



# KEROSENE IN THE WATER TANK

This story is remembered and repeatedly retold in Marthoma College, Thiruvalla in Kerala. In the early part of the seventies, the college union was governed by the Students Federation of India (SFI), the student wing of the Communist Party. The party, through a somewhat divide-and-rule strategy, came to enjoy the backing of the entire hostel community. The rival (Congress-backed) Kerala Students Union (KSU) was less than a shadow of its former imperious self. One June afternoon - less than two days prior to the union elections - a rumor spread around the college that the tank providing water for all the hostels had been poisoned with kerosene. Needless to say, this was never put to test. Less than a couple of hours later, the hostels were mostly empty, their residents having decided to visit their homes until something was done about the tank situation. Whether there was any truth to the rumor remains unverified till date. That the entire affair was orchestrated by an enthusiastic KSU worker is just another story lost in memory and years.

A caricature named 'illiberal democracy': Caste and communal equations are known to influence voting patterns in union elections and upset well-laid plans. Very often, governance is dynastic and through coteries. At the worst of times, union leaders take all their orders from the MLA hostels or similar politically fertile places. 'Fruitful' political involvement in 'strategically' important colleges gives a young political aspirant the acceptance necessary to even dream of making a 'career' in politics. Perhaps as a result, the wanton employment of violence to achieve political ends and the necessary 'shows of strength' in games of one-upmanship are active ingredients in this high-stakes cauldron. Steel-rods, rocks, knives and bicycle chains jostle for space in bags that also contain notebooks. Managements of many private colleges in Kerala have initiated moves to ban any organized political activity. The High Court found nothing wrong in such a measure; the bench probably mindful of the undisciplined disruption of educational activities in colleges. Student parties have in general, been irresponsibly shortsighted and known to have itchy 'strike' fingers. Is such mediocrity inherent in the idea itself? The advantages of college-level party activism were imagined to be sufficient to override its possible shortcomings. Nevertheless, it is clear from the High Court judgment that public opinion in favour of a non-political campus is fast gaining ground. Party politics in quite a few urban 'professional' colleges is now little more than a murmur. Even in colleges where party politics is limited, all political activity is slowly disappearing. Though most of India's 'elite' institutions (the IITs, the IIMs, Stephens, Xaviers, some national law schools etc.) are uniquely positioned to sway public opinion, the lack of organized political activity has threatened to reduce political consciousness to ridiculously low levels. For instance, during and after the events threatening the durability of the Indian Constitution in Goa and Jharkand, nothing at all was heard from the students of these institutions. In India's premier legal institutes - NLSIU in particular - one initiative to examine the legality of these controversial appointments was either missing or went unnoticed. Currently, political involvement in Indian colleges displays two very different kinds of indifference. Like small village communities, life on campus has parodied the outside world; in interactions among students and in their relations with authority. That campus politics - where it exists - resembles the ugliness outside is hardly surprising. Thus on the one hand, there exists extreme callousness about the nature of the means employed (think goondas with their saws) and the myopic approaches that arise from acting for shallow goals. This has succeeded in draining politics of any dignity and discipline; contributing to a growing and simultaneously deadening, apathy.

It is true that the nature of most political activity in India would hardly encourage someone to take to it. However, to claim that I-don't-do-politics-because-it-is-too-dirty is to take on too little responsibility. The omnipresent attitude of career orientation reduces the possibility of fruitful political engagement, let alone any attempts at purging the system. Very few students in Law School obliged their basic responsibility to vote in the Lok Sabha elections despite being eligible to do so.

The maintenance of 'good' academic records to secure comfortable careers comes at some opportunity cost. Increasingly, these costs are being perceived as bearable crosses. Perhaps such a perception is a reflection of the times we live in. It is hard to conceive of an IAS aspirant who is also deeply enmeshed in campus politics. In the past, more than a few have sailed both boats. Think of uncles, aunts and parents with glittering academic records who reminiscence about their political heydays. Not shockingly, such reduced political involvement has coincided with the 'shining' of the Indian middle class. Losing the flabby, bloated tires of this comfortable complacency to force a return to the athletic fitness of Emergency fervour or Gandhian discipline will not be easy. Perhaps we have it too easy!

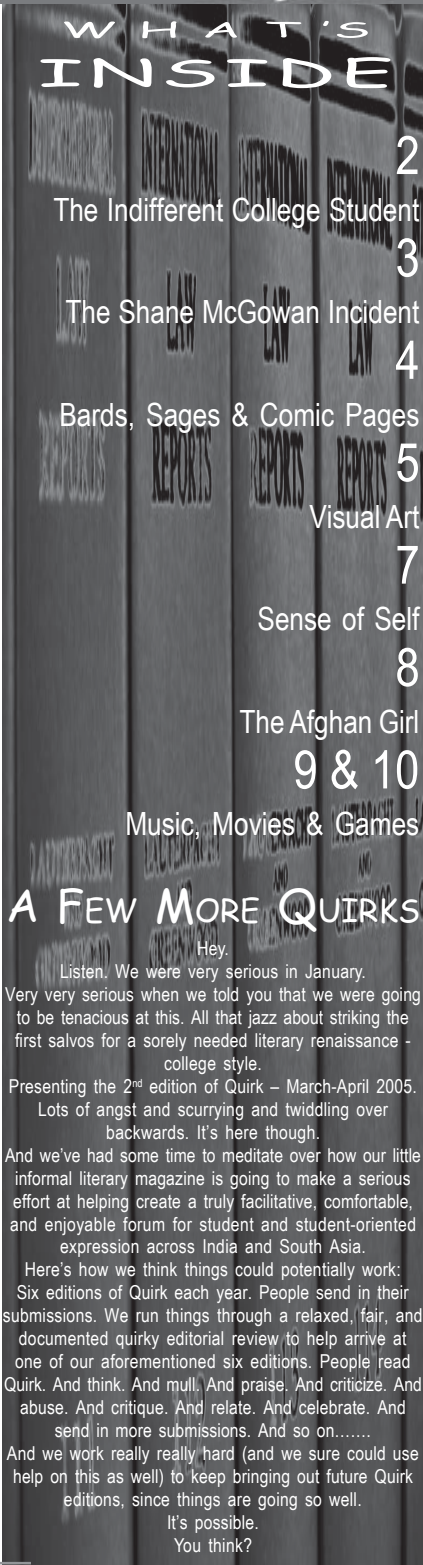
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Let's start at the beginning. Does a person have an obligation to attempt an improvement of the surrounding state-of-affairs? A legal argument can be made out in the affirmative using judicially recognized principles of 'inter-generational equity'. Despite that, it is clear that there is no overwhelming reason why such an obligation must exist and be fulfilled by all people. The answer must necessarily be a personal one. Not every Hindu who feels that Hindu religious symbols are gaining 'wrong' meanings will work to reclaim them. Not every employee who has been unjustly treated by an employer will rise up in arms. Not every student who sees the decline of academic standards in his college will work to improve the situation. Some will. Indifference towards surrounding circumstances does not define all students. Many have engaged with civil society - the space between the state and citizen - outside the mainstream political process; through religion-backed initiatives, alternate activism of the environmental, human rights or Narmada kind, literary and cultural societies etc.

Mumbai's colleges for instance, had rarely seen the kind of radicalism and feverish political activity that characterized Delhi, Aligarh, Calcutta, the North-East and Kerala. In fact, this blindness to all things political - bomb blasts, boiling Maratha sentiments, censorship, Mandal, Masjid etc.; was a cause for concern through the nineties. So it came as a pleasant surprise when in 1998, a small bunch of students decided to campaign for an anti-nuclear policy. It ballooned into a 1500 strong movement culminating in a rockshow attended by over twenty thousand people. 'Pop activism' is another middle path walked by small numbers of urban college students in big cities. Popular culture with issue-based activism makes an attractive combo for some. *Culturemove* was one such Bangalore based student initiative which explored the possibilities of music in protest. Despite the traditionalist's sneer, such engagement with civil society is gaining slow acceptance. It provides the youth options of involvement in democratic nation building without having to cut through mainstream politics. Its effectiveness in terms of influencing policymaking, however, is still doubtful because of the miniscule student community involved. The extent of our obligations is also crucial. Law School used to have a tradition of 'study circles' where people sat down and discussed things. From international legal controversies to sexuality, a broad canvas was covered. But is mere discussion enough? Debate needs to be a prelude to action. Study circles can at best, raise awareness levels in college. Political parties in colleges used to give students 'real' opportunities for change; the ones in search of such avenues are a frustrated lot today, there being few broad-based alternatives. It is this void that must be addressed.

The English media in India is keen - perhaps even goes out of its way (for instance: Times International 'coz "India is going international") to remind its audience that it is at the threshold of an Indian century. One of the oft-cited reasons is that the largest demographic group of India's population is in the 15 to 35 years bracket - considered the most productive. However, it is doubtful whether numbers alone will be enough to give India an edge. We need to discover ways to engage with civil society so that both vision and numbers come to be counted.

AJU JOHN



## THE INDIFFERENT COLLEGE STUDENT

It has been a fortunate pleasure as well as a tiresome burden, having to voyage through the marsh of abysmal mediocrity that most semi-urban Indian colleges are submerged in. It might be a dangerous generalization to make, and much as we stand to lose making one in this case, I think the possible gains we can extract far outweigh any other considerations. At the risk of sounding condescending, arrogant or pitifully vain, I have in the following article in an uncompromising manner used harsh and spiteful phrases, when talking of certain people and institutions. It is not a brash attempt to belittle anyone, just one to provoke. Given the staunch mindsets of adults, and with teens and college goes being overwhelmed with information and influences of an increasingly commercial nature, it is often only the extremist who gets to be heard, and an eccentric few who already have built a certain amount of credibility amongst the required circles. The term 'indifference' is of course overly subjective, and having had a rather vivid glimpse at the college cultures of a few institutions with vastly different standards, organisational set-ups, and general atmosphere I have found a great deal lacking from student communities; stuff that seemed so jarring and obvious that I assumed a large number of people would see it in the same light as I did. They have not and this in some part always gives adequate reason for the people of my 'lot' to dissasociate ourselves from the college environment, and easy it was, to make our indifference digestible by drowning in other substitutes.

All said it still seems clear that a handful apart, a massive majority of college students are thoroughly indifferent to exploration, the assimilation of knowledge and experience, social issues, their own field of study, and sometimes even to just using their eyes and minds. The flimsy skeleton of an active student community in this country is on the fringe of crumbling. 'Active' implying the desire to express thoughts and ideas, to express and create at the bare minimum. The same images are flashed repeatedly by a substandard and intellectually stunted media, whose form and content

of 'investigative reporting' that deals with college students is bland and out of tune with reality. Anytime this indifference or immaturity of students becomes so apparent that a formal statement by the press becomes necessitated, the same influences and general rubbish is recycled and offered as an explanation: the hundred odd trashy cable channels, frenzied and misleading exposures to different cultures, the excessive importance accorded to sustaining a good academic record rather than to learning and understanding, the shallow natures of typical college students (who are for reasons unknown portrayed as being trendy by every other person), the safety in numbers that mediocrity sustains, blah blah. Its eternal partners in crime: the acts of smoking anything under the sun, drinking anything containing alcohol, naïve rebellion, or for the conservative ones, simply living by age old tradition. Good for sound bytes and oh so fine debate material, but what trickles down to the street, after all the filtering and rephrasing? The easy underworld of excess for a few, the enchanting bank balances of the 'mass production zone' for the many, babies for the rest; a tasty recipe for indifference. "Just say no?" Sure.

The increasing number of specialisations mushrooming within varied disciplines of study has killed the possibility of students developing an unequivocally holistic perspective, unless students do take the trouble of attaining one, through means not prescribed. This strange approach to education, performance, success, and a career has rendered general nonsensical writing such as this a very ancillary role in student communities. However unfortunate it might be that such a mindset prevails largely due to predispositions and the random hand of circumstance, it does not excuse an unwillingness to change. Damn! What was meant to be a few minutes of editing has become an hour of re-writing. My train of thoughts have been fractured and sub-divided and what has resulted is a comical mess of opinions, personal bitching, from the outsider looking in to the insider looking out, all the while having to go about the obligatory tasks and associations with the people who constitute the

collective, the student community so to say. My experience here with this pre- pubescent collective has taught me something valuable: that this semi-urban, or semi-rural congregation of dim wits is not something fleeting or temporary. A precarious balance is maintained so that when the sword of progress pierces their vulnerable hearts and minds, they are miraculously untouched and the status quo is maintained. Bring in the concept of a modern, innovative and creative university; flood the streets with copies of 'The Economist', Hunter S Thompson's writings, Dostoevsky or anything that might broaden perspectives and combat this indifference. Some element of this general indifference might evaporate but the essence of what keeps this sort of irrational attitude strong isn't going anywhere. I have put a tremendous amount of thought into this seemingly straightforward theme 'the indifferent college student', and have unfortunately, come to some disturbing conclusions. Trust me when I say I have tried as hard as humanly possible to keep from attacking people who, though partly responsible for this affliction spreading through colleges, are just as helpless in dispelling this notion that we have a reasonably well developed university or college culture. The plain truth is that these centres purported to be representative of the academic sophistication of present-day civilisation are but breeding grounds for mediocrity and indifference, and for those of us who care enough to say something about it, cynicism.

Until I can draft a means of changing mindsets I need the cynicism to keep me alive. It might not be the most constructive or courageous approach but it will keep me alive. And at the end of the day that's what matters: that we don't get sucked into this easy life, that we hold on to our own while attempting to change things, have fun along the way and not take ourselves too seriously. Call me a dreamer but keep Quirk alive for as long as possible and who knows...

- RAGHU



This is an attempt to reconstruct chunks of blogs of 'indifferent' college students who vary widely in shape,size and colour:

**'INDIFFERENT' COLLEGE STUDENT 1:** It's been twenty-four more hours of unproductivity. Have been lying on this bed along with a heap of clothes and books. The Collected Works of Shaw stares back in familiar indignation of literature spurned, and university examination disregarded. A February-moderated Delhi winter wind condescendingly brushes aside my flimsy pattern and unsettles the motley contents of my table. I lay still and inactive. So do the contents of my room in the university campus. I use the first finger and thumb of my left hand to move around the pillow a little bit so as not to have to feel something poking from beneath. What I unearthed was a pen stuck to a piece of paper which could have been a letter to my mother, today, had I not given up in the middle of the first word two days back. It was supposed to be a fitting response to motherly concern over daughters who skip exams and pass up worthy suitors. Anger and rebellion had dissolved into

purpose is beginning to sound almost hazy. I am sticking around because the minister talks in English. Chances are that he will talk for longer if it is an English-speaking woman in a white transparent kurta. I have accumulated, during this time, an admirable collection of photographs all over the barren expanse of north-west India. Complete with sand-dunes and red turbans and village festivals and stories of oppression. The state tourism department seems to like them quite a lot. An international travel company has asked me to move into forest land to fit in with their ad-campaign showing a green India.

**'INDIFFERENT' COLLEGE STUDENT 3** Projects are finally done. One went in a day late. But it was necessary, at the cost of half a mark, so I could get it okayed by this stud senior, who won the gold medal in constitutional law. Partied all night to celebrate project submissions. There was no cover-charge at Spinn last night. Which means get sloshed and dance all night. That is the way to party. And not sip at dilute beer in dingy little Pecos, and act cool. Anyways, there was a HOT DJ! Who gave me two vodka shots free!

pulled down. If the left-wallahs did it, the right-wallahs would protest and burn vehicles on the road. The left-wallahs, in turn, would do the same thing if the right-wallahs had committed the act. Arre, what's the big deal if some forgotten neta's already-in-shambles statue is pulled down to make way for cars on the road, so that traffic isn't so bad during peak hours. Protests have almost become a recreational activity in Kolkata. At least, now there are better roads, and the city is developing on the eastern side... No one really cares about whoever's statue it is. It's just another ploy to create some tamasha. I'm sure the journos have a say in all this so that they can get a meaty story out of it. If anyone cared, they would try to put the whole bunch of good-for-nothing young fools, in my neighbourhood, into a college. Actually, there's no point in doing even that. Unless you are in good colleges, you won't have regular classes or exams. Which means you will just fool around or get into political gangs or ganja-peddling. To get into the ones, you need good marks, which you will never get if you are not already from a good city school. Besides,

LOOKING FOR INDIFFERENCE

an overwhelming sense of nothingness. It is beautiful not to think. Just to lie.

**'INDIFFERENT' COLLEGE STUDENT 2** The rally was largely non-violent. Some bruises, some minor injuries during the lathi charge which were taken care off immediately afterwards. Subsequent to a ragi-roti and god-knows-what-sabji lunch (which I cannot stomach even with gallons of romanticism), we began piling into our jeeps to head back and recuperate. Tomorrow's game plans had to be chalked out. The Minister had still not agreed to meet us. Today was the fourteenth dharna. In the middle of summer in north-west India. The limited water supply that the protest party carried had to be conserved for those who fell ill. It's trouble carrying water out of the villages in any case. Water which is ploughed out of various hand-pumps and carried in matkas by women over long distances. A much-publicised story of oppression in rural India. It can also make for exotic photographs for calendars published by the tourism department. The fight for clean water had begun in college, increasingly become a passion, pushing me out of college and home and the city. The fight, today, is a way of life. The

Life is good again. Need to get started on work regarding a publication. Research is done, just need to sit down and figure it out. That leaves just enough time for placement applications. I am running late on that front. The who's-who in class must have already applied. That just about ends my spell of partying. There is some furore in college about the notice for repeat examinations being too short. Not like anyone gives a shit. Slim chance that the administration is going to listen. It's just the pretentious little good Samaritans who run around kicking a fuss. The boy wants to cut out for the weekend. Don't know if it's a good idea. Could have got the application out of the way in that time. Also, too much money has been spent partying. Am unwilling, but let's see.... Parents are the most naïve creatures under the planet. Ma's always saying come home during holidays, what's the need to do so many internships. I don't know how she'd cope if she were ever thrown into a jungle like this one. If you can't play the game the way it's played, you just get left behind. And I am not ready to be one of those...

**'INDIFFERENT' COLLEGE STUDENT 4** Huge traffic jam around college because some old neta's statue is being

what is the point of getting into general courses? No one gets a job after three years of B.A. So one needs to get into professional institutes, which are bloody expensive and not for people like us. If the bloody traffic jam cleared on time, I would stand a higher chance at a more comfortable future. Had to miss my computer application classes coz I got late. Have missed two classes before this. It's bloody expensive for a diploma course, and I can't afford to keep missing classes. Three months to go before graduation exams. Had thought I had a chance at some job with the computers thing. It was probably part of the left's policy to keep us working-class people uneducated. They block roads so that those want to, can't make it to classes on time. If I spoke better English and could carry off make-up, I'd have a shot at receptionist's job, though my father doesn't like the idea. He doesn't think I have too much going by way of job opportunities, and hence I should marry the guy with the red hair, who owns a sari shop down the road. I don't like the way his hair looks. But he, apparently, has a flat somewhere on the Eastern Bypass...

-ATREYEE

MY GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE

The earliest and perhaps the only memory that I have of my paternal grandmother was of her running after me (age five or six), after I had committed some mischief or other, during my visits to her during my summer vacations. Of my maternal grandmother, *ammachy* to me, I have no such early recollections, perhaps because I saw a lot of her as I grew up and those memories crowded out any images of her that I had during my early childhood. Visiting *ammachy* during the summers, from between the fifth till after my tenth boards was a yearly ritual, something not-to-be-missed during those otherwise dreary summers.

*Ammachy* lived in an old, tired tharavad, an ancestral home so ancient that most, including my grandmother, had forgotten when it was built. It had long, rambling verandahs, and doors that opened from every room into a pebbled courtyard. At times it would seem to me that this unknown ancestor-builder of mine had somehow abandoned the task of completing the traditional Kerala *nalukettu*, for whatever reasons, the house having only three of the prescribed four sides of the rectangle enclosing the central courtyard. Ever since I remember it, the house was surrounded on three sides by rubber trees planted in straight lines, and at night I would often go to sleep with the hum of cicadas to give me company. Facing the house, on the other side of the courtyard was the cowshed, a peculiar place indeed. The cows themselves having been long gone, the place was used only for storing firewood, and other suchlike bramble. Once, I jocularly asked *ammachy* whether the cowshed was placed there so that in the olden days the cows could keep an eye on the house, and moo if any thief approached it at night. My grandmother, not being much into humour, merely gave me a stern glare in response. From that time on, I kept my jokes, and my thoughts, to myself.

Though the house itself was quite ancient, many of the old parts had been replaced by modern substitutes. Some of the wood parts, however had been left behind, and among them included the wooden pillars on the extended verandah. These pillars were intricately carved with exquisite capitals stretching up to reach a sloping tiled roof, to which I would jump and measure my height at the beginning of every holiday. But the strangest amongst the remnants of that other world was a large high roofed building adjoining the main house, which was converted, as the needs of the house expanded, into a bedroom for the elders of the family. On one of the walls in this building were hung pictures of my great grandparents, and portraits of their parents. Those rooms had a peculiar aura about them, something of a church-like sanctity, aggravated only by the surrounding silences; inside them, I would often find myself speaking quietly to whomever I was with, or ensuring that my slippers did not flap as they touched the red oxide floors, as if I

would disturb their ancestral sleep if I spoke too harshly or walked too loudly. These silences however were not unique to the tip-toe rooms, but pervaded large spaces of that ancient house. To any first-time visitor, there were not immediately noticeable, because they would hide themselves in cobwebbed corners and wait for the novelty of the visit to fade out. But even then, they were shy friends, and would prefer to approach slowly, step by step, as the conversations of the house dwindled. *Ammachy*, sitting on the verandah with her guest, dressed in her plain white *chatta* (blouse) and *mundu*, would conspire for these moments, the necessity of etiquette-talk tapering off to meet these companions of hers with a far-away look in her eyes, and a deep tiredness among her wrinkles. During the summer months, my friends and I would often weave patterns on those silences, especially during passionate courtyard cricket matches, played with impromptu formed local teams. But even these were only transient intervals. The silences would return invariably, and *ammachy* would watch them carefully for a while, as they floated through her house, and then the far-away-look would return to her. In the evenings, as their firm embrace become insufferable, my escape was always the guava tree.

Immediately behind the house, and shortly before the interminable rubber trees began their parallel processions, their veins bled white onto upturned coconut shells, there stood an old guava tree; an old guava tree whose branch-edges grazed the sloping tiled roof of the house, and whose upper reaches offered my a panoramic view of the horizon over the house. I was an expert tree-climber and would sit many of those evenings nestled in its branches, hearing the steady drone of the cicadas build up their sounds for the night, watching the sun grow soft in its age, lending a warm glow of redorange, before it set, as if for the last time. *Ammachy* would begin her evening prayers at around the same time, her softly chanted hymns reaching me through the opened windows behind the house, and I would hear her call out to me to join her. I would linger on for a short while, straining for a last glimpse of the dying sun, before I clambered down, and joined her in breaking the spell-of-silence. And we were always successful. In the night, the silences would not return, warned off by our evening prayers, and the constant drone of the cicadas-through-the-rubber-trees. Even the late night truck traffic on the main road, I think, conspired with us on this.

The house had not always been like this, had not always been a battle between silence and life; in those days the silences had been too few and far between to be noticed. It had come slowly, like a thief at night, like an uninvited visitor who had slipped in without anyone's notice, but since had arrived, was too late or too impolite to be turned out. When *ammachy* had arrived as a young seventeen year old bride, the house had been bustling with activity, with the scramble of children and the gentle steps of old age. She was set immediately at work, feeding and clothing the large joint family. She had come meekly, at a time when other grandmothers and great-grandmothers were holding sway, but she knew then that as the wife of a priest, as a *maskiyamma*, she would be the one who would stay. She proved herself then, and again, successfully over the years,

as an able administrator of land and house, as a caregiver, as a matriarch. Although deferential to the wishes of *achen*, her husband, she ran the house with a sharp tongue and a gentle hand, and raised not only her own children, but also her nieces and nephews. Over many years, the family went their separate ways, her children married, and *achen* died, and *ammachy* was left alone on the verandah, watching the silences.

They didn't forget her, her family. Initially, they would pressurize her to leave, to go with them, to lock up the house and wander their worlds. But she would refuse, gently at first, and then when they did not understand, more sharply. Their world was not hers, and between those worlds, she preferred the silences. In the alternative, they came every now and then to visit. My summer visits were, I think, a part of that plan. Only, they didn't know of the silences, of how incapable I was of facing it. So every summer I would wait eagerly, for some part of the family to arrive, for the silences to be drowned out by the slamming of car doors, and the hurrah of loud voices greeting each other. Unlike unpleasant visitors who were frightened off by these approaching houris, family never knew. And never feared. For a while, even *ammachy* would lose her far-away-look and smile, amidst the hullabaloo. But oh! Most joyous of all: There was a permanence about the manner in which the silences themselves scurried off.

Over the many summers, *ammachy* grew progressively ill, and fragile. Once, when the illness was feared by all except *ammachy* herself, her son (my uncle) had her removed to a hospital. After an initial acquiescence, she retracted and demanded her return home. My uncle stood firm, but she was adamant. "If those doctors want to see me, they can do so at home," she proclaimed. Home was her place of rest, her place of return. The last time I went to see her, one evening, shortly after I had joined college, she was at home, as she had wanted. She was deathly ill, but the far-away-look was gone. Instead in her eyes, I saw only warmth and recognition. All of her children, many nieces and nephews, and many of us grandchildren were there, around her. All of us spoke in whispers, in hushed tones, as if speaking quietly would keep the inevitable away. I leaned close to her and whispered my name, said "it's me, *ammachy*." Her lips did not move, but I saw a flicker of recognition in her eyes. I waited awhile in that closed room, but soon noticed that the silences were back. *Ammachy* would not have liked it, for though she may have preferred them to other worlds, to far-away-places, at home, she preferred her children's voices. I quietly slipped out the door, and saw that evening was approaching fast. Not knowing when next I might witness such a beautiful sunset, I ran behind the house to the old guava tree. As I clambered up the branches, I saw the sun in its final descent, its final rays spread over the earth, a breathtaking sunset which left light over the world even after it had set. I stayed there a long time after that, watching the darkness descend, watching the silences sweep over me. This time, though, I was not afraid. The silences had momentarily won. But *ammachy* would soon be Home.

- ABU MATHEN GEORGE

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Walt worked in a state building with four hundred employees spread over three floors and played easy jazz at low volume on his desk radio. He was allowed to dress “professionally casual” and frequently sported black Doc Martin boots with thin laces and a gray flannel button-up sweater with elbow patches sewn on by his wife.

He kept his black hair short and neat, had aspirations to open a small book store, and were it not for social norms and the laws of the land, would have put a large caliber bullet through Wanda Cornelius’s head.

“An advertisin’ man asked me yesterday to be on a billboard,” Wanda said loudly, leaning against his door before Walt bothered to look up. “But I’m not doin’ it. You know they just want to use me to draw folks in their bank and then get them on the credit plan, payin’ interest until they too old to care. Said I had an appealin’ face. Appealin’.

Pointed up to this woman on the sign above and said that could be me. I told him, polite as could be, that if he would excuse me, I was waitin’ for my bus.”

They were threatening to move Wanda into Walt’s office. His supervisor Reynolds brought it up. They were closing the Sacramento branch and had to make room for new people. Wanda ate bacon at work, kept in a plastic bag in her desk. “I’m not apologizin’ for it,” she told Walt. “Lady down in accounting said she thought it was funny that I eat bacon on a regular basis. I like bacon. Maybe you like chips and bring a bag for yourself for the day. That’s your business. Why should I be apologizin’ for what it is I like to eat?”

Walt’s life hinged on rationalization, but he could make none for having to endure Wanda. He stuck with the job to pay rent and survive. He was bright, but dropped out of high school and didn’t attend college. After six years they gave him an office. It had no window and was poorly ventilated, but was his.

“You got it good, havin’ this office,” Wanda told him, more than a year after he moved in. “‘Course it’s ‘cause you a man and of the right disposition. Seven years your elder and they still got me sittin’ out there in the open. You don’t know how good you got it.”

He resisted mentioning that she had only been there two years. Nor did he bring up that she made more than he and worked fewer hours. Still she came, three or four times a day and always with a fresh monologue. He heard about her brother in law’s crack problem, her husband’s bouts with constipation, her critical opinion of Jodie Foster and her stance on the English. “Why they have to go talkin’ that way - like they better than everybody?”

And now Wanda would be next to him on a daily basis. It wasn’t a done-deal yet, but it would happen. Reynolds never mentioned anything he didn’t follow through on. Walt had to make a preemptive strike and Marie Keegan seemed the logical choice. He didn’t know her well, but they had both traveled together on a business trip with a group from the office. They had eaten dinner at a San Diego TGI Friday’s and Walt had been uncomfortably short on conversation. He spent most of the meal repeating that he wished he’d ordered what she had. Marie spoke with a slight Irish accent, and was thoroughly professional.

“Marie Keegan?” Reynolds repeated after hearing Walt’s request. “I have no objection to moving Marie in with you, but Wanda Cornelius also wanted a change of space.”

“Unless Wanda requested my office specifically, I think it would be a smoother transition.”

“Well, that’s a consideration,” Reynolds agreed. “Let me speak with both and see what we can do.”

When Walt arrived Monday morning, he passed Wanda in the hall. She kept her mouth tightly closed, shook her head and shoulders, and gave him a smug “mmm-hmm.” He regarded her briefly but kept walking. Inside his office, Marie was positioning her desk six feet from his. Her shoulder-length brown hair was tied in back and she had the appearance of a striking schoolteacher, making an impression with new students on the first day of class.

“Looks like we’re roommates,” she said. She was wearing a snug blue sweater.

“Yes, I know,” Walt said, looking her in the eye. “I hope that’s alright with you.”

“Anywhere I can get my work done.” She looked at him expectantly.

“Yes?” he said, sensing there was more.

“Could you shut the door?” she asked. “I work better without interruption.”

Walt closed the door behind, not mentioning the ventilation. He draped his button-down around the back of his chair and sat with an uncharacteristic grin. He checked his email: one from Reynolds and seventeen spam deliveries.

“You still have your accent, don’t you Marie?” Walt asked a few minutes later.

She kept at what she was doing for a moment before looking up. “Yes, I guess I do,” she said.

“It isn’t heavy,” he went on. “Just a hint.”

“Well, I left Dublin when I was seventeen.”

“Oh. I see,” Walt said. “It’s nice as it is.”

She acknowledged him politely and went back to work. He was sure he had something to do, but couldn’t remember what. His screensaver flicked on and he stared at the endless formation of connecting pipes.

Walt sat ignoring his meat loaf that evening, playing with the prongs on his fork and not saying much to Brenda, his wife. She was a thoughtfully attractive, full-face woman with pale blue eyes and imperfect nose. She glanced up between scanning the evening cable listings.

“Do you talk much at work?” Walt asked her.

“I don’t know,” Brenda answered. “I suppose not. Not too much.” She cut herself another slice of meat loaf. “What defines ‘much?’”

“Like what we’re doing here,” he said. “This is much. I asked you a question, you rolled it over in your head, and then you responded.” He kept his eyes fixed on her, emphasizing his interest in the subject.

“Well, I had a conversation with Karen Philo today about beanbag chairs. About how they’ve gone out of fashion.”

“And that wasn’t at lunch?” he asked. “I mean it was during office hours?”

“Yeah,” Brenda said. “In the morning. What brings all this on anyway?”

“Nothing,” Walt said.

Brenda made him an apple tort with whipped cream for dessert and he retreated to the living room and put on a Pogues CD. He removed his shoes and stretched out on their nicely maintained olive green couch, glancing around the small but tastefully decorated home.

“This brings back memories,” Brenda said, coming in with her coffee.

“Yeah,” Walt mused. “It still holds up.” He touched her lightly on the back of her head in a mildly awkward manner and she smiled curiously.

Walt got in early Tuesday morning and made sure to shut the door behind him. He turned the radio on low, sharpened two pencils, and made several phone calls. When Marie arrived, he greeted

## The Shane McGowan Incident

her politely and went back to work. Halfway through drafting an estimate, he felt he was being watched. His eyes drifted slowly from monitor to Marie, who sat in suggestive pose with face in hands and chest resting atop her desk. He smiled at her.

“I’m sorry,” she said.

“Yes?” Walt asked.

“Would you mind terribly turning the radio down? I really need quiet to get my work done.”

“Oh,” he responded, deflated. “It’s just KJAZ. I mean I really couldn’t get it much lower.”

“I know,” she said, smiling and leaning expectantly forward. He switched the radio off and she went immediately to work. His concentration drifted and he wondered if he was able to function without the low-playing jazz. It had become a fixture for him over the years. Marie retrieved a fresh document from the printer beside the filing cabinet, then returned to typing.

“You ever wonder why beanbag chairs didn’t remain popular, Marie?”

“Excuse me?” she asked, looking up with only her eyes.

“You know, beanbags. The floppy chairs with the foam pellets inside. Why didn’t they stay in fashion?”

“I’m afraid I’m not familiar with them.”

He thought about that for a minute. “Not familiar with them?” It hardly seemed possible. It could have been a cultural thing, but she had to have at least seen one. He stared in her direction a bit longer, pondering her proclaimed unfamiliarity and recalling the beanbag chair from his childhood.

“Is there something else?” she asked.

“What?” Walt said snapping out of it.

“You looked like you wanted something,” she said.

“No,” he said. “I’m sorry, there’s nothing.”

The week dragged on. He was careful not to lose concentration or let his eyes focus too long in her direction. Conversation was brief and centered on mundane office matters. “Do you have any scissors in your desk?” “I think I’ll take my lunch now.”

He was relieved when Friday came. Near quitting time, he decided to take one more stab.

“Big plans for the weekend, Marie?” he asked, sticking to a seemingly safe topic.

“Nothing much,” she said, gathering her purse. “You?”

“Going to IKEA to pick up a bookshelf for the wife,” Walt told her.

“IKEA?” Marie said. “Don’t get me started on that place. I can’t stop buying when I’m there.”

Walt pounced on the opportunity. One last shot so he could go home feeling they’d made progress.

“The road to excess leads to the palace of wisdom,” he told her. She stared.

“William Blake,” he explained.

“Oh,” she smiled, putting her sunglasses in her bag.

“Say Marie, you know who Shane MacGowan is, right?”

She glanced at him for a moment. “No. Can’t say that I do.”

“Oh come on,” Walt said, smiling. “Shane MacGowan? Singer for the Pogues? They were a band. Kind of a cross between the Irish Chieftains and the Sex Pistols.”

“Nope. Never heard of them. Or him.” She closed the bag and left.

Walt stewed over the incident as he pieced together the IKEA bookshelf. Brenda brought him a glass of lemonade and complimented him on the job he was doing. He was good with that sort of thing - putting something together with specific instructions. When he finished there were no extra bits and the corners and edges came together neatly. She brought a box of books out from the bedroom to see how they looked on display. “It’s a definite improvement,” she told him, letting an old copy of “Shogun” rest on the top level.

“Do you think most people know who Shane MacGowan is?” he asked her.

“I have no idea,” Brenda responded.

“How about most Irish people? I mean Irish people of our generation who spent time over there. Wouldn’t you think they’ve at least heard of Shane Macgowan?”

“Maybe,” she said. “Why the sudden fascination with Shane MacGowan?”

“No reason.”

She placed a copy of “Sometimes A Great Notion” next to “Shogun.”

Walt stayed up late that night researching Shane MacGowan on the Internet. He found himself completely taken with the Irish singer, who was reported to consume two bottles of whiskey a day in his younger years. He got up from the computer and poured himself a glass of Jamesons from an unopened bottle in the kitchen, then continued reading on MacGowan. He read about his favorite London pub, Filthy McNasty’s, his stints in and out of detox clinics, and the time he fell out of a tour van at fifty miles an hour. Walt scribbled quotes from various musicians and writers, some proclaiming MacGowan to be the “Ireland’s greatest living poet.” He downloaded an image of the singer with three day’s growth, flashing his famed single-toothed smile and saved it as the background for his computer desktop, then crawled into bed around two.

The office buzzed Monday with rumors of the impending addition of personnel. Wanda was leaning over a coworker’s desk when Walt walked by.

“Don’t make much difference what you or I want,” she told the woman. “Want got nothin’ to do with it.” She crossed her arms defiantly when he passed.

Walt shut the door to his office, acknowledged Marie, and went to work. They had three sentences of conversation the entire day and she gave him a cheery “bye now!” before she left.

“Bye now ” Walt thought to himself on the bus home. “What’s that?” He picked up a four pack of Guinness in large cans at the Chinese grocer and opened one at home.

Brenda returned from work and asked him about the beer in the fridge.

“What’s with the Irish kick?” she said, “I had to stare at the picture you left on the computer screen all morning.”

“That’s Shane MacGowan.” Walt smiled, starting to feel the effects of his second can.

“I know who it is,” she said. “His toothless presence is a bit unsettling. I can think of nicer things to vacuum to.”

“Do you know what Oscar Wilde said?” he asked, putting is feet up on the coffee table. “ ‘Work is the curse of the drinking class.’ That’s pretty good, don’t you think?”

“I think if you’re going to turn into a beer-drunk for the rest of your thirties, you better let me know now,” she told him.

“MacGowan is something of an Oscar Wilde of his generation, don’t you think?”

She didn’t answer.

There were three new employees Tuesday morning, transferred from Sacramento. Wanda had already cornered one, giving him the low-down on things. Walt went the long way around to avoid another ‘mmm-hmm’. Marie again seemed in a good mood and they spoke little through the morning. He stopped her as she was getting up to go for lunch.

“Marie,” Walt said, “there’s something I want to ask.”

“Yes?”

“Well, it’s not a big thing. I suppose it’s kind of ridiculous, really.” She looked at him curiously, sticking around to hear him out as she zipped up a black pullover.

“Last Friday,” he went on, “when we were leaving.. we had that brief conversation.

And I thought that maybe you misunderstood me when I asked about Shane MacGowan. You know- the Pogues guy?”

“No,” she said, still smiling. “Never heard of him.” She shut the door behind her.

He pressed her again, gently, Wednesday afternoon.

“I don’t understand,” she said, shaking her head. “Is he a fuckin’ relative?” She pushed her roller chair away from the desk. “I don’t know who he is, OK? I’ve heard of U2 - OK? Bono? Is that good enough?”

“Bono?” Walt asked. “That’s curious. Because Bono, he’s a lightweight - a poseur.

But Shane MacGowan, well he’s in the great tradition of hard-living artists and literary figures. You know- William Burroughs and like that. And you being from Ireland and obviously bright, I was certain you would be familiar with him.”

“Well you were wrong,” she told him. “And I don’t care for the stereotype, if you must know.”

Walt couldn’t sleep that night. He sat playing with the wax from a burning candle at the kitchen table. “Doesn’t care for the stereotype?” he thought. “She knows who he is. A s well as she knows her own mother, she knows who he is.” He went to bed and fell asleep around three. Two hours later, Brenda woke up to the sound of Walt rummaging through an old bag of clothes in their closet. He told her to go back to sleep.

The next morning he was out the door quickly with only a glass of orange juice, and in the office before all except one of the new employees. He stepped out briefly for a cup of coffee and when he returned Marie was waiting, standing with one hand on hip in back of her chair. He offered her an assured smile.

“What the hell is this?” Marie asked the next morning, holding up the small t-shirt he left on her desk.

“I bought it a long time ago at a Rainbow Records outlet. “Rum, Sodomy and the Lash’- it was one of the Pogues’ best albums.”

“And why is it on my desk?”

“Well,” he said, “you know how we got into that funny thing about Shane MacGowan? I thought it might be a nice gesture to point out the absurdity of the incident. It was small on me to begin with and shrunk in the wash. It might look good on you.”

“What does that mean?” she asked, holding the shirt in a crumpled ball. “It shrunk, so it will look good on me?”

“Not because it shrunk,” Walt backtracked. “Because it’s still in good condition. I just mean that it doesn’t fit me any more.”

She threw the shirt pointedly in his direction and it landed on his shoulder. “Take it home and let your wife model it,” she told him.

“Before she notices it’s missing.”

Walt made no mention of the shirt incident to Brenda. He was restless and got in and out of bed several times that night.

The week passed slowly, but there was no further reference to the shirt, and it looked like they would make it through Friday afternoon, until Marie checked her email.

“Walt,” she said with cheeks flushed red, rotating her computer screen far enough for him to see, “would you mind explaining this?”

“That’s a JPEG picture from the Internet. It’s Shane MacGowan. I thought I’d send it to you so you’d know what he looks like.”

She took a breath. “You emailed this to me?” she asked. “From ten feet away, you emailed this to me?”

“Well, no. I sent it to you from home last night.”

Walt stood in the doorway, staring into the office Monday morning, while Wanda watched from behind.

“Now I’m no census taker,” she told him, “but there seem to be a lesser number of desks in here then there was last Friday.”

He pulled his head out and looked around the rest of the office.

“If you must know,” Wanda went on, “she in that tiny room down the hall - where the janitor used to keep his things. Now I ‘spose he got to find somewhere else to store his cleanin’ supplies. She could barely fit her desk in there. But she had what you might call determination.”

He stared curiously at the door to the janitor’s supply closet.

“Mmm-hmm,” Wanda confirmed, “she in there. And if I was you, I’d hope that door stay closed.” She followed him in and watched him remove his sweater and sit down. “I don’t expect you care to let me in on exactly what it was made this happen, but that’s OK. I don’t need to be knowin’ everything.”

He looked up at her and stared for a moment. “It was about Shane MacGowan, if that makes you feel better,” Walt told her. “It was about Shane MacGowan.”

“Shane MacGowan?” Wanda repeated, crossing her arms and shaking her head. “You ‘spect me to eat that? All this over some Irish boy ain’t even got the sense to get his teeth fixed?”

Walt sat that night waiting for the 32 bus home. He played with one of the patches on his sweater. It was coming undone and he made a mental note to tell Brenda. The leaves on the city trees were beginning to turn fall brown and litter the streets.

The bus came and he sat down in the back and gazed out the window. One block down he noticed a rather large billboard and something about the woman on the sign caught his eye. It was Wanda Cornelius, wearing bifocal lenses and holding a cooked turkey.

“Bayview Bank,” it read. “As Familiar as Family.”

- Rick Monaco

## THANKS !

Quirk would like to thank **Reliance Industries Ltd** for VERY generously supporting us. We would especially like to acknowledge **Mr Bhat**, who decided that a litmag like ours deserves a chance. The person who ensured that the money reached us; quickly, efficiently and in time for this issue is a Law School alum: **Honnesh**. Besides, he put up with us!



The ability to place cultural information in linguistic storage is crucial to the existence of a culture. This explains the legends, fables and folklore that gets formulated and passed down through generations. Through our paper, we will explore how the Indian Comic Genre (more specifically Tinkle and Amar Chitra Katha ) forms a contemporized version of this age-old tradition of storytelling, adapted to cater to today’s radically changed socio-cultural milieu. The need and relevance of hallowed epic tales like the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and other historical legends in graphic, sequential art form, or the appeal of Tinkle characters like Kalia the Crow, Kapish the Monkey, Tantri the Mantri, Shikari Shambhu and Suppandi will be studied with respect to their sociological functions and their psychological and symbolic value. Throughout the paper we will be looking at the comic form with respect to the modern alternative it provides to the traditional folk medium and will briefly take into consideration its market and audience. Human culture, comprising automated responses to social expectations is not inherited but learnt. An important way of transmitting cultural information from generation to generation is by encoding it in language and passing it down. B.Malinowski, a pioneering social anthropologist, who sees the contents of myths and folklore as sociological systems, talks of the concept of ‘cultural storage’. The language and concept is a derivative of genetic discourse. Just as biological information is encoded in the living cell, cultural information is codified into language and is thereby transmitted to every member of the sociological group. Keeping this in mind, the Vedas, the Epics, and other classic works that fall into the genre of story collections like the Panchatantra, Jatakas, and Hitopadesha along with all native folklore can be seen as the literary repositories of Indian culture. As we shall demonstrate, contemporary comics draw heavily from this ancient canon and fall into the same literary tradition as is evidenced by their general style, treatment and recurring motifs. Therefore by meshing together ancient tradition with two modern alternate avenues of communication - graphic pictorial and static letters - into an amalgamated, comprehensible and complimentary package, the comic book can be seen as a highly accessible and contemporised instrument of cultural conditioning of the child. It would not be an understatement to say that most of the contemporary child’s knowledge of Indian history and mythology is derived from the Amar Chitra Katha. The effect and scope of this genre came to the forefront in an interview with its creator, Mr Anand Pai, when he recalled an incident in an international Ramayan Mela where a delegate once identified the mother of Ravana as Kehkasi because he had read as much in the Amar Chitra Katha. It was then that Mr. Pai, realized how authentic people thought it was and that he would have to be very careful with his research. Such acts of cultural documentation, as is attempted by this comic, have always been essential for cultural conservation, especially now that global boundaries are slowly being erased and closed cultural identities being threatened. Comics can thus be seen as a continuation of the ancient task originally performed by the age-old Indian oral tradition- of acquiring, storing and retrieving cultural articulation. Thus, they would also function as a primary source of shared understanding, shared wisdom, shared cognition and a shared world-view. Having said this, it becomes interesting to note that the Amar Chitra Katha was started (in 1969) with the aim of ‘nation building’ and the subtitle of the series to this day remains ‘rediscovering the glorious heritage of India’. Now that it has been firmly established that this genre is not a frivolous means of merely entertaining children with short attention spans and oscillating interests, let us take a closer look at the actual genre. Another function that was performed by the oral tradition was to ensure that each individual of a cultural group acquired the skills needed to deal adequately with the social, material and functional demands of their environment. Has this function also been taken over by Tinkle and Amar Chitra Katha? As the USP of Tinkle, “bridging the gap between education and fun” implies, these comics are intentionally instructive and educative. But what is the nature of this education? The ‘moral’ of the story, contrary to the apparent, is more often than not barely ethical, be it the tales of Birbal or the witticism of Tenali Rama. To

Bards, Sages  
and Comic  
Pages  
A LOOK AT THE INDIAN COMIC GENRE

summarize an instance from the comic adventures of the latter, once two thieves come to loot his house. Being fully aware of their presence, he starts talking in a loud voice about how unsafe it is to keep valuables in the house and that he has done the smart thing by stashing them in the well outside. The thieves gleefully run off to the well, little knowing that a) there is no treasure and b) he has constructed furrows leading from the well to his fields so that the water they dig out serves to irrigate his crops!!! The power of common sense, wisdom, thought and analysis that is also known as ‘Viveka’ is privileged over ‘Dharma’ or morally impeccable conduct. Animal tales such as Kalia the Wise Crow and Kapish the Monkey with the Supernatural Tail who invariably succeed in outwitting their conniving enemies can perhaps be traced back to the 6th century compilation, the Panchatantra. These tales glorify the “clever” animal that succeeds in outwitting its covert enemies. These secular morals – “be wise and live”, “outwit your enemies” and such can barely be called ethical imperatives. The Panchatantra is a work that preaches ‘Niti’ or the “wise” conduct of life, devised by Vishnu Sharma, who was asked by the king Amarashakti to teach his sons the art of running a kingdom and in general, success in life and the art of ‘Tantra’. He spoke of his new method of instruction through the fables: “Following the same principle, in this work, the science of ‘Niti’, conduct or (polity) is taught to youths under the guise of stories.” This practical purpose of teaching worldly wisdom pervades the Panchatantra. A critic, R.Keith observes “the fable, indeed, is essentially connected with the two ranches of science known by the Indians as the ‘Nitisastra” and the ‘Arthasastra”, which have this in common, as opposed to the Dharmasastras that they are not codes of morals but deal with man’s action in practical politics and the conduct of the ordinary affairs of everyday life...”. The work therefore passed as a textbook of ‘artha’, worldly wisdom or ‘niti’, polity, one of the four aspects of human desire, the other being “dharma”, religion or morally proper conduct and “Kama” or love. This is not to say that there is an absolute inversion of the values of ethico-moral behavior the Dharmashastra preaches by the doctrine underlying the Panchatantra and its successive tradition bearers. The characters in it always act according to Dharma, but with characteritic shrewdness that is taught by the Arthashastra. Therefore Tantri the Mantri, whose name is provocative in itself is punished and never allowed to triumph over the naïve and unimpressive Raja Hoojah. His “tantra” is interpreted and received in the negative sense as scheming and conniving probably because it is aimed against the king, the structural and hierarchical head of the social order. Thus we can read the functional purpose of the moral as not ethical imperatives but imperatives which deal with social propriety and efficiency. These tales may also be studied for their symbolic value. In animal tales like Kapish and Kalia, simple, defenseless animals outwit the more powerful animals of prey like jackals and tigers either through their supernatural prowess or superior wisdom. The elongating tail of Kapish can be equated with Hanuman, the mythological figure in the Ramayana who set fire to Lanka using his tail. Conventionally dominant animals like jackals and lions have been attributed stock negative characteristics. This can be viewed as a reflection of the psychological battles in the mind of a child about having to submit to the authority of adult figures in their lives. The triumph of the little man over the mighty with his nimble wits is a recurring theme in literature and this can be seen through the example of Tenali Rama as well. The perennial fantasy about superhuman characters also reveals projection of emotional impulses (in this case the desire to be extraordinary and do the impossible) onto characters in the story. In the case of the Ramayana series of Amar Chitra

Katha which is usually retold around Rama as the cultural hero, as is with the epic, it becomes a case of the cultural aspirations of a whole culture being projected onto the hero. On the basis of Karl Gustav Jung’s assumption of dream as individual myth and myth as social dream, the psychological conflicts of a whole culture get portrayed in its myths. This way the collective unconscious of the culture finds expression in its stories. This can be illustrated even through the story of Tinkle’s favourite Anglophile, Shikari Shambhu, whose behaviour reflects his sympathies towards the British demeanor and attitude. Such inclinations are manifested through his attire, profession and mainly his sun helmet. Francis.A.E.Caro and Rosan.A.Jordan explore correlations between folklore and other aspects of cultures of the dominant and subordinate groups in a study of stories, say that the sun helmet is a symbol of the British influence in colonial India. It appears in many comics and movies, signifying the game hunter or the white man in the tropics who used it for protection. Furthermore, it served as a powerful community symbol associated with an Anglo-Indian and Anglophilic identity. The comic laughter aroused by Shambhu’s accidental victories only serves to highlight the nation’s lingering preoccupation with its colonial past, thereby proving true Jung’s theory about cultural anxieties, with respect to comics as well. Suppandi featured the stereotype of the archetypal comic fool who can never handle a situation right. This section invites reader input where they send in the storyline based on which the editors and artists bring the character alive. All folklore and oral storytelling traditions are shaped by immediate audience responses, which mould the further course of the story. In a sense, Tinkle allows room for the same purpose through the Suppandi section and the responses, as is recorded, have been overwhelming. The publishers get between five and six thousand stories from their readers each week, proving that this audience-narrator interface has been successful and serve in forging and maintaining a close bond between the same. Manifestations of old conventions of the folklore tradition thus linger on in the changing world of today. There is also a space allotted to science, discoveries and general knowledge in the Tinkle comic. This corresponds to the adaptation made by this new folklore genre to accommodate the overwhelming and seemingly contradictory world of technology and science. The relatively new section of “The Anu Club” where a science professor instructs a group of children about scientific discoveries also depicts this adaptive change. Several adventure stories along the line of Western comics and containing Western mythology is also an acknowledgement of the overwhelming presence of the myriad of stories and cultural connections that the other cultures, including the Western comic genre have to offer. The Indian adaptation of Spiderman shows a dhoti-clad Spiderman jumping off rickshaws and furthermore, Indian spirituality and mysticism get infused into the tales with him acquiring powers from a yogi and not the radioactive spider as is originally established. These instances depict this genre’s versatility in assimilation and adaptation to the demands of the changing time, with the audience always in focus. The economic market for these comics is also lucrative. With the growth of Indian consumer power and changing spending habits, there is a lot of scope for the Indian Comic Genre. India has the youngest population in the world, crossing 5.5 million under twenty in the year 2015. Also, being a country with a population of children thrice the size of that of the United States ensures that this genre has a substantial mass base popularity and power. Therefore it can be used almost as effectively and with as far reaching an effect as folklore. We conclude by saying that the Indian Comic medium, along with being the one creative field capable of perfect synergy, considering how it amalgamates visual with the spoken, allows mindscape and free fall. This is contrary to certain educators’ narrow view that illustrated adaptations prevent a child from using his/her imagination to the fullest. On being questioned as to where the child’s imagination would go, a cartoonist would say “to the gutter”, which is comic book parlance for the space that comes between each panel. And the rest is left for you to imagine...

PIYA SRINIVASAN & ASHA SUSAN TITUS

WHERE THE STREETS HAVE NO NAME

PRIYADARSHINI KEDLAYA

Far, far away there is a city,  
Where the streets have no name,  
I haven't decided if it's a pity,  
But people there are all the same.

'A street,' said one, enlightening another,  
'Is a path treaded to change position.'  
'Names' he added, ' would be a bother,  
Uniqueness is but an ancient illusion.'

'What is to be achieved through identity  
I can hardly begin to imagine, and yet  
Remote societies engage in this stupidity.  
Names for everything, so much to forget.'

'The excuse they have, openly lame,  
Is creation of a sense of belonging.  
No doubt it is a matter of great shame,  
Such a primitive notion of bonding.'

Perched on cuboid stone benches,  
They munched on wholesome leaves,  
While another listens to one's hunches,  
Till one asks another, what he believes.

Nodding gravely, said another to one,  
'Time will push them forward to evolve,  
To teach them just how it is done,  
All conflicts uniformity will solve.'

Far, far away, there is a city,  
Where the streets have no name,  
I will not decide if it's a pity,  
That people there are all the same.

Backdoor Men

The greys of twilight merge with suburban hydro-carbons as I head back to my newest nest. One more milestone in the endless road to prosperity. The road that is taken again and again by the hapless lot of middle –class offspring. I enter my green-walled haven. Bedroom. Living room. Bath with geyser.

Happiness.

The dust of the biscuit factory giving it the perfect touch of reality to the otherwise flawless dream. These dreams are concrete. Shock-absorbers to virtual cores of big cities. Including ones with cute cars, gel-haired desires, blue mocktails and planned development.

I guess these patches of concrete outgrowths are part of the plan. Sort of backdoor to the Siliconic Dream. The backdoor of Pretty Woman Ladies Beauty Parlour is a window to a world of female feelgoodness. A world of suburban broadboned duskiness desperately trying to chisel its way into metropolitan anorexic wheatishness. The landlady runs the beauty parlour on the ground floor, and lives in a flat somewhat similar to mine, on the eastern end of the first floor. Thick lips and square shoulders sniffing deception in me.

My salaried appearance ultimately earned me Reliability. She found me worthy of the task of economical operation of the pump switch. For this, the keys to the meter-box beneath the staircase had to be taken out of the cosmetics cupboard of the Woman Zone. Everyday excepting Sundays.



It is a task simple enough. Inhale. Pull at the half-shut backdoor. An apologetic guilt-ridden look at one of the hairy-armed attendants . A minute of giggle-and- nudge.A fixed gaze at the rummage in the hairclip-box.Grab the bunch of keys. Exhale. The merciful landlady had agreed after an unfortunate incident involving bare thighs, unnerving shrieks, slammed doors- to minimise the ordeal by allowing me to hang them on a nail sticking out of one of the window-frames, on the way back to my Green-walled Haven. Now it was just once in day. Everyday excepting Sundays.

The business of smoothening skins ends by seven in the evening. The hustle of cleaning up spilt wax and unwanted hair, and accompanying noises drift up to window. Snatches of suburban flirtation colour up mundane chores. The sideburnt-xeroxboy is one of the more regular guests. Drunken exchange of epithets, promises of never-talking-to-him-again and the roar of motorcycle marks the weekly visit of the broad-shouldered automobile repairman.

By daybreak, it's Woman Zone again.The backdoor- a shy screen against the masculine world.

On Sunday mornings, the tingly scent of hairspray, body lotion, the prickly film of unwanted hair clings on to me. Sunday mornings are days of relief from the regular ordeal. I operate the pump and retire to my Greenwalled Haven. The landlady

returns to domestic clatter. Afternoon reverie descends. The drone of autorickshaws underline shifting images of broad lips, square shoulders, large mirrors.

ATREYEE





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Flickering light, electric shock  
Crawling snake-pit, I could not sleep  
I jumped at every sound, you mocked  
The very walls began to creep.  
Something strange was happening here  
I knew it, but couldn't understand  
You had watched it all, I feared  
Grey fingers on the stumps of my hands.  
A twitching, tremulous, mad season  
Medusa with a camel's hunch  
Little circular bits of reason  
Once before dinner, once before lunch  
And now I look back into the void  
And laugh, and say I was paranoid.

ARUN SAGAR

CLARK KENT, THE AMISH  
FARMER  
v.  
JIMMY DEAN, THE KRYPTONIAN  
-RUDEN

SOLITUDE  
- RUDEN



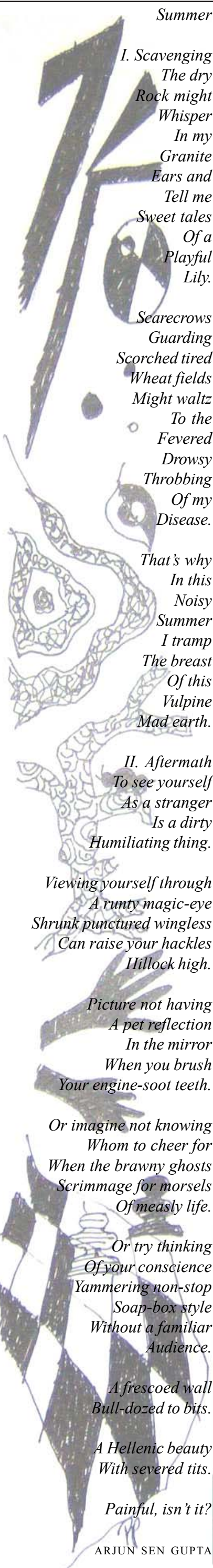
TRIBUTE

Windmill twisting fender on stage  
All the world's a mighty rage  
Big nose, a wasteland in your head  
Blue eyes screaming, the King is dead!

Empty glass, but you explained  
Distorted thunder in my brain  
Euterpe and her lustrous calves  
Four mirrors, or showed they halves?

Substitute the world for a cage  
Even Peter Pan must age  
No little boys, no glittering siren  
No men norgiants made of iron.

ARUN SAGAR



Summer

I. Scavenging  
The dry  
Rock might  
Whisper  
In my  
Granite  
Ears and  
Tell me  
Sweet tales  
Of a  
Playful  
Lily.

Scarecrows  
Guarding  
Scorched tired  
Wheat fields  
Might waltz  
To the  
Fevered  
Drowsy  
Throbbing  
Of my  
Disease.

That's why  
In this  
Noisy  
Summer  
I tramp  
The breast  
Of this  
Vulpine  
Mad earth.

II. Aftermath  
To see yourself  
As a stranger  
Is a dirty  
Humiliating thing.

Viewing yourself through  
A runty magic-eye  
Shrunk punctured wingless  
Can raise your hackles  
Hillock high.

Picture not having  
A pet reflection  
In the mirror  
When you brush  
Your engine-soot teeth.

Or imagine not knowing  
Whom to cheer for  
When the brawny ghosts  
Scrimmage for morsels  
Of measly life.

Or try thinking  
Of your conscience  
Yammering non-stop  
Soap-box style  
Without a familiar  
Audience.

A frescoed wall  
Bull-dozed to bits.

A Hellenic beauty  
With severed tits.

Painful, isn't it?

ARJUN SEN GUPTA



People,  
Just got to know about your little endeavour from Abhay's mail on the Sarai Reader's List, and decided to check out your first number. Won't be all seniorish and say that I am impressed, let me just say that it is one of the best things to come out of the law school for the brief period I have known it. Good enough, I may add, to make me rite this mail even when I am physically and mentally as far away from law school as possible! and here are some thoughts I wanted to share with you guys, no advice and absolutely nothing profound, just some random snippets that crossed my mind.

1. I always believed that law school, the peer group that is, have a unique voice. It is a mixture of a lot of wit, some sarcasm, some pretension, premium brand humour, some really sharp inside jokes, some badly digested theory, a lot of cynicism, a lot of intellect, some erudition and so on... I guess we all know it, and definitely feel it around us, so guess you are following though I may be a bit off with my definitional attempt there. One of my favourite example of this is when as a repartee to someone writing on 19(1)(A) [i think soon after SBI was replaced by Corp Bank] "pray why?", someone else wrote "Or as Marx would put it, "why pray?".... I guess you get what I mean. The sad part was that there was hardly anything that captured this unique flavour which we all grew into, and (atleast for me) thoroughly enjoyed. Yeah there were those classic 19(1)(A) notes, the yearbooks (though our batch never had one), the occassional Hitchhiker's Guide to Law School, the plays we wrote etc., but they all passed onto collective memory of moments, to be discussed fleetingly when two law schoolites met anywhere. Somehow, I see Quirk being cooked in that special ingredient. It's great for the journal coz every literary journal, when it starts, needs its unique voice, and I think Quirk can find it if it taps into ( which I feel it is already doing) this highly interesting flavour. And it is great for law schoolites coz finally their unique energy can find some creative output. I know that you guys aim to be more than a "law school mag", but tapping into and giving shape to this voice wont make you one, it will just make you a stand out read, while you will always have a base. It is somewhat like a good football club, while you have your loyal fan base from which to draw the energy to run the club, if you play well, you will be liked by audiences everywhere, and in time good foreign players may be willing to sign up!

2. A place like law school, we all know, is where competition acquires a daily and nightly meaning. To get into what's-the-good-word team you must slug it out complete with the "grievances" of non-parity and bias. Few things, if any, are just fun! I think you guys have the potential to be that. Maybe in the future you will be tempted to "select" an editorial board based upon points etc., but hope you can avoid that. I think it is imperative that you can open up spaces in law school which are non-competetive and non-hierarchical. That is the only way this magazine will be worth it. The problem with such "idealistic" attempts in the past has been either they get appropriated into the committee mainstream, or that people lose interest coz there is nothing to gain. I am sure you know as well about this as I did, just hope you think it through. Only I feel that for this to make sense, the non-competetive element is non-negotiable.

3. Having said that, every good magazine needs a good editorial board, and a certain editorial process. the question is, how to do that while being non-hierarchical. The method lot of the alternative magazines in France adopted at the height of the avant-garde movement, and a practice followed by many little magazines in Kolkata, is to call the authors, and anyone interested and read the piece and discuss it. Peer review, suggestions and subsequent alterations work very well. Also a lot of people have very good ideas but do not know how to develop it, that can be discussed in this forum as well. In short, what I mean is that small literary mags work best when it is not just a monthly publication, but an engaged group affair. But then, we all know, there is so little time in law school 🙄

4. This is another thought. Abhay wrote in his piece that many people do not want to come forward, for various reasons. I think one of the factors in law school is this thing called the "law school cool". I guess it is those who speak the best in that law school voice I talked about, who stake a claim on this. So, though I wrote that your journal should capture that voice, I also feel that you should go beyond exclusiveness and this law school cool. Because good literature is not always cool, it is much more than that.

And this reminds me, to answer your question of why literature, it is, to me something which privileges passion, and that is why a place so replete with and dominated by reason like law school, needs it so desperately!

That is all that I have time to say (coz it is not easy to get onto the internet here and have done too long for anyone's comfort here).... in the end, wont be all smug and say "keep it up", just say that hope you guys make this work, and hope it happened while we were still there....

That's it for this fanmail 🙄

sincerely (in the truest sense of the word)  
sandipto"

How do you feel on leaving college? It's a question that my classmates and I face quite often these days, and everyone faces sooner or later. The expected response is tears and nostalgia and lots of smiling photographs. "Take the photographs and still-frames in your mind". Oh how we will miss those carefree college days and so on. To be quite frank, my first reaction is exactly the opposite. Quite simply, I just can't wait to get out of here. But if I stop to actually think about it, I find this instinct of mine quite odd. College is supposed to be a great experience, right? The formative years, the fun years, the golden years? Whatever happened to the whole "Purani jeans aur guitar" spirit? Why do I find myself counting the days left for me to graduate, and wishing they'd

# ON LEAVING LAW SCHOOL

pass sooner? What's wrong with me, dammit? But strangely enough, I suspect that I'm far from alone. The sad truth is that most people can't wait to get out of law school. A standard riposte to any uppity junior is hey, you've still got two (or three, or whatever) more years in this place, ha ha! And I'm sure most people would rather face the Spanish Inquisition than go through five years of law school again. Of course, as with most things, it's not that black and white. Yes, we all worry about the future; college at least provided security – something you take for granted until you suddenly find it being pulled out from under your feet. And yes, of course I'll miss a lot of the good times, the familiar faces, the incredible feeling of having nothing 'official' to do for most of the day (another thing that every student takes for granted). And who could forget hostel life, with its birthday bashings, its pranks, its scavenging for food, cigarettes, drink you-name-it-we'll-take-it, its profound conversations about Life, the Universe and Everything, and its routine madness? Someone once called it "this easy community" – very apt, I thought. Yes, of course I'll miss all that. But still, the overall feeling on leaving is one of relief, if not elation. It's quite disturbing, really. Maybe the reason is not something peculiar to law school. Maybe nostalgia takes time, that's all. I went to my old school the other day, and was actually surprised to feel the occasional twinge (and God knows I used to hate that place too). And I felt far more nostalgic about the places where I'd spent my time as a little kid, rather than the senior years. So maybe a few years from now I'll be quite sentimental about law school. But I can't help feeling that there's more to it than that. The truth is, I'm quite tired of it all. All the politics and the competition and the committees and the weird institutional dynamics between students and other students and teachers and staff. I'm even tired of the same old fun. I still can't put my finger on exactly what's wrong with the place. Yet, and I know I'm not alone in this, I can't help getting the feeling that there's something missing, some abnormality in law school's cosmic balance. Look at the number of suicide attempts, not to mention the actual suicide that took place last year. Look at the number of people suffering from depression or some form of neurosis (and yes, there are more than you think!). Look at the number of people flunking (yes, yes

## What Dreams May Come

shubho banerjee

time is the currency of favour  
buying the moments that linger  
long after they are left behind  
weaving dreams with drops of sunshine  
and a sense of warmth that spreads  
like the touch of a shimmering rainbow  
leaving behind the feeling of being mellow  
the price of happiness to be paid in kind  
for the highest bidder standing next in line

dearly though its spent

craving to reach out  
for the breaking of a smile  
that lasts a few seconds  
and lightens the darkness  
of the hubris inside  
life rumbling by in its wake  
leaves the crumbled dust  
of once forgotten beauty  
of promises of keeping the hope alive

but the memory languishes

one and one never really make two  
a lesson hard learnt  
easily gone with the wind  
until the next time  
when the tears return  
to sweep away the ruins of all we dreamt  
the rains come down  
and washes the tears for now  
the dream becomes a wish  
were the wishes come true

flickering the lights go out

I know we should study more to avoid flunking, but that's not the point). One obvious issue, that itself has become quite a cliché, is cynicism. In law school, its an insidious, creeping sort of cynicism that permeates everything, and I mean everything, and all of us are guilty of it to some degree. Of course, you could say that becoming a bit cynical is just a part of growing up, and any transition from school to college and beyond involves it. But not to the extent that its prevalent in law school. It's really funny how every year we rely on the 1st years to provide the 'enthu' for Le'Gala and Strawberry Fields, and only a small fraction continue to want to be a part of these events when they become seniors. This actually brings me to something else on my mind – the

increasing "fixation" (for want of a better word, I'm no sociologist) of identity in law school – whether it be "batchism" (extremely prevalent in all batches), regionalism, whatever. This fixation of identity is another thing that's quite a cliché – labels like "pseudo", "junkie", "G5" are of course bandied about half in jest, but the problem is that they are only half in jest. And this combines with the absolute lack of privacy and the ridiculous amounts of gossip. I suppose this is connected with the extreme constrictedness (yes, yes, I know that's not a word) of law school: the same place, the same faces day in and day out for years, sometimes it really gets to you. As much as I love being with my friends here, it's really like a breath of fresh air to talk to someone from the Outside World. Ok, when I started this piece I didn't intend it to become a diatribe about what's wrong with law school (honestly!). I just got a little carried away. But the good thing is that a lot of us feel these things, and recognition of a problem is the first step towards curing it. The "faculty-student conclave" initiative that began recently was a step in the right direction, though I don't know if it is going anywhere. And of course, this magazine itself is a great thing – something fun, something different, something informal. Of course, being lawyers-in-training we can't help ourselves sometimes, so even in "Quirk" meetings we end up voting on whether we should vote on something, and so on! It's just ingrained in our psyche somehow as law students – I bet most colleges don't work that way. Of course its not necessarily a bad thing – transparency, democracy, blah-blah-blah....but you know what I mean, right? Anyway, enough random thoughts on law school. Where did I begin? Ah yes, nostalgia. Nope, not reached there yet. But you can't help having some sort of strong emotions (even if they are mixed) about a place where you've spent five years of your life. Whether you love it or hate it, its home after all, right? And now its time to pack up and move.

ARUN SAGAR

## WALKING THE EDGE AJU JOHN

On a venal road, commerce thrives, the urban blood  
throng;  
Sexy cars whiz, beggars plead, He pimps: neon night!  
She is bored.  
Under the yellow streetlamp shower she waits long,  
Clothed bejewelled painted: so hungry eyes might  
Transaction complete,  
Thrice tonight, with a third stranger; the bed creaks  
“Come in, why don’t you? Sit, big bear”, Urmila said;  
Decent identities unbuckled: grope flesh, false shrieks  
Clothed painted back on the street: li’l ones to be fed.

She sleeps for school tomorrow, a long way off from  
this bustle.  
At that frayed dupatta border of morality where  
The streets, they have no name.

Under this bridge at city’s periphery,  
Slime trickles through car rust, refrigerator carcass.  
He got up.  
Nightlife city moon illuminate naked glory;  
Haloed locks gnarled beard layered grime: almost  
Jesus?  
And he told me,  
“I had a son Vaman; till twenty I raised,  
Had a job car wife salary TV insurance home,  
Now I stare at random streetlight: mad paagal crazed,  
See God in white tungsten; like dogs the city streets we  
roam.”

On the fringes of legal personality, I devour Thought’s  
refuse.  
At Logic’s deserted outpost  
The streets, they have no name.

Sidelined outskirts slum stench red light whorehouse  
hardly urban things,  
Straining familiar Arabic ramblings: incomprehensible  
still!  
Laughing shouting crying running, then shooed chased:  
no hard feelings?  
Under the carpet unacknowledged lunatic: may kill!!

The moon saw it, I told myself I didn’t!  
The streets, they had no names.



# SENSE OF SELF

He posed before the mirror, paternally checking, the rotundity of his posterior pecking when the air grew still and silent and it hit him, crystal violent - It lies within you - dark, alive, breathing, growing, festering. It begins to consume you – slowly but surely advancing its icy tentacles into the very last vestiges of your conscience, the darkest recesses of your brain, the sacrosanct chamber of your heart. And it brings along with it its icy minions – pain, guilt, unhappiness, doubt, fear – the fear ... of being discovered, along with the greater fear of never being discovered and continuing to live behind a façade of deceit and fake-ness. What does life want of a person? Or rather, what does a person want life to want of him? Is there a creature that exists who does not want something to be expected of him? If so, where does he live? How does he get through the drudgery of everyday life – living with inferiority – seeing himself regress – helpless – unstoppably moving backwards – towards that all consuming monster that they call failure. Where is this Satan? – Where is the elusive creature that I strive to be? How does he look? Does he look like me? Worse, does he not EVEN look like me? Does he have a shield that protects him from all those lies around him – pulling him down? Does he feel? I know he thinks – but does he think of what he is feeling.... of what he should be feeling... of what he should not be feeling.... should not be doing. Does he think of his future? Of his aims, of his life? Does he think, nay, should he think, of his fellow man? Is it worthy to call other people ‘fellow men’? What have they done to deserve that honour of being accorded the same species as me? Why are we all said to be similar? To be equal? What if I'm not? What if I'm not like them? What if I don't think like them? What if I think that what they ‘think’ is not really thinking? Am I blaspheming? Am I allowed to have such thoughts? Should I permit such thoughts to grow? Should they be allowed to live? To grow, to increase in strength and ferocity until one day, I no longer will be able to restrain them within me and they will burst forth influencing every action I commit? Commit? Is ‘commit’ restricted to sin? Do I approve or disapprove of myself committing sins? As I say sins, I cannot help but think of Christianity and the God in whom I never believed. Yeah sure, I can tell you a hundred times that I've said that God doesn't exist – I believe it often enough too – and then I can't help smiling at myself contemptuously as an unwilling – “Oh God” escapes my lips every time I find myself really requiring help in the form of divine intervention. But what if I'm right? What if there is no god? Do we control us? Have you thought of how terrifying that could be? WE CONTROL US? Are we even frigging half capable of controlling us? Would you leave dynamite and a plunger next to a playing child and say that they're left there because there is no one else in the room that knows what to do with them? That's like the slothfully indifferent words of the drunk locomotive driver of the train that never saw daylight, or the indifferent corner-store lout - “I just thought the kid might as well be in charge of it.” Wait, I'm not drunk, I'm not even in a state of artificially induced “highness” as it's called. Hmmm, wait, I am,

drunk after all. “Drunk on what?” – that's the question. I fear to think of whether it's fear I'm drunk on or whether it's the fact that I have finally found an answer to combat that same fear. In my 31 years of existence, I've done a lot of fake things: pleased, flattered, been servile, even cheated, to get forward. What really terrifies me is that while I can say that it was wrong for me to do all of those things, in that VERY same breath I can also say with that same certainty that I could not have gotten where I am and might not get where I want to be, without employing such low underhand means. What does that mean? Is that an indication that I'm not capable enough? What if these are some of my capabilities? What if I'm a good liar? A good flatterer? What if I perform the role of a second – hander admirably well? Damn, there's someone at the door! Do I go to get it? No I won't. Do you want to know why I'm terrified to move away from this mirror? It's because I'm afraid that my honesty, my rationality, and my creativity will die out before I can say what I want said. Why should these qualities of mine diminish and die away? Why are they NOT a part of me that I can call up whenever I want to, and use how I deem best? Why is my creativity a thing of caprice appearing when it wants to and leaving when it wants to? I'm afraid. I know the answers. I know what I have to do. I also know that talking to you has helped me and I will do it again. And again. And again. And yes, I'm afraid but I take solace in the fact that I know the answer to the question of what I have to do. Whether I can do it, is minor. It's a granted, an assumed, a total non-issue. I will do it. I have to do it. I'm afraid, you see. And I don't want to be afraid any more. The only way to kill the fear is to take the plunge, and so, I take comfort knowing that I have but one unbelievably hard option, which I have to take. I have taken it. There can be no looking back. My destiny has been set. And it's mine, all mine. And he was released, drenched and heaving and his enlightened head fell off and rolled away leaving the world protecting its dark ways. Decapitated poet for heresy pays.



ABHAYARAJ NAIK

## Collaged Hoopla Life

The world is a crazy hoopla.  
A maze of legs  
That have Walked,  
Run, tumbled, bent, hungered.  
Of minds running fiercely  
In light years,  
Living, breathing, yearning, feeling.

Amber eyes,  
Anonymous stranger,  
All knowing  
Yet, the humble learner.  
You tasted the pulse of ocean-tumult existences.

You heard the double M.A. rickshaw puller:  
Saw his theorized treatise  
Melt into sweat; a concentric wheel-  
That went round and round; motionless.  
This peddler of New India became your mentor.  
His eyes twinkled more and more  
As the gas and bulbous plagued dust  
Entered his being.

You were every perfect colour and line-  
That struggling young painter's  
Invisible subject;  
A Jagged inspiration-  
His first charcoal Lock and Key;  
Poking and probing, leading him from  
Deceptive crossroads to safe quarters.

You  
pilgrimage –travel man  
From the ice-cream vendor  
You stumbled, knowingly into;  
The curious camaradie of the swollen slum.

Your chupples dark and layered...  
As they encountered-  
The maidservant who stole,  
The homeless puppy you adopted somewhere along the way,  
The broken Ludo game-  
It was  
The distant laughter of a family butchered.

As I , extended, stretched-  
A quest seeker in search of intangible meaning,  
Become one with your homely streets:  
My finely crafted comb...  
Continues to comb  
Sieves, sings and chooses....  
From the lust of the orange,  
The pink of a karigar's salwar...  
These rough edged, uncalibred...  
Snippets of lived existences,  
Ordinary histories,  
Strangers and yet my own.

ASHMI AHLUWALIA

## LETS TALK ABOUT FREE/OPEN SOURCE SOFTWARE (FOSS)

The aim of this article is to address some common questions about free/open source software in simple language. Some of the complex issues (like the debate between free and open source software) have not been dealt with or simplified to facilitate understanding. 'Open source' and 'Free Software' have been used interchangeably.

### What is Free/Open Source Software (FOSS)?

All software is written in source code, which is the portion of a program written and read by humans (usually geeky programmers). Object code on the other hand is the language of 0's and 1's (binary numbers) which is read by the hardware. The author of the source code has copyright over the original ideas expressed in that code, just like a book author owns the original ideas expressed in that book. So far so good. Now the proprietary model (for example, Microsoft) works on the basis of keeping the source code of software secret. When you 'buy' Windows XP, you do not actually buy the software. You acquire a license to use the software subject terms and conditions of the license agreement. Just think what would happen if Microsoft also gave you the source code for XP (and the rights to modify/distribute it). You could then change the source code to suit your requirements, write further software modules to enhance efficiency, share it with others who could then distribute it further. If Microsoft does that, its commercial viability itself would be under danger as smart programmers all over the world will start distributing their own versions of XP. Therefore, the proprietary model believes that its commercial viability lies in protecting its source code through intellectual property rights and it prefers to keep it closed - therefore the name 'closed source'. Ok, now let us take the open source model. This model works on the philosophy of sharing. This means that when anyone creates software, he releases its source code along with the program. E.g. Linux operating system. But let's take the example of the Mozilla Foundation and its software Firefox (a browser like Internet Explorer, only ten times better). Firefox is open source software i.e. its source code is freely available on the internet. So every programmer sitting anywhere on the planet can modify, distribute and add to the source code, thereby changing how Firefox works. Well, that does lead to quite a bit of chaos out there, with various fragmented versions of the software. But there is a centralized process whereby the most experienced programmers approve what changes actually go into the Firefox browser that Mozilla Foundation releases. **So can I just copy source code of open source programs and make my own program with minor alterations?** Yes, you can. But there are strings attached, obviously. Open source is also 'sold' through license agreements. General Public License

(GPL) is one of the more widely used open source licenses. By the way, Microsoft's licenses are called End-User License Agreements (EULA). Like GPL there are several other types of open source licenses with varying terms and conditions like BSD, MPL (but we don't need to discuss them here). The core conditions in GPL are: 1. You are free to take the source code, provided you guarantee availability of the source code for the entire work to anyone who wants it. 2. If you distribute the code, you cannot charge a licensing fee or royalty for the software, but may charge only for the cost of distribution. 3. If you take any amount of GPL code in another program, that entire program becomes subject to the terms of the GPL Hmmm. Things are sounding complicated now. Well, actually it's quite simple. You take the source code on which thousands of programmers from all around the world have worked, you have to share your contribution (source code that you added or modified) with them. You take the source code which is available openly, you can't commercially exploit it i.e. license it to someone else and charge a fee for it. Let's assume that you are a company making a product under the proprietary model (say Microsoft). Now it'll be very tempting for you to copy the code of Firefox browser and perk up Internet Explorer (if possible). But the third condition comes into play. If you do that, you'll have to make source code of Internet Explorer public. That is why this third condition is also called the 'viral clause' – it infects all future software which incorporates the *GPLed* open source code. **That's a smart piece of legal drafting..... But how does FOSS make money?** The commercial non-viability has been one of the primary criticisms of FOSS. What incentive would a spread out community of programmers have to keep writing code and improve software without getting paid? The fact of the matter is that most of the programmers are enthusiasts driven by a desire for peer recognition or personal accomplishment rather than profit. In addition to these reasons, there are several successful business models built around FOSS. Red Hat, founded by Bob Young is the best example. Remember, unlike proprietary model, you can't 'sell' the software (i.e. charge license fee). So he founded Red Hat Linux which targeted other services for its revenue. He started selling things associated with FOSS software: hardware that runs the software, non-FOSS software that uses or works with the FOSS software, support services

and reference manuals for the software etc. So now, if any corporate wants to use Linux, it will more often than not get Red Hat to install it for them. Red Hat charges them for maintenance of Linux and provides them other services too. Meanwhile, hundreds of programmers are fixing bugs, improving Linux for them – without being on their payroll! **What are the benefits of FOSS?** The main benefits are a) It is free - the only costs are training, service, and support costs and b) it allows any programmer to advance the ideas of the original developer and improve upon the software (in fact, there are tens of big dedicated global communities of programmers working on different projects). **I heard open source is against traditional copyright regime. Is it true?** No, it is not. If you re-read the part above which details the conditions in the GPL, you'll see that rather than opposing copyright regime, the FOSS model ingeniously uses it. Let's discuss this in greater detail. When a programmer writes the source code, he has copyright in his work. This includes the right to use it, reproduce it, distribute it etc (all rights reserved). To enable others to exercise any or all of these rights, a license agreement has to be entered into. In Microsoft's EULA, the only right you get is to *use* to the end-product of the source code i.e. the software program. In FOSS GPL, you not only have the right to use, but also to modify and distribute. But what happens if you breach the terms of the license? If you breach the terms, you lose the rights under the agreement i.e. you are no longer entitled to use, distribute or modify the work of the original programmer. So you are actually violating his copyright in the source code! This means you can be sued for copyright infringement. **What's the future of FOSS like?** The government is increasingly relying on open source solutions for governance and the services that it provides to the public at large. There are thousands of programmers in Bangalore and all around India working on open source. Open source model will only get bigger. Even Microsoft acknowledges it. In fact, seeing the pros of the open source model, Microsoft launched its Shared Source Initiative (SSI) whereby it shares the source code of its software with 'government, partners, independent developers, researchers, students, and other interested individuals'. *Open source is cutting edge in the field of intellectual property law; and also touches areas as diverse as constitutional and contractual law. It's interesting, fascinating and challenging.*

ANKUR SINGHLA



# Quirk

An orange blue mist had begun to envelop the sky. Lights sped by as Aaditva stood there cogitating. It was a cool, breezy evening. There was a nice earthen sensation about the breeze. People passed by as he pretended to find metaphors for a missing moment in time. Time - that had ceased to matter. Still, he couldn't do it any longer. There were dogs waiting to be fed and lights waiting to be switched off. 'How vague indeed?' thought Manjari. She had been observing this immaculately clad gentleman for quite some time now, standing across the road from her house. He clearly did not belong to this part of the city. She could tell. Years had passed by, as she stood there at the window observing people while carrying off her chores. She would have called the police almost immediately, but for his calm demeanor and his sophisticated charm. And now, all of a sudden, when this stranger was leaving, for his home perhaps; a part of her actually wanted him to remain standing there. It had been almost three hours or something remarkably similar to that. 'Oh, maybe he would be back tomorrow' she thought.

It was indeed quite intriguing. She had been thinking about the gentleman on the street the other day for quite some time now. 'He was just a stranger after all', she tried, albeit in vain to remind herself. 'Saba ...' she could hear herself murmuring, as she plunged herself into the ocean that her past was, while she stood at the window perhaps waiting for him to come there again. A lot of memories crossed her mind as she stood there staring into nothingness. All she would see then was a flurry of activity at Pawan Departmental Store. Fifteen years was indeed a long time. The chhoti khidki in the backside of purana imambara had been a silent witness all along - to riots, to vandalism, to the almost non existent reforms and to the political rallies. The images, still fresh came floating back in front of her eyes. It all seemed like yesterday. Watching the boys play cricket in the gully was always a pleasurable sight. She had seen it all happening, even though through this khidki. This was her world. Nothing more, nothing less. She had spent hours walking through the endless complex along the roofless walls, ornate in design with exquisite chandeliers, gilt-edged mirrors, silver Mimbar and colorful stucco work which adorned the interiors. All this came back to her, as she stood by the chhoti khidki. All this and the fact that, she had rarely ventured out ever.

Almost everyone could hear it – a loud, crashing thunderbolt. It was no use trying to sleep now. Ah well, maybe I should just go out for a walk or something, Sarah thought. It was almost 9 in the night. The soft touch of the droplets on her shoulders felt nice. It was a truly beautiful experience. The imambara was looking delightfully mystical with the moon shining in all its grandeur behind it. Even more beautiful than what it had ever looked in the day in all the time she had spent here. And time she had spent. It was close to a month. A very memorable month of her existence. She remembered coming to India with a backpack strung on her shoulders, and how her mind was overwhelmed with the overbearing stench that filled her nostrils whilst walking through the back alleys of a similar city for the first time. Butchering shops next to defunct houses; or more appropriately ruins of what would have once been called houses. On a note not so pessimistic, they are still majestic though; she had thought then. Mithai shops next to the butchering shops. Urchins playing next to the mithai shops. She also remembered almost taking out the camera to show to her friends back in Richmond and then not doing it deterred only by the attention such an act would attract. The urchins had stopped playing and were looking at her anyway. She had come a long way since then. She was almost a natural here now, if you were willing to ignore her white skin and her not so sharp Hindi and Urdu. She had developed quite a liking for the place, for the urchins, for the shops, for the people; for the mystique it possessed, in the one month that she had spent here. It was almost a routine now - walking up to the Kiran Tea Stall to have a cup of tea, or to restaurants with funny names for a lunch or a dinner. A content smile crossed her glistening face as she walked through the same alley for one of the last times. Her vacations were coming to an end. Soon, she would have to return to the grind in Richmond. Soon, very soon; she thought. Wondering if she could have brought anything from Pawan Departmental Store as she crossed it; she kept walking. A walk through time, figuratively speaking. For every place she saw now had a charming memory associated with it. The smile only broadened every second.

'Sweetheart; I am stuck in traffic. I can't do much to change this, can I?' mumbled Aaditva into his cell phone. 'I understand we should have already been there at the Roychaudharys; but I don't and possibly can't control the rain' he whispered, for there were other people in the car as well. 'Believe me, I will be home in another 15 minutes' said Aaditva and started gazing at the spotted windscreen. A million things crossed his mind as he sat there with his eyes intently fixed on the wind screen. The fact, that he was tired. That he was tired of this rat race. That he was tired of putting up a façade at these social gatherings he did not wish to attend. The world, as it was, came to a standstill. It still moved though, in a surreal sort of a way. Given a choice, he thought, he would still rather remain a silent spectator to this world, which lay splattered on a canvas in front of his eyes. In a way, he had adapted to watching the images fade away into nothingness, only to be replaced by vivid vibrant images; which would only wait for their turn to dissolve into the darkness. He let this happen, partly because he couldn't have done much to change it and more importantly because perhaps it kept him pleausurably satisfied in a vague sort of a way. Those frequent long, very long walks when Peeeya had gone off to sleep, searching for an answer, for the reality perhaps were becoming a routine now. His thoughts were disturbed by the loud and rather imaginative horn of the car behind them. 'Oh well, to another party now' he thought as he braced himself to enter the canvas, he had to become a part of the painting in a few minutes.

'Manju, pardey band karo' shouted badi bibi. She should have done it a long time back. It was getting dark. If it wouldn't have been for the charming stranger whose presence was more than missed today. It was also raining now. It had been a long evening, standing by the chhoti khidki. In a span of 3 hours, she had walked through the imambara and through time simultaneously, frolicked, cried, smiled and remembered Saba.

How can I possibly forget her? thought Manjari as she went around dusting the gilt-edged mirrors. Saba had been her only friend all these years. She remembered coming here 15 years back as a kid, merely 10 years of age then holding bade sahib's firm yet simultaneously gentle hand. Baba had sent her off as well, much like her other siblings. Oh how she had cried, shouted and screamed as Baba, with tears running through his cheeks, with folded hands handed her over to Bade Sahib. 'Baba, hum nahin jayenge' she remembered telling Baba as tears ran across her cheeks. Ma had chosen to leave them anyway, at an age she couldn't recall. Baba was all she ever had. She didn't want to leave. Baba didn't want her to leave. She was his favorite little angel, after all. She cried and she howled; her cries only to be crushed under the neighing of the horses and the sound of the bagghi. They left, as her weakening, trembling, shivering semi clad Baba stood there with tears running down, with folded hands in front of Bade sahib...in front of circumstances perhaps. Badi bibi told her three months later of her Baba's demise with a heavy heart. She did not scream then, she did not howl. Only two silent tears ran across her innocent, trembling face. Badi bibi had almost broken down seeing this and had hugged her tightly. She still remembered. Badi bibi had always been more like a mother to her. She cared for her, caressed her, scolded her and loved her, sometimes simultaneously.

And she hadn't seen many men better than bade sahib. In any respect. Not many people in those times provided education to their self born kids. And Manjari, well she was only a servant technically. But, bade sahib and badi bibi never made her feel that. She was always Manju to them. Nothing more, nothing less. Whatever was required for a kid of her age was provided, without her having to ask for it. Like primary education, for one. It was one of those days, her teens perhaps, when Saba had come over to play. They were living in the chhoti haveli across the road. Saba used to come over often. Almost daily if she could remember correctly. It sometimes bothered her if Saba failed to show up on time. If she decided not to come some day, Manjari would stand at the chhoti khidki, her eyes fixated on the road, for Saba could have come anytime. She would go too, but only sometimes. No one prevented her from venturing out. But, there was nothing to go out to. All that her world comprised of were Baba's memories, Bade Sahib, Badi Bibi, and Saba. Saba was gone now. She got married last year. It was quite an affair – her marriage, she remembered it quite clearly. For it was one of the few times she had actually stepped out of the imambara. Oh, how beautiful Saba looked that day. How charming, she thought as a smile crossed her face. She remembered meeting Saba only once after her marriage. She had come over for three days. They had gone off to Amreeka, badi bibi had told her once.

'Mail me that file, Arun' Aaditva said to his colleague sitting in the next cubicle. It was truly awful at the Roychaudhary's last night. Oh, how he hated all these fake socialite gatherings. Peeya, on the other hand was all for them. It gave her a chance to show off her knowledge, her class and her stature. He knew it. She knew it. In a vague sort of a way, everyone was there for a similar purpose. He though, was filled with repugnance, with rage. An irrepressible urge to cry out, to crush this immaculately spun web of lies seethed within him. This is what drove him to the long solitary walks. It was on one of those walks he had noticed the servant peering out of the rather small window. She was immensely captivating. The innocence on her face, the terror in her eyes, and her timidity had truly mesmerized him. Some thing at least is real, he thought as he got back to work. He wanted to see her once again, to see the timidity, the terror, and the innocence more than anything else. A walk to purana imambara was very probable in the evening. If he could manage to find the time for it, that is. Life is too busy anyway; he thought and got back to his files.

It was Sarah's last day in India. In another seven hours, she would in an airplane to New York and then one to Richmond. In another thirty hours she would be in her office, busy with the usual paperwork with no time for life. All this was going through her mind as she was flicking through the photos she had clicked. To say that she hadn't been touched would be a lie. Every photo elicited a sweet smile, and the whole chain of events revolved in her head, one by one. She kept one aside in a brown envelope, for it belonged to someone else. And so must it be given. Like any tourist, she had brought loads of souvenirs for friends and family alike. But, what this one month had given her was much more than souvenirs or photos. It had given her something which possibly cannot be articulated. She smiled and got back to packing.

Manjari had been thinking of this for quite some time now. She was not used to this feeling. She had lived in the imambara the major part of her life. The thought of stepping outside the imambara had never crossed her mind earlier. For earlier there was Saba. There was the chhoti khidki. There were bade sahib and badi bibi. This is what bewildered her the most. It was not entirely fair to leave bade sahib and badi bibi, given what they had done for her. They had loved her like their own child. She was torn inside thinking about leaving them, about leaving purana imambara. Maybe she would come back. May be she wouldn't. She herself did not know the reason for her to leave. What was it? Was it the gori maim she had so very often seen from the khidki? Was it the charming stranger whom she had seen once only? Was it the fact that Saba, her trusted friend was no longer with her? Or, was it just a silent cry for freedom? This state of ambivalence was crushing her inside out. She couldn't sleep for days. Badi bibi was beginning to worry about her now. She had asked her quite a lot of times if anything was wrong with her. She just nodded in a no. She finally decided, she decided to leave. But the difficult part was yet to come. She couldn't have left silently in the veil of the night. It would have killed Bade sahib and Badi bibi. More importantly, this is not the way she wanted to leave. It wasn't fair in any sense of the word. She would ask them for their permission. So she did. Bade sahib had just finished with his meals when she approached them. 'Hum janaa chahtey hain' she finally managed to ask them. 'Par kahaan bachchi?' they sounded worried. 'Pata nahin' she said, 'Shaayad bas thodey dinon key liye ghoomna chahtey hain, shahar dekhna chahtey hain'. Bade Sahib was known throughout the city for his rationality. He had never impinged upon anyone's space in his life. He didn't then either. They let go, with a heavy heart, only in the vain hope that maybe she would

come back someday perhaps. She bid farewell, with gratitude and pain mixing inside her.

Aaditva was thinking about the servant girl all this while. He decided it was too much to wait for the evening. He drove to purana imambara as soon as he managed to finish off his work. He was intrigued, puzzled and mesmerized. He found the window empty when he reached. The servant was not there. He decided to wait in the car, hoping that maybe she would show up soon. But, he couldn't have waited too much. He looked around generally. Pa...an Departmental Store, he read with difficulty. The paint was smudged and missing in many places. A foreigner talking to one of the locals. These foreigners, with their backpacks strung across their shoulders were too familiar a sight in this area. Maybe this one just came and is asking for directions from the other girl, he thought. He had been waiting for a long time. He decided to head back to office, there was still some work left. 'Maybe some other evening then' Aaditva said, more to himself than to anyone else.

She smiled gently as she stood outside the imambara, looking at the chhoti khidki. And at Pawan Departmental Store. And at the boys playing cricket next to the mithai shops. And at the gori maim who had once clicked a photo of her standing at the chhoti khidki. Why is she walking towards me? thought Manjari. She had something to hand out to Manjari, for all she knew they would probably never meet ever again. It was a brown envelope of some sort. On opening it almost instantly, she found the photo of her standing by the chhoti khidki. Something was scribbled on the bottom right corner of the photograph. 'My Very Own Afghan Girl' she read out, albeit with slight difficulty. The smile on Manjari's face only broadened for an unknown reason. 'Bye' Sarah said with a smile. For, she had to leave.

S A U R A B H

Street Theatre: A means of protest that no 'establishment' can co-opt The use of street-plays has an inseparable association with grassroots politics, whether of the partisan or activist mould. During the Freedom struggle, both Congress and Communist workers would take their messages to the masses by means of traveling groups whose plays would evolve as per the local sensibilities. In Latin America, much of the mobilisation against big land-owners has proceeded through 'Forum theatre' i.e. plays performed in public spaces where local communities gather to discuss socio-political issues as they affect them. Since the late 60's and early 70's, the Naxalbari movement has used street-plays as one of its' chief means of propagation. Following in the footsteps of the Indian People's Theatre Association (IPTA), presently there are scores of groups all over the country that ply this trade. In the 1940's, Utpal Dutt and Ritwik Ghatak were actively involved in street-plays with a political flavour. Badal Sircar's conception of 'Anganmanch' where performances happen in courtyards of village houses or even in open fields, corresponds to the idea of drama as a means of social change. In Punjab, Gursharan Singh has been directing and acting in street plays for more than 50 years, most of which take a clear 'anti-establishment' stance. The name of Safdar Hashmi of course is mentioned time and again in the popular media ever since he was murdered during a performance in Sahibabad, U.P. in 1989. Likewise there are hundreds of directors, activists and educationists who use this medium to reach their audiences. The idea of a street-play is itself a rejection of the inbuilt hierarchy of 'proscenium' theatre where the audience's access is limited by way of ticketing, limited space and the artificial separation between the stage and the viewing space. In turn, street-plays run with little or no props, no specialised acting skills and no technical elements like lighting, sets and electronically amplified sounds. Instead, storylines are structured around mass-based issues and the actors only have the use of their bodies as props and their throats for being heard over a large performing space. The plays or skits are generally fast-paced and laced with several jingles or songs in order to hold the attention of the on-looking crowd. There are no obligations on the audience. People are free to come to the performance and walk away. If the enactments are engaging enough, there will be a sufficient number hanging around at the end of each performance. The social function ensues if audience members address their comments, questions and criticisms to the cast. The feedback from one show becomes the basis for changes in the next. The performances of street-plays are essentially the output of a continuing process of deliberation. The importance of maintaining a vibrant tradition of street-theatre in the various vernaculars should be understood as a counter-balance to the 'homogenizing' influence of the market-driven popular media. When newspapers and T.V. channels funded by vested interests continue to ignore bread and butter issues, that void is ably fulfilled by theatre as a means of social dialogue. Unlike other forms of alternative cultural symbols like Graffiti art, Fusion music et al, the content of street-plays cannot be co-opted and orchestrated by corporate and governmental interests. Each performing group is at the liberty to choose a theme which they think is relevant and would help them get audiences. While it is true that a Street play can also be a mass-communication medium for partisan standpoints, there is no bar against more plays which toe the opposite line. The issues on hand could be local sanitation, exposes on leaders, police brutality, dowry deaths or even protests against nuclear weapons. A performance in a busy market, park or roadside is pushing the key agenda of bringing 'deliberation to the people' rather than 'people to a deliberation'. Reactions to dramatization in open spaces have a much higher recall value than individualized consumption of television broadcasts and cinema. The role of 'raw and caricatured enactments' on the streets does not entirely entail 'anti-government activities' and lobbying for idealist causes. A traveling company carries the observations and lessons gained from the audience in one place to those in another. More importantly it builds bridges for the 'self' to better understand the problems faced by the 'other' irrespective of social and political divisions.

SIDDHARTH CHAUHAN



Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic (hereafter referred to as KOTOR) isn't a spanking new game. It was released back in 2003 and its sequel has just been released. Why not review a new game instead? Reviewing old games is relevant because most Law School gamers don't have the most up to date PCs. By and large cutting edge gaming rigs are limited to a privileged few (whom I shall refer to as lucky scum, meanwhile secretly hoping that they'll allow me to occasionally play on their machines).

KOTOR is a Role Playing Game (RPG), which has been somewhat of a rarity when it comes to Star Wars computer games. Unless you count a kiddie title like Yoda Stories as a proper RPG (I certainly don't!) there's been a near complete lack of RPG games based on the Star Wars universe. Well, KOTOR sure did remedy that and how....

First out, lets look at the background of KOTOR. KOTOR is not directly based on the Star Wars movies per se, i.e. the classic trilogy or the new prequels. Rather, it's based largely on part of the expanded Star Wars universe, thousands of years prior to the events of the Classic Trilogy, as portrayed in the Sith War comics produced by Dark House Comics.

Let's turn to the game mechanics and the interface. KOTOR is a third person view game. You create one primary character, with the choice of initial role types of Soldier, Scoundrel or Scout. In addition, you gain party members during the course of the game who play parts in quests, fight alongside you and can also be controlled by you for certain periods of time. KOTOR allows you to personalise your main character with regards to the previously mentioned classes, gender, name, appearance and initial abilities. The Jedi character choices come later into the game and are again divided into 3 arch-types; Jedi Guardian (Focus on Combat), Jedi Consular (Focus on Force powers) and Jedi Sentinel (A middle path between the two). The initial choice of Soldier, Scoundrel or Scout is more or less invalidated when you become a Jedi; your character stats might still be affected by your initial selection but your play style drastically changes. I spent most of the earlier part of the game developing my character into a sort of Han Solo- Boba Fett hybrid but that all went out of the window when my character became a Jedi; I stopped using most of my previous skills and items and instead focused on using the force and becoming a kick-ass, dual lightsaber wielding Jedi.

Learning how to play KOTOR is pretty easy. It's short learning curve is pleasantly surprising , especially considering that most people don't have much experience playing RPGs. The game takes place mostly in real time (i.e. no turn based system) and pauses for commands only when important combat events take place like the spotting of an enemy or the knocking out of one of your party members. KOTOR has an well designed control layout, the mouse can be used to nearly handle everything and movement rests with the keyboard. Additionally, it's

worth mentioning that the default KOTOR keyboard mappings are superb and you'll very quickly appreciate its placement of the shortcut keys during frenzied combat sequences. Combat is quite good although it is somewhat on the lighter side in terms of combat moves available. The lightsaber battles are very well done though and stand up well when compared to the sequences from the movies. In addition, you have special mini-games scattered throughout KOTOR; Pazaak (a Star Wars version of Blackjack), Swoop races (they're nice but no serious competition for an actual racing game, though they're pretty intense and a nice way to make money in the game) along with sequences in which you man the gun turret on your starship and shoot down attacking fighters (sort of like Luke Skywalker and Han Solo in the first classic



Star Wars movie). All in all, all these mini-games really add to the immersion factor of KOTOR. Graphically, KOTOR has portions which are truly stunning. The top levels of the city world of Taris, the desert vista outside Anchorhead city on Tatooine complete with two suns shining across the dunes (which should bring a nostalgic smile to any Star Wars fan's face), the gigantic Sith tombs of Korriban, walking in a space-suit on the exterior of a space warship or the underwater base on the ocean world of Manaan; Suffice it so say that several levels of KOTOR are fantastic. And by and large, KOTOR doesn't require absolutely cutting edge hardware to run, it should run on most contemporary PCs and runs on IBM R-51 laptops too. However, if your system is near the low-end, then certain portions of the game (like the Undercity level on Taris and the underwater levels on Manaan particularly) may cause problems and it would be advisable to lower the graphical detail on these maps. Additionally, KOTOR also suffers from a bug on the IBM R-51 laptops which will result in the game crashing whenever a game movie is supposed to run. The only way to remedy this is to disable movies from the options menu. The movies can still be seen manually in Windows if you have the Bink and Smacker video codecs installed, which are available online. And trust me; the download is worth it because the movies, while generally quite short, are very well done.

One point which has sunk many a game over the years has been a weak plot. While awesome graphics will grab attention at first, I start losing interest in a game when it becomes clear that it's following the same cliché storyline. I can happily say that this problem never cropped up while playing KOTOR. It has one of the best plots found in a computer game till yet; it's always engaging, with twists and turns, and by and large avoids the classic clichés of both Star Wars games and RPGs in general. Not only is the plot well written, most of the games characters are very well fleshed out, have good voice acting and have detailed back stories. This is especially so with your party member's, all of whom have very detailed and interesting histories which are slowly revealed to you as you talk to them over the game. From a prim and proper female Jedi Knight heroine to a Protocol/assassin droid with serious homicidal tendencies to a fallen Jedi Knight who's returned to the Light Side; most of your party characters are very far from being drab or cliché. And the best thing is that such details are not just window dressing; they fundamentally affect the game. For example I managed to over time convince one of my party members to reveal her difficult childhood, and some time after that as I was travelling along with her, we ran into one of the figures from her past that she had mentioned who then proceeded to threaten her. There are many little moments like this which make KOTOR one of the most engaging games I've played in my life. The overall plot is very well laid out and is not static as your choices in the game greatly affect it and it branches between the Light Side and Dark Side. In fact, I've heard some people say that George Lucas should stop making his crappy Prequel movies and instead make a Star Wars movies based on KOTOR! While some may say that's a bit extreme; there's no doubt about the fact that KOTOR absolutely rocks as far as its plot goes.

But KOTOR also does have its negative points. It has its large share of dull, very similar looking base levels which are truly disappointing when you compare them to some of the well designed levels in the game. It also suffers from having certain very similar character graphical appearances (This will strike you pretty soon when you see that nearly all the old human male characters have the same graphical character model. Perhaps the designers wanted to subtly suggest cloning... but seriously!) It also has serious bug issues; my game suddenly crashed on several occasions. Therefore I really do recommend that you save your game very often. Its combat portions could definitely have had more varied moves. But KOTOR seems to overcome all of these problems. It sucks you in for hours at a time with you losing all track of the outside world. In fact, as I along with some other friends have discovered, it isn't a smart idea to have KOTOR installed on your comp anytime near project submissions or end-terms. It's like a digital version of crack. Family, friends, work; they all become secondary while you're playing KOTOR. When you finish it you'll truly feel like you've completed an epic journey, in the true space opera tradition of Star Wars. In summing it up; KOTOR isn't just a game..... It truly is an experience.

Raman Jit Singh Chima

Retrospective: Ten Years Ago

New Beginning

TRACY CHAPMAN

Released 1995  
Elektra Entertainment  
Rating: 4 out of 5

Despite the brilliance of her work, Tracy Chapman's commercial success has been hampered by a syndrome that has affected artistes such as Alanis Morissette and Tori Amos - she released an iconic debut that set the commercial bar so high for her that she has never been able to match it since. In Chapman's case the debut was a six-times platinum Grammy-winning 1988 self-titled record featuring "Talkin' 'Bout A Revolution", "Baby Can I Hold You" and the career-defining "Fast Car", which won her another Grammy. It's not that Chapman's songwriting has been deteriorating as much as it has been attracting less and less attention. Unlike artistes such as Morissette, New Beginning very nearly matched the success of her debut by becoming her only other multiplatinum album in the US and spawning the hit single "Give Me One Reason", which went platinum and won Chapman's fourth Grammy (including a nod for Best New Artiste in 1989 and the aforementioned Grammys for "Fast Car" and her debut album). However, "Give Me One Reason" is hardly the typical song on this album, as the tracks tend to be more of her usual: thought-provoking lyrics and simple melodies. A classic example is the metaphorical "The Rape Of The World", an environmentalist lament that in the hands of a less expert artiste would have run a very high risk of sounding contrived, trite and preachy, but in Chapman's hands manages to sound both heartfelt and genuine. A similar attempt on the title track, this time about the need to start over, doesn't quite meet with the same amount of success but results in quite a listenable track nonetheless. Chapman has no shortage of quiet but heartfelt introspectives, narratives and love songs: "At This Point In My Life", "I'm Ready", and "The Promise" both quietly put across emotion in a manner reminiscent of singer-songwriters such as Carly Simon, while "Remember The Tinman", "Smoke And Ashes" and "Cold Feet" display Chapman's songwriting talent at its finest. In the middle of all this, "Give Me One Reason" would seem a little too commercial if it weren't for the clever positioning of the track right after "Tell It Like It Is", a retro-sounding number that eases right into the mid-tempo bluesy groove of the single. As always, Chapman's tracks are arranged for continuity, not for the commercial success of possible singles, and this does wonders for the cohesiveness of the album as a whole. Ultimately, however, it's Chapman's subtlety that makes this album a winner even a decade later: her evocative lyrics and her ability to convey emotion in the simplest of arrangements are hard to ignore for the sensitive listener and clearly demonstrates why this album, despite being released in a year that saw more attention being given to the likes of artistes of various genres who spent far more time in the spotlight, quietly went on to become a sleeper hit, slowly selling over five million copies by the end of 2001, long after the sales of other albums released in the same year, such as Shania Twain's The Woman In Me, Oasis's (What's The Story) Morning Glory? and Garbage's and Brandy's self-titled debuts, had come almost to a standstill.

Thomas John

NIKHIL (EP)

THE NIKHIL KORULA BAND

Released 2003  
Available for download at <http://www.nkband.com/>  
Rating: 3 out of 5

The Nikhil Korula Band's official website describes the band as "veteran jazz musicians fronted by a former opera singer" and proudly boasts that the band has "sold out venues across Los Angeles, including the House of Blues, Temple Bar, Knitting Factory and the Viper Room." Behind the spin, however, lies what is essentially a college band that decided to stick around long after the members stopped living in the same dorm room. The band consists of seven members, fronted by acoustic guitarist/songwriter/vocalist Nikhil Korula, a graduate of the University of Southern California and predominantly plays what has been called "organic pop", including

influences from the folksy Joni-Mitchell-esque singer-songwriter genre and the groove of hippie-rock alike.

The main failing of the EP is that, right from the breezy opening riff of the first track, the otherwise enjoyable "Love Will Make Your Day", the influence of the band's peers, specifically the Dave Matthews Band is all too evident. While this might be put down to the two bands performing the same genre of music, at times NKB sounds almost too close to DMB for comfort, and it doesn't help that NKB's name sounds suspiciously as if it has been deliberately modelled on the older band. The influence of opera in Korula's voice is barely discernible - although it's fuller and much more well-trained than his peers in the genre, Korula's vocal style seems to be modelled far more on the likes of Dave Matthews and John Mayer than on the likes of Placido Domingo, with whom he has previously performed. The result is that, although Korula has quite a unique voice, its strengths are not really played up and it comes across feeling emotionless for the most part, especially given the almost bubblegum positivity dominating the album. The instrumental arrangements accompanying him, however, are quite well-done for the most part, beginning with the bubbly mélange of instruments used in "Love Will Make Your Day", interspersing high-energy percussion (provided by both Lorca Hart and Jack Lees) and cheerful saxophone riffs with soukous-inspired guitar and all manner of other instruments. The guest harmonica in "Freedom" is a nice touch, but it is quickly followed by the clichéd "When I Look In Her Eyes", which is a standard-issue paean to a hypothetical paragon, set to almost exanimate percussion and stripped-down percussion. This is followed by the buoyant "'Til We Dance", which might have been the highlight of the album if it weren't for the almost disturbing resemblance to something DMB might do, reflecting the bouncy feel of DMB tracks such as "Ants Marching" without really attempting to distinguish itself as a distinctively NKB track - and the wistful mid-tempo closer "If I Could", which successfully combines standard-issue harmonies with some of the better lyrics on this EP and a memorable saxophone riff. Unfortunately, Nikhil fails to create a distinctive NKB sound, which is what it

desperately needs the most. The band's talent is almost painfully obvious throughout the disc, but it doesn't effectively carve out a niche within its genre and thereby falls into the sea of indistinguishable horn-and-guitar organic-pop CDs, despite the innovative addition of a harmonica and even a harp to add colour to the instrumentation. The lyrics aren't particularly thought-provoking, the vocals end up feeling generic, and the music ends up being fun but forgettable, a critical mistake in a music scene where bands such as Maroon 5 are achieving commercial success by pushing the boundaries between genres and the lack of recall factor can spell doom for a band. In a nutshell, Nikhil's fatal flaw is that it succeeds greatly in pleasing, but fails at the crucial task of leaving the listener hungering for more.

THOMAS JOHN



Reserve Your Quirk

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**SPOILER WARNING: If you haven't seen the film and you plan to, don't read this.**

The plot of Kill Bill, Volume 1 can be summed up in three sentences:

- 1) Woman gets shot in the head while pregnant and wearing a wedding dress, by someone named Bill.
- 2) Woman goes into coma for four years following being shot in the head.
- 3) Woman gets out of coma and goes on revenge-fuelled killing spree (main target: Bill)

The lady in question is nameless: known only as the Bride (because of the wedding dress) or Black Mamba (her codename in her pre-bullet profession), all the information we get is that she was a hired assassin, that Bill was her boss and the father of her child, and that he, along with four of Black Mamba's former assassin colleagues, was responsible for nearly killing her. And the film that tells her story is a cheerful hotchpotch of a lot of things that would have seemed mad anywhere else but look perfectly fine here: anime, martial arts, hackings, slashings, disembowelings, scalplings, subtitled Japanese dialogues, blood, body parts, black-and-white film, flamenco music as the background to a swordfight, and some of the corniest lines in movie history (sample : spoken in Japanese)"O-REN ISHII! YOU AND I HAVE UNFINISHED BUSINESS! And "Those of you who still have your lives can go. But leave the limbs you've lost behind: they belong to me now."), which manages, in a very twisted way, to remind me of Charlie's Angels at times, with Bill as Charlie (never actually seen but only heard) and his pet Deadly Viper Assassination Squad (acronym: DiVAS) as the Angels (but of course, nowhere near as stupid as the Charlie's Angels movies- both of them). But the one thing this movie is not?Boring.

The story gets told in chronologically disordered episodes- a technique that's more than a little confusing at first, but turns out all right once the viewer figures out exactly what is happening: to make it simple, what happens is: the Bride gets shot, wakes up after four years in a hospital in El Paso, Texas (killing two people on her way out), goes to Okinawa to get a sword and then to Tokyo to find and kill a former colleague with it (the aforementioned O-Ren, shown first as an anime and then as Lucy Liu- who, by the way, makes a very convincingly ruthless Queen Elizabeth-type figure: the speech she makes after lopping off Boss Tanaka's head is, simply put, priceless), after which she goes to California to kill another former DiVA (the film opens with this sequence).

If it sounds like not much of a story- well, that's true, given that this is only one part of what was supposed to be one movie, but ended up getting split in two. But what Kill Bill lacks in plot, it more than makes up



for in style. If you're actually looking at it, sequences like the one where the Bride tries to get her big toe to wiggle, the encounter between the Bride and Gogo Yubari, or even the massacre of the Crazy 88 aren't exactly strictly necessary, but it's not like anyone except a hard-core nitpicker realizes that while it's happening. And the corollary to the (relative) lack of plot is that the film relies on its visuals to keep it going. A lot of the time, there isn't even much dialogue: Uma Thurman spends a lot of time looking convincingly deadly, but somehow manages- to be more than that. And the images can be beautiful and bloody at the same time; some of the best ones include: O-Ren's mother's blood soaking the mattress and falling in droplets onto young O-Ren's face as she gets run though with a sword, the Bride in her yellow tracksuit (the spitting image of the one worn by Bruce Lee in Game of Death) transformed into a blazing white Angel of Death by high-contrast black-and-white film while slicing her way through multiple black-suited Yakuzas, O-Ren standing in white sand (with faux snow falling from the ceiling) in an elaborately landscaped Japanese garden for the final showdown between her and the Bride, and the almost cathedral-like lighting in Hattori Hanzo's attic. A whole lot of people have said they don't like the movie because it's disgustingly bloody. And it's true that the gore is entirely over the top- but the violence is, for the most part, more in the spirit of a Tom & Jerry cartoon than The Passion of the Christ- it doesn't take itself seriously enough to be entirely repellent (ironically enough, the most repulsive part- a suggested sexual assault on the comatose Bride- doesn't involve blood. And the killing does get a serious side when Vernita Green's four-year-old daughter walks in on the Bride in the process of killing her mother). It's still disgusting anyway: a body manages to flail around without its head, fountains of blood gush from severed limbs, and about the only methods of killing we don't see anyone using are poisoning and defenestration. The worst bits (the killing of O-Ren's parents; Boss Matsumoto's paedophilia; the massacre of the Crazy 8 have been softened up a great deal by putting them in anime and black-and-white sequences: even so, there's a lot of blood. People who have a problem with the sight of blood should (duh!) not watch it, no matter how obvious it is that the blood is actually ketchup.

Sure, this movie- despite the fact that it's thoroughly attention-grabbing, and- frankly speaking- brilliant in parts- would never have won an Oscar. But how much do those matter anyway? Star Wars didn't win,either. Kill Bill is the ultimate testimony- right from its bloodiness to the cheesy movies Quentin Tarantino seems to have used for inspiration (how many Oscar-winning movies would dare to even look in that direction?)- to the fact that what does matter is not just whether the trip to the theatre was worthwhile, but worth repeating. In this case, it was.

NISHA THAMBI

## Mistaken Identity Delta Goodrem

Released 2004 | Sony Music Entertainment | Rating:★★★★☆

After her excellent debut, Innocent Eyes, which went on to go fourteen times platinum in her home country and spawn five consecutive #1 singles, Australian actress-turned-singer-songwriter Delta Goodrem has come up with a sophomore release that manages to outclass the original. The songs are still piano-driven and the genre still unabashedly pop, but the lyrics are more introspective and the melodies darker. A classic example of the former is the otherwise-insipid "Extraordinary Day", a narrative of Goodrem's discovery that she had Hodgkin's disease. The introspective theme runs through many, if not all, of the album's tracks (the delicate closer "Fragile" and the nearly-metaphorical "The Analyst", for example), and this is most clearly evident in the lead single, "Out of the Blue", written for her then-boyfriend Mark Philippoussis. The title track, despite being touted as wandering towards Kate Bush territory, is hardly alternative, is much too overblown in its arrangement, and winds up at some undefinable point in the middle of nowhere. In any case, the darker side of the album is offset by some distinctly pop tracks, such as the cute but almost boringly predictable "Almost Here", unsurprisingly not written by her but rather co-authored by her duet partner (and later love interest) Brian McFadden, of Westlife fame.

There are some missteps - such as the ill-conceived lyrics to the bonus track "Disorientated" and the contrived faux-R&B of "Miscommunication" - but Goodrem is at her best where her vocals and piano are allowed free rein, overblown arrangements or not, and this comes through most on tracks such as "Last Night On Earth", "Be Strong" and the album's highlight, "Electric Storm", which has possibly her most memorable piano riff to date. Goodrem has certainly evolved tremendously from her debut without falling into the all-too-common sophomore slump (which has the unfortunate side-effect of making Innocent Eyes seem comparatively vapid and commercial) but she still has quite a way to go before she realises her full potential.

THOMAS JOHN

## ABBEY ROAD THE BEATLES

There's no rock album quite like Abbey Road. In fact, when asked by anyone what I think of the album, I usually respond with a string of cheesy superlatives that don't convey much more than the fact that I really, really love it. So this is an attempt to try and describe why this album is so special, and to (hopefully) persuade those who haven't heard it to do so immediately. This one really is a must-listen.

But first, a bit of background. Abbey Road was the Beatles' last studio album (the Let It Be sessions were actually recorded before this, although the album was released the year after), and it was recorded at a time when it was obvious to all that their internal personal and creative rivalries would soon tear them apart. The Beatles managed, however, to put forth a tour-de-force as their swansong.

The first thing that hits you about Abbey Road is the richness of the sound. The guitars sound clean and pure, the drums sharp enough to be effective and yet non-obtrusive, George Martin adds his usual orchestral touches mostly in all the right places, and the Beatles' ever-present vocal harmonies reach new heights. The production, as usual, is immaculate; in fact, the only possible criticism of the sound as a whole is that some may find it slightly over-produced: you won't find here the raw, head-spinning screams of, say, 'Twist and Shout'. But hey, if that's all you want, go listen to AC/DC instead (and yes, I like AC/DC as much as the next guy...) The sound is much more 'mature' than that early Beatles feel. Of course, their musical genius shines through in all its splendour: the arrangements, the lyrics, the incredibly well-structured melodies.....but wait, wait, there I go again! Ok, deep breath....

The album starts off with a bang. 'Come Together' is of course one of those rock songs that has almost become a cliché, with its angry lyrics, ominous bass line, menacing drum rolls and that "shoot" whisper starting off each stanza. Some say the song is a hippie anthem, while others say it embodies John Lennon's disillusionment with the whole hippie ideology. Me? I'm not sure, though I tend towards the latter view (notice how angry and, well, almost cynical John sounds as he sings). Go listen to it anyway, if by some miracle you haven't already heard it. Next we have 'Something', probably one of the greatest ever love songs. It was written by George Harrison for his wife Patty, easily the greatest muse in rock music (remember 'Layla'?). Like most of Harrison's ballads, it manages to tug at your heartstrings without sounding corny or over-sappy at all.

'Maxwell's Silver Hammer' is the first Paul McCartney number on the album, and has a trademark McCartney simple, almost childish melody, combined with mock-horror lyrics. I'm not too fond of the main melody, it's rather ordinary, though watch out for the nice little orchestrated bits between the stanzas. 'Oh! Darling', however, is great: powerful, yet plaintive at the same time. Note the interesting staccato guitar work (at least I think it's guitar, you can never be sure what instruments the Beatles are using) in the 'heavy' bits, and Paul's great vocal workout. What I really love about the song, though, are the main melody and the 'soft' bits that begin and end the number.



listen to the great drums and keyboard combination in that 'loud' section, followed by the beautiful guitar and bass work in the jam in the middle section. A prime example of how the Beatles, like just about no one else, can work in several brilliant musical ideas into just one song, and make it all come together (no pun intended). Oh, and I love the lyrics: "You never give me your money, you only give me your funny paper". Brilliant! 'Sun King' has a lovely soft jam for its first minute, though the remainder of the song drags a bit with those same 'atmospheric' vocals again and some Italian (is that Italian?) in the middle.

The rest of the album consists of a set of short numbers that segue directly into one another: at times goofy, at times moving, at times rocking, but all great. There are too many highlights for me to point them all out, so I'll keep this short. 'Mean Mr. Mustard' is, well, cute, with a very nice lazy melody. There's a nice change of mood with the rocker 'Polythene Pam'. The brilliant drum intro to 'She Came In Through The Bathroom Window' along with the shout "Look out!" is fantastic, as is everything about the song. I just wish it wasn't so short. 'Golden Slumbers' can move you to tears with its beautiful soft melody and powerful chorus, one of the most cathartic moments on an album that's full of them. I love the way the theme of 'You Never Give Me Your Money' is reprised in 'Carry That Weight', with powerful trumpets sounding out the erstwhile soft melody. The album ends with 'The End', another rocker that winds down to a soulful conclusion. Wait a minute, it doesn't actually end there: if you let it keep playing, there's a funny little ditty called 'Her Majesty' that's all of 22 seconds long – a nice touch to end the album on a light note.

Oh I forgot to mention, surprise surprise, Ringo actually gets a drum solo (albeit a short one) on 'The End'- hey, even Keith Moon never played a drum solo! Though that's a different story....

ARUN SAGAR

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