



বাণায়ন

Rewind

Batayan



Batayan just completed the journey of its first five years. The milestone was celebrated in Kolkata, India, on Sunday, January 6, 2019. It was a glorious event, called "Batayaner Panche Pa" which means "Batayan turned five years old". Literary enthusiasts from Kolkata, Sydney, Perth and USA gathered at the event. Some beautiful moments were created at the ceremony when lovers of art and literature from all over the world shared a single platform of creative expression. We fervently hope Batayan will continue to grow and embrace more creative artists in the upcoming days. When a sapling is sprouted from a tiny seed all the conditions of its nourishment has to be fulfilled for the sapling to become a tree. Thank you all for your support for Batayan and provide it with sunshine and warmth in the first five years of its life.

Ranjita

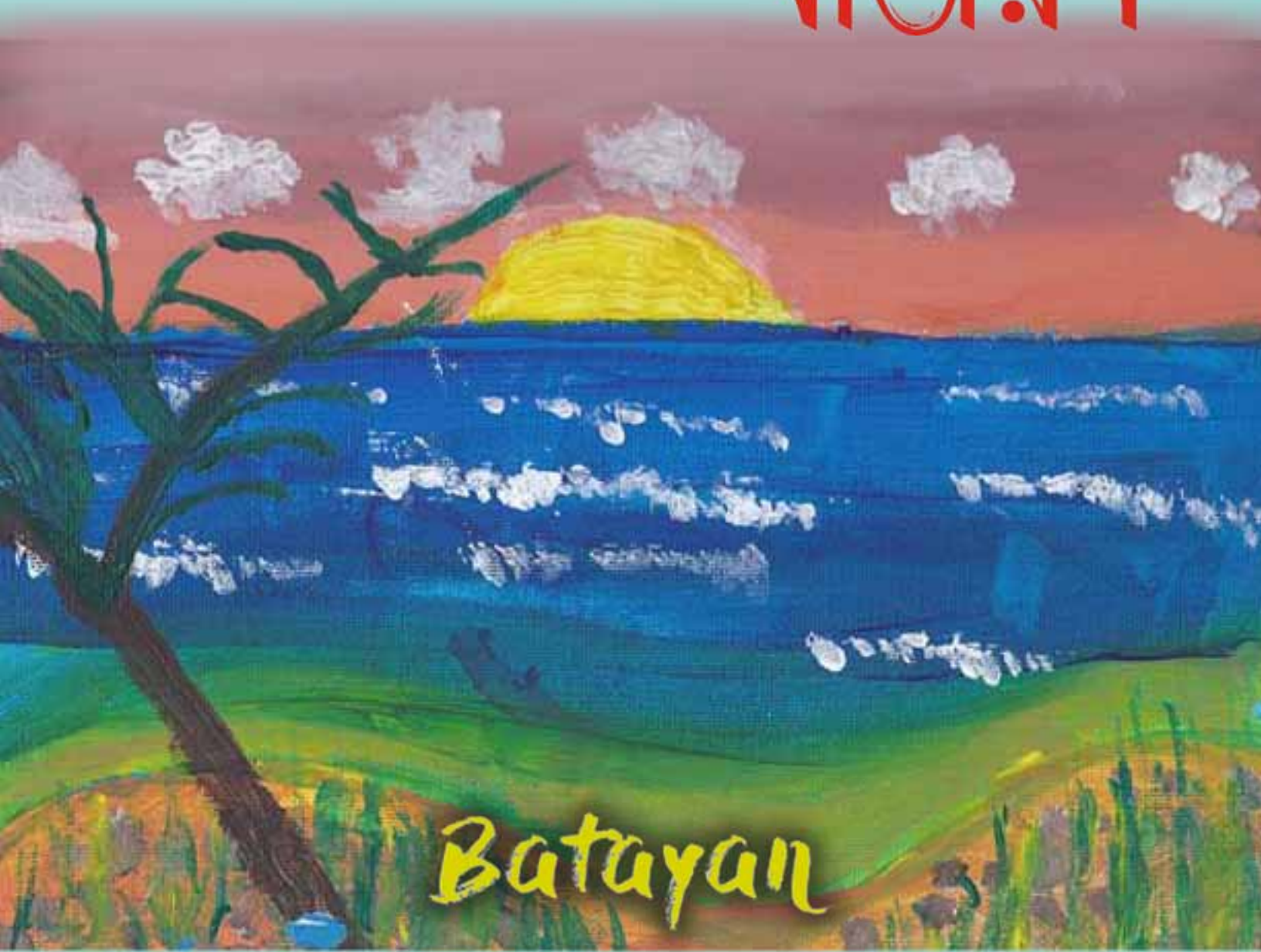
Perth perspective



Conceived by Anusri Banerjee as a bilingual international web magazine promoting literature and culture, *Batayan* is another pointer to a Kolkatan's labour of love. Banerjee is from Kolkata but has now settled in Perth, Australia, with her husband. *Batayan* has branched out from its roots in Perth, first to Chicago then to other cities across the USA, Australia and Europe. *Batayan* has also expanded its reach in the subcontinent to include Kolkata, other cities in India and Bangladesh. Following from its success as an online quarterly magazine it launched an annual printed edition. *Batayan* has got the inspiration and blessings of legendary poet Shankha Ghosh last year. *Batayan* has launched a new monthly on-line publication, *Kagojer Nauka* (The Paper Boat), which primarily features serialised novels, long stories and poems. *Kagojer Nauka* was launched featuring an exclusive new novel by the renowned UK-based author, Dr Nabakumar Basu. To commemorate its fifth year of existence a literary get-together was organised in Kolkata yesterday for building bonds between readers, contributors and enthusiasts of *Batayan* from across the globe. It was attended by *Batayan* contributors and men and women of letters.



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Editor

Jill Charles

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Front Cover



Saumen is an avid outdoor enthusiast and enjoys hiking, trekking, and photography. He also takes part in recitation, drama, mind science, Native American flute and Indian classical music. Saumen is an entrepreneur in the field of investment research and portfolio management. He lives in Chicago with his wife, Ranjita, and his daughter, Suranjana is a Junior in UW Madison.

Tirthankar Banerjee
Perth, Australia

Back : Kolkata Book Fair, 2019



His interest in photography started in student days. Much later the long nights in the dark-room were replaced by hours behind the computer and focus shifted from Black & White to Colour. He likes to show the images as they are and does not approve of computer gimmickry. He loves nature – flowers, birds, trees and all things beautiful. Tirthankar is an engineer, specializing in Renewable Energy and lives and works in Perth, Western Australia.

Megan Charles, IL, USA

Back Inside Cover

Allen McNair, IL, USA

Title Page

I, **Allen McNair**, am a self-taught artist and poet inspired daily by the wonders of life around me, and by my present and past experiences. From individual poetic portrayals in my early years of writing, I have graduated to writing and illustrating my self-published epic saga, *I Dream of A'maresh*.

বাণী পত্রিকা **BATAYAN INCORPORATED, Western Australia** দ্বারা প্রকাশিত ও সর্বসত্ত্ব সংরক্ষিত। প্রকাশকের লিখিত অনুমতি ছাড়া, এই পত্রিকায় প্রকাশিত যে কোন অংশের পুনর্মুদ্রণ বা যে কোন ভাবে ব্যবহার নিষিদ্ধ। রচনায় প্রকাশিত মতামত সম্পূর্ণ ভাবে রচয়িতায় সীমাবদ্ধ।

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Editorial

It's time for a new year and a new edition of *Batayan*. The English pieces in this issue follow the theme of struggle: old vs. new, near vs. far and especially making the everyday life meaningful.

In *How Peace Works* Kathy Powers celebrates the hard work of peacemakers. M.C. Rydel examines artists' effort for perfection in *Blurred Edges*. A flower blooms on the face of a barren gray cliff. Maureen Peifer remembers the sweet, scary and sincere moments of childhood in *Friday Afternoon*. Two siblings make the effort to stay together despite time and distance in *A Sister's Pride*.

We hope you can enjoy and relate to these works. Let art remind you that we are never alone in our journey.

Thank you for reading *Batayan*!

Jill Charles
Batayan English Editor

PS We are looking for more reviews of books, films and restaurants.

Susan Koenig

Amber

Catch the light and play
 Once live droplet of primordial day.
 Cold crucibles of pressure and held time
 have forced this tear from ooze and pitch
 and slime
 What separates that slight prehensile paw
 that touched your bubbly fragrance, pine-
 scent raw
 from my smooth fingered grasp that cups warm stone?
 What brothers are we then, beneath the bone?
 Deep honeyed light refracts to bridge the day,
 Igniting each, a shining slanted ray.



M.C. Rydel

Blurred Edges

The experts use photoshop to eliminate
Every trace of imperfection,
Erase a cowlick, hide the wrinkles,
Snip a jowl, touch up the eyes.
What's left is magazine perfection,
Which is really no perfection at all.

I find beauty in subtle imperfection:
A cathedral's tilted rose window,
Spilt tea when the in-laws come over,
The moon obscured by tree tops
And that deliberate flaw in a Persian rug,
Because only Allah can achieve perfection.

I am no expert, barely competent with my phone;
I take photographs with blurred edges,
Unintentionally, ring a bell at midnight,
Burn incense in hallucinogenic tents,
Sleep like a tonsured monk on a donkey
Leading everyone else in the dream, astray.

Dreams have a special imperfection.
The backup singers are a little off key.
Cities in the clouds sway in the wind.
People who you've known your whole life,
People who seen only once on a subway
Follow you like a procession of sins.

I have discovered a way to take photos
Inside my dreams and sell them for a profit.
What makes them authentic are the blemishes,
Nine and a half by eleven paper,
Foie gras and baguettes with the wrong wine
Erotic books, secret looks, and forbidden drawings.

Flawed beauty and remembered truths,
Like the melancholy sense of the bittersweet are,
Withered and lean, aging with grace,
A broken seashell on a Florida beach,
The singed humanity burnt off in Purgatory
Before the doors of Eden get to open.

Yes, I know religion is all made up.
Like little mistakes transcribed into braille,
It is the exquisite fabrication of imperfection.

Kathy Powers

How Peace Works

All hail to the peacemakers:
 Their presence so strong.
 Their outreach encourages
 Wise sense in our throng.

The schools for the peacemakers:
 Utterly serene
 Universal, inclusive,
 Structurally clean.

We get from the peacemakers:
 Goodwill, synchronized,
 Harmony, tranquility
 Composed, equitized.

We give to the peacemakers:
 Agreed assurance
 Unity, purposeful oaths
 Pledge reassurance.

*We all become peacemakers:
 Enduringly kind.
 Evolved, inevitable
 A product of mind.*

Kathy Powers — I am a civil rights activist and developed my passions from coping with bipolar disorder symptoms. I have a tagline: "Advocacy is my therapy." Through advocacy I have discovered truth and beauty in helping people and sharing art.



Maureen Peifer

Friday Afternoon

Friday afternoons, we third graders file into church at 2:30 just before dismissal for our weekly confessions. The soaring Gothic stone of Saint Gertrude's, its tall brown heavy arched doors inspire, no demand, our silence.

"Think about what you've done as you walk boys and girls. Examine your conscience and think about what you've done to hurt our Lord and what you will do to be better next week," intones Sister Mary Viola, our third grade teacher. Though not much bigger than many of us she speaks as with the voice of God in my 8 year old brain.

We file solemnly and silently into the smooth worn marble floored church, each stopping to dip two fingers into the holy water font and bless ourselves as we've been taught. We fill in two pews across, Sister Viola's class to the left near Father Mulcahy's confessional, Sister Mary St. Ambrose's class to the right by Monsignor Kelly.

I'm so glad we get the young Father Mulcahy - he doesn't make you so scared. Monsignor Kelly seems to delight in intoning the wrath of God, sometimes loud enough to be heard outside the confessional. "You did what young man ? For shame ! " He also gives big penance- decades of the rosary, not just Our Fathers and Hail Marys like Father Mulcahy.

Each ornate wooden confessional has a tall center section with the comfy priest chair inside and an outside light to let you know that father is " in ". On either side is a smaller door containing a kneeler which faces a covered carved wooden screen which can be slid back when it is your turn. You can't really see the priest, just a blackish outline leaning close to the screen to hear you as you whisper in the dark.

"Bless me Father for I have sinned. It has been one week since my last confession. I was disobedient to my mother 3 times. I tricked my brother twice. And I lied about washing out the tub after my bath. For all my sins I am heartily sorry and promise to do better in the future."

"Did your mother have to wash the tub since you had not?" asked Father Mulcahy.

"Yes," I whisper, even lower.

"Can you see how hard your mother works to take care of you and how God expects us all to do our share?"

"Yes, Father," I sniffle.

"Do better next week. Say 5 Our Fathers and 5 Hail Marys and do an extra favor for your mother. The blessing of God be upon you."

"Thank you Father."

As I file back to the long polished oak pew and kneel to say my penance, I look up at the tall arched stained glass window and see Archangel Michael smile right at me. I know I will do better next week.



Smoothing my navy blue jumper, I sit and wait to walk out with my class into the warm Autumn sun and think about how I will spend the dime nestled in my Buster Brown saddle shoes. We always stop at the corner store, Kelly's, on the way home on Friday afternoons.

Kelly's is set back from the corner of Granville and Green view just west of St. Gertrude's. There are painted faded pop signs along the top and bottom of the slightly dingy plate glass windows - signs for Coca-Cola, RC, Dr. Pepper. The dark green frames have slightly bubbled paint that you know would peel sometime soon. The bell on the door jingles every time one of us goes in or out. Mrs. Kelly only allows eight children at a time in the store. She stands - short, squat, red-faced and haired smiling at each of us while we look through the slanted glass display case and carefully peruse our choices of penny candies: wax lips, teeth, mustaches, bulls eyes, 3 for a penny, 3 packs of wax bottles full of some brightly colored disgusting syrup, licorice whips, peppermint sticks, lemon drops, 3 for a penny, sheets of dots.

Then there were the more expensive choices - Mars Bars and Almond Joy, a nickel each, Hershey bars 3 cent or 5 cent size, bottles of delicious chocolate Kayo in the ancient cooler, 7 cents each (you got a 2 cent deposit back). Mr. Kelly is in charge of the cooler. Finally, the decadent Twinkies, Snowballs, and Hostess Cupcakes nestled in their cellophane wrappers, begging you to spend your whole dime on them.

The choice is hard- sometimes you have to think about it all Friday afternoon, except during confession of course.

"I'll take a Kayo, 3 bulls eyes, wax lips, and 3 lemon drops, please Mrs. Kelly

She dutifully drops each item into a tiny brown bag while Mr. Kelly pops the top on the Kayo for you.

"See you next week dear".

Ah, the joy of a clean soul and a sweet reward.



Maureen Peifer is a Chicagoan with a lifelong love of literature, writing, travel, and teaching. She is currently the school librarian at a Montessori school where she previously taught.

Jill Charles

Mary, Queen of Scots — Film Review

Most students of European history know that in 1587 Queen Elizabeth I of England had her own cousin, Mary Queen of Scots, executed. There was a Catholic conspiracy to kill Elizabeth and crown Mary as monarch of England and Scotland, but evidence of Mary's involvement is still questioned by scholars today. Few know the story of how the two cousins grew up separately, raised as rivals, yet often showed more care and respect for each other than their male advisors and subjects showed for them.

Directed by Josie Rourke the 2018 film *Mary, Queen of Scots* looks history directly in the eye from the viewpoints of Mary (Saoirse Ronan) and Elizabeth (Margot Robbie) leading parallel lives in rival kingdoms on the same British Isle, each hoping for peace yet afraid of being deposed. Both actresses show the queens' struggles, hopes and fears in every line and every scene. I learned many nuances of history that my history books never mentioned from the letters between the two queens in which Elizabeth tried to find an English husband for Mary and Mary's requests to be Elizabeth's heir.

Mary's half-brother James opposes her Catholicism and alternately protects and plots against her to maintain his own power in the Scottish court. Both Mary and Elizabeth begin their reigns with an attempt at religious tolerance of both Protestants and Catholics. Yet Mary is bitterly condemned as a decadent Catholic by Protestant enemies raising troops against her and Elizabeth faces opposition from Spain and the papacy who would depose her for being an Anglican. Each queen is confronted, again and again by enemies from the preacher John Knox who claims that no woman can ever rule over men to hired assassins and false lovers.

Is it braver to abstain from marriage and male domination as Elizabeth does or to boldly marry for love and conceive an heir for the nation as Mary does? It shocked me to see the lower ranking nobleman try to seize control of Scotland by marrying Mary. After a rebellion in Scotland, Elizabeth offered Mary asylum in England for 19 years, which some claim was nothing more than house arrest before her eventual execution.

What is it like to have your own cousin as a deadly rival? The power of absolute monarchy comes at a bitter price, that of being unable to trust anyone around you and having very few peers who can understand how “uneasy is the head that wears a crown.”



Jill Charles grew up in Spokane, Washington and majored in Creative Writing at Seattle University. In 2007 she moved to Chicago where she writes poetry and fiction and lives in the Albany Park neighborhood. Her career includes nonprofit, academic and legal office work. Jill is co-editor of *Batayan*, a bilingual literary magazine in Bengali and English. She performs her poetry at open mic nights at The Heartland Café and Royal Coffee. Jill is one of the Chicago Writing Alliance workshop facilitators at Bezazian Library in Uptown. Read her jazz age novel, *Marlene's Piano*, available from Booklocker.com.

Susim Munshi

Essays from The Education of a Bengali Gentleman — A Sister's Pride

I had a rough time learning academic Bengali in elementary and high school. Perhaps my interests were elsewhere. Like dreaming about becoming an astronaut or traveling across the world as a Peace Corps volunteer. My school subscribed to the “Span” magazine and I fought my friends to be the first to read it cover to cover. Then in July 1969 Apollo 11 landed on the moon and really fired up my imagination. To compound all of my good intent to at least get a passing mark in Bengali, my school required students to speak, read, write English all the time, even in our dreams. My school was a boarding school. I came home only when school was out.

My performance in Bengali deteriorated all year and my frustration increased. By the end of the school year, I feared being held back in my grade. I squirreled away time from math and science, history and geography, and made an extraordinary effort to learn my Bengali spelling.

If the reader is familiar with Bengali they will appreciate when I say I don't remember any rules that clearly showed me when to choose between a “স, শ, ষ” all somewhat acceptable forms of “s”. How was I chose between a “র, ড়” the soft and hard sounds of “r”? During the long written examination I noticed the proctor hovering over my shoulders, shaking his head in dismay. “Susim is not going to have a pleasant winter recess,” I could hear him say. I would go home for winter recess and unlike every kid my age, write Bengali spelling words over and over again. The rest of my friends were playing cricket, visiting the chimpanzees in the zoo, queuing up for a glimpse of Louis Armstrong's moon rock.

I compensated my shakey Bengali spelling by memorising and reciting Bengali poetry and prose. After all I did win the English elocution contest since 4th grade! I would make a compact with my eighth grade Bengali teacher who really wanted our class to win that year's Bengali elocution. I gave up my rightful place at the podium for English elocution and made a dramatic impact on the audience and judges reciting several small selections from Sukumar Roy's “Abal Tabol.” It worked like a charm. I moved on to ninth grade where I could start a new school year studying the sciences, physics, chemistry and biology. The moon seemed within my grasp.

All throughout my childhood and youth Rabindranath Tagore, the Nobel laureate, held a revered place in my life, especially his Rabindra Sangeet. Now that I am retired I have a lot of time to listen, study, understand and appreciate Rabindra Sangeet. And write about it. No more Bengali exams. But I wish to spell correctly. So I turn to my female cousin who lives in Japan. First cousins grow up like brothers and sisters in India.

My sister in Japan, Arati, a homemaker, had been a teacher for a long time. We use technology to text messages in Bengali. My Bengali is getting better in leaps and bounds. She is also a beautiful singer of Rabindra Sangeet. We both have the exact same favorite Rabindra Sangeet. She always sings it masterfully and evokes the right emotions and sentiments. The song is “গোধূলিগগনে মেঘে ঠেকেছিল তারা”, “godhuligogone meghe dhekechhilo tara.” No rules of spelling for



her. Like a great teacher she plods at it every day, sending text messages back and forth several times a day, till I have it right. Recently she taught me how to write the “Bhagavad Gita Pranam Mantra” in Bengali; a prayer you recite after reading from the Bhagavad Gita. First I sent a picture of it written in Sanskrit. Then she sent it back to me written in Bengali.

Japan and the US are at two ends of the world. I like to take Rabindranath with me on my morning walks. Arati, who I address as “Fuldi”, and I video chat and sing and recite the same verses. We observe my garden bloom everyday; I by morning, she by night. Arati says she can smell the roses too. I believe she does it all from “A Sister's Pride!”



"Forward to the *Essays from The Education of a Bengali Gentleman*" by Susim Munshi — The great Stoic teacher Epictetus stated we become philosophers when we examine our preconceived notions, ask questions about our emotions and even the words we use each day. The essays in this collection are an honest self-examination of Bengali sentiments, values, and beliefs as perceived by the author who while growing up in a traditional Bengali household learned to look at them from a different perspective while going to a Catholic School and College in India, then moving to America for the rest of his adult life."



Mekhala Banerjee

Just a Guy

It's a gorgeous summer day in Chicago, all the living creatures are enjoying. Bunny rabbits are hopping around looking for bulbs to dig out. Babies are following their mom. Squirrels are running up and down through the tree branches or electrical wires. Blue robins, red jacks, sparrows have already started their melodious concert without any permission. Humans are not staying behind either. Ria, a Bengali woman in her forties, short thin built wearing jeans and a t-shirt, came out to do some garden work. She enjoys to do it, or more clearly she loves flowers, but she is not accustomed to do any hard work. In India they have "Mali", who works in the garden. She never did any house work, they have people for that. After a while Ria was huffing and puffing, struggling with garden tools, mumbling herself about her husband for not helping. He is addicted to watch games and politics on TV. "Hallo Mam" Ria was scared to hear a deep voice, she looked up, there was a shaggy looking man standing in front of her, skinny tall white man in his thirties. His smiling face is not fearful, but he looked kind of dirty, didn't shave for days. She stood up, "yes". The guy came closer, "I was watching, looks like you are not used to do these kind of work, if you let me". Ria stopped him right there, "no, I don't want your help", she turned away to go into the garage. He followed her, "please, believe me, I can do any kind of work." "I don't need your help" Ria almost shouted, then went inside. She couldn't close the garage door, the haggard looking guy was standing. She stormed into the family room, slammed the door so hard, Nabin was deeply involved in Bears game, lying down on a navy blue sofa, this is his routine, looked at her, "what happened"? "Nothing, there is a guy, maybe a crazy one, tell him to leave" she replied in a bitter mood. Whenever he watches TV and she does yard work, she comes back with a fighting mood, he knows that. He quietly went out to see what's going on, now a days so many things are happening, you will hear as soon as you turn the news on. He came back in after a while, "Ria, from now on you don't have to work hard, I found somebody who will take care of your yard." She was in such a furious mood, she didn't care or maybe didn't listen.

Next morning the door bell rang, Ria was shocked to see the yesterday's guy at the door step. "why you are here again?" she yelled at him. He replied with the same smile as before

"he told me to come today to work in the yard"

She went upstairs to wake Nabin up to take care of the guy. That was the beginning, then so many years passed by, nobody knew how that haggard looking guy became a trust worthy helping hand. He started coming almost every day, asking Ria during lunchtime, "can you make some hotdog for me?" She was making it anyway for her son. After a while it became a routine. She didn't want him to sit with them on dinner table, but when her son told him to come inside and eat with them, Ria couldn't say "no", although she didn't like that. His clothes weren't clean, hair was shaggy. Once he was working on the attic, he was taking longer time than Nabin thought. They had to go out, he was getting annoyed, "he is so slow, you like to give him every job you can find, ridiculous". She came on his rescue, "you gave him the job when Sears gave a higher quote than him". "ok, ok, ask him, how long it would take". "We can leave, he will close the door when he will be done", she said it in a straight face. "Are you kidding or what? You will leave the whole



house open to him?" his voice was raised. "Why not ? He is not a thief, he doesn't care for things. I can trust him totally". She wasn't talking softly either. Ria went upstairs, "hey how long it will take ? We have to go out". "May be couple of hours, I will close the door, by the way, could you leave some food on the table". Ria changed, told Nabin to get dressed, made a big chicken sandwich, left it with some chips and a coke.

They got into the car, Nabin started the radio.

She was listening her cd, they were not in a mood to talk. At the party, Ria over heard Nabin was telling "you couldn't believe, one day I am telling you guys we will be robbed."

Ria went to the kitchen to help the host, she didn't want to hear the same story again and again. "Oh! what a paranoid, I am glad that my kids didn't inherit his genes", she thought. After dinner all were sitting in the big living room, "Ria, please you can't be so kind, now a days as soon as you open up the TV you hear some scary story," Minadi said in a very authoritative tone. She is several years older than them. Now Suva the host, joined them, "I was listening piece by piece, what's the story". Minadi told the execrated version. "Oh my God! Ria, are you out of your mind ? I really can't believe, a smart lady like you could take such an idiotic decision like this". Ria was totally lost at the same time furious at Nabin, for making a big storm out of a tiny little breeze. She didn't say a word, but her face could explain, everybody else was out of their mind not she. After the party on the way home they didn't talk either.

Today they were the first person to leave, usually that's not the case. Everybody were so worried, "something might have happened already, they should have gone earlier and check, may be they have to call police right away", Suva's husband Ron announced while

they were getting into the car. As soon as she put her seat belt on, "thanks a lot for putting up a nice drama". He kept quite , may be he felt a little guilty to let the situation go out of control.

He knew the crowd, he should have known it better. Another day, he was so upset, almost slapped Sunny. Even though Ria didn't like Sunny to wash his muddy clothes and shoes in their washing machine, but she was more tolerant than him. Sunny's reason was, he didn't have money to use laundromat, his son was right she knew that. Little by little the guy acquired a small spot in their mind. He used to get vanished from time to time. Mostly Ria started to think "what happened to him ? Did he get sick ?" Ria's disgust attitude towards him started to change slowly. Time goes by in it's own schedule. If the guy wouldn't show up at her doorstep after the winter, she gets worried about the well being of that shaggy looking guy. She didn't notice when that annoyed smile put a dent on her mind. She even told her son, "why don't you ride your bike through the neighbor hood. You might see him sitting some where". Nabin watching TV, heard her saying that, smiled himself "that's Ria". Ria's son Sunny a teenager, friendly, fun loving kid, having hotdog with him sitting on the backyard, talks to him. That became a routine for every summer. Mom and son loaded him with jacket, sweaters, blankets. One summer he was late more than a month, Ria opened the door, here he was with the same smile on his face. "I thought you were dead", Ria joked. "you are older than me, so you will die before me. I will dig up your grave", he answered. She came to the kitchen to make hotdog. Sunny wanted to invite him for his graduation party. When Ria was going towards him, Sunny noticed, ran to her, "Mom, don't tell him to take the garbage away, today he is our guest too like everybody else". Ria felt so ashamed of herself, actually she did want to approach him for garbage, on the other hand she felt proud of her son. Before anybody



knew that guy made a spot for himself on their household. Now Ria knew all about him, mostly from her son, he is the one who talks to him. His father thrown him out of his house when he was only twelve. That broke Ria's heart, in India even the poorest family wouldn't through their kid out of their house, they may eat one meal but still they would stay together. He grew up on his own on the street, slept in woods, even in harsh winter. He gathered things from garbage, or by virtue of some good Samaritan's donation. After long two decades he found contact of his mom, but it was too late, she didn't live long enough to stay with him. One winter night they went to bed, after watching the news, Ria got cozy to Nabin, "do you mind if I tell him to stay in our basement?" Nabin got a shock, moved away sat up on bed, "what? No way, I wouldn't allow any stranger inside our house, you are the one who got mad at me when I hired him to help you in the garden, remember? Now you want him to stay inside the house? How much you know about him?". "he is a nice guy." Ria protested. "listen first, don't argue, your son knew all about him. Actually he took Sunny to the woods to show him where he lives." "what? Do you know how many rapes and murder happened in the woods? How did you allow him to go without asking me? Oh, no you are really something." At the end his voice showed frustration. "from tomorrow he wouldn't have to come here anymore" Nabin declared. Ria got of the bed to get some water. "This is winter he doesn't come now, this winter is going to be very tough, that's why we are planning him to stay here." He interrupted her, "who are we?" his voice was loud, he sounded really upset. She came back holding a glass of water on one hand, held the foot rail to get a support. She was wearing a purple color nighty, her hair tied in a pony tail. "calm down, try to understand." He shut her off, "I am tired let me go to sleep now, will discuss it tomorrow". He slipped under the blanket turned around away from Ria. She didn't have a choice not to try to go to sleep. Within few minutes he started snoring, she was wide awake, that day Sunny was so excited to describe how in the woods he put up a tent, although everything was dirty, her son is an adventurous kid, she loves his nature. Her eyes were visualizing her parent's house. She grew up in a completely deferent kind of household. It was a small town, they lived in a big house with so many people not only the family members. Dad's and uncle's friend coming in town for varieties of reasons, court case, doctor's visit, board exam etc.. During Puja (religious festival) people from servant's family used to come from village. It was so much fun playing and talking to them. She didn't remember no one was ever worried about these kind of thoughts.

She turned around towards Nabin, he was sleeping like a baby. She touched him, felt about him, "he grew up in a city like Calcutta, there was always something going on, maybe they were not allowed to trust any stranger." she gave the benefit of doubt of his behavior.

Sun rays invaded her bed through the big eastside window, Ria opened her eyes, stretched to feel if he is there or not. He had gotten up already, she could get the smell of coffee, that was the only job he happily accepted. After the usual morning chore she came to the kitchen, poured fresh coffee to a cup, sat down on the sofa by Nabin. TV was on, she took a ship of coffee, put a hand on his lap, "I was sorry for last night, you know," He interrupted her, "I am sorry too, I knew your intention was very good, but in this country there is no door you can lock, that is extremely dangerous. Anyway we didn't know anything about his past. I can call couple of churches to find out if they allow any homeless like him" his eyes were on the news though. Ria was relieved, released a heavy sigh. She straighten herself to sit properly, "you may not know, but we knew him for several years. Sunny always talked to him. He never took a can of coke even without asking me, do you know I was so amazed to see such a strong character, he asked me to take off for an hour,



when I asked “why don't you finish then leave” “he told me the social security office will be closed he had to call right now.” I really couldn't believe the answer he gave, “I had no cell phone, I have to go to a pay phone.” “Have you ever imagine a poor, I mean really poor homeless guy didn't even ask me to use our phone. I have a great respect for him, he may not be educated, wears dirty clothes unshaved shaggy look, but as a person he is way above average. I did understand your point of view, you are absolutely right, you never know”.

“Hi Mommy” Sunny came down, “what's for breakfast ?” door bell rang, he ran to open the door. “Hi Glen, come inside, it's getting chilly,

Mom is making egg mac muffin”. Ria got up to the stove, she heard her sun was trying to convince him to stay in our basement. Ria got scared eagerly waiting for the answer, Nabin said he will find some place for him. Her eyes was flooded with tears when she heard him saying “I love to stay in woods, I belong there, I have been on pavement, under the bridge or woods since I was twelve, don't worry man, I sleep well under the sky shining with thousand stars.” “But there are animals” Sunny was concerned. “They know me, they won't hurt”, he smiled. Ria put her sari to hold her tears, she didn't know the difference, relived or happy.

“You are not just a guy” she uttered.



Sreya Sarkar

Demonizing Intellectualism in India is Like Punishing the Youth for Being Curious

Has one wondered why there has been such a mass exodus of students from India to other countries? Indian parents who lament that their children are immigrating abroad need to understand the prime reasons behind this tough decision. Those who seriously intend to pursue academics, especially in the social science and humanities fields don't find too many options in India today. The few good universities remaining are also facing budget cuts and are being forced to align philosophically with the present political leadership in the country, to merely survive.

Higher education in India has seen better days and I was fortunate to witness that myself. I had learnt the ABCs of Political Science in my undergraduate college, studied the technical definitions of a range of political processes and regimes there but what they actually looked like when applied in a society is something I discovered in my Masters at Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU). For the first time, I was exposed to rigorous methodical investigation of social revolutions and political upheavals in the core courses. And also for the first time, I could ask questions that came to my mind without feeling awkward or self-conscious because I was in an environment where students were not judged because they were curious. My subject became a living, breathing entity, a real-life experience, a novelty in itself, and not just some stuffy textbook material I needed to memorize and print in examinations to acquire my higher education degree.

I remember how the professors at JNU did not generally give us class-room restricted examinations at the end of the semester. Instead we were encouraged to pick topics related to the courses and carry out in-depth secondary research. No one pressured us to finish assignments or attend classes. We simply did all that because we were genuinely motivated to hone our critical thinking. It was challenging at times but also invigorating and made us feel truly grown up, like our thought process and analysis really mattered in the real World.

There were other kind of challenges that irked some of our pampered selves though, like learning to survive in a hostel for the first time, enduring the hot, dry weather of Delhi and being served bitter gourd and lentil that smelled like burnt plastic for dinner, but all that had nothing to do with academics. Some of us would fall ill often, but that was all a part of growing our immunity to survive in the real World outside. Overall, the two years at Jawaharlal Nehru University taught me two important life lessons. First, to think critically and boldly. Second, to be open minded.

Last year, when I went back to JNU after sixteen years, I found myself in the same old dusty campus I had left behind. Much remains the same. The overgrown bushy vegetation crowding the walking trails, colorful posters adorning the walls of the School of Social Science buildings, a relaxed group of students playing gully cricket after class, folks stopping for cups of tea at the rickety food shacks, the usual rush to the libraries to collect or return books, the longish line in front of the Xerox machine, a few lone figures scattered on the steps of the Social Science Department staring at nothing in particular, lost in a World of their own. There has never been anything flashy about the campus or the students in it. Simplicity has been the only ongoing style since its' inception. Visibly the two things that seemed substantially different was the lack of serpentine lines of students in front of the phone booths, as most students own a mobile phone



now and the fresh sprinkling of red brick buildings, added here and there to accommodate the increased number of students in the campus.

As I strolled through the familiar landscape, my mind was extra alert, taking in the details and making note of the energy level in the campus, but nothing extraordinary caught my eyes. I had read so many articles and seen such disturbing videos of the JNU “sedition” row in the last two years that I had foolishly expected some kind of filmy riot to break out at any moment, but that did not happen. The campus remained calm and studious as always.

My initial reaction after reading the media articles about the 2016 row had been like many others. *Why did the students have to kick up a useless fuss over Afzal Guru when there were so many other real issues in India?* I had wondered. But since then I have had the time to ponder upon the significance of the episode. Perhaps the messaging was wrong, the slogans were somewhat unwise yet none of it was ill-intentioned, I realized over time. Instead of nit picking on the semantics around the event, it could be far more constructive to scrape the surface and try to decipher what they were really trying to examine in the event that gave rise to so much unwanted excitement and presented the entire nation the excuse to ridicule a well-functioning university and reduce it to a petty cliché with “Desh drohi (anti-national)” and other colorful allegations pouring out of the mouths of an ignorant mass of people.

It all started with a cultural event in February, 2016. It was an art and photo exhibition primarily discussing the “struggle of Kashmiri people for their democratic right to self- determination.” It was organized by Kashmiri Indian students, and was supposed to be an important bridge between the two major types of status given to Afzal Guru--- a terrorist or a martyr? It was a thorny topic I agree, full of inflammable sentiments and bitter personal experiences, but the organizers had not predicted that it would snowball into such a major controversy.

What followed was pure political drama, aided by some irresponsible Indian news channels. Soon after JNU Students Union President Kanhaiya Kumar was arrested, slammed with Sections 124A (Sedition)¹ and 120B (criminal conspiracy) of the Indian Penal Code. Investigations into the incident were carried out by the Delhi government and the University administration. Neither could find enough evidence against Kumar and declared that the controversial slogans came from outsider participants and not the students in JNU.

It was a lot of sound-bites, a half year of free picnic for journalists and aspiring politicians who milked the event and the university to the extreme. For those who are not aware of the politics around it, this event could seem to have arrived oddly out of the blue but, in a way it signaled the beginning of an end. The sedition row controversy brought JNU to the national limelight, but the process of disrupting the university from within had already begun two years ago in 2014.

Romila Thapar, eminent historian and one of the founding members of JNU stated in a Frontline magazine [interview](#)² earlier this year that the founding Vice-Chancellor of JNU, G.

¹Sedition Law is a colonial law dating back to 1837, used to suppress Indians when they were protesting against the British rule before Indian Independence. Today it is loosely used to arrest anyone who makes any critical comment against the government. Previously, social activists like Binayak Sen, Arundhati Roy and cartoonist Aseem Trivedi have also been slammed by this law.

²“JNU's questioning minds a problem for indoctrinators”-Interview of Romila Thapar by Ziya Us Salam for Frontline magazine, April 27, 2018



Parthasarathi was clear about the function of the university. Its' purpose was to impart broad-based knowledge, and even more importantly, to teach students to think independently. Furthermore, the founding VC had taken a stance that the university must be accessible to all those that aspire to be its students and are qualified to be so. These guiding principles in the founding of JNU were followed in subsequent years and gave it a somewhat different orientation from that of most other universities in the country.

The system worked mostly as I have personally experienced. There were no compulsory attendance rules, yet the classes happened on time and were well attended. The exams were held regularly, the grading system was transparent and fair, the relationship between the professors and the students was based on mutual respect and the willingness to collaborate rather than maintain a formal teacher student dichotomy.

It was not perfect always. There was bad infrastructure for the students to endure---lack of water and at times no electricity in the hostels, but the students learnt to shrug it off by saying, *at such a subsidized rate, no accommodation will be perfect.*

There were some sexual harassment cases, but GSCASH, the University's Gender Sensitization Committee against Sexual Harassment acted as a tough watch dog and a strong deterrent for all those elements who thought they could get away with disrespectful behavior. The lesser known fact is that GSCASH was equally supportive of men who made complaints against women. Its' agenda was to prevent and punish sexual harassment. It was neither feminist, nor radical in essence. Students on campus felt safe enough to venture out whenever they wanted, wearing whatever they chose. They could socialize with others without being attacked verbally or physically. Delhi did not feel safe, it still does not feel so, but JNU did.

The academic bodies in JNU like the Academic Council and the Executive Council were previously coherent. The decision-making process regarding the curriculum, the admission criteria etc., was democratic with open participation from students and professors alike.

The composition and the activities of these academic bodies have transformed in the last four years. Ever since Professor M. Jagadesh Kumar, the current Vice-Chancellor has come to office lots of such changes have come about. The JNU Executive Committee last year dissolved GSCASH and in its place appointed the Internal Complaints Committee. More recently, the Academic Council passed the resolution to start a new department called Center for National Security Studies to teach courses like "Islamic Terrorism". The student union representatives were not allowed to participate in this council meeting and the teacher's union office bearer who protested against the title "Islamic Terrorism" and suggested that at least they should rename it "Religious Terrorism" was told by the chair that his "objection" would be considered "later".

There was an attempt earlier this year to make attendance compulsory not only for the Masters students but also for the MPhil and Doctoral candidates registered at JNU. That met with a strong resistance from students and professors who found the rule absurd as the university never really had any attendance problem.

The university has been constantly bombarded with change in rules without any academic logic and now with Kumar's arrest and the following harassment of the student's union, it is clear that JNU is being attacked in every way possible, given the slightest excuse.

The agenda is clear.



An institute that helps free thinking, makes students bold enough to criticize the government actions, is a threat to the authoritarian regime the country is heading towards. And if you are thinking that it is just Delhi, the center with a particular party in power that is stamping on the right to freedom of expression, think twice. If you rake history you will be surprised to find that such atrocities have taken place in regional states too, that too in those states that have had a very different political orientation than the present party in power at the center.

Anti-nationals, Terrorists, Naxalites, Maoists---these are just few of the common terms used arbitrarily for intellectuals who have spoken up against the government excesses and unfairness from time to time. And the root of all intellectualism, seem to be the universities, especially those that have strong social science departments. So, what does one do to stop them? Reduce them part by part in a hushed clandestine manner and then finally destroy them altogether.

The thought that might pop into your minds at this point may be on the lines of “I understand why you feel a certain amount of attachment to your alma mater and would indulge in a passionate rant like this, but I did not study there, no one in my family did, so why should I care?”

One should care. If one is interested in nation building and the safeguarding of democracy, one should care. If one is interested in keeping their children from migrating in large flocks away from India, one should care. And here are the reasons why.

First, universities with strong social science programs are an asset. What many don't realize is that they prepare the next generation of social work practitioners, policy makers and researchers with competencies to address our society's multiple needs. Before the media and the ill-informed Indian public attacked the JNU students and researchers, calling them leeches living off public money while soldiers died defending our borders, they should have done their homework well (perhaps they did not do so because it was not “compulsory” just like the attendance in JNU). That could have informed them that JNU alumni are everywhere. They have been representing India nationally and internationally as civil servants, diplomats and renowned journalists. They have been participating energetically in social activism³ and in the electoral process. Many have become elected officials and several have been the driving brain behind important national projects. A fun fact is that even the man behind the present central government's “Make in India” campaign is a JNUite.

Second, central universities like JNU are special as they enhance diversity and teaches tolerance which is the exact opposite of what the popular brand of nationalism in India is propagating now. JNU welcomes all students, whether they are from metropolitan cities or small villages and that is much needed in a nation that has so many cultures and religions coexisting. It teaches young citizens empathy and compassion which is the only way to proceed in a multicultural nation like India. To proliferate a narrow definition of nationalism in a complicated mix of cultures and to close down universities that try to understand such a complex mesh of ideologies will only worsen the regional uprisings that have raised their heads repeatedly and result in an ugly civil war in the country.

Third, in today's world where a barrage of information hits us in waves regularly through conventional media, social media and WhatsApp, it becomes difficult to separate authentic

³“15 Noted JNU Alumni Who Have Proudly Represented India Nationally and Internationally” by Sampada Sharma, scoopwhoop.com, Feb 26, 2016



information from misinformation. Social science teaches one to see through conspiracy theories, rumors and political propaganda by asking the right questions and builds the ability to analyze the answer objectively.

Fourth, it is not just JNU that has been facing the heat, other universities like Delhi's Ambedkar University, Hyderabad University, the Tata Institute of Social Science are all facing tremendous budget cuts. Political appointments at the level of Vice Chancellors have already started in many of these universities. Soon there will be no value of a teacher's merit and competencies and that can only mean sub-standard higher education for an entire nation's youth.

Fifth, another disturbing proposal is the revival of the Central Universities Act of 2009 which asks the central universities to follow a common admission procedure, common syllabus and transferable faculty which does not fit the needs of the large, heterogeneous population it is supposed to serve. "This proposal will minimize autonomy, narrow the space for innovation and create a teaching culture where creativity and critical thinking will be curbed," said Zoya Hasan⁴. She is one of my favorite professors from JNU and is currently the ICSSR National Fellow at Council for Social Development in New Delhi. Gradually but surely, the country's entire education system is changing as the textbooks get re-written and the syllabus is filled with mythology and religious texts. The central government has already quietly appointed a committee of scholars a year ago. The intention of this committee according to Reuters⁵ is, "To use evidence such as archaeological finds and DNA to prove that today's Hindus are directly descended from the land's first inhabitants many thousands of years ago, and make the case that ancient Hindu scriptures are fact not myth." This sounds as scary as the Nazi use of the "perfect Aryan child" propaganda to control Germany that ultimately led to the nation's terrible downfall. The universities are the last bastion upholding freedom of thought and speech. Once they come down, the rest of the slide will follow soon and it will affect all of us calling India our motherland, whether we live there or outside.

While so many Indians are striding forward, contributing significantly to World politics, science and economy, back in India the education system that bolstered this generation of successful Indians, honed their skills and set them intellectually free, is being shackled in regressive chains. Ultimately, nationalists of all stripes in the nation must realize that India's borders need to be defended not just against the enemies outside but also against alienation within the borders. To call the idealist youth engaged in building crucial cultural bridges as anti-national is not only legally absurd but also politically dangerous for a nation in constant ideological flux. Parents and concerned Indian citizens should note that the future of our country is the youth. By alienating and banning the youth for their ability and will to think independently just to serve the cheap needs of a political party is an act of "sedition" in the process of nation building, by itself.

⁴"No ache din for higher education" by Zoya Hasan, The Hindu, April 2, 2016

⁵"By rewriting of history, Hindu nationalists aim to assert their dominance over India" by Rupam Jain and Tom Lasseter, Reuters Investigates, March 6, 2018



Souvik Dutta

Shuka and Janaka

यतः सर्वाणि भूतानि प्रतिभान्ति स्थितानि च /

यत्रैवोपषमं यान्ति तस्मै सत्यात्मने नमः //

yataḥ sarvāṇi bhūtāni pratibhānti sthitāni ca /

yatraivōpaśamaṁ yānti tasmai satyātmanē namaḥ //

~ *Yōgavāsīṣṭhaḥ, Verse 1*

Translation – I bow in reverence to the Ultimate source of existence in this universe. The nature of this source is pure and unadulterated Truth. It is from this Truth that all beings radiate into existence. It is this truth which sustains all beings. It is this truth alone where all beings eventually dissolve into.

There is wisdom in truth, knowledge in truth but how important is the source of this knowledge? Who has the qualification of being a Guru? Do we associate Guru with his/her attire, designation or stature in society?

Ancient seers always left behind for generations deeply encoded philosophical lessons in beautiful simple stories. We find such a beautiful story in a classical text of Sanatan Dharma – Yogavasistha. Yogavasistha is an amazing book on Vedanta. The author of this classic text never thought it was important to mention his/her name. This has been the highest philosophy of Sanatan Dharma. What the Guru had to offer was more important than who the Guru was. Some scholars say the text was written as part of Ramayana by Valmiki and later taken out of it to become an independent text for students. The text has also been summarized and verses reduced to form a shorter version of the text called Laghu Yogavasistha. The text is dedicated to Rsi Vasistha and is in a form of a dialogue between the Rsi and his student, none other than Sri Ramchandra.

In the classic, there is a story about Shuka and the king Janaka. This is one of my favorite stories which I often mention in my seminars when we discuss the importance of perception. Another version of the same story is very popular among Sikhs and found in the text Aadh Guru Granth Bhagat Mala. I will combine minor variations of both the stories and present it here for you.

After one hundred years of austerity, Vyasa churned Shuka out of a stick of fire. This is the story of the birth of Shuka as per the great epic Mahabharata. Since Shuka was born with great ascetic power, he was never interested in the life of a householder. Now, the Vedic mode of life had four ashrams – Brahmacharya (student), Grihastha (householder), Vanaprastha (retired) and Sannyasa (renunciate).

During Brahmacharya ashram, Shuka, on advice from his illustrious father, went to study with Brihaspati, the Guru of the Devas. Brihaspati taught Shuka all the knowledge he had. Shuka having



received this knowledge glowed like the gods themselves. He returned to his father Vyasa after studying with Brihaspati for many years.

Vyasa then instructed Shuka to enter into Grihastha ashram. Shuka respectfully declined and said that he had no intention of entering into material life. His illustrious father sensed that this arrogance in his Shuka stemmed from the pristine wisdom he gained from Brihaspati. Wisdom should only result in humility. If wisdom in a person causes ego and arrogance, such an individual is surely on a path of failure. Vyasa being the father of Shuka loved him dearly wanted to correct Shuka before it was too late.

Vyasa instructed Shuka to go to his next Guru to gain the knowledge of Grihastha ashram. Shuka was always eager to learn and so was very excited to learn the name of his second Guru, especially after having such a great teacher as Brihaspati as his first Guru.

Vyasa spoke "Dearest son Shuka, I would like you to go to the kingdom of Mithila and request the king of the kingdom, the great king Janaka to be your Guru. Consider this as your father's order."

Shuka was extremely surprised and exclaimed – "Illustrious father, your word is my command but do you think a king immersed in deep material pleasures will be able to teach me anything worthwhile in life?"

Vyasa smiled and left. Shuka started his journey to the kingdom of Mithila.

When Shuka reached the gates of the Mithila, the guards stopped him and asked him his identification. Shuka, with great confidence and expectation of respect, said he was the son of the illustrious Vyasa and requested an audience of King Janaka. When Janaka heard that Shuka had come to visit him and what he had mentioned to the guards, he asked the guards to take him to the normal guest quarters and made him stay there waiting for His audience for 3 days and 3 nights. Shuka was shocked by this behavior but he couldn't leave without meeting King Janaka as was instructed by his father. So we patiently waited. On the 4th day, Shuka was escorted into the prime guest house with beautiful maidens and was offered kingly garments and ornaments and delicious meals. This shocked him too as he thought any wise man would know that a student seeking wisdom is hardly interested in worldly pleasures.

On the 5th day, Shuka was escorted to King Janaka's palace. Janaka was sitting on a royal golden throne wearing kingly garments, expensive jewelry, attended by women all around him. The scene confirmed the assumption Shuka had been developing all these days, King Janaka is immersed in deep materialism and materialistic pleasures of the world. Shuka thought to himself – "There is nothing wrong with a king to be materialistic. However, I still don't understand why my wise father sent me to this materialistic king to learn and accept him as my Guru."

On seeing Shuka, Janaka like any other king went up to him, greeted him and offered his seat. Then Janaka asked Shuka – "Dear Shuka, please accept my pranam. Do let me know how I can help you and what is the purpose of your visit?"

Shuka said, "King Janaka, please accept my pranam. I was born from the fire of austerity of my illustrious father, Vyasa. I have studied the shastras under the Guru of the gods himself. After the completion of my Brahmacharya ashram, I returned home and my father wanted me to enter the Grihastha ashram. When I mentioned that I had no interest in Grihastha ashram, my father insisted that I visit you and accept you as my Guru to learn more about Grihastha ashram."



Janaka smiled and asked – “Dearest Shuka, do you think there is anything to learn in Grihastha ashram?”

Shuka confidently replied – “King Janaka, I honestly feel it is a waste of time to even learn about to this ashram. I don’t believe Grihastha ashram can teach me anything of value to me. I don’t understand the necessity of this ashram at all.”

Janaka smiled and asked Shuka to take a tour of the kingdom and visit him the next morning. Shuka took a tour of the beautiful city of Mithila. Like any other kingdom, people were busy trading, buying, selling, fighting, loving, caring, abusing. All possible mundane events were taking place. Shuka tried to see if there was any spiritual wisdom in them but he could find none.

On the 6th day morning, Shuka arrived to see Janaka. Janaka spoke to Shuka – “Dearest Shuka, I have arranged for a beautiful festival in the city. Many people would like to seek your blessings since they came to know you are the son of Vyasa. Some important scholars would like to debate and discuss the shashtras with you as well. You will have a busy day ahead of you. Please take this cup filled to the brim with oil. During your day, please ensure not a single drop of oil spills from this cup. If a single drop of oil spills from this bowl, my guards will behead you right there at that spot. Enjoy your day!”

Saying this, Janaka left the scene. Shuka was shaking holding the cup of oil in his hands. Two guards immediately stood by his side and escorted him to his chariot. Shuka, however, was focused completely on his bowl of oil. The chariot passed through the city where there was a beautiful dance presentation for Shuka but Shuka didn’t even raise his eyes from the bowl to see it. The chariot stopped at a school where scholars were waiting to discuss the knowledge of the scriptures with Shuka but Shuka didn’t get down from the chariot. Finally, the chariot stopped near Janaka’s palace and Shuka very carefully got down from the chariot, entered the palace and got in front of King Janaka.

Janaka was surprised to see Shuka back so early. He asked – “Dearest Shuka how did you enjoy the city, the dances, the scholarly discussions and the debates?”

Shuka, still focused at the bowl slowly moved to the king and handed the bowl over. Shuka said – “King Janaka, I have no idea what kind of a joke this was? How could I have seen anything in the city when you had mentioned to me that not a single drop of oil from the bowl should fall out? The whole time my complete concentration was on the bowl of oil. Please note that not a single drop of oil spilled from the bowl.”

Janaka smiled and asked Shuka to see him at sunset the next day.

On the 7th day, Shuka went to meet Janaka at sunset and was surprised to see the scene. Janaka was clad only in a white dhoti, no gold, no ornaments. Janaka was alone in a small room with a stone Shiva Linga. The room was also very humble, like a cottage of a Rsi. There were some texts in one corner, a rumble seat, and a lamp. Shuka was very puzzled indeed. There was a radiance glowing from the face of Janaka.

Janaka smiled seeing Shuka and asked him to sit with him.

He spoke – “First three days I tested your patience Shuka. 4th day, I exposed you to materialism and wanted to see how you react to it. You passed my test on all the 4 days. You could have easily left but your father’s words were more important to you than my insult. Materialistic



abundance didn't impact you either. 5th day, I tested you with perception. Your real test started that day. Perception is the key thing to learn about in the Grihastha ashram. You saw my material abundance and measured who I would be. The 6th day was your test. That cup I gave you is manas (mind), the oil in the cup is Atma (spirit) completely focused on Paramatma (God). Only a perfectly still mind can hold an Atma which is focused on Paramatma. This is why the cup has to be still, a single ripple in the mind will disturb the focus of the Atma. The challenge of the Grihastha ashram is that although the mind has to be still, the Atma has to be focused on the Paramatma, the body has to be in a constant state of mobility and engage with other people to help them evolve. This was the chariot and all the festivities of the city. As a king, I have to fulfill the dharma of my position, I have to be physically present in my kingdom, run and rule my state, take decisions for others, provide justice, look after the welfare of the citizens but in doing so I have to maintain the perfect balance of the mind. People will perceive me in many different ways – some will call me cruel, some materialistic, some pleasure seeking, some arrogant, some helpful but those images are not me. What I have is not a measure of who I am. This is the most important lesson of Grihastha ashram, my dear Shuka. Only in the evening, at sunset, after completing my duties as a king and before embarking upon my duties as a husband and father, do I get one ghatika (48 minutes) time for myself. During this time, I worship my aradhya Shiva, read my texts and teach anyone who is interested to learn anything from me. This is my life as a king."

Shuka was in tears. He fell to the feet of Janaka and said – "Respected King Janaka, please accept me as your most humble student. You are not only a Raja, but you are also a Rsi. From today, the world will know you as Rajarshi."

It is said that Shuka learned about Grihastha ashram from Janaka for many years. He learned to respect incomplete common people and learned to see the best in people so that he could help them evolve. Some say, Shuka even went to have a family of his own. Some say he always remained a Brahmachari. Nevertheless, the encounter with Janaka changed the talented, arrogant, skillful Shuka to a humble, humane, wise Shuka.







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