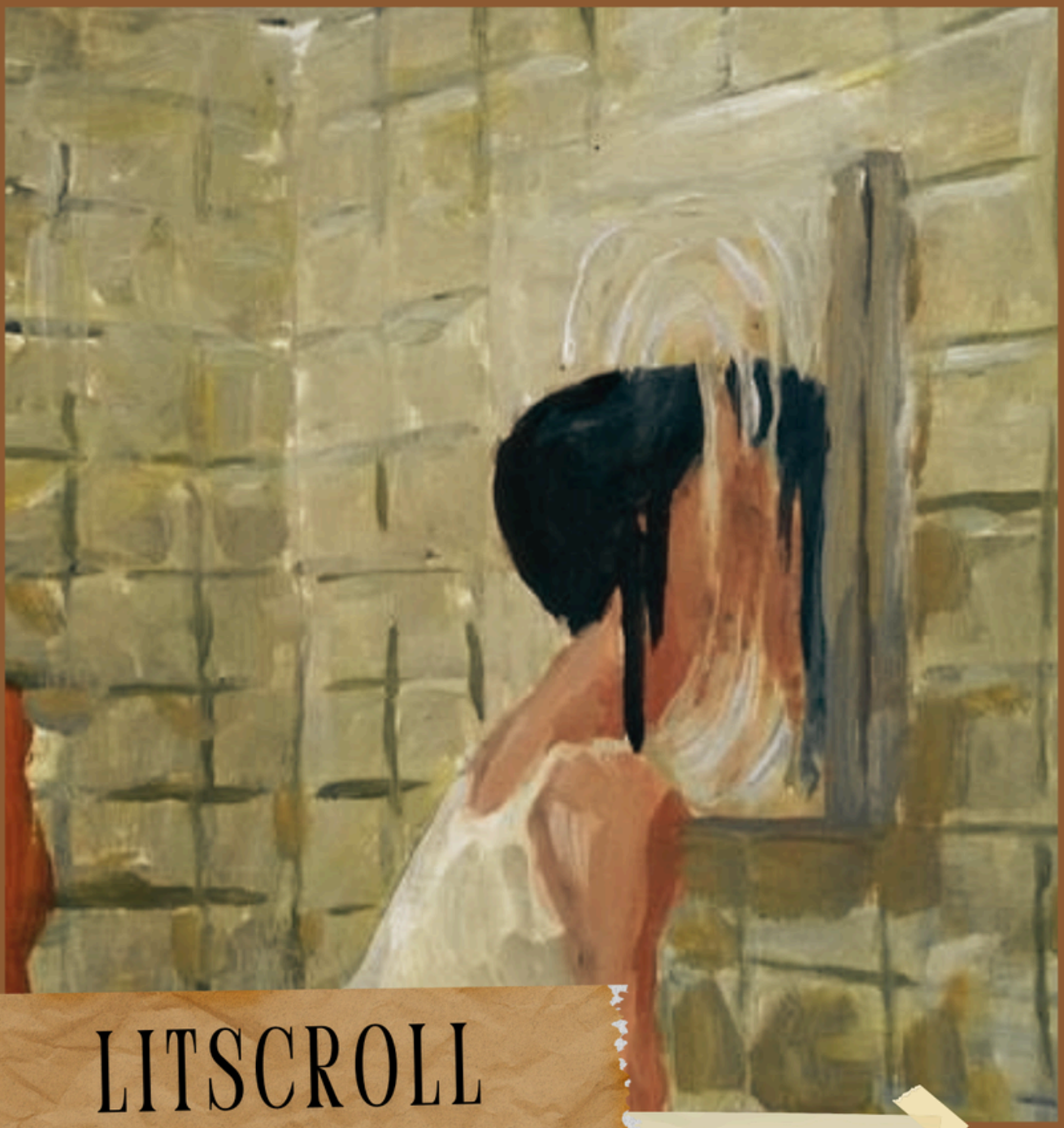
ALIENATION *and* BELONGINGNESS *in* LITERATURE



LITSCROLL

2025

CONTENTS

CONTENTS

From the Desk of the Editor

"The ache for home lives in all of us, the safe place where we can go as we are and not be questioned."

— Maya Angelou

Dear Readers,

As I sit down to pen my thoughts, a wave of pride washes over me, mingled with a deep sense of gratitude for being able to unveil the fifth edition of *LitScroll,* where home is a memory and exile, a truth. I am immensely grateful for the opportunity given to me. Since I started my journey as Editor-in-Chief in the month of October, it has been nothing short of enriching. This year's edition is a powerful testament to those who seek belongingness amidst the void of alienation.

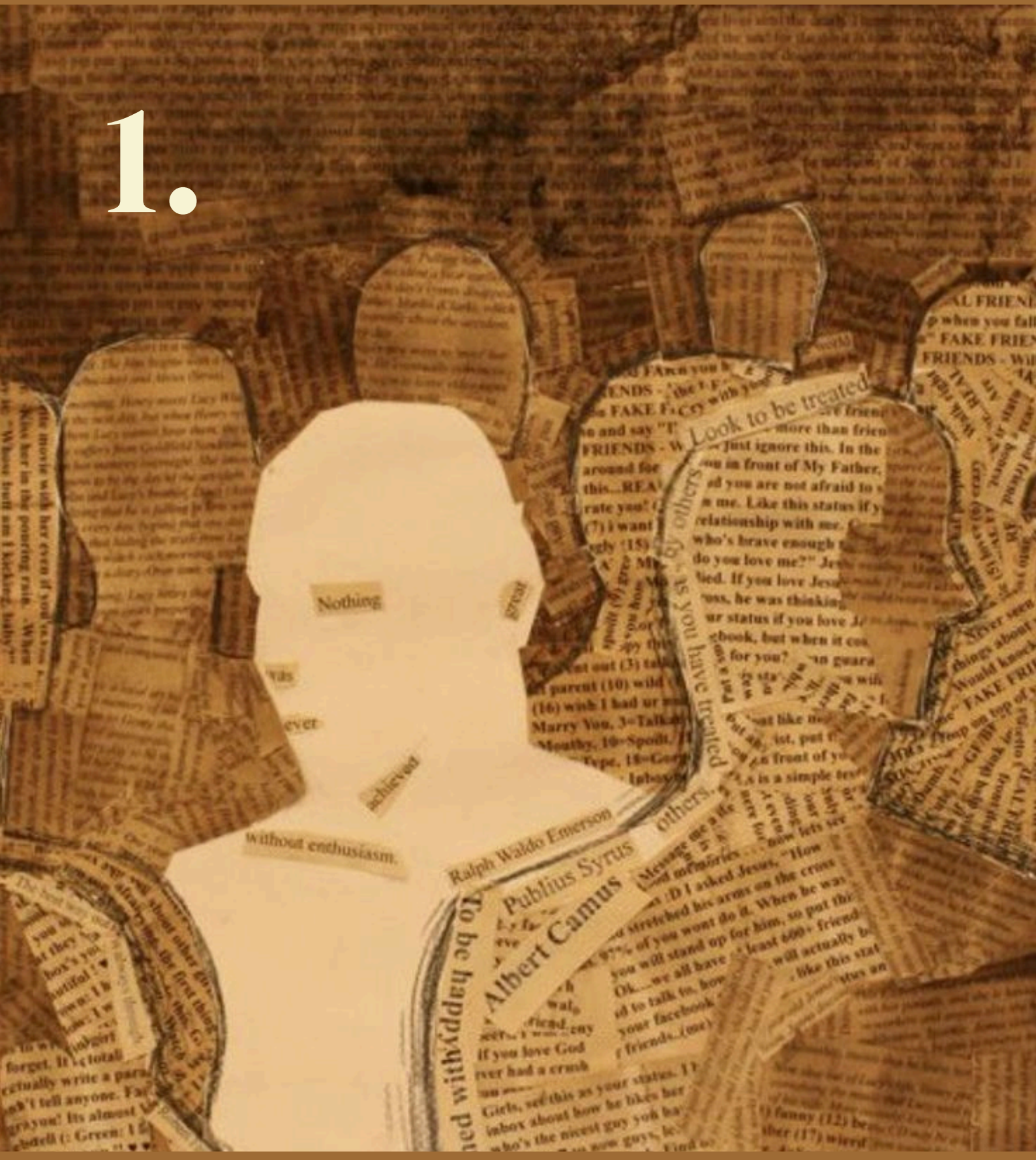
Our theme for this edition is "Alienation and Belongingness in Literature". The initial section, "In Prose and Passage", of the magazine provides a glimpse of the story telling talent of our students. "The Poet's Quill" has graced our pages with heart-warming poetry. This edition is special as it marks our first attempt to include research papers from universities across the country. We are honoured to have had Dr. Sharon Pillai as our judge for our very first Intercollegiate Research Paper Writing Competition.

Interwoven within are insightful research pieces that delve into literature's cathartic power to turn estrangement into empathy and solitude into solidarity. Additionally, we have included a new section for students to share their beautiful memories and the experience of belongingness at JMC, the "Board of Belongingness". "The Panel Parade" is a compilation of comics by our creative minds on the theme of gender, mobility, and the city. Each story examines a different aspect of gendered experiences while moving through the city. We are also excited to share with our readers deeply engaging and inspiring interviews with two distinguished figures, Mr. C. Sailo and Dr. Zahra Rizvi. Their thoughts have graced us with a profound sense of knowledge and made the edition fun.

The sheer volume of work catalogued in the magazine is a testament to the dedication of every member of *LitScroll* who worked tirelessly to achieve this success. I'd like to take this opportunity to extend my heartfelt gratitude to our former principal, Prof. Sandra Joseph, who retired in May, as well as thank our new principal, Sister (Dr.) Molly. Their support and guidance at various stages have been invaluable to the magazine team. Extending my gratitude to our Teacher-in-Charge, Dr. Susan George, who has constantly supported us. I am especially grateful to the true pillars of LitScroll, Dr. Payal Anil Padmanabhan and Dr. Dolly V. Muanching, for always standing by our vision, giving us complete liberty and helping us whenever we faced any hiccups. Finally, a big shout-out to my incredible teams—Content, Design, and Social Media—for their creativity, dedication, and tireless commitment. And, lastly, to the voices in *LitScroll* – this year's edition would have been incomplete without your powerful narratives.

As *LitScroll* 2025 comes to life, it also brings a closure to an academic session that brought us all back under one roof—revisiting the memories, rekindling collections, and rebuilding camaraderie we had deeply missed. This magazine is a testament to the elation we, at the English department, experienced upon returning to the shared spaces where the strength of the collective inspires hope and change. With great pride, I present to you the fifth edition of *LitScroll*. We hope you find the same joy we felt in these pages!

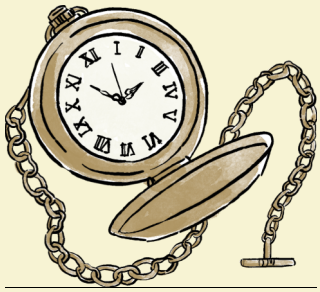
Signing off,
Minna Ann Jacob



In Prose and Passage

The Passage of Time

Aamna Rehman, BA Honours English, 1st Year



How surreptitiously the time, age, and the frailty of my own body have begun to distance me from those I once knew like the back of my hand. I look at my hand now, and even that doesn't look the same anymore. The skin is loose and thin, the bones beneath fragile. I can feel the veins under the skin so clearly, like unruly creases spreading across an old carpet. It's hard to believe how much has changed. Once, not so long ago, I was full of strength—hands brimming with energy and purpose. I remember when my granddaughter was eight, with freshly washed hair, dripping and dampening the back of her frock with a semi-circle of wetness. I would sit her on my lap, my hands steady as I gently combed through the tangles. She would curl up, clutch my hand, and drift off to sleep, my arm aching from the strain of stroking her back for what felt like hours. I didn't mind then. My hands were full of life—washing clothes by hand, digging into the soil, stirring pots for dinner, pushing them on the swings. It was all a part of the rhythm of life, something I didn't even think to question.

But now, my own body betrays me so often. My children, my grandchildren—born of me but living apart most of the time— we seem to have outgrown each other. How could I expect them to remain the same? I look at my grandchildren, and I can't help but feel the distance growing. Their worlds are so different, filled with stories of college life, social media, and things I struggle to understand. They talk about fests, reels, and friends, and though I listen, it's hard to feel a part of their lives anymore. Inevitably, I have been swept by the rush of time, and I have learnt to swim. But I don't sail through them as my family does. I use the phone and I know how to look up recipes and gardening tips. It is still not the same as being born knowing what to do, like we did with our needles and threads.

My little girl is in college now, while I never studied past the 10th grade. How could I possibly understand what she's going through? Sometimes, when they talk to me about their days, it feels like, by comparison, I've barely done anything at all. But then, a memory rises —a moment from my youth. Didn't my friends and I play games, share stories, and gather together every evening on rooftops? Didn't my hands stay busy, either knitting, sewing, chopping, or stirring, when we came together like a family? The world feels smaller now, and my connections with it thinner, like the skin on my hands. Yet, there are moments when I feel the past pulling at me, sharp and vivid. It's strange—sometimes the memories from my childhood feel crystal clear, so vibrant. I could swear I remember the first colored broadcast on *Doordarshan* like it was yesterday, as if I could step right into that picture if I tell the story enough times. I do need that little gadget to remind me of things I need to do, medicines I need to take, or events that are scheduled for the next week. It seems like the world keeps spinning faster, while I stand still, watching.

"All Amma talks about is how things were during her time," my grandchildren say. I can feel the

annoyance settle across my lips, my brows furrowing. What do they know, these young ones? But can I blame them? They're so full of life—alive, alive, alive. Everyone at that age feels invincible. Didn't I, too, feel this way once? And yet, the years weigh on me. My thoughts drift back to those evenings of gathering and talking in the next *gali*, where everyone's home felt like part of my own. I think about how time has passed and left its mark on my relationships. My granddaughters slip in from time to time, offering perfunctory hugs, a brief moment of connection before they disappear back into their own lives. Although it's different now—more awkward, less intimate, I take the affection anyway.

Then one day, the eldest slips into my room. She offers a hug, and then, sitting down next to me, she places a yarn and a crochet hook in my hands, a wry smile tugging at her lips. "Teach me how to do this, *Amma"*. A tentative warmth seeps through me. She says she saw it on a "YouTube reel". The familiarity of the gesture is a comfort, but it's bittersweet. I automatically reach out to stroke her hair, and with a soft, pleased smile, I say, "Of course, Beta". In that quiet moment, the years fade a little. I can almost feel the past flowing back into me, connecting my hands with hers across the bridge of time. Maybe it's not so different after all.

A Peaceful Chaos: The Inward Turmoil

Deblina Brahmachari, BA Honours English, 1st Year

The paradox of life and the unfolding of fate remain frantically beyond control in every regard. It becomes even more chaotic the harder we try to maintain control, slipping through our fingers like water meant to stay within human hands. We are formed from habits, from certainty, and shut into a blindfold governed by unpredictability. There strikes a silent war inside us between resistance and surrender—holding on and letting go, between the illusion of control and reality's acceptance.

Imagine being caught in a wild sea. The waves rise like towering walls of liquid fury. Instinct asserts that fighting is all you can hope for. You thrash, kick, and struggle against the weight of water. You're sinking deeper the harder you resist. Panic takes you over now. Fear tightens its grip on your throat like a vice. You're exhausted. Then the realisation hits you: stop fighting. Let the water carry you. Suddenly, you float.

This is peace in the midst of chaos. It is not the absence of struggle but the ability to find stillness amidst it. It is not submission; it is understanding. It is not weakness; it is wisdom.

We teach our children from the day they are born to be masters of their destinies. Success, they say, comes to those who seize it with relentless hands. Worth, in turn, is measured in accomplishments, victories, and moulding life to fit our desires. Control is worshipped; uncertainty is feared; yet neither is in touch with reality.

The world is an unpredictable power: a landscape moulded by forces beyond our understanding. Time moves forward with no regard for human preference. People enter our lives unannounced and leave without warning. Love blossoms where we least expect it and withers despite our best efforts. The more we attempt to force life into submission, the more it rebels.

But what if control were just an illusion? What if only uncertainty were certain?

Life opens gates to strange contradictions. Indeed, the tighter you hold it, the more it spurns your control, reducing your power. The more you struggle to hold it, the more it eludes you, like water that denies mere human hands the ability to contain it. We are creatures of habit and certainty, yet thrown into a world of unpredictability. There is an internal war—a war between resistance and ease, between holding on versus letting go, between the illusion of control and the reality of acceptance.

Imagine being in the midst of a violent sea. Blue water walls rise around you, towering high up to the sky, and your instinct tells you to fight. You thrash your legs and arms against the weight of the water.

You sink deeper with every ounce of resistance. Panic and fear constrict your throat like a vice, and soon an overwhelming sensation of exhaustion overtakes everything. Then, suddenly, it strikes you: you stop resisting and let the water take you, and suddenly you float.

It is the peace that reigns within chaos. Not the absence of struggle but ability to find stillness amid it. Understanding, not submission. Wisdom, not weakness.

From birth, we are taught to take control of our destinies. Success belongs to those who burn their hands over the things they want. We value mostly successes, victories, and the ability to mold life into what we want; we worship control and fear an uncertain world. Yet, no one is actually controlling anything.

In this wild world, where no force can be understood, where time marches on heedlessly of human desire, where people pour into our lives from nowhere and leave without caution, where love sprouts in the least expected places and dies against all intentions—life is stubborn and revolts all the more against our would-be dictatorial hold.

What if control is nothing but an illusion? What if the only certainty is uncertainty?

We cling to control because chaos frightens us enough to believe that life itself will immediately fall into disarray without neat interior reins on it. Control was never the savior from chaos; it was the origin of suffering.

When life defies our rigid, inflexible expectations of how we expect it to go, it sets us up for almost certain disappointment. Commands do not rule life; it does not bargain with anybody. Life moves at its own free-willed rhythm.

True harmony lies not in conquering chaos but in coexisting with it.

Surrender crumbles many fears. It feels like jumping off a cliff into the pit below without any surety of what awaits at the bottom. Surrender does not mean giving up and handing over control of everything to destiny. Surrender is not resignation, and it is by no means passive acceptance. It is the conscious choice to stop waging war against what one cannot control.

We resist because we are afraid. If we let go, it seems life will swallow us whole, so the fear of not fighting becomes perceived as survival; struggle becomes equated with living.

Peace is often thought to be the opposite of chaos, the ideal state where tranquility remains untouched, an oasis in the middle of mortal life. But true peace is not found outside confusion; it lies in the power to remain 'the eye of the storm.' Life is uncertain; it is full of ups and downs, gains and losses, love and heartbreaks. Nothing can prepare or guard us against the floods of changes, yet human beings still long for stability, unlike victims of inevitability who think they can control life to secure happiness.

After a point, resistance becomes futile. A heartbreak is too severe to heal; a loss stands immeasurable against life's compass of time. This is the moment when all efforts come to naught, and we face the choice of either fighting against the tide or letting ourselves go with it.

And here, when surrender to the cosmic flow occurs, something extraordinary happens: a lifting of the burden; a cessation of turmoil; the ocean changes from an adversary to an ally.

At this moment, one realises that life was never meant to be controlled, only lived.

Pain is a fact of life; suffering is a choice. The struggle consists not in the conditions but in our unwillingness to accept them. By letting go of attachment to a certain outcome, we mitigate needless suffering.

Think of a bird caught in a terrible storm on a bough about to snap, gripped by fear of the wretched winds carrying it away. The wind has roared through, the bough has wept in its rain, and the bird can either hold its squirming little body and ponder how to go on or let go and let itself be caught by the wind.

And what does the wise bird do? It trusts its wings.

Acceptance is not indifference. It is not shrugging one's shoulders in some passive way, nor is it a blind assumption. It is the active acceptance of reality-as-is in a manner that does not force it into what we want it to be.

To accept means to acknowledge that there is a place for pain, that loss is not always a tragedy, that uncertainty is not an enemy. It is to see that within chaos is an order—a rhythm carrying everything toward where it ought to be.

Think of the change of seasons. The trees do not resist autumn nor mourn when their leaves fall. They do not fight winter's stillness or attempt to hasten spring before its appointed time. They reside in total surrender to the rhythm of life, knowing that each season has its purpose.

Humans, however, resist every season of their own existence. We grieve the past, we fear the future, and we reject the present if it does not fit our expectations. But peace is the state of letting each moment simply be what it is instead of demanding it be something else.

To accept does not mean to be unambitious or to have no desires. Rather, it involves moving ahead with life free from resistance, pursuing things without attachment, and achieving things without desperation.

This is a fragile interplay between persevering and yielding, entreating and entrusting.

powerful, and still. Surrendering is not a one-time affair. It is a continued exercise; it is a conscious daily decision to give up one's right to define what life is. Such trust propels one forward: Even though there is uncertainty, at this moment, we are just where we need to be.

Here, There, Somewhere

By Somebody

Almost everyone around me thinks of *sarson ke khet*—fields of mustard—as something romantic, associated with Punjab or the movie *Dilwale Dulhania Le Jayenge.* But, I never can. I never understood the hype because, for me, it's normal. I live in a small town in Uttar Pradesh, where seeing fields—whether of mustard, or rice—is an everyday thing. I also feel a little strange, or perhaps indifferent, to the fact that my town is never represented anywhere. Even when small towns are shown in films, they always seem culturally significant in a way mine never is. We are just… common, or what one would call *'normal'*. Maybe because it's neither a rural place, nor an urban city.

At least, that's how it feels. We went to school, came back home, ate, went to tuition, had dinner, and slept. The adults' lives were slightly different, but they revolved around housework, the shop, or a job. Even having a job is a relatively new thing—most people are shopkeepers. My father has a job, but he doesn't live with us. And it's okay. My life—technically, everyone's life in my family—is what it is because of him. Without him, things could have been much, much worse.

I have always wanted to live in a big city like Delhi. Because my father worked there, my mother and I would visit for shopping before every occasion. It is better there. I am so angry that we can't move. I want to do so many things that I can't do here. I want to learn how to speak English fluently, go to malls regularly, and attend a school that is fancy and prestigious. I hate how everyone is so nosy where I live, always wanting to know everything, even when I do not want to talk to them. It's very annoying

***

So, I am finally in the big metropolitan city. Everyone tells me that this is way better. We live in a society now. I have my own personal room, my own study desk. I got admission into one of the top schools. But there is a pandemic, and I cannot go out. I hate it here. When I was in my hometown, I couldn't even stay in my room for more than two hours, and here I have to stay in a room 24/7. I do not know anyone here. I have the peace I always wanted, but sometimes I feel a bit alone. But, I think it's okay.

***

My mom is furious at me because I have now made a habit of not coming out of my room at all. I actually enjoy it. I do not get up from my bed most of the time. I have started eating a lot of fast food —thanks to the pocket money. All the tests and classes are online. I have made a lot of new friends online. It is going great, but my Mom and Dad have started calling me a *rent-free stranger.* But, it's okay because I do not hang out with them that much.

***

I don't know why I even put this college on my preference list. And now I am here—in a college I was not interested in and in a course I never wanted. But everyone else here is also very weird. It's like they are in a secret competition with you, which should not be the initial response people have—or should have—when they meet somebody. But, it's okay. I don't know the culture here. I'm going to go to a lot of places, and I will enjoy it on my own. It will be fun.

Also, I can speak English very fluently now, but when I speak, my parents look at me like they don't recognise me. They're still surprised that the child who grew up with them can speak this way. They didn't teach me like this. Even in college, whenever I tell someone I'm from a town in Uttar Pradesh, they're surprised. They think I'm from their city. And at first, I was proud of that. It felt like I had escaped—escaped being from a state that, to most people, represents all the backwardness in this country. Escaped being associated with the worst of my culture, traditions, and nation.

I feel better. I feel superior. I can also read so many books now. It is very easy for me, but I have never felt more distant yet so belonged at the same time. I do not speak with anybody. I don't have conversations anymore. I think I don't even care how people are. But I think everything will be okay soon.

***

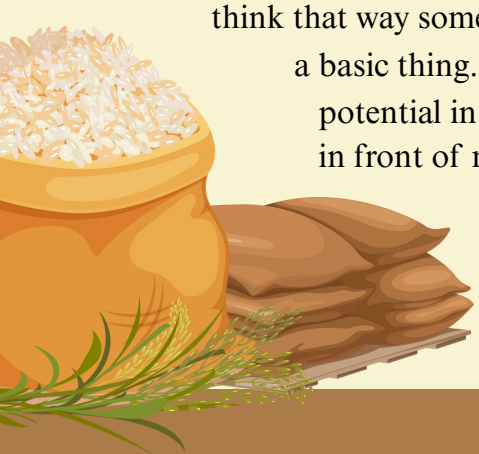
Everything is really overwhelming. I don't know what to do. I miss my hometown. The last time I did was the last time I went back. College had become overwhelming, and I just needed to breathe *good air.* People say small towns have a slower life, but I've never felt more on time, more alive, than when I was there. I don't know when that changed. I'd like to say it was because of my courses in college, but I can't pinpoint the exact moment when I stopped thinking that way. When I realised how stupid, egotistical, entitled, narcissistic I had been.

I don't miss myself from back then.

Coming back to the question—why do mustard fields always make people think of Punjab? I've seen them my whole life, and I never found them particularly special. Yes, the fields fascinated me, but not because they were mustard fields. It's like how people say Punjab and Bengal are the most romantic places, as Rabindranath Tagore once wrote. Maybe that's true. But, that doesn't mean romance doesn't happen anywhere else. I've seen it in front of my eyes—seen it in my parents' marriage, in the way my *Taiji*, my siblings, love me, in the small, selfless gestures of my family.

I just never cared to see it before. I think I did—at least before any of these changes—but sometimes I like to think that I still do. Or maybe I just thought it was mediocre, or that I was too great. I still think that way sometimes, but I don't dismiss other people because of it, which is, I would say, a basic thing. I do not think I ever considered somebody inferior. I can always see great potential in everybody. Or, maybe I am just coping, trying to make myself look better in front of myself.

Maybe it's because I am scared to belong.



Belonging means surrendering yourself as an individual, and if you do that, then who are you? The lines become blurry.

So I never belonged—not fully. Not to my family, not to my friends. I was always there - but never really....their. I would fight for them without hesitation, but I never let myself just be with them. I used to feel superior for speaking English, and now, I find myself unable to express anything deeply because a lot of things cannot be expressed in a language I did not grow up with. Talking in my native language makes me feel too vulnerable. And yet, with my friends, I only speak in English—so I can never fully share the things that can't be translated. Either way, I feel exposed.

It leaves me in this strange space.

And sometimes—actually, a lot of times—I miss my hometown. At least, the version that I grew up with.

Not the place, exactly—I still live there. But I miss Teej. I miss the way we used to put *mehendi* on our hands, wear new clothes, put on bangles, dress up, and play on *jhulas* [swings]. I remember how excited we used to be—a whole month before the festival, my siblings and I would put up a *jhula* in our house. Before school, after school, in the evenings, even at night, we would sit there and swing. Or how, when *moonji*—freshly harvested rice—came from the fields, we would gather and make castles from *katta*—bags—and play inside them.

But now… I hate the smell of *mehendi* and find the *moonji* castles to be too dirty. I don't know why. Even if I were given the chance to experience all of this again, I don't think it would feel the same. My town doesn't feel the same. It's not as green, not as alive as I remember. And I hate that.

Maybe that's why places like Punjab and Bengal are remembered in the way they are. Because their culture is preserved. Because things are still there—still celebrated, still seen.

But for me, the things I loved are slipping away, lost somewhere between my memory and now.

And here I am, writing this in English—because even though I have so much to say, there are words I still can't translate. But, it'll be okay.

The Perceptive Porridge

T. S. Lakshmi, BA Honours English, 3rd Year

In the rainy season, we would all huddle around in the veranda staring at the raindrops washing away the mud. Ammama would be in the kitchen busy rustling up *palada pradhaman* [wheat porridge]. Other households would make it on important days, but that rain was special. In the summer, when the first rain would fall, all us cousins would sit together talking, playing and munching on this toasty porridge. It marked the beginning of our holidays – a glorious two months of pampering and playtime.

As we were slurping our deliciously warm nectar, my uncle and aunt drove in from the station with their daughter – my cousin. My cousin was very pretty, with fair skin and a red rose pinned on her long straight hair. The second she spotted Ammama, she ran up to her and gave her a hug. Now, my Ammama was a small person, tiny you might say, but in my head, she was larger than life. Everything and everyone centred around her. Lavanya did not look like she was planning on letting go of my Ammama. She had just moved to Mumbai a few months ago and had come home for the holidays.

"Now, why don't you all go get settled. She and I will bring you some warm *pradhaman*." And she motioned for the girl to follow her to the kitchen.

I went along with them to pour myself another helping. Ammama called to Lavanya, "Kanna, how are you? How has Mumbai been? Do you want to tell me about it?"

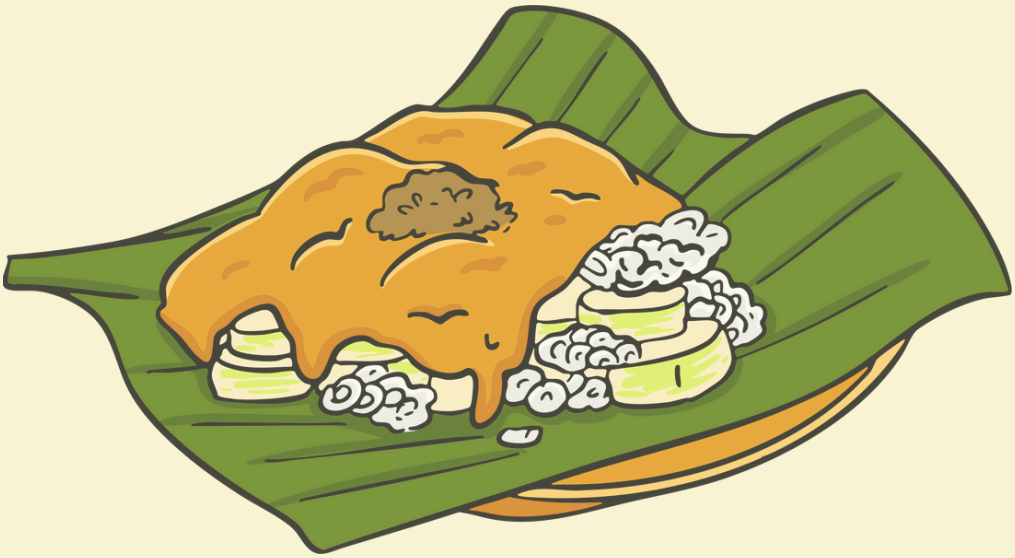
And that was when I saw that her face was wet. It was not wet with the drops of renewing rain, but with salty, corrosive tears that left black streaks of kajal in their wake.

"I hate it Ammama. I want to come back. I am not going back to school; I want to stay here with you. They don't speak my language or know of anything that I know. They are so different and strange, that you would think they came from a different continent." She ladled large scoops of porridge into the bowls. "Imagine standing in a room where everyone stares and stares at you, a new item to judge and comment on. And when you open your mouth to speak, they can't understand a word. I'm an alien to them. In fact, it is worse, now I am merely invisible to them. Even if I try to speak their language, to join their interests, I only say the wrong things. Or worse, they will correct you or teach you something that gets you in trouble." She laid the ladle down roughly and waves of creamy milk splashed across the sides of the pot.

Ammama poured the last of the *pradhaman* into a bowl. The dregs of wheat were warm and crunchy flecks of lip-smacking goodness. A part that she would usually save up for me. Today, she handed it to her and bade her to have some. "Now my child, drink it. Drink it up". And she smiled reassuringly at her. "Life is like the *pradhaman*. It seems sweet and smooth at first like the milk that floats on the

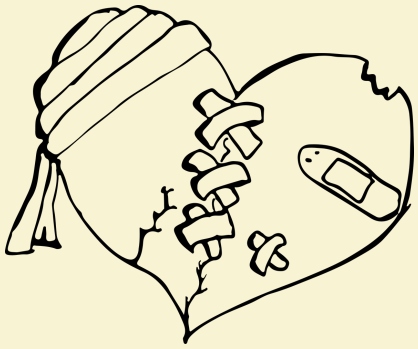
top. In between you will get small, tiny bits of wheat. But, they won't be hard but rather toasty an enjoyable to crunch. As you keep drinking you will reach the *ada* [pieces of wheat]. They will be bigger, tough and chewy. It will take you twice as long to swallow them and it will force your heart jaws to work twice as hard. But without those pieces you are merely drinking sweetened milk. It is the tough wheat that makes this drink different from the others, more exquisite and special than the rest. Life is like the *pradhaman*. It is the tough hard things that give it flavour, that make it unique. It might take you some time to learn the language to make friends, but in the end your life will be more flavourful, you will know and experience far more than those of us who are satisfied with our plain sugared milk."

Lavanya put down her bowl, smiled at Ammama and gave her a kiss on the cheek. "I'm going to play with the rest of them. Will you give some more *pradhaman* at night? I want my fill." And she ran out to play with me.



The House I No Longer Call Home

Pragya Sharma, BA Honours English, 2nd Year



I was texting Vinaya, lost in the usual rhythm of our conversations. And then, came a reply.

"*Hmm.*"

A simple word. Ordinary, unremarkable. Just a filler in conversation. But, the moment my eyes landed on it, something shifted. As if my mind was waiting for the smallest trigger to unravel the memories I had buried long ago.

Because *hmm* wasn't just a word for me.

It was a space between comfort and hesitation. A quiet way of saying, *I don't know how to put this into words, but something is wrong.* And back then, I never had to explain. The moment I typed *hmm*, his response would follow *"What happened? Tell me."* As if he could sense my unease through the screen. But now, there is just silence where familiarity used to be. And in that moment, I realised – words are not just words. They are echoes of people we used to be, of the homes we once had in others.

But before he became my second home– he was just a name. Nothing more, nothing less. A roll number in the attendance. In a class full of familiar voices, his was just another one blending into the background. But sometimes, the most significant people enter our lives quietly, without warning, without fanfare.

One ordinary afternoon, while flipping through the school magazine, my eyes landed on a drawing– nothing extravagant, just a simple sketch of a robot, surrounded by mathematical equations. Yet something about it mesmerised me. I assumed it had to be a girl's work. Weren't girls the ones known for their artistic expertise? But curiosity tugged at me, and I searched for the name of the creator.

And, there it was – Yashit.

The name that once meant nothing suddenly carried weight. Who was he? What kind of mind saw numbers and art as two sides of the same coin? I felt an unfamiliar pull, a desire to know him. And as if the universe had been listening, fate intervened. A few days later, I was added into a group chat, just a casual friends' group. And there he was, a silent member in the list of names. It felt like a sign. That was the moment I knew my life was going to change forever.

I tried initiating conversations in the group chat with him, hoping he'd respond, hoping he'd see me.

But more often than not, my messages were left ignored, lost between other people's conversations. Slowly, I convinced myself that maybe he wasn't someone I was meant to talk to.

But sometimes, things don't unfold the way you expect.

That night, it was just the two of us online in the group chat. A rare moment or maybe a coincidence. We started texting—just casual replies, but for the first time, I felt seen. Soon, found excuses to talk to him-inside jokes, doubts, anything that could lead to a one-on-one chat.
And when we talked, time slipped away. We related to so many things—how we had visited the same paediatrician as kids, how we both had memories tied to the same nearby markets, how school gossip intertwined our lives. And somewhere between those endless conversations, I realized—I was *falling*.

But his responses weren't the same. While I eagerly waited for his replies, while I reread his texts, he seemed… detached. He was most engaged when we talked about Kaisha—his crush. So, I let him. I brought her up often, asked about her, encouraged him to share. Because maybe, I thought, that's how people bonded—by letting them talk about what mattered to them.

Until one day, I grew tired of it.

"*She doesn't pay that much attention,*" I told him, half-hoping he would take the hint, that he would shift his focus elsewhere. He did-but not in the way I wanted. That night, he messaged someone else—Masum, the new girl in our class. And just like that, I was ignored. I watched him go online and offline, knowing those minutes weren't spent on me. It stung. More than I had expected it to. I went to sleep hoping that by morning he would ask if I was okay.

He didn't. And yet, I didn't stop.

I tried to make myself indispensable—helping him with personal problems, his academics, anything that would make him feel that I was *needed* in his life. I was a topper in school, naturally good at academics, and so, without him even asking, I began doing his part of assignments. I justified it to myself—*it's just a small effort, it's nothing.* But deep down, I knew I was trying to prove that I was worth his attention.

And then, one day, the words I had longed to hear finally appeared on my screen:

"*I love you.*"

I stared at the text, my heart racing. This was what I wanted, wasn't it? But something inside me hesitated. Love wasn't just a word. It was a responsibility. A commitment. And if I said yes, it wouldn't be for a fleeting moment—it would be for something lasting. So, after three days, I made my decision. Soon he started treating me the way I had wished to be treated for a long time.
My parents weren't blind. They sensed it—the frequent texting, the late nights. And, they didn't stay quiet. The taunts weren't subtle.

"*Leave all this, concentrate on your studies.*"

"*That guy is not right for you*"

Their words stung, but what hurt more were the looks—the silent disappointment in their eyes. And yet, I held on. I endured every taunt, every insult, every disapproving glance. Because I believed in him. In *us.* I believed that when it mattered, he would fight for me the way I was fighting for him.

One night, the weight of it all became unbearable.

The taunts. The pressure. The feeling of being torn between love and family, between duty and desire, between who I was and who they wanted me to be. I needed to feel something—anything—other than the ache hollowing me out. So, I picked up a blade.

Not once.

Not twice.

More than ten times.

Until the sting of it overpowered the pain in my heart.

The next day, he saw the scars. His eyes scanned my wrists, confusion flickering to concern. "*Vidya, yeh kya hai?*"I couldn't tell him the truth. I couldn't say, *I did this because I'm tired of the taunts, because loving you feels like a battle I'm constantly losing.* So, I lied.

"*Board Exam stress,*" I muttered, forcing a small smile. He didn't push. He just nodded, accepting my answer. And maybe that hurt even more—how he didn't see past the lie, didn't sense the storm inside me. Maybe if he had pushed me to open up, I would have. But he didn't.

And with time, I stopped using pain as an escape. Instead, I made a choice—a choice to leave behind anything that made my parents doubt me. I chose a girls' college, a place where they would believe that I had finally changed. He, on the other hand, took a drop year for NEET. And I was ready to support him.

I would sleep early so that he could study without any distractions or guilt. I limited our meetings. From seeing each other daily, we started meeting just once in a month or two. And I convinced myself that this was love too— having the patience to wait. The quiet sacrifices made in the background. I stood by him throughout that year. I checked on him, made sure he wasn't overwhelmed, and motivated him.

And when the final day came—the day of his NEET exam—I poured my heart into a message. A long, heartfelt text reminding him that he was capable, that he had worked hard, that no matter what happened, he was enough. I wanted him to walk into that exam hall believing in himself.

But sometimes, no matter how much effort you put into something, the results don't go your way.

His dream remained a dream. He couldn't clear the cut-off to get into a medical college. The disappointment was heavy, but he chose engineering as a backup. And I still stayed and supported him. Because love is about standing beside someone in their failures too.

A month into his engineering life, I started noticing the shifts. Subtle at first – a slight delay in replies, a growing distance in conversations. The detailed messages he once sent were gone—now, he didn't even tell me his whereabouts. And yet, I kept quiet. I blamed it on my overthinking.

Maybe he's just adjusting to college life.
Maybe he's busy.

So, I waited. I waited for him to come online. I waited for merely even five minutes of his time—just a few words, a sign that I still mattered. But the distance only grew.

Until one day, he said it.

"*I'm losing feelings. I think we should break up.*"

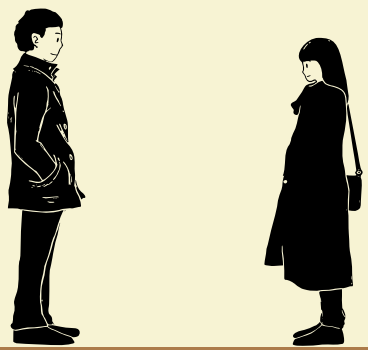
That moment something inside me had shattered—scattered into a thousand pieces I couldn't even gather, let alone put back together. In the days after, there was this unbearable weight in my chest, like my ribs were caging a pain too big to hold. I cried until my body gave out—until my eyes swelled so much, I could barely open them, until my head throbbed like it was punishing me for existing.

But, sleep was never mercy. Sleep was war.

I would wake up gasping, my body jerking awake from nightmares that felt more real than reality. His voice—cold, detached, reminding me that I was nothing. That I had been erased. And sometimes, I saw him with someone else, and even in my sleep, the betrayal burned like acid in my veins.

For five months, I lived in that pain. It wasn't just sadness—it was a never-ending spiral I couldn't crawl out of. Every day, I cried until I was heaving for air like I had forgotten how to breathe. I would dig my nails into my skin, pinch myself until bruises bloomed—punishing myself for being so naive, so blind and for believing in him for three years.

I lied to my family. "*Screens hurt my eyes*", I told them when they asked about the redness, the puffiness. But they didn't know I had spent half an hour pressed against a wall sobbing hard. I would stare at the ceiling, whisper prayers into the dark, begging for a sign, for a way out. *God, save me from this. Please, just make it stop.* But, the room stayed silent. The pain stayed.



Some nights, in my dreams, I saw my younger self—small, untouched by heartbreak, still believing in love. I reached for her, pulled her close, and sobbed into her tiny shoulder, whispering apologies for what I had become. *I'm sorry. I don't know how to protect you anymore.*

I withdrew from everything. I stopped talking to my closest college friends – Jeenal and Vinaya, let my grades drop, let my attendance drop until I was barely present at all. Society interviews came and went, and I let them. I didn't show up. I didn't try. I didn't care. I erased him from my life—or at least, I tried. I stopped going to the places we used to go. Stopped listening to the songs because even melody felt too alive for someone who felt this dead inside. I threw every gift-every reminder of him. But nothing worked. His absence was everywhere.

And then, one day, I could no longer hold it all in. The weight of it—the grief, the anger, the unbearable pressure of carrying it alone—became too much. Crying, shaking, I held that old blade in my hand, familiar and cold, and I put a cut.

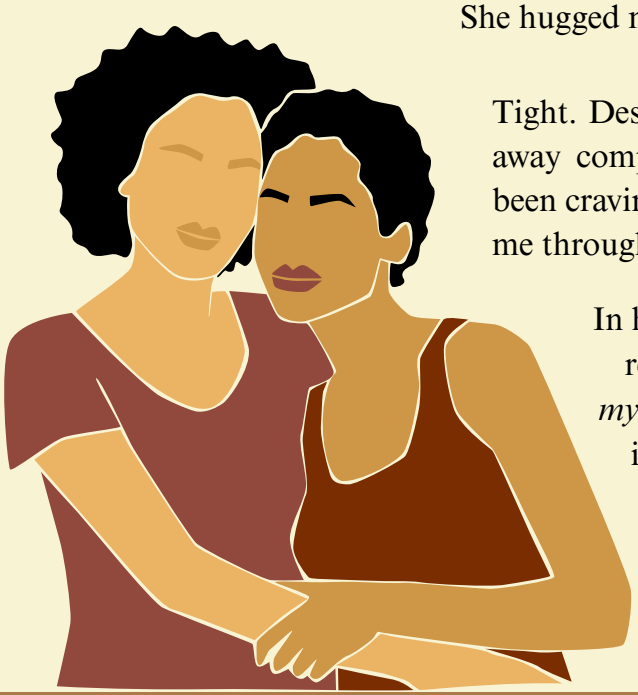
Just one.

I walked out of the bathroom, my body trembling, my mind numb. And then I saw her—my mother. She had seen me like this before, swollen eyes, a face drained of light. But this time, she didn't look away.

And, that was the moment I broke completely.

I told her everything. The way he left. How I was terrified—not just of losing him, but of *losing to him.* Of him moving forward, while I stayed stuck in this endless cycle of pain. How my future looked like an empty, black void, while his—after shattering me—seemed bright, peaceful, untouched by the wreckage he left behind.

My hands wouldn't stop shaking. I showed her the scar I had carved just now, bracing myself for the scolding, for the anger. But she didn't yell.



She hugged me.

Tight. Desperate. As if she was afraid that if she let go, I would slip away completely. And that hug—that moment—that was all I had been craving for so long. Not words. Not advice. Just someone to hold me through it. And finally, God heard me.

In her eyes, I saw something I had been too blinded by pain to realise—*if I died, there would be no repentance from him. But my family… they would blame themselves forever.* I saw the fear in her eyes, the love, the helplessness of not knowing what I had been carrying this alone for so long. And that day, I made a promise. A promise to never hurt myself.

A promise to choose *me.*

I used to think that belonging meant being someone's first choice—the one they texted first, the one they couldn't go a day without. But now, I talk to myself more than I talk to others, and maybe that's a good thing. I study alone, I plan my days, set goals, and reward myself.

My friends are still there, but I don't rely on them the way I used to. I talk to my family more—because somewhere along the way, they became my safest place. I no longer wear my best clothes or put on makeup just to be seen by someone else—I do it for myself, for the way it makes me feel. I take care of myself because I refuse to abandon myself the way I was once abandoned.

Even the things I love have changed—my favorite movie isn't Stree anymore, because I don't find comfort in love and drama the way I used to. Now, it's Bhaag Milkha Bhaag, because running forward, even when you're tired, even when everything hurts, is the only way I know how to survive.

And somewhere in this journey a line from a song stayed with me: "*Sichhega kaun, hum jo murjhaye? "Thaamega kaun, hum jo girjaye?"* And the answer was painfully clear—no one. If I fell, I had to be the one to stand again. If I withered, I had to be the one to bloom again. So I will rise, even with shaking legs. I will move forward, even with a heavy heart.

Some days, the past still lingers like an ache in my chest, but I no longer mistake that ache for love. I no longer hold space for people who walked away. All this time, I searched for a home in someone else. I begged for belonging in places that never truly held me. But, now…

I have found it within me.

This time no one can take it away.

2.

The Poet's Quill

I DON'T KNOW

Meenal Gupta, BA Honours English, 2nd Year

I don't know when it happened.
Was it as soon as I was born?
Had my first cry, took my first breath?
Was it when I was 14, and my body noticed a shift?
Or was it when I was 18, when I was ready to change the "ownership"?

When was it when I became an object?
To be scrutinised?
To check its symmetry,
To check its weight,
Its beauty,
Its worth.

When was it when I became an object of desire?
When was it when I became someone,
Who "asked" for it, just because I wore what I want?
Who just by existing,
Became someone's object to relieve their frustration?

When was it when they get to know,
I am more emotional than rational?
More sensitive than strong?
Someone irrational and fragile.
I don't know when did it even happen.

Before I knew,
I was a canvas to be painted on by others,
A painting hung on wall,
Displayed to be appreciated by everyone.
I was a song with no lyrics of its own,
I was a cook who couldn't feed herself alone.

Is it really because...I am a girl?
Does that mean I was an object before
I knew who I was?
I was an attraction,
Before I can even walk?

When did I become a thing to own?
“A sister”
“A daughter”
“A mother”
“A wife”
Someone with various identities-
But none my own.An object that can only be worthy
Only if it’s “owned”.
.
.
.
Maybe that is why
I don't know when it happened
Because
I was never my own.

IN A QUEST FOR SELF

Malavika Prasanth, BA Programme, 3rd Year

"Am I not normal?" I asked myself.
Each day, every night, I would ask myself.
My pillows were wet every night,
Because this feeling of being 'different' ripped my heart.
I was never comfortable with your remarks about my body,
Nor with the titles you bestowed upon me.
I never felt like myself,
I never liked being in this position,
But the thought of being abandoned haunted me;
Because it was a sin to be like this.
And for you –
I was a sinner.
I was on a quest –
to seek my true self,
And when I found myself,
You made me believe that I was a miscreant.
You said, someone like me – is forbidden for heaven!
But ,I was already in hell, wasn't I?

THE ELEPHANT IS NOT INSIDE THE COCONUT

Suchi Singh, BA Programme, 3rd year

I was not green, black, or brown,
But of course, I was painted.
A stroke of red, a brush of blue,
A sign to say, I have been rescued.

They tap, they shake, they listen close,
hold me up against the light.
They whisper chants into my skin—
But the cut always bleeds.

A priest once murmured secret spells,
A doctor named me odd but fine.
A wizard from a faraway land—
Prophesied my shameful cure.

Some swore I had tusks,
Others cracked me just to see inside.
Some called me useless, some a curse,
Some swore I was never meant to be.

They sliced, and burned, and bled me dry,
Hiding me with scorn in their eyes.
They poured out smoke and fed me fire,
And prayed I'd be like them in another life.

But, I am not what they expect.
No milk to drink, no shell to break.
No secret beast, no waiting cure,
No Other, hidden by mistake.

The elephant is not inside the coconut.
It never was. It never will be.

WHERE THE EARTH REMEMBERS ME

Minna Ann Jacob, BA Honours English, 3rd Year

Where's my home? they asked.
For a moment, I was at a loss—
Trying to remember what I once cherished.

My home…
It feels like a long-lost friend.
Familiar, and yet, something is missing.

In the rising smoke,
And the city's endless noise,
I lost the anchor that had once held me still.
The blanket that kept me warm

Gone are the days when I woke up to
The sweet cacophony of Mynas
And the calls of silvery-cheeked Hornbills.

I miss the first kiss of monsoon rain.
Where earth cradles dreams in green whisper,
Where lightning paints wild images across the sky–
Images no artist can ever capture

My home is where the earth
Remembers me.
Where the wind whispers
The stories of my childhood.
Where the birds humm
My grandma's lullaby.

3.

The Scholar's Shelf

ELA Students Seminar: Best Paper Award

THE THEME OF THIS YEAR'S SEMINAR WAS ECOLORE: NATURE, NARRATIVES, AND MYTHOLOGY

FROM SILENT SPRINGS TO LOUD RESISTANCE: THE ECOFEMINIST LEGACY OF RACHEL CARSON

Authors: Prachi Prabhakar (Author), BA Honours English, Lakshmibai College & Durgpal Singh (Co-Author), MA Sociology, IGNOU

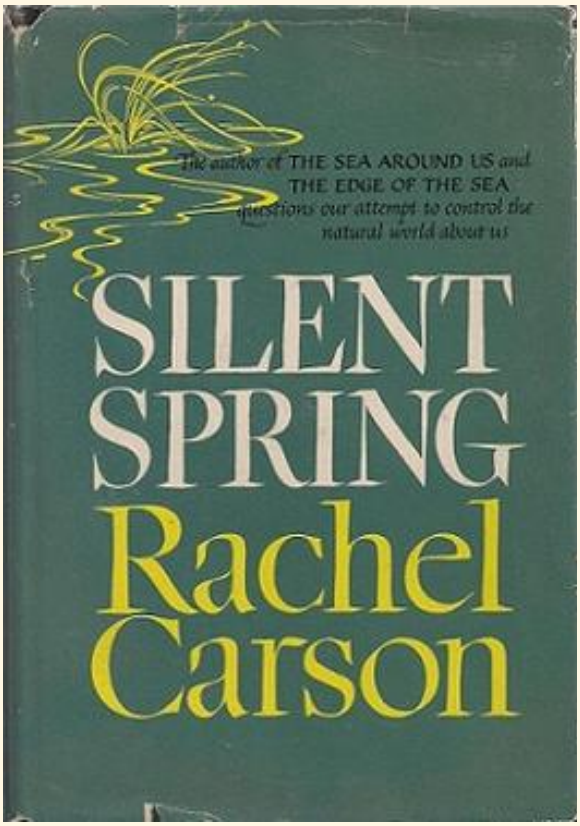
Abstract

Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962) stands as a seminal text in environmental literature, catalysing the modern environmental movement and laying the groundwork for ecofeminist thought. This paper explores Carson's work as a powerful critique of the patriarchal, industrial exploitation of nature, highlighting her alignment with key ecofeminist concerns—the interconnectedness of life, the ethics of care, and resistance to systems of domination. Carson's depiction of the chemical industry's reckless assault on ecosystems reflects what ecofeminist scholar Carolyn Merchant describes as the "death of nature," wherein the environment is treated as a passive resource to be controlled and commodified.

Carson's narrative is imbued with an ethic of care, emphasising humanity's moral responsibility toward the earth: "The 'control of nature' is a phrase conceived in arrogance, born of the Neanderthal age of biology." Her lyrical prose and accessible scientific explanations challenged the male-dominated scientific community, empowering ordinary citizens-particularly women-to advocate for ecological justice. The paper also addresses how Carson's work intersects with environmental justice, illustrating how pesticide use disproportionately harmed vulnerable, rural communities. In this sense, Carson anticipated later environmental justice movements, which, as Robert Bullard argues, recognise that "environmental threats are not randomly distributed."

Despite facing fierce backlash, Carson's legacy endures, inspiring generations of environmental activists and shaping public policy. By framing *Silent Spring* as a foundational ecofeminist and environmental justice text, this paper argues that Carson's insights remain vital in contemporary discussions of climate change, biodiversity loss, and corporate accountability. As Carson wrote, "In nature, nothing exists alone"-reminder that the struggle for environmental justice is inherently a struggle for collective survival and the preservation of life's delicate web.

Keywords: Ecofeminism, Environmental Justice, Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*, Patriarchy and Nature, Pesticides and Public Health



The first edition cover of Silent Spring.

Rachel Carson, American conservationist, marine biologist and author of Silent Spring.

Introduction

In the opening pages of *Silent Spring*, Rachel Carson presents an unsettling vision of a world where nature has fallen silent:

> There was once a town in the heart of America where all life seemed to live in harmony with its surroundings. But then a strange blight crept over the area... No enemy action had silenced the rebirth of new life in this stricken world. The people had done it themselves. (1)

This is not a passage from dystopian fiction but a reflection of the devastating consequences of unchecked human interference with the environment. Carson's work is not merely a scientific exposé on pesticides; it is a prophetic warning about the fragility of ecological balance and the dire consequences of industrial recklessness. Through a fusion of scientific inquiry, poetic lament, and moral urgency, *Silent Spring* dismantles the myth of technological progress as inherently beneficial and reveals the deep ecological crisis brought about by human arrogance.

At the time of its publication in 1962, Carson was an outsider in the male-dominated world of science and policy, a reality that shaped both her work and the reception it received. Despite her meticulous research, her findings were met with fierce resistance from chemical corporations and government agencies, which sought to discredit her.

She was dismissed as "hysterical" and "unscientific," reflecting a long history of silencing women's knowledge and marginalising female voices in science (Merchant 5).

Yet, Carson's work ultimately catalysed one of the most significant environmental awakenings of the 20th century, leading to the ban on DDT, the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the rise of the modern environmental movement.

Beyond its immediate impact on pesticide regulation, *Silent Spring* resonates deeply with two major critical frameworks: ecofeminism and environmental justice. Ecofeminism, as articulated by thinkers like Carolyn Merchant and Vandana Shiva, critiques the mechanistic, patriarchal view of nature as an inert resource to be controlled. Carson's writing actively resists this worldview, advocating instead for an ethic of care—a perspective that acknowledges the interconnectedness of all living systems and the responsibility of humanity to nurture rather than dominate the natural world (297).

At the same time, her book anticipates the concerns of environmental justice, a movement that highlights how industrial pollution disproportionately harms marginalised and low-income communities (Bullard 23). Carson's meticulous documentation of pesticide contamination reveals how chemical corporations, driven by profit, prioritise industry over public health, often at the expense of those with the least political power.

More than six decades after its publication, *Silent Spring* remains a radical and urgent work, challenging the dominant narratives of technological supremacy and unregulated industrial expansion. Through its poetic warnings and scientific rigour, Carson's work continues to shape environmental consciousness, urging society to reconsider its relationship with the natural world before it is too late.

The Environmental Movement of the 1960s

The mid-20th century was marked by the rapid industrialisation of agriculture and an increasing reliance on synthetic chemicals. Following World War II, the development of synthetic pesticides, particularly DDT, was celebrated as a scientific breakthrough. Initially used to combat malaria and typhus among soldiers, DDT was repurposed for agricultural use, promoted as a technological marvel capable of ensuring higher crop yields and eradicating insect-borne diseases. However, this unchecked chemical expansion came at a cost. Carson documented how pesticides were indiscriminately spread across fields, forests, and water bodies, accumulating in the food chain with unforeseen consequences for both human health and biodiversity (23).

Much of this chemical dependency was fuelled by the military-industrial complex, which sought to apply wartime scientific innovations to peacetime industries. The repurposing of chemical warfare agents for agricultural control blurred the lines between military science and environmental policy. Carson exposed this ideology, warning that the same mindset used to wage war on enemies was now being applied to the natural world—with disastrous effects (42). The chemical industry, backed by government agencies and corporate interests, aggressively promoted pesticides despite growing evidence of ecological harm. In many ways, *Silent Spring* was a direct challenge to government and corporate complicity in environmental

degradation, highlighting how regulatory bodies often prioritised economic growth over public and ecological health.

Carson's Position as a Woman Scientist

Carson's work was revolutionary not only for its content but also for who she was—a woman in a male-dominated scientific establishment. The scientific community of the 1960s valued cold, detached objectivity, yet Carson's writing was lyrical, accessible, and emotionally charged, making complex ecological concepts understandable to the public (Carson, p. 67). Her insistence on blending scientific precision with poetic expression challenged the rigid boundaries of scientific discourse.

Unsurprisingly, she faced fierce gendered attacks. Critics dismissed her as "hysterical" and "unscientific," mirroring a long history of silencing women's knowledge. This response echoed historical patterns of witch hunts, where women who challenged dominant knowledge systems were labelled irrational or dangerous. Silvia Federici, in *Caliban and the Witch*, describes how patriarchal power has historically demonised women who wield scientific, medical, or environmental knowledge, branding them as threats to social order (Federici 119). Carson's struggle exemplifies this pattern—her work threatened male-dominated industries and scientific authority, and as a result, she was ridiculed and undermined.

Ecofeminism and Environmental Justice

The critical frameworks of ecofeminism and environmental justice provide a deeper understanding of *Silent Spring*'s impact. Ecofeminism, articulated by scholars like Carolyn Merchant and Vandana Shiva, critiques the androcentric worldview that treats both women and nature as passive, exploitable resources. Merchant argues in *The Death of Nature* that the Scientific Revolution mechanised our view of the natural world, reducing it to a machine to be controlled rather than a living system to be respected (Merchant 43). Carson's work pushes against this mechanistic view, emphasising interconnectedness, fragility, and the need for care-based environmental ethics (Carson 297).

At the same time, *Silent Spring* aligns with environmental justice, a movement that emerged in the 1980s but whose principles were embedded in Carson's critique. Robert Bullard's work in *Dumping in Dixie* reveals how pollution and industrial waste disproportionately affect low-income and rural communities, a reality Carson had already highlighted decades earlier (Bullard 23). She exposed how the chemical industry's disregard for environmental safety led to the contamination of waterways, soil, and food sources—affecting not just wildlife but also the most vulnerable human populations (Carson 120).

Silent Spring as a Proto-Ecofeminist and Environmental Justice Text

By blending scientific research, moral urgency, and poetic lament, *Silent Spring* does more than expose the dangers of pesticides—it critiques the broader systems of patriarchal science and corporate environmental racism. Carson challenges the masculine, militarised approach to nature, arguing that dominance leads to destruction, not progress. She also gives voice to communities affected by environmental harm, making her work a forerunner to both ecofeminist resistance and environmental justice activism.

Ecofeminist Themes in *Silent Spring*

1. The Rhetoric of Care vs. The Rhetoric of Domination

Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* presents a stark contrast between two competing ways of understanding the natural world: one rooted in care, interconnectedness, and respect, and the other shaped by control, conquest, and exploitation. Carson's prose resists the technocratic, militaristic language used by the chemical industry, which frequently describes pesticides as weapons in a battle against nature. Terms like "pest control" and "war against nature" frame the environment as a hostile force to be subdued rather than a living system to be nurtured (85).

In contrast, Carson's language embraces an ethic of care. She writes, "In nature, nothing exists alone" (51), emphasising the interconnectedness of all living things. Her descriptions of ecosystems highlight cooperation rather than domination, urging humanity to recognise its dependence on nature rather than assuming mastery over it. This rhetorical approach aligns with Hélène Cixous' concept of "écriture féminine", a form of writing that disrupts patriarchal, hierarchical discourse by prioritising intuition, fluidity, and relational thinking (879). Carson's lyrical, evocative style challenges the rigid, detached objectivity expected in scientific discourse, making her work not only scientifically rigorous but also deeply personal and emotionally compelling. By embracing narrative, emotion, and poetic imagery, Carson's writing resists the dominant male scientific discourse that often priorities control over coexistence. In doing so, she reclaims ecological knowledge as something that requires emotional and ethical engagement, positioning herself within a feminist tradition of resistance against patriarchal knowledge production.

2. The "Control of Nature" as a Patriarchal Ideology

A central critique in *Silent Spring* is the androcentric obsession with mastering nature, a mindset that Carson directly challenges. She warns against the arrogance of human intervention, stating:

> The 'control of nature' is a phrase conceived in arrogance, born of the Neanderthal age of biology and philosophy, when it was supposed that nature exists for the convenience of man (Carson 297)

This critique aligns closely with Carolyn Merchant's argument in *The Death of Nature*. Merchant describes how the Scientific Revolution transformed nature from a living, organic entity into a machine—one that could be studied, manipulated, and ultimately controlled for economic and industrial purposes (Merchant 43). Carson's workdirectly

challenges this mechanistic worldview, instead advocating for an approach that values restraint, humility, and respect.

Throughout *Silent Spring*, Carson exposes how the chemical industry's reckless use of pesticides reflects a deep-seated patriarchal ideology that views the earth as a resource to be exploited. The belief that science and technology can "fix" natural imbalances—without considering long-term consequences—mirrors androcentric patterns of domination that have historically justified the control of both women's bodies and the environment. Just as feminist scholars critique patriarchal systems for controlling female reproduction, labour, and autonomy, Carson critiques the industrial system that controls, poisons, and depletes ecosystems for profit.

By questioning the notion of unquestioned scientific progress, Carson introduces a feminist critique of industrial capitalism, exposing how both women and the natural world suffer under systems that prioritise control over coexistence.

3. *Silent Spring* as an Ecological Mourning Text

Beyond being a scientific exposé, *Silent Spring* is also a grief narrative, mourning the destruction of nature much like elegiac literature mourns the loss of loved ones. Carson's descriptions of dying landscapes and silenced wildlife evoke themes of death, absence, and irreversible loss:

> No birds sang. (2)

This stark image, which Carson repeats throughout the text, mirrors the language of mourning found in poetry and literature, positioning *Silent Spring* as an ecological elegy. Her descriptions of withered vegetation, poisoned rivers, and absent birdsong parallel human bereavement:

> The roadsides, once so attractive, were now lined with browned and withered vegetation. (Carson. 49)

This mourning is not just for individual species but for entire ecosystems, making her work resonate with contemporary discussions on planetary grief, maternal loss, and eco-anxiety. Astrida Neimanis' theory of "weathering" describes how humans, particularly women, experience ecological grief as a deeply embodied, gendered experience, especially as environmental degradation disproportionately impacts marginalised communities (122).

Carson's mourning of nature also reflects a maternal sense of loss, as she often anthropomorphises the earth as something vulnerable and in need of protection. In this way, *Silent Spring* serves as both a lament for the planet and a call to collective ecological responsibility, urging humanity to change its destructive course before it is too late.

4. The Silencing of Nature and Women

One of the most powerful metaphors in *Silent Spring* is the concept of silence—a

symbol that operates on multiple levels. The silence of birds represents ecological devastation, but it also mirrors the silencing of marginalised voices, particularly women and indigenous communities whose ecological knowledge has historically been dismissed.

5. The Silencing of Women Scientists and Activists:

- Carson herself experienced professional silencing, as chemical companies and male scientists dismissed her research, calling her "overly emotional" and "irrational" (184)
- This parallels historical patterns where women in science and medicine were excluded, erased, or demonised—similar to the persecution of midwives, herbalists, and women healers during the witch hunts (Federici 119).

6. The Silencing of Indigenous and Rural Communities:

- *Silent Spring* highlights how rural farmers, indigenous peoples, and working-class communities suffered the most from pesticide contamination, yet their voices were ignored in scientific and policy discussions (Carson 167).
- This reflects broader patterns of environmental injustice, where corporations and governments make decisions that disproportionately harm marginalised populations, while excluding them from the conversation (Bullard 45).

7. The Silencing of Ecosystems Poisoned by Pesticides:

- Carson presents nature itself as a silenced entity, robbed of its ability to function and regenerate.
- The absence of birdsong, the stillness of poisoned rivers, and the eerie quiet of dying forests symbolise the long-term, irreversible consequences of human intervention (Carson 206).

By linking the silencing of women, indigenous communities, and nature itself, Carson reveals how systems of oppression—whether patriarchal, colonial, or capitalist—function by erasing alternative ways of knowing, being, and coexisting with the environment.

Environmental Justice and Corporate Accountability

1. Disproportionate Impact on Marginalised Communities

The environmental consequences of pesticide use as documented in *Silent Spring* did not affect all communities equally. Carson reveals how rural, working-class, and indigenous populations bore the brunt of environmental contamination, despite having the least power to resist it. Pesticides infiltrated water supplies, poisoned farmland, and sickened entire communities—while the industries responsible faced little accountability (Carson 127).

This pattern aligns with what environmental justice scholar Robert Bullard describes in *Dumping in Dixie*: "Environmental threats are not randomly distributed. They follow the paths of least resistance, disproportionately burdening poor and marginalised communities" (23).

Carson's research exposed this reality decades before the environmental justice movement formally emerged. She documented how chemical companies prioritised profit over human health, recklessly promoting pesticides despite knowing their harmful effects. Low-income farmers, agricultural labourers, and indigenous groups—those who were most dependent on the land—were also the most vulnerable to corporate negligence and government inaction (Carson 176).

One particularly striking example from *Silent Spring* is her description of a farm where DDT poisoning resulted in mass bird deaths and human illness.

Yet, despite clear evidence of harm, regulatory agencies failed to intervene, revealing a systemic failure to protect those with less political power (Carson 182). These injustices foreshadow later cases of environmental racism, where pollution disproportionately affects Black, Indigenous, and low-income communities, from toxic waste dumping in predominantly Black neighbourhoods to indigenous land being exploited for resource extraction.

2. Corporate Power and Scientific Manipulation

Carson's work directly confronted the chemical industry's aggressive misinformation campaigns, which sought to discredit her research and protect their profits. The chemical companies responsible for mass pesticide production launched personal and professional attacks, branding Carson as hysterical and unqualified, despite her meticulous scientific research (184). These tactics mirror modern corporate strategies to undermine climate activists and environmental science.

A clear contemporary parallel is the fossil fuel industry's suppression of climate science. Just as Carson faced corporate-funded attacks, today's climate scientists and activists face disinformation campaigns designed to delay environmental regulations. ExxonMobil, for example, spent decades funding climate denial propaganda, even as internal research confirmed the link between fossil fuels and global warming (Oreskes and Conway 101). Similarly, Monsanto's legal battles over pesticides and GMOs reflect the same profit-driven suppression of scientific truth that Carson exposed. Monsanto, now owned by Bayer, has been repeatedly sued for misleading the public about the

dangers of glyphosate-based herbicides like Roundup. Internal documents revealed that the company manipulated scientific research, pressured regulatory agencies, and attacked journalists and activists—tactics strikingly similar to those used against Carson (Gillam 67).

Carson's battle with the chemical industry was an early warning about the dangers of corporate influence over science and policy. Her work shows how industries prioritise short-term profits over long-term environmental and public health concerns, a pattern that continues to shape climate policy, pollution regulations, and agricultural practices today.

3. Citizen Science and Public Advocacy

One of Carson's most revolutionary contributions was her ability to democratise scientific knowledge, making it accessible to ordinary citizens. *Silent Spring* was not just a book—it was a call to action. By writing in clear, evocative language rather than academic jargon, Carson empowered non-scientists to understand and challenge corporate and government decisions that affected their health and environment (Carson 221).

This accessibility fuelled grassroots activism; inspiring movements that held corporations accountable for environmental harm. The principles Carson outlined laid the foundation for later environmental justice movements, including:

- Erin Brockovich's activism against Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E), which knowingly contaminated drinking water in Hinkley, California, leading to widespread health crises. Like Carson, Brockovich used scientific evidence to challenge corporate negligence and demand justice for affected communities.
- *The Love Canal Disaster* (1970s), in which a working-class neighbourhood in New York discovered they were living on top of toxic chemical waste. The community's mobilisation led to the creation of the Superfund program, which forces corporations to clean up hazardous waste sites.
- Indigenous land defenders, such as those protesting the Dakota Access Pipeline, whose struggle against environmental degradation echoes Carson's warnings about corporate overreach and the destruction of natural resources.

Carson's work continues to inspire citizen science movements, where non-experts participate in environmental monitoring and advocacy. From community-led water testing initiatives to climate justice campaigns, the idea that ordinary people can challenge corporate power remains one of *Silent Spring's* most enduring legacies.

Carson's Legacy and Contemporary Relevance

1. Policy Changes Inspired by Carson

The publication of *Silent Spring* in 1962 sparked a profound shift in environmental policy, leading to some of the most significant regulatory measures of the 20th century. Carson's revelations about the dangers of DDT and other synthetic pesticides mobilised public outrage and forced policymakers to confront the consequences of

unchecked industrial pollution. In 1972, a decade after *Silent Spring* was published, the United States banned DDT, marking one of the first major victories for the environmental movement (Carson 297).

Beyond pesticide regulation, Carson's work played a pivotal role in the creation of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 1970. The EPA was established to regulate pollutants, enforce environmental laws, and ensure corporate accountability—principles that Carson strongly advocated for in her book (223). Her work also influenced the passage of laws such as the Clean Air Act (1970) and the Clean Water Act (1972), both of which sought to curb industrial pollution and protect ecosystems from chemical contamination.

These policies were a direct response to the public awakening Carson initiated, proving the power of scientific knowledge when paired with grassroots activism.

However, despite these regulatory successes, many of Carson's concerns remain pressing. The rollback of environmental protections in recent years and the continued influence of corporate lobbying highlight the fragility of these victories. Carson's work underscores the need for continued vigilance and activism to prevent environmental backsliding.

2. Influence on Modern Ecofeminism and Environmental Justice

Carson's legacy extends beyond policy changes; she also deeply influenced ecofeminist thought and environmental justice movements. Scholars like Vandana Shiva have built upon Carson's critiques, arguing that corporate agriculture and industrial capitalism

function as patriarchal systems that exploit both nature and women's labour. Shiva's work, particularly in *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development*, echoes Carson's concerns by exposing how agribusiness prioritises profit over ecological sustainability, leading to monocultures, soil depletion, and loss of biodiversity (Shiva 78).

Carson's legacy is also evident in the climate justice movement, particularly in the activism of Greta Thunberg and indigenous land defenders. Thunberg, much like Carson, has faced gendered criticism and corporate pushback for her outspokenness on environmental destruction.

Similarly, indigenous movements worldwide—such as the resistance to the Dakota Access Pipeline—embody the principles Carson championed, advocating for respect for the land and the protection of vulnerable communities from industrial harm (Carson 210). By framing environmental destruction as both a scientific issue and a moral crisis, Carson laid the foundation for intersectional activism, where environmentalism is linked to social justice, feminism, and anti-colonial resistance.

3. Why Carson's Warnings Still Matter Today

While *Silent Spring* was primarily focused on the dangers of pesticides, its warnings extend far beyond chemical contamination—it serves as a critique of industrial hubris, corporate greed, and the reckless pursuit of technological progress at the expense of nature. These concerns remain alarmingly relevant in the face of climate change, biodiversity loss, and corporate greenwashing.

The rapid acceleration of climate change, driven by deforestation, fossil fuel dependence, and industrial agriculture, reflects the very same patterns Carson identified: short-term profit taking precedence over ecological balance. Just as the chemical industry dismissed Carson's warnings about pesticides, modern corporations downplay or deny the catastrophic impacts of greenhouse gas emissions (183).

Biodiversity loss is another crisis that Carson foreshadowed. The mass extinction of species due to habitat destruction, pollution, and climate shifts mirrors the ecological devastation she described when pesticides wiped out entire bird populations (Carson 112).

Scientists today warn that we are living through the Sixth Mass Extinction, a crisis largely driven by human activity.

Furthermore, corporate greenwashing—the practice of misleading the public into believing a company is environmentally friendly—echoes the tactics of the chemical industry Carson fought against. From oil companies rebranding themselves as champions of sustainability to agribusinesses promoting genetically modified crops as "climate-smart," the exploitation of environmental rhetoric for profit remains a pressing issue (Carson 201).

As climate change intensifies, the question arises: Are we heading toward another "silent spring"—one caused not by pesticides but by rising temperatures, deforestation, and ocean acidification? Carson's work challenges contemporary society to listen to the science, resist corporate misinformation, and act before irreversible damage occurs.

CITATIONS

- Bullard, Robert D. *Dumping in Dixie: Race, Class, and Environmental Quality.* Westview Press, 2000.
- Carson, Rachel. *Silent Spring.* Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1962.
- Cixous, Hélène. "The Laugh of the Medusa." *Signs*, vol. 1, no. 4, 1976, pp. 875-893.
- Durani, Sahar. "Ecofeminism: Bridging Gender and Environmental Justice." *Equality*, 27 Dec. 2023, https://academiaworldnews.com/ecofeminism-bridging gender-and-environmental-justice/ .
- Federici, Silvia. *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation.* Autonomedia, 2004.
- Gillam, Carey. *The Monsanto Papers: Deadly Secrets, Corporate Corruption, and One Man's Search for Justice.* Island Press, 2021.
- Greenberg. "Environmental Racism: The Disproportionate Impact of Pollution on Marginalized Communities." *Greenberg News,* 4 May 2023, https://greenberg.news/environmental-racism-the-disproportionate-impact-of pollution-on-marginalized-communities/ .
- Merchant, Carolyn. *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology, and the Scientific Revolution.* Harper & Row, 1980.
- Neimanis, Astrida. *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology.* Bloomsbury Academic, 2017.
- Oliveira Sánchez, Laura. "What is Ecofeminism? Uniting Gender Equality and Environmental Justice Worldwide." *Ecofeminism Today*, 16 June 2023, https://senenderezo.com/2023/06/16/what-is-ecofeminism/ .
- Oreskes, Naomi, and Erik M. Conway. *Merchants of Doubt: How a Handful of Scientists Obscured the Truth on Issues from Tobacco Smoke to Global Warming.* Bloomsbury Press, 2010.
- Shiva, Vandana. *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Development.* Zed Books, 1988.
- Vijayaraj, Bhuvaneswari. "A Comprehensive Study of Ecofeminism." *The Anthropologist,* 2017, https://english-studies.net/a-comprehensive-study-of ecofeminism-by-bhuvaneswari-vijayaraj-summary-and-critique/

Winning Papers for Intercollegiate Research Paper Writing Competition

Best Paper: Why belongingness is the key to alienation in Nabokov's *Lolita*

Author: Priyanka, Lady Shri Ram College, 1st Year

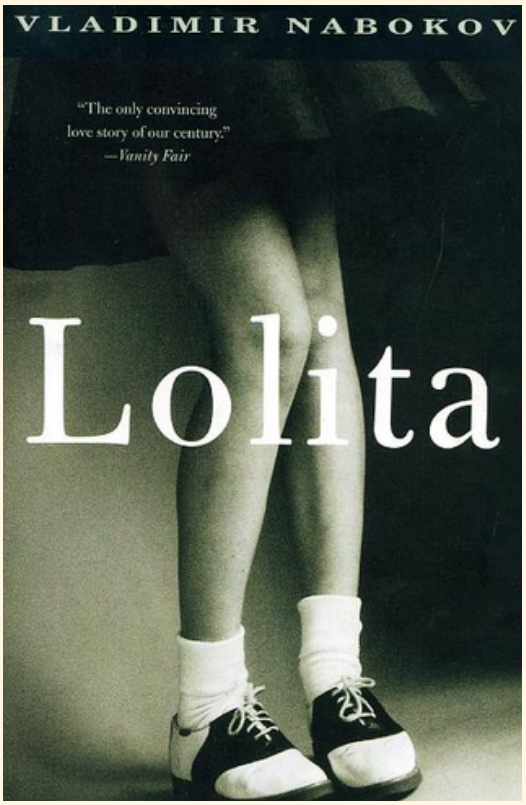
Abstract

The paper aims to unmask the literary layers of Nabokov's *Lolita* from the perspective of alienation and belongingness to present a critical commentary. The paper argues that *Lolita*'s essence thrives on traumatic alienation and hence forms the foundation for the plot of the novel, how belongingness, if not felt by an individual, only reinforces alienation. It also argues that not only the prey, Lolita but also the predator and the narrator, Humbert Humbert also showcases various forms of alienation through his worldview. Lastly, it argues about the alienation of Lolita's voice in the novel and the movie adaptations and why *Lolita* cannot be expressed in a film. The analysis is interdisciplinary and connects psychological phenomena to the book.

Keywords - Pedophilia, Abuse, Alienation, Hebephilia, Projection, Taboo

Introduction

One of the most sickening of literary masterpieces, *Lolita* is a deceptive 'love story' that gently manipulates the reader. It explores the theme of hebephilia, perversion, sexual abuse and grooming. A psychoanalytic perusal of the book would be sufficient to understand the depth of crimes committed by the protagonist of the novel by engaging in cruel acts both psychological and physiological in nature.In wholeness, *Lolita* is a cunningly written depravity.



Penguin Random House Cover, 1997

What readers are often surprised to find while reading *Lolita* is that not only do they hate Lolita for being a 'seductive temptress' but also that they sympathise with Humbert's agony of an unrequited 'love'. So is the book about a child seducing an adult man? Or, is it about love blooming in the darkest and nastiest of deserts despite the occasional snakes and scorpions? The term Lolita, which is also the Spanish diminutive of Dolores Haze, refers to "a precociously seductive girl" ("Lolita").

Nabokov's prose style widely contradicts the dark matter of the book. It is presented as a lover's account of his forbidden and unconventional love story that cannot be understood by the narrow minds of the society. A taboo relationship. Humbert manipulates the reader to alienate the truth and hide it under layers of dark poetry. Martin Amis argues that Humbert's prose style resembles a "sweat-drenched finery" or a "brute of forty". The body of a muscular brute, oiled up might correctly describe the prose in *Lolita*. It is a roller coaster of emotions that doesn't give the reader rest and soon they are riding on a new high like a "recreational drug" (Amis 1). A paragraph from the book, when Humbert encounters Lolita for the first time, illustrates the prose style employed by Nabokov:

> ...Without the least warning, a blue sea-wave swelled under my heart and, from a mat in a pool of sun, half-naked, kneeling, turning about on her knees, there was my Riviera love peering at me over dark glasses.
> It was the same child — the same frail, honey-hued shoulders, the same silky supple bare back, the same chestnut head of hair. A polka-dotted black kerchief tied around her chest hid from my aging ape eyes, but not from the gaze of young memory, the juvenile breasts I had fondled one immortal day. And, as if I were the fairy-tale nurse of some little princess (lost, kidnaped, discovered in gypsy rags through which her nakedness smiled at the king and his hounds), I recognized the tiny dark-brown mole on her side. With awe and delight (the king crying for joy, the trumpets blaring, the nurse drunk) I saw again her lovely indrawn abdomen where my southbound mouth had briefly paused;and those puerile hips on which I had kissed the crenulated imprint left by the band of her shorts — that last mad immortal day behind the "Roches Roses." The twenty-five years I had lived since then, tapered to a palpitating point, and vanished. (25)

Psychological Alienation in *Lolita*

> The wayward child, the egotistic mother and the panting maniac… (Nabokov 4)

Belongingness is a contextual term which changes meaning based on the domain of knowledge. In *Lolita*, the sense of belonging takes a narrow, ugly and hideous meaning like a black worm being cut in half. How the desire to belong can perpetuate alienation is disappointing. In *Lolita*, Dolores Haze is obdurate, headstrong and sometimes wayward in her interactions especially with her mother Charlotte Haze, who is not an ideal parental figure in Dolores life. Humbert often calls her a "monkey". We are looking at a child who is unaware of trust, safety and a healthy environment and also lacks any sort of parental protection as her mother sees her as a competition for male attention. In this chaos, enters Humbert Humbert, a handsome adult man, Lolita can look up to as the father figure she never had before. It's natural for a child to seek affection and a place to belong even in the most bizarre ways and this is what Humbert uses to his advantage to manipulate the initial kiss and reflect Lolita as the temptress who seduces him.

The first embrace initiated by Lolita becomes the ounce of honey that Humbert jumps on to evade the burden of responsibility on him as an adult. Lolita gets upset when she hears that Humbert agrees to send her to summer camp and becomes delighted when he comes to pick her up from the camp. This indicates a desire to have a figure that cares about her world and feelings. The way Lolita expresses this is impacted by her environment. She has a strained relationship with her mother. An aversion to her own sex leads her to seek affection and care in the opposite sex. She is also used to competing with her mother for male attention and sees pleasing

the other sex as the only way to win them over. So the only way Lolita knows to gain that affection is by physical intimacy, which is also impacted by other factors like her company at the summer camp. In actuality, Lolita is driven by the desire to please and expect affection and is unaware of her situation and actions and their consequences.

It is interesting to note that alienation in Lolita not only engulfs the prey but also the predator. While Lolita is conditioned by her upbringing and environment to perceive the world from a certain lens. Humbert Humbert is also evading the reality of conventions, questioning and manipulating accounts and histories to obscure the truth. His pedophilia becomes the cause of his alienation from the society and anything close to a real human connection. Humbert is exclusively a pedophile, which means, sexually mature women often disgust him or simply bore him. From the onset of the novel, Humbert foreshadows himself as a tragic lover and his love story as a tragedy. Yes, it is a tragedy but for whom? To support this claim, Humbert states many historical accounts like Dante and Beatrice and even the Indian tribe Lepcha, where an eighty-year old man could marry an eight-year old girl according to Humbert, moulding some of them to suit his narrative. Nabokov presents Humbert as an unreliable narrator and amazing manipulator. He is mixing lies along with the truth which makes us doubt whether these inconsistencies also pervade the rest of the narrative. Even the pseudonym Humbert Humbert sounds as unserious as Humpty-Dumpty, breaking away from the sophisticated facade. Humbert lives in his delusions alienated from reality, living like an outsider. He often questions his desires and morality of his actions but always ends up smoothing the ridges to distance himself from the guilt and his rotting morals, like putting colorless gloss over black glass. Humbert's road trips with Lolita are another way to escape the reality and the true depth of his crimes, something he refuses to acknowledge until the end of the novel.

Humbert's alienation is not only social but it also has moral and temporal dimensions too. Humbert refuses to acknowledge his cruel and malicious deeds and deems himself a flawed hero while simultaneously treating Lolita like a pet. Humbert is a hebephile (attracted to only girls of age 11-14) and calls fourteen-year old Lolita his "aging mistress". He paints Lolita as a vulgar girl to externally voice his insecurities by shifting the blame to her, which is psychologically known as Projection. Another portrayal of his projection is murdering Claire Quilty. Quilty is also a pedophile just like Humbert, metaphorically his brother. Humbert murders Quilty to seemingly take revenge for Lolita but what Humbert actually sought was to find a foil in Quilty to project his guilt and portray himself as the 'better man'.

Humbert completes the memoir just before his death. Even in his recollections, we see him often comparing his actions and reality to something parallel or visibly similar on the surface, reflecting his unstable mental state and his obsession with justification of cruel deeds. Humbert uses Edgar Allan Poe's poem 'Annabel-Lee' (1849) to justify his obsession with prepubescent girls, asking the reader to sympathise with him. Poe married his cousin, Virginia when she thirteen and he was twenty-seven, something Humbert forces us to ponder about, drawing to the fact that pedophilia isn't something unique to him and had been explicitly practiced even by great and renowned artists. Humbert uses this example to romanticise the abuse he inflicts on Lolita.

The Alienation of *Lolita*

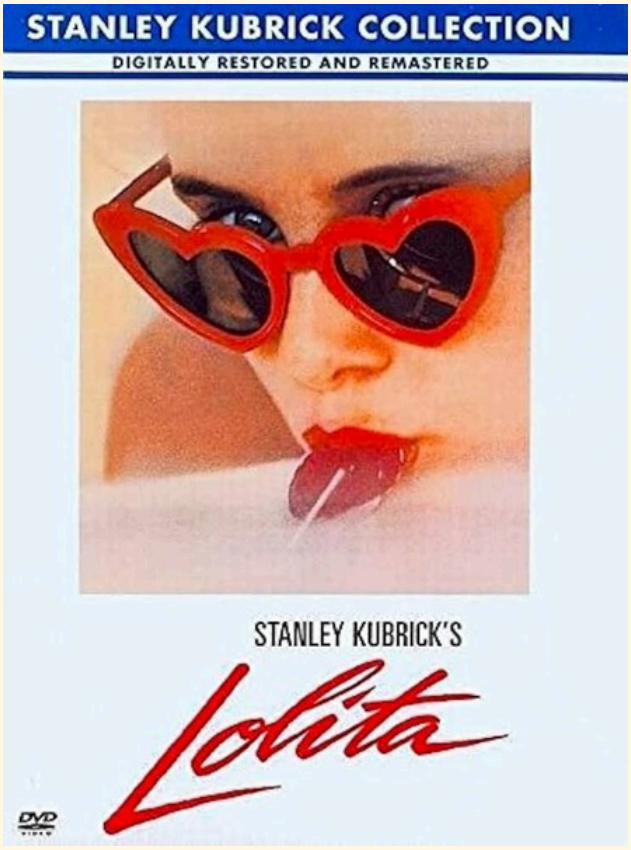
While Lolita is the title of the novel and name of the protagonist, the whole two hundred thirteen pages in the book doesn't give voice to Lolita or a single thought from her perspective. From the eyes of Humbert, we get to know her but it's a sexualised and indifferent view, devoid of sympathy or even clear judgement. Humbert writes a memoir from his perspective with all the floweriness and finery of poetry, starting the memoir with Lolita's name but the novel isn't about Lolita. It's a confessional memoir of his obsession with girl children. Lolita's perspective is a latent reality like the other side of a coin. There are little snippets from other characters in the novel and rarely from Lolita, that tell us about her inner world or her perspective on her relationship with Humbert Humbert. This dialogue demonstrates her take on the relationship-

> what was the name of that hotel, you know [nose puckered], come on, you know — with those white columns and the marble swan in the lobby? Oh, you know [noisy exhalation of breath] — the hotel where you raped me (Nabokov 133)

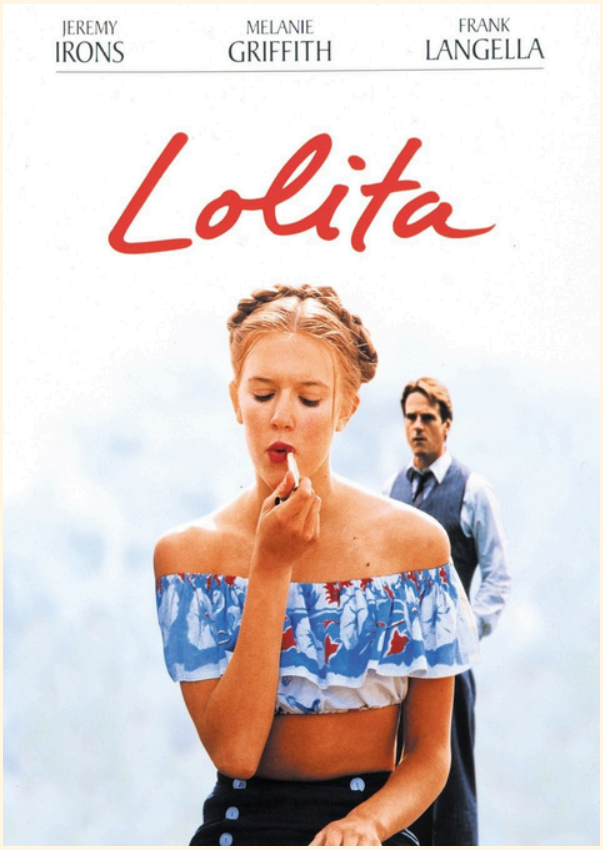
The subtle actions highlighted by Nabokov in square brackets intend to indicate the lack of vulnerability portrayed by Lolita but from Humbert's perspective, he intends to minimise the impact of Lolita's words and highlight her tone. Lolita's tone here is downplaying the abuse inflicted on her but it could also be Humbert who is unable to see her pain and completely changes the tone to hide it from the audience as well. Humbert is writing the memoir while he is in jail and dies before he ever faces a real jury. He often refers to the reader as the 'member of the jury'. There is expectantly co-existence of two entities here, the jury and the reader, so whatever Humbert writes, he is writing it from a defensive place in the ego, over-explaining his actions, blurring the lines of rational and fabricated domains . So whatever Lolita tells us gets obscured by Humbert's delusions.

Lolita in Movie Adaptations— Distanced From Reality

Lolita has two movie adaptations, however the opinion, that both of these adaptations fail to reflect the depth and the sexual subtleties in *Lolita*, is hailed by the mass audience. Even the movie adaptations are unable to reflect the deep, rhetorical intricacies of the text. Though the (1962) adaptation, directed by Kubrick, is considered more apt, it is still categorised as romance/crime on rotten mangoes and described as black-comedy and psychological drama. The later adaptation is categorised as romance/ drama, and the movie reviews describe Lolita as an unconventional romantic tale. The weak cinematography shadows the actual concept of the movie, alienating the audience from Lolita. She has a completely different reality which does not surface in any of these two movies. In the book, Lolita is twelve when Humbert sees her for the first time but the Lolita in the 1997 adaptation, played by Dominique Swain, is shown as much more physically mature, obscuring the truth and the true extent of the horrors in *Lolita*. In fact, the 1997 adaptation displays Lolita in teenager outfits with a defiant personality, which has now been turned into a fashion icon and morphed into a certain way of dressing and social culture. In contrast, the Lolita in the book is a twelve year old who picks her nose and pulls her wedgies, like other children.



Stanley Kubrick's adaptation of Lolita, 1962



Adrian Lyne's adaptation of Lolita, 1997

Maybe *Lolita* cannot be expressed in a movie. The rhetorical manipulation is difficult to discern on paper and is only reflected due to the inconsistencies in the narratives. The subtle inconsistencies are difficult to surface on the cinema screen and the weak faith that the educated and aware audience can interpret the movie for what it is, is already doomed. In the process of depicting the dark matter of *Lolita* in its truest form, one is set to direct a movie that will get prohibited at the very first screening. The ugly fantasies, the occasional cruel ignorance, the delusional maniac and the helpless child will set the stage for an unbearable tragic transgression. The movie that depicts Lolita in the 'right' manner will need to depict the toxicity, maliciousness, child abuse and the pedophilic mindset; these are things that the post-modern audience isn't ready to see on the screen yet.

Conclusion

Lolita is a rhetorical text and deals with cruelty and child abuse covered under aesthetics. The desire to belong is an inherent human need, which drives the narrative in Nabokov's *Lolita*. Understanding this is important to understand Lolita, whom we only get to know from Humbert's perverse lens. The world crafted by Humbert reveals more about Humbert's delusions and convictions, reflecting the self-imposed moral, social and temporal alienation. Lolita's voice gets lost in the narrative, the modern audience has morphed her into a fashion icon, a culture and a trend. The movie adaptations fail to reflect the extreme depths of her character and curtails Humbert's actions.

CITATIONS

- Amis, Martin. “Martin Amis on *Lolita*.” *Vladimir Nabokov Centennial*, 17 Apr. 2006, www.randomhouse.com/features/nobokov/amis.html
- “Idiopathic and Acquired Pedophilia.” *National Library of Medicine*, 28 Jan. 2021, https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8500885. Accessed 1 Mar. 2025.
- “Lolita.” *Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/Lolita. Accessed 3 Aug. 2025.
- Nabokov, Vladimir. *Lolita.* Penguin Classics, 2006.
- Tamir-Ghez, Nomi. “The Art of Persuasion in Nabokov’s *Lolita*.” *Poetics Today*, vol. 1, no. 1/2, 1979, pp. 65–83. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/1772041. Accessed 3 Aug. 2025.

SPECIAL MENTION: RECLAIMING ROOTS THROUGH LANGUAGE: RHYTHMIC RESISTANCE IN "THE ADIVASI WILL NOT DANCE" AND "TOBA TEK SINGH"

Author: Ritvik Srivastava, O.P Jindal Global University, 2nd Year

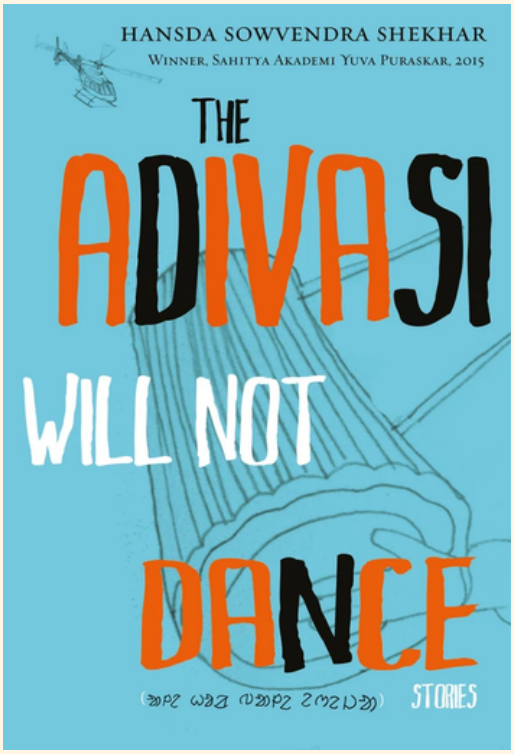
"अभी कुछ और भी दिल हैं, के जिनको बांटने का, काटने का काम जारी है-
वो बंटवारा तो पहला था अभी कुछ और बटवारे - बाकी हैं!" -GULZAR

There are some more – left still
Who are being divided, made into pieces –
There are some more Partitions to be done
That Partition was only the first one. (Translated by Anisur Rahman)

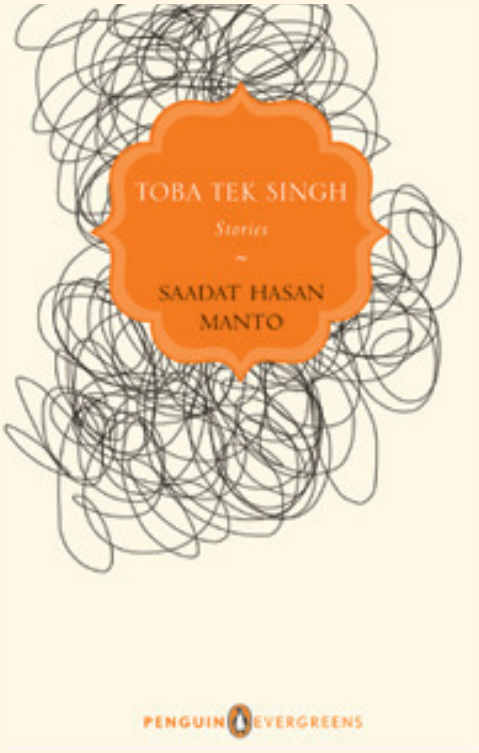
Gulzar's evocative poetic lines about making sense of the true 'batwaara' not only, move away from the obvious interpretation of geographical divisions but rather emphasise upon the internal rifts within various aspects of human identity and their languages of expression. This essay fleshes out this idea with two tales that rhythmically remake identities. However, the rhythm of language is not always bound by pertinent phrases or syntaxial statements, but rather can often be in the forms of the Adivasis' refusal to dance or Toba Tek Singh's incoherent mutterings.

Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar's text, *The Adivasi Will Not Dance*, centres on the life of Mangal Murmu, a musician and a dancer from the Adivasi community, specifically of the Santhal region.

This tale of remaking identity goes around the realisation that hits Mangal while he is eagerly anticipating his performance at a government event to welcome a visiting dignitary. The defiance to dance stems from him realising that the very act of dancing endorses the system that exploits and oppresses people like him. The 'batwaara' of pride and survival forms the plinth of the story. On the other side of the spectrum, is the tale of *Toba Tek Singh* by Saadat Hasan Manto which is set against the backdrop of partition. It speaks of the 'batwaara' of not only nations but also of the 'lunatic' inmates of a mental asylum in Pakistan. This text revolves around one such 'lunatic'



The Adivasi Will Not Dance by Hansda Sowvendra Shekhar



Toba Tek Singh by Saadat Hasan Manto

named Bishan Singh, whose incoherent mutterings coupled with his confusion regarding his homeland, Toba Tek Singh, act as the basis for his remaking of identity. His idiolect acts as a metaphor for the idiocy and chaos of the process of partition. The 'batwaara' of piecing these 'lunatics' as insane and the rest as sane forms the basis of this story. However, what stays common between the two are their attempts at the reclamation of identities in the form of Mangal's refusal to dance and Bishan's decision to not conform to the norms of language. The choices made however, may not always be conventional—it sometimes chooses the opinion grounds over dancing grounds and sometimes chooses to stay still between barbed wires as a sign of protest.

The epigraph is an apt representation of the thoughts and questions that lingered in the minds of the people who bore the brunt of partition. The partition although, was aimed at drawing distinct borders between the two nations, it instead blurs the borders between a man's identity and his expression and poses questions about the same. The 'baatna-kaatna' of the 'dil' is a satirical take on the division of people with their identities and cultures. It highlights the absurdity of the dehumanisation of dividing heart and soul like that of dividing nations and landmasses.

The poetic lines emphasise upon how partition was only the beginning of the 'batwaara' that was to be unfolded. As, unlike the Adivasis' refusal to dance, the mode of expression of Bishan Singh from the story *Toba Tek Singh* was more direct and explicit. Upon being asked about his opinions about partition, he would recite his incoherent mutterings and say, "Upar di gur gur di annex di be dhyana di mung di daal of the Pakistan Government" (3). The meaning of this might have been unclear, however, the emotions of the man were depicted perfectly in his gibberish.

The absurdity of the utterances though, was reduced significantly due to the 'lunacy' of the man but the metaphor however, lies in the unclarity of his words which reflect the chaos of his mind. His bilingual way of phrasing his catchphrase, signifies his unalignment with either of the power blocks of partition. His ambiguous gibberish becomes a strong statement of his rejection of hybridity, of being divided between the borders of binary identities of India and Pakistan and emphasises on the need for individuality whilst longing for a home shows the 'batwaara' in the truest sense. His broken syntax acts as a metaphor for the cracks made on the identity of countless folks during the process of partition—cracks which never would be healed again. The tale of Toba Tek Singh comments on the socio-cultural landscape of the partition period in an extensive manner with a combination of explicit and implicit references scattered all across. The lack of decipherable undertones in the incoherent mutterings explicitly exhibits the difficulties faced by the citizens of both nations while coping with the forceful remaking of their identities. The puzzling politics around the land, function as an implicit explanation to the puzzling utterances of Bishan Singh and the fragmented nature of these mutterings, much like the politics echoed the disconnect. On the other hand, the disruption of the rhythm of language and its rules highlights the very irony of how mere words are not enough to convey the gravitas of the brutalities of partition.

The voice, although longed seeing the ones he belonged to—his family, his friends and especially his own land, Toba Tek Singh. The said, "voice of his heart," (4) too was torn apart in the said 'dil ka batwaara' which Gulzar talks about. The dehumanised 'dil' may have seen a glimmer of something truly humane in the form of his voice of heart. Unlike his identity, the decision to stay in Pakistan or to move to Hindustan was not for him to form. The longing for belonging(ness) persisted within Bishan as he asked for the final time "Where is Toba Tek Singh? In Pakistan, or in Hindustan," (6) The words once roared with individuality became mere whispers of something forgone. His last words "Upar di gur gur di annex di be dhyana di mung di daal of Toba Tek Singh and Pakistan," (6) acted as the penultimate attempt towards his resistance to conforming with norms that of language, of borders and of identity. And there he lied, as his concluding act, blurred between the barbed borders, misunderstood, unheard and still longing for a sense of belonging.

But as Gulzar further stated, "Abhi Kuch aur Batwaare Baaki Hai" one such 'batwaara' is from the universe of valour, of hardships and of sheer perseverance displayed by the Adivasi Community in the second tale, *The Adivasi Will Not Dance*. Much like Bishan Singh's incoherent mutterings which refused to be confined by the norms of syntax and phrases, the Adivasi community too use a novel concept for their rhythmic expression. The narrator, Mangal Murmu, describes himself in these words, "I am a musician. No wait…I am a farmer. Or… Was a farmer" (2). The otherwise strongly opinionated Adivasi was not certain about something as rudimentary as his own identity. In contrast, what he was quite certain of was his art. Mangal says "We Santhals can sing and dance, and we are good at our art. Yet, what has our art given us? Displacement, Tuberculosis" (6). The dilemma is evident in the inconsistency between the lack of reciprocated recognition received from the art and the efforts put towards it.

The argument, however, was not the reciprocation. The oppressed were there, discontentment was there, the language to express it was there but why the dance of Adivasis? Was there no other way of expression? It is not like the Adivasis did not try. The instances where Mangal describes their attempts to be heard is scattered across the story, be it the writing of letters to the government executives in "Ranchi-Dilli," (9) or the fight by Adivasis from all walks of life. The attempts were there, but so was the reciprocation but it was not in the form of recognition craved by the unheard like Mangal, but rather in the form of aggravated oppression. He recounts, "The district administration fought back. The agitators were all beaten up and thrown into police lockups" (8).

Although, the oppressed were there, discontentment was there, even the language to express it was there but why art? The very art which typecast the Adivasis as mere dancers and singers was their only mode of free expression. The art was their language. Mangal's words, "What does a hungry man need? Food. What does a poor man need? Money. So here, I was, needing both" are a testimony to the fact that their rhythmic expression was not only a choice they made but rather was a larger attempt of sustenance. The assumption taken is that the language is supposed to remake the identity and that the rhythmic expression of dance and music was their very language. But then why does Mangal refuse the only mode of their expression for that single day? Well, the very refusal to dance is testimony to the remaking of the identity of countless Adivasis. From being timid and oppressed without any opinion grounds to now having strong views and the courage to walk off the dancing grounds, they reshaped the age-old identity curated for them to blindly follow.

Mangal's unexpected speech which displayed the transition from standing helpless on the dancing ground to now having an opinion ground is a testament to the remaking of his identity, his dignity, and his confrontation with the harsh consequences. The consequential quarrel, which unfolded post his speech not only broke the plastic flowers in the attire of Adivasi artisans, but also broke the conventional connotations attached to them. The rip in the sarees with the "green panchhi" (11), or green birds not only signified the will to fight back but also as a metaphor for the liberation from the tyranny they were subjected to.

From the rhythm and music of the dance of Adivasis to the absence of pertinent phrases, or syntaxial statements in Toba Tek Singh's incoherent mutterings, the language has played a pivotal role in the remaking of the identity of both the protagonists. The 'batwaara' that Gulzar talks about, however, lingers even in the rhythmic expressions of the contemporary world. The bridge between the two tales forms by the breaking of boxy shackles and blurring the bold borders of norms while also reiterating its everlasting continuity and never-ending nature of struggle as Gulzar stated.

CITATIONS

- "Magnum Opus – Toba Tek Singh." *Urduwallahs,* 2 May 2012, urduwallahs.wordpress.com/2012/05/02/magnum-opus-toba-tek-singh/.
- Accessed 6 Nov. 2024.
- Manto, Saadat Hasan. *Toba Tek Singh*. Translated by Frances W. Pritchett, Penguin, 2005.
- Shekhar, Hansda Sowvendra. "The Adivasi Will Not Dance." *The Adivasi Will Not Dance: Stories*, Speaking Tiger, 2015, pp. 169–187.

4.

Recommendation Room

Trapped or transformed? The Fight for Identity

MUSKAN. BA HONOURS ENGLISH 1ST YEAR

Alienation and Belongingness are two popular themes in literature, but there stands an inherent contradiction between the two words. “Alienation” refers to a sense of being isolated from society. It is where solitude transforms into loneliness. “Belongingness” on the other hand, refers to the feeling of being accepted, included, or connected to a group, or place. The desire to belong is a human instinct, yet the ways in which we seek are deeply personal. Some people find acceptance in friendship and family, while others find it within themselves. Both themes are used by artists and writers to describe the human condition, societal issues, and personal struggles. Sometimes alienation and belongingness relate to personal relationships or experiences, and other times they are rooted in society. . . The meaning is subjective, and the reader, or viewer are invited to comprehend their own meaning and add to their understanding of these themes. Dear Readers, what follows is a list of recommendations inviting you to engage with various artistic explorations of alienation and belongingness.

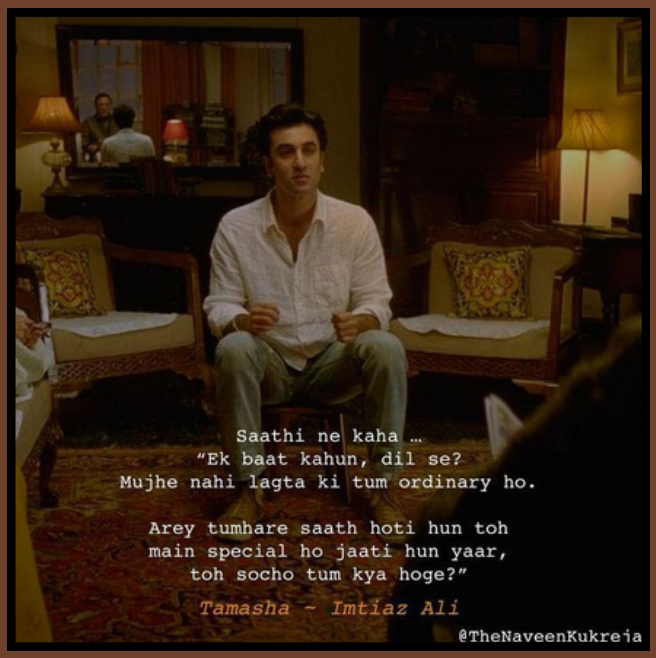
ALIENATION IN THE ARTS

1. Franz Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis* (1915)

One of the most well-known explorations of alienation is Franz Kafka’s *The Metamorphosis*. The novella tells the story of Gregor Samsa, who wakes up one day to find himself transformed into a giant insect. This transformation serves as a metaphor for Gregor’s disconnection from his family and society. His family, initially shocked, grows increasingly hostile toward him, symbolising the alienation felt when one is no longer able to fulfil the expected roles within a family. Kafka’s portrayal of alienation highlights the way in which modern society can strip individuals of their humanity and disconnect them from their social roles.

2. Imtiaz Ali's *Tamasha* (2015)

One of the most underrated yet amazing films, *Tamasha*, starring Ranbir Kapoor and Deepika Padukone talks about society's double standards and offers a remarkable portrayal of alienation. The film draws attention to how in order to fit into a society which truly does not belong to us, we allow ourselves to get lost. In *Tamasha*, alienation is shown through Ved's struggle to fit into society's expectations while losing his true self. The most powerful scene unfolds when he breaks down at work, first speaking in a robotic way, then suddenly laughing and crying as he realises how lost he feels. He no longer recognises the person he has become because he is trapped in a life that doesn't make him happy. This film portrays how societal pressure can make us feel lost and disconnected from our inner self. This is one of my favourite films, not just because of its perfect cinematography, but because, as we move forward in life, there comes a point when we all become Ved. We finally understand that society is like a spider's web, but somehow, we need to break free from it and emerge even stronger.



Tamasha shows how feeling lost isn't about being alone.
It's about not being understood until someone finally does

3. Aamir Khan's *Taare Zameen Par* (2007)

Among the many films that explore alienation and belongingness, *Taare Zameen Par* holds a special place in my heart. The story of Ishaan, a dyslexic child struggling in a rigid educational system, deeply moved me.

His alienation is not just social but also emotional, as he fails to express his struggles to his family and teachers. As someone who values creativity and understands the pressures of academic excellence, Ishaan's journey felt personal.

In a world that judged his struggles,
Ishaan found belonging in someone who finally saw his brilliance

4. Robert Frost's *Acquainted with the Night* (1928)

Robert Frost's poem "Acquainted with the Night" shows feelings of loneliness and isolation. The speaker walks alone at night, avoiding people and feeling alienated from the world. The clock in the sky suggests uncertainty, making him feel adrift. The poem starts and ends the same way, showing that his loneliness never ends.

5. Vincent Van Gogh's *Starry Night* (1889)

Painted during the time when he was in a mental asylum, Van Gogh's painting uses the sky and the village tells us about his emotional turmoil and yearning for deep connection.

He used strong blues and glowing yellows to create emotion and contrast. If we compare both the major colors, blue reflects Van Gogh's sadness, silence, and depth, while yellow brings in warmth, light, and hope. Together, they form a powerful emotional contrast, showing how pain and beauty can exist side by side. The painting shows how he felt inside, full of emotions, hopes, and loneliness. The sky looks wild and alive, while the village below is calm and quiet. This shows how far he felt from the world around him.

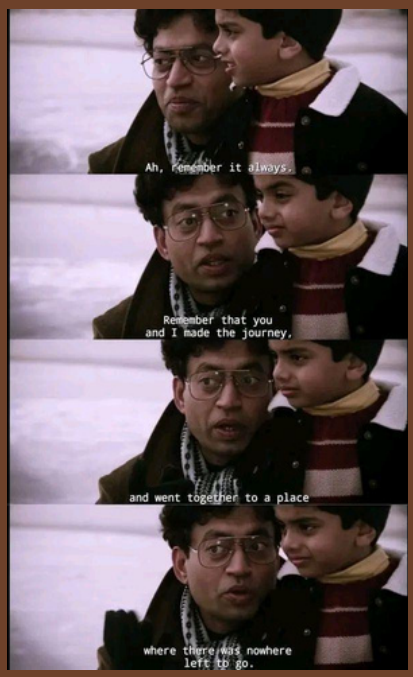
His thick brushstrokes and swirling lines make the sky seem like it's moving. Through this painting, Van Gogh shared his feelings without words, turning pain into something beautiful.

Starry Night is not just a sky. It's Van Gogh's way of showing what it feels like to be alone and still full of wonder.

BELONGINGNESS IN THE ARTS

1. Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* (2003)

The Namesake by Jhumpa Lahiri tells us about the life of an immigrant struggling with loneliness. Gogol, a young man born to Indian immigrant parents in America struggles with his identity. He is caught between his family traditions and the culture of the country where he was born. He is torn between two worlds. The book amazingly explores the two worlds of immigrants and how it becomes difficult for them to adjust and find true connection and kinship. This powerful narrative was adapted into a critically acclaimed film in 2006, directed by Mira Nair. The film stars Kal Penn, Tabu, and the late Irrfan Khan, whose portrayal of Ashoke Ganguli brings quiet strength and emotional depth to the story.



In a life caught between two worlds, it's love, memory, and shared journeys that make us feel at home.

2. Rabindranath Tagore's *Where the Mind is Without Fear* (1910)

Where the Mind is Without Fear by Rabindranath Tagore is one of the most striking examples of the portrayal of belongingness. In this poem, he talks about a free society. Tagore imagines a place where education is open to all, a place where people live together with unity and brotherhood. The poem connects kinship to freedom and the ability to express ourselves without any obstacles.

3. Gabriele Muccino's *The Pursuit of Happyness* (2006)

The Pursuit of Happyness is based on the true story of Chris Gardner, an American businessman, motivational speaker, and philanthropist. He highlights the struggle of finding stability and belonging in a harsh world. Chris, a struggling salesman, faces homelessness with his young son. Despite the hardships, their strong bond gives them a sense of comfort and safety even when they have no physical home. The film beautifully shows that belongingness is not about material wealth, but about the love and support we receive from those closest to us.

(Ever wondered why there's a 'Y' instead of an 'I' in Happyness? Take a pause and think about it.

The film uses "Happyness" with a 'Y' because Chris once saw it misspelled outside his son's day care. But, that 'Y' stayed with him. It became a symbol showing that happiness doesn't always come in the perfect form. It's a reminder to stop chasing perfection and to pursue happiness instead!)

This movie shows us that sometimes the hardest journeys lead to the brightest moments. This is a story of hope, grit and never giving up.

4. Peter Weir's *Dead Poets Society* (1989)

In this film, a group of students at a strict boarding school find a sense of belonging through poetry and self-expression. Their teacher, John Keating (reminiscent of John Keats), encourages them to think independently and embrace their true selves. The film beautifully portrays how passion and shared interests can create deep bonds of friendship and community to overcome isolation.

Dead Poets Society reminds us that even in silence, words have the power to set us free.

5. Zoya Akhtar's *Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara (*2011)

This film explores how friendship provides a true sense of solace and support. The three protagonists—Kabir, Imran, and Arjun—go on a road trip, which becomes an emotionally transformative journey too. Arjun, trapped in hustle culture and obsessed with money, finally understands that life is more important than closing the next business deal. Imran confronts his past and learns to accept himself. A simple road trip becomes an adventure that offers viewers lessons on how to face the real world.

Three friends. One journey. The courage to break free, breathe deep and belong to themselves.

CONCLUSION: THE IRONIC DANCE OF BELONGING AND ALIENATION

Alienation and belongingness are not opposite forces but two sides of the same coin. One cannot relate to belongingness until and unless they have experienced the sting of alienation. Whether its Ved from *Tamasha* struggling with his personal identity in this double standard society, or Ishan in *Taare Zameen Par* finding his place through art—in each of the pieces mentioned here we witness that the quest for a place to belong is often a lonely and difficult road.

But, that's the irony—maybe we need to lose ourselves first to find where we actually belong. We all have experienced this bitter emotion, but at the end of the day, we finally understand ourselves and even find peace in being alone. **So, maybe the real lesson is this: belonging isn't just about being accepted by others, it's about embracing who we are, even if that means standing alone.**

CITATIONS

- Dewangan, N. K., et al. “Psychology of Alienation and the Quest for Belonging in V. S. Naipaul’s Half a Life and Magic Seeds.” *ShodhKosh: Journal of Visual and Performing Arts,* vol. 5, no. 1, 2024, pp. 212–26. https://doi.org/10.29121/shodhkosh.v5.i1.2024.212.
- Herwiana, S. “Alienation in the Movie Melancholia.” *Alsuna: Journal of Arabic and English Language*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2023, pp. 37–54
- Johnson Thiel, Jaye. *Collaborative Filmmaking and Affective Traces of Belonging.* Sense Publishers, 2015.
- McIntyre, J., et al. *The Art of Belonging: Exploring the Potential of Cultural Place-Making for Social Inclusion of Young Forced Migrants in Europe.* Lund University Research Portal, 2023. https://portal.research.lu.se/en/publications/the-art-of-belonging
- Rosalina, I. “Alienation Occurred in *Melancholia* Movie.” *Nuris Journal of Education and Islamic Studies*, vol. 2, no. 2, 2022, pp. 116–29.

5.

Cut to Critique

FILM REVIEW: THE ETERNAL SUNSHINE OF THE SPOTLESS MIND

Jenna Joseph, BA Honours English, 3rd Year

Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind, a 2004 sci-fi rom-com film, tells the story of Joel Barish and Clementine Krucynski and their decision to forget each other after some years of being together. Joel and Clementine are attracted to each other seemingly because of their opposing personalities - Joel is introverted and Clementine is impulsive. This, once attractive qualities, make them repulsive to each other in the future. Joel finds her "pathetic" and Clementine starts to realise that he is "boring" and that she feels trapped in the relationship. After a huge fight when Clementine came home late one night, she makes the decision to break up with Joel and go to Lacuna – a clinic headed by Dr Howard Mierzwiak, which performs procedures to erase memories of whoever they want to.

Joel, after finding out that Clementine has fully forgotten about him, also undergoes the same procedure. However, the procedure does not go smoothly. He finds the procedure extremely wrong and does not want to go through with it. He attempts to hide Clementine in his memories where Mierzwiak cannot find him but its to no avail. They find themselves at the beach where they first met; but instead of panicking and finding a "place to hide", they enjoy the last piece of memory they have left and Clementine tells him to meet him in Montauk.

In the background of their tragic love story, we also follow Mary – an employee of Lacuna – who is infatuated with Dr. Mierzwiak and has an affair with him. They both

agree that Mary should also undergo the procedure and have her memory erased. When she comes to know of this, she is disgusted and leaks the company's confidential records – recordings of patients before they go through with the procedure. She firmly believes towards the end of the film that erasing memories point blank is morally wrong. Clementine and Joel both receive their recordings and have no idea what is going on. However, they both acknowledge that they have flaws which can inevitably lead to their breakup and decide to try again.

The film revolves around themes of memory, nostalgia and acceptance of flaws in a relationship. It has a sci-fi take on literally erasing memories of people and Dr Mierzwiak profits from it. He has a very successful clinic where people come with the "ghosts of the others' belongings" and he tries to map their existence in the patients' brain. After a person has walked out from our lives, everything that belongs to them could trigger us upon seeing them. The technicians use the belongings of the person they want to forget to map out the reactions in the brain and then use this map later to wipe out the memories. The film itself is a huge argument against the act of wiping memories for two reasons. The first reason is the aftermath that Clementine experiences post-procedure. She is with Patrick, one of the technicians who performed the procedure on her. Patrick tries to seduce Clementine using the gifts and words that Joel once used to tell her. This makes her feel very uneasy and it triggers memories of a man that she used to love – Joel. She instinctively goes to Montauk to clear her head and she meets Joel there and the cycle continues. Therefore, through Clementine we get to know that erasure of memories does not always lead to happiness– sometimes we need to face the fact that that person is no longer a part of our lives and that such memories can be the reason we become a better person. We cannot always be left by happy memories.

Joel, lost in the aftermath of forgetting.

The second reason is what Joel experiences while he is undergoing the procedure. This is where the crux of the film lies. Joel goes into the clinic demanding answers of why Clementine has seemed to completely forgotten him and decides he wants it for himself on a whim. The erasure works backwards – from the bitter dying moments of their relationship to their "honeymoon phase" and right back to the moment they met. He re-experinces the happy moments he had with Clementine: when they laid down together in the frozen Lake Charles, going out to parties together or just being with each other. He suddenly realises that the procedure is wrong and he wants to go back. He is content with living in a world where Clementine has forgotten him if it meant he got to keep his memories of her. He goes to hell and back trying to "hide" her in his subconscious but fails. Joel realised that without his happy memories with Clementine, he is extremely unhappy and cannot let go of her due to his overwhelming nostalgia and what she once brought out in him

The lure of the past and what it once made him feel convinced Joel of what the procedure really was doing to him. The core of the film's message is centered around this allure of the past, no matter how much pain it brought them. It talks of the ultimate human experience of not forgetting pain but instead embracing it. Alexander Pope's quote in the film: "How happy is the blameless vestal's lot! The world forgetting, by the world forgot. Eternal sunshine of the spotless mind! Each prayer accepted, and each wish resigned" is mentioned by Mary. She also goes on to say that she likes how a baby is "so pure and so free and clean". The naivety of Mary's statement is clearly visible here. How can a person be fully free from the pain that others cause? The naivety inevitably catches up with her.

When past caught up to Joel and Clementine (when they heard the break-up tapes), they learnt from it. Joel fought for her, in the contrast when he so passively let her go at the start of the movie. Clementine, on the other hand, let go of her impulsive tendencies and stopped to listen to Joel. This indicates that there is personal growth in both the characters, which leads to the miniscule possibility that they might not break up again in the future.

Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind is a film which embraces the beauty of flaws in a relationship and the memories we make with a loved one while being in one, no matter how painful it is to look back on.

Joel and Clementine in a cherished moment

A PEEK INTO THE HUMAN CONDITION THROUGH INTERACTIVE STORYTELLING — THE BREATHTAKING YET DEADLY WORLD OF THE LAST OF US

Aira Sharma, BA Programme, 2nd Year

In recent years, video games have redefined the boundaries of traditional media in the widespread sphere of storytelling and have emerged as an activity that extends beyond mere leisure — with each new advancement in game development since its big break in the early 1990s, creators have transformed video games into an unconventional yet powerful art form that allows the audience to engage with the narrative in a much more innovative manner than any of its precursors. As game designer and director Hideo Kojima says, “Games have the potential to achieve something that neither movies or novels can achieve, it’s a unique form of storytelling and should be explored to the fullest”. Exploring the narrative in an interactive and immersive way allows the audience to find a deeper resonance with the message of the story, here the player isn't just a passive witness to the narrative rather by assuming control of the character, they are ultimately responsible for their actions — such as in the case of Rockstar’s *Red Dead Redemption II* where we see the events of the game unfold through the eyes of an outlaw at the cusp of the 20th century, dealing with his inner turmoils of morality. Through the game’s honour system, the other characters present in this fleshed-out virtual world treat the player with respect or contempt in the wake of their actions. As is the case for most modern games, players are placed on an equal footing with the character, compelled to witness every decision and action the characters partake in, requiring players to subconsciously adopt the character’s emotions — even when these

responses might differ from their natural inclinations, thus establishing a state of equilibrium in the sentiments and mindset between the player and the character. To establish a connection between my previous statement to narratives depicting alienation due to trauma as their plot's core driving force, I will turn to *The Last of Us* game series as a fitting example of a sentimental narrative that actively indulges in themes of trauma and its effects on the human psyche.

A glimpse of the danger lurking in the desolate ruins of humanity's past —The Last of Us Part II (2020)

Set in the backdrop of a post-apocalyptic world that has fallen to an inexplicable zombie virus, both games of the series stand as compelling examples of how mediums of interactive storytelling can explore themes of deep emotional and psychological trauma in a personal and collective sense. Each member of the main cast of both the games displays intense signs of detachment and isolation both physically and emotionally — in fact, society as a whole has been ravaged by this virus as survivors have formed distinct factions that seem to be at constant war with each other, perpetuating conflict even in the face of a common threat — the infected individuals out for their lives.

The game's impeccable focus on world-building further reflects the broader societal divide amongst survivors, with many survivors resorting to extremist ideologies as a desperate attempt at reinstating some sort of societal order — some having fallen victim to rather delusional cults or paramilitary forces harbouring the ideals of "survival of the fittest", thereby justifying that they will go to any lengths, no matter how violent or inhumane to survive in a world creeping with the undead at each and every corner. The radically contrasting factions introduced throughout the events of each game not only represent the diverging societal response but also the mental inclinations of their members by illustrating how traumatic circumstances can shape psychological responses in a broader sense. For instance, the rebellious para-military force, the Fireflies, embodies a sense of hope and resilience although they're driven by impractical and unlikely attempts at reinstating societal order through a cure to the

virus for a better future. Likewise but conversely, the closest faction that has somewhat restored societal order is a group of religious zealots with unwavering faith in a false prophet that serves as a psychological refuge from the horrors of the world — a small but tight-knit group, that has reverted to a rather primitive and agrarian way of life to fend for themselves in this harsh and deadly world. Overall, each group the players come across throughout the course of the narrative validates this certain idea of "unity in strength" but with a highly skeptical outlook where trust is fragile in the aftermath of collective suffering since in a world defined by bloodshed, survival comes at the cost of morality, and the lines between hope and delusion, order and tyranny, seem increasingly blurred.

The Firefly emblem.

Joel carrying his injured daughter at the start of the outbreak.

While the various groups introduced illustrate how collective trauma fractures society, the focal point of the story's emotional depth is deeply rooted through its characters bearing the burden of survival, loss and moral compromise. This notion is established early on in the game through its epilogue and introduces us to Joel Miller, a young single father with a preteen daughter desperately trying to escape the chaos ensuing around him as he witnesses every near and dear one transform into a cold-blooded monster.

The defining moment of his trauma comes after a narrow escape with death as he and his family are chased by the infected, soon after he finds himself cradling his daughter in his arms in her very last moments and the game makes it very obvious that this loss will forever change him as a person — not only did his entire world collapse around him in a literal sense, but a father's world too fell as he sat there on the ground pleading for his child to wake up. With twenty years passing, Joel has become an emotionally impenetrable and reserved man, residing in a government-controlled quarantine zone, although still deeply harrowed he manages to make ends meet as a smuggler. After some unforeseen circumstances, he comes across a young girl of about fourteen years of age who is seemingly immune to the virus and is tasked with the duty of escorting her halfway across the country in order to find a cure for the outbreak. Despite his initial reluctance to tolerate Ellie's childish antics and playful attitude, Joel eventually warms up to the impulsive yet witty girl over the course of their journey — almost as if

Ellie and Joel as they make their way across the country.

he had been granted a second chance at getting his daughter back. Through Joel's complex character arc, we see the redemption of a man who lost everything he had ever known and finally regained his inner peace through reestablishing a significant but long-lost familial bond. Prior to the epilogue of the first game, players take control of Joel once more as he rampages through a Firefly base upon hearing Ellie would have to be killed to extract the virus from her brain to create a cure. Igniting a sense of protectiveness within Joel he abandons all thoughts of the "greater good" and pushes the player into sympathising with a father who would go to hell and back just to ensure he would not lose his child all over again as he fights his way through the dark corridors of the hospital overrun by Firefly soldiers, killing anyone and everyone who stood between him and his child. The man who previously felt frequently annoyed by the young girl's inquisitive nature and juvenile personality, has now grown increasingly protective of her and would do whatever it takes to look out for his surrogate daughter and ensure her safety in the wake of danger. His character stands as the perfect example of how intense emotional trauma alienates an individual, fundamentally damaging their intrinsic need for human connection and emotional attachment. The death of his daughter not only served as the source of his grief but also the death of his humanity as his psychological scars posed as an obstruction that isolated him from others, a fact quite evident from his initial lack of empathy in his temperament towards Ellie.

Joel rescuing Ellie from her fate at the end of the first game.

Concluding the events of the first game, the epilogue makes the players take control of Ellie as if to pass the baton from Joel to her. This is especially relevant since the sequel of the game retires Joel as its protagonist and chooses to focus on Ellie — or rather documents her fall from grace as she is consumed by a cyclical bloodlust arising from her thirst for revenge.

19 year old Ellie, following Joel's death.

Five years have passed since the epilogue of the last game and the now nineteen-year-old Ellie has gone from a lively and naïve teenager to a somber and withdrawn adult, once the truth about Joel's actions on that fateful night at the hospital came to light. Having made it out alive even after being bitten by the infected and having lost her best friend to that very same incident, she has been a victim of immense survivor's guilt from the mere age of fourteen. As Joel says, "She wanted her immunity to mean something." — ignorant of Joel's parental instincts towards her, Ellie believes he stripped her of the chance of becoming the savior of humanity and felt betrayed and deceived by the very person she trusted and loved most, especially after losing everyone else in her life at a very young age.

Meanwhile, Joel believed that there was more to her life than simply being a sacrificial lamb — she was meant to live for the sake of living and find value and joy in her life as a human just meant to exist, with him stating that he would not change his actions if given the chance to repeat the situation all over again. Unfortunately, this conflict caused a severe rift between the two with the sequel hinting towards this tension throughout the first few hours of the game itself. This survivor's guilt of hers grew increasingly stronger upon Joel's death at the hands of those seeking their own retribution upon him in their quiet and safe community, propelling Ellie further into a relentless struggle with her demons as she finds herself entangled in an endless search for answers. Though she has somewhat matured over the years, she remains an incredibly impulsive individual and embarks on her quest for revenge, ultimately forsaking her remaining loved ones and even putting their lives in danger to avenge Joel. The game further pushes the player into sympathising with Ellie's guilt and justifies her thirst for revenge as a product of her trauma through constant flashbacks of her and Joel situated between the events of the first game and the second game — the happy content moments where he taught her to play guitar taken for granted, the confrontational quarrels between the two and most importantly, the night before Joel died when the two had finally accepted their differences and made an attempt at making amends.

The main plot of the story leads our fierce yet foolish protagonist to the depths of the city of Seattle, now an overgrown and savage wilderness due to nature reclaiming its spaces. With danger lurking in every corner taking the forms of both human and infected threats, Ellie, entirely absorbed by her bloodlust constantly puts her friends in harm's way proving that her trauma has blinded her to her own consequences — sending her down a self-destructive spiral as she constantly puts her life at risk while fighting her way through hordes of infected zombies and hostile human factions. Her negligence even led to one of her best friends being killed in cold blood and her surrogate uncle — Joel's brother, Tommy being critically wounded. Throughout all this, Ellie finds a few moments of peace through music, momentarily tranquilising her anguish as she feels closer to Joel by strumming her guitar.

The game follows up and does a phenomenal job at putting the players in the characters' shoes, especially in the incident where Ellie's PTSD is triggered by a mere shovel falling over in Ellie's barn — with the game's sound design bringing in the parallels of the scene which unfolded during Joel's death. The visuals play a crucial role during this scene too, with images of Joel's beaten lifeless body flashing between the scenes, piecing together a terrifying experience of the trauma Ellie has been experiencing throughout the narrative. The bright sunny day has turned into a dark and sinister setting as Ellie finds herself trapped in the barn, with the only light source being an ominous red as it leaks through the doors and banishes the feelings of pastoral serenity the game previously established. Shaking with each kill, Ellie finds herself consumed by the adrenaline rush of this cat and mouse chase which leads her back on track on this pointless pursuit with Joel's murderer, abandoning the new life she had built for herself back home. Ridden with PTSD, Ellie isolates herself from her loved ones and sets out towards the other side of the country once more without a second thought and finds herself alone in the desolate desert landscape of post-apocalyptic California, once again fighting her way through infected and barely surviving as she navigates such deadly circumstances.

The barn where Ellie's PTSD first becomes evident.

Ellie's reaction as the gravity of her actions sets in.

Joel and Ellie's last moment together.

Ellie sitting alone in the bleak span of the sea.

The last few sections of this chase lead the players to a direct confrontation with Joel's killer and the two have a final face-off — memories of her last conversation with Joel come flooding in and Ellie ultimately lets his murderer go when she could've easily killed her and brought Joel to justice. The scene ends with Ellie sitting alone sobbing on a dark dreary seashore clutching her wounded hand as the waves splash against her in a gentle motion as if to comfort her for making the right decision to put this cycle of violence at an end while simultaneously painting a haunting picture of isolation and unimaginable suffering through its visuals and sound alike.

Ellie's farmhouse in the epilogue of Last of Us Part II.

Finally, the epilogue brings us back to Ellie's farmhouse, now standing desolate and devoid of all the lively animals and people that made it her home — as she makes her way through the empty building, she finds her room to be the only one with her belongings still there and as she sits down and one again picks up her guitar to feel Joel's presence still with her, she realises she can no longer indulge in the one thing that brought her any form of solace as she has injured her hand beyond repair. The game's interactive strumming mechanic makes this scene significantly impactful as the players

The very last scene of the game depicting Ellie struggling to find solace in her only remaining connection to Joel.

are forced to feel the same frustration as her as she struggles to play for the final time with the guitar resonating with muted incomplete notes instead of the sweet melodies that once soothed her at her worst. As the camera pans out and she leaves the farmhouse perhaps once and for all, she sets out all alone for an untold destination and the gravity of the situation truly sets in with the audience that she is now truly alone — paralleling Joel's story at the beginning of the series as a story of relentless grief, emotional repression and isolation as a deeply unsettling testament to the perpetual toll of traumatic circumstances, making *The Last of Us* truly a befitting piece of media worth exploring in terms of its compelling message and philosophical themes of human behaviour.

CITATIONS

- Halley Gross and Neil Druckmann, "The Last of Us Part 2 and How It Deals with Authentic Trauma," *GamesRadar*, July 2020, https://www.gamesradar.com/the-last-of-us-part-2-and-how-it-deals-with-authentic- trauma

- Hideo Kojima, interview by Chris Schilling, *The BAFTA Fellowship,* April 2020, https://www.bafta.org/stories/the-fellowship-2020-hideo-kojima

- Neil Druckmann, "The Road Ahead," *GQ Magazine*, June 2020, https://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/culture/article/the-last-of-us-part-ii-neil-druckmann-interview

A VIEWING OF THE NAMESAKE

Rinchan Lyall Robert, BA Programme, 2nd Year

One cool February evening, the India Habitat Centre in Delhi hosted a special screening of the movie *The Namesake*, featuring the presence of the director, Mira Nair. *The Namesake*, adapted from Jhumpa Lahiri's 2003 novel of the same name, follows the story of Gogol, born to immigrant parents, as he searches for his identity through the fractured pieces of his parents' lost culture and the world he calls home, which refuses to accept him as its own.

Three college friends and I planned to watch *The Namesake* together. All of us had read the book, but none had seen the movie. After arriving early, securing good seats, and craning our necks for a good half hour in search of Nair, the film opened with Ashima, played by Tabu, practicing Rabindra Sangeet. As pointed out by one friend, who grew up in Siliguri, her Bengali accent was quite poor (this was a recurring theme of my friend's misery throughout the movie, as the entire cast of Bengali characters was portrayed by non-Bengali actors). Ashima enters her house to find a pair of foreign shoes waiting outside. She steps into the American-made leather shoes, and we see a full shot of a woman in a sari, with flowers in her hair, wearing odd-looking shoes—a pair of shoes that will change her life as she steps into them, both literally and metaphorically. Waiting inside is the owner of the shoes, her soon-to-be husband, who is there to whisk her away to America, promising a better life. Ashok, played by Irrfan Khan, tries to make his wife comfortable, but how can she, a flower blooming among strains of sitar swaddled in six yards of inherited silk, fit in with the cold machinery of the West? She resigns herself to her fate, never truly letting go of her own country,

Ashima dresses up to meet Ashok for the first time.

culture, and people. She tries every day to make the space her own: speaking in her own language, cooking her own food, and wearing her traditional attire in a world that gapes at her. Ashima creates a contained haven for herself, with her only companion being her husband. Together, they face the bewilderment of the foreign land they have come to call home. A fear they harbour is for their children, who grow up in ways so different from themselves, with beliefs and values so alien to their parents. It takes a village to raise a child, and their parents are but a minuscule part of it.

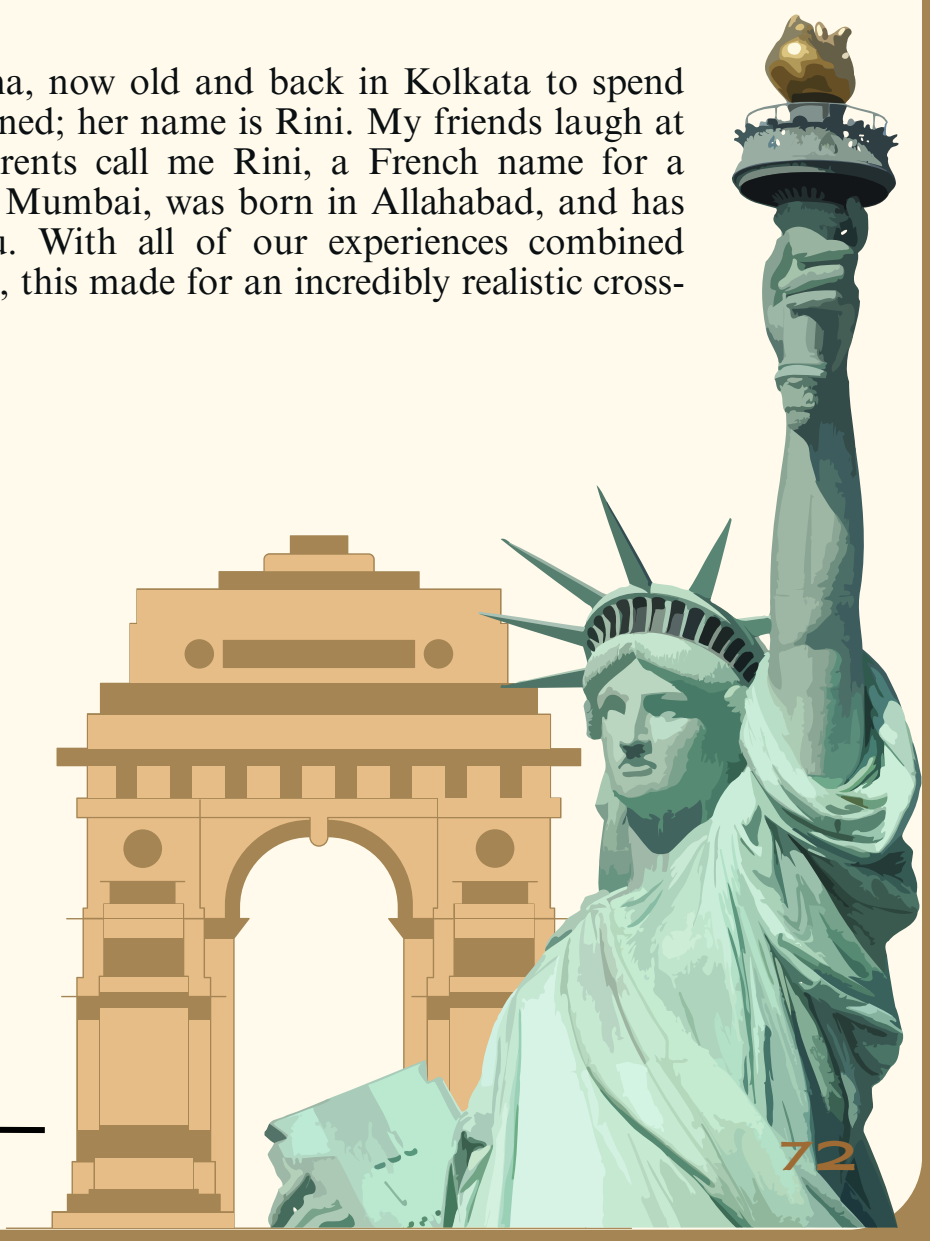
As Gogol, played by Kal Penn, enters, we laugh—an inside joke shared by another friend accompanying me. She resembles Gogol and embodies the air of an Indian student lost in a foreign country, a theme often discussed by Naipaul, Ghosh, and even Gandhi. She will soon experience this herself when she moves to France next year to pursue higher education, facing an inevitable detachment from her hometown, Guwahati, which she left many years ago. As the narrative shifts to the next generation, Gogol is in a constant tussle. His music, art, literature, and personality are all worlds apart from those of his parents. He yearns for more understanding and freedom from them—individuals who are themselves unaware of their own place in the world and, therefore, do not provide their children with an inheritance of stability in identity. The family takes a trip to India, visiting monuments, and Gogol is as fascinated by the architecture as my other friend sitting behind me, who hails from Lucknow and moved to Delhi to study history, just as Gogol is drawn to architecture.

The Ganguli family on their first trip to India.

The film also explores the family's hometown in Bengal, and Mira Nair, who never lived in Bengal, weaves the beautiful motifs of Kolkata and her own memories of visiting the city as a child to create a nostalgic and fresh vision of Ashima and Ashok's dreams. They are finally where they belong, but Gogol feels peculiar. These are, after all, his people and his streets, yet he does not belong, nor does the city accept him. The family returns to America and continues with their lives—relationships, deaths, and new beginnings come and go. Gogol becomes increasingly in touch with his roots; Ashok's death brings him clarity, as he realises that his father died alone on foreign soil, and he might too. A failed marriage leads him closer to his family, particularly to his mother, who has stood as a rock through it all. Gogol returns as the prodigal son and is accepted with open arms into what he has desperately tried to refuse throughout his life.

In a post-movie discussion, the director mentions how she moved to London to study at Harvard and stayed there. She, too, experiences what Ashima, Ashok, and Gogol do —a shocking numbness to everything happening at 'home,' a place that is merely a symbol of the real thing. Mira Nair was offered several high-profile Hollywood movies while planning The Namesake, but she turned them down upon realising the importance of depicting the experience of detachment and displacement—anyone could direct Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, but only she could make The Namesake.

The movie concludes with Ashima, now old and back in Kolkata to spend her last days. Her sister is mentioned; her name is Rini. My friends laugh at my namesake on screen. My parents call me Rini, a French name for a student in Delhi who grew up in Mumbai, was born in Allahabad, and has roots in Bihar and Tamil Nadu. With all of our experiences combined (including those of director Nair), this made for an incredibly realistic cross-cultural viewing.



GENDER, IDENTITY AND BELONGING: THE FLUIDITY OF SELF IN RESTRICTIVE SOCIAL STRUCTURES

Shivangi Sood, BA Honours English, 2nd Year

Joyland: An Ordinary Tale of a Not-So-Ordinary Subject in South Asia

The name *Joyland* may create the visuals of a world full of pleasures, a utopia in some sense. However, this assumption is instantly falsified from the very first scene of the movie, a representation of patriarchy in one of its most prominent forms—control over birth. The movie asks, in fact, demands: "Where do you locate humans who are not men or masculine in a patriarchal society?" Directed and released in Pakistan, an Islamic nation, the movie faced an interim ban soon after its release following severe backlash from conservative groups citing it as "highly objectionable material".

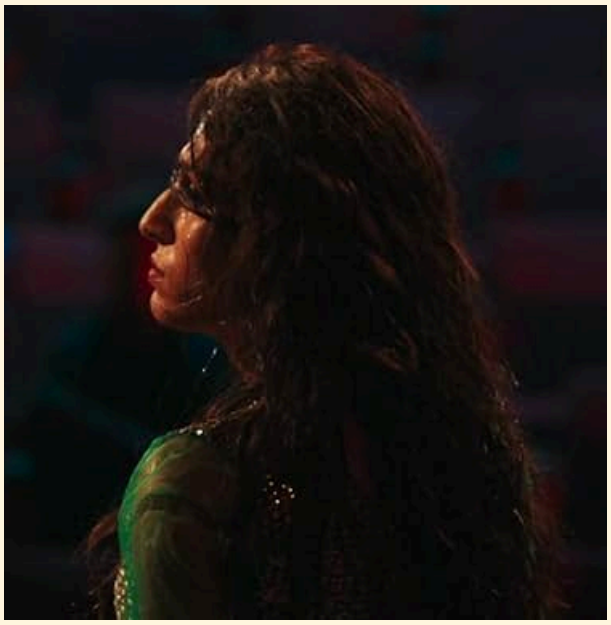
Plot Summary

Pakistan's first-ever movie to be nominated for the Academy Awards, *Joyland* (2022), directed by Saim Sadiq, is a tale of a seemingly normal household under the leadership of the patriarch, played by actor Salmaan Peerzada. His youngest son Haider (Ali Junejo) is unemployed and has been depicted as a man who lacks "masculinity". He hesitates while butchering a goat, plays with his nieces, and does not shy away from participating in household chores. His wife, Mumtaz, on the other hand, is an ambitious makeup artist and a strong woman. She takes the task of butchering the goat without any reluctance and earns for the family like a "man" while her husband partakes in "womanly duties". The Rana family has another

couple, Saleem, the elder brother of Haider, and his wife Nucchi, whose sole purpose is to bear a son for the family to continue the bloodline. She fails to deliver a boy in the opening scene of the movie even after giving birth to three daughters, disappointing her husband as well as the father-in-law.

One of the most crucial characters is Biba, an unapologetic and fierce transgender dancer (played by Alina Khan, a real-life trans actress). She serves as a catalyst for the plot, assisting Haider in gaining confidence and defying gender expectations as a backup dancer in an underground erotic theatre, the occupation Haider takes up secretly. This mutual understanding results in a romantic relationship between the two, while his wife Mumtaz at home is expected to leave her job and prepare for motherhood—a life she never desired. Biba, despite being strong, fails to fight against the discrimination prevalent in South Asian society towards transgender people. She reveals her desire to get "gender-affirming surgery", however, even Haider fails to support this decision. The movie ends with Mumtaz's suicide once Haider's infidelity, as well as the maternal responsibility imposed on her, becomes difficult to bear. Thus, the suffocation of a patriarchal society does not allow the film to end on a happy note, much like the lives of those who do not conform to its oppressive demands.

Mumtaz and Nucchi visit a doctor and learn that Mumtaz is pregnant.



Biba's desire of having a gender-affirming surgery

Geography and Cinematography

Set in Lahore, Pakistan, *Joyland* depicts the mundane lives of the Pakistani population. The city appears both poetic and profoundly overbearing, with the dim interiors of narrow alleys and disorganised middle-class South Asian households adding to the realistic effects—it possesses the ability to constrain a person. The theatre full of men is vibrant with flashy and neon colors; however, the lives of people working there juxtapose this vibrancy—they lead some of the worst lives in Pakistan as a highly marginalised and villainised community.

Is a Woman Only Born for Motherhood?

Despite having a successful career as a makeup artist, Mumtaz's default role is to bear children for the family. However, she despises such responsibilities, articulating her desire to work and contribute to the family income, which is outrightly denied by the father-in-law. On the other hand, Nucchi, her sister-in-law, has been relegated to the role of a child-bearer and caretaker of the house merely because of her gender. Since her husband says, "What would she do by working as an interior designer?" she accepts this resolution, nullifying the value of her qualification. The movie raises questions regarding the role of women in an Islamic society as well as within the South Asian community. Mumtaz's forced transition from an independent woman to a housewife exemplifies the erasure of women's desires in traditional households.

Streets of Lahore, Pakistan as shown in Joyland

Cultural and Social Impact

Being shot in Pakistan, a conservative and religiously controlled nation, *Joyland* could not reach a wider domestic audience due to its interim ban in the initial stages after its release. The movie uses household languages, Urdu and Punjabi, to normalise the issue it confronts. It does not sensationalise the relationship between Haider and Biba. Instead, as the director says in an interview with Red Carpet News TV, "The struggle of the characters is so human and so complex, I think it's something that's very special about Joyland because usually when you see a film that's talking about gender, it's with a very liberal flag, with an aim of showing heroes and villains. But this film tries to avoid that and paints a more human and complex picture".

Queer Identity and Forbidden Love

The representation of Haider and Biba's romantic tale is neither exploitative nor stems from mere sexual attraction. Instead, it portrays their relationship with sensitivity, emphasising the emotional complexity of Haider's journey toward self-discovery. While Biba constantly struggles to seek recognition both in personal and professional life despite being a talented performer, she refuses to be pitied or hidden, embodying a defiant queer identity in a world that refuses to acknowledge her as a woman.

Finale

Joyland (2022) is a film that encapsulates within its dialogues and cinematography the suppression of non-conforming subjects in a male-centric world. It is both a bold and transgressive narrative that attempts to trivialise the taboos surrounding gender, queer identity, and female desire while unfolding the multiple layers of human psychology instead of showcasing society in black and white. Lastly, it successfully conveys that true joy remains out of reach for those who dare to defy the norms.

6.

Interviews

MEET C. SAILO: MOMO-SAPIEN. MEMORY MAKER. MEME-WORTHY MUSE

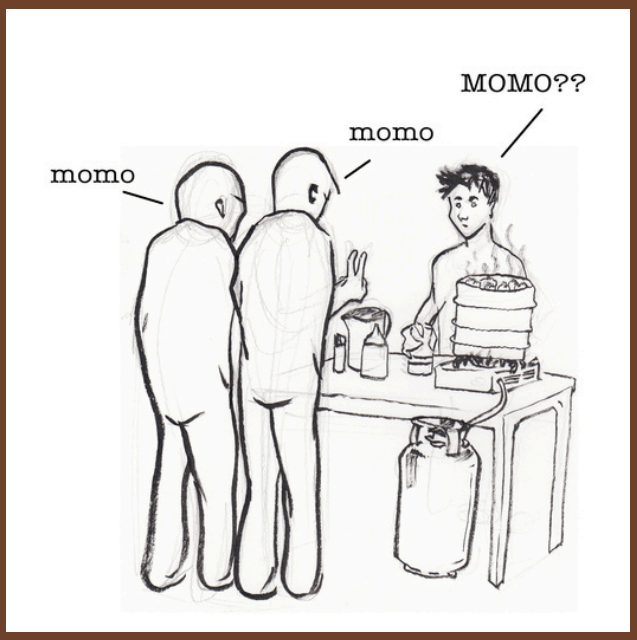
C. Sailo is not your average artist. Hailing from Mizoram and having wandered across India—from the calm of the Andamans to the chaos of Delhi—he's basically a human passport stamp. A designer by training and a storyteller by instinct, Sailo uses minimalism, wit, and a dash of existential confusion to reflect on identity, memory, and the very real struggle of being asked, "Where are you really from?"

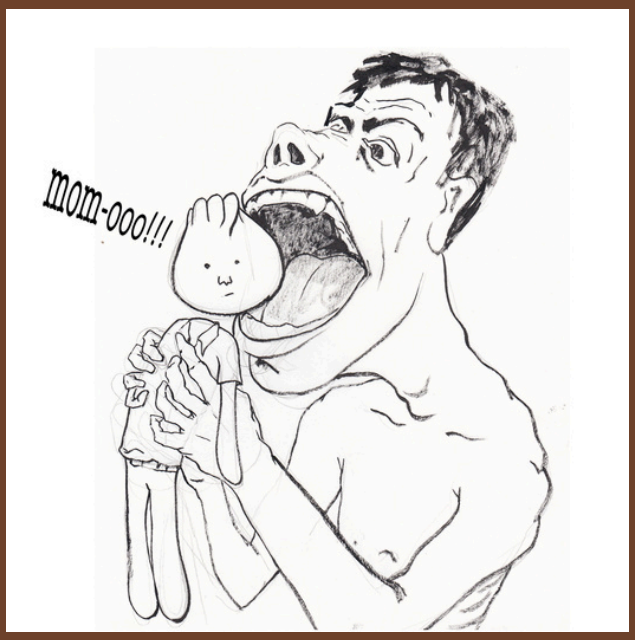
You might know him as the brain behind *Momo-Sapiens: An Evolution Story*, a zine that takes on racism and cultural stereotyping using (what else?) momos and clever line drawings. It's funny until you realise how uncomfortably real it is. That's kind of his thing—making you laugh, pause, and think, all in the same breath.

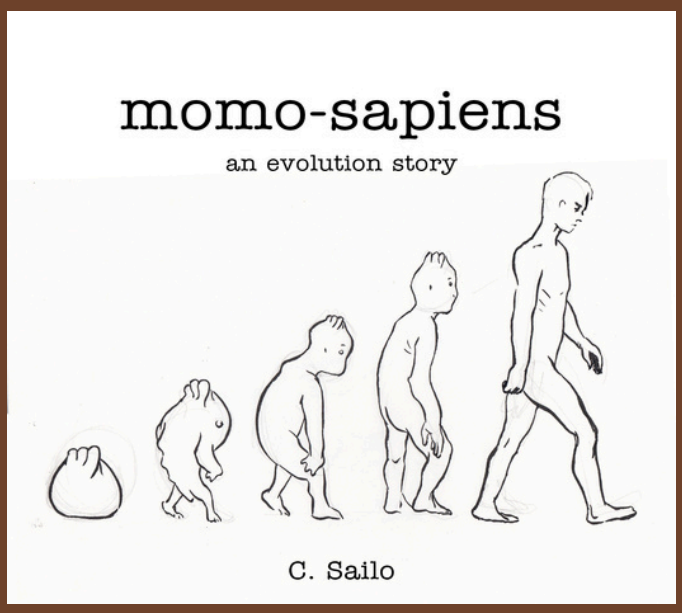
In this interview, C. Sailo is mainly talking about their creative journey and identity, focusing on how art, satire, community, memory, and personal experiences of displacement and marginalisation inform their work—especially in comics and zine-making.

So grab a plate of momo (just to set the mood) and dive into a dialogue that explores art, belonging, and the beauty of being delightfully out of place.

EXTRACTS FROM C. SAILO'S ZINE MOMO-SAPIENS







EXPERT INTERVIEW WITH MR. C. SAILO

1) What inspired you to pursue comics and zine-making as a form of artistic expression?

I wouldn't say that comics or zine-making was a strong calling for me, nor do I consider myself an artist in any particular medium. My journey into this space was more organic—it happened because Indie Comix Fest was taking place around 2017 or 2018. Simply put, I was always eager to participate in creative spaces wherever I could, even back in high school. I also had an older friend, Bazik, who introduced me to the art field, which played a big role in shaping my involvement. It was less about a deliberate pursuit and more about following opportunities that naturally came my way.

2) How has your experience in design school shaped your artistic process, particularly given your diverse cultural exposure?

Beyond the institutional space, what has truly shaped my artistic process is the community I've built—my friends, the tribe I spend time with, and the informal spaces we create together. Whether it's stopping by Chai Point for casual conversations or making room for silly yet meaningful discussions, these moments have been just as influential as formal education.

These informal spaces foster a culture of sharing—perspectives, experiences, and ways of understanding the world. They've taught me the value of listening and exchanging ideas in a way that goes beyond structured learning. Being exposed to diverse cultures has also allowed me to embrace a sense of transcendence—a fluid identity that isn't confined to a single definition but instead evolves through interaction and shared experiences.

"These informal spaces foster a culture of sharing—perspectives, experiences, and ways of understanding the world. They've taught me the value of listening and exchanging ideas in a way that goes beyond structured learning."

3) What draws you to writing about the strange, the uncanny, or the unexplained? Do you see it as a way of understanding the world or challenging perceptions of reality?

I think the strange and the uncanny are not always as distant from everyday life as we assume. Over time, we become accustomed to certain oddities, while at other times, we notice the uncanny emerging from the mundane. This constant interplay fascinates me.

Redefining and recontextualizing these experiences allow us to challenge perceptions of reality and explore its multidimensional nature. By looking at things from different angles, we uncover hidden layers of complexity —not necessarily to reach a definitive conclusion, but to deepen our understanding of the world. Toying around with the strange or unexplained is a way to navigate these uncertainties, to sit with ambiguity rather than resolve it, and to acknowledge that reality itself is fluid and ever-shifting.

4) Your piece beautifully blends mythology with reality. What inspired you to write Momo-Sapiens, and how do you see folklore intersecting with contemporary life?

When I was writing *Momo-Sapiens*, I didn't overthink it at the time—it was more of a playful exploration, using satire to make sense of the theme. In hindsight, though, I see it as part of a larger idea: our need to remember and be remembered.

Folklore, in many ways, is a form of collective memory. It connects the past with the present, shaping identity and giving continuity to stories that might otherwise fade. I think this need to preserve and retell narratives is deeply tied to our sense of self—because if we really think about it, existence is fragile. Myths and folklore anchor us, offering a way to make sense of the world while evolving alongside it.

5) In your essay, you reflect on shared cultural experiences through food. How do you think food serves as a medium for storytelling and connecting with one's roots?

Food is one of the most powerful ways cultures tell their stories and connect with their roots. It carries history, tradition, and even philosophical perspectives.

Fermentation is more than just a food process—it is a metaphor for transformation, time, and even death. Foods like bekang and axone (fermented beans/stinky beans) undergo controlled decay, yet instead of destruction, they emerge richer in flavor and nutritional value. This process reflects many cultural beliefs where death is not seen as an end but as a transition.

Additionally, fermented foods preserve not just sustenance but also identity and memory. They carry history, much like oral traditions about ancestors. In regions where fermentation is central, there's often a deep-seated acceptance of life's cycles—of decay, renewal, and continuity. In that sense, fermentation isn't just about food; it's about survival, resilience, and the way cultures embrace transformation, including the idea of death itself.

Societies cultivate staple crops like rice and wheat, which reflects deeper cultural mindsets. Rice cultivation, which requires collective labor and intricate irrigation systems, fosters a sense of cooperation and interdependence. In contrast, wheat cultivation, which is more suited to independent farming, aligns with cultures that emphasise individualism. These agricultural traditions shape not just economies but also social values, creating distinct ways of thinking and interacting with the world.

In both cases, food serves as more than nourishment—it is a living archive of history, values, and shared experiences. Whether through the communal labor of rice farming or the slow transformation of fermented foods, these culinary traditions offer a tangible connection to the past, helping people understand their place within a larger cultural narrative.

6) Both your spoken word performance and written work reflect on identity and community. How do you navigate the intersection of personal and collective memory in your creative process?

For me, identity and community are tied to memory—both personal and shared. I think we all want to remember and be remembered. In my creative process, I don't separate the two. Personal memory is shaped by the people around us, the stories we share, and the spaces we exist in.

I try to explore how memories change over time, how the past lingers in the present. Sometimes, this means rethinking familiar things—finding the strange in the ordinary or using humor and satire to make sense of things. I don't look for conclusions, just a better understanding of the layers that make up who we are.

7) Your writing often incorporates humor and satire. How do you use these elements to challenge stereotypes and offer new perspectives on Mizo identity?

When I was writing *Momo-Sapiens,* I didn't overthink it at the time, but in hindsight, I see how satire became a way to challenge power and hierarchy. Humor allows us to question structures without being confrontational—it creates space for reflection while keeping things engaging.

Mizo identity itself has never been exclusive; it's more of an umbrella identity. The term 'Mizo' comes from 'Mi,' meaning people, and 'Zo,' referring to highland.

The broader Zo identity among Kuki-Chin language-speaking people across Northeast India and Myanmar's Chin State began to take shape soon after World War II. In 1946, the people of the then Lushai Hills district (present-day Mizoram) united under the 'Mizo' identity, emphasising a shared cultural and historical connection.

Satire helps me explore these complexities in a way that feels natural—challenging fixed ideas of identity while acknowledging its fluid and evolving nature.

8) Your comic, Momo-Sapiens: An Evolution Story, satirises xenophobia and racism. How have your personal experiences of displacement and encounters with xenophobia influenced this work?

Momo-Sapiens was a way for me to use humor to talk about things that are uncomfortable—like xenophobia and racism. I didn't plan it too much at the time, but looking back, I think satire helped me challenge power and question hierarchy in a way that felt natural.

Growing up, I've seen how identity is not fixed—it shifts depending on where you are and how others see you. Mizo identity itself is not exclusive; it has always been evolving. But displacement and being treated as an outsider make you think more about belonging.

Through satire, I try to show these contradictions – to laugh at them, but to also make people reflect.

9) Having lived in various parts of India due to your father's postings in the Air Force, how have these diverse environments shaped your sense of belonging and identity?

Moving around a lot shaped how I see identity and belonging. I spent my toddler years in Delhi, then lived in Bihar, Pune, and Andaman and Nicobar, and later returned to Delhi. Each place had its own culture, language, and way of life, and I learned to adapt.

Because of this, I never saw identity as something fixed. It changes depending on where you are and who you're with. I think this fluidity reflects in my work—exploring how people navigate spaces, memories, and the idea of home.

> ***"The format helped me exaggerate and highlight absurdities—making serious themes like xenophobia and identity more approachable."***

10) Are there any recurring themes or narratives in your work that you find yourself drawn to?

I started questioning things through my art practice—like the nature of our experiences. For instance, I moved from painting to freezing two fish in water, exploring how materials and objects can shape meaning. This led me to an interest in material culture and how we perceive things through our senses.

I began experimenting with everyday objects, looking at the meanings, symbols, and perceptions they carry. Overall, I suppose my work has touched on themes like displacement, belonging, and identity—how they shift, adapt, and take on new forms in different contexts.

11) The comics medium is unique, affordable, and impactful. What drew you to comics as the starting point for Momo-Sapiens?

Unlike traditional storytelling, comics can break down complex ideas into bite-sized, relatable moments.

Since *Momo-Sapiens* plays with satire, the format helped me exaggerate and highlight absurdities—making serious themes like xenophobia and identity more approachable. Plus, comics are affordable and independent, which means they can reach more people without needing a big platform. That freedom made it the perfect choice for this story.

12) In the face of growing religious intolerance and xenophobia, what mediums and platforms do you believe can best amplify stories from the margins?

At its core, religion is often founded on principles of tolerance and coexistence. But with the rise of national identity, religious identity also undergoes shifts. My concern is not just with these changes but with the centralisation of power that comes with them—a process that can flatten diversity, not only in culture but also in ecology.

To amplify stories from the margins, I think independent and accessible mediums work best. Spaces that give people the freedom to share their experiences.

13) What advice would you give to artists trying to develop a personal style, especially in an era of increasing AI influence on art?

To be honest and courageous.

14) You reclaimed the xenophobic slur "Momo" and made it your own. How has adopting this name empowered you?

I feel badass. I've always connected with hip-hop—artists like 2Pac, Biggie, and Kendrick. I look up to them, not just for their music but for their stories of survival and identity. In some way, I relate to that. Reclaiming 'Momo' was a way to take control of the narrative, to turn something meant to insult into something powerful. It's about owning my identity on my own terms.

15) What advice would you give to students on coping with alienation and navigating a sense of belonging in a hostile environment?

I don't think I'm in a position to give advice, but I can share my experience. Even when it feels like your biggest nightmare, making eye contact when greeting someone, walking with firm strides, keeping a straight posture, and remembering to breathe helped me. More importantly, being strong with words—having a command over language—not to overshadow others, but as a tool to understand the external reality.

We tend to seek belonging wherever we go—it's natural. But belonging isn't just about fitting in; it's also about knowing where to draw boundaries. Being nice isn't necessarily a virtue. We can be assertive when needed, especially when it comes to self-respect. From my experience, being open-minded without courage can sometimes blur those boundaries.

MEET DR. ZAHRA RIZVI: A JMC ALUMNA AND A GLOBAL SCHOLAR SHAPING DYSTOPIAN DISCOURSE

Dr. Zahra Rizvi, a Delhi-born Fulbright-Nehru Doctoral Fellow at Yale University, earned her Ph.D. in English from Jamia Millia Islamia. Now a Lecturer at St. Stephen's College, Delhi, she specialises in young-adult dystopian fiction and pop-culture adaptations, notably *The Hunger Games.* A distinguished polyglot fluent in English, Hindi, Urdu, Persian, Korean, Punjabi, and some Latin, Zahra joins us to chat about literature, language, K-Dramas, and life as a global scholar far from home. Read on for her insights!

EXPERT INTERVIEW WITH DR. ZAHRA RIZVI

1) How did you determine your academic and professional path? Were you always drawn to film and new media, or did your interest in it evolve over time?

Firstly, congratulations on another fantastic issue of *LitScroll*, and thank you for thinking of me for this! Thank you, also, for this question.

In perfect cliché style, I grew up loving stories. I would devour books and dream of writing my own novels one day. I think my favorite movies were always book adaptations (the book is nearly always better, obviously). That is how I ended up in a literature program in college. At JMC, I was more inclined towards participating in every short story writing competition I could find (the Anupama Nair Creative Writing Contest was the first one), and it is still the best place I've had to creatively experiment with what one wants to do, I feel. One of my professors (Dr. Susan George, actually!) encouraged me to try my hand at academic paper presentations, and once I got the hang of it, I began to try out working on things that excited me—film, fanfiction, games, new media, and pop culture. A single media form was never enough for me. As a kid, I just had to know more and find out more, and I suppose in that sense, I was both drawn towards different media, but the way I interact with it has evolved and critically sharpened over time.

I find myself drawn to those aspects of media that make us think of our lives in new ways, media that make us rethink the ways we are connected (or disconnected), and the intersections between life, living, and love for stories.

2) Your research explores the political ecology of dystopian cities. How do you perceive contemporary urban spaces being reshaped by dystopian imaginaries in literature, media, and digital culture?

I am from a generation that grew up alongside the rise of YA dystopian fiction franchises. *The Hunger Games, The Maze Runner, Divergent,* and so on. These franchises developed alongside a world thrown into confusion, despair, violence, and increasing social divide while also experiencing greater connectivity, the internet and its popularisation, the rise of social media, and virtual communities. I think all of this fed off each other, especially within urban spaces and how we view and inhabit them. This is seen more and more with dystopias becoming nearer and nearer-future, the gap between us and dystopian worlds lessening. In this sense, I believe dystopian imaginaries are more shaped and reshaped by urban spaces than the other way around. Margaret Atwood sums it up really well when she says of her dystopian novel *The Handmaid's Tale* that she "would not put any events into the book that had not already happened" (2017, p. 13). this is not to say there

is no effect of dystopian fiction on contemporary urban spaces. Without being overly didactic, dystopias inspire people to not end up in dystopias, and wherever there are critical readers who actively read dystopian fiction as anti-predictions—once again, borrowing from Atwood's vision for her dystopian fiction—"if" this future can be described in detail, maybe it won't happen" (p. 21), there will be spaces of social dreaming for better tomorrows. It is no surprise that youth activism in contemporary times has referred time and again to fiction like *The Hunger Games* as a rallying point!

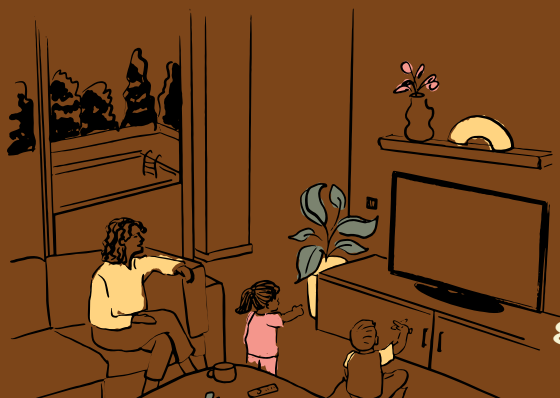
Every time you study a novel, a movie, or a game, you are going to find things that will make you see it in a new light… Sometimes it will be an uncomfortable realisation, but that's a good thing! More art should make people uncomfortable.

3) For many, video games remain a form of recreation only. What motivated you to explore gaming within an academic framework? Has this decision influenced how you engage with them recreationally?

I enjoy playing video games with my siblings, but academically, I think what led me to imagine them as critical to a section of my research is the fact that video games are media made more interactive and participative than other popular forms. A lot of the YA dystopian fiction I work with uses the logic of (video) games as an intrinsic part of their worldbuilding, and it felt natural to include gaming and gaming communities within an academic framework for working on them, then. Sure, it felt super new and challenging at first, but I had the privilegeof meeting and working with a budding group of game researchers in India, and going from creating Game Studies India together to co-founding the Indian chapter of DiGRA (Digital Games Research Association) to being part of an international games research community, our group has grown so much. Along the way we have collectively conceptualised what it means to study games as a valuable part of research. I imagine it sounds strange to a few (or maybe a lot of) people at first, but we have so many exciting avenues for research that games are just the tip of the iceberg.

Does this affect how I engage with games recreationally? So, there are two things that one must realise about research. Firstly, research is not easy, and while its fruits are meaningful, the process can be draining. I knew early on that I wanted to work with things I am passionate about and also enjoy, not merely as entertainment but as something I want to spend a major portion of my adult life critically engaging in. Hence, why literature, media, and games! I have never imagined these artifacts as merely recreational but as a crucial part of how we make sense of our reality. All art is personal and political.

And this brings me to my second point: every time you study a novel, a movie, or a game, you are going to find things that will make you see it in a new light… Sometimes it will be an uncomfortable realisation, but that's a good thing! More art should make people uncomfortable. Ideally, I want to know the complexities that mask any entertainment systems we often inadvertently become subject to. Do we all want to shut down our brains and just enjoy media sometimes? Sure, there is no dearth of such material handy, but it is never going to be empty media, whether we like it or not.



4) Young adult (YA) media and gaming are often dismissed as mere entertainment, despite their capacity to shape individuals and entire communities. When did you first recognise the significance of these media forms beyond their surface appeal?

It definitely didn't come to me in a dream! But you're so right to point out that one of the ways pop culture and media are politically dulled is by pigeonholing them as 'mere entertainment.'

I don't want to say that everything goes back to *The Hunger Games*. I was reading so much fantasy and SF even before it; in a lot of ways, my moral compass is a reflection of the books I read growing up, which I have my mother to thank for. That said, I have no idea when I first began to realise the significance you talk about. It now seems so obvious but, of course, it wasn't always. I do not know what first gave me the tools to better discuss the significance of these media forms beyond their surface appeal *Reading Adorno*, again a recommendation by an awesome professor in university, and, then *Stiegler* (recommended again – let this be a PSA, I take all recommendations seriously) while thinking about how I wanted to work on YA dystopian fiction like *The Hunger Games. The Hunger Games* and its popular appeal makes talking about the oxymoron that is 'mere entertainment' so much easier. I remember when the movies came out and the fandom would be so critical of the way the advertising and publicity was going against the very message of the novels, transforming a critique of entertainment into an entertaining show, and as an extension transforming readers and viewers into the Capitol spectators. The communities centred around popular media have their own problems but I think that moment of the THG fandom and allies' cultural protest and jamming really shaped a lot of contemporary YA fandom activism that worked on moving beyond just virtual spaces and having tie ups with other communities. I remember #MyHungerGames, protests outside theatres showing Mockingjay, the mockingjay salute cropping up again and again in protests in Thailand and other parts of the world, and Fandom Forward's movement for accessible and sustainable activism, and more.

5) As a scholar working at the intersection of youth activism, popular culture, and game studies, how do you assess the impact of digital interactive media and games on youth engagement with social and political issues?

I see there being more affinity spaces available for communities to form that are, due to the nature of the medium, filled with youth presence in large numbers. Interactive media (whether games or e-literature or otherwise) support and encourage more participation. These can have all sorts of participatory politics, some being more positive than others, and I believe that what makes it so interesting and commendable – to have a space to belong around shared interests which, then, motivates people to care about something beyond just shared (fandom) interests as well. New forms of media and their virtual spaces also open new channels of communication allowing sharing of otherwise difficult to access information. We see a wider array of awareness as well as calls to action amongst the youth for social and political

6) As a researcher from South Asia, what are your thoughts on how regional narratives and digital storytelling contribute to global conversations about alternative futures?

Oh, everything! Regional and local narratives make sure that there is no one single narrative of futurism. In my keynote for inaugural DiGRA India conference in 2021 and in my paper on "'Your Subaltern is not my Subaltern': Intersectionality and the Dangers of a Single Game-story" co-written with Souvik Mukherjee, I talk about how even in an industry like videogames, when there is a conversation around inclusion, sustainability, and climate care, having narratives from South Asia, for example, remind the stakeholders of, firstly, the grave absences in existing conversations regarding alternative futures and utopianisms, and secondly, makes way for rich alternative futurisms and sustainability practices from regional areas to come to the fore. Whitewashed media harm not just perceptions of the world but our reality itself and when our media become more inclusive and diverse, there is an active, conscious effort to make sure that no one gets left behind.

7) Do you believe there is a lack of appreciation for YA media in India? Not just in an academic context, but also in terms of the media content specifically targeted at teenagers and young adults?

I don't believe there is lack of appreciation for YA media in India. India is known to be a great market for YA media consumption, in fact. In recent years, Indian academia is also opening itself up to YA media research, no doubt a function of the popularity and influence of the form, but also because YA genres themselves have diversified in themes and subject matter, talking about climate change, alternative futures, youth activism, etc. In terms of YA media production, however, we are still a developing area. The book publishing market seems to be doing increasingly better in the genre and that is usually a marker for good things across media forms in coming times. I guess, time will tell how it goes, but I am hopeful.

8) To what extent has your experience at JMC influenced your career and personal growth?

I started doing research here so a lot can be traced back to my years spent at JMC. The college and its faculty taught me to take my work seriously and instilled a sense of rigorous research and academic acumen in me. I found myself encouraged to take risks and pick up novel areas to work on. My batch had a healthy competitive spirit as well. We really wanted to make the most of our college experience and motivated each other; I remember every end-semester we would pool in our assignment papers and notes so everyone could prepare together for exams.

I might be a bit biased when I say this, but I learnt a lot of my foundational scholarship processes here. JMC is blessed to have a highly competent faculty, and the professors go out of their way to contextualise literature, teach critical thinking and writing skills, and devise devise exciting ways to approach texts. I continue to be inspired by my years here.

9) Have you ever experienced feeling alienated or disconnected as a student, whether due to your background, identity, or any other factors? Would you be willing to share how you navigated those experiences and the strategies you used to find connection and cultivate a sense of belonging ?

Research can sometimes be lonely and alienating. It depends a lot on the spaces you find yourself in as part of your journey in academia. Additionally, all sorts of challenges will find you even if you are extremely lucky because you are constantly put into new environments whether it is a college or university or a new teaching or research job. The more you leave comfortable spaces, the more you will face new challenges. Being a Muslim woman from the Global South (for the lack of a word), I've come across casual racism, sexism and Islamophobia very often. I wish it wasn't so but the only way to navigate it is to surround yourself with a really good support system. I know, for a fact, that I couldn't have completed my Ph.D. if it wasn't for my family and my friends having my back.

As a student and as an academician, I promise you, you will find your people and it will be worth it. Don't let anyone get you down. Make people uncomfortable with your presence. Speak up. It'll make things easier for the people who come after you just as someone before you made the spaces warmer for you.

10) Given your extensive research experience, as a senior what advice would you offer to the current students of JMC interested in pursuing research at the intersection of media and literature?

That's very sweet of you. I'll pass on the advice I got from my seniors that's helped me. Don't be afraid to go for things you are passionate about. You can and will carve a niche for yourself. It might take some time but it will happen. On the other hand, it is okay to change interests and fields. Never too early or too late to have a check-in session with yourself. Literature and media comprise such a vast, brilliant field full of possibilities. It can be both fun and important.

And always, always pay it forward.

"...all sorts of challenges will find you even if you are extremely lucky because you are constantly put into new environments...The more you leave comfortable spaces, the more you will face new challenges."

11) You have held many prestigious national and international fellowships and research positions. How have these global research experiences informed your understanding of the ethical and transformative potential of digital futurisms?

I have been lucky to have gained both valuable friends and experience through really wonderful fellowships and research opportunities. I remember when I went to Michigan State University as a Ministry of Education SPARC fellow, I was a total newbie and just in awe of there being a Digital Humanities Lab on campus! That chapter taught me that there are endless ways to play around with digital media fields – things I hadn't even considered possible because I just didn't have that kind of exposure before. What was really wonderful was to come back my university here and bring that knowledge with me to share with my colleagues and students, and see more people interact with it in new and imaginative ways all over again.

My Fulbright year at Yale brought me in touch with the kind of film and media programme I had always wanted to participate in, making it possible to collaborate with like-minded folks and generate an inclusive, intersectional and diverse conversation on the transformative power

of pop media and culture, and to carve spaces to discuss care and digital futures in novel ways by platforming marginalised voices.
I've always thought of these opportunities as helping me be a small cog in a bigger conversation and my job is to make sure I can share what I learn with someone who can then continue the chain. It creates a richer conversation and more action!

12) Can you please offer our readers a few recommendations in fictional works and games that you have really enjoyed?

Oh, this is always fun. I know I am speaking to some of the most well-read youngsters around so I'll try to give a recent recommendation for YA dystopias. Yeah, I'll just have to go with Suzanne Collins' *Sunrise on the Reaping*. Makes revisiting *The Hunger Games* even more worthwhile but also can be read as an introductory standalone for the Panem-verse. I know you didn't ask for non-fiction but Contemporary Dystopian Fiction for Young Adults: *Brave New Teenagers* by Balaka Basu et al. is great if you're interested in this area.

I really liked *Everything, Everywhere All At Once* (Dir. Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert) in terms of recent(-ish) films. Otherwise, Hayao Miyazaki's *Howl's Moving Castle* is brilliant and something I often teach; it gets more nuanced with every watch. Short starter games I can recommend which are going to be interesting for budding dystopia scholars are Lucas Pope's Papers, Please and Osmotic Studio's Orwell, again featured often in my lectures.

<u>Note to my interviewers:</u>
Thank you for interviewing me for LitScroll. The amount of hard work you've put in curating these thought-provoking questions humbled me and I feel honoured to be part of this issue. I am glad to share a small portion of my work and life with the place I still think of as home. Good luck for your future endeavours!

The Panel Parade

SHADOWY PURSUIT

- Angelina.

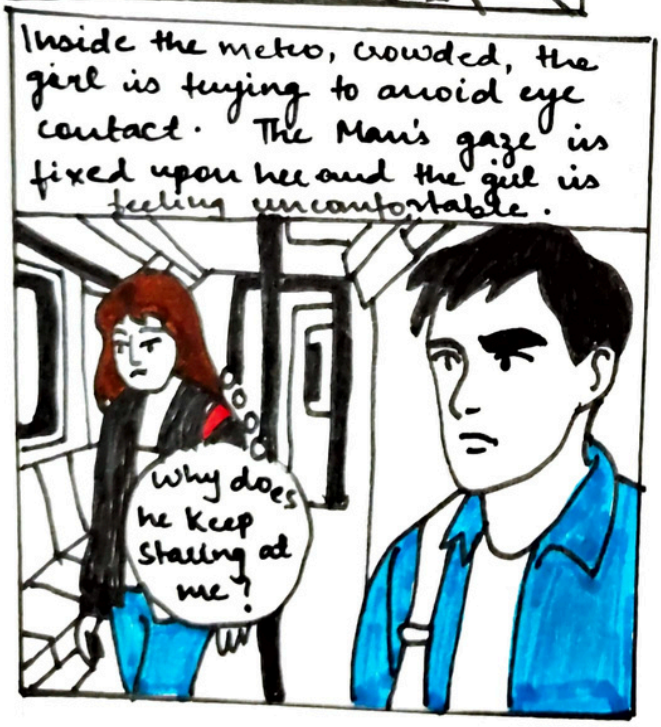
Angelina Kerketta, BA Honours English, 2nd Year

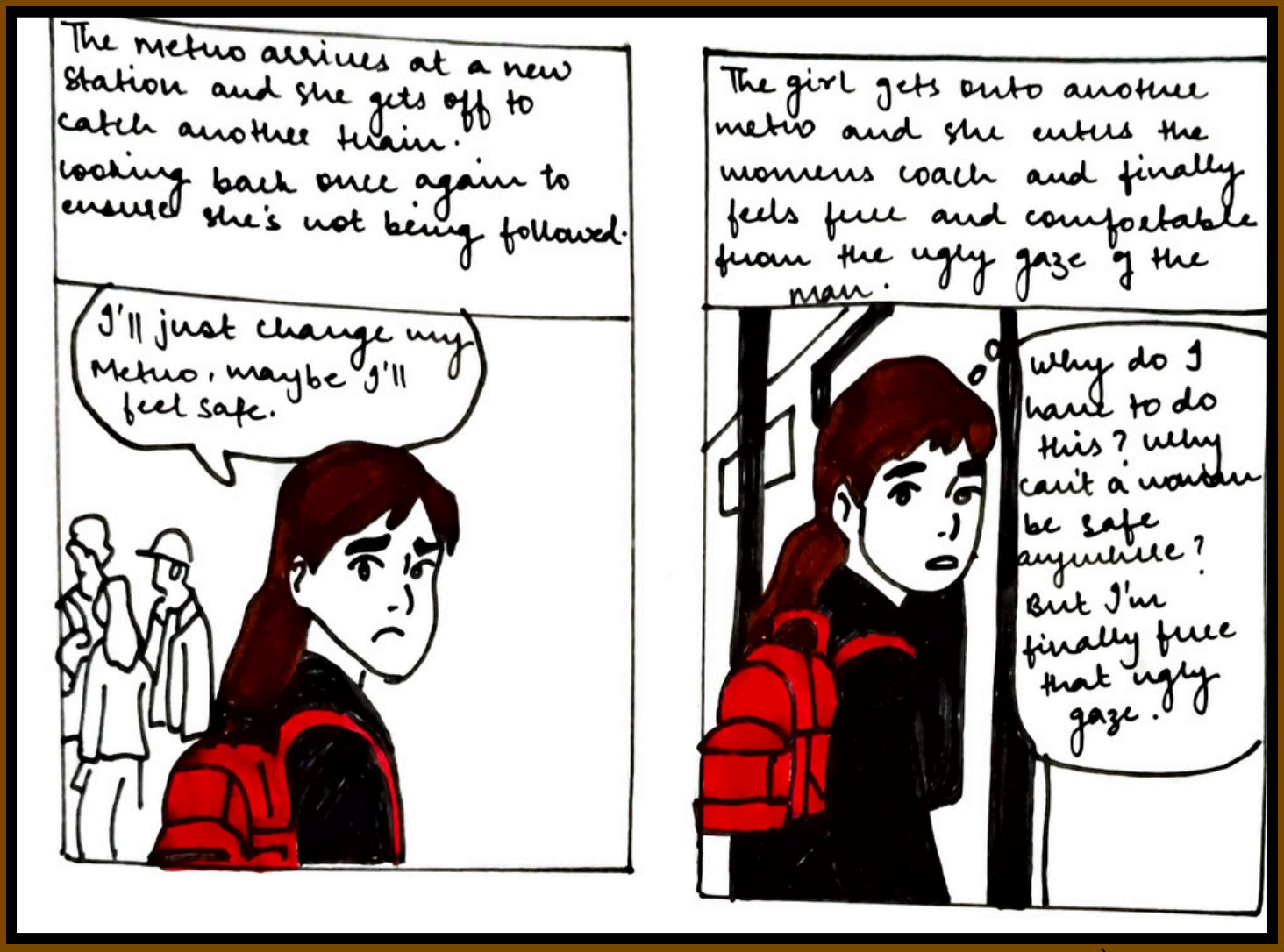
THE LOOMING THREAT

Catherine Johnson, BA Honours English, 2nd Year

Track of Fear

By: JIA JIMMY MATTAM



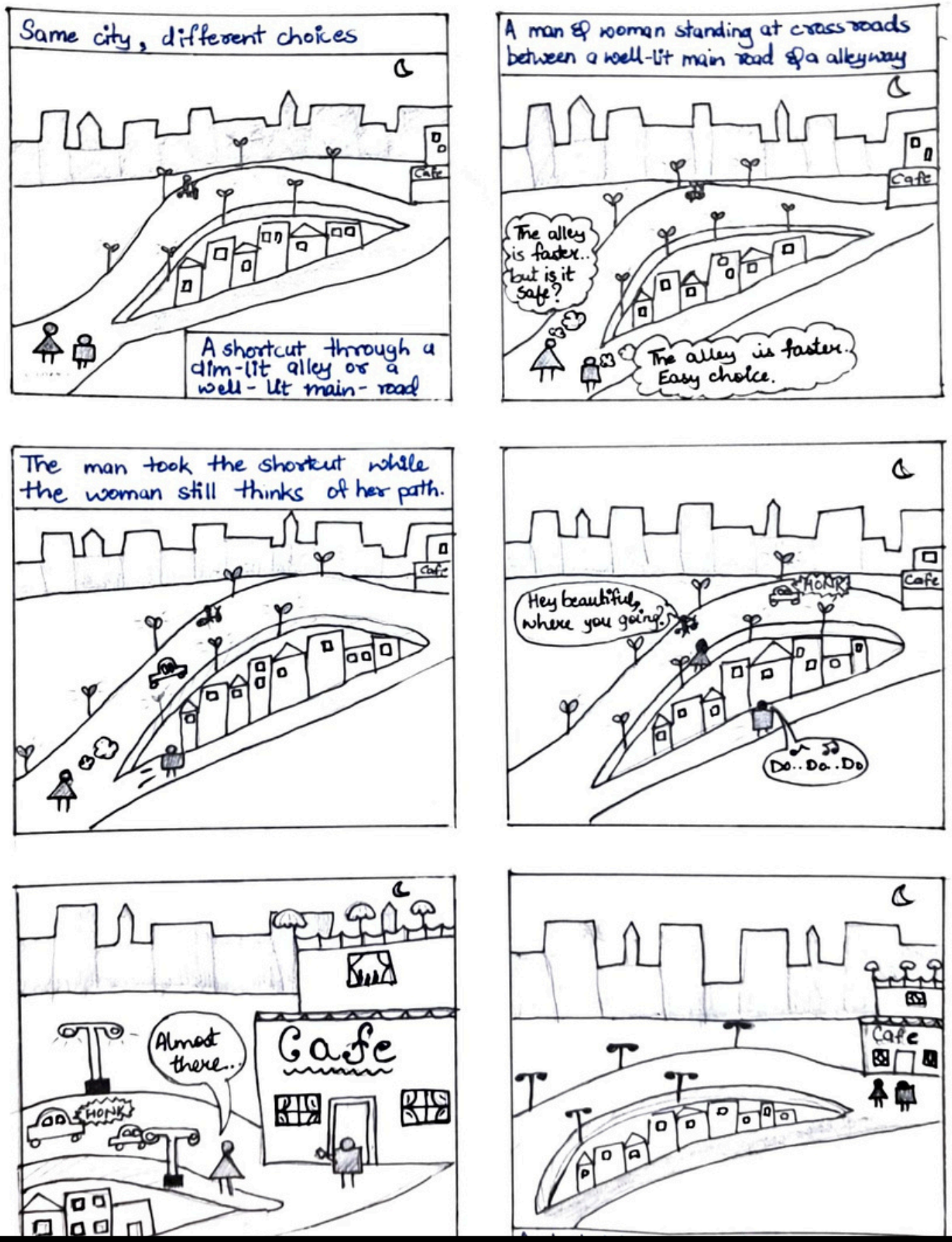


)

Jia Jimmy Mattam, BA Honours English, 2nd Year

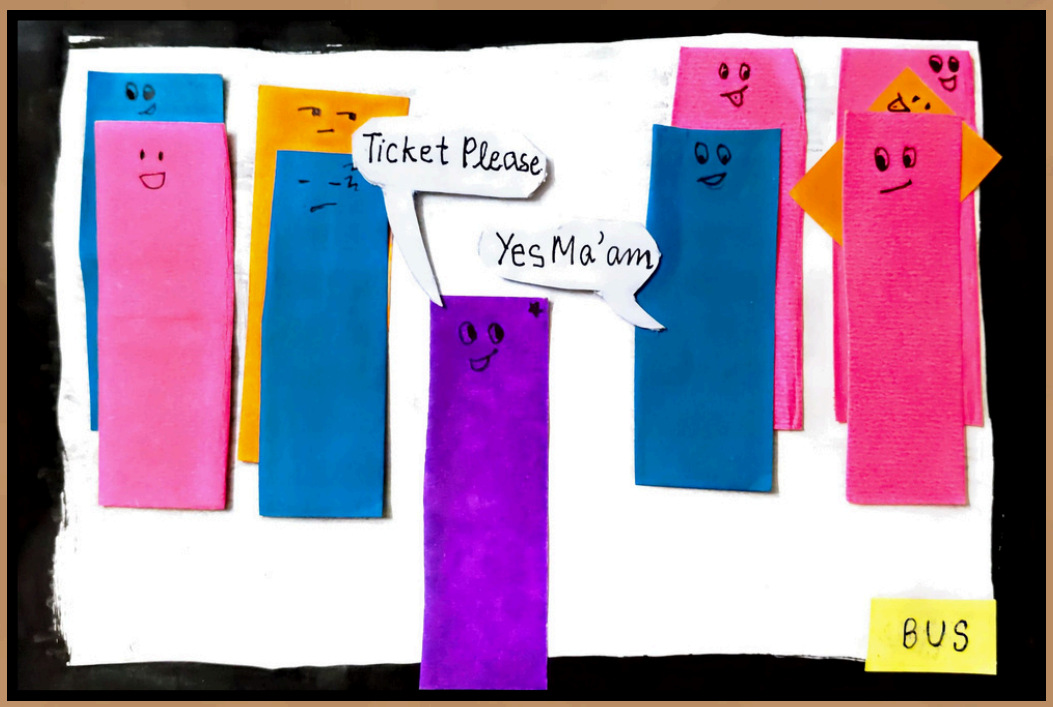
'The Shortcut'

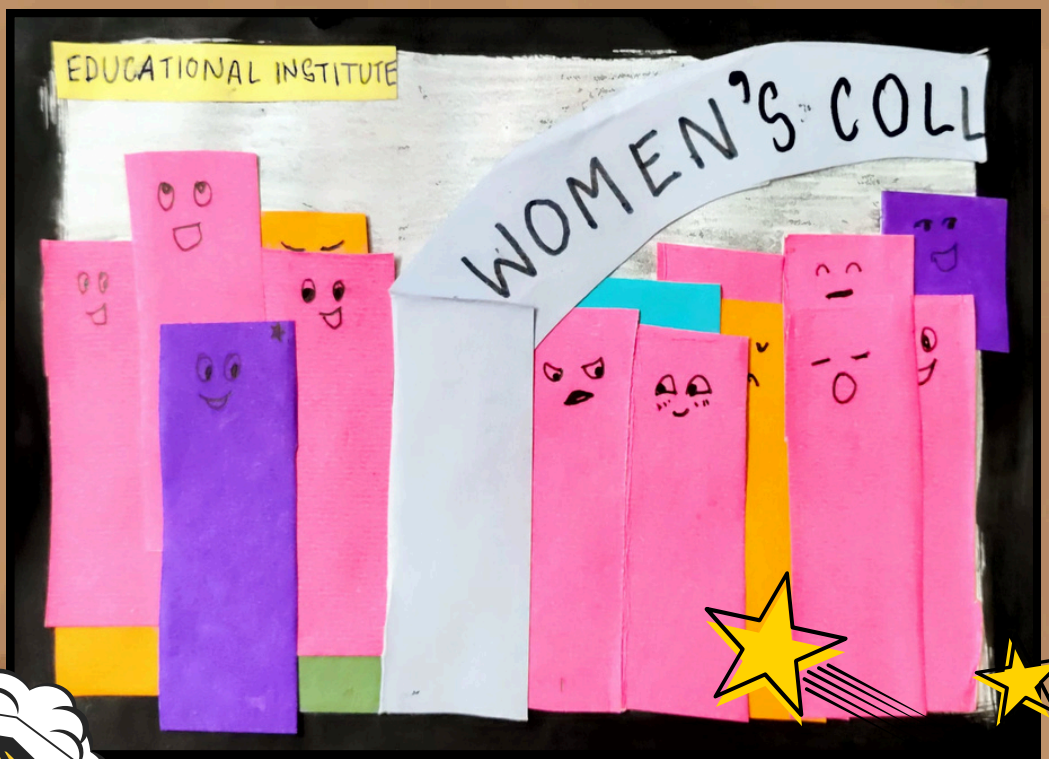
~Annie Thomas



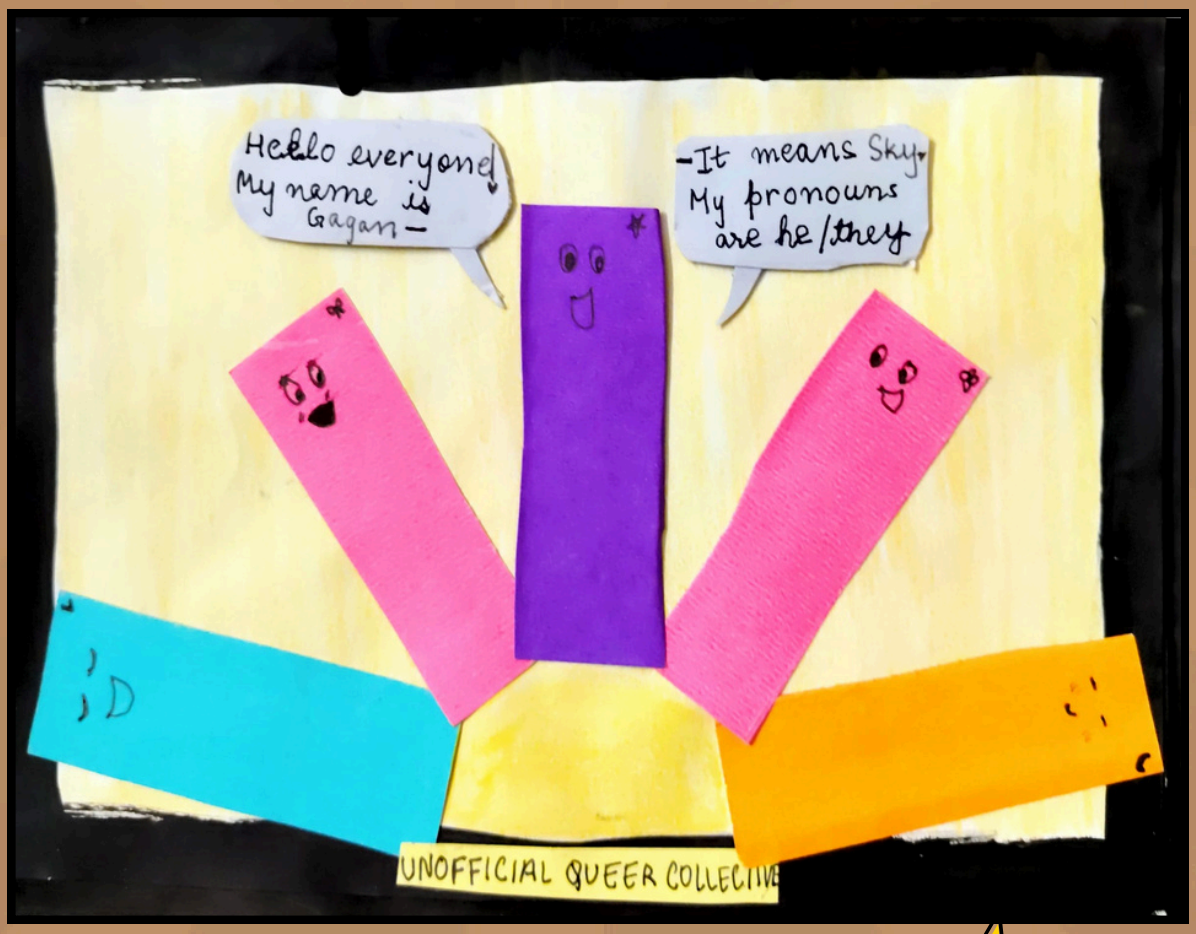
Annie Thomas, BA Honours English, 2nd Year

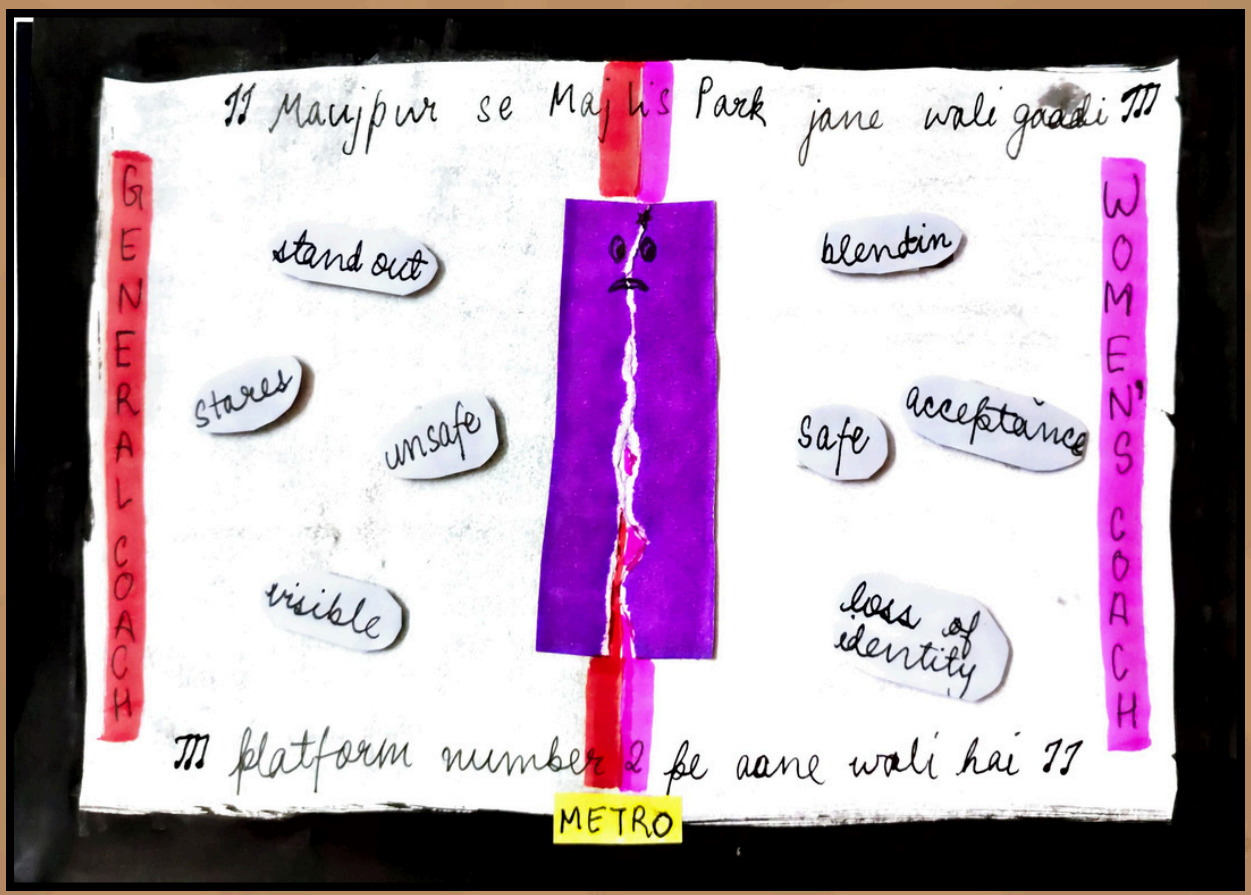

SKY
is the limit
KARN/INAYA
THEY/THEM


Ticket Please
Yes Ma'am
BUS


EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE
WOMEN'S COLL


GIRLS....
CLASSROOM


Hello everyone! My name is Gagan-
-It means Sky. My pronouns are he/they
UNOFFICIAL QUEER COLLECTIVE

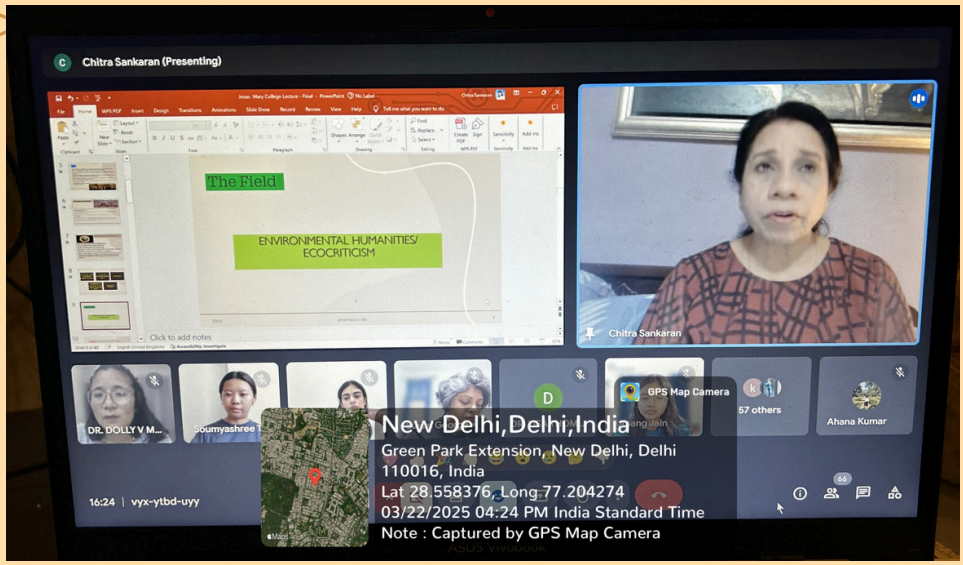


Inaya, BA Honours English, 2nd Year

Campus Chronicles

LITERATI DAY 1

Inaugural Lecture for Literati



"Exploring the Intersections of Literature, Ecology, and Mythology"
With Prof. Chitra Sankaran, National University of Singapore

Panel Discussion : Stories, Strategy & Sustainability

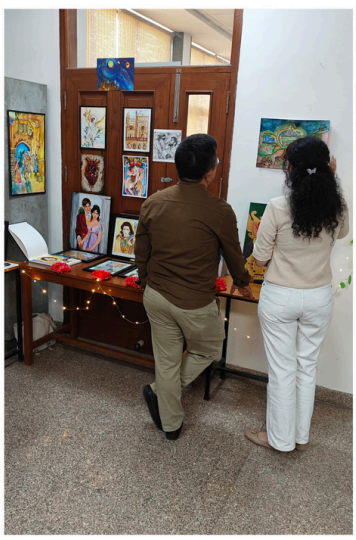
Literati Day 2, 2025–2026 opened on 24th March 2025 with a dynamic panel discussion that brought together three trailblazing voices—Dr. Senganglu Thaimei, Milan George Jacob, and Dr. Aesha Datta, moderated by our very own Dr. Sandhya Devesan Nambiar

LITERATI DAY 2

Interactive Lecture – Dr. David C. Vanlalfakawma

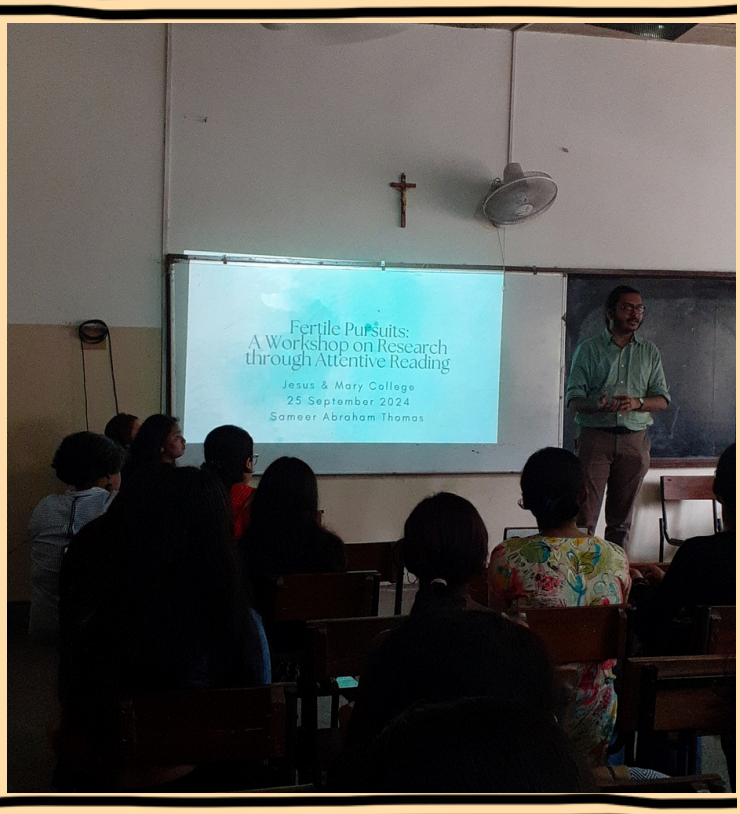
Dr. Vanlalfakawma explored themes of climate resilience, ecological justice, and indigenous knowledge systems–rooting his lecture in lived experiences from Mizoram's bamboo forests.

Bookstall for Literati



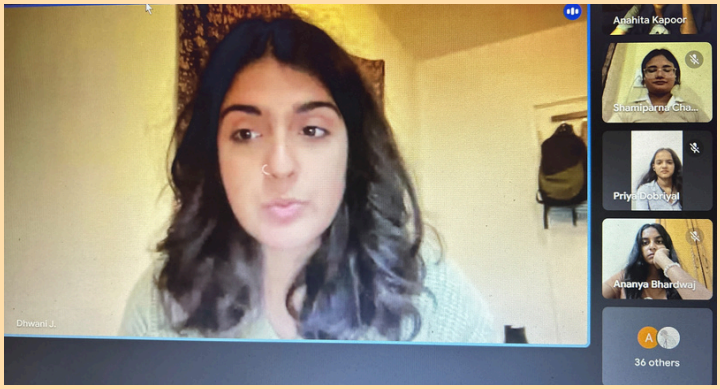
Art Exhibition

Workshops, Seminars & Alumni Talks



Fertile Pursuits: A Workshop on Research through Attentive Reading by **Mr. Sameer Abraham Thomas**

Alumni Talk on overseas studies, procuring letter of recommendation and writing SOP by **Ms. Divjot Kaur**



Alumni Talk on overseas studies, application processes, crafting effective Letters of Recommendation and Statements of Purpose, and securing funding or scholarships by **Ms. Dhwani Jaisingh**

Meet the Author: Catherine Chidgey

A interactive and engaging session with award winning author & lecturer at University of Waikato , **Catherine Chidgey**, held on 29th January 2025.

DEPARTMENTAL ACHIEVEMENTS

The English Department secured first place in the inter-department March Past competition held during the College's Annual Sports Day.

MARCH PAST 2025

S H A K E

S O C

2025

WON THE FIRST RUNNER-UP PRIZE

SHAKESPEARE SOCIETY OF INDIA

The English Department's Shakespeare Society staged its annual production 'Island of Dreams', an imaginative and layered adaptation of *The Tempest*.

EXTRACURRICULARS

As part of the college's annual Winter Chimes festival, the English Department participated in the inter-department carol singing competition. Despite strong competition, their collective musicality and spirit earned them third place.

WINTER CHIMES CAROL SINGING COMPETITION

9.

Board of Belongingness

Back when I was a fresher. I was giving auditions for Kahkasha. Theatre society auditions can be so daunting and I was very nervous. sitting in the amphitheatre. This girl. with curly hair. sweet face. comes and sits next to me. and asks if I'm nervous. I tell her that I am and she straight up asks "do you need a hug?" And. then hugs me. I've never met her before. but that was the sweetest moment of my life. She's my best friend and I love her to bits.

Mokshita Guha-Gautam
(B.A.Hons English, 2nd year)

Pragya Sharma
(B.A.Hons English, 2nd year)

A few months ago. I had made the library my second home. I was there almost every day - before lectures and after early dismissals. The library staff began to notice. greeting me with quiet smiles. as if silently saying. "We see you". Around 3-4 PM. when college would begin to empty. I'd sit for lunch. The non-teaching staff—those who often go unnoticed - waited to clean. never rushing me. always asking gently. "Lunch ho gaya. Beta?" We often speak of professors and peers. but for me. it was these small. consistent kindnesses that made me feel seen. And in that. I felt like I belonged.

Moving to a new city for college has been one of the more scary and empowering phases of my life so far. I was uncertain at first, but as time went by and I slowly started to figure out this new life of mine. I never felt so free, and in control of my life. Now, I have the power to navigate through life as I want. What to do, what to pursue, what type of people I wish to be surrounded by and how I wish to approach my dream life.

Soumyashree Thapa
(B.A.Hons English, 2nd year)

Michelle Rogers
(B.A.P. English + French, 2nd year)

I felt overwhelmed during my first days at JMC- everything was new, and living far from campus made it even harder. Long, tiring commutes made me feel disconnected. But then I met a classmate who lived near me, and we started traveling together. The daily rides turned into moments of laughter, shared worries, and growing friendship. That one connection changed everything. Suddenly, the journey didn't feel so long, and campus didn't feel so distant. Just like that friendship, JMC slowly became welcoming and familiar - a place where I truly felt I belonged.

"I came looking for a college. but ending up finding my people" When I first came to JMC. it felt like I was glitching in a game where everyone else already had their friend groups and go-to seniors. And. I'd just be there: watching it all happen. convinced I wouldn't ever feel that kind of connection. But. then MUN entered the chat. I texted a senior. nervous but manifesting good vibes. and asked her to come with me. That one event changed everything. Now? She's not just a senior. she's home. We've cried. screamed. overshared. and healed together. JMC isn't just a college. It's giving comfort. chaos. and chosen family. My batchmates are serotonin in human form. and my professors? Their energy is so elite. it honestly makes lectures feel like a warm hug with academic validation. Somewhere between the panels and paper deadlines. I found a place that gets me.

Palak Singh

(B.A.P. English + Philosophy. Ist year)

Anonymous

It was the rain in JMC. On the third day of orientation. it started pouring. sudden and heavy. Everyone was laughing. loud. slipping into conversations like we'd all be friends forever. I tried too. Smiled. cooked up fantasies. But. halfway through. uncertainty kicked in. I thought — maybe I should just go home. It's too much. Too many names. too many faces. And. the rain didn't stop. It soaked us. the rain was honest. The campus looked strange and kind — everything a little blurred. just like my thoughts. And I stood there. soaked. unsure. Nobody knew who'd become a friend. who'd just pass by in the corridor. Maybe nothing comes out of this. but for now. that was enough.

JMC felt like an outsider in the first few weeks at Delhi University. This was my first time traveling alone. and the initial experience had been a bit chaotic. I'd made some mistakes earlier. both in managing my studies and forming connections. and was determined not to repeat them here. One afternoon. after my DSC class . went to the print shop and approached a girl who was in my class through that I made my first friend in JMC.

This supportive environment at JMC.(seniors random people i have classes with or someone was looking amazing). I can both contribute and grow. it's helping me avoid past pitfalls. finding a balance . i haven't figured that out but it's fine I'm not stressing upon it . It was within this creative chaos and newfound camaraderie that JMC discovered my sense of belonging on campus. finally making the sprawling university feel like home and truly helping me . well there is more coming. I can't wait❤️

Lorraine Gerald
(B.A.Hons English, Ist year)

Notes received have been posted as received, to borrow a line from Jeet Thayil, "these errors are correct"

10.

Jukebox

Dear Readers,
As a small parting gift from the *LitScroll* Team, we present to you a fresh, gourmet selection of songs that we thought of while working on this issue of the magazine, so here it is: the *LitScroll* JukeBox #1!

Sent in by all our team members, here is a curated list of songs you can play while reading this beautiful little magazine. Maybe it will enhance the experience, maybe you'll find something new, either way, I promise it will be quite fun!

Alienation and Belongingness as a theme touched a vein in all of us. As young adults who are often away from home, fresh to college, forging a fresh way of thinking, carving our space in the world, it seldom leaves us time to consider our own selves. When we do find the time on late quiet nights, it leaves us in a perilous limbo: everything has changed, nothing will ever be the same. This leads to the questions: who are you now? When you don't even know that, what is the point?

Coming from this inner conflict, I received a large number of (very low BPM) songs dealing with loneliness, abandonment, and change. Songs like *What Was I Made For?* by Billie Eilish, *No One Noticed* by The Marias, and *People Watching* by Conan Gray all echo the simple wish for direction, for trust, and for something dependable and stable.



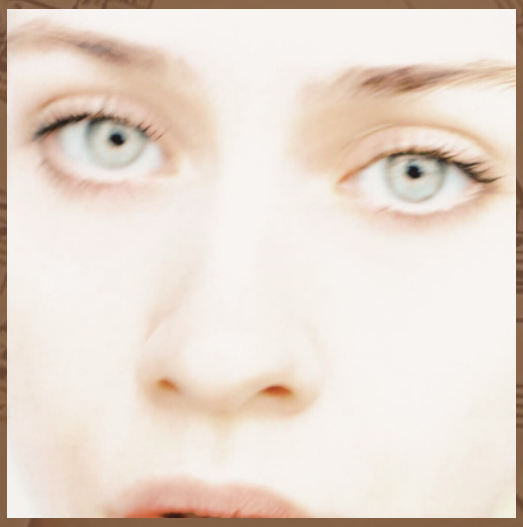
There is a bit of teenage angst too, most of us are growing out of our teenage years, but teenage angst is extremely relevant even now. The songs *Galapagos* by The Smashing Pumpkins, *Hard Time* by Paramorea and *The Child is Gone* by Fiona Apple can play to rock the house. The playlist features even quieter songs of dissent such as *Like a Rolling Stone* by Bob Dylan and *I Am a Rock* by Simon & Garfunkel.

After angst, comes slow and eventual acceptance. Everything has changed, nothing will ever be the same. And maybe, just maybe, it will be alright. Eventually you will settle into the world that you inhabit , you will find people who believe in you. It will be *Strange* like the Celeste Song but hopeful like *This is Me Trying* by Taylor Swift, *The Wind* by Yusuf/Cat Stevens, and *Bittersweet Symphony* by The Verve.

There is hope in the world for those who wish to see it, and there is hope for those who choose to ignore it, too. Eventually you too will belong, to this world and most importantly, to yourself.

The End. (A song by The Beatles, apologies, I couldn't help the pun there, as corny as it sounds!)

Rinchan Lyall Robert,
B.A. Programme, 2nd Year


1. *People Watching* by Conan Gray

2. *Homeward Bound* by Simon & Garfunkel

3. *This is Me Trying* by Taylor Swift

4. *Hope is a Dangerous Thing for a Woman Like Me to Have* by Lana Del Ray

5. *Fourth of July* by Sufjan Stevens

6. *Sign of the Times* by Harry Styles

7. *Like a Rolling Stone* by Bob Dylan

8. *The Only Living Boy in New York* by Simon & Garfunkel

9. *Matilda* by Harry Styles

10. *Our House* by Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young

11. *The Wind* by Yusuf/Cat Stevens

12. *I Am a Rock* by Simon & Garfunkel

13. *Bittersweet Symphony* by The Verve

14. *Comfort Crowd* by Conan Gray

15. *Daydream* by The Smashing Pumpkins

16. *Galapagos* by The Smashing Pumpkins

Loved

17. Fresh Tendrils by Soundgarden

18. Hard Times by Paramore

19. Francis Forever by Mitski

20. *Bayaan* by Kaha Jaun

21. *No One Noticed* by The Marias

22. *Show Me How* by Men I Trust

23. *Strange* by Celeste

24. *The Child is Gone* by Fiona Apple

25. *What Was I Made For* by Billie Eilish

26. *Malibu* by Hole

27. *Talk to me* by Cavetown

28. *Only the Brave* by Louis Tomlinson

29. *Black Star* by Radiohead

30. *The End* by Beatles

Scan this QR to listen to our playlist on Spotify !!

LITSCROLL 2024-25

MEET THE TEAM

MINNA ANN JACOB

Editor-in-Chief

I judge people by their political stance. It tells me everything I need to know.

- **Comfort movie**: *Harry Potter*, cuz why not?

- **Identifies as:** A curly hair girl who loves to flaunt her natural curls and proudly holds the title of certified animal cuddler - you can never convince me that humans are better than animals.

- **Location:** probably in a heated debate with someone over topics like patriarchy, misogyny, feminism, and capitalism.

SHIVANGI SOOD

Head Of Design

- **Comfort movie**: *Queen*... because going on honeymoon alone sounds like a dream!
- **Identifies as:** A professional yearner
- **Location:** My mind (I wish there was a way out though!)

Canteen me hari chutney khatam hogayi kya? Samosa kaise khau?!!

YOGYAA GUPTA

Head Of Social Media

- **Comfort movie:** *YJHD*— because when Kabira starts, I make unblinking eye contact with the wall and call it healing
- **Identifies as:** A girl in STEM (S: Stress T: Tea E: Existentialism M: Melodrama)
- **Location:** Somewhere between "I'm fine" and Googling symptoms at 2 AM.

If you really think about it...that's patriarchy

GUNTAS KAUR CHANNI

Design and Social Media Team

- **Comfort movie:** *Crazy Rich Asians*
- **Identifies as:** A coffee addict
- **Location:** Mentally absent

I think I told you this already, but

MUSKAN VERMA

Design and Social Media Team

- **Comfort movie:** *Pride and Prejudice*
- **Identifies as:** A chai lover with a journal and a wandering mind.
- **Location:** Between library shelves and bookstore corners.

Are you eight, or what?

AIRA SHARMA

Design and Social Media Team

- **Comfort movie:** *Bullet Train*
- **Identifies as:** An apple
- **Location:** everywhere and nowhere

"**incoherent mumbling**"

RINCHAN ROBERT

Content Team

- **Comfort movie:** *When Harry Met Sally* (ONLY romcom ever made!)
- **Identifies as:** A doormat
- **Location:** everyone's doorstep

"No, don't buy that, I can make it for you."

AAMNA REHMAN

Content Team

- **Comfort movie:** *Before Sunset*
- **Identifies as:** A lazy creative
- **Location:** in a fantasy book

Before it has to exist for anyone else, your art has to exist for you

DEBLINA BRAHMACHARI

Content Team

- **Comfort movie:** The *Devil Wears Prada*
- **Identifies as:** Bookish and bold, a paradox.
- **Location:** Between books and cinematic dreams.

I don't overthink, I just predict the future beforehand.

"Until we meet again between the pages."

~Litscroll 2025-26