

A Literary Club Initiative

SOLSTICE

merrymaking





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promises and more
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SOLSTICE

CELEBRATION



**The Sun didn't Burn his
Heart Today**

Shridatri Giri, XI - Y

**All with a Smile
on her Face**

Riturija Sankar, X-H

**They ran in
the Rain**

Priyanshu Chatterjee, X-F

The Grimson Veil

Ahana De, XI-L

Baashiwala

হাস ছেড়োনা বন্ধ!

Priyanshu Chatterjee, X-F

Kaagaz ke Phool

-মক রাহ পর চলকে দো কদস

Devansh C. Thakur, X-E

NOT ONLY IN PALACES BUT IN A PAUPER'S DWELLING, NOT ONLY IN CORPORATE PROMOTIONS BUT IN LIFELONG PROMISES, NOT ONLY IN PRICED SHOES BUT IN A BARE BABY'S FIRST STEPS, IN WHISPERED PRAYERS, IN SILENT TEARS, IN RESILIENCE'S QUIET UNYIELDING CHEERS, IN SUNRISE AFTER DARKEST NIGHT, IN FIREFLIES IN PHOSPHENES BRIGHT, IN THINGS NOT GRAND BUT ALSO SMALL, WHEN MOMENTS OF JOY AND PEACE STAND TALL

IT HOLDS MY HEART, YOUR HEART, OUR HEARTS.

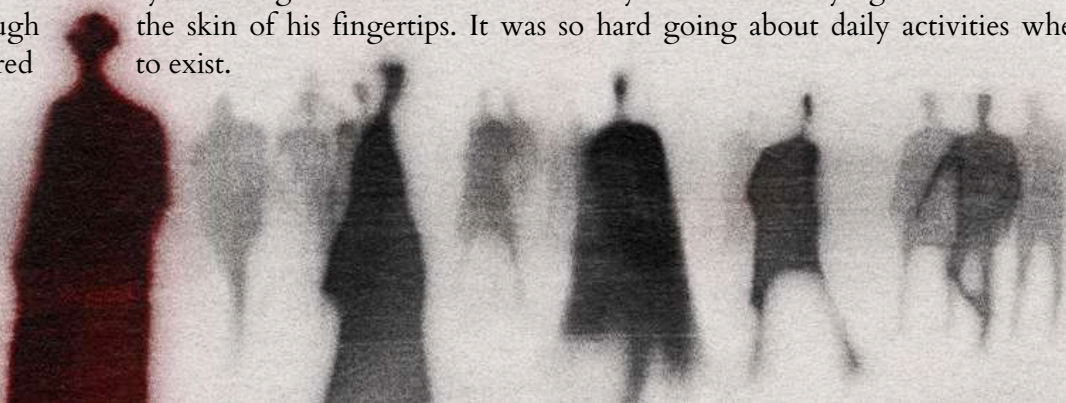
THE SUN DIDN'T BURN HIS *Heart* TODAY

Childhood rhymes had taught him that people rose to the call of the rooster. Instead, he woke up with a throbbing headache. Barely able to crack open his eyes, he checked his phone— 9:00 a.m. “Heavens! I’m late,” he cursed under his breath, jumped down his bed and sneezed. He looked at the closed windows of his bedroom; the dust had no way to escape. Stumbling on his feet, he checked the date on the calendar on his table.

29th August. Of course. The loud music blared from the speakers and filtered in through the airtight space early in the morning. What excuse had he given to the manager? Right, a trip to Karnataka. “Chandra, it’s good to see you take my advice seriously,” his manager had said, grinning appreciatively with his crooked teeth that seemed to increase the length of his moustache just right. “Such a diligent employee you are, that your manager needs to pester you about taking a vacation, huh?” He had joked, shaking his head while he approved his request for a leave. All he did was stand with his hands behind his back— a habit since his schoolboy days— and smile politely and nod. “Doesn’t even pay me enough for a trip to my mother’s grave, let alone a week in Karnataka,” he grumbled under his breath as he flopped back on his bed, aimlessly checking his phone for any texts. He glared at the direction of the loud music; or rather, at the closed window. “Don’t get the point of all this nonsense just for a wedding. At least play something worth listening! Terrible music taste.” He scrolled aimlessly for another while and then he finally sat up. His back hurt from the awkward position he was laying in. He sneezed again.

The sunlight blinded him. He got a call. “Chandra, coming tonight? I’ve heard that the menu they’ve set is amazing,” gushed Tarok babu. He felt the familiar butterflies attack his stomach. He had completely forgotten he was invited to the new neighbour’s wedding as well. After a bit of a silence, he laughed nervously. “Oh, yes, of course! How could I?” He pretended that someone else was calling him. “Yes— yes, I’ll come. No, no, cannot think of it. Haha, yes. Yes.” He abruptly disconnected and heaved a sigh of relief. He never intended on attending the wedding. “I don’t even know them personally, why should I?” he had justified in the three-members’ group chat to which he faced a barrage of “Free food, that’s why,” counter reasonings in different variations. His shoulders ached. His knees did, too. Only thirty, but the way he walked might make someone hazard his age up to forty or forty-five.

He made the bed. The sheets felt dusty. It had been almost three days, after all. Online quizzes long ago had told him that he had a high chance of being down with depression, but his mother had scared him enough about therapists as a child. “You’re being too much, babu, should I take you to a therapist?” was what she would threaten him with whenever he pulled a tantrum about going to music classes. The cost of each session would drill through his meagre salary, anyway. He brushed his teeth and broomed his small, one-bedroom flat. He did the laundry; he couldn’t procrastinate that anymore. He barely had any wearable clothes left. He tried listening to music while going about his neglected duties of adulting, but even that didn’t ebb the perennial demotivation dragging him further inside the grey of his mind too effectively. He made a list of groceries, took a bath, and went out to do some shopping. The anxiety of having to talk to the food delivery men and clarifying directions made him bite through the skin of his fingertips. It was so hard going about daily activities when you felt too tired to exist.



He scowled at the children playing outside as he struggled to balance his shopping bag on one hand and open his old, rickety umbrella. The sun was too bright. In very sly steps he managed to bypass the eager relatives and invitees of the wedding clamouring and enjoying without a care, even as the car behind the large group honked to let it pass. He couldn't face confrontations; that wouldn't do. He only hoped he was an individual insignificant enough for anybody to notice his absence.

He skipped lunch; felt too tired to cook. He scrolled his phone and texted his friends in the group chat out of boredom. He always felt too tired to do anything. It was only the prospect of money and the inevitability of work that pushed him out of the suffocating spiral that his mind was, and focus on something else. He lit a cigarette and breathed in the smoke, flipping through the pages of his childhood journal. He snickered at the old entries where his younger self had longed for freedom. Freedom, right, he thought. It's a never-ending cycle of entrapment, discontentment and slavery, alright. He slept again. His mind was too burdened with unpleasant thoughts he could never keep away. He didn't realise when the sun had set, he didn't care enough to do so. He only ever really appreciated the beauty of the sky when he flipped through the posts of his mutuals, where they never failed to post a picture of the sky at least once a day.

The bell rung. "Who's it now?" He groaned, dragging his feet to check. His mind nagged that someone had probably figured he was skipping the wedding and had come to confront him about it. They would know how pathetic he really was. How terrible, how selfish, how rude. They would humiliate and argue with him and others would hear their loud voices and the hosts would be so disappointed and—"Oi, Chandra. What about your Karnataka trip, man? Didn't tell us anything about it. That's hurtful, you know." He blinked. No, it wasn't someone berating him. No, Anu and Vikesh were here. He had to take a step back; his head hurt from the overstimulation. He almost missed out on what Anu was saying. "Karnataka... what?" he asked, seemingly dazed. Unbothered, they stepped into his flat with the familiarity and authority of landowners over their property, keeping a few bags on the table. Chandra felt embarrassed. His place was in no condition to host even his closest people. It was barely liveable. "What're you doing here?" he asked as he shut the door, with the same confusion with which he had gathered the information of his scores in tenth class. "Figured you weren't in Karnataka and would do some good with company instead of letting yourself rot," Vikesh said, pouring himself a glass of water. "We've got so much gossip you've missed out on." And despite himself, Chandra found himself grinning a little. His cheeks hurt from the effort, but it was real. They had brought over food as well. His stomach growled at the aroma. He pulled a chair and sat down beside them as they dished out the meal. He was laughing, too, after so many days. Their booming drowned out the annoying music blaring from the speakers outside. "Want to watch something?" he offered as he did the dishes and they washed their hands. The house finally felt like a home. "Yeah, sure. I'm turning on Netflix on the TV. Anu, come here — what should we watch?" Vikesh yelled from the other room as he worked out the television.

Chandra had deemed himself impenetrable, and yet, their very presence had thawed his ice, even if only temporarily. He had forgotten what it felt like to be with them. In the back of his mind he dreaded the silence when they would eventually leave, but for now, their talks could force his self-sabotaging thoughts that ate away at his mind to the corner.

The sun may have been bright today, but it couldn't manage a burn at his heart this time.

ALL WITH A SMILE ON HER FACE

The smell of October diffused into the steam rising from the cup of tea that rested on the table in the balcony. Beyond the vacant armchair and the swaying of the floral curtains came a rustling sound. Inside the only bedroom in the apartment, particles of dust and debris were dancing around. A withered and worn-out cardboard box lay on the floor, its contents scattered in and around it. There were notebooks, pages with torn edges, and threadbare clothbound diaries. Dhriti was peering over these remnants of her literary past.

There was a frown enclosed between her eyebrows that reeked of self-doubt and the cascading mass of hair kept posing as a barrier between her and the sight of her decade-old cursive. At that very moment, she was supposed to be writing an article. It was her yearly Durga Puja column that was centred around women. This year, her procrastination had landed her at the precipice of the deadline as Durga Puja was already underway.

She had made herself a cup of tea very day. However, she had her mind saying that she would not. So, she pulled out the cardboard box from underneath her bed. She had sat down on the cold marble floor and picked up the first notebook from it.

It was her notebook from third grade written in it, entitled 'My Grandmother'. Dhriti recalled the first time her English teacher had told her mother that she had "a flair for writing" one notebook after another as she had progressed. Soon she was surrounded by paragraphs, descriptions she had penned about her mother and grandmother over the years. As she started reading them, she stumbled upon the realisation that she had always used the word 'superwoman' in each of her write-ups. She had described her mother as a sacrificial figure, engrossed in tending to everyone with an effortless smile on her face all day. She had depicted her grandmother's daily routine through rose-coloured glasses even though her grandmother never had the luxury of replacing her own cracked glasses.



and decided to pen her article that succumbed to the voices in not find her muse this year. She had pulled out the cardboard box from underneath her bed. She had sat down on the cold marble floor and picked up

grade. There was a paragraph 'My Grandmother'. Dhriti teacher had told her mother that year. Then she took out her formative school years surrounded by paragraphs, descriptions she had penned over the years. As she started

realisation that she had always used

As a little girl, Dhriti thought it was perfectly natural to wake up to a table set with breakfast and a perfectly ironed school uniform every day. Though, nothing seemed to iron out the crinkles between her mother's eyes. Her mother was a teacher. When she returned from school each day, it never crossed her mind that her mother was also returning from school. When she left the empty lunch plate on the table to take a nap, she was unaware that her mother also wished to do so some days. When she was in college, she had tried to braid her hair several times and failed. But stashed away in a corner of her dressing table, still lay the crimson red ribbons her mother would tie at the ends of her braids each day.

Dhriti gathered a few of her notebooks and went to sit on the armchair in the balcony. She extended a hand to pick up the cup of warm tea that lay on the table, but she retracted it to turn the page to the time when she was stuck on a mathematics problem. She had rushed to the kitchen where her mother's forehead had been flooded with sweat and salty rivulets descended down her temples.

But, when Dhriti had shown her mother the sum, she set aside her chopped onions and explained it to her right there atop the tiled kitchen counter. There was a day when her mother had spilled some turmeric powder on her saree. Dhriti had found it lying beside the laundry basket. She saw her mother tidying up the living room for some guests who were supposed to visit. Her mother knew that when they arrived, the only thing she would get the chance to add to the conversation was the refreshments. Her mother had not reached the laundry basket yet. Her favourite saree was lying there beside it. So, Dhriti picked up the saree and took it to the sink where she started using soap to remove the turmeric stain. However, soon Dhriti found that the stain was turning a darker, reddish shade. When her mother had seen it, she taught her daughter the science behind it. But, she did not know that crouched behind her mother's eyes hid a scarred soul, awestruck to see someone showing her such a sliver of affection.

Now, Dhriti picked up the cup of tea. It had cooled down beyond the drinkable temperature. When she looked outside, she saw a mother and a daughter at the grocery shop across the street. She wondered if mothers, grandmothers, and aunts sweat, and cry, and work the same, why they could not breathe the same. And she hoped that that daughter clutching onto her mother's rose pink dupatta never describes her mother as a superwoman. For, there is no such thing as a superhuman, there is just a human with an inhumane forbearance and an eternal vow of silence who is conditioned to convince herself that perpetual sacrifice is the greatest expression of love.

Dhriti grabs her car keys. Within the hour, she is face to face with a wooden door and promptly rings the doorbell. She is greeted by her mother, and grandmother who is in town for the Puja. They make a huge fuss. In a minute, a plate of sweet delicacies is ready and a stack of new sarees is handed to Dhriti. She realises that in her haste, she had forgotten to bring the gifts she had bought for them. They decide to visit the local pandal down the street.

So, Gauri and her daughter Isha and her daughter Dhriti, join their hands before the idol of Goddess Durga. The Goddess is adorned with dazzling jewellery and revered as the multi-tasking ideal of a woman, with ten occupied hands ready to vanquish or display virtue on demand. She is the divine superwoman that all human women must live up to, or so the voices of education in their heads say. But, as three generations of women stand in front of the ideal idol of their heavenly namesake, they all have different prayers to offer. The grandmother wishes for her family's welfare, never her own. The mother wishes for prosperity, for everyone but herself. But, the contrarian daughter has mutiny in mind. She wishes for something novel, she prays for a celebration of all the flesh-and-blood womankind anointed as superwomen. She prays for the next smile on her mother's and grandmother's faces to be when they are celebrated for being human. And when she drives back home to her presently chilled cup of tea, she knows what her article will be about.

Rituija Sankar, X-H



THEY RAN IN THE RAIN

The city was a constant buzz in their ears: the honking of automobiles; the shouts of vendors; the rhythmic clatter of a roadside dhobi beating clothes against a stone. Five boys, barely into their teens, wound through the convoluted alleys of the Kolkata slum, their laughter bouncing off corrugated metal walls. They were a jumble of unmatched garments – ripped at knees and elbows, yet their souls were merry, their spirits free. Each evening commenced with two rickety bicycles, two of the lads perched on each of them and the fifth running beside them, roaring with uncontained delight. They darted about the streets of the metropolis, swerving in and out of traffic like old hands dodging pedestrians. They often didn't know where they were headed; curiosity impelled them on an insatiable longing for new experiences. As the sun sank beneath the horizon, turning the heavens various shades of reds, they set off beyond immediate environs. On these forays two shaky cycles that only faith and invention held upright bore them aloft; but where were they going? The big city was like a huge monster that couldn't and perhaps wouldn't ever understand these boys.

They used to find themselves at the border of a sparkling mall, an imposing structure of glass and steel that laughed at them. A hushed talk could be heard as they looked through the transparent barrier at a world of air-conditioned luxury, at dummies dressed in clothes they could only imagine and at shelves overflowing with strange fruits they had never seen before. “What would you get if you went in there?” one would ask another. “We should sneak in,” one would suggest, but the harsh reality of their clothes, the telltale signs of poverty, would silence him.

Every evening they would go on a journey; it was as if they searched for something that the big city refused to provide, yet if questioned, what did they seek? They wouldn't have an answer. They always denied it being any particular item or a place, just an atmosphere. This feeling was vague and elusive, hanging on the outskirts of their consciousness. They longed for a world where bright kites flew in the sky above them instead of old laundry hung out to dry like tattered dreams strung between electric poles; where houses built from mud did not lean against each other so precariously but stood alone, proudly vibrant with laughter promising better days ahead. The reality they lived in was taunted by gigantic skyscrapers. Giant life sighed far away through bustling distances; a sigh only caught occasionally by these slum-dwellers who could never be a part of it.

In this journey, there was no plan for how they would approach their destination, and there was virtually no destination to look forward to. They were adventurers in their rights. They were found roaming and wandering around various corners of the city. Some days, they would sit down and engage some stranger in a conversation.



Sometimes with a fruit seller who sold mangoes that shimmered even in the light of the low-power bulb. He'd tell them stories of the faraway orchards where the juiciest mangoes would grow, and his eyes would gleam with satisfaction that they wished hard to possess. Another day, they would find themselves talking to the watchman of a public toilet, a man perpetually shrouded with discontent. As evenings would come to a close, they would often casually play carrom with a group of elderly men by the side of a vast banyan tree. They would tell them stories about the good old days when the city was not as fast-paced as it is today. Some other day, they would come across a street artist, whose thin hands would paint an artwork on a canvas spread right on the pavement. They would sit, spellbound, seeing a world of bright colors and creatures beyond one's imagination unfolded before their eyes.

Every meeting, every discussion however was a stroke on the canvas of the imagination of these boys. Each one of them, in some way, would plead with them, beg them, inform them, instruct them, explain it to them, and perhaps scream at them and ask them to dream. The boys were storytellers themselves; they dreamt of lands where flying kites would kiss the clouds, they sang songs that made the birds fall silent, and they walked until their legs gave out, but their spirits remained as high as the sun at noon. With each passing day, they desired more often than ever to walk and keep walking, to talk and keep talking, to cry only to break into laughter, to dream and not stop dreaming, and to run in the rain.

Their parents were, however, tired people, who had to face the facts of life. They spoke of the city as a heartless beast, where only the sons of the kings would soar high. They narrated the story of *Ekalavya*, the excellent archer who was ostracized by his teacher *Drona*, as a cautionary tale. They would warn them that the world was filled with such *Dronas*, ready to clip the wings of *Ekalavyas*, who'd longed to dream. "Don't dream, boys," they'd say, their voices laced with a lifetime of disappointment. "Find a job, earn two rupees; that's all life has to offer."

One evening, the heavens were rent asunder. The first drops were fat and shy, they splashed on the soil like the first kisses of the earth. It was a warm welcome, a relief from the scorching heat that the city of Kolkata offered them all year round. However, it was not long before the sky opened up and poured out its wrath. Heavy rain poured down on the city and the dust turned into streams of water and mud horns and loud voices of vendors were suddenly shut off. The city suffocated by the attack. a collective scream

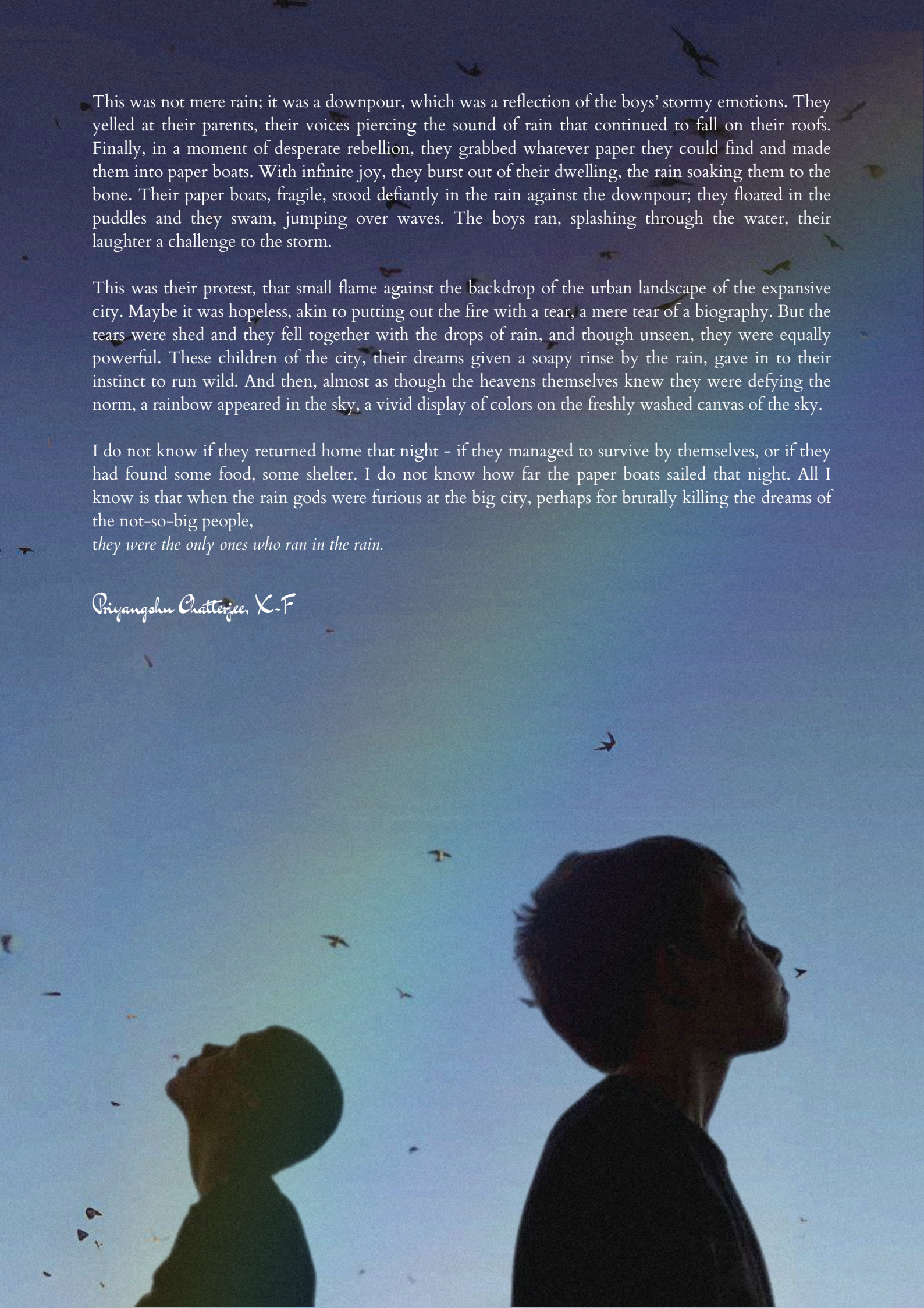


This was not mere rain; it was a downpour, which was a reflection of the boys' stormy emotions. They yelled at their parents, their voices piercing the sound of rain that continued to fall on their roofs. Finally, in a moment of desperate rebellion, they grabbed whatever paper they could find and made them into paper boats. With infinite joy, they burst out of their dwelling, the rain soaking them to the bone. Their paper boats, fragile, stood defiantly in the rain against the downpour; they floated in the puddles and they swam, jumping over waves. The boys ran, splashing through the water, their laughter a challenge to the storm.

This was their protest, that small flame against the backdrop of the urban landscape of the expansive city. Maybe it was hopeless, akin to putting out the fire with a tear, a mere tear of a biography. But the tears were shed and they fell together with the drops of rain, and though unseen, they were equally powerful. These children of the city, their dreams given a soapy rinse by the rain, gave in to their instinct to run wild. And then, almost as though the heavens themselves knew they were defying the norm, a rainbow appeared in the sky, a vivid display of colors on the freshly washed canvas of the sky.

I do not know if they returned home that night - if they managed to survive by themselves, or if they had found some food, some shelter. I do not know how far the paper boats sailed that night. All I know is that when the rain gods were furious at the big city, perhaps for brutally killing the dreams of the not-so-big people,
they were the only ones who ran in the rain.

Priyanshu Chatterjee, X-F



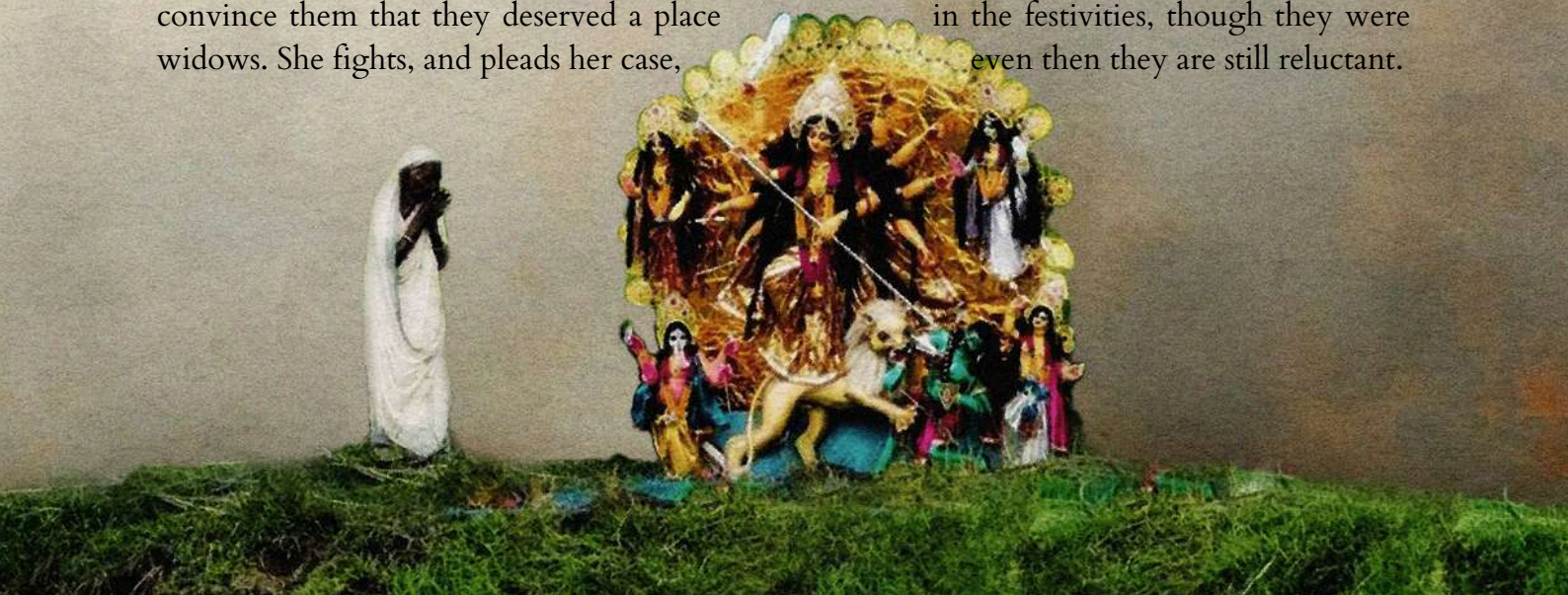
The Crimson Veil

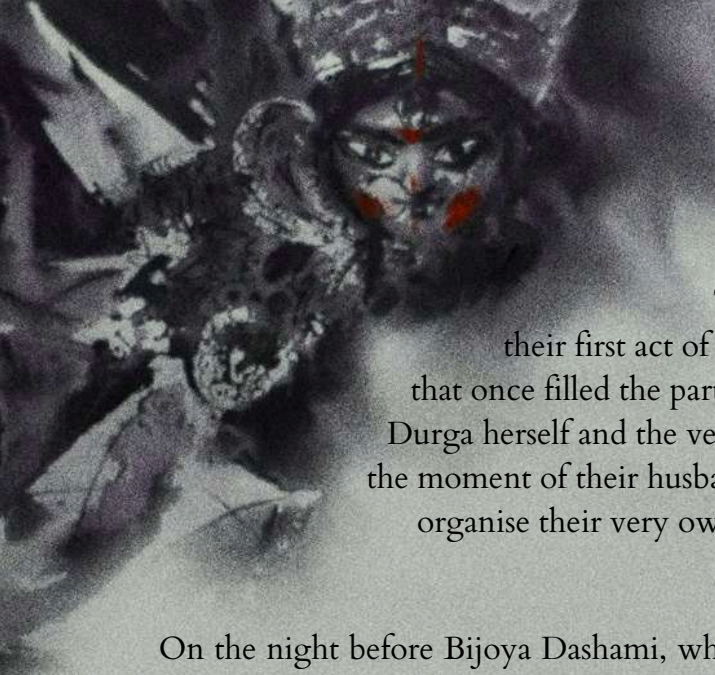
In the heart of a small village, the air hums with the vibrant energy of Durga Puja. The streets are alive with the sounds of conch shells, rhythmic drumming, and the melodic chants of priests invoking the goddess's blessings. The smell of incense and freshly bloomed flowers drift through the air, mingling with the sweet scent of traditional sweets being prepared in every household. Colours swirl everywhere—brilliant reds, golds, and greens—and laughter rings out as the residents, dressed in new garments enjoy the festivities.

Yet, amidst this spectrum of colour, this joyful chaos, a quieter scene unfolds on the edges of the village. In a narrow lane, where the sounds of celebration fade into an eerie quiet, stay the widows. Their white saris clashing with the colours around them. They watch as silent observers, their lives stripped of the gaiety that once filled their hearts. The death of their husbands rang the death knell of all their festivities and the right to live life. This is how it had always been in this orthodox, tradition bound conservative village. Rules were set in stone—traditions unwavering.

The youngest among the widows, watches from the shadows, her heart aching. For her, the sights, sounds, and smells of Durga Puja bring not joy, but a stinging reminder of what she has lost—not just her husband, but her place in this celebration of life. Merely in her twenties, being recently widowed, has thrust her into a stark and lonely life. As she joins the others, she feels out of place. Adorned in their pale white sarees, bereft of jewellery, they don't speak much, quietly resigning to their cruel fate. But she was young and spirited. As the drums beat louder and the smell of incense wafts towards her, she feels a different kind of stirring within her—whisper of defiance, a voice of rebellion against the heavy weight of tradition. Her heart sings, softly.

She starts, by convincing the other widows of the village. Years of imprisonment within the bars of tradition had in turn made them just as traditional. Initial efforts were met with failure. They had resigned to their cruel fate without putting up a fight against oppressive practices. She was initially crestfallen at their hesitancy and displeasure. It was difficult to convince them that they deserved a place in the festivities, though they were widows. She fights, and pleads her case, even then they are still reluctant.





Eventually,
she slowly chips away at their caged hearts.

The youngest sufferer presented a radical proposal as their first act of defiance. They were going to use the red vermilion that once filled the parting of their hair, the vermilion associated with Maa Durga herself and the very vermilion which they had been stripped off from the moment of their husband's passing. It was decided that they were going to organise their very own secret 'Sindoor Khela' on the last day of the pujas—
Bijoya Dashami.

On the night before Bijoya Dashami, when the pandals are quiet and the village is asleep, the widows gather in a small group, hidden clearly under the stars. Anxious, jittery, they look to one another, searching for reassurance. Soon, the first-ever rebel will lift the box of vermilion, anxious footsteps echo in the distance. The women freeze, hearts pounding, wondering if their rebellion is about to be discovered. But after a long pause, the footsteps fade. Finally, with shaky hands she opened the box and taking a pinch of vermilion and applied it on the forehead of the eldest widow. As tears swelled at the corners of the elder's eyes, the other widows joined them.

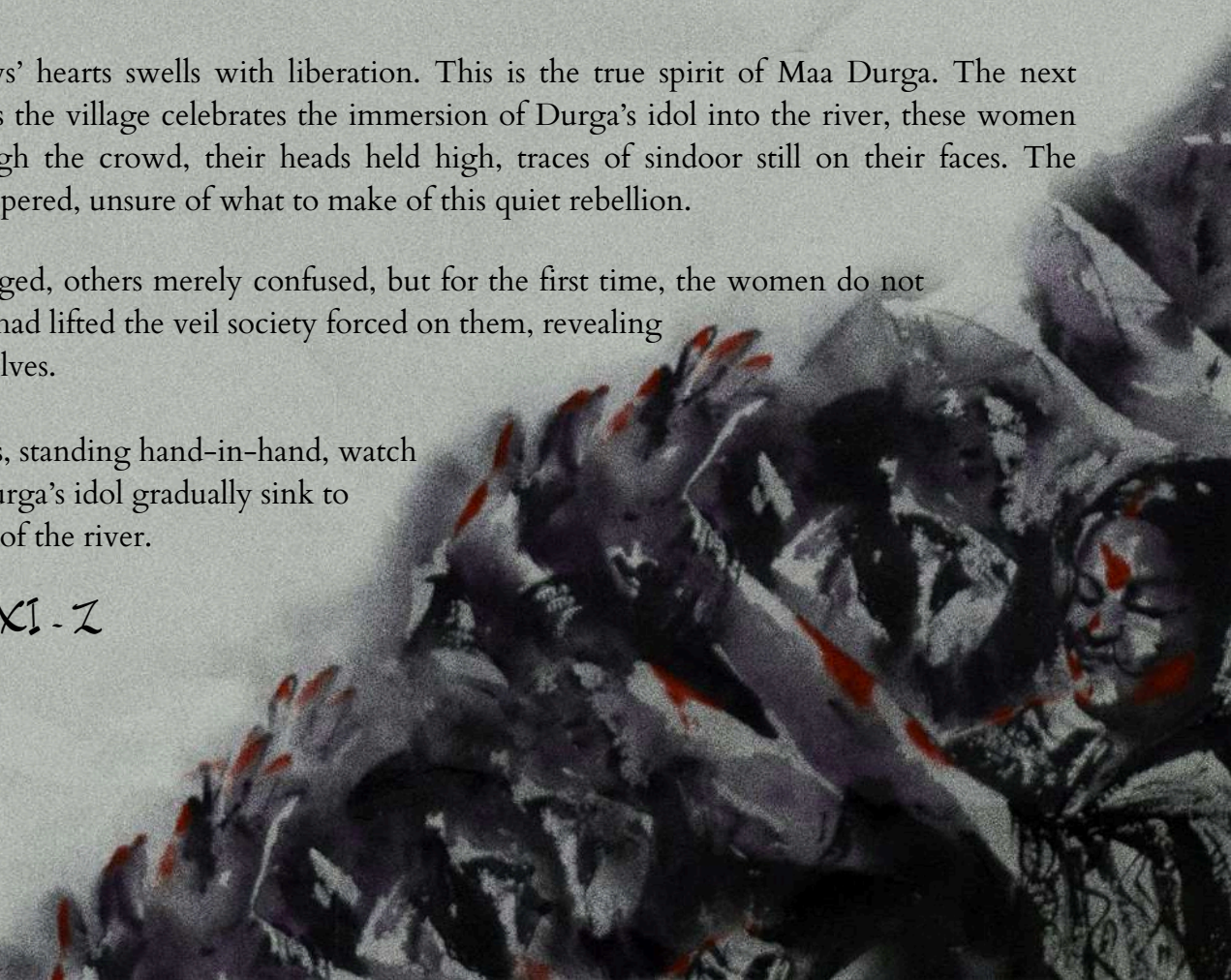
One by one the widows take turns applying sindoor to one another. Their laughter is hushed but joyous, finally reclaiming what was unjustly snatched from them. As the night progressed, the women's faces and white sarees were streaked crimson red. They were finally visible to each other, not as widows to be pitied, but as women who had endured loss and emerged stronger.

The widows' hearts swells with liberation. This is the true spirit of Maa Durga. The next morning, as the village celebrates the immersion of Durga's idol into the river, these women walk through the crowd, their heads held high, traces of sindoor still on their faces. The village whispered, unsure of what to make of this quiet rebellion.

Some outraged, others merely confused, but for the first time, the women do not care. They had lifted the veil society forced on them, revealing their true selves.

The Durgas, standing hand-in-hand, watch Goddess Durga's idol gradually sink to the bottom of the river.

Ahana De, XI - Z



কলকাতা কেবল ভালোবাসার শহর নয় -
ব্যথার, বেদনার, বিরহের, বিচ্ছেদের শহরও
বটে, তবু সে কাঁদতে জানে না, অতি সযত্নে সে
এক একটি অশ্রুবিন্দু লুকিয়ে রাখে, ভিক্টোরিয়ার
আকাশে জমাট বাঁধা কালো মেঘের মধ্যে। আজ
শহর যেন তার ছেলেবেলা হারিয়ে
ফেলেছে, সরলতা হারিয়ে
ফেলেছে, ঐতিহ্য হারিয়ে
ফেলেছে, হয়তো

নিজেকেই হারিয়ে ফেলেছে, সবুজ -
কমলার অশেষ যুদ্ধে। বালমলে মুখোশের
পেছনে যে তীব্র যন্ত্রনা, অনুশোচনা, নিঃসঙ্গতা
বাসা বাঁধে, তা আমাদের কান অবধি পৌঁছেলেও -
মনে দাগ কাটে না তাই আমরা সহানুভূতিশীল,
সমব্যথা নই।

ব্যস্ত কলকাতা যখন দীর্ঘশ্বাস ফেলে - লাল
সিগনালে দাঁড়িয়ে, ঠিক তখন শহরের ধুলো মেখে,
সেই পুরোনো লোকটা এগিয়ে আসে, সে যেন
হাজার বছর ধরে হাঁটছে। ক্লান্ত, জীর্ণ, কুশকায়
শরীরটা - ধ্বংসস্তুপের মতো, সে বয়ে নিয়ে যায়।
হাঁটতে, হাঁটতে কবে যে কলকাতার দুঃখ তার
নিজের হয়ে গেছে, আমার জানা নেই। তার শরীর
ভেঙে পড়লেও, শিরদাঁড়া এখনো অটুট। তার
কেঠো হাত দুটো প্রতিবাদ করে চলেছে, এই
উদাসীন নীরবতা, স্তব্ধতা, সব কিছু ভেদ করে
তার বাঁশি অনবরত বলে চলেছে - "তোমার নাম,
আমার নাম, ভিয়েতনাম - ভিয়েতনাম!"।

যে সমাজ একদিন ভালোবাসার কথা বলতো,
বেঁচে থাকার কথা বলতো, যে সমাজ স্বপ্ন দেখতো,
সেই সমাজ আজ চুপ, নীরব, নিরুত্তর!
বাঁশিওয়ালার লড়াই কোনো সংগঠনের বিরুদ্ধে
নয় বরং সেই মানুষের বিরুদ্ধে যারা সব কিছু
দেখে, জেনে, বুঝেও - প্রতিবাদ করে না।

সেই সমস্ত মানুষের
বিরুদ্ধে যারা স্রোতে গা
ভাসায়। সেই সমস্ত মানুষের
বিরুদ্ধে যারা শুধু পাল্টাতে
চায়, পাল্টায় না। তার বাঁশি
পরিবর্তন চায়, প্রতিবাদ চায়,
প্রতিকার চায়, বিপ্লব চায়।
সবাই চুপ কেন? কথা বলছেন কেন?
আমি জানি না।

কলকাতা আজ অসহায়, সে ভেঙে
পড়েছে, তাকে চেনা যায় না।
কার হাত ধরে সে উঠে
দাঁড়াবে? কোন পথে
গেলে সে ফিরে
পাবে, খুঁজে পাবে
পুরোনো কলকাতা?

বাঁশিওয়ালার কাছে কোনো তথাকথিত
'ম্যানিফেস্টো' নেই, তার পেটে হয়তো
খাবারও নেই, কিন্তু আমাদের চেয়ে অনেক
বেশি স্বপ্ন তার চোখে, সে বাঁচতে চায়, সে
বলে "হাল ছেড়ো না বন্ধু বরং কণ্ঠ ছাড়ো
জোরে, দেখা হবে তোমায় আমায় অন্য
গানের ভোরে!"। অনন্ত গ্রীষ্মের পর সে
বৃষ্টির আশ্বাস দেয়, মান-হুঁশ হারা মানুষ
কে, মানুষ করে তোলায় প্রতিশ্রুতি দেয়।
সে সফল হবে কিনা জানি না, পরিবর্তন
বে কিনা জানিনা, শুধু এটুকু জানি, আমি
রাস্তায় নেমে চিৎকার করে বলতে পারি —

মানুষ থেকেই মানুষ
আসে, বিরুদ্ধতার
ভিড় বাড়ায়, আমরা
মানুষ, তোমরা
মানুষ, তফাত শুধু
শিরদাঁড়ায়।”

প্রিয়াংশু চ্যাটার্জী
১০ - এফ
প্রধান সম্পাদক



कागज़ के फूल

मेरे लिए वह दिन कुछ खास नहीं था। हर एक दिन की तरह पलक झपकते ही आसमान से तारे गायब हो गए थे और मैं अपना ठेला लेकर, यह लोग कुछ तो बोलते हैं - हाँ! "बेगुनविला"! उस पेड़ के सामने जाकर खड़ा हो गया। मुझे नहीं लगा कि उस दिन, अवनी बाबू ' पूजा बोनस ' पाकर उल्लसित हुए। लगा

जैसे, वह आज फिर अपनी पत्नी के साथ प्रीत के कुछ कड़वे पल बिताकर, उनके बेटे के लिए "बुढ़िया के बाल" खरीदने आए थे। ऐसा भी तो नहीं लगा कि छोटे बाबू देव को गणित में थोड़े ज्यादा अंक मिल गए हो। उनका मुँह भी बिगड़ा हुआ था। पर, "बुढ़िया के बाल" से कोई क्यों समझौता करें?

और पंडित हरीश जी में भी तो कोई बदलाव न नज़र आया! वे भी रोज की तरह, चोरी-छिपे, अपने 'नाती' को, बेटा-बहु की नज़र से बचाकर, स्वादिष्ट मीठी पकवान खिलाते ले आए थे। इन लोगों की बातों से पता चला कि आज 'महापंचमी' है। दुर्गा पूजा के उज्वलपन का पहला दिन! पर मेरे लिए वह दिन कुछ खास नहीं था।

वरन् , इन दैनंदिन चेहरों से भिन्न, एक नया, आभा-प्रभा से जगमग, प्रफुल्लित मुख देखकर मुझमें एक नया उत्साह जग उठा। बोली, "भैया! आज आसमान से यह गुलाबी बादल तुम्हारे ठेले पर क्यों उतर आए हैं? मुझे इन बादलों को छूना है।" और हाथ में मोल लेकर तैयार खड़ी थी। टॉफी मिलते ही, बरखा-व्याकुल मोर की भाँति, वह खुशी से झूम उठी। मैंने उससे पूछा, "तुम्हारा नाम क्या है, गुड़िया?" उस दिन से मिनी रोज मेरे ठेले पर आती। कभी कैंडी लेती, कभी नहीं। जिस दिन अवनी बाबू तक नहीं आए, या मैं छोटे बाबू की एकटक बाट जोहता रहा, मिनी के लिए मुझे राह न ताकना पड़ा।

एक दिन, मिनी दूर से दौड़ कर आई और मुझे मुट्ठी भर कुछ कागज़ के फूल पकड़ा दिए। बोली, "भैया, मैं ओरिगामी कॉम्पिटिशन में फर्स्ट आई हूँ। स्कूल में मुझे बोला गया कि तुम्हारी यह कला बड़ों को जाकर देना। मैं आपके पास चली आई।" मेरे पास शब्द नहीं थे। "धन्यवाद, बेटा।" मैं यह बोलकर उन फूलों को अपने ठेले पर सजा दिया।

फिर, एक दिन, अचानक, मिनी के इंतज़ार में एक चुप्पी-सी छा गई। वो नहीं आई। मेरा दिन बेरंग-सा लगने लगा। तीन साल पूर्व, महामारी ने मुझसे मेरी 'मिनी' छीन ली थी। मेरी बेटा भी मेरे गुलाबी बादलों से समझौता कर, नभ के बादलों को छूने चली गई थी।

मुझे अभी भी वह दिन याद है। मिनी को फूल बड़े पसंद थे। एक ऐसे ही दिवाली के दिन, 'मिनी' घर से बाहर आई और मेरे ठेले पर आकर बैठ गई। पता नहीं किससे उसे कुछ कागज़ के फूल मिले, पर उसी में था वो 'कोरोना' वायरस जिसने मेरी मिनी को मुझसे कहीं दूर भेज दिया। वह कभी इस मिनी के कागज़ के फूल न देख सकी। यह मिनी भी शायद मुझसे बहुत दूर चली गई। जीवन से मैंने बहुत कुछ सीखा है पर यह कभी न जान पाया कि सब मुझसे दूर आखिर क्यों चले जाते हैं।

आज विजयादशमी है। मैं ठेला उठाने ही वाला था कि मिनी दौड़ कर आई, "भैया, कुछ गुलाबी बादल! आज तो बड़ा अच्छा दिन है! मैं बहुत खुश हूँ!" पता नहीं क्यों, पर मेरा त्योंहार जैसे सार्थक बन गया। "कहाँ थी तुम, गुड़िया? इतने दिन कहाँ थी? मैंने सोचा कि तुम मुझे छोड़के चली गई थी.."

"भैया! आप चिंता क्यों करते हो? मैं तो आपकी मिनी ही हूँ!" दूर, ढाक-ढोल की आवाज़ गूँज रही थी। माँ के विसर्जन के लिए सब तैयार हो रहे थे। परन्तु, मैं ने निःस्तब्ध होकर अपने ठेले की ओर नज़रें घुमा ली। कोने में पड़े थे कुछ सुंदर, कागज़ के फूल।

देवर्ष सी. ठाकुर, १० - ई
संपादक



THOUGHTS SOMEWHERE ONLY WE KNOW

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
Priyanshu Chatterjee. X-F

Self Conflict

“Come, my friends,
'T is not too late to seek a newer world.
Push off, and sitting well in order smite
The sounding furrows;
for my purpose holds
To sail beyond the sunset, and the baths
Of all the western stars, until I die.
It may be that the gulfs will wash us down: It
may be we shall touch the Happy Isles,
And see the great Achilles, whom we knew.
Tho' much is taken, much abides; and tho'
We are not now that strength
which in old days
Moved earth and heaven,
that which we are, we are;
One equal temper of heroic hearts,
Made weak by time and fate,
but strong in will
To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.”

Ulysses by Lord Tennyson

As I sit down to write the editorial, I ask myself a question, a question that seemingly has a very mundane answer. This question can be perhaps answered by anyone, an answer that doesn't require much intelligence or thought, to be given out loud and clear.

The question is
“What is Independence?”

As for the answer, I'd rather expend some thoughts. For I sincerely believe that the simplest explanation, that one might consider is perhaps one of the many ways to look at it, and hence take into account the fact that – Great minds do think alike but fools seldom differ.

After seventy – seven long years of poverty, partition, struggle, resilience and finally rising from the ashes – a discordant note still hangs heavy in the air, the unfulfilled promise of true independence.

True independence calls for a journey on which one self-realizes... We all have two lives, the second one starts when we realize that we only have one.

Independence of the mind paves the way to true national independence, in a society that cherishes truly liberated and illuminated citizens, forming a self-sufficient system is the rock of a self-reliant nation. Society gets benefitted when one is not an imposer to others' ideas and is free to introduce them until they do not have to worry about them. Only such a cultural milieu can sustain the free exchange of ideas, where everyone must feel confident about their unconventional ideas and be fearless of rejection. Unique, varied, and original ideas result from this freedom that idealists talk about. By nurturing independent minds, a nation not only fortifies its democratic foundations but also ensures that its people are equipped to navigate the complexities of an ever-evolving global landscape, thereby achieving genuine and sustainable independence.



*How many roads must a man walk down
Before you call him a man?
How many seas must a white dove sail
Before she sleeps in the sand?
Yes, and how many times must the cannonballs fly
Before they're forever banned?
The answer, my friend, is blowin' in the wind
The answer is blowin' in the wind...*

In an era illuminated by science and interconnected by technology, it sounds rather unfathomable that the spectre of religious conflict still looms over a considerable proportion of the human race. These fault lines standing as insurmountable barriers across towns, cities, and countries have led to and continue to spiral out of control and endless conflicts that make little or no sense and only serve to erase every reasonable definition of life.

The wars (fought, won and lost) that exanguinate Mother Earth's pious lands, must stop. For a gun against a gun, it never stops the war and only the dead see the end of it. A true religion breeds tolerance, fosters love for all beings, and echoes the language of peace, that aligns with the deepest aspirations of humanity. It is a faith that keeps hope alive, a beacon in the darkest of nights. Until we rediscover this essence, and until we dare to challenge those who pervert it for their ends, the spectre of religious conflict will continue to haunt us.

As peace and not war, has the ultimate victory, as the clash of arms is replaced by the whisper of hearts; it is only then that we shall speak of having true independence.

Conflicts like malignant growths prevent the manifestation of real independence which is the stage of being when the human spirit flutters free from the chains of fear, oppression, and inequality. Nevertheless, the cure of this malaise may be found in not the political realm or the locus of power, but in the otherworldly space of art

The art of expression is the origin of revolutions, the transformation of societies, and the future of a better world. To think is to question, to challenge, to imagine. And it is through this critical lens that art emerges as a potent force for change.

One pen can perhaps help us achieve the India that we dream of, the India that resides somewhere only we know. For a pen against a gun is what can stop a war, books are what can bring about revolutions, and words are what can cut deeper than swords.

*And if you have a minute,
why don't we go
Talk about it somewhere
only we know.
This could be the end of
everything*

*So why don't we go
somewhere only we know?*

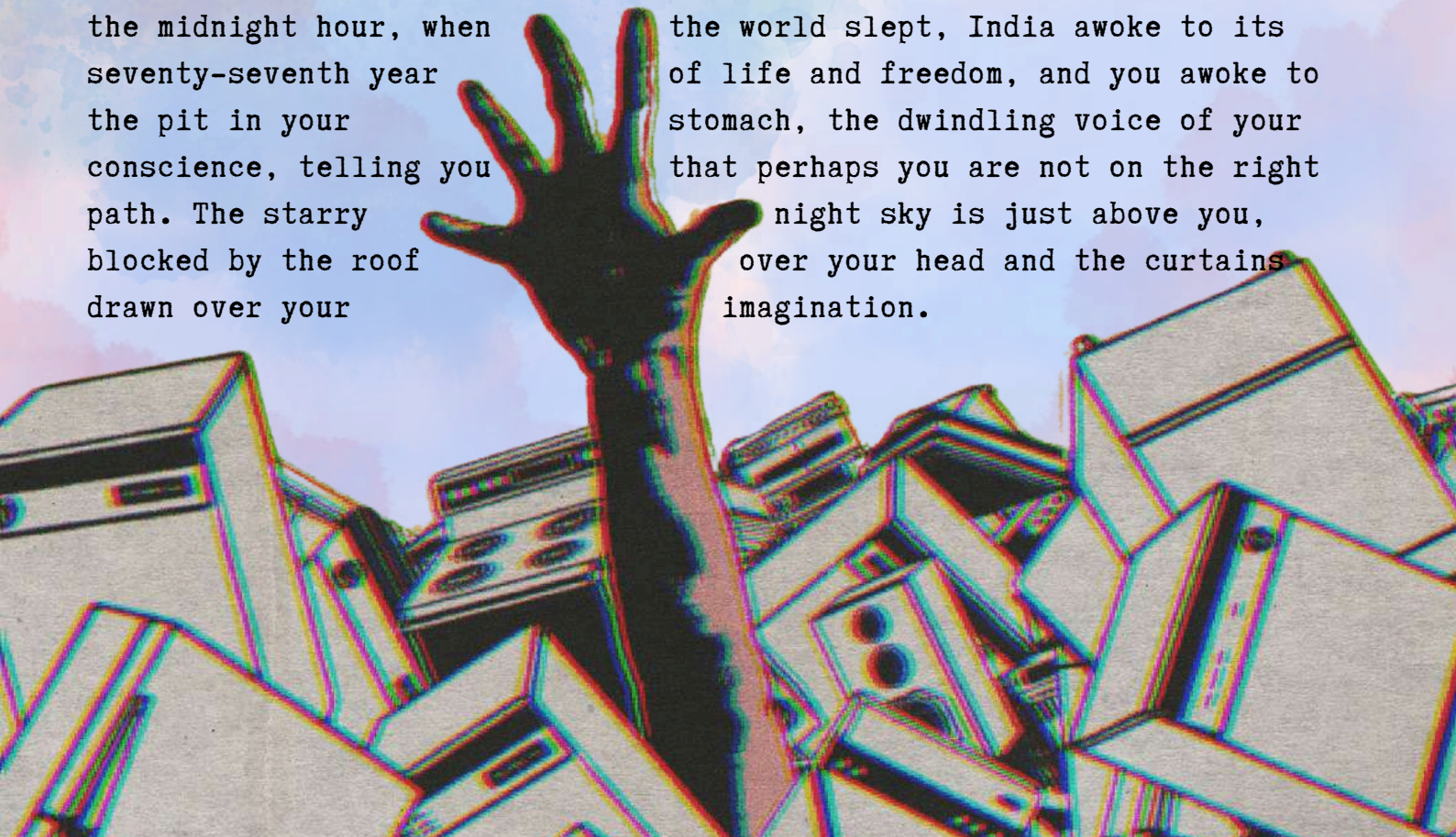


*To the boy enslaved
by his independence,*

*With love,
Calcutta*

Echoes of the patriotic songs reverberate throughout the school premises and the streets all around. The crease between everyone's eyebrows reflects their impatience. You sit in one secluded corner, beneath the shade of the tri-coloured tents, shielded by your classmates and their tired shadows. The faint light of the screen that persists even after you drag down the brightness, sparkles in your eyes. Every minute you press the volume down button again, lower the brightness once more. They are already at the minimal level, but you do it again and again, a reassurance that you will get away with this, and a reaffirmation that you don't need to feel guilty. The cadence of your feet tapping the carpet-clad ground synchronises with the thumping of your heart, but your hand has its own pace. A slower rhythm flows through your thumb as you slide it across the screen every fifteen seconds. The device is the final addition to the orchestra that plays the symphony of your life.

Plays and marches begin. They display our freedom struggle and the lives lost in its wake. This thought is a banal fact to you. It holds no gravity in your heart because it rarely crosses your mind. You spent hours contemplating the perfect scheme. On the eve of your motherland's Independence Day, you stayed up late pondering how you would sneak in, the device that shackles you with its invisible chains. At the stroke of the midnight hour, when the world slept, India awoke to its seventy-seventh year of life and freedom, and you awoke to the pit in your stomach, the dwindling voice of your conscience, telling you that perhaps you are not on the right path. The starry night sky is just above you, blocked by the roof over your head and the curtains drawn over your imagination.



As a child, you used to walk on the tiled path to the bus, your head hung low with concentration. You declared the yellow tiles molten lava and stepped on the pink ones with grace. Now you pace down the path, your head still hangs low, but not as low as your self-esteem. You are disconcerted without the device, it haunts you when it's in your hands and plagues you when it isn't. On the bus, you pick the seat farthest from your teacher and right beside the window. On your right, the world passes by you through transparent window panes with a million tiny scratches, but you are unaware, you believe the world to be at your fingertips. After a while, you take the device out and slip it into your pocket. Periodically your hands trace your pockets, assuring yourself of its presence. It is your closest companion. The brevity of its lifespan does not bother you because you know the device has infinite clones, you could simply buy another. It is your closest paid companion.

Saffron, white, and green flash before your eyes on the device. You do not care to look up at the same colours in front of you. You have developed a fear of blinking, a fear that in that fraction of a second, something on the screen could go unnoticed by you. But you are fearless in reality. You have never been afraid of your surroundings. In your bubble of oblivion, you are carefree. At any given moment, you solely wonder about what is on your screen, you do not need to worry about the next reel you see or the next app you open. These actions have become purely automated. When the yellow tiles after years of being molten lava, when you stopped jumping over broken drains and skipping through broken dreams, when the clouds your favourite ceased resembling cotton candy and the clear blue sky became only a thing to photograph, you became a prisoner. A chained prisoner in a free land, watching the Independence Day celebrations.



When the flag is hoisted, you are forced to rise. With great effort and willpower, you rise for the occasion. It is a rare occasion for a barrier to exist between you and the device. You put the device back into your pocket and place your hand carefully to cover it. The song you have heard since your finger-painting days starts to echo all around you. You cannot bring yourself to enunciate the words. The only thought you are aware of is what your pocket holds, what you hold so dearly. Years after people have stopped being friends and started being followers, you look around at the familiar faces of the spectators. Years after the sky had become just an aesthetic scene that helps you hound likes, you look up at the bird flying in it. Its wings flap past the white, fluffy clouds, you feel brave enough to close your eyes and be present.

When your eyelids are granted respite, they cover your eyes with exhaust. And, when they rise again, your eyes form droplets of water threatening to descend your cheeks. You can wipe away the half-formed tears from the precipice of your eyes. You can choose to look up, or you can adorn yourself with the invisible chains again because you are independent to do so.

With love,
Calcutta



Ritwija Sarkar, X-H
Editor

WORD SEARCH:

Words can be found in any direction (including diagonals) and can overlap each other. Use the word bank given below:

S Z F J P A R V K R F K P J I
O L R C R Y M O N O T U A N K
F G A I W E C G F P V A G J U
O O T T X M E F R N H I D E P
K J E A B J X H C K E K C Q G
R C R R V V X H R R M I O Z Z
A Q N C C P E A E A T S G M I
L Q I O N I H V R S X A N G S
U Q T M V C O T U I C U E E U
C J Y E H S Y J I S W A R A J
E Z N D P R S O C I A L I S T
S H W N A R E P U B L I C H S
C N O I T A R E B I L S J U R
P T A U H Z F Z O F E Q I H P
X X Z Z Y T I L A U Q E Q A Q

WORD BANK:

Sovereign

Martyr

Liberation

Swaraj

Secular

Equality

Justice

Socialist

Democratic

Charkha

Republic

Autonomy



PHOSPHENES

the sheen of light that you see when you close your eyes and press your hands on them.

sarcas!Zmatic

WITH PRIYANGSHU CHATTERJEE - EDITOR IN CHIEF

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LANGUAGE MEETS LAUGHTER ENGLISH VINGLIṢṬ

Source: @the.language.nerds

To err is human,
to forgive is divine,
to refuse is decline,
too salt is saline,
to moo is bovine,
to bleat is ovine,
to oink is porcine,
to howl is lupine,
to bark is canine,
to purr is feline.

When the English tongue we speak, Why is "Break" not rhymed with "Freak"? Will you tell me why it's true we say "Sew" but likewise "Few"; And the maker of a verse cannot rhyme his "Horse" with "Worse"? "Beard" sounds not the same as "Heard"; "Cord" is different from "Word"; cow is "Cow", but low is "Cow"; "Shoe" is never rhymed with "Foe". Think of "Hose" and "Dose" and "Cose"; And think of "Goose" and yet of "Choose". Think of "Comb" and "Tomb" and "Bomb"; "Doll" and "Roll" and "Home" and "Some", And since "Pay" is rhymed with "Say", Why not "Paid" with "Said", I pray? "We have "Blood" and "Food" and "Good"; Mould" is not pronounced like "Could". Wherefore "Done" but "Gone" and "lone"? Is there any reason known? And, in short, it seems to me - sounds and letters disagree.



The Hungry Tide, Swades, and Devi
REVIEWED

by Anushka Chakraborti, Ritwija Sarkar



THE HUNGRY TIDE

★★★★

“Beauty is nothing but the start of terror we can hardly bear, and we adore it because of the serene scorn it could kill us with...”. This is an apt description for “The Hungry Tide” by Amitav Ghosh which portrays the terrifying beauty of the Sunderbans in a lyrical approach.

The words vividly illustrate the raw allure of the tide country wherein the reader can sense the sheer thrill Piya feels on first spotting the Irrawaddy dolphins and the unspoken bond between her and Fokir that is communicated only through the primordial language of expressions.

The story intricately weaves subtle metaphors of love through the unsettled landscape of stormy Sunderbans and attaches the poems of Rilke with the folk concepts of Dukhey and Bonbibi with startling clarity. Diving deep into the resettlement at Morichjhapi, the hushed communist revolution of Kolkata and the devastating history of Lusibari and its surrounding islands, Amitav Ghosh composes a story that touches every part of Sunderbans while retaining its ruminative character on diverse topics from the ancient past to the hazy present.

Anushka Chakraborti, X - 6
Editor

EDITORS' PICKS

The Color of Paradise - Majid Majidi

Independence - Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni

Grave of the Fireflies - Isao Takahata

The Namesake - Jhumpa Lahiri

Midnight's Children - Salman Rushdie

Tiner Talowar - Utpal Dutt

SWADES ★★

Yeh jo des hai tera, swades hai tera, tujhe hai pukara

“Electricity!” exclaims the woman, her face laden with wrinkles and disbelief. The source of this energy is none other than the stream around which she grew old.

The man behind her smile is, Mohan, portrayed by Shah Rukh Khan who works at NASA. On his parents’ death anniversary, he longs to meet his childhood caregiver, Kaveriamma. When he reaches the remote village of Charanpur, his attention is drawn to its plight. “Will you buy a cup of water?” asks a boy of about 6 years, at the railway station.

Tearing up, he is adamant to mend the electricity crisis. He boards the departing flight but is plagued by flashbacks of India back at NASA. So, he falls back into his motherland’s arms forever. The film is more than another patriotic preacher. It gives us an awakening jolt to not rely on our cultural heritage as an excuse to retard development. Progress and tradition can go hand in hand. While the film seems utopian, its inspiration was the story of a real NRI couple. Emotions coalesce when the title track plays. Coupled with the evocative soundtrack by A.R. Rahman, it serves as a reminder that we are not mere residents of India but also its nurturers.

Ritwija Sarkar, XI - 6
Editor



DEVI

I a m h e r

The opening shot of *Devi* (Satyajit Ray) is pitch-perfect in its execution, as it starts with a pair of kohl-lined eyes that pierce through the screen, gradually replacing the blank visage of a clay idol of Goddess Durga with bold, painted features. It sets the tone for a gripping narrative which displays the gradual deification of the 17 year old scared girl into a sacred goddess expected to perform impossible miracles. This film is believed to be Ray's first work that directly challenges orthodox ideology and is overtly political in its message. The camera directs us inward – portraying the closed worldview of Doyamoyee's cruel world while turning the focus on the human gaze itself. It is a clear portrait of a society's power to deify and dehumanize, create and destroy. The two ways of perception clash in the film in an accurate reflection of modern society, where a young girl is placed on a literal pedestal and swarmed by incense-wielding priests and supplicants. The terror of this revered figure, her frightened, tear-streaked face deters no one. After all, it is only her symbol who is truly worshipped, not the human being who resides within it.

The ideological division between the devotee Kalikinkar and coldly logical Umapasrad is indicative of a renaissance transition of Indian history. *Devi* holds up a palimpsest that scatters the ideas of new and old, of progress and failure. Through the fearful eyes of Doyamoyee, the warring ideologies of divine certainties and empirical fact meet, but Ray offers a third option, the freedom that lies in recognising the truth of art. The crux of the film's message lies in the unsure denial of self-knowledge, a gaping void that neither religion nor rationalism can fill. *Devi* builds on all these cemented facades of the cult of the Goddess. The last shot of the film ends with the simplicity of tragedy - a bejeweled Doya, her eyes crazed with grief, runs out from her room and is swallowed up by the void of the mist. Satyajit Ray ends this masterpiece of brutal truth and vicious cynicism with the stark truth of a woman's anguished hope.

Welcome Wordsmiths

Putting one word after another, until it is done.

*It is that easy.
It is that hard.*

**tale -
tellers**

AHANA DE
SHRIDATRI GIRI



A Day Off

As I walked into my sun kissed living room after a long school day, dropping my bag on the floor, I plopped onto the couch. Although exhausted, a sense of relief washed over me as I remembered that I had a day off the next day— Independence Day. Automatically my hand reached for the remote and I turned on the television. Flipping through the channels, I paused as a familiar face flashed on screen. It was my neighbor Mukti Kapoor, a lady whom I had admired for the better part of my life; one of the most educated, respected, and enlightened women I had ever met. A well-known personality, acknowledged for her fiery, passionate speeches and her work that ignited the flames of freedom and fairness, irrespective of every societal division. We lived on the same floor and I have been a witness of her rise to her current status and her numerous achievements over the years. It was therefore, nothing but expected to see her giving one of her enriching talks on some of the pertinent issues that still engulfed our nation on the eve of the seventy-seventh Independence Day.

As I remained glued to the screen watching her speech gradually unfold, a muffled, stifled sob distracted me. Another suppressed sob roused me from the couch. As I opened my front door and peeked outside, I noticed a girl sitting on the common stairway with her head buried in her hands, sobbing convulsively. When she raised her head to wipe her tears, I realized she was one of the house helps who worked on our floor. I couldn't help but feel a sense of pity pass over me. I walked over to her, softly tapping her shoulder and she jerked back, surprised, unsuspecting of anyone else's presence, her eyes red and swollen from all the crying. I asked her what was wrong, careful not to scare her any more than she already was. Initially taken aback, she gradually composed herself and recounted a tale I can only describe as dumbfounding.

Lakshmi; her soft voice quivering with fear of the horrific brutality she faced at the hands of her employer for merely one request; a human right— a day off on Independence Day. And as she spoke, I slowly came to notice those dark bruises, almost invisible on her brown skin. She narrated of the numerous other cruelties she faced; the emotionally scarring verbal abuse she was subjected to. Here was a girl, and as I came to realize, not much older than I was, who had been shackled by the very chains we had sworn to destroy the day we got our independence.

Lakshmi suddenly looked at the window by the stairs and realizing that the sun had almost set, she exclaimed that she must rush back to prepare dinner. Even though I tried to reassure her that she would get her independence and justice, having already made up my mind to speak to Ms. Mukti Kapoor that very night, she couldn't be completely convinced. Yet, thanking me she headed back to her cage. As I watched her walk back, my heart sank. She entered the apartment which displayed the nameplate- M. Kapoor. I could not wrap my head around what I just saw. I had always been an avid admirer and supporter of her and often found myself boasting to my friends about the privilege of being her neighbor. Someone who was the epitome of confidence, grace and respect. Yet as I remembered Lakshmi's tear-streaked face; all my respect and admiration crumbled to dust. Her eyes didn't lie and neither did those bruises. I realized that I had left my television switched on. Mukti Kapoor was just concluding her speech. As her words rang in my ears, they felt hollow, empty, bereft of any real feeling. My famous and respectable neighbor's now seemed nothing short of a passionate, ardent and fervent speeches well-rehearsed play before an audience. That's all it was. There was no truth in her words. I could no longer ignore the stark disparity between character and her actions behind the revered public portrayal of her closed doors. I realized how blind I had been, how blind we had all been to the superficiality of it all.

The Hypocrisy of Independence stared me in the face.



Ahana De, XI - Z
Editor

NOT A PUPPET ANYMORE

My life was laid out for me—
Daughter, student, sister,
wife, mother.
It was the circle of life; it
was all planned out for
my ease
I merely had to walk the
charted territory.
But I'm not a puppet
anymore.

I learnt and formed my
own worldviews,
Learnt to work free the
strings I was bound to.
Knowledge is only
acceptable till it matches
their initial purpose, but,
I'm not a puppet
anymore.

Dancing to the setlist I
didn't have a glance
over,
Steps were the souls of
traditions, none of them
were mine;
I could not understand
the music, I had formed
my own language
And although I was
expected to, I never did
—
Because I'm not a
puppet anymore.

The future seemed so close,
just a few more moments of
dancing to the beat,
Till I run free to the
crowds and cry in
newfound glee.
I can finally voice my
thoughts, like my mother
always wanted me to
Because I'm not made of
wood and strings, I'm flesh
and bones.
I'm a human,
I'm not a puppet anymore.

But they broke me down and
tore me apart;
Infantilized and belittled the
achievements of my life
They tried to snap my wings
and shorten the span of time I
spent outside—
But I'm not a puppet anymore.

My spine is strong, and over
the years it has grown
And I am not afraid of being
called a reckless fool by the
rulebook fools.
My life is my own, and
nobody can own it
I am not afraid to speak out, I
am not afraid to go down
Because I can be whoever I
want to be—
Because I am not carved out to
fulfil someone else's fantasy;
Because I broke out and lived
my life freely.

After all, I'm a human being.
I cannot be a puppet anymore;
I wasn't meant to be.

एक दिन अचानक

पूर्व पर्व में....

लेखक पड़ोस के रास के मेले में अपनी माँ को लेकर जाते हैं। वहाँ जाकर सहस्र दुकानों के बीच एक उनका ध्यान आकृष्ट करता है - जिसमें एक नौ या दस वर्षीय लड़की असाधारण चित्र-कृतियाँ रच रही थी। जब लेखक उससे चित्र बनवा रहे थे, अचानक, एक भयानक हादसा हुआ। मेले का एक चरखी-झूला दुकानों पर आ गिरा। लेखक सहायता करने हेतु उस लड़की की ओर गए पर वे हैरान थे।

मैं यह देखकर हैरान था कि वह लड़की बेहोश थी पर जब मेरी नज़र उसके हाथों की ओर गई, मैंने नज़रें घुमा ली। उसके हाथ उसके देह से विच्छिन्न होकर पड़ी थी।

जो लोग उसी से अपने चित्र बनवा रहे थे, वही लोग मेले के प्रांगण से कुछ कोस दूर जाकर कह रहे थे, "कितना भयानक हादसा है न! हे भगवान!" पर इस छोटी बच्ची को देखने तक कोई नहीं आया।

मैं जल्दबाजी में उसको अस्पताल लेकर गया। सरकारी अस्पताल था, तो लोग कहने लगे, "इस बच्ची का हाथ बचाना बहुत मुश्किल है। हम ज़रूर पूरी कोशिश करेंगे। आप निश्चित होकर वहाँ बैठ जाइए।" डॉक्टर के आने तक बहुत खून बह चुका था। पर, फिर भी जो डॉक्टर आए, वे इस लड़की की चिकित्सा करने को राज़ी न थे। आखिर में, एक कंपाउंडर आया, उसने कहा, "इसका हाथ ऐम्प्यूटेट करना पड़ेगा।

नया हाथ लगाना ज़्यादा मुश्किल नहीं। अभी एक डॉक्टर को बुला रहा हूँ।" डॉक्टर के आने के पश्चात् चिकित्सा द्रुत गति से हुई। ऑपरेशन समाप्त होने के ठीक बाद, एवं बाहर की लाल बत्ती बुझते ही, एक राहत-सी मिली।

कुछ दिनों तक वह लड़की बेहोश रही। इस सब के बीच मेरी माँ मेरे साथ थी। पर मेरी नज़र, एकटक उस लड़की पर थी। क्या है उसका नाम? इस उम्र में यह काम क्यों करती थी? घर कहाँ है उसका? अनगिनत सवाल थे। मैं रोज़ एकबार अस्पताल आता और उसके तबियत के बारे में पूछताछ करता।

फिर एक दिन, अचानक, उसे होश आया। मैं फूला न समा रहा था। उससे मिलने गया। वह मुझे जैसे बहुत सालों के बाद पहचानने की कोशिश कर रही थी

फिर, मुझे परिचय देने की ज़रूरत नहीं हुई। वह बोली, "दादा, एक बार फिर तस्वीर बनाऊँ?" मैं उसके नए, तकनीकी हाथ की ओर देखा।



"मंदिर, मस्जिद, चर्च के फसाद में फँसकर रह गया,
इंसान बनकर आया था, धर्म बनकर रह गया।"

उसके ठीक होने के बाद भी, मैं रोज़ अस्पताल जाता, उससे बातें करता पर कभी उसका नाम ही पता नहीं चला। एक दिन पूछ लिया। "नाज़नीन। मेरा नाम नाज़नीन है। कुरआन के मुताबिक..."

उसके लफ़्ज़ धुंधले-से पड़ गए। एक अकस्मात् 'सामाजिक', मानवमात्र की आवाज़ मेरे मन में गूँज उठी। शायद इसलिए, क्योंकि उसका नाम 'नाज़नीन' था, पता नहीं।

नहीं, पता है। यह इस कारण ही था कि उसका नाम नाज़नीन है।

अगर उसका नाम गीता, सीता या दुर्गा होता, तब क्या मुझे यह झिझक होती? क्या मुझे यह आवाज़ सुनाई देता?

क्या मुझे नाज़नीन की मदद नहीं करनी चाहिए थी? समाज कहता है, "नहीं।" क्या एक शय्याग्रस्त, बेसहारा मरीज़ के साथ यह मीठी, अविरल बातचीत मुझे जारी रखनी चाहिए? जात-पात कहता है, "नहीं।" क्या मुझे एक भिन्न धर्म के व्यक्ति के साथ यह निस्वार्थ, मधुर, निष्कलंक संबंध बनाए रखनी चाहिए? तथाकथित धर्म कहता है, "नहीं।"

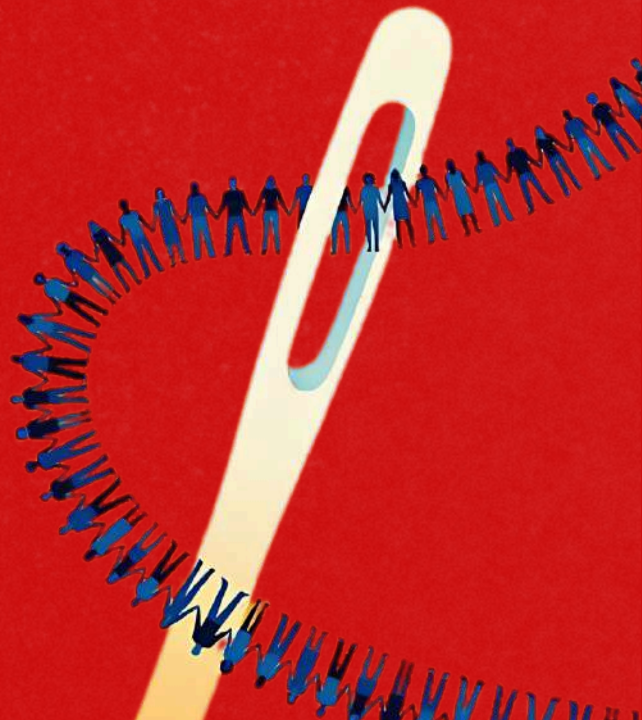
परंतु क्या मुझे एक इंसान का साथ निभाना चाहिए? इंसानियत कहती है, "अवश्य!"

यह सिर्फ़ नाज़नीन की कहानी नहीं, आपके पड़ोस में रहने वाले इकबाल, स्कूल में तीन बेंच दूर बैठने वाली वाहिदा, चर्च में जाने वाले क्रिस्टोफर, वाहे गुरु के भक्त सिकंदर, अथवा किसी जैन, पारसी, या आपके स्वयं के ईमाम या धर्मवाद के कुछ लोगों की भी कहानी है।

खुदा क्या जाने? शायद ऐसी कई नाज़नीन आज भी उनके दरवाज़े पर एक दस्तक के इंतज़ार में हैं.. क्या आप वह मुसाफिर बनेंगे जो इनके दरवाज़े पर सिर्फ़ एक दस्तक देकर, समाज की बात न सुनकर, मुड़ नहीं जाएंगे?

आज़ादी मिलें हमें सतत्तर साल हो गए। पर क्या हम सच में बंधनों से मुक्त हैं?

देवर्ष सी. ठाकुर, १०- ई
संपादक



ESSENTIAL ENVIRONMENT

*In the bosom of the plowland sleeps the Promise of the Wheat;
With the ice for head-and-footstone, and a snowy shroud outspread
In the frost-locked tomb of winter sleeps the Miracle of Bread.
With its hundred thousand reapers and its hundred thousand men
- The Promise of Bread , C L Edson*

So says the farmer, as he wakes up with the first rays of the sun, hurrying to take care of his precious seedlings. In the golden hour of dawn, these crops are the tangible proof of his year-long toil. Yet he rarely, if ever, enjoys the fruits of his labour. Does he ever listen for the soothing symphony of the silver bullets that batter his field, without thinking of how much his saplings need? Does he ever sink his feet in muddy water and pull out the weeds, without thinking of how much his harvest would have been damaged? The quintessential Indian farmer, struggling to provide two square meals for his children but forever slogging in the fields to shore up their futures. Most farmers in rural India never receive the full or even partial support of the government schemes made for their benefit. A huge population of these bereft countrymen live hand to mouth and work for long hard months without any guarantee of a successful harvest. Many still gaze on in despair as each monsoon inundates their crop, flooding fields and poisoning the soil. The muggy gritty Indian summers wither the fresh harvest and are usually accompanied by swarms of locusts and other pests who waste no time in thoroughly devouring their favourite food. However, just as every dark cloud has a silver lining, India had the Green Revolution. The Green Revolution (1967-1978) revolutionised Indian agriculture. Its founder M.S Swaminathan brought Norman Borlaug's wide-ranging work with HYV seeds to India. He introduced mechanized farm tools, irrigation facilities, pesticides, and fertilizers. The long-lasting impact of this movement can still be seen in the highly developed and well-irrigated fields of Punjab, Haryana and Uttar Pradesh. Though it spread around the country, its impact was significantly smaller in the coastal states. This revolution, closely followed by the White Revolution, completely changed the dairy and agricultural practices in India for the better. Despite India's rapid progress from the dark days of famines and droughts in the colonial and post-independence period to the innovative and technology-driven practices of modern India, it still has a long way to go in alleviating the century-old struggles of the Indian farmer. We can all help along the way in the little ways that matter, by spreading the message and helping whenever wherever we can in the tiny villages that dot rustic landscapes, truly honouring the spirit of rural India.



Anushka Chakraborti, X - L
Editor

রেজাল্ট

পনেরোই আগস্ট ২০২৪, আজ তার আটাওরে পা, যদিও এখন আর্থারাইটিসের কিঞ্চিৎ ব্যথা বোধ করেন তিনি, তাই আটাত্তরে পা দিতে কিছুটা কষ্ট হলেও, ছোটবেলার মনের জোর এক্কেবারে ম্লান হয়ে যায়নি। আজ তার রেজাল্ট, প্রতি বছরই বের হয়, এই একই দিনে। আমরা যেমন মাধ্যমিক - উচ্চমাধ্যমিক - স্নাতক - স্নাতকোত্তরের গণ্ডি পেরিয়ে, জিরোতে পারি, তার সে অবকাশ নেই। তাকে রোজ পরীক্ষা দিতে হয়, কোন কোন বছর, পরীক্ষা দিয়ে অতুলনীয় নম্বর পেয়ে পাশ করেছেন, কোন কোন বছর পেয়েছেন একটু কম, কিন্তু ফেল করেননি আজও।

পাড়ার লোকে সবাই বলতো - "লক্ষীছাড়া"! এক্কেবারে মিথ্যে বলতো না, স্থির, দৃষ্ট, মেধাবী হলেও - জন্ম থেকেই সে অবাধ্য। সারা দুপুর কাঠ ফাটা রোদ্দুরে, মেয়েকে খোঁজার পর, সূর্য ডুবু-ডুবু হলে, বাপ মা জানতে পারতো - কোন এক পেয়ারা গাছে উঠেছিল সাহস করে, তাড়াছড়ো করে নামতে গিয়ে, ডান হাত মচকে - ব্যথায় যন্ত্রনায়, এখন নদীর পারে বসে সে অনর্গল অশ্রুপাত করছে।

শাসন করলে চিল চিৎকার করতো, ক্ষনিকের নিস্তব্ধতা ছেয়ে যেত, কিছু পরেই ছুটে পালিয়ে যেত বাড়ি থেকে, রাতের আগে আর ফিরতো না! সবাই বলতো - "প্রতিবাদী"! এক্কেবারে মিথ্যে বলতো না।

চার দেওয়াল বাড়ি তাকে স্বপ্ন দেখতে দিতো না, তাকে প্রতিবাদ করতে দিতো না, তাকে চিৎকার করতে দিতো না। দীর্ঘদিন দমিয়ে রেখে, মুখে কাপড় বেঁধে, চোখে পট্টি পরিয়ে, তাকে উপযুক্ত নারী করে তোলার চেষ্টা করেছে সেই ঘর, সেই বাপ মা, সেই সমাজ - কিন্তু শেষ রক্ষা হলো না! একদিন ঝপ-ঝপ সন্ধ্যে নেমে এলো, পিচ - রাস্তার মতো কালো আকাশে, মেঘ ডাকলো, সেও চিৎকার করলো, সেদিন সে কোনো অন্যায করেনি, অকারণ শাসন সে আর মানবে না! হাতের সামনে খসড়া কাগজ টুকু নিয়ে সে ছুটে বেরিয়ে গেলো বাড়ি থেকে, বাম বাম বৃষ্টিতে যেন হাড় অবধি ভিজে যায়। সে ছুটলো, দিকভ্রান্ত হয়ে দিগন্তের দিকে, সে ছুটে গেলো! কাগজের নোকো বানিয়ে, ভাসিয়ে দিলো বৃষ্টির জলে। আর ফিরলো না।

তারপর তার নতুন ঠিকানা। সেই ঠিকানা থেকেই, ভোরের ডাকে একশো চল্লিশ কোটি মানুষের কাছে পৌঁছয় স্বাধীনতা আর ভালোবাসার টেলিগ্রাম, সেখানে সে লিখেছিল - কিছু সময়ের অপেক্ষা, তারপরই স্বাধীনতা। লিখেছিল, "স্বাধীনতা তুমি ফসলের মাঠে কৃষকের হাসি, অন্ধকারের খাঁ-খাঁ সীমান্তে মুক্তিসেনার চোখের ঝিলিক, তরণ মেধাবী শিক্ষার্থীর ঝলসানি-লাগা সতেজ ভাষণ, পতাকা-শোভিত শ্লোগান মুখের ঝাঁঝালো মিছিল।

জীবনের দুপুরবেলায়, এক চিলতে রোদ আর এক সংখ্যা নবারণ হাতে, সে আজ বসে আছে, সে অপেক্ষারত, আজ তার রেজাল্ট।
সে ভারতবর্ষ, আজ তার জন্মদিন...

এই মৃত্যু উপত্যকা আমার দেশ না!
এই জল্পাদের উল্লাসমঞ্চ আমার দেশ না!
এই বিস্তীর্ণ শ্মশান আমার দেশ না!
এই রক্তমাত কসাইখানা আমার দেশ না!

প্রিয়াংশু চ্যাটার্জী
প্রধান সম্পাদক



S LSTICE

