

THOUGHTSPELL

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**STUDENTS' MAGAZINE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
THE BHAWANIPUR EDUCATION SOCIETY COLLEGE**

Team *Thoughtspell*

Editorial Sub-Committee:

Teachers:

Mr. Tathagata Sen

Mr. Sayan Chatterjee

Ms. Sayantani Sengupta

Mr. Soumyajit Chandra

Mr. Pema Gyalchen Tamang

Dr. Gargi Talapatra

Student Editors:

Ankhi Bandyopadhyay (UG Semester IV)

Bhavna Jagnani (UG Semester IV)

Kaushiki Ganguly (PG Semester II)

Nafisa Islam (PG Semester II)

Shatabdi Roy (PG Semester II)

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From the Editorial Sub-Committee:

Delineating the various categories of the literary critic, T. S. Eliot memorably expatiated the type of the critic as the failed creative writer—an idea which invariably urges the average intellectual to embark on an uncomfortable journey of introspection and soul-searching. A literary curriculum generally requires a student to continually engage in the analysis of literary texts through a myriad critical lens. Armed with the entire arsenal of literary theory, students will constantly dissect, deconstruct and interpret literary texts, and the pristine joy of reading is sacrificed on the altar of critical insight. Owing to academic pressure and multiform responsibilities, the creative verve of young minds will often be confined to the straits and narrows of amateur endeavour, to be later channelled towards careers which provide them with limited opportunity to showcase their creativity. The Department of English, The Bhawanipur Education Society College has been ever-vigilant in ensuring that its students do not experience similar travails. Acknowledging the necessity of encouraging students to explore their creative and intellectual proclivities outside of the space of academic curriculum, the Department of English has decided to bring out the first volume of the students' magazine, *Thoughtspell*, in order to provide the students with a platform to showcase their multifarious creative efforts.

The proposal for publishing a bi-annual students' magazine was put forth by the Department of English in November 2021, which was duly approved by the honourable Teacher-in-Charge and the Management. Subsequently, a vote was organized in the Department of English in order to decide a name for the imprint. 'Thoughtspell', suggested by Prof. Sonal Kapur, was unanimously selected as the most appropriate title for the magazine. It was decided that the students' magazine would have an editorial sub-committee including teachers and student representatives from the UG and PG sections of the Department of English. An online test was devised to evaluate the editing, formatting and analytical skills of more than thirty candidates

who had put in their names as aspiring student editors. On the basis of the results, a group of Student Editors was selected which includes Ankhi Bandyopadhyay (UG Semester IV), Bhavna Jagnani (UG Semester IV), Kaushiki Ganguly (PG Semester II), Nafisa Islam (PG Semester II) and Shatabdi Roy (PG Semester II). A logo-making competition was organized for the UG Semester VI and PG Semester IV students, and Irani Chowdhury's (UG Semester VI) work found its way to the cover page of the volume.

Thoughtspell aims at publishing both critical and creative endeavours of students in its first volume. The first section, "Afflatus" is entirely devoted to creative writing by both UG and PG students, which includes poetry, essays and short stories. A subsection has been devoted to collaborative fiction composition and creative writing exercises carried out in online mentoring sessions during the two-year long pandemic and the consequent Lockdown. The second section, "Sapienza" comprises a collection of research papers presented by students in the Students' Seminar on 'American Literature and Cinema' and 'Mapping Histories through Women's Narratives' in March 2022.

The third section of *Thoughtspell*, "Peripatetic" contains field reports composed by the PG students of the English department. A field trip to Jadunath Bhavan Museum and Knowledge Centre was organized for the PG Semester II and Semester IV students on 22nd and 25 March, 2022, respectively. Jadunath Bhavan Museum had hosted a month-long exhibition entitled 'Twin Sisters with Cameras' in order to showcase the photography of Debalina Majumdar and Manobina Roy. The exhibition was attended by the postgraduate students and they summarised their experiences in two field reports which are accompanied by photographs.

The fourth ("Kaleidoscope") and fifth ("Camera Lucida") sections of *Thoughtspell* are devoted to artwork and photography of the students of the Department of English, respectively.

It has been an amiable experience for the Editorial Sub-Committee to have overseen the inception of the first volume of *Thoughtspell*. Not only has editorial duty offered the members

a welcome respite from regular academic involvement, but also made them proud of the multifaceted creative potential of the students of the department. The current volume of *Thoughtspell* is but one small step in a long, fruitful and enriching journey to come.

Soumyajit Chandra

Sayan Chatterjee

Pema Gyalchen Tamang



SECTION I:

AFFLATUS

Creative Writing

Last Note: A Eulogy to the Lost Writer in Me

Anisha Das

UG Semester VI

"Oh! Valiant child of mine, burning alone in rift of fire,
I sit here, gathering pieces, till we burn together on pyre.

On days when the cherubims laughed,
I could not love the ink he touched.
I lost you then, when the drumbeats hurled,
Pushing me in abyss, the zephyrs buzzed.
We stumbled together, as Satan fell:
Charring down, in writer's Hell.

Blank pages, a lacuna within was all you gave,
When you were lost in me, leaving me for memories to crave.
I died a thousand deaths, jarring myself in a reverie alone.
Alone, defeated leaning in a corner,
I couldn't write my pains, though they bleed, tearing my skin.
Shrieks of soul, never echoed in your sundry mountains.

I always adorned you, embellished your creations with caring verse,
Rhymes, rhythms, metaphors and alliterations:
mixed in potpourri without a terse.

In enchanted aura, I lost my way,
Treading in your mountains of words,
A montivagant soul, muffled itself.

I sat to write today, when a numbness felt my nerves,
I could not bring you out, through my dribbling ink,
You just pestered with the flowing time!
I panted for breath, a smog engulfed me,
Like how I closed these eyes, in Delhi last year.
You were lost in me, leaving a mother's lap empty.

I know you love hide and seek, hiding my words, returning again.
I wish you come back, like the droplets turning clouds,
Raining with your wholesome words,
In my utopia of verse.
I will be waiting still, in your care my dear,
For though you leave me now, I will always wander, in your care.

Colour of Paradise

Srijita Banerjee

UG Semester VI

Blue

Pink

Red

Violet.

It wasn't any.

White

Teal

Green

Yellow.

It wasn't any.

It was the feeling

Of my feet touching the grass.

It was the feeling

Of my skin feeling the breeze.

It was the feeling

Of hearing a familiar voice.

It was the colour of paradise.

Paradise,

Of mine.

Where rain poured down,

Only on me

To hide my tears.

Where leaves rustled

When I danced.

Where snow fell

When I was sad.

Paradise,

Of mine.

You exist

In my mind.

Paradise,

Of mine.

You are my

Escape.

From this mundane reality.

A repose to illusion,

Giving in

To denial.

Paradise,

Of mine.

I dream of you.

Paradise,

Of mine.

You are black and blue.

Black like my eyes.

Black like my hair.

Black like my longing.

Black like my soul.

Paradise,

Of mine.

I dance with you.

Why?

Shilpa Layak

UG Semester VI

I Love You

Yes, I Love You

But I want your big house, nice car, and plenty of money.

I want all the materialistic pleasures in my life

So, I want you to be well-settled

Yes, I am a woman and I have to be dependent on you

You can't be dependent on me

You can't live in my house

You need to have a job, even if I don't have one.

You must be more educated than me.

You have to earn more than me.

You must be the "perfect one".

Not for me but for the "society".

Why so many terms and conditions associated with love?

Why so many expectations?

Why can't a man be dependent on a woman?

Why society?

Board Games

Angelina Basudas

UG Semester VI

Today is the big day when I dust my old games.

My God! They have gathered so much dust.

I thought of selling them to the best deal but then kept to my best friend.

My god! They have gathered so much dust.

I wish I could say “remember when polly played, when simon said-“

My God! There is so much dust in here.

I have things to stuff, I have stuff to store

I don't have space for some silly old bore

So many rules, so little time.

So will you please pause

And listen to me for one last time?

Blamed not you, not me just this selfish rhyme.

The call's loud, the new must be old's shroud.

I pull them out from the bottom and roll them in paper.

My God! I don't wanna see them ever.

They feel so light. The games are just wood, paper and dice.

Scars- A Testimony of the Battles I've Won

Navyaa Baid

PG Semester II

Looking back at the harrowing memories of yesterday-

When the wounds were unhealed before turning into a scar,

I saw the star in me fading away in this oblivion

Asking me where we are?

Breathing incessantly under the night sky

I felt myself drown in the ocean of sorrow,

Although subdued but waiting for a better tomorrow...

The pain stabbing me like a knife in the chest,

It felt like I had lost All my zest

The silent shrieks now turned into a flowing river of tears,

Being deceived in love cost me my happy years!

I haplessly turned my head round for some hope or desire,

In this bleak world where my heart was burning like fire!

Then, the moon aroused in me a thought-

That I wasn't the only one distraught;

Just like the sun aids the moon's shine,

It was my willpower which would determine my life's design.

Coming back to the present day

When I look at the wound turn into a scar,

It is a testimony of the Battles I've won-

FINALLY, I am free of the cage

And living life formerly envisaged!

Inverted Reality

Sneha Roy

PG Semester IV

Every time I look at the sky

There is a story, in my head

It has you and me

It has all our meets and departs

It has all the bareness and despairs

So every time I look at the sky

I see you, in different forms

I converse, not in language, in emotions

And every time I look away

I take along my story, you take yours

In the hope of seeing each other again

All meetings are pretty much the same

Except some happen solely inside the head

Yet give me strength to live, as if so real.

Identity

Nafisa Islam

PG Semester II

They ask me of my identity,

To list my fears and distinctions –

I am both, I add, the distortion and the distorted

The chaos and divergence meet in my being

Of peace and silence whirling winds inside me.

They repeat, with religious fanaticism, to raise and paralyse

I am both, I shout, of the undivided and the divided waiting in firaaq.

Sinful arms losing its innocence

In its contentious zeal around me,

They ask me, what is my truth, I say it's in the silenced, indelible and deranged softness of the lips.

By hurling held positions, I strive for an inertia, perpetual in my reality,

What once was truth will be a lie soon,

Everywhere, I join, Kazi and Tagore,

My belief is in the undying- longing of both my identities, interlacing in complexities.

Lastly, they ask me, why is my title,

I say, it's of salaam, falak, zabt, iman and niqa;

In the moon lies stories of the past, digging deeper in every quest, insecurities of the coming, far from humanity and grace;

They scowl,

They sneer,

I smile,

I conquer,

I ask, why do you probe and misplace me?

Carnival of Life

Kaushiki Ganguly

PG Semester II

Welcome to the Carnival, child.

Rejoice, behold the mighty and the mild.

For there are rides, and games and shows,

And candies and dolls and frilly bows.

There are prizes for all who win

And losers repress the shame within.

But don't you give up, for there is time

To be better whilst in your prime.

There goes the Toddler Express,

Filled with shorts and tutu dresses

Worn by angels not yet shorn

Of wings, unburdened, not tainted by scorn.

Munching on caramel apples and funnel cake

They are carefree, unaware of what's at stake.

Giggling and waving, chuffing along,

Clutching onto innocence with fingers strong.

The Youngster Coaster is all the rage

Among children who are not yet teenage,

With braces and buttonless shirts,

And spectacles and frilly skirts,
Who hold hands sweatily on the high
And learn how not to cry,
While longingly letting the warmth go,
On reaching another easy low.

The Teenage Ferris-Wheel dreamily takes a turn,
Where shy hearts profess love and learn
How to kiss and make memories right,
While the flame of romance burns bright.
Some are lucky, they stop at the top,
And enjoy the beauty of time coming to a stop.
The unlucky ones, stuck at the side,
Some cannot, while others make time abide.

The shows are for all, but the stalls of game
Are mainly for the adults to play without shame,
Be it a young couple, playing to impress,
Or a parent trying to win a toy for their princess,
For every adult is not unlike you, my child,
They simply cannot afford to be beguiled,
But you still can laugh, enjoy, be naive,
For this is the Carnival of Life.

Affection

Moubani Mukherjee

UG Semester VI

"Tapu, have you packed your entire luggage? Take a look. How can you be alone in Calcutta...My heart is pounding at this thought!"

"Mom, everything will be fine. Dad, please tell mom that there are thousands of boys and girls like me are out of their houses for work."

His mom sarcastically said, "The boy who loses his wallet, who doesn't wake up without a bed tea, has already grown up! Do you even understand a mother's mind?"

And she kept on telling, "Don't eat too much junk food, or else you will fall sick and we will not be there for you to take care. "Because of these pampers, all of us remain children in front of parent and feel helpless. Mom, mom, sit here quietly. You two need to be very careful. Otherwise, I will be worried", Tapu said holding their hands.

Tanmoy Sen, a math teacher by profession. He lives with his parents in the village of East Medinipur¹. Tapu is a very talented student since his young age. At present he has got a job in a famous school in Kolkata. So Tapu has to leave his home and parents for that job. Naturally parents do not want him to go to Calcutta alone; even with a thousand of insecurities; they agreed. He is also sad about leaving, but he has to leave his parents behind with lots of duties. But there are no other choices.

The next morning, with the blessings of his parents, Tanmoy left for Calcutta. A friend of him had arranged a rented flat near the school. The flat is in Jadavpur². It is quite viable for living alone. Time passed, Tapu has adjusted himself with new circumstances. Now he doesn't wake up at the chirping of birds, there are no ponds and greenery seen

¹ A district of West Bengal.

² Jadavpur is one of the important junction in South Kolkata

through his window. When he returns to flat at night, there is no one to wait for him. After teaching at school for the whole day, he often comes back at night; he feels claustrophobic. He doesn't have much time talk to his parents. He feels remorseful about this. Tapu could not go home due to the pressure of work at the new school since he came to the city. The "Pithe-Parbon³" is knocking at door. It is like a festival in their village, but there is not much excitement in this restless place. On the night before "Poush Sankranti⁴" Tapu's mother called him to return home. Tapu said that he is unable to take a leave." When Ananda Da, his colleague brought homemade "Patishapta⁵" to school on Saturday, Tapu missed his mom very much. Back in the flat, he was thinking about his house, mother and aunts. All of them together make "Patishapta", "Dudh Puli⁶" and many kinds of delicious sweets. Far from the home he can smell those.

Sunday morning. There is no rush to get out today. But as the school exams are coming, question paper has to be prepared. There is no exemption even today. As soon as he sat down with the notebook- pen, the calling bell of the flat rang. Usually no one comes to him at this time, so he was quite surprised. As soon as he opened the door, he saw his parents standing in front of him and he was speechless!

"Mom, Dad!"

His mom said, "We can understand that you are unable to come but we are not. So we thought to give you a surprise visit." Tapu exclaimed joyfully, "Come in, give me the bags. I can't even say how I am feeling right now." Tapu's mother took out a few containers from the bag and sat down next to Tapu, "Look, I have brought "Patishapta" and "Dudh Puli" for you. Tapu's eyes are rolling, he feels very guilty thinking about his irresponsible behavior. After

³ In West Bengal, **Makar Shankranti** is celebrated as **Pithe-Parbon**.

⁴ This festival is dedicated to the Hindu religious Sun god Surya. **Poush Sankranti**, the last day of the Bengali month **Poush**.

⁵ These are thin crepes or pancakes made with refined flour, rice and semolina stuffed with a delicious caramelized coconut.

⁶ Half-moon shaped stuffed rice cake or dumplings cooked in milk.

tasting, cheerfully he said, "That taste, that taste is all the same, nothing has changed." "Look, Tapu, we don't want to be a burden for you. We know that you have lots of pressure, but we wait for your call. At least try to call every two days." His mother said with anxious.

Tanmoy stays in silence for a while, "Mom let me put my head on your lap, I am feeling very distressed..."

Captured Reminiscence

Srijita Banerjee

UG Semester VI

I do not remember. It was quite some time ago. I was fifteen then, somebody different. Someone else. Someone ancient. I don't know what I am still, but scrolling through the album made me remember what I was that summer, an everlasting memory etched into the memory lane of my mind. In my hand I held a photograph. A photograph Ibrahim Agha passed onto me, four years ago. A picture of a Dargah in black and white, where pigeons flew everywhere. I remembered how serene it was. I could close my eyes and picture it all again. Too vivid, too real. I laughed. I pictured myself, vaguely remembering my old self but I remember what made me belong there. With him. I wore a skull cap, like the sellers of Kashmir wore. Beautiful intricate designs stitched onto the cap like patterns coming alive. It gave me a boost of courage and confidence. Incidentally, my black beautiful taqiyah had two C's stitched in magenta. They were stems of the woven yellow flowers but to me they looked like two C's. The two C's I lacked. I am picturing the rest, hope you don't mind. I wore a cotton red kurta, white pants and black loafers. My chest is heavy with clothing I barely thought I needed. Last night, I slept with the window open. I wanted to feel the coldness. I felt it but it didn't kill me. I always thought coldness killed people because after we die, we turn cold. I woke up sneezing. I told Maa that I caught a cold. I did not dare tell her I slept with my window open. That honesty would cost me my freedom. My freedom was a room in the attic. It was all my 15-year-old self could dream of.

We came here two weeks ago. This cottage belongs to a friend of my Baba's. He owns a big restaurant here. We dined there for a whole month. The food was mouth-watering and we savoured every morsel of it. The people there, I have no words for them except that they were

unearthly people. Too kind, too generous, too human-like. When Maa, Baba, Uncle and Aunty would sit down to eat, they took hours to finish their lunch or dinner. I was too bored most of the time. Their conversations were lullaby to my ears as they talked about grown-up stuff in hushed voices. It indeed was a lullaby because on the fifth day, it worked on me. I woke up to realise my hands were dipped in cold water. Nobody even noticed that I fell asleep with my hand in a bowl of warm water which soon turned cold. Who could blame? They met after fifteen years. Mr Das Gupta was my Baba's best friend in school and throughout college, but one day, Uncle came to the land of the roses and fell in love with it. There was snow everywhere. It was cold but it was beautiful. Hauntingly beautiful. Uncle came back but he couldn't forget about Kashmir. He dreamt of visiting Kashmir once again. It seemed like a beacon of happiness and peace. Something which could never be found again on the face of earth. Peace is not easy to come by. One day Baba fuelled his dream. He gave Uncle a fantastic idea to open up a restaurant in Kashmir because Uncle's hand at cooking was magical. Thus they parted their ways but luckily Maa and Baba were looking for an escape from their mundane urban lives, away from Calcutta. They wrote to each other all the time, thus his name was very familiar to my ears. One day Baba decided to pay his dearest friend a visit, who lived in the land of the roses which bloomed even in the cold.

The first day I came here, a brother served me my lunch. I wasn't so shocked. Back at Calcutta, boys younger than myself cleaned and scrubbed floors to feed themselves. In Kashmir, I expected it too. Corruption and capitalism is everywhere. The world would stop functioning without that. Not everybody is blessed with materialistic things even before they are brought into this world of absurdity. The brother was older than me. A year or two but still not eighteen. Eighteen was the age of freedom. I wondered if the Brother got his freedom. I wish he did. The world was too cruel to him. He wished me with a smiling face. Mind you, Ibrahim Agha had two teeth missing. When he wished me a very warm morning, I thought his

smile resonated with my broken harmonium keys which were asleep back at Calcutta. I smiled and shook his hands. I still remember his hands and his touch. His hands were hard like rocks. He had hard skin on his palm. Some days later, I took those hands in mine to examine them. It felt like mine, but it wasn't. He worked with those hands, those fingers and all the time I used my hands, it was for eating or holding a pen or a pencil or playing on my harmonium. The odd thing about Ibrahim Agha was, his touch was never hard like his hands. It only spread softness and kindness to whomever it lay.

I remember now why I slept that day with an open window. I wanted to feel how Ibrahim Agha felt every night. He couldn't afford a warm room, or a warm bed. He could barely protect himself from the cold. I knew because I saw his home. It couldn't be called a home. It was strictly a house. It was only two weeks then. I woke up, put on warm clothes and didn't forget my taqiyah which had strengths I didn't have. I wore it always, it was a gift from Ibrahim Agha. We had a plan that day. I had a privilege which I used that day. The first day we came here, Uncle said, "Abir, today is the first day I see you in front of me. I have seen you in photographs but you're more alive when you're standing in front of me. You may ask me anything. I will grant it to you, without a thought. You might even ask for this restaurant, I might give it to you." Uncle winked at the last statement. Bamboozled by the generosity of the man whom I only knew by stories and pictures, I laughed. I promised Uncle that I won't be robbing him of everything, when the time would come I would let him know. I put on warm clothes, took five and twenty-rupees from my pocket money and rushed to the restaurant. I knew Ibrahim Agha would be waiting at the end of the street for me that day. I met him after running for five minutes. My lungs were on fire. Ibrahim Agha in his sweet voice said, "Catch up with your breath. I am here, beside you, Abir Jaan." I was panting. But I was happy. I was on my way to get my wish debited from Uncle. We ran, hand in hand to our wish master.

‘Mitten Uncle, Good morning!’ I burst out near his ear. Mitten Uncle fell from his chair in exclamation. It was one of Baba’s old tricks to scare Uncle. Uncle got up from the floor laughing.

‘Just like your father,’ he said and put his hand on my shoulder. A warm and soft hand.

‘I have come here to ask for my wish.’ I declared.

‘And what is that? Mind you, choose wisely,’ he said and moved his fingers around like the tentacles of octopus. It reminded us of a magician and a hope of a wish to be granted by magic. I looked at Ibrahim Agha and said, ‘My wish is to have Ibrahim dada with me today. We will both go out to venture into Kashmir!’ This time it was me who was moving his fingers like the tentacles of an octopus.

‘Huh?’ said Uncle. After a while the wish ingrained itself in the mind of my wish master. With a laugh he said, ‘Oh, go. Kashmir awaits you but Ibrahim beta,’ he said and placed his warm soft hands on his shoulders and continued, ‘Take care of him, okay?’ He smiled and from his pocket gave him two hundred rupees. I saw Ibrahim Agha’s eyes gleam with confidence.

He and I ventured out. There was a big lake surrounded by trees. It is not used too much but Ibrahim Agha had a small boat which he stationed near the bank. The lake was a short cut. The roads would take one hour to reach the town, by boat it took half an hour. I never sat on a boat or even rowed one. It was the first time in my life. I knew I did terrible but Ibrahim Agha only smiled his gap toothed smile. I knew I was doing fine. The two C’s of my taqiyah gleamed on my head. I don’t remember anything after that. But I remember something which made this memory stay in my head. Perhaps forever. For me, forever doesn’t have an expiration date because it has expired already. For me, forever meant holding onto a piece of memory until it could not be held onto anymore.

The forever I held onto was beautiful. Almost movie-like. But, I didn’t trust movies. They lacked realism and I am a realist but sometimes even a realist will lose his way in the

mysticism of our mind. Ibrahim Agha took me to see his shrine. Amir Hazari Dargah. Perhaps it is still beautiful like it is in my mind. The Dargah was big but it was empty. Everybody went to the world to earn something off a prayer but not us. We already earned. A day. I remember Ibrahim Agha with his soft hands put surma around my eyes. He said I looked like a musalman. I believed him. There were pigeons everywhere we looked. The top of the Dargah was crowded with pigeons where they sat like nawabs. There was a cacophony of hoots but it made the Dargah more like a shrine. A man was walking by in kurta and pyjamas. I can't recall the colour. It's all black and white in my head. The gate was made of iron. It was black. It was the most beautiful door I've seen in my life. The Dargah was the prize of the architects but it was forgotten like lost civilizations buried under earth. Ibrahim Agha held his hand out and invited me in. I don't remember anything else. But I remembered this.

We were sitting in front of this coffin-like case over which a green shroud was laid down with wreaths of jasmine and roses on top. The room had a faint smell of incense sticks. I saw Ibrahim Agha touch his forehead to the ground. I followed him, not knowing what to do. The room was dark when I entered. It resonated with the crowd of thoughts in my head. The floor was cold when my warm forehead touched it. I almost thought it would sizzle, like onions when they are thrown into a hot pan. I could hear a faint whisper. It was coming from Ibrahim Agha. I didn't know the language. God has a language I knew, but I didn't know that language. Did their god understand Bengali? I prayed still knowing it won't reach the ears of their beloved Allah. It felt so good, praying to Allah. I don't speak to god much but for the first time I sat there with my warm forehead touching the cold hard floor and prayed for a long time. Long enough to bring tears into my eyes. Long enough for Ibrahim Agha to bring me back to the room where a tomb lay. The room was alight. My tears were my offerings to Allah. I hope he took it. I left the room of silence, of peace to enter the world of cacophony, again. Ibrahim Agha put his hand on my shoulders. He too understood. I saw the cacophony just in front of

me, hooting in complain of not getting enough grains. The nawabs were angry. I couldn't care less. My soul was at peace. Some flew away just one feet away from us, I could still feel the jolt of air over my face which smelt of pigeon. Trailing my hands over the walls of the Dargah, I thought I would learn Arabic. I was too foolish then. I could see the shadow of my brother just behind me. He kept his words.

I left the Dargah with peace inside me, caged. It didn't cost us any money. Our pockets still had the notes which we carried with us when we entered the shrine. I wanted to walk barefoot over the road of ice. I took my black loafers off. Brother did the same too. We ran from the Dargah. The Dargah which smelled of pigeons, whose doors were the most beautiful doors, the walls which had peace echoing from its core, we left the Dargah. Everywhere we looked, it was snowing. It was cold and it was white everywhere. The trees hiding their colourful leaves behind the thick quilts of snow. I wanted the sky to snow, but it wouldn't. I had my wish master walking beside me. He shook a small tree and its whole quilt came down on me. I was laughing. We were laughing. It was a harmonious laugh. The sky was changing colours. We had to head back home. I had to head back home, Imran Agha had to head back to his house. We had Naan and Chole Bhature for lunch. It was a ten-minute walk from the Dargah. Ibrahim Agha knew I wasn't like everybody else. I liked peace, he gave me that.

We walked back to the boat. The small black boat which floated over the warm water. No matter how hard it snowed, the lake never froze. It was like the smile of Ibrahim brother - warm, peaceful in its own way and sublime. He held out his hands again for me to take it. I took it and stepped into the boat. Brother rowed till we reached the middle of the lake and then he let go of the oars.

'Abir Jaan, I never thought I would succeed in taking you inside the Dargah. I thought they would stop me and strip me as punishment. But, they let you. Miya, 'la ilaha ill Allah'. It means there is no god but Allah. I prayed to him. He listened. But I feel it should be, 'yujad Allah'.

There is god. The previous one sounds vacant... empty. Don't you think?' Ibrahim Agha questioned me.

I took off my taqiyah and answered him. At least I thought I did because he smiled.

'I am not a god-pleaser, brother. To me, all the faces of gods are god. I believe in the believing. Not in the mode. You call god Allah because you have no name for God other than Allah. Your translation 'there is no god, but Allah'. It really means 'there is no god, but god'. We need your Allah to find peace. And I need my god to feel peace.' I placed my hand over my chest. 'I have a string over my chest which classifies me to a better portion of the society. Once you strip me of that, I become ordinary. But I would still find god. God is everywhere. God is in the air, in the water, in the food, in you and me. God is everywhere. We just have to find it.'

I remember his young square face breaking into a smile. A two-tooth missing smile but it was a smile. A smile which still brings me peace even after not seeing it for four years. I thought after all these years he would write to me in his broken handwriting. Perhaps he would come and ring my door's bell. I write to him every week still, but he never responded. I always write about the same thing, the Dargah and my keeper for the day. Maybe Ibrahim Agha got over me but I could never. Doesn't he know his smile spreads peace over me? Peace I never witnessed outside the Dargah ever again in this mundane Calcutta where no mosque, Dargah could bring me. Maybe peace will walk to me one day. I wish Ibrahim took his freedom, boarded a bus, then a train, then an auto, then a flight of stairs, then a bell to ring while I would open the gate wearing the black taqiyah with two C's over my skull, and that same photograph clutched in my hands. One day, maybe.

Vintage Paradise, Postcard Love and Ice cream

Drishti Shroff

PG Semester II



As I grimaced at the sky, it appeared darker than usual. It took the form of memories pouring like rain on your face with soft taps. It grew unsurprisingly sombre. I think to myself how I'm suspended in time, the fleeting moment of your parting eye contact and goodbye replaced by a yellow cab under the lamppost hinting at you to return home. I was slightly stirred looking at the old postcards kept by the cab driver in one corner. It's an era where postcards are on par with the antiquity of typewriters. I think of how I'd like to be a runaway, stay in a quaint cabin, and write postcards that will either decay on my desk or find themselves in the drawers of another individual. It seems that the traffic is high. However, I'm in no rush to reach home. The cold made the windshield translucent with its fog and I couldn't differentiate if I was sober or

intoxicated anymore as I stared past the branches of trees and cars moving through the mist. We couldn't identify which one was trying to escape the other, me or the trees. The answer was simple though, nothing stationary ever escapes. The cab froze abruptly in front of the post office. It was waiting for another passenger to arrive.

It was a lean man in his 20s, nervously scratching his head on his way to the passenger seat. Joint cabs let you observe people in their natural state, a space they share with themselves. The man introduced himself as Jerry and handed me a Bolsey 22. It was a tiny vintage camera. He removed his coat and pushed it inside his bag. He looked thoroughly nervous as though he was carrying an illegal drug or pistol in his pocket. A few minutes later, he apologized and took back the camera. I half-smiled at him, he sure had a bad day at work or maybe he's been told to be the watchdog for the diamond he's been holding to his chest in the shape of a vintage camera. He grew oddly comforted, staring at the bald head of the driver, shifting his gaze every few seconds to the postcards, and having his eyes dilated, probably something of a memory. I gazed over his shoulders at the view on the other side and instinctively made eye contact. He looked over at me briefly before he introduced himself.

"I received a call late this evening today asking me to return to my store after a few individuals raided and decimated the place. I hoard old antique furniture and vintage objects but I find myself tied; protecting them lest someone buys them. It's precious to me, I think it protects me more than I protect it."

I felt a bit concerned and perceived that wreckage of this kind would make him furious. Although he looked strangely calm in his demeanour. I looked at the driver and the postcards in the corner of his window. Things that are precious to you make you feel protected. He looked back at the camera he's been holding close and comfortably closed his eyes to a resting state. I

often felt strangely pacified by this mystical attraction of exchanging stories with strangers, like having some uncanny access to their deep-rooted fears and tales unprecedentedly making a home in your memory.

It's endearing when you sit close to someone you wish to look at and sneakily pull them into an embrace or just cause a visual catastrophe uncomfortable for the people in the room. I smirk to myself. However, as I oddly thought of that, something crossed my mind. I was once seated very close to a special friend; I could conjure at least that. And amidst that wide football field, you could see a banyan tree that could be as old as the loud rear engine of the car I was seated in, frankly, the thought jolted me because now I didn't quite want to stay put in here. I sighed and played back my former thought before digressing into trivial observations any further. A girl emerged from behind that tree in her 'holier than thou' persona that somewhat snatched the gaze of footballers from their concurrent positions. Her eyes met with the person seated next to me as she simultaneously pranced to take a seat beside him on the ground. In all honesty, she did generate herself from pop culture's lens of male fantasy, and all my initial hesitation to break into a conversation with him amidst a busy football match seemed to catapult into a bitter aftertaste in my mouth and I flinched. So much for lip-biting into the abyss of the self-effacing and hesitant mind.

A match later, she held his hand and furtively proceeded to the bench placed behind the banyan tree. I was so consumed by the developments in my environment beginning from him approaching and sitting close to me to being surreptitiously dragged apart that I almost missed hearing the players asking me to pass over the ball. For a second, I remember it being like my 5th-grade exam. The teacher asked me to answer the questions in the viva and I had the most deadpan expression on my face which threw her off and provoked her to thump the table twice. Minutes turned into hours; the match was over. I tightened my laces with the arms of a lost

soldier whose hands moved slowly and defeated. As I advanced to the university campus, my eyes instinctively darted behind the banyan tree. Seated across from each other, it seemed like a playful yet deep banter suggested from the look on his face. I shrugged awkwardly as I looked away and thought to myself why he'd mentioned to me yesterday about our rendezvous during the match and getting ice cream later. I felt as though I'd only feign an alien discomfort if we did manage to get ice cream now. I couldn't identify which one of us was escaping the other. The answer was simple though, nothing stationary ever escapes. It seemed to be an elusive reality to him. I skipped to the other end of the field and quickly caught a cab home while it poured heavily. As I grimaced up at the sky that day, the approaching sunset looked darker than usual.

My eyes fluttered open, I realised they were shut all this while as I replayed something that often served as a reminder to disrupt the hanging silence with your voice lest you hand it over to another person. My stop arrived, it seemed like a short journey now that I think of it. I broke the hanging silence concluding with a warm smile that I was struck with something influential and pretty about his story. The man sitting next to me looked at me voiceless like he was attempting to articulate a proposal but was resisting with a terrible force. He finally breathed out that he'd like to invite me for a longer ride to his store. "There's a new ice cream shop near my store and it's got a wide range of flavours with all the ingredients imported from the Swiss farm of my uncle. Would you prefer blueberry or strawberry?" I giggled a bit. Would you want me to sell you the benefits of joint cabs even more? I coyly placed my fingers on my chin and looked over at him from the corner of my eye. I sat in the cab and uttered Strawberry. He glanced at me with eyes that truly looked surprised yet shy and apprehensive. Within seconds, he receded back into his seat and spoke fondly of his uncle, a little about his farmhouse on the outskirts, and blushed whenever he caught me staring intently at him. Although, I only

meant to hear his stories loud and clear. His eyelashes were long and he blinked a lot whenever he remembered something interesting to correlate.

The ice cream date was sweet and enchanting like his stories. I would permanently settle in Zurich to savour these heavenly and divine strawberries. I looked at him crossing the road over to his store when my cab arrived. He stood there looking at the sky before his eyes adjusted over my sheepish grin. It seemed our feet were glued to the pavement. I think to myself how I'm suspended in time, the fleeting moment of your parting eye contact and goodbye replaced by a yellow cab under the lamppost hinting you to return home. I thought of writing him a postcard, dainty and quaint. I hopped into the cab. It grew unsurprisingly calm.

The Cat on a Bike

Soham Debsarkar

PG Semester IV

I met a cat on a bike today. It stood on its fours - the front legs propped up against the metallic engine, hind legs resting on the vinyl-covered seat. Head held high. The setting sun gleamed against its emerald eyes. Majestic. A creature aesthetic enough to be featured on record covers or Pinterest pages.

I sat in the auto, waiting for it to accommodate my co-passengers. The cat, with its richness and potential, had my undivided attention now. It said nothing, not even the faintest meow, yet, it welcomed me into a wordless conversation. A talk of politics here, of the latest fashion there. A talk of celebrities and exaggerated gossip. I wondered how it knew so much. Typical human arrogance.

I wondered a lot. I wondered about things too ordinary. I wondered if it had a family. I wondered what might have been its last meal. I wondered why it was so alone. Was it alone? Or was it basking in the glory of the solitude it had preferred for itself?

I wondered about extraordinary things. What might have been going on inside its feline head? Was it solving the equation of life? Memorising an epic it had heard from other cats? Wondering about the essence of utopian freedom? Maybe all of them, together.

For the first time, it meowed. How did it know that I wasn't paying attention anymore? How did it know of my audacity to have created a life for it unwarranted? Was it a meow of rebuke? Of disappointment? Of pity? I did not know. I would not know. As the auto fired up its ignition, carrying me away into my own life of dreariness, of remarkable sameness, perhaps the cat on the bike meowed at me once more. Perhaps the cat forgave me for my intrusion. I would not know.

Collaborative Fiction

UG Semester V, July 2020

Kaushiki Ganguly

Debapriyo Das

Badal

She looked at me, with her beautiful pair of expressive eyes firmly transfixed on my forehead, following the trajectory of the sweat that originated because I was nervous of her being scantily clothed. I could see her gazing at that drop of sweat for quite some time, until it blended within my beard. Her lips slowly curved into a teasing smile. She looked into my eyes and asked smilingly, “Why are you so nervous?”.

I searched for words while wiping the sweat off my forehead, and said, “I’m not, I mean it’s just that I am not a professional photographer and I have never seen you this way. So that’s that I guess.”

She smiled again and turned her back to me. She wasn’t very beautiful as per the definition of the word goes, but she had something that made me as well as many of my peers like her. I somehow approved myself to believe that my subtle liking was different from their generic ones. Her eyes were her best feature according to me, accompanied by her behaviour. She was always nice to me. Tying her shiny hair into a messy bun, she sat down, making herself comfortable while trying to strike a pose. When she found one, she let out a breath and said, “Go ahead, capture me with all your might.”

It was last night, while I was trying to fall asleep when her text lit up my dark room. She asked me to bring my camera, stating she intended to show me something. I had gleaned the knowledge that she was well acquainted with many photographers. She had denied many proposals for photoshoots in the past, hence the reason behind this odd request implored to be

found out by my curiosity. I somehow suppressed the questions arising in my mind for the moment as sleep overtook the reins of my brain from curiosity.

I prepared my camera, and before clicking, I couldn't help but ask her, "Don't mind me inquiring but why did you ask me, when you had other better photographers than me?"

She didn't turn back, she remained quiet for sometime and then while facing the wall she answered, "I was waiting for you to ask this. Well, umm it's simply because you're the only one I can trust with this..."

I presumed she was talking about her outfit. There was an unknown peace resting in that long bare back of hers. The spine parted it into two halves of riches that I admired while tiny drops of sweat magnified the mole on her left shoulder. There were deep marks of conformity which curbed her spirit and body. The sublime pain of her infinite soul being tamed to follow the societal and patriarchal decorum, was still visible from the red patch it left behind.

Nonetheless, I clicked her pictures. Suddenly something caught my eye. It took me some time to realise what it was. I saw...black feathers sprouting and enlarging...emerging from the pores of her skin and detangling and arranging themselves into a perfect framework. Her wings...at least that's what I perceived them to be...grew till they were of similar length and breadth to that of a car's door. I stared and stared, my eyes unable to comprehend the sight unfolding before them. Her wings fluttered lazily, and she turned her head to gaze at me with mischief in her eyes. I felt her gaze, scrutinising my reaction, and tried to ease my expression into an amiable one.

"Too scary for you? Would you have preferred white wings, maybe? More angelic?" She waited a while for my reply, before continuing, "Unfortunately, I am no angel."

She smiled to soften the blow. I was tongue-tied the entire time, but mustered up some courage to speak. A hoarse sound escaped my mouth and I cleared my throat, embarrassed, before

reaching for my bottle of water. She patiently awaited my response, pursing her lips to hide her amusement.

“Why, uhm, why are you showing this to me?” I finally managed to utter, secretly glad that my voice sounded normal. She shook her head, disappointed.

“Wrong question. What you should be asking me is why do you see them? Your camera lens doesn’t for sure,” she said, further amazing me. “Go on, click a picture if you don’t believe me,” she softly added. Her eyes were serious now.

With trembling hands, I held the camera, before breathing deeply to calm myself. When my limbs felt steadier, I clicked once, twice, thrice, before stopping and checking the photos. To my utter shock, none of the photos showed the wings. Yet, when I lifted my eyes, I saw them, jet black and stunning, soft yet sharp, tempting yet foreboding, while the mole on her shoulder winked at me, a drop of sweat caressing it before departing forever.

My mouth dried up and I only managed to say, “How is this possible? Am I hallucinating? Are they real?”

“Feel them,” she said, her eyes guarded.

“What!?”

“Feel them. Unless you feel they are real, you won’t believe your eyes. Go ahead. I am giving you permission to feel them. “

I swallowed hard, and without wavering or breaking contact with those mystical orbs of hers, I raised my fingers towards the inky black, delicate appendages and felt them.

To my astonishment, they vanished and all it left was some sparkle and dust. I looked at her with a worried face.

"Where did it all go? Where did the wings go?"

I screamed, frustrated, as I saw her hair strands dazzling in the sunlight as if they were silk threads bought up by the merchants overseas. She smiled as her eyes lit up with excitement.

"I asked you to feel it. To feel my wings of freedom, love, dedication and responsibilities". I could feel her words as my heart pounded in my chest. She continued.

"My wings are meant to be felt by your soul not by the touches of those hands that capture every object of beauty in those materialistic lenses"

I was still awestruck as I mumbled.

"Why me? Why did it feel so fascinating for a moment and then it was all gone?"

I rubbed my eyes and realised that I was hallucinating. She looked down for a while, her cheeks were red as roses as she whispered,

"You captured my inner self through your clean mind and beautiful heart. That's the reason why I asked you to feel my inner wings – the appendages of my soul and being. I don't know if I am the right girl for you but you are the one who can free my soul and make me alive again"

I smiled as I closed my camera shutters. She came near me and kept her warm palm on my right cheek.

A white feather floated in the air as it fell in between us.

I picked it up and looked at it.

I was still holding the white feather. The wings that are meant to fly couldn't be captured in just a photograph, so exposed to the stray commodifying gaze of society.

I let that thought pass away for a second and leaned to embrace the moment. And just as I tried to rest my chin over her, to my amazement, she wasn't there. She wasn't there anymore!

I was shocked but immediately checked on my thoughts, for I heard a voice.

It was her voice. She called out my name.

She was still sitting there, looking at me.

I couldn't face her. I couldn't tell her what she seemed to know already.

I can now sense the urge, the urge that desires to get control over that volatile part.

I stood there, arranging myself and my apparatus. As I looked up to check on her, she stood in front of me – with those magnificently black, restless wings aspiring to explore the skies, skies that awaited her arrival.

The Unkindest Blow

Saki

Contributors:

1. Amrapali Biswas
2. Ishika Raha
3. Shubham Dey
4. Anuradha Chowdhury

UG Semester IV

Act 1 Scene 1

Unfulfilled demands and unheard grievances have left the attendants of the World's union of Zoological Garden with fading hopes. They have gathered to plan for an outbreak.

Attendant/ Zookeeper 1: To All the sufferers and agitated souls! Speak out your distress.

A/Z 2: Let us conquer suppression.

A/ Z 3: Should we Revolt?

A/Z 1: Strikes!

All: STRIKES????

A/Z 1: Hail the lord! Let the blind be blessed with vision. It's time to awake.

A/Z 2: Spread the news! Prepare yourselves. The spirit must not die.

All: Let us join hands...come whatever may, 'we shall overcome'.

Act 1 Scene 2

The heart of London is experiencing a sensational season of strikes. The political class is suffering from anxiety and has called for a private meeting.

Member 1: How humiliating! They call us blind?

Member 2: Turn off the news! My head aches! I fear the animals will participate in the strike soon!

Member 1: Our Lord of the Admiralty must be arriving. He will supervise.

Act 2 Scene 1

After a laborious period the strike has collapsed without any outside intervention. The media has turned its attention towards the newer happenings in the nation. Among all other matters sprang up into a sudden prominence the pending Flavertoon divorce suit. The Duke and Duchess of Flavertoon engage in a private conversation.

Duchess: This feels exasperating. The media- stupid questions and fatuous observations!

Duke: Media is trying to satiate public appetite.

Duchess: Do they seriously need to intrude in our private lives? This is fatiguing.

Duke: *sighs* Our privacy will be secured. Let us not get in a fluster.

Act 2 Scene 2

At noon. 2 days before the trial. Enter the Duke of Flavertoon and a reporter.

Reporter: I suppose I may say this will be one of the biggest affairs of its kind during the lifetime of a generation.

Duke: (lazily) I suppose so – if it comes off

Reporter: If- if what?

Duke: The lady and I intend to go on a strike.

Reporter: Strike!!!! By any possible means, are you contemplating a mutual withdrawal of the charges?

Duke: precisely

Reporter: But what about the arrangements that have been made? The special reporting, cinematographs, catering for the distinguished foreign witnesses, the prepared music hall allusions, and of all the expense!

Duke: Honestly, that is the reason. The intrusion of media into our personal space will feed the media a kind of frenzy at the expense of our vexation I believe! Participating in the Strike is a better alternative. Good Afternoon.

Act 3 Scene 1

A fortnight before the proceedings of the final trial, London mourned the immature demise of the Duke.

Countrymen: Can't believe our Duke took such an early leave. This is really disheartening!

Reporters and media: Alas! The Duke is no more! It's a great loss!



SECTION II:

SAPIENZA

Research Papers

Victim to Fantasy: The Fetishization of Nabokov's *Lolita*

Anwasha Saha

UG Semester IV

Literature is no stranger to trivialising consent and glamourising the trope of sexual assault by a benign figure of authority, and Vladimir Nabokov's *Lolita* is perhaps the greatest representation of the portrayal of sexual assault in a romantic light. The Russian-American author explores the object of temptation and the pursuit of pleasure through a paedophile's perspective. As a consequence of this, the lines of morality are blurred by certain despicable mitigations that also invoke from the general readership, a beguiling empathy for the paedophile Humbert. The fetishization of *Lolita* is a repercussion of said empathy and is further fuelled by the 1997 cinematic adaptation, *Lolita*. The Adrian Lyne film paints *Lolita* as a consenting participant, diminishing her experience as a child incest victim. Humbert on the other hand becomes the figure of a righteous admirer of aesthetic beauty who is also on the hunt for salvation.

Nabokov utilises Humbert's narrative to establish a dual identity, one, where Humbert seeks judgement and morality as a sinful man and another, where he presents himself as an admirer of the aesthetic quality of nymphets. This conscious separation of the mortal's hedonism and an artistic lover's 'greater endeavour' "to fix once for all the perilous magic of nymphets", justifies to a vast readership any and every assault inflicted on *Lolita*. Through his narrative style, Nabokov provides the readers a glimpse of Humbert's mind where he is nothing short of a devoted lover, willing to immortalise the affections and temptations he had. "This is the only immortality you and I may share, *Lolita*." *Lolita* to Humbert is not a consenting partner but an object of sexual gratification and a souvenir. Regardless, this "devotion" that Humbert possesses as an aesthetic admirer, overshadows the victim's plight, for *Lolita*'s story remains largely unheard. Humbert refuses to see *Lolita* as an individual being, but as his childhood love,

Annabel Leigh, incarnated in Dolores. "It was the same child... Annabel Haze, alias, Dolores Lee, alias Lolita." Lolita lacks agency for she is not only a child victim but also a figment of Humbert's fantasies that he has dominion over.

Furthermore, Humbert claims to possess only noble intentions for her despite his sacrilegious advances. This moral righteousness is achieved by his hunt for Quilty, another paedophile who is almost a doppelgänger of Humbert himself. However, Humbert attempts to rationalise that Quilty was simply a deviant predator, with no emotional attachment to "nymphets" unlike himself whose acts were rooted in love. In a desperate attempt at salvation, he murders Quilty in cold blood to avenge Lolita's corrupted childhood. It is only much later that he recognises his own contribution to Lolita's plight. Matthew Winston writes, "Humbert has been a monster, he himself confesses. He has tried to fix Dolores Haze within the unchanging boundaries of a literary character he has created. Repentant and remorseful, he glorifies her and compensates himself by writing a book about his love for her."

The sophisticated portrayal of this "forbidden romance" perpetuated through *Lolita* was perhaps strongly augmented by the socio-cultural scenario of contemporary America. American society has always been largely influenced by French ideas of sexual libertine alongside liberty of thought and expression, which is probably the foundation of not only Nabokov writing *Lolita*, but also its widespread consumption. In *Strong Opinions*, the Russian-American author makes it abundantly explicit that an ideal political state must possess, "Freedom of speech, freedom of thought, freedom of art. The social or economic structure of the ideal state is of little concern to me." It is thus salient to note, that even before acquiring the American Citizenship in 1945, Nabokov associated his literary career with that of libertine American ideals, devoid of the rather rigid Russian conformity to social order. "I am an American writer, born in Russia, educated in England where I studied French Literature...My head speaks English, my heart speaks Russian...".

In the context of the role played by American society in the fetishization of Lolita, a significant influence is that of the aesthetic fallacy brought to life by the 1997 French-American film, *Lolita*, by Adrian Lyne. The Adrian Lyne film, much like the book, leaves little to no perception of Lolita beyond being just an object of sexual gratification. Lyne succeeds in shedding light on the grotesqueness of Humbert's paedophilic mind by staying true to Nabokov's attention to detail. Lolita's pubescent portrayal, her braces, her "sexual awareness" as a "tempting nymphet" as perceived by Humbert, and the justification of his predatory tendencies draws attention towards Humbert's unreliable and manipulative narration.

Lolita, as a book or the film, despite not being insidious itself has had a counterproductive influence on society due to the widespread romanticisation of Humbert's motives. Nomi Tamir-Ghez claims, "What enraged or at least disquieted most readers and critics was the fact that they found themselves unwittingly accepting, even sharing, the feelings of Humbert Humbert... Instead of passing moral judgement on this man who violated a deep rooted sexual and social taboo, they caught themselves identifying with him." This sense of self association correlates with the exhilaration of a forbidden sexual endeavour, leading to a drastic fetishization of Lolita and the predatory relationship that she was a victim of. Ethos of this objectification is prominently observed even in present-day society through pop culture, fashion and social media. From the 1978 movie *Pretty Baby* to Ezra and Aria's glamourized paedophilic relationship in the popular American series named *Pretty Little Liars* to the Lana Del Rey album *Born to Die*, the psycho-sexual impact of Nabokov's *Lolita* is glaringly obvious. Contrarily, the rise of the "coquette" aesthetic all over Instagram and Pinterest, claims to reclaim femininity as a synthesis of girlhood and sexuality. Coquette fashion associates itself with vintage clothing combined with the innocence of a schoolgirl. Floral or cherry patterned rompers, sundresses, braids, heart-shaped sunglasses, ribbons, and Mary Jane shoes are generally predominant amongst the "coquette" aesthetic. It is thus beneficial to consider that

despite being an individualistic expression of self, the idea of “coquettes” or “nymphets” is rooted in sexual exploitation of minors and also often leads to body dysmorphia in teenagers.

The subservient transition of *Lolita* from a victim to a contemporary American fantasy is a consequence of multiple eloquent artistic narratives. Norman Miller describes Nabokov’s *Lolita* as, "an assault on the reader," who, "softened by the power of appeal... is ready to forgive all...". The statement, however, stands true for not only the widely romanticised novel but also for the multiple adaptations and allusions of it over the decades that constantly contribute to the sexual objectification of a victim whose narrative remains unheard till date.

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Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird*: Perspective of a Reader and a Viewer

The paper has been co-authored by :

1. Aritraja Mukherjee
2. Amrapali Biswas
3. Ishika Raha

UG Semester IV

“Shoot all the bluejays you want, if you can hit ’em, but remember it’s a sin to kill a mockingbird” says Atticus Finch. Now, when we look for a “mockingbird”, we see a harmless bird, emulating soothing music from its fellow birds and singing blissfully. It is a matter of “the Sin” to take away life. It is even a greater “Sin” to eradicate the innocent. And hence the title goes *To Kill a Mockingbird*. In this paper, we will be delving into the comparative perception of Harper Lee’s *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) which paved its way into Hollywood in 1962 in the form of a film and secured an Oscar Award in 1963.

Lee’s depiction of Social Prejudice as Narrated and Visually Portrayed Robert Mulligan’s cinematic adaptation successfully retains the essence of Lee’s Novel. The narrative demands our attention to explore further the tender psychological state of the child protagonists - the perceptions they develop with respect to the immediate influence of their surrounding affairs which in turn shapes their personality and determines their behavioural approach (Lee, 1960). Scout, Jem and Dill exhibit an inquisitive attitude which we generally associate with ‘childhood’ as they indulge in a mission to unearth Boo Radley’s real identity (Kuppuswamy, 1961). We discern Jem delineating Boo in a grotesque and beastly manner- an absolute preconceived idea much of which he has ingrained from mere hearsay. There is young Scout,

who in her early days of growing up mostly emulates her elder brother Jem thus, developing a similar perspective.

Mulligan's visual representation of Lee's narrative compliments a viewer's understanding of the scenario and especially the development of the characters as they act out their emotions. At one instance, when Scout asks her father whether he is defending a "nigger", as audience we are hinted at this young girl's confrontation with the cruel ways of the world. It is to decipher how the persistent imposition of societal outlook upon individuals moulds the innocent minds into an adulterated one. Along with the portrayal of the consequences of racial prejudices and the deep-seated pre-conceived ideas the narrative becomes Scout's discourse of development from innocence to that of an unanticipated experience. While we read through the story or watch the film, we tend to excavate the significance or the central idea that has perhaps been there as an allegory in the title. Any audience would wonder about this "mysterious", unseen Boo Radley. However, it is only towards the tail of the tale that the veil is pulled up and Boo Radley appears on stage for the first time. Diane Talgum views Boo Radley resembling a mockingbird, and attacking him with "public notice" would be akin to annihilating a helpless being (Lee, 1960). "They picked you to defend the nigger that raped my Mayella" Mr. Ewell mocked Atticus. Perhaps by societal judgement it is an apparent "Sin" committed by a White lawyer to defend a Black Man (Lee, 1960). The image of Atticus Finch Lee delineates and the manner in which Gregory Peck fits into his role play makes the character emerge out to be someone humane who is liberated from the dreadful social construct and intends to inculcate virtuous values within his children.

Again, this Black man, Tom Robinson is "guilty" because of his complexion and he got "tempted by a white woman". Laws are supposed to be equal for every individual, but "An evil assumption that all Negroes lie, Negroes are basically immoral beings, all Negro men are not

to be trusted around our women” left room for subjugation and segregation in terms of laws (Lee, 1960). Therefore, Racism arises from the story as one of the themes which tempted a community to commit “the Sin”.

Mulligan mastered the trajectory of the storyline of Lee’s novel. As a viewer takes interest in reading the novel, it would still be Gregory Peck to be imagined as “Atticus Finch”, Phillip Alford as “Jem Finch”, and Mary Badham as “Scout”. Conspicuously, there are certain minor differences to be observed in the film. However, these are unavoidable, the reason being it is an adapted version of an original composition. Many critical reviews are anticipated to come up and it is the amusing, gambling world of press and newspaper reviews where there is a tug of war between the positive and negative criticisms. Many critics now consider this story to be the voice of a million mouths for there are still many Tom Robinsons who pray for justice and a thousand Atticuses who keep on attempting to stick to the truth and struggle hard to bring in justice for the falsely accused.

It is disheartening to know how “Racism” has found no escape from today’s America. Although a considerable number of the African-Americans have made their way into the American mainstream, there is still a section who constituted the population similar to Tom Robinson, for whom justice seems to be far away even today. The Harlem Renaissance of the 19th and the 20th Century and the “Black Lives Matter” Movement of the 21st Century are the evidence that throws light upon the Racial prejudices which still prevails in the society (Hutchinson, 2007).

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**Representation of the Amiable, Passive Male Enabler and his Contribution to Rape
Culture in Emerald Fennell's *Promising Young Woman* (2020)**

Ananya Ghosh

UG Semester VI

In 2020 Amos Guiora, a Law professor from Utah published a book called *Armies of Enablers: Survivor Stories of Complicity and Betrayal in Sexual Assaults* after interviewing over twenty sexual abuse survivors. In his book, Guiora expounds a bystander, or a passive enabler, as a “person who is physically present when another person is in peril, who sees that another person is in peril, and has, from a legal perspective, knowledge,” and “the person has the capability to act” but, astonishingly, chooses not to. Emerald Fennell, an actress who has starred in shows like *The Crown* (2016-), builds on this delineation to bring forth her narrative through her Oscar-winning screenplay of *Promising Young Woman* (2020), a black comedy thriller. She presents a man, Ryan, who perplexes us with his involvement in the act of rape. For this study, I shall conjunct the strands of Ryan’s appearance, his psyche and his contribution to Rape culture and concatenate it with literary, cinematic and real-life experiences.

In the movie, Cassandra Thomas, referred to as Cassie, endures a hollow existence ever since her best friend, Nina Fisher, unable to cope with the trauma of rape, had committed suicide. She dropped out of medical school, abandoning her promising career to take care of Nina. Years later, she meets Ryan Cooper, who was her batchmate, and now, is a successful Paediatrician. Ryan is a man devoid of toxic masculinity- he indulges in self-mockery and sings a Paris Hilton song unabashedly in public, which would usually be considered ‘womanish’. Fennell’s female gaze is zeroed in on Ryan, as she deconstructs the male gaze, personifying

him as a charming, equanimous, jocose human with an affectionately awkward personality. To drive this even further, she casts Bo Burnham, a famous comedian known for his staunch feminist ideals, as Ryan. The audience's parasocial relationship with Bo and Ryan's character, initially fit like the pieces of a puzzle. However, Fennell warps our perception of Ryan's 'nice guy' persona when it is revealed later on that Ryan was present during Nina's assault- he saw it happening and chose to be an onlooker. It is shock-inducing to witness the eradicated humanity of a character with the aforementioned traits. Bertrand Russell's concept of appearances versus reality, mentioned in his book *The Problems of Philosophy* (1912) is pertinent here, as Ryan's performative nature evinces a society where appearances construed through our sensations are fleeting and perfidious, and that anyone could be an enabler. *Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape* (1975) by Susan Brownmiller had debunked the rape myth that any man could be a rapist, not just "evil" or the "mentally ill". Profiling enablers is not easy, as they are not a specific type of men, and sometimes, not even men.

In a world that is populated with such people, the literary and cinematic references are endless. *Thirteen Reasons Why* (2017), a web series adaptation of the famous novel by Jay Asher records an uncomfortable rape scene where Monty de la Cruz humiliates Tyler Down repeatedly in the restroom, while the other friends watch. Serena Joy, holds her handmaiden down, often without any pressure, while her husband, Fred Waterford, rapes her under the guise of a theonomy, every month in Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale* (1985). In an interview, Guiora talks about one of the victims from his book: "Peter is sitting on the priest's lap, being assaulted... In walks the Monsignor, who sees it and the Monsignor says to the priest and I quote, 'When you're done, just turn off the lights.' That's an enabler."

It would be outlandish to conjecture that Ryan's psyche is shared by all enablers, but analysing his mind will give us Fennell's insight into their consciences. His inaction may be caused by conformity, allegiance in the form of friendship to the perpetrator, personal biases

or simply for avoiding conflict. He may rely on shared responsibility to shirk his accountability, but what is interesting is how he copes with his guilt. Anna Freud in *The Ego and Mechanisms of Defence* (1936) elucidates on Defence Mechanisms, which we notice in Ryan when he is confronted by Cassie. When he says, “I didn’t even do anything!”, he resorts to denial per se, to dissemble his role in the act of rape. With repression, he unconsciously creates a distorted reality or a ‘substitutive formation’ in which he is not at fault. Jacques Lacan, the French Psychoanalyst, had noted in an interview:

“Now, in psychoanalysis, repression is not the repression of a thing, it is the repression of a truth. Consequently, he tries to rationalise his passivity, as he is morally conscious of his culpability, justifying it with, ‘I was a kid.’”

Social psychology can also be actuated to explain Ryan’s mind. In *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance* (1957), Leon Festinger discusses the inconsistency in our thoughts- something that Ryan struggles with. He is not a perpetrator, but his actions directly enable rape- his choice in the participation leads to an inner conflict in him. Apropos to manipulating this conflict, he rationalises it through ‘selective exposure’, wherein he skews through memories that he would like to retain and through ‘motivated reasoning’, where his bias for the perpetrator, Alexander Monroe, leaves him with a clean conscience.

Until recently, sexual assault was confined to the bubble of the perpetrator and the victim. In recent discourses, enablers have become a part of the conversation. A winding web of culture has been recognised encompassing sexual assault by the second-wave feminists in the 1970s. It was coined ‘Rape culture’, something that condoned, normalised and relentlessly bred sexual aggression. Feminist researchers have argued: “...rape was no longer viewed as an outcome of an individual deviant, but the product of a larger Rape culture that condoned and excused male violence.” (Brownmiller, 194) So, when Ryan tells Cassie, “Don’t think I am a bad person”, we are torn to believe the opposite. The perpetrator, Alexander Monroe, benefits

from the complicity of Ryan. Enablers often safeguard and salvage the reputation of predators or perpetrators. They devalue victimhood and disparage human and bodily dignity. It is pertinent to fathom our responsibility in perpetuating an atmosphere that upholds sexual assault as inconsequential. Bystanders are a part of the society that sanctions this nonchalance to perpetrate.

Bell Hooks notes in *Feminism Is For Everybody* (2000): “Feminist movement is advanced whenever any male or female of any age works on behalf of ending sexism.” (116) Emerald Fennell furthers the feminist cause by creating a piece of art that is different- a sensitized portrayal of the trauma of sexual violation with the brightest hues of femininity, contesting sexism at the core. Ryan’s beguiling nature is, therefore, as preposterous as our treatment of sexually violated victims. Through Fennell’s voice, the audiences navigate through the different faces of an amicable man, who is capable of being unfriendly.

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Ismat Chughtai's Elephant in "The Quilt"

Anushka Sejal

UG Semester VI

"I wrote and do write as I speak, in a very simple language, not the literary language."

-Ismat Chughtai

Across cultural boundaries, women have always been considered second-class citizens. Male chauvinism and its fulfilment have been included into cultural depictions. In our society, men are viewed as embodiments of power and courage, while women are viewed as helpless victims of man-made conspiracies. Repression of female libido became a source of power for men, who gained pleasure by controlling the female. Our patriarchal society exemplifies this coercive power. As a result of seeing and understanding all of this, a rebellious writer named Ismat Chughtai began writing about women and posed concerns about female sexuality and consciousness. Her home exuded a cheerful and candour vibe, which motivated Ismat to be daring in her works and word choices. She was an ardent and unapologetic supporter of women's empowerment.

She demolished the myth of the ideal Muslim lady by recreating repressed Muslim women's voices, which proclaim women's independence from male oppression and society's "will." Her works are about women, their bodies, their sexual desires, and their stories. When Ismat first began writing, people mistook her for her brother, Mirza Azim Beg, and thought that he wrote under the pen name Ismat Chughtai. One can picture the hypocrisy of people back then on all of these themes where a man is entitled to write on such topics but a woman can't even talk about it.

Ismat wrote one of the most contentious pieces, "The Quilt," also known as "Lihaaf." Her short story depicts the strong sexual longing in a typical Muslim household, which was kept hidden. The narrator is a young girl who recounts an incident that took place while she was living with Begum Jaan, her mother's adopted sister. Her mother left her at Begum's and travelled to Agra. There, she witnessed something different, describing it as a "scar left by a blacksmith's brand." The tale delves into the most obscure and unexplored aspects of sexuality as seen through the eyes of a woman. Begum Jaan married Nawab Saheb at an early age, even though he was much older than her, exemplifying the then-prevailing society's practice of commodifying the women of their families. We also see Begum Jaan being portrayed as one of the most beautiful women, although Nawab is not attracted to her beauty. Instead, he is drawn to younger boys with "slender waists who wear flimsy shirts." Women are socialised to avoid expressing their sexuality. The Nawab was completely unaware of, or chose to ignore, his new bride's existing sexuality. He is unaware that she entered this marriage with certain hopes and desires, including sexual fantasies. The marriage of Begum and Nawab only serves to conceal his homosexuality. Or one could say it was a stamp on the Nawab's heterosexuality.

The fact that Nawab rejects Begum Jaan's presence in his life highlights the fact that male chauvinists in society disregard feminine sexuality. It is common for sexual declarations to be conditional on one's rejection to be noticed. Begum Jaan remained pale and sickly at the beginning of the story until her masseuse Rabbu entered her life. She was constantly massaging her and addressing her "itch" in her body. Although the doctors and hakims told her that she had "no unblemished skin," little did they know about her sexual itch. Following a period of neglect from the Nawab, the massages Rabbu gave Begum Jaan began to invigorate her sexual life. "It was Rabbu who rescued her from the fall."

There was a deep sense of eroticism developing between Begum Jaan and Rabbu. An open secret discussion on 'Lesbianism' was taking place in this story, but society could not

entertain it and they questioned the writer. Ismat in one of her interviews talked about this topic saying “I thought that men always went to prostitutes, but because girls can’t go to prostitutes, they do this.” This line illustrates the incorrect information she had as a child because it was not discussed freely and was not widely known. Females have always been regarded as subordinate to males, and their sexuality has long been overlooked. But Chughtai wanted the world to know about it without hiding anything. Yet she tried to portray everything under the “Quilt” like a secret, which reminds us of the ‘Imitation and Gender Insubordination’ by Judith Butler, where she says that “Conventionally, one comes out of the closet...; so we are out of the closet, but into what?” She speaks on the need for gender identity openness, but she also recognises the judgments that come with coming out in a gender role that society considers “the other.”

Ismat's phrases were bold, and she was prosecuted with obscenity for using words linked to female body parts such as waist, chest, thighs, and so on in public with her work ‘Lihaaf.’ Chughtai frequently uses the metaphors of fire, thirst, and heat to depict the body and its distinct carnality; it is also witnessed in her other works like ‘The Mole’. She also mentions the “slurping sound of a cat licking a plate” and “smacking her lips, as though savouring a tasty pickle,” which are metaphors for sexual practices. Ismat’s character's confidence was reinforced by the words, which demonstrated her fearlessness in the face of patriarchal culture.

Begum and Rabbu's relationship began with sexual ideas, but they were emotionally attached as well. They used to spend all of their time together, even sleeping together. The narrator notices them sleeping together and mentions a shape that their quilt makes, which she describes as an “elephant.” The narrator used the expression “elephant in the quilt” in humor, but Ismat meant something more serious and impactful. It was the sexual tension, relationship,

and desires concealed behind society's morals. The quilt mentioned by the narrator or Chughtai is a cover for all of these forbidden behaviours. Female sexuality and libido were regarded as forbidden conduct in any case (haram in Muslim culture). Society does not address a woman's sexual desires, urges, and expectations. Instead, a man is permitted to do whatever he likes. We can see that the Nawab enjoys the company of young lads, yet Begum Jaan and Rabbu's connection was a matter of talk among the other servants, illustrating the society's hypocrisy and sexism. A highly stylised homoerotic undercurrent runs through 'Lihaaf.' This story's premise does not seek to display virtuosity, instead speaks the truth.

The narrator's elephant represents not only the hidden truth of sexuality, but also the depravity that the rest of the world was frightened to look at, but not the writer. The visual of the elephant in the quilt was as disturbing for the little girl as it was for the readers of that time. Chughtai had a unique way of discussing passion, sexual desire, and sensuality. Furthermore, in addition to their sexual overtones, her other works illustrate the territorial claim that encompasses women's bodies and their objectification. Chughtai made it a point to write about women but not through a "masculine gaze," instead of portraying women as independent individuals. "I have always thought of myself first as a human being and then as a woman." The author's goal in writing the story is to create a new lady in a world that is sexually and socially biased. By portraying how the female protagonists in her stories attain their individuality by questioning their devotion to it, Chughtai questioned the patriarchal rule of conduct.

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Reincarnation of Sylvia Plath in the Songs of Contemporary Female Artists

Drishti Arora

UG Semester VI

“Though I never met Sylvia Plath, I can honestly say that I have known her most of my life”, said critic Sandra M. Gilbert in the opening line of her captivating essay “A Fine, White Flying Myth: The Life/Work of Sylvia Plath” (p.245). This similarity which Gilbert shows is something that Plath readership share, significantly women. Sylvia Plath is widely recognised as one of the leading figures of twentieth century literature and culture, who through her journals, poetry and prose, expressed her sense of alienation, mental anguish, her troubled marriage and unresolved conflicts with her father. Her works, even though they were tied to personal experiences, depicted the situation of women in mid-twentieth century America. Known for her genre of confessional poetry, Plath has immensely contributed to the literary realm of women’s writings. By the time she took her life at the age of thirty, she already had a huge readership through her well-known poetry volumes, *The Colossus*, *Ariel* and her only published novel, *The Bell Jar*.

Inspiring a number of women of her time, one cannot fail but notice that Plath’s form, structure and style of writing has been revived time and again, so much so that her works are celebrated to this date. Transcending the Plath legacy, we find noteworthy works in this generation too that are influenced from her. She is not just restricted to the literary genre but her presence is also felt in today’s contemporary music. The songs of twenty-first century female artists, Lana Del Rey and Taylor Swift draws a parallel between some of the most renowned poems of Sylvia Plath. The presence of the poet is felt throughout the songs of these

female artists, almost as if she is reincarnated. Lana Del Rey and Taylor Swift have drawn their inspirations from Plath with heart-wrenching portrayal of symbolic and significant lyrics in their mellifluous music, which has been a solace to millions of listeners.

Lana Del Rey's song 'Video Games' traces back to Plath's most famous poem, 'Daddy' which is painfully dark, surreal and in her own words, 'is a poem spoken by a girl with an Electra complex' whose 'father died while she thought he was a God' (BBC broadcast). In Rey's 'Video Games' the addressee becomes the singer's lover who emerges as a sort of adored, divined God. The lyrics depict a woman who has lost her identity to some kind of mistress, satisfying her man's wishes and this idea of transforming oneself in such a situation is present throughout the composition. It is interesting to note the composition sound of /u/ in both the pieces. In 'Daddy' Plath mainly refers to her father, "you do not do, you do not do/ anymore, black shoe" and in 'Video Games', Rey addresses to her lover while she sings, "it's you, it's you, it's all for you/ everything I do." This alliteration of /u/ sound emphasises the addressee- the 'you' showing how the lover or the father takes up the artist's mind while they compose their respective works. This constant use of the pronoun you in the poem and in the chorus of the song entails the loss of the woman's personality in benefit of her father or lover.

The two female artists use religious annotations as they refer to the men in their lives. The lines in the poem 'Daddy', "Marble-heavy, a bag full of God/Ghastly statue..." indicates the idol-like figure of God hinting fright, wonder and adoration. In the 'Video Games' lyrics "Heaven is a place on Earth with you" elevates the status of men close to God. Be it a lover or the father, both characters seem to be joined together as Plath mentions that in marriage, she "makes a model of" of Otto Plath, while Del Rey adores and idolises the man she loves, recalling the father-daughter relationship. Both works represent a numb female figure

oppressed by an authoritarian man. By the end of the poem, we see a liberating, ironic tone indicating that Plath might have freed herself from the repressions of her father Otto Plath as well as her husband, Ted Hughes. However, we do not find a breaking point in 'Video Games' where the lover continues to live a repressed life, in a video game designed by her partner. The contrast in the ending of the poem and the song depicts the different reaction of these women to their respective events. No matter the time and background these female artists come from, it shows how trauma does not necessarily have the same type of response and both of them dealt with it in their own way.

Interestingly, Taylor Swift's song 'Look What You Made Me Do' strongly recalls of Sylvia Plath's 'Lady Lazarus', in theme as well as tone. The song visualises resurrection, anger and vengeance, conjuring Plath's powerful masterpiece, 'Lady Lazarus'. In Plath's case she wrote the poem reflecting the Biblical Lazarus, who was resurrected by Jesus Christ and by this parable she refers to her suicide attempts where she eventuates as a transformed person. Swift's song that talks about resurrection not only resurrects the singer but it seems she has also resurrected the long-gone poet. Her 'Look What You Made Me Do' is a vivid imagery and has become a greatest rupture with the former sweet and innocent Taylor being metamorphosed into "fiery, vengeful explosion, declaring 'the old Taylor dead' and the new Taylor a woman out for the kill", in Dee Lockett's words (Vulture, 2017). It's as if she's following Plath's advice while she turns her death into consequent revival through a phone call in the song, "I'm sorry but the old Taylor can't come to the phone right now / Why? Oh! cause she's dead!" Similarly, in 'Lady Lazarus', Plath talks about death and resurrection highlighting how she lost her old self imposed by the society, breaking the norms of patriarchy. She portrays herself as a powerful female protagonist emerging phoenix-like, from the ashes of trauma to wreak vengeance on the male oppressors. Swift's lyrics "But I got smarter, I got harder in the nick of

time/ Honey, I rose up from the dead, I do it all the time”, echoes the Lady Lazarus with nine lives who asserts “Dying/Is an art, like everything else/ I do it exceptionally well.”

Unlike using the second person in ‘Daddy’, Plath surprisingly emphasises on herself and on the pronoun ‘I’ in ‘Lady Lazarus’ the traces of which is also seen in ‘Look What Made You Me Do’. The phrases in ‘Lady Lazarus’, ‘I have done it again’, ‘And I am a smiling woman’, ‘I may be skin and bone’ and then in Swift’s song, ‘I don’t trust nobody and nobody trusts me/ I’ll be the actress starring in your bad dreams’, suggests that these artists have focused on themselves and have travelled a long way from the stereotyping patriarchal society.

It is evident that Sylvia Plath’s figure and work in the music and characters of Lana Del Rey and Taylor Swift throws light on the evolution of different representations of womanhood throughout the years. It is noteworthy that the works of Sylvia Plath have been a motivation for these singers because they relate to the female psyche of the poet on a personal level, indicating not only the everyday struggles of women but also their psychological repercussions.

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Torn From the Roots: A Partition Memoir – Kamla Patel

Mushrat Rafique

UG Semester VI

Kamlaben Patel (1912-1992) belonged to a middle-class family. A young widow at no stage claims to be the heroine. She was the right-hand woman of Mridula Sarabhai who oversaw operation recovery, spent more than five years in Pakistan on the recovery mission of how women, were exchanged like oranges and apples; of the heart breaking stories she heard and the lives she saved. “Moolsotan Ookhadela”, a book written by her, originally in Gujarati, later translated in English, entitled “Torn from the Roots: A Partition Memoir” by Uma Randeria.

Kamla Patel’s work Torn from the Roots: A Partition Memoir narrates personal histories that have gone almost unrecorded and unexplored. This alternative history throws light on the abduction of women followed by the force recovery and rehabilitation programme initiated by both the governments for rehabilitating the abducted women as recorded in Kamla Patel’s memoir who was in charge of a ‘Recovery Camp’ in Lahore and was responsible for recovering Hindu women left or forcibly detained in Pakistan.

The life experiences of those captured women were so horrific, that even a person like Kamla Patel, who had not lived those atrocious happenings, could not prepare herself to recall them. To pen down the tales of these ill-fated women, it took her twenty-seven years to calm down, so that she could narrate the incidents in a proper frame of mind.

The partition has given an unforgettable and severe wound to Hindustan and newly constructed Pakistan. The new border of both countries was articulated on the innocent women's bodies, specifically abducted women. The people of India worship their nation as 'Bharat Mata'. But it's a poignant irony that partition has scratched the borderline, between India and Pakistan, as if on the bodies of abducted women. Sexual violence happened on a mass scale during partition and nearly a hundred thousand women were believed to have abducted, raped, sometimes sold in the prostitution, sometimes forcibly married. Religion plays a vital role in the partition violence, especially the abduction, rape and molestation of women. The rape of women means a fatal blow on the self-esteem of women. Many Punjabi women gave their lives by jumping into a well to save their honour.

At the initial part of the memoir "Torn from the Roots," Kamla Patel recollects that on the invitation of Mridula Sarabhai, she visited Lahore for the first time. She was to stay in the refugee camp in the local D.A.V. College, Lahore. When she arrived at the refugee camp, she was horrified at the conditions there with innumerable flies and all-pervading filth. Children suffering from cholera and typhoid were lying in their own excreta. Breathing became so difficult for her that it was impossible even to gulp down some water.

The women who were abducted suffered the most inhumane treatments possible. Kamla Patel recounts the case of 600 women and children from Kunju district of Gujarat. These women looked like a bag of bones. Their skin was full of sores, their hair was filled with lice, their clothes were dirty and torn. She was deeply shaken by the sight in front of her. One of these women had lost her three children due to absolute starvation. The extent of their malnutrition was such that their skeletons were clearly visible, and the children who were seventeen years old looked no older than eight or nine. Those women did not have any salt for six months, and had survived only on a dry roti and bathed once in 15 days.

The author states that the majority of the rescued women were illiterate. It, therefore, was quite difficult to extract necessary information from them. What made the matter complex was the fact that until these women truthfully shared their details with the camp authorities, their families could not be located in India, putting a hold on the rehabilitation process. This happened due to their fear that once the truth is told they would be subjected to further tortures. As they were well convinced that whatever had happened to them was their own fault. This tendency of self-victimization is analogous to the old patriarchal belief that a woman being defiled by a man is her own responsibility.

The partition of 1947 threw the entire country in chaos, which resulted in many atrocious acts perpetrated on women. Men abducted women of the other religion to injure the honour of that community. And to undo this damage, both the governments recovered the women to the places they rightfully belonged, putting aside their individual wishes. The astonishing fact here is that both governments made the recovery process a matter of prestige. This clearly portrays the attitude of the governments which were bent on establishing their supremacy rather than considering the happiness of these women. Such instances throw lights on the socio-cultural aspects of the country; even more painful is the attitude of the state towards its women.

Questions were raised on the drawback of the bill called The Abducted Persons (Recovery and Restoration) Bill on 31 December, 1949. The virtually unlimited powers given to the police with complete immunity from enquiry or action and no accountability at all; the denial of any rights or legal recourse to the recovered women; the question of children; the contribution of tribunal; forcible return of unwilling women. Kamla Patel was dissatisfied with the restoration act because no importance was given to the wishes of those women and children as if they were some inanimate objects. She was helpless before the rules implemented by the government.

It can, therefore, be concluded that women were the worst sufferers in the partition of the country. Women suffered greatly; not only they were forcibly raped and converted, but were also forced to live with their abductors who happened to be the murderers of their family members. The psychological scars of such women remained afresh, as the memories of those wrongdoings were so dreadful that it could never be forgotten irrespective of the time elapsed. Women thus became voiceless beings who did not possess individual autonomy either over their bodies or their lives. Kamla Patel's contribution to partition history is unforgettable. Her memoir makes one feel the incidents happening before their own eyes.



SECTION III:

PERIPATETIC

Field Reports

Reviews of the Experience of the Exhibition visited on 22nd March, 2022

PG Semester II

The Department of English

"The twin sisters captured the intricately beautiful lives of the women folk and the world surrounding them. We saw the photograph of their relative getting beautifully adorned for her wedding, and later of her new phase of motherhood. The sisters captured their mother and wrote captions about her role in shaping them as the woman they became later on. Their father played an important role in making his daughters achieve their talent by not only giving them a box camera but also with his efforts in training them on how to develop the film in the darkroom."

-Nafisa Islam

PG Sem II

"The exhibition gave an insight into the lives of the sisters and also revealed the similarity in their perspective while taking photographs. "

-Drishti Shroff

PG Sem II



Photo Courtesy: Nafisa Islam (PG Semester II)

"The passion and effort behind each and every picture taken, so kindly explained to us by the curators, showcased how genius works. Even though they have believed themselves to be 'amateur' their work in my opinion makes the lines blurry."

-Malabika Saha

PG Sem II

"The tone of every image had a special setting - in one we could see the solitude in an empty bench amongst a park filled with people, and in another there was a cloudy and foggy street of London where women went out dolling themselves , to pick some grocery or just to converse with fellow beings. The subtlety in how the images spoke to the perceiver was impeccable and touched right at the root."

-Sneha Mukherjee

PG Sem II



Photo Courtesy: Nafisa Islam (PG Semester II)

"What makes photography truly revolutionary is its sustained disobedience to social norms. As global tensions escalate oppression and limit human rights, photographers respond by challenging artistic conventions. Though rooted in tradition, the exhibition explored photographic integrity in its many forms, from portraits to silhouettes. The human form is rendered non-objectively, and a singular experience is conveyed through sporadic imagery-Nostalgia. This diversity of content, method and process reveals a central tenet of the exhibition, and for art in general: through the lens of the two sisters."

-Dibya Patranabish

PG Sem II



Photo Courtesy: Md Zoheb Hussain (PG Semester II)

Twin Sisters with Cameras

PG Semester IV

The Department of English

In one of the quieter alleys of Lake Terrace is situated the house of the exemplary historian Sir Jadunath Sarkar (1870-1858). Partially guarded by the shades of perennial trees, the Jadunath Bhavan Museum and Knowledge Centre is almost stuck in time, boasting the obdurate, revered look of postcolonial Calcutta, flamboyantly contrasted against the modern apartments, cafes and office buildings in the vicinity.

And to keep up with the spirit of the grand olden times, the Jadunath Bhavan plays host to 'Twin Sisters with Cameras', a month-long exhibition commemorating the photographic excellence of Debalina Majumdar and Manobina Roy. The sisters were born and brought up in a comparatively liberal Bengali household in the north Indian town of Ramnagar. The influence of their father Binod Bihari Sen Roy, a teacher employed by the Maharaja of Benaras, had always been there, but the gift of Agfa Brownies on their 12th birthday in 1931 would completely mould their journey into the world of photography, and their legacy as the twin sisters with cameras.



Photo Courtesy: Rima Nath (PG Semester IV)

Some memorable anecdotes of the Twin Sisters:

1) Being female photographers during the 1930s was no less than a challenge for them. However, being blessed with a supportive family, their love for photography bloomed. Their father, Binod Bihari Sen Roy played a very important role in their lives. He was a respectful person in Ramnagar, Benaras. As he was a progressive man, he did not let his daughters fall prey to social evil practices like the Purdah System. Thus, he took them beyond the estate, as the King of Ramnagar had prohibited the girls from taking photographs in public, within the boundaries of the town.

2) The twin sisters always accompanied their father, whenever he travelled somewhere. One night he took them to the performance of a Baiji, where the sisters were mesmerized by the voice and sight of the Baiji, and were inspired by her. The next day, the sisters were adorning

themselves in front of the mirror, with the desire to become like her. Which, when witnessed by their mother, infuriated her.

3) The twin sisters took several pictures in their domestic settings. The photographs often feature their aunt, nephews, children, grandmother, grandfather, and more. One side of the wall in the exhibition was devoted to pictures of women in the family across all generations.

4) The twin sisters did not get much opportunity to travel abroad because of their compulsion to look after their families. Thus, in the year 1959 their trip abroad (London, Paris and Geneva) always remained special, as it was for the very first time they enjoyed freedom. The twin sisters also observed lonely old women on the streets going to buy loaves of bread, waiting for someone to greet them or to say "Oh! What a lovely day/ How have you been?" Thus, it aroused a sense of pathos within the sisters, which inspired some of their most famous works.



Photo Courtesy: Sweta Shah (PG Semester IV)

More such memorable anecdotes were found while going through their works, and memoirs.

The exhibition, curated and maintained by Anuja Mukherjee and Kamalika Mukherjee, recounts the photographic milestones in the lives of 'LinaBina' - a moniker derived from the names of the twin, that expertly supports and holds together a world so integrated, artistic, and photogenic, seen through the lenses of the twin's cameras. A field trip to Jadunath Bhavan organized by the Department of English, The Bhawanipur Education Society College, gave way to an afternoon of intrigue and admiration. Here's what the students gathered from the memorable trip:

“Honestly very much moved by the pictures. Debalina Mazumder and Manobina Roy perceived their world through the viewfinder, and not just perceived just for the sake of it but created some fantastic artistry through their lens. Born and brought up in a comparatively liberal household , both the sisters were exposed to conceive new things in a new light which made an impact in their photography as well. The hide and seek of light and shadow is a frequently occurring element in both of their photography, specifically the use of stripes in the form of light and shadow which in turn represented the Kodak world that existed then . The most interesting thing to note is that both the sisters also collected the data like exposure , weather, position of the sun in the picture taken . ”

- Sharodia Roy

“Our college, The Bhawanipur Education Society College, had arranged for a Field Trip on The Twin sisters' Photography excursion on March 25 , 2022. We were taken for the excursion to Jadunath Bhavan Museum and Resource Centre. We all had a great time there witnessing

some fantastic lens-works of Debalina Mazumder and Manobina Roy (the twin sisters). It was such a pleasure seeing such incredible frames, also the light & shadow elements were represented beautifully in each and every photograph captured by either of the two sisters. We as students are really honoured to be a part of this amazing experience. Thanks to our college for introducing us to this wonderful historic work.”

- Sangeeta Nandi

“The exhibition titled ‘Twins Sisters with Cameras’ is truly an inspirational one. To see the range of emotions captured and expressed through the monochrome, and the artistic vision of the two photographers Debalina Mazumder and Manobina Roy at such a primitive age of photography is nothing short of wondrous. The way these photographs have been compiled and captioned at the Jadunath Bhavan Museum and Resource Centre ensures the photographers' vision has been respected and that their creativity is not tampered with. The exhibition pays due homage to the sisters.”

- Sawana Nath

“I never visited an exhibition, so it was a matter of great excitement to me from the beginning. There was a lot to know about those early techniques and angles of photography and cameras and the skill through which the two sisters Debolina Mazumder and Manobina Roy made their dreams happen. I must say it was difficult at their time when the contemporary women didn't have the privilege to come out from the threshold of their “Andormohol”. It was the male head, rather the father and next the husbands who supported their art of photography instead of subjugating them or confining their identity as housekeepers only. It was an awesome privilege

truly. I think this generation of photographers has been greatly inspired by them if they come across this exhibition. The one thing that strikes me is their patience and use of time. They were good mothers and beautiful homemakers but never needed to sacrifice their hobby for their household duties. One shot, one perfect picture and that is all. And for it they waited a long day to have the perfect light or darkness. Now the era of editing and dslrs hardly know what that hard work was. And the way the research has been done upon the two twentieth century ladies is beyond words. Thanks to researchers Anuja Mukherjee and Kamalika Ma'am for providing us such a chunk of information that was previously unknown to most of us."

- Rima Nath



Photo Courtesy: Rima Nath (PG Semester IV)



SECTION IV:

KALEIDOSCOPE

Art



Prerana Sharma

UG Semester II



Koyena Das

UG Semester VI



Waves of Love

Khushi Saraf

UG Semester IV



Sukalpa Mukhopadhyay

PG Semester II



Aanchal Agarwal

UG Semester VI



Starry Polar Night Sky

Nafisa Islam

PG Semester II



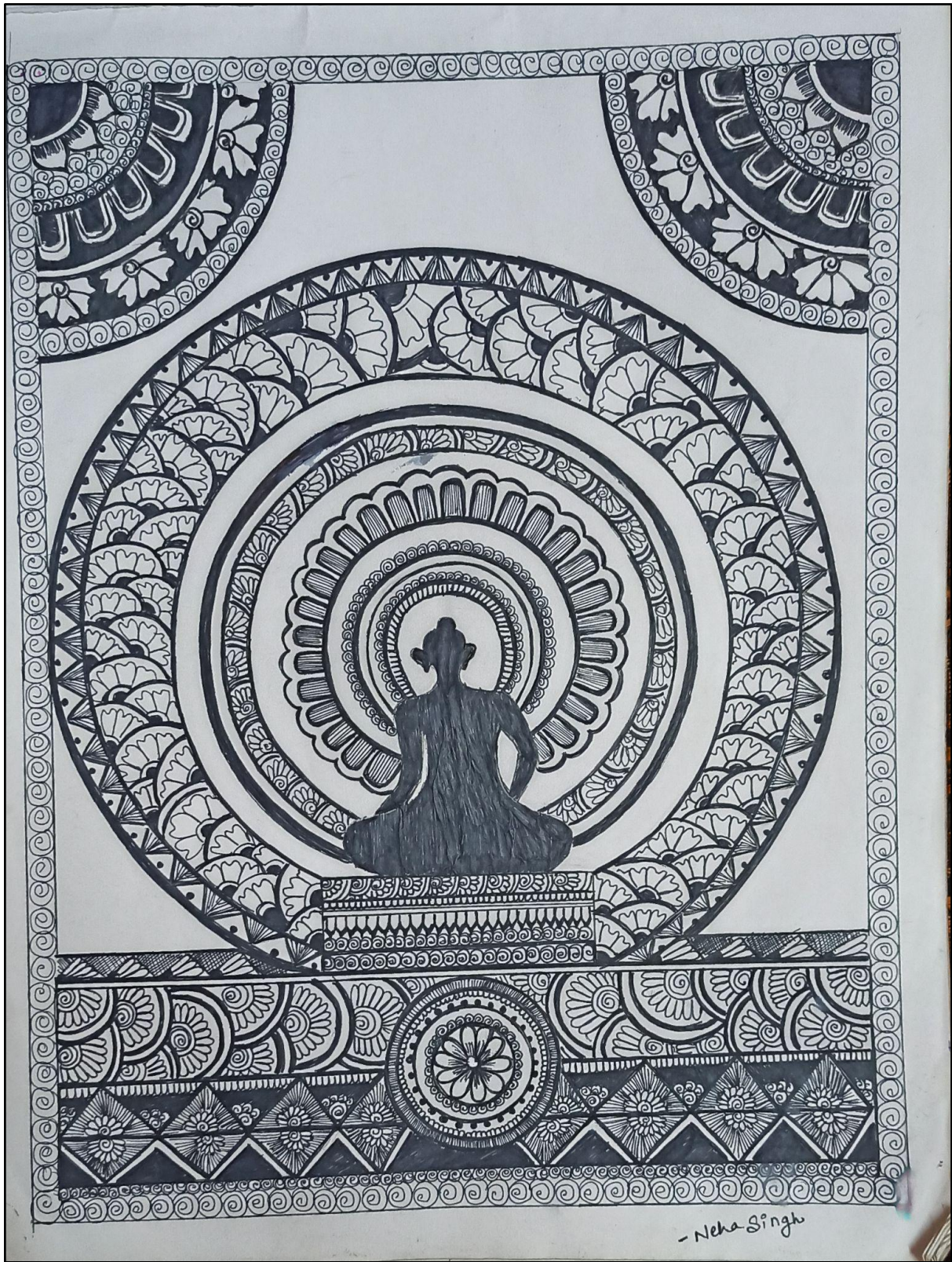
Tiyasha Dey

UG Semester VI



Souvik Saha

UG Semester VI



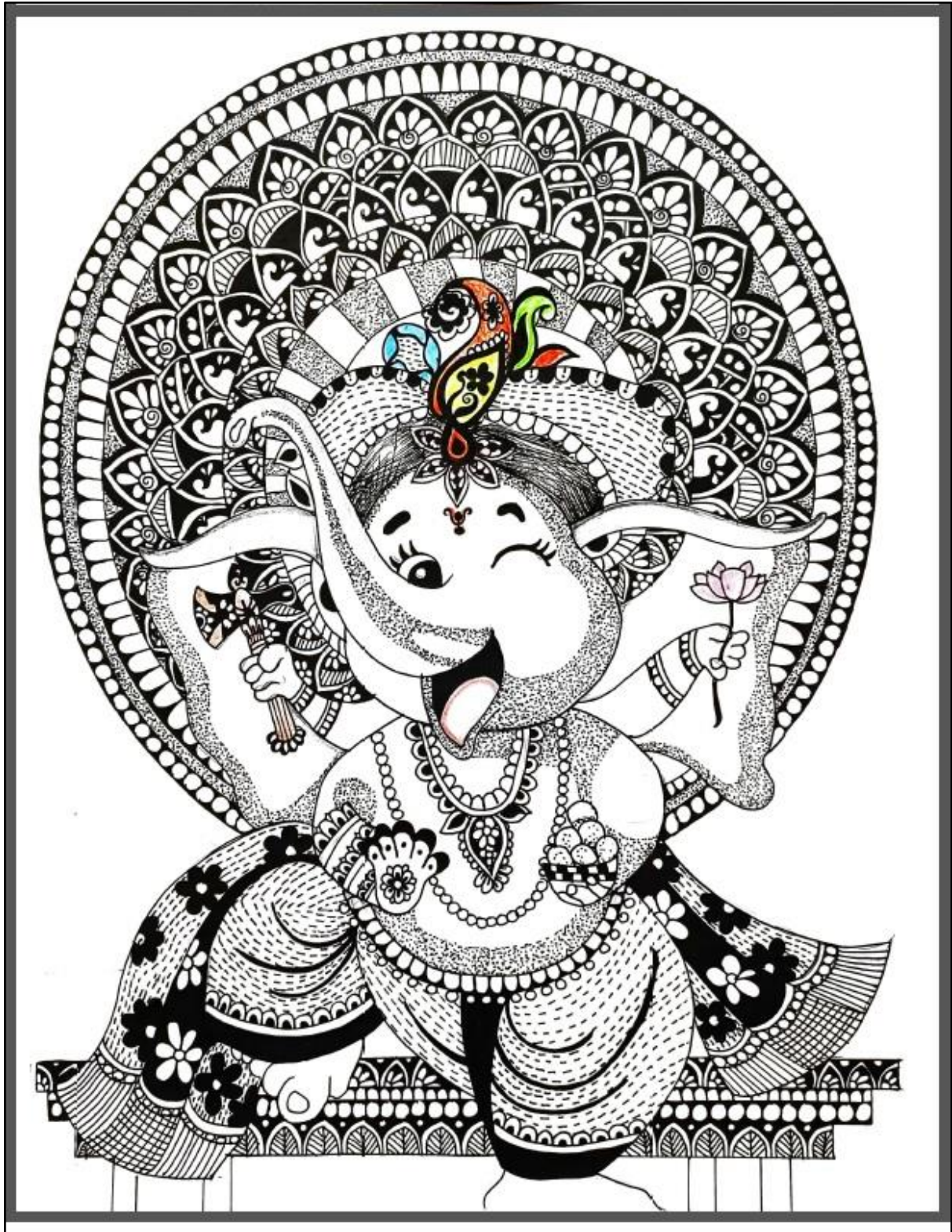
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UG Semester IV



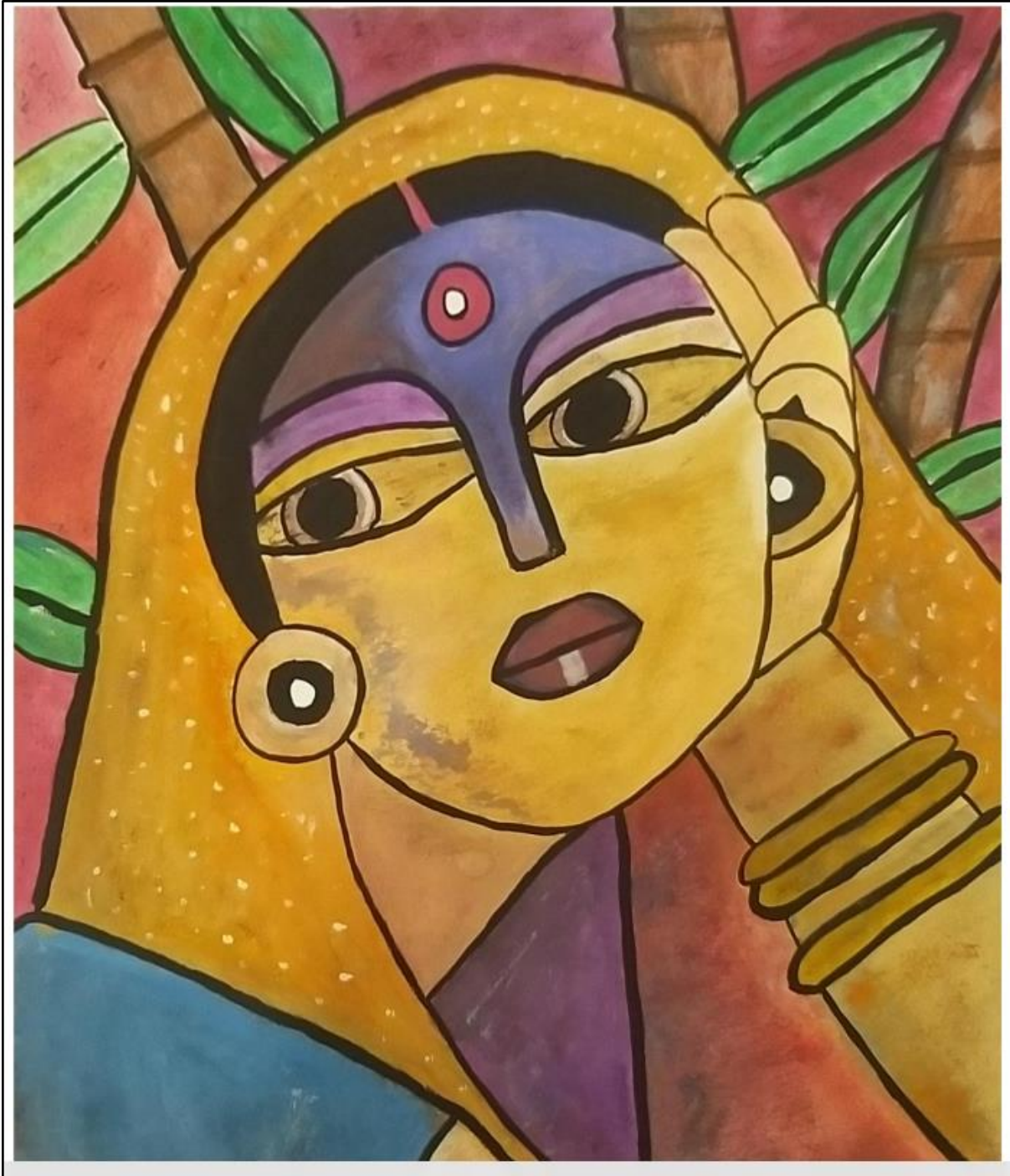
Prasangsa Majumder

UG Semester VI



Aanchal Agarwal

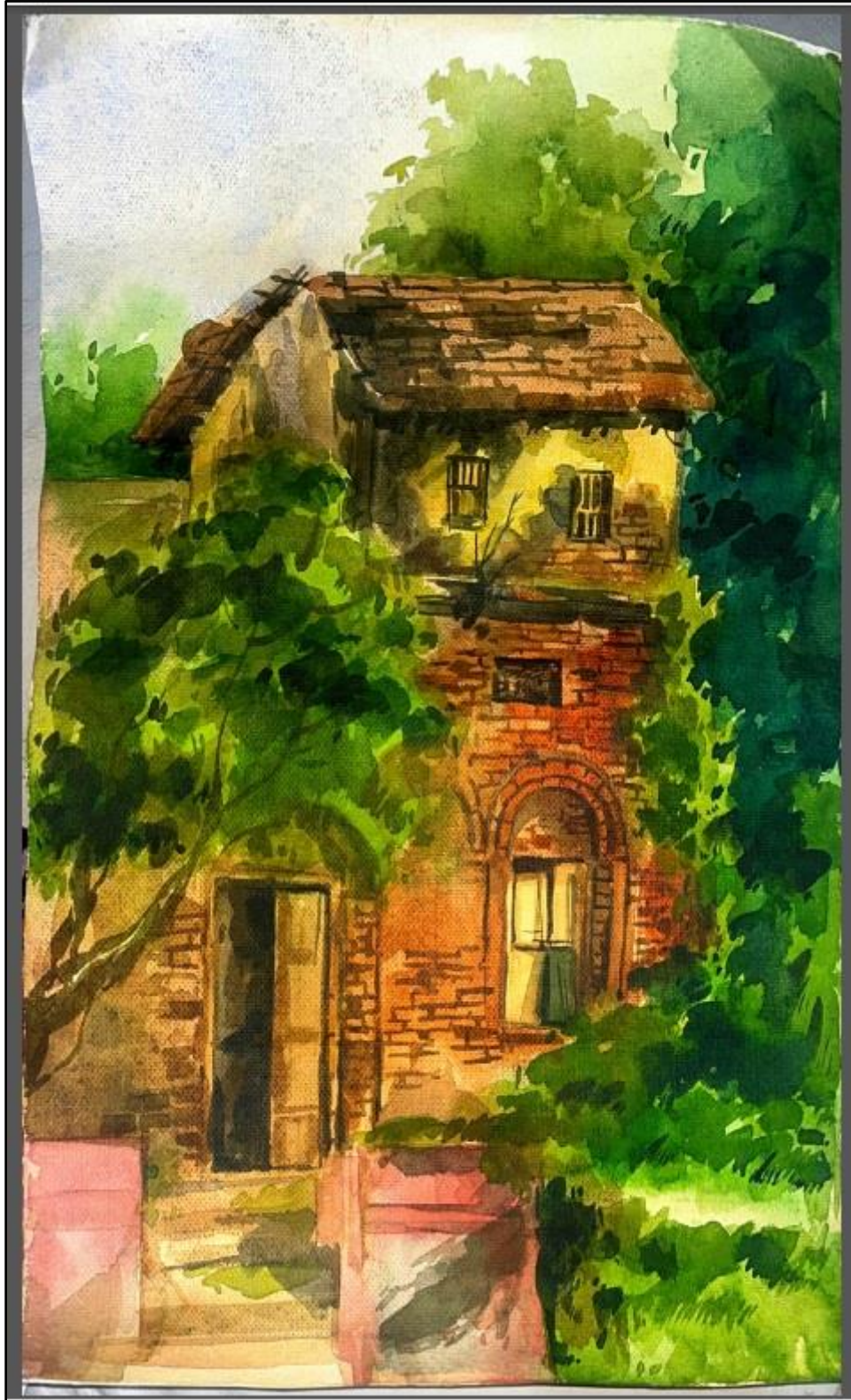
UG Semester VI



Layers of Depth

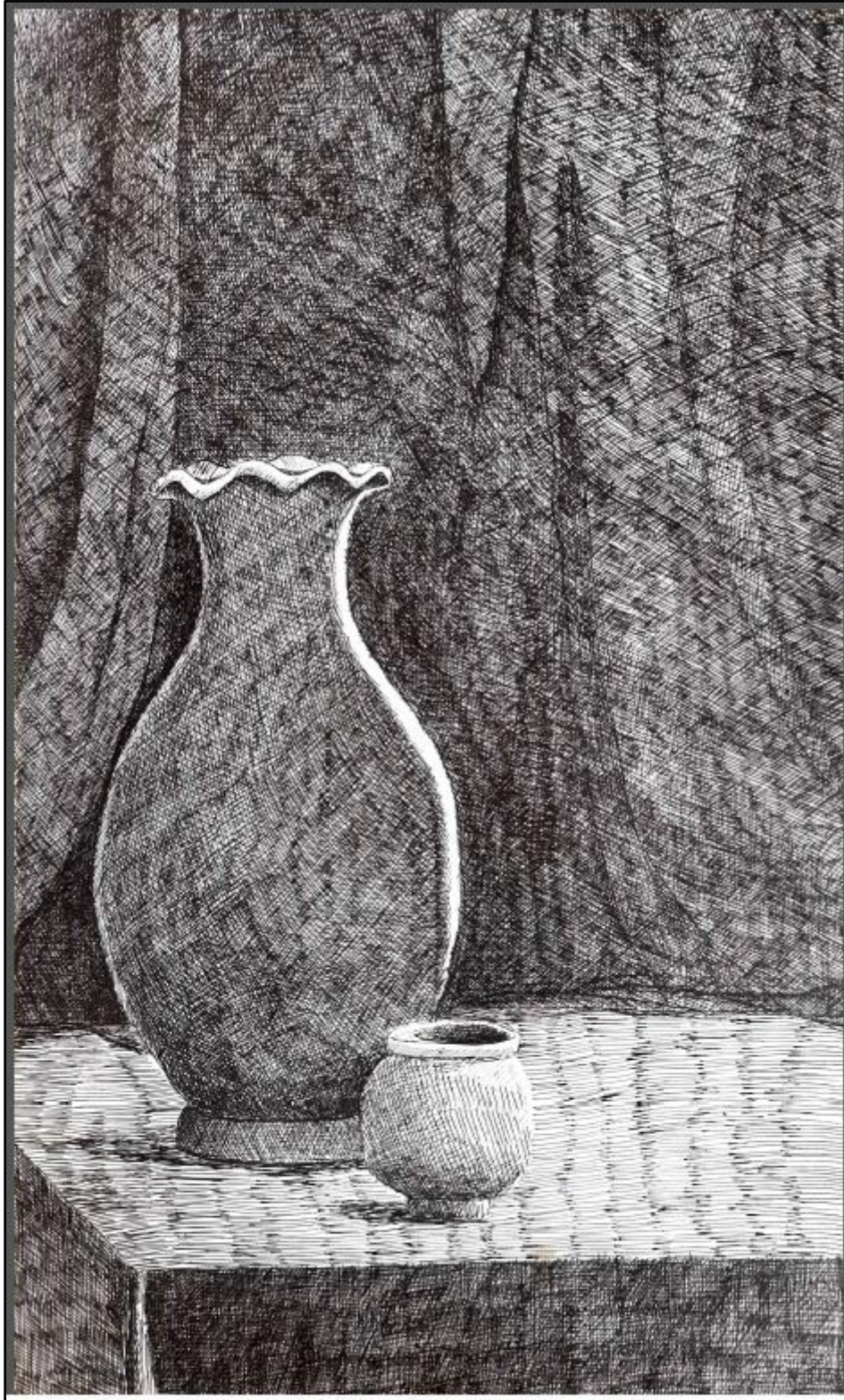
Drishti Shroff

PG Semester II



Faiza Siddiqui

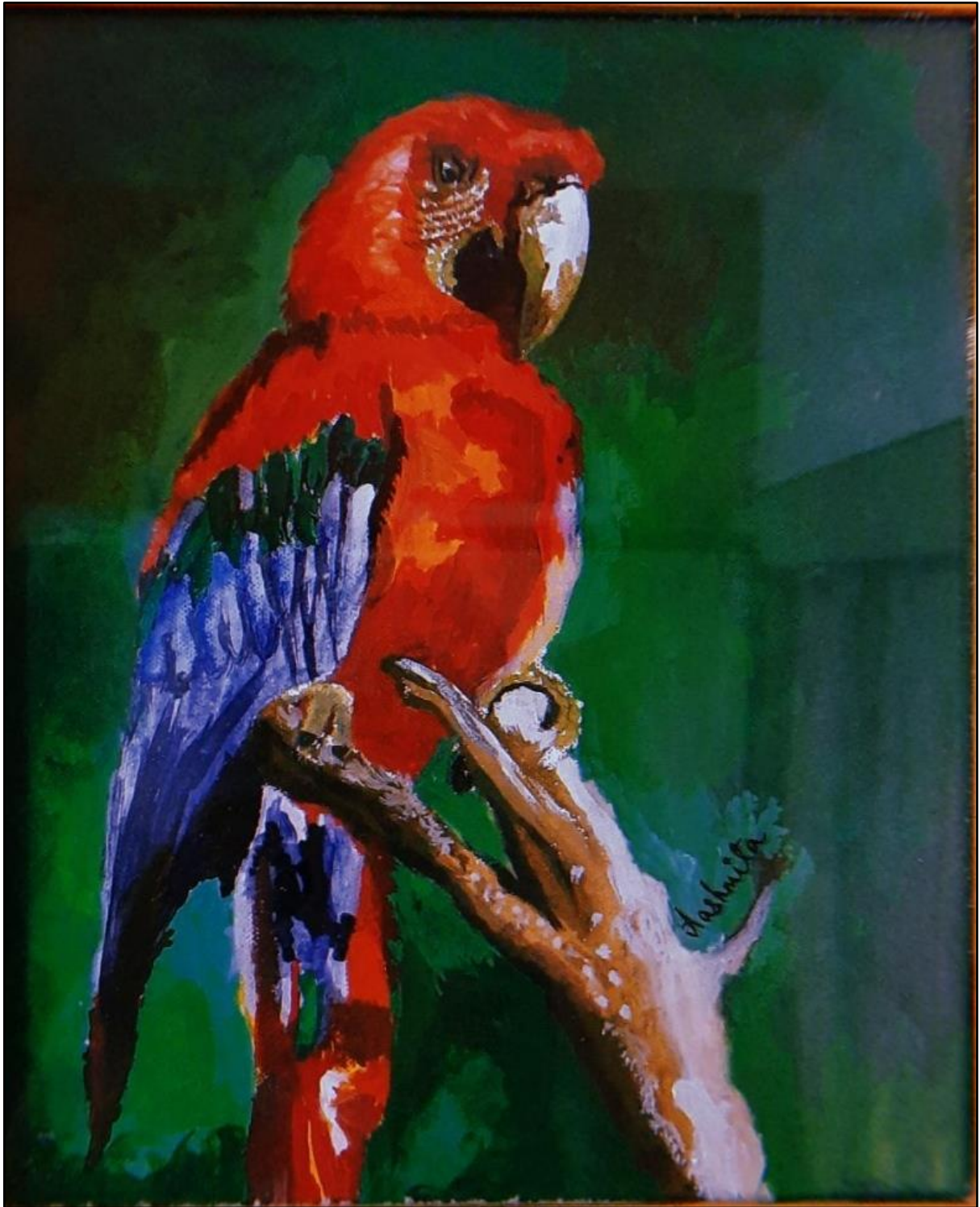
UG Semester VI



Pen and Ink Artwork

Nafisa Islam

PG Semester II



Aashmita Das

UG Semester II



Ahana Banerjee

PG Semester IV



SECTION V:

**CAMERA
LUCIDA**

Photography



Bidisha Bhattacharya

UG Semester VI



Aanchal Agarwal

UG Semester VI



Prerana Sharma

UG Semester II



Shatabdi Roy

PG Semester II



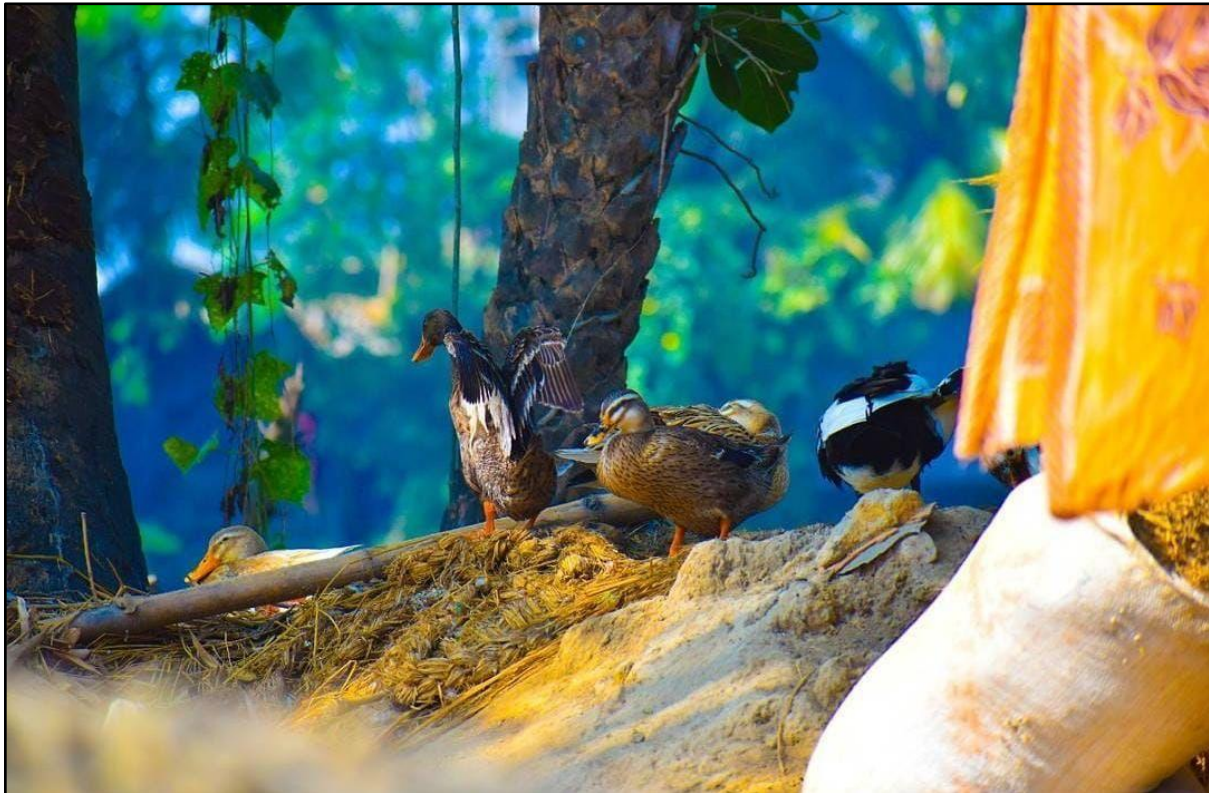
Sukalpa Mukhopadhyay

PG Semester II



Subham Roy

UG Semester VI



Yashita Singhania

UG Semester IV



Subham Roy

UG Semester VI



Sukalpa Mukhopadhyay

PG Semester II



Prerana Sharma

UG Semester II



Aanchal Agarwal

UG Semester VI



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