

Foreword

Schery asked me how things were when I met her around mid march and I instantly replied stating I was having the time of my life in Manchester. This was such a loaded statement that Schery rightfully pressed me on to qualify it. I'm inadequate as a poet to do so concisely, and even the most conscientious of you readers will not read a thesis. Take my word for it.

Everything hastened. I've chosen to move on from more friendships here than I made at Imperial (an exaggeration, but allow it), and that left me with a strongly reciprocal and very active group of people. From hosting potluck dinner parties with refined conversation to holding back someone's hair as they threw up, term had it all.

I've decided to keep this one shorter (tried to anyway) seeing as half of you in the workforce don't have time to spare.

Miss Sanghrajka's gift

I only attended my first Indian Dance Society class in late November at Shikha's request. Whilst that turned out to be more amusing than anything else, with a very feminine choreography and me being the only guy, I enjoyed the vibe of people there and decided to come again. From there, IDS turned into probably the largest source of enjoyment and entertainment at uni. Though how much I was able to follow a choreography varied based on the instructor and style - as Shikha knows, her classical ones were too intricate for me, the other members always made it a good time. It came to the point where I could unabashedly treat the group chat as my own despite only having been there a few months.

Miss Pavothil's allure

Incidentally, I met Malvika at IDS. I'd be lying if I said the connection was instant - we hardly spoke the first class apart from introductions. It did however feel very comfortable very quickly. From everyone I've met in the academic year so far, I went on dates with a few and would consider it with a few others, but no one remotely sent me back to feeling the buzz like I was in highschool about to ask out Nadia, following which I veritably jumped in the air to give you perspective. Though the attraction turned out not to be mutual, it was exciting to be reminded of the intensity of spark I wish to have. It is of curiosity the similarity of circumstances under which I met both Nadia and Malvika, and a few of the overlaps between their characters.

Miss Kaur's faith

Though Jasmeen may have been highlighted a dozen other ways, it is a trip to the Gurudwara that was most unique. As many of you know, I am not a particularly religious person, though I do appreciate the sense of community it often provides. Thus when Jasmeen revealed she's a regular patron of the Gurudwara, I decided to join her on her next visit, rather tempted by the ghee laden halwa they often serve.

I'm glad I went. Though I had trouble sitting cross legged for any length of time in the prayer hall, and my mind wandered too frequently to reach a state of rest, I found relaxation in everyone else's focus. Jasmeen, too, had transformed. If it were a film it'd be the point where she prepared to meet the parents.

Although we had to leave before langar was ready to be served, I relished listening to conversations in Punjabi, and discussed what faith meant to Jasmeen. As we talked, another girl from uni, Sanya, also walked into the langar hall. The sense of community I was referring to was much heightened with the backdrop of university. Although I don't know if I'm ready to say I will start visiting regularly, I will concede it was a nicer experience having done so than I thought it could be. I was also appreciative of having Jasmeen to lead me through it seeing as I had forgotten a number of basic considerations such as carrying change for donations, sitting on a specific side of the prayer hall, etc.

In terms of faith overall, Jasmeen's views are for her to share. The impact the conversation had on me is perhaps one which my mum has been attempting for years - recognising a potential separation of spirituality and religion. Let's see if I subscribe to that way of thinking any time soon.

Miss Gupta's distress

In many Bollywood movies, especially out of the early 2000s story lines hinge on two main characters bumping into each other abroad and finding either solace or conflict in the only other Indian around. It is of course commonplace to meet compatriots -there are a lot of us- but this case was strongly reminiscent of the creative liberties Yash Chopra relied upon.

Queuing to check in for my flight to Zurich from Manchester, I'd happened to remove my headphones to get a sense of what was happening around me. I noticed a woman with an Indian passport at the counter also flying onwards to Dubai being given trouble over wanting to use a visa on arrival service. Put plainly, the staff there were either incompetent or discriminatory. As I got to the front of the queue, they gave me some trouble as well but backed off when I put my foot down with the residence permit.

Aditi had been asked to wait whilst they awaited confirmation from Dubai's immigration authorities, so after my check in had been sorted, I went up to her and inquired to see if everything was alright. To say English airports have been chaotic as of late is an understatement, and Aditi was under considerable duress grappling with the possibility she may miss her flight. This is where the Bollywood moment occurred, with us bonding over a tirade against the airline and her appreciating some support. Eventually after more back and forth with the staff backing her up, I was getting concerned about making it on time myself so head off and wished her luck. Soon after, they received that email confirmation and sent her on her way with a fast-track pass through security, where she spotted me in line and convinced staff to let me with her as well to thank me for assistance.

With the trauma behind us, we finally had a chance to exchange names and basics. As it turned out, she was visiting Dubai on holiday for the exact same week I was, and we're scheduled to be on the same flight back to Manch. The exchange of favors continued with me pilfering snacks and cutlery from the airport lounge for her in both Manchester and Zurich seeing as she'd not eaten anything that morning.

She'd called her parents to keep them updated on her progress, and I was amused but not surprised to see her skirt around mentioning me. We got the gate agent to seat us together for the next leg to Dubai, where having some company naturally made the journey feel considerably shorter. Towards the last third of the flight, after some fitful sleep, I realized I was suddenly doing a lot more of the talking. Seeing her take a Combiflam explained a lot, and so I tried to do my part and be of assistance from giving her my pillow to telling the parents across the aisle to calm their bickering kids down. As her pain killers kicked in, and Swiss air pulled through with some ice cream, the vibe picked up again and we indulged in stereotyping the passengers around us, shielded by whispering in Hindi.

We parted ways right before immigration, where she waited for her parents flying in from India. It's an exciting feeling knowing it's not goodbye but see you soon with a stranger.