Welcome to the fifth issue of Awaaz, Brown’s South Asian Journal of Arts. Within these pages you will find poems, short stories, photographs, and art that explore the South Asian experience. I also encourage you to visit our electronic archives, now available on our webpage at http://students.brown.edu/Awaaz/

We have the distinct pleasure of publishing our first ever piece in non-English text (see page 12). Srinivas Reddy, who graduated from Brown in 1998 with an AB in South Asian Studies, currently works as a professional concert sitarist and educator. We have included two selections from his translation of the Telugu poem Āmuktamālyada.

We also are honored to include an editorial piece by Professor Ashutosh Varsuney, who joined Brown’s Department of Political Science in January 2009. His discussion of the terrorist attacks in Mumbai in November 2008 was originally published in Financial Times (see page 20).

Over the last year, we have reached out to faculty, staff, and alumni in our ongoing effort to boost the visibility of the journal. I want to thank Anjali Sridhar for her guidance and fresh ideas for the journal. Likewise, Vijay Chitnis and the Office of Institutional Advancement have been working with Awaaz to see how the journal can help link Brown’s campus with the extensive South Asian alumni community. The journal would not have been possible without generous help from Dean Rajiv Vohra and Nancy Congdon.

In October 2008, Awaaz achieved Category III status, the highest level awarded by the Undergraduate Council of Students. This also enabled us to present a budget proposal to the Undergraduate Finance Board, which was approved in January. I am proud to have witnessed Awaaz achieve these milestones, which are vital to ensuring a sustainable future for our group.

I sincerely appreciate the work of the staff members of Awaaz for their continued dedication to this project. In the coming issues of Awaaz, I hope to see increased participation from students, alumni, faculty, and staff, whose creative work speaks to the South Asian experience and can enrich the dialogue Awaaz has sought to promote.

With gratitude,

Kam Sripada
Editor in Chief
Class of 2009
Āmuktam ālyada  is one of the five great maha-kāvyas or ornate long poems of classical Telugu literature. It was composed in the sixteenth century by the Andhra poet-saint Āṇḍāḻ Ṛṣṇi madhu-garvam aṣṭi migula tat rakti hṛṣṇi maṇi meghara ṭḍaṇcu lo nija mukta ādavara adva poet-saint Āṇḍāḻ Ṛṣṇi madhu-garvam aṣṭi migula tat rakti hṛṣṇi maṇi meghara ṭḍaṇcu lo nija mukta ādavara emamu kori pāḍāḍaṇča navvu || 5.147

She got up, she sighed, and laughed as she thought “Prayers to the Lord, are they ever answered?” But as the melody grew louder, the higher harmonies heard, the mangrove blossoms lay there motionless and with a flash of lighting the Love Struck One thought to herself “Let me humble the pride of Spring!” And below the mass of mighty clouds like the jewel studded bow of Indra, God of the Rains. The Love Struck One thought to herself “Let me humble the pride of Spring!” And below the mass of mighty clouds like the jewel studded bow of Indra, God of the Rains.

Selections from Chapter 5 employ metaphors of music to describe the young devotee’s burning love for the Lord. She sang the Melody of Rain that summoned the clouds, like the jewel studded bow of Indra, God of the Rains. The Love Struck One thought to herself “Let me humble the pride of Spring!” And below the mass of mighty clouds like the jewel studded bow of Indra, God of the Rains.

She got up, she sighed, and laughed as she thought “Prayers to the Lord, are they ever answered?” But as the melody grew louder, the higher harmonies heard, the mangrove blossoms lay there motionless and with a flash of lighting the Love Struck One thought to herself “Let me humble the pride of Spring!” And below the mass of mighty clouds like the jewel studded bow of Indra, God of the Rains.

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She got up, she sighed, and laughed as she thought “Prayers to the Lord, are they ever answered?” But as the melody grew louder, the higher harmonies heard, the mangrove blossoms lay there motionless and with a flash of lighting the Love Struck One thought to herself “Let me humble the pride of Spring!” And below the mass of mighty clouds like the jewel studded bow of Indra, God of the Rains.
infinite spectral children
running further towards recess
carting wheels, seeing saws
our jaws drop as teacher she walk in
cataclysmic parading giants
along ebony slated hearts
minutemen of the classroom
she walk in and she draw sing
she walk in and she top thing
muted eyes
of poignant punctures
of wisdom administered by spoonfuls
incompatible orifices and dogmas
swinging in tandem pendulumic
she keep an everywhere on eye
she beatin’ behinds
ninety and hundred makes no difference
when reading between the lines
guiding sorrow’s each mortal
through desks of tranquility
ridden blood hidden beneath
we say she god
she say spoil the rod
spare the child

by Srividya Kalyanaraman

by Srividya Kalyanaraman

Hilary Fischer-Groban
Chowpatty taxis, Bombay
Every Inch of Lebanon by Ila Tyagi

The cherries were so ripe that Joanna's hands were soon carried the clear plastic bags while her mother and Ammo Salim were going to divide up the family property. Joanna was a little annoyed to see her father draped languorously on the couch in front of the television, scotch in hand, that evening. She wanted the television to herself, and was secretly rather pleased she and her mother would be alone in the house tomorrow evening. The following morning Joanna walked down the hall to find her father lying on the couch as if nailed there while her mother fluttered around in the kitchen. He was having problems with his back again, her mother said, and wouldn’t be flying as planned. Joanna’s father was watching the television set hungrily. She vaguely remembers seeing on the news that Hezbollah was causing some sort of commotion in southern Lebanon. Soldiers from the national resistance movement had attacked and killed some Israeli soldiers and taken two hostages. They expected to exchange the hostages for Lebanese prisoners in Israeli jails shortly. Between 1948 and that summer, the summer of 2006, approximately half a million Palestinian refugees had accumulated in southern Lebanon. During the ‘60s and ‘70s the Palestinian Liberation Organization had been carrying out operations against Israel from Lebanon. Since the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 to boot out the PLO – leading to the birth of Hezbollah that same year as part of its Shi’a members saw themselves as part of a greater Arab cause in solidarity with their Palestinian brothers – there had always been minor skirmishes in Lebanon’s Shi’a-dominated south, along the border with Israel. Joanna was sure that everything would clear up in no time. Lebanese prisoners are released from Israeli jails, Joanna remembers him saying. They are infringing upon our territory. Joanna turned to see her mother’s face, joyful at having at last found the right oven. It was a good plain white model, reasonably priced, and just wide enough to fit into the slot their old oven would leave behind. The following morning Joanna woke early, but later than her parents. She could hear the murmur of the television in the living room. Sunlight slanted in through her Venetian blinds, running across her room and curving up onto her rumpled bed in rows. She lay on her back for a while, looking at the ceiling, running her fingers through her closed hair. When she got up and padded down the hall to the living room, she saw both of her parents sitting side by side on the couch, watching the movements closely on the screen. They bombed the airport, her mother said. The Israel Defense Forces had bombed the airport. Now they were infringing upon our territory. Joanna’s father couldn’t leave even if he wanted to. The man from the appliance shop had arrived and was installing her five-year-old oven in the kitchen. Joanna saw that all the phone lines. Israeli ships were blockading the port. Charbel flipped a business card in Joanna’s direction and said, hey Joanna, can you get me a hairdressing job in America? Charbel is a bit soft in the head, Joanna thought. Joanna nodded and said hm-hm from time to time while picking up dog-eared magazines from the ground to read and keeping one eye on the screen for news from Nasrallah. The main road from Lebanon to Syria had been hit. The salesladies looked equally dated, suspicious spinster-types who warily eyed Joanna’s fresh beauty in their shops’ dusty interiors. Others shops were more modern, everything gleaming white and steel. Joanna looked and shied at a dizzying array of shapes, sizes, models, and colors, but no oven seemed to fit. The cherries ripened unusually early that summer, and Joanna’s fondest memory of the trip is of driving up the mountains to her uncle Salim’s restaurant Kasr Al-Buhaira, or Lake Palace, to pick cherries. She, Joanna’s mother and Ammo left her father and Tante Henriette behind in the restaurant to discuss how they were going to divide up the family property. Joanna carried the clear plastic bags while her mother and Ammo Salim joked about the family they had both married into. The cherries were so ripe that Joanna’s hands were soon covered in purplish-red juice that squeezed against the plastic walls of the bags. The cherries were the best-tasting cherries Joanna had ever had. Joanna’s mother shared her own troubles with Ammo Salim, telling him how the stove top was fine, but how she couldn’t bake anything in the oven without burning it. Ammo Salim nodded and sympathized, handing bag upon huge bag of cherries to Joanna to collect. These cherries are for you, he said. Don’t you dare give any to Henriette! They had been a week in Beirut, and her father was due to go home to Abu Dhabi the following day. After a hard day of oven-hunting with her mother, Joanna was expected to exchange the hostages for Lebanese prisoners in Israeli jails shortly. Between 1948 and that summer, the summer of 2006, approximately half a million Palestinian refugees had accumulated in southern Lebanon. During the ‘60s and ‘70s the Palestinian Liberation Organization had been carrying out operations against Israel from Lebanon. Since the Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982 to boot out the PLO – leading to the birth of Hezbollah that same year as part of its Shi’a members saw themselves as part of a greater Arab cause in solidarity with their Palestinian brothers – there had always been minor skirmishes in Lebanon’s Shi’a-dominated south, along the border with Israel. Joanna was sure that everything would clear up in two or three days as usual this time. Hezbollah’s Secretary General, Hassan Nasrallah, was going to be making a statement later that afternoon. Joanna’s mother still hadn’t chosen an oven, so after taking medicine for his back her father said, let’s drive around, let’s visit your cousin Charbel. Charbel had the television going full blast in his hairdressing salon and was talking a mile a minute. Joanna nodded and said hm-hm from time to time while picking up dog-eared magazines from the ground to read and keeping one eye on the screen for news from Nasrallah. The main road from Lebanon to Syria had been hit. The cherries ripened unusually early that summer, and Joanna’s fondest memory of the trip is of driving up the mountains to her uncle Salim’s restaurant Kasr Al-Buhaira, or Lake Palace, to pick cherries. She, Joanna’s mother and Ammo Salim left her father and Tante Henriette behind in the restaurant to discuss how they were going to divide up the family property. Joanna carried the clear plastic bags while her mother and Ammo Salim joked about the family they had both married into. 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The main road from Lebanon to Syria had been hit. The
speed and ferocity of the Israeli response to Hezbollah’s incursion was taking everyone by surprise.

Let’s go somewhere this afternoon, said Joanna’s father, eating more medicine for his back. Let’s not sit at home. They went downstairs, crossed the street, walked behind the Metropolitan Hotel and across the roundabout to get to Boulevard Mall. Their predominantly Christian, east Beirut neighborhood, Horch Tabel, seemed unusually peaceful in comparison to what they had just seen on the television screen. The mall had few people in it and there was no music playing. Joanna and her parents sat in the Häagen Dazs café and ate ice cream. As they were walking back through the Metropolitan Hotel they overheard the receptionist saying that some people were checking out. Joanna and her family went out again for falafels for dinner. The falafel shop was filled with people watching the television screen pan over scenes of destruction in southern Lebanon. The airport had been bombed again. Fuel sloshed over a burning tank was giving rise to flames in shades of purple and pink. Here I am, thought Joanna, there is nothing happening around me, but I am watching bombings happening in the south of this very city. The conflict had escalated into something much bigger than a hostage negotiation. Indeed, everyone seemed to have quite forgotten about the two Israeli soldiers.

That night Joanna heard her first sonic boom. She and her parents were awake, listening to distant explosions and the tak-tak-tak of anti-aircraft fire in their respective rooms. Joanna could hear the bombs dropping in little packages, maybe fifteen at a time, pause, another package of fifteen bombs, pause. She heard the swoosh of reconnaissance drones. Then, at around 1:00 a.m, Israeli jets moving overhead unleashed an immense cracking sound. Joanna’s body snapped into a fetal position and she tugged the covers over her head. The sound made her so angry. It shocked her. Here you are in your place and suddenly an outsider comes and destroys it. But, as John Bolton, the American ambassador to the United Nations, later said, if Israel reacting in its own self-defense meant the defeat of its enemy, then that was perfectly legitimate. Israel was entitled to exercise its right to self-defense.

Israel’s exercise in self-defense continued the following day, and the day after that. A week into the self-defense, 300 Lebanese civilians had been killed and more than 1,200 had been wounded. For Joanna, the days passed in a cycle of getting food, watching the news, sleeping, and repeating the cycle. The self-defense often intensified in the afternoons. At night Joanna would leave her window open by one centimeter, so it would have space to rattle as the bombs fell. She shifted her bed away from her window to avoid being showered with glass as she slept. Her parents had a battery-powered radio that they listened to when the electricity was rationed. Don’t you love the third world? thought Joanna irritably, pacing around her room. She read blogs, news and analyses online and felt almost like a caged animal, though caged in what, she had no idea. In an e-mail to her friends abroad, she wrote, please have fun and go out for me because I am stuck at home watching my country being destroyed.

Her father’s back was feeling better. Let’s go somewhere, he said. Let’s get out of here for a while. That same day Joanna packed her retainer and a change of underwear and piled into the car with her parents. They drove up to Kasr Al-Buhaira in the mountains. On the way there Idhat Al-Sharq, the Radio of the East, played patriotic Lebanese songs. Joanna’s parents discussed their options. These were either staying in Lebanon or leaving via Syria. Hotels in Syria and flights out of the country were overcrowded, and her parents weren’t too keen on that option. Maybe a passage to Cyprus would open up shortly, if the Israelis could assure them that they wouldn’t sink the boats. Short on sleep after the previous evening’s entertainment from what Joanna liked to think of as the Olmert-Peretz orchestra, she let her attention weave in and out of her parents’ conversation. Their car was leaving Beirut’s urban sprawl behind and slowly rising up into the mountains. Beyond Antelias the settled areas became a little sparse, and the final stretch of the journey was bare.
selections from Chapter 5 employ metaphors of music to describe the young devotee's burning love for the Lord.

But as the melody grew louder, the higher harmonies heard, like the jewel studded bow of Indra, God of the Rains.

And below the mass of mighty clouds the mangrove blossoms lay there motionless beat and bent down by the burning breeze.

She plucked the five strings of her long-necked lute to drown out the love songs of carpenter bees.

Wishing for her own well-being
The Love Struck One thought to herself
“Let me humble the pride of Spring!”
She sang the Melody of Rain that summoned the clouds, and with a flash of lighting a multi-colored rainbow appeared in the sky, like the jewel studded bow of Indra, God of the Rains.
And below the mass of mighty clouds the mangrove blossoms lay there motionless beat and bent down by the burning breeze.

bhramara-gītika māya vipañci miṭa tāna śruti kūḍī migala tat rakti hecča ve nivārīnci leci daivikamun ēduta yuktulu phalimpa vanucu biṭurīcī navva || 5.147

She plucked the five strings of her long-necked lute to drown out the love songs of carpenter bees.
But as the melody grew louder, the higher harmonies heard, she suddenly stopped.
She got up, she sighed, and laughed as she thought “Prayers to the Lord, are they ever answered?”

transcribed by Srinivas Reddy

Amuktamāl𝑟ya is one of the five great mahu-kāyasyas or ornate long poems of classical Telugu literature. It was composed in the sixteenth century by Śrī Kṛṣṇadevarāya, the most celebrated king of the Vijayanagara empire in South India. The poem depicts the life of the medieval Vaiṣṇava poet-saint Andāḷ, or Goda as she is known in the Andhra country. These two selections from Chapter 5 employ metaphors of music to describe the young devotee’s burning love for the Lord.
the temperature outside was decent bordering on unrespectable. typical for the month of june, yet she slept beneath three layers, sweat stained, in an unpleasant heat flash. for the sake of comfort, disregarding the fact that she lay in a climate even bikram-enthused yogis would shy away from, her comfort was unquestionable, body scrunched tight with three protective shields above it. tiny clouds—not the cumulus kind, those were the pretty ones—hung ominously from her ceiling. they precipitated different Matter - family, friendship, school, career, marriage. some precipitate she couldn’t even recognize. her face turned in towards blanket buffer number one. cloud gazing meant staring up at a dizzying sky blue and she couldn’t take the nauseating feeling. instead she hugged her body close and rocked herself, humming an old indian tune her parents had serenaded her with when she was a child. a case of fetal vs. fatal.

fetal vs fatal
by Rohini Muralidharan

Darshan Patel
Sanjay & Bob
*the language spoken in the state of gujarat, india, and my first language.

“does your pussy taste like curry?”
“how come you don’t smell like a hind-oo?”

it isn’t that there aren’t words for “i love you” in gujarati*. maybe it’s that there is no need for them.

when I want to see my self, i skip the mirror and look instead at my journals, my words. recently i open my journals to find only white.

“hey, where’re you from?
[new jersey]
no, where are you really from?”
[new jersey, fuck you]

can i really “be from” a place i’ve been to nine times?
can i really not “be from” the place my mother birthed me, the place i started preschool and will graduate an ivy league college, the place i attended senior prom in a shiny white limo and a cute date, the place whose accent claims me as its own whenever i speak ?
[hey girl, wanna go down the shore this weekend?]

i’d like to think it’s more important to know where i’m going.

*the language spoken in the state of gujarat, india, and my first language.
Assault on fabled city puts unity of nation to the test

by Ashutosh Varshney

Consider how Indian democracy has addressed terrorism. India’s politicians have asked: are terrorists simply terrorists, or are they Muslim or Hindu terrorists?

By targeting south Mumbai, the terrorists have not only attacked the economic symbol of a rising India but also its most globalised quarters. A big hypothesis beckons: India is a highly unequal democracy in a bad neighbourhood, and as long as its democracy, inequalities and regional misfortunes remain unreformed, it will be vulnerable to terrorism.

Inequalities are the second part of the problem. The Indian economy has been booming, but while some business leaders, film stars and sports icons are Muslim, Muslims mostly come from the poorest, least educated and most poorly skilled communities. Nowhere is this contradiction more evident than in Mumbai. It has some of the richest Indian Muslims but there is a huge Muslim underclass and a connection between Mumbai’s underworld and its poor Muslims has been noted. Muslim gangs are among the most powerful players in Mumbai’s organised crime. To many, crime appears to offer greater and easier rewards than a dogged pursuit of regular employment.

Finally, Indian democracy functions in a region whose failings are second only to the Middle East’s. Recent works by Pakistani scholars make it clear that the state in Pakistan has long been fractured between agencies that support terrorism and those that seek to control it.

India has its troubles in Kashmir and the north-east, but these conflicts have never reduced the Indian state to a shambles. Alone in south Asia, India has had sufficient institutional strength to hold regular elections.

India has to ask how long it can continue to be institutionally strong if the neighbourhood is so violent. Its borders are porous and the prospect of maritime terrorism, raised by the Mumbai carnage, makes them more so. Foreign policy and national security are tied up with India’s political health, with potential consequences for India’s economic resilience.

What can be done? How to include India’s Muslims in the economic mainstream is key. India’s political parties need to learn that terrorism cannot be seen as a vote-winner. It is an evil and a security threat. If political parties link terrorism with Muslims or Hindus, they will only bring greater catastrophe closer. Finally, India must vigorously cultivate peace with Pakistan.

Luckily, a government today exists in Pakistan that has made the most resolute gestures towards peace in decades. President Asif Ali Zardari has opened up a unique opportunity for regional peace. After Mumbai, India needs to respond.

This piece first appeared in Financial Times on November 29, 2008. Reprinted in Awaaz with permission.

Photo by Rohini Muralidharan
It is fifty-three in the morning yet for some reason I, the notoriously deep sleeper, have woken up merely because of the distant sounds of the house stirring. I greet myself at the mirror and methodically begin to brush my hair—one hundred strokes, just as I was taught. I pull it back and smooth any wrinkled items of clothing—neatly composed, just as I was taught. While I dress, I meditate on the fact that when I dress, I meditate on the fact that when
my grandmother passed away, I was twelve. I noticed how my mother’s face was a little more blank. I knew how to connect with other people, how to help others, and how to cultivate family. She taught us that while family relationships seem so effortless, they fall apart most easily and how to cultivate family. She taught us that while family relationships seem so effortless, they fall apart most easily—neatly composed, just as I was taught. I say good morning to my family members, the lady who works in our house, the gardener—ever polite, just as I was taught.

Yet the house is not quiet without her—her laugh is so lonely. “Manu and Deepak must be so quiet without her.” “Manu and Deepak must be so quiet without her.” “Manu and Deepak must be so quiet without her.”

I am determined that my nani, in whatever form her soul inhabits right now, is enjoying the world from a fresh, new perspective—just the way that her ever-inquisitive mind used to like it. But at the same time, she hasn’t left us in the visceral sense. She lives with us, among us, and within us in a way that she always has and always will.

As we drive out to into the water we remember her quietly. We’re sitting around a table on my grandmother’s back porch trying to teach her the card game “Pig.”

“Now listen Nani,” Daddy explains patiently, “We each pass one card around at a time. If you see a card that you want, take it and pass on a different card. When you have four of the same kind, stick out your tongue. Or you can stick it out if someone else is sticking theirs out. But do it discreetly. The last person to stick out their tongue loses. And the game is supposed to move quickly!”

We start playing the game and cards pile up at Nani’s side. She is completely oblivious to the fact that she’s holding up the game and is happily chewing her Cheetos, off somewhere in her own world. Someone gets their four of a kind and the rest of us stick out our tongues but Nani continues looking at her cards contentedly. We let a little time go by, waiting to see if she’ll catch on. All of us are smiling and don’t dare make a noise. Then my brother and I crack; we begin to giggle. Nani looks up, confused, and the two of us collapse into laughter.

“Nani! You were supposed to stick out your tongue! You lose again!” my younger brother exclaims. Very deliberately, my Nani turns her head to have a look at the entire table and says, “Ahhhhhhhh,” as she triumphantly sticks out her bright-orange-colored tongue. Her good humor, ready smile, and willingness to tease and be teased were quite unexpected qualities for someone who lived a life of unending parties and unbridled laughter.

She lives with us, among us, and within us in a way that her ever-inquisitive mind used to like it. But at the same time, she hasn’t left us in the visceral sense. She lives with us, among us, and within us in a way that she always has and always will.

As we drive out to into the water we remember her quietly. We’re sitting around a table on my grandmother’s back porch trying to teach her the card game “Pig.”

“One-Hundred Strokes” by Sujata Gidumal
the traditional title given to an older sister in the Indian culture, her siblings called her “Rocksan.” “Rock” was short for her full name, Rukhmani, and “san” was used in their hometown Osaka, Japan, to connote respect.

“When we called her ‘didi’ she used to say, ‘What rubbish! My name is Rock and that’s what you’ll call me!’” remembers Savit, fondly. “She was really like a mother figure to us growing up,” explains her first sister, only a year younger than my grandmother.

World War II found my grandmother and her growing family in Japan, where they had lived peacefully for almost ten years. All of a sudden her father, an Indian and therefore a British citizen, was taken prisoner by the Japanese among whom he had settled down. After almost a year in prison, he returned to his family and they all boarded the ship where they were held for the next year as prisoners of war. The ship took them to such exotic places as Lorenzo Marx, Durbin, and Cairo, and finally deposited them in Bombay in the midst of the escalating struggle between Hindus and Muslims that would culminate in the creation of Pakistan.

As Nani attended college in Bombay throughout her twenties, supported by her forward-thinking father, my great-grandmother worried. She had ten children and the first was already past 25, unmarried, educated, and a girl. It was all my great-grandmother could do to maintain her hopes as boy after boy rejected her daughter on the grounds that they did not want to marry a woman “smarter” than themselves. Meanwhile, her husband rejected equally as many on the grounds that they were not good enough for his precious first daughter anyway. Nani took advantage of this time as she nursed dangerous and near-impossible ambitions to become a doctor and to change the world. The suitors kept arriving, however, and she knew one would soon catch up with her.

The day she was to meet Gobind Khiatani my grandmother felt like a princess. She was adorned in her mother’s jewels and a new saree, embroidered with a delicate border in the feminine style that so suited her petite body. As she walked into the fancy hotel she felt the familiar nervousness of meeting a man who might become her husband and her fingers tingled under the extra length of the saree she held demurely over her left arm. She smiled inwardly at her affected elegance. And then she saw the stairs. Her stomach dropped and girlish tingles turned into a very real fear. She remembered that she had begged to wear high-heeled shoes and was allowed to do so at her own expense. On the brink of losing her cool, Nani’s stubborn nature took control: she straightened her slight frame and mustered the most perfect posture she could manage. She concentrated with as effortless a demeanor as she could feign and placed each foot very slowly, very carefully, on the step in front of her. Yet halfway down her shoes got the better of her.

She tripped.

He laughed.

Her hopes were dashed, his interest piqued.

A few months later, her new husband whisked her off to the remote island of Jamaica, where she was to spend the rest of her life. My grandmother found herself halfway around the world, wife to a strong-willed and controlling man, surrogate mother to her husband’s niece and nephew, pregnant with her own child, and bereft of any dreams to go to medical school. Yet she is not remembered for the hardships she went through; she never discussed them. She is remembered for her generosity, her kindness, and her love.

None of us cry as we scatter her ashes in the water. A slight breeze surrounds us along with the sound of the waves and our love for her. She has shaped each one of us in innumerable ways and we will always remember her for it. The hundred strokes in brushing my hair have come to signify diligence, patience, perseverance and so many more of my grandmother’s characteristics to me. They also signify a certain stubbornness (as my hair does not always need one hundred strokes) that I cherish equally as closely.

She is still shaping people’s lives. The look on the boat driver’s face confirms this—he is awed by the tales we have been telling of this woman. He has been affected by the strength of her kindness and compassion, as have all of us. So as her ashes float away with the waves we do away with my grandmother’s body and rejoice in her beautiful soul, now free to return to whichever place she calls home. We float the other direction towards the shore and our boat is pulled rhythmically with the hundreds of strokes of the boat driver’s paddle.
Today I went to a lecture about a girl’s adventures in Kolkata. She had been working for Missionaries of Charity, Mother Teresa’s organization. I have never been to Kolkata (to me, in fact, it was still Calcutta). All I knew that Kolkata was in Eastern India, in West Bengal. I was from the South. Where our language was radically different, where people didn’t speak a manipulated form of Hindi, where we had mosquitoes and monsoons, masala dosa and uthapam, my cousins and extended family. That was my home. That was where I was from. What did Kolkata matter to me?

Her presentation was mostly pictures—a map of India, with Kolkata highlighted far north above my home state of Kerala. A picture of where she stayed in Kolkata—the guest house of Missionaries of Charity with 12 beds laid out side by side, all different sizes, and each half (sometimes less than half, as they were not uniform at all) of the size of my own bed now. She showed us a picture of an “Eastern style toilet” on a local train—metal with ribbed footpads on either side and a hole in the middle. With a grimace surfacing every five seconds or so, she told us that she had one in her room at the guest house, one that was much dirtier.

I knew those toilets. They were the ones at my grandparents’ house, the house I had grown up in, the ones that had made my America-born sister cry when she first saw them. I recalled my uncle telling me how Eastern toilets are more sanitary than “Western closets,” as one never comes into contact with its surface and washes with water rather than wiping around the bacteria with toilet paper. I smiled at the picture.

She went on, telling us about the street she lived on in Kolkata—a picture of bustling people amidst cars, goats on the street, manual rickshaws—all familiar sites to me. I could almost feel the dirt and mud from the street as I stared at the broken roads, how my chappals would always be caked with dirt no matter how I walked, and sometimes seep in between my toes. I could almost hear the cars and people crowding the road, drivers yelling out to others to move out of the way, and the roar of an occasional motorcycle or two. When she showed us
pictures of shops along the street, I knew them all—I knew the items they were selling, how exactly the shopkeepers would try to convince me that they had the best price and best quality even though they sold the exact item at the same price as all the others, and the big signs outside their store window written in Malayalam or in broken English displaying what was inside.

Then an unfamiliar picture came up on the screen, pulling me away from what I knew. A picture of a bridge above the Ganga, a holy river in India. I had never been to this bridge. It looked strange to me to see it. A contraption of steel triangles hovering above water. None of the bridges that I had crossed in Kerala were like this. Most of the time I would notice the tin sheets rattling underneath as we passed over gingerly, or the murky brown water from the monsoons. There was no architectural feat to marvel over.

Underneath this picture, there were two more. She told us that she had put these all together to show how she gained a new perspective. She told us that when she saw the bridge, she saw this symbol of modernism, something connecting two cities together. The other pictures showed people bathing in the Ganga right underneath the bridge. She told us how people bathed, urinated, and cooked with the same water. She grimaced as she told us about this, about her new perspective of looking behind the obvious architectural phenomenon to right below where people were bathing in dirty water. I didn't understand what she was saying. I knew that if I had the opportunity to, I would jump right into the Ganga, dirty or not. The river is supposed to flow straight from Shiva’s head— who knew what it could do? I had friends and family who kept vials of this water with them, the purest substance known to us Hindus, even if it is murky brown.

I tried to put my unsettling feelings aside. Clearly this girl did not know the significance of the river. Just another misconception. I had heard things like this before on national news. So what if one girl was saying it? Another picture showed women wearing saris walking around the marketplace. She told us that she had noticed that only “highly educated and wealthier” women tended to not wear these and that the lower class were the ones who wore traditional clothing more often. I looked at her in disbelief. Every time I had gone back to India, I remember seeing throngs of women wearing saris, some made of cotton, some made of silk, some with heavy embroidery. My mother loved the freedom of being able to wear one again in public whenever we went back. I remembered the first time she encouraged me to wear one. I had just turned 18 and she had a blouse stitched just for me. I had put it on badly, afraid that it would fall off after walking 2 steps. I used more than 10 safety pins to hold it up, but I still looked in the mirror again and again, practicing how to walk in it before she came in to undo the mess I had made and help me put it on properly.

I looked around the room, trying to find someone who was as confused as I was about what the presenter was saying. There was no one. Everyone’s eyes were on her, some smiling slightly and others nodding to her words. I tried to reassure myself, thinking that maybe it was because I was not from Kolkata or because I had not been back in over three years. Maybe I was wrong.

I left the room after her presentation, pictures from it imprinted in my memory. Pictures with words that didn’t fit. Pictures that I confused with ones that I had seen when I had last gone. They seemed to be all the same. They were all home.
Ju hu
by Priyanka Ghosh

The humidity
Captures the salt and smell of the sea
And sticks it strongly to your skin and
Makes your hair dirty with salt
The camel rides and horse rides
With the colorful scarves
And old, dark
Men driving the carts, asking for
Some extra money, change. telling stories.
The grilled, but more burnt corn
Dipped in a mixture of lime juice
Chili and excessive amounts of salt
The smoke coming from its preparation
mixes with the humidity
And through the smoke
And the humidity
And the noise
There’s my mom’s smile, my youth and
Hers from long ago.
i sat with a quilted duffel suitcase between my legs. two-watched indian man mirrored my position only with a plastic duane reade bag instead of my duffel one. he slowly reached into his shopping bag and removed its' contents one by one. all appeared to be forms of moisturizer, though each was contained in a different shape. with the subway seat blanketed in oddly shaped tubes and bottles, he began to dissect the scent and texture of each of his purchases. he picked up the first product, uncapped it and held it up to his nose. with eyes closed he inhaled deeply and smiled. a pleasant scent. approved for hand treatment. he then rubbed the lotion into his hands until its essence filled each and every pore. he brought his hands, palm side up, towards his nose taking one triumphant sniff. his aromatic hunger was fed. the first bottle reclaimed its prime spot on an adjacent plastic orange seat while indian man picked up the next object, and repeated this procedure to the t. he continued until each and every occupant of the duane reade bag had been scentspected. with a satisfied look on his face, two-watched Indian man folded his Hands and began to sleep. 

(enter subway at 2nd ave station)

he wore two watches. a silver for his right hand and a gold for his left. his rectangularly shaped glasses pushed to the bridge with a collared shirt tucked into tailored pants look conjured images of bangalore train rides. had we been in bangalore, the slightest scent of fish would have tickled our noses and bonded indian man and i in a bubble of nausea. however, as fate had it, this train was the jamaica bound F line and by some remarkable coincidence i and indian man sat across from one another just as we might in a foreign land, he glanced down to silver watch hand, checking the time. after pausing, he turned to gold watch hand, eyebrows met at the center of his forehead. the silver face was promptly removed from right hand and placed adjacent to the gold dial. his eyes dashed back and forth like a spectator at a tennis match...silver, gold, silver, gold, after a few minutes of adjusting hands, both Hands ticked off the same beat. indian man took one last glance to verify that yes, indeed, silver and gold had harmonized.

i sat with a quilted duffel suitcase between my legs, two-watched indian man mirrored my position only with a plastic duane reade bag instead of my duffel one. he slowly reached into his shopping bag and removed its' contents one by one. all appeared to be forms of moisturizer, though each was contained in a different shape. with the subway seat blanketed in oddly shaped tubes and bottles, he began to dissect the scent and texture of each of his purchases. he picked up the first product, uncapped it and held it up to his nose. with eyes closed he inhaled deeply and smiled. a pleasant scent. approved for hand treatment. he then rubbed the lotion into his hands until its essence filled each and every pore. he brought his hands, palm side up, towards his nose taking one triumphant sniff. his aromatic hunger was fed. the first bottle reclaimed its prime spot on an adjacent plastic orange seat while indian man picked up the next object, and repeated this procedure to the t. he continued until each and every occupant of the duane reade bag had been scentspected. with a satisfied look on his face, two-watched Indian man folded his Hands and began to sleep.

(exit subway at kew gardens/union tpke station)
Who could forget this moment? It was January 30th, 1948. Delhi, India’s capital was full of beggars, cows, dust, and poverty. After its independence and separation from Pakistan in August 1947, India had been struggling with violent conflict between Hindus and Muslims, leading to fires, riots, and destruction. It was around five in the evening, at the time of sunset.

I. Prayer & Assassination

With the simple sally, sandals, glasses, and nothing else, Mohandas is walking for his daily prayer while being supported by two younger women. He is exceptionally thin from fasting, so as to cease the religious bloodshed. He murmurs, “Good things progress at the speed of a snail.” Although his face is peaceful, he feels sad for the Indo-Pak discrepancies. “I always wanted to live until the age of 120, but my life is no more important than improving this situation.” He walks forward step by step.

Suddenly, a man steps in front of Mohandas, greets him, and kisses his feet. Mohandas bows slightly. The man steps back. All of a sudden, he points a gun at Mohandas’ chest. Three sharp gunshots run up to the sky, and come down to the ground. Mohandas touches his forehead to express his forgiveness for the assassin. He feels a stunned pain in his body, and collapses.

As he feels his forehead, he suddenly hears the sound of train approaching. He realizes that there is a ticket in his hand. It says “The Indian railway of memory: stop at childhood, youth, late maturity station.” The next moment, he sees his mother, father, and elder brother in a train. The train takes him to the flashback journey of his life, tracing where he came from. He steps into the train. It starts to run faster than the speed of light so he can meet important moments and people, before the pain takes away his consciousness.

II. Family & Tears

“Ma, it has been a long time,” Mohandas says to his mother. Tears drop as he meets his family members who passed away while he was young. He asks her, “Can you recall when I was in primary school? I was often sweaty when I came back from the school, because I ran back. I was always afraid of my friends insulting me. I always was.” Her eyes became wet as she looks at Mohandas. She says, “Mohandas, I understand you more than you can imagine.”
I am happy that you strictly follow religious principles."

She starts to pray.

"Dad," Mohandas' father has an air of dignity, and looks at his son. Mohandas turns with integrity. In his hand, the son realizes that there is a letter that he wrote more than sixty years ago. "Dad, this is a letter of confession."

Mohandas says, "I feel very guilty about what I had done, but I am not courageous enough to voice it. Could you read this?" Mohandas expects him to scold and shout at him as a strict man. While he waits for his father to read, he looks at his elder brother. He smiles. Mohandas suddenly recalls that he was a very shy child without self-confidence. He feels as if he is a child again.

His father does not say a word. Mohandas realizes that his father is holding his letter tightly, and shedding tears. This is the first he sees his father's tears. In the letter, Mohandas confesses the attempts of stealing, eating meat, and suicide. Mohandas feels shameful especially because his father does not become angry and violent. He feels the meaning of his father's tears. The train stops at "Youth Station." Mother, father and elder brother stand up, and say "We have go. Kasturba is coming." The orange sky is shining through the window. A piercing whistle is heard.

At the Last Maturity Station, three dignified men come in. They are all inspiring thinkers for Mohandas. The first, a Russian man with a long beard is Leo Tolstoy. The second, a young Frenchman, is Romain Rolland. The third, a tall man with a very long beard, is Rabindranath Tagore, the distinguished poet from Calcutta. They find Mohandas and sit together with him.

"Non-violence is certainly the idea that the world must seek for. God is Love. After many years of struggle to realize Christianity, it is obvious to me that art is a great source of will power to move forward in life. Yes, simple life and non-violence are valuable, but I also think the arts must be respected."

Rabindranath continues, "Yes, independence and non-violence are what India has to endeavor for. It is truly meaningful to avoid the British oppression, as Indians are all suffering physically and very seriously. "No, we cannot. Once we decided to remain vegetarian and non-violent civil rights movement, you have always demanded so much from me. You may be strong, but I do not matter. Other white customers feel uncomfortable if Indians are in the first-class. So, do you want to stay or get out?"

Mohandas feels very frustrated and angry. But he also thinks that if he went to the third-class compartment, it would show that Indians are meant to be discriminated against. Mohandas decides not to obey the unfair demand. "Get out, Indian!" His bags and he are thrown out of the train of memory.

While he is being thrown off the train, Mohandas realizes that he is covered in blood and full of pain, and has collapsed in Delhi. There is no bag that he had in the train. He tries to recall what happened in a station in South Africa fifty-five years earlier. In that cold night alone in the train station, he pondered life—whether he should remain in South Africa to fight against discrimination towards Indians, or go back to his family in India.

What he dreamed of and struggled with in that cold night without any light led him to go through the path towards Indian independence. Perhaps, the lonely night was a watershed in his life's goals and meanings. His life principle became courage, generosity, and self-sacrificial love.

His cognition is increasingly fading away. Voices come from people surrounding him, "Papoo!"

"Sorry, I feel extremely tired, and my chest hurts. May I go back to my compartment to rest for a while?" Mohandas asks them. The sky is completely dark now, and stars are shining over the sky.

V. Papoo & Goodbye

Mohandas walks into the train compartment. It much resembles the one of South Africa, which he took forty-five years ago. Mohandas looks inside, where there are the bags on the train on which he started the Civil Rights movement. He sees a white man looking at him inside the compartment through the window.

Suddenly, a clerk arrives and complains; "You cannot take this first-class compartment because you are Indian. You must go to the third-class if you don't want to be forced to get out of the train." Mohandas replies, "but I have a ticket. You can see." The clerk says strongly, "That does not matter. Other white customers feel uncomfortable if Indians are in the first-class.

Afterward

This piece was written to express my deep appreciation towards two great men: Mohandas K. (Mahatma) Gandhi from India, and Kenji Miyazawa from Japan. Although Mohandas is often seen as a spiritual person, in fact, he was to many humans, a model human.

My goal is to make him more tangible by incorporating his life experiences into Kenji Miyazawa's famous tale of "Night of the Galactic Railway."
The green bars that remain locked into the square –
that outlet of gold rays against a border of concrete wall –
from behind which I peer
do not give me
the title of "prisoner''.
Rather, I am a philosopher looking for
my life’s meaning, the artist starving for beauty.
Lovingly the queen stares down from my castle
at the kingdom which was bequeathed to her
pride that rushes through
her veins as if it was blue blood.
Rickshaw wheels revolve on pavement,
School children skip along under a fog
that smears what could be blue sky.
"City of Joy,” always captivating my heart –
I see horizon beyond horizon.
My top of the world
Is gazing at skyscrapers, a far away bridge;
on a land I love
yet can never belong to.
has a keen eye for facial hair.

is a graduate student in Urban Education Policy.

has a pet bunny rabbit that hops on her bed every morning at 7am.

hopes everyone has a chance to go to Juhu sometime.

loves complicated names.

wants to find peace within herself.

still loves to karaoke.

wants to be Batman.

is a hot chocolate addict.

drümmer sig bort, här.

wants to know for whom the bell tolls?

is worried about Sanjay and Arti in Harare, Zimbabwe.

wants to live on a beach one day.

would like his chai to be less sweeter.

is a professional concert sitarist.

is trying to raise the bar.

has a job, a secretary, a mother, two ex-wives and several bartenders that depend upon her, and she doesn’t intend to disappoint them all by getting herself “slightly” killed.

is a professor in Brown’s Department of Political Science.

is a so-called “food snob.”

spent a month with Gandhi.
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