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THE ECLECTIC

NEWS AND PUBLICATION SOCIETY, BIT MESRA

A WRITER ONLY STARTS A BOOK;
A READER
COMPLETES IT.

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HISTORY OF ART THROUGH A QUEER LENS

-DIYA MONDAL



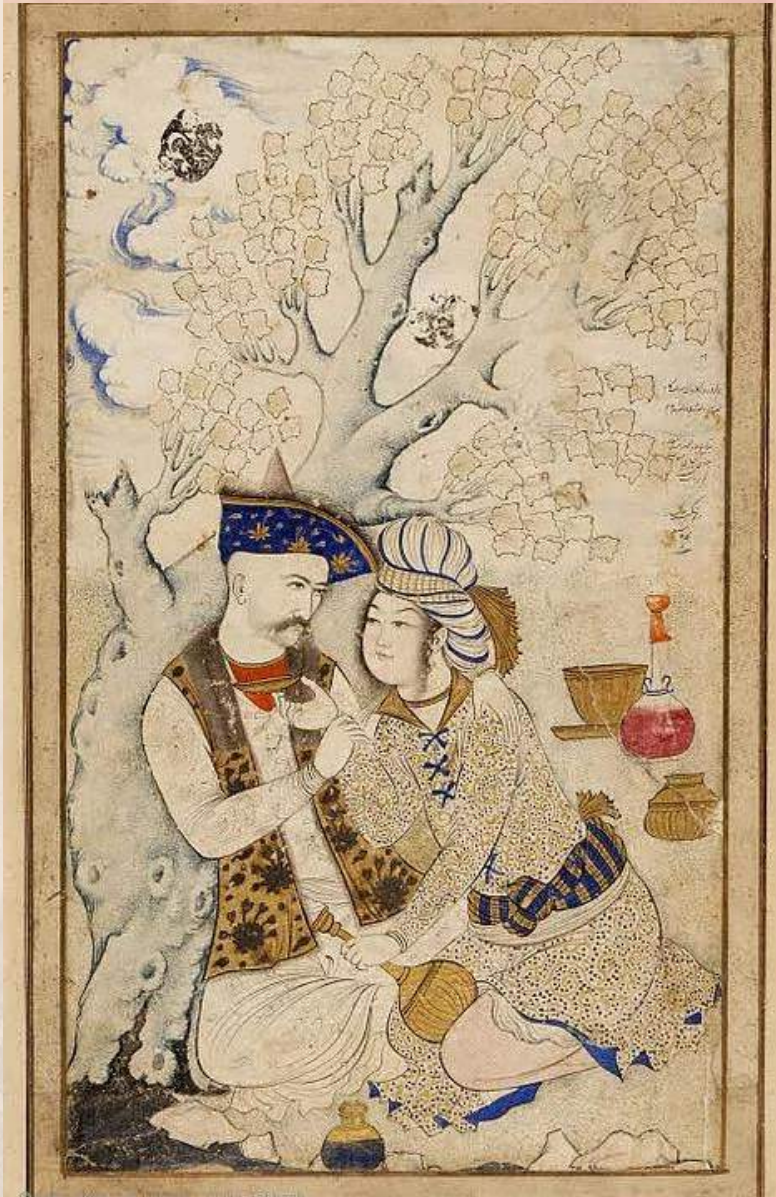
There's an old song in Northern England called "The Legend of the Lambton Worm". A young man named John Lambton goes around fishing at River Wear and catches an eel that he calls 'queer'. So small and slimy it was that he threw it down the village well. Years later, when he comes back, he finds that the Eel has grown into an enormous dragon. The moral of the story is: what you throw away today thinking it useless and unimportant might be something much more vibrant than your imagination.

Queer Nation, an LGBTQ+ activist group, initially used the term queer in an attempt to combine contradictory impulses, to bring together people who have been made to feel perverse, queer, odd, outcast, different, and deviant, and to pronounce similitude by defining a common identity on the fringes. It is a term that constructs a more fluid identity of gender and sexuality and an act of deviance to oppose the condescending heteronormative institutions of society.

**"WHEN I LOOKED AROUND, I
SAW AND HEARD OF NONE
LIKE ME. WAS I THEN A
MONSTER?"**

-MARY SHELLEY

The month of June, known colloquially as Pride Month, commemorates LGBTQ activism and culture through the years and celebrates an individual's identity. It memorializes the Stonewall Riots of 1969 when authorities invaded a gay nightclub and detained gay individuals for engaging in homosexual activities. Riots erupted, and protests were held six days in a row until the situation gradually calmed down. When a culture struggles to identify a marginal voice, resistance comes from every direction. So it isn't surprising that queer artists



traveled back in time, searching for another queer eel, to identify within renowned artworks an identity similar to themselves.

Whether it is Achilles who "grieved with his whole being" for Patroclus in the Battle of Troy, or why Saint Maurice and Theofredus from The Sacred Band of Thebes had just a little 'homosocial' relationship, or why St. Sebastian's dramatic revelations sound a little too much like a coming-out narrative. A large part of history has been straight marked by cis-gendered, heterosexual historians. The first queer eels of our narrative were spotted as early as 9,600 BCE

-5,600 BCE in Mesolithic rock art in Sicily.

In Ancient Greece, surviving standing stones and wood carvings implicitly suggest same-sex interactions. As has been generally noted, the traditional Greeks didn't have terms or concepts that correspond to the contemporary dichotomy of heterosexual and homosexual, but a wealth of ancient Greek documents on sex ranging from Plato's Symposium to several plays by Aristophanes and Greek artworks and vases exist. The most frequent assumption about sexual orientation, at least by Ancient Greek authors, is that people can respond erotically to beauty in either sex. Similar were the views on sex and attraction in Ancient Rome, highly influenced by Greece. In Japan, there are wood carvings that show graphic lesbian interactions. Even in India, Kamasutra, the book of sex, written somewhere between 400 BCE and 300 CE, dedicates an entire chapter to homosexuality. Erotic sculptures of men and orgies among women are depicted in the Khajuraho temple; a carving of Ardhanariswara, an androgynous form of Shiva and Parvati, exists in Gangaikonda Cholapuram, and even the Arthashastra mentions practices of homosexual acts. Although, some argue that it was only upper-caste men to whom these homosexual desires were accessible, excluding lower-castes of Hinduism by large.

Between the years 1250 and 1300, homosexual activity (also known as sodomy) was radically criminalized in

most parts of Europe and even punishable by death in some places. Some immensely popular Florentine artists like Leonardo da Vinci, Michaelangelo, Botticelli, Donatello, Benvenuto Cellini, etc., made their love for male beauty explicit despite the threat of sodomy laws by the state. In a 1910 essay, Sigmund Freud analyzed some childhood memories of da Vinci recorded in his notebooks, concluding that the artist's suppressed homosexual inclinations were "sublimated" in his art- explaining why he had left so many works incomplete. For example, Saint John the Baptist (1513-15) is supposed to be modeled on da Vinci's old apprentice and rumored lover Gian Giacomo Caprotti da Oreno. Another artist, nefariously known for his bisexuality, Caravaggio, trailed in their shadows. His paintings, *Boy With A Basket of Fruit* (1593) and *Boy Bitten by a Lizard* (1592-93), both feature sensual images of boys with their robes fallen down their shoulders, painting almost sinful imagery, urging the onlookers to enjoy its array of fruits, flowers, and flesh. Historically, Islam has been considered intolerant to homosexuality and queerness. In actuality, the relationship between the Muslim faith and same-sex love is a multidimensional issue that cannot be reduced to "Islam vs. LGBTQ+". Numerous works of poetry and art created decades after Prophet Muhammad received God's message suggest that homosexual relationships were visible in the Muslim world for a certain period. For example, *Haft Awrang*, or *Seven Thrones* by the celebrated Persian poet Jami, the 17th-century portrait of Shah Abbas I, and his page by Muhammad Qasim Musavvir, and numerous more contemporary queer Muslims have revolutionized the field of queer art. Along with these queer artworks already present, some queer artists have been reimagining queer history by inserting their narrative backward



in time and exploring how previous eras might have looked had the LGBTQ+ community been more fully accepted and recognized. Some such artists are Martine Gutierrez and the multidisciplinary duo McDermott and McGough. Other artists like Mary Høeg, a lesbian photographer, and Frida Kahlo, a bisexual Mexican artist, were prominent throughout their lifetime. But as a whole, queer artfully emerged from the closet in the 1960s and 70s when gay liberation activists created an uproar and encouraged more people and their creative innovations in the field of arts to come out. The desire to document and celebrate depictions of queer identity, life, and history is an example of the politicization of sexuality that emerged during this period. With the onset of AIDS in the 1980s, the queer eels were deemed the most monstrous species, as if they had become the sick virus themselves

They were treated as fully grown dragons, like something that needed to be eradicated from society as quickly as possible. Although the most affected by the virus were queer eels themselves, these 'normal' people let the pandemic kill the queers while sitting idly by. A myriad queer artist took up the opportunity and created art to advocate awareness for AIDS. The Silence=Death project drew from the feminist art activism group, Guerilla Girls, which was widely used by organizations like ACT-UP as a central image of their campaign. Infected with the AIDS virus himself, Keith Haring sought to fight ignorance and fear by depicting Safe Sex and creating awareness in his Ignorance= Fear (1989) political activism.

Since the 2000s, queer practices have experienced a broader acceptance. Notable performance artists like Wu Tsang and Cassilis have been producing gender non-conforming and transgender art. Photographer Samra Habib has started a photography project, Just Me And Allah, to document queer Muslim lives. Social media has provided platforms to a majority of the under-privileged to express themselves through their artwork. Indian artists like Anwesh Sahoo and T Praveen Kumar have



been successfully documenting the lives of non-binary people in rural areas through their art.

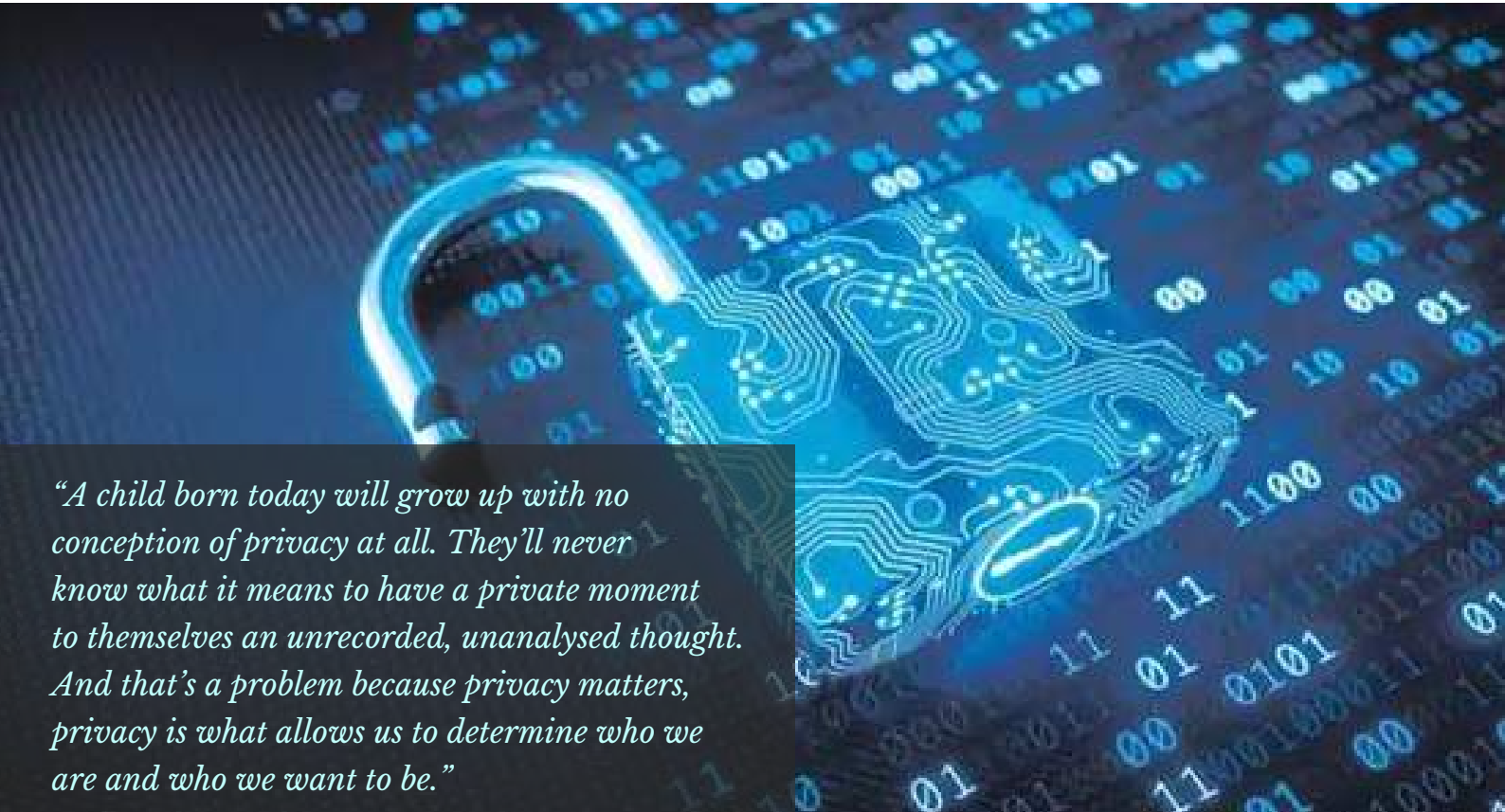
In conclusion, queer people have been present since the birth of mankind, being a natural part of it, and there is a wide range of ancient and modern art made by and about them to prove it. However, the inability of society to accept the dissimilar has always resulted in people being discriminated against and vilified as monsters, even before they had the right to choose their own identity. But neither the intolerance in a heteronormative space nor the revolting profanities have stopped them from being extremely innovative and expressing themselves via art, embracing the very odious term, queer, and no longer shying away from being who they are. They are just another product of nature, even though they have quite often been deemed unnatural. Still, every time someone ostracizes them for how abnormal they are, like a slimy Eel, they have come back fighting to haunt their oppressors like a ferocious dragon with portentous wings and will always be here no matter how much the cis-gendered heteronormative society tries otherwise.



DATA PRIVACY

YOUR DATA, YOUR CHOICE

~ Asad Yousuf




“A child born today will grow up with no conception of privacy at all. They’ll never know what it means to have a private moment to themselves an unrecorded, unanalysed thought. And that’s a problem because privacy matters, privacy is what allows us to determine who we are and who we want to be.”

-Edward Snowden

Close your eyes and envision yourself confined in a dark, enclosed space. The room has an infinite expanse with an equally large number of virtual screens. Paranoid, puzzled, and afraid, you wander around, taking notes and observing the surrounding environment when suddenly one after another screen lights up. A video of your fifth birthday flashes up. On the right, you can see the numerous text discussions you had with your best pal while you were feeling depressed. All the details of the workout session you did a week ago are displayed on the screen in front of you. Surprisingly, you have gained a few extra pounds in the lockdown. There is an advertisement for a fitness regime at the gym, which is only two blocks away from your place and would be beneficial to you. Are you anxious, terrified, or perplexed? Even if you vehemently disagree, we are all living out our fantasies in real life.

With every click on the internet being recorded, data privacy is becoming a growing concern. It refers to an individual's right to choose when, how, and to what extent personal information about them is shared or discussed with others. This personal data can include a person's name, contact information, location, and online or offline conduct.



"We were so in love with the gift of free connectivity that no one bothered to read the terms and conditions."

-The Great Hack (Netflix)

The possibilities of a more connected world have created ramifications beyond our reach and undermine consent in a whole new way. Companies have enticed us into their web, luring us in with their perfect concept of global connectivity. We thought we were accomplishing the goal of a linked, peaceful world, a world where we could share souvenirs, a world that becomes the guardian for our memories. However, we could not even get close. On the other hand, we willingly exposed ourselves to everyone. Our personal information, secrets, and memories were routinely used to create profit, influence decisions, and shape public perception. The data was ours, yet the revenue generated went straight to the pockets of Silicon Valley's billionaires.

Connectivity and data sharing expose us to security risks and vulnerabilities, and we run the risk of our information falling into the wrong hands in the event of a data breach. It is imperative to raise awareness about such an issue. We need to understand how our data is manipulated to do so. Data and information about an individual are collected in two ways by IT businesses. Simply said, the first is smartphones. With over 3.8 billion active users,

smartphones are the most efficient mode of data collection. They constantly track and report their users' location, friends, and hobbies. Syncing with your smartphone, even before a cup of coffee, has become as much of a global morning routine as brushing your teeth. Your apps on a variety of endpoints are now becoming data harvesting agents, thanks to unprecedented device proliferation. The second is the ease with which two (or more) datasets can be combined to reveal secrets that each set can reveal on its own, as well as to identify individuals from data that appears to be completely anonymous. We can deduce a wealth of details from publicly available data: four Facebook likes is generally enough to reveal a person's sexual orientation.

People's inability to estimate the value of their data is the most typical problem with data intrusion. The prevalent belief that "if you have nothing to hide, you have nothing to fear" lies at the basis of the movement's sluggishness. Claiming that one doesn't need or want privacy because he/she doesn't have anything to hide implies that no one should or could have anything to hide, including their immigration status, jobless history, financial history, or health information. This implies that no one would



object to casually disclosing details about their religious beliefs, political affiliations, and personal practices to strangers. Finally, claiming that one doesn't care about privacy because one has nothing to conceal is essentially the same as claiming that one doesn't care about freedom of speech because one has nothing to say.

The problem is not that data exists or is gathered, but rather how it is being leveraged to influence human judgments. Personal information is utilized to assess and isolate folks depending on their preferences and interests. User profiling of this type can be used to target people with appropriate advertising and posts to persuade them to change their minds. When speculating on an individual's data and personal information in isolation, they are worth relatively little. The refinement and aggregation of data from millions of people give it a whole new level of usefulness.

Several instances bring to light that personal data is widely used for economic espionage, social control, and diplomatic manipulation. The Facebook–Cambridge Analytica data controversy involved the British consulting firm Cambridge Analytica collecting the personal data of million of Facebook users without their consent, mostly for political advertising purposes. A huge breach of privacy occurred at Strava, a fitness tracking application. As a result, it released a globe map

with 3 billion data points that its users had contributed. This revealed the locations of hitherto unknown US military bases around the world. The future's next big thing in innovation is the healthcare industry, and the battle for hegemony has already begun. Weight, heart rate, pulse rate, blood sugar levels, and blood pressure are all monitored through healthcare applications or wearables. According to reports, several healthcare businesses have been accused of sharing decades of an individual's health information with insurance companies without their consent. Apart from this, rallies and protests have been held in the past using social media as a method to bring people together who share the same viewpoint. It's all about power, as Snowden puts it.

As big data is a novel idea, there is not yet a comprehensive list of techniques that have been recognized by the security industry. There are, however, a few generic security tips that can be implemented to prevent future security breaches. The dome of data and privacy is supported by three components: the individual, the technological corporations that collect and process our data, and the government that functions as a gatekeeper between the two. The most typical option proposed by companies is to request consent from data providers. The details of the information supplied, on the other hand, are typically disguised in long terms and conditions, and users are typically unaware of the



repercussions. New businesses, such as the Center for Humane Technology (co-founded by Tristan Harris), have sprung up intending to marry technology and ethical design.

The other potential solution revolves around how the government should take action by enacting appropriate data protection regulations. The concept is promising, but it is not without its detractors. Internet Rights Pioneer John Perry Barlow once said, “Relying on the government to preserve your privacy is like asking a peeping tom to erect your window blinds.” Even businesses should be able to refuse some data about individuals to the government and political parties. What's needed is a shift in mindset among those who harvest and process data. They must continuously ask themselves — or be asked by society — how this information can be used for harm and how to avoid it.

It's an oxymoron to look for privacy on the internet. Hence, the point is, it's ultimately upon us to safeguard ourselves from invasive data practices. We should become increasingly cognizant of the minor daily decisions we make on the internet, such as whether or not to reveal our location on a webpage or allow an app to track our activity. We can examine the data privacy policies of the most frequently used applications. That way, we'll be able to see where our phone's cookies are being dropped and which third-party websites are stealing information from these applications. Establishing strong passwords, setting up a top-notch firewall, securing digital devices, and simply being cautious when sending emails and surfing the web can help to mitigate data privacy risks to a large extent. Data protection regulations will continue to evolve in the next years, as will data privacy for everyone's digital well-being.



THE INCOMPLETE INFERNO: MISSING OR DEAD?

-MARSHNEIL PRASAD



December 25th; Trees twinkling with fairy lights, families gathered around bonfires, kids excited for presents, carols, shiny resonating jingle bells, elaborate feasts, and heading towards a beautiful new year. That's what we call a "Merry Christmas." But this time, let's talk about a different Christmas story. A story about a devastating Christmas night of 1945; an enigmatic holocaust with blazes of fire engulfing the shrieks of a family shattered in whipping ropes of smoke. The story of a father crying out for his children, a frantic mother howling in pain, unable to rescue her kids. This is the story of one of the most bizarre foul plays, which ghastly deprived a family of its most precious relations and put them in a labyrinth of unanswered questions to date. This is the story about the children who went up in smoke and were never seen again, the Sodders.

The disappearance of Sodder children has been an intriguing and baffling catastrophe even after half a decade of this traumatic mishap. An air of somber and quietude prevails near Fayetteville, West Virginia, even today, where a night before Christmas Eve, a fire broke out around 1:00 A.M. at the Sodder house. George and Jennie Sodder escaped with four of their children, but Maurice, Martha, Louis, Jennie, and Betty, were trapped in

the mishap. These young Sodders, of 5 to 14 years, vanished into the smoke, leaving behind no traces of their existence or demise. The futile attempts, due to the sudden unavailability of resources, of the wretched father to evacuate his children indicated a conspiracy and no coincidence. He tried to reach the children confined upstairs through the window, but the ladder, which was always propped against the house, was strangely missing. To his utter dismay, the trucks, which functioned perfectly a day before, had their engines dismantled; the water in the rain barrel was found frozen. The tribulations didn't end here. Exasperated calls to the Fayetteville Fire Department went unheard. The firefighters were told about the sudden outbreak and the trapped children, but their tepid response was unanticipated. After a brief informal search, Fire Chief F.J. Morris suggested that the blaze had been hot enough to completely cremate the bodies, though an official heat index reading was never taken. The fire was attributed to the "faulty wiring" of the house. And before the year ended, the coroner's office issued five death certificates, stating the cause of death as "fire or suffocation." But was this an accident? Surely not. A rubber object, similar to Napalm (a "Pineapple Bomb" used in the war) found at the

fire scene, and the telephone repairman's remark of the phone lines being cut and not burned indicates that this was not a demise but a decoy. But on what grounds were these testimonials passed? How rigorous was the inspection, and was there any proof to support it? All these questions remain clouded in dubiety to date.

After five years of lackadaisical search and investigation, West Virginia Governor Okey L. Patterson and State Police Superintendent called a hearing in the state capital building in 1950. They officially declared the "hopeless case" closed. Although crestfallen with the deplorable decision, the parents kept striving to get justice for their children. They set up billboards on Route 16 and passed out flyers offering a \$10,000 reward for information leading to the recovery of their children. Years passed, but no strong corroboration could be achieved in this cold case. Every Christmas, they pinned their hopes on the billboard to receive some news of their kids. The poor parents witnessed only misery and fraudulence from youth to dotage and finally died,

WANTED

\$5000.00 (five thousand) REWARD

MISSING PERSONS

FIVE CHILDREN - Brothers and Sisters


Were they KIDNAPPED - MURDERED? MYSTERIOUSLY DISAPPEARED

Missing since December 24th, 1945


MR. and MRS. GEORGE SODDER

of Fayetteville, West Virginia, Offers \$5000.00 REWARD


FOR ANY INFORMATION LEADING TO WHEREABOUTS OF THEIR FIVE MISSING CHILDREN, OR EVEN ONE MISSING CHILD




MAURICE SODDER
Male, white, age 14 when he disappeared. Age now about 20 years of age. Dark hair, brown eyes, thin nose, straight in right cheek only. Shaggy in right cheek only.



MARTHA LEE SODDER
Female, white, age 12 when she disappeared. Age now about 18 years of age. Dark hair, brown eyes, thin nose, straight in right cheek only. Shaggy in right cheek only.



LOUIS SODDER
Male, white, age 12 when he disappeared. Age now about 18 years of age. Dark hair, brown eyes, thin nose, straight in right cheek only. Shaggy in right cheek only.



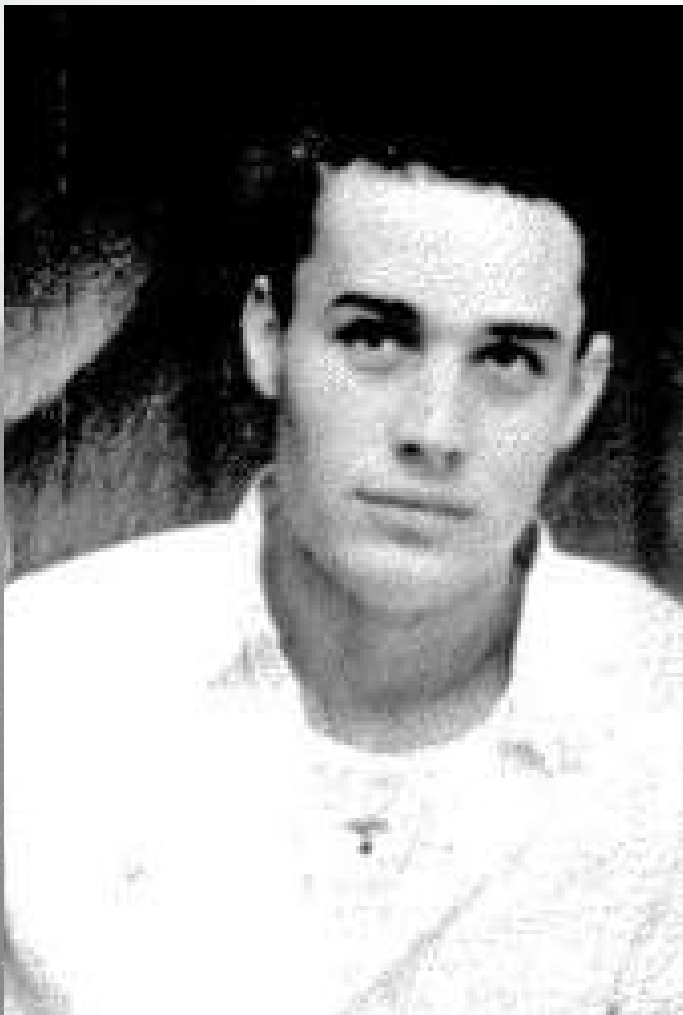
JENNIE IRENE SODDER
Female, white, age 8 when she disappeared. Age now about 14 years of age. Dark hair, brown eyes, thin nose, straight in right cheek only. Shaggy in right cheek only.



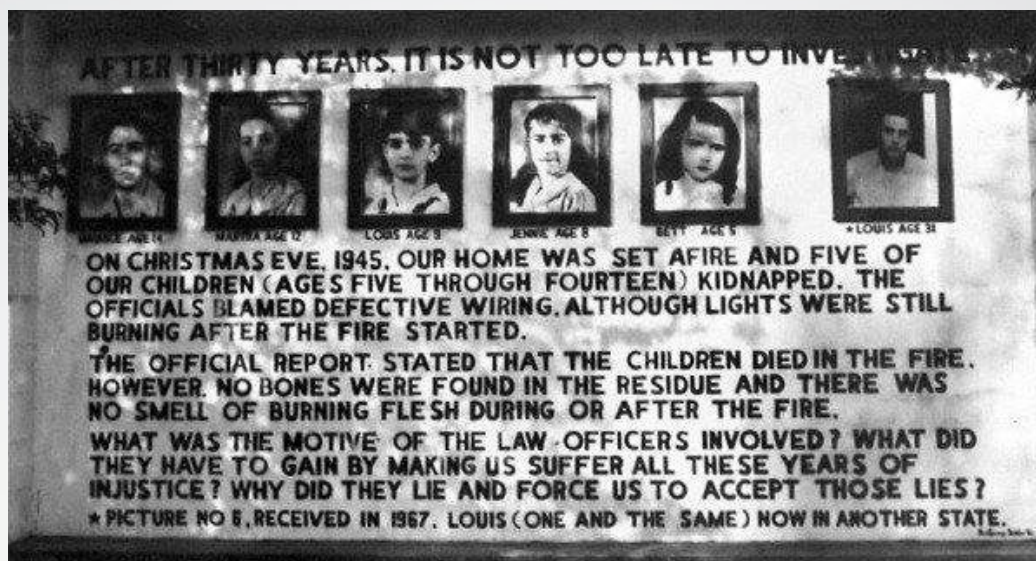
BETTY GOLLY SODDER
Female, white, age 6 when she disappeared. Age now about 12 years of age. Dark hair, brown eyes, thin nose, straight in right cheek only. Shaggy in right cheek only.

FIRE WHICH DESTROYED THEIR HOME CHRISTMAS EVE 24TH, 1945. NO BONES OR IDENTIFICATIONS OF ANY MARKINGS RE OF FIVE MISSING CHILDREN WERE NOT FOUND IN THE ASHES AND RUBBISH OF BURNING REMAINS OF THE BURNED HOME OF MR. and MRS. GEORGE SODDER'S FAMILY. THE PARENTS PERSIST THEY STILL REFUSE TO BELIEVE THEIR FIVE CHILDREN DIED IN THE WHICH TOTALLY DESTROYED THEIR HOME. THERE WAS NO EVIDENCE OF ANY HUMAN FLESH OR BONES.

TO ALL LAW ENFORCEMENT: FEDERAL, STATE, COUNTY, AND CITY--PLEASE BE ON THE ALERT FOR THE ABOVE FIVE



with a restless soul and an unfinished corner in their hearts to unite with their children. George Sodder died in 1969, his wife, Jennie, 20 years later. After her death, the billboard came down. The fire was not a sudden outburst but an expected outcome of a series of strange events that the Soddors couldn't read as an alarm. A few months before the mishap, a pretentious electrician pointed at the fuse box, saying, **"This is going to cause a fire someday."** But the local power company had already pronounced it in fine condition. A suspicious car being parked along Highway 21 with a man inside, watching the Sodder children. An unfamiliar midnight call received by Jennie at 12:30 A.M. just an hour before the tragedy. All these strange events eventually summed up to a sinister criminal conspiracy fabricated as an accident. What became unbearable was the ceaseless struggles of the parents, which followed as the case started taking an unexpected swerve. Newly appearing facts and unsorted mysteries soon favored Sodder's "vague" suspicions and made the case more and more arduous. The Fire Chief claimed to have buried a **human heart in a dynamite box** at the fire scene, but a fresh unburnt beef liver was found after excavation.



Unsettled with the verdict, Jennie had conducted a private experiment. She was told by a crematorium employee that bones remain even if bodies are burnt at 2000 Fahrenheit for 2 hours, whereas the house was destroyed in 45 minutes. Even remains of household appliances were found; thus the idea of missing bones was implausible and skeptical. Shards of human vertebrae sent to the Smithsonian for analysis also went missing just before the DNA investigation. The police even caught a man stealing a block and tackle at the Sodders place while the conflagration was raging. He admitted to cutting the wires, but what came of this arrest or why police didn't follow it up is unknown. All these mysteries and strange occurrences collectively portrayed an unscrupulous act of closure, something devious yet abstruse.

“Your goddamn house is going up in smoke, and your children are going to be destroyed. You are going to be paid for the dirty remarks you have been making about Mussolini.”

But, the most puzzling question is why this was portrayed as an accident, a pre-planned stratagem? Was it just an act of revenge on George Sodder to make him suffer years of injustice or a mere coincidence? Why was the heart in the box faked? Were the leads genuine, or were they merely attracted by the billboard reward? What was the motive of the law officers involved? Many researchers believe that the prime origin of this gruesome tragedy might have been related to George Sodder's personal history as an

infuriated insurance salesman threatened him about his political views. George was a vocal emigrant from Italy, and his anti-fascist and disdainful views against Benito Mussolini often sparked heated arguments in the Italian community in Fayetteville. George's covert past-life also led some to speculate about his shady business in Italy.

Some theories suggest mafia involvement, while some believe that the children were taken to Italy or sold to an orphanage. But did the children survive those blazes, and even if they did, why couldn't they return? The photo, resembling Louis Sodder, sent in 1968; the strangely missing address on the letter; the resembling facial features; the hand-written note; all these interminable questions still have no answer. But the one answer we all know is that the case remains UNSOLVED, that the Sodder fire was not a mysterious tragedy but a horrendous foul play. The sufferers are gone but their sufferings are still alive. The havoc created continues to haunt generations after generations. Even today, Christmas in Fayetteville is a constant reminder of the disaster, which never received its justice. Many believe that the children died 70 years ago, but Sylvia, the youngest Sodder alive, firmly believes her siblings are out there, and the search is still on. Perhaps this would be Christmas when the truth comes out. Perhaps this would be the Christmas they finally come home.

कश्मीर: ज़मीन-ए-फ़िरदौस का ऐतिहासिक सफ़र

-अजितेश हर्षित



"गर फ़िरदौस बर रू-ए-ज़मी अस्त,
हमी अस्तो हमी अस्तो हमी अस्त"

अमीर खुसरो द्वारा रचित इस पंक्ति का अर्थ है कि अगर धरती पर कहीं स्वर्ग है तो वो यही है, यही है, यही है। यह पंक्ति भारत के मुकुट के रूप में सुशोभित भूमि कश्मीर के लिए कहा गया है। इसके इतिहास का पहला पन्ना तवारीखी हिंदू ग्रंथ नीलमत पुराण में मिलता है जिसका उद्गम स्रोत कश्मीर की धरा ही है। इसीलिए इस पुस्तक को काश्मीर माहात्म्य भी कहते हैं। मान्यता है कि देवश्रेष्ठ ब्रह्मा के पौत्र और सप्तऋषियों में से एक महर्षि कश्यप ने सतीसर नाम से प्रसिद्ध झील (जिसका वर्णन नीलमत पुराण में है) को बारामूला की पहाड़ियों में छेद कर सुखा दिया था तथा उसके पूरी तरह सुख जाने के पश्चात् उन्होंने ब्राह्मणों के एक समुदाय को आदेश दिया कि वह उस भू के हिस्से में बसें और अपना समाज स्थापित करें। झील सतीसर तथा महर्षि कश्यप के नाम के संगम से उस पावन धरती का नाम कश्मीर पड़ा तथा उन ब्राह्मणों को कश्मीरी पंडित/ ब्राह्मण के नाम से जाना गया।

यूनानियों ने कश्मीर को "सभ्यताओं का पालना" का दर्जा दिया था। इतिहास में जितने शास्त्र रूपी साहित्य कश्मीर से निकले हैं उतने शायद ही विश्व के किसी और भाग से आए हों। ऋषि पतंजलि द्वारा रचित महाभाष्य तथा योगसूत्र, आचार्य दृढबल द्वारा संशोधित चरक संहिता, लगधा द्वारा रचित वेदांग ज्योतिष तथा कवी लालेश्वरी द्वारा लिखे गए वाख कविताएं आदि सभी इसी भूमि की उपज हैं। अभिनय एवं नाट्यरूपांतरण को परिभाषित करने वाली पहली साहित्यिक रचना "नाट्यशास्त्र" भी कश्मीर की धरती का ही विश्व को एक तोहफ़ा था। यह कहना गलत नहीं होगा कि हम आज अपने चेतना को प्रभावित करने वाले चलचित्रों के लिए कश्मीरी सभ्यता के ऋणी हैं।

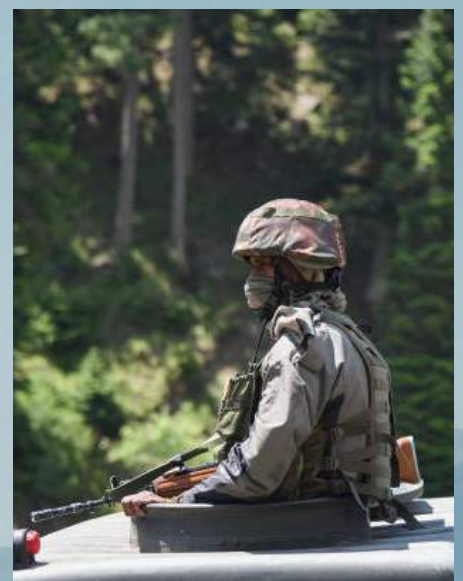
परन्तु इस निर्मल क्षेत्र के इतिहास के सारे पृष्ठ कंचन के भाँति स्वर्णिम अक्षरों में नहीं लिखे गए हैं। मध्ययुग में मुस्लिम आक्रांताओं ने इस पावन भूमि को कब्ज़ाने के मकसद से इस पर आक्रमण किया। सनातनी संस्कृतियों और परम्पराएं, जो विश्व के सामने कश्मीरियत का प्रतिनिधित्व करती थीं, उन्हें मिटाने की पुरजोर कोशिशें की गईं।

जुलूम-ओ-सितम का यह सिलसिला सालों-साल चलता रहा और फिर आई १५ अगस्त, १९४७ की मध्यरात्रि, जहाँ एक ओर तो आजादी का जश्न पूरा देश मना रहा था, वहीं दूसरी ओर धार्मिक आधार पर भारत माँ के विभाजन का गम हर राष्ट्रवादी भारतीय के दिल को झकझोर रहा था। जिन्नाह के "दो-राष्ट्र का सिद्धांत" की परिकल्पना के फलस्वरूप कश्मीर के एक अभूतपूर्व अध्याय 'आतंकवाद' की शुरुआत हुई।

कश्मीर जिन्नाह और पाकिस्तान की महत्वाकांक्षा का पहला शिकार बना। इस्लाम के बुनियाद पर बने राष्ट्र पाकिस्तान के आकाओं को पाकिस्तान का मुकम्मल नक्शा बिना कश्मीर के अधूरा लगता था। नतीजतन, पाकिस्तान के जनरल अकबर खान के नेतृत्व में वजीरिस्तान के निवासियों और चंद सैनिकों के लिए बनाये गए आज़ाद कश्मीर फ़ौज ने स्वतंत्र कश्मीर को हड़पने के उद्देश्य से २२ अक्टूबर, १९४७ को कश्मीर पर धावा बोल दिया। कश्मीरी सेना के प्रमुख राजेंद्र सिंह ने कुशलतापूर्वक इस फ़ौज को बारामूला में ही रोक दिया। इसके मध्य राजा हरी सिंह ने २६ अक्टूबर, १९४७ को भारत के अंगीकार पत्र पर हस्ताक्षर कर दिया और जम्मू एवं कश्मीर स्वतंत्र भारत का पंद्रहवां राज्य बन गया। भारत के तत्कालीन प्रधानमंत्री श्री जवाहर लाल नेहरू ने संयुक्त राष्ट्र में इस मुद्दे को उठाया और संयुक्त राष्ट्र सुरक्षा परिषद् ने इस मुद्दे पर एक प्रस्ताव पारित किया। इस प्रस्ताव के तहत १ जनवरी, १९४९ को संघर्ष विराम का एलान हो गया। उस क्षेत्र को परिभाषित करने वाले काल्पनिक रेखा को आज नियंत्रण रेखा के नाम से जाना जाता है। इस छल में पाकिस्तान ने कश्मीर के ३३ प्रतिशत भूमि को कब्ज़ा लिया जिसे आज "पाक अधिकृत कश्मीर" कहते हैं। कश्मीर की अद्वितीय परिस्थितियों को देखते हुए संविधान निर्माताओं ने धारा ३७० और ३५(A) के माध्यम से उसे अस्थायी रूप से कुछ विशेष अधिकार दिए।

जनरल मुहम्मद ज़िया-उल-हक़ पाकिस्तान के चौथे फ़ौजी तानाशाह और छठे राष्ट्रपति थे। उन्होंने भारत के खिलाफ गुप्त युद्ध लड़ने की नींव रखी। इसी तर्ज पर पाकिस्तानी फ़ौज ने "ऑपरेशन टुपैक" का मसौदा तैयार किया। "ब्लीड इंडिया विथ अ थाउजेंड कट्स" उनके नियोग का सैद्धांतिक वाक्य बना। इस दूत-कर्म का उद्देश्य भारत के भीतर ही अस्थिरता पैदा कर भारत को अंदर से खोखला बनाना तथा पाक फ़ौज को मैदान-ए-जंग में सहायक भूमिका में रख मुजाहिदों से युद्ध लड़वाने का था। इस क्रिया के अंतर्गत १९८० के दशक में पाकिस्तान की जमीन ने सैकड़ों आतंकवादी संगठनों को पाक फ़ौज की देख रेख में जन्म दिया जिनका काम धर्म के नाम पर कट्टरता पैदा कर नौजवानों को आतंकवाद के रास्ते पर ले जाना था। तत्काल रूप से भारत के प्रशासन में आने वाले कश्मीर के निवासियों को भी इसी जहर का घोल धीरे धीरे पिलाया गया।

१९८९ से ही संप्रदायवादी शक्तियों ने कश्मीरी पंडितों पर सितम ढाने शुरू कर दिए थे। नतीजानुसार बड़ी तादाद में इन हिन्दुओं ने १९८९ के शुरुआत से ही पलायन शुरू कर दिया था। और फिर आयी १९ जनवरी, १९९० की रात! सर्दियों वाली रात के गहरे सन्नाटे के बीच अचानक मस्जिदों को छोड़ पूरे कश्मीर की बिजली एक साथ चली गयी। और हर मस्जिद के लाउडस्पीकर से इस्लामिक नारे लगने शुरू हो गए। आधी रात को कश्मीरी पंडितों को उनकी मातृभूमि से निष्काषित करने का फरमान जारी कर दिया गया। कट्टर इस्लामिक संगठनों ने वही सिलसिला दोहराना शुरू किया जो १९४७-१९४८ की लड़ाई में आजाद कश्मीर फ़ौज ने बारामूला में किया था। कश्मीरी हिन्दुओं के सामने तीन विकल्प परश किये गए- रॉलिव, चालिव या गालिव मतलब मुसलमान बन जाओ, भाग जाओ या एक खौफनाक मौत मरने के लिए तैयार हो जाओ। बर्बरता ऐसी कि जिस भूमि को महर्षि



कश्यप ने कश्मीरी पंडितों को सौंपा था वहां इस घटना के पश्चात सिर्फ ३००० के करीब कश्मीरी हिन्दू बचे। पाँच लाख से ज्यादा कश्मीरी हिन्दू अपने देश में ही शरणार्थी बन गए।

सालों तक इन पीड़ितों की वेदना को सुनने वाला कोई भी सत्ता के कुर्सी पर काबिज़ न हो सका। आश्वासन तो खूब मिले किन्तु समाधान नहीं। धारा ३७० तथा ३५(A) के आवरण के भीतर सिर्फ मुट्ठी भर लोगों या यूँ कहे कि मुट्ठी भर परिवारों ने सत्ता का सुख भोगा। कश्मीरी पंडितों के कत्लेआम के बाद तो कश्मीर वह लोहा हो गया जो जंग लगने से खराब हो चुका था। नीति निर्माण में कौशलता की जगह अनियमितता ने ले लिया। हुरियत के नेताओं ने युवाओं के हाथ में किताब की जगह पत्थर पकड़ा दिए और ए.पी.जे. अब्दुल कलाम की जगह इन कुछ कश्मीरी नौजवानों का प्रेरणास्रोत बुरहान वानी बन गया।

२०१४ में भारत के लोगों ने बदलाव का संकल्प लिया और पूर्ण बहुमत के साथ प्रधानमंत्री श्री नरेंद्र दामोदरदास मोदी को सत्ता के कुर्सी पर बैठाया। उनके संगठन के कई संकल्पों में से एक संकल्प कश्मीर के विकास में बाधक धारा 35A और 370 को हटाना भी था। उनके कार्यकाल में उरी तथा पुलवामा में पाकिस्तान द्वारा संचालित आतंकवादी संगठनों ने अपनी आदत के अनुरूप पीछे से वार किया। परन्तु वह ये भूल गए कि यह नया भारत है। "ये घर में घुसेगा भी और मारेगा भी।"- भारत के वीर सैनिकों ने प्रधानमंत्री के दृढ़ नेतृत्व के साथ उरी और पुलवामा हमलों का जवाब "सर्जिकल स्ट्राइक्स" और "एयर स्ट्राइक्स" से दिया। २०१९ में भाजपा के पुनः जीतने के बाद , उदय हुआ ५ अगस्त, २०१९ की उस स्वर्णिम सूरज का जिसकी चमक देख खुद कुंदन भी शर्मा जाए।

"है कौन विघ्न ऐसा जग में, टिक सके वीर नर के मग में?
खम ठोक ठेलता है जब नर, पर्वत के जाते पाँव उखड़,
मानव जब ज़ोर लगाता है, पत्थर पानी बन जाता है।"

-राष्ट्रकवि श्री रामधारी सिंह 'दिनकर'

वह कार्य जिसे साकार करने की क्षमता स्वतंत्र भारत के ७० साल के इतिहास में किसी में नहीं थी, वह इस सरकार ने कर दिखाया। संसद भवन में देश के गृह मंत्री श्री अमित शाह ने "जम्मू कश्मीर पुनर्गठन विधेयक २०१९" पेश किया। संसद के दोनों भवनों से पारित होने के पश्चात राष्ट्रपति के अनुमोदन से यह विधेयक कानून बन गया और देश ने इतिहास रच दिया। देश भर में खुशी की लहर दौड़ उठी। सालों से नम आँखें लिए अपने ही देश में दर दर भटक रहे कश्मीरी पंडितों की आँखें आज सालों बाद खुशी के आंसुओं से भरी हुई थी। हर देशवासी को अपने विविधता में एकता वाले इस महान समाज को सामंजस्य के एक सूत्र में गुंथे जाने का गर्व था। गर्व था कि कश्मीर इस आधुनिक काल में भी उस शिखर पर दुबारा पहुँच सकेगा जहाँ कभी वह हुआ करता था, आशा थी कि वह ब्राह्मण जिनका मूल आशियाना कश्मीर की धरा थी वह वहां वापस बस सकेंगे, उम्मीद थी कि वह कश्मीरी युवा जिसे पत्थर उठाने पर मजबूर कर दिया गया था वह वापस उन्नति के मार्ग पर चलेगा और हौसला था कि "एक भारत, श्रेष्ठ भारत" का सपना साकार होगा।

