Field Trip, Ellora Cave 16
Kam Sripada ‘09
Digital photograph
Dear reader,

Welcome to the 2007 spring issue of Awaaz. This spring we are happy not only to celebrate a year of existence, but a fantastic year of growth and exploration. The Awaaz staff invites you to our best collection of art, photography, poetry and prose yet! We hope Awaaz serves as a map of the South Asian experience for Brown students, as well as for the broader Providence community and beyond.

This semester, we gave up two of our prime leaders to far away countries, but gained new perspectives and fresh faces. Now a better established organization, Awaaz focused on more thoroughly exploring and reflecting on the Brown community and greater South Asian experience through the careful selection of diverse submissions this semester. We also reached out to South Asian Brown alumni, and found an unexpected amount of interest and support. In the future, we hope to continue to work with alumni and establish a strong Brown community of those who share the South Asian experience that extends beyond our time at Brown.

We are excited to include not only student submissions, but also the extraordinary artwork of highly esteemed Brown alumna, Chitra Ganesh. “She was born and raised in New York City, and currently lives and works in Brooklyn. Transforming and circulating buried histories are at the core of her drawing, installation, text-based work, and collaborations. Her recent works are inspired by Hindu and Greek mythology, present day imperialism and queer politics, graphic novels, song lyrics, and erased moments in South Asian history. She graduated magna cum laude phi beta kappa with a BA in Comparative Literature and Art-Semiotics from Brown University (1996), and MFA from Columbia University (2002). She received numerous grants and awards, including awards from NY Community Trust, New York Foundation for the Arts, College Art Association, and Astraea Foundation for Lesbian Justice. From 1998-2003, she was a Board Member of the South Asian Women’s Creative Collective (SAWCC). Ganesh has exhibited her work locally and internationally, including at The Queens Museum of Art, Bronx Museum, the Asia Society, Fondazione Sandretto in Turin, Nature Morte in New Delhi, and Gwangju Contemporary Art Centre in South Korea. She is represented by Thomas Erben Gallery in New York City and Vitamin Arte Contemporanea in Turin.”

Thank you to Ganesh and to everyone who submitted to Awaaz. We appreciate your involvement in the building of a creative and safe space, and for recognizing the importance in expressing our voices outside the academic classroom, and through more creative, challenging forms. We are also grateful to Jhale, for sending us love and support even from Cairo, and we can’t wait to have you back. Thank you also to our family, friends, pets, and lovers for their love and continued commitment to Awaaz. Finally, thank you reader for taking the time and listening to our voices.

Sincerely,

Nisha Mirani’10
Editor in Chief
Staff

Editors in Chief
Nisha Mirani ‘10
Jhale Ali ‘08

Treasurer
Sejal Jhaveri ‘09

Managing Editor
Nandini Jayakrishna ‘10

Editing Team
Godbhuli Bhattacharya ‘09
Ila Tyagi ‘09
Priyan Chandraratna ‘08

Design Editors
Kam Sripada ‘09
Jaya Mathur ‘07.5

Publicity Chair
Sumbul Siddiqi ‘10

special thanks to . . .
Creative Arts Council; Dean of the College Katherine Bergeron;
SASA; Nidhi Mirani; Saroj and Ghanshyam Mirani; Suraj Chopra;
Abja Midha; Amita Swadhin; Amita Kulkarni

*All submissions were selected through an anonymous voting process and do not necessarily reflect the views of Awaaz, South Asian Journal of Arts’ staff.
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inside Front</th>
<th>Field Trip, Ellora Cave 16</th>
<th>Kam Sripada ‘09</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Upstairs</td>
<td>Nisha Mirani ‘10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Home</td>
<td>Priyan Chandraratna ‘08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Bharatvarsha (Redux)</td>
<td>Anonymous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Vanity</td>
<td>Shruti Parekh ‘10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Chinese Checkers</td>
<td>Sujata Gidumal ‘10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Kate, fee Misr</td>
<td>Jhale Ali ‘08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Hey Girl</td>
<td>Jaya Mathur ‘07.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Food for King: A Recipe</td>
<td>Devina Swarup ‘07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>forever her fist</td>
<td>Chitra Ganesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>kannagi</td>
<td>Chitra Ganesh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Father/Daughter</td>
<td>Vani Kilakkathi ‘08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Dambulla Buddha Cave</td>
<td>Ahalya Nirmalan ‘10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Strawbella</td>
<td>Ila Tyagi ‘09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Draped Cloth</td>
<td>Ila Tyagi ‘09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Calcutta – India</td>
<td>Devina Swarup ‘07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>even the dogs don’t bark</td>
<td>Jhale Ali ‘08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Untitled (Samrat Yantra Doors, Jaipur)</td>
<td>Kam Sripada ‘09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Silent Soul</td>
<td>Prabjhote Kumar ‘08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inside Back</td>
<td>Utrayan</td>
<td>Ojus Doshi ‘08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Upstairs
Nisha Mirani ‘10
Digital photograph
The heat hits me,
    a heavy blow to the entirety of my body,
as I step off the plane onto a dilapidated ramp.
The humidity
    permeates my nostrils as I descend into a cloud of
    wet air and my feet find
    the tarmac.
Every time it is the same:
    alarming, refreshing, uncomfortable, and familiar.
I glance at the soldiers scattered around,
    not much older than myself, carrying
    machine guns, wearing black berets and
    looks of camouflaged fear.
In the arrival hall, sounds of the Sinhalese language
    soothe the ear;
    warm, rich, melodic. We are reunited
    with the family in a whirl
of loving greetings, silk saris, comments on our weight or complexion, and
    double-cheeked kisses.

    Home.
To be washed in the waves of a sea of saffron, a crush of cardamom. The spirit of things hangs in the air, sitting and simmering, percolating for days, like deep-stewed curries. To know life by touch and not name.

At work, the drivers sit out back, playing cards, sweating in the hot shade, waiting until six, seven, sometimes ten at night to chauffeur someone back home. Servant guys too. They open the doors, guard the front, call the cars up when you leave, bring the tea around twice each day and a snack if you are working late, move the equipment. No one ever speaks to them, says thank you or hello. I am the only one, I think. They are nice to me; all smiles. I feel bad for them. They do the shit work and they are invisible.

At the INA Markets, where I bought samosas for nine rupees, one man took the money, another made change, a boy turned the samosas in the oil and plucked out two for me, and another man stood by, folding old magazine pages and newsprint into neat bags to wrap them into. Everything here is a process. Nothing is done by oneself or requires just one person’s approval, one person’s initiative. Everything is process, everything hammered at by a multitude of hands.

Breakfast. Breakfast was usually an omelet. When it wasn’t, it was hot aloo parathas. Sometimes the mango was yellow tangy, sometimes orange and syrupy like sweet sweet yam. There was always fruit.

In India, everyone’s always late, which is to say no one is ever late, because no one can ever be late.

I came here to work; that is why they brought me. Plane ticket, visa, food and lodging, stipend. A steel bird came and carried me over the Atlantic.

I still can’t reconcile the glossy bus stop ads for beauty creams and cell phones being hawked by white supermodels with the skeletal, ragged men living out of makeshift shanties beneath them. The white-tile western-style malls with United Colors of Benetton hawking their prim and proper politically-correct “lifestyle brand” with the impoverished street-vendors frying eggs and refilling glass soda bottles by the curb outside the parking lot. Maybe the people are just that much more used to it, or maybe the majority of people are just too close to the edge themselves to worry about the people beneath them.

I guess I am still trying to process it all.
I was counting twenty, thirty cows each way of my commute when I got here. I soon stopped counting. These are not Ben & Jerry’s cows. They are beasts, trodding slowly over the piles of refuse that they pick and nibble at, lifting their heads occasionally to eye the passing traffic, or a man urinating by the side of the road.

There are dogs roaming the city too. Mangy little things, so exhausted from the heat, or lack of nutrition, or both, that they simply lie flopped on their sides, sleeping, most of the day. They don’t ever seem threatening. No one seems to mind their presence. Sometimes a shopkeeper or street wallah will prod a dog, lightly with a stick. It might look up hazily, eyes full of mucus and dirt, weakly push itself up onto its front legs and stagger its way off a few steps to gently collapse again.

Now and then, there are goats. Funny-looking goats with short snouts milling about the side of the road. They linger about the bony legs of cows. Cows that chew trash and sag like famine. Dogs too fatigued to moan.

I am having dreams. Strangely powerful dreams, vivid and mysterious.

When we went to Agra and Jaipur, we hired a man – Pintu – to drive us. His face bore deep lines, lines that carried weary gloom. There is something about him that made me uneasy. He was quiet and self-kept but his gold wristwatch seems to speak of an inner greed.

In my dream, as though a vision, I am with Pintu, driving along a straight, empty road in the dry Indian countryside, I look out to the left and see the dry fields ablaze. There is a darkness to them,

I look at the floor. Pintu looks back, towards me. He is speaking but I can’t hear the words. I look down again. When I finally look forward, the fields to our right are burning. A road between fields of fire. The sky is ominous. We keep driving. Somewhere in the distance ahead, the fire creeps onto the road itself. I am in hell.

For a few bucks each we got to ride elephants up to the top of the Amber Fort. They’re amazing creatures. So slow and deliberate, but intelligent and strong at the same time. There’s a scary realization, as you ascend the hill, that these huge creatures you’re sitting atop could easily step right over the low walls that separate you from a precipitous drop over sharp, rocky brown terrain. I’m sure their handlers aren’t the kindest of people (how else do you keep a two-ton beast with a padded blanket on its back ferrying tourists up a hill all day, every day) and I began to wonder whether elephants could be suicidal. Every now and then they sniffle or touch something along the ground with their big trunks and bellow, revealing their big, pink mouths, triangular like sliced open strawberries. They seem so tender.

At five in the morning we leave the club. Like stepping from a sauna fully-clothed. Hot wind. Stronger than any hot wind I have ever felt.

Friday I bummed a cigarette from Mansi and went up to the roof terrace for a smoke. It’s nice up there, peaceful. I sat on the ledge and looked out over the lot next door. A building is being built there. From where I was I could see two women carrying heavy loads on their heads. There was something nice about
the scene – peaceful, traditional. I found myself wondering “what if I moved here?”

He is Surender Sharma. Almost my age; he barely believes me when I say I am only twenty. He is a university student – science. “Doctor?” I ask. He jokes that with his luck, who knows. His brother studied economics at Delhi University too. They both drive cabs.

Surender works the night shifts – because of his classes – so I usually see him only when I’ve let my day driver off. He’s funny – the surest sign I have that his grasp of English is stronger than any of my other drivers. We swap tidbits about our girlfriends (mine Indian British, his Nepali; both of us thinking marriage). We listen to Bollywood pop hits and bhangra, sitting in traffic molasses; a sea of brake lights and non-existent lanes.

Shuddh  (pr: shood) adj. – pure

Passed a group of men working to make a ditch today. One held the spike, one swung the sledgehammer. Six more sat by watching, waiting for their turn to labor. It must have been 110 degrees. Not a cloud in the sky. The ditch: maybe three feet wide, twenty feet long. Bang bang bang all the way down the line. A dozen hands to break an earth of stone.

“The battle to win India back was waged not only on the political plane but also in the realm of ideas. A turn-of-the-century Indian nationalist Bipin Chandra Pal, in a book called The Soul of India, delved back into ancient history in attempting to question the Western definition of India: ‘while the stranger called her India, or the land of the Indus, thereby emphasizing only her strange physical features, her own children, from of old, have known and loved her by another name… that name is Bharatavarsha.’ This name, deriving from the ancient king of kings Bharata, Pal claimed, was ‘not a physical name like India or the Transvaal, nor even a tribal and ethnic name like England or Aryavarta, but a distinct and unmistakable historic name like Rome’.”


As night fell, the park got more and more crowded with people until by dark it was teeming with families picnicking, vendors hawking chips and balloons and bananas and light-up rubber-band-launched projectile toys, small groups of teenage guys and rambunctious children, coconuts sliced on trays, air and smells passing like tides and everything so all at once. Bodies moving through the current like seawater in the rocks. It was just a Sunday evening.

I was not here for work. I was here for India.

Hot sun beating down, onto clay balcony floor, through the glass-pane door and half reflecting off curtains, half seeping through. It fell on my eyelids, burning red into otherwise total blackness. My dreams turned to lightness, washed out in sun and were bleached away.

Water falling down, being pushed down really, piped up actually, through rusted – though recently-laid – pipes, outward from untreated water facilities, down, down onto my head. And arms. And back. Loosening sleep-taut skin and restoring bounce to dulled flesh.
The towel around my body pulls water off, out and into terrycloth fibers arranged zig-zag interwoven, like peeling the skin from an orange. I wrap the towel around my waist and tuck it into itself. It hangs there, insecurely, allowing the shallow diagonal curves that run the corners of my abdomen to sneak out.

These curves are new on my body. They’ve only begun to carve themselves into me as I strain myself in the cramped gym room by night and the heat and light meals gradually sap the fat from my body by day.

I am smoking daily now; a few times. Smoke is as thick as the air here, but crisper.

Namaste. I see the self in you. Hands pressed together, a slight bend in the torso, just at the solar plexus. Reverential salutation to your inner truth.

The car pulls out and I hop inside. I never let the driver open my door for me. He still tries; half tries, with a smile that says shukriyaa. Our doors close with a sound half click and half thump and we roll out onto the street.

Within this cool, fiberglass vessel I watch the people pass. I watch as cows, street children, malls and trees all go by, like the drain has been pulled on life and every visual is rushing past me, toward that suction.

The steering wheel turns left and turns right, as we negotiate our place amongst buses, green-and-yellow autorickshaws, motorcyclists, two to a bike, sometimes around a slowly-trodding cow with an off-white hide and its sagging, emaciated frame. Traffic never flows straight here, always diagonals, twists, ups and downs over potholes, bumps.

I sit back and watch the fruit vendors with wood carts under stacks of lychees, pyramids of little red plant morsels; half-clothed children scrambling amongst stopped cars, slapping at windows and bringing their fingers to their narrow mouths, letting their eyes plead; burnt out looking men to the side of the road, smoking from wood pipes beside barbers, lathering and shaving, armed with high-chairs and small rectangular mirrors. Another cow chews a plastic bag. A stray dog pants, lets its back legs slacken beneath it. High-walled estates for the wealthy, their old brick walls running with painted soda advertisements, topped by shards of broken glass ready to cut and maim any naked hand foolish enough to try to scale them. Half-demolished buildings, rebar and cement drooping from their collapsed floors. Rubble. People moving along with their lives outside, all in different directions, all at once, all interwoven zig-zag. Images divorced from their potent scents, pervasive noises, the heat of Delhi air. This world: pulling inwards, looking out.

Anonymous
Vanity
Shruti Parekh ’10
Charcoal on paper
After minutes upon minutes of careful calculation, I execute the move. It’s meant to shock, to impress, to draw attention to the fact that I, Sujata Gidumal, am not only in complete control of the game, but am going to beat my grandmother for the first time ever. The move is flawless, a true beauty, and a quelled voice inside of me wonders how my grandmother let that pass. It tells me that she’s letting me win, finally giving up her stubborn resistance after years of competition. But that’s not possible, I realize with a cold shudder, because she’s not even paying attention.

“Nani! Nani!” I call her. “It’s your turn.”

“Oh!” she jumps slightly and refocuses her eyes on the board. “What did you do?”

I look at her, shocked beyond belief. Sure, I’ve noticed recently that her mind isn’t as sharp as it used to be. I’ve realized that she walks painfully slowly, that the slightest change in plans makes her panic, but this is almost more than I can bear.

For as long as I’ve known my mother’s mother she has played Chinese checkers. Among my most fond memories of coming to Jamaica are of the summers that I spent here alone with my grandparents. The three of us would sit out on the veranda for hours upon hours, enthralled by the inevitably dead-locked match between my grandparents. Both were as stubborn as mules and wouldn’t give even one measly move to their opponent for the sake of the game. I would run back and forth between table, where the game demanded complete and utter silence and concentration, and the railing, where I could watch the planes come into the airport. I could sit for hours, never tiring of the concentrated and determined expressions on my grandparents’ faces or the beauty and grace I saw in the flight of a plane.
But now, in the present time, it seems as though my grandmother is losing her grasp of the game. My move is painfully obvious, revealing itself in the bright red of my piece among the white of hers. It is literally impossible to miss.

“I moved this piece here,” I indicate to her.

“Wow, Sujni! How did you manage that?” But her reaction is too late and now every part of me is screaming to take back the move. How can I allow my first win against her to be like this? I feel like I’m taking advantage of my ever sweet grandmother.

“You know what I just realized? I think I made a mistake. I can’t do that move. How annoying is that?” I take back the move and hope desperately that she doesn’t notice; that she’ll move on.

“Sujata, I know you deserve that move. I saw you setting it up a long while back but I never thought you’d be able to pull it off. Please put your piece back, I just wasn’t paying attention and that’s my fault,” she informs me, now completely lucid and acting like her former self. I blush and return my piece, yet the guilt still gnaws at my insides. I know that even though my grandmother is, or was, ruthless when it came to Chinese checkers, she never permits cheating. I’m ashamed for thinking this time would be different. “Anyway, it opens up this wonderful path for me!” she giggles the laugh that I hear very occasionally these days and performs her move with a flourish. “Nani!” I exclaim as the guilt recedes, “That’s so not fair!”

“You know what’s not fair? What’s not fair is you taking advantage of the fact that I can’t see in this light!” She gets up, her mood changing instantly as has become the norm recently.

“Oh, you are not quitting again! I’m just about to win!” but I can’t retaliate because some mixture of sorrow, guilt, and pity still remain with me and I allow her to walk away into the shroud of darkness that is slowly but surely surrounding her.

The shroud is composed of a variety of things, her memories, her regrets, her wishes. It is a physical shroud, a shroud of failing sight, of dependence upon a cane, of an unknown and incurable rash that torments her day and night. When it envelops her I feel like she is lost, hopelessly and utterly lost beyond my grasp or the grasp of anyone around her. The only thing that gives us hope is her stubbornness. She won’t let it take her and she fights viciously against it.

I look inside to see her settled upon her favorite couch and sleeping peacefully, with Who Wants to be a Millionaire? playing in the background. Her soft and crinkly face tells the tale of years of hardship and struggle, of her fragmented childhood, of never having a homeland. Of her 9 siblings, no two were born in the same city, three were mentally retarded, and only two remain today. There are traces of the impact she made in Montego Bay, Jamaica, the city she has called home for almost fifty years. Most still remember her never-ending kindness and support, her insistence that no one leave her house without something to eat or drink, her devotion in the face of her husband’s commanding and difficult presence. Yet the number of visitors she receives decreases daily since she herself has become difficult in her old age.

Dinnertime rolls around and the usual suspects surround the dinner table: my Uncles Deepak and Manu, my mother, my brother, his best friend Praveen, my nani and I. We are, as usual, answering round
of questions being fired at us from Uncle Deepak, along the morbid lines of: “if your mother and father were falling of a cliff who would you save?” or the ludicrous: “if you were a camel in the middle of Manhattan and it was Tuesday and raining and you had to choose to go left or right, which would you choose?” or the frustrating: “would you choose your best friend over a billion dollars? How about your brother? Your mother? Your Uncle (wink, wink)?” We were debating the final question, he trying to persuade my brother and I that he was well worth a billion dollars, and us stubbornly refusing, when he addressed my grandmother,

“Hey, mom! What would you choose?” She looked up quickly and blurted,

“What? Chicken?” The table immediately burst into hysterical laughter but I just looked at her and, surprisingly enough noticed that roughish glint in her eyes. Then I too began to laugh, not mockingly, but utterly happily because I know that beneath the shroud still lives my nani, with her love of all things chocolate, her penchant for some mischief, and her quirky personality. Although daily she travels deeper and deeper and becomes more and more lost among the dark woods of old age, every once in a while she affords us a glimpse of her old self which is so priceless. She won’t lose herself completely, at least not until she knows it is her time. And until then, we will continue playing Chinese checkers, even though I know that I will never be able to bring myself to beat her.

Sujata Gidumal ’10
Her skin is tan
  no, not tanned –
  tan
    the color from mixing
      brown and white
rough, chapped around
  her elbows and knees
easily scarred
  reminds her constantly of
    falling at six years old
    shaving clumsily at eleven
  a naked chronology of mishaps and missteps
Like an exotic flower he says
  the man who sees
    tan skin
    hazel eyes and kajal smudged along the lower lid
    heavy brown curls draping slight shoulders
You sure are unique she says
  the collection of differences
    a lot to absorb
    more complicated than just
      tan skin
You’re always so tan they say
  of tan skin
    in the middle of January
and she says
  and she says
    and she says
    and she says
Thank you

Hey Girl

Jaya Mathur ‘07.5
Food for King: A Recipe

I. Samosa

“Merely the best known\(^1\) of an entire family of stuffed pastries or dumplings popular from Egypt and Zanzibar to Central Asia and West China”

(Alan Davidson, Oxford Companion to Food, Oxford University Press, 1999)

“A small triangular pastry filled with spiced meat or vegetables and fried in ghee or oil.”

(Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary)

“Three cornered piece of magic”

(www.samosa-connection.com)\(^2\)

II. Filling

Potatoes. Potatoes and peas. Potatoes, peas and cilantro. Potatoes, peas, cilantro and ground cumin. Potatoes, peas, cilantro, ground cumin and ground red chillies. Potatoes, peas, cilantro, ground cumin, ground red chillies, whole cumin and lime juice. Potatoes, peas, cilantro, ground cumin, ground red chillies, whole cumin, lime juice and cashews. Potatoes, peas, cilantro, ground cumin, ground red chillies, whole cumin, lime juice, cashews and raisins. Potatoes, peas, cilantro, ground cumin, ground red chillies, whole cumin, lime juice, cashews, raisins, oil, firm kneading fingers with dusty grimy chaotic riotous smoggy sweltering muddy littered rubbled airconditioned sweaty Indian fingernails.

Salt.

Salt to taste.\(^3\)

III. Wrapping\(^4\)

Flour. Oil. Water (the quantity which you will only discover through arduous trial and error involving drowning of many a sad samosa in a wok-sized sea of smoking spattering oil)
IV. Chutney

Hindi-Urdu chatni transliterated into British as chutney, sweet or spicy pureed relish whose most fantastic form is in the esoteric grasp of pottering-about sari-clad waist-length-hair iron-chef grandmothers.

V. Nutrition facts

Deep-fried in ghee or vegetable oil until it crackles.

“Baked samosas are a healthier alternative to the traditional fried ones...” (Wikipedia.org)

“Rubbish.”

1 Star of Hollywood, one might say
2 Fourth search result found by Google: A questionable authority on the origin of samosas? Yes; On understanding its place in the history of mankind? No.
3 The tongue’s tastebuds are divided into four sections: bitter, sweet, sour and salty. The average person has 10,000 tastebuds that are regenerated every two weeks. As you grow older, your tastebuds die and stop being replaced. However, my samosa papillae are safely cloistered in a ceaseless proliferative cycle.
4 10th century encasing enclosing a myriad avatars transcending empires across the ancient Silk Route.
5 To a FOB (Fresh-Off-the-Boat, or in this day and age, FOP – Fresh-Off-the-Plane), America appears to love standardization. In an effort to appear ‘authentic’, all Indian restaurants across America serve three miniature bowls of chutneys with their samosas: bright-red-food-colouring-coloured diced onion; grainy-soupy-cool-green-cilantro; honeybrown-onionseed-dashed-sweet-tamarind. In India, you will be hard-pressed to find cilantro chutney with samosas. Honeybrown-onionseed-dashed-sweet-tamarind chutney is the closest thing to ‘authentic’ that is available. And the bright-red-food-colouring-coloured diced onion one? The bright-red-food-colouring-coloured diced onion chutney is as native to India as a kangaroo is to England.
6 Rich golden clarified saturated fatty butter from pure cow’s milk actually proven to reduce LDL (bad) cholesterol levels.

Devina Swarup ’07
FOREVER HER FIST: I threaded myself through her hole (so tightly) -- before the sky pierced me with her arrows or after the slip of her tongue on my tell-tale heart?

MOTHER IN ANOTHER LANGUAGE...
AFTER THE ICE HAD MELTED, BENEATH THE RIVER OF SORROW, HER FISH EYES
COULD BREATHE IN THE VIOLENCE OF AN UPCOMING STORM....

LIKE AN EARTHQUAKE
BURNING AT MY FEET.
AN EARTHQUAKE, A HURRICANE,
OUR TWO SHADOWS. OR WAS IT JUST
PANDORA,
DIGGING HER
OWN GRAVE...

kannagi (2006)
Chitra Ganesh
Digital C print
Courtesy of Thomas Erben Gallery
Father/Daughter

I’m sitting on the stairs of my family’s house, staring through the open door to the cars lined up in the driveway. This is where my father stationed me hours ago; my job is to greet the visitors entering our house to pay their respects. I try to be a good hostess, but I know I’m not performing my duty very well. I can barely manage to look at the guests when they come in quietly, slipping off their shoes and touching me on the cheek as they walk past. I can’t feel the weight of their hands on my face, but I can identify the smells under their fingernails: turmeric, ink, dirt. “I’m sorry,” they murmur. “I’m so, so sorry.”

The air swirling around my head is thick with mourning; I can almost taste it. The entire house stinks of it, has stunk of it for days. I hate these elaborate posturings of grief, the meaningless rituals of loss. The soft words in sad voices, the drab, ill-fitting clothing, the trays upon trays of funeral food… I don’t want them. What I want is to miss my mother in my own way. I want to be alone, but a lifetime of friends swarms the house, devouring her empty space.

Their memories of her hurt me most. It’s painful for me to hear her friends tell stories about her, shaking their heads or laughing emptily when they think it’s appropriate. As if these people could know my mother through her cooking or her country girl manners. They chatter on and on about her saintliness, and I fight the urge to tell them about the woman I knew. I want to share my stories about the beatings my sister and I received for minor childhood infractions, about my mother’s constant verbal abuse of my father. She was a person, I want to say. Nothing more. Nothing less.

I force myself to smile mechanically at the next person who walks through the door: a tall, mustached man I recognize as another doctor in my mother’s clinic. He turns his lips upward in response and nods. After he kicks off his shoes, he bumps against the coat rack while bending over to remove his socks, knocking my mother’s lab coat off its customary rung in the process. I get up to put it back, and my hand freezes to the fabric on contact. The right pocket still holds her prescription pad and favorite pen, and I can see a small BMI chart through the white cloth of her left pocket. I finger the tiny gold buttons on the lapel before I hang her coat in the hallway closet and close the door.

I turn and glance across the hall to the small group of people enveloping my father. I can’t see him, but I can hear his quiet laugh floating above the heads of the taller men. I know it hurts him to smile, but, somehow he does it. I know it kills him to try to keep up appearances.

My father is not a quiet man; he is a silent one. In his tiny village perched on the edge of one of India’s Great Rivers, it is tradition for boys to grow up without words while gorging themselves on pain. They silently walk the scorching midday sands without shoes, even those who can afford them; the elders stand in worn-in doorways and watch, wordlessly approving of the boys’ silence. My father comes from a long line of these sand-walkers and so will suffer my mother’s death in silence for the rest of his life. I’ve already seen the beginnings of it. I watched him in my mother’s closet last night, rocking on his haunches, her clothes spread out in a fan around
him. There was a steady beat to his suffering, but no melody or words; his was the saddest song I’ve ever heard.

I spent last night staring at my mother’s image frozen on photo paper, watched it flicker in the light of a lone oil lamp. I couldn’t purge the memory of my father alone in the closet, couldn’t get it out of my mind, so I clamped my mouth tight around my fist to keep from crying and stayed that way the entire night. When I look at my hand now, at the tiny half-moon of raw spots, I know I will carry those scars forever. I curl the fingers of my other hand over the tears in my skin, hiding them from any restless eyes.

The group around my father gradually diffuses, and I feel twinges of pain as I see him approaching aloneness. I know, somehow, that this will be the last time we’ll have so many people together in the house. My mother was the social one, organizing functions every month like clockwork. My father, like me, always retreated into the background at these parties, though he always reemerged to serve his famous coffee to the guests before they left. I know now that his coffee will not be enough to bring my mother’s friends back to our house, that it will not fill the void left by her death.

“Appa,” I say, getting up and walking toward him. He raises his eyes to meet mine, but I have a feeling that he is looking through me rather than at me.

“Yes?” he says. Loneliness crackles in his voice.

I suddenly find it hard to look at him, so I shake my head and turn away. “Nevermind,” I murmur, but I don’t know if he hears me. “Don’t worry about it,” I say, more to myself than him.

It starts raining several hours later, after all the people have left. The house is quiet, aching. Cold. My father examines bills at the kitchen counter while my sister and I sit mutely on the aged couch, staring at our backyard. My eyes are fixed on the heavy black tarp covering our pool, the same pool where my sister and I learned to swim. My mother would watch my father give us swimming lessons, but she never ventured into the pool herself. Despite being the daughter of river-women, she was terrified of drowning.

Raindrops splatter across the tarp. Below the cover, I know the water is green, dead, rotting – but it will come back to life in the summer. I wish that people could be more like pools. I wish that chlorine and mesh nets were all we needed to achieve immortality.

I think the first language we learn to speak is one of Waters. As I stand in the doorway of my uncle’s apartment and watch my father playing with my six-month-old cousin, I feel sure of this. As he burbles her wet, liquid baby language back to her, her face crinkles in delight; they understand one another. Niki was born a week after my mother passed away, and my father believes that my mother’s spirit is crouched somewhere within her. The proof, he says, is Niki’s nose. When she was born, my father insisted that Niki had her dead aunt’s nose. Nobody tried to persuade him otherwise.

Everyone on my mother’s side of the family is the owner of a small, slightly rounded nose that is prone
to nostril-flaring when its owner’s temper flares. Old black-and-white photos suggest that the origin of the Shankar family nose was a small, impish man named Muruga, the first person to work at the textile mills on the banks of the Kauveri. For many generations, the Shankar men rose at four in the morning and drank cups of sweet, milky tea, savoring its lingering heaviness on their tongues during the long, dark walk to work. My uncle, the first Shankar man to go to college, was also the first man in a century to drink coffee instead of tea before he left at seven to work in a clean, new-carpet-smelling office.

The smell of masala tea rises from a small pot on the kitchen stove: my uncle’s specialty. In the five years he’s lived in America, I’ve never been able to take a free breath in my uncle’s apartment; the air is always curried, and the cooking oil in the air forms a thin, almost visible layer on everyone’s skin and clothes. The oil also sticks the window fastenings together, making it impossible to escape the smell of cumin and curry power belched up from the cooking pots that are always on the stove. My aunt believes in spice the way other people believe in God and smother all of her food in it. Everything her hands graze turns orange from the turmeric powder caught between the ridges of her fingertips. Though I am slightly embarrassed by her Midas touch, I admire her cooking for its unapologetic fieriness.

My aunt is a short, quiet woman with a talent for slipping past people unnoticed. Except for her heavily-peppered curries, everything about her is watery and anonymous; this liquid element is surprising given her home – a clay village in the middle of a desert. She laughs so softly, no one ever hears her, and even the sound of her footfalls is almost inaudible. Her body has blurry, fuzzy edges that let her blend into walls the same way the heat of the desert mutes all colors to various shades of gray.

I hear my aunt’s normally quiet voice raise in volume, and I turn my head to look into the kitchen. She and my uncle are arguing over the dishes. This is their favorite fight; my aunt doesn’t think my uncle is a thorough enough scrubber and takes every available opportunity to inform him of her opinion. I dislike getting involved in their domestic disputes, but this time, I am inclined to side with my aunt. My uncle once proposed eating off paper plates for Thanksgiving to reduce the cleanup time, a suggestion which made my proper, traditional mother livid. He now recites his favorite argument, contesting that soap is simply an accessory and that a good rinse suffices for most dishes. My aunt shakes her head and pushes him out of the way, taking over the job of washing the dishes herself. As I watch him leave, I feel a sharp twang of pity for my aunt.

My uncle is a study in mediocrity, in averages. He is about average height with an about-average build, and his moustache is of average thickness compared to my other male relations. He dropped out of architecture school to become a computer programmer and now has a mid-level job at a mid-level brokerage firm in Midtown Manhattan; I wouldn’t be surprised if he works on the tenth floor of his twenty-story office building. After he pulls himself away from his wife’s chiding, my uncle heads toward the living room to check on Niki. He sees me standing in the doorway and nods. I nod back. We stand next to each other and watch Niki try to pull my father’s glasses off his nose.

“He’s very good with children,” my uncle observes.

“Yes. He is.” I can’t think of anything else to say, so I bite my lips and look at my hands.
I wonder what my father was like when I was a baby. My mother would tell me and my sister stories of his old temper, his coldness after they got married, but nothing of the shy, soft-spoken man I know now suggests these things. I wonder if my father was happy about having a baby girl or if he secretly wished for a son. I want to ask him but decide against it.

The baby laughs as my father tosses her up in the air, and I wish, for a moment, that I could be little again.

It is dinnertime at our own house, a few weeks after our visit to my uncle. My father lifts the last cardboard carton from the now-empty paper bag and sets it on the glass-topped breakfast table in front of us. My sister and I wait for him to sit down before we begin opening the various containers and spilling their contents onto our plates: vegetable lo mein and tofu in garlic sauce for me, white rice and kung pao chicken for her. Out of the corner of my eye, I can see my father watching us for a moment before reaching for a container.

“How’s the food?” he asks around a mouthful of lo mein. “Is it good?” My sister and I nod at him, and he smiles, happy to have solved the problem of tonight’s dinner. He’s tried making meals for us before catching the train to work, but getting up at 5:30 every morning tired him out. Now that we’ve gotten used to not having my mother cook for us, readymade and prepackaged food (supplemented by the occasional takeout) are our family dinner staples. Tonight’s dinner is special because we’re all eating together. Usually, my sister will take her food to the couch in front of the TV, and I’ll take mine to the kitchen counter to keep me company during homework. Only my father will sit at the table, eating his dinner alone under the stained glass lamp and staring across the darkness of the neighbor’s lawns.

We are so unaccustomed to eating together that the meal is completely silent. I can feel my father’s happiness, his simple pleasure of having people to eat with. I wish I could be better company and try to think of something meaningful to say.

“College applications are going well,” I say, almost choking on the words. “I’ll be finished with them in a few days.”

“Good,” says my father, looking at me with a small, shy smile. He is short, much shorter than I am, and he looks even shorter at the table hunched over his half-empty plate. His upper back curves slightly inward on itself, giving my father the appearance of constantly shrugging. I think his back makes him worry about our bone density because he’s always asking me and my sister if we’re drinking enough milk or taking our calcium supplements. I wonder if anyone has ever teased him about his posture.

“I think I’m done,” says my sister, forking one last noodle into her mouth. “I’ll be watching TV if you need me.” She puts her plate and glass in the sink and heads into the den for the evening.

The spell is broken. My father gets up to wash his plate and hers, leaving me at the table alone. I sit there for at least an hour, staring at the dragons sprawled across the containers in front of me and wondering how and why I’m crying.

Vani Kilakkathi ’08
Strawbella

I don’t remember standing outside a toy store window looking at her with adoring eyes. I certainly don’t remember how much she cost. I don’t even remember where I first saw her, but I do remember that I wanted her more than anything else in the world. Her name was Strawbella, and boy, was she beautiful. Her frock was red, like a strawberry, and crinkled around the edges in tiny frills. The doll had a small pink heart in the middle of her cheek—so much rounder and peachier than my own brown one—that appeared and disappeared depending on the ambient temperature. You could hold an ice cube to her cheek and the heart would disappear; you could hold the ice cube away and the heart would slowly crawl back in again. Her head was clustered over with tufts of shiny, light-colored hair. Oh, how soft she was. To me, growing up in Bombay—an impoverished megalopolis of rabid dogs and human shit on the streets, of corruption and cacophony—Strawbella was the essence of glamor.

My mother had promised to buy Strawbella for me, but not right away. By Indian standards, my parents were far from poor, but my father was only a marine pilot for the Bombay Port Trust, my mother didn’t work, and we didn’t have money to throw away. To buy Strawbella some saving was in order, and would take some time.

I knew my mother always kept her promises, but I waited for Strawbella with the ardor and the impatience of a lover. Had I known whom Nabokov was, I would have argued that Humbert Humbert didn’t know half as much about desire when he sighed over the pale light of his life as I did, when I sighed over Strawbella. My thoughts—indeed, my whole being—revolved around the happy day when Strawbella would, at last, be mine. Conversations with my mother would go something like this:

“Mamma, when will you buy Strawbella? Will you buy her soon?”
“Yes, *betu*, yes,” she would say, using the Hindi endearment for “child.”

“Mamma, Richa got a new doll who’s called Lisa and who has a yellow dress and brown hair, but her dress is not as nice as Strawbella’s dress and I like Strawbella’s hair and the heart on her cheek more.”

“*Yes, betu, yes,*” my mother would reply.

In an effort to distract me, however briefly, from ceaselessly thinking about Strawbella, my mother put her gift for giving unexpected presents in surprising places to good use. One that delighted me especially, which she bought at the drop of a hat at the Nehru Science Center when I asked her to, was a pink plastic box with a strawberry somehow suspended in midair at the center. It was a money box, and used a trick with mirrors to hide coins dropped through the slit on top—you could hear the *chunk* of the coin hitting the bottom, but couldn’t *see* the coin. Another was a bouquet of two roses, which she gave me at the bus stop one afternoon when I returned from school. The school bus would drop me in front of the State Bank of India, and either one or both of my parents would be waiting for me for the short walk back to our house. I got off the school bus on this particular afternoon and saw my parents barreling towards me on my father’s scooter, my mother sitting behind my father and partially obscured by his helmet. The Kinetic Honda stopped beside me and my father stuck out one leg to steady the machine as my mother leaned towards me and suddenly I had two small flowers in my hand, wrapped up in white paper. “For your two beautiful eyes,” my mother said.

For a while all seemed well. I went to school every day, played hopscotch in the warm Bombay evenings with my friends, and dreamed of my doll.

Then my mother got angry, and retracted her promise.

One afternoon on our way home from somewhere or other, I hit her in the street. We stood waiting on the tarmac for a gap in the traffic in order to cross, as the side of the road we were on didn’t have a pavement. If I were to return to my old neighborhood in Bombay, I could point to the exact place where we were standing: the juncture between an alleyway where I once found a starving kitten, and this street. I was in a fit of temper over something or other, and she had just said something that irritated me especially. I heard the *thump* of my palm striking the small of my mother’s back. My mother’s back jerked forward under its force.

My petulant disrespect shocked my mother. It violated the code of behavior she had established for me: close as we were, there were certain lines I couldn’t cross. She flew into a rage. She was taller than I was, so I remember her looking down at me, but in her rage her thin body seemed to flap upwards and outwards until she was engulfing me all around as she whipped back to look at me and began to shout. Her great anger forced itself painfully on every sense: pressed up against my eyeballs, squeezed my ear-drums deep inside my head, filled my mouth with a taste of fear that was almost solid. She turned back around and started crossing the street blindly, half-stalking, half-running, leaving me behind, and to hell with the ugly Fiats honking shrilly down the street, the coarse rickshaw-wallahs straining at their
pedals and crammed into every crevice in the traffic, the dirt-poor spindly-legged vendors jouncing their fruit carts along the edges of the street in the opposite direction to the traffic and getting in my mother’s way.

As she was flying across the street a thought occurred to my mother. She flung me a look over her shoulder, rapidly being swallowed up by the traffic, and exclaimed, “I’ll not buy Strawbella for you!”

And she was gone. I stood abandoned for a moment, fear spreading from my mouth to the rest of my body. Then I followed, dodging the traffic more carefully.

A few months later and a little less than one thousand miles away, I sat on the terrace that made up the roof of my grandparents’ Delhi house. My long hair hung around my face in wet heavy strands. I was fresh out of a bath and sprawled beside my ancient grandfather on a cot, drying the still-damp spots between my toes and in my ears in the sun. I was also eating crisps. A brand called Crax manufactured shiny red and silver packets containing spicy corn rings, which I loved. My grandfather–my mother’s father–was stretched out on his side, in his cotton _kurta_ and lint-spotted sweater, making his morning newspaper crackle as he turned its broad pages over slowly. The taste of spicy corn was still on my tongue when suddenly there my mother was, and she was pressing Strawbella–red light of my life, my sin, my soul–into my thin arms. The gift was unexpected.

Yet I was struck, as I sat there considering the new acquisition in my lap, by what an anachronism she was. She belonged in the past, in the days when I had really wanted her. Strawbella’s tardiness was irritating, and my irritation vented itself in silent criticism of her appearance. Her incorrigible redness annoyed me, her sweet new-plastic smell made my nostrils curl, and I itched to pull her shiny, light-colored tufts of hair apart. Strawbella was a traveler who had arrived, bag and baggage, to a hotel where her reservation had long expired. So she would simply have to go back. Tough.

I didn’t give Strawbella back to my mother, of course; I kept her. She had been won after a long, occasionally arduous, battle, and I valued her–no longer for herself, but as a trophy signaling victory. Eventually, I threw her away.

By this time I had almost forgotten about the doll, and my first thought was how it was almost magical, the way one minute Strawbella wasn’t there and the next minute she was. I said to my mother, somewhat distractedly, “I eat one chip and you bring a doll?” My mother’s face expressed contrition, a mute apology for having lost her temper the way she had in Bombay. She looked relieved that the matter had finally been brought to its natural end.

Ila Tyagi ’09
Draped Cloth
Ila Tyagi ’09
Acrylic on canvas
The crowded streets of Calcutta are dusty and humid and full of hawkers and pedestrians and beggars and rickshaw pullers and office-goers and teenaged brats and college-going kids who jostle past you and into you and elbow your ribs and chest. Walking on the pavement is a battle. You can move along about as easily and swiftly as you could bushwhacking through a cacti-overgrown, sand-filled yielding stream bed with spiny branches thrusting into your face from the overbanks. Some of the pavements are eroded and ground down to the soil underneath and around the anthill piles of rubble have grown temporary barber shops, eateries and bathing areas that do brisk business by day only to be faithfully hauled home at night. Junk food hawkers store ingredients in used top-lopped-off-petroleum-jerry-can containers that eventually provide the stomach and ultimately the immune system a resistance comparable to wrought iron. All respectable outdoor barbers have a stool, a hand-held mirror and a boxful of steel instruments. And if men aren’t experiencing close shaves, they are lathering themselves down at the tube well hand pumps that perennially gush with water famously muddy with silt dumped by the Ganges as it thickly lightens its load collected much earlier across the plains of northern India.

men lathering themselves down at the tube well hand pumps

To the uninitiated, my description of regular bathing on the pavement as a crowd of dirty yellow taxis,
rickety trucks, snazzy cars and trundling trams hurdle past may seem too fantastical and simply bizarre. However, I’ll have you know that the Indian man manages to come out scrupulously clean even as he maintains his modesty in such an immodestly unprivate world.

The whole process requires a lungi, a length of fabric tied around the waist in a double knot, rather resembling a sarong in essence and appearance but without those annoying strings with which one never knows what to do. A dark coloured lungi is preferable, to avoid the Hollywood-Bollywood-esque titillating translucencies when completely soaked. When it comes to ventilation, the lungi sets an exceptionally high bar; it even manages to surpass itself: the lungi can simply be lifted upwards and tucked into the waist in a quasi-mini-skirt, aerating usually hirsute male Indian legs. Nobody bats half an eyelid at shiny brown skin enveloped in stark white foam, being scrubbed crazily with bare hands: down legs, up glistening torsos, around faces, froth everywhere, through tousled hair, steering clear from scrunched up eyes, frequently holding the double knot at arm’s length forming a sort of private cubicle, while the opposite hand avoids neglect of those nether recesses.

Possessing an Indian driver’s license does not have the usual American associations of driving in the expected civilized manner on roads shared by other commuters. A driver’s license from Calcutta means this: you can drive a manual in traffic that consists of pedestrians, who are intrinsically programmed to walk on the road (even if sidewalks that are otherwise usually taken over by tea-stall owners, barbers, hand-pumps, men sitting around or even shanties, exist) as well as manic jangly taxis (that will have the audacity to ram into your fender as you may idle at a red stop light and then step out to yell at you, you woman driver, for what, your car stopping at a red light), zooming cars that pass you from the left (dangerous if you drive on the left side of the road), wild freight-trucks and buses that seemingly careen into you, barely veering away in time making you cringe in your seat as you struggle to watch the rear-view mirror, the side-view mirror (if someone hasn’t knocked it off already by driving too close) while making sure you don’t run over the pedestrians, an occasional stray dog while avoiding the snail-paced hand-pulled cart, the huge pothole smack in the centre of the road, while your feet dance across the clutch, accelerator and brake more nimbly than the ballet dancer last night as traffic moves forward in alternating leaps and lurches even as you negotiate your morbid fear of a slimy lizard that seems to have made a home of your vehicle and decides to make an appearance just then.

The muggy morning stillness is broken by a violent dusting of the rickety staircase outside the room. The rain assaults the translucent yellow plexiglass ceiling in dull thumps. That’s how you tell if it’s raining. But take a peek, the bamboo caresses a neighbours’ second storey bathroom window slats. Lie on the foam mattress on the floor with your head against the window on your back. Just one more minute. The water makes imaginary gullies down the glass. A bug crawls into the crack between the window and the marble floor. No, not a solitary sneeze, it brings
misfortune, make it a pair instead. If it rains hard enough, the streets will get waterlogged. A ‘rainy day’ off! I stare at the hot water stream out of the rusting faucet. Too low and a chattering of teeth, but too high and the bucket will be too heavy to carry back the twenty feet into your bathroom. The black thunderclouds drape a perpetual dusk over the house. An invitation for sentiment. Something important could happen. I wear ‘flood pants’ today. Yes, those capris.
even the dogs won’t bark
02-28-07

i go through so many ups and downs with you that you are completely unaware of, hoping it might be the same on your end, ready to have this be my last phone call or the last time i click on certain photos or the last time i make a late night confession over email, this you must know, but then i read something you have written, hear your voice or deduce that you are happy now and can’t help myself, what is that?

please keep writing because that’s how i may contact you, i know i have told you your writing moves me but twice now you’ve written things that are so on point my heart ends up in my throat and i can’t catch my breath. please, keep writing keep writing keep writing.

Jhale Ali ‘08
Untitled (Samrat Yantra Doors, Jaipur)
Kam Sripada ‘09
Digital photograph
Outside the temple, boys loiter in the cool air, kicking around grayed stones or playing five-on-five basketball on the makeshift court. The men, some turbaned, others sporting scarves or handkerchiefs, talk about money and watch the game in fond remembrance of their youths. It is dark, and late. The trees stand like paper silhouettes against a deep blue sky, peppered with the piercing white of stars barely there. The celebration of the birthday of Guru Nanak, the first Sikh prophet, brings families and friends together from all over. The women roll out hot chapattis in the kitchen of the temple, sharing stories of their parallel lives as daughters, wives, and mothers. Their girls stay away from the food, loath to accept the customary duties from a time and place far removed. Instead they walk around the smaller halls whispering in hushed tones, giggling, assessing the boys with cheeky grins and a little less timidity than their mothers would like.

I find myself vacillating between the hoops and the halls. I walk quickly in public, giving the appearance of importance but often going nowhere. My friends loiter about, either joining in the games or resorting to a corner to talk about music or gangs or sports or women. I’ll stay somewhere till I realize I no longer fit in, that there is something better for me to do. I’ll talk to someone till I realize that they’re just as lost as I am at the temple, and then, conscious again of my discomfort, I’ll walk away.

I’m always looking for something that will put me at peace - at peace with my religion, at peace with the knowledge that I can only believe in God when something goes wrong, and at peace with the fact that I drink too much to be holy. At the temple, the discord in my personality reaches its crescendo, clashing with the melodies of the hymns. As I walk, I am dogged by the invisible eye of elders who prey on the failure of children to live up to their fathers’ expectations. My parents have long been regarded upstanding members of the Sikh community. They are humble and proud of it, quiet, non-confrontational, and deeply religious. They are everything I am not. The elders see this and gossip quietly in their circles, passing down sly observations like polluted rain, dripping down from a dying tree onto the fertile soil underneath.
Eventually I walk into the service.

The main hall of the temple is infused with golden light, emerging from crystal chandeliers hung high above the heads of worshippers. Women, sitting in their bright, traditional dresses, form a sea of orange and red on the left side of the room. The men, mostly wearing red turbans matched with business suits, sit on the right. It is hot, unbearably hot to the entrant but unnoticeable to those already there. A group of devotional musicians on stage leads the crowd. Men stare intensely at the tabla drum player, trying to replicate his blinding hand movements on their thighs. Women croon in pitch with the lead singer, finding their voices amongst the din of hundreds, thousands. Men and women alike rock back and forth, eyes fiercely closed, a look of intense concentration on their faces. They are lost too, but not in the same way I am. Everyone is lost in the soaring voice of the ragi, the melody of the harmonium, and the vibrations of the tabla. In the crowd, some discover themselves so deeply that they become fixated, appearing comatose. Their ears switch off. Every sense switches off. Their mouths hang slightly open, their bodies are frozen. One has the sense that to wake such people would be like shaking someone out of their greatest dream.

I have never reached such a deep state of meditation, for I am far too self-conscious. I have come somewhat near though, my eyes closed in thoughtless surrender to the music. The rhythms have a potency that banishes those who have nothing to do but gossip, those who have nothing to say but lies. It leaves the thud of the basketball far in the distance. In the rhythm, the chanting, the heat from bodies pressed together in search of salvation, my clashing chords resolve themselves into a brief, fragile harmony. For those moments, the conflicting poles of my personality lose their grip on me, and somehow, I rise above them, like the smoke that rises from the communal kitchen, billowing majestically into the night sky.
Awaaz Voices

Jhale Ali ’08 saves the berries in her Captain Crunch for last.

Priyan Chandraratna ’08 agrees that the opposite of war isn’t peace, it’s creation.

Ojus Doshi ’08 can’t do it. He’s hurt his back. But he would still like to purchase your couch.

Sujata Gidumal ’10 is a trained Kathak dancer and a proud member of Badmaash.

Vani Kilakkathi’s ’08 favorite meal is yogurt rice with mixed vegetable pickle and salt and vinegar chips.

Prabhjote Kumar ’08 thinks that papers should be written on musical staffs.

Jaya Mathur ’07.5 is always down for a crossword puzzle.

Nisha Mirani ’10 loves animal sanctuaries, believes in horoscopes, and loves to karaoke.

Ahalya Nirmalan ’10 studies engineering and loves to travel.

Shruti Parekh ’10 spends her time finding creative ways to rep the Dirty South.

Kam Sripada ’09 likes decaf tea. Double the sugar. Double the milk.

Devina Swarup ’07 is 75% Indian and 25% samosa.

Ila Tyagi ’09 is going for the pale pastel shades now, they’re more becoming to her.
Utrayan
Ojus Doshi ’08
Digital photograph
If you would like to be part of Awaaz or would like to submit pieces for our next publication, please contact Awaaz.Brown@gmail.com