

# TEXTING THE SELF

AN ANTHOLOGY  
OF POSTGRADUATE  
WRITING



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THE  
SELF

AN ANTHOLOGY OF POSTGRADUATE WRITING

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# Foreword

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Contemplation and action go hand in hand in Jesuit institutions. It is this spirit of being fully engaged in the present task while not losing sight of the larger picture that we seek to share with our students as an alternative in a world where immediate gratification trumps everything else.

Our realities offer challenges that prompt everyday engagement even as they require an understanding that comes from careful reflection.

Questions of identity and justice cannot be answered by the logic of the scoreboard and a list of talking points. Listening in a spirit of humility and trying thus to learn is a key value in a world shaped by heterogeneity and diversity.

It is heartening to see how well the students of the postgraduate course in English have understood the value of such engagement. Research that engages with our realities can produce new ways of knowing; it is admirable that such an effort has been undertaken with the seriousness that it deserves.

I congratulate these young researchers and writers, and trust that these efforts will continue.

Fr. Dr. Victor Lobo, S.J.  
Vice Chancellor  
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# Preface

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The Master of Arts in English at St. Joseph's is designed around the idea of enabling the student to proceed towards creative expression, translation and research over four semesters. This anthology hopes to represent the journeys made by our students in these endeavours.

Our students are encouraged to write from the first semester onward. The act of writing about the world we know is perhaps a good way to place in context the effort of writers from familiar and unfamiliar worlds. Creative writing also seems to permit the experience of arriving into an English formed from everyday speech. Some of our selections thus offer a skaz that may make this present moment more visible to other readers.

Those who study English often bear the responsibility of being builders of bridges. Translation from Indian languages is one way of being true to this responsibility. Our students have attempted to render the experience of reading in the mother-tongue, or an adjacent language. This collection records these first attempts in the hope that they will be emboldened to make many more such attempts.

We also hope to demystify the process of humanities research for our students and lead them to embodied practices of knowledge production. Their tentative beginnings are captured here.

Investigating the lived experience of caste is a matter of great interest for us on account of the conversations and insights it leads to. For many students, this is a moment of discovery, a time for connecting dots that leads to a figuring of past and self. The practice of auto-ethnography, a journey from within memory and experience to an understanding of one's social context, has been invaluable in this effort. We hope to capture some of these moments of discovery in this anthology.

The title of this anthology is a reminder of the value of being able to represent ourselves while also referring to the idea of writing to, or for, a future self.

I congratulate the MA batch of 2021-23 for their many efforts and trust that this anthology of writing will spur them, and those who follow, to greater achievements.

Arul Mani  
Dean, School of Languages and Literatures



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# Explorations

# Beginning research...

**T**he research papers represented in this section capture the way in which conversations and collaborative thinking defined the post-graduate experience at St. Joseph's. The papers explore a variety of topics and themes, and aim to constantly refer to the coexistence of a multiplicity of truths. Research thus becomes art, even as it documents the student's self as another work in progress.

# The Epic as the Intimate

## A Reading of the Cinema of David Lean

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Varun Bhakay

### Introduction

“What difference do you think you can make, one single man in all this madness” is the rhetorical question Sean Penn’s Sergeant Welsh poses to Private Witt, played by Jim Caviezel, in Terrence Malick’s 1998 philosophical war drama *The Thin Red Line*. The scene crops up two-thirds of the way through the film, coming on the back of a rare American success in the bloody battle to take Guadalcanal from Imperial Japan, but it forces the viewer to engage with the broader subject of the film through Witt, a bit of a truant who is coming round to soldiering the way Welsh likes it being done.

Welsh would have been just as well off putting his question to the three David Lean protagonists this paper takes a look at: Colonel Nicholson from *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957), the titular *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), and the doctor-poet that is *Doctor Zhivago* (1965). None of the three men seeks to consciously alter the world and isn’t, at least to begin with, in any position to do so. They are, initially, shaped by the circumstances around them – chiefly war but also an evolutionary world in which they seem out of place, and then take to shaping the circumstances around them, each in his own way: Nicholson looks towards the immediately personal in building his Japanese captors a vital railway bridge in *Kwai*, Lawrence wishes to aid the Arabs install self-rule in their lands in *Lawrence*, and the Doctor makes an attempt to live a prosperous private life under the intrusive glare of a state apparatus that disapproves of the very thoughts that inhabit his mind. Ultimately, each of them fails, the great no-no of cinema, whose heroes can be bruised and bloodied but never beaten. Fatalistically, each of them meets his death during the film, bookending the idea Lean explores of these beings who seek to make a difference, and none of the deaths is conscious: Nicholson is dealt the death blow by a mortar round, Lawrence has a motorcycle accident, and Zhivago’s heart gives up on him when he spies, after ages, the woman he most deeply desires. It seems to be a rather bleak view that Lean takes, but through it, he asserts the greater insignificance of man in relation to the physical world, which remains in motion despite the departures and arrivals from it.

These three films marked a major career deviation for Lean, a director better known for studio films of more modest means. He stepped out now, venturing to the tropical jungles of Sri Lanka for *Kwai*, the sprawling deserts of Jordan for *Lawrence*, and to snow-decked Spain for *Zhivago*. With the troupes of actors he repeatedly assembled and the scale on which these films were made, they naturally became synonymous with the epic genre, filmed and projected on widescreen. And yet there is an intimacy to these films, in particular to their protagonists. It is that intimacy that this paper seeks to explore: to place importance on the men taking centre stage and place their actions within the historical framework the respective films establish, but to not take the latter much further. In effect, the broader idea is to look at these films as character pieces and understand the impact the films have from that standpoint rather than go down the usual route of admiring Jack Hildyard (*Kwai*) and Freddie Young’s (*Lawrence* and *Zhivago*) terrific photography and the swelling scores by Malcolm Arnold (*Kwai*) and Maurice Jarre (*Lawrence* and *Zhivago*) while approaching the films as epics.

It must be acknowledged beforehand that Constantine Santas’ book *The Epic Films of David Lean* (The Scarecrow Press, 2012) already has, in passing, at least, considered Lean’s cinema as being “intimate stories on a large canvas” (56) but this paper attempts to apply that notion to very specific works of Lean and in very specific circumstances as well.

### The Bridge on the River Kwai (1957)

David Lean’s eleventh feature film in fifteen years as a director marked for him a return to a period of history that had been alluded to in his earlier work but which he had only dealt with directly once before – the Second World War had been the backdrop against which *The Sound Barrier* (British Lion Films, 1952) had been set, dealing with aerial warfare and innovation in the field, but with *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (Columbia Pictures, 1957), Lean turned to the war on land, specifically in the Far East. Adapted from the Frenchman Pierre Boulle’s novel *Le Pont de la rivière Kwai* (Julliard, 1952) by Carl Foreman and Michael Wilson, *Kwai* fused the human drama of war with a spirit of adventurism by showcasing the building of a bridge on Imperial Japan’s infamous “Death Railway” by British prisoners of war alongside a combined Allied commando effort to destroy the bridge. Fronting either end of the film’s thrusts were actors Alec Guinness, who played the British Commanding Officer Colonel Nicholson, and William Holden, who was cast as the US Navy “Commander”

Shears, once a prisoner of the same camp as Nicholson and his men, now back with a small team to destroy the bridge the prisoners have laboured over.

The mishmash of genres may appear casual or even careless to one who has not viewed the film, but there is a degree of seriousness in Lean's approach that makes the combination work: he never lets the commandos become invincible, rather using their leader Major Warden, played by Jack Hawkins, to make a point about the cruel, calculated nature of modern warfare, and the situation in the camp, while almost always grim, never opts for the sort of gut-wrenching commentary that would make a viewer tear their eyes away. Lean's whole focus is on creating a compelling picture that draws attention to itself through narrative and performance, not cheap thrills or claims of De Sica-esque depictions of reality. This observation of a balance in the narrative is backed by Constantine Santas in the book *The Epic Films of David Lean* (The Scarecrow Press, 2012), wherein Santas states that though "placing more emphasis on nuanced performances than on spectacle and action, *Kwai* contains enough of war adventure elements to appeal to popular audiences" (2). There are moments where Holden's showmanship – all too natural to the Hollywood star – pales in contrast to Guinness' subdued performance, but Lean never allows the viewer a moment to question the purpose behind putting the two contrasting figures in the same film. Lean's vision is to see the contrarian events of the construction of the titular bridge and its destruction as being part of the same whole, and it works in returning Nicholson to his duties as a British officer, in first building the bridge and then in inadvertently destroying it.

Nicholson presents a quandary to any viewer familiar with the "type" he is expected to represent in *Kwai*: he is the antithesis of the senior officer in any prisoner-of-war camp film known to a larger audience. Contrast his curt dismissal of the idea of escape from the camp with the enthusiastic encouragement given to prospective escapees by Group Captain Ramsey of *The Great Escape* (John Sturges, 1963), a role coincidentally played by James Donald, who appears in *Kwai* as the British medical officer Major Clipton; in the BBC-Universal television show *Colditz* (created by Brian Degas and Gerard Glaister, 1972-74), Jack Headey, who makes a brief appearance as a reporter at the beginning of *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962), plays Colonel Preston, a strict-but-fair senior officer who ensures on thoroughly planned escapes from the titular castle deep inside Nazi Germany. Nicholson puts aside the thought of escape, first by noting the preposterousness of the idea given the men have little idea of where they are in relation to identifiable parts of South-East Asia and their lack of information about the running status of the war (*Kwai* 18:00-18:50). He does not mention it but the fatal problem in escaping in the part of the world where the prisoners of *Kwai* are would be their inability to blend in, something that would not bother an escapee in Continental Europe. Later, Nicholson adds that the prisoners were ordered to surrender by their formation commander and superior officers in Singapore, and to escape would be, strictly speaking, in contravention of orders passed (*Kwai* 19:25-19:35). Nicholson is also determined to impress upon the enemy, of whom he takes a dim view once the camp commandant Colonel Saito shows his manner of functioning. But even before that, his troops march into the camp. March, not walk as one would expect bedraggled, tired men who have laid down their arms to. Melanie Williams points to the state of the soldiers in *David Lean* (Manchester University Press, 2014) thus: "As the men under Nicholson's command march, Lean picks out details of their physical dilapidation: the dirty bloody bandages, the ragged uniforms, the boot that flaps a part with its owner's rhythmical movement" (147). Despite being in near-literal dire straits, the men march, symbolising the steadfastness of their commanding officer.

Nicholson proves to be a man the Japanese cannot put down; when instructed that officers will work on the bridge alongside their men, he refuses, citing the Geneva Convention, which forbids the use of officers as manual labour. He is punished, as are the officers under his command, but no one lets up, forcing Saito to back down and concede to the British demands. It paves the way for the sort of celebration among the men one would only witness when a beloved commanding officer relinquishes his command: when Nicholson is released, they hoist him onto their shoulders (1:03:20-1:05:00). It is, objectively, the sole British victory of the film.

Having won his men this victory, Nicholson begins to unravel, though not visibly. He makes the point that his vanquished, starving men can be reformed into a battalion by building the bridge, that doing so would lift their morale (1:08:15-1:09:40). Santas suggests that Nicholson has his work cut out for him because "[h]e easily brainwashes his officers, who are receptive to his orders after his defeat of Saito in the battle of wills and ready to take any steps to finish the bridge..." (16). All this while, Lean has built Nicholson up into a hero and a man to look up to, the sort of man who stands tall in times of adversity, like the Soviet spy Mark Rylance played in Steven Spielberg's *Bridge of Spies* (Walt Disney Studios/ Twentieth Century Fox, 2015). This volte-face gives Lean room to tease a new side of Nicholson, one the audience may not find as palatable. It is not an unpleasant side; in fact, one could suggest that Nicholson is doing right by his troops, keeping them together. He is also aiding the enemy. In effect, Nicholson's characterisation allows Lean to explore a grey area of the human condition seldom highlighted in uniformed war films, certainly not in ones about the Allies in the Second World War.

In *Beyond the Epic: The Life and Films of David Lean* (University of Kentucky Press, 2006), Gene D. Phillips

suggests that Nicholson “is one of those Lean characters who refuses to accept the possibility of failure, even when it stares them in the face” (248). It is this hubris of Nicholson that proves to be his undoing. Williams suggests that his “insistence that he is doing it for his men’s morale belies his vanity and his own Ozymandian tendencies to construct a lasting monument that might endure for ‘six hundred years, that would be quite something’” (152-53). It is so that we arrive at a crucial realisation: Nicholson is as self-serving as they come, but he does not realise it. He has none of the self-awareness Lawrence or Zhivago would possess. In effect, he is, well and truly, in over his head. This is what makes the concluding exclamation of “What have I done?”, repeated thrice over as the train races towards the bridge, so compellingly complex. Nicholson has just killed who was once a comrade (Shears), and what for? His stumbling onto the plunger that detonates the bridge has been a subject of much debate and discussion over the years, and will perhaps never be resolved conclusively, for nobody – not Lean, not writer Boulle, not adaptors Foreman and Wilson, and not Guinness cleared that up in their lifetime.

It is not his death, but his actions that qualify Nicholson as a tragic hero. The viewer has known all along that the man is flawed, that his moral compass is not necessarily in alignment with most others’, but his conviction in his actions and the belated realisation of what they have led to makes Nicholson a compelling character to explore. He leaves ambiguity aplenty in his wake, more so than his successors from Lean’s next two films, a strange occurrence given how Nicholson’s entire makeup seems to suggest a simple man.

As regards the tragedy of history, Nicholson has no say in coming to Saito’s camp: it is a matter of pure chance, as anyone with a nascent understanding of military bureaucracy will concede. He happens to find himself on one of the most dangerous active construction sites in the history of the world, but it is what he makes of it that points us to the historical tragic. His indulgences render circumstances such that they would qualify as being so. He plays with tragedy, perhaps unknowingly, but his assistance to the Japanese is unparalleled as far as the film is concerned, and he is thus a perpetrator in the tragedy that befalls the men under his command once the bridge construction commences.

*Kwai*, one could argue, is too many things for it to be pigeonholed. It is not very easily classified as being an intimate film unless one examines the players within it, at least three of whom it examines from almost uncomfortable proximity. What cements its plausibility as an intimate story is the interaction that Nicholson and Saito have on the bridge pre-climax, when the former reveals “his deepest feelings through what seems to be an idle conversation, in little details like the way he stretches out the words ‘from time to time’, or telling gestures like his stroking the wood on the bridge lovingly - a sudden outbreak of sensualism in an otherwise buttoned-up man” (Williams 149-50).

## **Lawrence of Arabia (1962)**

*Lawrence of Arabia* was a long-gestating project on both sides of the Pond for over three decades before David Lean brought it to fruition, having been fascinated with the subject of the film since childhood. “He was to young English boys the last word in exotic heroes,” is Lean’s summation of T.E. Lawrence in Sandra Lean and Barry Chattington’s *David Lean: An Intimate Portrait* (Universe, 2001). Lawrence had been a man of many talents, and had become famous for his contribution to the Arab theatre in the First World War.

Lean’s undertaking was not the first filmed account of Lawrence’s life, but it became quasi-official with the purchase of the rights to adapt *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Lawrence’s recollections of the campaign. With the book secured, Michael Wilson, the co-writer of *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (Columbia Pictures, 1957) set to work. Wilson’s work was subsequently turned over to Robert Bolt, a successful playwright who proceeded to collaborate with Lean closely.

Unlike *Kwai*, where there was a bevy of characters, it was Lawrence who mattered in *Lawrence*, and Lean’s choice was the hard-drinking, up-and-coming Irish actor Peter O’Toole, who was supported in key roles by the likes of Alec Guinness, the American Anthony Quinn, the Egyptian Omar Sharif as Sherif Ali, Jack Hawkins, and Anthony Quayle. The pseudo-biopic stance of the film also meant that this naturally became a more focused, more intimate examination of a particular man. Lean, Gene D. Phillips states in *Beyond the Epic: The Life and Films of David Lean* (University of Kentucky Press, 2006), sought the approach of the character study of a complex personality, one that explored inner conflicts (272). At the same time, given the ambiguity and hearsay about Lawrence, to say nothing of the censorship laws in force in the major markets of Britain and the USA in the early 60s, Lean preferred to leave some things unsaid, opting to not explain every single thing about Lawrence (Phillips 277).

The film opens with Lawrence’s death in a motorcycle accident and a memorial service that follows in London where a handful of people recall the dead man. All of this Lean deals with quickly before cutting to Cairo. And Lawrence. The viewer is quickly acquainted with the character that is the protagonist and what is said and thought of him before he, and we, are dispatched to the deserts of Arabia to link up with Arab tribes opposing the Ottoman Empire.

Lean makes much of the arid landscapes *Lawrence* traverses, shot gorgeously by Freddie Young, who would go on to win an Academy Award for his efforts. And yet, despite the scale, there is a sense of closeness between the viewer and Lawrence, a man who is, till the time another speaks to him, an enigma. He is not taken very seriously by the Arabs at first, and his desperation to belong, which stems from being an illegitimate child, grows to the point that he aches to be one among them. In *David Lean* (Manchester University Press, 2014), Melanie Williams suggests that his adoption of Arab garb is a sign “of his growing ease” in Arabia (157). As his successes grow, so does Lawrence’s ego. Phillips notes that Lawrence, at one point, believed that he and the Arabs were being led by God in their desert crusade (262). He is reminded of his mortality twice in the film, but pays no heed to it, though he grows increasingly disillusioned with the British manner of undercutting the Arabs, to whom Lawrence appears to have promised things beyond his pay grade.

Essentially, *Lawrence* is not squeamish about presenting its protagonist as a flawed man. Williams notes that the film is quite aware of this fact (160) and Santas backs that up with an assertion that Bolt and Lean believed Lawrence to himself be aware of his shortcomings in buying into his greatness (34). But Lawrence’s ego trumps his self-awareness on multiple occasions: he poses atop a derailed train only to be shot (2:32:10-2:33:30), and his excursion into Derra, one he is advised to not undertake, ends in a beating and sexual assault (2:50:54-2:58:18). His hubris is Lawrence’s undoing, repeatedly. Rather than take recourse, he wallows first in self-pity, and then feels the troubles of post-traumatic stress. As Phillips points out, he “turns out to be a man defeated by his own capacity for greatness” (309).

And then there is the more psychological probe that Lean makes of Lawrence’s character, arriving at a conclusion that the man’s triumphs, military and personal, were always underscored by guilt and doubt (Williams 160). He rescues Gasim, played by Indian actor Inderjeet Singh “I.S.” Johar, from certain death early on in his desert travels but is forced to execute him prior to the assault on Aqaba for a crime the man confesses to having committed. No sooner has Aqaba been captured that Lawrence sets off to make his report of the same to British higher command, a hurried endeavour in which Daud, one of the boys he has taken under his wing, pointlessly loses his life. His pursuit of refashioning himself in light of his birth is one that is persistent, and not even the sagacious Sherif Ali, who reminds him that he can be whoever he wants to be (Lawrence 2:59:01-3:02:02), can get him to see sense. Lawrence, in *Lawrence*, becomes one of the Arabs inasmuch as a White man can be, but full integration into the tribes evades him, though both Ali and Prince Feisel (played by Guinness) become great friends of his. Similarly, he is considered too odd a man to be a soldier by his first commanding officer, and his second uses him to such devious ends that Lawrence appears to be unsure of whether he would want to remain in His Majesty’s Service altogether.

Lawrence sets out to shape history, have no doubts about that. He is not deterred by his relatively low military rank, nor by his lack of social standing. A man from nowhere is determined to be of one of significance. His adoption of Arab garb ought to be viewed in those terms, of him embracing an identity of his choice. But as he sets out to shape history, he subscribes to the fables that have grown around him. He is deluded enough to believe he has a lasting solution to the qualms of the Arab chieftains and the tribes, whilst unbeknownst to him, Britain and France plan to carve up Arabia among themselves. Therein lies the tragedy of history in *Lawrence*: the protagonist fails to admit, even to himself, that he is not in control of the situation that is playing out. It leads to a degradation in not only his own eyes but in the eyes of those to whom he had promised their homeland. Despite his education, Lawrence is unable to look at himself as being insignificant in matters beyond the personal and he thus concedes the making of history quite shambolically.

In *Lawrence*, the tragedy of history and the historical tragic are intertwined, though that need not always be the case. Here the lives of those affected and the machinations at play produce a greater game than any Lawrence may have foreseen. The impact on his own self is limited: in fact, he gets exactly what he demanded on a personal level, whereas the Arabs to whom he promised the moon and more must look with eagle eyes to spot the most minuscule of sparkling dust in the wreckage of their lives.

As mentioned earlier, Lean does not supply all, or even most of the answers about Lawrence. In calling the film a “masterpiece of understatement”, Phillips points out that there is much in it that is just alluded to, merely implied (310). He is speaking primarily about character interactions but the statement holds true for the film as a whole. Lean immerses the viewer in a portrait of Lawrence which attracts a whole host of emotions. For a film about complex geopolitical wrangling and camels galloping in the desert, there is an almost unreal amount of personal engagement Lean creates for the viewer. One might dislike Lawrence but one is also adamant to see matters through to the end because he is such an arresting presence.

### **Doctor Zhivago (1965)**

Boris Pasternak’s novel became as infamous as it did famous even before it was published. First of all, the Soviet government refused to sanction its publication, hence it was smuggled out of the country to Italy, where it received its first print run. The anger the Soviets felt towards Pasternak only grew when the book secured

him a Nobel Prize for Literature, and he was informed that were he to travel to Sweden to receive the Prize, he would not be let back into his country.

No surprise then, that David Lean should be refused permission to shoot his adaptation of Pasternak's novel in the Soviet Union. He returned to Spain, where he had filmed *Lawrence of Arabia* (Columbia Pictures, 1962) and decided to film there instead. Robert Bolt, co-writer of *Lawrence*, now became the sole writer on *Zhivago*, aided in his quest to reframe and fit Pasternak's novel into a screenplay by Lean.

It is a film which is understandably intimate at first glance. Which love story is not? And *Zhivago* is, primarily, the story of the illicit love between the doctor-poet Yuri Zhivago and Larissa "Lara" Antipova. It so happens that the story, as a whole, takes place over the first half of the twentieth century, which naturally means it deals with the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 and life in the USSR as it came to be subsequently.

In a surprising reverse of his casting of Alec Guinness and Anthony Quinn, both White men, as Arabs in *Lawrence*, Lean chose, as *Zhivago*, the man who had been Sherif Ali. Rumour has it that even Omar Sharif could not believe Lean wanted him for *Zhivago*, and tried to dissuade the famously stubborn director, who would not relent. And so, an Egyptian came to be a Russian in one of the great Russian stories of its time. Filling in the cast were notables from the British acting circuit – veterans like Ralph Richardson stepped in, as did Guinness for what would be his penultimate collaboration with Lean, and newcomers flooded the sets in the forms of Julie Christie (Lara), Tom Courtenay (Pasha Antipov), Rita Tushingham (Tonya Komarova). Two Americans came by, too – the noted method actor Rod Steiger and Geraldine, the daughter of Charlie Chaplin.

In contrast to the active protagonists of *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (Columbia Pictures, 1957) and *Lawrence*, the titular character of *Zhivago* was a passive character. In Gene D. Phillips' *Beyond the Epic: The Life and Films of David Lean* (University of Kentucky Press, 2006), Lean is said to have reassured a concerned Sharif about his performance by telling him that *Zhivago* was "an observer", one who served as the sole link between all the characters of the story (338). In fact, this is the most repeated attribute assigned to *Zhivago*, that his passivity marks him out as a hero, for they are a kind who are only ever viewed as being active agents of one kind or another. *Zhivago*, while not necessarily comfortable, is, in Constantine Santas' view as elucidated in *The Epic Films of David Lean* (The Scarecrow Press, 2012), a unique hero by way of his passivity (73). Santas goes on to suggest that "[p]assive resistance may be just as worthy and heroic an act as shooting down a hated villain" (83). *Zhivago* never really does much to change the status quo. He stumbles through life, though not by design. It just so happens that he is temperamentally not the kind to create an alteration in the atmosphere that surrounds him. This also makes him different from the likes of Steiger's Viktor Komarovskiy, a Machiavellian if there ever was one, and Courtenay's Pasha, a man who will go to great lengths to effect the changes he believes society needs. Indeed, the one thing that *Zhivago* does do, even after the Bolshevik assumption of power renders private life as being obsolete, is that he dares to live and love those around him with the same passion and affection as he did in Tsarist Russia. It was this quality of *Zhivago*'s – his concern for the individual and his engagement with life's demands – that drew Lean to the story, to begin with (Phillips 327).

The Soviet insistence on the inconsequentiality of the individual is highlighted also by how absent *Zhivago* is through the first hour of the film, and how he remains a negotiator in his own quest for survival despite having done little wrong but write poems that the Party considers frivolous.

The clampdown on the individual life also means the likes of *Zhivago* and Lara, in order to pursue their relationship, must recapture their individuality in the most dynamic of situations, almost always fraught as they are with danger for who might be keeping an eye on whom. Despite the prevailing atmosphere of mistrust, not once does either character turn on the other, nor, for that matter, does *Zhivago*'s wife Tonya. These are people all forced to keep alive within themselves the capacity of human decency, a will to live, and an ability to love in a time where all of those are in grievously short supply.

Melanie Williams, in *David Lean* (Manchester University Press, 2014), points out how even the film's music is an attempt at refocusing the lens on *Zhivago*-Lara rather than focus on the Revolution: "Jarre adhered to Lean and Bolt's original aim of emphasising the more intimate personal story over the events which form their backdrop" (196).

None of this is to suggest the film views the Revolution as being altogether bad, rather its concern is with what it does specifically to the individual life and how arbitrary the whole mechanism of power, as exercised by the State, appears. This, Williams argues again, is what makes *Zhivago* stand out, for even in the direst of times, when he is beaten, he "is able to find beauty" (190), when those who rule the roost are hell-bent on creating a standardised view of the world for all subjects of the State to follow.

The historical tragic in the film appears through the dual loss *Zhivago* suffers when Lara is forced to move away



with her daughter, marked as she is by the State for having been married to Pasha Antipov alias Strelnikov, and by the already-damaging eviction from Russia of his uncle Alexander, of Tonya, and their two children (Santas 77). The circumstances are such that Zhivago cannot remedy the situation and, like his creator Pasternak, he is loathe to deprive himself of life in Russia.

The tragedy of history appears to dovetail through the historical tragic: one may assess them as being cause and effect, for the tragedy is not the Revolution, nor for that matter how it is brought about, but by what it transforms into at the whims and fancies of those who have brought it about.

*Zhivago* is, for a film that spends so much time outdoors, capturing not just scenic beauty but also mayhem, an almost internalised film, for so much gets buried within the protagonist as a result of the chaos that reigns supreme around him.

## Conclusion

The attempt, with this paper, has been to break new ground in understanding the cinema of David Lean, in particular those of his works that have been long classified as belonging to a certain genre of the artform and trying to see whether, through application of certain lenses and attempting a close reading of them could produce a slightly newer, different perspective.

It is my understanding that the paper explores this new space of looking at the epic as the intimate while first conceding the films' status as epics that are designed to enrapture their audience by the sweeping scale on which they are produced, before then examining how the films interact with their respective protagonists with a degree of intimacy not expected in a film of this kind. The paper reverses the idea of the big stage and the man on it by examining the scenarios that form the backdrop of the films whilst presenting the protagonists as the central element of the picture through which the backdrops are informed. It is my hope to be able to rework this more substantially over a period of time to arrive at a more concise and yet more thorough appreciation of Lean's cinema in the manner through which it has been examined in the paper.

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# **The One Who Doesn't Age**

## **Exploring the Vampire's Body in Bram Stoker's *Dracula***

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*Nishita Patel*

### **Introduction**

The Vampire, since its very conception, has been a mystery and a medium of horror, grotesque and death. It is seen as inhuman, unholy and evil. Though the character of the vampire has gained much popularity now in different narratives, it is still just as mysterious of a creature to decode. It is important to examine the reason that led to such a creation and the many ideas, identities and desires the vampire embodies within itself. The basic characteristics of a vampire that makes it non-human stems from a human desire to achieve all that is non-human like immortality, extreme strength and agelessness. This paper will look into the idea of human and non-human while exploring the body of the vampire through different stages i.e., the body which is about its conception, the desire which is about its mind and its development, and the death which is about its ultimate end. The novel *Dracula* by Bram Stoker will be used as a tool to look into the ideas of human desires, immortality and violence, and this will be done through the character of Count Dracula. The question of what makes a human will be asked alongside examining the non-human aspects of a vampire.

### **Beginning with the body**

“A very marked physiognomy” (Stoker 24). This is how Mr. Jonathan Harker describes Count Dracula upon their first meeting. Count Dracula, the infamous vampire from the novel *Dracula* by Bram Stoker embodies in himself all that is non-human but is presented in the form of a human body. The search for the reason why a dangerous creature is disguised as human can lead to an understanding that there is some human in the non-human. This distinction between the human and the non-human can be blurred through the vampire. “Produced through and in history, the body situates oneself in the world. We are not a ratio inserted in a body: we are our own body. It is from and through the body and its intruding affective force on our desires and emotions that we can make some sense of the reality around us” (Campello and Schmidt).

If we assume the body to be a channel which helps us understand the world around us, it makes sense to think that even the vampire would need bodily functions to understand the world around it, but what makes it different? The vampire is a dead human. It is human at its core and hence retains its body but now has a different experience in the world. “His hand grasped mine with a strength which made me wince, an effect which was not lessened by the fact that it seemed cold as ice – more like the hand of a dead than a living man” (Stoker 22).

The difference now becomes not about the body itself but what the body is capable of doing. Its capacities and its strengths are enhanced as a vampire. Count Dracula with his strength, his aversion to food but his thirst for blood now embodies violence, horror and ageless immortality in the same human body that was once incapable of producing such horror and violence. The body of the vampire represents several other anxieties of human existence but it is important to first examine it as a tool for human desire. “If the vampire stands for anything, that would be the lack of a sense of disconnection between one's self and the world, that lost state of complete fulfilment, which precedes the formation of the ego, while the desire to return to that state perpetually jeopardizes the adult subject's precarious self-identification” (Kuzmanovic 413).

The vampire can be situated within the realms of human mind and can be looked at as an idea that represents certain facets of human understanding. In order to understand the reason behind creation of the mythos of the vampire or the character of Count Dracula, it is essential to acknowledge the connection between the human and its unconscious mind in the context of the Victorian age. “One of the keys, perhaps the one that gives us entry into the deepest recesses of the morality which controlled both Victorian life and Victorian art, was the widespread hostility among Victorians to “mystery,” to the “daemonic,” to the irrational” (Madden 460). The horror felt by characters in the novel is their reaction to the unknown and the mysterious. They turn to God and religion time and again to seek protection from the inhuman creature and the terror that surrounds them. The presence of something holy in their minds means that the opposite also exists and a character like Dracula is a manifestation of everything that is unholy and opposes human morality.

This imagery of the inner desires or fears manifesting as creation of vampire can also be seen in parallel to

the idea of blood. The unknown mysteries of blood in our veins that an average human does not get to see is revealed. The concealed blood is out in the open and it is done by a horrific creature like the vampire. The idea of a vampire sucking out human's blood is a result of the anxieties around maintaining the health of a human. This can be seen clearly through the character of Lucy in the novel. The transfusion of blood is performed three times in order for her to regain her health but eventually she ends up dying. This also reveals that the idea of the "un-dead" comes from doubts and questions regarding the actual importance of scientific and real elements like 'blood' in making the 'human'.

The image of the vampire is the image of someone who doesn't sleep or eat, has extraordinary strength and looks quite peculiar. This can be analysed through the symptoms and bodily features of Count Dracula as given in the novel. His face was described as 'strong' with a thin nose and 'massive eyebrows' along with 'peculiarly sharp white teeth'. The sharpness of the teeth here seems necessary for someone who bites and sucks blood from humans but it also represents the animalistic and non-human portrayal of Dracula. Dracula also particularly loves the night-time where parallels can be drawn with 'bats' considering vampires themselves can transform into them. "I love the shade and the shadow, and would be alone with my thoughts when I may" (Stoker 31). The shade and the darkness can represent the death in this case.

The body of the vampire in itself represents the cycle of life and death carrying both within itself. "Blood running inside reflects the condition of life. Blood flowing outside indicates the end of life" (Inoue 89). Blood is internal and gives life. The death is represented by darkness. The blood being sucked by the figure of the night and being spilled represents the continuation of life in death and darkness. The character of the vampire takes a symbolic role in these terms and so does its body.

When it comes to the human body, there are certain limitations and there is always the truth of death. Dracula, being a vampire, overcomes most of these limitations like death, ageing, human speed and human's reliance on food and sleep. However, this creature remains dependent on human blood which if it contains all that is human deems unable to turn a vampire into human but rather takes it further away from humanity. The question posed here is what then makes Count Dracula a non-human. Is it the body? Or is it what the physical body embodies? The question here is what the idea of Dracula is and where it stems from and what desires of a human being it represents.

### **The Middle: Desire**

Once the body of the vampire is established as this 'walking dead' human who has traits quite peculiar and non-human, it can also be established that the vampire is a nearly perfect human being. Count Dracula for example, is a well-read, rich and powerful figure in the novel. He has his own library and he spends much time researching and learning. There is an aura of sophistication in such a depiction of the vampire. It shows that a human can be all these things if they had the time or the ability to master something quickly. All of this makes the vampire a nearly perfect human minus the violence that it embodies. But would a human not resort to violence and power exertion if they had all that a vampire has? The vampire has an upper hand not just physically but mentally as well and in today's world, especially in the age of technological advancements, we can see the desire for human perfection leading to destruction which is similar to that of a vampire.

The task of defining 'human' is a difficult one. One of the many ways it is defined is, "representative of or susceptible to the sympathies and frailties of human nature" ("Definition of Human"). The nature and the inner psyche of a human plays much role in making something human. If we take this understanding of 'human' into account, then the same parameter can be used to understand the 'non-human' as well. The dichotomy of these two terms goes beyond 'the body' and stems from the mental aspect that creates a split. However, these two terms are still rooted in each other's understanding.

In the novel, Count Dracula does not hesitate before killing. All the men in the ship carrying the 'earth boxes' are killed by him and he spares no mercy on anyone. His mere presence is terrifying for people. "The sight seemed to paralyze me" (Stoker 60). The desire to act on violence and the non-human nature can similarly be analysed in serial killers who are often seen as one of the vampires. "Many cases where a vampire identity has been assigned, such as offenders who murdered victims and drank their blood, are obvious" (Browning and Williams 65). In cases like these, there is nothing non-human in physical terms about these criminals but the split that happens, takes place on a mental level. It can be deduced that the vampire that we know, is a part of the human and human desire to be or do something beyond the norms. It can also be deduced that the body of the vampire as we know today and the physical aspects of it were perhaps assigned later to this creature to match its non-human tendencies. The desire of human is also to create the other, the evil that can embody all that is beyond normal.

When the topic of human desire is approached, there are many tangents it can move towards but looking at it from an ideal lens and looking at the historical context of the novel Dracula, the very natural desire to achieve

immortality and eternal good health seems normal. Any difficulty a human being faces, the desire is to erase it completely. Through the character of the vampire, a human can live this desire. If we look at the case of poverty and starvation during Victorian times, creation of a being who does not need food or sleep seems like the perfect fantasy. The vampire embodies other human desires like youth and agelessness. It does not age and has immense strength and speed at all times. Other than the physical features, the desire to have violent, powerful and life-threatening characteristics is often resisted by humans and hence the vampire and its fantasy gives the 'human' freedom to be 'non-human' on a mental level. "A desire that is rejected in such a conflict is not eliminated; indeed, it may still have power over us, and actually move us to act" (Penelhum 310). The suppressed human desires hence, come out in the form of creation of a dangerous myth.

The other character from the novel apart from Count Dracula who helps us understand on some level the capabilities of a human mind and its desires is Renfield. His 'madness', as referred to by Dr. Seward, always came from some kind of inner desire, inner attraction towards what Count Dracula had to offer him. When he starts keeping pets, there is also in him a desire to love that is disguised by his madness. His 'animalistic' behaviours that shock everyone like eating his birds raw come from a desire to become something. It is revealed later that he is a very logical man but his human desires along with Count Dracula take over him easily. "A kitten, a nice little, sleek, playful kitten, that I can play with, and teach, and feed – and feed – and feed!" (Stoker 76). The desire to feed and eat is somewhere a desire to be loved and to be filled with love. "The motivation to eat is not merely driven by a desire for nutrients and satiety; emotional, and psychological processes play an important role as well. Emotional states affect when people eat, how much they eat, and which food items they choose to consume" (Hamburg et al. 2).

If we examine the character of Count Dracula and the mythos of the blood sucking vampire, we can deduce that the feeding of blood is a form of satiating a desire to be fulfilled, to be whole and by that logic, be human again. This makes this process cyclic as a non-human driven with human desire tries to be 'human' again. However, the end of the vampire happens with the end of its human body because as the 'un-dead' and the 'walking-corpse', it begins to embody death.

### **In the end**

The vampire is created as an endless being. It does not fear death because it has already defeated it owing to its own existence. This parameter can be used to differentiate between the human and the non-human in the form of a vampire. However, the final stage of eternal youth, agelessness and immortality that the vampire ends up achieving is a result of human's aversion towards ageing and mortality.

The ageing body is one of the biggest limitations that humans have. Ageing has physical, mental and social consequences and it affects every human leading them slowly towards death. But what is the true end of a human? In the novel the character of Lucy, once dead, ends up becoming a vampire. Her true end becomes the end of her vampiric non-human form when she is killed as a vampire. The same happens to Count Dracula at the end of the novel. The one who does not age ends up withering away in the end. The idea of eternal youth in a vampire is a representation of human's ageist tendencies. The example of the three lady vampires in the Castle of Count Dracula who were dangerous but Jonathan wanted them to kiss him, mesmerised by their beauty showing the superficiality which is also what a vampire embodies.

The desire of immortality comes from a place of fear of death and it is again the unknown mystery of death that scares humans. The idea of horror is to perhaps take that fear out and give it a shape, form or a name. Almost every character in Dracula except Count Dracula himself faces the terrorising fear of death and this constant play is perhaps to know the aftermath of death and what lies beyond death. This fear of death perhaps, is what makes human a human. "What distinguishes man from the other animals, according to Hobbes, is foresight and hence the awareness of death. Man is the mortal being who is aware that he is such" (Ahrens Dorf 580).

The question that arises is that if the human desire for immortality is achieved through the character of a vampire, then why is it important that a character like Count Dracula dies? Why does the vampire's immortality have a limit? In the novel, the aversion of characters towards all that is evil is constantly seen along with the mention of religious elements like the Crucifix to counter the evil. If the theory of mental split between human and non-human is to be taken and the vampire is to be seen as the manifestation of a human's non-human desires, then we can see the death of the vampire as the death of the non-human and triumph over the evil. The double death is to clear out both the human and the non-human of evil as a form of catharsis and maintain ultimate peace.

### **Conclusion**

As the vampire's physical body and what it embodies is examined in various ways using its body, its mind and its death, it is important to know that certain questions are difficult to answer completely. However, this paper helps in understanding the human through analysing a creation that is completely non-human. Count Dracula

represents everything that a human is afraid of becoming and this character reminds a human that there is a strangeness present in every human being. The question of why someone would conceive the character of a vampire is still not properly answered but it could be to understand their own self, their own human mind. The question of what a human projects onto the non-human vampire's body and what it embodies can be explored in much more detail. The death of the vampires in the novel and the specific ritual used to kill them is something that can be looked into along with the shapeshifting abilities of a vampire and can be a point of further research. The body of the vampire contains many mysteries within it and the study of each mystery can lead to numerous answers. However, it cannot be studied in isolation but must be studied alongside human nature, its body, its desires, its existence and its death.

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# Integration of Public Spaces into Personal Stories: An Exploration in Jayant Kaikini's *No Presents Please*

Poornima Shree TM

## Introduction

Spaces are interactive. There is a definitive division of spaces. Public space is defined as a space where public interaction is possible in relation to private spaces. The public space becomes part of the identity and experiences of the urban dwellers. The mapping of the city in the dweller's eyes is intensely connected to their experiences.

Public spaces in urban cities construct spaces for interaction both at collective and individual levels. At collective levels, the public spaces become the base for a sense of interaction between strangers who in turn become part of memories. Monuments are the symbols of past history and a part of collective memory. Space is not merely physical or geographical in nature. But rather it is the place of communication, interaction with fellow beings, power play, and social groups are formed. Social space is constructed through laymen, power structures, and classification. For an individual, spaces become the sites of interaction with their feelings, emotions, opinions and their belief system is influenced by it.

Space and identity are closely related by being interdependent on each other. Symbolic spaces are created as one interact with the social structures and the space. It is deeply rooted in their experiences personally and how society sees them. Perceptions of an individual and the characterization of the buildings are interesting to watch. The history of a public structure and the places in the city becomes a part of a city dweller's experience but they construct a different meaning as a part of their own personal story and in the construction of identity.

Jayant Kaikini is a Kannada writer, poet, lyricist, columnist, and scriptwriter. Multifaceted Kaikini takes us along to Mumbai to the deep corners of the city where people from all classes and places try to find space for living while holding onto their wonders and desires. This paper will examine the process by examining stories from Jayant Kaikini's short story collection *No Presents Please*. The stories which will be explored in this paper are 'Opera House', 'Gateway' and 'Water'.

Usually, fiction and many pieces of writing hold cities and public spaces to be a background, describing them to be a perfect setting and holding aspirations for characters. There has been a wide study in the field examining the difference between symbolic space and social space. The definition of public spaces has been redefined many times ending with a common definition "public space is that space where 'the public' is formed and thus social and cultural rules governing public behaviour predominate" (Mitchell D).

The public areas become emblematic of the memories and identities of those who visit them. Public spaces consist of roads, restaurants, parks, bus stops, monuments, tourist attractions and part of the urban landscape where people interact with each other outside their homes. Public spaces are connected to memories by being symbolic of their histories or culture.

Bourdieu in his essay "Social Space and Symbolic Power" speaks about how spaces are given meaning symbolically and how it becomes a place of social exchange in the eyes of a person. "The concept of social memory has been linked to the development of emotional and ideological ties with particular histories and geographies" (Johnson 294).

In this aspect, social memory and individual memories vary with place and time. There is an increased interest in understanding the relationship between memory and public spaces. There has been quite some research in understanding monuments commemorating histories and past and their role in constructing identities.

Mumbai has a diverse urban landscape with people both natives and migrants flocking in for a better livelihood. Their lives are pretty dormant and contained within kotis but the city's spirit gives them an identity.

In this context, Kaikini's Mumbai has rich descriptions of spaces and characters living in the untold corners of the city. Kaikini's collection of short stories has not been looked at in this way, its delicate intricacies in helping shape the characters are fascinating.

## **Two points of view**

Perspectives of space build out of two different points of view. They are subjectivism and objectivism. Pierre Bourdieu in his essay 'Social space and Symbolic power' said that these two perspectives "can reduce the social world to the representations of that agents have of it" (15). Objectivism is the belief based on the fact that it is built out of reality as subjectivity sees the understanding of the landscape in relation to the human emotions and concerns (What is the basic idea of Objectivism?).

Objectivist sees the points of reality which constitutes of organisation of several units of structures, basically it talks about the constituents of social reality and other factors. It includes economic condition, the political climate, and the history of the city itself (What is the basic idea of Objectivism?).

Subjectivist outlook based on human behaviour and desires helps in the construction of the city in its magnificence. There is a constant interaction between these two to produce reality in the city dweller's eyes. When reality is constructed for the individual, objective concerns are established but at the same time governed to a certain extent by the population's practices and beliefs.

Mumbai is more than just an urban city. It is the melting pot of cultures. The laid social topography of the society has significantly changed from the early British period to the present day.

Objectivism and subjectivism together produce the plurality of identity. The city's landscape comprises physical space, physical structures, and the people in it. Plurality of identity includes various factors including gender, occupation, and many more. Everyday interactions and experiences build the relationship of an individual with a space. But here I am looking at the subjectivist reality that is constructed in the character's eyes in relation with their mindset and their perception of public structures.

## **Mumbai's History**

Mumbai is a city in Maharashtra with more than 20 million in population higher than any other metro cities in India. It has its own rich history which claims its uniqueness and glory. Mumbai is one of the important cities both with its rich history and culture influenced by both colonial British and later influences.

The city is filled with historic colonial buildings, the famous "Gateway of India" and many other sites constructed by the British during the colonial era. Originally it was a seven island-city that was surrendered to Portugal in 1534.

Later on, the city was passed on to British hands in 1661 as dowry when England's King Charles II married his Portuguese consort Catherine of Braganza. It was leased to the East India Company by the king where the company made its headquarters in 1687. Trade expanded and its significance grew and Bombay became a commercially important hub. Bombay's cityscape represented Victorian London in some sense with similar architecture and style of buildings in the city. As the city had undergone changes in several decades, there has been a change in symbolic significance as well (K Amit).

Mumbai is a city with a diverse population. While most of the narratives set in Mumbai are about middle-class people with white-collar jobs like working in the IT industry and corporate businesses, government employees and small business owners. There are stories that live in the unexplored corners beyond the high-rise buildings in dingy chawls and kotis. The people who live here are daily wage workers, hawkers, office-goers, theater cleaners, factory workers and slum dwellers with 'n' number of aspirations and desire. Their lives are left unetched in the annals of literature, rather than being captured in 'filmy' style, Kaikini inspects their journey from their eyes in real life. The simplicity and the humbleness of life is sowed upon the readers.

These people are migrants with different homelands and different cities, they are susceptible and vulnerable in some terms. But they do not have a proper identity, subjected to different cruelties of life, they live an unstable life with the fear of their homes being snatched away and other threats. But they tend to establish their identities in the city itself. Although there is a sense of rootedness, the permanency of monuments and public spaces is emblematic of the idea of permanency and accessibility.

The monuments and the buildings of this age symbolise a reason for their original builders and now, it has been transformed to become a public monument and a different purpose.

These monuments and public spaces become the space of interaction of all kinds of individuals. Mumbai is a city where the different worlds of strangers intermesh to give a space for interaction for the whole vibrant city.

## **Identities and Spaces**

Identities are built based on facts, the knowledge that has been passed on from generations, cultural impact, economic and social construct. The contributing factors include the history of the city itself. Spaces are transformed in a sense through the experience of people.

Individuals and power politics play in the distribution of the space and quality of living. The city and the areas described in the books have their own charm, writing the fate of the character in his own eyes. An interesting feature of Kaikini's stories is that it explores Mumbai streets and the areas in general.

There are public monuments that have their own history. The Gateway of India has its own history and is emblematic of the colonial past. It was constructed in 1911 to commemorate the landing of King George V and Queen Mary at Queen Bunder. It started serving "as a symbolic ceremonial entrance to India for Viceroy and the new Governors of Bombay" (Gateway of India).

In the story 'Gateway', stability and rootlessness are visible in the highest sense. This is a story about a middle-aged man trying to find a decent job in Mumbai who encounters failure but learns the meaning of life at the end. The Victorian buildings transcribe the power it is emblematic of and the carelessness that the employers display towards the interviewees like Sudhanshu. The Victorian buildings are remnants of colonial past and power which is indicative of the British's way of treating Indians when they held power. These buildings metaphorically assert the power to these employers who are mentioned in this story.

A definition of the new world and space is questioned from the beginning which is not answered until Gateway and its existence are evoked. So, it is apparent that spaces have a subjective nature which happens in the eyes of the protagonist. The subtle sense of space to evolve over time has its distinct forms of power and the impact at different point of time in different people's memories. Sudhanshu paved the time to be the key to the memories of spaces being the masterpieces of the time period itself. The moment Sudhanshu sees Paali, his wife near the Gateway, a moment of realization happens-it's a series of memories that help him in constructing the changing nature of this space. Here, he mentions Gateway as "Is the Gateway showing us how to live with the rest of the world?" (Kaikini 94). Gateway of India has a specific image in the tourist's and the passer's mind. But here in Sudhanshu's mind, it had acquired its own significance. It liberates him of his misery metaphorically and giving him a new sense of viewing life. Here, the public monument gave a sense of safety and security to him in the form of a moment of epiphany.

In the story, 'Opera House', the places transcend to being different spaces over a different period of time. This story is about Indranil who works in the Opera House, a cinema theater and his journey of returning a thermos which was left behind in the theater to its owner.

The history of 'Opera House' is narrated to be a theater for dance-dramas and plays which later transformed to cinema theater. This evolution of the treatment of the place exhibits the constant change in the attitude of people and time. Emblematic of its own uniqueness, its purpose has changed but the workers still hold on to its memories. There are two kinds of life in the city of Mumbai-the day and the night.

The Opera House symbolizes the glory of the past where people flocked to watch plays and dance performances. It saw several jubilees. The destruction of the three other theaters in Andheri saw the replacement of the old with a new shopping mall. But the memories that people who have visited there hold the same significance of the fallen structures.

Indranil, who works in the theater has built the space to be his own at some point. This becomes a home to him in which he is regularly employed. His world is constructed among these walls and the city becomes the true room of comfort for him. The transformation of characters in the story always happens in the city and not in their homes. Indranil's world had interwoven with the whole area of Opera house described as "Indranil wove his little world around the Opera house theater" and "gotten used to idea that the whole neighbourhood was his home" (Kaikini 39).

In this section, Indranil who was unaware of his identity and was homeless, made the theater his home, and his perception of the area transformed into part of his story. The locality added to his identity. The people and the buildings there hold a special meaning to him. His whole identity in terms of perceptions and beliefs surrounded this region. For instance, Indranil when he kept the flask, it became a part of his living like "the spirit of the Opera House, speaking to the carved wooden ceilings, sewing the silver projection screen, cleaning the smudges left on Saavli's face by her eyeliner, blowing at the flame of channawala's burner.." (Kaikini 46). These descriptions are about the Opera House and its inhabitants which had become a part of his life. When people left Opera Theatre after hearing about its closure, he did not budge, this shows the depth of



attachment he has with the theatre.

The public structures, its age-old stories, and the relationship it shares with its present inhabitants have the charm of its own. The space becomes their home. Maganbai who works at the theater points to how it has shielded and constructed a life for them in it. In one of the instances, he says “This is our home, if we don’t look after it, who will?” (Kaikini 45). From this, it is deducible that the characters interweave their experiences into the space.

The building in each corner has a story to tell. Immortalizing the buildings becomes possible through memories and the connections that are made.

The description of the Opera House Theater, its sculptures, and the three balconies with its intricate décor ‘drowned in darkness’ saw the life of the ordinary being pushed behind by splendor and the power of the city. Once glorious goes to a state of neglect at the end. The characters in the story who are working in the theater set the standards of their world according to their duty. The transformation of the building transforms the mood of the scene and the space, the interaction gets better.

In the story ‘Water’, the rains seem to be a reason bringing a halt to people’s movement and lives for a brief moment. It felt more like a pause, stating that their lives and plans are now being altered by the space which is water-logged and has heavy traffic. The FM radio in the taxi kept playing messages from city dwellers who were stuck in the rain to ensure their safety and whereabouts. Here, the public spaces are now transformed into personal spaces, meaning the people now take their place.

Chandrahaas, Santhoshan and the taxi driver, Kunjbihari who were stuck in the main road saw the city and the people becoming one. Spaces and situations influence people’s actions. There is a sense of living in the whole crisis. The streets filled with life seem to stand still when the rains lashed heavily. There is less hope but the spirit of the city still amazes the reader. The immediacy of the need is more attainable, strangers helping passersby, volunteers directing the walkers, hotels, and shops giving shed for the stuck, humanity is visible, here the community living is promoted. Spaces may be open to public or privately owned and can have their own significance but under circumstances, it transforms to be a part of the common space of interaction.

Here public structures do not only include monuments alone but rather structures in public that may or may not have historical importance. But rather they are part of the usual landscape. Mumbai is described as having “less space” in one of his interviews by Kaikini (Kaikini). The lives of people overlap in a way as it is densely populated, the working and the middle class face an issue of space, so kotis is one such system where houses are small and closely situated next to each other. They are usually one-room kotis with a small verandah.

Kaikini has managed to capture the nearness being the lens through which people’s lives intermingle. In ‘Spare Pair of Legs’, the one-room kotis is where most of the narrative stays most of the time.

The symbolism here contributes to the memory-making process in general. There is a rootlessness in the story. Characters in this story have allotted a structure with their own meaning to find the rootedness. In Gateway, the tall telephone tower stood as a background. But as Sudhanshu’s thoughts framed it to be a tomb so the features become an emblem of the character’s thoughts in general.

## **Conclusion**

Kaikini had given the charm of the city to being a mother looking over the children and being the trademark of chaos with a distinctive charm. Spaces transform under the influence of the characters and the physical structures. Mumbai as a city has a unique spirit with metaphors, similes and images exposing it in Kaikini’s stories. Kaikini had said in one of his interviews that “Mumbai has the ability to liberate someone’s resume or biodata” of a person’s epiphany and provides liberating freedom from their insecurities and other feelings. Although dense in population and less in space, it carries the idea of freedom and a moment of bringing together the people as a whole. Public spaces emblematically transform according to the character’s story and memories.

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# When a Modern Malory Meets the Fabled King

## A reading of John Steinbeck's *The Acts of King Arthur and His Noble Knights*

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Amylin Ben Thomas

### Introduction

Then Merlin said, “ Let everyone sit quietly and do not move, for now begins the age of marvels, and you’ll see strange happenings ”( Steinbeck 87).

The world knows him as the creator of ‘ The Grapes of Wrath, ‘ Of Mice and Men ’ and ‘ East of Eden ’; but he wanted to be known as the sublime-teller of his first love( Steinbeck, note by Chase Horton p. 294), the Arthurian legends. Just like his time and study at Stanford University was left untreated, his times of work on ‘ The Acts of King Arthur and His Noble Knights ’ – From the Winchester Calligraphies of Thomas Malory and Other Stories is an deficient work( neither edited nor corrected by John Steinbeck). It couldn’t be more dramatic than this, as it was John Steinbeck’s death that had to put an end to his jotting. Steinbeck started his work in 1956, and it was published posthumously in 1976 with just seven chapters and ending it with maybe, the topmost knight of the Round Table – Sir Lancelot of the Lake. Steinbeck was a strong religionist that this work would be his best, it would be what the world remembers him for. “ John Steinbeck spent months of his life in England exploring Arthurian locales and living in a medieval cabin in Sommerset rewriting Malory with a biro cache stuck into a goose quill ”( Hardymont 10).

The intended followership for this work were children, a work that neither rewrote nor reduced, that neither sapped nor sentimentalized Malory, but kept all the grown-up content and the length of the original. “ There are several effects I’ll not do. I’ll not clean it up ”( Steinbeck 291). King Uther Pendragon sees the beautiful Igraine, and falls in love with her, who’s formerly married to Gorlois the Duke of Cornwall. Steinbeck was of the opinion that children are able of not just understanding but accepting these effects, until they’re confused by moralities which try by silence to exclude the realities thrown at them. “ These men had women and I ’m going to keep them. ”( Steinbeck 291). Elly McCausland says that Acts holds a complicated relationship with child and nonage, and isn’t respectable moment as a textbook for child compendiums despite the author’s intention as penned in the proslution. This is rather a textbook about the child( the child in Steinbeck) than for the ‘child ’. The resonances of nonage that Steinbeck draws out indeed in the ‘ Herod moment ’ of King Arthur where he orders the slaughter of children in response to the vaticination that one of those would grow up to master him, which he himself addresses as the nastiest in literature; is mind- boggling. This wasn’t Tennyson’s puritanical Malory with all the durability and brutality taken out. This being said, the final chapter describing the death of Lancelot, wherein all of the knight’s physical prowess is rendered useless in front of the four queen witches, a beautiful creation of how Lancelot resorts to recalling the imaginative tricks of magic he learnt as a child to subdue his rigors, speaks loud of the power of nonage imagination and fantasy which helps Sir Lancelot to come out as the victor, in a nearly loosing game. Then again the Americanising of words is apparent, which gets the upper hand as opposed to the fine old English language. What Malory did to the English legend beings, is what Steinbeck did to the Arthurian legends. The psychological underpinnings, of how the stories of Merlin’s influences, the tragedy of Sir Lancelot of the Lake, is where Steinbeck’s magic and creativity are apparent in the adaptation. Joseph Campbell’s understanding of retellings would define this work of Steinbeck, from where we know that it isn’t the derivate of operation to the ultramodern day, but is the illumination of hints from the inspired past a ‘ retelling ’ needs to contribute to. Jackson J. Benson states that Steinbeck’s new direction involved not just an attempt to bring life to his narrative and make the stories more his own, but to use the Malory to say what he wanted to say about his own time. He wanted to make the Arthurian story speak to us, just as Malory had used the legends to speak to the fifteenth century.( Benson 858)

“Return of King Arthur British and American Arthurian Literature since 1800” edited by Beverly Taylor and Elisabeth Brewer has in the description the following, “ The reanimation of interest in Arthurian legend in the 19th century was a remarkable miracle, supposedly at odds with the spirit of the age. ”( Taylor and Brewer). Mark Twain’s “ A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court ”, is among the most read accommodations of the Arthurian Legend. This work too aims in modernising the myth, but with a lot of Twain’s originality and twists. Twain’s modernising isn’t of the language or the style. It’s with the themes of the British Arthur; we see the Yankee tale travel. However, this American work, debunks similar unrealistic norms, if Malory and to an

extent Steinbeck kept the infallibility of a noble complete. Alan and Barbara Lupack describe Twain's use of the Arthurian myth in *Connecticut Yankee* is important for numerous reasons for one, it lacks the acceptance of romantic ideals typical of important nineteenth-century literature; it rejects the notion of the knights of Camelot as models of virtue, an approach that's common in both literature and social associations told by Tennyson; and it designedly deflates what Twain regards as the erudite and moral pretensions of the utopia of the King. (Nayak 2) On the other hand Steinbeck's textbook will remain a faithful-telling of the original, and its focus on individual psychology was in tune with the social currents of its time and the rising significance of individuality in America.

The psychological and emotional investment in the details of medieval warfare, his modern adaptations to the Lancelot love story, and his own original contributions to the adventures of the Round Table knights- Sir Gawain, Sir Ewain, and Sir Marhalt gives us an ingenious version of the tales. Malory's paradigmatic legends is evidently portrayed to the readers of today powerfully, in a manner that bridges their spiritual, natural, and also intellectual manifestations. When Lady Igraine is first mentioned, Malory comments about her as a 'fair lady' and as being 'passing wise'. We then see her when she hears that her husband is dead and, in some way, she cannot understand she was tricked—Malory says, "Thenne she marvelled who that knight that lay with her in the likeness of her lord. So, she mourned pryvely and held her pees." But for his young readers Steinbeck translates it as follows "And later, when news came to Igraine that her husband was dead, and had been dead when the form of him came to lie with her, she was troubled and filled with sad wonder. But she was a wise woman, alone now, and afraid, and she mourned her lord in private and did not speak of it" (Steinbeck 19). These lines bear it all. A woman all alone in a hostile and mysterious world, could only afford to be wise with her actions and reactions if she desires to survive. While Malory's people knew exactly the aura created, it has to be fed to a modern reader Steinbeck thinks; the need of a fifteenth century women to be extremely wise, swallowing her pride and inquisitions and to keep it all to herself and move on.

What about the writing is naturalistic, and modern, complicated, and Steinbeckian? The well-developed round characters, cosmopolitan worldly interests, and inevitable multiple points of view it carries; multi-dimensional interactions and characterizations - all with modern appeal using the modern language but within the traditional literary heritage of the Arthurian genre, motifs and places qualify a rewriting sect just, and more as Steinbeck desired to achieve. Steinbeck gives his best in understanding Sir Thomas Malory's point of view. He is certain that Arthur was more than just a character, he is more than just an emulation or the 'qualities of a medieval warrior transferred into one being. Arthur is Malory's hero. We see that what alienates this hero from Malory is the former's reality of being a king. A fifteenth century king could do no wrong. A principle which was in full force. His faults were the blame of his counsellors. If he could do no wrong, the factor of pity is removed. But in spite of this Malory has him sin with his half-sister and draw his own fate down on him. A lot of considerations and understanding of Malory's work, towards the end took a toll on Steinbeck, who didn't even consider anymore Malory's state of mind and the source of his ideation as that necessary or important. But Steinbeck adds his gleanings of Malory's view point, in modernising the characters in his work. From the Round Table episode, Steinbeck feels that, "From this point on Arthur becomes a hero and almost without character. But this is the nature of all heroes and to make him human might be a revolution. God knows he is surrounded by humans and maybe that is necessary—the contrast." (Steinbeck 336) This is certainly an unfinished manuscript, but not an incomplete reading.

No one is to open this book and expect any Steinbeckian magic from the first syllable. And that was precisely what his agent and editor opined. They expressed their concern over the direction this book embraced, having read the initial chapters. This constant dilemma and desire and his decision to stay faithful to the original piece, was the hardest battle he had to fight. And it is this very thing that contributed to the ceasing of the work, he always dreamed to have accomplished. We end up requesting the American writer to have his own style inculcated and if that were to happen, we would have had a classic fantasy in display. The advice from his allies combined with Steinbeck's growing comfort with the project, gave him the confidence to tell the story the way he felt it ought to be told, regardless of Malory's precedent. Steinbeck's writing comes to life over the course of the two chapters "The Death of Merlin" and "Morgan Le Fay." We see that happening paragraph by paragraph. For the very first time the characters are animated and brought to life, we can see them walk and talk. The longer the descriptions, the realer and tangible the land they inhabit becomes. Observations on the nature of humanity, is what makes John Steinbeck the great writer he is. And we see that transformation start in these chapters and is consummated in the last and longest chapters: "Gawain, Ewain, and Marhalt" and "The Noble Tale of Sir Lancelot of the Lake." These latter chapters are such masterpieces that is seen appreciating the joys and agonies of life, and are paragraphs that give us comedy and action. Truly Steinbeck is seen turning over a new leaf, and definitely for the better. Surprisingly, letting go of the fidelity he held so close, we see Steinbeck create new scenes and ponders deep into his characters something Malory never did and also carves his women characters with such dignity and empathy, scarce in Malory's time. The handsome selfishness of Sir Gawain, Sir Ewain's extraordinary training under one of the most believable women warriors, in fiction – Old damsel Lyon and the bittersweet stab at romance and, the tragic encounter with giant of Sir Marhalt. Topping it all, the superhuman abilities and immutable determination of this knight in contrast to his vulnerabilities

that is unleashed by Guinevere herself, seen in Sir Lancelot are too precious and wonderful to not be reckoned with.

The case in point, for how Steinbeck had it streamlined is set up in the chapter ‘ The marriage of King Arthur ’ where the king asks Merlin if he should take a woman and secure his successor. Merlin agrees and Arthur reveals his love. I love Guinevere, the heir of King Lodegrance of Camylarde. She’s the fairest and noblest miss I’ve seen. Merlin asked, “And surely Guinevere is as lovely as you say, but if you don’t deeply love her, I could find another good and beautiful enough to please you.” Merlin added, “ Well also, if I should tell you that Guinevere was an unfortunate choice ” and prophesized she “ will be treacherous to you with your love and utmost trusted friend. ” Arthur refused to believe Merlin’s warnings. The mage sorely said, “ Every man who has ever lived holds tight the belief that for him alone the laws of probability are cancelled out by love. Indeed I, who know beyond mistrustfulness that my death will be caused by a silly girl, won’t vacillate when that girl passes by.( Steinbeck 83- 84) In the chapter “ The Death of Merlin ”, the wizard pursues the Damsel Nyneve but, he knew that his fate was on him, for his heart swelled like a boy’s heart in his aged bone and his desire crushed his times and his knowledge. Merlin wanted Nyneve further than his life, as he’d provisioned. He pursued her with his wishes and would not let her rest Merlin knew what was passing to him and knew its fatal end, and still he couldn’t help himself, for his heart idolised on the Damsel of the Lake.( Steinbeck 103) The ultramodern dimension added to the love of Lancelot and Guinevere, where the physical closeness of love is emphasized and not just the stately or platonic love set up in the Arthurian love corpus is set up in the lines “ Their bodies locked together as though a trap had been sprung. Their mouths met and each devoured the other. Each frantic heart beat at the walls of caricatures trying to get to the other until their held breaths burst out and Lancelot, dizzied, set up the door and blundered down the stairs. ”( Steinbeck 288)

## Conclusion

This adaptation as genuine, as one could describe is far from being classified as a great or classic work. However, why should one engage with this? An Arthurian would be quenched with the response stated: a ‘ modernized Malory ’ written by a fabulous American author won’t fail to pull in the devout Arthurian or Steinbeckian, If so, an admixture of a legendary English king, Arthur from around the sixth century, Malory the knight and writer from the fifteenth century, and the doomed hunt of the erudite mammoth of the twentieth century makes the literal composition of the work commodity to look forward to. Writing of his story, Steinbeck concludes, “ I suppose I’m breathing some life into it but perhaps not enough ”( Steinbeck excursus. 298).

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# Translations

# In between...

**T**ranslation takes us to different cultures quicker than anything we know. As much as one can argue that translation can leave out the essence of a particular language, it is nonetheless better to have some of the essence than none. The English language becomes a medium to study not just one language but brings to us a host of other languages, from near and afar. It is because of translation that subjects like World Literature and Indian Literatures exist, and we are much more connected thus to the cultures of the world.

In a multilingual country like India, translations come to the rescue of the reader. We are more connected as a nation because translations exist.

In a course where one reads literature of all kinds, it is fitting that the students also become translators. The works in this section are translated from different languages of India and also contain a note by the author regarding their experiences during the process of translation.

# Using a Thorn to Remove a Thorn

A translation of the Silvester D'Souza Mysore story from Konkani by *Samantha Coelho*

Once upon a time, our foolish Pascu got up in the morning, ate cold congee (rice porridge), like every day, wore his dress, and went out. Oh! Where, you ask? He went to roam around the village. And for what? Where did he go? Nowhere! What did he bring? Nothing! He was like those useless roaming boys. His grandmother had already left for the market in the morning carrying the eatables on her head to sell. Early in the morning when the cock crows, she gets up and starts cooking food. Do you know what snacks she cooks? Golibaje, Chathembade, Podi, etc... In those days, there was no drought for oil and its prices had not touched the sky because they were able to save it! Let the poor old woman live now.

See that old woman, she is an active person. Do you understand? These statements should not be said lightly. Not a single second she will sit quietly. The whole day she will aarentathali (continuously mumble). Just like the saying "As God is for everyone, I am for myself", when everyone was busy with their work, this poor old woman was working without asking for help from anybody. How many goods can she sell? She was just trying to stand on her own feet without anyone's help.

Let it be, we will get back to Pascu who went roaming. Let us see how far he reached. Walking, walking, didn't he reach a faraway jungle? Once he reached there, he saw a thick-skinned animal under a peepal tree. He had only seen bullocks ploughing and running in the paddy fields full of water. The animal in the forest looked like those bullocks. But our foolish Pascu found a strange body part attached to the animal.

"Arre Deva! (OMG!) This bullock has four penises! What strange thing is this?", he thought to



*Jotham Judson*

himself. The animal that he saw was not a bullock, but a buffalo. And seeing the udder of the buffalo, the foolish fellow thought it was four penises!

He found one stranger thing: the buffalo had one calf with it. A little while ago it had given birth to it. Watching it, Pascu became stiff like a statue. He had never seen a bullock giving birth to a calf. That poor fellow had never seen a buffalo also. So what did Pascu do after seeing this strange animal?

First, Pascu looked left and right. There was nobody nearby. He thought, 'I've got one bullock and its calf!' He became very happy. He concluded, 'Let me take both of them to my house.' He took one stick and said, "Hoyth!"

Listening to Pascu's scream, do you know what that buffalo did

then? It got very angry thinking, 'Who is this useless who has come to aadoong (headbutting) me? And didn't I just give birth to the calf?' It thought he had come to take away its calf and became agitated. It came running to hit Pascu with its horns, scaring him out of his wits.

Thinking that he would die if he stayed there, Pascu shouted "Arre Deva! (OMG!) I am dead!" He started running. Running, running, he reached the field where he saw one cunning man coming from the front.

"Mama! See there, one bullock has given birth to a calf, Mama!" said Pascu.

Hearing this the man felt like laughing. He had come in search of his pregnant buffalo. After listening to Pascu, he realised that



Pascu was foolish. "Where?" he asked Pascu. He led him to the peepal tree in the forest. Who led him? Of course, Pascu did. After reaching the peepal tree and seeing the animal, the cunning man came to know that it was his buffalo.

"This is my buffalo only and this is the calf that was birthed by it. Not bullock and its child, got it? Now what you have to do is take that calf on your shoulder and go forward. Then see if the buffalo will come after you," said Mama. Pascu agreed and decided to lift the calf on his shoulder and started walking through the field. All the dirt and blood from the calf's body came on Pascu but he didn't care. The buffalo started to follow Pascu straight to his house.

"Do I have any share in this buffalo or not?" asked Pascu like he was very smart. Why? Because he had carried the calf and brought it to his house.

"Oyis! Surely it is there. Buffalo's front side is yours. The back side is mine," said the cunning Mama. "Okay, Mama" agreed the foolish Pascu. Mama was pleased with the fried food lottery that he would soon get to eat.

"If so, you have to come daily to our house and bring a bundle of fodder and give food and drink to the buffalo. This is because the mouth of the buffalo is in the front side, that's why" said Mama. Look how smart he is.

After that, Pascu would bring fodder daily and time to time give food and water to that buffalo and wait till night to go back to his house completely empty-handed. On the other hand, the cunning man would milk the buffalo and sell the milk. But he would never give any milk to Pascu.

That way Pascu started working every day but he had not told this secret to his grandmother because he knew that she was a smart woman and was scared that she might scold him. Unfortunately for Pascu, someone who knew all about these things went and told

his grandmother. She immediately called her grandson and inquired about it. This led to Mama's cunning scheme getting exposed. The grandmother got very angry. "Wait, if I don't teach that sly fox a lesson, I'm not Paskin." Saying this she took an oath and gave a nice plan to Pascu and sent him to that Mama's house. 'Removing thorns from thorns' was her idea.

The next day when Pascu, who had taken the fodder, was giving it to the buffalo, Mama was ready to milk the buffalo. When he put his hand on the buffalo's udder, there was a big hit on the buffalo's face with a "dubb" sound. At once the buffalo kicked with its leg, and the cunning man flew and fell into the buffalo's shit pit. Immediately the buffalo pooped and all the poop fell on his face!

"Arre Deva! (OMG!) Why did you hit the buffalo, you idiot?" shouted Mama.

"Front side is mine, right Mama? I put food. I hit! You don't have any right to ask. The back side is yours. If I hit the back side, then you ask!" said Pascu. Even though the cunning man thought, 'This useless fellow! Wait, I'll teach him a lesson!', he said,

"Please sir! I'll fall at your feet. Don't hit the buffalo. Daily I'll give you one kuttan (one quarter) of milk."

"Not one but two," said Pascu.

"Okay," Mama agreed.

After that, every morning Pascu would bring one stack of fodder, and at night that Mama would give two kuttan (one quarter) of milk to Pascu.

To find out if this story is true or false, go and ask your grandmother yourself.

### **Collaborating to translate**

"Using a Thorn to Remove a Thorn" by Silvester D'Souza Mysore is a children's story that portrays the moral of being kind to everyone and not taking advantage of anyone. After reading two-three different stories, I finally decided to go ahead and translate

this particular story because it reminded me of a story that my mum told me when I was a child. It felt like this was an important moral that children from a young age should develop, that will help them in their future. Being kind to people is an important quality that forms a foundation for a happy life. Since this is children's literature, the written language is simple so that it is understandable.

This story was originally written in Konkani, which is my mother tongue. Growing up with parents that belonged to two different states, Karnataka and Maharashtra, the language that they communicated with each other was English and Hindi. These were also the languages that I learnt in school as my first and second languages respectively. This led to us communicating in only those two languages. Listening to my parent's conversations with our relatives helped me to understand both languages, but I can't read, write or speak them. Originally, I had decided to translate a Hindi text into English, but that language is not considered my mother tongue. Since it was strictly mother tongues only, this led to the idea of translating something from my mother tongue Konkani into English. The difficulties faced during translation were that I had to translate a story from a language that I couldn't read or speak. I first asked my aunt to send me some Konkani-written stories that were originally written in that language. After getting those stories via courier, my dad and I sat together and read the story sentence by sentence. He would read the text in Konkani and I would tell him what I thought it meant. If I turned out right, he would continue to read the next line, if not then he would give me word-to-word translation in Hindi and I would frame them into proper English sentences. This led to the first draft having many grammatical problems because we were doing a very direct translation. By the second draft, I was able to deal with all the grammatical errors.

When I tried to polish the text, the other difficulty that arose was

keeping the Konkani writing style, which worked for the language, and trying to make it work with English text. The Konkani style of 'call and response' in the story is not seen in any of the English texts. Most of the time, these won't work in the English text, but considering that the text is for children's literature I decided to go with the same writing style. This style of call and response keeps the attention of the children as they are given a chance to respond to multiple questions and this would help boost their energy. It also portrays the element of unification, as the person reading this text and their audience can both participate in this story.

The most common difficulty faced by most translators is finding appropriate words in English for the words from their mother tongue. Many words didn't have a relevant English word to be translated into or had phrases that only made sense in Konkani. Words like "aadoong" could be loosely translated into headbutting, but their literal meaning can't be translated into one word. The same

goes for words like "kutten" which is a sort of measurement that means one-quarter, but it doesn't give the audience an idea of how much that is. These difficulties prove to be a little hard for the translators as they are trying to translate the text in a manner that makes the audience understand but also not lose the essence of the meaning and style of the original text. The other difficulty is the phrases that work in Konkani don't work in English. The phrase "pleased with the fried food lottery" doesn't make that much sense to English speakers. But the Konkani version of this sentence is commonly used by the people, which means that they got a tasty lottery.

This story also contained a lot of dialogue and thoughts. To show the difference between them, I decided to use the double quotation symbol and an apostrophe. Double quotation symbol indicates that the characters are telling their dialogues and an apostrophe indicates that these characters are thinking inside themselves, i.e., their thoughts.

The metaphorical meaning of this story is that everyone needs to be kind in this world. Because no matter what happens, a day will come when you will fall prey to your own traps. Even if a person is as foolish as Pascu, the cunning man could have remained humble and not allowed Pascu to make a fool out of himself. But he encouraged him to continue with his foolishness. This led to the cunning man being kicked and pooped on by the buffalo. This story tries to teach us the idea of Karma or tit for tat that takes place in it. When you are nice to people, their good nature follows you. When you trick people and loot them, then their curses follow you. This is what happened in the story. The cunning man kept looting Pascu out of his fodder without any profit. This led to the kick from the buffalo and also had to start giving out milk to Pascu every single day. Even the overall meaning of staying kind to people is a nice thing to teach to kids. If they are taught this message from a young age, they would grow up to be better adults.

## Narahari Das

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A translation of the Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury story from Bengali by *Vidula Katham*

There once lived a Goat Kid in the pit, on the ground, that was next to a jungle and a mountain. The Mother Goat would not allow the Kid to leave the pit. To dissuade him from going out, she would tell him stories of bears, tigers and lions. The scared Kid would then not think of leaving the pit. As he grew, his fear started to wane. And one day, when his mother was away, the Kid finally came out of the pit.

Closeby, a huge Ox was eating grass. The Kid had never seen a creature as big as that before. Going by the Ox's horns he assumed that it was a goat just like him but

bigger in size and that good food had helped him reach that size.

The Kid said to the Ox, "What do you eat?"

The Ox said, "I eat grass."

The goat said, "Grass? Even my mother eats grass but she is not as big as you are."

"I eat special grass and in huge quantities."

"Where can I find this special grass?"

"In the jungle"

"Please, you need to take me there."

The Ox and the goat then went to the jungle. The grass in the jungle was delicious and the Kid had never tasted anything like it before. He ate as much as he could. In the evening the Ox said, "Let us go home now."

But the goat's tummy had become so heavy that he couldn't walk. He said to the Ox, "You go. I will come tomorrow."

So, the Ox went home and the goat found a pit nearby and took shelter

in it. That pit belonged to a fox. The Fox had been to his maternal uncle the Tiger's place for an invitation for dinner. On returning he found that his pit was occupied by a strange creature. The goat Kid was black in colour and due to the darkness, the Fox could not see properly. So, he took the Kid for a monster.

He said, "Who's there?"

The cunning Kid replied:

Though resemble a lion, I might  
It's me who always wins a fight  
I'm Narahari Das,  
My stool takes time to pass,  
Fifty tigers I eat in a bite.

On hearing this, the Fox ran till he reached his Tiger uncle's place.

The Tiger said, "What? Nephew again?"

The Fox said, "O Uncle, a misfortune has befallen me. A certain Narahari Das has occupied my pit. He says that he eats fifty tigers in one go."

On hearing this, Tiger uncle became furious. He said, "How dare he say so? Let us go, Nephew, let us go now and see how he eats fifty tigers in one go."

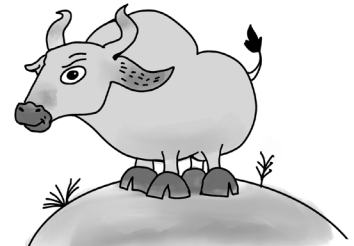
The Fox said, "No, Uncle, I will not go with you. What if he comes to eat us? You are fast and will disappear in a leap or two and I will end up getting eaten up."

The Tiger said, "I will never let that happen. I will never leave you and run."

The Fox said, "I will come only if you agree to tie me to your tail so you cannot leave me and run."

Hence, the Tiger, with his nephew tied to his tail, went to see Narahari Das. When they reached somewhat close to the pit, Narahari Das spotted them from afar and addressed the Fox aloud, "I had asked you to bring me ten tigers but you have brought just one?"

On hearing this the Tiger thought



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that his nephew had tricked him into coming to Narahari Das so he could eat him. And so the Tiger ran. But the Fox who was tied to his tail suffered serious injuries. He got thrashed to the ground, got cut and pricked by thorns and almost got smashed while his Tiger uncle ran and leapt away. The Fox cried out in pain, "Oh! Uncle, Uncle." The Tiger thought that Narahari Das had caught up to them so he ran even faster.

And so the night passed. The next morning the Goat Kid returned home. The Fox was very angry with his Tiger uncle, so much so that he never forgave him.

### Reliving the process

For this paper, I have translated a children's short story "Narahari Das" by Upendrakishore Ray Chowdhury from Bengali to English. I have talked about my experience in translating the text - the difficulties that I have encountered in the process of translation. I have also looked into a book by Umberto Eco titled *Experiences in Translation* wherein he talks about the various concepts in the field of translation. My first step in the process of translation was to read the original text of "Narahari Das" and then attempt to translate it to English. I simultaneously noted down any difficulties that I faced or any

thoughts that crossed my mind while translating. I made it a point to not read any translation theory before I finished translating because I did not want my translation to be influenced by biases or someone else's ideas. So, I started reading Eco's book only after I finished translating. When I read the book I found that I was able to connect Eco's ideas on translation to my own experience. When I started to translate the text, I did not have any idea about how to go about it so I very mechanically translated the text without giving it much thought. When I read Eco's book I found that his ideas somewhat justified or provided reasons for why I had done what I had done. His book made me conscious of my thought process during translation which is something that I had not done earlier. I went back to my translation and this time paid attention to the lexical and syntactic choices that I had made. Eco's book shed light on the workings of a translator's mind.

While translating "Narahari Das" from Bengali to English, I noticed that in the source text, a single sentence sometimes tried to convey multiple ideas. I faced difficulty in translating such sentences. There was a sentence in the source text which said that there was a plot of land and next to it was a tree and a mountain and in that plot of land there was a pit where a goat kid

lived. A lot of information is being conveyed in that single sentence. So, it takes a while for the reader to understand what to focus on. When I read that sentence I initially thought that the focus is on the land. As I kept reading my focus kept shifting from the land to the tree, to the mountain, to the pit and then the goat kid. I kept thinking how I could include all the information mentioned and also make it look put-together. So, I decided to first identify the principal idea that the sentence was trying to convey and then weave other information around it. So I translated that sentence as: "There once lived a goat kid in the pit, on the ground, that was next to a jungle and a mountain."

In his book *Experiences in Translation*, Umberto Eco talks about the distinction between *Fabula* (story) & *Syuzhet* (plot) proposed by the Russian Formalists. Eco uses two sentences to show how the same story can be conveyed through two different plots. The sentences are: "I came back because it is raining", and "It is raining, so I came back." Eco talks about how in both the sentences the story is the same i.e. it is raining and that I am back. But the sentences use two different plots. In the first sentence the reader is told that I am back and then the reason (rain) is given. In the second sentence the reader is told that it is raining first and then the consequence (of me returning) is given. "I can tell the same story of the *Odyssey* even though I partially change the plot, for instance, by starting with the events that Ulysses (in Homer's poem) tells the Pheacians about only later". Therefore, in my translation I have not stuck to the sentential sequence of the source text.

The Bengali text is prospective in nature because the readers are introduced to the land first and then the goat comes into the picture, whereas my translation is retrospective because I chose to introduce the goat kid first. The readers get to know about the place where he lived only later. Eco, in *Experiences in Translation*, also

says, "a translation can be deemed satisfactory even though it shows scant respect for certain stylistic subtleties found in the original".

I also faced the difficulty of assigning a gender to the character of Narahari Das. Since Bengali is a gender-neutral language, pronouns are common to all genders. But while translating the text to English, using gender specific pronouns becomes inevitable. I could not have repeated Narahari Das every time. Initially the name just sounded masculine to me. While examining as to why it sounded masculine I broke the word Narahari into two parts, Nara and Hari. Nara is Bengali refers to a male whereas Nari refers to a female. Hence, I assumed that Narahari Das was a male goat. There were other characters in the story such as the ox, the tiger and the fox. They were mostly referred to as "Bagh mama" meaning Tiger Uncle and the fox was addressed as "Bhagne" meaning nephew. So, their gender was clear.

While translating from Bengali to English, I wanted to retain certain vernacular words such as "Bagh mama" and "Bhagne" because they are terms of endearment and help in creating the Bengali effect. But then I decided not to, because doing so would narrow down my audience. Retaining the Bengali words would create confusion among the readers from different language backgrounds. For instance people who do not have a fair knowledge of the Bengali language might mistake the word "mama" for "mother" whereas in Bengali it refers to "maternal uncle". Therefore, I feel that the decision to whether or not to retain vernacular words depends on the translator's target audience. My target audience would be people from all language backgrounds. So, I decided to not retain vernacular words in my translation.

Eco also says, "Equivalence in meaning cannot be taken as a satisfactory criterion for a correct translation". The Bengali text had a phrase, "Baba go". It literally means "Father, go" when translated to English. The

Bengali phrase creates an effect similar to the phrase, "Oh! Dear". Whereas the English equivalent "Father go!" gives a wrong idea. Hence, this is an instance when equivalence in meaning is not always the correct translation. Hence, I translated "Baba go!" as "Oh! Dear". While Eco says that an equivalence in meaning is not to be fixated on while translating, he also talks about something called the Functional equivalence. He says that the translators must first identify the function or effect that the original text intends to create and since different translators have different ways of looking at the same text, the focus of the translation is negotiable.

Eco also gives some examples to show that literal translations do not always work. He writes, "Uttered in different countries, they produce different effects and they are used to refer to different habits. They produce different stories". Eco compares French, English and Italian and how the same sentence conveys different things in each language.

Eco also gives the example of how in New York, "that guy" could be used to refer to a passerby but its equivalent "ce monsieur là" would qualify as slang. However, Eco also says that if the translation wants to give a sense of the days that a story is set in then it is necessary to retain all the *monsieurs* in the translation. He cites the example of Dumas's *The Count of Monte Cristo* to substantiate his point. Hence, literal translations do not always work. Eco in his book also says that translators are entitled to, not only, make radical changes to the literal meaning of the original text, but also to its reference.

When I tried translating one of the poems, contained in the text literally, it made no sense. The literal translation that I had initially done was:

Long-long beard  
Dense-dense intestines  
Lion's uncle I am, Narahari Das,  
I eat fifty tigers in one bite.

As is evident, the above translation

makes no sense and fails to convey the idea that the original intends to. So I have made “radical changes” as Eco would call them. Eco says that in order to make these changes a translator has to first interpret it. So, I read the poem and interpreted it and then tried to convey my understanding through my choice of words. My second translation of the poem goes:

Though resemble a lion, I might  
 It's me who always wins a fight  
 I'm Narahari Das,  
 My stool takes time to pass,  
 Fifty tigers I eat in a bite.

To arrive at the above translation, I first identified the “deep sense” of the original poem that is Narahari Das looks like a lion (long beard) but is mightier than a lion (Lion's uncle) and has a voracious appetite (dense intestines and fifty tigers). I then tried to convey this by deviating from literal meanings. “Interpreting means making a bet on the sense of a text” as stated by Eco. Hence, based on my understanding of the poem I made radical changes to the literal meaning of the original text. Eco says, “the translator must decide what the fundamental content conveyed by a given text is. In order to preserve a ‘deep’ story, the translator is sometimes entitled to change the ‘surface’ one”.

Speaking of rhythm, Eco suggests a translator first read the source text aloud to identify the rhythm that might play through the text and then follow this rhythm while translating. And Eco states that to preserve this rhythm of the original, a translator is allowed to make radical changes to the literal meaning of the original text. I feel that Eco does not get the fact that mimicking rhythms is not always possible. I read the source text out aloud and identified the rhythm like he said but what I failed to do is transfer this rhythm from the original to my translation. The original Bengali text is a children's short story. Since I wanted to create the same playful effect that the original text did, I added a limerick.

Umberto Eco also says that when

a translation goes beyond the original text and sort of enriches the target language with words and phrases thereby creating an effect that the original author did not intend to, then such a translation is not a good translation. Eco states that “A translation that manages to ‘say more’ might be an excellent piece of work in itself, but it is not a good translation”. He further says, “Therefore the rule ought to be never to enhance the author's vocabulary, even when tempted to do so”.

In his book *Structuralist Poetics*, Jonathan Culler says that Northrop Frye compared the study of literature with the study of science. The teaching of science is explicit while the teaching of literature is implicit. As one reads one gains a sense of how to read. One develops

a certain set of questions and knows what to look for in a text. Culler says that this understanding of how to read is the literary competence that the readers assimilate but are not aware of. He says that an author is a reader first, a reader of his own work. So, he is bound to exercise his implicit knowledge that is literary competence.

I personally feel that this can be applied to translators because translators are also writers. Culler also talks about how Frye felt that the main principles of literary competence are yet unknown to us. I would like to conclude by saying that we will never really get to know the depth of a translator's mind.



Jotham Judson

# A Bird Named Ambuga

A translation of the Na D'Souza's story from Kannada by *Gayathri Lakshmi*

Putti lives in the neighbouring city. Her school was on summer break. Her Ajji visited the city during the summer break and brought Putti back to the village with her. Her Ajji lives in an old house in the village. There is a forest all around it. Everywhere you look, it is green. You can hear the constant chirping of the birds. Here, the deer, the rabbits, and the peacocks play and run. Putti, who lived in the city, was delighted to see the forest and its animals. So she continued to stay at her Ajji's home.

During summer holidays, Putti came

To her Ajji's home

She danced and played in its angala

Without getting tired even a little bit

She observed the forest creepers

And played among the plants

Seeing the flowers, the birds, and the rabbits

Brought joy to her face.

A little bird once visited Putti as she was seated in her angala. It had a golden beak and the body was covered in red feathers. Its beautiful body was carried by tiny legs. Jin-Jin sang the lovely voice. The bird flew from one place to another fluttering.

"Ajji! Ajji! Come and look. A new bird has arrived" said Putti.

Ajji rushed out to the angala and observed the new bird.

"Oh! Ambuga has come" said Ajji.

That bird's name was Ambuga. In her angana, Ajji had cultivated a few tulip flowers. "These flowers release nectar. The birds come to

the garden to drink the nectar," said Ajji.

Ambuga has come to Ajji's house

To drink the nectar

from the flowers that grow in the angala

And ease it

The bird sat on the branch

And extended its beak

Then again it flew

After stealing flowers' nectar.

"The birds will come daily from now on," Ajji stated.

Just as she predicted, it happened. Their angala was visited by one to hundred birds. Likewise, the flowers also began to bloom. Each flower had a bird next to it. The nectar gathered in the bowl-shaped flowers and the birds sat

on its branch and inserted their lengthy beaks. They sucked on the sweetness inside gradually. Then they would spin around the flowers once before taking off.

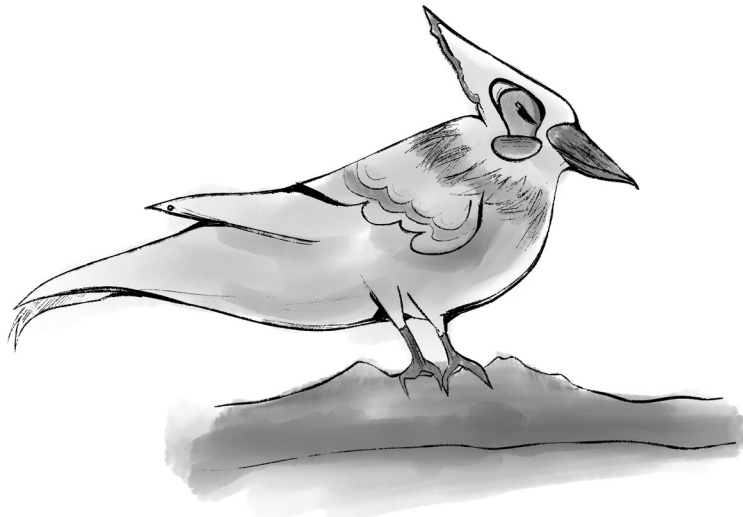
Putti's only task was to watch this. She looked forward to Ambuga's arrival every day. Upon arrival, the birds would fly straight for the flowers. After enjoying the nectar, a few birds would settle on her balcony's stone. While some could be seen playing in the angala. Some would even dare to approach the entrance of her house and have fun there. The birds would converse with one another. Chirping and fluttering here and there. One by one, they would vanish as soon as they sensed the afternoon heat rising.

On summer vacation Putti came

To Ajji's old home

She forgot about her friends

Upon seeing the village's beauty



Relishing the Greenery and the trees

Listening to the birdsongs

Putti found joy in Ajji's home

And forgot about the town

For a few days, it went on like this. Putti enjoyed playing and living with the birds. However, one day while Putti waited for the birds, she observed that none had yet arrived. There were no birds to be found. The angala seemed empty without the birds. Putti felt sad.

"Ajji! Ajji! The birds are not here" shouted Putti.

Ajji came and discovered that there were no birds in the angala.

Ajji responded, "Yes, Ambuga won't come anymore."

"Ajji, why won't Ambuga come to see us anymore?"

"The birds won't come back until the tulip plants blossom the following year."

Putti grew sad. She sat on the jagali in that sadness. She then wandered the angala. She pranced here and there. She then noticed a feather on the floor in the angala's corner. A red feather. Bright and beautiful. She rubbed it to her chin and cheek. A lovely, sensitive sensation. She repeatedly touched it. She felt the same joy as if she had touched the real bird.

"Ajji! Ajji!" she shouted

"What is it, Putti?" asked Ajji as she came out.

"Look! The bird has left me a gift."

Ajji noticed the feather on Putti's hand.

"Oh, very good," said Ajji.

This way putti became a big girl. But for her, the memory that the birds left her with was the most precious gift. She treasured it.

During summer vacation Putti came

To Ajji's old home

It happened while she was playing in angala.

A friendship with birds.

The season of flowers ended

The birds didn't return

As a reminder, they left a colourful feather

With her.

## **New Language & World**

"Language was just difference. A thousand different ways of seeing, of moving through the world. No, a thousand worlds within one. And translation, a necessary endeavour however futile to move between them." – R. F. Kuang

'Ambuga Emba Hakki' is the text that I choose for my ILRS translation process. It is a children's storybook and it is written in Kannada. The author is Na. D'Souza, and illustrator is Uma Krishnaswamy. I bought this storybook during Christmas 2022. I intended to buy this book to improve my reading skill in Kannada. I was hoping that reading this Kannada storybook would expand my language comprehension and increase my vocabulary.

I am from Kerala but was brought up in Bangalore. I had grown up listening to Kannada. My relationship with the language began when my parents decided to move to Bangalore. They put me in for Kannada tuition. They asked the neighbour aunty, a teacher, to teach me the language. However, she wasn't familiar with the language. She had lived all her life in Kerala and had no contact with Kannada. But my parents were determined to teach me the language since they believed that at least someone in the family should know it. So, they purchased "The National

Integration Language Series" Malayalam to Kannada copy. This was my first introduction to the language.

I studied Kannada till my 3rd standard but after being shifted from state school to CBSE board, I lost touch with the language. Kids in my new school preferred to speak English and Hindi. Kannada was spoken less thus I became distant from the language. But, after graduating from school, I once more began my complicated relationship with Kannada. This time, it was guided by the machas and machis that I met inside and outside my PU College.

I have always been envious of the ease with which my friends can communicate. I have often felt that I am at a disadvantage when communicating and interacting with the world around me. I struggle with my mother tongue i.e., Malayalam as well as my major contact language i.e., Kannada. Being fluent in English had left me distant and alienated from people and the world around me. I wanted to reconnect and truly know the language and the culture that had brought me up. So, when I was given the opportunity to translate, I decided to go with Kannada. A language that had welcomed me with songs like "Chuku Buku Railu" and "Hoove Hoove".

I loved translating this storybook. Each time I sat down to translate, I was introduced to a new set of words and experiences. It wasn't an easy task to translate this text. I was able to read the text, but my reading speed was slower than the average. So, I took the help of my friend, Madhurya. This made the task less daunting. With each new word that I was introduced to, Madhurya often shared a small piece of her emotional and cultural memory. I was able to connect her experience with my own cultural experience. I could imagine myself as a magician and explorer. I was trying to bring together two different worlds through words and language structures that I was familiar with. At the same time, I was exploring both English and

Kannada as landscapes. I began to look at the world around me more carefully. I have developed a new thirst to look at words and language more deeply.

One of the challenges that I faced was trying to translate certain words from Kannada that seemed to not have an equivalent in English. A word like 'angala', which refers to a common ground as well as a personal garden, couldn't be translated into a simple "courtyard" or "outdoor". Or the word 'kanike' could refer to a gift given to remember someone. The word "memorabilia" doesn't really

capture its true essence.

Another challenge I faced was choosing to go with the name "Putti" for the main character. "Putti" in Kannada is an endearing term for a "girl child" but it can also be a proper noun. So, deciding whether to go with "Putti" or "little girl" was another challenge that was thrown in my direction.

As I translated, I found that the sentence structure was often fragmented, and the syntax often didn't make sense. Thus, whether to stick to the word-to-word translation structure was another

challenge I faced.

I solved these challenges one by one. Choosing one word over another or giving importance to one form of translation over another was interesting. It made me understand my own biases and relationship with words. I found the words from the source language more attractive than the terms/ words offered by the target language.

## Anna and the Fox

A translation from Malayalam by *Gowry Prasanth Nair*

Once upon a time, there was a mischievous boy named Appu. He was extremely affectionate towards those around him. But Appu had the habit of talking to people and being friendly with them even if they were strangers. This habit of Appu's made his mother worry a lot. She tried to discourage this behavior through various means, but all was in vain. That's when she remembered the story of Anna and the Fox which her grandmother had told her when she was a child. Appu liked listening to stories, so his mother decided to narrate it to him.

In a distant land, there was a beautiful girl named Anna. She was known for having a kind heart.

One day, Anna's mother said to her, "I'm making some snacks, please take them to your grandmother's house today. If you meet strangers on your way, do not talk to them."

After promising her mother that she wouldn't talk to anyone, Anna started her journey from home.

While on her way to her grandmother's house, she met a

cunning Fox.

The Fox asked her, "Where are you off to?"

Having forgotten what her mother had said, Anna answered the Fox. She told him that she was going to her grandmother's house.

The Fox figured out the way to her grandmother's house from her. He then sprinted to her grandmother's house and knocked on the door. Grandmother opened the door,

upon which the Fox pounced on her and tied her hands together. He then locked her inside the cupboard.

After wearing Grandmother's clothes, the fox climbed into her bed and waited for Anna.

Anna reached her grandmother's house, opened the door and reached the bedside. She was confused to see her grandmother's big eyes, big ears, and big teeth.



*Jotham Judson*



“How did your eyes become so big?” Anna asked her grandmother.

The Fox pretending to be her Grandmother replied, “It’s to see you well.”

“Why are your ears so big?” was Anna’s next question.

“It’s to listen to you well,” came the reply.

“Why’s your teeth so big?” Anna asked.

“It’s to eat well.” Saying this, the Fox pounced on Anna. After realizing that this was the Fox and not her grandmother, Anna began to scream. Two men who were cutting wood in the forest heard her and ran into her grandmother’s house. They chased the Fox away and rescued Grandmother out of the cupboard. Grandmother hugged Anna with joy and they thanked the men who saved them. So Anna never spoke to strangers ever again.

After finishing her story, Mother said to Appu, “Did you see what happened to Anna after talking to strangers?”

Appu realized his mistake and said to Mother, “I will never talk to people who are not familiar or be friendly towards them.”

Moral of the story:

Be careful when you interact with strangers.

### **A story’s journey**

I chose the story ‘Anna and the Fox’ because I liked this version of Little Red Riding Hood. The mother is narrating the tale as a cautionary tale. Her son’s friendly nature worries her and she narrates the story of Anna who did not listen to her mother and was friendly with a stranger. The story the mother narrates is that of Little Red Riding Hood. It was interesting to watch this story being played out for its purpose of making children obedient. The child in the story in the end is shown as admitting to his mother that he made a mistake

and that he will not repeat it again. It’s intriguing to see how what is expected out of a child by parents is being portrayed through Appu as the model child. This story I found online is posted on a website for parents to read it to children, or for children to read for themselves. It is written in Malayalam, and the website in question offers several other choices for its readers to choose from. Many children’s story classics like “The Elephant and the Tailor” and “The Fox and The Grapes” can also be found in Malayalam on the website [storymalayalam.com](http://storymalayalam.com). It seems to be designed for children as the interface uses plenty of white space around, uses pictures and has smaller paragraphs for an easier reading experience. It also marks the change of a cautionary tale being addressed to girls and using a character like Appu in its story. It shows that children should be careful regardless of their gender. Here the story of Little Red Riding Hood is employed and acknowledged as a fairy tale. The mother says that this was a tale her grandmother used to narrate to her. The story ends with a “moral of the story” tagline which shows us that children’s stories are often tools to instill morality and obedience in children by showing them what is expected out of them, while portraying the bad things that will happen if they don’t obey their elders.

Some of the problems I faced while translating this work were due to not knowing which words to use in the translation or when there were not enough sources around me or on the internet to find an English word that would be suitable. The title of the story is an example of this. It uses the word “kurunari” which according to google is a fox. Kurunari is not a word I’m familiar with, because the word kurukkan is used more generally for fox in Malayalam. Another issue stemmed from the fact that in “Little Red Riding Hood” the antagonist is a wolf and not a fox. Maybe the change was made due to the fact that foxes are more familiar to a Malayali reader when compared to a wolf.

In the first sentence I faced my first difficult word. “Kusrithikuttanundayirinnu” is a Malayalam word which conveys three different ideas. The first is the mischievous nature of the subject but the word is only used on children who have the funny and harmless habit of being mischievous. The second meaning it conveys is that the addressee is a boy because the term “kuttan” is masculine, and is used to address boys. The last part of the term, “undayirinnu” achieves the same effect as saying “there was”. These three terms can be used separately or together the way it is here.

The next difficult word was “snehasheela” which is a word used to describe someone, who is affectionate. Literally, it would mean a woman (ending the word with ‘a’ means it is feminine, if it was ‘an’ it would be masculine) who is in the habit of being affectionate, an affection that could be called platonic love. I used the word “good at heart” first and then changed it to “affectionate” in the translation, which is what I believe is closest to the meaning that the source language was trying to achieve. Since the majority of the story was about Little Red Riding Hood there was not much difficulty in translating the text. Translating a text originally written in Malayalam becomes infinitely more difficult because of the Malayalam sensibilities and contexts involved in the text.

Most of the time when I could not find the right meaning I looked it up or asked a Malayali friend. I also wrote down a word and broke it down to understand everything it is trying to convey. It was relatively easy to translate considering the usage of simple language and ideas that were there in the story. I made sure to translate the essence of the story to the best of my abilities. Rather than matching what is written to what I need to write in English, I focused on what the sentence is ultimately trying to say. This entire exercise was a short trip to seeing changing trends in Malayalam childrens stories that are available and popular now.

# Autoethnographies

# What lies ahead...

**T**his section compiles students' lived experiences as they navigate the domains of caste and caste-related discrimination. As a deeply ingrained institution of Indian society, caste permeates all aspects of the social order shaping lives, determining opportunities, and defining identities. In this setting, the literature produced intimately presents extreme truths, making the study of societal workings a study of personal realities. The papers in this section offer us different vantage points on caste through the autoethnographic approach that blends the elements of autobiography and ethnography to demystify this complex phenomenon. Through these accounts, the reader will gain an intimate understanding of the inner workings of caste beyond mere statistics and academic discourse, presenting a holistic view of its complexities and impact on our lives. By interweaving individual experiences with the larger socio-political backgrounds, this section intends to initiate a deeper understanding and critical reflection on the continuing impact of caste in our societies.

# Dombara

## A Nomadic Community

*Siddharth AP*

Autoethnography is based on qualitative research where the author studies the “Self”. This focuses on the self-observation of the nature of identity, genealogy, social status, ethnicity, internal administration of the community, gender position, culture, sexuality, politics, life system, atmosphere, and so on. Autoethnography helps us to analyse personal experiences in order to understand the cultural experiences from an insider perspective. In this paper, I look at my own caste, culture, and ethnic setting, and attempt to trace back the history of the family line from my great-grandmother to my father (i.e three generations).

There are a number of nomadic communities present in southern part of India. Dombara is one such community, who were wanderer or nomadic tribe that moved from one place to another in small groups throughout the country in search of livelihood. Acrobatics is the traditional occupation of the Dombara community. Usually, they perform acrobatics, gymnastics, rope walking, and other stunts on the streets. When they settle in a new place, men start making combs, brooms, dolls, and mattresses and sell them to the villagers. This was one part of the income for the tribe, alongside their exhibition of gymnastics. They are well-equipped and very flexible with their gymnastic skills like rope dancing, tumbling, and athletic stunts. Once they have covered the entire area, they tend to relocate their temporary settlement to another place.

There are a lot of nomadic tribal communities all over India who migrate from place to place to make their living and to find shelter. Their lives revolve around their socio-economic necessity. They sold the basic tools necessary tools which they acquired throughout their voyage. In a way, they are an integral part of production relations in society. They played a major role in improving the agrarians in rural society by selling the basic tools for agricultural use and pastoralism.

These nomads are further divided into two categories namely Nomads and Semi-Nomads. Nomads are people who move from place to place and never settle, they change places depending on their convenience. They don't have a fixed habitat, they are not continually in the same place. Whereas semi-nomadic are partially settled, and migrate seasonally. Semi Nomads, in their period of settlement, cultivated crops and contributed more to the agriculture sector. And a major part of the semi-nomadic population involved themselves as agricultural labourers in the village where they usually settled.

During the colonial rule in India, the British colonists tried to assert their power over the people of India. Specifically, they wanted to control all the forests to meet the demands of foreign countries by providing them natural resources from India. But many tribes opposed it, they resisted the actions of the British government. The British wanted all the nomadic tribes to be settled in one place to clear the way for taxation. They especially wanted to control the people who were involved in the production sector. They wanted to hold a monopoly on the forest, trade, and agricultural land. In this way, they introduced the Permanent Settlement Act in 1774. This act restricted the rural trades and took control over the rural agrarian relations established prior to the advent of British colonialism. In this way, nomads who were involved in the local trade lost their livelihood, and the farmers lost their rights on the agricultural land. Tribal communities were then displaced from the forests by the colonial administration. In this crucial period, traditional traders like nomads, farmers, and tribals opposed this monopoly on their livelihood. The majority of this working-class population had organised and opposed the cruel exploitation of the colonial administration. The East India Company employed the army to control the rebellion of the local working class. The tribal and nomadic communities had organised rebellions in many parts of the country. These rebellions resulted in the First War of Independence in 1857. After this 1857 mutiny, the colonial administration brought cruel regulations to control the nomads and tribal communities in India.

In 1871 the British government passed the Criminal Tribe Act (CTA) in India. The government declared the millions of nomadic and semi-nomadic tribes as criminals. This was one of the most barbarous laws passed by the British which caused immense discomfort in the lives of both nomadic and semi-nomadic and tribal communities. In view of this law, a label was put on many tribes, and migration was restricted. In order to keep tabs on these communities, they were asked to report to the local police. This way, they started to monitor those tribes who opposed the British government, and further, they were convicted and were called and labelled as ‘Criminal Tribes’. In Karnataka, many nomadic communities were declared criminal tribes. Dakkal, Budga Jangam, Handi Jogi Sillekyathas/ Sillekyatha, Sudugadu Siddha, Chenna Dasar/ Holay Dasar, Gosangi, Mang Garudi, Ganti Chores, and Dombara amongst other nomadic tribes were notified as criminal tribes. After independence, under Jawaharlal Nehru, a new act was passed by the government which is called the Habitual Offenders Act to revoke the Criminal Tribe Act. With the help of this act, all the ‘notified’ nomadic tribes were

'denotified'. This act was passed on August 31, 1952, this day is celebrated as Vimukti Diwas or Liberation Day by Denotified Tribes (DNTs) every year.

My ancestors also belonged to the same community called Dombara, which was considered a criminal tribe. I have traced back three generations of my family lineage (great grandmother, grandfather, and father). My great-grandmother settled in a small village called Yaraballi in the Davanagere district. It was a remote village where livelihood was difficult and discrimination based on caste was blatant. My ancestors, my great-grandmother, in particular, were semi-nomadic. Dombara is called a nomadic community, but because of the Criminal Tribe Act in 1870 by the British Government, we were forced to settle. Their occupation also changed from acrobats, gymnasts, rope walkers, and stuntmen/stuntwomen to soft stone sculptors (God and utensils), animal husbandry farmers (mostly cattle), tea vendors, and agricultural farmers. They were obliged to inculcate these occupations because they were forced to settle.

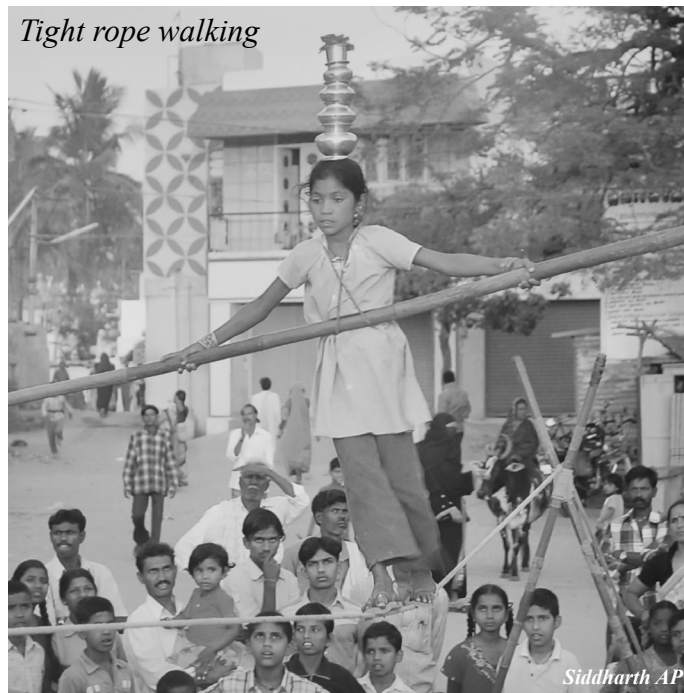
They used to carve sculptures of Gods and utensils with soft stone using some basic sharp tools every day, and work in agriculture fields along with looking after the domestic animals. Whenever the stock of sculptures was full, my great-grandmother used to travel to different places to sell them. Once a year, during 'Hampi Utsava', a famous festival celebrated in Hampi, she used to travel there with all her sculptures to sell at the fair. For the rest of her time, she worked in the agricultural field in the village, and ran a tea stall (in her time people did not call it a tea stall, they addressed it as Angadi which translates to shop).

Hindus believe that a person will be born into one of the four castes based on their sins and virtues of the past life. The four castes are Brahmans, Kshatriyas, Vaisyas, and Sudras. Within these four castes, there are a number of sub-castes. Untouchables are the fifth group, literally called as outcasts which do not fall under the caste system. They are labelled as impure, untouchables from birth, and performing jobs that are considered as unclean for minimal pay. Millions are stuck in agricultural fields and are not able to come out of poverty, the oppression by the upper caste or the socially superior caste, and most important illiteracy. Dalit women, in particular, suffered a lot more oppression, frequently being raped or harassed every day throughout the country from generation to generation. But my great-grandmother stood in front of them and challenged everyone and raised two children of her own and made a living out of working in agricultural fields, animal husbandry, carving sculptures, and running a tea stall.

Despite all of this, there was a lot of disparity amongst the people who lived in the village. The disparity of caste, people had their hierarchies in their social structures.

The three generations of my family that will be my

*Tight rope walking*



great-grandmother, grandfather and father faced a lot of discrimination in and outside of the village because they belong to a lower caste. They were considered outcasts and also as 'untouchable', which subjected them to so-called 'untouchability practices' in the entire village. Lower castes were not allowed to get water from the same well as the upper caste, since there was only one well in the entire village. Some upper-caste people helped my great-grandmother by giving her water. Lower castes were not allowed to sit with upper castes and were not allowed to use the same cups in the stalls. We were supposed to get our own cups and plates. In hotels, lower caste people were given tea and coffee in "Tengin Chippu" (Coconut Shell). Untouchability was practised to an extent where lower castes were not allowed inside the upper caste houses, we were supposed to stand outside and talk. Upper castes never thought of visiting our houses because we were untouchables, we were a disgrace to society. The lower caste in Uttara Karnataka in particular was addressed as "Kappu Jana" (Black People), a black mark to the society.

When it comes to worshipping God, the village had two temples namely Anjaneya and Siddeshwara. Here, only people belonging to the upper caste were allowed to enter the temple and worship at any time. We were also given an opportunity to worship the same God but we were not allowed inside the temple at any time. My great-grandmother taught her two children that "We are Kappu Jana, we are not allowed to go to the temple. But stand outside and pray to God and come back". It is still practised in the village, and none of the lower caste people are allowed inside these two temples. This is also an acceptance of discrimination, which is being lived through three generations in our family.

My great-grandmother ran a tea stall business in a small hut, in her time there was no concept of a tea stall. But they addressed it as 'Angadi' (Shop). She

cooked tea and other Uttara (North) Karnataka dishes i.e “Mandakki, Mirchi Menasinakai, and Vade”. The population was about six hundred including nearby small villages. Not everyone visited the tea stall, only people belonging to our (Dombara) community and people belonging to other lower castes ate from our Angadi, which had low income, but she ran the Angadi for a long time.

My great-grandmother’s name was Haalamma, but she did not have a surname. She was quite popular in the village because even while being a lower caste woman she ran a tea stall successfully all by herself. Most of them appreciated her and called her ‘Angadi Haalamma’. Everyone addressed her with the same name and ‘Angadi’ remained a surname in the family, until today (Siddharth Angadi Prabhakar).

The concept of the practice of untouchability was there, and still exists in the village. People belonging to lower castes, including my great-grandmother who belonged to the Dombara community were obliged to accept untouchability and they lived with it. They were fully aware of the hierarchies within the village and they followed the respective pecking order.

Poverty was at its peak in our family during my great-grandmother’s time and she worked many jobs to cover it up but she could not eradicate poverty. Later, however, she came up with a solution to overcome poverty by gaining education, and knowledge. Education and schooling were quite accessible to my grandfathers. My great grandmother worked hard to provide education to her two children. She sold the stone sculptures and worked in agricultural fields night and day to pay the fee of my grandfather’s education.

My father (Prabhakar) narrates a small story about what my grandfather went through in his tenth grade. I quote, “He was away from the village for his higher studies, and he was given a certain amount as pocket money. He always felt homesick and often used to visit his mother back home. And his mother strictly asked him not to travel more often and save money instead. Since he stayed in a hostel, he had this urge to eat ‘Dose’ in a restaurant. In his time period, affording to eat in a hotel was considered a very privileged act. Throughout his life, he only ate ‘Rotti’. My grandfather goes to a restaurant to eat Dose, and as soon as he takes the first bite of it he will remember his mother who works so hard to make a living along with providing financial support for their education, eats only Rotti, and the leftovers. The pain in this one bite of Dose was so deep and so painful for someone to go through at such a young age. After this realisation, he goes through extreme sorrow and stops eating the Dose, and walks away without finishing the food”.

‘Siddappa Angadi Haalamma’ was his name, he was the first person to pass out of tenth grade in the entire Bellary district. He gained a quality education and reached a very respectable position, and became a teacher. His students loved and appreciated him

regardless of his caste, they followed his path. He was an inspiration to many in the village to get an education and gain knowledge. Because of the knowledge he gained from his education, he was well respected in society. During my grandfather’s time period, a separate well was built specifically for lower caste people which did not have a rope to sew the water. Instead, they built steps to walk down the well and get the water, (which seemed very scary when I visited the well in the village). Only upper caste people had a well-equipped rope facilities system to draw water from the well. Gradually, the same well was also used by lower castes but there were restrictions to it as well. The well was divided, one side was used by the upper castes the other side was used by the lower castes. They both had different ropes to draw water and lower castes were not allowed to touch the other side rope. They were only designated to draw water from one side of the well.

Discrimination and untouchability continued in his time period also. People appreciated him in many ways and respected, and took his advice. He was a voice in many decisions that were made in the village, but he was not allowed to go inside an upper-caste home. He was not allowed to sit in front of upper-caste people. He also faced discrimination as my great-grandmother faced. But, the intensity was a little less because he was a knowledgeable person and well-respected among his students and many other officials in his workplace. He was later promoted from teacher to principal and from principal to IOS (Inspector of schools) officer and later on he was promoted to AEO (Assistant Educational Officer). A lot of them in the village were scared of my grandfather because there was an inferiority complex within the villagers about the knowledge he gained with his education and experiences.

He eradicated a huge amount of poverty from the previous generation. They moved from a hut to a well-built house using clay tiles that covered the roof. My grandfather wanted his children to achieve something more than what he had attained in his lifetime. He motivated his eight children (four children of his own and four children of his brother who passed away) to get educated and since he was a teacher he did a pretty good job in pointing his children in a right path.

There were ten people at home who were dependant on my grandfather’s salary. This was often a difficult situation. But my grandfather was happy with the little acceptance from society that he gained. He figured out the key to overcoming all the discrimination and the untouchability against us, which was the ultimatum of education and gaining more and more knowledge. It is believed that untouchables are entitled to perform jobs that are traditionally considered ‘unclean’ or menial. But my grandfather overcame it and became a teacher. It was the sole reason why he wanted his children to get an education and get the respect that he attained.

Along with all these discriminations, a new generation

emerged which was my father's time period. My father grew up facing the same discrimination which was faced in the past two generations. He was not allowed to go inside the upper caste houses and was not allowed to drink from the same cup at stalls. He was not allowed to go inside the temple to worship God. The new generation had accepted discrimination and untouchability, it was there in their everyday life. My father being the elder son of the family, held the burden of being an inspiration to his youngest siblings. He followed the path of education and became a fine scholar. He faced a whole lot of different discrimination in his lifetime. At a young age (twenty-seven) he married an upper-caste family girl by eloping because the family would never accept a lower caste. My mother belonged to a priestly class of the Lingayat caste, she was very privileged, economically well-equipped, and well-respected in society.

After getting married to an upper-caste girl, my father received a lot of threats from the people who belonged to the upper caste. In particular, he received a lot of life threatening calls, trying to scare him by saying that they will put him in jail. They tried to exercise their privilege as members of the upper caste community in trying to bend the law into their own hands. This is not a case that stood out in the discourse of Dalits. Thankfully my father was lucky enough to not meet such a fate.

My grandfather did not accept the marriage, not because of the caste system but because of the way he got married. My grandfather held certain principles and ethics in life, that he should be honest, not harm the other person, be nice to everyone around them, help the needy, live and let live, and most of all he worked so hard to get to a position and gain the respect from everyone in and around the village. But because of this act by my father, most of them in our village looked down on our family. This upset my grandfather. He did not quite accept the marriage in the beginning, but gradually he accepted the couple and welcomed them into the house. Later on, my grandfather admired my mother to the fullest throughout his life. But my mother's family did not accept the marriage and they abandoned her because she married a lower caste person. This is a whole different sort of discrimination that my father went through.

Since the rigidity around the belief that untouchables are supposed to perform menial jobs has been slightly relaxed, my father reached a higher position than my grandfather achieved in his entire lifetime. But in this process, my father had to face a lot of problems in getting a seat in a college for higher studies, while getting a job in a very respectable institution. He was directly promoted to Assistant professor, which upset the other upper caste people in the institution. Prabhakar (my father) quotes what his colleagues spoke about him, "How can a lower caste person get such a highest position at a very young age in this well-respected institution". Many of them opposed

this promotion but the management did not consider all that and continued to have him in the department. He was not welcomed accordingly, but later on, with the abundant knowledge that he gained from his readings, his colleagues were impressed by his talent. But deep down, they still think of him as a person who belongs to a lower caste community and he should not succeed. He faced a completely different sort of discrimination because he moved to a bigger world than the previous generation. It was a harsh one, but he overcame all those challenges and reached a very high position in society.

And in my generation, I grew up in a well-respected society because my father settled in a different geographical location. Here, there was no discrimination, no untouchability practices, and no restrictions. I grew up quite a bit more privileged than my ancestors. But the discrimination continued in the village, lower caste people are still not allowed to go inside the temple. We have to stand outside, worship, and come back. And the maternal family still has not accepted us, they cut contact long back when my mother got married. This is also a cold discrimination that we are facing.

## **Conclusion**

India has completed seventy-five years of independence. We are liberated from the colonial rule. But, subaltern communities still do not get the liberty from socioeconomic exploitation. Nomads and people from the lower strata of the society still struggle to get a basic livelihood.

Ethnographers estimated that nomads make up around 7% of the population of India. And amongst these communities, Dombara is also included, and there are families who still follow the nomadic lifestyle. They are excluded from the society and are facing problems to live their livelihood and the discrimination continues, which is a great tragedy. After independence, the Indian government 'denotified' the tribes which were notified' as criminals under Criminal Tribe Act (CTA) under Colonial Rule in India. But further, they were not given the facilities which were essential for them to lead their life, and they did not have the basic rights to settle in society. These nomads were excluded from society for centuries. They are not benefiting from any constitutional rights. Since they were permanently excluded from the society they do not have Aadhar cards, Ration cards, or Voter IDs which are basic facilities for a person to have as a citizenship of this country. Some of the nomadic communities are included in OBC, SC, and ST categories. But many communities are not included in the caste list. Discrimination and exploitation are haunting them. We should put an end to discrimination and inequality by which we can build a humanitarian society. We should live in a society where people should hold the ideology of 'live and let live'.

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# The Other Side of the Pond

## Caste, class, and mobility among the Kharvi

*Akash Bhosle*



*Aerial view of Akhada village*

*Akash Bhosle*

### Introduction

I grew up abroad, in Saudi Arabia, as an expat during most of my childhood years and throughout my long stay my encounters with caste were either invisible or incomprehensible. This arose due to the fact that the idea of caste was not present in my immediate public sphere and was a subject that was either suppressed, silenced, forgotten, or, in my opinion, overridden by the desire of the Indian community to survive by diligently working under a monarchy which had the power to easily strip one off of everything on the first sign of infighting. Hence, my school friends, who came from all parts of India, were, much like me, unaware of the silent mechanisms of caste and carried along as such, being fuelled by our relative naivety and inexperience. This, I think, is the closest one could get to achieving a truly casteless society where a group of children, academically inclined, remain, for a brief period in life, unaware of an archaic system of unjust segregation and discrimination. However, such a sanctum is fragile and prone to being shattered by caste's all-pervasive grip which eventually catches up.

It was when I returned to India during my summer vacations, and more definitively when I permanently shifted to Goa at the age of twelve, that I realised what caste was and to which one I belonged. However, this change in perspective was not easy, nor did it happen overnight. In fact, when I first arrived in Goa and started attending school there was a distinct lack of awareness amongst some of us about this social hierarchy, perhaps because we had grown up in the city where caste is slightly more fluid than in rural areas but, eventually, I began to grasp the dynamics of caste and the subtle ways it impacted daily life. This awareness brought about a change in my point of view and I no longer saw my classmates and me as just a bunch of school kids playing around but an amalgamation of individuals from different backgrounds who were trying to make sense out of their lives as well as their world view.

I was first introduced to the Varna system—the social system that forms the basis of Hindu society—in school. It was explained as a system of stratification that was an integral part of Indian social order in past

centuries and yet it was a topic that was barely touched and rushed through. The caste system in Goa—and the south to that extent—is different from that of other parts of India, as the warrior Kshatriya caste is almost non-existent. According to myths, Parashurama—a Brahmin incarnation of Vishnu who is credited with having “discovered” Goa—avenged the death of his father by annihilating all families belonging to the Kshatriya caste in the Deccan region and Goa (Pereira 954). This was the explanation that the history teacher had given to a class of students who were woefully unaware of what the caste system was. This myth is repeated in some versions of the Mahabharata and the Puranas and leaving believability aside this can be noted as an attempt by Brahmin priests to justify their dominance over other castes. At its core, it holds that whether one is or is not a Kshatriya—or any caste in the greater context—wholly lies in Brahmins’ hands and the level of power and control was what allowed them to maintain their dominance over other castes. The Brahmins—Chitpavans, Karades, Pandhyes, Joshis, Gaud-Saraswats—in Goa have always been on top of this social pyramid and every other caste—Vanis, Guravs, Sonars, Shimpis, Kharvis and so on—were under them. Goan society primarily functioned as a two-caste system: the Brahmins and the others. One of the main tenets of this system was based on the idea of purity and pollution; caste groups were unequal, ranked on a scale of hierarchy and their status or position in the system determines with whom they could interact—and who was off limits entirely. The idea of purity and pollution was one of the underpinning factors of this system.

## Occupations and preoccupations

I belong to one such ‘polluted’ caste. The Kharvis are a community in Goa and Maharashtra that traditionally make their living through fishing and have been designated as an Other Backward Class in the Central List maintained by the National Commission for Backward Classes. Many members of the Kharvi community claim to have originally migrated from Gujarat, and trace their lineage back to the hills of Kharwa. The term “Kharvi,” etymologically stems from the ancient Sanskrit word for salt or salty: “Kshar” which was later corrupted and became “Khar”. The Portuguese word “Pesh” (fish) and the Gujarati word “Sagarputras” (the sons of the ocean) also are related to the term ‘Kharvi’ (Rao 9). Kharvis have been involved in the practice of fishing for hundreds of years, and this profession has always played an important role in their culture. While their modes of fishing may be dated, mechanised methods have been increasingly used in recent decades. Traditionally, the women of the community assisted men with tasks such as shifting fish from boats to transport or selling at the market, though the gender divide has been eroding in recent years and women now take part in all aspects of the profession.

Fish is an integral part of the Goan diet for ninety percent of the population, and due to its ubiquity in meals the Kharvi community plays the crucial role

of facilitating the consumption of fish (Sreekanth G. B et al. 4). This role came as a result of the caste system and while this system has been built on great disparities in social capital, they are also maintained by strongly entrenched prejudices of the mind. As long as this mentality remains rooted in society, caste barriers will continue to exert a powerful influence on people’s lives. Owing to this, the Kharvis in Goa have rarely been able to break out of the traditional connotations that their job as fishermen brings, especially in the eyes of the upper caste, who believe that their occupation makes them unclean, impure, and inferior. This opposition—between the pure and impure, or between what is superior to what is inferior—underlies hierarchy, separation, and division of labour (Jodhka 17). This hierarchy is one of the foundations of discrimination, as it separates people into “us” and “them” and because these two things must be kept separate, so too do pure and dirty professions, according to the caste system.

The Kharvis are often seen as being a community that are not “educated” and are therefore unfit for any profession. This attitude and perception has resulted in very few opportunities for upward social mobility, with many older individuals in the community continuing in the fishing industry even though it is time-consuming and physically demanding. The younger generation of this group, however, have gradually started moving away from the occupation—and many no longer live near the coasts. The lack of social mobility is what drives them in search for better opportunities. Janet Rubinoff points this out while talking about the Kharvi mobility:

Greater gender parity and upward class mobility of fishing families have not necessarily translated into higher status within local caste hierarchies. In fact, many of the fisherwomen I interviewed felt they commanded little respect in Goan society because of their traditional low caste status and occupation. As one woman expressed it, “We have no name—no honour. We are educating our sons and daughters and do not want them in this shameful fish business” (Rubinoff 633).

I come from the village of Akhada where these sentiments are echoed. It is a small island of Tiswadi that comes under the St. Estevam panchayat, largely belonging to the Kharvi community. The villagers are largely Hindus, and the remainder Catholic. The village is located along the banks of the Mandovi river in the north of Goa and is surrounded by a number of small islands and islets. The island is home to approximately 150 households and has a relatively high degree of social cohesion and a strong sense of community. The Hindu majority primarily speak Konkani while the Catholic population speaks Konkani as well as English. During the monsoon, Akhada is cut off from the mainland due to flooding of its sole road connection that links it with Marcel—the nearest town. This could serve, according to me, as one of the reasons why the population largely practices fishing. There are a few shops in the village

and the sole governmental presence comes in the form of a primary school which is located on the top of a hill. Notably, the village lacks healthcare and proper waste disposal facilities.

The first time I encountered caste prejudice was when my grandfather took me with him to buy prawns from a seafood wholesaler. This supplier was, notably, a Catholic man who earned his income by using advanced machinery like trawlers and by availing benefits through fishery cooperatives. He was quite literally selling water to a fish—a fact that was not lost on me. The individual had taken my grandfather's occupation away from him, effectively removing the basis of his social standing in the caste system. He had taken away the occupation that defined my grandfather's place in society and through his superior education and knowledge economically benefited from it. It was the non-Kharvis that took advantage of government directives and schemes and in doing so supplanted the Kharvis as the top provider. As D'Cruz and Raikar point out:

Interestingly most of the ramponkars (Kharvis) were not interested in these state-sponsored ventures as fish were available in plenty. Being illiterate, they could not understand the schemes that were being floated by the government. Taking advantage of this, the non-kharvis availed of these benefits. (D'Cruz and Raikar 2050)

The non-Kharvis availed these benefits all the while staying clear of the negative connotations that arise from selling fish. This poses the question of how one can sell fish and yet remain clear from its negative connotations. How can one be a provider and yet not be associated with the act of selling fish? This question presents us with a clearer view of the underlying structures of the caste system. The Kharvis are associated with selling fish and therefore, it is not possible for them to be viewed as anything else; the Catholic man might have partaken in the Kharvi occupation but in doing so he has the ability to give the occupation a new meaning. He gives it a social or, to be more exact, an economic meaning. The Catholic man became associated with selling fish not by being a Kharvi—although he employs Kharvis in his trade—but by simply being a provider of food and hence, also becoming identified as such. The man, who for all intents and purposes is a Bahmon (a Brahmin who converted to Christianity) presents himself as above this occupation, and through the social capital that he enjoys, he is able to sell fish while remaining clear from its negative connotations.

During my visit, the man was surprised to see that I could speak English and questioned me on how I managed to learn it so well—portraying the prejudice that is deeply rooted in his thinking about lower caste people. It proves how, in India, caste transcends religious barriers. While egalitarianism is a key tenet of Christianity, we grasp how the caste system poisons even this community. Caste remains an integral aspect of the Catholic experience owing to the fact that most

of them were Hindus who were proselytised by the Portuguese colonial powers—the Brahmin caste having done so willingly to keep hold of the power and social capital that they enjoyed. In India, caste is not just about hierarchy but also about identity. If an individual converts from Hinduism to Christianity, they do not lose their caste status—they remain within the same community as before. Caste is not just a way of organizing society into hierarchies but also about influencing people's identities. We see examples of this through Catholic matrimonial advertisements:

Parents of Goan Roman Catholic, Brahmin Bachelor 28, businessman, fair, well-settled seek alliance from suitable educated girl. Call/whatsapp: XXXXX (O Heraldo, 8 November 2022)

The people I interviewed in the village all shared experiences of being looked down upon and being treated as second-class citizens by the upper caste. One villager, who frequents all the markets in Goa, said that “I have seen some people's expressions when they walk through our section of the market; they look at us in disgust and yet buy fish from us.” She continued, “They look at us as if we are dirty and they are clean. They mock us behind our backs and yet we are here selling fish to them” (Interview 1). Another villager, who sells his own catch, shared how the trawlers owned by the upper caste regularly destroy his nets and how they illegally run in the breeding season leaving them fighting for scraps (Interview 2). This is a recurring theme in this village when asked about caste discrimination and all of the villagers had similar experiences.

### **Migrating from caste**

One method of tackling this discrimination is through migration. The primary proponent of migration is the need to find work, but it also functions as an escape route for the discrimination and oppression that many Kharvi people face. Migration is a complex phenomenon with the potential to have both positive and negative effects on individuals and communities. In the Indian context, since the 1960s, migration has led to a rise in both economic and social power for various individuals and countries. The Velhas Conquistas (Old Conquest) and the Novas Conquistas (New Conquest) were two significant events in Goan colonial history that led to the mass migration of Hindus who fled to avoid the fury of the Holy Inquisition that happened during the 16th century (Silva 423). In many studies of migration among India's various groups to foreign countries, researchers have found that higher caste people tend to benefit more than less-privileged lower caste ones. This is because the former is able to take advantage of more opportunities and is often more mobile than those in lower castes. This does not mean that migration was expressly a domain of the upper caste. In fact, researchers like Vibha Chandra contend that it was primarily an act that was carried out by the lower castes:

At the turn of the present century, Indian attitude

towards migration depended on caste status. For the upper castes, migration was forbidden because it was a polluting enterprise. Migration held no stigma for the lower castes because they were born contaminated. (163)

This obsession with remaining pure is what Ambedkar points out as a reason for the practice of the custom of endogamy, which was situated in the “absence of messing with outsiders...[which] is a natural result of Caste, i.e. exclusiveness” (8). These rules of purity were enforced by the upper castes and had not only been used as a means of economic exploitation but also as an instrument for social control. Indeed, the Brahmins went as far as erecting proscriptions such as the Samudrolanghana that ruled that crossing the sea led to the forfeiture of one’s identity, social respectability, varna, and the destruction of their posterity. This gave lower caste people the chance to flee their lands and move elsewhere where social mobility was achievable—risking their future generations’ lives in a desperate attempt to escape casteism speaks volumes of their conditions.

However, in recent decades we have seen migration both within the country and abroad and it is no longer limited to lower-caste people alone; rather, it has become a norm for all Indians—from Brahmins to Dalits, and from rich to poor. A recent survey of three south Indian villages points out the migration patterns of the villagers and notes that upper caste members’ migration patterns were often motivated by a desire for greater financial success and better living conditions (Arokkiaraj). Concurrently, he observed that the lower caste people tend to see migration as the only alternative when faced with difficult circumstances at home. In lieu of these shifting views and ideas of travel, it becomes expressly important to examine how the caste system has an impact on how migrating Indians fare.

In Akhada, among the 150 households present, 12 households have members who have migrated abroad and moved away from the traditional fishing occupation. The Kharvi diaspora is mainly concentrated in the Persian Gulf. While the majority of the village still is embedded in the fishing occupation, the signs of migration do point towards certain socio-economic growth and a general trend of divergence from their traditional occupation is seen. Rubinoff while talking about the entire community mentions that:

...there have been increased educational and occupational opportunities for lower socio-economic groups, like the fishing community. Many Kharvi youth are migrating to the Gulf countries or Europe for work and are moving into alternative, non-fishing occupations, like construction or hotel service. (Rubinoff 632)

The population of Akhada is aging and younger generations are moving towards different economic opportunities in other fields. The majority of the

Kharvis travel and work in the Gulf countries as construction workers, drivers, and other low-skilled jobs in search of the ‘petro dollar’, and the trend of migration within the Kharvis has been on the rise over the last few decades, especially among young men. They migrate to the Gulf but do so for a limited period of time because local laws do not permit them to stay there permanently.

Goans often go to the Gulf as guest workers on contractual jobs for a definite time period, but some stay there much longer, spanning from 2 to 35 years long, however, all of them return back, eventually. It is usually a relative working abroad that helps their family and community members in migration. Indeed, this is the case for more than half of the individuals who have traveled abroad from the village. One member said that “Most of them migrated through the help of a relative working abroad, who helped them get the visa, and sometimes even paid for their ticket” (Interview 3). The most common destination for Goans is Saudi Arabia, with Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, and Qatar following. While most of them engage in low-skilled labour there are a very select few who have managed to secure jobs in relatively high-end sectors owing to their education and fluency in English.

Most of the Kharvi community is concentrated in unskilled, cheap labour or construction-related jobs where they experience a lot of hardship. On asking a community member, who used to work in Saudi Arabia as a truck driver, about the living conditions, he said, “It is bad. My employers confiscated my visa so that I wouldn’t leave the country. I stayed there for seven years working under bad living conditions.” He continued, “The pay was good and that’s what kept me going” (Interview 4). Another individual also commented on how his salary was withheld from him for three months and upon asking his employers to pay they threatened him with deportation (Interview 5). These acts are legally facilitated through the Saudi kafala system. It is a system that:

puts migrants in a situation of legal dependence and exposes them to many abuses, including excessively long working hours without rest or days off, confiscated passports, delayed or withheld wages, forced labour, arbitrary non-renewal of their work permits...The kafala system gives full legal responsibility, powers, and rights before the State to the sponsor, who is at liberty to cancel the migrant’s work visa and have him or her expelled. (Integral Human Development)

This is not an isolated case. Many individuals have gone through similar experiences in the process of migrating and it is not uncommon to hear that many have been deceived by their employers who promise them lucrative salaries but then force them into a life of slavery. This may be the reason for some individuals to avoid migrating altogether but those in my community decide to migrate whatsoever. It is hard not to believe that remittances have become a major factor in the decision-making process of

individuals who are willing to migrate. The logic behind this is that an individual who has been earning remittances from abroad can afford a better life back home as compared to someone who does not have any source of income. This has led to more people migrating to the Gulf in search of greener pastures, thus creating a vicious cycle that may not be easy to break. The economic injection however has completely transformed Akhada, especially by raising living standards. The remittance money has helped the Kharvis improve their homes, send their children to school, and purchase more land. For example, Akhada has seen a surge in the construction of new houses, which has created many jobs for local builders.

Going abroad to escape from the social hierarchy of caste supposedly helps the lower caste dodge the discrimination they would face from the upper castes. Though the Kharvi can escape from caste discrimination in Goa, they encounter other forms of oppression when they go abroad. This too—much like most socio-political issues of any Indian—is invariably linked to the caste system. Caste operates as a lens through which people see the world, and it influences almost every aspect of life: from education to employment to marriage. While talking about becoming a skilled worker one of the individuals I interviewed said, “I do not have the education because my father did not have one. He didn’t have one because his father did not need one. We just didn’t educate ourselves” (Interview 5). Most of the Kharvi diaspora in the Gulf function as unskilled labourers and, hence, are prone to this form of exploitation.

The caste system makes sure that the lower castes do not get access to quality education and employment opportunities, a disadvantage that invariably gets passed downwards. In the Gulf, this means working as cheap labour in construction sites, restaurants, and other service industries. They face unsafe working conditions, long hours, and mediocre wages. The Kharvi community, unlike the upper castes, cannot negotiate their social mobility when they go abroad. They are trapped in the same caste hierarchy that is prevalent back home. The fact that they are not well educated and come from rural areas means that they cannot access opportunities that the upper caste can and even when they do manage to do so the prejudices associated with their caste are inseparable from their identity. Even though the Kharvis try to escape the caste system and gain social mobility their inability to do so is a pointed reminder of the pervasive nature of caste.

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## Conclusion

Through the process of migration, the Kharvi community does achieve some semblance of economic mobility which comes at the cost of sacrificing one’s individual freedom and being subjected to poor working conditions. This, however, does not translate to any form of social mobility because while the Kharvis do gain some economic power for themselves, they are unable to overcome the stigma associated with their caste and thus remain trapped within its confines on their return to India. A former worker from the village who has now returned home from the Gulf pointed out that the “hope to escape” is what motivates many Kharvi migrants to bear the atrocities in the Gulf. He added that “people go there thinking that they will be able to earn enough money and return home with their heads held high. But the reality is very different” (Interview 6). Although this hope is a powerful motivator, it is also a bizarre kind of hope that only leads to disappointment; it is a hope that promises much but delivers little. This is because, as the community member points out, the idea of “returning home with your head held high” is an impossible one in a society that is so stratified by caste.

The stigma associated with caste can not be erased by earning money abroad, nor is it overcome simply by returning home. When asked whether they were treated any differently, one community member said that “when you go abroad, people respect you. They give you a lot of respect because they think that you are doing something grand. But when we come back, there is no difference in the way we are treated” (Interview 4). This suggests that caste discrimination does not necessarily depend on one’s social status; rather, it is part of an individual’s very identity. When asked whether they felt that their caste had changed after spending time abroad, the community members unanimously responded that it had not. The caste system is based on birth and cannot be changed or altered by simply visiting another country. In conclusion, migration does not allow members of the Kharvi diaspora to transcend their caste. While they may be able to escape discrimination based on their caste while living abroad, in most scenarios they do not gain any form of social mobility and are still considered to be inferior upon returning home because their status as being “impure” and “uneducated” will always follow them.

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## **Interviews**

1. Sulochana Tari, fisherwoman from Akhada village, Nov 2022.
2. Shrikant Tari, fisherman from Akhada village, Nov 2022.
3. Surya Tari, elder from Akhada village, Nov 2022.
4. Shripad Bhosle, expatriate truck driver from Akhada village, Nov 2022.
5. Nitesh Tari, expatriate waiter currently working in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, Nov 2022.
6. Dayanand Bhosle, expatriate office worker currently working in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, Nov 2022.

# The Soul of a Fragile Façade

## Upward mobility and the Kapu community

*Sahithi Devarapalli*

### Introduction

During my childhood, every time I had to fill in the first page of my school diary with details, the little me who used to try hard to fill it in on my own, had to always go to my dad for two initials. It's the blank space beside the term caste that used to be filled whenever he uttered an unfamiliar combination of two letters from the alphabet that I was quite familiar with. I who can remember all 26 letters, always used to fail in remembering O and C together.

During the vacation after my 10th grade, my mom asked my dad, "Which one is it again? BC?". My dad to me, "Yeah right, BC it seems for your mom." "Sahithi knows better than you." For a moment, I sensed a sense of superiority complex in him about not being BC. As I was contemplating the different categories' initials I have seen in my friends' dairies, my dad said to me, "Sahithi, tell your mom which caste is ours." As I did not want to fall his expectation, I stressed my brain for the answer. "OC, Kapu," I blurted. Although it sounded more like a question, my father acknowledged it as the right answer. Ever since then, my engagement with caste became less and less frequent for I thought I apparently was not a victim of caste to be concerned about it.

That being my first experience with caste, this autoethnography paper initiated my contemplation about caste. Not that I have not heard of the term "caste" used in my family setting ever but I did not really see the need to explore the "why's and how's" of the privilege I enjoy. I called up my Chinnana (my father's younger brother) a couple of days ago to have a very diplomatic conversation which my Nanamma (father's mother) would have described as 'Karra viragaledhu, paamu chaavaledhu' (neither the stick is broken nor the snake is dead). As I was curious to know the roots of prejudice that my whole extended family held, I called up my Chinnana. I enquired him about this on the call while sitting on the edge of my bed in my PG which is nearly 900 km away from my home in Andhra. "Our ancestors were farmers, were they not? How come we possess a lot of inherited properties and all now?" I asked. As I anticipated, he said, "You think your great-grandfather was some wage worker on the farm or something? Farmers are very highly regarded, and he is one of the most reputed individuals since then. Why else do you think we have a petrol bunk now?" I took a moment to stare at my PG room's age-old fan, a potential weapon that could end me some night, to process the equation, "reputation > MBA." The sudden increase



in the spooky sound of Chandramukhi's anklet that the fan made pulled me back to reality. I realized I was on the call and had to respond to my Chinnana's third "Hello?". Just when he was about to curse the network and hang up the call, I asked him to tell me about the establishment of the petrol bunk. However, he chose to tell me the entire life story of my great-grandfather. The one-way conversation soon became a Q&A session that went on too long that I had to ask my roommate to bring food for me when she went down to get dinner for herself.

My great-grandfather was a farmer in Pithapuram, a town in the East Godavari district of Andhra Pradesh. For a very long time, he rented land and hired workers. Later, he earned enough to own a couple of acres of land. He used to put a few agricultural wage earners into manual labor for farm maintenance. Eventually, he took permission from the government to cut down timber wood on the lands owned by the government. He started exporting the wood to various villages and towns around. In the 1870s, his existing alliance with the government and his experience in business led to the provision of a Kerosene dealership. Later, around the 1900s, as the number of vehicles steadily increased, "Would you like to take up the dealership of a petrol pump in Pithapuram?" asked a government official. It was that casual question that eventually took the shape of the prominent Indian Oil Corporation Bunk in Pithapuram. Back then when the idea of automobiles and petrol pumps was new, interviews were conducted by Oil companies for dealerships. In my fore grandfather's case, it was Indian Oil Corporation Limited, a central public sector undertaking under the ownership of the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Government of India.

There were other contenders as well but not many as everybody feared importing oil, a highly inflammable substance, from Visakhapatnam. Although the uneven roads back then were risky enough, my fore grandfather did not back off because of his prior experience in Timber transport. Nevertheless, he was chosen by the oil company because he was the only applicant experienced in business and owned around 20 cents of land on the main road of the town that connects it to many neighbouring towns. Consequently, the dealership was given to him in 1960. Along with fueling, The Sri Rama Stores, set up by my great-grandfather, provided services for vehicles ranging from fueling, oil changes, air filling, and selling engine oils and grease.

Back then there used to be only about three to four pumps in Pithapuram. Initially, there used to be price wars among the oil companies too. If one company reduced their price by a paise, the other used to retaliate likewise. Later, the oil companies came to a common ground and established a fixed price. There were no metered pumps like today. The fuel would be pumped into standard five-liter cans which were then emptied into the vehicle tanks. "The cost of one-liter petrol was only one rupee and some paise, and still our commission was better than what we get now", my great-grandfather nostalgically revealed to his

sons, my father and Chinnana, who later inherited the bunk. In those days there were only about 10 cars in Pithapuram. My Chinnana vividly remembered this one well-known person in the town who used to visit the bunk in a classy Benz. "He was very particular about his car, which used to be in pristine condition. We had to be extra careful while filling, not letting a drop spill onto the car. He used to insist that we filter the petrol too", he shared. This memory, what seemed to be a happy one, was unsettling to me when I heard him even talk about willingly deeming himself inferior to someone. Later, the power that person held made sense to me. Politicians. Connections.

Talking about politics, I really wanted to know the tea stall talk of my town regarding 'Kapu Aikya Garjana' that happened in 2016 by Mudragadda Padmanabham. It was a demand by the Kapu Community to be included in the list of backward classes that escalated into a full-blown political battle in Andhra Pradesh. Because back then when this happened, I was in the 10th grade enjoying the bandh holidays. My Chinnana began to explain the talk of the town - reservation is needed for even the Kapu caste because one community label does not define the economic status of every individual in the community. He also went on to say that it would not matter even if the Kapus are added to the BC category as long as one is rich. He did not really want to lose the feeling of superiority that the label gives him. He quoted an example from Telugu Film Industry (TFI), "all the top Tollywood families are mostly Chowdary's but Chiranjeevi's is not. Despite the TFI being dominated by Chowdarys, he still made his way into it only because of the insane amount of money he had. Now, his sons, nephews, and nieces are ruling the industry because of Chiranjeevi's fame. Nobody even knew which caste he belonged to until he started his own political party called 'Prajarajyam'". My Chinnana, I think, realizes that caste is a hereditary group with a fixed ritual status and class is a category of people with similar socio-economic status. Also, the fact that being included in BC gives reservation that could provide the youth with jobs and benefit the lower class. But I do not think he really is looking forward to it. He seeks pleasure in the power that a mere label provides. The amalgamation of business and agriculture led to a discernable sense of upward mobility. However, a casual dealership proposal for a petrol bunk my great-grandfather accepted provided my Chinnana with a strong sense of financial security that is good enough for him to secure his superiority complex irrespective of the loss of label.

## **The Beginnings**

The term "kapu" describes a social class of farmers who are largely found in the southern Indian states of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. The majority of the population in Kapu is rural, making up a diverse caste of peasants. In Andhra Pradesh where they are the major population in the East Godavari and West Godavari districts, they are categorized as a forward caste. They differ from the other three Kapu



communities that were in the state before Telangana's establishment in 2014 when the state was divided into two. The Turpu Kapu live primarily in Srikakulam, Vizianagaram, and Visakhapatnam, the Munnuru Kapu in Telangana, and the Balija in Rayalaseema.

## Origins

In Telugu, the word "Kapu" literally translates to "protector." According to some historians, it is a different variation of the ancient tribe "Kaampu" that is described in the Ramayana. They are referred to as a significant landholding group in the Telugu districts who are respected for being substantial, dependable, and the leaders of Hindu society after the Brahmans in the Gazetteer of Anantapur, a geographical index. They work according to their profession. They go by the names Chinna Kapu and Pedda Kapu, and they work to protect and defend cities and communities (the people involved in the administration and ruling of societies and kingdoms). Balija, Munnuru Kapu, Naidus, Ontari Kapu, Telaga, and Turpu Kapu are the caste's principal subgroups. In addition to these, there are numerous other regional subgroups as well.

In Telugu, the term "Kapu" denotes an agriculturist or grower. In the post-Kakatiya era, a few Kapu subgroups split off into distinct communities (Velamas, Panta Kapus, Pakanati Kapus, who were later referred to as Reddys, and Kapus of Kammanadu, who were subsequently referred to as Kammas). The remaining Kapus are still referred to by their old name. According to the stories, all caste clusters of cultivators share a common ancestor. The change of occupational identities into caste labels took place in the late Vijayanagara period, which is to say, in the 17th century or later.

## Status

According to the old Hindu ritual ranking system known as Varna, the Kapu are a Sat-Shudra community (the Sat-Sudra community was considered a lower caste in the Varna system and traditionally held occupations associated with manual labor and service). They are a dominating peasant caste in coastal Andhra, according to Nallapareddy Srinivasulu Reddy, an Andhra Pradesh MLA. He also identifies the Telaga as a backward peasant caste and the Balija as a peasant caste with Lingayat beliefs. Srinivasulu has examined the 1921 census of India to bring it into line with the current state and caste systems, and he draws the conclusion that the Kapus, who made up about 17% of the state's population at the time and could be considered a forward caste, were inferior to the Balija and Telaga, who made up 3% and 5% of the 1921 population, respectively.

According to Srinivasulu, the Reddys and Kammas are the two most powerful ethnic groups in Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, while the Kapus, despite having a relatively small number, belong to a group with less power but nevertheless significant political influence. Even so, Srinivasulu observes that the

Kapus of the coastal districts are distinct from the Munnuru Kapus of Telangana, noting that they are particularly effective in the East Godavari and West Godavari districts. While the former is rather wealthy, the latter who fall under the OBC group, has only recently entered politics.

The Kapu sub-castes were rarely distinguished in the official government classifications. The British administration of the Madras Presidency classed all Kapus as belonging to a backward caste in 1915; this classification persisted until 1956, even after the establishment of Andhra Pradesh. The Andhra Pradesh government delisted the Kapus caste from the list of inferior castes that year. Since then, numerous governments have attempted to include them once more, but they have been unsuccessful. Munnuru Kapus and Turpu Kapus were classified as "backward classes" by the Andhra Pradesh government's Anantha Raman Commission in 1968, but the Kapus as a whole was not. According to the Mandal Commission established by the Indian government in the 1980s, Kapus should be considered one of the Other Backward Classes (OBC). But the task of compiling the caste list for the OBC category was given to the state governments. The N. K. Muralidhar Rao-led state commission made no changes to the status of the other Kapu castes.

Early in 2016, the Kapus of the remaining Andhra Pradesh state began agitating for OBC status, sparking violent demonstrations. Both the YSR Congress party and the Indian National Congress party have backed their demand. The Telugu Desam Party (TDP), which was in power at the time, was said to be against the request.

## Taxonomies

The ancient tribe, Kapu, in the period of Kakatiya, was divided into subcastes on the basis of territory or profession. Based on territory - Telangana: Telaga, Kammanadu: Kamma, Velanadu: Velama, Renadu: Renati Kapu, Palnadu: Palnati Kapu, Pakanadu: Pakanati Kapu, Panta: Panta Kapu, Orugallu: Oruganti Kapu, Gandikota: Gandikota Kapu (migrated to Madura and Tinnevely), Neradu: Nerati Kapu, and Eastern (Turpu) region: Turpu Kapu. Based on the profession - Naidu (the Kapus who worked as Nayakas or Amaranayakas, i.e., commanders and administrators), Balija (the Kapus who got involved in trading), Reddy (the Kapus who started as Rathas and worked as administrators), Munnuru Kapu (the 300 brave Kapu soldiers and their families who helped Kakatiyas), Ontari (the specialized skilled Kapu warriors who can fight individually), Bhumanchi Kapu (the Kapu people who are good to the earth and do farming), and the Desur Kapu (the Kapus whose body is full of valor stating that they are warrior).

These castes had a flexible social structure and frequently intermarried. They used to view themselves as sub-castes of a single tribe. They were divided into distinct castes as a result of "Divide and Rule" during the British Decennial Census, which hardened caste identities and resulted in the development of strict

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# Discrimination: A Phenomenological Exploration

Jotham Judson UK

“There is no great disability in society, than the inability to see a person as more” - Robert M. Hensel

One of the biggest nations, India ranked first in the world population. The three names for the Indian republic - “India,” “Bharat,” and “Hindustan”- are used differently depending on the situation and the language of the exchange. The census taken in November 2021 indicated that there were 139 crore people living in India. India is the seventh-largest nation in the world. It is a nation with diverse cultures, languages, regional literary canons, and customs; as well as great and stunning architecture. When one thinks about India, these are the first things that come to mind, along with the image of caste and religion put on top. Even a large nation like India where there are many cultures, traditions, religions and languages. It is not immune to prejudice; there are many different types of it, but caste discrimination is the most prevalent. This paper attempts to explore the collective experience of my family and myself. This paper makes an effort to provide a phenomenological perspective on the collective experience of discrimination, including both my own experience and the experiences of those I’ve encountered. Autoethnography is one of the best literary forms for examining and commenting on one’s own life experiences. It portrays not just our own experiences, but also the individuals we encounter. This essay describes my family’s and my own experiences with caste. It tells the story of both unique and common lived experiences. Caste is the main topic of this essay. Phenomenology is employed as a theoretical framework to approach the work because the paper’s goal is to investigate my experience of caste, in the sense to look at my experience in comparison with my family’s experience. Phenomenological research is the study of lived experience

This paper focuses on how I got to know about the caste and conversion that happened in my family; it’s an autoethnography. Here in this paper the work is done mainly based on questions about discrimination and caste, through phenomenological approach.

Autoethnography is a mode of research which seeks to describe and systematically analyse personal experience in order to understand culture. It is not only the personal experience but also about the things and people encountered. It is a narration of both individual and collective lived experiences. It requires both a unique experience of a person and also collective experience of personal relevance (like family stories, secrets or even their own experiences). This approach challenges canonical ways of doing research and representing others and treats research

as a political, socially-just and socially-conscious act. A researcher uses tenets of autobiography and ethnography to do and write autoethnography. Thus, as a method, autoethnography is both process and product (Ellis et al).

Phenomenology is qualitative research. Phenomenological approach is how the phenomenon is experienced at the time it occurs, it is not the same for everyone. Phenomenological approach helps to understand the meaning of people’s lived experience, explores what people experienced and focuses on their experience of a phenomenon. It seeks to capture ‘lived experience’ (Manen 9). The German word ‘erlebnis’ is translated into English as Lived Experience. While looking into the etymology of the word ‘experience’ in English it does not include the word ‘lived’. However, the Latin word ‘experientia’ means ‘experience’. Therefore, the term ‘erlebnis’ refers to ‘living through something’, which also denotes the active and passive life experiences (Manen 9). I also conducted a family interview and inquired about their experiences with prejudice and caste. Before we continue, what exactly are caste and discrimination?

## Understanding discrimination

India’s caste system is said to be the world’s largest surviving social hierarchy. Caste plays a major role in India, the ancient caste system is different from now but still the discrimination is the same; insensitive as usual. It is one of the ancient systems which is followed to this day in India. According to Ambedkar, ancient Hindu society was composed of classes – Brahmanas, the Kshatriyas, the Vaishyas and the Shudras that became self-closed units called castes through the practice of endogamy. In his work, ‘Castes in India: Their Mechanism, Genesis and Development’, Ambedkar identifies caste as an important institution, which is practised by no other civilised society, past or contemporary as discussed in Ambedkar’s *Annihilation of Caste*. We can no longer claim that caste is the only factor in discrimination. Discrimination is said to be the disability of society. Discrimination happens throughout the world, it occurs in different ways. Here in India, discrimination is like a luxurious delicacy with different varieties and caste is the most expensive among them. In a nation like India, where discrimination is deeply ingrained and embedded; it is impossible to pull it out from the roots, but it might eventually alter.

## Remembered Experiences

This paper is an autoethnography comparing my experience and understanding of discrimination and

caste with that of my family's. In my school journals, I have seen the word "caste," but that part was never filled when the rest were. However, before sixth grade, I had never attempted to confront my parents about their caste. My parents declined to answer the query and said that I didn't need to know my caste. After that, I stopped questioning my parents about our caste. My parents didn't even bring up caste with me until I was in the tenth grade. If it hadn't been for the SSLC state board exam application, they would have never brought up caste in the first place. Nonetheless, they were hesitant to respond to the question, "What is caste, and to which caste do we belong?" My parents never mentioned caste to me until I was in the tenth grade. When questioned, they claimed that it was unnecessary for me to know about caste at the time. Parents may be concerned that the concept of caste will infiltrate their children's minds, but knowing one's caste is not a bad thing. Because it is simply a class system, similar to but distinct from the social class system. Nothing is bad or good until the concept of humanity is subverted for the sake of caste. In a large country like India, caste is not the only form of discrimination. Discrimination occurs in a variety of ways, including caste, religion, and other social classes, among others. When I first read about caste in my social studies textbook, it was also the first time I heard of Ambedkar. It raised many questions in my mind that were yet to be answered, so I went home and attempted to ask my father about this. But he scolded me and refused to say anything about caste. Just as I entered college, there began talks about my caste. I didn't experience much caste prejudice, but I did suffer other types of discrimination, including that related to religion, education, and other factors. I also conducted a family interview and inquired about their experiences with prejudice and caste.

My caste identified our family as BC Christian Adidraavidar, despite the fact that we are a Christian family. We were converted from Hinduism, which at first confused me. I spoke with my grandparents and parents for a brief interview. My grandmother was from the Navidar Pandithar caste, and her father served as the village's spiritual leader. He was feared by everyone in the hamlet because they know that challenging him will have negative effects. Siva Pragaram was the man's name. Due to his status as a pandithar, great-grandfather served as the village's equivalent of a doctor. Anyone who attempted to converse with him has mysteriously vanished or died. Even our own family believed that my great grandfather practised black magic (Mrs. Lithiyal). My grandmother fell in love with my grandfather, Mr. Murugasan, a member of a lower caste, while they were both working at the harbour. Despite the opposition of my grandmother's family, she eventually wed my grandfather. They were therefore ordered not to enter the village. My grandfather mysteriously passed away after a few years. My grandmother worked, saved for her children, and raised the five of them on her own, overcoming all the difficulties of single parenting. When my grandpa passed away, all of his children—my aunts and my father—were less

than ten. In addition, my great-grandfather too passed away. The general populace was able to breathe freely as a result of this. People listened to my great-grandfather out of fear for their lives rather than out of respect. After he ultimately passed away, my grandma was the target of the people's rage. At this point, they changed from Hinduism to Christianity. Charles, a preacher, assisted them and shared the gospel with them. My grandmother, was hesitant to accept it, initially. After her father's passing, nobody in the hamlet, according to my grandma, accepted her. Since she was now a single mother caring for five children, many people were afraid of and unhappy with her. No one understood her feelings, and many tried to sexually and physically attack her. No one came to help her with her problems. After adopting Jesus as her Saviour, she claimed to have a sense of relief and to have more strength to deal with her problems. She entered the village and lived among the residents after gaining the trust of the villagers (Mrs. Lithiyal). Here, it is obvious that sex is being discriminated against, not caste or religion. Even though it was obvious that my grandmother was from a high caste, she was nonetheless subjected to discrimination since she married a member of a lower caste. Even after being accepted by the populace, discrimination persisted. My father and aunts were not regarded as children in and of themselves. This time, my father and my aunts experienced caste-based discrimination once more. I questioned my father and my grandmother about how they learned about caste. When he was seven years old, according to my father, he learned about caste for the first time. He continued, by saying that because they are from a lower caste, he and his sisters received very poor treatment, with the exception of his mother (i.e., my grandmother). My father used to work in Sengal Soolai (Brick kiln), where red bricks are manufactured in bulk, but he was denied employment due to his caste. He always wanted to have a father but never experienced the love of a father. Even when someone offered him water, they would pour it from the top, forcing him to sip with his hand. Even though he didn't have the same opportunities as many around him, my father persevered because he believed in himself and in God. My dad worked hard in the brick kiln, and his sisters helped out around the house and made a little bit of money. Granny was well-liked by the populace, but because she was a single lady without employment, many still referred to her as a harlot. It's also because she wed a man from a lower caste. My father frequently states that discrimination takes many forms, but it is up to us to overcome it. It happens when a person starts to believe in themselves and put forth their best effort to prove it. Caste is not the only way to discriminate against someone. Well, discrimination will have its due not only with caste but also with colour, religion, region, language, culture and sex.

I was looking for a rental home in July 2022 with my buddies in preparation for leaving the college residence hall. I came upon a sign that read, "Only for vegetarians." We noticed many residences with signs that read, "Only Vegetarians." This briefly caused me

to consider the fact that some people question about caste without ever using the word “caste.” It’s okay for people to not want a meat eater in their home, but after experiencing one incident, I began to question whether these “Only Vegetarians” signs could also serve as a caste indicator. One particular event truly stands out in my memory; at one home, there was no mention of ‘only vegetarians’, so we went to see the owner and inquired about the home’s specifics. He was friendly at first, but he kept glancing at us, monitoring how we spoke and behaved during the entire conversation. “No”, the home’s owner said, pointing out that we are not vegetarians. It seems to me that the term “non-veg” or “vegetarian” is used to infer caste.

In the expectation that their children will grow up caste-free, many parents decide to not talk about caste with their children. The child may, however, end up learning about caste through other means and becoming corrupt as a result. A lot of individuals also think that caste is the only thing that causes discrimination. In actuality, religion, social class, language, geography, colour, and gender are other characteristics other than caste that may result in prejudice.

There are five straightforward solutions to the caste system’s problems, in Ms. Reetu Chaudhry’s opinion, in order to be caste free. Children must first be aware of caste. Caste and casteism must be properly educated about. Children should receive proper caste education to prevent their caste from corrupting them and their interactions with mankind. Caste should be used less often. The term “caste” should only be used with extreme caution. Caste should only be mentioned in specific contexts. The younger people nowadays should place the least value on caste. Inter-caste relationships, the young mass should become more supportive of inter-caste marriages. They will get closer and foster positive relationships with one another as a result. Removal of socio-cultural Inequality: The primary factor causing socio-cultural inequality has been caste-based social and cultural disparities. No one will have a positive opinion of their own caste if the inequalities are eliminated and all castes are placed on an equal sociocultural footing. Promotion of economic equality: There is a significant economic divide between upper- and lower-caste populations. It increases social distance and aids in the growth of casteism. In order to achieve economic development, all castes should be granted equal access to the economy (Top 5 Remedies to the Problem of Casteism). Discrimination encompasses a wide range of factors, in addition to caste, such as sex, religion, location, colour, and language. Last month, while I walked close to Cubbon Park, I was conversing in Tamil with a friend. Someone quickly approached me and remarked, “You Tamil people have come to Bangalore occupying and ruining it.” Another day, my friend and I were returning home after supper children were playing football when one of them screamed slurs at us on the basis of us being from Tamil Nadu. Is it a result of the language I use?

Or is it a result of where I’m from? They definitely don’t know my caste, which actually demonstrates that there are factors other than caste. One tactic used to repress individuals is caste. At the end of the day I am also an Indian who just moved out of my hometown. I am just a human being, who belong to people and not from somewhere inside a forest. When a kid starts to understand just humanity, they will understand others very easily. I have another instance to recollect. My father, an evangelist, was set to take off for the first time. In the airport, he ran into one of my former teachers. My dad tried to approach him after recognising him. Until my father acknowledged that he is an evangelist, my teacher spoke to him readily. When we leave a state, we are referred to by the state’s name, and when we leave India, we are referred to as Indians. Caste, religion, location, colour, or whatever the demarcation and categorization, prejudices can always take place. We all guilty of the same, knowingly or unknowingly. Our caste or religion are not used to identify us. We will be referred to as Indians. In India, discrimination extends beyond caste to a number of other areas of social life. In India, caste still exists and cannot be eradicated. It will occasionally appear, much like a cyst. But compared to earlier periods, caste has far less of an impact. There are currently a lot of inter-caste and inter-religious marriages.

## **Conclusion**

Discrimination has many different forms and occurs everywhere. One of the oldest forms of discrimination still used today in India is based on caste. One needs to remember that there are also other forms of prejudice besides caste. However, in order to truly eradicate caste or any other forms of prejudice, we must first have a clear understanding of them and refrain from elevating them above humanity as a whole. When the day is done, people will recognise me by my name and place rather than my caste because I am a person who has migrated away from Tamil Nadu. Discrimination happens throughout the world in different forms. Caste is one of the ancient living ways of discrimination, which is still dominant in India. At the end of the day people won’t recognise me by my caste because I moved out of Tamil Nadu; instead, they will know me by my name and where I live. Once more when I leave India, people will address me by my name and nation of origin (India), not by my caste or any other characteristic. When I leave a pattern, I am referred to as Asian before my nationality. My name is still yelled out, heard, and remembered, nonetheless. Individuals are remembered by their names alone, not by their nationality or anything else. Discrimination exists everywhere, and while it must be eliminated, it will take time. But finally, we may overcome it by understanding it better. As soon as people start to understand that everyone is equal, discrimination of any kind will stop. Everyone goes to bed at night with their eyes closed, breathing the same air and experiencing the same darkness. We have no idea who is sleeping next to us. Is it true that discrimination was used when creating our world? No, simply a few disabilities that are treatable.

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# The Reliability of the Unreliable Narrator

## Framing Narrative Spaces of Knowledge and Memory for the Nadars of Travancore

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*Nivedhana Pandian*

In preparation for this research project, my grandmother, gleeful at the prospect of passing on to me the task of excavating old family documents, sent to me her mother's – my great-grandmother's – M.Litt thesis, titled "Folk Music and Dance of Kerala". Edith Rachel Ann – Edith Walsalam at the time – was an elaborate researcher, whose work had taken her to various rural regions of Kerala. "To acquire a good knowledge of the subject," Walsalam declares, "one should have a general appreciation of Kerala, the land of their birth" (1). She goes on to elaborate on the uniqueness of the region, Kerala

is gifted with a wealth of beauty in her mountains, lakes, rivers, forests, coconut palms, cultivated lands and quaint architecture. A simplicity of life and dress is still retained in her teeming population of trim, good-looking, intelligent, clean and cheerful people. (Walsalam 1-2)

This account is curious for several reasons. There is a certain disjointedness to Walsalam's Kerala, a spatial fragmentation. The Kerala that she describes is that which has been greatly bestowed with natural prosperity and lushness; this is what defines its geography. Yet she maintains that the people of the land are clean and educated; they are civilised, as opposed to the way they have been presented in dominant discourse. What is fascinating to me about this passage is the manner in which both these aspects feature in the same sentence. Nature had come to be considered in terms of a certain level of untaintedness.

Walsalam's description of the people of Kerala echoes this sentiment, they are "clean", and they are "intelligent" – they mirror the landscape of Kerala itself. The irony of this notion arises when one ponders upon the history of this "cleanness" and its periphery in the author's mind. Edith Walsalam came from a long line of missionaries and Western-trained doctors, she was a woman from a largely urban area who pursued higher education in the early twentieth century. The features that represent purity are entrenched with a historical unnaturality that Walsalam will have never considered; her Walsalam's Kerala was that painted in the hands of an educated Christian convert, a woman of a newly socially- mobilised lower caste in Kerala. This almost paradoxical account reflects a this fragile, optimistic, and a somewhat patronizing lens, implicitly informed by a conflict that is underlined by caste on one hand, and religion on the other. This conflict, to me, has been imperative in the formation of a Nadar identity, a collective Nadar worldview.

The paper intends to explore the complicated history of the Nadar community by means of histories that have been documented and passed down, and primarily seeks to understand these texts in themselves, set against various accounts, claims and stories within and outside the community. The works that will be analysed largely fall under three categories: personal accounts from family, family documents, and records kept by missionaries. I aim to investigate the complex relationship between caste and Christianity, set against the experience of being born into a Christian Nadar family. This will be done through a careful interrogation of the sources themselves, and will, most importantly, be used to study the role of censorship in the formation of the Nadar identity as well as in its upward movement in society. This includes the notion of agency within the caste hierarchy, as well as the power dynamics involved in the creation of colonial accounts of the caste; I will then trace the politics of censorship in contemporary times with regards to the Nadar caste, in relation to what is said about the community in the public domain as well as what is not, as well as the self-censoring that often occurs when family members are asked difficult questions, words that are altered, justifications, glorifications, and discontinuities.

The study aims to delve into the various histories of the Nadar community, to question it and to learn from it, in order to understand Nadar history in a sense that is nuanced and holistic. It will navigate questions relating to the interrelation of ownership, status, and knowledge, and their interplay in the caste hierarchy in South Travancore. I argue for an interrelation between certain problematic features of the community today, such as its homogeneity and oftentimes superciliousness, and the collective trauma of oppression, the sentiments of which seem to echo larger insecurities within the community – that it is a combination of caste forces and the doctrines of Christianity which contributed to its fragmented collective identity, and that the twin intertwined forces of Christian faith and social power finds its roots in the nineteenth century in South Travancore.

The form and structure of the paper are admittedly disjointed, but this will reflect the disjointed story of the caste itself, the justifications it makes to sustain itself and the missing histories that urge it to write itself back. It is an oral history in the loosest sense of the term, for the starting point for every juncture of it has been the stories that have been passed down across centuries in my family, but these stories have

been extended and considered against other accounts and records, due to my fascination with this method as storytelling, over all else. My approach will weave rapidly between inner and outer worlds, the private and public domain; it is autoethnographic in its worldview, but the academic style has been retained in order to sever the constraints of both forms and present this study in a manner that can interrogate a multiplicity of sources. Through the paper, readings, and interviews, as well as my own experiences, I have attempted to rummage through spaces of continuous movement – rummaging in order to achieve, with some degree of success, a less elusive history and story of the Nadar community.

## **The Nadars in Travancore**

The case of the Nadars of South India has baffled historians, sociologists, and theologians alike. This is perhaps because of its somewhat bizarre placement within the societal hierarchy, or the even more bizarre series of events that would come to determine this placement across decades. “Nadar” is an umbrella term which was set in place in 1921, due to negative connotations associated with the term “Shanar”, the name by which the community was previously referred. The Nadars were historically placed between the Shudras and Dalits, thus maintaining a space in the middle, and this “peculiar position of in-betweenness earned them the appellation of being the highest among the lowest and the lowest among the highest” (Sheeju 299). In nineteenth century Travancore, however, the palpable demarcation between the dominant castes (the Nambudiri and Nair communities) and the remainder of the lower castes, rendered the Nadar community ultimately an untouchable community, economically backward and chained to traditional professions such as palmyra-climbing and toddy tapping.

Robert Caldwell, who worked with the London Missionary Society, says about the Shanar caste,

The caste of Shanars occupies a middle position between the Vellalers and their Pariar slaves. Their hereditary occupation is that of cultivating and climbing the palmyra palm, the juice of which they boil into a coarse sugar. This is one of those occupations which are restricted by Hindu usage to members of a particular caste; whilst agriculture and trade are open to all. (3)

The social positioning of the Shanars and other low castes resulted in various modes of degradation, humiliation and exploitation. Women of lower castes were not allowed to wear upper clothing in public spaces, as a symbol of respect and modesty to the upper castes. Additionally, various taxes were heaped upon the Nadar community, even though most Shanar men were forced to perform unpaid labour, for Hindus of upper castes as well as the government. This practice was commonly called uliyam, “the custom of compulsory and gratuitous services to be performed by ‘backward classes’” (Nair 30), which came to connote

the unconditional and non-negotiable unnegotiable submission expected of the lower castes. There is also the matter of spatial purity; Nadars were required to keep their distance from members of the upper castes, in order to keep from tarnishing them.

All these factors contributed to a mass conversion to Christianity in the nineteenth century, by many members of the Nadar community. The missionary presence was strong in Travancore, with the local base of the London Missionary Society having been situated in Nagercoil. The conversion of the Nadars is deeply complex, since it was only partly invoked by a desire to spiritually deepen one’s connection with the Christian God; Nadars, who were outside of the caste system and who struggled economically, were presented with a ray of hope, with the prospect of aspiring towards a better social station, so they “aligned themselves with new centers of power in the emerging political landscape of colonial south India, they started to acquire pirutus of their own, from new sources” (Kent 203). Doss states that the Nadars, along with the Ezhavas, Pariahs, Malas and Madigas, “as well as other ‘untouchables’, came on their own to the missionary faith for material help and protection” (182).

Many sociologists have commented on the economic and social ripples because of this phenomenon; even the administration in Travancore and the missionaries were aware of it. Kent goes on to state that in the process of conversion and reidentification,

[Nadars] built up new respectable bodies, combining indigenous concepts of virtue and propriety with new notions of the properly bounded and contained Christian body to craft visual self-presentations that signaled to both Hindus and Christians that they were people worthy of considerable respect and regard. (203)

This is largely in relation to the process of retaliation that soon followed the conversion to Christianity; the Shanar Revolt (1812-1858), for the rights of low caste women to cover their chests in public. Caste and the body are deeply intertwined; this notion will be elaborated upon through the course of the paper.

The Nadar community also exerted this newfound social mobility movability through the opportunities in education for which conversion to Christianity allowed. Binoy declares,

Newly converted lower castes experienced new identities and selves through religious assertion. It has given them some kind of social freedom and relief from the caste shackles. And the missionary schools and institutions led to the emergence of a new middle class under the influence of colonial education and religious conversion, which directly influenced social change. (2)

South Travancore was the site of the first English medium school in South India, known at the time as the Nagercoil Seminary. These schools aimed



to spread English education across the region and to promote women's education and collegiate education. Of course, these educational institutions were not solely established as an altruistic enterprise. Missionaries, having realized that the group which was most inclined to embrace Christianity was the Nadar community, and built these schools with the hope of amplifying their converts, to promote the formation of a native church.

This access to education, as well as the "vocal and resitive" agency afforded to the community through protection from the missionary presence, served to elevate it financially and socially (Binoy 3). What is fascinating, which will largely be the focus of my paper, is the tension between this precarious social position, and the role of narrative and censorship in establishing an identity built on an almost paradoxical relationship between the role of these things within and outside the community. "Thus," Binoy remarks, "the case of the Nadar converts is one of the best documented and most interesting of all mass conversions in India" (199).

### **A Family History from South Travancore**

I began my research by attempting to trace a genealogy of sorts of my family. The available accounts begin with Arulanandam, born in 1920, a second-generation convert and missionary. Not much is known about his family prior to conversion. Other family records primarily focus on William Fletcher and Mosavalsalam Sastrikar, my great-great grandfathers, and influential missionaries in the nineteenth century.

In 1867, William Fletcher wrote a Tamil hymn which presented strong imagery of liberation from slavery and suppression from upper caste forces. It was translated to Malayalam by Mosavalsalam Mosavalsala Sastrikar, a famous Christian songwriter. The song was called "Adimaivelai Ozhinthathe" in Tamil, and "Adimavela Ozhinju" in Malayalam.

On the first anniversary of her mother's death, my grandmother penned a booklet which traced a concise history spanning four generations. "With the great efforts [Mosavalsalam Sastrikar] took," says my grandmother, "he succeeded in establishing 15 churches among the poor and downtrodden of that time. Though he was given promotion in his ministerial work, he found pleasure in serving the poor and he chose to live and move among them" (8).

The ambiguity of this description was unsatisfying to me in the process of my research, as well as the responses I received from my mother and grandmother when I asked them about the same. "He helped liberate so many downtrodden people," my mother responded, echoing the rhetoric of the missionary reports, her primary source of information. The "efforts" described are vague in their implications; was this on the basis of the construction of the churches themselves, or in

perhaps coercing conversion?

I found myself constantly faced with similar situations through the course of my interviews. As a strong believer from a deeply Christian household, my grandmother foregrounded the missionary activities of my great-great grandfathers; the socio-political factors involved seemed to tamper with this narrative, I was met with either stony silence or a bout of awkward stutters when I asked about the demographic of people who were converted.

The history of conversion in my family, even in relation to the mass movement towards the same in the nineteenth century, still seems a bit of an anomaly. The holes in the narrative make themselves known through loudness rather than silences, through ravings and enthused stories of the grace of God in blessing those who serve him.

Very little could be traced about the economic and social standing of neither William Fletcher nor Mosavalsala Sastrikar, and this has largely arisen due to a seemingly deliberate rewriting of history. When I asked my mother about this, her answers were greatly censored by the very factors that determined them. "He left the comforts of his house and God provided for him," was the response evoked. I attempted to gently engage with this whilst in conversation with my grandmother, but found it quite interesting that much of what she remembered from what had been passed on to her in terms of the social history of Travancore was mostly focalised on the slave castes, and missionaries' contact with them. Of course, this is largely because her ancestors, all having been missionaries at various points in time, had never been inside the Nadar community, but largely aligned them with the missionary presence in Travancore, primarily the London Missionary Society. What is unfortunate, however, is that little is known about their lives prior to them devoting their lives to this profession; the oral history of my family passed down generation after generation is largely informed by these two aspects, promoting a certain level of castelessness in these accounts of our ancestors, despite the factors informed by caste that led to their becoming missionaries in the first place.

This can be understood strongly as a stark attempt to preserve the narrative of Christian deliverance and liberation. Fletcher's song "Adimaivelai Ozhinthathe", translated to English by Samuel Mateer, states, The owners who enslaved us often caused us much suffering; But will it comfort us to relate all the oppression in full? (Mateer 317-318)

This characterisation of the Christian subject as a liberated being is also heavily reliant on the workings of caste. "Adimaivelai Ozhinthathe" elaborately records the various caste injustices and oppression faced by lower castes in Travancore, primarily the slave castes. The song does not perform the function of social commentary but promotes "Christian

liberation” (Paul 151). This liberation, of course, is not that which has arisen from native forces; it comes from the outside. Whilst approaching family members and documents, this then reveals something essential in understanding the Christian Nadar community – a stringent refusal to engage with individual families’ pre-conversion past, or aspects of the Nadar identity that are outside the religious paradigm. The implication of this in recounting family history is thus an inevitable engagement with one’s “sordid past”, a time before the “clean” and “intelligent” characteristics that Edith Walsalam attributes to the people of Kerala comes into play.

One can hypothesise, therefore, that Christianity in India cannot be looked at without considering caste-considering in caste; neither can it be studied without considering the role of colonialism.

### **Heathens, Liberation, and Colonialism**

Many researchers of Malayalam Christian music describe Mosavalsala Sastrikan as a liberator and social activist. As Paul states, “Protestant Christianity broke the linguistic caste hierarchy in Kerala society ... The significance of songs can be discussed as a variety of linguistic modernity, wherein Protestant Christian songs played a crucial role in constructing new images of life and hope” (151). Mosavalsalam Sastrikan’s music, to Paul and other critics, represented the newfound hope that the missionary presence in Travancore had provided for members of the lower castes; on one hand this was because of the intermingling of the rhetoric of Christian salvation and the rhetoric of liberation from slavery, on the other it is because musicians like Mosavalsalam Sastrikan and William Fletcher chose to compose music in both the folk and Western styles.

This dual understanding that has been passed down across generations, to me, seems to underline the entirety of the Nadar Christian identity across decades. While I was in conversation with my grandmother, she strongly affirmed that “God had blessed us with such a strong family line, it is our duty to do our part and pass on their legacy.” Other families within the community share a strong fixation on tracing their lineage on Christian terms. As aforementioned, a key feature of the Christian Nadar community seems to be this preoccupation with shedding all parts of their caste-based identity prior to conversion. Narratives relating to the post conversion period will be discussed in a latter part of this paper, along with its paradoxical companion, which is the Nadar claim to Kshatriya status.

Music, therefore, played a large role in dismantling the rigidity of certain caste conventions and traditions. While critics like Paul speak of this moment in history as imperative in the social reform movements that would follow, as well as in the establishment of native churches, this was, to others, a step backward. Herbert Arthur Popely, a missionary of LMS from the early

part of the twentieth century, rebukes the practice of Western music and instruments in Indian churches by saying the following,

There are now in every regional language a large number of Indian lyrics and bhajans in Indian metres, which express often very beautifully the truths of the Gospel and the spirit of Christian teaching. Most of them are written in easily intelligible language which can be well appreciated by simple Christians and many of the tunes to which they are sung are very beautiful and inspiring. It is very important that in every church, both rural and urban, there should be a small group of people who can sing these Indian lyrics properly and can lead the singing of the whole congregation. (Popely 86-87)

Popely’s reason for stating this seems simple enough – he wishes to encourage the practice of native Christians creating songs in their own language. However, on interrogating this sentiment further, one can trace certain notes of bias and discrimination in terms of who deserves access to Western music. For Popely, a key problem is that Indian congregations often have no training in Western singing, and therefore ruin its cadence. In the above passage, he states that regional Christian music can be both appreciated and learned by “simple Christians” quite easily.

When I mentioned to my mother, whilst sorting through various missionary accounts of Travancore, that the constant evocation of the “heathenism” of the Shanars undercut whatever claim to a noble purpose the missionaries had, she narrowed her eyes and responded, in harsh finality, “That’s just how bad the people were.” I knew there was no pushing this line of thought, any further remarks would draw attention to my skepticism with the history of this conversion, with the self-assuredness of British accounts about the “good work” that they were doing.

A central problem with my mother’s statement is that it implied that once Nadars converted to Christianity, they had claim and access to social respect, primarily that from the British missionaries. A quick glance through various missionary accounts would serve as evidence against the same, as they quite clearly share the same biases as the colonial government at the time, in relation to their simpleness and inherent naiveté. Samuel Mateer, in his book *Land of Charity*, claims that “[i]n consequence of long ages of oppression, the Shanars are, as a class, timid, deceitful, and ignorant.” (41). He goes on to state of the Shanars that their “superstitions too, although gross and debasing, are less complex and fascinating to the native mind than those of the Brahmans, so that they appear to have been providently prepared to lend a willing ear to the truths of the gospel” (42).

One can begin to see therefore, the complex relationship between caste and colonialism. “But missionary activism did not stem from social altruism alone. From the point of view of Protestant theology, the low castes’ depths of degradation made their material and spiritual uplift a persuasive index of the

power of the Christian faith” (Kent 52). The lower castes were most likely to convert, partly because of the oppression that they had undergone for so long, but also largely due to questions of knowledge. To missionaries, the upper castes of Kerala, the Namboodiris and Nairs, were not more intelligent than the lower castes – they were however less naïve and more guarded of their position in society. In other words, Shanars represented a *tabula rasa* of sorts; they were misguided, but not as misguided as the upper castes; they were a “primitive entity”, and “had to be inducted into the reformist fabric of conversion” (298). Thus, education was seen by the missionaries as having “liberated the intelligence and reasoning power of the converts” (Doss 193).

The conclusion one may draw from this notion is that there is an inherent detachment with which the English missionaries operated in South India, where the English church was superior to the native church, therefore requiring borders of knowledge to be drawn, in terms of that which is worth making accessible and that which was unnecessary for the “simple” lower caste natives, that which they could possibly devalue. To interrogate the case of Nadars in this paradigm of closed knowledge, therefore, is to understand that the community was absolutely at the mercy of the two major knowledge sources at the time: the upper castes, and the British. The British, however, in the process of mass conversion, allowed for the feeling of being privy to an alternate knowledge among the lower castes, a notion that would expand to other domains with the establishment of English-medium schools constructed by missionaries from the nineteenth century onward.

This is another reason for a phenomenon that is akin to collective amnesia that one can trace among the Christian Nadar community. Aside from the “post-heathen” narrative sponsored by missionaries, there also arose a dichotomy of religious knowledge; Christianity promised spiritual liberation, but because of the increased economic benefits of conversion, it also ensured the prospect of material improvement in one’s standard of living. This collective amnesia seems to manifest in a series of ways. In one regard, it has slowly but surely, over the years, built up the narrative that economic prosperity within the Nadar community has been due to the blessings of God, which that which have spanned the entire duration of the community knowing Christianity. On the other hand, there is also an offshoot of English Christianity that has appeared, the notion that Nadars are people chosen by God; this trajectory of Christian faith is seen to have only been strengthened by its strong interrelation with missionary work, and thus direct contact with English missionaries. As Sheeju states, “Formal structures of democratic governance were nowhere in existence within the nineteenth-century picture. As a result, low-caste people were distanced from communicating with centres of power” (Sheeju 303). Native missionaries behaved as intermediaries between the English missionaries and the Indian people.

The manner in which these missionaries are spoken of, in many Protestant churches, is with fondness and reverence. When I was around thirteen, the Diocese of the Church of South India prescribed on the syllabus for Sunday Schools across their C.S.I. churches a biographical study of Robert Caldwell, a missionary who famously preached around Tirunelveli. Our lessons on this man were largely censored; they focused on his contributions to the Tamil language, to the South Indian people in the areas he visited, and so forth. It is only in preparation for this project that I came across *The Tinnevely Shanars*, a book by Caldwell himself, presenting a rather anthropological and derogatory image of the Shanars of the region. He says, in the book,

Hence, the demonolatry of the Shanars being known, their ignorance of god and of a future state, and their isolation from other classes, one may safely infer that their moral condition must be very low and debased. The absence of the restraining and purifying influences of Christian truth is, under all circumstances, a fatal want. Nothing can compensate for ignorance of God. (42)

In comparison, we can consider Edith Walsalam’s account of Mosawalsalam Sastrikal’s encounter with Samuel Mateer,

The missionary the Rev. Samuel Mateer, on seeing his longing for study presented him with treatises on music in Sanskrit and also a Cremona violin. His had study and his God-given gifts made him compose many beautiful and scientific songs in the Malayalam language. They are still in use in all Malayalam Churches and are updated in melody and poetry. (5)

Looking at this account in relation to all that has been discussed in terms of both music and religiousness reveals a fair amount about the aspects of Christian faith that are not explicit in their manifestation, primarily in terms of caste. Caldwell states that the reason for the urgency of converting Shanars is that their isolation causes them to seek demonolatry. “In fact, missionaries themselves denounced these inferior—superior differences publicly. Yet, they continued to use caste titles privately in their works. For example, Palla Christian, Pariah Christian, Nadar Christian, Parava Christian and so on figured in the missionary discourses” (Doss 181-182).

On the other hand, studying this as well as the ideas put forth by Popely, in relation to my family history, makes certain respects of this relationship far more comprehensive. Mosawalsalam Sastrikal is largely considered to be the first person to compose original Christian songs in Malayalam. This, of course, was exactly what Popely and other influential English missionaries promoted. What is unsaid, however, is the implicit inferiorisation of the native church and the native missionary that was previously discussed. It is paradoxical, therefore, that the music which contributed towards the feeling of liberation that Christian converts gained, also served to push the narrative of inferiority propagated by British

missionaries.

“LMS missionaries depended on him for helping in solving their problems,” my grandmother remarked of William Fletcher. She writes in her pamphlet, “It is said that he could even spread the Good News of the Gospel among those hard-headed landlords of the upper caste!” (8-9).

This view of Christianity, I argue, is imperative in the manner in which the Nadar community sought to further improve their social status across domains.

### **The Caste-Claim**

Nadars, along with various other groups, were considered to be outside the caste hierarchy in Travancore. Many sociologists agree that the community was considered “untouchable”, along with various other groups such as the Ezhavas, Paravas, Pariahs, Pallahs, and so on. However, Caldwell’s *The Tinnevely Shanars* (1849) sparked outrage among both Christian and Hindu Nadars, primarily due to his characterisation of Nadars as untouchables, and for highlighting their oppression at the hands of the upper castes in the book. The protesters “sought to discredit this representation by producing a counter-representation of themselves as a formerly noble people, now fallen on hard times” (Kent 13). They claimed that the Nadar people were Kshatriyas by birth, descended from the Chola and Pandya ruling class. In fact, the dissent was so strong that Caldwell was forced to halt publication of the book and rewrite those passages, thus interspersing these claims into what is largely considered an official record of the region.

This incident is usually studied in relation to the small newfound class of educated Nadars, who could now read and were thus deeply offended by this depiction; “as a consequence of their upward mobility, [they] sought a history for themselves which would silence their degradation at the hands of the upper castes” (Pandian 13). In this study, we look at it in relation to what was previously said about the “chosen one” status that had been honed and also inspired this movement, especially in a community whose last social reform movement had been a result of caste discrimination.

As previously mentioned, it was largely the Christian Nadar community that took offence with Caldwell’s book. One reason for the same is that which Pandian describes – having received education in missionary schools, and by extension, more career opportunities, the Nadars were now upwardly mobile in society for the first time; and this was through a created narrative of a former glory.

This can be connected to the question of knowledge that was previously discussed. There are two key paradoxes we can note at this juncture. Firstly, it is the secondhandedness of the knowledge received by the Nadar community that had created their public

identity thus far, and it is the same knowledge that was now malleable; for it was the British that assisted in breaking the rigidity of certain caste practices.

Additionally, it was after the advent of Christianity within the community, “post-heathenism”, that there was a claim to a previously Hindu identity. This is instrumental in defining the identity conflict of the Nadar caste – on one hand, there is the urge to strip the community of its caste past, on the other hand, there is a heavy invocation of the same, and a deep sense of pride in it. Kent speaks of this in terms of the creation of a communal identity built on the notion of respectability, saying,

At the same time, the distinctiveness of Christianity from indigenous religions was important insofar as it permitted low-caste Indian Christians to make a symbolic or material break from preexisting social systems, so that they could create a new, respectable community identity. It is clear that in the dynamic political field of colonial south India some low-caste converts found Christianity a useful instrument for differentiating themselves from old orders of power and status and of forging new identities as a way of escaping old patterns of degradation and marginalization. (240)

This tension thus seems to be created on the basis of accessing “closed knowledge”; in other words, this process behaves as a compensation by writing itself back into the two major channels of knowledge, insisting on a dualism to deepen the richness of a missing past.

### **Censorship and Social Status**

In 2017, a chapter on the Shannar Revolt in a Class 9 NCERT textbook was removed. The textbook was called *India and the Contemporary World*, and the revolt was included in a section titled “Clothing: A Social History”. This move was met with a multitude of varying responses within the Nadar community itself. There was understandably a great deal of outrage, but there were also others who condoned the decision to remove the event from the history that was accessible to school children. The latter is, interestingly, a reenactment of the same anxieties that arose from this turbulent societal past. “If memories of degradation are an enabling resource in producing allies against continuing forms of oppression, in this instance erasure of such memories is what is being sought by an upwardly mobile caste” (Pandian 12). In other words, the Nadar community was rapidly rising in the caste hierarchy not because of its claims to Kshatriya status or its affiliation to Christianity, but its erasure of its own past through an emulation of the very caste groups that had oppressed it.

The *New York Times*, in 2010, released an article titled “Business Class Rises in Ashes of Caste System”. The article is painfully skewered and under-researched in its representation of caste – it goes as far as to claim that caste is no longer a barrier in India – but features a Nadar man named Mr. Manikavel declaring proudly that, “We [Nadars] are supposed to be a backward

community but we don't think of ourselves that way" (Polgreen). Pandian states that this narrative has now come to extend beyond that propagated by the Nadar community itself, and that "there was a refusal or an unease to come to terms with the untouchable past of the Nadars who are today both economically and professionally influential" (13). He also states that it is primarily members of upper castes who refuse to acknowledge the role of Protestantism in the social mobility of the community.

One can consider this movement upward the social ladder through erasure of history as a type of censorship in itself. It is not only through removals of chapters in textbooks and badly-written articles that this operates. Such censorship also operates on the microlevel; stories of the Nadars' great ancient history have been repeated in my household far more than any reference to the low status held by them in the nineteenth century. Of course, this may partly be for the purpose of painting a positive and inspiring image of one's lineage, but it is interesting to me how the Kshatriya claims also arose in the nineteenth century, yet are far more prominent in the collective memory of the Nadar people. "[A]s a consequence of their upward mobility, [Nadars] sought a history for themselves which would silence their degradation at the hands of the upper castes" (Pandian 13).

The Nadar community has now claimed a status

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that is nearly unrecognisable in relation to its sordid past. However, it is plagued by repressed trauma on the basis of the need to assert itself and gain a solid footing in society. This, in turn, has contributed to a very apparent homogeneity. One reason for this is that Nadars are largely endogamous.

One can also observe equally homogenous compositions within traditional churches; if this is not the case, Nadar congregation members often maintain close ties with other Nadar congregation members.

To sum up the complex past of this community, one can really denote identities for the Nadar community on the basis of which narrative spaces they have historically left empty, and which spaces they have made a point to fill. The invocation of familial memory within this study serves to locate my own caste experiences within these spaces and to invoke the various factors which contributed towards the manner in which the act of talking about these memories has been shaped. One can look at Nadar censorship as an unfortunate barrier in the process of attempting to decode its history, or one can consider history itself as an act of censorship; regardless, it serves to prove that history is always chosen and not found.

# Miscellany

# A matter of prompts

**I**n either rendering a whole new environment on the page, or blending one's reality with flights of fancy, the writing featured here probes the personal as well as the public. The pieces traverse the expanse of describing one's relationship with a particular household appliance to exploring old family homes, from stories of creation to ones of experience, and thus reframes the familiar in unexpected ways. The writer is enmeshed with the writing in some cases, detached from it in others, but in each instance we are offered a fresh perspective.

# Bricks And Stones

*Kamui Allohara*

The year was 2002. It was a Monday morning. Not one that ushers a sigh to the start of the long week. Nor the recycling of the routine. The days were simple. Yohan would wake up to the sound of his mother's soothing voice. He loved it. Just something beautiful about a voice putting you to sleep in one world while greeting you awake in another. Add in the buttery elements of the summer vacations. The days of the week lose their relevance. With no care in the world, seven-year-old Yohan was having the time of his life. Even Monday found itself defeated. Its purpose was reduced to a mere spectacle of an event where Yohan could play the hero. It had just been a year since his family moved into the new society. The place was humongous but far from being complete. It boasted seven buildings, five complete and two on the way. A garden was poised at the centre of the complex that separated the two sets of buildings. The domain was still

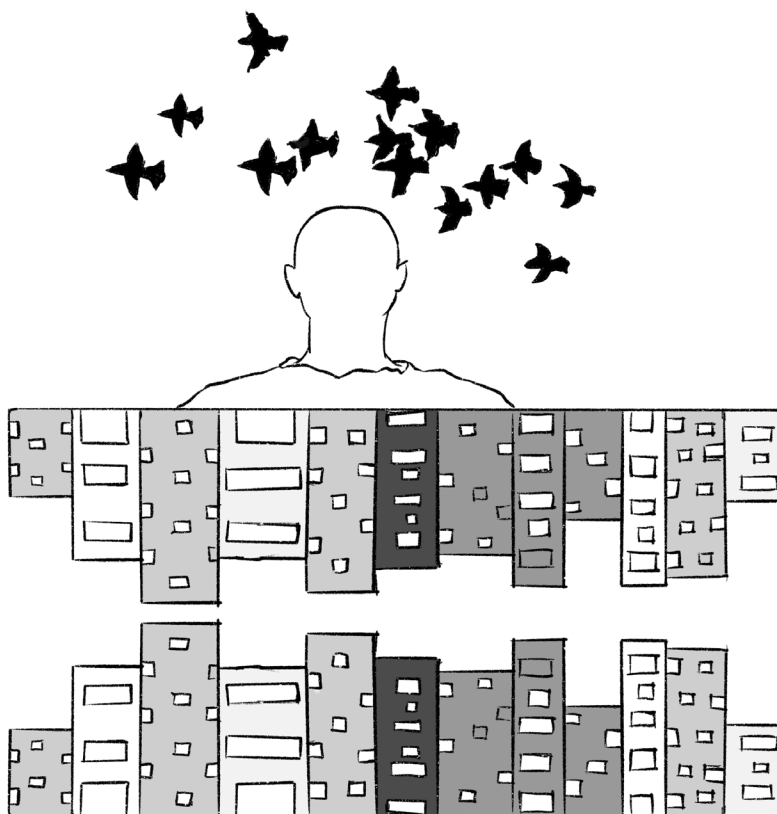
foreign to his 4-foot self. Like a kitten in a new household, Yohan would find himself exploring this new place. He didn't see a society. He saw a playground. Soon, he found his first crew and together they started fitting one piece of the gigantic playground into their tiny brains at a time.

Every day was an adventure. The crew of eight would gather at 10 am sharp. It had been 3 months since they all sat down together and prepared a rotational list. Every day, a unique member of the crew would get to lead the entire team. But there was something special about that Monday. It was Yohan's day. He had patiently waited for it. He always felt his command in leadership was unmatched. And the stage finally belonged to him. It was his chance to lead his soldiers. His head caught up with fantasies. His shirt, on the other hand, did not enjoy that luxury. Its fabric found itself balmed in Yohan's drool. He probably didn't even realize it.

The plight of his daydreams could only be momentarily seized by his mother's call for breakfast. She had chosen to make Bolognese pasta that day. The day could not have possibly been any better.

Yohan was quick to catch himself getting lost in these moments of fantasies. The time in the world outside seemed to move faster when he was reveling in them. He could not be late today. The fantasies were hard to resist. The order of priority finally caved in when he looked at the clock. It was 9.55 am. The dilemma was resolved with a dose of panicked urgency. He scuffled around hurriedly out of the house. The excitement surged his adrenaline and sent him sprinting down four floors. He had to rush to the centre of the garden. It was the decided meeting spot. He finally caught sight of the distant silhouettes of two of his friends who aberrantly pulled the lever on his excitement. He had completely forgotten about his friends visiting their natives. It was summer vacation after all. The number had now dwindled down to just a measly three. Yohan marvelled upon his now rotten luck, heaved and let out a sigh. Begrudgingly accepting his fate, he glanced at Ragalu and Basendran, his apt lieutenants for the day, who now seemed to condescendingly await the captain's orders. Disappointed, yet thankful. Yohan reassured himself and he resolved to simply enjoy the grandiose of the day. He had to make it count.

The crew chose to wander around cycling the apartments hoping Yohan finds something that sparks his interest. The usual activities didn't seem grand enough. His eyes were finally drawn to the two buildings that were still being constructed. It was a place never ventured before. The unknown excited and scared him at the same time. But he had to take the lead. This was his moment. Yohan mustered up the courage to pitch



*Gowry Prasanth Nair*



his plan. It took a few rounds of convincing but he managed to get them on the same page. Their eyes finally met, content matched consent. The battleground had been decided.

The air was dusty, laden with the smoke residue of cement dust that irked their noses into snoozes of sneezes. Failing to act as a deterrent, it rather propelled them into thinking, "THIS IS IT". Perhaps, slightly influenced by the repeated reruns of the film "Border", they were captivated by the ambience that screamed warzone. A quick survey of the field filtered a pit barely deep and wide enough to accommodate two. They had found the only uncompromised post which was available. Bailing out wasn't an option. They found themselves engulfed with an oozing and overwhelming sense of patriotism. The surge hit Yohan first. Songs only ever heard in patriotic events seemed to find themselves passing through the lips of the young captain. He even managed to sell it to the shy Basendran who reluctantly joined into this charade. It didn't take long for Basendran to lose himself to the mood and be completely taken over by Chandrashekar Azad, his favourite independence fighter. He had once given a speech on the martyr for

his elocutions and thereby was the only fighter he knew. Ragalu on the other hand succumbed to peer pressure and joined the fray. The boys had convinced themselves that the onus was on them to defend Mother India from the onslaught of her enemies. The fact that they only found a single post signified the vast advantage that the enemies hold over their motherland. It had effectively narrowed down the limited options available to just one. Yohan addressed his lieutenants one final time. A few words of encouragement. They needed a battle plan. They didn't have time.

Yohan subdivided the trio into two parties which seemed like the only plausible option. The lieutenants formed team alpha and were delegated into taking cover in the pit while providing the necessary support. The captain, the sole member of team Charlie would take the front lines and march into the oncoming onslaughts. The momentary solace quelled itself at the first sight of approaching intruders. This was the final stand. There was only one way this mission could end. They acknowledged their impending fates and saluted each other one final time before screaming, "JAI BHARAT!". All they had to do was buy a bit more time. But the

shouts of the battalion infiltrating and dressed in shady construction outfits far overpowered their measly crew of three.

Whatever transpired after that was a haze. Momentary explosions resolved into screams that resonated in terror. Moans of the final stages of life, feeble but distinct. Yohan rushed back to the post as fast as he could. His breath mimicked his palpating heart. Tears engulfed coughs. The intertwined lines of the real and the fantasy started untangling right before his eyes. One by one, enemies turned back into construction workers, neighbours, watchmen-humans. Those explosions were not bombs. Reality betrayed the fantasy. Whatever was left of it was displaced by the smog that had filled up the fortress construction dump zone. It was just another Monday for the construction workers. Routine work. Forced to clear the smoke out, Yohan's hands found themselves in a continuous but helpless whirl. They tried to reach out. And they did. Vanity prevailed. They grazed past bricks and stones before finally meeting skins and bones. He found his comrades but they had left him.

## Kelv to the Rescue

*Ashish Joseph Hoovaraj. C*

I've always hated the summer heat. Who would want to go outside and sweat? It's so annoying to perspire, and the idea of 'outside' has made its way to the comfort of my home. If you tell me to simply switch on the AC, then I'm going to come all the way to your house, disguised as the Income Tax Department. Well, watch Akshay Kumar's Special 26 to fully understand my evil schemes. So, don't try your comedies with me. What could possibly save me from this hell? It was definitely no AC but it had to

be something.

It was an early edition Kelvinator, cherry red in color and had the best sticker/magnet collection. Yes, a fridge- was the best thing that had ever happened to me as a kid. My parents had gotten it as a wedding gift, so that makes this fellow my age. Although, it was pretty tall when I was a baby, I made up for the gap as I grew older. To this day, it's unbelievable to think that an electronic appliance could last such a long time, for if you

were to look at its age in human years, it would be a hundred years old. I can literally visualize the fridge with grey hair, a sweater vest and a little plump belly telling me stories of 'The Cold War'. MY GOD. SO FUNNY. LAUGHTER. NATURALLY INDUCED NITROUS OXIDE.

The peak of summer, oh, those days you could catch a glimpse of reality: everything was an after-image, a blur, and everything had three copies of it. The scorching

sun, towering over the entire city, almost appearing in a hellish bodysuit, overwhelming to the point where your body was a cocktail, a nasty cocktail added with all natural ingredients, even traces of urea could be seen. Don't ask me if it's all my sweat, for I know not and don't plan on finding out either. The only recurring image that takes control like a guiding beacon would be the thought of going back home. Beatdown by the heatwaves and also playing one heck of a game. I've had my dose of playing sports for the week and I'm looking forward to a relaxing, ice-cold shower. I want to numb my skin to the point where I feel like a popsicle walking out of a freezer. While making my way to the washroom there was an uneasy sensation, more precisely a cold chill down my spine. A random thought of somebody spitting on me during the game kept playing like a loop. Intentional or not, I have no clue. Anyways, after drying up, I had put on a fresh pair of shorts and an oversized t-shirt while making my way to the hall.

I had no time to waste. My parents would be back soon and I couldn't watch an A-rated TV show in front of my orthodox Christian mother. As I turned towards my right where the kitchen is, I don't know whether it was all the hunger, the freezing shower or the spit loop that made me hysterical. Trust me when I say, "My fridge had an angelic glow." The Messiah has returned, with the finest collection of frozen food, the only thing I liked about capitalism. The door opened by itself, ever so slowly. It felt so scandalous, as though the fridge had desired to be eaten. How is this possible? There I could see everything. I'm tempted to say 'compartments filled with milk and honey' but that just downplays the scenario. This beautiful apparatus, one of the most ingenious inventions, had three varieties of juice, frozen nuggets/fries, and my mother's cheesecake. I'd kill anybody to have a slice, the Supreme Leader in particular. Let him try stealing this cake. I'm just kidding, maybe or maybe not? Today's special menu: Fried chicken nuggets, French fries and a glass of Minute Maid. As I took the packets out and

closed the door, I caught a glimpse of all the stickers and magnets. One magnet in particular was of a Bible message that said, "I will praise you for how wonderful I've been made." Honestly, for a person who is not that religious, I fully agree with that statement. Most modern-day appliances are engineered in an incentive manner. Low cost and fancy attachments but have a lot of servicing charges. The longevity of these products is slowly being compromised as most companies are looking at profits. With the existence of such a cruel system, my fridge sits in the corner with a box of caramel popcorn, munching and watching all the others fall.

I wonder how it feels when you see people your age die, especially when people are getting old. The thought kept resonating in my head as I threw a bunch of nuggets into the oil because my Thatha was pretty old, and kept outliving most of his friends. This was no time to go on a philosophical tangent, I had to cook these nuggets and fries, quickly. I couldn't think of

anything else right now. My mind was occupied with making golden yellow nuggets and also the story of a middle-aged teacher and an old student of his. Both of them were cooking the best batch of methamphetamine that America has ever seen. Now, tell me one good reason why anyone wouldn't watch that show after reading the blurb? My fries were almost done and I was just one step away from binging the show till my mother returned. Which meant about two hours and that meant I could watch two solid episodes. BACK-TO-BACK!

Kelv was always stacked. Yeah, we have nicknames for each other. It never mattered what season it was, but some way or the other there was a wide range of edibles, just waiting to be devoured. These snacks could be in the form of solids, liquids, a combination of the two. If you got the scent of any funky gas or fumes then best leave the house for three to four business days or get ready for a solid whacking session and watch all the



*Nivedhana Pandian*

solids in your body turn to liquid as my mother makes sure it happens. I've managed to pull off such a task during the course of my summer vacation. I remember my mum had to go to Kerala for ten days. I had one job to do, and this phenomenal shit-fest was caused by my very own smooth brain, polished and reflective, which literally shone like a beacon if you had to beam it. I had to do the dishes, and I found an old lunchbox of mine that had emitted a weird energy. It felt as if there was a biohazard warning marked on it. Something about it felt really off, and as I opened the lid, there were fumes coming out of it. A dormant volcano had resurrected itself, and spewed these absolutely stinky pyroclastic debris. The kitchen started reeking of dead matter, so dead that it caused a chain reaction leading to the death of another. But love is such an emotion that literally makes you delusional beyond imagination. One call from the girl I had liked and I forgot everything. What smell? What box? What?

Do you like me? <insert blush> "bvsvbjvbjvbjvbjvbn." I was lost in my own world, and managed to swap the box which had all the curry leaves. Yes, I put whatever dish that had a microscopic civilization growing on its surface, smelling like a thousand farts inside the fridge. I stacked that in the fridge and my mother had eventually found it. Well, you probably know what happened after. It was nasty. It was painful.

If I had to picture my twenty-year-old Kelvinator, it would bring about endless tangents of memories that I had experienced in all my life. I'm twenty-one going twenty-two and it feels unreal to know that an electronic appliance would last for so long. All of us will cherish it, we all have our memories with it, and surely, they might be different but what matters is that its presence in our house will always bring about an imaginary photo album, an album that contains each of our happiest moments. These moments will

emerge like a grandfather's stories, and Kelv is as old as one. Smoking its pipe, holding a newspaper and going about with its daily routines. As each of us are going about our day, our troubles and happiest moments, it's always there. Sitting in the corner, whispering silent words of assurance in the form of a yellow light as you open the door. The door will be your metaphorical 'shoulder to lean on', and the ingredients inside will remind you of the different people of your life. It feels so unreal as I type this out, that I've never really thought of memories in such an aspect, and the fridge had brought back images from the deepest parts of my memory. When Kelv passes away, then I shall hold a human-like funeral. You shall not be forgotten, my friend. I will eat a wide variety of junk food, prepare my bowels to give you the twenty-one gun salute because you are a warrior, and I wish to see you set sail to the afterlife like Sheafson.

## No Homes Left to Find

*Anagha Anil Nair*

The breeze has the curtains fluttering in the wind, allowing the streetlights to illuminate the room and place its bareness in stark relief. He stumbles across the room, groping the wall to find the light switches but the rough sheets twist around his ankles and bring him hurtling down to the floor. The pained shout ringing through the room is muffled by him shoving his fist into his mouth as he squeezes his eyes shut in hopes that the neon lights, from the party he had been forced to go to, would stop piercing through his skull and into his retinas. He clenched his right hand into a fist when he thinks of the party, when he thinks of seeing them leaning against the door with a smile playing on their lips. There isn't much he thinks he wants to tell them, but sometimes he wonders.

He wonders how their lips could curl upwards when all he can think of doing is putting one foot in front of the other without falling.

He thinks of the way their hands had curled around another person's waist and wonders how his own hands can do nothing but draw blood from their bitten and weary cuticles.

He thinks of the way their eyes flit around the room with crinkles in the corner and laugh lines on their forehead, he thinks of how he would tickle out those laugh lines into existence and how those eyes would then shut like that was all they could do from keeping the affection from being unleashed.

The affection that would peak

from the way their hands curled around his waist, the way their legs twisted in the sheets of his bed, their hair flopping on their face every time they twisted away from the tickling.

He stayed on the floor, breathing heavily from the pain of twisting his ankle, head throbbing with the memories peering out of the drudges that he'd buried them in, fingers aching with the need to hurt in a way that will keep all of him intact.

Taking a deep breath in, he tried to get back the pieces of himself that he had scattered across the room when he'd barged in a few hours ago. He clutches at the shirt he'd thrown to the side, heaving as he removes the binder and quickly puts the shirt back on to stop

himself from seeing, from having to feel anything. Lifting himself onto the bed, he stretches his twisted ankle out, sifts the drawer next to his bed for his glasses, and puts on the bead bracelet he had yanked out of his wrists before.

Picking up his phone, he ignores all the texts that ask him about his abrupt departure from the party and calls the nearest delivery place for the smallest portion of rice he can get. Sufficiently satisfied that he can, at the very least, think of putting something into the cave inside him, he plays with his bracelet in an attempt at calming the rising panic in him. Twisting its beads back and forth and rolling them around his fingers, he remembers that now he doesn't have to wonder whether he's good enough, if he deserves the love they give, if he can look at the mirror and not see grey sludge coursing through blackened disgusting veins.

He is interrupted by the ringing of his doorbell. A little terrified wondering whether he has begun to lose time like he did before, like he always did before, he takes a deep breath in, limps across the room

with his body twisted away from the mirror placed in the corner, and opens the door with his eyes glued to the floor. He stretches out his hand to take the delivery but is met with silence and emptiness. Slowly lifting his head thinking that this is possibly the worst day his neighbours could have chosen to meet him, he was ready with an apology on his lips. The apology seemed to sour and rot in his throat when he sees them standing at his newly painted green door.

He takes a step back and has to remember that everything has changed, his door is a different colour from the beige it was the last time they were here, his room is in the other side of the city from the last time they left without a call, he fits into size S clothes now and doesn't eat as much as he used to when they would feed him, his mirror has been painted bright and oppressive pink from the last time they ran their hands down his back and whispered that he looked pretty, he's not their him anymore.

Before he can even think of closing the door, they reach in and trap his wrist in their hands.

"You're real," they whisper into this vortex of time that is both the present and past combined and which somehow spat him out like a spittle-dribbling mess.

He can't work his mouth into saying anything but "I'm not him."

"Then why are you wearing those beads that I used to tie my hair with, hmm?" they whisper like anything more would shatter the pieces of him they see sewn up haphazardly, tightening their hold on the wrist in such a way that would leave a bruise. Distantly he wonders if the pain will wake him up from this nightmare, this dream.

"Mama told me that I got better." A pause, a blink of an eye and he realises that he needed to tell them that he was good, that he was Mama's good girl, that he didn't need them anymore because -

"I wear smaller clothes, I can hide under the bed easily and I can study better now."

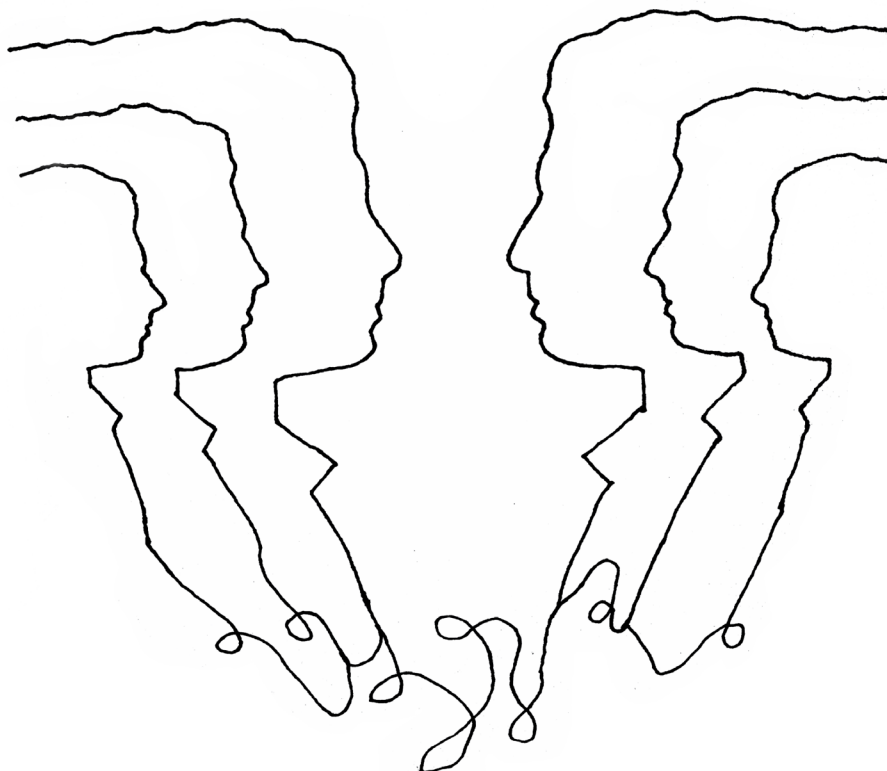
There is a glimmer in their eye, their hold slackens and they lean into his space "What has she done? Oh kid, come here."

They stretch out their hands but he can't let more than their hand in as that would make this room their room and he had to do this for his Mama.

"Mama said that sometimes these urges, they come and go. I don't know who you are. I can't lose Mama again." He thinks he says this without his voice wavering but he doesn't think he succeeds when he sees them holding his wrist a little tighter again.

He thinks he'll have to scrub the grey out with the blade kept at his bathroom counter and wonders whether that would take him down to XS. He presses his free hand into the purpling canvas on his bloated stomach and sighs.

He's taken out of his musings when he hears muttering from them. He doesn't know if he makes a sound but they're suddenly looking at him. He wonders if they see the



peace he's created, the purpling peace Mama has carved out on his back. His lips twitch realising that he's never seen them with their eyes squinting and their brows pinched.

They seem startled by his lips curving up and press against the door a little harder, a little like they're trying to scrape its green away.

He looks down and thinks of his Mama and how she told him that they would try to take him away from her and how disappointed she would be if that happened. Steeling his nerves by taking a rattly breath in, he yanks his wrist out of their hand, whimpers, and runs inside to get to the bathroom before Mama feels any disappointment.

He is stopped by them standing in front of him, their feet planted right next to the pinkened mirror. He wonders again if he lost time because he ran, he tried.

They place their fingers under his chin and breathe right next to his

ear "Come back to me, kid. Mama doesn't have to know, she'll be okay not knowing."

Suddenly he's taken back to clothes that are too tight and shards of glass littering the floor of his yellow bathroom of before.

He can't go back there, even when they whisper how pretty he is, how loved he is, how beautiful he looks, how they could make him feel good again.

He hears his Mama telling him with her sparkling green belt "Don't you dare be (with) that abomination" over and over again while hugging him and wonders why both Mama's and their hug feel the same, tight like they both want to swallow him into them, strong like they'll never let him be a him outside the both of them, bone-crushing like they know the pain will keep him from pulling away.

He knows he can't let go of them now that they're here. Their hands have already sunken into his bones

and their fingers have already pressed bruises on his wrist.

His Mama will be so mad at him but maybe he can bleed a little and remind her that he will be better this time, that he will not go on his hands and knees to her to save him, that he is safe.

He leaves the shattered remains of himself near that mirror as they call him to their space.

"Home", they breathe into his lips.

"No, you", he whimpers because his home is in the shattered glass and the bleeding crevices of his body. His home is not his anymore, hasn't been his in a long time.

"She'll never take you away from me, يا قمر . You're mine," they breathe into his unwashed hair, petting it like they used to before everything.

He is their's, he is Mama's, maybe, maybe not, maybe never.

## My Gender-Neutral Kitchen

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*Arshina Parveen*

Very often I am reminded of the days when the kitchen was meant for women and the outside world belonged to men. I have seen my grandmother, my mother, my aunts, and cousin spend their days in the kitchen. Girls were taught house chores starting at the age of eight or nine. I was taught to do dishes and make dough when I was eight. By the time I turned nine, I knew how to make chapatis and grind masala on a stone slab. I knew how to chop vegetables. But somehow the kitchen was not my place. OMG – what am I saying!?! Kitchen is meant for women, meaning, meant for me too. But no, no, I hated working in the kitchen. I did it only to keep my mother happy and get her appreciation.

Before I turned ten, we went to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. My brother and I joined school after some of my father's Indian and Pakistani friends persuaded him to put us in school. We made friends there. Everyone had little kids. I was the eldest kid amongst them all. Girls or boys, they all went to school and tuition after school to make sure of their good grades. Initially, my mother didn't pay much attention to what we did at school but when we visited our family friends they would talk about their children and school. There would be discussions about exams and ranks and extra classes. "Bhabhi, aapki bachhi ko kya mila exams main?" asked an aunty in a get-together.

My mother didn't know what to answer so she said, "Abhi result nahi mila."

Then they would move on to discuss how much time they must give to their children for studying. My father had a Pakistani friend who was into the sofa-curtain business. My father would manufacture the wooden skeleton and he would wrap it up with sponge and whatnot, giving it a shape and aesthetic look. He loved eating and was a gentleman. He always asked me to read him my English book. I was not allowed to spend much time with the guests, except for serving food. Nonetheless, I would stand near the door in case my father called, and that's when I would hear conversations like this.

“Bhaiji, mene faisla kya hai, maine apni kudiyan nu zaroor padhana hai. Ladko ka kya, kai vi jilange. Kudiya nu paraye ghar jana si, pura khandan sambhalna si.”

“Maine kavi school ni dikhya bhaiji. Bachpan se hi baba de nal kaam ko jan lagya, bas tabse ajlo kaam hi kaam,” he added while enjoying his last bites of food and later gulped a glass of water.

Like this uncle, my father had never been to school. But that was not the case with my mother. Though she didn't go to school either, she did go to Madrasa where she learnt basic English, Hindi, Urdu, and math along with Arabic. My grandmother did not approve of this, so as soon as my mother turned ten, my grandmother forbade her from ever stepping out of the house without her permission. My mother learnt everything, cooking, cleaning, doing laundry and dishes, stitching clothes, and a lot more. But what my mother witnessed in Saudi was in contrast to what she learnt in India. My mother saw how much work parents were putting into getting their children educated instead of teaching them house chores. She tried to adopt some of those things. I was no longer expected to do the house chores. Although I was assigned a couple of things to do on the weekends; like dusting and all, but not cooking.

My first visit to India was after five straight years in Saudi. I had forgotten everything I learnt as a child. I mean cooking and all. I couldn't even cut onions anymore. So, when I came to India, I was expected to work the kitchen and help my grandmother and aunts. I didn't know a thing. They laughed at me and said, “Khana pakana nahi ata to tujhse shaadi kon karega? Husband ko kitabe khilaigi kya?” Then they taunted my mother and asked why she hasn't taught me a thing. Anyone who came home was told about me and I was laughed at. I was already told time and again that my parents would never find a man for me given my dark skin color and no good features. Not knowing cooking added to all the taunting and teasing. One day, my grandmother decided to teach

me how to light a fire in a choola. “Chal, khana pakana nahi aata to chula hi jalana seekhle. Agar tere miya ke ghar main gas nai hua to chula hi chalana padega,” my grandmother said, and my aunts laughed.

I tried to light the fire for almost half an hour. Everyone was staring at me. But I couldn't. The whole front yard was filled with smoke. Smoke filled my eyes too. My face turned red, and my eyes watered. I burst into tears and my grandmother yelled at me, “Chali ja yaha se.”

I ran to my room and cried. I hated it. I couldn't wait to go back. And finally, we did. We went back to Saudi, and our daily routine resumed. But this time, my mother decided to teach me at least the basics. I was bad at it. My mother felt ashamed and that no one indeed would marry me. I was unable to cut onions and peel the potatoes. She cried for days, and I kept practicing. I re-learned it. Cutting onions and peeling potatoes and some more kitchen stuff when I was about sixteen. I still didn't know the names of dals though. What a shame, I tell you, because I still don't know.

I turned seventeen when my youngest sister was born. My worst nightmare – we were in India for her birth. No one was around to take care. My Khala, my mother's sister, was about to get married, my cousin was about to get married, and some family members were too sick to visit us. I didn't know a thing about the city or its transportation. I didn't even know where to buy the groceries from. My mother was on complete bed rest. There was only one way. I learn more than just peeling and chopping. Suddenly, the kitchen and the whole house was on me. Except this time, I didn't hate it. I wanted to cook – make delicious food. Which I did.

The first thing I cooked was chicken. Everyone loved it. Though I did mess up the dough this time. I had completely forgotten how to make it. Dough-making is not just work, it's an art. Mixing and rolling, and beating and rolling, a right amount

of beating with the right intensity makes perfect dough. And perfect dough makes perfect, fluffy, and soft rotis. This was an art that I learnt at the age of nine and had forgotten it when I actually needed it. This was the beginning of my cooking. There has been no end to it. I don't enjoy cooking for myself. I'm not a foodie. But I love to cook for my family, friends, colleagues and pretty much for everyone.

In the year 2012, my mother met with an accident that fractured her six ribs on the left, four in the front and two at the back. She was once again on complete bed rest. I was once again the in-charge of the house and the kitchen. But this time I was ready. That's a time I'll cherish for life. Not because my mother was in bed but because that's when I got closest to my siblings. Earlier, all of us would vent to my mother about everything that happened at school. All the stories and all the fun. But now my siblings would surround me while I cooked for them and narrate their stories. The discussions, debates, jokes and fun that I have experienced in my kitchen, I haven't anywhere else. Whenever I cook, my brothers and sisters sit and stand around me, sometimes giving me a hand as we discuss politics, family, school and friends and everything under the sun. I have created tons of great memories there.

“Arey kahan margaye sab, in ladkon ko aurat banadena. Jab dekho kitchen main ghuse rehte hain,” my mother would yell from her room. She hated the idea of men in the kitchen. If my brother broke something while helping me in the kitchen, she would blame me for it. “Ye sab ladkiyon ke kaam hote hein, ladko se karwaogi to yahi hoga,” she would shout in anger with the little energy she had. But this didn't stop my brothers from coming to the kitchen and narrating stories.

“Baji, I'll read a story for you today,” my little brother would say while I made chapatis for dinner. “Baji, we had a lot of fun today in the bus, everyone was shouting and then ma'am got angry,” my sister would say while I served her



*Poornima Shree*

lunch after her school.

“Baji, what are you cooking today, I want to eat chicken, please make chicken and roti na,” my grown-up brother would demand.

The world is not the same as it was a couple of decades ago. Though there are people who still live with the idea of women in the kitchen and men in the world outside, there are a lot of people living otherwise. I see many of my friends helping their wives in the kitchen. I also see wives working and husbands taking care of the house or at least sharing the house chores. And I must say, I am married to one such man, who believes in cooking and feeding. He loves cooking and eating, and I love cooking for him. There are days when I work, and he cooks. No complaints there.

While my siblings narrated stories, I would assign them small tasks in the kitchen to help me finish the work as soon as possible. We have solved a lot of problems while cooking and talking. We have cracked the best jokes in the kitchen, we shared the best of advice and suggestions and secrets. My brother learnt cooking, I taught him. We have come up with great ideas in my kitchen. We have cooked our favorite meals together. I have had male friends helping me in my kitchen while I made biryani for them. Now that I am writing this sitting on my study table, my husband is in the kitchen, chopping onions. I am happy that I am not a part of the world where the house itself is divided into gendered areas. My kitchen is gender-neutral. It’s open to everyone.

## **The Curious Case of a Hat**

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*Afsal Rehman H*

In the house that my family occupied when we were first living in Kochi, there used to be this hat, like the one American cowboys used to wear now that I think about it. Maybe not exactly like that but a similar one. I never asked my family where it came from or who bought it. I was just completely enamoured with it and instantly correlated it to the ones Michael Jackson used to wear while performing live on stage and in his music videos. As a result, it

always fascinated me until one day I picked it up and put it on. The next thing I knew, I was mimicking his steps from the ‘Smooth Criminal’ video, much to the amusement of my brother who I didn’t know was watching me from afar. My younger self thought at that time, that a dancer’s performance was incomplete without a hat. It could be the exact same hat or even a cap or any other type of headgear. I always saw it as the last piece of the puzzle, with the puzzle being

how to make a performance dazzle with flair and flamboyance with a sprinkle of wonder that would envelope the heart and soul of any onlooker. After my brother saw me dance on my own, he called my parents to the room and showed my performance while he played the music video as a morale booster. I had not learned the choreography of that song nor did I have any sort of technical knowledge then. All I remember is how I badly copied MJ’s steps with

that hat on. By the end, my parents and brother were happy with what I had done and that gave me a sense of affirmation and happiness. I received it sheepishly because I didn't think it was that spectacular. Unlike now, I was experiencing a mini stage fright as well as feeling overly self-conscious. Suffice to say, ever since then, my love for dancing has not only deepened but increased with time as well.

This hat was also the first thing I remember using for an extended period of time until I guess my teenage years, albeit in different forms which I will elaborate on later. When I was younger, the hat would rattle around my head whenever I wore it. I would say that was one of my major icks with the hat. Fast forward to a few years later, the hat stopped rattling and I could carry it smoothly. I recall one particular instance where this rattling of the hat ended up in me experiencing a half-comical half-accidental 'injury'. I was doing a not-so-good impression of the infamous moonwalk step and towards the end, I mimicked MJ's head-bang that followed almost every time after he did his moonwalk. Unfortunately for me but hilarious for my brother, the hat tipped just slightly over my eyes and blocked my line of sight. While attempting to put it back in its place over my head, I absentmindedly walked over to the TV stand and ever so slightly, bumped my head into it. Naturally, I fell down with a plop. The next few minutes were filled with my brother and mother reassuring me that I did good and to not pay too much attention to the little unfortunate accident that occurred. This happened in another instance as well, although thankfully it didn't result in me banging my head onto a physical object.

The fixation with the hat lasted a week or so. These incidents took place in that short span of time. And just like any other kid with a short attention span, I turned my focus to other more fanciful 'new toys'. At that point in time, I only considered it as nothing more than a plaything that I had gotten bored of quickly, unbeknownst to me that in the future, I would rue the missed opportunities of wearing it.

Regardless, I liked seeing it in the house even if I stopped wearing it.

Then the time came for my family to shift houses and move to Kolkata. I was preoccupied with a lot of things at that point in time. Mostly sadness and irritation about migrating to a new city which distracted me from thinking about the hat. So the existence of the hat didn't pop back in my mind until one day when I was overwhelmed by this sudden urge to look for it after a couple of months since the move. This sense of being overwhelmed was a result of my inquisitiveness of trying to look for familiar stuff that would comfort me and as such, I had begrudgingly adjusted and settled in to an extent. Occasionally there would pop up the feeling of being home-sick even though my family was there around me. It was probably the first time that I felt a deep longing for an inanimate object that filled me with good memories. I say first because soon after that, I wanted to wear that cute little hat but I couldn't find it anywhere. I ran to

my mother and promptly asked her where was it. She had no answer to my question. I was dejected and slumped on my bed thinking I should have held it close while en route on the journey.

The next day was a holiday and so my father was spending his rare lazy mornings with the newspaper as was his habit. I went to him and asked where was the hat that I used to wear. He looked at me, peeking over the top of the newspaper he was holding. His eyes pierced through those reading glasses of his and proclaimed that it must have been sent to the house in our hometown in Trivandrum. He sent half the stuff over there as there wasn't much space available in our house in Kolkata. I don't remember what exactly happened next, maybe tears started welling up but all I know is immediately after he said that, my father put down the newspaper and got up, and said we will look for it here in the house for there was a small chance that it would be present among the belongings around us. Almost half



Arshina Parveen



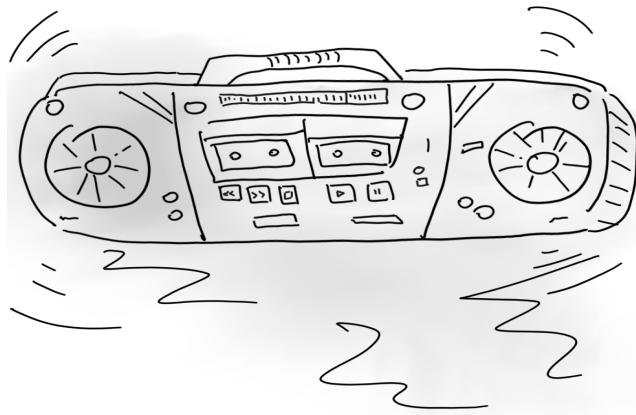
a day went by before my father finally found it. It was in the trunk where we kept our belongings that weren't necessarily required for day-to-day activities. He guessed that it would be there as it was the only big area left to check. I do not know how exactly he managed to get it open for it was a two-man job to even unlock the trunk but I was grateful to him for finding it.

The next few months went by. I would keep the hat next to me throughout those months. I would wear it from time to time but only inside the house. The idea of dancing or mimicking MJ's steps didn't cross my mind at this point as I was just happy to wear it. My fascination with it has always been that it looked "cool" and not necessarily that I only wanted to dance with it.

But as I progressed further in my studies, my time to goof around which included make-believe scenarios with my hat, was cut short by my mother. She became stern because she wanted me to score well in the exams. She would keep a close watch on my activities and so, my time to play around with the hat came to a disappointing end.

Then, the day came when it was announced that we were going back to Kochi and I was giddy with joy. Perhaps too giddy to not pay attention to where all my belongings were going. In any case, I had to convince my father to let me carry my Spider-Man toy and other things, as well as my favourite book along with me which wasn't a mean feat at all. The idea of the hat didn't cross my mind at all, not even once in this phase.

After a long and arduous journey, we finally arrived at our new house in Kochi and the rest of our belongings came a month or so later, carried by a huge truck. My family was in the process of finalizing my admission and on the lookout for a good college for my brother. It would take me a year or so before I began to think about that hat again. By this time, my father was on his own, living in a small flat and working in Bangalore.



*Sashanta Singh Sougajam*

His office suddenly saw it fit to transfer him. I asked my mother one day where the hat was (deja vu? maybe). She didn't have a clue once again and told me to ask my brother. So I did. He sat down and thought about it hard and finally arrived at the conclusion that it was in Trivandrum. It was there along with the rest of the belongings that were sent by my father just before our journey back to Kochi.

I was a bit gloomy after realizing this, knowing that this time around, my father wasn't there to double-check. Even if it was in Trivandrum, he wouldn't consider it a worthwhile effort to go all the way there, just to get back my hat. I could hardly ask my mother to do so. She was getting into one of her stern phases, albeit this time the subject of her attention was my brother and his semester exams.

So, I put that thought behind me. I resolved that I could see and get a hold of it whenever I had school holidays. This was around the same time where I started putting a bit more effort into my dance and it soon developed into a full-fledged hobby. I would perform and at the end of my performance, the exhilaration and thrill I experienced equaled that of ecstasy. But I can't lie when I say that there were times when I wished I had my hat with me on the stage when I was performing. The thought of how well it would match with my bright blue uniform

on normal days or a blazer or jeans on special events was something that really excited me. All I knew was that I wished I had it beside me at that point in time.

After my school days, I continued performing even more so in my college. I thought it was time for an upgrade and so, I bought a cap like one of those that b-boys used to wear. It was a bright yellow Johnny Bravo one. It went along with my outfit whenever I had to perform. I thought as a dancer, having the right outfit from head to toe, was the other half of having a good performance. I say upgrade because by then, I had seen my old hat whenever we visited Trivandrum. I even wore it but I decided not to bring it back along with me. The years had caught up with it or it might have the innumerable journeys it had to undergo moving from city to city, house to house. It was all worn out and looked faded. On one side of it, the cloth material was a bit torn as well. It unfortunately was an antique by then and I thought it best to leave it there where it could lie in rest and did not have to face the extreme weather like how my cap had to face. I placed it back behind the glass case and smiled ruefully to myself, thankful that it was one of the things that propelled me to discover the one thing that I do best and I just wished that I could have worn it one last time on the stage before retiring it.

# Fumes and Happy Particles

Sashanta Singh Sougajam



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Fumes for mouth, yellow-blue conflagration, the arsonist's play and a heaven's-hole for ventilators. The wall art in the kitchen, like hieroglyphics, was an amusement board and a watercolor canvas. Take five steps yonder and you couldn't miss the wall carvings of creatures with long legs and gigantic horns, and warriors with elongated spears. The entire house was an inviting canvas.

The fume creature is ever so generous. It survives on steam and cloud and in return, provides crystalline droplets of golden honey. It possesses a hoarse voice akin to a titan's cry. Exhaust is a boring way to describe it, so I shan't mention it ever again. The heaven's hole sneaks into the room, golden-ash for rays, bringing the morsels of micro-particles to life, like starlight on a December night. There are wallpapers of vegetables and fruits on the left side of the cookstove. Blood-orange pomegranates, sunset-bananas, a bright green corn with yellow gemstones for bullets and the intimidating papayas. The seeds that glowed

like that of a dreary midnight and the vibrant yellow acrylic paint on the papaya always made me think twice before entering the kitchen. It seemed like a giant cocoon of caterpillars, waiting for the right moment to jump out of the wallpaper. I decorated the hallway towards the kitchen with doodles that looked like a projection of lucid dreams. These doodles were guardians of the house, fending us from the terrible creatures of the night.

If anything, porcelain has to offer—it is brittle and bound to break, be it a porcelain face or the crockery. It stays there, in the almirah, its habitat. Occasionally, it is brought to life for the porcelain people that visit the house. Temporal beings who come and go with faces that shall be forgotten over the weekend. Sometimes, I'd sit in one corner of the kitchen, and watch Mama prepare dinner, staring at the wall as the boiling dish projects picturesque visuals like shadow puppets being performed in fog-carnival. It reminds me of the days when my cousin would fly kites and I'd just stand there, watching

my attention drift away slowly, and eventually, moving my irises from the kite to the clouds, as they shape-shift from those fluffy hamburgers to a giant snowman and eventually turning into an armadillo. Papa made crab gravy one day, and I believe that was the last of it. The aroma revolted against my nostrils and it was anything but pleasant. He should just stick to his humble mutton and chicken curries.

Chapati was the clay maker's alternative. The kitchen had ample dough and sometimes, all it takes is a good dollop or two to make it come to life, thanks to its malleability. I'd ride my tricycle selling carved chapati sculptures to uninterested buyers. S has her clay set, but she would keep it to herself. It was kept in her cupboard and the only time I got to play with her was when her school and home tuitions were over. Sometimes, she would not play the clay set at all, ergo, it would become an artefact begging for company, sitting silently on the mantelpiece. That is how I came up with my own raw materials. Although it was not as flexible as clay, it sure was as close

as it could get. Maybe a bit of both is what made it special. I found out about this gem one fine day when I decided to help Mama roll the dough. It was soft and mushy, just like the clay set. You can easily shape them into different figures and sizes, but, unlike the clay, they turn semi-brittle soon, especially with the outer layer. The first thing I carved out of the dough was an elephant. Or maybe that's what I thought it looked like. I coloured it with a sketch pen and it was inconsistent. Come to think of it now, it looked like a massive pile of burlap sacks that had been splattered with orange paint. Ever since, moulding dough became a thing of guilty pleasure. Chapatis are good sculpting materials.

The rancid smell of the coffee jar takes me back to the old bungalow. Grandpapa's room, ghost quiet and still. Loud silence filled the corners, with tendrils of webs for curtains. It has enjoyed being in solitude and continues to observe the passerby from a distance through smudged English windows. The dim-lit rooms call for wanderers to explore them. Be careful, they would say. The roof has seen better days, they added. Therefore, we were prohibited from exploring the first floor. Nevertheless, it didn't stop me from occasionally venturing into the abandoned bungalow. The room was much colder due to the thick walls and the layers of wood and minerals that snuggled the bungalow. We inhaled a different type of air. It was the type of air that bites your nose; an uninviting breeze of dry winter's night. The kind that leaves you with a painful sore throat the next day.

The room had a huge wooden desk, frosted with layers of dust. The compartments were either jammed or squeaked eerily. A pair of old spectacles, untouched for ages, slept in a bruised aluminium casing. Digging even further, I was greeted with a multitude of comic books. Some belonged to a cousin I never met. The name said so. These were comic books from a bygone era. They were Mandrake and Phantom comics, along with war-picture comics, read and passed down by siblings from different generations. I sat there, going through the silverfish-infested, jaundice-yellow pages. Power outages accompanied late evenings at times, and when that happened, these comics and the fluorescent lantern were my companions. Mama often reminded me of how it was going to ruin my eyesight, and to get a brighter light. At times, I'd sit on the rooftop, and be free from the daily humdrum. The sparrows only aided merry in the background. The gambrels of the bungalow are a constant reminder of the life it once had. Inaccessible and sightless, it stood still with all its history.



*Sashanta Singh Sougajam*

