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MÉLANGE

The Patient Void

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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.) Tejashree 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

To be, or not to be, that is the question. This opening line of Hamlet by William Shakespeare had constantly rung in my ears the moment our theme was decided. And what really stands incredible in this edition is that the theme felt resonating to all. Identity! That's the theme. When it was announced, I knew the stories of people being confused. Because the theme was so broad and seeped in everyone's life, the confusion was on what to cherry pick one thing out of hundreds in mind.

In this 9th edition, you will find interesting takes on how people identify themselves with or what they consider identity. Languages, places, parenting ways, emotions, cinema and so on. A contemplative issue, as I fondly call it. Because this time, pieces makes us reflect in the world we live and built within ourselves. It's very human to question. And this questioning, the constant dilemma of who we are and supposed to be, the need to define ourselves and shape ourselves in to something concrete so that we stand in this world without feeling fleeting.

I remember when we started working on this, I kept on mentioning to Twisha and Koena, to define the theme. To narrow it down. Until I sat on writing my piece and realised, that it is easier said than done. Because when we say identity, it has too many tentacles. It's about how we label us, perceive others, characterise ourselves and outline common traits to be part of something called 'group.'

When I find myself stuck in the dilemma of defining who we are, the very confusion becomes the beauty of the issue - something almost inexplicable. It reminds me of a beautiful song by The Carpenters named 'Two Sides.'

Well, there's two sides, there's another side of me
There's the one you think you live with, the one you never see
It's never really lived, but it's never really died
It's never really made it but it's tried.

Love and light,
Yashvi Jain
Editor-in-Chief, *Mélange*

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Designed by Team Melange

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Average Or Below Average?

By Yashvi Jain

A personal reflection on when your body becomes your identity.

I love women. I love their 'becoming'. I love their stories. And therefore, all my life, I have seen and heard many stories of such women, fondly. The suffering, grief, womanhood, and sometimes the era when they were girl. Gone through mastectomy twice, I know this 62-year-old with sagging breasts as an eye candy for people. Or the woman aged 23 got married to a man 8 years older than her, only because she was growing too quickly; her parents were afraid that she would stop looking like a girl. Or this story of a woman bearing 4 kids is now unable to lose her pregnancy fat. Or maybe, the story of mine where tummy fat is why I was bullied in my school days.

It happened one Saturday afternoon when I went to the clinic for regular checkups. As the banter went on and jokes were passed here and there, suddenly my doctor paused to have a look at my weight. 'You need to reduce this.' His voice concerned me. 'Why?' I asked. He mentioned the possibility of the body becoming 'insulin resistant.'

Now, I know where it all can take me. Increased weight, excess hair growth, acne, hyperandrogenism (High Male Hormones), and ultimately PCOS. This was alarming. Unsettling. Almost scary. How would I even be fine with an increased weight, which I still blame for stealing my precious years. Years when kids had their friends, would play badminton after school, or just play with a kitchen set, going to each other's home were also the exact years when I had no one.

Fatty, fatso, monkey, hippo... I had weird nicknames. None of this was confined to school. It was birthday parties, family gatherings and so on. People would go and ask my mother why I was so fat. And never did my mother defend. Because I was one, and she agreed with it. So, all my adolescence was about losing weight. Wanting to disown the tag. Years of control over diet. Months of exercise and outdoor activities. Finally losing it all.

But now everything is in vain. Because it's all back. The fat. Three layers of skin can feel growing on the belly. Bras-ries all tight. 'I feel bad about myself.' I said to my friend. She asked, 'Why?' 'Because I am growing fat.' Silence. There was a silence for a brief moment. And that was the realization.

How often do women identify themselves with their bodies? As if it's not just the body but a matter of dignity. The sense of familiarity. A body is the way they recognize themselves.

I have very closely seen a man and a woman going through cancer. And I have also seen a pattern. I remember the man going through mouth cancer, lamenting being unable to go out and work and play with friends. But the woman, on the other hand, was shattered when one of her breasts was about to be removed. Her existence was blurred. The fragility of the body wasn't just physical to her. And this moment of disbelief is what I have seen closely in life again and again. At times, after pregnancy, my sister was unable to understand what was happening with her body. Or my aunt with autoimmune disease simply didn't know what to do with her trembling hands.

I have seen women crying over their bodies. Crying for being too fat or too slim. Crying for losing pretty privileges. I have seen the distress they go through to maintain their body. The unseen enormous effort that goes behind having that one 'causal' look.

To be that girl, we are all now victims of beauty culture. Eventually, also the victim of wanting a good face, a good body, or good skin while constantly categorising ourselves as below average. Honestly, haven't we all categorized ourselves at some point? We are average when we see someone having a fair complexion than us. Below average when the waist and hip perfectly shaped the dress of someone. Somewhere around average when someone has straight sulky hair.

How do we identify ourselves? Like some scale. Probably conditioned to us by the million market share of cosmetics, clothing, and whatnot industries. The concept and ideas of women's bodies are how we tend to make our bodies meaningful, ultimately experiencing our bodies that way.

When we say body, there is a biological and cultural implication to it. However, it's the cultural cues we have all indulged in. That woman with breast cancer didn't care much about cancer the way she did about losing her breast. Or, I didn't really give thought to the other issues with my body becoming insulin resistant, but weight gain. Women, so often eat with the fear of weight gain rather than the feeling of satiation. Or go through the tedious task of hair removal, not to remove the tan but to look less

like a man.

Now, when I try to lose weight, will it be for my body? Yes, but as a last priority. The foreword is always to make my body acceptable to society. The fear of missing articles of clothing that may not fit my bulky body. Or to avoid getting married at an early age to a man 8 years older than me.

As much as this is conditioning, it is also the way my body recognizes itself. The way my body absorbs meaning and ideas in society is how my experiences are shaped. There is an act of survival in following such cosmetic pursuits. In knowing whether the shape of the body is apple or pear.

I know a woman who cried to sleep after seeing a bronze statue of a woman with three layers of skin around her belly. She felt seen that day. Heard when she said it to me. And maybe, this is all it was about. Nobody appreciated us when we were in pyjamas. Nobody said our eyes are beautiful the first thing in the morning. None of us talks about the pain of wearing silicone cups because wearing that blouse without a breast gets uncomfortable. And maybe that's why we keep on categorising ourselves in the tag of 'average' or 'below average.'

I know no woman - virgin, mother, lesbian, married, celibate - whether she earns her keep as a housewife, a cocktail waitress, or a scanner of brain waves - for whom her body is not a fundamental problem: its clouded meaning, its fertility, its desire, its so-called frigidity, its bloody speech, its silences, its changes and mutilations, its rapes and ripenings.

- from *Of Woman Born* (1976)
by Adrienne Rich



The Language That Knows Me First

Exploring how language shapes identity with the language that lives within us.

By Koena Banerjee

Identity is often spoken of as something visible, our names, our homes, the cities we come from, or the cultures we claim as our own. It is described through the things people can easily see or categorise. But some parts of identity are quieter than that. They exist in places that are harder to explain, yet impossible to separate from who we are. They live in the sounds we grew up hearing. In the words that shaped our earliest understanding of comfort.

In the language that held us long before we even understood what language meant.

For me, that quiet identity lives in Bangla.

Long before I could form sentences or understand grammar, I understood the comfort of calling out "Maa" and "Baba." Those were perhaps the first sounds that truly belonged to me. I did not learn them consciously; they simply arrived, as if they had always existed somewhere deep within my being.

Even today, after learning and speaking other languages in classrooms, conversations, and public spaces, those two words remain unchanged. No translation could ever replace them. "Mother" and "Father" may carry the same meaning, but they do not hold the same warmth. "Maa" feels softer.

"Baba" feels closer.

And perhaps that is what a mother tongue truly is the language that arrives before thought does.

Growing up, like most people, I slowly learned to navigate different languages. There is always one language reserved for classrooms, where grammar matters and sentences must follow rules. Another language belongs to the outside world, used in formal conversations or unfamiliar spaces. Sometimes there is yet another language meant for the wider world, the one that allows us to move beyond the boundaries of our hometowns or cultures.

But none of them ever feels quite the same as the language that raised you.

I notice this most during moments of emotion.

Whenever I am happiest when laughter spills out freely, and conversations move faster than I can organise my thoughts, I find myself slipping into Bangla without even realising it. The words come naturally, effortlessly, as if they were waiting beneath the surface the entire time.

And strangely, the same thing happens when I am sad. In the quiet moments of frustration, longing, or reflection, it is Bangla that surfaces first. When emotions feel too large to fit neatly into sentences, Bangla seems to understand them better than any other language I know.

In those moments, speaking Bangla does not feel like a choice.

It feels like instinct.

Perhaps this instinct was built slowly over years through small, ordinary moments that quietly shaped my relationship with the language.

Some of my earliest memories are not conversations, but

sounds.

Morning sounds.

In many Bengali households, mornings often begin with music soft, familiar melodies drifting through the house before the day fully begins. For me, one of those songs has always been "Hoye toh tomari Jono". The moment its opening notes play, something shifts inside the room.

Even before I fully understood the meaning of the lyrics, the song carried a sense of calm and reverence. It was not just music it was atmosphere. It felt like a gentle reminder that the day had begun.

Those mornings created a strange connection between Bangla and comfort. Even now, hearing those songs instantly brings back the feeling of slow mornings at home the smell of breakfast in the kitchen, sunlight slipping through curtains, and the quiet rhythm of a household waking up.

Language, in those moments, was not just something spoken.

It was something lived.

Then there were festivals.

If language carries culture, then festivals are where that culture comes alive most vividly.

Poila Boishakh, the Bengali New Year, has always been one of those days when Bangla feels larger than everyday speech. It becomes celebration itself.

The morning begins differently.

There is a sense of freshness in the air, as if the entire day is meant to begin again.

New clothes are worn often traditional ones and greetings are exchanged with warmth and enthusiasm. "Shubho Noboborsho."

The phrase is simple, but it carries the joy of renewal.

It is spoken between family members, friends, neighbours, and sometimes even strangers. In that moment, language becomes a bridge

connecting everyone celebrating the same beginning.

Food, music, and laughter fill the day, but the language remains at the centre of it all. It shapes the greetings, the songs, the rituals, and the conversations that unfold.

On Poila Boishakh, Bangla does not feel like just a language.

It feels like a shared heartbeat.

And then there is Mahalaya.

If Poila Boishakh marks beginnings, Mahalaya carries a completely different kind of emotion. It is quieter, more reflective, yet deeply powerful.

For many Bengalis, Mahalaya begins before dawn. There is something sacred about waking up in the darkness while the world is still silent. Radios or televisions softly play the iconic recitation of Mahishasura Mardini, a program that has marked the arrival of Durga Puja for generations.

The moment the chants begin, the atmosphere changes.

Even if you are half asleep, even if you do not fully understand every word, the sound itself carries something ancient and profound.

It feels like listening to history echo through time.

Growing up, those early mornings felt almost magical.

The house would be dimly lit. The outside world would still be wrapped in silence. And somewhere between sleep and wakefulness, the recitation would fill the room with a sense of anticipation.

Durga Puja is coming, and I can't wait for the sound of the dhak."

And somehow, Bangla carried that anticipation better than anything else could. Moments like these quietly shape the way we relate to our mother tongue. They build emotional connections that go far beyond vocabulary or gram-

mar.

Bangla was not just the language spoken at home.

It was the language of songs that marked the beginning of mornings.

The language of festivals that brought families together. The language of rituals made time feel sacred.

Perhaps that is why Bengali has always been more than just speech. It carries within it an entire world of art and imagination.

The poetry of Rabindranath Tagore feels like entire landscapes unfolding within a few lines. His words often hold a quiet depth, where nature, emotion, and philosophy blend seamlessly together.

Then there are the powerful compositions of Kazi Nazrul Islam, where rebellion, passion, and spirituality flow through rhythm and melody. His work reminds us that language can be both a weapon and a refuge.

And in cinema, storytellers like Satyajit Ray have shown how Bengali culture can be captured through the smallest details of everyday life. His films do not rely on grand spectacle instead, they reveal beauty in ordinary moments, much like the language itself.

Through poetry, music, and cinema, Bangla becomes something larger than conversation.

It becomes art.

Yet despite this richness, mother tongues often grow quieter in modern spaces. In a world increasingly shaped by global languages, many of us slowly begin to distance ourselves from the language that once felt like home.

We adapt.

We translate our thoughts.

We switch languages depending on the room we are in. And slowly, the language that once came most naturally begins to exist only within certain corners of our lives. But the truth is, a mother tongue never truly leaves us. It lingers quietly.

In the way we call our parents when we need comfort.

In the jokes that somehow lose their humour when translated.

In the phrases that suddenly return when emotions overwhelm us.

And sometimes, it returns in the most unexpected moments through a song playing in the background, a festival greeting, or a memory of early mornings that felt softer than the rest of the day.

That is when we realise something important.

Our mother tongue was never just a language we learned. It was a language that taught us.

It shaped the way we express affection.

It shaped the way we understand sadness.

It shaped the way we celebrate joy.

And perhaps that is why, no matter where life takes me, Bangla will always remain the language that recognises me first.

Because before the world taught me how to speak, it was Bangla that taught me how to feel.

And somewhere between the simple words "Maa" and "Baba," my identity had already begun to take shape.



BETWEEN WHO WE ARE AND WHO WE SHOW

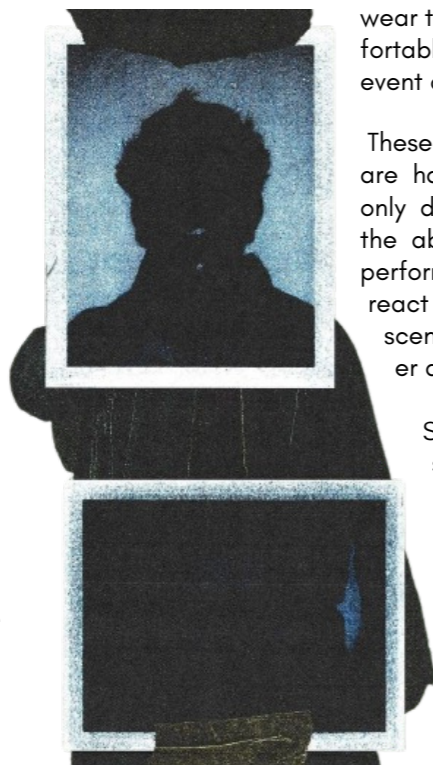
By Samiksha Kadam

A reflection on the many roles we step into and the selves we quietly carry.

The Selves We Carry

Identity is often spoken of as something stable, something that does not change. It is treated like a name written in ink. People say things like 'she is always so confident', or 'he has always been quiet.' Statements like these make it seem as if each of us carries only one fixed version of ourselves.

But if we pause for a moment, the question softens and grows more complicated. Are we truly just one version of ourselves, or are we something that keeps us shifting like the sky as the day moves from morning to evening?



Think about an ordinary day. When you are with your friends, you might feel like a breeze passing through an open window. You laugh easily. Words come without effort. Everything feels light.

These changes happen quietly without you even noticing. We move through situations the way water takes the shape of the glass it is poured into. Someone who speaks confidently among friends might feel their heart race when asked to speak in front of a class. Someone loud in a group may grow quiet in a formal setting.

Many people like to believe they know exactly who they are. Yet everyday life shows us that the version of ourselves we present is often more flexible than we think. It bends slightly, depending on the room we enter and the expectations there.

The real question, then, becomes: is that flexibility a sign of confusion, or is it simply part of what identity really is?

The Roles We Step Into

As we grow older, life naturally gives us different roles.

We might be a student in a classroom, a friend at a cafe, a child at home or a teammate on a field. Each role carries its own rhythm and expectations.

In a classroom, we sit straighter and listen carefully. With friends, we relax, speak freely and allow ourselves to be louder and more playful. Even the clothes we wear quietly reflect the roles we are stepping into. What we wear to college might be casual and comfortable, while a family function or formal event calls for something more polished.

These alterations do not imply that we are having to impersonate others. They only demonstrate that human beings have the ability to adapt by nature. As does the performance of theatrical actors, so do we react to the atmosphere of the surrounding scene. Every circumstance portrays another aspect of ourselves.

Sometimes these roles may be the same or even conflicting. One may experience the burden of being at home and, at the same time, want to enjoy being free with friends. It might seem that we are being dragged in opposite directions in such moments. However, it is also here that we get to know balance. We start knowing when

The Digital Mirror

In today's world, these shifting versions of ourselves become even more visible through social media. The quiet evenings, the moment of worry, and the ordinary routines of daily life rarely appear on the screen. What we see online is often a part of reality, like a highlight reel instead of the full movie. We think about how others will see our posts, and that thought quietly shapes what we choose to share.

Because of this, the version of ourselves that appears online might not always match the one that sits quietly in a room at night. It is another way we present ourselves to the world.

The Quiet Influence of Society

Long before we consciously make these choices, the world around us is already shaping us. From the way we are spoken to as children, to the behaviours that are praised or discouraged, we begin to absorb patterns without even realising it. Family, school, media and culture all leave their marks, gently guiding what we see as acceptable, desirable or even possible.

Over time, these lessons become our habits. We adjust our behaviour almost automatically, as if following a map we cannot see. The way we greet people, the tone we use in conversations, the things we choose to express or hold back, all of it is influenced by the invisible framework around us. It becomes so familiar that we rarely stop to question where these instincts come from.

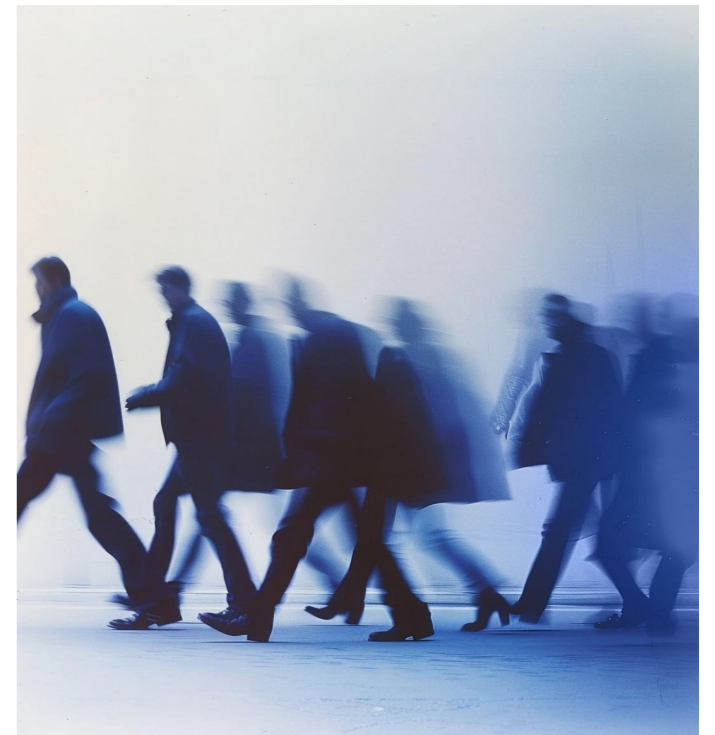
Yet sometimes these expectations can feel like costumes that're just a little too tight. In trying to meet others' expectations, we might hide our thoughts or feelings. We might swallow an opinion. Silence a feeling because we fear how it might be received. In those quiet acts of holding back, parts of ourselves begin to shrink, not because they are unimportant, but because they feel unsafe to reveal.

There are moments when we notice this more clearly. A pause before speaking. A quick decision to agree, even when we feel differently inside. These small moments reveal the quiet negotiation happening within us—the balance between belonging and being true to ourselves.

But awareness changes things. The more we begin to notice these patterns, the more space we create to question them. We start asking ourselves: Is this truly what I believe, or is it what I have been taught to believe? Do I want to stay silent, or have I simply learned that speaking comes with a cost?

This does not mean rejecting society altogether. After all, these influences also teach us kindness, respect and how to live alongside others. Instead, it means recognising which parts of these influences align with who we are, and which ones ask us to become smaller than we should be.

In that awareness, something shifts. The "costumes" begin to loosen. We realise that we are allowed to adjust them, reshape them, or even set them aside when they no longer fit. And in doing so, we slowly reclaim the parts of ourselves that had been quiet for too long, allowing them to exist not perfectly, but honestly.



When Words Become Boxes

Another powerful influence comes from the labels people give us. From an early age, we are often described with simple tags: the quiet one, the smart one, the funny friend. At first, these labels seem harmless, even flattering. But over time, they can begin to feel like boxes.

If someone is always called quiet, people may stop expecting them to speak up. Slowly, that person might begin to believe that their voice does not belong in the conversation.

In the same way, someone known for making others laugh may feel pressure to remain cheerful, even on the days when their heart feels heavy. They may hide sadness behind a smile because they believe that is the role they must continue to play. But humans are far more complex than any single word.

Why We Change in Different Spaces

Adjusting ourselves to different situations is not necessarily a flaw. It is part of how we move through a world filled with people. Speaking respectfully with elders, behaving professionally in an interview, or relaxing with friends are all ways we adapt to our surroundings.

These small adjustments help us navigate life smoothly, like learning the rhythm of every room we enter. That self we carry is not something frozen in time. It grows quietly with every experience, every conversation and every relationship. Family, culture, friendships and education all leave their marks on who we become. Perhaps it is better to imagine the self not as a statue carved from stone, but as a river that keeps flowing. The water changes with every passing moment. Yet the river remains itself. And somehow, within all these shifting roles and changing spaces, we continue in a lifelong process of becoming who we are.

THE BRIGHTEST

By Kiana Pavri

Finding identity, belonging, and quiet self-discovery in the flickering darkness of a theatre.

Have you ever been to a theatre? Whether it is a movie hall or an auditorium, for many, it is simply a place of entertainment. For me, however, it is much more than that. A theatre is where I feel most like myself. That darkened hall, often overlooked by others, feels like the brightest space in my life because it is where my identity truly comes alive.

DARK ROOM

As a child, I was often told that I dreamt too much. My imagination was seen as a distraction rather than a strength. Yet, I eventually found a world where dreaming was not only accepted but celebrated. Cinema became that world for me. It offered a space where emotions were not judged, where imagination had no limits, and where I could exist freely without the need for validation. What once felt like "delusion" gradually revealed itself as hope, a quiet reassurance that, no matter how uncertain life seemed, everything would eventually fall into place.

My connection with cinema deepened during the lockdown, a time when the outside world felt overwhelming and unfamiliar. It was then that I discovered old Hindi films, which opened a new dimension of understanding and comfort. The simplicity of Raj Kapoor, the emotional depth of Dilip Kumar, and the effortless charm of Dev Anand left a lasting impression on me. Their films reflected a slower, more meaningful way of life, one that valued authenticity over complexity. In a time filled with uncertainty, these films grounded me and quietly shaped my perspective on life. What began as admiration soon became a part of my identity.

Over time, my love for cinema transformed from passive viewing into an active experience. For the past several months, I have been attending film screenings at Regal Cinema, organised by the Film Heritage Foundation. Standing in long queues for hours might seem trivial or even unnecessary to some, but for me, it is a meaningful ritual. Those queues represent a community of individuals who share a genuine passion for storytelling. In those moments, I feel a sense of belonging that is rare to find elsewhere.

When the lights dim and silence fills the theatre, something shifts within me. In those few seconds of darkness, I feel completely present, free from expectations, doubts, and distractions. It is in that stillness that I realise how deeply cinema is intertwined with my sense of self. While many people travel far and wide in search of identity, I find mine sitting quietly in the middle rows of a theatre, watching stories unfold on a silver screen.



There have been several moments that have strengthened this connection. Watching *Gone with the Wind* for four uninterrupted hours was not an act of patience, but one of passion. Experiencing *Casablanca* in a theatre allowed me to feel its timeless dialogues in a way that no screen at home ever could. Similarly, viewing *Abhiman* in its original 35mm print, despite its imperfections, made the experience more authentic and meaningful. These moments were not just about watching films; they were about understanding who I am through them.

Cinema has taught me that identity is not something fixed or predefined. Instead, it is something that evolves, shaped by what we experience, what we admire, and what we choose to hold onto. In today's fast-paced world, where convenience often replaces connection, many people lose touch with the things that truly define them. However, cinema has allowed me to reconnect with mine. It has given me a space where I feel understood, inspired, and complete.

In conclusion, the theatre may appear dark to the outside world, but for me, it is the brightest place I know. It is not just a space where stories are told, it is where I discover my own. In that darkness, illuminated by the flicker of moving images, I do not search for my identity. I simply live it.



It's Not Me, It's Them

By Tanushree Wadodkar

Inbecoming myself, I slowly realised I had been becoming my parents all along.

Every time I pick up the phone to talk to someone in my family, there is one thing they say without fail: "You sound just like your mother." Whenever I meet my relatives, they always comment on how I'm just like Baba. And that is the best compliment I have ever received. Because why wouldn't I want to be exactly like the people who mean the most to me?

Every time you look at me, you're also looking at my parents. In many ways, big or small, they exist in everything I do. Sometimes I realise it instantly, like when I say something my mother would. Other times, it takes someone else pointing it out. But as I grow up, I am beginning to understand that my personality did not just form automatically. It was shaped slowly, with love, patience, and quiet effort, by the two people who raised me.

My mother lives in the strongest parts of me. She is practical, headstrong, and somehow manages to hold the entire family together without making it seem difficult. When something goes wrong, she doesn't panic. She thinks, she adapts, and she fixes it sometimes before anyone even notices that something was wrong in the first place.

Growing up, I saw this happen again and again, but I never truly stopped to think about it. Now, when I look back, I understand how much strength it must have taken to carry so much responsibility without ever letting it show. She stood tall even when things around her felt like they were falling apart.

When I am crying in her arms, she doesn't just comfort me, she gently pushes me to find a way forward. She tells me to wipe my tears, to think clearly, and to face whatever is in front of me. She has always pushed me to give my 100%, while also understanding that sometimes my best might not look like much. She taught me to stand up for myself and to never allow anyone to disrespect me. Somewhere along the way, without even realising it, I became stronger because of her.

And then there is Baba.

He is sentimental in a way that makes you feel understood without him having to say much at all. He is my quiet strength, the steady presence that makes everything feel a little less overwhelming. He listens more than he speaks, and when he

does speak, his words carry weight because they have been carefully thought out.

When I talk to him, the heaviness of my problems seems to ease. His presence feels calm, almost grounding. I see him in myself in the way I feel deeply, in the patience I try to show, and in the empathy I carry when I listen to others. And it's not just me who sees it; the people around me notice it too.

My parents, to be honest, are two very different people. Growing up with them felt like standing between two opposite worlds. My mother is logical, practical, and solution-driven. She believes in fixing what is broken and moving forward. My father, on the other hand, is reflective, emotional, and patient. He believes in sitting with a problem, understanding it, and giving it space.

And me? I am a strange but meaningful mix of both. I have my mother's ability to think things through and find solutions. At the same time, I carry my father's sensitivity and emotional depth. Sometimes, it feels like I have been given the best of both worlds, a balance between strength and softness, between logic and feeling.

But if I am being completely honest, I also carry their flaws.

There are moments when I hold on too tightly to my stubbornness, just like my mother. There are times when I let my emotions take over, just like my father. And in those moments, I don't always feel like the best version of myself. But maybe that is what makes it real.

I am not meant to be a perfect, polished version of my parents. I am meant to be a human, one someone who carries both their strengths and their imperfections, and learns to grow with them.

When I was younger, I believed that growing up meant becoming completely independent from my parents. I wanted to be different. I wanted to be seen as my own person, separate from who they were. I thought that individuality meant distance.

But the truth is far more comforting than that.

Growing up did not mean leaving them behind. It meant carrying them with me in ways that are sometimes visible and sometimes not. Their voices became my inner guidance. Their actions became my understanding of the world. Their love became the foundation I stand on.

Even now, whenever I face a challenge, my first instinct is From my father, I have learned empathy, patience, and the importance of truly listening. Together, these qualities have From my mother, I have inherited resilience, the ability to keep going even when things feel difficult or uncertain shaped how I see the world and how I respond to it. to wonder: What would my mother do? Or what would Baba say? Not because I rely on them to make decisions for me, but because they have already shown me how to think, how to respond, and how to move forward.

In those moments, it feels as though they are still right there beside me, guiding me, supporting me, and reminding me of who I am.

That, to me, is the most special part of my relationship with them. Even when I am physically away from them, I am never truly separated from them. They live in the way I think, the way I react, and the way I understand the world around me.

When I look in the mirror, the reflection isn't just mine.

It carries traces of them of everything they have taught me, both through their words and through their actions. They were the first voices I listened to, the first examples I followed, and the first people who showed me what strength and love truly look like

And no matter how much time passes, or how much I grow and change, that will never really go away.

Because I am not just myself.

I am also a reflection of them.

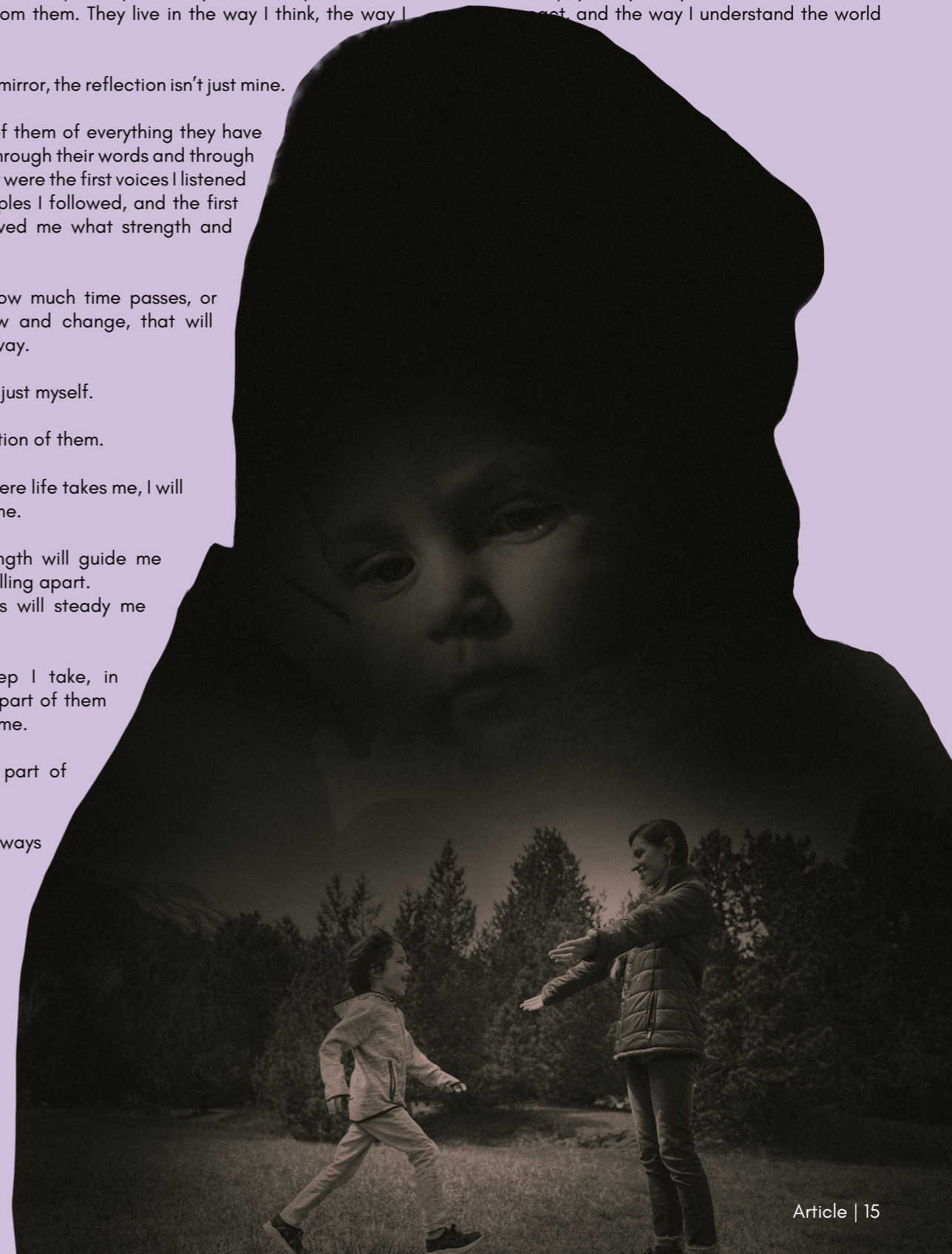
And no matter where life takes me, I will never truly be alone.

My mother's strength will guide me when I feel like falling apart. My father's words will steady me when I feel lost.

And in every step I take, in choice I make, a part of them always walk with me.

Because I am a part of them.

And they will always be a part of me.



Becoming Meera

By Shreyya Ajoy

A story of unlearning who she thought she was, and embracing who she was meant to be.



It was a sultry afternoon in the last little town of Devgarh. Every soul in this borough knew Meera as the difficult girl.

"She's such a snob," the shopkeeper would whisper whenever she walked past.

"Always arguing, always angry," the neighbours would sigh.

Meera had grown accustomed to those words. They followed her like dark shadows. At twenty-two, she had already mastered the art of not caring about what other people thought or opined. Or at least she pretended not to. Because life was such.

However, deep inside her personal space, things were different.

Her beloved father, around whom the world revolved, had passed two years ago. Ever since, something within her had collapsed. The house that was once filled with laughter now echoed with broken silence. The peeling chips off the walls seemed to whisper memories she was too afraid to confront.

The same sultry afternoon, unexpected monsoon rain tapped softly against the windows. Meera was in the attic searching through the contents of an old wooden trunk.

She was soon planning to sell the house. The house carried throbbing memories of her departed father, her only go-to source of comfort. She never knew her mother. Father never spoke of her.

Whenever she asked about her mother, her father would always playfully dismiss her, saying, "I am your father and mother. Why do you need anyone else?"

"Nothing is left for me here," she muttered.

The trunk smelled of old paper with a tinge of sandalwood. Inside were worn-out books, some photographs of the duo having fun on myriad occasions and a faded brown shawl that used to belong to her father.

Her fingers paused on the smooth fabric that frayed at the edges.

"Why did you leave me?" she whispered into the silence as unanticipated tears trickled down her face.

She did not even attempt to hold them back.

Her father, Raghav, had been everything to her. He was gentle, patient, caring and endlessly supportive qualities that seemed almost unrealistic in a world that often felt harsh.

Therefore, his unexpected passing from a sudden heart attack had spiralled Meera into an abyss of sorrow.

She fought with people. Quit her job. Pushed away, friends. It felt easier to be angry than to experience the emptiness within her Soul.

As she lifted a stack of old notebooks, something slipped out and fluttered to the floor.

A crumpled piece of paper.

Meera frowned.

"What's this?"

She picked it up carefully. The ink was slightly smudged, as though someone had written it with trembling hands.

Her heart skipped when she recognised the handwriting. It was her father's. Her fingers began to shake.

"Why didn't I see this before?" she whispered.

Slowly, she unfolded the fragile paper.

'My dearest child Meera,

If you are reading this letter, it means I am no longer around to explain things myself. And there is something you deserve to know. I have been meaning to talk about this for a long time, but could never muster enough courage ever to do so.'

Meera's breath caught in her throat.

Her eyes moved down the page.

'I have carried a truth in my heart for almost a couple of decades now. Not because I wanted to ever hide it from you, but because I feared losing you.'

The words blurred slightly as fresh, hot tears gathered in her eyes.

'Meera, my child, I am not your biological father.'

The world seemed to stop exactly as she read those words.

Her hands froze; her heart pierced and shattered into a million pieces.

"What...?" she whispered to herself.

The attic felt suddenly smaller, the air heavier. She couldn't bring herself to accept this harsh reality.

She read the line again.

I am not your biological father.

"No... no... no..." she murmured.

Her heart pounded wildly as the next lines came into focus.

'Many years ago, I found you sitting alone outside a temple. You were barely a year old. You were crying, scared, lonely and clutching a ragged doll.'

Meera's breath became shallow.

Fragments of forgotten memories seemed to flicker faintly in her mind. It seemed like life was replaying a video on an imaginary screen in front of her.

A temple bell.

Rain.

A small, tattered doll.

Her father's handwriting continued.

'I waited for hours, hoping someone would come for you. But no one did. I even checked with a few passersby and visitors.'

She couldn't bring herself to read further as fresh tears rolled down her cheeks.

'That fateful day, I had two choices. Walk away... or become your father. I chose the latter.'

Meera's vision blurred completely now.

'And my dear child Meera, the moment you looked at me with those frightened eyes and held my hand, my heart had made the decision for me.'

The letter trembled in her hands.

"I... I was abandoned?" she whispered.

Her chest tightened painfully.

All her life, she had believed she belonged somewhere that she had roots. That she had a story.

But now...

Everything felt uncertain.

She continued reading.

'I never wanted you to feel unwanted. You deserved love, security and a home. And loving you became the easiest thing I have ever done. I could never marry anyone, fearing how anyone else would accept or treat you. I just wanted the best for you always.'

Meera covered her mouth as a sob escaped.

She remembered childhood evenings when he would cook dinner while humming old songs.

The way he attended every school function, annual day and parent-teacher meets.

The way he stayed awake all night when she had a fever.

Those memories suddenly flooded her mind like a storm.

But anger rose alongside them.

"You lied to me," she whispered bitterly.

Her fingers tightened around the paper.

"You should've told me!"

For a moment, rage burned through her grief.

Then her eyes fell on the final paragraph.

'I know this truth might hurt you.

But please remember something important. Blood may create life... but love creates a family.'

Meera finally allowed her tears to flow freely and relentlessly.

"You are not defined by where you came from. You are defined by the choices you make and the love you give."

The last lines were written shakily.

'And my dear sweet child Meera, the most beautiful identity you will ever have is the one you choose for yourself.

Thank you for allowing me the honour of being your father.

With endless love forever,

Raghav.'

Silence filled the attic.

Meera sat there for a long time, staring at the letter.

Her mind felt like a whirlwind of emotions.

Shock.

Grief.

Confusion.

But also... something unexpected.

Understanding, a breezy sense of awareness.

Memories surfaced one after another.

Her father taught her how to ride a bicycle.

"Don't worry, I'm right here," he had said as she wobbled down the road.

Her teenage years were when she screamed at him during arguments.

"You don't understand me!"

Yet he always responded calmly.

"I may not understand everything, Meera. But I'll never stop trying."

A painful realisation slowly settled in her heart.

She had spent the last two years drowning in anger and self-pity.

But the man who raised her had chosen her.

Chosen her when he could have walked away.

"Why didn't I see it?" she whispered.

Her tears soaked the letter as she hugged it to her chest.

"I'm sorry, Papa," she cried.

Outside, the rain had stopped.

Soft sunlight filtered through the attic window.

For the first time since his death, Meera didn't feel completely lost.

She looked around the room.

The house no longer felt empty.

It felt... full.

Full of memories.

Full of love.

She stood slowly and wiped her tears.

"No," she said quietly.

"I'm not selling this house."

Her father had given her more than a home.

He had given her a life.

And now it was time she honours that.

Later that evening, Meera walked to the small tea stall near the market.

The same place her father used to visit every evening.

The owner looked surprised.

"Meera? Haven't seen you in months."

She smiled faintly.

"Yeah... I've been away. Away from myself. But now, I am back."

He poured her a cup of tea.

"You look different," he said curiously.

Meera stared at the steam rising from the cup.

"I found something today," she replied softly.

"What was it?"

She paused.

"A letter from my father."

"And?"

Her voice was steady now.

"It reminded me who I really am."

The man nodded thoughtfully.

"Sometimes the people who leave us... leave behind the lessons we need the most."

Meera smiled.

For the first time in years, it felt genuine.

That night, she placed the letter carefully inside a frame and kept it on her bedside table.

Before sleeping, she whispered into the darkness.

"Thank you for choosing me, Papa."

A gentle breeze moved through the window.

And somehow, she felt he had heard her.

Because for the first time in her life, Meera wasn't the difficult girl anymore.

She was simply someone discovering her true identity.

And that was the beginning of everything.





A Life Without Yesterday

By Roshni Purohit

Surrounded by people who knew him, he struggled to recognise the person they spoke about.

"Nine o'clock already", Aarnav murmured, glancing at the clock on the wall. Another long corporate firm where he worked as a manager, with meetings, deadlines, and spreadsheets that seemed to be multiplying by the hour. He packed his stuff, adjusting his laptop bag on his shoulder as he was about to leave the office. A message popped up on the screen: "Call me when you are free, your papa wants to talk." His parents still lived in Jaipur, whereas he had shifted to Bengaluru four years ago for work. "Okay, will call in a while", he replied.

As he got out of the building, he saw that the rain was hitting hard on the roads. He took out his umbrella and stepped on the crossing. The rain was suddenly pierced by the loud screech of tires. Then a flash of headlights and everything went black.

In the hospital room,

When Aarnav opened his eyes, the white ceiling above him felt unfamiliar. The room was full of the smell of antiseptics. As he tried to sit up, he felt a sharp pain in his head. The nurse noticed that he was awake and asked, "Mr. Aarnav, how are you feeling now?"

"Where am I?" he questioned.
"This is a hospital, you had an accident last night", the nurse replied.

He frowned, "What?!, Accident?!", he said in disbelief. "You were hit by a car while crossing the road", the nurse tried to explain. He touched his head, which was wrapped in a bandage.

The doctor entered the room. "Good that you're awake, Mr. Aarnav. I am Dr. Abhishek Jain. How are you feeling?" the doctor asked.

"My head hurts and.... Who am I?" Aarnav said.

The doctor said, "You don't remember?" Aarnav shook his head slowly and whispered, "No".

The doctor told him to rest and not take stress for now.

The next day

His parents have arrived from Jaipur. As soon as they came, they rushed to the hospital. His mother entered the room; her eyes already filled with tears. "Aarnav!" she cried. He looked at the door and saw a couple standing. The woman came and hugged him. Aarnav had no idea who they were. The woman released the hug and said, "I am your mother, beta, do you remember?"

Aarnav shook his head. His father put his hand on his shoulder and said, "It's okay, the doctor told us this might happen".

"Temporary memory loss", the doctor explained. "The head injury has resulted in this memory loss; he might recover soon or might not".

"Might not?", his mother repeated.

"Memories are unpredictable; we can't be fully sure about

them," the doctor explained.

A week later,

Aarnav was discharged from the hospital. His parents took him to his apartment. The photographers hung on the wall, with strange, unfamiliar faces and places.

His parents tried to explain each picture to him, but he was completely blank. He stared at himself in the picture and questioned, "Is that really me? So confident?" His father replied, "Yes, you were always confident and determined".

He glanced at the apartment again, a bookshelf filled with books. A guitar leaned in the corner. He walked over to it and picked it up. A faint melody slipped from his fingers before he realised what he was doing. His father asked him, "Do you remember this melody?"

"No," he slowly murmured, "My hands... just knew".

From next week, he joined the office. The office lobby felt strange. His co-workers greeted him warmly, but each greeting carried an expectation he didn't know.

"Sir!" his colleague Payal called, while walking towards him. "It's good to see you back. How are you now?" "Thank you, I am good now", Aarnav replied while smiling awkwardly.

Payal took him to his cabin, gave him a file, and said, "Read it, these are the topics we'll discuss in today's meeting".

"Meeting?" he questioned. "Yes, in about 30 minutes".

Aarnav just nodded his head while figuring out what was happening.

In the meeting room,

"Manager Sahab is back!" a coworker joked. Aarnav forced a smile. Payal told Aarnav that he usually leads the meeting. "Usually?" he repeats. "Yes, you are one of the best managers here." "I am afraid that I don't remember," he paused before replying. The room went silent. After the meeting, Aarnav went into his cabin and sat on his chair.

Looking at the ceiling, he let out a sigh of relief.

Days passed, and he was still in search of himself. "Who was I? How was I? What is my identity?" These questions skipped through his mind every moment.

His apartment felt like a mystery of puzzles that he tried solving but just couldn't.

One evening, he opened a drawer beside his bed and found a diary inside. Inside were neatly written plans and ideas. He read out a line, "success isn't measured by the power you hold, but by the responsibility you carry".

"Did I write it?" he frowned and asked his father. "Yes, you always believed that," his father replied. But the words felt unfamiliar.

Sometimes he walked the streets of Bengaluru, thinking that something would trigger a memory. The smell of cof-

fee shops, the sound of traffic. Nothing was known.

One afternoon, Payal invited him for lunch. He questioned her, "How was I before?" "You were a very ambitious and goal-oriented person before the accident; I always looked up to you," she told him. "Really!?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, you used to work late. Always chasing the next promotion". "Was I happy?" he asked.

"I think so... you were successful, but sometimes you seemed... tired", she answered.

"So even the version of me you know was not perfect." "No one is", she replied.

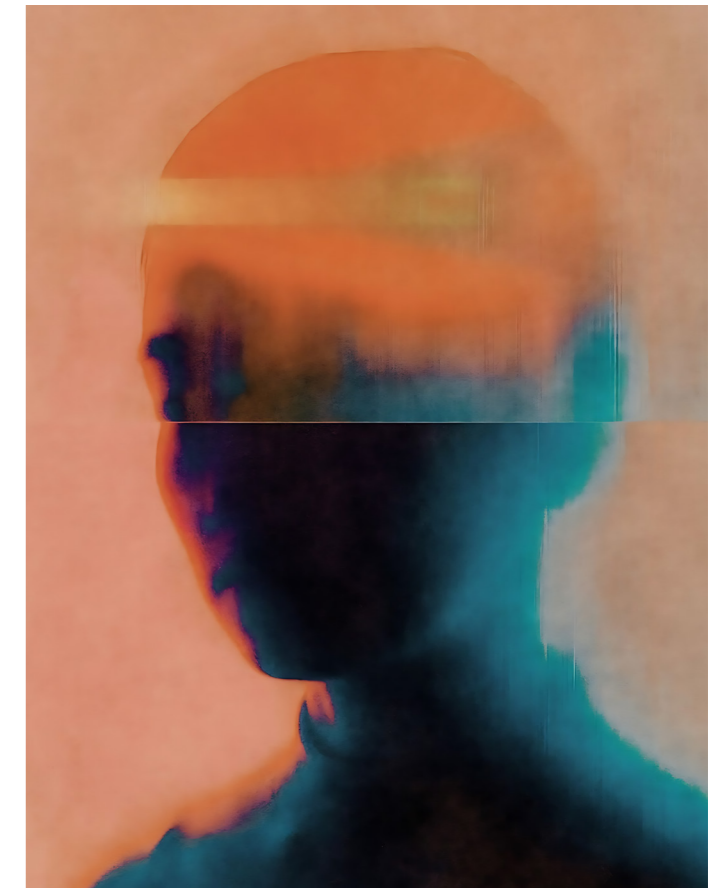
His parents went back to Jaipur. While leaving, his mother asked him to take care of himself and visit them whenever he wants.

The news about him having memory loss spread among the relatives. His elder sister visited him when her parents went back. She bought their old photo album with her. She showed him their old pictures, "Look at this picture, you used to hate this picture", she laughed.

He flipped through them. Childhood photos. School, college photos.

"You were always the responsible one," she said. "How?" he asked. "You always took care of everyone," she replied.

"Everyone keeps on telling me who I was, but none of it feels like me", he said while closing the album slowly. "Maybe because you are not the same person anymore," she said.





After a week,

While his elder sister was leaving. She said, "Don't pressure yourself to remember anything". "But how do I know who I was?"

"Maybe your identity is not in the past, but in the coming future," she said while smiling.

That night, he opened the diary again. After starting at the empty page for a while, he started writing,

I may not remember who I was,

But I still have the power to choose who I want to be tomorrow.

The next day, he got ready for the office with a new hope. He reached the office and asked Payal to call everyone to the meeting room in five minutes. Payal nodded her head.

"I know I am no longer the manager I used to be," he told them. "That's obvious", his colleagues replied. "But that's not entirely bad," he continued.

"What do you mean?" someone asked. "From the time my accident happened, everyone tried telling me about the person I was. But the truth is... I don't remember him".

The room went silent. "So instead of trying to become who I was, I have thought to start fresh", he continued. One of the colleagues asked, "So, what kind of manager are you going to be now?" "I guess we will find that out together," he smiled.

Everyone was happy seeing this new version of him. And most importantly, he seemed happy.

Later that evening, he walked through those streets again. For the first time after the accident, the city didn't entirely feel unfamiliar. That day, he realised something.

Identity was not a fixed story written in the past. Perhaps it is something that could be written.

As he walked on the streets of Bengaluru, Arnav felt a sense of comfort. For him, it might always be a mystery of the man he used to be. But the person he would become would still be created by him.

And this time, he chose himself.

श ह र की क ह नी



By
Pehel
Rajwani

चेहरे के टुकड़ों में
बंटी हुई मैं, हर
शहर की कहानी
में अपनी पहचान

KAL, AAJ AUR KAL

By Twisha Vora

By Koena Banerjee

To the shadow of my past,

I wish I could let go of you,
I hope to rebuild a future with you,
But the present times feel too new,
And life feels too blue;
where facing my inner demons feels like attacking my safety.
It has been a long time since I wrote you a letter. All I do is huff when someone mentions you. Honestly, all that stopped me was my fear. Going back in time to relive our past experiences while knowing their impact and outcomes is deeply introspective, especially right now, when understanding myself seems expensive. It feels so unsettling to know how I used to be with an innocent smile, deprived of the constant validation I now get from the same social I never intended to get sucked into. But here I am with the courage to look back, and that is how I was shaped.

I remember the time you moved house. You went from having a grandma, grandpa, aunt and uncle there for you to being bored in what was a foreign abyss for you. The friends you lost in the way that you could never reach back to still prick my feelings and be the source of my overthinking. I still feel your thoughts lingering in my mind, and I know that they decay your optimism, but I wish you could stick to the one thing you loved so dearly. But you still moved to focus the little bits of attention you had on creating a new life with the non-existent motivation to study the things that had once filled your mind. The irony lingers within me when I want to study but cannot.

I also remember your first day of your second school. What confuses me is why you couldn't be there for yourself, why you wished for a friendship when you knew the reality. You should have been used to the solitude. That adaptability is something I had to build for both of us. And that was not the only thing I had to dwell on. I pitched all the things you were too busy to prioritise. Days moved by, and you slipped into the sand of time, but one thing gripped you, hold tighter than roots of time. Your love for art is something I keep dear to my heart to date. Something you've got to experience and live, and I struggle to find that minuscule joy of doing a hobby you found yourself doing for the rest of your life, but now has become a memory to rejoice in.

पर अब क्या करे... छोड़ आए हम तुम्हारी दुनिया और एक नई ज़िंदगी में, जहाँ तुम्हारा न कोई नशान है और न कोई पहचान।

I have adapted from you, I have learned a lot of things from you, you have taught me a few of the biggest learnings of my life, but you always seem to be the remainder in my equation that I have always despised. I envy your will to continue enhancing your creative abilities, your courage to speak out loud, and your joyous personality, isolated from the social mask. But alas, I hesitate to put forth my point. I am always busy painting a small figurine, and I also seem to be introverted and reserved to live my teenage dreams.

All my situations derive from you, and all my problems arise through you. You are the spider in my web that has trapped me in your life experiments. I know this looks like I'm complaining to you, and I know no other way to write to you. But always know I am a product of you, and will always remember, I reap what you sow. I love you from the bottom of my heart, but my feelings feel too complex. All I hope is that your choices have yielded well for me.

Yours not truly,
Not your aspired future self.

Dear you,

A letter written today is meant to be opened when you have forgotten what you were trying to do, older and wiser, probably still figuring it out by the time you read this.
You will have shed a version of yourself. That's not a loss. That's the whole point. Identity was never a fixed thing. It was always a magazine, revised with every new edition, corrections made to the story while the spine stays the same.

You were never just one thing. You were a collection of ongoing drafts, each one more honest than the last. Right now, as I write this, I am sitting with a hard question: who am I when no one is watching? What part of me is certainly mine, and what part of me would I want you to inherit?

Do we observe, or do we perform for an audience that never asked us to? The honest answer is: I'm not entirely sure. I am learning, slowly and imperfectly, to sit with that uncertainty instead of rushing to fill it. Not knowing used to feel like failure, like everyone else had received instructions I somehow missed. But I have started to understand that the searching is not a detour from identity. The people who seem most fully themselves are not the ones who stopped asking questions. They are the ones who made peace with asking them forever.

What I want you to remember is this: you care deeply, sometimes too much, and the caring exhausts you in ways people didn't always see. You were brave in a quiet way, and no one gave you an award for the conversations you walked away from, or the boundaries you finally held, or the dream you kept alive even when it seemed embarrassing to still believe in it. I hope that by now you have stopped apologising for taking up space. I hope you have made peace with your contradictions that you can be soft and strong, certain and searching, rooted and still becoming. These aren't opposites pulling apart. They are the texture of a real, complicated, fully inhabited person.

The world will try to flatten you into a single, legible thing. Resist that. Gently, gratefully, persistently resist it. And if the way you've changed surprises you, let that be good news. It means you were paying attention. It means life got through. It means you were open enough to be shaped by experience, which is its own kind of courage.

There are parts of you that remain through all the changes, a thread that belongs to you alone, that didn't let everything else unravel it. Hold onto that. And if some of what you have become is unfamiliar to the person writing this letter, that's alright too.

You are not obliged to stay consistent with every past version of yourself. Growth is not betrayal. Changing your mind is not a weakness. Becoming someone, your younger self might not fully recognise is sometimes the most faithful thing you can do with a life.

I hope you are living inside your own story, not the one your family wrote for you, not the one handed to you by default, not the one that looks best from the outside. I hope you have found people you can be genuinely named by. I hope you love the version of yourself that doesn't perform. I hope your relationship with yourself has grown quieter and kinder, not perfect, just kinder than it used to be. I hope you still have questions, not anxious ones, but curious ones. The kind that feels like doors rather than walls. I hope identity has become, for you, less about defining and more about directing. Less about proving, and more about inhabiting.

You earned this version of yourself, even the parts that were hard. Especially the parts that were hard.

With love, curiosity, and a little nostalgia
You, as you were.

FRAGMENTS OF ME

By Zahra Mukadam



Nobody becomes themselves alone.

By the time you realise you're becoming someone, most of the pieces are already there, and most of them didn't come from you.

They arrive quietly, from the people who stay in your life long enough to leave something behind. A phrase you start repeating because someone you once knew used to say it. A habit that suddenly feels natural, even though it wasn't always yours. Tiny traces left by the people around you. And somehow, those traces are what begin to make up who you are.

Some of the earliest pieces of who I am came from growing up between two sisters.

My older sister has been the blueprint for most of my life. Not in a loud way, there were no dramatic speeches about how to survive in the world. It was quieter than that. For as long as I can remember, I watched how she carried herself, how she handled things. For years, I copied her without even realising it. She had a way of refusing to let me stay naive, refusing to let me be the gullible child the world could easily push around. At the time, it sometimes felt like bullying. Looking back, I think she was training me in her own way, quietly removing the fragile pieces before the world had the chance to break them.

My younger sister added something entirely different. Loving someone younger than you changes your instincts in ways you don't notice forming. You start protecting someone other than yourself. You become protective without ever deciding to be. I don't know exactly what part of her has shaped who I am today; maybe I'm still too close to see it clearly.

Some pieces arrived later, through friends who quietly changed me without ever trying to.

Gayatri's piece came with distance. Most of our conversations now happen through FaceTime calls that stretch for hours, her in one city and me in another. She's studying to become a doctor, carrying a kind of pressure I'm not sure I could survive for even a fraction of the time she has. Watching someone continue through something that demanding changes the way you understand strength. It stops looking dramatic and starts looking quiet simply the decision to keep going, every single day.

Some pieces come from warmth. From afternoons that stretch much longer than they were supposed to, sitting across the same café table while conversations wander through everything and nothing at once. The ease with which those conversations flow has a way of making ordinary days feel brighter than they probably should. Many of those moments have Asmi somewhere in them, turning simple conversations into something that lingers long after we've left.

Other pieces come from a different kind of energy, the kind that reminds you it's possible to stand your ground without apology. Watching Anushka move through the world has made me realise that shrinking yourself to fit into a room was never a requirement in the first place.

Some pieces arrive quietly, long after you think you already know yourself.

Aamna has this subtle way of pulling me a little further out of the shell I once mistook for my entire personality. Not dramatically, not all at once. I didn't go from a quiet person to a social butterfly overnight. It's just small moments that make you realise the world is bigger than the boundaries you once drew around yourself.

Greha brings something else entirely, the kind of energy that turns ordinary days into unexpected detours. The kind of friend who reminds you that life is allowed to wander.

Identity works in strange ways. It grows through what we gather along the way, but also through what we learn to leave behind.

If you keep carrying bricks from the past, you'll end up building the same house over and over again. Some pieces were never meant to stay.

You don't see things as they are. You see them as you are. And who we are is never something we build entirely alone. We don't walk away from people unchanged. Even when they leave, their colours remain.

So yes, the quote "I'm a mosaic of everyone I've ever loved" is true.

My older sister's guidance.

The comfort of long conversations with Asmi.

The steadiness of Anushka's refusal to shrink.

The quiet shifts Aamna and Greha introduced without even trying.

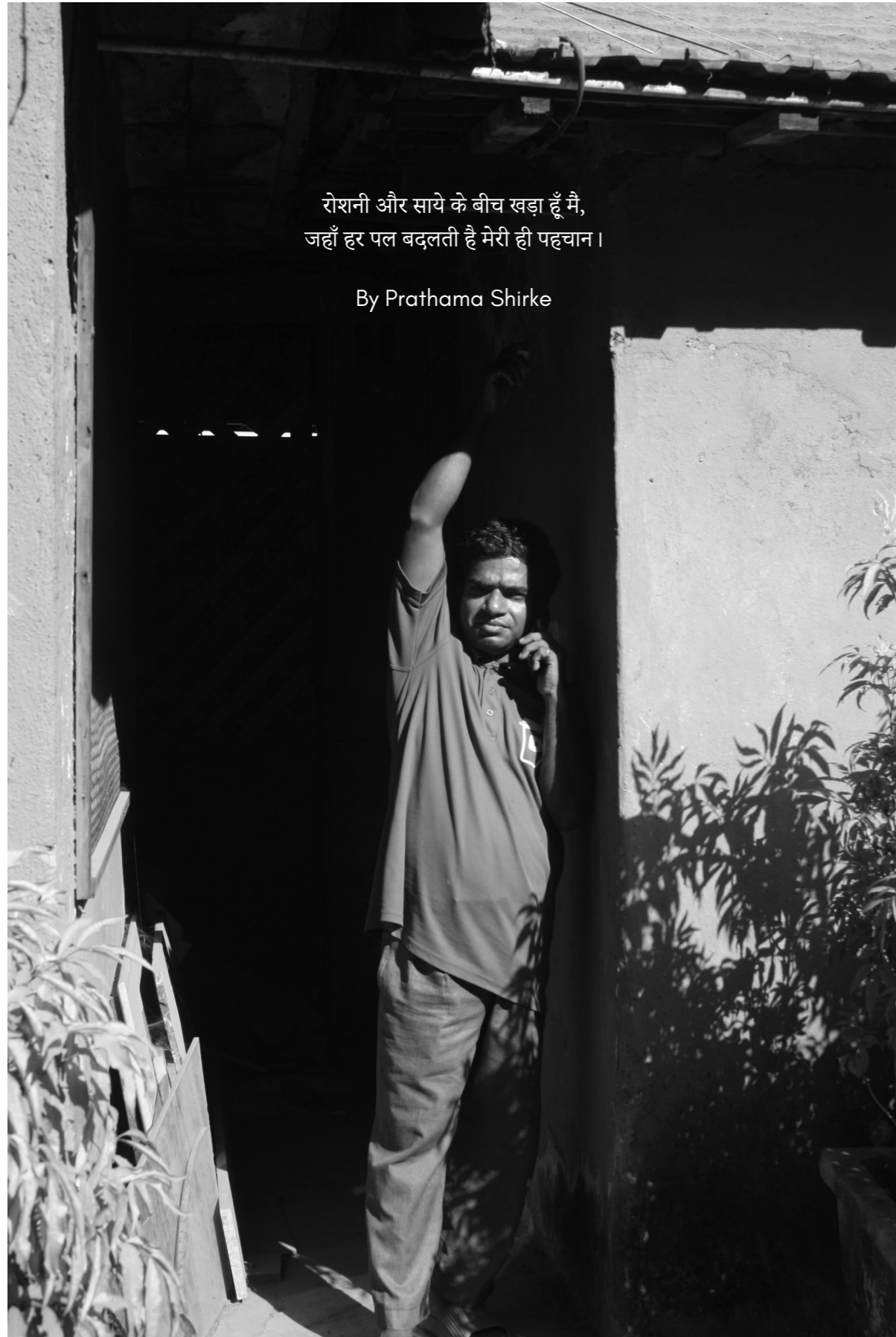
Maybe not every piece is bright.

But every piece is real.

And if you want to know who I am,

Look at the pieces I kept.

दहलीज़ पर ज़िंदगी



रोशनी और साये के बीच खड़ा हूँ मैं,
जहाँ हर पल बदलती है मेरी ही पहचान।

By Prathama Shirke

अँधेरे में एक झलक

अंधेरो की गोद में भी एक उजाला पलता है,
जहाँ मैं खोकर भी हर बार खुद को ही पाता हूँ।



THE PATIENT VOID

By Krutika Lohar

Looking for it everywhere,
even when it stands so close
palpable in the quiet corners of the soul,
visible only to the patient eyes of the heart.
The void carved a hollow within me,
a silent space that slowly widened
until it blurred the road ahead
and dimmed what once felt certain.
Unfathomable
a question lingering quietly in the background,
while I keep convincing myself
that the answers lie somewhere further ahead.
So I kept running.
Towards ambition,
to the gleaming dream of prosperity,,
towards the wealth the world
so confidently points toward.
I thought perhaps there,
in the noise of achievement
and the weight of prosperity,
the emptiness would finally fall silent.
But the void remains patient.
It waits beneath the surface,
softly reminding me
that identity cannot be purchased
and meaning cannot be measured in numbers.
Unspoken, the truth lingers quietly.
Maybe we have always known it
concealed somewhere down in our hearts,
waiting till we should quit running so that we could hear it.

And yet,
even now,
I still try to hide it.



It just takes a little courage to be something more,
You can find a version of yourself,
You have never seen before.

There are so many versions of ourselves,
We haven't even met.
We think that we have found our true selves,
But they remain somewhere hidden instead.

We are people with many people within us,
Whom we are yet to find.
We think that we know who we are,
But we are way more than words can ever define.

Maybe you will find a girl in a faraway corner of your heart,
The girl who is weeping, and the girl whose world is falling apart.

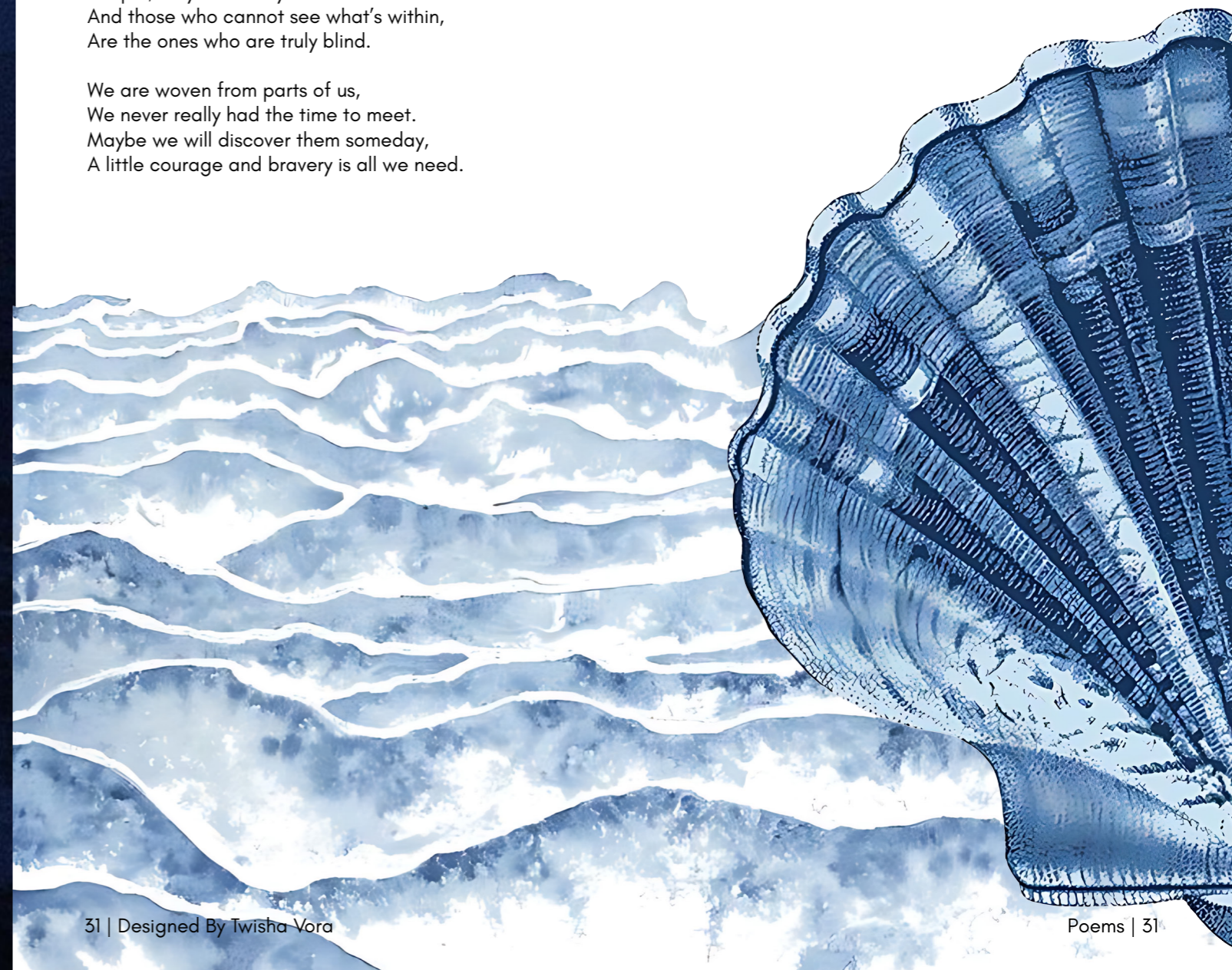
Maybe you will find a boy who loves to watch the stars,
The boy, who thinks that a person cannot be defined by their scars.

The thing is,
that people are too busy to notice the people residing within them,
People, they do not try to find.
And those who cannot see what's within,
Are the ones who are truly blind.

We are woven from parts of us,
We never really had the time to meet.
Maybe we will discover them someday,
A little courage and bravery is all we need.

Within Us

By Tanushree Wadodkar



PIECES OF ME

By Aarushi Chaurasia

When I look at myself today,
I don't see a single word, I see whole story

I see fragments
Colourful pieces gathered from the cities
That once held me closer

Nagpur holds a piece of who I am
The side of me that longs for warmth and
Belonging.

The side remembers slow evenings.
Folk stories drifting through the air,
And the freedom of running barefoot in the yard.

Nagpur lives in me
In the way I hold in tightly
To the people I love.

A version of me still rests in Jabalpur
The one who learned
How quietly life can change
The one who understood how to adapt,
To grow into unfamiliar spaces
Even when everything felt new.

Jabalpur lives in me
In the way I welcome change
Instead of fearing it

Indore lives in me
In the way I share love
Through a plate passed across the table

And then there is the loudest
Most restless version of myself
Mumbai.

The city where ambition grows louder than doubt
Where kindness sometimes comes
From strangers.
Where I learned that solitude
Does not always mean loneliness.

Mumbai lives in me
In the way, I can't stand alone
And still feel full.

These cities are not just places
I once lived

They are quiet architects
Of who I have become.

I am who I am today
Because each of them
Left something of themselves in me.



Thou Thre Thy

By Twisha Vora

First day of the ninth year,
Old faces, renewed with energy,
Recounting vacation adventures,
Manifesting small, foolish joys.

Then comes a new face
Confidence worn like a crown,
Standing at the edge of the door,
Experienced, mysterious, eloquent.
Questions gather in his presence
Will he be kind, simple, and understood?

As the day unfolds,
So do his many traits.
The elegant man turns dramatic,
Explaining each point with flair,
With emphasis upon himself,
And the art of making things hell
Adding complexity where none belongs,
Creating loopholes none can repair.

The day comes to an end,
And so does my will to listen.
His endless reiterations scrape the sky,
His journeys to Venice retold
Measured in both months and days
Within his restless mind.

For my love of debate,
I reason with his claims,
But he names me dissonant
"Thy mind is barren ground,
Where knowledge hath not sown."

I read and read,
Know his story like a ballad-monger,
One who blends into the tale,
And lives within its frame.
His identity never stands apart
He is the story he proclaims.

And now his tale seeps into mine,
For years to come,
With embers left to burn.

With a heart still gold,
I quiet my rising ire,
Let observation steady me
Learning his ways, accepting his sway.
I try to trace his hidden ache
For his story has lived
A thousand years or more.

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By Prathama Shirke



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