

MÉLANGE

**Abish
Mathew:
“It is the
journey to
find the
voice - the
voice
itself!”**

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***The Arundhathi
Subramaniam
Interview on
Navigating Life
through Poetry***



Preface

Welcome to *Mélange*, a literary magazine crafted by the Mass Media students of Kishinchand Chellaram College. *Mélange* stands as a home ground for storytellers, a place where diverse voices come together to share their unique narratives. Our mission is to create a platform that unites and elevates a spectrum of ideas, stories, and perspectives, providing a rich tapestry of editorial penmanship and visually captivating designs.

In an age where every story matters, *Mélange* is dedicated to offering an inclusive space where both emerging and established voices can put forth their thought process. We believe in the power of storytelling to bridge gaps, foster understanding, and spark conversations that inform, educate and inspire people. Each edition of *Mélange* is carefully curated to reflect the vibrant and multifaceted nature of human experience, ensuring that every voice finds its place within our pages.

At the heart of *Mélange* is a commitment to nurture creativity and give out the freedom of expression. We invite you to explore the myriad of narratives presented here, to be moved by the artistry and authenticity of our contributors, and to join us in celebrating the boundless potential of storytelling. Let *Mélange* be your gateway to discovering newer ideas and exploring unheard tales of this wide and vivid world.

In this endeavour, we are eternally grateful to Prof. (Dr.) Hemlata K. Bagla [Vice-Chancellor of HSNC University], Prof. (Dr.) Tejasree Shanbhag [Principal of K. C. College], Prof. (Dr.) Shalini R. Sinha [Vice Principal & Head of the Mass Media Department] and Surya Gune [Convenor of Knot]. Thank you for providing your endless support and empowering our every pursuit!

Editor's Note

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the fourth edition of *Mélange*!

One of the significant threads that binds and drives the human race is our collective and diverse expression and infusion of emotions. It has this distinct ability to capture the universal appeal and the personal intricacies at the same time. This coming together of finite and infinite possibilities made 'Emotions' the perfect theme of our biggest edition yet, which delves deep into unravelling the fascinating layers of what flows within our heart, mind and body.

Much like the cover of cloth that rests on our skin, emotions act as the essential fabric of our lives that help us present and nurture our truest sense of self. By our little smiles, tears, silences and fears, we share a part of ourselves with the world and take the musical composition forward. It's truly moving how quietly this connection and imagery travels through the human fields and continues to hold a pivotal space where even the slight absence of it will create a complete sight of dread.

Emotions are the ingredients that add flavour to every palette, whether it's life, experiences, media or this world. Whether we talk about finding one's lost self or dissecting those many faces of grief in cinema, we will somehow come back to the same piece in the puzzle that decides everything. And it's not an unfortunate situation because, without its presence, I cannot fathom how one would cherish the joy of watching India win the World Cup or be able to empathise with the masked suffering of another person. It's hard to swallow the fact of how empty our lives would be!

However, the world has and will survive because there seems to be no end to the magical spell of this visceral feeling called love. Through all the flings, flames and fair share of heartbreaks and rebounds, it has managed to loom large over this generation as well. The amount of pieces regarding the same rather dramatically highlights: "Mohabbat Zindabad Thi, Mohabbat Zindabad Hai aur Mohabbat Zindabad Rahegi!" Thankfully, it has become easier to express this feeling with the advent of emojis, which perfectly capture and portray the depth of what one has to say (or do they?).

For this edition, we were grateful to interview Abish Mathew and Arundhathi Subramanium and get their valuable insight on how emotions play a key role in the life of an artist. It was truly an honour to hear their perspectives on questions related to art, life, and society, which will definitely help aspiring artists carve their own journey.

With over thirty contributors, we have explored the wide tapestry of intrinsic rush together and churn out unique perspectives. The sheer range of submissions by the students from our department assisted us in building this beautiful assortment and division, featuring articles, photographs, letters, short stories and poetry. Alongside, we are pleased to feature a poem from Subhajit Sanpui, a dear senior and passed-out graduate from our department, who is revered as a poet by the pen name "Qaasid".

We are absolutely thrilled to offer this extensive collection of pieces covering such varied genres. As you turn every page and move ahead, we hope this ride inspires, nourishes, overwhelms and gushes you with those countless emotions that keep oiling and running the wheel of this age-old human factory.

Warm Regards,
Raj Darji,
Editor-in-chief, *Mélange*

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Designed by Janhavi Potdar & Raj Darji

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Visuals by Rishita Agarwal



Can I have some context, please!

By Ishita Limkar

Our reality is so absurdly real and unreal at the same time. This article is essentially the conclusion I have reached after lots of overthinking. Now, you think about it for a second. You exist in a world that seemingly appeared out of nowhere. Isn't it magical, yet somehow a bit terrifying to think about it? I recently fell down a wormhole, trying to figure out what the world truly is all about. Needless to say, there was no definitive answer. However, I did come across an incredible article about our world potentially being a simulation by WIRED (not sponsored, for obvious reasons). I had a good laugh and felt a bit lighter after reading it, but it got me thinking about how life really is.

Life began with the Big Bang when one point blasted out and stretched to form our universe. At least, that's what we believe in or have theorised. We might never know the truth, and in all likelihood, no one ever will. But that raises the question, or rather the pondering, "What exactly are we?" This is being said in the context of our curious state about the universe, not the confusion you are facing with your situationship.

We exist because of what? Is it science? Is it luck? Is it religion? Is it magic? We will never know. Ever since we were born, we have been taught about religion and God, how they created the whole world and the universe, and how they are omnipotent and omnipresent beings who are always looking after us. And in the process of learning about this in my formative years, one question always bugged me - "If God created the world and the universe, who created God?" She didn't exactly appear out of nowhere, did she? I am sorry if I have hurt any religious sentiments, but isn't it a genuine question? Anyway, I have been wondering about that for a very long time, and it has always held me back from fully committing to the idea of God. This curiosity about the origin of not only God but also the whole universe stayed with me, and I still carry it.

The homes we live in comprise a small part of the building, which is a small part of a locality, after which come cities, states, countries, continents, the Earth, the Solar System, the Milky Way galaxy, and so on, and the universe keeps on expanding further and further. We are such a tiny, minuscule spec, basically an atom in this universe. And I know what you might be thinking - "Is she going to go off on a nihilistic rant now?" No, most certainly not. {I believe anything could exist in this world. It could have parallel worlds, gods could exist, simulations might be real, and every single theory is on the

table. We have got our hands, but we will always have to fold, no matter the cards.}

I know, for a fact, that we will never know anything worth knowing about the universe. It would defeat its purpose. The only thing worth understanding from this entire article is the lightness of life. We are living in a world that shouldn't technically exist. Nothing should exist, as nothing ever did. We are all living in a world that was created from nothing. You would say that the small point expanded, but where did that small point even come from? Our lives are absurd; they are unimaginable; they shouldn't even really exist, yet they do. As I approach the end of the article, I want to assure you that I was not attempting to instigate an existential crisis in you. If this article did start a crisis in you, congratulations because you truly understand what life is now, and you are basically at the top of Maslow's pyramid at the moment, and if you didn't experience anything, then no harm, no foul, but damn, I am judging you.

All I am trying to say is that whenever you feel that the burden of life has fallen on your shoulders and you feel like there's nothing out there in the world, remember how magically and wonderfully absurd life truly is. It does not mean that your problems do not exist, because they do. The point is, that all these problems can be solved. Either there's a fixed solution or an abstract one where you change your perspective and attitude. We exist out of nothing, yet we feel, care, and see the world so deeply. We've created marvels out of it in the forms of knowledge, architecture, art, music, movies, science, cultures, and languages, and it's all so lovely how we still try to create something, anything that conveys 'human'.

We try to help one another whenever we can; we build societies and structures that hold us all together and try to survive in this world by doing whatever we can. {We indeed forget that we are living sometimes, especially in this social media-driven world where we are constantly trying to escape the world, but we try to live our lives the best we can.} We always try to find things that make us feel human, as we should. You exist purposefully because our existence is purposeful. And there is still so much more to create and more to discover in this wave of the universe we are riding on.

Welcome home, son!

By Yashvi Jain

It was the month of December, and when the whole world was swirling with unprecedented work, I was still. Life was happening to everyone but not to me. The world kept bustling while I spent my days in bed. I developed a chronic illness, and before figuring out what went wrong, I had to urgently look after it to ensure it did not go wrong. With great difficulty, I tried making my breakfast, boiling water, and cleaning the mess. I didn't ask for help because I was never taught to. "Do everything yourself," was something my mother used to say. Every new day turned greyer for me. I kept on losing energy, medicines never worked, and life was turning into shackles until, one day, everything changed forever. It was another grey day when I woke up in the morning to fetch a glass of water. While doing it, I fell! I went to bed again without water. Akin to climbing Mount Everest, I stretched my hands to my phone, lying at the bedside table. I plugged in the airpods and played '500 Miles' by The Brothers Four. I crumbled into tears and was unable to console myself, and that day, I realised there was no home afar waiting for me.

Nostalgia is a beautiful word. Hits almost everyone. It's sentimental and feels warm. But homesickness is an unpleasant, lamentable, and strange feeling. A melancholic cousin of nostalgia. It's a heartbreakingly sad feeling that takes you to your stomach and heart. It is the reason why you don't sleep, suffer from anxiety attacks, lose interest in everything, and feel like the most helpless person in this world. Though it was more than six months of living independently, that was the first day I grieved for home. I have fallen many times but have never been far away from home. The term 'homesickness' didn't look real to me until it started taking a toll physically. And it spurred more with the music. That was the day I understood the power of music, which was capable enough to stimulate the memories of home.

The Power of Music

Music has lingered deep in me, activating the feeling of homesickness more than anything else. Being an ardent fan of orchestral music, I have listened to symphonies where each note is a pure expression of homesickness. For instance, 'Missing Home' by Erikson Jayanto (Indonesian music). Over time, artists have adapted their ways to develop art out of it, and I still question why it is not considered a musical genre.

Home Strange Home

I am still thankful to Spotify Shuffle for introducing me to John Denver vaguely remember

the day I heard 'Take Me Home Country Roads,' but when I did, there was no going back. I listened to this song on a loop, and the chords struck my heart. So much so that I still play it every time I return home (a day that hardly comes in six months). And how could I forget? It was my caller tune for months because I wanted people to be reminded of home whenever they listened to it. But it took me days to realise it's not a popular opinion. Staying away from home never dwells on the longing for it until it moulds itself into homesickness. It is losing a fragment of it daily and finding it difficult to connect. I go home, and everything has already changed.

My garden is already blooming without me, and I am being replaced by my sibling to water it. My pup, 'Bambi,' who was three months old back then, has already failed to recognise me. There are no friends to meet at the meeting pool. Granny in the chair died in my absence. Everyone saw my eyes, only to realise that they would be gone soon. And then the chord of this music grasped me by the ear again.

"I hear her voice in the morning hour, she calls me
The radio reminds me of my home far away
Driving down the

road, I get a feeling
That I should have been home yesterday, yesterday"

500 Miles Away From Home

There are a lot of remakes of this song, but I have stayed true to the version by The Brothers Four, which was the greatest hit in 1963. Every Wednesday, it was sung in my school as a prayer. But back then, who knew that this repetitive chord was a folk song sung by desperate railway workers wanting to go home? But poor men, how would they go without any money?

"Lord, I'm one, Lord, I'm two
Lord, I'm three, Lord, I'm four
Lord, I'm 500 miles away from home"

Jamaica Farewell

On that account, 'Jamaica Farewell' by Henry Belafonte deserves a bow for being succinct in leaving something and never returning. When I heard -

"But I'm sad to say I'm on my way
Won't be back for many a day
My heart is down, my head is turning around
I had to leave a little girl in Kingston Town"

I was so sure that he would never meet that girl again. To me, saying farewell to Jamaica became tricky because of that little girl. And this taught me that home was always about people and never place. A place starts feeling more like home when there are people around whom you

can stay unfiltered. What am I in my homeland if there's no one there waiting for me to come? Hence, it's always people and never place!

Am I Obedient To Carolina, West Virginia, or Jamaica?

I belong to neither of these places. But still, the fact that songs like 'Carolina in My Mind', 'Take Me Home Country Roads,' or 'Jamaica Farewell' worked for me, all because they brought home in front of my eyes - my mother, sisters, brother, father, pup, my family, and my friends. I remember where this song came from: 'Leaving on a Jet Plane' which goes like this:

"All my bags are packed, I'm ready to go
I'm standing here outside your door
I hate to wake you up to say goodbye
But the dawn is breaking, it's early morn
The taxi's waiting, he's blowin' his horn
Already I'm so lonesome I could die"

Leaving on a jet plane makes me shed tears once in a while because Denver, in reality, died on a plane. The songs you listen to have already been tasted by those who sing them. They all just speak of one's love for the natural surroundings of their home. So yeah, you don't have to be Southern or Northern to be imbued with such songs.

Welcome Home, Son

This reality of going and never coming back makes me rush down memory lane. When I was eleven years old, I remember watching a Nikon commercial whose music struck into my ears, stirring something weird in me. It felt pleasing. I didn't have internet access back then, so it was good to stay in the memory of it. But one day, I received an email from a pen pal in Colombia with this song attached called 'Welcome Home, Son' by Radical Face.

And momentarily, I saw a gush of life moving in front of my eyes. From childhood to today, everything appeared as a montage. I guess I will never feel at home anywhere, but the idea of home will always be there for me. I always wanted to build a home on my own. Not a father's house. Not a man's house. Not a bungalow. Not an apartment. A house on my own. And this music by Radical Face always inspires me to believe that there is a home waiting for me, today and every day!

"Peel the scars off my back
I don't need them anymore
You can throw them out or keep them
in your mason jars
I've come home"



How to bring Parampara, Pratishtha & Anushasan in our lives?

By Jineeta Jain

Here's a fun fact: You can unlock your goals!

We all have ambitions and goals that we want to achieve in life, don't we? They largely take shape from the million thoughts that go through the human brain every day. However, do we act upon every single one of them? Not really. Still, these numerous thoughts sometimes overwhelm us and we find ourselves stuck in a never ending loop of overthinking. It is not only tiring and time consuming but also takes one away from the goal that requires their attention and this can be anything. Whether it's small or big, told or untold, it can be as simple as wanting to sit with our parents and talk about our day and as complicated as deciding what we want to do with our lives. Our goals can be long-term, like being financially independent, or short-term, like drinking eight glasses of water. In this article, I have tried to expand on some tips which might help you to stay focused and dedicated towards your goal!

1

Get clarity: This means making the goal imaginable. Think about what you want to achieve. Dig deeper and maintain tunnel vision as if the light at the end is your goal. For example, if you want to start saving money, ask yourself how much money you are spending on things which are not primarily needed. Calculate and make a list of the same so that you are well aware of your expenditure pattern and can very well control it.

2

Take baby steps: Breaking down the ultimate goal into smaller milestones can be a great way to approach and achieve it. This segmentation will allow you to keep moving forward with confidence and ultimately help you to cross the finishing line. For example, when you are learning a skill like 'Adobe Photoshop', start by spending time on the software and watching YouTube tutorials that guide you through the interface. Further, you can make use of this knowledge and try editing images that suit your imagination.

3

Know your strengths and limitations: It's important to identify your strengths and limitations. Observe yourself and get to know what helps you concentrate or what are the queues that cause distraction and trigger procrastination. Once you identify them, the next step is to figure out how you can avoid it. For example, music helps many people concentrate but for some it's sitting in a quite room.

4

Accountability: Talk about your targets with people so that you can get an accountability partner to whom you have to report at the end of the day. Inculcating this practice will help you make note of things that you have done to achieve your goal and tally your progress. This partner doesn't necessarily have to be another person. It can also be you asking yourself the same questions at the end of the day or journaling them.

5

Create an environment: According to Atomic Habits by James Clear, your brains always associate a place or a corner with something. For example, when I go to lie down on my bed, I always feel lethargic. That's because our brain is associated with being lazy or resting in your bed. To avoid this, try rearranging your room. If your goal seems quite unrealistic or unachievable, imagine yourself already achieving it and talking about it with your trusted ones as much as you can.

6

Use tricks to persuade your brain: Your subconscious mind can be easily persuaded. You need to learn a few tricks. If you want to develop the habit of reading a book repeatedly, remind yourself of the benefits of reading and how enjoyable it can be. Use positive affirmations instead of negative ones by focusing on what you can do in place of what you cannot. By anchoring your emotions, you can channelise your energy and body on working towards your goal.

7

Journaling: When journaling, it's not important to write extensively about everything, as it can be extremely overwhelming. So here's what I do: I ask myself questions such as "What is that one thing I got better at today?" This could be something as simple as giving a smile to someone I know or refraining from using curse words in front of friends. One of the best things to write in a journal is "things to do tomorrow". We all have tasks which we keep on holding off. Making a list of things to do tomorrow can be a great way to push yourselves in completing those tasks. For example, it has happened to me countless times when I was holding off writing this article because I thought that I wouldn't write one good enough. But then I started putting it on my to-do list and slowly step by step, I completed it, maybe not on time, but I did.

8

The 10-minute rule: The 10-minute rule involves spending 10 minutes researching your goal. For example, if your goal is to lose five kilograms, you can research or ask around to find out if others have achieved this goal and probably take important notes from their process. This helps your brain understand that your goal is achievable. Ask yourself what specific change or target point you want to reach. Understand whether you want to become fitter or lose belly fat? Then, spend at least 10 minutes a day researching exercises and learning the technique to perform them.

Always remember: All dreams and aspirations can be achieved through a series of attempts, persistence, perseverance, prudence, and focus. So, go ahead and make them come true!

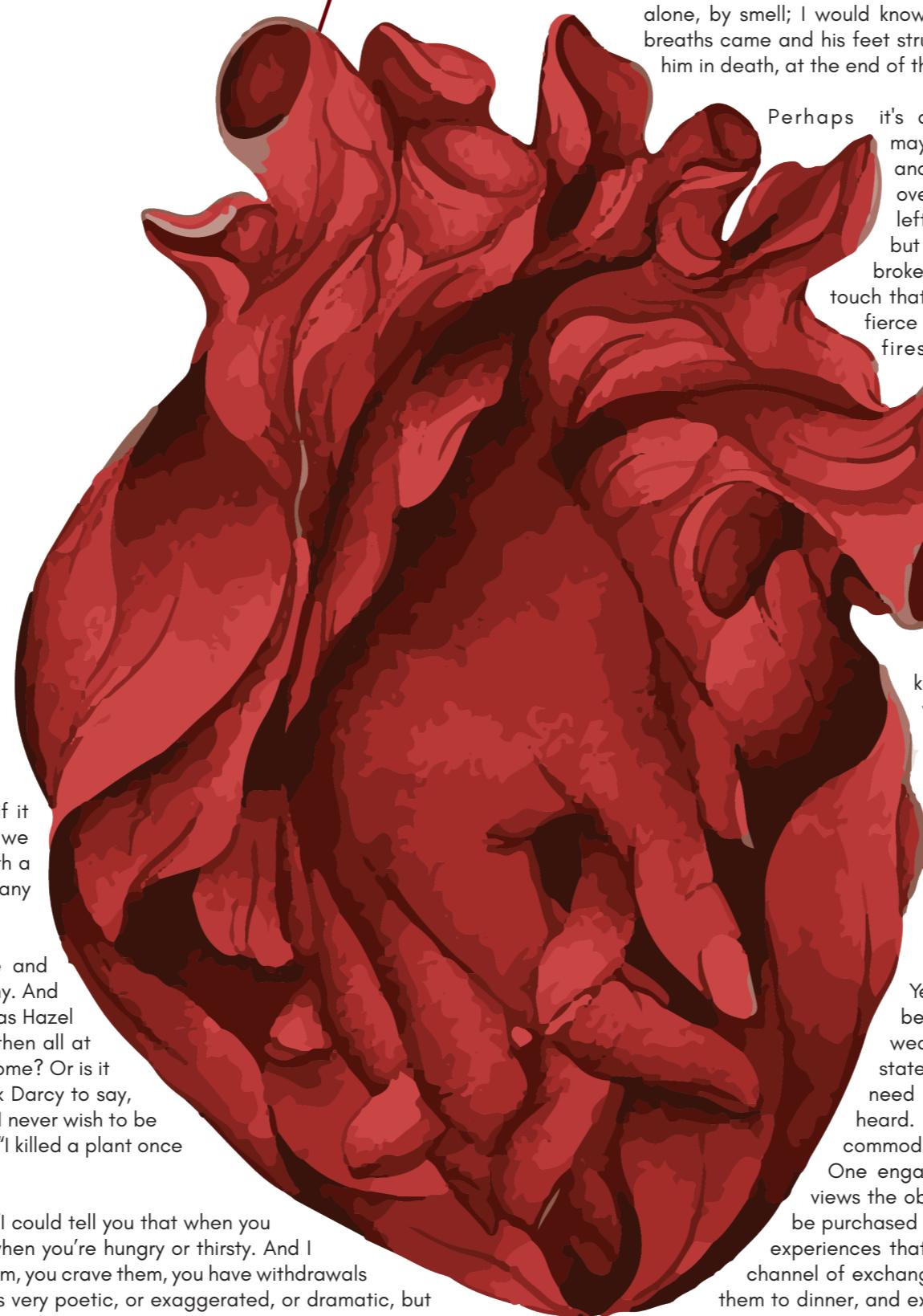
Anatomy of Love

By Arshita Peshen

Love. I wonder who was the first ever human to feel this emotion or if it exists beyond the boundaries of literature, species, and the world as we know it. What exactly was it that made them designate that feeling with a word? In the entirety of the human race, there perhaps exists just as many definitions for this four-letter word.

One could argue whether love really exists or if it is an elaborate and orchestrated scheme induced in our race merely to produce our progeny. And if it really does exist, is it the slow, inevitable fall into deep connection as Hazel described, "I fell in love with him the way you fall asleep. Slowly, and then all at once." Does it feel like a warm embrace after a long day, like coming home? Or is it an all-consuming feeling, the overwhelming enchantment that overtook Darcy to say, "You have bewitched me, body and soul. And I love... I love... I love you. I never wish to be parted from you from this day on." Or is it as José Olivarez described it, "I killed a plant once because I gave it too much water. Lord, I worry that love is violence."

Perhaps it's just a mere chemical reaction in our body like Grace said, "I could tell you that when you fall for someone, the bits of your brain that light up are the same as when you're hungry or thirsty. And I could tell you that when the person you love leaves you, you starve for them, you crave them, you have withdrawals from them, like an addict would from a drug. And I know this all sounds very poetic, or exaggerated, or dramatic, but it's not. Love is a science." Love might indeed be all of these things, a tapestry woven with threads of vulnerability, ecstasy, and sometimes pain.



Among all this, what's most striking is how beautiful and powerful love must be for it to become a constant to drive people to create art, music, and stories to pay tribute at its altar, transcending generations and generations. A means that led Nizar Qabbani to write, "My lover asks me: 'What is the difference between me and the sky?' The difference, my love, is that when you laugh, I forget about the sky." and Madeline Miller said, "I could recognize him by touch alone, by smell; I would know him blind, by the way his breaths came and his feet struck the earth. I would know him in death, at the end of the world."

Perhaps it's all of these, all at once; maybe it's feeling lost and found, cared for and overlooked, consumed and left aside, ripping you apart but also piecing together your broken shreds. It is the gentle touch that heals old wounds and the fierce passion that ignites new fires. Love is the paradox of needing someone desperately while cherishing your independence. It is the whisper of comfort in the darkest moments and the jubilant laughter that echoes through the brightest days. Love is both the anchor that keeps you grounded and the wings that let you soar. It is the vulnerability of opening your heart and the strength of mutual trust. It is the most profound journey, where the destination is not a place but a deeper understanding of ourselves and each other.

Yet, amidst this beauty, it can't be ignored how it's used as a weapon under this capitalist state to exploit the innate human need to be valued, seen, and heard. Capitalist romance is the commodification of this practice. One engaging in capitalist romance views the object of desire as a thing to be purchased by investing in material and experiences that one trades to initiate the channel of exchange. I buy them flowers, take them to dinner, and expect sexual gratification in return.

Two key aspects emerge here to distinguish capitalist romance. The transactional intention displaces the

intention toward veneration. A display of wealth displaces a display of devotion. In capitalist romance, it is no longer "I adore you" but rather "I can afford you." The internalisation of this system of valuation is what gives rise to what in capitalist society is called "practical love", an oxymoron if there ever was one—love, from a certain perspective, has no purpose and is rather an end in itself—where the wealth and financial security of a sexual object is considered the most important characteristic in determining whether it is worthwhile in acquiring.

Ultimately, love remains an enigmatic force. Despite its commercialisation, love's true power lies in its capacity to drive us toward connection, inspire profound acts of creativity, and compel us to seek deeper meaning in our relationships.

In a world that often seeks to monetise and rationalise every aspect of human existence, love defies such simplification. It persists as an elusive, multifaceted phenomenon, reminding us that the most profound experiences are often those which resist easy categorisation. Whether as an end in itself or a catalyst for artistic expression, it remains one of humanity's most enduring mysteries. Arguably stated best by Badiou: "Love is a risk, it ruins your life by changing your past and is only understood retroactively. It's not a list of pros/cons but a true act of freedom that opens the dimension of seeing from the other's perspective and wanting to give the other what you don't have and what you don't want. It is revolutionary and anti-capitalist."

SKULL, CLOWN AND PINK RIBBONS

By Gargi Paralkar

Having a conversation is like a dance. It should flow in a natural rhythm, smoothly, and without any awkward pauses. One wrong step, and you set yourself behind; one incorrect choice of words, and the talk takes a misconstrued turn. A graceful move, a sharp twist, or a quick spin tells a story without words.

Similarly, in a conversation, how do we articulate such emotions without underplaying or magnifying any feelings? All these vast ranges of emotions have varying degrees of intensity. Annoyed, how annoyed? Laughing—how hard? Happy! How much? How do I communicate exactly how I feel? Unfortunately, when it comes to our generation, doing that with words requires clarity of thought and effective communication, both of which have been thrown out of the window. But we do communicate, don't we? Yes, our vocabulary might not be the strongest, but emojis? Emojis, we certainly know.

When words fail, emojis save the day!

How often have you typed thank you and felt as though it lacked a certain character, a certain warmth? Your fingers hover above the keyboard as you wonder if it is a little cold, so you add a thumbs up at the end, and voila, what was first a flat text is now lively, like words that require a tone to set the correct mood for a conversation. A text coupled with an emoji makes the intent clear, leaving no room for any doubt or misunderstanding. Although it seems silly, an emoji in a text serves a very important function. A message without one can come across as oddly formal. It is a way of adding a human touch to the virtual world.

But today, emoji have been taken to another level. The shift from millennials to Zoomers marked a change in the way people express and interpret emojis. A dad will reply to a funny video with a laughing emoji. But their kids will respond to the same video with a crying one.

Many of the most widely used emojis have undergone creative interpretations, transforming their original meaning into entirely new ones. While millennials may use a heart emoji to show love, Gen Z might use a heart emoji sarcastically, suggesting a satirical 'no'.

The list is never-ending, and the lingo is ever-changing, but let's look at a few popular ones.

1.

Crying 

Once upon a time, to express strong emotions like sadness or frustration, it is now used to indicate when something is so funny that you cry laughing. Although, it does not involve any real tears.

"Who talks like that?"

2.

Thumbs up 

A classic one, widely used by the fathers of the world. Used to say 'message received' or 'appreciate', it is usually signalling approval. But Gen Z uses it sarcastically.

"Thanks for your help in the project 

3.

Clown 

If you get clown face emojis while messaging, you have likely said something foolish or absurd. When a person says something embarrassingly irrational or silly, a string of clown emojis is usually the right answer to go with.

"The earth is flat."

4.

Skull 

When people send skull emojis after a joke or comment, it means 'I'm dying with laughter!' or 'I can't even'. It's also used when a friend shares a shocking piece of information.

"The deadline is tomorrow."

5.

Moai face 

When something foolish is said, the  emoji is used, while the  emoji is used to express admiration. For example, you watch a video of a boy saving a cat, and you reply with a moai emoji.

"What a sportsman he is!"

6.

Pink Ribbons 

It's a symbol of beauty and glamour associated with femininity, used to indicate something cute or pretty or to embellish a text.

"This cat has the prettiest eyes."

7.



The infamous eye and lip emoji combination suggests feeling stunned or shocked. It's a playful and fun way to show awe, or when you are taken aback by the ridiculousness.

"She completed her assignment on time."

8.

Twinkling Stars 

These are not merely decorative stars added to a celebratory message but are also put next to a word for emphasis, mockery, or sarcasm.

"What a waste of time it was!"

It truly is fascinating how people get creative with emojis, adapting the meaning of icons with the kind of imagination usually associated with art and music. Give humans a bunch of symbols, and you get an amusing take on them.

The journey of emojis has been nothing short of an epic saga, transforming from simple emoticons into a vibrant language. Emojis have grown up alongside us, reflecting our changing world by bridging language barriers and making our conversation more dynamic and fun. So whether you are replying to a friend's silly remark or pondering over life's big questions, emojis have your back!

Many faces of Grief

By Yahvi Jain

For the longest time, melodrama was the only genre I was reminded of when I watched Bowood. After all, how can anyone make a way out of it? When I was young, I was made to watch every movie from Khan's era. When I grew older, I sat back in time and started watching films featuring Kapoor. No doubt, this period from the 1960s to the early 20s has evolved a lot. Love triangles have always been a hit, but the creators did an excellent job making movies on public issues. A lot of experiments, technologies, and fresh perspectives were infused into filmmaking. The intensity scale to measure grief was mere sound work, curves of eyebrows and character's wail. To me, it was just the shift from sacrificing the side of Nirupa Roy's fictional husband's death to the more dramatic side of Kajol's lovelorn life 'Kuch Kuch Hota Hai.' Everything between these shifts swayed from being dramatic to more campy.

What seemed like a phase of a socially conscious movie – the time when Raj Kapoor tried hand on direction – was turning into an unintentional parody. The emotions that came up with films were ill-treated because of this; the subject never worked. The focus was meant to be on issues, but stardom seized all the essence. For instance, Amar Prem wanted to show the presence of 'tawaif' culture in India. But what did it focus on? The bountiful love chemistry of Rajesh Khanna and Sharmila Tagore. What does it say? We tend to make films about the hero-heroine and not really about life.

Focusing and defocusing is a misunderstood concept. I realised it when I stopped watching the 'best movie of all time' and started exploring movies very few people talked about. When I started focusing on such films that captured emotions rather than moments, I discovered that, in this broad spectrum of emotions, death and grief hold a special place for me.

Movies are here to make you laugh, love, smile, hate, irritate, or cry. But those who make you cry will always be special.

Grief has been translated into different expressions and circumstances. In some movies, it went beyond showing mere melancholy, while in others, it turned cheerful. So let's walk down through the lane of cinema to know about the perspective of Bollywood on grief and its portrayal, and how the definition of grief has changed with understanding.

Grief into acceptance

When grief is tried to be buried, it blooms in the form of acceptance. Grief being grief, movies like 'October', '102 Not Out', and 'Anand' have shown acceptance in its truest form. In 'October', by Shoojit Sircar, Dan (Varun Dhawan) grapples with the deteriorating condition of Shiuli (Banita Sandhu) and keeps on living his life. It shows Dan's inner journey, which turns out quieter with every frame measuring the possibility of her death, and he keeps on doing his chores without being dramatic. In 'Anand', Anand (Rajesh Khanna) poignantly takes one through the journey of a person who has accepted his approaching

death and believes that every moment henceforth is a celebration. In '102 Not Out', 'Dattatraya' (Amitabh Bachan), after knowing that death is coming, aspires to his son Babulal (Rishi Kapoor) to celebrate his death and live many more years to break the record of the longest-living man.

All in all, these pictures have shown how grief is swallowed little by little without hindering the way one lives.

Grief into humour

An unexpected way to express grief, there are few Bollywood movies where the death of someone has given birth to a situational comedy or lighthearted atmosphere. In movies like 'Ram Prasad ki Tehervi', family members go through the stages of grief, i.e., denial, anger, depression, and acceptance. The film 'Karwaan' has poignantly portrayed the coping process slowly, where the characters take their time to realise what they have lost.

Grief into violence

Revenge coupled with grief is the best dish to serve on the plate! 'Badlapur' is a great example where the death of the beloved makes Raghav (Varun Dhawan) frenzy to kill people included in it. Another example is the movie 'Kaabil', where the death of the beloved turns the protagonist violent to seek revenge. Bollywood has a big list of movies based on revenge. To state a few: Sholay, Aakhree Raasta, Dewaar, etc. However, none of them sheds light on the protagonist's coping process, which lacks depth.

Grief into silence

Sometimes, the death of a beloved person is too much to handle, which turns into silence. One such movie is 'Kapoor and Sons', where the death of Harsh Kapoor (Rajat Kapoor) turns the movie frames into a big silent moment. One of the best movies to exemplify this expression is 'Masaan'. This movie shows two love stories where two of them each lose their loved ones. The aftermath follows the struggle to live without them, where silence between lines speaks louder than anything.

Grief into hope

When the sky looks much greyer, there is hope that can let a person stand and bear the storm. This expression would be incomplete to describe if not mentioned: 'The Sky Is Pink'. Inspired by a true story, this film shows the suffering of a family whose daughter suffers from chronic illnesses, and all the family can do is hope. Also, the effect of 'Jhaddo ki jhappi' to infuse hope in those who see death approaching and make them cheer up is what turns grief into hope. Yes, we are talking about 'Munna Bhai, M.B.B.S.'

Many shades of grief go from lighter to darker with every movie being made. That implies Bollywood has traversed a long way to focus on nuances on the lane. As a result, the list is mammoth-sized. Now, there are examples where grief turned into addiction, like 'Kabir Singh', and also when grief turned into courage, like 'Queen'. All in all, there are various ways to capture those shades, which the movie mentioned above brilliantly does. However, this journey is a long way to explore grief in all aspects. Ask how? Now, have you ever noticed the list of Hindi movies made to show palliative care—a thing that sways between life and death? Cinema is still a long way to go.



SAY HELLO TO THE NEW EMOTIONS IN THE TOWN!

By Divya Khapne

"A New eMotIOn..." Joy awkwardly nods as she sees a tinge of lime yellow covering the control board. "Hey, how does this little button work?" asks Curiosity while aggressively punching buttons through the whole row. Yeah, that is how I imagined the opening scene of this emotionally phenomenal animation's third instalment.

With Riley on her way to high school, it's just the age group that I have come out of. So I thought, well ! Why not share my perspective on something I have experienced in that phase of my life and see how it plays out?

Here are some emotions I would like to see in Inside Out:

Curiosity:

Being newly admitted to a high school, Riley is probably going to be exposed to new cultures, genders, and ideas. Imagine living in your cramped neighbourhood for almost your whole life and being suddenly thrust into this completely new place where people have different ways of doing or saying things. Naturally, she can't help but feel curious—she might need to channel her inner Sherlock to navigate this new world.

I can see Curiosity as a lime-yellow emotion with huge circular spectacles over its eyes.

Confusion:

Picking a major definitely takes the cake, being one of the most difficult things that you will experience in your twenties. Or it can be navigating relationships you have. Riley might find herself confused as she struggles to identify what she wants from a relationship. Additionally, she might struggle with aspects of her identity, including her gender identity.

Confusion will have multi-pattern-printed skin with his hair pointed in a '?'.

Guilt:

In your twenties, you make so many decisions spontaneously that they can inadvertently hurt your loved ones. At the moment, you might not feel anything, but later, a wave of guilt can flood in. We might witness Riley's occasional impulsiveness, and while sadness made her feel bad about leaving her parents in the first part, it's about time we got a separate emotion for it!

Guilt can be a grey-coloured emotion in a neutral shirt and trousers holding 4-5 piled-up suitcases.

Obsession:

Fortunately, boy bands are a thing in the Pixar universe (as if they haven't already gotten everything else right). And while we could see Riley being a fan of the Glow in Something band, I would really love to see some hints of the obsession that teen girls usually have with pop culture idols. The fascination has intensified with social media and the way you can now feel intimately close to a person without being at an inch's distance from them.

Obsession would be Envy's twin, except I would see her in complete black attire with two single points for eyes and messy hair like a bird's nest.

Sus:

Excuse my 'Among Us' vocabulary, but can we all agree that the newer the surroundings, the more suspicious we are towards them? Riley is highly likely to start questioning the course of things around her. She could develop trust issues (given that her best friends pretty much ditched her for a new high school) and be wary of letting someone in her circle again.

Sus will adorn a detective's outfit with black glasses holding a smoke pipe, perhaps.

Regret:

You have to have some amount of experience and awareness to feel regret, and the twenties are THE age for it. Maybe Riley could regret the choices she made in terms of her career or something as trivial as a new flavour of ice cream she ordered, but it tasted very bland. Regret could help her learn from her past mistakes and thus grow as a person.

Regret, as an emotion, would have muted shades of blue and black with a downturned smile and eye bags.

Love:

If the filmmakers are considering introducing a love interest for Riley, part three could be an ideal opportunity. With a variety of emotions already introduced in the second instalment, it would be interesting to see how they react to her feeling affection for a person. I can imagine Disgust dropping an 'ew' every now and then while joy is bursting with excitement.

I feel Barbie pink would be the perfect colour for Love, along with foot-length hair and heart-shaped eyeballs.

Ambition:

This seems like a far-reach (pun intended), but seeing Riley's competitive side in this movie definitely hints towards her being an ambitious kid. I mean, most teens are. Also, her being part of the best hockey team, 'The Fire Hawks,' would further fuel her to better herself. I feel ambition would play a role in Riley setting mental goals and working hard to achieve them.

Ambition as an emotion would be tall, wearing a red and royal blue-striped T-shirt, and carrying a cane.

All these emotions, from curiosity to love, will add layers of complexity to Riley's personality. It might get a bit crowded in her brain too. Either way, Inside Out will continue to be close to the young audience's heart for its depth and universal themes.

I cannot wait to see what the makers have in store for us in Part 3!



Aanewala Pal, Jaanewala Hai

By Raj Darji

As the college re-opened in June and I entered the premises, I could feel the air had changed. It's been over two years since I have been travelling to this place almost every day. Naturally, I have grown fairly accustomed to and comfortable with the environment. Looking back at this period, I wonder cheerfully and recall moments that will live with me - some very memorable and some jarringly embarrassing. Even if you have gotten to know me a little, I am sure you can precisely guess which end of the paddle weighs more over here. Regardless, as I walked the stairs of our campus, there remained a sense of emptiness with regard to the time that just went in front of my eyes, and I saw the canteen was closed. Indeed, what a symbolic start to the last year of college!

Though I was a student at Kishinchand Chellaram College in my junior year as well, I was scared of stepping into the under-graduation phase. It was not only a new campus but also a proper beginning of full-fledged college life, which in our batch case got postponed by two years due to the pandemic. If somebody ever asks me to share the core memory of my junior college life, I can only recount taking offline HSC Board Exams after studying for almost the entire two years online. Consequently, I ended up scoring rather poor marks in my 12th standard. So, carrying the baggage of disappointment and lost social skills, I met Ishan (Ishu boi) Nair on the first day of degree college. While I was nervous and sitting on the edge of my seat, he was pretty assured and laid back in a giant auditorium filled with unknown faces. He had kept an image of Al Pacino on his wallpaper, which probably became the starting point of our conversation.

To describe my first year, I would say it was a quiet one where I restricted myself from getting involved in supposed unnecessary activities like joining clubs or participating in fests. I attended almost all the lectures and focused on doing assignments with a constant group of amazing people, featuring Saachi, Nidhi, Krishna, Ananya, Sanjana, Sunnypriya and Joy. We worked on some interesting ideas together and did well in executing almost all of them. However, it would be best if you confirm with them whether they had a fun-good time working on them, and to be precise, tolerating me (and my rigid deadlines and wish to present every assignment before everyone else).

From this bunch, there are two people I would specifically like to emphasise a bit upon. First of all, Saachi - a very hardworking, fun and dedicated person - who I believe should officially join the financial advisory committee of the college. The other person is Joy - who was the official actor in my unreleased short film - but he just never showed up on sets. I will not say you shouldn't expect anything from him, but it is always better if you expect the unexpected. Also, I would like to give a shout-out to Sneh sir, who made attendance compulsory and forced everyone to attend college in the first year. Though it was not always the most pleasant experience, there were days when we did not get the bigger classroom, and almost a hundred students had to accommodate themselves in a room which could hardly fit half of them. Nonetheless, it was fun attending his lectures and doing his unique assignments.

Contrary to the first year, I got more involved in doing extra-curricular activities in the second year. Not only did I participate and attend other college fests, but I also became part of an unfortunate club, which was sadly a very uncooperative society. And what helped me understand this difference is when 'Knot' was formed, and I became a part of this beautiful family. This experience was a good

litmus test through which I got a clear sight of what a red and green flag means in real life. Through 'Knot' I got the chance to become part of 'Mélange' as an editor, and it would be too narcissistic of me to delve further into this story. But, I would like to thank Delara (the OG Editor-in-chief), Janhavi (the troubled-tortured Design Head), Anushka (the over-enthusiastic Editorial Head) and the entire Mélange team [excluding Payal:] for believing in me and working on my declaration of creating a sixty-page magazine.

Through these fests and club activities, I got to know more about Neel (Not VCP Operations), Harsh Dua (Not VCP Curations), Nikhil (Not Chairperson) and Harsh Jain (Knot VCP Events). The common link which brought all of us extremely close together was 'Blitzkrieg' - the only college fest I genuinely love and did wholeheartedly for the past two years. I felt really welcomed in the team and was blessed to work with some amazing HODs - Mehek, Meghna, Zainab, Advait, Samriddhi, Delara and Sahil. I met the three A's - Advait, Atharva (how Aadi) and Attarv - some of the finest seniors alongside almost the entire last year's batch, which was just too wholesome and overly excited about reasonably unreasonable stuff. Unlike junior college, I would say I have created some of my core memories by participating in 'Blitzkrieg'. But now, it is maybe time to look beyond.

In around January–February, I (Not VCP Organisations or Outreach or Content) remember having tons of conversations with the group mentioned earlier regarding how we will handle 'Knot' and organise 'Blitzkrieg' even better by actually bringing twenty to twenty-five colleges on the ground and extending the festival for four days. We had planned the entire thing - who will be the core, what departments will come under each of them, and who will be the respective heads of each department. We had taken the wise words of Gaurav Patil, Ex-chairperson & forever CEO of Grandeur, extremely seriously, "Ideate karne ka kaam khatam hogaya hai. Abb execute karne ka time hai."

CUT TO:

In May, Harsh Dua and I were regularly interacting on online meets - we were working on starting a podcast, which did not come into flourishing. Our conversations segwayed into topics I talked about before, but the enthusiasm was certainly restrained. Of course, we were working on our individual plans for our desired departments, i.e. 'Mélange' and 'Spotlight'. Still, it never outweighed the realisation that we are reaching the end of the tunnel and soon will be exposed to the real world. It was time for us to face the fact that we were ill-equipped to hold our ground while climbing the mountain we gauge. Yet, the good part about it remains that we at least found our mountain.

This article has entered its concluding phase, much like our college life. But before it ends, I would like to take a moment and thank all the faculty members and support staff for their guidance and help throughout the course. Finally, to my friends and batchmates, let us collectively have a good time and wrap this chapter of life on a peaceful note. As this article comes to an end, my Spotify shuffle has started playing the song 'Aanewala Pal Janewala Hai'.

**“आनेवाला पल, जानेवाला है,
हो सके तो इस में, ज़िंदगी बिता दो,
पल जो ये जानेवाला है ।”**



“It is the journey to find the voice - the voice itself!”

The Abish Mathew Interview



Abish Mathew is a celebrated and beloved personality when it comes to comedy in India. He began his career as Radio Jockey and slowly rose to fame with his stand-up sets and sketch videos, especially with 'All India Bakchod (AIB)'. With a unique style that blends observational comedy with personal anecdotes, he has performed extensively across India and internationally. The same wit and humour can be observed in his much-appreciated talk show 'Son of Abish' and acclaimed stand-up special 'Whoop' on Amazon Prime Video. Alongside, there is hardly anyone who can forget his affectionate enthusiasm and zeal as the fabulous host of 'Comicstaan.'

We are grateful to Abish Mathew for giving us his precious time to conduct this interview online. It was delightful to hear him share his years of experience and profound knowledge in his most humorously charming way!

It is great to see you back on stage again. I am assuming there must be a significant change when you step on stage now compared to your first or early performances. Could you please shed some light on it?

Comedians, like musicians and artists, refine their craft through practice - Riyaaz. Open mics are their rehearsal grounds, allowing them to test material and connect with audiences.

While creating a full stand-up show can be daunting, the pressure to produce a "masterpiece" can hinder creativity. Embracing the process, enjoying the journey, and consistent performance are key to developing a strong act.

So, you don't need to make it perfect. You just need to have fun doing it so often that without you realising, it becomes practice.

You have approached comedy through multiple mediums, such as stand-up, sketch videos, hosting reality comedy shows and conducting talk shows. How do you tweak and adapt your writing process to make it fit the requirements of each medium?

My music teacher back in school used to say, "Find your style", "Don't try to ape someone". Comedians before us used to say - find your voice in comedy!

Adaptability is about skill, but the true search is finding your style, finding your voice, finding your USP, and finding your uniqueness that makes you stand out. And I believe you might never find your voice, but it is the journey to find the voice - the voice itself!

You adapt and learn with each show and each year. It is not about the most viral video or the most sold-out show. It is more about creating something that 2030 Abish looks back at 2024 Abish and is proud.

Do you believe it's important for comedians or any artist to keep their art in check with the moral compass of society? Have you ever faced a similar dilemma?

Someone introduced me to this concept of "Art Versus Art by Committee." Art is self-expression. Art is unhinged. It is the liberty a human mind and soul should explore to achieve a flow state. On the other hand, art by committee is when an

idea is crafted by different people's empathies. So, the final product that goes out is more collaborative & sensitized. "we want to tell this" - as opposed to - "we are helping you tell this."

In art by committee, you create something that sits well with a collective empathy.

Now, to answer your question in specific, my art is music & stand-up, where I would love to explore everything. However, when it comes to Son of Abish, a talk show that I have done nine seasons of, by collaborating with more talented writers is an example of art by committee.

Do you feel the comedy-viewing audience has evolved greatly in the past decade? Does the factor of audience play a role in what kind of material you write?

Back in 2008, Stand-up comedy in Delhi started small, with limited venues and audiences. Word-of-mouth grew the scene, leading to more venues, comedians, and eventually a wider audience through the internet. This increased exposure fueled the evolution of stand-up comedy in India & the more audiences started coming in, the more we started evolving.

Early days in stand-up for me was raw and unfiltered. Our thoughts would have been unfettered, completely raw, impolite and at times rude.

However, as audiences grew, comedians learned to refine their material based on audience feedback. We started becoming more, "Oh, maybe I haven't looked at it from that perspective."

This forgiving yet ruthless hit-and-trial dynamic between the comedian and the audience made it more alluring to return to Open Mics. We had our writing partner in our audience.

The internet has expanded our audience globally, making us more aware of public perception. This feedback helps us refine our craft and authentically connect with those who resonate with our work.

As far as the audience evolution is concerned, I think we both have co-evolved. With the rise of the internet, the entire world has become the audience. This exposure has made comedians more aware of their impact and has forced us to refine our acts.

Art is extremely subjective, and it stands equally true with comedy because there are several factors involved in a performance or a sketch comedy video. So, how do you go about assessing your work, especially stand-up sets and punchlines?

Stand-up is a 3-step process, You have an original thought, you communicate it to the audience in the funniest manner, you rehearse your performance and make it funnier for the next show.

There is no other way to know if a joke will work or not with confidence, regardless of how many years you have done it.

Audience laughter is the ultimate validation for stand-up, reflecting genuine emotional response. Unlike scripted formats, stand-up relies solely on audience feedback.

Collaborative content creation is akin to a basketball game.

Each team member contributes, refining the idea until it reaches its final form. This collective process ensures quality and audience appeal.

It's like playing any sport. Like basketball, where you have an idea, and as soon as you pass it to somebody else, they find a new way to get into the basket. This collective process takes time but ensures quality and that the audience is on your side. This is good because - "three other people, I like, have said this is good!" - that's awesome validation.

How tiring is it to constantly live under the expectation of people to be funny almost every time and everywhere?

Initially, when you start doing anything, you are doing it for the joy. Then, as soon as enough people start seeing it, you become conscious. People's validation becomes an extremely important part and the people who liked you for who you were begin to leave because they are like, "Oh, we don't know this new thing we are not getting." It's not wrong. It's a part of evolution. Like the pendulum, it will swing back to finding your own authentic voice.

That's how it was for me after many years. I am a joyful person, and I want to create joy around, off stage and on stage. A question, long ago, I had posed to myself: "If God comes and gives you a choice that you can either be funny on stage or off stage, what will you choose?"

When I asked my friends this, they said, "Oh, definitely funny on stage because I enjoy that."

On the contrary, since the beginning when I posed this question to myself, I would any day take being funny and joyful off stage rather than on stage because when I am funny and joyful off stage, my family, my nephews, my friends, and everyone's having a great time.

It's because if you are a joyful person, it translates everywhere, and that's where I am right now, trying to find joy in this conversation and all the work I do. For me, it becomes easy since if you are not finding joy in the work you do, whatever you are doing, it will become a little laborious to get into a long-term commitment. So, it's just you finding your joy.

You have greatly and rightfully emphasised the need for people to seek therapy, especially at a time when the conversations around mental health were at a very nascent stage. Only if you are comfortable, could you please elaborate on what was the driving factor that pushed you to make this appeal?

People often ask about therapy and whether it's a personal question. What you discuss with your therapist is personal, but the act of going to therapy should be as impersonal as visiting a physician, a physiotherapist, or even just going for a regular checkup. Reflecting on my journey with therapy, I have always been open to experiencing new conversations and new things. My profession relies heavily on how deeply I can dig into myself, and as we age, priorities shift, and we all accumulate a stack of unresolved issues, whether from school, college, or other stages of life.

If I have to live with myself for so long, how do I make a good friend out of myself? And if I am struggling, who do I talk to? It's too much pressure to only talk to friends, as they have

your best intentions at heart. Family and friends are your first line of defence when you are struggling, but you need to be open to seeking help from the closest people in your life. When I took my concerns to a professional, it opened up my mind to the realization that I wasn't alone; many people were experiencing the same issues. This brought me immense peace, something I wouldn't have discovered without professional help. For me when friends say the same thing, it might come off as sympathy or empathy, but when a professional does, it feels practical and secure. It led me to explore more about myself through therapy. I keep recommending therapy to my friends and even my parents despite the challenge of suggesting it to them due to hierarchical dynamics. However, when people see the positive changes in you, they might come to you for advice.

I don't believe in preaching. Instead, I am vocal about my own therapy experience. I say, "Yes, I go to therapy, and it has helped me. If you see any changes in me, it's because of therapy." I have become more open and less reserved, largely thanks to therapy, which I decided to take at a low point in my life when everything was seemingly going well, but I couldn't find joy. Under pressure and personal issues, I decided to talk to a professional out of curiosity. This inquisitiveness led me to therapy, which I now appreciate deeply. I am an explorer of different kinds of therapy and continue to encourage others to seek it.

You were a part of "AIB Knockout Roast" which received a lot of criticism for its use of language and certain remarks. That roast happened in 2014, and while it's been almost a decade, the controversy around the "Roast" comedy format has continued to garner enough controversy even with the recent "Pretty Good Roast Show." In your understanding, why has this format not yet found its space in India? Also, will it ever be able to find its space in the mainstream?

This is a great technical question. From my experience with multiple roasts, I see the roast format as a beautiful one, but it requires a lot of consent, which happens naturally in a live show setting. When you digitize a live show, you need to filter it to ensure the audience is giving consent to view the content, which doesn't always align with today's nature. Ideally, it shouldn't need this filter, but that's the reality we live in. As a strong supporter of free speech, I believe self-regulation and self-censorship are necessary and contextual. Additionally, audiences have the right to be offended and voice their concerns, and it's our responsibility to listen and choose how to adapt.

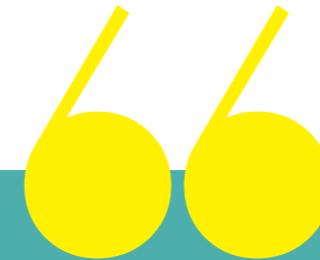
The true essence of a roast lies in performing it in closed rooms where the audience has given explicit consent to enjoy the format. Roasts are akin to underground hip-hop scenes or graffiti art; initially controversial and considered culturally disruptive, but they survive because they are accepted and consented to by their audience. Therefore, I believe roasts should be conducted in live settings, allowing those who appreciate the format to attend without widespread repercussions. Additionally, there can be designated spaces or shows, similar to how TV categorizes content by ratings like PG, universal, or adult.

We are in an interesting time where your generation has the

responsibility to point out where we went wrong and how to do better. I hope that in the future, those who enjoy roast comedy can do so freely, with fewer repercussions and more understanding of the format's intentions to make people laugh and provide catharsis.

Last question: Can you please share one of your most overwhelming experiences on stage as a performer?

Oh! I have two very contrasting overwhelming experiences that I would love to share. The first one tilts more on the trouble-thriller side. So, I was performing on a very small stage. We were having a lot of fun, and there was this new concept of a joke that I was trying on stage. I started doing this performance, and the audience really got into it. They began to laugh so hard that I started laughing hard, and then I was crying on stage. And it wasn't like laughter crying. I broke down on stage, and I was like, "What?" It came to me as a surprise, "Wait, what happened? What? Hello, who is this? Hello, what's going on?" And then I started crying on stage, and the audience started laughing more because they thought it was part of this ridiculous sketch I was putting on. And because I was so joyful, it was a mix of emotions. I had no idea. I had a breakdown on stage, and I got off stage crying, and everyone was applauding. For me, it was an overwhelming moment, after which I was like, "Okay, I really need to figure stuff out." But that came out of so much joy when the audience was enjoying that it might have triggered some memory or something else.



As you know, what a privilege it is to do what I do, and I can't take it for granted.

The second anecdote is more positive and feel-good. I was performing in a college in Delhi. It was a girl's college, and the show was going really well. Everyone's having a great time. Then the principal walked in, and everyone went quiet, and for the next five minutes, no one was laughing as much as they were before. Therefore, I just addressed the principal respectfully, made her aware of the situation, and told her, "If you laugh, then everyone will laugh more. So, laugh like you are watching your son perform, and you are proud of him." After that, she started laughing and looking back at the students, kind of encouraging them to appreciate the show. It became such an overwhelming performance that at the end of it, she came up to me, and it's a principle that the entire college is afraid of. Everyone is silent, and she comes close to me and says, "As a son, I am so proud of you, and I want to do something that a lot of girls in here want to do." And then she kissed me on my cheeks, and the entire crowd up roared. I started blushing and could only manage to say, "Thanks Mom!" And that overwhelming memory is still ingrained in my mind. As you know, what a privilege it is to do what I do, and I can't take it for granted.



“Poetry feels more like crafting a piece of jewellery”

The Arundhathi Subramaniam Interview



Arundhathi Subramaniam has emerged as one of the most influential voices in contemporary Indian poetry and literature. Her career, spanning more than two decades, is marked by a body of work that is both evocative and introspective, exploring themes of love, spirituality, and identity. Renowned collections such as 'When God is a Traveller' and 'Love Without a Story' have garnered widespread acclaim, earning her numerous awards both in India and internationally, including the Sahitya Akademi, the Raza Award for Poetry, the Zee Women's Award for Literature, the International Piero Bigongiari Prize in Italy, and fellowships from the Charles Wallace, Visiting Arts, and Homi Bhabha foundations.

Arundhathi's writing is celebrated for its lyrical beauty and profound insights, often reflecting her deep engagement with Indian culture and philosophy. It is a great honour to have her with us for this interview. As a poet, writer, and seeker of truth, she offers fascinating insights and experiences that provide a compelling glimpse into the world of contemporary Indian literature.

Do you recall the first poem you ever wrote? What inspired you to write it?

I wrote lots of rhymes as a child, Jiya. And thankfully, none of them have survived! I remember one about a love of eating and another somewhat melancholy one about the rain. The first poem I think I can stand by is one that I wrote at the age of nineteen. It was called 'Amoeba', and it reflected a certain fascination with how 'one' becomes 'two'. It was a philosophical question made concrete through the metaphor of a unicellular organism. And I still think it works somewhat. It entered my first book of poems, which was published more than a decade later.

Can you elaborate on a few poems that have had a profound impact on you and moved you deeply?

As an adolescent, I read a lot of Zen poetry. Its intense economy appealed. Also, the flash of epiphany. I loved Basho's poem on the frog leaping into the pond, for instance. I still use it in poetry workshops as a marvellous illustration of a poem's ability to rupture jaded ways of seeing.

I remember the first time I read TS Eliot's 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' and 'The Waste Land'. I was probably about thirteen then. There was a delicious sense of shock as I discovered poetry that was opaque and invitation all at once. It was a mix of mystery and music that kindled my excitement about language. While I liked the verbal frugality and revelatory spirit of Zen poetry, the expansiveness and complexity of TS Eliot appealed, too.

Many years later, when in college, I remember my first encounter with Arun Kolatkar's book, *Jejuri*. I read it in the break in the college library. I was bored then and somewhat lonely. I had a few friends at the time, but no deep friendships. And that's when I realised yet again that books could be great companions! I loved the freshness and ease of Kolatkar's images, the playful irony, and the distinctly Indian landscape.

And, of course, there were other poems in my adolescence

that shifted the way I looked at the world: from Shelley's 'To a Skylark' to Wallace Stevens' 'Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Blackbird'. Many years later, when I was a published poet myself, the work of the Scottish poet, John Burnside, moved me deeply and reminded me of how much I like the meditative spirit in poetry. Especially when combined with musicality.

What is your writing process like? How does it differ while approaching prose and poetry?

Broadly, I see prose as manual labour and poetry as magic. Obviously, that's a generalization. There has to be a sense of flow – a mix of rhythm, alignment, energetic attunement, and ease – for prose to work. And poetry needs as much labour as any other form.

But sustained prose work demands getting up and hammering out a few paragraphs daily. Those paragraphs are refined later, of course. But it's important to keep at it and not simply wait for some thunderclap of inspiration. With poetry, the process is more veiled, more lunar. I work with lines, with verse fragments, and allow them one day to find their way into a mosaic—if that is meant to happen.

Poetry feels more like crafting a piece of jewellery. If prose is carpentry, poetry feels like a lapidary's art. It's about refining and polishing, rather than working with a hammer and power drill!

As an artist, can you expand on the interplay between emotions and creative expression?

Personally, I like poems that change the way I map the world in some way. That small startled 'oh' is what I turn to poetry for. But for that shift to happen, one needs an alignment of idea and feeling, thought and emotional intensity.

When writing a poem, I trust the process only if it feels like it's emerging from a place where emotion and idea are in sync. The emotional impetus is, for me, the spine, the very axis of the poem. It cannot be just about a thought: wanting to change the world, for example, or wanting to elevate consciousness. It has to come from a deeply felt inner place. That 'lived-in' quality gives a poem its grain. It makes an idea feel gritty, a thought crunchy. That is vital for poetry.

When the constraints of poetry feel limiting, how do you adapt your writing style to maintain your creative freedom?

I don't know if poetry feels limiting. People don't buy books of poetry enough to be riled by it! In any case, the only way for any artist to maintain creative freedom is to choose not to live in fear. If you are bullied by a cultural climate into expressing yourself in one particular way, it's best not to write at all. Creative writing, by definition, is about speaking your truth.

But I also do find that I am a little less inclined to write a rage poem nowadays. Rather than focus on what I detest, I prefer to write about something that I want to spend time with and explore. This is not a conscious choice; it has happened gradually over time. Turning a rant into an anthem is one

way to speak your truth joyfully. You're still cocking a snook at the status quo, but happily. It's an implicit critique, not a frontal verbal assault.

At the same time, it is sometimes necessary to engage in some explicit critique. I wrote a poem many years ago called 'To The Welsh Critic Who Doesn't Find Me Identifiably Indian', which was a deliberate decision to confront a cultural gatekeeper by briefly acting like one myself!

How do you manage and maintain your emotional state while writing and in daily life?

I don't try to sustain it. If rage impels a poem, for instance, I might sit down and write a couple of pages at a stretch. However, almost always, the mood of rage subtly shifts by the end of a page. Emotions are transformed by the act of writing. And that's the magic of poetry. It's exciting to allow the transformation to happen and see where it leads. Poetry is as much about discovery as it is about self-expression.

Are there any emotions that you particularly find challenging to express in your writing?

Interesting question. I've expressed anger in my early work. Sadness too. But to express full, open-throated grief took me time. And although I always believed my work was sensual, a full-fledged erotic poem didn't happen until my third book. To express tenderness without turning sentimental—that's a perennial challenge. To be vulnerable without turning self-indulgent—that's another ongoing challenge. It took time to realise you can be full-throated and nuanced at the same time. A poem—whatever the emotion—has to emerge from someplace deep within the human anatomy, not just from the larynx.

Has your writing ever helped you navigate through an emotionally turbulent period in your life?

Absolutely. It helped me through many difficult phases as a young person and later in life too—moments of heartbreak and loneliness. It also helped me through many barren phases in my spiritual journey. Both writing helped and reading helped. I remember re-reading AK Ramanujan's translations of the 10th-century poet, Nammalvar, around twenty years ago and feeling this great surge of joy. Suddenly, the world felt more habitable, just knowing that there was a campfire of dead poets I could turn to for company! I felt much less alone.

How do you approach writing about 'devotion' in your poetry and prose?

I am not comfortable with devotion as mere religiosity. Poems that speak of swooning surrender and unexamined reverence makes me uncomfortable. The poems I'm drawn to redefine our conventional ideas of devotion. They don't offer insipid vanilla love. They offer a fierce, passionate, sometimes erotic, sometimes enraged devotion. There is nerve in it. And spine. And fire. Even fury can be a kind of devotion. (That's why we have the nindastuti in this country, a literary form that sees anger as a kind of love song to the divine!)

I'm not interested in feel-good homilies or in scriptural commentaries. The finest Bhakti poems do not offer us certainty. Instead, they confront mystery. They allow themselves to be hoarse and bewildered. They choose wonder over trite certitudes. Devotion here isn't a placid belief. It is a spirited response to uncertainty.

Do you ever revisit your earlier works and question the emotions you expressed, wondering if you were genuinely feeling that way or perhaps being a bit dramatic?

I don't doubt the genuineness of the emotion, but I definitely do know I would write some poems differently if I were to write them today. I don't think there are any right or wrong emotions. The business of poetry is to express the whole gamut without judgment. But I do sometimes feel I could have expressed myself with one adjective less or with an altered line length!

Does expressing your emotions through your art have an impact on your personal relationships?

Well, I think writing poetry makes me less judgemental and more aware of nuance, of contradiction, of all the dark crevices that we all carry around in our hearts. Also, sometimes when you say what you want through your poetry, you don't have to say it to any particular person anymore. That saves a lot of needless emotional expenditure! More seriously, I believe that poetry has helped me become a better listener. My earlier poetry was about self-expression, but it's gradually become more about a kind of eavesdropping on the self. So, the impact on personal relationships is probably just this: I listen today more than I talk.

Do you engage with the feedback you receive from readers and critics? How does it influence your future work?

Through my twenties, I was quite deeply affected by what others thought about me and my work. But I'm glad I didn't publish my first book until my thirties. By then, I'd spent a long time with the poems and had reached a point when I had a certain clarity about my choices. I also realised during my years with a writer's group, The Poetry Circle, in Mumbai, that feedback that resonated with a hunch I already had about a poem was the kind to take on board. Feedback that didn't quite align with that inner hunch could be discarded.

Today, it is lovely to hear from readers who have found a moment of resonance with something I write. But I don't base my writing on that, because that would spell the end of my creative freedom. I'm aware that my work engages in areas that might be seen as esoteric by some. For a world that is largely engaged with the contents of the News at Nine, listening to a mystic poet who wrote of a moment of personal bewilderment in the 10th century might seem somewhat irrelevant. But I keep the faith that there are receptive readers somewhere, and there usually have been. It's lovely to hear from the appreciative ones, and I treasure their messages. At the same time, I try not to predicate my choices on reader responses.

Are there any specific emotions you haven't yet explored through your work but wish to in the future?

Not a specific emotion. But I'd say I'm interested in allowing language to grow subtler without any loss of energy, intensity, or voltage.

Reflecting on your writing career from when you first began until now, how would you describe your journey?

It has been full of surprises. I always knew I loved poetry, but becoming a lifelong practitioner of it is something else. Watching how my poetry has changed—in texture and form—from the first book to the most recent is also startling to me.

And yet, when I look back on who I was at the age of ten—a quiet kid with simmering questions about life and loss and meaning—I realise my essential preoccupations have remained the same. I'm still in love with kinetic language (which is how I see poetry). And I'm still asking the same questions—even if inflected differently—about living and dying. I guess I'd describe my journey as surprising, challenging, rewarding, and anchoring.

What advice would you give to a young poet who is just starting out and feels apprehensive about fully expressing themselves through their work?

I'd say being apprehensive is not a bad thing. But don't be crippled by self-doubt. Like any art, poetry deepens with time. Keep writing, but also make sure you keep reading. It's quite amazing how many young poets don't read other poets. It's important to buy books of poetry (not simply read online) and to read not just widely but deeply.

Don't get swayed by those who claim to love your work. And don't get silenced by the naysayers either. If you can create a poets' group that can offer constructive feedback on your poems, that's great. Just make sure it isn't so critical that it silences you or so flattering that it makes you turn delusional.

Above all, write poetry because you really, urgently, want to. Don't write to sound clever or simply to fill in a pause. Don't ever turn lukewarm! That is the death of poetry.

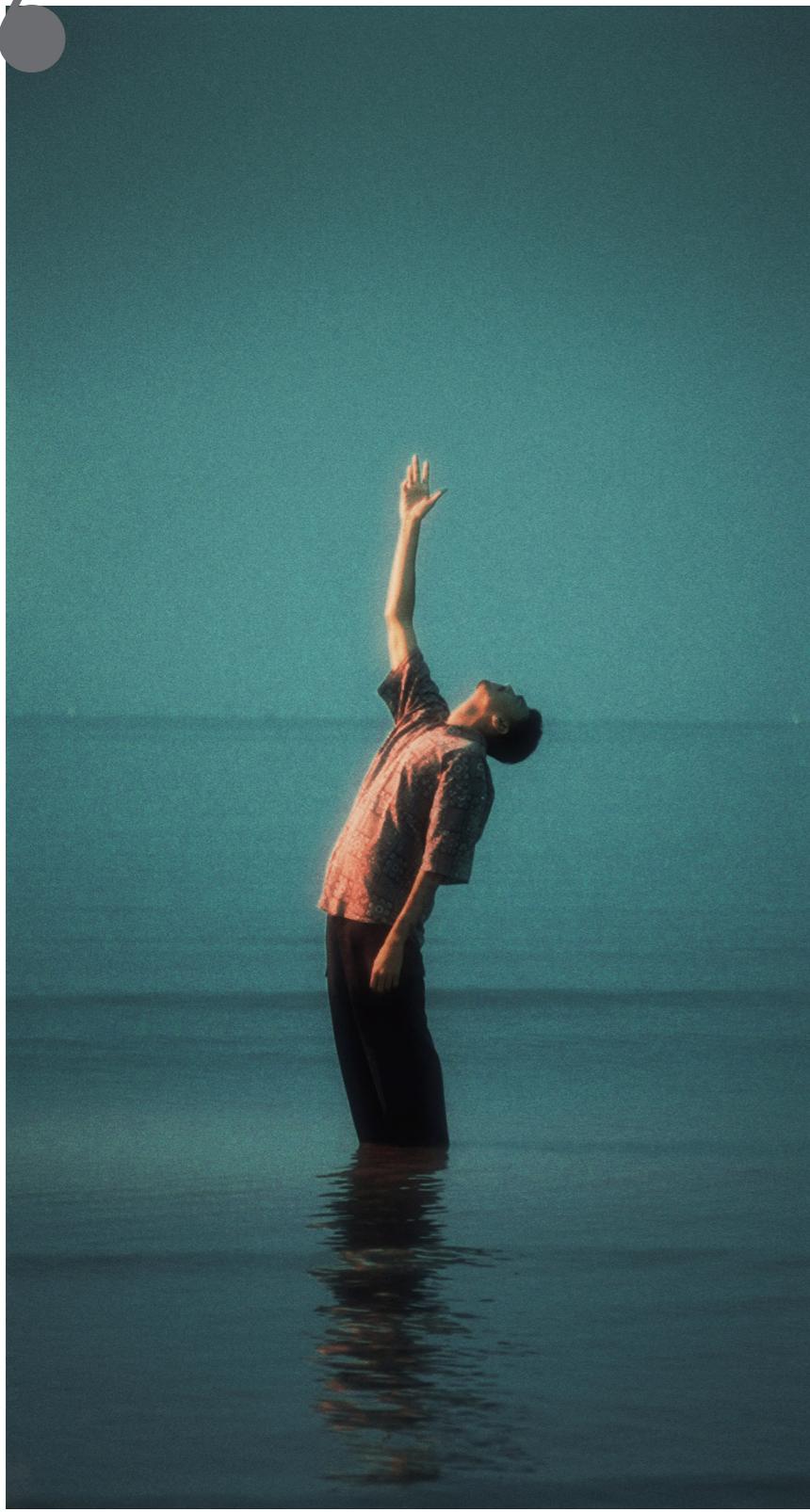
(Image Credits: Meetesh Taneja)



TRANSCENDENCE

By Manav Bendi

“



A calming scenery where an individual is enveloped by cool blue hues, standing peacefully in water and reaching up his arm towards the sky. The serene colour scheme, along with a composed posture on the part of the character, evokes introspective, desiring sensation and some spiritual relation to reality beyond physicality. A desire for knowledge and peace could be inferred from it. It captures the softer aspects of feeling, reflecting a quiet dream-like story about searching and longingness.

With shallow water around, the person stands engrossed in red light. The deep shade contrasting a dark background blends feelings like passion, disturbance and confrontation with uncontrolled intensity. By looking upward, the subject shows the person has stopped thinking about themselves or yielding to their feelings, which may be overwhelming. The picture has stark opposing shades, creating a mood of pressure, making it a more powerful representation of dreaded human experiences.



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Line Finest Line Touch



By Drishti Shinde

With its rich texture and contrast, this poignant photograph captures the essence of human connection with tenderness. A child's little hand, adorned with a simple beaded bracelet, clutches onto an adult's finger with gentle determination. The greyscale simplicity of the image beautifully highlights the themes of trust, protection, longing and the unspoken bond between generations. It transcends and renders a delicate visual ode to the purity of childhood.

Tenderness Embrace



By Sumedh Nikam

In this heartwarming moment, a serene blend of warmth and love comes to life as a mother cradles her sleeping child. It is mesmerising to see how the delicate white fabric drapes gracefully, symbolising purity and the gentle touch of maternal care. The child's tender and chubby face resting against the mother's shoulder conveys a deep sense of security and contentment. With utmost peace and sincerity, this endearing portrait presents the universal and magical bond between a mother and her child.

Mumbai, Monsoon & Marine Drive

By Janmesh Vaishnav



In the midst of a city of individuals, two souls seem to find comfort with each other under one roof. They overlook the coastal waters of Mumbai at the famous Marine Drive, an old school spot famous amongst lovers. As the rain pours down on the city, the camera tries to capture the two individuals in their most natural form.

A Stroll in the Park

By Divya Khapne

Gregory is completely lost. Not because he's scared or anything—he doesn't have to be. But the appointments have been scheduled for the whole day. Where he comes from, things are so different. No routine and way less population. They definitely don't have jobs there, and everybody lives... in harmony. The thing that confused him the most when he arrived at Gregory's house was why he would let his demons win so easily. He sat on a small stool staring at Gregory in the bathtub as he floated in the maroon mess... oh, what a terrible sight! Naturally, he had to replace him because that was his mission from his home planet—to clean up the mess humans left when they decided not to exist anymore. He came to understand how these beings are so interdependent that the loss of one could disturb an entire society. Hence, he became Gregory, Gregory was now him.

Initially, the whole ordeal was... well... weird. He couldn't expand his fingers like he used to or use his tentacles to engulf food. His iridescent skin now felt rigid and unfamiliar. As a therapist, Gregory had to be aware of all the patients, their problems, what they had been through, family dynamics, medical history, mental health history, trauma history, coping mechanisms, substance use... the list goes on. Fortunately, he could absorb this information... all at once, processing it with an efficiency no human could match.

David, an 80-year-old, walked in with a perfectly happy smile. But Gregory knew for a fact that he was suffering from nightmares as a result of PTSD.

Dr Gregory: "Hi David, how have you been since our last session?"

David: "I've been doing better. The techniques we talked about for managing flashbacks are really helping. I actually managed to get a full night's sleep a couple of times this week. The grounding exercises have been a game-changer. When I feel a flashback coming on, I focus on my surroundings, as you suggested. It helps me stay in the present. But there are still nights when the nightmares are really bad."

Yes, Gregory was able to juggle up a solution to this because he was exceptionally intellectual. Although, he found the concept of 'flashbacks' peculiar. This involuntary reliving of traumatic events must be quite debilitating. His species did not experience memory in such a fragmented manner.

Dr Gregory: "Anything else you need to talk about?"

David: "Yeah, I've been meaning to tell you this for some time, since my kids moved out of my home, I've felt this huge void.

With our sessions for the past couple of months, I've felt that void a bit less. Having someone to support me would really help me focus on navigating these issues better. I know it's a lot but can we go for a stroll in the park some days when you are free? I really enjoy your company."

Gregory searches in his system's incorporated internet if this is the right thing to do but finds thousands of articles highlighting why a doctor shouldn't hang out with a patient and ethical concerns of the same. He humbly rejects David and reminds him to be consistent with his medications.

It has been a busy week for Gregory, spending almost 8 hours a day in therapy sessions. On his free days, he would often accept invitations from Gregory's friends, mistaking them for appointments due to their insistence. Today, since he had no plans, Gregory decided to check out a coffee shop. He had always heard about it from Gregory's friends and couldn't wait to see what made it so popular.

He enters through the jingling door of Luna Pâtisserie. He took in the potent smell of roasted coffee beans being crushed and the luscious, buttery fragrance of croissants and scones fresh out of the oven. He waits in the queue, already feeling a pro at the whole 'charming as a human' (thanks to the pre-downloaded memories). Gregory finds himself drawn to the plant-themed ambience and also the assortment of pastries kept on display. He orders his coffee and croissants, then settles at a table to observe the other patrons. One thing he found curious was the transactional nature of the server's interactions with all the customers. He wondered why one would pretend to fake positivity even when they are having a bad day.

As he observed those around him, he noticed an old couple seemingly celebrating a significant day, a group of teenagers animatedly discussing the latest action movie, and corporate employees diligently typing away on their laptops. Almost everyone seemed to be in the company of someone else...

And that's when he first felt it—a sharp pang in his stomach. Suddenly, his hunger dissipated, replaced by an inexplicable emptiness. He couldn't quite pinpoint what it was... As he observed the effortless connections among humans around him, he struggled with an overwhelming sense of disconnection. Searching through Gregory's registered neural imprints, he found a recurring emotion surfacing—loneliness.

He felt suddenly distressed, looking around and yearning for

connection, for someone to talk to. He was even more scared because this feeling was so unfamiliar to him. He had never felt this need to be part of interactions before... Why did it bother him now? Was it because he was finally human?

He struggled to comprehend that there were billions of people on this planet, yet not one here to comfort him. But then he realized, how could he find an emotion registered if it wasn't part of Gregory in any way? He shuffled through his stored imprints, looking for moments Gregory experienced similar feelings. In his last month of existence, there was a substantial record of this emotion. Could this be the reason why Gregory took that step? He didn't blame him; it felt terrible. Gregory must have felt it even more, especially with a whole contact book full of 'friends'. He discovered that despite outward appearances of social engagement, Gregory carried an internal solitude that grew unbearable. This unseen burden, invisible to others, silently eroded his resilience. All Gregory needed was someone beside him. Perhaps a stroll in the park.

Teary-eyed, Gregory left the cafe. His view on human emotions had completely shifted.

The next day David walks in, relatively better than when they last met. They had a talk about how David spent his week, whether his nightmares had lessened, and how well the medications were working. As the session ended, David prepared to leave through the door, just when Gregory stopped him—

"Hey also, let's go for a stroll in the park this Saturday, yeah?"



The Happiness High

By Samriddhi Mehta

Although the sun had risen from slumber a few hours ago, our ray of sunshine had just gotten out of bed, and she was ready to kick off an exciting day. Before diving in, here is a single-line description of our protagonist: Introducing Ms. Sunshine. Smiles brighter than the summer sun and energy higher than a kid on a sugar rush!

It was 9:17 on a Saturday morning, and the kitchen was already filled with the welcoming aroma of the desi adrak waali chai and upbeat Bollywood music.

Possibly irrelevant to the story, but it wouldn't do our protagonist justice if I didn't mention these three things which happened in the previous hour:

It was raining heavily—the kind that makes you crave kadak adrak waali chai (because tea makes me feel nahi aata) and garam-garam pakode.

She grabbed her roommate to buy milk since they had forgotten to put the bag out last night.

They entered the house only to return to the same shop to buy ginger. Why? Because she said, and I quote, "Bina adrak ki chai to mai na banau."

(P.S.: Let's not forget that it was pouring heavily.) Yeah, we were glad she didn't know how to make pakode.

Moving on.

The tea was ready, and the kitchen-turned-dance floor had done justice.

It was time to plan the rest of the day. Her roommate asked, "My friends and I are going out tonight. Dinner, bowling, dancing, and whatever follows. You want to join?"

She turned down the music. Enthusiasm aside, this young lady was an introvert. At least initially.

Shifting her attention to the question, she turned. "Will there be many of them?"

That earned her a chuckle: "Tum to aise pooch rahi ho jaise, 'Kitne aadmi the?'"

Our protagonist was still waiting for an answer. Her roommate sighed. "Only four-five."

Her eyes widened. "Four or five?" "Yes." She was about to shake her head frantically, but then the ambivert recalled the promise to herself—to get out of her shell. Reluctantly, she nodded in agreement. Her roommate gasped in surprise and grinned. Ms. Sunshine matched the enthusiasm a second later, shoving behind the slight anxiety. She was going to have fun. And she was excited.

The two girls jumped up and down. Her roommate held her arm to stop them. "Wait, wait, wait, there's a rule." Her eyebrows furrowed in confusion. "What?"

"You can't be awkward." "WHAT?" "What 'what?' You can do this! Warna wahi chodd denge tumhe." Her friend threatened.

She huffed. "Fine." The excitement and nervousness for the upcoming night had our protagonist buzzing with energy. But before that, they had more plans!

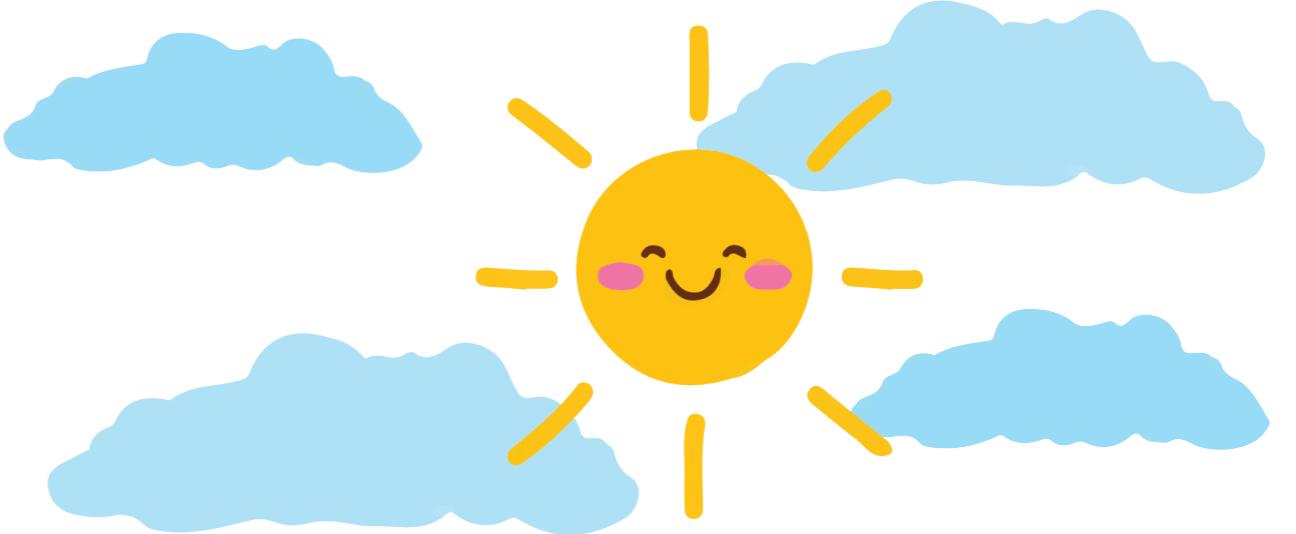
Each step held a bounce, and every chuckle echoed in the surroundings as the girls went out for a movie, followed by exploring random stores they saw on the walk back to the station.

The reader (and book collector—iykyk) in her also made her feet pause at book stalls. The day was building up amazingly.

Well, until the anxiety of talking to new people seeped in. She stood in front of the mirror in an empty room. "Listen up; you are going to have a great time." She looked like a stern potato, making it hard for her to take herself seriously. The bed beside the dressing table welcomed her mini-tantrum with open hands as she fell on it.

Five seconds later

"Listen up again. Those people are probably great, and you will allow yourself to talk to them." Her reflection stared back at her, finger raised and expression stern. Kind of.



"Be weird, be lame, be talkative, but be yourself. The worst thing that can happen is that you get awkward and detach yourself to wallow like a loner. That. Is. It!" A cough came from behind. "Is that an encouraging pep talk or a discouraging one? I can't figure."

Ms. Sunshine turned around to face her roommate with an embarrassed smile, scratching the back of her head. She hadn't heard her entering between the monologues.

"Encouraging?" Her friend narrowed her eyes and said, "Stop thinking!" "Fine." She agreed before another idea entered her mind. "Chalo, let's read something!" "How are you not tired? Thodi energy baad ke liye bacha le."

A few hours later, they were finally out of the house, and Ms. Sunshine was ready! She greeted the new people as if it weren't the first time, included herself in the conversations, and allowed herself to ask questions they were happy to answer. The night treated her to an experience of pushing her comfort zone and enjoying it.

Eventually, it was time to go. As everyone left in different directions, her roommate included, the sun had finally set for our protagonist, too. Her shoulders felt heavy as she travelled back alone, the plethora of emotions simmering down. The happiness was wearing off.

She was proud of herself. She was also tired. And that was okay. She unlocked the door with a click and stepped in. The keys, mobile phone, and purse dropped on the couch of their accord. The tired girl dragged herself to freshen up and crash on the bed. No energy remained to check any calls or messages.

The next day, she woke up to a slow morning. She stayed in bed for an hour, staring at the sky from her window while a slow soundtrack played in the background. Her mobile phone buzzed with a call from her family, only to be silenced. She would call them later, she decided. The rush of energy from the previous week, especially last evening, had knocked her out. She heated some breakfast and played a sitcom to accompany her before sleeping again. Oh, Sunday, how lazy art thou?

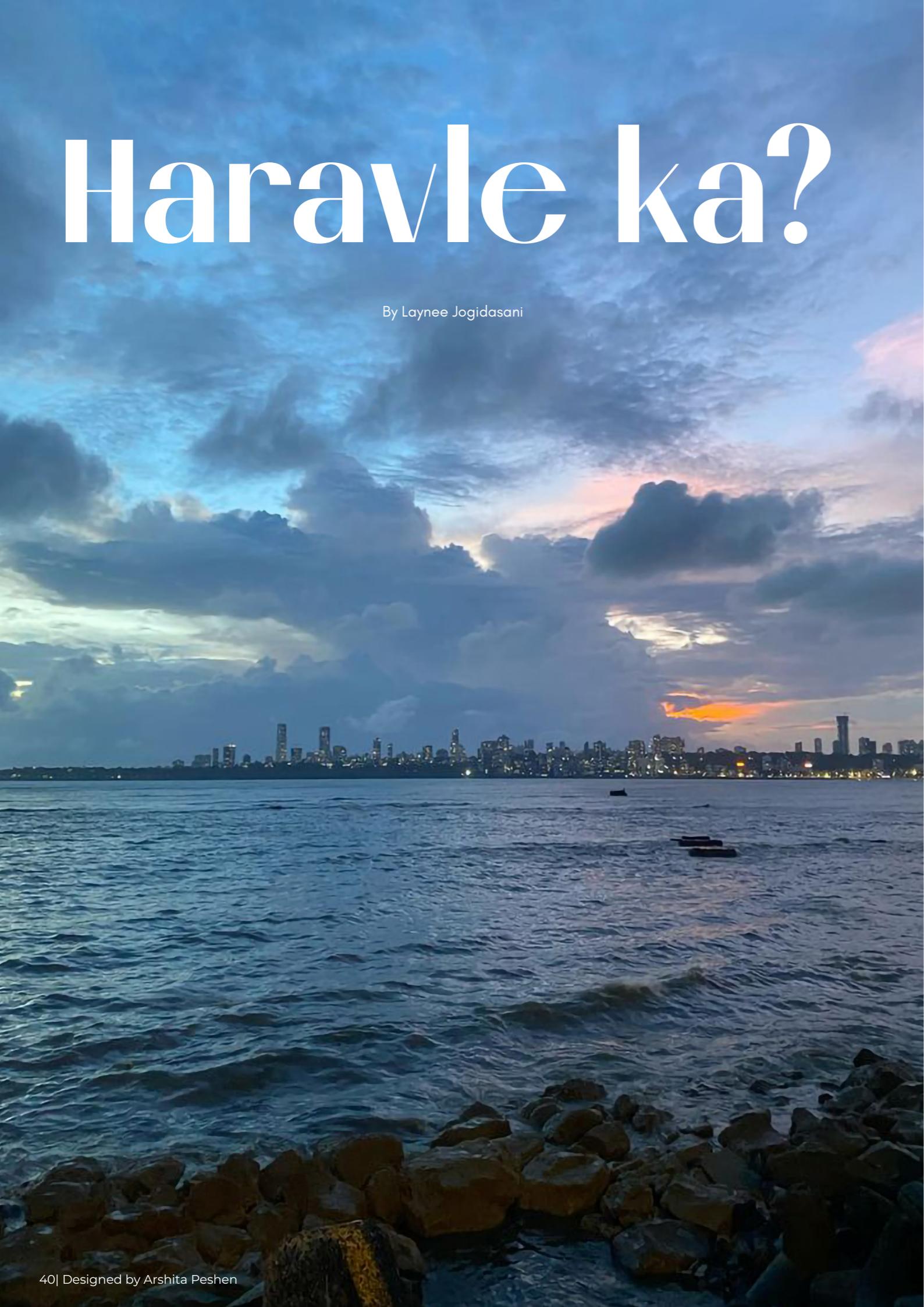
This time, when she woke up, Ms. Sunshine felt rested enough. Playing another music track, she was ready for a late lunch. She called them back home over the meal and spelled out the entire week for them as each bite filled her with renewed energy.

By the time the night arrived, our protagonist had revived her shine and was dancing to her tunes.



Haravle ka?

By Laynee Jogidasani



Hailing from a small town in Maharashtra, Naksh was in the city of dreams to make it big. This dream he had seen for the most part of his life. His first visit here at the age of seven left an unforgettable memory in the little boy's heart, which led him to want to work in the superfast Mumbai local and the iconic red BEST buses.

He topped his college exams and found himself a job at one of the swankiest and most prestigious marketing firms in the city. His office was in Lower Parel; his father was a wealthy businessman in Jejuri and had enough contacts in Mumbai to get him a nice apartment. He was the star of Jejuri and his parents' favourite child, so he was used to being seen by others.

His first day in the office was not as he expected it to be. His stylish, swagger entry had no spectators. His cool greetings had no receivers, and his humorous jokes at lunch had no audience. The very busy Elite Edge Marketing employees had their heads buried in laptops and earbuds shoved into their ears. According to Natasha, an intern, popularly called Nats, the lunch that Naksh had brought was too oily and heavy as it only consisted of two wheat tortillas and okra.

"What do you guys eat then?" He asked, being curious and concerned.

"Java Chip Frappuccino and Chilly Paneer in Herbed Bun on the Go, Please!"

Nat's chic accent and body language had left Naksh in awe of her aura. Feeling awkward, he quickly closed his tiffin. He had always been a social person in his hometown, where everyone knew each other. He was especially well-known due to his academic brilliance and his father's influence. But here in Mumbai, things were different. The fast-paced life and the sheer number of people made it difficult for Naksh to find his footing.

The people seemed more sophisticated and confident, and their connections seemed shallow. They spoke a mix of languages with various accents. One person's English seemed completely different from the other's. Their conversations often revolved around things Naksh was unfamiliar with like high-end brands, trendy cafes, and exotic vacations.

Even though he felt out of place, Naksh was determined to make friends with the group of people he and a bunch of other new guys looked up to. He had grown up being the centre of attention and the person everyone looked up to. The group he wanted to be a part of often went out for drinks after work. Naksh's father was wealthy but a man of high value. Drinking and wasting money on intoxicating substances was against his core values. Naksh was never allowed near these things and never attempted them. In the family, he was the good guy.

Wanting to be a part of the gang, he started joining them for drinks. Initially, having decided to just have soft drinks, peer pressure eventually made him spend his hard-earned money on expensive drinks and clothes to match their style, hoping it would help him blend in.

No matter how hard Naksh tried to blend in with the group, something about him always kept him distant from them. The

more he tried to keep up with their lifestyle, the more he grew distant from his natural self. They talked about things he couldn't relate to, and they often excluded him from their inside jokes. Naksh smiled and nodded, but inside, he felt like an outsider even after months of tagging along with every plan they made. He felt increasingly lonely and frustrated.

One evening, late at night, after another failed attempt to connect with his colleagues, Naksh found himself sitting alone on Marine Drive, staring at the waves crashing against the shore. He felt a deep sense of despair and wondered if he had made a mistake by coming to Mumbai. He missed the simplicity and warmth of his hometown, where he could be himself without any pretence.

As he sat there, lost in thought, a policeman patrolling the area approached him and tapped him on the shoulder, pulling him out of the trance.

"Kaahitari haravle?" Something whirls inside him in answer to the man's innocent question, and he eventually comes to self-realisation.

"Svatala haravle." Naksh sighed and nodded as he admitted something he had known all along. "Kuthe bhetnaar?"

The policeman smiled sympathetically. "Ekhadha asa vat ta ki Mumbai saharaat, pan te svataha madhe sapdel."

The police officer's words struck a chord with Naksh. He realised that the quest for fitting had made him lose sight of who he truly was. The overwhelming feeling of the new city, an achieved dream, and different people had made him a completely different person, someone he didn't recognise. He thanked the man for his advice and decided that it was time to make a change.

The next week, Naksh joined a local photography club. Photography had always been his passion, and he hoped to see the city he thought was his dream through the lens that he was in love with. The club members were welcoming and friendly, and Naksh felt an immediate connection with them. They spent weekends exploring the city, capturing the spirit of Mumbai and the speed of the superfast Mumbai locals.

With his friends beside him, Naksh's camera strap hung longer around his neck, making the lines for the red BEST buses appear shorter. They didn't care about his background or clothes; they valued his creativity and unique perspective. For the first time since moving to Mumbai, Naksh could proudly say that he had brought a tiffin of roti and bhindi instead of tortilla and okra.

He had started to thrive professionally and personally. His newfound confidence was reflected in his work, and his colleagues began to notice and appreciate his contributions. Naksh no longer felt the need to fit into a mould that wasn't meant for him. He embraced his individuality and found joy in pursuing his passions, which eventually led to his personal growth, and people looked up to him.

In the heart of Mumbai, Naksh no longer felt like an outsider; he had finally found his place in the bustling city.

The Boundary

By Laynee Jogidasani

Anayra

The beer bottles clinked as they touched the ground. Kabir sat down next to me. My legs couldn't help but move frantically due to the nervousness. It had been ten years. The fact that Kabir and I met here was unpredictable. I never expected him to come to Danish's wedding. Danish was my friend; after everything that happened between Kabir and I, he was the last person I expected to be here.

"So, how's life?" He asked, taking a sip of his beer. The river in front of us sent a cool breeze our way, calming and tingling my nerves simultaneously. It's funny how someone who once was your comfort place can now cause a tornado of emotions in just a few years.

Are ten years that few? Definitely not. But for me, they maybe were. It feels like we just graduated from college; abhi abhi toh job lagi hai, and ab Danish shaadi bhi kar raha hai.

"Good, great, actually. I just got promoted last month!"

"That's fabulous, Anayra. Congratulations!"

"What's on with you?" I asked.

"Zindagi ek safar hai Anu, kabhi english wala toh kabhi hindi wala."

An awkward silence followed his remark. Did he really think that my getting a promotion was fabulous? God, Anayra, stop being so critical. It's been ten years!

The sunset in the background made him take out his phone and click pictures of the setting sun.

"I can't believe you're still a sucker for sunsets; God knows how many pictures you have of them on your phone." I said. "Iss dhalte sooraj ko dekhne se acha kya hi ho sakta hai iss duniya mein! Sunsets are proof that endings can be so damn beautiful."

I stared at the setting sun; it was like the river would engulf it. The evening in Udaipur was taking a sudden turn. The wedding's chaos in the background started to fade as I sipped my beer.

"You remember we used to sit by the sea and watch the sunset together?" I said.

"How can I ever forget those evenings, woh shaam, woh mausam, aur college se thakke hue hum?" He replied, looking into my eyes.

"Kya tumne kabhi socha tha ki das saal baad, wahi shaam hogi, samundar ke jagah ye jheel hogi, yahi sooraj hogi aur wahi—" I interrupted him before he could complete the sentence. "Bas ab tum aur main hai"

Kabir

I tried keeping the conversation as casual as possible. The constant taunts and remarks about our past were not easy to ignore. Coming to this wedding was a shocker for me too,

but here I was, with a beer in my hand, sitting right next to my ex. A perfect way to ruin the evening.

"So, what brings you here?" I asked a question even I didn't have an answer to.

"Danish ki shaadi hai yaar, how could I miss it? He's been a great friend to me, too. Haan, thodi duri thi humare beech, but hey, I introduced you to him."

"Yeah, I cannot thank you enough for that. For leaving him for me."

We raised our bottles to appreciate the fact. Danish was the only connecting link between us after our ugly breakup. We had managed to divide everything we had together, from friends to hanging spots. Danish was someone we could never divide, maybe because he didn't let us.

"Well, how do I look?" I asked, shaking off the thoughts.

She took a minute to check out my suit. "Not bad for the person who wore his dad's suit at the farewell party!" I chuckled; that was one of the most embarrassing moments of college.

"How do I look?" She asked, gulping down a big sip.

"As beautiful as the sunset! Beautiful, fleeting, and impossible to hold on to!"

Anayra

"Hasn't your phone been filled with images of sunsets, just as your heart was once filled with me?" If only he had ever tried to hold on to us.

He chuckled irritably.

"Aah, your taunts still pierce my heart like the sunrise pierces the darkness." He was making every minute with him difficult for me to bear.

"And your words still evade the truth, like the sun evades the night."

"It's actually funny how you talk about the truth while you were the one incapable of handling the truth when I told you that your possessiveness suffocated me! You were the one who didn't let me breathe." The conversation took a bitter turn, something I didn't want this evening.

Silence returned. It was the same circle yet again, the same conversation once more. Thoughts pierced my mind like bullets. Unable to contain them, I spoke my mind out. It wasn't that he could hurt me any more than he already had.

"And you were the one who couldn't see my fear. My fear of losing you and of being abandoned. You didn't understand that my possessiveness was a cry for reassurance."

"Reassurance? Seriously Anu? Did you want reassurance?

I was trapped! Trapped in your expectations and your demands. I was suffocating under the weight of your love."

"And so you suffocated me under the weight of your indifference, Kabir." I sipped the leftover beer in my bottle. "Your emotional unavailability. You took me for granted like a sunset takes the sky for granted." My voice rose and fell into a whisper.

The fear of losing him had gripped me so hard that letting him go even for a minute was impossible for me. He was my man—the man I wanted for the rest of my life.

Kabir

Indifference? She talks about indifference while she was the one gripping onto me as if her life depended on me. Agar khush rehta toh humesa saath rehta.

"I was frustrated, Anayra! Frustrated with the shackles of your possessiveness. Frustrated with the fear of commitment that you instilled in me, and yet again, you failed to understand me. You couldn't see that my fear was a cry for help, a cry for you to hold me closer." Her voice shot up, and I could see tears in her eyes. Something I hated.

As the sun dipped below the horizon and a warm orange flowed over the serene lake, our conversation hung in the balance like the fading light of the day.

Anu's tears glistened in her eyes, but she refused to let them fall. Her gaze wandered everywhere but on me. I couldn't help but introspect. A part of me agreed with the fact that my lack of commitment was a major reason for us to fall apart. But since I was merely twenty years old. I was allowed to want things other than her in my life. I was allowed to dream of a future even without her.

There was no point in scratching the old wounds. It was time to move on. The silence grew heavy, like the stillness of the lake.

"I'm sorry. Sorry for not seeing it then; sorry for not being there where you needed me." My voice was barely as audible as a whisper.

Her lips trembled as she opened her mouth to speak. "You were never there, Kabir. You were like the horizon, always in sight but never in reach."

Her words struck something deep in me. Our breakup hadn't been easy on me either; the thought that she might be the one for me had engulfed my sleep for months after we drifted apart. Forgetting her wasn't easy, but having freedom from her did instill a sense of peace in me. It wasn't that I didn't miss her. I had left a part of myself along with her, my irritation from the mere thought of possessiveness reflected in every relationship I had tried to have in all these years.

"I should go," she said, her voice cracking.

"Anayra, just hear me once. I agree that I didn't act very maturely. Though it's not like you were mature either, you



always feared losing me, which made you so damn insecure about me, which affected us. You know, the tighter you grip sand, the faster it slips out of your hand. I loved the time when we were in love with each other; it was even one of the best times of my life... But maybe we could have worked it out now."

"Or maybe, we were never meant to be."

She turned and walked away, leaving me standing alone by the lake. The sunset reminded me of what I had lost. I sat there in complete silence, pondering over our conversation. Watching her walk away, I realised that this encounter wasn't a second chance at love but a long-awaited closure. The horizon that once symbolised our unreachable dreams then represented the boundary between our past and present.

Anayra

I felt a sense of peace wash over me like the calmness of the lake's still waters. I understood that our love had been fleeting, like the sunset's brief moment of glory. But its memory would remain.

I thought back to our college days, our laughter, our dreams, and our fears. We had been two souls searching for a connection—like a love that would last. But life had other plans.

As I gazed at the wedding arrangements, I realised that I had been holding onto the past for too long. I had been chasing a ghost—a memory that I couldn't relive. But at this moment, I let go. I let go of the what-ifs and maybes. I embraced Danish and Sanya as they set foot into the new chapter of their lives.

And in that release, I found peace and closure. I found the strength to move on, to embrace the new dawn that awaited me.



Dear Freshers,

By Payal Navarkar

Congratulations to all of you who have successfully made it out of your school uniform and are reading this letter. I know you have been here for a month now and, hopefully, have not gotten lost on our tiny campus like I did on my first day. While you must have heard several college guides and soothing words from your family and by now you must have experienced some of the stereotypes you had in mind about college. But wait! There's more to come. Those coming to Mumbai for the very first time must have blamed Bollywood for the unrealistic expectations they had about college life.

I am sure you must have thought about starting your first day of college with a blank spotless slate, and why wouldn't you? While people often suggest you stay the same and not change yourself for the sake of others, indeed, you should never adjust your roots for other people. However, why would you stay the same if you get a second chance to start a whole new life?

Entering college means having an opportunity to present yourself the way you want because no one knows your past. People will see what you show. Be more confident and talkative than ever, make more mistakes than ever, and question more than ever because that will help you discover yourself better.

Eventually, you will find yourself trapped in a circle of thoughts about whether you should enjoy your college life or think about your career. Some say, "Yahi baatein to baad mein yaad aayengi," while others say, "Career abhi nahi banaya toh kabhi nahi." Well, I am not the right person to tell you to choose college over internships. Why miss any opportunity to live two lives in a single timeline? You must go gain experience when the time is right. It is so much fun out there, too. When you get bored of monotonous college days, at least you will have other places to go and other people to gossip about.

Whether it is struggling with internships, participating in campus events, joining clubs, or simply enjoying a lazy afternoon with friends at the canteen, these experiences will enrich your journey and provide a break from the routine.

Some of you might not have explored places around the campus to hang out. Let me suggest one. Bade Miyan? Nah... Tumne Ram bhaiya ke Chole Bhature nahi khaye to kya khaya. This canteen is a place where you should sit during your breaks. Trust me, you will never find it empty. It is a one-of-a-kind place to sit and chill. Although you have air-conditioned classrooms, nothing beats the vibe of Ram Bhaiya's canteen. If you find no one there, remember that some of us are sitting on campus somewhere, so just come and find us. Saath mein baith ke chill karenge.

Oh, and the auditorium, the place we are still waiting to see. Even if we don't get a chance to see the new one on our media campus, I hope you won't stay Audi-virgin. We could not make any major memories in the auditorium, but let's hope you do.

While I would say "Fests, Freedom, and Fun" is the mantra to enjoy your college, but also our seniors have told us, "Marks Matter." Visit Gokul all you want, go to 210 all you want, but don't you dare think we don't have our "Paramapara, Pratishtha, Anushashan" of maintaining 75% attendance; otherwise, be ready to face "Jahapanah-The Great" (ref. 3 idiots).

Jahapanah se yaad aaya, Surya ma'am; we truly love her, and so will you. Sometimes, she will nag you for getting distracted in lectures, but by the end of the year, you will find yourself loving her more, and more of her ideas.

And the most exciting part of this life is yet to come and is just a few days ahead—'The Fest Season'. You are about to witness a whole new level of craziness, energy, laughter, tears, friendships, breakups, and a lot of feelings in just a short period of time. Do not hold yourself back from participating in any event; never think you are not good enough. Never hold yourself back; bring in your stupidest idea. You never know, what would make the best documentary or a short film?

However, everyone has their own way of dealing with things. Everyone has different choices, so who am I to share my life experiences with you people? Explore it for yourself and experience new things. In fact, we seniors would love to hear from you and more tea to be split.

"Yahan tak aa gaye ho, to kar hi loge yaar, kya tension lena." As they say, "Go with the flow".

Yours truly,
Payal.

Yours Truly, Anger and Anxiety

By Mrunmayee Ghadge



Greetings Maya,

I wanted to be thrilled to reminisce about our past together; truly, I did. I wished emotions like Joy or even Nostalgia were writing this letter to you right now, but unfortunately, it had to be me, your Anger. I don't know whether I should be honoured, concerned, or frustrated that I am being overworked by you lately. I guess it isn't your fault entirely, but the circumstances you find yourself in and those few foolish people you're forced to interact with. I wonder whether to be angry at you or the world around you; I guess it depends on the situation. When I think about all the times you said the wrong thing in front of the wrong people, I feel anger towards you.

But in the instances when people confidently attacked your self-esteem and, as a people-pleaser, you hesitated to take a stand for yourself, which fueled their egos, I got angry at both of you. Sometimes, I think you don't feel angry enough towards the harsh world. Nevertheless, remember the time you just couldn't wake up despite the ten snooze alarms and missed that flight you paid thousands for? I mean, you deserve to be angry at yourself! I often wonder what could've happened to all those chances that you were too stupid and scared to take. Let's talk about how you didn't study well enough and couldn't get into your absolute dream college. What on earth were you thinking? That was your only shot, and you missed it!

Remember the time you were too scared to confess your feelings to that one person, and now that they have moved to a different continent, you both joke about what could've been and what will never come to be? Is that a joke to you? It's surely not for me. Also, you need to stop caring about the opinions of literally everyone around you. I mean, what is it with you always trying out different hairstyles, expensive skin products, and uncomfortable clothes that you end up not even liking most of the time? They all just sit in that one corner of the room! It is just a waste of money that you will never get back! Do you recall that one toxic friend group from school who always treated you like a side character? Yes, the ones with whom you're still friends! When will you ever learn? You know the stuff that's bad for you, and yet you seem to love to self-sabotage!

Tell me one thing: if I get angry enough at you, will you finally fix yourself or become an even worse version of yourself? This trip down memory lane is always a nightmare for me. I'm working overtime for my brain and running on no sleep because I decide to overthink before bed! I think about all the opportunities that you wasted. Remember your first internship that you were super excited about, and were completely blind to all the red flags? Yeah, the same one that left you completely traumatised and terrified to ever apply for a corporation or to work at all. Out of hundreds of other roles in other companies, why did you have to apply for and choose this one? Let's just admit it: you are the worst at making decisions, and you end up making a mess, making your life haywire.

What are you ever going to do with your future? At this pace, in this economy, would you even be able to have a career? What if you end up working in a toxic workplace and never

reach your true potential? And if you do not have a nice, stable career, you can kiss buying a house goodbye! Not to discourage you, Maya, but I'm anxious about the future. You are making me, your Anxiety, run like a madman. Look around you; if you are going to survive in a capitalistic society hellbent on crushing you, you can't appear weak! When you think about the five years ahead, I start spiralling! You have no plan, nothing figured out! Everybody around you seems to have pulled themselves together; why can't you?! If you are clueless about planning your finances, the bills will eat you alive. You only have dreams and things you want to achieve in your mind, and yet there is no logical plan to follow!

Have you ever thought about what workplace politics will be like? Your sly, manipulative future coworkers and bosses who can play that game will walk all over you! I am scared, I feel frozen, time seems to keep running, and we are stuck in the same place. Is climate change going to turn out as horrible as the articles say? I know you want things to go your way, but what if they don't, or get much worse? What if the future is bleaker than I could imagine? We don't expect too much from life; however, I wonder, will you ever achieve financial stability? Will you ever travel to the places we have only seen on the internet? Will you be able to own a house and enjoy it while staying debt-free?

If not, will we be able to cope with the fact that you have achieved none of your dreams and all your ambitions were for nothing? Moreover, what if you lose touch with your current friends? Will you be able to make good enough memories or even get close enough with any new friends? What about your future romantic partner? Would you get to have a "happily-ever-after" ending or one that ends in disappointment? A lot of times I feel that being alone sounds better, doesn't it? I am mainly worried about the kind of people you are going to be surrounded by; sometimes, I don't get a choice. Not everybody's life changes for the better, you know? I don't want to sound pessimistic, but it's hard not to when you look at the society you live in.

Remember how we made a pact to never wear white in the monsoon because you were worried you'd trip and fall into a puddle, even though that has never happened? Also, the moments when you can rarely sit still with your left leg shaking at an annoying frequency, which can't be helped however much you try? It is because of me; it's my fault, I know, but that is the closest I can describe what anxiety feels like! Somewhere in the subconscious mind, I keep making up scenarios of what "could" go wrong and exhaust myself from all the overthinking and the unnecessary jumping to ridiculous conclusions. Maybe it prepares me to face the worst-case scenario; however, in the process, it ruins your present time. I wish it did not have to be this way, but this is just how I'm wired to be as a person, it seems.

Yours truly,
Maya's anger and anxiety.

Hell or High Water

By Tridhara Rathore

Returning to my childhood home, I felt an overwhelming sense of dread. For the first time, I despised my existence. Every step I took was filled with terror and fear of the unknown. A sudden heat rose through my spine, and I realised that any emotion or circumstance was better than this feeling of demise.

Numb, I glanced at my whole family, seeing them all together. In that split second, I couldn't hold back the weight of tears in my eyes; they flowed like a river. After a moment of turmoil, I clasped so close to my Bua, thinking to myself - that's just way hard to accept the fact that a man beloved by everyone, who never envied, with a heart of benevolence, Patriarch of the House, departed from his life and left us all in misery. As the Doctors had told us, we knew this was coming. I couldn't make peace with it. There was always an unexplainable ache that I felt every time I saw his pictures—a helpless thought that I could have done more for him.

As I walked in, there was a nostalgic odour of his body still lingering in his room, strong and settled. My grandfather had an artistic touch to him. He had the talent to transform a chunk of wood into an art piece. Everything was kept the way he left it—his wardrobe with his collection of cologne, pants, coats, and shirts—not a single thing was misplaced. As I dug through his cabinet, I found his album that we were never allowed to touch. As I lay on his bed and looked through the pictures in the album, I felt time freeze for a while. I recalled the way he used to wander and the way he would check up on everyone from time to time.

Grief is a chapter that will come into your life at least once. You will initially hate it but eventually feel a burden lift off your shoulders. Sometimes it's best to cry out rather than hold it in.

Since I was a kid, my grandparents were the ones who helped me get ready for school, prepared my food, and took care of me. As I grew up, I started to drift apart from them until a moment like this came into my life, where I learned the hard truth that you may never get that time you spent with them again.

Later in the day, when most of the rituals of the death ceremony were over, we all sat on the veranda, having a cup of tea. Refreshing the love and bond we shared and the endless memories we made with him. This phase brought me back to my roots, tying a knot so close to my heart that I never wish to untie. Laughing as we recalled the old times, I felt eased and grounded.

Death is not something that can be concluded with just one word of grief. For me, it's a million emotions; it's a mixture of love, sorrow, hate, anger, fear, grief, and disappointment. A relationship that you have built over the years with someone needs the courage to let go. You want to keep them alive in your memories. It's an emotion that can never be repressed, a core memory that shapes you and plays a role in building who you are.

It is tough to comprehend that the person you have known your entire life is not with you anymore. However, perhaps this is the whole point of life—letting go of things that do not fulfil us, which makes it much harder to continue and live.

It is well said that whatever happens is for a reason. Sometimes life must unfold on its own, and we don't always have to carve our paths.

The time came when I had to depart for Bombay, and with all my heart, I longed for something I didn't have anymore. Something was different this time. One person close to my heart was missing, and his absence was a void that nobody could ever fill. I said goodbye to everyone, holding each one of them tightly and keeping them close to me. I hurried straight to his room, summoned my feelings, and patiently looked through his wardrobe, his clothes, his writings, and his fragrance. I mustered up the courage to say farewell for the last time. Closing the door as I moved further away.

At that crucial moment, I knew the chapter was closed and done.



Where millions of dreams were made

By Samruddhi Pathare

*It is a sport loved and admired by millions of people.
A sport that will put your emotions on a roller coaster ride.
A sport that unites millions of people across borders.
A sport that isn't just a sport –
It's an emotion.*

– Cricket



From the small lanes of rural villages to the bustling streets of metropolitan cities, cricket is adored by all classes and sections of society in India. It is often used as an icebreaker to start small conversations in India. For years, people have revered it as a religion and celebrated it as a festival. They go all across the world to see their country thrive globally. We have witnessed people breaking the rules, spending their life earnings, and travelling miles away to see their favourite teams and players perform.

This sport has the power to bring people from diverse

backgrounds together and enjoy themselves. Simultaneously, we have witnessed that in past years, cricket has been used as a unifying medium to get people under one roof, cheer for their country, and forget their differences. Also, we have observed fans being very spiritual while watching a cricket match. They will wear their lucky jersey and sit with their fingers crossed for hours without complaints.

It shows how fans will go the extra mile to profess their love for this beautiful game. Some fans even paint their entire body to support their favourite player. For example, Mr

Sudhir Kumar Chaudhary, a worshipper of Sachin Tendulkar, paints his entire body in tri-colour with his name and jersey number. Another example is Mr H. Saravanan, who wears a wigs, paints his body yellow and stands in support of Mahendra Singh Dhoni. It displays how this game is deeply ingrained in the hearts of cricket fans.

I think credit should be given to iconic players who have made this sport immensely popular in India. Sachin Tendulkar, the "God of Cricket," has inspired many generations. We all have heard stories from our grandparents and parents about how they stopped watching cricket the minute Tendulkar retired, but that didn't make them stop loving this sport. Sachin Tendulkar has played a huge role in creating the cricket craze in India. He is and will always be an iconic figure in cricket history, to whom people will always look up. His responsibility was taken further by the modern-day legend Virat Kohli, the "King of Cricket." He has not only been able to inspire many youngsters but carried the sport to a much higher level internationally.

Similarly, iconic captains such as Kapil Dev, Mahendra Singh Dhoni, Mithali Raj, and Rohit Sharma have given us moments that instilled a sense of national pride among fans. It was the legendary World Cup win at Lords in 1983 under Kapil Dev's captaincy that made us believe that Indians have what it takes to win at big events. When we talk about iconic captains, how can we forget our captain, Mahendra Singh Dhoni? The only Indian captain who has won all major ICC trophies. "Dhoni finishes off in style" is an all-time classic that will be remembered for ages. On the other hand, thanks to Mithali Raj, who has created immense popularity for cricket among women, her career inspired many girls to take up cricket in a country where cricket was seen as a male-dominant sport.

Meanwhile, Rohit Sharma has etched his name in history. I don't think anyone can forget how he led the Indian cricket team to win the T20 World Cup in Barbados this year. It ended India's 13-year wait for an ICC trophy and gave Indian fans a reason to rejoice. We have always believed and supported the men in blue, even when the results were not in their favour. Indian fans believed the team would undoubtedly win the 2023 ODI World Cup, which happened in India, but their dreams were crushed after Australia snatched the trophy right under their nose. They were heartbroken and devastated as this loss was unexpected. Some had lost interest in cricket, but the minute India won a low-scoring thriller against arch-rivals Pakistan at the T20 World Cup 2024, many realised why they were fond of this sport.

What makes this tournament special is that it was a complete team effort that took them beyond the finishing line. I would like to mention the heroic performances of our players that made this tournament special and memorable, such as Rohit Sharma's aggressive approach in the power play, which always gave a flying start to the team; Virat Kohli stepping up in the finals when India needed it the most; Suryakumar's excellent batting performance against Pakistan and the USA, which helped India in the middle; and that stunning catch in the finals is going down as one of the greatest catches in the history of cricket. He didn't just catch the ball but grabbed the trophy for the entire country as well.

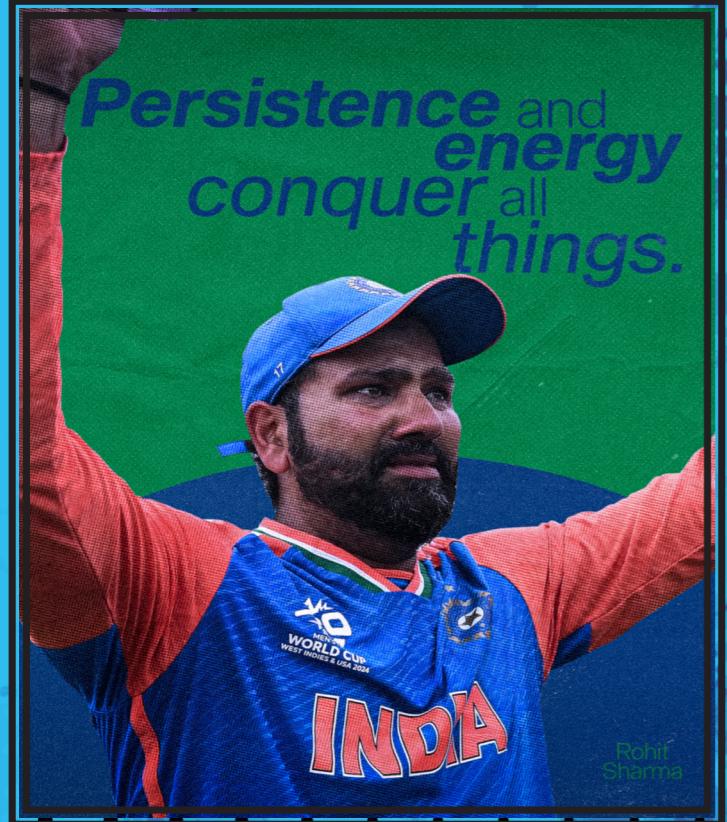
Hardik Pandya's comeback at the right moment worked in favour of Team India, and his performance showed us why he is one of the greatest all-rounders in the world. Spinners like Kuldeep and Jadeja made the opposition dance at their fingertips, and Axar's exceptional performances in all three departments were one of the reasons why India was able to taste this victory. Jasprit Bumrah is the absolute best, and it was delightful to watch his fiery spells in every match at the World Cup. It was something magical. He played as an X factor, which helped India cross the finish line. Players like Rishabh Pant, Shikhar Dube, and Mohammad Siraj also made valuable contributions, securing Team India's undefeated run at the tournament.

I would be lying if I said that we were confident enough to win the finals, as there was a point where South Africa was in a comfortable position to snatch this joyous victory from us. Most of our emotions were all over the place. It was a much-needed victory for fans as well as for players. We saw what it meant to senior players like Rohit Sharma, Virat Kohli, Hardik Pandya, and most importantly, their coach, Rahul Dravid. If India had lost this game, it might have created hate and anger among Indian fans against the game. Our heroes kept their calm and emerged victorious.

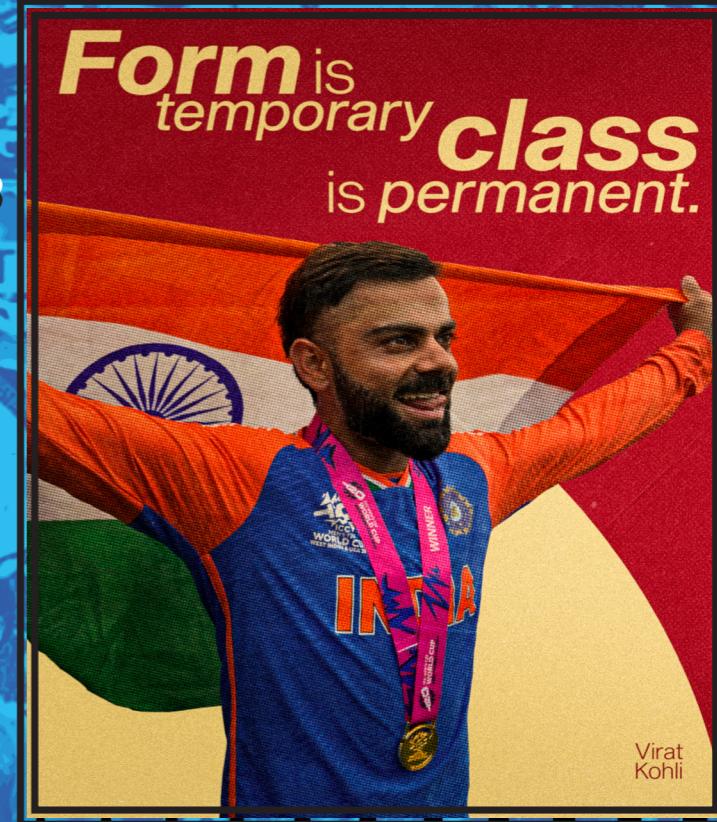
Fans were bursting crackers, singing and dancing on the streets, roaming with tricolour flags on their shoulders, and chanting "India!!" till early morning, demonstrating their devotion and affection for this game. It will be a core memory for many of us, and we will pass down these tales to future generations. Fans were overwhelmed and soon devastated as their childhood heroes announced their retirement from the T20 internationals. It came as a shock and was heartbreaking, as one trophy cost them the retirements of three-star players in this format. On the other hand, some felt it was the right decision as they got the chance to end it on a high note.

Festivities didn't stop here as the BCCI arranged an open bus victory parade at Marine Drive where fans could watch their heroes up close and commemorate this victory together. It was a sea full of blue fans on the streets of Marine Drive, where fans were waiting for hours to catch a glimpse of that trophy. Fans were again found sitting on trees, dancing, and singing songs like "Vande Mataram" and "Lehra Do" on the streets with a sense of pride and joy. It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience for Indian cricket fans.

Thank you for this.
We are proud of you, Team India.
From a beloved cricket fan.



Rohit Sharma



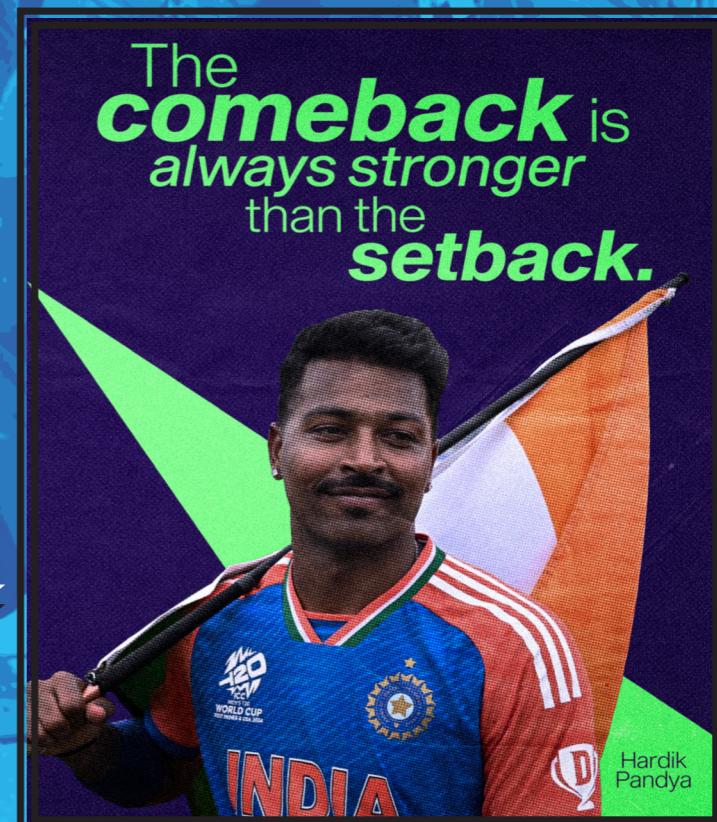
Virat Kohli

UNDISPUTED CHAMPIONS

Illustrations by Hatim Moriwala



Jasprit Bumrah



Hardik Pandya

Two shots of yearning

By Anushka Chavan

Wish you could've stayed that night,
The loud music and my dizzy brain,
In those few meters between us,
I cried, yearning for you.

My heart begged,
For you to stay,
Trying to erase our memories,
Convincing myself it's the last time.

I'll recall our conversations,
Each word is like a song I learned.
I'll find you in this strong wind,
Echoing our laughter.

I'll remember you in my happiness,
In the bitterness,
Whenever I light a cigarette,
I'll recall the last night I saw you.

I'll see you in my dreams,
In my words,
Remember you as part of my youth,
As a woman with a smile I loved.

In the final embrace,
I'll mark the last trace of us,
In the drunken air of my memories,
I'll be thankful to you for letting me love you.

I'll remember you as someone I once loved....



Echoes of Rebellion, Whispers of Calm

By Mansi B. Singh

Running away from the duress,
A teen's mind never at rest.

Sometimes there's a volcano of emotions,
Sometimes passion and devotion.

The emotional path begins with revolution,
Shattering the chains of control,
Imposed by those in higher positions,
As he embarks to take hold

However, there's hope and fright
At the same time,
Oblivious of the future,
A hopeful, timid creature
With a rebellious nature,
Taking nano steps
To prove himself the best.

The struggle and the failure
Might pour frustration's rain,
The piercing obstacles
Bleed agony and pain.

The restless teen neither whines nor weeps,
For overcoming is in his hands.
Each failure, each hardship,
Undeterred, he withstands.

His rebellious nature has cost him a lot,
Indeed a man, for all the battles he fought.

This voyage took the teen
To places he'd never been,
Through challenges unseen,
To a reflective scene.

In the end, the rebel seeks
A life of peace, where serenity speaks.
The battles waged, now at ease,
Only calm and gentle peace.



निसर्गाच्या भावना

By Neeraj Shedge

सप्तरंग उधळावा, धरतीला आली जाग,
उमेद पेटून उठली जणू आणीत टाकली साग.

काळ्यामातीच्या गाभाज्यात आज फुले बहरली,
सुंदर या निसर्गाने स्वर्गाची वाट दावली.

निसर्ग हा आपला उध्वस्त होतो क्षणभरात,
नयन नाही ओले तरी आश्रू आहे उरात.

मन भरून आले तरी जिभेवर शब्द नाही,
वातावरण नाराज आहे आणि आपले लक्ष नाही.

शहरात सापेडेना, डोंगरात शोधतोय जिव्हाला,
निदान आपल्या शहरात आपलेपना मिळावा.

अहंकार लाडावला आहे जण भाऊ धाकटा,
असंख्य आहेत लोक तरी गदीमध्ये एकटा.

स्वप्रांची नगरी बांधून गाव का शोधतो,
कुळ्हाड हातात घेऊन घाव का शोधतो.

उठा उठा गोगलगाय आली आहे धावून,
न दिसणाऱ्या निसर्गाच्या भावना पाहून.

लहान मुलांना बागडायला मोकळा आवार नाही,
दर्शनास कलश असून देखील, मूर्तीस गाभारा नाही.

पक्षी थवा बनवून उडतायत, घाबरले की काय,
घरटी अनेक तुटली तरी माणसाला काळजी नाय.

मनी नाही भाव तरी माजला आहे खलबलाट,
मन शांत करेल समुद्री लाटांचा खळखळाट.

झाड हिरवीगार त्यांच्या प्रत्येक पानात शंकर,
माणसांचा हलगर्जीपणा नाश करतोय भयंकर.

कोणीतरी जाऊन विचारा त्यांना चेहरा का पडला,
आधुनिक विश्वामध्ये भावनांचा दर वाढला.

ओरबाढून घेतलं सगळं, संपवली सगळी नाती,
अवकाशात तारे चमकत नाहीत काळ्या राती.

व्यक्त कसे करावे? कळत नाहीत निसर्गाच्या भावना,
देवाचे मटके भरले, माणसा अरे आता तरी थांब ना.

केवढा धांगड धिंगाणा तरी अलगाद हसते हवा,
रोज आशा घेऊन उभरतो सूर्य नवा उगवतो.



Mumbai: A City Paradise

By Sapna Dodmani

A city of dreams come true!
A city giving unconditionally,
But expecting nothing in return.

Bustling with folks chasing money,
While some trailing peace,
An uncanny cocktail,
Residing in a corner.

Mumbai, a metropolitan hub,
Endorsing countless lives and their journey,
Filled with an abundance of love and sorrow,
Continues to thrive.

Mumbai welcomes every soul without any qualms,
Hugging each one with wide open arms,
The city that embraced millions of lives,
Giving wings to each of their dreams

It's the city that never sleeps,
Carrying the weight of us humans,
The locals that not only carry the people,
But also their dreams.

A city that never stops,
A city that gets back on its feet,
No matter how hard it falls,
Be it due to terrorist activists or natural calamities.

Mumbai, a city of contrasts,
Where rich and poor dwell side-by-side,
Because success and failure
Are just grey shades in one's life.

It's the city where,
Every moment teaches us something new,
But it also gives us hope,
To renew every chapter.

It's the city where I grew up and reside,
It's the city that taught me to trust and conquer,
In the end, I want this to be the city,
That gives me a final goodbye.



We are not what we used to be

By Prisha Shah

Right from the day
When we parted our ways,
You've left me unanswered-
"How come you are not the one,
whom I had loved?"
How did things went so far, that in a blink of second
I questioned,
All the time we spend.
What did we lack in our efforts?
That we had no choice , but,
to face each other ,
When we had decided ,
to face everything together.
Whose fault was it ?
The answer is yet to be known
There are times
When I wish I never met you
Atleast, I would have saved myself,
from what I'm going through .
You made it unbearable for me ,
now that we are not together,
Don't bother to come in front of me ,
in any way,
That's my last plea.



तुम भी मेरे जैसी हो

By Jaswant Singh

हमेशा भीड़ में चुप होती हो
पास होकर भी सब से दूर होती हो
रोती हो लगता है सबको हँसती हो
ऐसे तुम खुद को पागल बनाती हो
कभी चाहती हो तुम्हार पास कोई हो
कभी अकेला रहना चाहती हो
तुम भी मेरे जैसी हो ।

बातें छुपाने का हुनर सीख लिया है तुमने भी
आसानी से बातों को टाल देती हो
बहुत समय से रोई नहीं हो तुम
चाहती हो कोई गले मिले,
उसकी बाहों में खोना चाहती हो
जब भी कोई पूछे कैसी हो, तुम हँस देती हो
न जाने कितने गम अंदर छुपाए बैठी हो
तुम भी मेरे जैसी हो ।

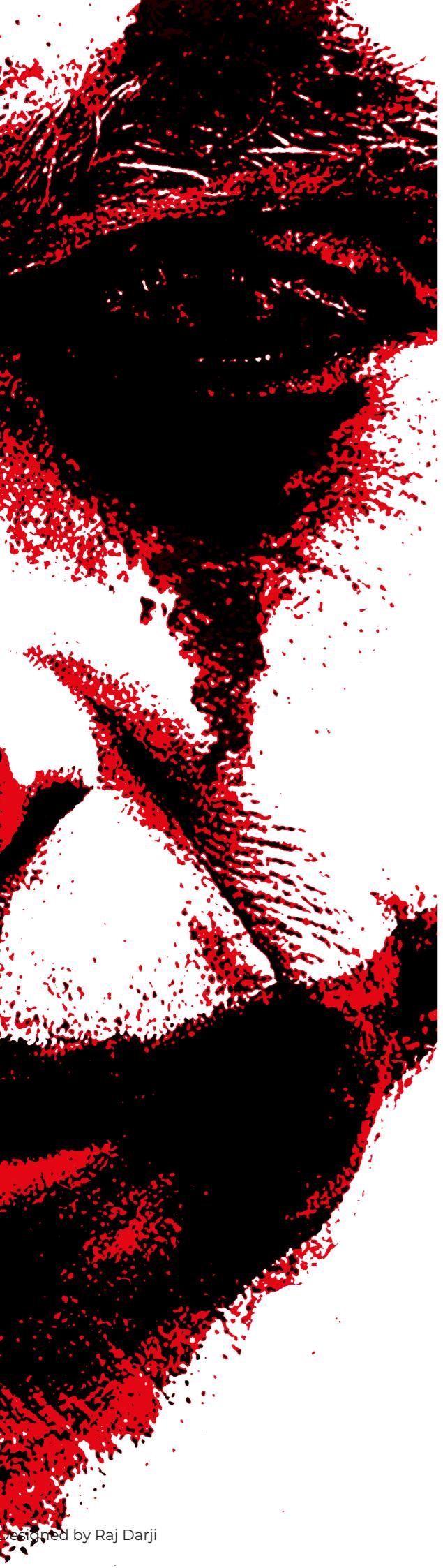
अपनों में बहुत चमक है तुम्हारी
गैरों में फीकी पड़ जाती हो
मिलना तो चाहती हो सबसे
थोड़ी दूरी भी रखना चाहती हो
और अगर घर की बात पर आ जाए आंसू
तो पोछ के हँसने लगती हो
तुम भी मेरे जैसी हो ।

कभी समाज से बहुत डरती हो तुम
कभी समाज को चुनौती देती हो
आजादी बहुत ध्यारी है तुम्हें
उसके लिए किसी से भी लड़ सकती हो
दिल की किए हुए तुम्हें जमाने हो गए हैं
लोग क्या कहेंगे बहुत सोचती हो
तुम भी मेरे जैसी हो ।

हँसकर छुपाने की कोशिश करती हो अपना गम
न जाने क्यों हर बार सफल हो जाती हो
सूरज फिर भी पसंद है तुम्हें
चांद से बहुत डरती हो
सपने देखना तो भूल गई हो
रात में तुम सोती कहां हो
तुम भी मेरे जैसी हो ।

जब हम मिलेंगे तो क्या करेंगे
तुम चाहोगी कि मैं पढ़ लूं तुम्हारी खामोशी
मैं चाहूंगा कि तुम पढ़ लो मेरी खामोशी
जब हर तरफ से थेर लेगा हमें सन्नाटा
तुम कूछ गिरा कर उसे तोड़ दोगी
और दखोगी मेरी तरफ मुस्कुराते हुए और कहोगी,
सौरी
तुम भी मेरे जैसी हो ।





Evil, isn't it?

By Arshita Vishwakarma

I don't remember since when?
I developed this admiration.
This admiration for the things of beauty

The tendency which made me see
Beauty in everything i see
Made me want to discover
Glitter in dust
Light in darkness
Good in evil.

I began to see a hero in the villain
I began to see the reasons for all the sins
I saw the world in another light
A perspective uncommon to all

Even the Devil seemed appealing to me
Even a stranger with crimson covered fist
Seemed to be attracting me

Because perhaps in everything
I started to see the thing of beauty
No matter how invalid was it.
In it all, I started to see the thing of beauty.

Is Parenthood Beautiful?

By Soumya Sakhee

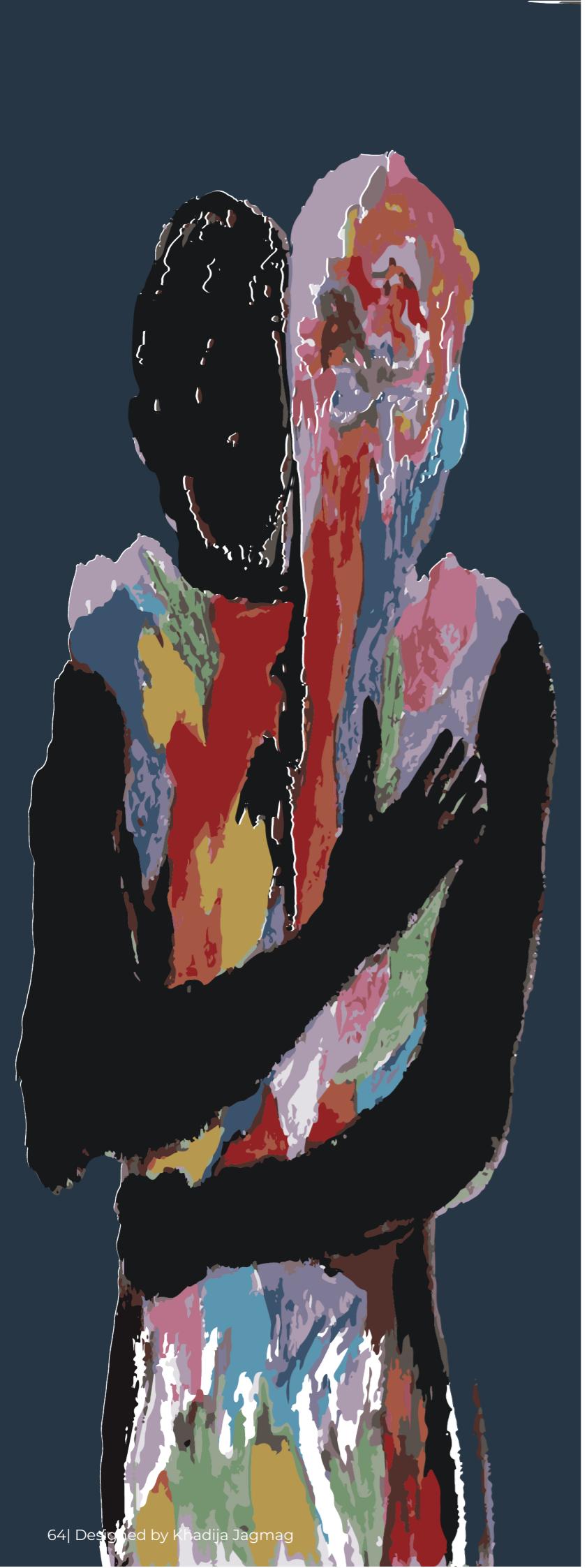
My motherhood's still alive
Yours is a newborn
I'm becoming a child now
Growing up pleasing for attention...

As my palms tremble
While asking for love & time
I see you walk away
From not just me but from parenting...

You've become like those lost laces now
Which cannot cuddle this old shoe
While you've found a new one & have started a new life
I lost my pair and shoelace too..

Is parenthood beautiful?
Only for me maybe
They call it responsibility, I call it connection
"Oh my dear, will you please call me once!"
"Oh my dear, will you please call me once!"





A Part of Sorrow

By Qaasid (Subhrojit Sanpui)

Let me just borrow,
A part of your sorrow.
So, you get a good day,
And a better tomorrow.

Let me steal,
The worries you feel.
So it makes you less burdened,
And gives time to heal.

Let me just fill,
A void that'll kill.
With words seeming empty,
But comforting still.

I know it seems absurd,
Doubting your worth.
Just know you matter,
You deserve to be heard.

Life's a messy lane,
with lots of tear and pain.
I know it's never easy,
but we'll find courage again.

Let's not hope for the best,
Let's leave worse for the rest.
For purpose lies in the moment,
Present's our actual quest.

We'll make friends with the demon,
Stay together unbeaten.
When you think of giving up, a piece of art
Will be right by you, with/ without a reason.

So, let me just borrow,
A part of your sorrow.
So that you get a good day,
And a better tomorrow.

// And a better tomorrow //



Game

By Gargi Paralkar

A quiet room, no windows in sight,
Merely a flickering light above,
A sly hostage and an honest man,
In this silent chamber, only one walks out.

The game is simple but not fair,
No rules to follow, just struggle and bear,
Who will win this duel?
Between courage and fear.

Courage steps forward, bold heart,
Eyes on the unknown, a story to unfold,
Fear's voice a soft whisper, of danger and doubt,
Yet courage desperately seeks a way out.

Courage speaks of dreams to seek,
Of paths that must be tried,
Yet fear insists with chilling twist,
"Stay safe, stay here, inside."

One inspires so brightly,
Singing of the future's light,
The other reasons and manipulates,
Recalling past's dark nights.

Courage falters and falls,
Holding onto hope with trembling hands,
Fear's shadow spreads wider,
A force even courage can't withstand.

In the end, light fades to gray,
The door swings wide, the sky roars,
And the hostage steps forth with the most wicked
smile,
Into the storm, where now darkness soars.

Sites & Citations

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