



# ART CONNECT

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### Editor

Anjum Hasan

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Mishta Roy

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From Shumona Goel's film installation *Family Tree*. Photo by Zubin Pastakia

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# Editorial

“Is there an Indian way of thinking?” asked AK Ramanujan twenty years ago in an essay of the same name. The answers will vary, he says, depending on which word in that question is being emphasised—*Is there an Indian way of thinking? Is there an Indian way of thinking? Is there an Indian way of thinking? And so on.* Before going on to illuminatingly address the last of these formulations, Ramanujan promises us that “We have not heard the end of these questions—or these answers.”

This issue of *ArtConnect* reveals how persistent questions of national identity and character are—especially when talking about culture. N Kalyan Raman, in his review of Kirtana Kumar’s performance, *The Wedding Party*, describes the dissimulation around Indian weddings and the “marathon dance of deception” that they consequently are. Shumona Goel’s film installation, *Family Tree*, reveals the breakdown of the idea of ‘Indian’ in the context of migration—an experience which leads to a fractured present where “we are never really quite at home. Never in the US, never in India...” On the other hand, says Kaushik Bhaumik, this passage from being singularly Indian to a psychically troubled migrant leads to the possibility of “a family tree exorcised of superstition and the irrational”.

Leading off from the question about an Indian way of thinking are questions about a Punjabi, Malayali or Kannada way of thinking. MK Raghavendra looks at what violence in Kannada films says about perceptions of Kannada identity, while Anindya Roy uses the graphic narrative form to explore the Bengali love for the game of football. And in our lead essay, Abhay Sardesai and Aditya Pant show how the literatures of several different language communities in Mumbai have worked with and through each other to contribute to Mumbai’s famed (though increasingly besieged) cosmopolitanism.

Ramanujan writes that one hallmark of the Indian way of thinking could be that we have little use for the all-encompassing, universal moral or social rule—“In cultures like India’s, the context-sensitive kind of rule is the preferred formulation.” By arguing in favour of a more nuanced understanding of cosmopolitanism, Sardesai and Pant point us in the same direction. The idea of cosmopolitanism as a kind of all-inclusive bonhomie is unproductive—what we need to acknowledge in the context of Mumbai (and by extension all of India) are “challenges beyond the question of openness and tolerance; challenges to do with the acts of making a living, sharing space, coming to terms with anonymity, learning a new language, communicating with people who [think] in a fundamentally different way...”

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# Contributors

**Abhay Sardesai** is the editor of *Art India* and Visiting Lecturer in Aesthetics at the Department of English, University of Mumbai. Sardesai translates from Marathi, Konkani and Gujarati into English. He was principal investigator of an IFA-funded project led by the Mumbai-based research centre, PUKAR, to research and document the literatures of Mumbai's various languages.

**Aditya Pant** is a graduate in history from Jawaharlal Nehru University and has worked with PUKAR in various capacities for over three years. Presently an independent researcher based in Boston, he maintains his connection with PUKAR by creating a global network of partners and extending his research interests to encompass youth, urban planning and development.

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**Anindya Roy** runs the comics publishing house, Phantomville, with Sarnath Banerjee. He writes for both comics and films, and is currently working on a collection of short stories. He can be contacted at [anindyaroy100@gmail.com](mailto:anindyaroy100@gmail.com).

**Harsho Mohan Chatteraj** is Kolkata-based artist and designer. He has worked, variously, as a columnist, cartoonist, illustrator, comic strip artist and visualiser. His main field of interest and expertise is that of comics and graphic novels.

**Emma Corkhill** is a graphic designer. She works in Sweden as co-editor of the journal, *Art Monitor*, when she is not working with issues of climate change or hanging out in Delhi with Phantomville.

**N Kalyan Raman** is a critic and translator of Tamil fiction and poetry into English. He has translated three novels by Ashokamitran: *The Colours of Evil* (1998), *Sand and Other Stories* (2002) and *Mole!* (2005); as well as a novel by Vaasanthi called *At the Cusp of Ages* (2008). His translations of contemporary Tamil poetry have been published widely in journals and anthologies.

**Kirtana Kumar** is a theatre director, actor and filmmaker. Her solo work in theatre includes Dario Fo's *Medea* and *Orgasmo Adulto*. Her films include *My Children Who Should be Running Through Vast Open Spaces* (1993) and *Guhya* (2001). In 2007 she received an IFA grant to develop and direct *The Wedding Party*—an exploration of the urban, middle-class Indian wedding.

**Debasish Sarkar** is a fiction writer and painter. His first book of short stories in Bengali will be out shortly. An alumnus of Jadavpur University and IIT, Mumbai, he currently teaches chemical engineering at the University College of Science and Technology, Kolkata. Between 2002 and 2005 he was part of an IFA-funded digital imaging project involving a group of painters and photographers.

**Madhuban Mitra** has a background in English Literature and has performed and taught Bharatanatyam for many years. She is the author of a doctoral thesis which examines the interventionist role of contemporary cultural practices in India, especially the kind of work that seeks to negotiate and reinterpret institutional and public spaces. Madhuban was Programme Executive at IFA from 2000 to 2008. She currently lives and works in Kolkata

**Kaushik Bhaumik** is Vice President, *Osian's—Connoisseurs of Art*. He has co-edited *Visual Sense: A Cultural Reader* with Elizabeth Edwards (Oxford: Berg, 2009). His forthcoming books include a history of early Bombay cinema, 1896-1936, to be published by Clarendon Press, Oxford in 2009.

**MK Raghavendra** is a Bangalore-based film critic who received the National Award for Best Film Critic (the Swarna Kamal) in 1996. His book *Seduced by the Familiar: Narration and Meaning in Indian Popular Cinema* was published by Oxford University Press in 2008.

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Those who celebrate Mumbai's cosmopolitanism tend to do so in an abstract way, say Abhay Sardesai and Aditya Pant. In response, the authors outline the specific history of the multi-lingual encounters that have shaped the city's cosmopolitanism. They follow the intersecting trajectories of Mumbai's many tongues—Hindi, Gujarati, Kannada, Sindhi, Urdu, Telugu, Tamil, Malayalam, Konkani, Marathi and English—as these developed into literatures. The city's ethic of social tolerance was hard won—developed over a century of trial and error, say the authors. Cosmopolitanism today might therefore be "a desperately needed political statement but it cannot be reduced to a slogan."



*Writing Across the City: The Many Faces  
of Cosmopolitanism*

Abhay Sardesai and Aditya Pant



8 **T**he tragedy unleashed on Mumbai by Raj Thackeray is based as much on ignorance as prejudice. The prejudice part is easier to tackle. It polarises responses and helps his critics to fiercely reclaim values of tolerance and openness. It also helps foreground debates about Mumbai's cosmopolitanism. Of course, some sociologists believe that Mumbai was never really cosmopolitan. According to them, a city shaped by community histories always hides within it a regional chauvinist core that erupts sooner or later. Cosmopolitanism, according to this school of thought, is an ideological value needed by the industrial elite to maintain law and order.

All these are, of course, debatable positions. What is undeniable is that ignorance too cuts both ways. Critiques of the nativist rhetoric often fall back on a simplistic Mumbai-for-all-livelihood-seekers position. They draw on the city's history of tolerance in a generic, abstract way and see it in terms of a fixed value. There is nothing wrong in this position, of course. One only wishes it was better informed so that a deeper knowledge of the city's past could circulate in the public sphere—knowledge that would help us tackle prejudice in a more effective way. For

the relative truth of the matter is that the old city's ethic of social tolerance was shaped over more than a century through trial and error and constant negotiation in bazaars, on streets and in residential enclaves between different communities, speaking different and common languages. It was not just about being modern in terms of a conscious choice, even though it is true that the idea (or ideology) of cosmopolitanism did circulate as an ideal.

An exploration of Mumbai's multilingual literary histories was launched some years ago as a response to the seething nativist rhetoric that had contaminated the city and looked a little like mildew that refused to hide beneath layers of paint. You could see it very clearly and you knew it would spread suddenly and vividly some time in the future. The reason for the study was simple: we felt that the city's cosmopolitan self-image had validity. However, it needed to be directly connected with its multilingual imagination. The study also implied a re-evaluation of the widely accepted emphasis on Mumbai as a forward-looking modern city open to new ideas and strangers, and allowing everyone to feel at home.

This glib description sounded a bit too slippery for comfort. It did not

wholly acknowledge that people in the city's community-bound alleys and ethnically carved neighbourhoods spoke many languages, some even unintelligible to each other. These spaces had faced many challenges that had never been documented or brought to the public eye: challenges beyond the question of openness and tolerance; challenges to do with the acts of making a living, sharing space, coming

It is indisputable that no single other factor has shaped Mumbai's street-smart cosmopolitanism as much as its ability to deal with linguistic diversity. It has forced people to deal with differences in real contexts and helped create a concrete space for transactions and exchanges through the working out of a system of multilingual communication. Through much of the 20th century the

**It is indisputable that no single other factor has shaped Mumbai's street-smart cosmopolitanism as much as its ability to deal with linguistic diversity. It has forced people to deal with differences in real contexts and helped create a concrete space for transactions and exchanges through the working out of a system of multilingual communication.**

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to terms with anonymity, learning a new language, communicating with people who thought in a fundamentally different way; challenges that included but also transcended the term 'cosmopolitan'. The label may undeniably be a desperately needed political statement but it cannot be reduced to a slogan. It needs to be grounded in historical experience.

government struggled to ensure a formal response to this need by trying to evolve specific policies. It recognised schools which taught in diverse languages, including Telugu, Urdu and Kannada.

As a community began to establish roots, its literature became a social marker within the shared public space of the city. Many literary

traditions received institutional support in some form or the other. The development of community-sponsored literary and theatrical institutions or the establishment of journals or magazines was almost inevitable. The space of literature also became a platform for exchanges and interactions between communities to help forge collective relationships with the city. Several literary traditions,

Telugu and Marathi often went together, just like Gujarati and Marathi or Gujarati and Urdu.

The city's literary imagination thus bridged formal spaces of social and educational aspirations with cultural identity. The poetry, theatre and fiction produced and exchanged in any of the city's several languages has always been infused sharply with the concerns of urban life. When a new

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Unfortunately, there is a standard, generic spiel about people from every nook and corner of the country coming to Mumbai and making it their home. This abstract idea, grafted on from a textbook narrative of industrial urbanisation, has done huge harm to understanding the specific nature of the city's socio-political sphere.

notably Urdu, Gujarati, Kannada and Konkani, spawned generations of writers who had grown up in the city and either wrote in their own language or bilingually. They helped their communities dig deeper roots in Bombay by connecting their lives in the city to their regional histories. Sometimes they did this in a language other than their own. For example—

language was introduced in formal curricula, it was often in its literary expressive form; either its establishment was a result of or eventually became the basis for a politicised literary consciousness. This was certainly true of Kannada, which was introduced in the Bombay University curriculum as early as 1902.

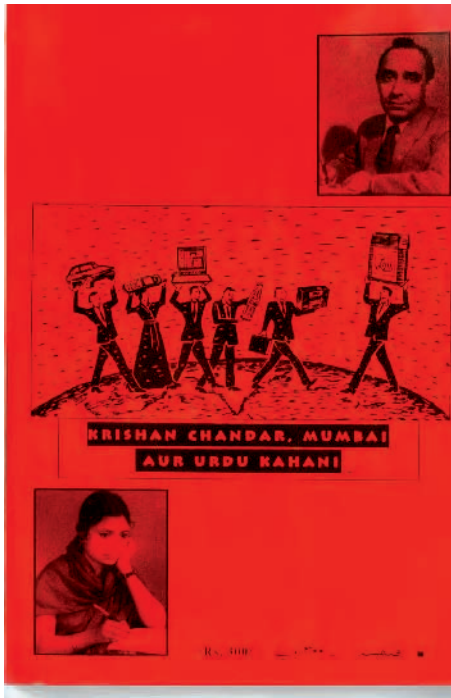
Unfortunately, there is a standard, generic spiel about people from every nook and corner of the country coming to Mumbai and making it their home. This abstract idea, grafted on from a textbook narrative of industrial urbanisation, has done huge harm to understanding the specific nature of the city's socio-political sphere. In fact, it is based on an impatience or even refusal to deal with the particular histories that made the city so diverse. People don't just come to a pre-fabricated tolerant and cosmopolitan city. They make it so. This process of making needs to be understood, documented and circulated within the public realm.

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The deep connections that languages like Gujarati, Kannada, Sindhi, Urdu, Telugu, Tamil and Konkani have with the city are way beyond the migrant-in-every-corner-of-the-city story. In fact, the pre-Independence history of the subcontinent has a lot to do with it. The city's contemporary political imagination simply fails to acknowledge that Bombay was more than just a source of jobs for many communities. They were connected to the city through the concreteness of the Bombay state of which the city was the administrative and cultural nerve

centre. For almost a century, the Bombay State extended all the way to Sindh, in modern-day Pakistan, in the north, to northern Karnataka in the south, while touching parts of Andhra in the east. The city did not just become a substitute for the erstwhile kingdoms that had provided the patronage so essential for the development of artistic traditions. It actually became a fountainhead through which diverse socio-literary and artistic traditions could come into their own.

Not surprisingly, Urdu writers mark the city astonishingly early, tracing their lineage to 1760, when an Urdu poet named Ata provided lyrical descriptions of life here. Two Urdu poets of Konkani origin, Babu Miyan Faqeer and Nusrat Ali, poetically chronicled the massive fire in the Fort region that broke out in 1803. Since then, the Urdu literary establishment forged a special relationship with the city, attracting poets and writers to visit and stay—right from Firaq Gorakhpuri and Faiz Ahmed Faiz to Maulana Altaf Husain Hali. The first Urdu play was staged on November 26, 1853 at Bombay Theatre and started a stream of literary production, popular and elite, that continues to characterise the Urdu public sphere to this day.



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Krishan Chander, Mumbai Aur Urdu Kahani by Dr Rafia Shabnam Abdi.

The Parsi and Maharashtrian theatrical entrepreneur did much to make the city a thriving cultural centre with the establishment of more than twenty-five theatre companies by the early 20th century. These included the Victoria Natak Company, Old Parsi Theatre and the Alfred Theatrical Company. The Parsi Theatre, as is well known, was the most popular of all, fuelled as it was by the singular talents of a playwright called Agha Hashra Kashmiri. Kashmiri, though, remained an object of disdain for the

serious Urdu writers in the city who continued to rule in the realm of taste and aesthetics.

It was in 1870 that Sesho Ramachandra Churmuri transformed Kalidasa's *Shakuntala* into the *Kannada Shakuntalau* which was first published in Mumbai. A couple of more translations saw the launch of a vibrant literary and theatrical Kannada scene in the city. Later on, Krishna Kumar Kallur, playwright and short story writer, came to the limelight through Kannada Theatres in Mumbai and the Kannada-speaking community was one of the first to set up literary institutions like the Karnataka Sangha and the Mysore Association.

During the first phase of its existence, the Parsi Theatre Group included Gujarati in a major way but eventually an argument between the Gujarati accountant and the Parsi owner led to a split that saw the rise of the Bombay Gujarati Natya Mandali in 1878. The first Gujarati play was performed in 1853 by the Parsi Natak Mandali at Grant Road. The first original Gujarati play to be published was *Stree Sambhasan* in 1856.

The birth of the modern Konkani Tiatr is credited to Lucasinho Ribeiro. He translated an Italian Opera *Italian Boy* and staged it in Bombay at



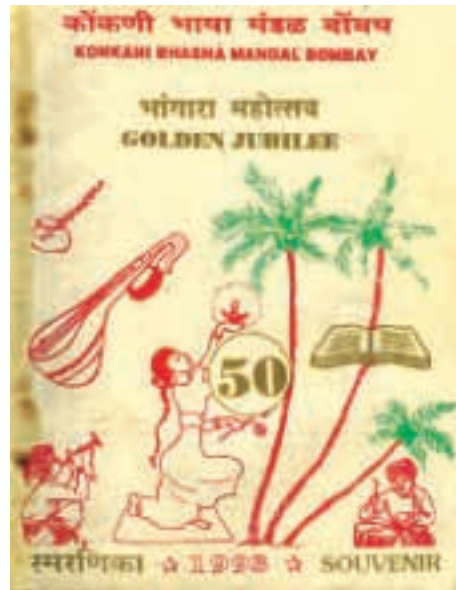
the Alfred Theatre in 1892. This event transformed the older play-watching traditions of the Goan migrants, used to the folk form *zagor*, into the modern proscenium drama that still dominates theatrical productions of Konkani all over the world.

The city was part of the imagination of the Sindhi community before Partition, as Bombay was the administrative headquarters of Sindh. Sea voyages between Karachi and Bombay were popular in the pre-Independence era and it was only to be expected that after Partition, the large Sindhi Hindu population chose to set up base here. Most of them were accommodated in the cramped Kalyan Camp in Ulhasnagar but eventually went on to choose the city as their literary capital. The city became the base for their political struggles related to the Sindh Script controversy and the movement for official recognition of Sindhi as an Indian language between 1955 and 1968. The community produced famous educational institutions as well as a fairly significant set of poets and writers in English.

With regard to Tamil and Telugu, community formations linked to labour movements spawned robust literary traditions that were politically charged from their inception. The

story of Telugu starts proudly with the efforts of the working class and acknowledges the contributions of the construction workers to both the city's development and the history of its literary identity. The first ever Telugu paper, *Andhra Patrika*, was established in Mumbai in 1908 by Kashinadhuni, though it eventually shifted base to Madras in 1914. There were other periodicals like *Telugu Samachar*, *Telugu Mitra* and *Andhra Veer* that sprung up in the working class neighbourhoods of central Mumbai. Interestingly, some of them were bilingual and even trilingual. For

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The golden jubilee souvenir of the Konkani Bhasha Mandal, Bombay.

example, the *Telugu Samachar*, started in 1926, at one time had 130 pages in Marathi, 100 pages in English and only 30 pages in Telugu. Its readership was ethnically Telugu but equally well-versed in Marathi and looked towards English as a language of aspiration.

The Bombay Municipal Corporation established Telugu schools in 1932 and it was around the Independence period that formal literary practices found expression. The establishment of the schools was largely linked to the efforts of Guntuka Narsayya Pantulu, a crusader for weavers' rights. A Marathi and Telugu library was established in 1925 in Kamatipura, while a full-fledged Telugu library was formed in 1932, called the Kashinadhuni Nageshwar Rao Memorial Library. Groups of mill workers in Lower Parel and Prabhadevi used to stage Telugu plays in the compounds of their chawls but it was only in the 1960s that Telugu theatre came into its own with the professionalisation of the Bombay Andhra Mahasabha and Gymkhana.

The Tamil population in the city made its presence felt in the early 20th century. There were literary journals published as early as the 1930s and fourth and fifth generation Tamil writers emerged quickly.



*Nagar Kavita*—an anthology of Bombay city poetry in Malayalam (1999).

The Malayali presence in Mumbai became significant in the 1930s and '40s. The community set up Malayali Associations in several neighbourhoods, from Colaba to Ambar-nath to Palghar. The Sahitya Parishath, a literary forum was established in 1927, and a few years later, the journal *Bombay Malayalee* was started. During those decades there were more than 250 socio-cultural and religious Malayali



associations and the first full-length Malayalam play was staged in 1940. The Malayali theatre tradition became particularly vibrant in the 1950s and '60s and there were anything between 35 to 40 theatre groups functioning in the 1970s. The Fine Arts Centre was set up by PMN Menon and inaugurated more years of very experimental and edgy productions. Mumbai-based Malayali novelists and short story writers found reasonable acceptance in the quality-conscious home state with its rigorous critical standards.

Interestingly, Hindi, which made its mark in Bombay in the post-independent period, grew out of

institutional support by an old colonial institution dominated by English-speaking elites—the *Times of India*. It initiated a virtual renaissance as far as Hindi literary journals were concerned by publishing magazines like *Dharm Yug* and *Sarika*. These in turn stimulated the emergence of publications like *Parag* and *Navneet* which were brought out by other publishing houses. Dr Dharamveer Bharati, Virendra Kumar Jain, Kanhaiya Lal Nandan, Rahi Masoom Raza, Vasant Dev were some major players. The 1970s and '80s saw the rise of a generation of poets and writers who had grown up in the city and also played a significant role in the Hindi film industry. In fact, the film industry had always been a contrary space for Urdu and Hindi literary practitioners. Commercially attractive and aesthetically ambiguous, the industry provided space for experimentation and revenue while becoming the easy whipping horse to blame for declining literary standards. Another institution that played a huge role in keeping Hindi theatre alive and dynamic was Prithvi Theatre that emerged in the 1970s and became a great space for literary linguistic cross-overs. It was (and is) common to find Marathi and Gujarati-speaking artistes working in Hindi theatre and



A Sindhi language magazine published from Mumbai.

vice versa. Its connections with the film industry and with English language practitioners also made it a distinctive space in terms of representing Mumbai's multilingual literary traditions.

Through most of the 20th century, all these literary spaces were connected equally to the city's volatile political movements (independence, regional or working-class related) and to its vibrant economy fuelled by

language whenever the city fumbled between tongues—when Gujarati had to converse with Tamil, or when Marathi had to converse with Telugu. By and large, though, speaking two to three languages in set clusters was the norm. It was (and remains) common to express linguistic proficiency in different permutations and combinations: for example, understanding, reading and writing English but speaking only in Gujarati and

16 **By and large, it remains common to express linguistic proficiency in different permutations and combinations: for example, understanding, reading and writing English but speaking only in Gujarati and Marathi; being proficient in Gujarati and English and having a spoken knowledge of Marathi; or speaking and writing in Telugu and English and having a spoken knowledge of Hindi, and so on.**

industries, docks and financial services. The city had developed an advanced educational infrastructure by the beginning of the 20th century with English emerging as a vital link between its varied linguistic spheres.

For much of the time, however, English had a Janus-faced presence. On one hand it became the link

Marathi; being proficient in Gujarati and English and having a spoken knowledge of Marathi; or speaking and writing in Telugu and English and having a spoken knowledge of Hindi, and so on.

This functional English has ballooned into a form of its own. It overlaps with Romanized Hindi and

has developed its readership connected to popular English magazines—mostly Hindi movie lore related. A significant part of the readership of the Chetan Bhagat-Shobhaa De school of popular writing in English also comes from this group.

However, a small but strong elite continues to control a more purist discourse linked to English literary expression. It originated in institutionalised, colonial literary spaces that dominated much of 20th century history—especially the university, elite educational institutions, high-end economic positions and the media. It was from there that more exclusive sensibilities spilled into educational institutions to lock the aspirational flows that otherwise allowed the English language to mutate and transform in sync with social histories. This saw the rise of a particular kind of snobbery manufacturing its own versions of high and low culture. One could say that this elite English literary class had a disproportionately strong influence in the city's literary sphere since they controlled a fair amount of institutional resources.

They comprised second and third generation English-speaking constituencies (from various ethnic and community backgrounds) who typically looked down upon vernacular

accents and regional variations of the English language and refused to acknowledge regional literary histories in terms of the specific historical contexts of these languages. It is important to mention that such a class did not have any deep, historical, English ancestry. It could well comprise a privileged Maharashtrian, Gujarati, Tamilian or Sindhi family from South Mumbai who spoke the Queen's English, thanks to education in an elite institution, and turned its nose at a first generation Goan English speaker from Dhobhi Talao.

However, many of the non-English literary traditions had their own version of high and low evaluative modes as well, and refused to negotiate the complexities of their own social histories. In Marathi, Tamil and Telugu though, one did find the eventual emergence of a stronger politicised voice that contributed to developing a counter-space within them. Otherwise, there have been all kinds of battle lines formed between a regional language's elite and the English elite, between the English elite and its low-brow popular users, between high Urdu and its low-brow Hindi filmi version.

With regard to basic demography, less than half of the city's population is Marathi-speaking. What

needs to be noted about this 45 % is that they represent diverse socio-economic groups and many are multilingual. Their diversity is an outcome of the complex way they have experienced their identity in the last hundred years—through militant,

includes only a tiny proportion of second or third generation elite English speakers and comprises mostly first generation English speakers who use it as a second or third language. They see it as a language of aspiration—but in a form

If one was to trace the history of Modernism in many of our literatures, one would find that not only does it have an urban axis, location and character but that it also occurs and evolves simultaneously in many languages. Traits, processes, spaces and events have been shared; literary cultures have grown in a remarkably identical manner.

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secular, communal and progressively caste-conscious social movements. The Hindi-Urdu speakers form the second largest singular linguistic group, followed by Gujarati, Tamil, Kannada and Telugu (in that order).

Interestingly, the number of Mumbaikars who are also functional in English is huge—almost as much as the Hindu-Urdu-speaking population. However, this figure of English users includes speakers who primarily speak other languages. In socio-literary terms this English-speaking group

that their own elite minority would simply not recognise.

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There are pronounced connections between linguistic communities, literary histories and urban politics in Mumbai. As mentioned earlier, necessity has been the mother of improvisation in more ways than one and familiarity has bred interest. Many writers have been consistently bilingual (Dilip Chitre, Arun Kolarkar, Vilas Sarang, et al) and many

have chosen to translate poetry and prose from one language into another.

If one was to trace the history of Modernism in many of our literatures, one would find that not only does it have an urban axis, location and character but also that it occurs and evolves simultaneously in many languages. Traits, processes, spaces and events have been shared; literary cultures have grown in a remarkably identical manner; and inevitably, some writers have straddled two distinct language-cultures. Mumbai has been the stage and has provided the setting and inspiration for several avant-garde experiments across languages.

As an example, consider the development of the little magazine as a literary form and as a counter-cultural initiative. In the '60s and early '70s, Gujarati magazines like *Yahom*, *Sandarbh*, *Falguni*, *Manisha*, *Uhapoh*, the pre-eminent *Kshitij* and the still-extant *Etad* (brought out separately and together by writers like Suresh Joshi, Labhshankar Thakar, Sitanshu Yashaschandra, Kanti Patel, Bharat Naik, Nitin Mehta, Mangal Rathod, Prabodh Parikh, among others) rubbed shoulders with the pre-eminent *Satyakatha* (most avant-garde Marathi writers from Dilip Chitre to CT Khanolkar wrote for it) and *Damn You* (young writers and poets in

English like Arvind Krishna Mehrotra, Adil Jussawalla, Nissim Ezekiel wrote for it), among others.

Little magazines brought alive the excitement of forging an avant-garde which cocked a snook at the orthodoxies of the literary establishment. They provided a much-needed platform for young writers to express themselves using rebellious modes and forms which carried implicit critiques of literary cultures and productions that refused to reinvent themselves.

To invoke Raj Thackeray's presence once again, it is quite telling that one of the ways in which he tried to endear himself to the Maharashtrian middle-class was by organising a huge poetry-reading programme where Maharashtrian celebrities (like Sachin Tendulkar, among many others) read out from their favourite poetic works. He also organised a grand event memorialising VV Shirwadkar (Kusumagraj), a Jnanpith award-winning popular poet. There were huge placards and hoardings announcing these programmes—many people thought of this as a refreshing change. A politician projecting himself as a *rasika* and as a protector of a literary culture impressed them—the production and projection of sophistication was quite uncharacteristic.

Was this a politician who read and appreciated quality literature? Was serious poetry making a comeback as a popular form? It was only later, when the North Indian was installed as the demonised Other, and hapless taxi-drivers, shop-keepers and students were threatened and beaten up, that you realised the cannily perverse way in which a literary genre and literary figures had been used to mobilise a language community.

When politicians play divisive games using language as a prominent identity-marker, it becomes imperative that we uncover the histories of interdependence and the traditions of borrowing and lending that most literary cultures in the city are heir to. The connections between linguistic, literary and political cultures in the city, as we pointed out earlier, are very strong and complex, a point that we emphasise repeatedly, in our study. We know only too well, that those who forget robust histories are condemned to get repeatedly contaminated by dangerous blasts from the past.

*(We are sincerely grateful to Rahul Srivastava for having helped us through the course of the project and for providing valuable inputs in the writing of this essay.)*

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Urvashi Pandya  
Vijay Kumar

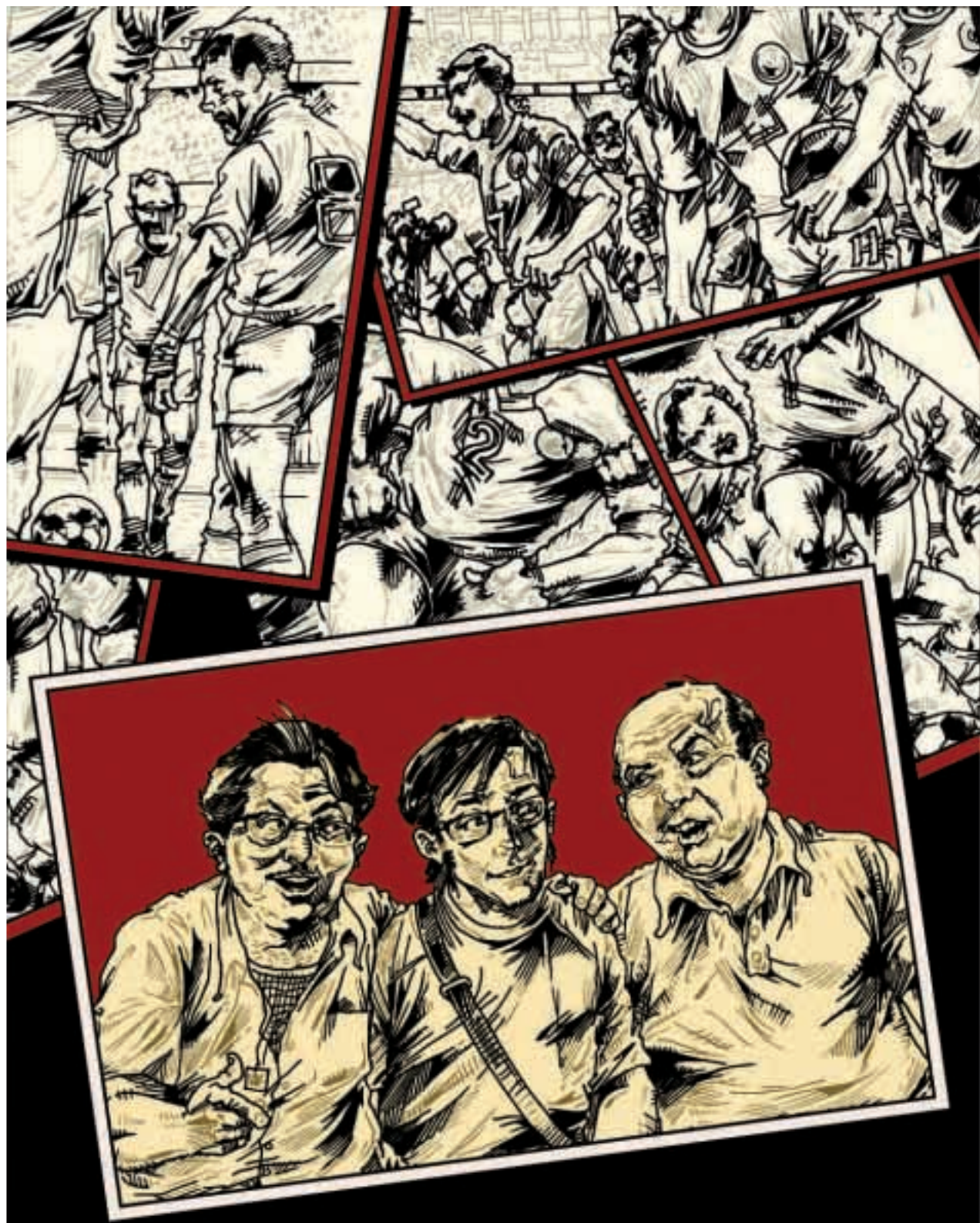
Photograph by Sumanth Rao



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Anindya Roy was part of an IFA-funded project started in 2001 to create a graphic novel on Kolkata. The following story is one of several that he wrote during the course of that project. Roy's stories explore the quirks of Calcuttans and their special loves—buying hilsa (with instructions to the fishmonger along the lines of “make curry pieces, not too large, but large enough so that one does not ask for two”), creating impromptu street-corner addas, worrying about nuclear attacks and, of course, football. In the following piece, Roy rewinds to when “the tiger first tasted blood” and shows us what followed in the history of Kolkata's football mania.





## EXAGGGGERATED BACK HEEL ...

Story: Anindya Roy, Art: Harsho Mohan Chatteraj, Color: Emma Corkhill



WHAT ARE YOU SAYING EVERY BENGALI IS A BORN FOOTBALLER?

ARREY KI BOLCHEN DADA, I SAY EVERY BENGALI IS A FOOTBALLER EVEN BEFORE HE IS BORN!

DIN NA DADA DIN NA, ROLL OUT A FOOTBALL TO ANY BENGALI MAN ANY AGE AND SEE THE LANGUAGE OF HIS FEET.

I TELL YOU IT IS MORE DIFFICULT TO HIDE OUR TALENT THAN TO SHOW IT WHEN IT COMES TO FOOTBALL.



WE ARE ON A BUS RIDE TO THE SALT LAKE STADIUM. ONE OF MY UNCLCS HAS TAKEN THE RESPONSIBILITY OF SAFELY ESCORTING ME TO THE PREMISES.

MY UNCLE, LIKE MOST BENGALIS, IS SHORT, SHORT-TEMPERED AND SHORT-SIGHTED, AND CURRENTLY CONFRONTING AN EAST BENGAL SUPPORTER SITTING BEHIND HIM WHO IS ACCUSING MOHJIN BASAN OF SLANDER, FOUL PLAY, PROMISCUITY, INCEST AND GOD KNOWS WHAT.

WHAT HAVE YOUR PLAYERS ACHIEVED AT THE INTERNATIONAL STAGE?

THEY HAVE BEEN SLAUGHTERED LIKE GOATS WHENEVER THEY HAVE REPRESENTED AN INDIAN TEAM.





A SEAT OF TWO HAS FOUR PEOPLE SITTING ON IT.

THE TOTAL SITTING AREA OF 50 HAS BEEN OCCUPIED BY 150.

THE FAVORITE BENGALI BODY PERFUME TALCIUM POWDER IS FLOATING FREELY FROM ALL FOLDS OF HUMANITY.



OCCUPANTS OF THE SEAT BEFORE ME ARE ENGAGED IN A FEROCIOUS DEBATE TO IDENTIFY THE FIRST BENGALI TO HAVE BROUGHT THE GAME OF FOOTBALL TO CALCUTTA.

DIPENDU!

MAHENDRA!

NABENDRA!

MANOJ!



ARRE, MANOJ IS ALSO MY SON-IN-LAW'S NAME!



YES, YES, NABENDRA PRASAD!

ARRE HE WAS BATHING IN THE GANGA WHEN HE SAW THIS BUNCH OF SAHIBS HITTING A BALL WITH THEIR FEET.

INSIDE THE GANGA!

HAN, HAN!







ARRE, NA RE BABA!  
IT WAS 1879, I  
REMEMBER IT  
WAS A HOT  
DAY.

HOW CAN  
YOU REMEMBER,  
MOSHAI? EVEN  
YOUR GRANDFATHER  
I AM NOT SURE  
WAS CONCERNED  
THEN!

PLEASE DON'T  
INTERRUPT.

NAGENDRA WAS GOING  
WITH HIS MOTHER TO TAKE BATH  
IN THE GANGA WHEN HE SPOTTED  
ENGLISH SOLDIERS KICKING A  
BALL IN MAIDAN.



HAN  
HANI!

NANDI BABU  
IS RIGHT! THAT  
IS WHAT WE  
HAVE HEARD  
ALSO!



THEN  
NAGENDRA GOT  
DOWN TO WATCH AND  
THEN THE BALL SOME-  
HOW CAME TO HIM  
AND HE KICKED  
IT.

THAT IS  
HOW THE TIGER  
FIRST TASTED  
BLOOD!

THE FIRST  
FOOTBALL  
ENTHUSIASTS OF  
CALCUTTA WERE  
APPARENTLY ALL  
STUDENTS.

SCIENCE  
OR ARTS?

NAGENDRA  
GATHERED A FEW OF  
HIS FRIENDS, WENT TO  
A SHOP IN CHOWRINGEE  
AND BOUGHT HIMSELF  
A BALL. ONLY MISTAKE  
WAS THAT HE BOUGHT  
A RUGBY BALL.



NOW THAT A BALL  
HAD BEEN BOUGHT IT HAD  
TO BE KICKED AROUND, SO  
THEY DID. ALL THIS FRANTIC  
KICKING DISTRACTED PROFESSOR  
G.A STACK, WHO HEARD ALL THIS  
CACOPHONY FROM THE  
PRESIDENCY COLLEGE  
RIGHT OPPOSITE.





AS THE BUS SCREECHED TO A SUDDEN HALT, NANDI BABU TOPPLED ONTO AN UNSUSPECTING LAP.



OOH NA GO!

WE HAD ARRIVED AT THE STADIUM.

THE OCCUPANTS BURST OUT AND SCATTERED ALL OVER ON THE ROAD.

**SCREEEEEECHHH**

AFTER NURSING NANDI BABU'S PAIN AND AGONY FOR A FEW MINUTES WE PESTERED HIM TO GO ON.

PROF B.A STACK FURTHER ENCOURAGED THE LOT BY BUYING THEM A SOCCER BALL AND ALSO TEACHING THEM BASIC RULES AND OTHER NITTY-GRIITTES OF THE GAME.

NAGENDRA PRASAD WENT AHEAD AND SET UP THE FIRST FOOTBALL CLUB CALLED THE WELLINGTON CLUB IN 1884.



AT THE GATES OF THE STADIUM, THE ATMOSPHERE WAS ABUZZ. UNCLE WAS MAKING SWIFT MOVEMENTS WITHIN THE CROWDS.

DEKHI BHAI...

ARRE DADA, APNI THELCHEN KENOP



OOPI!



WE ENTER, MANAGE TO LOCATE A SITTING AREA TO REST OUR BACKSIDES AND REFLECT ON THE AMBIENCE. WE CURSE THE HEAT FOR A WHILE, WIPE THE SWEAT ON OUR RESPECTIVE SHIRTS AND STARE BLANKLY INTO THE EXPANSE, WITH SNACK VENDORS WALKING AROUND US WITH THEIR CHIPS AND COLAS.



ARRE TOPSHAY!

ARRE SUPTA DA, HOW ARE YOU?



ALIVE. COME AND SIT HERE. MEET MY NIECE.

NEPHEW!



OH SORRY. BY THE BY, TOPSHAY HERE IS A WALKING TALKING ENCYCLOPAEDIA OF FOOTBALL!

LOT OF PEOPLE HERE TODAY!

PEOPLE!!

WHERE IS PEOPLE. THIS IS NOTHING. WHEN MOHUN BAGAN WON THE IFA SHIELD FOR THE FIRST TIME THEN YOU SHOULD HAVE SEEN PEOPLE!





TEA!

ASOON DADA, ASOON!

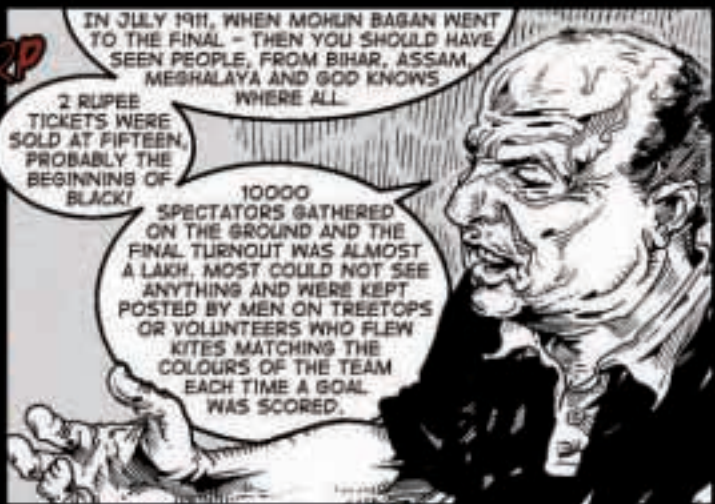
SLURRRRP



2 RUPEE TICKETS WERE SOLD AT FIFTEEN, PROBABLY THE BEGINNING OF BLACK!

IN JULY 1911, WHEN MOHUN BAGAN WENT TO THE FINAL - THEN YOU SHOULD HAVE SEEN PEOPLE, FROM BIHAR, ASSAM, MIZHALAYA AND GOD KNOWS WHERE ALL.

10000 SPECTATORS GATHERED ON THE GROUND AND THE FINAL TURNOUT WAS ALMOST A LAKH. MOST COULD NOT SEE ANYTHING AND WERE KEPT POSTED BY MEN ON TREETOPS OR VOLUNTEERS WHO FLEW KITES MATCHING THE COLOURS OF THE TEAM EACH TIME A GOAL WAS SCORED.



THAT WAS EXCITEMENT, GUPTA DA. THAT WAS PASSION! TODAY WHAT YOU SEE IS JUST LEFT OVER

OOH!



HEY, YOU SON OF A LAND-LESS APE, MAY YOUR SOUL DECAY IN A SLUM OF TOXIC WASTE!

TOPSHAY, I LEARNT, WAS AN AVID FOOTBALLER IN HIS YOUNGER DAYS.

SO MR. TOPSHAY, ALL THIS HOOLIBANISM WHICH IS ASSOCIATED WITH FOOTBALL... DO YOU SEE GLIMPSSES OF IT IN CALCUTTA?

SEE NO, SAW YES.

IT IS IN THE BLOOD OF THE CALCUTTAN ALRIGHT AND SOMETIMES PAID FOR IN BLOOD.



HE PLAYED IN THE RAIN, IN THE SUN, IN THE NIGHT, IN HIS ROOM AND HAD COMMENDABLE BALL SKILLS.







SO MUCH OF PASSION AND SUPPORT FOR THE GAME AND YET WE HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO MAKE AN IMPACT ON THE WORLD STAGE FOR YEARS NOW. WHY, MR. TOPSHAY?

WHY DO WE NEED TO MAKE AN IMPACT WITH EVERYTHING IN LIFE? WE ARE HAPPY AND EXCITED WITH OUR DOMESTIC FOOTBALL. BALANCED SIDES PLAY IN OUR TOURNAMENTS, WHICH MAKES AN EXCITING GAME.

LOOK AT THE CROWDS - THEY ARE ALL HAPPY, THE PLAYERS ARE HAPPY TO SEE US HAPPY, TICKETS ARE BEING SOLD. SO WHY GIVE A DAMN?

ARRE, I DO NOT UNDERSTAND YOU YOUNG PEOPLE. ARRE BULLSHIT MAN.



BUT PRECISELY SHOULD NOT ALL THIS TRANSLATE INTO SOMETHING BIGGER?



AGAIN, HOUGHTON WANTS TALLER PLAYERS.

YOU WANT SOMETHING BIG, YOU TELL ME HOW CAN YOU JUST GET TALLER PEOPLE?



IT IS NOT IN OUR NATURE TO BE TALL!

MOREOVER IT IS IMPOLITE AND INTIMIDATING TO OTHERS AROUND YOU!!!





BUT HE HAS A POINT - HE SAYS WE ARE SUFFERING GOALS OUT OF SET PIECES BECAUSE WE ARE TOO SHORT TO CONTROL THE BALL WHEN IT'S IN THE AIR.

HMMM...

SO LIVE WITH YOUR HANDICAP, MAKE IT YOUR STRENGTH.

YOU HAVE TO FIND YOUR CALCIUM FROM OTHER SOURCES IF YOU ARE INTOLERANT TO MILK.

CAN'T LOSE ALL YOUR BONES OVER IT, CAN YOU?

C5

## THE HEIGHT OF SUCCESS

WHO IS TALL, YOU TELL ME.

IS PELE TALL? IS MARADONA TALL?

IS HITLER TALL? IS BUNDEL TALL? IS SARTRE TALL? IS CAMUS TALL?

HUM? HUM? SO WHY BE A HEIGHTIST?

I THINK YOU ARE BEING UNFAIR. HE IS DOING THE BEST HE CAN TO IMPROVE OUR NATIONAL SIDE. THE LEAST WE CAN DO IS ENCOURAGE HIM WITH OUR SUPPORT.



THERE WAS A SMALL AGE OF SILENCE WHICH FOLLOWED THE MATCH ENDED IN A DRAW, HELPING MANY TO FIND FRIENDS AMONG RIVAL SUPPORTERS.



WE ALL WALKED OUT IN SILENCE. TOPSHAY'S SILENT AND RIGID FACE TOLD ME THAT HIS EGO HAD BEEN HURT, AND HE WAS WALKING WITH A LUMP OF BITTERNESS.



WE TOOK THE SAME BUS AND TWO STOPS BEFORE TOPSHAY'S STOP, I APOLOGISED TO HIM, BEGGING HIM NOT TO HARBOR ANY ILL FEELINGS.



HE MILLED OVER THE MATTER WITH A FEW MUTTERINGS AND BLINKS...



THEN STANDING UP WITH A CONGENIAL NOD AND A RESTRAINED SMILE, MOVED TOWARDS THE EXIT.

BUT JUST WHEN THE BUS STOPPED, HE TURNED AROUND AND POINTED AT HIS TROUSERS.



I HAVE FOUR RUPEES IN MY LEFT POCKET AND NONE IN MY RIGHT. BUT I STILL NEED THEM BOTH TO PULL MY PANTS UP.



BIRDS STOPPED CHIRPING FOR A WHILE. I STARED BLANKLY AT MY UNCLE WHO, JUST LIKE ME, HAD FAILED TO DECODE THE EPIGRAM.

TOPSHAY WALKED AWAY UNDER THE BACKDROP OF A SETTING SUN AND A FEW STRATO-NIMBUS CLOUDS.



TO THIS DAY, AT TIMES CHEWING AT THE REAR END OF A PENCIL, I WONDER WHETHER OR NOT TOPSHAY SCORED ON THAT GOAL-LESS DAY.



THE END





*The Wedding Party*—directed by Kirtana Kumar and funded by IFA—is a play that invites its audience to both witness and participate in a middle-class Bangalore wedding. It is an attempt—inspired by Indian folk theatre—to break the fourth wall—that invisible barrier between a performance and its audience in proscenium theatre. *The Wedding Party* received enthusiastic reviews when it premiered in Bangalore in January 2008. Here Kirtana Kumar shares excerpts from the diary she maintained while creating the play, while critic N Kalyan Raman describes how admirably well *The Wedding Party* captures the artifice and drama of Indian weddings.

*Rajesh Weds Menaka aka The Wedding Party:  
Two Perspectives*

Kirtana Kumar and N Kalyan Raman

Photographs by Roy Sincal





## THE WEDDING PARTY: DIARY NOTES

Kirtana Kumar

July 2007

Okay, so we're devising a play about a middle-class Bangalore wedding, with a cast of 20 actors and 'real' people, in a *found* space (not a proscenium theatre), with food and drinks, and with the possibility of the audience wandering all over the space being—variously—invitee/observer/voyeur/participant. Arre, folk artists have done so for years! How hard can it be?

36 We've been thinking about it for a while. Perhaps it began with the all-night Mudi yettu performance we witnessed in Kizhoor, Kerala.

Mudi yettu depicts the story of how Bhadrakali eventually defeats the *asuras* Darikan and Daanavendra. There are many stages in the performance, from the *Keli Kottu* or announcement of the play by the *chenda* drummers to the *Darika Vadham* or killing of Daarika, and the performers used every inch of the Kizhoor Bhagavathi Kshetram: the temple, temple courtyard and adjoining fields. It left us spellbound, the way the performers 'worked' the space and the audience. Or maybe it was a conversation we had in LA about a stunning

new play devised in an old house next to Hollywood Bowl. (The house became a character in the unfolding story of a murder and audience members could choose, at any given time, to be in any of its rooms. Thus each person's experience of the play was possibly unique.) It was definitely inspired by the scale and urban decay of Reza Abdoh's *Bogeyman* whose central image was the peeling away of layer upon layer of a brownstone building to reveal the truth of the characters it housed. But it was mainly born of our fascination with the intrigues of the average arranged marriage.

We started off with what Peter Brook calls a "deep, formless hunch": that urban audiences have become accustomed to stasis. We drink our coffee, dally awhile, put off our cellphones and enter the theatre *expecting* that the magic will happen for us, but quite unwilling to *participate* in the creation of magic. Even while we offer up applause, a certain formality prevents us from Artaudian excess. We're driven not by passion, but by immutability and custom. Everything *looks* right, the acting's okay, but still... Yet in a rock



concert or a folk theatre performance, audience and performer alike are cohorts in a ritualistic and participatory act of rebellion. As performers, we *craved* this in theatre: something, *anything*, that could release us from vapidty.

So our wanting to experiment with space in *The Wedding Party* was tied up with a burning desire to mess with the fourth wall in the way that Indian folk theatre does. Brashly, rudely and robustly. And to invite the audience in.

marriage in an urban metro), Ganjam Kalyana Mantappa (too lavish for this particular wedding: wooden pillars and brass *urlis*) and the less expensive *choultries* in Basavanagudi (resounding echo, lacking in atmosphere, hostility to theatre apparent in the tone of interaction.) Other spaces/old houses in residential areas have either parking hassles or massive street noise.

We need a space that offers us *tabula rasa*! Something simple that doesn't impose any one ideology on the actors. We need all the characters,

We drink our coffee, dally awhile, put off our cellphones and enter the theatre *expecting* that the magic will happen for us, but quite unwilling to *participate* in the creation of magic. Even while we offer up applause, a certain formality prevents us from Artaudian excess.

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September 2007

### Space

Finding the perfect *found* space has been a bloody ordeal. We looked at Seva Sadan (it is home to a girl's boarding school and therefore may not be receptive to the core ideas of the project—the deconstruction of

from the wedding planner to Maqbool, to co-exist plausibly within it. We need to find this perfect space and 'explode' it so that we start thinking in terms of images, parallel actions and multiple means of telling the story.

Till then we continue rehearsing at home.

## Casting

We've cast a cross-section of actors and non-actors. For instance, Felix is a real-life wedding organiser, Chandini is an msm/*jogappa* from Belgaum, Priya is an msm/*kothi* from Hyderabad.

(MSM is the acronym for Men who have Sex with Men. A *jogappa* is a male mendicant who might dress as a female. He is a very revered figure, having been dedicated to the Goddess Yellamma. A *kothi* is an MSM who takes on a feminine persona. I had earlier worked with Chandini and Priya during a Forum Theatre-inspired project. They both said they were keen on taking *kothi* issues to what they called 'general audiences'. And now here was the opportunity.)

It's amazing how experience can sometimes win hands down over craft. In addition to playing herself, Priya is the choreographer and many magic moments are spent with her teaching the cast a *kothi-baazi* version of 'Kajra Re' for the finale. Felix comes into rehearsal with brilliant energy and improvisational skills. (He's the voice of Chamrajpet Charles on Radio One FM.) Besides acting, he is catering for our 'play wedding' and we're renting his brother-in-law's auto-rickshaw for the entrance of the *pujari* and Renuka.

Casting actors on the other hand has been quite hard. Something has changed radically in the Bangalore theatre environment. Perhaps it's the traffic or angst triggered by diletantism. Actors are apparently so pushed for time that they are not keen on engaging with process and would rather be given a script, a 'lead' role and a two-week rehearsal schedule (evenings only).

## Space

Still rehearsing at home. Dear God, there are actors and props and chiffon saris everywhere...

November 2007

## Script

We started with no script at all. Just characters and riffs that we would improvise on. For instance, we had to have a bride and a groom. Then came the bride's ritualistic, Kanjeevaram-sari-attired mother and her mildly alcoholic father. Then the bride's mother's chiffon-wearing, still unmarried younger sister. The groom came with his own brood—his widowed mother, her widowed mother-in-law and his *kothi* friends. The improvisations included:

- A group of people eating a trad-



- itional Iyer leaf meal served by an Anglo-Indian wedding organiser.
- A young man climbing through a window to meet his lover on her wedding day.
  - A group of *kothis* crashing their friend's wedding.
  - The father of the bride talking to the groom on his cellphone, begging him to make it in time for the *muhurtham*.
  - A dubious video showing up during a wedding.

As the story line developed it seemed to reflect many of the team's experiences. Apparently nothing is too wild or far-fetched. One of the team told us her convent-educated Catholic first cousin ran away with a Muslim auto-rickshaw driver. Another team member had to drop out of the play. His first marriage broke up because he was accused of being a *kothi*, and he didn't want any further speculation.

Then the language...We wanted the language of the play to reflect the way we speak in Bangalore. That is,



English with multilingual inflexions and embedded class codes, making the language we speak as political as the content. Konarak and I write scenes, the actors perform them and we try to harvest their spoken English patterns. We then map their characters and motives and structure the trajectory of the play. Thus we have an Anglo-Indian wedding planner who speaks Kamanahalli English, a Kannadiga Brahmin *pujari*, an NRI uncle with a 'Malleswaram meets Manhattan' accent, a middle-class Muslim boyfriend and so on. The cast sometimes contributes linguistic colour. Felix, for instance, often brings in word and phrase usage that is unique to Kamanahalli—*Sweet Suzy girl* for sexy girl, *Nana* for Nynamma, *bourree* for bottle of booze etc.

### Space

We've found it! A lovely paper studio. This should be brilliant. The only hassle is that it's quite far out of town, no parking and a rather noisy bunch of construction workers outside. Also, Lakshmi (my interlocutor and the grandmother in the play) says no one will find it. Minor issues; will deal with them when the time comes. Now we can move out of home!

December 2007

### About space again

Try as we might, we cannot fit more than 40 people into the paper studio. This has little to do with the size of the space and more to do with our need to move people between spaces. One area, such as a balcony, may be able to hold 100, but if a second area holds just 40, you have to go with the lower figure. Our British theatre designer feels that 25 is optimum seating-wise, and my Indian Konarak is fighting for a melee of people, crammed together higgledy-piggledy.

I want to weep copiously.  
Then...

An epiphany! Why not perform at 58 St Mark's Road? Our home and erstwhile rehearsal space. By this time, we have energised it so much, it makes total sense. We have full control over it, can hang lights willy-nilly everywhere, use the driveway as a waiting area, maybe ask Geeta (our neighbour) if we can set up make-up and wardrobe in her house. No fuss, no stress about property damage.

Hmm...

Lovely! The actors are wedded to the space and every square inch of our house is now the set. Geeta's house is the greenroom. The dogs are in a shelter, our daughter is with her

grandparents, we sleep in a 10x10 space on a single cot and Konarak has started calling the play 'The Divorce Party'.

*The last days of December, 2007*

### ***Complicite***

That most essential of theatrical qualities. The complicity of actors, much like honour among thieves, implies more than confidence, more than trust, more than shared belief. It indicates that none shall be betrayed by either process or a fellow traveller. In devised theatre, complicite is the invisible net which prevents us from

falling into something far worse than a physical abyss. Complicite is the warmth of each other.

### ***An aside on sexuality***

Working with Chandini and Priya has been fantastic. Most of the Bangalore cast has never interacted with any marginalised group, let alone a *jogappa* and a clearly 'out' MSM transgender. The context of rehearsals has been one of artistic enquiry, so we never spent structured time on social discussion. But stuff happens subliminally in the theatre, and many actors have spoken of how enriching









the interaction has been. So imagine my surprise when one actor (an actor, not a person playing her/himself) expressed discomfort about being unable to “place their sexual orientation”. It knocked my socks off. And I thought—how amazing that some people, with no fuss whatsoever, accept each other and behave with sensitivity and yet for others there is a somewhat precious need to place people in recognisable categories.

*January 2008*  
*Performing*

Arriving at this has been nerve-wracking, but what a journey! We started off with just a sense that we wanted to investigate something about ourselves and the way we perceive each other and consequently theatre. We wanted a performance that is robust and organic rather than studied and dependant on hi-tech production to hold it aloft. We wanted to use language the way we know it.

It's the night before opening night. Here we are making our way through fairy lights and masking tape to our 10x10. We now have a core of 20 adept performers and a play whose form thrills us. We are on the verge of something wonderful. I hope all goes well.

## A RINGSIDE VIEW OF MIDDLE-CLASS VANITIES

N Kalyan Raman responds to *The Wedding Party*

“You may tell a thousand lies to bring off one wedding” goes a wise saying in South India. This does not merely emphasise a practical imperative of matrimonial ‘pre-sales’, it is a profound comment on human nature itself—namely, that such a life-transforming occasion, heralding both physical intimacy and a marriage of fortunes, cannot ever be forged if the truth were to be told in advance about both parties. That’s what makes weddings—Indian weddings in particular—such a marathon dance of deception—and an arena for high drama.

With an honesty and candour made possible—though not directly espoused—by postmodernism, one might stand this saying on its head to say: “You could also get a life by acknowledging a thousand truths.” Kirtana Kumar’s play, *The Wedding Party*, which premiered in Bangalore in January 2008 to serious acclaim from critics and viewers alike, could well be an enactment of that maxim. It is a triumphant performance that succeeds in its attempt to juxtapose, in the context of a here-and-now South Indian Brahmin wedding, the usual

deceptions with querulous new truths—with a not inconsiderable charm of its own.

The novel experience afforded by *The Wedding Party* begins with the admission ticket, which is in the form of a traditional wedding invitation. At the entrance, we are handed a glass of lemonade as refreshment. Beyond the threshold, we enter a real wedding in progress—as guests, not viewers. An Indian wedding is structurally designed to be a part-public, part-private spectacle, with the dividing line being blurred frequently and deliberately. The guest is expected to bear witness, approve, bless, admire and envy—all at the same time. Engaged thus with the performance, we are granted access to a variety of spaces and sounds—the front hall; the raised platform where the ceremony is held; the separate private chambers of groom and bride, along with their families; and of course, the guests’ own space with rows of folding chairs and strategically placed CCTV terminals bringing us a close-up view of the ceremony. The conventional distance between performer and audience is erased: our senses are now open to the farce,



trickery, vanities, earnestness, surprise and tragedy of this wedding as it unfolds before us.

The range of characters in *The Wedding Party* is impressively wide and closely mirrors the real world. Apart from the bride's parents—Gopi and Renuka—who must bring off this marriage at any cost, and the groom's mother, a faux innocent wannabe who is victimised by her own aspirations, the others too are sharply etched:

Rajesh, the gay groom who is too frightened to come out of the closet at the eleventh hour; Menaka, the harried bride and epicentre of this calamity-by-another-name; Maqbool, auto-rickshaw driver and Menaka's sometime lover; the ever-lecherous priest, leveraging his venerable position to seek opportunity of every kind; Felix, the smooth-talking wedding planner; Kalyani, the bride's sluttish aunt; Venky, Rajesh's true love,



and his transgendered friends; and 'Randy', the groom's vulgar NRI uncle, roped in to lend weight and respectability to the groom's party. Other minor characters—Prof Ramachandran, the US-trained anthropologist; a cantankerous old

lady from the groom's party; and Richard and Mandrin, friends of Felix looking for a bout of hothouse sex in the melée of the wedding—complete the tableau. With this richly-drawn cast, playwright-director Kirtana Kumar weaves a vivid, multi-hued



tapestry of our social mores and attitudes, our lies and fears, our murky hopes and disappointments in this tightly-knit and well-wrought play.

For the guest/viewer, what is striking about the players is the absence of denial. There is an edgy

rawness to the travails of the main characters—Gopi, Renuka, Rajesh, Rajesh's mother, Menaka, Maqbool and Priya, the last a transgendered friend who acts as Rajesh's conscience and helps him to resolve his dilemma. Their distress, anxiety, and indeed all their life-wrought wounds, are laid bare for us to see and hear about at close range. Their very speech, delivered from the gut in their own language and diction, seems a strong validation of who they are, without apology or wistfulness, in today's hard-edged world. It is hard to think of a context—within a play or anywhere else—where so many people from so many layers of society carry on a mutli-pronged conversation of such density in such a multiplicity of languages and styles. Rather like the world we live in, you might say, but that's not quite all. There is indeed a sense here of what the poet Allen Ginsberg said in a counter-cultural age 40 years ago: "There are no hierarchies; only so many eyes looking out." It is no surprise, then, that there is real dismay among the guests when the inevitable crisis erupts; and real wonder when it resolves itself in unprecedented ways to result in a happy denouement of song and dance, which celebrates not ceremony, but life itself.



There are certain aspects of a traditional wedding that are so full of artifice that they can only be seen as real-life caricatures. One is reminded of *Washingtonil Thirumanam*, a time-worn classic Tamil serial of the early 1960s, later adapted into a play, which described the minutiae of a Tamizh Brahmin wedding taking place on the banks of the Potomac, as refracted through the prism of a white middle-class American milieu. If *WT* was

mightily farcical and frequently are; and the priest makes us laugh at his pomposity as also at his shameless pursuit of the opposite sex, a veritable force of heterosexual lust as sanctioned by God, no less. There is also the hilarious scene in which Richard and Mandrin, friends of Felix, are caught *in flagrante delicto* in an upstairs bedroom by the cranky old lady friend of Rajesh's mother. Randy, the groom's low-rent NRI uncle, is in

48 It is hard to think of a context—within a play or anywhere else—where so many people from so many layers of society carry on a mutli-pronged conversation of such density in such a multiplicity of languages and styles. Rather like the world we live in, you might say, but that's not quite all.

merely a comic stage-drama, closer to our own times came that art-house hit film, *Monsoon Wedding* (2001), where the laughs, involving some minor characters and their foibles, were carefully interleaved with weightier situations. *The Wedding Party*, too, leverages the intrinsic absurdity surrounding a traditional Indian wedding. As minor characters clamouring for centrality and attention, Felix and Kalyani can be

a class of his own, exuding uncanny resilience and surface charm.

Which brings us to another interesting dimension of the play. Even as the solemn union of Rajesh and Menaka is sought to be arranged under a cloud of so much that is extraneous—a union that will never be, owing to Rajesh's inexorable orientation—the wedding ceremony itself seems to be such a force-field of sexual desire and opportunity. The



priest hitting on everyone, including Menaka's mother; Felix's happy-go-lucky (!) friends who make the best use of an empty room; Felix making a play for Kalyani, the bride's vivacious aunt; Maqbool crashing heedlessly into the venue to chance his luck with Menaka; Randy, pouncing on a recently single Mandrin—all these serve to remind us, if we need reminding at all, that beyond the faux solemnity of such false-hearted weddings lies a world in which power and desire, dreams and delusions play themselves out in very different ways.

The traditional wedding has

been a site of real-life drama as well as fodder for the occasional play. The latest in this genre, *The Wedding Party* is a well-constructed and executed play that leaves the audience somewhat breathless with its energy, humour, imagination and candour. It is that rare thing on the Indian scene: a truly contemporary narrative with a real engagement not only with its purported theme—present-day wedding as a false construct—but also with its guests-viewers. An evening's worth of fun, certainly, but also a ringside view of middle-class vanities in urban India during their most perilous hour yet.



This assemblage of paintings and short stories represents thematic as well as formal parallels across the two media that interest Debasish Sarkar. According to Sarkar, “Both the stories and the paintings embody the fracture of signs and although they do not illustrate each other, they cohabit like two prisoners in adjacent cells. The piece has been conceived in such a way that it begins with images and only a surreptitious presence of text.” Eventually, the text “eats up the page and images on it.” The monochrome images in this piece are made using analog methods on canvas and paper, while the colour images are digital collages created as part of an IFA-funded collaborative digital imaging project.

**Anxious Cities:**  
*The Scheduled Collapse of Yesterday's Cakes\**

Stories and Paintings  
by Debasish Sarkar



Translated from Bengali  
by Madhuban Mitra

Graphic Design  
by Manas Bhattacharya

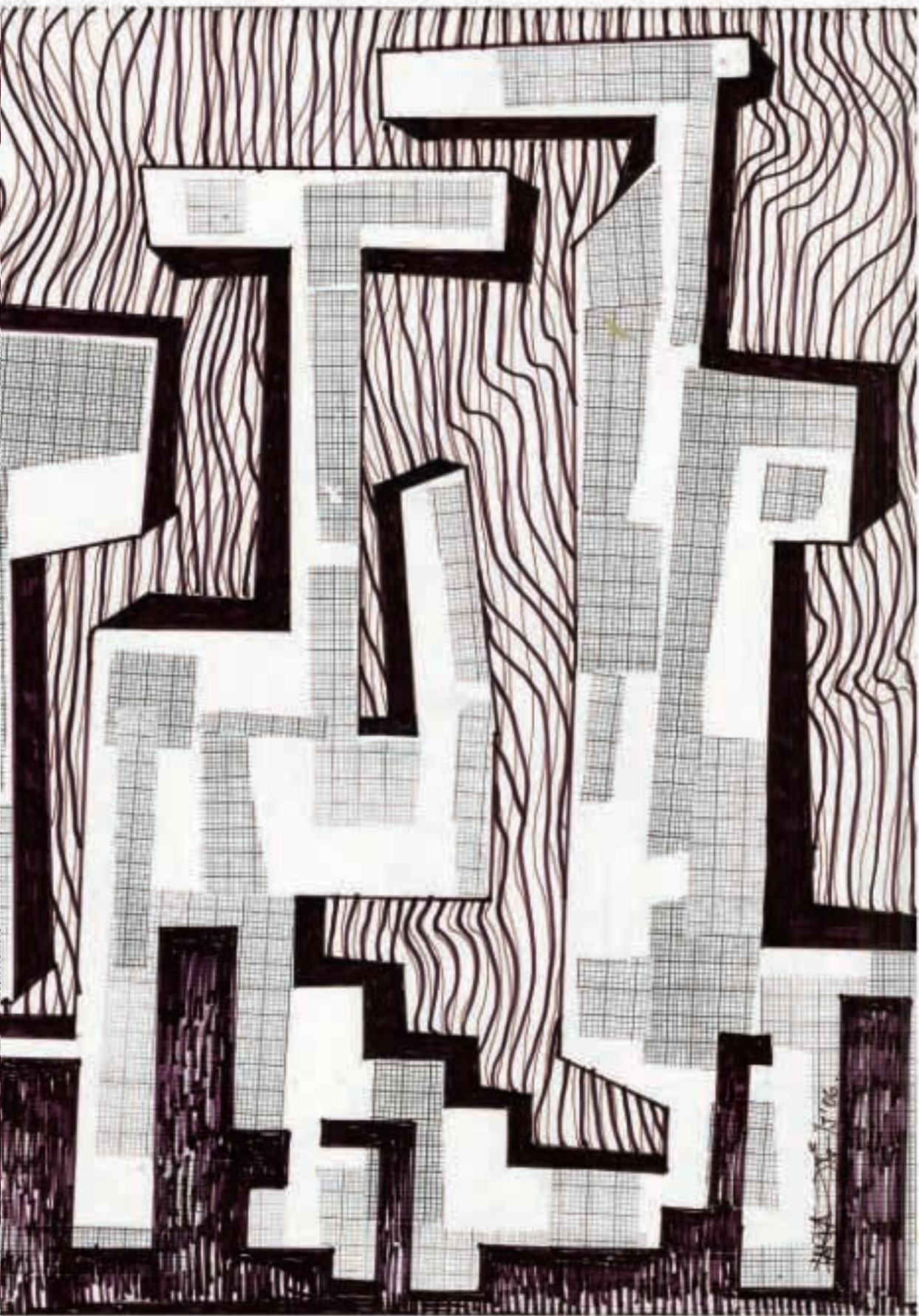


\*The phrase in the title is from *Meteoric Flowers* by Elisabeth Willis.









# 1

He sat there thinking of a house without walls.



# 2

The goldfish and the shark never meet because their continents are apart.  
Just as I never meet the girl who announces the names of stations in the Metro.



# 3

Where the University of Agriculture has now erected its new laboratory, there once lived a mathematician with his family of points, lines and curves.

When it rained, water leaked from his roof. The lines and triangles would get soaked to their skins. If the sun shone the next day, the mathematician would put them out to dry. The problem, as always, was with the drenched points. He gave them serious thought and decided that he didn't need them anymore. If he ever did, he could always break up a single line into innumerable points. Having made up his mind thus, he left the points scattered in the fields. Drawing succour from the fresh air and the moist earth, the points regained health. Gradually, they grew wings of magical colour and flew off in all directions.

Inaugurating the new laboratory, the Minister of Higher Education said, "One day, pesticide will be the most popular field of research."

# 4

The suburb is where the city is down to its dregs. Here, a man studies language. Fifty years and six months, and two terrifying nights. In the suburb, language breeds in this fashion. Early one morning, he imagined he was a slave trader, and soon after, died of chattering teeth. Three days later, stench rose from the rotting corpse – variations on stench, each represented by a word. Words born of stench woke from slumber, and they in turn, roused other words. The newly awakened words stirred up dormant others. One day, having fed on the rotting corpse, fifty-four and a half-lakh words laid siege to the city. In the imperceptible war that lasted a century, the words of the city took a sound beating and fled to the suburb.

Our words have been inflected with suburbia since, and the old leaves that fall on the deserted roads are, in fact, dead word-soldiers. Perhaps, we can assume that someone somewhere is inspiring their families to take up arms again.

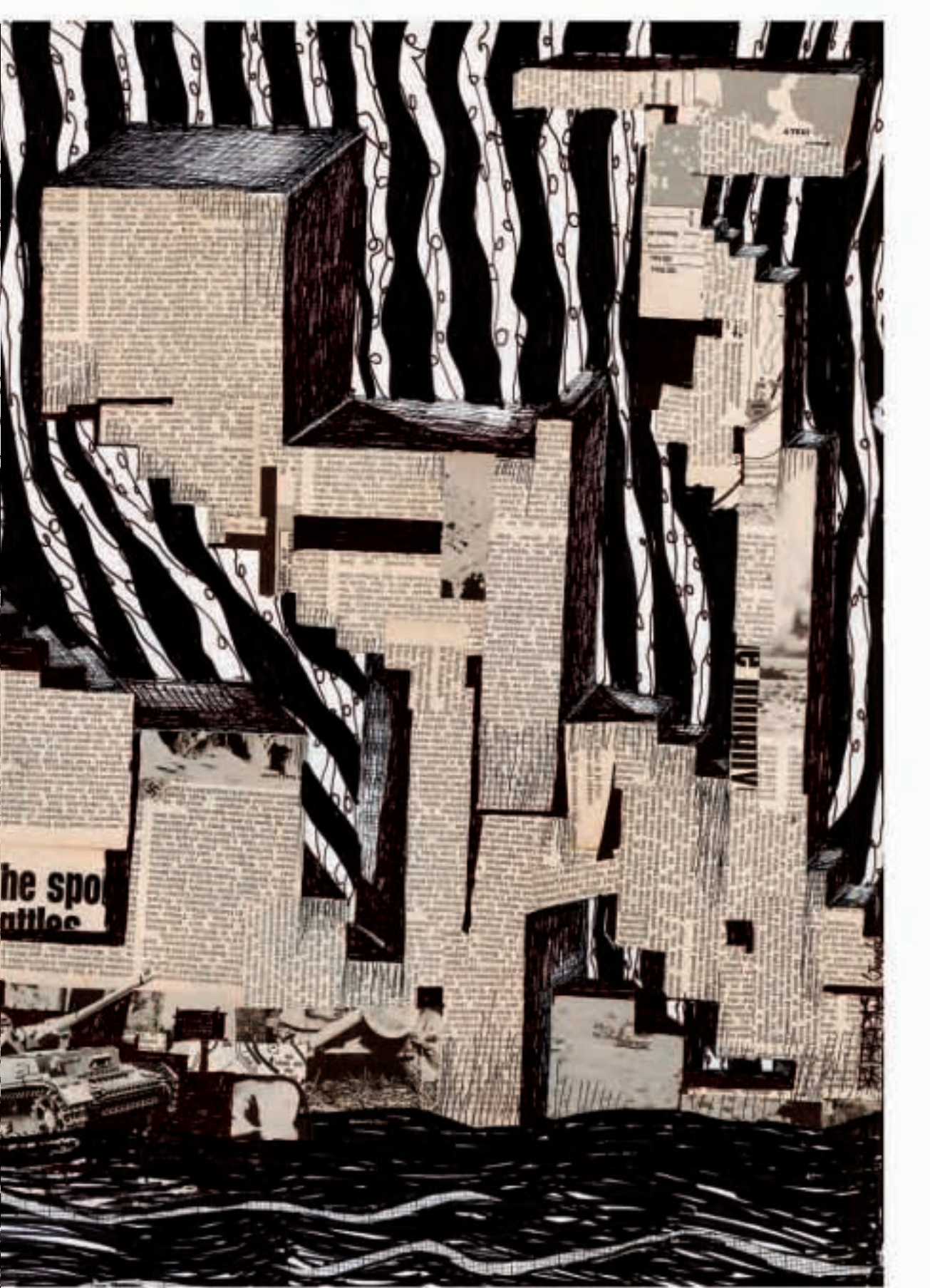
# 5

I am speaking of a time, at the beginning, when he realised that painting would suit him most as a vocation. He had mastered the use of colours, and his landscapes had a rare spontaneity – so much so that his pumpkin field would have restored people's faith in the unfailing reliability of cash crops. For reasons like these – what one calls expertise or application, a sense of colour or timing and the command over the painter's brush – the market soon accepted him (just as the market had accepted whale meat in the wake of the war and the acute shortage of food). Meanwhile, he had changed his residence twice and navigated through three different relationships. At the moment, he was with a very thin, flat-chested woman. It is said that the one before her was similar. Having observed his preference over time, his friends said that his choice of flat-chested women wasn't accidental. Rather, it was the sign of a consistent ideological position. And, in spite of small misunderstandings, he continued to be with the thin woman. And, I heard that his pumpkin fields were making good money as well. In the middle of such a season of content, he suddenly went astray. The matter might seem of no consequence: one day his woman casually asked him why he did not paint political images. A simple question, I guess. But this inconsequential matter began to take on gigantic proportions and relentlessly pursued him.









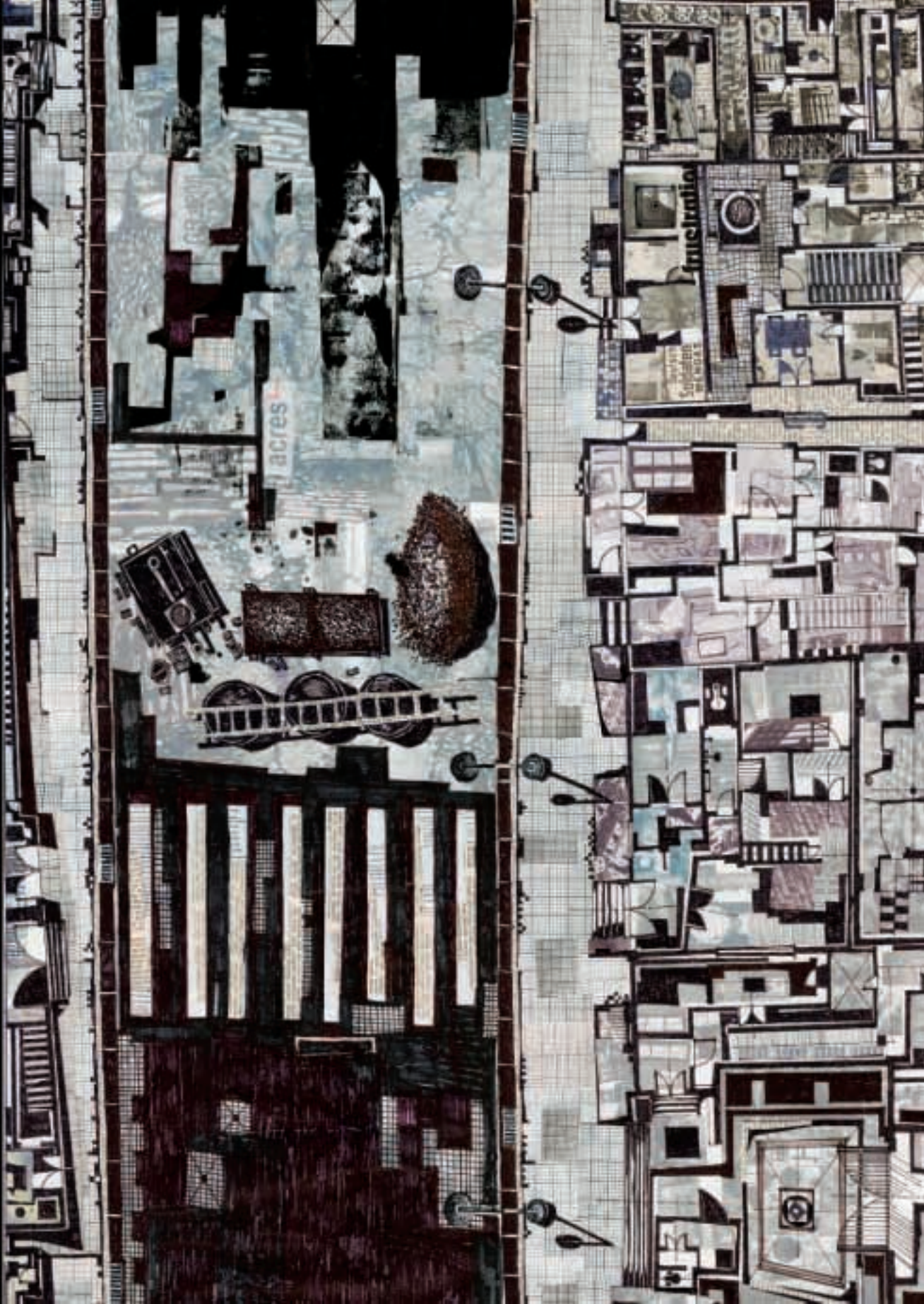


Initially, he thought such things happened to people and all he needed was a good, long sleep. Therefore, he tried to sleep, woke up, and slept again. He partook of rich, heavy food, drank a lot of water, and went back to sleep, but woke up again. As he opened his eyes, it seemed to him that the glass of water on his bedside table was asking him why his paintings weren't political. He leapt out of bed, put on his shirt and went out. After experiencing intense upheaval for a few days, he devised a few strategies. He bought a big lizard from the mountains and spent hours gazing at the clothesline in the sun. A month later, he embarked upon his first political painting. Surprisingly, he did not paint anything new. Rather, he started working with the last painting in his pumpkin field series. In fact, he was having trouble dealing with the fact that his earlier paintings had not been political. (When he was a child, his father often took him to the zoo, and there he had seen a species of tiger that, while pacing around, erased its own footprints with its tail.) Having thought long and hard, he added to the old painting, a spec-like madhouse amidst the pumpkin field. Then he took up the other paintings in the series and gradually added a hospital to one, a tall watchtower to another and a nuclear explosion to the very first painting of the series. (An unpicked pumpkin field left to rot, soon grows mushrooms.)

Done with the pumpkin field series, he began work on a brand new political image. He painted a prison with no guards, though the inmates weren't aware of it, and a rape colony in stark red. A few political figures with horrific faces, mercenaries who fought for whichever side gave them money, a thin barber who was really a spy, a butcher, a brothel, a disused oil rig, the underground, a hanging platform, and much more. In the space of three months, he came up with so many paintings that they could fill three or four separate exhibitions. His paintings made people shudder. The conservatives trashed him, while the progressives (it is widely known that the number of progressives has currently exceeded the number of crows) were full of praise. The price of his paintings went up exponentially, and he even received commissions from abroad. All his evenings, thereafter, were occupied by public discussions; national and international critics, connoisseurs and aspiring painters flocked into his house and made it difficult for him to live in it. Soon, the Lalitkala Academy inserted an advertisement in the papers, asking for someone to shoulder the honourable task of producing his biography.

However, he wasn't happy. When he woke up, the glass of water on his bedside table continued to tell him that his political pictures weren't quite right. He painted another picture, and the glass repeated its dictum, sharper, more forceful each time. He stopped painting and threw all the critics, connoisseurs and budding painters out of his house. He began to think all over again. He began to think what the ideal political image might be made of. Some watch-towers? No! Firing targets? Neither! The madhouse or the voting machine, or a derelict voting machine in a madhouse? No, those weren't apt either. He had to wriggle out of these traps because his intent was to paint the perfect political image. A steep and impossible task like brushing one's teeth (or the fact that he chose flat-chested, sick women to live with as a political gesture), a gesture that couldn't be adequately represented in a painting. Maybe it was possible, and for that he had to search, cleverly, painstakingly. And, in consonance with our belief, what we had expected soon transpired. After much psychological upheaval and intense effort, he found the route to the definitive political painting.







There wasn't anything new to say about him. Having found the route, he left home for another city, far away, changed the way he looked so that nobody would recognize him for what he had been, and joined the land survey department of the city as a cartographer.

It might not be true that only maps constitute the perfect political image. Nevertheless, there is more than an ounce of truth in the matter that a painter – whose only ambition was to make paintings – turning into a cartographer is, quite surely, a certain instance of a correct political position.

# 6

One afternoon in early autumn the zoo caught fire. The zookeepers weren't callous. Rather, compared to others, their alertness was impeccable. Yet, in the beginning of autumn a fire raged at the zoo. Fortunately, the damage was minimal.

However, a rhinoceros on fire escaped onto the street from a broken cage. He turned an ice-cream cart over and ran amuck at full tilt. For a long time, he had nursed a grudge against the paint factory. His anger was directed at radicals too. But he had never imagined expressing his anger in public. All he could think of as a final, albeit token gesture, was to gore at least one radical or charge at some factory. Meanwhile, the fire brigade van arrived with its shrill bells chiming, followed by the officials of the municipal corporation. Such a pity that one cannot afford to indulge in the autumnal carnival because there has been a sharp increase in the price of candles!

The fire penetrated his skin and reached the innards. Dead skin fell off and littered the streets as the rhino accelerated. But it isn't as if it was yesterday that all the paint factories in the city had packed up and moved to the suburbs. On the other hand, the radicals wanted to eradicate the game of chess. The knowledge of all this, however, did not deter the rhino. He kept running with the fire brigade men behind him and the plump corporation officers bringing up the rear. The fire burnt into his body and the cost of candles kept rising. On the run, he reached a major crossroad. He ran in circles for a while, each circle smaller than the one before. In the midst of his hectic circumambulations, it struck him that those who were fond of chess might be sympathetic to rhinos. In spite of these advantages, there was no respite as the price of candles maintained its steep upward graph.

Once he fell down in the dust, attempted to get back on his feet, and succeeded in doing so. His back smarted, as did the soft regions of his lower abdomen. With a vacuous look, he stood still. Smoke oozed from his back. From the tip of his small tail to the underside of his foot, he began to melt. He kept mum though. In flames, he stood still, alone. No thoughts stirred, neither hatred nor grievance. And, like a beacon flaring up for one last time, he demolished a temporary bookstall on the sidewalk.

Maybe it has to do with autumn that somebody's essay dwells on the subject of memory. None doubted his skill with words. He believed though, that by obfuscating the subject, he would be able to gloss over sloppy work. The process of making tea seemed like a logical argument, especially because it was an every

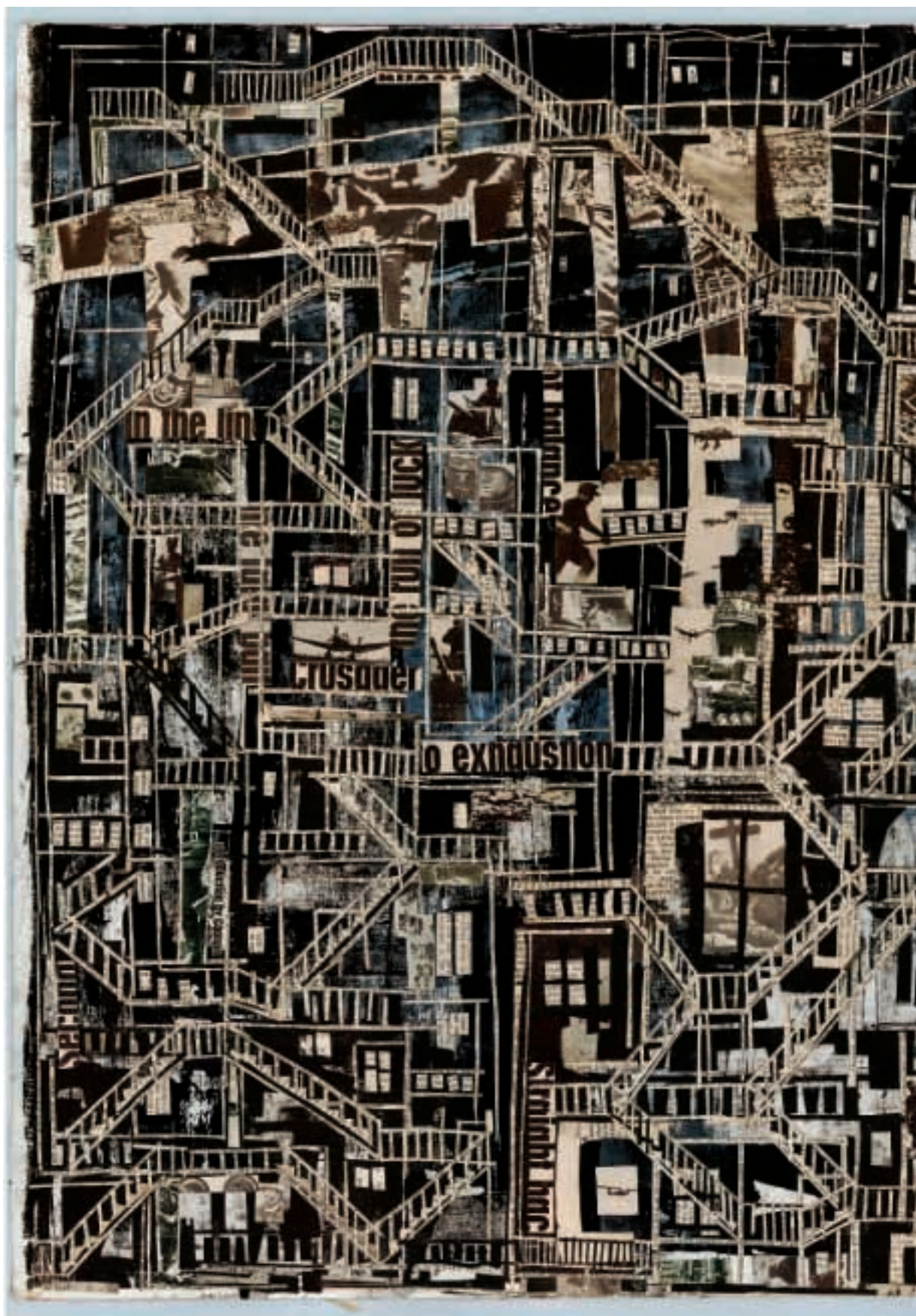




-day act with enormous portent. Into the boiling water you sprinkled the tea-leaves and waited for some minutes. The water lost its transparency, but acquired flavour. It is a pity that there is no time to think of such things in autumn. Particularly, when the cost of candles keeps rising everyday. The writer did not lose hope. Feet planted firm on the sidewalk, he dictated his essay to a stenographer. Recently, it had begun to dawn on him that he became a shade institutional whenever he took up his pen. Around him different kinds of people came and went. Some were impressed by his dictation; others thought he was a plain nut. These responses did not matter to him anymore. Rather, he felt that there was a symbolic significance to the fact that his latest essay dwelt on the subject of memory.

Before firming up his conclusive paragraph he took a long breath and wondered if he could come up with a dense, dramatic sentence that people would consume, would apply on their skin to make it supple and smooth. At that moment, the flaming rhino crossed the street and ran towards him. Circled around. Stunned, the writer stood and took in the scene. Maybe the rhino understood the writer. His words. So, the rhino stood still as well, without worries, without hatred, without grudges, all his memories losing their transparency and taking on the flavour of tea. Yet, for some unknown reason he, like the last, desperate flaring up of a beacon, demolished the bookstall. At that moment, the essayist remembered a dream in which the radicals had painted all the houses and roads of the city in the black and white squares of the chess game, and like always, their animistic memory comprised only of rhinos.











The rhino writhed in pain as he fell to the ground. His anger had been directed at the paint factory and at the radicals for a long time. But he died quietly with a head cleansed of all anger. Without thoughts. The fire brigade vans surrounded him, as did the bureaucrats. Through the thickening crowd all that could be glimpsed was a dying rhino amidst a pile of books. He had escaped a while ago from the zoo on fire. Alas, there wasn't a single radical left to appreciate the grandeur of this autumnal scene. And in spite of everything, the price of candles went up. The stenographer had wanted to join in the fun, but the lure of money made him sit down reluctantly and continue with the dictation. And, all the deep and complex aspects of memory unspooled in the last paragraph.

*Legend has it that in some city all the people gradually turned into rhinos. One man remained, who sat in his attic crying, and flinging objects around, because he could never believe he would turn into a rhino some day. Nobody knows what happened to him, though it might be possible that it wasn't in his destiny to turn into a rhino. It is also probable that he thought up a scene where a rhino burnt to death amidst a pile of books on the road. The truth that can be evinced from all the signs is that the scene of the zoo on fire is a metaphor for memory, where past morphs into animals and inhabits the cages. There we go, holding the hands of our newborn.*

He dictated his essay standing on the street. On the other side, the crowd gathered. Various people expressed their opinions, and continued to do so. The bells of the fire van and the shouts of the bureaucrats drowned the crossroads. It could only happen in autumn that somebody's essay dwelt on memory. Nobody doubted his ability to play with words. The only problem, however, was that from one day to the next, from one week to the other, and month after month, the price of candles took a higher leap.

## # 7

It would be a mistake to assume that William Blake knew nothing of this. For a very long time, the events were in his control. He realized quite early that if nothing else, the few drops of rain in the evening were important, a slight drizzle for a few minutes, and even if it did not lead to poetry, it was possible to return home with droplets of water.

The boy was thinking of a dried up sea with neon signs. There was a ringmaster who lost his job, and who walked on the wet beach around the shadow of a tiger tied to the shadow of the chain. It is heartening to think that the real tiger is still alive and he sits in his solitary cell thinking about the old trainer. But chances are that this is not so. Since the ban on performing animals, the preference for opium has gone up in the circus. The girl isn't too keen on the circus either, and she finds the act with the tiger particularly artificial. Not only the tiger, anything decorative or artificial congenitally annoys her. She doesn't like underwear; neither does she have any preference for poetry written by men. Somebody says that this might be a consequence of losing one's mother in childhood. It could be true in part, or not so at all. What is significant, however, is that after her mother's death, she would often think of a market in the middle of the desert where her father had opened a piano shop.



The plates of the Divine Comedy did not captivate him anymore. The pictures seemed a little fossilized. Blake thought long and hard about them and realized that the mistake was Dante's. Could anything specific ever be said about hell? Instead, hell could be shown from a distance. There would be questions, however, about where and in what manner. His first analogy was an abandoned coalmine that was then discarded in favour of a market where animals and birds were sold. The market was laid aside too, and a decrepit circus filled its place. That proved to be not quite fitting either. He began to think all over again. Days went by, but he waited with patience. Soon his thoughts began to rot in the shadow of his head. A gigantic, horrific picture, the whole of the inferno, built with neon lights. It was possible that the whole structure would float on water, and the lights would blink through the fog and the rain.

In his sleep, somebody was summoning him. He tried to think who it could be.

- Were you asleep?
- No, tell me.
- I got back just now. What have you been doing?
- Nothing.
- Tell me a story.
- What can I say!
- Whatever. Whatever comes to mind.
- How can one narrate a story like this, so suddenly!
- I'm not asking for a lot of things to happen. But then, what really needs to happen to tell a story?
- What kind of story do you want to hear?
- Whatever you wish.



Darkness! Blake was thinking that every good poem holds a darkness within it, and the words suddenly leap out and shine like neon lights. In this state, there is need for a little rain. Gas had been leaking out of some of the lights. If one removed them, there would be sufficient light, but the fuses had to be checked once again.

- Imagine there is an umbrella.
- Yes.
- And a sewing machine. An old man paces up and down with the umbrella.
- Does the sewing machine belong to him as well?
- No.
- Then?
- The sewing machine belonged to a house that cared for orphans. It escaped because the children bothered it far too much. Maybe they meet in a cemetery.
- Who?
- The sewing machine and the umbrella.

Though he had tested the fuses many times, yet he felt that they should be checked once again. He tested every inch of them. They seemed fine now. Blake walked through a light fog to the supply room.

- Then?
- Then whatever else could have happened.
- Don't you do this! Say something definite.

A neon hell flared up. Countless people. The punishment for each was more severe than the other's. On the electric rails, the beheaded bodies of Paolo and Francesca flew about from one end to the other, and within sat Count Ugolino feeding on his children's corpses. Soon after, Minos flared up too, as did the cyclic rivers of boiling blood and tar. Over the suicide forest flew the monstrous neon birds. Between one shadow and another, an endless hell lit up brick by brick.

- Hey, go on.
- Imagine that after they meet in the cemetery, the umbrella begins to cut out chunks of sunlight and collect them, while the sewing machine stitches them back together.
- Good. But, what does one do with stitched sunlight?
- Something I guess. Can be different things.
- Like what?
- Maybe, the sunlight is stitched together into a cave where a tiger lives.

The stumbling block was elsewhere. The neon lights generated so much heat that the sea became warm. Soon it began to simmer. But, Blake did not switch the lights off. Sand banks rose up here and there, and the sky became heavy with the warm vapour that had merged with dust.

- Now where did the tiger come from?
- The tiger appears in every story. Haven't you heard?
- No, I haven't.
- You haven't read of 'once upon a time there lived an old tiger'?
- No.
- Then you wouldn't know. All stories heard in childhood begin like that.



In spite of all this, the rain didn't come down hard. After a slight drizzle, all the clouds flew away towards the mainland. Then the ringmaster who had lost his job arrived, and walked around the dried up sea with its dead fish and neon lights, with a gigantic shadow of a tiger tied to the shadow of a chain.

- I cannot make any sense of this.
- There is nothing to make sense of. All stories you've read in childhood and upto the present, are all like this.
- Like what?
- That there is a tiger. It is always written that there was a tiger. Then he grows up and becomes old one day.
- Then he dies.
- No, he doesn't quite die in the beginning. One day, his paw is struck by a bullet as he bends down for a drink after a big kill. He loses the ability to hunt the wild boar and the deer, and becomes a man-eater. He kills a couple of men and is then shot by a professional hunter. That is the tale.
- Which means that all stories are ultimately stories about tigers?
- Looks like it. One circumambulates and comes back to the tiger.
- Okay, what about *Capital*? Is that a story about a tiger?
- Why shouldn't it be?
- Althusser, is that a story of tigers too?
- Althusser isn't a story.
- Okay, what I meant was Althusser's books.
- *Reading Capital*?
- Is that a story about a tiger?
- No, it is a story about a story about a tiger. In some way, there is always a connection. But what is of utmost significance in all this is that his paw takes the bullet. Whoever the hunter might be, the bullet never strikes the head, at least not at the first instance.

Blake saw the tiger clearly, like the neon light blinking in the jungle of the night. He has aged, but the sand still whirls under his ample gait. He must be more merciless than the anvil and the chain that made him. The girl was wondering whether *Capital* was really a story about a tiger. Was it an endless repetition then – *The Iliad*, *Don Quixote*, *Capital*, *Divine Comedy*...It is true though that all stories about tigers are about repetition. She was sleepy, and she still had to take off the make-up. It would be great to take a hot bath too.

- I'm moving tomorrow.
- I know. Let me know if you need any help.
- Listen, do not try to get in touch with me there. I will try not to call you.
- Fine.

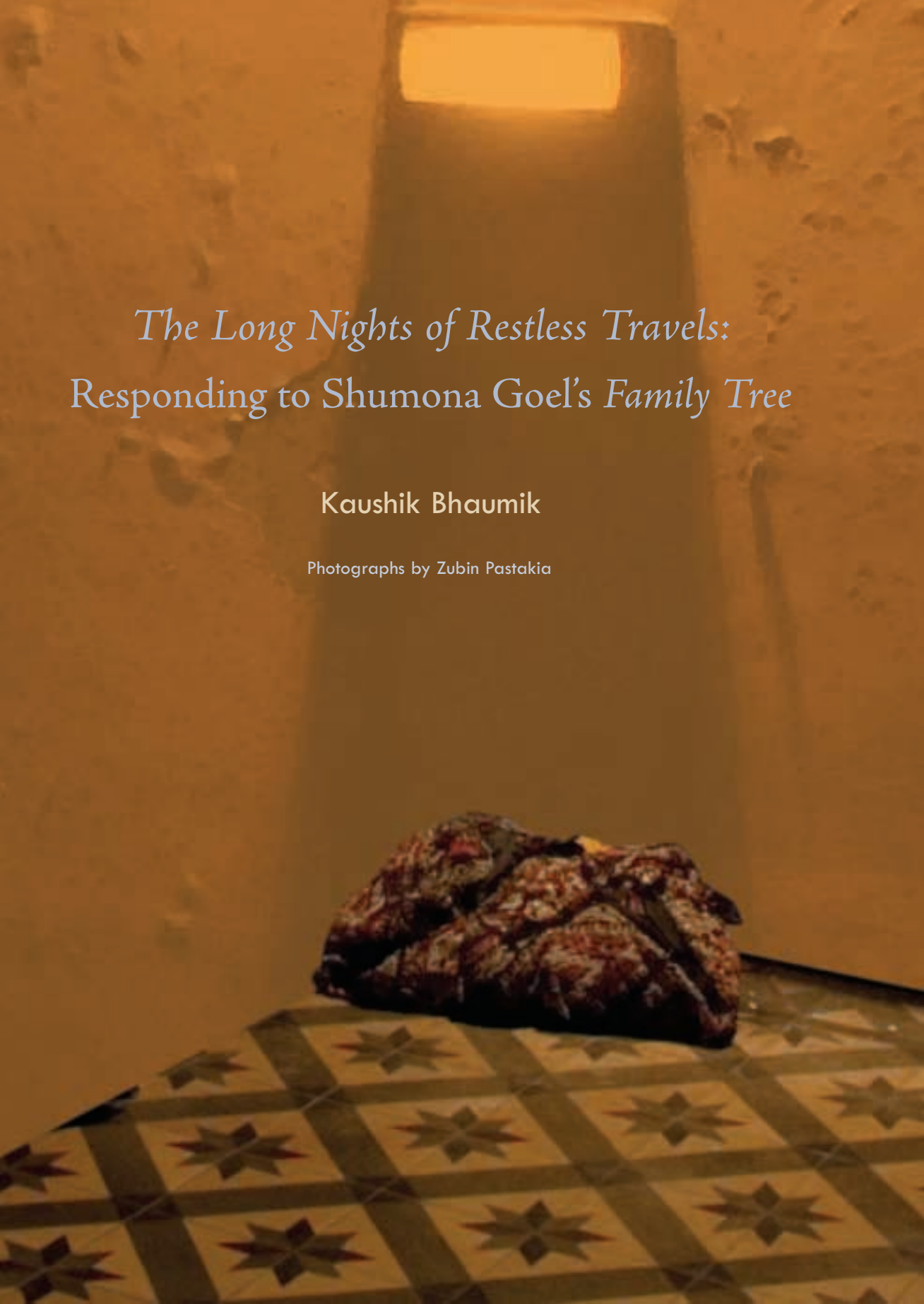
Night. Some neon signs are blinking. They must have been torn out of the sea and flown to the city. Maybe everybody has arrived, and the punishment meted out to each of them is more horrific than the other's. That is no cause for surprise because it has always been like this. Maybe all ringmasters who lose their jobs open a piano shop, the boy thought, and there is no reason to be sad about the shadow of the tiger. Many hazy rooms and attics in ruin lie in wait, and one day, stories will be woven again.

In August 2008, artist Shumona Goel exhibited *Family Tree* in a recently-vacated apartment in Mumbai. *Family Tree* is a site-specific installation of film, video, photographs and sound, and was the result of an IFA grant Ms Goel received in order to explore the emotional turbulence caused by migration.

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In this essay, critic Kaushik Bhaumik describes how the work creates a sensory awareness of a divided and fragmented self seen against seemingly familiar domestic spaces, which sometimes merge with the outdoors “to the point where we do not know whether we are walking in nature... or are inside a home.” It is dichotomies like these that *Family Tree* plays with—the feel of a pageant contrasting with the ‘stark individuated autonomy’ of each space; the suggestion of human warmth as well terror and alienation; and the migrant’s dream of the new “brought to heel by older historical contradictions”.



A photograph of a room with a doorway in the background, a patterned rug on the floor, and a pile of fabric in the foreground. The scene is lit with warm, orange light. The doorway is at the top center, and the rug is at the bottom. The pile of fabric is in the lower center.

*The Long Nights of Restless Travels:  
Responding to Shumona Goel's Family Tree*

Kaushik Bhaumik

Photographs by Zubin Pastakia





We are in a space of auras emitted by objects that also fleetingly allude to the personalities of the users of these objects: the bare minimum materiality required for a story to be told.

The story goes something like this: The setting is nocturnal. We are about to walk through a forest on a moonlit night, through the lives of a man, a woman and their two daughters who might have lived in such settings elsewhere. Inside and outside seamlessly transform into one another in this reverie, and relentlessly too. We begin in a dark and barely-lit drawing room with deliberately ‘dirty’ and ‘etched into lived spaces’ sort of photographs of human beings in Occidental attire after which we move into a large and empty, dimly-lit room with a large bed with ruffled linen followed by a dining room with humming lampshades and finally into a ‘nowhere’ room which could be the classic Indian ‘servant quarter’, a prayer room, a room for widows/old people, a chamber in a rural home, a store room or an in-between space where objects—clothing, books, knick-knacks and victuals accumulate casually, randomly and discontinuously. This fourth and last room, the brightest lit, is where the human form is alluded to explicitly and most

sensually, in the Indic, in the cast-off clothing. It was as if Magritte was doing a *Kathasaritasagara* story with its eerie dreamlike landscape in which damsels flee through woods, tell-tale, cast off clothing signaling the heroine’s track, drawing the hero unerringly and damningly to his doom.

A fierce battle rages in our senses walking through the spaces as we are caught between a perception of the rich pageant of life with its joys and sorrows taken in at once by the unconscious ecstatic, and the stark individuated autonomy of each space. The famous Kleinian PS<->D oscillation in the everyday. Selves are split in this divide and we have a hard time reconciling ourselves to the physical unity of the inhabitants. Lives, speaking and moving, undertake frenetic routine activities such as cooking, going to work, parties, taking care of children, sex, studying for exams and so on, in enclosed spaces in which bodies disappear from vision in the corner of our eyes, acknowledged and even joyously greeted but never taken in. But in the midst of such a psychotic space of distraction, the very same domestic spaces cascade through the unconscious to come back as our panic attacks, the assassin behind the door extracting revenge from us for being too distracted. Then such spaces











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are strictly individuated and become dark dungeons of our mind, forcing us to see the implication of every sensory reflex we have had regarding people and objects connected to these spaces. Of course, such suspicious paranoia of reality always leads us away from home into the world outside, for we are never really quite at home. Never in the US, never in India and so on and so forth. Here the inside and outside are always interchangeable, and emotionally 'outsides' are some times 'insides' and vice versa.

But what becomes clear in our travels through this oneiric work is that the imagination that has put together the piece has drained itself of fantasy and sees this object world on

the edge of the senses, making angels dance on a pinhead. The incisions that separate the sensory configuration of these spaces from sensory chaos indicate a creative hand that is ruthlessly perfect despite the fact that the torment of the senses only reaches sublimation in the creation of the piece. And this is directly related to a calmly precise delineation of lonely lives in an alien land. All spaces exude human warmth as well as leaning towards a disturbance or terror or alienation abroad. The drawing room door leads out to the bleak New England wintry landscape shot in 8mm from a car window, unending and enduringly depressive. No beautiful Oriental damsels passing on the





other side of the thorny thicket.

In another room the image of the brilliant technocrat, both passionate and detached, being tested for mental stability on a television screen, questions the depth of erotics possible on the bed by the side of which the image plays. The dining room is cosy but a distracting hum emanates from lampshades and a glitzy fashion show goes on in a low angle corner of the room, perhaps the reverie of youthful celebration of energies in the midst of parental depression. Clothes cast off unthinkingly could be a sign of sexual or psychic depression. A

postcard wishing a migrating couple the best in a foreign land plays off against stills of natural beauty. Does nature continue to play host to our shattered dreams in a turbulent world or is it the residue of beauty that has been wrested from labour and disappointment despite all the contretemps of life? Is the fragile romance of a newly-married couple leaving for foreign shores with dreams of a new happiness doomed to this indeterminate state that is at once terminally defeated by the barriers to psychic freedom and redeemed by life seeping

into the virtual realm of the photograph and home movie *à bout de souffle*?

The spaces we have walked through are primarily defined by the hope for a new day, an emergence of the self arising from the ambiguous intertwining of the old and the new.



Much of the creative tension comes from the non-hierarchical relationship between the two as they are played off one another to create a 'special effect'—the mingling of interiors and exteriors to the point where we do not know whether we are walking in nature

(albeit with some built up elements) or are inside a home. The 'old'—the rooms and other objects such as the furniture or the cast-off clothing open up the space of the exterior but the 'new' such as the televisual images too project archaic dreams and confuse the inside and outside, an effect that radical television has always tried to achieve. A Sisyphean circuit is set up for the senses to the point where the walker is forced in frustration to accept the whole as it is, a ruin.



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A ruin by definition always projects being both an inside and an outside at once: the 'old' and the 'new' (some parts of it are less derelict than others), death and life, jagged edges of derelict walls through which nature might peep out at us or maybe lead us to the dungeons of another time. We see postmodernity at its end-point, a mind driven to exhaustion in a fruitless meaning-making game based on a plethora of semiotic signals that just don't add up to a space that one might 'belong' to. The postmodern is finally revealed as the 'picturesque' ruin of modernity. The logic of the cutting-edge 'new', the migrant's dream of a New World that drove modernity, is brought to heel by older historical contradictions, archaic psychic conflicts and irresolvable doubts.

Transformations in the spaces we have experienced happen unconsciously and are seldom 'seen' by the subjects until much later in Bachelardian reveries where all sense experience is summed up for us in some kind of 'enwrapping' in the favoured key of the libido. The broken blossoms of the family tree finally begin to come together in the flesh as contradictions are accepted and the binaries we have lived in are acknowledged as myths. Forgiving the mind for cruelty to ourselves and through

that to our loved ones leads not to hope but a sensory closure to psychic turbulence in the care of the self.

However, such televisual /psychic/historical turbulence is necessary for the opening up of new spaces, quite different from the one we had dreamt of when embarking from the shores of life into the world, new spaces replete with new juxtapositions scarcely imaginable earlier, the gift from the creative mind. One is reminded of Guru Dutt's Bhootnath facing the ruins of his past after India's turbulent passage from feudalism to modernity in Abrar Alvi's *Sahib, Bibi aur Ghulam*. A space is opened up in this turbulence and a new love and new public medium such as cinema found in this passage, as well as new ways of encountering the old. The family tree now looks increasingly exorcised of superstition and the irrational by the passage of these post-historical turbulences into new experiential spaces. We are the ghost in the machine of our own lives as are the ones we have loved irrationally. All that endures turbulence is kept aside for a new spatiality of experience post-turbulence.

This is how we remember films and thus a projected film of this work was never made. The imprints of







spaces are in any case all that remains as our memory of film (and of our lives by extension). Thus we are provided with fine imprints of memory, the paring down of the flesh of things remembered right up to the vanishing point of materiality where matter and cinema become imperceptibly one. A new crossroad for both

art and cinema if ever there was one, after all the turbulences we have experienced during our long nights of restless travels through life, memory and history. We wonder if cinema can any longer occupy the space where *Family Tree* stands.



Kannada films of the last few years have grown increasingly violent. MK Raghavendra studies this phenomenon with reference to four recent films and in relation to how Bangalore features as the site for violence and lawlessness in these films. In the process, he explores the connection between film-related violence in the city and violence in films; the depiction of the police in these films; and the question of how their protagonists, who are usually migrants to the city, view their adopted home.

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Poster for the film *Durgi*. Image courtesy KM Veeresh.

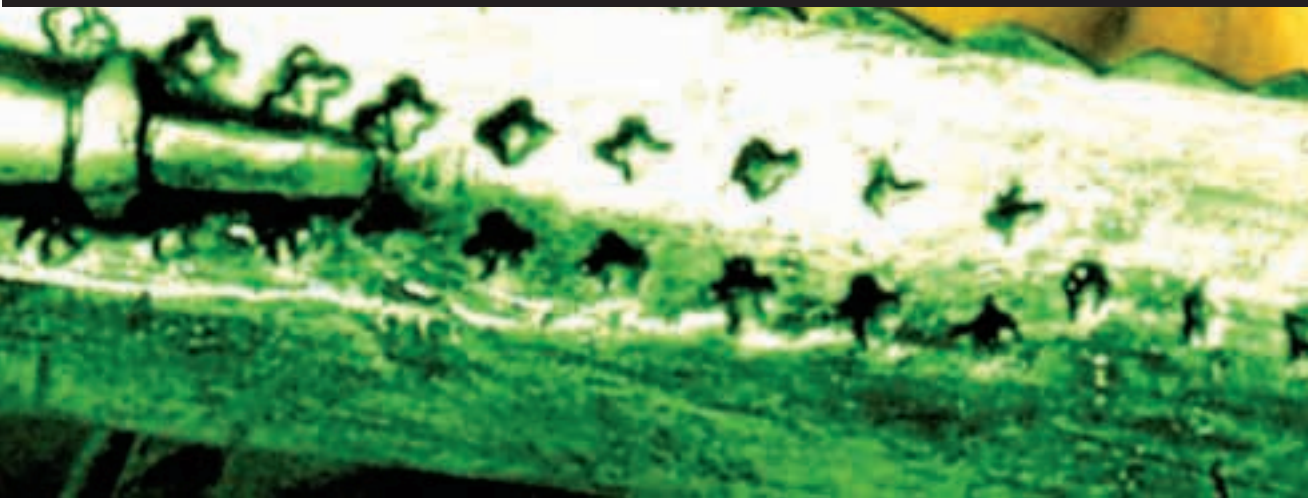






*Bangalore Against its Hinterland:  
Interpreting Violence in Recent Kannada Cinema*

MK Raghavendra





Photograph by Zac O' Yeah.



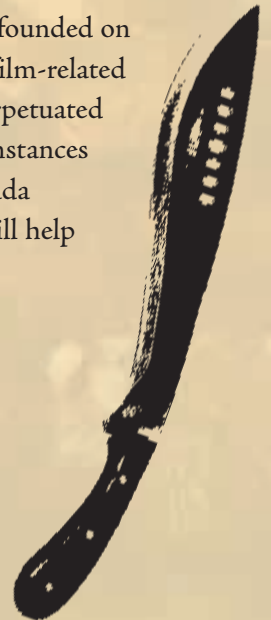
## Background

There are different ways in which Indian cinema can be categorised and if one of the earliest ways was to regard it in terms of its commercial appeal ('popular', 'art' and 'middle' cinemas), it is also possible to identify categories on the basis of the regional constituencies they address. Such identification is useful when our interest is in understanding the preoccupations of a constituency by interpreting the regional language cinema relevant to it, and it is apparent that only 'popular' kinds of cinemas address sizable constituencies. While 'Bollywood' has as its constituency audiences dispersed across the length and breadth of India as well as Indians from the diaspora, regional cinemas address largely local constituencies<sup>1</sup> based on the languages they are made in. Hence, while Hindi cinema may be said to be pan-Indian, articulating 'national' concerns and addressing the 'Indian' identity, popular films made in the regional languages appear to articulate vastly different concerns and address local identities within India. The fact that the different regional cinemas narrativise visibly different experiences from those narrativised by the Hindi film suggests that the regional cinemas

have access to levels of local experience not available to mainstream Bollywood cinema.

This essay proceeds on the hypothesis that interpreting a few highly successful Kannada language films of the past four or five years (in which Bangalore is a key motif) will indicate what the city means to the local Kannada-speaking populace (or Kannadigas), the constituency that Kannada cinema addresses. Holding the films together is their common emphasis on street violence in Bangalore city with the protagonist as a gangster. Besides looking at the films, however, it will be useful to look at instances of actual film-related violence in Bangalore in the same period. The logic is that, being of/from the same constituency as the violence, the cinema may reveal the underlying tensions that cause such disturbances. This essay is founded on the proposition that since film-related violence in Bangalore is perpetuated by film-fans, interpreting instances of violence in recent Kannada cinema 'symptomatically' will help us understand the political mindset of the audience responding to the cinema.

<sup>1</sup> Local language cinemas also cater to different international segments. The Tamil film, for instance, is widely seen in countries like Malaysia by a significant Tamil populace and the Bhojpuri film is seen in Mauritius.



### **Film-Related Violence and Film Violence**

The Kannada film star Dr Rajkumar passed away in Bangalore on April 12, 2006. He was 78 years old and died of natural causes but, not surprisingly, sorrowful fans went on a rampage in the city. A police constable was beaten to death by frenzied mobs and several people were killed in police firing. Most public demonstrations involving Kannada cinema today elicit violence in Bangalore. Dr Rajkumar's kidnapping by Veerappan led to arson and looting in 2000, the disturbances continuing sporadically for several months. The action of the Kannada film industry calling for a ban on non-Kannada films—in 2004—also led to violence. In most cases, the violence was restricted to Bangalore city and other towns in Karnataka remain peaceful. It nonetheless tends to get out of hand in every instance and various agencies are blamed but there is no effort to enquire into the causes. The disturbances are perhaps not 'instigated' but need another explanation.

Since it is now acknowledged that media texts are actively 'co-authored' by the audience<sup>2</sup> the involvement of the audience in the

generation of filmic texts is apparent. It is perhaps an instance of 'Skinnerian reinforcement' when a film's success leads filmmakers to replicate a formula and a successful formula becomes a useful way into the collective mindset of the film-going public. Significantly, the past few years have witnessed an increase of violence in Kannada cinema. One as yet unnamed category of films usually advertises itself through a poster in which the protagonist wields a weapon—a chopper, a razor, a chain or a knife—to signal her/his belligerence. If I find this significant, my suggestion is not that the films initiate street violence but rather that they may manifest the same social tensions that underlie street violence. Hence I expect that the examination of a few Kannada films will be useful and the films I have chosen are *Majestic* (2002), *Kitti* (2004), *Durgi* (2004), and *Jogi* (2005). These have all been popular films and *Jogi* was apparently the biggest Kannada hit of that year. In 2007 there appeared another huge hit made in the same mould—*Duniya*. Since the four films I have chosen have broadly the same motifs, I propose to render only the narrative of *Majestic* in detail and treat the other films as variants.

In *Majestic*, a boy lives in a rustic

<sup>2</sup> With the new developments in media studies one is permitted to say that media texts are 'co-authored' by audiences. Also see Sudhir Kakar, 'The Ties that Bind: Family Relationships in the Mythology of Hindi Cinema', from *India International Centre, Quarterly Special Issue*, Vol. 8 (1), March 1980, p. 13. "The prospect of financial gain, like the opportunity for sexual liaison, does wonderful things for increasing the perception of the needs and desires of those who hold the key to these gratifications... (Filmmakers) must intuitively appeal to those concerns of the audience which are shared."



Still from the  
film *Majestic*.  
Image courtesy  
KM Veeresh.



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milieu with his drunkard father, his suffering mother and his ailing baby sister. The child needs medical attention and the man has spent the family income on drink. The boy is witness to his mother selling herself but still unable to save her daughter's life. When the father returns from one of his binges and finds the child dead, he is unrepentant and remains intent on laying hands on his wife's earnings. This incenses the boy so much that he stabs his father to death and escapes

to Bangalore. In Bangalore the boy becomes handyman to a corrupt policeman named Randhir and is given the name Daasa ('slave'). But Daasa quickly learns the ropes and grows up to be a dreaded hoodlum. He has his own gang and is feared by his underworld rivals. He is an extortionist, a paid killer and undertakes unlawful activities of all kinds on behalf of his 'clients'. The turning point is when he needs to stop a romance between a rich boy and a





slum girl. The girl has a classmate named Kiran and this plucky girl virtually drives away Daasa's henchmen when they try to break up the romance. Daasa seeks to subdue her and after considering various alternatives, decides to change his appearance and feign interest in her. The inevitable happens and the two actually fall in love although the girl remains unaware of his antecedents. Daasa (as 'Prajwal') also finds himself undergoing a moral transformation. In any case, we come to learn that Kiran is the policeman (now Deputy Commissioner of Police, DCP) Randhir's daughter. When Randhir discovers that his daughter's boyfriend is actually Daasa, he tells her every thing about his former protégé. Kiran accosts Daasa and she will not accept his plea that he is transformed. In the last part of *Majestic*, Randhir's well-meaning mistress shows Kiran the kind of person her father really is but by then Daasa has already decided to kill her and take his own life. He stabs Kiran, learning too late that she still loves him. The film concludes with the girl dead and Daasa shot dead by DCP Randhir.

### Common Motifs

Before going on to the other films, it will be appropriate to examine the motifs exhibited by the group as a whole. Bangalore figures in all the films as a lawless space and the adopted viewpoint is that of the outsider or first generation migrant like Daasa who does not eulogise the home territory as 'unspoilt'. Three of the four films feature college students in a significant way and it appears that, apart from the gangsters, it is this student populace that is most identifiable with the city. The police feature prominently in three of the films as a degenerate lot generally, although the Police Commissioner in *Durgi* is a fair person and this is associated with his being a Central Government appointee. Politicians are introduced into both *Majestic* and *Durgi* but they are small people trying to get by as intermediaries. Interestingly, even when the politician is an MLA, he is deferential to the police officer in the story. Romantic entanglements occur in two of the films and only in one—*Kitti*—is it taken to a happy conclusion. All films have preambles positing a first event (e.g. Daasa's



killing of his father) that causes the remaining action. The films do not always begin with the 'first event', which is sometimes narrated through a flashback.

To relate the other stories briefly, *Durgi* is about a village tomboy whose minor sister is raped and murdered by Bangalore businessmen/land-grabbers, who contrive to get away with the connivance of the local MLA, the police inspector and the doctor entrusted with the post-mortem. The rest of the film is about Durgi's bloody revenge and her subsequent return to her village. *Kitty* is

about a young man who comes into conflict with feudal power in his village, leading to the liquidation of members of his family. When he takes revenge by killing some of the assailants, his father accepts the blame and is jailed. This transforms Kitty and he goes to Bangalore to live non-violently as a student until he encounters other hoodlums. His adversaries from the village also come to the city seeking revenge but the film ends happily with their being neutralised. In *Jogi*, Madesha leaves home after his father's death to seek his fortune in Bangalore. There he is embroiled in a







gangland war, sent to jail briefly and then released. His toughness soon makes him feared

as 'Jogi' but he yearns for his mother who, unknown to him, searches for him only streets away. Madesha expresses himself through an exuberant village dance and the film concludes with his dancing at the funeral of a poor nameless woman, whom he finally discovers to be his mother.

### *The Portrayal of State Authority*

Before I interpret the key motifs in these films, I intend to look at representations of the police in Hindi popular cinema, with the understanding that they have approximately the same significance in these stories, where they are key participants<sup>3</sup>. The police and the judiciary—often ridiculed before Independence (*Taqdeer*, 1943)—acquire gravity after 1947 and come to represent the moral authority of the State in the 1950s. In films like *Baazi* (1951), policemen bear huge moral responsibilities that overwhelm their personal interests. The respect accorded to the law continues well into the 1970s—the

moral stature of the policeman younger brother in *Deewar* (1975) is an instance. But something happens in the early 1980s with the police (and the judiciary) in cinema abruptly becoming corrupt /weak and often at the mercy of gangland bosses (*Agneepath*, 1989). Alongside the notion of the weak policeman/ judiciary also flourishes the notion of vigilante justice (*Insaaf Ka Tarazu*, 1980). The '80s were seen as a period in which 'divisive forces' had gained impetus within the Indian polity because of the regional/group demands directed against the Central State<sup>4</sup> and regional politics coming violently alive. The portrayal of the police can be usefully read in this context as the weakening of state authority—if seen alongside the emphasis on strengthening gang identities (*Ankush*, 1985, *Tezaab*, 1987), caste identities (*Ghulami*, 1985) and regional identities (*Ek Duuje Ke Liye*, 1981).

The liberalisation measures of 1991-92 are reflected in Hindi cinema as a withdrawal of the State from its own institutions. The police behave like a private agency in *Satya* (1999) and *Company* (2001), their indifference to legality making them stronger than their criminal

<sup>3</sup> See MK Raghavendra, *Seduced by the Familiar: Narration and Meaning in Indian Popular Cinema*, (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008). There is an argument here about how the police and judiciary are represented in Hindi cinema from the 1940s up to the new millennium.

<sup>4</sup> See Sunil Khilnani, *The Idea of India*, (Delhi: Penguin, 1997), pp. 50-52.



adversaries—instead of weaker as in the 1980s. Still, the police remain the tested way of representing state authority and from the evidence of the four films this also appears true of Kannada cinema. The deference with which MLAs treat police officers in both *Majestic* and *Durgi* suggests that they represent more than themselves. The first frame in *Durgi* is explicit in the way it shows marching policemen with the emblem of the Ashokan lions superimposed upon them. The cynical portrayal of the local police in the Kannada films may appear to find a parallel in Hindi cinema but there is a difference. I propose that there is still a high degree of approval of unlawful police methods and ‘encounters’ in recent Hindi films like *Page 3* (2005), which is absent in the Kannada films. The reason perhaps is that Hindi films implicate the sacred ‘nation’ in a way that regional films do not—they address local identity whereas Hindi cinema is widely regarded as playing a part in the sustenance of the nation<sup>5</sup>. The authority of the Central State is a fundamental affirmation in the Hindi film but peripheral in regional cinema. But it is significant that the only worthy policeman in the four Kan-

nada films (in *Durgi*) is a Central Government appointee, implying a deliberate distancing of local state authority from the authority of the Central State.

The second aspect requiring attention is the representation of the law as being present only in Bangalore. Even in *Durgi*, which has a village police inspector, the inspector behaves as an agent of Bangalorean interests. One meaning that can be derived is that local state authority not only has its headquarters in Bangalore but also functions, by and large, in the interests of that city<sup>6</sup>. Within Bangalore itself, the police are presented as an ineffectual, although self-satisfied lot. Let alone being firmly in charge, they do not even seek to exert control. In both *Majestic* and *Jogi* the police are responsible for authoring criminal lawlessness. Still, the lawlessness is so exaggerated that I propose it is not representational but, rather, allegorical. My reading (as in the case of Hindi films) is that it corresponds to deregulation by the State, engendering ‘social Darwinism’—competition without regulation. If the films regard ‘social Darwinism’ with more alarm than do Hindi films—which

<sup>5</sup> See Sumita S Chakravarty, *National Identity in Indian Popular Cinema* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998) and M Madhava Prasad, *Ideology of the Hindi Film* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999). If the sacred object in Hindi cinema is ‘the nation’ the sacred object at the local level is the Kannada language (often eulogised in Kannada cinema) but local state authority is not identified with it.

<sup>6</sup> A charge made against the former Karnataka Chief Minister SM Krishna was that he was administering only Bangalore. Krishna later shifted his constituency from small town Mandya to middle-class Bangalore.



otherwise have the same discourse—it may be because Bangalore's economic transformation has been more abrupt than Mumbai's and less comprehensible to those on the periphery.

### *The Outsider/Migrant*

Coming back to the adopted viewpoint, not only do the films identify with an outsider or the first generation migrant, they also regard his/her complete integration with the city as impossible. The protagonists of *Durgi* take up residence in Bangalore in a colony named after a woman from a small town ('Mandya Mangamma') and become part of the community

there. Migrants in temporary dwellings constitute a special community for Jogi even when he rules gangland. I also find the impossibility of romance between the migrant and the city girl significant. City girls are college students (rather than 'youth') and this may be a naïve rendering of the association of the city with the 'knowledge industry' and the new economy. More importantly, only in *Kitty* is the romance taken to a happy conclusion, the girl being from the same village as the male protagonist—sharing his status as a migrant, as it were.

Bangalore is also designated through its 'city' parts—those associated with the Kannada rather

Poster for the film *Tirupati*. Photograph by Zac O' Yeah.



than with the cosmopolitan population. 'Majestic' is a nerve centre of the city area (as opposed to the showier Cantonment area) and so are Kalasi-palyam and Mavalli (which also feature in the titles of Kannada films). Bangalore has a population comprising people speaking every language but language differences within the city are not problematised<sup>7</sup>. One could say that, rather than the conflict being between the Kannada and non-

Kannada people within Bangalore, it is between the entrenched Bangalorean and the migrant, with the possibility of the latter's integration consistently down played. 'Bangalore', in effect, appears unattainable. Where new city films emphasise lavish lifestyles (*Shivaji*, Tamil, 2007), the Kannada films show little interest in conspicuous consumption—as though that might be distasteful to those unable to attain it—and play up the disarray.

<sup>7</sup> For every 'villain' who speaks other languages there are outsiders on the hero's side. Jogi's gang, for instance, even includes a Sikh.

Poster for the film *Rajeev*. Photograph by Zac O' Yeah.





## A Conclusion

Bangalore has been represented in different ways in Kannada cinema and its first specific use was perhaps in *Schoolmaster* (1958) when it becomes the space facilitating romance between Kannada-speaking people<sup>8</sup>. In films like *Raja Nanna Raja* (1976) an outsider moves smoothly into a romance with a city girl with only the differences in their wealth being problematised, while in *Mayor Muthanna* (1969) a migrant becomes Bangalore's mayor. Given these representations, Bangalore's portrayal in the four Kannada films is curious. A year or two ago, a leader of Bangalore's IT industry created a furore by suggesting that the city should be de-linked from Karnataka and governed from New Delhi—as a Union Territory—to

preserve its industrial advantage. The constituency addressed by Kannada cinema was not his concern but this constituency does appear to regard Bangalore as 'lost'. The city seems unattainable to those from the hinterland, a space with which migrants might never integrate. State authority—portrayed as nearly invisible outside the city—has also abdicated its responsibilities inside Bangalore and the relationship between the Kannadiga and state authority is hostile. Given these perceptions within the constituency of Kannada cinema, it is hardly surprising that at each film/film industry-related demonstration, Bangaloreans witness even those believed incapable of violence—like exhausted old women—summoning up enough energy to destroy public property<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> The 'love marriage' between people from different parts of reorganised Karnataka signifying cross-cultural integration as opposed to the 'arranged marriage'—which implies the entrenched logic of kinship.

<sup>9</sup> This has reference to an old woman on television at the time of Dr Rajkumar's death, who used a small boulder to attack and damage a parked police vehicle in full public view.





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