And this ain't no surmise!

The branches are all blue,  
And unless you are too,  
The bark and the fruits,  
The foliage, the roots  
Are inaccessible to you!

Now, blue ain't all of us  
Looking for knowledge, thus  
They approach then,  
The raven's den  
Since the cost is superfluous!

The raven's kind at heart  
But, it uses some dark art.  
It uses its key,  
Without any fee  
And fills up your cart.

Of course there are few  
Who paint the branches blue  
And reprimand  
The common hand  
From receiving what is due.

Let's start a new pursuit,  
And try being not astute  
And imagine the tree  
Without boundary  
Without monopoly on its fruits.

Let us all magnify  
The forces that underly --  
The chain, the paint  
The strong restraint,  
Making a small bonsai.

Let's unshackle the tree  
And set the raven free  
Making the press  
Open access  
Establishing harmony!

Now let's take a few steps back  
Upon the traversed track  
And look at the might  
Of the tree in sight  
And what's there in its sac!

These people, if they could  
To protect their painted wood  
Try all their skill  
To catch and kill  
The academic Robin Hood.

The discussed raven's key  
Is questionable I agree,  
It steals and fools  
Using unfair tools  
And infringes privacy.

Ah! Look for yourself through the dark,  
Through myriad stars the sky enshrines,  
On the trail of no one's mark,  
No one's words or plenty lines.

But Eyes, my eyes! Where did I weep  
The paths, so many now to count,  
On which my heart had walked to sleep,  
Enamoured by the lily's mount?

I felt the winter wind throughout  
The birth of time, the fledgling night,  
To meteors that roam about  
And bow down to the traveller's sight;

The winter wind that sung to me  
Of my own heart's placidity,  
Entangling me with nature's spree  
To live a lone felicity.

Oh lily of the silent spring,  
Haven't I shared my griefs with you--  
The tales I tell, the pasts I sing--  
Why do you make me sit the hue

Of a falling night, of a falling day?  
I came to you in love and rue,  
And I have cried so many a May  
Upon your scent of pollened dew.

The winter winds that I have shared  
With the mighty god, that Solitude,  
Waiting for gaiety to stare  
From past my garden's gratitude!

Waiting a blind eternity  
Upon the fragrance of a truth  
That waits upon the night's late glee  
To bring it spring amidst its youth!

Why in this perpetuity  
Do I suffer so many a death:  
When each day morning comes to me  
I lose your scent in a final breath!

- Atul Sharma, Fourth Year

# Graveyard of Dead Poets

And there we lay -  
Our souls entwined,  
Our bodies at waste;  
Passion lay dead in the tracks trodden by habit.

You wouldn't know.

All words of love  
That had done us mellow -  
Colourful as the spring and sprightly as a swallow  
They seem now to be  
But the burnt remains of a plundered bee-hive,  
In black decay.  
All words of passion  
That could arouse us  
And let us loose as if a raging Spanish bull;  
All fantasies of the most beautiful and the artful,  
- now left none but thin air  
Reeking of the rotten carcasses  
Of our once-throbbing hearts.  
Every bullet,  
Every slogan,  
That had once set our faith aflame -  
Left nothing but grey ash.  
We lay in waste.

You wouldn't know.

It was not a graveyard  
Sombre in death,  
For  
Every word truly once felt  
Now hung heavy  
In the mesh of dead poetry -  
Rotting,  
The pungent stench keeping the decaying bodies  
Alive in disuse and waste  
In the graveyard of dead poets.

- *Anonymous*

# THE DEMISE

We were the best of friends.  
 But once, something went fatally wrong.  
 Either one or both of us  
 Had drugged ourselves up-  
 Maybe I inhaled too much of Success,  
 Or he probably took, an overdose  
 Of Hatred, Depression or Difference.  
 After along, patient and cold wait,  
 His pliability suddenly gave away.  
 He attacked me, pouncing and mauling,  
 Brutally impaling me with empty threats.  
 In my drugged up stupor, I threw him  
 Onto the rails of Revenge.  
 In no time was he crushed,  
 And almost severed in two.  
 Realizing, I paced toward him.



But then I was in a dilemma:  
 It was either 'Friendship in jeopardy',  
 Or 'Jeopardy in friendship'.  
 I chose the former, and tried desperately  
 To repair our good old camaraderie.  
 But alas, it was too late.  
 I turned his carcass over,  
 And looked into his beastly eyes.  
 It was his carcass, not his corpse,  
 For he had transformed,  
 Into a beast, and so had I.  
 Yet he 'is' my best friend.  
 In regret and remorse I sat there still,  
 While from the West the blood-red sunset  
 Tenderly kissed the lifeless him.

**RATUL BISWAS**

**Second Year**

# Stillness

Pooja Nathan  
Second Year

O flames of roaring, searing heat,  
With all-consuming might replete,  
How I desire to be like thee,  
Devouring knowledge; pure and free.

Stillness, stillness, heavy and thick,  
In flames that lick a moistened wick,  
Of the candle that will never glow,  
The things that I will never know.

O winds that rob the massive trees,  
Of ground, and aid the swaying leaves,  
How I wish to speak thy tongue,  
Speak my mind, sing the unsung.

Stillness, stillness, in the boughs,  
As still as a picture would show,  
The wind has ceased and so have I,  
To speak those words, even to try.

Stillness, stillness, come reside,  
In my heart; it frets and rides,  
On joys and sorrows, love and hate,  
If only I could stand and wait,

For that day, the very hour.  
When the wick is dry, the winds are mild,  
The candle will glow, burning bright,  
And cast a swaying halo of light

# খড়ের দায়ী

সন্নিভি দাস  
দ্বিতীয় বর্ষ

সহ্য হ'ল না আর  
কিভাবে বলব আর,  
ছন্দ না পেয়ে  
হ'ল না অন্তমিল !

সে যে দাবানলের আগুন  
জ্বলছে ধিকিধিকি,  
শুধু একটু খড় দাও  
জ্বালিয়ে দিই তাকে  
ছেড়ে দিই, পাগলের মত  
জ্বলুক, জ্বালাক,  
চিঁড়ে ফেলুক অগ্নিদেবের শয্যা।  
নিঠুর হবে সে,  
মানবে না সমাজের কাছে হার  
পশ্চগুলোর পরিবর্তন হোক  
অঙ্গারে !  
এত ভীষণ চিন্তা,  
তবু বাধা শুরুতেই  
খড়গুলো এগিয়ে দেবে কে ?  
সে তো আমার কাজ নয়।



# THE BATTLE

I was the King of the Kingdom of Joy,  
 But one day Life paid an unexpected visit.  
 He took me captive, He axed my Head,  
 Guillotined my Heart and Bludgeoned my Love.  
 Yet, I wasn't dead, just unconscious.

I woke up the day next,  
 In my cell at the Prison of Despair,  
 Chained in the shackles of Hatred.  
 Quite later that morning,  
 Without letting me fight,  
 Without letting me speak,  
 Without letting me justify,  
 He dragged me to the Gallows of Death,  
 Where many have voluntarily died,  
 Strangled in the ropes of Depression.  
 Putting me on the Pedestal of Uncertainty,  
 He blindfolded me with Terror.  
 Finally, the fatal noose of Melancholy  
 was put Round my battling neck.  
 It was just time when Doom  
 pulled the lever.

The noose embraced me tighter, just like Love.  
 I somehow summoned my friends—  
 Anger, Will and Strength.  
 But they were all bribed by Betrayal.  
 I remember, 'thus misery doth part  
 The flux of company'.  
 He killed me, He killed my Hope,  
 But He couldn't kill my Soul.

I was born again, to parents Time and Oblivion.  
 I don't know how I died,  
 I don't know how long ago,  
 But I have brother Regret reminding me,  
 What a libertine I had been in Joy,  
 Thus extenuating my offense.

Since then I keep away,  
 From my ugliest enemy, Mistake,  
 And tell my other foes too,  
 I cannot be killed,  
 I cannot be suppressed,  
 I cannot accept defeat.  
 That's why,  
 I am the Invincible.

**RATUL BISWAS**  
 Second Year

# The Story of A Victim

And in the fate, darkness prevailed,  
Such as well, did a mere light of hope.  
Yet, the filth and dirt, heavily rained.

And in each touch, iniquity prevailed.  
Such blaring was every plea,  
Yet, was unheard, and was pneuma-guzzled.

Spirit albeit was slurped,  
Power albeit was drained,  
Against the ogre, the soul rebelled.

Chastised was "She",  
For being interruptive,  
As "they" had set on, for a lesson to teach.

And in their homes, maternity prevailed.  
Such attended, was each since juvenescence  
had commenced.  
Yet, she wasn't spared, from being lessoned.

And in her apparel, indecency prevailed;  
Such had they opined, which drove their instinct for the "lesson".  
Yet, by none was his self-guilt, ever confessed.

For, there prevailed no benevolence  
For, there prevailed greed and dominance  
For, there prevailed judgments based on garments  
For, there prevailed no RESPECT.  
For, it's quite relevant that there prevails DISRESPECT  
For, it had and will continue mortifying the victim, for the sake of RESPECT.

And she, victimized, yet, remains  
Victimized more, by malevolence,  
Stamped forever, she remains.

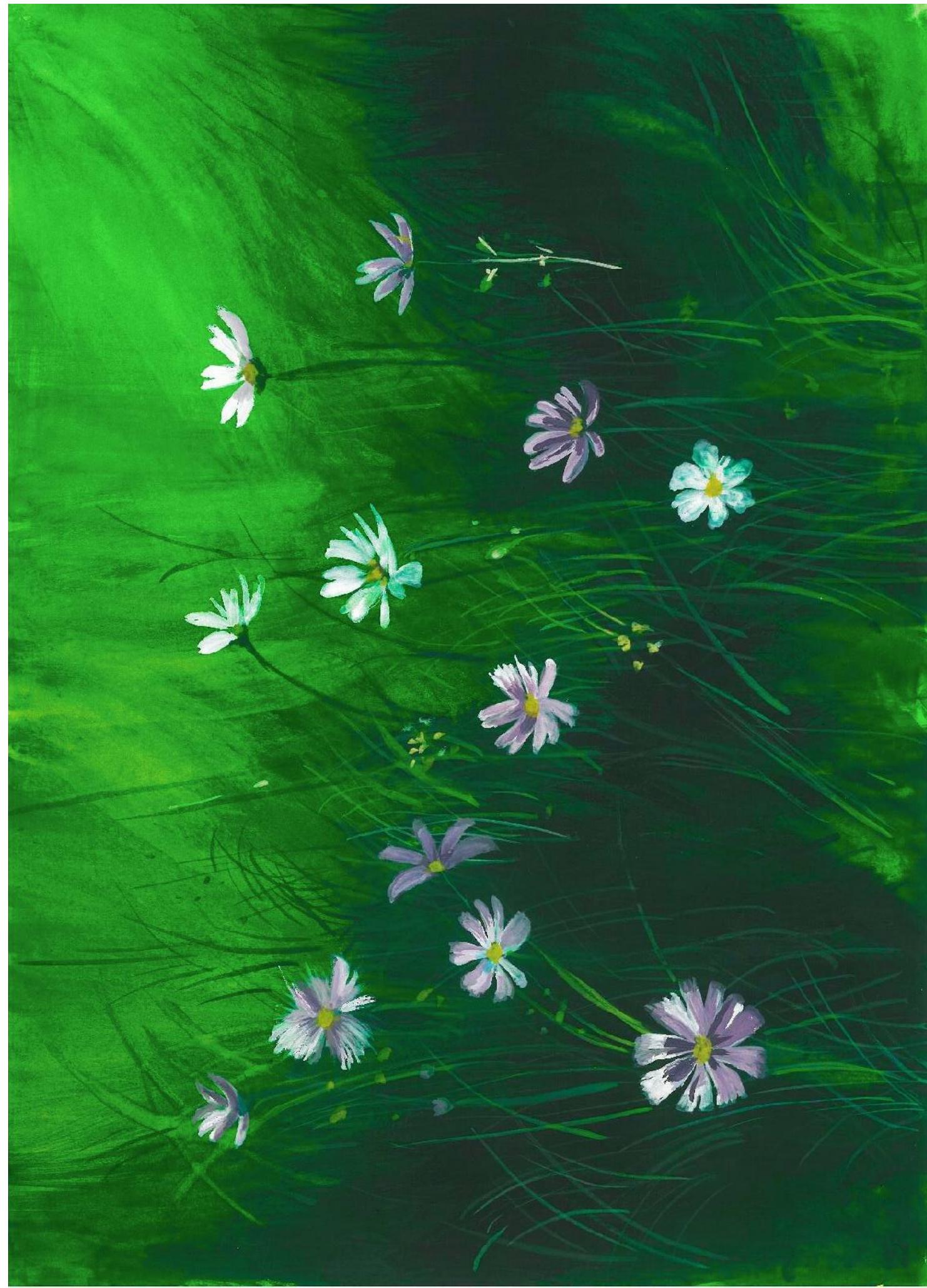
- Pragyadeep Roy



Art by -  
Niril Panigrahi  
Third Year

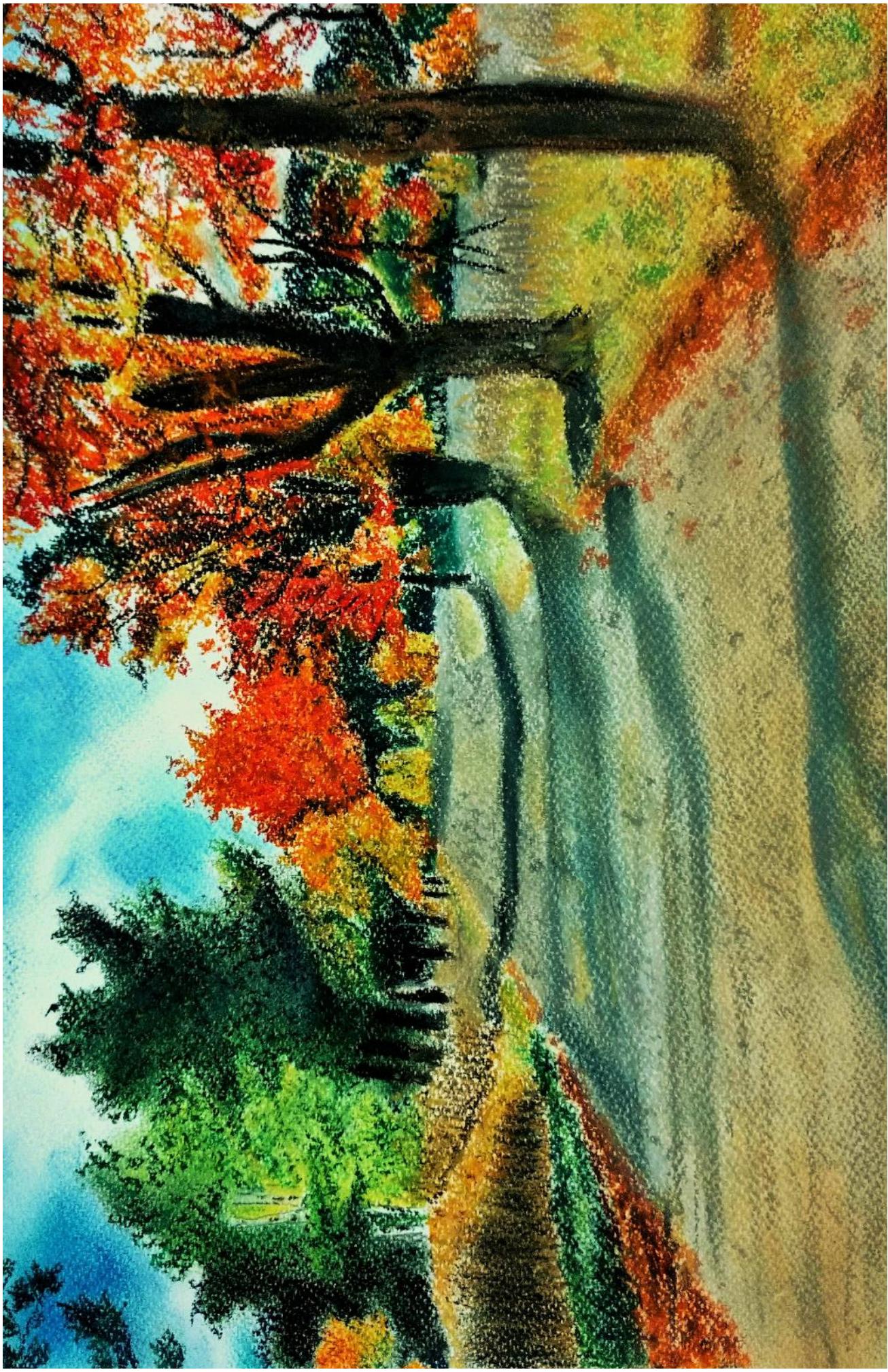


Art by -  
**Surbhi Munda**  
Third year





Art by -  
Samriddhi Thakur  
Third year



Art by -  
**Samridhhi Thakur**  
Third year



STORIES



Petrograd

Just Another Fairytale

Pleasure and Pain

Shiva

Knowing Everything

The Promise

Mostly Harmless

চণ্মা

তারিণীখুড়ো ও ভূত-ভবিষ্যৎ



# PETROGRAD

— Gokul G Nair  
Third Year

Ever since his retirement from the Imperial army, Captain Pyotr Kornilov lived alone in his Izba<sup>1</sup> on the outskirts of Petrograd<sup>2</sup>. Being a Cossack, it was tradition that made Pyotr join the Russian Cavalry, of which he remained a part of for over 25 years. It was unusual for someone of his age to retire voluntarily, but this was a man who would not tolerate disdain, and disdain was all he ever got in the army.

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<sup>1</sup>Russian Log House

<sup>2</sup>Now St.Petersberg

At the time, Russia was at war with Germany, fuelling the glorified family feud with nothing more than the sweat and blood of its citizens. Imperial Russia was no match for Industrialised Germany, yet the desperate Czar demanded that his people be drained so that he could make a stand against his German cousin. As the war raged on, the citizens of Petrograd begged first for bread, but when they realised that this was like asking a he-goat for milk, feelings of antipathy towards the Czar's rule began. Men, and Women took the streets, demanding that the Czar abdicate. The authorities knew that what would begin as peaceful protests would eventually turn into a bloody revolution so they apprised the already preoccupied Emperor<sup>3</sup> to receive laconic replies telling them to shoot the innocuous protesters. It was evident that the Czar was incredulous about the gravity of the situation.

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Usually, the crackling from the fireplace was the only sound in Pyotr's house, but that evening someone was tirelessly knocking at the door.

"Coming!", Pyotr announced as he made his way to the door. It was the last person he would have wanted to see, but his visit was not all that unprecedented.

"Captain Sergei", said Pyotr coldly.

"Commander Sergei", the visitor corrected, "I can't seem to forgive myself for being glad that you're still alive, but the situation is dreadful. May I come in?", he replied. His host nodded. Sergei walked briskly into the drawing room

and sat next to the fireplace. It was very cold outside.

"You want my help to curb the rebellion, is that all?", Pyotr asked without hesitating.

"Ah! So you are not living under a rock after all!", he began his reply, "There are very few officers left in the Petrograd Garrison, and there are rumours that the soldiers may mutiny. We need someone to keep the situation from exploding".

"So you want me to babysit a few soldiers?"

"Not exactly. We have received information that the protesters are planning to march into the Winter Palace tomorrow. You are to lead a squadron of a dozen mounted soldiers and disperse the mob before it reaches its destination. General Khablov believes that you will be able to replicate the success you had in 1905.", he said, glancing at the medal that hung on Pyotr's wall, an award he had received for his bravery during the revolution<sup>4</sup> twelve years ago.

"A medal for open firing at unarmed civilians.", he murmured with a deliberate tone of disgust, "What if I refuse?"

"Then you must not forget that it is the Czar's generosity that provides you bread, not his wrath."

Sergei was right, for without the military rations he received, Pyotr would be no better than the rioters, so he had to comply.

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<sup>3</sup>Who was at the western borders of Russia, overseeing the war

<sup>4</sup>The 1905 revolution was crushed.

It had been almost half a decade since Pyotr had seen urban Petrograd, but it hadn't changed much. He rode into town in a horse cart with Sergei sitting opposite him. The streets, as the cold wind portended, appeared desolate. Barring a handful of old labourers who had gathered around a pile of burning red cloth, there wasn't another soul on the usually frenetic Nevsky Prospect<sup>5</sup>. The only movement was that of the wavering red banners that hung on almost every street light and balcony.

The cart suddenly came to a halt when some children ran across the street chasing a dog. Pyotr watched as they eventually caught the animal and snatched a small loaf of bread from its mouth to share it among themselves. He could sense a kind of patrician disdain on Sergei's face as he looked at the emaciated children. How did they have the strength to chase down that dog, Pyotr wondered, oblivious to the fact that hunger could turn the cleverest of men into mindless animals.

"We're here", Sergei announced after reaching the barracks.

---

After suiting up, Pyotr met his squadron members, a dozen Cossacks around the age of twenty. They were a malnourished lot, but even in their weak eyes there was a flare of emotions, a sign of agrant impiety towards the captain.

"We will first blockade the road and wait for them to disperse. If they continue to push forward, we open fire", announced Pyotr.

"Are we to shoot starving people?", asked a soldier, interrupting the Captain.

"Yes, those are the orders", Pyotr replied.

"They could be our parents, our own brothers and sisters! How can we shoot them?", another soldier protested.

"Remember that you are a Cossack and that we have traditionally served the Czar for hundreds of years. You and your entire family have sworn your allegiance to the emperor! Do you know the price you'll pay for insubordination?", Pyotr threatened, but deep down he pitied the young soldiers.

By mid-afternoon the next day, Pyotr's squadron, all mounted on horses, had assembled at the entrance to the road that led to the Winter Palace. He could see people at a distance, marching towards him. Clearer than their faces were the bright red flags that they held aloft. As they approached closer the Captain could get a closer look at their faces. They were starved faces, men, women and children, all of them barely bones, but they looked determined and full of conviction to their cause. They came to a halt a few feet away from the mounted men.

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<sup>5</sup>Main Street in St. Petersburg

Pyotr knew that this congregation would not be easy to scatter. Unlike the 1905 protesters who were provocative and aggressive, this group was placid like a pond with no fish. They showed no intentions of turning around.

Pyotr fired a bullet into the sky in an attempt to shake them, but apart from the initial fright and the clamour that died slowly, there was no reaction.

“Men! Ready... Aim...”, shouted the Captain, and the soldiers lifted their rifles acquiescently.

There was a sudden commotion in the crowd, but he could make nothing out of the indistinct chatter, then he saw movement near the middle of the mob. It looked like someone trying to make their way to the front, but no one was visible. Could this be an armed assassin trying to get to the front so that he could get a clear shot at him, Pyotr wondered, so he prepared himself to shoot if it were necessary.

To his surprise however, it was no assassin but a little girl, around six or seven years old. She was dressed in worn out clothes, her brown hair tied into two braids. She nervously walked towards Pyotr, who had put his pistol back in the holster. She approached the captain and looked up at him, and he was startled when she put her hand into her

pocket.

She removed a small rose from her pocket and holding it by the stem she offered it to the mounted captain. What an unexpected turn of events, Pyotr thought. He had come there, confident that he would be able to say that one word- ‘Fire’ but he could not utter the monosyllable.

He bent down and took the flower from the girl’s hand, smiling as he did so. He turned around and signalled his soldiers to retreat. As he walked away from the euphoric cries of victory, he knew he had done the right thing. He did not feel guilty for betraying the loyalty that his family had fostered for centuries, for mutinying against his Czar.

The eventful revolution of that February<sup>6</sup> is still considered to be one of the most non-violent movements in history, that deposed a tyrannical Monarch and replaced it with an elected government. Although the country soon became a communist autocracy, it showed the world that a King-forged, King-centred country could become a King-less one in a matter of months and that the right to rule is not God-given but a service done to the citizens of the nation.

Pyotr and many other Cossacks were called Comrade-Cossacks by the people, and seen as nothing more than workers<sup>7</sup> in uniform from that day forth.

Note: This story is a work of historical fiction. Not all the characters and details in the story are real.

<sup>6</sup>February in the Julian (Russian) Calender. In the Gregorian calender it would be March.

<sup>7</sup>Proletarians

# Just Another Fairytale

Once upon a time, far far away, in a land of sandy shores and swaying palms, lived a little boy; he was the eldest son of his family and was petted a lot by his mother. He was a very lucky boy indeed because his father was a ge-

nie, and whenever his father came home, which was very rare (genies were busy people) he always brought wonderful things from all the wonderful lands he visited. Beautiful decorated dishes, mugs, cups and cutlery for the mother; delicious bis-

cuits, icecreams, flavoured powders, exotic chocolates and much more for the children. The large house would be filled with the scent and perfume of distant fairylands. All the neighbors' kids envied him and his brothers.



He thought that he was the happiest child in the world; and it was indeed true, for happiness is all in your head; and he knew it very well too. But there was one thing that he didn't know, and that was that even sadness is all in your head. He wanted to be like his father. He would not have allowed it if he knew it earlier; as in this world, genies were only allowed to make others happy, they themselves could never be. But then, the boy didn't know that.

**But there was  
one thing  
that he didn't  
know, and  
that was that  
even sadness  
is all in your  
head.**

And nothing is so good that it lasts eternally and perfect situations must go

wrong.

Once his father came home, bringing with him the same old goodies and announced for one and all to hear, that he would not be going to the fairylands anymore. The boy was sad; who would bring those wonderful things for them now? But never mind; he loved his dad and he could spend all his time with him now.

One day he found his father sitting on the porch in a large rocking chair. He noticed that his precious father was crying. He went near him and asked, 'Why, oh father, why are you crying?'

In between the tears, the words were lost. 'I don't know, and don't ask me,' was all that the boy heard. And in somewhere deep inside, the boy wondered if he too would have to sit on this porch and cry if he were to be like his father. Alas, if only he knew.

Again, he saw him sit there and cry, and again, till his legs gave way and then the neighbours had to support his father as he moved around. The decorated dishes lay locked away in

a trunk in the attic. The genie of old, limped as he walked.

Then there were people dressed in white, who came with a wooden casket and carried away his father to another world.

Now the only person who sat in the rocking chair was him, the little boy. One day, as he was sitting and thinking, a man came and stood before him. A tall thin man with handsome features, wearing a dark blue velvet shirt with a darker pair of jeans. Around his head was tied a bandanna made of black and patterned with silver stars.

'Why are you sad?' the man asked. 'I am not sad,' the boy replied.

'Yes, you are,' the man insisted; and that was all.

Suddenly everything around him crumbled and fell; one day he lost all that he ever had. And only the man dressed in the best of blue stood near him. Forever in a black void; that was all. And not all the pills covered in blue plastic could rescue him. The ones that the man gave him only dragged him deeper and deeper into that abyss.

*Painting by Samriddhi Thakur*

What was there to be lost?  
Nothing.

And what was there to be gained? Nothing.

One day he came home, staggering with each step. In the darkness of the night his mother was waiting for him. She cried, 'Where have you been so long? It's long past midnight.' He only lifted his hand and pushed his mother away yelling in anger, 'I don't know, and don't ask me.' His mother fell on the floor in pain. Somewhere in the darkness, he saw the eyes of a little girl watching him. He stopped and turned to his mother, 'Who are they?'

'Please. Please don't raise your voice. Please don't wake the children up. They are our guests. What is wrong with you?'

The boy was quiet, for although he was a boy no longer, he loved his mother.

He then asked, 'Mother, have you known pain? Pain such that you don't want to see tomorrow? Pain such that you want to disappear into the floor? Mother, have you known such pain?'

'Yes,' the mother replied, 'I have, when I gave birth to you, my son.'

The boy smiled and asked, 'And have you known it for every single day of your life, mother?'

'No, I haven't'

'Then do not ask me any more questions, Mother.'

And the mother stopped asking him any more questions.

Today he travels from one rehabilitation centre to another, seeking for something to stop this pain.

I would have helped if I could but then I was just a little kid watching from afar with wonder at this strange world.

He sits in the front of that broken down house. It is his brother's wedding; but he was not invited, for he has forgotten everyone and everyone has forgotten him just like how he had wanted it.

This may not be just another fairytale because it has a happy beginning and a sad end, unlike the usual fairytales... And at times, some stories may not make any sense...

-Jadeera Abubakar  
Fourth Year



# Pleasure and Pain

-Pooja Nathan  
Second Year

I remember nothing of my childhood, but a photograph that I recently found inside one of my father's old books testifies that even I was once a boisterous little rascal. In this particular photograph, I am holding my father's gold-pated watch by the chain, gleefully ignorant of its value. I can also see my mother towering over me, her youthful face set in a curious mix of amusement and exasperation. Sometimes, I find it hard to believe that I was once this bright-eyed imp with just eight teeth in total.

Times have undeniably changed. The sparrows I used to watch have disappeared, whatever hair is left on my scalp is a sickly grey, and my parents are dead.

My parents were good people, but strange. My father, who taught biology in a school nearby, was a man who liked to keep himself to himself. When he was not poring over textbooks or watching documentaries on television, he liked to take walks in the fields that stretched out benevolently behind our little house. I sometimes tagged along, and got to see peacocks jerking their iridescent necks at prospective mates, green beetles with orange undersides, and vine-snakes with their beady eyes. I thoroughly enjoyed these walks for two reasons: firstly, I had been bestowed with the privilege of going on a walk with my father; he never took anyone along, and secondly, my father was a keen observer, and knew all about the lives of the things we saw and admired; listening to him filled me with a sense of wonder and reverence for the marvel that nature is.

My father did not drink or smoke, nor did he beat or scold; yet, my mother and I were afraid of him. When he was angry, he would lock himself in his room for a very long time. When he finally emerged, the floor would be littered with shredded mattress or cloth, or paper ripped from a book. My mother quietly cleaned the mess up, and things went on as usual.

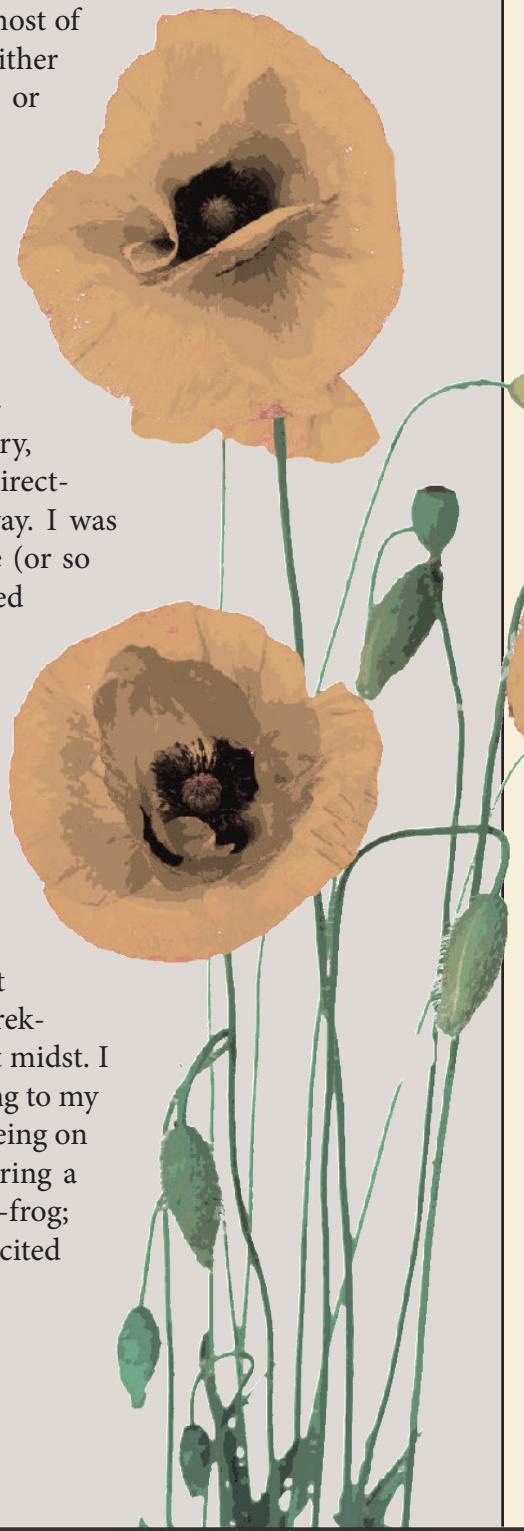
My mother was an embodiment of vitality and resilience. She was not beautiful, nor was she extraordinarily skilled, yet her measured words resounded with quiet command. My father often said that the best thing that had ever happened to him was his marriage to her. She did not go out to work despite her degree, but kept the household running with unerring efficiency. My father's salary was given directly to my mother who would spend it diligently, saving a small amount even in the most gruelling of circumstances.

My mother's only weakness was sleep. Mostly, she woke up at around 5:30 am and went to sleep at half-past 10. On some days, however, she slept for

fourteen hours straight; nothing could disturb her. My father did not usually mind, but sometimes his displeasure was evident.

I was never a star performer in school. Always a little squat, I did not excel in sports. I was always an average student, but my parents never forced me to study for long hours or play outside with my raucous neighbours. As a result, I spent most of my time indoors, either watching television or 'helping' my mother with household chores.

An incident that took place when I was in fifth standard is etched vividly in my memory, although I was not directly affected in any way. I was not a child anymore (or so I felt). I had learned that my father was something of a naturalist, as they called it. The fields surrounding our house gradually gave way to forest, and my father was spending almost all his spare time trekking in their verdant midst. I had heard him talking to my mother about him being on the verge of discovering a new species of tree-frog; he seemed very excited about it all.



One muggy Friday, he proclaimed that he had indeed discovered a new species of tree frog. Researchers from the Ministry of Environment and Forests had accompanied him on a trek, and had confirmed his discovery. He was to write an official paper describing the frog and its habitat in detail to be submitted to the Government. It was the project of his dreams, and it had come unexpectedly.

He spent more time in his room than ever, drawing and re-drawing figures, writing draft after draft. We both knew that it was apt to leave him alone. My mother entered his room only to give him his meals

It was during this time that she fell into one of her monstrous slumbers. It was a Sunday; neither I nor my father had school. My father slaved away in his room; my mother snored away in hers.



There was no food in the house, nor anyone to make it. My father, despite his intense concentration was getting hungrier, yet he would not ask. He was like that. The sun rose and sank, enveloping the village in a dim orange glow. I had fallen asleep on the couch. The television was blaring. Suddenly, the house was filled with scrapes and thuds. They were coming from my father's room. I inched towards it cautiously. The door was open, and I peered through, only to see my father ripping up his drafts fanatically. I stood and stared, too curious to walk away, yet too terrified to stop him. His face was contorted in fury and his hands moved mechanically, reducing his precious paper to irregular shavings of nothingness.

Suddenly, he stopped. His expression abruptly changed from one of uncontained anger to one of infinite repentance. The damage his anger had

caused had finally dawned on him. I inched away quietly. He never spoke a word about the tree-frog to us again.

Adolescence was a bumpy ride while it lasted, but in retrospect seems to be a rather insignificant patch in the quilt of life. One incident however, is unforgettable.

I was not the kind of girl who went after boys. However, there was a certain exception. He was in my class, tall, dark-skinned and soft-spoken. When I first saw him, I was smitten, and so I think, was he. We only spoke to each other a few times, but when we did, it was about our house, our kids, our sprawling mansion and our simple, happy life together. I had made up my mind to run away with him.

The necessary precautions were taken. I had grabbed some money from the shelf under the altar, packed a few things that I would need, and covered my face with a dark shawl. It was a carefully planned exploit. My parents were out for a teachers' day function, and I was alone at home. We were to meet near the temple, and he was to take me from there. He would bring some money too.

I found him waiting, and as soon as he saw me, he started to walk away. We exchanged no words. I followed. We could not afford to get noticed.

A few hours later, the village was far behind us. We paused near a clearing, and I finally pulled away the shawl from my face. Just as he locked me in embrace, I heard a shout.

“Traitor!”

It was my drunkard uncle. What he was doing there, I still do not know. He was usually too drunk to keep up with the goings-on of the world, but it was evident that he had recognised me.

I had two choices; I could run, or I could return shamefacedly with him. I looked up at my saviour, only to realise that he had fled.

The very next day, I was being carted off to a boarding-school in a big city far away from home.

The next few years were difficult, a transition into forced womanhood.

Before I knew it, I was married and had two little children. Our family was an establishment bound by love and discipline. My husband was a reasonably successful banker. I was to my family what my mother was to us, long ago.

The city was a completely different environment, although a more convenient one. Life took a course of seemingly constant normalcy, or so I thought.

My younger one, a boy, was given to dysentery. One weekend, the four of us set off on my husband's bike to fetch tender coconut-water for the little one. The vendor sold his wares by the edge of a thriving coconut grove in the outskirts of the city. On the way, just past the city, the bike broke down. Determined to repair it, my husband asked me to stand with the kids on the shady pavement, while he tinkered with the engine, beads of sweat adorning his forehead. It was taking longer than we expected. The kids, curious as ever, eventually joined their father.

The truck came, roaring . The truck left behind a pool of blood. His blood, their blood; not mine.

Every time I cross the main-road, I feel the urge to stop, to stand still, to wait. It must happen.

My father should have rejoiced when he tore up his paper.

I should have danced and sung when my lover left me.

I should not have wept and mourned, but should have laid out feasts and hosted revelries when my husband and little ones left me that day.

**If pain is endless, why doesn't one enjoy it?**





# SHIVA

by Pranav Minasandra  
Second Year

“I put my heart and soul into my work, and lost my mind in the process” - Vincent van Gogh

The difference between breakfast today and breakfast every other day was that there were four plates on the dining table instead of three. Dr Sinha, as he had done for the past two years, had awoken at four in the morning, and cooked a marvellous meal for his wife and daughter. The taker of the fourth meal was yet to arrive.

Dr Sinha was, by education, a neurosurgeon. At the pinnacle of his career, he was one of the best in the country. Patients from Rajasthan to Tamil Nadu used to approach him for their surgeries, ready to dole out any amount of currency required, to let the steadiest of hands bore into their skulls. Dr Sinha, at that time, was making more money than could be spent. He lived a comfortable life with his daughter and wife. Nothing could, then, have made him happier.

The accident had put an end to that. The car crash made sure that both his wife and daughter would never walk again, and that Dr Sinha would never perform a surgery again. His savings dwindled to almost nothing because of a rapid succession of medical procedures the trauma of the car crash necessitated for his family and himself. Unable to operate any longer, Dr Sinha had to find other sources of income.

It was then that Shiva had suggested his new line of work. Shiva was Dr Sinha's guardian angel. Two years ago, Dr Sinha was returning from a conference in Pune, when suddenly, in one of the more forested parts of

the route, the car had swerved uncontrollably and plummeted fifty feet down a ravine. Dr Sinha was violently thrust out of the car, and was in the throes of death when, in the broken rear-view mirror, a few feet before his eyes, he first saw Shiva. In a few more minutes, help arrived. Dr Sinha knew it was the man he glimpsed in the mirror who had brought help, but was unable to trace him for a year.

Then, Shiva met Dr Sinha for the first time.

The doctor's family had visited a mall, then. It was one of the few things that he thought still made his daughter happy; a star athlete whose legs don't obey her commands anymore has few joys indeed. His wife and daughter had disappeared into a dressing room, and that was when, in one of the many mirrors that adorned the wall, Dr Sinha spotted yet again, the man who had rescued him from a horrific death.

Dr Sinha rose, steady as usual, and approached the man.

"Hello," he said. "I might be wrong, but had you been in Khandala the previous year?" It took only a second for the man to recognise him, and immediately shake his hand.

"I am Shiva, sir. Trader from Kolhapur." The doctor wanted to introduce the man to his family, but Shiva had to leave urgently. They agreed to meet again.

**Dr Sinha was violently thrust out of the car, and was in the throes of death when, in the broken rear-view mirror, a few feet before his eyes, he first saw Shiva.**

And this was the beginning of a new friendship. In a few months, Dr Sinha and Shiva began to meet every week. Shiva, it turned out, had a whip-like intellect, but lived in dire poverty.

His lack of confidence, as the doctor soon realised, was the cause. His quivering eyes rarely met the doctor's steady ones, and his shaky mutters could barely refute his friend's calm and powerful arguments.

Yet, it was Shiva who suggested the idea of counselling, which had now become Dr Sinha's bread and butter.

"Why you don't talk to patients, calm them nicely? It is helpful, families give money, no?", he had said. And thus, it had begun.

Dr Sinha commenced his new profession of counselling people due for surgeries and other complex medical procedures, supplying much appreciated guidance to patients. It was all these facts put together, that made today's situation extremely delicate; Dr Sinha was to counsel Shiva.

Through the window, the doctor saw Shiva approaching the house and immediately strode to the door and held it ajar. Shiva walked in, and glanced perplexedly at the doctor's wife and daughter. The doctor wondered why, and immediately realised something.

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Why, Shiva had never met his family before! He immediately introduced them, and Shiva awkwardly shook their hands. Sitting down, they began to eat, and the doctor noticed that Shiva kept shooting concerned glances at his wife and daughter.

Breakfast was over soon, and the doctor began. "Shall we go to my room now, Shiva? It is almost time."

Shiva pushed himself back, and the chair screeched as he stood up. Slowly, looking carefully at the doctor's wife and child, he made his way after the him. The ladies, the doctor noticed, had barely noticed Shiva.

The doctor handed Shiva a plastic chair, and took one for himself. He closed the door, and they both sat together. Dr Sinha found it hard to begin. After all, he had never before had to explain to his best friend that he was slowly going to go mad.

"Shiva, do you know that the mind is one of the most complex organs of the body? Ruling the

two hemispheres of the brain, the mind is one of the most subtle, unexplored regions of the body. Why, we know more about the moon than we know about our mind!

But like every other organ of the body, the mind has diseases. And because the mind is so complex, its diseases are often far more devastating..." Each syllable was enounced in a precise calm way, but the doctor was not sure that his patient was listening.

Shiva barely took his worried eyes off the door. He replied irrelevantly. "You remember full car accident doctor?"

Yes, thought Dr Sinha. He remembered it vividly enough though sometimes, he wished he didn't. He remembered exactly how the steering wheel had turned into a dummy in his hands. He remembered how the car had plummeted, head first, into the ravine. He recollect ed in unrelenting detail how he had been flung into a tree. And, of course, he remembered how, a few minutes later, he had glimpsed his saviour through a broken mirror. The same saviour, who was now sitting across the room, and who was whimpering under the iron fist of paranoid schizophrenia.

The doctor had experienced this before. Patients often diverted the topic, so that the diagnosis would be avoided. He continued, undeterred. "Our senses feed the brain with information, and our mind interprets it. This generates a fantastic image of the world, full of colours, and scents, and sounds that we experience.

But sometimes it so happens that the brain begins to generate, with its own prejudices, its own information. This confuses the mind. While usually only embarrassing, sometimes this leads to violent or paranoid thoughts. Such a condition is referred to by doctors as schizophrenia."

"Doctor, when first you see madam after accident?"

The doctor had seen his daughter before he got to see his wife. They had been flung out of the car as well, but then, the machine had toppled onto them. His wife had been much more severely injured. They had spent six months in the hospital. They would never be able to walk again. The doctor barely saw his wife until the hospital staff brought her to his house. The same was the case with his daughter. Nevertheless, the doctor continued.

"In some cases, people hallucinate. Have you heard of hallucinations, Shiva? It's when the brain's information is interpreted

by the mind as something happening outside. You may conjure the image of a person, or the melody of a voice that is not really there. This is why you're here Shiva. I noticed you speaking to yourself on a few occasions. The last time we met, you had violent conversations and proceeded to attack thin air! Do you remember any of that, Shiva? I can be certain that you don't. This is schizophrenia Shiva. You need treatment."

"Madam never come back," Shiva muttered. "Both madams die in accident make full sense."

His eyes, filled with realisation, were pleading.

"Doctor, both madams die long back. You conjure image. Not me. You conjure image of family for two years!"

Now Dr Sinha felt dazed. He could not keep himself from asking the question.

"What do you mean?"

"No madams outside when I come. I thought you making joke, but you image conjuring! Hallucinationing! You remember when your wife or daughter last talk to someone else than you?"

A creeping doubt overtook the doctor. No. He had not seen his

wife or his daughter interacting with anyone. But he had assumed that that was because of the severe depression that they were facing. But this man... No! He must not listen to a paranoid lunatic, but still...

"My wife and daughter are fine, Shiva. It's you we need to worry about. Schizophrenia may run in the family. Do you know anyone who..."

"DOCTOR YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND OR WHAT? Your wife, dead. Your daughter, dead. Everything false. All patients false. You simply imagining things. Me first person in house in ages."

No one but patients had set foot in the house in ages. Everything Shiva said seemed to fit like a lock in a key. But the man was lunatic! Clinically insane! He himself as a doctor had certified that!

Just last week, he and Shiva had been out in the woods, to enjoy the scenery. It was a pleasant curve of road, overlooking a beautiful expanse of jungle. There was a large curved mirror at the turning, to enable drivers to see vehicles coming from the other side of the turn.

Dr Sinha had been looking past the mirror when suddenly, his eyes caught the reflection of Shiva, a few metres away from him, arguing and throwing punches at no one in particular. This was when the doctor concluded that Shiva was suffering from Schizophrenia, and needed help. He had asked him to come home in a week. Shiva had come. But things were not going the way Dr Sinha had expected.

"Look Shiva. You are now crossing a limit. Don't make me lose my temper. Listen to what I am saying. I have called up the authorities. They will be arriving in a while. Don't make things difficult for us. We'll be taking you to a facility, a good facility! You will be treated very well, and -"

"Doctor tell me why there so many knife here. Tell me let us see if you know."

"There are no..." The doctor looked around. How could he have not noticed them? There were at least five dozen knives in the room, their blades glistening malevolently.

"Have madams ever come to this room in your memory?"

The doctor tried to recall. No. He could never recall his family coming into that room. But that could not mean ... could it?

"Tell doctor. How your patients pay you according to you? Cash or cheque? When you last go to bank to withdraw money?"

He did not even try to remember. He did not know. He certainly did not know from where he was getting the money he needed to survive.

"I called up mental hospital. Authorities come in five six minutes to catch you, not me. You mad, not me. Don't make trouble!"

The doctor's mind raced. Was it true? Was he really mad? It made sense, whatever Shiva had said. He must be right. After all, Shiva had saved him once. He was saving him again. He would go quietly. But he had seen Shiva violently thrashing about! Or had he? Perhaps he had hallucinated that as well? He must have. Yes.

In three minutes, the sound of an ambulance's siren filled the air. Men in white suits walked in, softly but sternly grasped Dr Sinha's hand, and took him out. There, he saw his wife. Was she his wife? She was a hallucination!

"...hadn't let us into that room in years. We thought he was harmless, though a little deluded. But after seeing today that it was full of knives he had sharpened, we were scared, and decided to call

you for help. Thank you for ..."

Dr Sinha's mind reeled. Which of these was true? Had his wife and daughter died, and was he hallucinating? Or were they still alive?

If this were true, Shiva had tricked him into losing his mind. He felt his mind unmaking itself. Helplessly, he looked at Shiva.

Shiva was held by as many men in white as himself. But that grin! Shiva was grinning ear to ear, a look of evil satisfaction in his eyes. Dr Sinha lost his temper. With a violent pull, he tore himself from his captors, seized one of the huge knives lying nearby, and hurled it with all his strength at Shiva's head.

The missile unerringly found its mark.

The mirror shattered. ■

# KNOWING EVERYTHING

**I** am a loner, traversing through the carcasses of my own fallen skins and shades, the dura maters that my hundred personalities shed in the past few years of my life, masquerading to be a person of zero drama. I keep flinging aside my worries by the roadside, braiding the gales that hit my face into thin streaks of causal experiences, slowly piling experience upon experience to build up a heap they call life. But is there more to life than being humbled by the stars every night—my deepest darkest self wonders to the hues of a fading sunset.

"To them, my friend, it is a world of wonders," Ravi said, as our conversation seemed to be reaching a conclusion. "We have thought of a falling angel, burnt by the very sun that nurtures us and feeds us. It is because the star has no mercy. It does not live, like me, like you."

Ah! How much I would have given for explaining to him that no one lives like me! Except time—time is the only thing I compare myself with. It is endless, relentless, cruel, it knows everything because it creates everything. I wish to do the same, but there are a billion thunderbolts that kiss the ground the moment I try to raise my head even in my class of thirty biology aspirants. Some of them come to the same violin class as me in the evenings, so they comprehend a slightly broader portion of me; but then, what is a sunbeam before the magnificence of the star itself. Though I am dark: the incarnation of a nocturnal feeling of empty solitude, cursing everyday the facetious platitudes the world throws upon me.  
Once Ravi did dare ask me.

"Yes indeed, my homosexuality shouldn't come as a surprise or shock to you after two years of being my roommate in this boarding school!" I replied, trying to be blatantly casual.

He laughed, a bit apprehensively, and realized that I knew. I knew him inside out while he was still only a baby fumbling with the slowing oozing out facts of my life. He finally enunciated the deep throated fatherly maxim of superficial modernity that I have heard again many times now:

"It's okay; I mean, it's totally natural. Homosexuality is not taboo; there's nothing to be worried about."

*Painting credits -Niril Panigrahi*

Niril

"You just asked me regarding my sexuality, and I replied. Why did you get so worked up?"

Didn't he know that it was all the trouble: it was as much trouble as was finding a girl for a heterosexual boy, perhaps double that trouble even! Life is no less cruel to us than to them. We perhaps bleed only more in the hands and look only less in the eyes of our lovers than them. But well, shells inside shells inside shells, peeling inside the white layer, then the grey layer, then finally reaching the black layer which is a diamond hidden from my own conscious thought as well! How much could I hope for a person so disparate from me to fathom!

But there she stood today, motionless in the fading airs of a fragile fragrance of dreams of carefree flights. Her life was the only one which did not reflect mine, for I had realized years ago that in all my sentience, inside my all-knowing brain, I was still not special—and hence the pile of experiences on which I relied so much through cold logic.

But her love for me was not cold. It was warm as the sudden sun that eases the desert sand out from the hands of eternal winter in the months of February. But it was more than that. She was my own realization, and also of what lacked in me, like a flute being played: lurking in the background, inducing waves of glee and even amelioration on the placid ocean that my soul had become. She had walked with me through my vicissitudes for the past eighteen winters. Joining the same school and then the same boarding school as me, she had somersaulted with me in my mirth in the comings of refreshing summers and monsoons.

"Is it so hard for a biology student to fall in love with a physics girl?" Gayatri had dared to ask me finally one day, upon which I had laughed happily but nervously, for I had always laughed along with her, many times holding her hand and not realizing how joyous it would make her. We had become each other's spirits, though she knew me and I could never know her. And even though she knew, she asked to be in my memories forever—for I was already in hers, an object of adoration and support. All I had to offer was my laugh: my heart had already been eaten away, or so I had been telling myself.

Many a times I contemplate upon the melancholy the

roots of the banyan feel buried deep into the soil, hitting the bedrock deep down and never able to see the sunlight or dance to the music of the awakening, blossoming nature every morning; or even worse the roots of the cherry blossom, that can never play with the iridescent mesh of sunbeams caught in the pink of its leaves along with the morning dew. In times like these, I play the sorrow of love and life upon my violin, and hope that it attracts the person I truly love. Time has shown me again and again though that his shyness and the depth of his shells are indeed much weightier than my own. Time and time again I break through them, but he whistles me out like a guide on a museum ride, panicking that too much will be revealed—keeping some doors always shut for the kings and queens that will never arrive anymore.

But there she stands today, lifeless and smiling in the wait for a bus, her last act of friendship culminating in one of my life's greatest joys. She is the rainbow, and the arrow Indra shot through her has pierced my heart yet again. She played soccer with me today in the morning in the school grounds, and now she is leaving for Bangalore, alone to a world she has always wondered about.

I will be joining AIIMS this year, along with her twin brother, the person I had always loved, and who had loved me back in my days of falls and rises along with his sister. I had conjured up images of my going out on adventures with him, out into a fantasia of elves and dwarfs, mesmerizing the common folk by riding wolves as big as cows, roaring as the first breeze of the sunrise upon the mountains of the north, and sleeping entangled in each others arms at nightfall. I had told her my truth as we reached the end of our coexistence, and she had truly brought me and her brother together at last, joining a string of responsibility, and left for her own adventure to the south.

Summer is returning now, and our life as a couple begins anew. I should have stolen Gayatri's diary before she left, though. Ah! I knew nothing about the sun that gave me life twice: in friendship and in love.

- Atul Sharma  
Fourth Year



# THE PROMISE

Ratul Biswas  
Second Year

March 15, 2015.

Today is a good day, not just because it's a holiday, but it's my birthday. Memories flood my mind as the sky turns amber and the hot panting of the earth brushes against my skin. On the mantelpiece by the ajar window stands a picture of olden days, my best friend and me with hands on each other's shoulders.

We had been classmates since our earliest days at our alma mater. Eleven years of it- Spandan was my partner at school. Both of us used to swim and sink together. We had grown very close friends - it once happened that when we were promoted to different sections, both of us broke down into tears. And today, forty years hence, I still sob in solitude and pain.

It was the day of graduation. I was happy for both of us, because our efforts had yielded good fruit. But the taste of success was washed away very soon. It is said that some people cannot enjoy the taste of fortune. No sooner did the school bus drop him home than his neighbours took him and sped to the hospital. Perplexed and astounded, he obeyed them like a robot and off they went.

I too was there with him, he couldn't leave my side. He went inside the cabin nervous, and came out numb. I was not allowed inside, but I could just see two persons wrapped in bloody bandages when the door opened. The sinister truth left him traumatized. He had lost both his parents in an accident, in a flash of an irreversible, brutal, unforgiving moment. I don't remember him crying; he was too stoned to. For days on end, he spoke nothing, just pressed my hand in helplessness and hope, whenever I was with him. The next day he came out draped in white, standing like a corpse, igniting to ashes with infinite remorse his most valuable possessions.

Hope finally resigned to reality, and a few months tried their best to alleviate the burden too heavy for a young boy to carry. By the time we graduated from the twelfth grade, he fell in love with Anamika, a really decent girl from the best girls' school in town. And we being boys of the best boys' school in town, obviously we were in great demand! At first it was infatuation I suppose, as adolescents of some sixteen-seventeen years are driven to by their hormones. To speak the truth, I too had fallen in love with another lovely girl. But as they say, 'All that glitters, is not gold', 'La Belle Dame Sans Merci' betrayed me. And I was badly hurt after our break up. Thinking of it now, my lips unconsciously bend to a smile. I remember that he was there to console me and stand by my side. Initially I warned him against her, as are humans expected to learn and preach from their mistakes; however it unexpectedly grew into love that promised to withstand the worst storms life could bring.

The tides of life drifted us to different lands as we matured. We went to different colleges after school, different cities altogether, chasing our own future. The nostalgia of childhood memories seemed to fade away, maybe because we had become sensible adults now, maybe 'life' happened to us. Or maybe he had found his love and I could not open myself up since the misadventure. I had employed myself in a chemical company at Zurich, but no one could pull him out of his home town of Calcutta.

"What more do you need when all your life is here?", thus was the verdict of a rising entrepreneur of the city. He sometimes used to brand me as brainwashed for serving in foreign lands.

Distance does not sever human relationships. It is the human mind which does. We were still friends, as good friends as before. And he loved her more than ever. I recollect that how he needed someone desperately close to him especially after losing his parents at a very raw age. The years rolled by unnoticed, seven long years.

I had been in Zurich, with barely any news from him. No other remarkable incident happened when, quite absurdly, one day I heard from him after a long time.



I was really delighted. With lots of news accumulated over the years, we talked for a few hours! In the midst of the conversation, he asked me whether I found myself someone. I was a bit embarrassed, yet I told him that I had none. I remember joking about the timidity and simplicity of Anamika, and whether she was still too shy to marry him! Funny I asked him that, because he said he was engaged with her and week next they were scheduled to marry. Elated, I flew back from Zurich to Calcutta.

His marriage was a grand occasion, perhaps the best I have ever attended. And why shouldn't it be? After all it came from one of the most successful businesspersons in the city. He had grown into a young charming man, with the same old face, excepting the beard. And Anamika, well, looked like the most beautiful woman in the land. I was really proud for both of them. My stay was filled with 'Dude-to-dude-talks', unearthing of stupid memories and frivolousness, apart from the razzmatazz of lights and people and the rich assortment of food. A few days of revelry was culminated by the call of duty.

Soon, everything was back to track, but my heart which was filled with a bittersweet feeling; one side, I was really happy for my friend, a stark example of Shakespeare's words, 'Love is not love that alters when it alteration finds', and on the other, I was in despair, searching for love.

About nine months later, I got a call from Anamika. I was surprised that the new bride called me out of a sudden.

"Spandan has developed a really bad haemorrhage, he does not have much time. Please come home."

"But how? ..."

He was driving home from office and had a stroke while driving. His car crashed into another at an intersection and he was caught up in the wreck. That was the synopsis of what I could make through her tears.

I boarded my flight the next day. Ten hours of flight seemed like a millennium. I cursed the plane because it could not travel faster. Wild, corrupted thoughts flooded my mind. Just in time, I reached the hospital. Anamika and her parents were in the lobby. Despite being blinded by hot tears, she could recognise from a fuzzy silhouette of my face that it was me. "Thank you for coming here," she said, directing me to his cabin. Her mother was chanting some prayers, as she counted the beads of her rosary with her fluttering fingers. Her father was talking to the doctor, as if buying with great endeavour precious words of expectations of his recovery. I entered the cabin and saw a mutilated, moribund friend smiling at me at the expense of my brimming eyes.

"How did this happen? And why did it happen?" I asked.

He kept silent, smiling still. He rested his palm on mine and grasping it with his ebbing strength breathed the final words, "Take care of her."

What was I supposed to tell a friend whom I'd never meet again? All I could do is gently press his resting

palm in a silent promise. Big drops of tears coursed their way down his rough bearded cheeks, edging along the periphery of his oxygen mask, while his ecstatic smile persisted in a hope to meet his parents soon.

And then it happened. The feeble pulse flat-lined. Thrown out of wits, I called for the doctor in excitement and fear. He entered the room with a nurse. They pumped up the oxygen, injected him and tried the defibrillator. All the paraphernalia along with the expertise of the famous doctor failed to bring my friend back to life.

Outside the cabin, the corridor and waiting area resonated with wails and the laments of a newly made widow. Lament that knows no end, misery unbound, void prayers transcending the farthest heavens. I couldn't help console her and myself burst into tears.

He  
kept  
silent, smiling still.  
He rested his palm on  
mine and grasping it  
with his ebbing strength  
breathed the final  
words, "Take care  
of her."

It was as if he had been waiting for me, waiting to hand me over this behemoth responsibility to take care of his beloved.

I promised him the responsibility to take care of her. But how could I do that? Her parents were old and withering fast, so the only alternative of taking care of her was to marry her. After much moral and emotional deliberation I decided to marry her- that was the only way I could uphold the integrity of my best friend. Her parents also agreed to this, and we got married a few days later.

I decided to quit my job in Zurich and settle in Calcutta. I thought it would be better if she was not taken to a foreign and unknown land in this hour of misery, it would be too much for her to cope with. I found myself a job in a chemical company which had its quarters in Calcutta.

It was a marriage of a different kind. Marriage without any pomp and show, without any hope or expectation. Days passed, she was naturally silent for all the time. Sometimes, I tried to console her, but she required some quiet and peace, as was expected post trauma.

Occasionally she would sit in the veranda and see the sun die in the west. Her stillness disturbed me, how long could she live like this, like a fading breath? There was an uncanny silence holding over us. Sometimes, at night, in my dreams I saw him. Disturbed, I woke up and asked myself was I doing something wrong? Was I committing a moral error? But I had no other alternative, but to fulfil my comrade's final wish.

Time was very lazy in its pace. It was barely a month and we were all trying savagely to come to terms with this unbearable loss, when her child Rahul was born, with eyes as brown as his father, and his lips cut in the same fashion. Truly fate was playing a wicked game with us; taking away a life and giving back one in return.

A couple of years went by. The seasons changed without any pity, the world turned as fast as it had been, blinding itself from the misery and pain of its inhabitants. The child grew up too. One day when I came from office, I met with a surprise. Walking on his trembling legs, the child, with tender hands grasping his mother's fingers—that was the most beautiful moment I can recall. That was perhaps the first day when I saw her smile. The baby crawled towards me and whispered 'Papa'. The evanescent smile died out just like a flash of lightning amongst the nefarious clouds. My arms, which had produced itself forth to support the baby withdrew in repulsion and just for the moment, my eyes rested on hers. I stood up, leaving the baby to its own accord and walked into the bedroom and shut the door behind me. I remember distinctly how I had cried copiously in some dark corner of the room for getting such an undeserved designation. It almost choked me to death and I felt tremendously awful at taking my friend's place. How was I to slap this innocent kid, tell him that his dad is dead and snatch away all his happiness?

But this was not the end. It was round the year, like in the breaking cold days of January. The previous night it rained hard and a strong wind was under way. The kid was tucked away in his cradle and was snug and sleeping. Despite the uproar of the wind, for once, I supposed to hear a door click in the midst of my slumber. Thinking that some door was swung open by the raging storm outside, and that she had gone to shut it, I resumed my sleep.

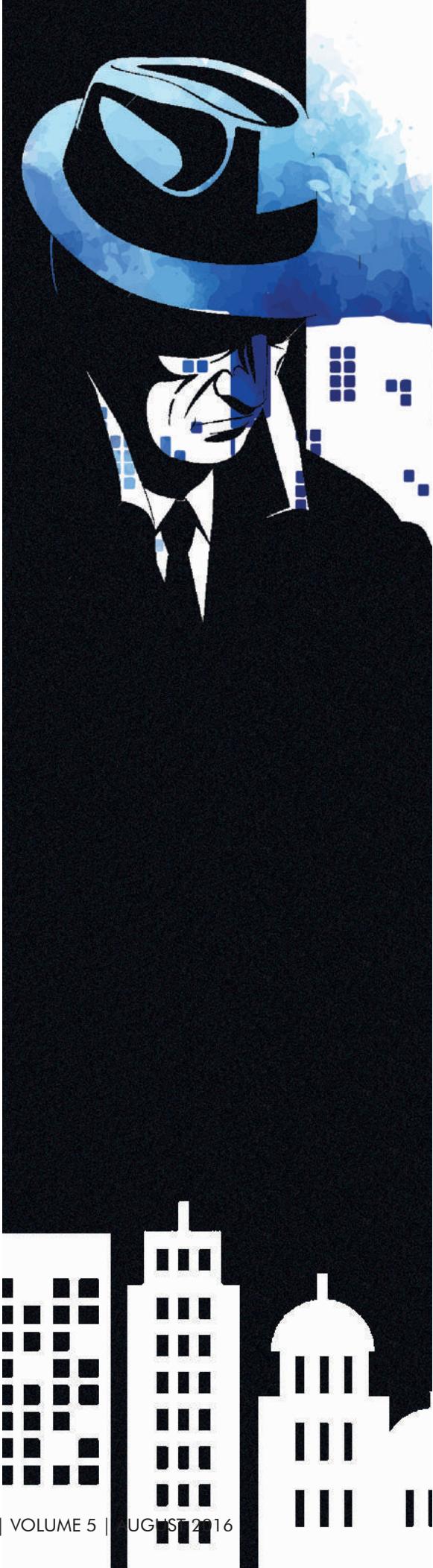
And I realised that a door did open last night. The next sunny morning brought with it the deadliest of storms. Awkwardly, I saw that the table was not laid for breakfast, and everything was dreadfully quiet. Down in the drawing room something caught my attention. I found a letter kept under the centrepiece on the table. It read somewhat like:

*"Dear Rishi, take care of my Rahul. I need to go to him. I lost him once but he has found me. He is patiently waiting for me at the bridge. I am sorry, but it is not your fault. I thank you for all that you have done for Spandan, me and my baby. I love you. You are his dad now."*

A ghostly chill ran down my spine. Perplexed, I rushed out of home and headed straight for the bridge. I had been just too late to reach her. She had gone, plunging from the Howrah Bridge, to her soul-mate. I knew it was her, a part of her saree had torn off among the bolts of the railing, where some pedestrians had gathered. Everything paused. The hooting of the traffic on the bridge and the chatting of the people standing by. I dropped there on the sidewalk, like a senseless heap of blood and bones and sinew, and the moment next is beyond any earthly description.

People think they know what grief is, but they don't. And today, forty years hence, I still sob in solitude and pain. Today sees Rahul as a renowned doctor and an author, who writes about his life, about human life. When he called from Mumbai to wish me a happy birthday, I answered him with overflowing joy, but after the conversation ended and I put the receiver down, I collected myself to a desolate corner of the house and resonated it with my unheard cries, imploring to the farthest heavens to take me to my friend and inquire unto him whether I could keep my promise.





# MOSTLY HARMLESS

Gautam Aditya Kavuri  
Third Year

**M**r. Murthy stopped and quickly darted into a side street.

Panting because of the exertion, he wondered what had gotten into him.

Wiping the sweat off his bald head with a handkerchief, he carefully peeked around the corner to look down the main road. He straightened himself and leaned his bulk onto the wall of the corner store with a sigh of relief. For the fifteenth time this evening, he began to question the propriety of his antics.

As he leaned in for another look at the main road, he felt something sharp press into his lower back. A calm voice from behind informed him that he would be wise not to try and draw attention to the situation. ‘Tell me’, asked the owner of the voice, ‘are you with the government? Are you one of Sunder’s men?’ The first thoughts through Mr. Murthy’s mind were about how estranged the man’s monotonic tone was from all the knife pulling that was going on behind. It took a few seconds, and an encouraging poke from the knife, then, before he could gather himself up and blurt out, ‘yes...I mean...I work in a Government office’. He went on to tell the man that he was a senior divisional engineer in the Railways and ask the man what the hell he thought he was doing to a respectable citizen like him, but the man was too busy steering Mr. Murthy into an abandoned building to listen. Once inside, the man quickly frisked Mr. Murthy. He then put a hand on his shoulder and spun him round. Mr. Murthy gasped as a look of recognition swept through his face.

Mr. Murthy was fifty something and slightly overweight. Every day he woke up at 6:00 am so that he could make it in time for his job, a good 10 km from home. He went, of course, in the car that the company provided, which was at his door at 7:30 each day. He usually came back at 8:00 every day, leaving work one hour earlier. Every Friday though, for almost ten months now, he had been doing something unusual.

It all began one day with a remark that his driver had made to him.

‘You know sir’, he had said, ‘I’ve watched a lot of movies, and I’ve been an auto driver for almost fifteen years before I started driving for the government, but not once have I heard anyone tell me to “follow that car”, or “follow that bus”, like they do in the movies’.

Mr. Murthy, of course, wasn’t really surprised by that particular revelation, but it had got him thinking. That day was a Friday, and his wife would be home late from the weekly get together with her friends at the club. Making up his mind, he had pointed out a white Maruti Swift on the road in front of them and said, ‘Driver, follow that car’.

His driver had looked at him in the rear view mirror, grinning.

‘Are you serious, sir?’

‘Yes’, Mr. Murthy had replied, ‘you wanted it to be like the movies, so follow the car’.

‘Okay sir!’ The driver was still grinning, ‘do you know those people?’

‘No...it wouldn’t be fun if I knew them, would it?’

‘Of course not sir, let’s do it!’

And so it started. Neither Mr. Murthy nor his overzealous driver had had an inkling of how difficult this business really was. A successful tailing entails ensuring that you don’t lose the car in front, while simultaneously remaining inconspicuous. Needless to say, they couldn’t really pull it off the first time. The people in the car they were tailing had grown suspicious, and had stopped their car and gotten out to see who was following them. Mr. Murthy remembered beating a hasty retreat, while praying that the people weren’t noting down the number on his car’s plates.



This went on for a few weeks, until Mr. Murthy got more ambitious and began following people on foot. He would check out of the office a few hours earlier every Friday, so that he would have more time for his hobby. Eventually, the driver had gotten bored, and moved on, but Mr. Murthy had kept at his little game.

The method for picking out a person that he would follow was as simple as it could get. He would walk out of his office at 4:00, have a cup of chai at the roadside stall, and then follow the first person he saw who was wearing white clothing. In the early days, he either used to tail men, or people

who seemed to be in a hurry. This was mostly to ensure that he wouldn't get himself into too embarrassing a situation. Eventually, he had started keeping a record of what the people he was tailing did, and where they went. Ten months on, it had almost become an obsession with him, an escape from his otherwise humdrum existence. Now, of course, his skill had increased, and he felt quite confident he could successfully tail almost any average citizen.

Lately, his hobby had turned into an obsession. His wife began to notice him reading books on surveillance and espionage and incessantly googling things like 'stealth' and 'how to move unnoticed' and 'are fat men at a disadvantage in espionage'. One night, she had been scared out of wits when she crashed into Mr. Murthy crawling around the house while she was going into the kitchen for a drink of water. Mr. Murthy, though, was a rock in the face of all his wife's pleas and requests to stop his 'silly and potentially dangerous' pastime. This was his hobby. He had invented it, and he wasn't going to give it up. Be-

" I'm not  
a government  
agent! I work for  
the Indian  
Railways"

sides, it was completely harmless, and very exciting.

The man in front of Mr. Murthy had a long scar on his left cheek. The evening sun cast most of the man's right side into shadow, but Mr. Murthy could still make out a revolver glinting in the darkness. He swallowed.

'So,' asked the man with the scar, 'what kind of an undercover government agent carries no concealed gun?'

He stroked the corner of his mouth with a finger and grinned, 'Or did you forget yours at home?'

It took Mr. Murthy a few seconds before he could process what the man meant, and a few more seconds before he could reply, 'I'm not a government agent! I work for the Indian Railways.' Mr. Murthy paused for a moment, 'you've probably got the wrong guy, like in the movies.'

'A likely story buddy,' the man was shaking his head, smiling, 'but this isn't "North-by-Northwest", and you know it. You're exactly the guy I want.' The man paused for effect. 'Why were you following me?'

Mr. Murthy took a deep breath. He had had a pretty strong feeling that this was what it was all about. It was a Friday, and the man with the scar was wearing a white tee-shirt. Mr. Murthy told the man, as briefly as he could, about his hobby and that he had been following people without reason for almost a year now. He explained that he, the man with the scar, was just an arbitrarily chosen subject, and all this was just a big misunderstanding. He apologized multiple times. He would do anything to stop the man from pulling the trigger.



The man with the scar smirked as he listened. 'Come on,' he said, motioning with his gun to a dilapidated flight of stairs, 'we're going up.'

'You...you don't believe me?'

'Of course I do...you're too fat to be a secret agent anyway. But I'm not going to let you go...no...we're going to go on a little trip.' Mr. Murthy could almost feel the man grinning maniacally behind his back as they climbed into the darkness. Mr. Murthy sat pillion on the speeding motorcycle and hung on for dear life. It had been over two hours since he had first encountered the mysterious scarred man, and the only prayer on Mr. Murthy's lips was that he be able to make it home alive. The scarred man had led him from one seedy place to another, picking up various items, and dropping copious hints that he was going to kill someone tonight. What scared Mr. Murthy most though, was that since the last half-hour, man had begun hinting that maybe he had hinted too much to Mr. Murthy, and saying aloud that some people should be 'enjoy life while it lasts'.

The scarred man, it was clear to Mr. Murthy, was a contract killer. He was going to bump someone off for his shady employers, and was probably going throw in a complementary Mr. Murthy as well. Mr. Murthy shifted uncomfortably in his seat and cursed his Friday sojourns at the weird-activity-club for the hundredth time tonight.

When all this began, at the abandoned building, Mr. Murthy had thought that the man would probably beat him up and leave him, face in the dirt, somewhere inside the building. When that didn't come to transpire, Mr. Murthy had been marginally relieved, but looking back now, being beaten senseless and left at that place somehow seemed infinitely more appealing than his current situation. Once the scarred man had forced Mr. Murthy

to lug himself up the staircase, they had gone into a particularly nasty looking room, where the scarred man had had a black travel bag waiting for him. Positioning Mr. Murthy near the shuttered window on the other side of the room, the scarred man had walked slowly in through the moldy doorway and into the room. Still covering Mr. Murthy with his gun, the man had slowly opened the zipper on the bag and peeked inside. Mr. Murthy had been able to make out something long, cylindrical and black inside. As the man had zippered up the bag, apparently satisfied by what he saw, Mr. Murthy had heard a distinctive metallic clinking from the bag. Any further doubts he had had about what was the bag contained vanished when the scarred man had mimed shooting someone with a rifle and had then stuck his tongue out to indicate that whichever imaginary being was at the wrong end of the firearm had copped it. The man had then proceeded give him one of his trademark maniacal grins before motioning him to walk out of the room.

Mr. Murthy watched the trees rushing by as he continued to think upon what was probably the most eventful Friday evening of his life.

As they had come out of the building, and into the hustle and bustle of the market, the scarred man had already swapped his gun for a knife. He had led Mr. Murthy around the place for almost ten minutes before he muscled him through a tiny doorway, and into what looked suspiciously like a fortune teller's shop from the movies. The tiny room was very poorly lit, and over perfumed. A thick scent that reminded Mr. Murthy of Rooh-Afza hung in the air. To their right, Mr. Murthy could see a badly-carpentered reception desk, which had the picture of an ugly old man hung behind it. He was, Mr. Murthy assumed, the proprietor.



The walls on both sides were unpainted, and a set of dirty curtains framed the doorway opposite the entrance. The scarred man led Mr. Murthy through the curtains and into a bigger room. A single lamp hanging from the ceiling lit up the gloomy scene. By the light of the lamp, Mr. Murthy could make out a large wooden table and two chairs opposite each other. A wizened figure sat on one of them. The scarred man forced Mr. Murthy into the other chair and put Mr. Murthy's palm on the table, upturned. It looked like Mr. Murthy was going to have his fortune read.

For a long time, the old man just stared at Mr. Murthy's hand. Then he started tracing lines on Mr. Murthy's hand with his greasy fingers, mumbling to himself. Finally, after several minutes of this, he declared, in a raspy voice,

'You're in grave danger.'

Going by the amount of sweating Mr. Murthy was doing, this wasn't an admirably difficult conclusion to make. There were only two explanations consistent with Mr. Murthy's excessive perspiration:

- a) He had just run a marathon.
- b) He was scared stiff.

A cursory look at Mr. Murthy would enable even an intellectual of the tiniest stature to conclude that option a) bordered on the highly improbable. Given further that there was a menacing looking man pacing about behind him, that he was in grave danger was as clear as crystal. Mr. Murthy hadn't said any of this out loud of course; he had just tried as hard as he could to maintain a mildly surprised facial expression. When a maniac with a gun, who is just perhaps a diehard fan of chiromancy, is standing behind you, you don't really want to go off insulting the first palm-reader you come across.

Mr. Murthy was trying to maintain an even breathing, but the anticipation was killing him. What was the scar faced man up to? Was this how he was going to die, murdered in a seedy fortune-teller's in some forgotten alley? The fortune-teller, no doubt mistaking Mr. Murthy's expression for an intense curiosity about his impending doom, began voicing proclamations that served to unnerve Mr. Murthy even further.

'Death lurks around the corner...the intertwining of your destiny line with the line of Satan reveals this.'

Going by the amount of sweating Mr. Murthy was doing, this wasn't an admirably difficult conclusion to make. There were only two explanations consistent with Mr. Murthy's excessive perspiration:

- a) He had just run a marathon.
- b) He was scared stiff.

Mr. Murthy could hear Mr. Scarface's shoes rhythmically clicking against the floor behind him.



'When the hour of the devil arrives, you death will arrive with it...'

By now, the craziness in the atmosphere had gotten into Mr. Murthy's head.

'The hour of the devil is not as far as you think...it draws near...like a feral beast stalking its prey.'

The Scar faced man had begun to do something with his handgun...Mr. Murthy could hear metal parts clicking against each other.

The fortune-teller continued, unabated. 'You will be dismembered beyond recognition, your intestines ripped out and stretched to the limit while you're still alive. Then they will slowly be cut off with a pair of scissors...' the old man was standing on his chair, making slow cutting motions with his left hand while his right held up imaginary intestines. He was licking his lips.

Mr. Murthy could hear nothing from behind, all had gone quiet...

The anticipation was killing Mr. Murthy...he felt like he was going to throw up.

He closed his eyes and waited for the bullet to his head from behind, the hairs on the back of his neck seemed to be moving around, like tentacles, feeling for danger. His heart was sending waves of tingling liquid through his veins. He held on to the arms of his chair, bracing for impact.

'Your blood will be fed on by common mongrels...'

'Hey! Old man,' the fortune-teller's sordid penance was interrupted by the scar-faced man, 'you got any...stuff?'

The old-man stopped mid-sentence and narrowed his eyes. He looked from Mr. Murthy to the man with the scar, and back again.

'Are you with the government?'

The significance of this question was not entirely lost on Mr. Murthy. This was the second time tonight that he had been asked this.

In normal life, Mr. Murthy would have without exception answered in the affirmative to that question. He was quickly learning, though, that 'yes' was definitely not the right thing to say if a shady looking guy stopped you in a dark alley asked you this.

Mr. Murthy shook his head to indicate a 'no'. The old man further narrowed his eyes. A few minutes later, they were outside again, and the scar faced man was leading Mr. Murthy through the crowded market.

Their next stop had been a very brief one, where the scar-faced man had pushed Mr. Murthy into the gun store of a dangerous looking man and had begun to spew expletives at him. The scar-man had been further helped on in this endeavor by the fact that he had been standing with Mr. Murthy right in front of him, so that if anything had gotten out of hand, any projectiles aimed toward him would have had to travel through a few dozen inches of human tissue and muscle before they hit their mark. Mr. Murthy, who had been acutely aware of this fact throughout the encounter, had quite missed the essence of the exchange. But that had been the least of his worries.

Things had happened quite quickly after this. The scar faced man had gone up to a liquor store and bought a bottle of some liquid or another.



He had offered it to Mr. Murthy, who had refused, and then had proceeded to down the whole bottle in surprisingly short amount of time.

Finally, he'd managed to hotwire some poor bloke's motorcycle, and having secured his precious bag, and having gotten Mr. Murthy to climb up into the back-seat, had promptly crashed into a pedestrian.

Needless to say, it hadn't exactly been an uneventful journey from then on, but Mr. Murthy had no time to think about it, just now.

He had just spotted an opportunity. The man with the scar was slowing down at an intersection. Mr. Murthy could see a few policemen gathered there. It was now or never.

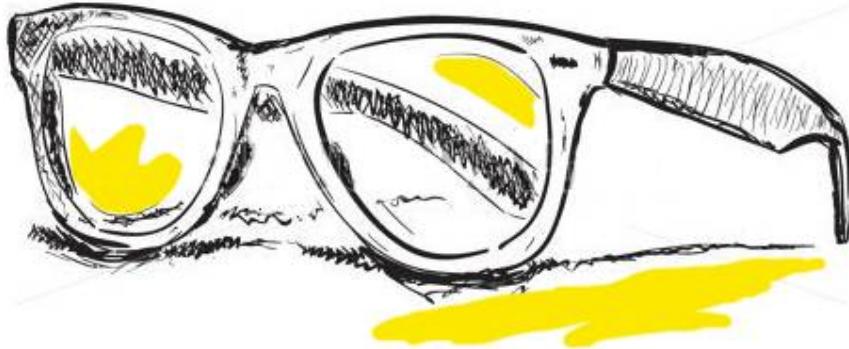
Mr. Murthy placed his hands on the motorbike's cowl, bracing himself for the biggest leap of his life.

It all happened in an instant. As the bike slowed to a minimum, Mr. Murthy leaped off the bike. Police would later tell him that he looked like a giant frog attempting

a ballet move. The scar-faced man briefly lost control, with his rear tire skidding across the road, but he had seen the cops too, and took no time at all in righting himself and zooming off into the night. Mr. Murthy pushed his face off the road and watched the rapidly disappearing tail-light, with relief, unmitigated, pure relief. He had been scared to death, taken to the edge of his sanity. As the police ran to help him up, he had already made up his mind: From now on, his Friday afternoons would be spent at home, in front of the television set.

The scar-faced man slowed to a stop, looked around, and pulled out his mobile phone, 'Vijay! Yes...everything went fine. I think I overdid it with the fortune-teller and my uncle's gun-store, but you can tell your mom that your dad won't be going on his weekly surveillance trips anymore...' chuckling, he re-started his bike and zoomed into the night.





## চশমা

প্রথম যেবার চশমা পরি – খুব মিষ্টি একটা আকাশী ফ্রেন্মের চশমা ছিল। সেটার একটা সুতো ছিল – ঘাড়ের পেছন দিয়ে গলানো থাকত – খুলে পড়লেও চশমাটা যেন পড়ে ভেঙে না যায়। সুতোটা বাদামী ছিল বলে আমার ভারী রাগ হয়েছিল – কেন, ওটা আকাশী রঙের পাওয়া যায় না? দিয়ে সেই চশমা পরে তো মা আমাকে বারবার জিজ্ঞেস করছে – এই, সব ঠিক মতো দেখতে পাচ্ছিস তো, দেখ কোনো অসুবিধা হচ্ছে কিনা – হ'লে কাকুকে বল – আর আমার সেসব কোনোদিকে কোনো ভক্ষণ নেই। আমি খালি হঁ হঁ করছি আর ঘাড় ঘুরিয়ে ঘুরিয়ে চারদিকে দেখছি আর দেখার চেষ্টা করছি – আমাকে ঠিক কেমন দেখতে লাগছে। দোকানটার পেছনদিকে যে কাঁচটা ছিল – কালো কাঁচ – তাতে আয়নার মতো সব দেখা যায় – আমি একদম পেছন ফিরে ঘাড় হেলিয়ে পোজ দিয়ে দেখছি আমায় কেমন লাগছে। চশমাটা একটু করে তুলছি – আবার খুলে দেখছি। মা একবার ঘাড় ধরে সামনে ঘুরিয়ে দিয়ে বলল – এ-এ-দিকে দ্যাখ – আমি তো আবার সুযোগ পেলেই ঘুরে দেখছি। তারপরে আসবার সময় সারা রাস্তা – বাসের জানালা, মিষ্টির দোকান – যেখানেই একটু কাঁচ আছে – আমি না, ঘাড় ঘুরিয়ে ঘুরিয়ে দেখছি – আমায় কেমন লাগছে। দিয়ে মা রেং-মেংগে বিরক্ত হয়ে চশমাটা খুলেই নিয়ে একেবারে ব্যাগে ঢুকিয়ে দিল – ও বোঝা হয়ে গেছে, তোর চশমা লাগবে না। এদিকে আমি তো ঘ্যানঘ্যান করে যাচ্ছি, ওমা, আমি ঠিকমতো দেখতে

পাচ্ছি না, এই দেখ হেঁচট খেলাম – ওমা, চশমাটা দাও না। - দেখে হাঁটো।

কিন্তু স্কুলের বেলায় তো আর দেখে হাঁটো বলা যায় না – ক্লাস করতে হবে, নোট নিতে হবে – আর স্কুলের মিসরা বলেছিল বলেই তো ডাঙ্গার দেখাতে যাওয়া হয়েছিল, আর তাতেই তো চশমাটা হ'ল। তাই স্কুলে যেতাম চশমা পরেই। প্রথম দিন মা আবার কাজলের একটা টিপ দিয়েছিল আলতো করে – যাতে নজর না লাগে। আমি খাঁচাগাড়িতে বসেই মুছে নিয়েছিলাম।

তো যাওয়ার আগে স্কুল-ড্রেস পরে চশমাটা পরে রোজ একবার করে গিয়ে ফুল-ড্রেসিং আয়নার সামনে গিয়ে দাঁড়াতাম – আর দাঁড়ালেই মা উত্তম-মধ্যম ঝাড় দিত। আমাদের তখন ভাড়া-বাড়ি, তিনখানা ঘর আর বাথরুম-পায়খানা – টেবিল-চেয়ারও ছিল না – কিন্তু শোয়ার ঘরটায় একটা ফুল-ড্রেসিং আয়না আর একটা আলনা ছিল – মা বিয়ের সময় পেয়েছিল।

এদিকে স্কুলে গিয়ে আবার বসেই চশমাটা খুলে ফেলতাম। মারো-মারো বোর্ড থেকে লিখতে দেরি-টেরি হয়ে গেলে মিসরা বকতেন – মৌমিতা মিস – যিনি মা'কে বলেছিলেন চোখ দেখাবার কথা, ক্লাসে ঢুকেই বলতেন চশমা নেই কেন – কিন্তু অতক্ষণ চশমা পড়ে থাকা যায়? নাকের কাছটা কেমন একটা করত, মাথাও ধরে আসত – তাছাড়া লক-অ্যান্ড-কি খেলতে গেলেই ওটা খুলে চলে আসত – সে আরেক ঝামেলা।

ফলে গিয়েই চশমাটা খুলে ফেলতাম। আর এই করে করে যা হয় — একদিন চশমাটা হারিয়ে গেল।

সেদিন তো একেই বাড়িতে ফিরেছি মুখ একদম চুন করে — আমার এত সাথের চশমাটা গেছে — আর তারপরে মা'র মার। ভাড়াবাড়ির দিদা অবধি নীচে নেমে এসে মা'কে থামিয়েছিল সেদিন — আমি হাউহাউ-হাউহাউ করে কাঁদছি। মানে পেন্সিল-রাবার মাঝেমাঝেই হারাতাম — কিন্তু একেবারে চশমা হারিয়ে গেছে — এমনকি আমিও বুরাতাম যে চশমা একটু দামী। আর পেন্সিল তো বাবা অফিস থেকে আসার সময়ই এনে দিতে পারে — চশমার জন্য সেই মা'কে আবার ছুটতে হবে আমাকে নিয়ে। সেদিন বাবা যখন অফিস থেকে ফিরল — সারা বাড়ি কেমন একটা — মা রান্নাঘরে থম মেরে বসে আছে — আর আমি এঘরে ভয়ে ভয়ে বসে ফৌঁপাছি — বাবা বেল বাজাতে আমি সেইরকমই ভয়ে-ভয়ে উঠে গিয়ে খুলে দিলাম, মুখে একটাও কথা নেই।

বাবাই এরপরের চশমাটা এনে দিয়েছিল — সেটা ছিল গোলাপী রঙের। আমি আর ভয়ে কিছু বলিনি। মা স্কুলে যাওয়ার সময় পইপই করে বলে দিত — চশমা খুলবি না, খুললেই একদম আগে ব্যাগে ঢুকিয়ে তারপরে আর সবকিছু। সেই থেকে ওই যে ব্যাগে ঢোকানোর অভ্যেস — পেন্সিল-রাবারও কম হারাতাম এর পরে। আর সত্তি বলতে কি — আমার মতো সবকিছু অগোছালো রাখা পারিকও এর পরে আর একটাও চশমা হারাইনি। তবে ওই যে গিয়েই চশমা খুলে ঢুকিয়ে দিতাম — তখন আমার চোখের পাওয়ার বেড়ে গেছে চড়চড় করে। এখন চশমা ছাড়া থাকতেই পারি না, মাথা ধরে যায় — সবকিছু ঝাপসা দেখায়।

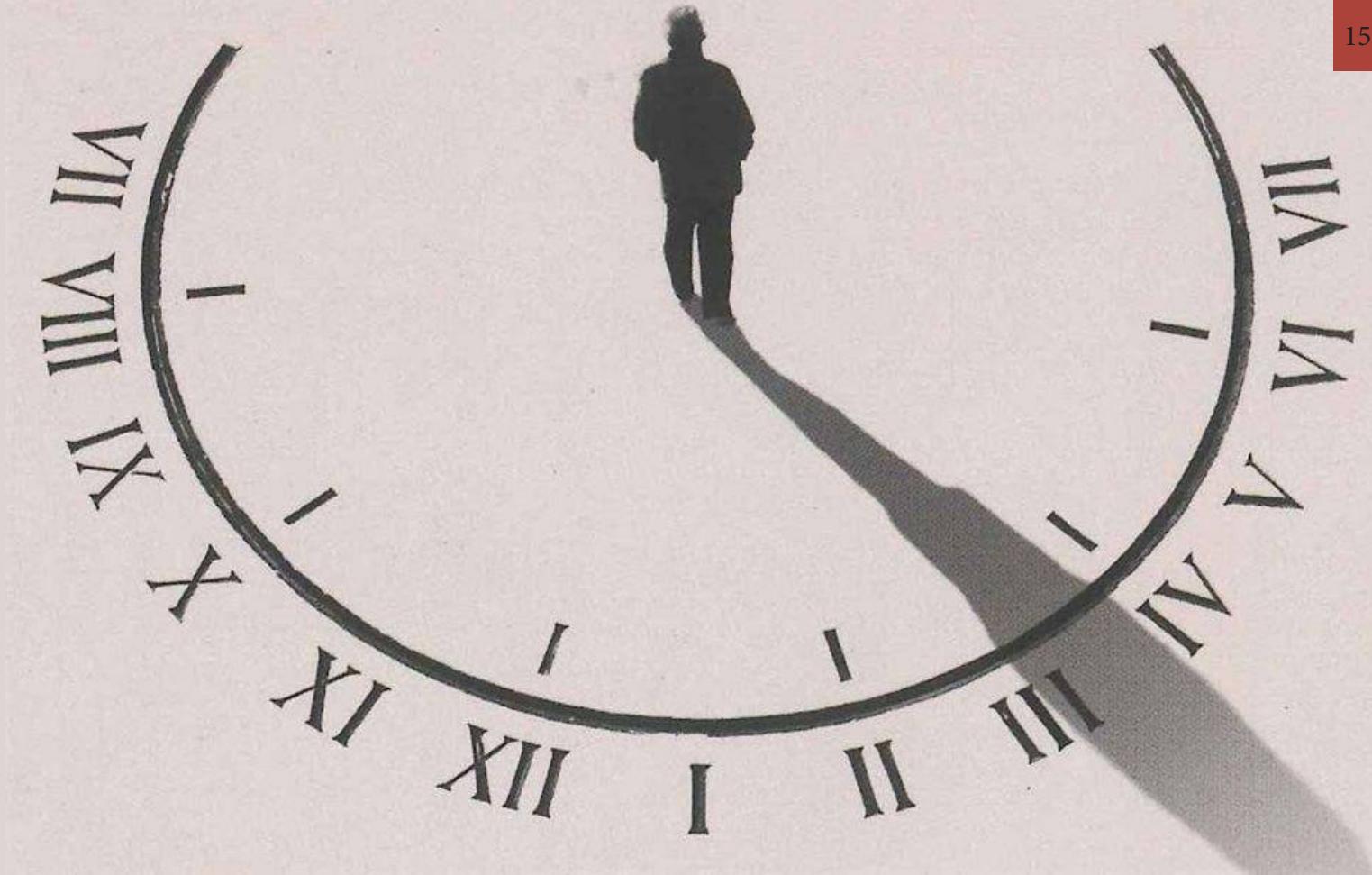
এই চশমা নিয়েই আরেকটা ব্যাপার হয়েছিল যখন আমি ক্লাস টেনে পড়ি। ততদিনে আমাদের এখনকার ফ্ল্যাটটা হয়ে গেছে। তখন রিমলেস-হাফ-রিমলেস চশমা খুব চলত — আমার খুব ইচ্ছে ছিল ওরকম একটা চশমা পরি। বাবা অবধি বারবার বলেছিল — তোর পাওয়ার বেশী, সামলাতে পারবি না, ভেঙে যায় যদি — আমি শুনিই নি, বলেছিলাম প্রি-টেস্টের রেজাল্ট ভালো হলে প্লিজ দিও। সেই চশমাটা তোলাই থাকত, বিদ্যায়ির দিনে সখ করে পরে গেছিলাম — আর ওখানেই কী একটার মধ্যে চশমাটা পড়ে ভেঙে গেল। মা সেবারে খুব বেশী কিছু বলেনি — হয়ত খুব নিজে খুব সখ করে করেছিলাম বলেই — বা প্রি-টেস্ট ইত্যাদি মিলে একটা অর্জন করার মতো ব্যাপার ছিল বলেই কিনা,

যাহোক। মা শুধু কাঁচটা ডেনড্রাইট দিয়ে জোড়া দিয়ে রেখেছিল — ঠেকা-বেঠেকা। এটা নিয়ে রাগারাগি হ'ল কয়েকদিন পর, একটা বিয়েবাড়ি যাওয়ার সময়। আমি তো কোনোমতেই আমার ওই পাতি ফ্রেমের চশমাটা পরে যাব না — ওই হাফ-রিমলেসটাই পরব, হোক না ডেনড্রাইট দেওয়া। তুমুল রাগারাগি — আমি তো আবার কাঁদছি, মা হড়হড় করে মাথায় জল ঢেলে দিয়েছিল। সেদিন এমনি চশমাটা পরেই গেছিলাম — তবে সেই হাফ-রিমলেস চশমাটা এখনও শো-কেসে রেখে দেওয়া আছে। মা ফেলে না।

এখন আরো অনেকদিন পেরিয়ে গেছে বেশ — পাওয়ারও আরেকটু বেড়েছে — অন্য একটা চশমা পরি — মোটা বাদামী-বেগুনী ফ্রেমের — এগুলো আবার এখন খুব চলছে। কিন্তু এখন আবার, অনেকদিন পর — চশমাটা আর পরে থাকতে পারছি না। বড় বেশী, বড় বেশী জিনিস দেখতে হয় এখন — এত কিছু দেখতে পারছি না আর। আর নিতে পারছি না।

এখন আমি আবার, চশমাটা খুলে টেবিলে রাখব। সবকিছু ঝাপসা হয়ে যাবে — ল্যাপটপে একটা পেপার পড়েছিলাম — তার লেখাগুলো আর পড়া যাবে না। ফেসবুক খোলা রয়েছে — কিন্তু মানুষের মরে যাওয়ার ছবিগুলো আর চেনা যাবে না। হোয়ার্টসঅ্যাপের পিং বাজছে — কিন্তু মেসেজগুলো আর পড়া যাবে না। সব ঝাপসা হয়ে যাবে। দিয়ে আমি ঝাপসা চোখে জানালাটা দিয়ে বাইরে তাকাব — গাছটাকে মনে হবে স্কুলের উঠোনের আমগাছটা, আর আকাশ তখনও এইর'মই খুসর হয়ে আসত জুলাইয়ের বিকেলে। আমি একটু পরেই ব্যাগ গুছিয়ে বাড়ি যাব — আর আকাশী চশমাটা পরে আমার ভাড়াবাড়ির ফুল-ড্রেসিং আয়নাটার সামনে গিয়ে আকাশী চশমাটা পরে ঘাড় হেলিয়ে দাঁড়াব। রান্নাঘর থেকে মুড়ি ভেজানো নিয়ে এসে মা আমায় দেখতে পাবে — মা'ও ঘেমে-নেয়ে একসা — দেখতে পেয়েই বকা দেবে।

-অনামা-



## তারিণীখুড়ো ও ভূত-ভবিষ্যৎ

আজ তারিণীখুড়োর চা খাওয়া যেন শেষ-ই হচ্ছে না।

মানছি যে এই বর্ষার রাতে খুড়ো অনেকটা পথ ঠেঙিয়ে এসেছেন, কিন্তু তাই বলে আমরাই বা আর কতক্ষণ ধৈর্য ধরে রাখতে পারি? আমি ন্যাপলা কে একটা খোঁচা দিলাম। ওর মতো খুড়োর সামনে মুখ খুলতে কেউ পারে না। ন্যাপলা একটা গলা খাঁকারি দিয়ে বললো, “ও খুড়ো, এবার একটু পেয়ালাটা রেখে গরীবদের দিকে তাকান।”

খুড়ো মনে হয় চা খেতে খেতে একটু অন্যমনস্ক হয়ে পড়েছিলেন। চমকে উঠে বললেন, “অ্যাঁ?”

“না মানে এরকম একটা ওয়েদার, আপনার স্টক থেকে দু-একটা ভূতের গল্পো ছাড়ুন”, বলল ন্যাপলা।

“নাঃ, আজ আর ভূত না। আজ বরং ভবিষ্যৎ নিয়ে একটা সত্ত্ব ঘটনা শোনাই তোদের, “কাপটা রাখলেন

তারিণীখুড়ো। আমরা মুখ চাওয়া চাওয়ি করলাম। এবার খুড়ো কি টাইম-মেশিন নিয়ে গল্প ফাঁদবেন নাকি?

মুখে পানটা ঠেসে দিয়ে খুড়ো শুরু করলেন, “ঘটনাটা আজ দুপুরে হল, বুর্বলি তো। তখন দুপুর বারোটা নাগাদ। ঠিক করেছিলাম আজ মেয়ের বাড়ি যাবো, তাই বাস স্ট্যান্ডে দাঁড়িয়ে ছিলাম। দুপুর, তাই রাস্তা বেশ শুনশান। জামাইয়ের জন্য কী মিষ্টি নেবো ভাবছিলাম, এমন সময় পাশ থেকে একটা লোক রাস্তায় নামলো পার হবে বলে। আর ঠিক তখনি একটা বাস মারাত্মক জোরে এসে লোকটাকে পিষে দিয়ে চলে গেল। কিছু বুঝে ওঠার আগেই।

এদিক ওদিক তাকিয়ে দেখলাম, কাছাকাছি কাউকে দেখা যাচ্ছে না। এগিয়ে গেলাম রাস্তায় পড়ে থাকা দেহটার দিকে। কৌতুহল হচ্ছিলো, কে এই অভাগা লোকটা। তাছাড়া যদি বেঁচে থাকে, তাহলে মানুষ হিসেবে একটা দায়িত্ব তো আছে।

লোকটার কাছে গিয়েই বুঝলাম, স্পট ডেড। চারিদিক  
রক্তে মাখামাখি। কোনোরকমে ধূতি বাঁচিয়ে দেহটাকে  
উল্টাতেই মাথাটা বোঁ করে ঘুরে উঠলো। এ মুখ আমার  
চেনা। এই পাঞ্জাবি, ধূতি, পকেট থেকে বেরিয়ে থাকা  
রুমালটা, পাশে পড়ে থাকা ছাতাটা — সব ক'টাই  
আমার প্রচন্দ পরিচিত। এইমুখ আমি প্রতিদিন আয়নায়  
দেখি, এই ছাতাটা আমি কলেজ স্ট্রীট থেকে ২০ টাকায়  
কিনেছি, এই পায়জামা-পাঞ্জাবি পরেই আমি মেয়ের  
বাড়ি যাচ্ছি। রাস্তায় বসে পড়লাম। খুব ঝাপসা ভাবে  
দেখতে পেলাম, ডানদিক থেকে একটা বাস পাগলের  
মতো হ্রন্দিতে দিতে ছুটে আসছে।"

তারিণীখুড়ো চায়ের কাপটা তুলে 'সুরুত' করে একটা  
চুমুক দিতেই বুঝলাম, ঘরে আর কোনো আওয়াজ নেই।  
ন্যাপলা শুকনো গলায় বললো, "তারপর?" "তারপর  
আর কি, বাসটা মেরে দিয়ে চলে গেল।"

"মা-মানে?"

"মানে যা বুঝছিস তাই আর কি। যাই হোক, জীবনের  
শেষ গল্পটা শোনানোর লোভ ছাড়তে পারলাম না।  
আচ্ছা, আজ আসি রে।"

ঠিক এমন সময়ে আমাদের চমকে দিয়ে লোডশেডিং হয়ে  
গেলো। ঘরের মধ্যে ঘুটঘুটে অঙ্ককার। কোনোরকমে  
হাতড়ে হাতড়ে মোমবাতি জ্বালিয়ে দেখলাম,  
তারিণীখুড়োর বসার জায়গাটা ফাঁকা।

অঙ্ককারের মধ্যে বিষ্টু আমার হাতটা ধরলো। দেখলাম,  
বরফের মতো ঠাণ্ডা। ধরা গলায় বললো, "এ-এটা কি  
হলো রে?"

আমি কিছু বলার আগেই দরজায় কড়া নাড়ার আওয়াজ  
হলো। আমরা চারজন মুখ চাওয়াওয়ি করলাম। এই  
সময় আবার কে এলো রে বাবা? আমি এগিয়ে গেলাম,  
পিছনে পিছনে বাকি তিনজন। দরজা খুলে দেখলাম,  
বৃষ্টিতে ভিজে দাঁড়িয়ে আছেন - তারিণীখুড়ো!

"এ-একি খুড়ো! আপনি এখানে! তাহলে ভিতরে ...  
এতক্ষণ ... ওটা কে ..."

"ওঃ। তাহলে তোদের সঙ্গে দেখা হয়ে গেছে। ধূর।  
আবার দেরী করে ফেললাম।"

"মানে? আর ভিতরে ওই লোকটা — মানে আপনি —  
কী বলছিলো — বলছিলেন? কী লরি চাপা পড়ে গেছে  
না কীসব — কী হচ্ছে কিছুই তো বুঝতে পারছি না ..." "

"আরে ভিতরে এতক্ষণ যে ছিলো সে আমি-ই। আর

এই যে এখানে দাঁড়িয়ে আছি, এটাও আমি।"

"অ্যাঁ?"

"হ্যাঁ। মানে আসলে আমি সত্যই মারা গেছি। কিন্তু  
একটু মুশকিল হয়ে গেছে সেখানেই। এই সময় জিনিস  
টা বড় গোলমেলে। মানে একটা আমি ভবিষ্যতের  
আমি, আর একটা আমি — মানে এই আমিটা সময়ে  
একটু পিছিয়ে গেছি। কিন্তু দুজনেই মারা গেছি। বিশ্বাস  
কর, চোখের সামনে নিজের ভূতটা বারবার দেখতে  
বড় বিরক্তিকর লাগছে। টাইম-স্পেস ব্যাপারটা বড়েই  
জটিল, বুঝলে হে খোকা। আচ্ছা যাই হোক, এবার  
আসি রে। দেখি যদি তাড়াতাড়ি গেলে ধরতে পারা  
যায়।"

চারজনকে হতবাক করে দিয়ে তারিণীখুড়ো বর্ণনমুখর  
সন্ধ্যায়, কলকাতার ভেজা বাতাসে মিলিয়ে গেলেন।

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— ব্যাপারটা একটু বাড়াবাড়ি হয়ে গেলো, বুঝলেন  
মশাই। বাচ্চা গুলো বড় ভয় পেয়ে গেছে।

— .....

- তবে হ্যাঁ, আপনার যন্ত্রটা কিন্তু বেড়ে কাজ করে। কি  
সুন্দর টুক করে চোখের সামনে থেকে উঠাও হয়ে গেলাম

— কেউ কিছু বুঝতেও পারলো না।

— .....

- তা নাম ঠিক করলেন জিনিসটার?

- হ্যাঁ। টেলিট্র্যান্সপোর্ট।

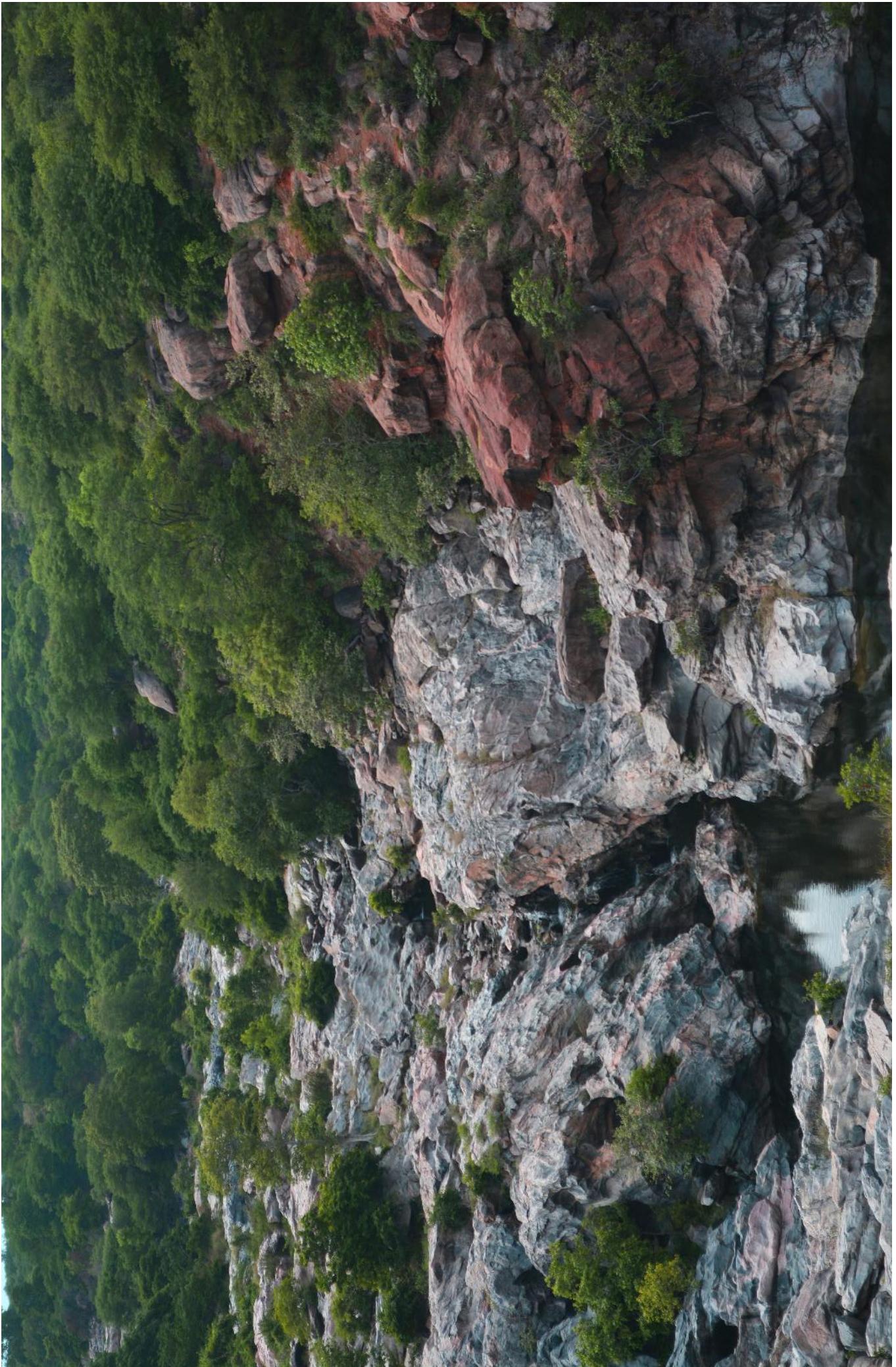
- বাঃ। দারুণ তো! ট্রান্সপোর্ট ইউজিং টেলিপোর্ট।  
গুড গুড।

- তাহলে আমিই প্রথম?

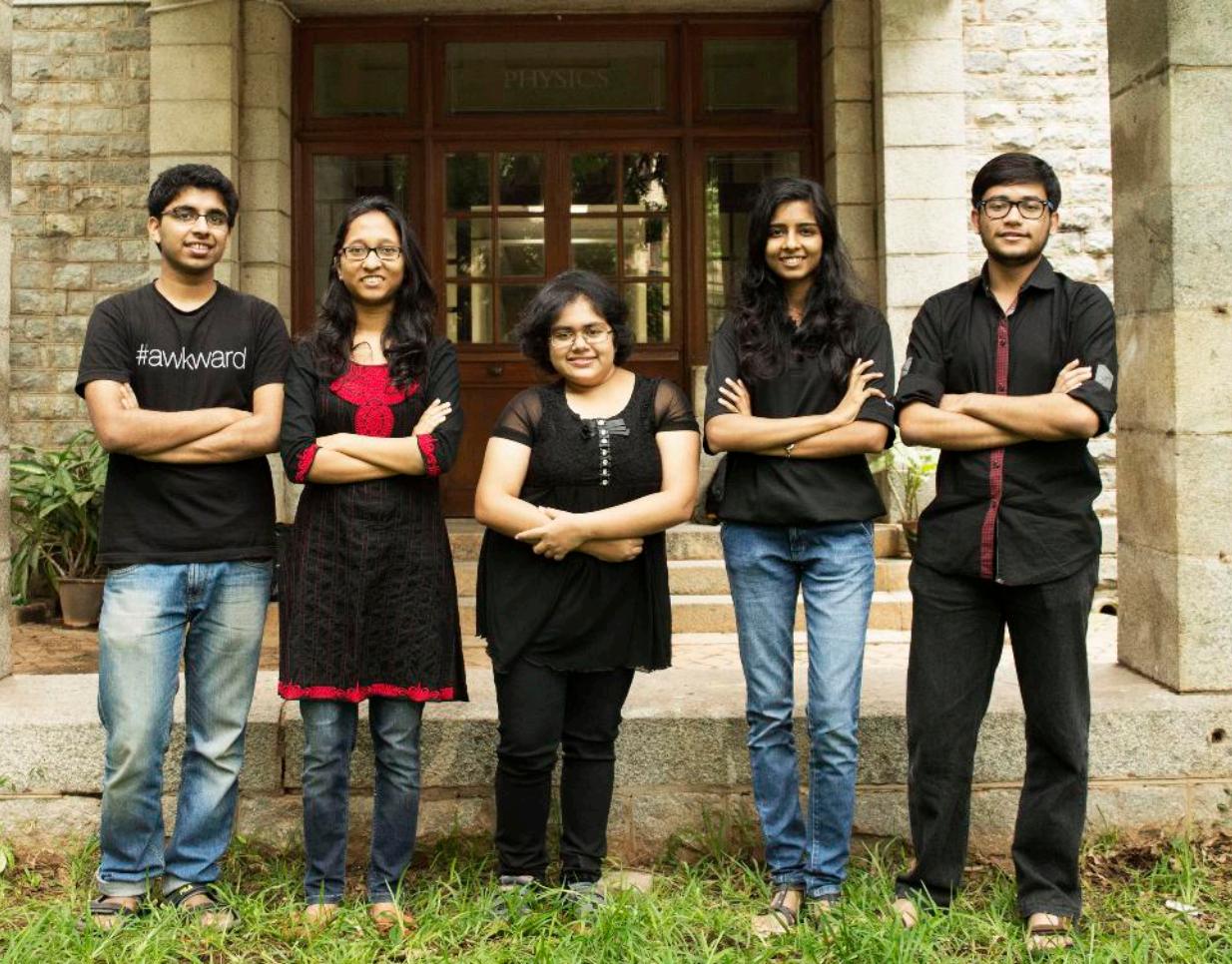
- না না। এ-ই যে, আমার সমস্ত সফল এক্সপ্রেসিনেন্ট  
এর সাক্ষী — নিউটন। আয় রে নিউটন, আজ আর  
ফিস-পিল নেই। ট্যাংরা এনেছে প্রহ্লাদ।

নিউটন বললো — ম্যাঁও।

-সপ্তর্ষি মজুমদার  
দ্বিতীয় বর্ষ



Photograph By-  
Aditi Rai  
Third Year



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