

MEJANGE

Imperfection is Aesthetic

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Then, Now, Forever

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Preface



Welcome to Mélange,

A literary magazine crafted by the students of the Department of Mass Media, Kishinchand Chellaram College, Mumbai. 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.

The views and opinions here do not necessarily reflect the views of the editorial board, college, or affiliated organisations. They are those of their respective contributors to Mélange. These perspectives are put forth with the intention to encourage discussion and do not represent any official statement or advice.

In this endeavour, we are eternally grateful to Prof. (Dr.) Hemlata K. Bagla [Vice-Chancellor HSNC University], Prof. (Dr.) Tejasree Shanbhag [Principal K. C. College], Prof. (Dr.) Shalini 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 sixth edition of Mélange!

Cracks in the wall, blunders and mistakes, a patch on your favourite shirt, broken relationships, inexplicable human nature, blemished faces, a halfway journey, and so many imperfect messes that are beyond 'Imperfection'—this edition explores what it means to be imperfect, and how picture-perfect lives are mere utopia.

When my team decided to go with Imperfection as a theme, I was unsure. After all, how do you define Imperfection? The definition varies from person to person. It solely depends on how one sees and perceives reality. This lack of a universal definition made me wonder—how do we do justice to something so fluid? For what imperfection is for you could be wholeness for me in life.

Turns out it went beyond my imagination. The pieces in this edition deeply resonated with all of us somewhere. While working on it, we were all touched in our own way, and that just made us embrace whatever we had on our plate. This issue wholeheartedly celebrates the essence of imperfections that make us human.

As you flip through the pages, you will find nuggets of Imperfection in aspects of cinema, media, relationships, art, and Life. You will find yourself stumbling across flaws, mistakes and unfiltered moments that redefine and shape the lives of people.

This edition strongly reminds me of the Chinese tale where a woman carried two pots— one flawless and the other broken. While the first one held the water all the way to the destination, the other pot was later appreciated for leaking water, which helped water plants in the way. That offers a cozy blanket of acceptance—the beauty of accepting things the way they are and growing with them. For that reason, this edition stands out for having cultural essence with it. From taking you to the depths of Japanese philosophy Wabi Sabi to taking a voyage through the journey of a potter, picture to picture, there are gleams of it. Alongside, there is a corner that pays homage to one of the greatest filmmakers—Shyam Benegal. Followed by the stories of friends, verses dedicated to relationships, the evolution of fragmented writing, and ironic framing by the media.

As you walk through the paths of Imperfection, I hope you find comfort in knowing that perfection is not the absence of flaws but the presence of beauty in its purest form. What we are, what we create, and what we leave behind may be dented by flaws, but that does not make them any less whole.

As Kahlil Gibran once said in his poem, Do not Love Half Lovers:

The half is a mere moment of inability
but you are able for you are not half a being
You are a whole that exists
to live a life not half a life.
Happy reading!

Warm regards,

Yashvi Jain
Editor-in-Chief, Mélange

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Designed by Tejas Bainalwar

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Visuals by Tejas Bainalwar

Har Mein Har ko Dekha

By Vedant Shete

Shyam Benegal was a prolific filmmaker, most notably for his contribution to Indian cinema, particularly in the realm of the Indian New Wave and Parallel cinema. Amongst the array of filmmakers and storytellers of the 1980s and 1990s Hindi cinema, he created a vociferous identity for himself through his field of work, often satirizing the milieu of then social problems and attacking obsolete societal institutions such as caste disparities and gender inequality. His films not only represented marginalized communities but also depicted their struggles and battles with identity in society. This encouraged a dialectic in the parallel arthouse cinema, similar to that of the Indian neo-realist films of the 1960s.

Though Benegal's films were not neo-realistic formalistically, they constantly indulged in the realm of realism that plagued the rural corners of the country. This observation finds resonance in *Ankur* and *Manthan*, the latter being India's first crowd-funded film—its genesis owed to the collective will of 500,000 farmers in Gujarat, who saw their co-operative agrarian movement immortalized on screen. Though Benegal hated the categorization of cinema into alternate and parallel streams, his contribution remains most distinguished for laying the foundation of a progressive countercurrent to the entrenched star hierarchy. He orchestrated the rise of a parallel constellation—one that birthed actors like Om Puri, Naseeruddin Shah, and Shabana Azmi, their very identities rendered inseparable from the ethos of the arthouse movement. Beyond the honor of the Dadasaheb Phalke Award, the Padma Bhushan, the Padma Shri, and a multitude of National Film Awards, Benegal's crowning achievement was the singular cinematic lexicon he carved for himself. Across the vast graph of his films, he cemented his place as a true auteur—one whose legacy continues to reverberate, inspiring generations of filmmakers who seek to challenge, subvert, and redefine the language of Indian cinema.

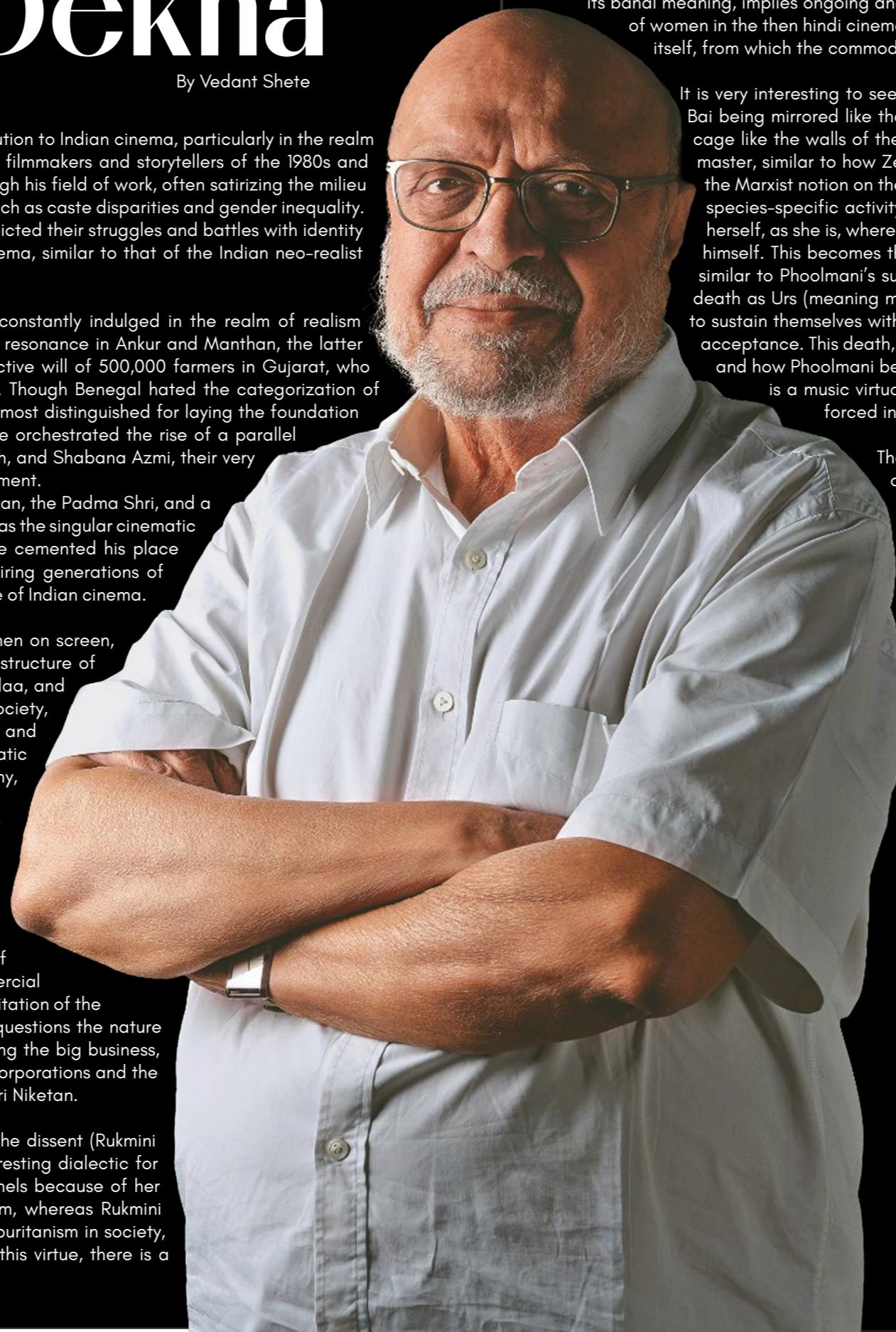
Another unique aspect of Benegal's films was the depiction of women on screen, which asserted the existence of inequalities due to the patriarchal structure of society. This issue was addressed in films like *Ankur*, *Bhumika*, *Zubeidaa*, and *Sardari Begum*. His films were immersed in the reality of Indian society, but not like the new wave films like Chetan Anand's *Neecha Nagar* and Bimal Roy's *Do Bigha Zameen*, which portrayed society with cinematic exaggeration and hyperbole. Instead, he sought to foster empathy, immersing audiences in the lived experiences of his characters. Taking *Mandi* as an example, all the characters in the film are in some way flawed, but still, he manages to create an emphatic connection and humanize them. The film uses the real-life practical milieu to create situations, and the behaviour of the characters, by virtue of being absurd, creates comedy in which there is satire and social commentary. This imperfection is what makes the world of *Mandi* interesting. A compelling narrative is created through the usage of symbolisms, such as the replacement of all sexual activity with a commercial transaction, which signifies the title *Mandi*, meaning a market. The invitation of the medium of any financial exchange gets a sexual connotation. This questions the nature of an expansionist capital society, with members like Mr. Gupta being the big business, which by the virtue of its influence controls politics in the municipal corporations and the social narrative by being sponsors of institutions like Shanti Devi's *Nari Niketan*.

It also addresses the dual nature of corporations, as both sides of the dissent (Rukmini Bai and Shanti Devi) are funded by Mr. Gupta. This creates an interesting dialectic for feminism, as Shanti Devi, an activist, forces women out of the brothels because of her moral absolutism and does nothing whatsoever to rehabilitate them, whereas Rukmini Bai accommodates phoolmani. This also addresses the ill effects of puritanism in society, leading to fundamentalist ostracization of a section of society. By this virtue, there is a

similarity created between Kamli, the prostitute who forces Phoolmani and Vasanti the dancer to sleep with customers, and Shanti Devi, who forces the whole brothel out of the city. The film also addresses the destruction of courtesan culture, where the heritage of a city is expelled out as the force of colonization destroys the structure of patronage that sustains it. This becomes an Anglo-imperialist perspective for commercial expansion, evident from the usage of Bahadur Shah Zafar's ghazal, the last Mughal emperor who was exiled to Rangoon in a similar fashion. Much like Mr. Agrawal, who lived off British financial support, Mr. Gupta's corporate lobby in the city operates as a modern parallel. Similarly, in Mr. Agrawal's house concert sequence, where the ghazal is performed, when a request is made to perform a trendy Bollywood song, it is declined by Rukmini Bai with a reply that is a pun, "agar koi chaalu cheez sunni hai to hindi film hi dekh lo." Here, 'chaalu', in its banal meaning, implies ongoing and a separate connotation of cheap and hollow. This satirizes the commodification of women in the then Hindi cinema. This can also be interpreted as an ironic attack on the tawaif (courtesan) culture itself, from which the commodification of women has its roots in India.

It is very interesting to see the symbolisms of animals used in this film—the treatment of Tungrus by Rukmini Bai being mirrored like that of a gimmick bazaar monkey, and that of the parrot and Zeenat, trapped in a cage like the walls of the brothel. A parrot cannot sing by will like other birds but mimics the sounds of its master, similar to how Zeenat is coerced to maintain her image and "chastity." This can be interpreted as the Marxist notion on the alienation of humans as a species, where the capitalist machine prevents us from species-specific activity. This supposedly safeguarded environment is what prevents her from truly being herself, as she is, wherein Darvesh seeks to release the parrot so that he can learn how to fly and actualize himself. This becomes the mode of instruction for Zeenat, who decides to flee. Here, Zeenat's escape is similar to Phoolmani's suicide attempt, which frees her from the brothel. This suicide is the Sufi notion of death as Urs (meaning marriage, or as mystics prefer, death). Both Rukmini Bai and Zeenat won't be able to sustain themselves without each other, but in this act of letting go, that is suicidal, there is freedom and acceptance. This death, the 7th rung of love in Sufism, is the dissolution of individual identity here of Zeenat and how Phoolmani becomes an object of desire much like Zeenat. In the end, despite the irony that one is a music virtuoso and the other is mute, both share the common fate of coercion—Phoolmani is forced into sex, while Zeenat is forced into abstinence.

The film also explores the Sufi perspective on love, portraying it as a force that helps one break free from worldly and societal chains to discover oneself and connect with the Creator (Allah). In Sufism, no distinction is made between ishq-e-haqiqi (love for God) and ishq-e-mijazi (love for man), and through this love, Zeenat sets herself free. This is evident from an extract of the Qawwali (a folk Sufi form of music) "Har main Har ko dekha," the quote from Amir Khusrau: Khusrau dariyaa prem ka, so vaako uski dhaar, jo utra so duub gaya, aur jo duuba so paar. (Oh Khusrau, the river of love runs in strange directions. One who jumps into it drowns, and one who drowns gets across.)



Road Not Taken

By Yashvi Jain

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveller, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
-Robert Frost

Two roads. One was left for another day. One was travelled by. And that's where it leads...

I guess whatever I write has been heavily inspired by experimental writing. For me, it's one of those things that encourages me to read more because it always convinces me that I know nothing. And though it is easy to negate the clause when I say 'I know nothing,' I think of it as something really positive. It exposes me to how much I don't know and what kind of mammoth-size room I have to learn things. Things are apart, and I love reading experimental writing. Why? The reasons are many. But is it a popular opinion? Certainly not. Why? Reasons many. Something worth unravelling.

Long, long time ago, experimental writing was seen as a threat to shatter the conventional way of writing. That makes it unconventional. But, the difficulty lies in explaining a conventional way of literature. Elucidating from the lens of the West, any literature piece has a pattern. It has tensions, and the story is divided into- the beginning, middle, and end. It had arches and climaxes. Straightforward to understand, followed by consistency. There is much to add to what traditional conventional style means, but this is not an essay about conventional writing. It's about what was experimented on within experimental writing.

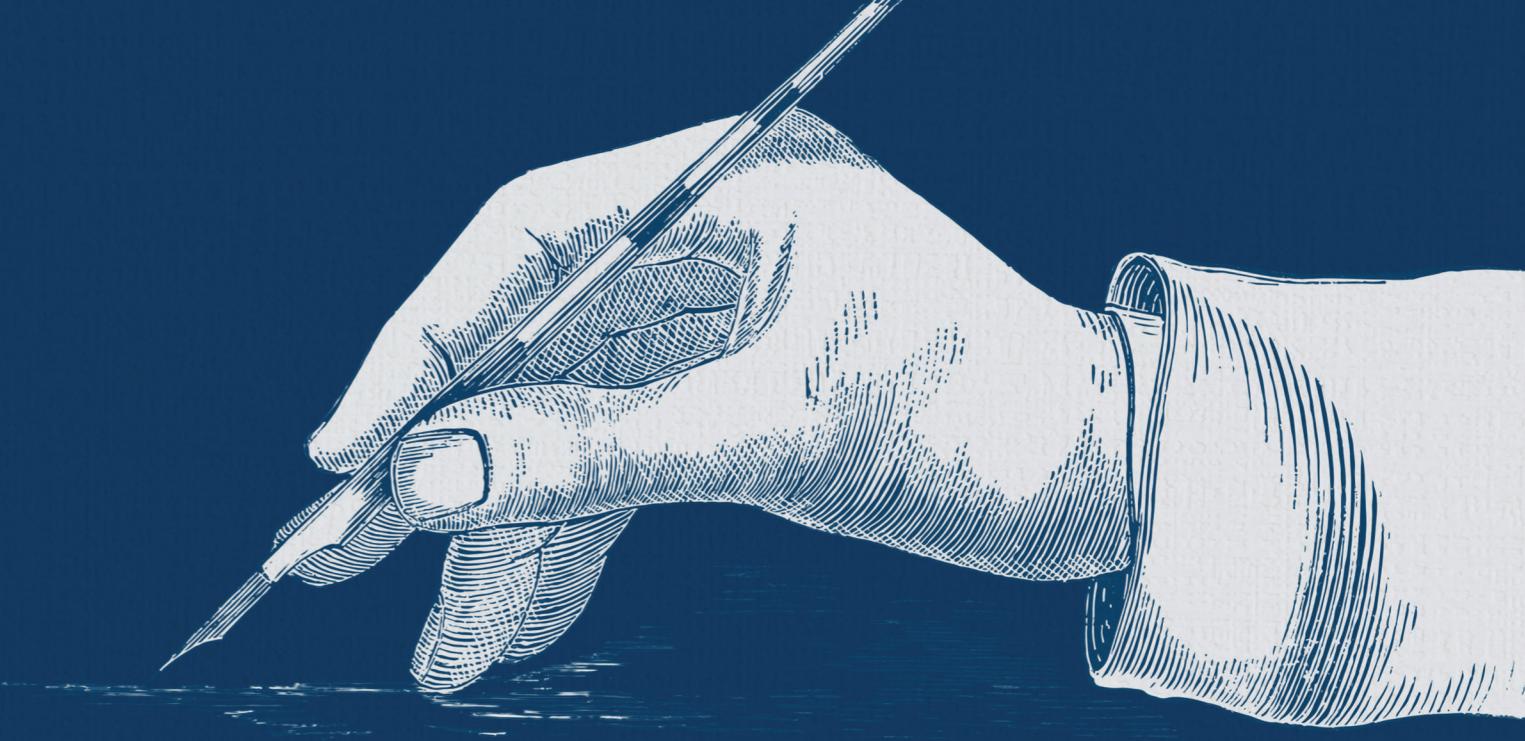
The Mess in Experimental Writing

Well, everything. At least, that's how it was perceived when it came to light. Writers liked to follow a freeing force with no hard and fast rules. Modernist writers, notably T.S. Eliot in *The Waste Land* or Gertrude Stein in *Tender Buttons*, wrote in ways that made conventional readers scratch their heads. A typical poem? Nope. An ordinary novel? Not quite. These works embraced non-linear narratives, fragmented language, and paradoxes. But guess what? At the time, these experimental forms were often dismissed as disorganized, confusing, or imperfect. Readers struggled with the absence of a plot or cohesive structure. Critics were baffled. These writers weren't just pushing boundaries—they were tearing down the walls of what literature should look like. This kind of "imperfection" was simply not the standard of good writing to many. Rejection kept on rolling until the 1960s, when it became a prominent force again.

And look what flourished?

Mess, of course! From a Western lens, the rise of experimental literature seemed like an explosion of chaos. Traditionalists clutched their pearls, dismissing it as unstructured, incomprehensible, and downright rebellious. But here's the twist: what critics saw as a "mess" became the foundation for one of the most celebrated movements in literary history- Modernist Movement.

Writers like James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, and Virginia Woolf took the reins and ran wild with unconventional techniques. Let's not forget Joyce's *Ulysses*, a novel that dared to chronicle an entire day in a stream-of-consciousness style, making readers feel like they were swimming in someone's brain soup. It was criticized for being unintelligible at the time, but today? It's hailed as one of the greatest novels ever written. T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, being more than a poem, was a collage of fragmented imagery, obscure references, and a refusal to follow the "rules" of poetry. And Woolf? She mastered interior



monologues and non-linear storytelling in works like *To the Lighthouse* and *Mrs. Dalloway*, reshaping how we understand character and narrative.

While these writers faced significant criticism for "destroying" traditional literature, they inspired countless others. The "mess" they created wasn't random but the reflection of life itself: fragmented, non-linear, and far from perfect. It resonated deeply with writers like Samuel Beckett, William Faulkner, and Gertrude Stein, who carried the torch of experimental literature forward, each adding their own flavour of imperfection to the mix.

This so-called "mess" didn't stop there. Modernism gave birth to Postmodernism, a movement where writers like Thomas Pynchon (*Gravity's Rainbow*) and Kurt Vonnegut (*Slaughterhouse-Five*) pushed boundaries even further, playing with irony, absurdity, and a deliberate lack of cohesion. Experimental literature has evolved into a playground for writers to question conventions, celebrate imperfections, and redefine storytelling itself.

That's the experiment in it...

The experiment in experimental writing is nothing but everything. It's too subjective to explain what it means. For one reader, it might seem like a chaotic stream of fragmented thoughts, while for another, it's a masterpiece reflecting the complexity of life. Whether it's perfect or imperfect? Well, that's up to whoever's reading it. But here's the thing: experimental writing isn't just about being edgy for the sake of it or throwing traditional rules out the window to annoy grammar purists. It exists because it's the most honest way to express how life or an event feels to the writer at that moment. That differs. That will always vary.

Unlike regular storytelling, which loves to serve you a proper beginning, middle, and end, experimental writing doesn't care about that stuff. It's not about "what happens next." It's about how it makes you feel as you're reading it. There's no neat timeline, no perfect structure, just pure essence. It's less about "this is the story," and more about "this is what it feels like to live through this story." And that's precisely what makes it so unique.

What's more interesting? Experimental literature can mean a hundred different things to a hundred different readers. There's no "right" way to understand it. That's why it ended up inspiring even non-experimental writers. Take Ernest Hemingway, for example; he wasn't breaking every rule in the book, but his minimalist, "iceberg theory" style definitely took a signal from the experimental writers. And honestly, without experimental writing shaking things up, we wouldn't have seen movements like the avant-garde, which didn't just stop at literature. It influenced everything—films, art, music. New culture chapter. Sure, experimental literature feels like the road less travelled. And yeah, not everyone gets it. But those who dared to take that road? They changed the game. They showed us that storytelling doesn't have to fit into a neat little box; it can be messy, unconventional, or whatever way it wishes to be. Alphabets of writing simply never existed!

And isn't that what Frost was really saying in *The Road Not Taken*? Sometimes, the less obvious path is the one that leaves a mark.

Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference.

Imperfection is aesthetic

By Twisha Vora

Understanding Wabi Sabi

Japan has seen a dynamic range of development across various industries. People here are known to achieve this by perfecting everything they do in all the fields. Japan is a country that is known to focus on perfection and detail-oriented work. The concept of Kodawari, a Japanese term that means the pursuit of perfection, is often used in a person's work, relationships, and social communication. You might have come across the fact of Japanese trains and their accuracy over time management. With perfection influencing their lifestyle, I often wonder how the 'Wabi Sabi' philosophy came to be practised in Japan with so much finesse.

Wabi-sabi is a traditional Japanese aesthetic and philosophical concept that celebrates imperfection, transience, and the beauty of the natural world. It represents an appreciation for life's fleeting nature and an acceptance of imperfection in art, design, and daily living. While it has inspired art, architecture, and lifestyle, it has also conveyed a deeper meaning of self-acceptance and understanding oneself by putting forward the importance of imperfection and the act of embracing it completely. It is grounded in the principles of impermanence, suffering, and emptiness. These remind us that nothing ever lasts, nothing is ever finished, and nothing is ever perfect. Wabi Sabi can be understood more by interpreting each word's meaning where 'Wabi' means simplicity and 'Sabi' means attentive melancholy in a gist.

The history behind what we know today as the Wabi-Sabi philosophy

Although this is known as a Japanese approach, this philosophy originates from Chinese Zen Buddhism. There is evidence of Dhammapada, a canonical Buddhist text that contains Buddha's sayings in the foundation of Wabi Sabi's philosophy. This indirectly shows the paradox of this philosophy. Ashikaga Yoshimasa, the 8th shogun of the Ashikaga shogunate (1435-1490), played a key role in developing wabi-sabi, a Japanese aesthetic emphasizing imperfection and transience. As a patron of the arts, Yoshimasa supported Zen Buddhism and the tea ceremony, both of which are central to wabi-sabi philosophy. His construction of the Silver Pavilion (Ginkaku-ji) in Kyoto, with its understated design and integration of nature, became an iconic example of this aesthetic. Yoshimasa's reign marked a shift toward simplicity, humility, and the appreciation of natural beauty, which remains central to Japanese culture today. This history is still prevalent in the tea ceremony or 'Cho-no-yu.' Under tea master Sen No Rikyu, the tea ceremony gained attraction in the 16th century, emphasizing quietude, humility, mindfulness, and the acceptance of imperfections, which are the central traits of wabi-sabi. Rikyu often favored rustic, handmade utensils over luxurious, ornamented ones to embody wabi-sabi principles. After the death of Rikyu, issues with interpreting the 'true' teachings of Rikyu have risen, leaving the core principle of the tea ceremony behind. The focus has shifted from the original simplicity to obsession over aesthetics. However, without the thought of wabi-sabi, the tea ceremony loses its authentic charms. Several attempts at reviving the philosophy through the ceremony were made by injecting modern thought into it. Time will only test the fate of the artists who have made efforts to initiate a move to revive the tea ceremony tradition.

Interpreting the 'Wabi Sabi' philosophy

The Japanese approach promotes their dominance through literature, traditions, and culture. This pushed the wabi-sabi philosophy to reach the West. The work of John Connell is considered to be centered around the philosophy of wabi-sabi, and other figures like Jesse Richards (a filmmaker), Nick Virgilio (a poet), and Leonard Koren (an author) are a few people who have helped give a stage to this philosophy. Over the recent years, these promotions of the philosophy have led to a new trend of the 'Japanese style of living'. Wabi-sabi has been used as a commercial tool by those in the fields of design, decor, lifestyle, architecture, and social media. The idea of anything rustic, imperfectly one of a kind, weathered or aged has been coined as the art of the following. This commercialization of what was supposed to be a way to connect to

nature, life, and its cycle and oneself more has been turned into a mere aesthetic to be followed when it goes viral. With millions of people interpreting it to their understanding, many speculations of misunderstanding of the true concept of what wabi-sabi truly stands for go to the backhand of people's minds. This misrepresentation could potentially have consequences over the years down the line when a new generation of people are exploring various cultures from around the world. They will not be able to gain the correct knowledge of what wabi-sabi is through social media and therefore their understanding would also be incorrect. A culture and common flow of thought shared by many will be threatened by evolving into something that it originally was against. It might follow the same steps of following an idea of what is perfect, what is acceptable, to follow the template by the internet, of what is supposed to be embracing the way something is, accepting the changes as it is, and coexisting as something ages beautifully.

Artist's Perspective

Each culture, tradition, or philosophy has to have a visual representation of itself to help conceptualize and visualize what it means to convey. Wabi-sabi, the philosophy described with themes like nature, life and death, ageing, acceptance of the cycle of life, and simplicity, is represented with rustic, aged, asymmetrical, simple, one-of-a-kind objects, space or moments. Perfection is never the main objective during the process and artists go with the flow when creating their creations. Each work, irrespective of its outcome, is viewed as a piece of beauty. It brings out the emotions of peace, serenity, comfort, and home. This contrasts with the Western approach to modern design, which emphasizes industrial, concrete, and corporate elements that convey symmetry, precision, sleekness, and the uniformity of city life. The use of dried plants, heavy use of wood in all aspects of a home, abstract and textured art, and cracked or chipped vases are a few aspects that intersect with the wabi-sabi philosophy. The cracked or chipped vases are what I find interesting and quite aligned with what the philosophy wants to convey. The chipped vases are still used as a piece of decor despite their broken form, showcasing the acceptance of unrepairable and imperfect and coexisting in the flow of what nature has planned for us. Similarly, the cracked vases that people might deem objects to throw away are upcycled by joining them together with precious metals like gold and silver. The finished piece highlights the cracks and embraces them completely, turning them to be a form of beauty. By embracing the cracks, the vase is transformed into an art piece that would have been as special if the cracks were hidden or not joined. This shows us the application that the wabi-sabi philosophy wants to practice. It opens the eyes of those who think of art as portraying beauty rather than it being a tool helping to embrace the beauty in everything.

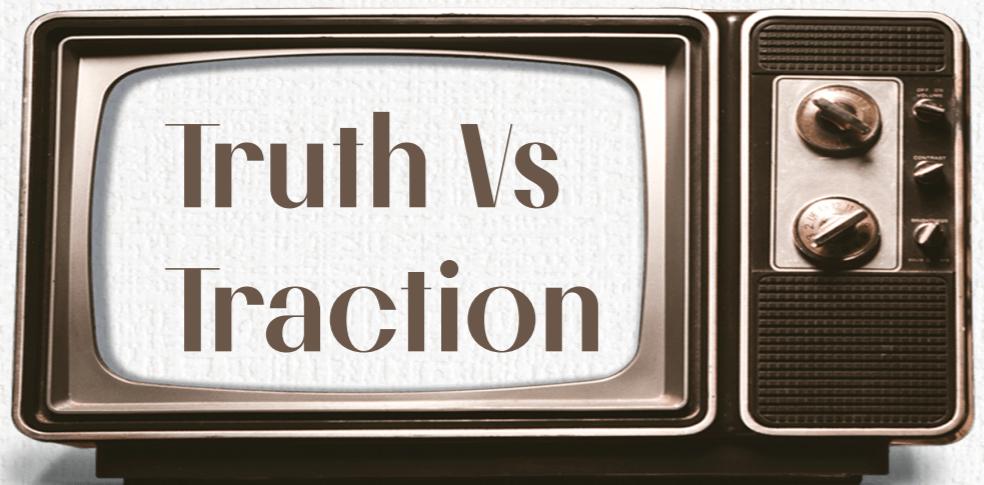


The Psychology of Imperfection

Although embracing the ageing, decaying, and weathered evokes mindfulness and acceptance of nature; the celebration of such thoughts can also make people feel melancholy about realizing that things and fulfilment are not constant in life, and anxious about the overstimulation due to feeling helpless in the game of life's inherent flaws. It is human nature to always run behind success and strive for perfection which comes out innate in our behaviour in varying degrees. For whom control, order, precision and perfection matter, wabi-sabi can be unsettling and evoke a sense of despair. In such cases, instead of offering solace, wabi-sabi could exacerbate the turmoil within the person to balance the tension between accepting imperfection and striving for excellence or stability. Knowing when to seek the high or get in the flow is up to the situation and the thoughts that overpower us.

Conclusion

Whether we apply the philosophy of wabi-sabi to our lives or not, we do encounter times when we unintentionally or intentionally gravitate to embrace the teachings of this philosophy in our lives and build a deeper connection to the natural world and the cycle of life. Sometimes, wabi-sabi can become a thought used in our personal lives. By fully understanding the essence of wabi-sabi and its teachings, we can embrace a timeless philosophy that reminds us perfection isn't everything. It shows us that solace can be found in imperfection, that not everything goes as planned, and that sometimes, we must surrender control and let life guide us toward its own course.



Truth Vs Traction

By Sapna Dodmani

When we think of information, one thing that comes to our mind is the 'media'. Media has been considered the 'fourth pillar of democracy.' It was established to question the government and to play the role of a watchdog for democracy to survive in its purest form. But today, the media's principles and values are being questioned regarding its choices.

Once, Donny Miller said, "In an age of information, ignorance is a choice." Today, we live in a world where information is infinite and opinions are inundating, but most of all, the media plays its role. Media is pivotal in many ways, from telling stories to creating narratives. It has come a long way. It is the beacon of hope for people, as it delivers the truth without being filtered. However, patterns have changed in the contemporary media world in recent years. Authentic Media is being threatened and replaced by fabrications. It's trying to be perfect by wearing the mascot of imperfections. Amidst this drastic change, how can one say that the media still holds to its roots? Its subtle imperfections are eroding its values, which it survived on for years. Values like truth, fairness, independence, and accountability, aiming to inform and represent everyone. But today, these principles are often overshadowed by the need for profit and attention, leading to biased and sensational content instead of authentic reporting.

The emergence of 24/7 broadcasting is changing the dynamics of media existence. Decades back, media was the only source of information and the means to be aware of what was happening then. The traditional media was known for its groundbreaking work and the principles it was rooted in. The newsrooms knew the importance of how facts were scarce, opinions were separated, and sensationalism was shunned. But the trends are taking a turn, as today's newsrooms are no longer about breaking stories but about curating narratives. In doing so, the truth is the one who becomes the first casualty.

Today's media world is on a quest to capture and hold the audience's attention by following the footsteps of fabrications and wearing a mascot of dishonesty. Media is no longer following the values of authenticity and honesty. No matter how much it tries to be authentic, it fails at some point. It has become a platform to favour one-sided views and opinions. To do so, exaggeration and manipulation have become tools for perfection in the media. Today's media often tries to appear unbiased, credible, and relatable to connect with the audience, for example, from emotional interviews to presenting one-sided information, making it seem authentic. While these coverages look true, they are often planned to attract viewers.

Contemporary media is no longer about presenting facts but cooking stories. The stories which benefit the interests of their sponsors. The major problem with today's mainstream media is how much it is being influenced by money and power. These influencers are no one but the advertisers, political parties, and corporations with a significant share in what gets reported and how. Instead of focusing on important issues, many media outlets choose safe stories that align with their sponsors' interests, neglecting that their values are being sidelined. For example, during campaigns, the media acts as the enemy for the other parties to tarnish their image in the public eye. At the same time, it makes the other party's image seem perfect and poignant for society to accept. From showing one side of an ongoing war to completely neglecting the fact that innocents have nothing to do with the war, yet they are being targeted, the media has failed in its job of being neutral.

The story doesn't just end here. To attract viewers and revenue, journalism, once doing its job of digging deep into the root causes of issues, is now being replaced by the trends of sensational and dramatic stories. This clearly indicates how significant issues and topics are overlooked, especially those affecting vulnerable and marginalized groups. Examples of such can be seen in the Manipur violence, where we didn't even hear a single word from the state for days and months; instead, the state was out of network for about a month. In fact, when the media outlets covered the story of the Manipur violence, purporting footage to show a Meitei woman allegedly being raped by a Kuki man during the first few days of the violence was circulating. This, in turn, added fuel to the flames.

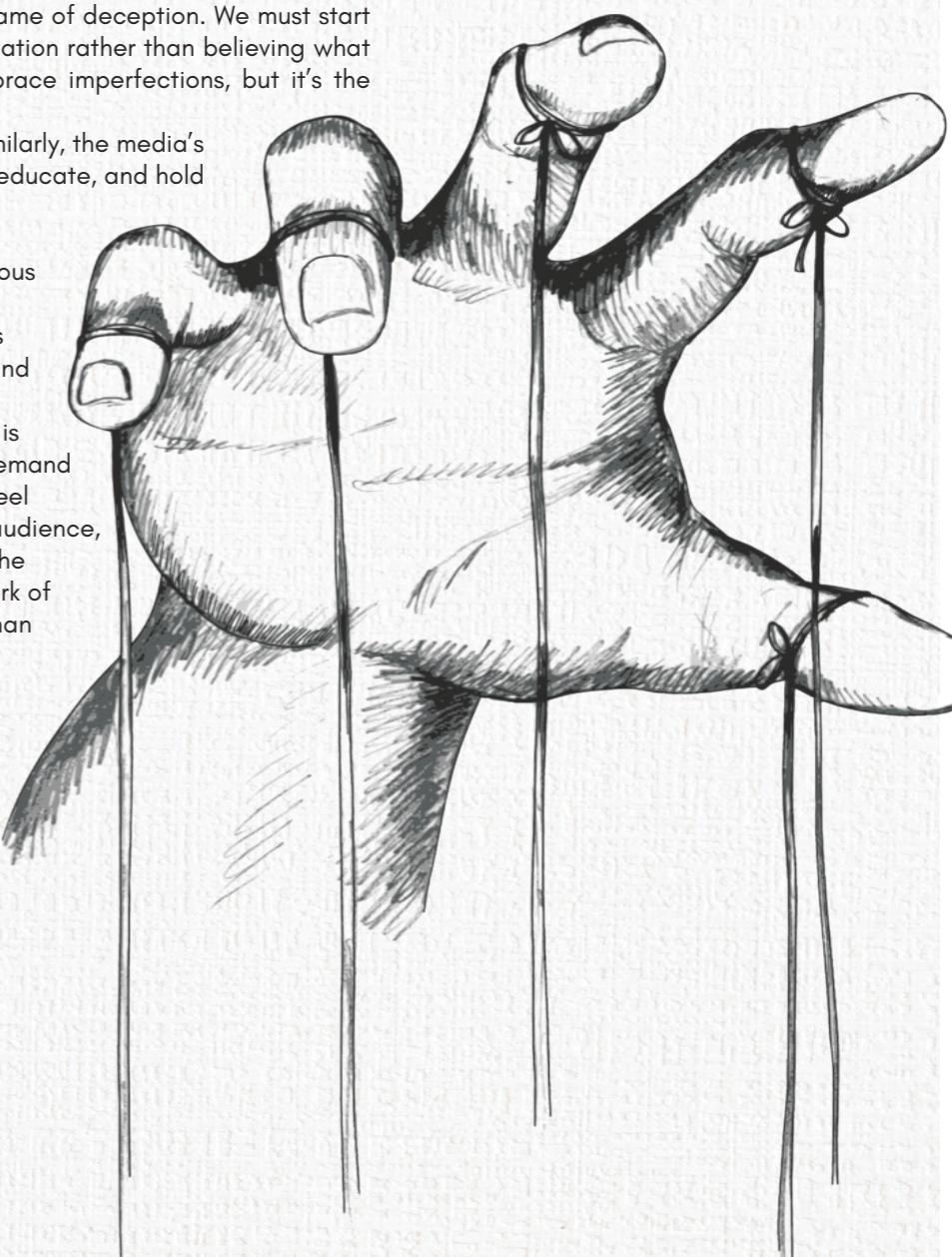
It's not just in India; even internationally, the condition of media being 'perfect through imperfections' can be witnessed. One example of the same is the unprecedented death of the Russian opposition leader Alexey Navalny. To date, it's not clear how he died. All we know is what the media showed and told us—that he passed away due to sudden death syndrome. But who knows how true it is?

Amidst this shift, the media is not the single entity to be held accountable but also society as equally. The audience, for whom the media is an essential source to be informed about what matters most, can still not distinguish between unbiased information and fabricated content. On the other hand, the media is subtly playing its role. Society is choosing to ignore and silence crucial and tremendous changes slowly killing the right to authentic and genuine information. Many don't even realize how much the media is influenced; for those who know, it's about convenience—something the media has mastered. It's easier to believe what is served to the audience's plate without cross-checking or questioning it. Due to the overwhelming amount of information available at one's fingertips, people prefer fast and straightforward answers.

The ones who know where the media is going wrong and really want to voice out the problem have chosen silence as their answer. For them, fear is the main antagonist when speaking about media biases and inaccuracies. The fear of being targeted and isolated has given a free ticket to media houses to be perfect through meticulously executed falsification. When media derails from being honest, the consequences are profound, resulting in a loss of trust that was built over the decades, challenging the credibility of journalism and fueling the spread of fake news and conspiracy theories. It indeed fosters societal division by creating false narratives and giving space for crisis.

To bring an end to such changes, society needs to come out of the woven web of convenience displayed by media houses. We, as an audience, need to start noticing its flaws and questioning the astute game of deception. We must start demanding better quality and authentic information rather than believing what is served. Media houses aren't forced to embrace imperfections, but it's the choice they have made for their benefit—or rather, to survive. Similarly, the media's job is not just to entertain; it is here to inform, educate, and hold power accountable.

Mainstream media's cooked stories are dangerous for democracy's health. Hence, it's up to both media organizations and audiences to stop this trend and restore authenticity. It's their job to find the line between reality and deception. Having honest, unbiased media is not just important; it is the need of the hour. The question is: will we demand truth or continue to settle for stories that only feel real? The answer lies in the choices we, as an audience, make to read, watch, and believe. Meanwhile, the newsrooms should prioritize their traditional work of presenting factual and accurate news rather than baking it with propaganda narratives.



Ate and Left Crumbs

By Samriddhi Mehta

Have you ever wondered why some of our best stories come from unplanned adventures? Spontaneous trips, cooking mishaps, bursts of creativity between meals and whatnot. The rawness of every day is messy and unpredictable, but a clumsy fall here or an extra loud laughter there brings small moments of joy.

Wouldn't it be boring if everything went how it was supposed to? The real fun begins when you let yourself move away from the idea of what is ideal.

(The scene opens in an open garden venue, and five people are standing in the centre of the event.)

Photographer ready?
Yes

Subjects ready?

Well...

"Stop ruining my hair, dude!"
"Aye, you're stepping on my shoes."
"Bhai seedhe khada reh."

And, click.

Despite taking fifty more photos in the next twenty minutes, it was the first one which got framed and shipped to each of them.

Introducing Sasha, Allo, and Levi, three out of five mentioned above.

Twelve hours earlier

Sasha tapped her feet on the railway station's floor while she waited for Allo, coffee in hand. Her train had arrived 15 minutes ago and due to the close timings of her friend's arrival, she thought it would be better to go to the next destination together. However, as she looked at her watch, Sasha cursed the moment she had that idea.

After knowing him throughout school, how could she forget that Allo was never on time? It's not like his train arriving half an hour earlier should do him any favours. Finally, she readjusted her duffle bag and stood up to find her friend because he was not picking up calls either. After checking the train schedule, Sasha walked towards the stairs to cross to another platform, where Allo's train had arrived.

She moved towards his compartment, only stopping upon noticing a crowd gathered around an entry door. Not having the time to feed her curiosity, she started walking again only to hear a familiar voice.

"Yes! Yeah, that's the one."

Eyebrows furrowed, Sasha turned to the small group and

walked towards them. A coach attendant stood on the railway track, his upper body visible through the small gap between the train and the platform. He held out a black formal shoe to a younger guy squatting on the floor for a better look. It took Sasha a few seconds to confirm this was the same person she had been waiting for.

"Allo?" She called out. The said one looked for the source of the voice before his eyes brightened. "Sasha!"

With one shoe on foot, the other in hand, he rushed to hug his friend before casually saying, "Sorry, my shoe fell through the gap." Sasha had a million questions about this incident that she wasn't sure she wanted answers to.

"I want to ask how, but firstly why are you even wearing formal shoes with joggers and a t-shirt?" To this, Allo shrugged. "I have to wear them for the event and I had no space in my bags."

She took a pause. "So, you decided to wear them on the train?" She asked, still not processing the logic or lack thereof. Her friend only nodded. Sighing, Sasha let it go. She needed more caffeine before another friend joined them. They ordered a cab to the airport, adding a stop to grab a quick lunch at a drive-thru.

Levi's flight had landed by the time his friends reached. He ran a hand through his hair, noting for the umpteenth time that it had grown too long. It was not like he had a particular liking for their length, it was just that he felt too lazy to go to a salon every now and then. He still wouldn't if not for the event. What a task, he groaned.

As he exited, he found Sasha and Allo easily. They had called out his name for the whole airport to hear, "Levi!!!" Not daring to look around at people's reactions, he kept his head down and moved towards the sound of his two friends.

He put down the luggage to welcome the hug when both of them ran towards him, Sasha followed by Allo. When they let him go, Levi noticed a look exchange between them. Sasha looked a little panicked while Allo... well, he looked like Allo - uncaring and high-spirited. He did not know yet that their prank had gone wrong.



"What?" Levi asked. Not answering, his friends diverted the topic to how his flight was and hurriedly moved towards the cabs. Not suspicious at all. Once their luggage was loaded, they settled into the vehicle. Levi sat in the passenger seat as the others took up the back one. He looked through the rearview mirror to see them whispering again, and this time, Allo's expression matched Sasha's. The chewing gum they had planned to put on Levi's t-shirt had accidentally stuck to his hair.

The next time Levi asked with a glare, they could no longer escape with nervous laughs. Instead of going to their neighbourhood, the three of them entered a salon half an hour later with their luggage in tow. Levi grumbled, "I know I had to get a haircut, there was no need for you to do this."

While Levi tried to get his hair corrected, attempting to hide the damage done by the chewing gum above his left ear, Allo left to get his shoes fixed and polished. On the way to the airport, he noticed that the front part of the shoe's sole had torn off when he was getting off the train, right before it fell through the gap. Sasha called Max and Tara, who were waiting for them at the venue, to update them about the delay.

No one was surprised to hear what happened, given their history through the school years. It didn't matter that most of them didn't live in the town anymore; their peculiarities always caused a similar ruckus when they were together. Levi's situation, this time, resulted from Sasha's impatience and Allo's quirky ideas.

Present

The housewarming party at the twins, Max and Tara's, house had begun when the three of them finally arrived. They somehow tried to stay composed - one with a mended shoe, one with a temporarily decent haircut, and one buzzing with caffeine.

Spotting a photographer in the first five minutes of arrival, five of them decided to take a picture before they caused more chaos. As they arranged themselves to pose, the chain reaction started

with one of the twins, Max, noticing an oddity in Levi's hair. "Stop ruining my hair, dude!"

Sasha turned to look, only to step on Allo's broken shoe. "Aye, you're stepping on my shoes." He stepped back to protect his foot, accidentally bumping into the other twin on his side. "Bhai seedhe khada reh."

Final picture:

Max stood sideways, mischievously pushing Levi's hair to one side while the latter tried to brush his hand away. Sasha stood beside Levi, chuckling at his hair mishap. Meanwhile, Allo held his foot in hand. Tara, on the other end, was caught pushing Allo with one hand while smoothing her dress with the other.



Echoes Between us

By Jineeta Jain

The little bell above the door jingled as Mehek burst into the cozy corner café, her laughter echoing above the soft hum of quiet conversations and clinking cups. She scanned the room, spotted Stuti at their usual corner table, and waved dramatically. Stuti, already sipping her coffee and immersed in a book, glanced up, smiled, and raised a hand in acknowledgement.

"Stuti!" Mehek exclaimed, dropping into the seat across from her. "You're early as always. How do you do that? I swear I leave home with the best intentions, and then suddenly, bam! I'm late again."

Stuti smiled faintly, folding the corner of her page and setting the book down. "I just plan my time better," she teased, her voice calm and steady.

Mehek rolled her eyes and leaned back in her chair. "Oh, please. Not all of us can be human planners like you, Miss Punctual. Anyway, you'll forgive me because I have tea—no, scratch that—drama to spill."

Stuti raised an eyebrow. "Drama? Should I be worried?"

"Absolutely not. It's great drama," Mehek said, pulling a bright pink folder from her bag. She slapped it onto the table triumphantly. "Here's the pitch deck for my startup idea. I've already talked to a couple of potential investors. It's happening, Stuti. It's happening." Her eyes sparkled with excitement.

Stuti leaned forward, intrigued. "You're serious about this? What's the idea?"

"Okay, imagine this," Mehek began, her hands animatedly painting the air. "An app that connects young creatives to freelance gigs without all the usual middlemen. Simple, intuitive, and no more exploitation by shady agencies. I'm calling it 'SparkLink.'"

"It's... ambitious," Stuti said thoughtfully. "But do you think you're ready for something like this? Running a startup isn't easy."

"That's the thing!" Mehek said, practically bouncing in her seat. "I don't want to wait. College is great, but this feels bigger. I've got the energy, the connections, and the vision. Why waste time?"

Stuti's brow furrowed. "You're thinking of dropping out?"

Mehek hesitated, her excitement dimming slightly under Stuti's serious gaze. "I mean... yeah. Maybe. I've been mulling it over. Don't look at me like that! I know what I'm doing."

Stuti folded her hands on the table. "Mehek, you're impulsive. That's not a bad thing, but something like this needs more thought. What if it doesn't work out? What's your backup plan?"

Mehek's expression shifted, a mix of frustration and defensiveness. "Why do you always have to overthink everything? Not everyone has to obsess over every little detail, you know. Sometimes, you just have to take the leap."

Stuti's voice remained calm, though her eyes reflected a hint of hurt. "I'm not saying you shouldn't try. I'm saying you should be prepared. There's a difference."

The tension between them hung in the air, heavier than the smell of freshly brewed coffee. Mehek leaned back, crossing her arms. "You don't trust me, do you?"

"That's not it," Stuti said softly. "I trust you more than anyone. But I also know you. You're brilliant and bold, but you don't always think things through. I don't want you to get hurt."

Mehek's eyes softened for a moment, but she quickly masked it with a wry smile. "You're just afraid of risks, Stuti. You always play it safe. Do you even know how much you're capable of if you stopped hiding behind your books and plans?"

Stuti's lips parted, but she hesitated. Mehek's words stung because there was truth in them. She had always been cautious, maybe too cautious. Still, she couldn't ignore her concern for Mehek.

"Maybe I am," Stuti admitted finally. "But being cautious has its place, just like being spontaneous does."

"So now you're saying we're both wrong?" Mehek said, her tone lighter but still edged.

"No," Stuti said, a small smile tugging at her lips. "I'm saying we're both right."

Mehek tilted her head, her expression curious. "Explain."

Stuti picked up her coffee, cradling it as she spoke. "You're bold and quick on your feet. You see opportunities where others see obstacles. That's your strength. But sometimes, you're so eager to move forward that you don't notice the cracks in the road. That's where I come in. I see the cracks. I help fill them."

Mehek's lips twitched, the ghost of a smile forming. "And what do I do for you, Miss Perfect Planner?"

Stuti's smile widened. "You remind me to take chances. To stop overanalyzing and just... live a little."

For a moment, they sat in comfortable silence, the warmth of their friendship washing over the tension. Then Mehek leaned forward, her elbows on the table. "Alright, Miss Observant. Let's test your theory. Help me fill the cracks in my plan."

Stuti's eyes lit up. "Are you serious?"

"Totally. You're my unofficial business consultant now," Mehek declared, pulling out the pink folder again. "So, tell me where the cracks are."

For the next hour, they poured over Mehek's pitch deck. Stuti pointed out gaps in the financial projections, suggesting ways to make the numbers more realistic. Mehek countered with creative solutions, her energy infectious. They debated, brainstormed, and laughed, their differences blending into a perfect balance.

As the evening wore on, Mehek leaned back with a satisfied sigh. "You know, you're pretty good at this. Maybe you should quit your research project and join my startup."

Stuti laughed, shaking her head. "Not a chance. But I'll always be here to help."

Mehek's smile softened. "Thanks, Stuti. For everything."

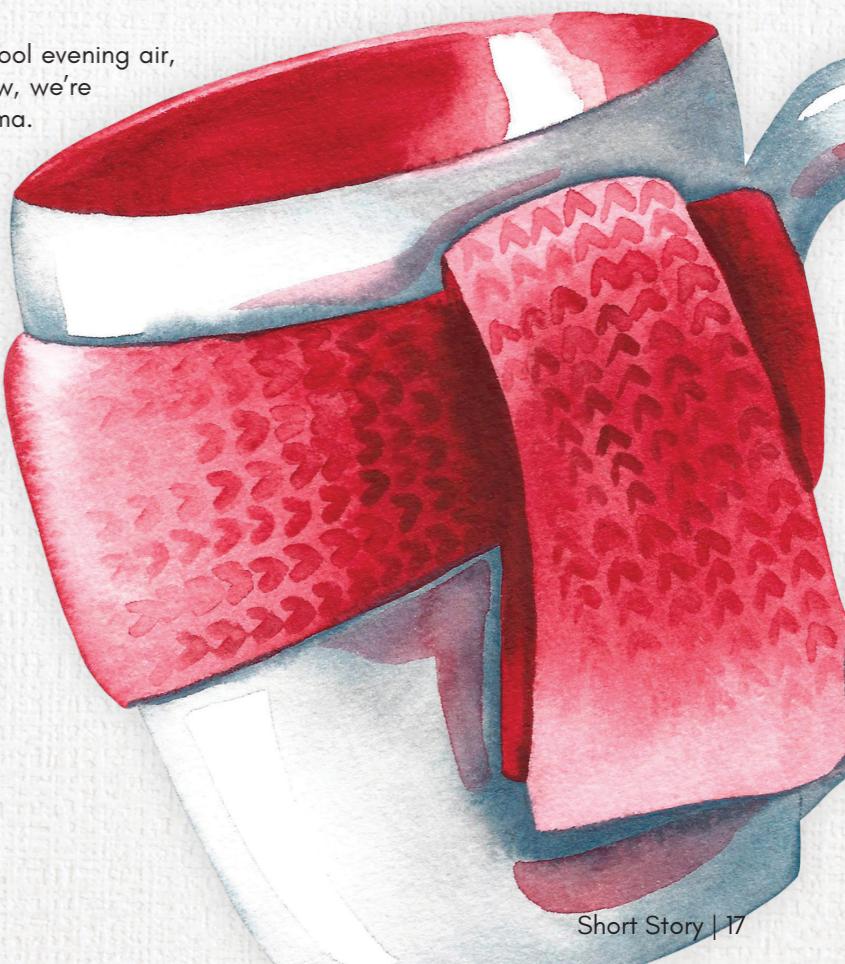
Stuti reached across the table, placing a hand over Mehek's. "That's what best friends are for."

As they gathered their things and walked out into the cool evening air, Mehek slung an arm around Stuti's shoulders. "You know, we're like the ultimate duo. You're the brains, I'm the charisma. We'd be unstoppable."

Stuti chuckled. "Let's just hope we never have to stop each other."

Mehek grinned. "Deal."

Under the streetlights, their laughter echoed, a testament to a friendship that thrived not despite their differences but because of them. Together, they were a bridge between caution and courage, logic and instinct, proving that the best partnerships are built on balance.



घड़ा

By Yashvi Jain

माटी कहे कुम्हार से,
तू क्या रोंदे मोहे,
एक दिन ऐसा आएगा,
मैं रोंदूंगी तोहे ।



Still Chaos

By Amit Parekh

Standing still is an art, it asks for courage. It takes courage to pause, to question, to embrace the cracks within. In a world that blurs past, having the courage to introspect, to contemplate, to accept your wrongs makes me wonder, is it a weakness to stand still or the bravest act of all?



A Pottery Day

By Sanchit Goyal



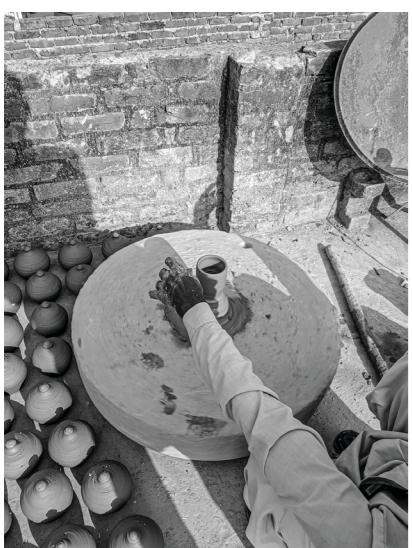
(From earth we shape dreams)

In the early morning of spring, harsh cold winds, but no blinding fog. Fresh morning—students hurrying. Energy yet to take over the roads. Visiting an artisan friend of my father; in the morning sun, we enjoyed the end of winter, witnessing the processing of earth into dreams.



(Where Circle Birth Art)

A patriarch father sculpting out of tradition, on a manual wheel, mastered intricate pieces like larger pots and Gullaks. Son, with an electric wheel, sculpts diyas—small, swift, and skillfully minimal.



(Generations turn the wheel)



(Hands that hold stories)



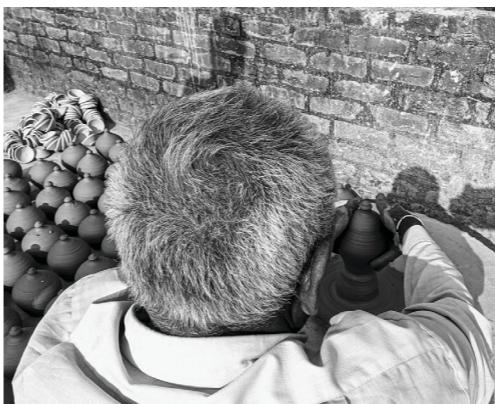
During my visit, I witnessed the molding of Gullaks—nostalgic symbols of our childhood, fostering habits of savings; reflecting middle-class family ritual fostering financial prudence.



(The potter's gaze transforms)



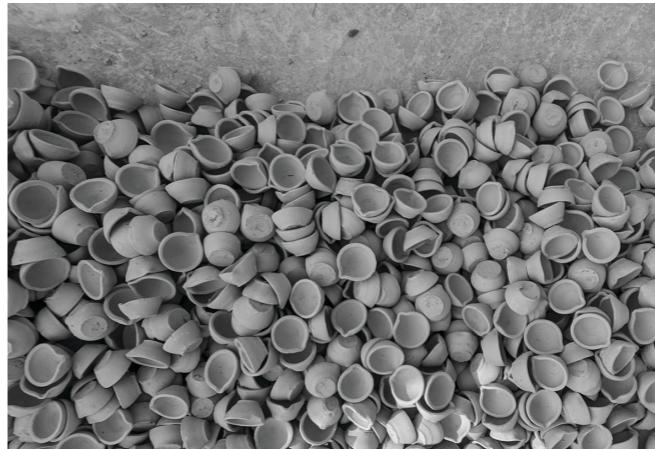
Then, We sit in the morning sun of the last of the winter.



He was a bit hesitant, risking his valuable hours, to us. Later, He Trusts.



(Each pot whispers)



The room, a furnace with pots in burning dried cow dung and covered with sand, heating up water for winter baths. The aroma of cow dung and heated sand was sweet, reminiscent of warm rain, creating a cozy atmosphere.



2 Gullaks for 2 kids in the house. It was made from sand of front of the house, dried on roof and furnace in the room beside. Those tokens of dreams might have travelled the least but others travel miles away to the one's who'll adapt to habit to save.



Common sand turned into dreamers with smiles.



Pots, so hot; that water would instantly evaporate. Wondering cluelessly, spotted a candle inside clay, holding it upright, Intriguing! remembers seeing something similar in a fancy furniture store few days ago, same.



(Clay Become Dreams)

This is what my father does, Supporting artisans like them and delivering Small dream tokens to kids in the remote area of Northern Himalayas in Uttarakhand.



Mess, Mistakes and Memories

By Payal Navarkar

Dear Younger Me,

Let me start by saying this: your college journey won't be perfect. And thank God for that. You'll trip, fall, lose your way, and find it again—often messily. But trust me, that's where the magic lives. You'll walk into college with a backpack so perfectly packed it screams, "I'm ready for anything." Neatly stacked notebooks, new pens, and expectations that life is as organized as your bag. But here's the truth: that backpack is going to change. Over the next three years, that backpack would evolve. It would turn into a tote bag, weighed down with emotional baggage and fewer material things, and eventually, into a sling bag—light but carrying the wisdom to handle the big problems that once seemed impossible.

I know you're scared right now. Sitting alone in a classroom where the buzz of unfamiliar faces feels like a thunderstorm. You're wondering if you'll find your people. Spoiler alert: you will. Your first year will feel like a whirlwind. The main campus will captivate you—the big spaces, the new faces, and your desperate urge to make as many friends as possible. And you will. But as time goes on, the Colaba campus will steal your heart. Its smallness will feel like a warm hug—a tight-knit community of your people. You'll stop caring about big crowds and perfect friend groups. Instead, you'll cherish your small circle of imperfect people who understand you in ways no one else can.

Blitzkrieg will become the highlight of every year. The preparations, the chaos, the endless debates, and, oh my God, the people. You'll meet the best and worst of them there. Some will push, challenge, and stay in your corner forever. Others? Well, let's just say they'll teach you lessons in letting go. And even in the madness, you'll realize that preparing for the fest was always more exciting than the fest itself.

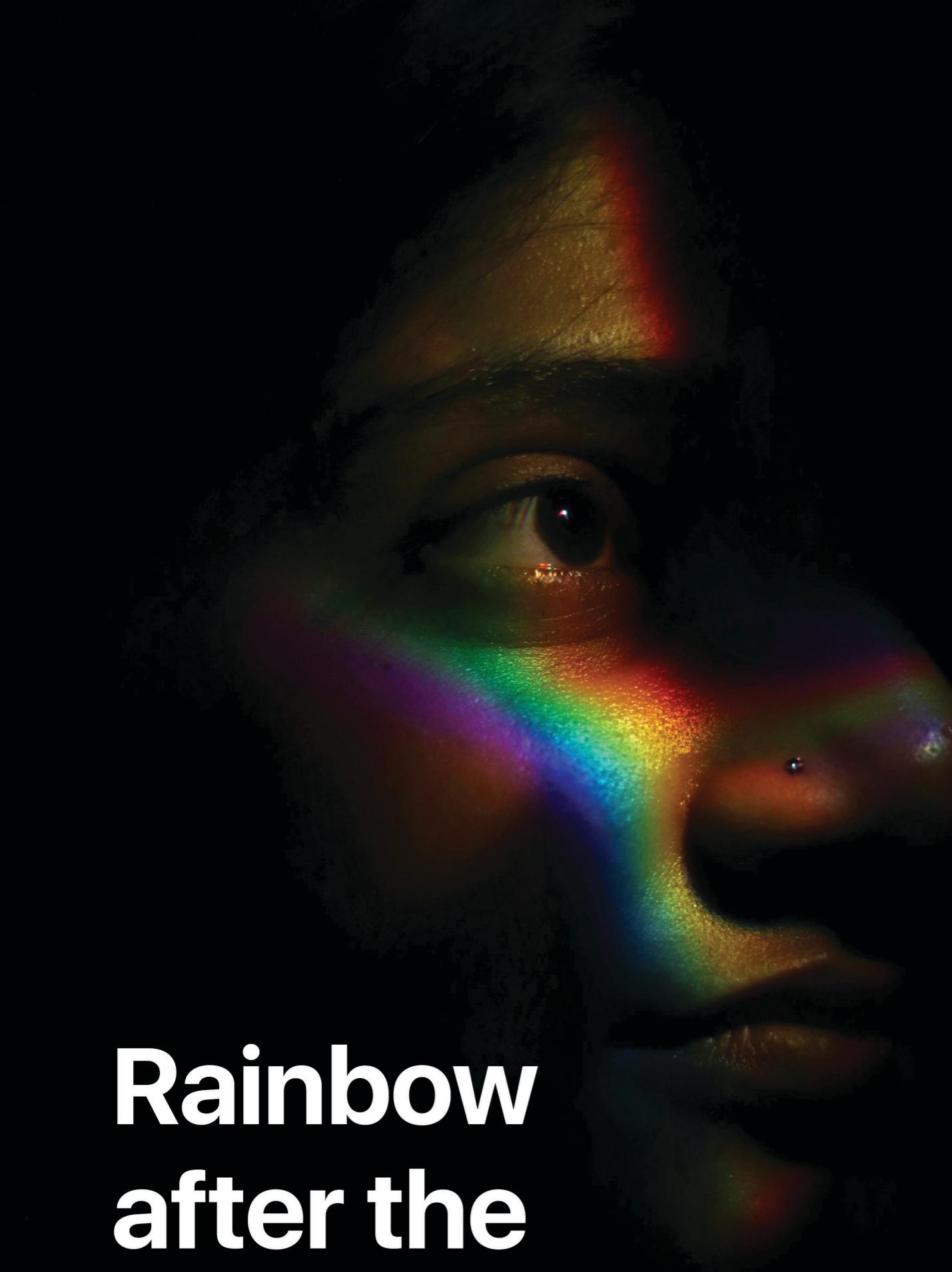
You'll take big, messy steps in the beginning—trying everything, failing, and learning the hard way. By the end, you'll understand that it's the small, intentional steps that genuinely make a difference.

And the people—oh, the people. On your first day, Riddhi (yes, Aloo of the group—iykyk) will find you alone and speak to you, breaking the ice that felt unbreakable. And then you visit Kitaab Khana later with Aleena, yes, the one person who'll stick with you from day one to God knows till when. Oh, and Harsh Jain. You don't know it yet, but he'll walk into your story like a character you didn't write, completely off-script, yet somehow indispensable. And don't even get me started on the OG cool gang vs Antar Pantar debate in the second year—it's as useless as it sounds but will give you memories you'll laugh about for years. And then there's Rinky—annoying, relentless, like the younger cousin you desperately want to abandon but can't because, deep down, you love them.

Let's not pretend it's all sunshine. You'll lose some people along the way—leave them behind, or maybe they'll leave you. It'll sting, but you'll learn. For every goodbye, there'll be a hello. And these bonds? Some might just last forever. Your attendance will shift, not in the lecture halls, but in Ram Bhaiya's canteen. That place will feel like home when college doesn't, with dal pakwaan that fixes everything and laughter that lingers. Your KC College journal will hold the rawest, most imperfect parts of you: the stories you were scared to tell and the dreams you didn't think you were ready for. You'll walk in as a girl terrified of strangers and unable to make small talk. And you'll walk out as a woman whose job will literally involve talking to strangers. Small talk? Still not your forte. That inner introvert? She's not going anywhere. And that's okay. You don't need to be perfect to be confident.

These three years will be messy, chaotic, and far from picture-perfect. You'll get glimpses of the corporate madness trauma but also the beauty of finding your place in the world. You'll learn that life isn't about erasing imperfections but embracing them, carrying them, and finding strength in them. These three years will change, challenge, and carry you further than you think. You'll learn that life isn't about being perfect—it's about carrying your imperfections with a perfect attitude. And as you graduate, your sling bag will hold just what you need: solutions for the big problems and the strength to manage it all. So, step into that classroom, nervous and unsure. Sit alone if you have to. It's okay not to have it all figured out. Riddhi will find you, Aleena will stay, and Harsh will crash your script. And you? You'll grow into the perfectly imperfect version of yourself.

With love,
The You Who's made it through



Rainbow after the Hurricane

By Sanskruti Jadhav

Dear Saku,

Can you believe we've come this far, Saku? From the quiet, uncertain 12-year-old you once were to the person who dares to write this letter today. Look how far we've come in this game of conversations with ourselves. So first off, hello dear, how are you? I know a very basic question, right? But now I understand how impactful this question is. You hoped someone, someday, would ask you the exact same question and you would just burst out all of your thoughts, but nobody asked, and you never cared about it. But today, I have this opportunity to ask you, and I will. All these years, you just kept piling up your feelings one upon another, and I guess that's the reason for your weight gain. Jokes apart, but now when I look back, I feel I did wrong to you, I feel I gave you nothing, I feel like I failed you because, really, how long can we keep blaming others for YOUR mental health, Saku? You are your own traitor, is what I feel.

Each time a stranger's careless words called you 'fat,' you silently absorbed their cruelty as if their opinions carried the weight of truth. Every time they told you, you couldn't do it, you did exactly what they wanted, which made you so fragile that today when someone appreciates you, you go backstage and cry. When someone calls you beautiful, it feels like a foreign language—one you've longed to hear yet don't quite know how to translate. Whenever you win a competition, it feels like you won a war with yourself. Day by day, you allowed yourself to fade into the shadows of doubt, forgetting the brilliance of your own potential and the unique talents that set you apart.

Despite the shadows of those moments, life had its way of introducing light—kind souls who reminded you of the brilliance within you. I still remember 7th standard teachers day, you were mimicking Marathi's professor, and the whole class was entertained so much that even today when you meet them, they remember every detail of that mimicry. I still remember how your very first performance was appreciated by the whole school every single person was giving you a standing ovation not just the audience but your co-actors started crying and clapped for you. You were so overwhelmed that you thought it was a dream, but my dear, it's not a dream anymore. Let me tell you now, every single time you perform, people go crazy. If you could hear or see people's reactions to your performance in the future, you would probably die out of happiness. Don't worry too much Saku, let them speak, let them criticize. Once you grow up, you will understand it was all a lie.

If they tell you you are not enough or perfect, just tell them nobody is. The definition of perfection varies. For you, Saku, perfection might mean having a smaller waist, good grades, everyone around you loving you, pretty nails, hair, and a smile. But if you ask me today what perfection is, it's the art of embracing your unique self.

Anne Marie once said,
"I'm not a supermodel from a magazine
I'm okay with not being perfect 'cause that's perfect to me.
Somebody else's perfect doesn't define your achievements.
Somebody else's achievements don't define your potential."

I know you are very confused in life about your future but let me tell you you've figured everything out, everything in future is going exactly how you imagined it to be.
By now, I know you're holding back tears—but let those tears remind you of how far you've come and how much farther you'll go.

Saku,

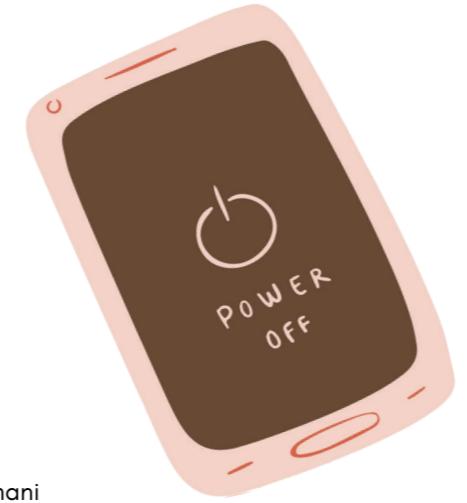
तुम जीती रहोगी,
तुम आगे बढ़ती रहोगी
कोई तुम्हें कछ भी कहे
तुम उभरती रहोगी

लाख आएंगी मुस्किले
लाख आएंगी नजरें
तुम खुद पर भरोसा रखना
अपने अंदर हौसला बनाए रखना

एक दिन जब पीछे मुड़कर देखोगी
तो मंजिल की नहीं, सफर की याद रखना!

Embrace Yourself

By Sapna Dodmani



Dear Youth,

Today, I turned my lens on you guys to share a few words. Since we all know how fast-paced the world is and how trends are evolving, it's a good thing that the world is evolving and trying to embrace new things and techniques. Whether it be in the field of technology, fashion, career choices, or living standards, we are shifting from traditional forms to modern styles. The cycle of evolution is so rapid; it's like if you blink your eyes in a second, the trends and ideas are being replaced by new ones. To all these transitions, social media is a cherry on the cake, bombarding content that appeals to viewers to adapt to the changes. This is where you guys are slipping.

Social media is a big boon to the media industry, giving wings to big companies, influencers, and users to share their opinions and a platform to voice the issues faced by individuals. Contemporary media has diverged from its track; the dynamics are changing, as well as the uses of social media. It's no longer a platform of information, awareness, and educating its pupils but is pushing them to embrace—or rather to fall into—the well of imperfections. To explain this in a better way, let's take a few examples. Today we come across many beauty products, trendy clothes, and other fashionable products on social media. These ads or reels are webs woven by big industries to appease the audience and, moreover, pursue them to purchase. The game doesn't just end here. Influencers are hired to shoot an ad or reel for that particular brand to attract the masses. We, as an audience, fail to understand that this is clear persuasion to buy such products to look stylish or fashionable.

Social media meticulously pushes us toward a hole of an illusion of perfection. We try many ways to look perfect, whether by changing tons of clothes or by applying expensive makeup just to look glamorous. But I have a question: for whom are you all doing this? To make space in a society of perfection that is itself imperfect in innumerable ways? For many, society, friends, and family are the biggest hurdles in embracing your imperfections. It's the pressure you get from all of them—whether to excel in academics, career choices, or peers pointing out flaws in you, such as your looks, taste, skin tone, dressing style, or the number of followers you have on social media. These factors all contribute to making choices that are not necessary or are just illogical. The constant pressure from external factors pushes you to take a path that distracts you from your ambition or goal. You get addicted to the process of trying to fit yourself into a web of perfection displayed by your own enemies. You try

various ways—whether wasting money on expensive things to look gorgeous or risking your precious life to create a reel just to get those so-called followers on your media site. Sometimes we even forget our values and ethics and, under peer pressure, get addicted or start drinking alcohol or start consuming other additive products. To those who drink voluntarily, no offense; but to those who drink under peer pressure, simply remember one thing: you are in the wrong space; you don't belong there.

By doing all this, we are just trying to forget one thing: these external factors are not friends but enemies who are pushing us far away from our ambition and passion. Amidst such transitions and the constant demand to fit into the hole of perfection, remember: you are enough as you are, with all your quirks, flaws, and vulnerabilities. Be the one who accepts yourself as you are. No one in this world is perfect. It's just that they are living with the mask of being perfect in everything, which they are not. If you are not good at something or if you are not as good-looking or gorgeous as the rest of the world, then that's fine. It's just the way of life. The fabric of life dwells upon hugging the flaws and weaknesses. That's what makes you different and makes you shine out in front of your enemies. Remember one thing: one day, those people will come and praise you for who you are and what you choose.

One step toward accepting your flaws takes you closer to hugging your dreams. Our imperfections teach us humility and compassion. They allow us to empathize with others who are struggling, fostering deeper connections. A world obsessed with perfection is one where vulnerability is suppressed, but vulnerability is what makes us relatable and different from others. In the game of perfection, we always forget our health is the one being sidelined. We forget that when we think too much about trying to be perfect, we neglect the fact that mental health matters. In the race to be perfect, one suffers from anxiety, depression, and burnout. When we're constantly striving to meet impossible standards, we lose sight of our worth and well-being.

Self-acceptance is the only answer to your enemies. Self-acceptance is the process of acknowledging your flaws without letting them define you. It's about giving yourself permission to be a work in progress and finding joy in the journey rather than fixating on the destination. Let's forget others' tantrums about our looks and choices.

Let's make a difference and do ourselves a big favor by ignoring the feedback given by others on our imperfections. They are no one to tell us how to eat, look, walk, or what to read, wear, or pursue as a career.

To the youth of today, I urge you to embrace your imperfections. Celebrate your uniqueness, for it is your greatest strength. Understand that life is not a competition to see who can appear the most perfect but a journey to discover and express your true self.

When you do this—when you embrace imperfection—you inspire others to do the same. You create a culture of authenticity and acceptance, where people feel valued

for who they are rather than what they achieve or how they look. This shift can lead to a more compassionate and inclusive society.

Imperfection is not something to fear or hide; it is something to honor and celebrate. It is the cracks in our armor that let the light in, the struggles that make our triumphs meaningful, and the quirks that make us unforgettable. So, dare to be imperfect. Dare to fail, to stumble, and to rise again. Dare to show the world your true self, unapologetically and wholeheartedly. In doing so, you will find freedom, fulfillment, and a deeper connection to those around you, because perfection is just an illusion, but imperfection is real.



Always By Your Blues.

By Samiksha Kadam

Me, you or me with you sounds better...
They're like the seashore, which I'm dying to reach
And they think the shore itself has a destroying storm
What so? Even if it destroys, either way, I'm dying to doom in you...

Those waves ain't pleasant or smooth...
Besides, they are full of hurdles in the evening soon
But we ain't lone, right?
Me by you, you by me...
Like a struggling stone aligned in

These burning lights passed by the sun
Ain't burning me, my darling'...
Thought it's shining the water sea
And you, my love, ain't harming me...

All your faults, all your blues...
Come across me, And they won't be abnormal dues
All I want is you by me...

Even in the storms, waves, or burning sunbed...



The Mother I Needed, The Woman You Are

By Lakan

To Mother,

I write to you from a place of rage,
raw and sharp, though I know it will blur with time.
We are two beings bound by blood.
Yet we dream in languages foreign to one another,
speak in dialects of misunderstanding.

I swore I would not be you.
Yet when I look closely,
your shadow makes its way into my choices.
Our paths mirror like rivers converging,
each turn reminiscent of your own.
Your questionable choices reflect my own,
your unnecessary alliances haunt my relationships.

You pulled us from a home built on the foundation of lies
and violence-
promising a better life, a brighter life.
Yet the new life you promised us was born from scattered
fragments.
Overly emotional boyfriends who feasted on your loneliness,
you wore their false promises like gold jewellery.
And when the dawn came,
you told us it was all a dream,
that it wasn't real.

But we remember.
We remember the apologies that were never born.
We remember the locked doors,
the whispered conversations we were never meant to hear.
And the loud silence that existed in the air
when truth tried to break through.

You tell us now it didn't happen.
That the past is a figment,
a misunderstanding,
a tale distorted by time.
But we remember, Mother.
We remember the broken bottle,
the crimson wrists,
the slammed doors,
the nights that bled into mornings of silence.

You tell us your stories with a sadness so heavy,
hidden behind your smile, your plighted life.
A young bride, a violent husband.
A family so familiar they are strangers.
A life unravelling before it even began.
And yet, you live that tragedy over and over,
choosing men who don't love you,
choices that carve through our lives like a river through
stone.

In this house, we cannot speak of what hurts.
We cannot name the wounds,
but we are forced to watch them bleed.
You demand silence, yet leave us with the echoes of your
unspoken truths.

Your anger burns hot,
quick to start, slow to fade.
Your refusal to hear me,
to see me,
to accept the parts of me you'd rather deny.
The walls you build between us,
they wound me in ways you'll never understand.

You are imperfect, Mother.
But so am I.
And perhaps that is the sad truth of it all,
we are two imperfect beings,
ribboned together by a lace
that neither of us can fix nor understand.

For now, I write with the bitterness of truth.
But perhaps someday,
I will write to you with the softness of something that
whispers forgiveness
even when my heart says otherwise.
Because in your flaws, I see my own,
and in your struggles, I see a reflection
of what it means to be human-
to try and fail,
and try again.

With the weight of all that has been,
and all that might still come.
I write this For you,
To you,
because you are my mother.

अपने ही रंग में मुझको रंग दे!

By Sanskruti Jadhav

क्या खूब है ये साँवला रंग,
किसी को भाए तो कोई कहे हाय!

बचपन से ही टेलकम को चेहरे पर लगाया,
फिर भी लोगों ने मुझे काली- कलूटी कहकर चिढ़ाया ।

अकेले रोती थी , क्योंकि रोते बक्त अच्छी न दिखती थी,
ये सारी बातें कह न पाती इसीलिए तो लिखती थी ।

सारा बचपन बस सोचने, समझने और सवालों में बीत गया,
और खुद का अस्तित्व धीरे धीरे कहीं छूट गया ।

सपने मेरे बहुत बड़े, बहुत बड़ी मेरी सोच,
पर आज तक समझ न आया , कैसे मिटाऊँ मेरे दिल पर लगी खरोच ?

बक्त सब कुछ बदल देता है सुना था मैंने,
और बक्त के साथ रोक दिया बातों को सहना मैंने ।

जिस रंग में रंगना न चाहती थी मैं कल तक,
उसी रंग को जब गले लगाया तो आत्मविश्वास ने दी दस्तक ।

किसी और का होने से पहले खुद का होना ज़रूरी है,
क्योंकि खुद के बिना ये ज़िन्दगी अधूरी है ।

लोग तो कहेंगे , लोगो
का काम है कहना,
लेकिन तुम कभी ना खोना अपने आत्मविश्वास का गहना ।

खुद को दूसरों जैसा बनाने की कोशिश मैं करती रही,
लेकिन फिर एक दिन समझी कि मेरे अंदर की आवाज़ ही है सही ।

क्यों खुद को है बदलना ?
क्यों खुँद को है जकड़ना ?
बस काशिश यही होगी , अब
खुद को है समझना ।

खुद की नज़रों में ऊपर उठने से बड़ी और कोई बात नहीं,
और तुम फिर भी आगे बढ़ते रहोगी जब कोई तुम्हरे साथ नहीं ।

दिल की आवाज पर विश्वास करना सीख गयी,
अगर कोई ना भी रहा साथ तो उसी दिल से बात करना भी सीख गयी ।

आत्मविश्वास से ही कर सकूँगी अपने सपनों को पूरा, दूसरों का सुनती रहूँगी तो रह जायेगा जीवन अधूरा ।

बस यही बात समझ कर , अपने पर तुम खोल दो,
और खुदके रंग में रंग गयी हो ये सभी को जाकर बोल दो ।



शायद

By Gorang Dogra

ना जाने क्या तकलीफ होगी, ना जाने क्या गिले होंगे ।
ना जाने हम जब मिल जायेंगे तो क्या सिलसिले होंगे ।

वहीं जो गुल धरों के थे मुझे बैठे सदियों से,
किसी अनजानी दुआ से शायद फिर वह गुल स्विले होंगे ।

फूल तोड़ने पर भी उनसे हम ने यही कहा के बस,
ध्यान से देखना ज़रा शायद वह अधिकिले होंगे ।

मिलने पर पहली बार भी तुम तो बेगाने न लगे,
हो सकता है जान - ए - मन हम तुम पहले भी मिले होंगे ।

उनका दीदार नहीं होता तो इस में क्या खता उनकी,
शायद उनके मोहल्ले में घर ऊँचे मंज़िलों के होंगे ।

हमारी तरफ से शायद किसी कमी के ये सिले होंगे,
के जिनसे हम मिलेंगे अब वहाँ शायद फासले होंगे ।

हमारा तुमको देखने पर ही ज़िन्दगी जब है हिल गयी,
तो जिनके पास तुम होंगे उनके तो कारोबार हिले होंगे ।

यूं तो हमको मारने में काफ़ी ज़ोर भी लगता है पर,
हमें मारने से पहले वह हमसे घुले मिले होंगे ।

काले से इन दिलों को मत समझना के हीरे है,
शायद से वह हमको जला देने वाले कोयले होंगे ।

क्या पता था जिन पर खुद से बढ़ कर ऐतबार था,
वह हमको ही जलाने के लिए आए काफिले में होंगे ।



समय

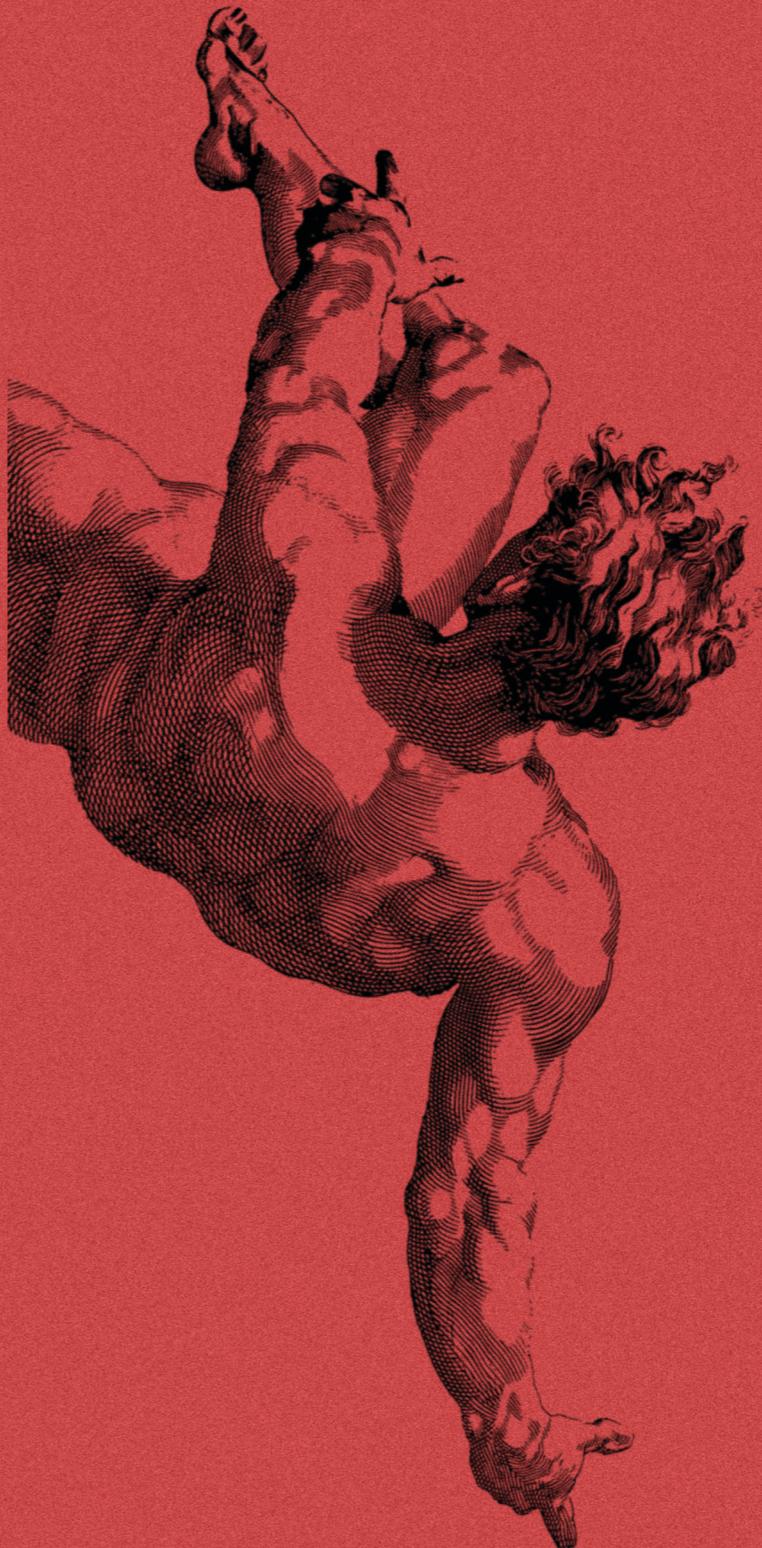
By Prathamesh Magare



समय अचल है,
चलने वाले है हम।
वो नहीं सिमटा,
सिमटे पढ़े हैं हम।
यादों की सिराख में,
नातों में मन।
ऐसे नहीं मिला था समय,
ऐसे नहीं थे हम।
सरकती छांव में,
तपती पलटती धूप।
एक चंचल नाव में,
दिले प्यार का रूप।
नहीं बंद बने हैं नदियों में,
ना ही थांब लगे हैं जीवन में।
बस ये अचरज ये समय अचल,
प्रखर निखरता आकर वन में।
नहीं हो धन पाट,
नहीं हो पाप व्याप।
जीवन शिखर पर, तब
ना हो पश्चातप।
फिर क्यों उछाल,
करके पुकार?
जाप समय
के गाता मैं।
समय:
ये संसार अचल है,
मैं समय नहीं।
पुनः काल अचल में समय नहीं,
ये बात करता है मन कि
क्या मान सम्मान ये अचल है,
तन-मन भी?
है भूख-प्यास इस जीवन में,
ये पश्चातप तेरे मन में।
इसे लांघ,
तान अपने हथियार।
स्वीकार कर हार आकर तु मान।
तु नाप ले और भूल जा,
सारी नदियों सा महासागर को।
ये हैं अर्थांग, जो भी लय है,
वही, बस वही समय है।
ना बांध सकेगा यादों को,
ना बांध सफलता नातों में।
है ये अचल,
है समय ये।
जा, थाम समय—जो जीवन में।

What's Perfection?

By Jineeta Jain



My body's shape feels wrong somehow,
Too skinny, too big, I can't allow,
Myself to see the good that's there,
When all I do is compare and stare.

My grades fall short, my mind feels slow,
No matter how hard I try to grow.
Some friends ace tests without a fight,
While I'm up late, trying to get it right.

My hair won't sit the way I want,
Too frizzy, too flat, a daily haunt.
I see the posts of silky waves,
And wonder why mine misbehaves.

Look at them gaining experience,
With a resume too good to be simple,
While I am here, still figuring out life,
What to eat, what to think and what to hide.

My face breaks out before big days,
I cover it up in a hundred ways,
They say we should look a certain way,
But who decided that, anyway?

Someone asked how can I feel seen,
I said, "Quiet and peace are my keen."
In the end, it's a vicious cycle on screen,
Always comparing who is better it seems.

The pressure's loud, the world's so fast,
And every mistake feels like it'll last,
But here's the truth I'm learning to see:
No one's perfect, and certainly not me.

We're all just trying; we all have flaws,
Trapped in our own self-perfecting laws,
But it's our quirks that make us strong,
And in our struggles, we belong.

Khamiya teri Khamiya meri

By Mancy singh

ये कैसी खामियाँ मुझमें,
ये कैसी खामियाँ तुझमें।

पल-पल दोष लेकर चलूँ,
एक नहीं, हर रोज़ लेकर चलूँ।

बेहतर तो दूर की बात,
खुद को ही कोसता चलूँ।
अकेला ही पाया है खुद को,
खुद के संग दोस्त सा चलूँ।

ये ज़माने के कालेपन से,
मैं हर शाम सा ढलूँ।
मज़स्तह दिल पर मरहम,
कितनी बार मैं मलूँ।

ना कोई खामियाँ मुझमें,
ना कोई खामियाँ तुझमें।

हैं बस ये लोगों की बातें,
जो यूँ ही परिदों को डराते।
हैं बस ये लोगों की बातें,
जो खुद कुछ नहीं कर पाते।

क्यों इन नाकामों से डरें हम,
इनके लिए खुद से क्यों लड़ें हम।
उंगली उठानी है तो उठाते रहो,
और उड़ते परिदों को
आसमान दिखाते रहो।

Frosted with Fractures

By Elvee

The kitchen hums with a quiet fight,
A whisk spins fast in yellow light.
The scent of sugar fills the air,
Yet all I feel is cold despair.

He stirs the batter, deep in thought,
His hands tremble, voice caught in a knot.
The cracks in him are easy to see,
Yet he pretends like they were meant to be.

My mother's cake was a work of art,
Each slice calming the storm in my heart.
But she's gone with not a glance along the way,
Leaving two souls on that fateful day.

She made her choice, him not me or Dad,
All I felt was a fire raging bad,
At her, at him, at my cruel fate,
At love, at life, that swayed to bitter hate.

His hands jittery, trembling like his tries,
Frosting the cake and avoiding my eyes.
With a lopsided heart and a shaky line,
No masterpiece but like this moment, it is still mine.

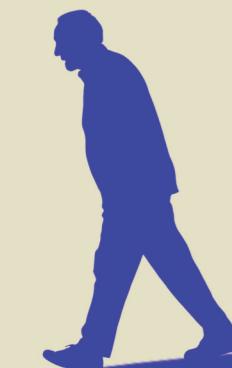
I wonder why didn't he fight,
To keep her close, to make it right.
A man who failed to hold her near,
How could he stand and have no fear?

Yet as he hums a broken tune,
The wounds in me start to bloom,
I see the sweat that never seems to cease,
He's trying hard, hard to hold it and keep his peace.

Hollow love, a broken man,
Still, he does the best he can.
He can't bake love, the cracks beyond repair,
Without goodbyes, she left the empty chair.

But in the mess, I see the truth,
The battered hope, the awaited proof.
He's not a hero, not a saint,
Just a father with his own restraint.

As the cake crumbled, the candle sat low,
But in its light, I start to know:
We're flawed, both in pain,
Yet through the cracks, love will remain.



The silent cracks of creation

By Twisha Vora



Contemplation fills my mind,
What is the one thing that I must find,
Is it that one stroke in the painting,
That doesn't seem perfectly dainty?

I paint over and over,
On this piece of paper,
Past ideas buried deep inside,
Frustration seeped through, and I cried.

I still keep painting on,
The canvas filling with colour on,
It screams in my mind,
A puzzled, jumbled kind.

The colours blend, but not as they should,
The vision once vivid, now misunderstood.
Imperfect, flawed, my art falls short,
As doubt whispers loud, my spirit contorts.

Thoughts reaching all heights,
The interpretations giving me fright.
Emotions taking over my brain,
But my hand works trained.
Filling the canvas with my heart
My masterpiece, though delayed, plays its part.

Ideas float here and there
In the quest to where
Lies the bigger picture
Without any stricture.

Sighing in surrender
I present my piece to others.
It outshines me,
Yet they analyse it to the tee.

Accepting their interpretation,
Without offering objection,
Lies beneath the idea of
Whatever fits their glove.

In the space where doubt and truth collide,
They choose what fits, and set the rest aside.
With shifting views, they redefine,
What's right or wrong, by their own line.

Whether it's something
Correct, incorrect everything
In the minds of those viewing
Imperfections become wooing
The thought once deemed
Bad by its creator, redeemed.

ऐ दिल है मुरिकल जीना यहाँ!

By Elvee



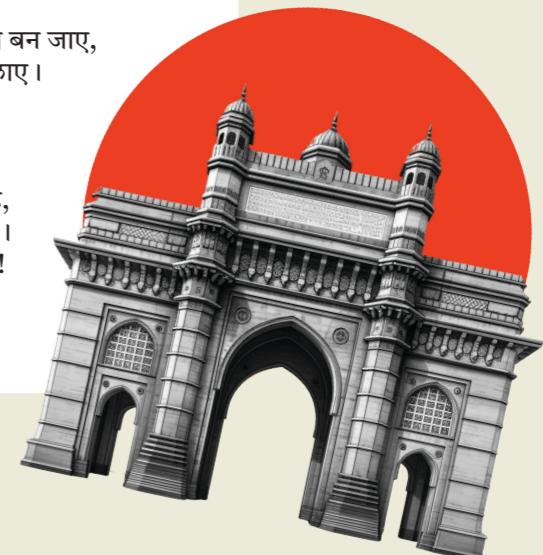
मुंबई, ये शहर तुम्हें सहलाए कैसे,
ये तो वो शहर है जो हृदों से आगे बढ़ाए कैसे।

ये घर बनने के लिए बना नहीं,
पर तुम्हें घर बनाना सिखाता है यही।

मुंबई की रफ्तार तुम्हें थकने ना देगी,
पर अकेलापन कभी-कभी रुला ज़रूर देगा।
लोगों के पास यहाँ बक्तव्य कभी नहीं,
फिर भी ये शहर छोड़ता कोई नहीं।

ये शहर वो नहीं जो तम्हारा अपना बन जाए,
ये शहर वो है जो तुम्हें खुद से मिलाए।
सपनों के पीछे ये तुम्हें भगाए,
नीदें तुम्हारी ये शहर चुराए।

यही तो इसे सबसे खास बनाता है,
यही तो ये सबकी आस जगाता है।
एक दिन यहाँ मेरा घर ज़रूर होगा!
पर ये शहर तब भी मेरा न होगा।



Then, Now, Forever!

Dear Future Me, Dear Future Me - Payal Navarkar

There was a time when speaking felt like a mountain too steep to climb. A voice that once ran free went silent after school, but college handed it back stronger, bolder, and unafraid. You were never the one to talk to strangers. Conversations felt like locked doors, but look at you, now your profession thrives on them. Your friends, your people, they taught you this. They turned hesitation into confidence, awkward hellos into effortless stories. From crafting newspapers to curating events, from writing to analysing news—every piece you worked on left a mark. Your words found homes in pages, voices in spaces. So, if you ever find yourself doubting, if silence ever feels tempting again, remember this: you were always meant to speak, to write, to tell stories. And you always will. With belief, Your Past Self



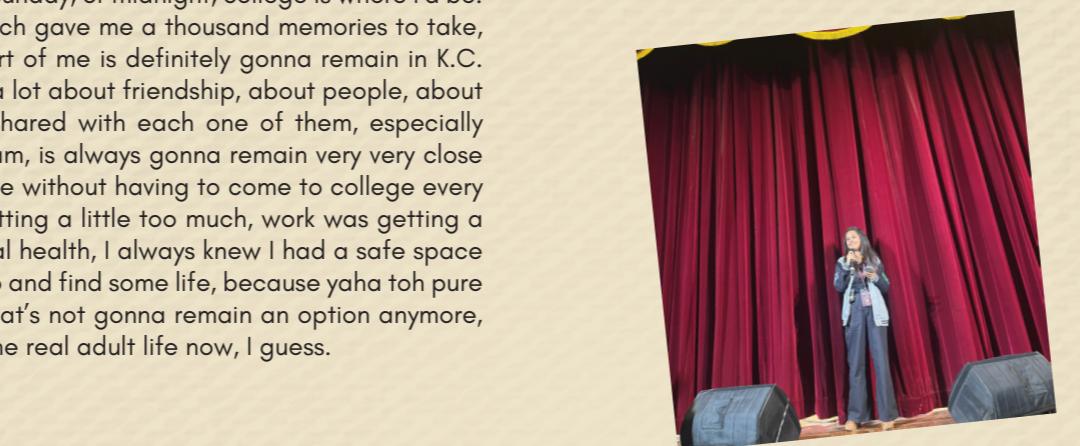
To the Moon, Saturn & Back - Anushka Karnail

Moving to a big, fast-paced city like Mumbai wasn't as easy as 18-year-old Anushka had imagined. But through all the chaos, my two best friends, Prisha and Naquiya, were my calm. I owe them so much and am beyond grateful for them. Three years, six semesters, countless events, thousands of people, and endless memories later, they've been my one constant. As an overthinker who second-guesses everything, they were the steady, confident voices I always needed. My college journey would have been nothing without them, and I love them to the moon and Saturn <3



Where My Heart Will Always Be - Lagan Dhall

College has been something very close to my heart, I mean I've spent more time in college than my own home. Let it be a Sunday, or midnight, college is where I'd be. Participated in almost all the fests, which gave me a thousand memories to take, and, away, taught me so much. A part of me is definitely gonna remain in K.C. forever. This is a place that taught me a lot about friendship, about people, about life. These teachers, and the bond I shared with each one of them, especially Sagar sir, Himanshu Sir and Surya ma'am, is always gonna remain very very close to my heart. Life is gonna be incomplete without having to come to college every day. When I would feel like life was getting a little too much, work was getting a little too difficult or hectic on my mental health, I always knew I had a safe space called Colaba campus where I could go and find some life, because yaha toh pure time kuch na kuch ho raha hota hai. That's not gonna remain an option anymore, and it's time to get out there and live the real adult life now, I guess.



Picture Abhi Baaki Hai Mere Dost - Raj Darji

Ladies and gentlemen, Itni shiddat se maine tumhe paane ki koshish ki hai, ki har zarre ne mujhe tumse milane ki saazish ki hai. Kehte hai agar kisi cheez ko dil se chaho toh puri kainaat usse tumse milane ki koshish mein lag jaati hai. Aap sabne mujhe meri chahat se mila diya. Thanks, thanks very much, I feel like the King of the world. Aaj is baat ka bhi yaqeen ho gaya ki humare filmon ki tarah humare zindagi mein bhi, end tak sab kuch theek ho jaata hai. "Happies Endings." Aur agar theek na ho, toh woh the end nahi. Picture abhi baaki hai mere dost!



Finding peace in all the chaos - Insiya Kabira

Hello Insu, How are you doing? I know that you are stressed out right now and you are trying your best to figure out everything on your own, but I also know that it's okay if you haven't figured things out. It's going to be alright. You are a strong, independent girl like you always call yourself. And I know you will figure this out one thing at a time. Always remember that you don't need to know about life at this very second; you can take your this out one step at a time. Maybe embrace the unknown with an open heart. This year of college, you've had your highs and lows, and you've thought about giving up so many times. But I'm so proud of you that you didn't. You powered through everything you were going through and worked your way through the problems that were thrown at you. In all that chaos, you found genuine friendships, realizing that everyone around you is equally confused as you are. But always remember not to let your stress overshadow your beautiful moments. Cherish every laugh, every challenge, and every friendship. Enjoy your last moments of college to the fullest, make tons of memories with everyone, and be happy because you probably won't remember the stress, but you will remember each and every laugh you had with these people and the peace you found in this chaotic world. Love them; they are the best thing that has happened to you.



Serendipity - Aleena Chopdar

Dear Aleena, Choosing KC and Mass Media over LSR and UPSC was undoubtedly a bold decision, but looking back, it was 100% the right one! Explaining this choice to our family members from a tier-three district wasn't easy, but you trusted your creative instincts and made a decision that led to a life free from regrets. A life where you won't second-guess yourself, no matter how many people may doubt the path you've taken.

This journey has been nothing short of amazing—full of self-discovery and meeting people who share your passion. Who would've thought the kid who used to watch "It's Controversial" on E24 alone would one day be discussing the entertainment industry and even working in it?

When people say they didn't enjoy their college life, I feel incredibly grateful for the unforgettable experiences, the wonderful people I've met, and how much I've lived it to the fullest.

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