



বাংলায়ন



BALCONY





Paul Kunda 2020



# Batayan

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March, 2020



Editor  
Jill Charles





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**Tanima Basu** is a senior Statistician at the University of Michigan. Her mind is always crunching numbers but a stream of Art runs deep inside that she inherited from her artist dad.

#### Front Cover

Waited for cherry blossom

#### Payel Kundu



I have always had a deep interest in the minds of others, and how they experience the world. I pursue this interest partially as a neuroscientist, and partially through my art. It is impossible to truly experience something through the eyes of someone else, but my work tries to capture the experiences of those around me, and inevitably, how I experience them as well through the lens of my depiction. I love sharing my thoughts with others in this visual way, and I love seeing the contents of other people's brains in the form of their art as well.

#### Front Inside Cover

Quarantine

#### Rikta Rudra

Perth, Western Australia



**Rikta Rudra** – Born in Madhya Pradesh – Jabalpur, living in Perth, Australia for the past 35 years. Her profession is a school teacher specialising in Early Childhood. She enjoys travelling, gardening and music – mostly Rabindra Sangeet.

#### Title Page

Kookaburra in Backyard, Sydney

44th International Kolkata Book Fair,  
Kolkata (Australia Stall)

#### Back Inside Cover

#### Alpana Guha

Perth, Western Australia



**Alpana Guha** graduated from Lady Brabourne College, did her Masters in comparative literature from Jadavpur University. She did a diploma in French language from Alliance Francaise. She traveled worldwide now lives in Perth and a professional interpreter.

Sea Beach, Denmark, Western Australia

















#### Back Cover

বাতয়ান 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

What does it mean to connect with another person? When we meet, we connect by saying hello, waving or shaking hands. When we know each other well we connect by sharing our thoughts, feelings and experiences.

For the past five weeks our connections to the world and to each other have been tested. The coronavirus has spread across Asia, Europe, the Americas and Australia. In the absence of a cure, the best prevention of the virus has been social distancing, staying at least 6 feet from others, wearing face masks and remaining at home instead of going into work or school.

I feel lucky that my husband and I have jobs where we can work from home. Many workers in restaurants and retail stores have lost their jobs and businesses and had to go on unemployment. The US government has sent grants to businesses to help them, but the uncertainty of when people will go back to work is hard. Many small businesses cannot last more than one month without income.

As we stay distant from our family members, friends and coworkers, we seek new ways to connect. I connect to nature with walks in my neighborhood seeing the robins and daffodils. I wear a face mask in the grocery store to protect myself and the workers there. My friends and I call each other and visit by phone and text messages instead of in person. I attend church services online, clicking on links to hear the prayers and hymns. For Easter, I used an online video conference to see my parents, sisters, niece and nephew.

Editing and writing for *Batayan* is one important way to connect to my friends and family and to all our readers. The theme of this issue is the balcony, a space where a person at home reaches out to see and interact with the world. I think of myself and my neighbors standing on our balconies, able to see and hear each other but not close enough to touch or risk infection. Because it is online *Batayan* can be accessed from anywhere and it creates a community including its contributors and everyone who reads it.

We hope you enjoy the English pieces of this month's *Batayan*. In this spring issue of *Batayan*, there are many beginnings and endings. Shuvra Das explores life and death and nature in *On Silences*. Reach into your mind for calm and meditate with Allen McNair. Enjoy a review of the engaging film *Court* by Amanita Sen. Face life's challenges while finding a friendship with Kathy Powers. Feel the loss of an animal friend in Malina Damjanovic's *Kilo*.

We hope you enjoy the spring issue of *Batayan*. Please send us your stories, poems, essays, reviews and travelogues for the summer issue. Stay safe, stay well and stay connected!

**Jill Charles**

Batayan English Editor

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## Shuvra Das

### On Silences

Are all silences the same?

Silence that engulfs a concert  
when Philip Glass plays;  
the quiet that grows all night,  
and drenches the early rays.

The moment before a glass  
shatters on the floor;  
the hush as a child naps  
and we tiptoe by the door.

The noiseless empty beach  
between the breaking waves;  
the silence of the headstones  
among the nameless graves.

The echoes that are lost  
in a twisted canyon maze;  
the lull of darkness that drops  
before a thunderstorm rage.

The eager pause of the doctor  
as a newborn lets out a cry;  
the silence of a guilty nation as  
the naked rulers lie.

The instant when worlds go dark  
as the killer empties his gun;  
the voices that are strangled  
when the hangman's job is done.

---

**Shuvra Das** is a Professor of Mechanical Engineering and lives in the greater Detroit area. He graduated from IIT Kharagpur in India and finished his PhD from Iowa State University. Photography, painting, writing, theater, and travel are some of his passions. Lately, he has been spending a lot of time in political activism.

---



## Kathy Powers

### As You Get to Know Me

*Hey you, as you get to know me,  
You'll see me on many precipices.  
Sometimes I want to physically jump;  
Sometimes I enjoy the view.*

*Sometimes I'm a rock supporting those in needs;  
Sometimes I'm a lone rock,  
Feeling no pain, never crying.  
Sometimes I'm an evergreen growing in the rocks.*

*Sometimes I imagine drifting through the free sky  
Never crashing, just feeling free.  
As you get to know me, you'll see I keep ultra busy  
And forget the mood swings that warp my reality view.*

*I'm busy, busy, busy  
I forget my grief;  
I forget the past.  
I force the present upon myself.*





## Balarka Banerjee

### This Tribe

When the chronicles of this tribe  
Will finally be written  
I will be able to save none of you.  
When the story of these times  
Will finally be told  
The pages themselves will bleed  
As the words of cruelty and greed  
Will cut open wounds  
On these virgin tree-borne papers.  
A story of a people born too late  
Burdened by the weight of history  
And the expectations  
Of their own creations.  
They strived too hard  
For far too little  
And succumbed to the  
Mad hungry call of their  
Own survival instincts  
Of blood, lust and bloodlust  
And lost all self awareness  
For the single minded  
gratification of self  
In the end this tribe will  
Not be able to save themselves.  
From their own legacy  
But look for them when the drums play  
When they join that mad sweaty dance  
Look at them between the beats  
And for a moment you might just see

---

**Balarka Banerjee** is a Molecular Biologist by profession and an executive in a Biotech company in Sydney. Besides science his other passions are Drama — writing, acting, directing — Poetry and Art. He likes good cinema and music. He is a foodie and a good cook. No wonder he enjoys writing about his experiences and interests.

---



Tapas K Ray

## SMOKE



Oil on canvas

She comes from a village  
you dare not know  
to the market of  
your urban shadow.  
you can exploit the frustration in her  
She only listens to the distant thunder.

Across her bronzed heart  
and magnetic gaze  
She stares through you,  
to the empty space.  
She seeks her peace deep within  
with each drag she takes in-between.

"You, creature of market  
might value my labor less  
Cause all you want  
is a pound of flesh  
But with shutters down, one deep drag I take  
through the purity of smoke I sell my hate."

**Tapas Kumar Roy** – Tapas is a researcher of Economics by profession. He lives in the US. Predominantly he is an artist and a painter. Because of this he has a unique way to look into things. Tapas is also a poet. His artwork and poems have been published in magazines in the US and India.



Jerry Kaiser

Lockdown Art



**Jerry Kaiser** — Jerry is a lifelong floral artist as well as a passionate human rights volunteer. He works settling newly arrived refugees in Chicago.





Allen F. McNair

## **You Are Awareness Realized**

You are awareness realized from the essence of your thoughts.  
If you experience negative thoughts within your mind and heart,  
Your perception of your reality will be negative in whatever the  
Circumstances you encounter during the day of your life.

Rather than dwell on the negative, you can choose to look  
For the positive situations in your present experience now.  
You have your life, your breath, your wakefulness today.  
Don't force your mind to push out the uncomfortable thoughts.

You can remember the positive actions that you wish to take.  
Negative feelings are not facts to rule your consciousness.  
By accepting their presence in your mind, they cannot rule you.  
They are a passing phase of your active mind, to be let go.

By letting these thoughts float within, not acting upon them,  
Other more positive thoughts and feelings will naturally enter.  
There is room in the mind for both the negative and positive.  
Dwell not on the negative but naturally accept each thought.

Let kindness and charitable thinking be the rule of your day.  
You will see life in all of its qualities, not colored by blackness.  
Life has shades of experience, not absolute black and white.  
Allow the windows of your perception to be clear and bright.

You have a choice to dwell on the darkness or then turn on the light.  
You can experience a fuller life of reality when you release your fears.  
Even these fears can be a signal of needing to change your life.  
Embrace each thought to motivate such a welcome change today.

A strange woman on the train warned me not to do what she knew  
I was thinking of doing at the moment of our exchange of words.  
At first, I refused to believe that I would do anything I shouldn't.  
Yet upon serious reflection, I realized that I could change my life.

I reflected upon the choice of my actions of hot temper in my life.  
In the past experiences of this uncomfortable emotion, my thoughts  
Ruled my choice of words, expressing profane language aloud.  
My day seemed dreary and black, crushing my spirit deeply.



I soon realized that I had positive events to look forward to in my future.  
The experience of satisfaction from these events could be welcome.  
An evenness of emotions was a pleasant alternative to discomfort.  
Even a stranger has something to contribute to the possibility of change.

The most unusual of experiences can be positively motivating when  
We turn on the light of truth to brighten our awareness of our reality.  
Our thinking determines our perception of our very life circumstances.  
We can be at our best by opening the door to everything life offers us.

---

**Allen McNair** — He is 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*.

“The instruments for the quest of Truth are as simple as they are difficult. They may appear quite impossible to an arrogant person, and quite possible to an innocent child.”

— M K Gandhi (My Experiments with Truth)





**M. C. Rydel**

**In Memory of Gregory Curry**

He died about a week before the virus  
Locked all of us into our homes  
For months, waiting for his funeral postponed.

As if capsized, shipwrecked, marooned,  
Surviving on crabs and coconuts,  
We dared not step into the street.

The city outside could, just as well, be the sea:  
Underwater playgrounds with no kids,  
Discarded papers, wrappers in the current ,

Apartments with their shades pulled,  
Daffodils blooming for no one  
The few castaways left, avoiding each other's breath.

Into this deep, we must commit Curry's body.  
His sartorial presence tailored and pressed,

A cape, a cap, and calabash pipe,  
A room at the Plaza, seven hundred a night.

What coral tinged bottom will welcome him?  
What skeleton Capote will host his masked ball?

Masks of sequined gold, ivory and silver,  
Pairs of Roman masks black, pearls in shells;

A whole rhinestone, ram horn, antlered room of masks  
Hides his newly released soul like a dressing screen.

We don't want him washing up like Shelley,  
So we take him at least four nautical miles out.



If we're lucky he'll find the old shipwreck  
Where souls stand in doorways to resurrect.

The missing bottom of the doorframe  
Their route to Elysium beneath a broken mast.

The sea receives its honored guest  
The colder the deeper, the better, the best.

Curry haunts beaches - now off limits to all.  
He boards schooners like a well-dressed corsair.  
His soul rises from the sea and hovers in the air.



## Malina Damjanovic

### Kilo

Kilo my hero my heart you have touched.  
In more ways than I would have thought such.

A gentle giant with a slobbering smile.  
You brought such pleasure and made my  
day worthwhile.

I am saddened by your death, it happened  
to soon. I will love you forever Big Guy, from  
here to the moon.

Rest in peace Kilo your suffering is at an end.  
Until one day we will meet again.



---

Malina Damjanovic grew up in Chicago. She worked in both retail and real estate. She attended Ravenswood, Lakeview High School and Loyola University, where she found her passion for writing. She enjoys spending time with family and friends. Her hobbies are hiking, pets, arts, all the city has to offer.

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## Maureen Peifer

### Mildred Alecucucus

It's gray and opaque outside, dull winter light struggling through the dining room windows like it's real work to make you think it's daytime. We have to play quietly cuz Dad's asleep in our bedroom, just home from his all night shift at J&J Lithography. Mom's in the living room with the radio on really low- Arthur Godfrey or something – reading the Tribune and sipping her first Pepsi of the day.

"Well," says Marty "how about the Maureen Marty and Ginny game?"

"Yeah," Ginny says excitedly, "yeah, we're on a pirate ship. I'll be the first mate, you're the captain, Marty, and Mo can be the prisoner we just captured from the evil pirate Blackbeard whose ship we just sank."

Marty grabs one of dad's hats and a bandana and ties it over his eye while Ginny gets the swords and daggers from the toy box in the corner of the dining room. I start pulling the blankets and sheets off Uncle Connie's bed because the dining room is also Uncle Connie's bedroom. He's in college at Loyola and tends bar at night, so he's really not there much. We drape everything over the table. Ginny ties a sheet corner to the chandelier to make a sail and another corner to the top hinge of the built-in china cabinet.

"Careful," I hiss quietly, "remember what happened last time when you jumped up there and broke the turkey platter."

"Yeah, yeah," Ginny says impatiently.

"Now," Marty grins pulling out some string from the roll in the kitchen drawer by the stove, "We're going to have to tie you up."

"What!" I groan, "why do I always have to be the prisoner or a princess or some dumb thing?"

"Cuz you like all that dumb girl stuff," Ginny says. "You never want to climb and fight and stuff like we do."

"Okay", I cave in, "A-GAIN! FINE!!!" I crawl through the opening in between dad's old army blanket and the white wool striped Pendleton that drape the table and sit against the the table pedestal. "Can't you just pretend I'm tied up?"

"No, that's no fun!" Ginny asserts. "We'll just tie your body to the table and leave your hands-free. Okay?" Marty adds agreeably.

"Oh, you're such a chump!" Ginny again, "What if she escapes? she's Blackbeard's co-captain so she hates us."

Marty wraps the string around and around me and cuts it off with his new pocket knife, a Christmas gift from Uncle Connie. "Fine," I think. "I'll just hang out here with Mildred since I don't have a book and it's too dark to read down here anyway. As Ginny and Marty screw around above deck, I drift into conversation with my friend Mildred Alecucucus. Mildred and I have known each





other since I was two. She just showed up in our bedroom one day sitting on the edge of my bed while Marty slept in his crib - Ginny wasn't even around yet. She still doesn't know about Mildred. Marty knows about her, but he doesn't see her like I do.

She lives in the wardrobe side of our dresser - it's roomier there and she likes to hide between the dresses and sweaters. She's got braids like me, but hers are bright red with plaid bows. She usually wears overalls and a plaid shirt, hardly ever shoes, sometimes socks. Books are her favorite - just like me and she's got a magic doorway in the back of the wardrobe that lets her into the children's section of the big Library downtown on Randolph Street. I saw it once when Dad took us downtown to buy new winter coats and hats. We went to lunch at the Top of the Rock in the Prudential Building, the tallest place in Chicago. I begged to stop at the library cuz it was right on the way. It was so cool, all those beautiful tile designs and the Tiffany domes and the huge marble staircases. The children's room was like heaven. and Mildred could go there anytime she wanted - lucky!

"So," Mildred says, "what you been reading lately?"

"Hans Brinker and the Silver Skates, it's really cool. Did you know they would skate on the frozen canals in Holland in winter and go all over the place?"

"Yeah, I think I heard that," Mildred says dreamily. "Imagine living someplace that has canals instead of streets like Broadway or Clark Street. It must be so fun. What about summer, do they swim around?"

"No," I say knowledgeably, I read about it in my Peter Martin geography book at school. There are lots of barges and boats and bridges and regular streets too. People walk a lot and take buses and I heard they ride bikes too. Sounds like a really cool place."

"So, back to Hans - does he do great stuff?"

"Yeah, he tries to win this prize skating so he can help his family. I'm not finished yet so I don't know how it ends."

"Bet he wins," Mildred nods smugly. "What's with your sister? Why does she always want to tie you up?"

"I don't know - she loves to have adventures in be in charge. She thinks I'm too bossy - I heard her tell Marty - and too nice. She hates dolls and girl stuff - paper dolls, dresses, tea parties.

She'd rather play with Marty - soldiers, Lincoln Logs, and climb around. She loves to climb and run and stuff."

"No dolls at all?" Mildred asks.

"Well, not really, just Charlie."

"Who's Charlie?"

"Oh, Charlie Peifer, her stuffed chimpanzee. "He's got white plastic shoes and yellow overalls with suspenders. She does stuff like hang him from the curtain rod or tie him to the bedpost.

She says he's tough and loves to escape from any knot she can tie. Last week she snuck Dad's razor and shaving cream into our closet and shaved him - his hair is really short now."



"Did she get in trouble?"

"Yeah, Dad was mad cuz she clogged up his new Gillette. She had to dry all the dishes for two weeks instead of trading days with me like we usually do. She thought his hair would grow back, she told me later."

"What a dope," said Mildred. "Wanna hear a good story?"

"Yes please," I smiled.

"Well, I heard the librarian down at the library tell this one the other day," she begins. "It's all about a girl called Madeline and she lives in Paris."

"I'd love to go there," I whisper.

"Me too - anyway - yeah, so these girls live at an orphanage with their governess Madame somebody or another and travel all over Paris in matching coats and sailor hats in perfect lines of 2, having such adventures."

"Hey you," Ginny sticks her head in, "get out here and help us hoist the sails and swab the deck!"

How can I when I'm tied up?

"Oh yeah," she grins. "Captain Marty, free the hostage!" she yells roughly. Just then Mom comes in to say it's time for lunch - would we like to eat on board or row over to the kitchen, scuse me, port to dine? "On board," Ginny and Marty say instantly.

Portside for me, I'm sick of being below deck. "See you later, Mildred. Hey," I whisper. "I want to hear more about Madeline."

She winks and vanishes.

---

**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. Her summers are spent in Amsterdam, which inspired this poem.

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## Srabani Roy Akilla

### **T for Tea** **A Peaceful Power of a Beverage**

We have hardly seen such unfolding scenes of enmity and hospitality together in recent times! Last year, on 14th Feb, Valentine's day, when the world was getting ready to celebrate love with Roses and Candles, India faced a brutal terrorist attack, on a convoy of vehicles in Pulwama, Kashmir. The attack took the lives of 40 security personnel. In reply, agitated Indian Govt had immediately launched a mission to destroy Terrorist Training camps alongside India-Pakistan border, precisely speaking, entering into Pakistan's soil. During that mission, Abhinandan Vardhaman, an Air force fighter Pilot from India, had to eject himself from his aircraft Mig 21 on Pakistan's land, as an emergency attempt to save his life when his jet was struck by a missile. There, he first got mobbed, beaten by the locals, later was rescued, blindfolded, interrogated and surprisingly was also offered a cup of Tea by some of the defense personnel of Pakistan. Back home, to his tensed nation India, a sight of its bloody, brave and beloved Soldier comforting himself with a warm cup of tea on the TV screen, was suddenly enough to bring some temporary relief and hope for his safe return. In a short video clip, we heard one Pakistani Army officer asking Abhinandan "How was the Tea ?" While sipping it, Abhinandan 's reply was: "Oh the Tea was fantastic, Thank you !".

I knew Abhinandan was at risk for his life, I knew my home country was panicking about his safe return, but I wanted to believe that no one in this world, can kill somebody after offering a cup of Tea. For a moment, silently T was for Tea, not for Terrorism. The cup in Abhinandan's hand looked like a powerful weapon loaded with a peaceful beverage. It was that very sight, which had captivated my attention among all chaos and pain. Abhinandan was later released and on March 1st, 2019, and was handed over to India at its Wagah Border.

But why Tea? Because Tea is still that ancient beverage, with which two neighboring, yet forever hostile countries India and Pakistan, share cultural heritage, seek joy, take refuge in their daily lives, and bring the entire family on a table to share stories of their own. Even Kashmir, for which the political tension, debate, and sporadic border fights are on for decades, is well known for its traditional 'Nun Chaye ' which is nothing but Salt Tea. But in the rest of India, Tea is usually popular with sugar.

Why not Coffee? Because, while Coffee mostly feels personal for individuals and romantic for couples, Tea is not only meant for family or a large number of friends and guests, it is also celebratory and symbolic, which perfectly suits densely populated India's or Pakistan's social, traditional close-knit family structure. Besides, when, in the west, Coffee makes a winter morning look picture perfect with a book in your hand, Tea is something, both in India and Pakistan, which waits for you in the evening, when you return home from work. Tea still means, both milk and sugar added and boiled with carefully collected Tea leaves of reputed brands like Darjeeling, Lipton, Tajmahal or Red label. Such Tea is not supposed to take care of your health or weight loss issue. Tea takes care of your erratic mood, emotional well being, and creative mind. If the coffee has a relation with snow in the west, Tea has a deep bond with Rain in India. We celebrate Rain, welcome Monsoon with Tea and deep-fried snacks. Coffee is moderately appreciated in India but

still not that widely sought after by all generations. Otherwise, the founder, of Indian Cafe chain "Cafe Coffee Day" V .G. Siddhartha would not have committed Suicide last year leaving a note behind in which he took responsibility for not being able to create a profitable business model. The Coffee, you prefer to make for yourself, Tea, you desire to be served. A coffee mug is usually heavy. Teacups are fine, fragile, classy and many times give an impression of your household, to a guest, who is visiting your home for the first time. Tea is definitely the one among many things, with which Pakistan and India still share their cultural bond despite their political rivalry. The image of Indian Wing Commander Abhinandan Vardhaman, enjoying a steaming cup of Tea with ease, will be engraved in our memory, as an unbreakable image of bravery, the patriotism of an Indian Soldier and human dignity in general. I will not forget those bruises on Abhinandan's Vardhaman's face. But at the same time, I will also remember that small Tea Cup in his hand. The warmth and power of which was beyond borders and bullets.

---

**Srabani Roy Akilla** — Srabani loves to read, write, see and think. Her writings have been published in literary magazines in India and the US. She has her own blog. She loves to write freely and independently in her facebook page.

“The world is too much with us; late and soon, Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers: Little we see in Nature that is ours; We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon! The Sea that bares her bosom to the moon; The winds that will be howling at all hours, And are up-gathered now like sleeping flowers; For this, for everything, we are out of tune.”

— William Wordsworth



Debu Mukerji

## ORIENTAL JESUS

*"Let there be Christmas in our hearts every day, renewing us,  
bringing us a new birth" — Swami Paramananda (1977)*

Swami Paramananda (1884-1940; before monastery life: Sri Suresh Chandra

Guhathakurata), was the youngest disciple of Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902). He was at the Vedanta Centre Massachusetts for quite a few years. His words at prayers and utterances were recorded and compiled by Sister Devamata (Laura Glenn).

Sister Devamata used to say, Swami Paramananda's words lend themselves with peculiar aptitude to a work of this nature. His sentences have the focus, shining quality of a finely-cut gem which requires no embellishments or ornate setting.

These were first published in 1926 at the Ananda-Ashrama, Vedanta Centre Massachusetts. The book narrates, "The Christ is a great Spirit of universal significance. We clothe Him in the garment which is familiar to us. The Christ spirit is a universal avenue through which flows Divine blessing. Jesus was an Oriental. In order to understand the pathos of His life and soul, we must enter into the Oriental consciousness. The true Christ is not a dogmatic Christ, but a Light shining from a lofty height shedding beneficence on all humanity and ecology. It is for each one of us to bring this Christ Light into our soul."

In the "Unknown Life of Christ" (1894), Nicolas Notovitch, the Russian author tells how he went to Tibet, hoping to study Tibetan literature, handwritten on papyrus scrolls. Because of the secretiveness of the Lamas, it was impossible to find a trace of what he wanted; but a strange miracle happened. Just when he was returning fruitlessly to India, he fell from a cliff and broke his leg, and was taken back to the monastery to receive the necessary care! The Tibetans are very hospitable to their invited or stricken guests. While the injured man was recovering, the head lama asked him what he wanted. He said, "Read to me the papyrus scrolls!"

From these sacred scrolls he secured conclusive evidence that Jesus Christ's name was "Isa", meaning "Lord," which afterwards was pronounced as Jesus. "Isa" conferred with the Masters on Yoga and about the great problems of human upliftment, living with them at the Monastery; but at age fifteen, it is said, they tried to get Him married, so he fled. The sacred scrolls further revealed that as Jesus Christ was visited by the Wise Men of the East, so He paid them a return visit to Tibet and conferred with the Great Masters. Jesus then went to India to confer with the Masters there; and after preaching the Message in India, he went to Asia Minor. He wanted to spread His message universally. However, Wikipedia notes indicate the consensus view amongst modern scholars reflect that Notovitch's account of the travels of Jesus to India was a hoax.

The West, with all the wonderful devices of the practical Occidental mindset, is in the East today, dominating it. But mark you, the Eastern soldiers are not silent. The West has power and strength; but the East is armed with silent philosophy not to conquer lands, but to conquer souls, with love, service, and kindness.





On the topic of “Oriental Christ”, Paramhansa Yogananda, wrote “ *Jesus was an Oriental*, by birth and blood and training. The Wise Men of the East, or East India, came to confer about Him when He was born, ... knowing Him to be one of the greatest message-bearers of Truth..”.Yogananda continues, “I am not saying that Jesus Christ learned everything from the Great Masters of India, but it has been definitely proven that Jesus was connected with the High Initiates and the Masters of India. He heard from them, You have unlimited power, you must cultivate that power, resurrect your soul from the dream of frailties; resurrect your soul in eternal wisdom...Meditation is the way to resurrect your soul from the bondage of the body and all your trials.”

Referring to the *The Oriental Jesus* — Johan D. Tangelder wrote, “it appears that the “The New Age Movement, NAM” is a prominent anti-Christian manifestation of the privatizing of faith. It is difficult to pin down, because it is not a specific group but a very loose network of groups, organizations, and individuals with a common sense of concerns. It is strongly influenced by Eastern religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism. In NAM thought, **Jesus is the historical figure**, and **Christ is the universal consciousness or truth or being**. During His so-called “lost

years”, Jesus supposedly travelled to India, where He studied under gurus before returning to Palestine. He is similar to a type-like Buddha or other manifestations of various sages who demonstrate for their age, a type of pure consciousness or unity with being. Individuals can learn from Jesus, can be enlightened to their own divinity or Christ consciousness, to attain what Jesus had.”

The Oriental Orthodox Churches are a group of Christian churches adhering to morphyditic Christology and theology, and together have 60 to 70 million members worldwide. As some of the oldest religious institutions in the world, the Oriental Orthodox Churches have played a prominent role in the history and culture of Armenia, Egypt, Eritrea Ethiopia, India, and parts of the Middle East. The Oriental Orthodox Churches are composed of six autocephalous churches. Collectively, they consider themselves to be the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church founded by Jesus Christ in his **Great Commission**, and that its bishops are the successors of Christ's apostles. In Christianity. The Great Commission is said to be the instruction of the resurrected Jesus Christ to his disciples to spread his teachings to all the nations of the world. The most famous version of the Great Commission is in **Matthew 28:16-20**, where on a mountain in Galilee Jesus calls on his followers to make disciples of and **baptize all nations in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit**.

The Great Commission is similar to the episodes of the commissioning of the Twelve Apostles found in the other Synoptic Gospels, though with significant differences. Luke also has Jesus dispatching disciples during his ministry, including the Seventy disciples, sending them to all the nations and giving them power over demons,. The dispersion of the Apostles in the traditional ending of Mark is thought to be a 2nd-century summary based on Matthew and Luke.

Excerpting from the *Vivekamani* (Nov 16, 2017) Swami Vivekananda was an admirer of Jesus of Nazareth. Between 1888-1893, when he travelled widely in many states of India, he had nothing but a '*kamandalu*' and two books with him — a) Bhagavad Gita, and b) Thomas à Kempis' book, *The Imitation of Christ*. The Imitation of Christ, is a Christian devotional book. It was first composed in Latin ca. 1418-1427. It is a handbook for spiritual life arising from the Devotio Moderna movement, of which Kempis was a member (Wikipedia). Swami's suggestion was — “To obtain Bhakti, seek the company of holy men who have Bhakti, and read books like the '*Gita*' and



the '*Imitation of Christ*'; always think of the attributes of God." Vivekananda was undoubtedly a follower and admirer of Jesus of Nazareth. In another lecture he told "Jesus Christ was God... He has manifested Himself many times in different forms and these alone are what you can worship." In the famous lecture '*Christ, the Messenger*' (delivered at Los Angeles, California in 1900), Vivekananda said — "If I, as an Oriental have to worship Jesus of Nazareth, there is only one way, that is, to worship him as God and nothing else".

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Sreya Sarkar

## The Wrong Hat

The local police had been called by the college principal to contain the unrest at the Delhi College. The head constable, Pandey, had seen this kind of protest before. There had been more and more of such a nuisance recently. He watched over the young crowd, bemused at the college-going boys and girls' stamina and appetite for troublemaking. Was he this rebellious when he was their age? Did he have the audacity to protest so openly? Had the age of social media emboldened them? Did the modern smartphone they carried in their pockets, make them more aggressive? Perhaps, the daily diet of greasy WhatsApp messages and spicy Twitter feeds had filled their veins with extra belligerence. His retirement date, less than a year away now, seemed to be approaching too fast and he was convinced that he had seen all stripes of crooks and thugs there were to be seen. Yes, the student slogans were feisty and their voices shrill, but the lanky jeans-clad college-goers with backpacks full of books and young idealism, holding up neatly composed placards seemed rather innocuous. They appeared more like stubborn kids bent on winning an argument than hardened criminals. They were starting to look worn out after a day of high-pitched frenzy. A few of them were stifling yawns. And some were rubbing their eyes. They looked bored and hungry. One could tell that they were planning on disbanding soon. The plan was pretty much to wait and watch till the protest fizzled out.

Some of the students knew Pandey by now, for this was not the first protest they had organized. A few months ago there was a demonstration against the college fee hike. Before that, there was a peaceful procession demonstrating against the wrongful arrest of one of their student leaders who had spoken against Kashmir's lockdown. Pandey had been present to watch over them on both occasions. Their relationship with him was not particularly a chummy one but there was neither a well-defined hostility between them. The students knew that he was just doing his job.

The crowd turned more animated all of a sudden. A group of men wearing khaki clothes descended on the droopy students. They wore helmets and armors like law enforcement officers yet their stance was different, more aggressive, more proficient in starting rather than stopping conflicts. They attacked the students, first with their fists, then with sticks. The shock of being tackled unexpectedly brought about brief seconds of stupor among the students, as they guarded their limbs and heads and placards against the blows.

Startled voices floated up from the student crowd.

*Stop, stop...please!*

*We did not cause violence, so why are you attacking us?*

Pandey froze on his feet as he realized what was happening. He rushed to the inspector, his senior, who was standing aside allowing this to happen.

"Did you order backup?" he asked the inspector. "But why? They were winding down, weren't they?"





The inspector did not respond. Instead, he took his time stretching his back and rolling his head on his shoulders.

Pandey heard a shriek from one of the students. He rushed forward and tried pulling aside the wiry man who was hurting the student. The man seemed familiar. The man had recognized him as well, for he paused his activity, stared him in the eye and quickly moved away to the other side of the crowd. The commotion escalated and soon tear-gas canisters hurled at the crowd spewed fumes amplifying the panic further. What followed was utter chaos. Soon after Police vans arrived, students were captured and shoved into the van. The crowd dispersed after losing its leaders but Pandey was determined to find out how the situation shifted abruptly. He had a hunch.

He decided to follow the man he had noticed earlier. Now he remembered who he was. His name was Jaggu. He was arrested about a year ago after he broke into someone's house. Following him was not that easy. The man was agile. He walked briskly and dived into the shadows of South Delhi slums, making his way through a narrow lane. He entered a shack, that seemed better built than the shanties around it and closed the door quickly. Pandey stood outside the door in the misty darkness, wondering what to do next, when the man stepped out again, startling him.

"Why have you been following me?" Jaggu tossed at Pandey, not bothering with a preface.

"What were you doing in front of the college?"

Pandey glanced down at the half unbuttoned khaki shirt on Jaggu.

"Why are you dressed in khaki?"

Jaggu glared at him for a moment and said in a low voice, "You can't follow me like this!"

They heard voices and Pandey was pulled inside Jaggu's cottage with a sharp tug.

"You can't be here." Jaggu let out a ragged breath.

"Yes, I can be. Now tell me what were you up to?" said Pandey.

"Don't talk loudly. There are people outside," Jaggu said in a quieter voice.

There was a loud knock on the door. Jaggu put his finger across his lips cautioning Pandey. He whispered in his ears with a silent plea in his eyes, "Please stay inside while I finish talking to them."

Pandey nodded briskly and Jaggu stepped out closing the door. Pandey stood rooted to where he was standing. He could hear parts of the conversation outside.

"Did someone follow you?"

"Someone was trying to... but I threw him off."

"We can help if you can't deal with it."

"No, that's not necessary. He lost my trail."

"Here is your share. Are you sure he lost you?"

"Yes. I am sure."



"You know the instruction in case someone follows you, right?"

"I know."

"You have to be careful."

"I will be."

As the voices faded to a murmur, Pandey let out his long-held breath. As he scanned the dimly lit room, he noticed the sparse furniture. There was a bed with a garish bed cover, a wooden table and a chair on one side. On the other side of the room was a wide velvety curtain that had partitioned off a part of the room. It looked out of place. His curiosity made him draw aside the drape and almost lost his balance as he stumbled on what seemed like a hidden room with a heap of hats and belts and scarves. Behind it was a row of hangers full of clothes. There were so many of them. How could Jaggu afford to buy these many clothes? On closer inspection, he noticed that the clothes were different from daily wear. They were more like costumes.

The door opened and closed. Jaggu wiped his face with a handkerchief and switched on a brighter light. Pandey blinked holding on to a hanger with a saffron-colored *dhoti* and rudraksha garland with one hand, and a black priest robe with another. He put them back on the rod holding the rest of the clothes and raised a questioning eyebrow at Jaggu.

Jaggu opened his khaki shirt unhurriedly and was about to put it away in a hanger when he noticed a bloodstain on the collar.

"I will have to wash this now," he said with a touch of exasperation in his tone.

"Don't look so surprised," he said avoiding looking at Pandey. "I get paid well to be someone else. You know how I had to steal from people to remain alive, once. Now I don't have to, anymore."

Instead of being infuriated at what he had found out, Pandey felt a wave of sympathy towards Jaggu. The kind of things one had to do to survive in Delhi, he thought with a sigh.

"Can you tell me something? Who asked you to come to college? The inspector?"

"No."

"But he knew?"

"Yes. He had his orders from above. He had no choice but to cooperate."

"Then... who called you?"

"I can't tell you."

Pandey hanged his face and approached the door.

"Don't go out yet. They might still be waiting." Jaggu's face held a smidge of compassion despite his severe stance.

"Pandey Ji. I don't want you to get hurt."

"But you had no problem hurting those students?"

"It is not personal. Its either this or becoming a robber. I have a family in my village to take care of."



Pandey stood looking at him trying to decide whether he felt antipathy or pity towards Jaggu.

“What if everyone thought like you? Just because you have a family to feed, you can get away doing anything?”

Jaggu sighed while he put on a fresh T-shirt. “I tried doing different things. After I was let out of the lockup, I got a part-time at the cement factory, but it does not pay that much. I also tried getting a car license, but all that also requires money. I am training to be a cab driver. Once that comes through, I will...” He seemed to be struggling with words. “I will leave this hateful work.”

Pandey stood thinking what to do now. The right thing to do was to report Jaggu but what would that do? He went through the other options one by one. He should help Jaggu get a secure job but with his retirement so close by, who would listen to him? He should talk to someone to get Jaggu's license done. Wait, why was he thinking of helping him? He was a crook after all. Unmindfully, he sighed and picked up his hat from the heap it had fallen into. As he was about to leave, Jaggu stopped him.

“Pandey Ji you are wearing the wrong hat. That...that is not your hat.”

Indeed. It was not his constable hat Pandey was wearing. He had donned a military beret.

Silently, he picked out his own hat and replaced it with the wrong hat and set out in the dark to retrieve his steps back to the police station.

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**Sreya Sarkar** having spent her childhood in a civil service family surrounded by voracious readers and fervent political discussions, Sreya nurtured a wish to write from an early age. After a short stint as a journalist in India, she set off for her second Masters in Political Science at University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, following which she worked as a public policy analyst in U.S. think tanks and published numerous articles and op-eds for newspapers. She currently lives in Boston and is working with Delhi-based Red Ink Literary Agency to get her first full-length novel published.

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## Gautam Bandyopadhyay

### Obsession

--: Part - 1 ::--

It was a cold New England morning! I walked my usual three rounds through the mall and sat down on a bench near the food court. This has been my routine for the winter months since retirement. At this time of the day, the mall is normally not busy. But today I noticed a large group of high-school girls and boys hanging around the food court - I thought that they must have some kind of school activity. The group was behaving as expected of their age — full of life and excitement, bubbly and busily talking to each other and playing with their cell phones. A few of them were standing hand in hand with their 'boyfriends' or 'girlfriends', with eyes and expressions typical of teenage love. I thought about our days in school and college over fifty years ago. How different that was from today? My mind started to wonder.

I remembered my undergraduate days. I went to Presidency College, one of the few co-educational colleges in Kolkata at that time. For many of us, this was a big change, particularly for someone like me who grew up in a suburban small town and never lived in a big city. Although I grew up with three sisters, going to a class with girls was new and somewhat intimidating. The societal norms and expectations placed severe constraints in being friends with members of the opposite sex. The idea of having a girlfriend or boyfriend was limited to a few adventurous souls; for the rest of us, the rule was to focus on studies and studies only and wait for the right time and age as defined by the family, for any kind of relationship meaning an arranged marriage!

After Presidency College, I ended up in Science College in Rajabazar for postgraduate studies. During those three years, I took Bus No. 33 from a Ballygunge stop near my residence, a male student hostel for postgraduate students. The boring hour-long bus ride from our Ballygunge stop to Rajabazar in a crowded and often hot and humid conditions, was part of our daily routine for attending classes. People watching was the only tolerably fun activity of the ride. But soon that ride became more colorful when we realized that a group of girls from Lady Brabourne, a women's college, are often on the same bus on the way to their classes. The girls probably noticed our presence too, but they never realized that we have started to pick our favorites among them. For most of us, this was just innocent fun, curiosity, and interest appropriate for young men our age. We had no expectation that this budding interest would lead to anything real like a date. Even the smartest amongst us did not have any idea as to how or the courage to approach a girl based on seeing someone from a distance in a crowded bus. Anything beyond that, such as romance or falling in love from this routine, was simply an unrealistic dream! This was true for most of my friends, except Ranajit, of course.

Ranajit was a good-looking young man of average height and fair complexion. He grew up outside Bengal, had somewhat of a quiet personality, but his behavior and mannerism showed his cosmopolitan and western upbringing. He liked a girl named Sreela. We knew the name as she chatted with her friends in the bus. Soon we realized that Ranajit's interest was far more than casual. We started to notice that sometimes he would not get on the bus until he saw Sreela, and



in some instances, he would even miss his early classes just so that he can see her. Every once in a while, Sreela would not be in any of the buses during college hours in the morning. That started to bother Ranajit a lot; he would visibly be upset and depressed. Time was flying by. We were busy with our normal demands for classes and exams and did not notice that Ranajit's obsession for the girl was really eating him up. If he did not see Sreela in the bus for a few days, he would get out at Brabourne and would wait for hours for her at the gate. Over time, the lack of progress in his effort to get close to Sreela was becoming a serious load for him. It started to impact his personality as well as his class grades, and we were not of much help for him.

One evening, he came to our room very excited and started to tell us that finally he found out more about the girl. He explained that Sreela did not always ride in the bus, because every once in a while, her family car dropped her off at the college. We thought that, may be finally he developed enough courage to introduce himself to the girl and talked to her. But that was not the cause of his excitement. He told us that Sreela was often dropped at the college in a black Ambassador. He now got the car license plate number and he tracked the name and address of the owner through the West Bengal Motor Vehicle Department. He now knew where Sreela lived.

We were all blown away by this story. In those days, we did not even know that this could be done by anyone other than possibly the police or professional detectives, and even for them, it had to be a time-consuming procedure to cut through all the bureaucracies. And here Ranajit was telling us that he did that in a few months in his spare time!! It was mind boggling to us that he would take so much trouble for the car information, but yet had not talked to the girl.

Once again, we became busy with our exams and our individual lives and did not pay much attention to Ranajit's craziness. He would stop once in a while to give us updates about his progress, such as he now knew the color of the house she lived in, that she had another sister, and that her father had some kind of business. Every time we would ask if he had a chance to introduce himself, and he would tell us that he was almost ready to talk to her because she would soon be done with Brabourne, and he would not want to lose track of her. By this time three years had gone by, and we were all ready to move on with next steps of our lives. I took a job in Bombay for a short stint, and soon after left for USA within the year.

Ranajit also left India and came to USA about the same time. I was in California and Ranajit was in Chicago. I reconnected with Ranajit and after about 3 years, I collected enough money from my meager research assistantship and managed to travel east. Ranajit then lived in a huge apartment owned by his uncle who was a well-known professor at a local university. His uncle lived in another house, so Ranajit had this beautiful place all to himself.

The first thing I asked was, what happened to Sreela and you? He said he no longer had any interest in Sreela. I enquired further if he ever got to talk to her. He said yes, eventually one day he stopped Sreela at Brabourne College's gate and talked to her. He found out that Sreela had noticed his interest all along and she also knew all about him. They had a very nice conversation, and they decided to meet at a restaurant. After a few of these casual dates, Sreela invited him to her house, and by that time, Ranajit told me that "I was not interested to know her anymore. So, I never went to her house". I was shocked. After all that effort for three years, how one could lose interest so fast. Ranajit commented that he lost interest when the challenge was gone, the normal dating part felt very mundane. I asked what have you done since then? His eyes lit up and told me with excitement about three more of his adventures, all of which happened to become mundane when



the girls appeared to become interested. But the one that he was pursuing at that time was the most challenging the married lady living next door!!

I left Ranajit's place next day, and since then I did not try to contact him anymore. The last I heard after another three years that he moved to New Jersey and bought a fancy car to support his dating adventures. Sometimes I wonder, if he ever found the girl that he did not get bored of after he had 'conquered'!! Did he ever settle down?

Suddenly I woke up from my daydream at the mall and realized that more than an hour had gone by and my coffee was done. The school kids were also gone by that time and the food court was considerably quieter. I have not seen Ranajit in 45 years. I thought that I should go home now and see if I can track him down on the internet!! Ranajit's obsession is now becoming mine!

\* \* \* \* \*

-:: Part - 2 ::-

### **Where is Ranajit?**

Driving back from the mall, I could not get Ranajit out of my mind. I am talking about my college buddy from Kolkata. Ranajit literally stalked a girl for three years during our regular bus ride to our class, but when the girl started to like him and invited him to her house, he had cold feet, dropped her and her family abruptly without any explanation, and ran away to USA. He is the same guy who I met later in Chicago, still on his adventurous spree with dates and, even scarier, eyeing on a married lady. The more I thought about him, angrier I became, and I felt an urge to find him to see what else he had done in the last 45 years!!

Thanks to modern technology, it did not take me long to track Ranajit down. With a few clicks on the computer and some basic personal information, I quickly found him on LinkedIn. Not surprisingly, he did very well professionally - I always knew Ranajit as a brilliant electronics and software engineer. He appeared to be settled in a bordering town of New York in New Jersey, retired from a multinational company after a long career, and currently working as a consultant for a startup. I was, however, more curious about his personal life.

I called him at his office. He sounded genuinely happy to hear from me and complained bitterly that I got lost after my last visit.

"We must find some time to see each other soon and catch up" Ranajit said. "We have a lot to talk about - we are both getting old, I don't know about you, but I have collected quite a few ailments, and I don't know which one gets me and when." I agreed that I am in the same boat health wise, and we should meet soon.

Within a month of our conversation I needed to be in New York for a family visit. I took a detour and stopped by Ranajit's office. It was a small office in a nondescript building in the suburbs, a typical low cost, resource constrained startup operation. Ranajit greeted me warmly. He lost a lot of weight and most of his beautiful wavy hair, but otherwise looked generally fit. He did welcome me with the smile and mannerism that did not change over 45 years. He briefly talked about his startup activities. We exchanged information about our professional careers, and people that we both knew from college, and shared a bit about our personal lives. He told me that he got married about 35 years ago. They had a daughter who graduated from Princeton and worked for a New York financial company.





I asked him about his move from Illinois and about all of his adventures. He smiled and said, "That was a quite a crazy time for me." Then he looked at his watch and said, "Why don't we do something? Let us go to my home that way you will have a chance to meet my wife and we can continue on our lives' horror stories." He smiled and waited for my response. I was hesitating I had a four-hour drive to get back home and I did not want to be too late. But I was also curious about Ranajit and his family. I agreed to spend a few hours.

Ranajit lived in the neighboring town from his office. It was a nice big house with a well-maintained yard in an upper scale neighborhood. He did quite well in his career, and his lifestyle showed that. We walked through the door and Ranajit hollered for his wife "See who I brought here today." His wife walked down the stairs in a pair of jeans and a simple top. I thought momentarily - I knew her from the past. I searched through my memory and suddenly it dawned on me - was she Sreela? I was astounded despite ageing I could recognize her and asked to confirm "Are you who I think you are?" I was afraid to say the name, I did not want to be wrong. They both broke out in laughter and Ranajit said, "I really wanted to surprise you. Yes, she is Sreela." I did not know how to respond.

On my drive to New York that morning, I was dreading to see Ranajit in a very different situation - possibly divorced and troubled and may be deranged by this time. But instead, he was happy and settled in his retired life with his lost love. What a nice surprise!!

Ranajit and Sreela filled me up with the missing parts of their story. When Ranajit was struggling to settle down in Chicago with a directionless social life with a few dates here and there, and was dangerously attracted to a married lady, he suddenly realized that he was actually looking to replace Sreela. Not knowing what to do, he became depressed and recluse. He could not get her out of his mind and started to feel miserable for treating Sreela the way he did. "It was a big mistake" Ranajit said softly, "I hurt her so much and how cruel I was", he looked at Sreela with a feeling of sadness.

With that desperate feeling, Ranajit wanted to reconnect with Sreela - but three years passed by in between. Through his Kolkata social connections, he learnt that Sreela left for USA for a Ph. D. program and was still not married. He was excited and hopeful with the news and doubled down on his search. He eventually found out that Sreela was studying at a University in New Jersey. That was the turning point for him. Without hesitation, he moved to New Jersey.

Ranajit found a job in the area. It did not take long to find Sreela. He met her in a local Saraswati Puja, a religious cum social community event. Sreela remembered the day very well. Her emotional reaction from that day showed up in her face and in her voice.

She said, "I was shocked to see him there, and I was so angry that I did not want to be anywhere near that creep. I wanted to leave the puja venue instantly. But I did not want to make a scene with my local friends who had no idea who this guy was. So, somehow I stuck around for the day."

Ranajit had enough sense not to push Sreela on that day. He looked at me and said "I was so happy to see her there - I just did not want to rattle anything. I wanted to give her the chance to absorb the shock of seeing me again". He knew in his heart how much pain he caused her and her family.

Sreela interrupted Ranajit, "Thank god, you did not push, and thank god you apologized for your behavior in Kolkata - you really made everybody in my family angry, upset and feel insulted". She continued to tell me, "My first impression from that day during Saraswati Puja was he



regretted his past behavior. He told me that he was not thinking straight and asked for another chance whenever I was ready."

Sreela was apprehensive though and did not want to react or respond. She tried to ignore him through the day and tried to forget that he was there.

Ranajit, however, was not ready to lose her again this time. He was willing to give Sreela the time and space. They met a few times in various social gatherings. Sreela continued to ignore him, and Ranajit continued to behave like a gentleman. Both of them were very popular in the community both had strong interest in literature, drama, and music, and both participated in local functions and activities. Gradually Sreela started to become comfortable around Ranajit.

Sreela commented, "Ranajit really put up a good show of measured behavior and composure in the community for a whole year." It became hard for her to ignore him and his subtle attentions. Then she said softly, "Of course I was angry, but somewhere in me, I wanted him back in my life as well".

It did not take long after that. They were in love. Time had come to talk to their families in India about their intentions. They both knew it was going to be hard, particularly for Sreela's family.

Sreela briefly talked to her younger sister over the phone about this renewed romance with Ranajit. Her sister was absolutely shocked and then became furious. How can she open herself up to this guy's manipulation once again? Sreela tried to explain the events from the past year how Ranajit apologized and how he behaved since she met her again. Her sister was not convinced - she was scared that Sreela would get hurt again. She said with a concerned voice, "You guys need to come soon to India to discuss this with Ma/Baba this is serious!!"

Sreela and Ranajit bought their tickets to Kolkata. Sreela went to her parents' house and Ranajit went to one of his relative's home his parents still lived in Delhi. Ranajit never told his family any of his past history with Sreela from his college days. The concern he had was if his stupidity came to light to his family, they would be embarrassed. But his problems were far less complicated. He knew that he would not have much resistance from his family regarding his relationship. The story was indeed different with Sreela.

When Sreela got to her home, her parents invited her in with gloomy faces. They barely talked, just mumbled, "Good to see you go take a shower and take a little nap. We will talk later." She knew that the storm was brewing, but she also had a feeling that Ranajit would certainly win them over this time.

Not surprisingly, the first conversation with Sreela's parents was difficult. They thought that her decision to reconnect with Ranajit did not make sense at all; in their opinion, it would 'never' work and she would regret this mistake her entire life. Everybody was in tears!

In the middle of this emotional conversation, Ranajit showed up to their house without warning. Sreela's parents were shocked and surprised, they did not know that he was in town. Nobody could say anything for a few minutes. Ranajit looked around - he could feel the tension in the room. He did not waste any time with niceties; he immediately started with a sincere apology, "I am extremely sorry for the pain that I caused to you all with my childish and crazy behavior four years ago. I have regretted my actions ever since." He ended by saying in a nearly tear-filled voice, "Please give me another chance, I promise I would not disappoint any one of you again. I do want to marry your daughter and want to spend the rest of our lives together." It was an emotionally charged moment. Sreela's father, a very practical businessman, was listening to Ranajit's monologue intently and said to himself, "This guy certainly has a flair for drama - nothing he does seems conventional. Hope he becomes normal some day for Sreela's sake."



Ranajit spent rest of the day with Sreela's family. They wanted to know everything about him, his time in USA and his story about trying to reconnect with Sreela. They heard that he moved to New Jersey when he found out about Sreela's Ph. D. program. They talked about their surprise meeting at the Saraswati Puja and the many joint social activities over the year, when they got to know each other well. Ranajit admitted that it took a lot of time for Sreela to accept his sincerity, and then he said with a little bit of drama in his voice, "I was ready to wait as long as it was necessary to make her feel comfortable."

By the end of the day, the tension was mostly gone, and everybody started to feel at ease. Ranajit appeared to have convinced Sreela's parents that he was a gentleman and possibly worthy of becoming a son-in-law!

The room became quiet after a day-long, tension-filled conversations. All eyes were glued on Sreela's parents for their reactions and decisions. The parents were still reeling from what they heard during the day - they were pondering if they should make a hurried decision. But Sreela's face said it all. She was eagerly waiting. Her parents looked at each other and then her father smiled and said, "You two have come a long way. We are glad that you both waited till now and made this mature decision together." Then with a big sigh, as if the big tension was relieved from them, he said, "We agree with your decision. Now time to think about next steps and marriage." Everybody broke up with claps and smile. Ranajit and Sreela were finally relieved that they have now crossed the biggest hurdle. The next step was to talk to Ranajit's family!

Everything moved quickly after that. Ranajit's family was happy with Sreela and they agreed with their decisions. Within a year, they went back to India and got married. It was the proverbial 'everybody lived happily ever after' ending of a feel-good story.

I was very happy to see that Ranajit did not hide anything from Sreela about his dating adventures in Chicago and Sreela accepted his stories as an effort to 'find his soul,' which she said smilingly "really lived in me." It was also heartening to hear the story of Ranajit winning over Sreela's parents.

It was late in the day and I was ready to go back home. We reminisced a little about our foolishness during our bus rides in Kolkata. She mentioned that they also knew most of us by name, and coyly said that I had a real admirer amongst her friends, but she would not tell me who that was. For a moment, I forgot my age, and became curious and wanted to know if she was the same girl who was also my choice. She just smiled and said, "Let me put it this way those were good old days - everybody we are talking about including you and us, are all happily living our lives today"!!

As I walked to my car to drive back, I said to myself "What a day and what a surprise! I must tell the rest of the story about Ranajit to my friends." Many of them are still angry with him and wanted to know what happened to the stalker!!

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**Dr. Gautam Bandyopadhyay** is a retired technology and innovation management professional with more than forty years of industrial experience in multinational corporations. Writing is his retirement-hobby. His hope is that someday his American-born children and grandchildren would be interested to read his writings to understand a little bit of their father/grandfather who arrived in USA as an engineering Ph.D. student in University of California, Berkeley, fifty years ago.

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## Souvik Datta

### Saptarishi

Saptarishi is the Vedic name of the Ursa Major constellation. The stars are assigned names based on the names of the Rishis in every era.

The Vedic cycle of time is a complex subject. This cycle of time (era) is called Manvantara. 71 Chaturyugas make a Manvantara. The current Manvantara is called Vaivasvata.



The current Saptarishis and their western names are —

- Jamadagni -  $\alpha$  UMa Dubhe
- Bharadwaj -  $\beta$  UMa Merak
- Gautam -  $\gamma$  UMa Phecda
- Atri -  $\delta$  UMa Megrez
- Vishwamitra -  $\epsilon$  UMa Alioth
- Vasistha -  $\zeta$  UMa Mizar
- Kashyap -  $\eta$  UMa Alkaid

#### The Names of the Rishis

Please do note that in most websites or the internet you would get the list of Saptarishi as Marichi, Atri, Angiras, Pulaha, Kratu, Pulastya, and Vasishtha. However, this was valid in the Swayambhu Manvantara. However, right now humanity is in Vaivasvata Manvantara. The list



changes with every Manvantara and in the current Manvantara (Vaivasvata) the names are stated above.

The stars don't change, only the names assigned to the stars changes so as to honor the Rishis who are responsible to bring the eternal wisdom from the heavens to the Earth to us humans.

### **Vashishth and Arundhati**

During a Hindu wedding, after the Saptapathi ritual, the groom shows the bride the star Vashishta (and Arundhati). The reason is that the star system is a binary star system where each star revolves around the other. This is supposed to be an example of an ideal marriage, where no one partner moves around the other, instead, both partners complement each other and move in a synchronous dance of balance.

### **Swastika - The ancient origins**

The Saptarishi mandala moves around the fixed pole star (Polaris, Dhruva) and if we take a snapshot of their position on the four phases of time - 2 equinoxes, 2 solstices, we will get the shape of a Swastika.

Saptarishi mandala signifies timeless eternal wisdom. In their journey in a year around Dhruva, who sits on the lap of Narayana (Bhagawan), Saptarishi mandala makes a sign of Swastika. It is auspicious because it signifies time which is eternal since it revolves around an unchanging fixed point in an ever-changing world. This is why the mark of Swastika is so special in the Vedic customs.

The subject of Saptarishi and their immense contribution to humanity is a very deep topic. In this article, I have just tried to bring out a few timeless customs and their meanings as it pertains to the Saptarishi mandala.




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**Souvik Dutta** works as an IT professional in Chicago, IL and lives with his wife Amrita and son Hridaan. His passion includes study of ancient scriptures, texts and obscure works of Vedic sages. He lectures in and around the country on Vedic philosophies.

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## Chayan Chatterjee

### A Freshman's Diary in Perth - Trip to Rottnest Island

I arrived in Perth for the first time last year, starry-eyed and delirious (with a hint of trepidation), just like most young men and women about to settle in an exotic country far from home. I was about to start my journey as a research student at the University of Western Australia, in the Department of Physics, and couldn't wait to discover the possibilities that life at UWA and Australia in general, had to offer.

In today's age of rootlessness, when the idea of 'home' is but an ephemeral, ever-changing concept, with people living in and out of their suitcases and feeling alienated even in familiar spaces, I was unsure about how my new circumstances would greet me. But as it turned out, the people of Perth are the most warm and welcoming I have ever come across anywhere. While my relatives who are settled here were instrumental in making me feel at home, and took care of every single concern I had about living in a foreign country by my own, equally hospitable were my supervisors, colleagues, friends and acquaintances in Perth. Even random people I meet on the streets, at coffee shops and grocery stores greet me with a warm smile and often with an impromptu "G'day, mate!" which is a rather subtle characteristic, I am told, of locals here in Australia. In fact, the first time someone ever wished me "Happy Easter" in my life, was a complete stranger I happened to come across on my way back from a grocery store!

It is therefore quite natural, for a population so warm and hospitable, to organize an elaborate and grand welcome for new commencing international students in







this beautiful country. Therefore this year, having enrolled as a PhD student at UWA, I had the great pleasure of being invited to a grand welcome ceremony by 'StudyPerth', an organization dedicated to the care and support of new international students in Perth, like myself. As part of the welcome, which was kicked off at the heart of the city, at Elizabeth Quay, with food, drinks, music and selfies with koalas and kangaroo joeys, we were all invited on a trip to the spectacular Rottnest Island on the 8<sup>th</sup> of March.

Rottnest Island, or Rotto, as is locally called, is situated about 19 kms from the Perth coastline, a veritable pearl of beauty in Western Australia. We started off the day by queuing up for a ferry at Fremantle, another major tourist attraction and a place of significant historical importance. We reached Rottnest in about 40

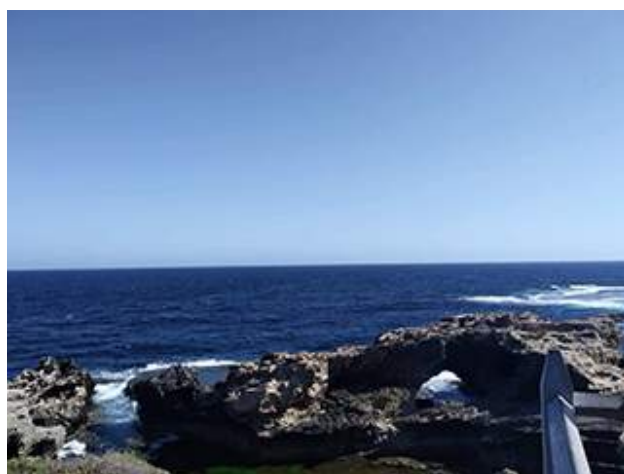


mins, while already enraptured by the journey which offered some wonderful views of the Indian Ocean.

As is customary in Australia in all major occasions, the trip at Rottnest began by acknowledging the original inhabitants of the

land, the Noongar people, through a traditional ritual that recognized their Elders, past, present and emerging. We were then told a short history of the island and some of the major attractions during our stay there. It was interesting to learn that the name "Rottnest" was actually derived from "Rat's nest", after European settlers confused the star inhabitants of the island, the quokkas, with large rats. Speaking of quokkas, we kicked off our trip with a 30 minute walking tour, in which a local guide took us to the spots in the island where these lovely quokkas were abound at that point of the day, while telling us more about the island's heritage and its furry inhabitants. The quokkas are marsupials which belong to the same category of species as kangaroos, and are mostly nocturnal. They were once labelled by a popular magazine as "the happiest animals in the world" for their very characteristic 'smile', which makes for really adorable photographs, if one manages to get a selfie at the right moment! They are also one of the most protected animals in Australia, with their habitat confined to this one island alone. However considerable conservation measures and the influx of tourists sparked off by the '#quokkaselfie' trend on social media has reportedly increased the population of this once heavily persecuted animals.

After the walking tour, which afforded us more than a few selfies with the cute quokkas and which also gave me the opportunity to make some new friends, we started to explore the rest of the amazing island. We could hire a bicycle and take a tour of the captivating surroundings with the sun on our faces and wind on our hair, a feeling hard to beat, or choose to relax on the beaches and enjoy the spellbinding views or go for a swim in the cool waters. There were also ample opportunities for adventure sports in and around the island, including snorkeling at The Basin and Parker points. Because it was a particularly hot afternoon in March, we decided to take the bus



tour around the island and cover the major view points from the comfort of the bus interiors.

The bus stopped at several locations in the island, and I alongwith my friends got off in a few of them, only to be confronted each time by such spectacular views of the bays and





beaches that would remain in our memories forever. I have read that there are over 63 beaches and bays in Rottnest Island. After wandering about for a while and then getting lost in number 11, we decided to mostly let go and just aimlessly enjoy the tranquility of the sandy havens and the allure of the turquoise lapping waters. We even spotted some seals sunbathing on distant rocks in the middle of the ocean using binoculars. If only we hadn't had to catch the last bus back to the ferry towards the end of our trip, we could have had the chance of swimming along with a pod of dolphins that had reached remarkably close to the beach we were in, only about a minute before we got on the bus.

Among the other major attractions at Rottnest that we were unable to cover in the five hours we were in the island are some fifty

other bays and the Wadjemup Lighthouse, which sits almost at the centre of the island and supposedly provides stunning 360 degree views, which certainly calls for another trip sometime soon!

We went back, exhausted from walking for hours in the sun, but with our hearts filled up to the brim with the richness of unforgettable experience. The shadow of conflict I had within me, my thoughts about the implications of starting a new life far from home, my inhibitions and fears in the midst of this new strange milieu were certainly dissuaded to a great extent. I was happy. I had met new people, made new friends, the oceans were bluer than anywhere else I had ever been to. James Baldwin had once written that home is "not a place but simply an irrevocable condition". I was beginning to agree.

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**Chayan Chatterjee** is a first year PhD student of Physics at The University of Western Australia. He is enthusiastic about astronomy and the cosmos and aspires to do research in the field. He is an avid reader and is passionate about literature, particularly poetry.

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Amanita Sen

## Film review – Court

When the death of two Dalit children (feeling ashamed to classify children by the name of their caste) hits the headlines, I feel compelled to write about a Marathi film, *Court*, a National Award winner in 2015, directed by Chaitanya Tamhane, which I have watched lately.

In a complete non-preachy tone this film holds the mirror to our abysmally corrupt judiciary system which is blind to the neediest section of the society.

A tutor who writes songs to inspire the common people is held responsible for the suicide of a man employed to clean the gutters. His songs speak of suicide, is the excuse given to get him arrested and thus used as an eyewash to not address the reality which is, these men are sent to clean the sewers without proper gears and masks.

I Googled to be enlightened on this issue, and found that in the first quarter of this year itself 50 people and in 2018 September 11 people had died. I didn't scroll down further. What are they now, these deaths, other than mere numbers?

In a scene from this film, it is shown that the court, in the middle of this hoax of a trial gets adjourned for the summer vacation. The director holds the shot for quite some time on the dark courtroom. This scene for its painfully eloquent silence gnaws inside. I almost hope it knocks at the door of conscience of people who can make a difference somewhere but so far have relented to do so.

The last scene is also worth waiting for, summarising the story for us.

I was reminded of none other than Ray-his sensitive master-touches in all his films addressing relevant social issues right from *Debi* to *Gonoshotru*.

If you want to watch some good acting, brilliant economy of word-usage which cinema has the scope to provide to you, taking resort to symbolic depiction of the message, you might watch this film on Netflix or on Youtube.

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Amanita's poems have been published in various print and online journals in India and abroad. She works as a mental-health professional and lives in Kolkata.

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# Australia Stall – 44th International Kolkata Book Fair







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