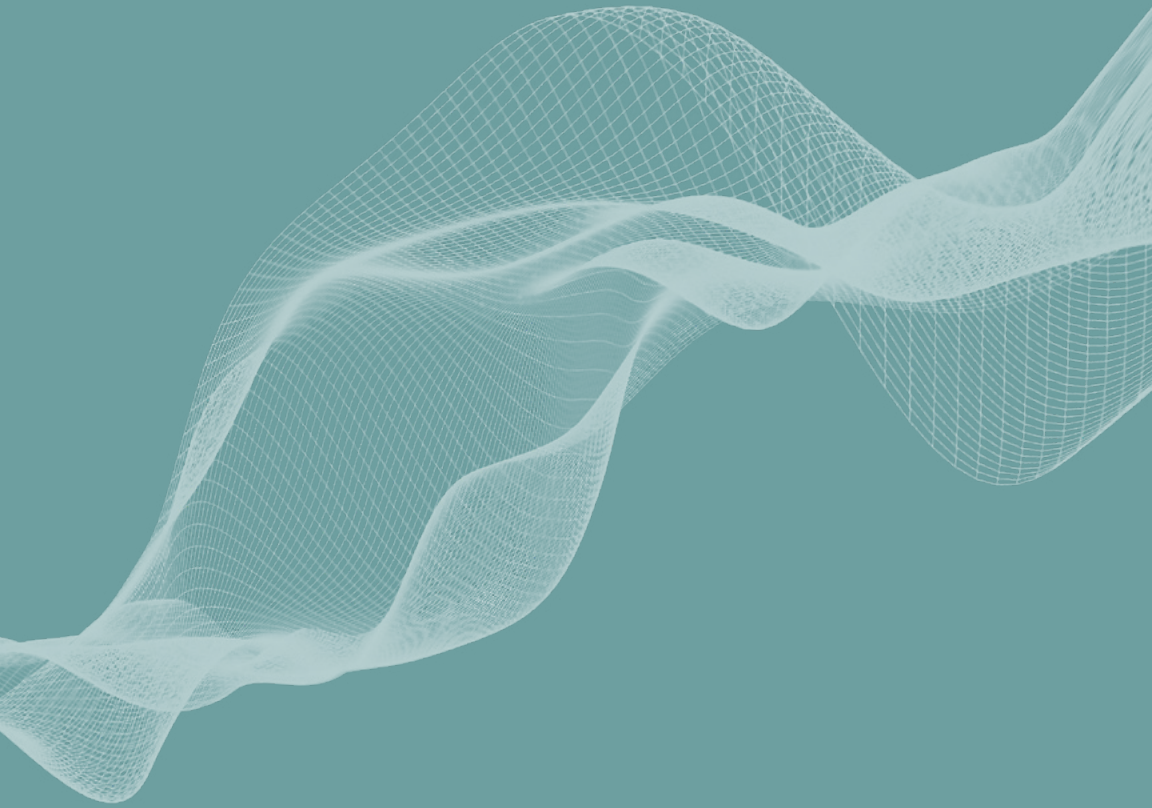


Call #1



Edited by: Rahul Juneja

Hekh: Call #1

Produced and Designed at Hekh, Mayur Vihar, New Delhi

Editor: Rahul Juneja

Design: Shruti Shandilya and Aakriti Palliwal

Cover Design: Shruti Shandilya

Published by:

Hekh

375-G, Mayur Vihar, Pocket 2, Phase 1

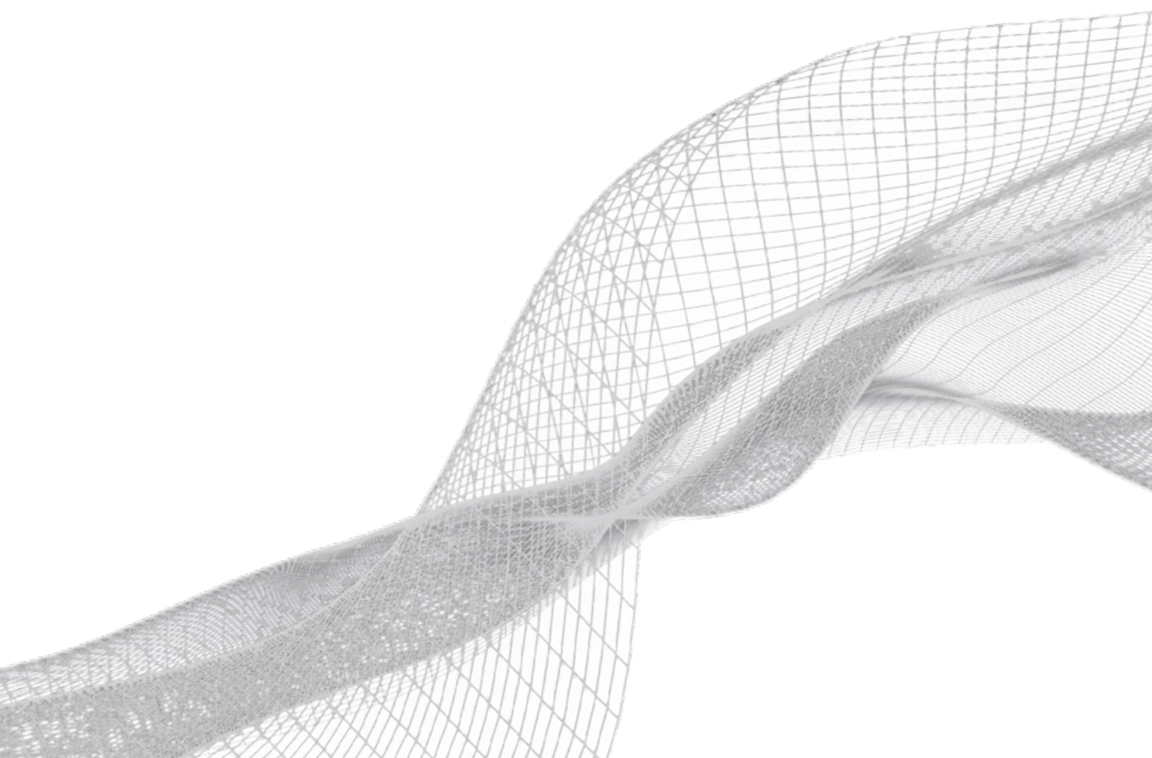
New Delhi- 110091

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Published on 1st August, 2024.

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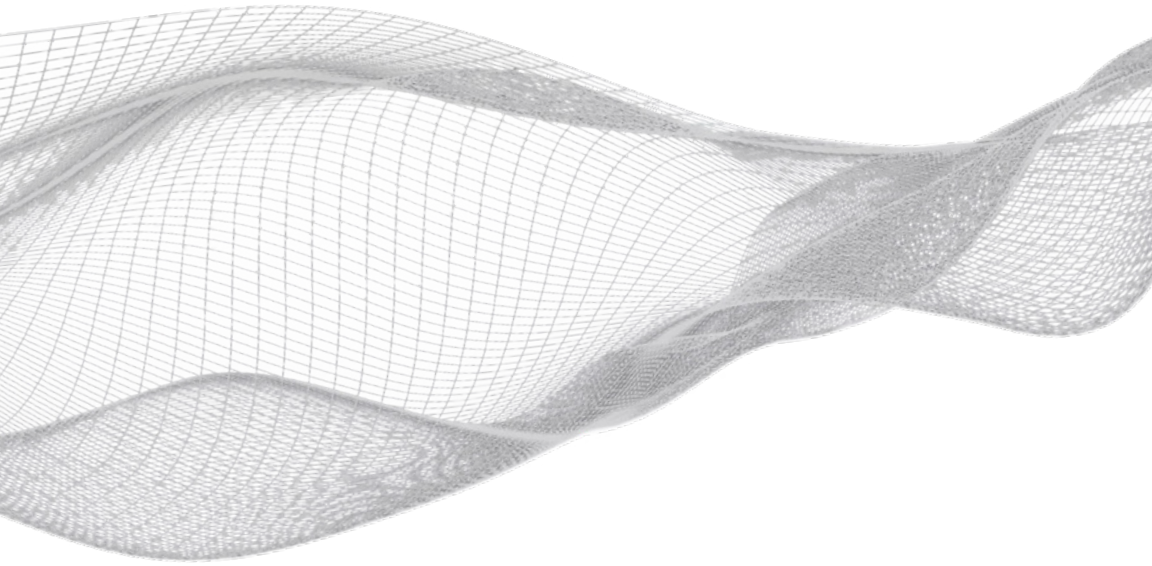
Price: Rs. 300, US\$ 12, € 11 Euros.



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Rahul Juneja
Rohan Dahiya
Soumya Yadav
Sumit Kumar
Studio A68
Suvani Suri
Tushti Pundir



***रौशनी, छिपकली और पतंगा**

****9 + 2 = 11**

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Arun Kumar Singh



SN Elementary

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Tushti Pundir



Gulleyball- Moneyball

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Line and Intervention

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Studio A68



Government College of Art Chennai.

Kindly Choose:

Option 1: Review and Ressurrect

Option 2: Do not Resuscitate

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Malavika PC



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EDITOR'S NOTE

Rahul Juneja

The journey of this call started from a deeply personal note, one situated in my artistic journey from Karnal to now. From a rigorous, imitational skill based practice to finding myself denying all that was inculcated and given; In a constant confrontation with an unknown, volatile definition of art, that slowly brings to light the constructed binaries of legible and non-legible, art and non-art, professional and amateur, practice and theory. This vocabulary of binaries was suffocating, yet it set in quickly that existing structures fed off these binaries to survive, and even thrive. Every structure references the past, albeit in a linearity. Often, we find ourselves thrown into and spearhead it without our intent. What is then, the way to move forward and can it be done without carefully taking note of what is now, and what is our place in this paradigm that evolves with us? Does the past and its lingering have to be such an absolute? Can the artistic gesture in the contemporary allow us to become nimble, where the linear torpedo of history is transformed into a constellation of ideas and events to be drawn from, through our contextual lenses and at our own pace(s)?

The first encounter with this lingering, was felt while pursuing bachelors at the College of Art in New Delhi; An 81-year-old recipe laid down the ingredients to make a traditional, classic dish, with extremely detailed and specific measurements. Within this veil of an acquired, hired taste hides an imposed legible; one that kills any deviations in ideas, media to translate, and the being of the artist. The 'tradition' brings a stasis that safeguards itself through the rubric of sacrilege and an unknown cultural loss- reducing the free, energised, inherently unstable artistic gesture to a fabricated stability. These discussions with friends even then over bread pakodas (Indian snack) and Mandi House daal chawal (lentils and rice) were always intense; but we yet did not have the language, or the confidence to articulate such thoughts- even though they had scale, lived experience, and a thriving richness within them.

With time, it became apparent that these concerns, were not merely specific to us, but something plaguing curriculums, artists, and institutes across India, and with exposure to contemporary paradigms- throughout

the world. Whispers continued to echo and travel, albeit within extremely intimate and informal settings. Young graduates, insecure and thrown into the 'market', could not risk being judged, or for that matter, threaten their position within the 'artistic circle'. Repercussions of indulging in free expression at government institutes, and a culture that equates questioning with disobedience had forced us to be wary of people, their motivations, and especially of projecting our ideas of work, or art, and god forbid, ideologies.

While these whispers in intimate gatherings and solidarities seemed arbitrary to many; these associations gave way to something profound. New solidarities and friendships, an environ of care and trust pushed one to think of a pluralistic vision of artistic practices, where we could free our imaginative scales, let go of inhibitions and open ourselves to a new world of art that is contouring itself around us. These conversations not only continued, but intensified. Whether they took place under the starry skies of First Draft gatherings on a terrace in Vasant Kunj; or over a glass of old monk mixed in warm water in Big Banana; sipping chilled nimbu paani with friends on a stall in Connaught Place; having fresh samosas and sipping chai at Studio A68; eating delicious kebabs sitting in Studio Jangpura; or through 4 a.m. provocations in the night in their Eureka moment. These affinities kept resonating, generating a constellation that has not been hesitant to engineer new imaginations of artistic gestures through inhabitation, gatherings, and space making. A need for an interface also became apparent- where these mappings could be marked and continue to generate further articulations.

A prompt for a publication started to take shape, one that would not be restricted to textual contributions, but articulations in all formats capable of generating a mobile and discursive sphere. The first round of invitations heavily focused on specific institutions, universities, and art colleges, within which we were placed contextually. The inquiries ranged from thinking about colonial hangovers; the generation of an ultimate 'ism'; the intertwining of the womb and the institute; tracing an inherent ontological deficiency within structures; navigating purity, stasis, and sacrilege in the institutional context; and thinking of integrity, intensity, and the rough edges of the structures we inhabit.

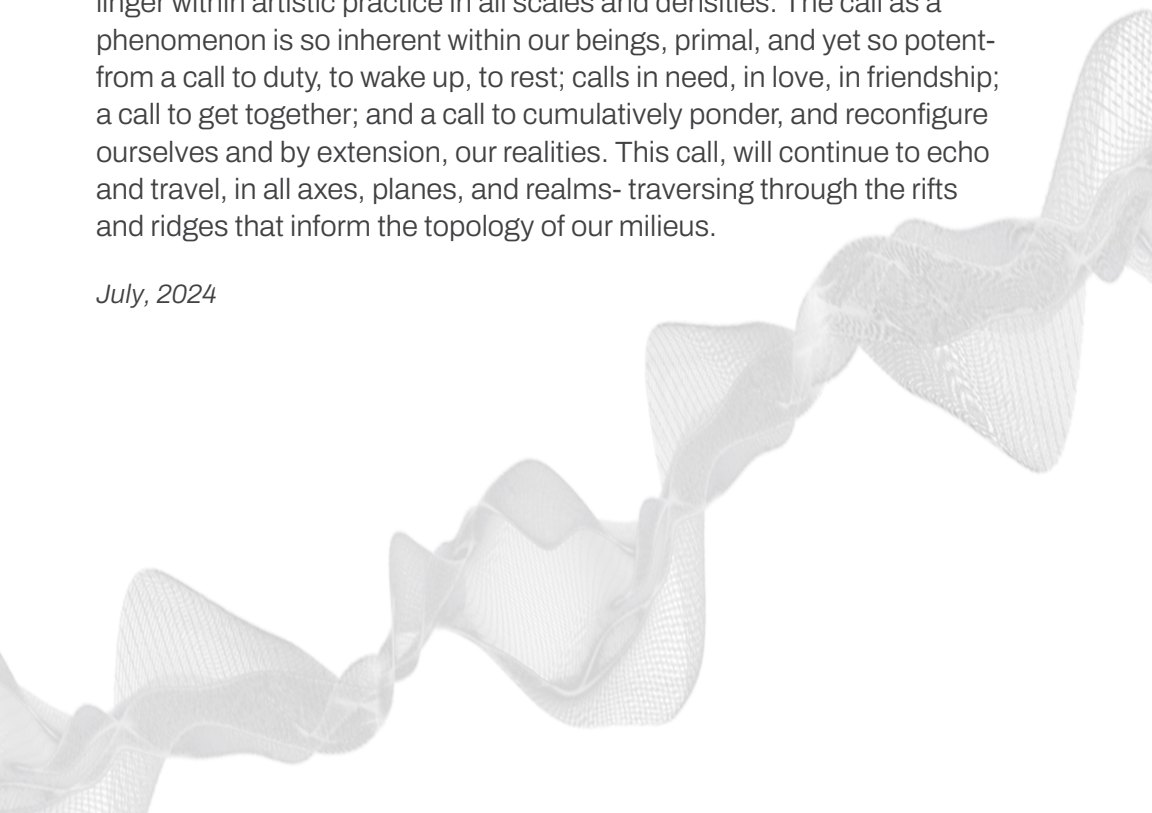


The subsequent round saw an abstraction of what an institution could be- this brought together thinking on structures, formalizations, and hierarchies- of orders of knowledge, of language, and of resistance. The contributions here, dealt with patriarchal institutions and the rigidity they cultivate; the coronation of spectacle that structures uphold as a mask; The ways in which the market anxieties shapes artistic practices; the relationship that artists have with night and labour; and thinking around thresholds, capacities and rules that inform our individual and collective perceptions.

The final round, saw interpretations and navigations around the fundamentals of what structures are, and practices that propose new forms and what they should hold dear. From bringing to life spaces sustained by care; The urges to find new axioms of practice and working while navigating through complex, economic and social frictions; Gatherings that create and reflect on practices through invitation as a form; The residues of gatherings, collaborations, and their form; and of piracy, fermentation, fusions, and rogue recipes.

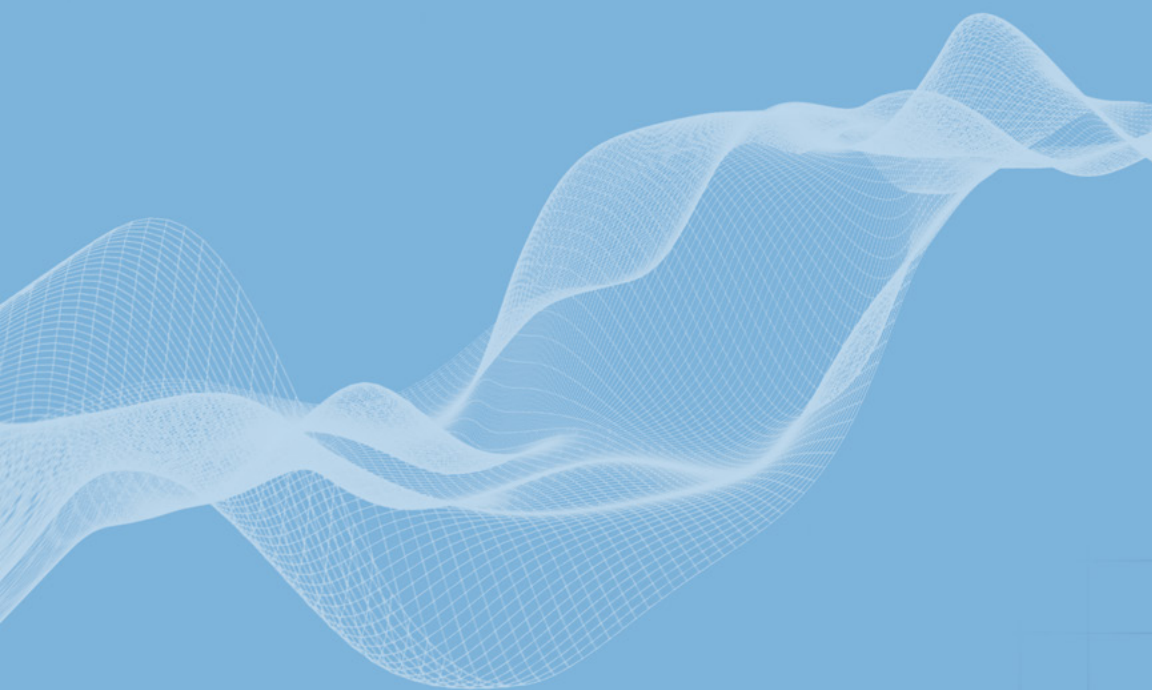
This call has continued to gather resonances throughout the months since its interception, to open up how institutions, and structures linger within artistic practice in all scales and densities. The call as a phenomenon is so inherent within our beings, primal, and yet so potent- from a call to duty, to wake up, to rest; calls in need, in love, in friendship; a call to get together; and a call to cumulatively ponder, and reconfigure ourselves and by extension, our realities. This call, will continue to echo and travel, in all axes, planes, and realms- traversing through the rifts and ridges that inform the topology of our milieus.

July, 2024



TRACING

Anurag Singraur, Malavika PC, Manika,
Kaushal Sapre, Priyesh Gothwal, Rahul
Juneja, Rohan Dahiya, Tushti Pundir




SOCIAL ANATOMY OF AN INSTITUTION

Anurag Singraur

April, 2024

The university¹ is a site of layered histories that carry evidence of abandonment. Material, precious to context once, is often found as relic by the new occupants. This excavation is extraction of the useful from the decayed. Most of which, used over and over, find shelter in huge warehouses where dust sits upon them. The rust slowly eats through what is metal, while water seeps in whenever it pours too heavily. Files that were once the founding documents of the infrastructure, now are feast to the silverfishes. Perhaps they are the biggest and the 'purest', in consumption, repository of data. These are often categorized and compartmentalized into cages at different locations. Stuffed on top of one another as an installation, pocketed inside hoarding spots within the premises. Material in abundance accumulated ready to be sold to scrap. Strictly prohibited to even move on and off campus. Like an attempt to encapsulate decay within cages. Students often find solace within this decay when visualizing newer ways to represent their ideas. Emergence of new realities from the rusted past, of which, 'decay' becomes a prominent theme.

In the institutional understanding, this 'decay' has a different meaning, it has a negative connotation. This understanding places it as something that is exterior to the body. Something that needs to be cleaned. It traces deep and way back, if not to the early teaching system, but to the colonial gaze that seeps through these institutions of control. This purist ideology negates any form of deviation from the prescribed pathway of integrity and neglects any alternative growth. Traces of which will be found in the culture around the formation of any institution in all its physicality and non-physicality. Since ancient times, the moral censure that comes with usage of the word or at least the acceptance of the idea has been met, throughout the world, with an objectively observable decline that the society, or the institution in question, is bound to. Hence, the rosy retrospection causes an effect of declinism. Meaning



the cognitive biases resulting from predispositions about the past being more favourable than the future. Declinism is seen as a phenomenon that is an emotional strategy, to find something to recoil when the current situation seems to be filled with void.

Signifiers of “Decadence”² usually lie in the material realm in defining an institution. Epistemically “waste” fills in for decadence in a socio-political understanding. Also ‘futility’. Institutions today are often thoroughly looked at with this lens of tangible productivity and progressiveness. It’s quite a contrast to look at decadence but also as a concept here. Something parasitic. This paradigm is crucial in understanding the representative capacity of the institutional setup and its everlasting coherence with decadence that transcends the typical notion of what it really constitutes. Perhaps, then the idea of an institution unanchors from its established past.

Institutions are meant to be places where different minds come to recalibrate. For ways in which we have been coded into different structures of the society, the institution provides a newer understanding. Ideally, this should be the mode of systematic operation of it to realize better ways to operate a healthy churning of thoughts. This includes an active contestation of the physical and the conceptual infrastructure that the institution is based upon. Numerous bodies within it take up roles to prevent the complete control of the extreme ends of the spectrum; on one hand is individual liberty while on the other is institutional control. The constant asking that one does, both as an individual actor and part of the larger contributor to the structure, neutralizes the spaces for a better engagement amongst its occupants. Often confused with the idea of ‘abled mobilization’ within both its tangible and intangible realms; alot gets separated from what constitutes these spaces. These social spheres are in deep contestation with the normatives of our anthropocentric understandings. Hence, these spaces of social sphere are often contested and in need of countervailing existing hegemonies. This requires an unfolding of the understanding of what comprises the ‘social sphere’?

The formulation of the social sphere is similar to a phenomenon that,



according to 'Williams' in the 'The analysis of culture'³, does not comprise any one event or subject to any particular series of events in history. It is not just the recorded social and cultural understanding that is done during a particular time frame. It is often understood that to sum up 'social behavior' and for its better comprehension, one has to take a step back and look at the 'overall picture'. In the rush to encode its components' smooth transition, the institution fails to recognize this bigger picture. Periodization is another mode to encapsulate culture through which there is an attempt to intricately define 'the social', altogether. But how Williams defines the 'culture' is through which we may also direct to the necessary components that contribute to the assessment and further formulation of the social sphere. It is also understood through the same that different social spheres have different impacts on each other, and to rule out any one of them or even a minute component of anyone is also to deprive ourselves of a "complete" composition. And further, is there anything as "complete"? There seems to be an endless pursuit to put a parameter to be able to define something as a "whole" precisely, which is again what bodies with a false sense of autonomy do. But the social studies give room to the nonparametric approach as there is a synchronization of infinite undefined phenomena in chaotic order that would best define a culture and further social behavior. Even when we formulate an institution and variables of its existence. It is through this, that the social then is also incomplete without the political. Politics here is not just understood in the way that one thing has an impact on the other but also through their ends and beginnings.

'Completeness' belongs to the realm of the incomplete. Beginnings are often the end and the ends are the beginnings. Hence, categorization always bars the basic components that are the structure of something. How Hall, in his essay 'Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms'⁴, associates feelings with the formulation of culture is through 'experiences in process', which, makes it almost inevitable for both the object, part of the 'recorded culture' and the intangible structures that may or may not have a 'visible' impact on it, to shape our conscience. "Practicing Culture", is an attempt to transgress this 'visual' boundary through a detailed analysis of the 'object' and the elements of its being, both through the questions of the 'what' and 'how'.



The visual has its own reservation, thinking through the vantage point of it being a medium of documentation. Visuals contextualize! It is through the ability to not only visually take the form into consideration but also relate it with the material, out of focus but also invisible. This is how the question of 'being' is addressed, which is ontological. The relation of the object in context to how it is defined also derives its 'being' from how it can not be defined. In institutional understanding, a flower is different from a bee that feeds upon it, is not just the epistemological difference between the flower but also how they both can be identified with respect to each other. In other terms, a flower is 'not a bee' but when it feeds on the flower, it becomes an extension of the flower. Hence the ontological definition of the two also is the epistemological interrelationality. Any institution, under a similar lens, has aggregates that constitute its formulation that is 'ontologically deficient'. The conditions under which these elements or just an element (here, the aggregate) exist are, to an extreme sense, independent or undemanding. They can be shapeless, structureless, or formless and still exist in the realm of the physical and not require the need to be complete in themselves. In this case of definition, no one can really pinpoint the possible number of aggregates that shape an institution.

What then animates the institution? Is it merely the humanly devised structure of rules and regulations, the sole progressive parameter of which is through the rigidity that it maintains. The language of its structure that it may never transcend. An anti-reformic that perpetuates its existence. An institution has a historical reference attached to it. It is a memory of space and time that has lived through it and simultaneously has impacted the understanding of cultures. How recorded cultures have understood these institutions, historically, are through a singular means to decode and read them under a set pattern which often disallows the existence of its aggregates that follow it with space and time. Institutions today also face museumization and are also made part of the historical timeline that eventually puts its burden of existence on the present. This really makes any alteration in the process of it being a neutral space almost impossible. But how does this 'object of the past' therefore of the present and the future, get this significant identity? In his writings, Williams shares his understanding of the 'culture' through numerous 'happenings' that undergo at the same time and also

separately, as these are neither whole nor incomplete. Similar to a contemporary understanding of an institution. As a matter of fact, anything that is thought and externalized works towards defining the institution and its culture. Even the mere existence of it in different times and spaces, helps in the estimation of its culture of this spatiotemporal.

Speaking in the same tone, autonomy then becomes a contested idea. The seemingly absent institution's ontological 'definitivity' claims its ability to transform with time. While it seizes to 'progress', it also, like the institutions of the 'societies of control', shows pseudo-reformistic characteristics in times of crisis. This capacity to perpetuate gives itself a false idea of autonomy. A claim that fails to shift the burden of its formulation, spatiotemporally. The aggregates are understood to follow the logic of preservation, where they fall into the trap of defining/hypothesizing it as an absolute entity. The components' claim to autonomy gives it a false sense of absoluteness. In other words, the aggregates of these institutions, even as individuals, often find it compelling to make it as definitive as possible. The inability to do so is seen as waste, making it an unquenchable thirst. The institution exercising its false autonomy gives itself unprecedented power over its aggregates, hence becoming 'regimic'.

References

1. The university here refers to Ambedkar University, Delhi, which the author is part of for the academic session 2022-2024. These are varied experiences that he shares as a student-wanderer. n.d.
2. "Decadence." n.d. Wikipedia. Accessed May 26, 2024. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Decadence>.
3. Raymond Williams. 1998. The analysis of culture. N.p.: University of Georgia Press.
4. Stuart Hall. 1980. Cultural Studies: Two Paradigms. N.p.: Creative Work: TBC.





As a former student of the second batch of MFA at Shiv Nadar University (SNIOE) and currently in an administrative and teaching role since the inception of the BFA program at O.P. Jindal Global University (JGU), I will explore the behavioral implications of the first few batches of students at a pedagogical institute, from the perspective of a younger twin among three siblings.

“It is no accident, Ma, that the comma resembles a fetus—that curve of continuation.” - Ocean Vuong.

,



THE YOUNGEST, THE MIDDLE, AND THE OLDEST CHILD : A TWIN INFRA- STRUCTURE





THE YOUNGEST, THE MIDDLE, AND THE OLDEST CHILD

Masters of Fine Arts (MFA): A two-year-long postgraduate degree in fine arts.

Bachelor of Fine Arts (BFA): A four-year-long undergraduate honors degree in fine arts.

And a twin, like a wraith¹ with imperceptibility, navigates the dichotomy of master and disciple.

Elder sister > Twins (elder-brother >< youngest-self).

Oldest sister > firstborn twin >< secondborn twin.

Oldest child > middle child >< youngest self.

The oldest child is the only child until (...) The middle child is the youngest child until (...) The youngest child is fated to be young till eternity.

The ideological rebellion of the oldest comes from the direct resemblance and, hence, repulsion from the institution. The emotional rebellion of the secondborn comes from the expectation to be the firstborn. And the reckless rebellion of the youngest comes from the protection of the oldest and the middle child.

A guinea pig (...) Overlooked and ignored (...) Accused of enjoying the surplus.

Elder sister > elder brother >< youngest self

36-year-old > 30-year-old >< 30-year-old (-30 minutes)



‘
;

THE ONE AND THE OTHER TWIN

*MFA 2014 was the older batch for 2015 and remained so...
He stands at the door, ready to leave.
We shared an apartment.
I held a towel over my head.
It was sky and stars.*

*MFA 2015 was the younger batch for 2014 and the older batch for 2016.
He lays at the edge, ready to sleep.
We shared a bed.
I held a blanket over my head.
It was sky and stars.*

And a twin, like a wraith¹ with amortality, complicates the chronology set in place at birth.

Age and the order of birth:

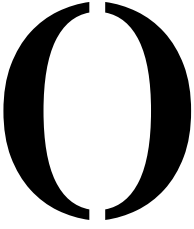
Biologically believed, they are both the same age (‘,) For some, the firstborn is the older twin as it steps into the world before the other (‘,) While for others, the secondborn is the older twin as it steps into the womb before the other.

*BFA 2021 is the older batch for 2022 and remains so...
The secondborn twin.
Youngest among the three.*

*Becomes the other.
BFA 2022 is the younger batch for 2021 and the older batch for 2023.
Becomes the other.*

*The oldest to his youngest self.
Middle child among the three.
BFA 2023 is the younger batch for 2022 and will remain so...*





THE WOMB AND THE STUDIO: A TWIN INFRA-STRUCTURE

Twin infrastructure: the womb (,) that lies before the institution and the studio (,) that lies after the institution. Both offer a pool of resources with an infrastructure of share and care.

Monochorionic placenta: Sharing from one placenta/resource pool in the womb.

Dichorionic placenta: Sharing from two different placentas/resource pools in the womb.

And a twin (,) like a wraith¹ with intangibility (,) navigates across the walls of the institution.

1. The belief that a ghostly twin's appearance portends death is common to many cultures. In German folklore, such an apparition is called a *Doppelgänger*; in Scottish lore, they are wraiths.- Merriam-Webster Dictionary.

“

DEDICATION:

To my twin brother and elder sister; to MFA batch 2014, 2015, and 2016 at Shiv Nadar University (SNioE) and to BFA batch 2021, 2022, and 2023 at O.P. Jindal Global University (JGU)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT:

Priyank Gothwal, Mohit Shelare, and Rahul Juneja



S.N ELEMENTARY

Tushti Pundir
May, 2024



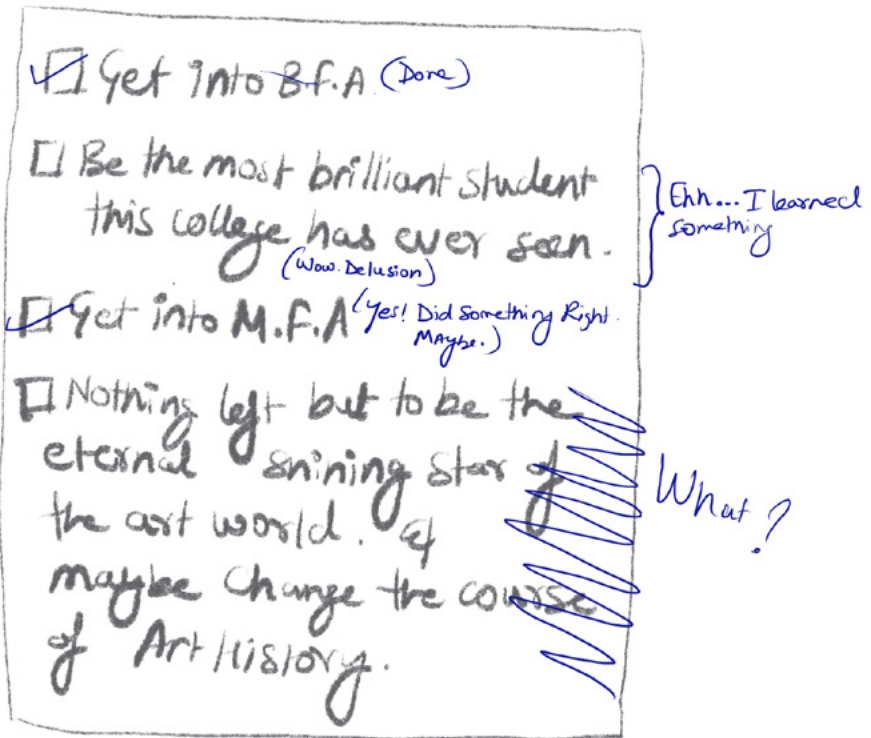


Chapter 1

PANIC

Phhh... Okay. Deep breath, kiddo. You're good. You're okay.

Let's refer to the checklist I made at 15. Maybe that would help.



Calm down. I was a kid when I presumed that. Things are totally different now. My goals are totally different now. I don't know what they are yet,_ but they are totally different. At least I got into M.F.A.

Hyderabad_Won't lie, this one I'm happy about. Now I have a notebook full of questions (the kind human civilization has been asking for over 2000 years), and they're really bugging me, won't let me think straight. I'll just haul them to my first class and sort it all out.

**After the first class..*

Huh.

I should have probably left out a few subjects. We could have done without nihilism, pessimism, aestheticism, double standards of the art world, the value of art, the value of life, probability, relativity, subjectivity, and a tiny bit of every other topic. Maybe I started ranting too soon. Was I the only one? Is everyone else not as panicked as I am? Crap. I really messed up my first impression.

Homework from the first class: Forget everything you know about art. (Sure. Because that's where I shine. Letting things go.)

In the months that followed, there were mass breakdowns, tantrums, and a surge of midnight hikes on the HCU campus (organized by the 1st-year M.F.A. students).

Students were shaken up and destroyed by the earth-shattering, cutting-edge, critical follow-up questions like: "Why?"



Before my very eyes, I witnessed a moment of non-cooperation led by students saying, “Fuck this nonsense. Let’s go for a smoke.” But these brave souls were few and far between. The rest still ran frantically for solutions.

The faculty knew exactly what we were going through. We would whine and complain, flailing our arms with wide eyes. They’d offer sympathetic chuckles and words of encouragement, but apparently not the solutions. As we were about to realize, from now on, we don’t get answers; we just learn to ask the right questions. (It might sound stupidly elementary, but with our messed-up academic background*, this really came as a surprise, and as expected, this did not sit well with a lot of the students)

Interestingly, what was also messed up were the lack of facilities, space, equipment, budget, faculties, resources—the whole package deal you’d expect from a government university in India. (God bless our faculty; they always kept trying, even though things rarely turned out as planned.)

After absorbing the initial shockwave of criticism and “unhelpfulness” from the faculty, there was a widespread epidemic in the department—Analysis Paralysis (*sounds like a spell). For a few months, studios were empty, sketchbooks and diaries were dusty, camaraderie was strong, and we realized everything in Hyderabad was expensive. (Well, expenses had nothing to do with the shockwave; we just realized it at that point. No wonder so many of us kept collecting trash and dirt for work.)

Anyway, Analysis Paralysis.

*Academic background refers to twelve years of an ignorant mind droning under the Indian education system, followed by four years of uncritical, baseless assignment submissions dictated by a curriculum set in 1942.



Chapter 2

DOSA WITH PEANUT CHUTNEY

One summer after: I'm sitting in my studio space. For now, this is the most comfortable place in the world. I have a makeshift table in the corner with a white tablecloth, a grey desk drawer, and a floor mat. My friend's studio space is right beside mine, and my stomach is comfortably full after a hot dosa with peanut chutney and tea. (Nice Sunday breakfast.)

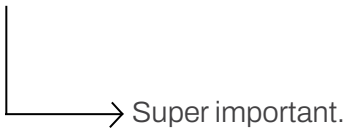
I didn't need to come to the department today; it's empty. But I needed to paint a light sky blue square. (very important) In the evening, I'll go to the south campus to get my laundry done. I'll have tea with a friend and maybe a chicken patty (if available).

For the next 25 minutes, I'll just sit and write in my Pomodoro notebook for dissertation class. (Inner monologue with an imaginary audience—this is where I shine.) The task we've received from Kirtana ma'am is very clear. Just write. Get in the habit of writing. It could be anything, in any language. No one will read it if you don't want them to. Seriously, anything—spend 25 minutes just cussing out the whole process if you want.

Anyway, details are beside the point.

The main teaching objective of the dissertation class is quite simple, as simple as it gets. (At least in an institutional bubble, it's relatively simple.)

Integrity: with yourself, with your work, with your peers, and with the community at large.



Then there's also gratitude and discipline. Also very important. Compassion, cooperation, respect—the whole deal.

12 years of schooling, 4 years of bachelor's, and 2 years of masters to learn what I could have learned from Panchatantra—not that I'm complaining, I'm actually quite enjoying this.

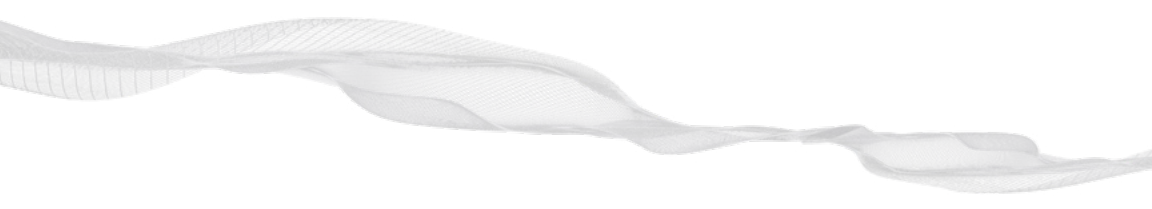
I'm almost entirely sure that I'm biased towards Kirtana ma'am's teaching methods and philosophy. It makes complete sense to me, at least.

Me -> I wake up at 6:30, work out till 7:00. Unlike Delhi, here I'm able to breathe. I do a few sketches and go for breakfast with a fellow obnoxious person at 7:30 sharp. And this has been my heaven. I sleep max by 11:00 pm, and my roommate constantly calls me a boring old person. Which is also great! I love being boring. I'm loving the privilege of being boring.

***Fine Print**

It should be taken into account that my narration is rose-tinted. The experience is not the same for everyone, and our department has huge, massive holes in it, including but not limited to constant class cancellations, limited faculty interactions, outdated curriculum, equipment, etc.

Intentions from both the faculty and students are really good; they just never really pan out that well, like the first wonky pancake.



Chapter 3

HIGHLIGHTER

My hasty writing rushes over the paper as the thoughts come spurting out. The words have no elegance, patience, or finesse. They are messy, repetitive rambling thoughts—the constant bickering of my head and the many residents living inside.

I have months and months of documentation of this bickering, and with the neon highlighter, I sit singling out the troublemakers, odd moments of realizations, and some rather mundane conversations. That was the point of the whole exercise: to sift out something from these months of brain dump. And I know hardly anyone stayed with the routine until the end. As far as I know, only two of us even finished the notebook.

For the past few weeks, we've been sitting in a dark, air-conditioned seminar hall, looking at hours and hours of presentations by each other. We've seen each other's every single artwork we've ever made, discussed movies, books, childhood, and accompanying traumas. We've seen photos of each other's family, home, old school, and friends. Anything and everything one might want to share.

Day by day, someone sat at the front of the hall, receiving undivided attention from the class—an eager audience to each other, those who decided to be there, even if it was just for the AC. Through this, we had constant questions, discussions, debates, counsels, and some passive-aggressive comments. But Kirtana ma'am has kept the tone of dialogue in check; all criticisms are more than welcome if you know how to present them. One drawback of these marathon presentations is that the studios are empty again.

It is fascinating to see how we are working out our foundations and our 'whys'. I don't know if my friends have realized this yet or not, but there is a huge difference in their presentation skills, speaking skills, and confidence. Huge difference. They are able to hold hour-long presentations without making it dull for a second.



And as Kirtana Ma'am had hoped, there is no competition. None at all. Our displays, fresher's, farewells, Holi parties, Diwali dinners—everything is a team effort. (Of course, there might be a few minor disagreements here and there, but that's normal.) Even the students who have their separate set of ideologies are not that far away from the rest. For the first time, I'm not repulsed by the idea of group efforts, because I know that everyone will genuinely do their part.

This overt feeling of 'Hum saath saath hain' might be laid on a little thick with the farewell approaching.



Chapter 4

PRODIGIOUS SEEM'D THE TOIL

In this department, we've developed an extremely finely tuned and precise method of eliminating fabricated and superfluous elements devoid of foundations. Someone would walk up to you and say, "Cut the crap." There is a good probability that this will be either Suresh Sir or Sunil Sir, that is, if your peers haven't caught up to you already. Your friends are going to be relatively gentle.

If the operation is successful, you won't have any option but to address the taboo that you were attempting to avoid.

Actual examples of taboos unearthed:

- *"I avoid figurative work because I suck at it."*
- *"I have a half-assed knowledge of my work subject."*
- *"I have no subject."*
- *"I've not put in any actual effort."*
- *"I'm stubborn and inflexible."*
- *"I don't want to be an 'artist'."*

As I mentioned earlier, things at SN School of Arts and Communication, Department of Fine Arts turn out a little wonky. Like the first pancake, a little rough around the edges. It's not dishonest or tasteless, but it's a bit crude. This point can be illustrated by the fact that a very good/ odd reading recommendation I've received from my art history teacher, after discussing my work, is "The Little Prince" by Antoine De Saint Exupery.

Make of it what you will.



EH OF AN EPILOGUE

I've not had any conclusion or closure from SN School. For me, it's more or less like we've read a chapter in school and have been sent home with homework. So I'm still working on it.



LETTER TO A FRIEND

Manika

April, 2024



Hi bub !

How are you doing? I hope everything's good. How was Kerala, did uncle aunty enjoy it? and did you get those chips and sweets that I asked you to get? I swear I'll disown you if you forgot about it.

I have been feeling nostalgic since the visit to our college a few days ago, it felt even more distant than the last time we went there. It seemed bustling yet lonely, crowded yet empty. It was that time of the year when not even a single room is empty, the walls are occupied with the thoughts, muses and studies that we spent creating the entire year, the efforts that had been put behind it, the long year of questions that we ask multiple times, the ruckus of getting the layout pass, the laughter that used to fill the corners of the room and the silence that followed along with the footsteps of a professor. Those early mornings of lectures had hardly ten students in the beginning but as the time came to an end and we moved towards the final semester, the no. of students increased as if it will all make sense now. Well, it was a matter of attendance as well. But the campus seemed less occupied this time, in need of wanting more. It reminded me that every year the exhibition happened during fall whereas this time we were experiencing it earlier than that. Is that the reason for the rushed work and empty spaces? Hmm... I am not sure how to take that inquiry in consideration and move ahead with it.

Several students appeared content and delighted by the bright lights and festivities. It was akin to offering candy to a child to distract them from a wound, and the act seemed familiar here; the delicacy of time being stolen from one seemed not to trouble them, or did they acknowledge it? Is it their innocence that shields them, or does the saying "ignorance is bliss" render wisdom futile? I missed the installations and the extravagant sculptures in the campus. Everything seemed compact and rigid. Rooms were packed with diverse studies including portraits, still lifes, outdoor scenes, sculptures in various mediums, print techniques, and campaigns for different brands, you know how it goes. However, only a handful appeared to move beyond the technicality, delving deeper into conceptual exploration beyond the sheer volume of output. Somehow, it lacked intellectually stimulating installations or artworks. I can't help but wonder if the pandemic was the reason, considering our batch was the last to witness the exhibit, where every corner was either adorned with works from various departments or buzzing with engaging activities. I'm sure you must remember the late nights, spending time together while we lit up seeing everybody working together on their projects. Aahhh... that was really one of the best times that I had with you, connecting with so many people sharing ideas, bonding on unfinished assignments, sharing experiences and stories. Well, a lot happened back in those nights, but the best thing that happened was we made friends who helped us get through it all, and guided each other through the semesters. All of it was so natural to me

that I never thought that it could ever change, that this place can ever feel so empty, lacking in laughter and knowledge.

You know, the past few times it has been really difficult to visit the college as well, the guards won't just let us in, they keep asking questions like why, where, what and who? I don't remember facing this problem during our time on campus, I even remember our alumni coming to hang out with us and I think it always brightened the light around. The faculty never minded it back then. It looks like the institution seems to be forced to be rigid in terms of rules and regulation and I'm not sure who is benefiting from this new mode of oppression. Sometimes I question where is this constant anxiety amongst the professors building from that the interaction between peers and alumni seems to be such a nightmare to them? We learned the most from our seniors, it was always a ride along their memory lane with lots of lessons and mistakes that unfolded on the way. It seemed a bit easier to ask foolish questions to them for which they always made fun of us but eventually helped us figure out our own way around it. I missed that environment this time and I have a feeling that you would have too, empty corridors, no fish market at the canteen, no one waiting for the court to be vacated so that the football players could take their turn, there was hardly anyone working till late and the dawn was setting sooner than anticipated. It seemed like the possibility of connecting with each other was being made difficult with each step ahead.

well, we all really missed you at the convocation, especially me. Ohhhhhh that reminds me girl you're in for some tea here, Not that I enjoy spilling it but you wouldn't believe what happened during the convocation. We were all excited and ready to be the first batch in years getting convoked. Wearing white sarees and boys in traditional attire, trust me it was an eye candy day for all; only when it was all being started, we were lined up at the entrance, where guards stopped us to check whether the dress is proper or not and directed to the professors to determine our campus access. It was a truly distressing moment for everyone involved. Despite wearing white sarees with a red border, we were closely examined for any slight variation in the shades of our attire. Even a slight deviation towards off-white or maroon in the red border led to objections and denial of entry. Where in the guidelines was this stupidity mentioned? It was disheartening how this overshadowed our day. Plus, the department head butted in and added on to this circus about what we were wearing. Can you believe some were turned away because their red wasn't the right shade that matched the professor's eyes? And even when they tried to explain, they were asked to leave the college premises in spite of their reasoning. Although some managed to sneak in despite all the fuss. >.< It was such a dumb moment, and I just felt so bad for everyone that I almost didn't even wanna go to the ceremony.

was it really necessary, after all it was our day? It reminded me of those times in class when we were told exactly

exactly how to do our assignments. I felt totally out of place, and honestly, it's all kind of pointless. This kind of stuff just stresses students out and stops them from being creative, because they're always worried about fitting into the institute's idea of how things should be done. And you'd think things would loosen up after high school, but nope, it's the same old story. The future's about more than just learning; it's about finding out who you are and building a sense of self especially for creative heads. Don't you think an institution is supposed to create a safe space for discussions amongst peers?

Hmm... I never shared this with you before but there were times when I felt really down and disheartened. I thought that I could not fit in amongst our classmates, like maybe I just didn't belong there. It took months after graduating to realize that the fault wasn't mine, nor was I doing anything inherently wrong; I was simply a student who was struggling to understand how the institution is catering to the needs of the young creative minds. I was filled with curiosity to learn more, yet hesitant to voice my questions, which kept me at a distance. I truly wished I could have expressed this to our professors and batchmates, asking more questions in the hope that they might understand. However, it never felt quite so simple; you know, certain accomplishments were consistently lauded, establishing a benchmark for others to follow, almost serving as a blueprint for the proper execution of tasks. There was always a gaze that those works used to give, showing

superiority amongst all the others. The gang of superiors who won't reveal much and stare right back at you leaving you uncomfortable and unfulfilled.

Ayee, do you remember the few sessions we had with the visiting faculties? Weren't those the best weeks one could have asked for? But if I'm being honest till the point we used to understand what had to be done the week was almost over and, to be real, my own self-critique slowed things down even more. They always had a unique way of taking the class and usually gave us space for explorations and experimentation, even with all that freedom, a lot of us still wanted clear instructions on the precise execution of the "tasks", clinging to our habit of following specific guidelines and boom the freedom was yet again never fully achieved. Do you think if we'd been taught about the current practices beyond the usual stuff, it would've sparked more ideas and communication? I believe it could have entirely shifted the dynamics of our thinking, creating additional room for discussions centered along the line of art and artistic practices. This could have cultivated a secure environment for interaction and sharing, potentially evolving into a center for wild, creative ideas and thoughts, fostering innovative thinking strategies, team building, and personal development exercises. wow!

I wonder what possible changes could have been there which would have made the situation more workable for us to

bring in the individuality in works rather than trying to align with a particular idea and at the same time facing difficulty to form a body of work which we understand and connect with. It's like a kitchen where instead of forcing everyone to follow the same recipe, you give each chef the freedom to explore their own flavors and techniques. By encouraging experimentation, you end up with a menu full of unique and exciting dishes, rather than just churning out the same old recipes. Similarly, if we are able to create a space to express ourselves freely and create a diverse and dynamic community, rather than turning into uniform products of the institution.

All of this has left me with sooo many questions that I can't just keep to myself anymore, sorry in advance for blabbering but I have to share it with you. I mean "How does an institution influence the development of students' critical thinking skills? What impact do restrictions have on young minds, particularly within the context of an art school and the societal challenges they face? This prompts an examination of the knowledge and value embedded within these institutions. Do the constraints help real inquiry or do they accidentally create hindrance? Can an institution thrive under strict surveillance that leaves little room for exploration? Do the rules and regulations serve to constrain or uphold the institution's purpose? What is the institution striving to achieve through these regulations, and is its intent effectively communicated and understood? How does one determine the appropriate degree of freedom within

these boundaries?" I could keep going on and on endlessly, but at times, I wonder where it is leading to and who's even listening to us?

Enough about it, anyways. It's a discussion that seems endless when we get into it. Last I heard, you were busy with work. How's that going? Are they still expecting you to put in overtime without proper compensation for your time and energy? I'm telling you man you gotta set a certain limit to this. And have you found time to dive back into your art? You have always been rebellious; I hope you're not letting conventional ideas take over. I've really been missing our wild work ideas and brainstorming sessions together. It seems like forever when we sat down without the care of time. Oooh, I'm thinking of applying for my masters this year; I think it'll be a new chapter with new mysteries to unravel. I miss you a lot, monkey. Meet me soon.

P.S. Please... please consider getting a mobile phone now; this antisocial phase of yours has lasted long enough for me to play along. I'm starting to run out of ways to stay in touch with you :(

Loads of love



GOVERNMENT COLLEGE OF FINE ARTS, CHENNAI. KINDLY CHOOSE:

(OPTION 1) REVIEW AND RESURRECT

(OPTION 2) DO NOT RESUSCITATE

Malavika PC

May, 2024

Finding a government job, staying on that level for 4 decades or ambitiously climbing its machinery to become a coveted cog in the wheel, receiving assured state tenures, provident funds and warm retirement parties is an aspiration for many; a marriage that rarely leads to divorce. This anchor allures the artists seeking security and frightens the ones who know to recognize the seduction of Sirens, for this subset lives unbridled on the edge even if they fantasize and experiment with working in institutions.

Teachers in Government Fine Arts Colleges, one hopes, make an examined choice of what it means when they step into these institutional boots. They need a Bachelor's in Fine Arts, a Master's in Fine Arts or a doctorate in their field to qualify. This means they studied Fine Arts for years and (again one hopes) leads one to presume that their study furthered their practice with some level of curiosity and personal choice because the sub-subset of species that picks Fine Arts as a career choice is slim. For it is neither a high-paying IT job, a secure government position, an actor-singer-dancer-life-coach-like proposition where one can have crowds thronging for them nor one as respectable or honorable as doctors or engineers.

So something's got to give, for these young adults to drop the 'I will apply to a Fine Arts College' bomb on their unsuspecting families, one fine morning. Perhaps this is not too deviant a behavior in metropolitan




cities, but think of suburbia and villages, where career aspirations mean something else. Now cue in special effects: volcanic mountain erupts, crashing waves freeze, and frames of shocked parent faces swirl and shatter into a few hundred pieces. While the procreators spend the rest of the months sniveling into their sleeves, second-guessing all their parental choice and actions, and finding solace in venting this unfortunate fate with neighbors and relatives - the young dreamers have already set off on the course of the artistic journey of their lifetime.

Two key government institutions in Tamil Nadu facilitate education in the Fine Arts, one in Chennai (since 1850) and the other in Kumbakonam (since 1887). There are many others but these two have a reputation that exceeds the alternatives. The Chennai monolith is the focal point here. Its legacy began when it was set up as a guild to infuse the Queen's royal aesthetic to traditional Tamil artists to produce work for British institutions in situ. Practically every grill, gate, door, and stained-glass window of the British era from the Chennai Central Station to the Madras Veterinary College was made here. With the entry of KCS Paniker as principal in the late 1950s, the College, its faculty, and students underwent the age of inquiry that propelled the Madras Art Movement of the 60s based on reclaiming the arts from Western sensibilities and establishing it in the roots of their native vocabulary and regionality, which galvanized in the establishment of the Cholamandal Artist Village (1966) in Chennai, spawning some of the most critical and ingenious South Indian Modernist artists to date. Such is the legacy that lures young artists to the Government College of Fine Arts, Chennai.

Roughly 100 students towards six undergraduate programs and another 20 for five postgraduate disciplines enter this campus annually. Unlike musicians and dancers in Tamil Nadu who have the option of finding gurus, Cambridge A-level programs in school and private institutions to learn a form from a young age, Tamil children who have the dream of exploring visual arts don't have such choices save a few hobby art classes and summer programs (if they are urban). Some city schools have art as a high school elective. However, the effectiveness of these classes? Debatable. Ergo, if the students in Tamil Nadu want to make something of their artistic visions, then these two colleges are it. Now, how does a student prepare for an entrance exam for these colleges?

By pure luck! They must have practiced their pants off on their own to make something of their rustic passion. Or, they did some homework and discovered some of the teachers and alumni of this college running paid entrance exam classes that drill students across a few months. Word spreads like wildfire that these teachers have a quota of students guaranteed to enter college from their programs, before we know it their private studios are buzzing with enrolled students hoping to get in. They undergo rigorous training (as it is a matter of pride and economics of which private tutor manages maximum entry into the college) to execute the five evaluations to be faced shortly: portraiture in pencil, landscape painting from memory in watercolor, typography by painting two words in black in generic Helvetica or Times Roman (basically serif and sans), still life in pencil, and “imagination” in watercolor based on a surprise theme. These earnest pre-students practice hard till all 40-50 of them in each of the coaching classes somehow coalesce to create what appears like 40-50 copies of the same portrait; a truly delightful performance piece to watch, if one listens closely, one can hear an orchestra and a decisive conductor. Although they have learned this skill of catching likeness in a short time (not story, character, mood or emotion), they will not know that this will be the most taught to them in the 4 years to come. Exam done! The bulk of prepped students are in! Celebration; biriyani, old monk, garlands for the tutors - the works. And they all set foot into the college of their dreams. Now cue in special effects in slow motion: volcanic eruption, a hundred crows flying at a gunshot - freeze that frame, this time with the student faces in shock swirling and shattering into a few hundred pieces. Why? Well, they walked into a campus of teachers married too long to their chairs behind desks by lunch baskets with a rolled-up dog-eared magazine stuffed into it. The very same people who once wanted to be artists and share the magic of an artistic perspective to life and work, those who have the luxury of making their station their studio, the students their future - those, who now have settled like thick chunky dust on institutional furniture, true to Newton's First Law of Motion, happy to rest and be conditionally undisturbed. Do they not teach then? Sure, they do when they feel up to it and ever so proudly, (despite the age of the internet), from a moth-eaten 60-page document stapled and photocopied across generations. They impart languidly, for Chennai is always hot and government college fans are always slow. And what's the rush in teaching art anyway, especially to a



helpless, captive young audience across 4 years?

This shock to the system creeps in very slowly as the students are kept purposefully busy in the foundational year. Most students come to the college from rural Tamil Nadu and the suburbs of Chennai. They are primarily Tamil speakers, they don't understand English. They went to Tamil medium schools. Most of them would find it more affordable to travel 6 hours a day (with a train or bus pass on student subsidy) to come to college than to find a room with mates in the city and take care of their food. Even the annual course fee which is less than 4000 rupees plus the expense of art material, is too much for them. It is against such economic and spatial constraints that these students decide to pursue this life. Perhaps it should be mentioned right here that the choice of their undergraduate pursuit (Textile, Sculpture, Visual Communication, Ceramic, Printing & Painting) is conferred upon the student in their admission form, before their first year - instead of a year later when they can spend time delving into mediums to discover and decide for themselves what they have a pull towards. So, students don't get to choose whether they want to be painters or printmakers, the college does. Once students believe that the institution knows better, such directional choices need not be doubted - plus one is just grateful to be in art school finally. This "opportunity" and the students' "gratitude" will become the toy for the cats that play with mice for the joy of it.

Most freshers catch a hint of a warning through the veil, and something in them goes, 'Wait a minute,' but even so, they go for it - for their dream awaits. And it is fun. In the first year, classes happen every day. Teachers give demos and lectures and course correct student work. Even the dullest teachers polish their routines for this annual showing. Unknown young individuals become peers, they shop for materials and eat lunch together under trees, and friendships begin. They compare sketches and works, and challenges and rivalries begin. Beginner English lessons happen, and students start to take pride in asking their friends to pass the brush in English. Something of art history shows up, and they learn to see the depth of ideas, inspirations, and contexts. There is a ton of new skills to be learned. There is classwork. There is homework. The days are full of focus, sweat, catch learning curves - all ecstasy - real and enjoyable. Their dream gathers molecules, and something of a form


begins to shape in the young minds.

Come the second year, students will begin to glean this dream to be a consistently deflating hot-air balloon. Teachers will begin their first act of distancing and then some. Teachers who did well in the first year, who had initiative and gathered a dedicated student following, will be transferred to Kumbakonam or pressured to shut up. Lunch baskets, magazines, and now smartphones will have more timely attention than their cohort. Casteist camps will be forged, and oppressors will begin to show themselves. Favors will be asked of students, sexual and of other nature of compromises like turning a blind eye to their teacher's obscene behavior. The fantastic but un-updated library will be held hostage to one hour a week per department. The museum will be forever closed, except to be rented for film shoots and odd inspections. Functioning equipment will be held until students appear favorable in one way or another. Broken equipment will remain broken with no chance of repair. Silver and bronze heirlooms made in the college when it was a guild in the 1800s will be sold for weight, and no paper trails will exist. All manner of resources, from money to art material, will be pilfered and pocketed. Students unable to get their hands on the material that the institution must give them for their work will find odd jobs to pay for it or save on food to buy it. Most of them will develop acute stomach ulcers, and some will vomit blood. Student work will be vandalized. Fans will drop from ceilings just an inch away from students. Classes will dwindle from daily, to bi-weekly, to bi-monthly and then to 'we have class?'. English classes will be abandoned, even though final exam papers are to be written in English and 99.9% of books in the library are in English with little or no evidence of Tamil. A student looking for further understanding must settle for images and make what they will of them. The 60-page lesson document will reappear on exam days when teachers will encourage students to copy from it, they will provide stones so that the cheat sheets don't fly away. Why would teachers enable this behavior? Because if their students fail, it affects the faculty's track records. Toilets and bathrooms will clog, and flood with urine and shit, and the taps will stop working. Men will pee by the trees and plants, adding to the fertility of the campus flora, while the girls will develop urinary tract infections from holding their bladders and changing sanitary napkins in unhygienic conditions.



Students will realize that the once grand banyan of the Madras School of Art is now nothing but a figment of collective imagination. From the anticipation of investing 4 years in honing craft, critical thinking, and a sound sense of cultivating one's artistic vision and its articulate expression in a desired medium, the focus will turn to pure survival. They will see that if something must be learned, they must fend for themselves together. They will raise petitions, meet lawyers and human rights activists, call on alumni, and write to newspapers and news channels seeking support. They will organize lectures, demonstrations, workshops, and festivals and bring in resource people to expose each other to the world of art across mediums, train themselves, and make room to experiment, express, and exhibit their work. They will help each other to stay inspired and alive. Students will be harassed for their initiative and silenced. A student will end his life hanging from the branch of a tree on campus, one will jump off a fast-moving train from a psychotic break, and one will off himself in his room after leaving a dying declaration on video of his pitiful oppressed experience as a student in such conditions. All manners of artistic to straightforward protests and strikes will begin. Cops will come. Chaos will ensue. Some coverage will lead to some pressure. Faceless, nameless higher authorities will overthrow the then-current principal, and a new one will be put in place. Principals will play musical chairs, and every year or two this cycle will repeat itself until by grace someone sensible or reasonable arrives who will address the opportunity as responsibility as opposed to a position. This person too, after a few years of battling against bureaucratic forces, wanting to continue their practice will tire and then voluntarily retire, while the rest of the staff will burnish furniture through the rest of their tenure. Four years concluded: the students turned graduates holding degrees in their hands will wonder what it all meant and ask themselves. Now what?

Well, now they must hit the road running to survive the real world. They must learn to endure an industry. With fledgling skills fired by an unbeatable spirit, they will intern, assist, and give everything to every opportunity that meets them to find their way through. Some will join the animation, design, textile, publishing, and film industries. They will grow within these networks and careers in their way, as they will tenaciously weather life. Many will accept and welcome mediocrity in exchange for a



paycheck to safeguard themselves and their families against the hard tides of existence. Some will learn to see their value and ask for more out of themselves, their practice, and the world around them. Very few, however, will become artists in the true sense of the word: those who will think to create work in their voice, relevant to their time, and sure as hell ahead of it. In the last few decades, if an artist who has emerged from this institution shines and the college proudly steps in to take credit and boast of its star alumni, it is fair to bear in mind that the due must go to the student's efforts and initiatives to make their own and brave into the world rather than what the college offered them. Said artist would have reached their calling not because of the institution's quality rigor but despite it. Even to this day, despite 4 dysfunctional years plus a few, the students remain loyal and nostalgic about their years in the college due to the training they eke out of their own volition and the experiences of learning from each other.

Student lives on the one hand, it is critical to admit that the world of art has evolved into a new animal, and we struggle to stay on track with how quickly it morphs. History changes right under our noses. In every discipline, like the sciences and humanities, understandings change when new findings establish themselves, evoking radical shifts in perceptions and methodology and consequently influencing the operational framework of our thinking and working systems. While learning the foundations of chosen subjects is crucial, if skills are the sole end of long-term education, then it is safe to say that the students of this college are well prepared to later participate as professionals in glorified assembly lines within which they can repeat actions ad infinitum under the guise of the "creative act." But if the whole purpose of education and practice in disciplines is to decode existence, see differently from how it has been seen before, and develop a capacity to examine foundations to the point of Copernican shifts, then aren't the vision and systems of dissemination of this college deeply wanting? In this light, is it fair to look back at the institution and ask why it failed the students so dramatically? Or should one accept that no institution is truly capable of preparing a student for the future and let this one off the hook too?

What does one do with an institution like this? The Government College




of Fine Arts, Chennai, is one of the few places that makes an arts education extremely affordable. While it costs a few lakhs per annum minimum in most private and government art and design schools, a student here can make do with less than four thousand rupees as per annum fees. It has the history, infrastructure, machinery, and so-called faculty to deliver a reasonable education and fails miserably with a deeply conditioned apathy for what it promises to give.

So are there no good teachers at all? There are! A few fantastic rogue ones. They are those who put their noses to the grinding stone and keep up practice. Some show up at 6 am to college and chisel away at large granite to make sculptures, while others sit in the rooms and churn paintings one after another well into the night while feverishly attempting to communicate the causes of such fever. Such energies are contagions. One wants to work around them and learn - one is reappetised. They share tea and cigarettes with students, allow them into their studios in college and outside, and share the processes of their making (and other artists), they give students material, books, and time. They push the students to expand their capacities and capabilities. These gems are rare birds that you spot once or twice in 4 years. Such teachers flummox the bureaucracy by shining despite the decades of dull, incessant pressure. The rest of the teaching camps will separately and together plot to irritate, disturb, turn, and overthrow these personalities. But no, these spirits will sustain and persevere, and much to the chagrin of their peers, they will become heads of departments and even principals to do the best they can for their students. But, as mentioned above - rare. Does it seem fair, responsible, or feasible to bet and load the future of a generation of art students on one or two teachers who give their life and soul to their promise? What is an institution if it doesn't have a vision? What does it want to give its students, and what does it want for them in life? How is it staying updated with discourses in art practices in its city, state, nation, and the world? What ideologies and political leanings is it recognizing as the undercurrent of its vision and position? How is it preparing to offer Tamil-speaking students a way to learn arts through Tamil? How can it embrace interdisciplinarity and step out of its insularity? Last but not least, how can it protect its artistic heritage while fostering contemporaneity?



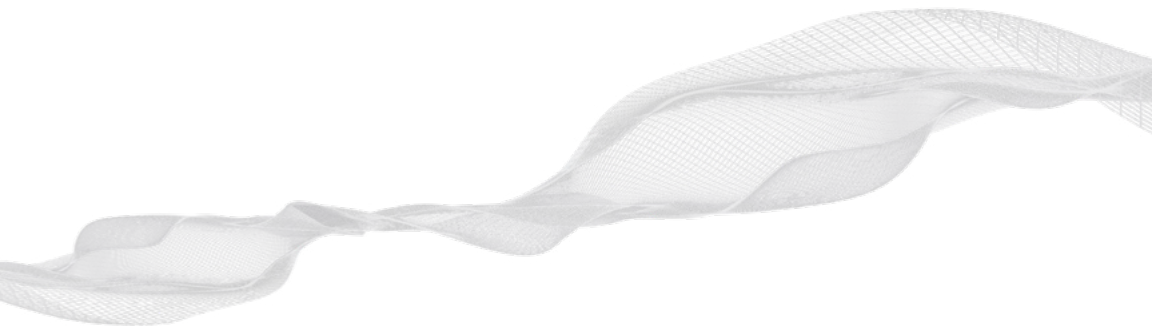
The Government College of Fine Arts, Chennai, needs to seriously reflect. If it wants to maintain and use its legacy as currency and keep its roof up - the time has come for it to recognize that it has been falling short for decades. It must ask how and why complacency and tenure took over creative aspiration and critical thinking. It must acknowledge its abusive corruption and allow room for the external artistic community to step in. It must review its syllabi jointly with external professional practitioners, academia, and arts educators and build a pedagogy that resonates and can be disseminated from its core. The teachers need refreshing training in some way. No one asks them to turn out one masterpiece after another, but if they have no practice, they cannot teach. Perhaps the mediums of their expertise no longer stir their desire, maybe they want to learn something new. Whatever their current calling, they must decide to become students in some way, once again. Having long forgotten how to feed someone hungry and open for training, these teachers need immediate examples of how hard it is for synapses to connect and how long it takes for these connections to be forged into a human system until it can become a sustained practice, that then emerges as one's voice for expression. When they recognize once again what it means to own a learning curve, they will without doubt teach with a different purpose for which they need to ask and accept support gracefully.

How could they go about this? Rather than attempting to fix a faulty engine of a bus in motion, doesn't it seem reasonable to park it for a while despite all the plans and inconvenience of the co-passengers to avoid a big accident soon? Just halt it for a brief period to take time and examine what is going on and what needs fixing, so one can call the right kind of mechanic, source the materials to fix, and fine-tune it for the long journey ahead. We know this bus wants to be alive and take many new generations of young artistic visionaries on unforgettable voyages of self-discovery. Similarly, although a hard pill to swallow and unprecedented in history, if the college is serious about reflecting, then it needs to stop its current activity and declare a specific timeframe within which it can review its accountability, educational standards, and frameworks to find a way to restructure itself towards what it poses, dreams, and hopes to offer.



It is easy to throw stones here and the desire to burn this place to the ground is real. But one must acknowledge that this institution is still a sanctuary. Albeit a rickety and severely malnourished one with its core spirit still glimmering through all the grunge and dust. It remains one of the few places in Tamil Nadu where students intent on being artists have been gathering (across a century and a half) to rigorously develop their skills and sensibility. It is also reasonable to state that such radical restructuring, especially that of a state-run body, will take time, extraordinary patience, communication, debate, heated arguments and resources (people, time, economics), and a vibrant, steadfast vision. It is neither an overnight affair nor something that happens with naive cynicism, armchair criticism, righteous finger-wagging, or the deeply satisfying 'I told you so'. It is imperative to repeat that this recovery is going to take time, some deep weaning, and dealing with heavy withdrawal. It is hard work and cannot be done alone. It is an act of collective empathy and one to be done in tandem with the artistic community, where it must roll up its sleeves for the long haul.

Perhaps, Inshah Allah, the Government College of Fine Arts, will wake up to this reality, review, and desire a resurrection to have its metamorphosis. Or it may wither and die of natural causes, in which case - please, do not resuscitate.





ART IN THE AGE OF INSTITUTIONAL REPRODUCTION- MAPPING THE TURN TO SELF

Rahul Juneja

November, 2023

Imagine walking into a large room with off-white walls and muddy terrazzo—a key aesthetic in old government institutions in India. As you enter, you encounter a swarm of faces of all sizes mounted on the walls, in various media and stylistic inclinations with a singular commonality- they are all staring at you. On the floor, walls, easels, benches, windows, and even the ceiling. They come at you and devour you, and you start to wish this was a surrealist nightmare.

This is an everyday scenario within the College of Art in New Delhi. Throughout my four years of bachelor's, I saw myself and my peers engaged in a constant production of naturalistic studies, which later turned into ceaseless self-portraiture, evident in the portfolios of all bachelor's and even master's peers. Yet, this was not only the case for our institute but several others all across India. How could it have been the same, when art is so subjective? And if there was some common undercurrent at the root of it, what was sustaining this institutional turn to self-portraiture?



Fig 1. MFA final year display, Annual Exhibition, College of Art. 2024

A Dive into the (non)Peripheral Self

Kathakali dancers generally do their makeup themselves, often taking long hours and requiring them to look in the mirror constantly. They also play only one character their entire life, or characters on the same emotional spectrum- for instance, a dancer who plays Sita might become Draupadi, but never Karna. Here, the artist is dedicated towards mastering a singularity, which is an important to note since the drive towards this 'self' is very linear and singular.



Fig 2. Kathakali dancer doing makeup, Kochi, 2024.

While the proximity of the mirror to the eye gives a detailed, hyper-accurate view of the physical “self”, it physiologically blocks the natural peripheral field of the eye from viewing anything else. The extreme proximity to a non-relational selfhood, or an internalized ideal, thus comes at the cost of sacrificing access to peripheral vision through which the world renders itself visible.

This mirror of self, given within the institutions, often literally, is a rabbit hole that does not allow and usually forbids seeing the world outside that mirror. The training that the artist undergoes at art institutions such as College of Art, in our case, through many variables in tandem, strips the artist of the agency to trust their worldview, only to turn to “themselves” as a last resort. It remains the reason one finds in most work within such institutions (including mine) an extremely excavational approach towards the self, of something primal and pure that must be found via extreme introspection.

Such an observation then points to the question: How is this stripping of agency happening, and how does the institution sustain it? What are the cogs of this well-oiled art machine that flattens potentialities within the idea, media, context, and temporal space the artist inhabits as a thinker? Even if this turn to self is perceived as something positive and, perhaps, a creative choice, what kind of notions of self are being generated within such institutes?

While the text constantly references my experience at College of Art, New Delhi as a bachelors student in painting, traces of this impulse can be found in most government art institutes; and innumerable art exhibitions churned out every year.



The Colonial Cocktail and it's Century Long Hangover

Before diving deep into the specific exercises or tendencies that lead to this 'institutional reproduction,' we must understand the impact of the colonial curriculum and its legacy within Indian art institutions. The aftereffect of a colonial cocktail is often understated, which wanted to produce an idea of art that the colonizers were synonymously living and exporting to the colonies; a rudimentary copy-paste without any regard for the context, temporality, or their culture. The systematic dismantling of aesthetic systems and various art forms in India not only left a gap but also produced a simultaneous hunger for validation- a colonial cocktail that, unfortunately, even though some of the "Indian Modernists" and their successors tried to sober up from, but the institutions of art continue to drink.

While this hangover is more ideological than formal, it would be beneficial to trace some aesthetical configurations this lingering continues to produce. JJ School of Art in Mumbai, and College of Art in Chandigarh, still house a course in MFA portraiture, where John Singer Sargent is the god, and Zorn's palette is their bible. 'Black' as a color remains prohibited in several institutes, finding root in impressionism. Transgression of conventional media and their application, is considered 'experimental', and the people who practice such art, rebels. Still life and composition in watercolors or clay remain the preliminary exam for getting into top art institutes. Segregation of artistic modalities, like painting, sculpture, textiles, murals, and portraiture, plagues the pedagogic system, with no flexibility to choose or transfer during the course. 'Detail' and naturalistic rendering remain ideals sought after by the students and the faculty. Many 'Avant-garde' Indian art schools seem hell-bent on self-exoticizing by putting 'craft' out in a claim of civilizational continuity while still trying to fit in a linear narrative of a Euro-centric constructed historical timeline. All these examples point to but one thing;

At the heart of the curriculum still lies a hunger for validation from the colonial masters, that consequently generates a system frozen in time.

A symptom of this crisis can be seen in a 40-foot board that stretches across the gallery of the first floor of Block H in the painting department corridors in the College of Art. The board starts with miniature paintings on one end and ends with Renaissance on the other- an apt metaphor for the range of subjects we see in Indian government art institutes even today. There is a fascination with the old western masters, an obsession with anatomy, and subsequently a propagation of what is termed 'realistic'. Everything that comes in between seems just for the sake of inclusion.

The miniatures are primarily romantic depictions of either Radha Krishna or erotic depictions of kings belonging to Mughal or Rajasthan schools.



Fig 3. Starting section of the board depicting Miniature paintings, College of Art, Delhi. 2024.



Fig 4. End section of the board depicting work of the old western masters.

Immediately after the miniatures from the left, we see an abundance of European masters- Bondone, Angelico, Grunewald, Bruegel, Massacio, Cranach, Durer, Davinci, Michelangelo, Raphael, Poussin, Vermeer, and Caravaggio with texts illustrating a detailed, romantic view of the old masters and their lives.



Fig 5. Middle section of the board, depicting Durer, Davinci, Raphael, Vermeer, Cranach

As we move to the middle of the board- from renaissance to the western modern artists, we see Degas, Courbet, Klimt, Picasso, Monet, Cezzane, and Lautrec. An important thing to note here is that all the artworks displayed on these boards are either portraits or figurative in nature.



Fig 6. Middle section of the board, depicting Courbet, Cezzane, Lautrec, Degas, Klimt



Fig 7. Middle section of the board, with Ravi Verma, Shergill, Souza, Jamini Roy, Tyeb Mehta

We see that Indian artists are also present on the board, albeit the ratio speaks for itself- one in every thirty images, or maybe even less. The only artists found are Raja Ravi Verma, Abhinendaranath Tagore, Amrita Sher Gill, M.F. Hussain, F.N. Souza, Jamini Roy, and Tyeb Mehta. No other great Indian modernists, let alone contemporary artists, earn themselves a place on the board.

The problem isn't merely that there is no inclusion of Indian artists, whether modern or contemporary (albeit being a massive marker of stasis and ignorance), but rather that every work is dealing with only one mode of representation, which is, the figurative based in an immediate reality. The timeline is at best haphazard, and what starts in the beginning as a linear timeline claiming to help the students understand the progression of art, starts to become an imposition.

The Ism and the Unoriginal

A great example of the impact of this board in the curriculum is the ‘master copy’ exercise, dedicated to copying a painting from a great European master from the past of a known ‘ism’ to understand the artist’s process.

Even if we flag the obvious problem, which is why the artist is supposed to ‘copy’ rather than interpret, we never see a contextual dissection along with the formal exercise. The chronology of art, in this case, is built through the formalist transformation of a figurative rather than the changing world that lies at the base of this impulse. Thus, these isms become the only references of the art students through idealization and iteration by the faculty, creating echo chambers.

A significant by-product of exercises like these is reinforcing a binary of original and unoriginal. “Oh, your work resembles this ism, doesn’t it,” is a sentence that echoes within every classroom as a derogatory accusation, that one is ‘unoriginal’. While we could extend this debate within a larger philosophical realm, what it does here is rebirth the absolute, singular idea of the modernist artistic genius, whose peril lies in being unable to produce an ‘original.’

Since there is no attempt to negotiate the shift of the contextual, and the conceptual grounds of why any artistic movement happened- a mindless pastiche of formalist elements takes place. A crucial question then emerges: is there no need for any historical or contextual mediation when we bring a formal style, motif, or tendency of the past into the contemporary? Does the institution situate the artistic within isolation from the history of the world itself?

Within the context of the Indian institution, this exercise should also be seen through a reverse lens. Even within the master copy exercise, there remains an absence of any ‘Indian Master’. Yet, this situation does not arise from a deliberate exclusion, but a crisis of situating the Indian modern in a coherent chronological lens of world art history for the student to follow. The discourse of the Indian modern within such institutions, articulates itself in a derivative position, and playing catch up; rather than in response or relationality.



We see that the position of the artistic institution is genuinely in crisis, where it does not know how to deal with the love-hate relationship it has with the ‘unattained’¹ heroic Indian Modern, let alone engage with the anxieties of the contemporary.



Fig 8. Painting by William Adolphe Bordeu recreated by Sonu Kumar in the mastercopy week, batch of 2017.

1. While art historically and chronologically we seem to be out of the period which is generally agreed upon as the “Indian Modern”, the contradictions and crisis which haunted them continues to haunt the institution. It seems that the Indian modern is still unattained, since the institution seems to carry the same baggage of finding a pure Indian modern, through cementing an “authentic Indian” while fitting in the legible western. Thus, it always remains in its claim as a catchup, rather than creating its own arena. The contemporary then to the institution, is any deviation outside this conundrum, generally found in the immediate material reality rendered through slight media experimentation.

40-60 ,60-40 ,20-80: Amidst Individuation and Homogenisation

In the second year of BFA, we received an orientation from our Head of the Department, Painting, who gave us this peculiar formula: “The students within the department of painting follow a 80-20, 40-60,60-40 ratio.” The 80:20 stood for 80% academic work and 20% conceptual work in the second year, 60:40 in the third, and 40:60 in our fourth and final year.

Academic work here signifies the group of exercises prescribed in the curriculum, deriving from atelier-style learning- still life, model studies, etc. Students are instructed to draw from life every day and hone their skills to develop a good ‘base’ based on skillful imitation. The conceptual here broadly deals with systematically inserting an idea within the work while being reflective of the academic training and maintaining a media. This is done in order for the student to start moving towards a stylistic language of their own, a claim to uniqueness based on visual differentiation.

The vehement insistence on individualistic visual language remains a modernist lingering, an invocation of the artist genius that supersedes all debates of ethics and aesthetics. Anything and everything within the artistic process is justified as long as it churns out something distinctive. This individualistic drive of the institution not only generates the discursive problems associated with hailing modernism as a hero, but subsequently also kills methodologies towards art making that might be organic to an individual.

Through the veil of prioritizing the individual artist, the construction of a specific, standardized kind of individual takes place- with specific aesthetic sensibilities, formalist qualities, who uses select media, and surface of a specific size.

Thus, under the guise of pure individualism, the institution propagates homogenization.



When one walks into the interviews for postgraduate studies in College of Art and other government institutions, this formula generates a cruel irony: during the bachelors, the students religiously produce naturalistic renderings, of the world. Yet, in masters, the portfolio must be “conceptually sorted” and with an “individualist visual language.” Here, art dangles in stasis between situating the artistic in the skilled and a rich conceptual inquiry without any pedagogical imaginary that can act as a bridge to mediate this gap.

Another integral part of the problem lies in the duration within which the artist is supposed to perform this simultaneous learning and unlearning. Since the institution houses people from various backgrounds with access to variable resources, the time frame to render this language apparent in the artworks becomes an act of cruel flattening. Thus, we see many artists who follow the urge to reconcile the academic language taught by the institution with one’s “organic development.” The artist then stays dangling between this lingering good and bad, the systematic and the rebellious, the organic and the imposed.



Fig 9. Paintings outside the academic cell, College of Art. 2024.

Navigating Industrial, Personal and Institutional Time

Since I mention duration as a critical factor contributing to this configuration, we need to dive deeply into the relationship of time between the institution, the artwork, and the artist.

Let's take the example of weekly submissions. The student has to submit a weekly assignment for most of the BFA, where the media and the surface are already specified. There is no time to think of one's interests and curiosities, let alone time for questioning and criticality. Here, the artist becomes a machine within the factory of the institution, operating on a weekly schedule to churn out art, and towards the end of the tenure of four years, an artistic product- capable of reproducing the institution through themselves.

The second negotiation is with an industrial notion of time implemented within creative academic institutions. In the final examination, there are three parts- Still life, Composition and Portrait study, and the students get two days to complete each. Within an industrial production system, time spent is inversely proportional to profit. The institution here, situates the quality and capability of the artist learner with not merely what they do with the prompt; but how quickly they are able to do it. The artistic gesture then shifts from intellectual thrust or even the craft, to the speed of it.

The third is not a direct negotiation but a negotiation between personal and institutional time. This segregation is generated due to the compulsion to generate work that fits within the 'academic' rubric, vis-à-vis the urge to follow their own interests. We might argue that they can choose to follow the idea of time ascribed by the institution; However, government institutions give many people from all sections of society a chance to gain a formal education within their field of passion to sustain themselves financially. An economy of time carefully, then, starts to constrain the contour of artistic practices within the institution.



More Labour, Better Art

“If a person has spent 300 hours working on a piece of art, the least it does is deserve my attention.”

This quote by a friend might be an excellent starting point for understanding the perceived weight that artistic labor carries. During discussions in my bachelor's degree program, we always explained how we had made something rather than telling what we had made. Specific keywords kept popping: Composition, lines, flow, etc. The most frequent ones, however, were ‘detail’ and ‘layering’. Here, the time spent in layering was directly correlated with not only the quality but the authenticity of the work. Behind this figure of the artist engaging in detailed work, painstakingly etching time onto the surface, lies the demand for the artist to be portrayed as destitute and keep working.

It's actually a simple demand-supply equation- we are in a culture that does not understand the value of labor due to an excess supply. The artist is not thought of as a productive individual of material utility within the world; thus, the artist needs to be in constant cultural labor to gain its place within the structure. When done long enough, the figure of the artist starts to seek refuge in this broken, depressed figure that starts to assign their value to labor and the subsequent ‘product’.

The artist thus is reduced from an active thinker, who engages with the symptoms and currents of their time, to an aesthetic laborer. We keep producing ‘good’ bodies of work but are never cognizant of what is being produced, let alone why we produce it.



Composition = Conceptualisation

It's fascinating how the word 'composition' is rendered synonymous with 'conceptual' through sheer repetition. Such a synonymy renders the act of making a formal arrangement of elements in a medium the same as engaging deeply with an idea, churning , embodying it, being guided by it. This continues the trend of the systematic stripping of the artist from their position as a thinking being to a person with mere formalist skill.

In a conversation with MFA students in College of Art, many talked about their idea of 'concept' in art. They talked about being allowed to include a concept into a work in the 'composition week' as something that has to be injected because the particular weekly submissions allow and demand 'conceptual work.'

The product of such weeks are concepts rendered in a highly didactic language, which neither does justice to the skill of the artist nor to the thought. The policing of the idea and the methodology to render it leaves the artist dazzled, since the criteria of legible and non-legible, quality and non-quality are decided by the faculty, trained in the same cycle.

What this stagnancy through supervision and imposition of these 'concepts' does to the learner is develop thresholds to what is acceptable as a conceptual work. The most prominent example, perhaps, is a common motif in artworks throughout the last decade within College of Art- the rendering of digital artifices into a painting or drawing, without even attempting to acknowledge what the shifts hints towards through the media, let alone the discourse.



Institutional fetishes and Ultimate medias

The institution at the BFA level, introduces a set of media gradually as a 'foundation'. Yet this suggestive exercise often turns compulsive-narrowing the possible media that is 'legible' to translate an idea. Within this framework, the generation of an 'ultimate institutional media' takes place, which is absolute and continues to haunt.

A simple psychological exercise gives us insight into the sustenance of this institutional media. Through the repetition of academic exercises via pencils, charcoal, gouache, and acrylics, the student gradually climbs up the ladder of media from 'easy to difficult.' A drive towards producing an idealized European figurative, slowly builds up to the introduction of oil painting. Oil paints thus naturally, through the course of the navigation, emerge as the end point of the grand media journey, at the top of the ladder, as the 'ultimate medium'. Even institutions that are working towards their take on the grand decolonial drive continue to perform it through oil painting, which remains a colonial introduction.

This argument is not a reductive take against continuous engagement with singular media. However, the excavation drive towards the subconscious, paired with the repetition of media and methodology, translates to a space where the artist feels a false sense of absolute control, not due to rigor or intuitiveness with the idea and media, but the habit.

The media then starts limiting, the scale of the idea- which, as discussed above, begins to form a template of operation within the institutional structure. The fear of being 'graded poorly', gives way to repetition and flattening of scales and possibilities- to mold the artist in an institutional media.





Fig 10. Work at display in canteen, College of Art. 2023.



Fig 11. Painting at display in canteen, College of Art. 2023



Fig 12. Painting displayed in Annual Exhibition, College of Art. 2023.

Abstraction Abstinence

We see a strong aversion towards abstraction within such institutions, but it is not merely due to a preference for the figurative as a proof of the artist's skill, but rather what the figurative inherently is; an imitation of something known that we see in our daily lives. Something familiar. The abstract challenges this contour and pushes us to tap into the sensory or go beyond our conventional understanding of the world.

Personification helps reduce the 'threat' of abstracts non-perceivable by the human. The most effective horror movies don't ever rationalize the monster; the spider in the bathroom scares us more when it disappears. The lack of familiarity guises the urge to control, and creates hostility to this seemingly foreign, non-rational, and non-imitated.

Within the institutional context, the aversion to abstraction, both in media and the idea, marks the death of an institution- what is an artist, if they cannot be nimble, unanchored, not in control, and irrational? The nimble and unanchored artist is perceived as a threat to the 'legacy' of the institution, set within a romantic past. Change as a phenomena within this canonized, institutional setup is always perceived as desecration of a cultural rather than reinvention.



DADADADADADA

The crisis of placing the sacred within art also resonates with the crisis of placing 'art' within the artistic gesture. While being a larger art historical crisis trickling down to the contemporary; in our context, it is produced through a selective stoppage in art history. Even if one puts aside the extremely crunched curriculum that pushes the entirety of seemingly 'chronological' Western art and ancient India to the Indian Modern in just four years- the constructed linearity stops just before Dadaism.

But why?

The first reason is that dada stands precisely against the very definition of art, aesthetics, and beauty, which the institute has spent immense energy and effort to curate. All perceived coherence on the front of media and the idea undergo severe crises in the mind of the student.

The second reason, is the construction of an ultimate "ism."

Just like the gradual rise in the ranks of media within the institution builds an 'ultimate media'; the selective stoppage to surrealism in the gradual coursing of art history generates an ultimate 'ism.' Here, the fetishist relationship surrealist art historically had with the unknown self, and as a tool and process to unveil the grand unknown, is reiterated and put on a pedestal.

The grand unknown, however, in itself is not the end problem. The grand unknown in surrealism also hints at a 'puritan self'- with the claim, that if one constantly unpacks the unconscious and keeps subtracting life experiences and information, the artist will somehow reach a state of pure consciousness. In combination with the enamoured relationship with the figurative and this excavational drive, artworks depicting this 'self' are mass-produced.



Production of the Self from the Institutional Machine

While these exercises and temperaments might seem disjointed at first; their working in tandem starts to reveal a well-oiled institutional machine. Through the combination of lapses in art history, reductive ideas of practice, archaic formulas, glorification of the figurative and formal tendencies, constructed binaries between theory and art, fetishization of media, mechanical repetition, intentional aversion to the abstract, romanticization of artistic labor, etc., the artists within such institutions find themselves dangling in a world of uncertainties and complex confusions, trying to cope through institutional methodologies that are frozen in time.

The combination of the antagonistic relationship to time that the artist within the institution builds, makes the artists feel guilty of not being able to 'produce' within this industrial mode of production. The artist then turns towards what is comfortable and habitual—the academic exercises and formalist engagement given to them by the institution, providing a momentary satisfaction of being 'productive' when they produce something tactile. This leads to a rabbit hole of not what they want to do, but what they are able to do. It then becomes a structural turn, where the students are so used to the idea of 'painting from life' that it becomes their sole *modus operandi*. Since the institution places the greatness of an artist in the ability to make the figurative sublime, in the absence of models around them that will sit, they turn to only one model, which is available all the time.

Themselves.

And Voila! The self-portraiture production machine is now running at full potential.



This is not to say that works dealing with the self, or self-portraiture itself, are inherently problematic. Within this hyper-accelerated world where we are constantly trying to find our positionality, self-portraiture can be seen as an assertion of identity, of a claim of time and space, and of culture. In queer, gender, and marginalized discourses, who have been subjected to violence by representation through various media, expression and assertion of self-hood are important. Personal narratives can become extremely important in reconfiguring a universalized idea of the global that modernization has left behind, whether it is posited within a post-colonial or decolonial discourse.

However, my problem with the self is quite specific, which is the self that the machinery of the institution generates- Imitational, generally figurative, generated through specific media, and mostly, has a gaze that looks out at the viewer, not as a provocation or confrontation but with a hunger for validity—a claim, that instead of asserting remains unsure. The romanticization of the puritan self and the imposed non-legibility of the external within the institute start to romanticize the ambiguity of that journey and make the self-portrait the holder of this deliberate mystical.

Subsequently, two things happen:

Either the artist starts to pose this self and projects the world's anxieties onto that singular entity, thus flattening phenomena that might be far more complex and seeing them through the lens of 'self.'

Or, the artist continues to look for this pure, unadulterated self through bodies of work that keep reiterating the same conceptual base and become a ground for formalistic experimentation of the same idea- rendering the mobility of an artist as a thinker still.

Any 'avant-garde' (and I carefully use the term, almost in ironical rhetoric) is, thus, doomed to be systematically, institutionally, assassinated.

The institutional machinery thus, produces and reproduces its own with every subsequent generation of the artist, dangling within the binaries of good and bad art, keeping the portrait right in front that contours their anatomical structure, but not their embodied crisis.





Fig 13. Fourth year painting studio, College of Art. 2024



Fig 14. MFA Painting final year display, Annual Exhibition, College of Art. 2024.



Fig 15. Display at Annual Exhibition, College of Art, 2024.



Fig 16. Fourth year painting studio, College of Art, 2024

Turning the Institutional Turn

The turning of this 'institutional turn' is tricky; the first order of things perhaps is to dismantle the idea of the 'original' and the 'pure' that lies at its heart.

Shiv Kumar Batalvi, in his only surviving interview on record, makes an interesting argument of ontological deficiency and constructing a coherent image. When asked about the perfect woman, he quotes: "वह तस्वीर कभी बनी ही नहीं। कभी किसी की आँखों से, कभी किसी के होंटों से।"². Here, Shiv talks of the inability to conceive a 'complete image'; only to see a part in someone and the other in someone else. We often talk about the impossibility of the image to represent an event, but perhaps we also need to acknowledge the limitation of the artistic process to conceive of an image, singularly self-sufficient without finding resemblance or grounding it in some reality.

Marco Pierre White, one of the greatest chefs recognized worldwide, quotes in his Oxford interview - "The greatest of chefs know that mother nature is the true artist, and they are just the cook." and "We can never invent, only refine."³ Here, mother nature is the true artist because food, even if uncooked, has a distinct flavour. The chef merely changes its profile- either intensifying it or diluting it. Here, is marked the impossibility of creating something that is ontologically itself by default - The chef does not generate the flavour within the raw vegetable or the meat. The chef remains a mere medium, and through his training, his palette and his experiences from his life start to gather to propose a take on the ingredients present and make a dish.

The argument, thereby, of owning an idea starts to unravel- even in the context of image making; there needs to be a detachment and disassociation which needs to happen concerning the ownership of the image or even an idea. The propensity of a proposition is built through things already in momentum and then given direction. This interpretive aspect, central to the artistic process, can subvert and dismantle this idea of an artistic original.

2. Shiv Kumar Batalvi Interview: "Shiv Kumar Batalvi, जिन्होंने India और Pakistan दोनों का दर्द सहा (BBC Hindi)" Interview by Mahendra Kaul, 1970, Video, 14: 6, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fhV7EKwGJsi>

3. Marco Pierre White Interview: "Marco Pierre White | Full Address and Q&A | Oxford Union" 29th March, 2016, Video, 59:40, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U-xClstDBal>

Another critical intervention needed, is the move towards acknowledging *synchronous resonances*.

Within the institution, the production of an individual happens through dismissive differentiation. During a conversation with an MFA student, she told me how she started pushing towards a different idea, which she had been working on for months due to a friend working on similar ideas. It is only natural that multiple people will deal with the same ideas due to institutional, cultural, social, and political similarities. Yet, what started to form was a language of comparison, through which she felt she was constantly in an antagonistic relationship with her classmate.

This singular, artistic genius needs recalibration towards a pluralist paradigm. Any work or idea in tandem conceived within a group of people automatically brings all these contours into tension. It grounds the distant notion of the conceptual as not one's own- building a 'shared original'. Here, the cohort emerges as the site of resonant learning, where both the singular and the plural are in tandem towards new milieus and protocols.

The simultaneity of this model also resonates with the baser impulse of the contemporary: a continuous contouring and non-contouring process. The laterality turns the historical from a linear torpedo to spearhead to a constellation of ideas and events to be drawn from through one's context, at their will and their pace. Through it, the understanding of the self gives birth to a relational self, not through mere differentiation, but something constantly destabilizing itself. This continuously contouring, relational self then defuncts the idea of a pure self, which has never been altered- subverting the excavation drive. This shift is also seminal to move away from the impulse to channel the figure of 'I' and 'me' as the sole interface for ideas to present themselves. Such a rubric also grants the artists the freedom and the groundwork to take the discourse into their hands and dissect the various epistemes that govern us, solving the crisis of 'where to start from' by giving them the locus of the now.



BALLAD OF AN ART EDUCATOR: RANT AS FORMAT

Rohan Dahiya

May, 2024

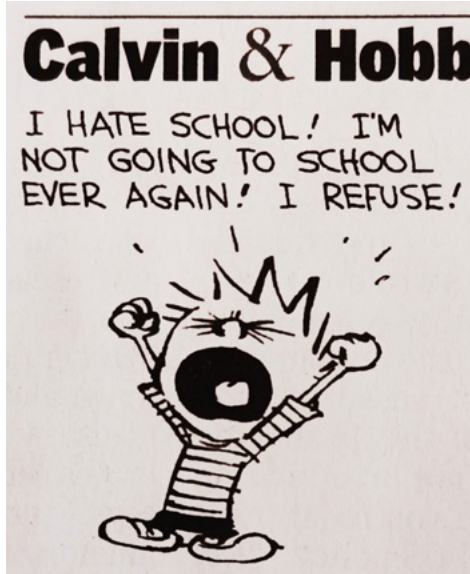


Image 1. Watterson, Bill. "Calvin & Hobbes." Comic Strip, 12 March 1992.

[Visual Description: A young boy expresses an objection against going to school. He exclaims, "I HATE SCHOOL! I'M NOT GOING TO SCHOOL EVER AGAIN! I REFUSE!"]

As young kids, we've all been there. Being forcibly made to go to school every harrowing morning; the hatred at times making it feel akin to ghastly prisons. I too have felt it. Just like Calvin's vehement protestations here, I too have had my share of rebellions. But what I never anticipated was that this feeling of disdain would someday shadow me into adulthood! Now an art educator, sharing the very same institutional space as I once did as a student, I stand witness to a variety of prejudices, expectations, stereotypes, and other problematic concerns; Not confined to just any one institution, but reflecting upon

a broader systemic problem, affecting all art educators across Indian schools. Which in turn unfolds a barrage of queries;

Why is Visual Arts synonymous with 'Craft' or Decoration / 'Beautification' in Schools? How did the state of Creative Expression become like this, or has it always been like this to begin with? Why are non-art 'subject teachers' treated with more respect (not just by management but even our society), Credited with superior pay grades, but art facilitators are relegated to the lowly status of mere "activity teachers"? Why is there no space for research-oriented Art pedagogy? And is it just my Subcontinent or a similar tale of woe is witnessed all across the world?

Firstly, let's begin with how school administration readily equates 'Visual Art' with *visually-appealing 'craft'*, expects G-R-A-N-D decoration of its corridor walkways, auditorium stage-beautification (as if one's developing art-sets / backdrop scenography for SLB's film-shooting) and ornamentation of pin-up boards in classrooms, every two-seconds (yes, cause India is a mighty hub of festivals!). It seems they urgently require *'tent-waale'* (party caterers) and event management professionals, but apparently are too *kanjoos* (miser) to spend for it. It all appears as if administrators come factory-fitted with a keen aim for creating parent-tailored *Majestic-Yet-Superficial experiences with Chump Change!* Thus, these private-sectors instead make-do with underpaying freshers, enticing them with minimum wage and exploiting them in a pressure-filled environment, bereft of basic worker-rights.

While some might dismiss the issue by simply suggesting not to take such jobs, the reality is far more nuanced. Factors such as surging 'unemployment rate', combined with a scarcity of jobs for freshers (persistent with an already 'uneven' ratio of the vacant posts against contesting applicants), is further compounded by an even scarcer availability of creative or 'artistic' roles, thus compelling artists into accepting such jobs and thereby making the situation even more daunting! Moreover, there's a certain dissonance between the artistic framework nurtured (and dreams sold) within art colleges, versus the contrasting ground-realities of a commodity-based, market-driven 'art industry', awaiting art graduates as they exit the protective boundaries of

an institute of higher education.

The pressure from family and society only adds to the frustration experienced by these newly minted artists, where the discontentment stems not solely from inadequate monetary compensation or task-related expectations, but the harsh necessity of just 'being able' to earn enough to afford & maintain a 'basic standard-of-living', to sustain oneself, and to provide & support one's family. As a result, artists often find themselves reluctantly accepting such jobs, leaving them vulnerable for easy exploitation; where they have to endure '*lower-pay for longer work-hours*', and tolerate the likes of *insensitive, unsupportive, & unprofessional employers and alike work-conditions!*



Image 2. Tomlinson, Vaughan. Digital Illustration, 2023.

[Visual Description: A kid draped in white-bedsheet costume, with text 'COST OF LIVING' written over it. Kid is trick-or-treating on a Halloween night.]

Gradually, one starts doubting the learnings of their postgraduate degree in visual arts, as if it all was completely futile. The true essence and value of the subject that you worked so hard to acquire all those years, developing those research-led critical inquiries through your art-practise, fostering that inclination towards an intellectual engagement with the

subject's core- '*maano sabki dhajjiya si udd jaati hai!*' (starts feeling like an utter waste!)

Meanwhile, I am cognizant of the power held by 'External' (*the extrinsic factors or lived-experiences we acquire*) over the 'Personal', and how it could significantly shape up *individual perspectives*. For me, perhaps it was the pursuit of a certain impulse of the 'Contemporary', or maybe it was the academic-setting within my university, the pedagogical methodology it employed, *the critical discourse on Art & Media* within my college, or the creative ambiance and experimental-practises i encountered on the outside. Perhaps it all informed my 'sense' or understanding of art, facilitating the development of this need of *critical framework for creative expression or an artistic-practice*; thus at times differing from the widely held beliefs & notions of 'essence of art' others might hold, in markets and society at large.



Image 3. Screenshot from "Mera Teaching Career." Stand-Up Comedy Video, YouTube. Uploaded by Solanki, Aashish. 2023.

[Translation: "After going to school, I realized that I only like the subject, not the children."]

Secondly, in our society as well as within the premises of a school, theory or '*subject teachers*' seem to command this *unspoken* 'respect', and are imbued with a certain *prestige*, credited with association of what are deemed as 'important' fields of study or essential subjects in the academia. As a result, they are frequently offered higher pay-grades. On the contrary, art teachers, whether specializing in visual or performing arts, are merely seen as '*activity teachers*' or craft instructors, being relegated to the status of someone merely overseeing '*light-hearted recreational pursuits*' or leisurely activities! Thus, lacking the obvious recognition and 'seriousness' commensurate with our discipline at the same time. *Why does this dichotomy exist, I wonder?*

This pervasive stereotype of a '*drawing master*' or a 'wall-painter' in our society is relentless, putting visual artists akin to party-clowns! Is it that hard for us to envision or comprehend art beyond the confines of vahi *ghisa-pita* (repetitive) realistic '*Sceneries*' or life-like 2-minute 'portraits'? What is this prevalent ease of assumption, whereby art is reduced to the simplistic query of *whether you can decorate their new house's walls with attractive images?* Is the notion of creative expression as something revolutionary or a consequential endeavor so beyond the conventional understanding or acknowledgment?!

Thirdly, the situation in schools reminds me of Patna Kalam (a style of Indian Painting and an antecedent to Company School) under the patronage of British Raj and Indophile Europeans. Where, the intervention of said patronage led to a dismantling of aesthetics, a shift in thematics and stylisation of art. Indian artists were trained in specific Mediums & Materials to churn-out 'likable' characteristics and representations, all in accordance to the '*taste*' of patrons; thereby reducing them to mere *artistic-labours* or 'natural imitators', *stripping them of their autonomy*, their intellect agency! Indian artists were simply a tool as per the company's discretion, or as they say 'a means to an end'. Funnily enough, a similar set-of-events often happen in relation to an *indian school's principal / coordinator & its visual arts teacher*, where the latter is simply an *aesthetic majdoor* (labour) to carry out the head's wishes, strictly without the use of 'brains' or any cognitive ability whatsoever! Sometimes I feel this must be the only job profile that truly does 'deserve' AI-based automation, providing instantly generating 'decorative craft' upon command!





Image 4. @duckorpenguin. Instagram, Accessed Aug. 2023.

[Visual Description: Image reads, "Dream Job? Sorry, I don't dream of labor." Text sits next to a duck's face morphed upon a seated human-female.]

Feeling of '*dihaadi-majdooi*' (daily wage labor) occasionally creeps upon the said artist, sans his/her/their creative vision. Such comparison, although troublesome, comes easily to the mind of an artist stuck in a school-setting. However, the rationale here is rooted on grounds of 'skill' and 'monetary compensation'. Much of society tends to evaluate 'daily-wage labor-work' (and its worth) on the basis of '*hours*' worked or time-spent as a scale; where they innately assume to have a 'right' to be dictatorial, to being owed '*any*' and '*all kinds*' of work(s) in the said time-frame, amidst the presence of employed laborer. This skewed perception of entitlement is then justified and appropriated by the logic of "*hum paise de to rahe hai!*" (equivalent to the notion of throwing money at them); thus resulting in a perpetual cycle of continuous and immense exploitation by the hands of the master.

A pattern emerges, as this frequent approach of biased perception, insensitive treatment, inadequate payment, and disrespect- further expands and gets translated, to the circumstances facing an art school teacher. The latter, a 'skilled' professional (with a formal education) is often paid equivalent to, and sometimes even less than, the 'unskilled' labor-for-hire! Further blurring the distinction between skilled artists and unskilled laborers, undervaluing and blatantly ignoring an artist's specialized skills and contributions.



Image 5. "Corporate Satire." Sad And Useless Humor. Website, 2009, <https://www.sadanduseless.com/>.

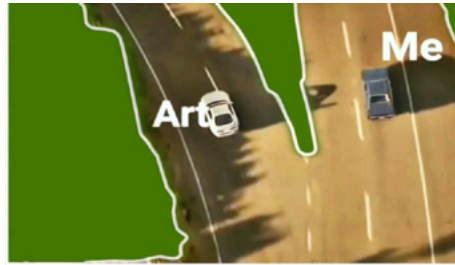
[Visual Description: An ongoing Interview in a corporate-setting, with text-bubbles articulating the conversation between two parties.]

Moreover, with the primary aim of refining your pedagogical methodology, inculcating a research-based art learning, or increasing the curve of your personal-growth, with which you *initially* entered into this job sector- all of it gets brutally crushed against the constant woe of the fulfillment of 'decoration' and nonsensical *clerical tasks*, seated within your frontal lobe at all times! This divides your brain in a constant pull-and-push between your individual goals and the *institutional expectations*, leaving you high and dry in this 'tug of war'!

Throughout a working day filled with continuous classes, the minutes you so carefully save up for personal aspirations (be it learning more about the Board policies, or understanding Curriculums better, participating in interesting events, developing your teaching skills, inculcating your interest areas of study with pedagogical practice, or climbing up the professional ladder et al.) all get consumed in this constant conflict within your already 'under-pressure' and baffled mind.

One gradually starts losing their identity, losing themselves in the due process of this existential crisis. Slowly, you start despising the institution, the job profile, and even 'Art' itself, which once brought you joy now ceases to evoke any sense of happiness! The contemplation of anything art or related-to-art, every school on-the-goddamn-planet-earth, everything under the sun just triggers an angered, resentful, and hateful response!





Pov: After getting job

Image 6. Popular Meme (Edited Version) based off "Fast & Furious 7." Hollywood Movie, 2015.

[Visual Description: Aerial view of two cars parting ways as a divider approaches. White texts reading, 'Art' and 'Me' are inscribed adjacent to respective cars.]

Fourth, and finally, this perpetual cycle of brutal adversity intensifies to a point of such overwhelming magnitude that it plunges you into deep misery. You find yourself compelled to wake up and *drag yourself day after day* to endure a bad work environment and worse job profile, solely to sustain yourself. Given the strenuous and taxing nature of such a gig, I really demand to be paid '*Therapy Reimbursement*' in order to afford an expensive psychologist, so as to now counter the lovely trauma(s)/ mental-health violations inflicted! It's the least to expect, don't you think?! (*Please do add CBT allowance along with the PF and HRA allowance within my CTC lol*). The irony lies in the necessity of earning money through employment to afford therapy, only to find that the very institutions become responsible for deteriorating our already strained mental health, for which we required therapy in the first place! *Lamentable paradox, isn't it?*

Further, I wish to take you readers to a detour, circumnavigating into the core logic of this problem. Deep-diving into the carcinomic ‘cause’, rather than its messy symptoms;

यदि आप जानना चाहते हैं, कि ये “आर्ट-टीचर” कि सप्लाई आ कहां से रही है? तो [यहाँ क्लिक करें](#) ।

For those, who want to know what happens when your (intrinsically-motivated) interests gets entangled within the reality of worldly-matters, [click here](#).

Disclaimer of Consequential Damage; **Open at your own Risk.**

**The Author shall not be liable for any emotional or mental distress / anguish sustained by the Reader.*



Image 7. Still from “Pilot.” Brooklyn Nine Nine, Season 1, Episode 1, Fox, Fremulon Productions, 2013.

[Visual Description: Detective Jake Peralta, a fictional character in #B99, walks across a gridlocked NYC Street. Seemingly exhausted, he states, “I can’t breathe anymore. This job is eating me alive.”]

I've genuinely asked multiple experienced people from different sectors regarding the aforementioned situation. I do understand that different sectors and institutions have different sets of challenges. But be it a '*sarkari damaad*' (government-employed educator), or facilitators within prestigious global-schools' chains, to newly-established institutions capable of amend, the plight of art teachers persists unchanged. While some institutions may have a bigger supporting art team, or maybe possess a more 'stable' administrative framework led by empathetic professionals/coordinators, **the crux inherently remains the same-** that art teachers 'must' undertake the laborious responsibility of decorative work and cater to on-demand craft requests throughout the academic year; '*ki har jagah aisa hi hota hai, chaahe aap kahi bhi chale jao.*' ('that it's the same story everywhere, no matter where you go.') The intensity of the situation might vary, but it very much remains an 'unofficial' facet of the 'job-description' for visual art school teacher. Perhaps this will always be the case at senior secondary educational institutions of India.

But maybe it isn't as bad as I'm demonizing it in my narrative? Maybe it simply boils down to one's personal 'choice' or *preference*? Maybe all that matters is if you choose to like the crafty-definition of art, if you not only enjoy but 'want' to engage with the process of *client-tailored* commercial/applied arts, and are simply okay with making it your 'bread and butter'. Maybe only then can you choose to overlook the professional hazards that come along with this job profile. And if so, maybe it really is for you! Some individuals I know even thrive in such roles. However, I've come to realize it definitely ain't for me!

Over and out. **writer shrugs sighfully** (~^▽^~)



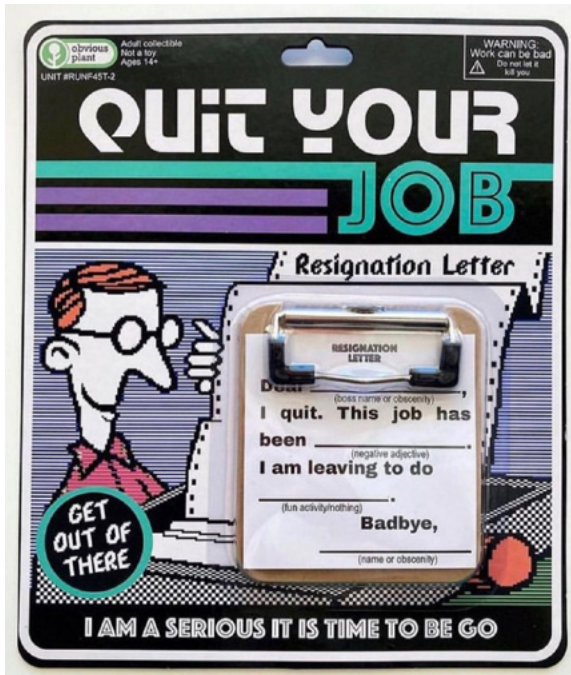


Image 8. Wysaski, Jeff. "Quit Your Job". Obvious Plant Project, 2015, <https://obviousplant.com/>.

[Visual Description: Gag toy with a 'Resignation Letter' Template inside. One of various 'Fake Products' planted in American Retail Stores by Jeff Wysaski.]

GULLYBALL MONEYBALL

Kaushal Sapre

March, 2024

Instructions for a game for early career artists and art students

Apparatus:

Stress ball x 1

Whistle x 1

Notepad for scorekeeping x 1

Elevated Platform x 1 (could be a tall chair/cushions/table, etc.)

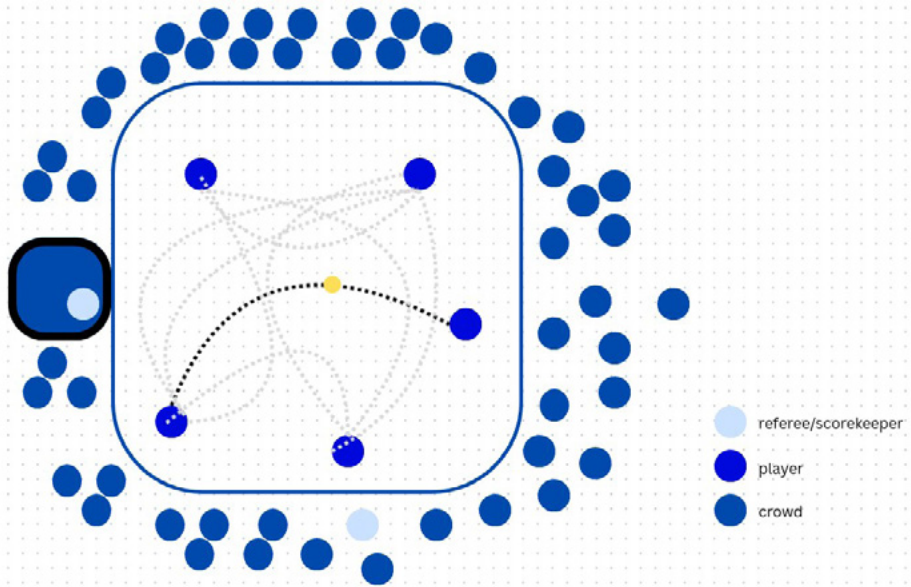


Personnel:

Referee x 1

Scorekeeper x 1

Multiple teams of 3/4/5 players



Field of Play:

Variable dimensions. Floor is the arena. The elevated platform is on the edge of the arena.

How to Play:

- Referee sits on the elevated platform
- Players sit on the arena
- Referee has a list of questions. They announce the first question and throw the stress ball to a player in the arena
- The player has to catch the ball, respond to the question and pass the ball to their teammate
- Teammate responds and passes the ball further
- The team has to develop ideas by responding/questioning/debating while passing the stress ball
- Scorekeeper keeps track of the number of passes for each question

- If the team's responses are exhausted, they can throw the stress ball back to the referee
- The referee blows the whistle to bring the stress ball back from the arena to close the question
- The referee then announces the next question and throws the ball back into the arena
- Game ends when all questions are exhausted
- New team enters. Referee changes.
- Team with the highest cumulative score wins

Questions:

- How far or near is the word "market" for art students and early-career artists?
- Does valuation in the market have an effect on the reading of artists? Does it elevate attention or distract attention? Or does it run counter to the idea of seriousness?
- Does doing well in the market have an effect on discussions about those artists?
- Is there a difference between 'valuation' and 'worth'?
- Does distance or proximity from the market work as a measure?
- What gets evaluated in the world of art markets?
- How does news about the market leach into discussions between artists?
- Do you think the market will have an effect on your own work as an artist?
- What do you expect from the market?

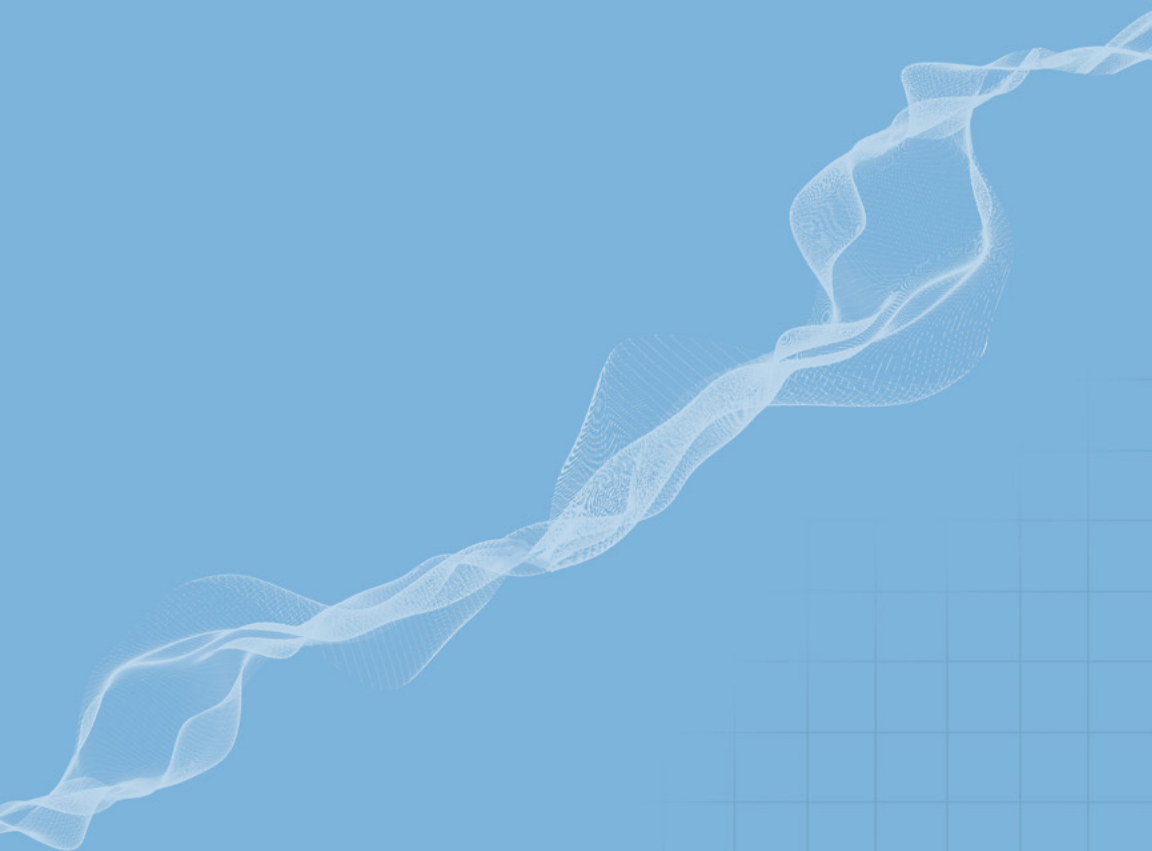
****Developed by Kaushal Sapre along with Bhogal Studio friends using questions framed by Raqs Media Collective.**

Like all gully games, this one's rules are bendable at will.



COURSING

Aditi Purwar, Arun Kumar Singh, Soumya
Yadav, Sumit Kumar



MOVING WITH THE SPACES

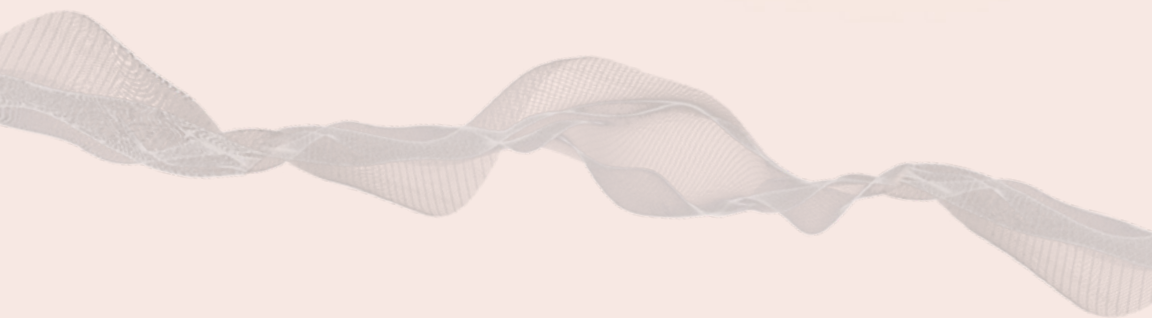
Aditi Purwar

April, 2024



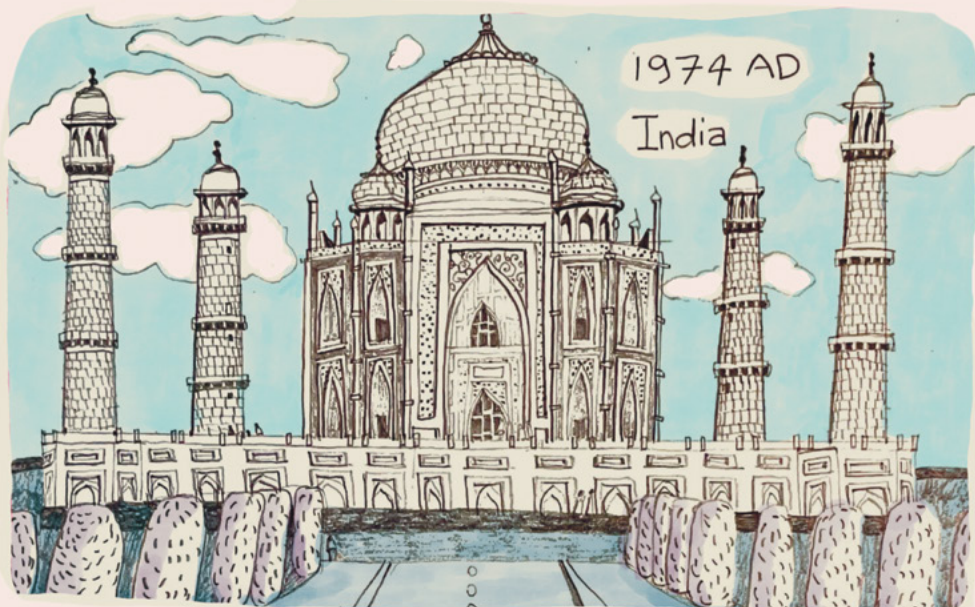
THE TEA CUP SET

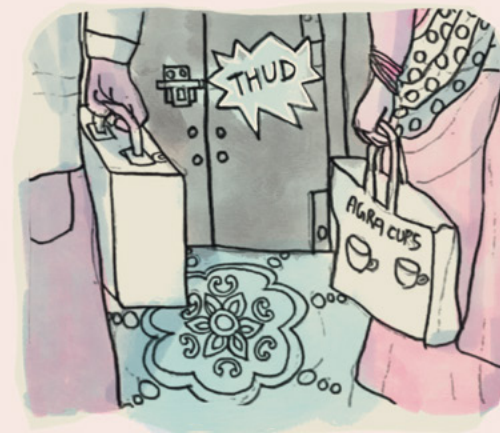
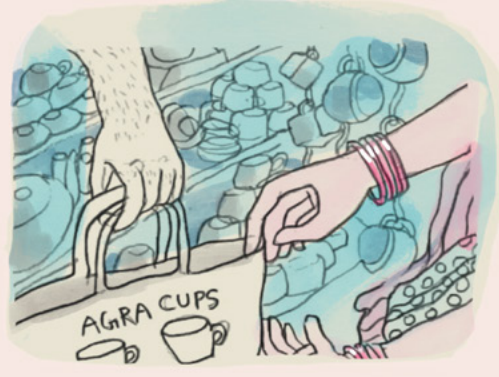
ADITI
PURWAR

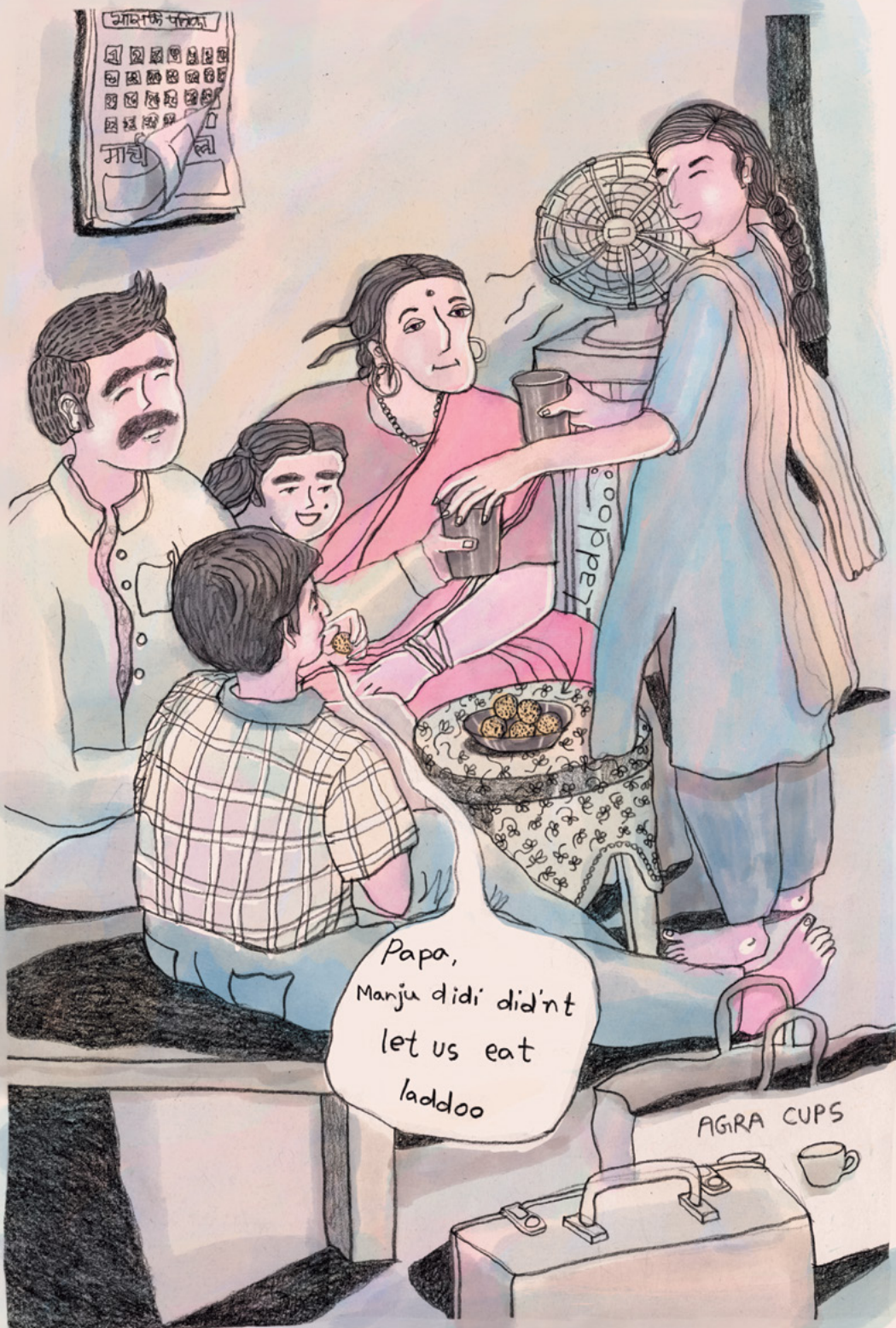
















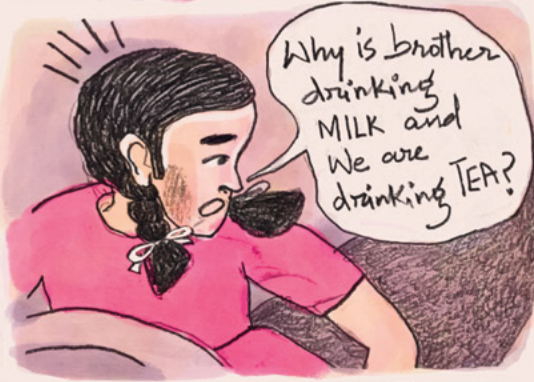














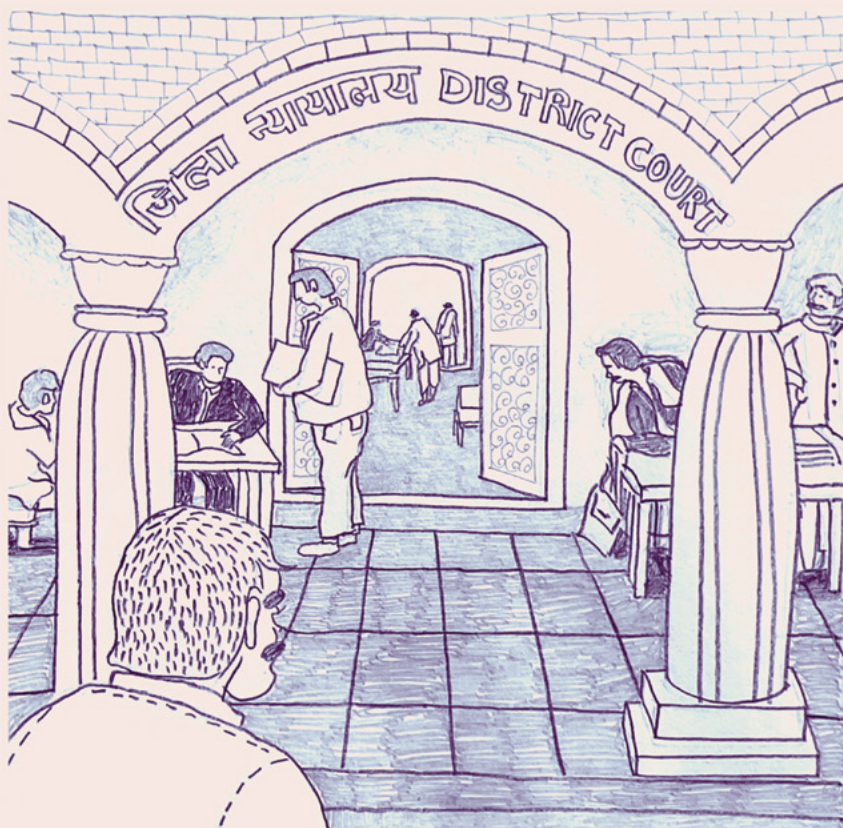
Brother,
Here!
Enjoy your
milk
ALONE.
I will
drink
TEA with
Manju
Didi.



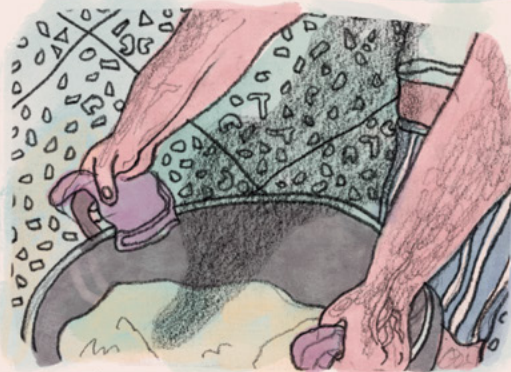
What book did
you bring, Mini?

Just a school
notebook.
Didi.







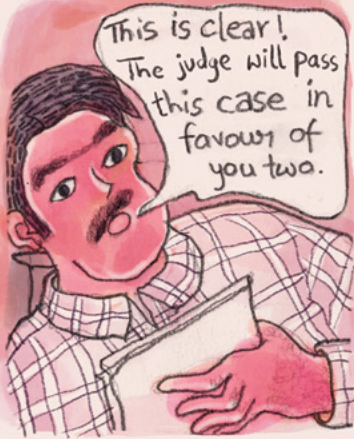


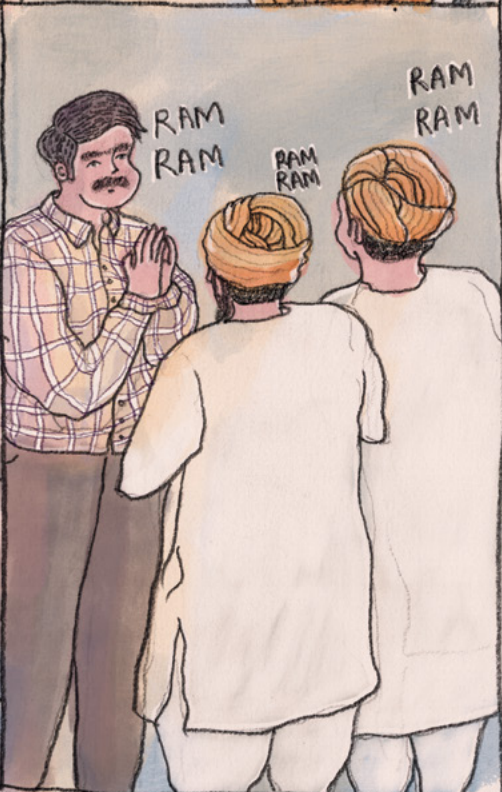


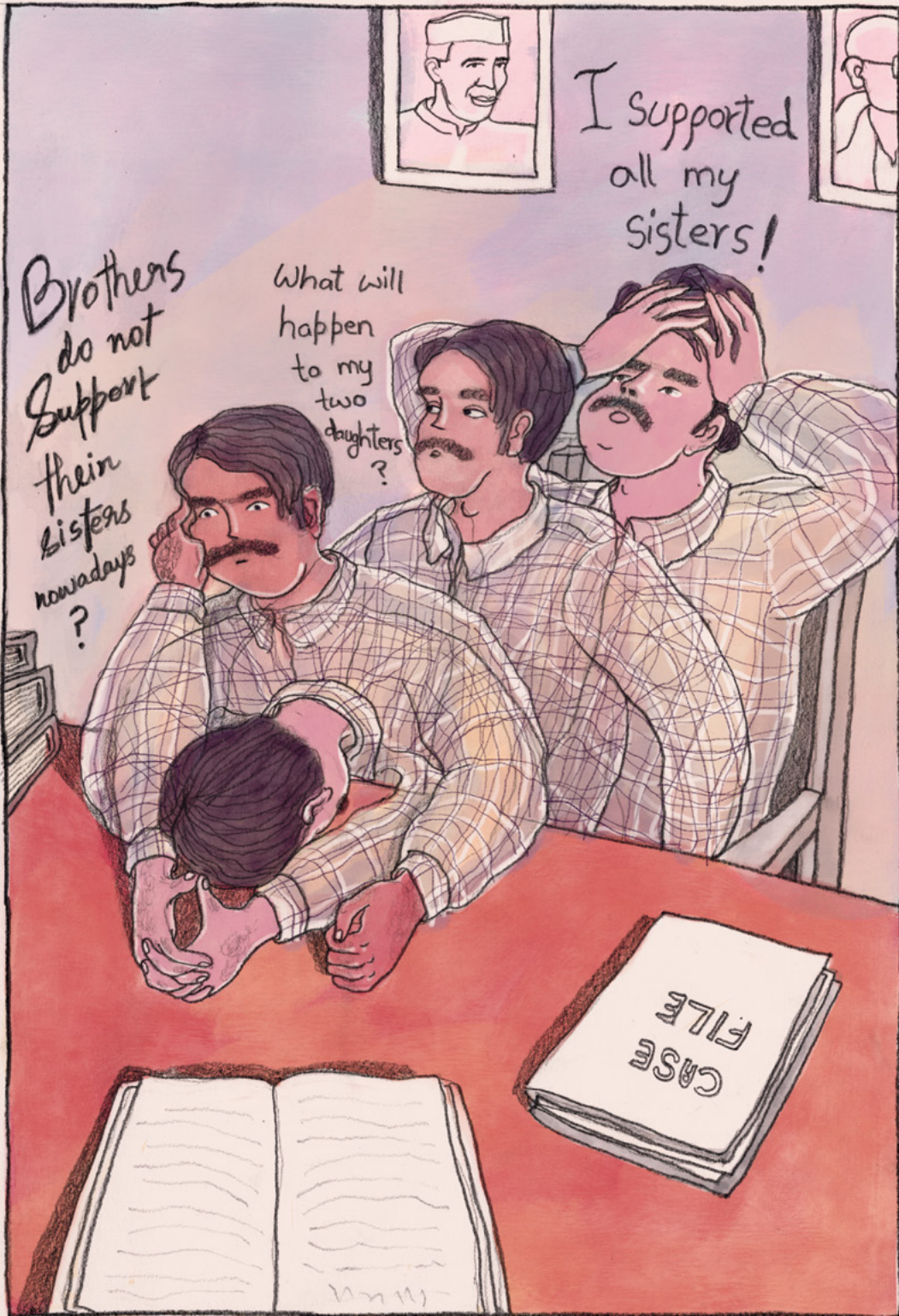




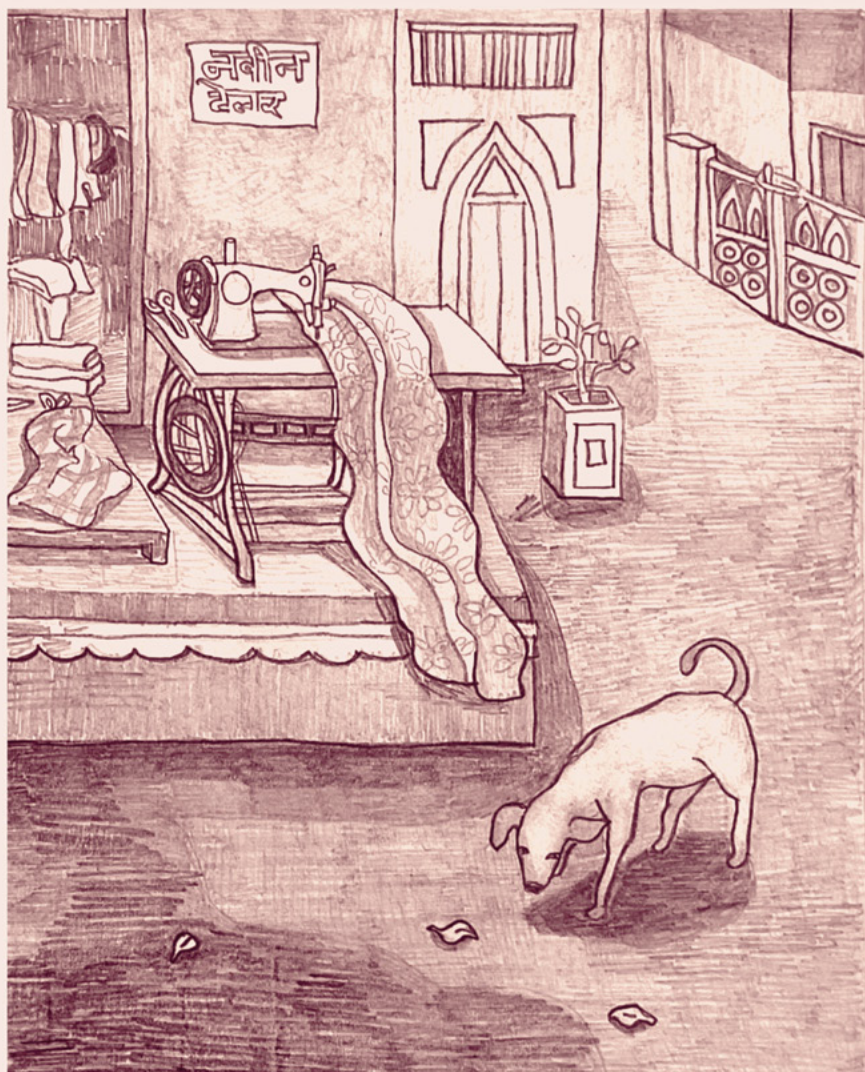
According to Hindu succession act, 1956, only sons or grandsons had rights over ancestral property.





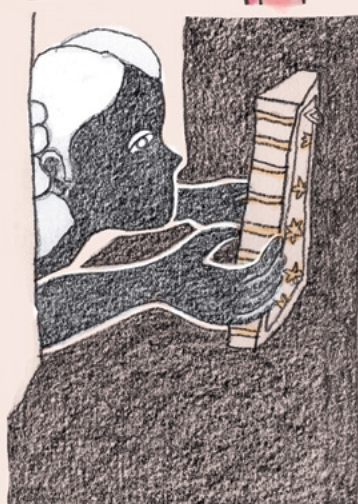
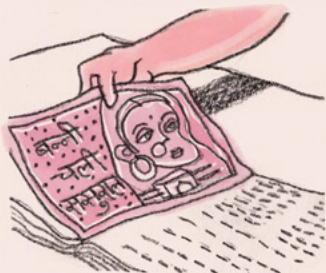








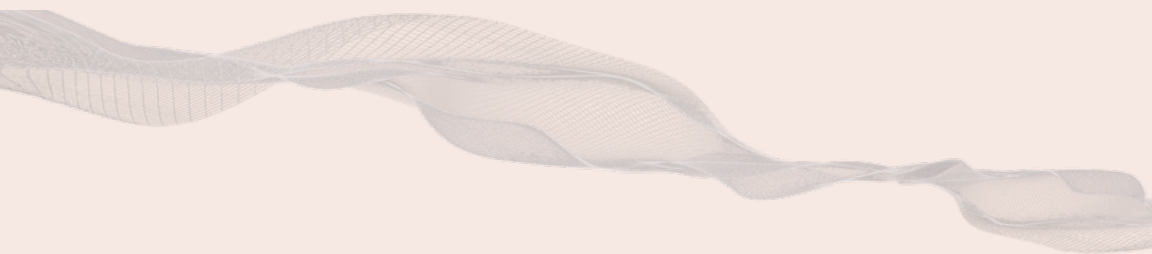


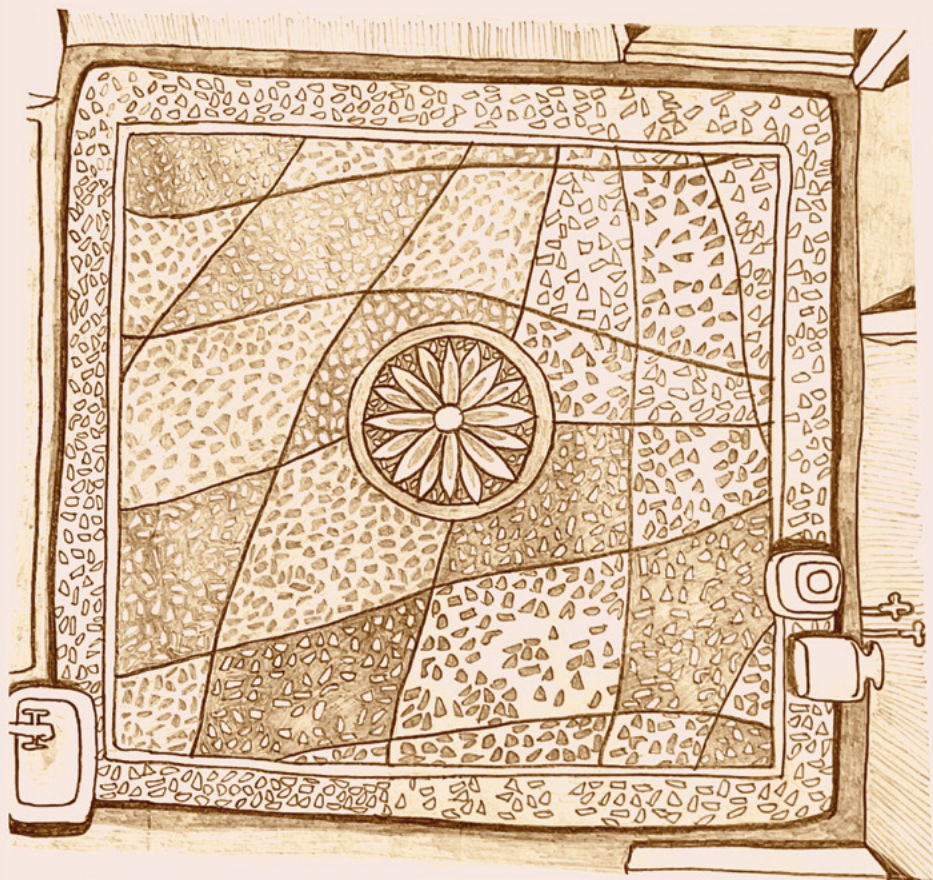




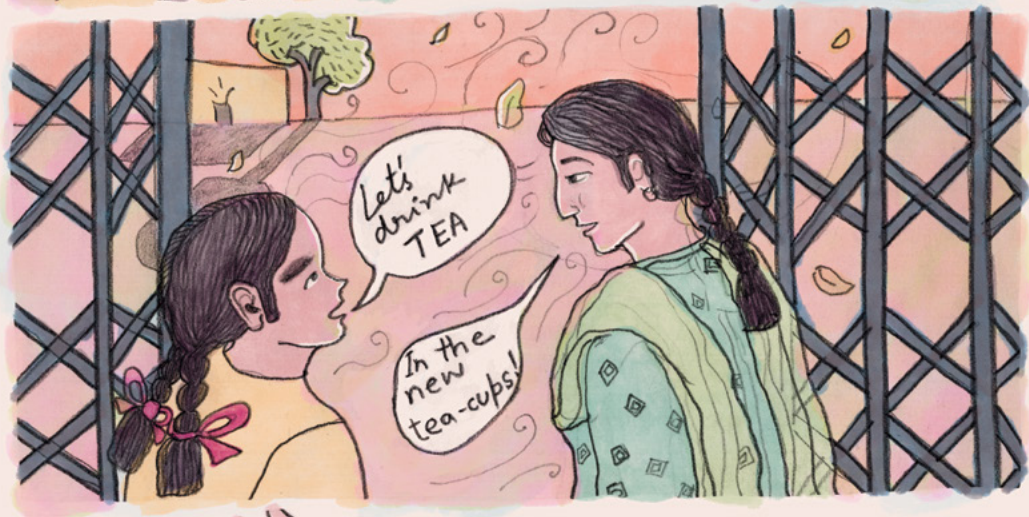






















(Image 1: 'A view of terrace', Oil pastels in A3 paper)

During the first wave of the pandemic, I returned to my home in Allahabad leaving my third-year studies at the College of Art, Delhi. Universities shifted to an online mode of learning. Allahabad (now Prayagraj) is a religious city. People keep themselves busy with everyday religious rituals. As a person born and brought up in such an environment, I can say that these everyday rituals are a peaceful method to remain stuck in the same state. During the pandemic, I kept myself busy with painting my surroundings. Regardless of the true picture of reality, an artist can paint it beautifully. Many artists consider 'the act of painting' as a ritual itself. However, 'painting as a ritual' can accommodate change. This change could be a change in technique, medium, content, perception, or thought process. When the pandemic perpetuated stagnation, I found movement in the act of painting.



Image 2: 'One third of the Haveli', acrylic on canvas board, 61cm x 51cm)

To give you a glimpse of how people live in spaces in my society, I would like to exemplify this with a personal example. My grandfather bought the middle one-third of a medium-sized traditional haveli. The bricks of the haveli date back to the 19th century. The internal doors towards the other parts were replaced by walls.



Image 3: A spread from the graphic novel 'The sky is filled with water' (2024)

He had four sons, therefore the property was further divided into four parts unofficially after long disputes. I along with my parents and two siblings were living in one-twelfth of the haveli. I used to calculate the possibility of further divisions in the future. The summary was hard to digest, 'The girls of the family need to marry in a well-off family to avoid further divisions, despite the updated inheritance law, it was an unsaid rule.'v

The number of permissible floors was also limited. The concept of division was no longer sustainable. I was reading about the India-Pakistan division and contemplating the Pandavas-Kauravas fight in the Mahabharata while watching a minuscule version of it live. Knowing that they could not afford me for long, my mind was constantly on the move. Being curious about the relationship between space and the state of mind, I observed how my family cooperated with the neighbors and how I should frame my conduct.

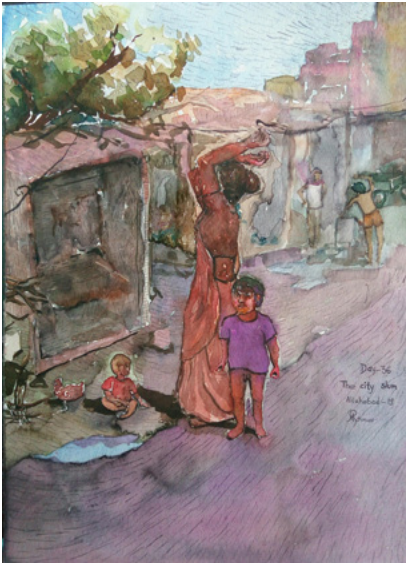


Image 4: The city slum, watercolor on A4 paper, drawing from memory

Apart from buying groceries from vendors and saying 'Namaste' to a few customers in my father's shop. I did not have much interaction with my neighborhood. I always felt restricted in communicating verbally, maybe gender created the difference. There is a big area of slums in Kydganj near Minto Park. Passing through the road, I remember myself daydreaming about making proper homes for them.

But this daydream was never compatible with my moving state of mind. Sometimes we don't need a threat or an attack from outside, the inactivity of people and their non-caring attitude towards each other is enough to tear down the social fabric. When we selfishly only care about our family's descendants, we are not doing good either to them.

I looked into the history and the incidents that happened in Uttar Pradesh. The communal riots of 1992 coincide with my birth year. My aunt tells me that we, four families, separated our kitchen after you were born. Around the same time, my father quit his non-paying law practice and opened a small general store. It feels like it was from past life when we used to fill thousands of envelopes with greeting cards. The drawings on those cards always felt inspirational and close to heart.



Image 3: The two shopkeepers, oil on board, 81 cm x 61 cm

Though I belong to a Hindu family, I am not religious, unlike my parents. My father respects other religions and he taught us to do so. I was privileged to eat siwai during Eid-al-Fitr, a festival celebrated by Muslims. But this was not the norm, not everyone did this sort of intercultural exchange. The vulnerability associated with identity and religion surprises me. It was an illusion to think that everything was peaceful. I think the statement 'The personal is political' holds in many aspects. The communal riots in 1992 and many riots before caused severe injury to the psychological state of the society.



Image 3: Water color on A4 sketchbook

It's a shame to say the majority of people get polarized by the political wave and start to hate each other. It's sad to see people closing their eyes and losing their sympathy while avoiding such discourses.

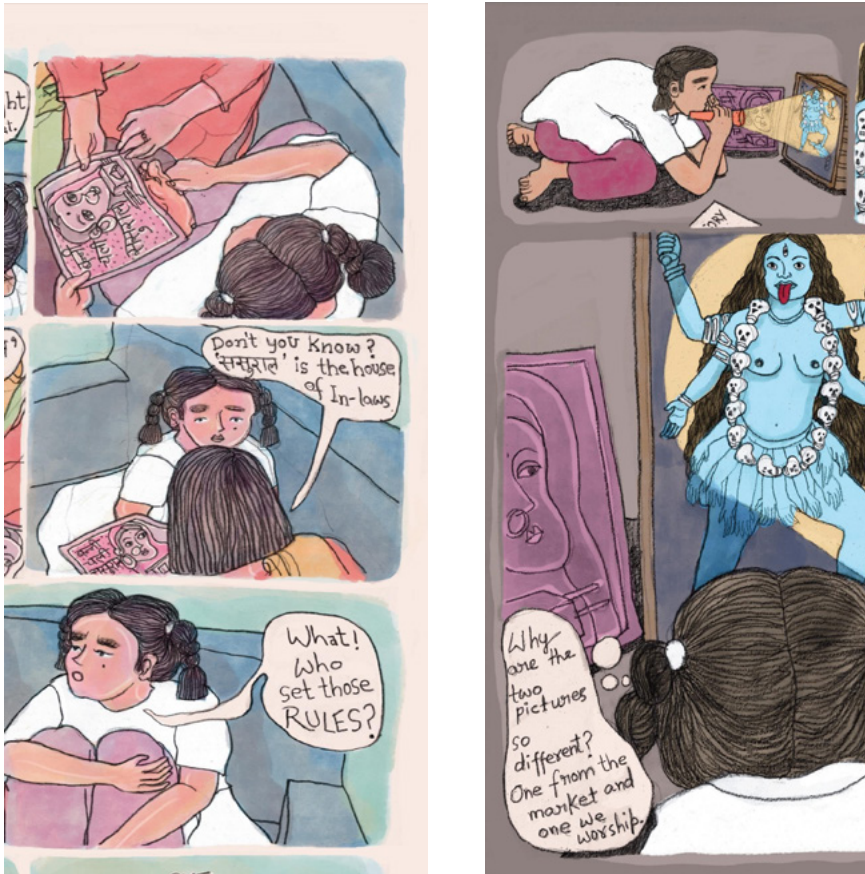


Image 6, 7: Excerpts from graphic story 'The Tea cup Set', graduate project 2023 at LUCA School of Arts, Brussels, Belgium

Being introspective helps in widening your perception. Now I understand that patriarchy is just a smaller context of a much bigger picture. The authoritative behavior that is suffocating many lives is more widespread than we can imagine, there are transnational forces affecting the socio-political framework. Growing up, I had been annoyed and upset with the patriarchal mindset of people in my society. Seeing my mother not be able to pursue her career was a major setback for me. My mother had

been a pillar of strong emotional support in our family, which was in my opinion, much more valuable than any financial support we had.

They say that early childhood experiences are important in shaping the overall personality. What was your childhood like? In a culture of denial and inactivity, people store all the traumatic events in their bodily memory and instincts in order to resolve it later. And the unresolved trauma seeps into generations. How well can you organize the storage in your brain? My grandfather developed dementia in his later years before his death. When bodily memory supersedes the conscious one, the need to express is immediate. I started writing poetry in class 5. However, I studied engineering. I have an MTech degree from IIT Roorkee. But later I realized I was too poetic to make microstrip antennas. A lucrative career couldn't hold the need to express. I completed my second bachelor's in painting from College of Art, Delhi in 2021 and my second master's in graphic storytelling from Luca School of Arts, Brussels, Belgium in 2024.



Image 8: A painted nightmare (2020), water color on A3 paper

A painting is a moment frozen, but its sequences can move with time. I find graphic storytelling a suitable match for my state of mind, even though the form can change, the essence would be the same, 'moving'. I favor content more than aesthetics. Content connects with contemporary times and society and I have a lot to say about it, you might call it a 'content crisis'. Other than visual aspects, for a large sequence to work as a story, I am honing skills like 'rhythm of the frames', 'treating text as part of the image', 'the narrative curve', 'linearity and nonlinearity', 'change in the view angles', very similar to what writers and filmmakers do. During my first three years at the College of Art, Delhi, I along with the others took pride in the detailed aesthetic qualities of a painting, hours of hours invested in one canvas were more appreciated than the readability of the content. However, in the final year, many teachers indirectly taught me to challenge this inclination. During my master's in Belgium, since graphic books are made for a wider audience, here they promote the readability of the visuals more than their graphic richness. The aesthetics and richness of the visuals cause readers to stop for the frame and feel the moment, the readability takes them forward and makes them turn the page. I am struggling to find a balance between both of them, to decide the pace at which I want my readers to turn the pages. As a reader myself, I never thought an author would design a book considering all these aspects. I treat graphic books as a sequence of expressive paintings, but I do not want to confine myself as either a painter or an illustrator. I don't understand the reason for creating such binaries and institutionalizing it to impose it further on visual art students. It is not facilitating the need for their creative expression. I neither want to confine myself as a designer as promoted by western schools. A designer gets lost in attracting the audience. The sense of perfect design doesn't exist; people get lost in this illusion. However, I would rather be a flexible storyteller, by learning and unlearning, as I move with the space, I want to give voice to what needs to be heard.





अनटाइटल्ड

सुमित कुमार

April, 2024


शैक्षणिक पद्धति, अभिव्यक्ति का एक कृत्रिम तरीका मात्र है। इसमें हम सिर्फ खुद को बेहतर पेश करने तक ही सीमित होते हैं।

असल में देखा जाए तो नियम सिर्फ आपको सभ्य बनाने के लिए हैं। जो कि मनुष्य की अब तक की खुद को धोखा देने की सबसे बड़ी चालाकी साबित हुई है। और जो भी इन नियमों से आगे जाने की कोशिश करता है, उसका असभ्य, विद्रोही, अधार्मिक आदि जैसे शब्द पीछा नहीं छोड़ते, जो सभ्य लोगों की ही देन है।

देखा जाए तो सभ्य होने की ये चादर कुछ शताब्दियों पहले यूरोप के देशों से होते हुए दुनियां भर में फैली, जो खुद को समझदार और शिक्षित कहते थे। धीरे-धीरे इन शिक्षित लोगों ने दुनिया के असभ्य और बेफिक्र लोगों को सभ्य होने का पाठ पढ़कर अपनी तरह निर्जीव और बेचैन कर दिया, जिसका किसी को अंदाजा ही नहीं हो सका।



और अब जब कोई वापस
से सजीव होने की कोशिश
करता है, तो उसे **असभ्य**
कहा जाता है।



आखिर आधुनिक होने में कितना पारंपरिक होना पड़ता है और कितना गैर पारंपरिक?

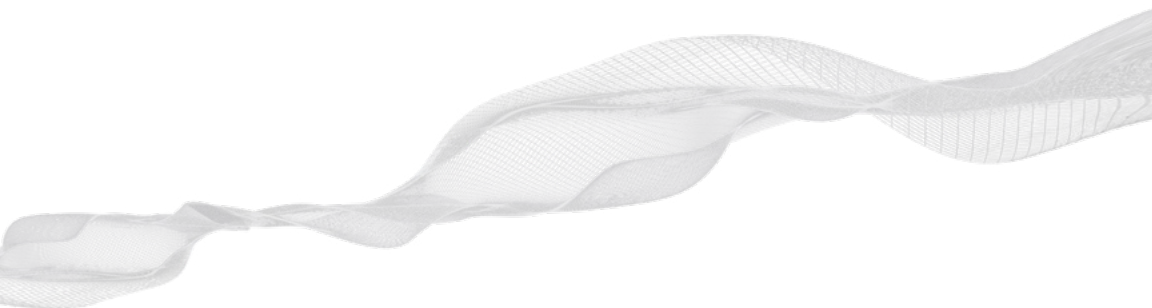
आधुनिक होने को हम कितना समय के साथ होने वाली क्रिया कहेंगे या कितना परंपरा के विरुद्ध होने वाली प्रतिक्रिया? न जाने कितने सारे आधुनिकता के लिए हुए आंदोलनों ने परंपरा के ढांचों को गिराकर, उसकी नींव पर आधुनिकता के झंडे गाड़े हैं। तो क्या आधुनिक बनना बिना हिंसा के संभव नहीं है?

यदि बात की जाए कला की तो मुझे लगता है कला में आने वाले बदलाव और आधुनिकता को लेकर हमारी जितनी जिज्ञासा रही है, काशा! हमने वह जिज्ञासा सामान्य जन तक पहुंचाई होती क्योंकि देखा जाए तो कला भी पूरी तरीके से पूंजीवाद से छुटकारा पाकर आम लोगों तक नहीं पहुंच पाई है, जितना उसे होना चाहिए था। हां, राजाओं के महलों से निकलकर आम जनों के रुचि (हॉबी) के रूप में जरूर जुड़ी है मगर अभी तक जीवनयात्रा के रूप में नहीं।



किसी पीढ़ी के कौन से भाग को हम आधुनिकता
से माप सकते हैं?

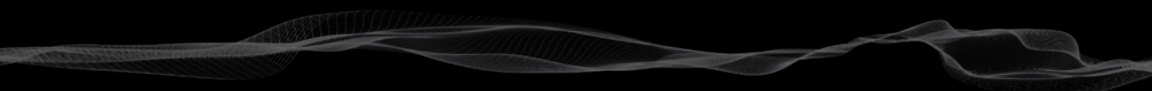
और क्या कभी पिछली पीढ़ी नई पीढ़ी की
आधुनिकता को स्वीकार कर सकेगी?



Angst

Soumya Yadav

February, 2024



रातें बदल रही हैं
 अब ये फर्क नहीं पड़ता
 रात बड़ी है या छोटी
 क्योंकि अब छोटे-छोटे सूरज
 रात को बना देते हैं आर्टिफिशियल दिन

रात के साथ-साथ बदल रहे हैं
 आदमियों के सोने के नियम
 कुछ सदियों पहले
 सोने के नियम आश्रित थे रात और दिन पर
 मगर अब आश्रित होते जा रहे हैं
 आदमी का जी नोचते पूंजीवाद पर

आदमी भी होते जा रहे हैं
 आर्टिफिशियल
 उनकी भावनाएं तड़प रही हैं
 मन के कुएं में
 या यूं कहें कि मशीन के कुएं में
 छटपटा रही हैं।

आर्टिफिशियल आदमी नहीं देख सकता
 आदमी की भावनाएं।

Perhaps the biggest marker of the civilizational importance of the 'name', lies in constantly trying to argue "What's in a name". The first label. The first structure. The first rubric.



रौशनी, छिपकली और पतंगा

अरुण कुमार सिंह.

June, 2023

बारिश में हमेशा ही अजीब सी धूप आती थी और वो परेशान हो जाते थे। उनका नाम क्या था -उन्हें नहीं मालूम। मतलब मालूम था पर भूल गए थे। जैसे घर में कभी चश्मा रख कर भूल जाते थे वैसे ही नाम। उन्होंने नाम को कभी अपने से चिपकने नहीं दिया। हमेशा ही उसे अपने से अलग रखा।

घर में जो लड़की काम करने आती थी वो हमेशा उन्हें मास्टर जी कहकर पुकारती थी। कभी कभी उसके मुंह से सुनकर उन्हें लगता था कि उनका नाम यही है। फिर कभी official documents आते तब मालूम पड़ता कि सुरेश भी कह सकते हैं। पर कागज पर लिखा नाम और ज़िंदा इंसान के मुंह से नाम सुनने में फर्क था। अभी तो उनका नाम मास्टर जी ही था।

आज वो बहुत झुँझला रहे थे। कई दिन से तबीयत खराब थी। खांसी। बारिश ऐसी कि दो पल को बहुत तेज होती फिर एक दम से धूप। आँगन में जाल के ऊपर शीट पड़ी थी। एक दो बार दिन में उन्होंने उसे आगे पीछे किया था लेकिन फिर थक गए थे। अब वो शीट पूरी ढकी थी। जब पहली बार में शीट को एक बूंद पड़ते ही आगे किया था तो अपनी पत्नी के ताने याद आ गए थे।

“तुमको बहुत जल्दी रहती है आँगन ढकने की। अरे बरसने तो दो। ढंग से आँगन भीग जाए तब ढको। अभी ऐसा लगता है आसमान को चुनौती दे रहे हो कि तू भिगा के दिखा। उसके चक्कर में वो बिलकुल नहीं बरसता। जब देखो उसे टोक देते हो।”

वो बस मुस्कुराकर ये सारे ताने सुनते रहते। जैसे कुछ मीठा मुंह में खा रहे हों वैसे होठ करे रहते। ऐसे क्या देख रहे हो? वो पूछती तो मुस्कुरा देते।

आज बड़ी देर हो गयी, आई नहीं!! वो सोच रहे थे। आज उन्हें अपना नाम भी याद नहीं आ रहा था। नाम के मोहताज से हो गए थे। जब वो आएगी तब नाम लेगी तब याद आएगा कि खुद को बुलाते क्या हैं! उसका नाम क्या

है? किस्से पूछें? कोई है? उन्होंने खाली घर से पूछा। हालत ये थी कि अभी ये भी याद नहीं आ रहा था कि घर में उनके साथ कोई रहता है कि नहीं। कुछ देर तक इधर उधर ताकने के बाद वो फिर आराम कुर्सी पर बैठ गए। कुछ देर तक घड़ी को ताकते रहे। उसके पड़ोस में छिपकली रेंग रही थी। रेंग क्या रही थी पड़ोस में लटके पतंगे को देख रही थी। जो शायद मर चुका था और छिपकली को लग रहा था कि जिंदा है और अभी हरकत करेगा। कोई हरकत नहीं। वो डर भी रही थी। उन्हें बहुत कौतूहल हो रहा था इस खेल में। भूख जैसा कुछ पेट के निचले हिस्से में महसूस हो रहा था पर कहें किस्से। खुद बनाना कुछ सीखा नहीं।

फिर उठकर आँगन तक हो आए। ऊपर शीट को फिर जांचा। बारिश के आसार थे पर उन्हें भरोसा था कि अब नहीं होगी। फिर भी शीट को पड़ा रहने दिया। वो आएगी तब उससे कम से कम इस बारे में बात तब भी हो जाएगी। टीवी देखी जाए। सोचा। फिर रिमोट ढूँढने लगे। कुछ साल पहले, या शायद नयी... याद नहीं कब आई थी टीवी। रिमोट भी नहीं मिल रहा। जाने कहाँ रख दिया है उस लड़की ने। क्या आदमी अपना सामान अपनी मर्जी से नहीं रख सकता? झुँझलाते हुए खुद से बड़बड़ाने लगे। उन्हें पता था जवाब हमेशा से यही था कि तुम्हें याद रहे तब न। ये उनकी पत्नी भी कहती थी और अब ये लड़की भी। ज्यादा ज़ोर दिया तो उन्हें पत्नी के चेहरे के भीतर वो लड़की दिखने लगी। पर ये अभी भी याद था कि दोनों अलग हैं। फिर शांत बैठ गए। नींद आँखों से कोसो दूर थी। घर से निकलना मना था। चार बार बाथरूम भी हो आए थे। अब और कितना इंतज़ार। चाय बना लेता हूँ। सोचकर किचन में गए पर ताला पड़ा था। अब चाभी ढूँढो! अजीब समस्या है! पूरे घर में चाभी ढूँढने पर भी नहीं मिली। वो साथ ले गयी होगी। कुछ लिख कर गयी हो? जगह जगह नोट ढूँढने लगे। उन्हें धुंधला सा कुछ याद आया कि कभी बात तो हुई थी कि कुछ चीजों को नोट पर लगा देंगे जिससे याद रहे। पर ये अभी की बात है या बहुत पुरानी, ये कहना मुश्किल था।

कमरा बहुत छोटा नहीं लग रहा? घर! घर। घर में 2 बेडरूम होने चाहिए। पर वो दूसरे में जा क्यूँ नहीं पा रहे। दूसरे बेडरूम पर ताला भी नहीं पड़ा। उन्होंने धक्का दिया तो मालूम चला अंदर से बंद है। मन हुआ कि पूछ लें कोई है पर फिर कुछ सोचकर रुक गए। अजीब सा लग रहा था। वापस आकर बिस्तर पर लेट गए।

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घड़ी की आहट से आँख खुली। रात हो चुकी थी। वो अभी तक नहीं आई। सबसे पहले यही सोचा। ऊपर जाकर शीट देखी। वैसी ही थी। बादल? तारे भी नहीं थे। बादल हैं। हवा बिलकुल नहीं चल रही थी। वो फिर नीचे आ गए। किचन पर ध्यान देने पर थोड़ा चौंके। ताला खुला था।

अंदर खाना बना रखा था। वो आई थी? और बिना बताए चली गयी? बताओ। खाने में दाल थी, आलू गोभी की सब्जी थी, रोटी। ठंडी। यानि बहुत पहले आई थी। उन्होने लाइट जलायी। उसकी चमक से दो पल को आँखें बंद हो गयी। छिपकली अपनी जगह से नदारद थी। घड़ी की सुइयां अपनी जगह बदल चुकी थी। दूसरे बेडरूम में देखा तो ताला पड़ा था। अरे, ये भी चले गए। बहुत दूर से ट्रेन की आवाज़ आ रही थी। रिमोट मेज पर रखा था। टीवी ऑन कर दी। चैनल नहीं बदल रहा था। एक ही लगा हुआ था जिस पर पुरानी फिल्म आ रही थी। जो वो कईयों पर देख चुके थे। किचन से खाना लाकर उन्होने मेज पर रखा और खाने लगे। खाना खत्म होने के बहुत देर बाद तक टीवी को देखते रहे। फिल्म आंखो के सामने थे पर मन में वो खुद से बात कर रहे थे। वो मिली क्यों नहीं? मैंने कुछ गलत कह दिया था क्या पिछली बार? मुझे जगा भी तो सकती थी? या फिर उसने कोशिश की और मैं जागा नहीं? उसका फोन नंबर। पर फोन... एक फोन था वहाँ।

वो फोन के पास गए। कोई नंबर उन्हें याद नहीं था। उन्होने ऐसे ही कोई भी नंबर डायल कर दिया। घंटी की आवाज़ से उन्हें लगा कि चलो कुछ तो है जो उन्हें बाहर से जोड़कर रखता है। हैलो... उधर से भारी भरकम मर्द की आवाज़ आई। हैलो... उनके मुंह से निकला। जी कहिए। वो मेरे यहाँ जो लड़की आती है उसका नंबर मिल सकता है। आप कौन? मैं... मैं... जी मुझे नाम याद नहीं है। फिर मैं पहचानूंगा कैसे? उसके पीछे से हंसने की आवाज़ें भी आ रही थी। जैसे कुछ लोग आपस में हँस रहे हों। जी आप नंबर देखकर बता दीजिये न। मुझे याद होता बता देता। अरे आपके आस पास कोई पेपर या कागज होगा न। ऊपर से रात बहुत है। ऐसे में किसी भली लड़की के घर कॉल करने से क्या फाइदा।

उन्हें बात तो सही लगी। अच्छा वो किस वक़्त आती है? मुझे नहीं मालूम।

उसका फिक्स नहीं है। इसका मतलब आप उसे जानते हैं? नहीं। तभी नहीं मालूम। जब तक लड़की का पता नहीं चलेगा मैं कैसे जानूँगा। आप हुलिया बता सकते हैं? वो लड़की है। हाँ, आगे? वो... मेरी पत्नी जैसी दिखती है। क्या? मतलब मेरी पत्नी की शक्ल उससे मिलती है। या उसकी शक्ल मेरी पत्नी से मिलती है। आप अपनी पत्नी को पहचानते हैं? हाँ... नहीं। मतलब याद नहीं आ रहा। तो याद करने के बाद फोन करिए। और फोन कट जाता है। एक मरी सी सीटी बजती रहती है। जिसे वो देर तक सुनते रहते हैं।

कुछ देर फोन रखने के बाद वो फिर दूसरे बेडरूम के पास जाते हैं। ताले को अच्छे से छूकर देखते हैं। टूटता नहीं है। अंदर की आहट लेने की कोशिश करते हैं। कोई आवाज़ नहीं। दूर कहीं झींगुर भी बोल रहे हैं। बहुत देर तक वो सामने देखते हैं। फिर लेट कर सो जाते हैं।

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मास्टर जी। मास्टर जी।

कोई उन्हें जगा रहा है। वो जल्दी से उठना चाहते हैं पर कुछ लोगों ने उनके हाथ पकड़ रखे हैं। मुझे... अपना नाम बताओ, नहीं तो मैं फिर भूल जाऊँगा। आप डरिए मत। मुझे अपना नाम बताओ। मेरी पत्नी का नाम? मेरा नाम मास्टर जी है। तुम्हारा? मैं... मैं... हाँ, वो कुछ कहती है लेकिन उनके कानो तक बस उसके होठ चलने की आवाज़ पहुँचती है। उन्हें कुछ समझ नहीं आता। एक दम से बहुत दर्द उठता है और वो फिर सो जाते हैं।

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सुबह आँख खुलती है तो उनके पूरे बदन में जैसे लाख सुइयाँ चुभने का दर्द है। वो अपने को छूकर देखते हैं। पूरा घर देखते हैं। सब वैसा है जैसा रात को था। खाने के बर्तन मेज पर हैं। किचन का दरवाजा खुला पड़ा है। ऊपर शीट पड़ी हुई है। वो लड़खड़ाते कदमों से ऊपर देखते हैं। बादल अभी भी आसमान पर हैं। कहीं कुछ नहीं बदला। सपना था। अपने चेहरे को पोछते हुए कहते हैं। वो अपने को देखना चाहते हैं। कहीं शीशा नहीं है। घड़ी के पास जाते हैं और उसमें अपना अक्स ढूँढने की कोशिश करते हैं। कुछ समझ नहीं आता। टीवी अभी भी चल रहा है। ओफफो, रात भर टीवी

चलती रही। पत्नी होती तो बहुत गुस्सा करती? पत्नी या लड़की। सोचते ही उनके सिर में दर्द होता है। वो फिर बैठ जाते हैं।

फोन कर लूँ? ये सोचकर फिर फोन मिलाते हैं। कल कौनसा नंबर डायल किया था? लिख लेना था। इस बार लिखने के लिए पेन तलाशते हैं पर कहीं कोई पेन नहीं है। न पेंसिल। छोड़ो। कोई भी नंबर फिर लगाते हैं। इस बार उधर से एक महीन आवाज़ हैलो बोलती है। जी, मैंने रात को भी फोन किया था। हाँ, बताइये, अभी क्या चाहिए। जी मुझे वो लड़की के बारे में जानना है जो मेरे यहाँ आती है। आप कौन? मैं... मास्टर जी। हाँ, मास्टर जी। मेरे यहाँ कोई लड़की आती है जो सब काम करती है।

हम्म, कैसी दिखती है? मेरी पत्नी जैसी। आपकी पत्नी जैसी। हम्म। फोन पर आवाज़ ठीक वही सब दोहराती है जो ये कहते हैं। एक डॉक्टर की तरह। आप डॉक्टर हैं? उधर से हंसने की आवाज़ आती है। बहुत दिनों बाद किसी का हँसना सुना है। उन्हे अच्छा लगता है। नहीं। मैं कोई नहीं हूँ। आपका नाम क्या है? बताना मना है। बता दीजिये, मैं वैसे भी भूल जाता हूँ। तब तो बिलकुल नहीं बता सकते। कल आप मुझे ही अपनी पत्नी कहने लगेंगे! अरे मैं मजाक नहीं कर रहा हूँ। मैंने कहा भी नहीं। आप उस लड़की को बुला दीजिये। कौनसी लड़की? वही लड़की जो रोज मेरे घर काम करने आती है।

आपको याद है कि रोज आती है? हाँ। कैसे पता है? मुझे याद है। शक्ल बताइये? मेरी पत्नी जैसी। अब वो थोड़ा गुस्से में लग रहे हैं। आंखों का रंग? इतने ध्यान से नहीं देखा। लंबाई? पत्नी जितनी। आपकी पत्नी आती है या वो? पता नहीं। आप मेरी पत्नी को जानती हैं? आप शादीशुदा हैं? मैं... हाँ। अंगूठी है? हाँ। लड़की क्या करती है? घर पर सफाई करती है। खाना बनाती है। मुझसे बातें करती है। और क्या पता है उसके बारे में? मुझे उसकी हँसी अच्छे से याद है। कैसे हँसती है? वो फोन पर हँस के दिखाते हैं। मैं कैसे मान लूँ? आप पागल हैं क्या? आप सीधे सीधे नहीं बता सकती उसका नाम।

फोन अचानक से कट जात है। वो बहुत देर तक फोन के receiver में हैलो हैलो चिल्लाते रहते हैं और फिर रख देते हैं। उन्हें रोना आ रहा है। या रोने

जैसा कुछ। निढाल होकर कुर्सी पर बैठ जाते हैं। क्या करूँ? बहुत जोर देते हैं कि एक नाम दिमाग में उठ जाये। वो नामों के बारे में सोच रहे हैं। नाम याद आ जाने से शायद लड़की का चेहरा याद आ जाएगा। चेहरे से नाम क्यूँ नहीं याद आ रहा!! वो इधर उधर टहलते हैं। यहाँ कोई शीशा क्यूँ नहीं है? शायद खुद का चेहरा देखने से नाम याद आ जाए। मास्टर जी। याद तो है। नहीं, असली नाम! वो खुद से जिरह कर रहे हैं। वो क्या करते हैं? कहाँ रहते हैं? कौन कौन है घर में? ये उनका घर है? क्या... ऐसे सवालों की लड़ी लगती है। अचानक से फोन बजता है। किचन में आहट होती है... ऊपर बारिश होने की आवाज़ आती है। बिजली जैसा कुछ कड़कता है। उनकी निगाह घड़ी की तरफ जाती है। घड़ी की सुइयाँ छिपकली बन जाती हैं जो सारे नंबर रूपी पतंगो को खा रही हैं। उन्हें उल्टी आती है। वो बाथरूम की तरफ भागते हैं पर रास्ता नहीं याद। और गिर पड़ते हैं।

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वो एक अंधेरी जगह है। रोशनी। रोशनी। रोशनी नाम है। लड़की है। वो बार बार रोशनी चिल्लाते हैं। कहीं बहुत दूर से धूप की शहतीर दिखती है। चीरती हुई। वो उसकी तरफ हाथ बढ़ाते हैं। पर उनके हाथ नहीं हैं। सिर्फ शरीर है। अंधेरे का बना हुआ। वो हर तरफ हैं। वो सिर घुमाते हैं और रोशनी चारों तरफ घूम जाती है। आगे बढ़ते हैं पर कुछ होता नहीं है। वो हाथ ढूँढ़ रहे हैं। वो रोशनी चिल्लाते हैं पर मुँह के भीतर अंधेरा भरता जाता है। उन्हें लगता है वो डूब रहे हैं। पर असल में डूबना उन्हें याद नहीं है। उन्हें कुछ याद नहीं है। उनका नाम क्या है? सिर्फ एक चीज़ याद है रोशनी है। धीमे धीमे वो भी याद नहीं रहता- रोशनी बोलते कैसे हैं। होंठ किस आकार में बन जाते हैं जब रोशनी नाम पुकारते हैं। बस दिमाग में एक अजीब सा कुछ रह जाता है कि उन्हें रोशनी की तलाश है।

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अचानक से उनकी आँख खुलती है। वो बिस्तर पर हैं। अपने घर में। अपना घर? हाँ उन्हें याद है उनका घर है। सारी दीवारें सफ़ेद हैं। उन्हें सफ़ेद पसंद है शुरू से। ऊपर शीट पड़ी हुई है। वो उठकर देखते हैं। सब ठीक है। उनके पैर आराम से पड़ रहे हैं। जाने क्यूँ उन्हें लग रहा था कि धरती ठोस नहीं

होगी। वो दौड़ कर ऊपर जाते हैं। एक अलग स्फूर्ति है उनके भीतर। ऊपर बादल हैं ठीक वैसे जैसे सोने से पहले थे। पहले, कितना पहले?

वो अपने चेहरे को छूते हैं। सब कुछ है। दो आँखें, दो कान, एक नाक, होंठ। हल्की दाढ़ी। उनके दाढ़ी है? इसका क्या मतलब है? उन्हें याद नहीं कि कभी उनके दाढ़ी रही हो। खैर। वो नीचे आते हैं। आँगन में सफ़ेद काले टाइल्स हैं जिन पर गुब्बारे बने हैं। उन्हें याद है जब ये टाइल्स लगे थे तब रोशनी मज़ाक में कहती थी कि उनकी फर्श में गुब्बारे बने हैं। रोशनी नहीं, उनकी पत्नी। पर... रोशनी ही तो उनकी पत्नी है। वही तो रोज़ घर जमाने आती है। हाँ। हाँ। वो खुद को दो बार बताते हैं। वो मुझे मास्टर जी बुलाती है। हाँ। पर... कुछ है जो उन्हें समझ नहीं आ रहा।

वो जल्दी से मेज के पास जाते हैं और सारे ड्राँअर खोलते हैं। बहुत सारा समान निकलता है। पेन, पेंसिल, कागज, डॉक्युमेंट्स जिन पर क्या लिखा है उन्हें नहीं मालूम। वो पढ़ नहीं पा रहे। खिलौने। आल पिन। स्टेप्लर। गोंद। वो फोटो ढूँढ रहे हैं। कोई फोटो नहीं है। घड़ी की तरफ देखते हैं। उसके पड़ोस में छिपकली है। ठीक वैसे जैसे कल थी। कल या शायद परसों। उन्हें याद नहीं। अजीब है। वो फोन की तरफ देखते हैं। फोन वैसा ही है। उन्हें अजीब सा डर लगता है फोन को देखकर। वो किचन में जाते हैं। ताला पड़ा है। इसका मतलब वो आएगी। कौन? खुद से पूछते हैं। रोशनी! पर वो तो पत्नी का नाम है। वो लड़की अलग है। कैसे पता? दोनों एक ही हुई तो? ये कैसी पहेली है। वो खुद को झिड़क देते हैं। दूसरे बेडरूम में जाते हैं। ताला नहीं है। अंदर अजीब सी आवाज़ आती है। किसी के हंसने की। वो ये आवाज़ पहचानते हैं। वो खटखटाते हैं। आवाज़ रुक जाती है। वो दोबारा खटखटाते हैं। कोई आवाज़ नहीं आती। कुछ देर में फिर हँसी की आवाज़ आती है। वो फिर ध्यान से सुनते हैं। फिर खटखटाते हैं। आवाज़ रुक जाती है। ये खेल बन जाता है। कुछ देर बाद आवाज़ लगातार आती रहती है। वो डर जाते हैं। फिर अचानक से सब शांत।

वो फोन उठाते हैं। नंबर मिलाते हैं। कुछ भी। उधर से कोई आवाज़ नहीं आती। पर फोन उठ चुका है। हैलो... हैलो... कोई है... कुछ देर बाद एक बूढ़ी थकी सी आवाज़ आती है। जी। मुझे वो... मुझे एक शीशा चाहिए। क्यूँ? शक्ल देखनी है। क्या करोगे? शक्ल देखूंगा। दाढ़ी बनानी है। तुम्हारे

दाढ़ी नहीं है। आपको कैसे पता? चाहिए क्या है? मैं कहाँ हूँ? अपने घर में। मैं मास्टर जी हूँ न? पूछ रहे हैं कि बता रहे हैं? बता रहा हूँ। आप कौन हैं? मैं... वो कुछ शब्द बोलता है, जो उन्हें समझ नहीं आता। वो दोबारा पूछने से डरते हैं कि कहीं फोन कट जाएगा। कुछ देर तक सिर्फ एक दूसरे की सासों को सुनते हैं। सुनिए। ये कहते हैं। उधर से खाँसने की आवाज़ आती है। मुझे बाहर जाना है। बाहर कैसे जाऊँ? किसी ने रोका नहीं है। आप जब चाहे जा सकते हैं। अच्छा। मैं ठीक हूँ? हाँ। फोन कट जाता है। वो डर कर फोन रख देते हैं। ड्राँअर में से पेन निकालते हैं और कागज। कागज पर वो रोशनी और मास्टरजी लिखना चाहते हैं पर उन्हें नहीं पता ये लिखते कैसे हैं। बहुत कोशिश के बाद भी असफल होते हैं।

घड़ी की तरफ देखते हैं। अजीब से निशान बने हैं। वो निश्चय करते हैं कि अगर सुइयाँ एक खास निशान से आगे बढ़ गयी और वो लड़की नहीं आई तो वो बाहर चले जाएंगे। वो टीवी का रिमोट ढूँढते हैं। छिपकली पर नजर जाती है जो अभी भी मरे हुए पतंगे को ध्यान से देख रही है। उन्हें छिपकली की दाढ़ी दिखती है। आँख मीचकर वो टीवी देखते हैं। टीवी पर कुछ चित्र हैं। लोग हैं। उनकी शक्ल हैं। पर उन्हें उनका कुछ मतलब समझ नहीं आ रहा। एक चश्मा दिखता है। फिर चश्मे के पीछे दो आँखें, दो कान, एक नाक, होठ, गर्दन, धड़, कमर, पैर। पूरा शरीर। पर वो इसे क्या कहें उन्हें समझ नहीं आता। बेचैनी होती है। वो फिर घड़ी की तरफ देखते हैं। सुइयाँ जैसे बढ़ ही नहीं रही। पूरे घर में घूमते हैं। छत पर जाकर देखते हैं। शीट पड़ी है। उसे खिसकाने से डर लगता है। बादल अभी भी हैं। जल्दी से नीचे आते हैं। घड़ी बिलकुल नहीं बढ़ी। वो बिस्तर पर चढ़ते हैं। घड़ी की सुइयाँ हाथ से आगे बढ़ा देते हैं। कुछ नहीं होता। उन्हें अजीब सा उत्साह होता है। उनके सामने छिपकली आगे बढ़कर पतंगे को खाने की कोशिश करती है। पर पतंगा छिपकली को निगल लेता है। और उड़ जाता है। वो देखते रहते हैं। वो आँगन से दरवाजे की तरफ बढ़ते हैं। दरवाजे पर कुंडी है। कांपते हाथों से कुंडी छूते हैं। ठंडी है। पर फिर अचानक से उन्हें लगता है कि ठंडा असल में क्या होता है?

वो कुंडी खोलते हैं। दरवाजा खोलते हैं। आगे सड़क है। कोई दूर दूर तक नहीं दिख रहा। और भी घर हैं। उन्हें कुछ समझ नहीं आता। वो दरवाजा

बंद कर देते हैं। एक उदासी भी है कि अगर वो चले गए और लड़की उनके पीछे आई तो उसे बुरा लगेगा। वो वापस आकर कुर्सी पर बैठ जाते हैं। कुछ देर में नींद आ जाती है।

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नाम अगर घर होते तो अक्षर उसके कमरे। हर अक्षर में अपने मन से रहते। रोशनी। र के भीतर वो रहते। श के भीतर पत्नी। न के भीतर वो लड़की। मात्राएँ बीच की खाली जगह होतीं जिसमें वो सब मिलकर हँसते। रहते। खुशी नाम का पतंगा होता जो दुख नाम की छिपकली को निगल जाता। छिपकली बड़ी होती पर पतंगे में धीरज होता। दूर से देखने पर वो मरा हुआ दिखता पर असल में वो इंतजार में होता। घड़ी जैसा जीवन होता जिसकी सुइयाँ अपने मन से इधर उधर कर लेते। जब मन चाहा वैसा समय लगा लेते। एक आँगन होता जिसमें धूप बारिश का खेल होता।

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वो सपने में बहुत देर से बड़बड़ा रहे थे। जब आँख खुली तो एक दुबली पतली लड़की सामने थी। उन्हें लगा वो आ गयी। वो खुशी से बैठ गए।

तुम आ गयी?

आप कौन?

मैं... मास्टर जी। लड़की ने दोहराया। वो उसे गले लगाना चाहते थे। तुम कहाँ थी, इतने दिन से आई क्यों नहीं? घर के बाहर ताला पड़ा था। आप कौन? मैं मास्टर जी। तुम्हारा नाम क्या है? रोशनी। देखा मैंने कहा था। तुम्हारा नाम रोशनी है। तुम रोज आया करो। मेरी पत्नी का नाम भी रोशनी था। अच्छा। पर तुम्हारी शक्ल तो मेरी पत्नी से मिलनी चाहिए। फिर कैसी है? लड़की ने पूछा। दो आँखें हैं, दो कान हैं, एक नाक है... पर शक्ल... शक्ल यही होती है? उन्हें याद नहीं था कि शक्ल की परिभाषा क्या है।

तुम कहाँ रहती हो? लड़की ने दूसरे बेडरूम की तरफ इशारा किया जिसके किवाड़ खुले पड़े थे। वो चौंक गए। तुम हँस रही थी? नहीं। हाँ। पता नहीं। बहुत दिन हो गए। तुम मुझे जानती हो। हाँ, मास्टर जी। तुम्हें याद है न

तुम रोज मेरे घर आती हो। सब काम करने। अच्छा। मैंने तुम्हें हंसमुख सोचा था। कल पता क्या हुआ, एक पतंगा छिपकली को खा गया। मेरा मन किया कि मैं भाग जाऊँ पर... मुझे तुम्हारा इंतजार था। अब? लड़की ने पूछा। अब क्या हम बातें करेंगे तुम घर का काम करोगी। क्या काम है?

उन्होंने चारों तरफ देखा। सब करीने से जमा हुआ था। मुझे नहीं पता। तुम मुझसे बातों करो। करिए। तुम... मैं... मेरा नाम क्या है? आपको अपना नाम नहीं मालूम? पता नहीं, याद नहीं रहता। जब कोई कहता है तब याद आता है। मैं आपका नाम परेश रख देती हूँ। ये मेरा नाम नहीं है। आपको कैसे पता? ये नहीं पता। बस ये नहीं है। मेरा नाम रोशनी नहीं है। झूठ मत बोलो। मैं झूठ नहीं बोलती। आओ टीवी देखें। वो रिमोट ढूँढते हैं। फिर टीवी चालू कर देते हैं। टीवी पर कुछ अजीब सा चल रहा है। तुम्हें ये समझ आ रहा है? वो लड़की से पुछते हैं। वो हाँ में सिर हिला देती है। वो उसे ध्यान से देख रहे हैं। घड़ी की तरफ देखते हैं। घड़ी में सुइयाँ बहुत तेज भाग रही हैं। पर फिर वो सोचते हैं कि उन्हें घड़ी की सुइयों की सही रफ्तार नहीं मालूम। छिपकली की जगह अब पतंगा और पतंगे की जगह छिपकली। छिपकली बेहोश होने का नाटक कर रही है। उन्हें इस नाटक का अंत मालूम है। उनका मन है कि वो पतंगा बचा लें।

वो ये सब बातें लड़की को बताते हैं। लड़की कहती है वहाँ कुछ नहीं है। वो ध्यान से देखते हैं। उन्हें सब दिखता है। अरे वो देखो न, पतंगा धीमे धीमे छिपकली की तरफ बढ़ रहा है। पर इस बार छिपकली पतंगे को खा जाएगी। क्यों? क्यूँकी कल पतंगे ने छिपकली को खाया था। और वो दोनों एक दूसरे की जगह थे।

घर आप ही तो ठीक नहीं करते? नहीं। मुझे तो कुछ नहीं आता। आपको कैसे पता? वो जिरह पर उतर आई है। फोन पर पूछ लो। वो फोन लेकर लड़की के पास आते हैं। फोन मिलाते हैं। अब उन्हें नंबर डायल करने में कोई परेशानी नहीं होती। हैलो, उधर से किसी बच्चे की आवाज़ आती है। सुनो, रोशनी आ गयी है। अच्छा। मैं बहुत खुश हूँ। अच्छा। पर ये मान नहीं रही। ये कह रही कि मुझे जो दिख रहा है वो सच नहीं है। अच्छा। तुम अच्छा अच्छा नहीं कर सकते। कुछ जवाब दो। अच्छा। क्या रोशनी ही रोज मेरे घर आती है? मुझे नहीं पता। मैं नया आया हूँ। पहले कौन था? मुझे नाम नहीं याद। तुम्हें भूलने की बीमारी है? नहीं, बस याद नहीं। किसी

और को फोन दो। कोई और नहीं है। कब तक आएंगे? मेरे जाने के बाद? तुम कब जाओगे, जब वो आएंगे! ये... रोशनी तुम बात करो। हैलो, लड़की कहती है। हैलो। सब ठीक है? हाँ। उधर से जवाब आता है। वो ध्यान से लड़की और बच्चे की बातें सुन रहे हैं।

तुम लोग काम की बात करो! क्या पूछूं? लड़की पुछती है। कि मेरी पत्नी कहाँ है? इनकी पत्नी कहाँ हैं? उधर से कुछ जवाब आता है। लड़की हँस पड़ती है। ये भी हँस पड़ते हैं। क्या कहा? वो कहता है कि आपकी पत्नी... आपकी पत्नी... हाँ मेरी पत्नी... लड़की बहुत तेज हँसने लगती है। इन्हें बेचैनी होती है। ये लड़की पर चीखने लगते हैं। मेरी पत्नी कहाँ है? मेरी पत्नी कहाँ है? लड़की हँस रही है। उधर से बच्चा हँस रहा है। छिपकली पतंगे को खा रही है। इनके हाथ लड़की की गर्दन पर हैं... लड़की हँस रही है। लड़की का चेहरा विकृत होता है। ठीक घनी पीड़ा में इन्हें अपनी पत्नी जैसा कुछ दिखता है। पर तब तक देर हो चुकी है। लड़की की सासों बंद हैं। ये हँस रहे हैं। इनके गले से लड़की की हँसी गूँज रही है।

अचानक से एम्ब्युलेन्स की आवाज़ आती है। दरवाजा खुलता है। ये निढाल से खड़े हैं। घड़ी की सुइयाँ निढाल सी पड़ी हैं। लड़की पर कुछ equipments लगे हैं। एक लड़की है, जिसने सफ़ेद नर्स के कपड़े पहने हैं। एक आदमी है भारी भरकम, एक बूढ़ी औरत है जिसके गले में stethoscope है। एक बच्चा है। सब आकर इनके पास इकट्ठे होते हैं। ये बार बार कह रहे हैं कि मेरी पत्नी को बुला दो।

इनके सामने लड़की को दूसरे बेडरूम में ले जाया जाता है और दरवाजा बंद हो जाता है। ये फोन किनारे पर रखते हैं। पूरा घर साफ करते हैं। घड़ी की सुई जहाँ थी वहीं करते हैं। छिपकली और पतंगे को ढूँढते हैं। ऊपर जाते हैं। शीट को हटाते हैं। ऊपर बादल हैं। एक बूंद इन पर गिरती है। ये नीचे आते हैं। बारिश आँगन भिगोने लगती है। ये देर तक उसे देखते हैं। फिर दरवाजा खोलकर बाहर निकल जाते हैं। बाहर सड़क पर इतना पानी है कि नदी है। नदी में छिपकली और पतंगा तैर रहे हैं। दोनों हँस रहे हैं। ये नदी में उतार जाते हैं। डूबना याद नहीं था पर डूबते डूबते इन्हें डूबना याद आ जाता है। इनके गले से रोशनी जैसी हँसी फूटती है। उस हँसी के बुलबुले को छिपकली और पतंगा दोनों खा लेते हैं। सब शांत हो जाता है।

9+2=11

Arun Kumar Singh

March, 2024





Link to Video: <https://youtu.be/6YAyc209l78>

Five performers. One female. One facilitator (offstage). Seven books. Page 24. The first complete sentence. Each element (human & non-human (binary!? As if!) trying to communicate a very personal story to the world. A story they have never shared with anyone. A story that challenged them to accept themselves. The condition: they can only use their body and voice to tell that story. No verbal communication.

What is a story? What makes a story? How do we deconstruct a story and still express it to the world around us? Where does a story emerge in a performance?

Let's make a performance about the story of an equation. Each element crosses each other and gives birth to millions of permutations and combinations of stories. How many can I grasp in a single moment? The euphoria of witnessing the emergence of new stories every single time these elements intersect with each other... Will they feel it? The people who will witness it?

Labels. The interesting, conflicting, and magical world of labels. Let's play with labels! He decided one day. Especially in a performance. Tathagat (Buddha in simple (not!) terms) will not show his face. He will be attached to material things. He won't liberate. He will constrict. And he will be massacred. In a very comical way.

Where does the violence lie? What is the idea of violence? Where does the disgust lie in the violent act? What does a violent act consist of?

WE WILL KILL A PERSON AND HIS INTESTINES WILL BE OF MAGGI AND BLOOD WILL BE TOMATO SAUCE (15 Rs. Maggi Pichku Pouch).

The performer: *And we will eat that.*



Facilitator: *Sure?*

Performer: *Very sure.*

And that happens. It horrifies me. I want to censor it. But why? Will they recognize the violent streak in my blood? Will they reject me? Will I reject myself? Let's put it and see. Please, universe, let someone stop this atrocity... this violence. Nobody did. I was horrified even more. I will keep doing this until someone stops this. Will they?

Let's deconstruct a performance. Let's deconstruct a story(stories). Let's deconstruct a label(s). Let's deconstruct a language(s). Let's deconstruct our responsibility as a viewer(s). Let's deconstruct our role as witness(es). Let's deconstruct a very simple equation. Through a performance.

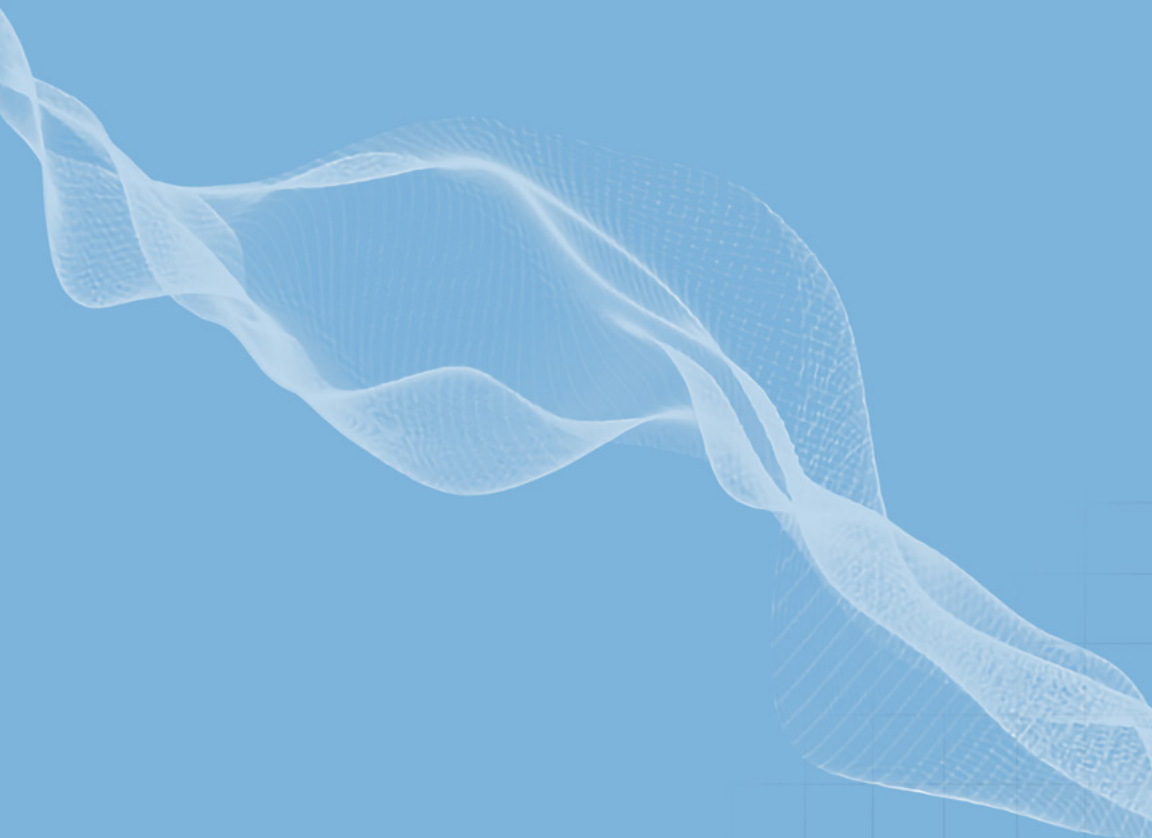
Nothing more than that.





AUGMENTING

Hafsa, Nicholas Ferguson, Pavni Anand,
Studio A68, Suvani Suri



BOOK SHOW-I

Nicholas Ferguson

February, 2024

Book Show comprises around 80 artists' books, predominantly self-published, by Delhi based practitioners and a few of their all-India peers. The publication formats span multiple registers: sketchbooks, edited zines, photocopies, digital media, origami style folding objects, a mobile, hardbound full color runs, and more.

On the evening I attended, contributors and their guests browsed and conversed, initially cross-legged on cushions and in hushed tones, and then when the space filled to standing-room only – some 50 or so people –, there were readings, questions and exchanges of thought. Raqs Media Collective, an enduring and nourishing force within Delhi's art scene, were there and talked a bit about the context in which their work had emerged in the early 1990s. Spaces and events structured like this one were more common and created an exciting moment for art. When I left around 9pm the conversation was in full swing. I learned that things wound up around 4am.

Despite its modesty, the exhibition is remarkable in its achievement. It does not aspire to the status of a survey, nor even, beyond the format of the book, does it have a common theme. Rather, it represents a kind of web of relations between the artists brought together. Indeed, pretty much everybody knows each other. That an exhibition born of horizontal, affective relations should be worth writing home about is, admittedly, a matter of perspective. To the circles of friends and acquaintances whose social formation would come to define the avant-garde in Europe in the first part of the 20th century, an event of this type would surely have been the norm. Yet, against the backdrop of the India Art Fair held in Delhi earlier in the month, and the vertiginous nature of the corporatized, global art into which it is integrated, Book Show brings us down to earth with quite a bump.

The studio in which the event is hosted was built as a humble though agreeable home. Situated on the second floor of a budget apartment



block, it comprises two rooms, in total no more than about 30m² (the inner one without natural light), and a balcony overlooking a small park. It is rented collectively, and the artists rotate to make use of their respective shares. Broadly speaking, the contributors are an emerging generation, professionalized, some teaching in colleges and universities though, to my knowledge, without gallery representation and with limited access to public funding. Several belong to other artist groupings that loosely but routinely coalesce at events hosted within a handful of independently run spaces like this one. I offer this history because, in the spirit of sharing best practice in these troubled times, I hope to make possible comparison with scenes and exhibition models in other 'global cities', as well as knowledge of the conditions that make them possible.

There is of course a severe risk that, without public funding, philanthropy, artist cooperatives, and, dare I say it, a buoyant market, radical art worlds such as this will stagnate and disappear. Now that so much has been achieved, it is more important than ever that ways of financing non-profit art such as this are developed, alongside appropriate platforms for its dissemination. For there is no doubt that, when it comes to envisaging a society beyond the one 'worlded' by global capitalism, the model of collaboration and exchange at large in Book Show lets us see that an alternative is already here.

Organised by Priyesh Gothwal. 3/21 Kashmiri Park, Jangpura. New Delhi. 10 – 18 February 2024.



Image from opening of "Book-Show I", at Janpura Studio, New Delhi.



Documentation of "Book-Show I", at Janpura Studio, New Delhi.



Documentation of "Book-Show I", at Janpura Studio, New Delhi.



Documentation of "Book-Show I", at Janpura Studio, New Delhi.



Documentation of "Book-Show I", at Janpura Studio, New Delhi.

LINE AND INTERVENTION

Pavni Anand

May, 2024

The spirit of the project is embodied in this collective metaphorical recipe. The ideas and components are entirely human, and they are transformed into a delectable culinary journey that explores shared spaces, boundaries, and the intricate dance between human perception and interaction. Cooking it together always yields inconsistent results that are beyond the chef's control.

Ingredients:

1. Invisible Lines Flour: 1 cup of subtle connections
2. Intervention Essence: 2 tablespoons of transformative energy
3. Transactional Yeast: 1/2 cup of reciprocal understanding
4. Shared Space Syrup: 1/4 cup of communal harmony and understanding
5. Threshold Salt: A pinch of transition
6. Boundary Butter: 1/2 cup of melted creativity
7. Mapping Spice: 1 tablespoon of exploration
8. Contamination Crumbs: A sprinkle of unexpected elements
9. Observation Oil: 1/4 cup of attentive awareness
10. Glitch Glaze: 1 tablespoon of thought-provoking dialogue
11. Privacy Pearls: 1/3 cup of personal sanctity
12. Security Seeds: A sprinkle of safety
13. Possession Powder: A dash of belonging
14. Identity Essence: 1 teaspoon of individuality
15. Presence Paste: 1/4 cup of lingering impact

Process:

1. First, one needs to preheat one's consciousness and creative space to a temperature of keen observation and in-depth reflection to ready the oven.
2. Then, start with combining subtle connections and transformative energy, creating a delicate and cohesive blend. This combination of unseen bonds and impactful actions will help shape the relationships and spaces.
3. Now, gradually start folding in melted creativity, communal harmony, and understanding into the mixture. One must ensure that it mixes in completely without any lumps, as this integration of creative disruption with the sweet sense of communal belonging and cooperation is important for the process.
4. To activate the mixture, one would need to set aside the reciprocal understanding yeast, allowing it to rise and expand. This is needed to increase the potential for mutual exchange within the shared spaces.
5. Now, add a pinch of transition salt and exploration spice, according to taste, to enhance the flavor with discovery and boundary navigation elements.
6. A mid-tasting leads to the addition of a sprinkle of unexpected elements. These disruptive interventions challenged the status quo and also led to the drizzle of attentive awareness to the mixture, enriching it with the essence of keen observation and understanding. One can also add in the thought-provoking dialogue glaze over, made of the meaningful discussions and reflections prompted by the interventions.
7. Following a group tasting, one should gently fold the personal sanctity pearls, safety seeds, belonging powder, and individuality essence, making sure they are evenly distributed throughout the concoction.
8. Then, use your hands to shape the mixture into boundaries, delineating/ defining the invisible lines between people and within spaces.
9. After placing the mixture in the conceptual oven, bake it for 20-25 minutes at a temperature of introspection or until the boundaries are firm and well-defined, thoughts are thoroughly

stimulated, and perceptions are reshaped and fully realized.

10. Then, serve with a garnish of insight and a dollop of lingering impact paste on the side. This would let one experience the lasting impression of understanding and exploration of perception and space as it permeates every bite.
11. Now, share the transformed dish with others to savor the rich flavors of introspection, creativity, and intricate weaving of individual and shared experiences woven into its fabric, along with engaging in meaningful conversations inspired by the dish.

END OR

LUKEWARM LUBRICANTS ~ *

Hafsa**

February, 2024

“hmm...”, we all turned towards the figure sitting at the low lit part of the circle. “There is something I want to share about this space we are creating together–” The gathering was about *intimacy*. She stopped short; she wanted to say something but felt overwhelmed by the process of translation, of articulating her thoughts.. We could barely hear her voice, the last words faded in the air. There were three more people holding themselves, waiting for a few seconds of silence to leap at. The topic changed.

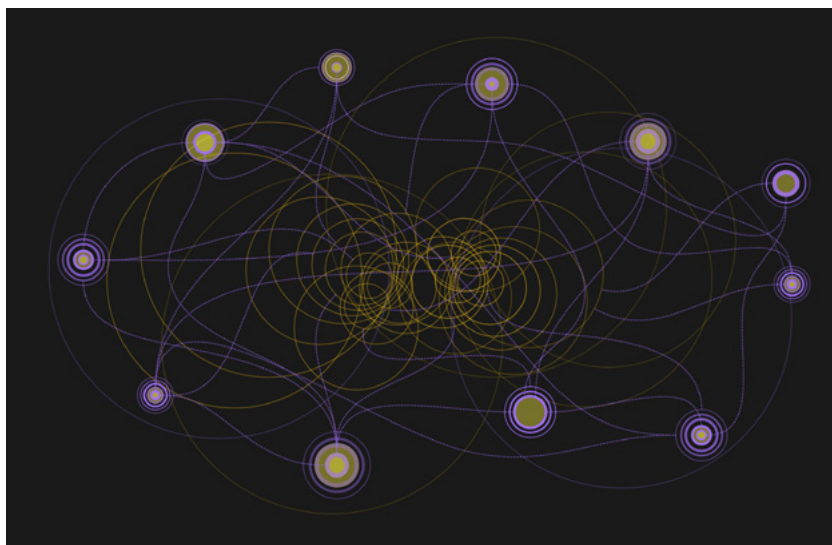
It sounds familiar, the voice, I thought. Most regular appearance, a lightness in movements, tender, faraway voice, with a dimly lit, lukewarm presence. I tried remembering- when did we first meet? Then, now, never. Where was this meeting? everywhere, nowhere. Remembering is difficult, forgetting- inevitable, when memory turns fragile and sore, when there is too much to hold onto but all the surfaces are slippery with excess, greasy stimulants.

I had felt their presence before at many gatherings and art events, yet could not remember clearly. Presence is a strange phenomenon nowadays, you have to be present with all your weight and voice, your mere existence is not enough, nothing is enough.. This person was absent in that subtle, translucent way. Then what was their role in the gatherings? Can it accommodate a lukewarm presence? Everyone makes a gathering, co-creates it, whorls through it in varying intensities. Perhaps it was something more than the weighing presence of a singular being, something intangible, ungraspable, ephemeral, with wavy movements– a cold wind swelled between us, carrying our voices, the words shivered as they touched my warm skin.. So, is it the residue? the witness? the energy? the calm, silence? Silence... It's the base ingredient for every conversation, without which nothing can be said or heard. *Words are gaps between silence*, I remembered reading somewhere. If everyone wants to be heard, is there anyone left to listen?



It, she, they, who? I'm not sure what pronouns to use for this lukewarm silence and its intimacy. **It** is. **It** is the porous absorbent, the silence, that balances the lubricants and staggers the turn towards chaos (yes, a proximity to chaos makes a good blend). I wondered what it thought, what brought it to the gatherings so often.

Everytime I asked someone at the gathering about **it**, they had no clue who I was referring to until I tried describing its presence. One frequent gatherer said, "yes, that sounds like you are talking about the nature of a gathering, not a person.." Perhaps that was true, if people were made up of conversations, being passed from one to another, cross-connecting, weaving, disconnecting, layers of consistent inconsistencies, the obedience of disobediences that makes a charged space, then they were forming a single-multitude. A multitude that retains its individual parts, that creates itself each time it connects with them, each time anew. **It** was akin to the gathering, the unnamed, undefined composition of forces, a multi-cellular, lubricated, writhing organism.



Gathering as an organism, a microcosm// imagined-representative spectrum of a gathering and its conversational unfolding.

I have been thinking about co-creation of spaces— who makes a space and who occupies it? Can they be the same? About the dynamics of a monolithic structure in comparison to a shared one. Who speaks and who listens; what emerges, what resides, and what is carried forward?

It took the role of a gathering's caretaker, not too much care, else it will suffocate, not too little; else it will dry out and wither. The right amount of lubricants is equally important, the potency of tension, as it once said. *Its* movements were between lingering and meandering, always present while circulating and evading the accumulation of dust, like the conversations themselves that spur energies only through movement and evasion, sustained and instagnant, horizontal and vertical, extending and deepening like roots and branches. *It* is like a bird nested on one of those flowering branches, ready to fly with the conversations, spreading the pollen from one to another.

I have a tendency to drift off moments; sometimes a word flares up my thoughts (here—*it*), all goes haywire, the ground gets jittery, and it takes a while to return, but where? They are talking about – wait what?

“...so the belief in a divine entity came from people after they had accidentally eaten hallucinogens such as shrooms in the wild and got visions that they believed to be divine manifestations.. this led to cults and then the formation of religions...”

– and so on, he went... This one talks a lot, but I like to listen to him. It's good there is no time-keeper or a moderator [*moderate* ^{adjective} - *kept or keeping within reasonable or proper limits; not extreme, excessive, or intense; mediocre or fair; moderately*] to say, “your time's up, 5 more mins and then we will have a quick Q&A followed by refreshments, before we switch to the next panel..”.

But where did this conversation come from? Gathering-intimacy ----- hallucinations? (too embarrassed to interrupt now, I will ask him later..)

I wonder what keeps them going for hours endlessly on a single prompt or idea, if not the hallucinatory rush they get while spilling themselves out? We really love to talk and share, it is addictive. See! It's already

quarter to midnight, no one wants to leave. I remember the last gathering went on-and-on– the whole night, finally some people felt hungry and went off to have breakfast; they never returned. Maybe they are still chatting? I giggled as the thought crossed my mind. Thankfully, no one noticed. Now they are talking about curation, which might have spiraled from hallucinations-divine-god- the curator as a figure choosing, ordering, arranging, ideating, a figure with power over its subjects (or objects..)?

“Co-creation”, the word fell out of my mouth, it was swirling in my head but perhaps my thoughts got too loud. Everyone turned. Do not look at me, do not look at me, I murmured to myself.

“What about co-creation?”, the girl who smelled of jasmine and turpentine oil jumped in. Did she say she’s a curator during the introductions? I tried gathering my thoughts..

“Well, I’m more interested in the process of co-creation than curation, like we are co-creating this space. There is a sense of creating something together rather than making a separation between the curator and the artist. Curation might come with a creative inquiry but the institutional categorization and framing heighten the hierarchy and give more value to the role of a curator than the artists. I think we need a systemic change at the level of education. Co-creation and collaboration need to be emphasized as modes of practice in art schools to dismantle the stage occupied by the individual figure– a conductor of an orchestra. I feel it is a very capitalist and colonial rendering of a singular figure that holds more power than the multitude, that has been strengthened by existing binaries and subjections of intellect over labor, concept over creation, fine art over craft and so on..”

Everyone stared in silence while I monologued. I could taste a tanginess left by the words in my mouth, ‘co-creation’ was particularly stuck around my half-erupted shy wisdom tooth. Maybe I went too far, plus I have not cited any consequential references or theories to prove my reasoning.. did it sound whimsical? Tell me honestly! I had previously repeated it a few times in my head, but it never resolved itself, and here I had rolled this half-formed thought in public!

But isn't a gathering exactly a space meant for this, for mistakes, dilemmas, confusions***, drafts? For half-formed ideas written in runny ink? I wouldn't dare deliver this on a stage-setting. That's the reason why we need spaces such as these more than the archaic sanitized structures manufactured by institutions as templates that are copy-pasted everywhere. (Off she goes again..) Precarity, fragility, contingency, without them we will only run scripts rather than saying what we really want to, what we are honestly thinking, to freely share ourselves, however wrong or silly it may sound. We fear making mistakes, hence we need scripts, a stage to rehearse the script, 10-minute timers to quickly 'discuss', fast-food criticalities where we turn our mental switches on and off from one topic to another; I cannot even fathom how people do it. They get into a topic, say something 'smart' and appealing, and move into another set of topics so neatly severed and compartmentalized, like hospital wings, this one for eyes, this for nose, this for toenails and so on. It takes me at least an hour (in the plural usually) to just build up a taste, chew, and slowly swallow before forming my thoughts. They make me feel like my pace is from another time period. Are we not behaving like AI? You feed the prompt, and you get the answer— 2-minute noodles quickly eaten by 8-fingered hands!



Made with Canva AI generator in <10s / Prompt- Anime hands with noodle bowl.

These fast-food systems are nothing less than a performance of confidence, a boost to our individual egos. A gathering, however, is slow, taking its own time to ferment, without a closing bracket or a full-stop– a durational meandering,,, It disseminates this ego of one into a shared-self, the associative-self, slowly emerging over hours of passing the ball till the ball dissolves into the conversations. It is necessary that the multitude exists without erasing individualities and their personalizations, a multitude that is not just an assembly of ingredients or apparatus in a machine. We as beings are not reduced to a sum of our references+influences+resources+...; we are not an algorithm that takes data from various sources and serves a concoction. We choose and soak the layers of influences and experiences differently, each person bringing, responding, and creating something divergent through an immeasurable, unreachable, impalpable process that cannot be revealed or understood by dissecting it and making it transparent***. Hence the space created in a gathering is not an impersonal, homogenous flat surface but a multitude with textures and creases, singularities, and selfhoods. Not completely diluted or self-less, not completely concentrated or self-centric. Somewhere between air and solid– a liquid, a lubricant.

Is that *it*****? The associative-self, the multitudinal lubricant that co-creates, meanders, and carries a gathering till the next morning?

Someone yawns.

Yes. *It* is 4am.

~* Observations from [first draft](#) gatherings and collateral conversations in Delhi art milieus from 2018-present.

** Hafsa هافس “gathering” in Arabic. Hafsa is a pseudonym taken by the writer to stay anonymous, to speak freely while not holding authorship over the thoughts that have emerged over many conversations during the gatherings. Moreover, Hafsa helps keep the translucent presence of the gatherings and maintain their lukewarm lubrication, not too hot or concentrated on a sole author, not too cold or diluted without any characteristic or name. The fictional scene in the essay meanders through and assimilates many dilemmas, inner rumblings and sustained conversations with friends and peers that may or may not crystallize with time.

*** Her discoveries were confusing. But this also gave them a certain charm. How to clarify to herself, for example, that long, sharp lines clearly bore the mark? They were fine and slender. At any given moment they stopped every bit as much lines, every bit as much in the same state as at the beginning. Interrupted, always interrupted not because they terminated, but because no one could take them to an end. Circles were more perfect, less tragic and didn't move her enough. Circles were the work of man, finished before death and not even God could finish them better. While straight, fine, freestanding lines—were like thoughts.

Yet other confusions. That was how she remembered child-Joana before the sea: the peace that came from the eyes of the cow, the peace that came from the recumbent body of the sea, from the deep womb of the sea, from the cat stiff on the sidewalk. Everything is one, everything is one . . . she had chanted. Her confusion lay in the interconnectedness of the sea, the cat, the cow and herself. Her confusion also came from not knowing if she had chanted “everything is one” when she was still a girl, staring at the sea, or later, remembering. Her confusion didn't just lend charm, however, but brought reality itself. It struck her that if she clearly ordered and explained what she had felt, she would have destroyed the essence of “everything is one.” In her confusion, she was the truth itself unwittingly, which perhaps provided more power-of-life than knowing it. The truth which, although revealed, Joana couldn't use because it wasn't a part of her stem, but her root, binding her body to everything that was no longer hers, imponderable, impalpable.

~ Lispector, Clarice. “Joana's Joys.” *Near to the Wild Heart, A Noite*, 1943, p. 38.

**** It ~ lubricant / intimacy / silence / co-creation / associative-self / conversations / impalpable / slowness / silliness..



(UN)MESHINGS: CONVERSATION WITH STUDIO A68

Anurag Singraur, Ashish Chauhan, Garima Rohilla,
Niharika Grover and Ritika Verma in conversation with Rahul
Juneja

January, 2024

Rahul: We have been talking about ‘organicity’, as prompted by Anurag. Did you guys come together organically, and where did you think the need for such a space emerged?

Ritika: Initially, the urge was quite simple and organic, we needed a separate space from our homes to inhabit and work in, although we did have a space within our university and colleges respectively, it felt that perhaps it was difficult logistically to sustain such a space alone, so a few of us got together and we started hunting for this space. We had a nice beautiful ideal idea of the space, greenery, security, etc. People can come visit big halls, where people can get together, talk about alternative art practices, So we got a space in Saket, South Delhi after much pain. We started living there and lived there for a couple of years, had open displays, invited recent art graduates, local neighborhood people etc. In the initial phases, Anurag was placed in East Delhi and he used to visit sparsely, but then me, Ashish, Garima were there, with two additional people- Shakti and Jyotsana. Jyotsana had a performance art background, and Shakti was an interdisciplinary artist from Ambedkar University. Some of us had started working in the Delhi government, so we were thankful for having a space to contemplate, and a safe space to share all those developments. That is my version of it though, hahaha. I am sure others will add in.

Niharika: I came in at a very different stage actually; I came just before I had come into Ambedkar; so I got acquainted very differently to the studio space here and then subsequently to the space at Ambedkar so as everyone mentioned prior, the space here is quite different than an institutional space; since its a collection of interests, of skills, and of abilities, so the conversations we have are holistic and richer; getting everyone’s readings, the references, etc. are extremely helpful when you

are trying to build something; I feel the limitations we face as individuals are overcome when we are thinking and doing things collectively. I think this resonates a lot with HEKH also, since it becomes like an echo of different things coming together in one space.

Garima: Working with the people in active politics (Delhi Secretariat) and meeting the same people beyond office hours also has to do with it. The conversations were often carried forward, which blurred the line of distinction between art practice and politics.

To add further; I agree with Anurag's idea of organicity, but simultaneously things always don't happen according to plan; especially the logistics. Yet it's not merely about the finances; but teeny tiny behavioral quirks that might translate to logistics; how does one manage food? Do we employ someone? Who does the cleaning? Who leaves the light on for the entire night? Do we have to repaint the wall because it was part of someone's work? The constant flux of ideas and people has shaped things around a lot. Inhabitants have had crucial roles in the beginnings that were taken up by others joining in later, doing the same in their own way. Hence, the space keeps going on. But it is important to think of organicity in this nuanced way; since there is always an order to things. Perhaps the most important is to have a vision for the space individually, as well as collectively.

Anurag: For the multiplicity in perspectives, precisely when we were talking about the interaction with Andan (Ruangrupa), we were thinking about things one includes and excludes in a space, autonomy?, etc; Knowing each other for almost 8 years now, has a lot to do with this. I do wonder if time is something that actually binds us all together which is also a kind of structuring in itself; which has also been contested since. Tangible, intangible hierarchies for instance, come into play. It would seem that we are able to consider things more intimately, and much more closely due to the time we have spent together, even if the structures we set for ourselves are constantly collapsing and being reinstated. Thinking about the collective, I remember a conversation that we once had at college with a professor saying that a collective/group based on friendship is doomed- since it often veils exploitation which goes under its rubric; But on the other hand, I believe, that



becomes far more corporate, where a hierarchy comes into play and then delegation happens that loses its associative tendencies and care. There is definitely some structure that is required, but I don't know if it's completely the presence of friendship, or the lack of it that configures such a thing.

Rahul: It's interesting to see different things being conceptual and physical anchors for the sustenance of the space- friendship, time, collaboration, similar jobs etc. The 'integral' here, seems to be something not set in stone, but mobile and morphing.

Ashish: I want to add something, It's regarding the functionality of a collective space. Us knowing each other for a long time does play a role. We are able to communicate the most objectionable, and the most mundane things to each other without the risk of misinterpretation. Conversations that need to be had in order to keep the space running. Knowing someone is very different, and living with someone is an entirely different monster, hahaha. During the inception of the studio, I had just passed out from Delhi Collage of Art (DCA) and I was looking for progression within my artistic practice. I was trying to be distinctive, towards making a 'new style', but also looking for a job & joined DCA as an assistant teacher. I was eager to be in the studio, which was in a Saket at that time, near Safdarjung enclave where one of the DCA's campuses was. But then, things started to build; watching movies, having conversations around various things and art, started to enrich my practice. Discussions around media, displays, and conceptual ideation were extremely easy, since we were living together and some of us had experience from AUD. So yes, there is some kind of idea that within us some are more experienced, and that brings newness to the discourse and also in the working of a collective space. I think this really shaped my idea of art through collectivization, how to be in a space.

Niharika: As artists, we make a lot of negotiations. I think in artistic practice, making money, etc. and we have made them in the studio as well- ranging from places ourselves in public forums, to organising pottery workshops; there has been a range and this negotiation has been done quite actively within the studio space. Negotiations regarding dynamics, hierarchies, which are often unseen even perhaps. Ritika



was our senior, she was a teacher while we all were students at DCA; it's extremely interesting to think how that dynamic shifted from thinking of her as a teacher, to a peer through the studio.

Ritika: In my opinion, time does play a very important role. Something that started with a careful idea of friendship, and something impulsive and for the sake of a rehearsing, now we have been increasingly thinking about extending the idea of the studio from a physical space to a conceptual plane, which is mobile (in the interest of time and its scope). Niharika is not in India, Garima is not in Delhi anymore, and all of us do keep traveling. This has instilled the possibility of taking/making this space more intangible yet progressive within the alternative thoughts. We have been thinking of adding non-resident participants, since we have been projecting ourselves as a 'group' or 'collective' in various gatherings in the city. We have become the Mayur Vihar gang over the period of five years. So we have been approached to collaborate for presentations, screenings, project based residencies, etc. So we are thinking of including people who are not the residents, but are open to being included in this space further conceptually.

Rahul: I also want to probe a little further into your pedagogical, and artistic background. Most of you- Ritika, Garima, Niharika, Ashish and Anurag went to Ambedkar University for your post-graduation. Has this changed your relationship to the studio? I know Ritika also currently teaches, and Ashish once taught at Collage of Art in New Delhi.

Anurag: Ambedkar (University) has visibly changed how I now see and think; traces of which can be seen in gatherings, sessions, and activities that we have curated during our time in Ambedkar and before. Some shift in aesthetics that crucially navigates our intention of doing something in the studio. Apart from that, the studio is also a personal space; where I unwind, rather than just being 'the studio'.

Ashish: I believe our relationship with the studio changed with the different time in terms of when I was teaching in DCA and when I was doing the masters from AUD. The Studio serves as a safe space for us to be able to express ourselves, discuss ideas, and have constant



support of each other. For me the shift of the relationship with the studio from DCA to AUD has become much stronger as a concept of space, working together and the idea of collectivism.

Ritika: So far we are willing to hold this physical space, as an entity and we are definitely thinking of making frameworks and skeletons where we can accommodate more emerging artists, more events, organizations, collectives who are like minded and shares common goals for the art landscape of the city and even beyond. I think this conceptual extension was something that Ambedkar enabled, to think of the studio more than the physical space. Different institutions have played vital roles in the making of 'StudioA68', be it Delhi Collage of Art or Ambedkar University. If DCA has enabled us to take forward the idea of friendship into bringing up a space where caring, sharing, and collaborations matters; AUD has helped us put together our propositions conceptually as collective in the interest of the creative landscape of the city, as well as our individual practices.

Rahul: In your last open studio, you put special emphasis on the act of 'coming together.' How are the inner dynamics configured within the studios in such events, and how do you deal with disagreements?

Ritika: Whenever we try to do an open studio, we do try to have a similar thread, or an overarching coherence within individual works done by members of the studio. Like I remember Anurag and Niharika had done a work which was quite intermingled; and my work was also responding to their works; so there is definitely consideration, and compromise to accommodate certain works. But keeping the agency of the rest, all of us so far have been able to agree with the disagreement as well.

Anurag: As far as the last display (open studio 4, Studio A68) is concerned, even when we were doing separate works, we were hoping to invite people from the building, so it's seen as a whole; I wanted to hence change the form of the entire studio. I think the framework of separation, there at that point, got diluted. They did not see us as individual artists; also because there was a spatial extension into other spaces.



Ashish: More than separate works also, the events, presentations, open studios and other ideas are something that we all agree upon; even if the vision for what the event entails can be different for each of us, the intention bonds the inhabitants together.

Rahul: So intent remains clear.

Ritika: Yes. When we fix a day for the open studio; the curation of the space is collaborative and the intent is crystal clear; I don't think within the 4 open studios we have had, there have been no rifts in this sense. Within many formulations I have seen, generally a curator is invited and extended to mediate or avoid this precise rift; where the burden shifts. Our display space is the same, and the artist is the curator only, so the conversation is much richer, and more grounded. And it is the beauty of the collective or open space that we intend to create.

Rahul: With this clarity in intent, do you think the friendship is at the backend or at the front in these formulations? How does it shape ideas of practices, and in decision making, compromising, or asserting even in these situations?

Ashish: I think a combination of both.

Ritika: Rationale leads the discussion; and then friendship follows. For instance, we might think that a certain individual's work fits here better; or does not. But! Then we also take into consideration the person's temperament and how they would react to situations with extreme sensitivity and care. Precisely because we know each other. Negotiations are made in any open/public/non private space.

Anurag: I mean, we do have to have people to afford this beautiful balcony, hahahaha.

Ritika: Haha, true true. But you know, in the Saket space, when the balcony was smaller than this room, even then 4 of us were able to sit and chat like this together. I mean, we deserved this bigger one, but yeah. Hahaha.



Ashish: But that's the thing, no? There is intent. There is friendship. These things combine and make a bigger bond. Sometimes we disagree as well. There are layerings within each individual, which we all respect deeply; not romantically, but yeah.

Rahul: As you just mentioned, it is far more than friendship that sustains such a space, yet is at the heart of it. But friendships are also complicated, especially when people live together. As you mentioned, perceived hierarchies can crop up, amongst members that might be due to disparities in language, financial background, artistic training, age, etc. Have you faced such situations, and how do you deal with them?

Ashish: When we started to know each other, we used to look up to certain people as Kankan sir, Ritika maam; In 2015 Ritika taught me sketching. Kankan sir taught me painting in DCA. But at the same time, we have also been friends. Although the nomenclature of sir hasn't gone. We have had moments that would not have been possible had we been thinking of hierarchies.

Anurag: Akash and I were introduced to the studio post its formation, and I wonder if that line has blurred in all these years. Time helps to blur a lot of these perceived boundaries.

Ritika: With the academic progression of all of us (doing post graduation), has also changed this dynamic a lot; apparently, I did my masters far before then the rest of the studio mates. But the conversation has now shifted, there is equality and freedom of sharing ideas and improvements to each other.

Rahul: I think I understand what you are hinting at. We also need to think of hierarchy not as something inherently bad but something that plays out naturally. We often stop so many times when certain people in a gathering start to speak, right?

Riitka: Definitely, there is some notion of it floating around. For instance, I have recently started working with motion and mechanics. Anurag helps me in these conversations, and shows me the way. I do



do acknowledge that because I know he knows more about me in that subject. Hence, his opinion in my mind is valid more than other members in the studio as well. So there is acknowledgement of skill.

Rahul: So here hierarchy emerges then not from a position of condescension, a positive acknowledgement of agency.

Ritika: I believe, it boils down to synchronicities of ideology also; I don't think it's completely rosy for everyone. Since we do come together from relatively same economic, class backgrounds and have had the same training.

Anurag: I mean, I do remember when I was in my bachelors, for instance, some of us had already done our masters from Ambedkar, in discussions, and otherwise. There was some perceived hierarchy which used to create friction, but we also took it as a prompt to further experimentation and be challenged in our individual practices.

Ashish: Being in a different institution, considering it conceptual, or non-conceptual, even when we discuss in the studio, everyone develops in their modality of practice. The temperament of discussion, and talking and thinking through was there even before we got used to the parlance of discourse.

Rahul: I find it fascinating that you all try to locate where the hierarchy is originating from, and then devise methods to negotiate with them. What do you think is the recipe to keep an investigative temperament towards it?

Anurag: To know our course structure to an extent, but also seeing someone else's to move away from what is being taught to us; Frankly, the exposure to other things makes one re-assess one's own viewpoint. I could use any material in the open studio, but then someone will pose the question- Why? A basic question as that would stay with me. I admire this flow of thinking together that starts with a simple question but also navigates through a certain order. It would then become easier to think of this perceived hierarchy in a much more constructive way; so

in this way, I appreciate this hierarchy, and its presence, stretching our bandwidths collectively.

Ritika: It's also because the why is never placed in a harsh way; It's a helpful why. With the question, there are always prompts that are investigative in nature rather than interrogative.

Anurag: Yeah, I mean the pipe work I did in the open studio (open studio 4, Studio A68) was a result of a lot of constructive feedback and provocations from peers. So the intent with which the provocation occurs remains key; so we can collectively think of it.

Ashish: There has also been a culture of healthy discussion among us beyond the day of presentation, or even with the absence of the artist in question; at times, couple of us will be talking about one of the other members work to think about what it means, the possibilities it opens up as a proposition, and how that person might be able to take it forward; generating a very healthy environment of discussion.

Ritika: When we place ourselves within any context, whether it be one unit or it be in the society complex we live; we try to project ourselves as one unit.; as a studio. Anyone can ask about anyone's work, and I suppose, we should be able to answer them on the spot about each other's work & overall practice, because we have such a healthy dynamic of discussion amongst us. There is genuine curiosity, and a mutual respect as creative and intellectual equals.

Rahul: I think it's extremely interesting how you keep constantly switching between individuals and working as a group. How do you think this framework has affected your idea of what 'individual work' is; and then how do you see the work you do as a studio?

Anurag: I think a lot of collaborations have come in; and the understanding of what collaboration is has also widened. I think post Ambedkar, it has become clearer that ideas, media, and whatever we even speak of, in discussions, is not strictly ours; we take so much of each other into



discussions, and then we project outside as an 'individual'. Your idea is not solely your idea. Your work is not solely your work. The 'market' would want you to believe it; but it's not. You give credit. You acknowledge. There is no 'original'. I think that really helped me blur this 'individual'. To meet and share with 5 people who were genuinely interested in my work, and really positively pushed me.

Ritika: When we banded together for the first time also; there was this notion of multiplicity, togetherness; I feel, the collective process has also greatly affected what we do as practitioners individually; material and conceptual, scales and possibilities have greatly increased.

Rahul: I think this shift of what is the 'original' is extremely important. Within my essay as well, the 'original' that is to be produced by the artist in the institutional eyes is problematized; since it reiterates and cements the notion of the artistic genius that is destined to produce a pure original. This form of getting together, and brainstorming and sharing, I think does two crucial things: One is that it makes you think of your peers, artists, as more than creative and aesthetic labourers and as thinkers; and it also generates a feeling of simultaneity, through resonance of thought and ideas; making you realize that what we perceive of our own, is not solely ours. The idea thus is not frozen, but gains propensity through this act to be pushed further, rather than through only individualistic claims.

Anurag: I think there is definitely some insecurity, that if we share our ideas in the public, they will be stolen; this is itself a marker again of the presence of an 'original'. "That is mine!"

Ashish: Adding more, there is this artistic assumption that something I have produced, will somehow be snatched away from me if I reveal it. They work in a cocoon; thinking someone might steal their process.

Anurag: We have seen people in galleries, who don't allow studio access. I think we also must acknowledge the role of capital in all of this; a large chunk of that insecurity comes from thinking that if somebody is able to copy my idea, then they will also be able to get money for



something that 'I' have discovered (in their mind); and that sharing it will also dilute the USP (unique selling proposition) that the galleries or the market mechanism brings forth. This idea of the individual as the creator has in itself, an inherent capitalistic connotation.

Ritika: The funny thing about it is though; with due time, the references or the inspiration for this 'original' are revealed; but are never acknowledged. Not now, not throughout art history.

Ashish: There are many artists around us in our contemporary world, who are open to sharing, and letting us into their practice; I truly think that at the bottom of this curiosity, when we ask a question, lies an impulse to learn more. It is mere inquisitiveness to understand the process of someone's work we really admire.

Rahul: Pursuing the question of the individual and the genius, what follows also is the 'market' and the monetary aspect of art. Recently in a gathering, we were hit with, "What do you have to show for yourself individually, beyond this format of gathering?" The conversation that ensued between us later revolved a lot around finances and logistics. How do you sustain such a space, and is there equal distribution of burden across the members?

Ashish: I think definitely; related to this sharing and getting together is the logistical nitty gritty of it. Also since we mention and think of capital briefly in the previous section, how we manage this space economically is also an equal consideration. Most spaces fizzle out or fall apart at some point, atleast those that are composed of young practitioners due to figuring out their funding, or uneven contributions by members, so on and so forth. I believe each of us has the understanding that the funds we put in here can go to other places, yet there is this understanding that the space is a priority to all of us. There have been moments when the inhabitants of the studio have not been able to pay equal rent or contribute to utilities equally. But due to this spirit of friendship and the urge to keep this space alive, someone always fills in without the expectation of being paid back immediately or ever.



Ritika: Yeah, the priority has remained the space; also, the way we have been contributing in the studio has been varying, because each of us have different 'sources of income', I have been working with govt & pvt cultural organizations ever since and before the studio had been established. Some members have been entirely dependent on freelance work. But something that has kept us together is definitely that the studio should survive. The flag should be hoisted up high, hahaha.

Something that has also helped us immensely is also keeping the rent, utilities, and everything incredibly organized. We make notes and we are humble enough to acknowledge when we overspend, or one of us has been bearing the brunt of the expenses. There is meticulous planning too, with this feeling of friendship, care and keeping the studio alive.

Ashish: Yeah, its not all hunky dory all the time. Otherwise we won't be able to survive. Everything is not so rosy. Many times the space needs some kind of negotiation and effort which we all try to put in according to the requirement of the situations.

Anurag: I think when we incorporate more people, that is taken very subjectively amongst ourselves; there are disagreements, but we have put certain agreements prior, and have worked on them throughout to ensure that everybody feels welcome, but is also held accountable. We had a spreadsheet for the mopping of the floors too, hahaha, has not really work though.

Rahul: I know you are also working towards expansion of the 'studio'. There are already people like Garima, and Niharika who are not present physically, yet are active contributors in the studio in all markers. I am curious, regarding the imagination of expansion is taking shape. Would the core remain mobile, or consolidated; and what dynamics could change?

Ritika: Somehow, we have experimented a fair bit with our core earlier; but I don't think that has worked out well for us for a number of reasons. It always invites crises. I am definitely skeptical; since all the variables we discuss above, ranging from ideology, logistics, their inhabitants of



the space, etc. is difficult; especially also when we have spent so many years together and have a certain dynamic.

Anurag: When I joined at the start, I just jumped in; but all the previous members were very kind to accommodate my presence, my lifestyle, and my practice as well. I think what this core is, needs further interrogation. If we were to think from the notion of who does fundamental things, managing, and everything, and if that really defines the core of something? Perhaps this struggle with me associating myself at distance from core is the closest example of this notion of fitting in; and what weight associations gain with time, even if they are perceived.

Ritika: There is definite discomfort within all of us as to what is the core, and how it gets defined; especially since the studio and we all as individuals also do a lot of work in the public domain. The irony of it is not lost on us; since we talk of blurring boundaries, and integration, and simultaneously are conscious of our own 'core'. But I do think that when you are running a space, or any organization, there is a core that is looking for its survival, whether it be fiscal or intellectual. We perhaps might be able to find a better word or title for this 'consolidation at the center' instead of core; but it remains, at least in my mind, a functional necessity.

Ashish: I think as far as expansion in general is considered, it has already started; we don't have to think about it in a formal way. Presentations, reviews, screenings, etc. It's all happening.

Ritika: I agree. Friends and peers have been approaching to collaborate with the studio, and we have also been increasingly thinking of how we might be able to accommodate a larger pool of practices and people. Residencies, perhaps for shorter periods of time. All our open studios so far have featured people who are inherent parts of the studio. This time, we are thinking of ways that we might be able to accommodate more people and rethink the entire notion of the 'studio' as a physical and conceptual space.



ASSOCIATIVE FREQUENCIES: A SCORE IN THREE SCENES

Suvani Suri

July, 2024

I'd like to begin by locating the idea of the collective or the collaborative, tracing it to a central concept in sound- the concept of **frequency**. The etymology of 'frequency' points to the earliest use of the word for the 'state of being crowded' or the 'fact of occurring often or in multitudes', before it comes to be applied in physics as the rate of recurrence¹. Staying with the erstwhile usage of the word provides clues into the networked totality of frequencies that we occupy, their interlinked histories and mutations in listening experiences that they have the ability to create and transform.

SCENE I

collecting frequencies

In early 2021, I was one of the attendees of an online lecture series '[Fragility of Sounds](https://www.fragilityofsounds.org/fragility-of-sounds-lecture-series/)', curated and organised by Pia Palme & Christina Fischer-Lessiak as a part of their long-term artistic research project at the University of Music and Performing Arts Graz². Designed to explore the multifold terrains of composition and contemporary music theatre interwoven with feminist practice, the series brought together composers, performers, musicians, scientists and researchers to address the fragility and interdependency of sounds and peek into membranes and surfaces, filters and transitions. After the conclusion of the series, I was invited by Pia Palme to contribute to the anthology *Sounding Fragilities*³ as a reader-listener of the program.

My reflections on the series manifested in an assembly of the meandering notes, scattered sketches and frantic jottings that I was making and working through as I was listening in to the *Fragility of Sounds*. The 'synthesis-information' abounded in leaks, spills, short-circuits and cross-connections that were happening as I traversed the episodic lectures while mapping it

1. Sourced from the Online Etymology Dictionary. <https://www.etymonline.com/word/frequency>

2. The Fragility of Sounds Lecture Series was held in January to March 2021. For the details of the program, see under <https://www.fragilityofsounds.org/fragility-of-sounds-lecture-series/>

3. *Sounding Fragilities: An Anthology*, edited by Irene Lehmann & Pia Palme, Wolke Verlag, Hofheim, 2022. <https://www.wolke-verlag.de/musikbuecher/lehmann-palme-sounding-fragilities/>

to my own curiosities and questions around thresholds. The resounding question for me was–

‘What did the lecture series produce in me, as a listener and student of the series, as a member of the remote yet collective audience scattered across the world and across time-zones?’

For now, without getting into the details of the text montage⁴ which came about as a response to this question, I want to draw out an excerpt from my reflections on the series from back then. This is being done keeping in mind the Hekh (at first named Haek) invitation/prompt which is where i want to further carry this thinking towards.

For a long time now, I’ve been encircling the *thought-image* of ‘a break’. A break as in ‘a breaking point’ but also the discontinuation instated by that which is ‘broken’. I’ve found myself drawn to the sensorium that foresees, compels, introduces and inhabits this *break in the continuity of being*.

A cut

A break

A split

A crack

A fracture

The vocabulary, materiality and sensorium of the fragile is significant as a potential condition for the break. A break that opens up possibilities of a point of contact between the entities that have been held separate so far, thus suggesting that at the very point of closure, there might be an opening. In relation to the sonic, fragility could be postulated as that which affords a process of relentlessly teasing out the topological entity of the edge of sound, of being and meaning. In conversation, collaboration, collectivity and gathering, the limits of fragility are tested, pushed, elasticated leaving in its wake imprints of cuts and breaks.

4. Can be accessed and read here: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1dx92LFnm481rt6088nnY877Nhe7rXv5S/view?usp=share_link

Cut to now, it is this thought that I would like to sketch out into a score again, this time to respond to the editorial provocation of the Hekh.

The first scene as we enter the score is an attempt at collecting frequencies through a fragile listening that ekes out the edges, breaks and voids of the spaces in between bodies, institutions, contexts, situations and milieus, bypassing or leaking into the spaces that might appear to be separate and neatly distinct, but in fact are paradoxically interlinked at their very limits or break points.

The word ‘*sound*’ interestingly, at times a noun and at other times a verb, is etymologically anchored to the idea of safety, health, wholeness and vigour. The sensibility of the word sound is the point from where to begin assembling the collective. As we plunge right into the first scene of the score, a guideline is to remember to listen in a way that encompasses all that is possible to hear when sitting in a group, source or sourceless.

This first part of the score is to listen for that which is associative⁵, that which takes shape when keeping the gaps open for encounters and meanings to unfold beyond the limits.

A room full of frequencies
 Breathe in the moment you are in the midst of
 Read the room you are inhabiting
 Taste the questions in the air
 Sense the swing of the space
 Listen to what is sound, what is unsound
 What is it that was just said? How was it heard by you?
 Where does it hit you, push you, poke you, caress you, tickle you, excite you?
 Find the openings among the sounds for each new direction that emerges
 The sensation of thought in the body- where do you feel it the most?
 Can this thought be traced to a source or is it acousmatic?
 Can frequencies be told apart? Can they be swept?
 The associative hum of the room, lingering for long after it is produced
 How do you carry the hum? Where all do you take it?
 How do you gather, lift and hold it adrift?
 Do you grip it tight or let it be held light?
 Do you preserve it in its form or shape it as you walk along with it?
 How do you collect?
 A room full of frequencies.

5. I owe my slowly developing familiarity and curiosity towards this crucial word (and mode of being in the world) to its repeated and critical invocations by Jeebesh Bagchi in various conversations, scenes and situations.

SCENE II

sonic wanderings or drifting beyond sense into form

A curious term in soundscape studies came to my notice some time back. Sharawadji or Sharawadgi.

A name for a sound effect, Sharawadji is a term that originates from Chinese and refers to the inexplicable feeling of plenitude produced by the contemplation of a sonic motif or a sense of pleasure derived from hearing something unexpectedly beautiful or intriguing. A word that is etymologically disputed and shape-shifts in different citational contexts, it attempts to name the aesthetic effects of an arrangement that is perceived as spontaneous or improvisational rather than meticulously planned.

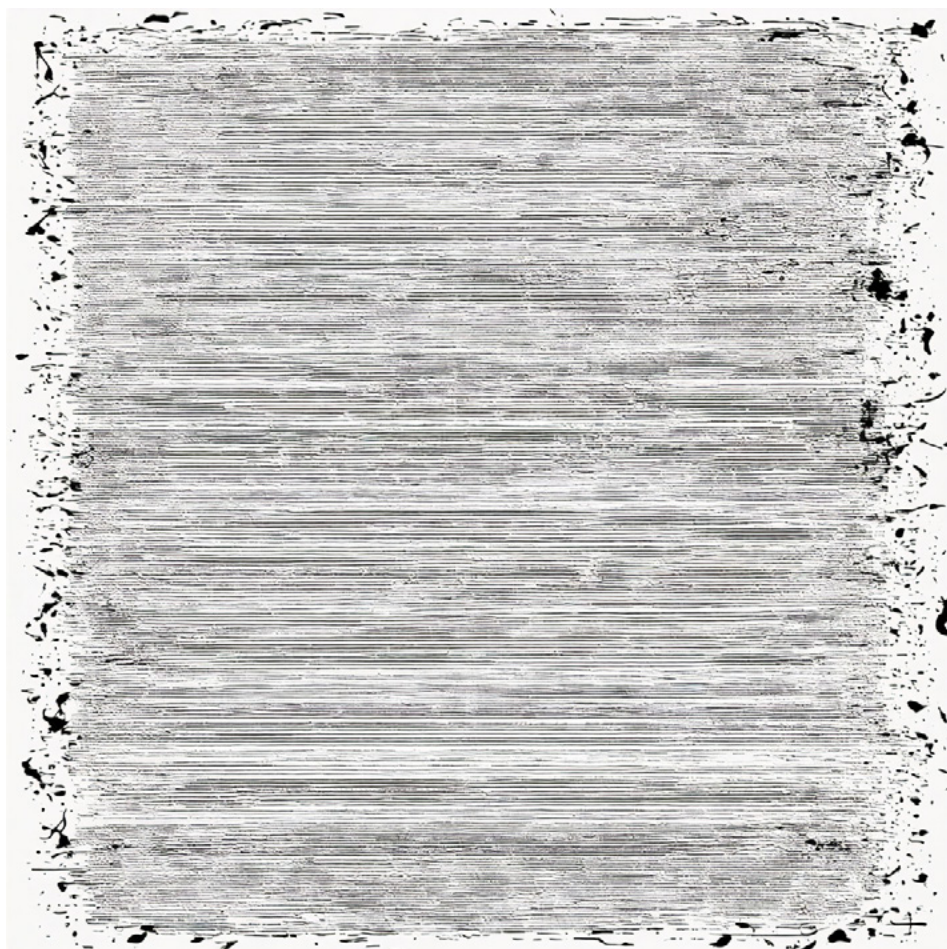
I find the ideas (un)contained in the nomenclature of this word quite generative in order to be able to think of the idea of associative frequencies. Perhaps that's where the Sharawadgi effect lies— in the pleasure of thought that bounces off one another, that takes shape, morphs, multiplies and produces reverberations, that may or may not be (in)audible.

The effect transports one elsewhere,
beyond strict representation - out of context.
In this brutally present confusion, we lose
both our senses and our sense.⁶

The sharawadji plays with composition rules; it diverts them and stimulates a feeling of pleasure in the perceptive confusion. Apparent disorder constitutes the necessary, although not exclusive, condition of the sharawadji effect. Distortions, incongruities, imbalances, and irregularities all diverge from canons of beauty but nevertheless exert such an attraction that the eye or the ear gives way to pleasure. Artifice disappears: the neat shape with discernible contours and composition is opposed to the formless shape that hides its artistic elaboration from eye and ear.⁷

6. Sonic experience: a guide to everyday sounds / edited by Jean-François Augoyard and Henry Torgue, translated by Andrea McCartney and David Paquette, McGill-Queen's University Press 2005, pp. 118-117

7. Ibid.




Sharawadgi in a frame or tracing the resonances of an associative evening at a gathering somewhere in the city



This is also how I see the collective of frequencies forming, flocking, dispersing, syncopating.

There is a composition playing in the space of a gathering
What are the rules that it is shaped by?
What are the conventions that it defies?
Tune in to the emergent sonic form floating in the space
Can you spot the everydayness of it?
Can you sense the chaos in it?
Wander through the familiar and unfamiliar frequencies engulfing the space
Find your own
Stay with it
Pour a drop of your voice into the mix.
A hmmm, aaah, mumble, rustle, murmur, shout, shuffle, whisper or blip
Tune out of the conversation, then tune back in
Churn in the halting and heaving, ferment in the streams of thought
How many pauses in the atmosphere can you hold?
How many sighs can you gulp?
There is a composition playing in the space
Stay with it
Disappear in it
Improvise
Reappear
Wait
Move
Shift
Improvise.



SCENE III

murmurations

Starlings. The synchronised movement patterns of a starling flock is also known as a murmuration. Guided by simple rules, starling murmurations can react to their environment as a group without a central leader orchestrating their choices; in any instant, any part of the flock can transform the movement of the whole flock. Collective leadership/partnership. Adaptability.⁸

This image from Adrienne Maree Brown's *Emergent Strategy* can be carried and situated alongside Fred Moten and Stefano Harney's description of the act of study as "what you do with other people. It's talking and walking around with other people, working, dancing, suffering, some irreducible convergence of all three, held under the name of speculative practice..."⁹

Just like the nebulous world of neumes¹⁰ that defy staying within the precise enclosures of musical vocabularies, giving way to newer forms of thinking and composing, study as a creative practice also unfolds in those moments, activities and situations that cannot be defined or circumscribed within the limits of disciplines and routines. It is in the imprecision of these associative bounds of experience and in the undefined and unanticipated encounters that learning transpires and transforms into possibilities.

There is also a latent imprecision in the word association, lying alongside the risk that is an elemental part of the process of building associative work- the risk of not knowing what it is to become and how it is to sway. This suggests the potent possibility of reinventing the understanding of association and (**not** interchangeably) collaboration as that which cuts one off from the expected, plunges into the unknown or uncertain and places the wager on a co-construction. It is in this surrender to the imprecise and the unknowable that new worlds form.

8. *Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*, adrienne maree brown, AK Press, 2017
In her section on the core principles that emerge from their study and practice of emergent strategy, adrienne maree brown, borrows from the complex movements observed in mycelium, ants, ferns, wavicles starlings, dandelions as a way to think about emergent processes, resistance and collective sways.

9. Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study*, Minor Compositions, 2013

10. In compositional vocabularies, neumes are melodic fragments that are not in intervals and never clearly defined.

This feels like the moment to make a return to frequency again and the conceptual potential of positing association as the act of collecting frequencies- a multitude of dissonant, unstable, entropic yet networked frequencies from the midst of one's own environment, situation or milieu. A gathering as in a congregation of frequencies produced through (a multitude of) listenings.

Listening to precarity, listening to be precarious, listening to take risks and to wager upon the unexpected commons that lie at the heart of the desire for association, (re)invention, connection. Listening to frequent desire as we swirl around in our worlds, alone/ together.

Listening to desire.

As a counterpoint to citational burdens, precise formats, predicative syntaxes and institutional insistence on adherence to legibility, it is in the scattered and often dismissed notes, footnotes, squiggles, annotations and margins of what is heard that new possibilities, connections and reinventions often start to appear in thought. It is these that hold me in rapt attention in gatherings and where I feel like I am privy to the artistic rigour, intensities and processes of associative practices.

People are curriculums, I found myself saying to a friend the other day. Curriculums of heart, of hurt, of gestures and articulations, ways of listening and sounding, a swirl of thresholds, thought-spaces, tones and pitches. A sonic vacuum that sucks one in.

The contradictions that make us, split us, move us and pull us together, part apart.
Disorientation of a kind that draws out our potentialities from within, without.

Curiously, the word 'noise' originates from the Latin root for nausea- that is something that continues to fascinate me. I think about the churnings and dizzying cuts produced in the quietude of a duration spent in the midst of a group of many. The lumps of silence as loud and voluminous as the moments of noise are still. The soundscape of a heterogeneous scattering of questions, claims, mishearings, pauses, poetry and ramblings can

perhaps be visualised as a fluffy poem floating around in a landscape, inseparable from it and yet its own thing. It holds the answers but has to be read out in one's own voice and resonate in the hollows of the body at the same time as it reverberates in the undulating terrains of the fertile atmospheres where it grows, in all directions. Together, resounding in the extimate folds and creases between the body and language, landscape and memories. As you immerse yourself in the sonic environment of associative thought, the distances between you and the space of many becomes palpable and material.

To close off this long and winding ramble is a last borrowed score for this instance of Hekh. I take this improvisation from Pauline Oliveros's anthology of performance scores written for those who are wanting to explore the associative practice of deep listening.¹¹

OLD SOUND NEW SOUND BORROWED SOUND BLUE

for Voices

Old Sound – A sound that you remember from a long time ago.

New Sound – A sound that you have never made before.

Borrowed Sound – A sound that you borrow from someone else.

Blue Sound – A sound that is blue for you.

First listen inwardly to find your sound to be expressed vocally. Voice each kind of sound—old, new, borrowed, blue—from one to three times within a time frame of about five minutes. Pace yourself by listening to everyone and everything. Find a time for each of your sounds. Voice your sound just before, just after, or together with someone else's sound. The piece is finished when everyone has used all of their sounds not more than three times each.

1994

This is where i pause
for now.
Until
 we
 gather
again.

11. Pauline Oliveros, *Anthology of Text Scores*, Compilation and editing by Samuel Golter, Deep Listening Publications, 2013, pp. 105



ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Aditi Purwar

Aditi Purwar is a visual artist and a graphic storyteller, pursuing a Masters in Graphic Storytelling from Luca School of Arts, Brussels, Belgium. She has self published a graphic narrative as a school project 'The Tea Cup Set', and is currently working on a graphic novel 'The sky is filled with water'. Aditi did her Bachelors in Fine Arts in Painting from College of Art, Delhi, India. She was born and brought up in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh.

With her stories and drawings Aditi presents the contemporary manner of living in myriad ways. The narrative structure of the graphics gives her purpose to immerse in her visuals. Aditi hopes to work on more visual stories in the future individually or collectively which touch the hearts of people and provide meaning to their lives.

Anurag Singraur

Anurag Singraur is a visual practitioner who thrives on finding ways to bring together Art and sciences, more importantly technology and its mediation. Interested in translation and its complexities, he uses media as an opportunity to explore and bring newer reading to the existing set of knowledge by interchanging different sets of data to further understand the infrastructure of multiple hardware/software.

He is a Postgraduate of Ambedkar University Delhi (2022-2024) and a graduate of the College of Art, Delhi (2021). Also, Co-initiated and a resident at Studio A68 (2019) which thinks around 'space' and its negotiations in daily life via gatherings, displays, showcasing and developing thoughts and ideas around living and working together.

Arun Kumar Singh

Arun Kumar Singh is a performance maker and writer. A Master's degree holder in Performing Arts (theatre arts) from the University of Hyderabad, his work explores the themes of identity, language and being in Indian cultural context.

Arun's repertoire includes notable plays such as 'Aarambh' (Selected for the National Micro Drama Festival), 'Singrauli Files', 'Birtha Mauthews', 'Supposed to be a Joke' has captivated audiences in prestigious venues across India. His translation and adaptation projects, like Dario Fo's 'A Woman Alone', Marsha Norman's 'Night, Mother' and La Farce de maître Pathelin showcase his versatility and commitment to bringing diverse narratives to the forefront of contemporary theatre in India.

A writer by heart, his short stories deal with the dynamics of language and memory. His Hindi story 'Khargosh' won a prize at the National Level and was published in half-yearly Hindi literary magazine - Pakshdhar's July-December 2023 issue. Recently, his article on Habib Tanvir was published by Rang Sanvad, Bhopal.

Hafsa

Hafsa هـ ص ف ح “gathering” in Arabic. Hafsa is a pseudonym taken by the writer to stay anonymous, to speak freely while not holding authorship over the thoughts that have emerged over many conversations during the gatherings. Moreover, Hafsa helps keep the translucent presence of the gatherings and maintain their lukewarm lubrication, not too hot or concentrated on a sole author, not too cold or diluted without any characteristic or name. The fictional scene in the essay meanders through and assimilates many dilemmas, inner rumblings and sustained conversations with friends and peers that may or may not crystallize with time.

Kaushal Sapre

Kaushal Sapre is an artist based in Delhi, India. He studied physics and chemical engineering before completing his masters in visual art in 2017. Since 2019, he has also been teaching courses around digital technology. The courses that Kaushal facilitates - and his work in general - are to do with rethinking the self and the social in everyday technical activity. He develops web servers, manage an internet radio station, curate lists, write code, organise gatherings, make and perform with experimental sound instruments. Kaushal's work involves building, staging and sharing infrastructural interventions that respond to his immediate environment and peer network.

Malavika PC

Malavika PC is an interdisciplinary visual and performance art practitioner with a strong call for abstractions. She holds a BFA in Industrial Design in Ceramics (Government College of Fine Arts, Chennai 2004). Alongside her independent practice and consistent solo showcases, she has associated intensively across years in varying capacities with collectives and institutions like Adishakti Laboratory for Theatre Arts, Perch Theatre Collective, Ranga Shankara Theatre and 1Shanthiroad Studio/Gallery. Her illustrations and graphic design have been published by several houses like Karadi Tales, Tulika, BLaft, Timeout, Times of India, The Hindu and Duckbill.

Among many recognitions for her work, she was the recipient of the year-long Arts Practice Grant from the India Foundation for the Arts (2016), a production grant from Basement 21 (2021) the BeFantastic International Fellowship in AI for Artists (2022), a Student of the Year in Department of Ceramics - Government College of Fine Arts Chennai (2004) and is currently part of the City as Stage International Cohort of the Serendipity Arts Festival (2024). ‘The Ringarotus’ and ‘Favourite Things’ are crucial examples of her cross-disciplinary performances. In 2018, she apprenticed with David Lance Goines in Linocuts and Calligraphy at St Hieronymus Press, Berkeley.

Manika Kumari

Manika is a Delhi-based visual practitioner. She completed her schooling at the Banyan Tree School and holds a BFA in Painting from the College of Arts, Delhi (2018-2022), along with a one-year Diploma in Fine Arts from Delhi Collage of Art (2018). Manika briefly served as a project assistant at Art Alive Gallery, New Delhi.

Driven by a profound curiosity about the world and a passion for exploring diverse cultures and perspectives, Manika's artistic practice involves visualizing and experimenting with various media forms. Engaging with multimedia allows her to uncover layers of potential, supporting the conceptualization of her work. Each medium she explores is given the freedom to interpret and explore different facets of her artwork.

Manika recently participated in the College of Art Carnival at Lalit Kala Akademy 2024. She was also part of the group show 'TEXTXET' at the Foundation of Indian Contemporary Art and participated in a workshop with Pahul and Renuka Rajiv in 2023.

Nicholas Ferguson

Nicholas Ferguson is a British artist, theorist and curator. He is an advocate for the public value of radical art, art pedagogies within and beyond the academy and an expanded role for art in planetary social thought. His photo essays and urban interventions have contributed to political and/or natural histories of the built environment, philosophies of art and infrastructure, and theoretical discourses on art, ecology and flight. He holds an MA from Oxford University and a PhD from Goldsmiths. He is Associate Dean for Research at Richmond the American University in London and Senior Lecturer in Critical and Historical Studies at Kingston University, London. In Spring 2024 he was Visiting Fellow in Art at Shiv Nadar University, Delhi.

Pavni Anand

Pavni Anand is a visual artist based in Delhi with a Bachelor's degree in Fine Arts from College of Art, Delhi University, and a Master's degree in Fine Arts from Shiv Nadar University, Greater Noida. Through her practice, she questions the reliability of photographs as a representation of reality and the subjective nature of memory and further considers how sensory experiences can shape our understanding of the world through intermedia installations, artist books, sound, and video. By examining the boundaries of shared spaces through her interventions, she explores the ways in which one can navigate and negotiate the complex power dynamics that exist within them. She is currently working at Goethe-Institut / Max Mueller Bhavan New Delhi.

Priyesh Gothwal

Priyesh Gothwal is a Delhi-based visual artist who works with drawing, text, video, and found or appropriated materials. His practice focuses on the formation of language, fiction, and different narrative configurations. He completed his MFA from Shiv Nadar University in 2017 and was a resident artist in the Ashkal Alwan Home Workspace program in Lebanon from 2019 to 2020. Priyesh is one of the founding members of first draft and has initiated a series of book shows. He is currently managing and teaching in the BFA program at JSLH, OP Jindal Global University, Sonapat.

Rahul Juneja

Rahul Juneja (b.1999) is a multiform artist based between Karnal and New Delhi in India. He completed his BFA (Painting) from College of Art, New Delhi and MFA from Shiv Nadar Institute of Eminence. Rahul is interested in loosening images, devising myths, and intercepting speculative shadowlands that lurk at the contour of our realities.

He is a resident at Foreign Objekt (2024) and was the recipient of Khoj Peers Share (Triangle Network) in 2023. His work has been shown at Underground Art and Design New York; Goethe Institut, Foundation of Indian Contemporary Art (FICA) New Delhi, Kochi Muziris Biennale; India Art Fair; Anant Art Gallery; and Art.H9 Gallery Hong Kong.

Rahul has also given lectures and artist presentations at College of Art, New Delhi, and Jindal Global University, Sonapat. His works and writings have been published by Underground Art and Design, Alternative South Asian Photography (ASAP) and Foreign Objekt.

Rohan Dahiya

Rohan is an Interdisciplinary visual artist and an art educator, whose interest aligns with fields of Psychodynamics and Post-Internet Movement. Based in New Delhi, India, his research-based practice is located at the intersection of Arts & Technology, exploring software and computer-based interventions in critical creative expression.

Rohan has completed Post Graduation in Visual Arts from Kala Bhavana, Santiniketan in 2022. He has been a part of various exhibitions, such as, 'TEXTXET' (2023) at the Foundation for Indian Contemporary Art (FICA) New Delhi, 'A Season of Conviviality' at Lalit Kala Akademi, Rabindra Bhavana, New Delhi (2022), 'Responses to The Divine Comedy', Consulate General of Italy-Kolkata (Italian Embassy) x Kala Bhavana CIAS (Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies) (2022), and Students' Biennale (Project VT/9), Kochi-Muziris Biennale, in Kerala (2021), among others.

Soumya Yadav

Soumya Yadav is a visual artist from Kota, Rajasthan. He has completed his Bachelor's in Fine Arts in Painting from the College of Art, New Delhi, and his Master's in Fine Arts from Kala Bhavan, Visva Bharati University, Santiniketan. As a practitioner, he works with ideas of identity, memory, movement, and everyday life experiences, exploring these through various tools of artistic expression like drawing, video, installation, and poetry. Soumya has exhibited works at various prestigious venues, including the Contemporary Art Gallery in Kota (2016), Lalit Kala Jaipur (2017), Think Culture Conclave, New Delhi (2018), and a group show at Lalit Kala Akademi, New Delhi, to mark the Centenary Celebration of Kala Bhavana, Santiniketan. He was also awarded the State Award by Lalit Kala Akademi, Rajasthan (2023). Currently, he works and lives in New Delhi.

Sumit Kumar

Sumit Kumar is an artist based in Delhi; He completed his MFA in painting from Jamia Millia Islamia University in 2023 and BFA in painting from College of Art, New Delhi in 2021. Currently, Sumit has been working as a freelance artist and exploring.

Sumit was recently selected for the Takshila Fine Arts Scholarship. He raises questions on the apparent loopholes in mainstream ideologies.

Studio A68

Studio A68, a multi-disciplinary open space is an atelier for different residing and visiting artists from a wide spectrum of visual and performing arts. Studio A68 is an effort to think collectively around the impact of art via a space within the community, by constantly changing its lens toward the everyday mundane. It focuses on bridging the gap between art and community through conventional and unconventional media by twitching subjective ambiguity. This studio establishes connections among practices to closely understand the complex social, political, and economic changes in the community and the world and its interwovenness. It also spreads the idea of giving back by looking at art as a critical instrument of change.

Studio A68 has conducted several open-house displays, inviting, engaging, and curating works of visual and performing artists since 2019. It has prioritized theory-based practice by conducting regular readings and discussions. Collaborations with multiple ateliers and studios is how the studio addresses socioeconomic integration. It encourages and empowers local craftsmanship by putting it in the loop of co-creation and collective growth. The studio also partners with institutions, regional and general bodies, museums, galleries, and public spaces to communicate the essentiality of an organized art practice. It sees documentation while implementing, researching, and investigating, vital for the growth of its associations, singulars and itself.

Suvani Suri

Suvani Suri works with sound, text and intermedia assemblages that think through modes of listening and voicing. Her artistic practice plumbs the gaps, cracks, absurdities and excesses embedded within the technological processes of production, mediation and perception of sound. This often takes the form of podcasts, objects, installations, mixtapes, workshops, curatorial propositions, publications, live/ discursive sessions and collective interventions. Alongside, she composes sound for video and performance works and has been teaching at several educational spaces where her pedagogical interests conflate with a sustained inquiry into the digital and sonic sensorium.

Tushti Pundir

Name: Tushti Pundir | **Born:** 1999, Ghaziabad | **Schooling:** DPS Indirapuram (2005-2017) | **BFA:** College of Art, Delhi (2017-2021) | **MFA:** SN School of Art and Communication, University of Hyderabad (2021-2023) | **Professional Experience:** Sufficient enough, currently Project Manager & Researcher at Sanchit Art Gallery.

That is enough data to make a blurry silhouette of me. Apart from the objective data, I'm.....

(Doubting the 'I'. Not helpful while writing a bio). Anyway, I sleep, I poop, I read, I write, I get curious, I get easily bored, I get happy and giggly, I again get bored, mostly I'm not impressed with myself. I like science, literature, history, politics, philosophy or any other subject I can remotely understand (Very easy to make me curious).

For a long time, I've kept a lot of pressure on myself to be that image of an 'artist', a 'thinker', a net 'good'. Those are not fun, interesting, real roles. So I'm not those for now.







Hekh is a multifaceted contemporary arts organisation based in New Delhi, India, providing platform to a vast spectrum of cultural practitioners.

Hekh takes its name from the characteristic vibrato in traditional Punjabi singing, where the constant modulation through dips and surges generates an undying call. This call, continues amplifying, reflecting, intersecting, resonating as it navigates through space and time- intercepting interfering with and informing frequencies both ancient, contemporary and future. Hekh emerges as both an interface as well as a signal; and through this churning duality maps the shifts that terraform our artistic and cultural landscape.

Call #1 is the inceptional issue of hekh, a semi annual publication. The issue focuses on mapping how institutions and structures linger within artistic practices, on navigating complex socio-cultural formulations and extending new imaginaries of practices emerging within the Delhi art milieu.

